

## Abstract

This thesis argues against the dominant understandings of the problem of poverty in Thai society. It aims to offer a new perspective on poverty by using the poststructuralist approach to the issue.

The purpose of the study is to answer five major questions. How has the dominant discourse of poverty been established and accepted? What hidden interests are masked by the definitions used and the solutions offered in the form of aid programme to alleviate poverty? What other types of deprivation or suffering, in addition to those stemming from an insufficient income, are experienced by those defined as poor people? What reactive methods do the poor use to meet these challenges? Finally, what are the characteristics of poverty groups that are caught in the poverty trap and poorness?

The study tackles these five questions in light of the global capitalism whose original goal is poverty eradication. The main arguments of this thesis challenge the mainstream of poverty knowledge in the following ways.

Firstly, poverty does not have a universally agreed upon meaning. Instead, its meaning is constructed for specific reasons. Most basically, particular interests that remain ostensibly hidden from the aims of poverty alleviation exploited the definition of poverty to shape and control social elements.

Secondly, it is not possible when trying to understand how to solve the problem of poverty by using dichotomy approach between mainstream and alternative theories of development.

Thirdly, neither the mainstream development idea that higher incomes can solve poverty nor the alternative development belief that ending poverty is a matter of self-reliance is sufficient. Other methods and theoretical approaches are needed to these traditional solutions.

The results of the study show that political technologies condition people to believe that they are poor. These technologies produce “poorness” as a social condition

through three elements: a sense of unvalued, ungrounded and unautomated of the self. These elements of the poorness create the docile body of the people making them receptive to imposed methods of poverty eradication. Poverty in the global capitalist system is an outcome of a quest for accelerated production and correspondingly increasing levels of consumption. The money that is used for consumption is borrowed from poverty alleviation projects, which results in very high levels of debts.

In discursive practice of the significations and attempts to eradicate poverty in the past has created the myths of poverty. An emergence of new meanings, the absolute poverty by measuring poverty as anyone living below poverty line changed to measuring poverty as an examination of taste and lifestyles in contemporary society. At the same time, a multi-dimensional measuring poverty as anyone lack of quality of life changed to expanded the boundaries of who is defined as poor from those classified as “peasants” to today’s designation of them as “grassroots people.” In any case, these groups remain bound to the specifications of the state development project, and acquiesce in their status in order to receive the benefits of development under capitalist principles.

One approach to alleviate poverty and poorness is an understanding of the origins and the creation of the meaning of poverty, in order to create a new discourse. A new discourse of poverty can allow people to live in a capitalist society in a social space of their own construction. This can be done by people exercising their right to define and critique what poverty means, and all that it entails. It is hoped that a new way of talking about poverty will lead to a new movement and new political identity that is connected to and distances itself from the global capitalism.