

# Life Coaching in Thailand: Creating a Fantasy of “Wealth” for Entrepreneurs<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Life coaching has gained significant popularity among entrepreneurs in Thailand, often promoting the ideology of “wealth” under ideas of a capitalistic economy. This study examines the emergence of life coaching in Thailand’s entrepreneurial society to deconstruct the social ideology of the success and wealth it promotes, with a focus on individualism. Using an anthropological approach and critical discourse analysis, the “Life Map” program (a pseudonym) was selected as a case study for this research. The data was collected from 2018 to 2022 through in-depth interviews and observations. The study proposes that the main discourses generated by life coaches emphasize self-improvement, intelligence, wealth, happiness, and moral values. It argues that these discourses show how life coaches create a fantasy that manages the lives of entrepreneurs by infusing their inner selves with life coach knowledge and enforcing it on an inner level. The study tries to break new ground (theoretically) by arguing that life coaching involves not simply a problem of knowledge but also fantasy.

**Keywords:** life coaching, fantasy, entrepreneurial, capitalism, neoliberalism

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## Introduction

Online life coaching<sup>2</sup> has emerged as a prominent trend in Thailand, with a significant number of individuals seeking the assistance of coaches to realize their aspirations of financial prosperity and individual liberty. Nevertheless, the purported potential of a better life through life coaching may represent a fantasy, upheld by the capitalist system in which it functions. This article argues that life coaching in Thailand creates an illusion of wealth and freedom, and that the ideology contained in life coach teachings acts as an illusion that masks the inequality of the structural system.

The surge in the demand for life coaching in Thailand is driven by several factors, including the expanding middle class with disposable income, the increasing stress from work and life pressures, and the pursuit of personal fulfillment. A distinct feature of Thai coaching is the integration of Buddhist philosophy and mindfulness practices, known as the “Thai way of coaching” (Phondej, 2017: 129). Coaches leverage these traditions to enhance client self-awareness and inner peace. Renowned life coaches like Kru-Aoi, Life Compass, Captain Ben, and Sean Buranahiran incorporate these practices. Teaching content is a blend of disciplines fostering personal development that include happiness studies, positive psychology, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), and business.

For this reason, my research question is: Why is life coaching not solely concerned with generating knowledge but also with fantasy? The objective of the research is to study the fantasy creation of life coaches that affects the creation of entrepreneurial subjectivity.

## Literature Review

Scholars argue that happiness studies, positive psychology, and life coaching are evolving within the changing neoliberal economic system.

<sup>2</sup> Life coaching: In the 1830s, the word “coach” was used to refer to private tutors. The term was borrowed from the name of a four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage that was used to transport people to their destinations quickly during the mid-15th century in Europe. In 1861, the term “coach” was used to refer to sports coaches, such as football coaches. Later, the coaching industry was developed to improve human potential. With the addition of the word “life,” the term “coach” now refers to someone who guides individuals in achieving their goals in life (see Phondej, 2017: 127).

Ashley Frawley (2015) examines the language and imagery of happiness, highlighting a paradox in its meaning. She critiques how the state measures happiness through statistics, shaping social life and imposing a specific form of happiness. William Davies (2015) argues that the happiness industry encourages multitasking for financial stability, linking it to capitalism. However, capitalism also leads to self-exploitation, blaming individuals for failures, and accumulating debt. In essence, the happiness industry becomes a tool for both capital and the state to perpetuate self-exploitation through labor.

Following Majella Greene’s analysis (2012), the surge in self-help books aligns with increased job insecurity in the twenty-first century. Both the state and capital prioritize promoting happiness, as it positively impacts economic outcomes. This emphasis on happiness serves as an illusion of “empowerment” for workers, allowing them the semblance of managing their lives through positive psychology. Termed “DIY happiness,” this study critiques flexible governance for masking structural issues by placing the burden solely on individuals, diminishing the ignoring of structural problems.

Unlike the work of Nicholas Rose (1990), which redefines governance as the control of individuals’ minds rather than just physical force, the present study asserts that in neoliberalism, self-help knowledge contributes to the construction of entrepreneurial subjectivity. Rose proposes “governing the enterprising self,” emphasizing individual responsibility. Binkley’s study (2014) supports this, indicating that neoliberalism not only affects economic aspects but also weakens societal power accumulation. The happiness industry, as discussed, is a tool of neoliberal states, shaping citizens’ daily lives through self-improvement knowledge. Pursuing happiness becomes an ethical directive linked to entrepreneurial subjectivity.

Binkley argues that the happiness industry, influenced by neoliberal governments, regulates lives, and encourages self-development. In capitalist nations like the United States, happiness is commodified and pursued with an entrepreneurial spirit. Life coaching, a growing profession, is legally recognized and popular. However, this

perspective does not consider global variations. In Thailand, life coach training is uniquely connected to religious dimensions, setting it apart from practices in other countries (Binkley, 2014: 3).

The studies cited above explore the impact of the happiness industry, which includes how-to books, happiness policies, and life coaches, on individuals. However, psychoanalysis, highlighted by Colin Wright (2014) is crucial for understanding mental regulation. Using Lacan-influenced psychoanalytic analysis, Wright argues that the cultural fixation on happiness may lead to suppressing negative emotions, resulting in “toxic positivity” and a false sense of contentment. This, he asserts, can cause isolation and alienation. Ultimately, the ideals of neoliberalism are deemed illusory, manipulating individuals into aspiring to happiness and transforming fantasy into power.

Happiness studies, positive psychology, and life coaching share the common goal of promoting well-being. Life coaching, as explored in this article, in the Thai context primarily targets wealth promotion. In this cultural context, financial prosperity, like happiness, is seen as essential for fulfillment. These beliefs often result from capitalist ideals, defining wealth through personal asset accumulation. Examining how the concept of wealth contributes to a fantasy of fulfillment is a noteworthy area of study (see Biswas-Diener, R., 2017; Seligman, M. E. P., 2011).

Yet the topic of creating fantasy in Thai life coaching has not yet been explored. Existing academic works on Thai life coaching fall into two categories: 1) business and entrepreneurship coaching in Thailand, focusing on life coaching’s role for business owners and entrepreneurs; and 2) deconstructing discourse on happiness, success, and wealth in life coaching. Notably, the work of Changwichit, Pothongsunan, and Lamsam (2020) contributes insights into online Thai communities, highlighting potential benefits and challenges. Other studies investigate life coaching users in Thailand, exploring its impact on work efficiency and business creation (Chaiyachet et al., 2020; Ngaoprom et al., 2021; Chitprasert et al., 2021; Thamaraks et al., 2019).

Existing studies do not analyze how the phenomenon of life coaching emerged from economic and social changes. Wongyannawa (1989), the sole study addressing happiness creation in Thai society, asserts, “Pursuing happiness within liberal capitalism mirrors dictatorial imposition. Wongyannawa’s use of the word “happiness” refers to a specific fantasy linked to capitalism. The present study underscores viewing life coaching as the promotion of a fantasy, in which coaches attract clients with visions of opulence, offering an escape from the issues inherent in capitalistic ideals. Yet, this diversion can be deceptive, masking the exploitation and dominance experienced by most individuals within the capitalist system.

Life coaches advocate the ideology that “hard work leads to wealth,” yet the appeal lies in intertwining this notion with fantasy, creating a more engaging experience of reality. Life coaches promise post-training success, asserting that “everyone can become rich with sufficient effort.” The incorporation of fantasy makes the coaching curriculum more enticing. This is the reason why coachees adhere to these ideologies: they cling to something at the level of fantasy, it is not because they lack knowledge.

Fantasy provides us with a means to alleviate our dissatisfaction by asserting that “if other people can do it, we can do it” This is why I use psychoanalytic concepts to analyze life coaches. Sometimes people join life coach activities based not on the knowledge that the coach teaches, but on enjoyment or fantasy. Therefore, life coaches represent a form of organization that generates fascination with the capitalist mindset within a structure that would otherwise be unattainable (Jayanama, 2022: 124). Hence, the concept of fantasy in this article is rooted in the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan.

In life coaching organizations, the organizational structure cultivates a sense of enjoyment. Life coaches instill through their teachings an enduring aspiration to become wealthy. Nevertheless, a paradox arises: no matter how diligently one works, wealth remains elusive. In this context, a powerful element of fantasy emerges as coaches harbor lofty expectations that everyone can attain millionaire

status. For example, images depicting the opulent lifestyles of those who have undergone training with the coach are presented as aspirational models, showcasing the potential for success. This scenario perpetuates enjoyment with unattained possessions.

A society driven by the pursuit of success can be likened to one fueled by stimuli. Life coaches sometimes make misleading promises, suggesting that if others can become wealthy, we too can attain riches. This results in a sensation that, no matter how diligently we strive, our desire remains unfulfilled. Yet, the desire persists, representing the suffering engendered by capitalism.

Hence, the wealth that a life coach promises is an inaccessible deficit. Hope functions as a form of enjoyment, subtly prompting subconscious acceptance and nurturing a willingness to invest in repeated sessions with life coaches. Without a sense of lack, the desire does not arise, and capitalism fails to stimulate consumption.

## Research Methods

The article employs qualitative and ethnographic research methods, investigating “Life Map,” a prominent life coaching business in Bangkok, Thailand, from April 2018 to December 2022. Fieldwork involves course participation, tracking 11 participants, and data collection through member conversations. Activities are organized via training programs and social media connections, with data gathered from interviews and monitoring social media platforms—the primary channel for life coaches’ communication.

## The Expansion and Development of Life Coaching

Life coaching emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the rise of neoliberalism in the United States. Tomas Leonard, a financial strategist, pioneered life coach training to address clients’ needs for guidance on investment and income growth. Leonard introduced Coach U, the first official life coach training program, which included

tele-classes and telephonic meetings. He played a pivotal role in founding the International Coach Federation (ICF) in 1992, a significant milestone in the history of life coaching (Buckingham, 2021). The ICF’s establishment has expanded life coaching globally, with ICF certification becoming a standard for professional coaches (Voice TV, 2017).

In Thailand, self-help and how-to books debuted in 1938 with publications by Vijit Vadakan (1952) and Charoen Chaichana also known as Chaiwat (Chaiwat, 1950). The self-development phenomenon gained momentum in 1950 with the translations of Dale Carnegie’s ‘How-to’ series (Sommut, 2020). However, the genre’s popularity surged in the 2010s following the subprime crisis, and contributed to the growth of self-help and how-to books in bookstores. Initially, translations of books such as *The Secret* (Byrne, 2006) and *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* (Kiyosaki, 2018) dominated. Subsequently, indigenous Thai books in this genre, such as *The Top Secret* (Sujira, 2008), emerged and became bestsellers. Life coaches increasingly referenced these concepts, leading to the establishment of life coaching training programs. In the 2010s, life coaches in Thailand were limited in popularity. The emergence of Bandit Ungrangsri’s coach training program significantly increased their presence in Thai society. Notably, Thai life coaches do not specialize in specific areas; instead, they claim to possess universal expertise.

In 2011, Jimi the Coach Academy was established in Thailand by Pojanard Sibang-Kerd. The academy provides consultation services to various organizations using coaching science and life-coach training science. Those interested in becoming life coaches are required to complete a 1-2-year program with a tuition fee of 20,000 THB (Nattaya, 2020). That same year, another renowned coach, known as Kru Aoi, launched a self-development program called the Life Compass Classroom, which utilizes neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) techniques. The main difference between the two coaches is that Jimi focuses on producing coaches and offers training designed for both the government and private sectors.

In 2017, the popularity of life coaches in Thailand experienced a significant rise. Although each coach employs different techniques, they all incorporate life burden narratives along with advice on how to address various issues. The coaches promise a life of wealth if individuals attend their training sessions. The trainings are offered both online and offline, with or without tuition fees (Klampaiboon, 2020). The interesting point among these Thai coaches is that most of them are not certified by the ICF, but they might have attended NLP trainings offered by foreign institutes. There is no life coach federation in Thailand, unlike in other countries. Instead, each of the Thai coaches founded a company.

This article uses the “Life Map” program (pseudonym) founded by Coach A. Enrollment is through the website or a Line account, with the program held twice a month covering subconscious issues, business thinking, and self-development. My fieldwork involved a two-day session at a five-star hotel in Bangkok, hosting 600 participants per round. At the time of data collection, Coach A was renowned. In late 2017, regular training fees ranged from 25,000 to 30,000 THB, while special programs cost 100,000 THB and above for 300 to 600 participants. However, the number of participants later decreased to 100-300 per training program, and the training fee was reduced in the following years due to the anti-life coach issue in Thailand at the end of 2018. That was a time of debate about the effectiveness of life coaches. This controversy prompted a closer examination of what truly defines a positive impact in the realm of Thai life coaching. Thus, the trend of life coaches generated both positive and negative responses, prompting questions and criticism about the necessity of relying on their advice for a better life. As a result of these incidents, many people on social media are now opposed to training with a life coach (see Bangkok biz news, 2020). After attending the Life Map training, I continued to follow the program’s social media platforms.

Despite the high training costs, the middle class, including working individuals, invest significantly to attend life coach training. Drawing from the Life Map program, the training fee serves as a filter,

attracting participants earning at least 20,000 THB, including small-to-medium business owners. “Coachees,”<sup>3</sup> as referred to in this article, aspire to wealth instead of leading high-risk lives, viewing entrepreneurship as the path to financial growth rather than as employees in an organization.

### The Construction of Entrepreneurial Subjectivity in Life Coaching

The author: I noticed that you have bought many life coach training courses. Aren’t you wasting money?

Net: I just clicked on the link because I would like to know whether it could come true. Coaches display strong business knowledge, making it easy to grasp. I just want to become rich faster. I have no idea how to achieve the goal. So, whatever suggestion sounds good seems fine for me to give it a try.

The author: Why the life coaches? Why don’t you try yourself or even take courses in business administration instead?

Net: I want to accelerate wealth accumulation. Despite trying all methods, it’s challenging. Sometimes shortcuts are necessary.

(Interview with Net [Pseudonym], 2018)

In another conversation, a participant in life coach training similarly expressed a desire for strategies to quickly become a prosperous entrepreneur. This desire reflects common motivations for investing in life coach training.

The study of entrepreneurship from an anthropological perspective has been ongoing for several decades, with its origins traced

<sup>3</sup> Coachees are individuals who receive knowledge and guidance by attending self-development training offered by life coaches. They include permanent employees and small business owners who aspire to become wealthy. They seek techniques and knowledge from life coaches to generate more income through new channels and enhance their potential in various aspects. Their ultimate goal is to achieve millionaire status.

back to Weber (1905, 1958). Weber's works had a profound impact on the development of entrepreneurial studies, as he argued that entrepreneurship, acquired through wealth accumulation, led to the establishment of capitalism. Religion, particularly Christianity, contributes to the capitalist spirit, which in turn, affects the discipline required to work hard. Similarly, the infusion of Buddhist practices such as meditation and merit-making into Thai life coaching cultivates an entrepreneurial spirit. While success brings material wealth, it paradoxically leads to spiritual emptiness. Buddhist practices, aimed at alleviating the toxic stress of capitalism, address this issue as acts of merit align with Thai society's system of valuing virtuous individuals. The capitalist system utilizes faith to affect coachees on a spiritual level, making Buddhist teachings a tool to replenish the inseparable spiritual deficiency resulting from material accumulation.

Durkheim (1984, cited by Ruef and Lounsbury, 2007) described entrepreneurs in the context of the evolution of the division of labor, which explained the collapse of jobs and the emergence of more skilled and independent entrepreneurs. Likewise, Simmel (1990, cited by Ruef and Lounsbury, 2007) described the relationship between outsiders and middle entrepreneurs who conduct business in society. The present article argues that life coaches not only encourage personal growth and development, but also foster entrepreneurial subjectivity among their participants, many of whom are entrepreneurs themselves.

The conditions of the neoliberal economy contribute to individuals adopting an entrepreneurial mindset, which is believed to lead to a good and happy life. According to David Harvey (1989: 177-178), capitalism is not just an economic system; it also serves as the primary mechanism for managing human subjects. In this context, a good life refers to one that is aligned with capitalist values, meaning that happiness is derived from wealth accumulation. This implies that the participants are not individuals who are living with high risks but rather those who aspire to become wealthier. Therefore, the participants, aspiring entrepreneurs, believe self-employment is the route to wealth and a better quality of life. This phenomenon can be explained by the

fact that capital transforms individuals and their productivity. Entrepreneurial subjectivity fosters self-recognition as non-labor, creating a sense of ownership and aligning with neoliberal principles.

When analyzed in the context of the Thai state since the 1980s, particularly after the global economic crisis, the Thai economy and government policies have tended towards neoliberalism. In order to borrow money, Thailand must comply with the conditions set by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as seen in initiatives like the SME One Tambon One Product Project (OTOP) (Kesboonchoo-Mead, 2005). Consequently, since the 2000s, numerous studies in the social sciences and humanities have focused on the transition towards an "entrepreneurial society" (Sattayanurak, 2016: 50-54). This shift has led to changes in employment and a greater emphasis on self-awareness among workers as entrepreneurs (Glassman and Hadad, 2004) resulting in a shift towards individual responsibility for labor welfare (Archer and Elliot, 2021: 238-242).

As a result, permanent contract employment has been replaced by flexible contract employment with increased insecurity. With permanent positions being scarce, recent graduates are more likely to be unemployed and thus forced to become small business entrepreneurs or freelancers. Following the coup of May 22, 2014, the economic sector in Thailand declined, and technology significantly transformed businesses. Unemployment statistics from 2017 when compared to the same quarter in 2014 (prior to the coup) show a significant increase in the number of unemployed individuals, with 463,379 entries reported, which is 122,162 more than that recorded in 2014 (341,117). Furthermore, the unemployment rate for individuals aged 15-39 in the first quarter of 2017 was found to be higher than that reported in the same quarter of 2014, with a statistically significant increase (National Statistical Office, 2017).

Regarding another perspective, entrepreneurial subjectivity existed before the emergence of life coaches. A life coach is someone who takes advantage of this entrepreneurial self-transformation to make a profit. Life coaches, who saw a market demand for guidance on

wealth-building, utilize this self-transformation to generate profit and establish themselves as gurus, sharing knowledge on how to achieve financial success.

The case of Mac, one of the present study's interviewees, serves as an example. Running a small ceramic business affected by economic regression and the COVID-19 pandemic, he faces a 50 percent reduction in orders. With ongoing financial obligations, including office installments, a car, and children's education, his reduced income prompted cost-cutting measures which include downsizing the staff and abandoning office expansion plans. To supplement his income, Mac turns to trading tokens in cryptocurrency markets. Seeking solutions, he attended a life coach training session, hoping the insights gained would improve his situation.

In this way, I view the effects of neoliberalism as compelling individuals to embrace entrepreneurial subjectivity, mandating them to work diligently and realize their full potential. It is noteworthy that many of the participants in life coach training are business owners seeking tools to amass more capital. Their decision to attend these training sessions stems from a desire to acquire knowledge that can help them become successful entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, there is a cost to happiness in capitalistic societies. When individuals strive to be as happy as possible, they must be more diligent because since working generates their main income, which they must then trade for things that bring them joy. A capitalistic economy promotes the deceptive freedom that humans believe they have to write their own destiny as a tool to manipulate people's lives. The release of humans from factories and the idea of self-employment as a means to earn more are new forms of manipulation that exploit the desire to become wealthy. Life coaching is a tool used to improve productivity, creativity, and self-support. Amidst the only form of subjectivity—the entrepreneurial self—individuals are controlled by power in the dimensions of desire and life, fostering transformation, forms of self-development, and self-control. This internal control differs from the control of discipline (Kitirianglarp, 2018: 166).

Indeed, economic factors play a significant role in driving individuals to train with life coaches as they navigate economic inequality and uncertainties. Consequently, life coaching has emerged as a profession that supports the self-transformation of "entrepreneurial subjectivity."<sup>4</sup> Entrepreneurs who seek to improve their business and personal lives are willing to accept the guidance and expertise of life coaches. In this way, life coaching fosters individualism, resilience, and adaptability in individuals who must navigate the challenges of the current economic climate.

### The Law of Attraction to Wealth

Life coaching often links the law of attraction<sup>5</sup> to career success and wealth. According to this philosophy, positive thoughts attract positive outcomes. Coaches use tools like visualization and goal setting to maintain individuals' motivation and focus on objectives which are crucial for entrepreneurial success. The practice emphasizes that setting and visualizing goals can fulfill desires. For example, Coach A shares the personal experience of imagining success:

I can earn a million baht daily from selling my products when I believe it to be true. I am happy because I love my parents, make merit, construct my own destiny, work smart, think twice, and spend less. It's not easy, but I have to be strong and carry on from deep within (Coach A [Pseudonym], 2016).

<sup>4</sup> The use of the term, "entrepreneurial subjectivity," implies that individuals are actively constructing their identity and values in relation to the demands of the marketplace. Through life coaching, individuals can develop a sense of agency and control over their lives, which is especially important during times of economic uncertainty. Life coaching also emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and personal growth, which can help individuals improve their competitiveness in the market and explore multiple channels to earn income simultaneously.

<sup>5</sup> The law of attraction has its roots in the beliefs of positive psychology writers who assert that similar energies attract each other. Between 1901 and 1912 several books were published that explained this law, which is often utilized in financial matters and to attain success in various areas as desired. For instance, in Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret* (Byrne, 2012), the law of attraction is described as a universal law that operates by transmitting frequency waves to attract our thoughts. To apply this law, one should commence by asking the universe and having faith that they will receive what they desire. Subsequently, one should cultivate a sense of gratitude as if they have already received it. The technique for success entails repeating this visualization process (Panchawarangkun, 2013: 3-30).

In my analysis of the Life Map program process, I find the concept of the law of attraction particularly interesting as it emphasizes the power of the universe and its potential to manifest events. While the power of the mind to shape the universe is unproven, the Life Map program uses this concept as a key tool to assist coachees, especially those aspiring to become wealthy.

The Life Map program utilizes the law of attraction as a core technique, through a practice called “Roll”. Participants imagine their desired outcome and visualize it in their minds while rolling their hands in a circular motion, as if shaping their vision. The more vivid the mental image, the higher the chances of manifesting it. Another exercise in the program is the “Dream Board,” where participants attach pictures of their desires, such as a luxurious house, a fancy car, or a dream vacation, to a board. Seeing these pictures helps them visualize their desires as already fulfilled.

In Nut’s case (Nut [Pseudonym], 2018), she practices the law of attraction activity daily, engaging in self-talk in front of a mirror. She likens this process to installing new programs on a computer, believing that affirmations like “I can create money,” “I can easily make money,” and “I am holding one hundred million baht in my hand” will become reality. During this routine, she looks at herself in the mirror, smiles, and speaks these phrases aloud.

Another interviewee, Pim (Pim [Pseudonym], 2018), believes that imagining success is real. While measuring success may be challenging, positive thinking and goal-oriented practices contribute to achievements. Pim’s experience underscores the significant role emotions play in overcoming challenges. Applying the law of attraction, she found that the companies, job opportunities, and acquaintances she had envisioned materialized in her life. Despite finding it strange, Pim remains uncertain whether this is the power of the universe or just coincidence.

The concept of mind power or potential, which includes the practice of the law of attraction, allows for the integration of body, language, mind, and knowledge from subjective perspectives

(Kitirianglarp, 2017: 13). Many individuals believe in the law of attraction as a means to achieve their desired goal of becoming millionaires. Life coaching activities, such as visualizing success, can serve as a mechanism for addressing stress related to unfulfilled desires, including the ability to purchase luxury items like branded clothing or a high-end car. However, the regular attendance of coaching training sessions is not due to myth but from their adherence to the promises of a fantasy that exists alongside reality, albeit at a different level. Consequently, “coachees” exhibit a persistent attachment to the practice of life coaching, notwithstanding its constricted practical functionality. This enduring commitment is driven by their psychological investment in the enjoyment derived from their fantasy.

This process turns the discourse of wealth and well-being into a new commodity in capitalism, which defines wealth in relation to consumption as part of organizing enjoyment (Wright, 2014: 804-811). However, it also entails convincing people to have one-sided optimism and blocks negative feelings such as anxiety, sadness, and anger, in order to entice them with fantasies of hope of becoming millionaires.

Fantasy, linked with the concepts of “law of attraction” and “visualization,” is precisely where fantasy comes into play; it is seductive precisely because its core is empty or unclear. Instead of dictating precise paths to success, life coach teachings bestow on individuals the freedom to chart their own course. However, this freedom can often result in nothing more than being subject to pleasure and submission to the superego (Jayanama, 2022: 182). It is akin to a scene or narrative in which we envision ourselves enjoying ourselves fully, devoid of specific details. The law of attraction, frequently coupled with self-talk, changes into internal directives that must be followed. This internal power can expand desires beyond their initial goals. For instance, a coachee striving for a million baht as a symbol of success may, upon achieving it, yearn for even more. This longing is fueled by the perpetual creation of desires that can never be completely satisfied.

## Entrepreneurship Failure and Mental Illness

Through my analysis of life coaching practices, it has become clear that the “imagination to wealth” ideology places significant pressure on individuals to constantly envision and desire success. However, the reality is often disappointment and failure, leading to significant distress and despair. Many individuals spend large sums of money attending multiple life coaching training sessions and comparing themselves to their classmates, only to face the harsh truth that following a life coach’s advice does not guarantee millionaire status. This can result in significant mental health challenges, including stress, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy, which may be compounded by the financial strain caused by the costs of attending these training sessions.

The experience of another interviewee, Meaw, serves as an example of the negative impact life coaching can have on mental health. Despite following the life coach’s advice, she faced unattainable goals, which lead to depression and self-blame. After seeking help from a psychiatrist, she realized that her pursuit of an idealized world of success was unrealistic and damaging to her mental health. Frustrated by the financial cost and pressure to conform, she stated, “The more I chased it, the more I had to pay for training just to live with my nonsensical imagination of success” (Meaw [Pseudonym], 2018).

The experience of Pai, a 40-year-old woman facing financial challenges, is another example. She deems her nursing job insufficient for debt resolution and, influenced by others’ success with Coach A’s training, borrowed 100,000 baht to attend the same program. After just five sessions, she resigned from her nursing job to become a land broker, envisioning wealth through daily land sales. Her pursuit, marked by risks like borrowing and quitting her job, culminated in stress and anxiety.

While showering, I envisioned the water as golden rays that could be absorbed into my skin, granting me the ability to become a millionaire. Every morning, I affirm to myself that I am capable of earning more money and that many clients

will contact me today. I make an effort to present myself professionally and avoid being finicky throughout the day, smiling and maintaining a positive mindset (Pai [Pseudonym], 2018).

Despite returning to nursing due to her irregular income as a land broker, Pai persisted in her pursuit of wealth. Believing more techniques would accelerate success, she worked harder and returned to her previous job. However, this mindset contributed to her developing grandiose delusional disorder. Despite attending the Life Map program five times, she faced setbacks, struggling to repay debts. Notably, Pai blamed herself, not the economic structure or the training. The alarming aspect was her deep immersion in imagination, believing in the law of attraction for millionaire success.

Life coaching and positive psychology, according to Jayanama (2021), are tools that reinforce a self-help culture promoting hard work and the pursuit of one’s dream job as the foundation of successful moral values. This emphasis on personal responsibility and freedom to manage one’s life can place a heavy burden on individuals, often leading to self-blame and the concealment of economic inequality in the face of individual failure. Consequently, it can be posited that mental disorders are a byproduct of the capitalist system, which also produces cures for these disorders as a means of masking the damage it has caused individuals instead of addressing the underlying structural issues.

Mental illnesses are symptomatic of the influence of competitive capitalism on people, who become preoccupied with their own affairs and self-interest, driven by fantasies of wealth. In reality, desire is always lacking. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire is perpetually lacking and cannot be fulfilled. Hence, the goal or desire of human beings is to be obsessed with finding objects to fill their inherent deficiency at all times, making it impossible for them to fulfill their desires no matter how hard they try. Lacan’s concept of “surplus-jouissance” highlights the product of discourse as a crucial factor in mental states, including depressive disorders, which are not

bodily mechanisms, but thoughts guided by language (Lacan, 1962-1963: 193). The discourse of the subconscious mind was created under psychoanalytic theory and scientific knowledge, which also gave rise to positive psychology. People adopt positive psychological discourse to improve their self-image, but when they persist in this discourse without achieving success, they become unable to find satisfaction, often leading to mental illness resulting from the subjective adoption of the language that is a product of capitalist society. Psychiatry's relationship with neoliberal capitalism reinforces the inequality and oppression inherent in capitalism (Wright, 2014).

Life coaching, meditation, and positive thinking shift the responsibility onto individuals, requiring them to learn self-care. Failure in this context implies personal inadequacy, and it is not ascribed to societal factors (Wright, 2014). These practices can lead to self-blame, anxiety, depression, delusion, and other mental disorders, given that individuals grapple with the relentless pressure to constantly excel and attain more. The underlying source of this psychological distress can be traced back to capitalism's competitive nature, which promotes intense self-absorption and a fixation on personal desires. While life coaches may attempt to fulfill these desires, the constant desire for more often leads to what Mark Fisher (2009) refers to as "depressive hedonia," a state in which individuals are unable to find satisfaction in their lives. Ultimately, life coaching teachings are a tool for managing the desires of the mind, but they cannot fully satisfy those desires.

In short, fantasy is not simply a byproduct of language and symbols. Lacanian psychoanalysis would say that it is also related to the kind of subjects that we are (Lacan, 1962-1963). As subjects of desire, we are always lacking something. In other words, lack is ontological; fantasy often promises that we can be non-lacking. Hence, when a coachee is on the verge of abandoning their passion, they experience a strong yearning for guidance from a life coach. The desire for coaching sessions with a life coach persists, as capitalism has constructed a phantasmal realm within life coaching teachings to serve as the anchor for our enjoyment. Ultimately, it can lead to depression because of the endless pursuit of riches.

## Conclusion

In this study, I have examined whether the teachings of life coaches are responsible for creating fantasies based on the idea that "everyone has the potential to achieve wealth, happiness, and success," despite the reality that many entrepreneurs face economic challenges such as unemployment, debt, and wage stagnation. This fantasy is essential for the survival of capitalism, as it generates hope and a desire for a better life, ultimately leading to consumerism and the pursuit of luxury goods. The allure of fantasy works by tempting us with idealized dreams, and life coaches encourage us to maintain an optimistic outlook by promising to fulfill our lack of that leads to endless desire (Jayanama, 2022: 15).

The influence of capitalist ideas tempts people with the allure of a more promising future and exploits this innate human yearning by establishing a market system that thrives on our ceaseless pursuit of more. Therefore, a life coach's activity is to re-create the fantasy of becoming rich to fill the endless lack in one's life.

Briefly stated, the exploitation of human desire by capitalism and life coaches is at the heart of the issue. The teachings of life coaches serve as capitalist discourses that create a fantasy world for people to live in within the confines of capitalism. The imposition of positivity upon individuals is a mechanism through which the influence of capitalism prevents us from questioning society and impedes our realization that we cannot control the system. Creating a "fantasy" of taking responsibility for one's life, having a warm family, or having good financial planning serves to create a surreal environment that allows us to live in a world that does not truly belong to us. This is, in essence, a false sense of freedom. Neoliberalist thinking is a mirage that convinces us to fantasize about a life of wealth and luxury and seeks to turn that fantasy into power to control our lives.

Life coaches' teachings create a fantasy that leads entrepreneurs to obsess over finding techniques to become wealthy. However, the more they search for the secret to success, the more they become trapped in a cycle of unfulfillment. This leads them to seek out new methods,

tips, and coaches, perpetuating a vicious cycle. The power of fantasy deceives people into repeatedly chasing after their desires, stimulating their minds with false hope. Life coach courses exploit the desire to make money constantly.

The pursuit of wealth is presented as a fleeting gratification that requires ever-increasing fantasies to sustain it. The allure of becoming a millionaire tantalizes us with two levels of hope: 1) Capitalism leads us to believe that anyone can achieve this status with enough effort, but true satisfaction remains elusive. Life coaching is a business that thrives on this notion, as coaches encourage us to set goals like earning one million baht. Yet, once we attain this, our satisfaction levels shift to desiring ten million baht, and the cycle of consumption continues. 2) Life coaches promise that we will achieve our goals eventually, but satisfaction is always temporary. The ideal future they present is an unattainable dream.

For this reason, this article has aimed to uncover the problems that arise under 21st-century capitalism, where the pursuit of a “good life” is idealized through the promotion of positive thinking, hard work, and investment. As a result, individuals are compelled to prioritize wealth in their lives, creating a moral imperative to achieve financial success. The dominant power of capitalism shapes an entrepreneurial subjectivity that seeks to attain millionaire status.

The life coach discourse obscures the underlying economic structure by playing on the notion of lack, thereby minimizing the structure of problems and emphasizing individual responsibility and potential. The ideology of life coaching works through the paradoxical promise of hope and the temptation of unfulfilled desires, ultimately contributing to the creation of a capitalist outlook. Life coaches sell the fantasy of achieving wealth, perpetuating the illusion of neoliberal ideology that convinces individuals to dream of a luxurious life, turning fantasy into a form of power. Ultimately, the success of this ideology relies on individuals choosing to submit to it. People wholeheartedly believe in the life coach without any critical thought until an idea that contradicts the coach’s order cannot be carried out (Suphachalasai, 2012: 153).

The discourse on “wealth, happiness, and success” is a life coach discourse influenced by capitalism to control life. When people constantly fantasize about what they desire, they cannot stop producing, because they think it will help fulfill their desires. If they cannot reach the satisfaction of being a millionaire, it may lead to mental illness, as fantasy creates a discrepancy between real and fantasy.

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