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# Yúnnán in Xuánzàng's '*Great Táng Records of the Western Regions*'

*An Annotated Translation a Small Section of 玄奘's《大唐西域记》*

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## The Yúnnán Papers

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This text is part of a series of translations of historical Chinese texts concerning Yúnnán.

This series does not aim to present any new research but to allow an English-speaking audience to better understand Yúnnán's history and culture through original texts. The texts are heavily annotated, giving geographical, historical and cultural background information and references to contemporary academic discussions.

The texts in this series are currently in draft and undergoing revision. Those translations that have reached a certain state of maturity can be found on my website at

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## 1 Introduction

The famous Táng dynasty monk Xuánzàng 玄奘, \*602–†664, who from 629–645 CE travelled to India to study Buddhism, never went to Yúnnán 云南. But his ‘*Great Táng Records of the Western Regions*’ 《大唐西域记》, completed in 646 CE after his return to China, contains a small passage on the lands to the south-east of India, from where it is said to be possible to reach Shǔ 蜀, i.e. present-day Sìchuān 四川 via the tribal areas then south-west of China, i.e. present-day Yúnnán. This section is translated here as well as a passage on the name of India.

## 2 About this Translation

I became aware of this text via a mention in Lutz (1991), p. 17, where its translation by Samuel Beal is included.<sup>(1)</sup>

There are many editions of the 《大唐西域记》. It was also included in the Sikù Quánshū 四库全书 library, see illustration 1.

The text for this translation was taken from the electronic copy at <https://zh.wikisource.org><sup>(2)</sup> and automatically converted into simplified script.

I am aware of two translations, the above-mentioned early translation by Beal and a much newer by Li.<sup>(3)</sup>

## 3 Annotated Translation

### 卷二 Overview of India 《印度总述》

#### An Explanation of its Name 《释名》

In the beginning of his work, Xuánzàng discusses the proper name for India, which in the Hàn dynasty ‘*Records of the Historian*’ 《史记》 had been called *Yuāndú* 身毒.<sup>(4)</sup>

详夫天竺之称，异议纠纷，旧云身毒，或曰贤豆，今从正音，宜云印度。

The term for **India** has been subject to various disputes and different opinions. Traditionally, it was called *Yuāndú*, and some called it *Xiándòu*. Now, adhering to the correct pronunciation, it is called **Yìndù**.

印度之人，随地称国，殊方异俗，遥

The people of Yìndù call their country according to their region, 大唐西域记 5

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r1: India ] Here he used Tiānzhú 天竺 to denote India.

r2: *Yuāndú* ] Beal (1884), p. 69 transliterates this as ‘Shin-tu’.

r3: Xiándòu ] Beal (1884), p. 69 transliterates this as ‘Hien-tau’.

r4: Yìndù ] Beal (1884), p. 69 transliterates this as ‘In-tu’.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Beal (1884) contains a full translation with annotations of Xuánzàng’s text.

<sup>(2)</sup> at <https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E5%A4%A7%E5%94%90%E8%A5%BF%E5%9F%9F%E8%A8%98/10>.

<sup>(3)</sup> Li (1996).

<sup>(4)</sup> The pronunciation of the first character is debated, for some information see the entry in the glossary.

举总名，语其所美，谓之印度。👁

each district having its own customs. Those from far away use a common name which speaks of its beauty and call it Yìndù.

For comparison, the translation by Beal:

On examination, we find that the names of India (T'ien-chu) are various and perplexing as to their authority. It was anciently called Shin-tu, also Hien-tau: but now, according to the right pronunciation, it is called In-tu. The people of In-tu call their country by different names according to their district. Each country has diverse customs. Aiming at a general name which is the best sounding, we will call the country In-tu. (Beal (1884), vol. 1, p. 69)

Beal's translation suggests that Xuánzàng picked the name, while my translation suggests that this was a name in use for India.

The translation by Li reads:

In a careful study we find that Tianzhu is variantly designated, causing much confusion and perplexity. Formerly it was called Shengdu, or Xiandou, but now we should call it Indu (India) according to the right pronunciation. The people of India use different names for their respective countries, while people of distant places with diverse customs generally designate the land that they admire as India. (Li (1996), p. 49)

## 卷十 **Seventeen Countries** 《十七国》

### **Kamarupa** 《迦摩缕波国》

The 10th *juàn* of the work contains a section on Kamarupa 迦摩缕波国, a state in the region of present-day Assam during the time of Xuánzàng. The text claims that it was possible to reach the south-western border of Shǔ from there in two month, suggesting a land-road east across the mountains of Miǎndiàn 缅甸 into Yúnnán and then north-east into China proper.

The terms for the tribal people in the region used in the text, Xīnán Yí 西南夷, Mán 蛮, and Láo 獠 all appear in the much earlier *Records of the Historian* 《史记》, suggesting that, while the geographical connection between the regions is surprisingly well-understood, the information about tribal groups was probably added through knowledge of earlier Chinese texts and not through first- or secondhand contemporary information gained in India.

This section is translated in in Beal (1884), vol. 2, p. 198 and Li (1996), p. 301

东境风土

此国东山阜连接，无大国都，境接西南夷，故其人类蛮獠矣。

大唐西域记 10

详问土俗，可二月行，入蜀西南之

Customs and Conditions of the Eastern Border

Going east from this country are continuous mountain ranges, there are no big cities, the border connects to the western and southern Yí, so the people there are like the Mán and Láo.

I asked in detail about local customs: it is possible to enter Shǔ

[6: 👁 ] Source text: <https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E5%A4%A7%E5%94%90%E8%A5%BF%E5%9F%9F%E8%A8%98/02>

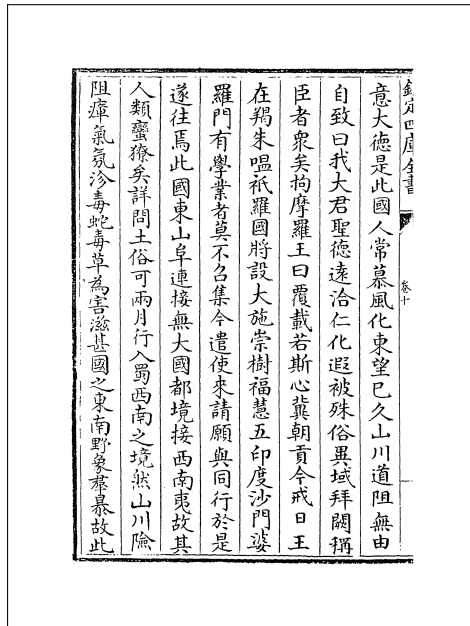
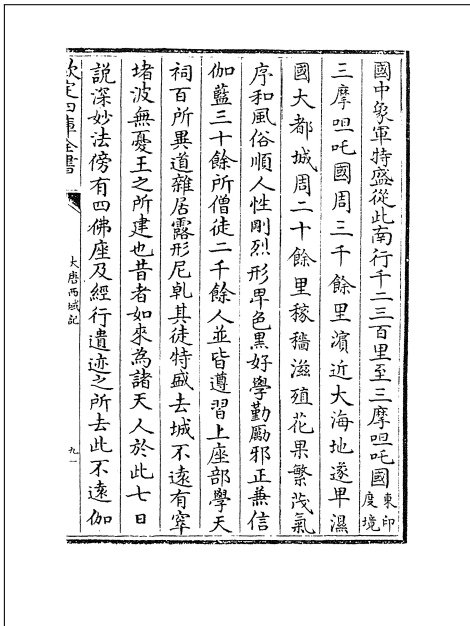


Illustration 1:  
Section mentioning Shǔ in the Sikù Quánsū edition of 《大唐西域记》

Source: <https://archive.org/embed/o6o44625.cn>

境。  
然山川险阻，瘴气氛沴，毒蛇毒草，  
为害滋甚。  
国之东南野象群暴，故此国中象军  
特盛。👁

from its south-western border in a journey of two months.  
The mountains and rivers are treacherous, there are miasmas and  
noxious airs, poisonous snakes and weeds, posing great dangers.  
In the south-east of the country are fierce herds of wild elephants,  
so the country's elephant army is particularly strong.

大唐西域记 15

## 4 Glossary

**Dàtáng Xīyù Jì** 《大唐西域记》: 'Great Táng Records of the Western Regions', narrative of Xuánzàng 玄奘's travels to India, completed in 646 – see page 5, 7

**Dù Yòu** 杜佑: Táng dynasty scholar and politician, 735–812, compiler of the 《通典》 –

**Guìzhōu** 贵州: province in south-west China –

**Hàn Cháo** 汉朝: Hàn dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 202 BCE–220 – see page 5, 7

**Hàn** 汉: Hàn, main ethnic group of China, also name of early dynasty – see page 7

**Hòu Hàn** 后汉: later Hàn dynasty, second period of the Hàn dynasty – see page 7

**Hòuhàn Shū** 《后汉书》: 'History of the Later Hàn Dynasty', classic historical text, one of the twenty-four official histories of China – see page 7

**Jiāmólǚbō Guó** 迦摩缕波国: Kamarupa, an early Indian state, in the region of present-

[17: 👁] Source text: <https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E5%A4%A7%E5%94%90%E8%A5%BF%E5%9F%9F%E8%A8%98/10>

- day Assam – see page 6, 7
- Láo** 獠: tribal group in regions west of Yúnnán, for the term and its pronunciation see Churchman (2016), pp. 87–88 – see page 6
- Mán** 蛮: historically a generic term for non-Chinese people in the southwest – see page 6
- Miǎndiàn** 缅甸: Miǎndiàn, present-day Burma, the lowlands west of Yúnnán – see page 6, 8
- Nán Yí** 南夷: southern Yí, general term for non-Chinese people south of China – see page 8
- Qīng dynasty** 清朝: Qīng dynasty, last dynasty of imperial China, 1644–1912 BCE – see page 8
- Shǐjì** 《史记》: ‘*Records of the Historian*’, – see pages 5, 6, 8
- Shǔ** 蜀: name of a state during the Warring States period, later used to refer to the western part of present-day Sichuān – see page 5, 6
- Sìchuān** 四川: Chinese province – see page 5
- Sìkù Quánshū** 《四库全书》: ‘*Complete Library of the Four Treasuries*’, Qīng dynasty library collection – see page 5, 8
- Táng Cháo** 唐朝: Táng dynasty, Chinese dynasty, 618–907 – see page 5, 8
- Tiānzhú** 天竺: India, Ancient name for India – see page 5, 8, see 身毒
- Tōngdiǎn** 《通典》: ‘*Comprehensive Statues*’, 801 work by Dù Yòu 杜佑 – see page 8
- Xīnán Yí** 西南夷: western and southern Yí, a term first appearing in the 《史记》 denoting non-Chinese people in present-day Sìchuān, Guìzhōu 贵州 and Yúnnán. It is often translated as ‘southwestern barbarians’, but it seems to be a short form referring to both Xī Yí 西夷 and Nán Yí 南夷, see Yang (2004), pp. 5–6 – see page 6, 8
- Xī Yí** 西夷: western Yí, – see page 8
- Xuánzàng** 玄奘: Chinese monk, 602–664, who travelled to India from 629–645, bringing back many Buddhist scriptures – see page 5, 6
- Yán Shīgǔ** 颜师古: Táng dynasty historian and linguist –
- Yí** 夷: one of the collective terms for non-Chinese people in the south-west – see page see 蛮
- Yìndù** 印度: India, name for India introduced by Xuánzàng 玄奘 in his 《大唐西域记》 – see pages 5, 6, 8
- Yuāndú** 身毒: ancient reference to India, first appearing in the 《史记》. The term is pronounced *Yuāndú*, see 《古代汉语词典》(2002), p. 1385, not *Shēndú*, as in the 《通典》 it states (in the chapter on India): 「颜师古云：捐毒即身毒，身毒则天竺也。塞种即释种也，盖语音有轻重也。」– ‘Yán Shīgǔ noted: *Juāndú* is *Yuāndú*, *Yuāndú* is *Tiānzhú*. Just like *Sāizhǒng* is *Shìzhǒng*, they are variations in the intensity of the pronunciation.’ However, this is not entirely uncontested as it can also be argued that this annotation mistakes a small state called *Juāndú* 捐毒 mentioned in the 《后汉书》(第八十六卷 for *Yuāndú*, see Wilkinson (2013), p. 358. The term is synonymous with 天竺 – see page 5, see 天竺
- Yúnnán** 云南: at the time of the Táng dynasty the name for the geographic region south of its Jiannan district – see page 5, 6



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