

Chinese measures and their equivalent

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Chinese measures and their equivalent

The following table has been compiled using when possible the equivalent measures given by Endymion Wilkinson in his *Chinese History – A New Manual*¹, fifth edition, 2018.

The basic unit for linear measures is the *chi*, 尺. Chinese Vinaya masters affirm that the *chi* used in the Vinayas is the Zhou *chi*, the *chi* used during the Zhou dynasty. Master Hong Yi calculated it as equivalent to 19.91 cm. Nevertheless, it seems that archaeological findings do not support this figure (see CHANM, table 42.4). According to CHANM, the Zhou, Qin and Han dynasties *chi* is equivalent to 23.1 cm, which I round down to 23 cm.

There are some discrepancies between the measures listed in CHANM and the figures given in the Vinaya. For example, the pace (步, *bu*), which is a double step, is said to be equivalent to the bow (弓, *gong*), but in the Vinayas the last is longer. I keep the figures given in the Vinayas.

Other measures are of Indian origin and of course they do not appear in CHANM.

Sometimes, different Vinayas offer different assessments of measures. I have tried to list all the variants according to the various Vinayas in which these measures can be found.

尺	23 cm	chi (foot)
	Modern China : 33.33 cm	
寸	1/10 尺 : 2.3 cm	cun (inch)
肘	1 尺 8 寸 : 41.4 cm	zhou (cubit)
弓	5 肘 (僧祇律 MV) : 9 尺	gong (bow)
	4 肘 (十誦律 SV) : 7.2 尺	
尋	8 尺: 184 cm	xun
拘盧舍	2000 弓(僧祇律 MV) : 414000 尺 : 10 里 : 4140 m	krośa
	500 弓 (十誦律 SV) : 3600 尺 : 2 里 : 828 m	
	5 里 (雜寶藏, <i>Store of Miscellaneous Treasures</i>): 2070 m	
里	According to the figure given in the MV and the SV for a krośa, 1 里 is long 414 m ²	li (Chinese mile)
由旬	40 里: 16.56 km	yojana
	8 拘盧舍 (雜寶藏, <i>Store of Miscellaneous Treasures</i>)	
	The maximum dimension of a bhikṣu territory(僧界) is 3 <i>yojana</i> . If we consider the length of 40 <i>lis</i> for one <i>yojana</i> , we get a figure of 49.7 km.	

¹ Henceforth abbreviated as CHANM.

² According to CHANM, 1 *li* is equivalent to 360 *bu*, namely approximately 500 m (49680 cm). Since this would totally change the proportions given by the Vinaya, I keep as standard the figures given in the table above. Moreover, the dimension of 1 *li* is consistent in both MV and SV.

	In Thanissaro Bhikkhu, <i>BMC</i> , V. II, Chapter 13, p. 175, the figure is similar: 48 km	
槃陀	1 槃陀: 28 肘 : 50.4 尺 : 1159 cm	abbhantara
	The dimension of an aranya according to the SuVV is 7 <i>abbhantaras</i> (槃陀), namely 81 m	
步	6 尺 : 138 cm	bu (pace)
	63 步(Village with an unrecognizable boundary) : 87 m (rounded up from 8694 cm)	
	13 步(the 13 paces extension of the natural robe-inclusive territory) : 18 m (rounded up from 1794 cm)	
丈	十尺: 230 cm (2.3 m)	zhang (pole)
升	200 ml	sheng (pint)
斗	10 升: 2000 ml	dou (peck)
指	2 寸 : 4.6 cm (Sugata measure)	zhi (thumb)
磔手	The length of the span measured from the thumb to the point of the middle finger: 23 cm (Sugata measure)	zhi (span)