



The cult of wealth: Religious practices of life coaching and creating millionaire subjectivity in Thailand

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Abstract

Most studies in anthropology suggest that religious practice plays a significant role in promoting capitalism and entrepreneurship. However, this article focuses on non-religious areas and argues that life coaching programs, such as “The Mindfulness Map (fictitious name)” — a course at an institute in Thailand that teaches knowledge on developing wealth and is popular among entrepreneurs — create new forms of religious practice that promote wealth. This article uses the concept of subjectivity to understand how religious beliefs and faith support capitalist ideology. The phenomenon in which a life coaching program is rooted is the cult of wealth,” and the resulting religious practices and mystical worship give practitioners a sense of blessing and protection. Their interpretations of religious practices for wealth alleviate the sense of insecurity in Thailand’s capitalist system.

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Introduction

This article focuses on the expansion of mass life coaching programs in Thailand. Interestingly, the inclusion of references to Buddhism and religious practices in these programs represents a shift in the

interpretation of the spiritual dimensions resulting from changes in the capitalist economy. Underlying this assumption is the recognition that new types of organizations arising from economic changes use religious practices to instill and stimulate people’s minds, and that entrepreneurs drive the way of life in capitalism.¹

¹ In the 2010s, life coaching was limited to a small circle in Thailand until conductor Bandit Ungrangsri introduced a coach training program, after which it gained popularity. Unlike other countries, life coaches in Thailand do not specialize in areas like business, spiritual, or health coaching, but instead possess universal expertise. In 2017, several life coaches gained popularity, including Kru Aoi Life Compass, Bandit Ungrangsri, Sean Buranahiran, Captain Benz, and Kru Ngaow Rossukon, each with their own unique techniques. However, they all use life burden narratives and similar methods to address issues (Sirot, 2020; The Matter Team; 2020).

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Most studies on life coaches and happiness (Binkley, 2014; Frawley, 2015; McGee, 2005; Wright, 2014) focus on their relationship with business, but the study of life coaches who incorporate dimensions related to religion and beliefs has not been well studied. On the other hand, the study of capitalism and religion typically focuses on areas within religion or entities directly related to religion, particularly the dominance of capitalism in the religious space.

In this study, rather than exploring the perspective of making religion meet the needs of capitalism, I examine the “Mindfulness Map Program” as a case study. This program, designed by life coaches, aims to teach individuals how to live a wealthy life in Thai society. The program draws on knowledge from business administration, positive psychology, as well as religion and beliefs. Life coaches in Thailand have integrated religious practices to meet the needs of the laypeople, and the line between “religious” and “non-religious” practices has become blurred (Kataoka, 2012). Participants in the life coach training did not concern themselves with whether the practices were religious or not, but rather focused on the results they produced. I analyze how the current form of religion differs from the traditional one, as it does not necessarily fall within the state-defined sphere of religion, but rather emphasizes spirituality without invoking deities. I use a Weberian approach to expand on this topic, emphasizing the shift from Weber’s traditional asceticism to a contemporary focus on richness. On the issue of capitalism and spirituality, it is important to note that capitalism was not only formed by the economy but also by spirituality, which has contributed to the development of the capitalist spirit in Thai society.

Therefore, the purpose of using religious practices was to create hope and encouragement for economic progress, rather than a moral outcome. However, many working-age individuals who participate in the “Mindfulness Map Program” view their life coach as a living inspiration and spiritual leader, akin to a cult leader’s sacred status. Although the life coaching industry in Thai society is not considered a religion, it is linked to Buddhism and its belief dimensions, providing a guarantee of academic interest.

On the other hand, some members of the life coaching business in Thailand view the act of teaching self-improvement for wealth as a means of creating an entrepreneurial subjectivity. This argument assumes that entrepreneurial subjectivity is a result of the dynamics of a neoliberal economic system. However, if there is no distinction between life coaches in Thailand with Buddhist references and life coaches in other contexts,

then members are not required to attend a life coach program that incorporates Buddhism and faith. Therefore, instead of attending the Mindfulness Map Program solely to fulfill their desire for wealth, I argue that capitalism is not merely an economic system, but also has a religious dimension that contributes to the formation of the capitalist spirit.

This study shows how the “Mindfulness Map Program,” a life coaching program in Thailand since the 2000s, manipulates spirituality like a cult. Capitalism commodifies faith by using life coaching, an integral part of the system, to mobilize people’s minds and promote the millionaire spirit.

Literature Review

Studying Religious Practices related to Capitalism in Thailand

In the Thai context, scholars have primarily focused on studying the spiritual landscape and religious marketplaces where people seek supernatural help to attain success, wealth, and power. These movements have become popular since the 1980s and 1990s, coinciding with the significant influence of capitalism on people’s daily lives. Beliefs associated with wealth, such as the cults of King Chulalongkorn, Guanyin, and royal spirits, have gained momentum (Jackson, 1999a; 1999b; McDaniel, 2011; Stengs, 2009). This trend has intensified after the economic crisis in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, when people struggled with economic instability (Pattana, 2012; Tanabe & Keyes, 2002). Studies on religion and modernity have shown that spirituality and magic can coexist with modernity by adapting to secular responses (Keyes, et al., 1994; Meyer & Pels, 2003; Pattana, 2008; Tanabe & Keyes, 2002).

The religious practices infused in the knowledge of life coaches were discussed in this study. It is found that the structure of life coaches’ knowledge carries the spiritual dimension—a religion aspect—into the Mindfulness Map Program for Wealth. As a result, I examine capitalism’s mechanism for life capture, particularly in the spirituality of life. The mechanisms of spirituality and religion are able to invade and manage the feelings of humans considerably. Its aim is to encourage entrepreneurial subjectivity.

Unlike studies that explore the relationship between religion and capitalism, a considerable body of work by anthropologists has investigated the impact of economic changes and modernity on the proliferation of popular

religions, particularly in Southeast Asian societies (Camaroff & Camaroff, 2000; Jackson, 1999a; Pattana, 2012; Taylor, 2004, 2007). Nonetheless, studies of modern Thai spirituality have shown that beliefs and lay expectations are subject to change over time and context (McDaniel, 2011; Kitiarsa, 1999; 2012; Stengs, 2009). However, the diversity of Thai religions is not a recent phenomenon that can be attributed to economic changes or modern religions but has been an ongoing development. Justin McDaniel has proposed the concept of “religious repertoire” to comprehend the range of religious practices and their potential variations, which can be internally inconsistent and contradictory (McDaniel, 2011, p. 225). Similar to the Mindfulness Map Program, the program presents itself as a lifestyle advice business, but it includes a mixture of dimensions of beliefs that appear to be contradictory, yet they serve to stimulate greater interest among program participants.

Contrary to the perspective that posits religion as the driving force behind the emergence of capitalism, Daromir’s book “Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development” (2010) argues that in Indonesia, capitalism is connected to Islamism. This connection leads people to attribute their success to their worship of God, resulting in strict adherence to their religion. The religion practice of the Life Map Program is consistent with this view, as it helps us understand the mechanisms of the neoliberal economy, including spiritual mechanisms that can influence the mind. Capitalism can function effectively when combined with entrepreneurial subjectivity that integrates both spiritual and economic dimensions. Moreover, entrepreneurs must possess a capitalist spirit for capitalism to operate efficiently (Wongyannawa, 2020, pp. 1–33).

The Mindfulness Map Program and new religious cults, such as Wat Phra Dhammakaya (Feungfusakul, 1993), have both similarities and differences (Khongthana, 2016). Both emerged in the context of capitalist economic development in Thailand and have attracted new members from the urban middle class, as well as other ceremonial cult groups, with the goal of achieving wealth.

Life coaches in Thailand combine religious practices with various forms of magic as a means to accumulate wealth. This observation draws on Weber’s famous work, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” (1904–1955), which posits a connection between capitalism and spirituality. According to Weber, capitalism derives its spirituality from the reformation of religion to meet the needs of the modern world, which gives people a new spirit that can be cultivated through capitalism.

Weber argues that the roots of rationalism in the spirit of capitalism stem from the Protestant concept of “calling,” which refers to a religious or divine duty or obligation. The Christian ministry was replaced by the idea of calling, and asceticism led people from their monastic cells and inner world into the rational and working life. The notion of “spirit” is crucial to the capitalist drive for production standardization and equality.

Spirituality is essential in capturing individuals on a spiritual level, making it a crucial mechanism. Although working hard for more money can be viewed as greedy, if seen as a religious act, individuals may perceive it as a decent act. The idea is that if they have more money, they can donate more. Thus, entrepreneurial subjectivity aims to enable people to believe that they can be wealthy without feeling guilty.

Methodology

Using qualitative and case study methodology, this article collected data through in-depth fieldwork and participatory observation at a popular life coaching business in Bangkok, Thailand, referred to as “Life Map (pseudonym),” from April 2018 to December 2022. The study involved middle-class individuals who were participating members of the life coaching program. The author engaged in course activities, closely tracked the experiences of 11 individuals, conducted interviews with participants, and monitored social media platforms for news, as these were the primary channels used by life coaches to communicate with their members.

Results and Discussion

Mindfulness Map and its Development Religious Practices of Life Coaching in Thailand

This study analyzes Coach A’s (pseudonym) life coaching program. In 2011, she received certification as a subconsciousness instructor from the National Guild of Hypnotherapy (NGH), one of the leading institutes for hypnotherapy. The key differentiating factor between Coach A and other life coaches is the incorporation of both religious and secular elements in her program. Coach A developed the two-day Life Map Program, which focuses on positive psychology and aims to assist participants in becoming entrepreneurs and increasing their wealth. The program requires a fee and full participation at the designated location. Additionally, the

free Mindfulness Map Program provides content on meditation practices, vipassana, and Buddhist dhamma talks, and is available to those who have participated in the Life Map Program at least once.

In this article I focus on analytics “Mindfulness Map Program”. It requires individuals to practice meditation in a big cluster. There are 400–500 individuals participating in each arrangement.² The activity is held four times per year in luxury hotels situated in Bangkok or in suburban provinces. The participants are required to hold zero talks, wear white attire, and eat vegetarian food. The activities are to alternate between meditative walking and general meditation. The practice is based on the Vipassana (four mindfulness precepts): inhalation following, exhalation following, prayer, along with the dhamma-infused speech of Coach A. The content of such a speech entails Jataka tales dating back to the era when Buddha was still alive. The tales recount how Buddha’s disciples practiced meditation in order to become rich.

The group of participants consists of middle-class working people between the ages of 25 and 50, referred to as “coaches”³ in this article.

The meditation hall is located in luxurious hotels with high-quality amenities and decor. The hall features elegant chandeliers and a large Buddha statue as a backdrop, portraying Buddha as a human being. The coach’s seat is elevated on a stage above the other seats, contributing to a sense of hierarchy. The seats for participants are arranged in a sacred manner on a carpet, and they are required to wear white clothing, creating a serene and powerful environment.

It can be argued that the grand meditation venue, with its luxurious facilities, may inadvertently stir up desires for wealth among participants, despite the calming effects of Buddhism. The meditation program emphasizes comfort, venue grandeur, and white attire, and appeals particularly to young workers who yearn for success. Coach A promises that after the meditation practice, there will be a shortcut to success. However, it should be noted that meditation is primarily a practice of refocusing effort on both the physical and mental levels, which can enhance one’s ability to compete in the market.

The Mindfulness Map Program is a unique approach to life coaching practices in Thailand, as it is provided free of charge, and each event is made possible by the generous donations of money and objects from 50 to 100 individuals. Being a host of this event is interesting because it involves presenting objects and making a donation, which can be seen as a form of marketing and advertising for hosts’ own businesses. Maew, for example, used to donate objects to the event because she believed that making merit through such participation would lead to even greater merits.

However, the emphasis on the rational and organizational aspects of capitalism has led to the neglect of the religious dimensions involved. Thus, it is crucial to broaden the scope of Thai religiosity. The emergence of life coaches who integrate religion into their programs has drawn an increasing number of individuals to participate in the training in the modern world.

The Cults of Wealth: Mixing Religious Practice into Life Coaching

This study does not consider religious movements that highlight religious adaptation in Thai society. Instead, it emphasizes the use of new religions and beliefs for wealth and prosperity. These new symbols, rituals, spiritual communications, and commercial productions of religious objects are mainly focused on the individual’s wealth (Jackson, 2022). Incorporating the spiritual dimensions into the organization of life coaches is considered a novelty. Interestingly, members who support such life coaches tend to ignore the symbolic complexity of the religious practices to which they refer, and only care about the outcomes of wealth. Although the idea of Weberian modernism has been well developed, scholars such as Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) agree that the form of magical rituals changes according to the logic of the culture of neoliberalism, modern technology, and digital media. While Tambiah (1977; 1981; 1985) describes the performance characteristics of rituals constituting the magical realm of religious life, I argue that living under neoliberalism creates a life full of risks and insecurities.

² There is no exact data on the number of life coaching businesses in Thailand. Furthermore, there is no precise count of Mindfulness Map Program participants. As for the time during which I did the fieldwork in 2018, this type of business was most successful, with about 600 people participants at a time and training sessions being held at least 2–3 times a year. However, the life coaching business also grows by social media to make the production of online courses. Therefore, the number of members cannot be determined. Also, it is business information that I cannot have access to.

³ *Coachees* are individuals who attend self-development training offered by life coaches, including permanent employees and small entrepreneurs, who hope to become rich and seek techniques and knowledge from life coaches to increase their income and potential in various dimensions. Their ultimate goal is to become millionaires.

This factor leads to a special obsession with religion and belief, as it provides emotional shelter and the power of holiness as a shortcut to wealth. Moreover, mixing religious practice with secular practice is an essential tool that stimulates people's minds to want to get rich and live in line with the capitalist way of life. Therefore, the phenomenon of life coaching businesses can be considered "cults of wealth".⁴

The religious practices within the Mindfulness Map Programs can be classified into two distinct types: mindfulness meditation and magic, both of which are linked to superstitious ceremonies and beliefs.

1. Mindfulness meditation

In the Mindfulness Map Program, meditation is referred to as "prayer," and includes practices such as meditative walking and conscious breath control. The aim of these exercises is to calm the mind, particularly during times of fear, stress, and burden, which in turn allows the person to gain greater self-control and clarity of thought. Furthermore, according to Coach A, there is a power known as the "power of mind" that has the ability to manifest desires, including wealth (Information from Facebook Fan page of Coach A (A pseudonym), 2016).

Meditation is viewed as a tool to increase productivity (Purser, 2019), and it is related to entrepreneurial subjectivity and the adaptation to economic fluctuations, which require mental stability. This is different from the past when meditation was solely for dharma-related purposes, such as cognitive growth and disengagement. However, in the Mindfulness Map Program, meditation is manipulated to generate mental stability and hope for wealth among entrepreneurs. Bee's account illustrates this, as she states,

"I used to practice meditation every morning and evening, which helped improve my consciousness and concentration at work. It was rather effective, as I could keep track of my thoughts, control my feelings and mind more efficiently, and have more power to live on."

(Interview with Bee, 32 years old).

Contemporary research on meditation in Thailand highlights the "Trendy Dharma" movement, promoting meditation as a means to enhance everyday life and social status. This trend reflects the growing influence of lay individuals known as "Dharma Experts," who teach meditation and generate Dharma knowledge to meet the

spiritual needs of the secularly (Satasut, 2015). This trend is similar to the meditation practices used by life coaches, who combine psychology with religious practices to create a form of modern Thai Buddhism that responds to the capitalist society. However, life coaches also incorporate magic and worship into their teachings.

The Mindfulness Map Program has redefined meditation as a tool to address daily issues and break free from suffering, which is seen as a personal responsibility. Poverty and inequality are viewed as temporary issues that can be changed through discipline and diligence. Meditation is seen as complementary to economic activity and a way to enhance creativity and generate benefits, providing a shortcut to making money with less effort. Coach A shared her experience of expanding her business from three to ten shops within a few months after practicing meditation, emphasizing that it can be applied in real life and not just about closing one's eyes. She said,

"I managed to practice meditation seven days a month. I knew that I had debt and suffered from it. However, when I practiced meditation, my diamond business grew from 3 to 10 shops within a few months. It was impossible amidst such an economic crisis. I can tell you that meditation practice is not just closing your eyes. Rather, it is the practice that can be applied in real life. I would work and live happily, the outcomes would be great, thereby great money."

(Information from YouTube by Coach A (A pseudonym), 2016).

The Mindfulness Map Program incorporates religious practices and meditation into life coaching instruction in order to strengthen the effectiveness of entrepreneurs through the Dharma. This integration is driven by the recognition that these practices have a direct impact on the internal experiences of individuals, and that meditation can function as a means for calming the mind and mitigating stress brought on by economic volatility. By cultivating control over their consciousness, individuals are able to work towards mastery of their inner selves. As individuals become more disciplined, they can achieve deeper levels of self-control and focus, allowing them to generate and innovate without being overly concerned with economic instability. Thus, meditation serves as a powerful tool for encouraging value creation among entrepreneurs.

⁴ *Cults of wealth* represent a convergence of new religious practices, which are viewed in this article not as a commercialization of Buddhism, but rather as a tool to cater to the capitalist way of life. The emphasis is on wealth as the ideal in life, and people must adapt and improve themselves to compete in the market system. Jackson characterizes the emergence of "cults of wealth" as a spiritualization of the market, rather than just a commercialization of Buddhism in Thailand (Jackson, 2022, p. 27).

2. Magic and prayer toward success

The use of magic for worldly success is not limited to the teachings of life coaches. This phenomenon has been observed since the 1980s and 1990s, when economic changes intensified the influence of capitalism on people's daily lives. This is consistent with the expansion of supernatural worship for wealth, such as the cults of King Chulalongkorn (Stengs, 2009), Guanyin, and some royal spirits (Jackson, 1999a; 1999b; McDaniel, 2011). Beliefs associated with wealth grew even stronger after the economic crisis in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, when people struggled with economic volatility (Tanabe & Keyes, 2002; Pattana, 2012). Numerous studies on magic and modernity have shown that magic and spiritualism can coexist with modernity by adapting to secular responses (Keyes et al., 1994; Kitiarsa, 2008; Meyer & Pels, 2003; Tanabe & Keyes, 2002).

Consequently, the magic and rituals used by life coaches have taken on a new meaning in response to the capitalist lifestyle that demands success in terms of consumption and money. The purpose of using magic is to create hope and encouragement for economic progress, rather than a moral outcome (Landy & Saler, 2009).

I exemplify the merit-making activity of the Life Map group at a temple, where participants were required to wear traditional Thai attire and bring donations in the form of money or gold. These donations were utilized for constructing religious statues, offering to monks, and purchasing monk's robes. The event included a worship ceremony to pay respects to the Great Naga, the temple's guardian. Selected coachees were invited to participate in a worship dance, and by doing so, they believed they would gain more merits. The ceremony combined Buddhism and magic, and Coach A mentioned the miracle of the Naga, where clouds in the sky formed the shape of the Naga after the ceremony. She believed this would bring luck to all participants. The activity was broadcast live on the organization's Facebook page, and coachees who watched the event were congratulated. The ceremony aimed to bring wealth and professional success (as posted on Coach A (a pseudonym)'s Facebook page in 2019).

An interesting aspect of merit-making activities is how individuals showcase their wealth and success through their attire, diamonds, branded objects, gold, and elaborately decorated donations. They emphasize the value of the donated object by prominently displaying the donor's name and the item's worth. This display of luxury is particularly popular among entrepreneurs who desire to assert their status and be acknowledged by society as successful and distinct from others.

As mentioned previously, meditation is a self-control tool that enhances productivity. Complementing meditation, magic can fulfill desires and hopes. In an accelerated capitalist system, rapid wealth garners attention, but it is unattainable through conventional means. Therefore, resorting to magic becomes a solution. In Thailand, religion is closely tied to economic changes, particularly in life coaching, where coaches advise on how to become wealthy. These ethical and religious practices promote the idea of personal responsibility for success in life. As belief systems endorse a good life in capitalism, ethics play a crucial role (Max et al., 2018, pp. 33–42).

Life Coach: Leader of the Cult of Wealth

The Mindfulness Map Program distinguishes itself from other life coaching programs by offering "spiritual leadership" in addition to its coaching services. Coach A's discourse value lies in how meditation has helped her achieve wealth and success. Unlike other life coaches who rely on business science and positive psychology in their programs, Coach A teaches members the benefits of meditation and holy worship. According to her teachings, if members practice these spiritual activities as she does, they too can succeed in their careers and overcome any obstacles.

During my fieldwork, I observed Coach A's appearance on stage after the conference room lights were dimmed. The spotlight focused on her, and she appeared with a smile that evoked strong emotions in the participants. As she descended from the stage, the seminar attendees burst into loud cheers and applause. Many of her disciples shed tears of joy, and some even requested to shake her hand, expressing how blessed they felt to have met the real Coach A. Her always-smiling face exudes a sense of friendliness, and she often encourages those who attend her training by shaking hands and giving hugs. By displaying charisma through faith, Coach A further reinforces her spiritual leadership status. The more people show faith in Coach A as a spiritual leader who manipulates the spiritual dimension, the more she dominates people's mental levels.

The Mindfulness Map Program has a seating arrangement that shows a clear hierarchy. Coach A, as the leader, sits on a stage that is higher than any other seat in the hall. The first five rows in front of the stage are reserved for high-status coachees, while the rest of the participants sit in the remaining seats. This arrangement reflects the socioeconomic inequality among the participants. This observation is consistent with Maew's account, who remarked:

“During the training under the Mindfulness Map Program, there are hierarchical seating arrangements. Successful and famous individuals are seated in the front rows. I wonder why they are seated in the front and offered different meals, even though they pay the same amount of money to participate.”

(Interview with Maew, 31 years old).

The cult-like status of the Mindfulness Map program is reinforced by the members’ deep faith in Coach A and the perceived sanctity of life coaches. The hierarchical relationship between Coach A and the members resembles that of a spiritual leader, with some members believing that following her teachings will improve their lives. Meeting Coach A is viewed as an opportunity to encounter a charismatic and meritorious role model. Members who are close to her elevate her status, portraying her as a superhuman coach. Pim (a pseudonym) expressed her thoughts on Coach A’s status, saying:

“Life coaches in Thailand have multifaceted functions. I think Coach A infuses such superstitions so much. It motivates me to believe that life coaches are not different from horologists. As widely conceived, our country would love to make people believe and hold faith without question. We also believe the magic is a special feature.”

(Interview with Pim, 30 years old).

Despite participating in the Mindfulness Map Program, not all members hold Coach A in high esteem. Reverence is only shown to those who have attended multiple sessions and have been selected by Coach A as successful disciples. Self-made life coaches, on the other hand, are seen as spiritual benefactors who promote the mobilization of the mind through faith. However, these beliefs do not align with Dhamma. Instead, religion is used as a means of achieving wealth, and these coaches serve as role models for those who seek to use religion for financial gain.

Creating the Spirit of Millionaire in 21st Century

As stated above, the Mindfulness Map Program has attempted to elevate the status of the life coach business in Thailand by utilizing the religious capital and recognized beliefs to empower itself. This program has many middle-class people paying to attend such activities. Anyway, blending spiritual dimensions is not arbitrary, but life coaches use practices that most people accept, such as meditation, chanting, worshipping sacred objects,

etc. These are things that most Thai people are familiar with, and they are a window of hope in a capitalist system where life is fraught with risks due to economic volatility. We can see from the preceding example that the spiritual dimension of the Mindfulness Map Program focuses on assisting the entrepreneurial subjectivity process to give people the qualities of competitive entrepreneurship—the desire to get rich—in line with the needs of capitalism.

Economic changes since the 1970s have led to a shift in self-perception regarding employment, from that of a worker to that of an entrepreneur, as a coping mechanism. This involves personal development to transform oneself into human capital, where the self becomes a source of income and fulfillment of desires (Kengkij, 2018, pp. 140–141). The working class seeks tools and knowledge to improve their potential and abilities, resulting in the emergence of various life coaching programs. These programs aim to transform individuals into entrepreneurs capable of managing risks and remaining competitive.

In the Thai context, since the 2014 coup, there has been a decline in the economic sector, and technological advancements have transformed the business landscape, resulting in a shift from permanent to flexible contract employment. This shift has caused a sense of insecurity, and the scarcity of permanent positions has left recent graduates unemployed, pushing them towards becoming small business owners and freelancers. According to the 2017 unemployment statistics, the unemployment rate has increased significantly, particularly for those between the ages of 15 and 39. Specifically, the unemployment figure was 463,379 entries, which is 122,162 greater than that recorded in the same quarter in 2014 (341,117) (National Statistical Office, 2017). In response to the challenges of living in a capitalist society, some individuals have turned to religious practices as a means of coping and survival.

As Weber noted, the moral code of religion, such as accumulating economic wealth and working hard, fosters a capitalist spirit. This relationship between religious ethics and economic life is evident (Max, 1958). While Buddhism in Thailand does not have a clear provision that everyone must accumulate wealth, Jackson’s work rejects Weber’s prediction of the progressive “disenchantment” of modernizing societies. Instead, Jackson proposes that modernity itself generates ever more magic (Jackson, 2022, p. 3). He analyses “prosperity religions” that have emerged amid economic upheavals since 1990, creating a middle-class culture that aligns with capitalism and consumerism. As life has become more connected with commerce, the worship of fortune and success has also increased, in line with the changing

needs of a new industrialized society, ignoring religious liberation (Jackson, 1999a). This can be observed through “supplications” with the use of amulets and fortune-tellers. The “immediate results” of meditation and merit-making have led to new religious movements, such as Dhammakaya and Santi-Asoka (Feungfusakul, 1993; 1998).

This study argues that life coaches promote the belief that being rich equates to being a good person, similar to Calvinism. However, unlike Calvinism, life coaches encourage individuals to work hard and create wealth for their own benefit, rather than for God’s sake. The use of religious practices in the business world to teach entrepreneurship reflects the inextricable link between capitalism and the utilization of religion as a tool for inspiring hope. This relationship is rooted in capitalist logic.

The emergence of entrepreneurial subjectivity has led humans to recognize the crucial role of self-belief in achieving success. Religious practices significantly contribute to making the capitalist spirit effective in entrepreneurial life by offering hope and eliminating expected difficulties (Kengkij, 2018, pp. 27–31). For instance, meditation helps address uncontrollable risks, while worshipping holy spirits generates hopes for wealth. Additionally, blessings can reduce the desire for a luxurious lifestyle. These practices underscore a technique of power that seeks to manipulate humans abstractly (Foucault, 2008), impacting the working aspect horizontally. The objective is to exert self-control using the mechanisms of life coaching programs.

Religious practice is a power technique in The Mindfulness Map Program that controls from within—the mind—rather than from without. This leads to entrepreneurs knowing how to control themselves based on the notions of merit-making and morality circulating in all aspects of their lives. The knowledge of practice is embedded in the subjectivity process, which necessitates internal self-control. It also contributes to entrepreneurial subjectivity, which leads to self-control and increases the effectiveness of working from within. It is evident through the term “Rich philanthropist” a term that implies being rich without feeling guilty, as entrepreneurs believe that wealth offers more opportunities to do good and be happy than poverty does.

Integrating spirituality and religious practices with capitalism is no different to using knowledge to control inner thoughts. Therefore, I propose an argument for incorporating religious practices into capitalism, which captures life’s most abstract aspects. In a capitalist society, trade relations create challenges, particularly

during the economic regression caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Small-scale businesses that lack social welfare and depend on their customers are particularly affected. Business owners face risks such as investments, debts, rents, and employment costs.

“When I started my company, I rushed to invest my savings in various ventures to become wealthy quickly, but returns were unsatisfactory. I turned to fraudulent direct selling, leading me to start over and take significant responsibilities to cover expenses and bank debt each month. Despite challenges, I’m grateful for what I’ve achieved.”

(Interview with Mac, 38 years old).

Small business owners without personal funds often rely on loans, forcing them to manage all aspects of their lives independently, including investments, insurance, housing, and child education. While debt allows for greater financial freedom, it also creates a sense of responsibility and guilt. In the face of economic challenges and inequality, entrepreneurs take on multiple tasks and risks, hoping that hard work will lead to wealth and happiness.

In the context of economic adversity and inequality, individuals often search for tools or means to achieve their life goals quickly. The ultimate aspiration of many people in the 21st century is to become rich. Life coaching businesses have contributed to the development of an entrepreneurial subjectivity, and the integration of religious practices is intended to create a tool to alleviate life’s difficulties while also fueling aspirations for wealth. Consequently, when life coaches incorporate religious practices into daily life, they are cultivating what is referred to as “the spirit of a millionaire.”

The concept of entrepreneurial subjectivity emphasizes coaches’ desire for wealth, goodness, and happiness, which is crucial for success in market competition under capitalism. The religious practices taught by life coaches reveal that the capitalist spirit, with an awareness of self-interest, is not solely caused by changes in technology or the economy, but by the construction of entrepreneurial subjectivity through a change in the “thinking system.” The emergence of the life coaching business is at the heart of this subjectivity, fueled by the sale of faith and the creation of “the spirit of the millionaire.”

Conclusion and Recommendation

The religious practices taught by life coaches motivate entrepreneurs to improve their lives. Incorporating

religious practices into a life coach's curriculum reflects how capitalism sells faith, controlling the coachee's body and mind at a spiritual level. Various practices, such as meditation and making merit, mobilize the mind through the spiritual dimension to meet the needs of worldly life and wealth. Thus, the inclusion of religious practices in the life curriculum reflects that capitalism is not solely built on the economy. "The Spirit of a Millionaire" is "The Spirit of Capitalism."

In Thai society, Buddhism and its practices have adapted to suit people's lives in a capitalist society. This has led to the emergence of new cults of wealth such as Dhammakaya, and objects of worship for wealth, such as Naga and Thao Wetsuwan. The spiritual apparatus can be found in other organizations, not necessarily related to religion, such as life coaching courses. Studying the role of life coaching in integrating religious practices to meet desires for wealth is crucial to expand the scope of sociological and anthropological knowledge in Thailand.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

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