

Thesis Title : The Vessantara Concept of Charity or Donation:
A Critical and Analytical Study
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Abstract

This thesis aims to study the story of Prince Vessantara's great donation as told in the Buddhist scriptures. The Vessantara's story plays an important role in Theravāda Buddhist communities especially Thailand as the model of the practice of Buddhist ethics. The final aim in human life in Buddhist teaching is the total absence of suffering. To attain that aim, Buddhism admits that it is very hard for the individuals to struggle against suffering alone without the help from the Buddhas. A Buddha according to Buddhist belief is one who devotes his life to help people fight against their suffering. For becoming a Buddha, some certain virtues are required. Those are required normally called the *pāramī*. Prince Vessantara practices the *pāramī* of great donation to become the Buddha. It is believed among the Buddhists that his great donation is necessary for becoming a Buddha, implying that there is no way for the Prince to help people without following this *pāramī*.

As the great donation of the Prince is concerned with such very sensitive matter as a donation of wife and children, the story of Prince Vessantara is sometimes criticized even by the Buddhist thinkers themselves as to whether following the real Buddhist teaching. Buddhism is well known through its teaching of loving kindness. The donation of wife and children of the Prince could be criticized to be contrary to the teaching of loving kindness.

In the thesis, the author tries to argue that even though the great donation performed by the Prince could be debated in terms of Buddhist ethics itself and other ethical perspectives, finally it is rational to accept that the great donation of the Prince accords with the main stream of Buddhist teaching.

