

VISUALIZING SRIVIJAYA'S CIVILIZATION DURING THE 9TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Srivijaya civilization flourished on Sumatera Island between the 7th and 13th centuries and was later famous as one of Asia's largest trading centres. Unfortunately, there have been few large-scale heritage structures and visual documents from Srivijaya, leading to a lack of visualization of the civilization in the past. Hence, the project introduced in this paper attempted to develop the visualization of Srivijaya during the 9th century, which was depicted in Indonesian history as the empire's golden period. The research began with intensive data collection involving a literature review, interviews with key experts, and field observations of the relevant museums and historical sites. The retrieved information was then analyzed and validated to formulate illustration guidelines to portray the Srivijaya civilization. The present study confirmed the lack of credible written resources to formulate more detailed illustration guidelines regarding the major limitation of producing Srivijaya civilization's visualization in the 9th century. Despite the popular knowledge that Srivijaya reached its golden period in the 9th century, there were very limited resources from the domestic and global literature that signified the situation of the empire during that time. Thus, the study suggested the necessity for developing a stronger database related to the Srivijaya's civilization. Likewise, the study would also like to underline the importance of increasing the number of knowledge holders to ensure that information about the Srivijaya culture can be passed down to future generations.

Keywords: *Srivijaya, Visual Arts, Community Engagement, Cultural Heritage, Indonesia*

1. PREFACE

Since the Palaeolithic period, humans have documented their surrounding environment through visual arts, such as drawing, painting, and sculpturing. Succeeding generations subsequently used these arts to understand past figures, events, and civilizations. For example, wall scenes discovered in Egyptian tombs and temples have enabled modern people in recognizing ancient Egyptian society's beliefs and social structure. Drawings and paintings have also helped the later generations understand how people dressed in the past and their environments. Even paintings embedded in souvenirs and popular artworks could help researchers identify the specific events and landscape changes as shown by the paintings of the Canton factories between the 1760s and 1822s.

Nevertheless, not all civilizations left rich written and visual records. For example, one of the civilizations that left a very limited visual record is Srivijaya, a maritime empire that flourished in Sumatra Island, Indonesia, between the 6th to 13th centuries. The Indonesians were not aware of the existence of this empire until two foreign scholars, George Coedes and Hendrik Kern, introduced the name of Srivijaya, which they believed referred to a local kingdom in Sumatra.

The kingdom was asserted to be based in Palembang, the current capital of South Sumatra Province. However, the lack of large-scale heritage structures, such as masonry structures and other ruins that clearly mentioned the name of Srivijaya, had driven several scholars to question the validation of Palembang as the capital city of the empire. At the same time, there was limited information about the existence of visual documents that portrayed Srivijaya civilization in the past.

Through the present study, we attempted to examine the possibility to develop the visualization of Srivijaya through a popular approach. We purposively selected the 9th century, as this period is often mentioned in the Indonesian history books as Srivijaya's golden era. The study itself began in early 2021, involving local customary institutions and community organizations which have strong concerns about the sustainability of Palembang's cultural assets.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces a literature review regarding the presence of Srivijaya as the setting of the present study. The next section presents the research process, which includes developing the narratives and illustrations guidelines. Then, the visualization of Srivijaya civilizations during the 9th century will be presented and discussed in Section 4. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the lessons learned and suggests study directions for the future.

SRIVIJAYA: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

The postulation of Coedes regarding the existence of a maritime empire named Srivijaya had driven worldwide researchers to unearth its mystery. Srivijaya, as asserted by Coedes, was originated in Palembang and later expanded its territory to other regions such as Malay and Thailand. Other sources often used as arguments to support Palembang's status as the capital of Srivijaya were the written records of I-tsing, the traveller Buddhist monk, and Chau Ju Kua, a Chinese customs officer. I-tsing's voyage record was believed as the oldest and first document detailing the situation of Palembang. His record identified a region called Bhoga that was situated along the Bhoga River. Moreover, the description of Bhoga being the chief trading port with China and its distance from Malayu and Java matched with the geographical and socio-economic characteristics of Palembang. Fo-shi, the city believed to be the present Palembang, was described by I-tsing as a fortified city where many Buddhist priests resided to study and do good works. Ju Kua's record added more information regarding the characteristics of San-fo-tsi, referred to as Palembang, in the translation version of Hirth and Rockhill.

According to this translation, San-fo-tsi is a region where the foreign traders exchange gold, silver, porcelain-ware, sugar, dried galangal, and camphor. Other than trading, the area also served as the learning centre for the Dhamma practices, and it had a stringent law on adultery. Moreover, it was not easy for the random merchant ships to enter Srivijaya due to its strict entrance procedure. Due to this rigorous system, Ju Kua portrayed the country as an excellent shipping centre. His record also described the detailed townscape, such as the local dwellings built either overwater or scattered about outside the city.

Srivijaya reached its golden period under King Balaputeradeva, who was mentioned in the Nalanda inscription. This inscription equates Balaputeradeva's fame to the five Pandava brothers of the Mahabharata. However, the invasion of Rajendra Chola in 1017 CE disrupted Srivijaya's domination in Southeast Asia. Kulke identified this period as the culmination of Srivijaya's history. Later on, the empire was relocated to Malayu-Jambi, and, in 1275, Srivijaya fell under the control of the Singasari Kingdom until being subjugated by the Majapahit Kingdom, its successor state. Nonetheless, during this time, the Chinese pirates attacked Palembang and tried to invade the city. This situation forced many Palembangnese to escape to safer regions, such as the Malay Peninsula and the isolated area within Palembang. The Sultanate of Demak ended the Majapahit's reign in Palembang, and the sultanate eventually took over the city as one of its territories.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research went through the following process to validate the information retrieved. First, the study began with intensive data collection. Then the data was analyzed and validated to formulate a set of illustration guidelines to portray the Srivijaya civilization. The data was collected through intensive literature reviews, interviews with key experts, such as the local archaeologists and the architect whose expertise is relevant to the Srivijaya Empire (See Figure 1), and field observations of the relevant museums and historical sites.

Next, the collected data was analyzed and interpreted through Whatsapp Group created for the group discussion. The group members comprised the leader of the local customary institution, participating scholars, and leaders of the community organizations that have been actively promoting Palembang's heritage. Following this, the group produced written guidelines for the illustrators to visualize the civilization. The visualization adopted the Manga-style animation, expecting that this type of visualization can attract more youth to the historical figure and events. The completed illustrations were eventually presented in a short comic series and landscape images, then exhibited at the Museum Balaputeradewa, a local museum in Palembang City, Indonesia.

Figure 1

Group Interviews with the Key Experts (Ananda, 2021)



THE VISUALIZATION OF SRIVIJAYA CIVILIZATION DURING THE NINTH CENTURY

Srivijaya King: King Balaputeradewa

There is very limited information about King Balaputeradewa (also known as Balaputeradewa in Indonesian), particularly his visual appearance. However, the discussions with key experts revealed some important hints about the shape and style of his crown, which was argued as having a similar style to the crown worn by Javanese rulers at the time. Furthermore, the key experts asserted because there was little evidence regarding King Balaputeradewa's royal outfit, the illustrators could have more freedom to portray the design and colour of the King's robe, sarong, and accessories. Figure 2 portray the final visualization of King Balaputeradewa with his crown, ear accessories, and necklace. The crown is decorated with gemstones, as the King was portrayed as a rich king who could afford to build a monastery equal to the total area of five villages in a foreign country.

Figure 2

The Portrayal of King Balaputeradewa



Figure 3
The King's relationship with the Java Island



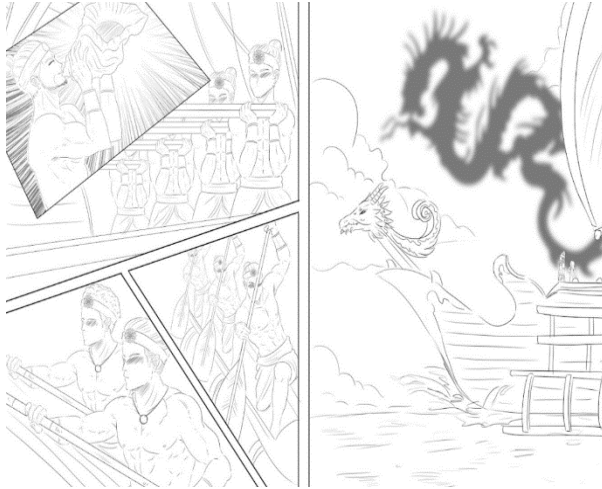
We also tried to portray his relationship with Ratu Boko Temple in Central Java (See Figure 3). According to the key experts, several theories associate Balaputeradeva with this temple. One theory, which De Carparis postulated, mentioned the flee of Balaputeradeva, who fought with his brother-in-law for the throne. Another theory rejected this postulate. Balaputeradeva was portrayed as having no rights to ruling Java. Thus, he voluntarily moved to Srivijaya, which was also the land of Sailendra, the dynasty from whom he descended.

Srivijaya Maritime Power

Since its establishment, Srivijaya has been famous for its maritime power. Kulke described Srivijaya as an empire that participated in international maritime trade. According to the key experts, the discovery of many treasures under Musi's riverbed is the clear evidence that reinforced the status of Musi as the busy international port of Srivijaya. Experts believed that this maritime culture lasted until Srivijaya's ruling in Sumatra. Unfortunately, due to the changing civilization, the maritime culture is no longer dominating the lifestyle of the Palembangnese people. The depiction of Srivijaya's maritime culture is portrayed in Figure 4. The boat's design was developed based on the recommendation of the key experts to follow the depiction of the sailing ship discovered at the Borobudur's relief, as the temple was also built by the Sailendra dynasty.

Figure 4

The Maritime Power of Srivijaya



Srivijaya's Riverine Settlement

According to Chau Ju Kua's observation notes, many Srivijayan lived in the riverine settlement (See Figure 5). He mentioned that people who lived in these floating houses were freed from the tax. Manguin's analysis also supported the description of the existence of this riverine settlement in Srivijaya. Even after the fall of Srivijaya, the presence of the riverine community was still identified, although, in later years, riverine-based development demonstrated a great social polarization in Palembang, as only those who were granted permission from the Sultan could build houses on the land.

Figure 5

The Riverine Settlement in Srivijaya



Srivijaya's Ancient Royal Garden

The existence of the Sriksetra Royal Garden was mentioned in the Talang Tuwo inscription. This inscription signified the intention of King Jayanasa, the first King of Srivijaya, to build an edible garden for his people. According to the key experts, the inscription mentioned several native plants, such as the Sago Tree, which produces Sago flour, one of the important ingredients in Palembangnese traditional cooking. This input influences the portrayal of Sriksetra Royal

Garden in Figure 6, depicted as having many Sago Trees. Unfortunately, this garden no longer existed due to Palembang's rapid development pressure. In 2021, the Government of South Sumatra's Province invited the local historian communities to trace the location of this ancient royal garden in Palembang. Currently, the place where this ancient garden is meant to remain has been converted into residential complexes, making it more difficult to trace its history.

Figure 6

The Sriksetra Royal Garden



Final Exhibition

The completed illustrations were printed and displayed at a special exhibition event organized by the local youth community. Due to the spread of COVID-19, the organizer limited the number of visitors who could attend the exhibition. The organizer also requested the assistance of Palembang's local historians and cultural activists to provide educational information to visitors, as seen in Figure 7. Visitors exhibited an interest in the displayed images and expressed a desire to see more visual narration of their hometown's history, as the visual arts assist them in understanding the history easily. The community leaders also stated the importance of the young people showing more interest in their history and trying different mediums to help the city promote its historical and cultural assets, as shown by the present study's project (See Figure 8). After the exhibition, the organizer stored the printed illustrations for their future use.

Figure 7

The Participation of Local Historians to Explain the Srivijaya's History to the Visitors



Figure 8

Short Comic Displays Introducing Srivijaya Civilization Exhibited at Museum Balaputeradewa



4. CONCLUSION

The present study confirmed the lack of credible written resources to formulate more detailed illustration guidelines regarding the major limitation of producing Srivijaya civilization's visualization in the 9th century. Despite the popular knowledge that Srivijaya reached its golden period in the 9th century, there were very limited resources from the domestic and global literature that signified the situation of the empire during that time. Likewise, there was very little information regarding King Balaputeradeva, who was asserted to have a significant contribution to the rise of Srivijaya.

Unlike other civilizations that flourished in Indonesia, Srivijaya has few written and visual resources, particularly how the empire looked in the ninth century. Therefore, the portrayal of the King and the daily life of the Srivijayan during this period was mostly developed by considering the input from the key experts and some relevant literature depicting the previous and later period of Srivijaya. Without the assistance of key experts researching Srivijaya, it would be very difficult to formulate guidelines for the illustrators to visualize the past civilization of Srivijaya.

Thus, the present study would suggest the necessity for developing a stronger database and more comprehensive studies related to the Srivijaya's civilization. It is very critical for Palembang to have its own comprehensive library focusing on Srivijaya and the later civilization that flourished in the city. Likewise, the study would also like to underline the importance of increasing the number of knowledge holders. Without any successors who can acquire full knowledge of Srivijaya's civilization, it is unlikely that future generations would be able to recall the empire that was once one of Asia's major trading centres.

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