



Vietnamese Children's Songs and A Distinctive Mode of Thinking

Tran Thi Minh¹

¹ Faculty of Preschool Education, Hanoi Pedagogical University 2, Vietnam

Received: 02.05.2025 | Accepted: 05.05.2025 | Published: 15.05.2025

*Corresponding Author: Tran Thi Minh¹

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.15428990](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15428990)

Abstract

Original Research Article

The article "Vietnamese Children's Songs and a Distinctive Mode of Thinking" presents the concept of thinking in children's songs and analyzes the prominent characteristics of this form of thinking. According to the author, children's songs are not only linguistic games for children but also products of a unique way of thinking – the folk thinking of children. The distinctive feature of children's song thinking is its improvisational nature, illogical form, but rich in imagery, following a flow of free associations and vivid imagination. Children approach the world through a lens of personification, mysticism, and transformation, turning nature into friends and objects into characters, creating a vibrant and familiar world. The thinking in children's songs is also expressed through verbal games, rhythmic sound structures, and the combination of unusual, paradoxical, or surprising images. Through this, the article affirms the aesthetic and cognitive value of children's songs in shaping the artistic worldview in children.

Keywords: *Children's Songs, Children's Song Thinking, Children's Song Imagination, Vietnamese Children*

Citation: Tran, T. M. (2025). Vietnamese children's songs and a distinctive mode of thinking. *ISA Journal of Multidisciplinary (ISAJM)*, 2(3), 74–80.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the concept of children's folklore has gradually taken shape in folklore studies across various countries. This is a natural development, as the body of folklore in any culture typically includes a segment either created for or closely associated with children. While adults have an abundant repository of folk songs to express their thoughts, emotions, dreams, and aspirations for a better life, children also possess their own unique world reflected in children's songs, which vividly capture their innocent and imaginative experiences.

2. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1. Scholarly Approaches to Vietnamese Children's Songs

To date, many studies have explored children's songs, yet the definition and scope of the term "children's song" remain subjects of scholarly debate.

In Vietnam, interest in children's songs emerged before 1945. Scholar Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh was a pioneer in this

field. Rather than using the term "children's song," he referred to these expressions based on how children used them in practice—as "*songs children sing, games children play*." He believed that children learned to sing before they learned to speak. According to him, children's songs include, firstly, songs accompanied by games; secondly, songs sung without associated games; and thirdly, lullabies [3, p. 662]. Thus, folk literary works orally transmitted and used by children—for singing, playing, or lulling—were grouped together. He also observed that these songs were not fixed texts and varied depending on regional context.

In *Vietnamese Literary History*, Dương Quảng Hàm explained that "*dao*" means a type of singing without formal structure, and hence defined children's songs as "*songs of children*" [3, p. 753]. However, he did not clarify which genre of folk literature children's songs belong to.

In the preface to *Children's Folk Songs (Ca dao nhi đồng)*, Doãn Quốc Sỹ stated: "Most of children's games are folk songs." He referred to these playful verses as "*children's folk songs*" [3, p. 671]. However, in his classification, he

categorized them into various domains, such as: moral songs, play songs, humorous reversals, the stork in Vietnamese folk songs, songs about agricultural life and traditional customs, riddles, and children’s songs from Nam Hương. Therefore, although he called them “children’s folk songs,” the works in his collection belong to multiple genres including folk songs, riddles, proverbs, and authored songs.

In *Popular Poetry*, Volume IV, Nguyễn Tấn Long and Phan Canh defined children’s songs as simply “children’s folk songs” [3, p. 683], thereby placing them within the folk song genre.

In *Notes on Vietnamese Children’s Songs*, Vũ Ngọc Khánh introduced a new approach to this genre. He avoided the general term “children’s songs” due to potential confusion, instead proposing the term *children’s song* (đồng dao) to refer to folk chants created and sung by children—including game-related lyrics but excluding prophetic chants. He considered children’s songs a distinct genre of folk literature, on par with proverbs and folk songs [3, p. 713].

In *From Traditional Children’s Songs to Contemporary Poetry for Children*, Trần Hòa Bình remarked: “Every culture’s folk heritage contains songs specifically made for children (...) these are children’s songs” [201, p. 753]. According to him, any folk work sung by children can be classified as a children’s song.

In some literary textbooks, the study of children’s songs is addressed as part of the folk song genre, though only briefly. For instance, Hoàng Tiến Tựu defined children’s songs as “oral folk poetry passed down among children” [8, p. 143]. He regarded them as a subset of folk songs, but when classifying, he extended the scope to include other forms of folk literature such as *vè* (narrative rhymes). According to him, the domain of children’s songs includes narrative verses about objects and animals (e.g., birds, fish, flowers, fruits), calling songs (for buffaloes, calves), and even prophetic chants sung by children.

Emphasizing their functional role in everyday life, Phạm Thu Yến noted: “Children’s songs are orally transmitted folk verses, often sung by children during play and daily activities” [7, p. 200]. In the textbook *Vietnamese Children’s Literature*, co-authored with Dương Thu Hương, Trần Đức Ngôn also described children’s songs as folk songs for children, but he argued that *children’s song* is not a scientific term and should not be regarded as an independent genre of folk literature. Instead, he saw *children’s song* as an umbrella concept encompassing works from various genres, such as children’s folk songs and children’s narrative rhymes (*vè*) [4, p. 77].

Furthermore, in the anthology *Children’s Songs and Games of the Vietnamese People*, the editorial team defined children’s songs as: “Orally transmitted songs performed by

children of early childhood and teenage years. Originally anonymous folk compositions, some later-authored poems composed in a similar style have also been classified by researchers as children’s songs” [3, p. 5]. Based on this perspective, their collection includes a wide range of genres: narrative rhymes, folk songs, anonymous folk poems, and even authored children’s poems.

In the title of a conference paper presented at the 2005 Folklore Studies Symposium organized by the Institute of Cultural Studies, Lê Đức Luận proposed that *children’s songs* (*đồng dao*) constitute a distinct genre: “*An Initial Exploration of the Children’s Song Genre*” [see 5]. In his article “*A Study of the Vietnamese Children’s Song System*” [1], Nguyễn Nghĩa Dân agreed with this view, stating: “(...) children’s song is a genre of folk literature created by and for children.” Similarly, in their article “*Understanding the Genre of Children’s Song*,” Châu Minh Hùng and Lê Nhật Ký offered the following definition: “As a literary genre for children, children’s song can be broadly defined as: folk songs composed for children to sing and play with” [2, p. 62]. These authors acknowledged the genre without providing deeper theoretical explanations.

Thus, despite varied perspectives, there exists a certain divergence regarding the scope and connotation of the term *children’s song*. However, a point of consensus among researchers is that children are the central and authentic subjects of both the creation and performance of these songs.

From the views above, three main approaches to understanding *children’s song* can be identified:

1. Broad definition: Children’s songs are seen as a complex group of children’s folk literature, or works primarily composed for children. These works may span various genres such as *folk songs* (*ca dao*), *narrative rhymes* (*vè*), poetic fables, and even include prophetic folk verses that are orally transmitted among children.
2. Narrow definition: Children’s songs are traditional folk songs created either by children themselves or by adults for children, primarily sung during playtime. In this view, children’s songs are considered a subcategory of *folk songs* (*ca dao*).
3. Independent genre: Some scholars regard children’s songs as an independent literary genre with distinct thematic and stylistic characteristics.

In this paper, we adopt the second perspective, treating children’s songs as a subcategory of folk songs, specifically functional folk songs associated with daily life. However, we also expand our examination to include certain narrative rhymes (*vè*). In the collection *Children’s Songs and Games of the Vietnamese People*, we identified 24 out of 567 entries (≈ 4.2%) labeled as *vè*, including rhymes about flowers, vegetables, birds, and humorous reversals. However, these verses do not exhibit characteristics of satire or lament typical

of social commentary rhymes (vè thể sự), nor do they aim to recount national history like historical rhymes (vè lịch sử).

In terms of content, these verses reflect simple perceptions of the natural world, akin to lighthearted lessons that help children (and adults) expand their understanding of nature. Artistically, they often employ four-syllable verse, even line breaks, and mid-line or end rhymes. Their thematic and stylistic features closely align with *children's songs about nature and the homeland*, making them, in practice, an integral part of the children's song tradition.

In our view, children's songs are a subcategory of functional folk songs (*ca dao sinh hoạt*). They are a form of folk poetry tailored in content and style for children, typically sung during play. These songs may be composed by children themselves or by adults who adopt a childlike worldview and sensibility in the creative process.

2.2. Children's Song Thinking

2.2.1. Conceptions of Children's Song Thinking

Thinking is a concept frequently discussed in both philosophy and psychology. The Vietnamese Dictionary defines "thinking" as "the higher stage of the cognitive process, in which the essence and laws of objects are discovered through such forms as images, concepts, judgments, and reasoning" [6, 1385]. In essence, the result of thinking is a reflection of the objective world—a subjective image of objective reality. Thinking does not exist in isolation or metaphysically apart from reality; it is closely tied to human practical activity and language.

Psychological researchers classify human thinking into three dimensions: action-based and intuitive thinking, image-based and emotional thinking, and conceptual-logical thinking. These modes are interrelated and form corresponding types of thinking such as scientific thinking, artistic thinking, and practical everyday thinking.

In the field of literature and art, a unique form of cognition called *artistic thinking* emerges. Artistic thinking is grounded in image-based and emotional cognition. This form of thinking "allows the artist to simultaneously discover the object and express the subject's attitude toward it. Moreover, as a re-creation removed from the object itself, artistic thinking uses imagination and fictionalization to construct symbolic images with high generalizability and powerful emotional impact on readers" (Phương Lưu). In other words, art is image-based thinking, as Belinsky vividly put it: "The philosopher speaks through syllogisms, while the poet speaks through pictures." However, the reflection in artistic thinking is not a passive copy of reality; it bears the strong imprint of the artist's subjectivity, involving imagination and creativity.

Building on previous scholarship, we propose the following conception: Artistic thinking is a type of aesthetic cognition specific to a community or an individual artist, shaped by concrete historical conditions. Artistic thinking encompasses the content, the method of perceiving, and the means of expressing reality. It can be said that artistic thinking—closely tied to the creative subject—is the backbone upon which the ideas and perspectives of a work are formed, and it determines the selection of expressive tools and artistic techniques.

In practice, artistic thinking manifests in diverse forms. At a broader level, it may be associated with literary paradigms—for example, the artistic thinking of folk literature, classical literature, modern literature, or postmodern literature. It may also be linked to literary movements, such as the thinking of romanticism or realism. More narrowly, it may relate to a specific genre, shaping its creative methodology—such as poetic thinking or novelistic thinking. Children's song thinking is situated within this system of artistic thinking and reflects the characteristics of the genre.

Thus, *children's song thinking* is a form of cognition linked to a particular literary genre. Since children's songs are a type of folk poetry for children, their mode of thinking shares similarities with poetic thinking. Moreover, because this genre is tailored to children, it also displays its own distinctive and unique way of perceiving the world. We define children's song thinking as a specific kind of image-based artistic thinking. For a children's song to be memorable, the folk creator must follow certain cognitive principles—such as thematic consistency, expressive coherence, and effective image construction.

As noted in the literature review, most authors have not directly addressed this concept but have indirectly pointed to features related to children's song thinking. However, because this dissertation focuses on this topic as a scientific object, it is necessary to define the concept more precisely. Our understanding may not be entirely complete, but based on prior insights, we propose the following definition:

Children's song thinking is a form of artistic thinking characterized by age-specific psychology, the way children perceive, experience, and re-create the world. It reflects a mode of cognition structured by the innocent, imaginative worldview of childhood and its modes of communication with the world. This thinking manifests in both the content and the method of perceiving and expressing lived experience in children's songs. Over time, children's song thinking has crystallized and embedded itself in the creative psyche. This mode of cognition has influenced modern literature in general, and modern children's poetry in particular. In fact, many contemporary Vietnamese poets have employed modes of children's song thinking in their work, which reflects a natural process of artistic inheritance and innovation.

2.2.2. Characteristics of Children's Song Thinking

Based on the content and artistic features of children's songs, we identify several fundamental characteristics of this mode of thinking:

Children's song thinking is a form of childlike thinking manifested through creative expression. The hallmark of this thinking style is its innocence, spontaneity, and playful charm. The subject of children's songs is children themselves. They possess a natural desire to enrich their spiritual lives, to express and reveal themselves. Children's song thinking reflects how children perceive, feel, imagine, and create—a literary community that can simultaneously compose, experience, enjoy, and echo the inner voice of childhood. Engaging with the surrounding natural and social worlds, children observe, feel, and articulate their experiences in a free, uninhibited, and sincere manner.

To speak of children's song thinking is to speak of a unique way of perceiving and expressing the world—"using the origin to measure all things" (Lê Lưu Oanh). It is a clear, pure, and untainted perspective on life, revealing the carefree and innocent soul of children. Unlike folk songs, which often express personal emotions and inner sentiments, children's songs primarily convey children's perceptions of the world. The prevailing tone is joyful, with little presence of sadness. Serious or socially profound meanings are rare and, if present, are only fleeting—"as light as drifting clouds or passing breezes" [8, 146]. For example, verses like *Sawing here, sawing there* (*Kéo cưa lừa xẻ*), *Three old ladies went to sell a piglet* (*Ba bà đi bán lợn con*), and *The little ant climbed up the tree* (*Con kiến mà leo cành đa*) are humorous and illustrate the natural and whimsical thinking of children. The image of the carpenter returning home to nurse, the pig vendor scurrying back and forth, or the ant climbing in and out of a tree branch mirrors the mischievous worldview of young children. This helps explain why some children's songs may seem disjointed or lack a specific meaning, yet remain memorable and beloved by children.

While adults lean toward rational, analytical, and structured thinking, children favor intuitive, perceptual thinking. We believe that intuitive thinking is the foundation of children's song thinking. Many children's songs lack a central theme or coherent focus, instead saying whatever comes to mind. Still, children find joy in them, as this matches their cognitive level and does not force them to reason like adults. These songs capture impressions of external objects rather than abstract concepts. In other words, children's songs perceive the world primarily through direct visual and sensory experience, often using enumeration and emphasizing memorable and distinctive external features. In many children's songs, objects and phenomena are listed joyfully, helping children recognize and recall names of things with ease. For instance: *"The carrying pole has a notch / The water caltrop has horns / Bánch chung has leaves / The fish has fins..."*. For older children, these

characteristics may seem obvious, but for preschool or early primary-aged children, this kind of knowledge is meaningful as it helps them understand object properties. It aligns closely with children's fragmentary observations and their dynamic, leaping cognitive style. As children grow older, their understanding may expand: *"Scissors for tailoring / Plow for farming / Hoe for building ridges / Trap for catching fish / Slingshot for hunting birds..."*

Through this perceptual thinking, children's songs view the objective world with fascination, full of colors and forms. Lacking extensive experience or knowledge, children perceive everything as if encountering it for the first time. Their unique "capacity for wonder" in the face of the world's vast diversity is a defining trait. Observing their natural surroundings, children raise countless questions: What kind of plant or fruit is this? What shape, color, or flavor does it have? Regarding flowers, there are hundreds of species, each with its own characteristics: *"Reflecting like a mirror / That's the well flower / Flying and flitting / That's the bird flower / Sinking in water / That's the stone flower..."* As for fruits, they span all four seasons—papaya, pineapple, corn, pomelo, lemon, guava, mandarin... Children's way of identifying fruits is also imaginative: *"With sloshing insides / That's the Siamese coconut / Found all over the village / That's the basket gourd? / Sent to market by mom / Turns out to be a mulberry..."*. When it comes to vegetables, there's also sensory association: *"Tastes a little fishy / That's fish mint /.../ Spicy like chili / That's Vietnamese coriander..."*. And sometimes, names are linked to human vices: *"Rude behavior / That's thorny weed / Deceitful heart / That's wild ginger..."*.

Alongside grass, plants, and fruits are creatures from forests and oceans, forming a kind of "collection" that includes both familiar and unfamiliar names—some of which may be recognized by today's biologists. The rhyming verses about fish serve as an extensive inventory with up to 188 species named. There are names everyone knows, such as perch, crucian, carp, and climbing perch, but also many strange names of freshwater and saltwater fish like *nác*, *đao*, *sà*, *chéc*, and more. The rhymes don't simply list names—they establish various connections, sometimes mechanical, sometimes organic. Occasionally, the name of a fish triggers a reflection on human behavior: *"Won't listen to coaxing / Like the stubborn nganh fish / One must yield the way / Like the evasive muong fish..."*

The liveliest is the "bird village": *"Always calling, always singing / That's the bồ chao bird / Diving down suddenly / That's the kingfisher..."* As children play, so do the birds; when children pretend to march into battle, they imagine birds assembling into neat military ranks, ready to fight: *"Boom, boom, boom... / Beat the drum three times / Line the troops neatly / The phoenix in command / The white crane follows orders / On the right are birds / On the left are storks..."*

Deeply connected with nature and all living things, folk rhymes reflect a friendly and empathetic outlook toward the surrounding world. With their pure souls and nascent minds

just beginning to understand reality, children possess a remarkable ability to inhabit the objects they describe, to live and empathize with them. From a belief in the idea that “all things are friends,” trees, flowers, animals, and natural phenomena become companions—singing, playing, and sharing joy with the children. The *nhọ nôi* flower is sneaky; the spinning blossom loves to dance. The sour starfruit speaks sarcastically, while the persimmon is sweet-talking. Watching a magpie sing, the child replies: “Little magpie, little magpie / You sing for me to hear / You lull me to sleep / I sleep so deeply...” Upon catching a grasshopper, the child commands: “Grasshopper, pound my rice / I’ll sew red and black clothes for you.” Even the moon and stars, though far away, are bound to the children’s world by invisible threads. They call the stars down to “have company,” inviting them to hold the baby, catch fish, wash rice, scoop water, and share a meal. Surprisingly, they even imagine hearing the star munching on sweet potatoes—“crunching and munching”—and pairing them with greens. The moon, too, is invited down to join in their happy activities: “Mr. Moon, Mr. Moon / Come play with me / So we’ll have company...” The vast, mysterious cosmos, full of puzzles even adults cannot solve, becomes intimate and approachable for children.

As a genre primarily for children, folk rhymes are closely linked to games, fulfilling the need for play and providing structure for children’s recreation. Not only are they elements of play, but they themselves are also a form of play. In traditional societies, children didn’t have the abundance of entertainment options available today. Folk rhymes were born to meet the children’s needs for singing, laughter, and relaxation—for instance, games like *Chuyền thẻ*, *Nu na nu nống*, or *Chồng nư chồng hoa*. Furthermore, when paired with games, these rhymes help instill discipline, a collective spirit, and social adaptability. They offer opportunities for children to socialize, share joy, and exchange experiences—marking a key difference between folk rhymes and many of today’s digital games.

Thus, playing and singing are considered the primary functions of folk rhymes, in addition to other undeniable roles such as cognitive and educational functions. These rhymes are children’s songs and belong to the domain of children’s folklore, tightly integrated with play activities. Due to the synthetic nature of folklore, rhymes and games do not exist independently but are blended and interwoven. According to our survey of the *Children’s Games* section in the book *Vietnamese Folk Rhymes and Games* [3], 47 out of 106 games (44.1%) feature accompanying rhymes. Specifically, 35 out of 37 physical games (≈61%) include rhymes; 4 out of 33 skill-based games (≈14%) have rhymes; and 8 out of 16 intellectual games (≈5%) incorporate rhymes. Clearly, folk rhymes are essential to games, enhancing enjoyment. Without them, many games could not take place.

Beyond games, the very nature of rhyming speech in folk rhymes reveals them to be a kind of language game—a game of rhymes and rhythm. Researcher Lê Nguyễn asserts that “folk rhymes are a typical genre form of linguistic thinking.

They tend to empty the meaning from words, turning language into performance... The overall meaning of the text is fragmented and disassembled. Its syntactic logic is replaced by the logic of sound, rhyme, and rhythm.” Therefore, many folk rhymes seem disjointed in content, merely arranging words to rhyme, and some are performed without any game context—yet they remain cheerful and witty thanks to rhythm and rhyme, and are often preferred over those with more complete content [3, p.719]. From this perspective, perhaps the playful nature of folk rhymes reveals an intrinsic artistic freedom and creative spontaneity.

To serve the function of play and match children’s psychology, folk rhymes reflect life and the world through simple, rhymed, unembellished language. Their thinking is spontaneous, indeterminate, flexible, and free, relying heavily on imagination and association. In fact, imagination and association are essential to all artistic creation, especially in poetry. However, given the unique nature of their audience, the imagination in folk rhymes takes on specific characteristics.

The imagination in folk rhymes is characterized by innocent and creative anthropomorphism, closely aligning with children’s psychology. Rhymes bestow actions and emotions on all objects, pulling them naturally into daily life. This resonates with children’s “all things are friends” worldview and their naïve belief that everything can speak, connect, and empathize. Children merge with nature, hearing the voices of grass and flowers. They believe in Mr. Sky, Mrs. Sky, Mr. Moon, Mr. Star, Mr. Thunder, Mr. Lightning... They talk with the moon and stars, inviting them to live and play together. Even the moon and sky can marry: “Mr. Moon married Mrs. Sky / Wedding in May, celebration in October...” Mr. Thunder and Mr. Lightning are fierce: “Mr. Thunder, Mr. Lightning / Roaring loud / Exploding wild / Breaking pots and pans...” Animals are given charming nicknames: *sên sên sên sên* (slug), *con mèo con meo* (cat), *con gà con ga* (chicken), *con hổ con hô* (tiger), *con voi con voi* (elephant)... To children, the slug becomes a princess, the peacock loves to dance, the turtle carries its house for a stroll, the goby fish knows how to sieve rice, and buffalo calves obey their mother: “Mother calls once / Lifts its head and runs / Mother calls again / Lifts its neck and runs...”

Folk rhyme imagination leads children to create an immersive world where they joyfully play different roles. This can be seen in rhymes associated with physical games (*dung dăng dung dề*), role-play games (going to market, building houses), or creative games (folding boats, staging battles). For example, when children sing: “*Ép nhong nhong / Ngựa ông đã về / Cắt cỏ Bồ Đề / Cho ngựa ông ăn*” (Gallop home / The general’s horse returns / Cut Bodhi grass / To feed the noble steed), they imagine themselves as victorious generals returning from battle.

It is evident that imagination is a crucial mental function for children. As Paustovsky once remarked:

“Imagination is the source of artistic creativity...” Folk rhymes, deeply fueled by imaginative power, are no exception.

Alongside imagination is association. Imagination forms the foundation for association. Associations in folk rhymes stem from childlike cognition and psychology. They are free, whimsical, and often transform the familiar into the strange. This trait is particularly evident in how images are constructed. In literature, writers avoid placing isolated images with no connection to others, but in folk rhymes, adjacent images are loosely connected. Though they appear in the same verse, each can stand alone. For example:

- “Layering parasols with eggplants / You rub the starfruit flower / Soaked starfruit, sour starfruit / Pagoda pillars, temple columns / The king’s new constructions / Orange trees, tangerine trees / Jackfruit trees, persimmon trees...”
- “Dung dăng dung dê / Leading children to play / To Heaven’s gate / Bowing uncle and aunt / Asking to return to the village / Let the goat go to school / Let the toad stay home / Let the chicken scratch the stove...”

It’s hard to find logical connections between images like “pagoda pillars” and “sour starfruit” or “jackfruit trees.” Likewise, there seems to be no relation between “leading children to play” and “goat going to school” or “toad staying home.” These spontaneous associations give each image a sense of solo performance, as Triều Nguyễn calls it, infusing folk rhymes with innocence and reflecting children’s leaping, free-flowing thought.

Such associations often rely on sound, ignoring semantic relationships to create unique structures. The logic of folk rhymes rejects rational interference. For example:

- “Chop the coconut tree / Spare the plum / Be careful with the mangrove / And the gourd vine / Which tree is tall / Which is short... / Spinach ripens red / The rabbit hops over...”
- “Gnashing nonsense / Ivory of gibberish / Husband of the judge / Wife of the fisherman / Lord beats the drum / Lord claps time / Quach Cu Lơ / Cu Lơ, the village chief...”

It’s nearly impossible to rationalize the presence of such lines. They follow the rhyme, not the meaning. “Chop the coconut” leads to “spare the plum,” “red spinach” cues “rabbit hops over”... Sentences like “*Gnashing nonsense / Ivory of gibberish*” may seem meaningless but are rhythmic and amusing, engaging children through their playful sound.

In some categories, associations reflect thematic fields. For example, object-listing rhymes offer knowledge about types of fish, birds, and fruits. This method introduces fresh views of

nature using paired listings suitable for a child’s simple understanding. For instance:

- “Listen to the rhyme / A verse about fish / Whale fish, *ngac* fish / *Nác* fish, *dura* fish / Whale, seahorse / Machete fish, swordfish...” → fish category
- “Listen to the rhyme / A verse about fruits / Beans up in the clouds / Are winged beans / Bearing many children / Is the papaya / Cut to ooze sap / Is the jackfruit...” → fruit category
- “Mischievous and funny / Is the *chìa vôi* bird / Loves to dive for prey / Is the *chèo bẻo* / Always tattling / Is the noisy bird on the roof...” → bird category

There is also a unique form of reverse association—paradoxical rhymes that invert properties between two objects. These “opposite rhymes” test children’s mental agility, challenging them to grasp the world by reversing logic. These not only delight the listener with aesthetic surprise but also stimulate intellectual growth, especially in adolescents. For example:

- “...As hard as sticky rice / As soft as stone / Fragrant as fish / Fishy as perfume / Dark as a mirror / Bright as ink / Hot winter / Freezing summer...”
- “...Straight as a shrimp’s back / Bent as a hoe’s handle / Sweetest is the owl / Smelliest is perfume / Dense as a bamboo tube / Hollow as a wooden log...”

In contrast, folk rhymes also use direct analogy—images connected by “like” or “as.” Sometimes the associations are close and natural:

- “Met the oil lady / Jasmine-scented oil / Met the squash lady / Squash split in two / Met the lime lady / Sour like vinegar...”
- “Releasing the leech / Don’t grab the woman / It’s a man’s fault / White rice like cotton / Money flowing like water...”

Sometimes, distant elements are analogized reasonably:

- “Little calf... little calf / Calf like ripe guava / Like a ripe cloud cluster / Like a water jar / Like a comb / Smooth fur like oil...”
- “Listen to the rhyme / A verse on cakes / Round like the moon / That’s the sizzling pancake /.../ Twinkling like stars / That’s the tapioca cake...”
- “Nu na nu nóng / Wide lakes, long rivers / Whose feet wash so well / As white as a fairy’s...”

Thus, association in folk rhymes is a fundamental cognitive operation expressed in diverse forms, creating surprising image combinations. Regardless of the form, folk rhyme associations are free, impulsive, sometimes seeming far-fetched or illogical, but in fact true to children’s thinking. They

reflect an innocent, playful, and carefree perception of the world—true to the spirit of childhood.

3. CONCLUSION

In summary, children's song thinking is a mode of thought associated with a specific literary genre, reflecting the innocent soul and intellect of childhood. As the earliest form of poetry for children, children's songs share many features with modern poetic thinking. In the context of children's songs, the child — positioned as a rustic little artist — is seen as the precursor to future child poets.

REFERENCES

1. Nguyễn Nghĩa Dân (2006), "An Exploration of the System of Vietnamese Children's Songs," *Journal of Folk Light*, No. 1.
2. Châu Minh Hùng & Lê Nhật Ký (2007), *Specialized Topic: The System of Literary Genres for Children*, Ministry of Education and Training – Primary Teacher Development Project, Hanoi.
3. Nguyễn Thuý Loan, Đặng Diệu Trang, Nguyễn Huy Hồng, & Trần Hoàng (1997), *Vietnamese Children's Songs and Games*, Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi.
4. Trần Đức Ngôn & Dương Thu Hương (2008), *Textbook on Vietnamese Children's Literature*, Education Publishing House, Hanoi.
5. Various Authors (2005), *Folk Culture Bulletin 2005* (Proceedings of the scientific conference organized by the Institute of Cultural Studies), Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi.
6. Hoàng Phê (Chief Editor) (2014), *Vietnamese Dictionary*, Da Nang Publishing House.
7. Vũ Anh Tuấn (Chief Editor), Phạm Thu Yến, Nguyễn Việt Hùng, & Phạm Đăng Xuân Hương (2012), *Textbook on Folk Literature*, Vietnam Education Publishing House.
8. Hoàng Tiến Tựu (1990), *Textbook on Folk Literature*, Volume II, Education Publishing House, Hanoi.