

The ceramic and porcelain collections on shipwreck in Vietnam Sea at History Museum in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam): History, Preservation and Promotion.

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ABSTRACT

In Vietnam, underwater cultural heritage is a new field developed in the late twenty century until now. Interest in this field began with the discovery of shipwrecks in Vietnamese waters in the 1990s. Through international cooperation as well as the support of modern equipment, Vietnam has approached and explored ancient shipwrecks in Hòn Dầm (Phu Quoc), Hòn Cau (Con Dao), Cà Mau, Cù lao Chàm (Quang Nam), and in recent years, the ancient shipwrecks Chau Thuan Bien in Quang Ngai. From 1993 to 2000, The History Museum in Ho Chi Minh City received more than 7000 artifacts from these shipwrecks assigned from the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Vietnam. Most of these archaeological materials are Chinese ceramics dating from the Ming to Qing Dynasties, some Thai ceramics such as Sawankhalok ceramics, Sukhothai ceramics, and Vietnamese Chu Dau ceramics dating from the 15th century. In this paper, we would like to give a brief introduction to these collections, preservation and promotion agenda alongside the History Museum in Ho Chi Minh city. Accordingly, the article will include three parts: the first is an overview of the historical museum and underwater heritage collections which include the number and types of artifacts. In the second part, we will present about our museum's actual preservation and exhibition covering the difficulties and limitations that we are facing. In the discussion part, we will present possible ideas about cooperation on exhibition, communication and conservation of the UCH collection in our museum case.

Keywords: Cu Lao Cham ceramic, Chu Dau ceramics, History Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnamese shipwrecks

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Part 1: MUSEUM BACKGROUND WITH UNDERWATER CULTUAL HERITAGE

The History Museum in Ho Chi Minh City is a large museum and has a long history of development in South Vietnam. Located in the heart of the city, the Museum is a popular destination for both domestic and international visitors. The exhibition content includes two main parts: Part one introduces Vietnamese culture and history from the Primitive period to 1945 CE. Part two introduces some typical ancient cultures in Southeast Asia such as Oc Eo culture and Champa culture. In addition, there are a number of galleries on Asian arts such as Buddhist statues, ceramics, and stone sculpture.

The first milestone was that the museum had access to the UCH artifacts in 1993. The museum received a group of 97 excavated artifacts at Hon Cau. In 1994, the museum continued to receive 49 artifacts which had been excavated at Hon Dam. In 1995, the Museum received 229 artifacts from Hon Cau. Those were the early milestones of the museum's work on accessing the UCH from shipwrecks. In 2000, the museum received 4366 artifacts which were excavated in Cu Lao Cham shipwrecks. This was the biggest UCH collection that the museum had before. Since then, the History Museum has had a colorful UCH collection with the number of about 7000 artifacts; mainly were Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai ceramics.

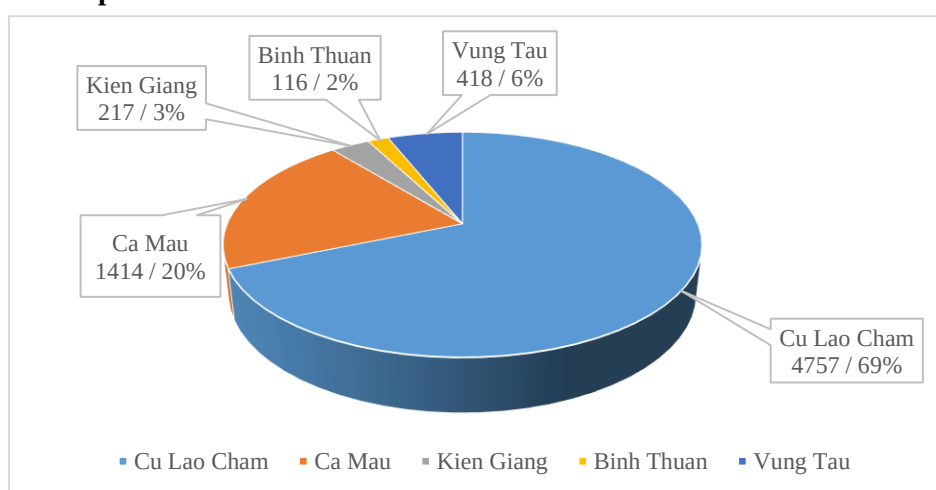
About UCH collections

The history of underwater archeology in Vietnam began in the late twentieth century. Up to now, after 30 years, there were six shipwrecks that have been officially discovered and excavated in Vietnam: Hon Cau, Hon Dam, Cu Lao Cham, Ca Mau, Binh Thuan and Binh Chau. In addition, as there are more newly discovered underwater archaeological sites, agencies and organizations also conduct small-scale salvage excavation.

The History Museum in HCM city is one of the major museums in Vietnam, the museum was honored to receive nearly 7000 artifacts which were of good quality, some of them also were rare objects from shipwrecks. They were displayed and exhibited in various museums in the country and abroad. The most typical collection is Chu Dau export ceramics that was found in Cu Lao Cham shipwrecks.

Table 1. Distribution chart of UCH collection at History Museum.
Display number of objects in collection and percentage of total.

Cu Lao Cham shipwreck collection



The shipwreck was found at a depth of 70 metres below the sea surface, coordinates at N16o16'08" latitude and E108o27'00" longitude, in Cu Lao Cham area. The excavation was conducted under the cooperation of the archaeologists from the Vietnam History Museum-Hanoi, Vietnam Salvage Joint Stock Company (Visal), and Saga Horizon Company (Malaysia); the project has also brought together archaeologists from the United Kingdom, Malaysia and Slovakia. The project was carried out in three years, from 1997-2000. 240,000¹ ceramic items were recovered from the wreck. Those items came from Vietnam, Thailand, and Chinese. The date of the shipwreck has been debated. Vietnamese researcher believe the vessel dated from the mid-to late-fifteenth century during the Le dynasty while some other researcher suggested of late fifteenth to early sixteenth century date (Butterfields 2000, 107; Guy 2000, 125-128)

There were five museums designated by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to receive, manage and display: The Hanoi National Museum, The History Museum in HCM city, Vietnam Fine Arts Museum, Hai Duong Museum and Quang Nam Museum was assigned 4366 artifacts on 24 March 2000. In addition, from 2000 up to now, the museum has added 385 objects from various sources, bringing

¹ Organization of excavations of the ancient shipwreck of Cu Lao Cham (2000), Excavating the Cu Lao Cham shipwreck (1997 – 1999), New discoveries in archeology in 2000 in Vietnam, page 549

the total number to 4751 objects. Collection content mainly daily ceramics such as dishes, bowl, ewer, cup; some of them are religious objects.



Figure 1. Cu Lao Cham collection in The History Museum in Ho Chi Minh city

Table 2. Cu Lao Cham collection detail

Name	Amount	Brief introduction
Dishes	368	They have many different sizes, from 25 to 48cm in diameter. Mostly blue drawing of flowers, animals and landscapes. A few were drawn colorfully, combined gold inlaid on the decoration.
Bowl	1731	This was a large number, different sizes from 7cm to 15cm in diameter. Decorative patterns are mainly painted in blue on the outer wall and bottom with floral and animal themes, a few are smooth.
Container	1501	The containers include kettles, vases, jars which used in daily life; some used in religion such as vial of vial, kendi. In the group, jars in spherical shaped painted with flowers or plain decorating accounted for a large number of 1376 artifacts. Especially, there were some vases shaped like animals such as birds, fish, turtles, monkeys, toads.
Small boxes	1146	They have spherical shaped, an average diameter of 5cm to 8cm and were shaped like a mangosteen fruit, or petal-shaped, flattened sphere. Decorative patterns are mainly blue drawings of flowers, animals, and human landscapes.
Others	05	There are some blocks of dent and chip plates and cups that were stuck together due to fire in shipwreck.

These ceramic artifacts reflect the development of export ceramics with rich glaze colors, designs and patterns; creating a distinct tradition of Vietnamese ceramics. This was a spectacularly demonstration that Vietnamese ceramics was participation in asian international trade in the fifteen and early sixteen century (John Guy 2005, 107).

Cà Mau shipwreck collection

A shipwreck was found in the sea of Cà Mau province, coordinates at N7o41'12" latitude and E105o29'18" longitude. The excavation were carried out from August 1998 to October 1999. Nearly 1130,000 items recovered were ceramics, including blue-and-white or multi-colored glaze, possibly from Chinese pottery such as Jingdezhen (Jiangxi) and Guangzhou (Nguyen Dinh Chien 2005, 359). Notably, there were some European-style porcelains such as milk bottles, wine jugs with handles, plates

decorated with flowers and a Dutch landscape. Inscriptions on some objects suggest that they were probably made under the Yongzheng reign (Chinese character: ‘雍正’), Qing Dynasty (1723-1735).

On 25 June 2002, the Museum received 1051 artifacts from the Ba Ria - Vung Tau Museum. From 2002 up to now, this collection has added 363 artifacts from the following sources: the customs police transferred and the museum collected, bringing the total number of collections to 1,414 objects.



Figure 2. Some objects of Ca Mau shipwreck collection in the Museum

These objects were used in daily life: 1333 artifacts including cups, bowls, plates, kettles, dishes, ewers. Decorative patterns are mainly Chinese traditional arts such as flower, landscapes. Group of flat round chalk boxes painted with stylized flowers and leaves: 54 artifacts. Several statues: human shaped, horse-riding mandarins shaped, toad shaped: 25 artifacts.

Hòn Cau shipwreck collection

The Hon Cau shipwreck was located under 40 meters of water, and was submerged in the sand layer from 0.6m to 1m, about 15km from Hon Cau island. The shipwreck was excavated in 1990 - 1991, obtained 63,856 artifacts including: 28,556 ceramics, 34,710 porcelains, 70 stonewares, 448 bronzes, 18 wooden objects, 25 other material artifacts and 39 specimens (Nguyen Quoc Hung 2005, 293).

On 23 January 1995, the Museum received 229 artifacts which were delivered by Ba Ria - Vung Tau. Before that, in 1993, the Museum had received 97 objects of this collection from the Fine Arts Museum. In addition, the Museum also collects more objects from different sources, so far this collection now has 418 artifacts.

The main of collection are traditional Chinese ceramics and Chinese ceramics according to European orders. The dating were in Kangxi Emperor (Chinese character: ‘康熙’), Qing Dynasty (1654-1722). Traditional Chinese motifs such as chrysanthemums, orchids, peonies, and landscapes are arranged in diagonal, vertical or subdivision strips. European-style themes are the way of drawing flowers and leaves with criss-cross lines, checkered, a type of decoration on 18th century European fabric and silk (Nguyen Dinh Chien, Pham Quoc Quan 2008, 25-27).



Figure 3. Some of objects of Hòn Cau shipwreck collection in the Museum.

Most of the artifacts were chipped because the ceramic was thin and light, so they are easy to be damaged and impacted by external forces. A few were in fairly intact condition with little intrusion of sea salt.

Hòn Dầm (Kien Giang) shipwreck collection

The shipwreck was found at a depth of ten metres below the sea surface, five kilometres far from the shore of Dầm Island (Hòn Dầm in Vietnamese) in Kiên Giang province; coordinates at N9o59'00' latitude and E104o02'00' longitude. More than 16,000 ceramics have been found, mostly celadon and brown glaze, such as Sawankhalok ceramics and Sukhothai ceramics dating back to the fifteen century.



Figure 4. Hòn Dầm shipwreck ceramics: Sawankhalok (left), Sukhothai (right).

Some reflect the Vietnamese blue-and-white styles such as boxes, kendi, lidded jars painted blue flowers on white enamel. Some other large celadon bowls reflect the style of the Southern Song dynasty (南宋 1127–1279) in South China.

This collection is not as large and rich as the above collections, with only 217 artifacts, but it is also possible to review a full representation of the types which were excavated in Hòn Dầm shipwreck.

Part 2: PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION

Preservation: Since 1993, when the first excavated artifacts from the shipwreck was carried out, the museum has made efforts in classifying, inventorying and building storage areas for these special collections. In particular, the Cu Lao Cham collection is the largest collection: we have built a distinguished storage which separates the excavated artifacts from other collections. The artifacts are classified by period and type for better management.



Figure 5. Cu Lao Cham storage view (top), Checking and detecting the damaged objects by salt intrusion (middle), Treatment method (bottom)

However, due to the limited staff of experts in underwater archeology, lack of knowledge in preservation about UCH objects, the museum preservation work faces certain difficulties. Currently, we have only one person for the management of this collection which also makes us haven't done well in taking care of the collection, some damaged artifacts haven't been detected and treated in time.

In training: Every year in Vietnam, museum staff are allowed to participate in many training courses on preserving objects which are organized by the Department of Heritage as well as international organizations such as ICCROM. They gave us the knowledge of basic preservation on various materials such as wooden, bronze, stone, textile, ceramic. But the limitation of foreign languages was a barrier that prevented us from accessing cooperation and training projects of foreign experts/organizations.

Technically equipment condition: Artifacts are managed and kept by a wooden cabinets and shelves system and don't have specialized equipment for preservation attached. The management and care of artifacts is done mainly by manual methods.

Preservation treatment: Because this is a specific type of excavated artifacts, of which they were soaked in sea for a long time, so a huge amount of salt has been accumulated in the ceramic core. The management by manual methods couldn't control the damaged artifacts. Every year, the museum's preservation team regularly treats this problem by soaking these damaged objects in fresh water and exchanging water many times until the salt inside object amounts gets low. Each batch, we perform an average immersion of about 100 artifacts for a period of about three months with many water changes.

The preservation team has treated heavy damaged artifacts by desalination methods in fresh water. For the remaining ones, we managed by regular checking without technical equipment supporting. We realized that we still didn't have a good way to preserve and developed a roadmap for the sustainable preservation of this UCH collection.

Promotion

From 1993 to 2000, the Museums were assigned to manage the collections and built a plan to display this collection to people. The museum also has carried out many exhibitions and displayed at the Museum. In addition, the Museum also performs well in coordinating exhibitions at many other museums in the country and abroad.

Exhibition in Vietnam: At beginning, the Museum mainly carried out thematic introduction of artifacts from shipwrecks in Vietnam Sea. The exhibition attracted the attention of the people in the city. In the following years, the Museum collaborated with other museums such as Hue Royal Museum, Khanh Hoa Museum to display on the sea festivals occasion. This was a good occasion for UCH artifacts to be widely introduced to the public and international visitors.

In recent years, with strong development of various digital initiatives, access to information on underwater archeology has helped the Museum update its display methods and build the story in exhibition. The display content have not only introduced objects in UCH collection, but has more scientific research to outline the itinerary, location of the ship, and the role of Vietnamese sea in international trade.

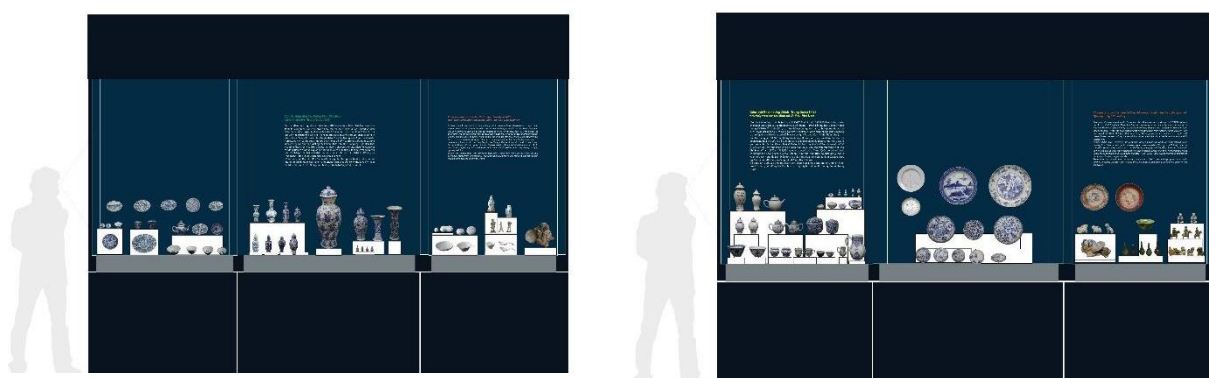


Figure 6. Market exhibiting thematic "Trading ceramics on the East Sea trade route" at History Museum in 2022

Abroad exhibition: Cu Lao Cham shipwreck ceramics collection is not only a large underwater heritage collection of the Museum, it's also a Vietnamese particularly famous export ceramic in the fifteen century. In 2009, its ceramics were displayed at the Houston Fine Arts Museum - USA with the theme "Arts of Ancient Vietnam" (Nancy Tingley 2009, 292-298). In 2010, some of them were displayed in Busan - Korea with the theme "Vietnam from the Hong River to the Mekong" on the occasion of the

fifteen anniversary of the twinning between the two cities of Busan and Ho Chi Minh. (Busan Museum 2010).

Part 3: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Since the Convention for the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage was established in 2001 by UNESCO. Many coastal countries that owned UCH have developed the Protection of Underwater Cultural and education programs. Some countries in Asia have been doing well, they are Korea, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore. In Vietnam, with 30 years history, the field of underwater archeology was still in the formative stage and had a lot of difficulties. Currently, there is only an underwater archeology institution with some staff and has difficulties in operating funding which compared to the rich marine resources and the underwater cultural heritage. Research articles on underwater archeology are still modest compared to other research contents on culture and history. Every year, the Vietnam Archeology Institute publishes new archaeological discoveries, the number of articles about UCH accounts is small. Statistics are as follows: in 2018 there were 11/322 articles, in 2019 there were 11/360 articles, in 2020 there were 15/339 articles, in 2021 there were 18/349 articles².

In our museum case, as presented in part two, we realize that our efforts have not been able to preserve and promote the UCH collection well. In preservation, our difficulties are lack of knowledge, experience, facilities, and funding for management UCH collection. In the exhibition and promotion, the total number of UCH artifacts displayed on the museum's exhibition system is small, about 250 artifacts, accounting for 3.6 percent of the Museum UCH collection. Although we have made great efforts to communicate about UCH, we have found that public awareness of underwater heritage is still limited. For changing, there should be synchronous policies and programs from the government, education system and research agencies.

Underwater cultural heritage is not only the property of the countries that own it, but has become a world heritage. Measures, policies, and the very implementation of maritime cultural heritage policies need to align with the overall global developments and not just Vietnamese, but scholars from any Asia-Pacific regions, must work together with regional partners who might share similar challenges. Therefore, we realized that positive value from international programs to protect underwater heritage and these activities need to be continued on a more national scale. It's necessary in building awareness of underwater heritage for countries. In our museum case, we think that we were late to access international programs on UCH, we have missed several opportunities to absorb knowledge and experience from many countries around the world. We also found that the collaborations abroad exhibiting underwater heritage was a good and meaningful activity in disseminating heritage outside the country which we have previously collaborated with Busan Museum and Houston Fine Arts Museum. Our collection is quite large and we are ready for exhibitions not only abroad but also in the country.

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