

TALE OF KIEU (Truyen Kieu) (Also known as Kim Van Kieu). Classic poem written by Vietnamese author Nguyen Du (1765-1820) in the early nineteenth century. Generally considered to be the greatest literary work written in the Vietnamese language, the Tale of Kieu is based on a Chinese love story and relates the story of a beautiful and intelligent young woman who sells herself as a concubine while remaining true to her real lover. Underlying the narrative plot is a powerful criticism of the greed, hypocrisy, and viciousness of contemporary Confucian society in Vietnam. The dramatic plot, as well as the beauty and the delicacy of the language, have made this 3,254-line poem the favorite literary work of millions of Vietnamese.

In the 1920s, the Tale of Kieu became the centerpiece of a literary controversy between supporters and opponents of French rule in colonial Vietnam. (See Literature; Ngo Duc Ke; Nguyen Du; Pham Quynh)