Yijing’s Descriptions of Srivijaya
(c.671 to 695 CE)

Yijing was Buddhist monk who traveled from China to India in 671 CE and returned in 695 CE. During his travels Yijing spent a considerable amount of time in Southeast Sumatra and his descriptions of Srivijaya, albeit brief, are an important source for information about the role of Buddhism in the early years of that kingdom.¹

I then arrived in Srivijaya, where I spent six months, gradually learning the Sabdavidya [Sanskrit grammar]. The king provided me with support and sent me to Malayu [Sumatran polity absorbed by Srivijaya in the 670s].

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Many kings and chiefstains in the islands of the Southern Ocean admire and believe [Buddhism], and their hearts are set on accumulating good actions. In the fortified city of Srivijaya Buddhist priests number more than 1,000, whose minds are bent on learning and good practices. They investigate and study all the subjects that exist just as in the Middle Kingdom [India]; the rules and ceremonies are not at all different. If a Chinese priest wishes to go to the West in order to hear [lectures] and read [the original texts], he had better stay here one or two years and practice the proper rules and then proceed to Central India.

.........

After having collected the scriptures, I began to retrace my steps to come back. The Indian texts I brought formed more than 500,000 slokas (stanzas), which, if translated into Chinese, would make a thousand volumes, and with these I am now staying at Srivijaya.

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In Srivijaya of the Southern Sea resides Sakyakirti, who travelled all through the five countries of India in order to learn, and is at present in Srivijaya. All these men are equally renowned for their brilliant character, equal to the ancients, and anxious to follow in the steps of the Sages.

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