

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN THE EARLY KONBAUNG PERIOD**

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### **Abstract**

During Prehistoric era, Humans lived and wandered as they pleased and ate whatever food available. Diseases either caused by environment or occur when humans consume foods available in nature recklessly unbalancing the diet. Humans, the highest intelligent creatures in the world, started to find means to alleviate diseases. With intelligent, insight, and experiences, humans learnt that foods medicinal properties when consumed under correct season and weather. They have recognized that daily diet such as tree, vine, meat, and fish can be consumed to relieve from sufferings. They analyzed which nutrients, fruits, flora and roots when eaten can bring cure for the suffering diseases. It is assumed that by knowing the effective usages of correct trees and vines them as means to alleviate diseases is how traditional medical came to be. By collecting those treating experiences, medical books were compiled. Experiences were shared to the family, off-springs, and followers. This craft of saving and curing humans' lives was Aryubayda Medicine. Aryubayda Medicine is the craft or skill relating to life meant for humans to live longer without diseases. Aryubayda Medicine treaties then spread to different places, forming different medicines with various names by polishing from medical scholars in different countries, and varying in curing according to races in different countries. The researcher firstly presents the gradual development of Myanmar traditional medicine, and later discusses the importance of traditional medicine in the society during reigns of Kings in the early Konbaung period.

**Keyword:** ayubayda, traditional medicine, medicine treaties,

### **Introduction**

The cradle of ancient Myanmar medicine was mostly proliferated from Indian medicine. Before Bagan period, medicines was brought and emerged in Myanmar along with India's literatures and cultures. The arrived medical treaties written with Pali and Sanskrit were interpreted by Myanmar scholars in terms of Myanmar way and style. By researching the medical treaties and learning more about medicine, people began to understand the usefulness of vines, grass, and trees, learnt to differentiate symptoms, and the way to heal with appropriate medicine. From this, the medicine treaties became widespread, people in Bagan period learned and practiced medicine treaties and acquired a substantial level in medical treatment. Evidences relating to medicine can be found in Sagaing, Pinya, and Ava period. According to medicine treaties and astrology treaties found at Tat Nwel monastery's stone inscription, the medical development in Ava period can be known. That inscription shows that medicine treaties composed in the forms of Myanmar poems, verse, and prose as there were many literate scholar monks and laymen scholars during Ava period. During Nyaungyan period as well as Taungoo period, Myanmar had trade communications with Western Countries. At the times, many Europeans served as professional soldiers under Mon and Myanmar kings. Thus, it was obvious that European medicines and treatments arrived at that time, especially from Portuguese soldiers who served under Myanmar, Rakhine, and Mon kings. Significant amount of Portuguese medicine and therapies arrived and spread in Myanmar.

In the early Konbaung period, many medicine treaties from foreign neighboring countries such as India, Sri Lanka, and European were arrived and spread. Under the order of the king, traditional medicine practitioners and compilers translated medicine treaties to Myanmar language from foreign medicine treaties written. They reiterated the translations into prose, poem and verses which could easily comprehend. Medicine treaties compilers included not only monks, laymen, civil servicemen but also scholars from rural areas who are pursuing medicine. This paper discusses

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about the improvement and development of Myanmar traditional medicine in the early Konbaung period. The importance of Myanmar traditional medicine in the early Konbaung period to Myanmar people are also discussed and presented.

### **The Development of Traditional Medicine in the Early Konbaung Period**

During the reign of Alaung Min Tayar who established Konbaung Period, time was passing by vigorous actions in military affairs, recruiting men for warfare, going to war in many places. The sectors such as economy, religion, education could not be performed many efforts. Alaung Min Tayar's bringing of physicians to the war can be seen as following.

In Alaung Min Tayar's first expedition to Hantharwaddy at A.D (1116) 1754, in barges among navy patterns, it can be found having Physician Minister Dae Wa Kyaw Thu, Ba Nyar Dae Wa, Architect Si Ta Lan kar, Blacksmith Eaindra Ba Nyar, Brass Smith Nga Thar Tun, physician, man of mantra and Barge for minister<sup>1</sup>. It is known that the post "Physician Minister" was appointed at the reign of Alaung Min Tayar. It is recorded that Physician Minister was the physician who was responsible for selecting physicians, appointing, and arranging physicians for the king and queens. In waging war at the reign of Alaung Min Tayar, the physicians have to go along with. It may be on the fact that curing to the king and patients in the war fields.<sup>2</sup> It is revealed that the physicians for the royals excelled at massaging were there at the reign of Alaung Min Tayar. In Myanmar kings' administration paper, the personal service of Alaung Min Tayar is described as –

"The massagers massaged in turn. It looked like taking about an hour."<sup>3</sup>

It is possible that Alaung Min Tayar employed physicians excelled at massaging and veins. Thus, at the reign of Alaung Min Tayar, there were many service men in medical affair and decorated physicians. However, it is deduced that famous physicians were not proliferating.

At the reign of King Naung Taw Gyi (De Pae Yin), Son of King Alaung Min Tayar, apart from normal herbal skill, Astrology was arisen before the rise of Astrology medicine. Myanmar astrology was descended from India. Past Karma is believed in Ayubayda books. It is believed that some diseases were happened due to past karma. Later, Astrology medicine books were compiled by merging astrology and medicine.<sup>4</sup> Before Astrology medicine, astrology was proficient in Myanmar since Pyu and Tha Yae Khit Ta Yar Periods. However, there was only fortune telling before Bagan Period. In Later Innwa Period (Nyaung Yan Period), Astrology medicine started to practice. However, in Konbaung Period, Astrology medicine was widespread in range.<sup>5</sup> In the reign of King Naung Taw Gyi (1760-1763), one monk physician scholar rose to prominent. That scholar is Taung Dwin Sayadaw Khin Gyi Pyaw who compiled many religious treaties and books and was heavily relied in the matter of medicine not only the reign of King Naung Taw Gyi but also throughout Konbaung Period. Khin Gyi Pyaw is the monk skilled at from astrology preventing misfortune to skills such as omens, portent, prophecy, ominous saying etc. Even though there was no evidence of his medical treatment to monks and laymen, he was excelled at Medical and Matter

<sup>1</sup> U Maung Maung Tin, Great Chronicle of Konboaung, First Volume, Lae Ti Man Tai Press, Yangon, 1967, Pg-120. (Henceforth: K.B.Z, First Volume)

<sup>2</sup> History of Myanmar Traditional Medicine, Yangon, Ministry of Health, Traditional Medicine, 1978, History of Traditional Medicine, Pg -70. (Henceforth: History of Traditional Medicine)

<sup>3</sup> U Tin, Myanmar kings' Administration paper, Fourth Volume, Yangon, Department of Culture, 1967, Pg-81. (Henceforth: U Tin, Myanmar kings' Administration paper)

<sup>4</sup> U Mar Ga, (Wa Na Kyaw Htin U Thar Tin), Article in medicine, Yangon, Sarpae Beiki Man Press, 1983, Pg-26. (Henceforth: Mar Ga, Article in Medicine)

<sup>5</sup> Ma Kyin Mya, Konbaung Period's Importance of Traditional Medicine in Social Affair, Master's Dissertation, 1983, Yagon University, Pg -45-47. (Henceforth: Ma Kyin Mya, 1983) .

treaties as well as the skill of telling fortune upon looking appearance. Although Astrology was widespread long before Konbaung Period, medicinal treatments concerning Astrology became prominent during the early Konbaung Period.

Many scholars believe that astrology medicine was created by Taung Dwin Sayadaw Khin Gyi Phaw at early Konbaung Period. It is learnt in Myanmar Medicine that physicians skilled at Aryubayda Dae Tha Nar Na Ya medicine, Astrology, Gan Dar Yi craft were there at the reign of King Naung Daw Gyi. Taung Dwin Sayadaw Khin Gyi Phaw compiled treaties as following: Dwar Da Thain treaties

1. Dwar Da Tha Si Nar Astrology treaties
2. Ar Di Ka Pa Dwar Da Yar Thi Nat Khat Pa treaties
3. San Na Woat Ti Medical treaties
4. Ah Thi Ti Dat treaties
5. Detailed book of Physical Appearance (9 Volumes)
6. Ka Way Thar Ya treaties (3 Volumes)

Among the treaties Sayardaw wrote, Dwar Da Thain book and Ar Di Ka Pa Dwar Da Yar Thi Nat Khat treaties have been prominent in today Astrology Medicine since Konbaung period.<sup>1</sup> At the reign of King Mae Du (Hsin Phyu Shin), some medical treaties were written. Some of the well-known are:

- Dar Tu Wi Bar Ga Di Pa Ni treaties (1763)
- Dar Nwa Nayi Ni Ya Medical treaties (1763)
- Dar La Ka Yin Ga Medical treaties (1771)
- Physicians' Therapy treaties (1771)
- Bay Tha Za Dar Tu Di Pa Ni treaties (1773)

Dar Tu Wi Bar Ga Di Pa Ni treaties was compiled by Thet Pan Sayadaw. In 1798 at the reign of King Myae Du (Hsin Phyu Shin), Dar TuWi Bar Ga Di Pa Ni treaties by Thet Pan Sayadaw was paraphrased in the form of prose diving nine sections with the intention of easily reading for descendants by Mingun Taw Ya Ashin Mu Ni Nar Bi Gaw Tha Tha Ma Thay.<sup>2</sup> Generally, medical treaties in that era are Astrology medical treaties and witchcraft medical treaties. Although the medical treaties originated from India, Myanmar physicians adapted the treaties accordingly to suit the local lifestyle. It was during King Naung Daw Gyi's reign that Astrology was implemented into medical treaties, developing Astrology medicine. Dar Tu Wi Bar Ga Di Pa Ni treaties and Physicians' Therapy book were especially famous medical codices. There are three codices relating to Dar TuWi Bar Ga Di Pa Ni treaties. They are Physicians' Therapy treaties (Di Kar Yu Medical book) by Kway Saung Sayargyi U MyatTun, Dar Tu Wi Bar Ga Di Pa Ni book by Ashin Mu Ni Nar Bi Yaw Tha, and Na Ya Ma Lar Medical treaties by U Kaung. Therapies and medicines in Physicians' Therapy book by Kway Saung Sayargyi U MyatTun were practical, and they are good therapies and ways of medicine inherited by generations of physician and recorded by Myanmar Language.<sup>3</sup> King Myae Du ordered to submit precedent physicians' therapies and so the physician

<sup>1</sup> History of Traditional Medicine, Pg-71.

<sup>2</sup> Hla Tha Mein, Collections of Biographies of Classic Grandees, Yangon, Hanthawaddy Press, 1963, Pg-45, (Henceforth: Hla Tha Mein, Grandees)

<sup>3</sup> U MyaTun, 200 years Myanmar Medicine, Yangon, Thu Dhammar Press, 1971, Pg- 45-46. (Henceforth: Mya Tun, Myanmar Medicine)

U Myat Tun, a native of Kway Saung Village<sup>1</sup> lived at Tha So Village<sup>2</sup> wrote it.<sup>3</sup> After arising Physicians' Therapy treatises, many traditional medical treatises written by prose and verse were written in Myanmar. In medical treatises written by verse, Na Ya, five (5) volume medical treatises<sup>4</sup> was famous. Physicians' Therapy book was earlier than Na Ya, five (5) volume medical treatises. Physicians' Therapy book was also called as Kway Saung Supplication.<sup>5</sup> Ways of medicine described in that book employed homemade medical things in making medicine. So, it can be said Myanmar traditional medicine in that age was developed. Though therapies and ways of curing were known, it would be useless if medicines were not. Because of the virtue of medical books compiled about homemade medicines, it can be said that Myanmar Traditional Medicine was significantly improved in Social affair at Konbaung period. During King Myay Du's reign Thamar Sin Ku Htone Kyans written by Kyway Taung Saya Gyi U Myat Htun. The codices written in prose style became comprehensible for the common people facilitate the widespread of Traditional medicine. U Myat Htun was a physician who became famous later on. He authored a book on treatises under royal decree.

At the time of King Badon, many actions for nation development were undertaken, especially in the areas of literature and educational development. To improve medicine, Ayubayda Medical treatises were collected from homeland and foreign and translated. Among scholars translating medical treatises to Myanmar, the most frequent and responsible person was Missionary Maung Htaung Sayadaw Ven. Nyar Na Bi Won Tha Dhamma Thay Nar Patti.<sup>6</sup> In 1808, a treatises-bringing group of emissary led by Shwe Taung Thiri Sithu came back. They brought 18 medical codices. They are- Khar Mar Ya Da Na medical treatises, Ta Na Thar Ya medical treatises, Ayubayda medical treatises, Za Na Da Ya Si Ta Ma Ni medical treatises, Tha Ma Ya Byar Ti Pa Day Tha medical treatises, Ga Yi Ta Si Nar Ma Ni medical treatises, ZawTi Thar Ya medical treatises, and Di Gi Tat Ta medical treatises.<sup>7</sup> In 1809, to a group led by Wa Thi Hta Brahmin was send to Mizzima region. They brought fortune telling books and medical treatises, including three medical codices. They were- Dar Tu Bayda Pyu Than Tha medical treatises, Dar Tu Mi Ya Ti Ni Ver Na Ya medical treatises, and Bay Thiza Ni Ya Zu medical treatises.<sup>8</sup> Two medical treatises were submitted by Siri Lanka at 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1809, namely Wa Ya Sa Yar Ga medical treatises and Tha Ya Tha Kay Pa medical treatises.<sup>9</sup> Mahar Dhamma Thingyan wrote about 700 names of herbal trees in 1812.<sup>10</sup> In 1812, Bat Ti Ya medical treatises were dispatched. In 1814, in the tribute of Viranathi King to King Badon, Thu Gu ta medical treatises, Wa Da Zi Wa Du medical treatises and Ya Thar Ya Na Tha Mu Sa medical treatises, and Tha Ya Man Sa Yi medical treatises were contained.<sup>11</sup> There were over 20 medical books between 1786 and 1814. It is revealed that they were from India and Sri Lanka. They were translated to Myanmar under King Badon's order for the use of public. Medical knowledge expanded under King Badon with the collection and translation of Medical books.

<sup>1</sup> Kway Saung Village was situated in south of Innwa and 23 miles away from it. Ma Kyin Mya, 1983, Pg-51.

<sup>2</sup> Tha So Village was in Na Htoe Gyi, township, Myaingyan township. Ma Kyin Mya, 1983, Pg-51.

<sup>3</sup> U Myat Tun, Physicians' Therapies book, Yangon, Mingalar Press, 1971, (Edited by Sayar U Soe Tint), Pg-11. (Henceforth: Myat Tun, Physicians)

<sup>4</sup> Na Ya Thu Ki book (about 44 years), Na Ya All Tha Hta book (about 65 years), Na Ya Marlar book (about 66 years), Na Ya Yar Thi book (about 70 years), Na Ya Tan Saung book, these five volumes of Na Ya medical book were very late than Physicians' Therapies book. Myat Tun, Myanmar Medicine, Pg-46.

<sup>5</sup> Myat Tun, Myanmar Medicine, Pg-11.

<sup>6</sup> Moun Htaung Thar Tha Nar Paing Sayadaw, Collections of Amyaetawphae, Mandalay, Padethar Pitaka Press, 1962, Pg-181. (Henceforth: Moun Htaung, Myaephae)

<sup>7</sup> U Maung Maung Tin, Great Chronicle of Konbaung, Second Volume, Yar Pyae Press, Fourth Time, Yangon, 2004, Pg-127. (Henceforth: Ka Ba Sa, Second Volume)

<sup>8</sup> K.B.Z, Second Volume, Pg-132.

<sup>9</sup> K.B.Z, Second Volume, Pg-139.

<sup>10</sup> Moun Htaung, Myaephae Pg-3.

<sup>11</sup> K.B.Z, Second Volume, Pg-145.

Since the medical books were written in prose and stanzas for the purpose of comprehension they were invaluable for the public. During the early Konbong period, Myanmar people including the King had to rely upon traditional medicine for health. The medical codices were about symptoms of diseases, cure and the use of natural products such as roots and barks as medicinal ingredients. The treatises were about diseases happening at the time and the ways to cure them.

Not only the translated Indian medical codices, but European medical treatises were also present since around 16<sup>th</sup> Century. It is possible that European professional soldiers brought European medicine to Myanmar. Christian Missionaries knew showing the power of astrology and medicine was effective and easier for propagation of Christianity. Father Ignazie de Britto wrote a dissertation on English Medical prescription on Injury curing in Myanmar in A.D 1787 at the time of King Badon<sup>1</sup>. In this way, it can be seen that European medical treatises was received and learnt. However, the success rate was very low. By looking these facts, it is significant that European medicine was employed a little and people relied on herbal medicine. King Badon ordered to collect herbal plants, fruits, and chemicals. It was seen that significant physicians around the country were summoned to the capital city. There was an order laid out to the governor of Hantharwaddy, the guardian of shipment, to collect chemicals from foreign countries to make medicine at 15, October, 1806. Physicians from Rakhine state were summoned to Amarapura with the order issued at 19, September, 1807. The first batch of Indian Physicians reached at Amarapura at 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1806. The next batch arrived at 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1810.<sup>2</sup> The collecting herbal plants and chemicals and summoning and appreciation to the physicians were plans and actions reinforcing the improvement current of Myanmar Medicine. Sending some Myanmar physicians to India may be because of Myanmar medicine proliferation.

By looking at abovementioned orders and actions, Myanmar pursued Oriental and Western medicine, proliferating Myanmar Traditional Medicine by changing what they learn from those medicines to Myanmar ones. Alternatively, trying can be seen in translating foreign medical book to Myanmar and traditional medicine was also encouraged all time.

Myanmar Traditional Medicine is the skill acquired by practical learning. If medical skill were learnt, teaching was attached to living besides teachers by serving them. Myanmar traditional medicine in Konbaung period was of important to Myanmar people. Throughout the early days of Konbaung period, medical treatises from foreign countries like India, Sri Lanka had been arrived and flourished in Myanmar. Many professional translators able to translate those treatises in line with Myanmar customs were appeared. The scholars compiling traditional medicine treatises in the reign of King Badon are royal servants, scholar monks, laymen. Not only them but also many scholars pursuing medicine from the rural areas are arisen.

It is found that the king himself believed and relied on Myanmar traditional medicine. It is investigated that physicians earned the public's belief, respect and rely as much as monks in Myanmar society in Konbaung period. However, Myanmar kings did not count on the public's health affairs out of the capital. People had to rely on physicians or practitioners of medicine. The list of victims, who were died because the physicians could not cure, cannot be found in the early days of Konbaung period. It is revealed that in the reign of King Badon, the diseases of kings, and royal clan men which cannot be cured by the royal physicians were received treatments from those physicians curing the people out of the palace.

In 1818, King Badon fell illness, 10 famous physicians in the capital city were asked to recover the illness. They are-

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Than Tun, Medicine, Pg-319.

<sup>2</sup> Ma Kyin Mya, 1983, Pg -66.

1. Sayar Nga Kan
2. Sayar Nga Kyaung (Lin Ka Taw)
3. Sayar Nga Chit Pwint (Pan Cha TaikBya Ma Dat Village)
4. Sayar Nga Chaw (Salin town)
5. Sayar Nga Saint (ThaSoe)
6. Sayar Nga Htwe (Shwe Kyat Yat)
7. Sayar Nga Yeit
8. Sayar Nga Shwe Pu (Sagaing town)
9. Sayar Nga Thaw (Corner of Sagaing town)
10. Sayar Ottama <sup>1</sup>

In learning medicine, Lin Ka Taw Sayar Nga Kyaung pursued the methods of physicians since he was 18 years old. Sayar Nga Shwe Pu followed his mentor and pursued by holding Pyit basket.<sup>2</sup> It can be seen that the kings themselves encouraged Myanmar traditional medicine. The king acknowledged not only medicine of the royal physicians but also physicians in the capital. By looking these facts, it is significant that Myanmar traditional medicine was on the stage of proliferation and firm. It is obvious that only traditional medicine was believed though physicians and medicines from foreign countries were there. Moreover, Myanmar traditional medicine was becoming stronger as medicine and chemistry treaties from India such as Ayubayda literature were gotten to Myanmar massively. This was due to the reason that King Badon ordered to translate the arrival treaties as well as medical treaties compiled on the reign of previous kings from Sanskrit to Myanmar. Through it, paraphrasing writing style was coming out and developed resulting in the birth of prose writing in order to ease in people's learning. At the reign of King Badon, medical treaties written by paraphrasing style can be found. For the treaties written by long verse, Na Ya Marlar treaties (1837), Na Ya Yar Thi treaties (1841), Na Ya Tan Saung treaties (Time was not mentioned), Na Ya Thu Ki treaties (1815), Na Ya All Tha Hta treaties (1836) altogether five can be seen. These treaties were not about new medicine methods. They represented the past and known medicine with verse. Later, those five medical treaties were combined and renowned as Five Volumes of Na Ya medical treaties. In those five volumes, Na Ya Thu Ki treaties was the earliest and royal clerk U Kaung served in Lord of Ava Min Ye Zeya Kyaw wrote at the reign of King Badon in 1815 while the following volumes were written during Late Konbang period. In Na Ya Thu Ki treaties, the treaties of Ayubayda medicine were presented and described. Myanmar conventional chemical medicine relating to Universe Astrology medicine and five great matters (PyinSa Boat) and practical therapies were presented. It is revealed that it was described in a way for both physicians practicing medicine and the people to understand. The way of matter leading, foods to avoid seasonally and foods to eat seasonally were written in those books. The contents of the books were about medicine used in royal series in Amarapura period, future telling, the role of number, Inn I, Ka Lae, Latt Phwe, Mantra, ways of erasing misfortune, and different views. Furthermore, medicines and therapies from Ayubayda treaties were fully described.

To sum up, if traditional medicine in early Konbaung period was overlooked, it was more successful under the reign of King Badon. During the reign of King Alaung Min Tayar, there were traditional physicians, physicians, and Minister Physicians. However, Alaung Min Tayar consumed the time in the work for unity of the country and establishment of the country. So, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ma Kyin Mya, 1983, Pg -68.

<sup>2</sup> Ma Kyin Mya, 1983, Pg -68.

physicians had to go along with the king in the war. The king himself could not encourage effectively. Thus, there was no creation in compiling medical books and therapies. This was the same for King Naung Daw Gyi for his short reign. King Hsin Phyu Sin (King Myae Du) was an enthusiastic in warfare like his father, but he performed the improvement of medicine. At his reign, *Dar Tu Wi Bar Ga Di Pa Ni* medical book by Thet Pan Sayadaw was rewritten in the way of diving nine sectors and paraphrasing by Ashin Mu Ni Nar Bi Yae Ma Htae. It is found that some medical books were written by order. At the reign of King Badon in 1812, the 700 names of herbal trees were compiled by Mahar Dhamma Thingyan by order. Under the Royal decree, the physicians and Sayadaws translate the medical books. It is revealed that translating was conducted in the style of Myanmar paraphrasing for easy understanding of laymen and physicians. Myanmar traditional medicine was reinforcing by arriving medical books like Ayubayda literature in great amounts from India in late 18 Century. This was on the cause of that King Badon ordered to translate the arrival books as well as medical treaties compiled on the reign of previous kings from Sanskrit to Myanmar. Through it, it was found that paraphrasing writing style was coming out and developed resulting in the birth of prose writing in order to ease in people's learning. Moreover, physicians were sent to foreign counties to pursue medicine. For the development of medicine, they were sent to India, Sri Lanka, and European countries. Western and eastern medicines were transformed into the form of Myanmar traditional medicine. Moreover both royal physicians and physicians at capital were relied upon when King Badon was ill. It is revealed that the king himself fostered Myanmar traditional medicine. He acknowledged the medicine of both royal physicians and physicians at capital. By looking these facts, it is vivid that Myanmar traditional medicine was in the stage of proliferation and firm. It is obvious that though physicians and medicines from foreign countries were there, only traditional medicine was believed. In the early Konbaung period, traditional medicine was important part of society. People relied heavily on the traditional medicine for their health.

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