

# Sino-Sri Lankan Relationship and Trikāyastava in an Inscription at Mihintale.

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By Dr. Ven. Maduruoye Dhammissara

Senior Lecturer, GWAI, University of Kelaniya, Yakkala, Sri Lanka.

[madudham@yahoo.com](mailto:madudham@yahoo.com)

## Introduction

History of Sino-Sri Lankan relationship goes back to a remote past even up to 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia B.C. Therefore, evidence can be traced from the Sri Lankan, Chinese and other sources for the religious, commercial and diplomatic relations between the two countries developed by leaps and bounds during the past 4 millennia.

*Trikāyastava* in an Inscription at Mihintale, Sri Lanka is a unique piece of evidence related to *Trikāyastava* concept. It eulogizes the *Trikāya* or the three bodies of the Buddha, developed by Mahayana tradition, in Sanskrit language and *Sragdharā* metre.

Applicability of the topic mentioned above arises through two ways: (1) *Trikāyastava* has been restored into Sanskrit from Chinese transliteration and from a Tibetan codex. No other country than these three, viz. Sri Lanka, China and Tibet has so far presented *Trikāyastava* in the equal form. (2) *Trikāyastava* too being a Buddhist concept found in both countries and common in the sense too. Therefore, it is certain that Buddhism is the bridge between the two countries relationship through more than two millennia.

## Historical evidence found about the relationship between Sri Lanka and China

According to the Indian epic the *Mahābhārata*, Chinese and Sri Lankan representatives attended the sacrifice, *Rājasūya* of Yudhisthira at Hastināpura, India. Referring to the *Mahābhārata*, some scholars have mentioned that the relationship of China and Sri Lanka goes back up to the second millennia B.C.<sup>1</sup> Referring to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and contemporary texts, some scholars have agreed to a trade relationship between China and Sri Lanka which goes back up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C. According to them, Chinese ships transported cinnamon to Dynastic Egypt from Sri Lanka which was known, during the prehistoric times, as 'the land in which cinnamon grew'.<sup>2</sup>

An ancient Sinhala text, the *Sihalavatthuppakaraṇa*, states that 32 Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka and 4 *Arahats* from India visited the capital of China. This occurred in and around the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. "Diplomatic relations between ancient Sri Lanka and China commenced around the first century B.C. While the Sinhalese have visited China, the Chinese too have reached *Sihaladvīpa*. Some of the Chinese visitors to Sri Lanka might have permanently remained here owing to various reasons such as religious activities and matrimonial ties."<sup>3</sup>

Chinese text Han Shu records that a Chinese mission to South India met with disaster and returned to China after visiting Sinhaladīpa. This incident, according to the record, had occurred at the beginning of the Christian era (1-6 A.C.)<sup>4</sup>

The Roman chronicler Pliny (24-79 A.C.) and the Greek Cosmos Indicopleustes (6<sup>th</sup> century A.C.) described Sri Lanka as a 'great emporium', which the Chinese used to frequent from early times. Sri Lanka used to export items of value such as honey, amber and pepper. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>