

## **China's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategy: The Colombo Lotus Tower and the Belt and Road Initiative**

### **Abstract**

The Chinese-built Colombo Lotus Tower—inspired by the Lotus Sutra in Buddhism—will soon be inaugurated in Sri Lanka as a hallmark of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Buddhist diplomacy between the two countries trace back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). After staying on the island for two years (411-12), the famous Chinese scholar-monk Faxian (Fa-Hsien) described Sri Lanka as the Buddhist “Kingdom of the Lion” while the venerable Chinese monk Xuanzang (602–64) called it the “Sorrowless Kingdom.” The Emperor Kublai Khan (1260-94) sent Marco Polo to Sri Lanka, followed by the Ming admiral Zheng He (1371-1433) who visited the island several times during his voyage. More recently, during his historic visit to Sri Lanka in 2014, President Xi Jinping characterized the Buddhist nation a “splendid pearl” as part of the rejuvenation of religious and cultural heritage for a global community of shared destiny. Born in Sri Lanka, the former American diplomat and UNESCO commissioner Professor Patrick Mendis will examine the long-history of religious and cultural exchanges between the Buddhist Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom for a glimpse into the prospects for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

(The views expressed in the lecture are Professor Mendis own and do not represent the institutions of his affiliation in the past or present).