



Conceptual Metaphors of "Rivers and Water" in Vietnamese: From the Natural Environment to Socio-Cultural Spaces

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ABSTRACT

In the Vietnamese cognitive system, rivers and water are more than just geographical features. They have become a core foundation for perceiving the world. This study shows that river-related imagery is not only a metaphor but also a primary cognitive coordinate in the Vietnamese worldview. Using Cognitive Linguistics as a framework, this paper explores the conceptual shift from natural environmental experiences to socio-cultural domains. Based on 200 data units, the study traces the development of river-related metaphors from their roots in folk songs and proverbs to their reinterpretation in modern journalistic discourse. The results show a clear transition in target domains: while folklore focuses on *emotions and personal fate* (72%), modern journalism prioritizes *economics and finance* (58%). The findings show that the "Flow" schema (47.5%) remains a constant factor in both sources, while the "Container" schema and metonymy help make complex social ideas easier to understand. Ultimately, river-related imagery is still vivid in the Vietnamese mind and continues to function as a familiar cognitive basis for navigating the complexities of modern life

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INTRODUCTION

For a long time, rivers and water have been more than just geographical features to the Vietnamese people. Because they live in a wet-rice civilization with a dense network of rivers, these elements have deeply entered their daily life. River imagery formed the earliest and most natural experiences of the Vietnamese about the world. Therefore, images like *dòng nước* (water flow), *bến đò* (wharf), and *con thuyền* (boat) are not only names of objects. They have become cognitive tools that help people explain many abstract things in life.

From a linguistic point of view, the connection between nature and language is not just a simple reflection. The Vietnamese people use natural characteristics, such as the flow of water, the stability of a wharf, or the dangers of rapids, to imagine time, emotions, fate, and social issues. This process has created a rich system of river metaphors that carry the unique identity of the Vietnamese language.

Many researchers have studied river metaphors in folklore like *ca dao, tục ngữ* or in classical literature. However, there is still a gap in studying how river imagery enters modern life, especially in fields like economics and politics. In a fast-paced society, we need to understand this way of thinking. It helps us see how Vietnamese people use their natural experiences to understand the complex movements of modern society.

Through this analysis, the research hopes to offer some modest insights into both the theoretical and practical dimensions of river-related metaphors. Theoretically, it provides empirical evidence for the embodiment principle. It shows how Vietnam's river-based environment creates unique image schemas and mappings, thereby clarifying the connection between geography and thought. Practically, the research explains a cognitive shift within Vietnamese society. This involves a transition from using river imagery for emotions in folklore to managing economic and social issues in modern discourse. By identifying the core "water-based" identity of the Vietnamese language, these findings provide useful tools for cross-cultural communication.

This paper explores the journey of the "River and Water" conceptual domain from physical observations in nature to deep meanings in modern culture. The research claims the strong life of river imagery in the Vietnamese mind. This is not only a core way of thinking but also an anchor to help preserve linguistic identity in today's world.

To achieve this goal, the research focuses on three main questions: (1) *Which models are used to map natural river characteristics onto abstract concepts?* (2) *How does the "River and Water" domain appear in modern social discourses like economics and politics?* (3) *What do these metaphors show about the worldview and mindset of the Vietnamese people?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

In Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor is not just an artistic device used to make language more beautiful. They are actually a core part of how we think. This mechanism helps us use real-life, physical experiences to understand abstract ideas. According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980), the heart of this process is

"mapping". This is when we take the structure of a familiar "source domain" and project it onto a more complex "target domain" to make sense of it.

Following this line of thought, Grady (1997) argued that these cognitive links actually come from the early interactions between the human body and the environment. This is a clear sign of *embodiment*. It means the external world is shaped through our direct experiences like seeing, hearing, or touching.

It is important to note that this way of thinking often starts from close metonymic associations in our living space. Before becoming abstract symbols, images like *dòng nước* (water flow), *con thuyền* (boat), or *bến đò* (waiting wharf) were familiar entities in daily life. For example, when mentioning *bến nước*, Vietnamese people do not just name a specific stopping place. They use that familiar space to imply a place of shelter or the luck and fate of a human life.

Because of this practical connection, river imagery becomes a bridge. It helps Vietnamese people project metaphors about time, fate, and the complex changes of life. Recognizing this connection helps us understand how the Vietnamese use the visible elements of rivers to grasp invisible concepts in their minds naturally and persuasively.

In this study, rivers and water play the role of the main source domain. The stories of flowing water, moving ships, or the rising and falling of the wharf are not just stories of nature. They have deeply entered daily speech and become a core way of thinking for the Vietnamese to imagine time and human destiny.

Embodiment and the River Imprint in Vietnamese Cognition

Embodiment is a key principle in cognitive linguistics. It suggests that our language and thinking don't just happen on their own. Instead, they are rooted in our physical senses and how we move in our environment (Johnson, 1987). For the Vietnamese, rivers and water are more than just scenery. Over thousands of years, they have become a deep part of the mind and a unique space for experience. In this space, the people and the river network are so closely connected that they have shaped a specific way of thinking.

In Vietnam, researchers like Trần Ngọc Thêm (1996) or Phan Ngọc (2000) all realize that the national mindset was shaped by a wet-rice civilization. In this civilization, survival is always linked to the flow of rivers. Nguyễn Đức Tồn (2008) also emphasized that things closer to the life of a community appear more frequently in their speech. Especially, Trịnh Sâm (2013) summarized this relationship through a natural rule: the most familiar entities will appear first, most often, and have the strongest emotional impact. This close connection has turned rivers and water into a major source domain. It acts as an anchor for the Vietnamese to imagine and express many aspects of life and people.

Moreover, this connection has created a linguistic picture with a unique Vietnamese identity. Depending on the living environment, each nation will have different ways to imagine and grasp the world. For a community where people see rivers as soon as they step out the door, rivers and water have become a *preferred source domain*. To put it simply, when facing abstract or difficult things, Vietnamese people often turn back to river imagery as a familiar anchor to explain them. This explains why even in modern economic news, people still

prefer to borrow river images to talk about dry or complex issues. It makes the ideas feel more natural and easier to follow.

Image Schemas and the Mechanism of Discourse Structuring

In cognitive linguistics, image schemas are abstract structures formed from human movement experiences in space. They act as a bridge connecting visual sensations with the way we build concepts (Langacker, 1987). Clausner and Croft (1999) argued that these schemas are always dynamic. They allow humans to organize abstract ideas according to the logic of physical movements.

In the river space, core schemas such as flow, container, or force are the patterns that help people imagine the world. In fact, a flowing stream is not just moving matter. It has become a cognitive anchor for us to understand the movement of time or the constant changes of life. Similarly, a *bến đò* (wharf) is not only a geographical space for boats to park. It is also perceived as a "container" full of expectations, memories, or even the private sorrows of human fate. Identifying these schemas helps us see clearly how the Vietnamese connect separate metaphorical images into a consistent and deep system of thinking.

Cultural Pragmatics and the Flow of Conceptual Development

To see the connection between traditional metaphors and modern news, this study explores how language and socio-cultural values work together. In daily communication, using metaphors is not just about thinking. It is an intentional choice. On newspapers, dry economic or political issues become easier to understand and more persuasive when they are seen through river imagery. Expressions like "*điểm nghẽn*" (bottleneck), "*khởi thông*" (unblocking), or "*khởi dòng vốn*" (opening capital flows) do more than just help readers imagine abstract ideas. They also show how people evaluate a problem and suggest ways to solve it, just like the natural laws of water flow.

With that in mind, this research identifies the river concept through three main points. First is the daily life of people with water and wharves. This is where expressions about ethics and lifestyle in *ca dao* and *tục ngữ* were born creating a unique Vietnamese way of thinking. Today, these river images appear in newspapers as a tool to persuade and guide readers. This shows not only how Vietnamese people think, but also how we borrow river stories to talk about modern life. It turns familiar things into the power of words in our daily life.

Interaction Between Language, Culture, and Cognition

It is said that language does not exist in isolation. It is the result of cultural conceptualization. Sharifian (2011) argued that concepts do not only stay in the mind of an individual. They are also communal and are shaped by cultural values. In this process, culture acts as a cognitive "filter." It guides how people observe, classify, and interpret the world.

In Vietnam, this relationship is clearly shown through the connection between the living environment and the national language. Đỗ Hữu Châu (2000) affirmed that to understand the culture of a community, we cannot separate it from studying their language. This is because language is the most honest "mirror" reflecting cultural characteristics. In a wet-rice civilization, "rivers and water" are more than just geographical entities. They have become a dominant cognitive model. Close experiences with flows and wharves are conceptualized

into thinking structures. This is similar to the view of Kövecses (2005) about metaphor variation. Although image schemas can be universal, the choice of which source domain to map depends strictly on the cultural context and the environment of each nation.

Furthermore, the river imprint also creates the art of verbal behavior. Trần Ngọc Thêm (1996) noted that river culture values make Vietnamese people always prioritize community and harmony. This leads to a lifestyle that values emotional bonds (*trọng tình nghĩa*). This characteristic strongly affects linguistic thinking. Instead of speaking directly or objectively, Vietnamese people often tend to beat around the bush. This way of speaking is actually a cognitive strategy to establish harmony and avoid hurting or offending others. This cautious and indirect mindset in speech is the result of a thinking style that moves flexibly like water to find safety in social relationships.

As Đỗ Việt Hùng (2013) pointed out, language always carries the cultural code of the local community. Therefore, when facing modern and abstract concepts like macroeconomics or political changes, the Vietnamese mind still looks for familiar river images to "decode" them. River metaphors in modern newspapers do not just simplify concepts. They are also a way for writers to use "softened" language. This helps the message reach the heart of the audience naturally and avoids direct conflict, which is a typical feature of river-based thinking.

In summary, the relationship between language, culture, and cognition is a continuous loop. Culture provides the materials for experience (embodiment). Cognition transforms experiences into concepts. Finally, language shapes those concepts into speech and behavior strategies. Studying river metaphors is the process of decoding the transformation of Vietnamese people. It shows the journey from the indirect and emotional communication in old *ca dao* to the proactive but flexible mindset in modern discourse.

METHODOLOGY

To decode the transformation of river metaphors, this study combines the following methods:

Cognitive Metaphor and Discourse Analysis

The study uses cognitive metaphor analysis to establish source domains, target domains, and mapping mechanisms. To ensure objectivity in identifying metaphors, the MIP procedure (Pragglejaz, 2007) is applied. This involves comparing the basic meaning of vocabulary related to the natural environment (rivers and water) in the *Vietnamese Dictionary* (Hoàng Phê, 2003) with its meaning in journalistic contexts. More importantly, the study combines an interdisciplinary perspective between linguistics, culture, and geography. This approach helps explain the formation of metaphors not only from pure thinking but also from the reality of the dense river network and the irrigation mindset of the Vietnamese people.

In addition, discourse analysis is combined to clarify the writer's intention. It shows how they use river imagery to guide readers through social issues.

Statistical Method and Data Classification

The statistical method is used to count the frequency of target domains and image schemas. This helps identify common thinking models. After collecting the data, the study performs a contrastive analysis between two groups of data. Placing folk songs and proverbs next to journalistic discourse helps show the similarities in traditional thinking and the differences in modern social management thinking.

Comparative and Contrastive Method

This is the central technique to clarify the similarities and differences in perception between traditional culture (*ca dao, tục ngữ, thành ngữ*) and modern thinking (journalism). Through this, the research points out the shift from a "harmonizing with nature" (*thuận thiên*) attitude to a proactive management mindset of the Vietnamese people.

Discourse and Interdisciplinary Analysis

The study combines metaphor theory with a cultural-geographical perspective to examine the data in specific contexts. This approach helps clarify the intention of journalists when they borrow river imagery to "soften" social messages and guide the perception of readers.

Data Sources and Sampling Procedure

The study examines 200 data units and divides them into two groups representing two different cultural spaces. The traditional culture group includes 100 samples from the classic works of Nguyễn Xuân Kính and Nguyễn Lân. These represent the wet-rice agricultural culture where rivers are linked to livelihoods and personal emotions. The modern journalistic discourse group includes 100 samples from major news outlets like *Báo Chính phủ, VnExpress, Tuổi Trẻ*, and *Saigon Times* (from 2021 to 2026). These reflect management thinking in the context of industrialization and integration.

The difference in time and cultural space between the two data sources is the basis for the comparative and contrastive method. Through this, the research shows the movement of the national mindset. It moves from a "harmonizing with nature" (*thuận thiên*) lifestyle in the past to an "active management" (*điều hành thực tại*) mindset today. To ensure typicality, the sampling criteria prioritize popular statements and well-established terms like *dòng vốn* (capital flow), *thanh khoản* (liquidity), and *đóng băng thị trường* (market freezing).

Data Processing Procedure

The data is processed through four steps:

- *Step 1:* Select and encode expressions that use keywords related to rivers and water.
- *Step 2:* Decode the mapping mechanism and identify the image schemas behind each expression.
- *Step 3:* Compare the embodiment and the conceptual shift between the traditional and modern data groups.
- *Step 4:* Summarize and systematize the research results to clarify the characteristics of the river conceptual domain in modern journalistic discourse.

Reliability and Validity of the Data

To ensure scientific quality, the study establishes data based on strict criteria for typicality and consistency. First, the data is collected from prestigious sources with wide influence, from classic *ca dao* and *tục ngữ* to the discourse of official news agencies. This choice helps the data reflect the common mindset of the community instead of individual language variations.

In addition, the value of the data is guaranteed by the consistency in the identification method. Applying the MIP procedure and checking dictionary meanings for both groups of data helps the comparison results stay objective and verifiable. All survey samples are placed in specific contexts to clarify the nature of cognitive phenomena. This approach helps the measurement go beyond just statistical numbers and truly reflect the movement of the Vietnamese identity through historical periods.

RESULT

Based on a survey of 200 data units (including 100 samples from folklore and 100 samples from modern journalistic discourse), the research obtained quantitative results about the presence of the river conceptual domain. These are shown in the statistical tables below.

Statistics on Target Domains

The survey results show a clear change in the target domains of the river and water concept between the two linguistic spaces (See Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of Target Domains in River Metaphors

Target Domains	Folklore (n=100)	Journalistic Discourse (n=100)
Emotions and Fate	72%	4%
Economics and Finance	2%	58%
Politics and Management	12%	22%
Ethics and Lifestyle	14%	3%
Other fields	0%	13%

In folklore, river metaphors are mainly used to reflect human emotions and fate. However, in modern journalism, this concept focuses on concretizing abstract ideas in management, economics, and finance. In the traditional data group, the *emotions and fate* target domain is dominant at 72%. Ancient Vietnamese people used the drifting and unpredictable nature of water to perceive the uncertainty of life: "*Thân em như hạt mưa sa / Hạt vào đài các hạt ra ruộng cày*". It can be seen that the source domain (River/Rain) maps onto the target domain (Woman's fate). This shows a "harmonizing with nature" (*thuận thiên*) attitude, accepting fate like the flow of water.

Table 1 shows that in 100 journalistic samples, 58% of river metaphors target *economics and finance*. This confirms a cognitive shift. Vietnamese people use the liquid characteristics and movement of water to imagine currency flows. Phrases like "*khởi thông dòng vốn ngoại*", "*bơm tiền*", "*thanh khoản*", or "*đóng*

băng” show that the natural environment is restructured to explain complex financial activities.

The *politics and management* domain has a smaller share (22%) but shows high stability. Metaphors like *con tàu* (ship), *tay chèo* (oarsman), and *lèo lái* (steering) appear consistently from folk songs to newspapers. This affirms a national mindset: governing a country is like steering a boat through waves. While folk songs advise on individual bravery (*Chớ thấy sóng cả mà ngã tay chèo*), modern journalism emphasizes national stature (*Con tàu kinh tế vững vàng vượt sóng lớn*). Therefore, rivers and water are still a solid “anchor” for how Vietnamese people think. The only change is the scale. In the past, it was about an individual rowing a small boat. Today, it is about steering the whole nation's economy through big waves.

Statistics on Image Schemas

The analysis of image schemas clarifies how Vietnamese people perceive the world through the “River and Water” concept (see Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of Image Schemas

Image schemas	Quantity	Percentage (%)	Examples
Flow	95	47.5%	<i>Dòng vốn, khơi thông, làn sóng, nước chảy...</i>
Container	45	22.5%	<i>Bơm tiền, rót, đổ vốn, bến đợi, thuyền...</i>
Direction	32	16.0%	<i>Vững tay chèo, lèo lái, con tàu, lộ trình...</i>
Force	28	14.0%	<i>Sóng ngầm, lợi ngược dòng, tức nước vỡ</i>

Table 2 shows that the *Flow* schema is the most common in both types of data. This shows a Vietnamese thinking habit: viewing the world as a constant movement, just like flowing water. Besides that, the *Container* schema also appears frequently (22.5%) through actions like *bơm* (pumping), *rót* (pouring), or *đổ vốn* (injecting capital). This shows how newspapers turn abstract financial amounts into tangible matter that can be measured and stored.

Statistics on Expressive Nuances

Table 3. Distribution of Expressive Nuances in River Metaphors

Expressive Nuance	Percentage (%)	Examples
Positive	45%	<i>Khơi thông, vươn ra biển lớn, bồi đắp...</i>
Negative	30%	<i>Đóng băng, điểm nghẽn, sóng dữ, sóng ngầm...</i>
Neutral	25%	<i>Dòng chảy, lộ trình, thượng nguồn...</i>

River metaphors in journalism are used not only for description but also for evaluation. Expressions like *điểm nghẽn* (bottleneck) or *đóng băng* (freezing) do more than describe a state of stagnation. They imply an obstacle that needs to be removed immediately. Meanwhile, *khởi thông* (unblocking) or *tan băng* (thawing) open up optimistic understandings of development and the recovery of the economic flow.

The differentiation of expressive nuances in Table 3 shows that river metaphors are also tools to guide perception. For instance, when using the term "*điểm nghẽn*," the writer not only points out a delay but also creates psychological pressure about the need to "*khởi thông*." In contrast, metaphors like "*vuơn ra biển lớn*" (reaching the grand ocean) or "*bồi đắp*" (enrichment) utilize experiences of the vastness and fertility of water to concretize expectations for development.

The use of words like "*đóng băng/tan băng*" (freezing/Unfreezing) in journalism shows a very interesting mechanism of metaphorical localization. Although Vietnam is a tropical country, Vietnamese people have borrowed the solid and melting states of water to describe the stagnation or restarting of capital flows. This shows that river metaphors do not stop at natural observations but have transformed to meet modern economic concepts.

Similarities and Differences Between the Two Data Sources

By comparing folklore and modern journalism, the research finds that the movement of river concepts is both a continuous heritage and an adaptation to the times (See Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison of Metaphorical Characteristics Between Folklore and Journalism

Comparison Features	Folklore	Journalistic Discourse
Nature of entities	Linked to tangible objects (<i>Thuyền, đò, bến bãi</i>).	Linked to intangible entities (<i>Dòng vốn, thanh khoản</i>).
Scope of impact	Individual, emotional, and ethical.	Community, economic, and macro-political.
State of matter	Mainly liquid and natural flows.	Appearance of state changes (<i>Đóng băng, tan băng</i>).

The difference in the *Nature of entities* (Table 4) shows a shift in thinking. In *ca dao*, rivers and water are objects for direct observation and dialogue (*Thuyền về có nhớ bến chăng*). It can be seen that the entities are tangible and linked to physical experiences like seeing or hearing. However, in journalism, river imagery has been abstracted. Concepts that cannot be touched, such as *dòng vốn* (capital flow) or *thanh khoản* (liquidity), are attached to the *Flow* schema. This helps readers imagine economic movements in the most natural way.

Regarding the scope of impact, there is a shift from the individual "I" to the community "we." In the past, rivers were used to talk about personal feelings and village ethics. Today, they are used to express macro issues of the nation. The enduring point of heritage is the way of thinking based on the characteristics of

water. Whether it is a story about an old boat or today's money flow, Vietnamese people still prefer to borrow the flexibility of water as it is sometimes full and sometimes empty to explain life's changes. This is the core similarity. It affirms that rivers and water are a continuous cognitive coordinate of the nation.

DISCUSSION

Rivers and Water in the Mindset: From Living Environment to Cognitive Habits

The high frequency of river metaphors in Vietnamese is not a random choice of vocabulary. Instead, it is an inevitable result of *embodiment* from the living environment. Vietnam is a country of flows with a dense network of rivers. On average, there is a river mouth every 20km along the coast. This geographical reality has created common idioms like “*Sông sâu nước chảy*”, “*Nước chảy đá mòn*”, or spatial descriptions like “*Chẳng chịt như mạng nhện*”. For wet-rice residents, rivers and water are not only a source of survival but also a relevant socio-cultural space where the earliest and deepest experiences are formed.

The root of this mindset is the mechanism of *cognitive metonymy*. In *ca dao*, images of *bến nước* (wharf) and *con thuyền* (boat) are essential entities in daily life. They have become an anchor for the Vietnamese to project abstract ideas about fate: “*Thuyền về có nhớ bến chăng / Bến thì một dạ khăng khăng đợi thuyền*”. Borrowing a location (*bến*) to replace a subject, or a vehicle (*thuyền*) to replace a human fate shows an "entity-centered" thinking to position social relationships. This is a solid cognitive foundation for more complex metaphorical mappings later.

Today, that cognitive flow remains persistent as it enters modern discourse. Invisible socio-economic concepts are "materialized" through the nation's practical experience with irrigation. Phrases like “*khởi thông dòng vốn*” (unblocking capital flows), “*điểm nghẽn thanh khoản*” (liquidity bottlenecks), or “*làn sóng đầu tư*” (investment waves) are actually extensions of ancient experiences in leading water into fields or washing away alum and salt. This affirms a rule: humans always use the most familiar things to explain the most unfamiliar ones. From the intimate voices of the past to the management thinking of today, rivers and water remain a unified cognitive coordinate. It helps the Vietnamese "internalize" new knowledge naturally and persuasively.

Thus, the consistent similarity between the two communities is the use of rivers and water as a "common denominator" to conceptualize the world. Although the social context changes, the Vietnamese mind still maintains a cognitive habit: using tangible and close entities as a measure for invisible and distant things.

Shift in Attitude: From Following Nature to Proactive Management

Looking deeply into the use of metaphors, the research finds a clear change in the Vietnamese mindset. In folklore, Vietnamese people often looked at the water flow to find sympathy for human fates, such as the expression “*mười hai bến nước*” (twelve wharves) which is full of luck and following destiny. In contrast, in journalistic discourse, rivers and water have become a space for strategy and management. Calling a difficulty *đóng băng* (freezing) instead of a regular obstacle shows a flexible way of thinking. We do not just describe a deadlock, but also suggest a solution of *tan băng* (thawing) to restart the system.

This shift is also shown through the exchange of positions between image schemas. In folklore, the *Force* schema is often linked to a passive attitude. Humans are entities affected by the power of nature through images of *sóng dập*, *gió dỗi* (beating waves, tossing winds) or the uncertainty of a *chìm nổi* (floating and sinking) fate.

On the other hand, journalistic discourse records the rise of the *Direction* schema. In this context, the image of the *con tàu kinh tế* (economic ship) no longer drifts but is always linked to actions like *lèo lái* (steering), *vững tay chèo* (steady rowing), and establishing a *lộ trình* (roadmap). According to Trịnh Sâm (2013), using body parts to name river entities, such as *mắt ghe* (eye of the boat) or *bụng ghe* (belly of the boat), shows that humans have "humanized" the scenery to master it. In modern discourse, *lèo lái con tàu* (steering the ship) is no longer an act of resignation to the flow. It has become a symbol for the capacity of national governance. This is a big step from accepting fate to a proactive mindset of mastering social changes.

The exchange of positions between image schemas reflects a fundamental shift in the human position within the flow. In *ca dao*, when the Vietnamese say "*Nước chảy hoa trôi*", the *Flow* schema is linked to aimless drifting. We can see that humans stand on the shore observing with the attitude of a passive entity leaving their fate to the push of nature. In contrast, in journalistic discourse, the flow is no longer drifting but is a goal-oriented movement. When writing about "*Dòng vốn chảy vào hạ tầng*" (Capital flowing into infrastructure), newspapers have concretized water into a resource that can be directed and controlled.

This shows that in the past, humans only saw the power of water through a threatening *Force* schema (*sóng dập*, *gió dỗi*). Today, humans proactively interact with that flow using the *Direction* schema. The difference is that ancient people saw the water flow as destiny, while modern people see it as an environment to show management capacity. For example, the image of "*vượt sóng dữ*" (overcoming fierce waves) in economic news no longer suggests a fear of destruction. Instead, it becomes a challenge of the leader's steering bravery. From the oar of the old boat to the steering wheel of the economic ship today, river metaphors show an important shift. Humans no longer follow nature passively but proactively control and master the flow. The change of tools in metaphors is actually a change in management thinking and the position of the Vietnamese before the changes of modern life.

Vitality of Identity: The Intersection of Local and Global Thinking

Compared to *ca dao*, modern journalism uses river metaphors more flexibly and diversely. The difference is that modern discourse is no longer limited to pure natural observations but has integrated global elements like "*đóng băng*" (freezing), "*tan băng*" (unfreezing), or "*thanh khoản*" (liquidity). As mentioned in section 4.2.2, using these terms does not only reflect a proactive attitude. It is also the result of a flexible interaction between conceptual domains. Even though Vietnam is a tropical country, Vietnamese people still flexibly apply the states of water to decode modern economic concepts. In this context, market

stagnation is perceived as a frozen state, while a restart is understood as the melting process of financial flows.

In fact, these terms become natural in Vietnamese not because of mechanical translation but because they are based on an inherent irrigation mindset. However, the core common point between old *ca dao* and today's journalism is borrowing the irrigation mindset to decode reality. For the Vietnamese, water is life, so any stagnation needs to be "*khởi thông*" (unblocked) for development. It is the experience of clearing ditches and leading water into fields that helps dry economic concepts become familiar and easier to absorb.

In this way, the Vietnamese have "Vietnamesized" international concepts using their own *embodiment*. Receiving new things through familiar river imagery is a way to affirm the nation's cognitive identity. Traditional ways of thinking do not disappear. Instead, they become an anchor for us to grasp and master the changes of the modern world.

Perception of the "Container": Concretizing Socio-Economic Entities

The *Container* schema helps concretize invisible values through embodiment. The common point between *ca dao* and journalism is the need to quantify abstract concepts into measurable entities. However, the purpose of use is different. In the past, people used "*bến*" (wharf) or "*thuyền*" (boat) to store emotions and personal fates. Today, journalism uses "*thị trường*" (the market) or "*nền kinh tế*" (the economy) to imagine the fullness or emptiness of social resources.

Expressions like "*rót vốn*" (pouring capital) or "*bơm thanh khoản*" (pumping liquidity) show a consistent way of thinking. This mindset views currency as a liquid and the market as an entity with capacity. Unlike the static nature of the folk mindset, the "*container*" in journalism is dynamic. It reflects modern social management thinking. This is how Vietnamese people use river experiences to manage reality. It is a persistent and creative heritage of the national way of thinking.

Cultural Depth of Communication and the Movement of the Vietnamese Mindset

The difference in values between the two data groups proves the movement of the national mindset through two communities with different social characteristics.

First, there is a contrast between the "harmonizing with nature" (*thuận thiên*) attitude and a proactive management mindset. In folk treasures, the cognitive subjects are agricultural residents closely attached to nature. River metaphors reflect an internal behavior toward stability. People look at rivers to reflect on human fate and life ethics. In contrast, modern journalism has "re-conceptualized" the flow into a space of strategy. Instead of passively waiting at a *bến* (wharf) like destiny, modern people proactively "*khởi dòng*" (open the flow) and "*lèo lái*" (steer) to coordinate social resources. The shift from the *Emotions-Fate* target domain to *Economics-Finance* shows a new attitude: from accepting fate to actively mastering social changes.

Second is the rule of "*softening*" in communication behavior. In any era, the indirect and harmony-oriented way of speaking remains a consistent rule for wet-rice residents. Even when facing tough issues like financial crises or interest conflicts, journalistic discourse still prefers river metaphors to avoid direct

confrontation. Using river metaphors like “*điểm nghẽn*” (bottleneck) or “*đóng băng*” (freezing) for economic deadlocks makes the message feel more familiar. It helps 'soften' the impact of bad news and makes it easier for the audience to accept without feeling too much pressure. This is the relevance of language: borrowing traditional materials to "localize" modern concepts, helping the new reality enter the community's mind most naturally.

This analysis shows that national identity is still the main lens through which Vietnamese people receive new knowledge. In real life, using familiar metaphors helps “*soften*” the tone of news and media. This makes communication more effective and helps the public agree on current issues. Even though this study only looks at 200 samples and doesn't cover all regions, it opens the door to explore other metaphors like food or trade. To sum up, the changes in these two data groups don't break the unity of the national mindset. Instead, they prove that rivers and water are still a solid “*anchor*”. This helps Vietnamese people stay flexible and master all the changes of modern life.

CONCLUSIONS

This study of river metaphors, from *ca dao* to modern journalism (2021-2026), confirms a consistent thinking pattern in the Vietnamese language. We see a clear shift in how these metaphors are used: they have moved from expressing emotions and personal fate to describing economics and social management. Instead of accepting the water flow as a fixed destiny, modern Vietnamese people now use river imagery to show a proactive role in 'steering' and managing their lives. This transition is deeply rooted in their physical experiences and traditional mindset.

These findings prove that river metaphors act as a “*cultural anchor*” for the nation. While the topics change with the times, the way Vietnamese people view the world through the lens of water remains the same. Modern journalism is not “*rootless*”. By using traditional imagery, it helps new and complex knowledge enter the Vietnamese mind more naturally. Finally, rivers and water remain the primary compass that defines Vietnamese identity in a rapidly changing world. Regarding recommendations, the media should use familiar river metaphors to make complex economic and political news easier to understand. This approach helps the public connect with new information through shared cultural values. It also builds social consensus more effectively.

FURTHER STUDY

Due to the limited sample size (200 units) and a lack of regional analysis, future studies could expand the dataset for better generalization. Furthermore, exploring other metaphorical systems, such as cuisine or trade would help complete the cognitive map of the modern Vietnamese identity in the digital age.

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