

TRANSLATING “CONTEMPLATION” IN ZEN BUDDHISM: A FUNCTIONAL-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS USING HOUSE’S MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the Vietnamese translation of the term contemplation in D.T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series*, rendered into Vietnamese by Trúc Thiên as *Thiền Luận – Quyển Thượng* (2023). Using Juliane House’s (1997, 2015) functional-pragmatic translation quality assessment model, the paper focuses exclusively on lexical realization under the register variable Field. A bilingual corpus was constructed and processed using the VietCorpus tool, followed by manual classification into functional equivalents and lexical mismatches. Quantitative findings indicate that 13 of the instances of the term contemplation align semantically and doctrinally with the source text, whereas the remaining 13 reflect varying degrees of mismatch, including register shifts, doctrinal ambiguity, and omission. A qualitative analysis of selected cases further reveals that inconsistent lexical choices can disrupt the functional coherence of Buddhist philosophical discourse. The study underscores the need for a more systematic and context-sensitive approach in Buddhist translation, especially concerning semantically dense and doctrinally significant terms.

Keywords: Translation quality assessment; Juliane House; lexical evaluation; contemplation; Buddhist translation.

1. Introduction

Translating Buddhist philosophical texts from English into Vietnamese entails more than linguistic competence; it requires sensitivity to the layered nature of spiritual doctrine, rhetorical style, and cultural specificity (Harvey, 2013; Beal, 2001; House, 2015). A central challenge lies in rendering terms that carry substantial doctrinal and experiential significance—contemplation, for instance, is a context-sensitive term whose interpretation varies across traditions, lineages, and textual purposes (Gethin, 2008; Lopez, 1995).

This study investigates the Vietnamese rendition of *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* by D.T. Suzuki, translated

by Trúc Thiên and published under the title *Thiền Luận – Quyển Thượng* in 2023. It specifically analyzes the translation strategies applied to the English term contemplation across different textual contexts, with attention to how these lexical choices influence the communicative efficacy and interpretive clarity of the translated work.

To evaluate the consistency and appropriateness of the lexical choices in translation, this study adopts Juliane House’s Functional-Pragmatic Model of translation quality assessment (1997, 2015). This framework foregrounds the need to preserve key contextual dimensions of the source text—namely, field, tenor, and mode—while examining how effectively the target text replicates the original’s

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textual function. From this perspective, lexical items are understood not merely as carriers of semantic content but as markers of interpersonal stance, cultural alignment, and stylistic orientation.

The study seeks to determine whether the Vietnamese renderings of the term *contemplation* in this translation meet the standards of functional equivalence as outlined by the chosen theoretical framework. It further considers the potential impact of lexical variation or inconsistency on the reader's interpretation and engagement with the philosophical content of the text.

This research employs a qualitative methodology informed by Juliane House's Functional-Pragmatic Model (1997, 2015) to evaluate translation quality. The analysis centers on the term *contemplation* as it is used in D.T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* and its Vietnamese counterpart, *Thiền Luận – Quyển Thượng*, translated by Trúc Thiên in 2023.

Utilizing a bilingual corpus and guided by qualitative analysis, this study begins with the English source text and conducts a comparative assessment of its Vietnamese translation. Anchored in Juliane House's (1997, 2015) functional-pragmatic model, the investigation concentrates on lexical choices within the Field register variable, with an emphasis on semantic accuracy, doctrinal appropriateness, and stylistic coherence. Through a combination of corpus-based sampling and interpretive evaluation, the study seeks to demonstrate how different renderings of the key noun *contemplation* affect functional equivalence and shape the communicative intent in the translation of a Buddhist philosophical work.

2. Literature review

This section surveys existing scholarship across three primary domains: (1) the distinctive features of Buddhist translation and the significance of lexical selection, (2) the theoretical foundations and practical applications of Juliane House's functional-pragmatic model within translation studies, and (3) prior research evaluating translation quality in the context of Buddhist or philosophical texts.

2.1. Lexical challenges in Buddhist translation

Translating Buddhist texts entails more than simply conveying meaning across languages; it requires careful attention to doctrinal accuracy, philosophical depth, and cultural resonance. Scholars such as Gethin (2008) and Beal

(2001) highlight that foundational Buddhist concepts—such as *dhyāna*, *śūnyatā*, and *bodhi*—frequently lack precise lexical counterparts in target languages like English or Vietnamese. This inherent indeterminacy challenges translators to engage in thoughtful and often inventive lexical decision-making to render intricate spiritual concepts in ways that are both faithful to the source and accessible to modern audiences.

Among the lexically complex terms in Buddhist discourse, *contemplation* holds particular significance due to its frequent occurrence and its intrinsic link to meditative and soteriological dimensions of practice. As noted by Harvey (2013), the term encompasses multiple layers of meaning—ranging from experiential to doctrinal and psychological—which complicates efforts to render it with accuracy. In Vietnamese translations, *contemplation* is expressed through diverse lexical choices, shaped by interpretive traditions, stylistic tendencies, and contextual factors. The variation identified in this study highlights the inherent challenge of achieving both terminological consistency and functional equivalence. In the absence of a systematic, theory-based translation approach, such inconsistencies risk altering the intended meaning, introducing doctrinal ambiguities, and diminishing the overall coherence of the text.

2.2. Juliane House's functional-pragmatic model

Juliane House (1997; 2015) advances a translation quality assessment framework grounded in Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, emphasizing three core register variables: field (the nature of the activity or subject matter), tenor (the relationship between participants), and mode (the channel or format of communication). Central to House's model is the notion of textual function, which integrates both ideational and interpersonal dimensions. For a translation to achieve equivalence in quality, it must successfully preserve this composite function within the target text.

House's distinction between covert translation—adapted to the norms and expectations of the target culture—and overt translation—which retains explicit markers of the source context—proves especially valuable in the analysis of religious and philosophical texts. In such contexts, the translator's role extends beyond mere message transfer to encompass the preservation of the source text's authoritative voice, conceptual coherence, and stylistic character.

House highlights the significance of lexical selection as a key factor in sustaining both register and functional equivalence. Far from being neutral transmitters of meaning, lexical items serve as indicators of cultural context, doctrinal stance, and interpersonal dynamics (House, 2015). As such, translating core terms like contemplation requires attention not only to semantic fidelity, but also to their alignment with the register and their broader pragmatic implications.

This study is based on the assumption that the Vietnamese translations of the term contemplation exhibit notable variation in terms of functional accuracy, and that such inconsistency may undermine the semantic integrity and doctrinal consistency of the target text.

2.3. Research gap

Although House's model has gained considerable traction within the field of translation studies, its deployment in the analysis of Buddhist or spiritual texts remains relatively underexplored. Recent efforts by Vietnamese scholars, such as Đỗ Thúy Hằng (2021) and Trần Thu Hương (2022), have begun to extend the model's applicability to literary and philosophical translations. Their findings suggest that House's framework can be effectively adapted to contexts where maintaining ideological integrity and rhetorical coherence is of critical importance.

Notably, Đỗ Thúy Hằng's (2021) examination of *The Da Vinci Code* and Trần Thu Hương's (2022) analysis of *The Great Gatsby* both illustrate the effectiveness of applying House's framework to lexical analysis in literary translation. Nevertheless, there remains a scarcity of research specifically addressing the translation of doctrinal terminology within English-Vietnamese Buddhist texts. This underexplored area presents a meaningful avenue for inquiry into how lexical variation influences functional equivalence, particularly in spiritually nuanced works such as Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism*.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and scope

This research adopts a qualitative framework guided by Juliane House's Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) model (1997, 2015), centering on the lexical representation of the term contemplation in D.T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series*, as rendered into Vietnamese by Trúc Thiên in *Thiền Luận – Quyển Thượng* (2023). Alongside functional-pragmatic interpretation,

the study incorporates a quantitative component by identifying and tallying the Vietnamese equivalents of contemplation across aligned source-target sentence pairs. This integrative approach—combining close textual analysis with empirical data—enables a comprehensive evaluation of both the contextual suitability and the consistency of lexical choices. Through this dual lens, the study aims to offer a nuanced understanding of translation strategies while grounding its findings in measurable patterns, contributing to the assessment of translation quality in the context of Buddhist philosophical discourse.

Although House's model approaches register through the three dimensions of Field, Tenor, and Mode, this study narrows its focus to the *Field* variable, with particular attention to the lexical resources used to convey domain-specific meaning. The analysis concentrates on the Vietnamese translations of the noun *contemplation*, evaluating the extent to which these lexical choices capture the philosophical depth and meditative connotations embedded in the source text.

3.2. Corpus construction and data collection

The research employs VietCorpus, a bilingual alignment and analysis platform, as the primary tool for data processing. A parallel corpus was manually created by segmenting the English source text and its Vietnamese translation into corresponding sentence pairs in Excel format, which were subsequently uploaded to the VietCorpus system. A total of 26 occurrences of the term contemplation were identified through keyword search. The aligned sentence pairs were then exported and subjected to manual review. Each Vietnamese rendering of *contemplation* was extracted, categorized, and assessed based on its contextual use and semantic adequacy.

3.3. Analytical procedure

In accordance with House's model, the study undertakes a register-based lexical analysis, with a specific emphasis on the Field component. The evaluation is limited to examining the lexical choices employed to convey the doctrinal and philosophical dimensions of the source text, assessing how effectively these selections preserve the intended meaning within the Buddhist conceptual framework.

3.3.1. Field analysis (lexical means)

The *Field* variable pertains to the subject matter and the domain-specific content of discourse. In the context of this study, it refers to Zen Buddhist philosophy, with particular focus on themes such as meditative insight, conceptual reflection, and spiritual transformation. The term *contemplation* is examined within this domain to determine how its Vietnamese translations correspond to the following dimensions:

- (1) The semantic nuances of Buddhist meditation,
- (2) Doctrinal alignment with Mahāyāna traditions, and
- (3) Cultural accuracy within the lexicon of Vietnamese Buddhist discourse.

Each lexical variant is assessed for its effectiveness in conveying the field-specific meaning both accurately and functionally.

3.4. Categorization of data

Instances of *contemplation* were organized into two primary categories: (1) Functional Equivalents, in which the Vietnamese translations demonstrated semantic accuracy, doctrinal consistency, and stylistic congruence (e.g., *quán*, *quán tưởng*); and (2) Lexical Mismatches, where the renderings departed from the intended conceptual domain, resulted in register distortion, or omitted the term entirely (e.g., *sự trầm tư mặc tưởng*, *đại định*, or untranslated instances). This classification framework does not rely on the overt/covert error distinction, but rather on the concept of lexical-functional adequacy as it relates to the Field component in House's model.

3.5. Evaluation criteria

This study evaluates translation quality by examining the lexical realization of the term *contemplation* and its Vietnamese counterparts through the lens of the *Field* variable—one of the three register components in Juliane House's Translation Quality Assessment model (1997, 2015). Instead of applying a conventional overt/covert error framework, the analysis centers on the lexical-functional adequacy of each translation, assessed across four interconnected dimensions: semantic accuracy, doctrinal relevance, stylistic appropriateness, and contextual alignment.

To guide this evaluation, the following criteria were developed and consistently applied to each instance of *contemplation* found in the corpus:

Table 1. Lexical Evaluation Criteria Adapted from House's Model (1997, 2015)

Criterion	Description	Analytical focus
Semantic Precision	Assesses whether the Vietnamese term retains the essential conceptual meaning of <i>contemplation</i> .	Lexical accuracy and semantic range
Doctrinal Appropriateness	Evaluates alignment with recognized Buddhist meditative and philosophical terminology.	Consistency with Mahāyāna doctrine
Stylistic Consistency	Measures how well the term fits with the tone, register, and stylistic flow of the original.	Tone, formality, and genre compatibility
Contextual Fit	Considers the lexical item's appropriateness within its immediate textual environment.	Sentence-level and discourse-level coherence

Each Vietnamese equivalent was evaluated based on its performance across the four established criteria. Renderings classified as functional equivalents generally met all or most of these dimensions, while lexical mismatches were characterized by shortcomings in one or more areas—such as the use of vague or overly general terms, departures from core Buddhist conceptual frameworks, or the omission of the original term.

This assessment method integrates qualitative analysis with a structured evaluative rubric, allowing for a systematic yet interpretive categorization of translation choices. Moreover, it contributes to the broader objective of examining how lexical variation impacts functional equivalence and shapes the communicative intent of a translated Buddhist philosophical text.

The findings derived from this evaluative framework highlight discernible trends in the translator's handling of the term contemplation. Through an examination of both the frequency and lexical-functional adequacy of the Vietnamese renderings within the corpus, the study sheds light on the diversity of translation choices and their degree of alignment with the source text's philosophical depth, doctrinal content, and stylistic intent. The subsequent section offers a detailed account of these results, structured around the two principal categories: functional equivalents and lexical matches or mismatches.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. An overview of the source text

In the year 1949, Zen was widely propagated in the West. As a result, Suzuki also produced essays on Zen. *Essays in Zen Buddhism* was published in 1949, marking a flourishing development of Zen during this period in the West. The term contemplation was used in the original work to translate terms from Sanskrit or Pali. It is also used to describe actions related to the practice of meditation. Therefore, contemplation can be formally adopted in Buddhist terminology.

In the original work, there are two instances where the author uses the term contemplation to interpret original Sanskrit terms. For example:

(1) Source Text: ... *Such and such is upright conduct (śīla); such and such is earnest contemplation (samādhi) such and such is intelligence (prajñā).*

In this case (1), the author employs the noun contemplation to translate samādhi, rather than using the more common term concentration. The original passage is a direct quotation from the Buddha, describing the triad of *Śīla* (morality), *Samādhi* (concentration), and *Prajñā* (wisdom), which together constitute the Threefold Training (*trīśikṣā*) in Buddhism. These three are interrelated and interdependent. *Samādhi* refers to a mental state free from the disturbances of thought, characterized by the cessation of all mental activity—including both wholesome and unwholesome thoughts—as well as detachment from external stimuli.

However, in English, the term contemplation typically denotes a process of deep thinking or deliberate reflection upon a particular subject. This semantic nuance diverges significantly from the original meaning of *samādhi*, resulting in a semantic mismatch. Consequently, this discrepancy may lead to confusion for translators attempting to render Buddhist concepts accurately across languages.

(2) Source Text: *In this there takes place a fully adjusted equilibrium between Samatha and Vipassana; that is, between tranquillization or cessation and contemplation.*

In case (2), the author of *Essays in Zen Buddhism* employs the noun contemplation to explain the Pāli term *Vipassanā*. The phrase “that is, between tranquillization or cessation and contemplation” is used to clarify the preceding idea—namely, that D.T. Suzuki is describing a state in which all thoughts are brought to a halt or relinquished, followed by a process of examination or inward observation directed at the meditative object.

Samatha refers to the calming or removal of discursive thoughts by the meditator, while *Vipassanā* involves insightfully observing or contemplating the object of meditation. When D.T. Suzuki uses the expression “tranquillization or cessation,” he is referring to the meaning of *Samatha* in Pāli. Subsequently, he employs the noun contemplation to convey the meaning of *Vipassanā*. The intended audience for this interpretation appears to be Western readers or scholars of meditation practice.

In summary, these two cases illustrate how selecting equivalent terms in content and meaning when translating Pāli or Sanskrit terminology into English can be a complex and delicate task. The examples above demonstrate this difficulty. Furthermore, such choices may pose additional challenges for Vietnamese translators like Trúc Thiên. There is likely to be linguistic or semantic disagreement

when attempting to translate the term *contemplation* into Vietnamese.

4.2. An overview of the target text

In 1971, Trúc Thiên was a well-known translator of the time. He successfully translated *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series)* into Vietnamese under the title *Thiền Luận (Quyển Thượng)*. This work attracted a large Vietnamese readership during that period and continues to do so today.

According to the *Buddhist Dictionary* by Nguyễn Hào (1999), the term *contemplation* is translated into Vietnamese as *quán*. Meanwhile, in the *Buddhist Dictionary* by Thiện Phúc, the term *contemplation* is translated as *thiền, quán, sự suy gẫm, or sự quán chiếu*.

4.3. Cross-textual analysis of the original and its translation

The analysis of the term *contemplation* in D.T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* and its Vietnamese rendering in *Thiền Luận – Quyển Thượng* by Trúc Thiên (2023) yielded a total of 26 sentence pairs. These were evaluated using the lexical-functional criteria presented in section 3.5 and grouped into two major categories: Functional Equivalents and Lexical Mismatches.

4.3.1. Lexical matches in the Vietnamese translation of “contemplation”

These 13 instances show a relatively high degree of semantic precision, doctrinal relevance, and stylistic consistency. Terms like *định, quán, quán tưởng, thiền* correspond closely to Buddhist meditative practices—particularly in the Mahāyāna and Zen traditions—where *contemplation* implies reflective perception or disciplined mental observation.

Table 2. Functional Equivalents of “Contemplation” in Vietnamese

No.	Source term	Vietnamese rendering	Occurrences
1	Contemplation	Định	1
2	Contemplation	Quán	6
3	Contemplation	Quán tưởng	4
4	Contemplation	Thiền	2
Total			13

Among the examples considered as matches, there is one particularly distinct case—the term *Định*. The translator followed the original text because the source used *contemplation* to translate the original Sanskrit term *samādhi*.

As presented in table 2, there is only one instance in which *contemplation* is translated into Vietnamese as *Định*. This case is appropriate and preserves the original intent of the author. However, the remaining cases should be reconsidered. A further illustrative case is the translation of *contemplation* into Vietnamese as “*định*.” While this might initially seem like a semantic deviation—since “*định*” (*samādhi*) is more commonly associated with *concentration* or *absorption* in English—Suzuki frequently uses *contemplation* to refer to the Sanskrit term *samādhi*, particularly within Mahāyāna settings that emphasize meditative stillness.

In the context of Vietnamese Buddhist literature, *samādhi* is consistently translated as “*định*,” making this rendition consistent with both established doctrinal practice and the translator’s interpretive intent. Though the lexical form differs on the surface, this instance qualifies as a functional equivalent under House’s model, as it retains the intended meaning in terms of the Field component.

(3) Source text: ...‘*Such and such is upright conduct (śīla); such and such is earnest contemplation (samādhi) such and such is intelligence (prajña)*.’

Target text: ...*Giới là như vậy. Định là như vậy. Huệ là như vậy.*

In sample (3), the translator successfully preserved the author’s intended meaning from the original. However, other instances categorized under *mismatches* should be reconsidered. As presented in sample (1), the original author employed the term *contemplation* to convey the meaning and function of the Sanskrit noun *samādhi*. Consequently, in the Vietnamese translation, Trúc Thiên faithfully followed the original usage and rendered *contemplation* as “*Định*.” In terms of functional equivalence, the translation corresponds appropriately with the source text. However, this remains a special or exceptional case. This suggests that even when the target term appears to align with the source in function, the broader semantic field and cultural connotations still require careful consideration.

There are six instances in which the term *contemplation* is translated into Vietnamese as “*quán*.” These cases show a clear match between the source and target texts.

(4) Source text: *Hence Tao-hsuan's special reference to Dharma's teaching as the Tai-chêng pi-kuan (Mahāyānistic wall-contemplation).*

Target text: *Do đó mà Đạo Tuyên cực tả giáo lý Đạt Ma bằng bốn chữ Đại Thừa Bích Quán 大乘壁觀 nghĩa là phép nhìn vách của Đại Thừa giáo.*

In a manner similar to Sample (4), the translator inserted the Chinese source term into the translation to improve semantic precision. The translator was no longer faced with difficulty or confusion when rendering the term contemplation into Vietnamese. This is because, in the original text, the author had already employed the Chinese transliteration to explain the meditation method of the Patriarch Bodhidharma. In the source text, the author also established an equivalence between kuan (觀) **and the English term** *contemplation*. That is, *kuan* and *contemplation* are functionally and semantically equivalent. Both refer to the act of examining, observing, or deeply contemplating a specific object during Buddhist meditative practice.

Thus, selecting the closest equivalent Vietnamese terms—*Quán*, and *Quán Tưởng*—has helped establish a match between the translation and the original text. The process of identifying the meaning may at first seem difficult to grasp. However, readers can further explore original sources in Chinese or refer directly to the original text to gain a clearer understanding.

4.3.2. Lexical mismatches in the Vietnamese translation of “contemplation”

These 13 cases were classified as lexical mismatches, based on the presence of:

- (1) Register shifts (e.g., *trầm tư*, which leans toward secular introspection),
- (2) Overgeneralization (e.g., *sự trầm tư mặc tưởng*, which lacks the specificity of *quán*),
- (3) Or complete omission of the source term (*contemplation* not translated).

Such renderings may dilute or redirect the source text's intended meaning, particularly where *contemplation* serves a critical doctrinal or meditative function.

Table 3. Non-equivalent Vietnamese renderings of “Contemplation”

No.	Source term	Vietnamese rendering	Occurrences
1	Contemplation	Đại định	1
2	Contemplation	Định	2
3	Contemplation	Định tâm	1
4	Contemplation	Không dịch	4
5	Contemplation	Phép quán	1
6	Contemplation	Tam muội	1
7	Contemplation	Tịnh	1
8	Contemplation	Tịnh quán	1
9	Contemplation	Trầm tư	2
10	Contemplation	Trầm tư mặc tưởng	1
11	Contemplation	Trầm tư quán tưởng	1
Total			13

Clearly, there is a significant mismatch between the translation and the original text. This inconsistency results in a lack of clarity in the target language. Moreover, it can also lead to semantic contradictions with other technical terms. For example, the term *Định* or *Định tâm* is used differently from *Trầm tư*. While *Trầm tư* implies being immersed in or deeply engaged with thoughts, *Định* refers to the cessation of all thoughts and a focused concentration on a single object. In this sense, *Định* is closer in meaning to *Quán*, although a more accurate equivalent might be *Chỉ*.

(5) Source text: *Their life-activities were unceasingly directed towards the advancement of this; and as one can readily recognize, they so differed from those merely absorbed in contemplation or the practising of dhyāna so called.*

Target text: *...mọi hoạt động của các ngài trong đời đều không ngớt tinh tiến hướng đến đó; và cái đó như ta dễ thấy, khác hẳn với sự trầm tư quán tưởng, hoặc ngồi thiền nhập định.*

Sample (5) illustrates a case in which contemplation is rendered as “*sự trầm tư quán tưởng*.”

In Buddhist practice, meditation follows a progressive path from *Samatha* to *Vipassanā*—that is, from *tranquillization* to *contemplation*, as discussed in sample (2). Therefore, the cessation or relinquishment of all thoughts is regarded as essential. From this perspective, both functionally and semantically, the use of the term “*trầm tư*” (deep thinking) within the compound phrase “*sự trầm tư quán tưởng*” (meditative contemplation) is inappropriate. This is because *trầm tư* refers to a state of deep or absorbed thought, which implies active mental engagement rather than cessation.

Consequently, it fails to maintain functional and tonal equivalence, and is therefore classified as a **lexical mismatch** according to the Field dimension in House’s translation model.

(6) Source text: *In this there takes place a fully adjusted equilibrium between Samatha and Vipassana; that is, between tranquillization or cessation and contemplation.*

Target text: *Đó là chứng đến cảnh giới tuyệt đối quân bình giữa chỉ (samatha) và quán (vipassana), nghĩa là giữa thiền và định.*

In Buddhist teachings, the initial causes are *Chỉ* (calm abiding) and *Quán* (insight), which lead to the results of *Định* and *Huệ*. The *Danh Từ Phật Học Thực Dụng* compiled by Tâm Tuệ Hỷ clearly defines *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* as corresponding to *Chỉ* and *Quán* (Tâm Tuệ Hỷ, p.93). In case (6), the sentence in the original text consists of a main clause followed by a clarifying phrase. The main clause introduces the concepts of *Samatha* and *Vipassanā*, while the subsequent phrase explains these two Pāli terms using their English equivalents: *tranquillization* or *cessation*, and *contemplation*. Therefore, in this context, translating contemplation as “*Định*” in the Vietnamese version is not appropriate, as it disregards the explanatory intent and semantic nuance embedded in the source text.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the Vietnamese renderings of contemplation in *Thiền Luận – Quyển Thượng* reveals a noticeable inconsistency in lexical choice, with a half of the instances falling into the category of lexical mismatches. From a functional-pragmatic perspective, these mismatches predominantly represent Field-level shifts that affect the transmission of Buddhist meditative and doctrinal meaning.

The quantitative data show that while terms such as *định*, *quán*, *quán tưởng*, *quán sát* and *thiền* were successfully employed in 13 instances, reflecting doctrinal accuracy and semantic clarity, a larger number of cases—13 in total—deviated from the source concept in varying degrees. These included translations such as *sự trầm tư mặc tưởng*, *tam muội*, *trầm tư*, and others that, although contextually related, failed to fully capture the source term’s referential function or introduced unintended stylistic and conceptual shifts.

Qualitative analysis of selected examples further illustrates this discrepancy. In certain cases, *contemplation* was replaced with broader or doctrinally distinct terms (e.g., *tam muội* instead of *quán*), resulting in subtle distortions of the philosophical nuance intended in the source. In others, the term was omitted entirely, weakening the communicative intent and undercutting the meditative progression described by Suzuki. These cases reflect what House (1997, 2015) identifies as covert translation tendencies, where target language norms override the source’s ideological and textual functions.

Importantly, this inconsistency is not merely a linguistic issue but a philosophical and pedagogical concern in Buddhist translation. Given that core meditative terms are central to the soteriological structure of Buddhist texts, mistranslations—even if minor in form—can lead to interpretive confusion and misrepresentation of key practices or insights. The translator’s lexical choices, therefore, should be guided by doctrinal grounding, contextual sensitivity, and consistency throughout the text.

This study also underscores the value of using a bilingual corpus with functional-pragmatic evaluation, which allows both macro-level patterns and micro-level deviations to be systematically identified and analyzed. The results demonstrate that even a single term like contemplation, when inconsistently rendered, can materially affect the coherence and doctrinal clarity of a translated Buddhist text.

5.1. Conclusion

This paper examined how the term *contemplation* is rendered in the Vietnamese translation of D.T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series*, using a corpus-assisted, functionally-informed approach grounded in Juliane House's translation quality model. Through both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study revealed a significant proportion of lexical mismatches (13 out of 26 cases), raising concerns about consistency, doctrinal accuracy, and functional equivalence.

By employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study found that only 13 out of the 26 occurrences of *contemplation* qualified as functional equivalents, whereas the remaining 13 instances exhibited various types of lexical mismatch. These mismatches frequently reflected shifts in semantic field, register, or conceptual nuance—for example, translating *contemplation* as *sự trầm tư mặc tưởng*, which fails to convey the meditative stillness implied in the source text. In certain cases, the term was omitted entirely, further diminishing the translation's alignment with its intended function.

While several instances demonstrated strong alignment with the original in terms of semantic precision and stylistic tone, many translations deviated—either by generalizing the concept, shifting the register, or omitting the term altogether. These mismatches disrupt the Field register variable and reduce the effectiveness of the translated text in conveying Suzuki's philosophical message to Vietnamese readers.

The study highlights the importance of integrating theoretical models like House's TQA into Buddhist translation assessment, especially when dealing with core doctrinal vocabulary. It also reinforces the need for translators to maintain a consistent, context-sensitive approach when rendering semantically rich and doctrinally significant terms.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for future Buddhist translation projects and scholarly practice:

- (1) Standardize core terminology: Establish a reference glossary for frequently used Buddhist concepts (e.g., *dhyaṇa*, *contemplation*, *śūnyatā*) to ensure consistent and doctrinally sound renderings across texts.
- (2) Adopt a functionally-informed approach: Encourage translators to consider not just linguistic equivalence, but also the ideational and interpersonal functions of terms, as suggested by House's model.
- (3) Utilize Corpus-Based tools early in the process: Employ parallel corpus platforms (such as VietCorpus) during the drafting and revision stages to flag potential inconsistencies in term usage.
- (4) Integrate peer review with doctrinal experts: Include Buddhist scholars or practitioners in the translation review process to verify doctrinal alignment, especially for key meditative or philosophical terms.
- (5) Revisit and revise existing translations: Given the findings of this study, translations like *Thiền Luận – Quyển Thượng* could benefit from partial revision, especially in terms of lexical consistency for key concepts such as *contemplation*.

By addressing these issues, future translations of Buddhist texts can better preserve both the semantic depth and spiritual intent of the originals, ensuring greater accessibility, clarity, and fidelity for Vietnamese readers and practitioners alike.

This study revealed both matched or mismatched cases in the translation of the term '*contemplation*' between the source and target text. However, the findings primarily relied on quantitative analysis with only limited qualitative insights provided. Therefore, future research should place greater emphasis on qualitative analysis. Specifically, subsequent studies should explore the mismatched instances in greater depth, focusing on their functional, semantic, cultural implications.

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