



Nam Kim and Professor Lawrence Keeley (Department of Anthropology at the University of Illinois at Chicago) working at the Co Loa site in Vietnam.

COURTESY OF TRINH HOANG HIEP



Students from the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of the Philippines with Philippine National Museum scientists at an Iron Age burial site in Bacong, Philippines. PHOTO BY LAURA JUNKER

Breaking New Ground

EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Nam Kim, an archaeologist in the Anthropology Department of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, first traveled to Vietnam as a graduate student in 2005. At the time, there were few—if any—Americans with active field programs in the country, and he wanted to explore the possibility of doing his field research at Co Loa, an ancient site outside Hanoi.

The trip had both professional and personal significance. As a scholar, Professor Kim was interested in understanding the cultural reasons why societies engage in warfare and war's influence on the course of human history. This interest, however, was partly rooted in the impact of war on his own family's history. Kim had left Vietnam with his parents when he was one year old.

During the 2005 visit, he met with representatives of the state-sponsored Institute of Archaeology, who were receptive to his proposal for a joint project at Co Loa, the site of what is believed to have been a thriving state in the third century B.C.E. The challenge was to find funding for this venture. In 2007, Kim returned to Vietnam with a Luce/American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) dissertation fellowship that made it possible to begin work with his Vietnamese colleagues. He was the first foreigner allowed to excavate at the site and to examine its rampart fortifications.

"For someone who left Vietnam as a refugee, it was an amazing opportunity to be able to collaborate in an investigation that revealed new information about early Vietnamese history," he says.

Professor Kim's fellowship was part of a broader Foundation effort to revitalize the field of Asian archaeology and to build relationships between North American and Asian specialists. When the

Luce Initiative on East and Southeast Asian Archaeology and Early History began in 2005, research had been hampered by a lack of financial resources, and the region's rapid development was endangering many important sites and artifacts. There was also a need to increase scholarly attention to existing and new archaeological finds—discoveries that expand understanding of the origin and evolution of Asian societies and the influence of early history on contemporary cultural and political identity.

Over the initiative's five-year course, grants to North American universities and museums supported seven collaborative research projects with Asian counterparts and helped create ten new faculty positions. Luce also partnered with the ACLS on a competition for individual fellowships, which made awards to 130 graduate students and scholars—including Kim—in the United States, Asia and Canada.

One of the ten new faculty posts was filled by Professor Kim, who joined the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 2010. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, Kim is able to use the university's Luce funds to develop programs that promote scholarly exchanges. Guest speakers from Asian countries expose students to cutting-edge archaeological work in the region. Kim also invited a group of his Vietnamese colleagues to the United States, where they met with researchers and visited a prehistoric Native American site.

The Luce Archaeology Initiative has brought new scholars into the field, seeded important research and increased academic interest in Asian archaeology.

"The impact has been significant," says Professor Kim. "We now have a new generation of scholars in tenure-track positions, doing active fieldwork in Asia in collaboration with colleagues there. Students on both sides of the Pacific are being trained and will have greater opportunities to collaborate, to learn new methods, to work at sites and to study important collections that might not have been accessible before. There has been tremendous change, and we will continue to see the fruits of all this work in the coming years." ■