

Emperor T'ai Tsun that all tributary nations should present their choicest vegetable products. Yüan Wen 袁文, an author of the Sung period, in his work *Wen yü kien p'in* 羹牖閒評,¹ states that the spinach (*po-liñ*) comes from (or is produced in) the country Ni-p'o-lo (Nepal) in the Western Regions.² The *Kia yü pen ts'ao*, compiled in A.D. 1057, is the first Materia Medica that introduced the spinach into the pharmacopœia.³

The colloquial name is *po ts'ai* 菠菜 ("po vegetable"), *po* being abbreviated for *po-liñ*. According to Wan Ši-mou 王世懋 (who died in 1591), in his *Kwa su su* 瓜蔬疏, the current name in northern China is *č'i ken ts'ai* 赤根菜 ("red-root vegetable"). The *Kwan k'ün fan p'u* uses also the term *yin-wu ts'ai* ("parrot vegetable"), named for the root, which is red, and believed to resemble a parrot. Aside from the term *Po-se ts'ai*, the *Pen ts'ao kan mu ši i*⁴ gives the synonymes *hun ts'ai* 紅菜 ("red vegetable") and *yan ts'ai* 洋菜 ("foreign vegetable"). Another designation is *šan-hu ts'ai* ("coral vegetable").

A rather bad joke is perpetrated by the *Min šu* 閩書, a description of Fu-kien Province written at the end of the sixteenth or beginning of the seventeenth century, where the name *po-liñ* is explained as *po len* ("waves and edges"), because the leaves are shaped like wave-patterns and have edges. There is nothing, of course, that the Chinese could not etymologize.⁵

There is no account in the traditions of the T'ang and Sung periods to the effect that the spinach was derived from Persia; and in view of the recent origin of the term "Persian vegetable," which is not even explained, we are tempted at the outset to dismiss the theory of a Persian origin. STUART⁶ even goes so far as to say that, "as the Chinese have a tendency to attribute everything that comes from the southwest to Persia, we are not surprised to find this called *Po-se ts'ao*, 'Per-

¹ Ch. 4, p. 11 b (ed. of *Wu yin tien*, 1775).

² 波稜出西域泥婆羅國. This could be translated also, "in the Western Regions and in the country Ni-p'o-lo."

³ *Či wu miñ ši t'u k'ao*, Ch. 4, p. 38 b.

⁴ Ch. 8, p. 87 b.

⁵ Of greater interest is the following fact recorded in the same book. The spinach in the north of China is styled "bamboo (*ču* 竹) *po-liñ*," with long and bitter stems; that of Fu-kien is termed "stone (*ši* 石) *po-liñ*," and has short and sweet stems.—The *Min šu*, in 154 chapters, was written by Ho K'iao-yüan 何喬遠 from Tsin-kian in Fu-kien; he obtained the degree of *tsin ši* in 1586 (cf. Cat. of the Imperial Library, Ch. 74, p. 19).

⁶ Chinese Materia Medica, p. 417.