

Nguyen Dinh Chieu's Thought on Human Beings and Its Significance for the Progressive Development of Vietnamese Women in Contemporary Society

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ABSTRACT:

Nguyen Dinh Chieu (1822–1888) was a prominent patriotic poet, educator, and physician in southern Vietnam during the nineteenth century. He is widely recognized for his anti-colonial literary works and moral philosophy grounded in benevolence and righteousness. Despite losing his eyesight, he continued teaching, practicing medicine, and composing patriotic literary works, thereby becoming a symbol of resilience and devotion to the nation. In recognition of his outstanding cultural contributions, UNESCO honored him as a World Cultural Celebrity. Nguyen Dinh Chieu left behind a valuable literary legacy, notably *Luc Van Tien* and *Van te nghĩa sĩ Can Giuoc* (Elegy to the Martyrs of Can Giuoc), which embody the indomitable spirit and patriotic commitment of the Vietnamese people. This article focuses on clarifying Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thoughts on human beings and examining their significance for the progressive development of Vietnamese women in contemporary society.

Keywords: Nguyen Dinh Chieu; thought; human beings; women's development; Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Nguyen Dinh Chieu (1822–1888) left the Vietnamese nation an invaluable literary heritage, encompassing poetry, verse narratives, elegies, funeral orations, proclamations, and other literary forms. Of particular significance are his works embodying progressive ideas concerning human liberation and comprehensive human development. Based on the methodological foundations of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, this study employs a combination of research methods, including historical analysis, logical analysis, synthesis, comparison, abstraction and generalization, textual analysis, and survey and

statistical approaches, to clarify Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought on human beings. His thought emphasized that individuals should possess ideals and a worldview rooted in patriotism; embody the values and virtues of national solidarity and resilience; uphold morality, culture, and civilization; and continually nurture aspirations through adversity. His life serves as vivid evidence of extraordinary willpower and perseverance, reflecting the personality of a great cultural figure who, though "blind in sight, remained enlightened in spirit." Therefore, studying, preserving, and promoting Nguyen Dinh Chieu's invaluable intellectual legacy constitutes a meaningful

endeavor that contributes to nurturing traditions, morality, and humanistic values for the progressive development of humanity, particularly Vietnamese women in the contemporary context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of scholarly works related to Nguyen Dinh Chieu reveals a relatively rich academic landscape, reflecting widespread scholarly interest in Nguyen Dinh Chieu as a world cultural figure. Existing studies have examined his life, literary legacy, patriotic spirit, ethical philosophy, and social values from diverse disciplinary perspectives, thereby providing important theoretical and empirical foundations for contemporary research.

Pham Van Dong (1963), in his commemorative work marking the 75th anniversary of Nguyen Dinh Chieu's death, produced one of the most influential scholarly and critical studies on Nguyen Dinh Chieu. The author emphasized that the core of Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought lies in patriotism closely associated with traditional moral values, particularly loyalty, righteousness, and resistance against foreign invasion. Nguyen Dinh Chieu is portrayed as an enduring "bright star" whose intellectual and moral influence remained undiminished despite the tragic historical circumstances of national suffering.

Le Tri Vien (1985) conducted a comprehensive study of Nguyen Dinh Chieu's life, personality, and ideological thought. His work highlights Nguyen Dinh Chieu's ethical philosophy of benevolence and righteousness, the ideal of "literature as a vehicle for morality," and a life philosophy devoted to the people and the community. These values are clearly reflected in major literary works such as *Lục Van Tien* and *The Elegy for the Fallen Soldiers of Can Giuoc* (*Van te nghia si Can Giuoc*).

The edited volume *Nguyen Dinh Chieu – A World Cultural Figure* (Nguyen Chi Ben, Ed., 2022) brings together studies by numerous scholars on Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought, life, literary artistry, and socio-cultural contributions. The collection provides multidimensional perspectives on his intellectual legacy and reaffirms his significance in both national and global cultural contexts.

Similarly, *Toward 200 Years of Nguyen Dinh Chieu Studies* (Research Group of Ben Tre Province and Ho Chi Minh City University of Culture, 2022) compiles a broad range of scientific studies conducted over nearly 160 years. This collection reflects the historical evolution of scholarly reception and interpretation of Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought and literary contributions.

In addition to these major works, numerous journal articles, conference proceedings, and national as well as international scholarly discussions have explored various aspects of Nguyen Dinh Chieu's intellectual and cultural legacy. Collectively, these studies provide valuable information and establish an important scholarly foundation for examining Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought on human beings and its significance for the progressive development of Vietnamese women in the contemporary context.

METHODOLOGY

This study is conducted based on the methodological foundation of Marxist historiography, combined with approaches derived from political science and interdisciplinary research methods to ensure objectivity, scientific rigor, and logical consistency throughout the analytical process. Specifically, the study employs the logical method to examine the internal coherence and development of Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought on human beings within its historical and socio-cultural context. In addition, the method of document analysis and synthesis is utilized to systematize, interpret, and critically assess primary and secondary sources, including literary works, scholarly studies, and historical documents related to Nguyen Dinh Chieu's intellectual legacy.

Furthermore, the comparative method is applied to identify similarities and differences between Nguyen Dinh Chieu's ideas and contemporary perspectives on human development, particularly regarding the advancement of Vietnamese women in the current context. Through comparison and contextual interpretation, the study seeks to clarify both the enduring values and historical limitations of his thought. The integration of these methods provides a comprehensive and multidimensional framework for analyzing Nguyen Dinh Chieu's

conception of human beings and assessing its contemporary relevance to the progressive development of women in Vietnam.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Nguyen Dinh Chieu's Thoughts on Human Beings

First, human beings are guided by ideals and a worldview grounded in patriotism.

Throughout history, the Vietnamese nation has experienced numerous upheavals, transformations, and challenges. Nevertheless, successive generations have consistently nurtured humanistic ideals and cultivated a profound sense of patriotism and compassion for the people. In Vietnamese literary tradition, patriotic consciousness has been continuously reinforced through seminal works, ranging from *Nam Quoc Son Ha* (*The Mountains and Rivers of the Southern Country*), the timeless military proclamation *Hich Tuong Si* (*Proclamation to the Officers and Soldiers*), and the triumphant declaration *Binh Ngo Dai Cao* (*The Great Proclamation upon the Pacification of the Wu*), to the tragic yet heroic spirit embodied in *Van te nghia si Can Giuoc* (*The Elegy for the Fallen Soldiers of Can Giuoc*). These works collectively shaped and strengthened the national spirit of patriotism and collective responsibility. Within this intellectual and historical tradition, Nguyen Dinh Chieu stands out as an exemplary figure whose conception of human beings was deeply rooted in patriotic ideals and moral responsibility toward the nation and its people. Although he lost his eyesight in early adulthood and endured approximately forty years of blindness, Nguyen Dinh Chieu never surrendered to despair or isolation. Instead, his physical blindness was transcended by a profound moral and intellectual vision, through which he composed literary works imbued with patriotism, national dignity, and humanitarian concern. His writings not only reflected resistance against colonial aggression but also elevated the moral spirit of the Vietnamese people during one of the nation's darkest historical periods.

For Nguyen Dinh Chieu, the ideal human being is not merely an individual possessing knowledge or personal virtue but one who demonstrates

unwavering devotion to the homeland and compassion for the suffering of the people. Patriotism, in his view, was inseparable from moral duty and collective responsibility. This perspective is particularly evident in *The Elegy for the Fallen Soldiers of Can Giuoc*, where ordinary peasants, despite lacking formal military training, willingly sacrificed themselves to defend the nation. Through his literary portrayal, Nguyen Dinh Chieu transformed these common villagers into moral exemplars of patriotism, courage, and self-sacrifice.

Therefore, Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought on human beings reveals a profound humanistic philosophy in which patriotism functions not only as a political sentiment but also as a moral ideal shaping human dignity and social responsibility. His intellectual legacy continues to hold contemporary significance, particularly in fostering civic consciousness, ethical values, and national responsibility among younger generations in the context of national development and globalization.

Research on the historical development of Nguyen Dinh Chieu's poetry demonstrates that the depth of his thought concerning the people and the nation became increasingly evident, particularly from 1858 until the end of his life, evolving from an awakening of patriotism to resolute viewpoints and decisive actions expressed in patriotic poetry and prose during the period of French colonial resistance. His notable works include *The Elegy for the Fallen Soldiers of Can Giuoc* (*Van te nghia si Can Giuoc*, 1862), *The Elegy for Truong Dinh* (*Van te Truong Dinh*, 1864), *The Elegy for the Fallen Soldiers of the Six Southern Provinces* (*Van te nghia si tran vong Luc tinh*, after 1874), the ten poems *Lamenting Phan Tong* (*Dieu Phan Tong*, 1868), and *Lamenting Truong Dinh* (*Dieu Truong Dinh*, 1864). The work *Dialogue Between the Fisherman and the Woodcutter on Medical Ethics* (*Ngu Tieu y thuat van dap*) is a medical treatise, yet also a political work, revealing profound reflections on human suffering and the pain of national loss:

"Though eastern skies, western winds may blow,

Warmth and coolness fail to harmonize, causing suffering to the people."

At the same time, it reflects faith in the strength of

justice, confidence in ideals, and determination in mobilizing forces for resistance and ultimate victory:

“Justice crowned the aged Nghiem Nhan,

Better death than surrender to Truong Phi.

Justice stained the imperial robe with blood,

Like Ke Thieu, saving his lord in peril.

Justice became Cao Khanh’s tongue,

In Thuong Son, cursing the enemy, embracing punishment willingly...” (*Poetry and Prose of Nguyen Dinh Chieu*, 1971)

Nguyen Dinh Chieu also upheld the dignity of a patriotic scholar who deeply perceived the pain of national loss and territorial division while openly expressing the aspiration for complete liberation:

“The former frontiers have now been divided into foreign lands,

How can we still share the same sky beneath sun and dew?

...

One nourishing rain shall cleanse the mountains and rivers!” (*Dialogue Between the Fisherman and the Woodcutter on Medical Ethics*)

Nguyen Dinh Chieu expressed profound concern for the nation and compassion for the people, representing the patriotic spirit of the Vietnamese nation and the integrity of upright Confucian scholars in the face of foreign invasion. He highly praised the heroic and indomitable spirit of millions of ordinary people, particularly the righteous fighters of the Six Southern Provinces and the moral integrity of the Can Giuoc insurgents. The poet firmly articulated his steadfast determination:

“Our righteous path possesses many ways to eliminate evil,

Demons and wicked spirits cannot overcome sages and virtue.”

His elegiac poems celebrated those “loyal and righteous people worthy of crimson memorial steles” through immortal verses expressing unwavering patriotism, affirming that although they sacrificed their lives, their noble spirit would

resonate for generations: “The spirit of two words shines through frost and snow; Heroic integrity illuminates mountains and rivers for a thousand autumns.”

Nguyen Dinh Chieu was a great and exemplary poet of patriotism and compassion for the people. His poems, proclamations, and elegies were deeply patriotic, closely connected with the lives of ordinary people, praising heroic patriots who sacrificed themselves for the nation and the people, while inspiring public consciousness toward meaningful actions in the service of society and the country. As Vu Dinh Lien affirmed: “It may be said that Nguyen Dinh Chieu followed the only correct path that today’s Party leadership has laid out for artists and writers: literature and art serving the people, literature and art struggling for the revolution” (Vu, 1958, p. 115).

Second, human beings embody the values and character of the nation’s tradition of solidarity and indomitability.

Living through a period of national collapse and social devastation, Nguyen Dinh Chieu had to shoulder family responsibilities while raising seven young children, yet he never abandoned his aspirations. From Gia Dinh to Can Giuoc and other locations before eventually settling peacefully in Ba Tri (Ben Tre Province), he consistently nurtured his patriotic ideals. Through his literary works, he expressed the collective suffering of a nation subjected to misery, subjugation, and colonial domination. Yet, rather than weakening his resolve, his poetry, denunciations, and lamentations radiated the spirit of national solidarity and resilience. He openly condemned the colonial rhetoric of a so-called civilizing mission toward the “barbaric” people of Annam, exposing its true essence as robbery and violence:

“Since the Westerners came to seize our land,

Claiming a new regime and sowing debts of hatred and resentment.”

(Elegy for the Fallen Patriots of the Six Southern Provinces).

Or: “A bowl of rice and a shirt are burdens of life, Yet why should we concern ourselves with their forefathers?” (Elegy for the Can Giuoc Martyrs).

Nguyen Dinh Chieu sought to awaken those who remained deluded and followed the French colonizers, warning that they represented unrighteous forces:

“Tell all to strive in hunting the beasts,

For once the rabbits are gone, the tiger will turn upon them” (Duong Tu and Ha Mau).

He further admonished:

“What meaning is there in living while serving heretical troops,

Casting away incense burners and overturning ancestral altars only deepens sorrow;

What meaning is there in serving as colonial soldiers?

Sharing weak wine and chewing bread only increases shame” (Elegy for the Can Giuoc Martyrs).

Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s literary works vividly portray patriotic fighters and insurgents who, despite possessing rudimentary weapons, wearing only “a coarse cloth garment around their waists” and holding merely “a bamboo spear in hand,” were filled with an indomitable spirit and determination to resist:

“No need for commanders to repeatedly beat the war drums;

At the drum’s sound, they stormed the barricades, treating the enemy as though they were nothing.

They feared neither small nor large French bullets;

They burst through the gates, risking their lives as if they had none” (Elegy for the Can Giuoc Martyrs).

Though fully aware of the danger and destructive power of French firearms, these peasant-soldiers remained steadfast, refusing to submit to the enemy’s superior force. Through verses dedicated to his close friend Phan Van Tri, Nguyen Dinh Chieu sharply criticized figures such as Ton Tho Tuong, whom he regarded as weak and inclined toward compromise with the colonial administration:

“Do not borrow the tiger’s might to frighten timid monkeys,

Hearts of iron and stone shall never waver.

...

A gust of wind may bend the grass,

Yet victory and defeat remain undecided” (*Poem Dedicated to Truong Dinh*).

Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s funeral orations (*elegiac prose*) achieved everything accomplished by the greatest funeral writings in Vietnamese literary history and, in many respects, surpassed earlier works in patriotic fervor and literary power. His elegies burn with hatred toward invaders and deep compassion for fellow countrymen, creating “a communion between the living and the dead who sacrificed for a noble cause, while echoing heroic praise, resonating with the grandeur of battlefield victories, and inspiring profound reflections on the fate of the nation... Funeral prose, traditionally mournful, becomes extraordinarily vivid, rich in information, and overflowing with emotion” (Vietnamese Intellectuals Group, 2018, p. 237–238).

These works portray ordinary individuals endowed with extraordinary patriotism and an unyielding spirit. They courageously charged enemy fortresses, fought resolutely, and willingly embraced sacrifice:

“No need for commanders to repeatedly beat the war drums;

At the drum’s sound, they stormed the barricades, treating the enemy as though they were nothing.

They feared neither small nor large French bullets;

They burst through the gates, risking their lives as if they had none.

Some thrust forward, others slashed backward, striking terror into colonial troops;

Front and rear alike ignored ironclad ships and roaring cannons” (Elegy for the Can Giuoc Martyrs).

Nguyen Dinh Chieu deeply admired these anonymous individuals who, despite humble origins, possessed the noble ideal of self-sacrifice out of compassion for the people and devotion to the nation.

“How pitiful indeed!

The people were plunged into flames and floods without delay,

Oppressed and squeezed dry to the utmost" (Elegy for the Fallen Patriots of the Six Southern Provinces).

They fought while alive, and even in death, continued to struggle for the homeland.

"Alive, they fought the enemy; dead, they still fight the enemy,

Their souls follow to aid the troops,

Forever vowing to avenge this hatred."

These were heroic figures who stood at the forefront, mobilizing and inspiring military resistance during uprisings and patriotic movements. The image of Truong Dinh, for example, was highly praised by Nguyen Dinh Chieu:

"Because the people refused to obey the Emperor's decree,

They rode several miles to block the imperial envoy.

Following the will of the people, he accepted the general's seal,

Bearing upon his shoulders the burden beyond the royal court" (Elegy for Truong Dinh).

Nguyen Dinh Chieu conveyed his perspectives on resistance against foreign aggression through funeral orations that stirred the spirit of hatred toward invaders among the people of Southern Vietnam: "Punishment reached even the poor and humble, their possessions confiscated and displayed;

Mercy was denied even to women and children, houses burned, and property seized. For more than ten years of unbearable hardship, interrogation, imprisonment, exile, and execution, how countless were the names of old and young alike..." (Elegy for the Fallen Patriots of the Six Southern Provinces).

Although subjected to severe oppression and exploitation, the spirit of struggle for a righteous cause remained deeply rooted within them, inspiring successive generations to rise in resistance.

Third, human beings uphold morality, culture, and

civilization.

During his lifetime, Nguyen Dinh Chieu was educated within the framework of Confucian scholarship, absorbing the teachings of sages and classical learning. His literary legacy reflects a profound influence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and traditional Eastern medicine, which enabled him to become a highly educated and erudite scholar with extensive knowledge in Confucian studies, medicine, cosmology, and numerology. Although some of his perspectives remained constrained by feudal ideology, his thought was fundamentally progressive, emphasizing morality, cultural enrichment, and the civilizational values of human beings.

Nguyen Dinh Chieu sincerely embraced and firmly believed in the ethical values of Confucianism:

"The traces of the Three Kings and Five Emperors have only just passed,

Continuing Heaven's Way while proclaiming the virtues of our sages.

The two principles of moral order sustain the nation,

A single teaching of loyalty and filial piety builds countless homes."

Inspired by his belief in the scholarly tradition of the nation, Nguyen Dinh Chieu devoted himself to learning and self-cultivation with a spirit of intellectual humility:

"The sages and virtuous predecessors left their teachings behind,

To support the king, help the nation, reform society, and guide the people.

Study to understand the principles between ruler and subject,

To know one's duty as a scholar and one's devotion through filial loyalty."

(Duong Tu and Ha Mau).

From a young age, Nguyen Dinh Chieu was fully committed to learning, determined to seek truth at its roots:

"In youth, diligently devoted to study,

Every verse received Heaven's blessing."

Despite losing his eyesight, Nguyen Dinh Chieu refused to resign himself to a passive life within the family. Instead, he strove to become a person of value to society, dedicating himself to the people and upholding the spirit of patriotism. He became a genuine patriotic poet and an enduring example of the blind poet of the Six Southern Provinces:

"Though worldly affairs darkened these mortal eyes,

May my moral heart remain a complete mirror."

Questions and Answers between the Fisherman and the Woodcutter on Medical Practice (Ngu Tieu Y Thuat Van Dap) is ostensibly a medical text, yet it embodies profound philosophical reflections on morality and human conduct:

"Though books are many, principles grow obscure;

Though remedies abound, methods differ from ancient ways.

If one desires 'pure sources and clear streams,'

Stand upright, cast a straight shadow, and remember my words" (Questions and Answers between the Fisherman and the Woodcutter on Medical Practice).

Nguyen Dinh Chieu emphasized scientific reasoning, dialectical thinking, and the principles of human existence, stressing that contemporary realities should be understood through the accumulated wisdom of ancestors. Even the Book of Changes was regarded by him as a foundational source of medical knowledge:

"Half of medicine lies within the Book of Changes,

Without understanding its principles, one should not discuss medical practice."

Nguyen Dinh Chieu's poetry and prose reveal numerous practical observations that were generalized into profound philosophies of life. These works embody deeply rooted civilizational teachings transmitted across generations. For him, learning and intellectual inquiry had to be closely connected with practice:

"After learning, one must think of practice,

To stand idle in cowardice is to lose one's honor."

Nguyen Dinh Chieu believed that the mission of a physician must be grounded in knowledge, harmonized with the laws of nature, and dedicated to the principle that "helping save the people fulfills Heaven's will." To attain a profound understanding of medicine, one must first comprehend the natural principles underlying human illness and pathology, thereby determining appropriate methods of treatment. This reflects valuable accumulated wisdom passed down through generations:

"Indeed, Heaven follows the order of four climates:

Spring is warm, summer hot, autumn cool, winter cold.

Remedies must accord with the seasons to ensure well-being.

Each season carries its own energies, which must always be remembered."

For Nguyen Dinh Chieu, however, healing the sick and saving lives was not merely a profession but an act of moral cultivation and virtue accumulation, requiring distance from material temptations in order to serve the people with utmost sincerity. His humanistic worldview and people-centered philosophy represented a continuation and promotion of the nation's civilizational traditions:

"Wholeheartedly follow the righteous path of the people,

Faithfully preserve acts of kindness and benevolence.

If medicine fails to cure an illness,

One must humbly reflect upon oneself in fear and concern.

...

Seeing another's pain as one's own,

Whatever remedy may save them should be swiftly applied."

Nguyen Dinh Chieu embodied intellectual sharpness and an indomitable spirit deeply imbued with morality, remaining detached from the pursuit of fame and material gain:

"Within the circle of fame and profit—enough, enough!

A pillow of fleeting dreams—how many moments do they last?

Wealth and honor stir no longing in my heart,

Flowers fade, clouds drift, waters ripple, the moon grows dim.”

Throughout history, the Vietnamese people have naturally praised, respected, and revered national heroes, recognizing their contributions to the nation and their efforts to secure peaceful and prosperous lives for the people. Similarly, Nguyen Dinh Chieu celebrated righteous individuals and insurgent leaders filled with heroic spirit in the service of the people. These figures exemplified the continuation of the nation’s civilizational traditions. Such was the heroic courage of Luc Van Tien:

“Luc Van Tien wore a golden helmet upon his head,
Holding a silver spear while riding a black horse.”

Such was the heroic figure of Truong Dinh:

“In the South, his name resounded like thunder,
The battles of Go Cong spread his fame afar.”

Such was Phan Tong, standing resolutely beneath heaven and earth:

“A righteous and loyal man worthy of eternal inscription,

Standing beneath heaven and earth, his reputation never fades.”

And:

“One battle laid bare his courage before Heaven and Earth,

Compared with the past, no shame befalls a hero’s name” (*Elegy for Phan Tong*).

Nguyen Dinh Chieu also expressed unwavering loyalty to the nation and ancestral lineage:

“Food and clothing repay the nation’s grace,

A man must preserve intact his duty as loyal subject and filial descendant.”

(*Elegy for Phan Tong*).

Fourth, human aspirations are continuously nurtured through adversity.

Born and raised amid the hardships of a troubled

nation, Nguyen Dinh Chieu deeply empathized with human suffering, yet he neither surrendered to nor escaped from reality. At times, he embraced an optimistic and tranquil spirit amidst the beauty of nature; however, when the flames of war engulfed the country, he stood alongside countless compatriots who shared the fate of the nation.

Despite life’s injustices, bitterness, changing fortunes, and alternating darkness and light, Nguyen Dinh Chieu consistently demonstrated an unwavering spirit. He remained resilient, steadfast, and capable of transcending ordinary hardships:

“Tran Doan harbored not a trace of worry,

With wind and moon in one satchel, noble titles but fleeting dreams.

How are people today different from those of the past?

Who can forbid one from leaving, who can prevent one from returning?”

(Luc Van Tien)

Nguyen Dinh Chieu did not perceive life or humanity through an immutable veil of darkness; rather, he consistently aspired toward transformation and brighter horizons. This reflected a process of cognition moving from failure to success, from pessimism to optimism, and toward a profound longing for a better future. Such transformation, in his view, represented an inevitable law of existence:

“The Way of Heaven knows both prosperity and decline,

After hardship and misfortune comes a time of flourishing.”

However, for a patriot devoted to the people, words alone were insufficient; concrete action was indispensable. According to Nguyen Dinh Chieu, anyone wishing to contribute meaningfully to the national cause had to cultivate a strong will and a pure moral character, much like physicians who must nurture ethical integrity in serving the people. This embodied the moral philosophy of being truly human, living honorably, never betraying the nation or harming the people:

“The righteous steed still carries concern for the old nation,

How could one, as a human being, forsake one’s homeland?”

As later poet Le Anh Xuan (Ca Le Hien, 1940–1968) perceptively observed, Nguyen Dinh Chieu was a predecessor endowed with extraordinary fortitude, immense courage, and an enduring aspiration to rise above adversity:

“Once there was a patriotic poet

Who refused to share the same sky with the invaders,

Calling patriots to march forward,

Blind in eyes, yet with a heart bright as a torch.”

(Nguyen, 2003, p. 353)

Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s thought thus reveals a profound humanistic philosophy in which adversity serves not as an endpoint but as a catalyst for strengthening aspirations, moral character, and resilience. His life and literary legacy embody an enduring message of perseverance, patriotism, and faith in the possibility of renewal even under the harshest historical circumstances. The aspirations of Nguyen Dinh Chieu were inseparable from the aspirations of humanity itself, while his ideals reflected the spirit of an era shaped by hardship and perseverance. The ambitions, determination, and resolute will to resist oppression and exploitation were not merely personal convictions but represented the collective sentiments and shared responsibilities of the people. Through his literary works, Nguyen Dinh Chieu vividly reflected, documented, and encouraged the spirit of self-sacrifice for justice and moral righteousness, inspiring individuals to devote themselves to noble causes in defense of the nation and human dignity.

The Value of Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s Thought on Human Beings for the Progressive Development of Vietnamese Women Today

First, enhancing awareness of preserving and promoting the nation’s traditional values in shaping the qualities of Vietnamese women today.

Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s thoughts on human beings,

reflected throughout his literary works, not only portrayed the resilient spirit of the Vietnamese nation during the second half of the nineteenth century but also embodied profound humanistic values concerning patriotism, moral principles, perseverance, and social responsibility. These values continue to hold significant relevance for shaping awareness and cultivating the qualities of Vietnamese women in contemporary society, particularly in the process of fostering well-rounded women capable of meeting the demands of integration and sustainable development.

Through his patriotic poetry, elegiac writings, narrative poems, and morally instructive literary works, Nguyen Dinh Chieu depicted individuals characterized by integrity, noble ideals, and a willingness to place collective and national interests above personal concerns. Such values remain highly meaningful for Vietnamese women today in promoting patriotism, compassion, self-respect, resilience, and responsibility toward family and society. In particular, amid globalization and the rapid transformation of social values, inheriting the nation’s traditional virtues has become essential for women to preserve cultural identity while simultaneously enhancing their ability to adapt to modern life.

Reflecting on the ideological and moral significance of Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s legacy, Pham Van Dong observed that “*Nguyen Dinh Chieu was a patriotic poet whose works constitute immortal pages glorifying the heroic struggle of our people against Western invaders...*” (Institute of Literature, 1973, p. 24). This assessment demonstrates that Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s literary works possess not only artistic value but also serve as an important spiritual resource for nurturing patriotism, moral character, and determination among generations of Vietnamese people, including women.

Throughout the history of national liberation struggles, particularly during the resistance wars against French colonialism and American imperialism, the patriotism, resilience, and spirit of devotion to the people reflected in Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s literary works became a powerful source of inspiration for the masses in southern Vietnam, among whom women played an especially vital role.

The image of Vietnamese women as courageous and resilient figures embodying the spirit that “*when the enemy comes, even women fight*”—while simultaneously fulfilling family responsibilities and participating in revolutionary movements—partly illustrates the diffusion of the spiritual values inspired by Nguyen Dinh Chieu and other patriotic thinkers of his era.

In the contemporary context, Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s thought continues to provide valuable guidance for women in recognizing their responsibility to preserve and promote the nation’s cherished traditional values, including patriotism, solidarity, filial piety, compassion, and aspirations for self-improvement. These values constitute an important foundation for building the image of the modern Vietnamese woman as knowledgeable, ethical, healthy, socially responsible, and committed to preserving national cultural identity. Therefore, studying and applying Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s ideological values not only contributes to traditional education but also provides spiritual motivation for the progressive and comprehensive development of Vietnamese women in the contemporary era.

Second, fostering self-improvement and the cultivation of personal development

At the age of twenty-seven, an age often associated with academic achievement, reputation, and promising prospects, misfortune unexpectedly struck Nguyen Dinh Chieu. The loss of his eyesight caused profound anguish and suffering. However, rather than resigning himself to sorrow, regret, and despair over his fate, Do Chieu transformed adversity into spiritual strength and resilience, overcoming hardship through literary works that expressed his ideals and vision. Although physically blind, he remained inwardly enlightened—enlightened in spirit, steadfast in faith toward the future, and perceptive in recognizing the path of struggle pursued by the peasantry.

“Though blind, one preserves family morality,
Better than seeing yet neglecting ancestral worship.
Though blind, one avoids disgrace,
Better than seeing yet living dishonorably.
Though blind, one preserves integrity,

Better than seeing yet betraying one’s very form and dignity.” (Ngu tieu y thuat van dap)

Nguyen Dinh Chieu evolved alongside the changing trajectory of the nation, increasingly revealing ideas and human figures engaged in the pursuit of truth, particularly among patriotic scholars and righteous insurgents. This embodied a spirit of self-cultivation, learning, patriotism, compassion for compatriots, and commitment to defending justice.

“If one wishes for clarity of spirit and purity of essence,

One must preserve vitality and restrain inner corruption.” (Ngu tieu y thuat van dap)

Nguyen Dinh Chieu consistently reflected upon perseverance, striving to overcome adversity, and attaining a fuller and deeper understanding of a meaningful life grounded in moral principles and close ties with the people. From being a Confucian patriot, Nguyen Dinh Chieu gradually embraced a people-centered patriotism, remaining wholeheartedly devoted to the nation. Through his profound perception, visionary outlook, and sincere emotional engagement, he provided the people with literary works deeply infused with the realities of life, becoming a trusted companion in their journey to overcome hardships and achieve national independence and freedom.

Third, emphasizing the value of morality and human talent

As a moral exemplar possessing noble virtues, the life and legacy of Nguyen Dinh Chieu have exerted profound social influence and educational significance in promoting compassion, righteousness, and meaningful human relationships. His literary works strongly condemned evil, oppression, exploitation, injustice, and contempt for human dignity, while elevating moral beauty, traditional righteousness, filial piety, romantic fidelity, and respect for talent and virtue. These ideals represent the continuity and development of the fine cultural traditions transmitted through generations of Vietnamese people.

To this day, the works of Do Chieu possess not only literary and artistic significance but also enduring value in fostering a virtuous society, a renewed moral consciousness, and civilized patterns of life.

Viewed through *Luc Van Tien*, written during the decline of the Nguyen feudal dynasty and amid the erosion of ethical norms, Nguyen Dinh Chieu sought to uphold the noble value of morality as a means of restoring “*social ethics and the human heart*” (*the dao nhan tam*). At the same time, he consistently affirmed humanitarian values deeply rooted in tradition and sustained through popular recognition and continuity. Literary figures such as Luc Van Tien and Kieu Nguyet Nga became moral exemplars for generations of Vietnamese people. Luc Van Tien embodied heroism, righteousness, filial devotion, loyalty, and dedication to helping the people, while Kieu Nguyet Nga symbolized virtue, fidelity, and sacred emotional commitment.

Today, although history has moved beyond the painful era of war, separation, and loss, and Vietnam has entered a period of development marked by notable achievements, cherished moral values and human dignity continue to be preserved and respected. When the French authorities considered granting Nguyen Dinh Chieu a pension in his old age, Eugene Bajot remarked that the poet deeply appreciated the gesture “and that he was living in the complete respect of his disciples and the affection of his compatriots” (Nguyen, 2001, p. 620).

Through two resistance wars against French colonialism and American imperialism, the Vietnamese nation demonstrated its enduring resilience and indomitable spirit, remaining steadfast in the struggle for national independence, freedom, human dignity, and aspirations that Nguyen Dinh Chieu and many earlier patriotic intellectuals had long envisioned. Reading Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s literary works reveals a powerful current of humanitarianism and righteousness cultivated across generations within Vietnamese tradition.

Moreover, reading Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s poetry and prose highlights the moral greatness embodied later by President Ho Chi Minh, who inherited and further developed the humanistic, optimistic, and people-centered values established by earlier generations. President Ho Chi Minh affirmed: “Our Vietnamese nation is carrying out the greatest resistance war in its history. For the independence

and freedom of the Fatherland, for the interests of the socialist camp, oppressed peoples, and all progressive humanity, we are fighting and defeating the most brutal enemy in the world. On our land, is taking place a fierce struggle between justice and injustice, civilization and brutality. The people of socialist brotherly countries and progressive people throughout the world are daily looking toward Vietnam, warmly praising our compatriots and soldiers.” (Ho, 2011, p. 475–476)

Fourth, nurturing legitimate aspirations and ambitions for society and self-development

The spirit of struggle and resilience reflected in Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s literary works has exerted a profound and enduring influence on generations of Southern Vietnamese people up to the present day. Although during the period of French colonial rule, Nguyen Dinh Chieu’s funeral orations and patriotic proclamations were not widely disseminated or promoted, his literary legacy nonetheless continued to inspire patriotic sentiment. The French colonial authorities permitted the publication of *Luc Van Tien* with the expectation that the conservative elements of Confucianism embedded in the work would be broadly propagated. However, the impact of the text far exceeded their intentions and expectations. What endured most strongly was its fervent patriotism, embodied in characters such as Van Tien and Hon Minh. As Tran Van Giau observed in the article *Why Do I Enjoy Reading Nguyen Dinh Chieu?*:

“The reason is simply that because the author took benevolence, loyalty, filial piety, and chastity as the ideological core, resistance against foreign invasion naturally emerged in his writing. Moreover, anti-invasion resistance is a prominent characteristic throughout the long history of the Vietnamese nation. Especially in the mid-nineteenth century, when Western capitalist powers had begun military aggression in the Far East, and Da Nang had already suffered bombardment by French forces, the expressions of benevolence, loyalty, filial piety, and chastity in Do Chieu’s works became closely linked to the duty of resisting invaders and saving the nation” (Institute of Literature, 1973, p. 173–174).

Therefore, generations of Vietnamese people, both

past and present, have deeply admired and respected Nguyen Dinh Chieu because of the progressive social ideals and aspirations for advancement embedded in both his literary works and his life.

Nguyen Dinh Chieu's remarkable literary career has been highly valued not only for promoting patriotism but also for expressing profound moral principles regarding human conduct and social responsibility. For the Vietnamese people, the highest form of moral righteousness lies in resisting foreign aggression, defending the nation, and protecting the people. This principle constituted a consistent ideological thread and imperative course of action for anyone living in times of national crisis and turmoil. Cowardice and passivity were not tolerated; rather, fulfilling one's duty to the nation appeared as an ethical responsibility transmitted and entrusted by preceding generations. Although there were moments marked by discriminatory treatment toward intellectuals, despite the dual burdens of personal hardship and national suffering, repeated failures in resistance movements, and occasional underestimation of the power of the masses, Nguyen Dinh Chieu consistently upheld moral integrity and patriotic commitment throughout his literary works.

Beyond serving as a shining example of patriotism, Nguyen Dinh Chieu also demonstrated profound compassion for the people and maintained a close attachment to the masses. His poetry and prose vividly and authentically portrayed ordinary people, particularly Southern peasants. Whether named or anonymous, the characters appearing in his works reveal the strength, moral character, determination, and aspirations of the Vietnamese people. Furthermore, Nguyen Dinh Chieu regarded the mission of writers and intellectuals as one deeply connected to moral responsibility and human advancement, as reflected in his famous lines:

“A boat may carry endless moral principles without sinking;

The pen strikes down villains without ever bending.”

These verses encapsulate the temperament, aspirations, and convictions of a writer devoted to

human progress and social justice. Nguyen Dinh Chieu was an intellectual deeply responsible for the destiny of the nation and a model of genuine artistic dedication. As noted by the Vietnamese Intellectual Group (2018): “Nguyen Dinh Chieu's most successful literary figure, one of the greatest historical literary significances, is the image of the insurgent soldier, the anonymous hero who symbolizes extraordinary courage, sacrifice, and national strength, worthy of representing the spiritual values of the nation. Through his patriotic literary works, he became the foremost representative of patriotic literature not only in Southern Vietnam but throughout the country. Broadly speaking, he represented the culmination of an era of literature; yet, through his creation of the anonymous heroic figure symbolizing the national resistance movement, he simultaneously became a pioneer, particularly in initiating the literary current of anti-foreign aggression from the standpoint of the entire people, not merely one segment or minority... Such a beginning carries not only literary-historical significance in Vietnam but also notable international significance” (Vietnamese Intellectual Group, 2018, p. 236–237).

CONCLUSION

Nguyen Dinh Chieu was not only an outstanding patriotic poet of nineteenth-century Vietnam but also a prominent thinker whose ideas on human beings, morality, benevolence, and aspirations for overcoming adversity remain profoundly significant. Through his rich body of literary works, particularly *Luc Van Tien*, *Van te nghia si Can Giuoc*, *Ngũ Tiên y thuật van dap*, as well as numerous funeral orations, elegies, and patriotic poems, Nguyen Dinh Chieu articulated a progressive humanistic ideology in which human beings occupied a central place within moral, cultural, and social values. Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thoughts on human beings were manifested in several prominent dimensions: individuals should possess ideals and a profound sense of patriotism; human beings embody the spirit of solidarity and resilience of the Vietnamese nation; moral principles, culture, and civilizational values should be upheld; and legitimate aspirations should always be nurtured to overcome adversity and strive toward a better life. Despite experiencing immense

personal hardships, particularly blindness and the national tragedy of foreign invasion, Nguyen Dinh Chieu steadfastly preserved the integrity of a patriotic intellectual, employing literature as a spiritual weapon to awaken the people, encourage resistance, and affirm the dignity and worth of the Vietnamese people.

These ideas carry not only historical significance but also profound practical value for the progressive development of Vietnamese women today. First, Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought contributes to raising awareness of the importance of preserving and promoting the noble traditional values of the nation, such as patriotism, benevolence, filial piety, loyalty, and social responsibility—moral foundations essential to shaping the image of Vietnamese women in the contemporary era. Moreover, his life and moral character serve as a powerful source of inspiration regarding resilience, self-learning, self-improvement, and aspirations for advancement, thereby encouraging women to strengthen their internal capacities and proactively affirm their positions within both family and society. In addition, Nguyen Dinh Chieu's emphasis on morality and human talent in his literary works provides important guidance for cultivating a model of Vietnamese women characterized by

comprehensive development women who possess not only strong ethical values but also knowledge, competence, and the capacity for international integration. Furthermore, the humanitarian aspirations and sense of responsibility toward society and the nation conveyed through his works continue to serve as significant sources of spiritual motivation, inspiring Vietnamese women today to nurture legitimate ambitions and enhance their roles in economic, cultural, educational, scientific, and social development.

In the context of globalization, digital transformation, and increasingly deep international integration, continued research, preservation, and promotion of Nguyen Dinh Chieu's intellectual legacy are not only essential for safeguarding Vietnamese cultural identity but also carry practical significance in moral education, fostering ideals for life, strengthening aspirations for development, and enhancing the status of Vietnamese people in general and Vietnamese women in particular. Therefore, the progressive humanistic values left by Nguyen Dinh Chieu remain highly relevant and continue to illuminate the path toward building a comprehensively developed Vietnamese people, contributing to the national goals of prosperity, strength, democracy, equity, and civilization.

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