



IMAGE BY NAM QUAN

# The Eternal Debate: Hanoi or Saigon?

Through simple yet poignant images, graphic artist Le Minh Nhat revisits the rivalry between Vietnam's two great cities

TEXT BY JAMES PHAM

STAR TREK OR STAR WARS? Creation or evolution? Spider Man or Batman? iOS or Android?

Thanks to budding graphic artist, Le Minh Nhat, 25, there's now buzz around the greatest local eternal debate: Hanoi or Saigon?

Born in Thanh Hoa, 136 km south of Hanoi, Nhat moved to Ho Chi Minh City at the age of 18 to attend university. Armed with a degree in IT, it didn't take long for him to discover that he didn't like working with hardware. "I love images. Even TV commercials and advertising posters speak to me." So it was back to graphics design school.

For his final project, Nhat created a whimsical book outlining the differences

between Hanoi and Saigon, highlighting cuisine, dress, daily habits and work culture. "I love traveling and wanted to work with the theme of Vietnamese culture. The idea came from reading an online forum where people argued which region was better - the north or south. But it was very biased. So I wanted to make a pictorial comparison but with a narrower scope of just Hanoi and Saigon. As someone who's lived in the north and the south, I based the book on my own observations, asked family members and did a lot of research on YouTube and read articles."

The product was a 31 page book which Nhat uploaded onto Behance, an online platform to showcase and discover creative work. Picked

up by websites, blogs and media, the simple, poignant illustrations have gone viral. Within a week, more than 20,000 people had viewed his book. "My purpose in uploading my work was to find prospective employers. I wrote it in English because I wanted my foreign teacher to be able to read it. I didn't think about monetizing it or securing rights to it."

The images obviously resonate with viewers. "I think people yearn for traditional culture. People also like to compare things. 80 to 90 percent of the comments have been positive. People have given me lots of compliments and also some suggestions to fix the spelling and grammar. People also comment on their own observations. I think people who live in Saigon but go to Hanoi for business really get my work."

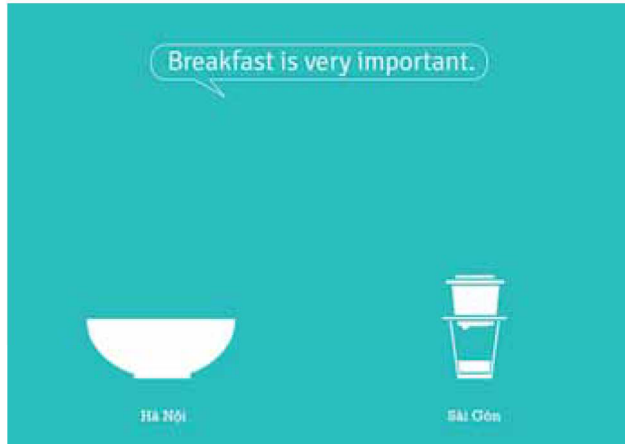
Nhat is currently interning as a graphic artist but has plans to make more books, with topics ranging from teenage slang to more on the differences between north and south. T-shirts are also in the works as is getting the book published.

On future projects, he says: "I want to make something to help first-time visitors better understand Vietnamese culture. I feel Vietnamese culture is like a gold mine that hasn't been fully excavated. If foreigners can come to Vietnam and write books for other foreigners about Vietnamese culture, why can't we?"

When asked which city he prefers, Nhat answers coyly, "Every place has its own characteristics. You can live anywhere as long as you're happy."

Scan to see more of Minh Nhat's work. ■





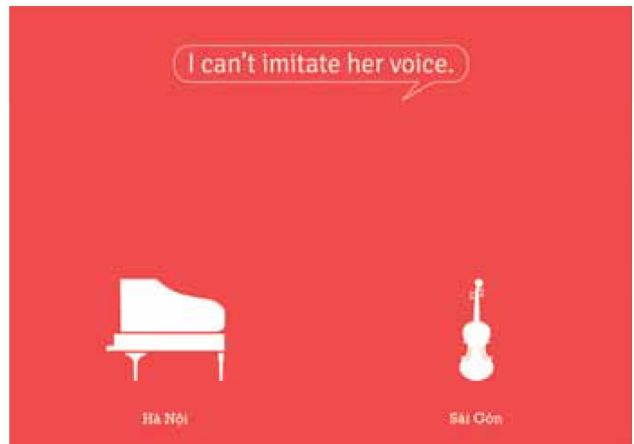
"Life is so rushed here in HCMC. Sometimes people only have time for a coffee and then head off to work."



"In Hanoi, the custom is to wish someone a good meal before eating. In Saigon, you just dig in."



"People in the north are more flowery in their speech, while Saigonese are straight talking."



"This image illustrates the difference in the northern accent and the southern one. People in the south tend to speak with a higher pitch."



"In the north, we go home early to be with our families, but here, people like to stay out to the early morning hours."