

# “MITHURA” From Pearl of the Indian Ocean to the Dragon's Land

K.B.G. Wayani Saumya Kariyawasam

ඉන්දියා සාගරයේ මුතු ඇටය ලෙස විරුදාවලිය  
ලත් ශ්‍රී ලංකාව හා චීනය අතර ඇති සම්බන්ධතාව  
ඉතා ඇත අතීතයට විහිදී යයි. ඉතා ඇත අතීතයේ  
සිට සේද මාවත ඔස්සේ මෙරටට පැමිණි චීන  
ජාතිකයන් ඇරැඹූ වෙළෙඳ සබඳතා අද වන විට  
ඉතා පුළුල් ව තිබේ. චීන භාෂාව හදාරන ලාංකික  
විශාල සිසුන් ප්‍රමාණයක් සිටින අතර සිංහල  
භාෂාව හදාරන චීන ජාතික සිසුන්ගේ ප්‍රමාණයේ  
ඉහළ යෑමක් මෑත කාලයේ දක්නට ලැබේ. දෙ  
රටේ වෙසෙන ජනයා අතර ඔවුන්ගේ භාෂා  
ප්‍රචලිත වීම දෙ රට අතර සම්බන්ධතා වර්ධනයට  
මහඟු පිටුවහලක් වී තිබේ. ශ්‍රී ලංකාව හා චීනය  
අතර පවතින මිතු දම අතීතයට ද ද වර්තමානයට  
ද වඩා අනාගතයේ ද වර්ධනය වේ යැ යි සිතිය  
හැකි ය.

---

© කේ.බී.ජී. වයනි සෝමා කාරියවසම්

සංස්. ජයමල් ද සිල්වා, දිල්ශාන් මනෝජී රාජපක්ෂ, දුලන්කා ලංසකාර,  
දිනේෂ් සඳරුවන්

‘ප්‍රභා’ ශාස්ත්‍රීය සංග්‍රහය, තුන් වැනි කලාපය - 2013/2014

මානවශාස්ත්‍ර පීඨය, කැලණිය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය

It was a memorable day on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2013, I set off for Chongqing , in China and this began the adventure of a lifetime from my island home Sri Lanka. The day began on September 03<sup>rd</sup> of 2013; I set off for Chongqing, China, and the adventure of a lifetime from my island home Sri Lanka. I spent the first couple days getting adjusted to the new time zone, and then I jumped into the academic work that would consume the bulk of the time of my internship at the Chongqing Normal University.

Sri Lanka is a small island nation with a complicated history. The country has inherited an exciting cosmopolitan culture, but in a self discovery it is found tragically to be at war with ourselves .Yet Sri Lanka finds itself tragically at war with its own selves. Sri Lanka has a fantastically beautiful and diverse ecology of beaches and mountains, elephants and birds, people and agriculture. Nestled in the Indian Ocean, surrounded by bountiful waves and exotic beauty all around, Sri Lanka is known to many as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean and is a true paradise on earth. With beautiful golden beaches, splendid terrains and jungles, as well as cultural and historical sites, this picturesque island provides an abundant source of attractions and places to visit. Today it is home to approximately 20 million people.

Sri Lanka is an island country that has been known by many names. The existence of the island has been known to the Indic, Chinese, Persian, Arabic, and Western civilizations for many millennia and the various names ascribed to the island over time reflect this. Chinese “*PaOutchow*” (“isle of gems”).

At least from about the 1st century BC, Sri Lanka was known to China, the Chinese calling it Seng-Kia-lo (Simhala = The Kingdom of Lions) or Seih-lan (Simhale) and Simhaladipa

## **“MITHURA” From Peal of the Indian Ocean to Dragon's Land**

---

(Sri Lanka). The Atthakatha, the Sinhalese Pali texts (before the fifth century CE) refer to travel between Sri Lanka and China.<sup>1</sup>

In 1972 Ceylon renamed itself “Sri Lanka”. In Sanskrit the name aptly means “venerated, resplendent land”. The formal name was actually the “Free, Sovereign and Independent Republic of Sri Lanka,” which was changed in 1978 to “the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka”.

It may be far from China, but its relations with China have been close and have stood the test of time. There was a time when China invented the printing technology; Sri Lanka created a religious literature. When China constructed the Great Wall, Sri Lankan sculptors carved the statue of Samadhi of Lord Buddha.

In January 1957, Sri Lanka formally established diplomatic relations with China. The relationship between the two countries was further strengthened after diplomatic ties were initiated in 1957, and reached dizzy heights when the Rubber – Rice Pact was signed. In 1952. Five years before the establishment of diplomatic ties between Sri Lanka and China, an agreement was signed permitted the exchange of Sri Lanka natural rubber with rice from China after called the “Rubber-Rice” Agreement.”It mutually favored both countries.

Years before the establishment of diplomatic ties between Sri Lanka and China, an agreement was signed with China and Sri Lanka to exchange natural rubber for rice. Often called the “Rubber-Rice” Agreement, it mutually favored both countries. China needed rubber which was hard to get following UN sanctions on the export of rubber from Malaysia, prompted by the Korean War. And Sri Lanka was faced dealing with a rice shortage. After signing

the agreement, China's then Prime Minister Zhou Enlai gave this walking stick to Senanayake to express the Chinese peoples' gratitude. This was five years before establishing diplomatic relations, and was the first trade agreement signed by China with a non-communist country.

Sri Lanka boasts of a written history going back over 2000 years. Beginning around the fifth century BCE waves of Indo-Aryan immigrants from Northern India settled the Island displacing and absorbing the prehistoric Veddah tribes which who lived tens of thousands of years as hunter-gatherers.

Descendants of these original inhabitants can still be found in remote areas in the eastern jungles and scrub, as they try today like every other group here to preserve, rediscover, and recreate their imagined authentic culture. The descendants of the Indo-Aryan immigrants are today the Sinhalese people, who make up some 70 percent of the Island s population and speak the language of Sinhalese.

Throughout Sri Lanka's long history, there have been extensive contacts with south India as well, including repeated invasions and the establishment of Hinduism and the Tamil language as major cultural influences. In truth, there was a mixing of cultures, religions, languages, and genes between the Sinhalese and Tamils over two millennia, but modern Sri Lanka is a case study in identity politics run amok.

The mythology and history of the Sinhalese are recorded in the Mahavansa, which also chronicle the establishment of Buddhism as the dominant religion in the Island. The first major Sinhalese kingdom was built in Anuradhapura in the fourth century BCE.

## **Legend**

Legend tells of the mission of Mahinda, one of the sons of the great North India Buddhist Emperor Ashoka, arriving in Anuradhapura in the third century BCE, where he converted the king to Buddhism. The earliest written records of the teachings of Lord Gautama Buddha were first transcribed from the oral tradition in Sri Lanka some three hundred years after the Buddha's death. Known as the Pali Canon, these scriptures establish the core beliefs and doctrines of Buddhism and make Sri Lanka an important destination for international Buddhist pilgrims and scholars.

Several travels of the Sinhalese to China are described in Chinese records. One of the ambassadors from Sri Lanka accepted in China is mentioned in the Leangs. One of the first embassies from Sri Lanka to China is mentioned in the History of the Leangs<sup>2</sup>. The Kao-seng-choan, written in 519 CE confirms adds, regarding this mission: Formally the king of Sri Lanka learning of Hiao-ou-it (373-396 CE) of the Tsin Dinah Cetti sent the Samanera Tanmol-iuen<sup>3</sup>. In the beginning of the period, I-hi (405-408 CE) of the Tsin, a statue of jade and ten packages of writings were sent by the Sri Lanka king. An interesting travel was in 429 CE when Sinhalese nuns went to China to establish the Buddhist nun order there. This was very probably the longest recorded travel of women anywhere until then. In 428 CE the Sri Lanka king sent an ivory statue to the emperor. The Sinhalese monk Sanghavaraman went to China in 431 CE while in 456 CE five Sinhalese monks were sent by the Sri Lankan Sinhala King as ambassadors on an Embassy to the Emperor of China.

According to the Mahawansa the Chinese Buddhist monk Faxian (Fahien) during the period 399 to 412 traveled on foot all the way from China to Sri Lanka and during the journey visited many sacred Buddhist sites for the purposes of acquiring Buddhist

scriptures. His journey is described in his important travelogue, a Record of Buddhist kingdoms which is a self written account by the Chinese Monk, Faxian of his Travels in India and Sri Lanka. The search of he made the purpose of which was few Buddhist Books of Discipline concreting Theravada Buddhism. The description presented here is a minuscule of the stupendous effort on his part to retrieve the Vinaya Pitakaya, a part of the Thripitakaya.

According to the Mahavansa, Chinese Buddhist monk Faxian (fa hien) who travelled by foot all the way from China to Sri Lanka by visiting many sacred Buddhist sites between 399 and 412 (4th Century) to acquire Buddhist scriptures. His journey is described in his important travelogue, a record of Buddhist kingdoms, being an account by the Chinese Monk Faxian of his travels in India and Sri Lanka in search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline in search of Theravada Buddhism. It was an attempt to show a fraction of his venture to search Vinaya Pitakaya, apart of the Thripitakaya.

He deepened his knowledge by conversing with monks and gathered sacred texts that had not yet been translated into Chinese. He returned to China by sea in 412, after spending two years in Sri Lanka. His Record of Buddhist Kingdoms contains valuable information about Indian Buddhism in this era.

The huge Abhayagiri Dagoba created in the 1st or 2nd century BC, was the centerpiece of a monastery of 5000 monks. The name means Hill of Protection or Fearless Hill (though some local guides mistakenly claim Giri was the name of a local Jain monk). The monastery was part of the School of the Secret Forest , a heretical sect that studied both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism. Chinese traveller Faxian visited in AD 412. The dagoba was probably rebuilt several times to reach its

## **“MITHURA” From Peal of the Indian Ocean to Dragon's Land**

---

peak 75m height. It has some interesting bas-reliefs, including one near the western stairway of an elephant pulling up a tree. A large slab with a Buddha footprint can be seen on the northern side, and the eastern and western steps have unusual moonstones made from concentric stone slabs.

The largest natural cave: Pahiyangala, in Sri Lanka, as known as and the oldest human settlement in Asia lies 400 feet above the sea level at Yatagampitiya in the Kaluthara District. The cave is 175 feet long. The cave mouth is 150 feet high and 280 feet in depth. Excavations done in 1986 – 87 and 2008 – 2009 had unearthed human craniums and prehistoric tools which are more than 38000 years old. Pahiyangala, according to the legends has got its name from the Chinese monk Faxian who has stayed in this cave for some time on his way to Sri Pada in the 5th century. The art on the walls of his room is from the Kandyan era. There is a 40 feet long sleeping Buddha statue inside this cave. Every year during the season, about 40 – 50 priests trek on the same route that Ven. Faxian took centuries back, to Sri Pada (Adam's peak).

The Sri Lankan played opera, about Faxian's arrival 16 centuries ago, ends with the monk returning home to China after overcoming another arduous sea journey, carrying back many Buddhist texts. These sacred books were gifted him in the ancient Lankan central capital of Anuradhapura, where Faxian studied at the ancient university of Abhayagiriya. Historically Buddhist texts were first recorded in Sri Lanka where Faxian studied at the ancient university of Abhayagiriya. here, then after being brought to China, translated into Chinese. Many lost texts have been translated back into Sinhalese by a multilingual Sri Lankan monk studying at Beijing University (give the period). The Voyage to the Heartland, with its powerful still timely message of sharing of knowledge and dharma, closes with these words on the screen from the Sri Lankan creators: “Tribute to the People of China.”

According to my personal experience in china, I found that Chinese people are great nation, including about 56 nationalities and the highest population of the world. Most Chinese people are great, as are most nationalities and most people of the world.

As long as we smile at each other, interaction between each other is great. I think Chinese people are quite loud and rough, honest and quite direct, and that is what I like about them. They can surely have a good laugh, and laugh about each other and themselves. They can enjoy themselves. I believe interaction between foreigners and Chinese should be focused less on differences and more on similarities. I might add, I even feel offended and hurt when people seem to see me as a foreigner, a stranger, a different kind of person, instead of as just a fellow person.

Chinese people speak very loud, so that made me think that they love to quarrel. In fact, it s just the way that Chinese people speak. I asked my Chinese friend “Why do Chinese people speak so loud?” Then, she told me that maybe there are too many people on the road, so they need to speak very loud in order for the other side to hear what they say. And the thing that annoys me the most is that many men smoke, and they smoke anywhere they want, it s really hard to avoid this situation, it seems that the smokers do not care whether others are allergic to cigarette smoke or not.

Meeting people in China is as easy as walking down the street. People will come up to you and ask if they can practice their English by talking to you, and the next thing you know, they will ask you to join them in whatever it is they are doing. I found that the language barrier is substantial. I would suggest that if you do not understand what the person is saying, just admit that you do not understand instead of acting like you do by nodding your head in agreement. It will become apparent that you did not understand at



## **“MITHURA” From Peal of the Indian Ocean to Dragon's Land**

---

some point or another when they want to do something or have you asks someone for something.

I found the Chinese people to be some of the friendliest people that I have ever met. I was taken aback by just how friendly they are. However, they will try to take advantage of us when it comes to shopping. Chinese people, they are often very warm and friendly and curious; they are tolerant, but not always polite. I think Chinese can be very polite, but not when they are boarding trains, buses or driving cars, then they are very impolite, it is “me first”.

It is up to the Chinese government schools to educate the people in cleaner ways of living. Many Chinese men have very bad habits about hygiene. They are dirty on the trains and at bus stations, as well as the public toilets. I have seen new buses and trains become very dirty because the men are dirty. Chinese men throw garbage everywhere and spit on the spot. I have often been to a public toilet and the man before me did not flush the toilet.

I was impressed by the Chinese people, very hard working and patient. I think that the Chinese are the most disciplined people in the world. I noticed the strong family connections when I use to speak with my Chinese friends.

Relations between China and Sri Lanka are generally warm. There is a Chinese embassy located in Colombo and a Sri Lankan embassy situated in Beijing. To honor the established of diplomatic relationship with China, there are number of gift donated by the People s Republic of China, strengthen in a spirit of harmony and understanding which was a model of International Co operation.

The Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH), is a convention center located in Colombo, Sri

Lanka. Built between 1970 and 1973, the convention center was a gift from the People's Republic of China in memory of Solomon Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) from 1956 to 1959.

China had presented Sri Lanka with a number of precious and long lasting gifts such as the BMICH, the Supreme Court Complex, the Norochcholai Coal Power Plant and the Hambantota International Harbor.

The Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH), is a convention center located in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Built between 1970 and 1973 the convention center was a gift from the People's Republic of China in memory of Solomon Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) from 1956 to 1959. The construction of the Hall was carried out by a joint Sri Lankan and Chinese workforce with a considerable portion of the exquisite building materials being imported from China.

The Nelum Pokuna (Lotus pond) Mahinda Rajapaksa Theatre: gift from China, which will remain as a further monument to the lasting friendship between Sri Lanka and China, will add to such important gifts as the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall and the Superior Courts Complex in Colombo. What is significant about these gifts from China is that in each case they have served to fulfill a long felt need in the country. The BMICH helped put Sri Lanka on the map for international conferences and conventions, the Superior Courts Complex brought new space and dignity to an old establishment coming down from the Dutch period, where expansion or modernising was necessary. Now, the Nelum Pokuna Theatre gives to Colombo and the country the much needed venue for the performing arts, with the most modern of facilities, beautifully designed, spacious to accommodate very large

## **“MITHURA” From Peal of the Indian Ocean to Dragon's Land**

---

audiences, the highest acoustic quality for the most demanding of musical or theatrical performances, with good allocation of audience related facilities such as catering, and abundant parking too. The new theatre with a seating capacity of 1,388 on three levels is a gift from China to Sri Lanka. Equipped with the most modern and high tech equipment, it is believed to have few equals in South Asia. This new theatre symbolises the new era of Sri Lanka as well as the newly strengthened friendship with China. Sri Lankan nation is used to thinking big. China was the eastern end of the Silk Road in ancient times and Sri Lanka was situated midway. The cultural, religious and trade ties between the two nations go back several thousands of years and have reached their peak today.

China had always stood for the strength, national integrity and freedom of Sri Lanka. During the past few years, Sri Lanka appears to have forged closer economic, military, and diplomatic relations with China. For instance, Sri Lanka has welcomed Chinese investment in the construction of a port in Hambantota, received arms from China for use in its civil war, and been granted “dialogue partner” status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Such high profile moves have unnerved analysts already fearing the rise of Chinese influence elsewhere in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) such as in Gwadar, Pakistan, and in Kyaukpyu, Myanmar (Burma). Consequently, news reports examining China's bilateral relations with Pakistan and Myanmar often make fleeting references to Sri Lanka's deepening ties with China in an attempt to establish a broader pattern of Chinese activity in the IOR. Such reports about Sri Lanka and China, however, are usually based on anecdotal accounts and speculation instead of substantive data

Chinese people and government's wishes are always blessed for the island's progress and the potential of Sri Lanka as a “new Asian miracle,” and for the two countries “strong friendship to continue forever.” In a world of growing economic

uncertainty and conflict especially westward, increasing shared peace and prosperity to the east and south in decolonizing countries like China and Sri Lanka perhaps can show an inspiring balance of new and old ways toward a better world for all people.

## **End Notes**

1. Weerasinghe, S. G. M., A History of the Cultural Relations Between Sri Lanka & China: An aspect of the Silk Route, The Central Cultural Fund, 1995, Colombo. p 20
2. Seneviratne, John, “Wan Hiuen Tse s Mission to India” Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. XXIV, pp 77-123