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# Unveiling Hanoi's unique cultural identity: From historical roots to contemporary society

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## Abstract

This article focused on deeply exploring the cultural identity of Hanoi while expanding and supplementing previous studies on this topic. Utilizing a qualitative research approach, the article analyzed the key elements that constituted Hanoi's cultural identity, highlighting its unique features and emphasizing its crucial role in the academic content of Hanoi Studies. Through detailed analysis and specific illustrations, the paper not only provided a comprehensive view of Hanoi's cultural development but also contributed to affirming the cultural value of the capital in the modern social context. Furthermore, the article called for attention from the international community and local authorities to preserve and promote these distinctive cultural values, ensuring the sustainability of Hanoi's cultural heritage in the future.

**Keywords:** Distinct cultural identity; Hanoi Studies; The role of cultural identity; Unique features of Hanoi's cultural identity

## 1. Introduction

Cultural identity is the core foundation of any culture, reflecting the unique values, traditions, and characteristics of a community or region. For Hanoi, the thousand-year-old capital of Vietnam, cultural identity is an aspect that needs to be clearly defined in the context of Hanoi Studies. Although many studies have addressed Hanoi's cultural identity, it remains a contentious topic in academic circles. Some scholars argued that Hanoi has a distinct cultural identity that can be distinguished from other regions, but the specific criteria for this distinction have yet to reach a consensus (Khuyen, 2010; Nguyen, 2010; Quang, 2009; Vu, 2018; Ho, 2023). Conversely, other perspectives claimed that "there is no Hanoi identity as a fixed, sustainable, and immutable cultural entity" (Chinh, 2011). This raised the need for a clear and deep recognition of Hanoi's cultural identity.

To clarify and address these debates, the article posed three main research questions:

- Does Hanoi have its own distinct cultural identity?
- What elements constitute that cultural identity?
- How can Hanoi's cultural values be preserved and developed in the era of globalization?

The study of Hanoi's cultural identity not only sheds light on the city's unique cultural values but also provides a foundation for preserving and developing these values in the context of modernization and globalization. The core areas of Hanoi, such as the Old Quarter, the Hoan Kiem Lake district, and former suburban districts like Tu Liem, Thanh Tri, Gia Lam, and Dong Anh, along with traditional craft villages such as Bat Trang and Van Phuc, are places that most vividly reflect the capital's cultural identity. Despite facing expansion and urban transformation, these areas still play a central role in preserving the historical and traditional cultural elements of Hanoi. By employing qualitative research methods,

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including document analysis, in-depth interviews with cultural researchers, and group discussions with local residents, the article provided a comprehensive view of Hanoi's cultural identity. The research not only reflected the historical and cultural elements of northern Vietnam but also emphasized the reception and blending of various other cultures. Simultaneously, traditional cultural values, from festivals to cuisine and folk arts, continue to play an important role in the lives of Hanoi's people. With its contributions to identifying Hanoi's cultural identity, the article clarified the core cultural elements, thereby offering recommendations for cultural preservation and development in the modern context. These research results not only expanded the understanding of Hanoi's culture but also held significant implications for developing policies to preserve and promote the capital's cultural values in the future.

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## 2. Literature Review

Research on Hanoi's cultural identity, such as by Chinh (2011) and Ho (2023), revealed that the capital's cultural identity is not a static entity but has undergone transformations due to historical and social factors. Chinh (2011) described the process of structuring and deconstructing Hanoi's cultural identity over time, while Ho (2023) emphasized the influence of French culture in shaping Hanoi's cultural characteristics during the modern period. This showed that Hanoi's culture has been shaped not only by tradition but also by foreign influences, creating a diverse and complex identity.

Festivals and customs played a vital role in maintaining and preserving Hanoi's cultural identity. Research by Khuyen (2010) on festivals and Quang (2009) on the spiritual culture of Thang Long-Hanoi both highlighted the importance of these rituals in the spiritual and cultural life of Hanoi's residents. Festivals were not only occasions for people to connect but also a means of transmitting and preserving cultural values across generations. For example, Quang (2009) analyzed the role of belief in shaping Hanoi's spiritual culture, while Khuyen (2010) focused on traditional festivals and community bonding activities.

Folk songs and traditional music also contributed significantly to Hanoi's cultural identity and its surrounding areas (Nguyen, 2011). Folk music genres such as Xam singing, Ca Tru, and Cheo had become important cultural symbols of Hanoi and had been extensively studied. Nguyen (2013) focused on Xam singing, a distinctive folk music genre of Hanoi, while Le (2022) analyzed the development of Ca Tru from the early 20th century to the present. These two studies demonstrated the close connection between folk music and cultural identity while highlighting the challenges of preserving traditional music genres in the modern context. Norton (2016) also compared musical rituals between Then and Len Dong, two rituals with deep spiritual significance for the Vietnamese, including Hanoi residents. These rituals not only represented beliefs but also reflected the complex relationship between people, culture, and religion in community life.

History and geography also played an important role in shaping and developing Hanoi's cultural identity. Nguyen (1986) and Lam (2005) studied the historical development of Hanoi, from the Old Quarter to the modern period. Nguyen (1986) described Hanoi in the first half of the 20th century, a turbulent period when the capital experienced major social, economic, and cultural changes. Lam (2005) focused on analyzing Hanoi's streets as a symbol of the diversity and richness of urban culture. Both studies showed that Hanoi's development through historical stages contributed to a rich and multi-dimensional cultural identity.

Beliefs and spiritual life played a crucial role in maintaining cultural identity and community cohesion in Hanoi. Vu (2018) studied the impact of beliefs on the lives of Hanoi's inner-city residents, pointing out that belief was not only a spiritual factor but also shaped how people lived and interacted with their social environment. This was supported by the research of Quang (2009) and Khuyen (2010), emphasizing that beliefs and festivals were not only part of the culture but also a way for the community to preserve and pass on spiritual values. Studies on Hanoi's cuisine have explored various cultural, historical, and social aspects related to the city's iconic dishes. Many works focused on analyzing the role of cuisine in forming Hanoi's cultural identity. Dishes such as Pho, Bun Cha, and Banh Cuon are considered emblematic of Hanoi's cuisine, reflecting the convergence of various cultures that have settled in Hanoi. These studies also showed that cuisine is not just food but an essential part of social life and rituals, reflecting family and community relationships. Other works examined the historical factors influencing the development of Hanoi's cuisine, from the feudal period to the colonial and modern periods. In the modern context, studies of Hanoi's street food have increasingly attracted attention, as it not only reflects consumer trends but also changes in the city's social structure and lifestyle. Additionally, preserving and developing traditional cuisine in the context of globalization is a topic of interest, especially as Hanoi's dishes have gradually become popular internationally (Nguyen, 2008; Nguyen, 2021; Tran, 2014).

Despite the contributions mentioned above, some important aspects of Hanoi's cultural identity remained unclear, such as: Does Hanoi have its own cultural identity, or is it merely a blend of cultural identities from various regions? The

distinctive features of Hanoi's cultural identity remained vague and general. These are the gaps that we addressed in this article.

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### 3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

First, it is important to understand what cultural identity means. Cultural identity includes the values, characteristics, customs, traditions, beliefs, and symbols that define a community or ethnic group, distinguishing them from other cultural groups. Cultural identity develops over time and is closely linked to the history, geography, and social and spiritual aspects of a community. It encompasses not only tangible elements such as clothing, architecture, and art but also intangible values like lifestyle, behavior, language, and worldviews (Chen & Lin, 2016). This is a multidimensional concept that reflects the connection between the past and present of a community.

More importantly, cultural identity is not a static concept but can evolve over time, influenced by cultural exchange, globalization, economic development, and changes in perception. However, this evolution does not erase cultural identity; instead, it can enrich or adapt cultural identity to suit new contexts (Chen & Lin, 2016).

The study of Hanoi's cultural identity is based on several key cultural theories, including:

- **Cultural Ecology Theory:** This theory examines the relationship between people and their environment, including both natural and social surroundings (Sutton & Anderson, 2020). For Hanoi, its geographical location and unique natural conditions have deeply influenced cultural development. This theory will help analyze the environmental factors and natural resources that contributed to shaping Hanoi's cultural identity.
- **Cultural Exchange Theory:** This theory addresses the interaction and influence between different cultures (O'Regan, 1999). In the context of globalization, Hanoi has experienced numerous cultural exchanges both domestically and internationally. Studying this process clarifies how Hanoi's culture has expanded and developed while also facing challenges in preserving traditional values.
- **Cultural Change Theory:** This theory focuses on changes in cultural values and practices due to social, economic, and technological factors (Varnum & Grossmann, 2017). Research on cultural change helps identify emerging trends and strategies for preserving and developing Hanoi's cultural identity in the modern context.

The research methodology employed is primarily qualitative, including document analysis and in-depth interviews with cultural experts and local residents. The interviews aim to gather perspectives on Hanoi's cultural identity, particularly traditional cultural elements and their transformations in the modern context. Document analysis helps synthesize and analyze academic papers, books, and previous studies on this subject.

This research adheres to ethical principles in scientific research, including protecting the personal information of interview participants and using the collected data solely for research purposes. All interviews were conducted with the participants' consent, and they were fully informed of the research's objectives before taking part.

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### 4. The Factors That Shaped the Cultural Identity of Hanoi

The cultural identity of Hanoi, a rich and diverse cultural heritage, was formed from the intersection of historical elements, natural environment, and distinctive cultural traditions. Hanoi, formerly known as Thang Long, went through many stages of historical development, contributing to the unique cultural values it possesses (Tran, 2004).

- **Natural Environment:** The natural environment of Hanoi played an essential role in shaping and developing the cultural identity of the city, significantly influencing the economic, social, and cultural development of its residents. This was also the reason why Hanoi was chosen as the capital, emphasizing the importance of its geographical location and natural resources in shaping local history and culture.
- **Geographical Location and Economic Development:** Hanoi's geographical location is unique: situated in the Red River Delta, the city holds a strategic position that serves as a gateway for trade between northern Vietnam and other regions. Its proximity to the Red River not only facilitated agricultural development but also encouraged trade and cultural exchanges. The Red River, with its network of tributaries and canals, became the primary means of transportation, aiding the movement of goods and people, and fostering the growth of traditional crafts. This helped Hanoi become a vital commercial center, where cultures and customs from various regions interacted and blended, thereby forming a diverse urban lifestyle for its residents (Tran, 2004).
- **Topography and Climate:** The topography of Hanoi is mainly flat, characterized by numerous ponds and a rich system of canals, creating an ideal living environment for its inhabitants. The temperate monsoon climate, with

four distinct seasons, profoundly impacted the daily lives and lifestyles of the people. The cold winter, often accompanied by fog and drizzle, encouraged traditional culinary activities like enjoying steaming bowls of pho, while the scorching summer promoted the consumption of fresh foods and beverages such as sugarcane juice and tea. The weather not only influenced agricultural activities but also affected festivals, customs, and the culinary culture of the people of Hanoi.

- **Natural Resources and Agriculture:** Additionally, natural environmental factors such as fertile soil and abundant water resources allowed residents to develop traditional agricultural practices. The characteristic agricultural products of Hanoi, such as fresh vegetables and flowers, not only met daily consumption needs but also became symbols in the festivals and customs of the local people. In particular, vegetables like water spinach, coriander, and flowers such as lilies and chrysanthemums were not only used in daily meals but also held cultural significance during festivals, weddings, and funerals (Nguyen, 1986). This reflects the intertwining of agricultural production activities and the traditional cultural values of Hanoi's residents.
- **The Impact of the Natural Environment on Cultural Identity:** All these factors combined created a rich cultural tapestry that reflects the interplay between history and the natural environment. The living environment not only provided essential resources for development but also created favorable conditions for cultural creativity. Thanks to the blend of tradition and modernity, as well as various cultural influences, the cultural identity of Hanoi developed unique characteristics that contributed to the evolution of its culture compared to its original roots, gradually forming the distinctive cultural identity of the city (Tran, 2004).
- **Social Environment:** Hanoi, as the political, economic, and cultural center of Vietnam, gathered residents from all regions, creating a diverse mix of cultures and traditions. This urbanization process took place not only during the Ly, Tran, and Le dynasties but continued through various historical periods, demonstrating Hanoi's appeal to people from all over the country.

This migration was not merely geographical but also carried with it the distinctive cultural identities from each individual's homeland. Working-class individuals, traders, officials, and intellectuals contributed to the Hanoi community, enriching the cultural tapestry of the city. Each group of residents brought along their cultural traditions, customs, and languages, creating a vibrant environment where different cultures interacted, blended, and thrived.

The mingling of cultures can be clearly seen in the names of streets in Hanoi, which are linked not only to distinctive products but also reflect the origins of traditional craft villages (Lam, 2005; Nguyen, 1986). For instance, Hang Bac Street is associated with the traditional silver-making craft of jewelers from two famous villages: Dinh Cong (Hanoi) and Chau Khe (Hai Duong). Silver craftsmen from these villages brought their exquisite crafting techniques, helping Thang Long become an important center for jewelry production nationwide, known for high-quality silver products.

Similarly, Hang Dong Street is famous for the craft of producing copper products, originating from craft villages like Cau Nom (Thuan Thanh, Bac Ninh), Ngo Xa (Tay Ho, Hanoi), and Dai Bai (Bac Ninh Province). The fine casting techniques from these villages established Hang Dong Street as a reputable center for copper crafts.

Hang Ren Street developed from the residents of Hoa Thi Village (Canh, Tu Liem), renowned for forging tools and weapons, which not only provided livelihoods for local people but also preserved the cultural values of traditional craftsmanship.

In contrast, Hang Thiec Street originated from Phu Thu Village (Hoai Duc, Ha Dong), primarily crafting tin products, which not only satisfied consumer needs but also contributed to cultural and spiritual activities within the community.

Lastly, Hang Manh Street evolved from Giai Te Village (Yen Phong, Bac Ninh), known for producing bamboo mats and woven products, adding beauty and diversity to traditional Vietnamese handicrafts. These streets served not only as commercial hubs but also carried the cultural imprint of traditional craft villages, contributing to the formation and development of the initial cultural identity of Hanoi (Nguyen, 1986).

**Cultural Fusion:** Cultural fusion in Hanoi occurred robustly, particularly between folk culture and court culture. Throughout the feudal dynasties, the combination of Northern folk culture and court culture created the distinctive elegance and refinement of Hanoi residents. Folk culture is rich in local identity with customs, festivals, and performing arts, while court culture reflects the solemnity and sophistication of the intellectual class.

Today, folk culture is still vibrantly preserved through festivals at temples and shrines in Hanoi. Many of these festivals originated from rural villages, where residents brought their cultural traditions when migrating to Thang Long (Vu, 2015). For example:

- The Kim Lien Temple Festival occurs on the 16th day of the third lunar month to commemorate Cao Son Dai Vuong, featuring traditional rituals and folk games such as tug-of-war and wrestling.
- The Yen Phu Temple Festival is held on the 10th day of the second lunar month, associated with the worship of the Four Gods, featuring procession ceremonies and folk cultural activities such as cheo singing and hat van.
- The Quan Thanh Temple Festival takes place on the 3rd day of the third lunar month, attracting numerous locals and tourists, stemming from the worship of deities in rural villages.
- The An Trach Temple Festival occurs on the 6th day of the first lunar month, reflecting the beliefs and festivals that the residents of An Trach brought when migrating into the heart of Hanoi, including solemn ritual activities and folk performances.

These festivals demonstrate that when people migrated, they brought their cultural traditions and beliefs to Thang Long, enriching the cultural life of Hanoi. However, these festivals have also been supplemented with new elements suitable for the modern context of Hanoi, such as artistic activities and urban markets.

The process of cultural fusion led to cultural transformation, clearly reflected in the communication, lifestyle, and customs of the residents. People in Hanoi, influenced by both cultural sources, formed a unique lifestyle that combines simplicity and elegance, bringing a fresh perspective to their original culture from rural areas.

**The Role of Urbanization and the Intellectual Class:** Since becoming the capital, Hanoi attracted various labor groups, traders, and intellectuals from everywhere, creating a distinctive urban lifestyle. Urbanization not only changed living habits but also enriched the cultural life of the city (Chinh, 2011). The intellectual and official class played a vital role in building the refined cultural values of Hanoi, particularly in education, literature, and the arts.

The livelihoods of this class generated rich cultural characteristics, including courteous behavior, emphasis on culinary excellence, love for cultural arts, and active participation in community activities. The refined and elegant lifestyle of the intellectual class became a defining characteristic of Hanoi residents. They were not only inheritors of traditional cultural values but also creators and developers of new cultural values, enriching the cultural identity of the city.

**Spirituality and Religious Beliefs:** Spirituality and religious beliefs played a crucial role in the spiritual lives of the people of Hanoi. Traditional beliefs and customs formed distinctive festivals, from the Ngoc Son Temple Festival, Tay Ho Shrine, to various indigenous and foreign beliefs. These festivals not only express respect for ancestors and deities but also serve as occasions for the community to connect and express their unique cultural identity (Vu, 2015).

The combination of traditional beliefs and foreign religious elements such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism created a rich and diverse spiritual foundation in Hanoi. These beliefs not only helped the people better understand the spiritual world but also influenced their cultural activities and daily lives. The intersection of these belief elements enriched the spiritual life of Hanoi's residents while reinforcing the cultural identity of the city in a modern context.

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## 5. The cultural identity of Hanoi through the ages

Hanoi, not only a modern city with a vibrant lifestyle, also served as a place that preserved and promoted profound traditional cultural values. The cultural identity of Hanoi was not merely a combination of cultural elements but also a complex historical process, closely linked to the city's development from its founding days to the present. The process of forming and developing the cultural identity of Hanoi unfolded over various stages, each with its unique cultural marks, thanks to the intermingling, adaptation, and blending of cultural, religious, and political elements.

- **The Origin Stage:** Thang Long, the original name of Hanoi, became the political and cultural center of Dai Viet in 1010 when King Ly Thai To decided to move the capital from Hoa Lu. This decision not only created a geographical shift but also opened a new era for the cultural identity of Hanoi, as the city became a convergence point for various cultural streams. During this period, the influence of folk culture and court culture began to take clear shape. Iconic architectures such as the Thang Long Imperial Citadel and the Temple of Literature - Quoc Tu Giam not only showcased architectural artistry but also marked the ideas of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The adaptation of cultural elements created a rich system of thought that shaped the lifestyles and beliefs of the people of Thang Long (Tran, 2004).
- **The Development Stage (Intermingling and Integration):** From the 15th to the 19th centuries, Hanoi continued to be an important cultural and political center, especially under the Le, Mac, and Nguyen dynasties. This period witnessed strong cultural intermingling, as Hanoi was influenced not only by local culture but also by Chinese culture through trade and diplomatic activities. The combination of court culture and folk culture created a

unique cultural identity, where traditional festivals like the Giong Festival, along with art forms such as Cheo and Ca Tru, reflected the strong development of the intellectual culture and spirit of the people of Hanoi (Tran, 2004).

- The Cultural Adaptation Stage: In the late 19th century, with the emergence of French colonization, Hanoi entered a new phase full of challenges and upheavals. This colonial period caused significant changes in the architecture, art, and lifestyles of the people. Architectural works in the European style, such as the Grand Theatre and Long Bien Bridge, not only altered the city's appearance but also introduced new cultural values. Despite the strong influx of Western culture, the people of Hanoi persisted in preserving traditional cultural values, creating a cultural identity that was both modern and ancient. During this stage, the cultural identity of Hanoi took on a richer appearance, reflecting a harmonious combination of traditional and modern elements, between Western lifestyles and Eastern cultural values (Nguyen, 1986; Tran, 2010).
- The Modern Period (Renovation and Integration): After 1945, when it became the capital of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Hanoi continued to assert its position as a cultural and political center. This period witnessed a significant transformation following the renovation, as Hanoi opened up to the world. The influences from international cultures enriched the cultural life of the city while reinforcing the cultural identity of Hanoi through the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritages. Historical sites like the Thang Long Imperial Citadel and the Temple of Literature - Quoc Tu Giam, along with traditional art forms such as Cheo, Tuong, and Ca Tru, continued to be maintained and promoted (Le, 2022).

In the context of globalization, Hanoi has become a diverse and vibrant cultural center, where elements of Western, Southeast Asian, and other cultures intersect. Modern cultural spaces, such as European-style cafes and international art events, reflected the diversity and vitality of Hanoi's cultural identity. The city was not only a place to preserve traditional culture but also an environment for new art forms to develop, creating diversity in expressing the cultural identity of Hanoi.

It can be seen that the cultural identity of Hanoi was a long historical process, formed and developed through different stages. This was not only a crystallization of cultural elements but also a result of the adaptation and intermingling between tradition and modernity. The cultural identity of Hanoi represented the achievements of cultural integration and creativity, making Hanoi a distinctive cultural center that continuously developed and renewed itself in the modern era.

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## 6. Elements of Hanoi's Cultural Identity

Hanoi's cultural identity formed from the diverse interactions and combinations of various elements, ranging from tradition to modernity, from community spirit to the characteristics of daily life. These elements not only created the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Hanoi but also reflected the interaction and cultural exchange between domestic and foreign cultures.

**History and Tradition:** The history and traditions of Hanoi, one of the oldest cities in Southeast Asia, not only reflected the formation and development of an ancient urban area but also left a profound mark on the souls of its people. Hanoi preserved many important historical relics, from the Temple of Literature - Quoc Tu Giam, which embodied knowledge and the spirit of learning, to Ho Guom, a symbol of the national soul, and the Thang Long Citadel, a witness to the ups and downs of the nation's history. These sites symbolized both the academic and cultural traditions and held deep significance regarding the beliefs and history of the nation, contributing to the formation of Hanoi's cultural identity.

The Temple of Literature - Quoc Tu Giam, with its beautiful and peaceful architecture, not only honored Confucius but also served as a prominent educational center for many centuries. It trained millions of talents for the country, forming a tradition of valuing education and intellectualism. Traditional festivals, such as temple festivals, were not only occasions for people to honor deities but also opportunities to convey unique historical and cultural values, affirming pride in the nation's cultural heritage. The appreciation of these cultural heritages helped preserve and revive historical memories, creating a strong cultural vein for the people of Hanoi. Annual festivals, like the Gò Đống Đa festival or the Chùa Hương festival, attracted large participation, serving not only to honor ancestors but also to strengthen community bonds and solidarity among generations (Vu, 2015).

In addition, cultural traditions such as weddings, festivals, and daily customs were deeply marked by history, from their organization to their specific rituals. These cultural values were preserved and promoted through generations, becoming an integral part of the lives of Hanoi's people. These activities not only reflected cultural identity but also manifested the connection between the past and the present, between generations, and among individuals. Hanoi also stood out for its diversity in beliefs and religions. The ancient pagodas, temples, and shrines were not only places of

worship but also symbols of the city's spiritual culture. This diversity contributed to a rich and profound culture, reflecting the community's respect for and preservation of spiritual values (Tran, 2004).

**Customs and Lifestyle:** The customs and lifestyle of Hanoi's residents demonstrated elegance and grace, creating an unmistakable characteristic in the city's culture. They excelled in polite and gentle yet formal interactions, which became an essential part of daily life. Greeting, listening, and respecting others' opinions were valued qualities that reflected the civilized communication culture of the local people. The concept of "playing in Kinh kỳ" was not merely about enjoying art or cuisine but also represented a profound philosophy of life, reflecting respect for the cultural and spiritual beauty of the city. The people of Hanoi savored life slowly, from sipping good tea in sidewalk cafes to enjoying delicate dishes like pho or bun cha, each activity carrying deep cultural meanings. These cultural values manifested in daily activities, from tea drinking and reading to family and friend gatherings. They valued moments spent together, where generations could share and learn from each other. Evenings spent watching a cheo play or participating in traditional festivals not only created bonds but also provided opportunities to preserve and promote valuable cultural traditions (Ly, 2012).

In daily life, the people of Hanoi also emphasized elegance in clothing. The ao dai, conical hats, and simple yet refined outfits were often chosen for festivals or work. This not only reflected personal style but also expressed respect for cultural traditions. A love of nature was also a crucial part of the customs and lifestyle of the people of Hanoi. They often spent time walking around Ho Guom, participating in outdoor activities like cycling around West Lake or exercising in parks. Moments spent in nature not only helped relieve stress but also created a connection to their living environment (Hoang, 1996).

Moreover, the richness of customs and traditions of Hanoi's people was also evident in the traditional festivals held throughout the year. The Lunar New Year, the Hùng Kings' festival, and the Gò Đống Đa festival all attracted many participants, providing opportunities for everyone to preserve and promote cultural values. These activities were not only entertaining but also fostered interaction and connection between communities.

**Beliefs and Religions:** Hanoi was home to a variety of beliefs and religions, ranging from Buddhism and Taoism to modern religions. Ancient pagodas, temples, and shrines such as Trấn Quốc Pagoda and Quán Thánh Temple were not only places of worship but also cultural symbols of the city. The diversity in beliefs and religions not only contributed to a rich and profound culture but also reflected respect for the spiritual values of the community. Annual religious festivals attracted many participants and served as occasions for people to connect, remember their ancestors, and pray for peace.

Hanoi also stood out for its customs related to beliefs, from offerings to traditional rituals in daily life. These activities not only expressed the people's devotion but also contributed to preserving the cultural and spiritual values of the nation.

- **Cultural Festivals:** Traditional festivals from rural areas, when held in Hanoi, were not only occasions to honor culture but also opportunities for more in-depth exploration and experience. These festivals were often designed with various activities, from art exhibitions, cultural workshops, to interactive events, creating opportunities for everyone to participate and experience firsthand. For instance, the Gò Đống Đa festival not only honored worship culture but also included sports competitions, folk games, and cultural exchanges among communities. These events not only promoted cultural awareness but also facilitated young generations to learn about and connect with traditions. Participation in activities such as traditional cooking contests, drawing competitions, or folk performance shows also helped children and teenagers gain a deeper appreciation for their cultural heritage, thereby awakening pride in their national culture. At the same time, these festivals opened up opportunities for international cultural exchanges by inviting artists and cultural groups from other countries to participate and perform. This not only enriched artistic activities but also helped the people of Hanoi access other cultures, broadening their perspectives and thinking (Vu, 2015).
- **Folk Art:** As a center for various forms of folk art, Hanoi developed traditional art forms such as ca trù, chèo, tuồng, and water puppetry. These art forms left a significant mark on the cultural life of the people and served as a bridge between generations. At the same time, the development of modern art fields like painting, music, and cinema also demonstrated the interplay between tradition and modernity, enriching the city's cultural life. Traditional art forms from rural areas, when developed in Hanoi, acquired a new hue, reflecting the unceasing creativity of people in an urban context. For instance, water puppetry, which originated from northern rural areas, retained its traditional form during performances at major cultural festivals in Hanoi while incorporating modern music, lighting, and lively performance techniques. This combination not only made water puppetry

more appealing but also attracted a large young audience, helping to maintain and develop this art form in modern society.

- **Folk Music:** The folk music of Hanoi, with unique genres like quan họ, hát xẩm, and hát chèo, was not only a precious cultural heritage but also a symbol of local cultural identity. Each genre carried its own story, reflecting the spiritual life of the local people. Quan họ, originating from Bắc Ninh, thrived in Hanoi. Young artists created remix versions combining electronic music, attracting a large young audience. Performances of quan họ on pedestrian streets around Ho Guom or at cultural festivals not only restored the heritage but also enhanced interaction with the audience through lively exchanges. Hát xẩm, often associated with wandering artists, underwent significant transformations. The combination of hát xẩm and hip-hop created unique musical products that were accessible to the youth. Young artists experimented with modern rhythms and melodies, thereby preserving the historical cultural values of this art form. Meanwhile, chèo singing, a distinctive form of folk theater, underwent modernization with investments in sound, lighting, and script content. Chèo performances became more appealing due to the integration of modern elements, expanding the audience and encouraging community participation. Folk music in Hanoi developed robustly, not only in preserving and promoting traditional cultural values but also in adapting to modern trends. This intersection played an important role in maintaining the ethnic cultural identity in the context of international integration, creating a rich and diverse cultural landscape for the city (Le, 2022; Nguyen, 2013; Norton, 2016).
- **Handicrafts:** Traditional handicraft products from villages, such as ceramics, weaving, and embroidery, displayed at cultural fairs in Hanoi not only preserved traditional techniques but also underwent redesign to meet modern consumer demands. These products were often handmade from natural materials, combined with intricate techniques, yielding high artistic value. This not only enhanced product value but also created new business opportunities for artisans. The integration of handicrafts and modern design opened new avenues for sustainable development in the cultural industry. Many artisans used modern technology to promote their products through online platforms, helping handcrafted goods reach a wider consumer base.

In addition, vocational training classes and workshops were regularly organized to impart crafting skills to the younger generation, aiming to maintain and develop traditional trades. These activities not only preserved culture but also contributed to creating sustainable income for local residents, fostering economic development and improving community living standards.

**Cuisine:** The culinary culture of Hanoi stood out as a highlight of the city, featuring dishes with refined flavors that balanced salty, sweet, sour, and spicy elements. Dishes such as phở, bún chả, and chả cá Lã Vọng were not only symbols of Hanoi cuisine but also reflected the blending of the essence of native cuisine and modern urbanity. Hanoi cuisine attracted not only locals but also international tourists. Organizing food festivals, where people could enjoy traditional dishes and interact with famous chefs, further enhanced the cultural value of the city's gastronomy (Nguyen, 2008; Nguyen, 2021; Tran, 2014).

Additionally, many restaurants and eateries creatively developed new dishes from traditional ingredients, helping to promote Hanoi's culinary culture to international friends. These dishes were not merely food but also carried stories about culture, history, and the identity of the people of Hanoi.

These characteristics not only specifically positioned Hanoi's cultural identity but also portrayed a dynamic, multi-dimensional image of Hanoi, continuously evolving and rich in cultural identity. Hanoi was not only a place that preserved traditional cultural values but also a space where new values emerged and developed, creating a diverse and vibrant cultural tapestry.

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## 7. Conclusion

Hanoi's cultural identity was a complex whole, formed by many historical, social, and cultural factors. This study highlighted the uniqueness of Hanoi's cultural identity, affirming that it could not be confused with the cultural identities of other regions. The main findings of the study included:

- **Identifying the formation and development of Hanoi's cultural identity:** Hanoi's cultural identity formed and developed through historical periods from the Ly and Tran dynasties to the French colonial period and later to the reform period. Each phase contributed to the unique cultural values of Hanoi. During the Ly-Tran period, Buddhist and Confucian cultures created profound spiritual values. The French colonial period brought cultural exchanges, leading to the emergence of many new artistic styles. The reform period opened opportunities for the vigorous development of modern art forms while preserving and promoting traditional cultural values.



- Defining unique cultural characteristics: The study affirmed that Hanoi possessed a distinct cultural identity and analyzed three main characteristics of Hanoi's cultural identity: elegance and politeness in communication, openness and cultural diversity, and the combination of tradition and modernity. These characteristics not only reflected the cultural essence of Hanoi's residents but also illustrated their personalities and lifestyles in a modern context.
- Contributing to cultural theory and practice: The results of this study held both theoretical and practical value, contributing to the development of appropriate cultural policies for the preservation and development of Hanoi's cultural identity. This would help policymakers gain a better understanding of the components that make up cultural identity, leading to more effective solutions.
- Promoting Hanoi's culture to the world: In the context of globalization, studying Hanoi's cultural identity could provide valuable lessons for other countries in preserving cultural identity while still embracing global cultural values. Many countries faced challenges in maintaining traditional cultural identities in an age of technology and strong cultural exchanges. By emphasizing the harmonious combination of tradition and modernity, Hanoi's cultural identity could serve as a model for other countries in developing sustainable cultures.

Contributing to the preservation and promotion of Hanoi's cultural values: The results and findings from this study contributed to the efforts in preserving and promoting Hanoi's cultural values, while also raising awareness and pride among the younger generation about their homeland's culture. This would not only create a rich cultural environment but also foster global cultural exchanges, enriching the cultural tapestry of the world.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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