

Tibetan medicine one of a kind

Government invests in conserving and developing ancient treatments. **Palden Nyima** and **Daqiong** report

Originating from Tibet and known as one of the miracles of traditional Chinese medicinal science, Tibetan medicinal science has developed steadily for thousands of years and is still highly valued today.

Tibetan medicinal science is believed to have a history of at least 3,800 years, according to documents of Tibet's native religion Bon.

Kalsang Dondrub, an associate professor at the University of Tibetan Medicine in Lhasa, capital of the autonomous region, says the *Four Tibetan Medical Tantras*, or *Gyud Phyi* in Tibetan language, is a classic of medical instruction first compiled in the eighth century by Yuthok Nyingma Yontan Gongopo, a great pioneer of Tibetan medicinal science. The content of the classic developed in the centuries that followed.

After Tibet's peaceful liberation in 1951, all levels of government provided support for Tibetan medicine and treatment, with the number of institutes of Tibetan medical science and students steadily growing over the decades.

According to the University of Tibetan Medicine, between 1963 and 1973, more than 50 Tibetan medicinal science inheritors were trained in the region. Between 1974 and 1981, a Tibetan medical science class was added at Lhasa City Nursing School and more than 140 Tibetan doctors were trained, marking the start of the modern education



The Tibet Medical & Astrology Institute, also known as *Mentsee Khang* in the Tibetan language, is a key medical institute in the autonomous region that offers traditional Tibetan medical services. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A doctor at a clinic in Galsang Deyki community in Lhasa offers traditional Tibetan medical service to a patient. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

of Tibetan medical science.

The Tibetan Medical School was founded in 1983, and over 130 medical professionals were trained by 1989, when the school was upgraded to the Tibetan Medical College of the Tibet University.

In 1993, the college was upgraded to an independent institute — the Chakpori Tibetan Medical College, which was named the Tibet Tibetan Medical College in 2001 and the University of Tibetan Medicine in 2018.

According to the Administration Bureau of Traditional Tibetan Medicine of Tibet, the central and regional governments invested heavily in the region's Tibetan medical institutes over the past 40 years.

Basang, deputy head of the bureau, says the Tibet Medical & Astrology Institute in Lhasa and six similar institutes in other regions have received large investments from the government.

Investment into the Tibet Medical & Astrology Institute has totaled 124 million yuan (\$25.88 million), including 102 million yuan for the construction of its ophthalmology department, according to Basang.

"During the country's 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-20), 258

million yuan was invested in the region's 21 county-level Tibetan medical hospitals. In addition, more than 27 million yuan was spent on medical staff training and developing traditional medical equipment, and more than 65 million yuan invested in the region's 654 township and community hospitals that offer traditional Tibetan medical services," Basang says.

"Over the 30 years since the founding of the University of Tibetan Medicine, the school has cultivated more than 7,000 Tibetan medical practitioners, including 33 with PhDs and 121 with master's degrees," he says.

"The autonomous region currently has 43 State-run Tibetan medical institutes with a total of 2,412 beds. They have received more than 3 million visits from patients seeking diagnosis and treatment," Basang says.

He added that there are more than 3,700 Tibetan medical practitioners in the region.

Producer's work helps endangered herbs grow

By **PALDEN NYIMA** and **DAQIONG**

Tibet is one of the key sources of medicinal herbs and protecting some endangered varieties is particularly important, says an industry insider.

One local company has made its contribution in this aspect.

Ganlu Tibetan Pharmaceutical, the region's major manufacturer of genuine Tibetan medicines, has been attaching equal importance to development and preserving resources.

Kalsang Norbu, deputy general manager of the company, says most of the medicinal herbs are collected in the wild, where the average altitude is more than 4,000 metres above sea level.

Some are imported from India and Nepal.

The company deems protecting endangered medicinal herbs a priority for its growth.

"Many Tibetan medicinal herbs are unique to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, such as the green *Meconopsis punicea*, which is becoming endangered due to the high demand for the medicine produced by the herb. My company began to plant the herb in 2017," Kalsang Norbu says.

The company established bases in the region's Nyingchi and Lhokha cities for breeding, domesticating and planting meconopsis punicea and other herbs.

To keep the herbs' original properties, Kalsang Norbu's company has been growing



Researchers collect Tibetan medical herbs in the wild for the purpose of domestication and research. PALSANG LHUNDRUP / FOR CHINA DAILY

them by imitating wild conditions: they collect the seeds from mountains, plant them in the bases and thin out the seedlings according to their original growing environment.

"By thinning out in such a manner, their medical effectiveness is almost the same as the wild species," Kalsang Norbu says.

He noted that artificially cultivated herbs in Tibet even have better medical effect than wild varieties in other region of the country.

"We still have a long way to go in the protection of local medical resources and innovation on traditional Tibetan medicines," Kalsang Norbu says.

Scholar brings new methods to almanac making

By **PALDEN NYIMAN**

As a graduate from Harvard University and a renowned Tibetan astrological academician, Yumba has made a revolution to the traditional Tibetan almanac-making system.

Yumba is the deputy head of the Tibet Medical & Astrology Institute.

Thanks to the efforts of Yumba and his team over the decades, Tibetan calendar making has entered the era of digitalisation.

And thanks to computer technologies, most of the calculation has been replaced by computer, with efficiency greatly improved.

Yumba's institute has produced an almanac covering the present and the past 2,500 years. If the job were done manually, it would have taken 1,000 years, according to Yumba.

Historical records show the science of Tibetan astrology and almanac dates back to 100 BC. The Tibetan almanac is regarded as a key part of the Tibetan *Sowa Rigpa*—or medical healing science.

"Almanac is crucial to Tibetans, according to which one can find the times for herb collection, cultivation, irrigation and harvesting, as well as many other things," Yumba says.

As what their ancestors did, manual production of a calendar requires astrological professionals to calculate for months, he says.

In 1990, Yumba had the idea of calendar digitalisation. One year later, a preliminary software system was developed, and now he has a complete computerised system for Tibetan almanac production.

"Computer calculation is much faster. By entering the year or month and a click of the mouse, the calendar of a year or a specific month will pop out on the screen in less than three minutes," Yumba says.

Based on the platform for almanac calculation, he has also developed two mobile apps for inquiring Tibetan calendar.

Named Yumba Almanac Calendar, one of the apps is in Mandarin, Tibetan and English languages, and it provides the references of the six existing traditional Tibetan calendars.

"Tibetan astrology and almanac are very unique and interesting subjects, and I hope the culture can be better preserved and passed on for the future generations," Yumba says.