

Teaching of Chinese as a foreign language in Sri Lanka

Kumari Priyanka Jayasuriya¹

There is a long tradition of friendship between China and Sri Lanka. It is rooted in the annals of our long history. Historical records indicate that there had been strong commercial and cultural ties between the two countries from the earliest time.

Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family and is among the world's oldest written languages. Its earliest written records date as far back as more than 3000 years. It is the main language spoken in China, and one of the world's major languages, ranking among the official as well as working languages at the United Nations and other international organisations.

With the rapid development of East Asia and China emerging as the largest market economy of the world, most countries of the world have realised the value of learning the Chinese language. At present the interest in learning Chinese is growing in Sri Lanka due to the attraction of Chinese to invest in Sri Lanka and strengthening cultural friendship between Sri Lanka and China. Further, there is also a recent trend of more Chinese tourists coming to Sri Lanka.

This paper attempts to discuss the importance of Chinese as a foreign language in Sri Lanka, its current trends and future perspectives. Hitherto this area has not been well researched. Thus this paper also discusses some contrastive aspects of Chinese and Sinhala and difficulties encountered by Sinhala native speakers in learning Chinese as a foreign language in the areas of orthography, phonology, morphology, syntax and pragmatics. Learning Chinese language builds up and strengthens cultural ties, and creates employment opportunities for Sri Lankans in many a field. This paper thus analyses the present teaching methodology in Chinese in Sri Lanka.

The data has been collected from students of Chinese language studies in Sri Lanka with a sample of around 100 students. To the best of our knowledge, a study of this nature has not been conducted so far with reference to Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka. Thus it is expected that this study will also open new avenues for future research in the area of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language.

Key Words: Chinese as a foreign language, Sinhala native speakers, Foreign language Teaching, Teaching Methodology

¹ Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka