

The Chinese Coins Found in Sri Lanka: A Preliminary Study

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According to the available historical Chinese sources, the relationship between China and Sri Lanka begins around 1st century BC. As recorded in the history, China actively had built its economic relationship in this era with South Asian countries via the south sea belt. But, as discussed in the historical sources like *Sihalavatthuppakaranaya*, ancient Sri Lankans were well aware about Silk Road or Silk Route which was an extensive interconnected network of trade routes across the Asian continent. This clearly reflects that the Chinese had used the overland route from the time they discovered maritime Silk Routes. But the relationship between ancient Sri Lanka and China in this regard is completely different from the relationship between India and China, because, it had been recorded, that thousands of ancient Chinese coins had been excavated from Yapahuwa and Kurunegala in addition to various other places throughout Sri Lanka. This presentation is confined to ancient Chinese coins found from Yapahuwa and one coin found from the Kurunegala hoard.

A large number of ancient Chinese coins of around 1,500 was found at the beginning of the 20th century (1906) in Sri Lanka during the Yapahuwa archeological excavation in 1910-11. The annual reports of the archaeological department confirmed that these Chinese coins had been sent to the British archives for scientific dating. But, unfortunately most of the coins which were excavated in other places in Sri Lanka, were kept in the Colombo Archives without proper investigations. They had not

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been labeled or identified according to the year or the places they were found. This may be due to the fact that the Sri Lankan Archaeologists are still unable to read these ancient Chinese coins.

However, it has been concluded that several coins which were found from Sri Lankan excavations had represented some early dynasties in China such as Qin, Sui, Tang, Wudai Shi Guo, Bei Song, and Nan Song (South and North Song). The discovery of 'Ban liang' coins to represent Qin dynasty in China is of great significance since no other country in South Asia found any coins representing Qin dynasty of China. So it is clear that the historical and economic relationship between Sri Lanka and China goes to an early period in history. Another important discovery is a 'Wuzhu' coin which represents the 'Sui' dynasty. Historical studies in India also indicate the discovery of such coins from various sites in India.

Furthermore, Sri Lankan archaeological excavations have discovered a coin of 'Wudai Shi Guo' dynasty and some 'Kai Yuan' coins of 'Tang' dynasty. Another coin had been identified as a coin of 'Bei Song' dynasty, based on the two holes of top side of the coin. These coins are very rare and no other country has discovered these coins except China and Sri Lanka. Among the coins found in Sri Lankan excavations, there were some coins which represent 'Nan Song' dynasty as well.

Keywords: China, Silk Road, Periyapattinam, Yapahuwa, Wuzhu, Banliang, Kurunegala