



## Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's Worldview: Content and Historical Significance

### ABSTRACT

*This study focuses on analyzing Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview, highlighting core values such as righteousness, filial piety, patriotism, and compassion for the people. These principles deeply reflect the national spirit, ethics, and social responsibility of the Vietnamese people during the era of foreign invasion. His thought not only inspired resistance, unity, and determination during the anti-French struggles of the 19th century but also shaped the values for future generations. The historical significance of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's ideas transcends time, becoming a treasured cultural and ethical legacy of the Vietnamese nation.*

**Keywords:** Worldview, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, Historical Significance.

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### I. Introduction

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (1822–1888), a prominent Vietnamese thinker, was honored as a World Cultural Figure by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) during its 41st General Conference held from November 9 to 24, 2021, in Paris, France. This recognition is not only a great source of pride for Vietnam but also carries profound significance at both national and international levels. The honor affirms his stature in preserving and promoting the traditional cultural values of Vietnam, particularly patriotism and humanism. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's recognition contributes to introducing and enriching the global treasure of culture and literature.

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview is profoundly expressed in his works, focusing on moral values, righteousness, and patriotism. He emphasized living according to ethical principles, valuing benevolence (nhân) and righteousness (nghĩa) in all social relationships, and embracing helping others and contributing to society as a noble purpose in life. He advocated for the ideal of living for justice, standing against evil, and defending what is right. At the same time, he highlighted love, altruism, and community solidarity. Particularly, his worldview is closely tied to strong patriotism, encouraging individuals to be ready to sacrifice to protect their homeland from foreign invaders. Exploring the content and historical significance of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview not only contributes to shaping and spreading the moral values of traditional Vietnamese society but also helps the world better understand Vietnam's history and culture.

### II. Literature Review

Researching Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview: its content and historical significance requires a scientific approach, integrating multiple research methods to ensure comprehensiveness, depth, and accuracy. Specifically, the study employs: The methodology of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, providing a philosophical foundation for the research; The document analysis and synthesis method, used to collect, analyze, and consolidate information from various sources to establish a theoretical basis and data for the study; The historical method, placing Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview within the social and historical context of 19th-century Vietnam to fully understand its meaning and role; The textual analysis method, exploring the content of his worldview through his literary works; The comparative method, assessing the inheritance, development, and contributions of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview in relation to traditional philosophical and ethical thought.

Regarding the topic “Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s Worldview: Content and Historical Significance”, several notable studies include: Trần Văn Giàu: Nguyễn Đình Chiểu: The Way of Being Human, published by the Department of Culture and Information of Long An Province in 1983, analyzes the core content of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s thought on the way of being human. Hà Huy Giáp: Nguyễn Đình Chiểu - A Great Poet, a Patriot against Invaders, and an Unyielding Role Model, published in Literature Journal, Issue 4, 1972, examines the concept of righteousness (nhân nghĩa) in Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s thought.

Mai Cao Chương: Nguyễn Đình Chiểu - Lessons on Patriotism and Humanity, published in Sài Gòn Giải Phóng newspaper, Issue 5, 1982, highlights the lessons drawn from Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s philosophy. Nguyễn Thị Thanh Tuyền: The Values and Limitations in the Humanistic Thought of the Patriotic Scholar Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, published in Education Journal, Issue 6, 2018, points out the values and limitations of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s worldview.

Currently, there is no direct research on the topic "Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s Worldview: Content and Historical Significance." The published works related to the subject are essential resources for the author to build upon and develop further in this study.

### III. Results and Discussion

#### Core Aspects of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s Worldview

The core aspects of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s worldview can be summarized as follows:

#### Firstly, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s Perspective on Righteousness (Nhân Nghĩa)

Righteousness (nhân nghĩa) is a fundamental value in Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s thought. He viewed nhân nghĩa not merely as compassion and love between individuals but as intrinsically tied to the responsibility of protecting the homeland and fighting against evil and injustice. In his philosophy, nhân nghĩa is not only a traditional moral value but also a guiding principle for action, serving as the foundation for patriotism and the determination to defend the nation in the context of French colonial invasion. Through his works, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu affirmed that nhân nghĩa goes beyond loving humanity—it also encompasses the struggle for justice, the defense of the homeland, and the creation of a fair and compassionate society.

First and foremost, nhân nghĩa in Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s thought represents love and care for humanity. He consistently valued and empathized with the struggles of the poor working class, those who endured suffering and loss, and the soldiers who willingly sacrificed themselves to defend their homeland. He wrote:

*“How can one love the people without striving to establish oneself, To bring rain during the scorching summer heat?” (Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, Complete Works, Vol. 1, 1978, p. 79)*

In Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s thought, love for humanity transcends distinctions of status or circumstance, extending to all social classes, including the poor and unfortunate, such as beggars:

*“Even the beggar is born of Heaven’s design,  
Illness may still be cured, and medicine freely given.”  
(Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, Complete Works, Vol. 1, 1978, p. 364)*

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu not only praised farmer-soldiers and heroes who defended the nation but also valued and cared for the poor and marginalized, those forgotten by society. For him, helping beggars or the disadvantaged was not merely a moral duty but also a reflection of noble character and deep empathy for the injustices of society. This philosophy embodies a profound humanistic spirit, illuminating moral values in both Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s works and his life.

His compassion extended beyond merely sharing in others’ pain; it was also about honoring human value and affirming their noble qualities. Additionally, he celebrated righteousness and encouraged people to live for justice and willingly help others without concern for personal gain:

*“Remember the saying: to see what’s right and fail to act,  
Such a person cannot be called a hero.”  
(Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, Complete Works, Vol. 1, 1978, p. 49)*

The love for humanity in Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s thought is not only profoundly humanistic but also a source of motivation to foster solidarity and determination, aiming to build a fair and compassionate society.

Furthermore, nhân nghĩa (righteousness), according to Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, goes beyond personal emotions and must be demonstrated through responsibility toward the homeland and society. He emphasized that nhân nghĩa must be tied to action, involving a commitment to defending justice and opposing evil and injustice. For him, love and compassion are not merely feelings of empathy but must be transformed into concrete actions that contribute to building and protecting the community.

*"To be a man is to repay the debt to the nation and family,*

*To honor your father and serve your lord with integrity—that is true talent."* (Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, 1978, p. 175)

For Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, responsibility toward the homeland and society represents the highest expression of nhân nghĩa (righteousness) and is also a condition for individuals to attain a noble purpose in life. This philosophy serves as a profound lesson on civic responsibility and patriotism for all eras.

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's philosophy of nhân nghĩa (righteousness) ignited the spirit of solidarity, compassion, and determination among the Vietnamese people. He reminded us that nhân nghĩa is not merely a personal moral value but also a source of strength for defending the homeland and building a just society. Through his works, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu conveyed messages about ethics and the responsibility each individual has toward their community. Nhân nghĩa is not just an emotion but must be demonstrated through practical actions to help others and contribute to society. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's philosophy of nhân nghĩa holds significance not only in his own era but also serves as a lasting source of inspiration for future generations, encouraging patriotism, unity, and a sense of social responsibility.

### **Secondly, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's Perspective on Trung (Loyalty) and Hiếu (Filial Piety)**

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's view on trung and hiếu represents a profound integration of traditional Confucian moral values with the patriotism and righteousness of the Vietnamese people. While traditional Confucianism emphasizes trung as loyalty to the king and hiếu as respect and care for parents, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu expanded and adapted these concepts to suit the historical context of his time. For him, trung signified loyalty to the nation and the people, especially during the period of French colonial invasion. He redefined trung not merely as allegiance to the king but as devotion to the homeland and its citizens. He wrote:

*"Why live following the heretic troops, tossing away ancestral incense and toppling the altar—such sights only bring sorrow?*

*Why live as a servant of the foreign soldiers, sharing their sweet wine and chewing their bread—such actions only bring shame?*

*Better to die with the honor of resisting the invaders, returning to our ancestors with pride,*

*Than to live bearing the mark of the Westerners, enduring great suffering among the barbarians."* (Poetry and Prose of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, 1976, p. 253)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu inherited and uniquely developed the Confucian concept of trung (loyalty) to align with the historical context of Vietnam during the French colonial invasion. Confucianism, also known as Confucian philosophy, is a system of philosophical, ethical, and political thought founded by Confucius (551–479 BCE) and further developed by his disciples, particularly Mencius and Xunzi. Originating in China during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, Confucianism became the ideological foundation of China and had a profound influence on many East Asian countries, including Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. In Confucianism, trung is traditionally understood as loyalty to the king, emphasizing the bond between ruler and subject in the political structure of feudalism. However, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu expanded the meaning of trung from loyalty to the king (trung quân) to loyalty to the nation (trung quốc), highlighting devotion to the country and its people. For Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, the loyalty of a righteous person was no longer confined to allegiance to the court but was instead directed toward the ideals of defending national independence and preserving the dignity of the nation. By situating trung within the relationship with the nation and community, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu elevated the Confucian concept of loyalty, making it more relatable and vibrantly relevant to the turbulent historical context of Vietnam.

Regarding hiếu (filial piety), Nguyễn Đình Chiểu regarded it as a core moral value, beginning with devotion and respect for one's parents. In his work *Lục Vân Tiên*, the concept of hiếu is

emphasized through the protagonist, Lục Vân Tiên, who consistently focuses on his family and fulfills his duties as a son. Despite facing numerous hardships, Vân Tiên remains deeply respectful of his parents, considering filial piety the foundation for developing one's character:

*"Vân Tiên knelt and said with humility:  
I may not surpass the ancients, but I will match those of today.  
I ask my parents to set their hearts at ease,  
So I may repay the debts of their nurturing with honor."*  
(Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, 2022, p. 114)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu extended the meaning of hiếu (filial piety) to encompass social dimensions. For him, hiếu was not confined to family relationships but also embodied a responsibility to the homeland, ancestors, and those who sacrificed for the nation:

*"To die having repaid the nation's debt brings a fragrant name, praised across six provinces;  
To die worthy of shrine and temple veneration leaves a legacy of righteousness admired for eternity."*  
(*Poetry and Prose of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu*, 1976, p. 254)

In Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's thought, hiếu (filial piety) is closely tied to the spirit of nhân nghĩa (righteousness). He regarded filial piety as the root of all morality and the foundation for building a just and compassionate society. This is reflected in his characters, such as Lục Vân Tiên and Kiều Nguyệt Nga, who always act out of justice and compassion, not merely for personal gain but for the benefit of the community.

In Confucianism, hiếu (filial piety) is considered the most important virtue, serving as the foundation for personal character development and harmonious social relationships. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu embraced this concept, emphasizing that hiếu is not merely a duty but also an expression of gratitude and a sense of responsibility toward family and society. While Confucianism primarily focuses hiếu on familial relationships (parents and ancestors), Nguyễn Đình Chiểu expanded its meaning to encompass relationships with the nation and the homeland. For him, patriotism and fighting to protect the country were also ways to demonstrate filial piety toward ancestors who sacrificed to defend national independence. He asserted that hiếu must not remain merely an ideal but should be expressed through concrete actions, such as helping others, upholding justice, and standing against evil. This is evident in the heroic characters in his works, who consistently act for greater causes and out of filial devotion.

### Thirdly, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's Worldview Reflecting Profound Patriotism and Compassion for the People

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, a great poet of 19th-century Vietnamese literature, stands as a symbol of patriotism and deep compassion for the people. This philosophy is vividly expressed in his works, from the poignant and heroic Funeral Oration for the Cần Giuộc Martyrs to the humane and morally rich poetic tale Lục Vân Tiên. He demonstrated his patriotism by encouraging the spirit of resistance against foreign invaders. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu praised farmer-soldiers who, though "unfamiliar with the bow and arrow, untrained in the barracks," were willing to sacrifice their lives for their homeland, embodying intense love for their country:

*"To die having repaid the debt to the nation brings a fragrant name, praised across six provinces;  
To die worthy of shrine and temple veneration leaves a legacy of righteousness, admired for eternity."*  
(*Poetry and Prose of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu*, 1976, p. 254)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu expressed his patriotism not only through resistance against invaders but also by preserving traditional cultural values. He condemned those who collaborated with the enemy and betrayed the nation, viewing such actions as unfilial to ancestors and contrary to national ethics. This spirit was reflected in his resolute refusal to cooperate with the French colonizers, even at the cost of personal material or social loss.

*"Better to let my eyes be shrouded in blindness,  
Than to see the enemy defile my kin.  
Better to let my sight grow dim,  
Than to witness my people in hardship and despair.  
Better to face a lonely view,  
Than to see the skies torn by invasion.  
Better to face darkness profound,*



*Than to see my homeland sunk in war's chaos.  
Though blind, I uphold my family's way,  
Far better than having sight but forsaking ancestors' worship.  
Though blind, I escape disgrace,  
Far better than seeing yet living in filth and shame."*

(Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, 2022, pp. 306–307)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu expressed deep affection and respect for the working people, those who were poor but rich in patriotism and righteousness. In his works, he movingly depicted farmers who, though "toiling humbly to make a living and struggling with poverty," were ready to rise and resist invaders. These ordinary individuals became heroes when the nation was in peril:

*"Without waiting for a summons or command, this time we vow to summon the strength of whales;  
With no thought of fleeing in retreat, this time we pledge to strike with the power of tigers."* (Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, 2022, p. 31)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu expressed his compassion for the people through his deep sorrow over the suffering and hardship caused by war. He empathized profoundly with the sacrifices and losses of poor farming families, the mothers who lost their children, and the wives who lost their husbands to the ravages of war. This empathy is evident not only in his poetry and prose but also in his life -as a physician dedicated to helping the poor and disadvantaged. He wrote:

*"In the western wind and rain of winter's cry,  
The ailing people turn to their healer nearby.  
The old ways saw king and subject standing near,  
Today, the young and old entrust their lives here."*  
(*Poetry and Prose of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu*, 1976, p. 300)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's patriotism and compassion for the people represent a profound synthesis of national spirit and humanistic ethics. His love for the country was not only expressed through inspiring resistance against invaders but also through his respect for national culture and traditions. His compassion for the people was more than mere empathy; it served as a driving force for his creation of valuable works that encouraged unity and the fight for justice.

### The Historical Significance of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's Worldview

From the core content of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview, several historical significances can be drawn, including:

*Fistly, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview contributed to deepening and enriching perspectives on human life in the history of Vietnamese thought.*

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview contributed to deepening and enriching perspectives on human life in the history of Vietnamese thought, particularly through the integration of traditional moral values with a strong sense of patriotism and compassion for the people. He not only emphasized the role of personal morality in self-cultivation but also highlighted the responsibility of individuals toward their community and nation. He upheld the spirit of righteousness, filial piety, and the ideal of "not ignoring injustice when encountered." Furthermore, he honored patriotic farmers who courageously sacrificed for their country, asserting that the value of human life lies not in status or position but in loyalty and actions for a greater cause. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's thought profoundly reflected traditional ethics while creating a unique foundation for a Vietnamese worldview, where individual values are intrinsically tied to social responsibility and love for the homeland.

Secondly, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview played a significant role in strongly inspiring the patriotic movement and resistance against French colonialism in Vietnam during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview played a pivotal role in strongly inspiring the patriotic movement and resistance against French colonialism in Vietnam during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He conveyed the spirit of struggle through values such as nhân nghĩa (righteousness), trung hiếu (loyalty and filial piety), and responsibility to the nation. He depicted the image of humble farmers who were willing to rise and fight against invaders with unwavering patriotism and resilience. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu honored their sacrifices as heroic symbols, encouraging a sense of patriotism among the people. His worldview established a moral standard, fostering national pride, solidarity, and a spirit of self-reliance in the context of colonial invasion. As a result, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's

works and thought became a powerful source of motivation for patriotic movements and the struggle for national liberation during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Vietnam.

Thirdly, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview deeply resonated with the people, becoming a spiritual legacy cherished by the people of Southern Vietnam.

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview deeply resonated with the people and became a "spiritual legacy" of the Southern Vietnamese due to its closeness, authenticity, and strong spirit of patriotism and compassion for the people, vividly reflected in his works. He did not compose ornate literary pieces solely for the intellectual elite but instead directed his pen toward ordinary laborers farmers, craftsmen those who were deeply connected to their homeland and always ready to rise in defense of the nation. The farmer-soldiers of Southern Vietnam, who willingly sacrificed their lives for the independence of their homeland, have stirred the hearts of countless generations. By celebrating the loyalty and indomitable spirit of the Southern Vietnamese people, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu made his worldview a spiritual emblem of this region. His works were not merely literature; they were a rallying cry and a profound expression of solidarity with the people. This connection elevated Nguyễn Đình Chiểu to the status of a poet of the people, a representative of the Southern Vietnamese spirit during a period of painful yet heroic resistance against foreign invaders.

Fourthly, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview plays a significant role in shaping positive human values in the context of contemporary Vietnam's socio-economic landscape.

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview, centered on the values of nhân nghĩa (righteousness), filial piety, loyalty, and patriotism, continues to provide valuable guidance for Vietnam's socio-economic life today. In the context of the country's international integration and rapid economic and social transformation, his philosophy serves as a reminder of the importance of personal ethics and community responsibility. Values like nhân nghĩa, reflected in the spirit of mutual support and kindness, form the foundation for building a just and humane society. This is particularly evident in movements for charity, environmental protection, and sustainable development. At the same time, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's patriotism and deep connection to the nation inspire younger generations to engage in activities that safeguard national sovereignty and preserve cultural identity in the era of globalization. His philosophy serves as a reminder that no matter how advanced or modern society becomes, maintaining ethics and living with compassion and justice remain the roots of all positive human values. Thus, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's thought holds not only historical significance but also contemporary relevance, playing a crucial role in guiding Vietnam's societal development in the 21st century.

#### IV. Conclusion

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview, centered on values such as nhân nghĩa (righteousness), filial piety, patriotism, and compassion for the people, not only deeply reflects the national spirit but also serves as a beacon of morality and life ideals for the Vietnamese people. During the tumultuous historical period of the late 19th century, his philosophy inspired the will to fight, a spirit of solidarity, and faith in justice among the people, particularly in Southern Vietnam. These values not only provided an ideological foundation for resisting foreign invaders but also became a symbol of enduring culture and morality, standing the test of time. The historical significance of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's thought lies not only in shaping patriotism during the resistance period but also in its ability to inspire future generations toward a life of virtue, justice, and responsibility to the community. His worldview, therefore, is not merely a legacy of a historical era but also a valuable lesson for modern Vietnamese society in shaping character and building a civilized, compassionate society.

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