



SAVE THE ELEPHANTS

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VIETNAM'S ILLEGAL IVORY TRADE THREATENS AFRICA'S ELEPHANTS

LUCY VIGNE and ESMOND MARTIN



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2016

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ISBN 978-9966-096-76-0

Front cover:

Raw tusks from Africa are being processed illegally in large quantities in northern Vietnam.

Title page:

Common jewellery items such as these are produced especially for the mainland Chinese.

Back cover:

Large quantities of worked ivory are available for sale in northern Vietnam, as seen in this display cabinet, with items for retail sale on top and bags of duplicate ivory items for wholesalers below.

Photographs:

Lucy Vigne:

Front cover, title page, pages 6, 8, 10 right, 12, 14-16, 18, 20-21, 22 right, 24-27, 29-34, 36-44, 46-58, 61-64, 65 right, 66, 67 bottom, 68 bottom, 70-71, 82, 84, back cover

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Published by:

Save the Elephants, PO Box 54667, Nairobi 00200, Kenya

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Abbreviations

BMT	Buon Ma Thuot
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
ETIS	Elephant Trade Information System
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
NGO	non-government organization
US	United States of America
USD	United States dollar





Vietnamese carvers can be skilful at producing ivory items, especially for Chinese and Vietnamese demand.

Executive summary

- The Vietnamese illegal ivory trade is now one of the largest in the world.
- Of all the ivory industries in Asia, Vietnamese carvers have multiplied in number and increased their production of illegal ivory items the most rapidly since 2008.
- Tusks are smuggled into Vietnam, nearly all from Africa, with only a few nowadays from domesticated and wild elephants in Laos and Vietnam.
- In early 2015 the largest proportion of tusks was seized officially in Haiphong; this changed to Danang in the latter half of 2015.
- Wholesale prices for raw tusks in Vietnam were about the same in 2015 as in mainland China, around USD 1,100/kg for a 1-3-kg tusk.
- Historically ivory carving was an insignificant art form in Vietnam.
- While Vietnamese ivory carvers have increased greatly in number, we did not hear of any foreigners working ivory in Vietnam.
- Ivory artisans earn on average USD 260 a month, considerably less than in mainland China.
- We talked to ivory carvers in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), in Buon Ma Thuot and in three northern villages who were optimistic about their business.
- Legislation prohibiting the ivory trade in Vietnam remains unclear. A loophole in the law allows worked ivory crafted before 1992 to be legally sold in Vietnam, although with the current weak law enforcement, nobody mentioned this to us, nor did hardly any vendor mention to us that exports were illegal.
- We saw no posters or other public notices in Vietnam publicizing that the trade in ivory is illegal.
- In HCMC, Hanoi, one town and village in the Central Highlands, and two villages in the north we counted 242 open outlets with 16,099 ivory items on display, for retail sale.
- Of these items, 9,893 (or 61%) were in one northern village that had not been counted before in a survey.
- Nearly all the ivory items for sale in Vietnam are new or recently carved and illegal.
- Vietnam has one of the largest number of newly worked illegal ivory items openly offered for retail sale in the world.
- Most objects are pendants and other small items, usually jewellery.
- There were few ivory antiques, the majority being in HCMC, popular with Chinese customers.
- Hardly any expensive ivory items for retail sale were seen. The most expensive new item was a 17-cm human figure for USD 2,500 in HCMC. The most expensive old items were a carved tusk and a large urn for USD 20,000 each in an antique shop in HCMC.
- The cheapest ivory item was USD 2 for a thin ring in one northern Vietnam village.
- Retail ivory prices for common comparable items were three times more in Beijing and Shanghai than in HCMC and Hanoi and seven times more than in a village selling the most worked ivory seen in Vietnam. This is due to cheaper labour in Vietnam, fewer overheads, and nearly all illegal items for sale that require no expensive paperwork.
- There appears to be little law enforcement within Vietnam against the illegal ivory workshops and retail shops, especially in the smaller locations that few Western foreigners visit.
- Nearly all the customers we saw shopping for ivory were from mainland China; they particularly like to visit Vietnam's northern villages to buy ivory items, both wholesale and retail, as the prices are considerably lower than elsewhere in the country.
- The chances of Chinese being arrested for carrying illegal ivory items crossing the border from Vietnam into China are extremely small due to ineffective law enforcement.
- A growing online illegal ivory trade is expanding

among Vietnamese and mainland Chinese.

- Other elephant products are sold wholesale and retail in Vietnam, especially in the western region nearer to Cambodia and Laos. Products include bones, feet, hairs, meat, molars, skin and tails.
- We saw no raw mammoth ivory and only one item for sale: a pendant.
- In 2008 a detailed survey of Vietnam counted 2,444 ivory items on view for sale. In 2015 our survey found this number had risen by 6.6 times. A main reason was the expansion of ivory carving and sales in one particular village in the north to meet demand from mainland Chinese,

and an increase in ivory items for sale in the Central Highlands area of Buon Ma Thuot to meet demand for the growing number of Asian tourists going there.

- While the illegal rhino horn trade in Vietnam has been heavily criticized, its recently booming ivory trade has been largely overlooked due to a lack of information about it.
- Corruption and mismanagement in Vietnam have abetted this expanding and flourishing illegal ivory trade, allowing retail displays to remain wide open and enabling smuggling of the many Vietnamese-carved illegal new ivory items into mainland China.



Chinese zodiac animal figures make popular ivory pendants.



Ivory carvings, such as this tray, were rare in Vietnam until the 19th century.

History of ivory in Vietnam

Art historians are uncertain when the Vietnamese first started to use ivory in any significant manner within the country. Certain tribal ethnic groups had used a small amount of ivory from the elephants living in the forests around them, some of which they captured and domesticated. The Mngong tribe, for example, are well known historically for wearing ivory earplugs, still seen for sale in antique shops in the main cities, but silver jewellery now is the traditional symbol of wealth in many hill tribes in the region, such as silver necklaces and headdress ornaments. The use of ivory is minor, in comparison.

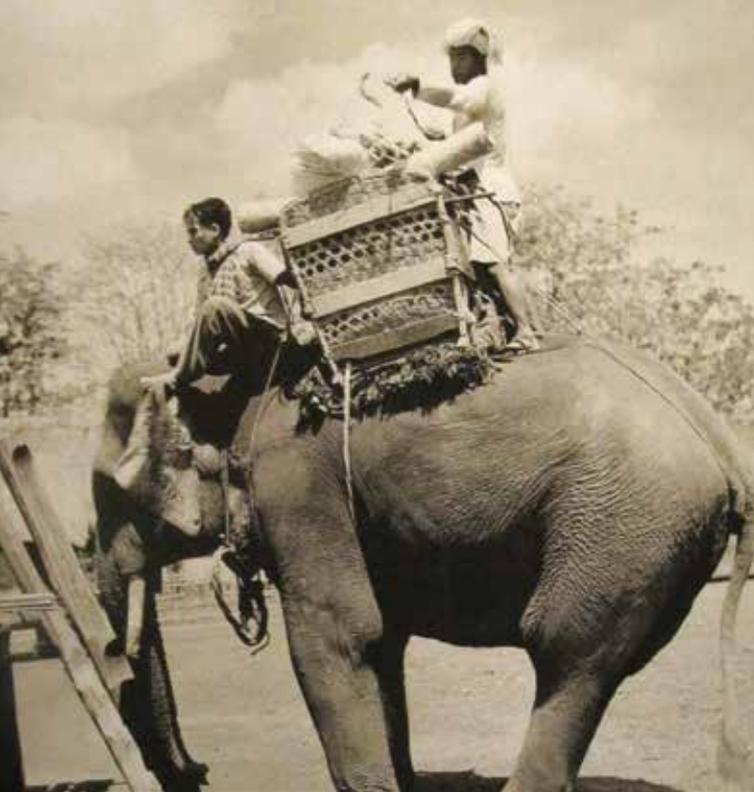
Raw tusks have passed through Vietnam to China for hundreds of years. In the early 15th century King Le Loi of Vietnam sent four pieces of tusk to China as part of a peace pact (Nguyen-Long 2013). The tradition in Vietnam is long, dating back over 1,000 years of Vietnamese artisans carving wood, stone and other materials. But scholars have yet to find any written records that mention ivory artisanship until the 19th century. Most worldwide studies of ivory, such as by Maskell (1905), Kunz (1916) or St Aubyn (1987), omit Vietnam altogether. Instead they describe local ivory production in Japan, China, Philippines, Thailand, Burma, Indonesia, India and Ceylon.

The first published reference we could find mentioning ivory crafted in Vietnam was for a piece of furniture called a *sap* (a low-lying table), which was elaborately inlaid with ivory and dated to the first decades of the

19th century (Nguyen-Long 2013). In 1991 in the History Museum of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), ivory items made in Vietnam in the 19th century were displayed, such as an ivory inlaid bed, ivory inlaid wooden clogs, a spoon, a wooden tray with an ivory brim, and an ivory inlaid zither (survey by Esmond Martin, 1991, unpublished).

The Fine Arts Museum in Hanoi in late 2015 displayed only two ivory items, both 19th century - an ivory inlaid tea tray and a cabinet inlaid with mother of pearl and ivory made by the Kinh ethnic group in the Thua Thien Province of Hue. The History Museum in Hanoi in 2015 had a few small ivory name seals from the French colonial period, but nothing else of ivory on display. Other ivory items mentioned in 19th century literature include boxes with lids and ivory inlaid wooden betel nut boxes (Nguyen-Long 2013). These few items were made for the royal family, aristocrats and other wealthy Vietnamese. It thus appears that ivory played only a very minor part in Vietnam's traditional arts and culture.

The French colonial government (1883-1954) supported the traditional arts and crafts of Vietnam. In 1887 the governor general inaugurated the first exhibition of Vietnamese arts in Hanoi, which included ivory objects (Nguyen-Long 2013). In the 1920s, French colonial administrators wanted religious ivory items (Stiles 2004), and the Chinese elite living in Vietnam also bought Vietnamese ivory objects.



For many years elephants in Vietnam were domesticated for transport, as on the right for the King of Hue.

After the Viet Cong defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, they took over northern Vietnam and nationalized the economy. Nevertheless, some ivory artisans continued to work in ivory. In 1990 Esmond Martin spoke to a 70-year-old Vietnamese carver in Hanoi who had been crafting ivory since 1933. He had learned the profession from his father. In the early 1950s he employed many carvers who worked about 6,000 kg of tusks a year, but after French rule, with the new government takeover of most businesses and with few foreign tourists coming to the country his business had mostly collapsed. By 1990, he was using only 100 kg of ivory a year, most of which came from Laotian and Vietnamese elephants (Martin 1992a,b).

In southern Vietnam the Viet Cong could not take complete control until 1975 when the Americans finally left. Soon afterwards the government took over many businesses and many businesspeople left the country. The shops along Dong Khoi Street, the main street selling souvenirs, including ivory items, were nationalized from 1975 to 1986 and consequently many shops failed to prosper. Then economic reforms were introduced, allowing more private ownership of businesses. By 1989 the souvenir shops started to reopen on Dong Khoi Street. A year later some of the old hotels in the city were renovated. In 1990 official statistics stated that 100,627 tourists from abroad visited HCMC (Vietnamese News Agency 1991). Vietnam, however, was still a poor country. In 1990 the per capita income was only USD 98 a year (Duc 2015). At this time, Vietnamese businesspeople, in conjunction with the government, had begun seriously to exploit the country's natural resources; elephant poaching was heavy, and some people were starting to make big

money (Martin 1992a; Stiles and Martin 1995). This was the beginning of the serious destruction of the natural resources that continues in the country today.

In 1989 the main shop owner selling ivory items on Dong Khoi Street, who also supplied a lot of items to other shops on the street, had six ivory carvers. By 1991 he had 17 ivory artisans, all relatives. He also employed 60 wood carvers. At least 10 of his ivory artisans worked in the central District 1. He said he had worked in ivory for 40 years and his family for 100 years. He bought raw tusks from people's old stock in their houses and from businesspeople west of Buon Ma Thuot, who obtained tusks from the nearby forests. He had paid USD 100/kg for tusks in 1990. By 1991 the price had risen to USD 150 a kilo for tusks of 2-3 kg each. The ivory carvers were paid for what they produced, not a salary; they earned 1,500,000 dong (USD 220) a month (at the official exchange rate), while the wood carvers earned only 1 million dong (USD 147) a month. They worked five days a week, from 7 am to 4 pm for maximum use of the sunlight. His main customers were Taiwanese and ambassadors from various countries who liked to buy small, 3-kg pairs of polished tusks, being easier to export. He said his ivory business had been much more profitable before the 1975 Communist takeover of Saigon when there had been more foreign tourists, and before the 1989 CITES legislation that prevented from 1990 its member states from allowing commercial ivory imports and exports. Vietnam was not a member of CITES until 1994 so international trading was still permitted at this time. He knew in 1991 of ivory carvers in the Hanoi area, HCMC, and one only in the coastal town of Vung Tau, south-east

of HCMC. Vung Tau had been a weekend playground for the French during the colonial period and was still in 1991 a seaside resort for expatriates.

The one ivory carver in Vung Tau had been carving ivory since 1972. When interviewed in 1991, he said he had bought raw ivory in 1989 for USD 150/kg and in 1990 for USD 200/kg for 2-3-kg tusks. He had bought scrap pieces of ivory in 1991 for USD 30/kg to carve small items. The raw ivory had come from Buon Ma Thuot and from Cambodia just across the border. He carved bangles, earrings, figurines, rings and other small items. He sold these wholesale in 1991 for USD 11 for a 2-3-cm Buddha, USD 4 for a ring, USD 10 for a thin bangle and USD 26 for a large one. He sold his items to souvenir shops in the town, but his business declined in 1991 due to the decrease in the number of Western foreigners buying ivory items with the international ban (Martin's fieldwork in 1990 and 1991; Martin 1992a).

The next ivory trade study, with the first count of shops and items, was carried out by Dan Stiles in 2001 (Martin and Stiles 2002). The price of tusks had risen to USD 300-500 per kilo. This price jump had a knock-on effect on the retail prices of the finished goods. For example, cigarette holders and chopstick pairs both doubled in price to USD 36-95; a thin ring was seven times more expensive at USD 10-20; while a pair of small earrings was 25 times more at USD 25. The main buyers were Europeans, Japanese and Taiwanese, taking the items home illegally. Demand for the smallest items had risen while demand for larger items had declined, being more difficult to smuggle home. The 2001 survey found ivory items for sale in 37 retail outlets (with 2,262 items) in HCMC and 13 (with 777 items) in Hanoi.

The next survey, again by Stiles (2004), took place in early 2003 when he found that in Hanoi the price of raw ivory had declined slightly to USD 350/kg. Most ivory was coming from Angola, brought back by Vietnamese working there in the form of cut blocks. Stiles found that the ivory industry was falling in Hanoi. Shops selling ivory there had declined to eight, and the number of ivory items in the outlets had also decreased on average.

By 2008 the price of raw ivory had increased dramatically to USD 500-1,500 per kilo in Vietnam (Stiles 2008, 2009). According to Stiles, this was the highest known price in the world at the time, and it was serving 'as an incentive for poachers to kill elephants' (Stiles 2008). Most tusks were from Laotian elephants with small quantities from those in Vietnam and Cambodia. In HCMC the 49 outlets counted had 251 ivory items; in Hanoi the 10 outlets seen had 407 items. A thin bangle was USD 50-95, thin rings USD

10-50 and small 1-5-cm figurines USD 20-181. The main buyers for ivory items were Chinese, Thais, and Vietnamese living in the USA.

A 2014 study in 21 locations in Vietnam (Nguyen and Willemsen 2015) found 85 outlets with ivory items numbering 2,300 for sale. No wholesale tusk prices were given, but retail prices had increased significantly overall since 2008; for example, a thin bangle was USD 95-189, a thin ring USD 5-112, and a figurine less than 5-cm USD 71-1,500. Buyers were Vietnamese and foreign tourists, including Chinese, with some items priced in yuan. This study found that 'the overall availability of ivory items in Vietnam appears to be on the decline ... and the total number of ivory items found on sale was less than in previous surveys' (Nguyen and Willemsen 2015). This conclusion was in sharp contrast to other findings in 2015 (Liu 2015). In 2015 Hongqiao Liu surveyed ivory in several villages in northern Vietnam (Liu 2015). He learned that the domestic Vietnam ivory trade was 'radically expanding'. He found a sophisticated network of Chinese-speaking tourist guides, professional traders, and desperate smugglers dealing in ivory in some of these villages and that they 'operate out in the open, like nothing is illegal'. Liu obtained data on raw tusk prices in 2015: USD 845-1,032/kg. A bracelet was priced at USD 150-200. Liu investigated the trade route that goes from the villages north to the Chinese border. He found that Customs officers on both sides of the border 'would not bother to check small wildlife pieces like bracelets'. He questioned why 'no international conservation organizations have released any market monitoring reports on the openly operating markets in Vietnam'.



In 2001 there was a larger variety of ivory items on open sale in Hanoi than today, including painted screens and ivory compasses.

HÃN GIẢM ĐỊNH HỒNG VÀNG-SJC
IDENTIFICATION JEWEL STOCK COMPANY



GIẤY KIỂM ĐỊNH ĐÁ QUÝ GEM REPORT

Số (Number): G43334

TP. HCM, Ngày (Date): 08/07/2015

SJC G43334

Description	NGÀ VOI (Ivory)	
Mặt dây chuyền Mounted li	Mặt dây chuyền Pendant	Dây đeo cổ Necklace
Dạng cắt mài Shape & cut	Tượng Carved statue	Cầu gần tròn Near-spherical
Màu sắc Color	Trắng ngà Ivory white	Trắng ngà Ivory white
Số lượng (viên) Quantity (piece)	01	120
Chiều thước (mm) Measurement (mm)	≈ 23.5 x 42.3	1 - 4.6
Trọng lượng (g) Weight (g)	9.81	10.3
Số đá gắn kèm (viên) Gemstone (piece)	20	



TÍNH BÊN TRONG: Cấu trúc vân gợn sóng
Internal Characteristics : Wavy structure lines.

GIÁM ĐỐC
DIRECTOR

CHUYÊN VIÊN KIỂM ĐỊNH
EXPERT

TRẦN MINH NHẬT

NGÔ VĂN NỀN

Sometimes an ivory item is offered with a 'gem report' to prove it is authentic ivory.

Introduction to survey

Following worrying reports from visitors to Vietnam that the retail ivory trade had increased, and with no known survey conducted on the situation for seven years, Save the Elephants funded the authors to carry out fieldwork in Vietnam in late 2015, to obtain ivory prices and to survey retail outlets and ivory items in the main areas known to sell worked ivory.

The number of large seizures of ivory going to Vietnam, as described later in this report, increased considerably in 2015 – further evidence that Vietnam was a hub for ivory. We were aware before going to

Vietnam that certain villages were active in producing handicrafts and expanding in ivory (Karl Ammann, pers. comm. May 2015). Various past surveys had named certain places selling ivory, which we therefore surveyed also, to compare trends. Our fieldwork in Vietnam was arranged before knowledge of two recent studies came to light (Nguyen and Willemsen 2015; Liu 2015), results of which were published after our survey, but we had a preview of the former paper as we flew to Vietnam, just before its publication.

Methodology

We carried out a survey of the elephant ivory trade in Vietnam from 23 November to 14 December 2015. We worked in HCMC (Saigon), in the Central Highlands town of Buon Ma Thuot and nearby tourist villages, and in Hanoi along with its surrounding villages. We interviewed owners of ivory workshops, ivory artisans, vendors, customers and officials or former officials to learn about the ivory business in Vietnam. We collected information on raw ivory sources, trade routes for tusks bought by carvers in Vietnam, wholesale prices of raw ivory, workshops, artisans, their earnings, ivory items produced and trends. We surveyed the shops, counting the number of retail outlets in the cities and villages we visited, the number and type of items on display for sale, and whether they were old or newly carved (as stated by the vendors or by their appearance), along with their origin, as well as their prices. We spoke to vendors

about their business and about their customers, and also spoke to some of the ivory buyers, collecting views from both. We based our methodology on our past surveys to collect comparative data and focused on the main areas of importance to visit. We concentrated on retail outlets with a good probability of selling ivory items in the ‘downtown’ areas visited. We read publications on Vietnam’s history and ivory legislative measures, and took photographs of all the ivory workshops where possible and retail outlets with large displays of ivory items to help us with accurate counting and identifying of items. We also talked to others who have collected data on ivory in Vietnam, especially Karl Ammann, Tom Milliken and Dan Stiles. In this report, we do not name the villages currently known to be producing/selling ivory items that we visited, but academic researchers on the subject can contact us for the names.

Legal position of the ivory trade in Vietnam

Vietnam acceded in 1994 to CITES, which prohibits international trade in elephant ivory. Before, the government had decrees and laws regarding the country’s endangered species that prohibited the hunting of elephants and the transport of wild elephant products, as well as the sale, production and use of these products. Thus all trade in wild elephant products was essentially banned, but one provision allowed internal trade in ivory obtained before the government’s legislation of 1992 that banned internal trade (Martin and Stiles 2002; Stiles 2008).

At the 16th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES held in Bangkok in March 2013,

the Parties, the Secretariat and the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) were concerned about Vietnam being a significant transit country for ivory. Vietnam was consequently asked to produce a National Ivory Trade Action Plan and submit it to the CITES Secretariat by 15 May 2013 (Milliken 2013), and this the government did. Since then, Vietnam has been part of a CITES process by which Vietnam’s compliance with CITES regulations are monitored.

Domestically, the government has recently made various decrees and directives to tighten the illegal ivory trade. For instance, in March 2014 the prime minister issued a directive to put greater



This raw ivory for sale in northern Vietnam has a stamp on it saying 'inspection', with an unknown origin.

government effort to combat poaching and trade in ivory (Nguyen and Willemsen 2015). This included regulatory improvements and more effort to enforce the ban on the trade in ivory and rhino horn. In 2014 the government approved a general wildlife decree increasing the fine up to USD 25,000 for those convicted for poaching, harvesting, trading, processing and keeping wild animals (CITES 2016).

Despite the laws prohibiting ivory imports and exports, and the domestic ivory trade ban for items carved from ivory since 1992, Vietnam continued to be one of the largest importers of illegal tusks, supporting huge illegal internal ivory processing and ivory carving businesses. Official seizures of ivory related to Vietnam increased in 2015 as reported by the press. Large quantities of illegal ivory imports: raw, semi-processed, and worked, were seized on their way to Vietnam, at Vietnam's Customs, and within Vietnam. For example, in July 2015, the border police arrested a lorry driver with 387 kg of tusks coming from Cambodia into Vietnam at the Ha Tien international border gate (*Vietnam News* 2015). In August 2015, 593 kg of ivory (and 142 kg of rhino horn) sent from Mozambique were seized at the Vietnamese port of Danang (*Saturday Nation* 2015; *AFP* 2015). Police and Customs then seized in August 2015 in Danang more than 2,000

kg of tusks inside a timber container from Nigeria (Tu 2015). A third seizure reported that month in Danang consisted of 1,023 kg, its origin not disclosed (*TRAFFIC* 2015). Danang had become the major port seizing ivory, replacing Haiphong. In November 2015, 860 kg of tusks in transit from Taiwan were seized at the Hoanh Mo border gate, hidden in 1,300 boxes of frozen fish heads that were en route to a third country (*Thanh Nien News* 2015). In December 2015 Haiphong Customs officials seized 2,200 kg of ivory (835 pieces) shipped from Mozambique (*AFP* 2015). Again in December 2015 a wildlife products trafficking ring was apprehended just over the border in China in Fangchenggang with 307 kg of ivory that had come in from Vietnam (*Xinhua* 2015).

Various officials and investigators in Vietnam and China believe that their 700-km international land border is the main route for wildlife smuggling from Southeast Asia into China. They believe this illicit trade flourishes because of the poor management of the logistics industry, the booming online trade, and poor coordination between Vietnamese and Chinese officials (*Xinhua* 2015). Law enforcement on the illegal ivory trade has been described as very weak (Milliken 2013; Vira et al. 2014; Liu 2015). The major Customs point is Youyi Guan (Liu 2015).



Western customers in Hanoi used to be some of the main buyers of ivory items before the international trade bans, but very rarely do they want ivory today.



Raw ivory in Vietnam is priced according to weight and quality with these pieces being the less expensive.

Results of survey

Sources and wholesale prices of raw ivory in Vietnam

Nearly all elephant tusks coming into Vietnam today are from Africa, and they are all illegal to trade. In 2015, combining information from 10 ivory buyers and sellers in Vietnam, we learned that the price of raw ivory wholesale for an average 3–4-kg tusk ranged from USD 889 to USD 1,334 or about USD 1,100 a kilo.

In **HCMC** an ivory carver informed us that in 2015 he bought raw ivory wholesale for 20 million dong/kg (USD 889), but the price varied according to quality and could be as much as 40 million dong (USD 1,777) a kilo. He might sell his poorer quality ivory for USD 28 million dong (USD 1,244) a kilo. Wholesale prices had remained the same in dong as last year, he said. He buys his tusks from a dealer in ‘Saigon’ who smuggles them in from Africa. Most are small tusks or they are cut into small pieces of 1–3 kg, making them easier to smuggle, he said.

In **Buon Ma Thuot**, raw ivory originating from Laos bought by a Vietnamese carver in 2010 was 34 million dong (USD 1,743) a kilo. In 2014 he paid 27 million dong (USD 1,262) a kilo and in late 2015 it was 24 million dong (USD 1,067) a kilo for an average-sized tusk of around 3–4 kg. Tusks, he said, can be sold wholesale in Vietnam for 29–30 million dong (USD 1,289–1,333) a kilo, and for a smaller piece for 24–25 million dong (USD 1,067–1,111) a kilo, or for an oblong edge piece for 10 million dong (USD 444) a kilo. A vendor at a jewellery outlet in Buon Ma Thuot said the price of raw ivory to buy was 25 million dong/kg (USD 1,111).

In a **tourist village near Buon Ma Thuot**, an elephant handler in December 2015 sold 4 kg of raw ivory that he had just cut from domesticated elephants working in the village (which he cuts and sells about every three years) for 30 million dong or the equivalent of USD 1,333/kg. Tusk tips are valuable, being solid ivory. He had sold the tips for 25 million dong four years ago, the equivalent then of USD 1,989/kg.

At the **first village near Hanoi** we visited, we asked about raw ivory initially at the first workshop we saw. It nearly all came from Africa, sometimes via Laos and Thailand and a little (old ivory) was from Europe. The village workshops obtain their ivory from traders who do not disclose the exact origin of the tusks. The price was 20 million dong (USD 889) in December 2015, down from 24 million dong (USD 1,122) a year

earlier. This was for the so-called pink good-quality ivory, usually from recently dead forest elephants (i.e. poached). Old ivory was cheaper. Smaller tusks of 18 cm in late 2015 were 18–20 million dong (USD 800–889) a kilo. For a larger full tusk the wholesale price was 26 million dong (USD 1,156) a kilo – but the tips were more expensive: 30–35 million dong (USD 1,333–1,556) a kilo. Two to three years ago, a full tusk was 30–35 million dong (USD 1,431–1,669) a kilo, and top quality was 40 million dong (USD 1,669) a kilo.

We also priced three raw tips 20 cm in length cut from large tusks in another workshop. The tips were selling for 30–35 million dong (USD 1,333–1,556) (down from 40 million dong or USD 1,921 three years earlier). This is more expensive than for an 18-cm full tusk from a younger elephant (USD 800–889) as the tips from large tusks have a wider circumference and are heavier.

A vendor said raw ivory was 26 million dong (USD 1,156) a kilo. Three years ago he said the price went up to 40 million dong with an average of 30–35 million dong a kilo (USD 1,440–1,681). Another vendor we spoke to in this village said the price was 26 million dong (USD 1,156) a kilo. Two years earlier it had been 30 million dong (USD 1,421) a kilo.

Yet another village ivory vendor/processor said raw ivory was now 25 million dong (USD 1,111) a kilo, but you could get low-quality small pieces for 7–8 million dong (USD 311–356) a kilo. Prices of tusks have dropped in the past two to three years, we were told, as the supply from Africa suddenly increased.

Another vendor/carver said that prices had been higher two years earlier. He explained that bigger tusks were harder and better, especially if you come across the pinkish colour when you cut it nearer the tip end.

At a **third village near Hanoi** where we also watched ivory carvers working, we learned that the price there for top quality was 30 million dong (USD 1,333) a kilo with the average price at 20 million dong (USD 889) a kilo for an average tusk.

Ho Chi Minh City

Background

HCMC has a population of 8.2 million, the largest city in the country. For centuries, Saigon, as it was formerly called, was part of the Kingdom of Cambodia. In 1862 the city was ceded to the French. The French then built ports, railways, roads and large French-style buildings, including an opera house and universities. Puppet regimes took over with finally the Communist take-over in 1975, when Saigon officially

became Ho Chi Minh City. Private businesses were confiscated by the new government. The city struggled economically until the mid-1980s. Foreigners were then encouraged to invest, and tourists started to flow in once more. The city has been growing in wealth ever since, but the discrepancy between the rich and poor has been huge and is growing.

Ivory workshops and artisans

Ivory carvers within the city are producing ivory items out of newly obtained ivory from Africa, one ivory carver freely admitted to us, although it is illegal. They produce mainly small items of jewellery, especially very small Buddha and Gwan Yin pendants 2.5 cm high, and larger round or oblong pendants of 5 cm with floral or Buddhist carvings. The very small ones can be made out of leftover chips of ivory. Certain jewellery outlets in China Town (the area called Cholon) provide literally from under the counter raw pieces of ivory if customers wish to order a specific item to be carved. One outlet produced for us a plastic bag containing seven pieces of ivory so we could choose a piece and order an ivory cross to be made. (She offered this to us as she only had bone crosses on display.) The raw ivory had been left over from a previous work that a customer had commissioned.

A curio shop in the tourist area of District 1 that sold mostly wood and bone carvings had their own family-owned carving factory, but because of its location no ivory items were on display.

We visited one ivory workshop in HCMC. The one ivory carver had a cabinet of ivory items for retail sale, as well as items of shell, stone and wood, that he had made in this workshop. We were attracted to the back of the shop by a drilling sound and clouds of white dust smelling typically of freshly carved ivory, where the young man, his arms and workbench coated in white powder, was smoothing a large ivory bangle. On seeing us, he stopped and put the bangle into a drawer. He was Vietnamese, 38 years old, and had been carving for 15 years, having learned from his father. He and his Chinese wife had two young sons who returned from school while we were there (the shop being in front of their home as is typical in Vietnam); the younger boy was wearing an ivory bangle.

The carver needs two days to carve a 4.5 x 6-cm pendant and a week to carve a Buddha of about

300 g, he told us. He is often commissioned to do these pieces. He also carves standard pendants and other small popular items to sell wholesale to the jewellery outlets in the area. People come directly to his shop, if they know it, to buy an item, getting a better price than in the jewellery outlets.

He said his business had been about the same in the last couple of years, and although he had no idea how many carvers in the city were working in ivory, he believed the number may be rising in general. Carvers are of Vietnamese nationality; they come and sell their work to certain vendors directly, while other vendors go to the carvers for items, he explained.

Ivory carvers in Vietnam earn about USD 200–400 a month; it is the same amount as wood carvers earn, as carving is considered skilled work requiring training. The minimum salary is about USD 120 a month for non-skilled work.



An ivory carver in HCMC uses this cutting machine to prepare his ivory for making mainly pendants.



Motorbikes are the main form of transport into HCMC's China Town where ivory items can be easily bought.

Retail outlets, ivory items and prices

We counted 116 outlets in the central areas of the city, displaying 3,098 ivory items for sale. These outlets were jewellery (numbering 78), antique (28), traditional medicine (4), wood (4) and religious (2). There was an average of 27 ivory items per outlet, with 67% in jewellery outlets and 24% in antique outlets (Table 1). The number of items in an outlet ranged from 1 to 404.

In the famous souvenir area in and around Ben Tanh market, we visited 130 jewellery outlets selling gold and gemstones, which were safely behind glass. Of these, 54 had small ivory items displayed among the well-lit displays of jewellery. By far the majority were 2.5-cm new Buddha pendants. We also visited China Town's large An Dong market and the neighbouring streets and found similar small pendants and other jewellery items in 31 of 119 outlets; here, relatively larger numbers of ivory items were openly on display. On the streets around the main market building were 10 out of 52 jewellery outlets with ivory, including in some of the small moveable stalls on the pavement, with items again in glass cabinets. When squatting to be on the same level as a pendant on a shelf, we could see the typical markings of ivory as different from bone, without our having to take out and examine each piece. Some ivory pieces were encased in silver or gold. A silver clasp/mount for a 2.5-cm size pendant cost an extra 600,000 dong (USD 27), for white gold 2.1 million dong (USD 93) and yellow

gold 2.7 million dong (USD 120) extra. There were also bone copies and plastic copies of texture similar to bone, usually encased in stainless steel.

Most of the antique ivory objects we saw were in the antique shops that line both sides of Le Cong Khien Street where we found 27 outlets out of 45 that were open with old ivory items displayed; we saw another antique outlet in China Town's An Dong market selling old ivory.

Other types of outlet in China Town's An Dong market were a number of wood stalls selling wooden carvings. Of about 20 we visited, four sold ivory items as well. Nearby were two shops selling fengshui and Buddhist items, including some made of ivory. We saw no mammoth ivory items in these shops.

In China Town is a wide, long main street with traditional medicine shops lining both sides where Vietnamese and Chinese medicinal schools overlap. Many are wholesale outlets, with sacks full of herbs spilling out onto the pavement, as well as the usual drawers of medicines ready for consumption lining the shop walls. Of about 20 traditional medicine outlets that we visited, four were displaying ivory objects for sale. Most were small jewellery items but in large numbers, often within transparent plastic packets, to sell either to wholesalers or in smaller numbers to retail customers. There were also some



Today's religious items are mainly small trinkets compared with old ivory carvings, such as this antique European crucifix seen for sale in HCMC.

older ivory objects and bone items, and in the back, a few outlets had fake rhino horns made of buffalo or cow horn, and saiga antelope horns as well. No Western tourists were seen in this area during an afternoon visit, thus some shops were relaxed about displaying a lot of ivory trinkets without the fear of being hassled by foreigners or forced to remove their items by the police.

We visited several main hotels and new shopping malls but found no ivory items for sale. Nor did we see ivory for sale in the usual more expensive souvenir/curio/gift outlets, most of which are in and around the Old Quarter. Those outlets mostly sell cheap souvenirs and handicrafts to the many tourists. Nor were any ivory items still on sale as they had been seven years before in the expensive outlets of Don Khoi Street and Le Loi Street in District 1 that tourists visit. We thus concentrated our time visiting the more expensive jewellery outlets and those shops selling antiques, especially in the Old Quarter and China Town, areas, known from previous surveys to sell ivory.

The most common items seen in HCMC were pendants (51%), followed by bangles and then figurines (Table 2). Most pendants and figurines have horoscope or Buddhist motifs for the many Vietnamese and Chinese believers. The majority of items had been recently produced, such as jewellery and chopsticks.

The array of older items, being sold second-hand or more, in the antique shops had been carved generally in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Africa and Europe

before the CITES ban came into force in 1990. They included items from China: a boat (USD 1,300), urns (about USD 5,000), magic balls, carved 3–4 cm plaques (USD 150–200); from Hong Kong: clams, a pagoda; from Japan: netsukes (USD 200–300); from Europe: a small book with ivory cover (USD 400), book ends and a crucifix; from Africa: figures and busts (12–20 cm for USD 700–800); and from Vietnam: old cylindrical earplugs worn in the past by some of the ethnic minorities.

There was a variety of human figures of different and unique styles in these antique shops, mostly from China, the largest being 75 cm for USD 2,500, and others of 40 cm for USD 5,000–10,000. It is uncommon to see these large figures made from recently acquired ivory as they are less popular among consumers: they are too large to smuggle easily. Buyers of large and expensive items such as these generally know about the international bans. Some items in the antique outlets were recently made, as recognized by their style, such as Chinese egg-shaped human figurines (USD 700 each).

The cheapest item in HCMC was a baby's bangle for USD 13 (Table 3) and the most expensive items seen were a big old carved tusk for USD 20,000 and a large urn also for USD 20,000; there was also a pair of large carved tusks on a wooden stand made 25–30 years ago in Vietnam for USD 17,000. These were all in the antique shops. There were no outstanding new ivory items or works of art seen in HCMC; nearly all were new trinkets.

Vendors and buyers

Both Vietnamese men and women were selling ivory items, but generally the shop assistants were young women with little knowledge or experience. In Vietnam the shop girls in the cities earned about USD 200 a month - USD 300 a month if they spoke English. This is thus similar to what the ivory carvers earn as there are so many and most are not highly skilled.

Most vendors tolerated our lingering presence in their shops out of good manners, but they became uncomfortable if we did not buy the odd cheap trinket, wondering why we were paying so much attention to ivory and the prices of items if we were not buying anything. Vendors sometimes encouraged our taking photos when they thought there might be a possible sale, helpfully taking ivory items out of the glass cabinets and displaying them on the top to avoid the light reflection. Again, most vendors out of politeness put up with photography, but it was best to be as discrete as possible so as not to upset them more than necessary. Only a few were extremely hostile, wanting us to leave their outlets.

Vendors appear not to be concerned or interested in rules and regulations, only wishing to sell their items as easily as possible by whatever means. There were no signs to say that ivory items could not be taken out

of the country. Often ivory, bone and plastic trinkets were displayed close together, so both vendor and buyer needed some knowledge of the items not to mix them up, but with us they were usually honest in naming correctly the materials of the objects that we examined.

Most customers of ivory items in the retail outlets are Chinese as ivory is cheaper here than in China. Many businesspeople come to HCMC from China and buy ivory trinkets that are easy to smuggle back home. A number of Vietnamese in the city who are of Chinese origin also like to buy ivory items for their family and friends. They have perhaps married a Vietnamese, choosing their allegiance to Vietnam with their children at Vietnamese-speaking schools.

With many outlets in the markets selling fake and genuine ivory displayed next to each other, some customers wishing a good-quality ivory item may prefer to go to a more expensive reputable jewellery outlet if they are unfamiliar with the material. Even less-experienced young vendors sometimes get confused. For instance, a large ivory beaded bracelet in an outlet was offered for USD 700 and a plastic equivalent for USD 30, but the inexperienced young vendor mixed the two up, unable to tell them apart.



Beaded items, including those in Buddhist shops, may be elephant ivory as recognizable by the criss-cross pattern (in the top picture) or plastic with wavy lines (seen below it).



Customers for ivory items in HCMC are mostly Chinese and Vietnamese.

Discerning customers examine ivory pieces closely with a magnifying glass or a torch to verify the material and its quality. Often in China Town ivory items are displayed preferentially in orange satin-lined boxes or on red material on a shelf or even on a revolving stand to be more easily noticed by a customer. In contrast, in the busier tourist areas, ivory is usually at the back of a shelf or the back of a shop at the lowest level of a display cabinet. Some vendors, especially in these tourist areas, were nervous of our presence and had obviously been hassled in the past.

Not only rich Vietnamese buy ivory items. We saw a woman helping to sell coconuts, cold drinks and mobile phone top-up cards on the pavement wearing both a recently made thin ivory bangle and an elephant hair bracelet that she had bought on holiday three years ago in Bangkok, believing the items to be better and cheaper there (she had paid USD 350 and USD 600 for them respectively). She had flown back with them on her wrist with no problem, having been told it was fine to travel with just a couple of personal ivory possessions. She said she bought her ivory jewellery abroad, to be reminded of her visit to Thailand.

Vendors sell souvenir Vietnamese handicrafts to many foreign visitors in HCMC. In the main tourist shopping areas rents can be very high – about USD

2,000 a month for one jewellery stall in a jewellery shopping centre, or USD 10,000 a month for a whole ground-floor narrow shop. Only a 10% discount was generally offered (usually after bargaining) in these shops, compared with 20% in market stalls where rents are lower.

Most ivory items were not priced, so vendors generally had to remember the prices, consult a list or ring someone up to ask. The older vendors were generally the owners and knowledgeable, especially in the antique outlets that were often family businesses. Some vendors commented that business was down in 2015 with the Chinese slow-down in the economy and consequently fewer shoppers. Antiques are more commonly bought by Chinese who like to buy old Chinese carved items as it is their cultural heritage, and genuine items are difficult to find and more expensive in China. They also like to buy old ceramics, furniture and jade. One Chinese customer from the USA, seeing us asking the price of an old carved tusk, warned us that we could not export it, and the vendor agreed with his customer. But generally the vendors did not comment or ask us what we intended to do with an ivory item if we bought something, giving us no warnings or advice about exporting it.

Buon Ma Thuot

Background

Buon Ma Thuot is the largest town in the lush green Central Highlands and the capital of Dak Lak Province. The French established the town around 1904 to develop farming in the area. By the 1920s, it was well known for its coffee, rubber and pepper. The French hired mostly people from the minority ethnic groups in the region as labourers. By the 1930s, many French had become wealthy in this area, especially in the production of some of the highest quality coffee in the country. This forested region was popular for sport hunting

among the French up until at least the 1960s (Kane 1963). Then the city slumped financially in the late 20th century, picking up with the growth of tourism in the past decade, especially as Vietnamese and Chinese became richer and able to travel, as it is an attractive area that people like to visit. It has grown in population from 65,000 in 1971 to 350,000 today, with many coming to see the waterfalls and other natural wonders of Yok Don National Park, the country's largest national park, and to take elephant rides.

Traditional life with elephants

Elephants have long been an important part of the culture for the Mnong and Ede ethnic groups living around Buon Ma Thuot. For many years catching elephants from the forests for domestication was a major event for them, and gave them their purpose and identity. Originally, wild elephants were rounded up and caught in a pit. But in 1922, a skilled catcher (who caught 482 elephants in his life) developed a new method that remained most popular, until elephant domestication was banned in 1990. Five to six men would scout for elephants in the forest and then assemble a group of 20 strong men plus young boy apprentices 15 to 16 years old. They would spend 15 days in the forest each month to catch elephants. They would ask God to be allowed to hunt and await the signal – a cockerel was chosen to eat foods offered to God. If after three days the chicken lived, God was saying 'yes'. The men would set off after the wild elephants with one previously caught that was 10-15 years old. It would be tethered to a tree to attract the wild herd to it. The elephant catchers on the backs of their elephants would separate a young elephant from the wild group and corner the animal, with a main catcher latching a rope made of male buffalo skin like a hoop under the right back foot. The team would capture, say, three to nine elephants. If the last elephant caught was an even number it would be released. Superstition rules the lives of many ethnic peoples and also Vietnamese, hence these specific practices. Another group of men in the village would then do the training.

Many of the tribal villagers still owned elephants

through the 1990s. They were considered to be family members, and the spirit of the village. Each family used their elephant for transport, their pet being trustworthy and safe even to take the village children across the river when flooded in the monsoon to go to school. 'They feel our feelings' a young Ede woman explained to us. She remembered when she was a child wondering one morning why an elephant in the village was not standing. She later learned the elephant had protected her master, who was drunk, under her body all night to keep him warm. When the man woke up he said, 'I am sorry I drank too much' and they took a shower together. The village elephants were always much loved and cared for. They were given special names and treated with great affection. When they died the family was in grief, especially the master. The tusks were kept by the family, not for decoration or for sale, and the body was buried. Nowadays businesspeople want to buy the carcass. An Ede village of 300 people we visited used to have over 100 elephants 20 years ago and now only 7 were left.

Nowadays, with the ban on catching and domesticating elephants, the Vietnamese use those that are still alive as tourist elephants for rides and the elephants look so sad, our Ede friend lamented. 'The Vietnamese businesspeople think elephants are just a service for people and work for people, and they want souvenirs from wild elephant products, but I say, if you buy these products you are killing them. There is a problem of education here. Both rich and poor Vietnamese want ivory for jewellery as a luxury.'

Source: interview with an Ede woman, aged 27 years

Elephant racing festivals

A big tourist attraction in the area of Buon Ma Thuot is a traditional elephant race celebrated in the third month of the lunar calendar, which falls in March. These races are to bring in the rains for the various crops. A few months before the race, the elephants are fed with abundant food and groomed to help the elephant gain energy for the race. On 11 March 2015, a race was held to mark the fifth Buon Ma Thuot Coffee Festival with 16 participating elephants. In the tourist village nearby, 10 elephants race on a mile-long racetrack. It is one of the biggest festivals in the Central Highlands, also featuring gong performances, and is part of UNESCO's oral and intangible heritage of humanity. The elephant race reflects the martial spirit of the Mnong people, famous in the area for their bravery in catching and training wild elephants. Elephants are gathered from different villages, and locals turn out to support their home town with their elephants dressed in colourful costumes. Each elephant is ridden by two jockeys,

one to steer and the other to control the elephant's speed. They can run at 40 km per hour, stirred on by the cheering crowds and beating gongs. The winning elephant receives a laurel wreath, sugar cane and bananas. Visitors enjoy the spectacle and marvel at the elephants.

The races attract thousands of visitors from within and outside the province. The event also encourages shoppers who want ivory souvenirs to remind them of their visit. Dak Lak Province has been dubbed the home of tamed elephants, although their population declined sharply from 502 in 1985 to 84 in 2000 with fewer than 60 in 2010. The province has established a healthcare and research facility on elephant reproduction and conservation so as not to lose their elephants. In 1998 all the village elephants started working for tourists in what became known as the tourist village.

Source: Vietnam National Administration of Tourism



As well as racing in festivals, elephants are mainly used nowadays for tourist rides.



A carver uses sandpaper to smooth an ivory ring on a spinning machine.

Ivory workshops and artisans

In Buon Ma Thuot vendors informed us that most of their ivory jewellery came from Hanoi or HCMC, but we learned that there were a few carvers producing ivory for sale in this town. We found a carver/dealer of ivory at his retail outlet who agreed to take us out to see his workshop on the outskirts of the town where he employed three young men to produce ivory and wood carvings with him.

The carvers lived on the plot with their young families where the ivory workshop was located – a large warehouse of corrugated iron among guava and other fruit trees. The ivory carver who owned the workshop paid his artisans USD 222–311 a month. There were also signs of cow heads and horns in various production stages that the artisans make to sell as trophies for people to hang on their walls.

The owner of the ivory workshop was a young Vietnamese. He had learned to carve from his father who was a carpenter. Most carvers here learn as apprentices to a carver instead of at a university, he informed us. He does not buy African ivory, using only Asian elephant ivory. He has to have an import permit to buy an elephant carcass from Laos, where

he also needs a permit specifying that the animal was a domesticated elephant and died naturally. There are not enough elephant carcasses in Vietnam although they are cheaper than from Laos, he said (Table 4). He showed us an elephant leg bone that he uses for large carvings. He uses all the bones from an elephant carcass for carving items, not at this workshop but at another in southern Vietnam, he told us. He uses or sells all the parts of the elephant; nothing is wasted. He sells the meat to people who like to try eating it out of curiosity, but it is often tough. He was turning the feet of an elephant he had recently acquired into newspaper holders at the time of our visit.

This ivory carver had never before shown foreigners his workshop, but he showed us around, apparently hoping we might invest. He agreed to demonstrate to us the making of a ring, and we watched for about 10 minutes, photographing and filming its production. The lower part of the tusk is used for rings. Thin pieces of used ivory were strewn about the ground with circles cut out of them from rings already made. Usually a batch is made at a time. He had four machines and made the ring in about seven stages, cutting it out of a thin disc-shaped slice of



Carvers in Buon Ma Thuot collect the ivory chips and powder to sell as medicine. Their ivory is from Asian elephant tusks recognizable by their tighter criss-cross pattern, compared with savannah ivory from Africa.

ivory. He did not use anything to measure the ring, judging its centre with his eye as to where to place the cutter to remove the middle. He next held the rough ring beside a grinder to smooth the outside, then he placed it on a wooden finger-sized spinning cylinder, using sandpaper for the edges. As the ring spun he applied strong glue (super glue) for added strength. He then used another machine to smooth the ring's inner surface, putting it onto a metal spinning cylindrical rod. Finally he used a buffer that polished the inside of the ring at one end of a machine and the outside at the other end to complete the ring. He and his carvers could produce 100 rings in a day or 1,000 in a month, each taking 10 minutes to make. A bangle takes 20 minutes to make. White powder was everywhere. He collects the clean leftover pieces of ivory and sells or grinds them up and sells the sieved powder for medicine. The Ede tribe use ivory powder for eye problems, or after burning it for an hour, they may put it in their ears to improve hearing. He showed us his sieve and a plastic bag full of saved clean powder.

He then showed a piece of Lao elephant tusk that clearly had the closer-together criss-cross lines of

forest elephant ivory, more similar to mammoth ivory. He has never used mammoth ivory and knew nothing about it.

Although the carvers mostly make bangles and rings, he showed us pictures on his smartphone of other items they make: rose pendants, plain miniature tea sets with six small cups holding 80 ml, cigarette holders and Christian crosses that he sells in his retail outlet in the town, but not to other shops, he informed us.

He reiterated that there were no other ivory carvers in the area, and that he only uses Lao tusks and Lao elephant products from legal sales of ivory from domesticated elephants that have died of natural causes. The complicated carved items, such as round and oblong Buddhist pendants with intricate Chinese designs, are made elsewhere in Vietnam, mostly for the Chinese market, from tusks coming mostly from African ivory nowadays. He said a lot of African tusks have been available recently. The carvers of this ivory, he commented, are mostly based in Hanoi and Hanoi areas, as other vendors in the town confirmed.



Shop owners confidently display their ivory items at the front of their souvenir outlets in Buon Ma Thuot.

Retail outlets, ivory items and prices

We found 24 outlets with 1,965 ivory items displayed for sale out of 49 outlets visited that could possibly be selling ivory. These were jewellery shops (13), souvenir shops (7) and hotel shops (4). The average number of items per shop was 82, with 54% in jewellery outlets, 29% in souvenir outlets and 17% in hotel outlets (Table 5). The number of ivory items in a shop ranged from 2 to 412. Nearly all the items were small and were recently or newly carved, not second hand.

Out of 33 jewellery shops visited, we counted 13 with ivory. Most were located in one part of the city, selling new gold and some silver jewellery with precious and semi-precious gemstones. A smaller portion of the display cabinet contained mainly ivory bangles, bracelets, earrings, pendants and rings in varying amounts and types.

Along three of the main streets of the city we visited nine souvenir outlets, eight of which had ivory items in glass cabinets openly on display for sale, often at the entrance front counter of the shop for visitors to see easily.

Four out of five of the more expensive hotels in the city had in their gift shops ivory jewellery and other ivory items as well as skin, tails, hair and bone items from the elephant and other animal products. This area is famous for its wildlife so visitors like to buy items supposedly from this region. Clear labels in the Vietnamese script named the materials as well as prices, which is unusual, with vendors normally prepared to inform customers of the material and price instead.

Nearly all the ivory items seen for sale were, as usual,

small and easy to carry for tourists or other visitors, with rings being 39%, pendants 32% and bangles 14% (Table 6). All the outlets sold similar items. More commonly than seen elsewhere were bangles, rings and necklaces made of elephant hair and often with silver, it being a city famous for its elephants. These were usually in jewellery outlets.

Items seen were limited to the standard bangles and baby bangles (usually plain of various widths); bracelets with large beads (typically numbering 11-12, especially liked by Chinese men); charms; cigarette holders; crosses; small earrings; figurines (usually animals); Buddhist rosary necklaces (that double up as bracelets with 108 beads that can be worn around the neck or wound around the wrist); pendants (various in size); plain plaques; and rings (usually thin and plain). The cheapest item was a ring for USD 9 and the most expensive was a new bangle 3 cm wide for USD 933 (Table 7). There were no large valuable works of art, only new jewellery trinket souvenirs.

On our departure at the airport we saw four jewellery outlets with ivory items and clearly printed prices (in dong) on labels. One stall was near the main entrance, another near the business lounge and two more were in the departure lounge with items laid out neatly under the usual glass countertops. They all belonged to the same company and were selling identical ivory jewellery items at identical prices. Also two large souvenir outlets in the airport departure lounge were selling the usual knickknacks such as embroidered bags, scarves, bone or cow horn items – but no ivory, as is usual for the cheap souvenir outlets in towns and cities.



Buon Ma Thuot has only recently started to grow with many new buildings.



Local Vietnamese in Buon Ma Thuot prefer to buy gold, while visitors choose ivory that is also displayed at jewellery outlets at the town's main airport.

Vendors and buyers

The vendors are local Vietnamese who tend to work in the town for rich businesspeople who are based in Hanoi and HCMC. They have little knowledge about ivory. Ivory items started to sell in this town around 2008/9, we were told. Customers for these ivory items are mostly East Asians, especially Chinese and Vietnamese visitors. Tourists who come to Buon Ma Thuot like to buy ivory here to remind them of seeing the elephants. They are not being told and are not concerned that nearly all the ivory originated in Africa and is not even carved here.

Considerably more of the local Vietnamese in this area than usual wore ivory-looking bangles or rings, but close examination revealed that they were plastic. A plastic ring may be offered for USD 2; a baby's bangle, which is also popular with the Vietnamese, may be USD 4, and an adult one USD 7, perhaps at least a 10th of the price of a plain ivory one in the less expensive outlets. They have become popular for all ages to wear, in and around this town, replacing coloured plastic jewellery, as they consider they look more expensive and have higher status. The plastic bangles for sale were generally small, for the thin-wristed Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese do not buy ivory nearly as much as gold. Some of the gold jewellery outlets were packed with local Vietnamese shoppers. A number of them had parked their motorbikes outside and were leaning over the counters, still with their helmets on, selecting items, preferring gold to silver as a way to store their money for investment and to re-sell in time at a profit. Many of these shoppers are too wary of buying or selling ivory for profit as people are less familiar with it and would be worried it could be difficult to sell later on as a customer may think it was fake. Gold is most popular as customers believe they can sell it at higher prices in a year or two.

Although long ago people in some ethnic groups wore ivory earplugs, they do not wear them nowadays. They do not have the same need to wear jewellery as ornaments for status as Vietnamese urban people. The ethnic minorities work on the land and are not businesspeople or vendors, thus are not materialistic. They are not interested in power, prestige and money like the Vietnamese and Chinese and have never had an interest in ivory to trade.



Elephants in this popular tourist village have their tusks cut every few years both for safety and for trade.

Tourist village in Central Highlands

Background

About 45 km west of Buon Ma Thuot, just beyond the entrance to Yok Don National Park, is a so-called tourist village now well known for elephant rides. This small village originally consisted of Lao and Mnong people and until 2000 it had only one shop (Vietnamese owned) that sold soft drinks, sugar cane and a few other items. The Vietnamese gradually moved into the village and developed a tourism business based on elephant rides and souvenir shops. This village has about 12 elephants that tourists ride. Their owners/handlers, from the Mnong and Ede tribes, now must use them for tourism, working for Vietnamese businesspeople who own and manage the tourist activities and who make the major profit. A little farther west is Cambodia, and north-west is Laos with extended forest areas where elephants used to roam, but numbers everywhere have been severely depleted by ivory traders.

Ivory workshops and artisans

Although the Mnong tribe used to use ivory mainly for decorative plugs in their ear lobes, they did not carve ivory for trade. The village has no history of ivory carving and the newly produced ivory items seen here for sale were mainly from carvers in and

By 2005 the tourist village had become a growing tourist destination in the area, especially for East Asians. In 2008 the seasonal dirt road was tarred, allowing visitors in the rainy season to drive to this small village that has maintained its rustic, quiet charm. Around this time, ivory appeared in the shops as tourism expanded. This village's annual spring elephant race festival attracts tourists and shoppers, who buy ivory items to remind them of their visit to watch the elephants. We saw another village that provided tourists with elephant rides. At this second village there was no sign of ivory items. This village, with a small hotel, is popular with Western backpackers. In comparison with visitors to the more famous tourist village, they do not come to the region to shop for souvenirs, especially not ivory items.

around Hanoi and HCMC. Of course some raw ivory is obtained from the domesticated elephants when an animal dies or from pruning the males' tusks for safety, and these are sold to a trader or carver, but we witnessed no carving being carried out.



Vietnamese tourists like to buy small ivory religious pendants as mementos of their visit here.

Retail outlets, ivory items and prices

We surveyed 16 out of 23 traditional wooden shops with souvenirs laid out on tables. We counted 703 ivory items, nearly all jewellery, with an average of 44 items per outlet. Numbers ranged from 2 to 412 ivory items in an outlet. There were also a few food, clothes and traditional medicine stores that did not show any ivory items. Other wildlife products were seen for sale, mostly elephant tail hairs and dried pieces of elephant skin, as well as claws and teeth from various species, plus all the usual multitude of items seen for sale in the Vietnamese curio shops available in the towns and cities. The main ivory items were pendants (52%), rings (18%) and earrings (12%), usually with the appearance of

small split peas (Table 8). Bangles for babies were more common than adult bangles in this village, unlike elsewhere. The cheapest item was a pair of earrings for USD 11 and most expensive a pendant for USD 356 (Table 9).

The Vietnamese visitors, as elsewhere, normally buy the smaller ivory Buddhist pendants (and sometimes Christian crosses) that measured 2.5 x 1 cm. Those with no silver sold here for about 1.5 million dong (USD 67). Larger ones (5 x 4.5 cm), preferred by the Chinese, have the usual intricate carvings involving Buddha or Gwan Yin and are 4–8 million dong (USD 178–356), depending on the intricacy of the carving.

Vendors and buyers

Vietnamese, who have increasingly moved into the area over the years, work in the small outlets in this village that mostly line the length of the road for the kilometre or so where tourists take their elephant rides. The vendors cannot afford to own real ivory items, but sometimes in a house behind the outlets, fake plastic tusks may be seen on either side of a framed certificate or photograph of a father or grandfather. These fake tusks may be plain or carved and are usually 30–60 cm in height, with a few selling for perhaps USD 18–31 for a pair in this village.

Tourists come from the big cities in large coaches, and after their elephant ride, they may do some shopping or walk to a nearby river with a rickety traditional wood bridge, also with shops selling souvenirs, including small ivory items and other small wildlife products. No Western tourists were seen here during our day's survey – only East Asian visitors with money to travel, take holidays and shop, and who were riding elephants up and down the road.

Hanoi

Background

From 1010 to 1802 Hanoi was the capital of Vietnam. Under the French in 1902 it was made the capital of all of Indochina. Following the defeat of the French and the formation of Communist North Vietnam in 1954, Hanoi was its capital. At this time the new government took over most businesses and arrested thousands of people suspected of being traitors to the new socialist government. Consequently the city almost collapsed economically. With the restructuring of the economy in Vietnam, starting in the mid-1980s, Hanoi residents slowly became more prosperous. In the early 1990s the city was still run down with few comfortable hotels and hardly any taxis. Even in 2008, the city was still lacking in

taxis and had few cars. Most people in Hanoi had only bicycles or motorbikes. By 2015, the city had become more energetic, with busy new highways and with flourishing educational, cultural and economic enterprises. It has a growing population of 7.6 million. As ivory has only recently become affordable to the Vietnamese, and they do not have a long tradition of carving it, as in China, works of art in ivory are not part of Vietnamese culture. Only some of the tribal people traditionally used ivory, mainly for plugs in their ear lobes. The Vietnamese, under Chinese influence, have only relatively recently started making and buying more Chinese-style carvings.

Ivory workshops and artisans

Traditional crafts are revered and supported in this region. However, we noted that ivory carving was not shown in an exhibition during our visit held in the Old Quarter in Hanoi at the entrance to a temple about artisans and the work they produce. Hanoi, being the capital and a popular tourist destination and conference centre nowadays, and being visited

by foreigners from all over the world, has much more effective law enforcement that prevents open illegal activities, such as ivory workshops. In Hanoi it is also expensive to rent space, and most artisans work on carving and other handicrafts in villages around the city instead.



Hanoi has a mixture of French colonial and modern architecture and while most people use bicycles and motorbikes, growing numbers have smart new cars.



Hanoi sells many colourful stone jewellery items but few are seen made of ivory.

Retail outlets, ivory items and prices

We found 29 outlets in the central areas of the city, selling 371 ivory items. These outlets were jewellery (18), antiques (8), hotel gift shops (2) and wood (1). They had an average of 13 ivory items per outlet. Displayed in jewellery outlets were 62% of the items, and 28% in antique shops, mostly in and around the Old Quarter (Table 10). The number of ivory objects ranged from 1 to 51 in an outlet.

We surveyed 158 of the more expensive jewellery outlets and found 18 displaying ivory items among gold and silver jewellery in the usual glass cabinets. These outlets were in the main tourist shopping areas around the Old Quarter, along one main jewellery street within the Old Quarter, and at a jewellery shopping centre in the south-east.

Fewer antique outlets were seen than in Ho Ch Minh City; they were generally dotted in and around the Old Quarter where tourists like to walk. We found 8 out of 17 with older-looking ivory items. Most antiques were not very old or were copies, and we saw no antique ivory works of art for sale.

Only 2 of the 14 more expensive hotels had gift shops with some ivory items on view for sale, one with older tribal ivory, the vendor said (mostly jewellery). The other displayed for sale the usual newer modern-style jewellery. Shopping malls are few and have only recently started to be built in Hanoi; none had ivory items seen for sale.

The main ivory items seen in Hanoi were pendants (44% of the total) and bangles (11%), plus a large variety of other small items consisting of a mixture of second-hand and new ornamental and utilitarian objects (Table 11). Prices were higher than elsewhere,

as the shops were in a city with expensive overheads and wealthy shoppers and foreigners. Most items, however, were of mediocre quality and small. The least expensive was a pendant for USD 65 and most expensive we priced was a carved plaque in an antique outlet for USD 1,200. Items were not priced and rarely labelled 'ivory' so as not to draw attention to this usually illegal material (as in HCMC). One expensive jewellery shop did have new ivory chopsticks actually labelled as 'ivory' for sale. But in the same shop was a traditional-style teacup for sale that had zig-zag lines that gave it away as fake. But the vendor thought it was ivory and priced it at 2 million dong (USD 88)! Thus, sometimes items of plastic and bone are offered for sale as ivory, accidentally or on purpose, but normally the price differentiates the two.

Most ivory items seen were the usual new plain jewellery trinkets. The carved items were, as elsewhere, of the intricate Chinese style, as well as plain Chinese-style items such as round plain pendants with a hole in the middle that are worn hanging on a string, originally a status symbol in Chinese culture but now also liked by Vietnamese. There were few ivory items from other parts of the world. We found only two extremely unusual African ivory items of about 15 cm each that a shopkeeper was selling on behalf of a Vietnamese person who had bought them in West Africa. They were priced at only USD 75 and USD 85; we saw some ivory rings for USD 150 and bangles for up to USD 600 (Table 12). These unusually low prices for the African items demonstrate that there is little demand for worked African ivory among Vietnamese and Chinese, while the high prices for the jewellery reflect high demand.

Vendors and buyers

Vendors who can speak a sprinkling of words in different languages are used to selling souvenirs to foreigners, offering prices to their customers in either dong, Chinese renminbi (RMB)/yuan) or US dollars as preferred by the customer.

In the Old Quarter, the few new ivory items seen were frequently placed in less visible areas at the back of the shop to avoid harassment, or on a high shelf where not many people would look, or alternatively at the bottom of a cabinet behind other items. In one expensive jewellery outlet, six ivory figures were prominently on view; however, the saleswoman said they were on display just for decoration and

supposedly not for sale. The vendors in central Hanoi are generally nervous about displaying ivory for sale, with fear of the authorities and law enforcement.

We saw nobody interested in buying ivory items in Hanoi. The Chinese, being the main customers, are told by their tour guides and interpreters to visit the nearby villages where the artisans make and sell ivory items at far reduced prices. Chinese shoppers are renowned bargain hunters who enjoy choosing the best quality items, and it was not surprising to see so few buyers in Hanoi's outlets where the collection of ivory items is so limited and relatively expensive, compared with the villages.



In Hanoi, ivory items such as these are usually displayed at the bottom shelf or at the back of the shop only to be spotted by keen buyers looking for ivory.



Villages around Hanoi still have attractive old stone gateways typical of the past.

Artisans' villages around Hanoi

Background

After the French left North Vietnam in 1954, the Vietnamese government set up village cooperatives including ones processing ivory for export. We have no written information on these ivory village cooperatives, only learning about them orally from an ivory carver in 1991 and on this visit, but presumably by the time of the liberalization of the Vietnamese economy in the 1980s these cooperatives had declined significantly. They gradually were replaced by private ivory businesses, as in certain villages around Hanoi that started to develop family enterprises (Minh 2015).

Craft businesses became popular, especially making items for export. Villages grew to specialize in producing and marketing certain types of items.

Bacninh Province, about 35 km north-east of Hanoi and reaching the Chinese border, now has 6,700 small and medium-size enterprises and 120 villages specializing in producing handicrafts (Minh 2015). The Vietnamese government and international donors have encouraged these businesses to grow by upgrading the area's infrastructure around Hanoi, such as the roads. It has been a way to enable villagers to earn money while staying at home, living in their rural areas, to reduce the rush of Vietnamese people moving to the cities in recent years, attracted by better job opportunities and a perceived improved lifestyle. Some of the first ivory carvers started in the villages south of Hanoi (Stiles 2004). We visited four villages south of Hanoi, and then two villages north of Hanoi that are known for carving various materials.

First village

Ivory workshops and artisans

We learned the exact whereabouts of certain villages that were known for their carving – including ivory – from tour guides, taxi drivers and vendors. The first and best-known village for ivory carving that we visited had by far the largest number of artisans and workshops that we saw anywhere in Vietnam. It was south of Hanoi among the paddy fields.

Villages used to be walled with a stone gateway leading into the main lane with single-storey red-tiled roofed houses on either side. This first village now had in place of the old traditional houses many flashy new pseudo-French-style villas about three storeys high. The date of construction was proudly written on them, mostly from the late 1990s through the 2000s. The growing wealth in the village could clearly be seen, with more money spent on some of the newer large houses with lavish balustrades and mouldings. Several new black Mercedes cars were parked on the road, a rare sight elsewhere, showing again how wealth in this village has accrued. The traditional old village temples, a large ornamental pond with lilies and a community house were still present, giving the village a sense of history and the villagers a strong sense of belonging.

As we walked along the main street we saw, through metal gates, courtyards in front of the large houses

that were being used as workshops for carving wood and ivory. Some workshops led into the house behind where the well-mannered Vietnamese allowed one to wander and see their enterprises. After a few hundred metres, there was a crossroads with another narrow main street running towards a second gateway leading out towards the rice fields and the main road. Most workshops and outlets were along these two main streets. They follow the law of fengshui – having a shop on a bigger street is better for business.

The artisans work long hours, working into the evenings too, but they take a break in the middle of the day, closing their workshops anywhere from around 11.30 am to 3 pm to eat and rest. The artisans we saw were mostly turning out beads, bangles and other mass-produced items. They used similar old-style manufacturing techniques, although newer machines to produce ivory items faster have been developed for use as well in the area.

We found 10 large and very active ivory workshops, most with numerous bead-making machines, each being used by an artisan for a certain stage of bead making. Littered all over the ground of these workshops were plastic bowls of semi-processed ivory and leftover ivory chips and shavings. We found one such shop by noticing that the windowsill outside was caked in ivory powder that was blowing



During our visit, villagers here were enjoying their annual festival at the Temple of God of Crafts. The festival becomes more lavish each year as their carving businesses improve.



Partially cut beads from slices of elephant tusks are hammered out by hand in large numbers to make into necklaces and bracelets that include rosaries.

out of the window. In this workshop, newly made ivory bangles that had just been washed were lying on the ground on a towel to dry. In the bedroom behind, two big dishes of ivory bangles were under the bed and thin ivory bangles in sets of seven (as well as buffalo horn ones) were piled up behind the door. These had just been made and were not on display for retail sale, so we did not add them to our count. The thin ivory bangles are sold in sets of seven so that the wearer can add a bangle each day of the week. The ready ivory bangles were available to us for retail sale. Some, they remarked, were made from so-called pink ivory, said to be from freshly poached elephants (especially forest elephants). Pink ivory is more expensive and preferred, supposedly having more power and spiritual value. The pinkish colour, as the carver demonstrated, can be seen with a bright torch. These bangles were priced at 6 million dong (USD 267) for one of 1-cm width, 8 million dong (USD 356) for one of 3 cm and 5 million dong (USD 222) for a more whitish one of 2-cm width. The bigger, more expensive tusks are needed for bangles while smaller ones can be used for beads, cut out from discs of ivory.

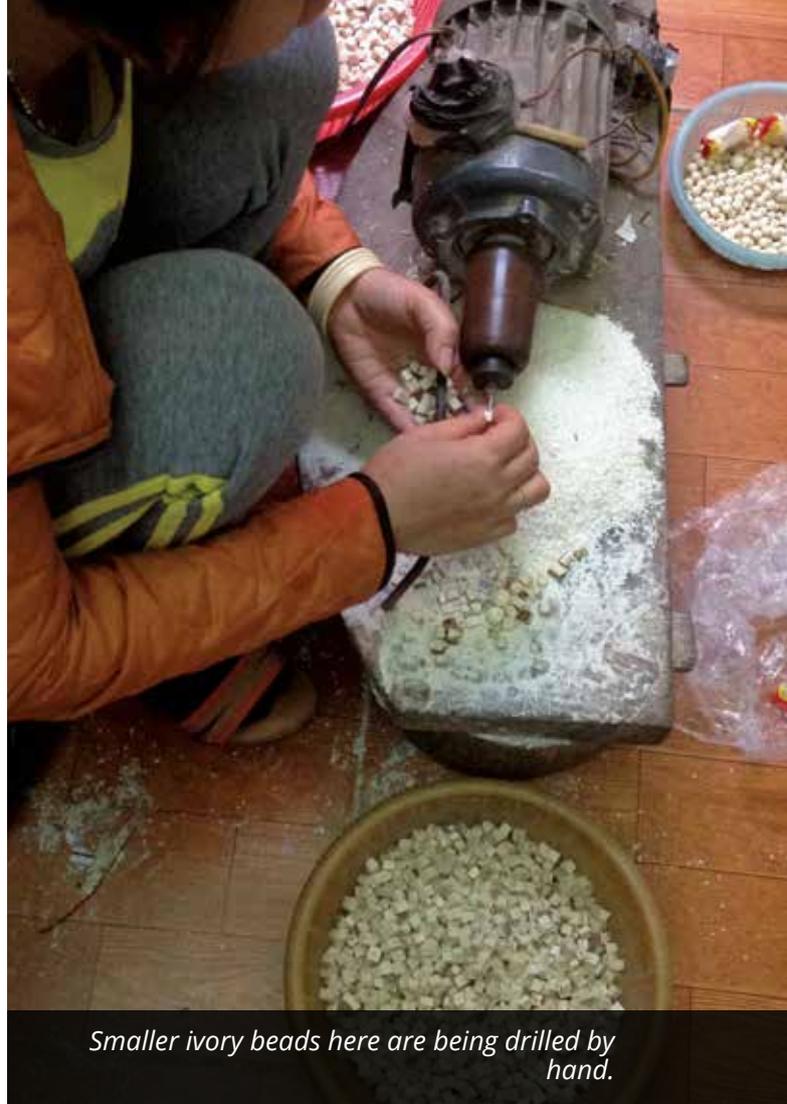
Six of the ivory workshops had ivory items available on display for customers, selling small amounts to consumers at a retail price and items in bulk to

traders at a wholesale price. One large workshop with a lot of ivory production and an equally large amount of ivory items for sale in its retail outlet had a frenzy of bead-making activities. Artisans were too busy to worry about a foreigner wandering about, nor did they seem used to hostile visitors bothering them with cameras. They essentially had no sense that they were doing anything illegal.

Production of bead items dominated in this village. Artisans utilized the same technique as for producing wood beads in the past. First the ivory is sliced into discs, then the ivory discs are put under a cutting machine like a biscuit cutter; they produce the bead size required, then turn the disc around to semi-cut the beads with the central cutting tube. They hammer these semi-cut beads out of the disc, one by one, through a hole matching their size on a low metal stand to fall into a bowl below. For the string, they drill a small hole through each small bead by hand. They place larger beads one at a time in a narrow trough the size of the bead with drills entering from either side to meet in the middle. A steady trickle of water onto the bead settles the ivory powder that sticks over the machine like a mounting pile of clotted cream. They put the beads into a spinning machine to smooth and polish them, then place them into round basket trays for sorting, with the artisan



This machine drills holes through larger beads with water trickling down the trough to settle the ivory dust.



Smaller ivory beads here are being drilled by hand.



After being whizzed around in a polishing machine the beads are sorted.



In several outlets women were busily stringing ivory beads for the flourishing ivory business.



Ivory figures that take time and skill to produce may be crafted here but are frequently carved in other villages by experienced carvers, to be returned, and then often sold wholesale to Chinese.

removing faulty ones for further smoothing. The ready beads are brought in large plastic bowls to the beading women to string.

In each of seven other retail outlets an artisan was working in the back - hammering out beads, sandpapering items and sorting or stringing beads. It seemed that the artisans were overladen with ivory to process, having to work on items in the retail outlets as well. We saw no skilled carving work, only ivory processing on a fast conveyer-belt-style scale. Another four workshops/outlets had closed metal doors and we could not visit them.

In one outlet that specialized in selling chopsticks of ivory, wood, mother of pearl inlay and bone, the vendor/artisan showed us a sack of raw elephant tusks and explained how he makes his ivory chopsticks. He uses only the solid part of the tusk. A kilo of raw ivory makes about five pairs of chopsticks. He said he also makes the usual ivory beads, and from the leftover pieces he makes smaller beads. The vendor said that the Chinese buy all his chopsticks and that they like to buy everything made of ivory that is available in the village.

Our interpreter informed us that he had last been to this village as a tour guide five years earlier when the artisans were processing mostly wood. At that time, very little ivory was being processed and sold.

One vendor told us that he was initially a wood carver and that his family then started to work on ivory. This was followed about four years later (2011) by rhino horn carvings, which the family initiated in the village. They had expanded to three shops selling ivory and rhino horn items by the time of our visit. Over 10 families were working in ivory and rhino horn now, making from both materials bangles, large-bead bracelets, plain oblong pendants and other jewellery items, he explained.

While some artisans in this village can carve as well as process ivory mechanically, many send the plain items out to Vietnamese artisans in other villages for the longer carving of a design on a commission basis. A 6.5 x 4.5-cm plain pendant that a customer asks to be sent out to a carver nearby will take a week to be ready.

Retail outlets, ivory items and prices

This village produces, wholesales and retails new ivory items, specializing in objects for the Chinese market. The village prospered in the 1990s when the initial tourist shops were set up selling wooden items, and now are prospering greatly with ivory items for sale and also similar items carved out of rhino horn. The sizes of the new houses have been steadily growing in tandem with the profusion of wealth in the village. One expensive car parked outside an ivory outlet had an ivory figurine on its dashboard, symbolizing the reason for their business expansion.

We counted 53 open retail outlets with 9,893 new ivory items displayed for sale and an average of 187 items per outlet (Table 13). The number of items displayed for sale ranged from 3 to 1,360 per outlet. These outlets are connected to the workshops that are usually family-run enterprises, with family members involved in ivory manufacture and sales. Nearly all were wood and ivory carving specialty shops. What was on view was only a small part of the amounts behind the scenes, as sometimes we were able to see when a door was left open. Vendors were always able to go to the back of the shop or into their houses behind their outlet to bring bags of more items if a buyer showed a particular interest in specific objects.

Although only new relatively inexpensive trinkets were generally on display, this village sells more expensive ivory carvings also. They are shown on request but are kept securely at home and not put on display. Some designers of these are in other nearby villages, as most artisans in this village tend to concentrate on mass production.

To help with counting ivory items in the cabinets, we took photos, as it was extremely difficult to take notes with people watching us everywhere, our being the only Westerners. Sometimes the vendors, if they noticed pictures being taken, objected, so it was important to take them quickly and inconspicuously, not to upset the vendors.

Although the outlets in this village seemed to specialize in ivory and wooden bead jewellery for the bulk of their production, all the common trinkets were available in the front glass cabinets, laid out on several shelves. Sometimes side cabinets packed with ivory stretched back into the shop. Wooden jewellery items were often available in the front glass cabinets as well, but ivory generally took pride of place on the top shelf; larger wooden carvings were usually in wall cabinets inside the shop.



Ivory items in this northern village are usually displayed on the top shelves of cabinets for easy viewing.



Nearly all ivory figures and figurines represent Buddhism or Chinese folklore, but sometimes there are small rhino figurines as seen on the left.



As most outlets are relatively recent, there were no shop numbers, and some had no name either. The great majority of the outlets that were open were selling ivory, with only four seen selling wood items only. The main items seen for sale were Chinese-style pendants (39%), many being the circular or oblong pendants of 4–5-cm size. They were usually intricately carved with Buddhist or flower designs. Bangles (nearly all adult size, and large to fit the Chinese people) made up 23% of the items and they were usually plain. Thin plain rings made up 14% of the items on display, often in bags for people wishing to buy them wholesale, while beaded bracelets and necklaces (usually in the form of rosaries with 108 beads) made up 13% (Table 14). The cheapest item seen for sale was a thin ivory ring for USD 2 and the most expensive was a tusk carving of 20 cm for USD 1,941. Most items were similarly priced in the outlets, each being the same type of outlet with the same overheads and selling the same types of items (Table 15).

Prices were usually calculated by weight for mass-produced items. One vendor, even of an expensive

carved ivory item, priced it by weight as opposed to skill. It was 630 grams and thus cost 43,680 dong, i.e. 69 dong per gram, but he said he would come down to 40 million dong (USD 1,778)/kg, i.e. 63 dong/g. When we put the carving on the electronic scale, it was in fact 624 g (64 dong/g). This shows why the Chinese may spend a lot of time in a shop, re-weighing items to calculate the best prices. Vendors may price their items also by size and by the design and skill of workmanship. Items did not have price tags, and retail prices could be higher or lower for a customer, depending on their perceived wealth or eagerness to buy.

The vendors in this village were mostly suspicious of our presence as nearly all buyers who come here are Chinese. They were thus not usually cooperative in giving us prices as we were not buying anything, they said. We asked the price of some large tusk tips of 15 cm weighing 338 g and 12.5 cm weighing 178 g, but the vendor would not give the price because it appeared we were conducting a market survey and he was concerned about his competitors, he replied.



Chinese, both retailers as seen here, and wholesalers, come especially to this northern Vietnamese village to buy their ivory items.



Visitors from mainland China particularly like intricately carved large oblong pendants which they sometimes photograph before buying.

Vendors and buyers

During our survey, which covered three days and four visits in this village, the families were having their annual village festival to worship at the temple of the God of Crafts. The festival becomes more lavish each year, they boasted proudly, as business improves. Outlets opened and closed at different times and days that weekend for the shop owners to visit friends on this holiday. Some villagers were busy playing in or watching a football match one afternoon, and not working, and there were many games set up for children too. Therefore, it was not surprising that some artisans and vendors were inactive. There were, therefore, fewer Chinese customers than on a normal workday, we were told. Our presence was thus rather conspicuous, and while some vendors were friendly, others were hostile, not wanting us to enter their outlets towards the end of our survey, aware we were only looking and not buying.

Ivory items are generally too expensive for most Vietnamese and we saw no Vietnamese choosing such items for themselves. Several Vietnamese women living in this village, however, were wealthy enough to wear ivory bangles of the most common 1-cm width, rather than plastic copies. The village shops sell items catering specifically for Chinese taste. Most of the Chinese customers are brought to the village by Vietnamese guides who speak Chinese, visiting in cars or tour buses. Normally cars and buses park outside the second gate leading onto the main retail street so that the customers can simply walk in to see the

outlets. Having vehicles on the narrow street would be too congested. Some vendors said the Chinese buy all their items: 'they like to buy everything'. The vendors informed us that they have learned some Mandarin to help them broker a good deal with their Chinese customers. Even some of the shop signs are in Chinese. While some Chinese are buying ivory items for retail sale for themselves, others are Chinese traders buying in bulk. Smartphones were ubiquitous because online transactions are common nowadays and ever expanding.

We saw several Chinese in the shops and watched to see what they were interested in buying. One Chinese man had a Mandarin-speaking Cambodian as his interpreter and was looking at round pendants with the centre hole and long bead necklaces/rosaries. He also examined many ivory bangles with his smartphone torch to buy one for his daughter. Chinese are hard bargainers, but he only managed a discount from 2 million dong (USD 89) to 1.8 million dong (USD 80) for the bangle. The starting retail prices are lower than elsewhere, being the production site, so discounts were small.

A Chinese man and woman were in another outlet negotiating the price of bangles on a table at the back of the shop, putting them on the little electronic scale. There was a large plastic bowl of bangles and many more were strewn over the glass tabletop while they tried to make their choices and settle a price.

Four people in another small shop were crowded over the front glass cabinet choosing pendants, with two round and one oblong one on the top of the glass counter being examined. The three Chinese customers were quoted 580 yuan for a pendant (USD 90), but they would pay in dong (2 million). One of the two women was a Vietnamese guide, and one of the men spoke a little bit of Vietnamese, which is unusual for Chinese people, suggesting he was a regular trader to Vietnam, not a tourist. Our guide tried to hear their conversation and we tried to witness a sale, but the vendor realized, after our pricing various items, that we were not buying, only pricing, and asked us to leave.

In another shop a group of two Chinese tradesmen and three sales women crouched on the floor looking at bundles of ivory combs, bangles and pendants. The vendors wanted 55 million dong (USD 2,444) a kilo for the items they had selected, which the Chinese men said was too much. They went away on their motorbike, to return in the evening for further negotiation. By nightfall, the group of two men and two women were outside the shop sending smartphone messages back and forth to dealers in China about the items to be bought, while one woman buyer was inside with the vendors still pricing items on the floor. Chinese traders being shrewd businesspeople, take their time over their purchases to acquire the best possible wholesale price, some working late into the evening.

We talked at length to a trader who lived in Guangxi Province in southern China who had driven from

China in his own car to the closest border to buy ivory items in Vietnam to sell back home. He came here to buy ivory items every two months. He calibrated the width of a 2-cm ivory bangle (with a metal measurer) that was USD 300, although he quoted to us the yuan price. He spent a lot of time on his smartphone contacting his buyers in China, as our guide, who also spoke Chinese, could gather. He came to this village regularly to buy ivory objects wholesale in bulk, and also items made of turtle shell that were also available in certain shops. He wore a wide ivory bangle on his left wrist. He was very friendly, inviting us to stay in Guangxi; his Vietnamese colleague, however, was a little concerned as to why we were there, as Westerners are not usually interested in buying ivory.

These outlets (retail and wholesale combined), in collaboration with their workshops, also take orders to dispatch ivory items to their Chinese customers. One vendor was arranging in a red suitcase 20-cm ivory figures in about three layers with 10 on the top, in full view of passersby.

The villagers were all relaxed about their ivory, with their activities and their displays totally in the open, impossible to miss at the front of the shops. Nowhere was a policeman to be seen on any visit, and their village life and ivory trade continued unabated. Chinese buyers also were very relaxed about being photographed, as if it were entirely normal and legal to be selecting ivory items, either retail for themselves and their family and friends, or wholesale for illegal trade back in mainland China.



Chinese traders send messages on their smartphones to their buyers in mainland China in the evenings to agree upon their final prices for ivory items.



Mounted heads of animals with antlers and horns are liked in Vietnam and China to decorate walls. Nearly all the stock in this village is exported wholesale to mainland China.

Second village

Ivory workshops and artisans

In the second village we visited, which we had been told had ivory carving activities as well, we saw cow and buffalo horns being processed, but no ivory workshops were visible on this visit. The villagers here were far more secretive about their ivory that they produce wholesale, along with horn, for the export market. We met a famous wood carver who was now retired. He invited us into his house with its curved marble stairway and lavish banister in the popular design of new Vietnamese houses being built by the newly prosperous. He showed us his certificates from the Vietnam Handicrafts Society, he having been called Nghe Nhan, excellent artist. His village has a 400-year history, and he was proud of his artistic heritage, especially inlaying wood.

He asked us to read his letter from the Vietnam Association of Crafts Villages (VICRAFTS) explaining how the production of traditional products made a contribution to the economy, creating employment for many thousands of labourers, so improving their lifestyle, especially of those who live in the countryside and produce items for export. The letter explained how culture offers the world shared experience, while training people to produce a high quality of traditional products. He glowed in the knowledge that he and his village had made a cultural contribution, being part of Vietnam's rich tradition in works of art and handicrafts.

He told us that although most carving work in the village traditionally utilized buffalo horn and more recently cow horn, he could not deny that ivory, and rhino horn more recently still, is also carved, but secretly, behind closed doors. The master carver would not comment further on this, saying he used to work for the government and could say no more. The people in this village were far more guarded about their work than in the first village.

Generally the workshops were behind large solid metal gates in the front of their expensive new three storey houses, similar to the first village we visited. Many produced animal head 'trophies' with horns from numerous species, the unusual ones, such as greater kudu and oryx, imported in bulk from Africa. These are popular in Vietnam with the rich, but are particularly in demand in China, artisans explained. They are in demand to decorate the walls of houses. Most common are the heads of cattle, notably big bulls, that are popular with businesspeople wanting to gain power from their 'trophy' through their belief in spirits, while others may choose softer items for decoration for their fengshui belief, we were told.

Artisans in this village specialized in making horn combs, with huge piles of buffalo horn ready for the stages of production in the family workshops. Some workshop areas had piles of bones, usually the femur of cows and buffaloes, and sometimes elephant bones.



This newly built showroom demonstrates the wealth being made by some businessmen in this village selling a variety of wildlife-crafted products.

Although the artisans admitted they can make items of bone and ivory in the same way, they were reticent about saying more about ivory. It was a rainy cold day and the village looked rather closed up and bleak. We

were there in the middle of the day when the villagers wanted to be left in peace to have their lunch break, which did not help us find friendly artisans who were willing to discuss their ivory production.

Retail outlets, ivory items and prices

We saw no shops selling ivory items, retail or wholesale. Some workshops had on display for retail sale in small cabinets bone beads and chopsticks, as well as horn combs. This village is not famous for a retail market of any kind where visitors can come to shop, and they all kept quiet about the

quantity of ivory and rhino horn items they produce and are being sold from the village, how they were sold and at what price, some naming other places to which we should go instead. We were told this village wholesales to traders for the mainland Chinese market.

Vendors and buyers

Worked ivory is kept hidden behind the scenes. There were some showrooms consisting of animal heads with horns and antlers on the walls. Vendors admitted they sold nearly all their stock to the mainland Chinese. Some showrooms were within untidy and scruffy workshops and others were new looking, well lit and expensively laid out.

The artisans worked in the traditional manner, as usual on the floor, sometimes in the showrooms. Vendors were few and we saw no customers in this village, as most items are dispatched to China. It is important nevertheless to record the lack of shops and consumers for future visit comparisons.

Third village

Ivory workshops and artisans

We learned about this village having ivory carving from earlier horn carvers, and left our taxi to walk down the labyrinth of narrow lanes, too narrow for a car. This village had remained much poorer with no retail outlets and no showrooms, and few workshop areas visible. We saw a woman covered in white dust; she was carving white stone into figures of Chinese gods and folklore characters for the Chinese market. No ivory workshops were immediately visible. So an old man in the village took us down more lanes through a closed door and into a small crowded ivory workshop where we counted 10 carvers all in one room, including a supervisor - all young boys except for one young girl, probably in their late teens. They were sitting cross-legged in rows in the small, cramped, almost windowless room, each with their own light focused on an ivory pendant, using electric dentist drills for carving the intricate Chinese designs so popular on round and oblong pendants, the same designs we had seen for sale in the first village. This suggests they supply carved items for Chinese taste to outlets in the first village, and perhaps elsewhere, for sale to Chinese mainlanders.

The young supervisor instructed his carvers to hide their items from us and ordered us to leave. He was very annoyed with the old man for having taken us to the workshop, which we would not have found without his help. This showed us that such activities indeed mostly occur behind closed doors, and that young Vietnamese are now being employed to become carvers in this growing business. As is normally the case with carved trinkets, a pencil

tracing over the pendant allowed the artisans to follow specific patterns that can be repeated over and over again on more pendants for faster work, without requiring special artistic talent or originality.

We explored the village further, although the light was fading, and soon we heard the tapping of chisels. Following the sound, we came down another narrow lane to an open doorway leading to a husband and wife working on the ground near the doorstep of their house. She was working on bamboo objects. He had an array of hand tools beside him and was chipping away at a large elephant tusk held securely between his feet in the traditional way. They welcomed us and allowed us to take photos, unlike the young supervisor in the previous workshop. We sat and chatted about his work, learning from him that he had started carving wood and bone at age 16 and that he was now 45. In 1992 he started using a bit of ivory, but mostly bone. He uses elephant bone, cow bone and buffalo bone, of increasing hardness; he prefers buffalo bone. Customers from Poland used to order carvings of bone items. Starting around 2010, he began carving more ivory items as demand for ivory suddenly grew. Demand continued to grow until 2014. Then he claimed demand for his ivory items was down. Most of his work was commissioned.

He said that the 3-4-kg tusk he was presently carving would take him a month to do. His normal working day was from 8 am to 8 pm with lunch and supper breaks, working a seven-day week except for holiday festivals. Most clients, he said, are mainland Chinese.



Young Vietnamese are now involved in carving ivory items for the recently increasing production of worked ivory, as seen in this village.



This master craftsman was carving on commission an elephant tusk with hand tools and an electric drill.



Elephant and buffalo bones are also intricately carved, but artisans prefer the texture of ivory.

He showed us a huge elephant leg bone he was also carving, which he said was harder than ivory but softer than buffalo or cow bone.

On our way out of the village, we heard electric drills and walked into another workshop, again in an outside courtyard area, where five teenage boys were sitting next to one another on the ground along with one teenage girl. They were carving large pieces of wood with hand tools, bent over each piece of wood that was held securely between their feet. The supervisor told us

that the young artisans are paid for what they produce and can earn up to USD 400 a month. These children like to earn money to help pay for their education at school. They later will be able to become professional carvers, in wood and also ivory. They were extremely surprised to see us but accepted being photographed as they worked, with their heads bent low over their large 60–90-cm wood carvings. Some of the wood, reddish in colour, was called *trac* (Thailand rosewood, *Dalbergia cochinchinensis*). The supervisor, as usual, said the main buyers were Chinese.

Retail outlets, ivory items and prices

No outlets were selling ivory items, nor were there cabinets displaying bone or wood trinkets or carvings for sale. We only saw a cabinet of soft white stone figurines for sale. Some carvers were supplied with plain ivory items to carve popular designs for the wealthier shop owners from other villages, returning to them the finished items for those shop owners to

sell in their outlets to their Chinese customers. While the shop owners in other villages were now making a handsome profit selling ivory items, these hard-working and talented carvers, cut off in this quiet, out-of-the-way location, were still poor, earning less money than the shop owners. There were no new houses or cars in this village.

Vendors and buyers

There were no vendors and no shoppers in this small village, being hidden away down narrow roads among the paddy fields. This was a carving village and was less prosperous, but the friendly ivory carver offered for sale his hand-carved buffalo bone carvings made with hand tools. One of 14 x 5 cm with a lotus flower and fish design was 400,000 dong (USD 18) and he reduced it to 350,000 dong (USD 16) to secure a sale. These hollow carved bones

do not have the lustre of ivory, but considering the workmanship, they were inexpensive. The village was isolated and quiet, and the maze of little lanes was people-free compared with Vietnamese towns with the usual congestion and general bustle. Retail buyers do not appear yet to come here, and instead items are made on commission for the villages or the export market.

Fourth village

Ivory workshops and artisans

We learned from the earlier horn carvers that this village had ivory carving activities today, and found artisans with garage-size workshops along one side of the road on the edge of their village. We saw nobody with ivory; the men and women carvers were surrounded by large chunks of wood and were carving them into an array of statues using numerous hand tools spread on the ground in front of them. They worked industriously, sitting at the entrance to their workshops to gain access to the most light. Some sat on the pavement with hammer and chisel, chipping away at wooden religious statues. Nobody admitted

to working ivory, although Vietnamese wood carvers can happily switch to ivory if it is available to them.

We decided to go through the old stone gateway into the village itself in case we could hear chisels or drills and see any ivory artisans, but we did not. The village again was very quiet, but there were some large, newly built houses two or three storeys high, enriched with decorative mouldings and marble tile entrances; money was obviously being made. Few traditional low houses remained.

Retail outlets, ivory items and prices

Although we were told ivory was carved in this village, it is obviously done very discretely and not displayed for retail sale. Like many villages specializing in handicrafts, they supply items wholesale to traders for sale elsewhere. We saw no shops displaying any ivory or wood trinkets for sale, nor were any visitors in the village. The villagers grow

their rice and are fairly self-contained, only displaying their items carved of wood on the roadside for drivers passing by to see. Again, it is worth recording our findings here to help future studies, in case there is further growth with ivory sales, as occurred in the first village over recent years.

Vendors and buyers

The artisans had sculptures of rosewood, cedar and jackwood filling their workshops that they would sell to anyone wishing an item, but they admitted that their work was for the Chinese market. One outlet

was making ornamental cow heads, again popular for men's offices or houses for people who are in power or want positions of power.



A carver was making a wooden mount for Ankoli cow horns that resemble ivory in their colour and size. Polished elephant tusks may also be mounted in this way, although none was seen for display.



Some of the skilled wood carvers can also work in ivory if it is provided to them, but wood is the predominant material for sculptures seen in this village.

Fifth village

Ivory workshops and artisans

The fifth village we visited that was known for its carving was north of Hanoi. Although nearly all the carvings we saw were wood, some ivory items were also carved and displayed in a scattering of the wood showrooms.

One carver, who had been taught to carve by her father, had wood and several of her ivory items in a display cabinet in her showroom, including an unusual ivory human figure of an old man that she said her father had carved 50 years ago. Interestingly, she told us that her father had learned to carve in the village cooperative when there were 100 ivory carvers here, producing ivory items for export. Her father was still alive, now 73, and lived in another hamlet; he now instructs carvers in wood, she explained, but time unfortunately prevented us from visiting him on this occasion.

Another woman vendor admitted she carves ivory secretly and had made the items that we saw in her display cabinet. She said she could make any ivory carvings requested, if provided with the raw ivory. Others also carve ivory here secretly, she said to our guide, as we looked at her various ivory items for sale.

We saw no give-away signs of ivory powder and

nobody was working ivory along this main road, being too exposed, with cars and no doubt officials passing by. The pavement was a hive of wood carving and sandpapering activity. The women artisans were happy to be interviewed and photographed about their work; they continued with their hammers and chisels as they talked, many wearing gloves to protect their hands from the sun, as well as masks for the dust and scarves. One said she had started wood carving at 18 years of age and she was now 46; she was the owner of her workshop and showroom. As she was experienced, she said she could work fast and it would take her only three days to carve the 130 x 40-cm wood panel that she was working on. There was a lot of skill and labour-intensive work in this industrious wood carving village, with room to expand into ivory if it became available to them.

Carvers squatted on the pavement along the busy main road of the village, working with hand tools in front of their showrooms that were filled with large finished, sometimes varnished, wooden items ready for sale. Many were very heavy, requiring cars to stop beside the entrance on the roadside to collect them. The carvers were mostly women, using their hand tools with great speed and dexterity, while less well paid women sandpapered the finished wooden items.



Large wooden carvings of Asian elephants were for sale in showrooms lining the main road of this village, where the artisans also work. Elephants are a strong part of Vietnamese and Chinese culture.

For this unskilled sandpapering work, a woman was being paid a salary of 300–400 million dong (USD 133–178) a month with one day off a week. The wood carvers get at least double that amount, being paid for what they produce, as they do for ivory. Most wooden statues were large figures of Chinese folklore characters, statues of Buddha and wooden elephants used to decorate door entries and doubling up as stools, often sold in pairs. There were also huge wooden vases, popular in houses and offices to symbolize the virtues of Buddhist ‘emptiness’. Some

had small cabinets, mainly to hold wood jewellery items such as bead bracelets.

Our guide had not been to the village for about four years and commented that it had grown much larger in the number of workshops and wood artisans, but workers were no longer doing inlay work with mother of pearl. The main road was lined a long way with these workshops, all selling similar wooden carved statues. Here were the largest number of wood carving outlets we saw in any of the villages visited.

Retail outlets, ivory items and prices

We carried out a sample survey of 50 of the many wood showrooms and counted 4 outlets with a cabinet each, selling 69 ivory items retail or an average of 17 items per outlet, ranging from 3 to 30 items per outlet. They were generally new, locally carved trinkets. They were all within small glass cabinets at the front of their showrooms, along with wooden beaded bracelets that some Chinese men were

examining in one cabinet. There were occasional plastic ones also. The most common ivory items for sale (36%) were carved Chinese-style 5-cm pendants (Table 16). Prices for these were about USD 50 but a 10% discount could be offered. The most expensive item by far was that unusual human figure carved 50 years ago, now offered for USD 2,000.

Vendors and buyers

The artisans, who may double up as vendors in these simple outlets, produce large wood carvings specifically for the Chinese market. We saw a car stopped at one workshop where the occupants were buying and filling up the car with wooden items from

the showroom. Business appeared to be booming as the carvers were so active and their showrooms were so filled with wooden sculptures, but the showrooms and their houses behind were run-down and in poor condition compared with those in the first village.

Sixth village

Ivory workshops and artisans

Some of the roads connecting these villages north of Hanoi were lined with high piles of huge logs, hardwoods obtained from the fast-depleting indigenous forests of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, with some pine from Russia, we were told. Our guide could see there had been a massive increase in the wood industry since his last visit to the area five years ago, due to the growth in the Chinese market. As carvers can work both wood and ivory, there is potential for greater ivory expansion too.

This village used to specialize in making firecrackers, but the government banned their manufacture in 1995, following too many deaths. So the village was now specializing in shell inlay work using shiny mother of pearl delicately cut and placed within wood furniture, trays and wooden pictures – a famous art form in Vietnam. We saw no ivory carvers currently working in this village, although the inlay artisans will use ivory when commissioned.

Retail outlets, ivory items and prices

Although ivory inlay items had been available for retail sale when the village started this specialty in the mid-1990s, interestingly, we saw no outlets

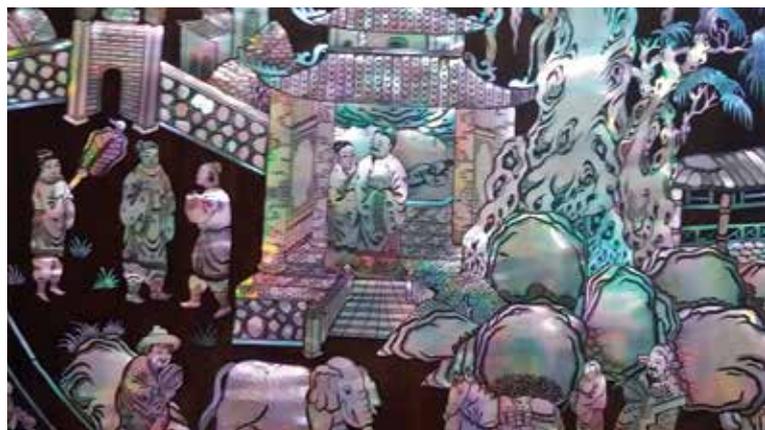
We visited an inlay workshop in the village to learn about the trade. Ivory used to be more in demand for inlay work. The owner of the shop presently used mother of pearl, which has gained in popularity, from two types of seashells supplied from Indonesia and Singapore. He could use ivory for inlay if a customer wished, he remarked. He traces out small pieces, cutting them out with a steady hand using an extremely fine saw. He employed seven artisans in his workshop, which was up a rickety ladder-like staircase on a platform at the back of the retail outlet. Three of them did the tracing and cutting, three cut the incisions in the wood and inserted the tiny shiny white shell pieces, and one engraved lines with black ink into the inlaid pieces to give the floral or scenic designs and shading. The artisan said there were another 10 inlay villages south of Hanoi in the district where he grew up; but he moved to this village to expand the craft about 15 years ago.

selling ivory objects in this village at this time, nor any wood items with ivory inlay work. Only the shinier mother of pearl inlay was seen in wood items for sale.

Vendors and buyers

Ivory inlaid items became popular 15 years previously, especially in China, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, but fewer vendors sell this style of furniture today. Demand declined for inlay in general in the last five years as the process is very slow and is not developing in new ways. Just a few individuals want ivory inlay, the artisan/vendor mentioned, while there is no demand for bone inlay. Our guide agreed that the sale of inlay had fallen significantly, after seeing how little was now

available, compared with five years ago. Fashion and taste come and go. The main buyers today for inlay are the Vietnamese, not the Chinese. Nowadays the Vietnamese want high-quality work, which many can now afford, the artisan/vendor remarked, but it takes much time and skill, so it has become more difficult to make a large enough profit compared with items that are quicker to produce and sell.



Detailed and time-consuming inlay work using mother of pearl has become easier to sell than ivory inlay nowadays, but ivory is used in this village when requested.



This bear and deer have been carved from the base of an antler and were for sale in HCMC's China town.



These tusks moulded from plastic, as a substitute for elephant ivory, are bought by Vietnamese to decorate their sitting rooms.



On a vendor's desk in Hanoi, this carved elephant bone was being used as a container. There is another in the background for sale.



Pig teeth (that vendors say are from wild pigs) and bone trinkets are often seen in souvenir outlets.



This was the only object of mammoth ivory we saw for sale in Vietnam.

Substitutes for elephant ivory in Vietnam

The main substitutes for both trinkets and carvings made of ivory in Vietnam are special woods and stones. For example, **mulberry wood** is a popular cream-coloured wood made into small beaded bracelets for babies to ward off evil; they generally sell for around 90,000 dong each (USD 4). There are a number of more expensive woods, some scented, such as **sandalwood**, used for jewellery and ornaments. Others are for carving sculptures; in China **agar wood** is particularly valuable. The most popular of the stones for carving is **jade**, including **white jade**, sometimes carved into Buddha figurines. A 2-3-cm white jade Buddha pendant was priced at around 1 million dong (USD 44).

Ivory carvers we spoke to claimed nobody in Vietnam carves **mammoth ivory** today. The main Russian mammoth ivory exporter confirmed this later and said he does not export his mammoth tusks to Vietnam as the Vietnamese do not want it (pers. comm. January 2016). It is the substitute most similar to elephant ivory and can easily be confused when items are sold together as in China, especially smaller items. We only came across one mammoth ivory item: an oblong pendant consisting of the brown outer part of the tusk, making identification easy. It was in HCMC's China Town. The vendor said it was not for sale and our interpreter claimed it was carved in Vietnam and was third-generation owned. Yet it was typical of the cheaper pendants carved of mammoth ivory nowadays in China from the so-called 'peel'.

Sometimes in the glass cabinets are ivory look-alike bangles and other items to which vendors give various names: **plastic**, **resin**, **ivory powder**, **ivory bone**,

ivory from the sea, etc. Regarding prices, a 2.5-cm plastic Buddha pendant in HCMC was about USD 12, a bone one around USD 27, an ivory one about USD 65. They were often sold in the HCMC tourist market outlets mixed closely together. Sometimes fake plastic bangles were on display near ivory ones. A large plastic bangle was USD 25-50 in HCMC. In the tourist village near Buon Ma Thuot the price offered was USD 6-12 for an adult plastic bangle and USD 4 for a baby's one. These ivory-coloured bangles gained in popularity in this region when more ivory came on the market. Before this, Vietnamese men did not wear them, but now many people have started wearing them as they look like the real thing, we learned.

Some carvings or small items of jewellery were made from the bones of **water buffalo**, **cow**, **pig** and **fish**. These bones can be identified by the small flecks that can fill with dust, especially if old; a hole at the base is often filled with bone powder, particularly common in small, 2-3-cm Buddha pendants. We also saw raw **elephant bone** selling wholesale in Buon Ma Thuot from USD 22-27/kg, depending mainly on size with the front upper leg bones being most expensive. Also, elephant foot bones and skull bones are much sought after as they are considered to carry the elephant's spirit more strongly, warding off evil spirits from the owner's home. Several elephant bone carvings in the Chinese style were in antique outlets in Hanoi, some for sale, and one used as a pencil container on a vendor's desk in place of the traditional ivory one. A large one was priced at USD 500 in an antique outlet. Also in Hanoi an elephant bone rosary necklace with

108 beads was 800,000 dong (USD 36) and a normal medium-length necklace was 500,000 dong (USD 22).

Comments were rarely made on what was illegal and what was not. Vendors just wish to sell their items. In the second village we visited in northern Vietnam, artisans specialized in making items from buffalo horn and cow bone, such as combs, chopsticks and beads. The leftover bones are used as animal food, selling for 7,000 dong/kg (USD 31/kg).

Various other **elephant products** were seen for sale, as all parts of the elephant are revered (Table 4). Hairs were in some places sold singly or made into rings, bracelets and necklaces, sometimes displayed in trays beside ivory items. In HCMC's China Town we were told the hairs are used to ward off evil spirits, as a magic way to prevent fever, and even to test for poison - you can insert a hair into poison and it can apparently change colour, as do ivory chopsticks, we were told. Usually hairs are 'harvested' from living domesticated elephants' tails (the hairs being 10–25 cm long) for sale to tourists. In the Central Highlands in Buon Ma Thuot and the neighbouring tourist village, we counted five and eight **elephant tails** respectively on display, some smelling of elephant, but others were old and had lost their animal smell. They were not offered for sale to us. Ivories from large incisors of other mammals are rare to see, but there was an array of smaller animal teeth, especially from canines, used for pendants. The most common items were named as wild pig teeth of about 8 cm for around USD 18–22 or USD 70 for a large one with an added USD 30 if carved, as priced in HCMC at a shop in Ben Tanh

Market. We also priced **bear teeth** and **tiger teeth** for USD 150 each in the Central Highlands where more wildlife products for sale were seen than in the cities, while so-called **leopard teeth** were about USD 67 each. Most teeth, however, were imitation, the expensive ones being carved from elephant ivory and priced at around USD 130, to be worn as pendants.

Mother of pearl inlay is a popular Vietnamese specialty and preferred to ivory inlay. Seashells with mother of pearl (nacre) include **abalone**, **pearl oyster**, **large gold lip oyster** and **nautilus**, all of which can be used in Vietnam for this traditional Vietnamese craft. In HCMC an artisan/vendor in his antique shop was fitting such mother of pearl inlay pieces into wood as he served his customers. In the north, in the sixth village we visited, artisans specialized in mother of pearl inlay. The main shop/workshop we saw displayed for sale mostly inlay furniture. Mother of pearl is also sometimes used by ivory carvers to make into items such as 2.5-cm Buddha pendants for 900,000 dong (USD 40).

Shiny white beads for bracelets and necklaces from **clam shell** are popular. A medium-size clam shell bead necklace was around USD 120. It is whiter, colder and a bit heavier than an ivory one. On first glance it may look similar, and as in China, more are nowadays on view for sale, showing their increasing popularity in the shops, as there is no prohibition. **Coral**, both red and white, is also used as jewellery.

Antlers are readily available and also are sometimes used in place of ivory for carvings. A carving from



In Buon Ma Thuot some souvenir outlets sold items made from Asian elephant bone: a comb was USD 22 and a pendant averaged at USD 15.



Rhino horn has become a recent, more expensive alternative to ivory, made into bangles and other common items, as we saw here in a northern Vietnam village. The majority of buyers are mainland Chinese.

the base of an antler was USD 300 in HCMC. Sometimes called deer horn, it is also made into beads for bracelets (looking similar to rhino horn beads, another more expensive substitute nowadays available, as we saw for sale in northern Vietnam). One large beaded bracelet of antler was a million dong (USD 44) on display in the fifth village we visited in the north where, by contrast, a plastic one of the same size was 200,000 (USD 9). Sometimes antlers are sold as part of a mounted deer head for decoration.

We only saw real **rhino horn**, which is a much more expensive alternative to ivory, in the first village we visited in the north (Vigne and Martin 2016). This horn has become increasingly popular since around 2011 for common small items, such as bangles and beaded bracelets, like those made out of ivory.

Water buffalo horn is crafted into a variety of jewellery and utilitarian items, as a cheaper alternative to ivory. Bangles were around 120,000 to 330,000 dong (USD 5–15) in HCMC, while buffalo horn beaded bracelets were 280,000 to 455,000 dong (USD 12–20) depending on bead size.

Also popular are the large horns from domestic **Ankoli cattle**. These horns are curved and white and thus can resemble ivory, but the horns may be slightly more twisted, and of course they are hollow. They are popular for decoration in people's houses, often in pairs on carved rosewood stands at the entrance of a room. They represent power and wealth, as do **cattle heads**, especially from large bulls, and other horned animals such as **oryx** and **greater kudu** being mostly sold en masse for the Chinese market, especially from certain villages around Hanoi. We also saw **saiga antelope horns** for sale for around USD 100 a

pair, and in HCMC they were also mounted on wood for wall decorations.

Throughout Vietnam one can find for sale a variety of claws, often displayed with worked ivory. Usually the claws of endangered animals are fake, however. Men may wear them as pendants for decoration and to ward off evil spirits. So-called **bear claws** were selling for USD 22–33, so-called **tiger claws** were about USD 27, and **leopard claws** USD 231.

There were also sometimes full turtle shells, especially from the **hawksbill turtle**, on walls for display in retail outlets. In the first village we visited in the north, a Chinese trader was looking at turtle shell items on display in an outlet selling ivory items. He was quoted in Chinese yuan (but would pay in dong) for items such as turtle shell bangles, beaded bracelets, necklaces, fans and combs. He was planning to buy a pair of turtle shell spectacle frames for 750,000 dong (USD 33).

Vendors sometimes said ivory items were made of another material, knowing that Western foreigners are wary of ivory. For example, in HCMC, an ivory ring with a dragon carved on top of it was named as 'deer horn', selling for USD 100. Similarly, a plastic bangle may be presented to a customer as bone for 300,000 dong (USD 13), as we were told in Buon Ma Thuot. Again, sometimes the vendors do not know the raw material or they say what they think the customer wishes to hear.

These alternative materials, however, do not normally replace ivory, although they may distract a customer into desiring another material instead. Usually they are simply alternative materials that customers may like.



This close up of a Gwan Yin ivory statue is the most popular figure, along with the Buddha, in Vietnam and China.



In 2002 ivory was in short supply in northern Vietnam's villages. This father and son worked on small ivory fragments to make Buddha amulets (small pendants). Middlemen bought their various ivory items to sell in Hanoi in the days before ivory quantities increased and negotiations with the Chinese on smartphones were common.

Ivory trends in time and space

Recent historical trends in the ivory trade in Vietnam

With the loosening up of the economy in the 1990s and increased tolerance of privately owned businesses, along with the encouragement by the government for foreign tourists to visit the country, the ivory business began slowly to pick up in the late 1990s. In the next decade the ivory industry grew with more wealthy Chinese visiting Vietnam. With the setting up of private handicraft industries in the villages around Hanoi, mainly for the export market, certain businesses became the major outlets for ivory item production and sale in the country.

Overall, Vietnam's ivory industry was still relatively modest on a global scale in 2008. Today, Vietnam has on display for sale one of the largest number of new, illegal ivory items in the world. Around 2008 tusks mostly came from domesticated and wild elephants originating in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos (Stiles 2008). With the expansion in the ivory industry, and with Indochina's elephant populations depleted, starting in the next decade nearly all tusks came from Africa.

Wholesale prices for tusks in Vietnam increased from about USD 100–200 a kilo in 1990 for an

average 3–4-kg tusk to a very high price on the world market of USD 500–1,500 a kilo in 2008 (Table 17). The reasons for this large increase in price were due to a sharp rise in demand for new tusks within Vietnam for carvers and a shortage of supply of tusks coming from Indochina with the heavily reduced elephant populations. In 2015 raw tusks, nearly all by then illegal from Africa, sold wholesale in Vietnam for USD 889–1,334 (with an average from 10 sources of USD 1,116), i.e. roughly the same as over the previous seven-year period (Table 17). By 2015 they were paying the same as in China for illegal raw ivory, prices having evened out in the region.

Stiles estimated in 2008 there were at least 17 ivory artisans in the country. He found 11 ivory carvers, one in Hanoi and 10 in three nearby villages (Stiles 2008). We found at least 79 ivory carvers/processors: 1 in HCMC, 4 in Buon Ma Thuot, at least 61 in the first northern village, 11 in the third northern village and 2 in the fifth northern village we visited. With the huge expansion in raw ivory coming into Vietnam, we believe the number of artisans has increased by at least 10-fold since 2008.

From 2001 to 2008, Stiles found in HCMC that the number of shops selling ivory items had increased by about 30%. From 2008 to 2015 we found that the number was nearly 2.5 times more. From 2001 to 2008 Stiles found the number of ivory items for sale in HCMC had fallen by 22%. From 2008 to 2015 there were over 1.5 times more (Table 18). In Hanoi from 2001 to 2008 Stiles found that the number of shops had declined, but from 2008 to 2015 the number had almost tripled. From 2001 to 2008 the items counted in Hanoi had declined by 47% and from 2008 to 2015 by 9% (Table 19). One reason for HCMC's growth in the quantity of items for sale has been the increase in the number of mainland Chinese visitors, especially to the outlets in China Town (Cholon), who are buying mainly new Chinese-style ivory jewellery. A reason for the decline in items in Hanoi is that there is no China Town as such, and the tourist areas are full of Western tourists and police so vendors are much more reluctant nowadays to display ivory items. Chinese tourists can go out to buy ivory retail nowadays directly from villages around Hanoi where it appears there is minimal law enforcement.

The main difference from 2008 was the expansion in the ivory trade in several villages, especially south

of Hanoi. Of the three ivory carving villages that Stiles visited in 2008, one was by far the biggest. This was the first village we visited near Hanoi and the number of carvers and ivory items had expanded greatly, not only for wholesale but now also for retail sale. Stiles had seen no retail outlets to survey (Stiles 2008). Many ivory items being made in 2008 were traditional Chinese figurines and figures, such as Gwan Yin. These were no doubt bought by traders for sale to the Chinese (Stiles, pers. comm. 2016). Today, this one village had become famous for ivory and accounted for 61% of the items we counted for retail sale in our survey in 2015, and the key change since 2008. This is the first retail count in this village, the biggest ivory centre known in the country today.

Another area had emerged for retail sales of ivory since 2008. This was in the Central Highlands in the town of Buon Ma Thuot, and nearby in a tourist village, both first surveyed by Nguyen and Willemsen (2015). There had been a steady expansion of visitors, thanks to an all-weather road to the tourist village, and growth in wealthy Asian consumers taking holidays to this region, able to buy expensive ivory souvenirs.

From 2008 to 2015 the types of ivory items surveyed



In 2008 a woman in a northern Vietnamese village acted as a broker selling raw elephant ivory to carvers that was smuggled in from Laos, and then she bought worked ivory from the carvers to sell herself.



Antique and old ivory items, such as these Mnong ear-lobe plugs, are becoming far rarer to find in Vietnam's retail outlets compared to earlier years.

in Vietnam remained mainly jewellery, especially pendants and bangles, including very small bangles for babies. The types of pendants in 2008 were mostly the small 2.5-cm Buddha/Gwan Yin pendants preferred by Vietnamese, but by 2015 many larger pendants of 5 cm were being made and sold for the Chinese market, such as the popular round and oblong shapes with carved Buddhist motifs. Some retail outlets in 2008 selling ivory items displayed for sale turtle shell items also (Stiles, pers. comm. May 2016), and this was the case in 2015 as well, with certain vendors choosing to sell endangered wildlife items together.

Retail prices in Vietnam, from data collected in HCMC and Hanoi, increased in US dollars 8.4 times from 1990 to 2008 for comparative items such as bangles, chopsticks, cigarette holders, necklaces and rings. This was due to the sharp increase in the price of tusks (by 7.3 times) and higher labour expenses. From 2008 to 2015 retail prices for these five items in Vietnam increased by 1.7 times. This smaller price rise was because the wholesale raw

ivory prices had remained roughly the same from 2008 to 2015 (Table 17).

Customers who may have bought raw and worked ivory as an investment in the early 1990s and sold it in 2008 would have made a huge return, but those buying in 2008 and selling in 2015 would not have netted a good return on investment.

In 2008 customers were ethnic Chinese (including from Hong Kong and Taiwan), Thais, local and American Vietnamese and some Europeans, in that order. In contrast, our survey found overall at least 75% of all the buyers were mainland Chinese.

As a substitute for elephant ivory, in the late 1990s Vietnamese were buying raw mammoth ivory in Russia and bringing back small quantities to Vietnam (Stiles 2008 and pers. comm. May 2016). Nowadays, no mammoth ivory is known to be imported into Vietnam and we found only one small mammoth ivory item for sale. That was in HCMC.



Generally Vietnamese throughout the country do not associate worked ivory with elephant tusks and have little knowledge about elephant threats.

Ivory trade trends within Vietnam in 2015

By far the most artisans seen were in the northern villages. One village we visited specialized the most in ivory. In it we saw at least 10 workshops that were run as family businesses; some had taken in extra staff for their huge production in bead processing with machines. In the Central Highlands we heard of no ivory workshops in the villages, and only one in the town of Buon Ma Thuot. This workshop produced small machine-made items such as rings and bangles from Asian elephant ivory, supplied mostly from domesticated elephants that died in Laos. In neither HCMC nor Hanoi did we hear of any big ivory workshops as rents there are much higher and cities have more law enforcement. But sometimes, an artisan may carve ivory in the back of the shop, as we saw in one instance in China Town in HCMC. Carvers are far more wary in the cities than in the villages, however, and the artisan we met in HCMC immediately hid the ivory bangle he was making when he saw us. None of the carvers in the villages objected to being watched and most were also relaxed about being photographed, except in the small third northern village we visited where tourists rarely go, and where a group of young ivory carvers stopped their work on our arrival at the command of the supervisor.

In total, we saw one ivory carver in one workshop in HCMC, four in one workshop in Buon Ma Thuot,

about 10 workshops in the first most active village with 1–10 artisans each, plus about seven outlets with an artisan each polishing items and stringing beads. In the third village we saw two ivory workshops with 10 carvers in one and one master carver in the other. And in the fifth northern village we met two ivory carvers. Men and women were equally involved in all locations.

As regards the retail trade, HCMC, with 8.2 million people not surprisingly had the most retail outlets (116) seen with ivory; Hanoi, with 7.6 million people only had 29 outlets with 371 items (Table 19). The availability of ivory in the shops seems to correlate with the amount of law enforcement in the locations, cities having the most, villages the least. It was the first northern village that had the most items by far in Vietnam on display for sale: 9,893 in 53 outlets. An average of 187 ivory items per outlet gave this village the highest number in Vietnam. The town of Buon Ma Thuot (with only 350,000 people) and the nearby tourist village in the Central Highlands had the next highest averages of 82 and 44 items per shop, with 1,965 objects in 24 outlets and 703 objects in 16 souvenir shops respectively (Table 20).

The retail outlets with ivory items in the cities were mostly selling expensive jewellery and in the northern

villages they mainly specialize in ivory and wood items. Overall in Vietnam we found ivory items in 109 jewellery outlets and 60 ivory/wood specialist outlets, followed by antique outlets in the cities (36) and gift/souvenir shops (22) in the larger urban centres, but few outlets were selling ivory in hotels (6) and none in shopping malls (Table 21).

The main items seen for sale in the six locations counted were pendants with the highest percentage (Table 22). All six locations we found with retail ivory items had the same top five items for sale, in alphabetical order: bangles, earrings, necklaces/bracelets (often in the form of rosaries that can double up as both), pendants and rings. Most of these items were newly made and similar looking in all the locations. Older items were relatively few and located in the two cities, usually in the antique outlets.

Although types of items across the country were generally similar, mostly small items of jewellery, especially pendants and bangles, there was one difference. The very small 2.5 cm Buddhist pendants were mostly seen in HCMC; they were of reduced popularity further north, where the larger Chinese pendants were seen in more outlets, being closer to the Chinese border where more Chinese shoppers go. New name seals were relatively few - 1% or less

of the items seen for sale in Buon Ma Thuot, the tourist village, and the northern villages. The name seals seen in HCMC and Hanoi were often old second-hand ones, stained with ink, for sale usually in antique outlets. There is obviously little demand for these in Vietnam. Chinese demand for them in Vietnam appears less than for other popular small ivory items, which are smuggled from Vietnam back to sell in mainland China illegally.

Retail prices for average adult bangles were cheapest at about USD 256 in the first northern village where we collected the most price information, followed by USD 302 in Buon Ma Thuot, USD 433 in Hanoi and USD 540 in HCMC. For cigarette holders prices increased in the same order of places, from USD 44, USD 69, USD 122 and USD 144 (Table 23). Retail price trends were much the same for other similar items that were easy to compare, with the first village near Hanoi generally selling items the cheapest followed by outlets in the Central Highlands, followed by the two big cities where items were comparatively expensive and where there was far less choice (Table 24).

Vendors are clearly relaxed about putting their new ivory items on view in the Central Highlands, along with two villages around Hanoi that we visited



This display shows typical new ivory items for sale in HCMC, similar to those seen elsewhere in the country.

with retail ivory sales. They were not fearing that inspectors would confiscate their ivory. This is in contrast to Hanoi, the capital, where police presence is no doubt a significant threat, keeping the city safe for tourists. As tourist numbers have grown in recent years and with the attraction of several cultural heritage sites, and better hotels and infrastructure becoming available, police inspectors will continue to be a feature of the city, keeping vendors nervous about displaying ivory. Items in both Hanoi and HCMC were often placed surreptitiously in parts of the glass cabinets that were awkward to see, where only a discerning customer keen for ivory would see them, so that the vendor would not be harassed by the authorities and general tourists.

In HCMC the majority of old and antique ivory items in Vietnam were seen in the antique shops. Next in quantity were in Hanoi. Virtually none was seen in the Central Highlands or northern villages.

In the cities, many of the retail outlets, particularly in HCMC, had a scattering of ivory pendants and bangles displayed close with substitutes. Bone and plastic alternatives for sale were often placed so close together with ivory that identification of ivory was sometimes difficult in HCMC, whereas in the northern villages, especially the main one selling ivory, vendors did not bother with bone and plastic.

There was a positive feel among vendors regarding sales of their ivory items, notably in the northern villages, where obviously occurred a large turnover of sales of newly produced items with the growing demand coming mainly from Vietnam's huge consuming neighbour. The number of Chinese mainlanders who visit Vietnam is highest for any nationality, and their numbers have recently increased significantly, from 905,000 in 2010 to 1,908,000 in 2013 (Vietnam 2015), coming especially to shop, now that many items are available more cheaply in Vietnam.

Customers in all regions of Vietnam, we were told, were mostly mainland Chinese, but especially so in the northern villages that concentrate on the export market. We witnessed that nearly all buyers, both wholesalers and retail private consumers, were Chinese. The smallest Buddhist pendants favoured by Vietnamese were seen for sale mostly in HCMC and the Central Highlands. In the Central Highlands Chinese customers, Vietnamese and other East Asians who come for tourism and for conferences like to shop for ivory as this region is famous for elephants. During our visit to this area, we saw a coach-load of Chinese tourists taking elephant rides along the road lined with souvenir shops. This area had the largest proportion of baby's bangles (6% of the items seen), small and easy to bring back home as souvenirs and presents.



Ivory items made today in Vietnam, such as this comb on the left, are processed at speed, and more commonly seen for sale compared with skilfully carved netsukes from Japan. The latter are available only occasionally in the cities.



African-carved ivory busts and figures are uncommon in both Vietnam and China as they are not considered of high enough quality nor are they of cultural interest in Asia.

Vietnam's ivory trade compared with mainland China in 2015

Raw ivory was nearly all coming illegally from Africa into both Vietnam and China in 2015. Wholesale prices for it in both countries were the same (authors' China survey in late 2015, in press).

The majority of carved items made in Vietnam are simply processed by machines with no carving merit; those that are carved are done mostly by young, recently trained Vietnamese to meet the growing demand. Some artisans do detailed work with hand tools, as opposed to China, where electric drills are mostly used.

Labour charges are still cheaper in Vietnam than in China. In Vietnam ivory artisans earn on average USD 200-400 a month compared with USD 875-2,000 in China with some master carvers receiving as much as USD 5,000 a month. Vietnam produces mostly less expensive types of ivory items for a faster turnover, and small items that are easier to smuggle into China for the illegal market. China, in comparison, has many more master carvers producing larger items of great skill and unique

designs. These carvers consider themselves artists and revere the Chinese cultural tradition of ivory carving, not wanting it to be lost through bans or domestic ivory trade. They may take two to three years to carve a big tusk. Vietnam, however, is relatively new to ivory carving and the artisans are producing items mostly en masse, usually with less consideration for artistic talent or to maintain an art form. Instead, the ivory business has become a recent and quick way to make money in place of carving wood.

Types of retail outlets are mainly jewellery shops in Vietnam's cities and towns compared with mainly ivory specialty outlets in China's larger cities. Those in Vietnam sell illegal new ivory predominantly while most items seen for sale in China are in licensed outlets. In Vietnam there are far fewer large items for sale. HCMC and Hanoi had on view for sale religious and human figurines/figures (mostly old) that make up 7% and 10% respectively compared with Shanghai with 15% and Beijing with 17% (mostly newly carved) (Vigne and Martin 2014).

Jewellery makes up a far higher ratio of items seen for sale in Vietnam than in China. In China many big items and full tusks are seen in legal outlets, as well as a larger variety of objects than in Vietnam.

Retail prices for comparable common items: ivory bangles, cigarette holders, name seals, necklaces and pendants, are considerably more expensive in mainland China. For example, in 2014 in Beijing and Shanghai the average prices were 3.5 times more for these five items compared with in HCMC and Hanoi, and seven times more compared with the first northern village where we priced ivory items retail (Table 24).

One main reason that worked ivory in mainland China's shops is more expensive retail, as well as the higher cost of labour in China, is that China's retail outlets are in cities with more expensive overheads. The northern villages in Vietnam have low overheads and sell their items from their workshops directly

to their retail customers (apart from wholesalers). Another reason is that most items on display in mainland China are for sale legally in officially licensed outlets and each item requires a legal ID card with extensive paperwork, which costs time and money.

Although in China some illegal new ivory items are sold in retail outlets, most items one sees in non-licensed outlets are old (pre-1990) compared with those in Vietnam that are mostly recently made (post-1990). In Vietnam, no new ivory items require ID cards although ivory from pre-1992 domesticated elephants can still be carved and sold - a major legislative loophole.

No new raw ivory is officially available for carving or sale in Vietnam. Most items in the outlets are, however, carved from newly acquired raw African ivory. In China, the government can still sell to licensed carvers raw ivory bought at the southern



Both in Vietnam and mainland China, carved items made of bone, recognizable by dots as seen here on the base of a container, are sometimes offered to inexperienced customers as elephant ivory.



Elephant products such as the skin (above) and the tail, for its hairs (below) can be bought in outlets in Vietnam, but these are rarely found today in China's retail outlets.



African auctions in 2008 and this can be sold legally with ID, but most ivory items have been carved illegally and are not even seen in the shops of China, being sold secretly from the internet or through contacts. Vietnam and mainland China have relatively few genuine antique pieces available for sale (Vigne and Martin 2014).

A major difference between the two countries is that mammoth ivory, being from an extinct species, is readily available to carve and sell legally in China, and this can make distinguishing it from elephant ivory difficult in the outlets of China (Vigne and Martin 2014). In Vietnam, we saw no mammoth ivory being carved and only one tiny item for sale, so the confusion in distinguishing the two ivories, and

the resulting loopholes, does not occur in Vietnam.

Vendors in China are more concerned about the future of their ivory business than in Vietnam. The recent economic slowdown hit the larger legal outlets hard, and the central government has been increasing restrictive measures as a result of political pressure (Vigne and Martin 2014). While demand reduction campaigns have put added pressure on the government in China to improve law enforcement, pressure has been far less in Vietnam; and as the ivory carvings are cheaper to produce, the illegal export market to China grows, replacing much of the legal ivory market in China that is struggling to sell competitively.



In this workshop in a northern Vietnam village ivory carvers have been replaced by machines that can produce four identical items simultaneously. Such workshops are not employing master carvers who prefer to make time-consuming art works, such as these old carvings from China below, that were for sale in HCMC.



Discussion

In 2008 Stiles concluded, ‘The scale of the Vietnam ivory market remains modest on a global scale’. By 2015 the Vietnamese ivory market had grown rapidly and was found to be one of the largest in the world. Our survey found many more ivory items than in a survey conducted in 2014 (Nguyen and Willemsen 2015) largely because the 2014 survey did not include the first village near Hanoi that we visited with by far the most ivory items for retail sale counted in our 2015 survey. Neither was this main village nor other villages with worked ivory referred to in the National Ivory Action Plan for Vietnam for July 2014 to July 2015 (CITES 2015).

Raw ivory, smuggled in nowadays from Africa, is mostly being processed very fast and in large quantities by machines into plain bangles and beads, illegally, in the northern villages to meet the burgeoning demand in China. With the restrictions on ivory trade in China increasing, it appears illegal Chinese traders have been turning more and more to the Vietnamese ivory market for their supply, driving up the demand for raw ivory and ivory trade in northern Vietnam where law enforcement is inadequate.

At the international land border between Vietnam and China, shoppers returning home from Vietnam at the Customs point are rarely arrested at either country’s border post. The Chinese can easily travel with small items in their luggage (Liu 2015). Chinese shoppers can also cross back and forth at other points along the border where there are no Customs, making law enforcement difficult.

According to Nguyen Manh Ha, who worked for 15 years at the CITES Scientific Authority in Hanoi on wildlife trade issues, Vietnam indeed only became a major hub in the ivory and rhino horn trade from Africa since about 2009 with 90% transferred out of the country as most of the demand for these items is in China (pers. comm. February 2016). He further remarked that people buy ivory for prestige purposes; in Vietnam, the buyers are rich people who have increased considerably in number in the last few years, but are still insignificant in number compared with the growing population of rich mainland Chinese. It must be noted that only a miniscule percentage of the population in Vietnam and China, even if they can afford it, actually desire ivory, but in mainland China, of course, this still amounts to a lot of people.

The Vietnamese government has become more aware of the severity of this illegal trade and of critical world opinion. This has led to some regulatory changes. According to Vietnamese officials and former

officials, intense training for law enforcement bodies in Vietnam on dealing with illegal wildlife trade, especially for ivory and rhino horn, has been put in place to build capacity. Customs, environmental police, economic police, anti-smuggling police, coast guards, border guards and forest rangers are more involved, and market control measures have been strengthened, as well as more effective use of intelligence information (Ha, pers. comm. February 2016).

Although law enforcement efforts have been increased recently, major gaps remain, according to Ha (pers. comm. February 2016). While traders have been targeted, buyers and transporters of ivory also need to be sensitized more strongly about the risks of being caught. While Vietnam’s international airports have more vigilance, it is needed also at bus and railway stations, as well as road border crossings (Ha, pers. comm. February 2015).

Of major concern that affects both countries is that buyers of Vietnam’s worked ivory destined for mainland China have significantly increased ivory trafficking of items through online chats. Little seems to have been done to prevent this or to intervene so far.

Attention has been growing over the last few years on awareness against illegal wildlife trade. ‘Demand reduction’ campaigns in Vietnam, however, have focused more strongly on rhino horn. Less information has been made available to the public in Vietnam on the illegal ivory trade, as knowledge has been lacking about the severity of this situation. We saw no signs or posters pointing out that it was illegal to buy newly carved ivory items and that it was illegal to take them out of the country. NGOs have selected target groups in Vietnam requiring knowledge on ‘demand reduction’ for rhino horn. This information, now that its significance has come to light, can be used on reducing demand for ivory too, with the help of international organizations, government agencies, traders and buyers. In mainland China, where campaigns and events against illegal ivory trade have been increasing, this too can be acted upon in similar and improved ways in Vietnam. The trade in both ivory and rhino horn frequently go hand in hand, with buyers often wanting both as status symbols to show off to their friends.

Education against illegal wildlife trade largely involves the youth; this is a long-term strategy. They are not the present buyers of ivory. While information is more readily available in the cities, only 40% of

the population is city based, so rural communities involved need to be sensitized. The media have been somewhat involved, but their activities are generally too short term. Thus, so far behaviour change regarding the use of ivory has been very limited and little has been successfully achieved to reduce the illegal ivory trade that goes through Vietnam across into China.

The fastest way to reduce demand is of course stronger law enforcement, including increasing awareness on the risks in buying and selling ivory. Urgent publicity on ivory restrictions, such as ivory seizures, use of detection dogs and arrests with more drastic punishments for wildlife offenders, can reduce people's wish for ivory trinkets much more quickly than the longer-term strategy (which is also of course required) of changing cultural attitudes and consciences. Collaboration and coordination among all the players to cut back on illegal trade is essential, particularly along the shared borders with China. A national strategic approach to tackle law enforcement and awareness is lacking within the country, with inadequate collaboration. Many NGOs and others are working hard but are not united, so resources and momentum are being wasted with inadequate coordination and projects that come and go. Concerned Vietnamese have been asking,

regarding the illegal trade in wildlife, 'Do we need a national strategy on combating wildlife trafficking and demand reduction? Do we need a coordination and cooperation programme for those involved in the effort? Should we involve the government more? Do we need a review and evaluate what we have been doing to document the failures and the gaps and to redirect the targets and change the approach?' (Ha, pers. comm. February 2016).

It is thus recognized that a coordinated approach is needed nationally and internationally along the ivory supply chain. For example, much contraband gets through unnoticed at various transit countries en route to Vietnam. It is not just Vietnam's responsibility alone. Apathy, corruption and incompetence are general, or people getting paid off to turn a blind eye, all along the supply chain. The need to expose the 'big bosses' in Africa and Vietnam is the most urgent issue, so that their illegal activities can be disabled without the smaller players simply being replaced if caught. In the long term, educating children and youth is important, but in the short term to stop this surge in illegal ivory trade, the organized crime syndicates need to be dismantled. The illegal ivory trade in general is increasingly being handled by investigators of illegal crime, which is the way forward.



Mainland Chinese traders are unconcerned about buying worked ivory in northern Vietnam to bring back home as law enforcement is extremely weak.

I V O R Y



Vietnamese vendors usually have no qualms informing interested customers that their items are made of ivory as generally official inspections are inadequate.

Conclusion

Vietnamese ivory traders have since 2008 made their country huge in the illegal ivory business. There may be no other country in the world involving the combined illegal imports of new raw tusks and illegal exports of the final ivory products to be as active as Vietnam today. Especially since 2008, the ivory business in Vietnam has greatly expanded, mostly due to the mainland Chinese, who buy at least 75% of all the ivory objects, mostly mass-produced jewellery. Labour is much cheaper in Vietnam and thus the prices of ivory items are generally far cheaper in Vietnam than in China. The Vietnamese government has been intent on promoting the production of handicrafts in the northern villages around Hanoi for export to increase prosperity, and artisans have been able, unheeded, to make ivory items for sale with ivory sourced from recently poached elephants in Africa. The laws are not clear enough, even if there were law enforcement. Although in reality nearly all the raw ivory is new and illegal, if traders claim their ivory is pre-1992 it is legal to carve and sell, creating a loophole. Legislation on ivory from domesticated elephants is not clear, creating a further loophole. Insufficient

intelligence and inadequate law enforcement at all the Customs posts on both sides of the land border between Vietnam and China allow many Chinese to return home laden with ivory items for personal use and for illegal trade in China.

Between 2008 and 2014 there had been no published surveys on Vietnam's ivory, despite pressure from CITES in 2013, so it was not known the level at which Vietnam had become one of the main ivory centres in the world. Consequently, the government of Vietnam, and foreigners and local NGOs did not take effective action to combat this illegal trade over this critical period.

To confuse matters, two publications came out in 2015 contradicting each other on the level of the ivory business in Vietnam. The second publication by Liu in 2015 conforms with our findings that Vietnam has become a leading ivory transit country and is radically expanding its wildlife trafficking business. We conclude that Vietnam's illegal ivory trade is one of the largest in the world.

Tables

Table 1. Types of retail outlets and number of ivory items displayed in Ho Chi Minh City, late 2015

Type	Outlets (no.)	Outlets (%)	Items (no.)	Items per outlet (no.)
Jewellery	78	67	1,066	14
Antique	28	24	1,369	49
Traditional medicine	4	3	429	107
Wood	4	3	173	43
Religious	2	2	61	30
Total	116	99	3,098	27

Table 2. Main ivory items displayed for retail sale in Ho Chi Minh City, late 2015

Item	Percentage
Pendant	51
Bangle	10
Figurine	7
Plaque	4
Necklace, bead	4
Chopsticks, pair	3
Name seal	2
Bracelet, bead	2
Dice	2
Earrings, pair	2
Miscellaneous	13
Total	100

Table 3. Retail prices for main ivory items in Ho Chi Minh City, late 2015 (US dollars)

Item	Size (cm)	Price range (USD)	Average price (USD)
JEWELLERY			
Bangle	1-2.5	222-1,200	540
Baby's bangle	0.25	13-50	30
Bracelet, bead	1	340-700	497
Earrings, pair		50	50
Earplugs, pair (old)	3	50-140	100
Necklace, bead	1	200-600	417
Pendant	2.5	22-45	121
Pendant	4-6	200-600	312
Ring	0.25	22-60	36
Ring	0.5-1	100-133	115
FIGURINES/FIGURES			
	2.5	30-58	39
	5	111-2,000	683
	10-15	700-800	775
(old)	15-25	2,500-10,000	4,100
(old)	40-45	2,500-8,000	5,167
MISCELLANEOUS			
Cigarette holder	10	100-200	122
Chopsticks, pair	20	100-370	184
Name seal	2 x 6	250-356	319

USD 1 = 22,500 dong

Table 4. Prices for elephants and their products in Vietnam, wholesale and retail, late 2015

Item	Wholesale (USD)	Retail (USD)
ANIMALS		
Live elephant, no tusks	35,556	
Dead elephant, no tusks	3,556–4,444	
Dead elephant from Laos, no tusks	5,333	
PRODUCTS		
Hair strand	5–9, av 7	15–20, av 17
Ivory chips leftovers, 100/g packet	22	31
Ivory powder leftovers, 100/g packet	13	18–22
Leg bone, min 120 cm	36/kg	
Smaller bone	22–27/kg	
Tooth, molar	66–144	
Skin	133/kg	144/kg
PROCESSED ITEMS		
Bangle, bone		20
Bracelet, hair		131–133
Bracelet, bone bead		14–44
Buddha, bone, 5 cm		95
Carving, bone, 15–20 cm		380–480, av 415
Chopsticks, pair, bone		29
Cigarette holder, bone, 10 cm		95
Comb		6
Name seal, bone, 1.5 x 6 cm		95
Necklace, bone bead, 1 cm long (108 beads)		16–41, av 29
Necklace, bone bead, 1 cm medium		22
Necklace choker, hair		80–208
Pendant, bone, 2.5 cm		11
Pendant, bone, 5 cm		19–30, av 25
Ring		2
Wallet, skin		18

USD 1 = 22,500 dong

Table 5. Types of retail outlets and number of ivory items displayed in Buon Ma Thuot, late 2015

Type	Outlets (no.)	Outlets (%)	Items (no.)	Items per outlet (no.)
Jewellery	13	54	818	63
Souvenir	7	29	803	115
Hotel	4	17	344	86
Totals	24	100	1,965	82

Table 6. Main ivory items displayed for retail sale in Buon Ma Thuot, late 2015

Item	Percentage
Ring	39
Pendant	32
Bangle	14
Earrings, pair	7
Figurine	2
Bracelet, bead	2
Charm	1
Miscellaneous	3
Total	100

Table 7. Retail prices for main ivory items in Buon Ma Thuot, late 2015

Item	Size (cm)	Price range (USD)	Average price (USD)
JEWELLERY			
Bangle	1–2.5	89–933	302
Baby's bangle	0.25	53	53
Bracelet, bead	1	267–356	312
Earrings, pair	1	11–18	15
Necklace, bead	1	156–356	258
Pendant	2.5	31–120	62
Pendant	4–6	178–356	278
Ring	0.25	9–73	29
MISCELLANEOUS			
Cigarette holder	10	67–71	69

USD 1 = 22,500 dong

Table 8. Main ivory items displayed for retail sale in a tourist village near Buon Ma Thuot, late 2015

Item	Percentage
Pendant	52
Ring	18
Earrings, pair	12
Baby's bangle	6
Figurine	2
Miscellaneous	10
Total	100

Table 9. Retail prices for main ivory items in a tourist village near Buon Ma Thuot, late 2015

Item	Size (cm)	Price range (USD)	Average price (USD)
JEWELLERY			
Baby's bangle	0.25	44-53	48
Bracelet, bead	1-2	111-133	122
Earrings, pair	1	11-22	16
Pendant	2.5	13-67	36
Pendant	4-6	29-356	109
Ring	0.25	16-44	29
MISCELLANEOUS			
Cigarette holder	6	29	29

USD 1 = 22,500 dong

Table 10. Types of retail outlets and number of ivory items displayed in Hanoi, late 2015

Type	Outlets (no.)	Outlets (%)	Items (no.)	Items per outlet (no.)
Jewellery	18	62	198	11
Antique	8	28	123	15
Hotel	2	7	47	23
Wood	1	3	3	3
Totals	29	100	371	13

Table 11. Main ivory items displayed for retail sale in Hanoi, late 2015

Item	Percentage
Pendant	44
Bangle	11
Figurine, religious/human	8
Ring	7
Name seal	6
Bracelet, bead	5
Necklace, bead	3
Figure, religious/human	2
Cigarette holder	2
Chopsticks, pair	2
Comb	2
Earrings, pair	1
Necklace, pendant	1
Figurine, animal	1
Carved tusk	1
Plaque	1
Miscellaneous	3
Total	100

Table 12. Retail prices for main ivory items in Hanoi, late 2015

Item	Size (cm)	Price range (USD)	Average price (USD)
JEWELLERY			
Bangle	1–2.5	235–600	433
Necklace, bead	1	219–800	436
Pendant	2.5	65–80	72
Pendant	5	178–300	239
Ring	0.25	67–150	96
FIGURINES			
	5–10	200–300	250
MISCELLANEOUS			
Chopsticks, pair	20	44–400	222
Cigarette holder	10	144	144
Comb with handle	15	103	103
Name seal	2 x 6	70–391	252

USD 1 = 22,500 dong

Table 13. Types of retail outlets and number of ivory items displayed in village 1, south of Hanoi, late 2015

Type	Outlets (no.)	Outlets (%)	Items (no.)	Items per outlet (no.)
Ivory/wood	51	96	9,870	194
Clothes	1	2	17	8
Grocery	1	2	6	3
Totals	53	100	9,893	187

Table 14. Main ivory items displayed for retail sale in village 1, south of Hanoi, late 2015

Item	Percentage
Pendant	39
Bangle	23
Ring	14
Necklace, bead	9
Bracelet, bead	4
Chopsticks, pair	2
Figurine	1
Button	1
Cigarette holder	1
Name seal	1
Beads, packet	1
Miscellaneous	4
Total	100

Table 15. Retail prices for main ivory items in village 1, south of Hanoi, late 2015

Item	Size (cm)	Price range (USD)	Average price (USD)
JEWELLERY			
Bangle		178–356	256
Baby's bangle		22	22
Bracelet, bead		111–178	145
Earrings, pair	1	13–22	18
Necklace, bead		133	133
Pendant	1–2.5	22–44	33
Pendant	0.25	44–133	79
Ring	1	2–4	3
FIGURINES			
	5	22–67	37
	20	1,778	1,778
MISCELLANEOUS			
Chopsticks, pair	20	111–120	115
Cigarette holder	10	44	44
Comb	10	10–111	60

USD 1 = 22,500 dong

Table 16. Main ivory items displayed for retail sale in village 5, north of Hanoi, late 2015

Item	Percentage
Pendant	36
Figurine	22
Bangle	17
Ring	14
Necklace, bead	7
Bracelet, bead	3
Miscellaneous	1
Total	100

Table 17. Past and present wholesale raw ivory price data for Vietnam, December 1990 to December 2015 (in US dollars)

Item	Raw ivory USD price/kg for 1–3-kg piece
1990	100–200
2001	350–500
2003	350 average
2008	500–1,500
2014	1,262
2015	845–1,032
Dec 2015	889–1,334, average 1,116

Sources: Martin 1992a; Martin and Stiles 2002; Stiles 2004; Stiles 2008; Liu 2015; this survey for December 2015

USD 1 = 4,200 in 1990; 14,450 in 2001; 15,415 in 2004; 16,100 in 2008; 21,388 in 2014; 21,310 in September/October 2015; and 22,500 in December 2015

Table 18. Retail price comparisons for standard ivory items in HCMC and Hanoi from 1990 to 2015 (in US dollars)

Type	1990	2001	2008	2015
Bangle, plain, 1 cm	38	70–150	58–300	222–520
Chopsticks, pair	33	36–95	40–200	44–400
Cigarette holder, 10 cm	19	35–70	110–320	100–200
Earring, pair, 1 cm	1	25	50–100	50
Name seal, 5–8 cm	–	25–30	55–200	70–391
Necklace, bead, medium	25–52	75–120	200–750	200–800
Pendant, 2.5–3 cm	–	25–30	25–35	22–450
Pendant 5–10 cm	–		35–280	178–600
Ring, 0.25 cm	2	10–20	10–50	22–150

Sources: 1990 Hanoi (Martin 1992); 2001 Vietnam (Martin and Stiles 2002); 2008 HCMC (Stiles 2008); this survey for 2015

USD 1 = 4,200 in 1990; 14,450 in 2001; 16,100 in 2008; and 22,500 in late 2015

Table 19. Number of retail outlets and ivory items displayed for retail sale in HCMC and Hanoi over time

Location	2001		2008		2015	
	Outlets	Items	Outlets	Items	Outlets	Items
HCMC	37	2,262	49	1,776	116	3,098
Hanoi	13	777	10	407	29	371

Sources: Martin and Stiles 2002; Stiles 2008; this survey for 2015

Table 20. Number of retail outlets and ivory items surveyed in six locations in Vietnam, late 2015

Type	Outlets (no.)	Items (no.)	Items per outlet (no.)
HCMC	116	3,098	27
Village 1	53	9,893	187
Hanoi	29	371	13
Buon Ma Thuot	24	1,965	82
Tourist village	16	703	44
Village 5	4	69	17
Totals	242	16,099	67

Table 21. Types of retail outlets and number of ivory items surveyed in Vietnam, late 2015

Item	Outlet (no.) in six locations	Items (no.)
Jewellery	109	2,082
Ivory/wood specialist	60	10,115
Antique	36	1,492
Gift-souvenir	23	1,506
Hotel	6	391
Traditional medicine	4	429
Religious	2	61
Clothes	1	17
Grocery	1	6
Totals	242	16,099

Table 22. Percentage of main ivory items displayed in the six locations surveyed in Vietnam, late 2015

Item	HCMC	Buon Ma Thuot	Tourist village	Hanoi	Village 1	Village 5
Pendant	51	32	52	44	39	36
Bangle, adult	10	14	—	11	23	17
Necklace/bracelet	6	2	—	8	13	10
Earrings, pair	2	7	12	1	—	—
Ring	—	39	18	7	14	14

Table 23. Retail price comparisons for standard ivory items in six locations in Vietnam, late 2015

Item (USD)	HCMC	Buon Ma Thuot	Tourist village	Hanoi	Village 1	Village 5
Bangle	540	302	—	433	256	383
Baby's bangle	30	53	48	—	22	38
Bracelet, bead	497	312	122	—	145	269
Earrings, pair	50	15	16	—	18	25
Necklace, bead	417	258	—	436	133	311
Pendant, small	121	62	36	72	33	65
Pendant, large	312	278	109	239	79	203
Ring, small	36	29	29	96	3	39
Cigarette holder	122	69	—	144	44	95
Chopsticks, pair	184	—	—	222	115	174
Name seal	319	—	—	252	—	286

USD 1 = 22,500 dong

Table 24. Recent US dollar retail price comparisons for common similar ivory items in Vietnam with China

Item	Vietnam			China	
	HCMC	Hanoi	Village 1	Beijing	Shanghai
Bangle	540	453	256	1,933	971
Cigarette holder	122	144	44	623	749
Name seal	319	252	-	790	703
Necklace	417	436	133	836	720
Pendant, large	278	239	79	757	715
Average price	335	305	128	988	772

NB: These retail prices were in Vietnam for December 2015 and in China for May 2014; in late 2015 the prices in China largely remained similar, based on our recent survey work (in press).

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the Elephant Crisis Fund that enabled Save the Elephants to fund our fieldwork in Vietnam. The authors also thank all

the staff at Save the Elephants in Kenya who gave us office assistance and support. Thanks are also due to Dan Stiles for his helpful comments.



Tượng Voi
Bức gỗ, vẫn tồn tại Chàm Pa, thế kỷ 10
Khảo sát tại Trà Kiêu, Duy Xuyên, Quảng Nam
Elephant sculpture
Sandstone, Champan culture, 10th century
Discovered at Trà Kiêu, Duy Xuyên district, Quảng Nam province

We acknowledge elephants, as carved here from sandstone in the 10th century in Vietnam, for struggling to survive despite so much human pressure in Vietnam and increasingly in certain parts of Africa.

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Elephant tusks processed into beads in northern Vietnam, predominantly for the mainland Chinese market, has been expanding significantly since 2008.

The authors

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Lucy Vigne first came to Kenya on a Royal Geographical Society/Oxford University expedition in 1981 studying the tool-using behaviour of Egyptian vultures (led coincidentally by Chris Thouless of Save the Elephants). She returned to Nairobi in 1983, working for the IUCN African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group under its chairman, David Western. Through the 1990s Lucy worked with Esmond Martin on ivory trade studies, publishing work mostly on ivory issues in Africa. In the 2000s she has been conducting surveys in Africa and Asia for continued data collection on the ivory trade, published in various journals. In recent years her fieldwork has been funded by Save the Elephants.

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Esmond Martin has been studying the ivory trade since the late 1960s when he carried out research on the illegal commerce in wildlife products along the East African coast. In the early 1970s, he travelled to other countries around the Indian Ocean researching the dhow trade and smuggling across the Indian Ocean. In the late 1970s and 1980s he carried out studies of the domestic ivory markets in Africa. He first visited Vietnam in 1990, examining the trade in ivory and other wildlife products, as well as living animals, such as the Tokay gecko (used as an aphrodisiac), pygmy slow loris (for curing cancer)

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and the clouded leopard (for live display). Since then Esmond has continued to carry out fieldwork on the ivory trade worldwide.

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ISBN 978-9966-096-76-0



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