



***Ho Chi Minh City's man of letters says his 10,000 books are only valuable if we know how to use them.***

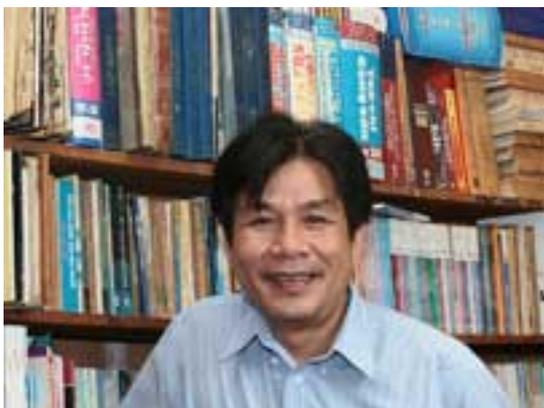


Photo by Nghia Pham

*Le Minh Quoc, a poet and journalist, stands in front of his 10,000 books*

Le Minh Quoc, a poet, writer, journalist and lover of books, says his collection of 10,000 volumes is not significant for its size, rarity or commercial value, but only for the knowledge contained within.

Quoc's father and grandfather were avid booklovers and it was from them that Quoc inherited his voracious appetite for books at a young age.

He began collecting books in college and has kept every book he has ever owned since then.

## Reading

Quoc says that 70 percent of the books in his massive home library are on literature, arts and culture.

"I do not collect books only for pleasure," says the well-known poet, "I use them for my studies as well."

"Each book has profound human content and each one also reflects the society at the time in which it was written."

One of Quoc's most precious books is *Dai Viet su ky toan thu* (The Comprehensive Chronicles of Vietnam), written by several distinguished historians from the 13th to the 17th centuries.

The series is printed on untrimmed *giay boi* (a kind of coarse paper) on which straw fibers can

still be felt and seen.

Quoc says the quality of the paper is a testament to the time in which it was printed.

Quoc's copy of *Dai Viet su ky toan thu* was published in 1945, and he says that the straw paper "reflects the stifling economic pressure the famine-stricken country was experiencing then."

Quoc says the books released during the period prior to Vietnam's economic reforms in 1990 were printed on better paper, but that their quality bears no comparison to today's publications.

Quoc owns a very valuable set of textbooks published during the period of French colonization.

"But I think whether a book is valuable or not actually only depends on how the owner uses it," says Quoc.

"A book's value is measured not by money, but by its different uses to different people."

Quoc says that it is good that so many books are being published and read online these days as the practice makes books more accessible and reading more convenient.

But as a book-loving romantic, he lamented reading from a computer screen, saying it cannot compare to reclining and cracking open an old fashioned book the way people have been doing for centuries.

## Writing

Quoc was moved by the words of eminent scholar and book critic Nguyen Hien Le: "If you want to grasp a matter thoroughly, you should write a book on it."

Quoc has thus written several books such as *Giao duc Viet Nam* (Vietnamese Education), *Ke chuyen danh nhan Viet Nam* (Vietnam's Famous Figures) and *Chuyen tinh cua cac danh nhan* (Celebrity Love Stories).

A versatile writer, Quoc's works range from prose, book reviews and newspaper articles, but his greatest passion is poetry.

Examples of his writing include acclaimed anthologies *Toi ve mat toi* (I Draw My Face, 1994), *T ho tinh Le Minh Quoc* (Love Poems by Le Minh Quoc, 1995), *Toi chay theo tho* (I'm Passionate About Poetry, 2003) and *Hanh trinh cua con kien* (An Ant's Journey, 2006).

Quoc has also helped launch [www.sachhay.com](http://www.sachhay.com), a website on which readers can buy books as well as read pertinent criticism, by prominent writers, poets, scholars, translators and critics.

Along with the website operators, Quoc also helped launch the *Ngoi Sao & Sach* (Stars and Books) program in which Vietnamese celebrities encouraged youth to read at the fifth HCMC Book Fair last week.

Quoc's treasured collection won second place at the *Tu sach gia dinh* (Home Library) competition at last week's book fair.

The fair, launched by the *Van Nghe* (Literature and Arts) publishing house, hosted several collections from not only known collectors in big cities, but also several home and family

libraries from farmers in remote areas.

***Reported by Diem Thu***

*(Thanh Nien Daili - March 19, 2008)*

<http://www.thanhniennews.com/2008/Pages/200831910330036868.aspx>