

An Introduction to Chinese settlements in the colonial period of Sri Lanka

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There are number of Sri Lankans of Chinese origin who have been living in the country for centuries. However, they are still not considered a nationality of the country. There is a need to research early Chinese settlements in the colonial period and their spread in this country. This will help the nation to uncover the history of the Sri Lankans of Chinese origin, allowing them to participate actively in the development of the country.

The colonial period of Sri Lanka is dated from the start of the first Portuguese influence in Ceylon, in 1505, until Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948. The number of Chinese people who were living in Sri Lanka increased rapidly during this period. During the early years of Dutch colonization in Indonesia, Chinese were growing in number and their wealth was increasingly visible to the local authorities of the Dutch East Indies. As a result, in 1740, Chinese who were considered suspicious would be deported to Ceylon, where they were forced to harvest cinnamon.

Frederick North, a Governor of Ceylon also had pursued the idea of securing foreign labour as work force. The 47 Chinese he was able to get down were settled in Galle and Trincomalee. Maitland, too, followed the same thinking and brought 100 Chinese to reconstruct the Hamilton Canal. The name Ja-Ela is a relic from this period when the ordinary people mistook the Chinese from Penang to be Malays. In Galle, the Chinese were settled in the China Garden.

With these historical facts, it is not difficult to discover the roots of origin of Chinese who have been living in Sri Lanka and their contribution to build the nation throughout the centuries.

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