



### Evolution of Thai Herbal Medicine



The possession of a soul, mind and body is considered humanity's greatest gift. In the quest to attain good health, humans have been impelled to search for cures for many ailments. The act of physical healing constitutes one of the most important of human endeavors. Through the test of time, ethno-medicine has evolved into intricate art that has been perpetuated by the passage of knowledge down through the generations within each ethnic group.

From existing evidence on drug usage by various ethnic tribes, it can be surmised that the inhabitants of the Indochinese peninsula developed their own systems of traditional medicine long before Sukhothai became a thriving capital of the region. Although no evidence has yet been found to substantiate such claims, a stone inscription dating back to the ancient Khmer Empire states that during the reign of King Chaiworamon VII made merit in accordance with Buddhist beliefs by ordering the establishment of 102 Arokayasala (hospitals) in an area that is now north-eastern Thailand.

Policy support for the development of traditional and herbal medicine was launched in 1977 through the 4th National Economic and Social Development Plan. Knowledge of therapeutic usage of these herbal medicinal products has become a valuable "heritage of local wisdom" which has been transferred from generation to generation within the family, village, society or even throughout the whole country. A lot of Thai people still believe in the efficacy of herbal remedies as well as traditional medicine practices. Usage of herbal medicinal products has remarkably been increased in accordance with the global trend of people returning to believe in the superb of natural therapy. As being a large natural resource of medicinal plants, Thailand is also alert to this global trend. Many research institutes are now turning back to the studies of herbal medicinal products or traditional medicine development. Local knowledge is recognized as a valuable inheritance. Study and research on the potential medicinal plants including extracting and purifying the active or principle components from plants to be used as medicinal products are conducted in many academic and governmental research institutions. New technology of manufacturing has been applied to produce the herbal medicinal products of higher efficacy and in more appropriate dosage forms.

The government has emphasized the promotion of traditional and herbal medicine by integrating it into primary health care activities. Formally, all herbal traditional recipes were regulated as herbal or traditional medicines. Then, there have been research and development utilizing modern technology to innovate pattern of consumption. These herbal products are now classified as modern herbal medicinal products.

The period of 1994 to 2000 was designated as the "Decade of Thai Traditional Medicine Development" focusing on the promotion of studies, research and development of health related products and health technologies, and increased capacity in producing traditional medicines and training in Thai traditional massage.

It could be said that, for almost a century, Thai traditional medicine had been a non-formal medicine system without substantial support and development from government. Only in the last decade did the Ministry of Public Health show endeavors to develop the whole system of the indigenous medicine. In 1993, the National Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine was established and in 2002 reformed to be under the Department of the Thai Traditional Medicine and Alternative Medicine.

