



Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Urbanizing Vietnam: A Case Study of Bamboo Basket Weaving in Xuan Thoi Son

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Abstract

Amidst the accelerating pace of urbanization in contemporary Vietnam, traditional handicrafts—once integral to rural life and cultural identity—are facing unprecedented decline. This article investigates the case of bamboo basket weaving in Xuan Thoi Son Commune, Hoc Mon District, Ho Chi Minh City, a traditional craft with over a century of historical continuity. Employing a multidisciplinary qualitative approach grounded in cultural history and ethnographic fieldwork, the study explores the historical evolution, socio-cultural functions, and present challenges confronting the craft. Data were collected through archival analysis, direct observation, and in-depth interviews with local artisans and officials. The findings reveal a sharp contraction in production, declining transmission of artisanal knowledge, market instability, and limited institutional support. Despite these challenges, the study identifies promising avenues for integrating the craft into community-based tourism, cultural heritage conservation, and sustainable local development. The article contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Southeast Asia, while also offering practical policy recommendations to revitalize endangered craft traditions in urbanizing contexts.

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Introduction

Vietnam is widely acknowledged for its rich tapestry of traditional crafts and cultural diversity. Among these, rural handicraft villages constitute a vital element of both tangible and intangible heritage, reflecting historical continuity, community identity, and economic resilience. However, the contemporary wave of industrialization and urbanization has significantly disrupted this heritage. Urban expansion into peri-urban and rural zones has triggered land-use pressures, labor shifts, and the decline of traditional livelihoods (Trần Minh Yên, 2004).

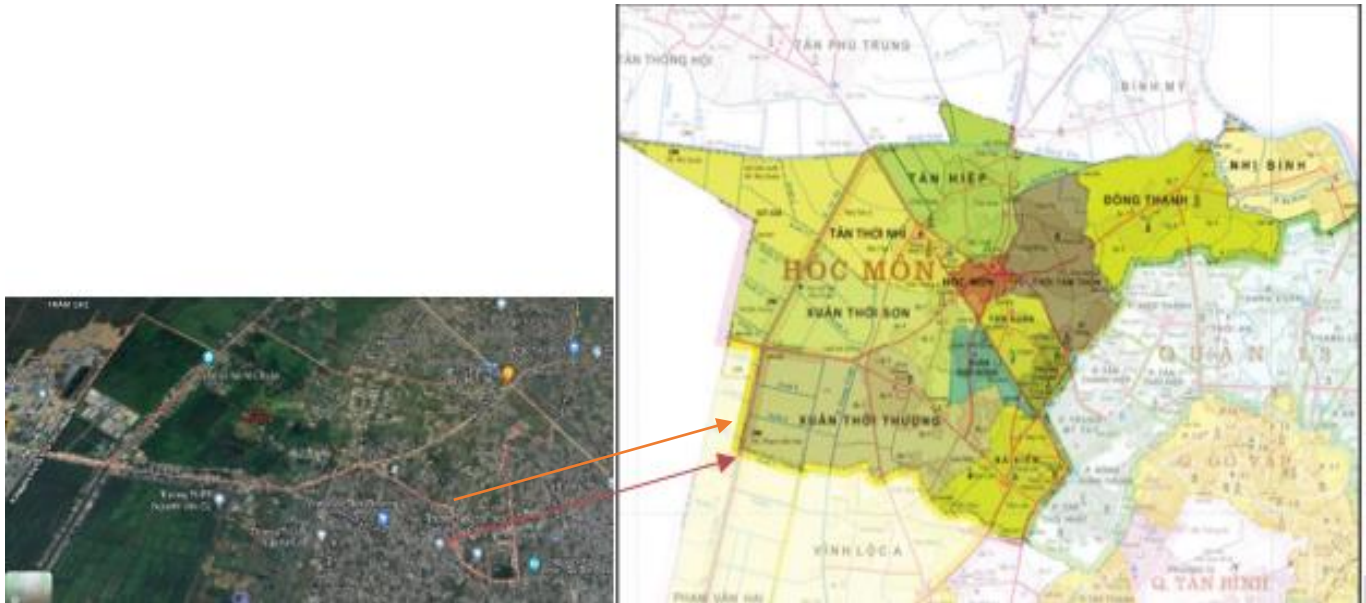
Ho Chi Minh City accounts for merely 0.6% of Vietnam's total land area but accommodates 6.6% of the national population (Ho Chi Minh City E-Portal, 2020). With a natural area of 2,095.239 square kilometers, it is the most densely populated urban center in the country, with a population of 8,993,082 recorded in 2019 (General Statistics Office, 2020 ^[3], p. 345). As of 2022, the city is administratively divided into 22 district-level units, comprising one sub-city (Thu Duc), sixteen urban districts, and five outlying rural districts: Binh Chanh, Can Gio, Cu Chi, Hoc Mon, and Nha Be.

Hoc Mon District, established more than 300 years ago, has been historically intertwined with the formation and spatial expansion of Ho Chi Minh City. At present, the district spans an area of 109.17 square kilometers and comprises one township and eleven communes, namely: Hoc Mon Township, and the communes of Dong Thanh, Ba Diem, Nhi Binh, Tan Thoi Nhi, Tan Hiep, Tan Xuan, Thoi Tam Thon, Trung Chanh, Xuan Thoi Son, Xuan Thoi Thuong, and Xuan Thoi Dong.

Xuan Thoi Son commune is located in the central part of Hoc Mon District. It borders Hoc Mon Township, Tan Xuan and Tan Thoi Dong communes to the east; Tan Thoi Nhi to the north; Tan Thoi Thuong to the south; and My Hanh commune of Duc Hoa District, Long An Province, to the west. This is one of the topographically higher subregions of the city, historically characterized by scattered forest ecosystems that were particularly conducive to the growth of plant species in the bamboo and neohouzeaua families. Although these

bamboo groves have now largely vanished—surviving mainly in home gardens of a few households—they remain a living indicator of the once-abundant supply of raw materials essential to the traditional craft economy. Geographically, the commune extends along an east–west axis and is traversed by regional transport arteries linking Ho Chi Minh City with Tay Ninh and Long An provinces.

The traditional basket weaving village is situated in Xuan Thoi Son commune, Hoc Mon District, Ho Chi Minh City.



(Source: bandovietnam.com.vn and google.com/maps)

Fig 1: Map of Hoc Mon District and Xuan Thoi Son Commune

This study aims to analyze the historical evolution, socio-cultural value, and present challenges of bamboo basket weaving in Xuan Thoi Son. It further proposes integrated solutions for revitalizing the craft in alignment with cultural preservation and sustainable development frameworks. In particular, the paper emphasizes:

- The embedded historical and cultural significance of the craft as a form of intangible heritage;
- The multifaceted impacts of urbanization on the viability of traditional practices;
- The strategic role of community-based tourism and policy innovation in the craft's preservation.

Research questions guiding this study include:

1. What intangible cultural values are embodied in the bamboo basket weaving tradition of Xuan Thoi Son?
2. In what ways has urbanization influenced the continuity of the craft and the structure of local livelihoods?
3. What interdisciplinary strategies can effectively safeguard the craft while promoting economic revitalization and cultural sustainability?

By bridging ethnographic insights and development policy discourse, this article contributes to contemporary debates on heritage conservation, local identity, and grassroots resilience within rapidly urbanizing contexts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a multidisciplinary methodology grounded in cultural history, ethnographic fieldwork, and the theory of intangible cultural heritage. It is further supported by policy

analysis to examine the historical trajectory, cultural transformation, and heritage value of the bamboo basket weaving village in Xuan Thoi Son Commune (Hoc Mon District). The objective is to assess both the evolution and the prospects for preservation of this craft amid the pressures of contemporary urbanization.

The research draws on three primary categories of source material:

1. Ethnographic field data, collected during site-based surveys in Xuan Thoi Son Commune, particularly in hamlets 2, 4, and 6—areas where vestiges of traditional basketry practices remain. Participant observation was accompanied by field notes and photographic documentation to analyze the production environment, tools, raw materials, and the rhythms of daily craft life.
2. Oral histories and semi-structured interviews, conducted with senior artisans, community members, local cultural officials, and district administrators. These narratives offer insight into collective memory, artisanal skill transmission, and socio-economic dynamics that have influenced the development and decline of the craft over time.
3. Secondary sources, comprising government reports on craft village development (2013–2022), policy documents related to rural restructuring and urban expansion, and academic literature on traditional crafts, intangible heritage, and sustainable development in peri-urban southern Vietnam.

Conceptual Research Framework

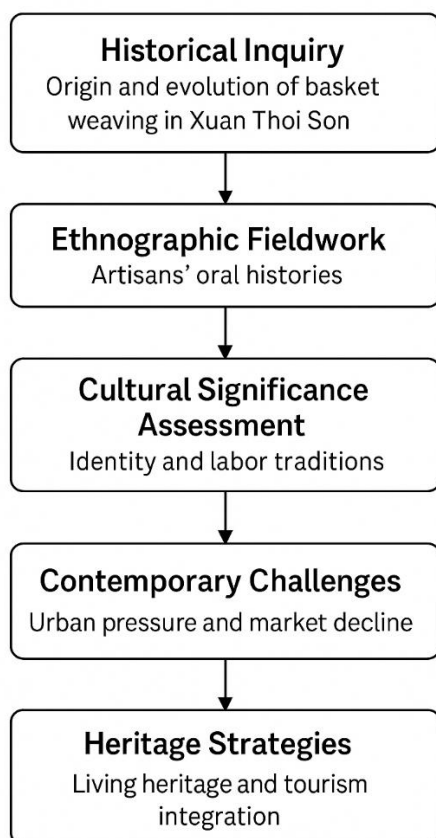


Fig 2: Conceptual research framework illustrating the progression from historical inquiry to applied heritage strategies in Xuan Thoi Son's bamboo basketry case study.

Data were thematically coded and subjected to source criticism, allowing for cross-verification between institutional narratives and vernacular memory. This triangulation of evidence supports a historically grounded, culturally nuanced interpretation of the craft's transformation.

Results

1. Historical Formation and Development of the Traditional Basket Weaving Craft in Xuan Thoi Son Commune, Hoc Mon District

Historically, in addition to wet rice cultivation, the inhabitants of Xuan Thoi Son Commune practiced the traditional craft of bamboo basket weaving, locally referred to as *đan giỏ trạc*. Although the precise origins of this craft remain undocumented, oral testimonies from elderly residents—many over the age of 80—attest that it was already practiced in their youth. It is therefore plausible to suggest that the craft has existed in the locality for at least a century.

The development of the craft has experienced multiple fluctuations, shaped by the broader historical and socio-political context of the region. During periods of armed conflict and political upheaval—especially during the anti-American resistance war, when Hoc Mon was a heavily contested zone—many households were displaced, leading to the temporary cessation of craft production. After the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, basket weaving continued to face challenges under the centrally planned economy,

which emphasized collective labor and industrial output over artisanal traditions.

It is difficult to determine the exact point at which local basketry products began to be commercialized and distributed beyond the commune. Nevertheless, according to oral accounts, by the 1940s and 1950s, local residents were already producing baskets in substantial quantities for sale in nearby regions. Initially, the craft focused on utilitarian items. Over time, however, it diversified to include a broader range of forms and aesthetic qualities—ranging from household containers to more decorative and elaborate pieces.

The primary function of these woven goods was to serve the agricultural economy, particularly for the storage and transportation of vegetables, tubers, and fruits. Given southern Vietnam's prominence as a fruit-producing region, demand for such baskets remained consistently high. In later decades, some households began producing ornamental flower baskets and fine art objects crafted from bamboo or rattan roots, reflecting a higher level of craftsmanship and cultural refinement—though such items remained a minority within the local craft sector.

Prior to 1975, basket weaving had become a widespread livelihood among most households in Xuan Thoi Son, and gradually extended to neighboring communes. Much like Xuan Thoi Thuong—which became known for its pandanus mat weaving—residents of Xuan Thoi Son engaged in this supplementary occupation using locally available raw materials, such as bamboo and rattan. Although officially considered a secondary activity to rice farming, in practice, basket weaving held equal importance in both economic and cultural terms for many families.

In the early post-reunification period, basketry production was reorganized into agricultural and handicraft cooperatives under state control. While these cooperatives initially provided advantages—such as centralized procurement of raw materials and assured distribution—they ultimately proved inefficient in absorbing the total output. There was a brief period during which products were exported to Taiwan, Japan, and several socialist countries; however, these export activities eventually ceased.

Following the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) economic reforms and the dismantling of state-run cooperatives, privately owned craft enterprises began to emerge. Between 1986 and 1995, enterprises such as Phuong Truc, Thanh Truc, Ngoc Hai, and Thai Huy achieved notable commercial success, generating employment and revitalizing craft production in the commune. However, from the early 2000s onwards, these enterprises gradually ceased operations due to intensified market competition and rising input costs. The prices of raw materials and labor increased significantly, while product prices remained largely stagnant.

At present, procurement and distribution are managed primarily by intermediary agents, who differ considerably from both the earlier cooperatives and private firms. These agents do not organize production directly but act as brokers, purchasing products for resale. While this model limits their engagement in the developmental aspects of the craft, it also shields them from financial risk, as they only acquire goods after securing sales contracts.

2. Technical Aspects and Production Processes of the Traditional Basket Weaving Craft in Xuan Thoi Son Commune

2.1. Tools and Implements Used in Production

- **Saw:** A hand-held tool (60–80 cm in length) used to cut raw bamboo and rattan stalks into smaller segments. Depending on the intended basket size, each stalk is divided into two or three sections.
- **Cleaving Knife:** Resembling the traditional Vietnamese *dao dũa* (machete), this tool is used to split strips or trim excess material from the weaving strands.
- **Shaving Knife:** A uniquely shaped blade, similar to the harvesting tools of ethnic minorities in Vietnam's Central Highlands. The L-shaped metal blade is attached to a wooden handle approximately 40 cm in length.
- **Seating Stool:** Usually a low wooden stool; some artisans improvise with old cushions or repurposed motorcycle seats.
- **Wooden Splitting Block:** Made from hardwood logs or stumps, this surface is used for splitting bamboo or rattan strips.
- **Scissors:** Used to trim excess fibers during the weaving process.
- **Pliers (cutting and twisting):** Employed to fasten or cut steel wire, especially for reinforcing basket rims and bases.
- **Electric Drill and Awl:** Used primarily in the production of decorative items, such as flower baskets or card holders, for carving or perforating detailed designs.

2.2. Production Processes and Weaving Techniques

Once raw materials are processed, production begins. The most common product remains the *giỏ trác*—a round-bottomed basket used for storing and transporting fruits and vegetables. These baskets vary significantly in size:

- **Small** (20–30 cm diameter): Often used as decorative flower pots.
- **Medium** (60–80 cm diameter, ~50 cm height): Suitable for everyday utility.
- **Large** (up to 100 cm diameter and over 100 cm height): Used for bulk agricultural transport.

Main production stages include:

- **Segmenting the Raw Material:** Bamboo and rattan (especially rattan due to its pliability) are cut into segments suitable for the intended product. Bamboo, being more rigid, is often reserved for rims.
- **Splitting the Strips:** Stalks are split while still fresh (undried) to maintain flexibility. Using a special knife, artisans slice diagonally with minimal force, then continue manually. Each stalk yields 4 to 10 strips, depending on the desired width.
- **Shaving the Strips:** The inner porous core is shaved to reduce stiffness and weight, improving flexibility. Both edges are smoothed to avoid sharpness. While experienced artisans often work bare-handed, novices typically wrap cloth around their fingers for protection.

Weaving the Basket:

- **Base Weaving:** Begins at the center and extends outward in a radial pattern (*lóng thừa*), with evenly spaced strips.
- **Shaping the Body:** Once the base reaches the desired diameter, strips are bent upward to form walls. A thicker strip is woven at the base to maintain form.
- **Rim Construction:** Upon completion of the wall height, the rim is reinforced with a sturdy strip. Loose ends are folded horizontally and interwoven in a braided pattern for durability.
- **Structural Reinforcement:** For large or load-bearing baskets, flexible steel wire is added along the rim and base to mimic and support the weave, increasing durability in case of natural material breakage.

2.3. Additional Factors in Craft Production Organization

Raw Materials:

- **Locally sourced:** A limited number of households maintain small bamboo/rattan groves. However, land availability has declined due to urbanization and increased housing density.
- **Procured externally:** Most households purchase materials from nearby areas such as Long An, Cu Chi, or the Mekong Delta. Some producers collect directly; others rely on intermediaries.

Production Space

Most households operate in small-scale workshops (10–20 m²), sufficient for basic production and drying. Larger distributors require additional storage. Some families work indoors, though this raises costs (e.g., lighting, space constraints).

Market Distribution

Products are sold in bulk, often hundreds per order, based on informal verbal agreements with middlemen or wholesale agents. Timely delivery is critical, typically using rented trucks. In cases of shortfall, producers may borrow baskets from relatives to meet quotas.

Distribution channels were historically diverse. In Ho Chi Minh City, *giỏ trác* were widely used in wholesale markets—especially those trading in vegetables, flowers, dried fish, or noodles. They were also repurposed as decorative planters. Orders were made directly or through intermediaries.

In rural provinces—especially the Mekong Delta and Central Highlands—these baskets were indispensable for fruit and vegetable transport. Orders were often placed through informal networks.

Remarkably, during the 1980s, international buyers from countries like Australia and Taiwan placed large orders for medium- and large-sized *giỏ trác* baskets, particularly for agricultural produce such as potatoes and melons (Ton Nu Quynh Tran, 2002 pp. 232–233)^[14].



Raw materials (bamboo, rattan) stored at a local artisan's household



Semi-finished bamboo baskets in the production process



Finished traditional bamboo baskets produced by artisans in Xuan Thoi Son Village

(Source: Dao Vinh Hop)



Decorative flower baskets, a product previously crafted by the village

Fig 3, 4, 5, 6: Raw materials and typical products from the traditional bamboo basket weaving craft village in Xuan Thoi Son Commune, Hoc Mon District, Ho Chi Minh City.

3. Evaluation of the Value, Significance, and Current Development Status of the Traditional Basket Weaving Craft Village in Xuan Thoi Son

3.1. Significance of the Traditional Craft Village to the Local Economy, Culture, and Society

Traditional craft villages embody multiple layers of cultural, historical, and socio-economic significance. They function not only as centers of livelihood and social organization but also as repositories of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The *giỏ trạc* basket weaving village in Xuan Thoi Son Commune exemplifies the vitality and creativity of local artisanal traditions. It represents a site of cultural convergence, where Northern and Central Vietnamese values have harmoniously blended with indigenous Southern

customs, contributing to the rich and diverse cultural mosaic of Ho Chi Minh City.

Historically, *giỏ trạc* weaving played a pivotal role in the local economy by providing livelihoods and enhancing household income. In a region with limited arable land for rice cultivation, this supplementary craft served as a crucial economic buffer for many families. Without the presence of this traditional occupation, numerous households would have faced significant economic vulnerability.

Following Vietnam's reunification in 1975, nearly all households in Xuan Thoi Son participated in this craft, underscoring its importance as a primary source of income at the time. Beyond its economic function, basket weaving also transmitted deep-rooted cultural and social values. It

cultivated a sense of discipline, resilience, and industriousness among community members. Labor was not merely a necessity but an integrated aspect of everyday life—blurring the boundaries between work and leisure in a way that animated village life and fostered collective identity. In earlier decades, the craft formed part of the symbolic identity of a revolutionary homeland, with bamboo and rattan serving as powerful emblems of perseverance and adaptability. In contemporary contexts, despite the pressures of urbanization, the tradition still evokes a rustic charm and quiet dignity. It offers a cultural counterpoint to the rapid pace of urban life in Ho Chi Minh City, symbolizing authenticity, humility, and rootedness.

Over time, the village has preserved its core artisanal values. All production stages remain manual, resulting in visually distinctive and skillfully crafted products that reflect the ingenuity of local artisans. Moreover, the materials employed—bamboo and rattan—are biodegradable and renewable, aligning the craft with contemporary ideals of ecological sustainability. In this sense, the *giỏ trạc* weaving tradition contributes not only to cultural continuity but also to environmentally responsible development.

3.2. Management, Conservation, and Promotion of the Traditional Craft Village in Hoc Mon District

Among the 19 officially recognized traditional craft villages currently operating in Ho Chi Minh City, eight have been designated for preservation under Decision No. 3891, which approved the “Scheme for the Conservation and Development of Craft Villages in Ho Chi Minh City for the Period 2013–2015, with Orientation to 2020.” The *giỏ trạc* basket weaving village in Xuan Thoi Son (Hoc Mon District) is one of four craft villages that maintain distinct cultural traditions yet are assessed as unable to develop independently. In response, the People’s Committee of Ho Chi Minh City assigned the Hoc Mon District authorities to design and implement a dedicated conservation and development project for this village (People’s Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, 2013) ^[10].

Hoc Mon District has made consistent efforts to preserve and revitalize the craft. In collaboration with the Xuan Thoi Son Commune People’s Committee, the district’s Economic Office conducted a field survey of 40 weaving households to identify needs for financial and technical support. The initiative aimed to promote investment in modern production equipment through subsidized loan schemes linked to the city’s urban agricultural restructuring program (2017–2020). However, most surveyed households declined the loans or refrained from expanding production due to the absence of stable market demand.

In 2019, the Ho Chi Minh City People’s Committee approved the “One Commune, One Product” (OCOP) program for rural areas, with implementation planned through 2020. As part of the program, six key agricultural products and six representative craft items were selected from six traditional villages—including *giỏ trạc* baskets from Xuan Thoi Son—as priority products for further development (Office of the People’s Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, 2019).

Most recently, in 2021, the Hoc Mon District People’s Committee conducted a comprehensive assessment of the district’s tourism development potential. This was followed by the implementation of Project No. 01-DA/HU (dated April 8, 2021), issued by the Hoc Mon District Party Executive

Committee, titled “Tourism Development Strategy for Hoc Mon District, 2020–2025, with Vision to 2030.” One of the core strategic orientations of the plan is the integration and promotion of traditional craft villages as cultural and economic assets within the district’s tourism offerings.

These overlapping policies and initiatives—at both municipal and district levels—reflect ongoing efforts to safeguard and promote the cultural, economic, and heritage value of the *giỏ trạc* basket weaving tradition in Xuan Thoi Son.

3.3. Transformation and Decline of the Giỏ Trạc Basket Weaving Village in Xuan Thoi Son

Amid rapid industrialization and modernization, traditional craft villages across Ho Chi Minh City have undergone profound structural transformations. According to the *Vietnam Craft Village E-Journal* (2021), approximately 60 sub-sectors of small-scale handicraft production remain active, concentrated in 19 officially recognized villages. While a few of these have adapted and thrived, many others face the critical risk of decline or complete disappearance.

Since the early 2010s, signs of deterioration have become increasingly visible. Formerly vibrant production hubs—such as the Thai My weaving village and the Phu Hoa Dong rice paper village in Cu Chi District—have entered periods of stagnation. Their sustainability is now uncertain, undermined by rapid urban expansion, land conversion for real estate development, and the declining interest of younger generations in continuing these traditions. In some cases, entire craft villages have vanished—such as the rattan basket weaving village in Mui Lon (Tan An Hoi, Cu Chi)—leaving no collective memory among either longtime residents or newer migrants.

In Xuan Thoi Son Commune, the *giỏ trạc* weaving tradition survives in only a few dozen households, primarily located in hamlets 2, 4, and 6 (People’s Committee of Hoc Mon District, 2021). The craft’s physically intensive nature—associated with repetitive strain, hand injuries, and income instability—has deterred younger individuals from inheriting the profession. As a result, current practitioners are mostly older adults (aged 50–60), many of whom engage in weaving during leisure time as a form of supplementary income. Given its moderate physical demands, the craft is now mainly practiced by retirees and housewives in rural households.

The trade faces mounting challenges in both material procurement and product marketing. Land previously allocated to bamboo and rattan cultivation has been largely converted for urban development, forcing artisans to rely on external raw material sources from provinces such as Long An and areas within the Mekong Delta. Material prices have risen sharply: high-grade bamboo now costs between 18,000 and 28,000 VND per stalk, while lower-grade bamboo has increased from 10,000 to 14,000 VND. In contrast, the market price for finished baskets remains stagnant, ranging from only 7,000 to 15,000 VND per unit. Monthly output is modest—approximately 3,000 to 4,000 units—and products are primarily distributed through intermediaries supplying the Binh Dien wholesale market (Nha Nam, 2021).

This economic imbalance has rendered artisanal livelihoods increasingly precarious, with average monthly incomes totaling only a few million VND. The lack of financial viability has driven many households to abandon the craft. Product diversity has significantly diminished; whereas the village once produced ornamental flower baskets and

bamboo-root handicrafts, it now focuses almost exclusively on utilitarian *giỏ trạc* baskets for agricultural transport.

The current condition of the craft reflects not only economic vulnerability but also the broader erosion of intangible cultural heritage. Without timely and strategic intervention—in the form of institutional support, targeted market development, and intergenerational knowledge transmission—the risk of irreversible decline remains imminent.

4. Proposed Solutions

Like many other traditional crafts in Ho Chi Minh City and Hoc Mon District, the *giỏ trạc* basket weaving village of Xuan Thoi Son has experienced alternating periods of prosperity and decline. To effectively safeguard and revitalize this unique form of intangible cultural heritage, a multidimensional approach is required—encompassing policy reform, institutional engagement, market development, and active community participation.

4.1. Strengthening Institutional and Policy Frameworks for Craft Village Preservation

Given the increasing threat of cultural erosion, the preservation of the *giỏ trạc* weaving tradition in Xuan Thoi Son demands coordinated action from both national and local authorities. The State plays a pivotal role in facilitating strategic interventions—especially in promoting cultural products, improving market access, and restoring confidence among producers.

Although various macro-level policies have been enacted to support the integration of craft villages into the market economy, there remains a notable lack of micro-level initiatives tailored to the specific conditions of local communities. Critical areas—such as land-use planning, irrigation systems, environmental protection, and raw material sourcing—require proactive state involvement, as these matters fall beyond the capacity of individual households (Pham Quoc Su, 2002 ^[11], p. 47).

Field assessments indicate that local artisans are in urgent need of support, particularly in securing capital for raw material procurement and identifying stable market outlets. The persistently low selling price of *giỏ trạc* baskets has contributed to declining income levels and weakened interest among younger generations. To address these challenges, targeted government assistance is needed—including low-interest credit lines, input subsidies, technical training programs, and, most crucially, robust support for market development.

Establishing consistent and diversified market access is a top priority. Once demand is secured, producers can confidently invest in improving product quality, diversifying designs, integrating new technologies, and adopting pest-resistant treatment techniques. Local authorities should also assist producers in forming cooperatives or establishing trade promotion offices capable of facilitating export opportunities and connecting with broader value chains.

Equally vital is the need to enhance the visibility of the craft in both domestic and international markets. This can be achieved through regular participation in trade exhibitions, cultural festivals, and tourism events that emphasize the aesthetic, ecological, and cultural value of *giỏ trạc* baskets. Promoting heritage-linked products can also serve as a catalyst for the development of cultural tourism in the area.

At the community level, artisans must adopt an active role not only as producers but also as custodians of cultural knowledge and potential contributors to rural tourism. Ongoing efforts in technical specialization, knowledge transmission, and intergenerational training are essential to ensure the vitality and sustainability of the craft in the face of ongoing urbanization and economic restructuring.

4.2. Integrating the Preservation of the Giỏ Trạc Basket Weaving Village with the Promotion of Hoc Mon's Cultural Heritage in Tourism Development

Hoc Mon District is a region rich in historical and cultural traditions. It is widely recognized as the homeland of the legendary “18 Betel Garden Hamlets” (*18 Thôn Vườn Trầu*), an emblematic symbol of southern Vietnamese rural heritage. According to the report delivered at the *Hoc Mon Tourism Development Forum* on October 7, 2022, the district is home to nine classified historical and cultural monuments. Among these are three key sites related to the Cochinchina Uprising of November 23, 1940: the National Historic Site of Nga Ba Giang; the Historic–Cultural Site of the Former District Chief Office of Hoc Mon (commemorating the Nam Ky Uprising); and the City-Level Historic Site of the Southern Regional Party Committee Conference in September 1940 (People's Committee of Hoc Mon District, 2022).

Hoc Mon also serves as a cultural stronghold for *Đờn ca tài tử* (Southern Amateur Music), a UNESCO-recognized form of intangible cultural heritage. The district is home to several prominent tourist destinations, including Hoang Phap Pagoda (which holds three national records and draws tens of thousands of visitors annually), H2O Villa Resort, Rin Rin Park with its koi garden, and various flower-themed rural attractions. Additionally, the area preserves multiple traditional craft villages, such as the mat weaving village of Xuan Thoi Thuong, the betel and areca nut village of Ba Diem, the rice noodle village of Tan Hiep, and other artisanal workshops.

Geographically, Hoc Mon benefits from its proximity to the Saigon River, adjacency to Binh Duong Province and District 12, an extensive network of canals, relatively clean air, and a hospitable local community. These advantages have contributed to recent growth in the district's tourism sector. In the first nine months of 2022 alone, more than one million visitors explored its cultural and historical sites during national holidays and special events (Phong Nguyen, 2022). Each traditional craft village serves as a cultural marker, embodying localized knowledge systems, community identity, and artisanal creativity. Integrating craft production with tourism development is not only a contemporary trend but also a proven model successfully implemented in other regions of Vietnam. Craft villages can evolve into “living museums,” offering immersive experiences that attract cultural and experiential tourists.

If adequately preserved and promoted, the *giỏ trạc* basket weaving village in Xuan Thoi Son could emerge as a compelling cultural tourism destination. This integration would enhance the district's tourism portfolio, increase consumption of locally produced goods, and improve household livelihoods. A dynamic tourism sector can help sustain traditional crafts by generating steady demand for handmade products, thereby incentivizing artisans to maintain their practice and transmit skills to younger generations.

Importantly, the geographical location of Xuan Thoi Son is highly favorable for such integration. The commune lies within an 18-kilometer radius—approximately 40 minutes by car—from major cultural landmarks, including Nga Ba Giong, the “18 Betel Garden Hamlets,” the Southern Regional Party Committee Conference site (September 1940), the Former District Chief Office of Hoc Mon, and Hoang Phap Pagoda. This spatial proximity enables the design of multi-stop cultural routes that seamlessly connect craft heritage with broader tourism infrastructure.

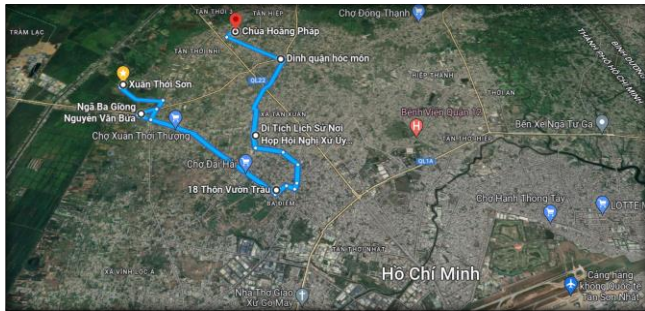


Fig 7: Illustrative map of the distance between Xuan Thoi Son basket weaving village and key tourist destinations in Hoc Mon District

(Source: Author's compilation based on Google Maps)

To successfully link tourism with cultural preservation, it is essential to design and implement craft tourism itineraries that allow visitors to engage directly with the village—observing weaving techniques, participating in hands-on workshops, and purchasing locally made products. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance marketing and communication strategies, forge partnerships with tour operators, and improve the thematic cohesion and quality of tourism products—including community-based, craft-focused, spiritual, and recreational tourism.

Finally, local authorities should encourage investment from private enterprises in tourism-related infrastructure and services. These efforts will help build a more dynamic, resilient, and sustainable tourism ecosystem—rooted in cultural heritage—thereby contributing to both economic revitalization and the long-term survival of traditional craft villages such as Xuan Thoi Son.

4.3. Integrated Solutions: Harmonizing Preservation and Development

Vietnam, as an agrarian nation, holds immense potential in the domain of small-scale handicraft production—comparable to countries such as India, Japan, China, Taiwan, Thailand, and Indonesia. Rooted in local ecological systems and traditional agricultural practices, these handicrafts have historically generated employment, ensured livelihoods, and served as vehicles for preserving and expressing cultural identity. However, unlike its regional counterparts where craft villages have been revitalized to support rural economies and enhance national branding, Vietnam continues to face considerable challenges in sustaining its traditional crafts, especially in peri-urban areas undergoing rapid urbanization (Tran Minh Yen, 2004).

In such transitional regions, the socio-economic base of craft village communities remains fragile and unstable. Development is an objective necessity—crucial for

modernization and social advancement. Yet, reconciling the dual imperatives of heritage preservation and sustainable development places substantial strain on local authorities and communities. Within this framework, safeguarding the traditional values of the *giỏ trạc* weaving craft—alongside promoting the cultural ethos of friendliness, hospitality, and ethical conduct embedded in Hoc Mon's social fabric—must be approached as interdependent, mutually reinforcing goals. To address these challenges effectively, a multi-dimensional, cross-sectoral strategy is essential—engaging local administrators, heritage conservation specialists, tourism planners, and, most critically, the artisan community itself. The bearers of traditional knowledge must be recognized as active stakeholders in safeguarding cultural continuity. Community awareness programs should emphasize the role of artisans as custodians of intangible heritage and encourage their active participation in heritage transmission.

Local strategic planners and tourism policymakers in Hoc Mon must increase their institutional focus on the *giỏ trạc* basket weaving village. Successful revitalization models from other Vietnamese regions—such as Bat Trang (ceramics) or Kim Bong (carpentry)—offer valuable lessons that can be adapted to the unique context of Xuan Thoi Son. Scientific research should be conducted to systematically document the socio-cultural and economic significance of the craft, providing a foundation for evidence-based planning and targeted policy interventions.

Simultaneously, public-private partnerships must be strengthened. Collaboration with tourism enterprises, travel agencies, and cultural service providers will be instrumental in designing integrated tourism offerings that incorporate craft heritage. Their expertise can facilitate the development of locally branded tourism products, preserving authenticity while enhancing commercial viability.

Investment in supporting infrastructure is also essential. Hoc Mon District, and Xuan Thoi Son specifically, should prioritize improvements in transport access, urban aesthetics, environmental conservation, and human resource development. The introduction of craft-themed tourism routes, culturally curated tour packages, and experiential activities—such as participatory weaving workshops—can significantly enhance tourist engagement and craft visibility. Furthermore, bridging production with consumption through digital transformation is vital. E-commerce platforms and online marketplaces can expand consumer access, particularly among domestic and international buyers seeking eco-friendly, handmade products. Capacity-building initiatives should also target digital literacy, marketing acumen, and foreign language proficiency, particularly for younger residents. Such skill development will enable the new generation to assume an active role in sustaining the village's economic and cultural vitality while adapting to the evolving landscape of heritage tourism.

5. Conclusion

The *giỏ trạc* basket weaving village in Xuan Thoi Son Commune, Hoc Mon District, Ho Chi Minh City, represents a distinctive form of peri-urban cultural heritage in southern Vietnam. It exemplifies the intricate interconnection between traditional livelihoods, ecological adaptation, indigenous knowledge systems, and collective memory. With a legacy spanning over a century, this craft village has contributed not only to the socio-economic sustainability of local residents

but also to the formation of a unique cultural identity in the region once celebrated as the “Eighteen Betel Garden Hamlets” (*18 Thôn Vườn Trầu*).

In the face of accelerating urbanization and socio-economic transformation, the craft is now at a critical juncture. Rather than perceiving its decline as an unavoidable consequence of modernization, it should be understood as an urgent cultural challenge requiring timely and strategic interventions. The preservation and revitalization of this heritage craft must be integrated within broader frameworks for sustainable urban and cultural development—particularly in transitional zones such as Hoc Mon.

Based on empirical findings and theoretical perspectives, this study proposes five core conclusions:

1. The *giỏ trác* craft constitutes a form of intangible cultural heritage of significant historical, social, and anthropological value.
2. Aligned with the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, traditional crafts embody not only technical skills but also knowledge systems, belief structures, and social values passed down intergenerationally (UNESCO, 2003) ^[16]. In Xuan Thoi Son, the basket weaving tradition reflects deep-rooted relationships between humans and natural materials (e.g., bamboo and rattan), modes of rural organization, and community-based knowledge—positioning it as a vital component of “cultural locality” within the discourse of urban sustainability and rural resilience.
3. The craft is undergoing marked decline in labor participation, production volume, and market integration.
4. Today, weaving activities are maintained by a diminishing number of elderly artisans, often on a part-time basis. Product diversity has decreased, markets are unstable, and support mechanisms remain fragmented. The absence of formal cooperatives, rising material costs, and weak intergenerational transmission have further endangered the continuity of the craft. This reflects what Long and Sweet (2006) term “cultural retreat”—the erosion of localized traditions under the pressures of globalization and urban sprawl.
5. Revitalization depends on embedding the craft within creative and community-based tourism models.
6. As emphasized by Timothy and Boyd (2003), the integration of traditional crafts into experiential and heritage tourism offers a viable pathway for economic regeneration and cultural continuity. Xuan Thoi Son holds clear potential for such integration, given its proximity to cultural heritage sites (e.g., Nga Ba Giong, Hoang Phap Pagoda), ecotourism infrastructure, and historical narratives. Tourism linked to heritage craft can enhance livelihoods, promote cultural pride, and serve as an educational tool for intergenerational transmission.
7. The craft village must evolve into a dynamic “living heritage space” rather than be preserved passively.

Following Ashworth’s (2011) concept of active heritage, preservation must be future-oriented, community-driven, and economically viable. Practical initiatives include:

- Establishing a community-based museum and visitor

center;

- Organizing annual craft festivals and intergenerational training events;
- Embedding heritage education into local school curricula;
- Developing *OCOP* (One Commune One Product) certified products;
- Embracing digital tools such as e-commerce platforms and QR code-based product traceability.

Such approaches reposition the craft as both a cultural and economic asset in the context of 21st-century urban planning.

1. Heritage governance must be interdisciplinary and participatory. Effective craft preservation must prioritize bottom-up engagement, where artisans and local communities are not passive recipients but active stewards. As noted by Cohen (1988) and Smith (2006), heritage is constructed through social processes, and its governance should involve inclusive partnerships across state institutions, cultural experts, tourism operators, and grassroots stakeholders. Policies should include legal recognition of artisans as bearers of intangible cultural heritage, along with financial incentives, marketing assistance, and technical training.

Safeguarding the *giỏ trác* weaving tradition is not merely an act of cultural nostalgia but a strategic imperative for inclusive and sustainable urban development. As Hoc Mon progresses toward its long-term goal of becoming an integrated urban administrative unit of Ho Chi Minh City by 2030, the preservation of community-anchored heritage—such as Xuan Thoi Son’s basket weaving village—should be considered a central pillar of a human-centered, ecological, and culturally resilient urban future.

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