

## Names of Sri Lanka as Revealed through Ancient Chinese Sources

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In the study of the development of the historical traditions of the world, China, takes a prominent place. Chinese sources are not only vital in constructing the history of China, but also valuable in studying the history of different countries in the world and their relations with China. In records related to foreign countries, various names have been found in Chinese sources to identify different countries of the world. For example, more than 34 names had been used to denote India. Quite a number of names have been used to identify Sri Lanka as well. In Chinese sources dating from the Han dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.) to the Qing dynasty (1616 - 1911 A.D.) alone, more than thirty names have been used to denote Sri Lanka.

The main focus of this research was to identify the names used for Sri Lanka in the sources from the Han dynasty to the Qing dynasty, to make a brief review of the sources and to analyse the basis on which such names were attributed.

When we examine the Chinese names used with reference to Sri Lanka, it is evident that a number of methods have been followed. For example:

1. One method has been to translate on the basis of the meaning of the word.
2. For example: "*shizi guo*" ( 虱子国 ), "*shizi zhou*" ( 虱子洲 ) (Sihadipa)
3. Another method was based on criteria such as the main materials like gems found in Sri Lanka.
  - a. For example: "*bao zhu*" ( 宝珠 ), "*bao zhou*" ( 宝洲 ) (Ratnadipa)
4. There is another category based on the pronunciation of the word denoting Sri Lanka.
  - a. For example: "*xilan*" ( 西兰 ) (Ceylon), "*Seng jia luo*" ( 僧伽罗 ) (Sihala)

This research is mainly based and focused on Chinese primary sources, which I have utilised for my postgraduate research during the last few years. It has enabled me to come across these names with reference to Sri Lanka. However, it has to be mentioned that more investigation in his area is crucial. Some names used for Sri Lanka have been established with certainty but there are other names that are still subject to controversy. Apart from this, some names which had been erroneously used to refer to Sri Lanka have now been identified and errors have been rectified. My objective is to make an initial inquiry into this important area of study in order to understand and evaluate properly the Sino-Sri Lankan relationship over the years.