

## NGUYEN DINH CHIEU The Blind Scholar of Gia Dinh

If Nguyen Cong Tru was famous for his dynamism both in serving the homeland and pursuing his own ideals, Nguyen Dinh Chieu — the blind scholar of Gia Dinh — might be considered the most faithful disciple of Confucianism.

Native of Tan Khanh village, Gia Dinh province, Nguyen Dinh Chieu, better known as Do (teacher) Chieu, was among the most illustrious and popular writers of South Viet Nam in recent history.

Graduated « Bachelor » in 1843, he went to the imperial city of Hue in Central Viet Nam to prepare for a Doctorate degree. In 1849, just a few months before the examinations, he received the news of his mother's death. He immediately returned to the South to attend the funeral but he wept so much that he became blind. Compelled to abandon all hope of serving at the Imperial Court, Do Chieu opened a private school which soon was attended by a large number of students coming from all parts of the country.

Nguyen Dinh Chieu was a great patriot despite his blindness. When the French occupied the southern provinces, he became a fervent supporter of the resistance movement. The French colonialists, fully aware of his great influence on the great masses, intended to buy him off with large quantities of presents and many honors. But Do Chieu tactfully declined all the offers made by the foreign rulers.

As a resistance writer, Do Chieu was well-known for his poem dedicated to Phan Thanh Gian, the national hero who died protesting Colonialism, and a moving eulogy to the memory of the dead resistance fighters.

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But Nguyen Dinh Chieu's greatest literary work was the novel entitled *Luc Van Tien*, a 2,076-verse masterpiece which is a romantic autobiography.

The novel described the eventful life of a couple — Luc Van Tien and Kieu Nguyet Nga — who were finally united after long years of vicissitudes. Due to its simple but elegant style, the literary work figures now among the classics of Vietnamese literature like the *Kim Van Kieu* of Nguyen Du.

Nguyen Dinh Chieu died on July 3, 1888 in Ben Tre province, at the age of 66. A street and a primary school in the Tan Dinh district of Saigon have been named after the blind scholar in recognition of his patriotism and literary talents.