

# Srivijaya Empire

# How Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism influenced Srivijaya through SPICE:

**Social-** The importance of merchants in Islamic society spread to Srivijaya introducing a new class ranking and placed power in the hands of traders in a major economic trading zone: the Strait of Malacca. The 'Indianization' of Srivijaya was voluntary and although many customs and religions were passed on, traditional family values of Southeast Asia were maintained and women continued to have more freedom than in traditional Indian societies.

**Political-** Rulers in Srivijaya incorporated Buddhist philosophy into their rulings and many established themselves as both religious and political leaders proving the importance of religion in Srivijaya society. The new wealth brought political change and resulted in a more centralized government and bureaucracy. The empire's influence controlled much of Sumatra, Western Java, and a majority of the Malay Peninsula.

**Interactions with the environment-** Buddhism introduced to Srivijaya resulted in stupas and pagodas to be constructed. Cities such as Palembang, which were popular stops for Chinese Buddhists on pilgrimage, influenced the landscape as new architecture, stupas and pagodas, were constructed.

**Cultural-** The spread of religions to Srivijaya brought a spread of cultural traditions and characteristics from India and China as well. It became a Buddhist observance center and Borobudur, a vast Buddhist monument in Java, was built. Because of trade, Malacca evolved from a small fishing town to a major Muslim port city and eventually a center for the study of Islam in Southeast Asia.

**Economic-** Spreading religion led to the involvement of Srivijaya in trade routes such as the Islamic controlled Indian Ocean trade routes. This immense exchange of goods and ideas brought large prosperity to the empire, led to their control over the Strait of Malacca, and created a Malay Kingdom. Srivijaya economy became more commercialized as much of the economy was based on creating goods for export and exchange.



Interactions among different peoples along the trade routes led to syncretism/blending of religious and political practices among Asia.

# Continuity vs. Change

**7th Century / 700**

**11th Century/ 1001**

**1025**

**1045**

Between the 7th and 11th century Srivijaya rose and became a hegemon for Southeast Asia. Its extensive trade routes and connections around Southeast Asia provided wealth for the empire.

While having all this power the Srivijaya Empire became target for for foreign powers and pirates. The Rajendra Chola of the Chola empire attacked some of Srivijayan Kingdoms key ports in the first of a series of raids that lasted at least 20 years. They managed to fend off the attack but were weakened in the process

**1225**

**1288**

By 1288, Srivijaya was conquered by the Singhasari Kingdom. The kingdom was completely erased from the map by 1400. The decisive factor that lead to their defeat was the conversion of the majority of Sumatran and Javanese to Islam, and the Indian Ocean traders that had provided for their wealth.

# Art, Architecture, Literature, and Innovations



Buddhist stupas in Srivijaya show the influence Buddhism had on the Empire and the relevance of religion in everyday life.



Srivijayan statue of Bodhisattva Padmapani: One of the most beloved Bodhisattvas meaning someone who has been awakened by the Buddhist spirit.



The Srivijaya Empire controlled two major passageways between India and China, the Sunda Straits from the city of Palembang and the Strait of Malacca.

# How and Why the Srivijaya Empire Developed and Maintained Power, SPICE:

**Social:** The commerce through international sea trade, greatly increased social interactions within Southeast Asia. Srivijaya controlled the Sunda straits located in Palembang and the strait of Malacca. Buddhism and Hinduism in some parts, spread throughout Southeast Asia as interactions with India increased, modifying the traditional social and cultural customs. This adoption of Buddhism was a voluntary transition. The control over the straits greatly increased social interactions with China, India, and Arabia due to increased commerce.

**Political:** Unlike many of the other empires the Hindu-Buddhist empire of Srivijaya did not have clearly defined territories, many cities, or large armies. From a historical perspective this kingdom should have had all the success it did but the empire lasted for around 700 years and the impact it left extended itself through geography.

**Interactions:** The Malay language, an Indonesian language served as a facilitation of interactions, especially during trade. This language came from Persian and Arabic influences. Most interactions were within trade. The straits helped to increase interactions through trading, which passed on religious and cultural influences, such as, Buddhism. The empire had power because many states relied on the straits they controlled for trade and transportation.

**Cultural:** Buddhism states emerged in Southeast Asia as a result of increased interactions due to trade. Specifically Vajrayana Buddhism, spread throughout the Srivijaya empire during the time period that it was developing in Indian. This explains how increased interactions during this time, provoked the spread of new cultural ideas.

**Economic:** The Empire extended its influence and controlled the Strait of Malacca. The power they had was based off their control of the international sea trade. Through the economic advancements it had, they maintained control with their variety of connections through Asia like China and India.