PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY AMONG THE PRIVILEGED THAI YOUTH:

AN EVALUATION OF SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THAILAND

Miss Valerie Paradiso

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By	Miss Valerie Paradiso
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Thesis Advisor	Assistant Professor Pitch Pongsawat, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree

---Dean of the Faculty of Political Science

(Professor Supachai Yavaprabhas, Ph.D.)

THESIS COMMITTEE

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(Jakkrit Sangkhamanee, Ph.D.)

---Thesis Advisor

(Assistant Professor Pitch Pongsawat, Ph.D.)

---External Examiner

(Assistant Professor Nalinee Tantuvanit, Ph.D.)

วาเลอรี พาราดิสโซ : ความเข้าใจของกลุ่มเยาวชนไทยที่มีฐานะต่อความยากจนและความไม่เท่าเทียม บทวิเคราะห์ความสำนึกทางสังคมในประเทศไทย. (PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY AMONG THE PRIVILEGED THAI YOUTH: AN EVALUATION OF SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THAILAND) อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก: ผศ. ดร พิชญ์ พงษ์สวัสดิ์, 180 หน้า.

บทวิเคราะห์ทางประวัติศาสตร์ของ เดอ สวาน เรื่องรัฐสวัสดิการได้ชี้ให้เห็นถึงบทบาทของความสำนึกทางสังคม (social consciousness) ซึ่งเป็นแนวความคิดของกลุ่มชนชั้นสูง และเป็นตัวกระตุ้นให้มีการเคลื่อนไหวร่วมกันในการลดระดับความยากจนในทวีปยุโรปและสหรัฐอเมริกา แนวคิดที่นำไปสู่ความสำนึกทางสังคมนั้น ได้แก่ ความเชื่อในการพึ่งพาอาศัยกันทางสังคม เชื่อในความรับผิดชอบทางสังคม และ เชื่อว่าความพยายามที่จะลดระดับความยากจนนั้นมีความเป็นไปได้จริง บทวิจัยนี้มุ่งสร้างความเข้าใจด้านความคิดที่มีต่อความยากจน ความไม่เท่าเทียม คนยากจน และ นโยบายสนับสนุนคนยากจน ระหว่างเยาวชนที่มีฐานะที่กำลังศึกษารายวิชาด้านสังคมศาสตร์อยู่ที่จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย วิทยาลัยนานาชาติมหิดล และมหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์

จากการใช้หลักการวิเคราะห์ของเดอ สวาน บทวิจัยนี้ได้แสดงให้เห็นว่าการแบ่งแยกชนชั้นในประเทศไทย ทั้งทางกายภาพและทางสังคม ได้ทำให้เกิดความรู้สึกของการพึ่งพาอาศัยกันทางสังคมต่ำลงระหว่างกลุ่มเยาวชนที่มีฐานะดี และคนยากจน นอกจากนี้ ความอคติต่อคนยากจน ความไม่ศรัทธาในรัฐ และไม่เชื่อใจพลเมืองคนอื่นในการร่วมกันแบ่งเบาภาระการบรรเทาความยากจน ได้ส่งผลกระทบต่อความรับผิดชอบทางสังคมและความตั้งใจของกลุ่มเยาวชนที่มีฐานะในการร่วมลดระดับความยากจนอีกด้วย อย่างไรก็ดี พวกเขาคิดว่าการลดระดับความยากจนเป็นไปได้ และสิ่งที่พวกเขาเล็งเห็นว่ามีส่วนช่วยในการลดระดับความยากจนในประเทศไทยได้มากที่สุดนั้น คือ การลงทุนด้านการศึกษา โดยสรุป เราสามารถกล่าวได้ว่า กลุ่มเยาวชนกลุ่มนี้แสดงออกถึงความสำนึกทางสังคมที่ไม่สมบูรณ์

สาขาวิชา การพัฒนาระหว่างประเทศ	ลายมือชื่อนิสิต	....
ปีการศึกษา 2556	ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก	....

VALERIE PARADISO: PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY AMONG THE PRIVILEGED THAI YOUTH: AN EVALUATION OF SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THAILAND. ADVISOR: ASST. PROF. PITCH PONGSAWAT, Ph.D., 180 pp.

De Swaan's historical analysis of the welfare state points towards the role of social consciousness, a set of perceptions held by the elite, in triggering collective action for poverty reduction in Europe and the United States. The amalgam of perceptions amounting to a social consciousness included the beliefs in social interdependency, social responsibility and in the feasibility of poverty reduction efforts. This study aimed to gain insights on the perceptions of poverty, inequality, and pro-poor policies among the privileged youth in Thailand by focusing on students enrolled at Chulalongkorn University, Mahidol University International College and Thammasat University in courses related to the social sciences. Using De Swaan's analytical framework of social consciousness, this research shows that the physical and social segregation between social classes in Thailand lessens the sense of social interdependency between the privileged youth and the poor. Moreover, the negative perceptions of the poor, the lack of faith towards the state and the lack of trust in fellow citizens to share the cost of poverty alleviation impact social responsibility and the will for collective action towards poverty reduction among the privileged youth. Nevertheless, the privileged youth viewed poverty reduction as feasible while investing in education was by far the most popular initiative to reduce poverty in Thailand. Overall, it can be argued that privileged youth showed signs of an incomplete social consciousness.

Field of Study: International
                 Development Studies

Academic Year: 2013

Student's Signature ....

Advisor's Signature ....

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction of Research Problem

Studies on poverty have repeatedly focused on measuring, defining and capturing the experience of poverty as to give insights on what policies and institutions are appropriate for poverty alleviation and redistribution (Green, 2006). However, the focus and methods of these studies have led to the portrayal of poverty as a factual, apolitical and ahistorical thing rather than a social construct and the product of social relations (Brock, Cornwall, & Gaventa, 2001; Sresunt, 2011). Studying solemnly the poor fails to take in consideration the role of the non-poor in the acceptance and perpetuation of poverty. Furthermore, these studies overlook the agency of privileged people in blocking or supporting pro-poor policies. As Sachs (2009) rightly states, poverty alleviation cannot occur if the rich and the pursue of wealth remain unquestioned and understudied in development (Sachs, 2009).

This thesis aims to expand the body of knowledge on privileged people in relation to poverty by gaining insights on the perceptions of poverty, inequality and the poor among privileged students enrolled at Chulalongkorn University, Mahidol University International College and Thammasat University in courses related to the social sciences. Analyzing perceptions using De Swaan (1988) theory of social consciousness will shed light on what beliefs, values and norms impacts the privileged youth's support for pro-poor policies.

1.2 Prior Research

This section discusses the researches that influenced the design of this thesis. The first part brings out the findings of some of the studies that explored how perceptions of inequality, the poor and the causes of poverty impact individuals' behavior and their policy preferences regarding poverty and inequality. The second part explains the theory of social consciousness, a theory that links certain perceptions held by the elite to the formation of the welfare state in Western countries. Additionally, the utilization of the theory of social consciousness within the context of developing countries is discussed. This sections aims at contextualizing the present study by acknowledging the literature review that influenced the choice of topic and the designing of the research questions for this thesis.

1.2.1 Perceptions of Poverty and Inequality

Reis and Moore (2005) describe perceptions as three intertwined entities: cognition, norms and values. Cognition stands for our non-evaluative capacity to understand, values are ideals about what ought to be and norms are shared ideas about the type of behavior deemed appropriate. Many researches focus on perceptions because they are tightly linked with behavior; how a person perceives something will necessarily affect its actions towards it (Kraus, 1995). In the

case of poverty, as G. Marshall (1994) denotes, norms about behavior impacts how the poor and the non-poor interact with each other within a society. When looking at social issues, one cannot expect social practices to be altered without a change of norms, beliefs and values. This is why it is important to look at the perceptions underlying actions as to understand the barriers to social change in one society.

In the policy-making literature, it is recognized that policy choices are not only driven by self-interest but also ideas, frames, values, norms and world views (Campbell, 2002). Luebker's research (2004) shows how closely linked perceptions of inequalities and support for redistribution are as the perceptions of inequalities had a greater impact on people's support for redistribution than their social position. His research suggests norms and values, rather than only social group's interests, influence people's choices in terms of pro-poor policies.

Kluegel and Smith (1986) study about the lack of support for welfare policies in the United-States also denote the importance of perceptions in explaining the perpetuation of economic inequality. Respondents repeatedly portrayed inequality as a just and positive thing deriving their arguments from classical economists and social Darwinists thoughts. Kluegel and Smith (1986) insights on perceptions of inequality in the United-States show how certain discourses, which penetrated people's consciousness, legitimize inequality thus disable support for redistribution. Their research also points out that these beliefs, which form the

dominant ideology, lead poorer people to support policies that go against their class' interests (Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

To understand inequalities within countries, numerous academics have also looked at people's perceptions of the causes of poverty. Attributions to poverty researches coin three main causal explanations to poverty: individualistic, structural and fatalistic (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003). Individualistic causes point to the personal characteristics of the poor (Bullock et al., 2003). Poverty is usually linked to laziness, drugs or alcohol abuses and lack of determination. On the other hand, structural attributions to poverty points towards the role of society in producing poverty through discrimination, unequal opportunities and low minimum wage. Finally, fatalism explains poverty in terms of bad luck (Bullock et al., 2003).

Feagin (1975), Huber and Form (1973), Kluegel and Smith (1986) and Bullock et al. (2003) all show that attributions to poverty impact policy preferences as people who believe in individualistic causes to poverty show less support for welfare policies than people who see poverty as a structural problem. Furthermore, people who attribute wealth to privilege or corruption and are displeased by income inequality are more likely to support progressive welfare policies (Bullock et al., 2003). Zucker and Weiner (1993) also demonstrate how we perceive poverty impacts our emotions towards it and our willingness to help. Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler (2001) notice how attitudes towards the poor impact decisions in terms of voting

especially when looking at the middle-class. Perceptions are therefore linked to the willingness to act against poverty and to support welfare reforms. As Cozzarelli et al. (2001) rightly states, to change a society for it to be pro-poor requires analyzing people's perceptions of the poor as well the interest such perceptions serve.

Numerous researches have focused on understanding what molds perceptions of poverty and inequality. Glaeser (2005) interrogated the beliefs citizens hold about inequalities in the United-States and concur that they are held by the many because of indoctrination from academic institutions and politicians. Gandy and Baron (1998) sees that beliefs about inequalities emerge from the social group one is part of. Alesina and Giuliano (2009) research shows that direct experience with inequalities and poverty also shape beliefs about these issues. In their study, people who had direct experience with poverty or had been victims of inequalities supported more redistribution than the others. Furthermore, the mass media also play a role in beliefs formation; how poverty and inequalities are framed by the media has an impact on how people perceive these issues (Harper, 2003; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013).

Feagin (1975) Huber and Form (1973) and Kluegel and Smith (1986) all denote in their respective studies that the majority of Americans ascribe individualistic causal explanations to poverty in the United-States. Feagin (1975) believed that the origin of such attribution comes from Protestantism while Huber

and Form (1973) and Kluegel and Smith (1986) thought this was due to the dominant ideology. The dominant ideology is a set of beliefs that justify the status quo and is shared by people from all social strata in spite of going against their own interests.

Researches on perceptions show that self-interest cannot only account for support for policies. Instead, perceptions of inequalities, perceptions of the poor and the causes of poverty can also impact support or disdain for policies regarding welfare. Such perceptions also influence people's voting-behavior and their willingness to act regarding social issues. The existing researches points towards the importance of examining perceptions as to understand what precludes greater support for poverty reduction and the expansion of the welfare system.

1.2.2 Social Consciousness

De Swaan's historical analysis of the welfare state in Europe and the United-States points towards the role perceptions of poverty and the poor played in triggering the installation of pro-poor policies (De Swaan, 1988). De Swaan (2005) argues the elite developed a social consciousness, a specific amalgam of perceptions, which facilitated collective action towards the support of pro-poor policies. De Swaan defines social consciousness as "an awareness of the generalization of interdependence which links all members within a national collectivity, coupled with an abstract sense of responsibility, which does not impel to

personal action, but requires the needy in general be taken care of by the state and out of public tax funds" (De Swaan, 1988).

The amalgam of perceptions amounting to a social consciousness includes the belief that social groups within a society are interdependent, that the elite is responsible for poverty and the poor, and finally that means to reduce poverty exist or could be created (De Swaan, 2005). De Swaan's analysis of the creation of the welfare state in the West shows that if the elite has these three components of social consciousness, pro-poverty measures will most likely be adopted (De Swaan, 1988). For this matter, the elite at the time played an essential role in enabling social transformation and enacting the policies that leaded to the welfare state (De Swaan, 2005).

De Swaan adopts an elite theory as to explain the formation of the welfare state. Reis and Moore (2005) comparative research that uses De Swaan theory of social consciousness argues that focusing on the elite is appropriate when looking at perceptions as members of the elite are the ones that hold the most power in a society to block or push for policies. Their study attempted to understand why some developing countries do not have greater welfare provisions by looking at whether the elite in their respective countries lacked social consciousness. In this research, the social consciousness theory was shown to be a useful tool to analyze perceptions as to pin point the barriers to collective action towards the support for pro-poor policies.

In the light of the study's result, De Swaan (2005) raised the point that

his theory reflects the context of the United-States and Europe at a specific time in

history. Developing countries today are not subject to the same forces as the

western countries in previous times. For De Swaan (1988), the threat of diseases

played a central role in the support of pro-poor policies by the Western elite.

However, recent studies point out that diseases do not represent as much of a threat

for the elite of developing countries, even though communicable diseases are still

present, due to modern medicine and their access to efficient private healthcare

system (De Swaan, 2005; Hossain & Moore, 2002). Additionally, due to the

industrialization period in Europe, working class people's concentration in urban

areas increased and their ability to organized as to demand better standards of living

also represented a threat to the elite especially when communist movements

started spreading around the globe (De Swaan, 2005; Hossain & Moore, 2002). In

developing countries, the poor have shown less ability to organize due to the lack of

unions and lack of cooperation between workers from the formal and informal

economy (Friedman, 2002; Hossain & Moore, 2002). Communism also no longer

represents such a threat as it did around the Cold War. Furthermore, the separation

of space between the rich and the poor in developing countries reduces the sense of

threats induced by migration and crime (De Swaan, 2005).

Additionally, developing countries have had pressures to keep wages

low as to provide a positive business environment to attract foreign direct

investment and gain comparative advantage against developed nations (De Swaan, 2005; Kerbo, 2012). The elite from the developed world was not subject to modern pressures coming from globalization and the spread of the free market (De Swaan, 2005; Kerbo, 2012). Many developing countries have had to obliged to the neoliberal ideas of development, which did not support social policies but instead economic growth through the shrinking of government expenditures (De Swaan, 2005).

De Swaan (2005) and Hossain and Moore (2002) argue that national identification, due to the formation of the nation-state in the West, also allowed the creation of the welfare state. They state that developing countries tend to have had their state formed due to external forces such as colonialism or pressures coming from foreign elite (De Swaan, 2005; Hossain & Moore, 2002). Also, the welfare state appeared at a time where the military capacity of Europe and the United-State was impinged by poor health and the lack of education of the poor (De Swaan, 2005). Investing in human resources became essential, as the possibility of war was high (De Swaan, 2005; Hossain & Moore, 2002). Investing in the poor as to increase military capacity may not be as essential in other countries today (De Swaan, 2005).

Furthermore, democracy forced the western elite to represent the interests of the poor as to gain political popularity. The non-western elite may also be led to perceive the poor as potential voters though this remain to be seen as numerous developing countries have gone through political crisis due to the elite attempting to protect their interests.

Developing countries do not have the same socio-economic, historical and political context than Western countries during their welfare transformation. For this matter, De Swaan (2005) suggests that his theory is useful to ask appropriate questions as to understand the micro-level of the policy process, the perceptions of the poor that are favorable for the support of social policies, though it should not be seen as a universal template to understand the development of the welfare state. However, analyzing the elite's perceptions can give insights on how to reframe the issue of poverty as to appeal to the non-poor and induce a cross-class coalition for the expansion of welfare.

1.3 Aim of the Study

To form the aim of this study, the arguments and findings from the researches previously mentioned were taken into consideration. Formerly, it was denoted that perceptions of poverty, inequality and the causes of poverty impacts policy preferences regarding poverty and inequality. Furthermore, De Swaan and subsequent researchers that utilized his theory demonstrated that evaluating the elite's social consciousness could shed light on the set of perceptions that disable, or enable, support from the elite for pro-poor policies. In spite that the theory of social consciousness reflects a specific context, recent studies have shown that it remains a valuable framework to explore the non-poor's perceptions of poverty and the poor. Consequently, this thesis utilized the theory of social consciousness to

investigate the privileged youth perceptions of poverty, inequality and pro-poor

policies in Thailand. The aims of this study are:

1) To explore the perceptions of poverty and inequality among the privileged

    youth.

    This objective will be met by exploring the views of students towards poverty

    and inequality in Thailand. Studying perceptions of inequality seeks to

    uncover the values and norms underlying inequality in Thailand. This part of

    the research would also bring out the privileged youth's understanding of

    social issues within their country and shed the light on whether the social

    group studied is socially aware. Social awareness is important as if the

    privileged youth believe the level of poverty and inequality is not

    problematic in Thailand, most likely they would not feel there is a need to

    support policies regarding such issues. Additionally, discussing the negative

    effects of poverty and its impact on the privileged youth aims to uncover

    whether they feel social groups in Thai society are interdependent, a

    perception part of the social consciousness framework.

2) To evaluate the privileged youth's causal explanations of poverty.

This objective will be met by analysing the privileged youth's causal attributions to poverty. Knowing whether the studied group adopts an individualistic, structural or fatalistic causal explanation to poverty will give an insight on the level of responsibility they believe to have towards the poor and poverty in Thailand. Social responsibility is also one of the perceptions necessary to amount to a social consciousness. This part of the research will also bring out the attitudes the privileged youth have towards the poor.

3) To determine how these explanations impact their policy choices for reducing poverty in Thailand.

Discussing policy preferences aims to expose a component of social consciousness, whether the group studied believe there are feasible means to reduce poverty in Thailand. Furthermore, it will give insights on what type of pro-poor policies the privileged youth is more likely to support as to provide suggestions of policies that reflect the values and norms of the group studied.

4) To assess which features of social consciousness the privileged youth exhibit.

This objective will be met by examining the privileged youth's perceptions of poverty and the poor by utilizing the theory of social consciousness. Three sets of perceptions are necessary to evolved into social consciousness, sense of social responsibility, interdependency and feasibility, thus students' perceptions will be evaluated as to see whether they fit within De Swaan's framework of social consciousness. Looking at such components of social consciousness could give an insight on the extent collective action towards reducing poverty and inequality among the privileged youth is feasible.

1.4 Research Questions

1) How do privileged youth perceive poverty and inequality in Thailand?

2) What causal explanations to poverty do the privileged youth endorse?

3) How their causal explanations to poverty impact their policy choices for reducing poverty in Thailand?

4) To which degree the privileged youth's perceptions of poverty amount to a social consciousness?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This research's theoretical framework was based on an adaptation of De Swaan theory of social consciousness. Reis and Moore (2005) comparative research focused on the elite, people who hold the most resources and have the

most power to influence society, as to understand what pro- poor policies the elite would most likely support and how could poverty be framed to appeal to the elite and induce their support for redistribution. However, economic development has allowed the creation of the middle class in developing countries, which also detains economic, social, political power and impact the policy process for poverty reduction.

As Corneo and Gruner (2002) states, social status often has greater impact on voting behavior towards distributive policies than financial interests. For this reason, people from the middle class often oppose themselves to redistribution as to not lower their social status. In addition, in countries with high inequality, Corneo and Gruner (2002) argue that the middle-class is more likely to support the elite's interests due to the larger social distance between them and the poor. The elite's perceptions of poverty and inequality matter but so do the perceptions of the middle class as its members also have interests in blocking pro-poor policies and hold strategic positions in institutions. Understanding their perceptions as to reframe the issue of poverty and inequality can heighten the possibility of collective action towards poverty and inequality reduction. For this matter, this study did not only focus on the elite but on the middle-class and people from higher status, which are perceived as privileged within their society.

Reis and Moore (2005) comparative research studied privileged people who occupied important positions within influential institutions. On the other hand, the privileged youth's perceptions were hardly explored in the research. Between the ages of 18 to 25 years old, the "impressionable years", socialization has the strongest impact and the perceptions and worldviews developed at that stage are the hardest to change (Alesina & Giuliano, 2009). Consequently, it has been argued that the youth's perceptions of today will most likely reflect the beliefs, attitudes, values and norms of tomorrow's adults (Alesina & Giuliano, 2009). With regards to this matter, understanding the privileged youth's perceptions of poverty and inequality can give an insight on the direction of support for pro-poor policies in the future. Looking at people already in power to understand the future of policies does not take in consideration that belief systems can differ between generations.

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework Diagram
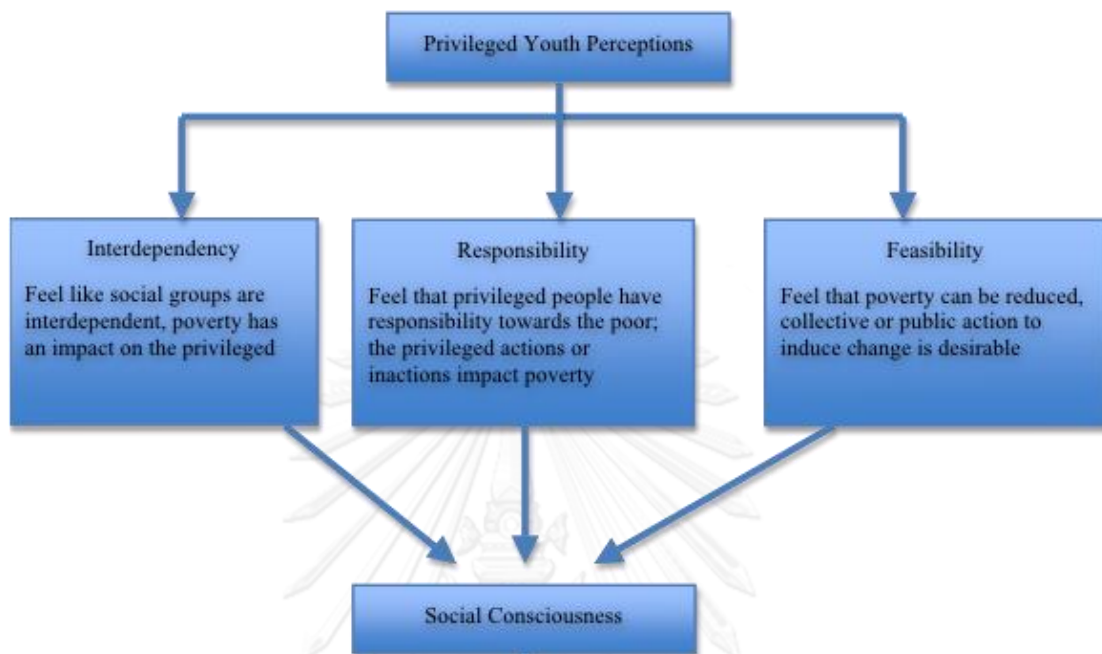
Inspired by De Swaan (1988, 2005)

1.6 Situating the Privileged Youth in Thailand

Vorng (2011) argues that western influence on Thai social stratification is undeniable however adopting a western conception of classes to analyze Thailand's social structure is inadequate. Demarcations of status in contemporary Thailand seems to have emerged from an interplay of the traditional *sakdina* system, the concept of hierarchy present in Buddhism, and Western influences (Vorng, 2011). The *sakdina* system was institutionalized by King Trailok and it ranked every individual in society while attributing privilege and rights in accordance to such

ranking (Vorng, 2011). King Lithai's writings later on fortified this hierarchical structure by associating it to Buddhism where the amount of 'bun' or merit a person accumulated in past lives dictated one's social status consequently people's social position was the result of *karma* and should not be challenged (Vorng, 2011).

As outdated as these constructions of social status propagated by the elite may seem, their influence can still be perceived in contemporary Thai society where notions of superiority and inferiority as well as the importance of knowing one's place still dictate social relations (Albritton & Bureekul, 2008; Camfield, Masae, McGregor, & Promphaking, 2012; Vorng, 2011). Education and the mass media have socialized people to endorse the social hierarchy while rituals such as the *wai* reinforce the ideology of unequal social relations in Thai society (Albritton & Bureekul, 2008). Vorng (2011) ethnographic research on status in Bangkok shows that Thais base their behavior on their status compared to others' status by determining whether someone is higher or lower in the Thai social hierarchy.

However, traditional social relations have changed due to western influence and globalization (Vorng, 2011). As noted by Vorng (2011), people increasingly show respect to wealthy people rather than monks or seniors. Sresunt (2011) argues that this emphasis on wealth is the result of the development discourse that pushed for accumulation of wealth and consumption and propagated materialism in Thai society. Vorng (2011) argues that age, income, family, ethnicity,

education, wealth, consumption habits and lifestyle choices are indicators of social

status in Thailand.

Overall, being from an affluent family situated in Bangkok, attending a

prestigious or foreign university, adopting a western lifestyle, consuming luxury goods,

being fluent in English and well-connected are all high status markers (Vorng, 2011).

Nevertheless, social status remain fluid as it varies in relation to others and the

context one is in (Vorng, 2011). Vorng's insight on social status in Thailand was

utilized to draw the scope of this research. This study focused on students from

Chulalongkorn University, Mahidol University International College and Thammasat

University foremost because being enrolled in one of these prestigious universities is

a social status symbol (Vorng, 2011).

Chulalongkorn University is the first higher education establishment

founded in Thailand and is reputed as a traditional and conservative institution

linked to nobility and aristocracy. Due to its reputation as the oldest institution,

Chulalongkorn is commonly known for attracting students from high status families.

Mahidol University International College draws its prominent status from being

associated with Mahidol University. It is known to offer a high quality international

program with steep tuition fees attracting affluent students that attended

international schools or studied abroad. Thammasat University was initially formed as

an institution for training civil servants in political and legal studies. Thammasat

University is known to offer a more liberal education in comparison to other universities and for producing politically active students. The university has the reputation for being a prestigious institution that formed numerous former Prime Ministers.

Each one of these universities has a high concentration of students that come from a privileged background due to their entry process and their tuition fees. These universities require a high-test score to be granted entry, which puts at a disadvantage the underprivileged; the majority of respondents interviewed attended private secondary schools, accessed private tutors or studied abroad as to secure a place in those universities. Furthermore, these universities tuition fees tend to be higher than other universities in Thailand due to their reputation, which fuels their exclusivity. The majority of respondents interviewed were enrolled in an international program whose fees are considerably higher than average university programs[1]. The economic capital required to obtain the type of education the interviewees benefit from and the social capital[2] they gain by revolving in exclusive groups that such establishments attract endow the social group studied the status of being privileged.

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[1] Out of the 26 students interviewed, 17 were enrolled in an international program; 6 students from Thammasat University, 2 students from Chulalongkorn University and all 9 students from Mahidol University International College. Gaining a degree from an international program from those universities can cost between 369,000 Baht up to 1,237,000 Baht approximately, which is a large sum of money in comparison to other programs' fees.

[2] Connections are an important component of social status in Thailand. Connections to privileged people's network can enhance social mobility or sustain one's status. Attending a prestigious university is an opportunity to create valuable connections. For this reason, many privileged Thais opt to undergo undergraduate studies

Education was the starting point for situating the privileged youth. Rather than drawing delimitations between social classes drawn from western theories, the subjectivity of the topic was taken in consideration and the picture of who are the privileged youth was drawn from observations and discussions, formal and informal, with the social group studied. The respondents' conception of being privileged echoed Vorng (2011) study by suggesting the importance of social status symbols in the construction of social classes. Being privileged for this social group is to have a specific lifestyle, education, family background and taste[3]. For the Thai youth, having social status markers that suggest wealth act as an assertion that they are part of the group, they are members of the privileged, which allows them to revolve in specific social circles where the non-privileged are cast out.

1.7 Research Methods

Studies on perceptions of poverty often focus on exposing the demographic variables that influence beliefs about the poor and inequalities through surveys. However, this method gives little insights on the justification and arguments people give to support their perceptions. Furthermore, the rigid surveys used are based on old classifications of attributions to poverty coming from the studies

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within their home country as to create a network and later on attend a foreign university to obtain their graduate degree.

[3] For more details on social classes and the formation of class identity in Thailand refer to (Vorng, 2010, 2011).

undertaken in the United States. These classifications of perceptions may no longer fit our modern time or may not be applicable in other countries. G. E. Lopez, Gurin, and Nagda (1998) state that perceptions of the causes of poverty most likely differ between countries because of culture; each nation portray these issues differently through the media, education, religion and politics.

As Harper (2003) rightly states, the most common methodology used in these studies forces respondents to mold their perceptions to match the survey while in fact their view may be different. Furthermore, this quantitative method fails to capture the contradictions within respondents' perceptions (Harper, 2003). For these reasons, a qualitative research based on in-depth interviews rather than surveys was viewed as better suited to explore people's perceptions for this thesis.

This research used qualitative methods to gather data. The first level of data came from conducting a literature review of various journals, books, newspapers, articles and reports related to the topic of the thesis. Such research provided a background on the issue of poverty and inequality in Thailand. Furthermore, it was used to explore the public debate on poverty and inequality in Thailand as to understand the present narratives on these subjects diffused in society.

The second type of data was gathered through a field research, which took place throughout June 2013 and August 2013, in Bangkok and Salaya. Data were

collected through in-depth interviews with 26 students: nine from Mahidol University International College, ten from Chulalongkorn University and seven from Thammasat University. Respondents were either at the undergraduate or graduate level at their respective universities and enrolled in various courses related to the social sciences. Additionally, a group discussion with five students was organized as to see what respondents tended to agree or disagree on when discussing social issues and pro-poor policies. Only a small sample of 26 students underwent interviews as the point of this research is not to entail "generalizability" but to provide answers to the research questions (M. N. Marshall, 1996).

To create a sample, teachers and students from the universities where the field research was undertaken referred candidates that fitted with the case study meaning candidates' social status needed to be middle-class or higher. The determination of what social class the respondents were from was based on the perceptions of the teachers, fellow students and on the respondents' own perception of what social class they ascribe themselves to. The majority of students described themselves as middle-class in spite of some having the economic, social and political capital to be viewed as upper-middle class or elite. There were at times disparity between the respondents' self-perceived social class and external perceptions on the interviewee. Nevertheless, this research did not aim to draw clear distinctions between social classes in Thailand but instead aimed at exploring the

perceptions of the privileged youth; a social group that benefit from a certain economic and social capital suggested by their educational background.

Furthermore, judgment sampling was done as to pick the students that would be suitable for open-ended interviews (M. N. Marshall, 1996). The sample studied was various; the respondents were from different regions in Thailand, they had different political affiliations and were either involved in volunteering activities or non-active. The aim was to create a diverse sample as to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the privileged youth's perceptions and social consciousness.

The interviews were semi-structured to allow the interviewees to freely express their views. However, the same set of questions was utilized in the interviews as to facilitate comparisons between respondents. Nevertheless, such approach resulted in an ambiguous account of the respondents' perceptions as discussions with interviewees yielded numerous contradictions. Despite the fact that it made it difficult to categorize and analyze the data, a research based on interviews rather than surveys projects a more accurate description of perceptions, as people tend to hold contradictory narratives, which surfaces depending on the type of questions asked when discussing social issues (Harper, 2003). Utilizing in-depth interviews results in a confusing picture, however, it depicts the complexity of

people's understanding of societal issues and makes explicit the dynamics of rationalizations.

The questions asked were drawn from the social consciousness framework, therefore, the questions sought to make explicit whether the privileged youth identify with the poor, whether they feel a sense of interdependency with the poor and responsibility towards poverty, whether they feel the condition of the poor can be improved and what policies would be more suited to reduce poverty (De Swaan, Manor, Oyen, & Reis, 2000) (See Appendix B for the interview guide).

1.8 Research Scope and Limitations

The study was conducted at Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University and Mahidol University International College and focused on students enrolled in a course related to the social sciences. The choice of universities was based on the view that due to their prestigious standing, these institutions tend to have a higher concentration of privileged students. However, the scope of this study disabled a complete picture of the privileged youth's perceptions as previous studies have shown that the level and type of education as well as the subjects studied influence the formation of beliefs. Guimond, Bégin, and Palmer (1989) research shows that people who study social science hold more structural beliefs about poverty compared to science and business students. However, Duckitt (1992) notices

that enhancement of structural thinking only occurs if education is progressive rather than authoritarian implying that education can be transformative or a socializing mean to sustain the status quo. Kluegel and Bobo (1993) studied American university students and came to the conclusion that people who attain higher education give less individualistic explanations to poverty than people with lower education level. As the sample was drawn only from educated students in the social sciences, the findings echo the perceptions and the social consciousness of only a portion of the privileged youth.

1.9 Significance of Research

The way we perceive poverty and inequality influences what policies we support, whether we socially include the poor and whether we adopt a pro-social behavior. This thesis provides a cultural understanding of poverty and inequality in Thailand. Looking at values and norms is essential because they impact our behavior. If reforms do not take into account values and beliefs, policies, laws and institutions may end up being unproductive. If perceptions show to amount to a low-level of social consciousness, this may imply that a reframing of poverty, inequality and pro-poor policies that matches values and norms may be necessary to encouraged support for poverty alleviation. Understanding perceptions can be used to construct credible narratives that push people to engage in pro-social behavior

and support pro-poor policies.

1.10 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues were carefully taken in consideration throughout the field research and the writing of this thesis. Respondents were made aware of the topic and aim of the research before they agreed to be interviewed. Additionally, respondents were asked whether they consented to be recorded during the interview. Furthermore, respondents' privacy was respected, their identities remained confidential and the information shared by the interviewees was only used for the writing of this thesis when consent was given.

CHAPTER II

THE CONTEXT OF THAILAND

2.0 Introduction

The first section of this chapter discusses how poverty has been portrayed within the international development discourse and its impact on Thailand's development strategies. It also lays out some of the issues that arose from Thailand's development path. Section 2.2 focuses on the social policies enacted in Thailand as to provide an understanding of where the country stands in terms of welfare provision and what challenges remain. Finally, section 2.3 discusses how the development process transformed Thai society and spurred the undergoing political conflict in Thailand. This section also lays out how the poor and rural people have been portrayed throughout the political conflict.

2.1 Perceptions of Poverty and Thailand's Development Strategy

Perceptions of the causes and nature of poverty has evolved throughout time and impacted significantly the poverty reduction strategies of numerous countries. The way poverty is perceived at the international, national and local level creates boundaries on what actions can be undertaken as to tackle the issue (Brock et al., 2001). At the early stage of development, poverty was perceived as material deprivation, lack of income and the result of underdevelopment (Brock

et al., 2001; Sresunt, 2011). If nations had an average income per capita below $100, their population was considered as poor by the World Bank (Rahnema, 2010). These perceptions of poverty legitimized focusing on modernization and promoting economic growth through the funding of infrastructures in poorer countries (Brock et al., 2001). The perpetuation of the international development discourse that embedded this specific conception of poverty also led people to endorse this view of poverty thus influenced them to perceive themselves as poor and to seek economic gain as to alleviate their situation (Rahnema, 2010).

One could say that the spread of capitalism led to the portrayal of poverty as a negative thing for society that needed to be eradicated. In this process, poor people began to be viewed as responsible for their poverty due to their lack of will to work thus they began to be categorized as deserving or undeserving of help consequently legitimizing the targeting of help and the disciplining of the poor as to integrate them in the economic system (Green, 2006; Gronemeyer, 2010; Rahnema, 2010). Rahnema (2010) analysis of international development discourses since the fight against poverty suggests that the poor have been perceived as underdeveloped people who need assistance from authoritative figures such as the government and international institutions to articulate their needs and to provide solutions.

Such discourses have led to the homogenization of the poor consequently legitimizing a reductionist approach to poverty alleviation through

economic growth regardless of countries' historical and social contexts (Green, 2006; Rahnema, 2010). However, by focusing on poverty and the poor, poverty reduction efforts have aimed for growth rather than justice thus failed to challenge the structure that allows and reproduces poverty (Green, 2006). In spite of being biased, the representation of poverty and the poor within the development discourse persistently shape our reality (Sachs, 2010).

Poverty narratives and poverty knowledge conveyed by international institutions have been disseminated in the societies of numerous developing countries throughout the development era (Brock et al., 2001; Sresunt, 2011). Around 1929, poverty in Thailand was perceived as a lack of income rather than caused by karma like in the later times implying an absorption of the international development discourse in the country (Sresunt, 2011). At the time, Thailand's quest for development followed the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development's advices by focusing on economic growth and on building infrastructures (Demaine, 1986; Sresunt, 2011).

As Sresunt (2011) states, Thailand embraced the development discourse by equaling development to modernization and wealth to infrastructures and to consumption goods, which became signs of development. Efforts for distribution were minimal as it was thought that investments would spur a trickle-down effect as advertised by international institutions (Demaine, 1986). Furthermore,

distributive measures were perceived as a threat for economic growth that would reduce national productivity (Upton, 2010). In this sense, it is said that Thailand underwent an export-oriented industrialization process, which bypassed social justice and social security for its citizens (Upton, 2010).

The development process also led to even more centralization of economic, administrative and political power in Bangkok (Demaine, 1986). Cities such as Bangkok benefited from economic growth and expanded, resulting in greater migration from rural areas to urban areas (Upton, 2010). Thailand's era of economic prosperity throughout the 70's until the late 90's resulted to an increase in income inequality and higher disparity in prosperity between regions and between urban and rural areas (Sresunt, 2011; Upton, 2010). Such income and wealth inequality continued due to unequal rights over access to resources throughout Thailand's economic boom; lands were taken and dams were built at the expense of locals' livelihoods (Higgot & Nesadurai, 2002).

Uneven development and the lack of distribution most likely fuelled resentment among rural people who did not benefit from Thailand's economic transformation, furthermore, it led to the stigmatization of areas that did not exhibit the signs of development such as the Northeast region (Demaine, 1986; Higgot & Nesadurai, 2002; Sresunt, 2011). Higgot and Nesadurai (2002) argues Thailand's success was based on exploitation as the country's competiveness on the

international market was prioritized over labor protection and as privileged people had preferential access to resources and power over locals. Overall, it can be said that between the 80's until the financial crisis of 1997, Thailand followed the neoliberal development agenda (Upton, 2010).

The financial crisis of 1997 changed the development discourse in Thailand. The damages of the crises led to the rise of anti-globalization and nationalistic sentiments within the country (Sirijit, 2013; Upton, 2010). Alternative development paths pushing forward localism and driven by Buddhist normative discourse such as the Sufficiency Economy, which was backed by King Bhumiphol Adulyadej, heads of nongovernmental organizations, academics and other prominent figures, were seen as viable trajectories to counter domestic consumerism and capitalism in general (Sirijit, 2013). The Sufficiency Economy called for self-reliance, localism, moderation and sustainability (Rigg & Ritchie, 2002).

Under the Sufficiency Economy, people were asked to moderate their consumption, become self-sufficient and seek economic opportunities within the nation's market instead of depending on foreign investments and the international market (Murphy, 2009). The emphasis on the community by localism was seen as a way to protect Thai traditional lifestyle and values against previous development efforts that modernized Thailand (Sirijit, 2013). Since the coup in 2006, the

philosophy has been actively pushed within the policy platform by royalist supporters as an alternative to Thaksin's populist policies (Walker, 2008).

In spite of the philosophy popularity, the Sufficiency Economy has been prone to numerous criticisms. Some have argued that the ideology's principles have been used to bend rising economic and political expectations from the rural population (Walker, 2008). By promoting the self-sufficiency of local communities and the self-reliance of people, it has also legitimized inactions towards the development of redistributive policies touching on resources and earnings (Walker, 2008). Furthermore, the philosophy has pushed the responsibility of welfare provider onto communities, the family unit and the individual rather than the state (Bell, 2008; Upton, 2010). In that sense, such social contract disable the creation of social security that could curb social inequalities and the social and political exclusion of the poor in Thailand (Upton, 2010). Furthermore, the philosophy has been largely pushed by the middle-class and the elite rather than the poor and rural people leading some to argue that it has been promulgated for the benefits of the privileged rather than for the mass as the people mostly encouraged to be self-reliant are the underprivileged (Upton, 2010; Walker, 2008).

Even though the development plans in Thailand grew to encompass a multidimensional view of poverty and a broader strategy for development, policies in place during the 1990's suggest that economic growth remained prioritized rather

than distribution (Demaine, 1986; Higgot & Nesadurai, 2002). All Sixth, Seven and Eight National Development Plan taken place between 1987 and 2001 resulted in further urban economic growth exacerbating the exclusion of the Thai rural population and the uneven development process (Higgot & Nesadurai, 2002).

Thailand has endorsed an export-oriented economy by capitalizing on its low-cost labor in the manufacturing industry and by installing a positive environment for businesses, which resulted in the tripling of its GDP per capita in 25 years (Phongpaichit, 2011; Warr, 2011a). This led to a decrease of absolute poverty, a reduction in the number of people working in agriculture and an increase in the average income per person (Warr, 2011a). However, Thailand's development strategy also resulted in high-level of inequality due to a lack of investment in human capital and an overreliance on cheap labor (Phongpaichit, 2011). With a GINI coefficient around 0.52, Thailand is one of the most unequal country in Asia while two third of the population remains economically insecure and less than 10 % of Thai people still subsist while living under the poverty line (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012; Phongpaichit, 2011). Moreover, the beneficiaries of economic growth among the lower social strata has steadily been shrinking; in 2002, 14.93% of the poor gained from economic growth, however, in 2009 this portion was reduced to 8.10% (Vora-Sittha, 2012).

Currently, Thailand is considered an upper-middle-income country due to its Gross National Income per capita reaching 4,210 US Dollars (Vora-Sittha, 2012). Nevertheless, as cheap labor no longer provides the growth rate that it did before, the rationalization to keep income low is disappearing (Phongpaichit, 2011). Furthermore, the high inequality in income has become a pressing issue as the recent political struggle of the past years have been perceived as a result of deepening inequality (Phongpaichit, 2011).

2.2 Thailand and the Welfare State

Thailand's development era has been characterized by low expenditures towards welfare. Traditionally, the family unit was the main safety net for individuals (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012). In 1974, a small program supporting workers was put in place then in 1990 The Social Security Act was established to provide more social securities for employees of companies (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012; Upton, 2010). Such act reached only a minority of the population, however, it grew to encompass self-employed people allowing access to workers to benefits in case of death, disabilities and health problems (Upton, 2010).

The financial crisis of 1997 brought greater pressure to expand welfare schemes (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012). In 1998, the Labour Protection Act was enacted and child stipends and the pension system were added, nevertheless, such

extension of social securities failed to include farmers and people who continued to rely on the securities provided by the private domain, communities, religious and charities (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012; Upton, 2010). In 2004, the Social Security Fund expanded the protection of workers while including maternity leave, child allowances, pensions and unemployment benefits (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012). The Thaksin government also brought the 30-baht healthcare program, now known as the universal health care program, which made healthcare services more accessible to the general population (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012).

The National Educational Reform Act was enacted in 1999, which made education a requirement up to twelve years (Camfield et al., 2012). Compulsory education was eventually extended to fifteen years, tuition fees were lifted and subsidies on certain things such as uniforms and schoolbooks were put in place to cut some of the costs induced by education (UNDP, 2010). In spite of having improved accessibility to education, the rate of drop-outs remains high as some poorer family rely on their children joining the workforce to add to the household income while others cannot cope with the remaining costs related to education (UNDP, 2010). In 2009, up to 57% of employees had primary education or lower while only 8% of the employed workforce had post-secondary education (Phongpaichit, 2011).

Disparities in terms of education remains between regions as people from urban areas benefit from a greater access to education compared to people from rural areas (Funatsu & Kazuhiro, 2003). Moreover, urban areas tend to provide higher quality of education and to offer superior resources compared to educational establishments in poorer regions (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012; Matkhao & Siwawong, 2005; UNDP, 2010). Evaluations of the quality of education throughout Thailand has shown that Bangkok and Phuket provides better quality of education compared to schools in the North-eastern part of Thailand (UNDP, 2010). As education impacts individual's income and social status, educational gap disallow tackling inequalities through education as urban people tend to benefit from greater social mobility compared to rural people (Funatsu & Kazuhiro, 2003; UNDP, 2010). People working in the informal sector tend to have lower educational credentials in comparison to those working in the formal sector thus lower educational attainments reduce access to formal social securities that are provided via recognized employments (UNDP, 2010).

Overall, education in Thailand has been criticized for being poor in quality and for not developing critical thinking and necessary skills to enhance productivity and respond to the demands of the labor market (Camfield et al., 2012; UNDP, 2010). Low expenditures directed towards education raises issues in terms of development, as Thailand may need to expand its pool of skilled labor if it wants to

avoid the middle-income trap and become a higher-income country (Phongpaichit, 2011; UNDP, 2010; Warr, 2011a).

2.3 Thailand Social Transformation

The decade of political conflict and the creation of the Red Shirt movement show that Thailand is undergoing major transformation and its social contract is in crisis (Glassman, 2011; Saxer, 2012). Glassman (2011) argues that the recent political struggles are signs that the royalist hegemony is decaying as rural people no longer endorse it. Capitalism being well established in Thailand means people in rural areas are no longer self-sufficient but instead often earn an income outside the agriculture sector and now demand to also benefit from the economic growth they contributed to (Glassman, 2011). Glassman (2011) argues that Thaksin populist policies challenged the royalist hegemony by encouraging consumption and business initiatives in rural areas consequently going against the traditional view of the rural life where rural people should not indulge in consumerism in spite that the elite and the middle-class in Bangkok do (Glassman, 2011).

Glassman (2011) argues that economic development has resulted in a split of Thai society where the elite and the middle class who both benefitted from the development process are on one side while the poor and rural people lay on the other side. Villagers' protests due to economic development already took place

in the 1970s and throughout the mid-1990s reflecting the longevity of the urban-rural divide in interests present in Thai society since the development process (Kerbo, 2012). Many perceive that the middle class has shown a preference towards the elite lifestyle and taken a conservative stance towards the recent political conflict by ruling against the Red Shirt movement (Camfield et al., 2012; Glassman, 2011; Ockley, 2005; Saxer, 2012). Throughout the Red and Yellow shirt conflict, the elite discredited the rural poor by promulgating the idea that they were being manipulated by charismatic personas rather than acting for their own interests (Glassman, 2011). The middle class has been seen as endorsing this negative perception of the poor by also blaming the rural people for vote-buying instances rather than blaming the ones who bought votes (Ockley, 2005).

Elitist conservative discourses molded by traditional values have portrayed the poor as ignorant, morally flawed and undemocratic while these perceptions have been used to delegitimize the underprivileged cause and demands (Saxer, 2012). As the struggle between the poor and the rich, the reformists and the traditionalists, remain unresolved, there is a need for the creation of a new narrative that could promote a coalition as to enable positive social change for Thailand (Saxer, 2012). As Saxer (2012) argues, Thaksin imposed a new social contract, but consent needed to be gained first for change not to be blocked later on.

In spite that the traditional social order prevails, people at the low end of the social hierarchy have made it clear that they are no longer passive and want the government to be responsive to their needs (Saxer, 2012). Due to the capitalist development Thailand has undergone, social change seems inevitable but the question remains how it can be accepted among all strata (Glassman, 2011; Saxer, 2012). Conservative discourses are still present though their dominance in Thai society is in decline while progressive discourses are gaining in popularity among the middle-class and the elite (Saxer, 2012).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed Thailand's development path and the development discourses that have been propagated within Thai society. The social policies enacted in Thailand were also mentioned as to provide an understanding of where Thailand stands in terms of welfare provision. Finally, it was deemed as necessary to explore the undergoing political conflict present in Thailand. Elitist discourses within the political debate have spread negative portrayals of the poor while the Thai middle-class has been viewed as endorsing such discourses and siding with the elite. This common outlook on the political conflict makes studying the privileged youth perceptions on poverty, inequality and the poor an interesting case, as there is a lack of empirical data on the subject. The following chapters in this

thesis explore such perceptions by discussing the findings from the field research in relation to the theoretical framework of social consciousness.

CHAPTER III

PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY AND THE POOR

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the privileged youth understanding of poverty using the findings from face-to-face interviews with students and factual knowledge from previous researches on poverty in Thailand throughout the analysis. As to provide a basis for the study of social consciousness, this section discusses interviewees' estimation of the amount of poverty in Thailand, what is poverty, who are the poor and where are they located. Perceptions of poverty were explored as to see whether poverty was seen as an issue for the privileged youth. If poverty were perceived as non-existent or not a problem, actions towards poverty reduction would most likely be deemed as unnecessary. Furthermore, the concept of poverty and the poor were discussed as to understand what is poverty for the privileged, who are the poor, what type of poor they can identify and what differentiates the poor from the privileged. Such perceptions were believed to influence support for pro-poor policies (Reis & Moore, 2005).

3.1 The Privileged Youth's Assessment and Description of Poverty

The findings from the in-depth interviews indicate that the privileged youth believes poverty to be widespread and an austere issue in Thailand. All students interviewed claimed that poverty in Thailand remains a severe problem even though some stated that Thais tend to have a higher standard of living in comparison to people from previous generations. Such assumption corresponds with Thailand's successful decrease of poverty from 33.8% in 1988 to less than 9% in 2008 (Bird, Hattel, Sasaki, & Attapich, 2011). The majority of interviewees believed 60% or more of the Thai population are poor while a considerable amount of respondents thought that poverty affects at least 40 to 50 % of Thailand's population (see Table 1).

These figures differ greatly from official statistics from the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, which affirms that only 8.5% of Thais are poor (Sresunt, 2011). This inconsistency could imply that how poverty is perceived among the privileged differ from how poverty is identified and measured at the national level (Sresunt, 2011). Nevertheless, the students' high estimation of the extent of poverty in Thailand most likely supports the view that for the privileged youth, poverty remains a concern in Thailand.

Table 1 **Students Estimation of the Percentage of the Thai Population Living in Poverty**

Estimate Percentage	Number of Students
30 %	1
40-50 %	11
60-70 %	13
More than 70 %	1
Total	26

Among the respondents, the majority perceived poverty in terms of deprivation meaning the poor are the ones who cannot fulfil their basic needs and cannot access education and health services. "If you are poor it means you don't have your four basic needs met. If you have clothes, if you have accommodation, if you have enough food to eat, if when you get sick you can access healthcare services and have access to education, for me you are not poor" (Interview, Tham1, 13.06.13). Such description matches some of the problems facing the poor in Thailand as lacking adequate housing and sanitation, struggling to feed oneself and one's family as well as being unable to send ones' child to school remains the reality of a portion of underprivileged people in Thailand (UNDP, 2010).

A small minority of respondents viewed poverty as multidimensional, as beyond sustenance, by pointing out that being poor entails lacking political power, opportunities, being disenfranchised and not having one's rights respected. "Being ignored, being excluded, being devalued, being just somebody that people look down on, this is what poverty is to me" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13). Nevertheless, what was poverty for the students in general fell under the line of absolute poverty rather than relative poverty; only a small minority talked about poverty by referring to the disparity in quality of life and income among people. "Poverty in Thailand means disparity in terms of quality of life and inequality in terms of economic income, as opposed to other countries like in Africa where poverty would be described as not having enough to eat" (Interview, Chula7, 27.06.13). However, for the majority, lacking the capacity to increase ones' social status and wealth was often seen as outside of poverty. "Some can meet their basic needs but they cannot prosper, doing the same job will not get them there, they think they are poor but I don't think so" (Interview, Chula9, 27.06.13).

Overall, respondents voiced a narrow view of poverty by perceiving it as a condition that disables people from meeting their minimum necessities to subsist. However, such depiction of poverty does not match with the findings from existing researches that focus on the experiences of the underprivileged. Students overlooked the working poor in Thailand who are also vulnerable and subject to

insecurities due to irregular employment and income (Naruemon & McCargo, 2011; Puchong, 2007). Moreover, the majority of students neglected mentioning the social exclusion that comes with poverty as the poor are often subjected to discrimination and are marginalized (Puchong, 2007). Finally, the lack of voice, the lack of political power and rights was hardly raised while these are issues people that underprivileged people in Thailand have been raising in the recent years (Naruemon & McCargo, 2011; Puchong, 2007). More could be said from a comparison from the privileged youth's description of poverty with the poor's view. Nevertheless, those few examples show that how the students conceive poverty differs in some ways from the poor's experience of poverty in Thailand.

In-depth interviews showed that students' depiction of poverty was not based on personal interactions with the poor as hardly any students mentioned that they either converse with the poor or have a personal relationship with underprivileged people (See chapter 7). This was made explicit throughout interviews as only the minority of respondents could expand on the concept of poverty by adding elements coming from personal interactions with underprivileged people. From this, one can imply that the respondents' articulations of poverty were drawn from conventional definitions of poverty rather than personal experience.

Considering that the international development discourse has now moved towards endorsing and propagating a multidimensional view of poverty, it is

puzzling why the respondents conceived poverty solemnly in terms of deprivation. On the other hand, such conception of poverty falls in the line of the sufficiency discourse present in Thailand. As King Bhumipol Adulyadej declared: "What is important is to have enough to eat and to live" (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2002). Such perspective is reflected in the privileged youth's narratives on what is poverty, as for most respondents, being poor is to not "have enough to eat and to live" (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2002).

3.2 The Privileged Youth on Identifying the Poor

In general, the student's identification of the poor tended to be based on appearances; the type of clothing they wear and the type of goods they consume. "You can see a very clear divide between who is rich and who is poor in Thailand, in terms of the clothes they wear, the brands they buy, the car they own..." (Interview, MUIC7, 25.06.13). In spite of agreeing with the previous statement, many students believed it has become harder to tell who is poor in Bangkok due to the city's thriving culture of consumerism. Furthermore, numerous students argued that certain street vendors, taxi drivers, motorcycle taxi drivers and beggars are capable of earning a decent amount of money in spite that these people are commonly perceived as poor. For these reasons, some students believed that the poor could be identified by the way they speak, react and interact with the non-poor rather than by external clues. The places where people choose to socialize were

also seen as a key determinant. "The poor wouldn't hang out in the same places as us, would you see a low-income person hanging out in Thonglor[4]?" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

Previously, it was stated that poverty for the privileged youth was explained using conventional terms by equaling it to people's incapacity to fulfil their basic needs and access basic services such as health care and education. However, the identification of the poor was frequently based on what the poor could not afford in comparison to the privileged consumption-behavior and lifestyle. "If they are poor they can't afford to buy our stuff" (Interview, MUIC6, 21.06.13). This shows a different conception of poverty where the disparity between rich and poor is taken into account. Considering the high estimation of poverty in Thailand given by respondents, one could argue that the privileged views on the percentage of poor people in Thailand are influenced by the country's large wealth gap and by material possessions being strong social status symbols (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012; Sresunt, 2011; Vorng, 2011). In spite that the students referred to poverty in absolute terms, the poor were not identified as the ones who cannot fulfil their basic needs but the ones whose lifestyle and consumption habits were frugal compared to the privileged.

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[4] Thonglor is a trendy and upscale area of Bangkok, which attracts affluent crowds such as the students interviewed for this research.

3.3 The Privileged Youth on Locating and Differentiating the Poor

When discussing where is poverty in Thailand, all students believed it to be everywhere, however, most students believed that rural areas, especially within the Northeast region, have a higher concentration of poor people. Students showed to be aware of Thailand's long-standing disparity between regions where rural areas have a significant higher concentration of poor people compared to urban areas (Baker, 2007; Bird et al., 2011; Warr, 2011b). It was noted in 2004 that 93% of the poor lived in rural areas while data from 2008 estimated that 40% of the poor were situated in Northeast Thailand (Bird et al., 2011; Warr, 2011b).

On the other hand, a considerable amount of students thought poverty to be more visible in Bangkok due to the wider economic gap between people. "There are a lot of 'hi-sos'[5] in Bangkok, they go to Paragon to buy expensive bags or expensive clothes while there are poor cleaning ladies working around them. There is this big gap between rich and poor in Bangkok, it's pretty evident, I would say the gap is more evident in Bangkok than in rural areas" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13). Data on urban poverty differ, some argue that there were only 635,000 urban poor in 2007, however, others believe that there are at least 1.3 million people living in poverty in the urban areas of Thailand (UNDP, 2010). In spite of

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[5] The expression 'hi-so' is a Thai slang colloquially derived from the English term 'high society'. It is used to refer to particular places, lifestyle, things and people that symbolize wealth and cosmopolitanism (Vorng, 2011).

having less poor, students felt that the close juxtaposition of wealth and poverty within Bangkok made the issue of poverty more explicit.

The majority of students perceived the nature of poverty as differing depending on its location; rural poverty was often seen as more bearable compared to urban poverty. "The rural poor still have farms, they have food, they can be self-sufficient, I think they are higher in status compared to urban poor because they have lands at least" (Interview, Tham2, 26.06.13). Almost all interviewees expressed the views that the rural poor suffer less because they can easily fulfil their basic needs while they also benefit from a safety net provided by the community. "I think it is universally known that rural people live together in a huge community and usually tend to help one and another" (Interview, Chula1, 19.06.13).

Students' views on rural areas tended to be more positive; the rural poor are living off their land in a close-net community where each member share the same living conditions, the same status, and cooperate with each other rather than compete. Students also held the belief that the rural poor tend to be more satisfied with what they have compared to their urban counterpart due to living in an environment characterized by less economic disparity. "If you are a rural poor you are happy because you have your own farm, you can interact with people in your neighbourhood and there is not so much competition. In Bangkok, you go to the slum, there is no space, the urban poor see Central World, they see the people in

there and then they compare themselves and want what they can't have"
(Interview, MUIC1, 05.07.13).

The plight of the urban poor was perceived as harsher due to the
higher inequality level, the competitiveness and materialistic culture present in urban
settings especially in Bangkok. "I think living in urban areas make poor people want
to be like the rich. Rural people don't see brands in a department shop, if you live in
town you see what others have and you work hard to get what they have"
(Interview, Chula3, 03.07.13). The notion that the urban poor suffer more than the
rural poor was often driven by the students' view that materialism is more
pronounced in urban areas and has negative effects on the poor. "In my hometown,
30 km away from the city, we are just satisfied with only a normal house and going
to the market... There is no need for an expensive car or bag. In Bangkok, you see
more people struggling because people want to own brands because they want to
be in trend, they want to be in the group" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13).

Additionally, students viewed living in urban areas as more expensive
than rural areas; therefore, the urban poor had to struggle more for less than they
would have if they were living in rural areas. "If you are considered poor in Bangkok,
you cannot afford a meal; food in Bangkok is more expensive than in the rural area.
People in rural area, they might have their paddy field, they may have animals at
home, so they can survive. In the case of the slums in Klong Toey, they might not

have food and land because it is too expensive in Bangkok" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13).

Only one student believed that both the urban poor and rural poor face difficulties therefore neither group is better off than the other. "I would not say urban poor are less better off than rural poor, they have different problems. A poor person from the countryside may be worried about the weather, whether their crops are going to be ok. Here in Bangkok, if you are poor, you can't afford the BTS for your children so they have to wake up at 3 AM to take the bus because the traffic is too long. I think their situation is just the same but involving different struggles" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13).

When discussing the differences between the urban poor and rural poor, most students believed that the type of work the poor were engaged in differed depending on their location; the rural poor work in the agricultural sector while the urban poor work in the service sector. For the students, the rural poor were the farmers while the urban poor were the taxi drivers, maids, street vendors etc. A few respondents believed differentiating the urban and rural poor is misguided as numerous rural poor flow back and forth from urban areas, thus the urban poor can also be the rural poor. "A lot of the rural poor come into the capital or urban centres to find jobs, which means that it is sort of intertwined with each other, you

cannot focus on rural poor without focusing on urban poor too" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

The later view fits with the increasing migration of rural people to urban areas, studies have shown that 80% of migration from the Northeast region goes towards Bangkok and cities around the metropolitan (Amare, Hohfeld, Jitsuchon, & Waibel, 2012). Looking at urban poverty, it has been noted that the majority of the urban poor are actually migrants from rural areas (UNDP, 2010). Furthermore, rural people tend to no longer rely only on agriculture as a source of income but also migrate to urban areas to work in the informal economy and the service sector (Amare et al., 2012). For these reasons, the rural and urban poor are more intertwined than what the majority of students perceived.

Looking at factual assessments of rural poverty, it can be said that closed to all students romanticized the life of the poor in rural areas. In spite of being perceived as more capable of fulfilling their basic needs, food insecurities affect mostly the rural poor, especially the ones residing in the North and Northeast regions of Thailand (Isvilanonda, 2011). It has been estimated that 97% of households affected by food poverty are situated in rural areas (Wangthamrong, 2010). Even though they may produce food, some farmers in those regions cannot fulfil their dietary requirements due to the fluctuation of food prices (Isvilanonda, 2011). Furthermore, unlike the students' image of the rural poor living off their land,

numerous rural poor do not own their land or have a land too small to provide subsistence for their family (Lubanski, 2012; UNDP, 2010). Besides, farmers from small farm tend to work hard, earn little and are at high risk of falling into debts (Sirijit, 2013).

In spite that rural areas have undergone socio-economic transformations, the student's perceptions of the rural areas reflect the old traditional conception of the agrarian life (Glassman, 2011; Sirijit, 2013). Various accounts from villagers suggest that materialism, consumerism and individualism are on the rise in rural areas (Fuller, 2011; Glassman, 2011; Sresunt, 2011; UNDP, 2010). However, findings from interviews insinuate that the privileged youth retain an idealized vision of the rural life where peasants are contempt and self-sufficient.

Nonetheless, this lack of correspondence between the reality and the privileged youth's image of the rural life is not surprising. First of all, the privileged youth's interactions with the rural poor are either minimal or non-existent thus their perceptions of this social group comes mostly from secondary sources (See chapter 7). At the same time, the privileged youth has been bombarded by a constructed image of the village life where the rural poor are portrayed as happy living off their lands. Even Siam Paragon, a high-end shopping mall that holds luxurious brands and cater for privileged people, hosted "the Sufficiency Photo Exhibition" in 2008, an

exhibition presenting pictures of happy villagers, modestly dressed, enjoying farming in their pristine rural area (Elinoff, 2013).

This constructed image of the rural life has been widely propagated in Thailand while the physical and social distance separating the privileged youth and the rural poor makes it hard to alter it. On the other hand, the physical location of the urban poor makes it difficult for the privileged youth to romanticize urban poverty. Even though there is still a large social distance between the privileged youth and the urban poor, both groups occupy the same space at times, which renders the urban poor's plight visible. In other words, it is difficult to idealize urban poverty when the privileged youth frequently see slums and people living on the streets begging for food or money.

Furthermore, what can be denoted from the privileged youth narratives on the rural and urban poor is the belief that capitalism and consumerism present in cities negatively impacts the poor while the agrarian life is more suited and positive for the underprivileged. In brief, the poor are better off living in rural areas and excluded from the capitalist modern economy that is more suited for the privileged. This belief echoes the values and norms embedded in the Sufficiency Economy that calls for localism, self-sufficiency and the moderation of consumption among people (See chapter 2).

As Walker (2008) notices, the burden of embodying such ideals has mostly fallen on the poor and rural people while the privileged have been able and allowed to indulge in a highly consumerist and materialistic urban lifestyle. However, studies on rural areas demonstrate that there is a growing desire among the rural population to move away from the sufficient agrarian economy towards the capitalist modern economy and the lifestyle that comes with it (Camfield et al., 2012; Walker, 2008). This disjuncture between what the privileged deem as beneficial for the poor and the poor's aspirations has been coined as partly fuelling the undergoing political conflict in Thailand (Albritton & Bureekul, 2008; Glassman, 2011; Saxer, 2012). Discussions with the respondents suggest that this group has absorbed the ideals and the constructed imaged of the rural life spread by conservative factions in Thailand.

3.4 The Privileged Youth on Targeting Pro-Poor Policies

When discussing the areas of Thailand which pro-poor policies should focus on, the students' perception that urban poverty is harsher was not reflected in their answers. No students believed that pro-poor policies should target mainly urban areas. Instead, a significant number of respondents believed that pro-poor policies should target rural areas while the rest thought that policies should aim at tackling poverty in both urban and rural areas (See Table 2).

Table 2 Areas Pro-Poor Policies Should Focus on

Areas	Number of Students
Urban Areas	0
Rural Areas	11
Urban and Rural Areas	10
Missing Value	5
Total	26

Students who thought that pro-poor policies should encompass urban and rural areas felt that it would be more efficient to reduce poverty because it would affect a greater portion of poor people in Thailand. "You cannot separate the rural from the urban, once you do that it may have repercussions to the other... If you do both, than it may help alleviate poverty" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13). However, the students felt that policies should match with the poor's needs depending on the area they reside. "They should focus on both but in a different context; find out what they really need, not apply the same policies for all areas" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13).

Other students felt that targeting rural areas is more appropriate because of its higher concentration of poor people and its lack of development. Interestingly, many students believed that targeting poor people in rural areas is beneficial because it would reduce the flow of rural people coming into Bangkok.

"Focus more on rural areas because essentially is where poverty mostly exist because a lot of people move to urban centers to look for jobs and opportunities, if you focus more on rural areas you won't have people moving into urban areas" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13). Students were aware that Bangkok tended to attract rural people as the metropolitan has benefitted from Thailand's economic development. However, they believed that uneven development has led to overpopulation and greater competition in Bangkok (See chapter 7). For those students, targeting urban areas would only fuel urbanization and exacerbate its negative effects.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter aimed at providing a basis for the assessment of the privileged youth's social consciousness. Discussing poverty in Thailand with the respondents revealed that the privileged youth perceived poverty as widespread as respondents' estimation of poverty in Thailand was significantly higher than official data. Furthermore, all respondents believed that poverty is an issue in Thailand consequently indicating that actions towards poverty reduction remain needed. The way they conceived poverty tended to be in absolute terms; the poor are the ones who cannot fulfil their basic needs and cannot access basic services such as education and healthcare. Only a minority of interviewees viewed poverty as multidimensional and showed an understanding of the poor drawn from personal

experience. In spite of being aware that poverty exists in Thailand, the lack of knowledge drawn from interactions with the poor among respondents suggests a social cleavage between the poor and the privileged youth. Keeping in mind De Swaan's theory, social distance between the poor and the non-poor can impact the privileged sense of social interdependency thus impinging the development of a social consciousness among the non-poor.

A salient point was also that students showed greater concern for the urban poor than the rural poor. Rural poverty tended to be idealized by respondents as the students felt that the rural poor can be self-sufficient by living off their lands and escape the pressures of consumerism and materialism present in urban settings. Such perception was viewed as drawn from the socially constructed image of the rural life disseminated in Thai society. Furthermore, ideals embedded in the sufficiency economy philosophy seemed to underline the discussions with the privileged youth on rural and urban poverty.

Nevertheless, their lack of concerns for the rural poor was not reflected in their choices of predominantly targeting pro-poor policies to rural areas or both rural and urban areas. Such statement could seem contradictory to the privileged youth's perceptions that the urban poor suffer the most, however, the privileged youth showed to support economic and social development in rural areas as to reduce rural-urban migration in Thailand. Responses suggested that internal

migration came as a threat to the students. This reflects De Swaan's thought that privileged people can be driven by their self-interests to support poverty alleviation's policies. Interviews with respondents suggest that it was in the privileged youth's interest to reduce rural-urban migration therefore they supported pro-poor policies which focus on developing underprivileged regions as to counter the flow of rural people coming to Bangkok and other urban settings.

CHAPTER IV

PERCEPTIONS OF INEQUALITY AND THE CAUSES OF INEQUALITY IN THAILAND

4.0 Introduction

Thailand's poverty reduction efforts have led to a significant decreased in poverty instances, however, economic inequality has risen throughout the country's economic development (Phongpaichit, 2011). Today, Thailand is one of the most unequal countries in Asia having a GINI coefficient around 0.52 (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012; Phongpaichit, 2011). This chapter discusses the privileged youth's perceptions of inequality, its nature and depth. The aim of looking at how students perceived inequality was to see whether the privileged youth believed there is a link between poverty and inequality in Thailand. Furthermore, this section aimed at making explicit what types of inequalities within their country the privileged youth perceived; do they believe there is disparity of wealth, inequality of income or subtle inequalities in social relations? Additionally, discussing the causes of inequality with the respondents was seen as important as to understand whether inequality is seen as natural, legitimate or perceived as an issue for the privileged youth. Finally, perceptions of inequality were explored as to see whether they impact the respondents' policy choices for poverty reduction.

4.1 The Privileged Youth's Views on Inequality

All respondents believed that inequality was rampant and multidimensional in Thailand. There was a clear consciousness among the students that they perceived inequality as having detrimental effects on society and a major concern. No students expressed the view that inequality is natural or necessarily desirable. This seems surprising as many have argued that Buddhist thoughts and the concept of "know thy place" in society have been providing a rationalization that lead to many Thais accepting the natural order where people are born unequal (Albritton & Bureekul, 2008; Matkhao & Siwawong, 2005). Numerous students mentioned that Thaksin and the political conflict of the recent years in Thailand raised awareness on the issue of inequality, which is now more seen as a problem than before. "Before, you were born different and it is part of karma, there was a traditional explanation to inequality, it used to be like that until Thaksin highlighted that it is not just karma. There is less of a general acceptance of the 'natural order' these days" (Interview, MUIC2, 25.06.13).

Inequality was not only perceived in terms of the economic gap between rich and poor but also in terms of gaps between regions due to the uneven development process Thailand underwent. Respondents often mentioned that there is a large disparity of income, investments, quality of education and job opportunities between rural areas and urban settings. "You would see a lot of people in Bangkok

would get so much more opportunities compared to other parts of Thailand. I think it is something very unfair, I understand Bangkok is the capital but on behalf of Thailand, you should develop each parts of Thailand equally" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13).

The most common type of inequality talked about by students was the unequal access to opportunities between rural and urban people. "We are talking about a lack of opportunities, opportunities are delineating. If you are born in a certain setting, in a certain place, you have certain opportunities that are available to you. If you are born somewhere else, no matter how hard you try, you are super smart, these opportunities don't present themselves, you are stuck in poverty and can't get out" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13). The majority of students felt that people living in Bangkok have access to more opportunities than their rural counterparts due to the concentration of socio-economic development in the metropolitan.

Furthermore, a significant number of students felt that rich people have access to more opportunities in comparison to poor people due to a culture of cronyism where personal relationships supersede meritocracy. This was viewed as reducing opportunities to prosper for people who do not have access to privileged people's networks. "If you have a kid and your child wants to work for this company and you have a friend who is part of this company or the manager of it, you can just ask him to hire your daughter...You get privileged depending on your surname, if your

dad is a popular soldier and did something important for Thailand, than you get more opportunities. We have this kind of patronage system, brother and sister system, I think it's one of the causes of inequality and that inequality is a part of poverty" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13). In that sense, the importance of social capital in Thailand was seen as reproducing privileges while creating an exclusive society (Puchong, 2007).

Students were aware that by studying in a prestigious university, they have access to those networks and opportunities that many are denied of. "To be frank, in universities such as this one, when you go through the system of 'rub-nong'[6] where you get to know your seniors and juniors, people form ties there and then they are connected even after college. All these universities provide the socialization for those people that have already money and a position in society to perpetuate this system. I don't see an infiltration of people who are not economically well-off in this university" (Interview, MUIC7, 25.06.13). "People who are in Chula have connections by themselves. People sometimes don't realize that by getting in a famous university this is how they form connections without knowing and all the connections in Chula are fine quality" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13). Respondents

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[6] 'Rub-nong' stands for the tradition within Thai universities where seniors organize a camp for first-year students to create bonds between newcomers and older students. In spite that it is perceived as a tradition that encourages unity, the practice has been criticized for encouraging psychological, and at times physical, abuses against younger students (Phakdeewanich, 2013). Furthermore, by forcing onto freshmen the idea of respect for their seniors, 'rub-nong' promotes the indoctrination of social hierarchy among students.

perceived such connections that come with going to a prestigious university as also part of the structure that reproduces inequality in Thailand.

Repeatedly inequality was voiced as also part of social relations and all students agreed that higher-status, wealthy and well-connected people get preferential treatments while the current power structure always fails the poor. "There is a saying in Thailand, 'ruay mai pid', if you are rich, you're never wrong" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13). Numerous students thought that richer people get more respect and get treated better by others compared to the poor who are often excluded and ignored. "You get more respect if you are rich, like I said, people most of the time only notice the richer people and take for granted the poor. Its common knowledge that people tend to look up but do not pay attention to what is happening down" (Interview, Tham7, 12.07.13). Some students believed that this feature of Thai society even impacts the judicial system where the poor and the rich have an unequal access to justice. "If rich people do something wrong, because of their rich background, because of their status in society, they don't get punished" (Interview, Chula3, 3.07.13).

4.2 The Privileged Youth on the Causes of Inequality

Table 3 illustrates the main causes of inequality mentioned by the 26 respondents during in-depth interviews. The groupings of the causes of inequality

present in the table below were formed through coding responses from interviews. Even though the causes of inequality are divided in clear categories, the different causes were often expressed as interlinked by respondents. Predominantly, Thai culture was used as to explain the prevalence of cronyism, nepotism and the lack of political will to reduce inequality in Thailand. This could imply a consensus among the privileged youth that the Thai culture plays a central role in the creation and persistence of inequality in Thailand.

Table 3 Causes of Inequality in Thailand

Causes of Inequality	Number of Students Agreeing
Uneven development path	9
Elite network/Cronyism	8
Hierarchical culture	7
Elite network/Nepotism	6
Capitalism/Free market/Globalization	6
Lack of political will	2

* Total interviewees = 26.

4.2.1 Capitalism and Thailand's Development Path

Table 3 points out that closed to a quarter of respondents viewed capitalism, the free market and globalization as having widened the gap between the rich and the poor in Thailand. "The oppression of the poor and the prosperity of the rich people is the result of capitalism" (Interview, Chula7, 27.06.13). A considerable amount of students blamed Thailand's high level of inequality on the government development efforts that led to the concentration of wealth in certain areas leaving the rest of Thailand underdeveloped. "I think the government causes inequality when they focus only in particular areas like Bangkok or some big cities. In the south they focus on economic growth only in big cities but then again the areas around there are really poor" (Interview, MUIC8, 25.06.13).

Thailand's uneven development path was also seen as having created disparity in quality of education consequently putting rural people at a disadvantage. "There is a disparity between schools in Bangkok and schools in rural areas. People who study in Bangkok have the chance to get good teachers, good facilities, they can go to museums, they can go on field trips. For rural students, they don't have those chances" (Interview, Tham5, 15.07.13). The different standards in education between regions were seen as disabling rural people to compete with urban people for jobs in cities. "You come from a high school from the countryside but you don't meet the standards that is set by the working market in the city therefore you cannot find a

job. Then you are in the city and you have nothing to do so maybe you start working in the informal economy or you work in a job that does not pay that much. The education level is so different than it already sets you apart from the very beginning" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13).

Education was not only delineating because of the quality but also because of the employers' perceptions of certain universities, which put at an advantage some and leave behind others. "Mahidol, Chula, Thammasat, the reputation of these universities are higher in terms of getting jobs. If you have a university degree from Khon Kaen, it does not mean much in Bangkok compared to these three universities. A lot of companies are biased towards institutions' reputations, they judge by the university's reputation rather than the person" (Interview, Chula5, 28.06.13). Consequently, this portion of students viewed Thailand's uneven development path as having created disparities in education that pushes rural people into low-paid employment while putting at an advantage people from Bangkok.

4.2.2 Elite Network: Nepotism and Cronyism

As a cause of inequality, a considerable amount of students referred to the elite that by benefitting from a high concentration of power and wealth sustain its interests to the detriment of people outside their group. "Some of the

people who direct the country are rich people, they are business people, they are

elite, they are related to the King, and they will protect their interests and their

group. You have to think that Thailand it works in network" (Interview, Chula3,

3.07.13). Numerous students interviewed believed that powerful people in Thailand

contribute to the persistence of inequality and poverty by engaging in cronyism. "It's

probably the elite network and I would even argue the network monarchy[7] that fuels

inequality. They maintain their network through different provinces, they have

families who work in different provinces and so in terms of opportunities that you

might have, you are better off if you are connected to those networks than if you are

not" (Interview, MUIC7, 25.06.13).

Students' perceptions of those elite networks tended to be highly

negative as they saw these groups as exploitative and filled with capitalist plutocrats.

"The rich wants to be richer so they just make the rules because they control

everything and distribute the wealth so little. They own the factories, they earn a lot

but the salary they give to people below them is much lesser than the profit they

make" (Interview, MUIC5, 25.06.13). Due to nepotism, some students viewed the rich

in Thailand as benefitting from a political monopoly that disables greater distribution

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[7] Network monarchy is a term coined by Duncan Duncan McCargo (2005) as to explain the power structure in Thailand. It is used to refer to the King and its surrogates such as Prem Tinsulanonda, the head of the Privy Council. Duncan McCargo (2005) argues that in spite that the King has been portrayed as above politics, the network monarchy yields considerable influence in Thai politics. Interviews with the privileged youth suggest that they also believe the network monarchy holds considerable power within Thai society while they perceive that such network contributes to the persistence of poverty and inequality in Thailand.

of resources and wealth throughout society. "Political participation determines the economic distribution. If rural people have no rights to participate in politics, they have no rights to join and to distribute the resource of the country to themselves" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13). Overall, respondents believed that the elite cause inequality because they limit economic opportunities and political participation, which disables greater distribution of wealth and social mobility for the underprivileged in Thailand.

4.2.3 Thailand's Hierarchical Culture and the Lack of Political Will

Several students pointed out that the high level of inequality in Thailand was inevitable because of the Thai culture, which does not value egalitarianism. "I believe inequality comes from the hierarchy, this feudal system that still exists in my society. If you got royal blood, you are still higher just by birth. If you are born from a wealthy family, than you are perceived as better than others. Inevitably there is going to be inequality because there is not this idea in my society that people are born equal" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13). "The problem is the values in Thai society, this culture of praising people above you. They think that higher-class people or richer people are better.... If you keep thinking that rich people are better, it gives a justification for the inequality to be there" (Interview, Chula10, 02.07.13). The hierarchical culture in Thai society was perceived as shaping social interactions while creating divisions between social groups. "Inequality is

everywhere, Thailand has so many classes and we categorize people and use different words to refer to them. That's already inequality, with the language you use, it changes the all course of things, how you react to them, how you talk to them, how you treat them..." (Interview, MUIC1, 05.07.13).

A considerable amount of respondents mentioned that inequality is engrained in Thai culture and impacts all spheres of Thai society. The hierarchical culture was perceived as shaping social interactions as people's decisions on who to associate with was seen as heavily based on others' social standing. Consequently, students believed that inequality in social capital is reinforced by Thai culture; people in general prefer to adhere and associate with individuals that are from the same social class or higher. "In college, you would see the gangs of people that are together, most of them are from the same class. The poor will stick together and the rich stick together because they have the same lifestyle. If you are different, you find a new group" (Interview, Chula3, 03.07.13).

Repeatedly, being part of a privileged network was mentioned as an important factor for success and acquiring wealth but students believed that the underprivileged do not have access to the same network as they do due to the segregation between social classes and the discrimination of the underprivileged. "When I go to MUIC, I see a lot of rich people, when you go out of MUIC, you still see the same people, you are still with your own class, which is a small percentage

of Thailand. Even if you meet someone that you don't know at all, you can trace whom you know in her network, at the end, we all know the same people. The rest, people outside your class, you don't interact with them" (Interview, MUIC1, 05.07.13). Client-patron relationships were perceived as part of the Thai culture and the most effective mean to move upward in society. A significant portion of respondents perceived such system as perpetuating inequality and poverty by fuelling in-group favoritism, which excludes the underprivileged from opportunities and hinders social mobility. "If you want progress in your life, you need connections, if you don't have connections it's really hard to make it" (Interview, Chula1, 19.06.13).

A minority of respondents raised the point that inequality is persisting due to the lack of political will to take valuable actions against this issue. "The issue of inequality has been raised, the economic issues have been raised, social issues have been raised, but nothing gets done, there is a lack of political will" (Interview, Chula9, 27.06.13). Discussing the source of this lack of political will, students expressed the view that privileged people in general do not desire parity with people that they deemed to be in lower strata of society. "If you are in an upper position, why would you want to be equal and unnoticed? You feel good about yourself when you look down, we never want to actually help the poor, we want them to stay there so we can feel better than them" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13). "The Thai

mentality is that you like someone to be under you so it can make you feel good about yourself, being higher is better" (Interview, Chula3, 03.07.13). This kind of desire of being superior to others was also linked to the Thai culture and perceived as a barrier to the distribution of wealth in Thailand.

4.3 Conclusion

Throughout interviews, students linked in one way or another inequality to poverty as numerous respondents believed that inequality in Thailand contributes to the persistence of poverty. Unequal social relations, disparity in development efforts between regions and cronyism were seen as disabling social mobility by fuelling the concentration of opportunities and wealth among people from the higher social strata. Furthermore, the concentration of power in the hands of the few due to nepotism was viewed as monopolizing political power thus excluding segments of the population from participating in politics. Consequently, decisions on the allocation of resources and public goods were perceived as mainly elite-led therefore political actions were in line with elite's interests rather than the public good.

Inequality in Thailand was explained at times, as a political problem meaning policies implemented and the allocation of resources by people in power were perceived as fuelling inequality. However, it could be argued that students

mostly viewed inequality as a cultural problem. The Thai culture was seen as breeding nepotism and cronyism as people tend to work in network made of people who are related to them or from the same social class. Additionally, the lack of political will was often attributed to culture as students mentioned that privileged people would not want to uplift the poor or the less fortunate as it would impact their social standing within the Thai social hierarchy. Nevertheless, students showed awareness of their privileged position within society due to their enhanced social capital that was perceived as an important component for social mobility in Thailand.

Another salient point from the field research was that students showed greater concerns for the issue of inequality of opportunities between rural and urban people and rich and poor people than for inequality of wealth and income, which were considerably less mentioned throughout interviews. This could suggest an underlying understanding of social justice among the privileged youth where inequality of opportunities, rather than inequality of outcomes, is perceived as unjust (Olin Wright & Rogers, 2011). Conceptions of social justice have shown to impact the type of pro-poor policies people support (Bullock, 2006; Hans, Janmaat, Hoskins, & Green, 2012). People who stand for equality of outcomes tend to support more redistribution than supporters of equality of opportunities (Bullock, 2006). Findings from this research support such statement, as chapter 6 will show that

students showed greater support for policies that enhance opportunities rather than

redistribute wealth.

CHAPTER V

THE PRIVILEGED YOUTH CAUSAL EXPLANATIONS TO POVERTY

5.0 Introduction

To explore whether the privileged exhibit a sense of social responsibility towards poverty reduction and the poor, one has to link the causal attribution to poverty, who is to blame for poverty, and what actions should be undertaken to reduce poverty (M. Lopez, 2013). This chapter discusses the privileged youth's causal explanations to poverty. The aim was to discern whether the privileged youth attribute poverty to the individualistic characteristics of the poor, to exterior socio-economic forces also referred to as the structure or to the behavior and attitudes of the privileged. It was presumed that if the respondents perceived poverty as caused mainly by the poor, they would exhibit a low sense of social responsibility towards poverty and the poor in Thailand. Findings suggest that the privileged youth foremost blame the privileged and the structure for poverty in Thailand. However, such perceptions often co-existed with the belief that the poor are also responsible for the persistence of poverty. The privileged youth narratives on the causes of poverty showed to embed contradictions and exhibited signs of a split-consciousness among the respondents.

5.1 Privileged Youth's Perceptions of the Main Causes of Poverty in Thailand

Table 4 illustrates the main causes of poverty expressed by the respondents during the first part of the interview on the causal explanations to poverty. Table 5 shows the individual comments from respondents on the causes of poverty that were not endorsed by other respondents. The results demonstrate that respondents shared similar causal explanations to poverty and inequality; capitalism and the free market, Thailand's uneven development path, the lack of political will and to some extent the monopolization of opportunities by privileged people were mentioned as both causes of inequality and poverty. For this matter, it can be said that respondents linked inequality to the persistence of poverty. The monopolization of opportunities by privileged people ranked high among respondents. An also high number of respondents showed to blame the government for causing poverty by implementing inadequate policies. Additionally, the lack of access to education of adequate quality was seen by a significant amount of interviews as a main cause of poverty.

Data suggest that respondents did not feel strongly that poverty is caused by a lack of economic resources due to corruption and low tax revenues. Instead, the findings show that poverty is perceived as a political problem where the government's lack of effectiveness, the misguided allocation of resources and the lack of distribution of power cause poverty. However, undertones of individualistic

attributions to poverty can be perceived in the respondents' answers. The second part of the interview, which concentrated on the contribution of the poor and the privileged to poverty, shows that the privileged youth felt that both social groups bear responsibilities for the persistence of poverty in Thailand. The poor and the privileged contributions to poverty are discussed more thoroughly in section 5.2.

Table 4 The Privileged Youth's Perceptions on the Main Causes of Poverty

Main Causes of Poverty	Number of Students Agreeing
Monopolization of opportunities	9
Badly designed policies	8
Low quality of education	7
Concentration of power and wealth within the elite and key institutions (unequal power relations)	6
Capitalism/the free market/export-oriented economy	6
Uneven development path	5
Culture of consumerism and materialism	4
Corruption	3
Low tax revenues	3
Lack of political will	2

*Total interviewees = 26.

Table 5 Extra Comments from Respondents on the Causes of Poverty

- Income Inequality
- Lack of Employment
- Lack of Infrastructures
- Oppressive Society
- Culture of Inequality

5.1.1 Capitalism and Thailand's Uneven Development Path

The field research showed that some causes of poverty and the causes of inequality were similar. As mentioned before as a cause of inequality, some students viewed the development of capitalism, the free market and globalization in Thailand as causes of national poverty. "Traditionally, a lot of Thais were farmers but industrialization pushed a lot of people into the industrial sector that is where the wages get pushed down because of capitalism. There are fewer lands for agriculture so people can't go back, they are forced to move into urban centers and become cheap labor" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13). Thailand's export-oriented economy was seen as contributing to the persistence of poverty as the poor are necessitated for cheap labor thus investing in human development becomes unnecessary for national economic prosperity. "One of the reasons why Thailand is growing years after years and has this large percentage of money influx, is because

they rely on an export-oriented economy, which is solely reliant on cheap labor, that is what drives the country" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

Another similarity with the causes of inequality was the mention of Thailand's uneven development path as a causal explanation to poverty. "The concentration of wealth in Bangkok, Thailand is too centralized, everything is in Bangkok. Job opportunities, good education, even politics, it's all in Bangkok and everything depends on Bangkok" (Interview, Tham5, 15.07.13). Uneven development between regions was seen as disadvantaging people outside of Bangkok who, having less access to opportunities and to education of high quality, were inevitably stuck in poverty. "The government is not providing enough education to fill these gaps to produce qualify individuals that can take these jobs. Without opportunities these people would never be able to go up the next step or make a higher income or be in a profession that would make them more money" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

5.1.2 Education

Responses to the causes of poverty significantly converged on education, the lack of access to education outside urban areas and the low quality of education at the primary and secondary level throughout Thailand. Respondents felt that in spite of education being accessible for some people, the low quality of education in Thailand disable the formation of productive and well-rounded citizens.

"I think we have plenty of school and university but the quality is not good enough. What they teach is not really useful for the real world... High school makes you narrow-minded, you need to think like what your teacher say. When you get out of high school, you start realizing that the world is different. You need to obey, only obey, what the teacher says at school, it does not teach you how to think critically." (Interview, Tham7, 12.07.13).

Moreover, students felt that privileged and urban people have greater chance to get into higher education establishments compared to poor and rural people. "In Thailand people have to study very hard during high school to get in the best universities. Most of privileged student, they have chance to pay for tutors, for extra classes to prepare them for entry exams or they can go abroad. But in the rural area, people who do not have the money, they can't access those services and they only study in their hometown. Being poor is a lack of chance to access certain educational opportunities" (Interview, Chula3, 03.07.13). Lack of access to good education was perceived as reproducing the social structure as poorer people do not have the necessary educational credentials to compete against the privileged on the job market. "The problem is that education is not distributed evenly, its concentrated mostly in urban centers but if you are uneducated, you don't have much job opportunities you don't make a lot of money, your kids are most likely to

be poor again" (Interview, Chula5, 28.06.13). Among those students, access to good

education was perceived as essential to increase social mobility for the poor.

5.1.3 Bad Policy Designs

A significant portion of respondents viewed government policies as

fuelling poverty by encouraging consumerism among the poor. "The government

produce poor quality policies, for example the first-car tax rebate, it's an incentive to

buy cars at cheaper price but it's essentially cars that the poor cannot afford, it just

puts poor people more in debt" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13). Many students felt

that the government populist policies stuck farmers and poor people into debts.

"The farmers now have more debt, because the current government they tried to

spoil them, give them more money, but they don't teach them how to use the

money. I think poverty is getting worse because of that" (Interview, MUIC6, 21.06.13).

This group of students perceived national policies that increase access to loans and

lower the cost of consumer goods as misguided because they believed that instead

of alleviating poverty, they promote unwise consumerism, which results in the lower

strata being stuck in poverty because of having debts they cannot manage. "There is

a lack of planning, the government never promote savings at all instead they support

this consumption-oriented economy through their policies and it causes more

poverty. I know few people that have many credit cards and they use one card to

cancel another debt… Thai people lack the idea that debt are meant to be paid"
(Interview, Tham6, 01.07.13).

The perception that policies, which encourage consumerism and
debts, causes poverty is not a causal explanation of poverty that has been raised by
privileged people in studies on social consciousness and attributions to poverty
conducted in other countries. However, such perception reflects the common
criticisms held against populist policies propagated by conservative factions in
Thailand. Consumerism among rural people and the poor has been heavily portrayed
as problematic in Thailand; on the other hand, consumerism among the privileged is
often overlooked or even glorified at times. There is a double standard present in
Thai society where the poor and rural people have the duty to retain a traditional
lifestyle away from consumerism and capitalism while the privileged and Bangkokians
are viewed as fit enough to be part of the modern economy. Underlying the
perception that badly designed policies contribute to poverty lays the belief that
poor people are in debt mostly because of their own incompetence in managing
money rather than external factors.

5.1.4 Corruption and the Tax System

Only a minority of students viewed corruption as a main cause of
poverty in Thailand. "If you do a project with the government, there is about 70 %

that go to the politicians and 30 % go towards the project. And the worse is that we see it as ok. Not only the government needs to be transparent, I think everyone needs to be" (Interview, Tham6, 01.07.13). Such group of students believed corruption to be pervasive thus not only present at the government level but also in all level of Thai society, though privileged people were seen as the main enactors and beneficiaries of corruption. "Corruption comes from the rich people... Even in my family we use corruption" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13). Numerous students stated that they have used corruption or witness instances of corruption often referring to family members or friends of theirs as examples. Nevertheless, the main concerns for poverty lied in corruption among politicians and the acceptance of such practice among Thai people, which was perceived by students as allowing the siphoning of necessary revenues to reduce poverty in Thailand.

A few students believed that poverty persist in Thailand because of the lack of resources caused by the low accumulation of taxes revenue. "A lot of taxes cannot be collected, there has been a lot of proposal on taxes but they never been passed and this inhibit a lot of social securities or social welfare" (Interview, MUIC1, 05.07.13). Some students believed that the lack of revenue from taxes was due to insufficiently high taxes on unused land and the large informal economy in Thailand. "The problem is that there are certain industries, part of the informal economy, like street food, they do not pay taxes" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13). On

the other hand, one student whose family owns a business mentioned that tax evasion is more pervasive as it is part of the business culture in Thailand. "I have to be honest right? My family business does not pay the full amount of tax, corporations have tricks not to pay the full amount of tax, it is normal in Thailand" (Interview, MUIC3, 21.06.13). This portion of students viewed low tax revenues as causing poverty by disallowing the accumulation of monetary resources for investing in poverty alleviation and the expansion of welfare in Thailand.

5.1.5 Concentration of Power and Wealth in the Minority

Numerous respondents believed that power and wealth was very much concentrated in the hands of the few, which they believed to be a cause of poverty. "There has been a monopolization of power since the country was born, first in the power of monarchy, political power and now economic power, it never changes" (Interview, Chula9, 27.06.13). Some students believed the concentration of power creates poverty because the underprivileged are underrepresented and their interests are overlooked. "The bureaucratic polity just exploits the locals more and more and do not really return the development to the rural areas. It also cuts the political participation from the rural areas; the poor people just want to participate in politics because they want their own resources to come back" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13).

The centralization of power was seen as combined with a concentration of wealth in few key institutions, which perpetuates poverty by not distributing the wealth of the nation. "One of the main cause of poverty in Thailand is any institution that accumulates too much wealth and does not spread that wealth, one of these institutions is one of the major institution in Thailand[8]..." (Interview, MUIC2, 25.06.13). Numerous students believed that the elite linked to the monarchy consolidate a significant amount of power, which allows them to protect their interests and accumulate wealth without having to distribute resources and capital to the less fortunate. In that sense, this portion of students felt that unequal power relations in Thailand results in greater poverty and inequality of wealth.

From this discussion on the main causes of poverty perceived by interviewees, it can be seen that students adopted structural explanation to poverty. Nevertheless, the explanations of students show to be underpinned by the beliefs that both privileged people and the poor contribute to poverty. Such finding is discussed more thoroughly in the section below.

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[8] A significant portion of the respondents was critical of the power structure in Thailand especially of the elite linked to the palace. Due to the lèse-majesté law that prohibits criticisms against the royal family, the majority of the respondents' comments on the subject were left out though their perceptions are insinuated throughout the discussions on the concentration of power and wealth and its role in creating and sustaining poverty and inequality in Thailand.

5.2 Who is to Blame for Poverty?

This section examines the respondents' perceptions of the individualistic causes of poverty in Thailand as mentioned during interviews. Individualistic causes stands for attributing poverty to poor people's attitudes and behavior. Unlike common attributions to poverty researches, this section not only looks at the perceptions of the poor's contribution to poverty but also at the respondents' views on the privileged people's role in the persistence of poverty. Exploring the respondents' perceptions on privileged and poor people in relation to poverty aimed at understanding who are to blame for poverty for the privileged youth.

Table 6 illustrates the diverse answers endorsed by respondents. The table shows that more students attribute responsibility for poverty to privileged people. However, the majority of respondents believed that both the poor and the privileged contribute to the persistence of poverty in Thailand. Privileged people were mainly viewed as causing poverty by monopolizing opportunities, lacking sensitivity towards the poor and poverty and by acting out of self-interest rather than for the public good. A lesser number of respondents also believed that privileged people tend to discriminate and exploit the poor for their own benefits.

The majority of the respondents also perceived the poor as responsible for poverty. The poor's passivity, complacency, laziness and lack of ambition were seen as major barriers for poverty reduction in Thailand. Additionally, more than a quarter of respondents characterized the poor as a deviant class; the poor are alcoholics, gamblers and drug users. The poor's addictions and their lack of capacity to manage adequately their finances were also viewed as contributing to poverty.

Table 6 The Privileged Youth's Individualistic Attributions to Poverty

Individualistic Attributions to Poverty	Number of Respondents Agreeing
Privileged people's attitude and behavior contribute to poverty	24
Privileged people discriminate the poor	4
Privileged people monopolize opportunities	9
Privileged people do not care about the poor	10
Privileged people exploit the poor	5
Privileged people are self-interested/ protect their interests and wealth	8

Poor people's attitude and behavior contribute to poverty	19
Poor people have bad consumer behavior	6
Poor people engage in deviant behavior (addicted to drugs, gambling or alcohol)	7
Poor people are passive/complacent/lack ambition	9
Poor people are lazy	8

*Total interviewees = 26.

5.2.1 The Privileged Youth Perceptions of the Poor

When asked whether the poor contribute to poverty, some students blamed the poor's deviant behaviors for poverty. "If you are poor you tend to be an alcoholic, if you are poor you tend to be addicted to drugs and gambling" (Interview, Chula1, 19.06.13). Such group of students believed that the poor's bad habits lock them in a cycle of poverty. "They don't know how to manage their money; their spending behavior is that they would spend on things that are not necessary, like drugs, alcohol, TVs, cars... They overspend, but yes they invest, only in buying lottery tickets" (Interview, MUIC6, 21.06.13).

A portion of students believed that the poor have bad consumer behavior, which leads them to spend money on unnecessary goods and on fuelling their addictions. Some of the respondents believed that the poor's bad spending habits could be attributed to their lack of education. "One of the main problems is that they do not have enough education, they are not taught properly how to manage, save or invest their money. If they do not learn how to manage their money adequately or know how to invest in things that would help their future or future generations, poverty would never reduce, it's a vicious cycle" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13). Other students thought that consumerism and materialism are predominant in Thailand thus it is the structure that influences negatively the poor' spending behavior (see Table 4). "The idea of consumerism is so high in Thai society, no matter how much money you throw at them, if they don't know how to use the money, they will end up using it in the wrong way like buying stuff they cannot necessarily afford" (Interview, Chula5, 28.06.13)

The attitudes of the poor were often perceived as contributing to poverty in Thailand. The poor were seen as lazy by a significant amount of interviewees consequently their lack of desire to work impinged their ability to get out of poverty and increases their dependency on the government's policies. "They are lazy for some reason, they do not work, they don't want to work and then they start blaming the government for their poverty but they don't do anything

themselves" (Interview, MUIC8, 25.06.13). However, some attributed laziness to not only the poor but Thai people in general. "One of the main characteristics of Thai people is that they are relatively lazy, they want the money but they do not want to work, they want a high-paid job without going through education. It does not work, they always want to take the shortcut (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13).

Certain students believed that the environment of areas in Thailand influence people's attitudes towards working and the poorest areas of Thailand tended to produce lazier people. "If you look at the students from the Northern or North-eastern parts of Thailand, they do not work hard compared to the southern parts or Bangkok. Could be the region area that propels them to be like that" (Interview, Tham5, 15.07.13). Many students believed that the urban areas produce more hardworking people due to the higher level of competition found in cities. Competitive attitude was often used to refer to people from Bangkok and perceived as encouraging productiveness while the lack of competitive drive was often attributed to provincial people. "Rural people are not as competitive as Bangkokians, so they don't really work hard, they just work to survive not to be better" (Interview, Tham2, 24.06.13).

The poor were also perceived by several students as passive, complacent and as lacking ambitions, which result in the poor accepting their social condition and not thriving to move up the social ladder. "There is a general

acceptance among poor people of their condition because they feel they have been born into this particular class because they may have done something wrong in their past life. There is this general acceptance of the way things are, the status quo, they don't aspire to be above, they just accept it" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13). Often, students believed that Buddhist thoughts such as the notion of karma contribute to the poor's passiveness and contentment. The poor, in comparison to the rich, were often perceived as more complacent and as lacking ambition. "Poor people do not think of the future, they work for today only to buy subsistence for today. The rich people think about the future, they think about expanding their business, not just about today" (Interview, Chula3, 03.07.13).

Nevertheless, more than a quarter of interviewees of students believed that the behaviors or attitudes of the poor do not contribute to poverty. Instead, they perceived the poor as victims of a system that disables them to upper their living conditions. "I think people work hard to live better but the structure in the society doesn't allow those who do to live better. There may be people who lost their way and just get drunk all the time, that is the picture of the rural area that we see but I really believe that the proportion of these people is very little comparing to the rural people that are affected by the structural problem" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13).

Those students believed that the framing of the poor as alcoholics, drug addicts and lazy were portrayals conveyed by the privileged and the media. "I think richer people say that poor people are lazy because they want to find an excuse, they just want to make themselves feel better by blaming the poor. The mass media always represent that picture, the kids from the poor family have problems because the father is addicted to gambling and the mom is an alcoholic, the media creates this idea. The rich kids have the same condition but the difference is that their parents have the money to afford it" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13).

Among those students, the passiveness of the poor was in fact attributed to society's failure to include the poor. "The idea that you accept the natural order, you are born into this caste and you will be stuck into this caste is because there is a lack of opportunity already. If there is this lack of opportunity, you accept that you are there because you won't get those opportunities anyway" (Interview, Chula7, 27.06.13). Moreover, unlike other students, they believed that the poor, far from being lazy, work harder than the rich. "The poor people that I spoke to and some poor people in my family as well, they work hard just to get by, if you compare the amount of working hours, they work more than the middle-class and the rich" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13).

5.2.2 The Contribution of the Privileged to Poverty

Throughout the interviews, closed to all students believed that privileged people bear responsibility towards the persistence of poverty in Thailand. A significant portion of students believed that privileged people contribute to poverty by monopolizing opportunities through their network (see Table 4). "People who are already rich, they maintain and collect their wealth among their family, they don't give out the authority. The system to select the people in organizations, even if they say they want someone smart, someone good, they select the people that are related to them. The gatekeepers always want someone who is not necessarily outstanding but someone they know" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13). Students often mentioned that the lack of meritocracy in Thailand is sustained by privileged people consequently they limit opportunities to the underprivileged. "There is a network of people up there that stop the opportunities from going downward. The problem is that a lot of people are below the food chain and they never get the opportunities because people who are at the top limit them" (Interview, Chula10, 02.07.13). The monopolization of opportunities by privileged people was perceived as one of the main cause of poverty and inequality in Thailand by a significant portion of respondents.

Privileged people's attitudes towards the poor and rural people were perceived by a minority of respondents as fuelling the discrimination of poor people.

"There is discrimination towards poor people and you can see a sort of feudal like society in Thailand. A lot of these rich people or so-called elite like to keep the status quo and their mindset towards poor people is distorted. They do not want to interact with poor people, they think poor people are a result of a lack of ambitions or a lack of motivation or because they are just simply lazy. Middle-class and upper-middle class share the same beliefs about poor people because they aspire to be rich, they aspire to be elite too" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

Those respondents raised the point that there are many stereotypes about the poor and rural people endorsed by privileged people, which disable the interactions between people from different social background. "Some of my friends do not even look at the poor people even if they are around us. They say 'don't get closed to them they are dangerous', even though they don't do anything. People just judge them because they are poor but it is not fair" (Interview, Tham7, 12.07.13). Students mentioned that the negative portrayals of the poor and rural people not only lead to their economic exclusion but also their political exclusion. "There is this common say in Thailand that when you look at rural people you say 'ngo chon jeb'... Privileged people think that rural people or poor people are so stupid with the way they vote that eventually they hurt themselves" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13). Stereotypes about the poor and rural people were perceived by a few students as means for the privileged to silence the political voice of such social groups. "When

poor people say something about their concerns, privileged people say they are stupid so we don't have to listen to them, there is no dialogue" (Interview, Tham6, 01.07.13).

Privileged people's character was often described negatively compared to the poor; students portrayed richer people as self-serving, insincere and self-interested. "People in lower parts of society tend to be friendlier, more open, there is not much of a hidden agenda but for upper-middle and elite, there is usually a catch that comes with every relationship. If you want to be my friend, you would have to have something that could benefit me" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13). Those traits of character were seen as fuelling the exploitation of the poor and disallowing genuine actions for helping the poor. "A lot of richer people are more driven by self-interest; they would rather exploit poorer groups for their own personal interests than help them" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13).

Numerous respondents endorsed the idea that the elite make their wealth on the back of the poor. "Poverty benefits the elite; they have to keep the poor where they are so they can prosper" (Interview, Chula9, 27.06.13). The privileged were seen as benefiting from the poor not only economically but also socially as having poor people means privileged people's status is elevated. "People who are not poor they maintain the system, they feel better when someone is below them. This idea is very strong and unconscious in Thailand" (Interview, Chula6,

08.07.13). Students believed that privileged people contribute to poverty by keeping the poor where they are because they benefit from it.

Furthermore, a significant portion of students felt that privileged people's self-interested nature disabled the distribution of power and wealth in Thailand. Such students felt that privileged people uses their power and wealth to manipulate the political arena to their advantage and to the detriment of the public good and particularly the poor. "Rich people pay into whatever causes they want to happen... Things like nepotism, things like using connections to gain political power and all, this defines the policies that come out, power plays a role in public policy. Why do you think Thaksin got thrown out? Because a lot of his policies supported the working class, which changed the status quo for many people... So they thought, we don't need Thaksin, because he is not helping us, he is helping out other people so let's overthrow him, it's a pattern in Thailand" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13).

The middle-class was viewed by the respondents as sharing the same interests than the elite. Numerous students felt that middle-class people's desire to upper their social status inevitably leads them to oppose themselves to any policies that distribute wealth to the underprivileged. "A lot of the middle-class aspires to be elite too, so they don't really care about the poor. They don't agree with money going towards pro-poor policies, they don't agree with their money being invested in

poor people. They would agree with their money being invested in policies that would benefit them just like the elite" (Interview, Chula10, 02.07.13).

Repeatedly, students kept mentioning that privileged people's lack of caring towards poor people contributes to poverty in Thailand. "The big problem is rich people do not really care about the poor or want to help them because they do not have any connections with them. Only when they need some kind of resources or want to get benefits, they will go to the poor but that is it. That is the problem; they only focus on themselves unless they want something" (Interview, Tham7, 12.07.13).

The majority of respondents felt that privileged people do not do charitable acts out of concerns for the poor but mainly to gain face in society. "I have rich friends who give money to beggars but not because they care. The notion that a beggar could rise up to their status would not be accepted. Here, you donate for face, they don't want equality, they want other people to perceive them as charitable" (Interview, Chula2, 27.06.13). There was a general feeling among students that privileged people do not feel concerned about poverty and the poor therefore they fail to act or support benefits for the poor. "There is not a genuine push to help poor people, I can't generalize and say no privileged people care but there is obviously nothing there that proves that they do" (Interview, Chula7, 27.06.13).

Students believed that in most cases, privileged people do not care because they tend to be ignorant about poverty and the poor or they simply look down at the poor. "They don't care about others, they believe they are better than the poor" (Interview, Tham5, 15.07.13). "Around this campus there are homeless people, we can see it every day. I don't think poverty is necessarily hidden in Bangkok, is just that people don't care about it. In my group of friends, they don't notice those kinds of people, they just don't care. I think it is related to culture, the belief that you should not look at poor people, you should just pass them and not care about them" (Interview, Tham7, 12.07.13)

The discriminative behavior of privileged people towards the underprivileged and their disregard towards poverty were seen as impacting the government's actions towards the social inclusion of the poor. "I do think that the general population that looks down on the poor contributes to poverty because if the general population doesn't care what makes the government care?" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13).

5.3 Conclusion

Findings on the causal explanations to poverty suggest that respondents believed there the causes of poverty and inequality are interlinked. Overall, a significant portion of respondents blamed the poor for poverty in Thailand.

The poor were often referred to as lazy, complacent, passive and as lacking ambition. Such mindset was perceived as hindering poverty alleviation as the poor do not have the drive to thrive and get out of poverty. These perceptions can impact support for pro-poor policies as respondents' answers imply that the poor are at risks of falling into dependency. If the poor are not seen as hardworking and mentally inclined to compete and better themselves, the privileged could perceive pro-poor policies as promoting dependency of the poor on the state. Additionally, perceiving the poor as wasteful and incapable of managing their money can be followed by a disdain for handouts; money given to the poor would inevitably be wasted, therefore it will not alleviate poverty. Finally, blaming the poor for poverty is problematic as if the privileged youth believe that the poor are responsible for their own poverty, initiatives that seek to transform the structure that produce and sustain poverty could possibly be viewed as irrational or misguided (Mcauliff, 2012).

Nevertheless, more than a quarter of the respondents did not blame poverty on the poor but believed that the downfalls of the poor are misperceptions. Those respondents attributed poverty to the structure and privileged people rather than to the poor. More respondents viewed privileged people as responsible for poverty in Thailand. The monopolization of opportunities by privileged people and their lack of sensitivity towards poverty and the poor showed to be the main concerns among the privileged youth. The findings suggest that in spite of blaming

the poor for poverty, the privileged youth is aware that privileged people's actions or inactions impact poverty reduction in Thailand. This awareness that privileged people and socio-economic pressures contribute to the persistence of poverty implies that the students showed signs of social responsibility, an important component of social consciousness.

Overall, the majority of respondents' causal explanations to poverty tended to contradict themselves. Numerous respondents believed that the poor are victims of structural factors that keeps them in poverty, however, such responses were often juxtaposed to an individualistic explanation to poverty, that the poor are to blame for their situation (Bullock et al., 2003). Studies that explore people's explanations of poverty have denoted that the juxtaposition of structural and individualistic explanations of poverty is common (Hunt, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Kreidl, 2000). The theory of split-consciousness states that conservative and challenging beliefs about the social hierarchy are not exclusive but can be mutually held in ones' consciousness (Kreidl, 2000). Kluegel and Smith (1986) argue that internal contradictions on the causes of poverty suggest that beliefs are "compartmentalized" thus the dissonance present in individuals' belief system remains unconscious to them (Kreidl, 2000). Interviews with the privileged youth supported the split-consciousness theory as the respondents often voiced opposing

thoughts on the causes of poverty and did not show signs of awareness that they frequently contradicted themselves.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRIVILEGED YOUTH'S PERCEPTIONS OF PRO-POOR POLICIES

6.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the privileged youth's perceptions of pro-poor policies. Section 6.1 explores the respondents' attitudes towards economic growth and distribution for poverty reduction. Section 6.2 discusses the interviewees' views on current pro-poor policies in Thailand. Section 6.3 examines the pro-poor measures that were the least supported by respondents while section 6.4 lays out the means to reduce poverty that were perceived as the most feasible among respondents. Finally, section 6.5 discusses the privileged youth's views on who should be responsible for reducing poverty in Thailand. Findings suggest the respondents' perceptions of the poor, the causes of poverty and their conception of poverty impact their policy preferences. Furthermore, discussions on pro-poor policies with the privileged youth suggest a preference for equality of opportunities over equality of outcomes. Finally, the policy preferences and the respondent's views on responsibility for poverty reduction insinuate that the privileged youth exhibit a low sense of responsibility towards the poor.

6.1 The Privileged Youth on Prioritizing Economic Growth or Distribution

During the interviews, respondents were asked whether poverty reduction policies in Thailand should focus on stimulating economic growth or encourage the distribution of wealth and resources. Table 7 illustrates the data, which demonstrates that support for economic growth was low among respondents in comparison to support for greater distribution.

Table 7 Respondents' Views on Economic Growth and Distribution as Means to Reduce Poverty

Means to Reduce Poverty	Number of Respondents Agreeing
Distribution	19
Distribution Combined with Economic Growth	4
Economic Growth	3

*Total interviewees = 26.

The majority of respondents believed that economic growth is insufficient to reduce poverty. A minority of respondents thought that focusing on

economic growth should be prioritized. "I think economic growth should be the priority because it is better for all the sectors of the country and not just for the poor" (Interview, MUIC6, 21.06.13). Only four students believed that economic growth could help reducing poverty though it has to be combined with poverty reduction measures. "Economic development creates jobs, provides the government with funds that can go in areas where money is needed but only economic development is not good enough" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13).

A significant portion of the respondents doubted that economic growth benefits the poor. "The economic growth in Thailand is quite high already the problem is they cannot trickle-down the resources to the rural areas. That is the problem of neoliberalism; resources do not trickle-down to poor people" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13). Numerous students pointed out that Thailand's economy has been booming for years but the minority of the country's population has benefitted from national growth. "There is a large percentage of economic growth every year but the problem is that there is not enough of that money going around equally... Even though there is a lot of economic growth is does not mean it eliminates poverty, it just means it creates more gaps, thus it creates more poverty" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

The majority of students supported this idea that economic growth creates more disparity therefore it is not desirable for poverty reduction. "If there is

economic growth, the ones that get the benefits from it are the elite. Even if the GDP of Thailand reaches 8 to 9%, what about the workers? They still receive the same wage" (Interview, Tham5, 15.07.13). Most respondents believed that Thailand needed more distributive policies while some of them raised the point that focusing on distribution would still allow the economy to keep growing, as it would increase domestic consumption by creating a more inclusive economic system. "Policies should focused more on reducing the gap not on economic growth... if people make more, they consume more, so it creates growth by itself" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13).

Interestingly, the minority who prioritized economic growth over distributive policies attributed poverty to the attitude and behavior of the poor and believed that privileged people do not contribute to poverty. In that sense, their support for economic growth could be explained by their causal explanations to poverty; the poor are undeserving of help because poverty is caused by the poor thus privileged people do not bear responsibilities for poverty consequently they should not share the cost of poverty alleviation. Such statement matches with numerous attributions to poverty studies' findings, which shows that people who believe poverty to be caused by the poor's characteristics tend to not support pro-poor policies (Bullock et al., 2003; Feagin, 1975; Huber & Form, 1973; Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

Among the other students there was a clear preference for distribution of the country's economic development rather than economic growth as a mean to alleviate poverty. Their preference supports the respondents' underlying view that the issue of poverty in Thailand is not caused by a lack of economic resources or economic development. They perceived that the accumulation of resources in specific areas such as Bangkok and the concentration of wealth in few groups of society contribute to the persistence of poverty in Thailand. In that sense, poverty was repeatedly linked to inequality; as economic growth was seen as having exacerbated disparity, distribution seemed a better avenue to counter poverty for these respondents.

6.2 The Privileged Youth's Views on Pro-Poor Policies in Thailand

This section explores the respondents' attitudes towards pro-poor policies already in place in Thailand. Respondents tended to not agree with any pro-poor policies that have been proposed in Thailand in the recent years. In their opinion, pro-poor policies in Thailand exacerbate domestic issues rather than improve people's quality of life. "A lot of the populist policies that have been initiated recently are not beneficial in any way. Computer tablets, tax rebates, subsidies and even price ceilings for agriculture goods, it is not beneficial in any way, all it does is that it just creates more and more problems" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

Furthermore, students felt that the policies are badly implemented and exploited by privileged people. "I come from the rural area and the way our municipality manages the money is very dark. I cannot see how they judge who to give money to, even for public education; some people don't even receive the money from the government. Officials always take the money for themselves first and then give the rest to the poor, this is why the system never works out. As much as the government gives, it is still how they feed their own fat cat" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13). Privileged people were often perceived as taking advantage of pro-poor policies to the detriment of the poor. "There are always rich people or people in power who are out there to exploit these policies" (Interview, Chula3, 03.07.13).

Numerous students mentioned that the government lacks of foresight by designing policies without considering the long-term effects of such policies. "The pro-poor policies do not work at all. I think the government launches these policies just for promotion, they are too short-term and when we look at the long-term, they do not work at all" (Interview, Tham7, 12.07.13). Many viewed populist policies as a tool for political support rather than a true attempt to improve the lives of the poor. "None of them are beneficial because they cause more problems in the long run, they are not well-thought, they are just there to make the parties popular" (Interview, Chula2, 27.06.13). In spite of agreeing with the negative statements discussed above, few students believed that populist policies have brought the poor

and their interests at the forefront of political discussions. "In the past the government did not mention the poor people, maybe current policies are not the best but it is good that they started thinking about the poor" (Interview, Chula3, 03.07.13).

The only policy that all students approved was the universal health coverage, as they believed health to be a basic need and the program to actually benefit the poor. "The healthcare scheme, this is a very pro-poor policy and the government wants to target the poor because these people are vulnerable compared to the middle income or high income group. I think most of Thai people benefit a lot from this healthcare scheme" (Interview, Chula1, 19.06.13).

6.3 Undesirable Pro-Poor Measures: Cash Transfers and Increasing the Minimum Wage

This section discusses the pro-poor measures that interviewees were strongly opposed to. There was a strong feeling among numerous respondents that cash transfers to the poor would be unhelpful to alleviate poverty. A significant portion of these students believed that handouts would fuel the bad attitudes of the poor and would deter their will to get out of poverty. "If we try to help the poor, they will not try to get out of poverty. If you give them money they might get lazier" (Interview, Tham2, 24.06.13). Another rational student' held against cash transfer was that handouts would fuel unwise consumerism among the poor. "No

matter how much money you throw at them, if they don't know how to use the money, they will end up using it in the wrong way like buying stuff they cannot necessarily afford" (Interview, Chula5, 28.06.13).

The majority of students mentioned that monetary assistance for the poor is undesirable because the poor cannot manage effectively their finances. "Giving out money does not work because a lot of people here do not know how to manage their money" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13). Some respondents believed that cash transfer could deepen social issues such as alcoholism and drug abuse among the poor. "I don't think giving money works, in the urban area there is troubles, if you give money to the poor people, it might work but many will do drugs... The minority will spend it for good things" (Interview, Chula9, 27.06.13). A small minority of students did not approve cash transfer because they perceived such policy as unable to reduce poverty because it would not tackle the structure that creates poverty.

The respondents that showed support for cash transfers believed that it should be targeted to only recent unemployed people who show to be actively looking for a job (see Table 8). "There should be a string attach, we would give you money if you do something. For example, in the US, to get unemployment money you have to show that you are looking for a job, if you are not looking for a job you don't get that money. In Thailand, if you are unemployed you should have to at

least show you are looking for a job". In that sense, those students agreed to help the active poor with unemployment benefits but a significant majority of students did not trust the poor with money. Closed to a fifth of the students felt that giving out goods to the poor would be a more effective option because it would insure that the investment would go towards providing a livelihood to the poor (see Table 8). "We should give them goods, not money. For example, food, clothes, medicine, things so they can meet their basic needs" (Interview, MUIC9, 25.06.13).

Another highly unpopular policy among a significant number of respondents was increasing the minimum wage as a mean to alleviate poverty. A portion of these students believed that increasing wages would result in higher inflation. "Increasing the minimum wage, it helps short term but in the long-run it creates inflation" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13). Because of inflation, a higher minimum wage was perceived as inevitably hurting the poor in the future. "If food prices increase, even if the poor have a higher salary, it does not matter, their situation remains the same" (Interview, Tham1, 13.06.13). Some students thought that a higher minimum wage would also impact negatively the business sector, which would put at risk the economy thus the poor. "Thailand does not really have cheap labor anymore with the 300 Baht a day increase minimum wage…. I think the increase of the minimum wage is pretty hard for the small to medium enterprises and it is not really beneficial for poverty reduction" (Interview, Tham5, 15.07.13).

There was a similar rational between the lack of support for cash transfers and institutionalizing higher wages, some students believed that if the poor would earn more it would possibly lead to greater issues due to the poor lack of skills to manage their finances; more money for the poor would result in more money spent on drugs, alcohol, gambling or unnecessary goods. "Increasing income for certain sections of society is not necessarily beneficial because the problem is that they do not know how to manage their own money. You have to equip them with the knowledge on how to manage their own money because otherwise it creates more social problems. Essentially, there is more gambling, there is more drugs…" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

The respondents' lack of support for transferring money to the poor through a higher wage or handouts highly reflects their views of the poor summarized in chapter 5. Discussing the causes of poverty showed that a large portion of the respondents viewed the poor as a deviant class; the poor tend to take drugs, drink too much alcohol and gamble. Moreover, numerous respondents viewed the poor as incapable of managing their money and prone to waste it on unnecessary consumption goods. Finally, the poor were viewed as passive and lazy. Respondents viewed cash transfers and a higher wage as policies that would encourage the poor's bad behaviors and attitudes, which were perceived as contributing to the persistence of poverty in Thailand. Consequently, those policies

brought little support among respondents as they were seen as hindering poverty alleviation. Findings suggest that the privileged youth perceptions of the poor and the causes of poverty affected their attitudes towards these policies.

6.4 The Privileged Youth on Feasible Means to Reduce Poverty in Thailand

Table 6.2 illustrates the means respondents viewed as feasible and desirable to reduce poverty in Thailand. Seven interviewees mentioned the necessity to invest more in pensions as the traditional role of the family as a safety net was eroding. "Pension is becoming increasingly important because before you relied on the family structure to take care of old people but now you get more migration of young people working in different areas than the place they grew up in so there is a need to take care of old people" (Interview, MUIC7, 25.06.13). Even though Thailand already has a pension scheme, respondents felt that the money given to pensioners is insufficient to make ends meet. "My grand-mother receives 500 baht every month as a pension... That is so small, it does not get you anything even in the rural areas" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13)

A smaller portion of respondents felt that creating more jobs in rural areas would be a good option. Interestingly, those respondents showed to be concerned about the flow of internal migrant workers coming to Bangkok and felt that creating job opportunities in rural areas could reduce this movement of labor.

"In urban areas, most professions are already filled, Bangkok is getting too cramped. They should invest in creating jobs in rural areas, some people migrate here for seeking opportunities, if they are opportunities back home, there is no need to migrate anymore" (Interview, Chula5, 28.06.13).

A small percentage of respondents showed support for tax and land reforms as to increase revenues to go towards redistributive policies and access to lands for the underprivileged. "What we needs is not more taxes but tax reforms, there are a lot of things in Thailand that are not taxed, they should tax things like inheritance funds, land, sales transactions, all these things have been overlooked" (Interview, Chula10, 02.07.13). "There are a lot of rich people who own lands outside of Bangkok which are left unused while a lot of farmers do not have these lands to produce things and provide them a livelihood.... For example, in Japan, unused lands are heavily taxed as a barrier for people who have money and buy lands without doing something productive with it. In Thailand, there are too much unproductive lands" (Interview, MUIC2, 25.06.13).

Table 8 Respondents Preferred Means for Poverty Reduction in
Thailand

Means to Reduce Poverty	Number of Respondents Agreeing
Increasing access to education and educational reforms	24
Giving out goods to the poor	5
Investing in pensions	7
Unemployment benefits	4
Creating jobs in rural areas	4
Tax and land reforms	2

*Total interviewees = 26.

There was a clear convergence towards investing in education as the
most viable mean to reduce poverty in Thailand among respondents. Closed to all
respondents judged improving the quality of education and increasing access to
education in rural areas as the best avenue for poverty reduction efforts.
Assessments of education in Thailand have shown that students perform poorly
compared to students from other countries (Camfield et al., 2012; UNDP, 2010).
Additionally, teachers' performance tend to be low in Thailand while the quality of
education is significantly lower in rural areas in comparison to urban areas (UNDP,
2010).

Furthermore, it has been denoted by the World Bank that Thailand spends a lower percentage of its GDP in education compared to other middle-income countries (UNDP, 2010). Also, the lack of promotion of critical thinking and other important skills within the educational system has been perceived as hindering the formation of labor capable of leading fulfilled economic, political and social lives (UNDP, 2010). The poor quality and lack of access to decent education in some areas of Thailand have been widely documented and part of the public discourse in Thailand therefore it comes as no surprise that respondents stated that they would support increasing investments towards education.

The support for policies targeting education was driven by various rationales among students. The majority of respondents believed that better and more accessible education could increase underprivileged people's access to opportunities. "Yes reducing poverty should be a priority but it should be more focused on education, everything starts from education. Once you have an educated population, they will pull themselves out of poverty somehow because if you are more educated, you have more opportunities in life" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13). For those students, improving education in rural areas and increasing access to education for the poor were perceived as essential to tackle inequalities and reduce poverty in Thailand. "In Thailand, the status quo is maintained by limiting access to

education because opportunities do not come without education, this need to change if we want to see structural changes" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

As the poor were perceived as having bad consumer habits, education was seen by a significant portion of respondents as a mean to socially reform the poor by teaching them how to manage their finances. "The poor are not taught properly how to manage their money or to save or to invest their money in things that are worth their investment and this is largely due to a lack of education, lack of knowledge... If they do not know how to manage their money adequately or know how to invest in things that would help their future or future generations, the problem will never change, it's a vicious cycle" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13). Education was seen by some students as a mean to provide the skills for people to become productive and self-sufficient economic agents in society. "There is no point to give money to poor people because they do not manage it well. If we invest in education they can develop by themselves in the long-term and they can become more self-sufficient" (Interview, Tham2, 24.06.13).

Furthermore, education was also viewed as a good avenue to tackle attitudes and behaviors that hinders poverty alleviation. "Children are still uncorrupted, if you want a systematic change your should start with the younger generation and change their mentality through education" (Interview, Chula5, 28.06.13). For some students, education should be improved by including the

promotion of moral conduct at school as to stop social ills such as corruption. "Thai people they think of corruption as normal, we should educate kids about corruption, teach them that corruption is not a good thing and not normal, once they grow up they should be less likely to be corrupted" (Interview, MUIC6, 21.06.13). Education in that sense was viewed as a social engineering tool that could benefit society by creating better citizens and politicians. "Education is one of the important things that can help shape people to become good politicians. It is not only about what you know but also about how you think. If people are shaped since elementary school until university to be moral, to be self-disciplined, to be somebody that has the mind to work for the public good, it would benefit everyone in society and create good politicians" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13). The importance of installing a sense of morality through education was denoted as in line with the current discourse on democracy in Thailand. Royalists and members of the Democrats Party have been arguing that politicians and some sections of the Thai population are too morally flawed for democracy to be workable in Thailand while such discourse has been used as a legitimization for disrupting the electoral process.

The field research showed that an important factor for students' support for reforming education in Thailand came from their dissatisfaction towards their educational experience. Numerous students felt that education in Thailand is too conservative and does not encourage critical thinking. "There is still this teacher-

centric model, passive learning, suppressing teaching in Thailand. It depoliticizes a lot of people, students in particular. The indicators of a good student here are being good at science, being good at math, but even if students excel in these subjects, they will not necessarily be someone who would contribute a lot to society." (Interview, Chula2, 27.06.13).

Accounts of students' experiences in the education system at the primary and secondary level were highly negative; many criticized the teaching style, the materials taught and the standards of assessments. "Education should be more about critical thinking, not just about memorizing. When I studied before, I did not know anything about social issues; I could not add my own opinion when talking to others because I just remembered things from books. When I read a book that someone wrote, I believed everything; I never thought something opposite to this book because there was no space for me to critique, to talk, to share. In exams, it was only multiple answers questions, but you should have instead open-ended questions where students get to write down their own views. Nothing will be right or wrong, but the best will be the answer that is reasonable and well-thought" (Interview, Tham1, 13.06.13).

There was a general feeling that education in Thailand encourages passiveness and the acceptance of the status quo. "In high school, the system is really bad. The education system just involves people to be the mechanism of the

state but it is a bad mechanism anyway. For example the history subject pushes believing in Buddhism and the monarchy. In history class, you will see in the textbook that the King does everything for the people and we can live now because of the King. That is what is said in the history textbooks and they do not leave room for questioning it. The educational system purpose is simply to make the people accept the structure and work for the structure" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13).

Due to the unsatisfactory quality of education, some students felt that educational reforms are necessary to form active and critical citizens that could push for systemic change in Thailand. "I think we should improve the quality of education but also we should teach about poverty as well because we never learn about social issues at school. Education here is too conservative, they don't teach us anything except what the king has done the last 800 years, and this does not raise awareness on social issues. I think education should be more concerned about the community and the society people live in. I think if schools would teach local and societal issues, students would be more capable and willing to improve their community and their country" (Interview, Tham6, 01.07.13).

In that sense, respondents felt that expanding the body of knowledge taught while including ethical learning could increase people's social conscience and lead to greater political will among the population to tackle national issues such as poverty and inequality. Reforming education for a small portion of respondents was

therefore essential not only to create economic agents suited for the labor market but also political ones that can contribute to society. "Education should make citizens realize about their own liberties, their own rights and capacity to participate in the politics. Providing an education that does not enable people to participate in politics and say what they really want is problematic" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13).

This convergence towards education can be seen as linked with the students' causal explanation of poverty. The lack of quality education in rural areas was perceived as disabling the poor to compete against urban people. Investing in education in rural areas was perceived as a viable mean to increase the job opportunities of the rural poor thus tackling a structural cause of poverty and inequality. As the poor were perceived as contributing to poverty through their bad consumer habits, education was seen as a mean to socially reform the poor by teaching them how to manage their finances. Furthermore, education was believed to be the best mean to install a sense of morality in people as to stop corruption and create better politicians. Consequently, education was perceived as a valuable means to counter some of the causes to poverty endorsed by the respondents.

Nevertheless, the privileged youth perception of education as a viable mean to reduce poverty suggest that they consent to what Moore and Hossain (2005) call the "human resources conception of development", meaning investing in and improving human resources is conducive of development. The linkage between

poverty reduction and education has been widely advertised by international development institutions as the success of South Korea and Taiwan in terms of development has been attributed to investments in increasing the quality and accessibility of education (Moore & Hossain, 2005). Conversely, discussions on the poor and pro-poor policies also imply that some of the privileged youth have adopted an authoritarian and elitist view of development. The poor are not perceived as being in line with the social norms and values esteemed by the privileged therefore they need to be disciplined through a type of education whose curriculum promotes such norms and values.

However, support for increasing access to better education in rural areas was also viewed by some students as a mean to decrease the number of people coming to Bangkok. "There should encourage rural people to enroll in those provincial colleges and try for rural education to be the same as in Bangkok. Everything should not be so centralized, people come to Bangkok to study, but they should go elsewhere" (Interview, MUIC3, 21.06.13). This suggests that some of the privileged youth showed support for such measure because of the impact migration has on their wellbeing. The threat of migration and its impact on support for poverty reduction is more thoroughly discussed in chapter 7.

6.5 The State and its Responsibility for Poverty Reduction

This section reveals the respondents' perceptions on who should be responsible for poverty reduction in Thailand. Closed to all respondents perceived the government as the main institution that is responsible of improving the lives of the poor because the state holds the most power to trigger structural change and it has the duty to respond to the Thai citizens' needs. "Everybody has to work together to be honest but perhaps the government would be the main body because they can push policies, can see the direction of where things should go" (Interview, Chula7, 27.06.13). "Mostly it would be the state because the state has the decision-power to take on a lot of things" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13). "I think the government should be responsible because they should serve the people that elect them" (Interview, Tham2, 24.06.13).

Some interviewed believed that civil society could provide valuable input to the government efforts to reduce poverty in Thailand. "The problem with civil society organizations is that they do not interact with the government while it should be a shared effort. The government does not have the necessary tools to assess certain things, what needs to be done. Essentially civil society they do so the proper working model should be civil society rooting out the problem and providing this knowledge to the government so the government can know what to focus on" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13). However, numerous interviewees felt that non-

government organizations lacked the power to take on such responsibility without the state's cooperation. "Civil society could be part of it but if the channels to get through the government are difficult than their efforts are worth almost nothing" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13). "Civil society in Thailand is not that strong to fight the government so there is no way they could do much without the state backing them up, besides, NGOs they sometimes have their own agenda and get funding from the government so why would they go against the government?" (Interview, Chula2, 27.06.13).

A minority of students felt that the private sector should be involved in poverty alleviation by providing employment and labor training as they hold responsibilities towards society. "The first institution is the state because we are bound to the state's obligation so the state is obliged to take care of us. The private sector needs people to work for them so they need to give back as well. So I think the government should work with the private sector to get businesses to engage more in investing in people" (Interview, Chula1, 19.06.13). Few students felt that the general population was also responsible for fuelling social injustices therefore it is everyone's duty to improve the lives of the poor while only one student believed it should be the main actor for change. "I think society is the most important because the problem does not only come from the top but also from below sector, the

government cannot lead when there are no people. If the people want change, the government has to promote this change" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13)

Even though closed to all interviewees believed the state should act to reduce poverty and inequality in Thailand, the majority was reluctant to finance the state through taxes. Some respondents felt that the tax burden would be shared by a minority of people therefore it would be unjust to increase taxes. "Even if they collect higher taxes, there are still people who avoid paying taxes even though they have a massive income. The people who would pay for those taxes will be the middle-class and the poor even though a thousand poor's income would not even come close to a fat cat income. People here are too selfish to respond together. If you receive more you need to give more but most people think if I work hard, all the money should belong to me because my wealth is a product of me working hard" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13). Such statement reflect Thailand's regressive tax system, which puts at a disadvantage the poor as the tax burden fall more on lower-income people than on the rich (Phongpaichit, 2011; Phongpaichit & Benyaapikul, 2012; Warr, 2011a). Furthermore, tax evasion has been a prevalent issue in Thailand; out of the 1.5 million rich people in the country, only a third of this group pay the full amount of taxation they owed (Sinpeng, 2011).

A predominant view among interviewees was also that the government is too corrupted therefore the taxes revenue would not be used for

poverty alleviation. "Higher taxes would just be more money to scheme off through corruption; it would not go to the right place" (Interview, Chula2, 27.06.13). "Would the government use the money for a good cause really? I am a bit hesitant to give a full yes because pass experiences with the government is that, they tax us but it does not go anywhere that really helps us. The government doesn't do anything so you think why should I pay? If there is one lady or a guy out there that would say we are going to put the money for a good cause, I would sure be willing to pay. It's not about paying higher taxes; it's about trusting the government" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13). Findings from the field research demonstrate that extensive political corruption was a clear deterrent for the privileged youth to support greater taxation.

Few students shared the idea that if the government was to use tax revenue efficiently, they would support increases on taxes. "If they were to spread the wealth I think we should pay more taxes. I think they won't but if they were yes" (Interview, Tham6, 01, 07.13). "It is a good idea to raise taxes for more social welfare, if there is something that gets out of increasing taxes, than that is good, I would be pro that" (Interview, Chula7, 27.06.13). However, some respondents stated they would not support higher taxes because they felt the revenue generated by taxes was high enough. "I think the income of the government is already high and they have enough to spend on poor people but the problem is that they are too focused on Bangkok people" (Interview, Tham2, 24.06.13). Such perception could be

viewed as misguided as Thailand's tax revenue represent only 17% of its GDP, which is considerably low compared to other middle-income countries (Phongpaichit, 2011).

Overall, the privileged youth were reluctant to support increasing taxes because they viewed the government as too corrupted and incompetent to believe that the taxes money would reach the poor. "Redistributive policies sound great but how do you know the tax you pay is to help the poor? It happened before, these policies have come out and they never worked, the money never went to the poor" (Interview, MUIC1, 05.07.13). Moreover, numerous respondents opposed themselves to increasing taxes because they did not trust other citizens to pay their share of taxes. Consequently, they felt the burden of increased taxes would fall on the minority of the population, which would be unfair. On the whole, respondents felt that the state should alleviate poverty by using more efficiently current tax revenues rather than increasing than by increasing taxes.

The view that the state should take care of the poor seemed contradictory to the mistrust the privileged youth have towards the government. The push for the state to take responsibility for poverty reduction could be explained by the students' view that poverty is partly caused by the government's bad policies, corrupted politicians and the lack of political will. However, such answer also suggests a lack of civic responsibility among the privileged youth. Students tended to believe that responsibility in Thailand is personalized. They felt a sense of

responsibility towards their family and peers, but only a few felt responsible for helping people outside their social circle. The idea that privileged people has a sense of responsibility for the livelihood of the poor only in times of crisis was mentioned throughout interviewees. This statement was supported by the fact that the majority of students who volunteered only did it during the flood or tsunami crisis.

Overall, students referred to the government as 'the other', an exploitative entity separate from the population. "In Thailand, people serve the government rather than the government serving the people" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13). The fact that they deem the government as something beyond their reach, most likely impact their feeling of social responsibility (Reis & Moore, 2005). The lack of will for paying higher taxes could be perceived as an expression of low social responsibility, but as a student mentioned, "the issue is not about paying higher taxes, it's about trusting the government"(Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13). Corruption and tax evasion scandals have been common in Thailand thus it comes at no surprises that the privileged youth mistrust politicians to use efficiently tax revenues and mistrust fellow citizens to share the tax burdens fairly by complying to taxation.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the privileged youth's perceptions on the means to reduce poverty in Thailand. Findings from field research suggest that the

respondents were dissatisfied with the majority of current pro-poor policies in Thailand. Discussions suggest that the privileged youth's perceived the state as inefficient and short-sighted. In spite of their negative perceptions of the state, most respondents felt that the state is the main institution that is responsible to improve the lives of the poor. Nevertheless, they strongly opposed themselves to increasing taxes to fund poverty alleviation programs because of the extent of corruption and tax evasion in Thailand. Discussions on who should take on poverty reduction suggest a low sense of civic responsibility among respondents.

Furthermore, there was a clear sentiment among respondents that more money for the poor is detrimental for poverty reduction. Cash transfers and higher minimum income were perceived as encouraging the poor's bad attitudes and behaviors, which contribute to the persistence of poverty in Thailand. Overall, there was a general feeling that the poor cannot be trusted with money. Respondents' responses suggested a disdain for any policies that could encourage dependency on the state. However, numerous respondents mentioned they would support more investments in pensions. This suggests that respondents were more sympathetic towards elderly people than other social groups.

All respondents strongly felt that there are feasible means to reduce poverty in Thailand thus exhibiting a component of social consciousness. The most favored mean was by far increasing access to education and investing in educational

reforms. Discussions on education showed that respondents felt that social mobility could be increased through education, which could also imply a lower sense of responsibility among respondents. Underlying the support for education lies the idea that if people are educated adequately, they can get out of poverty in spite of structural constraints and in spite of the privileged actions or inactions.

However, some respondents believed education could be a tool to promote new social values that could tackle social ills such as corruption and the lack of political will. In that respect, those students viewed education as a tool to reform not only the poor but also the privileged. The privileged youth's preference towards greater educational opportunities over any efforts to equalize income or wealth implies that equality of access or opportunities is believed to be more desirable than equality of outcome (Reis, 2010). As mentioned in chapter 4, there seems to be a link between the respondents' perceptions of social justice and the policies they support.

Interestingly, closed to all respondents viewed investing in education and the universal healthcare scheme as beneficial, which matches with the respondents' conception of poverty. The majority of the interviewees perceived poverty in absolute terms, the poor were the ones who could not fulfil their basic needs, could not access education and health care services. This perception repeatedly led to the view that pro-poor policies should be aimed at covering the

basic needs of the poor. In that sense, respondents' view of what is poverty was reflected in their attitudes towards pro-poor policies as the perception of poverty as absolute only calls for providing the poor with the strict minimum for their survival. Furthermore, such policy preferences suggest that the privileged youth are more inclined to support policies that benefit society as a whole than policies that benefits only the underprivileged.

Attitudes towards poverty reduction measures showed to reflect the respondents' causal attributions to poverty and perceptions of the poor. The lack of support for greater economic growth echoed the students' view that poverty in Thailand is not due to a lack of economic resources but perceived as a political problem. Furthermore, this perception of poverty could be seen as reflected in the respondents' lack of support for increasing revenues through taxes for poverty alleviation. The perceptions of the poor as lazy, wasteful and addicts were also reflected in the respondent's lack of support for cash transfers and a higher minimum wage. Likewise, support for increasing access to education and educational reforms was fuelled by the respondent's perceptions that it could tackle some of the causes of poverty and inequality such as the lack of access to opportunities for the poor, corruption, the lack of political will and the incompetency of the poor to manage money. Nevertheless, this push for education suggest that the privileged

youth has adopted a "human resources" perspective of development (Moore &

Hossain, 2005).

CHAPTER VII

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON THE PRIVILEGED YOUTH'S WELLBEING

7.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the privileged youth's sense of social interdependency. The first section discusses the relationship between the poor and the privileged youth as to understand how distanced the respondents felt from the poor. Whether poverty increases the threat of crime, diseases or political instability for the privileged was discussed in the later sections of this chapter. According to De Swaan (2005), perceptions of interdependency can be induced by the views that the poor represent a threat for the privileged wellbeing. Findings demonstrate that there is a large social distance between the poor and non-poor in Thailand and such distance impacts the respondents' sense of social interdependency, an important component of social consciousness. Overall, poverty did not show to induce noticeable threats to the privileged youth's wellbeing that could lead to greater support for pro-poor policies. Nevertheless, findings suggest that respondents were concerned by internal migration and such concern was perceived as link to their support for poverty reduction measures that could decrease the flow of rural people coming to Bangkok.

7.1 The Relationship between the Poor and the Privileged Youth

When discussing whether the privileged interact with the poor, there was a consensus among students that in general richer people do not interact with the poor. Two students believed to have a poor person in their family while only one had poor friends. Except from those students, personal relationships between the privileged and underprivileged was seen as impossible by the others. Some students believed that the disparity in economic resources between rich and poor in Thailand disabled them from interacting with the poor. "Segregation is one thing and that is caused by poverty and wealth, if you are poor you don't go to Starbucks, you meet your rich friends in Starbucks, you see poor people somewhere else" (Interview, MUIC2, 25.06.13). "Some people in MUIC do not want to hang out with a poor person, they would say don't invite your poor friend, he probably cannot afford to come out with us" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

Others believed that social class affected social relations as people from the lower strata have a different mindset, interests, lifestyles and even language. "The rich are more educated, they are socialized in a different society, so the way they talk to people is different" (Interview, MUIC3, 21.06.13). This idea that rich and poor are from different societies was recurrent in interviews and used as a legitimate reason why the privileged and underprivileged do not interact with each other. "They are in different societies, in different class, I can't think of much

opportunity they would meet" (Interview, Tham2, 24.06.13). "Poor people would think that they can't relate to rich people and rich people would think they can't relate to poor people" (Interview, Chula10, 02.07.13).

However, many students believed that interactions between social classes were minimal because it is perceived as undesirable in Thai society. "In Thailand there is a culture where you just go up and up the caste rank. You do not sympathize or interact with people who are below; it is always the other way around, you aspire to be like people above you. A lot of middle and upper middle people want to be elite, you never see any of them interacting with poor people but they would with the elite" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13). "The word poor has a bad connotation, it is even present in the way people make fun of each other, people around you would say 'don't hang out with these people, look at the way they dress, they look so poor" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13).

Many students believed that the rich and poor have an unequal social relationship due to the respect wealthy people get. "There is interaction but it's not natural, like between equals, they look at you like you are so high" (Interview, MUIC1, 05.07.13). The students' perceptions support other studies denoting that wealth is increasingly conducive of respect in Thai society (Sresunt, 2011; Vorng, 2011). This unequal relationship between rich and poor was also seen as fuelled by the privileged self-perception of superiority compared to people from a lower social

class. "If you go to the restaurant, you would see a 15 or 16 year old calling a waiter 'nong nong'[9] even though the waiter is 60. It's degrading and disrespectful but then waiters are perceived as low-class people" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

There was a consensus among respondent that the concept of equality between people is not present in Thai society and the lack of egalitarian values plays a role in social relations. "My nanny is like my other mother but I can tell my views are different from my peers. My friends do not interact with their nanny or driver, they do not treat them equally" (Interview, Tham7, 12.07.13). "When privileged people interact with the poor, it is not out of respect, it is not out of any pure motive, it is just for utilitarian reasons" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13).

At times, student mentioned that the poor and the rich interact with each other through charitable acts yet these interactions were perceived as mostly driven by self-interest. "There are a lot of 'hi-sos' that like to do the donations for the poor so they can look pretty and nice in front of society. I would not say they hang out, they just give money so they can be on TV" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13). "There are people who volunteer, take a picture, post it on Facebook and after that they just go back home. It's about face, it happens in the small unit of society as

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[9] The term 'nong' is used as to refer to someone younger in the Thai language while its opposite, 'phi', is used when talking to someone older. However, the terms do not only act as an age marker but also as to signal who holds more authority and deserves respect. Using the word 'nong' to refer to someone else can signal that the other individual is younger or that the person' status is perceived as lower within the Thai social hierarchy.

well with the government" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13). There was a significant majority of students that perceived privileged people's charitable acts as not aiming at improving the life of the poor but done to gain face in society.

All students believed that social classes confine social interactions in Thailand; privileged people interact with each other while the poor interact with low-income people. There was an acknowledgement that the poor and the rich occupy the same space and interact at times but their relationship remained economic; the privileged employ the poor or benefit from services provided by the poor. "There is no equality; privileged people will not see the poor as their friends. It's just this relationship between boss and employee, patron-client kind of relationship" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13). Identification and interaction with the poor was perceived as impossible partly because of the economic and social disparity. However, the hierarchical structure of Thai society and the important role social status plays in social interactions was seen as reinforcing the segregation of people (Vorng, 2011).

Discussing the relationship of the poor with the privileged youth suggest that there is a large social distance between the poor and non-poor in Thailand. Such distance was viewed as fuelled by economic inequality and cultural factors. This raises concerns for collective action to alleviate poverty. Responses show that the poor are widely perceived as the 'other'. A lack of social interaction

between the poor and the non-poor can fuel stereotypes, discrimination and a lack of empathy towards the underprivileged (Bottero, 2005). 'Othering' the poor encourage stereotyping and discriminating the underprivileged thus it can provide a legitimization for inactions towards poverty reduction (Bottero, 2005). Furthermore, a large social distance can decrease the feeling of social interdependency between the poor and the non-poor. The next section shows that the lack of relationship between the poor and the privileged youth affects their perceptions that poverty impacts their wellbeing thus it inhibits the development of social consciousness.

7.2 The Impact of Poverty on the Privileged Youth's Wellbeing

This section explores the impact poverty has on the privileged youth. Following De Swaan's theory of social consciousness, it discusses whether respondents felt that poverty brings on crime, diseases and political instability. Furthermore, it was assessed whether the privileged youth felt affected by the negative effects of poverty as to see whether these threats could push privileged people to support certain pro-poor measures in Thailand.

7.2.1 The Threat of Diseases

Findings from interviews insinuate that poverty did not come as a threat for the privileged youth's health. This feeling of non-threat was due in part to

closed to half of the students did not feel that poverty is linked to diseases. "I don't think poverty is related to diseases, some people think that the poor carry diseases only because they are maybe dirty" (Interview, Tham7, 12.07.13). "I don't think having economic resources is linked directly to health. If you see the case of Mataphut, the wages are increasing but the people still get diseases in spite of being more well-off" (Interview, Tham4, 01.07.13). Among students, some believed that the poor carrying more diseases is a stereotype while others thought that everyone is at risk of catching a disease regardless of their economic situation. As poverty and the spread of diseases were perceived as unconnected for those students, the threat of diseases induced by poverty was non-existent for those respondents.

On the other hand, the other half of respondents felt that the poor are more vulnerable to health problems than the privileged because they are more likely to live in an unsanitary environment and are less educated on health matters. "Some poor people do not believe in germs because they've never seen a germ. They believe in going to a monk to cure their illness, they don't think their health issue comes from a microorganism. This is mostly due to the poor's lack of education, which is an issue" (Interview, MUIC2, 25.06.13). "There are diseases caused by the environment. I am conducting a research in the slum areas and the their living conditions are so bad, they have stagnant water right under their houses,

it's not sanitary at all, so yes poverty and diseases can be linked" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13).

In spite that a considerable amount of respondents believed to be a link between poverty and diseases, only two students out of twenty-six felt that diseases caused by poverty could impinge on privileged people's wellbeing. Most students felt that poverty came as a non-threat for their health because of the lack of interactions between privileged people and the poor. "It could be a problem if there was a contagious disease but then again you have to take in account that rich people do not interact with poor people so it is hardly the case that it would impact the rich's welfare" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

Furthermore, students often mentioned that privileged people have the finances to access premium healthcare services therefore diseases are not so worrisome. "Of course rich people are scared of catching something from poor people, but then they just step way when they see them. Anyway, if you are rich you can go to private hospitals" (Interview, Chula3, 03.07.13). In spite that no respondents mentioned this, the lack of fear of communicable diseases from students could also be because Thailand has made significant progresses in containing epidemic diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis (Baker, 2007; UNDP, 2010).

De Swaan's analysis on the formation of the welfare state in the 19th

century pointed out that the threat of diseases pushed the elite to support certain

pro-poor policies focusing on health (De Swaan, 1988). Like other recent researches

on social consciousness, the findings from interviews show that communicable

diseases are not perceived as a threat for the privileged youth due to the

development of modern healthcare services and medicines present in Thailand (De

Swaan, 2005; Hossain & Moore, 2002). Responses raise issues in terms of support for

certain pro-poor policies. As students either felt that diseases and poverty are not

linked or believed they could contain health threats by accessing sophisticated

health establishments or avoiding the poor, policies aiming at providing sanitation or

other preventive measures focusing on health for the poor could not be prioritized

(Hossain & Moore, 2002).

7.2.2 The Threat of Crime

Closed to all students viewed poverty as increasing crime especially in

urban settings. "When people are desperate or they need money or other things,

they will resolve to crime, it is an inevitable effect of poverty" (Interview, MUIC4,

13.06.13). However, only 9 respondents felt that crime could impact privileged

people's wellbeing. This could seem counter to the data showing that Thailand has

a high rate of violent crimes compared to other countries (UNDP, 2010). However,

such crimes were not linked to poverty; respondents tended to link crimes such as stealing, drug using and gambling to poverty while the crimes committed by the poor were often deemed as petty or out of necessity. "If you don't have the money to survive, you have to steal. There are so many cases of mothers going to the grocery store to steal some milk for their child because they no money, but can you blame them?" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13).

Students were more compelled to see crimes over diseases as a threat to their welfare, however only a small minority of the respondents reported to have been a victim of a crime. The threat of crime coming from poverty was present in the student's consciousness but not to the point of requiring collective action to reduce poverty. The idea that the justice system tended to benefit the rich rather the poor meant the poor's criminal behaviours were perceived as manageable. "Those people who are poor don't survive, they end up in jail. They don't have the power to get away with it but privileged people do" (Interview, MUIC2, 25.06.13). For some, crimes perpetuated by privileged people were perceived as more noteworthy than crimes by the poor, which were seen as perpetuated out of need rather than out of greed.

Moreover, students felt that privileged people tend to ensure their security by remaining segregated from the poor and by seeking individualised protection. "Crime is not really a threat, unless you are located in an area where there are a lot of poor people but usually rich people do not live around poor

people. If you live in a 'mu ban'[10], you are not really afraid, there are security guards around at all time" (Interview, Chula8, 26.06.13). Unlike the elite who pushed for the welfare state in Europe, the privileged youth did not believe that collective action is needed to mitigate security issues coming from poverty as the poor's criminal actions did not pose a pressing threat and personalized security seemed sufficient to protect the privileged. For these reasons, crime perpetuated by the poor would most likely not push the privileged youth to support pro-poor policies in Thailand.

7.2.3 The Threat of Political Instability

There was a consensus among respondents that poverty and inequality lead to political instability. Additionally, there was clear sense throughout interviews that political instability was perceived as the biggest threat for privileged people. Such statement fits with Thailand's political landscape; all respondents have been either following or affected by the ousting of Thaksin in 2006 and numerous protests induced by national politics.

Few respondents felt that political instability was due to the wide gap between rich and poor and the political and economic exclusion of the poor in Thailand. "You can see it in the news all around the world, why there are so many protests now? Why are they doing it? They are doing it because they have been

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[10] 'Mu ban' stands in this context for a group of houses usually segregated by gates and protected by security guards.

devalued, ignored, excluded and they want to be considered" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13). A more predominant number of students felt that political instability is caused by poverty because the poor can be easily paid to go protest. "The poor have this incentive to change their status and since they are poor they have not many choices other than getting that 500 Baht to go protest" (Interview, Tham2, 24.06.13).

Throughout interviews, most students insinuated that the poor do not protest because of legitimate reasons, rather, the poor were being manipulated by the privileged. "People don't go protest by themselves, people in the rural areas can't afford to go to Bangkok, and it is an expensive trip. I have a driver at home and during the red shirt protest he got invited by his friend who said come hang out at the protest, they give us 500 Baht, a meal, a concert, a place to sleep and alcohol. Some politician is funding that…" (Interview, MUIC9, 25.06.13).

The majority of respondents disregarded the plea of protestors as protestors were viewed as ignorant, as lacking knowledge on democracy and politics, consequently social movements were viewed as unfounded for most students. "You say all the time you need to work, you are poor, why are you still laying around Sanam Luang and supporting your political view, it's just crazy. The red shirts going to the rural areas, they don't have the capacity to think, maybe they know what is right or wrong, but they don't know which one would be beneficial and which one

would harm them. Maybe they just know that the policy will help them a bit and that they have to love Thaksin or Yingluck because they love you, but than they have this mind of sufficiency economy, why don't they just do it?" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13).

Nevertheless, political instability was deemed as the biggest threat that poverty and inequality poses to the privileged for various reasons. A minority of respondents felt that political instability could lead to a change in power relations to the detriment of the privileged. "Why does political unrest impact the privileged? Because it is a change to the status quo and nobody likes change, especially if the status quo supports you. This is why between the red and yellow there is always problems because if you let the reds come up than the status quo changes for the yellows. But then the reds say if the status quo for the yellows continues well we are still going to be unequal and underprivileged and we don't want this. So I think the impact is that there is a change in the status quo and they don't want that" (Interview, Chula4, 15.06.13). Another small number of students felt that political instability could affect negatively Thailand's economy. "Political instability could drive away investments, which would have a detrimental effect on economic growth therefore on everyone" (Interview, Chula7, 27.06.13).

Nevertheless, the majority of students tended to refer to the negative impact the coup in 2006 and following protests has had on their daily lives when

discussing how political instability affects their welfare: "During the coup against Thaksin, you know they had a curfew, you could not go out or you could not meet up to talk with people at nighttime" (Interview, Tham1, 13.06.13). "My house is in Rachapasong and in 2010 they started protesting and I was scared. I was wondering if there was going to be a civil war or something. They were throwing Molotov cocktails by my house, I was freaking out" (Interview, Chula9, 27.06.13). "I don't feel comfortable with all the protests, can we just stop? The traffic is already bad but it gets worse when they protest. I got stuck for 2 hours on a road yesterday because there was protests, protests affects everyone" (Interview, Tham7, 12.07.13).

On whether poverty and inequality could cause a revolution, opinions diverged among respondents. Some believed that those days were over while others thought that this rebellious spirit went against Thais' nature. "I don't think it would happen because Thais are not that brave and they like to listen" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13). A predominant reason was that the use of force against protestors in the past has been a powerful deterrent for uprisings. "People have been talking about it, people are scared of being shot, so people will just let it be even though we talk about it but no one would dare" (Interview, Tham7, 12.07.13). "There is political instability but it has never become a full-blown revolution because of that small group of powerful people, they would just kill them before they say anything. There

is still this small group of people that control the mass and would make sure the revolution does not happen" (Interview, MUIC1, 05.07.13).

In that sense, the majority of students felt that public sentiments could lead to a revolution though the state and the elite would have enough power to repress rebellions. Only a minority of students felt that Thailand would not escape an uprising. "We have been pressing our society more tight, too tight, and it's going to explode that's for sure" (Interview, Chula6, 08.07.13). "For sure it will happen, as prices go up, people will be more and more discontent because wages stay the same. There is definitely going to be an uprising but, will it reach a point where middle or elite class will realize it's a problem of financial security or it is a problem of wellbeing, that I don't know" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

Findings show that the privileged youth was the most concerned about political instability thus this could seem as a possible threat that could lead to greater support for pro-poor policies. However, in spite that the majority of students felt that poverty and inequality leads to rebellions, face-to-face interviews with students have shown that only a minority of respondents viewed the recent political protests in Thailand as fuelled my social injustices. The majority of students felt that the poor and rural people protests because they are being paid to do so and because they are too ignorant to realize they are being manipulated by Thaksin and its proxies.

The privileged youth understanding of the protest reflects how the Bangkok-based media has framed the red shirts movements and its followers as a bunch of uneducated rural people manipulated and paid by Thaksin to come protest in Bangkok (D. McCargo, 2009). Outlooks among a portion of the privileged youth suggest that they believe political instability is not induced by poverty but by the elite, which manipulate the poor to push their own agenda. This raises questions on whether the threat of insurrections can lead the privileged youth to support pro-poor policies if they frame social movements in that sense.

As a student states: "Could political instability push the elite and the middle-class to do something about poverty and inequality, maybe, but the problem with privileged people is that they do not know that poor people are discontent with what they have, so they would interpret the protests differently. They would not think the poor or rural people are discontents with things like how they live or financial insecurity or how they are being treated, they would interpret it as a political dispute in terms of views on politics but nothing to do with financial security" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13).

It is hard to say whether the threat of political instability could lead the privileged youth to support pro-poor policies as it would most likely depends on their understanding of the underlying causes of social movements. Nevertheless, numerous respondents felt that the protests following the coup d'état against

Thaksin have open a public debate on poverty and inequality in Thailand and raised the youth social awareness on domestic issues. Whether this could result in a coalition among different social class to tackle social issues remains uncertain.

7.2.4 The Threat of Migration

Even though interviews did not specifically touch on the subject of migration, a considerable amount of students raised the point that poverty and disparity in economic development between regions has increased the flow of migrant workers coming to cities especially Bangkok. "There is a problem of centralization in Thailand because economic prosperity and opportunities are all concentrated in the capital or urban centers and you do see an influx of people coming to urban centers in a search for greener pasture" (Interview, MUIC4, 13.06.13). Respondents' perceptions of internal migration reflects Thailand long-standing rural-urban migration induced by the concentration of economic development in Bangkok and industrial areas (International Organization for Migration, 2011). Effectively, data shows that the population of the North-East region, the most impoverished region of Thailand, has been decreasing while the population of Bangkok and its surrounding has been increasing (International Organization for Migration, 2011). Students perceived that such movement of labor was induced by poverty and the lack of economic development in certain regions of the country.

In spite of not being part of interviews questions, internal migration was mentioned as problematic by more than a quarter of interviewees. "Poverty affects everyone in the city because essentially because of poverty, poor people migrate to the urban centers, it's too crowded, the competition is too intense in the cities and overall it just raises the cost of living for everyone" (Interview, Chula5, 28.06.13). "Everybody wants to come to Bangkok and then the problems that come after, of course there is overpopulation, too much struggling and competition to fight for jobs" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13). Additionally, a few students showed to be concerned by the coming of ASEAN, which could exacerbate the negative effects of migration perceived by interviewees. "I am so worried about ASEAN, I don't think we are ready, one day you are going to see not only Thais competing against each other, this is bad enough, but one day you will see a Singaporean in our country, a guy from Malaysia, the competition is going to be unbearable" (Interview, Tham3, 15.07.13). Students' concerns about migration revolved around the saturation of the labor market in urban settings and overpopulation, which were perceived as impacting negatively the non-poor's welfare.

Students who were concerned by the migration of the poor to urban centers showed support for pro-poor policies targeting rural areas (See Chapter 3 and Chapter 6). Respondents who felt threatened by migration of rural people to urban areas believed that the government should invest in decentralizing economic

development by investing, creating more jobs and improving the quality of education and health services in rural areas. As migration was perceived as a threat and caused by a lack of social and economic development, it makes sense that respondents were compelled to push for rural poverty alleviation. Therefore, it may be likely that framing pro-poor policies as aimed to reduce migration to urban settings could induce support from the privileged youth as it would coincide with their interests and their understanding of the migration phenomenon.

7.3 Conclusion

In spite of the awareness of the threats of poverty discussed, for the majority, the impact of poverty was perceived as something distant to them due to the segregation between the privileged and underprivileged. Identification and interaction with the poor was perceived as impossible partly because of the economic disparity. Adding to this, a large proportion of students believed that the segregation between rich and poor was fuelled by culture. There was an acknowledgement that the poor and the rich occupy the same space and interact at times, but the reality of the poor and the impact of poverty remained something mostly imagined rather than felt.

Could the threat of political instability, crime and uprising lead privileged people to support pro-poor policies? Most likely not. In spite of the

students' beliefs that poverty can have an undesirable impact on their welfare, such threats remain distant or minimal in their minds. The privileged youth felt confident that they could insulate themselves from diseases or crimes linked to poverty. Political instability showed to be the greater concern for the privileged youth. However, responses suggest that the way respondents perceived the causes to political instability could impact support for pro-poor policies. Only a minority of respondents felt that political instability is induced by the poor's socio-economic and political grievances while the majority believed that political turmoil is due to the poor's intellectual downfalls and lack of economic resources that makes them susceptible to elite's manipulation.

Nevertheless, students showed to be concerned by the ruralisation of Bangkok and felt that investing in rural areas would counter this perceived issue. This falls in the line of De Swaan's (1988) theory that if poverty impacts the privileged, they would support the pro-poor policies that fall in the line of their self-interests. Findings from field research demonstrate that migration of poor people towards urban areas was perceived as a threat by a significant number of respondents. Such respondents were eager to support policies that aim at increasing investments, employment, good education and opportunities in rural areas as to counter the pull-factor of Bangkok. De Swaan (1988) denoted that the threat of diseases, political instability and crime induced by poverty pushed the Western elite to establish the

base for the welfare state. In the case of Thailand and the privileged youth, it could
be argued that migration is a possible threat that could attract support for greater
investment in rural areas.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

8.1 Discussion on the Research Findings

This study aimed at evaluating the extent of social consciousness among the privileged youth in Thailand. To amount to a social consciousness, the privileged youth needed to exhibit three perceptions, a sense of social interdependency, social responsibility and feasibility (De Swaan, 2005). In greater details, such perceptions stand for the belief that social groups within Thai society are interdependent, that the privileged are responsible for poverty and the poor and that feasible means to reduce poverty exist or could be created (De Swaan, 2005).

The findings of this research suggest that the privileged youth did not exhibit a strong sense of social interdependency. The negative effects of poverty, such as diseases and crime, were viewed as either non-existent threats or minimal threats for the privileged youth's wellbeing. Furthermore, it was noticed that crime and the spread of diseases was not perceived as requiring collective action for poverty reduction to remediate such issues. There was a popular feeling among the students that the privileged can individually contain such threats by avoiding the poor, by opting to live in areas with private security and by accessing the private healthcare system. It was denoted that the social and physical segregation between

the poor and the non-poor impinged the perceptions of interdependency among the privileged youth.

Discussions with the students demonstrated that political instability was viewed as the biggest threat to the non-poor's wellbeing. However, the students interviewed tended to see political instability as caused mainly by the elite rather than by genuine social, economic and political grievances held by the poor. Consequently, such understanding of the causes of political instability in Thailand was noticed as not conducive of support for pro-poor policies among the privileged youth.

Nevertheless, a significant portion of respondents viewed internal migration as a threat to their welfare as rural-urban migration was perceived as causing overpopulation and increasing competition for employments in Bangkok. Contrasting with the privileged youth's understanding of political instability, internal migration was understood as caused by the centralization of development efforts in urban areas such as Bangkok. Such understanding of internal migration showed to induce support among the respondents for pro-poor policies aiming at economically develop rural areas and at improving public services located outside of urban settings. This suggest that framing certain pro-poor policies as means to counter the overpopulation of urban areas could possibly encourage cross-class coalition for poverty reduction as such framing would encompass the privileged youth's interests.

Additionally, migration seemed to be a threat that the privileged youth felt they could not mitigate individually unlike the threats of diseases or crime. Consequently, collective action for poverty reduction through pro-poor policies was deemed as necessary and desirable.

Findings on the privileged youth's sense of social responsibility towards the poor and poverty showed to be ambiguous. Discussing the causes of poverty with the privileged youth painted a confusing picture of their perceptions. Structural explanations to poverty were voiced but this was often juxtaposed with individualistic explanations to poverty, meaning the privileged youth believed that social, economic and political factors cause poverty but so do the poor's behaviors and attitudes. On that matter, the majority of respondents showed to exhibit a split-consciousness, which resulted in the respondents voicing contradicting views on poverty. Nevertheless, closed to all students expressed the view that the privileged are responsible for poverty; such feeling that privileged people's actions or inactions impact poverty in Thailand suggested that the privileged youth hold, to a certain extent, a sense of social responsibility towards poverty and the poor.

Finally, the belief in the feasibility of poverty reduction was clearly denoted in the privileged youth's responses on the subject, as all respondents believed that feasible means to reduce poverty exist. The most viable mean to reduce poverty among the respondents was increasing access to education and

investing in educational reforms. The privileged youth's attitudes towards education suggest that they hold a "human resources" conception of development; meaning education is viewed as conducive of development thus essential for poverty reduction (Moore & Hossain, 2005).

Nevertheless, the students' perception that education is the most viable mean to reduce poverty could be perceived as quite conservative. Support for education over other policies implies an underlying belief among the privileged youth that the poor can get out of poverty if they are educated. Such belief does not take in consideration the structural constraints the poor are subject to and pushes the responsibility for reducing poverty onto the poor. In that sense, the respondents' belief that privileged people are responsible for poverty was not strongly reflected in the privileged youth's main policy choice to reduce poverty. In relation to the theory of social consciousness, the privileged youth's preference for investing in education suggested that the respondents hold a low sense of social responsibility for poverty alleviation.

Additionally, respondents highly opposed themselves to increasing taxes to fund poverty alleviation. This could be interpreted as the privileged youth exhibit a low sense of civic responsibility, however, the lack of trust towards the state and towards other privileged people was viewed as impinging support for higher taxes. In spite that some of the respondents felt that increasing taxes to fund

pro-poor policies would be fair and desirable, the majority was unwilling to financially support poverty alleviation because corruption and tax evasion scandals have been extensive in Thailand. Taken as a whole, the findings related to social responsibility showed to be vague but hinted that the sense of social responsibility among the privileged youth was not particularly strong.

Overall, the strongest component of social consciousness exhibited by the privileged youth was the sense that there are feasible means to reduce poverty. However, the sense of social interdependency was not strongly exhibited throughout interviews. Even though the privileged youth showed signs of social responsibility at first, further discussions on preferences in terms of pro-poor policies and on financing poverty reduction suggested a low sense of social responsibility among the respondents. For these reasons, the privileged youth showed to exhibit an incomplete social consciousness.

This study also explored the privileged youth's perceptions of the causes of poverty as to see whether such perceptions impacted their policy preferences to reduce poverty in Thailand. The findings suggest a link between the respondents' causal attributions to poverty and their views on what pro-poor measures they perceived as viable. The perceptions among the privileged youth that the poor contribute to poverty through their behaviors and attitudes related to the respondents' lack of support for cash transfers and a higher minimum income. As the

poor were perceived as lazy, incapable of managing adequately their money and prone to substance abuses, more money for the poor was viewed negatively by respondents as they felt it would deepen social issues, increase the dependency of the poor on the state and would inevitably fail to alleviate poverty. The individualistic explanations of poverty held by the privileged youth showed to disable support for direct welfare initiatives.

The support for improving the quality of education in Thailand and increasing access to education for the poor and rural people came from various rationales among the privileged youth. Some viewed education as a tool to socially reform the poor and to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge as to mitigate the behaviors and attitudes of the poor that were perceived by some respondents as causing poverty. Others felt that the social ills contributing to poverty, such as corruption, could be diminished by improving education as to form socially conscious citizens and politicians. At times, the support for education seemed to also be in line with some of the causes of poverty mentioned by the privileged youth.

Then again, it was noted that preferences for certain policies were not only linked to the respondents' causal attributions to poverty but also to their conception of poverty. The majority of the interviewees perceived poverty in absolute terms, the poor were the ones who could not fulfil their basic needs, could

not access education and health care services. Perceiving poverty in absolute terms could be seen as constraining the type of policies that are viable for poverty reduction as absolute poverty only calls for providing the poor with the strict minimum for their survival. Findings demonstrated that respondents showed a strong preference for policies related to health and education. This implies that the privileged youth's understanding of poverty may also have an impact on the type of policies they support. The creation and dissemination of a new discourse on the nature of poverty in Thailand, which would promote the complexity of poverty, and on the causes of poverty, which would push for structural explanations of poverty, could be beneficial as to broaden the scope of possible and acceptable pro-poor policies among the privileged.

Furthermore, discussing inequality with the privileged revealed that the privileged youth is more concerned with inequality of opportunities than inequality of outcomes in Thailand. A preference for equality of opportunities was reflected in their choices of policy to alleviate poverty. Increasing access to education was perceived positively as education was viewed as enhancing access to better job opportunities for the underprivileged, on the other hand, policies to equalize income were negatively viewed. This could imply that the privileged youth's conception of social justice impacted their preferences in terms of pro-poor policies.

Overall, it could be said that the causal attributions to poverty can explain support and the lack of support for certain policies, however, how people conceive poverty and their views on social justice may also impact the type of policies they perceive as viable. Consequently, studies on attribution to poverty that focus solemnly on exploring the causal explanations to poverty in relation to attitudes towards welfare policies may be too simplistic to account for the complexity of perceptions in regards to poverty and to provide a complete understanding of policy preferences among people.

8.2 Recommendations for Future Research

This thesis focused on evaluating the extent of social consciousness among the privileged youth by exploring their perceptions of poverty, inequality and pro-poor policies. Such research design ended up providing a documentation of students' perceptions; however, it gave little insights on the origins of such perceptions. A clear point that arose from the research was that the negative perceptions of the poor among the privileged youth were not formed through interactions between the poor and the privileged as relationships between the two social groups were perceived as minimal or inexistent for the students. As the misperceptions of the poor showed to impact the type of pro-poor policies deemed

as viable for the privileged youth, it seems important to understand from what those negative views of the poor originate.

Hypothesizes on the subject can be drawn from the present study; however, the research design of this thesis does not lead to any conclusive remarks on the subject. Future research should focus on the system that influences the formation of perceptions as to understand who and what shapes the non-poor's views on poverty, inequality, the poor and pro-poor policies in Thailand. Researching the sources of perceptions would provide valuable information that could be used for developing tactics on how to disseminate new narratives aiming at countering the misperceptions that hinder cross-class coalition for poverty reduction in Thailand.

Another point that was noticed throughout the research was that being privileged in Thailand does not inevitably preclude support for pro-poor measures and structural changes. In spite of being the minority, some of the students interviewed showed to desire more parity with the poor and agreed with the enactment of pro-poor policies that went against their class interests. Furthermore, a portion of the respondents was socially active while several expressed the desire to pursue a career that would promote positive social changes in Thailand. Further research should focus on why some privileged people support pro-poor policies, are socially active or pursue careers that advance social justice. This would provide a greater understanding on what influences the privileged to be pro-poor,

simultaneously, it would give insights on how such influences can be disseminated among the privileged as to encourage cross-class coalition to support poverty reduction and social justice in Thailand.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWEES BACKGROUND

Chulalongkorn University Students

Code	Sex	Age	Course	Level	Political Affiliation	Region of origin
Chula1	M	26	International Development	Graduate	Anti-Royalist Red	South
Chula2	F	20	International Relations	Undergraduate	Anti-royalist	North-East
Chula3	F	20	International Relations	Undergraduate	Neutral	West
Chula4	F	28	International Development	Graduate	Anti-Royalist	North
Chula5	M	22	Sociology & Anthropology	Undergraduate	Neutral	North
Chula6	F	21	Sociology & Anthropology	Undergraduate	Neutral	Central
Chula7	F	20	Political Science	Undergraduate	Neutral	North-East
Chula8	F	21	Sociology & Anthropology	Undergraduate	Neutral	Bangkok
Chula9	M	22	Sociology & Anthropology	Undergraduate	Red	Bangkok
Chula10	M	20	Politics and Governance	Undergraduate	Anti-Royalist Red	North

Mahidol University International College Students

Code	Sex	Age	Course	Level	Political Affiliation	Region of origin
MUIC1	F	22	International Studies	Undergraduate	Red Anti-Royalist	Central
MUIC2	M	30	International Studies	Undergraduate	Red	Bangkok
MUIC3	M	26	International Studies	Undergraduate	Yellow	Bangkok
MUIC4	M	24	International Studies	Undergraduate	Anti-Royalist	Bangkok
MUIC5	M	21	International Studies	Undergraduate	Yellow	Bangkok
MUIC6	M	26	International Studies	Undergraduate	Yellow	Bangkok
MUIC7	M	21	International Studies	Undergraduate	Neutral	Bangkok
MUIC8	F	21	International Studies	Undergraduate	Yellow	South
MUIC9	M	26	International Studies	Undergraduate	Neutral	Bangkok

Thammasat University Students

Code	Sex	Age	Course	Level	Political Affiliation	Region of origin
Tham1	F	28	Rural Development	Graduate	Neutral	South
Tham2	F	21	Politics & International Relations	Undergraduate	Neutral	Central
Tham3	M	22	Politics & International Relations	Undergraduate	Neutral	East
Tham4	M	20	Politics & International Relations	Undergraduate	Anti-royalist	East
Tham5	M	20	Politics & International Relations	Undergraduate	Yellow	Central
Tham6	M	22	Politics & International Relations	Undergraduate	Neutral	Bangkok
Tham7	F	20	Politics & International Relations	Undergraduate	Neutral	Bangkok

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1- **Perceptions of poverty and the poor**

What do you think about poverty in Thailand?

How would you describe poverty?

If you were to think of someone as poor, what characteristics of the person

would lead you to think of him or her as poor?

Thinking of urban and rural areas in Thailand, where do you think the poor

are?

Where is poverty more visible in Thailand?

Are there differences between rural and urban poor? Is there a type of poor

that is better off than the other?

As an estimate, what is the percentage of Thai people living in poverty?

Should pro-poor policies target certain types of poor or certain areas?

2- **Perceptions of inequality in Thailand**

Is there inequality in Thailand?

What types of inequality can you identify?

How unequal do you think Thai society is?

Is inequality an issue in Thailand?

Why do you think inequality is so high (or low) in Thailand?

What causes inequality?

Do you think inequality is linked to poverty?

3- **Causes of poverty/ Social responsibility**

What do you think are the main causes of poverty in Thailand?

Why do you think poverty is still prevailing in Thailand?

Why some people are rich while others are poor?

Are there differences between rich people and poor people?

Do you think certain behaviours and attitudes of the poor or of the privileged

are responsible to the persistence of poverty in Thailand?

4- **Impact of poverty and the poor on the privileged youth/Social**

interdependency

Do privileged people interact with the poor? If yes, what kind of interactions?

Do privileged people care about the poor?

Does poverty impacts you? If yes, how?

Do you think privileged people have a moral obligation to help the poor?

Do you think privileged people benefit from the prevalence of poverty?

Do you think that poverty increases crime?

Do you think poverty increases the spread of communicable diseases?

Do you think poverty increases political instability?

Do you think poverty and the poor impact privileged people's wellbeing because of crime, diseases or political instability?

If not, why do you think privileged people are not afraid of the poor or of the negative effects of poverty such as crime, diseases and political instability?

Do you fear that poor people may rebel and an uprising follows?

Do poor people represent an opportunity for society and the privileged?

Do you believe that poverty or the troubles of the poor makes privileged people feel unease?

5- **Policy preferences/Feasibility**

Between distribution and enabling more economic growth, which one you believe should be a priority?

What do you think of the government initiatives to reduce poverty?

Do you think that solutions to eradicate poverty exist?

What measures do you think could reduce poverty?

What type of policies do you think are better to reduce poverty?

 - Monetary assistance for poor people

 - Subsidies

 - Creating jobs

 - Free healthcare

 - Free education

 - Higher minimum income

- Benefits given to unemployed people

- Distribution of goods to sustain livelihoods

- Pensions

- Other

Is reducing the gap between the rich and the poor feasible? If yes, what could be done?

6- **Collective action/ Social responsibility**

Which institution bears the responsibility to improve the lives of the poor?

The state, civil society, private sector?

Which institution should be in charge of poverty reduction?

Apart from the state, which institution can reduce poverty?

Would you support higher taxes to fund policies to alleviate poverty?

VITA

Miss Valérie Paradiso was born in the province of Québec, Canada. She was educated in Canada, the United-Kingdom, Thailand and Australia. She holds a bachelor degree of science with honours in International Relations and Philosophy from Oxford Brookes University, Oxford. Her numerous volunteering experiences and her studies abroad led her to want to pursue a career in the development field and a master in International Development at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.