

Received: October 2023 Accepted: December 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58262/ks.v12i1.004>

Approaching Pedro Paramo from the View of the Fundamental Vows of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha Sutra

Nguyen Thanh Trung¹, Dang Ngoc Ngan², Phramaha Chakrapol Acharashubho Thepa³,
Do Dinh Linh Vu⁴

Abstract

This article applies structural, cultural-historical method and comparative methods to approach Pedro Paramo (Juan Rulfo's novel) from the perspective of the Sutra of the Fundamental Vows of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha. These two objects are clarified in the spirit of interaction and comparison through some similar motifs such as the underworld, ghosts, etc. As a result, this process is practical to initially generalize the relationship between Buddhism and literature from themes, and artistic techniques. From an educational perspective, the research outcomes of this topic have the potential to serve as a scholarly resource on the theory and interdisciplinary research methods in the fields of literature and Buddhist studies. Furthermore, it paves the way for applying Buddhology Criticism in literature and Buddhist studies at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Keywords: *Pedro Paramo, Kṣitigarbha Sutra, hell, filial piety, Buddhology Criticism*

Introduction

Pedro Paramo reflects an unstable period in Mexican and Latin American history, in the early twentieth century. At that time, peasant uprisings broke out and failed, the dictatorship was stronger and stronger, the gap between rich and poor became deeper and deeper, and political social volatilities made the future far away but death nearer than ever. Combining that outsized reality with European Surrealism, Joan Rulfo wrote the novel through a new way of looking at reality – combining elements of reality and magic – and created a groundwork for Latin American Magical Realism. In fact, this is a thesis novel. Through the journey back to the village to find out his father of Juan Preciado, Juan Rulfo poses the problem of finding the past of Latin American countries after gaining independence from Spain and Portugal. Because only if understanding its past, can Latin America understand itself and make the future clear. This is the ideological value of *Pedro Paramo*. However, literature has its own way; with such a complex political and social-historical problem, Joan Rulfo structures it into a family problem with the relationship of a father (Pedro Paramo) - (Dolores) mother's Preciado) – son (Juan Preciado). Juan Preciado's journey to the village is filled with a series of stories told by eyewitnesses about Pedro

¹ Linguistics and Literature Dept., Hochiminh City University of Education, Vietnam.
Email: trungnt@hcmue.edu.vn

² Linguistics and Literature Dept., Hochiminh City University of Education, Vietnam.

³ Religious and Philosophy Dept., Mahamakut Buddhist University, Thailand.

⁴ Linguistics and Literature Dept., Hochiminh City University of Education, Vietnam.

Paramo – the economic, political, and sexual dictator of Comala. Pedro Paramo eventually died with his love, his sin, and the vitality of the village. All the narrators turn out ghosts, and Joan Preciado eventually finds himself dead and buried by those ghosts. This seems to be a closed-end for Comala and Latin America. After more than 50 years of publication, comments on the ideological limits – no way out for the characters or left-wing political orientation – have become obsolete. Latin America, perhaps, first, needs to solve its problem in the ideological rather than socio-political dimension. Therefore, the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* can be a necessary reference and comparison for Latin America and *Pedro Paramo*.

The *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* is a creation of Chinese Buddhism, because “no Sanskrit manuscripts of this text have been found.” (Buswell, 1990, 178). This sutra appeared in China around the 7th century, in the Tang Dynasty, associated with the name of Siksānanda – a famous monk and translator. In the Mahayana Buddhist belief, the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* appeared after *Lotus Sutra* and before *Perfect Enlightenment Sutra*. Compared with the topic of Buddha nature of *Lotus Sutra* and Enlightenment of *Perfect Enlightenment Sutra*, the content of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* is quite simple. It orients to the masses of the popular audience a specific issue – filial piety (Xiao, 孝) which is quite an important topic in Chinese Confucianism. *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* says that its content is a 3-month lecture that the Buddha gave to his mother in the heavens (Trayastrimsas). This detail is also quite common in the Indian Buddhist tradition. The *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* is very popular in East Asia and is recited regularly in July, and during funerals. Because the content of the sutra refers to the journey to hell to find the mother, the ritual of making offerings and chanting helps her soul to be saved from all suffering and reborn in heaven. Many pagodas, therefore, carve images of hell and Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva for educational purposes. Although most monks, nuns, and researchers have affirmed the metaphorical meaning of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* (hell is born from our mind), most people are more interested in the practical and physical aspects of hell. Therefore, debating to identify whether it is right or wrong is no longer meaningful as thinking of how to effectively apply both theory and reality.

The application of the content from the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* in the study of the novel *Pedro Paramo* represents an interdisciplinary research direction that fosters a novel approach to both Buddhist studies and literature, creating a new perspective for their correlation. This research direction holds practical value in enhancing opportunities for access and understanding of prevalent texts from both Eastern and Western cultural traditions while elucidating the cultural characteristics embedded within the corresponding texts. From an educational standpoint, the growing trend of integrating Buddhist studies with scientific knowledge is evident. In practice, both aforementioned texts have been extensively studied in foreign literature programs and Buddhist undergraduate courses. From a comparative perspective, learners will develop skills in cultural dialogue, comparative analysis, and scientific research.

Literature Review

The Sutra of the Fundamental Vows of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha (*Kṣitigarbha Sutra*), a Mahayana Buddhist scripture, plays an important role in the spiritual life of the East Asian inhabitants. It has been studied extensively in China through many topics such as a typical comparison with the salvation of Christianity (L. Pan-Chiu, Ching Feng (2013), Reconsidering

the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective), Buddhist relics (X Zhang (2015), Buddhist Art Communication between Dunhuang and Japan: A Study of a Silk Painting of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva found in Dunhuang), or images of pure earth and hell (B Wu (2016). From the underworld to the pure land: Contemporary Ksitigarbha (Dizang)- related rituals on Mount Jiuhua), etc. Correspondingly, the following hypotheses can be derived:

H1. *The application of the Kṣitigarbha Sutra, in its significant cultural role, when compared with texts from other cultural backgrounds, will reveal the distinct cultural characteristics of both.*

In Vietnam, Mai Tho Truyen (1964) in Kṣitigarbha Sutra's Secret Meaning, pointed out the allegorical and symbolic value of Kṣitigarbha Sutra and hell. He also emphasized the meaning of the mind itself which creates heaven and hell. This approach was later developed by Thich Chan Thien: "Some Mahayana images and language are often symbols to symbolize what thought cannot reach" (Thich Chan Thien, 2010, 109), and Thich Minh Dien (2011, The Compendium of the Kṣitigarbha Sutra),... Nguyen Huynh Xuan Trinh (2020) in Study Of Karmic Retributions and Transfer Of Merit in The Kṣitigarbhasūtra, focuses on the issue of karma and its transfer blessings: "my idea of merit is like a spiritual bank statement recording one's skillful acts (credit transactions) and unskillful ones (debit transactions) in which one's balance is surplus. Unlike an official bank statement, this spiritual bank account accompanies anyone even after his death" (p.71). Thus, while researchers around the world have been interested in comparative research expanding to many aspects, in Vietnam, the Kṣitigarbha Sutra is still interested in explaining its meaning. Consequently, one can infer the subsequent hypotheses.

H2. *With its intricate system of language and highly metaphorical imagery, the Kṣitigarbha Sutra is well-suited as a model for language and artistic imagery comparison from a literary perspective.*

Pedro Paramo is a magical realism novel written by Juan Rulfo in 1955 about Juan Preciado's journey to Comala, the village of the dead (hell) to find his father - Pedro Paramo. Interweaving many voices of the dead, this novel is interested in many topics such as structural level (A Stanton (1988), Estructuras antropológicas en Pedro Páramo; L. Leal (2015), La estructura de Pedro Páramo) and narrative art (S. Patron (2010), The Death of the Narrator and the Interpretation of the Novel. The Example of Pedro Páramo by Juan Rulfo). In addition, there are some studies related to Buddhism such as Faith Arianna Blackhurst (2019), The Mediation of the Cross: Spatiality and Syncretism in Pedro Páramo and Grande sertão: Veredas; Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh (2019), Liminal Spaces and Contested Narratives in Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo and George Saunders' Lincoln in The Bardo, etc. Therefore the ensuing hypotheses can be formulated.

H3. *Alongside various other research directions, the comparative analysis of the novel Pedro Paramo with Buddhology holds great promise.*

In Vietnam, this novel has been studied from the perspective of magic (Nguyen Thanh Trung (2016), Magic and Literature – the Case of Modern Latin American Magical Realism Novels) and ecological criticism (Nguyen Thanh Trung (2018), Eco-criticism and Latin American Magical Realism novels, especially in comparison with Buddhism (Nguyen Thanh Trung (2018), Magical Realism in Latin American novels viewed under the principle of Emptiness of Theravada Buddhism). Pedro Paramo, a Latin American novel that is dominated by Christian thought, is viewed from the perspective of relation, compared with Buddhism is a new research

direction promising many interesting results. However, the current research is still only briefly related, and analyzed, but not focused, and generalized to the relationship between this novel and Buddhism. In line with this, the following hypotheses can be deduced.

H4. *The initial application of Buddhology to the investigation of the novel should commence from an ideological perspective, gradually expanding to encompass the artistic representation. This pathway also aligns with the trajectory of literary research.*

The four aforementioned hypotheses hold strategic significance in the approach and exploration of object analysis. Firstly, both the Kṣitigarbha Sutra and the novel Pedro Paramo are positioned within an interdisciplinary context rather than being confined to traditional study and commentary. Secondly, while elements of culture and language have been addressed previously, they have often been fragmented and lacked a cohesive direction. In this context, through the lens of Buddhology Criticism, all these elements are synthesized into a cohesive whole. This contributes to elucidating the distinct nuances of meaning and artistry present in both texts. Lastly, implemented through an innovative approach coupled with specialized methodologies, this article has the potential to evolve into a comprehensive resource delineating technical and methodological approaches to addressing literary and Buddhological issues in the future.

Research Methods

Approaching Pedro Paramo from the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* and applying Buddhism to literary criticism, considering the relationship between Buddhism and literature, Buddhology Criticism needs to be developed and progressed in a centralized, systematic manner. Accordingly, Buddhology Criticism is a critical tendency to study the relationship between Buddhism and literature as well as the transformation of Buddhism into literature. This is a possible way to research because it is based on a massive system of texts, topics with a long history of discussion, research, and sects with specific texts and principles of Buddhism. This system proposes many themes, types, and motifs that are similar and suggestive for the study of works, literary and artistic trends. On the very wide range of Buddhist content, literary researchers can apply and compare influences, and types to find out the literary characteristics and artistic transformation of Buddhism. Buddhology Criticism requires a researcher to have knowledge and skills in both Buddhism and literature and at the same time combine these two subjects. For example, applying Buddhology Criticism to the study literature, the researcher must be aware of the difference between Theravada and Mahayana texts, between the law and the sutras, between the sutras and confessions, etc. in which there is a high rate of metaphors and literature in Mahayana texts. On the contrary, only if understanding the manipulation and literary theory, Buddhology Criticism researchers can find out the transformation characteristics of Buddhism into literature. Thereby they can explain thoughts, themes, characters, narrative, etc. In this spirit, Buddhology Criticism can clarify the transformation from thought to art of literature, the transformation from art to thought of Buddhism, and the affecting and influencing between them.

Particularly, this article employs three methods, namely structural analysis, cultural-historical method, and comparative methods, to examine the ideas and artistic techniques in the novel Pedro Paramo from the perspective of Kṣitigarbha Sutra. The research framework can be summarized as follows:

Table 1. Research model

Hypotheses	Methodological framework	Research methods	Ideologies	Artist devices	Significance
H2, H4		Structural analysis method	Theme and topic	•Constructing characters •Narrative techniques	The perspective from within the text
H2, H4	Buddhology Criticism	Cultural-historical analysis method	•Depicting the imagery of hell: Nature and significance. •Family relationships and filial piety	Metaphorical implication	Internal textual perspective
H1, H3		Comparative method	Cultural and societal attributes	Narrating	Clarifying meanings in comparison

Therefore receiving the novel of *Pedro Paramo* from the perspective of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* can be seen as a good application direction. From some similarities in roles, positions, motifs in the underworld, family relationships, filial piety, etc., these two objects can mirror and clarify each other through geographical and cultural comparisons. This is the driving force for the development of Buddhism and literature in the context of globalization. The essence of this activity is the process of determining the basic characteristics of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra*, using these characteristics to reflect on *Pedro Paramo*, then determining - explaining - pointing out the role, position, and meanings of their similarities and differences. The condition for these operations is a certain similarity between the two objects. However, it is the difference that makes the nature of the objects more obvious. Accordingly, filial piety, the image of hell, and the metaphorical nature (means) of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* will be applied to clarify the meaning of *Pedro Paramo* in terms of ideas, themes, and character, and storytelling. Of course, the differences in culture, ideology, and methods are always conscious; they will come back to further clarify the nature of both the sutra and the novel.

Research Findings

The meaning of Filial piety

The main content of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* can be reduced to four points: the spirit of filial piety, saving sentient beings, liberating suffering, and repaying kindness. This content is presented through a 13-chapter structure, with the form of dialogue and presentation of the two main characters, Shakyamuni Buddha and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, through the four precursors' stories of Ksitigarbha bodhisattva including a rich man, king, brahmin and maiden. However, the plot that attracts the most attention is that of the Brahmin woman and the girl who goes to hell to save the suffering mother. According to this plot, the mother often commits many sins: "My mother is superstitious and evil, despises Three Jewels, or sometimes temporarily believes in the Dharma and then does not respect it." (Thich Tri Tinh (translated), 2004, 21). Similarly, the father in *Pedro Paramo* is also greedy for wealth; he forges documents to rob land, plots to kill Susanna's father to marry her, falls in love, and monopolizes the person he loves. From a Western psychological perspective, this is a complex and contradictory character, but

from the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra*, this is a sinner of ignorance. Besides, the meaning of filial piety in the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* has a very broad meaning, it aims at parents all over the world, follows the example of filial piety throughout history, and associates with great and universal vows. In contrast, filial piety in Western culture focuses on one's parents; in a broader meaning, that is God. This filial piety is more specific, and limited, but supplemented by God's teaching (You must love everyone as your brother). Thus, the moral values remain the same, but the filial piety of Christianity emphasizes the authority of the Father and God. Therefore, in the novel, Pedro Paramo took the place of God himself and decided to leave the whole village to perish.

Through the content of filial piety, both the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* and *Pedro Paramo* successfully connect with cultural traditions, historical values, and indigenous themes. In the decisive role of the Mind, Kṣitigarbha is translated into Earth-Store. Chinese researchers have interpreted "earth" with 10 meanings that include vastness, refuge of sentient beings, regardless of distinction, love, and hate, receiving rain, giving birth to plants, all seeds depend on, giving birth to treasures, giving birth to medicinal plants, no fear of wind, no fear of lion roaring. This explanation is based on metaphor and metonymy to emphasize the role, position, and power of *Kṣitigarbha in Chinese culture*. Also in the indigenous spirit, Latin American researchers identified Pedro Paramo as Magical Realism despite the European perception that this is a surrealist novel. Both the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* and the novel succeed in visualizing the lesson of filial piety associated with practical action. Accordingly, Kṣitigarbha's predecessor went to hell, offering alms to save his mother; Joan Preciado returns to the village of Comala to fulfill her promise to her mother. Joan's actions were motivated by the Christian moral code that associated filial piety with action; because in the Bible, God once rebuked this sin: "These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. They worship Me in vain, for the doctrines they teach are mere human precepts" (Mt 15:5-9). This content is consistent across ideologies and cultures. However, from a Christian perspective, filial piety means "obedience" - associated with the authority of the Father, symbolizing the Father as God (Father). "My son, be careful to observe the commandment of your father, do not ignore the word of your mother" (Proverbs 6:20). This takes its roots in a nomadic culture that emphasizes leadership. So, Pedro Paramo - the father - holds absolute power in the village of Comala, everyone must obey him. However, the filial piety in the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* emphasizes the merit of nurturing, upholding the emotional aspect. The *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* shows the content of filial piety quite reasonably. This is easy to accept and different from the teachings that are bold and quite extreme in China's Twenty-Four Filialties.

The lesson on filial piety of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* and Pedro Paramo also reminds us that the object of filial piety is usually the mother, not the father. Juan Preciado's return to Comala in search of his father is due to a promise made to his mother, this character shows no affection for his father, especially when his father plots tricks and then kicked his mother out of the house. The mother's role is important in the story of filial piety; this detail is rooted in Indian agricultural culture: Women are associated with the role and ability to procreate. In Pedro Paramo, Susana San Juan is also associated with rain – the most important element for agriculture. Besides, the mother suffers more than the father. In the Ullambana Sutra, in the section "Reporting parents with respect" (according to Chinese tradition), the Buddha explained that women give birth many times, and raise small children; blood and milk flow out of them. So, their bones are lighter and darker than the man's. Furthermore, the portrayal of a father suffering in prison, waiting for his son to save him violates the father's powerful role in Chinese Confucian culture and Latin American macho society.

The following outlines the content of filial piety in the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* and *Pedro Paramo*.

Table 2. The filial piety in 2 texts

	Kṣitigarbha Sutra	Pedro Paramo
Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Both texts explore the role of wicked relatives through metaphors and allegories (metaphorical implication, magical realism). •The concept of filial piety centers around the figure of a devoted mother. 	
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Filial piety is directed towards both parents. •The role of the father figure is not explicitly clear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Filial piety is oriented towards the divine (God). •Author portrays the presence of a father figure, reflecting masculine cultural norms.

From the perspective of cultural interpretation, the concealed essence of "earth" within the Chinese cultural context has been elucidated as the operational principle behind the meaning of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra*. Through the spirit of native culture, this approach has resolved the conflict between the supernatural and the surrealistic nature of the novel *Pedro Paramo*. In this manner, the role of the mother in the filial piety narrative has also been clarified. Consequently, the educational orientation of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* and the artistry of the novel *Pedro Paramo* have been intricately woven into the fabric of culture, becoming vital components that harmonize the ideas and literary artistry of the texts.

The Journey to the hell

The theme of hell and the journey to hell is very common in most religions and ideologies. In general, hell is understood as the place where the souls of the dead will go. It is a place where life is fun, or at least as normal as it was (the field of Osiris - Egyptian Mythology, the Garden of Eden, and the Garden of Asphodel - Greek Mythology). However, for most versions, it is a place of detention and punishment for evil spirits (inferno/Tartarus (Greek Mythology), Mictlan - Aztec mythology (Mexico), Helheim - Norse mythology, "the home of the lies" – Persian Zoroastrianism, Hades, and Gehenna in Christianity). Hell is often located deep underground, full of red fire and punishments. Time spent in hell varies by culture: 1 year (Tartarus), 4 years (Mictlan), a temporary period (Hades), a very long time (Helheim), and passing forever (Gehenna). It is easy to go to hell but difficult to return, even the gods are in danger here. Mentioning to hell and journeying to hell, the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra*, and *Pedro Paramo* discuss issues that are both popular and deeply rooted in local cultures.

In Indian culture, hell is called Naraka or Niraya, which means an unhappy place full of hardships and punishments for sinners. In the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra*, chapter 1, hell is described as *"another shore. The water in that sea was boiling, there were many beasts with all iron bodies flying on the surface of the sea, running from one side to the other, chasing the other side. There are boys and girls, many thousands of thousands of people, floating in the sea, being eaten by wild animals"* (Thich Tri Tinh (trans.), 2004, 18). In chapter 3, hell is shown as a place with iron walls, there is fire everywhere, and all places are also a prison. Likewise, the road to Comala village is like the road to hell: *"... in the empty sky, a flock of crows flew, saying "crow, crow, crow". After passing the mountains, we went deeper and deeper. We have left behind us the steaming hot air above and are increasingly immersed in the hot air without wind"* (Juan Rulfo, 2019, 25). It should be noted that this detail has real meaning

because the name of the village of Comala comes from the indigenous Nahuatl community language; it means the place where clay pots and pans are produced; it is popular until today. Comala – hell – is the land of the dead: “*This village is full of ghosts. It was indeed a village where the dead and the unconfessed one roamed about. There is no way to exonerate them, and neither can we.*” (Juan Rulfo, 2019, 100-101). Ghosts like Abundio, Eduvigis, Damiana, etc. constantly told their stories, forming a constant murmur in the hot and stuffy atmosphere of the village. However, the village of Comala is just a quiet prison, where sinners must repent to pay off their sins before being judged for the last time at the end of the world. Therefore, the characters here still prolong their sad and regretful days, rather than suffer the punishments in hell as mentioned in the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra*.

On the way to hell, Ksitigarbha's predecessors as well as Juan Preciado met suffering scenes and punishments for sinners. This impression is so profound that it makes them want to find out the nature; with the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's predecessors, she hurried to find a way to free her mother from those sufferings. However, even if they have supernatural powers or youth like Joan Preciado, they are not able to immediately break the prison and eliminate suffering. They had to but can learn, give, and make offerings. This means these passengers had to transform themselves before freeing themselves from hell. Accordingly, the journey to hell becomes the journey to one's mind, finding the true heart; the journey to find the father's Juan Preciado is to understand the past and present. Breaking prison and ending suffering are symbols of the searching and studying of the journey of every human being. The dark space and prison are symbols, they are the product of mind: “... gradually I built a world called Mr. Pedro Paramo, that is my mother's husband” (Juan Rulfo, 2019, 18). Heaven or hell are both created by the mind, in other words, they are not real but play an important role in meeting practical and moral needs. The great vow of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva – if hell is not empty, he insists on not becoming a Buddha – seems impossible, and absurd but in fact, it is the aspiration to get rid of human being's ignorance (avidyā) and save all sentient beings so that everyone can realize the true mind and immediately become a Buddha. Accordingly, Juan Preciado didn't need to find out about his father but to understand himself; once one understands everything, there is no need to search anymore. This meaning is expressed in the framed structure of novels as well as in the past life stories that repeat the same plot and meaning of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra*. From the perspective of narrative structure, *Pedro Paramo* is more complex than the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra*. Because although the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* has a lot of dialogues and stories, this perspective is all in the third person, who did not participate in the story as in *Pedro Paramo*. This difference can be explained by the following 3 points. Firstly, *Pedro Paramo* shows the decentralization and degradation of a powerless personal ego amidst the unstable reality. Buddhist scriptures, on the other hand, affirm the meaning of cause and effect. Its purpose is to make people believe, so it must be reliable from the point of view of a stable, all-knowing storyteller. Secondly, from a historical perspective, the collected Buddhist texts all bear the mark of Ananda's narrating role: “*This is what I heard*”. So, the view is always from the outside, the storyteller can't participate in the story inside. Finally, from the perspective of art, thought, and reality of the VI-VII centuries, it is impossible to form in the Buddhist scriptures the type of uncertain space and fragmentation of time as in a 20th-century magical realism novel.

The comparative results of the journey to the underworld in the two texts are presented in the following table.

Table 3. The journey to hell

	Kṣitigarbha Sutra	Pedro Paramo
Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common and deeply rooted theme in native culture. • Similarities in landscape, atmosphere, and artistic significance of the spaces (Comala village, hell). • The journey into the underworld also symbolizes a journey of self-discovery and purification. 	
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The underworld is a place of punishment and retribution, according to East Asian beliefs. • Souls are sinners, subjected to external judgment. • Simple structure, emphasis on cause and effect, and an external narrative perspective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comala is akin to Purgatory, a place of atonement, following Christian beliefs. • Souls have freedom of movement and are self-motivated by remorse. • Complex yet simple structure, leading to personal introspection, with an internal perspective.

The motif of the journey to the underworld, explored through the comparison of the Kṣitigarbha Sutra and the novel Pedro Paramo, has transitioned from the realm of the supernatural to the psychological aspects of everyday life. This shift has transformed the purpose of exploring the external world into a self-discovery journey. This essence forms the core of social scientific research, demonstrating the intricate relationship between language, text, and human existence. This perspective has the potential to broaden the horizons of Buddhist studies and introduce an alternative, culturally nuanced viewpoint for literary analysis in the present-day context.

The meaning of a contrivance sutra

The Kṣitigarbha Sutra is a sutra of instrumental meaning; this sutra puts Compassion over Wisdom – using specific shapes to represent uniqueness. This is a teaching technique that depends on the listener's ability. From a literary perspective, this sutra shows a symbolic and allegorical meaning; it uses language to create concrete images to express abstract concepts emotionally. This is also the path of literature and art. In particular, the novel of Pedro Paramo, through figurative language, has created an art world that synthesizes realistic and magical elements; the village space is like hell, and the characters are ghosts: “I don't know what they do during the day, but at night, they come out with their confinement. At these hours here are full of ghosts. Can you see the souls wandering out there.” (Juan Rulfo, 2019, 99). This is the similarity between the Kṣitigarbha Sutra and Pedro Paramo: the world is created by the character's mind. However, literature considers it as Surrealism because of its close relationship between Joan Preciado's mind and reality. This is the reason why European researchers consider Pedro Paramo a surrealist novel. However, it should be noted that the element of time and reality of Pedro Paramo was much more emphasized. The concept of a vast reality including magic and reality, through magical elements to discuss community, political and social issues, etc. are features of the Magical Realism of Pedro Paramo. The name of this novel is Pedro Paramo, in which Pedro is rock, and Paramo is a barren plain. The critical sense of the novel is evident in the name of the main character who manipulates politics, deciding to leave the villagers hungry. The image of Pedro Paramo, therefore, is much more complex. Influenced by African and indigenous cultures, this character is like the god of fertility; he had many children, and kept the village prosperous. But Pedro Paramo was also the god of destruction; he participated in many murders, and created a famine that destroyed the village. But deep inside, his love for Susana is the most beautiful love that a man can have. This is

Pedro Paramo's strength and weakness. When he lost Susanna, Pedro died and crumbled into a pile of rocks. The elements of reality and magic combined in Pedro Paramo are the product of Latin American artistic thinking - Magical Realism.

The instrumental character of the Kṣitigarbha Sutra can help clarify many meaning layers of this sutra as well as the Pedro Paramo. Accordingly, the plot of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva's predecessors and details such as the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha, his mother Maya, who once died, now is in heaven, etc. have happened countless times. All are means of reminding and affirming the lesson of sentient beings' minds. By their very nature, these means are also unreal; all of them are wishful thinking. The Diamond Sutra once said, "All phenomena are dreams, spume, etc." Therefore, mother and father are the Alaya of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and Joan Preciado; when they are unclear, they are still guilty of suffering and making them restless. Realizing that everything is created by the mind, one can understand everything, and be free from suffering. Looking back at Pedro Paramo, this character's death demonstrates the fantasy: "He fell to the ground and his body was torn to pieces as if his body were a handful of dirt and gravel attached" (Juan Rulfo, 2019, Nguyen Trung Duc trans., 218). Accordingly, all views and evaluations of outsiders are not true of himself. That's why this character becomes complicated. For Juan Preciado, Pedro Paramo is an image of the past; trying to find out it, he will only be told, and get nothing. In the same way, understanding hell as said by the demon king and the Buddha would also be of no use if the precursor of Ksitigarbha bodhisattva did not practice meritorious deeds. Past and future are meaningless without action in the present. Focusing solely on his search for the past, Joan Preciado was engulfed in the narratives of ghosts and illusions from his mind and eventually repeated her father's actions. Because he and his father are the recurring roles of a Latin American that is desperately searching for the past. In the light of the Ksitigarbha Sutra, the message that Pedro Paramo brings to readers is also the present-day nature of Latin America.

Focusing on the present life, and accepting the past as our dreams are the way to understand reality. Accordingly, the demon kings in hell represent types of evil minds, hell is created by the mind of sentient beings. Likewise, the ghosts in Pedro Paramo represent the 7 deadly sins of Christianity: Pride, Sloth, Gluttony, Envy, Wrath, Greed, and Lust. These sins are associated with 7 demons in hell, with 7 plagues at the end of the world. Latin American magical realism novels often have a sense of apocalypse which pushes time to the end, ending all evil and eliminating evil, as in the book of Revelation in the Christian Bible. So, the end of the story is usually death for all. Because Christianity does not have any concept of reincarnation; the Apocalypse is considered the last time, at which time the good go to heaven, the bad go to hell forever, and purgatory is no longer necessary. This feeling is expressed in Pedro Paramo in detail when Susana felt the crunch of the earth's axis dry up when she died, when Pedro Paramo was about to leave the world, he felt as if time had stopped. This is the common end for humanity. However, from the sutra's perspective, hell and judgment take place for each person, right at the end of life. What determines the path of each person is the behavior in the present. Therefore, the message to Juan Preciado of a ghost in the novel has a profound meaning: "But when people die, a door closes and only opens for them. the door to hell, then you shouldn't be born in this world. For me, Juan Preciado, heaven is where I am right now" (Juan Rulfo, 2019, Nguyen Trung Duc, 113). This further clarifies the meaning of the Kṣitigarbha Sutra, a text regularly read and recited in Ullambana ceremonies, funerals, and supplication ceremonies. That meaning emphasizes causality; chanting Kṣitigarbha Sutra is a metaphorical form to remind ancestral filial piety, not to escape hell, release suffering. Reading and

chanting *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* expresses an instrumental meaning as the text itself; it focuses on the living than on the dead.

The means of the two texts are summarized in the following table.

Table 4. Educational meanings

	Kṣitigarbha Sutra	Pedro Paramo
Similarities	Symbolic language with strong allegorical elements A profound philosophical essence criticizing the negative aspects	A world created with a Educational significance, condemning and
Differences	Mythical thinking Addressing ethical issues Utilitarian approach, aiming to educate the living rather than the dead	Postmodern thinking (Magical Realism) Addressing socio-political issues Inclination towards apocalyptic Christianity

From an artistic perspective, the subtle nuances and practical nature of both the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* and the novel *Pedro Paramo* highlight the evident interplay between purpose and means in terms of impact and mutual significance. In this approach, purpose must be conveyed through means, and means must carry a sense of purpose. This notion underscores a rational way of engaging with both Buddhist scriptures and literary works.

Conclusion

The aim of *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* is towards the development of both literature and Buddhism. Literature itself is a science; it develops with life's process. Literary studies are influenced by the West from methods to trends; these trends, sometimes, go to extremes (such as romanticism, modernism, postmodernism, etc.). Researching literature in Buddhology Criticism will neutralize those extremes above. In addition, Buddhist studies will help develop a critical theory of the East and seek new meanings that are familiar to cultural traditions. In this article, *Pedro Paramo*, a complex Latin American work has become clear and familiar from the perspective of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra*. In Buddhism today, Buddhist monastic researchers are effectively engaged in the study of literary criticism, as well as other sciences. It is very beneficial for Buddhism to accumulate a rich system of modern knowledge, methods, and skills in the task of organizing, teaching, and developing Buddhism itself.

Buddhology Criticism can be carried out only if the obstacles and confusion of both Buddhist and literary studies have been resolved. In fact, at present, the crossing link between Buddhism and literature is quite common in sutra discourses as well as in literary analysis. However, most of these works aim to the similarity of humanity to serve people. Although correct, it is also unreasonable in some features. Because all ideologies, sciences, etc. always tend to have positive meanings. The comparison needs to ensure that both similarities and differences can be pointed out, and it must explain and present the roles and meanings of the above characteristics. This can only be achieved based on the disparate criteria of the two subjects. They are artistic language and symbolic thinking of literature, and Precept – Concentration – Wisdom of Buddhology. These features, in a new comparison, make both literature and Buddhism clear. Therefore, pointing out the similarities between the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* and *Pedro Paramo* in filial piety is only an operation of comparison and contracting. It is not Buddhology Criticism. Besides, in most lectures, monks, and nuns often list and explain the meanings of the scriptures. Although this can meet the needs of the general audience, it does not help the

development of Buddhism. Only interdisciplinary relations, understanding of the structure, and artistic storytelling of scriptures can create and develop Buddhist studies like the way Chinese Buddhism did. In this spirit, most Mahayana texts, no longer, carry the status of apocryphal scriptures but become proofs of inheritance and development. Buddhology Criticism, thus, has resolved the apocryphal problem between the two ancient Buddhist traditions.

In general, although the practical value of applying research findings to teaching needs further consideration, and time and experimentation are necessary to determine the worth of the Buddhology criticism method, the four research hypotheses have demonstrated reasonable aspects and contributed to promising outcomes. Thus, the article has adopted three contents/characteristics of filial piety, the hell, and the means of the *Kṣitigarbha Sutra* to explain the system of thought, themes, characters, space, and storytelling of *Pedro Paramo*. In that process, similarities and differences are explained from a cultural and historical perspective. At the same time, this process also helps clarify the basics of both subjects. As a result, this article proposes a tendency of Buddhology Criticism to study the relationship and transformation of Buddhism into literature. This trend has been applied on many levels but has not been systematically discussed and researched.

Limitations

Focusing solely on the theme of filial piety may inadvertently limit the rich significance of both texts from a theoretical perspective. Therefore, alongside this theme, various other aspects can also be explored in the research, such as the portrayal of heroic characters transcending mythical spatial boundaries. Furthermore, the practical application of comparing the two texts in teaching Buddhist scriptures and literary works at the university and college level can be extended; however, the extent of this extension requires a well-defined system of corresponding methods, specifically within the realm of Buddhology Criticism. The new approach of Buddhology Criticism requires the identification of its specific characteristics and its application to various works, regardless of their association with Buddhism. This may potentially lead to the extensive expansion of research subjects and analytical frameworks; fundamental principles of this approach need to be clarified to avoid speculative analyses. In the future, there is a need for research to elucidate principles encompassing the dependence on the ideological significance, the audience's receptiveness, spatial regulations, temporal considerations, etc. within Buddhology Criticism. Additionally, investigating these two texts through alternative methods, such as feminist criticism and contextual analysis, can be carried out to provide diverse perspectives on the research subject. Due to the specialized nature of Buddhist studies, the target audience of the article may be restricted to those familiar with Mahayana Buddhism, which is a common concern in interdisciplinary research. In such a context, endeavors like this article will serve as a preliminary step to continue the discourse and development of both the subject and this intriguing research methodology.

References

- Buswell, Robert E. (1990). *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*. The University of Hawaii Press.
- Buswell, Robert Jr.; Lopez, Donald S. Jr. (2013). *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton University Press.
- Sutra of the Fundamental Vows of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha. Thich Tri Tinh (trans.) (2004) (2011). Religion Publisher.

- Kṣitigarbhasūtra (The Sutra on the Original Vows and the Attainment of Merits of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisatta). Pitt, Chin Hui (trans.). (2005). Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc., Buddhanet's Book Library,
- Juan Rulfo. (2019). Pedro Paramo. Nguyen Trung Duc (trans.). The Vietnamese Writers' Association Publisher.
- Thich Chon Thien. (2010). Thought of Kṣitigarbha Sutra. Phuong Dong Publisher.
- Nguyen Huynh Xuan Trinh. (2020). Study Of Karmic Retributions and Transfer of Merit in the Kṣitigarbhasūtra. MA Thesis of Buddhist Studies, Philosophy, and Comparative Religions. Nālandā University.