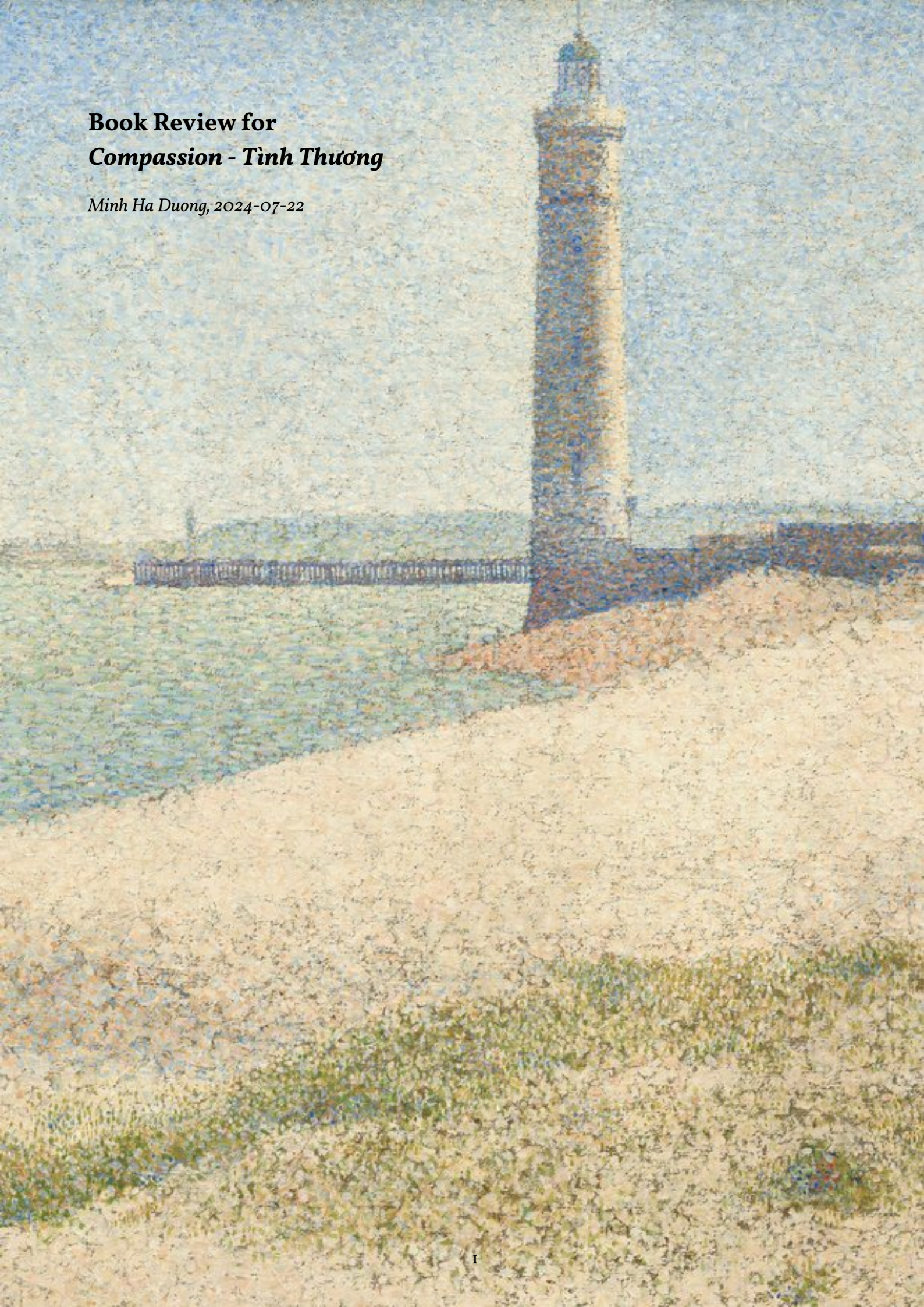


**Book Review for  
*Compassion - Tình Thương***

*Minh Ha Duong, 2024-07-22*



## I. Introduction

Compassion is an important key to solving all kind of human issues, and Ha Huy Thanh's 2024 book "Compassion - Tình Thương" provides both a theoretical framework and practical guidance for implementing it in applications ranging from personal relationships to workplace dynamics, and from local communities to international relations.

The book begins with Thanh's journey to the Vatican, which demonstrates the cross-cultural relevance of his message. This encounter with the Pope provides a starting point for a broader discussion on the role of compassion in fostering global unity. Then, across thirteen chapters, Thanh combines personal anecdotes, cultural insights, and practical observations to discuss the nature of compassion and its applications.

The book's presents a triadic approach to authentic compassion: understanding, sharing, and creating effective solutions. The book's first part is structured accordingly. 1/ Thanh argues that *self-understanding* is the foundation for cultivating compassion. Chapters two through four explore self-awareness, empathy towards others, and comprehension of broader circumstances. 2/ The author then emphasizes *sharing* as a critical conduit for compassion, whether it involves knowledge, resources, or emotions. He illustrates how sharing can transform relationships and foster a communal ethos. 3/ The book demonstrates how understanding and sharing lead to effective problem-solving, *creating solutions*. Thanh provides practical examples ranging from personal relationships to societal issues.

In the second part of the book, subsequent chapters apply these principles to various domains, including family relationships, workplace environments, and the concert of nations. Thanh uses real-life examples and case studies to demonstrate positive outcomes in diverse settings. A central thesis of the book is that compassion not just helps our day to day life: it is a key for resolving global issues.

The book's strengths lie in its practical application, cultural insights, and universal message. Thanh illustrates compassion's relevance through personal narratives, enriching the discourse with his Vietnamese cultural perspective. His argument resonates across cultural and national boundaries, positioning compassion as a fundamental human value.

Overall, "Compassion - Tình Thương" offers a thought-provoking exploration of compassion's role in human affairs, presenting it not just as a personal virtue but as a critical component of global problem-solving.

## 2. The science behind Compassion

Thanh argues that authentic compassion involves comprehending the perspectives and circumstances of others, facilitating the sharing of resources and knowledge, and collaboratively developing solutions to shared problems. This triadic approach resonates with various theories and practices of compassion across different cultures and disciplines.

On the theme of global unity through the practice of compassion, Thanh envisions a world where understanding and empathy transcend cultural and geographical boundaries, fostering global cooperation. This notion aligns with the Dalai Lama's advocacy for "universal responsibility" and the cultivation of compassion beyond one's immediate community. It also resonates with Master Thich Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhism practice. In Buddhist philosophy, compassion (*karuna*) is seen as a vital component of resilience, enabling practitioners to face suffering with equanimity and support others in overcoming their difficulties.

This vision of compassion as a unifying force echoes the teachings of Pope Francis, who has consistently emphasized the importance of compassion in addressing global issues. In his encyclical "Fratelli Tutti," Pope Francis writes, "*We need to develop the awareness that nowadays we are either all saved together or no one is saved. Poverty, decadence and suffering in one part of the earth are a silent breeding ground for problems that will end up affecting the entire planet.*" This sentiment aligns closely with Thanh's emphasis on the interconnectedness of global issues and the need for compassionate solutions.

Empathy and sharing, as discussed by Thanh, are crucial for building compassionate communities. This aligns with the Ubuntu philosophy in Southern Africa, which emphasizes interconnectedness and mutual support. It also echoes the "empathy-altruism hypothesis" proposed by social psychologist C. Daniel Batson, suggesting that empathic concern for others fosters altruistic behavior.

Thanh's ideas connect to contemporary movements in compassionate leadership and organizational behavior. Scholars like Simon Sinek and Brené Brown have highlighted the importance of empathy and vulnerability in leadership. Thanh's principles align closely with these leadership models, suggesting that compassion is a key driver of organizational success and positive social impact.

When it comes to this reviewer's specialty, Economics, the question of collective action is often formalized using Game Theory. Economists frequently assume that people

behave selfishly, leading to Nash Equilibrium outcomes where each party maximizes its own reward, assuming every other party does the same.

Practical problems with the Nash Equilibrium include the prisoner's dilemma and the tragedy of unmanaged commons. In the prisoner's dilemma, two individuals acting in their own self-interest produce an outcome that is sub-optimal for both. The tragedy of the commons occurs when individuals, acting independently according to their own self-interest, ultimately deplete a shared resource, even when it's clear that it's not in anyone's long-term interest for this to happen.

An alternative concept, the Berge equilibrium, relates more closely to compassion. In a Berge equilibrium, each player chooses a strategy that maximizes the payoffs of all the other players – and this is rational assuming others do the same. This concept aligns with an idea of compassion, where individuals consider the well-being of others in their decision-making process.

The Berge equilibrium can potentially resolve the practical problems associated with the Nash equilibrium. In the prisoner's dilemma, if both prisoners acted compassionately (in line with the Berge equilibrium), they would both choose to remain silent so as to avoid hurting the other player, resulting in the best outcome for both. Similarly, in the tragedy of the commons, if all individuals acted with compassion towards others and future generations, they would sustainably manage the shared resource, ensuring its long-term viability.

Thus, Thanh's emphasis on compassion in addressing global issues finds resonance not only in various cultural and philosophical traditions but also in economic theory, offering a potential pathway to more cooperative and sustainable outcomes.

### **3. Professional applications: this book is for you if...**

"Compassion - Tình Thương" offers valuable insights for professionals across various fields, particularly those in leadership, policy-making, academia, and non-profit sectors. The book's principles of understanding, sharing, and creating solutions are essential for addressing global challenges effectively and sustainably.

For Chief Sustainability Officers, the book provides a framework for integrating compassion into sustainability strategies. Thanh's emphasis on understanding and sharing aligns with the need to engage stakeholders and foster a culture of sustainability. This approach can help develop holistic strategies that address both environmental concerns and social well-being.

Directors of Climate Policy will find the book's insights particularly relevant. Thanh's call for compassionate solutions resonates with the need for inclusive and equitable policies. By promoting empathy and collaborative problem-solving, directors can design policies that address the complexities of climate change while considering vulnerable communities.

Executive Directors of non-profit organizations can benefit from the book's emphasis on sharing and creating solutions. This framework can help develop programs and initiatives grounded in compassion, enhancing organizational impact and fostering a culture of empathy and collaboration.

Academic leaders will appreciate the book's focus on fostering compassion within educational institutions. Thanh's insights can inspire interdisciplinary research and education addressing global issues, aligning curricula and research agendas with societal needs.

Consultants and advisors for international organizations will find the book's themes applicable to their work. Thanh's emphasis on empathy and collaborative problem-solving offers valuable perspectives for shaping policies and strategies that promote global well-being.

Overall, "Compassion - Tình Thương" is an essential read for professionals committed to making a positive impact. It provides a strategic framework for addressing complex global challenges through compassion, regardless of one's sector or field.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

Reading "Compassion - Tình Thương" has been both a personal and professional revelation. On a personal level, it has deepened my understanding of compassion as a practical tool for effecting change. Professionally, Thanh's insights have reinforced my commitment to integrating compassion into my work in energy transition and sustainable development.

Several key lessons from Thanh's exploration of compassion stand out. The practice of deep understanding will inform my approach to stakeholder engagement and policy development. The principle of sharing knowledge, resources, and empathy will guide my efforts to foster collaborative environments, sharing data, model and research outputs. Finally, the emphasis on creating solutions through a compassionate lens will shape my strategic initiatives, ensuring they are both sustainable and inclusive.

The book offers particular benefits for professionals in leadership roles, policymakers, academics, and those in the non-profit sector. It provides valuable insights for fostering collaborative and empathetic organizational cultures, designing effective and equitable policies, and integrating compassion into research and teaching.

The lasting impact of this book lies in its ability to translate the abstract concept of compassion into actionable strategies for addressing global challenges. Its relevance to today's world is undeniable, providing a roadmap for fostering empathy, collaboration, and sustainable solutions.

This book is published at a time when the clouds of history are darkening our vision of our common future. Thanh's work reminds us to connect to our shared humanity. If we all put compassion before the desires for wealth and power, wouldn't it be materially quite feasible for our global society to solve climate change, mass extinctions, social inequality, and geopolitical conflicts?

In a world increasingly characterized by division and conflict, Thanh's call for compassion offers a beacon of hope. It reminds us that understanding, sharing, and creating solutions do allow for the possibility of a more just and harmonious global society.

Cover image: Georges Seurat *The Lighthouse at Honfleur*, 1886.