

## **Ancient Maritime Relationship between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian Countries (up to 500 A.D)**

**Gamini Ranasinghe<sup>1</sup>, Wu chunming<sup>2</sup>**

The main aim of this paper is to show the maritime connections with Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries and special consideration is given to China up to 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The sea was the major connecting link of Sri Lanka with the rest of the world since the country was placed at strategic location in the Indian Ocean. As a result, there were many foreign influences on Sri Lanka since prehistoric times. Based on the archaeological evidence such as beads, potteries, ceramics, coins and written records, it can be concluded that there was a good maritime relationships between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries during the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Buddhism was one of the main reasons for the development of maritime relationships with the world. Sri Lanka was also very famous for gems, pearls, ivory and elephants in ancient times, and spices (mainly cinnamon, pepper, cloves, cardamoms, nutmeg and mace) played a key role in the economy of ancient Sri Lanka. All of the above trade goods were famous among the ancient merchants from countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Far East and the Near East. According to historical evidence, the maritime relationship between Sri Lanka and China had begun at least in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Han dynasty of China had launched its missions to several South Asian countries including Sri Lanka in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Also, China had developed maritime trade connections with East African coast, Arabic countries, East India, Europe using the Indian Ocean. During the same period, the ports of South India had developed maritime connections with Southeast Asian countries. As a result of the strategic and

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<sup>1</sup> Collage of Humanities, Xiamen University, Fujian, P.R.China.

Email:gaminir76@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> Collage of Humanities, Xiamen University, Fujian, P.R.China.

unique location of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, there were many maritime relationships with other countries. Based on archaeological evidence, this paper examines the maritime relationship between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries up to 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

**Keywords:** maritime archaeology; maritime trade, Southeast Asia,