

Research Article

The Srivijaya Route: Gateway of Civilization and Multicultural Heritage

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Abstract: The study examines the historical evolution of the Srivijaya Kingdom as a major maritime power and a prosperous centre in Southeast Asia from the 12th to the 19th Buddhist centuries. It focuses on Srivijaya's political, economic, social, and cultural contributions, as well as the spread of its influence to Chaiya, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Sukhothai. The research further relates these historical legacies to Human Security, highlighting how Srivijaya's multicultural heritage can help reduce conflict, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance security within culturally diverse communities. Historical and developmental research methods were combined with content analysis of historical and archaeological records. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with residents and experts across the study areas. The resulting qualitative evidence was analysed to examine Srivijaya's historical development and the persistence of its civilizational legacy. The findings indicate that Srivijaya was more than a trading polity controlling maritime routes between India and China. It also functioned as a significant regional centre of political, religious, and cultural development. Its multicultural foundations provide a potential model for peaceful coexistence in contemporary societies, particularly in Thailand's southern border provinces, where communities continue to face substantial human security challenges.

Keywords: History, Srivijaya Kingdom, Nakhon Si Thammarat Kingdom, Sukhothai Kingdom, Human Security.

1. Introduction

Thailand's southern border provinces possess a long and complex historical heritage shaped by several influential kingdoms, including Langkasuka, Srivijaya, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Pattani. These polities functioned as important centres of commerce, political authority, and cultural exchange. Their interconnected histories fostered considerable ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity, contributing to the multicultural identity that remains evident in the region today. Within this historical landscape, the Srivijaya Kingdom (12th–19th Buddhist centuries) held particular importance as a centre of maritime commerce and Mahayana Buddhism. Its influence extended throughout the Malay Peninsula and Indonesian archipelago, enabling it to operate as a prominent “port state” controlling key maritime routes and connecting South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China. Evidence of this prosperity is preserved in archaeological remains such as Phra Borommathat Chaiya in Surat Thani Province, which demonstrates the diffusion of Buddhism and Srivijayan artistic traditions. Similarly, inscriptions and archaeological materials found in Palembang, Indonesia, provide evidence of Srivijaya's extensive regional authority and influence. With the subsequent decline of Srivijayan power, Nakhon Si Thammarat developed as an important centre of religious and political administration on the Malay Peninsula. Examining Srivijaya and the states that followed it extends beyond historical inquiry, as its legacy has implications for contemporary Human Security. The United Nations Development Programme [1] conceptualises human security through economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political dimensions. In this context, Srivijaya's multicultural heritage is particularly relevant to Community Security, which emphasises the protection of cultural identities, development of social solidarity, and reduction of tensions associated with ethnic and religious differences.

Despite continuing unrest and social tensions in Thailand's southern border provinces, greater recognition of the region's historical foundations and enduring multicultural character, including their roots in the Srivijayan period, may offer meaningful cultural resources for conflict mitigation and peaceful coexistence. The shared heritage associated with Srivijaya can consequently be viewed not only as a historical inheritance but also as a form of social capital capable of supporting human security across the region. Accordingly, this research seeks to

consolidate knowledge of Srivijaya's historical development and its relationships with Nakhon Si Thammarat and Sukhothai. Human Security and Soft Power are employed as conceptual frameworks to illustrate how historical and cultural heritage can be incorporated into policy-oriented strategies that support peacebuilding and sustainable development within Thai society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Soft Power

Nye [2] introduced the concept of Soft Power to explain the capacity to shape the behaviour of others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or Hard Power. Its principal foundations comprise culture, political values, and foreign policy [3]. Since its introduction, Soft Power has increasingly been adopted by states as a strategic means of cultivating international influence. For the present study, Srivijaya's historical and cultural heritage can itself be understood as an expression of Soft Power. It should not be viewed simply as a cultural asset that can be utilised at a later stage; rather, its heritage inherently possesses the capacity to generate cultural attraction. Nye [3] argues that Soft Power emerges when people are attracted to, identify with, or aspire to emulate the values and culture of another society. Historically, Srivijaya drew people from different parts of the region through the appeal of its religious traditions, cultural achievements, and commercial prosperity rather than through military domination. In this sense, the Srivijaya period represents a historical manifestation of Soft Power.

In contemporary Thailand, elements of Srivijaya's cultural heritage, including Phum Rieng textiles, traditional foods such as Tupat, Khanom Duean Sip, and Budu, the Chak Phra and Sart Duean Sip traditions, and historical sites such as Phra Borommathat Chaiya, could serve as sources of Soft Power. These cultural resources may facilitate interaction among diverse communities, create economic opportunities through cultural and heritage tourism, and reinforce community security and resilience. Thailand's broader experience also demonstrates the connection between Soft Power and the creative economy through initiatives such as the “Kitchen of the World” campaign, the global promotion of Muay Thai, and Thai entertainment that has achieved international recognition. Such developments illustrate how cultural

assets can be transformed into economic and international influence. The Thai government has further incorporated Soft Power within the 20-Year National Strategy and the BCG Economy Model, alongside efforts to develop creative industries through the 5Fs: Food, Film, Fashion, Fighting, and Festival [4]. The relevance of Srivijaya's heritage to Soft Power therefore extends beyond the commercialisation or external promotion of cultural products. Strengthening awareness and pride in the region's multicultural Srivijayan heritage among communities in Thailand's southern border areas may foster a stronger sense of shared cultural ownership. Such recognition can help reduce identity-based tensions and support peaceful coexistence. Srivijaya's historical and cultural legacy may consequently operate as a source of Soft Power at both domestic and international levels.

2.2 Concepts of Identity and Human Security

Identity encompasses the distinctive characteristics through which individuals and communities are distinguished from others. According to scholars, identity develops through the recognition of similarities and differences between groups [5], while cultural influences play a more substantial role in its formation than racial factors [6]. Identity may be understood across three interconnected levels: personal, social, and collective identity [7]. In Thailand's southern border provinces, Srivijaya's heritage provides a common historical foundation shared by Buddhist and Muslim communities. Building a shared identity around this heritage may therefore help address tensions associated with religious and ethnic differences. The history of the Srivijaya Kingdom demonstrates how a "collective cultural identity" could develop through interconnected systems of trade, religion, and artistic expression that extended beyond ethnic boundaries [8]. In the present context, this historical experience can encourage communities in the southern border provinces to view their inherited cultural traditions as a "shared heritage", collectively formed through the contributions of ancestors from diverse ethnic groups.

Understanding identity formation and negotiation is also important within the broader framework of human security. Lederach [9] notes that identity-based conflicts often arise when groups believe that their identity is threatened or denied. Srivijaya's multicultural heritage is particularly relevant in this regard because it demonstrates historically that different ethnic and religious communities could develop a collective identity through shared cultural and economic foundations. For Thailand's southern border provinces, where tensions between Buddhist and Muslim communities have continued to involve questions of identity, evidence of their interconnected historical origins during the Srivijaya period can provide a basis for strengthening a shared sense of belonging. Cultural practices such as Tupat and Khanom Duean Sip, which remain practised or recognised among both Buddhist and Muslim communities, may further support the development of a common identity. Drawing upon such shared cultural foundations can assist in preventing conflict and, ultimately, strengthening community security.

2.3 Conceptual Framework of Human Security

As defined by the United Nations Development Programme [1] and Security [10], Human Security is concerned with protecting and empowering individuals and communities in response to diverse forms of threat. In this study, particular attention is given to Community Security, which seeks to safeguard ethnic, religious, and cultural groups against discrimination, violence, and other threats to their collective well-being.

Research within Peace Studies has consistently highlighted the contribution of shared cultural heritage to reconciliation and conflict mitigation [9, 11]. For Thailand's southern border provinces, recognising the common historical connections of Buddhist and Muslim communities with the Srivijaya civilisation may provide a basis for greater dialogue and mutual understanding. Since Srivijaya developed within a culturally diverse environment, awareness of this shared heritage could create social and psychological conditions that support more peaceful coexistence. Focusing specifically on southern Thailand, [10] argues that insecurity in the southern border provinces is associated with the weakening of cultural identity and inadequate recognition of shared historical heritage. From this perspective, revitalising public knowledge and awareness of Srivijaya's legacy, understood as a historical and cultural inheritance shaped by and transmitted through both Buddhist and Muslim communities, could contribute to Human Security. Such efforts may strengthen pride in a shared identity, address underlying sources of conflict, and support peaceful living.

2.4 The Srivijaya Kingdom

The Srivijaya Kingdom was established around the twelfth century of the Buddhist Era under the Sailendra dynasty, following the decline of Funan. Its sphere of influence extended across the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, the Strait of Malacca, and southern Thailand. Its political center may have been located either at Palembang in Sumatra or at Chaiya in present-day Surat Thani Province [12]. Epigraphic evidence and the accounts of the Chinese Buddhist monk Yijing attest to the flourishing of Mahayana Buddhism and the significant role of Srivijaya as a major maritime center. Of particular relevance from a Human Security perspective is Srivijaya's capacity to accommodate and manage ethnic and religious diversity. Christie [8] characterizes Srivijaya as a multicultural polity in which economic and religious dimensions were closely integrated. One of the principal mechanisms underpinning this system was the acceptance of religious pluralism, encompassing Mahayana Buddhism, Brahmanism-Hinduism, and indigenous belief systems, while maintaining a common foundation of shared economic interests. This model provides a valuable historical perspective for contemporary approaches to conflict management.

2.5 The Nakhon Si Thammarat Kingdom

The Nakhon Si Thammarat Kingdom constituted an important historical polity in Southeast Asia, assuming significant economic, political, administrative, and religious functions. Evidence of its emergence, development, and prosperity extends from approximately the seventh to the twenty-fourth centuries of the Buddhist Era. Initially serving as a major centre of the Tambralinga Kingdom, Nakhon Si Thammarat subsequently developed into an influential polity on the Malay Peninsula and established close connections with the Sukhothai Kingdom, as evidenced by the King Ramkhamhaeng Inscription. Beyond its own political and cultural significance, Nakhon Si Thammarat played an important intermediary role in transmitting Srivijaya's cultural heritage to the Thai kingdoms of mainland Southeast Asia. This function is particularly relevant to Human Security because the transmission of Buddhist values and multicultural traditions through religious and commercial networks supported the continued preservation and intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage.

2.6 The Sukhothai Kingdom

The Sukhothai Kingdom emerged in the late eighteenth century of the Buddhist Era under King Si Inthathit and is traditionally recognised as the first capital of the Thai kingdom. The kingdom experienced considerable political, religious, and cultural development. Its distinctive cultural identity resulted from the convergence of indigenous Thai traditions with Mon, Khmer, and Sri Lankan cultural influences. Evidence from Inscription No. 1 further indicates that Sukhothai's governance has traditionally been interpreted through the model of a ruler governing the people in a manner comparable to a father caring for his children. The connection between Sukhothai and Srivijaya, facilitated through Nakhon Si Thammarat, illustrates how religious and cultural networks could support regional security and stability without depending on military domination. This historical relationship provides an important model of Cooperative Security that may be relevant to contemporary circumstances.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a developmental research methodology that combines Participatory Action Research (PAR) with historical research. Evidence is derived from both primary and secondary sources. Primary qualitative evidence was gathered through fieldwork and in-depth interviews, whereas secondary evidence was sourced from documentary materials, inscriptions, and archaeological records. The integration of these approaches reflects the study's objectives, enabling the examination of historical developments while also assessing their implications within the contemporary context.

3.1 Sample Group

The sample consisted of scholars and specialists in history, archaeology, and cultural heritage conservation, alongside officials from the Fine Arts Department who acted as key informants. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants according to established selection criteria. These criteria included demonstrated expertise in Srivijaya history, cultural heritage, or local governance in the study areas, as well as relevant professional experience within their respective fields.

3.2 Research Instruments and Data Collection

The research team utilised the following instruments. (1) Semi-structured interviews were developed to address both historical and Human Security dimensions. These interviews generated in-depth qualitative evidence from key informants concerning the historical development of the Srivijaya Kingdom, its relationships with Nakhon Si Thammarat and Sukhothai, and the potential application of cultural heritage within the Human Security framework, particularly regarding Community Security and Collective Identity. The flexible interview protocol enabled informants to provide detailed accounts of their experiences and perspectives. (2) Field observations were undertaken at archaeological sites and within relevant communities to corroborate and strengthen the credibility of the interview evidence. The observations examined tangible historical remains and continuing cultural practices, including architecture, artistic forms, traditions, and community ways of life that demonstrate the enduring influence of Srivijayan culture in the study areas.

3.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative interview data were subjected to content and comparative analyses to identify recurring patterns and key issues associated with Srivijaya’s cultural heritage and Human Security.

4. Research Findings

Fieldwork was undertaken by the research team in Thailand and Indonesia, including in-depth interviews with five scholars, community leaders, and local scholars possessing relevant knowledge or experience concerning the Srivijaya Kingdom, as detailed in Table 1. The findings are subsequently structured into four sections, as follows:

Table 1: Key Informants Participating in In-Depth Interviews on the Srivijaya Kingdom

No.	Position	Area	Order of Informants
1	Head of Administration, Aceh Provincial Administrative Organization	Aceh	1
2	Finance Officer, Jambi Provincial Administrative Organization	Jambi and Bangka Belitung	2
3	Academician	Palembang	3
4	Owner of Ban Kuemeng Folk Museum	Yala	4
5	Independent academician specializing in the Land Bridge project	Chumphon	5

4.1 Srivijaya’s Role as a Regional Center and Its Implications for Human Security

The Srivijaya Kingdom developed into one of Southeast Asia’s most prosperous maritime powers between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries of the Buddhist Era. Its economic expansion was largely driven by maritime commerce, supported by its control over the Strait of Malacca, Sumatra, Java, the Malay Peninsula, and parts of southern Thailand. This strategic position enabled Srivijaya to derive considerable revenue from shipping charges and taxes imposed on international merchants, establishing the kingdom as a major economic and cultural centre. Beyond commercial prosperity, however, Srivijaya also contributed to the development of a relatively stable multicultural society, which can be interpreted as an early expression of Human Security, particularly Community Security.

Religious evidence further demonstrates Srivijaya’s influence on the belief systems of communities across these territories. Key Informant No. 3 (8 June 2024) observed, “Prior to the spread of Srivijayan influence, the people of Langkasuka held beliefs in spirits and supernatural forces. However, as Buddhism from Srivijaya began to spread, Buddhism became the predominant religion in Langkasuka. This can be seen from the presence of numerous Buddhist temples in Kedah, Malaysia, which is believed to have formed part of the former territory of Langkasuka.” This account demonstrates a significant mechanism through which Human Security may have been supported. Rather than relying on coercion or violence, Srivijaya promoted religious and cultural values that encouraged the development of shared systems of belief. These processes created conditions in which communities of different backgrounds could coexist within a broader framework of collective

identity.

Srivijaya’s position as a “commercial intermediary for China” also had implications for the economic dimension of Human Security by supporting sustained trade, generating livelihoods, and contributing to food security among local communities. Key Informant No. 2 (28 June 2024) emphasised that “Srivijaya controlled the trade routes through the Strait of Malacca and exercised extensive influence throughout the Nusantara archipelago.” Its economic significance consequently extended beyond the historical prosperity of the kingdom and remains relevant to contemporary strategic considerations. The Strait of Malacca continues to rank among the world’s major maritime shipping routes and has strategic connections with discussions surrounding the Thai government’s Land Bridge Project, particularly regarding the economic dimensions of Human Security. Key Informant No. 5 (25 May 2024) stated, “Local residents will inevitably be affected by land expropriation. Looking at the world today, if we simply remain as we are, there will be no development and no additional income. The enormous amount of investment involved will transform southern Thailand.” This perspective illustrates the potential tension between economic development objectives and Human Security at the community level. Srivijaya’s historical trading networks may therefore offer a useful conceptual reference for contemporary development policy, particularly by demonstrating how commercial activity can generate mutual benefits while contributing to the prosperity and security of local communities.

4.2 Interconnections and Shared Roots as Foundations of Social, Cultural, Political, and Economic Security

4.1.1 Social Dimension

The influence of the Srivijaya Kingdom on the Langkasuka Kingdom extended deeply into community life, encompassing religion, governance, language, art and architecture, and wider social structures. These interactions facilitated the incorporation of Srivijayan cultural influences into existing Langkasukan traditions. As Key Informant No. 3, an Indonesian academician, explained, “The Srivijaya Kingdom exerted considerable influence on the Langkasuka Kingdom across various dimensions, including religion, governance, language, art and architecture, as well as social structures” (Key Informant No. 3, 8 June 2024).

Over time, communities in the region gradually moved from traditional beliefs centred on spirits and supernatural forces towards Buddhism. This transition is reflected in the numerous Buddhist temples found in Kedah, Malaysia, a territory historically associated with the former Langkasuka Kingdom. Srivijaya also maintained kinship connections with Nakhon Si Thammarat. Historical evidence indicates that, during the thirteenth century of the Buddhist Era, a ruler emerged whose father governed Nakhon Si Thammarat while his mother was of Srivijayan descent. Such evidence points to a form of federated political and social organisation in which different polities were connected through kinship and social networks rather than being integrated solely through military authority. The movement of cultural traditions among these kingdoms further indicates that religious and cultural networks could contribute to regional security without dependence on military force. The voluntary transmission of Srivijayan cultural influences through trade, religion, and intellectual exchange therefore provides a historical example of Cooperative Security, demonstrating how interconnected cultural relationships could contribute to regional stability.

4.1.2 Cultural Dimension

The Srivijaya Kingdom brought the Langkasuka Kingdom within its broader sphere of influence and sustained the transmission of its cultural traditions across the region. The expansion of Mahayana Buddhism gradually influenced Langkasuka’s established beliefs in spirits and supernatural forces, contributing to the development of Buddhist religious practices. Linguistic and writing traditions associated with the Pallava script, which originated in India, were adopted by Srivijaya and subsequently introduced into Langkasuka. Cultural transmission, however, was neither entirely uniform nor universally accepted, as some groups within Langkasuka may have resisted Srivijayan influences. As Key Informant No. 3 explained, “Cultural influences from the kingdom gradually emerged within Langkasuka through a relatively complex process, and some groups within Langkasuka resisted the adoption of Srivijayan influence” (Key Informant No. 3, 10 June 2024).

Despite such resistance, Srivijayan cultural influences became deeply embedded across the region, particularly through artistic traditions, religious sculptures and iconography, and Buddhist beliefs. Their continuing presence can be observed at Silpa Cave in Yala Province, where Buddhist narrative paintings incorporating Srivijayan artistic characteristics coexist with elements of Sukhothai art from a later

period. These interconnected traditions have contributed to the formation and preservation of Collective Cultural Memory. Such memory can strengthen community cohesion by maintaining awareness of shared cultural origins and reducing tensions associated with the loss or distortion of collective identity. Accordingly, reinforcing collective awareness of Srivijaya's shared cultural heritage in Thailand's southern border provinces may provide an important means of supporting Human Security.

4.1.3 Political Dimension

Political relations between Srivijaya and Langkasuka first emerged through commercial exchange and diplomatic engagement. As Srivijaya subsequently expanded its territorial reach, supported by stronger military and naval capabilities, it eventually brought Langkasuka within its sphere of political authority. As Key Informant No. 1, an Indonesian academician, stated, "The Srivijaya Kingdom possessed considerable military strength, which enabled it to conquer the Langkasuka Kingdom" (Key Informant No. 1, 11 June 2024). Evidence from stone inscriptions and Chinese historical records documents these political power relations. Alongside military strength, Srivijaya demonstrated substantial diplomatic capacity by developing alliances and political networks with neighbouring kingdoms. Langkasuka, meanwhile, adapted aspects of its administrative arrangements to correspond with Srivijaya's comparatively centralised system of governance. These developments indicate a political structure in which military authority operated alongside network-based relationships, contributing to a federated arrangement that linked multiple port cities within a wider system of political control.

Although military capability played a role in Srivijaya's territorial expansion, its wider relations with neighbouring polities also reveal the importance of networks and shared interests in sustaining political cohesion. This historical experience provides a potentially useful perspective for contemporary relationships between the central state and border communities. In Thailand's southern border provinces, drawing upon this historical model may help inform approaches to conflict reduction by placing greater emphasis on shared interests, meaningful participation by local communities, and recognition of local identities, rather than depending primarily on uniform centralised policies across the country.

4.1.4 Economic Dimension

The Srivijaya Kingdom occupied a strategically important position within one of the ancient world's major maritime trading systems. Its control extended across the Strait of Malacca and Bangka Island, as indicated by the Kota Kapur Inscription discovered in Bangka Belitung. By serving as a principal commercial intermediary between China and India, Srivijaya generated considerable revenue through anchorage and shipping charges imposed on international merchants. The trading network handled a diverse range of commodities, including rattan, sandalwood, areca nuts, pepper, long pepper, and other spices. As Key Informant No. 2, a finance official from the Jambi Provincial Administration, explained, "The Srivijaya Kingdom was situated along a busy maritime and commercial route, where commodities such as rattan, sandalwood, areca nuts, and palm products were traded" (Key Informant No. 2, 29 June 2024).

Commercial links were also maintained between Srivijaya and Langkasuka and later extended to Patani. Within Srivijaya's sphere of influence, Langkasuka assumed an important position in managing east-west commercial routes crossing the Kra Isthmus. The resulting network supported economic prosperity across the region for several centuries. Srivijaya's commercial prominence, however, gradually weakened as China became less dependent on intermediary merchants and increasingly deployed its own trading junks for direct overseas commerce. Taken together, these four dimensions of interaction indicate that the historical connections among Srivijaya, Langkasuka, Tambora, and subsequently Patani cannot be explained solely through military authority. Rather, these relationships emerged from the combined effects of social, cultural, religious, and economic interactions that reinforced one another over time. This interconnected historical system provided an important basis for Human Security, particularly Community Security and Economic Security, by bringing ethnically and religiously diverse populations into a sustained common network.

4.3 Transformation and Its Linkages to Social, Cultural, and Economic Dimensions of Human Security

As Srivijaya's political authority weakened in the late sixteenth century of the Buddhist Era following attacks by the Chola forces from South India, and later with the expansion of the Majapahit Kingdom in

the nineteenth century of the Buddhist Era, its social, cultural, and economic legacies continued beyond the decline of its political power. Rather than disappearing, these legacies were transformed into forms of cultural capital that were transmitted to and subsequently adapted by successor states. From social and cultural perspectives, Srivijayan traditions followed two principal trajectories in response to changing religious conditions. The first developed in the upper Malay Peninsula and later became associated with Nakhon Si Thammarat, which emerged as a centre of Theravada Buddhism connected with the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition. The second extended across the lower Malay Peninsula and neighbouring archipelagic areas, where various Muslim polities subsequently emerged. Although these two trajectories developed within different religious frameworks, both retained and adapted elements of Srivijayan-era beliefs, language, artistic traditions, and cultural practices to suit their respective contexts.

Evidence of this continuity can be observed in customary practices among Malay Muslim communities, where certain rituals continue to contain elements associated with earlier Hindu-Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions, particularly those surrounding circumcision ceremonies. Key Informant No. 4, a Malay cultural scholar in Yala Province, explained, "This can be clearly observed in the circumcision ceremony. The specifically Islamic religious component is relatively limited: the circumcision itself is performed, and that completes the religious requirement. However, local practices extend beyond this. There may be an elephant procession and the construction of a balai, somewhat resembling a Buddhist preaching platform, with a ceremonial structure at the center that represents Mount Meru." The informant further described the persistence of earlier cultural beliefs following the adoption of Islam, "As far back as I can remember, we have been Muslim, but our practices have remained intertwined with the earlier culture of the local people. Islam became established here more than 400 years ago. Before that, Hinduism had a strong influence in this area, while Buddhist influence was comparatively limited. Hindu traditions became deeply embedded in everyday life, including food, ways of living, and clothing" (Key Informant No. 4, 3 May 2024). These observations indicate that religious transformation did not necessarily eliminate established cultural identities and practices.

Economically, territories that previously served as important centres of Srivijayan commerce, particularly the Bandon Bay area and the Strait of Malacca, have retained considerable strategic importance within regional and international trade. The Strait of Malacca continues to rank among the world's busiest maritime transportation routes. Although commercial and political prominence subsequently shifted towards Nakhon Si Thammarat and various Muslim polities, the geo-economic foundations established during the Srivijayan period continued to influence the strategic importance of these areas into the contemporary era. These historical developments carry important implications for contemporary Human Security. Buddhist and Muslim communities in southern Thailand continue to share historical and cultural connections associated with the Srivijayan period, evident in food traditions, customary practices, and cultural beliefs. This common heritage represents a form of social and cultural capital that may be mobilised for Conflict Prevention, particularly in addressing identity-based tensions and reinforcing community security within a religiously diverse society. While religious beliefs and affiliations have changed across historical periods, shared cultural foundations continue to provide opportunities for Buddhist and Muslim communities to recognise elements of a common heritage without compromising their respective religious principles. Consequently, acknowledging and preserving shared cultural heritage may support mutual understanding and peaceful living.

4.4 Traces of the 3Fs; Fashion, Food, and Festivals; as Soft Power Linking to Human Security

4.1.1 Fashion

One of the clearest surviving expressions of Srivijaya's cultural heritage is the Phum Riang textile, which originated in Phum Riang Sub-district, Chaiya District, Surat Thani Province. Its development reflects prolonged cultural interaction and co-living among Thai, Chinese, and Muslim communities, whose combined contributions produced a refined and distinctive weaving tradition. Among its various forms, the Benjarong-patterned Phum Riang textile has become particularly associated with Srivijayan cultural identity and is recognised as a distinctive form of traditional dress. In Palembang, Sumatra, comparable expressions of Srivijayan heritage can be found in ceremonial garments such as Aesan Gede and Pak Sangkong. As Key Informant No. 3, an Indonesian scholar, explained, "Aesan Gede and Pak Sangkong are forms of traditional attire that reflect the splendor of the Srivijaya Kingdom" (Key Informant No. 3, 7 June 2024).

The historical grandeur attributed to Srivijaya is further represented through traditional clothing featuring baju kurung embellished with golden floral motifs, songket textiles, and elaborate crown ornaments. Although differences in design and decorative details have emerged in response to the distinct cultural settings of individual communities, the similarities evident in clothing and textile traditions across the maritime region indicate the extensive cultural exchange networks that connected these territories during the Srivijayan period.

4.1.2 Food

Culinary traditions associated with the Srivijayan period continue to form part of contemporary life in the region. These include Tupat, consisting of rice wrapped and cooked in young fan-palm leaves, together with traditional foods and sweets prepared for the Sart Duean Sip festival and shared among Buddhist and Muslim communities. Other examples are Pla Som (fermented fish) and Budu, which reflect traditional knowledge of fish preservation transmitted from the Srivijaya and Langkasuka periods. However, some of these culinary practices are increasingly vulnerable to disappearing. As Ajarn Saman Dosomi, a Malay cultural scholar, explained, “Tupat, or rice cooked in fan-palm leaves, together with the traditional sweets associated with the Sart Duean Sip festival, have been passed down since the period of the Srivijaya Kingdom. They are not modern foods and are shared by both Buddhist and Muslim communities, with related traditions extending as far as Indonesia” (Key Informant No. 4, 3 May 2024).

In Palembang, Pempek is a well-known local dish traditionally associated with the Srivijayan period. Key Informant No. 3 explained, “Pempek, a fish-based dish served with Palembang-style dark sauce, bears similarities to the fried fish crackers found in Thailand’s three southern border provinces” (Key Informant No. 3, 7 June 2024). Such similarities provide evidence of enduring culinary connections across the peninsula that remain visible in contemporary food cultures. Southern Thai cuisine is also distinguished by its extensive incorporation of spices, herbs, and locally available plants. These culinary characteristics may likewise be understood in the context of the region’s longstanding maritime trade and cultural exchanges, which can be traced to the Srivijayan period.

4.1.3 Festival

Important cultural traditions associated with the Srivijayan period remain evident in contemporary practice. These include the Sart Duean Sip, or Ching Pret, tradition, which honours ancestors through ritual food offerings and five types of traditional sweets; the Chak Phra tradition, believed to have existed since the Srivijayan period more than 1,200 years ago; and Nora, a traditional performing art linked to Indian Yatra theatre that developed during the Srivijayan period and was subsequently transmitted across generations. Ajarn Saman Dosomi explained, “Both Mak Yong and Nora originated from India and were subsequently developed during the Srivijayan period before being transmitted to the present day. In fact, Mak Yong and Nora emerged during the same period and originated from Yatra theatre. Yatra refers to a form of travelling theatre that came from India through Hindu–Brahmanical traditions, in which theatrical performance was employed as a means of disseminating religion as well as a form of entertainment” (Key Informant No. 4, 3 May 2024).

Over time, these traditions developed along different religious trajectories, with Nora becoming associated with Buddhist communities and Mak Yong with communities that subsequently embraced Islam. Despite these religious adaptations, the two performing arts continue to share substantial similarities in their forms and customary practices. Certain ritual elements have been modified to correspond with the religious principles of each community. For instance, stewed duck may be used instead of a pig’s head during rituals honouring teachers and ancestral masters. Another important performing-art tradition is Nang Talung, which is believed to have been transmitted through Indian Brahmanical cultural influences before the Srivijayan period and remains part of the shared performing-arts heritage of southern Thailand today.

4.1.4 Implications for Human Security through Soft Power

The three dimensions of cultural heritage, Fashion, Food, and Festivals, are united by a common characteristic: each represents a cultural legacy that remains practised, recognised, or shared among Buddhist and Muslim communities in southern Thailand and neighbouring countries without necessarily undermining their respective religious identities. The continued practice of Tupat and traditional foods associated with Sart Duean Sip, together with the coexistence of Mak Yong and Nora traditions within multicultural societies, illustrates how Srivijaya’s heritage can operate as Soft Power beyond the commercial

promotion of cultural products. Its greater significance lies in its symbolic capacity to foster recognition of a Shared Cultural Heritage among communities characterised by ethnic and religious diversity.

From the perspective of Human Security, this shared cultural belonging provides an important basis for strengthening Community Security. It creates a common cultural space in which different groups can acknowledge their historical interconnectedness while retaining their distinct religious identities. Recognition that cultural traditions inherited by one community may share historical foundations with those of communities following different religions can help lessen identity-based tensions and foster social and psychological conditions supportive of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. The findings consequently support the view that Srivijaya’s multicultural heritage can be mobilised as both social and economic capital through historical and cultural tourism, creative industries, and community-based cultural activities, thereby contributing to the sustainable strengthening of Human Security in Thailand’s southern border provinces.

5. Conclusion and Discussion of the Research Findings

This research sought to analyse and synthesise the historical development of the Srivijaya Kingdom as a politically, economically, socially, and culturally significant regional centre in Southeast Asia between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries of the Buddhist Era, while interpreting its contemporary relevance through the conceptual frameworks of Human Security and Soft Power. The findings indicate that Srivijaya extended well beyond the role of a trading polity controlling maritime routes between India and China. It developed instead as a multicultural centre whose influence reached neighbouring polities, including Langkasuka, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Sukhothai. This interpretation accords with Christie [8], who identifies Srivijaya as a “multicultural polity” in which economic, religious, and cultural dimensions were effectively integrated.

The findings in Part 1 indicate that Srivijaya made an important contribution to Human Security, particularly Community Security, by supporting a comparatively stable multicultural social environment. Two major mechanisms were the diffusion of Mahayana Buddhism and the development of an extensive trading network that brought together communities of different ethnic backgrounds. This finding corresponds with the UNDP [1] conceptualization of Human Security, which addresses the protection of individuals and communities against multidimensional threats, including those associated with community and cultural security. Key Informant No. 3 (8 June 2024) explained that the transmission of Buddhism from Srivijaya to Langkasuka was not primarily dependent on coercion. Instead, it involved the development of shared value systems that contributed to the foundations of peaceful coexistence. This process is compatible with Lederach [9] view that identity-based conflicts can be reduced when diverse ethnic groups develop recognition of a Collective Identity extending beyond religious and ethnic divisions.

The evidence discussed in Part 2 shows that the historical connections between Srivijaya and neighbouring polities were sustained through four interrelated dimensions: social, cultural, political, and economic. From a social perspective, kinship connections between the ruling families of Srivijaya and Nakhon Si Thammarat during the thirteenth century of the Buddhist Era indicate a form of “federated” political organisation maintained through social and cultural relationships rather than relying solely on coercive authority. This finding supports Wolters [13], who conceptualises Srivijaya as the centre of a “Mandala”, a network-based political structure in which different polities were connected through commercial and cultural interactions. Economically, Srivijaya’s dominance over the Strait of Malacca supported the development and continuity of Economic Security over an extended historical period. Hall [14] similarly notes that Srivijaya’s maritime commercial networks linked ethnically diverse societies through common economic interests.

Part 3 demonstrates that the cultural legacy of Srivijaya continued beyond the kingdom’s political decline and was transmitted primarily through two trajectories. The first involved the Theravada Buddhist tradition, which subsequently influenced Nakhon Si Thammarat and Sukhothai, while the second involved the Islamic tradition that developed throughout the lower Malay Peninsula. This finding is consistent with Reid [15], who demonstrates that cultural heritage in Southeast Asia has often crossed political and religious boundaries through networks of commerce and human migration. Key Informant No. 4 (3 May 2024) observed that ritual practices among Malay Muslim communities in Yala, including circumcision ceremonies featuring elephant processions and symbolic representations of Mount Meru, continue to contain cultural elements associated with the Srivijayan period, when Buddhist and Hindu traditions interacted and overlapped. This observation reinforces

[9] argument that religious conversion does not necessarily eliminate earlier cultural traditions in their entirety.

The findings from Part 4 indicate that elements of Srivijaya's cultural heritage continue to operate as Soft Power through three principal dimensions: Fashion, Food, and Festivals. Within this interpretation, Soft Power extends beyond the use of cultural products as tourism commodities. It also operates symbolically by cultivating recognition of a Shared Cultural Heritage among Buddhist and Muslim communities. This finding is consistent with Nye [3] argument that Soft Power becomes particularly effective when people identify with and participate in the values and cultural meanings that generate attraction. Shared foods such as Tapat and traditional sweets associated with Sart Duean Sip, together with the performance traditions of Nora and Mak Yong, offer empirical evidence of this process. Although Nora and Mak Yong share historical connections with Indian Yatra theatre, both traditions have subsequently been adapted within the religious contexts of their respective communities. These examples demonstrate how Srivijaya's multicultural heritage may operate as Social Capital in support of community security. This interpretation also corresponds with Galtung [11] concept of Positive Peace, which focuses on developing social and cultural structures that facilitate peaceful coexistence rather than defining peace solely as the absence of physical violence.

Taken together, the findings carry important policy implications for Thailand's southern border provinces. The presence of cultural traditions inherited by both Buddhist and Muslim communities from shared historical foundations associated with the Srivijayan period demonstrates that contemporary religious distinctions do not necessarily eliminate common elements of identity. [10] argues that insecurity in the southern border areas is associated with the erosion of cultural identity and insufficient recognition of shared historical heritage. Accordingly, revitalising knowledge of Srivijaya's heritage and encouraging communities to recognise the common historical origins of their inherited cultural traditions may provide a viable policy mechanism for reducing identity-based tensions and strengthening Community Security over the long term. At the same time, developing historical and cultural tourism associated with Srivijaya, alongside creative industries founded on multicultural heritage, may support Economic Security by creating income and livelihood opportunities for local communities. Such a strategy is aligned with the principles of the BCG Economy and Thailand's Soft Power policy framework.

In conclusion, the research establishes that the Srivijaya Kingdom represents more than a historical legacy; its heritage can also be understood as a form of social and cultural capital that retains relevance for contemporary public policy. From the twelfth century of the Buddhist Era onwards, Srivijaya developed multicultural foundations by bringing diverse ethnic and religious communities into interaction through trade, religion, and cultural exchange. This historical experience offers a potential model for addressing diversity in contemporary societies, particularly in Thailand's southern border provinces, where Human Security challenges remain significant. Srivijaya's shared heritage can therefore be conceptualised simultaneously as Soft Power and Social Capital, with potential applications for strengthening Human Security across interconnected dimensions of Community Security, Economic Security, and Cultural Security. This interpretation is consistent with the framework of Security [10] and with Coedès [12], particularly regarding the importance of civilizational continuity in supporting long-term regional stability.

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