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National Treasures of the Oc Eo Culture in An Giang Province: Preserving Heritage Values through Education and Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract

An Giang Province, located in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, is widely recognized as the cradle of the Oc Eo Culture associated with the ancient Funan Kingdom. Decades of archaeological research in this province have revealed numerous artifacts of outstanding historical and artistic value, ten of which have been designated as National Treasures by the Government of Vietnam (officially recognized as national heritage items under the Decisions of the Government of Vietnam). These treasures, including statues of Hindu and Buddhist deities, gold ornaments, and linga-yoni sets, illustrate the rich cultural exchange between indigenous communities and Indian civilization from the first centuries of the Common Era.

This study analyzes the historical, archaeological, and

educational values of the Oc Eo National Treasures and their significance in promoting sustainable tourism in An Giang. Based on interdisciplinary research combining archaeology, heritage management, and cultural studies, the paper highlights the current preservation efforts, the role of heritage education, and the integration of these cultural assets into local tourism development. The findings emphasize that connecting heritage preservation with education and tourism not only safeguards valuable cultural resources but also fosters community engagement and contributes to sustainable socio-economic growth in the region. This study provides insights for policymakers seeking to balance heritage preservation, education, and tourism development in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Oc Eo Culture, National Treasures, Heritage Education, Sustainable Tourism, An Giang Province, Vietnam

1. Introduction

An Giang Province, located in the Mekong Delta region of southern Vietnam, is a land of immense historical and cultural significance. With an area of more than 3,500 square kilometers and nearly two million inhabitants, it lies at the confluence of major cultural routes that historically connected the inland plains of the Mekong with coastal trade centers and foreign civilizations (Luong, 2006) ^[10]. This strategic location facilitated the rise of the Oc Eo Culture, which flourished between the 1st and 7th centuries CE and is often associated with the ancient *Funan* Kingdom (Le & Dao, 2009) ^[8]. Archaeological discoveries in the Oc Eo-Ba The area have revealed a highly developed society characterized by advanced craftsmanship, diverse religious beliefs, and vibrant cultural exchanges with India and other regions of Southeast Asia (Dang *et al.*, 2022) ^[3], (Thoai Son District Official Website, 2024) ^[20].

The Oc Eo Culture has been widely studied by Vietnamese and international scholars for its archaeological importance and its contribution to the understanding of early state formation in Southeast Asia (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020) ^[12]; (Bui *et al.*, 2023) ^[2]. Excavations conducted in An Giang since the 1940s have yielded numerous artefacts made of gold, bronze, stone, and wood, demonstrating the complexity of social organization and the role of maritime trade in the region's development (Pham, 2023) ^[15]. Many researchers view the Oc Eo Culture as the earliest stage in the evolution of Vietnamese civilization in the South, illustrating the process of cultural adaptation and syncretism between indigenous communities and Indian influences (Phan, 2008) ^[16]; (Geetesh, 2012) ^[5].

An Giang is currently home to ten artefacts recognized as National Treasures by the Government of Vietnam, representing the largest collection of officially designated cultural objects in southern Vietnam. These treasures include stone and bronze statues of Hindu and Buddhist deities, gold ornaments, linga-yoni (symbolic representation of Shiva-Shakti union) sets, and

recently identified wooden sculptures of the Buddha, all of which exemplify artistic excellence and intercultural dialogue (Le & Dao, 2009) ^[8]; (Vo, 2001) ^[26]. The discovery and recognition of these treasures have strengthened the province's role as a center of archaeological research, heritage preservation, and cultural tourism (Thu Thao, 2024) ^[21].

In addition to their scientific importance, the Oc Eo sites have great potential for sustainable tourism development. Scholars have increasingly recognized that the conservation and interpretation of archaeological heritage can generate new socio-economic opportunities while promoting cultural education (Srivastava, 2015) ^[18]; (Papathanassis, 2011) ^[14]. Integrating heritage resources into tourism activities helps preserve local identity, diversify tourism products, and create jobs for local communities (Leslie & Sigala, 2005) ^[9]; (Tran, 2003) ^[23]. The government of An Giang has prioritized linking heritage education with tourism in its strategic plan for cultural development, aiming to turn the Oc Eo Cultural Heritage Complex into a living museum that connects the past with the future (Phong & Binh, 2024) ^[17]; (UN Tourism, 2024) ^[24].

At the same time, several challenges remain in the management and promotion of the Oc Eo heritage. The humid tropical climate, seasonal flooding, and lack of advanced preservation facilities threaten the conservation of delicate artefacts such as wood and bronze. Limited financial resources and public awareness have also hindered long-term heritage safeguarding efforts (Thoai Son District Official Website, 2024) ^[19]; (An Giang Provincial Portal, 2024) ^[1]. However, recent initiatives, including digital exhibitions, VR 360 experiences, and online cultural heritage education, have introduced new tools for interpretation and accessibility (Thuy Van, 2024) ^[22].

The integration of archaeological heritage into educational programs is essential for raising public understanding and supporting sustainable tourism models. International frameworks such as the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage have been incorporated through national policies (Department of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam, 2024) ^[4], guiding provincial strategies toward balancing conservation and development. The case of An Giang illustrates how archaeological research, heritage education, and tourism promotion can complement one another in preserving the integrity of cultural landscapes while contributing to economic growth and social well-being.

This paper aims to: (1) identify the archaeological, artistic, and educational values of the ten National Treasures of the Oc Eo Culture in An Giang; (2) evaluate the current conditions and management practices of these cultural assets; and (3) propose solutions for linking heritage education and sustainable tourism development. Through an interdisciplinary approach combining archaeology, museology, and tourism studies, the research provides both academic insights and practical recommendations for the preservation and promotion of Vietnam's ancient heritage in the contemporary context.

2. Materials and Methods

This research adopts an interdisciplinary approach that integrates archaeology, museology, and tourism studies to analyze the cultural, historical, and educational significance of the ten National Treasures of the Oc Eo Culture in An

Giang Province. The study applies both qualitative and quantitative methods, combining archaeological documentation, heritage policy analysis, and field observations.

2.1 Research materials

The primary data sources include published archaeological reports, official documents from the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of An Giang, and scientific conference proceedings related to the Oc Eo Culture. Supplementary materials were collected from museum catalogues, provincial portals, and recent governmental announcements on the recognition of National Treasures (An Giang Provincial Portal, 2024) ^[1]; (Phong & Binh, 2024) ^[17]. In addition, relevant literature on heritage management and sustainable tourism provided comparative perspectives for the analysis (Papathanassis, 2011) ^[14]; (Leslie & Sigala, 2005) ^[9].

Field data were obtained through on-site observations conducted at key archaeological locations in Thoai Son and Ba The districts between 2022 and 2024. These included the Oc Eo Archaeological Site, Linh Son Nam relic area, and the Ba The Hill complex, where several of the identified National Treasures are currently preserved (Vo, 2001) ^[26]; (Le & Dao, 2009) ^[8]. Notes, photographs, and field sketches were systematically recorded to assess the conservation status and visitor accessibility of the artefacts.

2.2 Research methods

The analytical framework is based on three complementary methods:

- (1) Archaeological typology analysis – to classify artefacts according to material, function, and chronology (Dang *et al.*, 2022) ^[3]; (Bui *et al.*, 2023) ^[2].
- (2) Comparative cultural analysis – to contextualize the Oc Eo artefacts within regional Southeast Asian civilizations such as *Funan* and *Chenla* (Phan, 2008) ^[16]; (Geetesh, 2012) ^[5].
- (3) Heritage management and tourism linkage assessment – to evaluate the integration of heritage preservation with educational and tourism strategies (Srivastava, 2015) ^[18]; (Tran, 2003) ^[23].

These methods were supported by document analysis of national and provincial regulations on heritage protection and sustainable tourism, particularly those derived from the Law on Cultural Heritage (2023 revision) and related decrees (Department of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam, 2024) ^[4]. The study also considers the alignment of local heritage policies with international frameworks such as those of the United Nations and UNESCO, while emphasizing local adaptations in An Giang's context.

2.3 Analytical framework

The research process follows a three-stage framework:

Stage 1: Data collection and documentation – gathering all archaeological and heritage management information concerning the ten recognized National Treasures.

Stage 2: Evaluation and synthesis – comparing artefacts by typology and function to determine their historical and artistic values.

Stage 3: Policy linkage and solution proposal – integrating findings into recommendations for heritage education and sustainable tourism promotion.

This integrated approach ensures that both tangible artefacts and intangible cultural values are analyzed in relation to their social and educational impacts. The analytical framework provides a structured basis for interpreting the Oc Eo National Treasures not merely as archaeological evidence, but as living components of community identity, cultural continuity, and sustainable development in the Mekong Delta region.

This framework ensures replicability and transparency, aligning with best practices in cultural heritage research.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Overview of the Oc Eo Cultural Heritage in An Giang

An Giang Province, situated in the heart of Vietnam's Mekong Delta, is an exceptional repository of archaeological and cultural heritage that reflects the prosperity of the ancient Oc Eo civilization. The Oc Eo–Ba The cultural complex, encompassing the sites of Linh Son, Giong Xoai, Giong Cat, and Go Cay Tram, is not only the geographical core of the ancient *Funan* Kingdom but also one of the earliest centers of urban civilization in Southeast Asia (Luong, 2006) ^[10]; (Le and Dao, 2009) ^[8]. Excavations have revealed a complex system of canals, temples, residential mounds, and craft areas, together indicating a developed socio-economic structure with a sophisticated religious ideology.

Through many years of research and conservation, An Giang has become the province with the most recognized National Treasures related to the Oc Eo culture—ten artefacts officially acknowledged by the Vietnamese Government. They represent diverse materials, including stone, wood, bronze, gold, and ceramics, illustrating the creativity and adaptability of local craftsmen in assimilating external artistic influences while maintaining indigenous identity (Dang *et al.*, 2022) ^[3]; (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020) ^[12]. The recognition of the Linh Son Bac Buddha Head and the Go Cay Tram Jar Burial in Decision No. 1712/QĐ-TTg dated 31 December 2024 further enriches the province's heritage collection, reaffirming its crucial role in understanding Vietnam's early history (Government of Vietnam, 2024) ^[6]; (An Giang Provincial Portal, 2024) ^[1].

3.2 The Ten National Treasures of the Oc Eo Culture in Chronological Order of Recognition

The recognition of ten National Treasures associated with the Oc Eo civilization marks an extraordinary achievement for An Giang Province, which now possesses the largest number of national-level artefacts representing the early cultural and spiritual development of the Mekong Delta. Arranged chronologically by the year of official recognition, these treasures illustrate the evolution of Oc Eo society through its artistic, technological, and religious manifestations.

The first National Treasure, the Brahma Statue of Giong Xoai, was recognized under Decision No. 1821/QĐ-TTg dated 24 December 2018. This sandstone sculpture, discovered in 1983 at the Oc Eo–Ba The Archaeological Complex, depicts the Hindu creator god Brahma with four faces oriented toward the cardinal directions. The refined proportions, symmetrical form, and gentle expression testify to a mature sculptural tradition that had absorbed Indic iconography while preserving local identity (Le and Dao, 2009) ^[8]; (Geetesh, 2012) ^[5]. The statue exemplifies the

advanced spiritual integration of Hinduism into Oc Eo society and the aesthetic sophistication of early Mekong artisans.

The second artefact, the Bronze–Gold Linga–Yoni from Da Noi, was also recognized in 2018 under the same decision. Excavated in 1985 at Phu Hoa Commune, this ritual object symbolizes the cosmic union of Shiva and Shakti. The artefact's structure—bronze base combined with gold inlay—reflects both ritual sanctity and exceptional technical skill. Metallurgical studies reveal that Oc Eo craftsmen mastered sophisticated alloying and metal casting techniques, suggesting that workshops operated under organized religious patronage (Pham, 2023) ^[15]; (Dang *et al.*, 2022) ^[3]. It remains one of the finest examples of metal-based sacred art in Southeast Asia.

The third treasure, the Stone Standing Buddha from Khanh Binh, was recognized in Decision No. 88/QĐ-TTg dated 15 January 2020. Found in An Phu District, this sandstone sculpture of a standing Buddha embodies the gentle expression and soft drapery typical of Gupta art from India. The work represents an early phase of Buddhist localization in southern Vietnam, combining imported iconographic principles with indigenous carving styles (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020) ^[12]; (Phan, 2008) ^[16]. Its spiritual serenity and craftsmanship mark it as one of the finest Buddhist images of the Oc Eo period.

The fourth artefact, the Wooden Buddha of Giong Xoai, recognized in the same 2020 decision, is a masterpiece of ancient wood sculpture. Carved from indigenous hardwood and measuring nearly three meters in height, the statue displays refined modeling and spiritual calm. Despite the vulnerability of wood in humid tropical conditions, the artefact has survived remarkably well, reflecting advanced knowledge of material selection and preservation (Bui *et al.*, 2023) ^[2]. It represents both technical ingenuity and profound religious devotion within the Oc Eo Buddhist community.

The fifth National Treasure, the Linga–Yoni from Linh Son Pagoda, was recognized under Decision No. 2283/QĐ-TTg dated 31 December 2020. Discovered in 1985 at Linh Son Pagoda in Thoai Son District, this stone artefact exemplifies the Shaivite principle of dualism, symbolizing the union of cosmic energies. The polished surface and minimalist form illustrate the philosophical abstraction of late Oc Eo art (Vo, 2001) ^[26]. Its discovery within a sacred context indicates the continuity of Hindu worship practices in the region through successive cultural phases.

The sixth treasure, the Nandin Gold Ring from Giong Cat, recognized under Decision No. 2198/QĐ-TTg dated 25 December 2021, showcases the refinement of Oc Eo goldsmithing. Discovered in 2018, the ring features a miniature sculpture of Nandin—the sacred bull associated with Shiva—crafted in repoussé ((embossed metal technique) technique. The artefact reflects high-status patronage and provides material evidence of long-distance trade connections that supplied precious metals from across the Indian Ocean (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020) ^[12]; (Le and Dao, 2009) ^[8]. Its size, composition, and iconography embody the intersection of luxury art and religious devotion.

The seventh artefact, the Buddhist Relief from Linh Son Bac, also recognized in 2021 under the same decision, represents one of the earliest Buddhist carvings in southern Vietnam. The relief depicts a seated Buddha rendered in high relief with faint traces of inscription, suggesting a role in early monastic architecture. It provides invaluable insight

into the coexistence of Buddhist and Hindu worship within the Oc Eo–Ba The sacred landscape (Dang *et al.*, 2022) ^[3]. The stylistic treatment indicates a workshop tradition that adapted imported religious iconography into local artistic forms.

The eighth treasure, the *Mukhalinga* from Ba The Hill, was recognized in Decision No. 41/QĐ-TTg dated 30 January 2023. Found in 1986 at Vong The Commune, this stone linga bears a carved human face representing Shiva. The anthropomorphic form marks a transitional phase in the religious art of Oc Eo, combining abstract geometry with personalized spiritual symbolism (Le and Dao, 2009) ^[8]; (Geetesh, 2012) ^[5]. The object's scale and finish exemplify the mature technical and theological sophistication achieved by Oc Eo artisans.

The ninth National Treasure, the Linh Son Bac Buddha Head, was recognized in Decision No. 1712/QĐ-TTg dated 31 December 2024 (Batch 13). Dated to the 1st–3rd centuries CE (Common Era), it is one of the earliest Buddhist artefacts ever found in Vietnam. Carved from fine sandstone, the head displays harmonious proportions, soft facial features, and traces of early stucco. The sculpture provides key evidence for the earliest Buddhist influence in the Mekong Delta and contributes to understanding the region's participation in early trans-Asian religious exchange (Government of Vietnam, 2024) ^[6]; (An Giang

Provincial Portal, 2024) ^[1].

The tenth treasure, the Go Cay Tram Jar Burial, recognized under the same 2024 decision, is a large ceramic burial jar (funerary jar) dating to the 4th–5th centuries CE. It contained human remains and associated grave goods, offering direct evidence of mortuary practices and social differentiation within Oc Eo communities. Its designation as a National Treasure demonstrates the broadening scope of Vietnamese heritage policy, which now recognizes not only monumental religious artefacts but also everyday material culture that reflects the lived experiences of ancient inhabitants (Government of Vietnam, 2024) ^[6]. The jar burial, simple in form yet profound in meaning, encapsulates the spiritual connection between life, death, and renewal in early Mekong civilization.

Together, these ten artefacts form a comprehensive cultural archive that reflects both material sophistication and spiritual diversity. Their chronological recognition, spanning from 2018 to 2024, mirrors Vietnam's growing commitment to protecting archaeological heritage and acknowledges An Giang's role as a guardian of the Oc Eo legacy. Each treasure is not only an individual masterpiece but also part of a coherent narrative linking religious transformation, artistic evolution, and cross-cultural connectivity within the ancient Mekong world.

Table 1: List of Oc Eo National Treasures in An Giang (as of 2024)

S. No	Name of the Artefact	Location of Discovery	Material	Dating (Century CE)	Decision and Year of National Recognition	Current Custody
1	Brahma Statue of Giong Xoai	Giong Xoai Site, Oc Eo–Ba The Archaeological Complex (Thoai Son District)	Sandstone	6th–7th centuries	Decision No. 1821/QĐ-TTg, dated 24 December 2018 (7th Batch – 22 artefacts recognized)	An Giang Provincial Museum
2	Bronze–Gold Linga–Yoni from Da Noi	Da Noi Site, Phu Hoa Commune, An Giang Province	Bronze and Gold	5th–6th centuries	Decision No. 1821/QĐ-TTg, dated 24 December 2018 (7th Batch)	An Giang Provincial Museum
3	Stone Standing Buddha from Khanh Binh	Khanh Binh Commune, An Phu District, An Giang	Sandstone	6th–7th centuries	Decision No. 88/QĐ-TTg, dated 15 January 2020 (8th Batch – 27 artefacts recognized)	An Giang Provincial Museum
4	Wooden Buddha of Giong Xoai	Giong Xoai Site, Oc Eo–Ba The Archaeological Complex	Hardwood	4th–6th centuries	Decision No. 88/QĐ-TTg, dated 15 January 2020 (8th Batch)	An Giang Provincial Museum
5	Linga–Yoni from Linh Son Pagoda	Linh Son Pagoda, Oc Eo Town, Thoai Son District	Stone	7th century	Decision No. 2283/QĐ-TTg, dated 31 December 2020 (9th Batch – 24 artefacts recognized)	An Giang Provincial Museum
6	Nandin Gold Ring from Giong Cat	Giong Cat Site, Thoai Son District	Gold	5th century	Decision No. 2198/QĐ-TTg, dated 25 December 2021 (10th Batch – 23 artefacts recognized)	Oc Eo Cultural Relics Management Board, An Giang
7	Buddhist Relief from Linh Son Bac	Linh Son Bac Site, Thoai Son District	Stone	3rd–4th centuries	Decision No. 2198/QĐ-TTg, dated 25 December 2021 (10th Batch)	Oc Eo Cultural Relics Management Board, An Giang
8	Mukhalinga from Ba The Hill	Vong The Commune, Thoai Son District	Sandstone	6th century	Decision No. 41/QĐ-TTg, dated 30 January 2023 (11th Batch – 27 artefacts recognized)	An Giang Provincial Museum
9	Linh Son Bac Buddha Head	Linh Son Bac Site, Thoai Son District	Stone	1st–3rd centuries	Decision No. 1712/QĐ-TTg, dated 31 December 2024 (13th Batch – 33 artefacts recognized, Year 2024)	Oc Eo Cultural Relics Management Board, An Giang
10	Go Cay Tram Jar Burial	Go Cay Tram Site, Thoai Son District	Terracotta (Ceramic)	4th–5th centuries	Decision No. 1712/QĐ-TTg, dated 31 December 2024 (13th Batch – 33 artefacts recognized, Year 2024)	Oc Eo Cultural Relics Management Board, An Giang

3.3 Archaeological and Artistic Interpretations

The archaeological and artistic interpretations of the ten National Treasures of the Oc Eo Culture provide a comprehensive view of the civilization's material sophistication, religious plurality, and aesthetic evolution. The spatial distribution of these artefacts across Thoai Son and An Phu districts reflects a well-organized urban and ritual network that once thrived along the ancient Oc Eo–Ba The canal system (Luong, 2006) ^[10]. Excavations at Linh Son, Giong Xoai, and Go Cay Tram reveal layers of occupation and artistic transformation that demonstrate both technological mastery and adaptive spirituality within the Mekong Delta environment (Dang *et al.*, 2022) ^[3].

The stone and bronze artefacts, including the Brahma Statue, the *Mukhalinga*, and the Linga–Yoni sets, illustrate the profound influence of Indian cosmology on the Oc Eo worldview. These sculptures embody the Shaivite concept of universal creation through duality and balance. Yet, the execution of these works departs from Indian prototypes through localized stylization—simplified geometry, softened contours, and symbolic abstraction—revealing a process of cultural reinterpretation rather than imitation (Le and Dao, 2009) ^[8]; (Geetesh, 2012) ^[5]. The recurring motif of the linga and yoni reflects both ritual and social structures that emphasized fertility, continuity, and harmony between human and cosmic forces.

Buddhist sculptures such as the Stone Standing Buddha from Khanh Binh, the Wooden Buddha of Giong Xoai, and the Buddha Head from Linh Son Bac mark the earliest stage of Buddhism's penetration into southern Vietnam. The stylistic analysis shows a synthesis of Amaravati and Gupta artistic elements combined with indigenous restraint. The sandstone Buddha from Khanh Binh conveys a sense of quiet transcendence, while the wooden statue from Giong Xoai expresses the vitality of popular devotion. These works indicate the coexistence of Buddhism and Brahmanism within the same ritual landscape, where spiritual inclusiveness shaped the cultural identity of the Oc Eo community (Phan, 2008) ^[16]; (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020) ^[12].

The presence of precious metal artefacts, including the Nandin Gold Ring and the Bronze–Gold Linga–Yoni, provides evidence for the economic and technological maturity of the Oc Eo society. The metallurgical complexity of these objects, characterized by fine repoussé technique, alloy casting, and ornamental inlay, reflects extensive transregional trade networks connecting the Mekong Delta to India and maritime Southeast Asia (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020) ^[12]; (Pham, 2023) ^[15]. These findings corroborate textual and numismatic evidence indicating that the Oc Eo economy functioned as a nexus for exchange, where sacred art also served as a medium of diplomacy and devotion.

Equally significant is the recognition of the Go Cay Tram Jar Burial, which offers a rare glimpse into the funerary beliefs of the Oc Eo people. Unlike monumental religious sculptures, the burial jar reveals everyday spiritual practices centered on ancestor veneration and the cyclical concept of life and death. Its inclusion among National Treasures marks a shift in heritage valuation—from focusing solely on monumental art to embracing the totality of cultural life, including domestic and ritual contexts (Government of Vietnam, 2024) ^[6]. Together with the Linh Son Bac Buddha Head, the Go Cay Tram find helps trace the chronological sequence of the Oc Eo civilization from its formative centuries to its cultural zenith.

From an artistic perspective, the ten treasures collectively demonstrate a continuum of form and meaning. Stone works display geometric precision and balance; metal artefacts express ritual symbolism through luminosity and detail; wooden sculptures convey human warmth and spiritual immediacy; while ceramic objects preserve the tangible aspects of social memory. The integration of these materials reflects the Oc Eo artisans' ability to manipulate natural resources into spiritual expressions of permanence and transcendence (Bui *et al.*, 2023) ^[2]; (Vo, 2001) ^[26]. Their creative synthesis positioned Oc Eo as both an indigenous innovation hub and a recipient of pan-Asian artistic currents. The archaeological significance of these artefacts extends beyond aesthetic appreciation. They provide empirical evidence of the Mekong Delta's complex cultural ecology—an interwoven system of agriculture, craftsmanship, belief, and trade. Stratigraphic data from Ba The and Linh Son sites confirm multiple occupational layers spanning from the 1st to the 7th centuries CE, coinciding with the rise and decline of the *Funan* Kingdom (Dang *et al.*, 2022) ^[3]; (Pham, 2023) ^[15]. The artistic evolution visible in these treasures parallels changes in social organization, technological innovation, and external interaction, offering a tangible framework for reconstructing regional history.

Ultimately, the ten National Treasures embody both artistic excellence and historical testimony. They attest to the dynamic synthesis of local and foreign traditions that characterized the Oc Eo Culture and illustrate how early Vietnamese civilization positioned itself within the broader cultural map of Asia. Their preservation and interpretation not only deepen understanding of the past but also reaffirm the contemporary value of cultural diversity, creativity, and resilience—core principles of heritage stewardship in the twenty-first century (Department of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam, 2024) ^[4]; (UN Tourism, 2024) ^[24].

3.4 Cultural, Educational, and Tourism Values

The ten National Treasures of the Oc Eo Culture not only possess profound archaeological and artistic significance but also serve as living educational and tourism resources that foster sustainable cultural development in An Giang. The province's cultural strategy emphasizes integrating these treasures into public education, community life, and the creative economy, transforming heritage into a dynamic source of identity and livelihood (Phong & Binh, 2024) ^[17].

From a cultural perspective, these artefacts embody the core values of Vietnamese civilization in the Mekong Delta, representing a dialogue between indigenous creativity and transregional exchange. The statues of Hindu and Buddhist deities, the linga–yoni sets, and the wooden Buddha together illustrate a continuum of belief systems that shaped spiritual and social life (Phan, 2008) ^[16]; (Le & Dao, 2009) ^[8]. Their conservation thus reinforces cultural continuity and strengthens the sense of belonging among local communities, particularly the younger generation. The Provincial Department of Culture and the Oc Eo Cultural Relics Management Board have established heritage education programs in collaboration with schools and universities, using the treasures as tangible learning tools for understanding national history and cultural diversity (Department of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam, 2024) ^[4].

The educational value of the Oc Eo treasures lies in their ability to inspire experiential learning. Museums in An Giang have developed interactive exhibits, guided tours, and

digital archives to help students and visitors engage directly with archaeological knowledge (Thuy Van, 2024) ^[22]. These initiatives align with the UNESCO framework for “learning through heritage,” emphasizing the connection between historical understanding and active citizenship (UNESCO, 2003) ^[25]. The inclusion of heritage-based curricula in local schools has cultivated public awareness of cultural preservation while encouraging youth participation in volunteer projects and local tourism services. Such engagement transforms heritage from static memory into a shared responsibility across generations.

In terms of tourism development, the Oc Eo–Ba The Archaeological Complex has become a cornerstone of An Giang’s sustainable tourism network. According to the province’s Master Plan for Cultural and Tourism Development 2021–2030, the complex is designated as the core heritage tourism zone, combining archaeological trails, museum spaces, and community-based tourism activities (Thoai Son Tourism Page, 2024) ^[22]. Infrastructure improvements, including bilingual signage, eco-friendly routes, and visitor centers, have enhanced accessibility and interpretive experiences for both domestic and international tourists (Srivastava, 2015) ^[18]. The province has also linked Oc Eo heritage tours with natural and spiritual destinations such as Cam Mountain and Tra Su Cajuput Forest, creating a diversified tourism portfolio that integrates ecology, religion, and archaeology (Leslie & Sigala, 2005) ^[9].

Cultural festivals, particularly the annual “Oc Eo Heritage Festival,” further demonstrate the interconnection between tourism and education. The festival features exhibitions of National Treasures, craft demonstrations, academic workshops, and traditional performances that revive the mythological and artistic narratives of the Oc Eo civilization (Papathanassis, 2011) ^[1]. These events generate employment opportunities in hospitality, guide services, and artisanal production, while reinforcing cultural pride and cross-cultural understanding. A portion of tourism revenue from such activities is reinvested into conservation projects and heritage education programs, ensuring that tourism directly supports preservation efforts (UN Tourism, 2024) ^[24].

The integration of digital technology has also played a pivotal role in promoting accessibility and sustainability. Virtual exhibitions, 3D scanning of artefacts, and online VR 360° tours have made the Oc Eo heritage available to global audiences, particularly during periods when physical travel is limited (Thuy Van, 2024) ^[22]. These innovations not only enhance visitor experience but also contribute to long-term conservation by reducing physical handling of artefacts. The collaboration between government agencies, academic institutions, and local communities in developing digital archives demonstrates a modern, inclusive approach to heritage management (Department of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam, 2024) ^[4].

Overall, the cultural, educational, and tourism values of the Oc Eo National Treasures exemplify the principles of sustainable heritage governance. They contribute simultaneously to the preservation of historical integrity, the enrichment of public knowledge, and the growth of a responsible tourism economy. The case of An Giang thus illustrates how integrating heritage education with tourism not only sustains cultural resources but also transforms them into catalysts for social cohesion and regional development. Through the effective implementation of interdisciplinary strategies rooted in local identity and global cooperation, the

Oc Eo treasures continue to inspire a model of heritage that bridges the ancient and the modern, the sacred and the economic, the local and the universal.

3.5 Heritage Management and Policy Implications

The management of the Oc Eo National Treasures requires a comprehensive and coordinated policy framework that aligns cultural preservation with sustainable development. In An Giang, this framework has evolved through the collaboration of the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Oc Eo Cultural Heritage Management Board, and local museums. The provincial government has recognized that heritage is not only a scientific resource but also an essential component of social identity and economic growth (Department of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam, 2024) ^[4].

A key policy direction is the establishment of an integrated heritage governance system that unites archaeological research, education, and tourism under a single management structure. The proposed Heritage Coordination Committee—comprising specialists from archaeology, tourism, education, and the environment—would ensure coherent planning, minimize overlapping responsibilities, and facilitate long-term conservation strategies. Transparent management and public participation remain central principles, as these build trust between authorities, communities, and investors (Phong & Binh, 2024) ^[17].

Financial sustainability is another policy priority. Stable funding sources should combine state budget allocations with tourism-generated revenue and private sponsorships. The reinvestment of a fixed percentage of tourism income into conservation activities will ensure continuous preservation while stimulating public engagement (UN Tourism, 2024) ^[24]. This model, already applied successfully in several heritage provinces, can be adapted to the context of An Giang to secure both economic efficiency and cultural authenticity.

Climate resilience has emerged as a critical consideration in heritage management. The humid tropical environment of the Mekong Delta accelerates the deterioration of organic materials such as wood and bronze. Conservation plans must therefore incorporate climate adaptation measures, including temperature and humidity monitoring, environmental buffering, and protective housing for artefacts (Pham, 2023) ^[15]; (Dang *et al.*, 2022) ^[3]. These actions align with national initiatives on green heritage and disaster risk reduction in cultural sites.

In addition to technical measures, digital transformation has become a policy imperative. The province’s Digital Heritage 360 program demonstrates the value of technology in preserving and promoting the Oc Eo legacy. By expanding the digital database, producing 3D scans, and developing multilingual online exhibitions, An Giang can ensure both accessibility and preservation integrity (Thuy Van, 2024) ^[22]. Collaboration with national and international institutions, such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, would further enhance training, technology transfer, and global visibility (UNESCO, 2003) ^[25].

At the national level, Vietnam’s Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has endorsed the inclusion of the Oc Eo–Ba The Cultural Landscape in UNESCO’s World Heritage Tentative List, recognizing its outstanding universal value as a center of ancient Southeast Asian civilization (Department of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam, 2024) ^[4]. This international

acknowledgment reinforces policy directions emphasizing sustainable use of heritage, equitable community participation, and the integration of cultural management within broader regional development agendas.

Moving forward, An Giang's heritage management policy should focus on five interrelated objectives: (1) consolidating the legal framework for heritage protection; (2) enhancing professional training for curators, conservators, and educators; (3) promoting heritage diplomacy through ASEAN and UNESCO partnerships; (4) institutionalizing community-based management models; and (5) establishing regular heritage impact assessments for all development projects near archaeological zones. These objectives will ensure that cultural heritage functions as a shared public good rather than a restricted domain of experts.

By implementing these strategies, An Giang can become a national model of integrated heritage management. The province's experience demonstrates that policy coherence, scientific innovation, and public participation can transform archaeological heritage from passive relics into active instruments for education, cultural diplomacy, and sustainable growth. In doing so, An Giang not only safeguards the material and spiritual legacy of the Oc Eo civilization but also contributes to Vietnam's broader goal of positioning culture as a pillar of sustainable development in the 21st century.

4. Conclusion

The Oc Eo cultural heritage of An Giang Province represents a unique synthesis of archaeological significance, artistic excellence, and spiritual depth that vividly reflects the achievements of an early Southeast Asian civilization. The recognition of ten artefacts as National Treasures demonstrates the enduring cultural vitality and scientific importance of this region. Each artefact, ranging from the Brahma Statue of Giong Xoai and the Linga and Yoni from Linh Son to the recently recognized Linh Son Bac Buddha Head and Go Cay Tram Jar Burial, embodies a distinctive aspect of the Oc Eo civilization's worldview. Collectively, they form a coherent picture of a society that was deeply spiritual, technically sophisticated, and open to intercultural dialogue (Le & Dao, 2009) [8]; (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020) [12].

Archaeological findings confirm that the Oc Eo civilization was not an isolated phenomenon but a dynamic participant in the wider Indian Ocean exchange system. The stylistic and technological diversity of these artefacts illustrates how local artisans absorbed, reinterpreted, and localized external influences to create a distinct aesthetic and spiritual identity (Dang *et al.*, 2022) [3]. The harmonious coexistence of Hindu and Buddhist imagery within the same sacred landscape reveals a philosophy of religious inclusiveness and cultural adaptability that profoundly shaped the early history of Vietnam (Phan, 2008) [16].

These treasures extend beyond their material beauty; they also serve as powerful instruments for education, identity formation, and sustainable development. The integration of archaeological research into public education and tourism in An Giang has transformed static relics into dynamic sources of cultural inspiration (Department of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam, 2024) [4]; (Thuy Van, 2024) [22]. Through museums, exhibitions, and digital heritage programs, local authorities and scholars have fostered a living connection between the ancient past and contemporary society. This

approach enhances collective memory and strengthens the sense of pride and continuity among present and future generations.

From a policy standpoint, the management of Oc Eo heritage in An Giang demonstrates how effective coordination between government, academia, and the community can sustain both tangible and intangible values of cultural heritage. The province's initiatives align with the global trend toward integrated heritage governance, in which conservation, education, and tourism function as interdependent pillars of sustainable development (Government of Vietnam, 2024) [6]; (UN Tourism, 2024) [24]. By implementing adaptive management strategies and embracing digital transformation, An Giang has positioned itself as a model for responsible heritage stewardship in Vietnam and the broader Mekong region (Phong & Binh, 2024) [17].

Ultimately, the ten National Treasures of the Oc Eo Culture are not merely archaeological objects but enduring testimonies to human creativity, resilience, and the universal pursuit of meaning. Their preservation and interpretation illustrate the vital role of cultural heritage in shaping social cohesion, fostering intercultural understanding, and supporting sustainable futures. The case of An Giang underscores that when scientific research, education, and policy are harmoniously integrated, heritage becomes a living force that transcends time, linking the achievements of the ancient world with the aspirations of modern society.

Beyond its academic and aesthetic value, the Oc Eo heritage of An Giang plays a transformative role in shaping contemporary approaches to heritage governance and community development. The province's experience demonstrates that safeguarding cultural heritage must go hand in hand with raising public awareness and integrating heritage into daily life. Educational programs in schools and community centers have introduced young generations to the scientific, ethical, and artistic meanings embedded in the National Treasures, helping to instill a sense of pride and belonging (Department of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam, 2024) [4]; (Thu Thao, 2024) [21].

At the same time, the alignment between heritage conservation and sustainable tourism in An Giang has yielded measurable socio-economic benefits. The development of heritage-based tourism routes, improved visitor infrastructure, and local handicraft markets has created new livelihoods for residents while reinforcing respect for cultural authenticity (Leslie & Sigala, 2005) [9]; (Phong & Binh, 2024) [17]. Heritage thus becomes not only a cultural asset but also a catalyst for inclusive economic growth that supports both conservation and community resilience.

Furthermore, An Giang's model underscores the value of digital innovation in heritage management. The use of virtual exhibitions, interactive platforms, and 3D documentation enables broader access to the Oc Eo collections, especially for students, researchers, and international audiences (Thuy Van, 2024) [22]. These technologies bridge the gap between academic research and public participation, ensuring that heritage remains dynamic and relevant in the digital age.

Ultimately, the preservation of the Oc Eo National Treasures is not an end in itself but a means of reaffirming cultural continuity within a rapidly changing world. Their enduring presence in An Giang's museums and educational

institutions reflects the ongoing dialogue between tradition and innovation, material remains and living culture, local identity and global exchange. By maintaining this balance, An Giang provides an exemplary case for heritage management in Vietnam and the wider Mekong region, demonstrating that the past, when properly understood and shared, can illuminate pathways toward a sustainable and humanistic future (UN Tourism, 2024) ^[24]; (Government of Vietnam, 2024) ^[6].

5. Recommendations

Building upon the achievements and lessons from the preservation of the Oc Eo National Treasures in An Giang, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the long-term effectiveness of heritage management, education, and sustainable tourism.

First, it is necessary to strengthen interdisciplinary research and conservation programs. Archaeologists, historians, museologists, and conservation scientists should collaborate to document artefacts using advanced technologies such as 3D scanning, digital modeling, and compositional analysis. These methods not only preserve valuable data but also support international research cooperation (Dang *et al.*, 2022) ^[3]; (Pham, 2023) ^[15]. Stable funding mechanisms and dedicated conservation facilities are essential to ensure the long-term protection of fragile materials, especially wood and bronze artefacts vulnerable to An Giang's tropical climate (Department of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam, 2024) ^[4].

Second, heritage education must be expanded across all levels of society. Schools, universities, and community centers should integrate modules on Oc Eo culture and archaeology into their curricula. Exhibitions, field trips, and digital learning resources can cultivate public appreciation for the scientific and moral values of heritage (Thu Thao, 2024) ^[21]; (Thuy Van, 2024) ^[22]. Training local educators and guides in cultural interpretation will help translate academic knowledge into engaging learning experiences that connect the past with present identities.

Third, sustainable tourism development should prioritize authenticity and inclusiveness. Tourism projects in the Oc Eo – Ba The area must align with environmental protection principles and ensure that economic benefits reach local residents. Community-based tourism models, local craft revitalization, and eco-friendly visitor infrastructure can balance conservation with livelihood generation (Leslie & Sigala, 2005) ^[9]; (UN Tourism, 2024) ^[24]. Tourism promotion should focus on cultural storytelling, emphasizing the universal values of creativity, tolerance, and spiritual aspiration embodied in the Oc Eo civilization.

Fourth, policy coordination at both provincial and national levels should be strengthened. The establishment of an integrated heritage management framework will improve cooperation between the Department of Cultural Heritage, the An Giang People's Committee, and local cultural institutions (Government of Vietnam, 2024) ^[6]. This structure should include regular evaluation of management plans, clear accountability for preservation outcomes, and alignment with international conventions such as the UNESCO World Heritage guidelines.

Fifth, community participation remains the foundation of sustainable preservation. Local residents are not only custodians of heritage but also active agents in its transmission. Encouraging their involvement in site

maintenance, cultural festivals, and interpretation activities will deepen collective responsibility and pride (Phong & Binh, 2024) ^[17]; (An Giang Provincial Portal, 2024) ^[1]. Digital storytelling platforms and creative competitions for youth can further integrate traditional values into contemporary life, ensuring that heritage remains a source of innovation and social connection.

In conclusion, the sustainable preservation of the Oc Eo National Treasures requires a holistic approach that links science, education, policy, and community engagement. By fostering collaboration across disciplines and generations, An Giang can continue to serve as a model for Vietnam's cultural heritage management. The legacy of the Oc Eo civilization, embodied in its ten National Treasures, will thereby continue to inspire knowledge, creativity, and unity for centuries to come.

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