

# Buddha Dhamma and Sufficiency Economy

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## Abstract

Consideration of Buddha Dhamma, the core teaching of Buddha that is fundamental to Thailand's culture, can help enrich understanding of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP). SEP is the development approach formulated by Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej. His Majesty first introduced SEP to the public in 1974, but its value only began to be widely recognized after he identified it in December 1997 as the appropriate response to the major economic crisis that was then afflicting Thailand. In common with all major religions, SEP decries greed. All religions are grounded in the scientific observation that every time greed has existed in any human community or society in a significant way it has been accompanied by human catastrophes. Factual evidence has proven this time and again throughout human history. Buddha Dhamma has the status of a mind-based science in that its epistemology consists of theory, actual practice after the theory, and finally, evaluation of the theory. It considers not only matter and energy as in physics but also the mind as the third dimension. As SEP draws some concepts from Buddha Dhamma, it can be said to rest on a mind-based science - not only on an ethical philosophy as is understood in the West. Practicing SEP will lead to the sense of wellbeing, of peacefulness, that comes from having a well trained mind rather than the pleasure that depends heavily on global exploitation of material resources. For this reason, it is time for people world-wide to gain a deep understanding of Sufficiency Economy so that they can achieve peace and tranquility before being confronted with all kinds of problems-- even the end of the human race-- that are caused or exacerbated by climate change rooted in human greed.

**Keywords:** Buddha Dhamma, sufficiency economy, human greed, mind- based science



## Introduction

This age of globalization, when economic globalization in particular reigns, has greatly increased material wealth and prosperity in a short period of time. Information and communications technology now enables the delivery of knowledge needed for any purpose from any spot on this earth to any other at the speed of light. Massive production of most material things can be accomplished within a much shorter time than was

possible 50 years ago. As a result, production is increasing by leaps and bounds. The increased production is now sufficient to satisfy all human needs- but not, however, insatiable human greed.

The fruits of the massive increase in production capability have not been evenly spread to everyone. Those few who hold political power, personal influence, and/or abundant capital, gain much more than others. The majority in this world at least gain some from the so called

“trickle down” effect. However, minority groups on the fringe receive few benefits and can even suffer losses—for example, when their farm lands or other resources are taken away to facilitate national development efforts.

Surprisingly, most people feel tense and stressed under the rush for material wealth and prosperity even though they also automatically equate material wealth with wellbeing. A reasonable explanation for this seeming puzzlement is that while economic globalization produces much more material wealth, it also stimulates insecurity because distribution of the wealth is highly unequal, and stimulates greed because this has proven to be an effective motivator of the mass consumption promoted by producers in order to serve their own wealth cravings. Thus economic globalization can actually be a cause of human unhappiness.

Moreover, while prosperity has grown in some areas, in others there is glaring inequality, misery and conflict (Pieterse, 2002, p. 24). Economic globalization has not delivered the basic necessities of food, housing, health, education, clean environment and secure livelihood on anything like a global scale (Davis, 2006). At the same time, the rapid growth of material wealth results in ecological threats to the planet that are manifested in the disturbance and destruction of natural systems. Current anthropogenic climate change, i.e., climate change caused by consumption of non-renewable natural resources produced to satisfy unlimited desires, is increasingly producing extreme weather conditions and thus floods, droughts, and violent storms. (Stern, 2007, Garnaut, 2008a, 2008b; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 1995, 2001, 2007).

All these undesirable social and environmental consequences stem from human greed, especially greed among the most influential and those climbing the ladder. Unfortunately, those hit the hardest are those who are the least to blame: the poorest and most vulnerable countries and people.

If human beings as a race are to survive for generations to come, a new paradigm is needed to guide development, especially human development. Instead of allowing human greed to be the driving force for material development, development needs to be driven by some other motivation-- such as the will to become less miserable or more serene. It also needs to be driven by thinking that replaces black-and-white logic with a recognition of every thing’s dual nature or fuzziness (Kosko, 1994).

Despite their differences, all major religions have at least one thing in common: they all condemn greed as a human vice. The condemnation of greed is based on the common empirical (scientific) observation that time and time again throughout human history whenever greed has appeared in a society in a significant way it has brought all sorts of problems and undesirable consequences.

Like Christianity and Islam, Buddha Dhamma, the core teaching of Buddha fundamental to Thailand’s culture, confronts greed. This paper explores the commonalities between Buddha Dhama and Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), the sustainable development approach formulated by Thailand’s King Bhumibol Adulyadej that is increasingly attracting international attention, in order to explain SEP’s spiritual roots and dimensions.

## **Buddha Dhamma**

The term Buddha Dhamma is used in this paper to emphasize I am not discussing a religion or philosophy in the Western sense. Buddha Dhama is not a religion in the Western sense because it does not depend on faith; that is to say, it does not depend on beliefs adopted without evidence. Buddha Dhama is not a philosophy because it is not merely a system of well thought-out ideas.

Buddha Dhamma contains three elements. First is pariyatti, the theoretical, or conceptual framework. The second element is pattipatti, which is the actual

application of the framework. The third is *pattivadh*e which is the evaluation required for the confirmation of the theory from the result of practice (Boyce et al, 2009, p.72)

All teachings of Buddha are results from his own theoretical frameworks, practical experiences, and personal evolution. They are proven theories in the sense that they are derived from evaluating the results of actual practice confirming underlying theories previously conceptualized (Puntasen, 2014). This perspective is reflected in Buddha's answer to Kalama, a group of villagers who always liked to accommodate travellers passing by, but who wondered whom they should believe when guests talked highly about themselves and put down others. Buddha's response to their quandry is known as Kalama Sutta, or, the answer he gave to Kalama. It goes as follows:

Do not believe simply because you have heard it.

Do not believe simply because you have learnt it.

Do not believe simply because it has been practiced from ancient time.

Do not believe simply because it's rumored.

Do not believe simply because it's in the scripture.

Do not believe simply because of its logic.

Do not believe simply because of guess work.

Do not believe simply because of reasoning.

Do not believe simply because it conforms to your theory.

Do not believe simply because it seems credible.

Do not believe simply because of faith in your teacher (Payutto 2005, p. 232)

What should be believed is what can be confirmed by a person's practical experience. Overall, this approach affirms the importance of individual experience in knowing and in understanding based on self-actualization (Boyce

et al. 2009, p.72). Buddha Dhamma is different from a mechanistic science that studies matter and energy. As a mind-based science, it goes beyond. Mind emerges from a combination of matter and energy to become a completely new thing. It has its own unique properties, properties that are different from either matter or energy. This third dimension was not recognized in Newtonian physics. Like Quantum physics, on the other hand, Buddha Dhamma recognizes the inevitability of uncertainty. (Payutto, 1991) Mechanistic science deals with typical behavior, while Buddha Dhamma deals with the atypical. A mind-based science proposes that truth can vary with different levels of mind development. As a mind is formed, it goes through various levels of development. For example, the mind of a two-year old child will have a different level of development than that of a newborn baby or that of a teenager. The level of this child's perception and understanding will also be different from that of a newborn or a teenager. However, at the same level of mind development, the same truth can be perceived. Therefore, truth is not merely an individual perception.

There are many known and proven methods of mind development. *Sikkhathaya* is the method suggested by Buddha himself. Contrary to what post-modernism propounds, truth can be "absolute truth" if the mind has been developed to the highest level. Achieving the highest level requires rigorous training, going beyond mere individual perceptions and feelings. Mind-based science introduces a new dimension in understanding the reality of uncertainty and thus an understanding that is more realistic than the old scientific paradigm (Puntasen, 2014, p. 66-7)

Western research on brain and psychological processes has shown that meditation affects heart rates and hormonal balance. Davison et al. (2003) found meditation to have demonstrable positive effects on brain and immune-system functioning. Such studies confirm there are physical/biological manifestations of the mind-

based process (Boyce et al, 2009, p. 73). They provide traditional scientific evidence that the mind alone can produce real effects and that one can train one's own mind (Layard, 2005). I am not presenting these facts in order to demonstrate that Western knowledge proves the validity of Buddha Dhamma, but rather to head off possible charges that this paper is simply promoting mysticism or faith-based belief.

### **The Core Teaching of Buddha**

According to Buddha Dhamma, from the time any living thing is born it can never be free from dukkha. Dukkha can be simply translated as "pain"; it can be physical pain or mental pain or both. At its most basic, dukkha results from natural changes: namely, birth, aging, illness and death. Any undesirable change is usually associated with dukkha. As change in everything is taking place all the time, clinging to something in the hope that it will not change actually creates a self-made conflict or contradiction because such hope does not conform to reality. In fact, in addition to pain, the word dukkha refers to conflict, contradiction, alienation, frustration, or anything else that is not easy to live with. The original cause of dukkha is our own ignorance.

Opposite to ignorance is *pañña*, the ability to understand everything in its own nature. In general, all of us as human beings have a tendency to distort facts to suit our preferences. The greatest distortion of all for a human being is to try to convince oneself that there exists such a thing as "self" that we can hold onto forever. Clinging to "self" attempts to provide a sense of security, but unfortunately, clinging to something that does not actually exist ultimately results in feelings of less security rather than more. If the mind has been trained to the point of being able to understand that there is no such thing as self, that the so-called "self" is changing all the time in its own natural way, then this is the point where *pañña*, has been cultivated and misunderstanding

will gradually disappear. The mind will gradually be free from delusion or defilement. Without "self", there will still exist "pain" in various forms, especially physical pain, to be contemplated. However, there will no longer be "my pain" or "our pain". The only pain remaining will be "the pain" whose existence is to be observed and understood. It will become interesting to contemplate how the pain originated and how it can, and will, be eliminated eventually. Through such contemplation, there will be less pain as there will be no more "my pain," while "the pain" will have been treated as an object of study.

Opposite to dukkha is sukha, the situation or condition that is easy to live with. With less dukkha there is more sukha. Using the analogy of temperature, if dukkha is heat then sukha is cold. If there is less heat there will be more cold, and vice versa. It is not like pain and pleasure in the Western perspective where pleasure is seen as something that will help us to feel good even if we encounter various forms of pain after or before the pleasure, or in other words, where pleasure is not seen as a sustainable reduction of pain. Reducing dukkha, on the other hand, ensures more sukha.

There are two kinds of sukha. *Kamasukha* is close to the Western concept of hedonism. Such sukha can be achieved through acquisition. It is considered to be a lower level of sukha. However, it is acceptable provided it does not put a burden on oneself or on any other living thing. If it does create a burden, it will turn out to be dukkha, not sukha.

The higher level of sukha is *niramissukha*. It is sukha achieved not through acquisition, but rather through giving, through meditation, or through helping others to be relieved of pain. The highest level of *niramissukha* is *vimuttisukha*. *Vimuttisukha* is sukha derived from becoming emancipated or liberated from all impurities of mind, from all defilements known as *kilesa* which consist of greed, anger and hatred, delusion and/or ignorance. This state of mind is also known as *nibbāna*, an ideal

state of mind that one tries to achieve if one wants to be completely free from dukkha. It can be achieved through the process of rigorous training of the mind. Actually, the core teaching of Buddha that directly deals with dukkha consists of four elements, known as the Four Noble Truths, which address respectively: the nature of dukkha, its original cause or causes, the determination to get rid of the cause (s), and the way to do it.

The nature of dukkha has already been explained above. It is the situation or a condition that is hard to live with, or more simply, pain. It is caused by the defilements that taint the mind. To get rid of dukkha requires strong determination. The way to do it is through the process of rigorously training the mind. The ultimate aim of such training is to cultivate and accumulate pañña to the point that one can understand everything in its own nature. In this way, all kilesa or defilements will disappear from the mind. The mind will be purified, calm and clear, or

enlightened. It will be in a state of so called nibbāna and there will be no more dukkha or pain.

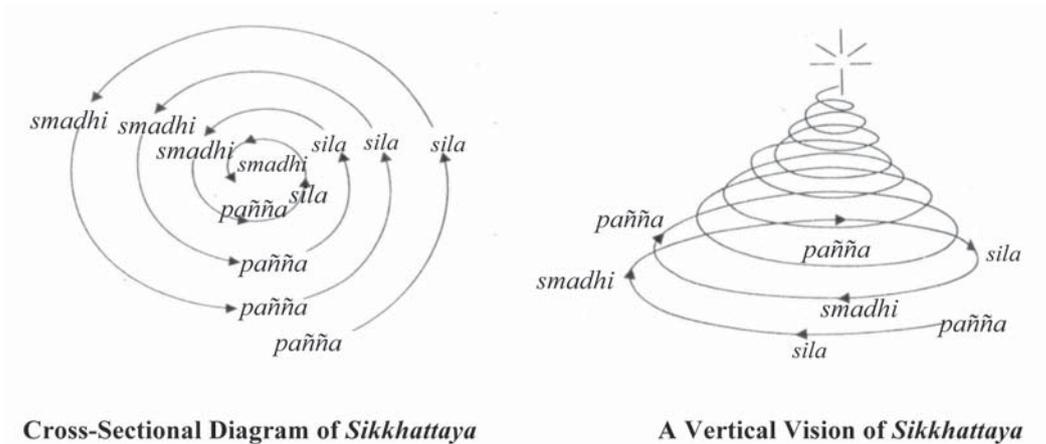
The process of rigorously training the mind is known as magga, or the Noble Eight Fold Path. The Noble Eight Fold Path can be rearranged into the sikkattaya, the Three Fold Training, which involves adhisilasikkha (training in higher morality), adhicittasikkha (training in higher mental discipline), and adhipaññasikkha (training for a higher level of pañña). Sikkha is the process of learning through actual practice until everything becomes clearly understood. The word adhi means greater, bigger, or higher. It implies that each level of learning will lead to a higher level of training and understanding. In other words, sila, smadhi and pañña must progress together at the same time, in a mutually reinforcing dynamic spiral. The ultimate goal is to eventually achieve the state of nibbāna (Puntasen, 2008, p. 32)

**Table 1**

*Adhisilasikkha*

<b>Adhisilasikkha (Sila)</b>	<b>Adhicittasikkha (Smadhi)</b>	<b>Adhipannasikkha (Pañña)</b>
- right speech	- right effort	- right understanding
- right conduct	- right mindfulness	- right mental attitude
- right livelihood	- right concentration	(Understanding everything in
(Causing no burden on one's self	(Performing only useful things	its own nature and always having
or any other living thing.)	with full concentration.)	right mental attitude.)

## Spiral Dynamic of Sikkhattaya



**Cross-Sectional Diagram of Sikkhattaya**

**A Vertical Vision of Sikkhattaya**

**Figure 1** Spiral Dynamic of Sikkhattaya

The training must follow this order: pañña → sila → smadhi → pañña → sila → smadhi → etc. Although pañña means right understanding, initially the understanding might not be clear. For example, it could begin with a belief that if one always does good things, such as speaking the right way, conducting oneself the right way, or living the right way, one will receive something good in life in return. Practicing right speech, right conduct and right livelihood is actually the training of sila. When one always does good things only, there will be nothing to be concerned about. This way, the mind will be calm and can concentrate on useful things more easily. As the mind becomes more concentrated, it can focus and achieve enlightenment more easily. This is how the higher level of pañña is generated. In the next round, practice at a higher level of sila will come with better understanding gained through the experience of practice in the previous round. The practice of sila at this higher level will involve better intention and more intensity. The mind will focus more easily, and understanding will be gained at a deeper level. The whole process will then continue in a spiral.

The Noble Eight Fold Path, which is comparable to the Three Fold Training of sikkhattaya, is also known as majjhimapatipada or the Middle Path. This is the path

that leads to the generation and accumulation of pañña. It is the path that avoids the two extremes of hedonism (self-indulgent luxurious pleasure) and asceticism (self-denial, renunciation, and extreme hardship). Buddha himself did not satisfy his thirst for knowledge, i.e. freedom from dukkha, through asceticism and leaving everything behind in his palaces. Only when he began to follow the Middle Path by living the normal life did he finally achieve enlightenment and become Buddha (the one who knew, being awakened and enlightened).

The Middle Path is the only path for the generation and accumulation of pañña, the most important tool for the cessation of dukkha. As a result, the Middle Path is most important in practicing and following Buddha Dhamma, and, as discussed below, in conceptualizing and practicing Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

### **Greed is the Major Cause of Everything**

As indicated earlier, the most important concept that links Buddha Dhamma with Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, as well as with all major religions, is the concept of “greed”. In Buddha Dhamma, greed is combined with anger/hatred and delusion/ignorance in one word: kilesa, or defilements. Kilesa is the cause of dukkha; to avoid dukkha one must avoid greed.

Anthropogenic climate change has its root cause in economic globalization driven by greed. Therefore, in addressing the problems caused by climate change, it is helpful to consider the difference between economics centred on greed and economics centred on sukha.

Economics, as developed in the West, usually claims to be a value-free scientific discipline concerned only with observable phenomena. In fact, this conception is based on an old scientific paradigm. It can be shown that economics is actually a value-laden subject. The operational value that lies at the centre of Western economics is human greed. Human greed originates in the sense of insecurity that is an animal instinct. For an animal, a herd can improve its individual security. A tribal community can do the same for a human being, but tribal community is achieved at the cost of individual freedom.

Technological development enables humans to depend more on technology for their security than they do on community. It thus enables individualism. However, increasing dependency on technology implies increasing dependency on personal wealth which can lead to increasing greed.

Buddha Dhamma views the human being as a special animal that has the potential for its mind to be developed to the highest level. It proposes that a good human life relies not on having ever more sophisticated technologies and materials, but rather on having a good balance between communal life and the accumulation of pañña, the ability to understand everything in its own nature. Through continuous and rigorous training of one's mind, greed and the sense of insecurity from which it originates can be replaced by pañña. Instead of being greedy and trying to accumulate wealth to satisfy a sense of insecurity, people can derive prayotesukha (happiness) from, for example, helping others.

From what has been discussed above, one can compare the core values of the two kinds of economies.

One is the economy based on greed, the interest of mainstream economics. In its extreme form, this is capitalism. The other is an economy based on sukha, focussed on humans being useful to others. It can be called paññaism.

The comparison of core values in the chart below reflects the reality that there can be different ways to explaining life and human progress or development.

**Table 2**

*Core values*

<b>Economy based on human greed</b>	<b>Economy based on sukha</b>
<b>Core values</b>	<b>Core values</b>
<b>Premise 1</b> For any living thing, life itself is most important. As a result, the act of self-interest is a rational behavior.	<b>Basic understanding</b> Once being born, all living things, especially animals and human beings, can never avoid dukha or pain. Helping each other to reduce pain is a 'rational' behavior. Hence, compassion and cooperation are rational. They serve as core values in Buddhist economics and Sufficiency Economy.
<b>Premise 2</b> Competition is the selection process for the fittest. Competition leads to progress. Therefore, the core values of this kind of economy are self-interest and competition.	
<b>End result</b> More is better than less, and winning is better than losing. There will be both winners and losers; economic activity is a zero sum game. If a winner feels compassion for a loser, the result is a 'lose-lose' situation.	<b>End result</b> Beyond acquisition of basic necessities for life sustenance, niramissukha or sukha can be gained from being useful to others, i.e. from prayotesukha. Both givers and receivers achieve sukha. It is a 'win-win' situation.

Coupled with a restricted notion of self-interest, conventional economics adopts a Darwinian theory of "the survival of the fittest" to conclude that economic competition leads to social progress. In contrast, an economy based on sukha recognizes that competition and relentless pursuit of profit are often associated with negative outcomes such as deterioration in working conditions and wages for employees, greater destruction and despoliation of the environment, and greater social uncertainty and stress. (Welford, 2007, p. 343)

In the economy based on sukha, cooperation is regarded as more "rational" than competition for fulfillment of needs. Compassion is seen as a human virtue. It is good for the person who practices it because it will always bring sukha to that person. It makes receivers of compassion feel good as well. It produces a win-win situation. Cooperation and compassion involve activities that are fair to all rather than pursuit of self-interest in ways that harm others. Material accumulation as an end in itself is seen as a futile goal, because there can never

be "enough" (Daly & Cobb, 1989). The quest for material pleasure is actually a cause of dukkha. It prevents development of one's potential for inner creativity, which in turn generates further lack of satisfaction and various negative mental states such as stress, anxiety, worry, depression and fear (Payutto, 1996).

### **The Origin of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy**

Because Thailand's king must be a patron of all the country's religions, one never knows for sure whether Sufficiency Economy Philosophy introduced by King Bhumibol Adulyadej has a separate origin from Buddha Dhamma or whether it is based on Buddha's teachings. However, many important terms used in Buddha Dhamma are also used in SEP. SEP can be traced back to the date of enthronement of His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej in 1946. In his acceptance speech, he said: "We shall reign in Dhamma (righteousness) for prayotesukha (benefits and happiness) of Siam people"

The word Dhamma actually refers to the concept of Dhosapit Raja Dhamma which means the ten virtues that a good king must comply with in order to reign over peaceful countries. The 10 virtues are: dana (giving), sila (good deed or righteous conduct), paricaga (giving up or sacrificing), ajava (integrity and honesty), maddava (gentleness or politeness, and respecting good reasoning), tapa (refraining from worldly desire through perseverance), akkoda (acting without anger or hatred), avihimsa (acting without causing any problem or any harm to the people), khanti (enduring or being patient with any hardship and pain, physical or mental) and avirodhana (being always with virtue and refraining from vices). These qualities are the ones that a good king must uphold for the love to his people, and King Bhumibol himself has been able to uphold them in full.

The word prayotesukha in the King's 1946 speech refers to the happiness gained from being beneficial to others and contributing to their happiness. Prayotesukha is actually the goal of Sufficiency Economy. Use of the word indicates that an economy should be oriented to win-win happiness rather than to greed or accumulation of wealth.

The official version of SEP began on July 18, 1974 when the King gave a speech to graduating students of Kasetsart University in which he said:

National development must be carried out step by step, starting with laying the foundation to ensure that the majority of the people have enough to live on and live for as the basic step, using economical yet theoretically sound methods and equipment. Once a reasonably firm foundation has been laid and in effect, higher levels of economic growth and development should be promoted. (National Research Council of Thailand, 2004, p. 1)

The phrase “enough to live on and live for” was later interpreted as “sufficiency”.

It should be noted that this speech served to oppose the growth-oriented approach to national development that, since 1961, had been adopted by the Thai government under the supervision of the World Bank and the U.S. government. By 1974, it had become obvious that while the national growth performance was quite impressive (averaging 8 percent annually), the gap between the rich and the poor had at the same time been widening. The King's SEP advocated distribution before growth. It advocated that everyone have sufficiency before the country is developed to “higher levels”.

In fact, SEP does not advocate more material wealth as the goal but rather more sukha or proyotesukka (happiness) for the majority of people. This can be confirmed by a speech the King made on December 4, 1995.

What others may say does not matter, whether they say that Thailand is old-fashioned or that we are outdated. Anyhow, we have enough to live on and to live for, and this should be the wish and determination of all of us to see sufficiency in this country. It is not that we will attain supreme prosperity, but we will have a sustainable and peaceful country. (National Research Council of Thailand, 2004 p. 1)

As a result of the Plaza Accord that was signed in New York in 1985, Japan was forced to float its currency. The value of the yen sharply appreciated, and Japan was forced to locate investment projects overseas as it was too costly to continue production at home. Thailand received a good portion of Japan's foreign direct investment, and also attracted investments from Japan's competitors: Korea, Taiwan, the U.S.A. and Europe. Thailand's growth performance moved into the double digits for the first time in the country's history (National Research Council of Thailand, 2004 pp.7-8).

The King was not impressed by this growth performance. At the very time that the growth rate was

close to its peak, the King introduced what he called the New Theory. This was a framework for agriculture to be guided by SEP (UNDP, 2007, p. 28). It advocated that farmers with small land holdings undertake activities that permit them to live on the basis of self-reliance as a beginning phase, and then to grow products for sale after basic livelihood has been firmly secured. His Majesty cautioned senior government officials and the general public not to feel complacent about the economic condition of Thailand even though the country was enjoying high levels of export growth during that period. (National Research Council of Thailand, 2004, p. 10). In 1994, he said:

“I am concerned because even though the past two years were jubilee years, I have seen evident signs which show that people are still in great difficulties, and that there are things that still need to be remedied and looked after in many areas. There is also a plight that comes from natural disasters. These natural disasters

could be alleviated, but we need some time to do that. There is another kind of danger: from the human mind. This could also be rectified, though it is more difficult to deal with than the natural disasters. Nature is something outside our bodies, but the mind is within us. This is something more difficult to cope with but not impossible.”

From 1987 to 1995, His Majesty stressed three central concepts in His speeches: “sufficiency,” “moderation,” and “living within one’s means”. These concepts later became SEP keywords.

In 1997, Thailand was shocked by an economic crisis, a crisis that the King had warned of during the boom years. His speech on Sufficiency Economy on December 4, 1997 was well received by the Thai people. It marked the beginning of Sufficiency Economy as an official philosophy.



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