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SUTHIN SUKHDEE : AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF FREEDOM ACCORDING TO BUDDHIST ETHIC IN THAI SOCIETY. THESIS ADVISORS : WARIYA CHINWANNO, Ph.D., SIVALEE SIRILAI, M.A. (PHILOSOPHY), PAGORN SINGSURIYA, Ph.D. (PHILOSOPHY), 104 p. ISBN 974-04-2363-9

This research aims was to study the concept of freedom in the Buddhist ethics and to study from the Buddhist perspective the way that freedom is used in the present Thai context. This was a qualitative research in the field of religious ethics conducted mainly through documentary research drawing mainly from the Tipitaka, Tipitaka commentaries, important religious scholars' works, books, journal articles, newspaper columns and other related documents.

The results show that the concept of freedom in general can be classified into 2 groups: spiritual and physical freedom. Spiritual freedom has its root in religious thought while physical freedom merely concerns the non-interference with an individual's choices about his or her life, body, property, etc.. Those who maintain this form of freedom may not know how to guide their life. Even in the most liberal countries, people's freedom is still limited.

According to Buddhism, freedom consists of both the mundane and the supermundane levels. The use of freedom in the mundane level—which may be in the pursuit of happiness and success, or moral cultivation—should always be guided by the aim to the supermundane freedom, the freedom from all ignorance, craving, and attachment. According to Buddhism, the proper use of freedom should be in accordance with the three goals: 1) Elementary goal: happiness and success— for example, good career, high financial status, fame, and close family. 2) Intermediate goal: cultivation of virtues in the daily course of life, free from obsession with external rewards, and promotion of the equilibrium between the outer and inner. 3) Highest goal: enlightenment and inner peace. It is found that illustrative cases of the use of freedom in the present Thai context such as suicide, prostitution, and pornography undermine the pursuit of either of these goals.

It is suggested that research should be conducted on each important Buddhist scholars' view of freedom, for example, Buddhadasa, Dhammapitaka, Sompan Promta, etc. because 'freedom' is a complicated concept and given different interpretations by different scholars. The results will enable a richer analysis of relevant social problems.