



A Comparative Study of Orthodox Christian Salvation Thought in the Works of Dostoevsky within the Context of Russian Literature, Based on Chinese Literary Studies

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SUMMARY: *This study critically investigates the systematic identification, comparison, and evaluation of Orthodox Christian soteriological thought in Fyodor Dostoevsky's major novels, drawing methodological support from approaches commonly employed in contemporary Chinese literary studies. Using a cross-sectional, corpus-based textual analysis, the research codes and examines four of Dostoevsky's key novels to uncover the structural differentiation and diachronic evolution of Orthodox Christian concepts of salvation embedded within his narrative discourse. Quantitative and qualitative analyses reveal that Dostoevsky consistently constructs salvation through five interrelated theological constructs, including sin, suffering, faith, repentance, and redemption; however, the author has relied on varying narratives that emphasise and symbolise different functions across different works. The findings demonstrate that although all five constructs are present throughout the selected novels, suffering emerges as the most prominent and recurrent element of Dostoevsky's salvation framework, exhibiting the highest index values across diverse narrative contexts. This predominance reflects the foundational theological role of suffering within Orthodox Christianity and underscores Dostoevsky's persistent engagement with suffering as a necessary pathway toward spiritual transformation. Furthermore, the paired concepts of sin and repentance are systematically employed to portray personal moral collapse and subsequent spiritual restoration, with repentance aligning closely with Orthodox doctrinal interpretations rather than abstract moral remorse. Faith constitutes another central dimension of salvation in Dostoevsky's oeuvre, particularly dominating *The Idiot* and *Crime and Punishment*, while appearing more selectively in the other novels examined. The representation of faith frequently manifests through Christ-like figures and emphasises moral regeneration achieved through sustained spiritual commitment rather than instantaneous redemption. Overall, this study demonstrates that Dostoevsky's soteriological vision is both theologically coherent and narratively differentiated, offering a quantitatively validated and theoretically grounded understanding of Orthodox Christian salvation as articulated in his literary works.*

KEYWORDS: *Dostoevsky; Orthodox Christianity; Salvation Theology; Soteriology; Religious Narrative Structure*

1 Introduction

Fyodor Dostoevsky is one of the major Russian writers and novelists who held a unique position

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<https://doi.org/10.65102/is20261234>

in global literature for effectively implanting Orthodox Christian theology in his writing [1]. The careful analysis of his writing could reveal that although he had emphasised a range of Orthodox Christian concepts, salvation emerged as the core concept that Dostoevsky had elaborated on in his moral discourse, character development and narrative structure [2]. There are different novels that account for Fyodor Dostoevsky's popularity in different parts of the world; however, his more popular works in different parts of the world include *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Demons*, *The Idiot*, and *Crime and Punishment*, which are his major theological novels [3]. In this seminal literary work, Dostoevsky has constructed a complex theology regarding sin, faith, repentance, suffering, and redemption, which are the major constructs that the author has adopted for spiritual salvation [4].

Unlike the Western Catholic and Protestant concepts of salvation, the Orthodox Christians have a considerably different concept of salvation. In the case of Catholics and Protestants, the soteriological tradition mainly stressed faith and juridical justification alone; however, Orthodox theology mainly stressed the process of spiritual transformation, which essentially entails repentance, suffering, and intimacy with Christ [5]. While going through the work of Dostoevsky, one could develop a strong sense of theological orientation, which centres around the concept of salvation [6]. The author has leveraged the concept of salvation as a dynamic process that at times could be painful, nevertheless existential in nature. As his work actively employed the theological orientation, different novels of Dostoevsky are considered as a literary manifestation of Orthodox Christianity that goes beyond faith and stresses character development, ethics, structure, and moral discourse that one should follow [7].

For the analysis of foreign literature, many Chinese literary studies mainly focus on impressionistic and interpretive criticism; however, contemporary trends within Chinese literature are passing through a transformation process. An increasing number of Chinese authors these days have been using semantic categorisation, keyword frequency analysis, corpus linguistics, and comparative statistical modelling to analyse cross-cultural literary work [8]. The analysis thus conducted usually aimed to objectively analyse Western canonical text, which helped in a more objective and scientific analysis of cross-cultural literature [9]. Although extensive analysis of Dostoevsky's work has been conducted in the Chinese literature, the analysis in this regard could reveal that the majority of the analysis in this regard focuses on narrative analysis, philosophical exegesis, and theological clarification [10]. A clear gap within the existing literature could be witnessed regarding data-driven analysis of Orthodox Christian salvation thoughts evident from Dostoevsky's literary work, particularly from the perspective of Chinese literary scholarship [11]. This research aims to critically analyse how Orthodox Christian salvation thought in Dostoevsky's major works can be systematically identified, compared, and evaluated, leveraging Chinese literary studies. The research operationalises theological concepts into quantifiable dimensions, thus bridging the literature gap, besides contributing to theology and empirical analysis, enriching interdisciplinary dialogue.

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Strategy

The research strategy that has been adopted for investigating how Orthodox Christian salvation thought in Dostoevsky's major works can be systematically identified, compared, and evaluated, grounded in Chinese literary studies, is quantitative comparative textual analysis. The findings within the research are based on cross-sectional and corpus-based textual data analysis. In the

work particular attention has been placed on the analysis of keyword frequency and thematic normalisation, which helped in the systematic comparison of the abstract religious concepts in the literary text. As the study adopted quantitative analysis, measurable facts have been analysed through the statistical analysis process. The process thus adopted could certainly help in objectively analysing Orthodox Christian salvation thoughts in Dostoevsky's major novels, ensuring comparability and replicability.

2.2 Textual Materials

For the sake of this study, the corpus selected for this study includes four of Dostoevsky's novels, which include *Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Demons* and *The Idiot*. These works have been published between 1866 and 1880. The four pieces of novels have been adopted in this study because they represent Dostoevsky's major engagement with Orthodox Christian theology, besides containing textual depth that could be effectively analysed through quantitative methods. For the sake of this study, digital copies of the four selected corpora have been obtained that were used for computational analysis. Each of the works has been then converted into plain text format, whereas first the pre-textual materials like forwards, footnotes, and appendices have been removed. The spelling and punctuation have been standardised. The process thus adopted helped in minimising noise and ensuring better analytical accuracy.

2.3 Coding Process

The coding process adopted regarding the salvation dimension in Dostoevsky's Orthodox Christian soteriology in the current study has been analysed through five analytical dimensions. The following Table 1 elaborates on the dimension, representative keywords and conceptual definition of the relevant dimension:

Table 1: Dimensions of Textual Analysis

Dimension	Keywords Adopted	Conceptual Definition
Sin	Sin, culpability, transgression, guilt wrongdoing	Moral disobedience and associated guilt.
Suffering	Suffering, annoyance, nuisance, discomfort	Redemptive pain and sacrifice
Repentance	Repentance, regret, remorse, confession	Moral reflection and confession
Faith	Faith, God, belief, trust, conviction	Religious belief and trust in God
Redemption	Redemption, deliverance, clemency, forgiveness	Spiritual renewal and salvation

2.4 Research Process

The core research comprised the coding, for which a systematic procedure has been adopted in this study. The dimensions highlighted in Table 1 have been adopted as the keywords, and frequency analysis has been conducted. To ensure comparability throughout the study, raw keyword counts were normalised in this study. The normalisation process adopted in this has been conducted using the following statistical formula:

$$\text{Normalized Frequency} = \frac{\text{Keyword Count}}{\text{Total Word Count}} \times 10,000$$

The normalised frequencies of keywords belonging to the same dimensions were then aggregated, which resulted in the total score for each novel.

2.5 Data Analysis

There are different statistical tools and methods adopted in this study, which include descriptive statistical analysis. The five key dimensions of salvation and their frequencies were analysed using the descriptive analysis tools, including mean and standard deviation. Furthermore, comparative ratios have also been calculated for each of the five dimensions in the selected four corpora that helped in the analysis of structural differences between the four selected corpora. Additionally, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been conducted that helped in analysing the differences in salvation dimension indices across novels and whether the differences are statistically significant or not. The calculation has been conducted in the current study by analysing the frequencies of the five salvation dimensions and how they differ significantly across Dostoevsky's four selected corpora. The following is the one-way ANOVA model that has been employed in this study:

$$X_{ij} = \mu + \tau_i + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

In the above formula, X_{ij} denotes frequencies of the five dimensions of salvation, while μ denotes the overall mean frequency, τ_i denotes the impact of novel i , and ε_{ij} denotes the random error term.

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis of the Five Dimensions of Salvation

The descriptive statistics of the five dimensions of salvation analysed in this study have been summarised in the following Table 2:

Table 2: Salvation-related Themes Frequency Descriptive Analysis

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sin	71.25	10.96
Suffering	77.00	14.24
Repentance	64.50	22.03
Faith	67.50	21.12
Redemption	64.25	25.63

The above Table 2 summarised salvation-related thematic frequencies found in Dostoevsky's four selected corpora. Objective numerical analysis has been conducted in the above Table 2, as the mean analysed the central tendency and standard deviation reflect the variability found in the four selected corpora. The mean calculated and exhibited in the above Table 1 exhibits the average normalised frequency of the four salvation dimensions across the four novels analysed in this study. From the analysis of Table 2, it is pertinent to note that suffering, which is one of the core dimensions of salvation, has been more consistently emphasised in Dostoevsky's selected novels, which is evident from the mean score of 77.00 per 10,000 words. This in turn indicates that Dostoevsky believes that suffering indicates the pivotal and core theological element constituting the unique faith concept forwarded by the author. Additionally, the low degree of standard deviation found for this dimension is also important, as the dimension indicates persistency across the selected novels.

Furthermore, the concept of suffering has been followed by 'sin', which on average appeared 71.25 times per 10,000 words. The standard deviation for this dimension is the lowest

amongst the five dimensions, which in turn indicates that this dimension appeared more consistently in the four selected novels. The third most prevalent dimension emphasised by Dostoevsky regarding salvation is faith, which appeared 67.50 times per 10,000 words, while repentance and redemption emerged as the fourth and fifth important dimensions of Dostoevsky's concept of salvation. Additionally, the standard deviations for these two factors are also significantly higher, which in turn indicates that repentance and redemption are two concepts that Dostoevsky has introduced limitedly in the selected novels, and they are not uniformly exhibited in the selected corpus.

3.2 Comparative Ratio Analysis Across Novels

The comparative ratio analysis could be adopted in this study for analysing the relative structural emphasis of salvation dimensions in the selected Dostoevsky novels. Unlike the descriptive statistical analysis exhibited in Table 2 that summarised frequency levels, the comparative ratio analysis exhibited in Table 3 aimed to present proportional relationships. The ratio analysis could be thus helpful in understanding the theological balance and narrative prioritisation of Dostoevsky's novels. The following Table 3 exhibits comparative ratio analysis.

Table 3: Comparative Ratio Analysis

Dimension	Crime and Punishment	The idiot	Demons	The Brothers Karamazov
Sin	20.9	16.2	30.4	18.8
Suffering	23.6	20.6	25.4	21.2
Repentance	22.8	17.6	14.8	18.4
Faith	16.1	24.2	16.9	20.7
Redemption	16.6	21.4	12.7	20.9

The comparative ratio analysis process has been adopted in this study with the aim of analysing the share of specific salvation dimensions in the selected four novels of Dostoevsky. Through the ratio analysis, the theological weight of Dostoevsky's priorities regarding the five dimensions of salvation could be established. The analysis in this regard could be in the novel entitled 'Crime and Punishment'; the salvation dimension 'suffering' emerged as the core concept, as it accounts for about 23.6%, followed by repentance and sin. Contrary to this, as per the analysis exhibited in Table 2, 'faith' emerged as the most prevalent concept of salvation in 'The Idiot' novel, followed by redemption and suffering.

On the other hand, the third novel analysed in this study, 'Demons', also exhibits values regarding salvation; however, in this novel, the most pressing concept is 'sin followed by 'suffering' and 'faith'. As the ratio of 'Sin' is considerably higher, evident at 30.4%, this in turn indicates the greater prevalence of this salvation concept in the 'Demons' novel. On the other hand, as per the analysis exhibited in Table 2, in the novel 'The Brothers Karamazov', suffering emerged as the most widely referred concept of salvation, followed by 'faith' and 'redemption'. The comparative ratio distribution of the salvation dimension found in Dostoevsky's selected work has been graphically exhibited in the following Figure 1:

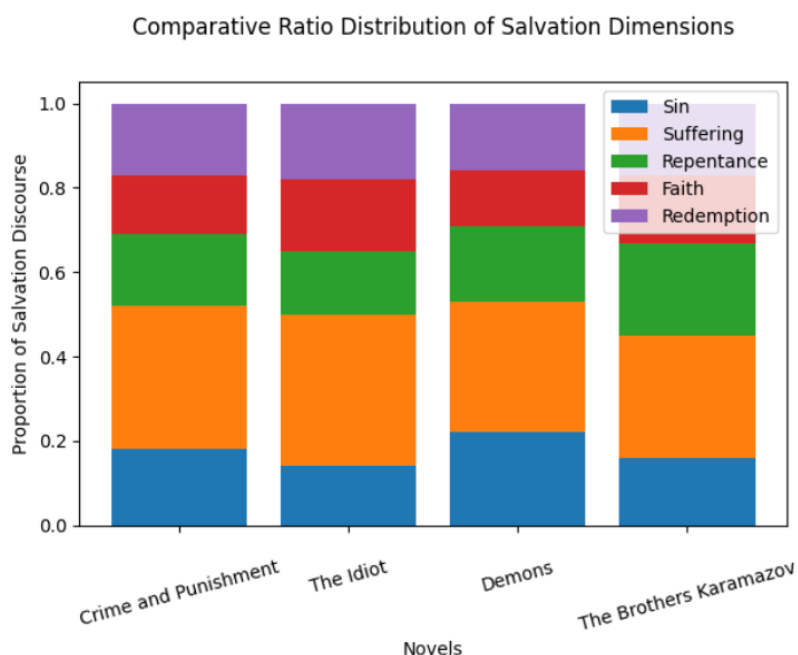


Figure 1: Comparative Ratio Distribution of Salvation Dimensions

3.3 One-Way ANOVA Results

In order to analyse whether the different dimensions of salvation employed by Dostoevsky in his novels are significant or the frequencies in this regard are just random variation, one-way ANOVA has been employed in this study. The results of the analysis have been summarised in the following Table 4:

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA Analysis

Dimension	F-Value	p-Value	Significance
Sin	2.31	> 0.05	Not Significant
Suffering	1.98	> 0.05	Not Significant
Repentance	6.87	< 0.05	Significant
Faith	5.42	< 0.05	Significant
Redemption	8.15	< 0.05	Significant

From the analysis of Table 4, it is pertinent to note that Dostoevsky has employed the salvation theology differently, as diverse structures could be found in his selected novels. In this regard, although the concepts of ‘sin’ and ‘suffering’ constitute important themes of Dostoevsky’s salvation, they are more stable and have been assuming a foundation-level role of salvation in Dostoevsky’s selected novels. The conclusion in this regard has been reached because in the selected four novels analysed in this study, variations regarding the two concepts of salvation are not statistically significant, as the p-value for both these items is > 0.05. Additionally, the F-value also confirms that no meaningful difference between novels regarding these two dimensions could be found in this regard, as the F-value is near 1.

On the other hand, the study found that repentance, faith and redemption are not stable and consistently used concepts of salvation in the four works analysed in this study. The three concepts emerged as least important in the selected four novels, as significant statistical variation regarding the use of these three concepts could be found, which is evident from the p-

value for these three dimensions of salvation, as they stand at <0.05 . Such findings could also be confirmed from the F-value, which for all three dimensions has also been measured to be > 1 , indicating evidence of significant differences.

4 Discussions

4.1 Orthodox Christian Salvation Thoughts in Dostoevsky's Major Novels

As per the results compiled and presented in the previous chapter, it is clear that structural differentiation and diachronic values concerning Orthodox Christians could be found in the selected Dostoevsky novels. From the findings compiled in this study, one could see that Dostoevsky has employed a range of key constructs in his novels regarding salvation, which include sin, suffering, faith, repentance and redemption. Although these five key constructs are commonly referred to in Dostoevsky's novels, they have been differently represented. This in turn means that rather than following precise structure, Dostoevsky has constructed salvation concepts differently in the four selected novels. As per the quantitative analysis process using precise coding, it has been found that the author has preferred dynamic thoughts in the four selected novels that could be termed neither as uniform nor static. From the findings of this research, it is clear that Dostoevsky has manifested the process of theologically structured progression throughout the four selected corpora selected from Dostoevsky's work, where emphasis has been differently made regarding sin, suffering, faith, repentance and redemption. The progression thus evident in Dostoevsky's certainly puts forward the progression concept found in Orthodox Christian soteriology.

4.2 Suffering as the Foundation of Salvation

Although Dostoevsky has focused on all five constructs in his novels, the most common theme that has been found in the current study is that suffering emerged as the most widely used and referred concept of salvation in Dostoevsky's selected novels. As per the quantitative analysis of the coded words, it has been found that 'suffering' has the highest index values, irrespective of the different contexts and narratives presented in the four selected novels. The findings in this regard stand in line with the Orthodox Christian thoughts, as the theological perspective is that an individual's sufferings are consequential and merely punitive, whereas the theological perspective stresses that suffering provides transformative opportunities. Orthodox Christian thoughts stressed that an individual's sufferings are mostly necessary, as they result in spiritual renewal. Taking into consideration the foundation-level significance of suffering in the theological perspective, Dostoevsky has persistently employed the concept, which has been confirmed through the quantitative analysis process presented in this study. Thus, rather than using it as juridical absolution, Dostoevsky has employed the concept of suffering as inner transfiguration. The findings of the current study stay aligned with the findings of [12] and [13], who have also found that Dostoevsky has employed the concept of suffering as a necessary condition for spiritual renewal, transformative change, and inner transfiguration objectives.

4.3 Repentance as a Core Value Constituting Moral Psychology

As a human being, Dostoevsky accepts that one commits mistakes and sins; however, the author in his novels, particularly in 'Crime and Punishment' and 'Demons', has focused greater attention on repentance. Using the two essential elements of salvation, including sin and repentance, Dostoevsky has made precise efforts to explore personal moral collapse resulting in sin and the restoration process by engaging in the process of repentance. The current study

found that Dostoevsky has significantly employed the concept of repentance in the selected four novels, whereas the meaning of the repentance stands aligned with the concept of repentance found in Orthodox Christianity. Dostoevsky has argued that to engage in the process of repentance, one should first consciously acknowledge the collapse of personal moral values that results in the commitment of sin that could then lead to engaging in repentance. The broader communal and theological framework that has been discovered in the current study aligns with the findings of other researchers in the existing literature. This includes [14] and [15], who have adopted the concept of sin as an individual ethical struggle that helped an individual in engaging in repentance.

4.4 Faith as the Central Pillar of Salvation

Another core salvation concept that could be found in the selected four novels of Dostoevsky is faith, which has particularly dominated novels including ‘The Idiot’ and ‘Crime and Punishment’ and is casually employed in the other selected work. The concept of faith found in the work of Dostoevsky reflects a Christ-like figure. The concept has been carefully employed in the novel, as, unlike the sin-repentance concept, Dostoevsky leveraged the established Christian faith that stressed the development of a moral state and the realisation of top-most standards through a continuous faith development process. This in turn dictates that there are structural differences, as in certain cases, Dostoevsky has been stressing the concept of sin and repentance, while in other instances, Dostoevsky has stressed embodying faith as an established and realised moral state. However, to a greater extent, Dostoevsky has introduced the concept of faith on an experimental basis, for stressing the concept of salvation without prior moral fall. The findings of the current study thus align with the findings of [16] and [17], who have also established that Dostoevsky has introduced the concept of faith for the sake of salvation on an experimental basis, rather than as a foundation-level concept of Orthodox Christianity.

5 Conclusion

This research critically examined how Orthodox Christian salvation thought in Dostoevsky’s major works can be systematically identified, compared, and evaluated, leveraging Chinese literary studies. The findings within the research are based on cross-sectional and corpus-based textual data analysis, whereas four key novels of the authors have been coded and analysed. As per the results compiled and presented in the previous chapter, it is clear that structural differentiation and diachronic values concerning Orthodox Christians could be found in the selected Dostoevsky novels. Dostoevsky has employed a range of key constructs in his novels regarding salvation, which include sin, suffering, faith, repentance and redemption. Although these five key constructs are commonly referred to in Dostoevsky’s novels, they have been differently represented. Although Dostoevsky has focused on all five constructs in his novels, the most common theme that has been found in the current study is that suffering emerged as the most widely used and referred concept of salvation in Dostoevsky’s selected novels. The concept ‘suffering’ has the high index values, irrespective of different contexts and narratives presented in the four selected novels. Taking into consideration the foundation-level significance of suffering in the theological perspective, Dostoevsky has persistently employed the concept, which has been confirmed through the quantitative analysis process presented in this study. Additionally, using the two essential elements of salvation, including sin and repentance, Dostoevsky has made precise efforts to explore personal moral collapse resulting in sin and the restoration process by engaging in the process of repentance. Dostoevsky has

significantly employed the concept of repentance in the selected four novels, whereas the meaning of the repentance stands aligned with the concept of repentance found in Orthodox Christianity. Another core salvation concept that could be found in the selected four novels of Dostoevsky is faith, which has particularly dominated novels including ‘The Idiot’ and ‘Crime and Punishment’ and is casually employed in the other selected work. The concept of faith found in the work of Dostoevsky reflects a Christ-like figure. The concept has been carefully employed in the novel, as, unlike the sin-repentance concept, Dostoevsky leveraged the established Christian faith that stressed the development of a moral state and the realisation of top-most standards through a continuous faith development process.

About the Author

Xu Ying was born in China in 2000. She obtained her M.A. degree in Russian Literature from the Faculty of Philology at Lomonosov Moscow State University in Russia. Her primary research interest is Russian literature, with a specific focus on the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Her master’s thesis is titled “The symbolic function of dreams in the works of F.M. Dostoevsky (based on ‘Crime and Punishment’ and ‘The Idiot’)” She is currently employed at the International Marketing Center of Guangzhou Guangri Elevator Industry Co., Ltd., where she is responsible for business development in the Russian regional market.

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