

# An overview of the development of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in Sri Lanka

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චීනය, ශිෂ්‍යයන් සංවර්ධනය වෙමින් තමන්ටම ආවේණික පෞර්විකයක් පෙන්වුම් කරමින්, ලොව පුරා රටවල් සමඟ සමීප සන්නිවේදනයන් ඇතිකර ගැනීම නිසා විදේශ භාෂාවක් ලෙස චීන භාෂාව ඉගෙනීම සඳහා ඉල්ලුමක් නිර්මාණය කොට ගෙන තිබේ. ඉංග්‍රීසි භාෂාව විශ්ව භාෂාව බවට පත් වූ අතර, චීන භාෂාව ක්‍රමයෙන් විශ්ව භාෂාවක් බවට පත්වෙමින් තිබේ. සංඛ්‍යා ලේඛනවලට අනුව, ලෝක ජනගහණයෙන් සියයට විස්සක් චීන භාෂාව කතාකරන අතර බොහෝ රටවල් චීන භාෂාව ඉගෙනීමේ වැදගත්කම වැඩි වැඩියෙන් අවධාරණය කරයි. ශ්‍රී ලංකාව සහ චීනය අතර මිත්‍රත්වයට දීර්ඝ ඉතිහාසයක් ඇති අතර, යටත් විජිත යුගයේ සිටම චීන භාෂාව ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ පැවති බව ඓතිහාසික ලේඛන පෙන්වා දෙයි. වර්තමානයේ ශ්‍රී ලංකාව ආර්ථික, සංස්කෘතික සහ අධ්‍යාපනික වැනි විවිධ ක්ෂේත්‍රවල චීනය සමඟ සමීප සහයෝගීතාවයක් පවත්වයි. චීන භාෂාව තේරුම් ගත හැකි දක්ෂයින් ශ්‍රී ලංකාවට වහා අවශ්‍ය කර තිබේ. මෙම අධ්‍යයනයෙන් හැත්තෑව දශකයේ සිට ක්‍රි.ව. 2012 දක්වා ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ චීන භාෂා අධ්‍යාපනයෙහි සංවර්ධනය විමර්ශනය කෙරෙයි. තත්කාලීන සාහිත්‍ය සහ දේශීය විද්වතුන් සමඟ කෙරුණු සාකච්ඡා ඇසුරින් විමර්ශනය සිදු කෙරෙයි. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ චීන භාෂා අධ්‍යාපනය අදියර තුනකට බෙදිය හැකි බව මෙම පර්යේෂණයෙන් හඳුනා ගැනෙයි. 1. චීන භාෂා ඉගැන්වීමේ ආරම්භක කාලය (ක්‍රි.ව. 1970 පෙර) 2. චීන භාෂා ඉගැන්වීමේ සංවර්ධිත කාලය (ක්‍රි.ව. 1970 - ක්‍රි.ව. 2006) 3. චීන භාෂා ඉගැන්වීමේ සමෘද්ධිමත් කාලය (ක්‍රි.ව. 2007 -කැළණිය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලයේ කොන්ග්‍රසසියස් ආයතනය පිහිටුවීමෙන් පසු අවධිය) වශයෙනි.

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**Abstract**

The fast developing China has shown its own unique personality and the close communication with countries around the world has created the demand for foreign language learning. English became the world language and Chinese has gradually become one of the world's universal languages, like English. According to statistics, 20% of the world's population currently speaks Chinese, and many countries are increasingly emphasizing the importance of Chinese language learning. The relationship between Sri Lanka and China has a long history, historical documents according to the Chinese have appeared in Sri Lanka since the colonial period. Relations were fostered by thriving trade exchanges along the Maritime Silk Route with China in various fields such as economy, culture, and education. Sri Lanka urgently needs talents who can understand the Chinese language. The current study investigates the development of Chinese language education from 70 centuries to 2012 in Sri Lanka. The investigation is done by surveying the existing literature and discussing it with the local experts. Through the investigation it is found that Chinese language education in Sri Lanka can be divided into three stages: 1. The initial period of Chinese teaching (before 1970); 2. The development period of Chinese teaching (1970-2006); 3. The prosperous period of Chinese teaching (2007) after the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the University of Kelaniya.

**Keywords:** Teaching Chinese as a foreign language; Teaching materials, Sri Lanka

**Introduction**

Historically, there are relatively few studies on Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka. Through investigation and research, it is found that China and Sri Lanka have had close

exchanges since ancient times. Through the literature survey, the author attempts to deeply discuss the situation of Chinese teaching and the use of Chinese teaching materials in the context of friendship between Sri Lanka and China from ancient times to modern times. The local education work in Sri Lanka is mainly in charge of the Sri Lankan Higher Education Ministry and the Sri Lankan Education Ministry. The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for the teaching work of all local colleges and universities, and the Ministry of Education is responsible for the teaching work of primary and secondary schools nationwide. Both ministries actively carry out the promotion of Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka and often encourage domestic teaching institutions to offer Chinese language courses in procedure.

### **Research Problem**

This study will primarily investigate how Chinese language studies have developed in Sri Lanka from the past until now. The main problem is to figure out, how the Chinese language developed in Sri Lanka from time to time. This study primarily examines how Chinese language studies have developed in Sri Lanka from the past until now. Accordingly, how did Chinese language studies begin in the past? How did it develop in the past? Facts are investigated through the questions of what are the changes that have occurred during the development.

### **Research Methodology**

Primarily the sources were investigated. Accordingly, the study of scholarly documents and works published in connection with the study of the Chinese language in Sri Lanka was investigated and a conclusion was presented.

## Discussion

### 1. The beginning of Chinese language teaching (before 1970)

Sri Lanka is an important country in the Indian Ocean for Chinese language teaching and dissemination. In ancient times, China called Sri Lanka as Lion Country, Lanka Island, Selan, and Ceylon. From ancient times to the present, Sri Lanka and China have been closely related in the fields of culture, politics, economy, etc., especially the spread of Buddhist culture. Sri Lanka believes in Southern Buddhism, and 70.2% of the country's people believe in Buddhism. Buddhism has a history of 2,000 years in the two countries. Because of the relationship between Buddhist cultures, Chinese people have visited Sri Lanka several times, and Sri Lankan monks have also visited China. Yang Gang and Zhu Zhu's (2016) "汉语在古代斯里兰卡的传播" and Dhammadinna N. Thero's (2016) "斯里兰卡汉语教学形势和开展导论" stated that the spread of Chinese in Sri Lanka can be traced back to the period of Emperor Pingdi of the Eastern Han Dynasty; In ancient times, the dissemination of Chinese in Sri Lanka was characterized by spontaneous dissemination; monks and businessmen were the main bodies of dissemination.

The first known Chinese to arrive in Sri Lanka was Fa Xian, a Chinese eminent monk, "法显传" "佛国记" records his arrival in Sri Lanka in 410 AD. At that time, Venerable Faxian could not only understand Sinhala but also write, indicating that he was very familiar with the local language. During his two years of living in Sri Lanka, he not only used Sinhala himself but also introduced Chinese culture and Chinese to Sri Lankans. Therefore, it can be said that Venerable Faxian was the first Chinese to spread Chinese in Sri Lanka. According to records, in 434 AD, 19 bhikkhunis re-granted the great ordination of

bhikshuni at the Nanlin Temple. Among them, 8 bhikkhunis studied "Song language" in two years, and 11 bhikkhunis studied Chinese in one year. These 19 bhikkhunis are the first Sri Lankans to learn Chinese in the current record.

Subodhi Thero said in "古代中国与斯里兰卡的文化交流研究" (2010) that the main reason for Chinese monks to come to Sri Lanka is Buddhism, but at the same time, they also promote Sri Lankans to understand and promote Chinese culture and Chinese language, spread Chinese in Sri Lanka. During the Tang and Song Dynasties, the spread of Chinese in Sri Lanka increased the influence of Chinese businessmen in addition to the influence of Buddhist monks. The archaeological findings of Sri Lanka have found that there are porcelain and Chinese currency from the Tang Dynasty to the Southern Song Dynasty in the famous Sri Lankan cities, which indicates that Chinese merchants traded with Sri Lankans at that time. While conducting trade, merchants also brought Chinese culture.

After the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sri Lanka entered the colonial period, and the Chinese gradually increased. Between 1733 and 1740, Dutch rulers brought Indonesian Batavia Chinese to Sri Lanka to engage in agricultural production. When Frederick North was the British ruler of Sri Lanka (from 1798 to 1805), he brought 47 Malaysian Chinese from Penang to Galle in order to successfully develop agricultural production in Sri Lanka. Later, when Thomas Maitland was the British ruler, he brought another 100 Chinese from Penang, Malaysia to Sri Lanka. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after the Chinese local or overseas Chinese came to Sri Lanka to settle down one after another, they gradually formed a Chinese community. The Sri Lanka census in 1911 found a small number of Chinese who could speak Chinese. Rajika Chelvaratnam's article pointed out that many Chinese from Hubei and Shandong provinces came to Sri Lanka

in the 1820s, and some came to Sri Lanka from Singapore, Myanmar, and India. After living in the Aluthkade area of Sri Lanka for a period of time, these Chinese moved to live in places like Maradana, Wellawatta, and Negombo.

The above results show that there are two main factors affecting the spread of Chinese in Sri Lanka: Buddhist exchanges and trade exchanges. Monks and businessmen are the promoters of the Chinese language in Sri Lanka, and they have made important contributions to the spread of the Chinese language in Sri Lanka. From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century (before 1970), although there were Chinese living in or traveling to Sri Lanka, they did not prompt Sri Lanka to offer Chinese language courses and Chinese teaching.

## **2. The development period (1970-2006)**

### **Development of the teaching process**

With the increasingly close exchanges between Sri Lanka and China, in the early 1970s, the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka opened a certificate course for "Basic Chinese Teaching". The report stated that the courses were designed in Tamil, Hindi, Chinese, Japanese, English, French, German, and Russian, offering a two-year certificate course, on February 9, 1972, University of Kelaniya announced the "Contemporary Language Certificate Course - Common Regulations", only offering English, French, German, Hindi and Chinese courses, the Chinese course is taught for two years, and the oral competency and writing competency are tested. Initially, there were no Chinese textbooks in the Sri Lankan courses, and the teaching materials were written by the teachers themselves. Certificate courses are the basic Chinese courses for Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka, not undergraduate courses. This course failed to meet the needs of Sri Lankan Chinese learners,

nor did it meet the Chinese learning needs of Sri Lankan Chinese. The reason may be that the government did not actually promote Chinese courses at that time, Sri Lankan students did not understand the importance of Chinese and lacked Chinese teachers and teaching materials.

Bandaranayake International Center (BCIS) has been conducting elementary Chinese courses and intermediate Chinese courses since 1975. This is one of the most famous social training institutions in Sri Lanka. In addition to Chinese, they also have language training courses in Japanese, Hindi, Korean, Tamil, German, and French. The syllabus for each language is revised every two years. At present, Bandaranayake International Center mainly conducts six-month elementary Chinese courses and six-month intermediate Chinese courses, with more than 300 students learning Chinese, and the courses are mainly for adults. The main textbook of this course is Ma Jianfei's "长城汉语", with workbooks and CD-ROMs.

In 1994, the Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya launched a three-year undergraduate degree program for Chinese majors (General Degree Program). This is the biggest development for Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka. In addition to Chinese majors, other students who like to learn Chinese could also take elective courses or two-year Chinese certificate courses. Because of the lack of textbooks, from 1994 to 2006, the two sets of textbooks "基础汉语课本" and "实用汉语课本" continued to be used in undergraduate courses.

Long Hua Cultural Institute officially opened Chinese courses in 2003. It was founded by local Chinese and is the most famous training institution in Sri Lanka. The institution specially designed oral Chinese courses for businessmen, tour guides,

gem workers and other professionals. Besides speaking courses, they also offer beginner Chinese courses, intermediate Chinese courses and advanced Chinese courses. Initially, the institution used the "本科系列教材" published by Beijing Language and Culture University as the main textbook for comprehensive courses, and later switched to using Yang Jizhou's "汉语教程".

### **Teaching materials**

During this period, the beginning and development of the Chinese language were seen in the University of Kelaniya, BCIS, and Long Hua Cultural Institute. Mainly at University of Kelaniya "基础汉语课本"、"实用汉语课本" books were used as the main the teaching materials in their curriculum. Both these two books are famous among foreigners as main teaching materials in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Also, it was seen that the Great wall Chinese textbook (长城汉语) was used in the Chinese language courses in the BCIS. By having a workbook and CD- ROMs, the students got the opportunity to study and practice the language very well by learning the language and engaging in exercises. Also, this book mainly tries to improve speaking ability by exchanging ideas based on various situations. Also, the 汉语教程 textbook with situational dialogues for the basic Chinese courses introduced by Long Hua Cultural Center was very popular among the students. The fact that this book has several volumes made it easier for the students to learn.

According to the above details, it can be observed that since 1970 Chinese language has been officially started at the University of Kelaniya. Because of the fact that the government did not promote Chinese courses at that time, Sri Lankan students seemed to have been worried and afraid to choose Chinese as their major subject, and also the lack of Chinese teachers and



teaching materials were the main reasons for not developing the language.

### **3. The prosperous period (after the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the University of Kelaniya in 2007)**

With the rapid development of the economy and tourism between China and Sri Lanka, more and more Sri Lankans are learning Chinese. In order to encourage students to take Chinese courses, the Sri Lankan government has opened majors related to Chinese. The establishment of the Confucius Institute at the University of Kelaniya marks a new stage for Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka. On May 3, 2007, the Confucius Institute at the University of Kelaniya, the first Confucius Institute in Sri Lanka, was officially established, and Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka entered a period of prosperity. In 2007, the University of Kelaniya cooperated with Yunnan Nationalities University of China, and the Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) sent volunteer teachers to the Confucius Institute at the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka to teach Chinese. During this period, the Confucius Institute mainly targeted the Sri Lankan social personnel and provided Chinese language teaching for them, and opened a one-year elementary Chinese course for adults (Certificate course in Chinese). There were 30 students in the first batch. They successfully completed the course and obtained the certificate of completion.

After the establishment of the Language Department of the Faculty of Social Science and Languages of Sabaragamuwa University in 1995, they introduced a three-year degree course in Chinese in 2007. In 2016 they introduced a four year special degree course. The Chinese teaching at Sabaragamuwa University was established relatively late, but it is the second university in Sri Lanka to offer Chinese language as a degree

major subject. In the beginning, only 10 students chose to major in Chinese, and now there are more than 100 students selecting Chinese as their major subject.

Authorized by Hanban and the Confucius Institute Headquarters, in cooperation with China Radio International and the Sri Lanka Lumbini Listeners Association, on July 28, 2009, the Confucius Classroom of Sri Lanka Lumbini Radio International was officially inaugurated. This is the first broadcast of Confucius Classroom in Sri Lanka. During the Chinese teaching process, a six-month elementary Chinese course, a one-year intermediate Chinese course and a one-year advanced Chinese course were arranged. All exams include listening, writing, and speaking. In addition to these courses, courses for Sri Lankan tour guides, and courses for gem and gold sales staff for construction staff are also offered. Apart from these courses they initiated to start Chinese courses for the primary classes. At the beginning of 2010 CRI Confucius classroom sent Chinese volunteer teachers to Nalanda College, Mahinda Rajapakshe School to teach Chinese to the primary and grade 6 onwards students.

Since 2010, the Chinese major of the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Kelaniya has been included in the Confucius Institute system. While studying in the Department of Modern Languages, students also need to study Chinese and Chinese culture at the Confucius Institute. In April 2011, the University of Kelaniya and Chongqing Normal University signed a cooperation agreement, and the teaching work has been carried out very smoothly so far. In August 2012, the Confucius Institute at Kelaniya University obtained the qualification to organize the Chinese proficiency test (HSK and HSKK) center and organized the first Chinese proficiency test in December 2012. With the rapid development of Chinese

language teaching, the Department of Modern Languages opened a four-year Chinese degree course in 2013. The establishment of a four year special degree course in Chinese language is a great development of Sri Lankan Chinese education.

According to the records in 1980, the Ministry of Education introduced the Chinese language as a major subject into the General Certificate Examination Advanced Level (G.C.E A/L). During this period, the Ministry of Education did not assign local teachers to high schools, so students learned Chinese by themselves before taking the test. Chinese was not a popular subject at that time, so there were no more than 5 students majoring in Chinese at an Advanced level every year. Although the Chinese major in high school has been established for a long time, it has not really developed. The author believes that this result was due to the lack of Chinese teachers at that time, the low level of students' understanding of Chinese, and the lack of localized teaching materials. Then after 2015, the Ministry of Education entered the Chinese language in to General Certificate Examination Ordinary Level (G.C.E O/L) as a subject. Now both G.C.E.O/L and A/L examination students can choose the Chinese language as their main subject. Chinese entering primary and secondary education is a very good chance for Sri Lankan students who want to continue the Chinese language from primary education.

With the increasing cultural and economic exchanges between China and Sri Lanka, in December 2016, Beijing Foreign Studies University and Honghe University jointly established the second Confucius Institute in Sri Lanka at the University of Colombo. At present, the Confucius Institute at the University of Colombo offers elective Chinese courses and weekend Chinese courses for college students, as well as business professional Chinese and naval Chinese courses. During this period, the

Confucius Institute at the University of Colombo has made great contributions to the development of Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka. In order to further promote the development of Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka, of November 28, 2019, Hanban established the Confucius Classroom at Sabaragamuwa University, which is the second Confucius Classroom in Sri Lanka.

Since 2007, the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka, the Confucius Classroom at CRI, the Confucius Institute at the University of Colombo and the Confucius Classroom at the University of Sabaragamuwa are the milestones of the development of Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka and these have given birth to a new period of prosperity. These training institutions in Sri Lanka have become an important driving force in the process of the development of the Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka. Historical documents, textbooks published in China have been used in various Chinese courses in Sri Lanka. At that time, only one or two textbooks could be obtained from Confucius Institutes or other organizations, which was not enough for learners to use. Teachers and children often use photocopies. Since there is no market for textbooks in Sri Lanka, photocopies have to be used.

### **Teaching materials**

Because there were no local Chinese textbooks published at that time, in 2009, according to the teaching needs, Yang Zongxiong of the Confucius Institute at university of Kelaniya compiled the "基础汉语课本" as the main textbook of the Confucius Institute. This textbook has been commonly used for two years by students and teachers. Then after several courses, they used many kinds of teaching materials, such as "当代中文、新实用汉语课本、游学在中国、汉语301句、跟我学汉语、休闲汉语、中国文化" etc.

At the beginning of the CRI Confucius classroom courses, the main textbook was "Great Wall Chinese" edited by Ma Jianfei, which has been used since then. For primary school classes their main teaching material was "Happy Chinese" Sinhala edition by Li Xiaoqi and Luo Qingsong; for Advanced Level students "New Practical Chinese Reader" by Liu Xun was used. At the same time, they used the textbook "Daily Chinese" (annotated in Sinhala), which came with a CD-ROM and was broadcast on the Sinhala channel of China Radio International, so that Sri Lankans could learn more Chinese.

Since 2010, the textbooks used in the comprehensive courses from the first year to the third year of the Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya are "New Practical Chinese Reader" published by Beijing Language and Culture University Press; for culture and literature courses, teachers independently select suitable materials according to the syllabus. The textbook for the one-year Chinese elementary class for social personnel is "Learn Chinese with Me" edited by Chen Fu; the textbook for the two-year Chinese advanced class is "New Practical Chinese Reader".

## **Conclusion**

In this study the author tried to investigate how Chinese language studies have developed in Sri Lanka from the past until now and the main teaching materials which have been used in the development process. Through the analysis of information and data, the author divides the development of Chinese language teaching in Sri Lanka into three stages: 1. The beginning of Chinese teaching (before 1970); 2. The development period of Chinese teaching (1970-2006); 3. The prosperous period of Chinese teaching (2007) (after the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the University of Kelaniya). The results

show that since the establishment of the first Confucius Institute in Sri Lanka in 2007, Chinese language teaching in the country has developed rapidly. Incorporating Chinese into the G.C.E Ordinary Level and G.C.E Advanced Level examinations in the Sri Lankan education system is a major event in the development of the Chinese language in Sri Lanka. It was also a massive development of the process when Chinese was started to be taught in four-year special degree programs as earlier Chinese was only taught in the general degree programme. However, despite the continuous development of the curriculum and its syllabus, the problem is that the comprehensive textbooks used in Sri Lanka are still only textbooks published in mainland China. The main reason for this is the failure to compile successful localized teaching materials. If localized Chinese textbooks are available in Sri Lanka students do not need to follow up on textbooks that are published from mainland China. Normally the textbooks that are published in China are both English and Chinese. Since the majority of Sri Lankan students' English language is not at a good level, understanding the content of the book is the main problem while they are learning.

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