

## 2015–2025: Ten Years of *Book Street Ho Chi Minh City*

I first came to know Ho Chi Minh City in 1990, when I set foot on Vietnamese soil for the very first time. Together with my Vietnamese mother, *Me Loan*, I had the privilege of rediscovering the land of my origins, step by step. Over the years, I witnessed the transformation of a country still marked by the shadows of war.

Despite the poverty and the deep wounds of its past, the people had preserved something precious — a flame that had never ceased to burn: the Vietnamese soul. With each journey, I saw it flicker before my eyes — in paintings filled with grace, in the melody of a child playing a simple bamboo flute, or in the smile of a passerby whose expression told a silent story of longing and love. I found that same flame resting on a living room shelf, in the form of a book cherished like a pearl by its reader.

The multifaceted Vietnamese soul revealed itself to me through art. At that time, *Book Street Ho Chi Minh City* did not yet exist. Its birth in 2015 was therefore all the more meaningful.

The concept of *Book Street* is, to me as author of several books, both unique and profoundly valuable. It is much more than a place where culture enthusiasts and families can explore the latest literary releases along its 120-meter stretch. The bookstores, publishers' stands, and small cafés with their inviting reading corners radiate a rare warmth and hospitality.

Beyond readings where audiences can engage directly with authors, *Book Street* offers a vibrant calendar of workshops, exhibitions, competitions, reading programs for children and youth, and countless participatory activities.

The *Book Bus – A Journey of Knowledge and Future* further nourishes the curiosity of young minds and makes knowledge freely accessible to all who hunger for it.

Here, art and creativity can flourish freely in all their forms. Vietnamese culture — the true essence of a nation — is made accessible to everyone, regardless of nationality or age, through this pragmatic living example.

I have had the honor of presenting some of my books for both adults and children (“Phoenix Daughter — Hope was My Path” and “Hip Hop in the Land of Ellsaby”). To share my stories in such a setting was an unforgettable experience. Not only because *Book Street* has become an essential cultural landmark offering all the diversity I described above, but also because it serves what books have always done best: connecting people.

A book creates a bond between author and reader, as the written story opens a window into the author's innermost world, inviting the reader to delve into it. It is a moving experience to witness adults becoming deeply touched by their emotions when immersing themselves in my stories, or to see young children drawing their favorite hero from my children's book.

Yet a book can mean even more: it can embody solidarity and compassion. To this day, I remain profoundly honored that personalities such as Mrs. Truong My Hoa and cultural representatives graced the presentation of my book “Phoenix Daughter – Hope was My Path” with their presence — a statement to the importance of nurturing the Vietnamese reading culture.

Equally meaningful to me was the joint handover of my children's book “Hip Hop in the Land of Ellsaby” — addressing the theme of overcoming grief in children — in March 2022. Together with the Vu A Dinh Foundation, chaired by Mrs. Truong My Hoa, we were able to express our deepest sympathy to 3,000 children orphaned by Covid.

Indeed, books build solid bridges, transmitting not only knowledge but also timeless human virtues. To me, reason enough to emphasize the essential role of *Book Street Ho Chi Minh City* today.

I would like to share a few humble suggestions. My hope is that *Book Street Ho Chi Minh City* will continue to nurture the love of reading, and perhaps, in the future, focus even more closely on the themes of *books*, *reading*, and *writing* — to cultivate a reading culture in all its forms and to encourage people to discover their own creativity and potential.

First, *Book Street* could be officially recognized as a “must-see” cultural attraction, ensuring that no visitor with a love for culture would miss it.

In addition, a new section might be envisioned — a “Journey through Time” dedicated to the history of writing and books: from the earliest clay tablets, papyrus, and parchment, to the Roman codex with its bound pages; from the painstakingly hand-illustrated manuscripts of the Middle Ages to Johannes Gutenberg’s invention that revolutionized printing; and finally, to the digital age — with the birth of publishing houses, mass production, the paperback revolution, and now, artificial intelligence.

Such a space would allow visitors to better appreciate the immeasurable value of books.

A platform could also be created to collect ideas, feedbacks and suggestions from visitors — even small contests on the “Future Vision of Reading Culture”. These initiatives would make the experience even richer and more complete. Through such creative efforts, *Book Street Ho Chi Minh City* would surely attract even greater attention, while strengthening the country’s vibrant literary spirit.

If Vietnam aspires to become the Guest of Honor at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2030, this would be a meaningful step along that path.

And perhaps, this model could extend beyond literature — inspiring new streets devoted to other arts: *painting*, *visual arts*, *music*, and more — each a living celebration of Vietnamese creativity.