

ŚRĪVIJAYA: A BUDDHIST CENTRE IN MARITIME
SOUTHEAST ASIA (7TH - 11TH CENTURIES)

BY

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ABSTRACT

Śrīvijaya, the illustrious Buddhist thalassocracy, was known for its geopolitical and economic hegemony in Maritime Southeast Asia from the 7th-11th centuries, and it continued to be an important local power in subsequent centuries. Despite its distinguished political and economic position, its religious contribution to Buddhist development in the Maritime Southeast Asia and its religious interaction with other regions has been underappreciated. This research undertakes a descriptive-thematical analysis of Buddhist activities in Śrīvijaya and its interactions with other regions, particularly South and East Asia, through local and foreign textual and epigraphical evidence supported with archaeological data. The significance of the research highlights the significant position of Śrīvijaya as a Buddhist centre that could pave the path of future research regarding religious and intellectual dimensions in the pre-Islamic period in Maritime Southeast Asia. The finding shows that Śrīvijayan rulers sponsored a number of Buddhist public works for various reasons in Śrīvijaya and established Buddhist interaction through diplomatic relations with other polities in South Asia and China. Numerous Buddhist monks, either local and foreign, were identified have stayed in Śrīvijaya to study and teach Buddhism, translate religious texts, propagate the religion, and meet other intellectuals. Śrīvijaya was a nexus for trade and ideas between South and East Asia, and offered numerous indigenous and local contributions that have been ignored by previous historians. Several Buddhist texts were written in Śrīvijaya by local and foreign monks preserved in foreign translations in China and Tibet, which underscores the profound and wide-reaching importance of the centre to Buddhist culture and civilization.

خلاصة البحث

سريوجايا - الإمبراطورية البحرية البوذية اللامعة - كانت معروفة بهيمنتها الجغرافية والاقتصادية في منطقة جنوب شرق آسيا البحرية من القرنين السابع إلى الحادي عشر. واستمرت في كونها قوة محلية مهمة في القرون التالية. على الرغم من موقعها السياسي والاقتصادي المتميز، كانت مساهمتها الدينية في التطور البوذي في منطقة جنوب شرق آسيا البحرية ومعاملاتها الدينية مع المناطق الأخرى لم تحظ بالتقدير. يقوم هذا البحث بالتحليل الوصفي والموضوعي للأنشطة البوذية في سريوجايا وتفاعلاتها مع المناطق الأخرى، لا سيما في جنوب وشرق آسيا. ويقوم هذا البحث من خلال الأدلة النصية والكتابية المحلية والأجنبية المدعومة بالبيانات الأثرية. تسلط أهمية البحث الضوء على المكانة المهمة لسريوجايا كمركز بوذي. ويمكن أن يمهّد الطريق للبحث المستقبلي فيما يتعلق بالنواحي الدينية والفكرية في فترة ما قبل الإسلام في جنوب شرق آسيا البحرية. يُظهر الاكتشاف أن حكام سريوجايا قاموا برعاية عدد من الأعمال البوذية العامة لأسباب مختلفة في سريوجايا وأقاموا تفاعلات بوذية من خلال العلاقات الدبلوماسية مع الأنظمة السياسية الأخرى في جنوب آسيا والصين. تم التعرف على العديد من الرهبان البوذيين، سواء من المحليين أو الأجانب، وقد أقاموا في سريوجايا لدراسة البوذية وتعليمها، وترجمة النصوص الدينية، ونشر الدين، ومقابلة المثقفين الآخرين. كانت سريوجايا حلقة الوصل للتجارة والأفكار بين جنوب وشرق آسيا، وقدمت العديد من المساهمات الأصلية والمحلية التي تجاهلها المؤرخون السابقون. وكتب الرهبان المحليون والأجانب العديد من النصوص البوذية في سريوجايا، وهي محفوظة في الترجمات الأجنبية في الصين والتبت. فهذا كله يؤكد الأهمية العميقة والواسعة للمركز للثقافة والحضارة البوذية. العديد من الرهبان البوذيين، سواء كانوا محليين أو أجانب، معروفون أنهم استقروا في سريوجايا لدراسة البوذية وتعليمها ولترجمة النصوص الدينية ونشر الدين ومقابلة العقلاء الآخرين. كانت سريوجايا حلقة الوصل للتجارة والأفكار بين جنوب وشرق آسيا، وقدمت العديد من المساهمات الأصلية والمحلية التي تجاهلها المؤرخون السابقون.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (History and Civilization).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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*For my late mother, who passed away while finishing my research, my late father, and my
siblings.*

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All praises and achievements are due to Allah, the Reliever (*al-Basit*), who persistently gives His Grace (*ar-Rahman*) and Mercy (*ar-Rahim*) to me and all mankind who lives until the Day of Judgment. Unto Him are all of my works, and from Him I obtain the courage to pursue my goals and further steps into the obscurity of the future that He only knows. May Allah forgive us all.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Abstract in Arabic	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Declaration	v
Copyright Page.....	vi
Dedication	vii
Acknowledgements.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Problem Statement.....	7
1.3 Research Questions.....	9
1.4 Research Objectives.....	9
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	10
1.6 Literature Review	12
1.7 Conceptual Framework.....	19
1.8 Methodology of Research.....	21
1.9 Chapter Outline.....	23
CHAPTER TWO: THE EMERGENCE OF MARITIME CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SOUTH ASIA, MARITIME SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND CHINA	24
2.1 Introduction.....	24
2.2 An Overview of Early Asian Maritime Commerce Interactions	26
2.3 Early Maritime Connections Between South Asia and Maritime Southeast Asia Pre-7 th Century	36
2.4 Early Maritime Connections Between China and Maritime Southeast Asia Pre- 7 th Century.....	43
2.5 The Significance of Maritime Southeast Asia During Early Maritime Buddhist Interaction Between South Asia and China Pre-7 th Century.....	57
CHAPTER THREE: THE RISE OF ŚRĪVIJAYA: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC OVERVIEW	72
3.1 Introduction.....	72
3.2 The Background of the Emergence of Śrīvijaya.....	73
3.3 Political Overview	78
3.4 An Economic Overview.....	105
CHAPTER FOUR: ŚRĪVIJAYA AS A BUDDHIST CENTRE	119
4.1 Introduction.....	119

4.2 An Overview of Śrīvijaya As A Buddhist Centre.....	121
4.3 Royal Sponsorship and Diplomatic Ties	127
4.4 The Presence of Local and Foreign Monks	138
4.5 The Composition of Buddhist Texts in Śrīvijaya	161
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	168
BIBLIOGRAPHY	172
Books	172
Published Book Articles	176
Journals	180
Theses and Dissertations.....	184
Working Papers	184

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The historical development of Buddhism,¹ since its inception in the 5th century BCE by the eponymous founder, Siddhārtha Gautama Buddha (563-483 BCE),² produced a plethora of philosophical schools (*nikāya*) of doctrine, with diverse interpretations of Buddhist doctrines and practices. Several core Buddhist traditions originated from the Buddha's homeland in South Asia and traversed across Asia,³ leading to divergent interpretations of Buddhist doctrines and monastic disciplines with their own distinctive characteristics and manifestations of local cultural traditions. This immense widespread transmission of Buddhist doctrines throughout Asia was conditioned by many factors, including political, social, economic, philosophical, religious, geographical, and linguistic, all of which performed distinct roles.⁴ As a religion, Buddhism was mainly propagated by itinerant monks who spread Buddhism to different lands and established monasteries in cooperation

¹ For more understanding about historical development of Buddhism, see Paul Williams, and Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A complete introduction to the Indian tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Brian Carr, and Indira Mahalingam, eds. *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 273-440; Purushottam Vishvanath Bapat, ed. *2500 Years of Buddhism* (New Delhi: Publications Division Delhi, 1956).

² Although this date, based upon the Sri Lankan tradition, is commonly accepted, it has been debated, and alternatives have been proposed by other scholars. See Ninian Smart. "The Buddha." In *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy*, eds. Brian Carr, and Indira Mahalingam (New York: Routledge, 2005), 275-276.

³ This includes Central Asia, Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, China, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia, but does not include Southeast Asia. Ann Heirman, and Stephan Peter Bumbacher, eds. *The Spread of Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁴ Ann Heirman, and Stephan Peter Bumbacher. "Introduction: The Spread of Buddhism." In *The Spread of Buddhism*, eds. Ann Heirman, and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 2.

with local rulers. The attraction of Buddhism was mainly based on its encouragement and spiritual motivation in proselytizing Buddhist doctrines attributed to the Buddha himself, intimate relationships between merchants and Buddhist communities, and political patronage by certain rulers for Buddhism, due to confessional or political reasons.⁵ Consequently, an intricate network of relations emerged between the core region of origin of Buddhism and disparate communities throughout Asia, comprising a vast Buddhist realm (alongside other religions) from Central Asia to Japan and Southeast Asia.

The initial spread of Buddhism was in the Indian Subcontinent,⁶ whence it was carried into Central Asia by the territorial empires of Buddhist rulers,⁷ and later in East Asia, established Buddhist networks and was built under commercial networks known as overland “Silk Road”.⁸ The intertwined religious and mercantile networks subsequently created a much more complex regional integration between South, Central, and East Asia. As Buddhism spread eastwards, these networks assisted Buddhist doctrines to arrive at East Asia, particularly China,⁹ via Central Asia during the early 1st millennium CE by itinerant merchants and monks.

⁵ Tansen Sen. “The spread of Buddhism.” In *The Cambridge World History, Volume 5: Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conflict, 500 CE – 1500 CE*, eds. Benjamin Z. Kedar, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 447.

⁶ In the 3rd century BCE, King Aśoka of the Maurya empire played a significant role in disseminating Buddhism as a state-sponsored religion to other parts of South Asia, including Sri Lanka. Sen, *The Spread*, 450-451; Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 81-94. Also See Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 137-181.

⁷ After death of Aśoka, some polities in South Asia, including Śātavāhana (c. 1st century BCE until c. 3rd century CE) and Kuṣāṇa (c. 30 CE until c. 230) assumed responsibility for the spread Buddhism into Central Asia. Sen, *The Spread*, 451-452.

⁸ For more understanding about the “Silk Road,” see Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). However, few scholars issued the term “Silk Road,” for example, Susan Whitfield, “Was there a Silk Road?,” *Asian Medicine* 3 (2007), 201-213. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157342008X307839>.

⁹ For the early history of Buddhism in China, see Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (California: Stanford University Press, 1971), 3-64.

More recent historical studies on the process of initial transmission of Buddhist doctrines into China have received a scholarly debate either through overland routes or maritime routes that predates one another.¹⁰ Supported by archaeological evidence from inland and coastal regions of China, Sen argues that this debate is irrelevant,¹¹ and suggests that the transmissions undoubtedly occurred via multiple routes rather than a single conduit. For him, it is fairly reasonable to scrutinize “the complementary, interconnected, and sometimes competitive roles of the overland and maritime routes in Buddhist interactions across Asia.”¹²

The spread of Buddhism via the overland Silk Routes via Central Asia was a significant intermediary route for South and East Asia, into China,¹³ but studies on the dissemination of Buddhism through maritime routes remains as an important matter of discussion. Recent archaeological and epigraphical evidence, and rigorous analysis of textual evidence from various places and historical periods, has identified the significant position of Asian maritime networks in the provenance, development, transformation, and circulation of diverse schools of Buddhism.¹⁴ While numerous publications employed the

¹⁰ Tansen Sen, “Buddhism and the Maritime Crossings,” eds, Dorothy C. Wong, Gustav Heldt, *China and Beyond in the Mediaeval Period: Cultural Crossings and Inter-Regional Connections* (Amherst and Delhi: Cambria Press and Manohar, 2014), 41. See also the debate issued by Rong Xinjiang, “Land Route or Sea Route? Commentary on the Study of the Paths of Transmission and Areas in Which Buddhism Was Disseminated during the Han Period,” trans. Xiuqin Zhou. *Sino-Platonic Papers* 144 (July 2004). 1-32.

¹¹ Sen argued that the time Buddhism penetrated China left scant archaeological evidence before the 4th century relating to the presence of Buddhist monasteries in Central Asia and Maritime Southeast Asia. Sen, *Buddhism and the Maritime Crossings*, 41; Sen, *The Spread*, 452.

¹² Sen, *Buddhism and the Maritime Crossings*, 41.

¹³ For more understanding about Buddhist overland transmissions from South Asia, via Central Asia, to China, see Xinru Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges AD 1-600* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Richard Foltz, *Religions of Silk Road: Premodern Patterns of Globalization (Second Edition)* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 37-58.

¹⁴ Andrea Acri, “The Place of Nusantara in the Sanskrit Buddhist Cosmopolis,” *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 6, No. 2 (July 2018), 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2018.5>.

name of this maritime network as “Maritime Silk Road,”¹⁵ the term “silk” is a misnomer, as it was neither the earliest nor the main traded commodity through these routes; this also entails the “unwarranted emphasis it automatically places on the role and importance of China,” downplaying the role of numerous ports, ships, and merchants from other regions that played a significant role in commercial and cultural interactions in the maritime routes, and pan-Asian civilization in general.¹⁶

Regardless of the terminology used to describe trade routes, they were nevertheless arteries of Buddhist cultural transmission, extended from the coastal regions of the Indian Ocean to the mountains of China and elsewhere, involving mainly merchants and monks, which equally complex processes as the parallel overland routes.¹⁷ Merchants who assisted monks in maritime routes financially supported the Buddhist monasteries and proselytization activities, and the dissemination of Buddhist paraphernalia to other regions.¹⁸ This maritime network connected South Asia and China through Southeast Asia, which experienced dynamic interactions in transmitting Buddhist texts, paraphernalia, artefacts, and relics alongside with other trade commodities. Besides that, there was a growing number of Buddhist monks, as numerous textual evidences attest, travelling via the maritime routes either from South Asia and China from the 4th century onwards. This flourishing Buddhist maritime interaction between South Asia and China proves that the maritime routes played a significant role in the early dissemination of Buddhism into China.

¹⁵ For example, Such as Michel Jacq-Hergoualc’h, *The Malay Peninsula: Crossroads of the Maritime Silk Road (100 BC – 1300 AD)*. trans. Victoria Hobson (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Ralph Kauz, eds. *Aspects of the Maritime Silk Road: From the Persian Gulf to the East China Sea* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010).

¹⁶ Sen, *Buddhism and the Maritime Crossings*, 39-40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁸ Tansen Sen, “Maritime Interactions between China and India: Coastal India and the Ascendancy of Chinese Maritime Power in the Indian Ocean,” *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies* 2 (May 2011), 44. http://cces.snu.ac.kr/data/publications/jces2_3sen.pdf.

Buddhist maritime interaction between South Asia and China encouraged cultural and economic reciprocity, and the significant intermediary roles of Maritime Southeast Asia (MSA), due to its geographical advantages in connecting both regions, should not be underestimated. Several studies over the past few decades have examined the occurrence of indigenous activities in Southeast Asia, particularly in the economic aspect, which became one of the integral components in Asian maritime trade interaction.¹⁹ Archaeological evidence suggests that MSA was mainly a stopover point for Buddhist monks continuing their journeys to China during the period of early transmission (5th – 6th centuries), but the region witnessed the efflorescence of Buddhist interactions between South Asia and China which may have subsequently facilitated the diffusion of Buddhism into numerous parts of the region in MSA.²⁰ The encouragement of proselytizing Buddhism by Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (502-557 CE),²¹ and the establishment of Nālandā Mahāvihāra,²² a prominent Buddhist centre of learning, attracted many students from across Asia. Furthermore, the emergence of new distinctive polities in Central, Southeast, and East Asia that employed Buddhism as their main state religion and source of political legitimization essentially interconnected existing Buddhist centres.

The rise of maritime commercialisation between South Asia and China intensified the number of Buddhist monks and merchants disseminating Buddhism into new sites

¹⁹ Such as Kenneth R. Hall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia: Maritime Trade and Societal Development 100-1500* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc, 2011); Oliver W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce: A Study of the Origins of Śrīvijaya* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1967).

²⁰ Sen, *Maritime Southeast Asia*, 34; Sen, *The Spread*, 448, 454.

²¹ On Emperor Wu's contribution towards Buddhism in China, see Warner Chen, "The Emperor Liang Wu-Ti and Buddhism" (PhD dissertation, New York University, 1993), ProQuest (9411178).

²² See K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *Nālandā*. Reprint from *Journal of the Madras University* (Madras: Journal of the Madras University, 1941); A. Ghosh, *Nālandā*. Fifth Edition (New Delhi: Archaeology Survey of India, 1965); Sankalia, H. D. *The University of Nālandā* (Madras: B. G. Paul & Co., Publishers, 1934).

adjacent to trade routes.²³ These several constituents assisted the active growth of proselytising Buddhism into MSA in the 5th and 6th centuries, and to other regions that previously had a limited contact with Buddhism. As a result, these maritime routes witnessed increased numbers of Buddhist monks travelling across between South Asia and East Asia (particularly China, Japan, and Korea), with a high demand of Buddhist paraphernalia and artefacts in these regions, and increasing localization and institutionalization of Buddhism.²⁴ These developments subsequently contributed in their own sphere of influences towards the emergence of numerous Buddhist centres in the vast Southeast Asian realm of maritime networks between India and China.

This was parallel with the emergence of Śrīvijaya as a Buddhist centre of MSA in the 7th century, which became a hegemonic power until the 11th century, and remained a political force until the 13th century. Śrīvijaya's central location remains a matter of debate, but it was probably located near to Palembang in Sumatra, which was exceptionally well situated for controlling sea lanes via the Strait of Melaka and the Sunda Strait, through which all Indian Ocean maritime trade passed between South Asia and China. Strategic political and economic aspects of Śrīvijaya indicated its ascendancy, and it was constituted as a Buddhist polity, in a cultural continuum integrating it with the broader Buddhist sphere between India and China. Śrīvijaya was actively visited as a Buddhist centre by foreign Buddhist pilgrims and monks, who studied and continued pursuing their journeys either to China or South Asia through the maritime route of Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Śrīvijaya was also a transit zone for itinerant merchants and monks shipping Buddhist relics,

²³ Sen, *The Spread*, 455.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 462.

paraphernalia, and texts before proceeding to their respected destinations. This study analyses Śrīvijaya's role as a Buddhist centre in MSA.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Recent studies have shown that Southeast Asia, particularly in the maritime region, besides being actively involved in commercial activities, was also a crossroads of Buddhist transmission and interaction between South Asia and China.²⁵ This could be observed in the Buddhist maritime kingdom of Śrīvijaya, which was an active and important centre of Buddhism. Numerous publications regarding Śrīvijaya have thoroughly discussed its political²⁶ and economic²⁷ dimensions, but its Buddhist characteristics have been ignored. Although Śrīvijaya was known as a Buddhist thalassocracy in MSA, scholars have not explored its sociocultural or religious nature in terms of its maritime supremacy in any depth.²⁸ Despite Śrīvijayan studies developing for several decades, Miksic argued that the political and economic threads remain permanently underestimated as matters of discussion

²⁵ See Andrea Acri, "The Place of Nusantara in the Sanskritic Buddhist Cosmopolis," *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 6, No. 2 (July 2018), 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2018.5>; Andrea Acri, "Introduction: Esoteric Buddhist Networks along the Maritime Silk Routes, 7th-13th Century AD." In *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons*, ed. Andrea Acri (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2016), 1-25; Tansen Sen, "Maritime Southeast Asia Between South Asia and China to the Sixteenth Century," *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 2, No. 1 (January 2014), 46. <http://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2013.15>; Tansen Sen, "Buddhism and the Maritime Crossings," eds, Dorothy C. Wong, Gustav Heldt, *China and Beyond in the Mediaeval Period: Cultural Crossings and Inter-Regional Connections* (Amherst and Delhi: Cambria Press and Manohar, 2014), 39-62.

²⁶ See George Cœdès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*. Trans. Susan Brown Cowing (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975); Daniel G. E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia. Fourth Edition* (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1981); K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The History of Śrī Vijaya* (Madras: University of Madras, 1949).

²⁷ See Kenneth R. Hall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia: Maritime Trade and Societal Development 100-1500* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc, 2011); Oliver W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce: A Study of the Origins of Śrīvijaya* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1967).

²⁸ Natasha Reichle, *Violence and Serenity: Late Buddhist Sculpture from Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 8.

and debate, and there is only a limited understanding of Śrīvijaya.²⁹ Even more ambiguity and neglect concerns Śrīvijaya's Buddhist role, which has been systematically underappreciated in terms of its contributions towards the development of Buddhism in MSA in relation to other parts of the Buddhist realm.³⁰

From a regional perspective, the works relating to Śrīvijaya that note its role in Buddhist interactions between South Asia and China “often neglect the contributions of the indigenous cultural practices, local economic networks, and the political aspirations of Southeast Asian rulers and chieftains to those interactions.”³¹ Previous scholars have only focused on the process of Indianization and Sinicization in this region, which connotes a single direction which can be perceived as a merely stopover in South Asia-China maritime networks, but failed to observe any active local reactions. The concepts of “Indianization” and “Sinicization” and their resultant implications for the history of Southeast Asia are inappropriate to understand the complex mutual relationships between Southeast Asia and other geographical regions and cultures. Although foreign Indic and Sinic cultural elements have always influenced and penetrated indigenous political, cultural, and societal development in Southeast Asia, historical studies have continuously underestimated and ignored the active role of local cultures and peoples in their own cultural expressions and development (although there is more acknowledgement of the latter in terms of the Arab-Islamic impacts).³² Although MSA was considered as a strategic geographical area between South Asia and China maritime connection, important elements such as its agents and

²⁹ John N. Miksic, “Archaeological Evidence for Esoteric Buddhism in Sumatra, 7th to 13th Century.” In *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons*, ed. Andrea Acri (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2016), 255.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 255.

³¹ Sen, *Maritime Southeast Asia*, 32.

³² *Ibid.*, 32-33.

socio-cultural milieu in the constitutive involvement of transmission and translocation of Buddhist monks, texts, ideas, icons, and paraphernalia in the Buddhist realm remain underappreciated in contemporary scholarship, which justifies the rationale for undertaking the current study.³³

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis aims to investigate the significance of Śrīvijaya as a Buddhist centre. In order to meet this aim, several research questions are constructed as follows:

- 1) How did the maritime connection between South Asia and China emerge as a channel for the transmission of Buddhism and its later dissemination into Maritime Southeast Asia, particularly before the emergence of Śrīvijaya in the 7th century?
- 2) How did Śrīvijaya emerge as a political and economic power in Maritime Southeast Asia during the 7th until the 11th centuries?
- 3) Why did Śrīvijaya and its contributions become significantly important as a Buddhist centre within the maritime connection of South Asia and China?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study could be summarized as follows:

- 1) To observe the emergence of the maritime connection between South Asia and China as a channel for transmission of Buddhism and subsequent dissemination into Maritime Southeast Asia before the 7th century.

³³ Acri, *The Place of Nusantara*, 7-8.

- 2) To analyse the emergence of Śrīvijaya as a political and economic power in Maritime Southeast Asia during the 7th until the 11th centuries
- 3) To identify Śrīvijaya's significant position as a centre of Buddhism in Maritime Southeast Asia.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study intends to contribute to Southeast Asian and Śrīvijayan studies in order to expound the indigenous contributions in Buddhist interactions and transmissions in MSA within the broader maritime connections between South Asia and China. The study particularly redresses the shortcoming of previous literature on the subject emphasizing the Indianization, including Sinofication, of Southeast Asia by emphasizing the original and proactive role of local cultures in their engagement with Buddhism and the broader political, economic, and cultural interactions in the maritime civilization between South and East Asia. The same regard has been put on Buddhist religious lifestyle and devotion among Southeast Asian people who underwent assimilation with indigenous beliefs and practices for their particular convenience. Therefore, it is necessary to inquire into Buddhist development and transformation among Southeast Asian peoples, particularly in the maritime regions, during the 1st millennium CE.

Geographically, MSA was located at a vital and strategic position of long-distance and bustling international maritime networks that provided commercial trade commodities from various regions. While the studies on mercantile activities and networks have received much attention from scholars, the relation between trade and culture, particularly Buddhist transmission, remains underappreciated, particularly in comparison to studies of cultural

interactions along the parallel overland Silk Routes. Buddhist transmission over maritime networks built through commercial trade networks within Asian maritime networks remain unexplored, and MSA was a significant hub in exchanges between South and East Asia, as well as within Southeast Asia itself, as a hub for peoples and disseminating Buddhist texts, relics, and paraphernalia across interconnected regions. Buddhism in MSA transformed indigenous belief and practices, and the region itself became actively engaged in the Buddhist realm as a major logistical and intellectual centre, transmitting religious artefacts and ideas to other Buddhist-contact regions. It is significantly important for future studies to observe the role of MSA in the process of transformations and transmission of Buddhism in the 1st millennium CE, given the pivotal role of Southeast Asia in both Buddhism and Hinduism in Asia.

From the 7th to 11th centuries the Śrīvijaya thalassocracy dominated the political and economic affairs of MSA, controlling the maritime passages of the Melaka and Sunda Straits, which were crucially important for the South Asia-China maritime networks. With its propitious dominance, Śrīvijaya significantly participated as a Buddhist centre that attracted local and foreign monks to study, translate, and transmit Buddhist *sutras* either from or to Śrīvijaya. Merchants and monks transferred Buddhist relics, miniatures, and paraphernalia, besides other trade commodities in Śrīvijaya, which became well-known for its international seaports connecting other regions. Internally, Śrīvijaya applied Buddhism in its spiritual activities, and manifested it in its political and economic objectives, as denoted in its local inscriptions and literary records.

This study attempts to examine certain aspects of Śrīvijaya, particularly its Buddhist activities, contributions, interactions, and development with other regions from a trans-regional perspective within the South Asia-China maritime networks. Śrīvijaya's position as an active Buddhist centre, besides its political and economic supremacy in MSA, should not be underestimated, but it has not been adequately studied. It is clear that the region was not merely a passive receiver of Buddhism. Furthermore, it also illuminates that future researchers should study Śrīvijaya by exploring its religious aspects that could facilitate in scrutinizing the political and economic affairs of the polity.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

The significance of Śrīvijaya in MSA as a Buddhist hub for international maritime trade routes in Southeast Asia and cultural exchanges between connected regions is clear, but little research has actually explored this enigmatic civilization, beyond reiterating the essential themes explained previously. Put simply, it is known that Śrīvijaya was a connecting network for commercial trade, and cultural and religious interactions via the maritime routes of MSA linking South and East Asia in parallel to the terrestrial “Silk Routes.” It is likely that MSA was more active and vibrant than the overland routes due to the economic advantages of maritime trade. Buddhist traders, monks, and pilgrims traversed these routes, facilitating religious and cultural exchanges, whereby Buddhism took root among local polities, and began to imprint itself in infrastructure and civilization, including Śrīvijaya, which became an important economic and cultural Asian hub.

Tansen Sen's *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400*, explains how Buddhism was transmitted and mutually

developed between South Asia and China, besides trade and diplomacy, through maritime routes in MSA, which included Śrīvijaya.³⁴ He mainly focuses on the period when Buddhism was an established religion in China, from the 7th to 15th centuries. He does however note the phases of Buddhism in China whereby the latter went from being a passive receiver of Buddhism from South India, including its phenomenal changes, towards being a Buddhist hub with its own uniqueness and sanctity, hosting its revered monks and priests, and the uniqueness of its sacred relics. This caused the development of strong mutual religious connections between China and South Asia, as Sen asserted, by restructuring in its religious reciprocation, and contributing an immense impact towards other intermediary states between China and South Asia.³⁵ China, South Asia, and its neighbouring areas during the period of Śrīvijaya were fully integrated into a complex religious network, besides their commercial network. Although the book shows how South Asia and China were tied in their reciprocal Buddhist networks in this period, Sen's work is less concerned with the role of MSA in the Buddhist network, and this study essentially seeks to fill this gap by extending this analysis of China's emergence as an independent Buddhist centre in its own right to the analogous development in Śrīvijaya and MSA in general (within the pan-Asian Buddhist network).

Since the academic rediscovery of the polity of Śrīvijaya by the French scholar George Cœdès in 1918,³⁶ Śrīvijayan studies posited its significant role in the history of

³⁴ Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400* (Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai'i Press, 2003).

³⁵ Tansen Sen, "Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade," 2.

³⁶ See George Cœdès, "Le Royaume de Çrīvijaya," *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient* 18, 1918, 1-36. <https://doi.org/10.3406/befeo.1918.5894>; For English translation, see George Cœdès, "The Kingdom of Sriwijaya." In *Sriwijaya: History, Religion, & Language of an Early Malay Polity*. trans. Pierre-Yves Manguin (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society, 1992), 3-40.

MSA. Previously, scholars like Junjiro Takakusu and Hendrik Kern did not recognize Śrīvijaya as referred to by its Chinese transcription, *Shihlifoshih*, incorrectly restored in Sanskrit as *Śrībhōga* and identified as the name of a king instead of that of a kingdom.³⁷ Subsequently, Śrīvijayan studies became more extensive and have obtained major attention by later historians studying the history of Southeast Asia. The early Śrīvijayan studies, particularly those in the late 19th century, were mostly discussed in non-English and non-Malay languages, and were mainly concentrated on academic reports. Since the beginning of the early 20th century, there have been a long-series of debates and many studies have been conducted in various languages about the remarkable polity of Śrīvijaya, either as part of the broader Southeast Asian scene, or focused on Śrīvijaya itself, and such studies have gradually illuminated certain germane aspects and perspectives.

Ramesh Chandra Majumdar's *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East Vol. II: Suvarnadvipa* was one of the earliest studies on the Śrīvijaya, conducted by an Indian historian, and published in 1937.³⁸ Majumdar proposed in his work that the Indian colonization caused a cultural diffusion in the Malay Archipelago, which he referred to as "Malayasia." He scrutinized the political history of the region constituted as *Suvarṇadvīpa*.³⁹ However, his study did not give much attention towards other civilizational aspects of the region; rather, it concentrates on political aspects. Several descriptions regarding Śrīvijaya, specifically its religious significance, were glossed over,

³⁷ Cœdès, *The Kingdom of Sriwijaya*, 3; I-Tsing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago*. trans. Junjiro Takakusu. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1896), xl-xlvi.

³⁸ Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East Vol. II: Suvarnadvipa* (Dacca: Asoke Kumar Majumdar, 1937).

³⁹ Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonies*, i.