

## **UNDERSTANDING OF CHINESE PEOPLE IN SRI LANKA THROUGH THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASSIMILATION AND MULTICULTURALISM**

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From the arrival of Prince Vijaya (Vijayawatarana) in 543 B.C., many ethnic groups came to Sri Lanka at different times, and they gradually became citizens of Sri Lanka. In the most general perspective, Sri Lankans talk only about the relations with India since the period of Prince Vijaya. Although not as much as India, Sri Lanka has established close relations with other countries too. In this regard, China can be distinctively recognized since the early history of Sri Lanka. Those relations date back to the time the Chinese monk Faxian (Fa-Hsien, Fa Hien) (A.D. 399-414) Buddhist pilgrimage in this country. Faxian undertook a trip from Xian in central China and continued traveling to Sri Lanka. According to historical records, Faxian reportedly travelled on a mercantile ship from the port of Tamralipti, in eastern India, to Sri Lanka in A.D. 408 or 409. It is also evident from Faxian's account that when he boarded to return to China four years after his stay in Sri Lanka (4010-414), he had made a great relationship with the Buddhist monastics in Sri Lanka. Numerous archaeological evidences are evidenced to the close friendship between China and Sri Lanka. Besides these archaeological evidence, contemporary evidence of China-Sri Lanka friendship is outright vital. The recent wave of independent migrants of Chinese begun in the late 1920s. Many of them temporarily settled at and spread out Maradana, Wellawatte and Negombo. They only had economic purpose and return home. This pattern changed with the intensification of the WW2 drawing a tendency to stay longer in Ceylon. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a new wave of Chinese migrants came to Sri Lanka with small business ambitions with the ensue of the civil war in 2009, Sri Lanka became a popular destination for rich Hong Kong people and mainland Chinese. According to available national statistics, the descendants of early migrants who remain in Sri Lanka is around 3500 persons. At present, approximately 80% of Sri Lankan Chinese spread out in the Western province, especially in the cities such as Colombo, Pamankada, Wellawatta, and Gampaha of the country. The Sri Lankan Chinese are living as a minority population in Sri Lanka. This study explored the lifestyle of Sri Lankan Chinese people and their profession and social status. Discourse analysis was employed for this study. Assimilation theory, and multiculturalism are used as a conceptual framework to understand the existence of Sri Lankan Chinese community. The findings of the study suggests that the integrity of Sri Lankan Chinese community to mainstream culture is a volunteer cultural assimilation and preserves cultural identity silently within a multicultural social landscape.

**Keywords:** Sri Lankan Chinese people, Identity, Cultural assimilation, Multiculturalism

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