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From the Ground, Up: The Looting of Vườn Chuối within the Vietnamese and Southeast Asian Antiquities Trade

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The exact nature of the illicit antiquities trade from ground to market in Southeast Asia remains poorly known outside of Thailand and Cambodia, where most research has been focused. This paper helps to address this imbalance by documenting and contextualizing looting activities at the Bronze and Iron Age site of Vườn Chuối, located within urban Hanoi. A brief excavation history is provided so as to place recent looting into archaeological context. The methods used to document the recent and on-going looting observed are then discussed, followed by the nature of the current threat to Vườn Chuối and a summation of what little is known about the Vietnamese antiquities trade in general and its relationship to regional antiquities trafficking. Finally, we discuss the current regulatory landscape in terms of constitutional, ownership, penal and international law, difficulties with enforcement and prosecution, and what course of action is needed not only to protect Vườn Chuối and similar sites in and around Hanoi, but also to continue to raise public awareness of the archaeological repercussions of the trade itself.

KEYWORDS Vuon Chuoi, Hanoi, antiquities trade, Southeast Asian archaeology, public outreach, cultural property legislation

Introduction

In recent years, commendable efforts have been made to document the pervasive looting that continues to feed the global illicit antiquities trade (e.g. [Contreras, 2010](#); [Cunliffe, 2012](#); [Insoll, 1993](#); [Mackenzie & Davis, 2014](#); [Stone, 2008](#); [Yates, 2015](#)). However, very little is known (or published) regarding the degree to which Vietnam contributes to Southeast Asian or global illicit trade, and whether or not the regionally unique legal and political structure of Vietnam, a Socialist Republic, has produced an internal market for, or affected local and international availability of, antiquities in general. Fundamentally, we suggest that, in countries such as Vietnam, significantly more looting occurs than is documented, especially sites dating to the Bronze Age (c. 3500–2500 BP) and later.

To understand the networks that allow the illicit antiquities trade to continue, and thus to better counteract it, more documentation of under-reported looting and the Vietnamese antiquities trade overall is needed. [Huffer and Chappell \(2014\)](#) began this task by conducting two weeks of fieldwork in Hanoi in January 2014, within which the visit to Vườn Chuối occurred. The research involved intensive fieldwork to survey the current state of the antiquities trade in that city. The street-level survey component of this research involved locating and mapping the distribution of several dealers and shop fronts, conducting impromptu or pre-planned interviews (where possible) with shop owners, and initial investigation of the nature of the private collecting community (specifically open-to-the-public private museums, commercial venues, and the annual antiquities fair held to coincide with the Vietnamese New Year (Tết) holiday). This work was underpinned by additional in-person interviews with both UNESCO and government officials, and the soliciting of responses to written questionnaires from numerous Western and Vietnamese archaeologists working throughout the country, which provided current perspectives on the nature and intensity of the trade in their area ([Huffer & Chappell, 2014](#)). This initial research informed the insights presented in this article. However, due to the sensitive nature of this work, the identities of some respondents have been redacted.

The results of this work in general suggest that an active, if relatively small, market exists for antiquities in Hanoi, and most likely in every major Vietnamese city, especially coastal ports. The market contains Vietnamese and Western participants, a substantial private collecting community, a high probability of cross-border and overseas export, poor enforcement, and a ready supply of new material to feed this market (e.g. [Chappell & Huffer, 2013](#); [Viet Nam News, 2012](#)). What is still very poorly known, especially in comparison to neighbouring Thailand and Cambodia, are the particulars (i.e. the routes and mechanisms) of how authentic, freshly surfaced, antiquities make it to urban and international markets in Vietnam.

This paper seeks to contribute to this effort by further documenting and contextualizing looting activities at one site in particular; that of Vườn Chuối, and placing the timeline of known or documented events within the larger context of the Southeast Asian antiquities trade. A brief excavation history is provided so as to place looting into archaeological context. The methods used to document the recent looting observed are then discussed, followed by the nature of the current threat to Vườn Chuối and a summation of what little is known about the Vietnamese

antiquities trade in general and its relationship to regional trade networks. Finally, we discuss the current regulatory landscape in terms of constitutional, ownership, penal, and international law, difficulties with enforcement and prosecution, and what course of action is needed not only to protect Vườn Chuối and similar sites in and around Hanoi, but also to continue to raise public awareness of the archaeological repercussions of the trade itself.

Vườn Chuối excavation history

Vườn Chuối is part of an interrelated complex of six Đồng Đậu-Gò Mun-Đông Sơn (*c.* 3500–2000 BP) domestic and mortuary sites, located within Hoài Đức District, Hanoi, at coordinates X: 105.72473 and Y: 21.056179. Vườn Chuối was first discovered and surveyed in 1969 by the Institute of Archaeology, Hanoi, with archaeologists from the Hanoi National University also eventually collaborating. Of the six sites, two were destroyed before the first excavations began in 2004 and one remains unexcavated, but the remaining three contain intact stratified deposits rich in material culture (Dung, 2009a; VISTER, 2013). Subsequent excavations took place in 2007, 2009, twice in 2011, 2012, 2013, and as recently as 2014, with the total excavation area now covering 709 m². Formerly belonging to Hà Tây Province, what remains is today within the Kim Chung urban construction zone of Hanoi city (see Figure 1). Hanoi itself is a still-expanding urban metropolis covering a total land area of 3345 km² with a population of at least 6.9 million (GSOH, 2014). While the number of undiscovered sites in and around Hanoi is unknown (and possibly unknowable) given the rapid pace of Hanoi's continued development, new discoveries continue to be made (e.g. Viet Nam Net, 2011, 2016).

Initial excavations commenced in response to licensed and unlicensed construction activity related to the laying of building foundations. Each excavation has uncovered numerous specimens of predominately cord-marked or incised and impressed pottery, faunal remains, bronze tools and weapons, casting moulds, slag, and nephrite jewellery. No burials were uncovered until the 2009 season, when two Đông Sơn graves *c.* 2000 BP were found within excavation units 5 and 6, cutting through lower Đồng Đậu deposits (Dung, 2009b). These and several subsequent juvenile and adult interments from both Đồng Đậu and Đông Sơn contexts have contained a variety of grave goods, including ornate ceramics and bronzes. Intriguingly, more recent excavations uncovered a variety of wooden artefacts from early Gò Mun contexts, perhaps preserved at the bottom of a pond near the settlement (Dung, 2009a).

The latest archaeological research was conducted as recently as December 2014. Led again by Dr Lâm Thị Mỹ Dung, Mr Bùi Hữu Tiến, and colleagues from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University (VNU), Hanoi, these excavations have brought the total number of skeletons (Bronze and Iron Age) to fourteen. Unfortunately, by now the archaeological content of the uppermost Iron Age layers (containing the most sought after, more elaborate, bronzes) have been completely destroyed by looting. The newest burials recovered (of both sexes, primarily adult) derive from the basal stratigraphic layers corresponding to the Bronze Age. *In-situ* recording of demographic profiles

occurred in the field, with additional laboratory analysis, and the possibility of stable isotopic and radiocarbon analyses as options for future research. Furthermore, additional threatened sites in the vicinity will hopefully be investigated and surveyed more closely, and perhaps excavated themselves.

The archaeological significance of Vườn Chuối and nearby sites is that they preserve a relatively complete depositional sequence spanning the Bronze and Iron Ages, and include the *in-situ* recovery of a wide diversity of bronze, ceramic, and organic remains, including rarely encountered human burials. Although no concrete figures are available, estimates from our primary informants suggested that approximately 60–80 per cent of archaeological sites in northern Vietnam have already suffered at least some degree of disturbance from development or looting activities. Each site from this time period and region that is damaged or destroyed diminishes our ability to understand early metallurgy in the Red River delta within a regional context, let alone changes to human biology during the initial few centuries of metallurgy and intensive agriculture. To better monitor and prevent damage to future sites, this paper presents one of the few documented examples of the threat to sites in and around Hanoi.

Methods and data collection

As colleagues (archaeologists at Hanoi National University and the Institute of Archaeology, Hanoi) stressed to us, intact deposits, especially burials, from the Bronze and Iron Ages are especially rare in northern Vietnam. To understand and assess the nature of this threat, two of us (DH and DC) visited Vườn Chuối and the surrounding area to record first-hand evidence for recent and on-going site destruction and conduct on-site interviews with the current site guard (with translation assistance from Mr Bùi Hữu Tiến of the Museum of Anthropology, VNU). The visit occurred on 23 January 2014. Although an interview with the known leaders or members of the looting teams themselves was not possible, we have no substantial reason to doubt the veracity of what we were told and shown. New photographs were also taken of both ‘old’ (at least one-year-old) looters’ pits of various sizes, and the most recent examples, as illustrated below. Interviews were conducted by DH and DC with both LTMD (one of the chief archaeologists and principal investigators of each excavation season at Vườn Chuối itself), as well as Mr Phạm Văn Hùng, a former Commune-level police officer for Lai Xá Village, Kim Chung Commune, Hoài Đức District, Hanoi City (and, at the time, the sole guardian of the site). Soliciting interviews from these informants helped to ensure that the most up-to-date information possible was obtained on both the archaeology of the site and surrounding, and the nature of the threat to it, which could then be independently assessed through the evidence for looting recorded in the field.

Current threats

According to archaeologists at the Hanoi National University (including two of us: LMTD and HLNg), as well as the former chief of police of the local Commune, who accompanied us when we visited Vườn Chuối in January 2014, looting began almost immediately after the first excavation season over the winter of 2004/05, but was

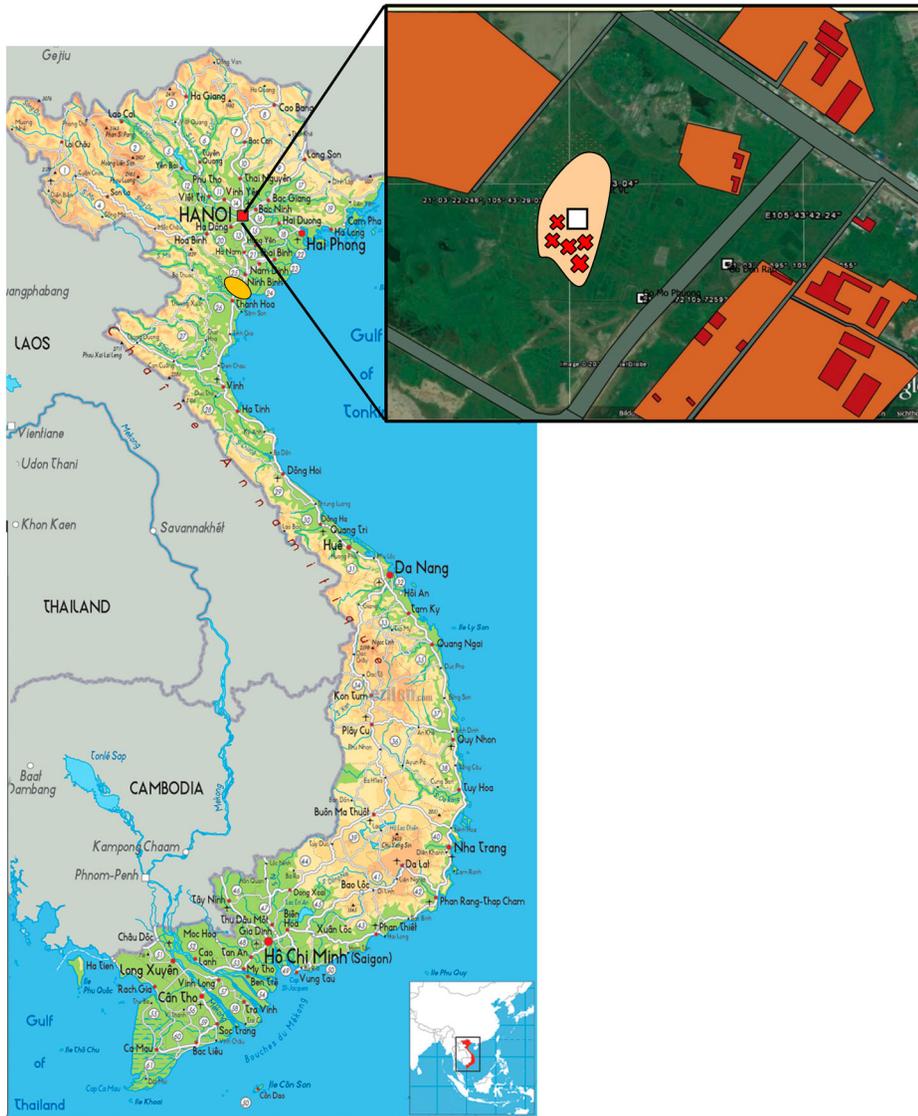


FIGURE 1 Map of Vietnam highlighting the Thanh Hoa region (yellow oval) and the location of Vườn Chuối within Hanoi. Red and orange represent recent construction, beige represents the extent of the Vuon Chuoi site complex, the white square represents excavated area, and red Xs where looting has occurred.

first noticed or recorded in 2009, the same year in which metal detector use was also first observed. As mentioned above, the initial excavation itself was prompted by encroaching construction, including the building of a stadium, park, auxiliary structures, and roads. The illicit activities identified, on the other hand, were directed primarily at the discovery of bronze artefacts (see Figures 2 and 3). This can be confirmed not only by the observations of local police who were able to see how frequently and deeply illicit excavation was occurring, but also through the charting of



FIGURE 2 Bronze dagger underneath right hand; burial 5, unit 2, 2012 excavation.

looters' pits and broken artefact discard (especially diagnostic Iron Age ceramics) between excavation seasons. Together, these sources of information have served as a record (if somewhat by-proxy) of the damage done over and between successive excavation seasons.

At the village or Commune level in Vietnam, policing in general, including controlling threats to local archaeological heritage, involves a very thinly resourced and staffed group of police officers with vested legal authority who are assisted by a large number of conscripted or volunteer 'militia' (private citizens who can monitor situations in real-time; colloquially referred to as the 'many observing eyes'). Looting activity was first reported to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2009 when individuals were observed by local community members 'depth-testing' the soil with iron rods and spades, and then saturating the top soil to more easily remove it and access the primarily bronze antiquities beneath



FIGURE 3 Bronze spear head beside left forearm; burial 5, unit 2, 2012 excavation.

(P. V. Hùng, pers. comm., 2014). Two of us (LMTD and HLN_g) — archaeologists directly involved in several seasons of excavation at Vườn Chuối — have also observed the increasing evidence of site damage, while the Commune police officer and his civilian assistants have also witnessed looting in action on several occasions.

One of us (HLN_g) recalls that, beginning in 2014, the Commune police also observed new illicit excavations in the fields surrounding the Vườn Chuối excavations and reported this to archaeologists at VNU (including LTMD). Several known perpetrators (members of the looting ‘gangs’ originating in Thanh Hoá Province, discussed below) were subsequently arrested by Commune police and bronze artefacts in their possession confiscated. Even before these arrests such items were being readily shown to the archaeologists conducting new excavations each season, especially from 2009 onwards. During the 2014 ‘season’, looting preceded further salvage excavation, and, as in previous years, the low apprehension rates reported are due to two primary reasons. The first is that, usually, only one individual with arresting authority was on-site when looting was occurring. Secondly, usually very few relatively low-level individuals were apprehended each time, with group ‘leaders’ escaping and with each looting ‘gang’ having spotters in place to warn others to scatter.

Illicit ‘testing’ activity at the site continues today as prospective looters actively explore undisturbed areas in the vicinity of the excavation units in order to return at a more opportune time to commence digging (see Figures 4 and 5). We were told by the Commune police officer when visiting that the looters were likely to be especially active during the pending Tết holiday season (early February 2014) when many local residents would be away visiting relatives. This confirms the observations of the archaeologists who worked to salvage what was left of the site.

Our informants, including LTMD, reported that in 2009 the use of metal detectors was first observed on site, thus signifying a substantial increase in more premeditated looting by so-called ‘gangs’ whose de-facto ‘leaders’ had access to enough



FIGURE 4 Pit remaining from previous looting activity.



FIGURE 5 Recent 'test pit' in advance of new looting activity, January 2014.

capital or were networked enough to acquire outside technology to aid their efforts. Each year from at least 2009 onwards, numerous individuals within these teams have been apprehended and brought to the Commune police station where their metal-detecting devices were confiscated and any artefacts in their possession seized. They were then either fined or released with a warning. It should be noted that the sale, possession, and use of metal detectors is prohibited in Vietnam so the devices seized at Vườn Chuối by police were almost certainly illegal imports, most likely from China, or made locally by amateur constructors ([Tuoi Tre News, 2014](#)).

We were also told that the general operating methods of these more organized thieves were well known to the local police. However, because the individuals apprehended at the site refused to disclose the identity of their collaborators (in part due to knowledge of the low-level of arrest, conviction, and penalties for archaeological looting) the police could not establish the hierarchical linkages of those within the 'cordata' (*sensu* [Manacorda & Chappell, 2011](#)) and thus were not able to detain or punish those principally responsible for organizing and executing the looting.

Our informants reported that most looters had now returned to using rods and spades rather than metal detectors because of the risks and cost of losing them through confiscation. Allegedly, most known groups (said to be six in total) were comprised of individuals from Thanh Hoá Province, three hours south of Hanoi. This region is the Đông Sơn 'heartland' within which numerous ornate bronzes have been discovered, and replicas are produced and traded widely ([Calò, 2009](#); [Chinh & Tien, 1980](#)). The 'leader' of one of these groups was mentioned specifically as someone who had hired individuals to excavate, paying their salary and providing equipment. In January 2014, our police informant, Mr Hùng, reported that he had personally been approached and offered a substantial amount of money to 'take a vacation' during the Tết holiday so that looters could have unfettered access to the site. The offer was declined.

In previous years such requests had also been refused, and yet looters continued to arrive. None of our informants knew exactly who such group 'leaders' answered to

within the local trafficking network, but they were aware that looted objects including bronze arrowheads and adzes, figurines, and small Đông Sơn drums, had all been seized from dealers in the Hanoi area, but many artefacts make their way into private collections (Huffer & Chappell, 2014; Nhan Dan, 2015). Private collectors were also suggested to have come directly to sites such as Vườn Chuối to buy, and looters had been observed selling on site, especially during 2009. To protect nearby sites, local residents had been asked to call the Commune police directly when looting was observed, but illicit excavation and construction activities remained prevalent.

It was also suggested to us by Mr Hùng that the current enforcement of national cultural heritage legislation and the monitoring of looting activities in Vietnam tends to stop at the Commune level, representing a disconnect with District- or Province-level officials. In fact, not only have similar instances of looting been observed in nearby Vĩnh Phúc Province (also within the boundaries of contemporary Hanoi), but another site within the Vườn Chuối complex was allegedly stripped of heritage status due to Commune-level boundary disputes, and has been looted indiscriminately). Again according to our primary informants, the District chief only realized the scope of the looting problem when it was reported in local newspapers, suggesting that the full importance and reach of cultural heritage legislation was being ‘misread, misunderstood or simply ignored’ by more senior sections of the governance structure.

Vietnam within the Southeast Asian antiquities trade

Looting such as that described above is by no means limited to Vietnam. Widespread plunder of antiquities from neighbouring Cambodia has been well documented (Clément, 2002; Davis, 2011; O’Reilly, 2007) and there is compelling evidence of well-organized and sustained illicit trafficking of cultural heritage objects across much of the Southeast Asian region (Alder, et al., 2009). Most of this trafficked material is destined for overseas markets in North America and Europe, although increasingly more localized markets are also evolving within the Asian region at large as a by-product of burgeoning standards of living in countries like China and Korea (e.g. Bull & Gruber, 2014; Gruber, 2014; Soudijn & Tjihuis, 2003).

This preliminary field research in Vietnam relating to illicit trafficking patterns (see also Huffer & Chappell, 2014) suggests that most of the more valuable ‘authentic’ antiquities traded are directed to local Vietnamese collectors rather than to ‘foreigners’, although wealthy expatriate collectors living abroad are also believed to be purchasing looted objects, according to prominent archaeologists interviewed at the Institute of Archaeology, Hanoi, including Metal Age expert Associate Professor Trinh Sinh. Documenting the nature and extent of this illicit trade is fraught with many difficulties, not the least of which are the clandestine practices of those involved as well as the endemic corruption that pervades this market and the antiquities trade globally (e.g. Mackenzie, 2011). The market is also plagued by the presence of forgeries, and there would seem to be a thriving industry within Vietnam associated with the production of highly sought-after bronze objects like Dong Son drums (e.g. Van, 2015). Primarily due to the fact that this

work has only just begun, only focused on Hanoi and Northern Vietnam to date, and not yet been bolstered by a similar (published) mixed-methods study detailing the current situation in any Southern or Central Vietnamese city, the extent to which we can contextualize the findings from Vườn Chuối into a larger, evidence-based synthesis of on-the-ground realities throughout Vietnam is limited.

Regulatory practices and the need for reform

What can be done, both in Vietnam and regionally, to combat this lucrative trade? In legislative terms, Vietnam has quite comprehensive legal provisions designed to safeguard its cultural patrimony (for a review, see [Saltiel, 2014](#)). Following unification of North and South Vietnam in 1976, the new Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) passed its first *Ordinance on the Protection of Historical Cultural Relics and Scenic Sites* in 1984 and conservation activities began with foreign assistance. The protection of cultural heritage is also reflected in Vietnam's constitution, Article 34 of which provides that:

The State and society preserve and develop the national cultural heritage [...] all acts causing damage to or prejudicial to historical or revolutionary monuments, works of art and beauty spots are strictly prohibited. (SRV, 2001)

Reflecting these constitutional principles, the National Assembly of the SRV in 2001 passed a comprehensive Law on Cultural Heritage (LCH) which, with minor amendments in 2002 and 2009, remains the nation's principal legislative provision on this topic (see [UNESCO, 2013](#)). This legislation sets out the parameters of protection given to both tangible and intangible objects of cultural significance. It also provides that all cultural heritage remaining under the ground or underwater, together with any newly discovered or excavated items, belongs to the people of Vietnam (LCH Articles 6 and 7). Definitions of the various objects considered a part of the tangible cultural heritage of the nation are provided in the LCH (Article 4).

Organizations and individuals retain the right to own cultural heritage objects as well as to purchase, sell, exchange, donate, or bequeath them as inheritance (LCH Articles 14 and 43). However, the export abroad of antiques requires the permission of the 'competent State agencies in charge of culture and information' (LCH Articles 43 and 44). Any such objects owned by the people at large, like those held in museums or newly discovered, are excluded from these provisions, as are objects termed 'national precious objects' (LCH Article 4[7]). National precious objects are required to be registered with the appropriate State agency, and the State has first right to purchase them for an agreed price or at auction (LCH Article 43).

These various provisions are in general accord with the protective regime encouraged internationally by UNESCO and its 1970 *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* (UNESCO, 1970). In fact, Vietnam became a signatory to this Convention in December 2005, although it has not yet ratified the more recent 2001 *Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO, 2001).

Against this regulatory background, our own observations regarding the looting occurring at Vườn Chuối suggests that, despite the provisions of the LCH, an active illicit trade in antiquities continues to flourish in Vietnam with minimal official intervention either at the local or national levels. In theory, the necessary measures required for such official action to enforce the protective provisions of the LCH described above are at present contained principally in Vietnam's Penal Code of 1999, although an amended version of this Code is due to come into effect on 1 July 2016 (see Vietnam Law Guide, 2016). As this amended version of the Penal Code does not appear to affect substantively the earlier Code's cultural heritage protections, references are made here to the still extant provisions of the Penal Code 1999 (Vietnam Penal Code, 1999).

Relevant Penal Code provisions affecting cultural heritage directly are to be found mainly in Chapter XIV dealing with Crimes Infringing upon Ownership Rights; Chapter XVI dealing with Crimes Infringing upon the Economic Management Order; and Chapter XX relating to Crimes Infringing upon Administrative Management Order. Thus, in Chapter XIV, Article 141 refers to the offence of illegally holding property in the following terms:

- (1). Those who deliberately refuse to return to the lawful owners or managers or to surrender to responsible authorities property valued between five million dong and two hundred million dong, antiques or objects of historical and/or cultural value mistakenly assigned to them or discovered or found by them, after the lawful owners or managers or the responsible authorities request to receive back such property according to the provisions of law, shall be subject to non-custodial reform for up to three years or a prison term of between three months and two years.
- (2). Those who illegally hold property valued at two hundred million dong or higher, or antiques or objects of historical and/or cultural value shall be sentenced to between one and five years of imprisonment.

At exchange rates at the time of writing, one US dollar (USD) is worth approximately 22,300 Vietnamese dong (VND). As such, the aggravated form of the offence of illegally holding property applies to objects that have a value of approximately USD 9000 — a relatively low threshold for the imposition of a quite severe penalty of imprisonment. By contrast, in Chapter XVI, the offence of illegal cross-border trading of objects 'being historical and/or cultural relics' attracts a minimum fine of between ten million and one hundred million VND or a prison term of between six months and three years. However, if those relics are dealt with in certain defined and aggravated circumstances, they may ultimately attract a life sentence, or even capital punishment. Article 153 of the Penal Code states that if cross-border trading is committed in one of the following circumstances:

- (4). Committing the crime in one of the following circumstances, the offenders shall be sentenced to between twelve and twenty years of imprisonment, life imprisonment or capital punishment:
 - a. Objects involved are valued at one billion dong or more;
 - b. Gaining particularly great illicit profits;
 - c. Causing particularly serious consequences.

(5). The offenders may also be subject to a fine of between three million dong and thirty million dong, the confiscation of part or whole of property, a ban from holding certain posts, practicing certain occupations or doing certain jobs for one to five years.

It should be noted that capital punishment was removed from this particular category of offence by certain reforms made to the Penal Code in 2009 (see [Death Penalty Worldwide, 2016](#)).

Our research to date has failed to locate any published official statistics regarding the actual use of these and other relevant Penal Code provisions in prosecuting those responsible for the looting and trafficking of cultural property in Vietnam. If they exist at all, such statistics seem to be tightly held by the agencies of government. But circumstantial evidence from official sources suggests that in reality any law enforcement activity in this area is at best limited to local initiatives of the type we have described at Vườn Chuối. In a recent report to UNESCO about the nation's implementation of the 1970 Convention, the Vietnamese Government admitted that:

Illicit excavation of archaeological sites has not been strictly prevented by the legal authorities [...] The black market of trading antiquities has been in operation for a long time. The illegal trading of antiquities has not been strictly punished. Increasing numbers of foreigners to Vietnam leads to the higher need of purchasing antiquities. The wrongdoers take this advantage to do business. (SRV, 2013: 9)

This situation is allowed to occur for a variety of reasons, including a scarcity of adequately trained law enforcement officials; the splintering of responsibility for law enforcement among diverse agencies; the lack of clarity in divesting regulatory functions between the central government, Districts, and Communes; the competing pressures of regulating the use of land required for urban development with the needs of cultural property protection; and all too often the corruption of regulatory functionaries.

Concluding remarks

Effecting change in these areas is clearly challenging and will require far more than the rejigging of the formal regulatory structure. Indeed, law reform is probably the last thing that is required at this stage, and any such reform should, among other things, be preceded by a concerted public awareness campaign to stress the importance of community-based cultural heritage protection and preservation measures in preference to those initiated through the legal system. Such a campaign should also target the young. A promising beginning can already be seen in the recently initiated UNESCO-sponsored educational programme that seeks to educate local youth about the process and practice of archaeology within the context of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Thăng Long Royal Citadel site (Ba Đình District, Hanoi) (see Figure 6).

However, as others have pointed out when reporting on the challenges to successfully implementing cultural heritage preservation programmes elsewhere in the region, educational outreach needs to be accompanied by economic incentive, as

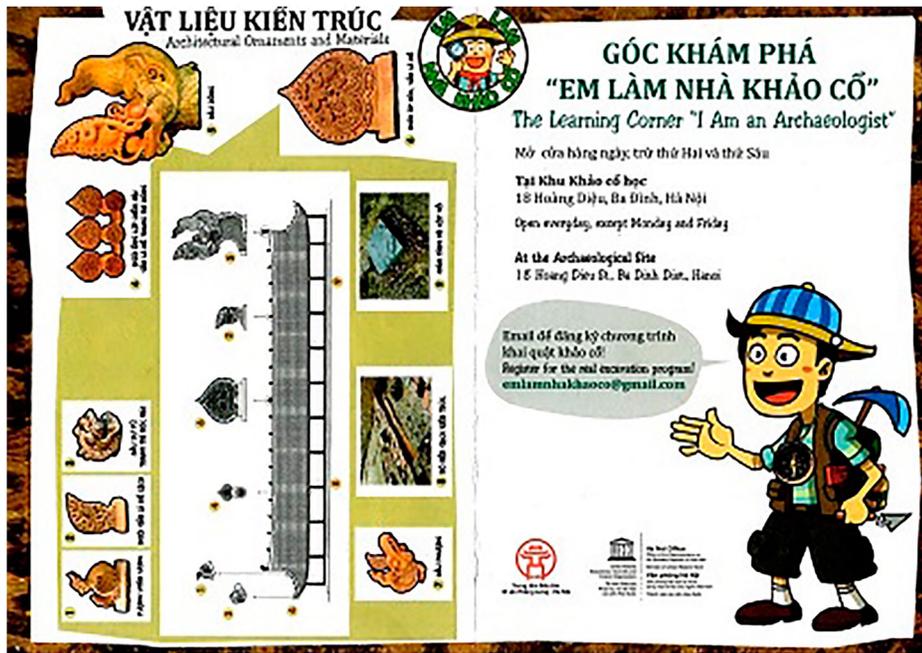


FIGURE 6 Outreach material for primary school students, UNESCO Hanoi.

for example, the NGO Heritage Watch has been advocating in Cambodia (O'Reilly, 2014). While perhaps not reducing demand or affecting motivations to deal or collect, poverty reduction efforts in general could lessen incentive to sell what is found into the global market place.

Looking further afield, there would seem to be considerable scope for the issue of cultural heritage protection to be taken up on a cross-national basis by a body like the Association of South East Nations (ASEAN) whose ten members include Vietnam. Each of the ASEAN members is confronted to a greater or lesser degree by looting problems involving both terrestrial and underwater sites. Thus collaborative programmes to train and equip law enforcement officials to better detect and prosecute cross-border traffickers as well as deter looting could be valuable. So, too, would possible joint ventures to assist with the identification and excavation of archaeological sites, including joint public-private partnerships such as those already utilized in certain shipwreck sites in the region (Blake & Flecker, 1994; Flecker, 2002). While still controversial and in need of transparent oversight themselves, such partnerships can allow the systematic survey and excavation of sites that would otherwise be given over to indiscriminate looting.

A sense of 'community level' responsibility for documenting and protecting unknown archaeological sites in Vietnam and throughout Southeast Asia is growing (e.g. Viet Nam News, 2013). It is to be hoped that, in future, cultural heritage sites as important as Vườn Chuối will not be subjected to such degradation and loss in between seasons of excavation often constricted by time and financial constraints, but will instead be recognized and protected by an informed and concerned new generation of Vietnamese citizens and their counterparts elsewhere.

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