

An Unconventional **Call for Papers**

Stan BH Tan-Tangbau, May 2026

Global Vietnam book series

Tentative Book Title

Vietnam Studies for the New Era: Binds, Interludes, and Sabbaticals

This proposed edited collection of writings aims to lay out some of the *bindings* that shape the way knowledge about Vietnam has been produced in the field of Vietnam Studies since the mid-1990s (when Vietnam Studies gradually regained momentum in the postwar years) and as personally experienced by different generations of Vietnam Studies scholars. In addition, it experiments with two unconventional conceptual tools, *interludes* and *sabbaticals*, that just might reinvent the field in unexpected ways for the New Era.

Bindings

1. For the sake of provoking self-reflexive reactions from potential contributors, I suggest that the field of Vietnam Studies has indeed been trapped in certain ways that are very much underlined by its colonial and Cold War origins, and further entrenched in the era of higher education internationalization by way of a generally uncritical embracing of EMI and obsession with “institutional ranking.” An analysis of the bindings personally experienced by different generations of practitioners, of both Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese origins, as well as Vietnam and non-Vietnam based researchers can ethnographically lay out the paradigmatic trappings that give shape to Vietnam Studies as we know it.

2. Let me illustrate a few matter-of-fact ways in which these bindings have surfaced:
 - a. “Oh, this is a book about Vietnam, but I am not interested in reading about Vietnam” “Oh... this book only focuses on Vietnam...” To study about Vietnam, one inevitably develops the necessary fieldwork skills and acquires, ideally, a high level of competency in the Vietnamese language and/or other related languages (e.g. local ethnic minority languages, or Chinese, Russian, and French) to enable us to engage with Vietnam in an in-depth manner. To this end, Vietnam Studies scholars often end up writing for people only interested in Vietnam. As our work gets more focused, more in-depth, so narrower the readership gets. Yet, does Vietnam Studies bear no relevance to other countries, regions of the world? Does a study of Vietnam carry no resonance with issues or phenomena elsewhere in the world? Does a study of Vietnam not germinate any theory or concepts applicable to other areas of the world? Are there no connections, direct or indirect, with what is happening or has already happened elsewhere with the issues we examine in Vietnam Studies? That what is happening in Vietnam is part of a larger world, part of a longer global history, part of a wider network of circulation?
 - b. “Oh, this book/work was published/written two decades ago! There is limited relevance to Vietnam's context today!” “It is a very different world, different Vietnam, today!” There is no doubt that contemporary Vietnam has undergone significant periodic changes, Revolution and War, Subsidy Period, Republican South, Doi Moi Period, Post-Doi Moi Period, and New Era. Likewise, we can identify Vietnam Studies works belonging to different periods in terms of the time period research was carried out and published, research topics that reflected the trends, concerns, and prevailing methodology of that time period, the particular generation of scholars who carried out the work, and even the kind of arguments that could be made and evidence presented (if the work was eventually published!). Fieldwork and research conditions in Vietnam have indeed changed drastically since Vietnam opened with the Doi Moi reforms, which drastically affected access in

- all aspects of research, research questions that could be posed, and the ways arguments could be crafted and evidence presented. As a result, present day readers may not see the relevance of many of these pioneering works that once upon a time shaped our understanding of Vietnam.
- c. “Oh, this book is written in Vietnamese and published in the country, will it be sufficiently critical of the state (and party)?” “The arguments raised in this book may not be well received in the country.” “We should expect the author to address the existing canon literature.” “Where is the policy recommendation?” We are all caught in the binds of paradigms, be it defined by the state, shaped by ethnocentrism, or academic theoretical/methodological trends of our times. There is no denying that these bindings affect what we could do, what we could write, or even what we should do or write! Conference papers in the country must be submitted to the organizers ahead of time for vetting so that permits for the conference could be approved. Conference convenors have to bear responsibility for any “surprise” digression from the “script.” And we must have heard such a comment at least once, “He/She would not make this point if the presentation was made in the country!”
 - d. Publishing in Vietnamese in the country means agreeing to editorial discretion of the editor/publisher to advance through the hoops of approvals and objections. Publishing in English (or in other languages) on “international” platforms usually means having to be “critical” of the state and ethnic majority lest one be accused of being an “uncritical academic” or worse, an apologist! And of course, one needs to pay tribute to the theoretical approaches or conceptual frameworks trending in the Western academic literature, and dare one try to be different! Let's face a brutal fact, few Vietnam Studies works dare to go against the grain by doing something drastically different and yet still end up being published!
3. *Bindings*, in any shape and form, pre-determine the “what, how, why, where, when, and who” when we produce knowledge about Vietnam (and in general). In this

regard, we cannot deny that our day-to-day working environment in many ways shapes the way we pursue our research work, too. From the obsession with “institutional ranking” (winning grants, pursuing “strategic” research topics, publishing in ranked journals and “prestigious” publishers), academic performance “review,” changes in teaching practices and objectives, clash between state policies and academic endeavours, and the dilemma of being in the field and being at home or in the office, these are the powerful everyday bindings that pervade the work of being a devoted Vietnam Studies researcher. It is pertinent that we do more than being aware of bindings.

4. As mentioned above, there are two objectives in this proposed collection of papers. First, I ask potential contributors to write about the *bindings* that they have personally experienced in Vietnam Studies. This set of papers should focus on the theme of bindings.
5. Second, to free us from such paradigmatic trappings, I call on Vietnam Studies scholars to experiment by writing *interludes* and/or recounting their *sabbaticals*, two seemingly conventional research tools, which in some ways have been “hiding in plain sight,” that may help us to Engage with Vietnam in ways taken for granted or less undertaken. Each paper should focus on either *interludes* or *sabbaticals*.

Interludes

6. *Interlude*, simply put, refers to a deliberate break between sections or chapters (or works) that may or may not amount to a chapter in itself, which takes the reader to a different place, talks about something that is distinctly different, adopts a contrasting voice, or injects a jarring perspective that somehow enhances the narrative, prepares the reader for the forthcoming turn, or puts in perspective or context what is to follow.

7. I find interlude a formidable and useful world-building tool. Given the focused deep dive of most Vietnam Studies works, strategic placement of an interlude can be a timely reminder of a larger world, context at play that at the same time gives us the excuse of not having to give a very detailed holistic account of that larger world, since it is only an interlude. World-building can also draw out pathways of interconnectivity by way of following the phenomenon at play or highlighting possible “strange parallels” (to borrow a term used by Victor Lieberman), extending the geography of our understanding. Interlude is also a world-building tool that can cut across time. By way of flashbacks or flash-forwards, we can trace precedents backward or forward, or track changes diachronically. However, I am not talking about world-building as an end in itself. Instead, I am advocating the use of interlude as being a part of the process of explicitly acknowledging the existence and relevance of a larger world and of history.

8. There are of course many other uses for interlude. Interlude can help to elucidate some form of hesitation or counter-arguments, which I suppose is a modest reminder of our awareness of other possibilities and existing conflicts in the phenomenon we study. Interlude can be a thought-provoking autoethnographic tool, bringing out our inherent personal bias, shared experience, or simply the emotional face of a researcher. Interlude can also be a useful pedagogical tool, cutting away into a “teaching moment.” Interlude also allows us to try something audacious as we construct a narrative or argument, if only to add contrasting layers to a supposedly laser-focused argument. Interlude, simply put, is a placeholder for creativity and innovation.

9. More significantly, interlude as a research device points a way towards a “Global-Vietnam” kind of Vietnam Studies. It holds promise as a small step to freeing us from the limits of country studies/area studies, which we must admit, have been very much shaped by colonialism, Cold War, and the dominance of Western academic frameworks that in the era of higher education internationalization by way of embracing EMI, solidified into a Western-centric and colonizing paradigm.

10. Interlude often requires Vietnam Studies scholars to take a break from routine Vietnam Studies research, or as I prefer to put it, take a “sabbatical” from the grind of Vietnam Studies, so to speak. For some, this means putting oneself outside the usual comfort zone. In this regard, Henry David Thoreau's self-imposed sabbatical such as recounted in *Walden* comes to mind, if one were to take it to the far end. For others, it simply means taking deep dives in things beyond Vietnam. The latter is, however, easier said than done. Then for Vietnam Studies scholars who do lead interesting lives beyond doing research in Vietnam, a grounded reflexive intersection between work and life may germinate innovation, creativity or even just a refreshing take on one's old work. In this regard, Phan Le Ha's heart-to-heart interaction with her father, as daughter/academic during her “sabbatical,” which resulted in Phan & Phan (2025), is a useful example. In many ways, interlude as a research device and sabbatical as a research practice go hand in hand together.

Sabbaticals

11. At its simplest, *sabbatical* is a rest for body, mind, and land from the routine grind after a certain period of toil. Rest, so that we can come back rejuvenated, the land itself as well, and ourselves hopefully in better mind and body, and stronger. And in the period of rest, we might adopt or realize new ways of seeing things. We might see and experience different things by way of travel. We might pick up new skills and vocations. We might just experience the same place differently. Or we might just see life differently. Indeed, the fields of Management and Business Studies have proven the utility, effectiveness, and necessity of sabbatical as a time-tested work ethic. I should perhaps clarify the conventional university “sabbatical” with targeted research output is not what I have in mind here simply because one is not taking a break from the research grind. In this regard, I do question how after a mere 2–3-year study with a very short fieldwork period in a graduate program nowadays allows one to claim expertise in a particular subject matter under Vietnam Studies, not unless this person already spent years deep in the issue prior!

12. Anyhow, my concern here is: Do existing Vietnam Studies works reflect some kind of unbridled embrace of sabbatical as a research practice? Here I find two examples useful to address this question.

13. Following his two-year long Walden sabbatical, Henry David Thoreau's works took a naturalistic turn, a departure from his earlier philosophical discussions, including his famous "Civil Disobedience." In Thoreau's self-imposed sabbatical, he took to the woods to live a self-reliant life with only the basic things he needed, so as to escape "over civilization." In the process, he began to pay more attention to the environment he lived in and the intersection between man and nature. As a result, his thoughts and writings took a distinct turn from his earlier philosophical occupation. Much has been written and debated about Thoreau's Walden sabbatical; I shall not spend much time discussing it here in this Call for Papers.

14. Another example that comes to mind, less talked about in English works and outside of Dai Studies (which even then, not much!), is the story of the pioneering Dai Studies scholar, Jiang Ying Liang, and his time in Yunnan. During the years he spent in southwest China, Jiang Ying Liang served for 6 months as county chief of Che Li (Jing Hong), capital of Xishuang Banna (Sipsong Panna), effectively taking a drastic break from his work as an anthropologist. These were drastically different roles with different responsibilities, different consequences, different limitations, and different impacts, but each role required his full devotion. Earlier, he spent several months between Sep 1937 and Apr 1938 carrying out fieldwork among the Dai in the Teng Long region under the sponsorship of the local Tusi. In late 1938 he returned with a large team of researchers to carry out a comprehensive study of the Dianxi region for about 1 month. The expansion of the Sino-Japanese War interrupted Jiang's plan to carry out field research among the Dai in Xishuang Banna. Instead, he took up a teaching position in Baoshan in 1941, where he lived with his family until 1942. Jiang took up a policy-making role in the government when he joined the border administrative committee in 1943, although he was still determined to go to

Xishuang Banna to study the Dai people there. Eventually, he was offered the role of county chief, which afforded him the opportunity to live in the region, albeit with distinctly different responsibilities. There is little doubt that Jiang was an anthropologist at heart and in soul. His diary entries tell of his thoughts about studying the Dai people all the time, even during his several hiatuses as a researcher when he took up roles as a teacher, policy committee member, and county chief. His day-to-day attention was fully occupied by his day job. If his earlier fieldwork in the capacity of an anthropologist allowed him to study Dai culture from the ground, bottom-up, we could surmise that in his role as county chief, he was able to gain a first-hand top-down view of the Dai people and the context they lived in alongside his everyday interaction with them from a contrasting capacity. The biographical sketch authored by his son tells of his full devotion to the administrator job and suggests that his “sabbatical” in Che Li in fact gave him the confidence to entitle his later monographs about the Dai in Yunnan without using the geographic prefix, Dianxi. This unintentional “sabbatical” gave Jiang the scholar extraordinary opportunities to experience and see things that otherwise his passion for anthropology might not have afforded him.

15. The examples of Jiang Yingliang and Henry David Thoreau are of course at the rather extreme end of what I mean by taking a break from the routine or the grind of Vietnam Studies as we practice today. My point is simple, I ask you to think of an experience you have had away from routine Vietnam Studies that helped you to touch base with a different aspect of life, a different world, that eventually reshaped your work in or thoughts about Vietnam Studies, if you have been fortunate enough to be able to return to it. I do believe that it is only when we take a sabbatical from the routine grind of Vietnam are we able to formulate an “interlude” for a Global-Vietnam Vietnam Studies.
16. For many, the “sabbatical” led to something else. You might have left Vietnam Studies, but the Vietnam in you might not have left. I would like to hear from you, too.

Some suggested ways to think about how you may want to write your contribution:

Binds:

1. A critical and reflexive treatment of the approaches/methodologies/theoretical frameworks you personally experienced in your engagement with Vietnam Studies over the years
2. A critical and reflexive treatment of practicalities/structure/ethos you personally experienced in the study of Vietnam over the years
3. A critical and reflexive treatment of the teaching of / use of / perception of Vietnam Studies you personally experienced over the years
4. An autoethnographic account of your personal academic environment that shapes the way you practice Vietnam Studies.

Interludes:

1. A comparative cross-regional, inter-regional, or even “global” deepdive of a particular issue you have written about Vietnam, that could be included in a book (or dissertation) authored by yourself but did not for various reasons, that would give it a “global-Vietnam” texture or would allow the work to be read differently. In other words, an extended interlude that may seem out-of-place in the book/dissertation/paper.
2. A reflexive autoethnographic treatment of a particular issue you have written about Vietnam, that could help to reimagine the work you have written previously (book, dissertation, or paper). In other words, an extended interlude that may seem out-of-place in the book/dissertation/paper.

3. A chapter-length revisit to an issue you have written in the past (as a book, dissertation, or paper) that could give it renewed temporal/historical relevance (since not every book gets the opportunity of being published as a “revised” edition!). In other words, an extended interlude that may seem out-of-place in the original book/dissertation/paper.

Sabbaticals:

1. A particular “sabbatical” (you define it for yourself) undertaken that takes you away from the grind of researching/writing about Vietnam to doing something distinctively different (you define it for yourself) that helps to reshape/rethink/reinforce your understanding of Vietnam.

2. A particular “sabbatical” (you define it for yourself) undertaken that takes you away from the grind of teaching (if that is a key aspect of your work) about Vietnam to doing something distinctively different that helps to reshape/rethink/reinforce your own position.

3. Reflections on a particular “sabbatical” (you define it for yourself) undertaken that takes you away from studying about Vietnam to a change in what you do entirely, including leaving full-time academic employment. Let me put it this way, you might have put Vietnam behind, but Vietnam has not left you!

Please send a short description (200-400 words) of what you plan to write in response to the seemingly self-explanatory book title using one of the above suggestions. The list is not exhaustive, so please write to me with any idea you may have in response to the musings above.

The central goal of this Call for Papers is to bring together, hopefully, a multi-volume anthology of interludes, sabbaticals, and bindings that could contribute to freeing Vietnam Studies from its existing paradigmatic trappings (As you see it! It may be in

terms of theory, methodology, practise, structure, ethos ...) and help to craft an ethos of knowledge production progressively being unveiled, debated, and exchanged in the Engaging With Vietnam initiative (<https://engagingwithvietnam.org/about/>).

Submission of Proposed Paper Idea

End of July 2026

Please email (no attachment):

1. Subject Heading: Tentative title of Paper
2. Brief description (200-400 words) of proposed paper (you don't have to write the usual abstract for this)
3. Brief description (200 words) of yourself (even though I may already know you!)
4. Best way to contact you for follow-up discussion (email, WhatsApp, Zalo, Line, WeChat...)

Send to: stanbhtan@me.com

Address to: Stan BH Tan-Tangbau

September 2026

Confirmation of selected proposed papers

March 2027

Submission of completed full papers (in English, properly formatted, and nicely polished) (5000-8000 words)

May 2027

Target submission of manuscript to Global Vietnam book series published by Springer

Notes:

1. I may invite a few more people to join me as co-editors depending on the number of volumes we are putting together.
2. You may submit in Vietnamese or Chinese or Cantonese, if English is not your primary working language. But the final paper submission must be in English (Please do not use AI).
3. You may submit in Japanese or French or Korean, (or Thai) if English is not your primary working language, but in this case, please submit a rough English version as well. Note that any correspondence with me is only possible in English, Vietnamese, Chinese, or Cantonese. But final paper submission must be in English (Please do not use AI).
4. The book will be published in English. We will strive to also publish a Vietnamese edition later (regardless, full paper submission must be in English).
5. Please do not use AI to write your submission.
6. If AI is used to translate the submission, please submit the translation together with the original.