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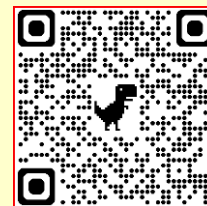
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Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's View Of Life: From Confucian Culture To Universal Values

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ABSTRACT

The study “Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s View of Life: From Confucian Culture to Universal Values” analyzes the inheritance and transformation of Confucian moral values in Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s philosophy. Starting from core values such as benevolence (*nhân*), righteousness (*ngĩa*), loyalty (*trung*), and filial piety (*hiếu*), Nguyễn Đình Chiểu expanded these into universal values, aligning with Vietnam’s historical context and embodying profound humanistic meaning. His thoughts emphasize compassion, social responsibility, patriotism, and self-sacrifice for the community, shaping not only individual ethics but also contributing to the creation of a harmonious, progressive, and humane society.

KEY WORDS: worldview, universal values, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu

1. Introduction

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (1822–1888) was a renowned poet and cultural figure of Vietnam, celebrated not only for his exceptional literary works but also for his exemplary morality and patriotic spirit. Through his notable works such as *Lục Vân Tiên*, *Dương Từ - Hà Mậu*, *Văn tế nghĩa sĩ Cần Giuộc* (The Funeral Oration for the Cần Giuộc Martyrs), and various patriotic poems and writings, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu made an indelible mark on national literature, particularly during the period of foreign invasion and cultural crisis.

In his writings, his worldview not only reflects the traditional Confucian virtues of benevolence (*nhân*), righteousness (*ngĩa*), loyalty (*trung*), and filial piety (*hiếu*), but also expands them into a more humanistic and universal direction, emphasizing compassion, justice, and peace.

The study of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s worldview in relation to Confucian culture and universal values is essential, as it not only sheds light on the influence of Confucianism in Vietnamese

literature but also explores how he transformed traditional values into global messages that transcend the boundaries of time and space. This research affirms the enduring significance of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s thought in fostering the comprehensive development of morality and character in contemporary Vietnamese society.

2. Literature Review

Regarding the topic “Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s View of Life: From Confucian Culture to Universal Values”, several notable studies can be highlighted:

In the article “Confucianism and Intellectual Characters in Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s Works”, published in the *Journal of Literature*, Issue 4, 1982, author Vũ Đức Phúc summarizes the Confucian ethical standards that influenced Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s worldview.

Professor Trần Văn Giàu, in his work “Nguyễn Đình Chiểu: The Way of Being Human”, published by the Long An Department of

Culture and Information in 1983, provides an in-depth analysis of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's perspectives on the way of being human through his writings.

The article "*The Application of Confucianism from the People's Perspective by Nguyễn Đình Chiểu*", published in the *Journal of Philosophy* in 1978 by Nguyễn Đức Sự, examines in detail how Nguyễn Đình Chiểu incorporated Confucianism into his works.

"*From Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's View of Life to Aesthetic Perspective*" by author Vũ Đình Liên, published in the *Journal of Literature*, Issue 4, 1972, explores Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview and aesthetics through his works.

Currently, no study or article directly addresses the topic "*Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's View of Life: From Confucian Culture to Universal Values*". The aforementioned studies serve as essential references for the author to build upon and further develop in this research.

3. Methods

To conduct the scholarly article "*Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's View of Life: From Confucian Culture to Universal Values*", it is essential to employ appropriate research methods to ensure scientific rigor and logical coherence. Specifically, the study is grounded in the methodological frameworks of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. It utilizes textual analysis, the historical method, the comparative method, and interdisciplinary approaches.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Worldview and Confucian Worldview

A worldview is a system of perspectives and attitudes that people hold regarding life, encompassing its purpose, meaning, and ways of living. This is an essential concept in philosophy, reflecting how individuals perceive and shape the value of life, guiding their actions and behaviors in society. According to researcher Đào Duy Anh, "Worldview pertains to human life" (*Đào Duy Anh, 1957, p. 64*). Throughout the history of philosophy, worldviews have evolved through various stages and schools of thought. In ancient Eastern philosophy, such as Confucianism and Taoism, worldviews focused on moral values, the relationships between individuals and society, as well as nature, emphasizing harmony and ethical principles. In the West, beginning with ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, the foundation for worldviews was laid through inquiries into happiness, ethics, and the purpose of life. In modern philosophy, thinkers such as Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus expanded this concept, emphasizing freedom, individuality, and the search for meaning in an ever-changing world. The diversity of perspectives on worldview not only reflects historical and cultural contexts but also illustrates the richness of human efforts to seek meaning and value in life.

Confucianism, founded by Confucius in the 6th century BCE, is a philosophical, ethical, and political system that has profoundly influenced East Asian countries, particularly China, Vietnam, Japan, and Korea. Aimed at building a harmonious and stable society, Confucianism focuses on cultivating moral virtues in individuals and fostering social relationships, from family to the state. Its worldview is reflected in its perspectives on human nature, life, and social conduct, emphasizing self-improvement, fulfilling moral responsibilities, and maintaining social order through the core values of *benevolence* (*nhân*), *propriety* (*lễ*), *righteousness* (*ngĩa*), *wisdom* (*trí*), and *trustworthiness* (*tín*).

Confucianism is not a religion centered on deities but rather an ethical and philosophical doctrine based on the teachings of

Confucius and his disciples. It highlights the importance of education, personal cultivation, and obligations to family, community, and the state. Confucianism views humans as inseparable from society and upholds the role of rituals and moral values in sustaining harmony.

The worldview of Confucianism is built upon three fundamental aspects:

First of all, confucian Perspectives on Humans and Life

Confucianism holds a profound and humanistic view of humanity, considering humans as the center of the universe and as beings capable of self-perfection through education and moral cultivation. According to Confucius, humans are born with an inherently good nature, and the goal of life is to develop moral values such as *benevolence* (*nhân* – love and compassion), *propriety* (*lễ* – respect for social norms), *righteousness* (*ngĩa* – doing what is right), *wisdom* (*trí* – understanding), and *trustworthiness* (*tín* – reliability). Confucianism emphasizes that humans do not exist independently but within social relationships, from family to the state, where each individual must fulfill their responsibilities to maintain harmony. Perfecting oneself through learning, ethics, and self-discipline not only enables individuals to achieve the status of a "gentleman" (*quân tử*)—the ideal human figure in Confucianism—but also contributes to creating a just and stable society. This perspective elevates the value of humans as entities that are both free and responsible, while being closely connected to family and community.

Confucianism perceives life as a continuous process of self-improvement, living harmoniously with family, society, and nature. Human life, according to Confucianism, is not merely about satisfying material needs but also about fulfilling moral values and responsibilities within social relationships. Confucius taught that life becomes meaningful when individuals cultivate themselves to embody the virtue of *benevolence* (*nhân*), which signifies love and compassion for others, while adhering to *propriety* (*lễ*), the rules of conduct that maintain harmony and order. Confucianism stresses the inseparable bond between individuals and their communities, viewing responsible living towards family, the nation, and society as the foundation for a good life. The Confucian perspective on life extends beyond personal morality to collective responsibility, aiming to build a just, peaceful, and stable society where everyone contributes to maintaining balance and harmony.

Secondly, confucian Perspectives on Human Relationships

Confucianism places great emphasis on interpersonal relationships, considering them the foundation for maintaining harmony in society. It advocates that social relationships must be built on ethics, responsibility, and mutual respect, encapsulated in the principle of the "*Five Relationships*" (*Ngũ luân*): ruler-subject (*quân thần*), parent-child (*phụ tử*), husband-wife (*phu thê*), sibling-sibling (*huynh đê*), and friend-friend (*bằng hữu*). Within these relationships, every individual has a duty to fulfill their role appropriately: rulers must be benevolent, and subjects must be loyal; parents must be loving, and children must be filial; spouses must live harmoniously; siblings must be affectionate; and friends must be trustworthy. Confucianism particularly values the virtue of *benevolence* (*nhân*)—love and compassion—as the core element for sustaining harmony and stability in relationships. According to Confucian thought, interpersonal relationships are not merely social responsibilities but also a path for individuals to achieve moral perfection, contributing to the creation of a harmonious, stable, and prosperous community.

Thirdly, confucian Views on Morality and Social Responsibility

Confucianism regards morality and social responsibility as the foundation for building and maintaining a harmonious and stable society. According to Confucius, personal morality is not only about self-cultivation but is also closely tied to one's responsibilities toward family, community, and the nation. Core values such as *benevolence* (*nhân* – love and compassion), *propriety* (*lễ* – respect for social norms), *righteousness* (*ngĩa* – right actions), *wisdom* (*trí* – understanding), and *trustworthiness* (*tín* – reliability) are seen as ethical standards guiding appropriate behavior in all situations. Confucianism emphasizes that each individual has a duty to fulfill their role in society: rulers must be benevolent, subjects loyal, parents loving, children filial, spouses harmonious, and friends trustworthy. The moral development of individuals not only brings happiness and meaning to their lives but also contributes to the sustainability of society as a whole. This perspective affirms that morality and social responsibility are inseparable and represent the path toward the collective prosperity of the community.

4.2 The Worldview of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu

The worldview of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu is a profound embodiment of humanistic thought, crystallizing the cultural traditions of the Vietnamese people, the influence of Confucianism, and the unique historical context of the 19th century. Through his renowned works such as *Lục Vân Tiên*, *Dương Từ - Hà Mậu*, and various patriotic poems and writings, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu expressed deep perspectives on humanity, life, and moral values. He emphasized compassion for others, loyalty, filial piety, and self-sacrifice for the community while strongly criticizing social injustices and corruption. His worldview not only drew from traditional Confucian values like *benevolence* (*nhân*), *righteousness* (*ngĩa*), *wisdom* (*trí*), and *trustworthiness* (*tín*), but also expanded toward universal principles imbued with profound and timeless humanistic meaning. In the context of a nation under invasion and a society in turmoil, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's ideas were not merely literary inspiration but also a moral compass, helping shape the values and patriotism of generations of Vietnamese people.

The content of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview can be analyzed through the following key aspects:

Firstly, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's Perspective on Humanity and Moral Qualities

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu regarded humans as the center of society, possessing inherent value not only through their individual roles but also through their connection to the community. He emphasized that individuals have the capacity for self-improvement through education and moral cultivation.

In his work *Lục Vân Tiên*, the protagonist is portrayed as an ideal model of humanity: courageous, loyal, compassionate, and willing to sacrifice for others. For Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, the worth of a person does not lie in power or wealth but in morality and kindness:

*“What counts as nothing is still called mulberry,
If tending the nation, one must first tend the family.
Day by day, steps lead farther away,
This wealth is left for an elder father's care”.*

(Poems and Prose of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, 1976, pp. 153–154)

According to Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, humans must embody moral virtues such as *benevolence* (*nhân*), *righteousness* (*ngĩa*), *loyalty* (*trung*), and *filial piety* (*hiếu*). He believed that *benevolence*—compassion and tolerance—is the core moral value of humanity. In his works, he consistently emphasized the necessity of kindness in

life. For instance, Lục Vân Tiên rescues Kiều Nguyệt Nga not for fame or fortune but out of pure compassion, exemplifying noble altruism. This reflects Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's belief that people are truly valuable only when they love and help others. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu also valued *righteousness*—living according to principles and justice. He highlighted the spirit of standing up against evil and defending justice. Integrity and loyalty to friends and society are indispensable qualities for building a true human character. The virtue of *loyalty* (*trung*)—faithfulness to ideals and responsibility toward the nation—was particularly emphasized in his patriotic poetry and writings. In the context of a country under invasion, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu affirmed that each person's duty is to remain loyal to the nation and be willing to sacrifice to protect their homeland. *Filial piety* (*hiếu*) was another fundamental value in Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's thought, vividly portrayed through characters like Lục Vân Tiên, who always prioritized his devotion to his parents. For him, filial piety was not only a family obligation but also the foundation for building personal and social morality.

He wrote:

*“To be a person of loyalty and righteousness is worthy of eternal praise,
Standing in the universe, your name shall never fade.
Repay the land and nation with your daily bread,
Keep faith and duty as a loyal servant and child”.*

(Poems and Prose of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, 1976, p. 275)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's perspective on humanity and moral virtues reflects a profound humanistic thought, using ethics as the measure of human value. He not only emphasized personal virtues but also encouraged responsibility toward family and society. These values have significantly shaped Vietnamese culture and national spirit, serving as timeless lessons for all generations.

Secondly, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's Perspective on Social Responsibility and Patriotism

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's views on social responsibility and patriotism are central to his worldview, deeply reflecting his love for the nation and the moral consciousness of a poet closely tied to the fate of his country.

He believed that humans cannot be separated from society and that every individual must fulfill their duties to contribute to the stability and harmony of the community. In his perspective, social responsibility is expressed through core moral values such as *benevolence* (*nhân* – compassion), *righteousness* (*ngĩa* – living rightly), and *wisdom* (*trí* – the responsibility to understand and act correctly). He wrote:

*“The way of Heaven is not distant or obscure,
It shines through the human heart, plain and sure.*

*Who, upholding righteousness, would betray their land?
Who, with compassion, would forsake their family's stand?
Through the ages, loyalty and filial piety have been esteemed,
Books still record the truths of right and wrong, it seems”.*

(Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, 1978, pp. 314–315)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu lived during a time when his country was under colonial invasion, and patriotism became an inseparable part of his thought and creative works. He believed that patriotism was not merely a natural emotion but also a sacred duty of every individual toward their nation and people. He praised courageous farmers who,

though humble, were willing to sacrifice their lives to defend the country. He honored them as those who “fight in life and fight even in death,” emphasizing that patriotism is the highest virtue of humanity:

*“In life, they fought the enemy; in death, they still fight,
Their spirits aiding the army, vowing through eternity to
avenge the wrongs...”*

(Poems and Prose of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, 1976, p. 254)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s views on social responsibility and patriotism embody profound humanistic thought, affirming that human life only gains true meaning when it is connected to the community and when individuals are willing to sacrifice for their homeland.

Thirdly, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s Perspective on Interpersonal Relationships

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu had a profound and humanistic view of interpersonal relationships, as reflected in his notable works. He particularly emphasized compassion and altruism as the foundation of all social relationships.

In *Lục Vân Tiên*, the character Vân Tiên willingly rescues Kiều Nguyệt Nga without expecting any reward, exemplifying unconditional love and kindness toward others. This act symbolizes not only benevolence but also conveys a message about proper human interactions: love and compassion should be the cornerstone:

*“Remember the saying: 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)

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s compassion extended beyond family and personal relationships to the broader community and society. He emphasized that only when people love and care for one another can society achieve harmony and sustainable development.

Altruism was regarded by Nguyễn Đình Chiểu as an essential quality for maintaining harmony in social relationships. To him, altruism was not merely the ability to forgive others’ mistakes but also an expression of tolerance and empathy for the struggles and misfortunes others face. In his works, altruism is often intertwined with love and compassion, demonstrated through the willingness to help others, regardless of their circumstances or social status:

*“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’s perspective on love and altruism reflects profound humanistic thought, showcasing a deep respect for moral values in human relationships. He saw these qualities not only as essential personal virtues but also as critical factors for fostering unity within communities and building a better society.

4.3 The Transformation of Confucian Worldview into Universal Values in Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s Thought

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s worldview was deeply influenced by Confucianism, especially its ethical values such as *benevolence (nhân)*, *righteousness (nghĩa)*, *propriety (lễ)*, *wisdom (trí)*, and *trustworthiness (tín)*. However, he did not simply inherit these traditions; he transformed them into universal values, broadening their significance to address the practical needs of Vietnamese society in his time and creating a worldview relevant across eras. This transformation not only highlights the humanistic nature of Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s thought but also demonstrates his adaptability and creativity in merging tradition with modernity.

It is evident that Confucianism profoundly shaped Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s worldview, particularly in defining moral values and views on humanity and society. The Confucian emphasis on self-cultivation for moral perfection and fulfilling duties toward family and society formed the foundation of his humanistic philosophy. This is vividly expressed through characters like *Lục Vân Tiên*, who acts according to the ideals of *benevolence* and *righteousness*, willing to sacrifice for justice and assist others.

However, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu did not remain confined to Confucian ideals; he adapted them in a more flexible and humanistic manner to suit Vietnam’s historical context. From individual virtues like filial piety and loyalty, he expanded these into broader concepts of patriotism and social responsibility. He transformed Confucian values from a rigid framework of rituals into a motivating force for the struggle for independence and freedom.

The influence of Confucianism not only shaped Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s worldview but also helped him develop universal ideas that transcend cultural and temporal boundaries.

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s integration and adaptation of core Confucian values—such as *benevolence*, *righteousness*, *propriety*, *wisdom*, and *trustworthiness*—are evident in how he tailored them to the historical context and societal needs of 19th-century Vietnam. While Confucianism traditionally focused on social relationships like ruler-subject, parent-child, and husband-wife, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu expanded these values to encompass the entire society, emphasizing patriotism and social responsibility. For instance, the concept of *filial piety (hiếu)* was not limited to devotion to one’s parents but elevated to loyalty and devotion to one’s homeland—a noble expression of morality during a time of national invasion. The Confucian virtue of *benevolence (nhân)*, traditionally centered on love within the family and small communities, was reinterpreted by Nguyễn Đình Chiểu as compassion and love for all social classes, regardless of status. In *The Funeral Oration for the Cần Giuộc Martyrs (Văn tế nghĩa sĩ Cần Giuộc)*, he praised the self-sacrificing farmers who died defending their homeland as embodiments of justice and patriotism—values that transcend the confines of Confucianism to become universal humanistic messages. This transformation demonstrates Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s creative talent in revitalizing traditional ideas while enabling Vietnamese cultural values to align with global humanistic principles.

Thus, the transformation of Confucian worldview into universal values in Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s thought reflects his profound vision and innovative mindset. By expanding and enriching traditional values, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu constructed a humanistic and timeless ideological system. These values not only served as an inspiration for the Vietnamese people in their struggle for independence but also provide valuable lessons for humanity in building a just, compassionate, and sustainable society.

4.4 Contributions and Lessons from Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s Worldview

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu’s worldview, a synthesis of patriotism, Confucian ethics, and his life experiences, holds enduring significance not only in his era but also for contemporary culture, morality, and ways of life. His humanistic thought has made substantial contributions and imparted valuable lessons, particularly in shaping human character, preserving national identity, and promoting universal values.

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu infused traditional moral values such as *benevolence (nhân)*, *righteousness (nghĩa)*, *loyalty (trung)*, and *filial piety (hiếu)* into his works, transforming them into guiding

principles for human behavior. These values strengthened patriotism and social ethics during a time of national turmoil. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview was deeply intertwined with patriotism, as seen in his praise of ordinary people—farmers, soldiers—as heroes in the fight against foreign invaders. He emphasized that everyone, regardless of status or background, could contribute to defending the nation if they possessed patriotism and a sense of justice. Rather than simply adopting Confucianism, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu transformed traditional values into humanistic and universal ideas. Love and altruism, for instance, were not confined to familial relationships but extended to society as a whole. These concepts are not only relevant to Vietnamese society but also hold global significance, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries.

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu emphasized that individuals must live responsibly, not only toward their families but also toward their communities and nation. This lesson reminds us that every person plays a crucial role in maintaining the harmony and development of society. From Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview, we learn the values of strong patriotism and a deep sense of protecting the nation's independence and freedom. This is particularly significant today, as traditional cultural values must be preserved and promoted amidst global cultural exchanges. The compassion and altruism in Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's thought teach us to live harmoniously, to love, and to support one another. This is a vital lesson for modern society, where unity and a spirit of sharing are essential for addressing common challenges. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu consistently emphasized moral cultivation and learning as a means to become a complete individual. This lesson encourages us to continuously strive for self-improvement and lifelong learning while contributing positively to society.

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview carries a timeless significance, resonating across all eras and societies. In the context of today's globalization, his philosophy reminds us that preserving national cultural identity and fostering personal moral values are foundational for survival and development in a diverse world. At the same time, the humanistic values he championed—compassion, altruism, and social responsibility—remain guiding principles for addressing modern societal challenges, from cultural conflicts to inequality and climate change.

Thus, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview not only contributed to fostering moral integrity and patriotism during a tumultuous period in history but also offers valuable lessons for modern society. The values he left behind—compassion, altruism, social responsibility, and patriotism—continue to inspire future generations in shaping character and contributing to the creation of a just, humanistic, and sustainable society.

5. Conclusion

Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview, rooted in the cultural foundation of Confucianism, transcended traditional boundaries to reach universal values imbued with profound humanism. His thought not only inherited core Confucian principles such as *benevolence (nhân)*, *righteousness (nghĩa)*, *filial piety (hiếu)*, and *loyalty (trung)* but also expanded their meaning in a flexible way to suit the social realities of 19th-century Vietnam. From compassion and altruism to social responsibility and patriotism, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu transformed moral values into universal messages for humanity, affirming the role of ethics and kindness in building a harmonious, just, and progressive society. These values not only shaped the cultural and spiritual identity of the Vietnamese people throughout history but also hold enduring significance, offering timeless lessons

for all generations. Through this, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu's worldview underscores the timeless stature of a patriotic poet, a humanistic thinker, and a moral symbol not only for Vietnam but also for humanity at large.

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