

ANTH 354: Political Economy in Vietnam (Writing Attentive)

Fall 2026

Tuesdays 1:10-3:30pm in Dalton 002

Department of Anthropology

Bryn Mawr College

Professor Melissa Pashigian

Office: Dalton 308

Office Hours: Mondays 1-2pm in person; Wednesdays on Zoom by appointment; Fridays in person and on Zoom by appointment. Email mpashigi@brynmawr.edu to set up an appointment.

Course Description

Today, Vietnam continues to experience ongoing dramatic social, economic and political changes brought about through a shift from a central economy to a market/capitalist economy since the late 1980s. Since then, the country has moved rapidly from a low-income country to a middle-income country. These changes have resulted in urbanization, a rise in consumption, changes in land use, movement of people, environmental consequences of economic development, and shifts in social and economic relationships and cultural practices. This course examines culture and society in Vietnam focusing largely on contemporary Vietnam, but with a view to continuities and historical precedent in past centuries. In this course, we will draw on anthropological studies of Vietnam, as well as literature and historical studies. Relationships between the individual, family, gender, ethnicity, community, land, and state will pervade the topics addressed in the course, as will the importance of political economy, nation, and globalization. In addition to class seminar discussions, students will view documentary and fictional films about Vietnamese culture.

Because there are more topics than can be covered in the space of a single-semester, students will have the opportunity to explore a topic of their choice related to the course in research assignments.

Required Texts (available at the Bryn Mawr College Bookshop):

- Nguyen Du. 1983. *The Tale of Kieu*. Bilingual Edition translated by Huyen Sanh Thong. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Schwenkel, Christina. 2025. *Sonic Socialism: Crisis and Care in Pandemic Hanoi*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Additional required articles and films are available on Moodle.

Class Meetings and Reading Assignments

T 9/1 Introduction to the Course: Anthropology of Vietnam

-In class film: *My Hanoi*

Optional:

- Avieli, Nir. 2005. Vietnamese New Year Rice Cakes: Iconic Festive Dishes and Contested National Identity. *Ethnology* 44(2):167–187.

T 9/8 Traditional Culture, Family, Village

Visitor: Kate Blinn, Social Science Reference Librarian Canaday

Readings:

- Odell, Andrew and Marlene Castillo. 2008. Vietnam in a Nutshell: An Historical, Political and Commercial Overview. NYSBA International Law Practicum 21(2): 82-91. **READ ONLY pp. 82-top of 85** for brief history of VN.
 - See also links to historical summaries in Moodle (peruse these).
- Nguyen Du. Tale of Kieu, Preface, Historical Background and pp. 1-79
 - [Use the Yale University Press edition only. Please take notes of recurring themes for use in class discussion]
- Jamieson, "The Traditional Village in Vietnam" in The Vietnam Forum 7 (1986), 89-126.
- Pham Van Bich. 1999. "Chapter 1 The Traditional Family." In The Vietnamese Family in Change. Surrey: Curzon.

Homework:

- Look online at issues facing Vietnamese society today and search in Tripod databases that you might be interested in pursuing in a research paper. Look through scholarly journal articles, and media sources for ideas and start building a short bibliography of resources that interest you. [You do not need to turn this in]

Optional:

- Orfeuvre, R., Ph. Brouillac, and C. Mounier. 2016. Chapter 2 "Ha Noi: The Villages, the Heart of Social and Patrimonial Life." In Ha Noi: a Metropolis in the Making, Sylvie Fanchette (ed.). Marseille: IRD Editions. [In Moodle]

T 9/15 Contemporary Issues in Vietnam

-Film in class: The Vanishing Village (24 minutes)

- Nguyen, Anh Tuan, Jamie Gillen, Jonathan Rigg. 2021. Retaining the Old Countryside, Embracing the New Countryside: Vietnam's New Rural Development Program. Journal of Vietnamese Studies, 16 (3): 77-110.
- Turner, Sarah. 2024. Ecologies of Coffee Sustainability in the Central Highlands. In Heise, Ursula K., and Chi P. Pham, editors. Environment and Narrative in Vietnam. Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Derks, Annuska, and Cao Thảo Hương. 2025. Heritage as a Space of Possibility: Transformation, Commodification, and Belonging at Đông Công Temple in Yên Bái, Vietnam. Journal of Vietnamese Studies 20 (3-4): 71-97.

Optional:

- A chapter about the village featured in today's film: Kleinen, John Chapter 3. Constructing civil society? A tale of two villages. In Vietnam: One-Party State and the Mimicry of Civil Society. IRASEC. <https://books.openedition.org/irasec/1035>
- Thu, Le Hoang Anh. 2020. Doing Bodhisattva's Work: Charity, Class, and Selfhood of Petty Traders in Hồ Chí Minh City. Journal of Vietnamese Studies 15(4): 4-32.
- McElwee, Pamela. 2017. Vietnam's Urgent Task: Adapting to Climate Change. Current History.
- Lincoln, Martha. 2023. Biopower in Transition: The Politics of Poverty in Vietnam. Journal of Vietnamese Studies 18(1-2): 104-142.
- Turner, Sarah. 2013. Under the State's Gaze: Upland Trading-Scapes on the Sino-Vietnamese Border. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography 34(2013):9-24.

- Dao, Amy. 2020. What it means to say “I Don’t have any money to buy health insurance” in rural Vietnam: How anticipatory activities shape health insurance enrollment. *Social Science and Medicine* 266: 113335.

T 9/22 China, Confucianism, France, Colonialism

- Nguyen Du. *Tale of Kieu*, pp. 80-167 [keep making notes on recurring themes for class discussion]
- Taylor, Keith. *The Lac Lords in The Birth of Vietnam*, pp. 1-44 [**READ pp. 1-13 ONLY**]
- Duiker, William. 1995. Chapter 2 Precolonial Vietnam. In *Vietnam: Revolution in Transition*, pp. 1-29
- Duiker, William. 1995. Chapter 3 The Colonial Experience. In *Vietnam: Revolution in Transition*, pp. 30-56.

Optional:

- Jamieson, Neil. 1993. “How the Vietnamese See the World.” In *Understanding Vietnam*, pp 1-41
- Hue Tam Ho Tai. 1992. Chapter 1 Our Father’s House and Chapter 3 Daughters of Annam. In *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wed 9/23 2pp Topic proposal due @5:00pm in Moodle

T 9/29 Gender, Marriage and Reproduction

Film Clip in class: Marriage Prayer

- Ngo Thi Ngan Binh. 2004. The Confucian Four Feminine Virtues (tu duc): The Old Versus the New – Ke thua Versus phat huy* In Drummond and Rydstrom (eds.) *Gender Practices in Contemporary Vietnam*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Belanger, Daniele and Khuat Thu Hong. 2002. Too Late To Marry: Failure, Fate or Fortune? Female Singlehood in Rural North Viet Nam. In *Gender, Household, State: Doi Moi in Viet Nam*. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications.
- Phinney, Harriet. 2005. Discursive Transformations: Maternal Desire among Older Single Women in Northern Viet Nam. In *Le Viet Nam Au Feminin, Viet Nam: Women’s Realities*, edited by Gisele Bousquet and Nora Taylor. Paris: Les Indes Savantes.

T 10/6 Discussion on Sentiment and Emotion and Writing Workshop

- Pashigian, Melissa J. 2009. Womb-Centrism and Other Vicissitudes in Vietnamese Kin-relatedness. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*.
- Tran, Allen L. 2015. Rich Sentiments and the Cultural Politics of Emotion in Postreform Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. *American anthropologist* 117(3): 480–492.
- Shohet, Merav. 2017. Troubling Love: Gender, Class, and Sideshadowing the ‘Happy Family’ in Vietnam. *Ethos* 45(4): 555–576.

W 10/7 Reading Response paper due by 5:00pm in Moodle

T 10/13 Fall Break - No Class

T 10/20 Consumption Practices Under Doi Moi

- Vann, Elizabeth. 2006. "The Limits of Authenticity in Vietnamese Consumer Markets." *American Anthropologist* 108(2):286-296.
- Truitt, Allison. 2008. "On the Back of a Motorbike: Middle-class Mobility in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam." *American Ethnologist* 35(1).
- Hansen, Arve. 2017. Hanoi on Wheels: emerging automobility in the land of the motorbike. *Mobilities*, 12(5): 628-645.
- Film in class: Vietnamese Bike Dreams

T 10/27 Modernity and new Urbanism

In class Films: Remaining; and Public Living

- Taylor, Philip. 2001. Critical Views of Modernity from Vietnam. *Anthropology News*, December, pp. 8-9.
- Harms, Erik. 2012. Beauty as Control in the New Saigon: Eviction, New Urban Zones, and Atomized Dissent in a Southeast Asian City. *American Ethnologist* 39(4): 735-750.
- Schwenkel, Christina. 2012. Civilizing the City: Socialist Ruins and Urban Renewal in Central Vietnam. *Positions* 20(2): 437-471.

W 10/28 5-page Research paper due by 11:59pm

T 11/3 Film discussion [Election Day]

- Watch film outside of class – we will discuss today in class.
- Read first half of book: Schwenkel, Christina. 2025. *Sonic Socialism: Crisis and Care in Pandemic Hanoi*. Oakland: University of California Press. We will discuss in class today.

T 11/10 Professor Christina Schwenkel, University of California Riverside visit to class

- Complete book before today's class: Schwenkel, Christina. 2025. *Sonic Socialism: Crisis and Care in Pandemic Hanoi*. Oakland: University of California Press. We will discuss it in class today with Professor Schwenkel.

T 11/17 Trading

- Leshkowich, Ann Marie. 2011. Making Class and Gender: (Market) Socialist Enframing of Traders in Ho Chi Minh City. *American Anthropologist* 113(2):277-290.
- Endres, Kirsten W. "Downgraded by Upgrading: Small-Scale Traders, Urban Transformation and Spatial Reconfiguration in Post-Reform Vietnam." *Cambridge Anthropology*, 32(2): 97–111.
- Nguyen, Minh T.N. 2016. Trading in broken things: Gendered performances and spatial practices in a northern Vietnamese rural-urban waste economy. *American Ethnologist*, 43: 116-129.
- **7pp draft of final paper due – bring hard copy to class to exchange with a peer.**

T 11/24 Readings and Peer review

- Peer review on a draft paper due to your assigned peer; you will be discussing your review with your peer in class today.

Readings: Highlands, Ethnicity, State, Environment

- Salamink, Oscar. A View from the Mountains: A Critical History of Lowlander-Highlander Relations in Vietnam. In *Upland Transformations in Vietnam*. Sikor, Thomas, et al. (eds). Singapore: NUS Press.
- Nguyen Thu Huong. 2016. 'The Red Seedlings of the Central Highlands': Social Relatedness and Political Integration of Select Ethnic Minority Groups in Post-War Vietnam. In *Connected and Disconnected in Vietnam: Remaking Relations in a Post-Socialist Nation*. Phillip Taylor (ed.). Canberra: ANU Press.
- Duong Bich Hanh. 2008. Contesting Marginality: Consumption, Networks and Everyday Practice among Hmong Girls in Sa Pa, Northwestern Vietnam. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3(3): 231-260.

--Thanksgiving Break--

T 12/1 Ritual and Religion

- Tu Anh T. Vu. 2006. "Worshipping the Mother Goddess: The Dao Mau Movement of Northern Vietnam. *Explorations in Southeast Asian Studies* 6(1): 27-44.
- Malarney, Shawn. 1996. "The Limits of 'State Functionalism' and the Reconstruction of Funerary Ritual in Contemporary Northern Vietnam," *American Ethnologist* 23(3):540-560.
- Kwon, Heonik. 2007. The Dollarization of Vietnamese Ghost Money. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(1): 73-90.

T 12/8 Readings TBD based on class interests

Individual meetings with me about your final paper draft will occur between 11/18-12/9. Final research papers are due **Thursday December 8 @5:00pm**.

Course Requirements

- **Attendance, participation, class preparation, and discussion:** You are expected to have read and digested the reading assignments prior to coming to class. As a participant in this class you, like I, are responsible for contributing to ideas and knowledge produced in the class. This necessitates participating in class discussion, responding to comments by other participants, as well as ideas presented in the course materials (books, articles, videos, etc.). Doing so makes for a more dynamic class and enables us all to benefit from a wider variety of opinions and interpretations of the material we will be discussing. Because discussion participation is so integral to the course you will receive a grade for class participation. The course is designed to be a seminar to foster discussion. While I will lecture part of the time during some sessions, the class sessions will

be heavily discussion-based, covering issues pertaining to culture and society in Vietnam and integrate issues raised in the reading assignments for that day.

- **In Class Presentation:** With a partner, together you will give a **brief** 5-10 minute ppt presentation of the themes, issues or problems that run through all of the readings assigned for that week. ***This should not be a summary of the readings, rather a synthesis.*** What ideas/themes connect the readings together? Include in your presentation at least three discussion questions. Your presentation will provide a segue into class discussion for the day.
- **Reading response paper:** I will provide you with questions to respond to in a 3-page paper based on readings in the first half of the semester. Assignment will be distributed in class.
- **2-page research paper proposal** (topic will be the basis of the 5pp research paper later in the semester): conduct library research about a topic related to contemporary Vietnamese culture that interests you (you can look to some of the weekly heading for ideas or find your own. Write up your topic and what you discovered. Assignment sheet will be distributed in class.
- **5-page research paper:** chose a topic related to Vietnam and Vietnamese culture and research it. The paper should be based on scholarly sources, especially anthropological sources with a bibliography of at least 8-10 scholarly sources. In advance, students will submit a 2pp paper proposal with a bibliography (see above for that assignment).
- **10 page final research paper (and draft and peer review):** this paper will be based on your 5pp paper unless you decide to change topic. You will expand your ideas and first create a required 7pp draft which will be peer reviewed by another student. You will also meet with me about your draft during an appointment. Then, you will revise and expand to a 10pp final paper reflecting comments you have received.
- **Writing:** This is a writing attentive course. In addition to discussing content, we will be discussing and practicing the writing process and spend some time in class in peer review. You will also meet with me about a draft paper once during the semester.

Grading and due dates

Assignment	Due date	Percent of total grade
Attendance/Class Participation	Ongoing	15%
In Class Presentation on readings/discussion questions	Various dates (you will sign up for one in class	10%
2pp proposal for research paper	9/23 @5:00pm	10%
Reading Response Paper	10/7 @5:00pm	10%
5pp research paper	Wed 10/28 @11:59pm	20%
Draft paper for peer review; & 10pp final research paper*	Draft due Tu 11/17 before class; Final paper due Thurs 12/8 @5:00pm	35%

*Note failure to hand in a draft of the final research paper for peer review by the deadline will result in the grade for your final paper being reduced by 3 grade steps; e.g a 4.0 paper will be reduced to a 3.0 paper, etc.

**Note: To pass the course you must successfully complete all assignments and participate in class.

Any requests for major extensions should be made in consultation with your Dean. The syllabus and assignments are subject to change based on the needs of the class as it progresses. If you are not feeling well, please do not come to class and send an email letting me know. If you become ill and expect to be out for a lengthy period of time, please reach out to your Dean.

Class Policies

Format for written assignments: All written assignments must be typed, double-spaced, 12 point font, with at least 1" margins, and page numbers. Ideas that are not yours and other sources including websites used to write the papers should be fully cited. Assignments will be submitted via Moodle. Keep a backup copy of each paper you hand in. Papers will not be accepted by email.

Learning Needs and Access: Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first speak with Access Services. Students can email accessservices@brynmawr.edu to request an appointment to begin this confidential process. If eligible for accommodations as per Access Services, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share their verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>)

Any student who has a disability-related need to record this class must first be found eligible to do so by Access Services and must share this eligibility with me, the instructor. Class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded. Requester will not be identified.

Illnesses and religious holidays: If you become ill and have to miss class, or if you are observing a religious holiday and will miss class, please get notes from a class member. If possible, please send me an email to let me know you will not be in class. If you expect to be absent for an extended period of time, please also communicate with your Dean.

Social Media: Student participation is a critical component of Anthropology classes. The Department of Anthropology envisions our classrooms as spaces where both students and faculty can exchange ideas and voice opinions on a range of topics without fear of being disparaged or ridiculed in public or online. Thus, we ask you to refrain from posting on social media things you hear or observe in our classes that are explicitly attributed or

could be tracked back to a fellow student or faculty member. If you have an issue with someone else's behavior or contribution in class which cannot be addressed in an open and respectful way, please let me know in private so that we can work together to maintain a productive learning environment.

Academic Honesty: Students are expected to have read, understood and abide by the Bryn Mawr College Policy on Academic Honesty <http://sga.blogs.brynmawr.edu/honor-board/honor-code/>. If you have any questions about the policy please see your instructor. **Note on Plagiarism:** Be sure to give credit where credit is due. All material drawn from outside sources should be quoted and/or cited appropriately. All papers written must be original to this course.

AI: Use of any generative AI or other text-generating software (such as, but not limited to ChatGPT, Claude, iA Writer, Marmot or Botowski) is not permitted in this class, and use of this software on graded assignments will be treated as plagiarism. A primary learning goal in this course is to develop your skills in conveying complicated ideas in simple ways. Conveying ideas simply requires a strong understanding and distillation of concepts as well as clear and effective writing. These skills take time to develop and require repeated practice to finetune. Emerging AI tools such as ChatGPT may assist someone who has not fully developed these skills but using them before giving yourself a chance to develop your skill takes away opportunities for learning and growth.

Title IX: Bryn Mawr College and Haverford College are committed to ensuring that all members of the College community have a learning and working environment that is free from sexual misconduct. All forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking, are violations of Bryn Mawr/Haverford's policies, whether they occur on or off campus. Bryn Mawr/Haverford faculty are committed to helping to create a safe learning environment for all students and for the College community as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sexual misconduct or other gender-based misconduct, know that help and support are available. Staff members are trained to support students in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more.

The College strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of sexual misconduct. Please be aware that all Bryn Mawr/Haverford employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors, clergy, and healthcare providers) are required to report information about sexual misconduct to the to their respective Title IX Offices.

Information about each College's Sexual Misconduct Policy, reporting options, and a list of campus and local resources can be found on the following websites:

Bryn Mawr College Sexual Misconduct Policy and Resources:
<https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/policies-guidelines-handbooks/sexual-misconduct>
Haverford College Sexual Misconduct Policy and Resources:
<https://www.haverford.edu/title-ix/sexual-misconduct-policy>

To make a report of Sexual Misconduct:

Bryn Mawr College:

Contact: Cary Carr, Title IX Coordinator, ccarr1@brynmawr.edu, 610.526.7863

Reporting form:

https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?BrynMawrCollege=&layout_id=200

Haverford College:

Contact: Raquel Esteves-Joyce, Interim Title IX Coordinator, rjoyce@haverford.edu,
610.795.6121

Reporting form:

https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?HaverfordCollege&layout_id=9