



AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY ON SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT CHINA IN SRI LANKA

Dr. Dasuni N. Jayarathne

*Lecturer, Department of Languages and Communication Studies,
Eastern University, Sri Lanka*

Abstract:

This research has been conducted to identify the strategies used by People's Republic of China to spread the soft diplomacy to the Sri Lankan audience. Hence the study has mainly focused to indicated the sources that the Sri Lankans are getting information from China and the perception creation about China among the Sri Lankans through the strategies they have used. This is a qualitative study and the data has been collected through the semi structured method with the purposive sampling. 20 interviews have been conducted with the people belongs to different categories. The results have been analyzed through the thematic analysis. Thus, the results indicated that, there are five main sources spread the information about China. China as a state used their international media in order to spread their information to Sri Lanka. Thus, CRI Sinhala service, Chinese social media influencers, local media reporting, real life experiences of the people and import / export business people are the sources of the information about China in Sri Lanka. Hence the CRI Sinhala service is more focusing on the Chinese culture. Social media influencers are spreading the news about the Chinese culture, real life, China's technology and China's relationship with Sri Lanka mainly. Further, local media reporting about China's projects in Sri Lanka. Thus, the real-life experiences and the import/export business people share the China's daily life style. The positive influence about China made by the China's media and the real-life experiences of Sri Lankans in China while the local media reporting specially the private channels give the negative feeling about China and the import/export businessmen give medium impression about China.

Keywords: Sources of information, Perception creations, China, Sri Lanka, International relations

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:	RESEARCH ARTICLE
Dr. Dasuni N. Jayarathne Lecturer, Department of Languages and Communication Studies, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. Email: jayarathnen@esn.ac.lk	

Introduction

China and Sri Lanka have a very close relationship for centuries. Sri Lanka was a prominent place in the ancient Silk Road. Therefore, since that time strong cultural, religious, and economic relationship are there between Sri Lanka and China. In very ancient times, Sri Lanka followed the eastern tradition and learning was considered a valuable treasure. Sri Lanka is a country with an impact of Indian culture and a traditional mixture. In ancient times, the country used to have a king-controlled system. Sri Lanka was colonized by portages by the Dutch and Britain. Therefore, these colonized ideologies had a huge impact on the public as well as on their ideologies.

China and Sri Lanka's economic relationships are more than 20 centuries. The location of the country caused the trade relationship of many countries. The background of this relationship between the two countries emphasizes clearly that, Sri Lanka and China had a strong relationship for centuries ago. In general, this was the case between Sri Lanka and China. Several stories from China provide proof of the early links between Sri Lanka and China with its location, among the many foreign visitors to Sri Lanka who left behind records of their impressions that are so valuable in reconstructing the island's history from ancient times. A few years ago, the public perception was not focused on China. But during the recent relationship between the two countries, the public focus started to shift toward China. As China became Sri Lanka's biggest investor and as it offered different scholarships for students and journalists in Sri Lanka, the public wanted to know more about China. The main two projects the Hambantota Harbor project and the Colombo port city projects which were conducted by China in Sri Lanka caught the whole attention of Sri Lankans in China. Though the previous focus was on India and America, recently a majority of Sri Lankans wanted to know about China mainly than other countries in the world. Hence, it was clear that more Sri Lankans interested to know the facts about China, the study has been focused to carry out the soft diplomacy, soft power specially sharing the culture and ect among Sri Lankans and the tactics they have used for it. With the present condition, it was interesting to know about the sources of information about China to the Sri Lankan audience and the perception created about the state by the different sources of information. This is qualitative research and the data was collected through interviews.

Research Methodology

This is qualitative research and the research used the semi-structured interview method to collect the data. Therefore 20 people have interviewed in four different categories such as university academics, international businessmen, postgraduate students, and government officers. The present research used the purposive sampling method. The freshly gathered data was analyzed with thematic analysis in the present research.

Data Analysis

The present research gave very interesting findings. The thematic analysis indicated the sources of information that Sri Lankans are getting information about China.

CRI- Sri Lanka

CRI- Sinhala radio has started as a web radio and then with the time main stream frequency radio was started. Though it has been started as a FM radio in Sri Lanka, with high internet

penetration the digitalized media of CRI has been expanded. When the CRI radio has been digitalized with the new media verities the audience perception and interest have been changed. Majorly, CRI – Sinhala service developed its website to give more information related to the Chinese economy and culture-related information. This has been analyzed in the present research to identify the content of the website and the major reporting in it. Moreover, there is the CRI-“Cheena Sinhala Handa “Facebook page which became one of the most famous Facebook pages in Sri Lanka. Though there are only BBC and CRI, CRI – Facebook page started to be more popular among the Sri Lankans in the recent time period.

The CRI – Sinhala website is one of the major ways of giving information to Sri Lankans. The web content is in Sinhala and the language is very familiar to Sri Lankans to understand, as the majority of Sri Lankans are Sinhalese. Sri Lankans are very familiar with China as a country since the two countries have had a great relationship throughout history. During the new era, the relationship between Sri Lanka and China became more official with the different political decisions. Due to all these China never became a new country to Sri Lanka. Though it was not a new country to study by Sri Lankans, Many of Sri Lankans don’t have much clear idea about China. Therefore, the content related to China in CRI – Sinhala service supported understanding more depth about the country. Further the CRI – Facebook page and the Subhasara CRI – Magazine is giving different sectors of information towards the Sri Lankan audience. The CRI is giving the information about the Chinese culture, politics, economy, social life of Chinese people and the international relations of China mainly.

Integrating social media influencer

CRI- Sinhala service used the social media influencer marketing as a communication strategy. As the CRI has the Facebook page, it was used the influencer profiles to get the CRI-Facebook reach of followers. The social media influencer is an important part of this information network and it’s one of a strategy that the media and other product companies used in order to reach number of audience and the customers. Therefore, I could say the three main Facebook pages which have number of followers castoff as influencing medias. The Facebook pages called “Waruni JZ”, “Rasika” and “Sunimalee” were using in order to spread the information in China. These all pages belong to the Chinese citizens who are very fluent in Sinhala. They are giving the information in different scenarios. Such as how to do shopping in China, what’s the currency value of Sri Lanka and how to shopping with Sri Lankan money in China, celebrating Chinese new year with their families, make different food items with their family members, how Sri Lankans and Chinese people are being as close friends in China, the fluency of Chinese language among Sri Lankans, Night life and markets in China, Sinhala and Chinese songs singing together, improve both languages together by Sinhalese and Chinese, are some of most popular information they have posted through their Facebook pages. These all became highly positive influencing posts and videos from Chinese Facebook pages to Sri Lankan audience.

Due to the recent economic relationships, Sri Lankans are highly interested and curious to know about the information of China as the majority has a feeling that China will overtake Sri Lanka.

Therefore, in the local social media sites Sinhalese used to post lot of thoughts related to these. In that kind of situation, it's very important of showing the clear image of China towards Sri Lankans.

➤ **Waruni JZ Influencer social media**

Waruni is a Chinese woman who speaks Sinhala language very well and She became kind of cultural ambassador of China. Many people used to follow her videos on Facebook. Her Facebook page is also combined with CRI- Facebook page. With comparing the other posts shared by the CRI-Facebook, her posts have high number of followers and many positive comments. As per the interviewees, they have mentioned that they were getting much interested information related to China from the Warunu JZ Facebook page. She has been studied in Sri Lanka and there are few other Chinese people who have been studied in Sri Lanka, who supported to make posts in her Facebook page. It's very famous Facebook page and many Sri Lankans follow it. Audience mentioned that, they are learning more about China through her Facebook page. They have mentioned it makes a good impression about China among Sri Lankans.

The Facebook page has many Sri Lankan followers and they are getting much clear idea about China as she is doing the Facebook page in Sinhala which is the native language for Sri Lankans. As per the interviewees viewpoints that the Facebook page, was mentioning more about the daily life of China and the special events in China which grabs the attention of the audience. The comments on her Facebook were highly positive and Sri Lankans were highly impressed with her Facebook page. She used to post the videos with speaking in Sinhala in Chinese markets – how to buy the vegetables, Chinese New Year celebrations, their daily office lives and etc. Therefore, it became very interesting setting for Lankans. Waruni's Facebook page is one of the highest following personal Facebook pages by the Lankan audience. They have mentioned that this FB page supported a lot to get a clear vision of China.

➤ **Rasika Liu influencer social media**

Rasika is a Chinese lady who can speak fluent Sinhala. She might conduct her master's degree in Sri Lankan University. She is working as a cultural ambassador of China and Sri Lanka. Her Facebook page is highly popular among Sri Lankans as its intercultural communicative social media page. In her Facebook page it has many followers and many Sri Lankans used to get information through her social site. It basically mentioned as China state control media. This Facebook page mainly reporting related to the beautiful places and occasions in China. She used to do different videos in China with talking in Sinhala language. This videos and the posts help the Sri Lankan audience to have a clear and good idea about China. Because the videos became very much familiar to the Sri Lankans with the language. The accent of speaking Sinhala make audience to watch it. Further her Facebook page has many followers and the comments are much more positive. Many followers mentioned that they used to get clear idea through her Facebook videos. Further this Facebook page named as entertainment site and it further give the details about the daily life style of the Chinese family. This makes a very positive and clear idea about China among Sri Lankans.

Local media reporting

As per the interviews, most of persons are getting information related to China through local media channels. The journalists mentioned that the most of the journalists in the government channels went for different training programme to China. Therefore, they have very pleasant and clear picture about China. This journalist who had trainings from China started to create different programs about China to the local people. There are programmes in local government media channel call “Ma dutu Cheenaya” which means that the China from my eye, “Nudutu lokaya’, means the unseen side of the world, are some of the prominent programs in China. Those were mainly showing about the beauty of China, special places in China, the social life and daily life of Chinese people. As per the journalists, these all-program contents were preparing by the journalists who went for the training in China. Further as China and Sri Lanka have very close economic relationship. Many panel discussion programs choose the topic to speak about the OBOR development projects in Sri Lanka. The interviewees mentioned that there was good rating for these programs in local media. They mentioned that there was high interaction of Sri Lankan audience for these programs.

Further, the foreign news telecasting in local media channels have been explained about the China, daily with its special news. Recently with the project of Hambathota harbor and the Colombo port city, China became the most famous country among the Sri Lankans than other all the countries in the world. Therefore, the decisions made by Chinese government became very important news to Sri Lankan audience.

In general, as per the data from the interviewees the local government channels reported positive side of the OBOR projects and about China. But there are few private channels which were against the local government in Sri Lanka and they try to make negative influence among the Sri Lankans about China and its relationship with Sri Lanka. But instead of the political vision and the connection of OBOR project the media reporting about the Chinese culture is highly interested by the local audience. Therefore, the audience required to know more about the Chinese culture.

As per the details given by the interviewees, China comes under the Asian Continent and the Sri Lankans would like to see an Asian country in the top countries in world as both countries in same continent. In general, most of the Sri Lankans believe China is a Buddhist country still and they have a big respect towards the China from the ancient time due to Buddhism. Moreover, the news of local channels explained about the aids giving by the Chinese government to Sri Lanka. Therefore, the free vaccines, sanitary items, stationaries given by the Chinese government to Sri Lanka and it explained in the local media news. Further it can explain that the local government channels elucidate the positive side of the China and Sri Lanka relationship, but the few private channels explained the negative side of the relationship between China and Sri Lanka as the political agenda of that private channel is not parallely going with the present government in Sri Lanka. The majority of the interviewees mentioned that they receive the information about China from local media channels mainly as well.

Real life experienced locals in China

Majority of the interviewees in the present research sample, have visited China for different purposes. Therefore, the University academics mostly got educated from China; they have completed their Doctoral degree from reputed Universities in China. Further the journalists went for the training sessions, Business people often visit China and the University students went to student programs. So mostly the interviewees in sample have a close connection with China in various ways. Therefore, the interviewees have the real-life experiences with China. They all have a very positive mind set about PRC as they connect with Chinese people in real life. They have a very positive image about the Chinese University education system. As per the students who got educated from there mentioned that they encouraged the local students and other people to educate themselves in China for at least one of their degrees in life.

Further, the journalists mentioned that they are very positive about the technology used in Chinese media and the digitalization of Chinese media. They have mentioned that they had a lot to learn from the Chinese trainings and they wanted to continue to have the trainings in China more. This has been one of the major ways that the people were getting information related to China. Approximately there were nearly 2000 students per year leaving to China for their studies. China became one of the most popular study destinations for the students specially for the medicine and the PHD. It's very interesting to indicate that the students who have been educated from China have very positive mindset about the country. The interviewees mentioned that they used to encourage many other people to plan their education in China. Further the majority mentioned that everyone started their carrier in relation with companies or organizations to China.

Moreover, the interviewees mentioned that the students experience in China has been shared through their social media pages. Their personal life experiences about China have been posted over the social sites. Mainly the students' experiences were about, where they have learned about Chinese culture. This information has been trusted by the people as well as the reporting based on experiences. Therefore, the students who studied in China and their information became one of the major sources for many people to know about China in positive way. Mainly the students who studied in China spoke positively about China. That has been supported for local people to know more about the country.

Though Sri Lanka is one of the colonized countries and appreciate the western perspectives, in terms of education many Sri Lankans prefer to select China with the recommendation of former graduates. Further the interviewees mentioned that most of the people in Sri Lanka they have different kind of mindsets related China which they got from western medias. Therefore, the experience sharing about China became one of the major sources they received the clear information about China.

Import/Export Businessmen in Sri Lanka

As per the findings of the present research export businessmen became one of the main reasons of getting information about China. There are small enterprises owners and large enterprises owners in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this businessman shared the economic information of China to Lankans specially than the cultural and the other information.

An investigative study on sources of information about China in Sri Lanka

Further, they have given the information about the Chinese products and the quality of the Chinese products. They have mentioned that the Sri Lankan majority think products from China have less quality. But they clarified that Sri Lankan business people buy affordable goods only from China. It means they have several products for different price ranges and they buy only the affordable goods for their price. Further, the interviewees mentioned that the large tea export business people used to spread information of China to Sri Lanka a lot through their social media sites. Many people used to get information through the social media sites as per the analysis findings. However, it has been indicated that the import and export businessmen become a source of information about China to Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

Table 1: Summary

Sources of information	Perception Created		
	Negative	Medium	Positive
CRI Sinhala service			
Integrated social media influencer			
Local media reporting			
Real-life experiences of local people in China			
Import/Export Businessmen in Sri Lanka			

As China became one of the most popular countries among Sri Lankans the information-seeking need related to China became really high and it became a trend. With the highly growing relationship between the two countries, many Sri Lankans started to learn the Chinese language from different institutes. Even though previously it was Japanese and Korean languages interest, now Chinese language took priority to learn among Sri Lankans. Even in the school syllabuses, many schools included Chinese as a subject recently. Due to this high enthusiasm for knowing about China, the results indicated the above-mentioned details as the other sources of information about China than the CRI Sinhala service. The thematic analysis indicated the above findings from the interviews conducted with the selected group. It has been identified that local media reporting, Real life experienced locals in China and the import and export businessmen became other sources that the Sri Lankans get information about China.

Therefore, it's important to understand that local media reporting has negative and positive sides both. But this information through local media isn't giving depth idea about China to Sri Lankans. But several TV programs which focus on China will give a deep idea. This has been identified as one of the main other ways where the Sri Lankan audience gets information about China. Further, the real-life experienced locals in China are very much important for Sri Lankans to get information. This is mostly given as positive ideas about China as many of the people who have experienced in China have positive viewpoints about the country. They used to share their experiences through local media channels and the audience can get a clear and trustworthy idea. Moreover, the Sri Lankan businessman becomes very much important to know about China. The

An investigative study on sources of information about China in Sri Lanka

real stories of the business people shared on the Facebook sites were highly important to the audience to know about China well. Therefore, these sources could be highlighted as other sources which give information about China to Sri Lankans. Therefore, it can conclude that real-life experiences local in China and international import and export businessmen give positive ideas to create a positive understanding of China. And the local government media gives positive support while the private media gives negative support towards the understating of China.

Reference

1. Bryman, A. and E. Bell, (2007) *Business Research Methods*, New York: Oxford University Press;
2. Callahan, E., (2005) *Cultural Similarities and Differences in the Design of University Web Sites*. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*,
3. Cocolina. M (2012), *Mass Media and Globalization*, Research gate publications
4. China and Sri Lanka: Between a dream and Nightmare, News article, *The Diplomat*>2016/11
5. Cull, N. (2008). *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American propaganda and public diplomacy, 1945–1989*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6. Botan C.H (2017), “*Strategic Communication Theory and Practice: The Co-create model*” , Wiley Publications
7. Duan. P (2017), *International Communication strategies of Chinese Radio TV networks initial observations*, *Global media and China* Volume xx 1-2
8. Eunson. B (2015), *Non- Verbal Communication*, Research Gate Publications
9. Fatimayia. F (2010), *What is communication?* School of Education, National Open University of Nigeria, Laos

