

Dissertation Title: Simone de Beauvoir's Concept of Women's Freedom and a Case Study
of Restricted Entry of Women into Lanna Stupa

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the dissertation is to examine De Beauvoir's feminism on women's freedom with a Thai case study: Thai women and Lanna Stupa. The researcher began the analysis by examining De Beauvoir's concept of women's freedom in her books *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*.

According to De Beauvoir's concept of women's freedom in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, De Beauvoir realized in the me-others relationship that it is indissoluble as the subject-object relationship. Human beings cannot be in the position of absolute subject because human beings can be reduced to objects in the eyes of others. De Beauvoir stimulated people to think in terms of ethicality by considering others' freedom as she claimed that "To will oneself free is to will others free." Therefore, Women's freedom is interdependent with other's freedom. For De Beauvoir's concept of women's freedom in *The Second Sex*, women's situations under Patriarchy result in women not being as free as men. It is exemplified by the restrictive traditional roles of being wives and mothers. De Beauvoir suggested that women should choose the life of

the independent woman by avoiding marriage. Women's situations in motherhood prevent them from gaining complete liberty.

The researcher also analyzed De Beauvoir's concept of women's freedom with the case study of Thai Women and Lanna Stupa. All Thai women are prohibited to go into the Pagoda in northern Thailand to pay respect to Lanna Stupa, Buddha's relics, because the Lanna people believe that women's menstruation can disempower the relics buried inside the Pagoda. According to De Beauvoir's point of view, Thai women have to think in the sense of ethical freedom as she claimed that "to will oneself free is to will others free." Therefore, Thai women do not have the right to go into the Pagoda to pay respect to Lanna Stupa in northern Thailand because Thai women must also care for Lanna people's freedom as they choose to keep their own traditional culture. De Beauvoir also believed that women are determined by social construction. She accepted that women in the perspective of the Lanna culture are still oppressed and the traditional beliefs of the Lanna people do not allow Thai women to enter the Pagoda to pay respect to Lanna Stupa inside the Pagoda of northern Thailand. Lanna people insisted on preserving their own culture which has existed for more than six hundred years. Therefore, Thai women are determined by the cultural determinism of the Lanna culture. Thai women do not have the right to go into the Pagoda to pay respect to Lanna Stupa in northern Thailand.

According to the researcher, the researcher would agree with Sartre's ontology of human beings' existence in nothingness. Women can create themselves so that they are free to act in all situations. Sartre's situation means that we do not know how to choose the choice if we do not have the situation because all facts are collected in situation. Women are parts of the situation without meaning. Therefore, the researcher

agrees with Sartre that Thai women are always free to choose in every situation, including of the situation of Lanna culture. Besides, the researcher agrees with Butler as she did not accept De Beauvoir's concept of gender because she did not accept that gender is constructed by situation. If Thai women accept the meaning of gender in De Beauvoir's perspective, Thai women have to accept the inequality in Thai society. As Butler mentioned that Thai women become men through the acts of gender that they perform. In other words, gender is a performance; it is what women do at particular times, rather than a universal identity as women. Thus, Thai women have the right to enter to the Pagoda the same as men because Thai women can do the masculine trait, predetermined by the society, context within which women are situated

Finally, the researcher agrees with Foucault that the tradition of "women not allowed" was invented in Lanna discourse. The reasoning is that women's oppression in De Beauvoir's perspective is the statement that was formulated into discourse. Discourse can explain the inequality of men and women in Lanna society. It was only formulated and constructed by set of discourse in order to delude people's perceptions. For the case study, the statement that "women not allowed" can be mentioned as discourse of the Lanna tradition with the ability to ban all women from entering to the Pagoda and treating them as impure due to their menstrual blood. Therefore, the researcher rejects De Beauvoir's idea of women's oppression with respect to this case study. Women could always create a new discourse of Lanna culture that is clearly neither feminine nor masculine. It would be firmly fixed so that women could get the equal rights as men and the tradition of "women not allowed" would disappear. When women's oppression is given a meaning in Lanna discourse that is unrealistic, all women should oppose it and insist on the right to enter the Pagoda.