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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Vietnamese Ceramics: The Journey from Traditional Craft Villages to the International Market

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| ABSTRACT

Vietnamese ceramics is one of the oldest handicraft industries in Southeast Asia, with a history of thousands of years closely linked to the nation's cultural development. From primitive pottery of prehistoric times to the exquisite artistic ceramics of the Ly – Tran – Le dynasties, the Vietnamese ceramics industry has undergone many ups and downs and today faces great opportunities to reach the international market. This article comprehensively analyzes the development journey of the Vietnamese ceramics industry, from the traditional craft village foundation to the process of industrialization, modernization, and international economic integration. Based on the analysis of production status, export performance, brand building, and the supporting policies of the Party and the State, the article proposes strategic solutions to enhance competitiveness and sustainably develop the Vietnamese ceramics industry in the global market in the new context.

| KEYWORDS

Vietnamese ceramics, traditional craft villages, export, international market, branding, sustainable development.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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### 1. Introduction

Ceramics is one of the oldest handicraft and fine art industries in Vietnam, closely tied to the civilization of wet-rice cultivation and the nation's process of building and defending the country. Over thousands of years of development, from simple earthenware products for daily use to sophisticated artistic ceramics imbued with Vietnamese cultural identity, the ceramics industry has become an inseparable part of the material and spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. Famous ceramic craft villages such as Bát Tràng (Hanoi), Phù Lãng (Bắc Ninh), Chu Đậu (Hải Dương), Thanh Hà (Quảng Nam), Bàu Trúc (Ninh Thuận), and Bình Dương are not only places that preserve and transmit unique ceramic-making techniques but also living cultural heritage, reflecting the intelligence, soul, and dexterous hands of Vietnamese artisans across generations.

In the context of globalization and deepening international economic integration, the Vietnamese ceramics industry is facing both significant opportunities and major challenges. Regarding opportunities, the new-generation free trade agreements that Vietnam has signed and participated in, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), have opened up large markets with many tariff incentives for exported ceramic products. Regarding challenges, fierce competition from major ceramic-producing countries worldwide like China, Japan, and Thailand, along with increasingly high demands for quality, design, environmental

standards, and social responsibility from importing markets, require the Vietnamese ceramics industry to undergo strong and comprehensive transformation.

The 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam clearly defined the goal of economic development towards industrialization and modernization, emphasizing the role of traditional handicrafts in the strategy for rural economic development and new rural construction. The Congress document states: "Develop rural economy in conjunction with building new-style rural areas, towards ecological agriculture, modern rural areas, and civilized farmers. Boost industrial and service development, restructure the economic and labor structures in rural areas" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 124). Continuing this spirit, the 14th Party Congress (scheduled for 2026) is expected to further define strategies for the sustainable development of traditional crafts in the context of digital transformation and deeper international integration.

This article aims to systematically and comprehensively analyze the development journey of the Vietnamese ceramics industry from its traditional craft village foundations to the international market, assess the current production and export status, identify opportunities and challenges, and propose strategic solutions to promote the sustainable development of the Vietnamese ceramics industry in the global market in the new era.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology**

### **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

This research is built upon several important theories and analytical frameworks in the fields of economics, management, and sustainable development.

First, Michael Porter's (1990) theory of national competitive advantage with the "Diamond Model" is used to analyze the determining factors of the competitive advantage of the Vietnamese ceramics industry in the international market. According to Porter, the competitive advantage of an industry is determined by four main groups of factors: factor conditions, demand conditions, related and supporting industries, and firm strategy, structure, and rivalry. Additionally, two supplementary factors—the role of government and chance—also significantly impact industry competitiveness.

Second, the theory of Global Value Chains (GVC) by Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark (2016) is applied to analyze the position and role of the Vietnamese ceramics industry within the global ceramics value chain. This theory helps identify the links in the value chain that the Vietnamese ceramics industry currently participates in, from which strategies for upgrading can be proposed to increase value and profits for Vietnamese ceramic enterprises.

Third, the sustainable development framework with its three pillars—economic, social, and environmental—is used to evaluate the sustainability of the ceramics industry's development. This sustainable development perspective is also fully aligned with the line of the Communist Party of Vietnam, as the 13th Congress document emphasizes: "Develop rapidly and sustainably... based on science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 115).

Fourth, the theory of nation branding by Anholt (2007) and the concept of "soft power" by Nye (2004) are referenced to analyze the potential for building a brand for Vietnamese ceramics as a symbol of culture and creativity on the international stage.

### **2.2. Research Methodology**

The article employs a combination of multiple research methods. The desk research method is used to synthesize, analyze, and evaluate secondary sources, including scientific research papers, monographs, reports from state agencies, statistical data from the General Statistics Office, the General Department of Customs, reports from the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and relevant international organizations. The historical-logical analysis method is used to study the formation and development process of the Vietnamese ceramics industry through historical periods, thereby drawing out laws and lessons learned. The comparative method is applied to contrast the Vietnamese ceramics industry with other ceramic-producing

countries in the region and worldwide. The SWOT analysis method is used to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the Vietnamese ceramics industry in the context of international integration.

### **3. Historical Overview of the Development of the Vietnamese Ceramics Industry**

#### **3.1. Vietnamese Ceramics in Prehistoric and Early Historical Periods**

The history of the Vietnamese ceramics industry can be traced back thousands of years before the Common Era, linked to famous archaeological cultures on Vietnamese territory. According to archaeological findings, the earliest ceramic artifacts discovered at sites belonging to the Hòa Bình – Bắc Sơn cultures (approximately 10,000 – 7,000 years BCE) are still very rudimentary, mainly hand-molded pottery fired at low temperatures in open-air kilns (Hà Văn Tấn, 1999). By the Phùng Nguyên cultural period (approximately 4,000 – 3,500 years BCE), ceramic-making technology had made significant progress with the use of hand-turned potter's wheels and more elaborate decorative patterns, including geometric motifs like dotted lines, hatched lines, and spirals.

The Đông Sơn cultural period (approximately 700 BCE – 100 CE) marked the peak of prehistoric ceramic art in Vietnam. Đông Sơn pottery was crafted on fast-turning wheels, fired at higher temperatures, with diverse forms such as pots, jars, vases, bowls, plates, and ritual objects. The decorations on Đông Sơn pottery reflect the daily life, beliefs, and worldview of ancient Vietnamese people, creating a unique artistic style not mixed with any other culture in the region (Phạm Minh Huyền, 1996).

#### **3.2. Vietnamese Ceramics during the Northern Domination Period and the Early Period of Independence**

During the over a thousand years of Northern domination (111 BCE – 938 CE), the Vietnamese ceramics industry was deeply influenced by Chinese ceramic techniques and styles, especially glazing techniques. However, Vietnamese artisans did not simply copy but selectively absorbed, creatively adapted, and localized, creating products with distinct characteristics. According to Nguyễn Đình Chiển (2000), celadon and white-glazed pottery from this period were produced at several kilns in the Red River Delta, demonstrating a complex cultural exchange and blending between indigenous traditions and external influences.

After gaining independence, especially from the Ly dynasty (1009 – 1225), the Vietnamese ceramics industry entered a period of brilliant development. Under the Ly dynasty, the capital Thăng Long became the largest ceramic production center in the country, with many bustling kilns. Ly dynasty celadon is considered one of the most beautiful ceramic lines in Southeast Asia, with a translucent glaze, jade-green color, thin lightweight body, and intricately carved decorations. Common decorative themes include lotus flowers, dragons, phoenixes, clouds, and waves—symbols closely associated with Buddhist culture and Vietnamese folk beliefs (Trần Khánh Chương, 2001).

#### **3.3. The Golden Age: Vietnamese Ceramics in the 14th – 16th Centuries**

The 14th to 16th centuries are considered the golden age of Vietnamese ceramics, particularly the blue-and-white ceramics and polychrome-glazed pottery. During this period, Vietnamese ceramics not only served domestic consumption but also became an important export commodity, widely sold to markets in Southeast Asia, Japan, the Middle East, and even as far as East Africa.

The most notable event demonstrating the international status of Vietnamese ceramics in this period was the discovery of the Cù Lao Chàm shipwreck (also known as the Hội An shipwreck) in 1997 off the coast of Hội An, Quảng Nam province. This ship carried about 250,000 Vietnamese ceramic artifacts dating from the 15th century, demonstrating the enormous scale of Vietnamese ceramic production and trade during the early Le dynasty (Butterfield & Crick, 2000). At an auction organized by Butterfields in San Francisco (USA) in 2000, thousands of ceramic artifacts from this wreck were sold at high prices, attracting great interest from the international collecting community and affirming the artistic and commercial value of medieval Vietnamese ceramics.

Chu Đậu pottery (Thái Tân commune, Nam Sách district, Hải Dương province) is the most prominent representative of Vietnamese export ceramics from the 15th – 16th centuries. Chu Đậu products are famous for their ivory-white glaze, exquisitely painted blue-and-white decorations with themes of flora, fauna, and daily life scenes, deeply

imbued with Vietnamese artistic identity. Notably, a blue-and-white ceramic vase bearing the inscription "Nam Sách châu, Bùi Thị Hý bút" (南策州裴氏戲筆) is currently housed in the Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, Turkey, serving as a vivid testament that Vietnamese ceramics had a presence on the international maritime trade routes very early (Stevenson & Guy, 1997).

### ***3.4. Vietnamese Ceramics in the Modern and Contemporary Periods***

From the 17th century onwards, the Vietnamese ceramics industry experienced a decline compared to its previous golden age, partly due to increasing competition from Chinese and Japanese ceramics on the international market and partly due to domestic political-social upheavals. However, ceramic craft villages continued production for domestic needs, and some new ceramic lines emerged to meet changing consumer tastes.

During the French colonial period (1858 – 1945), some ceramic production facilities following industrial methods were established, notably the Hải Dương Porcelain Factory (established in 1960, but its predecessor was a pottery workshop from the French era) and pottery workshops in Bình Dương, Biên Hòa (Đồng Nai). The Thủ Dầu Một School of Fine Arts (established 1901) and the Biên Hòa School of Fine Arts (established 1903) trained many generations of ceramic artisans with skills in design and crafting combining Vietnamese tradition and Western fine arts, creating the famous Biên Hòa pottery known for its colorful glazes and unique decorative style (Nguyễn Thị Thanh Bình, 2015).

After 1975, especially since the Đổi mới (Renovation) reform in 1986, the Vietnamese ceramics industry has seen important transformations. The policy of opening the economy, encouraging private economic development, and international integration has created strong momentum for the ceramics industry to develop in scale, quality, and export capacity. Many traditional craft villages have been restored and developed, while many new ceramic enterprises have emerged with large-scale production, applying modern technology, and targeting export markets.

## **4. Current Status of the Vietnamese Ceramics Industry**

### ***4.1. Production Scale and Geographic Distribution***

The Vietnamese ceramics industry today has a considerable scale with the participation of many enterprise types and production households spread across numerous provinces and cities nationwide. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, as of 2023, the country has over 5,400 craft villages and villages with craft activities, among which ceramic craft villages account for a significant proportion, mainly concentrated in the Red River Delta and Southeast regions.

The largest ceramic production centers today include Bình Dương, which concentrates hundreds of large and medium-sized ceramic enterprises specializing in industrial and art ceramics for export; Bát Tràng (Gia Lâm, Hanoi), the most famous traditional ceramic craft village in the North with over 200 households and enterprises; Hải Dương, home to the Chu Đậu pottery tradition being restored and developed; and Đồng Nai, with the Biên Hòa pottery line with over a hundred years of history.

According to a report by the Bình Dương Ceramics Association, Bình Dương province is the largest ceramic production center in the country, accounting for about 60–70% of Vietnam's total ceramic export volume. As of 2023, Bình Dương has over 300 enterprises operating in ceramics, providing jobs for tens of thousands of workers (Bình Dương Department of Industry and Trade, 2023). Notable enterprises in Bình Dương's ceramics industry include Minh Long I Joint Stock Company, Cường Phát Ceramics Limited Liability Company, Thiên Thanh Porcelain Joint Stock Company, and many others.

Bát Tràng, with over 700 years of history, remains one of the most vibrant ceramic craft villages in the country. According to statistics from Bát Tràng commune's People's Committee, the annual revenue of the craft village reaches about VND 2,000–2,500 billion, with about 30% of product value being exported to international markets. In 2019, Bát Tràng was recognized by the World Crafts Council (WCC) as a "Global Creative Craft Village," a great honor not only for Bát Tràng but for the entire Vietnamese ceramics industry.

#### **4.2. Current Status of Ceramic Exports**

Ceramic export is one of the notable highlights of Vietnam's handicraft and fine art industry in recent years. According to data from the General Department of Customs, Vietnam's ceramic export turnover has grown fairly steadily during the 2015–2023 period. Specifically, in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam's ceramic export turnover reached about \$550 million. After declining in 2020 due to the pandemic, ceramic exports recovered strongly in 2021 and 2022, reaching approximately \$580 million and \$610 million, respectively (General Department of Customs, 2023).

However, in 2023, Vietnamese ceramic exports faced many difficulties due to declining demand in major markets, especially Europe and North America, against the backdrop of high inflation and slowing global economic growth. The 2023 ceramic export turnover is estimated at around \$500–520 million, a decrease of about 15% compared to 2022 (Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2024).

Regarding export market structure, Vietnamese ceramic products are currently exported to over 80 countries and territories worldwide. Major export markets include the European Union (EU), the United States, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan (China), and ASEAN countries. Among them, the EU and the US are the two largest export markets, accounting for approximately 30% and 20% of Vietnam's total ceramic export turnover, respectively (Export-Import Department – Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2023).

Regarding export product structure, Vietnamese ceramic exports include many diverse categories. Household ceramics (bowls, plates, cups, teapots, vases, jars) account for the largest proportion, about 45-50% of total turnover. Decorative and art ceramics account for about 25-30%. Technical ceramics and construction ceramics (tiles, sanitary ware) make up the remainder. Notably, in recent years, the proportion of high value-added ceramic products, especially art ceramics and high-end ceramics, has shown an upward trend, reflecting the efforts of Vietnamese enterprises in improving quality and product value.

#### **4.3. Notable Enterprises and Successful Models**

Among Vietnamese ceramic enterprises, Minh Long I Joint Stock Company (Bình Dương) is a prime example of success in building a high-end ceramic brand "Made in Vietnam" with reputable standing in the international market. Founded in 1970, after more than 50 years of development, Minh Long I has become a leading ceramic enterprise in Vietnam, famous for high-quality porcelain products of international caliber.

According to the company, Minh Long I has invested millions of USD in modern production technology, including gas tunnel kilns imported from Germany, heat transfer decal printing technology, international-standard laboratories, and quality inspection systems. Minh Long I porcelain products meet the strictest standards of the EU, Japan, and US markets for food safety (lead and cadmium content below permitted thresholds), mechanical and thermal durability, and aesthetics. Notably, Minh Long I has successfully created the "Hoàng Cung" (Imperial) porcelain line with glaze quality, body, and design on par with famous world brands like Meissen (Germany), Limoges (France), and Noritake (Japan) (Minh Long I, 2023).

Minh Long I products have been chosen as state gifts in many important diplomatic events, including the APEC Summits 2006 and 2017 in Vietnam, and the second US-North Korea Summit in Hanoi in 2019. The selection of Minh Long I porcelain to serve at such international diplomatic events is not only a source of pride for the enterprise but also contributes to promoting the brand of Vietnamese ceramics on the international stage.

Another notable successful model is Chu Đậu Joint Stock Company (Hải Dương), which has restored and developed the Chu Đậu pottery line that was lost for hundreds of years. With systematic investment in research, reconstruction of ancient techniques combined with modern technology application, Chu Đậu pottery today has recreated the beauty of the 15th–16th-century line and become a state gift, exported to many countries worldwide. In 2012, the Chu Đậu ceramic vase "Vinh hoa – Bát Tràng" (Glory – Bát Tràng) was chosen as a state gift in diplomatic visits (Gốm Chu Đậu, 2023).

#### **4.4. Characteristics of Vietnamese Ceramic Products in the International Market**

Vietnamese ceramic products in the international market have several notable characteristics. Regarding quality, leading export enterprises in Vietnam have achieved product quality meeting the strictest international standards. Many enterprises have applied quality management systems (ISO 9001), environmental management systems (ISO 14001), and comply with EU (Regulation EC No. 1935/2004), FDA (USA), and JIS (Japan) regulations on product safety.

Regarding price, Vietnamese ceramics have a competitive price advantage compared to similar products from Japan, South Korea, or Europe, thanks to lower labor and material costs. However, the average export price of Vietnamese ceramics remains significantly higher than similar products from China, posing a challenge in the low and mid-range market segments.

Regarding design, Vietnamese ceramic products are increasingly highly regarded for their creativity and design diversity. Many products demonstrate a harmonious combination of traditional Vietnamese elements and modern styles, suitable for global consumer trends towards sustainable, eco-friendly products with unique cultural identity and compelling brand stories.

### **5. Opportunities and Challenges for the Vietnamese Ceramics Industry in the International Market**

#### **5.1. Opportunities**

The Vietnamese ceramics industry is facing many favorable opportunities to develop and expand its market share internationally.

First, the system of free trade agreements (FTAs) that Vietnam has signed creates significant tariff advantages for ceramic exports. Particularly, the EVFTA, effective from August 1, 2020, has committed to eliminating tariffs on most Vietnamese ceramic products exported to the EU within seven years of the agreement's entry into force. According to the roadmap, by 2027, most Vietnamese ceramic products will enjoy a 0% tariff rate when exported to the EU, compared to the previous average Most Favored Nation (MFN) rate of 6-12% (Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2020). This is a huge competitive advantage over key competitors like China (no FTA with the EU), Thailand (FTA with EU not yet finalized).

Similarly, the CPTPP opens up opportunities to access large markets like Canada, Australia, Japan, and Mexico with many tariff preferences. The RCEP, with the participation of 15 countries accounting for about 30% of global GDP, also creates opportunities for Vietnamese ceramics in Asia-Pacific markets.

Second, global consumer trends are shifting in ways favorable to the Vietnamese ceramics industry. Consumers in developed markets are increasingly interested in handmade products, natural origin products, eco-friendly, sustainable products with strong cultural identity. Vietnamese ceramics, especially traditional art pottery, fully meet these consumption trends. According to a Grand View Research report (2023), the global ceramic tableware market is expected to reach approximately \$12.5 billion by 2028, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of about 5.2% during 2023–2028.

Third, the trend of global supply chain shifts after the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions has driven many large importers and distributors to seek alternative sourcing outside China (the "China plus one" strategy). Vietnam, with advantages in geographic location, labor force, competitive costs, investment environment, and open integration policies, is becoming an attractive destination for ceramic orders shifting from China.

Fourth, the strong development of cross-border e-commerce and global online platforms like Amazon, eBay, Etsy, and Alibaba opens up new market access channels for Vietnamese ceramic enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and household producers in traditional craft villages. Through e-commerce, Vietnamese ceramic products can directly reach international consumers without many intermediaries, thereby increasing value and profit.

## **5.2. Challenges**

Alongside opportunities, the Vietnamese ceramics industry also faces many significant challenges on the road to conquering the international market.

First, international competition is becoming increasingly fierce. China remains the world's largest producer and exporter of ceramics, with advantages of massive production scale, complete supply chains, advanced technology, and low costs. According to UN Comtrade (2023) data, China accounts for about 60-65% of the global export market share for household ceramics. Moreover, other ceramic-producing countries in the region like Thailand, Indonesia, and Bangladesh are also actively expanding exports with competitive pricing strategies.

Second, the issue of branding and international recognition remains a major weakness for the Vietnamese ceramics industry. Most Vietnamese ceramic exports are under OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) or ODM (Original Design Manufacturer) forms, meaning they are produced according to foreign importers' orders and designs, then labeled with international brands for sale. This implies that the value added Vietnamese enterprises obtain is very limited, mainly in production, while the highest value in the value chain—design, marketing, distribution, and branding—belongs to foreign partners. It is estimated that Vietnamese ceramic enterprises exporting under OEM typically receive only about 20-30% of the final retail value of the product on the international market.

Third, design and innovation capabilities remain limited. Despite a rich tradition of ceramic art, the ability to transform tradition into contemporary design products suitable for international trends and consumer tastes remains a major challenge for many Vietnamese ceramic enterprises and craft villages. The team of professional ceramic designers is still thin, and the ceramic design training system at universities and educational institutions in the country has not kept pace with market requirements.

Fourth, the environmental issue is an increasingly serious challenge. Many ceramic production facilities, especially in traditional craft villages, still use coal and wood-fired kilns, causing air pollution, noise, and solid waste. According to the 2020 National Environmental Status Report by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, environmental pollution in craft villages, including ceramic villages, remains at an alarming level, affecting the health of residents and the quality of life in surrounding areas (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2021). In the context of major import markets increasingly tightening regulations on environmental protection and green manufacturing, this is an important challenge the Vietnamese ceramics industry must address to maintain and expand exports.

Fifth, the shortage of high-quality human resources for the ceramics industry is a growing concern. Many traditional craft villages are facing "aging" artisan teams, while younger generations are increasingly less willing to pursue ceramics due to unstable income, strenuous working conditions, and the appeal of other industries amidst urbanization and industrialization. The issue of transmitting skills and training the next generation is an urgent challenge for the sustainable development of the industry.

Sixth, the small-scale, fragmented, and scattered production structure, lacking value chain linkages, is a common feature of many craft villages and Vietnamese ceramic enterprises. Most ceramic production facilities are small and micro-scale, lacking capital for technology and equipment investment, lacking market access capabilities, and lacking information on international market demands and trends. The lack of linkage between enterprises in the industry, between producers and designers, between manufacturing enterprises and trading and export companies, reduces the efficiency and competitiveness of the entire industry.

## **6. Policies of the Party and State towards the Development of Ceramics and Traditional Craft Villages**

### **6.1. The Party's Viewpoint and Guidelines**

The Communist Party of Vietnam has always valued the role of traditional crafts, including ceramics, in the strategy for socio-economic development, especially in rural economic development and preserving national culture.

Resolution No. 19-NQ/TW dated June 16, 2022, of the 13th Central Committee on agriculture, farmers, and rural areas to 2030, vision to 2045, emphasizes the task of "vigorously developing rural trades; preserving and developing craft villages, developing rural tourism and community-based tourism" (Central Committee, 2022). The Resolution also sets the requirement to "accelerate the restructuring of rural trades, develop rural economy towards diversification, integrated multi-value of economy, culture, ecology, and environment."

The document of the 13th Party Congress (2021) also clearly defines the direction: "Develop rural economy in conjunction with building new-style rural areas, restructuring agriculture; develop rural economy, improve the material and spiritual life of farmers and rural residents" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 245). This guideline creates a political foundation and strategic direction for specific policies to preserve and develop traditional craft villages, including the ceramics industry.

In the preparation for the 14th Party Congress (scheduled for 2026), many opinions have been contributed on continuing to promote green economic development, circular economy, and digital transformation in rural areas, within which developing traditional handicrafts towards modern, sustainable methods, linked to e-commerce and creative economy, is a content of concern. General Secretary Tô Lâm, in many directive speeches, has emphasized the requirement for strong renewal, accelerating industrialization and modernization of the country, in which digital transformation and application of science and technology are key drivers for all economic sectors, including traditional crafts.

## **6.2. State Policies and Laws**

The State has issued many policies and legal documents to support and develop rural trades and traditional craft villages, creating a legal framework and resources for the development of the ceramics industry.

Decree No. 52/2018/ND-CP dated April 12, 2018, of the Government on the development of rural trades is the most important legal document, detailing policies to encourage and support the development of rural trades, including policies on production premises, credit, human resource training, trade promotion, science and technology, and environmental protection (Government, 2018). This decree has created a favorable legal basis for ceramic production facilities, especially in craft villages, to access support resources from the State.

Decision No. 801/QĐ-TTg dated July 7, 2022 of the Prime Minister approving the Program for Preservation and Development of Vietnamese Craft Villages for the 2021–2030 period sets the goal of "Preserving and developing trades and craft villages to maintain and promote the cultural values of Vietnamese craft villages; boost production, enhance competitiveness, and add value to craft village products; create jobs, increase income for people; protect landscapes, spaces, and the environment" (Prime Minister, 2022). This program aims for the export turnover of handicrafts and fine arts to reach \$6 billion by 2030, with ceramics being one of the key industries.

The "One Commune One Product" (OCOP) program, implemented under Decision No. 490/QĐ-TTg dated May 7, 2018 and continued under Decision No. 919/QĐ-TTg dated August 1, 2022 approving the OCOP Program for 2021–2025, has created important momentum for developing and improving the quality of ceramic products in craft villages. Many ceramic products from Bát Tràng, Chu Đậu, Phù Lãng, and other craft villages have achieved 4-star and 5-star OCOP certification, affirming quality and commercial potential in domestic and international markets (Central Office for New Rural Development, 2023).

Additionally, the Ministry of Industry and Trade has implemented many trade promotion programs, supporting ceramic enterprises to participate in major international trade fairs such as Ambiente (Frankfurt, Germany), Canton Fair (Guangzhou, China), MEGA Show (Hong Kong), and NY NOW (New York, USA), to promote products and connect business with international partners.

## **7. Building the Brand of Vietnamese Ceramics in the International Market**

### **7.1 Current Status of Brand Building**

Building the brand of Vietnamese ceramics in the international market is an important task but also an area with many limitations and inadequacies. As analyzed earlier, most Vietnamese ceramic exports are under OEM/ODM forms, not carrying the private brands of Vietnamese enterprises. This means that although Vietnamese ceramics are present on shelves in many stores and supermarkets in Europe, North America, Japan, and many other countries, international consumers are hardly aware of the "Made in Vietnam" origin of the products, and the brand value belongs to foreign distributors and retailers.

A very small number of Vietnamese enterprises have endeavored to build their own brands in the international market, with Minh Long I being the most successful example. However, building a Vietnamese ceramics brand at the industry level (industry-level branding) and national level (country-of-origin branding) remains very limited. Currently, there is no comprehensive national strategy for building the Vietnamese ceramics brand in the international market, and efforts for trade promotion and promoting the image of Vietnamese ceramics abroad are still scattered, lack synchronization, and have not created a strong enough communication effect.

### **7.2. Potential and Advantages for Brand Building**

Despite limitations, the Vietnamese ceramics industry possesses great potential and advantages for building an international brand.

First, the thousand-year history and tradition of the Vietnamese ceramics industry is an invaluable "brand asset." The story of 15th-century Chu Đậu pottery once exported worldwide, the story of the Cù Lao Chàm shipwreck with hundreds of thousands of ceramic artifacts, the story of the "Bùi Thị Hỷ" ceramic vase at the Topkapi Saray Museum—all are incredibly compelling "brand stories" that can be leveraged in communication strategies and international brand building.

Furthermore, Vietnamese cultural identity, with the harmonious blend of historical, religious, aesthetic, and folk life elements, creates an endless source of design inspiration for ceramic products. In the trend of globalization, as consumers increasingly seek differentiation, uniqueness, and cultural depth in products, Vietnamese cultural identity is the factor that creates a "unique value proposition" for Vietnamese ceramics.

Moreover, Vietnam is emerging as a top attractive tourist destination in the region and the world, and ceramic craft village tourism is becoming a distinctive tourism product, attracting more and more international tourists. Direct interaction between international tourists with artisans and ceramic products at craft villages like Bát Tràng, Thanh Hà, Bàu Trúc not only generates economic revenue but also serves as an effective channel for promoting the Vietnamese ceramics brand through experiential marketing and word-of-mouth.

### **7.3. Brand Building Strategies**

To build the brand of Vietnamese ceramics in the international market, a comprehensive and long-term strategy is needed, combining efforts from both public and private sectors.

At the national level, it is necessary to build and implement a National Brand Program for Vietnamese Ceramics (Vietnam Ceramics National Brand Program), integrated within the National Branding Program of Vietnam (Vietnam Value) chaired by the Ministry of Industry and Trade. This program should include the main contents: building a common brand identity for Vietnamese ceramics (logo, slogan, key visual), establishing national quality standards for export ceramic products, organizing international communication campaigns, and supporting enterprises in building and protecting their own brands in foreign markets.

At the enterprise level, it is necessary to encourage and support ceramic enterprises to transition from OEM to OBM (Original Brand Manufacturing) models, i.e., manufacturing and exporting products under their own brands. This transformation requires significant investment in design, marketing, building distribution channels, and customer

service in international markets, but it is the inevitable path to increase value added and profit for the Vietnamese ceramics industry.

At the craft village level, it is necessary to build and develop "geographical indications" (GI) and "collective marks" for characteristic ceramic products of each region, such as Bát Tràng pottery, Chu Đậu pottery, Phù Lãng pottery, Bàu Trúc pottery, and Thanh Hà pottery. Registering for GI protection and collective marks not only helps protect intellectual property rights and product reputation but also creates brand value tied to geographical origin and cultural heritage, similar to the protection models for Meissen porcelain (Germany), Limoges porcelain (France), or Arita pottery (Japan).

## **8. Solutions for Developing the Vietnamese Ceramics Industry in the International Market**

### **8.1. Innovating Technology and Improving Product Quality**

Technological innovation in production is an urgent requirement to enhance the competitiveness of the Vietnamese ceramics industry in the international market. Enterprises and production facilities need to actively invest in technological innovation towards modernization and automation of production stages, especially in raw material preparation, shaping, drying, firing, and product finishing. Shifting from coal and wood-fired kilns to gas or electric kilns not only helps better control firing temperature and improve product quality but also significantly reduces environmental pollution.

The State needs to have supportive financial policies, preferential credit to enable enterprises, especially SMEs, to access capital for technological innovation. Simultaneously, it is necessary to enhance research and development (R&D) activities in ceramics, including research on new materials, new glazes, new shaping technologies, and energy-efficient firing technologies, to create breakthrough products in quality and aesthetics.

Building and applying a national quality standards system for ceramic products, in line with international standards (ISO, EN, ASTM, JIS), is also an important task. This standards system will help unify product quality across the industry, build trust with international partners and customers, and serve as a basis for negotiating and overcoming technical barriers to trade (TBT) in importing markets.

### **8.2. Developing Design and Innovation**

Design is a key factor creating value added and differentiation for ceramic products in the international market. To enhance design capabilities, the Vietnamese ceramics industry needs to implement comprehensive solutions.

It is necessary to strengthen the training of professional ceramic designers by updating curricula at art and design universities, opening short-term training courses, seminars, and workshops on contemporary ceramic design, inviting international experts and designers to share experiences and collaborate creatively. Building ceramic design centers in major production areas, operating under public-private partnership (PPP) models, will create creative spaces and bridges between designers, artisans, and manufacturing enterprises.

Design strategies should aim for a harmonious combination of traditional and modern elements, between Vietnamese cultural identity and international aesthetic trends. Traditional patterns, symbols, materials, and techniques need to be reinterpreted and applied in contemporary design language, creating products that are both inheriting and innovative, suitable for various global lifestyles and interior spaces.

Additionally, it is necessary to encourage collaboration between young designers, contemporary artists, and artisans, and production facilities in traditional ceramic craft villages to create high-art collections capable of making waves in the international market and enhancing the brand image of Vietnamese ceramics.

### **8.3. Digital Transformation and E-commerce Development**

In the digital age, digital transformation is an inevitable trend and a great opportunity for the Vietnamese ceramics industry. Resolution No. 52-NQ/TW dated September 27, 2019, of the Politburo on some guidelines and policies to

proactively participate in the Fourth Industrial Revolution emphasizes the requirement to "promote digital transformation in industries, create new products, services, and business models" (Politburo, 2019). For the ceramics industry, digital transformation needs to be implemented on multiple fronts.

Regarding production, applying digital technology in production management (ERP, MES), product design (CAD/CAM), quality control, and supply chain management will improve efficiency, reduce costs, and increase production flexibility. 3D printing technology is opening new possibilities in ceramic shaping, allowing the production of complex, customized products at reasonable costs.

Regarding commerce, developing cross-border e-commerce through platforms like Amazon, Etsy, Alibaba, or building proprietary e-commerce websites will help ceramic enterprises and craft villages directly access global consumers. E-commerce not only expands sales channels but also allows enterprises to collect data on consumer behavior and preferences, thereby adjusting product strategies and marketing accordingly.

Regarding marketing and communication, digital marketing tools like social media (Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook, TikTok), content marketing, influencer marketing, and video marketing are particularly suitable for promoting ceramic products—which are inherently aesthetic and experiential. Building compelling digital content telling the stories of artisans, crafting processes, cultural significance, and artistic value of ceramic products will help create emotional connections with international consumers and build brands effectively.

#### **8.4. Developing Human Resources**

Human resources are a determining factor for the sustainable development of the ceramics industry. Human resource solutions need to be implemented comprehensively at multiple levels.

At the vocational training level, it is necessary to improve the quality of ceramic vocational training at vocational education institutions, combining theoretical and practical training, traditional crafting skills with knowledge of new technologies, design, production management, occupational safety, and environmental protection. Policies to attract and encourage young people to study and practice ceramics through scholarships, financial support, internship and job opportunities at reputable ceramic enterprises are needed.

At the skill transmission level, it is necessary to honor and support artisans, especially those awarded the titles of People's Artist and Meritorious Artist, in transmitting skills to the next generation. The State has had Decree No. 109/2015/ND-CP dated October 28, 2015, on support for artisans, skilled workers, and those contributing to preserving and promoting traditional crafts, but the level of support needs to be further increased to ensure the livelihood and motivation of artisans.

At the enterprise management level, it is necessary to train and enhance management capacity for ceramic enterprise owners and production households, especially in financial management, marketing, quality management, import-export, intellectual property, and international trade law. The SME management training program chaired by the Ministry of Planning and Investment under Decree No. 80/2021/ND-CP needs to be utilized more effectively for ceramic enterprises.

#### **8.5. Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection**

Sustainable development is a mandatory requirement, not only a social responsibility but also a condition to maintain and expand exports to developed markets that are increasingly tightening regulations on the environment and sustainable development.

An immediate solution is to accelerate the fuel conversion from coal and wood to gas, electricity, or biomass for ceramic kilns. Bình Dương province has had a policy to support ceramic enterprises in converting kilns from coal to gas, and to date, most large-scale ceramic enterprises in Bình Dương have completed the conversion (Bình Dương

Department of Natural Resources and Environment, 2022). However, in many traditional craft villages in the North, kiln conversion remains slow due to a lack of investment capital and traditional production habits.

A long-term solution is to develop the ceramics industry towards a circular economy, focusing on recycling ceramic waste, utilizing waste heat from kilns, using local and recycled materials, minimizing waste and energy consumption throughout the product lifecycle. Researching and applying eco-friendly glazes and pigments without harmful substances like lead and cadmium is also an important direction to meet increasingly strict regulations on product safety and consumer health protection in developed markets.

Ceramic enterprises also need to proactively apply international standards on environmental management (ISO 14001), social responsibility (SA 8000, BSCI), and sustainable development, not only to meet the requirements of export markets but also to build a positive brand image, aligning with the global trend of responsible consumption.

### ***8.6. Strengthening Value Chain Linkages and International Cooperation***

To enhance competitiveness and position in the international market, the Vietnamese ceramics industry needs to strengthen value chain linkages from raw materials, production, design, to marketing, distribution, and after-sales services.

Establishing and consolidating ceramics associations at national and regional levels, with functions of representation, coordination, and enterprise support, is necessary. The Bình Dương Ceramics Association is currently the largest industry organization in Vietnamese ceramics, but a strong national-level industry association is needed to represent the entire industry in foreign affairs, trade promotion, policy negotiation, and protecting the interests of enterprises.

International cooperation is also an important solution. Vietnamese ceramic enterprises and organizations need to actively participate in international ceramics networks, cooperate with research institutes, universities, ceramics associations, and foreign enterprises in technology transfer, human resource training, design, marketing, and brand building. Bát Tràng's recognition as a "Global Creative Craft Village" by the WCC is an important prerequisite to expand international cooperation in ceramics.

### ***8.7. Linking Ceramics Development with Tourism and Creative Economy***

Ceramic craft village tourism is a highly potential development direction, both generating economic revenue, promoting the Vietnamese ceramics brand, and contributing to preserving and promoting the value of traditional cultural heritage. Many ceramic craft villages have developed experiential tourism models, allowing tourists to observe production processes, mold and paint pottery themselves, and learn about the history and culture of ceramics.

To develop ceramic craft village tourism more effectively, there needs to be planning and investment in tourism infrastructure, building high-quality ceramic museums, designing attractive experiential programs, training knowledgeable tour guides about ceramics, and connecting ceramic craft village tourism tours into national and international tourism routes.

Additionally, it is necessary to develop the ceramics industry within a broader framework of the creative economy, where product value lies not only in materials and functionality but also in creative ideas, design, cultural stories, and experiences. Positioning Vietnamese ceramics as a product of the "creative economy," combining traditional handicrafts and contemporary design, will open up new high value-added market segments aligned with global consumer trends.

## **9. International Lessons**

### **9.1. Japan: Model for Preserving and Developing Traditional Ceramics**

Japan is a country with a long ceramic tradition and has been very successful in preserving and developing traditional ceramic lines while building the brand of Japanese ceramics with international repute. Famous Japanese ceramic lines like Arita (Saga), Kutani (Ishikawa), Mashiko (Tochigi), and Bizen (Okayama) are not only preserved as cultural heritage but also developed into commercially successful brands.

The Japanese government has implemented comprehensive policies in preserving and developing traditional craft industries, including the Traditional Craft Industries Promotion Act (1974), the system for recognizing and protecting traditional craft products, the system for honoring and supporting artisans (Living National Treasures), and investment in research, training, and trade promotion. The lesson from Japan shows that the effective combination of state policies, enterprise efforts, and community participation is key to the sustainable preservation and development of the traditional ceramics industry (METI Japan, 2020).

### **9.2. China: Development Strategy for Jingdezhen Ceramics**

Jingdezhen (Jiangxi province, China), known as the "world's ceramic capital," has over 1,700 years of ceramic production history. In recent decades, the Chinese government has had a strategy to develop Jingdezhen into a world-class ceramic center, combining industrial production, creative art, and cultural tourism.

In 2019, the State Council of China approved the "Jingdezhen National Ceramic Culture Heritage Innovation Pilot Zone," transforming Jingdezhen into a global creative city in the field of ceramics. Policies include investing billions of RMB in infrastructure, research, training, attracting international artists and designers to create, building museums, exhibition centers, and modern creative spaces. The lesson from Jingdezhen for Vietnam is the importance of long-term strategic vision, large-scale investment, and an integrated approach combining production, culture, creativity, and tourism in ceramics industry development.

### **9.3. Thailand: OTOP Model and Export Ceramics Development**

Thailand is a direct competitor of Vietnam in ceramic exports. Thailand's OTOP (One Tambon One Product) program, initiated in 2001, has been very successful in developing and commercializing local handicraft products, including ceramics. The OTOP program provides comprehensive support for production facilities, from product development, quality improvement, packaging design, brand building to domestic and international trade promotion. Thai ceramics, especially Celadon Chiang Mai and Benjarong pottery, have built strong brands in the international market, partly thanks to the effective OTOP program. Vietnam's OCOP program has many similarities with OTOP, but it needs to learn from Thailand's experience in effective implementation, especially in supporting design, marketing, and market access.

## **10. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **10.1. Conclusion**

Through a comprehensive analysis of the development journey of the Vietnamese ceramics industry from traditional craft village foundations to the international market, several key conclusions can be drawn.

The Vietnamese ceramics industry has an extremely rich historical and cultural foundation, with thousands of years of depth and ceramic lines that once held an important position in the international market as early as the 14th–16th centuries. This is a valuable heritage and unique competitive advantage that few countries possess, and it needs to be effectively leveraged in branding strategies and industry development.

In the current period, the Vietnamese ceramics industry has achieved commendable achievements in production and exports, with annual export turnover reaching hundreds of millions of USD, and products present in over 80 countries and territories. Some exemplary enterprises have built reputable brands, and products have achieved international-quality standards. However, overall, the Vietnamese ceramics industry still mainly participates in the

low and mid segments of the global value chain, with most exports under OEM/ODM forms, weak international branding, and not yet high value added.

The Vietnamese ceramics industry is facing many favorable opportunities from free trade agreements, supply chain shifts, sustainable consumption trends, and e-commerce development. At the same time, it must also face many challenges regarding international competition, quality and standard requirements, human resource shortages, environmental issues, and limitations in design, marketing, and brand building capabilities.

The Party and State have issued many important guidelines and policies to preserve and develop traditional crafts, creating a legal framework and support resources for the development of the ceramics industry. However, the implementation of these policies on the ground still has many shortcomings that need improvement to achieve better effectiveness.

## **10.2. Recommendations**

Based on the research results, the article proposes some key recommendations.

For the Party and State, it is necessary to continue完善 and issue specific policies to support the development of the ceramics industry, including preferential policies on taxes, credit, and land for ceramic enterprises investing in technological innovation, brand building, and export development. It is necessary to build a Strategy for the Development of the Vietnamese Ceramics Industry to 2030, with a vision to 2045, with specific goals, solutions, and roadmaps, linked to the country's overall socio-economic development strategies. Simultaneously, it is necessary to increase public investment in research, training, trade promotion, and international cooperation in ceramics.

For ceramic enterprises and production facilities, they need to proactively innovate technology, improve product quality, invest in design and brand building, actively participate in digital transformation and e-commerce development, apply green production and sustainable development. Enterprises need to gradually shift from OEM to OBM models, build their own brands in international markets, and participate more deeply in global value chains. For industry associations, it is necessary to strengthen the roles of representation, coordination, and enterprise support, promote value chain linkages within the industry, organize trade promotion activities, training, and experience exchange, and protect the common interests and brand of the Vietnamese ceramics industry.

For research and training institutions, it is necessary to promote scientific and technological research in ceramics, improve the quality of human resource training, especially training professional ceramic designers, and enhance international cooperation in research and training.

With a solid traditional foundation, rich potential, the support of the Party and State, and the innovative efforts of enterprises and artisans, the Vietnamese ceramics industry is fully capable of overcoming challenges, seizing opportunities, and affirming a worthy position on the world ceramics map in the 21st century. The journey from traditional craft villages to the international market is not only an economic development journey but also a journey affirming the cultural identity, intelligence, and creativity of the Vietnamese nation on the international stage.

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