

Sri Lankan Chinese: A Forgotten Ethnicity of Sri Lanka

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In the colonial period, western rulers pursued the idea of importing Chinese migrant workers from their colonies to Ceylon. British Governors of Ceylon had also pursued the same idea of securing Chinese labor for Ceylon. Independent Chinese immigrants began to arrive in Sri Lanka during 1920s to 1950 as a result of the civil war that erupted in China and the World War II. Since the country's Independence there were several thousands of Chinese living in Sri Lanka. Today it is reduced to a couple of hundred people with many migrating onwards to various countries. Sri Lankan Chinese, who were formally stateless and have had permanent residence since November 15th in 1948, were granted citizenship under the 2008 "The Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Chinese Origin (Special Provisions) Act". Despite the result of government act Sri Lankan Chinese are still not officially recognized as an ethnic group. Sri Lankan Chinese were either born in Sri Lanka or have come to Sri Lanka with their parents at a very young age. Most of these immigrants are already Sinhala-conversant though some of them are bilingual in Sinhala and English in the oral form. Previous studies have proven that early Chinese immigrants were not able to preserve their ethnic identity in Sri Lanka. The purpose of this paper is to investigate and analyze the ethnic identity of Sri Lankan Chinese. This research shows why Chinese immigrants choose Sri Lanka as their dreamland. This research reveals that very few Chinese people have decided to stay in Sri Lanka in order to set up their traditional businesses. But this situation has significant positive impact on the Sri Lankan society.

Keywords: Sri Lankan Chinese; Ethnic Identity; Sri Lanka, Chinese immigrants