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## Hanoi Old Quarter: Craft Streets, Architectural Heritage, and Socio-Economic-Cultural Characteristics

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### *Abstract*

*Hanoi's Old Quarter is perhaps one of the most famous tourist destinations in both Hanoi and Vietnam. For foreigners and many Vietnamese people, the Old Quarter often brings to mind vibrant commercial activities, distinctive street food, and unique architectural works. However, these are merely the visible aspects of a much deeper reality: in fact, the value of the Old Quarter goes far beyond that. Essentially, the Old Quarter is a rare heritage site in both Vietnam and the world, having existed continuously for over a thousand years. It serves as a 'living museum' of Hanoi - preserving the city's historical memories and distinctive cultural values - while consistently playing the role of a dynamic 'economic engine' of the capital throughout its long history. In this context, the article argues that, with its globally outstanding values, Hanoi's Old Quarter - together with the Thăng Long Imperial Citadel - contributes to shaping the identity of a world-class urban heritage site: the Thăng Long - Hanoi city.*

**Keywords:** Hanoi Old Quarter, Craft Streets, Architectural Heritage, Socio-Economic-Cultural Characteristics.

### **Introduction**

Within the framework of the Traveler's Choice Awards Best of the Best Destinations, announced in January 2025 by Tripadvisor - the world's leading online travel platform - Hanoi was ranked 14th among the Top 25 Most Popular Destinations of All Time (Vietnam News Agency, 2025). In Tripadvisor's evaluation of Hanoi, the Old Quarter was the first feature to be highlighted (Tripadvisor, 2025). This observation underscores the central role of the Old Quarter, both in the domain of tourism and in the broader socio-cultural life of Hanoi.

Up to now, Hanoi's Old Quarter has attracted the attention of many Vietnamese and international scholars. Various aspects of the Old Quarter have been addressed: the history of its formation and changes in administrative boundaries (Ngọc & Borton, 2004; Nguyễn, 2004a; Phan, 2013; Bùi, 2020); the landscape and types of civil and public architecture (Hoàng, 2004; Nguyễn, 2004b; Ngọc & Borton, 2004; Phạm, 2006; Nguyễn, 2017; Phạm, 2021); handicrafts, trade, and the economic role of the Old Quarter for the Thăng Long Citadel (Nguyễn, 2004b; Nguyễn, 2010; Trần & Đỗ, 2024); historical sites, beliefs, and the lifestyle of local residents (Lê, 2002; Nguyễn, 2003; Ngọc & Borton, 2004; Lim, 2004; Nguyễn, 2004a; Nguyễn, 2004b; Hoàng, 2004; Mazur, 2024); cuisine and tourism in the Old Quarter (Nguyễn, 2013; Vũ, 2014; Lam, 2024); the pressures of urbanization and conservation solutions for the Old Quarter area (Phạm, 2003; Nguyễn, 2003; Lê, 2004; Nguyễn, 2004; Lim, 2004; Luru, 2006; Phạm, 2013; Logan, 2023).

Thus, although the Old Quarter has attracted considerable scholarly and public attention, existing

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studies often concentrate on specific aspects - such as administrative boundaries, history, commerce, craft villages, or cuisine. The integration of these particular domains into a comprehensive picture of the Old Quarter remains an unresolved issue. Against this backdrop, adopting an interdisciplinary approach, we conceptualize the Old Quarter as an integrated space where historical and contemporary dimensions are intertwined, thereby illuminating its most distinctive values. The article argues that, with its defining characteristics of historical continuity and the convergence of Eastern and Western cultural elements over more than a millennium, Hanoi's Old Quarter - together with the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long - constitutes a central factor in shaping the profile of a heritage city of global stature: the city of Thang Long - Hanoi.

In terms of methodology, in addition to building upon previously published studies, the majority of the sources for this article come from observations and field research (Khattak et al., 2024), Along with long-term experiences and observations in the Old Quarter under various circumstances - gained from the authors having lived in Hanoi for over 20 years, in the first half of 2024, we conducted 15 in-depth interviews with three different groups of participants. These included three in-depth interviews with experts: a historian, an urban heritage specialist, and an architect. Additionally, we held five in-depth interviews with artisans from Hàng Bạc, Hàng Mã, and Hàng Gai streets, whose families have lived in the Old Quarter for generations. We also conducted four in-depth interviews with residents currently living on Hàng Bông, Hàng Giấy, Hàng Buồm, and Hàng Bè streets. Lastly, we interviewed three key officials: a city-level leader, a district-level leader, and a member of the Management Board of Hoàn Kiếm Lake and the Old Quarter. These interviews were invaluable as they provided us with diverse perspectives on life in Hanoi's Old Quarter.

### **The Concept of Hanoi's Old Quarter**

Hanoi's Old Quarter refers to an ancient urban area adjacent to the Thăng Long Imperial Citadel. It is also known as "Hà Nội 36 Phố Phường" (Hanoi's 36 Streets and Guilds), though this name is somewhat inaccurate, as the traditional 36 streets and Guilds extend beyond the boundaries of the modern Old Quarter.

According to Decision No. 70 BXD/KT-QH issued by the Ministry of Construction on March 30, 1995, Hanoi's Old Quarter is located within Hoàn Kiếm District, covering a total area of approximately 100 hectares. It includes 76 streets spread across 10 wards: Hàng Đào, Hàng Bạc, Hàng Buồm, Hàng Bò, Hàng Bông, Hàng Gai, Hàng Mã, Đồng Xuân, Cửa Đông, and Lý Thái Tổ (Bộ Xây dựng, 1995). Structurally, the Old Quarter resembles a triangle, with its apex at Hàng Than Street. The eastern boundary is formed by the Red River dike, while the western edge consists of Hàng Cót, Hàng Điều, and Hàng Da streets. The base of the triangle is defined by the axis of Hàng Bông - Hàng Gai - Cầu Gỗ streets (Nguyễn, 2004b: 222) (Fig.1).

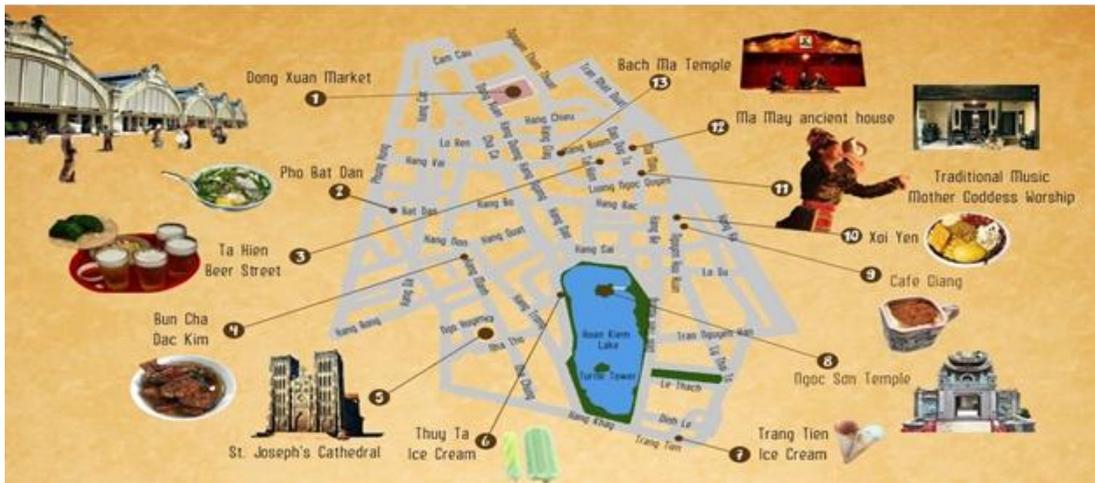


Fig 1. Map of Hanoi's Old Quarter

Source: [Xây dựng số 2024]

### History of Hanoi's Old Quarter

Hanoi's Old Quarter dates back to the Lý Dynasty (11th century) and was located next to the Thăng Long Imperial Citadel. It served as a residential area for officials, generals, soldiers, and common citizens. During the Lý-Trần dynasties, this area consisted of 61 wards that engaged in both handicraft production and agriculture. It was home to a diverse network of traditional craft villages in ancient Thăng Long, specializing in ceramics, porcelain, paper-making, jewelry, fine arts, bronze casting, ironwork, and carpentry. During the Lê-Nguyễn dynasty, the capital area was divided into 36 wards. Hanoi's urban structure became denser, with development trends focusing on the city's core. Ponds, lakes, and swamps were gradually filled in to make way for houses and streets.

By the late 19th century, after the French colonization of Hanoi, the Old Quarter underwent significant transformations. Streets were renovated with drainage systems, sidewalks, paved roads, and street lighting. Houses on both sides of the streets were rebuilt with brick and tiled roofs to prevent fires. Alongside the traditional Vietnamese architectural style, European-style buildings began to appear, marking a shift in the urban landscape of the Old Quarter.

In 1954, after peace was restored, the government took direct control of houses left behind by families who had migrated elsewhere or moved to the South. These houses were then allocated to families returning from the Việt Bắc resistance zone. This led to multiple households living in the same house, resulting in the formation of interior alleys, shared courtyards, and communal sanitation areas, contributing to increasing overcrowding. Since 1986, the Old Quarter has undergone restoration and economic, cultural, and social development. Many building facades were renovated and modernized. Dilapidated houses were rebuilt in a contemporary style, while communal houses, temples, and pagodas were restored and preserved. Additionally, mini-hotels and specialty restaurants began emerging within the historic tube houses, blending traditional architecture with modern tourism and commerce (Vietnam Institute of Architecture, 2024).

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1. Bát Đàn Street	2. Bát Sứ Street	3. Chả Cá Street	4. Cao Thẳng Street
5. Cầu Đông Street	6. Cầu Gỗ Street	7. Cửa Đông Street	8. Chợ Gạo Street
9. Đào Duy Từ Street	10. Đường Thành Street	11. Đinh Liệt Street	12. Đồng Xuân Street
13. Đông Thái Street	14. Gầm Cầu Street	15. Gia Ngư Street	16. Hà Trung Street
17. Hàng Bạc Street	18. Hàng Bò Street	19. Hàng Buồm Street	20. Hàng Bút Street
21. Hàng Bông Street	22. Hàng Bè Street	23. Hàng Cá Street	24. Hàng Cân Street
25. Hàng Chai Street	26. Hàng Chĩnh Street	27. Hàng Chiếu Street	28. Hàng Cót Street
29. Hàng Đào Street	30. Hàng Đậu Street	31. Hàng Điều Street	32. Hàng Đồng Street
33. Hàng Đường Street	34. Hàng Da Street	35. Hàng Gà Street	36. Hàng Gai Street
37. Hàng Giấy Street	38. Hàng Giấy Street	39. Hàng Hòm Street	40. Hàng Khoai Street
41. Hàng Lược Street	42. Hàng Mành Street	43. Hàng Mã Street	44. Hàng Mắm Street
45. Hàng Muối Street	46. Hàng Ngang Street	47. Hàng Nón Street	48. Hàng Phèn Street
49. Hàng Quạt Street	50. Hàng Rươi Street	51. Hàng Thiếc Street	52. Hàng Thùng Street

53. Hàng Tre Street	54. Hàng Vải Street	55. Lãn Ông Street	56. Lò Rèn Street
57. Lương Văn Can Street	58. Lương Ngọc Quyến Street	59. Mã Mây Street	60. Gạch Street
61. Trạm Street	62. Nhà Hỏa Street	63. Nguyễn Hữu Huân Street	64. Nguyễn Quang Bích Street
65. Nguyễn Siêu Street	66. Nguyễn Thiếp Street	67. Nguyễn Văn Tố Street	68. Nguyễn Thiện Thuật Street
69. Ô Quan Chưởng Street	70. Phùng Hưng Street	71. Trần Nhật Duật Street	72. Thanh Hà Street
73. Tạ Hiện Street	74. Thuốc Bắc Street	75. Tô Tịch Street	76. Yên Thái Street

Table 1. List of Streets in Hanoi's Old Quarter

Source: Provided by the Hoàn Kiếm Lake and Hanoi Old Quarter Management Board, 2024

## Research Findings

### Craft Streets and Occupational Rules

Hanoi's Old Quarter is fundamentally composed of craft streets. In these craft streets, artisans both produced and sold their handmade goods directly on the streets. Moreover, each street typically specialized in selling only one or two specific types of handicrafts. As a result, many streets were named after the products they were known for, with the prefix "Hàng" - such as Hàng Trống Street, Hàng Mã Street, Hàng Bạc Street, and Hàng Đào Street. This explains why 47 out of the 76 streets in Hanoi's Old Quarter begin with the word "Hàng." Since their establishment, the development of these craft streets has undergone significant changes. Some have thrived and even expanded into neighboring areas, while others have declined over time. Based on our field observations, several streets still maintain their traditional crafts, such as Hàng Mã, Hàng Thiếc, Hàng Bạc, and Thuốc Bắc. Additionally, while some streets no longer preserve their original crafts, they have specialized in selling a particular type of product. For instance, Hàng Quạt is now known for religious worship items, Hàng Buồm specializes in sweets and confectionery, and Mã Mây has become a hub for tourism services.

The longevity of craft streets in Hanoi's Old Quarter can be attributed to the strict professional regulations that craftsmen were required to follow in the past to uphold the reputation of their trade. First and foremost, each artisan had a responsibility to protect the prestige of their craft guild and maintain credibility in production and business. The rise or decline of a trade depended largely on the trust it earned. As one respected artisan from Hàng Bạc Street explained:

According to my grandfather, my ancestors originally came from Châu Khê Village (Hải Dương

Province) and migrated to the Old Quarter around the 17th century. Upon settling here, they established a set of regulations to uphold the reputation of their craft and the honor of their hometown. These rules were highly detailed and specific. I still remember one passage: "Our street's craft is a national treasure, established with strict standards from the past. We must uphold these principles and serve the community with dedication. Anyone who disrupts order or disregards the rules will be investigated by the guild. If found guilty, they will be fined one buffalo worth five quan. Likewise, any official conducting an unfair investigation will be subject to the same penalty."

The craft street culture also emphasized the importance of mutual support among artisans in both production and business. For example, the silversmiths of Hàng Bạc Street, originally from Đồng Xâm Village (Thái Bình Province), had a long-standing tradition: "Silversmiths from Đồng Xâm practice their craft across the land. If one day you encounter someone - whether familiar or not - holding a feather or a piece of charcoal, it is a silent plea for help. If they need money, offer financial support; if they need strength, lend a helping hand. If they are unemployed, provide them with work according to your ability." (Bùi, 1997: 67).

Kim Ngan communal house, Truong Thi communal house, Lo Ren communal house, Truc Lam communal house, Hai Tuong communal house; Hang Quat communal house; Thuan My communal house, Ha Vi communal house, Hoa Loc Thi communal house, Tu Thi communal house, Kiem Ho communal house, Trang Lau communal house, Nhi Ke communal house, Phuc Hau communal house, Hang Thiec communal house. These communal houses dedicated to craft ancestors serve as gathering places for people of the same surname or hometown, strengthening kinship and community bonds within the Old Quarter. Today, many of these communal houses remain important hubs for social connections, linking artisans to their ancestral villages and integrating the craftsmanship of numerous traditional craft villages across northern Vietnam such as Bát Tràng (Gia Lâm, Hà Nội) - pottery; Châu Khê (Hải Dương), Đồng Xâm (Thái Bình), Định Công (Thanh Trì, Hà Nội) - gold and silver crafting, etc. These communal houses preserve cultural heritage and craftsmanship, acting as bridges between Hanoi's Old Quarter and its rich network of traditional villages.

### **Architectural Heritage of Hanoi's Old Quarter**

Before the arrival of the French, the Old Quarter had a consistent urban structure, with a dense grid-like street layout. All the houses along the streets followed the "tube house" design. These houses are shaped like tubes, with narrow frontages and great depth, sometimes extending to another alley or street. Their layout is generally as follows: the front section serves as a shop or workshop, followed by an open-air courtyard that allows natural light to enter. In this courtyard, there is often a shallow pond with ornamental rock formations and goldfish, surrounded by potted plants and flowering trellises. The inner section of the house is the living space, connected to an auxiliary area at the back. Most houses are single-story structures with small, neatly arranged roof tiles. A distinctive architectural feature is the two sidewalls extending above the roofline in a stepped pattern, resembling stairs, with two ornamental pillars at the rooftop ends. Some houses have added an extra floor, but these upper levels remain low and rarely have windows. In Hanoi's Old Quarter, tube houses serve multiple functions: they are craft workshops, storefronts, and family residences all in one. The streets are bustling at all times, with people buying and selling, creating a lively and dynamic scene. Houses are built side by side, sharing walls and roofs, forming a close-knit community where neighbors support one another. The charm of Hanoi's Old Quarter lies in this very aspect - the harmonious and organic

arrangement established by past generations, creating a vibrant, interconnected, and thriving urban fabric (Nguyễn, 2004b: 222-223).

After the French occupied Hanoi in the late 19th century, they initially respected the existing tube houses (nhà ống) in the Old Quarter. During the early phase (1920-1929), they only built French-style townhouses on vacant lots or replaced houses that had deteriorated due to fire or age. From 1930 to 1945, French architecture became more prevalent, blending into the fabric of the Old Quarter. However, it was not until 1947-1954, after the destruction caused by warfare, that French-style townhouses were built in greater numbers, making them more concentrated in the area. Distinctive features of French colonial townhouses include: (i) Soft yellow facades & green wooden shutters - a classic feature of French colonial buildings; (ii) Elegant, artistic designs - intricate details on the facade, with curved or slightly raised roof ridges and decorative borders; (iii) Balconies with ornate railings - semi-circular balconies embracing the entrance or extending across the facade, often featuring simple balustrades and embossed plaster reliefs. These graceful, aesthetically refined structures added a European elegance to the Old Quarter while still coexisting with Hanoi's traditional architectural identity.

Beyond the presence of traditional and French-style residential architecture, the Old Quarter is also distinguished by a dense network of religious and communal structures—including temples, communal houses, shrines, and pagodas - embedded within its urban fabric. As Trần Quốc Vương and Đỗ Thị Hảo observe, “when residents of the former Thirty-Six Guild Streets migrated to the capital to establish livelihoods, they brought along their village tutelary deities and subsequently created a system of communal houses, temples, and pagodas across the urban wards” (Trần & Đỗ, 2000:79). According to the Management Board of Hoan Kiem Lake and the Old Quarter, the area currently accommodates over eighty religious monuments within a compact territory of approximately 100 hectares. This study highlights several architectural specificities of the Old Quarter's communal houses that are especially revealing of its cultural landscape.

The Old Quarter still preserves fifty-nine communal houses, a proportion that underscores their centrality within the district's religious heritage. These structures simultaneously articulate the agrarian origins of Hanoi's urbanism and the unique architectural adaptations shaped by dense urban conditions. Spatially, the communal houses of the Old Quarter diverge from the canonical model of northern Vietnamese rural communal houses. They typically lack ponds or forecourts, and their gates are often built directly onto the street, facing the urban thoroughfares (e.g., Thanh Ha, Yen Thai, Nhan Noi Linh Tu, Kim Ngan, and Tan Khai communal houses). As a result, the exterior forecourt - so integral to rural communal houses - is largely absent, while streets and alleyways themselves function as ritual and communal spaces during festivals and ceremonies.

Orientation also reflects this negotiation between tradition and urban context. While Vietnamese geomantic practice generally prescribed southern or western orientations, many communal houses in the Old Quarter instead face rivers, lakes, or other water sources, whether extant or historical. This pattern illustrates a vernacular sacred spatiality rooted in agrarian cosmology, rather than adherence to the more elaborate geomantic principles of Chinese origin. Notable examples include Yen Thai, Trung Yen, and Tan Khai communal houses, which open toward the Red River and Hoan Kiem Lake.

### **The Economic Role of the Old Quarter**

Throughout history, the Old Quarter has always played a crucial role as the economic driving

force of Thăng Long Citadel and later, the capital city of Hanoi. According to researcher Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ, as early as the 11th century, Thăng Long Citadel had a well-structured urban layout divided into two distinct sections: the "thành" (citadel; literally, wall), which served as the core with its palaces and fortifications, and the "thị" (market area), which functioned as a complementary commercial zone filled with streets and markets (Nguyễn, 1983: 34). Due to its prime location, the Old Quarter was, from the very beginning, the heart of Thăng Long's commercial district. By the 17th century, Thăng Long's market area had reached an unprecedented level of prosperity and was commonly known as "Kẻ Chợ." At this time, Western merchants and missionaries described it as a "market-city," a second city alongside the "palace-city" (Marini, 1666: 109).

From a district that originally served mainly the needs of the royal court, the market area of Thăng Long gradually gained independence and flourished. This prosperity continued even into the 19th century, when Thăng Long was no longer the national capital and later became the provincial city of Hanoi. In contrast to the citadel, which had significantly declined, Hanoi's commercial district remained bustling and, in some ways, even more developed than before. After enduring periods of war (1945 - 1975) and hobbling by an inefficient national planned economy (1976–1986), the Old Quarter's dynamism quickly resurged with the onset of economic reforms (Đổi Mới). This district was among the first and fastest to adapt to the market economy, serving as a crucial catalyst for the growth of tourism in particular and Hanoi's economy in general.

According to tourism company statistics, around 60% of visitors traveling in Northern Vietnam include the Hanoi Old Quarter in their itinerary. On average, approximately 20,000 visitors explore the pedestrian streets of the Old Quarter and Hoàn Kiếm Lake every weekend. The number of international tourists staying in Hoàn Kiếm District has also increased significantly - nearly 2.2 million in 2018 (a 12% increase year-over-year) and 1.24 million in the first nine months of 2019 (a 13% increase compared to the same period). Cultural tourism activities in Hoàn Kiếm District have played a vital role in boosting Hanoi's tourism industry, particularly in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase (Trần, 2024). According to the socio-economic reports of the Hoan Kiem District People's Committee, from 2020 to 2024, Hoan Kiem District has consistently achieved revenue of over 10,000 billion VND, making it one of the highest-revenue districts in Hanoi. Explaining the steady growth of Hoàn Kiếm District, a district leader stated:

"Hoàn Kiếm District's budget revenues rely significantly on the Old Quarter. Many households there have now transformed into heritage-exploiting businesses, paying sustainable taxes. The district's revenue comes from these types of service industries, rather than land sales like in many other districts. That is the immeasurable value of traditional craft streets and the heritage of Thăng Long."

### **Cultural Characteristics of the Old Quarter**

Professor Arnold Koerte described urban culture in the Old Quarter as "an almost perfect street space, with harmonious streets and scenery highlighted by facades, colors, and greenery... but it is the people - the ones who bring life and diversity to this city - who are the most significant factor". So, who are the people of the Old Quarter? In our view, the people of the Old Quarter represent an urban community residing in the heart of Thăng Long - Hanoi. Historically, this group has been collectively referred to as "Tràng An people."

In social relationships, the people of the Old Quarter place great importance on community

solidarity and mutual support. Ideally, individual needs are acknowledged by the entire community, reducing potential conflicts that arise from living in such close proximity. People help each other with small daily tasks, such as shopping, cooking, house-sitting, and babysitting. Major life events - weddings, funerals, and ancestral commemorations - are significant opportunities to reinforce this communal spirit. Most Old Quarter residents make their living through trade. They keep their shops open from 8 a.m. until late at night and, throughout the workday, engage in shared activities - eating, chatting with colleagues and neighbors, watching television, and looking after children together (Ngọc & Borton, 2004: 44-46).

Because they are accustomed to this unique way of life, despite the cramped living spaces, many residents still prefer to stay in the Old Quarter. Here are the thoughts of a middle-aged woman from Hàng Bè Street:

"The government has encouraged us many times to move to new urban areas with more spacious and airy living conditions. Outsiders often wonder why we insist on staying in this tight space. But we're used to living here. Yes, it's small, but it's easy to make a living, and everything we need is just a few steps away. More importantly, people here support and care for each other. If someone falls ill, the entire alley comes to visit and help. It's truly precious. That's why the elderly like us never feel lonely."

About culinary culture, one of the most remarkable features of the Old Quarter is its incredible diversity of food and beverages. Here, ready-to-eat food is a major component of the economy - at times, it feels as though half of the population is engaged in feeding the other half. Breakfast options typically include bún ốc (snail noodle soup), xôi (sticky rice), bánh cuốn (steamed rice rolls), phở (noodle soup), and bún ngan (duck noodle soup). For lunch, people often enjoy lighter fare such as giò (Vietnamese pork sausage) and chả (grilled or fried meat patties). In the evening, street vendors roam the streets, selling a variety of sweet treats, sticky rice, and chè (Vietnamese desserts) (Ngọc & Borton, 2004: 46).

Residents of Hanoi's Old Quarter place great importance on refinement and harmony in both the preparation and enjoyment of food. Their high culinary standards have been vividly described by an elderly woman from Hàng Bông Street:

"Each dish must be paired with the right accompaniments, each season has its own specialties, and even different times of the day call for different foods. Spices are crucial because choosing the right ones enhances the dish's quality. For example, ginger eliminates the strong odor of beef, sautéed eggplant with pork belly must be paired with perilla leaves, stir-fried morning glory requires garlic, and dishes like bún riêu cua (crab noodle soup) and bún ốc (snail noodle soup) must be complemented with vinegar."

With this philosophy, the people of the Old Quarter have either directly created or influenced the development of some of Hanoi's most iconic dishes, many of which have become culinary landmarks: Phở Thìn, Bánh cuốn Thanh Trì, Bún thang Hàng Hòm, Bún chả Hàng Mành, Bánh tôm Hồ Tây, Chả cá Lã Vọng, Ó mai Hàng Đường, Kem Tràng Tiền, etc. These dishes are not merely food; they represent the city's cultural essence, craftsmanship, and centuries-old traditions. Through their meticulous attention to detail and passion for gastronomy, the people of the Old Quarter have shaped Hanoi's reputation as a culinary capital of Vietnam.

## Discussion

First, as noted earlier, with its dual structure of citadel and market town, the imperial capital of

Thăng Long encompassed not only the royal citadel but also a dynamic commercial quarter, in which the Old Quarter played a central role. Thus, if the Central Sector of the Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (2010), then the Old Quarter equally merits such recognition. Its continued existence constitutes a living testimony to the historical continuity of Thăng Long's heritage over more than a millennium. Accordingly, we argue that the heritage of the former imperial capital would be rendered more comprehensive if the Old Quarter were to be integrated with the current Imperial Citadel sector to form a unified heritage system. Such an integrated system, by virtue of its singular values, would fully deserve recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Second, the Old Quarter represents one of the rare urban craft quarters in Vietnam, in which rural craft traditions played a formative role. Despite historical upheavals and contemporary challenges, this craft-based urban landscape has demonstrated remarkable vitality and adaptability. As such, the heritage of the Old Quarter simultaneously showcases the artistry and technical mastery of generations of Vietnamese artisans, while also reflecting the resilience and entrepreneurial dynamism of local merchants. Beyond its artisanal and commercial dimensions, the Old Quarter also constitutes a unique socio-cultural space shaped by a distinctive lifestyle transmitted across generations. This lifestyle encompasses occupational norms, social conventions, architectural aesthetics, religious practices, and a distinctive culinary tradition. In short, the Old Quarter embodies a cultural world deeply rooted in historical origins while also engaging dynamically with modern transformations.

Third, the Old Quarter exemplifies a salient feature of Hanoi's urban history - and of Vietnamese historic towns more generally - namely, the close interconnection between rural and urban spheres (Nguyễn, 2017: 6; Nguyễn, 2011: 190). In traditional Vietnamese society, the rural-urban relationship assumed a distinctive form. Whereas in the West, countryside and city were relatively independent entities, in Vietnam the predominance of the rural sector meant that urban development was comparatively late, with many cities originating from agrarian roots. Consequently, even when one speaks of "urban culture" in Vietnam, it is largely derived from village culture, representing a process of incorporation, adaptation, and symbiosis between rural traditions and urban formation. The history of the Old Quarter illustrates this duality: although residents became settled urbanites and were gradually "Hanoianized," they maintained enduring ties with their ancestral villages through commodity flows and, more importantly, through the continued observance of ancestral rituals such as the worship of craft founders and other customary practices. This dual orientation has endowed the Old Quarter with a hybrid cultural character - simultaneously urban and rural, traditional and modern. Its rhythm of life may be rapid and vibrant on the streetfronts, yet slower and community-oriented in the back alleys, where affective ties and neighborhood solidarity remain significant. This duality imparts to the Old Quarter, and to Hanoi as a whole, a distinctive identity rarely found in other modern capitals.

## **Conclusion**

Using an interdisciplinary approach, this article seeks to present a multifaceted portrait of the Old Quarter, allowing readers to recognize its core values. The Old Quarter is not just a historical relic; more importantly, its heritage remains vibrantly alive, continuing to function as one of the most dynamic and captivating parts of Hanoi. One of its greatest values is that it provides present and future generations with the opportunity to experience the rhythm, colors, and boundless energy of a heritage that has existed for thousands of years through the people and objects that bring it to life. Hanoi should include the Old Quarter in the dossier of the Thang Long Imperial

Citadel submitted to UNESCO, proposing that Thang Long - Hanoi be recognized as a World Heritage City - consisting of two organically connected components: the Old Quarter and the Imperial Citadel.

To preserve the unique values of the Old Quarter, Hanoi must prioritize heritage conservation as a crucial resource for ensuring sustainable tourism development. Additionally, achieving a balance between heritage preservation and tourism growth requires the implementation of several key measures: (i) Engaging the community: Respecting public opinion and encouraging citizen participation in conservation and urban renovation projects, as local residents are the true custodians of the heritage; (ii) Reducing population density: Implementing effective resettlement plans through fair compensation to alleviate overcrowding in the Old Quarter; (iii) Improving infrastructure and connectivity: Developing a comprehensive infrastructure system and prioritizing public transportation to link the city center with satellite towns, fostering tourism and economic exchange; (iv) Strengthening urban management and funding: Enhancing regulatory frameworks and mobilizing social resources to expand the conservation fund for the Old Quarter; (v) Seeking UNESCO recognition - Expediting the completion of a proposal to UNESCO for recognizing the Old Quarter - along with the Thang Long Imperial Citadel - as a World Heritage Site.

By adopting these strategies, Hanoi can ensure the sustainable preservation of the Old Quarter while allowing it to thrive as a living heritage that continues to enrich the city's cultural and economic landscape.

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