

Ethnic Identity and Heritage Language Education among Sri Lankan Chinese

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The Sri Lankan Chinese, who were formally stateless and have had permanent residence since November 15th in 1948, were granted citizenship under the 2008 “Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Chinese Origin (Special Provisions) Act”.^I These Sri Lankan Chinese were either born in Sri Lanka or come to Sri Lanka with their parents at a very young age. Most of these immigrants are already Sinhala-dominant though some of them are bilingual in Sinhala and English in the oral form. Previous studies proved that early Chinese immigrants were not able to preserve their ethnic identity and heritage languages in Sri Lanka even though number of Sri Lankans who were visited China had studied Chinese language and Chinese those who were visited Sri Lanka had studied Sri Lankan languages for completion of their mission in the history.^{II} As Sri Lankan Chinese are either third or fourth generation migrants, they were granted Sri Lankan citizenship. Yet, as they are ethnicity-based Chinese origins from a minority ethnicity, it is important to examine how their ethnic identity and heritage language education in modern era.

Based on the previous studies, this research collected literary based facts and conducted a series of interviews with Sri Lankan Chinese. This research suggests Heritage Language Education (HLE) could facilitate positive ethnic identity. According to a generally accepted definition by Valdés (2000), heritage language is the language someone learns at home as a child which is a minority language in society, but because of growing up in a dominant language, the speaker seems to be more competent in the latter and feels more comfortable to communicate in that language.^{III} Heritage Language Education or HLE serves as a bridge between psychological and social factors. Ideas towards HLE within ethnicity-based

Chinese environment influence to improve Chinese cultural awareness and language identity among Sri Lankan Chinese community.

KEYWORDS

Sri Lankan Chinese, ethnic identity, Heritage Language Education (HLE)

¹The act further says that “Any person of Chinese origin, who (a) has been a permanent resident of Sri Lanka, since November 15, 1948; (b) is a descendent. Presently resident in Sri Lanka, of a person who has been a permanent resident of Sri Lanka since November 15, 1948, shall be entitled to apply in terms of the provisions of this Act, for the grant of the status of a "Citizen of Sri Lanka”.”

<http://www.srilankalaw.lk/Volume-III/grant-of-citizenship-to-persons-of-chinese-origin-special-provisions-act.html>

¹¹Ven. Dhammadinna, Nedalagamuwe, An Introduction to the Commencement of Chinese Language Teaching in Sri Lanka, Abstracts, International Conference on Chinese Studies 2016, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, P. 33-34.

¹¹¹Valdés, G. 2000. The teaching of heritage languages: an introduction for Slavic-teaching professionals. The learning and teaching of Slavic languages and cultures, Olga Kagan and Benjamin Rifkin (eds.), P. 375–403.

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