

## **Numismatic Evidence in Ancient Sri Lanka-China Relations**

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Chinese sources indicate that the historical relations between Sri Lanka and China date back to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century B. C. Since then China has been engaged in economic affairs in the southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankans were already aware of the inland silk route from China to India, as revealed by a record appearing in *Sīthalavattuppakarana*. This proves that Chinese have had close relations with South Asia, even prior to the development of the sea silk route. The Chinese who reached North India via Gobi and Taklimakan deserts have travelled to South India across the Vindhya ranges and sailed to Sri Lanka as well as to other far eastern countries. It has been recorded that Chinese coins have been in circulation in their commercial transactions. According to Indian excavation records, the greatest collection of coins found in India counts only up to thirty two. In Sri Lanka, on the contrary, thousands of coins have been found from excavations conducted in Yāpahuva, Kurunegala and various other regions. Among these coins, there are replica coins belonging to the earliest Chinese dynasties as well as many coins belonging to other Chinese dynasties including Qin, Sui, Tang, Wudaishiguo, Bei song, and Nan song. There is also a Banliang coin belonging to the Qin era. This finding is of great importance since it has been recorded as the only such coin found in the entire South Asian region. Moreover, there are various types of Kai Yuan coins belonging to the Tang era, one Wuzhu coin belonging to the Sui era, as well as a coin belonging to the Wudaishiguo era. The coin belonging to the early Bei song era is also of much significance owing to the two punctures on its top. This type of coins is extremely rare and this has been recorded as the first such coin found elsewhere other than in China. This discovery paves

the way for a new reading of Sri Lanka-China relations while broadening the scope of the Chinese economic history. This research explores the nature of ancient Sri Lanka-China relations through numismatic data. Data from Sri Lankan excavations are compared with a number of literary sources from both Sri Lanka and China.

**Keywords:** numismatic, Sri Lanka-China relations, silk route

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