

# SRI LANKA: FROM THE ARRIVAL OF HOMO SAPIENS TO THE INDIAN OCEAN MARITIME HUB

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This is a case study that shows how the Indian Ocean was a major maritime hub up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and was gradually replaced by the Atlantic Ocean after the discovery of the Americas by the Europeans and Christopher Columbus. The Arabs and Chinese played a major role in it up to 1433, but for domestic political reasons, the Chinese dropped all practice of ocean navigation and commerce even before the arrival of the Europeans, which contributed to its decline.

Right now we are witnessing a reversal, both the come-back of the Indian Ocean as a crucial global area as well as the come-back of the Chinese as the main actor in this area in the present global context.

We are going to show striking similarities between the two historical periods (pre-14<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century).

We will consider the central features of this form of the evolution of the Indian Ocean and consider it in terms of the basic perspective of recent post-civil-conflict in Sri Lanka.



Map of Sri Lanka

## I./ The roots of this modern development

### a) From prehistory to proto-history

From the evidence of quartz tools found in various excavations that can be assigned to a Middle Palaeolithic complex, S. U. Deraniyagala (Sri Lanka's previous Director-General of Archaeology), attests that the first Homo Sapiens inhabited Sri Lanka from 125,000 to 75,000 BP [Before Present]. Sri Lanka was often connected to India by a land bridge when the sea level was

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/asia/sri-lanka>, October 2011

low. The last separation of the island from the subcontinent was as recent as 7,000 BP with the rising of the sea level after the last ice-age, which corresponds all over the world to the final phase of plant and animal domestication that some still call the “Neolithic revolution”.

Prehistoric records become more complete around 37,000 BP, around 18,000 years before the peak of the last glaciation. If we keep these dates in mind it seems fair to say that there must have been two migrations from Africa, an earlier one that probably conveyed languages that were to develop into the South East Asian languages (isolating character languages, Tamil is a member of this family), and a second later migration, which must have brought a linguistic level that will produce the agglutinative languages (Turkic, Caucasian, Uralic, etc, though few representatives in the Indian subcontinent) and Indo-Aryan or Indo-European languages later. These two families are close in phylogenetic order as presented here. The Indo-Aryan languages *per se* must have arrived in the Indian subcontinent slightly later coming from the Iranian Plateau where they had evolved into the Indo-European languages moving west and the Indo-Aryan languages moving east.

“There is palynological (pollen) evidence from the Horton Plains for herding (? *Bos indicus*) and the incipient management of barley and oats by >15,000 BC [Before Christ] and by herding and the farming of barley and oats by 8,000 BC (Premathilake 2000). Then there is Doravak-lena shelter which is said to have yielded a geometric microlithic industry in association with what appears to be a cereal and a crude red pottery by 5,300 BC and Black and Red Ware (BRW) by 3,100 BC (Wiieyapala in Deraniyagala ip:34, final report pends.). There is also Mantai where a geometric microlithic horizon dated to ca. 1,800 BC was found associated with a few pieces of slag, which could indicate the knowledge of copper-working as manifested in southern India by ca. 2,000 BC.”<sup>2</sup>

This is the transition from prehistoric time to proto-historic time in Sri Lanka.

#### b) The arrival of Buddhism from India

Dates are difficult to ascertain with precision since calendar datings can vary by as much as 61 years.

The Buddha (Sanskrit Siddhārtha Gautama, Pali: Siddhattha Gotama, 563-483 BCE [Before the Christian Era]) is reported to have paid three visits to Sri Lanka, nine months after his enlightenment (at the age of 35, hence ca. 528 BCE), five years later (ca. 523 BCE) and three years thereafter (ca. 519 BCE).

Buddhism reached the island however with the Indian Emperor Asoka (ca. 304–232 BCE) who converted to Buddhism, convened the third Buddhist Council (ca. 250 BCE) and sent his son as emissary, Venerable Mahinda, four other monks and one lay disciple to Sri Lanka. King Devanampiya Tissa (ca. 247-187 BCE) – the ruler in Anuradhapura at the time – was enlightened following the encounter with Venerable Mahinda and was converted to Buddhism. King Vattagamani Abhaya (ca. 44-43 BCE, and, after an Indian invasion, ca. 29-17 BCE) convened the fourth Buddhist Council (ca. 44-43 BCE) that commits the Tipitaka (the canonical sacred texts of Buddhism) to writing in Sri Lanka. The monks – the literati of the time – invented an Indo-Aryan language, Pāli, from Sanskrit and other Indo-Aryan languages to transcribe the oral preaching of the Buddha as preserved in the memory of monks.

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<sup>2</sup> (S. U. “Deraniyagala, Early Man and the Rise of Civilisation in Sri Lanka: the Archaeological Evidence”, <http://www.lankalibrary.com/geo/dera2.html>)

The last important date for the development of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is the purported arrival of Buddha's eye-tooth that was to become the Sacred Tooth relic in ca. 371 CE [Christian Era], received by King Sirimeghavanna (ca. 362-390).<sup>3</sup>



Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic of Buddha, Kandy

This spiritual development is important for the island because of the conversion of the various rulers (the island was divided in small kingdoms) and due to the opening and developing of monasteries (Abhayagiri and Jetavanaya monasteries were established before CE). The monasteries are sustained on alms but they give in exchange medicinal (medical), educational, spiritual and even social services to the population, encouraging their economic enterprise and advocating the dedication of a share of their income to help the needy and the monasteries<sup>5</sup>. But the influence of Sri Lanka is considerable with respect to Buddhism. It is from Sri Lanka that monks left on missions that aimed at spreading Buddhism and targeted South East Asia, particularly Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Cambodia and from there Laos and Vietnam and beyond China and Japan. Sri Lanka is the centre of Theravada (or Hinayana) Buddhism, the Small Vehicle Buddhism in South East Asia and beyond South East Asia essentially, hence in China, Japan and Korea the derived Big Vehicle Buddhism (Mahayana Buddhism) was developed with some help from Sri Lanka or South East Asian countries. This spiritual development and the prestige of Sri Lanka thus goes back to the third century BCE.

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<sup>3</sup> The most recent history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is *Island of Light, Buddhism in Sri Lanka, A Concise History and Guide to its Sacred Sites*, by TY Lee, [www.justbegood.net](http://www.justbegood.net). A hard edition exists (2010) and is available free from [admin@justbegood.net](mailto:admin@justbegood.net). Another hard edition was published by *The Sunday Observer*, Colombo, Sri Lanka in 2011.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.goway.com/asia/sri\\_lanka/sri-lanka-natural-wonders.html](http://www.goway.com/asia/sri_lanka/sri-lanka-natural-wonders.html), October 2011

<sup>5</sup> A lay Buddhist is supposed to practice three qualities or merits: *dāna* (generosity and helping others), *sīla* (morality and the observance of the five precepts), *bhāvanā* (the acquisition of wisdom through meditation). The five precepts are: 1- To abstain from harming or killing any living beings. 2- To abstain from taking what is not given. 3- To abstain from sexual misconduct. 4- To abstain from lying and false speech. 5- To abstain from abusive consumption of intoxicants and drugs.



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The reclining Buddha statue of Pidurangala, it was looted and vandalized in the 1960s. This platform on the East side of the Rock is dedicated to Kassapa I with a plaque



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Pidurangala Rock South face

### c) The economic and maritime development of Sri Lanka

After the turbulent period from 43 to 29 BCE when Sri Lanka underwent invasion by people from India in the north and a rebellion in the south and famines, during a period of relative calm the country further developed its irrigation system (Anuradhapura had devised irrigation techniques prior to this period: under King Pandukabhaya's reign in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE). Royalty played a key role in that development, which required a hydraulic technology, provided by a specialized caste of workers from India. Mahasena (ca. 335-362 CE) built many reservoirs and canals and his son received the Sacred Tooth Relic. Datusena (ca. 459-477 CE) built the largest reservoir ever and his son Kasyapa I (ca. 477-495 CE) was responsible for devising the extremely complex hydraulic engineering system of the water gardens and the citadel of Sigiriya. On that last achievement there are discussions about the dates and the length of construction, with Wilhelm Geiger being the one who pushed King Kasyapa's reign up to ca. 527, but with no hard evidence

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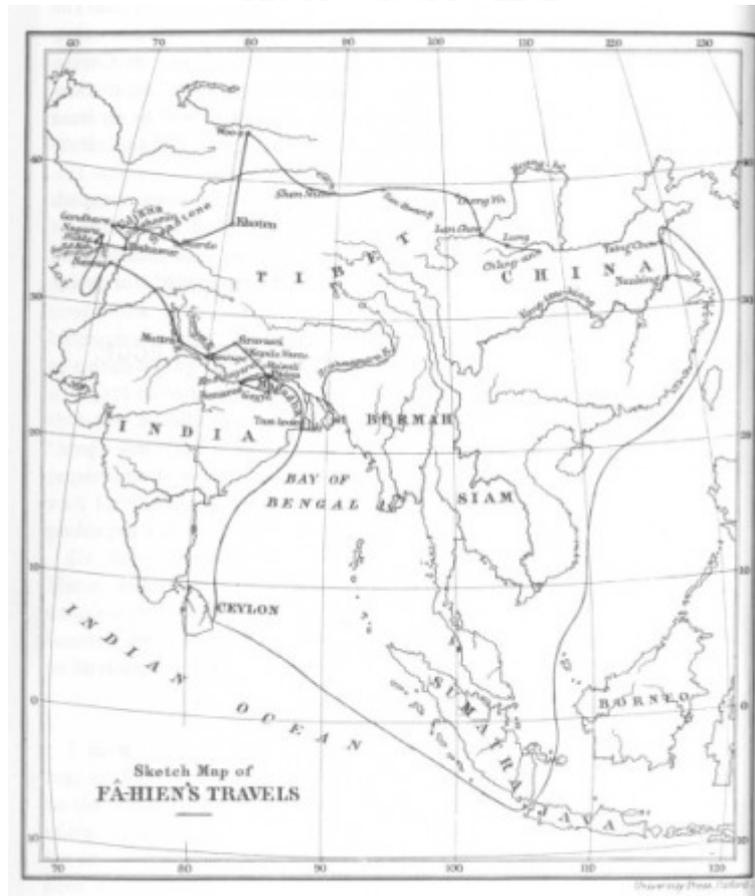
<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dailynews.lk/2008/10/17/fea10.asp>, October 2011

<sup>7</sup> <http://gazta.info/stories/srilanka/33628/1.html>, October 2011

but the time assumed necessary for the building of the citadel. It might also be the result of variations in calendars.

Note here that at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, during the Anuradhapura dynasty of kings, Sri Lanka received the visit of the Chinese pilgrim and writer Fa-Hien, and late in the 5<sup>th</sup> century an important monk, Jotipala, came from India on a spiritual mission.

### The Travels of Fa-Hien



8

#### *A RECORD OF BUDDHISTIC KINGDOMS*

**Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fa-Hien of his Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399-414) in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline.**

**Translated and annotated with a Korean recension of the Chinese text BY JAMES LEGGE**

James Legge, in 1886, published a rewriting of the book written by the monk Fa-Hien during his long journey in Asia to find, observe and report on the practice of Buddhism. James Legge used two copies of the book in Chinese, one in Japanese and one in Korean. He rewrote the book in third person. ~~The monk~~ Fa-Hien followed a long land route through China, Tibet, around the Himalayas, in northern India and the Himalayan kingdoms. Then he went on a maritime route from what is today Bangladesh to Sri Lanka, then from Sri Lanka to Java and finally from Java back to China. We are interested here in the sea travel to and from Sri Lanka at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Emphasis is always that of the author of this article.

“After this he embarked in a **large merchant-vessel**, and went floating over the sea to the south-west. It was the beginning of winter, and the wind was favourable; and, after **fourteen days**, sailing day and night, they came to the country of Singhala.<sup>4</sup>  
[Note 4: "The Kingdom of the Lion," Ceylon. Singhala was the name of a **merchant**

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.theravada-dhamma.org/blog/?p=6303>, October 2011

**adventurer from India**, to whom the founding of the kingdom was ascribed. His father was named Singha, "the Lion," which became the name of the country;-- Singhala, or Singha-Kingdom, "the Country of the Lion.""]<sup>9</sup>

"The country originally had no human inhabitants,<sup>1</sup> [Note 1: It is desirable to translate [two Chinese characters], for which "inhabitants" or "people" is elsewhere sufficient, here by "human inhabitants." According to other accounts Singhala was originally occupied by Rakshasas or Rakshas, "demons who devour men," and "beings to be feared," monstrous cannibals or anthropophagi, the terror of **the shipwrecked mariner**. Our author's "spirits" [two Chinese characters] were of a gentler type. His dragons or nagas have come before us again and again.] but was occupied only by spirits and nagas, with which **merchants of various countries carried on a trade**. When the trafficking was taking place, the spirits did not show themselves. They simply set forth their precious commodities, with labels of the price attached to them; while the merchants made their purchases according to the price; and took the things away. [Note 3: This would be what is known as "Adam's peak," having, according to Hardy (pp. 211, 212, notes), the three names of Selesumano, Samastakuta<sup>10</sup>, and Samanila. "There is an indentation on the top of it," a superficial hollow, 5 feet 3 3/4 inches long, and about 2 1/2 feet wide. **The Hindus regard it as the footprint of Siva; the Mohameddans<sup>11</sup>, as that of Adam; and the Buddhists, as in the text,--as having been made by Buddha.**] [...] [N]o face or shadow was now with him but his own, and a constant sadness was in his heart. Suddenly (one day), when by the side of this image of jade, he saw **a merchant presenting as his offering a fan of white silk;**<sup>5</sup> [Note 5: We naturally suppose that **the merchant-offerer was a Chinese**, as indeed the Chinese texts say, and the fan such as Fa-hien had seen and used in his native land.] and the tears of sorrow involuntarily filled his eyes and fell down. [...] In the city there are many Vaisya elders and Sabaeans<sup>8</sup> [Note 8: The phonetic values of the two Chinese characters here are in Sanskrit sa; and va, bo or bha. "Sabaeans" is Mr. Beal's reading of them, probably correct. I suppose **the merchants were Arabs**, forerunners of **the so-called Moormen**, who still form so important a part of **the mercantile community in Ceylon.**] **merchants**, whose houses are stately and beautiful. The lanes and passages are kept in good order."<sup>12</sup>

"Having obtained these Sanskrit works, he took passage in **a large merchantman, on board of which there were more than 200 men**, and to which was attached by a rope **a smaller vessel**, as a provision against damage or injury to the large one from the perils of the navigation. [...] On the sea (hereabouts) there are **many pirates**, to meet with whom is speedy death. [...] After proceeding in this way for rather **more than ninety days**, they arrived at a country called Java-dvipa, where various forms of error and Brahmanism are flourishing, while Buddhism in it is not worth speaking of. After staying there for five months, (Fa-hien) again **embarked in another large merchantman, which also had on board more than 200 men**. They carried provisions for **fifty days**, and commenced the voyage on the sixteenth day of the fourth month."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://lakdiva.org/books/fahsin/index.html>, Chapter XXXVII

<sup>10</sup> This could be Samantakuta mentioned in *The Mahavamsa*, or *The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, translated by Wilhelm Geiger, London & Oxford, 1912

<sup>11</sup> There were of course no Muslims at the beginning of the 5th century, though they were merchants and people from the Middle East or the Arabian peninsula.

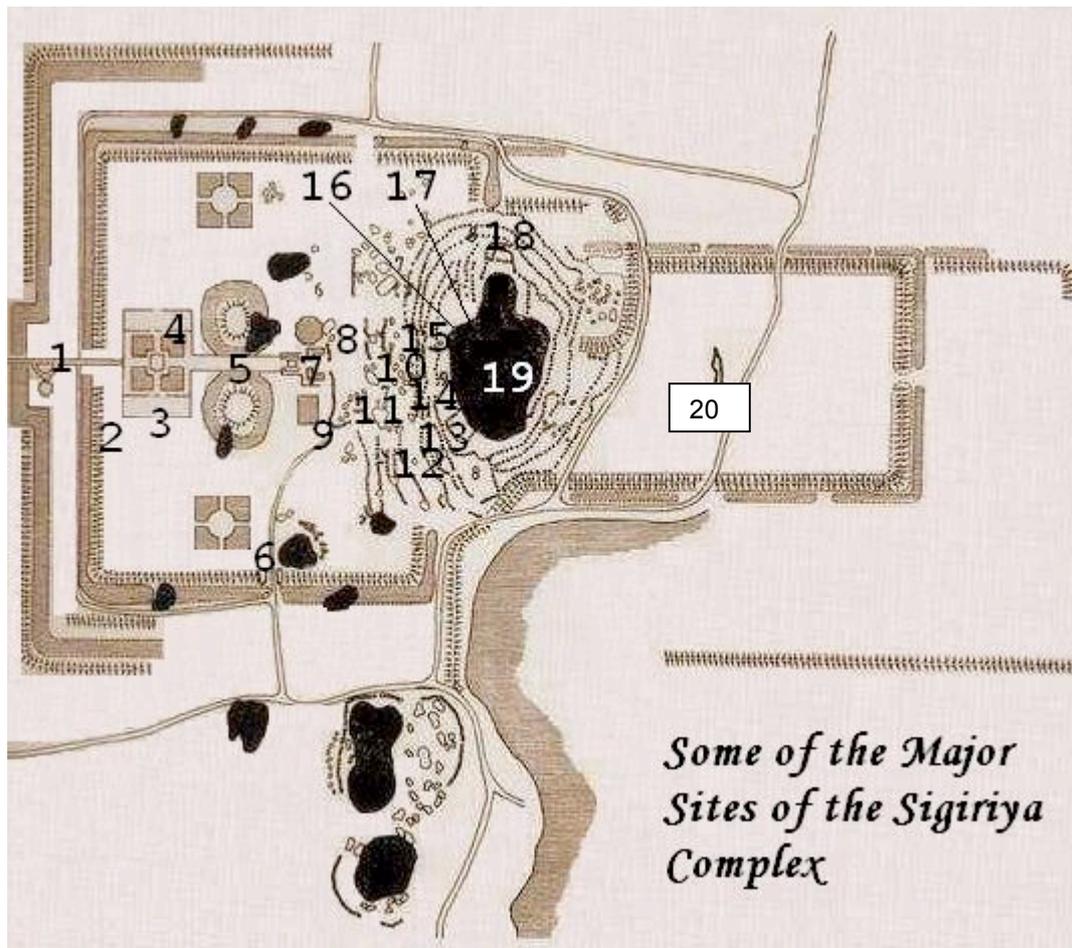
<sup>12</sup> <http://lakdiva.org/books/fahsin/index.html>, Chapter XXXVIII

<sup>13</sup> (<http://lakdiva.org/books/fahsin/index.html>, Chapter XL)

We are dealing here with long sea-journeys both in time and distance and with what were enormous seafaring vessels at the time. These ships are all identified as merchant-vessels and the main reason for visiting Sri Lanka was commerce, from immemorial (and mythic) times, but in the same way Java was a commercial destination and beyond China was the ultimate destination. This testimony also clearly reveals that Chinese merchants are present in Sri Lanka at that early date.

We have little information about the visit of the Indian monk Jotipala, apart from its being qualified as important.

d) King Kasyapa I (ca. 477-495) and Sigiriya



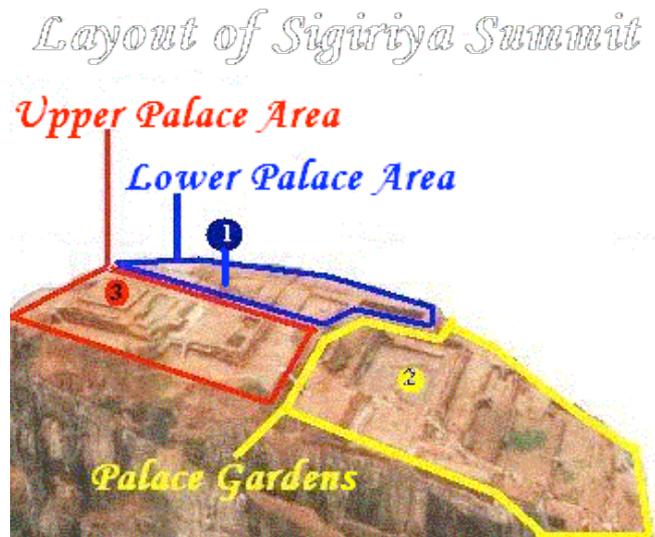
14

1. Inner western Moat	5. Fountain Gardens	9. Asana Temple	13. Audience Hall and Cistern	17. Mirror Wall
2. Miniature Water Garden	6. Summer Palaces	10. Monk's Cave	14. Split Boulder Archway	18. Lion Staircase
3. Bathing Pools	7. Upper Fountain Level	11. Dagaba	15. Terrace Gardens and civil servants quarters	19. Royal Palace
4. Water Garden	8. Preaching Rock	12. Cobra Hood Rock	16. Sigiriya Maidens	20. Eastern military and commercial complex

This king is a slight mystery in Sri Lankan history. The first son of King Datusena (ca. 459-477) from his first wife of non-royal blood (and said by some to be Tamil), usurped the throne from his father, against the will of his father and of his half brother the King's second son, Mogallana,

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.tracyanddale.50megs.com/Sri%20Lanka/HTML%20Page/rfortress4.html>, October 2011

from the second wife of royal blood. King Datusena is said to have been killed by Kasyapa, and Mogallena had to exile himself to India. The latter came back and defeated his brother and succeeded as king (ca. 495-513). Wilhelm Geiger questions the dates and pushes King Kasyapa's reign up to ca. 527 by arguing that the Sigiriya citadel could not have been built in a mere 18 years.



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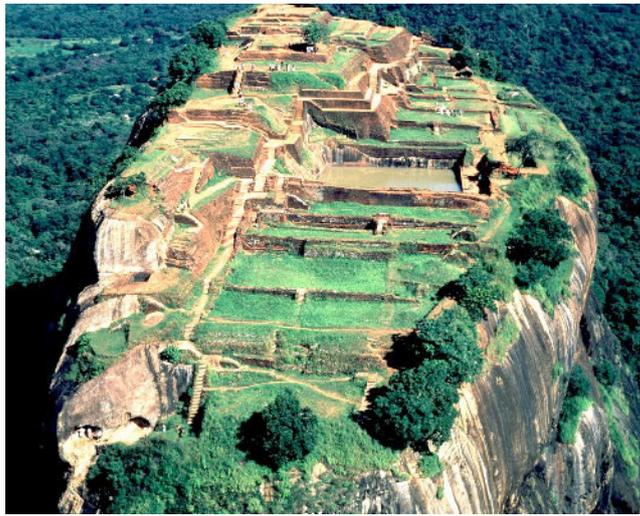


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Sigiriya Rock, west side

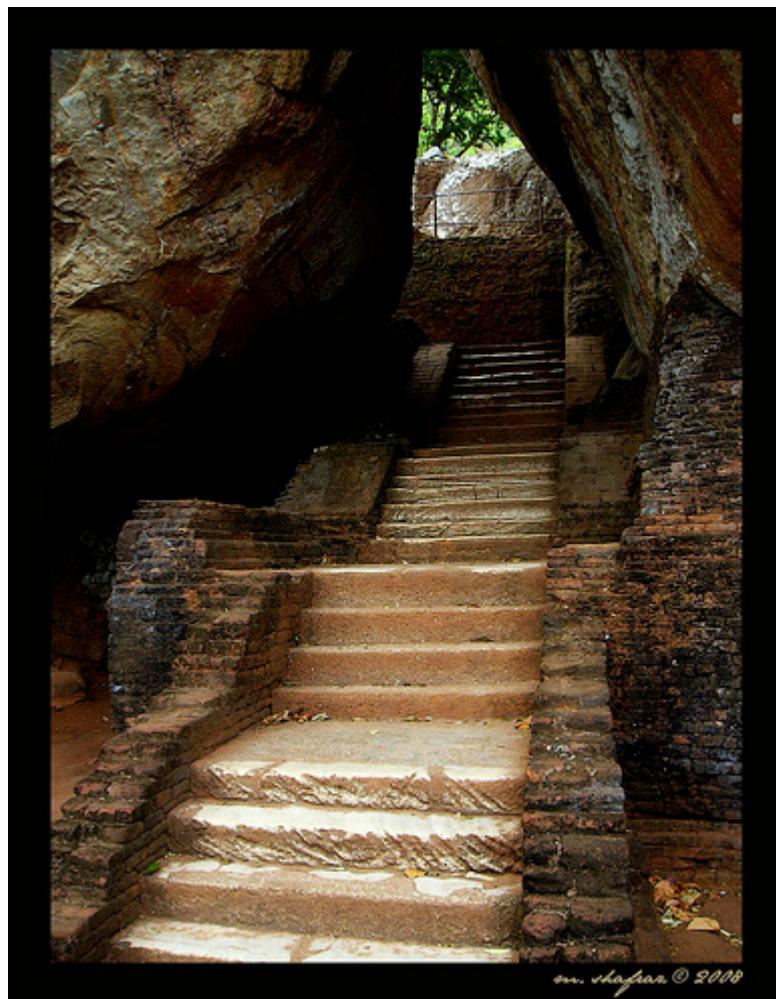
<sup>15</sup> <http://www.tracyanddale.50megs.com/Sri%20Lanka/HTML%20Page/rfortress4.html>, October 2011

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.urlaub-sr-lanka.info/index.php/sigiriya-sri-lanka>, October 2011



17

Sigiriya Rock, ruins of the palace at the top



18

An ancient stairway in Sigiriya, Split Boulder Archway

Kasyapa moved the capital from Anuradhapura to Sigiriya, a immense rock climbing into the sky, to become Parvataraja or Mountain King, which was not possible because the title had already been assumed by some other foreign leader. So he proclaimed himself Kuvera or God of Wealth and for that he had to live at the summit of a rock. It is thought that the project of assuming

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.mysrilankaholidays.com/sigiriya.html>, October 2011

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.tracyanddale.50megs.com/Sri%20Lanka/HTML%20Page/rfortress4.html>, October 2011

the title of Parvataraja, hence of living at the summit of a rock, was coming from the father, King Datusena, for commercial reasons. To finance the project of this palace at the summit of the rock and the capital city around it on the boulders and terraces, plus the water gardens (the project was composed from west to east by the moat and defensive walls, the water gardens, then the citadel itself with terraces, religious buildings and administrative buildings plus the homes of all civil servants, then the Rock itself and the palace on top and beyond it the military and commercial quarters; all together about 50,000 people must have lived and worked in this city), Kasyapa issued and regulated a gold coinage for commerce with overseas merchants and he established some free ports, free of taxes, to encourage that international commerce. These measures were immediately successful since they encountered no real competition. The hydraulic system of the water gardens was founded on a big reservoir built south of the citadel and very complex systems built by the Indian caste of hydraulic technicians and engineers. It has not been restored yet.



A painting of Asparas on Sigiriya Rock's west side

Close-ups of the Asparas or Maidens in Fresco Pocket B <sup>19</sup>



This historical episode is important to show that at that time commerce was an essential financial resource and activity in Sri Lanka which already lay in the path of various trade routes. The cultural and religious elements portrayed by Fa-Hien depict clearly that Sri Lanka was associated with the west and north coasts of the Indian Ocean that are Moslem, with India itself which is Hindu and with the east coast of the Indian Ocean and beyond with the islands of Indonesia and China, which are mostly and with variations in Buddhism, at the time.

#### e) Zheng He and the 15<sup>th</sup> century

It is safe to assume that the commercial role of Sri Lanka as a hub in the Indian Ocean continued throughout the historical period called by european historians 'medieval', (though, of course, Sri Lankan Buddhist society had nothing to do with European feudalism). We have to note

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.tracyanddale.50megs.com/Sri%20Lanka/HTML%20Page/rfortress4.html>, October 2011

though that international commerce was dominated by the Tamils and the Moslems at the time<sup>20</sup> with the essential harbours in the north of the country, the Jaffna peninsula, and under the occupation of the Indian Cholas the port of Trincomalee on the east coast and the transfer of the capital from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruva. The Cholas were from southern India and they were Tamils<sup>21</sup>.

Bear in mind though that the southern and south-western ports were active particularly for the western part of the Indian Ocean, thence the Muslim influence and domination.

Admiral Zheng He is essential here. He was the son of a Muslim family enslaved by the Chinese emperor. Their enslavement entailed the castrations of male children, but their sexual organs were kept to reunify them with their bodies at the time of death. Zheng He was thus a eunuch and as such he was entrusted with the building and managing of the Chinese fleet by Emperor Yongle and then Emperor Xuande. The objective of the fleet was commercial and targeted the west, hence the Indian Ocean.



*Zheng He's Voyages to the Western Sea: Zheng He onboard his Treasure Ship.*

From 1405 to 1433 (dates in this period are no longer dubious) Zheng He organized seven voyages to the Indian Ocean that led him to Mecca in Arabia and to Africa from where he brought back among other animals some giraffes. His fleet on his various journeys varied from 43 to 317 ships and a total crew of 28,000 people (compare with the 3 ships of Christopher Columbus in 1492 and his crew of 90). The size of the ships also had little to do with that of Christopher Columbus' ships (400 feet in length versus 85). From various sources we can see that Sri Lanka is concerned

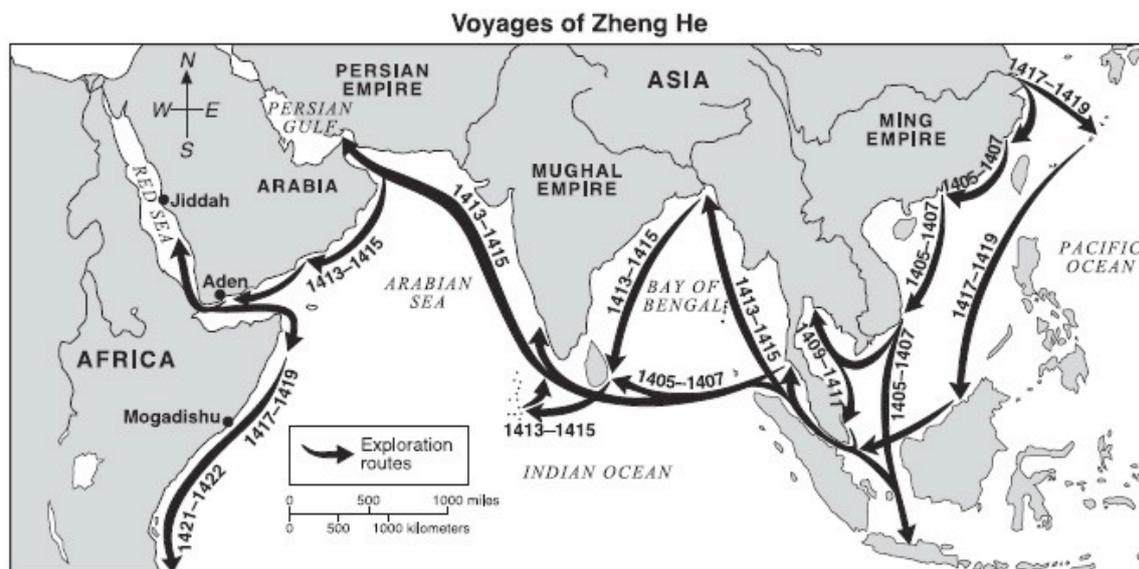
<sup>20</sup> Before that period in the pre-Chola Anuradhapura dynasty of Sinhalese kings well before any Chola invasions commerce was widely developed by the Sinhalese and the Sinhalese Kings gifted gems and elephants to countries such as Thailand. The question is why had the Sinhalese been marginalized as of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>21</sup> We must not forget that the early Lankan kings also brought their princesses from Southern India, implying the mixing of the two communities at the level of the early kings.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.alrahalah.com/2010/09/zheng-he>, October 2011

by all of them except the sixth voyage that was targeting the western coast of the Indian Ocean, Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. Sri Lanka is more or less always in a central position (source, Wikipedia).

Order	Time	Regions along the way
1st Voyage	1405–1407	Champa, Java, Palembang, Malacca, Aru (id:Aru), Samudera, Lambri, <b>Ceylon</b> , Kollam, Cochin, Calicut
2nd Voyage	1407–1409	Champa, Java, Siam, Cochin, <b>Ceylon</b>
3rd Voyage	1409–1411	Champa, Java, Malacca, Sumatra, <b>Ceylon</b> , Quilon, Cochin, Calicut, Siam, Lambri, Kayal, Coimbatore, Puttanpur
4th Voyage	1413–1415	Champa, Java, Palembang, Malacca, Sumatra, <b>Ceylon</b> , Cochin, Calicut, Kayal, Pahang, Kelantan, Aru, Lambri, Hormuz, Maldives, Mogadishu, Barawa, Malindi, Aden, Muscat, Dhofar
5th Voyage	1416–1419	Champa, Pahang, Java, Malacca, Samudera, Lambri, <b>Ceylon</b> , Sharwayn, Cochin, Calicut, Hormuz, Maldives, Mogadishu, Barawa, Malindi, Aden
6th Voyage	1421–1422	Hormuz, East Africa, countries of the Arabian Peninsula
7th Voyage	1430–1433	Champa, Java, Palembang, Malacca, Sumatra, <b>Ceylon</b> , Calicut, Hormuz... (17 states in total)



Source: Elisabeth Ellis and Anthony Esler, *World History: Connections to Today*, Prentice Hall (adapted) <sup>23</sup>

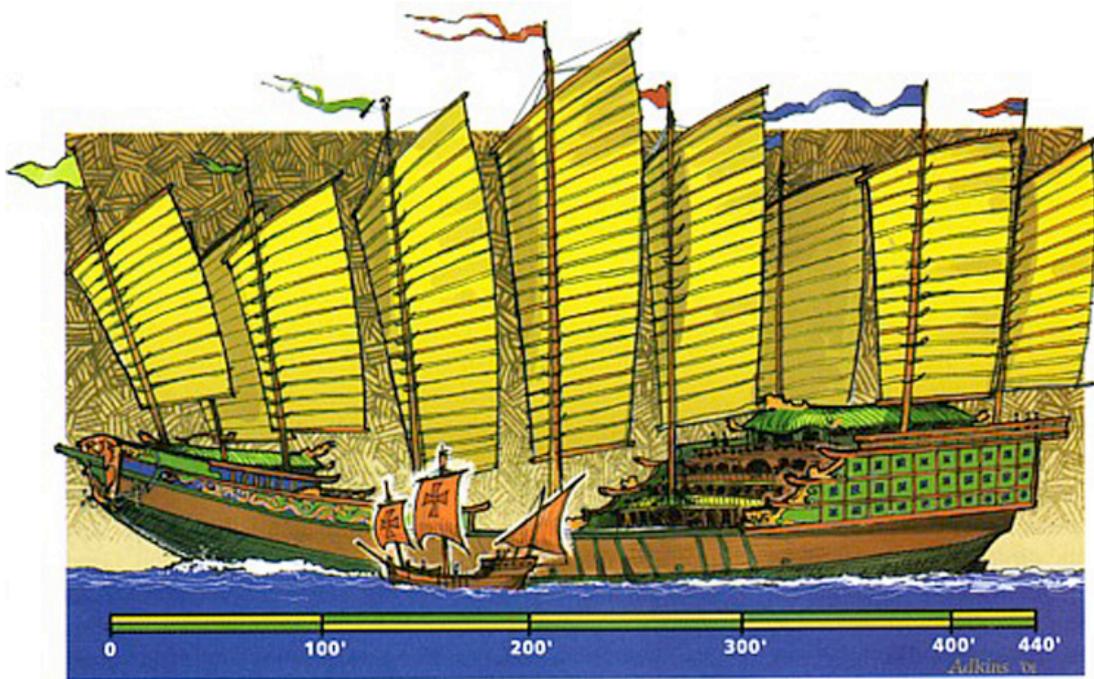
Zheng He's expeditions' routes.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.alrahalah.com/2010/09/zheng-he>, October 2011



24

Zheng He's armada was the largest the world would know for 500 years. The grandest vessels had nine masts and were 400 feet long. By comparison, Columbus's largest ship measured 85 feet.



25

Comparison of Zheng He's treasure ship (Baochuan) with Christopher Columbus' Santa Maria

But the most important one for us is the third voyage owing to a carved tablet that was brought by Zheng He for erection in 1411 in the harbour of Galle, on the south coast of Sri Lanka. This tablet is written in three languages: Chinese with reference to Buddhism, Persian with reference to Islam and Tamil with reference to Hinduism. The three languages and the three religions show clearly the objective is not to colonize the country but is respectful of its originality. It also shows that maritime commerce is dominated by the Tamils and the Moslems in Sri Lanka at the time, even in the extreme south of the country. But the tablet enumerates the list of gifts presented to the country in the name of the Yongle Emperor.

<sup>24</sup> <http://sambazanet.com/category/arts-culture/history>, October 2011

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.alrahalah.com/2010/09/zheng-he>, October 2011



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Statue from a modern monument to Zheng He at the Stadthuys Museum in [Malacca Town](#), Malaysia.



DOMINIC SANSONI FOR TIME

Zheng He's tablet paid equal homage to all the religions of Sri Lanka's warring ethnic groups<sup>27</sup>

It is interesting to quote the tablet, here only the Chinese portion as translated and available at <http://cf.hum.uva.nl/galle/galle/trilingual.html>. The tablet was refused erection by King Alakeswara of the kingdom of Raigama. What happened afterwards is highly controversial: the king would have been taken prisoner (along with the Sacred

<sup>26</sup> <http://trueislam.tribe.net/photos/4ff495af-6c81-4d30-84ec-7ce780772ef2> , October 2011

<sup>27</sup> <http://bharatkalyan97.blogspot.com/2011/08/book-review-indian-ocean-in-balance.html>, October 2011

Tooth Relic), brought to Nankin, the Chinese capital and freed by the Emperor. This sounds quite improbable. But here is the text of the Tablet.

'His Majesty the Emperor of the Great Ming dynasty has despatched the eunuchs Zheng He, Wang Jinghong and others to set forth his utterances before Lord Buddha, the World-Honoured One:

“Deeply do we revere you, merciful and honoured one, whose bright perfection is wide-embracing, and whose way of virtue passes all understanding, whose law pervades all human relations, and the years of whose great era are as numerous as the sands of the river; you whose controlling influence ennobles and converts, whose kindness quickens, and whose strength discerns, whose mysterious efficacy is beyond compare! The mountainous isle of Sri Lanka lies in the south of the ocean, and its Buddhist temples are sanctuaries of your gospel, where your miraculous responsive power imbues and enlightens.

“Of late we have despatched missions to announce our mandates to foreign nations, and during their journey over the ocean they have been favoured with the blessing of your beneficent protection. They escaped disaster or misfortune, and journeyed in safety to and fro.

“In everlasting recognition of your supreme virtue, we therefore bestow offerings in recompense, and do now reverently present before Buddha, the Honoured One, oblations of gold and silver, gold embroidered jewelled banners of variegated silk, incense burners and flower vases, silks of many colours in lining and exterior, lamps, candles, and other gifts, in order to manifest the high honour of the Lord Buddha. May his light shine upon the donors.

“List of alms bestowed as offerings at the shrine of the Buddhist temple in the mountain of Ceylon:

“1,000 pieces of gold; 5,000 pieces of silver; 50 rolls of embroidered silk in many colours; 50 rolls of silk taffeta, in many colours; 4 pairs of jewelled banners, gold embroidered and of variegated silk, 2 pairs of the same picked in red, one pair of the same in yellow, one pair in black; 5 antique brass incense burners; 5 pairs of antique brass flower vases picked in gold on lacquer, with gold stands; 5 yellow brass lamps picked in gold on lacquer with gold stands; 5 incense vessels in vermilion red, gold picked on lacquer, with gold stands; 6 pairs of golden lotus flowers; 2,500 catties of scented oil; 10 pairs of wax candles; 10 sticks of fragrant incense.

“[Date]. A reverent oblation.<sup>(2)</sup> [Note 2: Translation: *Spolia Zeylanica* & Louise Levathes.]

This commercial policy of the Chinese Empire was discontinued after Zheng He's death in 1433 during his last voyage (he was buried at sea) because the Confucian elite of the Empire who had always considered the Muslim eunuchs as a danger for the Empire managed to take over the situation and get the Emperor under their influence. Zheng-He [hyphenated or not?] fleet was destroyed along with his various logs and notes. Sea voyages were banned (at least for those whose parents were not dead), the building of more than two-mast ships was also banned under the penalty of death. And this was completely achieved by the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is difficult to consider it is the consequence of the arrival of the Portuguese who only appeared at the very end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Vasco de Gama 1498 reaching the West coast of India, hence far from reaching the heartland of the Chinese Empire).

## f) Western Colonization

The Portuguese arrived in 1505 in what is now Colombo. They used Sri Lanka as a security hub for their other colonies. They introduced a severe Christianizing procedure and were otherwise solely interested in spices<sup>28</sup>.

The Dutch arrived in 1638 and the Portuguese finally left in 1660. The Protestant Dutch rejected the religious policy of the Portuguese and were essentially interested in the production and exportation of cinnamon.

The Dutch surrendered Sri Lanka to the British in 1796 and the latter imposed their rule in 1815. Massive deforestation led to the development of plantations for exporting tea, rubber and coconuts, essentially. The Sinhalese Buddhist majority's refusal to work on the plantations managed by the British resulted in the enforced employment of Tamil quasi-slave-workers brought from southern India, subsequently established in the North.

At this moment we have to understand that the Tamil domination in commerce in the pre-colonization period, along with the Moslems, is due to the weight of the Tamils in Southern India and their domination of commerce in the Bengali Gulf, whereas the Moslems dominated the western part of the Indian Ocean. The Buddhist majority of the population was not so much interested in large scale commerce, except as a source of revenue for the monasteries and the local kings, though it was the main economic source of revenue of the island. The Buddhists were concentrating more on agriculture based on irrigation and the survival of the self-sufficient local population. The Sinhalese Buddhist rulers were (perhaps) essentially engaged in a spiritual mission for spreading Buddhism among allied nations with a priority in Burma and Thailand, South East Asia and the Eastern coast of the Indian Ocean. Beyond this area their influence was reaching China. This religious dimension, apart from their overall self-sustained secure life-ways, explains their reluctance at working on British plantations.

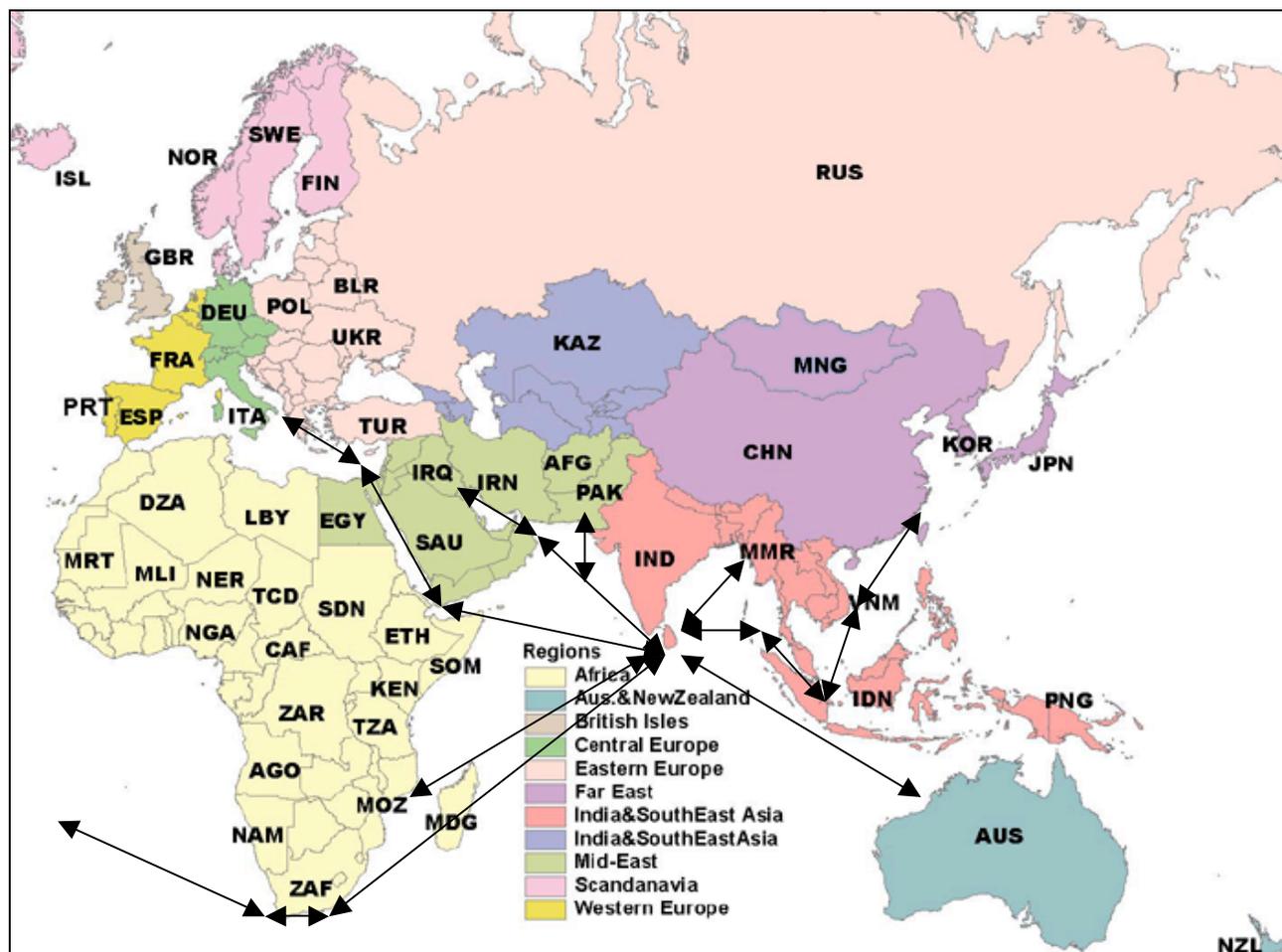
Sri Lanka secured independence from British colonization in 1948.

That provides the background for the modern period. The only mention of the district of Hambantota (surrounding the port of the same name) – a centre of infrastructural development at present – relates to an Inscription of Gajubaru I (ca. 114-136 CE) found in Godavaya in Hambantota itself. The inscription states that customs duties obtained in the port there were to be dedicated to the Godapavata Vihara, in other words, to the local Buddhist monastery. Apart from that, the main harbors of the south coast were Galle-Weligama and Dondra. The two other important harbors were Trincomalee and Mannar in the north.

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<sup>28</sup> A commerce they took over from the Arabs who had practiced it for a long time going back to BCE. The Galle tablet in Persian seems to imply that we are not only dealing with the Arabs, but rather with the Moslem world that included Persia (Iran and Iraq today particularly) which was not Arabic but Indo-European.

## II./ MODERN TIMES



Sri Lanka is the center of a vast maritime economic zone that can be organized as a hub for all kinds multidirectional shuttle container transportation, which means economy of scales and security.

Sri Lanka provided an essential link in the Indian Ocean's religious, economic and political balance, whether as an autonomous kingdom or under a European invasions. Yet, in 2010, Sri Lanka's Human Development Index was 0.658 ranking 93 among 172 countries in 2010, and the North and East of the Island had been damaged by 26 years of civil conflict resulting from terrorism. However, since 2007 new policies as well as new Sino-Lankan agreements (and a shift in Colombo's foreign policies from Washington to Beijing), have enabled the island to become an important actor again in the region through its newfound allies, with larger economic and political roles to play.

### A) Rebuilding a Hub

Sri Lanka has followed the trend to free trade and globalization, with the endeavour to regain its historic position as one of the essential hubs of world trade, as well as its place in the Indian Ocean. For the past 30 years the country has been integrating both the main terrestrial and maritime trade routes, without either one falling back.

The country joined the Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) project, led by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), under UN supervision, "initiated in the 1960s with the objective of providing a continuous 14,000-km rail link between Singapore and Istanbul (Turkey), with possible onward connections to Europe and Africa"<sup>29</sup>, but commenced only twenty

<sup>29</sup> United Nations, ESCAP, [www.unescap.org](http://www.unescap.org), August 2011

years later (1980s-early 1990s). Sri Lanka is part of the Southern Corridor, along with countries like Thailand, India or Singapore while the Northern Corridor spreads from Russia to Korea. Though an island, Sri Lanka is fully integrated in the railway project that links Asia and Europe.



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Sri Lanka is also integrated in the Asiatic main maritime itineraries with its major harbours Colombo, Hambantota, Oluvil and Trincomalee (anticlockwise West to East). Its ideal place in the Indian Ocean gives its harbours' line great economic and trade potential, as call ports but also as containers and shipping ports. Since the renovation of Colombo's harbour in 1993, Sri Lanka has come to count as one of the 35 most important harbours in the world.

The construction of two new harbours, Hambantota (South) and Oluvil (East) tremendously widens Sri Lanka's already important economic potential as an Asian power.

#### a) Infrastructure renewal

Looking at infrastructures is a good way of determining what has been done and what still has to be, especially concerning the economic impact of good connectivity between the cities and every part of the country (especially the mining regions near Elahera or between Ratnapurna and Rakvana, and the main three harbours). The *Road Development Authority* "Ongoing and Committed Projects" map<sup>33</sup> shows an important difference between the South (2/3 of the country) and the North (North of Vavuniya), i.e. between the recent northern conflict zone and the rest of the country. It resides in the number of road projects, both construction and rehabilitation, that will undeniably increase the connectivity between the economic core, the agricultural and mining zones, and the main harbours. Sri Lanka has a total of 12,000 km of highways, most of them being on the coastline and linking the main cities to its exit doors that are Colombo and Hambantota. Roads are absolutely vital for the country's economic resurgence, as well as its social and humanitarian needs.

The same can be said of the railways, since Sri Lanka is integrated in the Southern Corridor Trans-Asian railway project, and is rebuilding and rehabilitating its railways. According to the *Ministry of Transport*, Sri Lanka has 1,447 km of railway lines, 333 stations, for an average 103 million passengers and an increasing goods transportation of 100,000 tons a year (from 2006 to

<sup>30</sup> BIMSTEC logo, under copyright from BIMSTEC, [www.bimstec.org/about\\_bimstec.html](http://www.bimstec.org/about_bimstec.html), September 2011

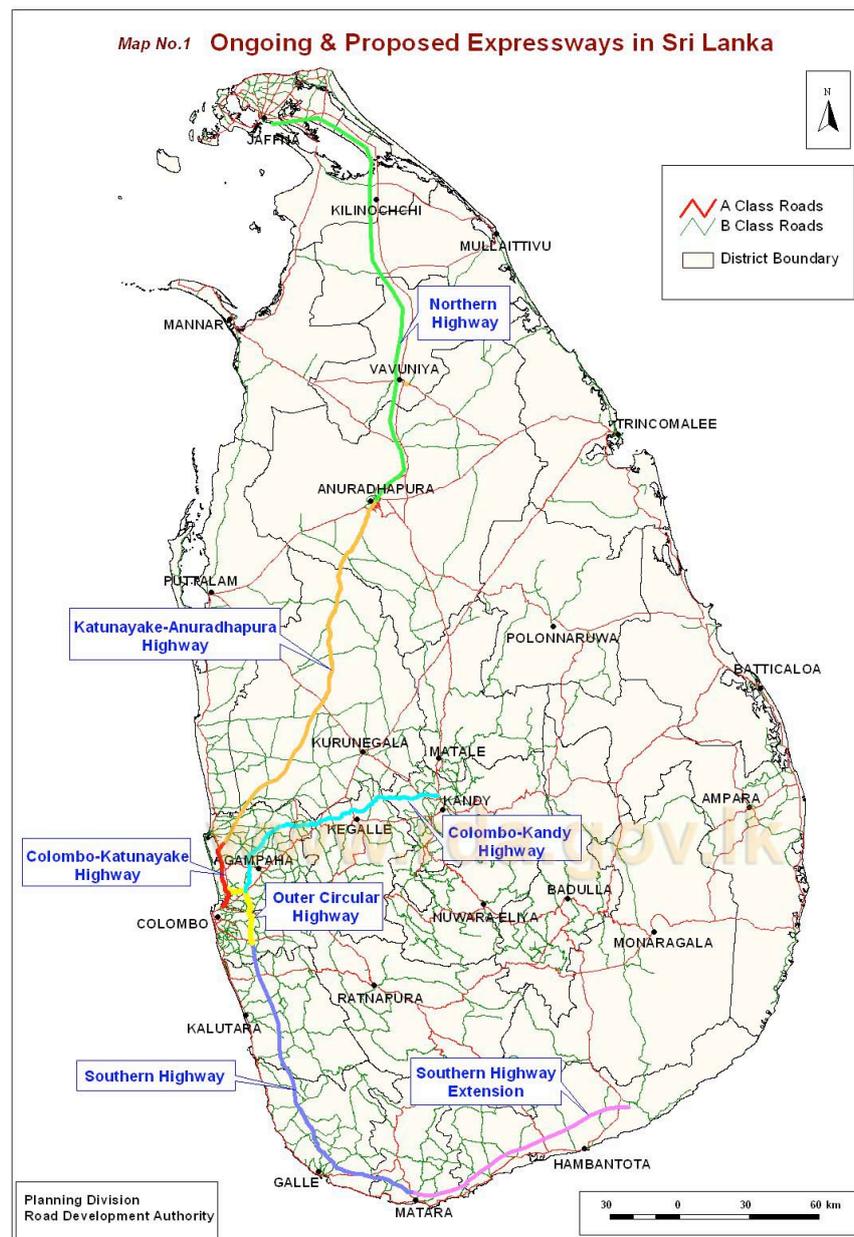
<sup>31</sup> SAARC logo, under copyright from SAARC, [www.saarc-sec.org](http://www.saarc-sec.org), September 2011

<sup>32</sup> UNESCAP logo, under copyright from UNESCAP (UN), [www.unescap.org](http://www.unescap.org), September 2011

<sup>33</sup> *Road Development Authority*, [www.rda.gov.lk/source/ongoing\\_committed\\_completed.htm](http://www.rda.gov.lk/source/ongoing_committed_completed.htm), August 2011

2008) and a total of 1.80 million tons shipped for the single year of 2009). Sri Lanka is planning to build a new coastal line in the South, from Matara to Kataragama, via Hambantota. This new line will be the second part of a project that links Hambantota to Colombo with a direct coastal railway line and upgrading the existing one near the capital city<sup>34</sup>. The money comes from the Indian Government (US\$167.4 million for rebuilding the coastal lines) and the remaining US\$363 million to build the new lines are not specified: so we can assume it either comes from the Sri Lankan government or a foreign country (China, Japan, India?). This new line and the prospect of repairing the damage of the conflict in the North will enable a major shift of population and goods to the new East and South economic zones.

*b) Hambantota & the harbour line*



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<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Transport, [www.transport.gov.lk](http://www.transport.gov.lk), August 2011

<sup>35</sup> Ongoing and Proposed express ways in Sri Lanka, Road Development Authority, <http://www.rda.gov.lk/supported/expressways/expressways.jpg>, september 2011

Sri Lanka is a historic hub of the Indian Ocean, and Colombo, its capital city, is legitimately one of the world's most important harbours: ranked among the 35 most important harbours since its renovation in 1993 by the Japanese. Yet Colombo is not the only harbour in the country, with historically less important ports such as Galle or Trincomalee (the world's fifth largest natural harbour, restored with Indian funding).

The Oluvil Port Development Project in the East is meant to reintegrate the region in the country's economic growth and boost the local economy and the North with the joint venture of Trincomalee on this Eastern façade.



Oluvil Harbor

Hambantota also has historical importance, but still has to play its particular role in Sri Lanka's commercial and economic ambition. Hambantota complex is a US\$7 billion project, 85% financed by Chinese low rate loans. The Sri Lanka Port Authority is to manage the traffic and the site of the Mangapura harbour complex of Hambantota, while the site is publicly owned.

“The US\$360 million contract agreement was signed on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007 for the construction of the Hambantota Harbour between the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) and the Consortium of China Harbour Engineering Company Limited (CHEC) and Sino Hydro Corporation Limited. [...] the first phase of the project is the construction of a jetty and an oil terminal. Later the Port [will] be developed to handle 20 million containers annually. The first phase [will] be completed in 3 years [November 2011] and the whole project [will] be completed in 15 years.”<sup>37</sup>

The second phase is expected to cost US\$800 million, to finance an extension of the shipyard and the commercial and industrial zone around the docks. This harbour, for both call and containers, will ease Colombo port's congestion and reorient maritime traffic to a more modern and operative complex, composed of the harbour, an international airport (Mattala, both for cargo and passengers, cost US\$210 million financed by the Chinese, and a special tax-free economic zone with businesses such as ship repair, ship building, bunkering, tanking.

<sup>36</sup> Oluvil Harbor project, The Observer Sri Lanka, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2009/10/18/fea15.asp>

<sup>37</sup> PEIRIS, Nuwan, “Hambantota Harbour and an Exile's Return – Geo-Political Dimensions of an Invasive Species”, South Asia Analysis Group, August 2007



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Port of Hambantota

Close to important trade routes, in particular those linking the Aden Gulf to the Malacca Strait. Despite full public ownership, the Hambantota complex is financed by the Chinese government and built by Chinese contractors, which makes them one of the biggest investors, and certainly the biggest donor, with projects mostly in the South. China, with Hambantota, now has full access to and control of the South and the North, from this harbour to their concession in the Mannar Basin, with investment in most of the commercial and energetic projects along the coast.

Hambantota – not fully operational yet – is an open door to foreign investment in the country, with increased shipping capacity. Its ideal location gives the supposedly biggest harbour in South Asia a tremendous advantage, reducing cruising time for cargo boats crossing the Ocean as a perfect calling port, complemented by the harbours of Colombo and to a lesser extent Olivil and Trincomalee.

### *c) The oil & energy question*

The energy needs of the developing industrial and commercial hub of the South and especially oil are very great indeed ~~tremendous~~. Sri Lanka is listed in most databases<sup>39</sup> without any proved natural reserves of oil or natural gas. Yet, in 2007, the Sri Lankan authority bought the 2D from the Norwegian TGS NOPEC that had been collecting data in the country since 2002, and divided the Mannar Basin in 8 blocks, two were given to the Chinese, two to the Indians and one bid was accepted from the British oil company Cairn.

Since the beginning of oil exploration in the 1960s, all attempts have failed but “seismic data reveal a number of large anticlinal closures or traps that can be interpreted as flower structures associated with northeast trending transfer faults” and “large oil fields with billions of barrels of oil reserves have been found under similar structural setting off the shore of Brazil associated with transfer faults”<sup>40</sup>. It is not yet possible to know whether, like in the Indian part of the basin, large amounts of oil are available, and if they are commercially recoverable.

<sup>38</sup> [Port of Hambantota concept.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Port_of_Hambantota_concept.jpg), [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Port\\_of\\_Hambantota\\_concept.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Port_of_Hambantota_concept.jpg), october 2011

<sup>39</sup> CIA's, EIA's, IEA's, August 2011

<sup>40</sup> *Petroleum Resources Development Secretariat*, [www.prds-srilanka.com](http://www.prds-srilanka.com), August 2011

This is an important question for the country's energetic future, even though other energetic sources are being developed throughout Sri Lanka to lower the oil dependence of the island, such as sustainable or coal produced energy. For example, the two phased Puttalam coal power plan that the Chinese funded with two low rate loans of US\$455 million and US\$891 million<sup>41</sup>, are meant to substantially replace oil with coal by 2014 (completion of the second stage for an added 600 MW to the first 300 MW). Sri Lanka is trying to reduce its energy bill, and the solar plant near Hambantota in Baruthakanda is parts of a wider national solar plan in the East and North.

The use of coal, oil, and sustainable energy funded by multiple partners including India, China, South Korea and the EC, is a way to acquire energetic independence from any foreign country while reducing the bill. Furthermore Sri Lanka aims at fully playing its role of an energetic hub, with its potential oilfields, while having split its internal energetic investment between several major countries, hence playing a part in energy security and control, especially in one of the most important part of the world regarding energy issues and transport.

## B) Rebuilding an international role

### *a) A key position*

The island of Ceylon holds a decisive strategic position, right in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

*“The Indian Ocean is the third largest of the world's five oceans (after the Pacific Ocean and Atlantic Ocean, but larger than the Southern Ocean and Arctic Ocean). Four critically important access waterways are the Suez Canal (Egypt), Bab el Mandeb (Djibouti-Yemen), Strait of Hormuz (Iran-Oman), and Strait of Malacca (Indonesia-Malaysia)”<sup>42</sup>.*

Sri Lanka is located between the strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab-el Mandeb Strait, three of the most valuable commercial strategic key points in today's world: trade routes that link Europe, a primordial receiver of Eastern Asian manufactured goods and the Middle East, and its natural resource reserves, to East and South East Asia, countries surrounding the East, Yellow and South China Sea like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and of course China. But not only is Sri Lanka at the centre of some of the most important trade routes, it is also one of the three summits of the triangle built by the Eastern shores of Africa, and its mining potential especially in the South, Australia and India, Sri Lanka and the South-Eastern coast of India being separated by the also strategically important Palk strait (more about it *later*).

According to the CIA's *Factbook*, the Indian Ocean holds more than 40% of the world's off-shore oil production. “According to the Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, *more than 80% of the world's seaborne oil trade transit through Indian Ocean choke points, with 40% through the Strait of Hormuz, 35% through the Strait of Malacca and 8% through the Bab el-Mandab Strait*”<sup>43</sup>. 12% of the world global fish capture production<sup>44</sup>, mostly by countries from outside the Indian Ocean, which is 4% more than in 2005 (8.4%<sup>45</sup>) as a result of over-exploiting the Ocean's resources<sup>46</sup>, thus

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<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Power and Energy, power.lk, August 2011

<sup>42</sup> CIA's Factbook, [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos), August 2011

<sup>43</sup> DeSilva RANASINGHE, Sergei, “Why the Indian Ocean Matters?”, *The Diplomats blog*, the-diplomat.com, March 2011, August 2011

<sup>44</sup> The Indian Ocean represents 10,752,474 tons of the 89,836,958 tons fished for the year 2009, FAO Global Capture Production ([www.fao.org/fishery/statistics](http://www.fao.org/fishery/statistics)) (Online Query Panel), includes all species, marine and inland water areas, August 2011

<sup>45</sup> “Ocean Fisheries”, Wikipedia at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocean\\_fisheries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocean_fisheries), August 2011 (calculated via the FAO's database).

weakening the surrounding countries' economy and food sustainability. With waters usually warmer than those of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Indian Ocean also has a tremendous tourist-based potential. With its important reserves of both natural (fossil energy and mining prospects make the Indian Ocean one of the three most important mining regions with Northern and South-Western America<sup>47</sup>) and food resources, both from agriculture, especially in India, Eastern Africa and Australia, and fisheries, the Indian Ocean is of a real importance for today's and tomorrow's world, and Sri Lanka is in the middle of it.

b) Re-Integrating the regional balance of power

Sri Lanka has a very particular important position in the Indian Ocean, which in itself is of a premier strategic importance.

The Indian Ocean was declared a "Zone of Peace" by the UN Security Council<sup>48</sup> in 1971, under pressure from the Non-Aligned Countries' movement founded in the 1960s with countries like India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China and most African Nations. Despite its peace label, the Indian Ocean has been an "arc of crisis"<sup>49</sup> since the 1960s and a shift of the Cold War from Europe to Asia (with key history events such as the Vietnam War (1963-1975)).

As one of the first Non-Aligned countries, Sri Lanka also joined numerous international and regional organisations, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC, established in 1995 but launched in 1997), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC, founded in 1997) or the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC, founded in 1985). Sri Lanka is fully integrated into multi-scale international organisations, from the Bay of Bengal to the entire Indian Ocean, which enables it to speak at every level of diplomatic and regional talks.



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<sup>46</sup> DeSilva RANASINGHE, Sergei, "Why the Indian Ocean Matters?", *The Diplomats blog*, march 2011, the-diplomat.com, August 2011

<sup>47</sup> Global Info Mine, Mines Site map, *Despite not showing all the mine sites in the world, this map still presents the main mining region of the world, and thus can be trusted and extrapolated according to the authors.*

<sup>48</sup> Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, Resolution 2832 (XXVI), 16 December 1971

<sup>49</sup> KUMAR, Chandra, "The Indian Ocean: Arc of Crisis or Zone of Peace?", *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, London, Vol.60, No2, Spring 1984

<sup>50</sup> Non-Align Movement Logo of the Sharm El Sheikh Summit, 2009, WIKIPEDIA. The Non-Align Movement Summits' logos are always presenting a white dove.

These organisations are also of multifarious importance, have different objectives and tasks, and also include different types of countries. These different international organisations are all economic and trade oriented, to promote free-trade, liberalisation and goods circulation and to encourage cooperation and discussion between members. A better integration of all the countries that share the rims of the Indian Ocean, and their diplomatic and commercial partners as observers, with countries like China, the USA, the European Union in a common objective of peace and balance between superpowers and lesser powers for global growth and security is essential. Let's not forget that 8 declared nuclear weapon nations (China and its energetic lifeline, France and La Réunion island and Djibouti base, Great Britain as the ex-major colonising power of the region and the Commonwealth today, India, Israel as a major player in the Middle East, Pakistan, Russia as a major player in Sri Lanka's foreign and military policies, the USA and the Diego Garcia Base) of the 9 or 10 (North Korea has no direct link to the region) have coastline frontiers, naval bases or direct interests in the Indian Ocean.

According to Mahdi D. NAZEMROAYA and his article "Great Power Confrontation in the Indian Ocean: The Geo-Politics of the Sri Lankan Civil War"<sup>51</sup>, Sri Lanka's civil conflict, that lasted from 1983 to May 2009 with an estimated 80,000-100,000 casualties, opposing the Liberation Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government, was another crucial point in the great powers' diplomatic agenda, especially in its final years. India and what the author calls "periphery" states such as the USA or Australia were tacitly and covertly supporting the Tamil Tigers, whereas the Lankan government was supported by a Chinese-Russian-Iranian alliance, called the Eurasian Alliance by some.



After the Sino-Lankan agreement over Hambantota, with its economic prospect and Chinese support in the fight against the Tamil Tigers, and the Chinese opportunity to set a foot in the Indian Ocean, the "US aid to Sri Lanka drastically declined"<sup>53</sup> (with a major shift in fiscal year 2007, with a drop of 64% in US aid, which has regressed ever since to US\$13 million in 2010. India's foreign policy also favoured the Tamils with "pressure on Colombo to make Sri Lanka a federal state with autonomy for the Tamils").

"It is from 2007 onward that Sri Lanka became a part of the Eurasian Alliance through its agreement with China and its subsequent estrangement from the U.S. and

<sup>51</sup> NAZEMROAYA, Mahdi Darius, "Great Power Confrontation in the Indian Ocean: The Geo-Politics of the Sri Lankan Civil War", *Global Research*, October 2009, [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca), august 2011

<sup>52</sup> WIKIPEDIA, LTTE page

<sup>53</sup> GAMAGE, Daya, "US aid to Sri Lanka drastically declined since 2005, now halted: no strategic interests in Sri Lanka", *Asia Tribune*, July 2011

India. By the end of 2007, Sri Lanka had [geo-strategically entrenched itself with] Russia, Iran, and China”,

including military assistance (technical support and training for the Sri Lankan army by SCO<sup>54</sup> essential members), weapon shipments and deals, and international support (including favoured votes at the UN Security Council from Beijing and Moscow). In 2009, with Sri Lanka joining the SCO as a Dialogue Partner<sup>55</sup>, ties between Sri Lanka and its new allies got tighter.

Mahdi D. NAZEMROAYA adds that it was Sri Lanka’s vital geographic location for China’s energetic and commercial safety that forced their move into the country, followed by Russia and Iran, investing in maritime safety in the Indian Ocean, to secure both a foothold in the region and protect their trade routes. With its new allies, two are nuclear nations and one is on the way to becoming one, Sri Lanka has gained renewed international and military weight, combined to domestic industrial, energetic and economic investment and aid.

With this information from Mahdi D. NAZEMROAYA’s article, the importance of the Palk Strait, between the North-Western tip of Sri Lanka and the South-East end of India becomes obvious: Sri Lanka holds a strategic and primordial defensive and commercial position for India, as all ships transporting goods from one coast of India to the other must pass in Colombo’s blue water, thence the Sethusamudram Ship Canal Project established by New Delhi in 2005 for dredging the Palk Strait in order to facilitate transportation and avoid the circumnavigation of Sri Lanka.

Colombo’s new military agreements are also a threat to India’s defensive line (in which Sri Lanka held a major role), as it opens a breach for China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), already holding other key spots in Gwadar (Pakistan), Coco Island and Kyauk Phyu (Burma), hence surrounding India’s national water.

As long as the Indian Ocean remains the world’s most crucial region in terms of shipment, trade, and energy and since the Atlantic Ocean loses its pre-eminence as the Indian Ocean did more than five hundred years ago, an example of this shift can be seen in the US redeploying their two-Ocean strategy, shifting their fleet from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and the adjacent Persian Gulf<sup>56</sup>, Sri Lanka will benefit grandly from this world superpower diplomatic quarrels, and yet will remain under their influence and “protective wing”.

## CONCLUSION

China is a country of superlatives: most populous country; biggest economic growth of the last few decades, becoming the world’s second largest economy; having the world’s second [largest] armed forces; all of which makes it definitely one of the two most important countries in the world. And its peaceful growth to economic power has to be compared to the European and American sovereign debt crisis and the conflicts in Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq.

Hambantota, like Gwadar, Coco Island and Kyau Phyu harbours, corresponds to a Chinese need to control not only the trade routes of the Indian Ocean, but the entire industrial and commercial chain of their manufactured goods.

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<sup>54</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organization, an intergovernmental mutual-security organization which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Except for Uzbekistan, the other countries had been members of the Shanghai Five, founded in 1996; after the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001, the members renamed the organization. Observer states: Uran, India, Mongolia, Pakistan. Dialogue partners: Belarus, Sri Lanka. Guest attendances: Afghanistan, ASEAN, CIS, Turkmenistan.

<sup>55</sup> Yekaterinburg Declaration of the Heads of the Member States of the SCO, June 16, 2009.

<sup>56</sup> HOLMES, James, YOSHIHARA, Toshi, “US Navy’s Indian Ocean Folly?”, *The Diplomat’s blog*, January 4, 2011, the-diplomat.com, August 2011

By controlling the production and the shipment of the goods, hence suppressing intermediaries, Chinese firms should gain manoeuvrable margins in order to remain globally competitive in spite of the increasing cost of Chinese labour and a revaluated Yuan. Chinese labour, thanks to wages increasing 14% annually over the past decade, and remaining double-figured for the next 5 to 10 years, added to a projected yearly 3% Yuan appreciation<sup>57</sup>, will make their manufactured goods more expensive.

In order to remain competitive, China's industry, therefore Beijing, is building a new "silk road" in the Indian Ocean, in order to secure and more importantly own the entire distribution chain, from their docks and relay or European docks, with major investment in European harbours, including the buying of vast section of Athens' Piraeus, Greece, port in 2008 (US\$30 million) and Le Havre, France, with the construction of 4 new lanes since 2000, to the warehouses, ships and supply lines.

Owning the entire chain and controlling the goods from the factory to the store would give the Chinese an increased commercial power over other foreign firms, keeping production cost and sale prices levelled, thus maybe gaining a 50-70% security margin as compared to foreign firms that control only the end-market distribution of the product, and being able, unlike their competitors, to buffer the labour cost and currency increases without increasing the product's sale price.

### **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

**Dr Jacques COULARDEAU** (born in Bordeaux in 1945), PhD in Germanic Linguistics (University Lille III) and ESP Teaching (University Bordeaux II) has been teaching all types of ESP, especially technological, scientific and historical ESP. He has done research in the fields of English and American literatures, drama and arts; opera, cinema and television at a global level; general linguistics with particular emphasis on Germanic, Indo-European, African and more recently Indo-Aryan languages, as well as Pali and Sumerian. He spent some time in Africa, the USA and many countries in Europe, and more recently Sri Lanka where he studied Buddhism and oriental spirituality. His present research covers the "language of Cro-Magnon" and the emergence of language among Homo Sapiens, the phylogenic and psychogenetic emergence of human language, and further studies on opera, drama and cinema, including mythological contacts between Indo-European and Turkic traditions and cultures. He is vastly published in many countries in all these fields.

He presently teaches within the CEGID (Compagnie Européenne de Gestion par l'Informatique Décentralisée, European Management Company by Distributed Computing, established in 1983) for the Groupement des professionnels de paie et de gestion (Synopsis paie, Centre of pay-roll management professionals) in Nice, after having taught in many Paris universities, including Panthéon-Sorbonne and Assas-Panthéon within the Sorbonne itself.

**Ivan EVE**, who was born in Paris on 1991, has had a long South East Asian experience, spending most of his life in Vietnam (Hue and Hanoi) for a total of four years and in Laos (Vientiane) for seven or eight years. Impregnated with local cultures and ways of thinking, as well as local practices and experiences, he travelled around Asia (China, Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, The Philippines, Nepal, and Malaysia) and got to stay in the United States and Australia for a few weeks as well. He used to speak perfect Vietnamese (that was lost in translation) and can now understand Laotian.

He is presently studying at the University of Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne, and has chosen a double major in History and in Political Science. He is finishing his three year undergraduate cycle.

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<sup>57</sup> FLANNERY, Russell, "China Faces Years of Double-Digits Wage Increases, Currency Appreciation", *Forbes*, March 18, 2011