

THE PERSONALITY TRAITS OF HANOIANS IN DAILY-LIFE SETTINGS PORTRAYED IN THE FILM *PEACH BLOSSOM, PHO AND THE PIANO*

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Received August 17, 2025. Revised October 13, 2025. Accepted November 5, 2025.

Abstract. Hanoians are recognizable for their specific cultural features, among which four are selected for analysis to describe a traditional Hanoian against the backdrop of the film *Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano* (*Đào, Phở và Piano*). This analysis is referenced by studies across various academic disciplines and the presentation of the feature film. The latter methodology makes it a pioneering contribution within the target area of study. It is concluded that the Hanoians in the film possess the qualities that align with those identified in previous literature. The characters have transcended the context of the film and served as representative figures of Hanoians. The question of whether these traits with their benefits and challenges persist in contemporary times remains unanswered. In addition, other qualities are not addressed within this study, and they, with the former ones, are suggested for future research. With the aim of preserving the quintessential traits of Hanoians, the contribution of this research is to promote civilian consciousness of the target qualities in order to complete the Hanoian portrait to a certain extent and avoid any possible conflicts related to regional discrimination.

Keywords: Personality, Trait/s, Hanoi/Hanoian/s, Peach Blossom, Pho, Piano.

1. Introduction

The traditional characters of Hanoians have been appreciated and explored more in depth in various art forms and academic works. These explorations encompass aestheticism and sense of place, cultural identity and commitment, personality traits and work outcomes, and a harmonious relationship with nature through urban architecture. Drawing on their personal experiences, Hanoian artists depict the city's beauty and its strong influence on local people. These elements contribute to a nuanced sense of home, revealed through the detailed consciousness embedded in their paintings of Hanoi's streets and buildings. Two leading artists in this tendency - Bui Xuan Phai (1921–1988) and Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng (b. 1976) - captured the dynamics of Hanoi's changing environment in their widely celebrated works (Dinh & Groves, 2011) [1]. Regarding the cultural identity and commitment of Hanoians, despite claims that there is no single definition of a “true Hanoian”, the historical and cultural heritage of northern Vietnam, as well as the integration of many other regional cultures, has shaped their unique sense of self. Moreover, traditional values such as festivals, cuisine, and folk arts are integral to both the lifestyle and communal commitment of Hanoi's people. (Tran & Do, 2024) [2]. For their typical communal commitment, Hanoians tend to be committed to administrative organizations. This personality trait is reflected in their job satisfaction, strong organizational loyalty, and lifelong tenure with institutions (Nguyen &

Uong, 2023) [3]. Moreover, their harmonious relationship with the surrounding natural environment is reflected in the indigenous architecture of the city. Its designs and constructions are based on attentiveness to local nature and culture. Through this urban architecture, Hanoians' reliance on nature also contributes to their personal and collective identity (Hanoi Times, 2024) [4].

However, research into the typical characteristics of Hanoians remains limited, particularly when based on cinematographic materials. Moreover, their personality traits are often discussed at the macro level (cultural, traditional, or historical) rather than in everyday life contexts. Therefore, this essay analyzes four significant qualities of Hanoians, living an ordinary life, during the late 1946 and beginning 1947, highlighting them against the backdrop of the *“Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano”*, a recently released film nominated for the 2024 Oscar in the Foreign Language category (VietnamNews, 2024) [5]. The qualities of Hanoians in the *“Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano”* film, chosen for analysis, are subtlety, aestheticism, commitment, and practicality. By synchronizing printed and online sources across various academic fields and drawing on multiple authentic viewings of the film, a comprehensive picture of these significant Hanoian traits emerges. Although a “true Hanoian” has never been explicitly defined, the above qualities clearly distinguish them from outsiders and have earned widespread recognition and appreciation over time (Le, 2021) [6]. It is also important to note that the positive and the negative sides of these attributes and whether they remain valid today are not included in this analysis. They are left for further research, alongside other qualities of Hanoians.

2. Content

2.1. Aims of the Research

According to Giang Quan (cited in Nguyen, 2014) [7], there were about 9% of the original Hanoians in the past, this percentage has dropped to 5% (measured within a population of 6.3 million) after its extension (urbanization), therefore the quintessential traits of Hanoians (namely subtlety, aestheticism, commitment and practicality) have been overshadowed by the fast pace of the modern life. This research, therefore, aims to raise awareness of this phenomenon and encourage its intentional restoration. Researchers, on a larger scale, have argued that traditional Vietnamese cultural expressions, such as art forms, indigenous customs and daily practices have been diluted by globalization and urbanization (Tran, 2024) [8]. The above-mentioned Hanoian qualities are not excluded in this tendency. While many studies have highlighted the resilience of rural cultural values during the Doi Moi era (Do, 2021) [9], few discuss the erosion of the urban identity, specifically Hanoian civility and aesthetic refinement. The call to revive traditional values is urgent to preserve cultural identity and identity continuity (Hoang, 2024) [10]. By setting a goal to revive these everyday virtues, this research also promotes the cultural preservation as well as a more holistic civic mentality deeply rooted into the modern life of Hanoi.

2.2. Methodology

This research is conducted on a secondary platform by referring to a wide range of studies across academic domains such as architecture, history, gastronomy, visual arts, and folk arts. Another methodology is also applied, which is the multiple authentic viewings of the feature film. While academic investigations on Hanoi's cultural identity have largely been carried out based on literature, visual arts, ethnographic case studies, or music, cinematography remains scarce. Film studies upon Hanoian identity are underexplored, aside from the analysis of Vietnamese diaspora identity in directors such as Trần Anh Hùng (Nguyen, 2020) [11]. Moreover, Vietnamese films exploring Hanoian identity predominantly address macro wartime themes (such as patriotism, collective sacrifice and heroism), rather than everyday traits (specifically subtlety,

aestheticism, commitment or practicality). Director Hải Ninh's *The Little Girl of Hanoi (Em Bé Hà Nội)* (made in 1974) best represents Hanoians, but it emphasizes communal resilience in the capital during the December 1972 bombings, exemplifying a "cinema of care" approach (Nguyen, 2023) [12]; (Bodemer, 2021) [13]. Similarly, broader studies of revolutionary cinema remain confined to identity on the backdrop of national struggle and heroic collectivism (Yip, 2024) [14]. Although there are some recent work on urban identity, they are more centered on ideology and space, rather than on micro-social habits (Hoang, 2016) [15]. In congruence with this, Nguyen (2014) [7] also stated that the availability of documents related to old Thăng Long (present-day Hanoi) allows for an imagination of the scale of urbanization, the urban population, and the merging of rural and urban characteristics within Hanoi's population structure to examine the roles and influences of urban culture. These are key factors in shaping a Hanoian cultural identity (refinement), or their four everyday traits, within the scope of this analysis. However, researchers appear to have paid little notice to these aspects. Therefore, examination of quotidian urban sensibilities, particularly hidden manners, craft aesthetics, and everyday life responsibility or adaptability to reality, remains a significant gap, pointing out the challenges during conducting this research because of the unavailability of existing references.

2.3. Findings and Contributions

The research found that Hanoi, the land of massive populations, historically emerging from the Red River Delta since the Lý and Trần dynasties (such as the Old Quarter development), has experienced a radical transition from rural to urban. There are significant migrations from faraway regions of the country to this town for life opportunities in contemporary times (Nguyen & Locke, 2014) [16]. Local people, together with newcomers, have formed the conceptions of Hanoi land and Hanoians. Nguyen (2014) [7] pointed out that when regarding Hanoi as a cultural entity with its own identity, it is necessary to consider both "rural Hanoi" ("nhà quê") and "urban Hanoi" ("kẻ chợ") conceptions. Two of these residential divisions co-exist within the same administrative structure but maintain different cultural practices and lifestyles. Therefore, there is no single or universally accepted definition of a "true Hanoian," as this terminology is coined with subjective perspectives stemming from cultural experiences and personal observation and critique. This statement is valid on a broader scale when people intrinsically rely on essentialist reasoning, implying a fixed "true self" (Christy, Schlegel, & Cimpian, 2019) [17]. Regarding the term "Hanoian", the absence of its formal definition does not prevent it from being vaguely defined in practice. Four particular features, subtlety, aestheticism, commitment, and practicality, have formed a portrayal of a typical Hanoian. Although their subtlety might be regarded as insincerity, aestheticism as unnecessary complexity, commitment as overcommitment, and practicality as stinginess/parsimony, these misperceived conceptions do not negate the image of a Hanoian. Therefore, the analysis of these four Hanoian traits, backed by the cinematographic narrative of *Peach Blossom*, *Pho and the Piano*, contributes substantially to the process of enhancing civic sense, preserving social harmony, and avoiding confrontation. These values are highlighted in cultures of many Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam (Kaur, 2024) [18]. This nuanced enactment is consistent with their shared Confucian ideals of propriety and aesthetic refinement, where these qualities measure moral strength (Treutel, 2010) [19].

2.3.1. Hanoi During the Historical Period of 1946-1947

In the late 1940s the city of Hanoi underwent significant social and historical upheavals. It became a focal point of the first Indochina War (Marr, 1995) [20]. After the Second World War, France moved its colonial authority over Vietnam, triggering intense tensions with VietMinh led by Ho Chi Minh (Duiker, 1994) [21]. On 19 December 1946, despite adverse conditions, the Battle of Hanoi began, in which VietMinh forces mounted a determined defence until they were compelled to withdraw. The start of a campaign for national liberation was marked after this withdrawal (Tonnesson, 2009) [22].

On the home front, civilians lived under harsh wartime conditions. Under the fierce bombardment of the French, many Hanoians suffered from food shortages and were forced to leave their homes to seek refuge in surrounding rural regions (Goscha, 2016) [23]. However, rather than weakening popular resolve, these attacks even deepened a greater solidarity and strengthened the determination to fight against colonial domination (Duiker, 1994) [21]. The Hanoians' shared experience of suffering and resistance made it a powerful catalyst for national unity and a stronger wave of independence.

2.3.2. Brief Review on the *Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano* Film

The final days of the Battle of Hanoi in 1946-1947, a pivotal period in the history of Vietnam, are the setting of the film *Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano*. During this period, French colonial forces clashed with VietMinh, who faced numerical and logistical disadvantages. Several life stories are woven together in the film, centering on a male protagonist Van Dan (a militia soldier of strong determination), and the female one, Thục Hương (a young piano lover). Their love story is told on the setting of the war chaos, as they and other Hanoians resisted the French attack while refusing to leave their hometown to shelter in other neighboring regions. The themes of patriotism, love, and sacrifice are explored in the film, which symbolize the Vietnamese traditions through elements like peach blossom (Lunar New Year), *pho* (a beloved Hanoian dish), and the piano (a symbol of refined and cultural life). The film highlights both the resilience and the elegance of Hanoians during such a tumultuous period of their country's history on a large-scale set with detailed historical facts (VietnamNet, 2023) [24].

The film has gained both local and international attention. It won the Silver Lotus Award at the 23d Vietnam Film Festival in November 2023 and was officially selected as Vietnam's submission for the Best International Feature Film category at the 97th Academy Award (Oscar) in 2025. This represents a turning point for the Vietnam film industry to demonstrate its capability to tell a love story in a historical film. The Vietnamese audiences have been deeply moved by its portrayal of love, resilience, and cultural symbolism. Directed by Phi Tiên Sơn, financed with \$815,000, *Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano* is a combination of both commercial success and media effect which underscores its impact both locally and internationally (VietnamNews, 2024) [25].

Alongside the positive feedback, the film has also received criticism from both viewers and critics. They pointed out that the visual effects and production design were weak. They lacked intensity and visual realism despite the substantial financing. Some viewers reported that the story is being told unevenly, leaving it undeveloped. Also, the transitions between different character arcs were fragmented, resulting in a choppy narrative. There are exaggerations in some close-up shots, resembling advertisements rather than cinematic images functioning as integral parts of the story's flow (Loc Chung & Phuong Linh, 2024) [26].

2.3.3. Personality Traits of Hanoians in Ordinary Life Portrayed in the film *Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano*

Hanoi, the heart of Vietnamese culture and history, has aged over thousands of years. The core qualities of Hanoians are associated with their subtlety, aestheticism, commitment, and practicality. These traits have shaped not only individual destinies but also the broader development of the whole country. They have endured through centuries of social and political changes, ultimately forming a unique beauty in the characters of Hanoi's residents. It is unclear whether these qualities remain unchanged today, but they are assumed to be typical characteristics of Hanoians. The following analysis considers these qualities in the order below to construct a portrait of an ordinary Hanoian in everyday life settings, as presented by the characters in the film *Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano*.

2.3.1.1. Subtlety

In general, subtlety is reflected in the way Hanoians communicate, behave, and interact. The essence is not what is said but how it is expressed. Hanoians tend to express their thoughts in an indirect way, relying on others to infer meaning to avoid potential embarrassment in conversations. This style is influenced by Confucianism, which emphasizes harmony, propriety and face-saving in mutual relationships. As a result, overt confrontation is avoided, and nuanced and mediated speech becomes a resource for resolving disagreement while maintaining relational equilibrium (Luong, 1992) [27]. In Hanoi, education and intellectual refinement confer prestige, so the indirectness functions as diplomacy, allowing deep feelings and criticism to be expressed subtly without rupturing the social fabric. In order to avoid direct confrontation, old Hanoians often deploy polite phrasing, measured tones, and ritualized small gestures. For example, offering tea carefully signals respect, disapproval, or social positioning without overt disagreement. Anthropological and sociolinguistic research points out that such cultural subtlety is a sophisticated way (but not a passivity) of navigating social hierarchy to manage power and obligation through implication rather than through direct assertion (Nguyen, 2013) [28].

Subtlety is also found in the artistic and cultural expressions of Hanoians. Traditional *Cheo singing* (Hát chèo) is an example. This art form employs allegory, satire, and calibrated performance gestures to critique societal norms and convey moral commentary indirectly. Deeply rooted in popular rural culture, *Hát chèo* relies on humor and layered representation to express criticism gracefully, maintaining communal connection while implying cultural sophistication (Luong, 1992) [27]. Allegory and satire enable Hanoians to defuse tension and conflicts without lecturing, making complexity intelligible in a refined and indirect fashion (Meeker, 2015) [29].

In the film *Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano*, subtlety appears in the nuanced portrayal of different relationships, cultural symbols, and delicate interaction among characters amid the chaotic backdrop of war. The clearest example of subtlety is the love between two young people (soldier Văn Dân and pianist Thục Hương). Their love story is told with minimal dialogues but deeply felt vocal expressions, accentuating the emotional depth in the critical wartime hours. Their quiet and understated love reflects the traditional approach of Hanoians to romantic relationships, in which deep feelings with grace and subtle gestures mean much more than any overt declarations.

The second-best example of subtlety conveyed in *Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano* is about the artist (no name is given in the film). He offered a room in his badly damaged house for the young couple to spend their honeymoon night. His light humor when capturing their happy-in-love moments, his gentle request to the bishop to speed up wedding ceremony for the young couple to have more time together before the next war day came, and his friendly reminder to the bishop to keep silent so the newlyweds could enjoy the first moments of their marriage life are all so subtle, demonstrating a “true Hanoian”. Above all, while others sought safety by leaving the town, he chose to remain to light incense for the deceased in silence. Although positioned as a supporting character in the narrative, the artist emerges as one of the most compelling representations of Hanoian subtlety.

Another small detail in the film clearly exemplifies Hanoian subtlety. A commander insisted on sending the pianist to the evacuation zone for her safety, but he did not give her a direct order, as he knew that she would never leave her beloved neighborhood and her lover. He quietly instructed his staff to arrange her departure without her knowledge; perhaps he was afraid of hurting her feelings. Although this quality has not been formally named, people from other regions still view it as typically Hanoian. Again, the subtlety of Hanoians is quiet, hidden, but appealing. It is seen in their conversations, relationships, and mindset, making them distinctive within the country.

Their subtlety is also felt through the cultural symbols such as the peach blossom, the flower blooming at Lunar New Year, and a bowl of *pho*, their favorite everyday dish. The young soldier

struggled to bring a branch of peach blossom to his unit for his comrades to have a moment of happiness, even in wartime. But when he arrived, his unit had already left the town. The *pho* vendors insisted on staying in town to feed militia soldiers with hot bowls of *pho* even though most of the others had departed and the town was nearly empty. The male *pho* vendor offered hot bowls of *pho* to the artist and the bishop, knowing that they had stayed up all night working on a painting. He did not ask for payment, understanding that they, too needed some warmth in the cold winter of war. All these examples show that Hanoian subtlety is unspoken; it is expressed through different registers, through conversation, relationship, or in symbolic gestures. Together, these forms make a Hanoian recognizable to people from other regions.

2.3.1.2. *Aestheticism*

Hanoian pursuit of beauty is visible in everyday life. They have been known for their high aestheticism, which is reflected in the way they lead their ordinary lives. Beauty is cherished as a concrete thing but not an abstract ideal in their mannerism, whether in cuisine, in fashion, or in home arrangement/decoration. The old saying “eat with manners, sit with posture” (“ăn trông nòi, ngồi trông hướng”) evidences an aesthetic mindset of Hanoians, which goes beyond the formal art into quotidian comportment. It goes in line with a broader cultural idea of taste and distinction. Such everyday practices of refinement are widely conditioned in society and function as a form of cultural capital. This makes aesthetic sensibility become both a marker and mediator of social status, rather than mere decoration (Bourdieu, 1994) [30]. In Hanoi, this philosophy is applied to domestic spatial ordering: a small courtyard with well-cared plants, interior arranged in harmony, balance, and attention to the relation between nature and the built site. The blending of these two features is shaped by local interpretation of geomantic mapping (including vernacular deployments of feng shui theory) and historical urban aesthetics (Vuong et al, 2019) [31]; (Tran, 2023) [32]; (To, 2008) [33]; (Logan, 2000) [34].

Traditionally, Hanoians hold a strong passion for flowers. This sentiment is quiet yet pervasive among the urban literati and middle-class households, forming an enduring cultural trait. For them, flowers do not represent only the beauty of nature but also a symbol of moral character and seasonal harmony. Locally grown flowers are often sold on street vending bicycles or at flea markets, placed in living places, or even used for culinary purposes in their proper seasons, reflecting refinement and sensitivity to nature. This Hanoian trait stems from Confucian ideals of elegance and restraint, shaping a salient lifestyle of Hanoi (Nguyen, 2020) [35]; (Goh, 2022) [36].

Cuisine is another domain where aesthetics is nurtured. Hanoians believe that nourishment is not only about nutrition but also an ornamental presentation of food. The preparation and presentation of traditional dishes like “*pho*” or “*bún chả*” requires not a simple skill but a craftsmanship and close attention to texture, color, and balanced composition. This dual commitment elevates a meal to an aesthetic and social experience. Culinary practices in Vietnam, especially among emerging middle-class people, operate at the same level of distinction, where flavor, aroma, and visual define an identity, expertise, and the cook’s place of origin. Thus, everyday cooking becomes an expression of refined taste and social meaning (Earl, 2014) [37].

Hanoians, by tradition, manifest a deep love of music and visual arts as an interwoven expression of both community and individuality. *Chèo* theatre is taken for granted; it is a beloved local performance genre. Its satirical tones and hidden moral commentary make the theater a place of entertainment and social gathering. There are life lessons audiences can learn, and values they can share through *chèo* nuanced performances (Meeker, 2015) [29]. In Hanoi, visual art is appreciated on a collective scale, not only within the community of painters. Modernity, colonial legacies, and local aesthetics are discussed in artists’ everyday practice (Taylor, 2004) [38]. Particularly, lacquer paintings emerge as a hybrid form merging traditional techniques with modern expressive ambitions. This creativity signals Hanoians’ devotion to beauty as a form of

self-fashioning (Safford, 2015) [39]. Music and art, embedded in daily life, articulate both belonging and subtle resistance, together forming a cultural ecology (Logan, 2000) [34].

In correlation with *Peach Blossom*, *Pho and the Piano* film, aestheticism is another highlight shaping a Hanoian personality trait. The main female character is a piano lover. Being educated in music, she showed a deep passion for her piano, especially when she returned home to find it left abandoned during wartime. To her, the piano is not an inanimate object, but almost human. She felt as if she had been shot when the piano was shot and insisted on holding a funeral for it. She even asked her husband to leave Hanoi for a place without war just so she could continue playing. Her newlywed husband shared this emotional connection. Despite the chaos of war, he tried hard to repair the damaged piano just to hear her play again. The young couple embodies the Hanoian spirit of aestheticism through their love for music and emotional resonance with art.

The militia soldier (the pianist's newlywed husband) is a "Hanoian" with his sense of aestheticism in how he cared for peach blossom (the symbol of Lunar New Year in Hanoi). On his return to central Hanoi during wartime, he brought a branch of this flower for his unit to feel the warmth of the traditional custom event. He was so anxious that the hard trip would tear off the tiny flowers. When deciding to catch up with his unit, he chose to leave the blossom branch with the artist, hoping it would remain safe with the man staying in town. And at the climax of their love story, he gave his bride these pinkish tiny flowers as a token of love knot, instead of traditional rings, due to the shortage in war. These touching details evidence Hanoian aestheticism through cultural tradition, a perception placed higher than any life adversity.

The *pho* vendor, a humble man running his small family business, is also portrayed as truly "Hanoian" with a bold sense of aestheticism. He is devoted to making a bowl of *pho*, never compromising or taking any shortcuts for convenience. In his view, a good *pho* bowl must include all high-quality ingredients, follow a full process with high attention to each step, and above all, be made with strong passion. True to this philosophy, at the most intense moment, after being shot, he reached out to rescue his pot of *pho* broth, targeted by the French soldiers, in the line of gunfire. Being an unknown man, the *pho* vendor serves as a powerful example of the Hanoian spirit of aestheticism. This trait has extended beyond the social class to a general hallmark of a Hanoian identity.

The artist in the film perhaps, is the clearest model of Hanoian aestheticism. He embodies a true artist with high professionalism and a strong inclination toward beauty. The reason is probably that he had devoted his life to art, and he was a true Hanoian. Painting was his life. In wartime, while others might ask for food to survive but he asked only for light to paint. He was unable to paint war themes as he felt no inspiration for them. He only picked up the brush when he was emotionally moved. To him, the war came to mean something fundamentally wrong, so to depict it would have violated his authentic self as an artist. With his deep love of beauty, even when facing death, he insisted on protecting his unfinished painting from the French soldiers. He chose to save the painting rather than his own life. The painting also brings attention to a bishop, who, though appearing briefly, displays a strong sense of aestheticism. When helping the artist to paint flags, he cut his own hand to give his blood to make the red pigment, as it had run out. Regardless of their social status, they all contribute to shaping an image of aesthetic Hanoian, standing out among the country's population.

2.3.4. Commitment

The old Hanoians are committed to their family, community, and cultural tradition. Deeply rooted in Confucian philosophy, their commitment is expressed in a strong sense of duty toward kinship, particularly through worship practices for the deceased and familial honor maintenance (Nguyen & Vu, 2020) [40]; (Slote & DeVos, 1998) [41]. Traditional Hanoian families are hierarchically and patriarchally structured; therefore, they emphasize mutual respect and intergenerational care, in accordance with Confucian filial piety (Slote & DeVos, 1998) [41].

Commitment is also evident in Hanoian devotion to craftsmanship. Artisans and craftsmen in the Old Quarter of the town exemplify perseverance and meticulous attention to product quality. They produce a wide range of products such as embroidered goods, silk garments, souvenirs, jewelry or metal locks. They work not only for livelihood, but also for preservation of cultural pride, family business and tradition (Orfeuvre et al, 2016) [42]. Moreover, their commitment to cultural, as well as traditional rituals, such as Lunar events (New Year, beginning and mid-month days), public ceremonies, weddings, family anniversaries, funerals, etc. is clearly reflected. Detailed protocols, passed down from ancestors to descendants, are preserved and maintained, emphasizing the ethical values of tradition and strengthening the sense of collective duty to both family and social circles (Nguyen & Vu, 2020) [40].

In regard to the Peach Blossom, *Pho* and the Piano film, Hanoians' commitment is shown subtly, yet significantly. The Hanoians in the film were committed to the general values of their country's tradition, however, their actions were simple and quiet. The militia soldier refused his bride's request to leave the town for a refuge because he believed his war duty was to stay and fight. He wanted to enjoy a hot bowl of *pho*, served immediately by the vendor, but he left his wish behind to continue searching for grenades for the unit as he had promised. The artist also refused to leave, not for any personal reason but out of worry that no one would remain in town to light incense for the dead. Another artist, Monsieur Phán, who lived in a romantic world and turned his back on reality, was also a man with a strong sense of commitment. Despite the dangers of conflict at night, he kept his promise to drive the militia soldier back to town. With his wild driving skills, he made an effort that went beyond his usual artistic disposition. Also, the bishop insisted on returning to his church at night, soon after conducting a wedding ceremony for the young couple, because he had a duty to hold the church service the next morning, even though the war outside was fierce.

Not only were the upper-class people committed to their traditional or professional duties, but those from the lower class in Hanoi during this historical period were as well. The *pho* vendors, despite the hardship of war, still maintained a sophisticated approach to making *pho*. He was devoted to his family business and committed to the traditions to which he belonged. The vendor and his wife also hesitated to leave the town because of their promise to the little shoe polisher to serve him a hot *pho* bowl. And for the little shoe-polisher boy, despite his young age, also had a strong sense of commitment. He attempted, defying sudden assault by the French soldiers, to bring back fresh onion leaves for the *pho* vendors as he had promised. These Hanoians, regardless of their social status, were responsible for their words. They took silent actions and tried hard to fulfill their duties, whether personal or communal.

2.3.5. Practicality

Being inclined toward aestheticism, Hanoians also value practicality. They maintain a balance between beauty and function, making it a distinctive aspect of their culture. This feature can be clearly observed in old Hanoi, where beauty is not abandoned for utility. They tend to blend the two to ensure a harmonious living environment. For instance, the architectural design of Hanoian homes, particularly in the downtown area, reflects how they respond to the growing population and narrow streets of the city. The tube houses have been chosen to address these issues. This design enables the maximization of space while still retaining elegance and functionality. These houses are horizontally narrow but longitudinally deep with multiple floors. A multigenerational family can be housed in such a home without sacrificing the traditional model of family. At the same time, this design does not conflict with aestheticism. Hanoians often adorn their houses with intricate wood carvings, traditional motifs, or interior mini gardens. This beautiful blending of practicality and aestheticism shapes the Hanoian mindset, lifestyle, and image, which are reflected in their everyday actions (To, 2008) [33]; (Nguyen, 2020) [35]; (Vuong et al. 2019) [31].

Hanoians are also practical in every aspect of life and work. They place importance on thrift and frugality, avoiding any potential waste. This practicality trait reflects their response to the socio-economic, historical, and natural challenges. Even in intimate family spaces such as the kitchen, food is prepared with careful attention to appropriate proportions of ingredients, ensuring that a meal is both economical and nourishing. In the culinary practices of the northern part of Vietnam, particularly in Hanoi, fermented dishes such as *pickled mustard greens* (dưa muối) and salted eggplants (*cà pháo muối*) are examples of their adaptability to life. These dishes not only are served to enhance the taste of the main course but are also preserved for use during rainy seasons or times of scarcity (Nguyen 2020) [35]; (Vuong et al., 2019) [31]. These fermented side dishes remain on the dining table of Hanoians, reflecting not only thrift and adaptability but also gastronomic art and cultural maintenance. In other words, their practicality also extends to social mannerism, through which they learn to adapt to the hardships of life by surmounting challenges with resilience (Conde Nast Traveler, 2018) [43]; (Goh, 2022) [36].

Another demonstration of Hanoian practicality is how they reuse household items and extend their use by fixing, repurposing, or passing them on to others. Having experienced the wartime scarcity and postwar economic crisis, Hanoians have learned to handle belongings with care for longer use. Clothes, household items are rarely discarded; instead, they are repaired, recreated, reused or given to other people in need for continued use. (Nguyen, 2020) [35]. This mode of life cycle not only reduces the wasteful disposal but also strengthens the communal bonds and promotes mutual support. According to Vuong et al. (2019) [31], this practicality, once again, derives from Confucian and collectivist tradition. It has been expanded widely afterward, encouraging broader public participation in this practice for social care and sustainable living (Goh, 2022) [36].

Within the scope of the *Peach Blossom*, *Pho* and the *Piano* film, practicality can be observed in how the characters struggled to survive in the final hours before their deaths. From a literary perspective, they may be viewed as typical characters set against a typical historical backdrop. Within the framework of this analysis, they are interpreted as typical Hanoians. The young couple is a focal point exemplifying this Hanoian characteristic. In the middle of wartime chaos, they still sought ways to reunite, not only by their strong love but also by their adaptability to life's challenges. The pianist managed to persuade the bishop to conduct a wedding for her and the militia soldier, despite their differing religious backgrounds, in wartime conditions. This can be seen as a young woman's successful act of negotiation. Though born to be romantic, she appeared to be pragmatic when insisting on leaving the collapsing town for a safer place to survive, to live, and to play the piano. In the decisive moment, she was conscious of the value of life, placing it above her romantic ideals, recognizing that survival is a prerequisite for playing music. The militia soldier overcame wartime obstacles to arrange a wedding with the pianist. Although conducted in the austere conditions of war, their ceremony remained refined and emotionally resonant, owing to his effort (as a true man) and the artist's support. And as a soldier, he tried his hardest both in battle and beyond. He never surrendered, even when failure was likely.

The couple of *pho* vendors, with their middle-class background, best exemplify practicality. Their thinking was simple yet pragmatic, rather than naive. They chose to remain in town longer to continue selling *pho*, not only to provide some hot bowls of *pho* for militia soldiers during wartime, but also to earn some extra income. The young shoe polisher boy offered his service free of charge to the militia soldier in exchange for borrowing an uniform hat, fulfilling his personal wish. And Monsieur Phán, though immersed in romanticism, knew how to bribe French soldiers to escape dangers and to take the militia soldier back to town safely. Similarly, the bishop, upon realizing that the red pigment had run out, offered his blood on the spot to help the artist continue painting. And even the artist, a true lover of art, also demonstrated his fairness when enjoying a fine sip of Western wine. This bottle was found by a militia soldier after a battle, saved during

wartime hardship for the artist. When he sipped the wine, the artist remarked that not everything Western was negative, even in the context of war against the French. Besides, another supporting character of the film, the commander, also demonstrated the regional thrift. He was hard on his staff about saving every single grenade due to wartime scarcity. While it may portray him as a harsh leader, it reflects a traditional frugality for survival under the harsh conditions and for collective benefits. All these characters struggled to adapt to the wartime reality, showed strong wills to overcome life's adversities. They also faced the realistic life without sacrificing aesthetic values and collective spirit, and ultimately became symbolic figures of Hanoi. On the whole, while their actions in the narrative carry multiple, overlapping layers of meaning, yet they consistently reflect the broader qualities of typical Hanoians, highly appreciated by people from other geographical areas.

3. Conclusion

A portrait of Hanoians with their four specific characteristics, which are subtlety, aestheticism, commitment, and practicality, has been analyzed within this essay, set against the feature film *Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano*. It is also worth noting that similar analyses addressing this question through a cinematographic reference have been largely unavailable until now. By referring to a wide range of academic works across different fields, as well as multiple viewings of the film, it can be concluded that a typical Hanoian in the film *Peach Blossom, Pho and the Piano* possesses these qualities, which go in line with the ones, examined in the earlier studies about Hanoians in general (Nguyen & Thomas, 2020) [44]; (Taylor, 2001) [45]. Though there is no specific definition of "a true Hanoian", people from other regional parts of the country still take this perception into account. Hanoians are also recognized for other features, such as their gentle accent or clear articulation of Vietnamese (VietnamNews, 2020) [46], but the four characteristics discussed above likely hold greater significance in shaping a distinctive Hanoian identity. Furthermore, the benefits, as well as the challenges of possessing these traits of Hanoians, can be observed across other different historical and social contexts (Drummond, 2003) [47], contributing to a more comprehensive portrayal of Hanoians from multiple angles of perception. The question of whether these traits, with their advantages and disadvantages, have continued into modern times is not addressed in this essay, as it lies beyond the current scope. Therefore, it is recommended that such a question, in addition to other Hanoian characteristics, be the focus of future study. The conduction of this research is, again, aimed at the preservation of traditional Hanoian features with the contribution of raising public awareness of restoring and maintaining them over the long run of socially harmonious development. On the whole, it can be stated that Hanoians have always been a source of inspiration for any examinations, both within and beyond the academic boundaries (Zinoman, 2013) [48].

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