

## Characteristics and Meaning of the Tao of Being Human in Nguyen Dinh Chieu's Thought



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**ABSTRACT:** The Tao of being human is one of the unique contents in Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought. Nguyen Dinh Chieu's concept of human morality demonstrates the following characteristics: simplicity and universality, sincerity but profoundness, imbued with the spirit of humanity. With such content and characteristics, Nguyen Dinh Chieu's concept of human morality has great significance in both theory and practice, contributing to enriching the nation's human morality as well as contributing to defining the human morality of the nation guide and educate good values in the lives of Vietnamese people in today's society.

**KEYWORDS:** Nguyen Dinh Chieu, The Tao of being human, characteristics, meaning, theory, practice.

### INTRODUCTION

Nguyen Dinh Chieu (1822 - 1888) is one of the typical thinkers of Vietnam in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His life and career are associated with great events in history and a painful but heroic era for the nation. That was the period when the Nguyen Dynasty sank deeper into the path of decline, and reaction, and the French colonialists invaded Vietnam. Nguyen Dinh Chieu has popularized extremely progressive ideas about human emotions, morality, and ethics. In particular, the Tao of being human is a very profound and exemplary content. The research focuses on clarifying the Characteristics and meaning of the Tao of being human in Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Nguyen Dinh Chieu is the pride of Vietnamese national culture and literature. There are many research works written about him, but the research project with the most outstanding contribution to the background, life, career, and works of Nguyen Dinh Chieu is the Complete Anthology of Nguyen Dinh Chieu. Dinh Chieu, including two volumes by author Ca Van Thinh. Editor (Principles of Universities and Professional Secondary Schools, Hanoi, Volume I: 1980, volume II: 1982).

The most outstanding one can't fail to mention a work that is extremely meticulously and excellently researched in this direction of research: The Path to Becoming a Human Being from Ly Thuong Kiet to Ho Chi Minh by Tran Van Giau (People's Army Publishing House, Hanoi, 2006). Tran Van Giau has made many contributions to the study of human ethics and traditional concepts of life of the Vietnamese people from the period of building and defending the country through national ideology through legendary stories, periods of feudal dynasties, and fighting against foreign invaders throughout history.

In short, Nguyen Dinh Chieu is one of the typical thinkers and patriots of Vietnam in the late 19th century. The ideological content expressed in his works highlights his style as well as the style of the era in which he lived and composed. Therefore, Nguyen Dinh Chieu received a lot of attention and concern from researchers and critics.

### METHODS

This study is based on the point of view of dialectical materialism; historical materialism; Ho Chi Minh's ideology and the guidelines of the Communist Party of Vietnam on human ethics. The article focuses on understanding and researching The Tao of being human in Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thoughts through his poetic works from 1850 to 1888. Systematization techniques will used throughout, analysis and evaluation, deduction and induction, contrast and comparison, logic and history,... to research and present.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Tao of being human in Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought can be conceptualized into main contents as follows: ideas of patriotism, love for the people and deep hatred of the enemy; loyalty - filial piety; a love-hate life attitude that is clear-cut and

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timely; establish virtue, do good deeds and be useful to the world. It carries extremely special nuances through its outstanding characteristics: simple and popular, authentic but profound, and imbued with the human spirit.

First, Nguyen Dinh Chieu was born and raised in the Southern region where Confucianism is still orthodox but it has not yet had the conditions to take deep root in human psychology. He was trained within the framework of feudal education and had living conditions close to the masses. It is these factors that help his concept of human morality express its simple and popular characteristics. He always directed all his emotions and thoughts toward the masses and discovered the beauty of the honesty and resistance enthusiasm of the working people which is most worthy of praise. In the history of China and Vietnam, Mr. Tieu, Mr. Quan, and young people were talked about as dependent people, ranked below the class considered gentlemen. But Nguyen Dinh Chieu sees them as individuals who always have a free life, an independent spirit, and are the embodiment of a heroic spirit, indomitable, wholeheartedly supporting humanity and justice. Even the benevolence that Nguyen Dinh Chieu wholeheartedly promoted was a Confucian concept and associated with feudal ethics, but through his "lens", it included relationships. Goodness between people is no longer the standard of a few upper-class people but of the whole society and bears the mark of humanitarianism with national roots. Reality from history helped him have a more progressive vision than the orthodox feudal Confucian class because the elements of Confucian culture were refined by him to blend with the personality of the Southern people: rich in humanity, meaning, always upholding the spirit of solidarity not only through words but also through practical actions. His concept of human morality has been challenged and tested in the simple life and activities of the masses and the wall of social separation has been completely broken, creating harmony. Generosity between people is the reason for community living and the happiness of the collective people. Nguyen Dinh Chieu said that benevolence is a human morality common to all classes in society and is most evident among working people, expressed through completely new qualities: public character, and collectivity, self-awareness, democratic consciousness, and rustic spirit although somewhat spontaneous. Therefore, even in his awareness of his social status, he also showed simplicity and universality. That is the positive characters who live ethically as human beings in the examples he has promoted come from all walks of life. The villains are mostly aristocrats, have status, and have more or less feudal education. He aimed to affirm: that regardless of any social group, there are people who behave properly, and are benevolent, persevering, and indomitable; It is not necessary to be a sage who has talent and knowledge to be a virtuous person.

Second, Nguyen Dinh Chieu's concept of human morality also shows sincerity but profoundness. The reason his concept of human morality is not the creation of philosophical concepts, categories, and ideas that are dry, rigid, and abstract but is very true and profound is that his purpose was to reflect both social life and the reality of the resistance war against the French and to educate morality and foster personality for people according to national traditions:

"The ancients lived honestly,

Few people indulge in alcohol, love flowers, and forget themselves" (Chieu, 1976, p. 369).

Nguyen Dinh Chieu also believes that the more noble a mission true thinkers and writers have, the more those who masquerade as literature and overturn reality, borrow eloquent words and flashy forms to hide their content. His evil attitude and malicious heart are even more worthy of criticism:

"Seeing today, there is also a literary group,

The physique of a goat and the skin of a tiger are unpredictable" (Chieu, 1976, p. 294)

He eliminated exaggeration to cling to external truths that seemed too small and trivial, but they created courage in spirit and art in thought. Thanks to that, Nguyen Dinh Chieu's concept of human morality is deeply critical and he is the one who inaugurated the idea of true reflection and direct satire, "It's not evil to stab a few bad writers", he said. Literature or any other way of conveying ideas is mainly a matter of struggling to clarify and reflect human morality, nurture people's hearts, and discuss world affairs. The pen must be a sharp spear to defend the government, exorcise evil, fight enemies to save the country, and quell rebellions to calm the people. The work is a large boat transporting morality and humanity, serving as "food" and "tonic" for the human spirit. To accomplish that task, thinkers must first all maintain "steadfastness", and "loyalty", and must be "leaders", and "practitioners", keeping a pure heart to overcome All desires and temptations push and pull, avoid falling into the confusion that "causes people to gradually ruin their bodies":

"Want the god to be bright and pure,

Maintains vitality and blood, prevents deep desires" (Chieu, 1976, p. 268).

To have such progressive concepts, Nguyen Dinh Chieu inherited the traditional concepts of "literature, morality", "poetic language" and "non-evil" but he promoted and reformed according to his ideas, new spirit and content more deeply to suit the needs of the times and the nation. In particular, at a time when the country was being invaded by the wave of Western culture, with the desire to maintain moral discipline, he opposed everything that went against the nation's fine customs and traditions. He believes that a correct and ethical life in family and social relationships is the right path. It is this thought that has helped his concept of human morality become extremely close and practical to human life, and has extremely profound meaning. Confucianists believe that Dao is the way of heaven, but Nguyen Dinh Chieu has a difference. More specifically, it is the religion for grandparents, parents, brothers, teachers, students, friends, etc. summarized in the three diamonds and five eternal principles of

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Confucianism. Especially in the context of Vietnam at the end of the 19th century, the Nguyen Dynasty was sliding on the decline, so ideology and issues of human ethics and living were in crisis. He directed people to a new approach:

“Remember the ancient word morality is righteousness,  
The path must be a narrow one” (Chieu, 1976, p. 277).

And the way to finding the right path is neither near nor infinitely far away, nor is it even difficult to find. It completely comes from each person's awareness, intelligence, and actions. The Tao of being human is not far away, it is the personality, soul and behavior of people in society:

“Heaven has to be somewhere far away  
Wash your heart and find it” (Chieu, 1976, p. 235).

In principle, the way of heaven is promoted, but in reality, Nguyen Dinh Chieu believes that the way of being human is much more valuable. That is the concept that covers his thoughts. According to him, in such a corrupt social context, it is necessary to aim at educating people to fight for justice. Because Nguyen Dinh Chieu's ideology was influenced by Confucianism, his benevolence was patriotism, the obligation to be loyal to the people, and to be loyal to the ideals of saints and sages but not stereotyped according to Confucian scriptures. He considered it the people's morality, the root to cultivate and practice to form self-discipline. However, he could not avoid being bound by Confucian ideology, and could not help but apply Confucian concepts to express his thoughts. However, he conveyed extremely profound content in Confucian concepts simply and vividly. At Nguyen Dinh Chieu, those concepts gradually lost their negative elements and absorbed more positive elements, in order to serve the people in life, work and even in combat. Nguyen Dinh Chieu mentioned the content of morality and ethics in Minh Tam Buu Giam (a precious example of the teachings of saints and sages) but was honestly popularized so that it is easy to remember and memorize and still retains its depth and profoundness. He let the characters in his works act according to the morality and principles of life, such as repaying the gratitude that others, have selflessly helped them through tribulation, helping others out of gratitude without expecting anything in return. Thanks to that, Nguyen Dinh Chieu's moral ideal is still a continuation of the nation's humanitarian tradition but it exists in an "open" space of the Southern region. This is the basis for the formation of the ideal of patriotism and love for the people - the highest peak of patriotism in the context of the decline of feudal ideology in Vietnam from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Third, by studying Nguyen Dinh Chieu's entire ideology in general, and his concept of human morality in particular, we can affirm that profound humanity is one of the outstanding marks throughout his thought and life and is expressed mainly in the following contents: that is, the ideology of patriotism, love for the people, promoting the role of the people in the resistance war against the French, deep hatred of the enemy, and opposition to injustice meaning, evil, cruelty; These humanistic thoughts are expressed through noble and practical spirit and actions, using the pen to fight the enemy, save the country, save the people, and educate people about morality.

Nguyen Dinh Chieu always shows his boundless attachment and love to the people and speaks up to the most humane aspirations of the people working hard in situations of being crushed under a feudal regime full of injustice and harshness. In the context of his country facing foreign invasion, he was very worried about the people's lives, which were already too miserable, so his hatred for the "traffickers" and "willingness to follow the enemy" became even deeper heavy:

“Incompetent ants are everywhere,  
Like duckweed, it's useless like a floating raft.  
Wandering through the lonely forest, listening to the birds sing,  
Squatting on a high bed, you can see a dog sitting on it.  
I can't let the poor people sink forever.” (Chieu, 1976, p. 230).

To sum up, all thoughts expressed in Nguyen Dinh Chieu's literary works also express sincere love for the people and country. The characters he built are all related to the sense of responsibility and ethical behavior that has been determined to maintain a peaceful life for the entire society and peace for the country, and Nguyen Dinh Chieu himself also implemented it. That is nearly like teaching is to help people in the sense of education, making medicine is to help people in the sense of welfare. Even in his feelings and attitudes, he also "hates, hates, hates with all his heart" people who live full of plots, tricks and unethical actions such as betrayal, deception, and greed, addiction to alcohol, lust for fame and fortune,... It is not difficult to realize that the concept of human morality that he aims for in terms of education does not only surround the relationships between father and son, husband and wife, friends, and teachers of the upper social classes but also spreads across the world radiating broader relationships such as national love and compatriotism and embracing all classes of people with all the purest feelings. His love for people always guides the poor, and the masses of hard-working people and has expressed the view that based on the interests of the people to evaluate human morality, have a love-hate attitude that distinguishes levels, and guides the building of proper equality in society. Therefore, humanity in The Tao of Being Human in Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought includes both ethical and moral meanings as well as political and social meanings.

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From those contents and outstanding features, we can easily see that Nguyen Dinh Chieu's conceptual system of human morality includes all the good and influential standards of morality and ethics, great in theory and practice, or other words, in human perception and action.

Regarding theoretical meaning, it can be said that Nguyen Dinh Chieu's concept of human morality has contributed to enriching and deepening the nation's human morality. At that time, he was a representative of the movement that criticized both nominal formalism in decadent feudal culture, ideology, and education as well as profiteering, superstition, and demagoguery that corrupted the foundation. Traditional morality of the nation through religions, mystical medicine, and techniques. This critical spirit was born in the 16th century of thinkers Nguyen Du, and Nguyen Binh Khiem,... until the 18th century such as Le Quy Don, Hai Thuong Lan Ong, Nguyen Cu Trinh,... Nguyen Dinh Chieu continued to connect that spirit but was more comprehensive and public, more urgent and decisive. He reviewed all the advantages as well as perfected the limitations of traditional Eastern culture when these concepts or ideas were still influenced by religion that was far from reality. He criticized all teachings of religions, and conservative and reactionary movements and exposed the superstition and frivolity that killed every person from the first germ of thought. Metaphysical fantasy escapism easily causes an escape from reality, becoming increasingly distant from the struggle of the masses.

As for Confucianism, on the one hand, he criticized the depravity, loss of roots, passion for alcohol, power, and violence and returned to purifying Confucian concepts. On the other hand, he used Confucianism to give the content of his moral thought a new color, turning it into a religion, using it as a weapon to fight against all opposing ideas to suit them, consistent with the reality of the nation's struggle, creating unified and comprehensive ideological strength. But an ideology cannot be born spontaneously, it must be prepared and it must be a product of the times. Vietnamese society in the past had not built its ideology and doctrine, not because we lacked talented people but because the old society only accepted people who were mandarins, not those who were Pure people who lived by new technology and culture. Nguyen Dinh Chieu spent his whole life building a theoretical basis, fighting for that ideology that he believed could save the people from oppression and injustice and prove it was superior. A clear comparison can be made that Confucianism at that time was a lull to hundreds of millions of Chinese people, forcing them to happily accept the rule of the Manchus. The reason for that is that it does not say anything about the people even though the kings are from different races. The thought that Nguyen Dinh Chieu advocates is completely different. This way of being a human being is not the personal way of a gentleman, in the sense of being a ruler, but is the way of being a person of the ruled to fight against the enemy and cannot be advocated at the whim of the times, it must be unified from time to time. Do not compromise with the enemy. Although he has not yet reached the point of completely negating feudal ideology and seeing all the positive sides of the above religions, there are many opinions that Nguyen Dinh Chieu had a "collide" with almost all of the religions. set of classical Eastern religious and ethical philosophies, but no one can deny Nguyen Dinh Chieu's efforts when he built a progressive content in the concept of human morality for the goal of "The house is peaceful, the country is governed, and the people are peaceful. He wished to return to the roots of Confucianism and dreamed of the ancient Yao-Shun period, using it as a mold for his human religion in the context of contemporary Vietnamese society facing difficulties and deadlocks when Discipline and social order became loose after a series of peasant uprisings and mutinies. Meanwhile, a more progressive class with newer ideas did not have enough conditions to form, leading to an ideological crisis among the majority of intellectuals and Confucianists in Vietnam at the end of the 19th century. Therefore, Nguyen Dinh Chieu's ideal of humanity is an inevitable theoretical and polemical product formed in the process of society seeking to escape that deadlock.

Regarding practical significance, first of all, Nguyen Dinh Chieu's concept of human morality has positive significance for the cause of education and moral improvement in Vietnamese society at the end of the 19th century and has the effect of enhancing awareness and cultivation of human morality for people in today's society. He created a wave of "living and imitating" moral examples through typical characters or his teachings and tried to build and disseminate that standard moral value system deeply. expanding into human awareness and life. The good things, beauty, and ideals of life contained in his human religion have had a strong effect in alerting and preventing those who want to reject tradition, pursue a luxurious lifestyle, and dissolve into the world. The wave of "Westernization" parallels the increasingly massive development of the commodity economy. "Don't be deceived by anyone" - don't become a lackey or servant to the enemy. He strongly encouraged the patriotic movement and the resistance war against the French colonialists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and created a fiery atmosphere, throwing himself into the fire and bullets, volunteering without waiting for "the sound of thunder". The drum flag, the drum urged, kicked the fence and rushed forward, seeing the enemy as nothing; I'm not afraid that the Westerner will shoot small bullets and big bullets, rush in through the door, risking his life as if it were nothing." Nguyen Dinh Chieu fanned the flames of determination and the spirit of fighting foreign invaders in the traditions of the Vietnamese people.

Especially at the current stage, under the Party's leadership, Vietnam is carrying out a comprehensive reform process, promoting industrialization, modernization, international integration, and developing a market economy. socialist orientation, carrying out two strategic tasks of both building socialism and firmly protecting the Fatherland. But the impact of the market economy has caused "the cultural environment to be violated, hybridized, unhealthy, contrary to good customs and traditions". In such a context, The Tao of Being Human in Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought has a tremendous effect in preventing and repelling moral

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degradation and negative human lifestyles. It requires and encourages us to attach our lives more closely to the cause of the Fatherland, to raise our hearts to the level of the Party's ideology and the people's sentiments, and to more skillfully apply the artistic guidelines of the Party, which has organically combined Marxist-Leninist aesthetics along with national traditions and perspectives. These are the factors to reflect honestly and courageously, promptly, and vividly the rich reality aimed at building new people and a new era.

### CONCLUSION

Throughout The Tao of being human in Nguyen Dinh Chieu's thought, three main characteristics stand out, which are: simplicity and universality, honesty but profoundness, and a gentle humanistic spirit. These unique characteristics of Nguyen Dinh Chieu have contributed to expressing his cultural knowledge, good personality, and ethics in a life of close connection with the people and dedication to the land, the country of a thinker and scholar before portraying the nation's destiny. Therefore, his concept of human morality has great advice both in terms of complex theory for the work of decorating and promoting national cultural traditions and also contributes to orienting values, good governance in current society and current Vietnamese society.

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