

**A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES
IN SHAPING PERCEPTIONS OF CLASS IN THAILAND**

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by

Pradit Chinudomsab

University of Canterbury

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Acknowledgement

Dedicate to my mom, my dad, and my family.

Special thanks to

Gods,

Ning and her family, Yaya and her family, friends in New Zealand, friends in Thailand,
friends in heaven including Bruce, and everyone who supported me.

Special thanks to all university staff, especially Jill.

Special thanks to my supervisor, Jim, and his family.

Thank you

Abstract

This thesis seeks to better understand the concept of middle class by focusing on the way students' experiences in university shape their class perceptions. In this study, we hypothesized that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions. Also, university environment, including its reputation, facilities, surrounding areas, lecturers, and student peers, is essential for producing class perceptions for students and Thai society.

This thesis focuses on three main areas: university environment (including its facilities, reputation, and surrounding areas), lecturers (including their background and courses), and student peer groups. To understand the middle class in Thailand, 7 universities nationwide were selected for this study based on the three criteria; reputation, location, and type of university (public, private and open universities). This thesis used mixed methods including observation, questionnaires, focus group discussions, and interviews of both lecturers and students.

In this thesis, we found that students are divided into different types of university based on their backgrounds. Moreover, the university environment plays a major role in shaping students' class perceptions, although each environment influenced students differently. In addition, we found that the middle class is not a single unit, but there are several fractions within it. In particular, we found that the middle class is strongly divided into rural and urban components, with little mobility between the two during the tertiary education process. The data demonstrate that the fractions are united in attitudes to the lower class but divided within.

Additionally, middle class consciousness seems to be partly shaped by traditional culture and its hierarchies since the knowledge from higher education has less influence on students' class perceptions.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	x
Chapter 1 : Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Significance of Topic	30
Research Questions	32
Chapter 2 : Literature Review and Research Methodology	33
General concept of middle class.....	35
Location, location, and location	38
General concept of class culture.....	41
Middle-class culture	42
Middle class in Asia	49
Middle class lifestyle in Asia.....	56
Education and the middle class	65
The significance of education for the middle class	65
The role of educational institutions	69
Role of the Monarchy in Higher education	75
The Thai middle-class and education	77
Hypotheses	84
Methodology	89
Research Methodology	92
Chapter 3 : Higher education, subject universities and their students	100
Development of higher education in Thailand	102
University Ranking	110
Case study universities	115
Student background	115
Current lifestyle	138

Future plans	154
Conclusion.....	157
Chapter 4 : Students and higher education	161
Class as seen by students.....	162
Everyday class	163
First reaction to class	168
Class matters.....	171
Who are you?.....	179
What is it?.....	201
The effect of education.....	204
Environment effect	211
The influence of higher education	243
Output	250
Conclusion.....	257
Chapter 5 : Lecturers, students and social class	262
Lecturers and their world	263
Background of lecturers.....	264
Views of lecturers	266
Views of students	318
The curriculum	319
The knowledge	321
General knowledge of class.....	323
Class within university	334
Conclusion.....	347
Chapter 6 : Conclusion.....	352
University reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions	357
By shaping students' perceptions, the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.....	365
University lecturers help shape and reproduce class perceptions to students and society.	367
The university facilities, students' peer groups and the university environment in general are important factors and essential for producing class perception.	370
Implications for the literature.....	377
The implications for Thai society.....	383
Future study.....	386

Limitations and solutions	387
Bibliography	389

List of Figures

Figure 1-1: Coups since 1932	2
Figure 1-2: Geographic Residence.....	7
Figure 1-3: Geographic Residence for Non-Bangkok Respondents.....	7
Figure 1-4: Employment Status	8
Figure 1-5: Levels of Education	10
Figure 1-6: Detail of Occupations.....	11
Figure 1-7: Household Income per Month.....	12
Figure 1-8: Average Household Income 2013	13
Figure 1-9: PDRC Participation in Demonstrations	15
Figure 1-10: The Relationship between Education Level and Salary.....	18
Figure 2-1: Middle Class Elements within Urban Area.....	64
Figure 3-1: Reason for Study at a Particular University.....	114
Figure 3-2: Reasons for Study in Comparison.....	118
Figure 3-3: Average Income per Month between Bangkok and the Rest of Thailand	123
Figure 3-4: Hometown of Students by Regions.....	124
Figure 3-5: Parents' Occupations in Comparison.....	129
Figure 3-6: Parent's Income in Comparison.....	133
Figure 3-7: Parent's Income of Thammasat University Students in Comparison	136
Figure 3-8: Parent's Income of Price of Songkla University Students in Comparison	137
Figure 3-9: Monthly Allowance in Comparison.....	139
Figure 3-10: Type of Mobile Phone in Comparison.....	142
Figure 3-11: Ownership of Computer in Comparison	144
Figure 3-12: Mode of Transport in Comparison.....	146
Figure 3-13: Activities during Semester Break in Comparison.....	152
Figure 3-14: Future Plans in Comparison.....	155
Figure 3-15: How Economic Background and Hometown Affect Students' Life Chances ..	157
Figure 4-1: How Often Do You Hear about Class or Have Conversations about it?	164
Figure 4-2: Have You Learned About Class from High School?	165
Figure 4-3: What Have You Learned?.....	166
Figure 4-4: First Thoughts When Hearing the Word "Class"	169
Figure 4-5: Does Class Matter?	172

Figure 4-6: Which Class Do You Want to Be?.....	173
Figure 4-7: Why Do You Want to be Middle Class?.....	176
Figure 4-8: What is Your Class? (Questionnaires)	180
Figure 4-9: What is Your Class? (Focus Group Discussions)	180
Figure 4-10: Reasons for Choosing Middle Class	183
Figure 4-11: Reasons for Choosing Lower Class	189
Figure 4-12: What Class is Your Friend (the one next to you in focus group discussion)? ..	193
Figure 4-13: Reasons for Believing Your Friend is Upper Class	194
Figure 4-14: Reasons for Believing Your Friend is Middle Class.....	196
Figure 4-15: The Relationship of Social Classes and Indicators	200
Figure 4-16: Lifestyle of the Middle Class	202
Figure 4-17: Do You Agree that Class is More Than a Theory and Can be Better Experienced in Daily Life? (Questionnaires)	206
Figure 4-18: Do You Understand Class from Daily Life Experience or Education?	207
Figure 4-19: Does University Environment have any Effect on Class Perception? (Questionnaires).....	212
Figure 4-20: Effect from University Reputation.....	213
Figure 4-21: Reasons for Choosing “Yes” and “Partly”	214
Figure 4-22: If You Studied at Chulalongkorn University, Would It Put You In a Better Class?.....	219
Figure 4-23: Effect from Peer Groups	224
Figure 4-24: Effect from University Facilities.....	228
Figure 4-25: Effect from Surrounding Areas	236
Figure 4-26: Does Education Affect Your Class Perceptions? (Questionnaires)	244
Figure 4-27: Does Education Affect Your Class Perceptions? (Focus Group Discussions) .	245
Figure 4-28: How Education Affected Your Class Perceptions?	246
Figure 4-29: Changes of Class Perceptions after Study (Questionnaires)	251
Figure 4-30: Changes of Class Perceptions after Study (Focus Group Discussions)	252
Figure 4-31: How Class Perceptions Have Changed?	253
Figure 5-1: Lecturers’ Highest Level of Education	265
Figure 5-2: Curriculums from Participating Universities	319
Figure 5-3: How do Lecturers Teach on Class?.....	321
Figure 5-4: The Meaning of Class	323
Figure 5-5: Are Thais Born into a class?	326
Figure 5-6: Is Class Part of Thai Culture?	328
Figure 5-7: Is the Current Class Situation Changed from the Sakdina System?	330

Figure 5-8: Are Foreign Concepts of Class the same as Thai Conception?	332
Figure 5-9: Class among Students	335
Figure 5-10: Yes, There is Class among Students	335
Figure 5-11: Are There Different Classes among Lecturers?	339
Figure 5-12: Classes between Lecturers, Staff and Students	342
Figure 5-13: Yes, There are Classes among Lecturers, Staff and Students	343
Figure 5-14: Relationship between Lecturers, Staff and Students	345
Figure 6-1: The relationship between university reputation, entrance examination and class fractions.....	365
Figure 6-2: Lecturers' roles in shaping class perception	369

List of Tables

Table 2-1: Top 10 Occupations Ranked by Status.....	81
Table 2-2: Other Occupations Ranked by Status.....	82
Table 2-3: List of Universities.....	90
Table 2-4: Detail of Data Collection.....	98
Table 3-1: University Ranking by OHEC.....	111
Table 3-2: Top 5 Universities in Thailand.....	112
Table 3-3: Entrance Score for Faculty of Dentistry.....	113
Table 3-4: Entrance Score for Faculty of Economics.....	113
Table 3-5: Reasons for Study in Comparison.....	118
Table 3-6: Hometown of Students by Regions.....	125
Table 3-7: Parents' Occupations in Comparison.....	130
Table 3-8: Parent's Income in Comparison.....	134
Table 3-9: Monthly Allowance in Comparison.....	140
Table 3-10: Type of Mobile Phone in Comparison.....	142
Table 3-11: Mode of Transport in Comparison.....	147
Table 3-12: Activities during Semester Break in Comparison.....	153
Table 3-13: Future Plans in Comparison.....	155

Chapter 1 : Introduction

Introduction

On May 22, 2014, the military took control of the Thai government. The cycle of democracy and military rule once again appeared in Thai politics. Although this coup was not unexpected and no one had ever ruled out its possibility, it did create some surprises to a lot of people, especially from disputants. Before the coup, the protesters, though they had not directly asked for a coup, had tried thoroughly to encourage the military to stop supporting Yingluck Shinawatra's government. During their protest, offensive weapons such as automatic rifles and grenade launchers were used by "unidentified groups" or "men in black" against both sides several times, causing many deaths and injuries, the military seemed to be very quiet and did not want to get directly involved. It seemed that the government was still in control. Although the protesters occupied major intersections in Bangkok, Yingluck's government stood strong and did not seem to slip up. The government's relationship with the military was not conflictual: at one point, Yingluck even used the Air Force auditorium and club as a government command centre.

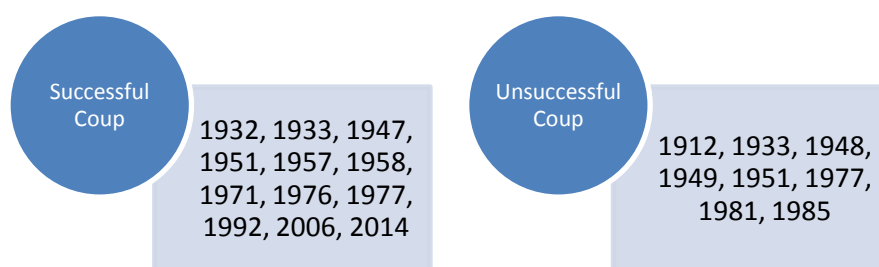
Two days earlier, on May 20, 2014, the military had declared martial law, to end the violence and facilitate negotiations between disputants, according to military. Unfortunately, the negotiation was not successful since the protesters wanted the government to resign, but Yingluck and her cabinet refused to do so. As reported by journalists¹, a second meeting was facilitated before the coup by General Prayuth Chan-Ocha, the army chief. After two hours

¹ Prayuth-Laothub Thalaeng Khuabkhum amnatrat' [Prayuth and armed forces declare control of state power], Komchadluek, 22 May 2014, <http://www.komchadluek.net/detail/20140522/185160.html> (accessed March 24, 2015).

without any positive result, General Prayuth asked the leader of the government delegates, Chaikasem Nitisiri, about the government's position on the protesters' request. Once again, Chaikasem reaffirmed that there would be no resignation from the government. The army commander then declared that he would seize power from the government and ordered the arrest of everyone inside the meeting room including government delegates, leaders of protesters, Red-Shirt leaders and representatives from political parties and independent organizations such as the election commission. At 16:30 pm, General Prayuth ordered a coup and set up the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) and the rest is another page of military intervention in Thai history².

Coups are not an unusual occurrence in Thailand. Since Siam transformed from Absolute Monarchy to Constitutional Monarchy in 1932, the military has played a major role in Thai politics. From 1932 till the present, there have been 12 successful coups and 8 unsuccessful.

Figure 1-1: Coups since 1932



Source: James Ockey (2007), "Thailand's 'Professional Soldiers' and Coup-making: The Coup of 2006," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 19(1), pp 99.

² 'Yorn nathee Prayuth thub toh yued amnat su ratprahan' [Reverse times to when Prayuth seized power], Thairath, 22 May 2014, <http://www.thairath.co.th/content/424643> (accessed March 28, 2015).

However, the number depends on the definition of “coup”. While James Ockey (2007) identified 20 coups from 1932, Paul Chamber (2013: 583-587) claimed there are more than 30 overt and indirect coups and coup attempts in Thailand from 1932 to the present.

The protest prior to the 2014 coup started with a small group of activists led by former members of the opposition party, led by Suthep Thaugsuban (who resigned from the Democrat Party). They opposed an amnesty bill initiated by the government and an earlier attempt to change the constitution to allow election of senators. The protesters believed that these actions aimed to erase Thaksin (former Prime Minister in exile and brother of Yingluck)’s culpability and to put senators under government control. Crowds grew from hundreds to hundreds of thousands, perhaps over a million, as the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) grew stronger. Soon their demands expanded to include removal of Yingluck’s government. At the peak of their protest, according to their own estimation, millions of protesters³ occupied the streets of Bangkok demanding Yingluck’s resignation.

The PDRC was using the same tactics as their predecessor, the Yellow Shirts or PAD, to put pressure on the government, by occupying major government buildings and streets. However, the PDRC also used a more active approach to gain more attention and raise funds. During their protests, the PDRC rallied inside Bangkok in many major streets and received considerable support from the urban middle class.

On the other side, The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) or Red Shirts, showed their support for Yingluck’s government by gathering in Bangkok and vowed to protect the elected government. Unfortunately, one incident led to a clash with

³ ‘Kopoposo chang chudchumnum 5 wethiyai jai klang kotomo kad khon orkma pen lan’ [PDRC declares 5 major protest sites in central Bangkok, expect more than million protesters], Manager, 19 December 2013, <http://www.manager.co.th/Politics/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9560000155994> (accessed March 24, 2015).

Ramkhamhaeng University students when the UDD rallied inside the Rajamangala National Stadium (next to Ramkhamhaeng University), resulting in deaths and injuries on both sides⁴.

Although Yingluck's government withdrew the bills and dissolved the parliament, the protesters were not satisfied and successfully obstructed a new election. The reasons provided by protesters were that they were against populist policies, which they claimed had brought Thaksin and his sister into power, and believed that Thailand's election system needed to be reformed as it was undemocratic and rife with vote buying. Moreover, the PDRC argued that Yingluck was only a puppet of Thaksin (her brother)⁵.

Since the sides could not find any peaceful agreement, the violence widened. On the government's side, police forces as well as Red Shirt supporters were used to repel protesters and regain control of Bangkok. In many cases, however, the police force reportedly did not follow standard practice. Instead, PDRC sources claimed they ambushed the protesters⁶. On the protesters side, the PDRC had their security guards protecting their leaders and protesters. The number of security guards was uncertain but, according to reports, they were several hundred or maybe thousands⁷. The origin of PDRC guards is unclear. Many of them were

⁴ "UDD ends rally after 3 protest deaths", Bangkok Post, 2 December 2013, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/382616/> (accessed March 24, 2015).

⁵ "Yingluck Shinawatra, the puppet hanging by a thread in Thailand", *South China Morning Post*, 26 November 2013, <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1366526/yingluck-shinawatra-puppet-hanging-thread-thailand> (accessed March 27, 2015).

⁶ "Duan muemued ying phuchumnum kopoposo na samoson tobo cheb 1' [Unknown gunmen ambushed PRDC protesters, 1 injured", *Thairath*, 28 January 2014, <http://www.thairath.co.th/content/399500> (accessed March 24, 2015).

⁷ 'Bueangluek kadkopoposo theung muepeun popcorn nai famlab soroso-soor roso' [Behind the scene of PDRC guards and Popcorn gunmen from government files], *Isranews Agency*, 23 March 2014, <http://www.isranews.org/isranews-scoop/item/28088-kadkopoposo.html> (accessed March 24, 2015).

volunteers⁸ however some were “in service” soldiers⁹. Both Red Shirt supporters and PDRC guards were armed, with weapons ranging from aluminium pipes or slingshots to handguns.

However, the high number of deaths and injuries resulted from an unidentified group, the “men in black” and “popcorn gunmen”. Although their origins are not clear, both groups represented the different side of the conflict and were heavily armed. Once again streets in Bangkok became a battlefield, reminding Thai people of the violence before the 2006 coup which saw the ouster of Yingluck’s brother, Thaksin Shinawatra.

The series of protests in Thailand over the last decade, led by Red and Yellow shirts (and/or PDRC) protesters, underlines the division in Thai society. The separation indicates dissent between two groups of people who identify themselves differently: one claims to represent rural masses and lower class people, while the other declares itself as a protector of virtue and generally represents middle and upper classes. Despite their attempts to play down the notion of class, the majority of Yellow Shirt supporters are urban middle class, as shown in figure 1 - 2. On the other hand, although the Red Shirts claim that they are fighting for democracy, equal rights and the lower classes, Thaksin is one of the richest men in Thailand.

This thesis aims to identify who the middle class are, which would also help identify the lower class. This thesis will focus on higher education as one possible indicator of middle class status. Not only does it look into the importance of a university degree, this thesis also investigates the socialization process during students’ university years and how it can shape their perceptions of class.

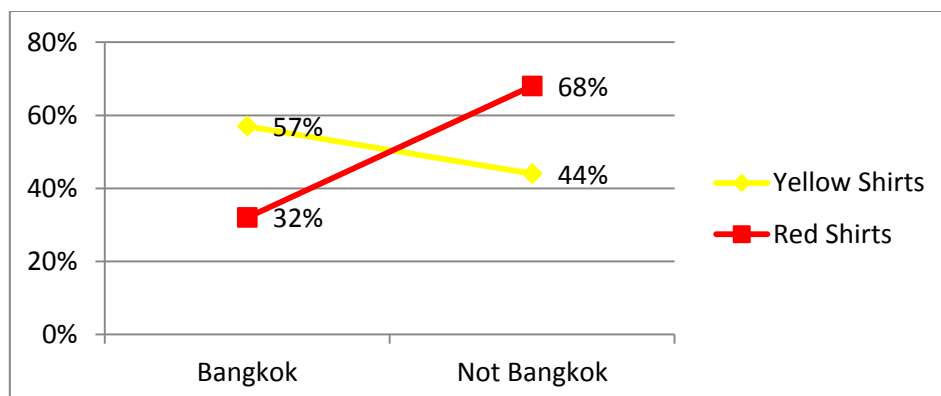
⁸ ‘Suthep obrom kad kopoposo’ [Suthep instructs the PDRC guards], Komchadluek, 22 March 2014, <http://www.komchadluek.net/detail/20140322/181408.html> (accessed March 24, 2015).

⁹ ‘Chub noui seal kad kopoposo’ [Arrested Navy SEAL, hired as guard for PDRC], Manager, 26 February 2014, <http://www.manager.co.th/Crime/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9570000022672> (accessed March 24, 2015).

In order to pursue these goals, 7 universities across Thailand were selected to conduct this research. Data was collected, based on a voluntary basis, from interviewing lecturers who teach subjects relating to social class in political science faculties in each subject university. Questionnaire and focus group discussion methods were used to collect data from students in political science faculties in each subject university.

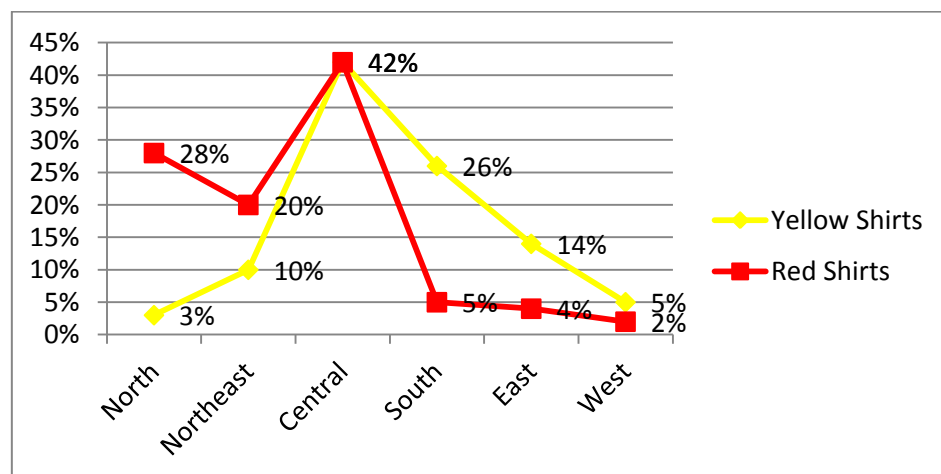
Firstly, this thesis investigates both sides of the recent conflict and attempts to identify them. Secondly, it looks into literature relating to social class and identifies the key concepts, particularly social class and the importance of higher education. Thirdly, it reveals and analyses data collected from subject universities. Lastly, this thesis attempts to answer the research questions of who are the middle class, how does education shape social classes and what is the importance of the university environment toward shaping class perceptions of students and Thai society more generally.

In order to identify the protesters, the Asia Foundation (2013) conducted an interesting survey on the profile of the protesters on both sides. Their survey was carried out on November 30, 2013, with the results supporting the claims of identity of both Yellow Shirts and Red Shirts.

Figure 1-2: Geographic Residence

Source: Adapted from Asia Foundation (2013) “Profile of the Protestors: A Survey of Pro and Anti-government Demonstrators in Bangkok on November 30, 2013,”

<https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/FinalSurveyReportDecember20.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2015), pp 5.

Figure 1-3: Geographic Residence for Non-Bangkok Respondents

Source: Adapted from Asia Foundation (2013) “Profile of the Protestors: A Survey of Pro and Anti-government Demonstrators in Bangkok on November 30, 2013,”

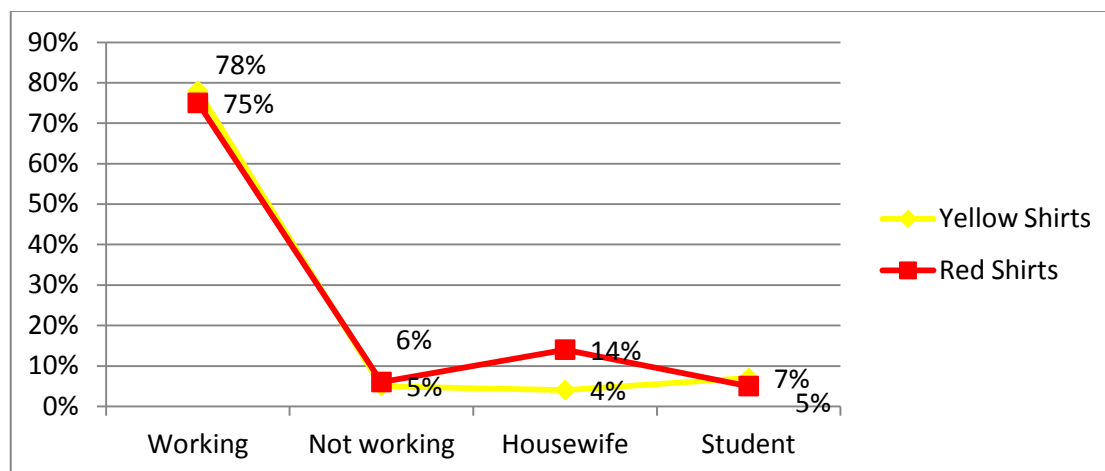
<https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/FinalSurveyReportDecember20.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2015), pp 5.

As shown in figure 1 - 2, the majority of Red Shirts were provincial residents with only 32 percent of respondents residing in Bangkok. On the other hand, more than half of the Yellow Shirts supporters were Bangkok-based while another 44 percent were from other provinces.

Figure 1 - 3 shown that most non-Bangkok respondents from both sides were from the Central part of Thailand, the nearest region to Bangkok. While there were no significant disparities between Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt respondents who came from the Northeast, East and West, the difference between respondents from both sides who resided in the North and South was large. Only 3 percent of Yellow Shirt respondents came from the Northern region while 26 percent came from Southern Thailand. In contrast, 28 percent of Red Shirt respondents came from the North while only 5 percent resided in the South.

These figures were not surprising since the Northern part of Thailand was a stronghold of Thaksin and his supporters while the Southern part of Thailand was dominated by the Democrat party. Moreover, Thaksin himself is from the North while Suthep is from the South.

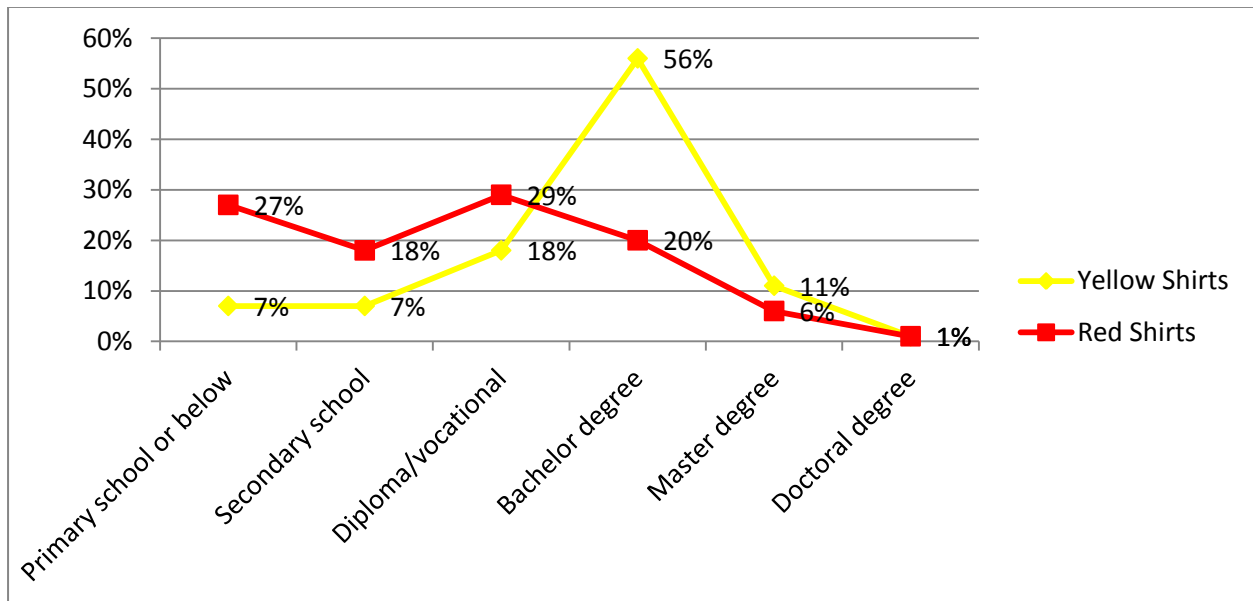
Figure 1-4: Employment Status



Source: Adapted from Asia Foundation (2013) “Profile of the Protestors: A Survey of Pro and Anti-government Demonstrators in Bangkok on November 30, 2013,”

<https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/FinalSurveyReportDecember20.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2015), pp 6.

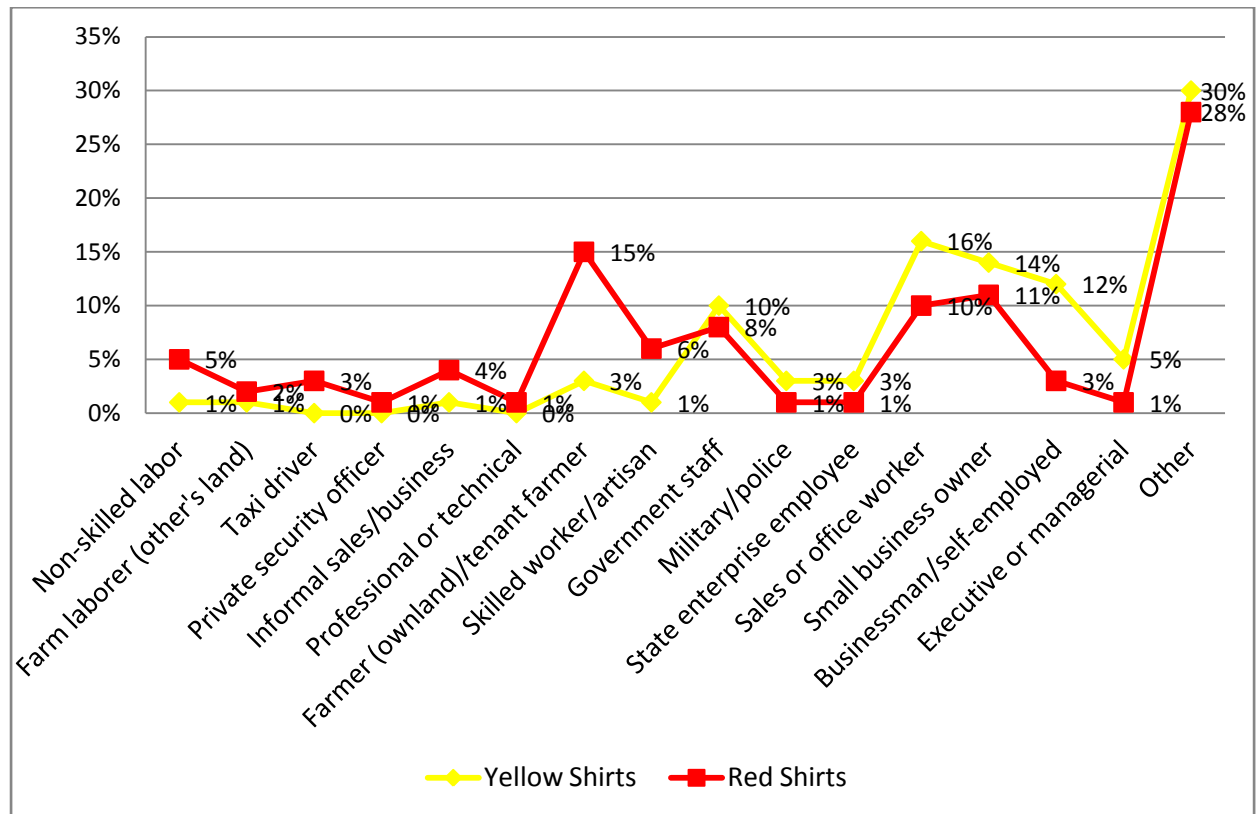
There were no real differences in terms of employment status. The majority of both groups were employed, with only a few that were unemployed. Housewives and students were a minority in the protests.

Figure 1-5: Levels of Education

Source: Adapted from Asia Foundation (2013) “Profile of the Protestors: A Survey of Pro and Anti-government Demonstrators in Bangkok on November 30, 2013,”
<https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/FinalSurveyReportDecember20.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2015), pp 4.

Figure 1 - 5 shows a wide difference in terms of educational background. The majority (62 percent) of Yellow Shirt respondents held at least a bachelor degree while only 32 percent of respondents did not undertake higher education. In contrast, 64 percent of Red Shirt respondents were holding less than a bachelor degree while with only one-third of respondents had higher education.

The highest proportion of educational level from Yellow Shirt respondents was bachelor degree (56 percent). In contrast, diploma and/or vocational degree holders were the largest group among Red Shirt respondents (29 percent) followed closely by primary school or below educational level (27 percent).

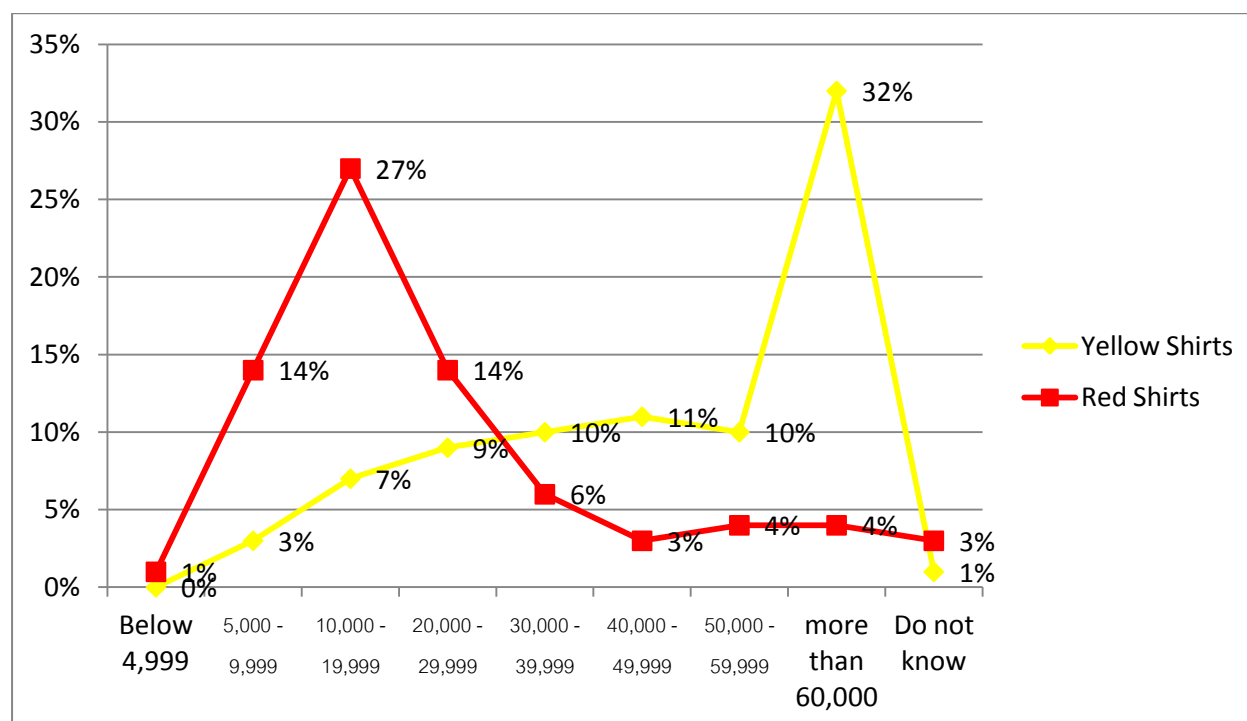
Figure 1-6: Detail of Occupations

Source: Adapted from Asia Foundation (2013) "Profile of the Protestors: A Survey of Pro and Anti-government Demonstrators in Bangkok on November 30, 2013,"

<https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/FinalSurveyReportDecember20.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2015), pp 6.

The diversity of both groups' employment can be seen more clearly in figure 1 - 6 as it divides into occupations. For Red Shirt respondents, the largest occupations category was farmer who owned or rented the land (15 percent) followed by small business owner, sales or office worker and government staff with 11, 10 and 8 percent, respectively. On the other hand, the majority of Yellow Shirt respondents were comprised of sales or office worker (16 percent), small business owner (14 percent), entrepreneur or self-employed (12 percent) and government staff (10 percent). The most distinctive dissimilarity between the two groups were in businessman/self-employed and farmer who owned or rented land categories.

Figure 1-7: Household Income per Month



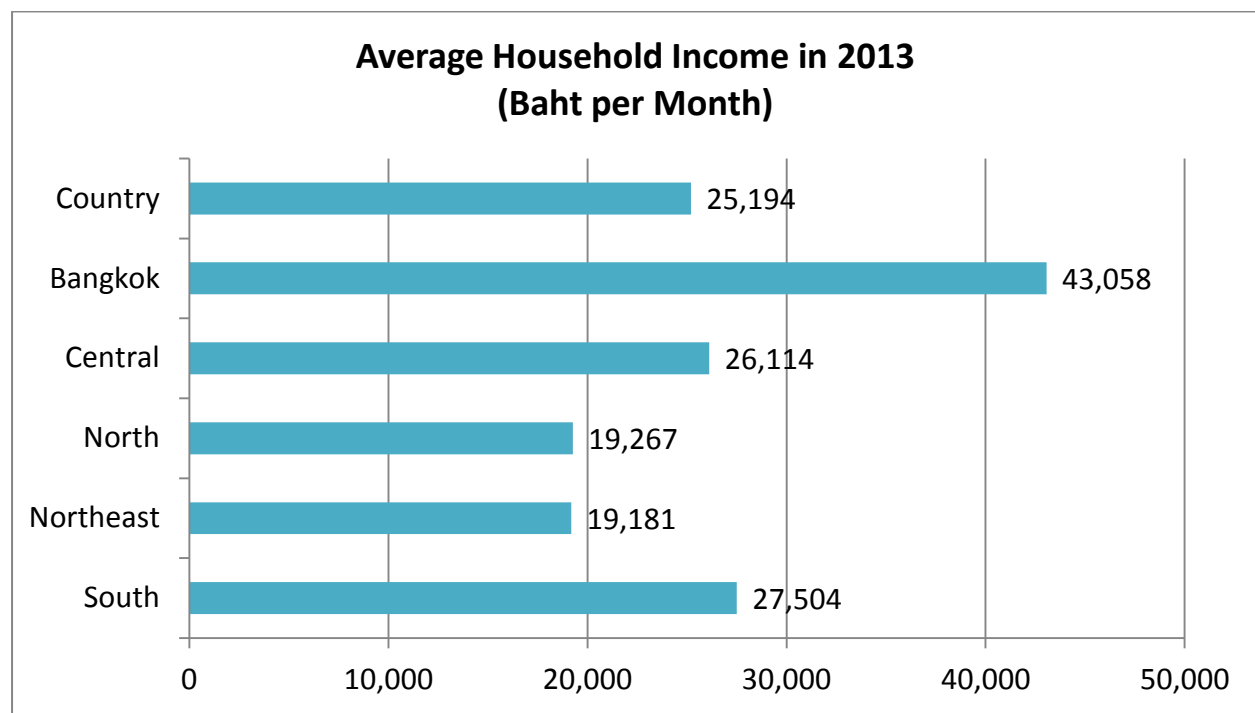
Source: Adapted from Asia Foundation (2013) “Profile of the Protestors: A Survey of Pro and Anti-government Demonstrators in Bangkok on November 30, 2013,”
<https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/FinalSurveyReportDecember20.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2015, pp 7.

Figure 1 - 7 shows a major difference between Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt respondents’ in terms of household income. More than half of Red Shirt respondents claimed to receive less than 29,999 Baht while most of them had only 10,000 – 19,999 Baht per month. In contrast, 32 percent of Yellow Shirt respondents claimed to receive more than 60,000 Baht per month and more than half of overall Yellow Shirt respondents claimed to generate at least 30,000 Baht per month.

Concluding from figure 1 – 2 to 1 - 7, it can be seen that the majority of Red Shirt respondents were from the North, Northeast and Central part of Thailand and had a lower level of education. Moreover, while almost all of them had jobs, their jobs did not provide

high levels of income. On the other hand, most of the Yellow Shirt respondents were from Bangkok, Central and Southern regions with a higher level of education and reported higher household income per month.

Figure 1-8: Average Household Income 2013



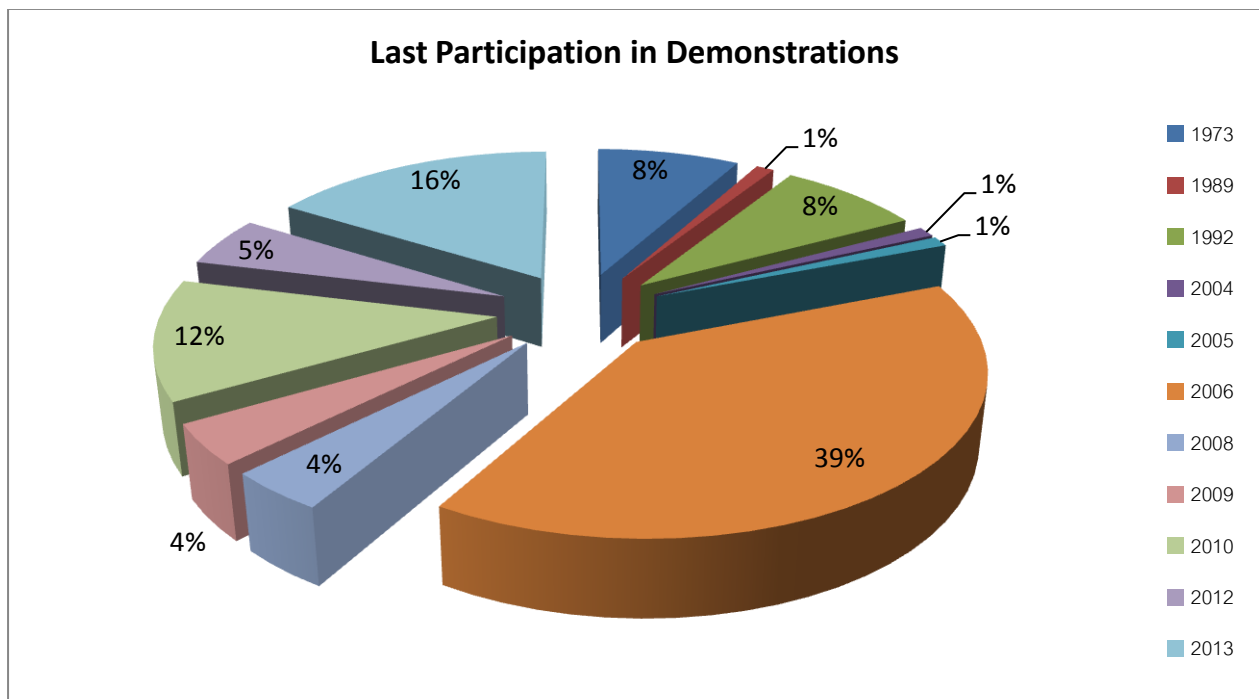
Source: The Household Socio-Economic Survey, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology.

Figure 1 - 8 shows that the average household income of Thais in 2013 was 25,194 Baht per month. However, there was a large gap between Bangkok and the rest of Thailand in terms of income. Average household income for those who lived in Bangkok was more than twice as high compared to those in North and Northeastern Thailand. Figure 1 - 8 supports the result of the Asia Foundation survey that the respondents from different regions had different household incomes and those from North and Northeast had lower income than the rest of respondents. In other words, household income and region are roughly correlated.

Since the majority of Yellow Shirts came from Bangkok, it is not surprising that their income, as shown in figure 1 - 7, correlated with the average household income in figure 1 - 8. From figure 1 - 3, the majority of Red Shirts came from the central region. Their income also correlated with figure 1 - 8. Therefore, it can be seen that the difference in income between Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts is, in fact, similar to the difference in income between people from Bangkok and other regions of Thailand.

In their later work, “Profile of the Bangkok Shutdown Protesters”, The Asia Foundation’s survey (2014) shows that at least 40 percent of PDRC protesters also participated in the 2006 protests, if not more.

Figure 1-9: PDRC Participation in Demonstrations



Source: Adapted from Asia Foundation (2014) “Profile of the “Bangkok Shutdown” Protestors: A Survey of Anti-government PDRC Demonstrators in Bangkok in January, 2014,” <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/THPDRCSurveyReport.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2015), pp 9.

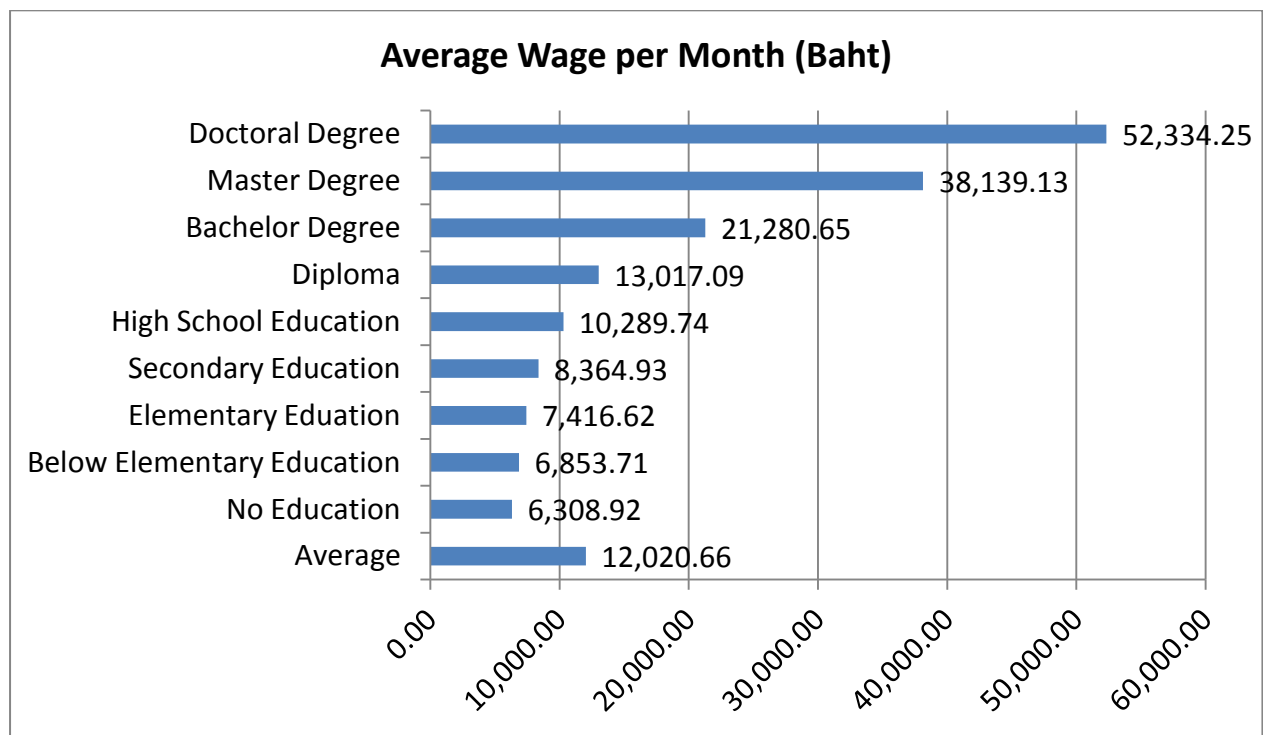
From the information gathered by The Asia Foundation shown in figure 1 - 2 to 1 - 7 and average household income in figure 1 - 8, indicates that, firstly, Thailand in the past decade or more has had a class-related conflict in which one side was the rural poor and another was the urban middle class. Secondly, the conflict also involved regional issues with Northerners on one side and Southerners on the other. Thirdly, it was also linked to education with lower-educated people generally on the opposite side from higher-educated people. Thus, the colors conflict in Thailand can be seen in many related ways. Moreover, the main difference between the two sides was their level of income and education. This indicates that level of income, level of education and social class are correlated.

Class is always significant in Thai politics. Although, there are numerous studies of the middle class in Western languages and Thai as well, the precise meaning of “middle class” is still debated. A person’s class could be categorized in many ways. By using their income, we can separate people between rich and poor or lower and upper classes of people. By looking at their occupation, we can distinguish between the higher or lower status positions, and we can identify the difference between manual and intellectual workers. By focusing on social status, we can tell the differences between members of high or low society. In terms of the middle class, we could literally understand it as a class in the middle or a class between upper and lower class; however, in the real world, to locate a person’s class is far more complicated. There are many theories regarding the middle class, with each using different criteria to denote a person’s class. As we will see in chapter two, occupation, income and education are some of the criteria that have been widely applied to identify the middle class.

As for the lower class, Andrew Walker (2012: 36-44) used poverty line to identify the poor. Based on his estimation, around “20-30 percent of households in rural Thailand could be classified as poor or near poor” (2012: 43). If his estimation is right and we could designate the poor as much of the lower class, it indicates that, firstly, at least 30 percent of the overall population can be seen as lower class. Secondly, being poor based on level of income may be linked to lack of education, as level of income and level of education are correlated as shown in figure 1-10. Lastly, if we have 30 percent of the overall population as lower class, it means that we have a large percentage of population sitting in between upper and lower classes or the so called “middle class”. This raises a question: is it possible that all of them are the same? These are in accordance with the aims of this thesis; to find out the importance of education towards middle class status and to find out is it a single middle class, middle classes or are there fractions within the middle class?

In the case of Thailand, despite the common usage of the term middle class in media, social science literature and literature more generally, and even in daily life, the definition of “middle class” is far from clear. In the past decade or more, journalists and academics have claimed that Thailand was facing a class conflict, especially during the Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt conflict. However, the boundary between the middle and lower class is not entirely clear. What is the line one needed to cross to become another class? How much income should one have to be middle class? According to Anek Laothamatus (1996: 209), for example, the Thai middle class is urban-based and consists of those who are situated between the wealthy upper class and the poor (such as peasants, farmers and workers), a quite vague definition. James Ockey (1999: 240-245) added further that lifestyle, status or occupation can be criteria of the Thai middle class.

Among the criteria, education is prominent. Higher education can lead to higher income, hence education is vital for those who seek a better life. In a straightforward way, education can lead to a better job and associated income. As shown in figure 1 - 10, education is highly correlated with income.

Figure 1-10: The Relationship between Education Level and Salary

Source: Average salary classified by level of education (2014), Bank of Thailand

From this chart, it is clear that a university degree is an important factor in the level of income. On average, Thais who have a job will receive around 12,000 Baht per month. However, this figure will vary when education is taken into consideration. Those who have less than a diploma will get a salary below the national average, while those who have a diploma and above tend to make more than the national average. There is no large difference, in terms of income, between those with no education, or below elementary education, or elementary education, or secondary education or even high school graduates. However, the gap can be seen clearly from diploma holder-through the higher degrees. Graduates at the diploma level will receive a salary 2 times higher than a person with no education. Bachelor degree holders can generate 3 times higher salaries than elementary education holders. Master degree graduates could earn almost 40,000 Baht per month compared to around

10,000 Baht per month for high school graduates. Doctoral degree possessors can receive more than 50,000 Baht per month while it will take 10 months for people with no education to get the same amount. Thus, the level of income is strongly correlated with the level of education.

However, the importance of higher education is not limited to the level of income. It differentiates skilled workers from manual workers (Gidden 1981: 179-180). It also helps in retaining or transferring middle class status from generation to generation (Power 2000: 134). In addition, educational institutions are where the socialization process begins with others in the middle classes (Moiseyenko 2005: 97-98). And, within institutions, middle class-values are transferred (Chanan & Gilchrist 1975: 121). In chapter two, we will discuss further the importance of education in shaping the middle class.

Conflict between classes could be seen as the main reason for the unease among Thais that also led to military involvements in Thai politics. According to Anek (1996: 202), it could be argued that the repeated presence of the military in Thai politics does not come from the absence of democratic values but it originated in the conflict between the major social groups—the urban, educated middle class and the rural farmers or peasants. Although his work came before the emergence of the Red and Yellow shirts in Thai politics, it identifies the conditions underlying the political turmoil in Thailand.

Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker (2008: 21) noted that conflict in Thailand can be seen as a conflict of class and privilege in which a minority urban middle class tried to hold the upper hand against the rural masses; however, the nature of conflict was more complex.

James Ockey (2009: 316) shared the same view,

While it is fairly simple to classify the divide in Thai society as regional, with the North and Northeast on one side, the South and Bangkok on the other, or as class-based, with the middle classes on one side, the poor on the other, and the rich divided, it is worth keeping in mind the divide is not so simply structural, and is of fairly recent origin.

While the divisions may be complex, class is still a central factor in regard to the colors conflict in Thailand. As stated by Giles (2009: 23) a civil war between the rich and the poor is happening in Thailand, but in a more complicated way. Therefore it would not be wrong to say that class conflict is one of the main problems in Thailand.

Although, in the past decade or more, Thailand has, arguably, faced conflict between classes, class is not new to Thailand and “the middle class” has long played a major role in Thai politics. The fact that the Thai middle class supported an authoritarian regime or demanded military intervention in politics is apparent in the history of Thai society.

The 1973 demonstration could be seen as the beginning of middle-class influence in Thai politics. As noted by Ben Anderson (1977), the success of the 1973 demonstration was based on middle class involvement. He argued that, if the protest consisted of “slum-dwellers rather than generally well-dressed urbanities” (Anderson 1977: 18), the result might have been different and “the dictators might have won fuller support for repression” (Anderson 1977: 18). He explained further that the decline in the economy in 1971-72 led to uneasiness and dissatisfaction among those who benefitted from economic expansion. Therefore, the student protest of October 1973 received massive support from the new bourgeois strata (Anderson 1977: 17-18).

However, the 1976 protest revealed the controversial political behavior of the Thai middle-class. Anderson explained that growing unemployment led to a perception of graduated students- become- troublemakers, which created resentments and frustrations within

the new bourgeois class. This new bourgeois class felt insecure from straitened economic circumstances and worried by the fear of never-returning to their golden days. Moreover, they had little thought about politics and government but had a strong perception of “not being to blame for the mess” (Anderson 1977: 19). Their paranoiac response was not limited to students but, also communists, foreigners, or whatever enemy they can imagine. For Anderson (1977: 18-19), this insecurity and fear could explain why people who supported the 1973 demonstration turned to dictatorship in 1976.

James P. LoGerfo (2000) noted that, in 1973, the Thai middle class successfully expelled the authoritarian regime of Thanom, Praphat, and Narong but three years later, because of lower class challenges and the communist threat, the middle class supported the dictatorship of Thanin Kraiwichian (LoGerfo 2000: 224-225). Anek also pointed out that although the middle class rejected “military-authoritarian rule” in the events of 1976-77, they were prepared to tolerate any military intervention that could prevent “a perceived threat from the Left” (Anek 1996: 209-210).

Since the 1990s, the urban middle class has been considered one of the most influential actors in Thai politics (Funatsu & Kagoya 2003: 243). As Andrew Brown (1997) stated in his work, despite the death of many protestors, the May 1992 demonstrations signaled the increasing power of the middle class in Thai politics (Brown 1997: 163).

While the May 1992 incident is generally described as “a middle-class revolt” and the victory over General Suchinda was perceived as “the triumph of democracy”, there are some lessons from the past that middle-class street demonstrations have also created a pathway to new dictatorships, such as the return of dictatorship in 1976. Therefore, the political role of the middle class is not clear. Their ability to hold democratic power and their interest in reforming authoritarianism are still in question (Robinson & Goodman 1996: 8).

Neil A. Englehart (2003: 257-258) points out that the 1991 coup was widely accepted, including by the middle class, because of corruption and the perception that democratic institutions only served the interest of privileged groups. In fact, there was little protest against the 1991 coup and the Thai stock market rose after the coup, particularly when Anand Panyarachun was named as prime minister (Girling 1996: 21). Even though the Anand government was formed undemocratically, he was very popular among the urban middle class, who may have believed that, as an appointed Prime Minister, he was not beholden to any party or interest group (Englehart 2003: 258). Although a month after the national election, there were protests against the appointment of General Suchinda as Prime Minister, these protests, he argued, were more about corruption than democracy, based on the fact that Suchinda's cabinet included several of the "unusually wealthy" politicians whose removal justified the 1991 coup (Englehart 2003: 260-261).

Agreeing with the unpredictable role of the middle class in Thai politics, LoGerfo (2000) explained further the role of the provincial middle class in the 1992 demonstrations. He noted that there were demonstrations, both supporting and opposing General Suchinda, in at least 30 provinces in Thailand during the May 1992 uprising, which have generally been overlooked by Thai media and academics (LoGerfo 2000: 221).

According to a survey on the 17th May by the Social Science Association of Thailand, to some degree, around half of demonstrators could be categorized as middle class, although this data may not reveal the truth about the demonstrations (Englehart 2003: 262). Based on the survey, Englehart pointed out that the lack of proof in survey methodology made possible selection bias. Moreover, the category of middle class in the survey included an unknown number of salaried blue-collar workers and low-wage white-collar clerks. Despite the fact that the shooting took place very close to Thammasat University, none of the casualties came from this elite institution. Furthermore, it is impossible to identify the proportion of the

middle class that didn't oppose the Suchinda regime by not participating in protests (Englehart 2003: 262-264). Moreover, despite a leading role of the middle class in the 1992 conflict, "when the fighting erupted, they were not in the forefront" (Ockey 1999: 244). Ockey further noted that, as witnessed by the number of deaths and injuries, the majority of those at the forefront belonged to a lower class while only few belonged to the middle or upper class (Ockey 1999: 244).

Despite the unpredictable behavior, the Thai middle class has had one consistent pattern in politics. LoGerfo (2000: 226-228) noted that, since the mid-1980s, the Thai middle class preferred "clean" politics and opposed any kind of vote buying. At that time, there were three indications that the middle class preferred "clean" politics: firstly, the election of Chamlong Simuang as Bangkok governor. Chamlong's private and public life is seen to be in accordance with "the highest moral principles" and his party contested the 1988 election with "four rules of unprecedented strictness: do not buy votes, do not compete for position, do not speak impolitely, and do not cheat" (LoGerfo 2000: 227). Secondly, the overwhelming support of Prime Minister Anand. Although he was appointed by the military regime, Anand proved to be independent from the military and, under his leadership, his administration was considered transparent. Thirdly, the extensive participation of "Poll Watch" in monitoring the 1992 election, led by the middle class. The PollWatch organization, established by Prime Minister Anand, received overwhelming support from the middle class. Over 60 percent of volunteers came from middle class occupations (most of them university students) and aimed to "prevent vote-buying, educate the public about democratic principles, and monitor the campaigning and balloting processes" (LoGerfo 2000: 228).

As LoGerfo (2000) noted, there are 4 reasons why the middle class want "clean" politics; firstly, they demand good use of their tax money without corruption; secondly, they have an ideal of democracy in which the middle class want Thai politicians to not buy votes

and think about the country before themselves; thirdly, they encourage the decline of the patron-client system and the increase of personal ability-based mobility in jobs; finally, “clean” politics allow everyone to be equal, especially in terms of business and economics (LoGerfo 2000: 229-231).

LoGerfo also pointed out that there are four main factors for the Thai middle class to support a particular regime; government efficiency, level of corruption, perception of threats from the lower class, and level of state repression. He argues that a weak or corrupt government can turn the middle class against any form of government, while a challenge from the lower class in democracy or extreme control by an authoritarian regime could push the middle class onto the opposite side (LoGerfo 2000: 224-225). It can be seen that the middle class opposes to corruption and want clean administration, but democratic system is not necessary needed.

In terms of political ideology, Funatsu and Kagoya (2003: 248) noted that while the middle class is keen on promoting democracy, they are dubious about the rest of the population, especially the rural farmers. For example, the middle class are not satisfied with the increasing budget allocated to rural areas because they do not think that it would do any good for Thailand. Funatsu and Kagoya argued further that although the social background of the Thai middle class is varied, they share “education-based homogeneity” which has some influence on their consciousness (Funatsu & Kagoya 2003: 257). Moreover, the middle class awareness of the importance of democratic procedures seems to be in question. Although the urban middle class is generally satisfied with democratization, they question the quality of votes from the rural majority. In fact, it is not the Bangkok middle class who opposed the lower class’s political participation, but it is highly educated people, regardless of their origin, that are reluctant to accept the equal value of each vote. Funatsu and Kagoya explained that this skepticism comes from the highly educated middle-class’ perception of

how politics works in the rural areas, including for example, vote buying (Funatsu & Kagoya 2003: 257-259). For the middle class, democracy may not represent equality in voting since some voters may not qualify in the eyes of the middle class.

In Western democracies, socioeconomic status and the tendency to vote are strongly related. Higher education, better incomes and decent occupations are significant factors for people to participate in politics, particularly voting in elections. However, this pattern is not evident in Thailand. Voters in Bangkok, the most highly developed and modern area in the country, participated less in many elections than those in the less developed rural areas (Suchit 1996: 192). This suggests that the middle class may not interest in election since the quality of voters did not meet their expectation and the result is likely to represent the majority, not the middle class.

Although Suchit Bunbongkarn's work (1996) and Anek Laothamatas's work (1996) were written two decades ago and circumstances in Thailand have changed, as members of the middle class themselves, their work still represent perceptions of some of the Thai middle class toward elections and the poor. As Suchit argued, at the time rural voters' participation in elections was not caused by their awareness of politics, but it was because of the mobilization activities of politicians in their areas. He explained further that most rural voters have a low level of education and are poor therefore they are easily mobilized to vote by local agents such as local leaders, political parties or government officials. Moreover, vote buying is another way to mobilize rural voters (Suchit 1996: 194). Anek explained further that rural voters at the time expected to receive greater benefits for their village instead of focusing on political principles, national policy or national interest. For them, the ideal candidate was the person who could provide a patron-client network in their village and also assist their financial needs (Anek 1996: 202). Their view suggests that the middle class do not trust the

poor because they can be bought and may make the outcome of any election not reflect interest of the middle class.

In general, vote buying in Thailand has been run by vote canvassers (Hua Khanaen). They are not party workers like in the West but they are local people with influence such as village headmen or landlords. Normally, a few days minimum wage was offered to rural voters in exchange for their vote (Anek 1996: 205-206). While rural voters did not consider receiving money from candidates a bribe, they did not appreciate those candidates who dump money to them without really visiting or helping their village such as by building or repairing local infrastructure. For rural voters, vote buying was more like receiving generosity for their village. But for the urban middle class, vote buying was financed by corruption. In fact, money has not been the only tool to win an election. Candidates need to stay close to the voters in terms of taste, culture, outlook and lifestyle. Therefore, the ideal candidates for the middle class, those who are highly educated and cosmopolitan, have been those who can reflect their middle class status. In contrast, the ideal candidates for rural dwellers regularly appeared to the middle class to be too uneducated, exhibit behavior and have too provincial an outlook to run the country (Anek 1996: 207-208). This suggests that the middle class and the poor see the election differently.

Suchit argued that Bangkok voters were immune to the countryside-style mobilization. He noted that most Bangkok voters, particularly those of middle class status, were very independent and believed in democratic ideology. Their vote was based on their own judgment, not mobilization and vote buying (Suchit 1996: 194-195). However, the voter turnout from Bangkok has usually been lower than most parts of Thailand, if not the lowest.

For example, in 1995, only 49.82 percent of the electorate from Bangkok went to vote, which was the lowest rate and compared to the average of 62.04 percent overall¹⁰.

One possible explanation is Bangkok voters lacked trust in politics and politicians. Despite their awareness of politics, Bangkok voters were pessimistic about their candidates and believe that all politicians cannot be trusted and have always been corrupt so there was no point in going to vote (Suchit 1996: 195). As Anek noted, the urban middle class concluded that an election in Thailand was “an invalid source of regime legitimacy”. Because of bribery, voters did not choose independently and did not have “responsible judgment”. For the middle class, Thai citizens were not “the sovereign of the state” as in democratic theory because they were just “a vehicle for illegitimate power” for the unethical politicians (Anek 1996: 214-215).

Before the Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) era, rural voters had little influenced on government at the national level, therefore, they were not an effective force in checking government performance. However, as rural people are the majority of voters, politicians did not need support from the urban-based voters who were aware of the importance of influencing government decision making. For example, the Chatichai government during the 1988-1991 was heavily criticized for corruption by mass media, Bangkok voters and business groups but government-power was based in rural areas and received massive support as long as the government provided for rural needs (Suchit 1996: 198). But, for the middle class, vote buying and corrupt electoral behavior, which were widespread in Thai politics, were not acceptable. They believe that the politicians who came to power by this process were unqualified and likely to be corrupt (Anek 1996: 202-203).

¹⁰ Data from “Information, statistic and election result for Members of The House of Representative (July 2, 1995)” by Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior.

Anek concluded that the major division in Thai politics was the different views and expectations for democracy, elections and politicians between the middle class and the poor (Anek 1996: 220-221). He explained further that, for rural voters, democracy is valued and a tool to gain greater benefits for their communities. Moreover, elections are more likely to be local affairs, not national, for rural voters, and they use their votes to repay those “friendly, helpful and generous” politicians who help them in their daily difficulties, rather than seek abstract rewards. On the other hand, the educated and Western minded middle class see democracy in the form of legitimacy to run the country. They believe voters must understand that politicians should be elected based on their policy, honesty and capability to perform at the national level and “voting decisions should be made independently of social, cultural and financial obligations” (Anek 1996: 221). However, it is important to understand that decision-making at the national level has, at least until recently, always benefitted Bangkok over the provinces.

Suchit noted that the substantial difference between urban and rural voters was their motivation. As he argued, urban voters’ participation in elections was encouraged by their political consciousness. They believed it was their responsibility and duty to choose the right administration to govern the country. On the other hand, voters from lower socioeconomic status such as rural people participated in elections because they expected their representatives to work for their interests in a more direct approach. In other words, rural voters cared about bridges and roads in their villages or the price of agriculture products rather than the role of their representatives in national politics (Suchit 1996: 196). However, the administration and policies that the middle class desired always promoted Bangkok interests ahead of the provinces and benefitted the middle class.

After the TRT party became more involved in Thai politics, rural voters became more aware of national policies. Since Thaksin came into power in 2001, low-income people benefited from his populist policies. Before the Thaksin era, the rural poor were overlooked and struggled to gain influence in politics (Chairat 2009: 50). And because of Thaksin, rural voters became the most powerful actor in politics while the middle class “were no longer the most important audience in Thai electoral politics, or the most important public voice between elections” (Ockey 2007: 8). During Thaksin’s period in 2001 - 2006, the urban middle class was dissatisfied with, as they called it, Thaksin’s “tyranny of the majority” system, and started campaigns against him. The Thai military, once again, interfered in Thai politics by carrying out a coup on 19 September 2006. With support from the urban middle class, the bloodless coup successfully installed an interim government, although the influence of Thaksin over Thai politics continues as his party continued to win each election. In 2009, the urban middle class finally got a government they wanted, a Democrat Party led government installed by the military. Nevertheless, the Democrat Party’s government faced challenges from the rural masses, which led to dissolution of parliament.

The difference in political perceptions created a situation where the rural majority chooses the government but the middle class are less satisfied and allow or invite interference by the military (Anek 1996: 221). While the authoritarian form of government could destabilize the economic environment, for the urban middle class, the threat from a rural-populist government is more dangerous to their class interest. In other words, middle class support for democracy only exists when the interest between class and form of government are in the same direction (Albritton & Bureekul 2007: 30-31). The role of the Thai middle class in politics is controversial; they may support democratic government but are willing to sacrifice the idea of democracy if their interests are in danger. Moreover, the Thai middle class questions the poor’s political participation as they believe it does not have the same

“quality” as the middle class, although the key difference is, as in all politics, over who gets what.

In chapter two, we will discuss further importance of education in shaping the middle class.

Significance of Topic

In Thai politics, class has been a major factor in the past and present and is likely to remain a factor for the foreseeable future. The role of the Thai middle class is controversial. They are sometimes thought of as a guardian of democracy, yet more recently they have become an obstacle. There are numerous studies of the Thai middle class and their behavior; however, a study on the way the perceptions of the middle class are shaped through education has not yet been undertaken.

Education is, arguably, one of the most important elements of the middle class. Education not only leads to a better income, it also helps shape the middle class in different ways. In general, noteworthy Thai scholars graduated from and have been influenced by Western-style academic institutions. Their knowledge and ideas have been passed on to their audiences, not only in the classroom but also through various channels such as books or media. Thus, the importance of a university lecturer’s position and higher education is not limited to reproducing knowledge to their apprentices; they also help shape the perceptions of society as well. Numerous Western ideas have been translated, defined and adapted to Thai society by academics, which have often influenced the way of life of Thai people. Concepts like globalization, capitalism, civil society, and others were injected into Thai discourses by these academics. Some ideas are widely accepted, some are not. But these ideas have, undeniably, opened new ways of thinking for many Thais.

Although the traditional Sakdina¹¹ class system was employed in Thailand for centuries, the modern notion of class has been recently introduced. University lecturers and higher education has been the spear-head of this development, their studies help determine the notion of class and class consciousness for the entire society. In addition, the environment in universities is also significant in shaping the notion of class. University facilities, reputation, and location are some of the conditions that students consider for their higher education. Relationships inside university are equally important for students, and may last a lifetime. The university environment and friendships may play a major role in socializing university members in terms of class perception.

A study of higher education and its influence on class perception is important. By understanding the role of higher education, we can better understand the class system in modern Thai society, which is important in creating an in-depth perspective of Thailand's class structure and the political crisis. Additionally, there is no study on the role of universities in spreading class perceptions in Thailand. For this reason, I have decided to study the university as an environment – including, most importantly, the lecturers, the students, the facilities and reputation of the universities and analyze how class perceptions and middle class culture have been created inside the university environment. As a result, this study would allow us to conceive of Thai politics and class formation from another perspective.

¹¹ The Sakdina system “was a system of social rankings established by the absolute monarch and specified for each individual by the king or his subordinates. It was a central feature shaping the administration of justice and of manpower control, and was linked ideologically with Buddhist concepts of a publicly demonstrable hierarchy of merit” (Zehner 1991: 157).

Research Questions

The thesis aims to investigate the building of middle class perceptions within Thai society, particularly through education. The thesis focuses on contemporary social classes in Thailand, by considering the role of the university in educating, reproducing and shaping class perception in Thai society. The thesis will look into the entrance process and how it relates to students' class background. There are 3 key areas that this thesis will investigate: firstly, who is the middle class: secondly, how does education shape social classes: thirdly, what is the importance of the university environment toward shaping class perceptions to students and Thai society.

In chapter two, we analyze literature relevant to this thesis, particularly on the concept of the middle class, the creation of the middle class in Thailand, and the importance of education for the middle class.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review and Research Methodology

From the last chapter, we found that the recent conflict in Thailand could be considered as a conflict between classes. However, not all academics shared that view. Although most academics seem to agree that the Yellow shirts are mainly middle class, their views on the class status of the Red shirts are debated. On the one hand, some scholars believed Red shirts are not lower class. They are not as poor as peasants, are climbing up the class ladder and can be seen as the lower middle class (Naruemon & McCargo 2011: 1000-1017, Pasuk & Baker 2016: 15-19). On the other hand, some scholars argued the Red shirts are lower class. They lack higher education, identified themselves as lower class even though they have higher incomes than peasants, and, most importantly, they proclaimed themselves as such during their protests (Sopranzetti 2016: 314). This indicates that identifying a person's class is complicated. This chapter will look into literature relating to the middle class and attempt to identify them, more clearly.

The concept of middle class has been widely discussed, but there is no single definition of the middle class – or even the term “class”. “As a concept, class is, therefore, being used to do many things: provide academic legitimacy, frame an academic discipline, speak to ‘the people’, measure social change, stand in for the social itself” (Skeggs 2004: 41).

Stephanie Lawler (2005) explained class broadly “as a means of analyzing forms of inequality”, not only in economic terms, “but also as circulating through symbolic and cultural forms” such as the right kind of knowledge or taste. She explained further the dynamic of class, “as a system of inequality that is continually being remade in all processes of social life” (Lawler 2005: 797).

As noted by Berch Berberoglu (1994), in his book; *Class Structure and Social Transformation*, there are many theories about social class. Elite theory (Pareto: 1935, Mosca: 1939, Mills: 1956) argued that there are 2 strata in society: “the ruling class (the elite) and the class that is ruled (the masses)” (Berberoglu 1994: 9). This theory argued that, in each society, there are a small number of talented individuals who monopolize political power and govern the rest (Berberoglu 1994: 7-9). In this view, “the power elite is not the mere identification of the elite in the three key institutions that constitute the American power structure but the interrelationship between these institutions and between the members of the elite that control and direct them” (Berberoglu 1994: 10). C. Wright Mills (1956: 7-8) explained further that the elite or the “triangle of power” are those in control of big corporations, high ranking military officers and those who run the state.

Max Weber (1964) explained class in a more “multidimensional” way. The center of his theory is the concept of “life chances” which is the control or lack of control over property by each individual that put them into the different class statuses (Weber 1964: 424-429).

For Karl Marx (1977), class has been treated “as being related to labor or employment” which distinguished “on the basis of their control (or lack thereof) over the means of production, which directly influenced their need to perform labor” (Eisenhauer 2008: 107). Therefore capitalist society consists of 2 main groups; the owners of the means of production and those who do not own the means of production, “the capitalist class owns the means of production and accumulates capital through the exploration of labor. The working class does not own the means of production but instead use its labor power to generate value for the capitalists as a condition for its survival” (Berberoglu 1994: 21).

Despite many theories about class, there are some weaknesses in these theories. Elite theory and Marxist theory focus only on two classes and pay little attention to the middle

class, which may not adequately explain contemporary society with its greater diversity. The middle class has become more important to fully understand the dynamic of each society. In contrast, the Weberian theorists believe in more than two classes; including the middle class, may better explain the structure of social class in society. Therefore this thesis will emphasis class in Weberian terms, however it will not limit itself to only one definition, since class is diverse and all aspects should be considered. It may also prove useful to consider, rather than assure, which indicators best capture perceptions in Thailand.

General concept of middle class

Linda Young (2003: 39) defined the middle class broadly, and vaguely, noting that, because of its various definitions, the middle class can be characterized as people who recognize themselves as middle class and are perceived by their society as such, thus focusing on self-perception.

In terms of economics and income based delineation, the economic boundaries that place the middle class between the upper and lower classes could provide meaning and measurement for the middle class. Although many governments established an official poverty line for the poor, there is no clear line separating the middle class from the rich. Moreover, these lines are not always recognized as the middle class boundaries. Therefore, “the notion of the middle class remains vague and arbitrary” (Eisenhauer 2008: 103-104). Even though there is no agreement, income levels, as Eisenhauer noted are one of the important indicators of middle class status. Hamill (2010: 316) added that, in terms of income, the middle class are people who can take care of themselves or their families, live in a decent place and, are able to have a college education, at least.

In Marxism, the middle classes are recognized as classes between the dominant and the subordinate class although they may be either transitional or a segment of the major classes (Giddens 1981: 31). According to Dahrendorf, the new middle class is not totally separate from the capitalist and the working class. In fact, the middle class consists of two parts: bureaucratic workers and those who work outside “such hierarchies (such as shop assistants)”. The bureaucrats are linked to the dominant group in society while middle class workers are closer to the position of manual workers (Giddens 1981: 56).

For Weber, there is more than one middle class located between positive and negative privileged classes which are generally separated by property ownership or marketable skills (Giddens 1981: 43). The concept of Weber’s class theory focused either on the notion of “life chances” or on “property class” which was the control or lack of control over property. Besides that, there were another two classes; the “acquisition class” which was based on occupation and the “social class” which was the result of the combination between occupational and property classes (Berberoglu 1994: 5-6). Although these middle classes generally lack property, they are different from other ‘negative privileged’ classes due to their skills. The acquisition classes possess market value skills which makes them different from those who can only offer their unskilled labor (Giddens 1981: 42-43).

Pluralists believed that class can be defined by such indicators as income or occupation, hence there are two large groups in pluralist theory: the middle class or white collar workers and the lower class or blue collar workers. The bourgeoisie and the middle class, Robinson argued, share a common culture and income and occupation level (Robison 1995: 3). Nonetheless, Robison believed, like Giddens, that the middle class is based on the possession of qualifications, while the bourgeoisie is based on the ownership of property (Robison 1995: 4). He also noted in his later work with David S.G. Goodman (1996: 8) that the complexity in defining the middle class made it difficult to understand its political role. While pluralists

identify the middle class by values of individualism and rationality, Weberians use status, income and occupation as indicators. He then added that the ability to control and manage labor is the line dividing the middle class and lower classes (Robison & Goodman 1996: 10).

Based on data collected from 13 developing countries, Banerjee and Duflo (2008) concluded that a steady well-paying job is a key factor for the middle class. Moreover, they noted that while some middle class people run their own businesses, they are often willing to shut down their businesses if the right salaried jobs come available (Banerjee & Duflo 2008: 21). Statistically, they found that the middle class's spending varies with income. Middle class expenditures are more likely to be for better and more expensive healthcare and education, better housing or more entertainment (Banerjee & Duflo 2008: 8). In terms of salaried employment, the difference between the middle class and the poor is who they are working for and on what terms. The middle class have relatively more secure salaried jobs than the poor. Furthermore, the middle class lives in smaller families and has fewer children than the poor. In addition, while the rural middle class and the poor spend at the same approximate level education, the urban middle class spends significantly more (Banerjee & Duflo 2008: 14-18).

In sum, there are many ways to identify a person's class; however, economic terms are probably most frequently used. Economically, the middle class is a class between the rich and the poor. On the one hand, the middle class is not wealthy enough to remain in their strata without working. On the other hand, the middle class is not poor. They have more job security and are able to afford a better quality of life. However, the economic aspect alone cannot fully describe the middle class or identify them. The complexity of the middle class is such that it takes more than one aspect to fully understand it.

Location, location, and location

These complications are also recognized by Carolyn Howe (1992) who systematically categorizes existing literature. In her book, *Political ideology and class formation: a study of the middle class*, she used three approaches to evaluate the location of the middle class; the gradational approach, the categorical approach and the relational approach. First, the gradational approach which focused on status ranking, education, and income of the individual. Second, the categorical approach which focused on the attributes or functions of classes such as the difference between blue-collar and white-collar occupations. Third, the relational approach which focused on the dependence of one class on another in terms of production relations such as capitalists and the working class in Marxism. She pointed out that, in Weber's theory, the acquisition class and the social class is a gradational concept while the property class is a categorical concept (Howe 1992: 5).

Although she examined the location of the middle class in the U.S. and Sweden in her book, her approach is very useful. For example, she outlined the study in the 1930s and 1940s by W. Lloyd Warner and his associates, which found a six-class system in the U.S. By using gradational and categorical concepts, their class distinctions started from the upper-upper class, which is the old-family social elite, followed by the lower-upper class, the upper-middle class, the lower-middle class, the upper-lower class, and the lower-lower class. People who view themselves as common, average or ordinary fitted into the lower-middle class, while people who think that their status is higher than other common people were categorized as the upper-middle class (Howe 1992: 6-7). This suggests that the middle class is not a single unit and there are fractions within the middle class.

Howe characterizes the middle class as knowledge controllers; "college-educated wage earners" who use mental labor and their skills for decision making and problem solving in their work (Howe 1992: 27), and tries to define the location of knowledge controllers in

society. She argues that knowledge controllers are widely recognized as a new class separate from the capitalist and working classes and with an independent position in political-ideological relations. She claimed that knowledge controllers emerged with the development of knowledge as a new primary force of production which has become more important compared to manual production workers (Howe 1992: 31-32).

In new working-class theory, knowledge controllers are seen as a new working class because of their status as wage earners located at the same level with clerical workers or carpenters. Although knowledge controllers have a higher education, this is only because knowledge is a necessary tool for higher technology production (Howe 1992: 35-36).

The new petit bourgeoisie thesis by Poulantzas (1975: 206) claimed that knowledge controllers had common interests with the old petit bourgeoisie; therefore, they can be seen as a new petit bourgeoisie. This theory points out that, in terms of political and ideological outlooks, knowledge controllers are not part of the working class or the capitalist class like the old petit bourgeoisie. In general, this new petit bourgeoisie has an individualist ideology due to a high level of autonomy in their jobs. They fear any changes that could challenge their privileged position as intellectual labor, so they oppose the collectivism of working class solidarity (Howe 1992: 38-42).

Based on the aristocracy of labor thesis of Lenin (1966), Howe developed a new aristocracy of labor thesis. Despite being structurally like the working class, a labor aristocracy is more pro-capitalist because its privileged status is gained from capitalism. A labor aristocracy is the upper strata workers with relatively high wages resulting from its strategic role in capitalist production (Howe 1992: 43-44).

Another theory regarding knowledge controllers is the approach of “contradictory class locations” by Erik Olin Wright (1978; 1985). Howe concludes from his work that knowledge controllers are located in contradictory class locations within the class structure. She

explained that, while knowledge controllers are wage earners, their autonomy in work made them not fully part of the working-class; however, they are in control of knowledge and produce bourgeois ideology so they also fall within the petit bourgeoisie or the capitalist class. Moreover, knowledge controllers are excluded from the ownership of productive property but they also possess skills which separate them from workers. She argued further that the need for managerial and supervision skills and for knowledge experts to control, reproduce and dominate the working class in capitalism is the reason for knowledge controllers arising. Nevertheless, knowledge controllers can be located in many class locations which “lead to the contradictory class politics of knowledge controllers” (Howe 1992: 44-46).

In conclusion, she found that these theories could not fully explain or locate all members of the middle class. She suggested that there is no single middle class but there are several classes that are located between the capitalist and working class and could be identified as middle class, with their role in the production and control of knowledge as a key characteristic (Howe 1992: 121).

According to Howe (1992), the middle class could not be conflated into only one single class. Education, income, family status, occupation and even culture can be identified as factors to separate people between different classes. The middle class can be recognized, if not defined, simply as the class between the rich and the poor; however, this is a “residual category”, and cannot be used as a definition—especially since rich and poor would need to be defined, and that is not easy either. While agreeing with Howe’s analysis and the Weberian that there is more than one “middle class”, this thesis will treat the middle class as one category with full acknowledgement that there are sub-strata or fractions within the middle class.

General concept of class culture

John Smail (1994: 45) noted that although class experience and class identity are different, class experience is necessary for “the emergence of class identity”. Therefore the origin of middle class culture comes from a common experience which creates a middle class identity (Smail 1994: 45). Stephanie Lawler added that identity is not only something we sense or experience “but as something conferred—something imposed on us irrespective of how we feel about ourselves” (Lawler 2005: 802). In terms of class culture, Rose (1997: 473) noted that, by practicing and struggling within a class, culture is formed, produced and reproduced. Therefore, class culture reflects the development strategies within class structure and, to understand it, structural and strategic analysis is required.

As identified by Bourdieu, there are four main types of capital: economic, cultural, and social (1986: 241-258) and symbolic (1985: 723-744). Economic capital is about what people own, which include income, wealth, financial heritage, monetary assets or property rights, while cultural capital can be regarded as high culture and “may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications”. Social capital, on the other hand, is based on connections and networks which are used in pursuit of favor and advancement to membership in a group. Although symbolic capital is another form of capital, it cannot exist by itself. Rather, symbolic capital needs to be legitimated and perceived by others before its value and power is realizable.

We can conclude from Bourdieu’s work, culture is an important capital resource for those who have and take advantage of it, similarly to property. Bourdieu argued that cultural capital is personified, and is physically and intellectually created and socialized through the education system and the cultural relicts allied with museums and art galleries. However, cultural capital and property are different. Cultural capital is embodied and depends on “people’s dispositions and perceptions” (Bennett et al. 2009: 11).

In addition, class cultures are shaped differently through families, schools, media and life outside work which cultivate class-specific requirements such as values, beliefs, relationships, and expectations. These institutions also “structure people’s lives differently by class” (Rose 1997: 473-474). Furthermore, class culture develops from the historical change in conditions and responsive strategies against class members and with other classes (Rose 1997: 474).

In sum, classes develop cultures to differentiate themselves from others. These cultures are developed through common experiences within each class. Although culture is dependent on a person’s perception, it can be shaped through daily life such as from education or relationships. In addition, culture is important for every class, not only the middle class, similarly to other types of capital. Therefore it is necessary to include culture in any class analysis.

Middle-class culture

Grossmann and Varnum (2010) argue that there is an assumption in social science that people of higher social class status dictate and exemplify the cultural practices of a society as a whole and the cognitive tendencies of people of higher social class status would be more culturally typical (Grossmann & Varnum 2010: 81). As Grossman and Varnum noted, some social science scholars suggested that “the normative way of being and thinking in a given culture” have been dictated by the higher class of people (Grossmann & Varnum 2010: 81).

Looking back into European history, “by setting oneself apart from others, one gains identity” (Kocka 1995: 785), this method was used by the European middle class to create themselves as a social formation, noted by Jurgen Kocka in his work; *The middle class in Europe*. Although the exact boundaries of the middle class are not clear, in general, it does

not include nobles, peasants, manual workers, and the mass of lower-class people (Kocka 1995: 784).

Kocka (1995: 785-787) explained further that the middle class was created beginning in the 18th century. He noted that the European middle class used ideology, education, culture and economic status as tools to separate themselves from others. They shared common interests, experiences, a sense of belonging and ideologies through various occupational groups, economic sectors and class position. They also used norms like individual achievement, regular work, education and scholarly recreation in arts, music and literature. In addition, a good economic status was required in order to fully participate in this culture which excluded the majority of people from becoming truly middle class. In the same way, Beverley Skeggs (2004: 4) added that the line drawn by the bourgeoisie to distance themselves from the aristocrats and “the unruly hoards below” was a historic endeavor in defining class.

Peter Kaufman (2005) explained further that, like working-class social reproduction, middle-class individuals sometime engaged in the same acts of resistance, rejection and contestation. Some middle-class individuals rejected parental direction such as in jobs or education but, unlike working-class people, middle-class parents were willing to support their alternative choices. Moreover, middle-class individuals sometime rejected working-class jobs and were willing to wait for middle-class occupations. As with working-class cultural reproduction, the peer group is equally important for the middle class. He noted that the unity within the peer group members is so strong it is almost impossible to leave the group or “attempt to succeed on one’s own” (Kaufman 2005: 252-257). Therefore, the middle class student who is socialized with middle-class friends is largely linked to “middle-class orientations” both by individual and social interactions (Kaufman 2005: 258).

Family also plays a significant role in social reproduction. As Kaufman (2005: 261) stated, the structural resources that allow the social reproduction progression have been provided to individuals by their family. Other than the peer group, family could be identified as the main reason for going to college. Parental support, both by structural resources and direction, makes college a priority for many in the middle class. And, clearly, middle-class students have a better opportunity in the educational arena and are better equipped for success (Kaufman 2005: 262). The reproduction of the middle class is heavily reliant on human efforts that transfer from one generation to another; without any action or negotiation “a privileged middle-class status would be jeopardized” (Kaufman 2005: 265). Culture thus differentiates the middle class from others. And also culture is a way of reproducing and shaping an ideology in the next generation through institutions like family, education or socialization.

Since many Thai academics learned social class concepts from Western countries, their understanding of class is based on Western concepts. Many of the early Thais academics went to Europe and when they came back, European knowledge and perceptions came back with them. By understanding how the middle classes were created in Europe, we can understand the ideas of social class which influenced many Thais academics. Moreover, Western theories regarding social class are widely accepted and used. The following sections start with two major theoretical works, on the creation of the English middle-class culture then the creation of middle-class culture in Sweden. These two case studies will provide a foundation to help understand the creation of middle class culture.

The creation of English middle-class culture

John Smail (1994) provided another example of how middle-class culture is created. He noted that the earliest middle class culture in England was an attempt to maintain a border with the lower class and challenge the political and social hegemony of traditional elites. As in Halifax, he explained, class consciousness was expressed and comprehended in a practical form. A network of social practices created self-fulfilling and consciously adopted division within the society. In the case of Halifax, the building of the Halifax Piece Hall¹² provided consciousness of the class identity to Halifax's middle class by allowing them to participate in planning and voting in the construction process. Despite sharing common values and practices, the boundary that separated Halifax's elite and the lesser professionals or shopkeepers was local political power, social practices and taste. Moreover, gentility was the boundary that divided the middle class from their lower class counterpart (Smail 1994: 191-230).

Linda Young (2003: 15) explained the fundamental drive of the middle class was their ambition of self-improvement and upward mobility, however, in practice, this motivation "contained a hollow element of promise" that higher status can be achieved by practicing good or correct behavior.

Although financial resources were necessary, money was not the only way to demonstrate middle-class compliance. As Young (2003: 15) explained, the acceptance from other members of the middle class is important. It required the integration of members of the middle class by practicing middle-class beliefs and ritual, or so called gentility. Moreover, there is a set of disciplines and values for the nineteenth-century middle-class; the self-control of person, body, mind, spirit and emotions, especially in a public environment, and

¹² For more information on the Halifax Piece Hall, see www.thepiecehall.co.uk

extending from “personal space to domestic shell to urban frame, carried into the country and across the sea to the colonies” (Young 2003: 16).

Unlike the aristocracy, middle-class people were neither rich nor owned land. Therefore, they needed to invert the view of work and leisure so that the need to work became not a necessity for the poor, but rather a form of virtue (Young 2003: 17). Normally, a family’s position on the social ladder could be identified by the possession of land and money. However, in addition to land and money, gentry’ status required “genteel consciousness, behavior and values” as well as education (Young 2003: 50). The aristocratic values and behaviors were based on their wealth but, for the middle class, they did not have that luxury. Therefore, the middle class created a crucial strategy to distinguish itself from the working class and the aristocracy. There were two strategies developed by the middle class in the nineteenth century; firstly, traditional aristocratic values of work were turned around so that work became “an honorable calling and a moral necessity for the genteel person”; secondly, the idea was developed that, by working, family of the middle class can live a good life at home (Young 2003: 71-72).

Taste was one of the important aspects of culture that was created by the middle class. As Young (2003: 89) noted, “the standards of middle-class taste, like the system of etiquette, functioned to describe and assert a different, separate and legitimate culture neither aristocratic nor proletarian”. The role of tasteful consumerism not only offered a conveniently accessible means of adopting the genteel lifestyle (Young 2003: 91) but also the capacity to realize them (Young 2003: 153). She added that the would-be middle class must know how to consume and sustain the middle class decencies and luxuries allowed by their incomes. For the would-be middle class, goods are more than symbolic or representative of their characteristics. New behaviors needed certain appliances to enable middle class status, such as owning and using a bathtub, which exclusively decorate the middle class and their

environment (Young 2003: 154). A distinct culture and lifestyle has been developed partly from the middle class desire to present their superiority and draw a line to differentiate them from others.

The creation of middle-class culture

The work of Frykman and Lofgren (1987) is another important example of how the middle class has developed and distanced itself from other classes. More importantly, their work indicates that the middle class believes they are superior to other classes which may explain the Thais middle class's view on the lower classes. Frykman and Lofgren used Sweden as their case study and their finding is not dissimilar from the English case.

The development of Swedish middle-class culture in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries was formed both through dependence on and opposition to the old elite and also opposition to the common people (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 8). The bourgeoisie distanced themselves ethically from "the old nobility with its prodigal life-style" and "from the grey mass of the people" (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 27). As Frykman and Lofgren (1987) noted, the life of Swedish peasants of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "was collective; as people grew up and aged they moved up or down established and predictable steps". On the other hand, the life of the bourgeoisie was different, "life becomes a career ladder for the individual to climb" (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 29).

For the peasant, the concept of marriage "was simply a component of the economy of self-sufficiency" rather than emotional (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 92). And, for the peasant family, work was mobile. Family members often went away from home for jobs, leaving the women for day-to-day work on the farm (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 92). By contrast, the bourgeois culture provided a very different basis for marriage. The family became

increasingly a unit of consumption, not of production like the peasant family. They developed an ideology that emphasizes the importance of the emotional ties that bind the family together. Husband and wife were united by love, and parental love directed relations between the generations (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 93). Moreover, financial status was important for a married man to support his family with an adequate home and at least one servant, therefore this goal could not be achieved by many poor middle-class men (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 101).

As Frykman and Lofgren (1987: 107) explained, the expansion of the bourgeoisie and their success required a new personality for individuals with self-fulfilment, self-discipline, and an ingrained sense of morality as the key aspects. In the same way as the English middle-class built their culture, cleanliness became fashionable (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 212). In addition, they explained, the cleanliness was taught in school, through the Elementary School Reader, to all children. Whether they could practice it in real life or not, children learned the rules of good health that underlines the need “for clean, dry clothes, for clean, airy rooms, and for moderation in pleasure and rest” (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 215).

For the bourgeoisie, they defined themselves as a better class than the “loose moral” and “public and private spending” immature old elite class and the peasantry, which “lacked culture and civilization”. The bourgeoisie believed in its own higher qualities such as “its high standards, its self-discipline and moderation, its thrift and rationally” which the above and below classes were short of. In addition, the bourgeoisie thought that they were more accountable, more rational and had better relationships with “other human beings as well as with the natural world” (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 266-268).

Frykman and Lofgren (1987: 269) explained that the nineteenth and early twentieth century Swedish bourgeoisie looked at “the mass of the people as crude, especially in the sense that they were not complete, mature people”. From the bourgeois point of view, the

peasant is similar to a raw material and represented “chaos and disorder” that needed to be culturally sophisticated and developed to the level of the civilization (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 269). For the bourgeoisie, the working class is “uncontrolled, undisciplined, hedonistic, irresponsible, irrational, loud-mouthed, vulgar, careless, dirty, physical” which is different from the good-character presented by the bourgeoisie (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 270).

In sum, the creation of the English and Swedish middle-class was similar. The most important aspect was the way the middle-class distanced themselves from others by creating and reproducing a new culture. In addition, the middle class believe that this new culture is superior to the existing one and should be a guideline for the society.

Middle class in Asia

One way to define the concept of middle class is to look at their economic behavior. In consumption, the middle class tends to maximize personal utility as well as profits in production; however, the middle class’s consumption is not solely motivate by personal interest, as Hughes and Woldekidan argued, but also social obligations that the middle class take into consideration. In terms of economic behavior, which includes consumption, saving, production and investment, the middle class is highly rational. In their decision-making process, costs and benefits will be calculated (Hughes & Woldekidan 1994: 140-141). However, the rational consumption of middle class may come from necessity. Since the middle class is not as wealthy as the elite, they could not use their limited resources without considering the best use for them or, in short, they are forced to be rational. The lower class do not have as many choices as the middle class or elite does so their consumption is not driven by “rational” choice but the need to survive.

Looking at economic aspects, middle class incomes range from lower-middle to relatively high income and are greater than the incomes of the poor, who can afford only basic necessities. However, they are well below the elite such as large landowners or large entrepreneurs. In Western countries, individual income is important in economic behavior however, for developing countries, family income determines the pattern of behavior. Therefore, in a country like Thailand, the identification of the middle class is in terms of family income rather than individual income. They then explained that the expenditure of the middle class is related to their income. Poor people spend a high proportion of income on food but rich people spend a lesser part on food and higher on education, goods, housing and leisure (Hughes & Woldekidan 1994: 141).

Another way to identify the middle class is in terms of occupation. Since people identify themselves and others by occupation, middle class jobs are important for middle class status. According to Hughes and Woldekidan (1994: 142), occupations that can be identified as middle class are

...entrepreneurs who are the owners of relatively small and medium manufacturing and service enterprises and a large range of (professional, technical and management) staff in medium to large scale businesses...

and

Sectors such as banking, insurance and other financial services develop to meet middle-class financial requirements as well as production needs, and they stimulate middle-class numbers as they develop. People working in the professions (law, medicine, accounting) and even paraprofessional occupations (nursing, bookkeeping) are usually considered middle class. As farmers move from traditional to commercial forms of agriculture, with

relatively sophisticated technology and with relatively large capital inputs, they become middle class.¹³

In addition, there is an assumption that, in late-developing countries, modernization and economic development would encourage the rise of the middle class, leading to democracy in the same way as in the West (Hattori & Funatsu 2003: 140). David Martin Jones (1998) noted that the concept of economic modernization creating an irresistible pressure for liberal democratic change in politics has been widely accepted in political science and economics, although he contested that argument himself. While authoritarian regimes may provide a stable environment needed for initial economic expansion, the stable environment will become intolerable in modern society. From this perception, we would expect to see democratization in Asian countries after their sustained economic growth.

As pointed out by Richard Robison (1995), there are three conceptual problems of the middle class. Firstly, the difficulty in separating the middle class from the bourgeoisie's political and social ideologies and from the proletariat's dependence on wages and salaries. Secondly, the problem of coherence in the middle class, which is caused by the wide range of occupations that varied from, for example, urban professional to village clerk. Finally, the uncertain interests and perspectives in politics, sometimes support democracy while other times prefer authoritarianism (Robison 1995: 3). Robison (1995: 8) explained further that the primary concern of the middle class is "the establishment of a system of market and career rewards based on credentials and qualifications" which, from time to time, democratic governments were unable to provide.

¹³ Ibid

Robison also noted, in his later work with David S.G. Goodman (1996: 2) that, for Western liberals, the growth of the Asian middle class and entrepreneurs was expected to construct democratic values in Asia. There is a lot of evidence to support this expectation such as the political transformations which were arguably driven by the middle class and business sectors that took place in several countries such as Taiwan, Thailand and South Korea. In contrast, the capacity of Asia's new rich is in question as they are unable to pursue and commit toward a genuine democratic revolution. In addition, the role of the Asian middle class in politics seems "curious" (Jones 1998: 147), especially when the Southeast Asian middle classes supported both democracy and authoritarian regimes in the past (Crouch 1993: 40).

Jones (1998: 149-155) explained the dependent nature of the middle class. He noted that the economic transformation of Asian countries has had nothing to do with constitutional democracy. In fact, it was governments' role in export-led and planned policies that encouraged this transformation or, in his words, "planned development informed by traditional values shaped the modernization process in Pacific Asia". Therefore, after more than thirty years of economic growth in Asia, the middle class is highly dependent upon state patronage for economic and social benefits. Moreover, for middle-class economic interests, a stable condition of politics is required for economic investment and production which may be provided by authoritarian regimes as well (Girling 1996: 47). Thus, for the middle class, democratic regime is not the only option available for preserving middle class status.

Jie Chen and Chunlong Lu (2011) explained further that the modernization approach asserts that as society begin modernizing, the level of income, education, socioeconomic mobility and importance of freedom of individuals would noticeably increase which, in turn, would promote democracy. In other words, the middle class is usually considered a strong enthusiast of democracy. However, evidence from this approach was mainly seen in Western

countries. On the other hand, the contingent approach suggested that “the orientation of the middle class toward democracy is contingent upon some salient socio-political and socioeconomic conditions” (Chen & Lu 2011: 706) which vary in each country. This approach proposes that the dependency of middle class on the authoritarian state in economic development and the worry about political instability could easily shift the middle class toward another direction; it does not necessarily support democracy. The evidence for this approach was found mainly in developing countries which undergo rapid economic transformations such as in Asia (Chen & Lu 2011: 706).

Ming Tang, Dwayne Woods and Jujun Zhao (2009: 81-82) also pointed out this controversial behavior of the Asian middle class. While modernization theory claimed that rapid economic development is giving rise to a pro-democracy middle class that will not tolerate authoritarian regimes, in China, the dependent nature of the Chinese middle class on state-led economic development disappointed many democratic theorists. Although economic development has led to the expansion of the Chinese middle class, this class also heavily depends on the current political and economic arrangements from the non-democratic regime for their high socioeconomic status and may not be ready to challenge that regime.

Tamio Hattori and Tsuruyo Funatsu (2003: 142) also argued the origin of modernization is different between countries in Asia and the West. While Asian countries modernized by industrial and technological development, Western countries were modernized by a long historical process connected to the development of middle class consciousness. The rapid economic expansion in Asia started after World War II, beginning first in Japan in the mid-1950s, followed by South Korea and Taiwan but at a different speed. China and Southeast Asian countries began their journey in the mid-1980s and then South Asian countries in the 1990s. These processes made significant changes in the industrial structure in each country (Hattori & Funatsu 2003: 146-147). While the progress of industrialization and the growth of

service industries in the West encouraged the expansion of the middle class through new occupations, the process of Asian middle class emergence is different from Western countries. Governments in Asia contributed heavily to the process of industrialization, unlike the West, which, in turn, made Asian populations greatly dependent on the state. The nature of industrialization in Asia depended heavily on governments and large corporations for financing large-scale technologies. And due to this difference, class consciousness was not established in the same manner as in Western countries (Hattori & Funatsu 2003: 152-155). In addition, the lack of strong class awareness in Asian workers also prevented middle class consciousness becoming as strong as in Western countries (Hattori & Funatsu 2003: 158).

Alongside the important role of the state in economic development, the middle class in Asia are more keen to protect their own economic interests than push for economic and political reform. Their dependence on the state is encouraged by the fear of the threat from lower class people. For example, the Chinese middle class believe that the rural people are not ready to fully participate in politics and they are willing to collaborate with the state to protect their socio-economic status (Tang et al. 2009: 83-85). A study by Min Tang, Dwayne Woods and Jujun Zhao (2009: 91) found that an increase in income does not develop people's preference for democracy. Jie Chen and Chunlong Lu (2011: 711) found that members of the Chinese middle class are not willing to push for their political rights if it will disrupt social order and, in fact, the lower class is more supportive of democracy than the middle class (Chen & Lu 2011: 711). Additionally, the middle class in other Southeast Asian countries, such as Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, appear to be satisfied with undemocratic governments (Englehart 2003: 275).

Although many Asian countries have elections and constitutions, the concept of democracy has not really been practiced. Losing parties in democratic countries should respect the election system by serving as "a loyal opposition, working within the established

political framework and honoring constitutional rules” (Kurlantzick 2008: 376). Kurlantzick noted that individuals and organized groups in Southeast Asia countries are often dissatisfied with the result of free elections and, most of the time, these people projected their cases in the streets rather than through elections. The dependence on people power to change governments affects the development of democratic regimes in these countries (Kurlantzick 2008: 376). Quite often that the middle class in Asia was the one who not respect the election and took politics to streets.

According to Clammer (2003), the middle class in Asia which emerged from economic expansion has begun to consume in an internationalized way, becoming cosmopolitan. The expansion of consumer culture in major cities in Southeast Asia not only encourages a social transformative process but also should stimulate a demand for education, media and political participation. However, consumerism leads the middle classes to rely on the state and its pro-market policies (Clammer 2003: 406-408). Moreover, the influence from the middle class lifestyle in the West through TV and other media made a significant impact on Asian populations; they believe that by pursuing industrialization they would be able to enjoy the same lifestyle one day, which limits interest in class consciousness (Hattori & Funatsu 2003: 156).

Clammer (2003: 409-416) argued that the middle class demand public goods and social services but they are contributing the least to civil society. He pointed out that the Southeast Asian middle class organized themselves for pursuing public goods for their own interest rather than for social change or democratization. Middle classes tend to support authoritarian regimes for their own interests such as social stability and public goods. He concluded that the new middle class have not yet achieved a level of political engagement beyond consumption.

It could be seen that the middle class in Asia is more concerned about economics than politics. Any form of government that achieves rapid economic development would be welcomed by the middle class. And their main goal is to preserve and expand their status in society, not create greater equality for all classes. In this sense, the middle class is not the driving force of democracy; in fact, they may be an obstacle. In addition, since the way to preserve middle class status is through economic capability, wealthier lower classes are not in the middle class's best interest.

Middle class lifestyle in Asia

Another way to differentiate social classes is by looking at their lifestyle. As Eijck and Mommaas (2010: 373-374) described,

Those individuals high on income and education differentiated themselves from those low on income and education by more refined, more complex, and more prestigious forms of leisure participation especially found in the public sector. Those people low on income and education had to resort to more simple forms of leisure mostly prevalent in the commercial sector.

As an example in India, as noted by Mathur (2010: 212), the “old middle class” refers to the small property owner located between working class and the capitalists, or the so called “petty bourgeoisie”. The “new middle class” is an educated group of people who work in professional and technical occupations. This new middle class gives priority to occupation, education and income from employment rather than owning property. In addition, the new middle class can also be categorized by their consumption and desire for leisure and a privileged lifestyle. Like many Asian countries, the new middle class in India has become

more consumerist. Modern and Western brands and services have become symbols of their position in society. Credited to the availability of income, the middle class can enjoy commodities such as clothes, cosmetics, films or electronic gadgets. The way new middle classes consume higher quality goods and services can be seen as a symbol of their higher status because these commodities are available but not everyone can afford them (Mathur 2010: 212-213).

Alongside employment status and ownership of middle class consumer goods, the new middle class in India separated themselves from the old middle class and others by their lifestyle. Modern department stores and shopping complexes filled with international brands of goods and cuisines, entertainment and leisure spaces become the landscape of India's urban cities. As the urban population becomes a larger section in India, they are adopting Western consumerism and lifestyles. He added that middle classes in India are characterized by "possession and use of consumer goods" in order to represent their social status, and this behavior has become a way for upward mobility by redefining the owner's social position through perceptions of themselves and others (Mathur 2010: 219-220). According to Mathur (2010: 220),

Shopping malls and bodies displaying visual and virtual signs of wealth and affluence are now interpreted as indicators of higher status not only with regard to the threefold division between high, middle and low classes, but also within these categories and within the caste system.

The lifestyle and consumption behavior of the Indian middle class could also be seen in the case of Thailand as well. International brands of goods and services in department stores have become part of daily life for many middle class in Thailand. Consumerism is important

not only to the middle class but also to their children. As Mathur (2010) noted, students in India have become more and more consumerist. He then explained that the influence of student peer groups dictates the way students consume products. Within their group, he argued, students judge each other through clothing and accessories and have a level of expectations from their members. These expectations put pressure on students to have, at least, the same level of accessories as their friends. Moreover, consumerism has become a mainstream lifestyle in India and students do not want to be left behind in this trend. He then stressed the importance of peer groups that “significantly, some of the students interviewed admitted that while they do not support the practice of consumption personally, they feel pushed into it by the pressure exerted by their peer group” (Mathur 2010: 223-224).

The importance of consumption for the middle class has also been recognized by Yao Souchou (1996). As he noted, by having some middle class symbols, persons can identify themselves as middle class. Such things as cars, tertiary education or washing machines can represent middle class status (Souchou 1996: 339). Because of their superior income, the middle class can enjoy a higher standard of living. And, in the case of Singapore, a car, housing quality and university education for their children are necessities for the middle class life-style (Souchou 1996: 341-343). Luxury items have become important for the middle class life-style, not only because they can afford them but, from middle class perception, luxury goods are something they deserve. The consumption of luxury items such as an expensive watch is a reward for their hard work as well as providing personal satisfaction. In his words (Souchou 1996: 344),

At the same time, by turning consumption into a reward for hard work and perseverance, ownership of prestige items takes on an ethical air: a natural outcome of a "good" behaviour crystallized in the very position and achievements of the middle class.

As for Singaporeans, fast food or designer branded goods are common rewards for middle class families to provide to their children (Souhou 1996: 348). He then added (Souhou 1996: 349),

If consumption is about defining a sense of self through things we eat and use, it is only natural that such strategy is extended to those we love. The simple statement "well-dressed children bring pride to their parents" is packed with a complex desire.

The relationship between the middle class and status symbols is also noticeable in Thai society. Beside luxury items, Raya Muttarak (2004) pointed out that domestic service can reflect social class in Thailand. To understand the relationships in domestic service employment, she argued, Thailand's socio-economic and historic aspects must be taken into consideration. She noted that the influence of "the Sakdina system" which had a long history in Thailand may mirror the relationship between domestic workers and employers (Raya 2004: 504-507). She argued,

The roots of class divisions date back many hundreds of years, and even today relationships and interaction between people from different socio-economic back grounds are believed to remain partially informed by the ideology of old Siamese society (Raya 2004: 507).

She explained that the interclass relationships in Thailand are based on patron-client relations which differentiate each party according to their wealth, power and status. These relationships highlight that Thailand is still a hierarchically ordered society. In the patron-client system, relationships are based on exchanging favors and on mutual benefit. In general, patrons would provide valuable materials to their clients and, in return, clients would give their labor or effort to their patrons. This pattern is reflected in domestic worker and employer relationships (Raya 2004: 507). Normally, employees in domestic service would need to do household work that their employer does not want to do and follow the orders of the employer. Moreover, domestic workers would not eat at the same table with their employer and live in a separate part of the house with their own facilities which are small and basic. They would need to speak and behave toward their employer in good manner. Therefore the sense of higher status is reflected in the relationship between employer and employee in domestic service.

Most domestic workers, both Thais and foreigners, are considered as working class since they are inferior in educational level or income. On the other hand, on the same basis, their employers belong to the middle class or higher. Since education, particularly at higher levels, is highly concentrated in Bangkok and the surrounding region, as a result of unequal development policies, the rural population had little access to higher education. As a consequence, without adequate degrees, the rural lower class can only work as unskilled or low-skilled workers (Raya 2004: 508-509). As she observed,

While the majority of the employers and their spouses had received higher (post-secondary) education, most domestic workers had completed only primary school or dropped out even before that point (Raya 2004: 509).

Domestic workers not only play a role in household responsibility, they also are a part of middle class position and lifestyle. Having domestic workers reflects the wealth and higher status of the employer compared to other families. Moreover, a middle class family will be free from household work and able to spend their time in more productive work or leisure, which differentiates them from the working class and increases their family social status (Raya 2004: 511-521).

In sum, the Asian middle class has a lifestyle that is related to consumption which then becomes a symbol of their status. International products, shopping malls, or even domestic workers are used to separate the middle class from the lower class. By dressing, eating or living in more contemporary and international ways, the middle class shows their superiority on the social ladder.

The Thai middle class

Who are they?

The literal definition of middle class in Thai is “people of the middle” (Ockey 1999: 230). However, there is no clear definition of the Thai middle class, which cannot be defined by education level, occupation or incomes separately. As James Ockey noted, sometimes prostitutes may earn more income than academics but this occupation is generally excluded from middle class occupational categories. In his words, “there is no neat coincidence in Thailand between ‘middle class’ structural positions, such as those defined by educational credentials, occupation status and income levels” (Ockey 1999: 234-235).

For Anek Laothammatas (1996), the Thai middle class is to be found among the wealthy upper class and the poor lower class such as peasants, farmers or workers. In other words, they are urban-base, private sector employees who work in “managerial, executive, or technical positions” or “self-employed professionals such as doctors, nurses, journalists, architects, and lawyers” (Anek 1996: 209). On the other hand, lifestyle could be one of the indications for people who want to be middle class. Media and advertisements direct the way Thai people should act in their daily life, such as where to eat or what to wear, which is very similar to Western culture (Ockey 1999: 240-242). There are at least two differently defined groups within the Thai middle class which are separated by their income and education, according to Ockey; the consumer middle class and the occupational middle class. The consumer middle class is constructed from prestige and life style such as owning cars or mobile phones. They are considered as a new rich but are not necessarily highly educated. On the other hand, the occupational or status middle class are well educated and possess high status from their occupation such as in media and academia. Although their incomes are relatively low, they have an influence over political ideology due to their occupation (Ockey 1999: 245).

According to Funatsu and Kagoya (2003), since the national development scheme was launched in 1958, the number of people who belonged to the urban upper-middle income bracket has increased. This newly emerged middle class became a new political force which distanced themselves from bureaucrats, merchants, or farmers. The rise of the urban middle class was encouraged by the decades of imbalanced economic development. The wide gap in development between Bangkok and the rural areas caused the income disparity between the urban elites and the rural farmers (Funatsu & Kagoya 2003: 245-247). Therefore, from the 1995 survey, “there is no denying that the Thai middle class are very much urban based” (Funatsu & Kagoya 2003: 252). Ockey also recognized in the same way, “while the middle

class has grown throughout the country, it remains concentrated in urban areas” (Ockey 1992: 309).

The growth of the Thai middle class is not a result of internal economic development only, it benefitted from U.S. capital investment during the Vietnam War and Japanese investment, especially during Sarit’s regime, which promoted the private sector, and the development of infrastructure, and encouraged foreign investment (Ockey 1992: 292; Girling 1996: 19; Englehart 2003: 256). Kevin Hewison (1997) argued that the development of capitalism contributed heavily to the emergence of the Thai middle class which has become a significant player in politics and economics since the 1960s. Summarized by Hewison (1997: 140-142), the development of the capitalist class in Thailand could be explained in three phases. Firstly, the emergence of capitalism under the absolute monarchy; capitalists came from the royal family, aristocracy, foreign traders and the administration’s tax agents. Secondly, the emergence of Chinese and Sino-Thai tycoons since World War II, who once were petty traders or laborers. Most of their later wealth came from the financial sector, although they also invested in agriculture, trade and manufacturing. Thirdly, the new generation of capitalists who emerged from economic growth after the late 1970s; they are well educated and often from business families. They likely see themselves as Thai. This group is interested in higher technology value-added manufacturing and service sectors.

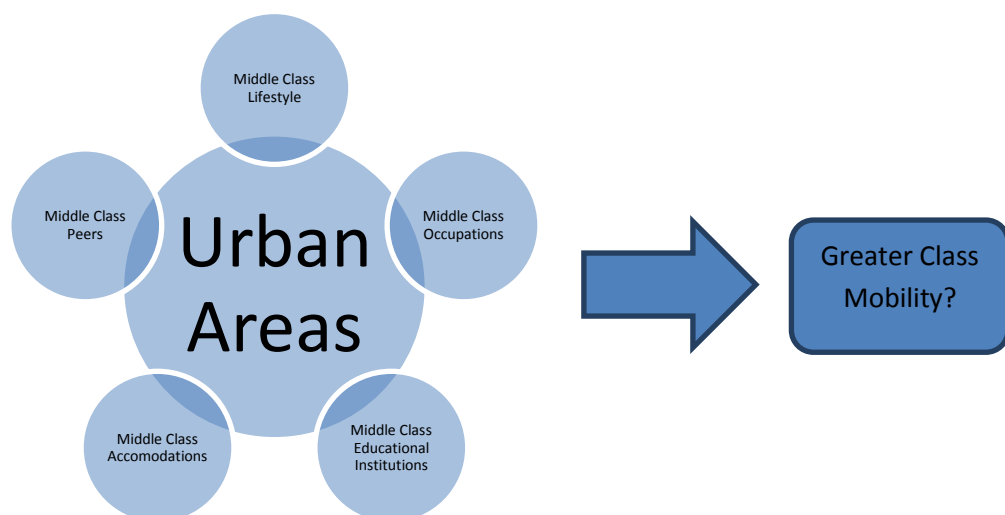
The significance of the middle class towards Thai capitalism is not only in their services in professional and technical skills, they are also significant consumers as well (Hewison 1997: 145). In capitalism, the middle class is an important consumer market and workforce for capitalist production, therefore, “the position of the middle class in Thailand’s capitalist economic structure is likely to be enhanced” (Hewison 1997: 153).

In terms of class mobility, Funatsu and Kagoya (2003: 253-255) explained that more than half of the middle class in Bangkok are first generation middle class who climbed up

from lower strata, and about half of the elites of the upper white-collar strata have fathers below middle class status. However, the mobility of class in Thailand was limited only to the urban population. The percentage of farmers who rose to middle class status is very small, while in contrast there are a larger number of urban manual workers who rose to the middle class level. As they concluded, upward mobility is taking place largely in cities.

The concentration of the middle class in urban areas, as a result of imbalanced economic development, can be depicted as;

Figure 2-1: Middle Class Elements within Urban Area



Since the education (good school and university), occupation (good payment jobs) and lifestyle (metropolitans) that the middle class desires are concentrated in urban areas, it is understandable that those who want to be middle class would move to urban areas for seeking class mobility and to enjoy middle class status. In turn, urban areas would grow to supply the demand of those who want to be middle class. In this way, urban areas will keep expanding at the expense of rural areas that lack these middle class jobs, universities and consumer goods.

Education and the middle class

The significance of education for the middle class

Education is undeniably significant in many ways, especially at the higher level. As Giddens (1981: 179-180) pointed out, the difference between skilled workers and manual workers is the market capacities which are conferred by educational and technical qualifications. This differentiation happens everywhere and not only in income but also in other types of economic reward. In general, non-manual workers enjoy better job security and greater promotion opportunities than manual workers. Moreover, the working hours and benefits also differ between these two classes. In terms of class, educational or technical qualifications are one of the three sorts of very important market capacity, along with ownership of property and possession of manual labor-power, which can differentiate a person's class (Giddens 1981: 107).

In America, since the 1970s, there is strong evidence that those with college degrees have a greater chance to get a middle class job than those who only graduated from high school. And the gap in incomes between high school graduates and college graduates is growing (Hamill 2010: 317-318). In economic terms, at least a college degree or equivalent technological skills training is required for a person to have an adequate opportunity to have a decent job with enough salary to enjoy a middle class lifestyle (Hamill 2010: 318). Hamill explained further that a middle class level of income provides a person more than material comfort. As she argued, middle class income people have greater opportunities to do charity and the possibility to develop their talents in arts or other areas (Hamill 2010: 324). Improvement in education is necessary to provide human capital for more productive jobs (Torche & Lopez-Calva 2011: 39). In addition, Torche and Lopez-Calva addressed the

significance of education as an opportunity for mobility into the middle class (Torche & Lopez-Calva 2011: 41).

According to Dahrendorf, education is a primary requirement for managerial occupations, which allow greater intergeneration mobility for working or middle class people. It is undeniable that education, especially higher education, is a crucial source of social mobility into elite positions; however, sometimes education is limited to a narrow group of privileged people (Giddens 1981: 168-169). In terms of schools, Giddens noted, if their equipment and facilities are poor, or if the quality of teaching staff and environment are low, this inevitably affects intellectual development (Giddens 1981: 185).

Besides helping the creation of middle class status, education can be seen as a tool for transferring middle class status. According to Power (2000), education is very important to retain middle class status. For upper class or elite who are very wealthy and powerful, she argued, their assets and privilege can be passed through generations without external influence. However, for the middle class, educational credentials are necessary to acquire or retain their status (Power 2000: 134). In her research, she found that “the socio-economic status and educational background of parents are important factors in the subsequent educational achievements and occupational location of their children” (Power 2000: 137).

In addition, higher education also reflects the difference between middle class and lower class. Lynch and O’Riordan (1998) pointed out the significance of finances towards education. They argued that educational opportunities depended greatly on financial capability. Despite the availability of educational services, young people with small budgets would not be able to take advantage. Private universities with high tuition fees might be out of reach as well as some extra educational resources like computers or expensive textbooks. In other words, students with limited financial support will have fewer available resources for

their study. Moreover, poverty would lead to students having less time for study, as they may have to work for income (Lynch & O’Riordan 1998: 459).

The educational disadvantage of any given person or group can really only be fully understood in terms of the advantage of others. The financial, cultural and educational experiences of working-class students need not, in and of themselves, create educational inequality; what creates the inequality is the fact that others have differential access to resources, income, wealth and power which enable them to avail of the opportunities presented in education in a relatively more successful manner (Lynch & O’Riordan 1998: 470).

Although there are scholarships or grants available for less fortunate students, those who control the decision are likely to represent the privileged group and be able to dictate the nature and terms of these opportunities (Lynch & O’Riordan 1998: 470). Economic barriers are crucial for lower class students and can dictate their chances for higher education. As Lynch and O’Riordan (1998: 472) argued “...limited economic resources dictated spending priorities in the households; day-to-day survival, 'putting food on the table', 'making ends meet', took precedence over optional goods, including higher education. For some, the costs were prohibitive”.

Kraus, Maxwell and Vanneman (1979) gave an example of how higher education is very important for retaining higher status and how the upper class blocked lower level counterparts from higher education. In the history of Asia, they argued, education played a major role in the bureaucratic system. “Education bestowed eligibility for bureaucratic position; and to be a bureaucrat, one had to be educated” (Kraus, Maxwell & Vanneman 1979: 139). They explained that, in ancient times, through religions, education provided wisdom, virtue and philosophy to officials as it was essential for the ruling regime. In other

words, education has been involved in the right to rule. In modern Asia the relationship between education and bureaucrats still exists. Social rank still largely depends on educational level. The priority of higher education is to prepare manpower for bureaucratic employment. Moreover, unlike in ancient times, since it is impossible to transfer bureaucratic position from parent to children, higher education has become a means to retain social status from generation to generation (Kraus, Maxwell & Vanneman 1979: 139).

Bureaucrats also want to control access to higher education. For them, the university is the supply centre for manpower, and limited access would guarantee their superior status in society. "If higher education were to become too widespread, the learning which is a major resource of the bureaucrats would become devalued" (Kraus, Maxwell & Vanneman 1979: 140). Despite their need to limit access to university, appropriate growth in access is essential to maintain their growing need of staff. There are 3 ways to restrict access to higher education; the number of admissions, the admission requirements and the separation of elite universities from others (Kraus, Maxwell & Vanneman 1979: 140).

Although one qualification that can define the middle class is education, it is evolving over time. As Hughes and Woldekidan (1994: 141) noticed, after World War II, managerial positions, both in private and public sectors, required only secondary education; however, a few decades later, tertiary education and even postgraduate degrees became an important requirement.

In sum, the higher education is necessary for having marketable skill, which can lead to middle class occupations and incomes. Education is not free, especially at higher levels. Although it is not necessarily true that a person with a limited budget would have less opportunity at a university, it does make it harder for that person to be well-educated. Thus, lack of higher education has limited class mobility for the lower class and created stability of status for the existing middle class.

The role of educational institutions

According to Weinstein (1975: 410), higher education has social purposes which are

...vocational training of specialists required by an industrial society; another social purpose is to promote equality of opportunity; another that of contributing to the rational direction of social affairs; and, higher education now has and can properly have in future a greater diversity of social purposes than ever before.

Haveman and Smeeding (2006: 129) described the role of higher education that

Higher education is expected to promote the goal of social mobility and to make it possible for anyone with ability and motivation to succeed. To be effective in this role, colleges and universities must seek out ability, motivation, and preparedness wherever it lies and then provide high-quality educational services to their students. The labor market will do the rest, rewarding those who acquire the skills that the nation's postsecondary system has to offer.

They explained further that effectiveness of higher education can be seen in terms of equally distribution of admission and graduation chances for all levels of income. However, in reality, economic position plays a major role in ability, motivation and preparedness of youth. Children in wealthy families have more advantages than poorer one (Haveman & Smeeding 2006: 129).

As they noted, the distribution of high quality education is concentrated among high income families. They explained that since higher education requires a well-prepared student,

those from lower income families who could attain only a low quality high school education have a significant disadvantage in the academic foundation required for higher education. Not only are low-income students not well-prepared in academics, they added, but also unprepared psychologically and culturally. The low income students are more likely to be raised in low income neighborhoods and study in lower quality schools, hence the poor environment could affect their ability (Haveman & Smeeding 2006: 134-140).

Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist (1975) noted that knowledge, techniques and values can develop through education. Although knowledge and techniques can be separated from values, they are “value-transferable”, not value-free. Therefore, the principles must be taught as transferable (Chanan & Gilchrist 1975: 120-121). They explained further that there are at least four ways in which values are conveyed in the school: first, actual control such as rules and punishments; second, value through speeches made by teachers whether it is on their own or on behalf of the school; third, contemporary norms of society or school that are transferred by the teacher through subjects inside the class room; fourth, the availability of personified values that the teacher provided (Chanan & Gilchrist 1975: 121).

Another function of higher education is noted by Olena Moiseyenko (2005), who argued that it serves to unite the society. She argued that education can lead to social cohesion. As she noted, “when students attend higher education institutions, they go through a process of socialization, and it is vital to ensure that they acquire the core values that underpin the social cohesion” (Moiseyenko 2005: 89).

She explained that besides the potential economic benefit in terms of employment and quality of life, higher education could create more cohesive societies through positive reception of gender, ethnicity, religions, or social class diversity. Students will go through a socialization process and obtain knowledge and skills in higher education institutions, she added, which would transform them into valuable members of society (Moiseyenko 2005:

90). Curriculum content in the fields of history, social sciences or religions would create a sense of memory, identity and citizenship in students. In addition, the ideas of fairness, equality or neutrality can be learned and practiced within higher education institutions. The ideas of fairness and equality can be seen in the form of ethical standards such as the prohibition of falsifying, cheating, plagiarism or stealing for students (Moiseyenko 2005: 94). Moreover, it can be found in professional norms for lecturers such as fairness in assessments or grades without any bias of student's race, gender or ethnicity and equal treatment for students. An example of neutrality can be shown in the form of academic knowledge as "ideological dogmatism may lead to the exclusion of other ideas and even groups in society" (Moiseyenko 2005: 89-95). However, this socialization process may not be effective for everyone. If the education system transmits middle class values, if not higher, to students, most would understand and accept them, although some may not understand and reject those values. In addition, each educational institution would have different ideas, curricula and contents, therefore the socialization of each institution may provide a somewhat different result. The variety of higher educational institutions would help prepare members for a more diverse society. Various personalities are interacting with each other within university including youth, professionals, international students or students with different races or religions. This process would develop necessary skills and create the awareness and acceptance of diversity for students to become effective citizens in society (Moiseyenko 2005: 97-98).

Nonetheless, the role of higher education institutions in developing countries may be slightly different. According to Watson (1981: 299),

...higher education institutions in the Third World are expected to fulfill a variety of key roles: to provide future leaders in politics, the bureaucracy, the economy and the armed forces; to act as a focal point for the standards of the whole education system; to be involved in research of an academic nature as well as research into national and regional problems so that the application of new ideas may have a practical bearing on the economy or on the development and well-being of large numbers of people and their environment; to prepare full-time teachers, community developers, animateurs; and in many countries to develop a national language.

In addition, higher education has a role in preservation of culture and tradition, economic and industrial stimulation, rural development, natural resource preservation and distribution, training manpower, preparing citizens for social and political responsibilities and shaping development policy. However, he added, knowledge can be directed by economic needs. For example, economic development needs higher education to focus on developing entrepreneurial skills, both in industry and agriculture (Watson 1981: 299-300).

In the case of Thailand, there is evidence that higher education was heavily relied on for national development. For example, as Watson observed, in 1961 the first National Development Plan was launched, which recommended that universities should respond to national manpower needs by developing strong graduate programs in some specific areas. In the Second Development Plan, areas such engineering, agriculture, medicine and science were short of manpower and higher education was expanded in these fields (Watson 1981: 303).

Besides the need for trained manpower, the change and reform of higher education also came from political motivations such as concerns regarding the instability of neighboring

countries and the increasing concern with Communist ideology within Thailand (Watson 1981: 303-304).

Economic growth, population pressures, social and manpower planning, the requirements of the economy for more highly skilled/trained personnel, the belief that investment in formal education would lead to socio-economic development, and finally political considerations for the instability of the regions away from Bangkok, together with fears of growing unrest amongst secondary school students unable to gain access to university, were all pressures that at different times and in different ways have led successive Thai governments to reform higher education” (Watson 1981: 304).

In addition, the university and its professors are very important factors for shaping new middle class life styles. The major source of cultural production is the university, which has a role in forming “new styles of cultural consumption and leisure time activities” (Bensman & Vidich 1970: 34-35). Bensman and Vidich argued that the college experience is “a source from which a new life style could be constructed” (Bensman & Vidich 1970: 34). Although their work is based on the period of 1930s and 1940s in the U.S., it could still reflect the role of university professors in today’s world. They explained that “college culture and the professors’ lifestyle appeared to be the epitome of refinement, sophistication, and gentility” (Bensman & Vidich 1970: 34) to the youth, and the experience of campus life involved “the use of literature, art, music appreciation, theatre attendance, and museum-going” can be seen as “major support to leisure” for the new middle class (Bensman & Vidich 1970: 34). They argued further that these experiences “became a reservoir of lifestyle model which the college graduate could take with him” (Bensman & Vidich 1970: 34). Therefore, the university, at that time, “has become the major centre for the production of culture and for setting new styles of cultural consumption and leisure time activities” for the new middle class (Bensman

& Vidich 1970: 35). Moreover, besides the university, European and English literature were other sources of middle class culture consumption. They represented an idea of upper-middle class life which is sophisticated, casual, carefree, bland and slightly immoral (Bensman & Vidich 1970: 36).

Linda Young also noted that teachers are very important in spreading “cultural capital – the leading values of a society and its modes of practicing them” (Young 2003: 79). Since cultural capital can be gained through education, one of the important tools for passing knowledge and values in education is the lecturer or teacher. Within the classroom, the lecturer is the one who models behavior for their pupil.

Despite focusing on high school teachers, Martin Forsey (2010) pointed out interesting aspects of middle class. Firstly, middle class would seeking out middle class. Forsey explained that teachers tend to define themselves by their working place and pursue students who are similar to them therefore the middle class teacher would rather work in the middle class school and focus mainly on the middle class students (Forsey 2010: 71-72). Secondly, modelling behavior. Forsey noted that many teachers are involved, freely or not, in “re-producing forms and styles of schooling” that suit only students who fit “the school culture built and maintained” by teachers. This group of students is often depicted as middle class, whereas the working class children are more likely to be a “school refusal” (Forsey 2010: 69). Klaus Eder (1993) added that, within schools, life-chances are determined in difference ways. Teachers, administrators, parents and students go through transformative and reproductive relationships with each other to re-produce and “translate inequality and power into different life-chances for [different] categorizes of [students]” (Eder 1993: 12).

In this sense, the different classes of schooling would provide different sets of cultural capital and life-chances to students. The middle class school would spread the middle class culture to the middle class students while the lower class school would provide lower class

culture to the lower class students. Although in the middle class school may also have lower class students, their teachers would focus less on them since they are less similar to the teacher.

In sum, education, particularly higher education, should equally provide market skills, provide opportunities for class mobility to every student and create social cohesion. However, in reality, education is not value-free. The educational institution and lecturer play an important role in shaping class perceptions. On the one hand, students who possess higher cultural capital could be more successful in education. After they graduate, they could become middle or upper class. On the other hand, lower class students who have less cultural capital and are educated in the middle class environment and socialized to its values may not be successful in education.

Role of the Monarchy in Higher education

In case of Thailand, it is worth mention that higher education, social class and the Monarchy are correlated. As stated earlier, the Monarchy played its role in establishing higher education in Thailand. Its aim was not to educate the mass but to preserve and transfer status of the elite. Higher education provided knowledge for members of the Royal family and the elite who will control the country one day. Later it was aimed to supply the increasing need of government's manpower. However, it was not open for everyone. Only those from the upper class families could enter these prestige institutions which aimed to retain the high social status of their families. However, the door to higher education was opened to satisfy the growing demand of middle class to improve their status. At present, education is more open to public and higher education enjoys more freedom in teaching than high school and lower levels. Yet, higher education is restricted to those who can afford it – mainly the upper and

middle classes. We can conclude that the purpose of higher education is never for educating every Thais. Instead, education is a tool to preserve, retain, transfer or improve class status for limited groups of people.

Education also plays role in preserving status of the Monarchy in Thailand. Pre-university level of education is heavily controlled by central government. Subjects and its contents are controlled and being used as a standard by all public schools in the country. Unsurprisingly, there are contents relating to the Monarchy since Thailand is having a constitutional Monarchy system. Obviously, all contents relating to the Monarchy are positive and emphasizes on the importance of Monarchy and its role in protecting and developing the country in the past and present.

In contrast, knowledge in higher education is not controlled by central government. At university, lecturers have power to choose subjects and contents to teach by their own wills. Therefore, any contents relating to the Monarchy is up to lecturer's preference – some are royalist, some are against and some are neutral. This indicates that students' perceptions on the Monarchy are largely depended to how lecturers teach them. This pinpoints the importance of lecturer in higher education which we will discuss further in following chapters.

Nonetheless, the Monarchy still have some symbolic roles in higher education. Firstly, through holidays relating to the Monarchy, such as the father day or mother day, where students putting up events and pay respect to the King and Queen. Secondly, at graduation ceremonies members of the Royal family will hand out degrees to graduates in many universities, particularly high reputation universities. This practice helps preserve the status of the Monarchy. According to Thak (2007: 204-218), it creates a sense of approval and legitimation from the King who is sacred and worshiped by every Thai to these new graduates from the middle class. Thak also pointed out that members of the royal family

personally participated with students' events in many universities which helped increase the prestige and popularity by allowing "ordinary people" more accessibility to them. This also develops a personal linkage between the Royal family and the middle class which may create a strong bond between them. These practices help preserve the status of the Monarchy and emphasize to graduates that there are classes above them that should be respected. The following chapters will show how students regard members of the Royal family as "the upper class" and how they see university graduates as "the middle class".

The Thai middle-class and education

In Thailand, education along with income and occupation are factors indicating socioeconomic status. Moreover, educational status arguably represents family income status (Albritton & Bureekul 2007: 25). Beside wealth, which is an economic factor, the Thai middle class can be determined by their prestige and the control of their life environment. Prestige could be derived from occupation, education and family status. High prestige comes from high education, as in Juree's words, "the lack of education confines one to manual labor which is low prestige in Thai society" (Juree 1979: 4-6).

James Ockey explained further that there are many indicators to identify the Thai middle class such as occupation, education or purchasing power. Education can provide a person greater opportunity in their occupation. Moreover, the education system creates shared experiences, values and knowledge between its members (Ockey 1992: 306). As stated by Hewison (1997: 144), Education is very important for the middle class, not only for themselves but also for their children, as it is a standard component of middle-class values. Funatsu and Kagoya (2003: 255-261) argued educational credentials are the key for upgrading a person's class. They found that an individual's income is related to the years of

schooling and to age cohort. They concluded that, first, the Thai middle class could be characterized by similar educational credentials and the opportunities for upward mobility. Second, differences in social backgrounds are common for the Thai middle class because they are intermingled. Third, because they are highly educated, the middle class enjoy a distinct economic status which separates them from others.

As observed by Ben Anderson (1977: 16-17), the massive expansion of education during the Sarit-Thanom-Praphat era signalled the beginning of middle class formation in modern Thailand. Traditionally, the majority of the population was uneducated or had a limited education from government primary schools or temples. This level of education is hardly useful for social mobility, from lower to upper class, but this fractional knowledge, such as the ability to read, is very important to conserve the social and economic order. On the other hand, Western-style education was reserved for the upper class only. The establishment of Chulalongkorn University in 1916 is considered as the beginning of Western style knowledge in Thailand with its goal for producing graduates to serve in the government sector (Paitoon 2005: 265).

Significant change in education was found in the secondary and tertiary levels. Education became very important for those who desired a better job opportunity to upgrade their social status. However, not everyone could be accommodated, even with this massive expansion, especially at the university level. Therefore, technical, vocational, commercial and other colleges were expanded as a second choice (Anderson 1977: 17).

Kraus, Maxwell and Vanneman (1979) argued that Thai society has been dominated by ruling bureaucrats and, to get into a bureaucratic position, requires a university degree. They explained further that, in the beginning, Thai universities were established with the main purpose of training government manpower. The control of higher education in Thailand was very strict. In fact, each university was initially created to train officers for specific ministries.

Even when universities were not under direct control of each ministry, general policies and the appointment of high ranking university staff were still under control of government (Kraus, Maxwell & Vanneman 1979: 144-145). Foreign university degrees are becoming more important in some high positions. They also mentioned that foreign degrees from great power nations became a prestige credential when King Chulalongkorn sent his sons to study abroad (Kraus, Maxwell & Vanneman 1979: 142).

Universities in Thailand have long been influenced by Western countries. Foreign governments and foundations aided higher education both directly and by sending foreign academics and giving scholarships to Thais to study abroad. As a result, Western values and technology became prominent in Thai universities and helped separate sophisticated bureaucratic officers from those they ruled. Although there were struggles over the control of universities in Thailand, the struggle was not caused by peasants or workers; rather it was due to conflict within the bureaucracy itself. The conflict between military and civilian factions in the bureaucracy can be seen in the 1960s when the military regime installed high ranking soldiers in the top position in major universities and established university campuses in rural areas, despite the opposition from Bangkok civilian bureaucrats. Eventually, as Kraus, Maxwell and Vanneman noted, the decline of university students privileged status and hope for occupation in the bureaucracy led to the 1973 student revolt (Kraus, Maxwell & Vanneman 1979: 145).

In his later work, James Ockey (1999) noted that the expansion of the higher-education system in Thailand was encouraged by the rise of the new rich. University enrolment rose from 25,000 in 1950 to more than 600,000 by 1990. Educational credentials became more important for Thai people to achieve middle class status (Ockey 1999: 234). Funatsu and Kagoya (2003: 257) pointed out that educational credentials are very important for class mobility. They could nullify the effects of an individual's birthplace. However, not everyone

has access to education. The wide gap in education and economics between urban and rural areas limits the chance to move upward for poorly educated rural children. Regarding the limited opportunities for rural areas, educational credentials are very important for the social structure in Thailand. They provide chances for anyone who is educated to raise their social status, regardless of their class origin.

In the past, it was considered a privilege for university graduates to be employed in government civil service. However, since the opportunities in public sectors such as commerce and finance have increased, the primacy of university as government training centre has declined (Smith 1987: 3).

Higher education is the channel to elite status in Thai society. Members of the elite are distinguished from the non-elite by the possession of a bachelor's degree and a position in the public or private sector. Their dominant position depends largely on superior know-how relative to the functioning of the government or private agency or business organization in which they are employed, and having been selected or named to such a position (Smith 1987: 3).

Although his article was dated 1987, it still reflects the importance of education in Thailand. As noted in chapter 1, income and level of education are closely related. However, high income does not reflect prestige in Thai society, occupation does. And most of the high prestige occupations require high levels of education. As shown in the tables below:

Table 2-1: Top 10 Occupations Ranked by Status

Rank	Occupation	Status Points
1	Doctor, veterinarian, pharmacist	82.9
2	Cabinet minister	81.8
3	Ambassador	79.7
4	Military officer: general	76.4
5	Provincial governor or equivalent	75.0
6	Architect, engineer	74.1
7	University professor	72.6
8	Nurse	71.5
9	Senator, M.P.	70.0
10	Physical sciences	68.7

Source: Adapted from Suphang Jantawanit (1991), table 4 and 5, ranked by urban response (as cited in Ockey 2004, p. 159).

In the top 10 high status occupations in Thailand, almost all involved high levels of education. However, not all of them provide high levels of income.

Table 2-2: Other Occupations Ranked by Status

Rank	Occupation	Status Points
31	Large-scale farmer	54.3
35	Soldier: NCO	51.2
38	Heir	50.1
39	Medium-scale farmer	49.6
40	Writer	49.4
41	Journalist	48.4
43	Village and tambon leaders	47.5
47	Police officers: NCOs	42.7
60	Sales representative	39.6
89	Service woman, e.g., masseuse, “partner”	17.6

Source: Adapted from Suphang Jantawanit (1991), table 4 and 5, ranked by urban response (as cited in Ockey 2004, p. 159).

On the other hand, of the 10 lowest status occupations in Thailand, almost all do not require high levels of education. However, some occupations such as service woman could generate higher income than the top rank of high status occupations. Therefore, education is not only beneficial in terms of income but also provides prestige as well.

As to politics, a survey by the King Prajadhipok Institute shows that education has no significant impact on democratic values. In fact, higher educated people are less supportive of political equality than less educated people. As they concluded, “the data thus indicate that education does not necessarily promote democratic values and, in some respects, works against development of democratic values of political equality” (Albritton & Bureekul 2007: 25).

In sum, the term “middle class” could not be perfectly defined yet and even the meaning of “class” is still debated. The middle class can be identified in many ways using many criteria such as level of income or education. However, each criterion alone could not fully explain the middle class. The importance of income, education, occupation, lifestyle, culture, and class consciousness must be taken into consideration together.

In this chapter, literature involved in developing the notion of middle class has been discussed. From that, it could be seen that class culture is one of the important criteria of the middle class. Class culture can be created or transferred in many ways; one of them is through education which is the centre of this thesis. Education is significant for the middle class. Education not only provides a qualification for middle class jobs, incomes or status, education is also a way to reproduce the middle class culture from generation to generation. This significance is also apparent in Thailand, where education has been seen as increasingly necessary for upward class mobility for Thais in general. Educational institutions and lecturers are a key in transferring class culture to pupils. This thesis will focus on the influence of higher education towards students in terms of class perception by looking into how the university environment affects students.

After reviewed literature involved, this thesis established that the middle class, at least in Thailand, is a large group of population who are not struggle with life but not wealthy enough to live without job. They are well-educated as they need degree to get a job with adequate income. They are consumerists and spend their income not only on living but also recreation. They have better life chances than the poor and concentrate mostly in urban area of any provinces. They have a cosmopolitan lifestyle and well-connected to technology.

In short, middle class status is heavily linked to the level of income and education which contribute to the middle class lifestyle. However, the level of income and education can be varied through times. For example, at present, a university degree is a basic

requirement for a decent job but, in the past, it is not necessary. Therefore, condition of being middle class can be changed in accordance with society development.

Hypotheses

In order to answer the research questions, several hypotheses have been formulated. Based on the review of literature, hypotheses are as follows;

1. University reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions.
2. By shaping students' perceptions, the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.
3. University lecturers help shape and reproduce class perceptions to students and society.
4. The university facilities, students' peer groups and the university environment in general are important factors and essential for producing class perceptions.

For the first hypothesis, after reviewing the literature, we found that higher education is important to get a good job and salary. As Gidden (1981: 179-180) pointed out, education differentiates between skilled workers and manual workers. Moreover, educational credentials are very important for class mobility (Funatsu & Kagoya 2003: 257), and represent family income status (Albritton & Bureekul 2007: 25) as well as providing prestige from occupations (Juree 1979: 4-6). However, higher education is currently not for everyone. Economic position plays a major role in ability, motivation and preparedness of youth. Children in wealthy families have more advantages than those in poorer ones (Haveman & Smeeding 2006: 129). The low income students are more likely to be raised in low income neighborhoods and study in lower quality schools, hence the poor environment could affect

their ability (Haveman & Smeeding 2006: 134-140). This gives the middle-class students a better opportunity in education as they are better equipped for success (Kaufman 2005: 262). Lynch and O’Riordan (1998: 459) shared the same view and argued that educational opportunities depended greatly on financial capability.

This also happens in Thailand where education, particularly at higher levels, is highly concentrated in Bangkok and the surrounding areas. Because of unequal development policies, the rural population had little access to higher education. Therefore, without appropriate degrees, the rural lower class can only work as unskilled or low-skilled workers (Raya 2004: 508-509). Moreover, because of their limited budget, poor people spend a high proportion of income on food but rich people could spend more on education, goods, housing and leisure (Hughes & Woldekidan 1994: 141). This situation could be applied to the middle class as well since all of them do not have the same level of income, and this thus posits that there are fractions within the middle class. This is especially true in the difference between the middle class in big cities (like the capital city or Chiang Mai or Khon Kaen) and provincial cities or even within the same city. The wide gap in education and economics between urban and provincial areas appears to limit the chance to move upward.

The university itself plays a role in preventing less fortunate people entering higher education by limiting access to university. There are 3 ways to restrict access to higher education; the number of admissions, the admission requirements and the separation of elite universities from others (Kraus, Maxwell & Vanneman 1979: 140). Therefore, this thesis hypothesizes that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions.

For the second hypothesis, after reviewing the literature, we found that university graduates play a major role in shaping Thai society. First of all, the university degree is required for jobs such as journalist, government officer, scientist, doctor and many more. As

Watson (1981: 299) noted, higher education institutions are expected to create future leaders in many areas. These people are undoubtedly influencing the society in many ways. Among them is what the society should look like. Frykman and Lofgren (1987: 269-270) claimed that the middle class see themselves as “better” than other classes, including the upper class. This indicates that, in the eyes of the middle class, they should be the one who rule the society or at least should be full participants. As Grossmann and Varnum (2010) argued, there is an assumption that people of higher social class status dictate and exemplify the cultural practices of a society as a whole and the cognitive tendencies of people of higher social class status would be more culturally typical (Grossmann & Varnum 2010: 81). This means the middle class would try to shape the society according to their values.

Secondly, Moiseyenko (2005: 89-98) believed that higher education plays a role in social cohesion. She argued that the socialization process within university would transform students into valuable members of society. For example, the intermingling between races, ages, and genders would make students more tolerant and better able to understand others. Moreover, she added that curriculum content in the fields of history, social sciences or religion would create a sense of memory, identity and citizenship in students. In addition, the ideas of fairness and equality can be seen in the form of ethical standards that would be transferred to students. And these experiences would be with them long after they graduate. University graduates will also help spread out these standards to society.

Therefore, this thesis hypothesizes that, by shaping students’ perceptions, the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.

For the third hypothesis, after reviewing the literature, we have found that the role of lecturers is not only to transfer knowledge but also to transfer culture and values to students. Teachers are very important in spreading “cultural capital – the leading values of a society and its modes of practicing them” (Young 2003: 79) and involved, freely or not, in “re-

producing forms and styles of schooling” that suit only students who fit “the school culture built and maintained” by teachers (Forsey 2010: 69). Although their works are based on high school, it is not far from the situation within universities. As Bensman and Vidich argued, the higher education experience is “a source from which a new life style could be constructed” (Bensman & Vidich 1970: 34) and the lifestyle of lecturers becomes a behaviour model to the youth. This indicates that the lifestyle of lecturers become a role model for students to follow. Students will learn how their lifestyle should be through lecturers.

Moreover, Chanan and Gilchrist (1975: 121) explained that there are at least four ways in which values are conveyed in educational institutions by the professors: first, actual control such as rules and punishments; second, value through speeches made by professors whether it is on their own or on behalf of the educational institution; third, contemporary norms of society or educational institutions that are transferred by the professor through subjects inside the class room; fourth, the availability of personified values that the professor provided. This indicates that lecturers’ ideas, perceptions and behaviours help cultivate students to become full members of society.

According to the literature, we found that lecturers transfer knowledge, culture and values to students. But the remaining question is what are the culture and values lecturers transfer? Based on their level of education, occupation and salary, lecturers can be identified as, at least, middle class. Therefore, this thesis hypothesizes that lecturers help shape and reproduce middle class perceptions to students which will then shape the perceptions of society in general.

For the last hypothesis, after reviewing the literature, we found that the university environment is another important factor for students’ class perception. We also found that taste is one of the important elements of the middle class. Young (2003: 153-154) claimed that the would-be middle class must know how to consume and sustain the middle class

decencies and luxuries allowed by their incomes. For the would-be middle class, goods are more than symbolic or representative of their characteristics. Since students spend most of their time inside and around university, everything they see and experience is an example of how the middle class and other classes appear. University facilities and environment in general show students what kind of middle class equipment they could expect. By having some middle class symbols, persons can identify themselves as middle class. Such things as cars, tertiary education or washing machines can represent middle class status (Souhou 1996: 339). Consuming higher quality goods and services can be seen as a symbol of their higher status, because these commodities are available but not everyone can afford them (Mathur 2010: 212-213). University facilities and environment in general work in the same way.

In addition, the peer group is equally important for the middle class. As Kaufman (2005: 252-257) noted, the unity within peer group members is so strong it is almost impossible to leave the group or “attempt to succeed on one’s own”. He claimed that the middle class student who is socialized with middle-class friends is largely linked to “middle-class orientations” both by individual and social interactions (Kaufman 2005: 258). Within their group, Mathur (2010: 223-224) argued, students judge each other through clothing and accessories and have a level of expectations from their members. These expectations put pressure on students to have, at least, the same level of accessories as their friends. This indicates that the peer group pressurises students to consume and have the lifestyle of the middle class.

Based on these findings, this thesis hypothesizes that the university facilities, students’ peer groups and the university environment in general are important factors and essential for producing class perception.

Methodology

In this thesis, I have chosen to study 7 out of more than 100 universities in Thailand. These universities were selected based on specific criteria as follows;

1. The reputation and privileged or less-privileged status of university.
2. Representation of universities in each region of Thailand.
3. The different categories of university such as public, private and open university.

These criteria aimed to include students from different class backgrounds to understand how middle class perceptions develop inside the university environment. The privileged or less-privileged status and the cost of each type of university could relate to different backgrounds of students. As stated earlier, each region in Thailand has different income level and, arguably, stands on different sides in the Red and Yellow shirts conflict therefore opinions from every regions in Thailand must be take into consideration. Last but not least, the different types of university in Thailand will provide broader knowledge on how each type of university creates middle class perceptions and may reflect student's background.

From the above criteria, my list of universities is

1. Chulalongkorn University
2. Thammasat University
3. Chiangmai University
4. Mahasarakham University
5. Rangsit University
6. Prince of Songkla University
7. Ramkhamhaeng University

These universities were selected to fit the criteria as follows; Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, which are located in Bangkok, have been selected because of their reputation and privileged status. Chiangmai University and Mahasarakham University

are located in the North and Northeast, respectively, both poor regions, while Rangsit University in Bangkok is private with high tuition fee. At the same time, Chiangmai, Mahasarakham and Prince of Songkla University can also represent Northern, Northeastern and Southern region viewpoints respectively. Open universities like Ramkhamhaeng, which draw students every part of Thailand and provide distance education may represent a different type of student.

Table 2-3: List of Universities

University	Type	Location
Chiangmai University	Public then Autonomous University	North (ChiangMai)
Chulalongkorn University	Public then Autonomous University	Central (Bangkok)
Mahasarakham Univerisity	Public University	Northeast (Mahasarakham)
Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)	Public University	South (Pattani)
Rangsit University	Private University	Central (Bangkok)
Ramkhamhaeng University	Open University	Central (Bangkok)
Thammasat University	Public University	Central (Bangkok)

Some of these universities have more than one campus, including: Thammasat University and Ramkhamhaeng University. However, in my thesis, I focused only on their main campus with the exception of Prince of Songkla University, where I choose to study the Pattani campus. The main campus can provide a wider variety of students and staff since most study or work at the main campus. However, in the case of Prince of Songkla

University, the Pattani campus can contribute more interesting views since at the Pattani campus the majority of students are Muslim.

In addition, this thesis focuses only on political science faculty in each university, at the undergraduate level. Undergraduate students are new to higher education, and are the largest group of students. They are also the first group to benefit from the income gap indicated above. Moreover, undergraduate students spend most of their time inside the university environment with their friends therefore they are more affected by the peer group influence than other level of students. Political science faculties were chosen to maximize the ability to understand the influence of knowledgeable lectures.

For this thesis, I have interviewed 22 lecturers, conducted 12 focus group discussions and handed out 490 questionnaires in total. Primary and secondary data is used for this thesis, as I use a combination of survey techniques and interviews methods to discover how universities shape class perceptions in Thailand.

Primary data is received from direct and in-depth interviews with people who are university lecturers and university students. These interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, therefore the numbers of participants in each university varied. Lecturers and students were from Political Science faculty in each university.

I chose to interview only lecturers who teach in a subject related to social class. My interviews with students were in the form of group discussion in order to expand participation of students. The numbers of participants in each group differed, ranging from 4-18 students per group. Although the data collection was designed on a voluntary basis, in reality some students were encouraged by lecturers where there were no volunteers.

Beside group discussions for students, I chose to use questionnaires as another data collection method to get as much data as possible. Questionnaires were provided to every student inside the classroom on the designated day, with consent from lecturers. An

observation of each university as a whole was also conducted to find out how the university environment helps produce perceptions of class. For secondary data, this thesis focuses on relevant materials such as literature and university websites. Relevant local, national and international sources of data were considered.

Research Methodology

To fulfil the thesis objectives, a mix of methods combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies was used to understand the complexity of variables in various aspects of the study on class perceptions in universities. Mixed methods research is gaining popularity in many fields of study, including the field of social science and education (Creswell 2003 and Brannen 2005). Mixed method research was applied in this study because it can help the researcher have a better understanding of a complex issue. The advantages of the quantitative method are; firstly, it is not a time-consuming method and data can be evaluated quickly (Yauch & Steudel 2003: 473). Secondly, this method can produce “reliable outcome data that are usually generalizable to some larger population” (Steckler et al. 1992: 2). However, in using only quantitative methodology it is difficult to receive deep and specific answers from participants (Manzoor 2006: 79-80).

Therefore, this thesis also applied qualitative method to fill the void in the quantitative method. The qualitative method can “generate rich, detailed, valid process data that usually leave the study participants’ perspectives intact” (Steckler et al. 1992: 2). Moreover, this technique uses broad and open-ended questions which allow “participants to raise issues that matter most to them” (Yauch & Steudel 2003: 472). These mean researchers would have clearer pictures about participants’ opinions as it allows participants and researcher to have long and in-depth conversations. Nonetheless, it is a time-consuming process and the

question is open-ended which means the researcher cannot control the answers (Yauch & Steudel 2003: 472-473). As well, the number of participants this technique could employ would be significantly lower than quantitative methods.

So, both methods can complement each other. Therefore, in this thesis, two qualitative methods, including interview and focus group, as well as a quantitative method, a questionnaire, were applied as a primary methodology in collecting data. Data was collected between September 2012 and June 2013. The research is strictly anonymous and received ethical approval from the human ethics committee of University of Canterbury before research was conducted in the field.

Interviews

In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with lecturers in all 7 universities. The university lecturers were recruited based on their positions and subject of teaching. Only lecturers who teach about “class” in political science or social science faculties were selected. There are 22 lecturers from 7 universities who participated in the interviews. The interviews were conducted in Thai, and then translated into English. Each interview took approximately 45-90 minutes at a lecturer’s office. The interview questions contained the same topics for all participants. The main topic of interviews was set to suit the thesis’s objectives and focused on these topics: perceptions of class, education as a tool for spreading class perceptions, the Thai education system and class perception, class and the university environment, and personal experiences with the class system in Thailand.

This thesis used unstructured interviews in which the interview questions and their sequences could be flexible depending on the conversation of the interviewee. With the unstructured interviews, the interviewer did not need to strictly follow the prepared questions.

The interviewer had freedom to ask, add some questions, or skip some questions depending on how the interview went (Kothari 2004: 98).

Using the interview method helped the researcher to have in-depth information with flexible options during the interview (Morgan 1997: 13, Johnson & Turner 2003: 308). It is useful for exploration and confirmation (Johnson & Turner 2003: 308) of data and allowed the researcher to gain substantial information on specific issues and provided deeper understanding of class perception in universities. It allowed the researcher to take a different path for each interviewee while covering the same material.

In contrast, this method can be expensive and time consuming, both in interview and data analysis. This leads to a lower number of participants than other methods and the limited sample size may not represent the whole population. Nonetheless, “when the goal is to learn about each informant in detail, the individual interview has an obvious advantage (Morgan 1997: 13)”.

Focus groups

The focus group technique began in sociology and is increasingly used by social science researchers as a research tool in collecting data (Smithson 2000: 104). The focus group technique is applied to this study because the participants can feel at ease in sharing and expressing their opinions in a group, especially in an informal and supportive group of people with the same background. Moreover, the group setting is beneficial in generating a variety of ideas which motivates and encourages other people in a group to interact and elaborate their expressions. The focus group also depends a lot on an effective group facilitator (Morgan 1997, Myers 1998. and Smithson 2000). If the facilitator has good interview skills, he would be able to encourage participants to share their opinions.

To collect data from focus groups, the researcher prepared open-ended questions and allowed groups of university students to openly share their opinions within a group, comprising 4-18 students in each group. There were 12 focus group discussions from all 7 universities. All focus groups were carried out within the university areas. The participants were selected based on a voluntary basis. The researcher introduced himself in a classroom with permission of a teacher, briefly explained about his research and then asked for volunteer students to join focus group discussions. The researcher acted as a group facilitator and encouraged students in a group to participate and feel comfortable to discuss and reveal their experiences of studying about class. Participants of focus group discussion were selected based on their background of study. Participants had to have experience in the study of subjects about class in their universities. During the discussion, participants responded individually but also openly discussed within their group some issues to bring out either shared or different experiences of participants about class perception.

The advantages of this technique are; firstly, it can provide in-depth information from various participants (Hughes & DuMont 1993: 776). Secondly, the researcher can observe interactions of participants in a short period (Morgan 1997: 8). Thirdly, it encourages participants to express their opinions, through group interaction. and allows the researcher to clarify the questions to participants (Khan et.al 1991: 8-20). On the contrary, there are disadvantages of this technique as well. Participants may not freely express their ideas since it is not anonymous (Khan et.al 1991: 8-20). Within the focus group, only a few participants may dictate the group conversation while others may not answer as much as they should (Johnson & Turner 2003: 310).

Questionnaire method

A questionnaire method was also applied in this research. This method is frequently used to investigate human behavior and often used in social and psychological research (Singleton & Straits 2009). A total of 490 Questionnaires were provided to every student inside the classroom on the designated day, with consent from lecturers. Students were asked to respond to questions in 15-20 minutes and returned questionnaires to the researcher in class. The questionnaire method for this study used both quantitative and qualitative research strategies. For the quantitative research strategy, questions are mostly close-ended in which participants had to choose the answers from fixed choices and answered on a provided sheet. Questions included demographic information, personal opinions on class perception, and experiences of studying in university. The researcher also conducted qualitative research through open-ended questions where participants wrote their opinions. All participants are anonymous and did not reveal their names.

The advantages of this method are the process is inexpensive, data can be obtained quickly and it is easy to analyse the data (Johnson & Turner 2003: 306). However, there are many disadvantages of this method. The received data may need validation, the questions should be short and the open-ended questions may result in vague answers (Johnson & Turner 2003: 306). Moreover, the data obtained from this method is not in-depth information and, sometimes, the participants may not answer truthfully (Beam 2017:94). Due to the concerns of weaknesses of the questionnaire method, this thesis applied the mixed method of research methodology, as mentioned above, to overcome the weaknesses of the questionnaire method.

So, using these three methods, helps strengthen the findings in this thesis. Firstly, by using both quantitative and qualitative methods, there are a good number of participants. Secondly, data obtained from one method can be validated by another method. For example,

data from questionnaires can be validated by data obtained during focus group discussions. Thirdly, all methods are complementing each other. Data from questionnaires can fill the void left by focus group discussion and vice versa. For example, some participants may not fully express their opinions during focus group but be willing to answer in questionnaires as they are more anonymous. Therefore, obtained data in this thesis is validated and reliable. In addition, all the questions in this thesis from every method have passed the human ethics committee. And this thesis was conducted with an awareness of potential bias in data collected from interviews, focus groups and questionnaires.

This thesis was conducted with an awareness of sampling bias that may have occurred by omitting or including certain group of students and lecturers during the interviews and focus group discussions. Moreover, as it was carried out on a voluntary basis, it is possible that participants who participated in focus group discussions are those who have strong opinions on the topic and this thesis may have under sampled those not interested in the topic.

Due to some limitation of field research study such as time constraints case studies were cautiously selected to represent a range of types of universities. The list of universities was selected based on many criteria, as mentioned in the earlier section. The researcher acknowledges that there is possibility of the risk of sampling bias from the selection of case studies in this thesis. Due to this concern, the selection method is set to reduce sampling bias. Firstly, since this study aims to examine conceptions of class, the criteria used in case study selection, in addition to location and type of university, is that the selected universities have to offer the subject of the class system to their students. This criterion is applied to homogenize the sampling by setting a common standard of selection to minimize the risk of sampling bias. Secondly, in universities where the subject of the class system is taught, participants, though voluntary, are students who studied the class system. Students who did not register in the class system subject were not selected to participate in this study in order to

standardize the samplings and further reduce sampling bias. Lastly, lecturers were also selected as respondents of this study on the basis of the subject, which selects a participant based on the subject they teach, in order to reduce sampling bias in the analysis. Lecturers who participated in this study had to be responsible for teaching the subject of class system, or something close or related to the concept of class.

For the questionnaire method, the risk of sampling bias is a lot less since all students in a classroom where the subject of class has been taught participated in the process. However, this thesis understands the risk of bias from omitting students who do not study in such a class does exist.

Table 2-4: Detail of Data Collection

	Interviews	Focus Group Discussions	Questionnaires
Chiangmai University	4	2	67
Chulalongkorn University	3	2	121
Maharakham Univerisity	2	3	128
Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)	2	2	47
Rangsit University	2	1	38
Ramkhamhaeng University	6	1	64
Thammasat University	3	1	25

In each university the number of participants varied due to the voluntary basis, the usual difficulties of getting volunteer students to attend. In term of lecturers, only lecturers who teach in class-related subjects and agreed to participate were interviewed. These conditions also applied to focus group discussions where only students who agreed to participate and study in class-related subjects were included. Therefore, participants in each university were different in number. For example, Ramkhamhaeng University has the highest number of participating lecturers, however only one focus group discussion was conducted. As an open university, Ramkhamhaeng University does not require student to attend physically, hence the number of students in classrooms was unpredictable and relatively low (compared to the total number of students registered in each subject). Moreover, students at Ramkhamhaeng University interacted less with each other inside the classroom. As witnessed in focus group discussion, students did not know each other and some conflictual feelings developed between them when they were speaking about sensitive issues such as politics. On the other hand, in focus group discussions in other universities, almost all participants knew each other and they were more open in the topics with each other.

In the case of Thammasat University which has the lowest number of returned questionnaires, I chose to study their international program which had only small group of students. However, I believe, their participation could provide another view on class perceptions since the program tuition fee is very high, which mean only students from good economic background can study.

In the next chapter, the history and development of higher education in Thailand will be presented and an in-depth analysis on how higher education affects the perception of class for Thai university students will be discussed.

Chapter 3 : Higher education, subject universities and their students

In chapter 2, literature related to this thesis has been reviewed, particularly ideas of social class in foreign and Thai society. From previous chapters, it was shown that, firstly, the middle class has played a major role in Thai politics since the end of absolute monarchy in 1932. Secondly, despite many debates about social class in Thailand, particularly the middle class, there is no clear explanation to differentiate a person's class. Thirdly, the middle class can be identified in various ways such as occupation, income, lifestyle or education. Lastly, higher education is important for class stratification, class perception and class culture, especially for the middle class.

Besides being one of many indicators of the middle class, higher education is also a tool to produce, reproduce and expand the middle class. Unfortunately, higher education in Thailand is not free, though public universities are subsidized by the government, and it is not available to everyone. In case of public universities, an entrance requirement must be met. For private universities, high tuition fees must be taken into consideration. For open universities, seats are unlimited, the tuition fee is low and students do not need to attend class; however, the quality and reputation of these universities is, we will see, lower than others.

In 2014, Thailand had more than 150 colleges and universities across the country with around 2,000,000¹⁴ students participating at all levels. Despite many choices in higher education, students are constrained by their economic status and social class. This chapter

¹⁴ Data from Office of the Higher Education Commission, Thailand. Access at <http://www.info.mua.go.th/information/> (accessed July 9, 2016).

will presents how particular universities cater to students from particular class strata or, in another words, how students have been separated into class fractions even before they enter higher education.

Firstly, this chapter briefly covers the development of higher education in Thailand which was designed for the middle class, or higher, and shows the relationship between universities and the bureaucracy. This is followed by discussion of the importance of the university ranking system, both domestically and internationally, which influences the way high school graduates choose their higher education institution. Then collected data, from questionnaires and focus group discussions in case study universities, will be presented on 3 major categories; student background, student lifestyle and student life chances.

The first category looks at the background of students in each case study university and analyses the difference between students in each case study university. Within the student background category, there are 4 sub-categories; reasons for study in each university, hometown of students, parent's occupation of students in each case study university and their parent's income. Reasons for study in each university will reveal the conditions students may face when choosing their higher education destination which includes economic constraints. Hometown of students could reveal students' lifestyle and economic background, and will demonstrate the urban/rural effect on students' higher education. Parent's occupation and income reveals students' economic background, which is clearly related to their class. This category will show that students in each case study university are from different class backgrounds and certain types of universities cater to certain types of students.

The second category looks into student lifestyle, which indicates the class of students after they entered each university. This category consists of 6 sub-categories; student monthly allowance, mobile phone ownership, computer ownership, job status, student's mode of transport and student's activities during holiday or semester break. This category supports

and provides more detail on the difference between students within each university and between universities.

The last category is student life chances which look into their future plans after graduation. This category not only shows the difference in students' class but also presents the difference in their life opportunity because of their class.

This chapter aims to answer the core question of how education shapes social classes. In addition, this chapter will consider the hypothesis that the university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions.

In order to answer the core question and prove the hypothesis, this chapter looks briefly into the history of higher education development in Thailand and investigates subject universities and their students. Moreover, this chapter aims to find the link between education and social class.

Development of higher education in Thailand

Literacy has been prioritized in Siam since the Sukhothai period (1238-1583 AC) when Thai alphabets were invented (Sombat 2008: 763). Edith Danskin (1979: 316) noted that the early development of education in Siam was largely based on Buddhist tradition where temples were the centre of knowledge. According to her, Thai educational reform was started in the middle of the nineteenth century by King Mongkut. Under his reign, schools were established for the royal family and a small group of elite in Bangkok. However, the expansion of education to other parts of country came when his son, King Chulalongkorn, was in power. Nonetheless, it was not until 1889 that a higher education institution was established, which then became the first state university in 1917 (Danskin 1979: 316).

J.Valenti (1974: 78-79) noted that

The Thai system is an elite system designed to prepare selected persons from the upper and upper-middle classes to fit into the government bureaucracy and to assume leadership positions in finance, international affairs and, to a limited extent, in commerce. This purpose in its modern form developed in the last part of the nineteenth century when King Chulalongkorn provided for the early and advanced education of princes, and other persons of promise.

Watson (1981) explained further that when the first state university, Chulalongkorn University, was established in 1917, it was a merger of the Civil Service College, an Engineering School, and the Royal Medicine School together with a newly created Faculty of Arts and Science and Political Science with the purpose of training manpower for government at the time of the development of the modern and independent state. According to Watson, the university in Thailand was created to produce civil servants for specific government departments and can be seen as a training school rather than a scholarly community (Watson 1981: 301-302). In other words, higher education during this period was designed for the upper class who would govern the country one day.

It was until the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932 that higher education was not limited to a small group of elites. “Soon after the Revolution of 1932, the idea of spreading knowledge of democracy among citizens through the establishment of a higher education institution became an urgent matter” (Prathip 1999: 1). A democratic regime was established and “the new regime recognized the role of education in preparing people for their new responsibilities” (Saroj 1957: 139) and aimed to turn Thais into “active democratic

citizens” (Sombat 2008: 763). As a result, Thammasat University¹⁵ was established in 1934 as an open university¹⁶ “with the objective of propagating (teaching) the learning of law and politics to all citizens” (Prathip 1999: 1). Thammasat University originated from the first Law School developed earlier by King Chulalongkorn in 1897, which was also linked to the Ministry of Public Justice and the Department of Public Administration (Watson 1981: 302) with the purpose of providing manpower in these fields.

Three more universities were opened in Bangkok with the same purpose of providing manpower to government. In 1942, Mahidol University was created under the direction of the Ministry of Health for medical sciences purposes. One year later, two more universities were established. Silpakorn University, developed from the existing School of Fine Arts and became associated with the Department of Fine Arts in 1943. Kasetsart University was created by the Ministry of Agriculture in the same year (Watson 1981: 302). In 1959, the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) was opened as an international postgraduate institution using the English language in teaching (Watson 1981: 307). The establishment of Mahidol University, Silpakorn University and Kasetsart University were not aimed to expand higher education to the masses but were still limited to a small group of elites with the purpose of serving government departments.

According to Ben Anderson (1977: 16-17), Thai higher education was significantly expanded in the 1960s during the Sarit-Thanom-Praphat era, particularly at the secondary and tertiary level. As a result of rapid changes in class structure and the emergence of new bourgeois strata in the late 1950s, the need for career-oriented education increased among Thais as they believed that education was a key to social mobility and an important way to

¹⁵ Former name was “Thammasat lae Karn Muang University” meaning the University of Moral Science and Politics.

¹⁶ Status of open university ended in 1960 and became public university.

access careers in the state bureaucracy. Since the Thai political system during the 1950s and 1960s was dominated by the bureaucracy with the “Chinese commercial class” and “an undifferentiated peasantry” excluded from political participation (Anderson 1977: 14), the desire for their children to join the bureaucracy from Thais and Sino-Thais, especially the new bourgeois strata, was understandable. University was the best choice for parents who wanted their children to achieve a better status; however, not every family could reach that goal. Therefore, the second best education options like technical, vocational, commercial or other colleges were also expanded during this period (Anderson 1977: 17). It can be seen that education became a tool for class mobility in this period while it previously was for class preservation.

Watson (1981) added that during the 1960s, higher education in Thailand was significantly developed. King Mongkut Institute of Technology, the first technological university in Thailand, was founded in 1960 (Watson 1981: 307). In 1964, a teacher training college, Prasarnmitr College of Education, was opened by the Ministry of Education in Bangkok and then expanded campuses to other parts of Thailand. Later, this college received university status and became Srinakharinwirot University in 1974 (Watson 1981: 302). Despite more universities being established, all of them were located in Bangkok and limited to the middle or upper class.

When the middle class began to develop beyond Bangkok, higher education was also expanded to fulfil their demand. In 1964, Chiangmai University was opened at Chiangmai (North), followed by Khonkaen University in 1965 at Khonkaen (Northeast) which was a positive sign of major development in higher education in other provinces (Watson 1981: 305). The National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) was created as a postgraduate institution in 1966 which specialized in public administration, business administration, development economics, applied statistics and research training for

government officials (Watson 1981: 307). Two years later, another regional university was established, Prince of Songkla University was found at Pattani (South) in 1968. Universities at Chiangmai, Khonkaen and Pattani were different from the previous ones as they were not directly linked to any government ministry and did not have only one specific purpose. Instead, they were “designed to generate agricultural and economic development, to stimulate local employment opportunities, as well as to provide trained manpower for these opportunities, and to answer the criticisms that there was an excessive concentration of higher educational opportunities in Bangkok” (Watson 1981: 305). It can be seen that the expansion of higher education in this period was in accordance with the economic expansion in major regional provinces.

Watson (1981: 305-310) noted that these newly established universities were not much appreciated. Academic staff from well-known universities were reluctant to work there and locals themselves felt that these regional universities were not at the same standard as those in Bangkok. Interestingly, during the first couple of years, most students in these new universities were from Bangkok as higher education in Thailand, with influence from European models, was designed in favour of children whose parents were professionals, businessmen or educated; such parents were mostly based in Bangkok.

Despite many universities and tertiary institutions being established in the 1960s, they still could not fulfil the increasing demands of the middle class. As a result, between 10,000 – 30,000 students decided to study abroad. However, when they returned, not all of their degrees were recognized on the job market. Moreover, study abroad meant a large amount of money was spent outside Thailand which was considered a loss to the country’s economy. In addition, there were growing concerns from government that the returnees might create political instability as they had witnessed in Europe and the US. Therefore Ramkhamhaeng

University was introduced as an open university¹⁷ in 1971 to satisfy the growing demands of higher education (Watson 1981: 307-308). Watson noted that “the creation of Ramkhamhaeng University marks a major policy shift away from linking higher education with man-power demands to accepting the pressures of social demand” (Watson 1981: 308). As noted before, the development of higher education in Thailand had been heavily linked to bureaucratic needs and the creation of higher education institutions was driven by the demand to fill government positions. However, the creation of Ramkhamhaeng University was driven by the demands from new high school graduates and their families, particularly the middle class. Moreover, the establishment of Ramkhamhaeng University also opened educational opportunity for the lower middle class as well, since seats were unlimited and tuition was considerably lower when compare to other universities.

Although the creation of Ramkhamhaeng University helped meet the growing demands for higher education, the higher number of graduates became problematic. Since Ramkhamhaeng, as an open university, did not follow any traditional enrolment system, the number of students enrolled was very high. However, when they graduated, particularly in law and social sciences courses, only a handful of jobs were available, creating an unemployment problem (Watson 1981: 309). Moreover, wrote Watson, “there has been the real danger that quantitative expansion has led to qualitative decline” (Watson 1981: 309-310).

Thailand got its first undergraduate private university in 1974. Payap University was established by “The Church of Christ in Thailand” at Chiangmai with help from The American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA/USAID) and United Board for Christian

¹⁷ Technically, Ramkhamhaeng University was not the first open university in Thailand. During 1934-1960, Thammasat University allowed students to enrol part-time and take some courses outside Bangkok (Watson 1981: 308).

Education in the USA (UB). Although Payap University was officially established in 1974, the role of Christian missionaries in education in Thailand has a longer history. Christian missionaries first came to Thailand, or Siam at that time, in the mid 16th century. However, it was not until the 19th century that the country became more open to the West (Hefner 1993: 281-286). The arrival of Christian missionaries not only brought a new religion to the country but also Western knowledge which helped contribute to the development of Western-style education in Thailand.

Another open university, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, was established in 1978, focusing on long-distance teaching and self-study methods. Since then, universities in Thailand have expanded to other developed provinces with an aim to respond to the increasing demands of the provincial middle class. However, since the middle class is mostly concentrated in Bangkok, higher education in Thailand was mostly developed in the same area. As a result, higher education is still out of reach or inadequate for the lower classes in rural areas.

Rajabhat is another form of university in Thailand. Originally, they were established with the purpose of training qualified teachers. In 1995, they were upgraded to institutes and expanded to provide post-secondary education more broadly and help support local communities. Almost a decade later, in 2004, Rajabhat institutes received university status and now operate as independent universities around Thailand. Despite their status, Rajabhat are located mostly in rural areas and have lower admission standards. Therefore, for many Thais, Rajabhat is inferior to traditional universities (Grubbs, Salisa & Kanoknate 2009: 284-285).

In Thailand, the status of public universities is considerably higher than Rajabhat. As Somkiat and Areeya (2010) pointed out there are three factors,

Firstly, because of their longstanding history, public universities have an advantage over their private counterpart in terms of prestige and perceived quality. Secondly, due to their limited admission policy and the competitive entrance examinations, public universities are able to attract the best and brightest high-school graduates, which in turn reinforce their prestige. Finally, public universities are heavily subsidized by the government and thus can charge lower tuition fees...As a result, public universities are more affordable, and thus more attractive from the perspective of the students (Somkiat & Areeya 2010: 711).

In sum, higher education in Thailand started with the purpose of educating a small group of elite to rule the country. However, with the increase of the middle class in Bangkok, higher education was extended and designed to respond to their demand. Not until regional provinces began to develop economically did the state-run higher education expand to the provincial middle class (only a few provinces originally met this criteria). Some Northern provinces like Chiang Mai were fortunate to have private missionary-led universities help supply the growing demand of the Thai middle class. However, Thai higher education does not reach the masses which may indicate that higher education is, in fact, a middle class institution.

Although many universities were opened, not all of them have the same quality of education. Bangkok-based universities are, sometimes, considered to have higher academic standards than universities in other provinces, with some exceptions of high reputation universities in provinces. University rankings could be one criterion for judging the quality of education in each university, and will be explored in the next section.

University Ranking

Reputation is the most significant aspect in terms of choosing university, whether it is by students or their parents. Students who choose to study based on university reputation can be seen as they have choices in higher education. Location or cost of study or other reasons are not their concern. In contrast, students who choose to study based on location have less choices since study in faraway university may cost too much for them. And the same goes with parental guidance or other reasons. Therefore, it could be translated that students who choose to study based on reputation may come from better economic background than other students since less fortunate students may be refrained by many factors in choosing university.

Universities in Thailand are different in terms of quality and reputation. In 2006, the Office of the Higher Education Commission of Thailand (OHEC) announced a ranking of universities in Thailand using research and teaching as criteria. The top 10 universities in each criterion are demonstrated in the table below.

Table 3-1: University Ranking by OHEC

Study		Research	
University	Mark (Full mark of 80)	University	Mark (Full mark of 100)
Mahidol University	61.11	Mahidol University	100
Chulalongkorn University	52.78	Chulalongkorn University	92.24
Chiangmai University	47.27	Suranaree University of Technology	81.49
Khon Kaen University	47.16	King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi	81.36
Rajamangala Univesity of Technology Krungthep	46.12	Chiangmai University	78.68
Thammasat University	45.72	Khon Kaen University	75.70
Suranaree University of Technology	45.37	National Institute of Development Administration	74.10
Kasetsart University	45.07	Thammasat University	73.61
King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi	43.59	Naresuan University	72.04
Silapakorn University	43.46	Kasetsart University	71.26

However, this ranking has drawn a lot of criticism from some universities, scholars and the public. As reported by a leading online newspaper, *Manager*, on 5th September 2006¹⁸, the method used by the Office of the Higher Education Commission in this ranking was problematic and some universities received marks beyond the limit in each category. Some universities did not accept this ranking and requested a new one. International ranking

¹⁸ 'Jad andab mo Thai yung wun mai lerk' [Chaos in Thais university ranking], *Manager*, 5 September 2006, <http://www2.manager.co.th/QOL/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9490000112739> (accessed April 17, 2015).

systems seem to be more accurate and trustworthy to most Thais. Rankings provide by Quacquarelli Symonds or QS and Times Higher Education (THE) are two indicators for many students who look for further study.

Table 3-2: Top 5 Universities in Thailand

Top 5 Universities by QS (2013)	Top 5 Universities by THE (2014)
Mahidol University (42)	King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (29)
Chulalongkorn University (48)	Mahidol University (52)
Chiangmai University (98)	Chiangmai University (82)
Thammasat University (107)	Chulalongkorn University (85)
Prince of Songkla University (146)	Prince of Songkla University (89)

Although there have been no official rankings in Thailand since the controversial one from the Office of the Higher Education Commission in 2006, the yearly entrance score requirement in each faculty of each university could be seen as a ranking of universities in Thailand. For example, the top 5 universities for Faculty of Dentistry in Thailand (2013)¹⁹ can be ranked as follows:

¹⁹ Adapted data from Association of the Council of University Presidents of Thailand (2013). Access at www.cuas.or.th (accessed May 14, 2014).

Table 3-3: Entrance Score for Faculty of Dentistry

University	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Average Score
Chulalongkorn University	25,714.7500	23,569.9000	24,007.1567
Mahidol University	24,742.8500	23,460.2500	23,686.8538
Thammasat University	23,753.1500	23,043.8000	23,234.3183
Srinakharinwirot University	23,887.4000	22,965.7000	23,194.9975
Chiangmai University	23,366.9500	22,966.9000	23,122.8778

The Top 5 universities for Faculty of Economics²⁰ in Thailand in the same year can be ranked as follows:

Table 3-4: Entrance Score for Faculty of Economics

University	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Average Score
Chulalongkorn University	23,199.0000	20,200.3000	20,719.2480
Thammasat University	21,119.2000	19,067.7500	19,534.1639
Kasetsart University	20,136.2500	18,464.1000	18,760.2204
Chiangmai University	19,351.1500	16,947.4000	17,527.9483
Khon Kaen University	18,662.7000	15,553.7000	16,529.1320

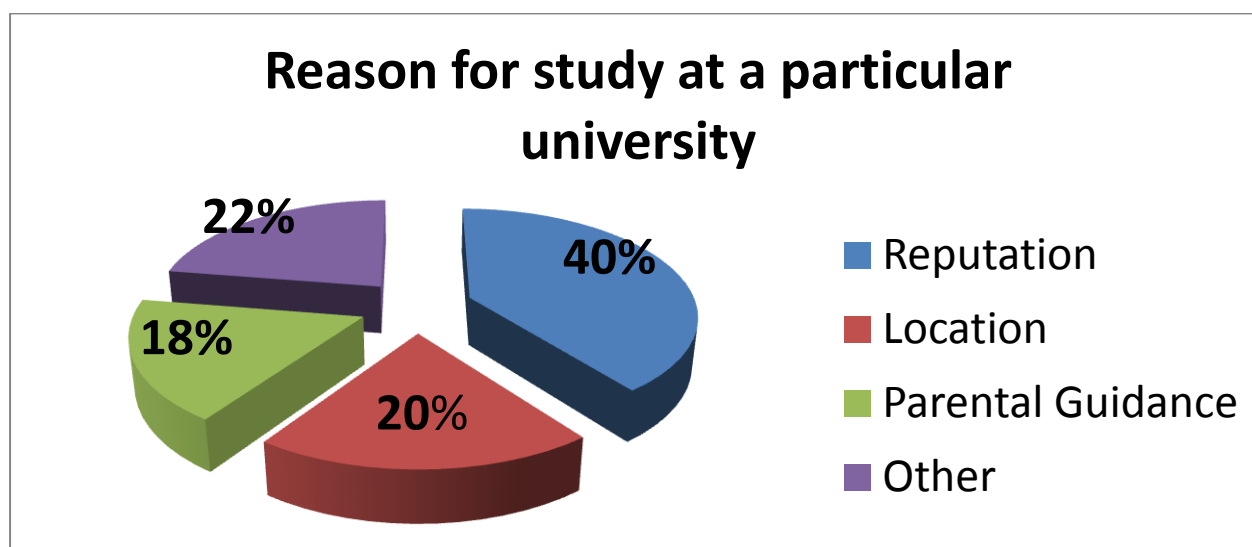
There are several purposes of university ranking systems. One of them is to be an indicator for prospective students and their family for choosing which university they want. However, different ranking operators provided different results which may be due to using different techniques and criteria. These ranking systems and entrance score requirements

²⁰ Ibid.

could reflect the university reputation which is crucial for a potential student's decision on a place to study. Students are likely to select their university based on this ranking.

As shown in the figure below reputation is the most important factor for students.

Figure 3-1: Reason for Study at a Particular University



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

According to data collected from case study universities, 194 of 490 students who participated in the questionnaire chose their universities based on reputation, followed by location (98 from 490) and parental guidance (88 from 490). Other reasons included receiving scholarships or they had no other choice as their score was not high enough or they did not want to study in the classroom so they preferred an open university or personal preference such as their admiration of a university or the availability of their preferred faculty in a university. This reveals that university reputation is the most important part in selecting students' higher education destination. The following sections will show type of student that choose to study in university based on reputation and also other reasons, what is the difference between them and how choosing university can be related to class.

Case study universities

Based on the 7 case study universities, this section is divided into 3 sub-sections; student background, student lifestyle and students' future plans. Each sub-section show how class can dictate student paths in higher education.

In this thesis, case study universities can be categorized into specific groups; as elite Bangkok-based universities (Chulalongkorn University and Thammasart University), Bangkok-based universities (Chulalongkorn University, Thammasart University, Rangsit University and Ramkhamhaeng University), provincial universities (Chiangmai University, Mahasarakham University and Prince of Songkla University), private universities (Rangsit University) and open universities (Ramkhamhaeng University).

Student background

Reason for study in each university could reflect students' economic background, academic background and even family class. The following figures show who students were before they entered into university life. Reasons for study in university, according to data collection, can be divided into 4 categories; reputation, location, parental guidance and other.

The first category is reputation. Reputation of each university can partly result from the quality of education in each university which is reflected in the ranking system. However, there are other equally important factors contributing to university reputation as well. Age of the university, its status as public, private or open university, prominent alumni or general perception of Thais are only a few factors that help a university gain its reputation. As stated earlier, choosing a university based on reputation may be related to a student's class since upper class students, without economic constraint, may have more choices in higher education. Therefore, examining backgrounds of students would help clarify this assumption.

The second category, choosing university by location, can also relate to several aspects of students. Location of university is important for many students, particularly students from provincial areas, because study at a nearby university has some advantages over moving to another province. Since most students in Thailand still live with their parents even at university level, in theory, students would need money only for transportation, lunch and educational expenses. However, if students have to study in another province, the cost of living would be greatly increased by accommodation and all day meals. Therefore, without a scholarship, only families with a high enough income, the middle class or higher, can support their children in higher education. Moreover, most high reputation universities are located in Bangkok and surrounding areas where cost of living is higher than other provinces. Students from other provinces would need high levels of financial support from their family.

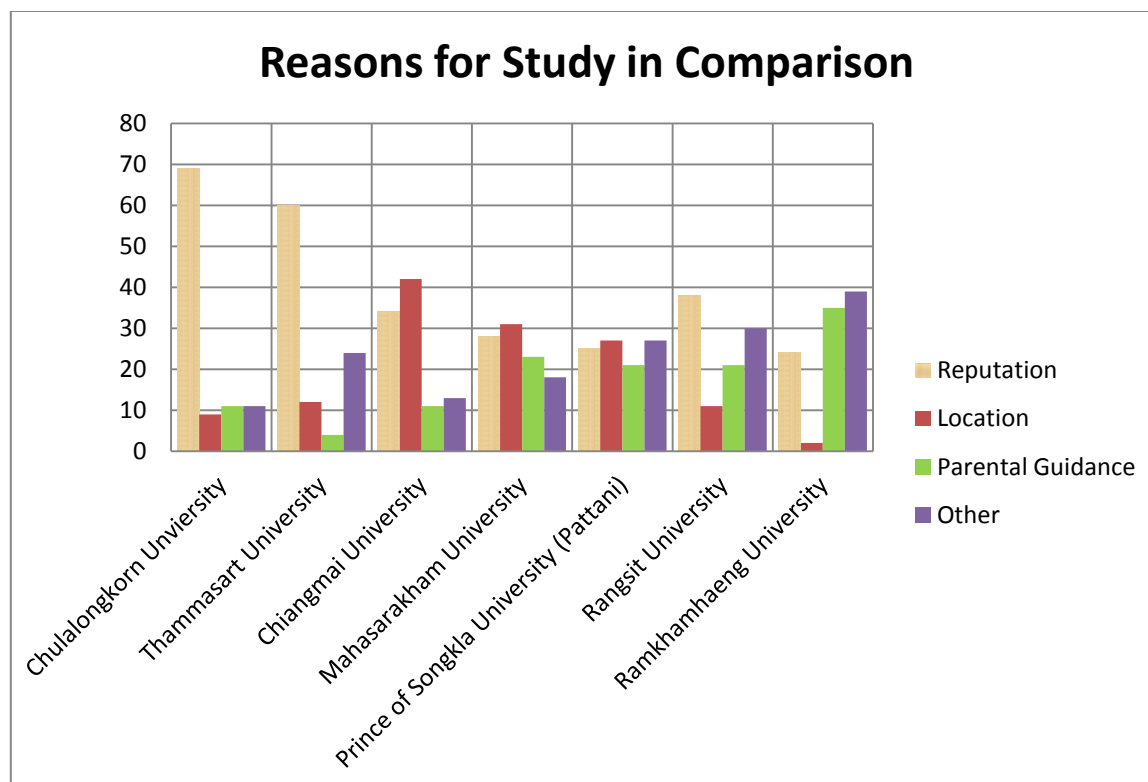
It is also worth pointing out that most high reputation high schools are concentrated in Bangkok and surrounding areas, the same as universities. This does not mean that students from Bangkok are more clever but definitely they have more opportunities for high education than their provincial counterparts. Therefore, for students outside Bangkok, the location of a university may as be important as its reputation. Students may choose a university based on availability in the area nearby.

The third category is “choosing university by parental guidance”. Parental guidance would be in the form of economic guidance, based on the comparison between parent’s income and cost of study plus living. Unfortunately, education can cost greatly, especially for low income families, therefore the self-estimation of the ability to cover the cost may influence a student’s choice of university. Moreover, parental guidance could indicate class of each student. For lower class families, without a scholarship, a student may need to consider less expensive options for higher education. For example, a public university near the student’s hometown can reduce the cost of living by staying with their parents instead of

living by themselves in another province or open university with considerably lower tuition fee. On the other hand, economic guidance for upper class families works in the opposite way. Obviously, a student from a high income family has more choices for their high education; public university (no matter how far away from home), private university (with high tuition fee), open university and even study abroad. In short, upper class, and maybe middle class, students can choose to study at good universities while lower class, and maybe lower fraction of middle class, students have less choices and have to choose only affordable universities.

Reasons for study

We have seen the overall reasons for study at a university by students from the last figure and have established that reputation is the most important factor for choosing a university. However, not all students ranked reputation as their most important factor. Data collected from each case study university reveal that reputation is only the most important for students at Bangkok-based universities, other than the open university.

Figure 3-2: Reasons for Study in Comparison

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Table 3-5: Reasons for Study in Comparison

	Reputation	Location	Parental Guidance	Others	Total
Chulalongkorn University	81 (69%)	11 (9%)	13 (11%)	13 (11%)	118 (100%)
Thammasat University	15 (60%)	3 (12%)	1 (4%)	6 (24%)	25 (100%)
Chiangmai University	23 (34%)	28 (42%)	7 (11%)	9 (13%)	67 (100%)
Mahasarakham University	35 (28%)	39 (31%)	28 (23%)	23 (18%)	125 (100%)
Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)	11 (25%)	12 (27%)	9 (21%)	13 (27%)	45 (100%)
Rangsit University	14 (38%)	4 (11%)	8 (21%)	11 (30%)	37 (100%)
Ramkhamhaeng University	15 (24%)	1 (2%)	22 (35%)	24 (39%)	62 (100%)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

The figure and table above show the reasons for study in comparison collected from the questionnaires during 2012 and 2013. Since Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University are considered leading universities in Thailand as shown in the ranking system, it is not surprising to see a very high percentage of participants chose to study there based on reputation. More than half of participants from both universities claimed to study there because of the high reputation. Since they are not constrained by any conditions such as financial or location issues, participants from both universities, at least those choosing to study by reputation may come from relatively wealthy families. In addition, students who chose “other” in this question mostly said to receive scholarships (both academic and sports) or wanted to study at the political science faculty in these universities. This finding suggests that students from elite universities may from a better class than students from other universities.

Provincial universities like Chiangmai University, Mahasarakham University and Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) have higher or a near equal proportion of participants choosing to study based on location rather than reputation, which probably means students are mostly from those particular provinces and nearby. This does not necessary mean provincial universities have less quality, although the gap between universities does exist. But it can be seen that provincial universities serve mainly people from the region who are restricted by their economic status, to study close to their family or failed to gain entry to high reputation universities. “Other” includes wanting to study at the political science faculty in these universities, personal preference, failed the entrance criteria in the first university on their list, followed friends, no other choice, low tuition fee, scholarship or regional university more suits their lifestyle. This finding clearly indicates that students have fewer choices in higher education, which likely to be resulted from their class background.

However, provincial university like Chiangmai University also places highly in the university ranking system and has a very good reputation which is reflected by one-third of participants choosing to study here based on reputation. This means some students from Chiangmai University may also come from high income families. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that most of students at Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) are Muslim. This may have influence over student decisions to study here.

Despite being behind in ranking system compared to public universities, Rangsit University, as a private university, still has a good reputation among private universities and has a high percentage of participants choosing to study based on its reputation. “Other” includes scholarships, personal preference and no other choice. Although some students claimed that they do not have other choices, they still have more choices than poorer students since they can pay the high tuition fee. Most students at Rangsit University are from relatively wealthy families, unless on scholarship. Data suggests that most students at Rangsit University are not from the lower class.

Although Ramkhamhaeng University has the highest percentage of parental guidance and is interestingly low on the location category, a lot of participants chose to study here because of its status as an open university where the tuition fee is low and they do not need to pass an entrance examination. “Other”, as the highest proportion, includes no other choice, personal preference, low tuition fee, do not have time for class, possible to graduate faster than normal university, do not like rules and believe that Ramkhamhaeng University can change their life. This data may indicate that some students here are from low income families and lower class since the tuition fee is the most important for them.

Data reveals that most students choose to study at elite Bangkok-based universities based mainly on their reputations. However, it is possible that students in Bangkok and the surrounding area have more choices in higher education, particularly as high reputation

universities are concentrated in the capital city. Therefore, many of them may choose reputation as a reason, since location is not a problem for them. This does not mean that all of them are wealthy but they have choices in higher education.

Students from provincial universities choose their universities based on many reasons, though location seems to be the most important. However, this does not mean that students do not care about university reputation. It is highly likely that most of them chose to study at the best possible university around their locations.

In contrast, for students at the private university and the open university, location is the least important concern for them. This fact may relate to students' social class and economic background in accordance with the hypothesis that university reputation and entrance process divide students into class fractions. Data suggests that most students at elite Bangkok-based universities have more choices in higher education because the unequal development between provinces and may indicate that they are not from the lower class. In contrast, many students at provincial universities have fewer choices in higher education and may indicate that some of them are probably from the lower class or the lower fraction of the middle class. However, it is important to note that not all of them are inferior to their Bangkok-based counterparts. In fact, many students at provincial universities have a good economic background and chose to study at the best university around their locations as shown in the case of Chiangmai University.

This finding reveals the relationship between university location, reputation and students' class backgrounds. The following parts will provide a clearer picture on how students were divided.

Hometown

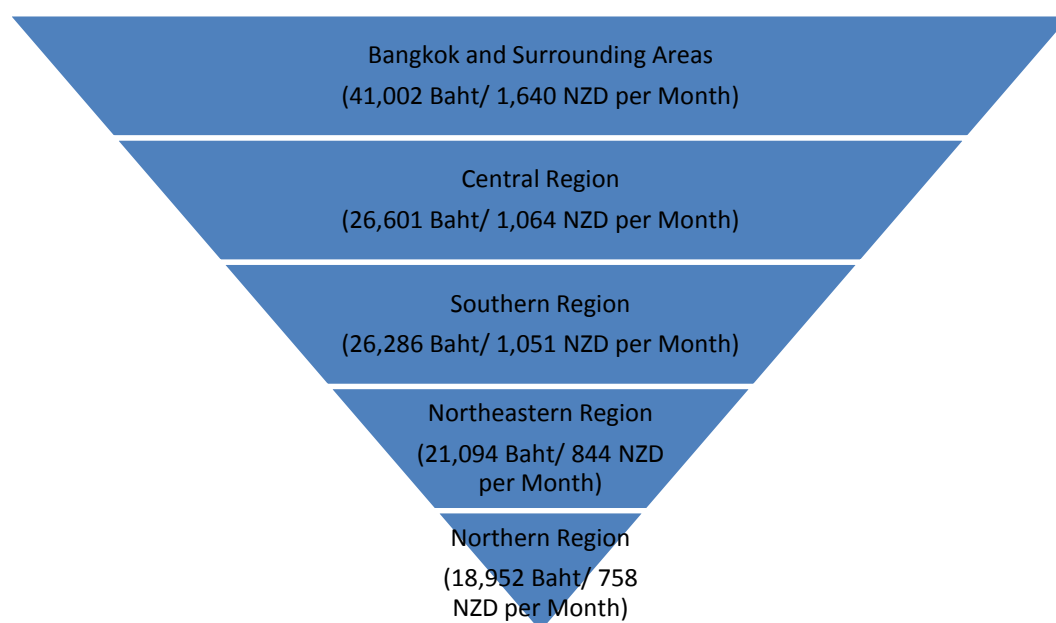
The hometown of students could be seen as another indication of student background. Unfortunately, there are wide gaps in many aspects between the capital, other large cities and small provincial towns. Different hometowns also often correlate with a different economic background for each student. The standard of living is so much diverse between places in Thailand. Being middle class in Bangkok²¹ is largely different from being middle class in provincial areas. The middle class in provincial areas are also different based on the level of development in each province. Some scholars regarded the Red shirts as lower middle class (Naruemon & McCargo 2011: 1000-1017, Pasuk & Baker 2016: 15-19) while Sopranzetti regarded the same Red shirts as lower class (Sopranzetti 2016: 314). This indicates that the middle class is not easily identified and there may be fractions within it. Moreover, the gap between fractions may be so large that the lower middle class and lower class become very close and difficult to separate.

The difference is not only limited to economic aspects but also includes education and even life chances. Related to the previous section, the hometown of a student is crucial for choosing university for various reasons. In economic terms, residents of Bangkok have higher average income compared to other regions. Moreover, as noted before, high reputation universities, and high schools, are concentrated mainly in Bangkok, therefore residents of these areas have more opportunities in education. Students from provincial areas have less choice in education, unless they are from high income families. Data from National Statistical

²¹ In 2013, the population of Bangkok was 5,686,252 (8.77 percent) from the overall population of Thailand of 64,785,909. Data from “Population from registration record by sex and area, whole kingdom”, Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior. Access at <http://service.nso.go.th/nso/web/statseries/statseries01.html> (accessed July 11, 2016).

Office shows the huge difference in average income per month between Bangkok and the rest of Thailand.

Figure 3-3: Average Income per Month between Bangkok and the Rest of Thailand



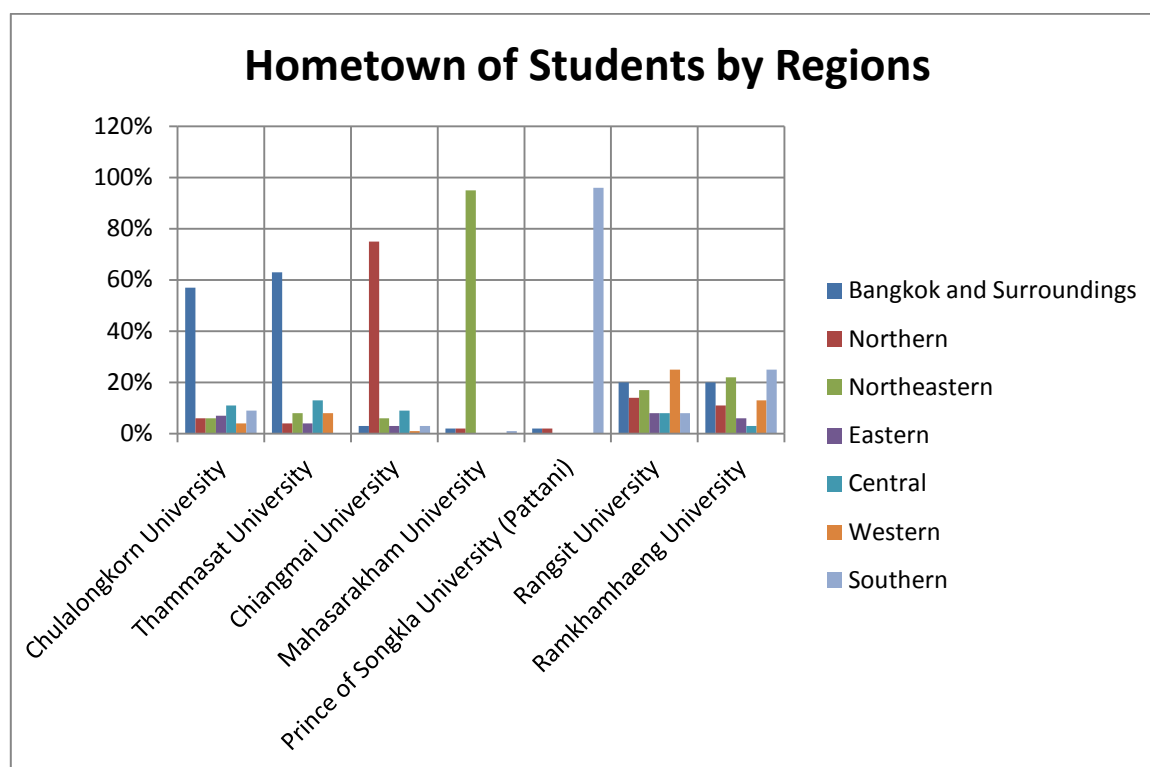
Source: Adapted from the Household Socio-Economic Survey, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (2015) ²²

As shown in the above figure, residents of Bangkok have an average income of 41,002 baht per month (around 1,640 New Zealand dollars), almost double the rest of Thailand. According to rankings provided by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) in 2013, of the top 10 universities in Thailand, half of them are located in Bangkok and surrounding provinces while the rest are spread out in each region. This fact indicates that students who live in the

²² Adapted data from The Household Socio-Economic Survey, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Information and communication Technology (2015). Access at <http://service.nso.go.th/nso/web/statseries/statseries11.html> (accessed July 11, 2016).

capital city would have more choices in their higher education than their provincial counterparts.²³ The following figure shows hometown of participants from each university;

Figure 3-4: Hometown of Students by Regions



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

²³ In 2012, the overall population of Thailand was around 64.5 million while population of Bangkok was around 5.7 million, less than 10 percent of overall population.

Table 3-6: Hometown of Students by Regions

	C.U.	T.U.	C.M.U.	M.S.U.	P.S.U. (Pattani)	R.S.U.	R.U.
Bangkok and Surroundings	68 (57%)	15 (63%)	2 (5%)	3 (2%)	1 (2%)	7 (20%)	13 (20%)
Northern	7 (6%)	1 (4%)	50 (75%)	2 (2%)	1 (2%)	5 (14%)	7 (11%)
Northeastern	7 (6%)	2 (8%)	4 (6%)	121(95%)	0 (0%)	6 (17%)	14 (22%)
Eastern	8 (7%)	1 (4%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	4 (6%)
Central	13 (11%)	3 (13%)	6 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	2 (3%)
Western	5 (4%)	2 (8%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (25%)	8 (13%)
Southern	11 (9%)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	1 (1%)	45 (96%)	3 (8%)	16 (25%)
Total	119 (100%)	24 (100%)	67 (100%)	127 (100%)	47 (100%)	36 (100%)	64 (100%)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

This figure and table on the hometowns of participants show that participants from Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, the elite Bangkok-based universities, are largely from Bangkok. In both universities, more than half of participants are from Bangkok and the surrounding areas while the rest are from every region of Thailand. This data could be interpreted in various ways. Firstly, since Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University are two of the best universities in Thailand, it can be seen that students from Bangkok are better educated from high school or private tutors so they have better scores in entrance examinations. Secondly, this shows that students from Bangkok have

more opportunities to study in high ranking universities since most of these universities are located in Bangkok. Thirdly, due to their high reputation, elite universities attracted students from every part of Thailand and these students can be seen as the best of each province. This is true not only in terms of education but also economic status, since students must relocate from their home and live in a more expensive city, with the exception of students who receive scholarships. Note, however, in the case of Thammasat University, this data is from the international program students who study at Tha Pra Chan campus while undergraduate students study at Rangsit campus at Phatum Thani province which may affect the result. Collected data from focus group discussions also shows that most of participants from elite universities are from high reputation high schools in Bangkok or other provinces.

For provincial universities, participants from Chiangmai University are mostly from Chiangmai and provinces in the Northern region. Participants from Mahasarakham University are mostly from Mahasarakham and provinces in the North eastern region. The same pattern goes with Prince of Songkla University where most participants are from the Southern region. These data show that Chiangmai University, Mahasarakham University and Price of Songkla University are primarily regional universities that cater to provincial residents who do not want to study far away from their hometown or cannot enter other universities.

Interestingly, participants from Rangsit University and Ramkhamhaeng University are from various provinces, which means location of university may be a lesser factor, with the status of the universities, as a private and open university respectively, more important. Rangsit University has a considerably higher tuition fee than public universities but lower entrance requirements which may attract some students from high income families from all over the country. On the other hand, Ramkhamhaeng University has a considerably lower

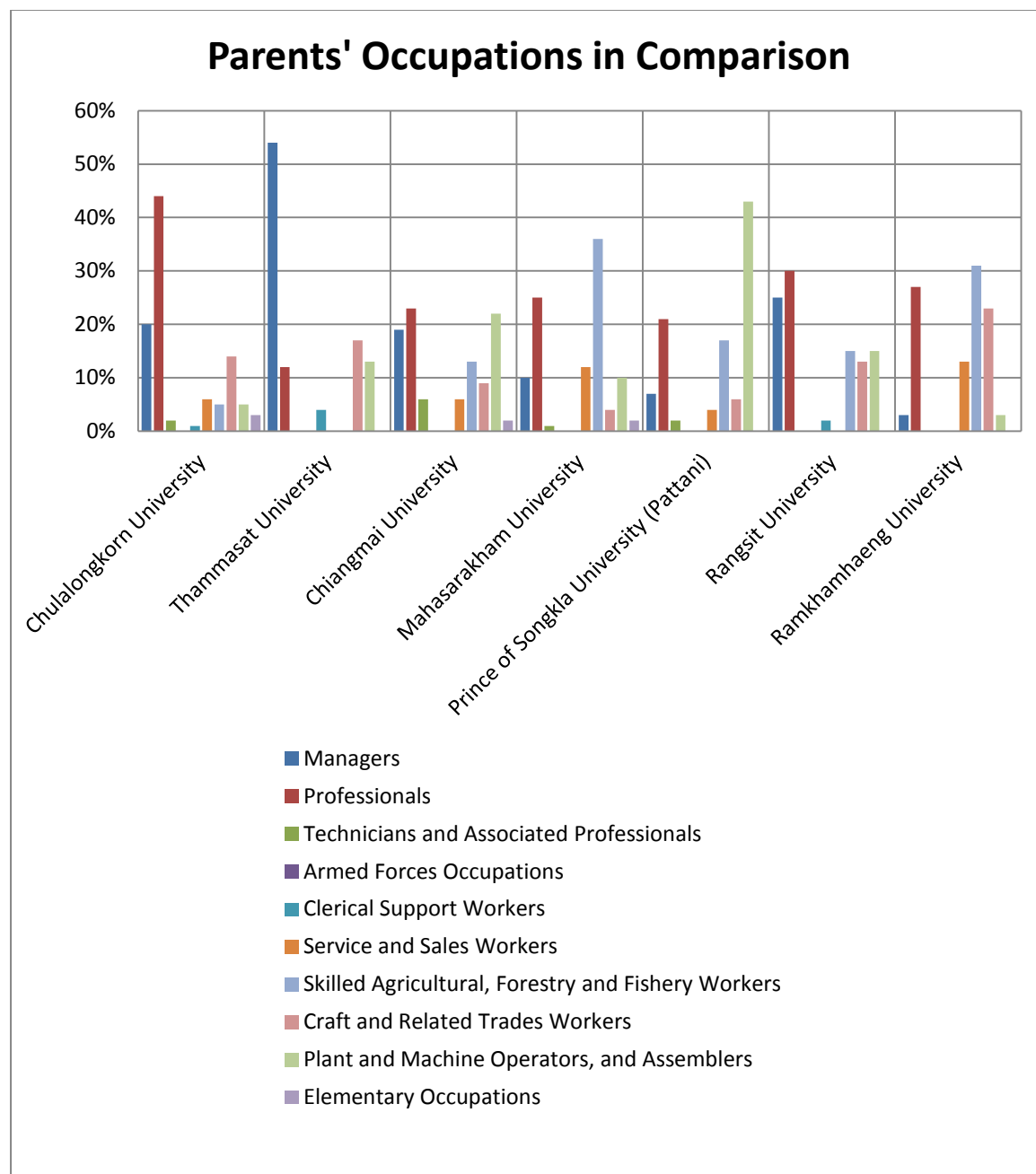
tuition fee than public universities with no or less entrance requirements so some students here could be from low income families from every part of Thailand.

Data indicates that students' hometown plays a major role in choosing a university. Some students may have to forego their desired university for the hometown university because of economic constraints. Apparently, students from Bangkok and the surrounding areas have more choices in higher education and, as will be seen, better life chances, since most high reputation universities and high schools are in the capital city. But, for provincial students, their choices are limited to a few high reputation universities in each region. However, in the case of the private university and open university, hometown is less relevant. This part and the previous section show that, besides being divided according to their economic background, students were also divided according to their hometown into certain types of university. As noted, students' hometown is heavily linked with students' economic background, which divided certain types of students into certain universities in accordance with the hypothesis that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions. The next part will more clearly show the relationship between students' family background and their choice of university.

Parent's occupation

Parent's occupation, obviously, represents family economic status and is one important indicator for a person's class. It is undeniable that financial support from families is crucial for students' education therefore parent's occupation is worth some attention. Moreover, parent's occupation also affects student lifestyle through monthly allowance. Overall, parent's occupation will indicate family status, or even class, of participants from each university.

In the below figure, a list of occupations has been adapted from International Labour Organization (ILO) Statistics by putting more middle class occupations on the left side and less middle class occupations on the right. While fully acknowledging some complication in identifying parents' occupation from this list, these data can still provide good information about family background of students.

Figure 3-5: Parents' Occupations in Comparison

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Table 3-7: Parents' Occupations in Comparison

	C.U.	T.U.	C.M.U.	M.S.U.	P.S.U. (Pattani)	R.S.U.	R.U.
Managers	24 (20%)	13 (54%)	12 (19%)	13 (10%)	3 (7%)	10 (25%)	2 (3%)
Professionals	52 (44%)	3 (12%)	15 (23%)	31 (25%)	10 (21%)	12 (30%)	17 (27%)
Technicians and Associated Professionals	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	4 (6%)	1 (1%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Armed Forces Occupations	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Clerical Support Workers	1 (1%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Service and Sales Workers	7 (6%)	0 (0%)	4 (6%)	15 (12%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	8 (13%)
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery workers	6 (5%)	0 (0%)	8 (13%)	45 (36%)	8 (17%)	6 (15%)	19 (31%)
Craft and Related Trades Workers	17 (14%)	4 (17%)	6 (9%)	5 (4%)	3 (6%)	5 (13%)	14 (23%)
Plant and Machine Operators, and Assemblers	6 (5%)	3 (13%)	14 (22%)	13 (10%)	20 (43%)	6 (15%)	2 (3%)
Elementary Occupations	4 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	119 (100%)	24 (100%)	64 (100%)	125 (100%)	47 (100%)	40 (100%)	62 (100%)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

The data shows a clearer picture of student backgrounds. Parent's occupation, the most important source of income for most students, can dictate student paths in higher education. From these data, more than half of students from elite universities and the private university are from families that have occupations that provide a high income. The data emphasizes that students from elite universities come from better economic backgrounds than others and better economic background means better opportunities in education. The figure also reveal

that study at private university requires higher tuition fees, and only students with good economic background, from any provinces, would be able to afford to study there.

In contrast, more than half of students from Mahasarakham University, Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) and Ramkhamhaeng University are from families that have occupations that provide relatively low income. This data indicates that students from lower income families have very different opportunities in education; those with provincial background, would mainly study at provincial universities to reduce the cost of relocation and living in the capital city. Moreover, it also reveals that provincial people with low income have less chance of entering Bangkok-based high reputation universities. In the case of Ramkhamhaeng University, it is not surprising to see many students come from low income occupations families, due to its status as an open university with a considerably lower tuition fee.

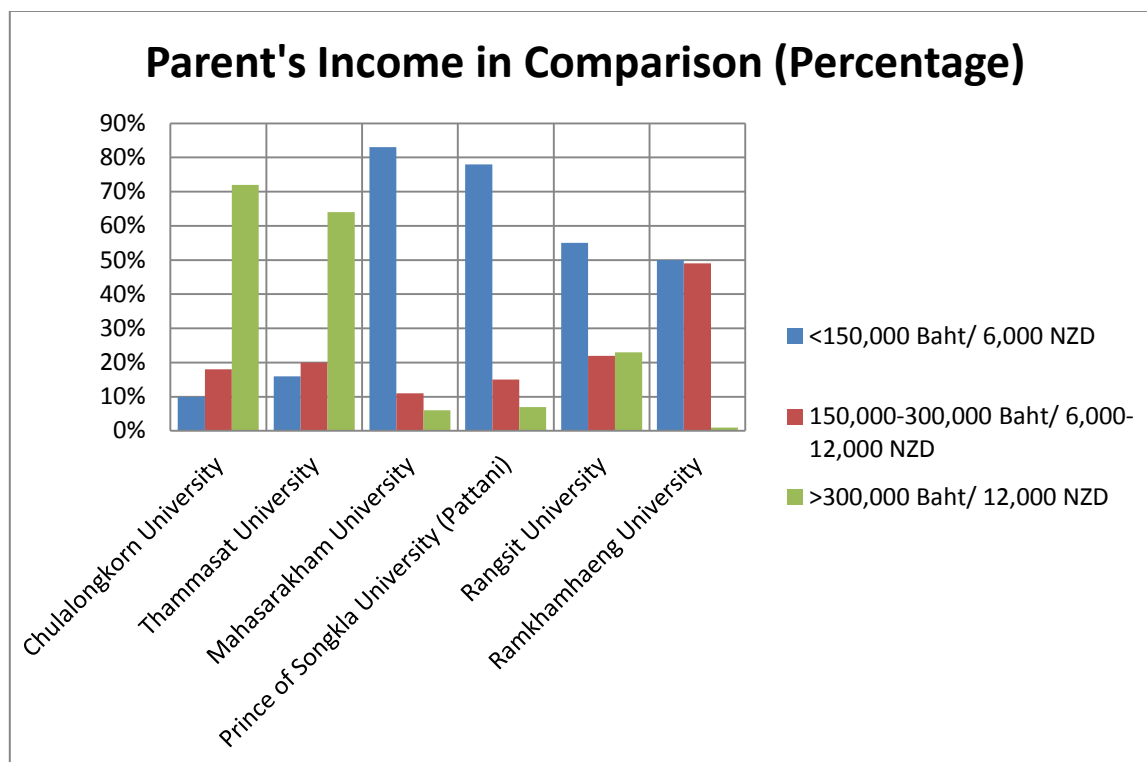
However, one provincial university did not follow the trend. Although, Chiangmai University is a provincial university, Chiangmai province itself is more urban than rural. Therefore, students from this university are more equally divided between higher income and lower income occupations.

This data and information from previous categories indicate that elite universities and the private university would have a higher proportion of students with good economic background while provincial universities and the open university would have a higher proportion of students from lower economic backgrounds, with some exceptions of high reputation universities in provincial areas. This finding is in accordance with the hypothesis that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions.

Parent's Income

Directly related to the previous category, parent's income is another clear indicator of class. Parent's income will also demonstrate the hypothesis that students are divided by the entrance process and university reputation according to their class fractions. As stated earlier, financial support is crucial for student paths in higher education as parental income could determine which or what type of university, students can enter. We can expect to see the same pattern as the previous part where students from good economic background would study in elite universities or private universities while students with lesser economic background would study at a provincial university or an open university.

The following data on parent's income was collected by the Office of the Higher Education Commission of Thailand and reported on 17 March 2015. This data provides parent's income of all students in academic year 2014 from almost all universities in Thailand.

Figure 3-6: Parent's Income in Comparison

Source: Adapted from the Office of the Higher Education Commission of Thailand (17 March 2015)
 24

Comparing parents' income, it is clear that most students from elite Bangkok-based universities are from very high income families. In contrast, in provincial universities like Maharakham University and Prince of Songkla University (Pattani), most students claimed to have parental income below 150,000 baht or 6,000 New Zealand dollar per month (roughly 1 NZD = 25 Baht). Unfortunately, there is no data for Chiangmai University; however, based on figure 3-5 and table 3-7, we can assume that parental income of Chiangmai University students would be higher than other provincial universities. Students from Maharakham

²⁴ Adapted from the Office of the Higher Education Commission of Thailand (17 March 2015). Access at http://www.info.mua.go.th/information/show_all_statdata_table.php?data_show=2 (accessed July 11, 2016).

University and Prince of Songkla University, clearly, come from much lower income families than those from elite Bangkok-based universities. Interestingly, private universities like Rangsit University also have a high proportion of students who claimed to have parental income below 150,000 baht per month despite its high tuition fees, almost the same percentage as an open university like Ramkhamhaeng University.

Table 3-8: Parent's Income in Comparison

	<150,000 Baht/ 6,000 NZD	150,000- 300,000 Baht/ 6,000- 12,000 NZD	>300,000 Baht/ 12,000 NZD	Total
Chulalongkorn University	3,317 (10%)	5,718 (18%)	23,309 (72%)	32,344 (100%)
Thammasat University (Main Campus)	395 (16%)	523 (20%)	1,649 (64%)	2,567 (100%)
Chiangmai University	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Maharakham University	33,583 (83%)	4,568 (11%)	2,597 (6%)	40,748 (100%)
Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)	7,078 (78%)	1,344 (15%)	681 (7%)	9,103 (100%)
Rangsit University	15,352 (55%)	6,313 (22%)	6,578 (23%)	28,243 (100%)
Ramkhamhaeng University	28,834 (50%)	27,933 (49%)	431 (1%)	57,198 (100%)

Source: Adapted from the Office of the Higher Education Commission of Thailand (17 March 2015)²⁵

However, these data from the Office of the Higher Education Commission (Thailand) may have some problematic issues. Firstly, these data may not be totally accurate since not all

²⁵ Ibid

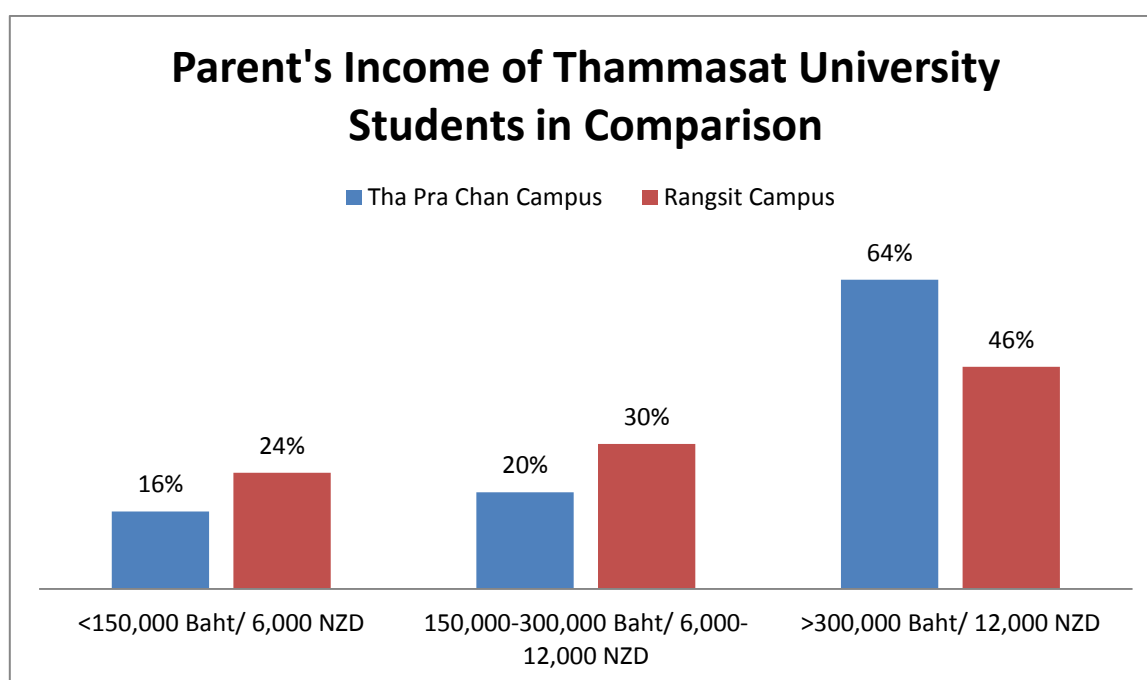
students know the precise income of their parents. Therefore, parent's income level is more likely to be an estimation. Secondly, and most importantly, there are a high number of students in each university who claimed that their parents have no income at all; for example, more than 5,000 students from Chulalongkorn University claimed that their parents have no income. Thirdly, the lowest category of less than 150,000 baht per month is, in fact, considered a very high salary for many Thais. According to the National Statistical Office (NSO), the average income per household for the whole country at 2015 was only 26,915 baht (1,076 NZD) per month.²⁶ This fact indicates that the Office of the Higher Education Commission did not even consider the number of the poor in higher education is worthy of differentiation and analysis. This emphasizes that higher education is designed for people from good economic background, which is only small proportion of Thais.

Nevertheless, these data show a pattern between students at elite universities from high income families and students at non-elite universities with significantly lower family income. Together with data from students' hometown, this indicates that students of elite universities are most likely from urban and high income family background while students at provincial universities are more likely to be from provincial and lower income families. Students from private universities are mostly from higher income families than students at provincial universities. However, the case of Ramkhamhaeng University is more complicated. Its status as an open university attracts students from various ages and backgrounds; some may not study full-time and may have full-time jobs. Therefore, it is more difficult to identify the actual economic status of students at the open university.

²⁶ Data from the Household Socio-Economic Survey, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Information and communication Technology (2015). Access at <http://service.nso.go.th/nso/web/statseries/statseries11.html> (accessed July 11, 2016).

Summarizing from this part, parental income shares the same pattern as the previous indicator, that certain types of university cater to certain types of students. Students who are Bangkok-based and come from high income families have more choices in higher education and more opportunities in high-reputation universities. On the other hand, students from low income background, either from regional provinces or not, have fewer choices in higher education and less opportunity to enter elite Bangkok-based universities. In short, it could be seen that students are already divided into each university based on their economic background and social class, as stated in the hypothesis.

Figure 3-7: Parent's Income of Thammasat University Students in Comparison



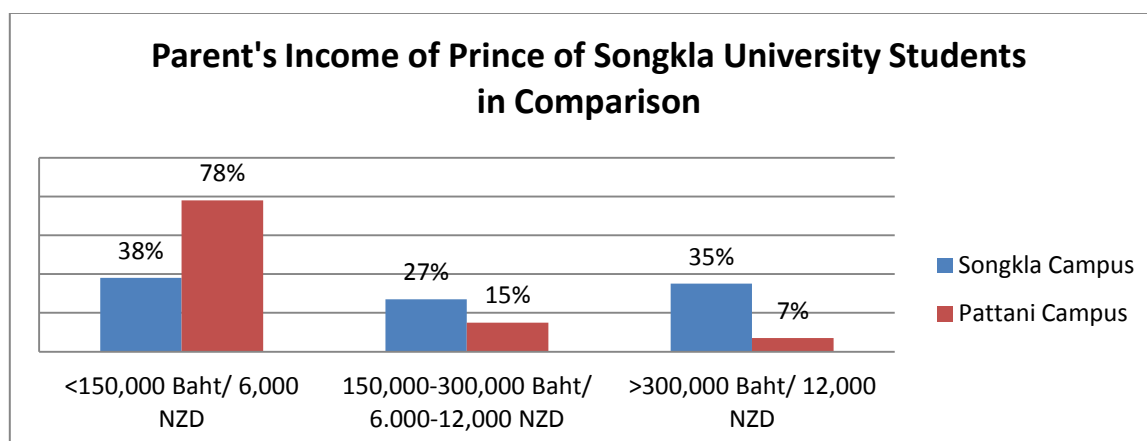
Source: Adapted from the Office of the Higher Education Commission of Thailand (17 March 2015)²⁷

In this section, it is also worth pointing out that, within the same university, different campuses also cater to different types of student. In the case of Thammasat University,

²⁷ Ibid

although parent's income of more than 300,000 baht per month is the highest category, both campuses are clearly different. At Tha Pra Chan campus, the parental income of more than 300,000 baht category is almost double the other two categories combined. However, at Rangsit campus, the parental income of more than 300,000 baht per month category is not very different from the other two categories. A possible explanation is that Thammasat University (Tha Pra Chan campus) facilitates only post-graduate or international program students where tuition fees are considered higher and, in turn, students are from higher income families. In contrast, Thammasat University Rangsit campus serves mainly undergraduate students with a lower tuition fee, hence students from every economic background can study here. This thesis, however, focuses only on Thammasat University Tha Pra Chan campus.

Figure 3-8: Parent's Income of Price of Songkla University Students in Comparison



Source: Adapted from the Office of the Higher Education Commission of Thailand (17 March 2015)²⁸

In the case of Prince of Songkla University, it is clear that students at Pattani campus are significantly poorer than Songkla campus. Pattani campus has a majority of students

²⁸ Ibid

(77.75 percent) who claimed to have parental income of less than 150,000 baht per month. However, students from Songkla campus have parental income spread more equally in all 3 categories. The difference between the two campuses of Prince of Songkla University may as well reflect the difference in terms of economic development between the two provinces.

Current lifestyle

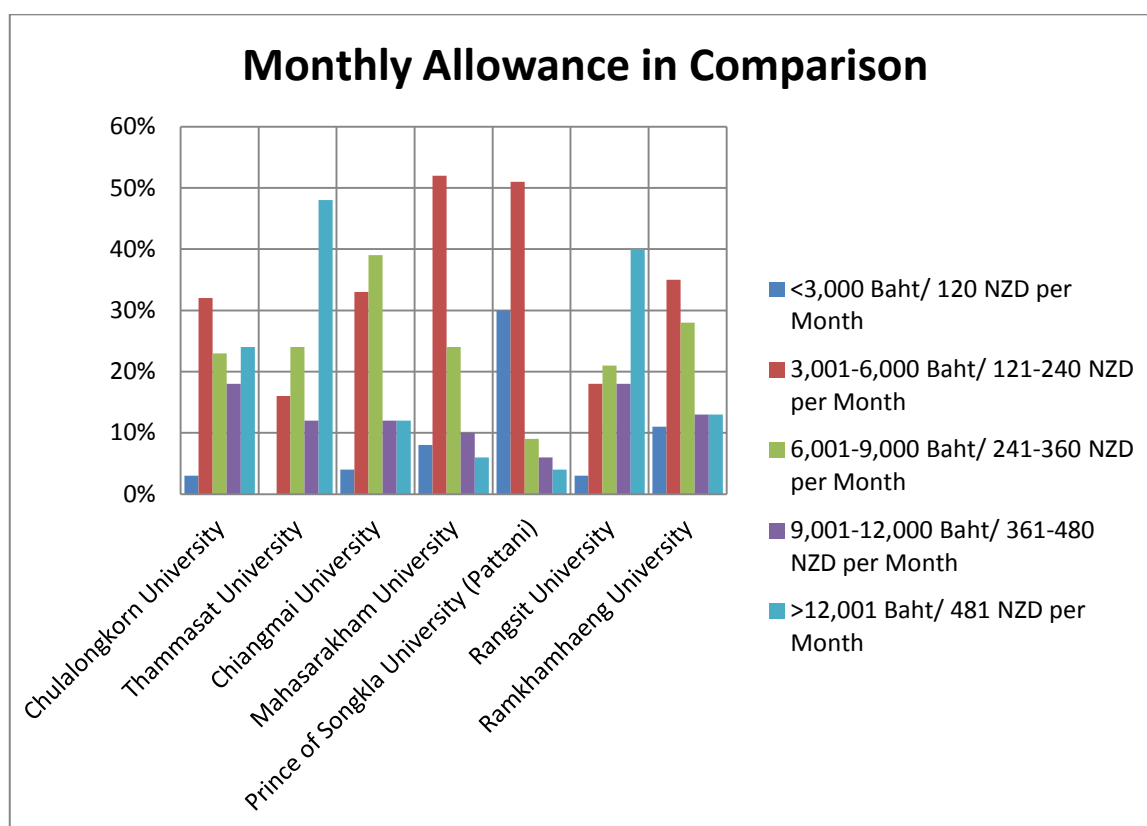
This section shows the lifestyle of students at university. Data was collected by questionnaires. In questionnaires, student's lifestyle can be seen from their monthly allowance, type of mobile phone, computer ownership, mode of transport and activity during their holiday or semester break. Each category can reflect student lifestyle and, in turn, help indicate their class. Lifestyle is not only money, but also a symbol of prestige and superiority. It will also show that, because of their economic background and hometown, students in each type of university have different lifestyles. Moreover, this section analyse the hypothesis that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions.

Monthly allowance

The first category is monthly allowance. Since money is important for maintaining lifestyle, monthly allowance can indicate a student's lifestyle and even their class. Monthly allowance can also represent the wealth of a student's family as well as a symbol of family's prestige. It is likely that a high income family would provide a higher amount of allowance for their children. One explanation could be the estimation of parents on their children's daily need. For example, if parents think their children should go to university by taxi, instead of public bus, their monthly allowance would be different. In this way, monthly allowance is

related to parent's class and perception of their children's appropriate lifestyle. It is likely that students who have high basic expenditures should also have a high monthly allowance matching their need. However, in reality, monthly allowance may reflect parental income rather than the need of students.

Figure 3-9: Monthly Allowance in Comparison



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Table 3-9: Monthly Allowance in Comparison

	<3,000 Baht/ 120 NZD	3,000- 6,000 Baht/ 121- 240 NZD	6,001- 9,000 Baht/ 241-360 NZD	9,001- 12,000 Baht/ 361- 480 NZD	>12,000 Baht/ 481 NZD	Total
Chulalongkorn University	4 (3%)	38 (32%)	27 (23%)	22 (18%)	29 (24%)	120 (100%)
Thammasat University	0 (0%)	4 (16%)	6 (24%)	3 (12%)	12 (48%)	25 (100%)
Chiangmai University	3 (4%)	22 (33%)	26 (39%)	8 (12%)	8 (12%)	67 (100%)
Maharakham University	10 (8%)	67 (52%)	31 (24%)	12 (10%)	8 (6%)	128 (100%)
Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)	14 (30%)	24 (51%)	4 (9%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	47 (100%)
Rangsit University	1 (3%)	7 (18%)	8 (21%)	7 (18%)	15 (40%)	38 (100%)
Ramkhamhaeng University	7 (11%)	22 (35%)	18 (28%)	8 (13%)	8 (13%)	63 (100%)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

The figure above shows the participants' monthly income from each case study university in comparison. Participants from Thammasat University have the highest allowance among the case studies while participants from Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) have the lowest monthly allowance. This figure presents a clear pattern between Bangkok-based universities and provincial universities, excluding Ramkhamhaeng University (open university). The participants from Bangkok-based universities have higher monthly allowances than the participants from regional universities. This pattern could result from unequal economic development that led to different levels of income in each province. Therefore, the participants from the provinces have significantly less parental income and monthly allowance. Nonetheless, another explanation could be that the participants from

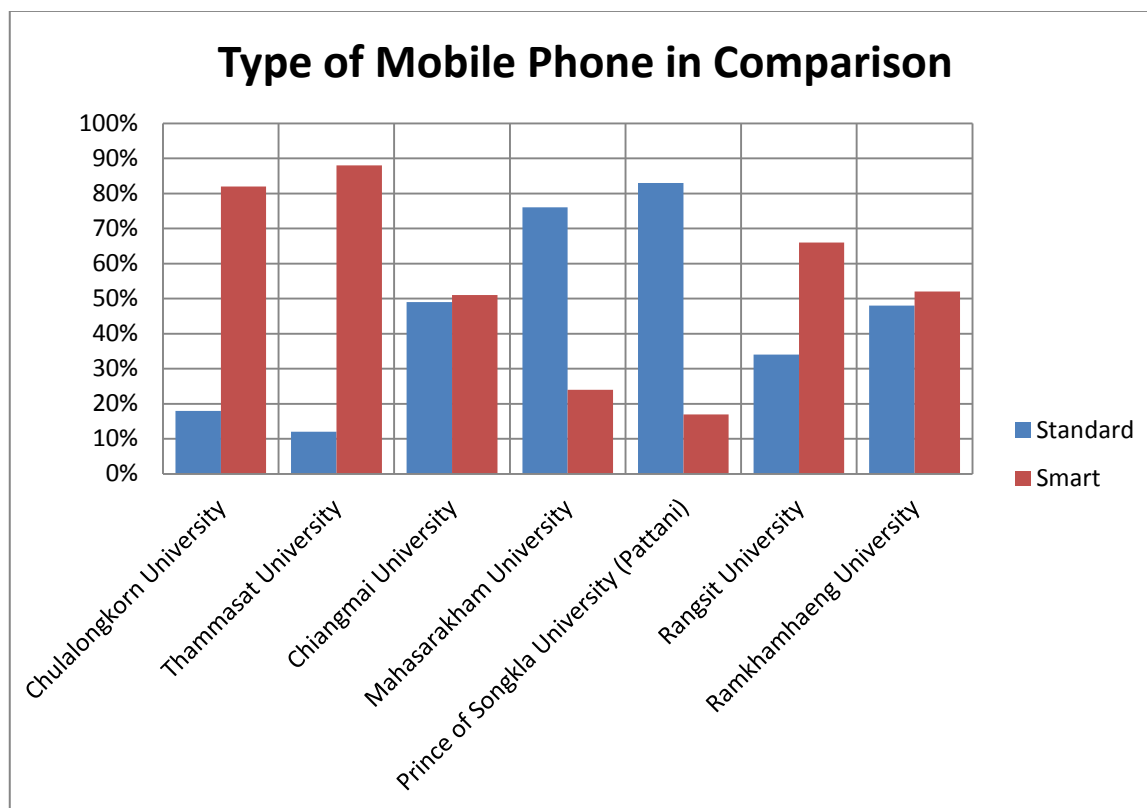
Bangkok-based universities need more money in order to stay in the metropolitan area with high living costs.

This data shows that, even though the majority of university students come from high income families, their economic statuses on campus are different, which raise the question whether all of the university students are from the same class fraction. It also further indicates that, as in the hypothesis, students were divided by the entrance process and university reputation according to their class fractions.

Mobile phone ownership

Another indicator of lifestyle is ownership of mobile phones. Arguably, a mobile phone is part of modern life, and more people than ever have at least one. A mobile phone is not only a communication device, but for many it also reflects the lifestyle and economic status of the owner. There are two types of mobile phone: standard and smart. The smart mobile phone is more useful since it can connect to the Internet. However, it comes with higher costs, both in the cost of the phone and the cost of monthly services. Among the smart mobile phones themselves, prices vary from cheap standard mobile phones to very expensive ones. Although there is no data on whether the parents or the students pay the monthly service costs or who actually pays for the device, mobile phone ownership can still indicate the students' lifestyle similar to the way monthly allowance does. It also indicates their status to other students; it is a symbol of wealth.

This section shows the percentage of ownership of mobile phones, both standard and smart, in each university which can reflect the lifestyle or even economic status of participants.

Figure 3-10: Type of Mobile Phone in Comparison

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Table 3-10: Type of Mobile Phone in Comparison

	Smart Mobile Phone	Standard Mobile Phone	Do Not Have	Total
Chulalongkorn University	98 (82%)	22 (18%)	0 (0%)	120 (100%)
Thammasat University	22 (88%)	3 (12%)	0 (0%)	25 (100%)
Chiangmai University	34 (51%)	33 (49%)	0 (0%)	67 (100%)
Maharakham University	31 (24%)	97 (76%)	0 (0%)	128 (100%)
Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)	8 (17%)	39 (83%)	0 (0%)	47 (100%)
Rangsit University	25 (66%)	13 (34%)	0 (0%)	38 (100%)
Ramkhamhaeng University	33 (52%)	31 (48%)	0 (0%)	64 (100%)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

This figure compares the percentage of mobile phone owners from each university. Bangkok-based universities have a high proportion of smart mobile phone owners while provincial universities have significantly fewer.

The ownership of mobile phones in each university not only reflects the lifestyle of students but also relates to their economic status. The smart mobile phones are one of consumer goods that also represent superiority lifestyle to others. Most participants from elite universities use the smart mobile phones that can signify they are rich and technology consumerists (or they just want to look like it). This suggests that students at elite Bangkok-based universities may have been cultivated of this lifestyle. In contrast, the participants from provincial universities use considerably fewer smart mobile phones; this figure implies that they likely could not afford them or, less likely, they just do not want the phones.

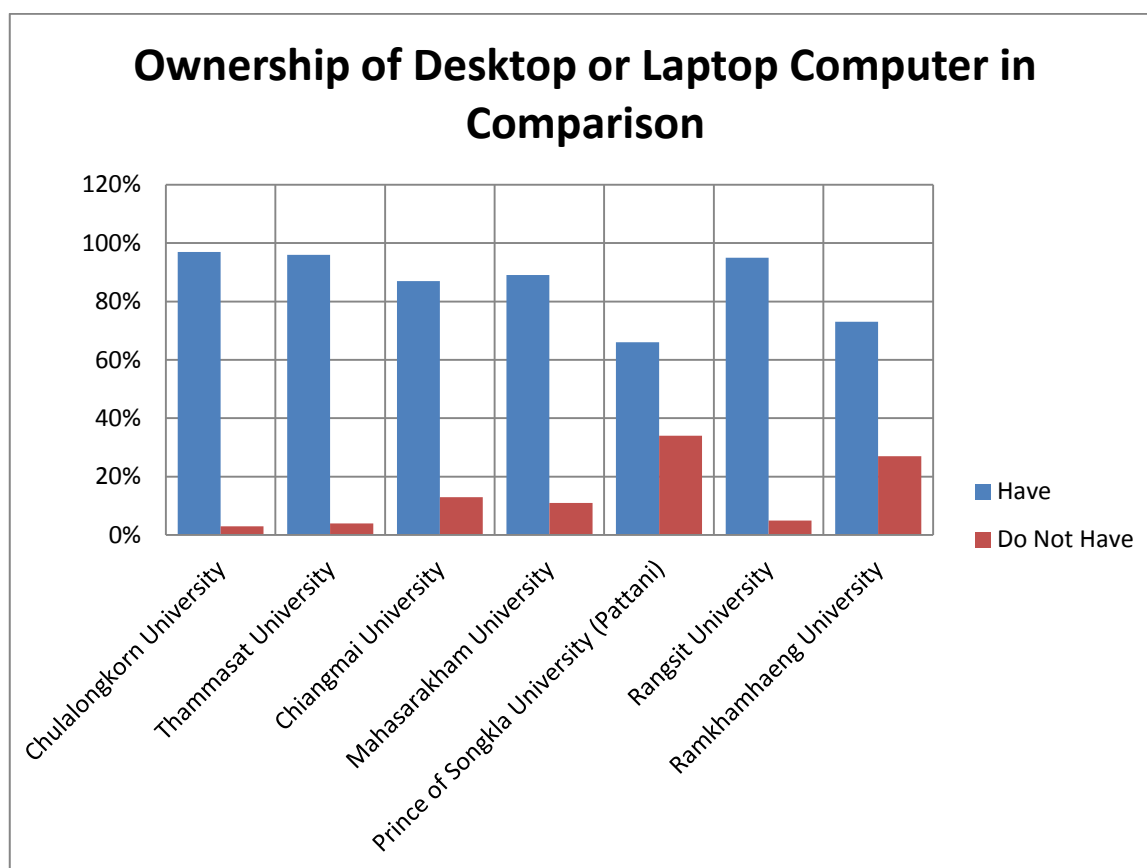
Again, this data shows the gap between the students from elite Bangkok-based universities and the students from other universities, indicating that not all university students share the same lifestyle. It is clear that students from elite Bangkok-based universities are from wealthier families than students from other types of university and have different lifestyle choices, which reinforces the hypothesis that the entrance process and university reputation divide students into class fractions. Moreover, data reveals that students from certain types of university come from certain class fractions and have an associated lifestyle.

Computer ownership

The ownership of computers can also reflect the lifestyle and economic status of owners and further demonstrate the hypothesis, in the same way that ownership mobile phones does. However, the computer is considered more important to the students than the mobile phone, and having one reflects not only lifestyle but also, more importantly, the

ability to support their study. Computers can cost less than some expensive models of mobile phone or may be more expensive but computer does not require monthly service cost like mobile phone, in case of using free university internet.

Figure 3-11: Ownership of Computer in Comparison



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Table 3 - 1: Ownership of Computer in Comparison

	Have	Do Not Have	Total
Chulalongkorn University	117 (97%)	3 (3%)	120 (100%)
Thammasat University	24 (96%)	1 (4%)	25 (100%)
Chiangmai University	58 (87%)	9 (13%)	67 (100%)
Maharakham University	114 (89%)	14 (11%)	128 (100%)
Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)	31 (66%)	16 (34%)	47 (100%)
Rangsit University	36 (95%)	2 (5%)	38 (100%)
Ramkhamhaeng University	47 (73%)	17 (27%)	64 (100%)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Although the numbers of participants from each university who have desktop or laptop computers are high, the difference between the Bangkok-based universities and regional universities can be noticed in the same way with the ownership of smart mobile phones. Desktop or laptop computers can be more or less expensive than smart mobile phones; however, they are more useful for university students. Therefore, it could be seen that the participants with limited budget choose to have computers rather than smart mobile phones; however, participants with a higher allowance can have both.

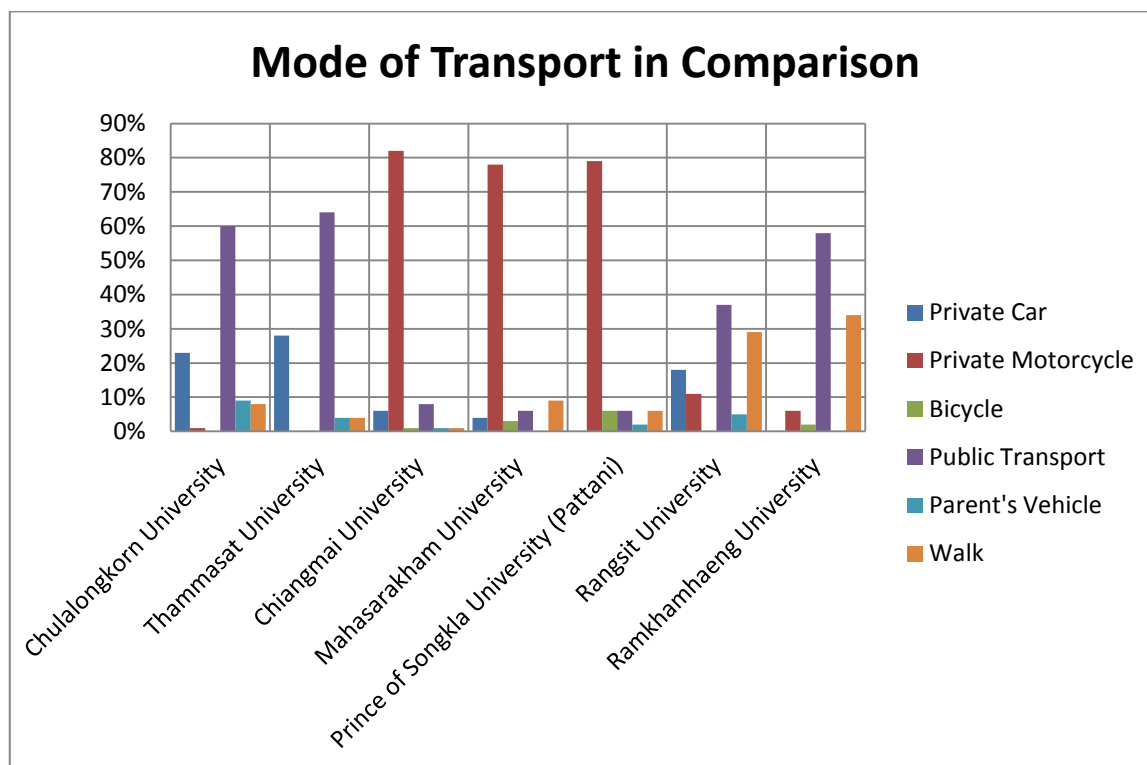
Although the differences among the universities are not as obvious, such differences are noticeable and share the same pattern with other findings in which the participants from Bangkok-based and high-reputation universities are wealthier than those from the provincial and lower-reputation universities.

Mode of transport

Mode of transport is another aspect of student lifestyle and economic status. It also represents a sense of superiority for some students and convenience for others. There were 6

categories in the questionnaire; private car, private motorcycle, bicycle, public transport, parent's vehicle and walk.

Figure 3-12: Mode of Transport in Comparison



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Table 3-11: Mode of Transport in Comparison

	C.U.	T.U.	C.M.U.	M.S.U.	P.S.U. (Pattani)	R.S.U.	R.U.
Private Car	27 (22%)	7 (28%)	4 (6%)	5 (4%)	0 (0%)	7 (18%)	0 (0%)
Private Motorcycle	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	55 (81%)	99 (78%)	37 (80%)	4 (11%)	4 (6%)
Bicycle	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	4 (3%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Public Transport	72 (60%)	16 (64%)	5 (7%)	8 (6%)	3 (6%)	14 (37%)	37 (58%)
Parent's Vehicle	11 (9%)	1 (4%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)
Walk	9 (8%)	1 (4%)	1 (2%)	11 (9%)	3 (6%)	11 (29%)	22 (34%)
Total	119 (100%)	24 (100%)	64 (100%)	125 (100%)	47 (100%)	40 (100%)	62 (100%)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

In order to see a clearer picture of the mode of transport in comparison, it is worth outlining the location of each case study university.

Chulalongkorn University is located in the centre of Bangkok where public transport is far better than the rest of the country. Beside public bus, public motorcycle and taxi, Chulalongkorn University has an underground train station and two sky train stations close by. Moreover, the university provides a free shuttle bus to nearby shopping complex and sky train station. At the same time, parking space inside the university is very scarce. At the Political Science Faculty, most parking is reserved for lecturers and post-graduate students. However, there are two choices for parking outside the university; parking at the side of the road for free at one's own risk or parking at commercial buildings nearby and paying for parking. In addition, traffic in Bangkok is often appalling, public transport like underground or sky train is much faster. Therefore, public transport is the most convenient choice for Chulalongkorn University students, even if they own a car. However, as seen in the figure above, a high proportion of private cars as a mode of transport are employed. This indicates

they can afford the high parking cost or they come to university very early and get parking space on the side of the road. This also suggests that private cars serve the purpose of socially superiority rather than convenience. Another mode of transport that needs to be clarified is “walk”. Chulalongkorn University has dormitories for their students; however, it cannot fully meet the high demand of students. Therefore, when participants answered with “walk”, it could be that they either walk from dormitories or from nearby student residences such as apartments or even high-end condominiums nearby.

The position of Thammasat University Tha Pra Chan campus could be the reason for students’ mode of transport preference. The university is situated in inner Bangkok, surrounded by government buildings, temples and important places such as the royal palace and the royal plaza (Sanam Luang). Although Thammasat University does not have as many choices of public transport as Chulalongkorn University, it has several bus stations, public motorcycle taxis, taxis and public river boats. Moreover, Thammasat University has even less parking space than Chulalongkorn University, mostly reserved for staff. Therefore, public transport may be the best choice for students. Nevertheless, there are a high proportion of private cars which may represent the privilege of international program students who can park their car in the same way as staff. In the case of elite universities, some students choose superiority lifestyle over convenient. This suggests that mode of transport is not only about rational choices but also a status symbol. Students from wealthy families use private cars to represent their higher economic status.

For provincial universities, public transport is far inferior to Bangkok. Although Chiangmai is one of the biggest cities in the North of Thailand, its public transportation is still behind Bangkok level. There are few reliable bus routes, limited taxis and, of course, no sky or underground train. Chiangmai does have local “red pickup”, which a kind of local bus but it is less convenient, compared to a standard bus system. Therefore, private vehicles

would be the preferred choice for local people. However, not everyone could afford to buy a car and traffic is not much better than Bangkok so, for most local people, a motorcycle is one of the best choices, particularly for students.

Maharakham University recently moved from city centre to the outskirts of Maharakham has a large campus and, of course, plenty of parking lots. However, Maharakham province provides even less choice of public transport than Chiangmai University. Moreover, due to their income, only a few students manage to have a car. Although it has local public transport from city centre to university, students preferred to use motorcycles instead.

Result from participants at Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) is not different from Chiangmai University or Maharakham University where the majority of participants use motorcycles as their mode of transport. Although Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) has plenty of parking spaces, none of the participants come to university by car, which could be due to their economic status. Public transport in Pattani is also less convenient. Therefore, like participants from other provincial universities, a motorcycle may be the best choice.

It is also worth noting that a motorcycle is a cheaper and more convenient mode of transport than a private car or public transport in provinces which encourages the use of motorcycle by students as shown in the figure above where a very high proportion of students from provincial universities use motorcycles as their mode of transport. Although the differences in each province do exist, results indicate a pattern that differentiates Bangkok-based universities' students from their provincial counterparts.

Pathum Thani, where Rangsit University is located, is not far from Bangkok and adequately developed in terms of public transportation, so it is no surprise to see a high percentage of participants in this category. Although Pathum Thani does not have sky or underground train like Bangkok, its public transport is still better than other provinces.

Rangsit University is surrounded by student accommodation, together with high numbers of participants from other provinces; therefore walking is one favourite choice for participants. Moreover, Rangsit University provides free transportation within the university area which greatly helps students. The high proportion of private cars may reflect high incomes. Although their parent's income are not very high, participants monthly allowances are among of the highest of the case studies. In addition, Rangsit University has a large parking area which may encourage the use of cars.

Since Ramkhamhaeng University is located inside Bangkok, public transport is more convenient than in other provinces therefore it is not surprising to see a high percentage of participants using this mode of transport. Although Ramkhamhaeng University does not have a nearby sky or underground train station, it does have a bus hub, public vans and others public transport. However, around one-third of participants claimed to walk from their residence to university which is a relatively high proportion. There are two possible reasons for the high amount of participants who walk to university; firstly, most participants from Ramkhamhaeng University are from various provinces and may stay at nearby accommodation; secondly, Ramkhamhaeng University is surrounded by student accommodation with many of them just across the street so there is no real need for transportation. Although Ramkhamhaeng University has plenty of parking space, none of the participants use a car as mode of transport. The reason could be that most participants are from other provinces and it could be difficult for them to find accommodation with parking space so the ownership of a car may not be very useful to them.

In sum, this category shows another difference between Bangkok-based universities and provincial universities. According to the finding, students at Bangkok-based universities are heavily dependent on public transport while students at provincial universities are rely heavily on motorcycles. This was due to; firstly, the difference in economic between people

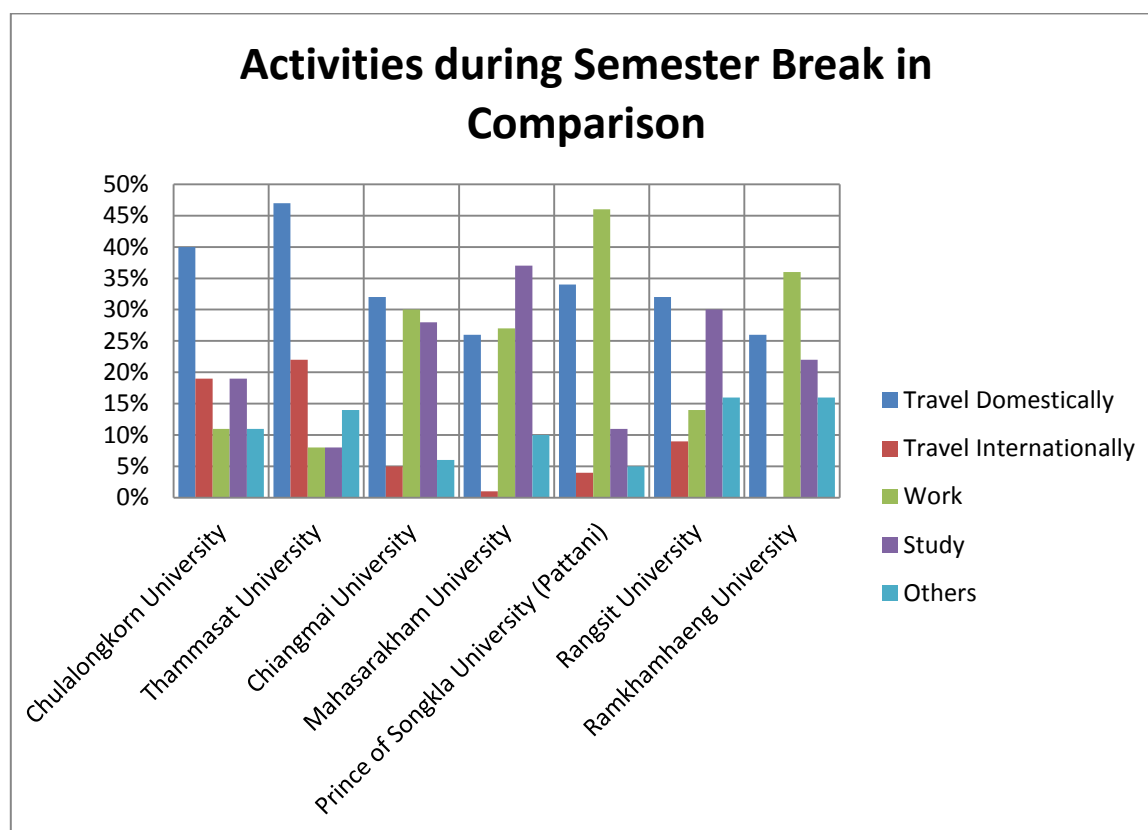
in Bangkok and provincial areas; secondly, the difference in traffic condition between Bangkok and provincial areas. This suggests that mode of transport is a rational choice for most students in terms of convenient and economic. However, some students, mostly from elite Bangkok-based universities, did not follow this trend and used private cars as mode of transport. This group of students came from high income families and used private cars to represent their higher status. Data indicates that participants divide into two groups; one choosing convenient over social status while the other choosing social status over convenient. It is worth pointing out that the latter may come from wealthier families than the former or they just wanted to be looked like one. For some students, mode of transport becomes a symbol of social supremacy in the same way with other lifestyles in this section.

In short, data indicates that, despite their ability to have private cars which may reflect upper middle class status or higher, participants from Bangkok-based universities experience an urban lifestyle and use public transport instead. In contrast, due to the ineffective public transport in regional provinces, participants from provincial universities use motorcycle as their mode of transport since many of them could not afford a car. Even at Chiangmai province which is highly developed and has many choices of transportation, participants from Chiangmai University preferred motorcycle as their mode of transport. This suggests the difference in lifestyle and economic status between Bangkok and provincial areas. This data emphasizes the difference in lifestyles between students at Bangkok-based and provincial universities as well as the unequal development in terms of wealth and public transportation between the metropolitan and other provinces. Again, data indicates that students in certain type of university are from different economic background. This is in accordance with the hypothesis that students were divided into class fractions by the entrance process and university reputation.

Activities during holiday or semester break

The next indicator of the middle class lifestyle is students' activities during their holiday or semester break. How they spend their leisure time could represent their lifestyle and economic status. Arguably, students from high income families would spend their free time mostly on leisure activities while students from low income families would spend their free time, if they have any, on more economically rewarding activities.

Figure 3-13: Activities during Semester Break in Comparison



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Table 3-12: Activities during Semester Break in Comparison

	Travel Domestically	Travel Internationally	Work	Study	Others	Total
Chulalongkorn University	74 (40%)	35 (19%)	20 (11%)	36 (19%)	21 (11%)	186 (100%)
Thammasat University	17 (47%)	8 (21%)	3 (9%)	3 (9%)	5 (14%)	36 (100%)
Chiangmai University	28 (32%)	4 (5%)	26 (30%)	24 (27%)	5 (6%)	87 (100%)
Maharakham University	43 (26%)	1 (1%)	45 (27%)	61 (36%)	17 (10%)	167 (100%)
Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)	19 (34%)	2 (4%)	26 (46%)	6 (11%)	3 (5%)	56 (100%)
Rangsit University	14 (32%)	4 (9%)	6 (14%)	13 (29%)	7 (16%)	44 (100%)
Ramkhamhaeng University	23 (26%)	0 (0%)	32 (36%)	20 (22%)	14 (16%)	89 (100%)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Domestic and international travel demonstrates the financial capability of spending free time on recreation and reflects both economic and social status. Yet, travel could have many possible destinations. For example, domestic travels can include the trips in which students go back to their hometowns in other provinces, stay at budget motels in nearby provinces, or even visit luxury resorts in faraway provinces. The same goes with international travel whose destinations could vary from neighbouring countries where the cost of travel and living is inexpensive or somewhere faraway such as Europe.

More than half of the participants from elite Bangkok-based universities (Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University) spend their free time in leisure activities while participants from other universities spend significantly more on non-leisure activities. Moreover, participants from both elite Bangkok-based universities who choose “other” list, activities such as, do nothing, go to volunteer camp, go to the fitness centre, training, participating in sport events, join youth camp and internship as their activities. This

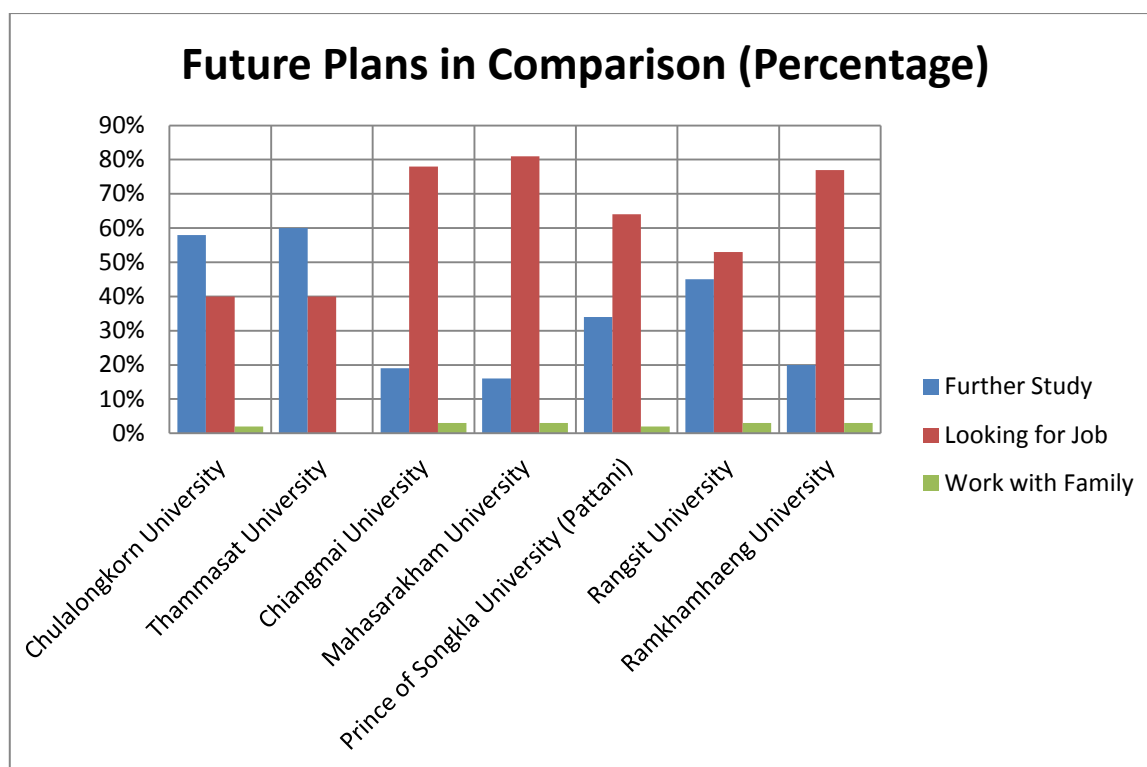
data shows that most of the participants from elite Bangkok-based universities are likely from high income families since they can afford to spend a considerable amount of money on relaxation. Participants from the rest of case-study universities spend most of their free time on non-leisure activities. In addition, those who choose “other” mostly do nothing, go back home or help earn money for their families.

Activities during students’ free time can also serve the purpose of superiority as same as other lifestyles. Travelling abroad becomes indicator of supremacy since only a few can afford. This separation is not only between students from different universities, but also between students in the same university. Although the majority of students could be identified as middle class based on their educational qualifications, it is clear that they are not the same. Students in elite Bangkok-based universities spend their free time on leisure activity more than students in other universities do; this further demonstrates that there is more than one middle class fraction and the middle class in Bangkok and provincial areas is very different.

Future plans

Life chances

Beside lifestyle, life chances of students in each university are also different. Future plans of the students can indicate their life chances of what they could possibly achieve or they think they could achieve.

Figure 3-14: Future Plans in Comparison

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Table 3-13: Future Plans in Comparison

	Further Study	Looking for Job	Work with Family	Total
Chulalongkorn University	48 (40%)	69 (57%)	3 (3%)	120 (100%)
Thammasat University	15 (60%)	10 (40%)	0 (0%)	25 (100%)
Chiangmai University	13 (19%)	52 (78%)	2 (3%)	67 (100%)
Maharakham University	20 (16%)	104 (81%)	4 (3%)	128 (100%)
Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)	16 (34%)	30 (64%)	1 (2%)	47 (100%)
Rangsit University	17 (45%)	20 (52%)	1 (3%)	38 (100%)
Ramkhamhaeng University	12 (20%)	47 (77%)	2 (3%)	64 (100%)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

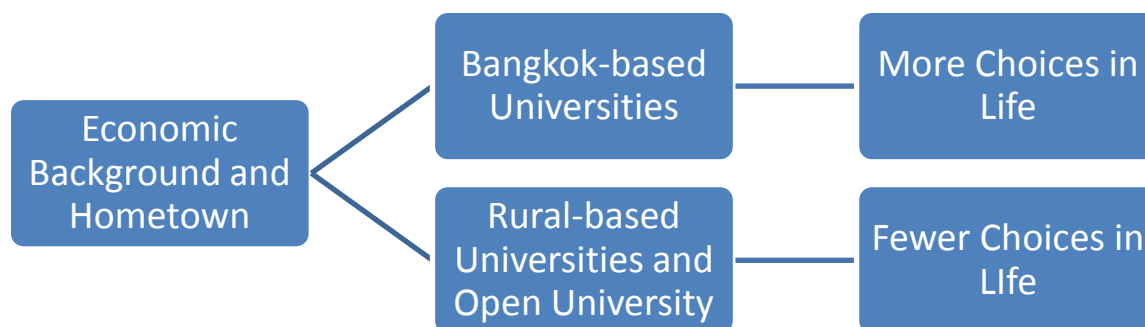
The students who chose “further study” likely have sufficient financial support from their family to pursue a post-graduate degree, which mean they have more choices in their life. In contrast, the students who chose “looking for job” and “work with family” may have limited choices since they may not be able to earn any higher degree or their family cannot support them or they need to have income right after graduation. The “work with family” category shows that the students’ families own some sort of business, either big or small.

This figure, again, reveals the difference between Bangkok-based universities, open university and provincial ones. More than half of the participants from elite Bangkok-based universities plan to study further while only a few from provincial universities and open university would do the same. It is also worth pointing out that the participants from Thammasat University are pursuing a combined bachelor-degree and master-degree program, so their further study could be at the doctoral level.

This data shows that the participants from elite Bangkok-based universities have more opportunities than their provincial counterparts do. On the other hand, the participants from provincial universities and the open university have fewer choices in their life. As noted in previous chapters, a university degree is highly related to income; generally, higher degrees mean higher income. Thus students from elite Bangkok-based universities who have better opportunities to study further could have better income in the future.

Data also indicate that economic background and hometown are important for a person’s life chance which can be illustrated as;

Figure 3-15: How Economic Background and Hometown Affect Students' Life Chances



The data presented shows that, due to their economic background and hometown, students were divided into different types of university, which support the hypothesis that the entrance process and university reputation divide students into class fractions. This division of students not only put certain students into certain types of university, but also place them into certain futures as well.

Conclusion

This chapter set out a brief history of higher education development in Thailand which started from training manpower for government, to provide higher education for a specific group of people, then, spread out to the middle class and some of the lower middle class. However, according to collected data, higher education in Thailand is not, practically, for everyone. This suggests that class mobility is limit for lower class. Moreover, the division between universities leads certain types of university to cater to certain types of students. In addition, collected data within this chapter are point to one conclusion: that students are

divided by their class background in putting them in the different kind of universities even before they study.

The middle class in Thailand has been closely associated with higher education. At the beginning, the middle class was mainly in Bangkok. However, since higher education and the middle class has developed throughout the country, the middle class was become more diverse with many fractions within it. One key element of the middle class is their education level. On this indication, every participant from each university should be in the same class since they are all studying at the same level. However, according to collected data, the middle class varies and, clearly, not all of them are the same.

In term of economic and social class, elite Bangkok-based universities like Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University are for students from high income families. As shown in this chapter, most students in both universities come from families with very good economic background and share the same cosmopolitan lifestyle. This group of students are Bangkok-based or from big cities like Chiangmai.

Provincial universities like Chiangmai University, Mahasarakham University and Prince of Songkla University (Pattani), which have the purpose of providing higher education in the different region, cater to lower income families than elite Bangkok-based universities. In these 3 universities, some students, particularly from Chiangmai University, are from high income families and have the same lifestyle as students in elite Bangkok-based universities. However, a larger amount of students are less fortunate. Students in provincial universities can be divided into 3 groups; students from high income families who share the same lifestyle with the students at Bangkok-based elite universities, students from good income families who do not fully share the same lifestyle with students from Bangkok-based elite universities, and students from lower income families.

Rangsit University also caters to certain types of students. Due to its status as Bangkok-based private university, tuition fees are considerably higher than public universities and, arguably, only students with strong economic background can afford the fees. However, Rangsit University participants are mostly from outside Bangkok and also share the lifestyle with regional universities therefore it could be seen that most participants in this university are mixed between high economic background students from both Bangkok and other provinces.

Ramkhamhaeng University, on the opposite end, is an open university where tuition fees are considerably lower so it suits students with limited budget. Despite being located in Bangkok, students of Ramkhamhaeng University are mostly from other provinces and from less wealthy families.

As noted earlier, a person's class is difficult to define and clear lines of each class do not exist. However, it can be generally described that, in term of class, the urban middle class who, clearly, have more choices, mostly study in elite Bangkok-based universities like Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, while some also study in any university they want. The provincial middle class who fewer choices, mostly study in provincial universities or private universities while a few also study in elite or open universities. And for the lower middle class, they mostly study in rural universities or open universities and it is only through scholarships that they could study at elite or private universities.

This findings show that students were divided into each type of university because of their economic background which support the hypothesis that the university reputation and entrance process divides students into class fractions. Moreover, this chapter answers the core question (how education shapes social classes in Thailand) by revealing that, firstly, education put students from certain classes into certain universities which affected their life

chances. Secondly, students with better life chances could generate better income and, in turn, put their children into a university that reflects their class status, thus perpetuating their class. Thirdly, education also prevents the lower classes from climbing up the class ladder by deterring them from better chances in their life. Lastly, education put students from the same background together which will help in the socialization process. It is worth noting that this does not mean every student in a university is from the same background. But data indicates a pattern that the majority of students in different types of university are of different backgrounds.

This is also reveal that, because of class fractions, students have different life chances. Social mobility is not only limit for lower class, but also people in the same class but different fractions. The provincial middle class has lower chances in social mobility than the Bangkok-based middle class because they have different life chances. Data indicates that social mobility between class fractions is difficult, even harder between classes. This deep division between Bangkok-based and provincial middle class create the clear line between them and may be one of reasons for Thailand recent political conflict.

In short, despite being use generally a single unit, the middle class has many fractions and, in term of lifestyles and opportunities, there are at least two (the urban middle class and the provincial middle class), and possibly four class fractions (the urban upper-middle class, the urban lower-middle class, the provincial upper-middle class and the provincial lower-middle class) within Thai society.

The next chapter will show the importance of lecturers, peer groups and the university environment in shaping student class perceptions.

Chapter 4 : Students and higher education

The previous chapter provided background, lifestyle and life chances of participants from each subject university. Background, lifestyle and life chances can indicate social class. It also revealed that students from certain economic backgrounds and with certain lifestyles study at certain types of university. It disclosed that students from high income families mostly study at elite Bangkok-based universities, while the less fortunate mainly study at provincial universities, private universities or open universities. Moreover, it uncovered that students from a particular type of university generally have a particular lifestyle. This finding indicates that, to the degree university students can be seen as middle class, they can be divided into, at least, urban middle class and provincial middle class fractions based on their hometown and background.

As revealed in the last chapter, a university degree is a minimum requirement for the middle class and crucial for a person's life chances and class mobility, unless a person is born wealthy. However, higher education is not only acting as a class ladder and barrier, but also as a creator or manipulator of class perceptions. Within higher education, class perceptions will be shaped. Therefore, this chapter will show how students' class perceptions have been shaped by higher education. This chapter will focus on university students and how higher education, as a whole, changes their class perception.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate the following hypotheses:

1. University reputation and the entrance process divide incoming students into class fractions.
2. By shaping students' perceptions, the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.

3. The university facilities, students' peer groups and the university environment in general are important factors and essential for producing class perception.

Moreover, this chapter aims to answer three core questions: firstly, who is the middle class; secondly, how does education shape social classes; and thirdly, what is the importance of the university environment in shaping class perceptions of students and Thai society.

This chapter investigates university students from subject universities to understand how education influenced their class status and class perceptions. It investigates students' understanding about class from their pre-university level and during the time they studied about class in university. Moreover, it explores the university environment and its influence on students' perceptions. It will show how education helps shape both students' perceptions and Thai society, and also helps identify the middle class. The data was collected from students through questionnaires and focus group discussions.

As the previous chapter revealed that participants could be divided by type of university, this chapter will look at subject universities according to their types, not individually.

Class as seen by students

In order to fully understand class and its effect on university students, it is worth looking into their general understanding of class first. Students were asked several questions that reflected their knowledge about class, not only from higher education but also the time before entering university.

As the participants were university student from various years, it may be impossible to obtain answers regarding class without any direct or indirect influence from higher education. However, this set of questions was designed to be basic and general, so participants could

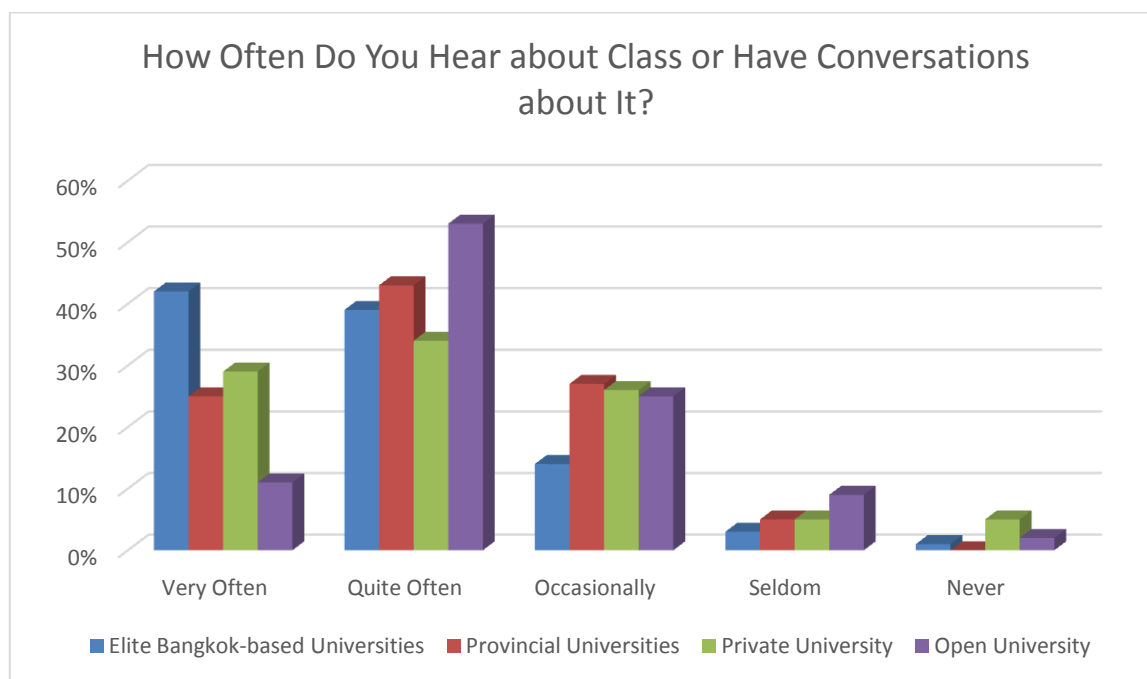
answer without any need of university knowledge. Some questions ask specifically about their knowledge of class before entering university. Their answers provide foundation in order to compare how participants' perception on class have or have not changed.

Everyday class

Besides education, ordinary people would have heard about class from many channels such as media or they may feel it through personal experience in daily life. Media like news or social networks spread information on inequality amongst people with different backgrounds and, unavoidably, highlight the notion of class. Moreover, Thai soap operas on most television channels would have some content relating to class, one way or another. This part aims to investigate the relationship between class and students in their everyday life. Asking the frequency of students hearing or having conversations about class could show how important class is to their daily life. In addition, in Thailand's latest political conflict, class was cited as one of the causes by media, academics and even the disputants. This political conflict was reported by almost every communication channel, meaning it was almost impossible to avoid hearing about it. Thus, in terms of personal experience, Thais could hear or have conversations about class in many ways, through education or in their daily life.

In fact, all Thais would have heard about class from education. Thais must learn at least the basic of Royal language and how to behave toward other social statuses, which could indicate the difference in classes. However, those that claimed to have not heard or had any conversations about class may not think Royal language has anything relevant to class, since Thais also use different words for different types of people such as monks, teachers or the elderly.

Figure 4-1: How Often Do You Hear about Class or Have Conversations about it?

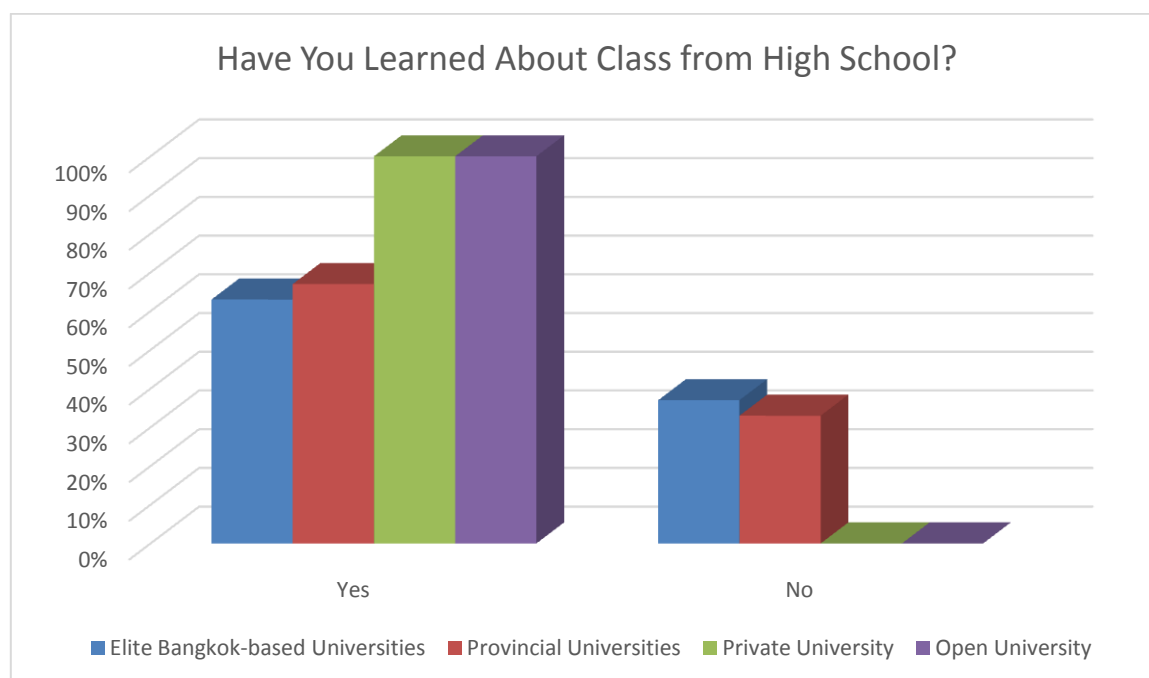


Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

It is clear that class is not far from students' thoughts. When asked how often they hear about class or have conversations about it, almost all students have heard or had conversations about it with only a few who claimed to never hear or have any conversation about class. As shown in the figure above, the majority of participants from every case study university has heard or had conversations about class, though to different degrees. Interestingly, some students claimed to never hear or have any conversations about class. It is highly unlikely for anyone to have not heard or had any conversations about class, given the recent political conflict in Thailand. However, this so called "class conflict" may deter students from disclosing opinions regarding class, or they may simply not care about it.

Hearing or having conversations about class indicates that students know and understand something about class, no matter what their understanding might be, people without any knowledge or understanding of class would not be able to identify any conversations regarding class and may not be able to talk about class in detail. Of course, despite the majority of students claiming to have heard or had conversations about class, it may not be the case that all students would perceive class in the same way. Each student may have their own interpretation or perception of class, which may be different from others. Students who see class as inequality would think differently from students who see class as a necessary division of labor. We can thus investigate students' basic knowledge about class by looking into what students have learned from high school.

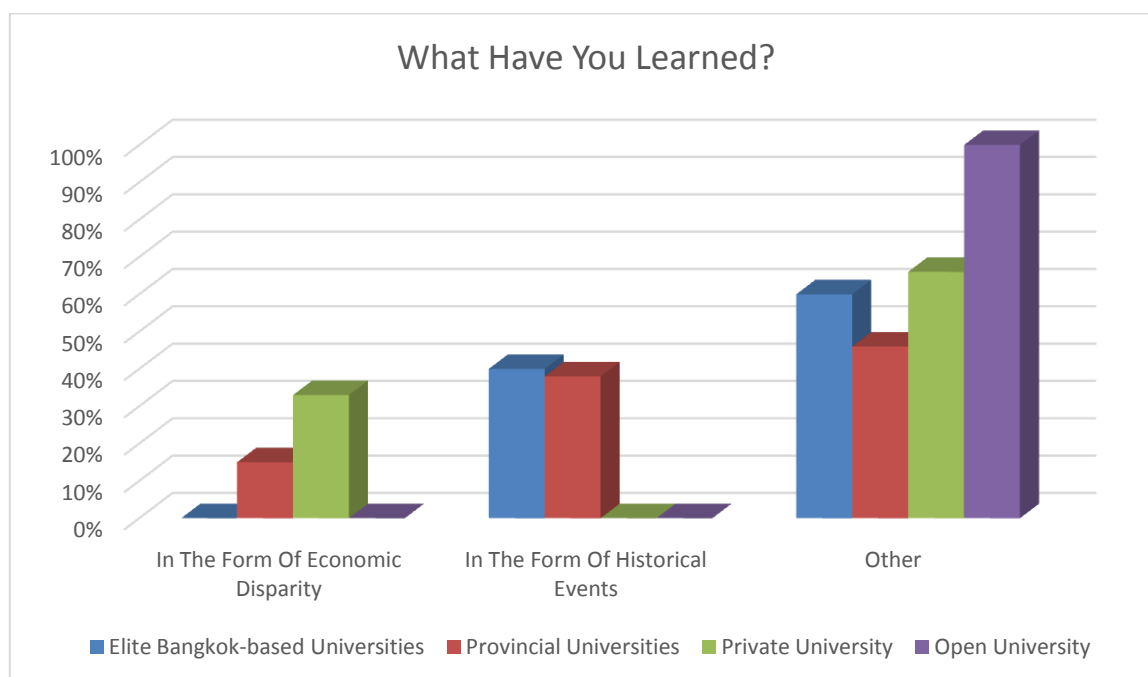
Figure 4-2: Have You Learned About Class from High School?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

According to focus group discussions, a majority of students from all types of universities claimed to have studied about class in high school. However, there are a considerable amount of students from elite Bangkok-based universities and provincial universities that claimed to have not studied about class in high school. Their reason is quite simple; they were in the science branch. In high school, students have 2 options in their study: a social science branch and a science branch. Social science related content would be less important in the science branch. This indicates that knowledge about class is not reaching everyone, particularly students outside social science. Students who claimed to have learned about class from high school did not disclose their branch. However, it is likely that most of them were in the social science branch, since they study political science at university. The content they have learned can be grouped into 3 major categories: in the form of economic disparity, in the form of historical events and other.

Figure 4-3: What Have You Learned?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

The figure above shown the content students have learned during their high school years. For elite Bangkok-based universities, only participants from Chulalongkorn University are included in this figure, since all participants from Thammasat University were in the science branch in high school. Nearly half of students from the elite Bangkok-based university claimed to have learned about class in the form of historical events rather than as economic disparity. For example, a student from the elite Bangkok-based university noted that, despite having reference to class in high school textbooks, the texts only describe historical events²⁹. One of his friends added that she learned about class in high school in regard to the Sakdina system and the monarchy only³⁰.

Students from provincial universities shared the same view. One male student claimed that, in high school, class was not a major theme of study. He added that the only issue related to class is how Thais discontinued the slavery system³¹. Another male student claimed that class is hidden in the Thai history subject³². A male student claimed he had studied about class only in historical terms, by learning about Thai Kings and their importance³³. Another student argued that, despite learning historical events from high school, they were taught only about the event but not the meaning of the event or the reason behind the event³⁴. Yet another male student claimed to study class from the subject of history, such as the slavery system in Thailand³⁵.

²⁹ Focus group discussion, April 2013.

³⁰ Focus group discussion, April 2013.

³¹ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

³² Focus group discussion, January 2013.

³³ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

³⁴ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

³⁵ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

Some participants from provincial universities and the private university argued that they learned about class in high school only in terms of economic status. One female student claimed to have learned only very generally about class in high school. She claimed to understand only how to separate class into the upper class, the middle class and the lower class³⁶. Another male student added that he studied about class from high school by learning of the gap between rich and poor³⁷.

Although the majority of students claimed to have learned about class in high school and can be categorized as shown above, there is one common ground for every participant. According to collected data, they all believed that their study about class was not in depth or sufficient. This finding indicates that knowledge about class in high school is limited and students may better understand class from their life experiences before they entered university. Moreover, it also indicates that their knowledge of class in terms of concepts would come from university education. Since students have learned about class in high school only at a minimal level, their knowledge would rely on higher education which indicates the importance of universities and lecturers to their class perceptions as noted in the hypothesis that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society. To better understand how university and its environment affect students' class perceptions, the next part will look into students' basic knowledge of class.

First reaction to class

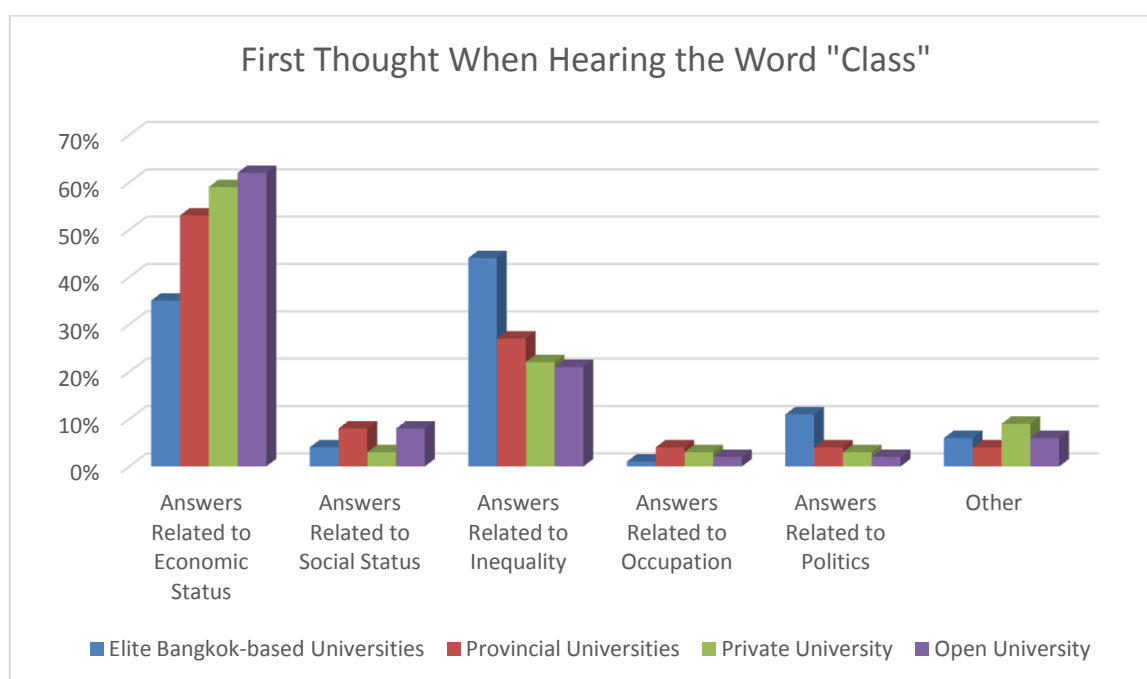
This part aims to examine participants' immediate reaction to the word "class". By asking participants during focus group discussions to provide their first thought when they

³⁶ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³⁷ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

hear the word “class”, this question could show what they really think or understand about class. It is likely that their ideas about class would be a reflection of their life experiences and education, both from high school and higher education. It is worth remembering, however, that the number of participants from each university varied, so that the percentages do not reflect equal numbers. Nonetheless, this data provides a clear image of how students understand class.

Figure 4-4: First Thoughts When Hearing the Word “Class”



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

From the open-ended question, students' answers mostly related to economic status. In fact, almost all participants grouped into this category answered with the phrase “economic status”. This is not surprising since economic status is the easiest indication of class and, in daily life, it is almost impossible to avoid seeing differences in terms of lifestyle or economic status.

Answers related to inequality were also common. Students' answers included double standards, privilege, advantages, separation, inferiority and many more. This indicates that, unlike economic status, inequality can be in various forms and students may not necessarily see it the same way. Another interesting point from this figure is the fact that participants from elite Bangkok-based universities think of class in forms of inequality more than economic status. As shown in the figure, the majority of participants from provincial universities, the private university and the open university think about class in terms of economic status while participants from elite Bangkok-based universities seem to pay more attention to inequality. It could be that, since most of elite Bangkok-based universities' students are from high income families, they may not pay much attention to economic disparity but look more at social status.

There are some interesting answers in the other category as well. For example, one student from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed to think of "Chulalongkorn University" when hearing the word "class"³⁸. He studies at Chulalongkorn University, one of the elite Bangkok-based universities in Thailand. His answer may indicate either a feeling of superiority about his institution or sarcasm. It is hard to tell. Two students answered with "insult" which may reflected their experiences or their views that a certain class would insult the lower class³⁹. One student from a provincial university answered with "Red and Yellow shirts"⁴⁰ indicating that student may perceive contemporary divisions as class conflict.

In any case, this data shows students perceived class in two major ways: economic status and social inequality. This may be due to their life experiences or education, both at high school and university levels. It is quite common to experience economic disparity or

³⁸ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³⁹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁴⁰ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

inequality in daily life. However, it may also indicate that students have learned about class in the same way, hence they share the same view. In addition, university is a good source of students' daily life experiences. Therefore, it would be logical to believe that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society, the university environment and student peers are perhaps important factors, and university facilities and the university environment in general are maybe essential for producing class perception. This chapter will further examine these hypotheses and some evidence on how the university and its environment may or may not affect students' class perceptions.

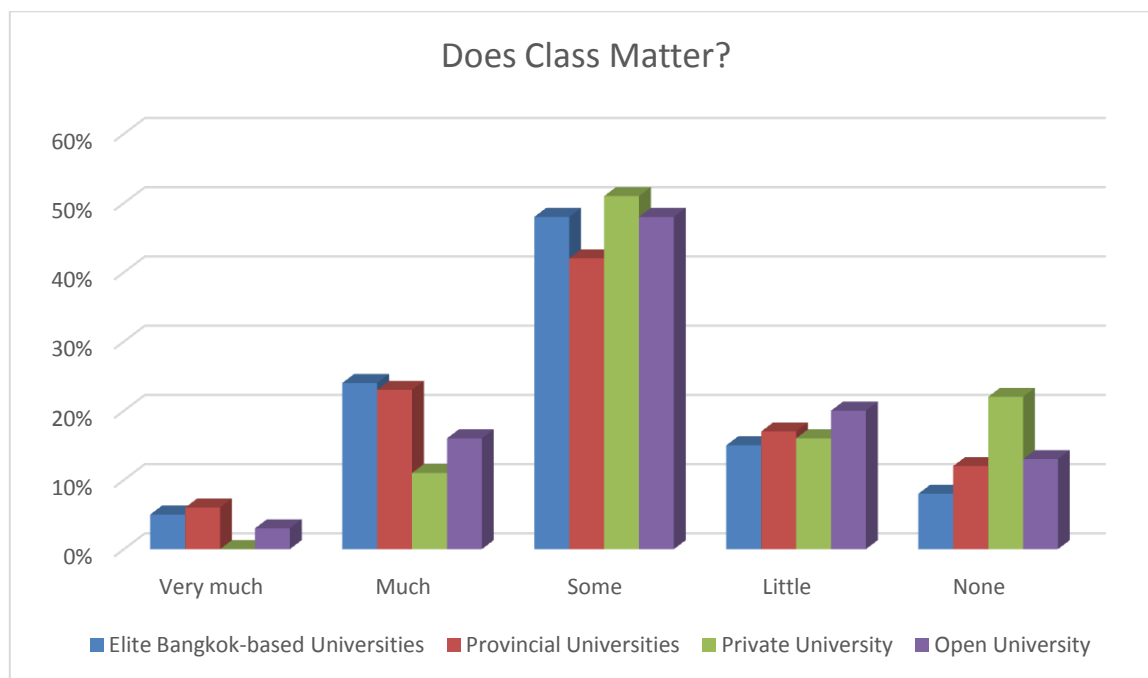
Class matters

This part aims to investigate the importance of class towards students. Data in this part come from questionnaires and focus group discussion. From the questionnaire, participants were asked to evaluate the importance of class to them. From focus group discussion, participants were asked which class they want to be.

The first question would represent participants' view of class, whether it is important to them, or society, or whether they care about it or not. The second question would serve two purposes: firstly, it shows what class they prefer and, secondly, it demonstrates whether class matters to them or not. For the second purpose, it could be hypothesized that participants who claimed that class does not matter to them, would not care about which class they are. Therefore, in principle, if class really does not matter, participants should not mind being in the lower classes. This question thus provides a check on whether students might care more about class than they admit. Moreover, by knowing their reasons, it will show how students understand class. Higher education inevitably plays a major role in students' knowledge. Therefore, this part will reveal how the university can shape students' ideas about class as set

out in the hypothesis that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.

Figure 4-5: Does Class Matter?

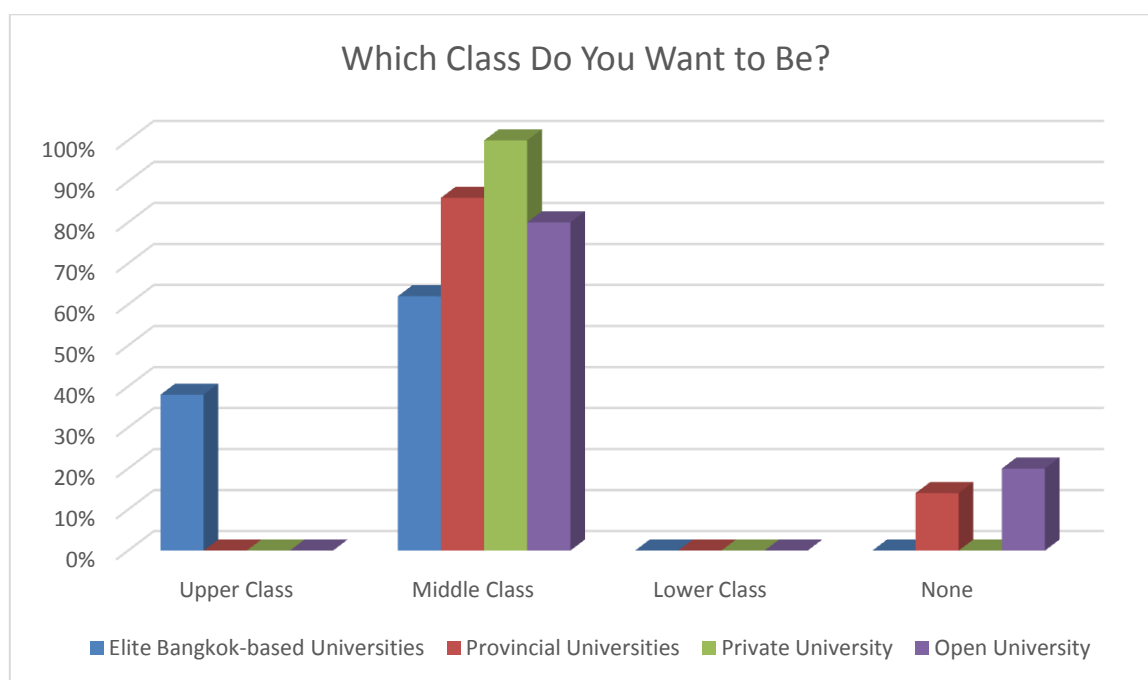


Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

According to questionnaires, the majority of students from every university claimed class matters to them at “some” level. With many participants choosing “little” and “none”, data indicates that class is not an important issue for most participants. When looking in detail, the figure shows that participants from elite Bangkok-based universities, provincial universities and the open university cared more about class than their private university counterparts. In fact, the percentage of students from the private university who claimed class does not matter is almost double the other types of university. In addition, none from the private university claimed class matters “very much” and only 10 percent claimed it mattered “much”.

Since the data is from questionnaires, there is no detail on the reasons behind their choices. However, it could reflect the difference in opinions between public universities and the private university. Nonetheless, this data shows the overall picture of how students think about class. The results from the focus group discussion in the next question seem to contradict this data. Despite the majority of students claiming class does not matter to them, none of them wanted to be lower class and only a few wanted to not have class at all.

Figure 4-6: Which Class Do You Want to Be?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

From the figure above, students were asked about their preferred class, and it is clear that most participants wanted to be middle class. Almost all participants from provincial universities, the private university and the open university wanted to be middle class with some from provincial universities and the open university not wanting to be part of any class.

Interestingly, around one-third of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities expressed their desire to be upper class.

Data suggests that students would have certain ideas about each class when choosing which class they preferred to be. These ideas resulted from many channels such as social learning, both inside and outside university, and education, at all levels. Only students from elite Bangkok-based universities expressed their desires to be upper class; this may be related to the findings in previous chapters that most of them are from high income families. Nonetheless, some students may not really know what upper class is and their choice may be based on assumption regarding the upper class. One female student from an elite Bangkok-based university fully expressed her desire to be upper class; however, according to her, she was not sure what is it like to be upper class.⁴¹ Another female student from the same university claimed she does not like class but, she insists, upper class is better than middle class.⁴² These examples emphasize that students may not know who or what upper class is.

In addition, not knowing what constitutes the upper class may have prevented many students from wanting to be upper class. Some students linked upper class with royalty and it is clearly impossible for them to reach that level. As noted by one student from a provincial university, “being in the upper class makes it harder to approach and interact with the lower class. The middle class is more flexible, it can interact with both upper and lower classes. If the upper class wants to interact with the lower class, it needs regulation, security and so on but the middle class can go anywhere they want”⁴³. Judging from his words, this participant may refer to the upper class as the royal family since he mentioned regulations which are well-beyond the widen upper class in the normal context. In contrast, some students may link

⁴¹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁴² Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁴³ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

upper class with very rich people so that it is possible for some to reach that position as shown in the case of students from elite Bangkok-based universities who preferred to be upper class. The findings suggest that students' preferences on class may be heavily related to their definitions of each class as well as their estimation of themselves. These definitions would be influenced, at least partly, by education and lecturers who pass knowledge of class to them. This is in accordance with the hypotheses that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.

In contrast, none of participants want to be lower class, although a lot of them claimed to not care about class. This suggests that students believed the lower class is not good enough for them. This perception may come from many sources including social value and education.

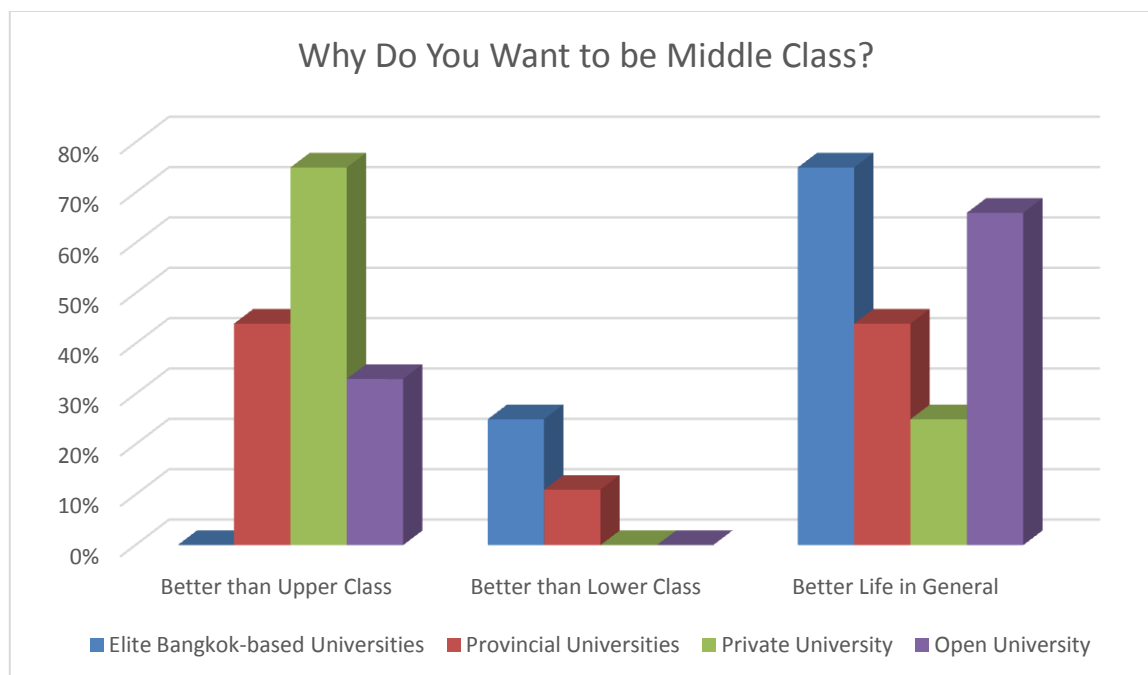
A few students from provincial universities and the open university claimed to not want to have class at all. One female student from a provincial university claimed she did not need to be part of a class as she only wanted to have a peaceful life.⁴⁴ One male student from the same university claimed he did not want class in society at all.⁴⁵ Two students from the open university claimed they did not want any privilege from class and want everyone to have the same rights.⁴⁶

As shown in the above figure, the majority of students expressed their desire to be middle class. Their reasons are varied and can be grouped into 3 major categories: that it is better than upper class, that it is better than lower class and that it is better life in general.

⁴⁴ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

⁴⁵ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

⁴⁶ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

Figure 4-7: Why Do You Want to be Middle Class?

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

As shown in the figure above, in the first category, no participants from elite Bangkok-based universities wanted to be middle class because it is better than upper class. However, participants from other types of university wanted to be middle class because it is better than upper class.

Students who directly claimed the middle class is better than the upper class believed the upper class faces more disadvantages than the middle class. One male student from a provincial university pointed to acceptance from society as his reason, as in his words, “some may honor the upper class but a lot of people would insult or look down on them”⁴⁷. Another male student claimed that being upper class brings more responsibility, while the middle class

⁴⁷ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

can interact and connect with any class they choose.⁴⁸ Yet another male student claimed that the upper class is too arrogant.⁴⁹

Students from the private university also thought there are disadvantages of being upper class. One male student claimed that the upper class is not always happy since they need to worry about their wealth.⁵⁰ Another male student claimed that as most rich people have debts, they are not truly rich.⁵¹ One male student from the open university claimed he wanted to be middle class because he does not like the way the upper class looks down on the lower class.⁵²

It is interesting that many students wanted to be middle class because they believe it is better than the upper class. Their perceptions may come from their experiences with the upper class or from having been told this. Higher education may also play a major role here. We have established in previous chapters that higher education is primarily populated by the middle class and can be seen as a middle class institution. Therefore, it is not a surprise that higher education would promote middle class values to students over upper class values. It also suggests the importance of university [as noted in the hypothesis that the universities play a major role] in shaping class perceptions in Thai society. It is also worth remembering that the middle class believed they are superior to the upper class in other studies (Frykman & Lofgren 1987 and Skeggs 2004) which may be the reason why many participants compare themselves favourably to the upper class.

⁴⁸ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

⁴⁹ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

⁵⁰ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁵¹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁵² Focus group discussion, February 2013.

In contrast, some students from provincial universities and the private university believed the lower class has more disadvantages than the middle class. Interestingly, only a few students directly argued that the middle class is better than the lower class, despite the fact that all participants did not want to be lower class. One possible explanation is that the students fully believed they are better than lower class, so they saw no need to compare the middle class to the lower class, which may be another reason why students compared themselves to the upper class. For example, a male student from one elite Bangkok-based university said being lower class would make his life more difficult.⁵³ A female student argued that the middle class or upper class could walk in and out of any shop while the lower class could not afford to do so.⁵⁴ Participants from provincial universities argued even further that lower classes needed help from the middle class. One male student wanted to be part of the middle class as he noted “who would not choose a good thing?”⁵⁵

The next category is “better life in general”. This category and the previous one are quite similar. The difference between them is that while one is directly linked with the lower class, the other is not directly linked to the lower class and may also include fractions within the middle class or even the upper class.

The majority of participants wanted to be middle class because it gave them a better life in general. For example, one student from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that, since he wanted to live comfortably, he wanted to be middle class.⁵⁶ One student from a provincial university claimed that being middle class would bring more options in his life.⁵⁷

⁵³ Focus group discussion, April 2013.

⁵⁴ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

⁵⁵ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

⁵⁶ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁵⁷ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

One student from the open university wanted to be middle class, not upper or lower class, as she is happy with her life now [she implies that she is middle class].⁵⁸

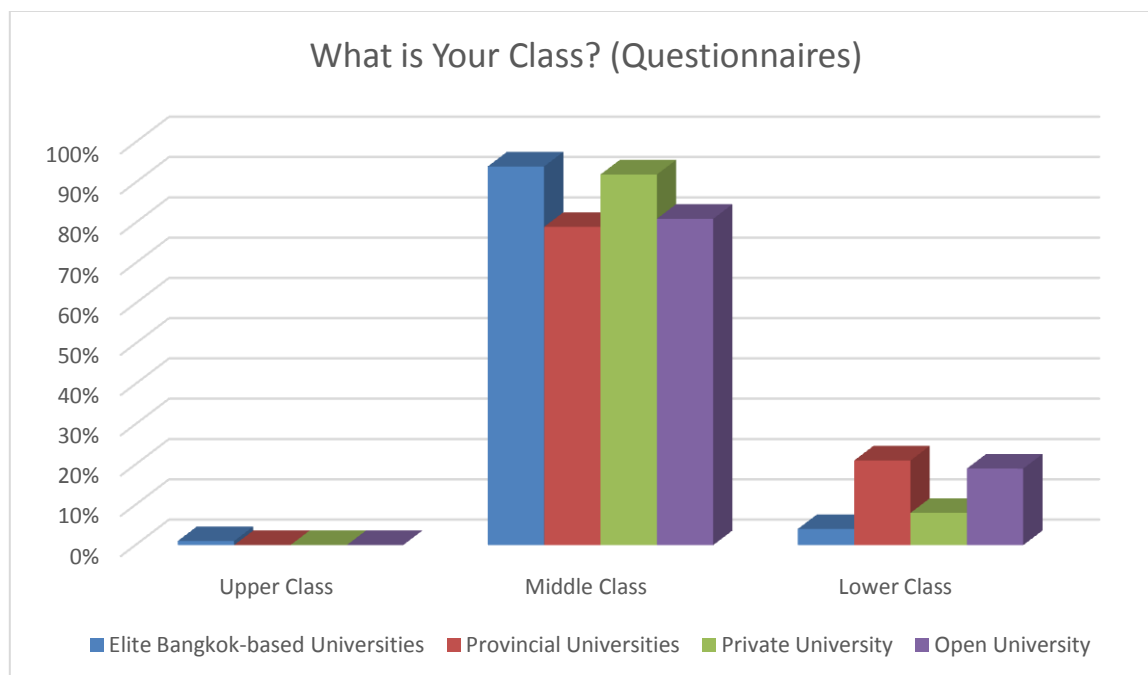
Although participants from elite Bangkok-based universities said they wanted to be middle class, they did not think the middle class is better than the upper class. This shows that these students might actually welcome being part of the upper class, if possible. In contrast, other students seemed to believe, or be manipulated to believe, that the middle class is better than other classes. Data from this figure and the previous figure indicate that students from elite Bangkok-based universities see middle and upper classes in one way while students from other types of university see them somewhat differently. This could be the effect from different education and/or life experiences between elite institutions and the rest. This finding is in accordance with the hypothesis that universities play a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.

Who are you?

The previous part revealed the importance of class and differences in class preference between students from elite Bangkok-based universities and other universities. This part will investigate further and see how students identify themselves and their friends in terms of class. The result could emphasize the hypothesis that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions. From questionnaires, students were asked to identify their class. From focus group discussion, students were asked the same question and also to identify the class of their friends.

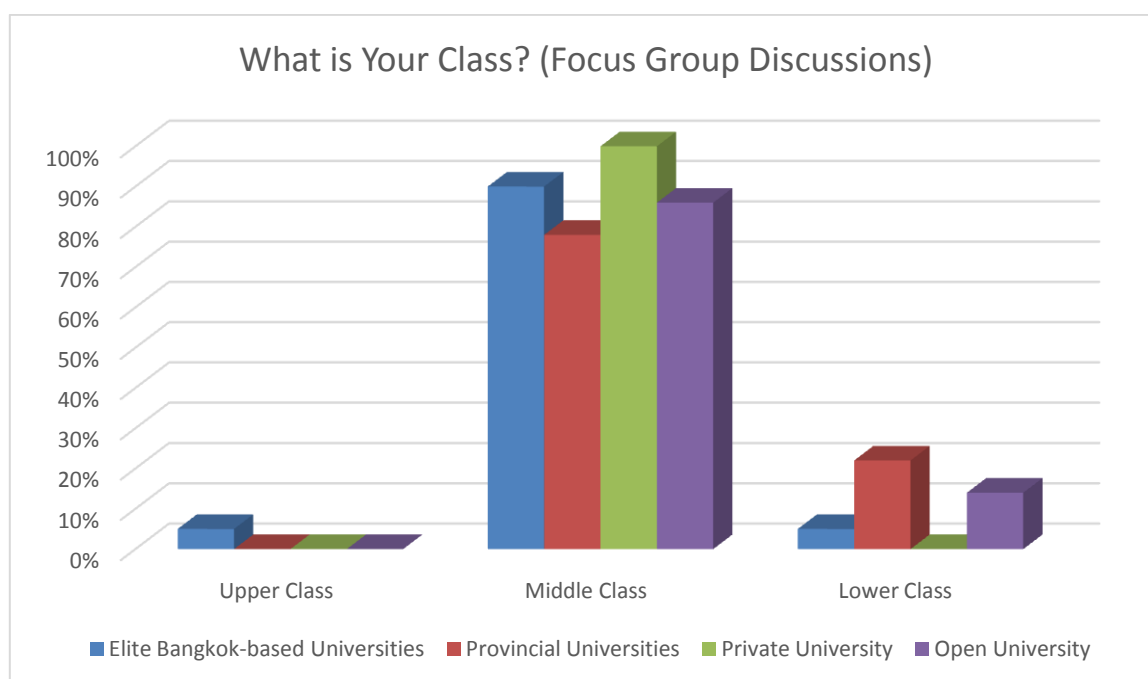
⁵⁸ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

Figure 4-8: What is Your Class? (Questionnaires)



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Figure 4-9: What is Your Class? (Focus Group Discussions)



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Data from questionnaires and focus group discussions are almost identical. As shown in both figures, the majority of participants from every university believe they are middle class. Some participants claimed to be lower class, though none wanted to be lower class in the previous part, while a few from elite Bangkok-based universities claimed to be upper class. This confirms the existence of a small percentage of participants who claimed to be upper class.

Although these figures are almost identical, there is an interesting difference in the data from the two figures. From questionnaires, some participants from the private university claimed to be lower class. However, from focus group discussions, none of them did so. There are at least two possible explanations. Firstly, students who answered questionnaires and students in focus group discussions are different people, due to the difference in number of participants. However, anonymity makes it impossible to tell. Secondly, students who answered questionnaires and students in focus group discussions are the same people, but they have changed their answers. In the case of the second explanation, this may indicate that participants from the private university did not want to declare themselves as lower class in front of their friends. This implies that being lower class is not fully embraced within the private university community.

Interestingly, some students from every type of university claimed to be lower class, including nearly 20 percent of students from provincial universities. It is worth pointing out that, in this thesis, the provincial university category is comprised of 3 universities, which means a higher number of participants than other types of university, hence the raw number is also high. This data further demonstrates there are at least two types of students who wanted to be middle class: those that already are middle class and those that are currently from the lower class. Moreover, these figures reveal that the majority of students claimed to be middle class but, in the previous figure, only a few of them wanted to be upper class. This reinforces

the findings from the previous part that most participants believed middle class is best for them.

In addition, this data is in accordance with the findings from Chapter 3 that there are fractions within the middle class (urban/provincial and/or upper/middle/lower). From the above two figures, most students claimed to be middle class, however, from the previous part, a high number of them still wanted to be middle class because they wanted to have a better life. Comparing these two findings, this indicates that there are, at least, one superior middle class fraction and one inferior middle class fraction. This suggests that students may perceive themselves as lower middle class; however, there are other fractions of the middle class above them hence they want to be in the higher middle class fraction, not upper class. In other words, mobility within the middle class may be more important than mobility between classes.

Students' reasons for claiming to be a certain class are very interesting. A student from one elite Bangkok-based university who claimed to be upper class provided his reason as "when I look at other people, I think they are the middle class, however, other people also think of me as middle class. But we are somehow different, so I do not think I am middle class. Then what am I?"⁵⁹ His view indicates that class boundaries are not clear. Moreover, despite the fact that there are fractions with the middle class, a student may understand middle class as a single unit hence claiming himself as upper class.

When it comes to reasons for believing they are middle class, responses can be grouped into 3 major themes: family economic background, family occupation background and education level.

⁵⁹ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

Figure 4-10: Reasons for Choosing Middle Class

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Students from every participating university agreed that family economic background is the main reason for being middle class. This figure is in accordance with the result from questionnaires which asked students' thoughts when they first hear the word "class" in the previous part. It emphasizes that economic status is the most common indicator for social class. As shown, at least 30 percent of participants from every university claimed they are middle class based on their families' economic background. For example, one male student from a provincial university claimed to be middle class as his family does not have much money.⁶⁰ Another male student agreed, he believed he is middle class because he is from a middle income family.⁶¹ One female student from another provincial university also claimed

⁶⁰ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

⁶¹ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

to be middle class because her family economic status is “self-sufficient”.⁶² One male student from the private university claimed to be middle class because of his economic status. He argued that his family has enough to live without any debt.⁶³ Their views suggest the difficulty in identifying the middle class. Since people value money or wealth differently, when some claimed to have “middle income” or be “self-sufficient” it may not have the same meaning to other people. Nonetheless, it also indicates that the ideas of “self-sufficiency” or “limited money” were promoted to them through many channels, including education.

Beyond their shared view that economic status can indicate class, other reasons for being middle class included more diverse opinions. None from elite Bangkok-based universities and the private university believed they are middle class because of their educational level or their families’ occupational background. In contrast, around 40 percent of participants from the open university claimed to be middle class because of their families’ occupational background while half of provincial universities’ students used educational level as an indicator.

Reasons for choosing different indicators are very interesting. In terms of occupation, one female student from a provincial university asserted herself as middle class because of her father’s occupation as a school principal. According to her, people around her, including adults, look at her as superior to other teenagers. In her words, “when I and my father go to school and talk with high ranking people there, I feel different from other kids and, I believe, they feel the same about me. I think those high ranking people have high expectations for me, unlike those punks”⁶⁴. Then she gave another example based on her experience. She said;

⁶² Focus group discussion, January 2013.

⁶³ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁶⁴ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

Once the customs officers took me from a shop which sells illegal movies when I was sitting there close to my house. On the way to the police station, those officers were threatening me and pressuring me to plead guilty but I refused and called my father. Unlike other people, my father has friends in the police force and he asked his friends to help me out. The customs officers who arrested me gave me an apology and told me that they did not know that I was a school principal's daughter. From this experience, I realized that class is very important and people will treat you differently based on your class.⁶⁵

Three male students from the open university saw themselves as middle class because of their occupation.⁶⁶ The first one believed he is middle class because he is not a laborer. The second one claimed to be middle class because his family works in the commercial sector. The last one believed he is middle class because he is a white collar or office worker. The difference between students from the open university and the rest is most students from the open university used their own occupations to identify their class while students from others universities used their parents' occupations as an indicator. As noted in previous chapters, some students at the open university work full time, hence they use their own occupations.

Data from students choosing occupation as an indicator of their middle class status suggests that students have similar ideas of which occupations are middle class occupations and which are not. This implies that their ideas of occupations resulted from a social learning process, through education, family values and so on, because there is no official list of middle class or lower class occupations. Moreover, according to the above figure, none from elite Bangkok-based universities and the private university chose this category. This may suggest that occupation is less important for them, since some occupations such as bureaucrat may

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

give them only power or social status, not money, which is more important to them. The findings may also reflect the difference in social values between Bangkok-based and provincial communities, as one preferred economic status while the other preferred social status.

In terms of education, half of participants from provincial universities and around 20 percent of participants from the open university believed education is the reason for their middle class status. Only participants from provincial universities and the open university chose this category while none from elite Bangkok-based universities and the private university did so. This suggests that participants from elite Bangkok-based universities and the private university may not consider education as the primary indicator of middle class. The findings may suggest that for some students, particularly from urban areas and high income families, economic status is more important than level of education in identifying class. Students' preferences may be caused by many factors. For example, firstly, it is possible that urban communities value money and wealth more than level of education since money and wealth are easier to notice; secondly, some students may believe that money and wealth could later lead to education. In contrast, students from provincial universities and the open university may think differently than their urban-based and wealthy counterparts. The findings may suggest that firstly, educational level is more important in provincial areas and, secondly, level of education could lead to future wealth. If these are the case, we are witnessing totally contradicting views between educational level and economic status, in terms of goals and means to achieve them. It is worth noting that urban middle class has more money than their provincial counterparts. Therefore, it is not surprising that urban middle class focuses more on income since they have more, and vice versa for provincial middle class.

Students provided reasons backing their claim that educational level is important for being middle class. For example, one female student from a provincial university believed she is middle class because, as a university student, her voice can be heard more than less educated people.⁶⁷ Another two female students from the same university believed university students are intellectuals, which increased their status in society.⁶⁸ One male student from another provincial university claimed to be middle class since he has a good education and his life style is dissimilar to the lower class. In his opinion, the lower class use manual labor to earn money but, as a university student, he is an intellectual who uses his brain.⁶⁹ Another male student from the same university believed he is middle class since he has a better future than less educated people who may end up working in a factory.⁷⁰

Nonetheless, there are a very high percentage of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities, the private university and some from provincial universities who claimed to be middle class with quite interesting reasons. This reflects the difficulty in identifying the middle class and emphasizes that there is no clear line separating each class. For example, two students from an elite Bangkok-based university believed that they are middle class based on the level of hardship they have. According to them, there are people who are facing more hardship than them and other people who are richer have less hardship. Since they are in the middle of these two groups, they believe they are middle class.⁷¹ Another student from the same university sees himself as middle class however, he noted, it depends on his location. He explained that he would be upper class if compared to people in his

⁶⁷ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

⁶⁸ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

⁶⁹ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

⁷⁰ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

⁷¹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

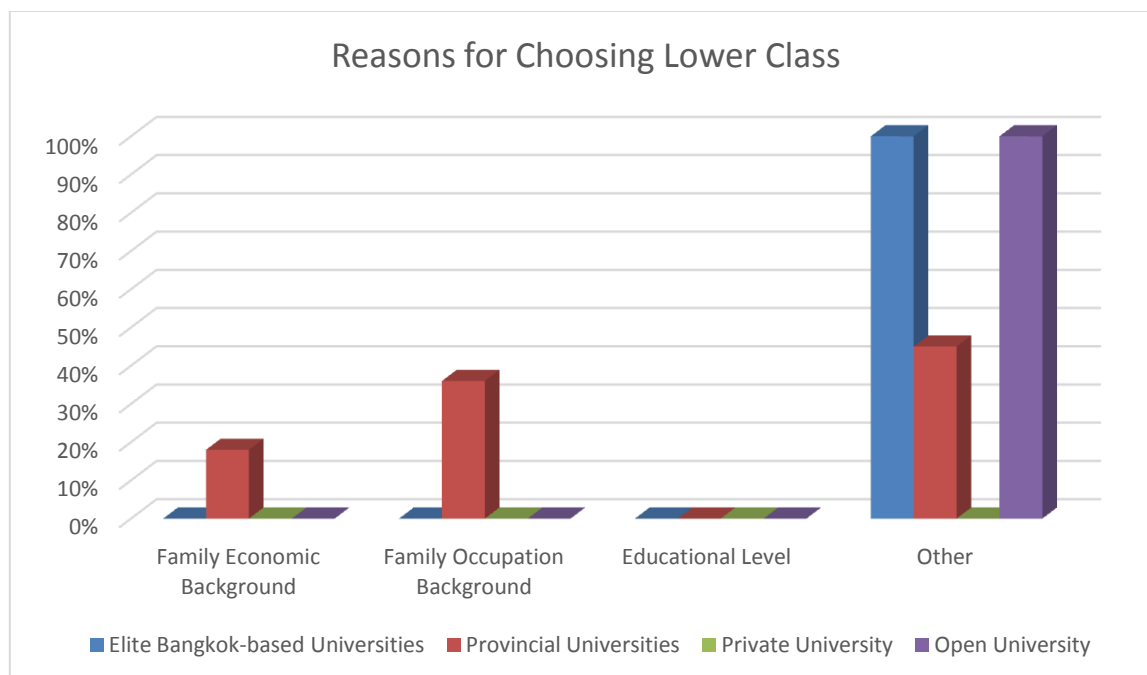
neighborhood (which is a slum). However, if he lived in the USA or Sukhumvit area, he would be middle class or maybe even lower class if he lived in the USA and became a dishwasher.⁷² His view suggests that being middle class is not only about personal qualification but also about comparison. Another participant from the private university claimed to be middle class. He argued that the upper class would be the King or royal family while the lower class would be peasants or slaves therefore he is middle class.⁷³ This is further evidence that students linked the upper class with royalty. It is a strong sign that the definitions of each class are not clear and largely depend on personal interpretation.

Collected data indicates that economic background is the most common way to identify the middle class. Moreover, data suggests that there are at least two ways for gaining middle class status. Firstly, by inheriting it through family economic status, students can be middle class or even upper class according to their families' wealth. Secondly, by acquiring it through level of education or type of occupation, class can change both upward and downward. By obtaining a university level of education or a certain type of occupation, people could move upward on the class ladder, particularly from lower class to middle class and mobility between class fractions.

Students who declare themselves as lower class provided more diverse reasons. Only a few participants claimed to be lower class, based on the same indicators seen above. The majority of students from every participating university have reasons that they do not fit, outside the main categories identified above.

⁷² Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁷³ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

Figure 4-11: Reasons for Choosing Lower Class

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

The number of participants who claimed to be lower class in each university is quite different. Only one student from each elite Bangkok-based university and the open university claimed to be lower class while more than ten students from provincial universities made such a claim.

Some students claimed to be lower class because they are from low income families. Other students believed they are lower class because of their families' occupation. One male student said his parent is a farmer so, in terms of parent's background, he may be lower class.⁷⁴ Another student fully accepted that he is lower class since his family background is in agriculture.⁷⁵ Students' reasons suggest that, for both middle class and lower class, there is a

⁷⁴ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

⁷⁵ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

shared understanding of which occupations should be counted as middle class and which should not.

Students who answered in the “other” category are even more interesting. A student from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed to be lower class because he identifies as such.⁷⁶ One male student from a provincial university saw himself as lower class because he is “ordinary people” without any bargaining power against more powerful people.⁷⁷ A student from the open university argued that he is lower class because he is from a rural province.⁷⁸ Most students from Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) used their relationship with authorities to identify their lower class status. One male student claimed he is lower class because he could not have the same social benefit as others. In his words, “like I said, my village is the easiest example, the village headman would give things to their relatives first”.⁷⁹ Another male student saw himself as lower class. According to his and his relatives’ experiences, he claimed to face double standards in service from authorities.⁸⁰ A different male student also claimed to be lower class because he does not receive justice from authorities.⁸¹ This data indicates that students believed they are lower class not only because they are poor but for many additional reasons, with status and treatment. However, it is particularly important.

Since there is no clear line between middle class and lower class, it is difficult to indicate how poor one must be to be considered as lower class. Therefore, it is not surprising

⁷⁶ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁷⁷ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

⁷⁸ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁷⁹ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

⁸⁰ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

⁸¹ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

to see students used other indicators such as occupation to help identify their class. However, occupation itself is not less complicated. Apparently, there are difference levels of prestige for each occupation as noted in Chapter one and class could be identified according to prestige. Moreover, occupation and level of income are clearly related. High prestige occupations like doctor come with lucrative salary while low prestige occupations like farmer or laborer do not generate much money. However, some low prestige jobs could earn more than high prestige ones such as prostitutes may earn more than academics yet are excluded from middle class occupations (Ockey 1999: 234-235) which adds more complication in identifying class. Nonetheless, this suggests that Thais have similar ideas on which occupations are in which class.

Some students believed education is a tool for class mobility. Interestingly, all students who argued this way came from a provincial university. One male student claimed that he is in the process of becoming middle class. In his words,

When I look at middle class and upper class, they are accepted by other people. But how can we identify class? A person with 8 am to 5 pm job, with a car and a holiday during the weekend, they are middle class. On the other hand, manual labors or workers that work on a daily basis are lower class. And those who have a better life than others, they are upper class. The way I see myself, as a university student, it is impossible to see myself as lower class so I see myself in a development process to be lower middle class.⁸²

⁸² Focus group discussion, January 2013.

Another male student believed similarly. In his words,

I agree with my friend, that we, as university students, are developing from lower class to middle class. I don't agree with the concept that the middle class is only located in Bangkok. In the Northeast, you can see that, in the past, we farm our land using manpower but, in the present day, my village use tractors since they have more land. So I think this is the expansion of the middle class. It is true that our parents are farmers but they fought hard and built themselves up from the lower class.⁸³

He argued further that "I believe we are middle class because we consume social media like Facebook, Hi Five and others, we communicate politically through social networks. This is beyond the lower class. It is equal to middle class but it is just a matter of which level of middle class".⁸⁴

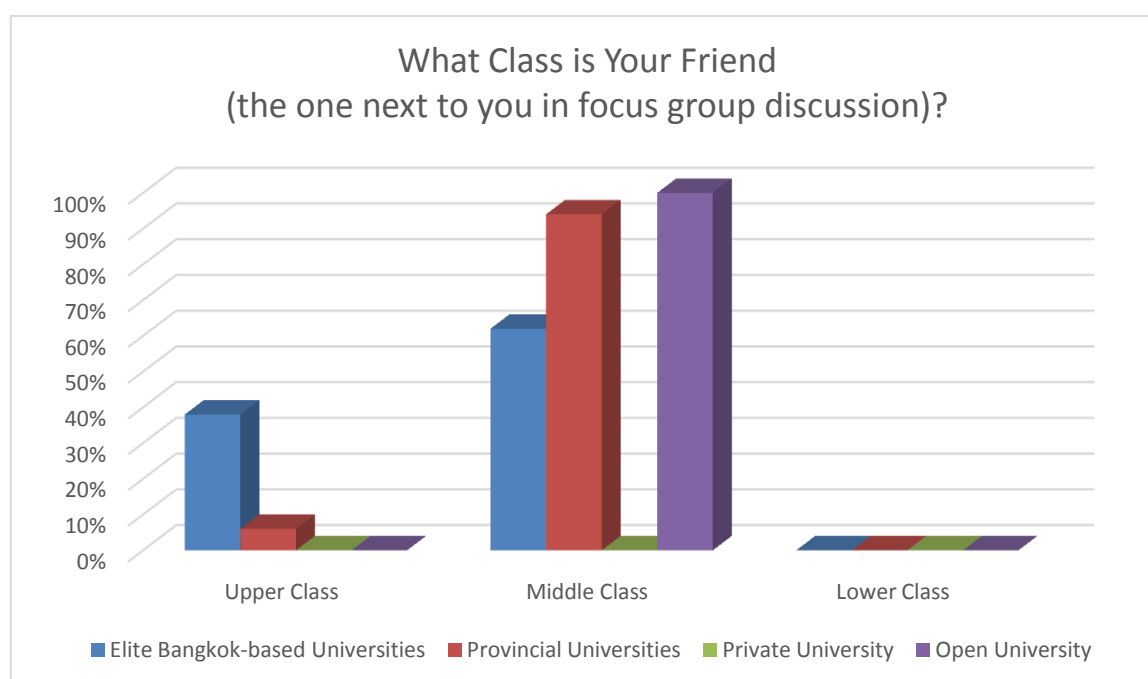
Based on students' arguments, there are levels of expectations to meet before they can be middle class. Level of education appears to be the most important for them. However, as noted by the last student, a certain behavior is also needed. However, these findings raised some questions. Why do students perceive class in such ways? How do they know the behavior of a certain class? A combination of education, social learning and life experiences could provide a good explanation. In any case, the findings emphasize the importance of education, at least partly, for shaping class perception.

⁸³ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

In order to investigate further the nature of class identification and validate students' claims of their classes, students were asked to identify the class of their friends. Unfortunately, there is no data from one elite Bangkok-based university, one provincial university and the private university. Still, the data provides very interesting and contradictory views from participants.

Figure 4-12: What Class is Your Friend (the one next to you in focus group discussion)?



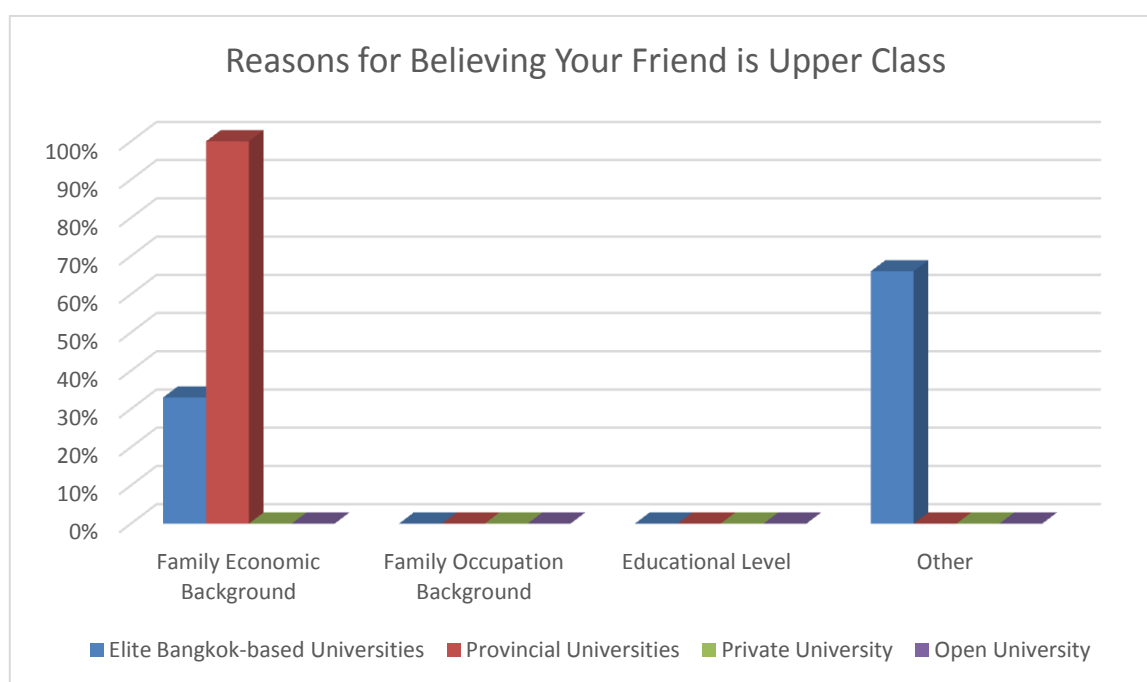
Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

As shown in the above figure, there are a much higher percentage of students claiming their friends are upper class than students who claimed that status for themselves. Since only students from one elite Bangkok-based university participated in this question, data on an elite Bangkok-based university solely represents Chulalongkorn University participants, and around one-third of them believed their friends are upper class compared to less than 5

percent who see themselves as upper class. A student from a provincial university also believed his friend is upper class, compared to none who see themselves as upper class.

While the majority of participants claimed their friends are middle class, unsurprisingly, none of them believed their friends are lower class. It is noteworthy that this data came from focus group discussions where students participated in a group. This may have some influence on their answers since some students may be reluctant to point out their friends as being lower class, particularly when all students do not want to be lower class.

Figure 4-13: Reasons for Believing Your Friend is Upper Class



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

The figure above reveals that, in students' perceptions, family economic status is important for being upper class, not education or occupation. For example, one student from an elite Bangkok-based university believed his friend is upper class because she is rich. However, she could also be middle class since she did not spend her money on luxury

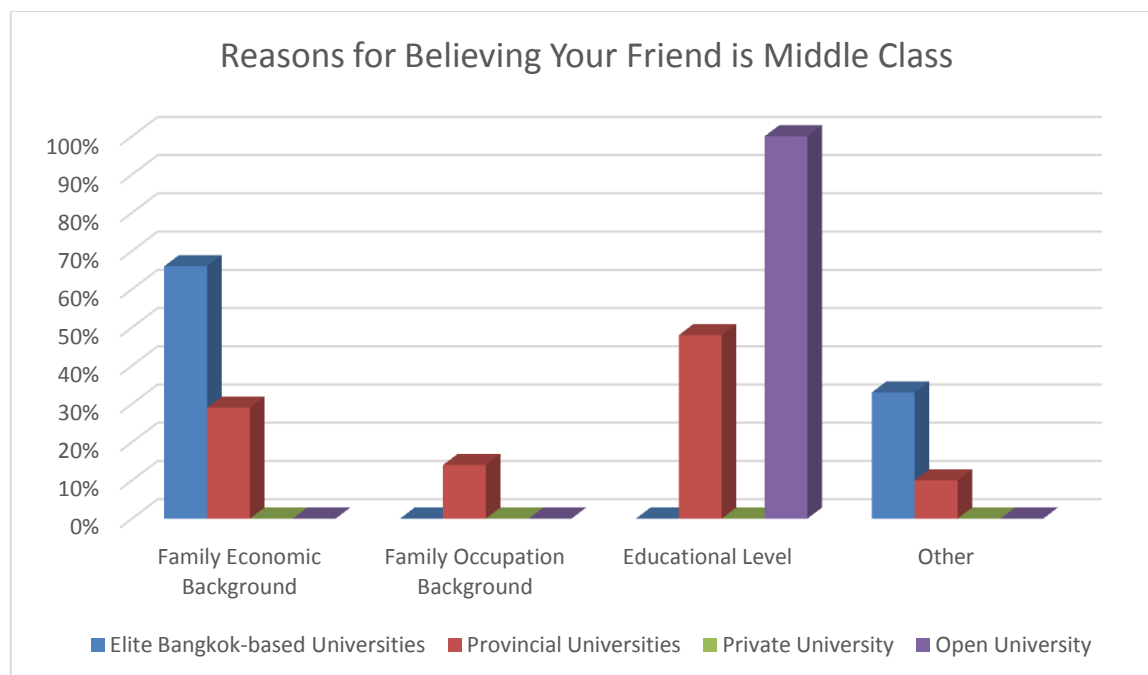
items.⁸⁵ His view shows that being upper class is not only about money but also conspicuous consumption. Another student from the same university believed her friend is upper class not only because she is rich but also is of Chinese descent.⁸⁶ One student from a provincial university claimed his friend is middle class because he is a university student but, in terms of wealth, he is upper class.⁸⁷ His view suggests that education is important only to the middle class, not the upper class. In the “other” category, despite only a few students claiming their friends are upper class, this data indicates that occupation and education are not as important as economic status when it comes to identifying the upper class. This finding may indicate that being upper class is generally through inheriting wealth from parents, and not something students could acquire by themselves.

In contrast, the majority of participants believed their friends are middle class. Moreover, despite some students claiming to be lower class, none of them see their friends in such a way. Reasons for being middle class are more diverse and linked to education which appears to be a pattern for the middle class (that education is important for the middle class while less important for the upper and lower classes) shown in the figure below.

⁸⁵ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁸⁶ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁸⁷ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

Figure 4-14: Reasons for Believing Your Friend is Middle Class

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

According to collected data, occupation and education become more important in identifying the class of their friends. This is in accordance with the way students believed themselves to be middle class where all indicators seem to be important, though to at different degrees. In terms of family economic background, yet again, we see that participants from elite Bangkok-based universities seem to pay more attention to economic status than educational level in identifying the class of their friends. For example, two students from an elite Bangkok-based university believed their friends are middle class because their families are not poor but do not have any privileges either.⁸⁸ There are also some students from provincial universities who used family economic background in identifying their friends' class. Most of them argued that their friends are in "middle income families" hence are middle class. However, some students argued that since they and their friends are at in a

⁸⁸ Focus group discussion, April 2013.

similar economic level, they must be in the same middle class. For example, one student from a provincial university believed his friend's economic status is close to him so they are in the same middle class.⁸⁹ Another male student from the same university also identified his friend as middle class based on having the same level of economic status.⁹⁰ This suggests that some students may not consider their elite university counterparts to be middle class since students from elite universities are richer than them even though they are supposed to be middle class because of educational level.

For the occupation category, a male student from a provincial university provided an interesting explanation on occupation and class. He identified his friends' classes based on their parent's occupation. According to him, if his friends are from a family of entrepreneurs, high ranking police or soldier, they are probably upper class. However, if they are from bureaucratic families, they would belong to the middle class.⁹¹ His view shows again the similar perception for most participants, if not all, in terms of ideas about occupational prestige.

In the educational level category, almost half of participants from provincial universities believed their friends are middle class because they have education while all participants from the open university share the same view. For example, a male student from a provincial university refused to identify his friends by family background, he believed, as a fellow student, he and his friend are in the same middle class.⁹² One female student refused to identify her friends by economic status but pointed to class mobility through higher education. In her words, "I see my friend as middle class but I did not identify her by

⁸⁹ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

⁹⁰ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

⁹¹ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

⁹² Focus group discussion, June 2013.

economic background. Even if their parents are ordinary people, my friends can upgrade themselves through university and have an education, at least, more than their parents, so I believe they are middle class”.⁹³ Another male student believed in education too, in his words, “it is simple, anyone with education can be middle class”.⁹⁴ A male participant from the open university claimed the lower class employs manual labor with no or less education therefore all of his friends are middle class.⁹⁵ These views reflect that education is crucial for middle classness and study at university level can make them middle class.

However, we have witnessed a pattern that only students from provincial universities and the open university pay more attention to level of education in terms of class status. In contrast, participants from elite Bangkok-based universities gave importance to economic status. These findings may relate to the fact, as obtained from collected data, that students from elite Bangkok-based universities come from higher income families than students from provincial universities and the open university. Therefore, students from elite Bangkok-based universities may be closer to the upper class than their counterparts at provincial universities and the open university and may think like the upper class where educational level is less important, as shown in almost all the data presented. This reinforces that there are fractions within the middle class in accordance with the hypothesis that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions.

In the “other” category, student responses are even more interesting. One female student from a provincial university noted that the middle class and lower class speak and think differently. She argued that the lower class is not concerned about the consequences

⁹³ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

⁹⁴ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

⁹⁵ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

when they speak.⁹⁶ Another female student shared the same view and believed her friends are middle class. She explained further that;

When I was young, I would look at my friends and identify them by their economic level. However when I am here, at university, I look into their behavior, opinion and attitude or social position. To be more specific, the middle class have more intellectual behaviors which clearly show their middle class personality, unlike the lower class personality. Or when university students speak and ordinary people speak, it is different.⁹⁷

Their views suggest that, to be middle class, we need to behave like the middle class. This indicates that there is a standard of behavior for the middle class which other classes do not follow, with the behavior learned from education or society. Moreover, their answers imply that the middle class must be intellectual, which emphasizes the importance of education for shaping middle class behavior. This shows that the university plays a key role in influencing middle class standard of behavior.

In sum, data from this “Who are you?” part revealed many interesting points. Firstly, students from certain types of universities used different indicators from other types of universities in identifying the class of themselves and their friends. In particular, students from elite Bangkok-based universities used mostly economic status to identify class while students from provincial universities used mainly educational level. Secondly, to identify the middle class, most students from every participating university shared the same view, that educational level is important for being middle class while being upper class or lower class

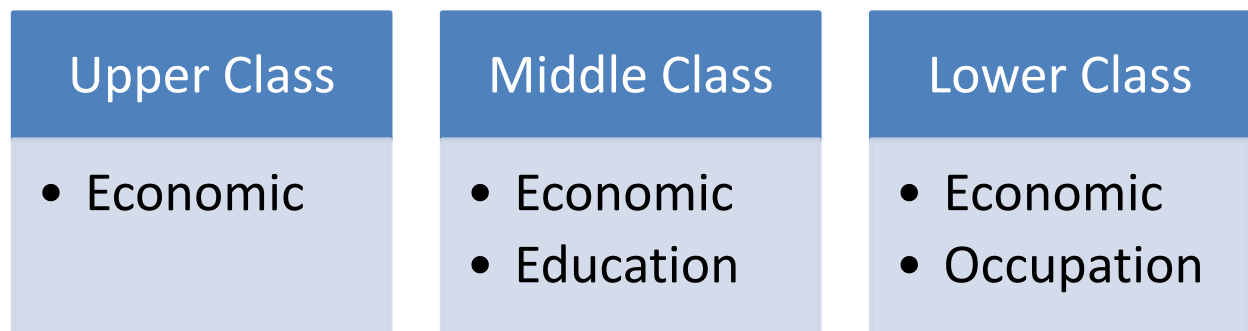
⁹⁶ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

⁹⁷ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

does not relate so much to level of education but mostly is linked to economic status, for both classes, and occupation, mainly for the lower class. We can see that the university teaches a standard of behavior as well as minimum requirement for students to become the middle class.

Based on these findings, the relationship between social class and its indicators can be illustrated as:

Figure 4-15: The Relationship of Social Classes and Indicators



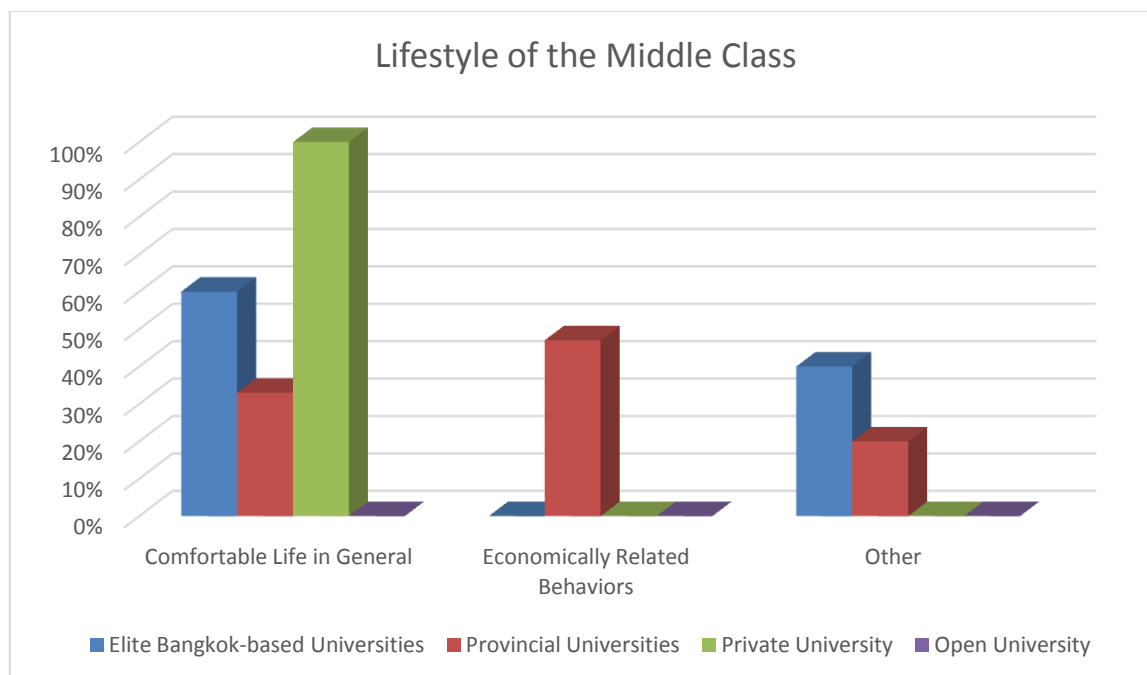
This figure shows that economic status can be used to separate all classes. However, level of education is solely used, at least in the eyes of participants, to separate the middle class from the upper class and the lower class. We have established in previous chapters that there are no clear lines separating each class hence, to differentiate themselves, the middle class need to create a unique characteristic. In this case, it is educational level. Obviously, the middle class cannot compete with the upper class in terms of wealth, then what will make the middle class different from the lower class? This is where education, particularly higher education, plays a major role because only a few in the lower class could achieve a university degree. As Lynch and O’Riordan (1998: 459) pointed out, the economic constraints of the lower class affect their abilities to reach higher education. Moreover, educational level could

make the middle class “better” than the wealthy upper class as noted by Power (2000: 134), educational credentials are necessary to acquire or retain middle class status while assets and privileges of the upper class can be passed through generations without external influences.

Moreover, higher education also provides the middle class a standard of behavior, which will separate them from the “loose moral” and “public and private spending” immature old elite class (Frykman & Lofgren 1987: 266-268) and “the unruly hoards below” (Skeggs 2004: 4).

What is it?

To investigate further how university students understand class, this part looks into specific component of the middle class. Since most students claimed to be middle class, they were asked two questions; firstly, what is the middle class lifestyle; secondly, whether modern and high prestige products like international brands of mobile phone or tablet help improve their class or not. Since students spend a lot of time inside the university, they would have learned and experienced class there. Their answers may suggest that their perceptions are under the influence of that environment. The findings in this part will show how students perceive class from university level environment, which will represent the hypothesis that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society. The first question is designed to see how participants understand the lifestyle of the middle class.

Figure 4-16: Lifestyle of the Middle Class

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Participants' views on middle class lifestyle may reflect their own lifestyle since almost all of them believed they are middle class. Participants seem to see lifestyle of the middle class in simple ways. According to collected data, middle class lifestyle can be categorized into 2 major themes: a comfortable life and economic behavior. A lot of students believed the middle class would have a comfortable life. Participants from elite Bangkok-based universities, provincial universities and the private university who answered "comfortable life in general" seem to share the same view on the middle class lifestyle. They believed that the middle class would have a decent life and sufficiency without many hardships. As one student noted "for me, when I reach the point that I am satisfied with myself, have enough money to spend, can take care of my parents and have whatever I need, that is the middle

class. Not too rich or too poor, just satisfied with what I have”.⁹⁸ Data indicates that the middle class do not desire to accumulate wealth without end but do want security from poverty for themselves and families. Therefore, mobility between classes is not important for the middle class but mobility between middle class fractions is desirable.

Almost half of participants from provincial universities and none from other types of university believed the lifestyle of the middle class is related to economic behavior. One male student claimed the middle class has a lifestyle of addiction to brand name products.⁹⁹ Two students believed the lifestyle of the middle class can be seen from the way they dress, though they did not clarify that.¹⁰⁰ Their views suggest that students believed the middle class has a certain lifestyle linked to luxury items; as Souchow (1996: 344) noted, luxury items become more important for the middle class as a reward for their hard work as well as for self-satisfaction.

A number of participants did not share the same views on middle class lifestyle and many of their answers did not directly explain the lifestyle of the middle class. Yet again, this finding reinstates the difficulty in identifying the middle class. For example, one student claimed it is easier to identify the lifestyle of the upper class than the middle class. He explained that the upper class would eat in expensive restaurants and shop at luxury shopping malls.¹⁰¹ His view, clearly, was not from education. This suggests that students’ perceptions come from social learning processes such as daily life experience or peer group. Another student argued that the lifestyle of the middle class is hard to describe; however, it would be

⁹⁸ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

⁹⁹ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹⁰¹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

easier to use occupation to indicate a person's class.¹⁰² A female student argued that the middle class must be able to blend into society. She explained that, as a Muslim, she would need to adapt herself to Buddhist society and live normally.¹⁰³

Overall, students evaluated the lifestyle of the middle class in a positive way. However, their answers can be generally perceived as based on everyday life, and not from an academic perspective. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to exclude the influence of higher education on students' class perception since students spent most of their days, 5 days a week within the university environment. Students would not learn much about middle class behavior from classroom but learn how to be the middle class from middle class environment, which in this case is the university environment. Students learned how to behave like the middle class and their behaviors were shaped within university through environment, which is including friend and lecturers. Therefore university level education is consisted of at least two important parts: classroom and university environment. To investigate further, the next part will look deeply into the effect of education on students' class perception.

The effect of education

As we know at beginning, some students are at the first year of university and first time away from home. Hence their perceptions heavily shaped by emerging university environment, which is largely middle class environment. Students learn middle classness in these years from both classroom and the real life, through socializing middle class in education by friend. Therefore, this is a crucial period for students, which both life in university environment and classroom knowledge are equally important.

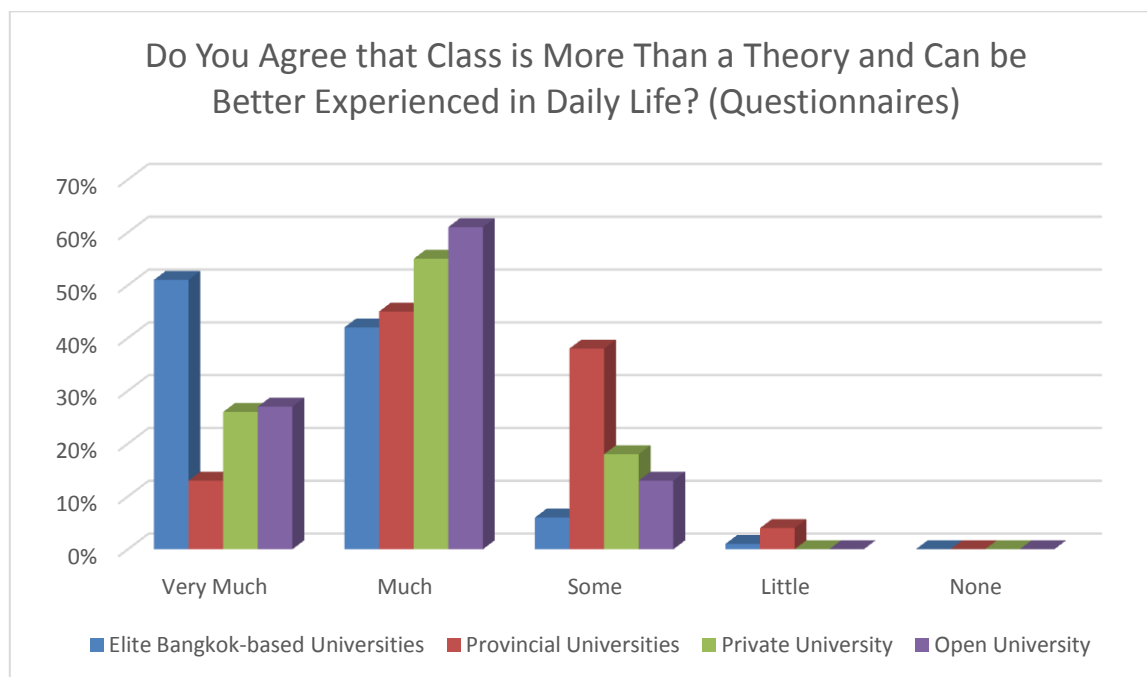
¹⁰² Focus group discussion, November 2012.

¹⁰³ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

Previous parts revealed that class is not far from students' life and most participants claimed to have learned about it from high school, though at minimum level. Moreover, it showed that most students believed themselves and their friends are middle class. Although economic status has been used by most students as a class indicator, there are some patterns that separated students in elite Bangkok-based universities from the rest. For example, educational level seemed to be important for students from provincial universities, more so than for students from elite Bangkok-based universities. This part aims to investigate these differences and to better understand how education can affect students' class perceptions.

There are 3 questions in this part. Firstly, from the questionnaires, students were asked "do you agree that class is more than a theory and can be better experienced in daily life?" Secondly, from focus group discussions, students were asked "do you understand class from your study or daily life?" The first and second parts serve the same purpose, to understand whether daily life or higher education has more influence on participants. In addition, this part will further explore the hypothesis that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.

Figure 4-17: Do You Agree that Class is More Than a Theory and Can be Better Experienced in Daily Life? (Questionnaires)



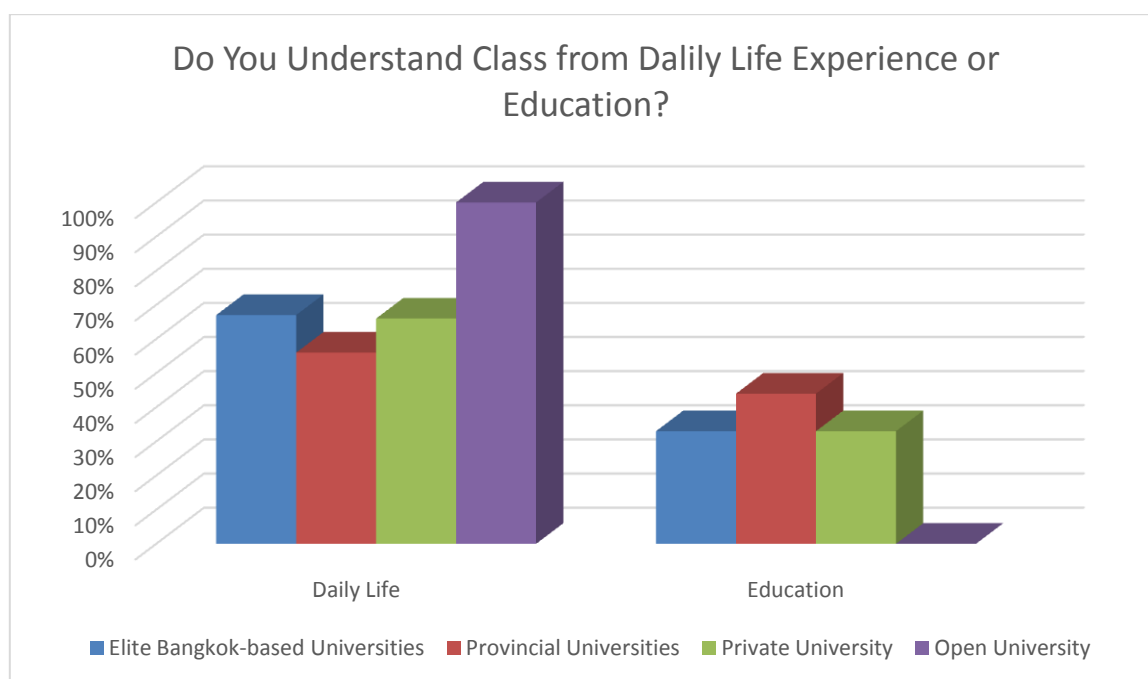
Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Results from questionnaires shows most students believed class is not only a theory and can be well perceived in their daily life. This data indicates that students would have experienced some forms of class disparity in their life hence they can compare it to their study. Interestingly, participants from elite Bangkok-based universities agreed with the question more than other types of university. Around half of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities chose “very much” which is twice as high as participants from the private university and the open university and 3 times higher than provincial universities. Since elite universities, the private university and the open university are all based in Bangkok, this may suggest that class disparity is more obvious in urban areas than provincial areas. This is also reflected in the “some” choice where the percentage of participants from provincial universities is double the Bangkok-based universities’ participants.

The fact that elite Bangkok-based universities' students are from higher income families than students from the private university and the open university may explain the differences in percentage between Bangkok-based universities. It is highly likely that class is more obvious when comparing between higher economic status and lower economic status than between similar economic background. Therefore, students from elite Bangkok-based universities may experience class more than their Bangkok-based counterparts.

The findings suggest that classroom may not be the main source of class understanding. Classroom is the main source of knowledge and theories about class however it is limited to students in certain faculties such as political science or social science. In contrast, all students, regardless of their faculties, go to university and learn in practice how to become the middle class through university environment. This indicates that higher education is not only about knowledge from classroom but also life inside university that creates and shapes students' class perceptions.

Figure 4-18: Do You Understand Class from Daily Life Experience or Education?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

To investigate further students' opinions about class, students were asked in focus group discussions whether they understand class from daily life experience or from education. Their answers are in accordance with the results from questionnaires. Most participants believed they understood class from daily life experience rather than from education. As noted earlier, daily life experiences would include experiences received within the university. This suggests that higher education not only affects students' class perceptions through teaching but also through experience. In another words, we could distinguish the learning process within university into at least two ways: classroom learning and environment learning.

According to the figure above, interestingly, all participants from the open university claimed that education did not help them understand class at all. One possible explanation is class was taught in the form of theory which is difficult to understand. As pointed out by a female student from the elite Bangkok-based university, "from education, I learned what class is in general, however, without experiencing it myself, I would not truly understand it".¹⁰⁴ She gave an example that when she went shopping, the service at the shop depended on how she dressed, if she dressed properly she would receive better service and vice versa for not dressing properly. Another student from an elite Bangkok-based university pointed out how students perceive class. In his words,

¹⁰⁴ Focus group discussion, 18 April 2013.

University students at Chulalongkorn University have money otherwise they could not study here. I mean if they are not clever, they must have enough money for a tutor. Most students here are not as poor as at other universities. And when they are inside this society, thus see only people of the same social status and do not understand other statuses because most people here are from the same level.¹⁰⁵

His view suggests that he believed students were divided into each university according to their class, which is in accordance with the hypothesis that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions.

Moreover, most students in this category believed daily life experience is the better source of understanding class, since class was taught only in a few courses, if any, at university which emphasizes that higher education is not all about knowledge but is also a social learning process with university that is equally important. As noted by a male student from an elite Bangkok-based university,

For the 3 years that I have studied here, I have barely learned about class from my study because there is no direct subject about class and only a few lecturers talked about it. However, society shows me many things. I believe it is social learning, in the way that we see it ourselves rather than anyone or any lecturer teaching us about it.¹⁰⁶

Data indicates that students learn about the middle classness through daily experiences within university than knowledge about class. Since most of participated students are in their first year of study, they are facing new standard of behavior set for them by university

¹⁰⁵ Focus group discussion, 4 February 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

environment and peers. It is obvious that students see many examples of class disparity in their life through their own experiences or in the media. However, some students mixed class with differences in status and hierarchy. This may indicate that students' understanding of class is based on broad general perceptions. For example, a male student argued that "just come to study, class is clearly divided. A student is in one class while the lecturer, who is scoring us, is god".¹⁰⁷

In contrast, students who believed they understood class from education provided interesting reasons as well. They believed class cannot be fully understood without first understanding its concepts or theories. For example, a female student from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that if she does not understand class at all, maybe she would not feel bad about it. She claimed that, without any knowledge about class, she could have lived normal life everyday but, since she knows, she felt separated¹⁰⁸. Another male student from the same elite university claimed that if he does not study in political science, he would not be able to notice class in society so clearly¹⁰⁹. From provincial universities, one male student claimed to learn about class from university. He argued that at first he did not even know what class was, he could not compare and did not know the meaning of it. However, after he studied, he used the knowledge he received to analyse class situations in daily life¹¹⁰.

These findings suggest that education provides a framework to see class in real life for students. Collected data shows that most students believed daily life experience is a better source of class perception than knowledge they received from higher education. However, since students spend most of their time within the university environment interacting with

¹⁰⁷ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

¹¹⁰ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

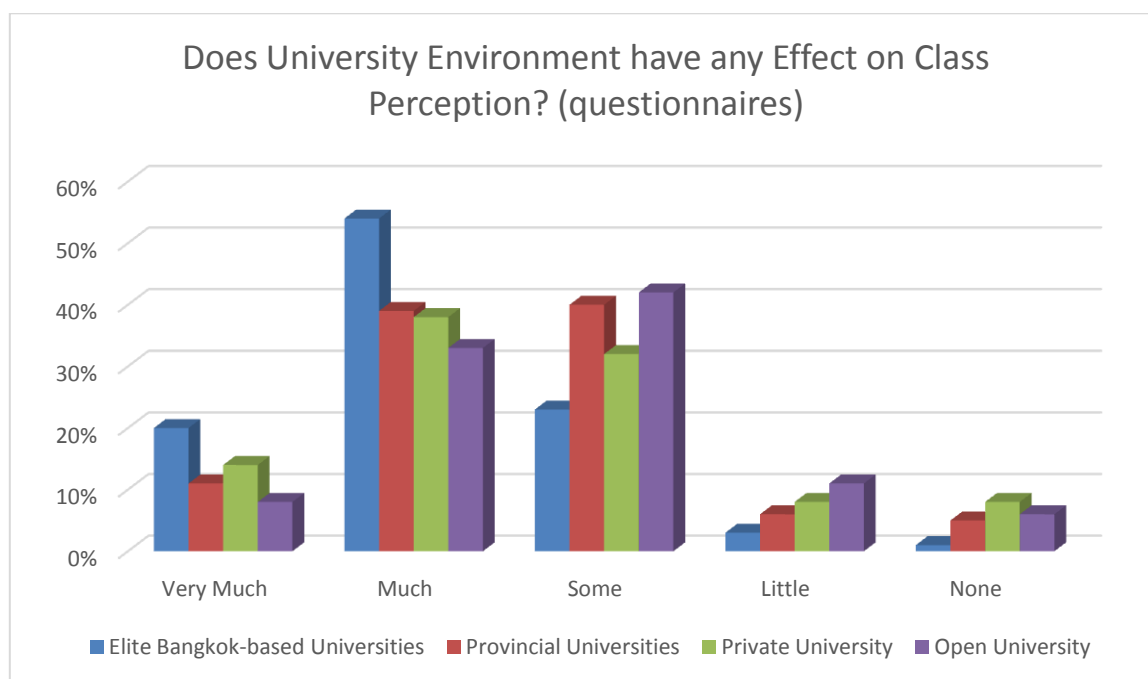
their peer group and staff, pass through surrounding area of university, use university facilities and carry the university's name with them, these social learning processes within higher education would contribute greatly to students' class perception.

Environment effect

We have established that daily life experiences are important for students' class perception. Since students spend most of their time within the university, much of their life experience comes from the university environment. This part aims to investigate the influence of university environment on students' perceptions of class. In addition, this part will explore hypotheses that the university environment and student peers are important factors, and university facilities and the university environment in general are essential for producing class perceptions. It is noteworthy to clarify that, in this thesis, university environment is referring to university reputation, university facilities and equipment, surrounding areas and student's peer groups.

From questionnaires, students were asked to rate the effect of the university environment on their class perceptions. As shows in the figure below, most students believed university environment can affect their class perception with only a few that chose "little" or "none".

Figure 4-19: Does University Environment have any Effect on Class Perception? (Questionnaires)

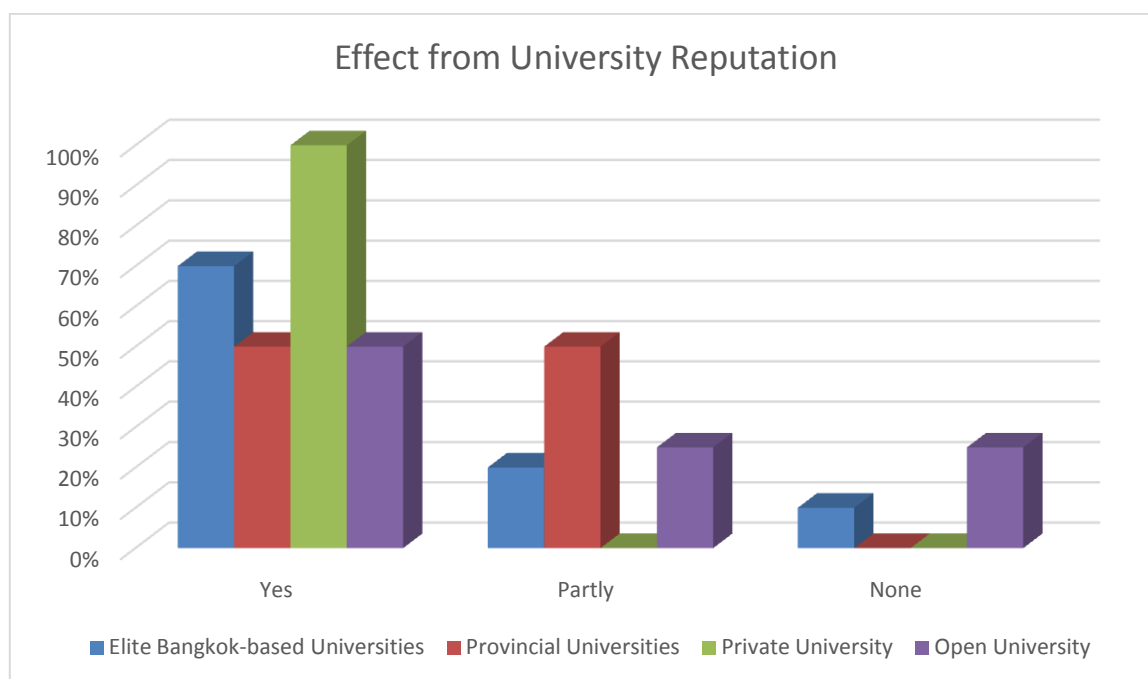


Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Although most participants view the relationship between university environment and class perceptions similarly, students from elite Bangkok-based universities seem to agree more strongly than others. According to collected data from questionnaires, around 70 percent of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities are convinced that their class perceptions have been influenced by the university environment. In contrast, around half of participants from provincial universities and the open university believed university environment could influence their class perceptions at “some” level or less while around 40 percent of the private university participants shared the same view. According to the figure above, most students shared the same view that the university environment affected their class perceptions. To further investigate, students were asked during focus group discussions

in detail how each component of the university environment can affect their class perceptions.

Figure 4-20: Effect from University Reputation

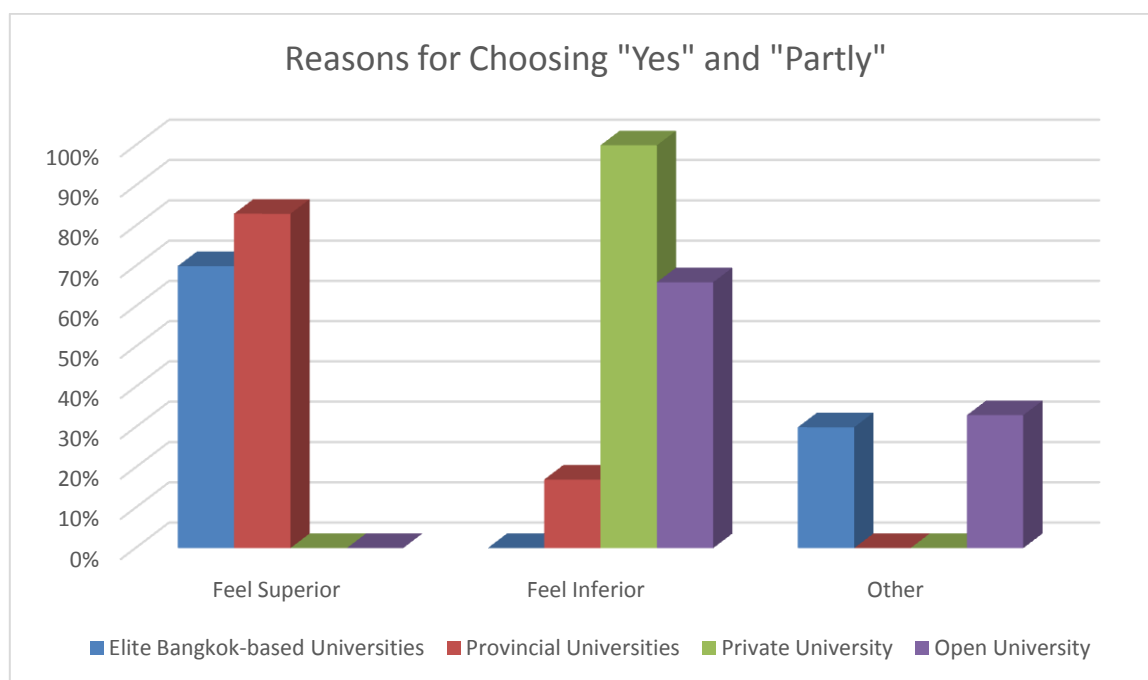


Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

The first aspect of the university environment that can affect students' class perceptions is the university reputation. Students were asked during focus group discussions to evaluate the effect from the university reputation on their class perceptions. As shown in the figure above, most participants believed the university reputation can affect their class perceptions. Some fully agreed, some partly agreed while a few completely disagreed. Only a few participants believed the university reputation has no effect on their class perceptions. One male student from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed the reputation of his university

does not affect him however it does affect the way “outsiders” look at him¹¹¹. One female student from the open university argued that, if she is from the middle class, she would be from the same middle class wherever she studied¹¹².

Figure 4-21: Reasons for Choosing “Yes” and “Partly”



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

In contrast, reasons for students who believed the university reputation can affect their class perception can be divided into 2 major categories; feeling superior and feeling inferior. In the first category, it is not surprising to see the majority of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities claimed to feel superior since their universities’ reputations are high. However, it is interesting to see most participants from provincial universities agreed.

¹¹¹ Focus group discussion, February 2013

¹¹² Focus group discussion, February 2013

According to collected data, participants from elite Bangkok-based universities used a different reference group from participants from provincial universities to express their superior/inferior feelings. Students from elite Bangkok-based universities believed they are superior to others based on three major themes; high academic standards, views of outsiders and life chances. In the first themes, many students believed their universities are among the best in Thailand hence they are in a better position than others. For example, a male student argued that some students may feel superior to other students from other universities since Chulalongkorn University declared itself as “the pillar of Thailand’s higher education”.¹¹³ Another male student did not hide his superior feelings towards students from other universities, in his words,

Based on my experience, students in each university were screened and are best suited for a specific university. Friends in each university would talk about different topics. Students in Rajabhat University would talk about their mobile phone while those from another university would talk about their future and those from another university would talk about academics. This shows that even though Chulalongkorn University or Thammasat University are not the best in the world, students there were screened, at least at some level.¹¹⁴

His view not only reflects his belief but also implies that students in each university were divided even before they entered higher education.

In the second theme, students believed they are superior because society regards their universities highly. For example, one student pointed out that Thai society always admires

¹¹³ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹¹⁴ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

people with a good educational background therefore it is not surprising for some university graduate to feel superior to others. He argued that, when outsiders look at Chulalongkorn University, they would think this university has only smart students¹¹⁵. One female student from another elite Bangkok-based university argued that, when she first studied here, she did not feel any different. However, when others talk about her studying at Thammasat University, they always compliment her as smart and this makes her feel good¹¹⁶.

For the last theme, students believed their elite Bangkok-based universities can take them to a brighter future than students from other universities. For example, a female student believed that Chulalongkorn University is better than other universities, particularly Rajabhat University, since she has more advantages than other students in terms of finding a job and could have a better salary¹¹⁷. Another male student from another elite Bangkok-based university argued that university reputation may not affect his class perceptions but affect his life chances. He claimed to plan further study abroad, saying foreign universities would look at where he graduated¹¹⁸.

Clearly, participants from elite Bangkok-based universities were not reluctant to compare themselves with any other university in Thailand and still feel superior. Moreover, data suggests that higher education is providing not only knowledge but also shaping life chances and acceptance from society, which students from elite Bangkok-based universities seem to enjoy more than the rest. Although it is more difficult for students from provincial universities to compare themselves with others, there are a lot of participants from provincial universities, particularly from Chiangmai University, who believe that they are in a superior

¹¹⁵ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹¹⁶ Focus group discussion, April 2013.

¹¹⁷ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹¹⁸ Focus group discussion, April 2013.

position. For example, one male student from a provincial university claimed he feels superior to his friend since he studies at Chiangmai University while his friend studies at Rajabhat University¹¹⁹. Another male student from the same university claimed that, by studying there, it makes him better than others since he can receive better education and due to Chiangmai University's high reputation¹²⁰. The reason students at Chiangmai University believed themselves better than those at other universities (though not elite Bangkok-based universities) is understandable since Chiangmai University is one of the best among public universities in terms of academics, though lesser than the elite Bangkok-based universities, and is located in a highly urbanized area. This may represent the uneven quality in higher education which unavoidably affects students' life chances. For example, there is one widely told story about a big company and how they select their employees. During an interview, one lecturer said "do you know what shade is on the Siam Cement company's¹²¹ chimney? It is pink [the colour of Chulalongkorn University]".¹²² This suggests that higher education is not only about having a university degree but also about where people study.

However, university reputation can also negatively affect students' class perceptions. All participants from the private university and the majority from the open university claimed they feel inferior because of their university's reputation. Participants from the private university and the open university claimed to be looked down on by society and by their counterparts from high reputation universities. For example, one female student from the private university argued that, as a private university student, people would look at her as someone who could not study in a public university and had to study in a private university as

¹¹⁹ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹²⁰ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹²¹ One of leading company in Thailand, for more information on the Siam Cement Company, visit <http://www.scg.co.th>.

¹²² Interview, a lecturer, April 2013.

she has no other choices¹²³. One male student from the open university claimed he was looked down on by Thammasat University students when he had conversations with them. He added that Thammasat University students think of him as inferior to them in terms of knowledge¹²⁴. These divisions happen not only between universities but also between campuses within the same university. As one student from a provincial university argued, since Prince of Songkla University consists of several campuses, each campus is separated in terms of reputation and the central campus (at Songkla province) alienated other campuses because the main campus believes they are driving the university's reputation while other campuses (such as his) just ride along with them¹²⁵. These views suggest that students from provincial universities, the private university and the open university see themselves in a lower position than students at elite Bangkok-based universities. Moreover, in reference to their elite Bangkok-based university counterparts, one student from the open university emphasized the importance of university reputation on his life chances. He argued that, when applying for jobs, employers would look at where a student is graduated, therefore, high reputation university students have advantages over him¹²⁶. Data indicates that there are resentments and tensions between the fractions within the middle class.

This data shows the relationship between university reputation and students' class perceptions. By studying in a high reputation university, students believed they are superior to others. This suggests that they think they are in a better position. In contrast, many students believed they are at a disadvantage based on their university reputation which also makes them think they are in a lower position than others. These findings may relate to previous

¹²³ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

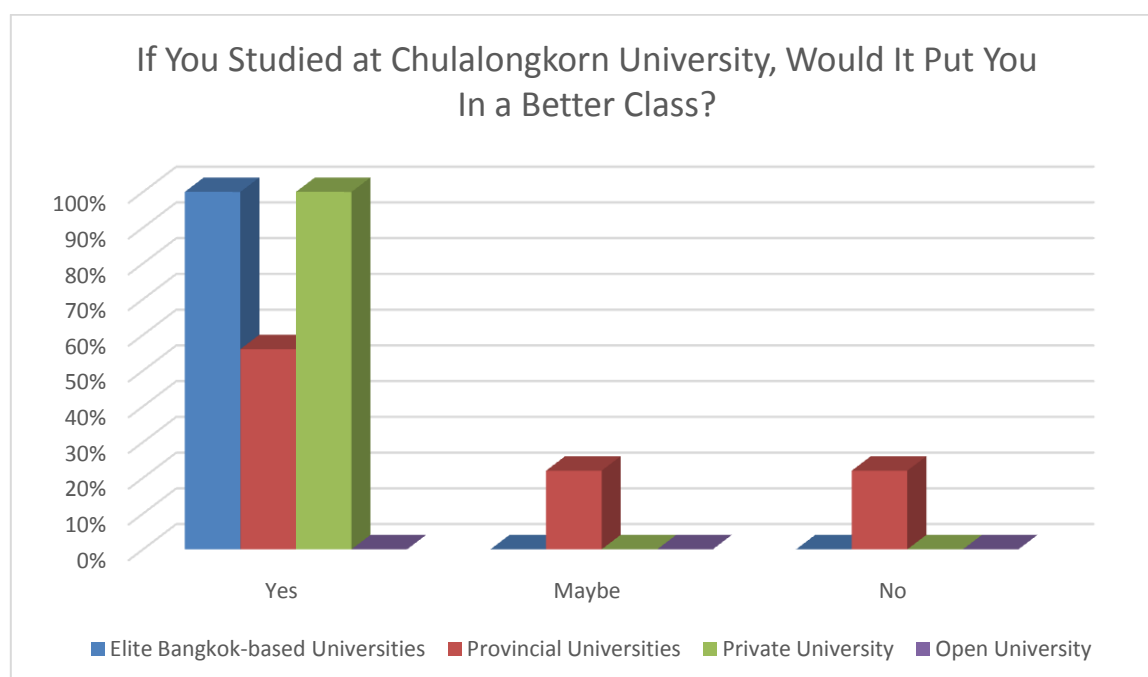
¹²⁴ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹²⁵ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

¹²⁶ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

chapters where we have established that family economic background plays a major role in which university students could enter. We have witnessed that students from elite Bangkok-based universities came from higher income families and they have better life chances as well. These facts emphasize that; firstly, students in different universities came from different class backgrounds; secondly, their differences affected their life chances which would affect their future class status; thirdly, it implies that class can be improved, not only by having higher education but also where they get higher education; fourthly, data indicates the resentment between fractions within the middle class. In order to prove the last finding, students were asked whether study in a high reputation university would put them in a better class.

Figure 4-22: If You Studied at Chulalongkorn University, Would It Put You In a Better Class?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

There are reasons to use Chulalongkorn University in comparison instead of the term “an elite university”. As revealed in the last chapter, Chulalongkorn University is one of the top university in Thailand, even some students from Thammasat University (another top university) accepted and claimed to study at Thammasat University because failed to enter Chulalongkorn University. Moreover, using an elite university from abroad may not provide accurate result since students may not know as well as their know Chulalongkorn University.

The above figures demonstrate the effect of university reputation on class perception, it will also reinforce the hypothesis that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions. Data indicates that students believed they are in different fractions, if not classes, based on their university’s reputation. Mobility between fractions, at least in the eyes of students, is also possible depended on where students study.

Participants were asked in focus group discussions to put themselves in Chulalongkorn University students’ position and evaluate whether it would put them in a better class. Unfortunately, there is no data from the open university and only one elite Bangkok-based university (Chulalongkorn University) participated in this question.

It is not surprising that most students think their class would improve by studying at Chulalongkorn University. However, interestingly, some students from provincial universities rejected the idea. As shown in the figure above, obviously, every participant from the elite Bangkok-based university believed, by studying at Chulalongkorn University, they are in a better class. For example, one female student argued that to study at Chulalongkorn University was her aspiration and provides her a good opportunity since it has many good lecturers as well as more intelligent friends, which she would not find at her hometown university¹²⁷. Another three students pointed out the university “brand” that makes them feel superior. One male student claimed that, when wearing the Chulalongkorn University

¹²⁷ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

uniform, he feels proud. In his words, “I can walk in this uniform with pleasure. I do not feel inferior to anyone although, at the same time, not much superior to others. Just not inferior that’s all”.¹²⁸ Another male student claimed that others look at him, as a Chulalongkorn University student, and think he is either rich or clever or both. Although, according to him, he is neither rich nor clever but, since he is wearing a Chulalongkorn University uniform, he is covered by the name and reputation of Chulalongkorn University¹²⁹. One more male student agreed with the importance of the university uniform. He claimed that he felt comfortable when walking around with his uniform since, he believed, no one would look down on him¹³⁰. Their views suggest that they believe their class status has improved since they are studying at Chulalongkorn University. However, their class in terms of economic status did not actually improve, although their life chances will, and the Chulalongkorn University brand may be more symbolic of superiority in academic terms. Nonetheless, since many students from Chulalongkorn University are from high income families, outsiders may perceive students at Chulalongkorn University in such a way. Students’ arguments on university uniform are a good example of this symbolic status. The majority, if not all, of universities in Thailand have the same uniform; white shirt and black trousers or skirts. The differences between students can be found only the neckties or belts with the university brand on it. Therefore, it is not easy to separate one student from another. This suggests that students’ claims of the importance of uniforms may be based on students’ self-belief more than outsider’s view. However, it is worth pointing out that uniforms did affect all students from any university that indicate they are “learning” which separates them from others.

¹²⁸ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹²⁹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹³⁰ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

Opinions from non-Chulalongkorn University students are similar. For example, one male student from a provincial university claimed that, using his common sense, there are obvious difference between Chulalongkorn University and provincial universities. He argued further that, without any need for analysis, almost every university in Bangkok is better than those in the provinces¹³¹. Another male student from the same university agreed and argued further that, overall, universities in Bangkok are better. He explained that students of each university are different as well as the social acceptance of graduates from each university¹³². A student from a different provincial university argued that, if he was study at an elite university, he may look down on students at Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) since this place require a lot lower admission score than an elite university¹³³. Their views suggest that participants believed that Chulalongkorn University is better than their universities and it would be better for them to study in such a university. As noted earlier, students' class did not actually change even when they studied at Chulalongkorn University. However, they expect their life chances to change.

In contrast, some students are not convinced that studying at Chulalongkorn University can improve class status as reflected in the “maybe” category. For example, one male student claimed that, since he does not study at Chulalongkorn University, he could not answer this question; however, in his words, “I believe everyone has equal dignity, regardless of where they graduate. However, for people with bias, they would think Chulalongkorn University students are superior since they are from a high reputation university and have better lecturers”.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹³² Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹³³ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

¹³⁴ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

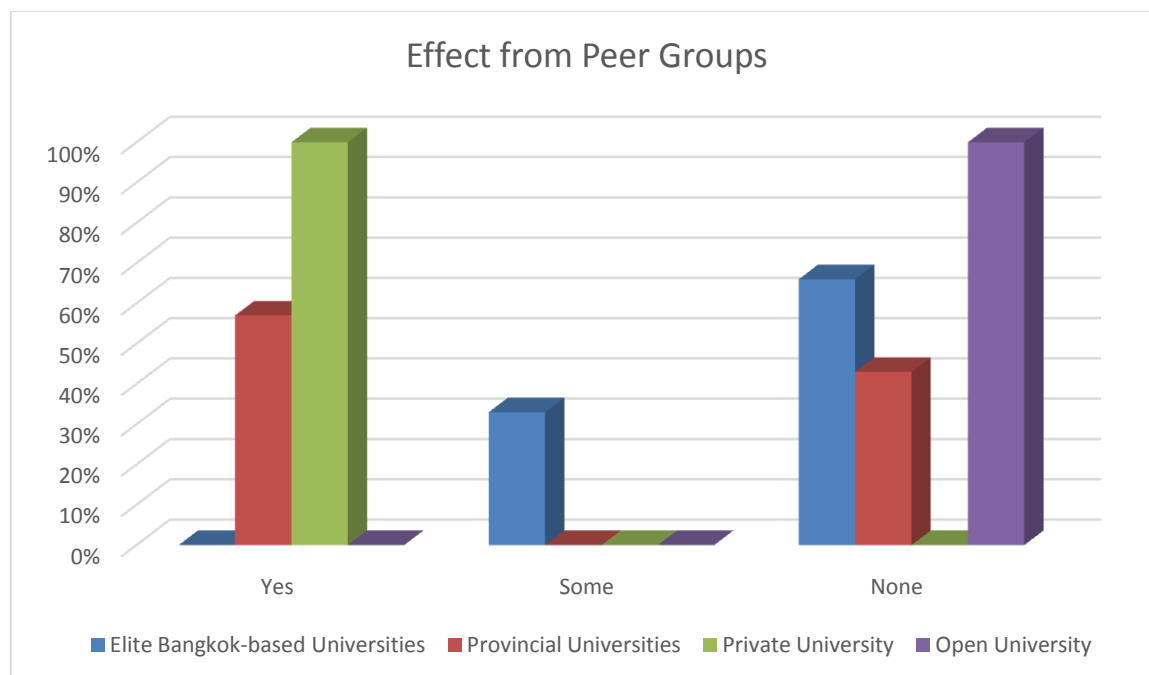
There are a few students who rejected the suggestion that their class can be improved by study at Chulalongkorn University. However, judging from their reasons, it is highly likely that these students actually rejected the superior status of Chulalongkorn University. For example, one male student from a provincial university believed it is only a belief to think Chulalongkorn University is better than other universities¹³⁵. Another student from a different provincial university claimed that Chulalongkorn University or Thammasat University have high reputations because the media focus only on them, especially in terms of academics. He claimed that the media should be fairer in terms of distribution of academic information¹³⁶.

Although all university students can be categorized as middle class based on their educational qualifications, a lot of students still think their class can be improved by study at Chulalongkorn University. This suggests that, at least in the eyes of students, there are class fractions within the middle class and students are divided by fraction, which is in accordance with the hypothesis that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions. University reputation itself did not put students instantly into a better class. Nonetheless, it did create perceptions of superiority and inferiority for students, as well as to outsiders. It also provides greater life chances to students at elite universities.

The next university environment factor that could affect students' class perception is students' peer group. Although academics believe peer group has a high influence on students (Kaufman 2005 and Mathur 2010), according to collected data, around 50 percent of overall participants claimed peer group has no effect on them.

¹³⁵ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹³⁶ Focus group discussion, November 2013.

Figure 4-23: Effect from Peer Groups

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

As shown in the figure above, more than 60 percent of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities, around 40 percent of participants from provincial universities, and all participants from the open university rejected any influence of peer group on their class perceptions. Only 30 percent of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities partly agreed while around half of participants from provincial universities and all from the private university fully agreed. Data may indicate that, in contrast to many academics, students think their peer group has less influence on them compared to other university environment factor, though further investigation is needed to assess their claim.

Students who rejected the effect of peer group provide various reasons. Almost all students from all types of university claimed to not care about the class of their friends or economic background and friendship has nothing to do with class perceptions. For example, one male student from a provincial university argued that students at his university have been

taught to not separate people by wealth hence everyone is equal¹³⁷. A female student from a different provincial university claimed peer group has no effect because all of her friends are from the same class. In her words, “we are the same class because I stay with them and we get along well. Our preferences are alike, their life and mine are the same; simple and easy going”¹³⁸. Her view is quite interesting and suggests that, though not representing every student, all her friends are from similar economic background and possibly the same middle class. This indicates that, firstly, university is a middle class institution; secondly, since they are from the same class, they do learn shared middle class behavior; thirdly, students may be divided into each university according to their class since her friends are all from the same economic background. It is in accordance with the hypothesis that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions. Another interesting example is from a male student from the open university as he noted that friendship has nothing to do with economic status. However, he pointed out that, in a private university, a person’s class is more important for friendship. He explained that his friend at Rangsit University needs to have the latest model of smart phone or luxury car to make friends there¹³⁹. His claim may represent how people value a certain type of university. It may indicate that, for some, the private university is for students who have good economic background or pretend to have such background. Nonetheless, students in this category may not notice the influence of peer group since students are loyal to their group.

In contrast, some students believed in the peer group effect. They can be divided into two groups; one believed class can be changed by staying with friends from a certain class; another believed students only stay with friends from the same class background. For

¹³⁷ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

¹³⁸ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹³⁹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

example, in the first group, a student from a provincial university believed, if he has rich or upper class friends, he would see himself as such¹⁴⁰. Another female student from another provincial university argued that, if she spends time with higher class friends, she would look like one of them¹⁴¹. For the second group, one male student from a different provincial university argued that, “When people stay and live together, like my friend here, it would be hard to be united if we are from different classes. But if we have the same provincial lifestyle and live the same simple life, it is easier to stay together”. Then he claimed that most of his friends have the same provincial lifestyle while some, who do not, were out of his group¹⁴². Two more male students agreed with their friend. Both students noted that they would prefer to hang out with friends who have the same economic background. They explained that their lifestyle is different from students who come from high income families¹⁴³. A participant from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that no one would be friend with a person who was too proud of their upper class status or behaved egotistically¹⁴⁴. This shows strong evidence that they emulate a lifestyle of their peer group.

Data indicate that, firstly, students did not believe peer group has strong effect on students’ class perception. Secondly, most students would stay in the group of their own class, not mixed, hence peer group does not cultivate new class behavior but create familiar atmosphere for students. It can be explained that, since students were screened and put in each university according to their class, there are not much difference among them inside university. Therefore, peer group did not teach them how to be a new class but only emphasis

¹⁴⁰ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹⁴¹ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

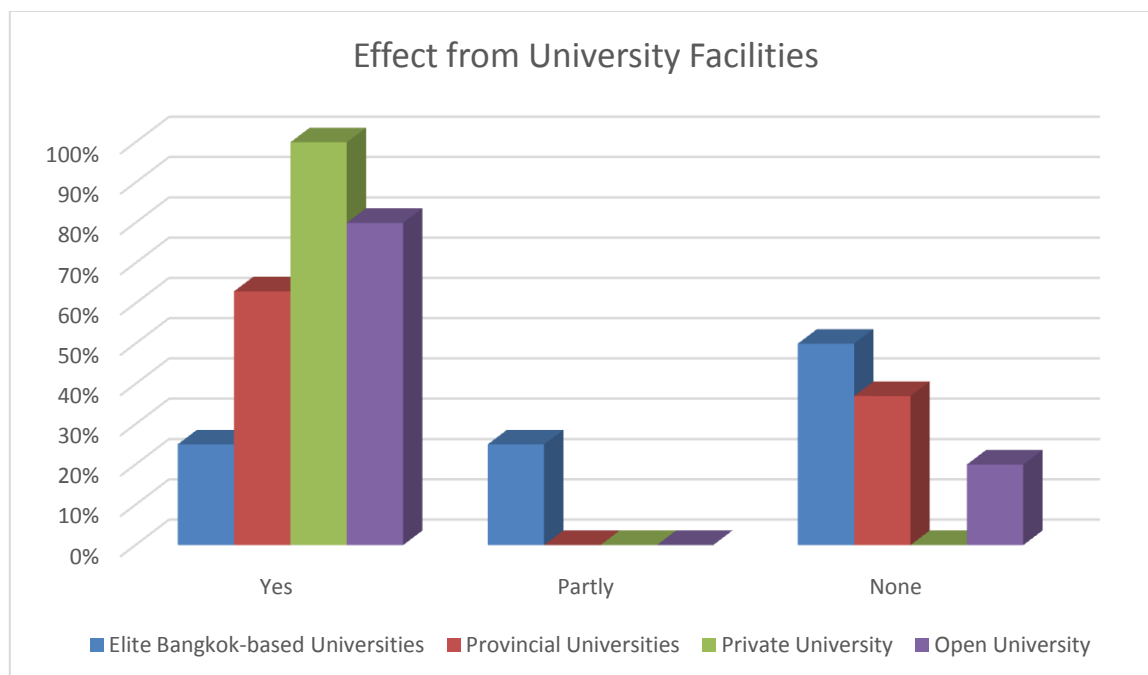
¹⁴² Focus group discussion, January 2013.

¹⁴³ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Focus group discussion, February 2013

and reproduce what they are designed to be; especially, when students would alienate their friend from different classes.

Despite many students playing down the importance of peer group, their responses still suggest that peer group is a key element in class perceptions as noted in the hypothesis that the university environment and student peers are important factors. Peer group helps students to fit their class destination by teaching them how to behave and act so they can belong to their group. Students are surrounded by the middle class and see only the middle class, hence emulate the middle class behavior. Peer group is also important in inhibiting intermingling between different classes. As shown in students' answer, they preferred to stay with friends from a similar background. This fact emphasizes that students would have learned how to interact mostly within their own class. These socialization processes ensure students to become the middle class. These findings, though mostly implicit in the discussions, are in accordance with hypotheses that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions, and the university environment and student peers are important factors in shaping class perceptions.

Figure 4-24: Effect from University Facilities

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

University facilities are another environment factor that can affect students' class perceptions as noted in the hypothesis that university facilities and the university environment in general are essential for reproducing class perceptions. According to collected data, other than elite Bangkok-based universities, participants from every university believed university facilities affected their class perceptions. In contrast, around half of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities denied the importance of university facilities on their class perceptions. University facilities can be described as all materials inside the university, from type of chair inside classrooms to the look of buildings. Each student has their own idea on which facility can affect their perceptions and answered this question differently. During focus group discussions, the researcher did not specify any facilities in the discussion and asked generally. The effects can be categorized into two major categories; participants feel superior and inferior to university facilities.

To better understand university facilities in Thailand, it may be worth mentioning that there are some patterns in university facilities, with differences between universities in Bangkok and other provinces. From the subject universities, Bangkok-based universities include Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, Rangsit University and Ramkhamhaeng University which are located in Bangkok and the surrounding area. Therefore, provincial universities in this study include Chiangmai University, Mahasarakham University and Prince of Songkla University.

Some obvious patterns are, firstly, universities in provincial areas mostly have large land space and buildings are situated far apart. Walking between these buildings or in and out of university in the heat is troublesome. In contrast, Bangkok-based universities have considerably less space and students can easily walk from building to building, though maybe not all buildings. Secondly, the landscapes of Bangkok-based and provincial universities are different. Due to its large space, buildings separated by large fields of grass are common in many provincial universities. Buildings squeezed into limited space are quite common for Bangkok-based universities. Lastly, many universities in provinces have significantly less budget than universities in Bangkok-based areas since they have fewer students.

In this part, it may be worth investigating university by university so we can have a clear picture of facilities in each university. In addition, since participants are from political science faculties, this part will focus only on faculty facilities.

The first university, Chulalongkorn University, has a division of students where one half believed in the effect of facilities while the other half rejected this idea. Interestingly, all participants who believed in its effect feel superior to others because of their university facilities. The political science faculty at Chulalongkorn University has old buildings. Two of them have wooden floors on both levels. It has its own library building, a small one but with a good amount of books. Classroom amenities and the sound system are good, though not the

best. Toilets are modern and clean. Despite old appearances, all buildings have air conditioning systems. One may consider these buildings as outdated; however, as reflected in student's answers, many considered them as buildings with a long and proud history. For example, a male student claimed that he feels proud to study at an old political science building, although he insisted he does not feel superior to anyone¹⁴⁵.

Another elite Bangkok-based university, Thammasat University, has two campuses in Bangkok; one for graduate students while another is for postgraduate students. This thesis focuses only on Tha Pra Chan campus where postgraduate students study, with all participants there. The Political Science faculty at Tha Pra Chan campus is more compact compared to Chulalongkorn University. However, it is sufficient since only postgraduate students study there. Building facilities are better than most participating universities since it serves mainly postgraduate students who pay significantly higher tuition fees. Classrooms with air conditioning systems, comfortable chairs and good audio visual are only a few examples. As one student noted, good facilities can be seen as a luxury which can be compared between universities. In his words, "it is the same thing as one having a car or house and another who does not".¹⁴⁶ This finding suggests that quality of facilities may relate to tuition fees so that those students from high income families again can receive better quality of education, in this case better facilities.

For both elite Bangkok-based universities, facilities are good. They have everything that is needed for higher education and in better quality. This reinforces that elite Bangkok-based universities cater to students from a certain economic background.

In terms of provincial universities, the political science faculty at Chiangmai University has old buildings but slightly more modern than Chulalongkorn University. Since most

¹⁴⁵ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

students use motorcycles or the university bus, parking was not an issue. Most, if not all, classrooms have air conditioning and good equipment, though it is below the elite Bangkok-based universities' standard. However, most participants from Chiangmai University did not compare themselves to other universities. In contrast, students claimed to feel inferior to "another side of the university". According to them, Chiangmai University is divided into two sides and one side gets better facilities than the other. As students of the political science faculty, the participants were in the "Suan Sak" side while students who study in medical related faculties were in the "Suan Dork" side. According to participants, the "Suan Dork" side has better learning equipment, buildings and dormitories. Some participants claimed further that lecturers paid more attention to that side. For example, one male student argued that the "Suan Dork" side of the university appears to have a better level of education and has become elite while his side has poorer buildings and equipment¹⁴⁷. Nonetheless, facilities here are better than other provincial universities which may have resulted from the location in the highly urbanized city of Chiangmai. Since Chiangmai University is located in an urban area and has urban customers, it may be necessary to develop more "urban" facilities.

Another provincial university is Mahasarakham University where no students believed university facilities have any effect on them, which may indicate that students are content with their university facilities. Mahasarakham University is located outside the city centre in the newly build area, hence new building and facilities. As it is newly build, Mahasarakham University can offer adequate support to cover all students' needs, which may explain why students did not see any effect of university facilities. The finding also suggest that students think the new Mahasarakham University facilities is what the middle class facilities look like, hence no complaining. Although students at Mahasarakham University can be categorized as the middle class, they are completely different from Bangkok middle class in many ways

¹⁴⁷ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

such as lifestyle and life chances. This supports that there are fractions within the middle class and each fraction have their own expectation and definition of the middle class.

In contrast, all participants from Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) claimed to be affected by university facilities. First of all, Prince of Songkla University at Pattani campus is part of Prince of Songkla University which consists of 5 campuses; Hat Yai, Phuket, Surat Thani, Trang and Pattani. According to a participant from Pattani campus, he argued that, between Prince of Songkla University campuses, facilities are different and Phuket campus has the best facilities¹⁴⁸. Unfortunately, the researcher did not go to Phuket campus and is unable to authenticate the student's claim. Nonetheless, facilities at Pattani campus alone may help clarify the student's claim. It is also well worth remembering that Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) is located in one of the three southern-most provinces where violence frequently occurred between separatists and the government. Although its effect on university facilities is not clear, the conflict is likely to have an impact at some level; for example, there were some buildings unable to finish construction. The Political Science faculty at Pattani campus looks like other provincial universities where land space is not a problem but facilities are limited. Political science buildings have no elevator despite their height but most rooms are air conditioned. It is a concrete building, unlike at Chulalongkorn University, though quite old looking and in poor physical condition. There are plenty of parking spaces although it is rarely used since motorcycles are the most preferred method for students. It has a computer room, a small and insufficient library and a not so clean toilet. Moreover, classrooms are too few for the number of students, hence many subjects are taught at a communal building. The condition of facilities made students feel inferior to other universities. One student complained that his faculty has "a bad sewage system, the cafeteria

¹⁴⁸ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

is not clean and there are not enough buildings for all students”.¹⁴⁹ His view not only reflects the condition of his faculty but also reveals his expectations for a university as well as for the middle class.

For the private university, all participants from Rangsit University claimed to be affected by university facilities however their reasons are divided. Around 66 percent claimed to feel superior while the rest believed they are inferior to others. As a private university in an urban area with a high tuition fee, buildings and facilities obviously reflect the status of customers. Parking space is rare because students and staff have too many cars, not because a lack of space. However, at the time of data collection, it was not long after a major flood which damaged most of the political science buildings. The reconstruction and repair process could be seen everywhere. As a result, it is difficult to describe the actual status of political science faculty facilities. Nonetheless, students’ answers may indicate what political science faculty at Rangsit University was like. One female student claimed that the beautiful buildings make her proud to study there¹⁵⁰. However, another female student argued that the university buildings also make her feel inferior since some students study in better buildings than her. According to her, buildings in Rangsit University made her proud and jealous¹⁵¹.

The last university is Ramkhamhaeng University. All participants from this open university claimed to be affected by university facilities, not compared to other universities, however, but from different types of students within the university. Despite its status as an open university, Ramkhamhaeng University has better facilities than a lot of provincial universities. The political science building has elevators and is air conditioned. However, lecturers’ rooms on the top floor are the worst in all subject universities. Due to the very high

¹⁴⁹ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

¹⁵⁰ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁵¹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

number of students, most students do not actually study at the political science building but use communal study buildings instead. According to participants¹⁵², good classrooms at the political science building are reserved for students in postgraduate or special programs which made participants feel inferior. Every participant agreed that, within Ramkhamhaeng University, there is a separation between students and postgraduates or special programs students. They claimed that they receive unequal treatment and feel that they are lower status. According to them, postgraduate students have far better equipment and access to better facilities such as classrooms with air conditioners or clean toilets. Students' claims are not far from reality. When in classrooms, it was easy to notice the differences between the political science building and the place where other students studied. Their classroom has no air conditioning, poor equipment and dirty toilets, even worse than some provincial universities. In contrast, at the political science building, everything was clean and classrooms seemed to be air conditioned and better equipped. This emphasizes that, even within the same faculty and university, quality of facilities depends on students' economic background. This also show that when students, from any university, think they are surrounded by the middle class environment, they are happy and are not complaint. In contrast, if students are surrounded by the environment that did not meet their expectation, they will complain about it. Moreover, the finding indicates that class expectation is different in each fraction of the middle class.

A number of participants claimed to not be affected by facilities at all. One participant from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that, even without any facilities, people would still look at Chulalongkorn University with high regard since Chulalongkorn University is more than just buildings or facilities, it is about reputation¹⁵³. Another participant from Thammasat University believed it depended on how faculty manages their

¹⁵² Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁵³ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

budget and has no relationship to students' perceptions¹⁵⁴. Two students from provincial universities also shared the same view and argued that it is about money and tuition fees¹⁵⁵. Another student from a provincial university pointed out that good facility did not mean students are rich¹⁵⁶.

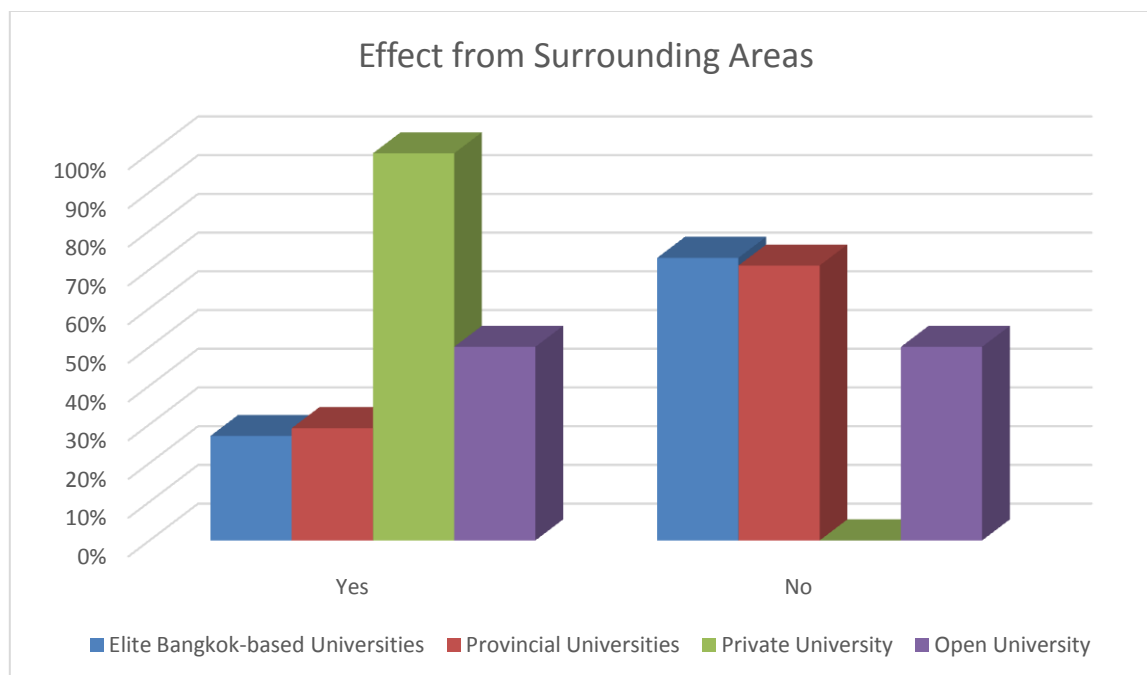
Overall, data indicates that university facilities generally match class fractions. Better fractions of the middle class have been provided better facilities which are accepted even by students. Data suggests that the frustration of students happened within university, not between universities. This shows that students are satisfied with facilities and are believed that it is adequately reflected their fractions, hence no resentment against other universities. The resentment only happened from the differences in treatment or ability to access facilities within university,

In addition, the effect from university facilities is not only reinforce the hypothesis that university facilities and the university environment in general are essential for producing class perception but also reinforce another hypothesis that university reputation and entrance process divide students into class fractions. Students from better fraction, clearly, can access to better university and better facilities than students from the lower fraction, despite, in some cases, they paid the similar tuition fee such as the difference in facilities between elite Bangkok-based and provincial universities. The next part will help investigate further whether luxury places like shopping complex affect students' class perception or not.

¹⁵⁴ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

¹⁵⁵ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

Figure 4-25: Effect from Surrounding Areas

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Similar to facilities, the surrounding area of each university can affect class perceptions of students as noted in the hypothesis that university facilities and the university environment in general are essential for producing class perceptions. However, the results from focus group discussions are quite different from the previous figure. As shown in the figure above, interestingly, a majority of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities and provincial universities denied any effect from the surrounding area, while participants from the open university were equally divided. In contrast, all participants from the private university believed in the effect from the surrounding area.

In this research, surrounding area means area around the university which may or may not belong to the university. It can include everything from rice fields to shopping complexes. It is the area that students would pass through on their way to and from university. It is the

area surrounding the university where students spend their time for lunch, dinner, shopping, or with friends. It does not include more distant areas.

Since the surrounding area can be seen as facilities outside the university, why does it have a different effect on students? It is possible that, firstly, these areas may not belong to the university hence the sense of belonging is not the same as university facilities. Secondly, it is also possible that students may not spend much time in these areas, and therefore are unable to evaluate their influence. Lastly, students may play down its importance since students were also asked “if your university has surrounding areas like Chulalongkorn University with many shopping complexes nearby, would it affect your class perceptions?”

Students’ reasons can better explain these differences. To better understand each university’s unique surrounding area, it may be worth separating this part by university. Chulalongkorn University is situated in the heart of one of the biggest commercial areas in Bangkok therefore the university surrounding area is very cosmopolitan and filled with luxury shopping complexes. It would takes less than 10 minutes for students to explore the variety of foods, clothes, gadgets and services from sophisticated cafés and restaurants, high-end shops and international brands of products. Moreover, the ease of travel is encouraged by the fact that Chulalongkorn University has so many choices of transportation including an underground train station in front of the university. Interestingly, many of these shopping complexes rent land from Chulalongkorn University, which may create a sense of belonging to students as one male student claimed that these areas are his territory. He argued that his university uniform made him feel comfortable when walking around this area while students from other universities would hesitate to walk around here in their uniforms¹⁵⁷. However, as shown in the figure above, most students from elite Bangkok-based universities did not believe in the influence of the surrounding area. One male student downplayed the idea of the

¹⁵⁷ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

importance of the university and commercial area neighborhood. He said that Chulalongkorn University is lucky to be in this area and all these shops are for everyone¹⁵⁸. When asked further about the effect if Chulalongkorn University is in a provincial area instead of in the middle of urban commercial area. One male student believed that Chulalongkorn University would be the same even without the shopping area¹⁵⁹. Another male student agreed and argued that Chulalongkorn University would still be held in high regard and have a high ranking¹⁶⁰. Their views indicate a belief that the surrounding area has significantly less effect than reputation, in the case of Chulalongkorn University.

Another elite Bangkok-based university is Thammasat University. Its Tha Pra Chan campus (where participants were studying) is located in the heart of Bangkok, it is situated in a non-commercial area. Therefore, unlike Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University is surrounded by old government buildings, temples and old residential housing. Although one of the most famous tourist areas (Khoa Sarn Road) is close by, it is generally a destination for low budget tourists with not many luxury places. As pointed out by one male student, the university environment has some effect. In his opinion, he believed one of many reasons that high school students want to study at Chulalongkorn University is its location with shopping centres and luxury around them. He added that, if Chulalongkorn University did not have the shopping complexes or sky train, fewer high school students would want to study there. He then compared to Thammasat University, that this same group of high school students would not want to walk around here where only temples or government building are nearby¹⁶¹. His view, however, may represent rivalry between Chulalongkorn University and

¹⁵⁸ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁵⁹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁶¹ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

Thammasat University since both are leading universities in terms of academics and are rich in history.

When asked further to compare the surrounding area of their university and Chulalongkorn University, most students did not believe it would change anything. Participants share the same view that surrounding area is less significant for them since they are studying in a high reputation university which outweighs other factors. For example, a female student claimed that the advantage of graduating from Chulalongkorn University or Thammasat University outweighs the university environment. She insisted that, even if Chulalongkorn University did not have any shopping complexes, it would not matter¹⁶². Another female student argued even further that luxury shopping would divert their focus from education to shopping¹⁶³. Their views emphasize that, for elite Bangkok-based university students, the surrounding area is not as important as the reputation of their universities. Although students did not believe surrounding areas had an impact, in both cases the elite Bangkok-based universities are in the middle class areas, surrounded by shopping or bureaucrats. The data also reinforces the importance of university reputation in students' class perception.

Unfortunately, only one participant from Chiangmai University answered this question and claimed the surrounding area has no effect on him, which indicates that the surrounding areas are fit with lifestyle he is expected.

In the case of Mahasarakham University, it has moved from the centre of Mahasarakham province to a new and larger location surrounded mostly by rice fields. When the university was built in this new location, the surrounding area was developed as well. However, it was apartment buildings and townhouses that were built, not shopping

¹⁶² Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁶³ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

complexes. There are many shops around the university to serve the high demand of university students; however, these shops are small, not luxurious, local and more provincial style. Products from these shops are not international brand names. When participants were asked “if their university were surrounded by shopping complexes like Chulalongkorn University, would it have any effect on them?” Most participants believed it has no effect, though their reasons are totally opposite to their elite counterparts. For example, two participants believed it does not suit their lifestyle to have luxury shopping complexes around¹⁶⁴. Their views reflect a clear distinction between urban and provincial lifestyles as well as emphasizing that the middle class has fractions, at least, Bangkok-based middle class and provincial middle class. It is also possible that some students wanted to play down the importance of the surrounding area. Interestingly, however, two students argued their university already has that kind of shopping centres¹⁶⁵.

In contrast, some students believed in its effect. For example, one participant claimed, although it does not directly relate to his class perceptions, the surrounding area of his university affected the way people look at his university¹⁶⁶. Another participant argued that he would feel better if his university had a luxury shopping centre around¹⁶⁷. His view suggests that he would have some ideas about the middle class lifestyle and is expecting to have one.

Regrettably, none from Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) participated in this question hence there will be no description of its facilities.

Interestingly all participants from the private university believed they are affected by the surrounding area. Rangsit University is located in Pathum Thani province, not far from

¹⁶⁴ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

¹⁶⁵ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

¹⁶⁶ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

¹⁶⁷ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

Bangkok, and is well developed. It is surrounded by student accommodation and shops. Although it does not have shopping complexes as in the case of Chulalongkorn University, it is more sophisticated than most provincial universities. Both expensive and inexpensive restaurants and cafes are around, including street food. Students have many choices, depending on their individual budgets. Yet, there are communities for low income people around the university, as well as some wealthier areas. It can be best described as a mixed environment. In any cases, all participants claimed the surrounding area could improve their class status. For example, one male student explained that the surrounding area affected outsiders' perception of them. He argued that a university surrounded by luxurious places would make its student look good too¹⁶⁸. His view suggests that the surrounding area may not directly affect students' class perceptions; however, it was the way outsiders look at their university and its surrounding that may affect students' class perceptions. Moreover, when looking into detail of participants who answered this question, all of them came from provincial area. This suggests that they may believe their class perceptions have already changed because they experienced a new environment, an urban middle class one, which is different from their rural environment.

The last subject university is Ramkhamhaeng University, an open university. It is situated in one of the busiest areas and worst traffic jams in Bangkok. It is surrounded by many commercial buildings and student accommodation. It has shopping centres closed by, though not luxury ones. As an open university, students are not as wealthy as at elite Bangkok-based universities or the private university as previously shown in Chapter 3 and many of them have full time jobs. The surrounding area reflected this fact and was filled with inexpensive products. In fact, the surrounding area of Ramkhamhaeng University is not so different from provincial universities in terms of living cost, and students seemed happy with

¹⁶⁸ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

it. When participants were asked about the influence of luxury shopping complexes and their class, one female student claimed it had no effect on her class perceptions. In her words, “it has no connection because the poor can walk there [luxury shopping mall] too. It is not strange, we can walk there even if we not buying anything”.¹⁶⁹ Her view reflects that; firstly, she may have admitted that she is poor; secondly, despite being unable to buy luxury products, she still wanted to walk inside luxury places to “taste middle class lifestyle” and maybe to look like she is middle class. If this is the case, then she is affected by the surrounding area but does not notice it. In contrast, a male student disagreed, as in his words,

If it is the Paragon [name of a luxury shopping mall], it is not like that [what the female student claimed]. On weekends, almost all customers are highly sophisticated people, they dress in fashion. Their dress can identify their class. To be honest, everyone wants to dress nicely but, if our financial status is not the same as them, how can we dress as good as them?¹⁷⁰

His opinion indicates that, at least for him, there are links between luxurious places, luxurious products and social class.

In sum, most students claimed that the surrounding areas did not affect their class perception. However, data indicates differently. It shows, firstly, a lot of participants are satisfied with their universities’ surrounding areas, since they are matched their expectations of a middle class lifestyle. Secondly, some students believed their surrounding areas did not match their lifestyle, hence complaining and believe it is affected their class perception.

¹⁶⁹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

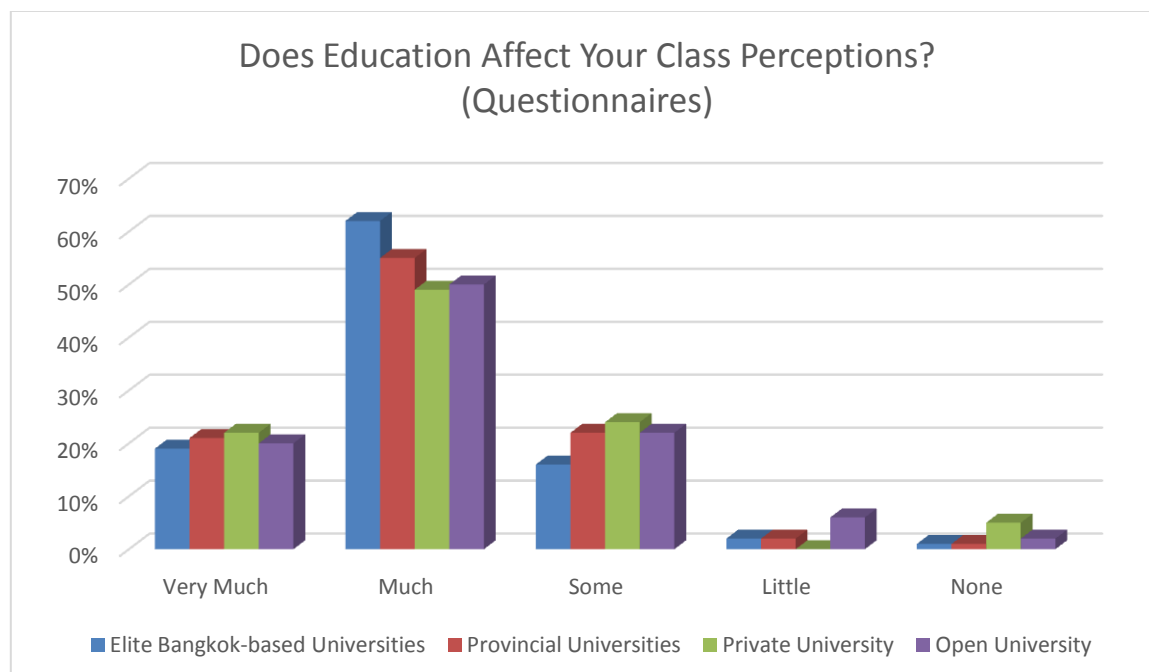
¹⁷⁰ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

Thirdly, data shows the fractions within the middle class differs by urban and provincial lifestyle, and each fraction has their own expectation on what does the middle class look like.

The influence of higher education

The previous part revealed how university environment can affect class perceptions of students. However, higher education is not only about experience in and around the university community but also about being educated. This part looks into how the content of higher education can affect students' class perceptions. It further examines the hypothesis that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society. From the questionnaire, participants were asked to evaluate the level of the effect of higher education on their class perceptions. As shown in the figure below, it is clear that most participants believed education affected their class perceptions, although most of them claimed daily life experience was a better source of understanding class than education in an earlier question.

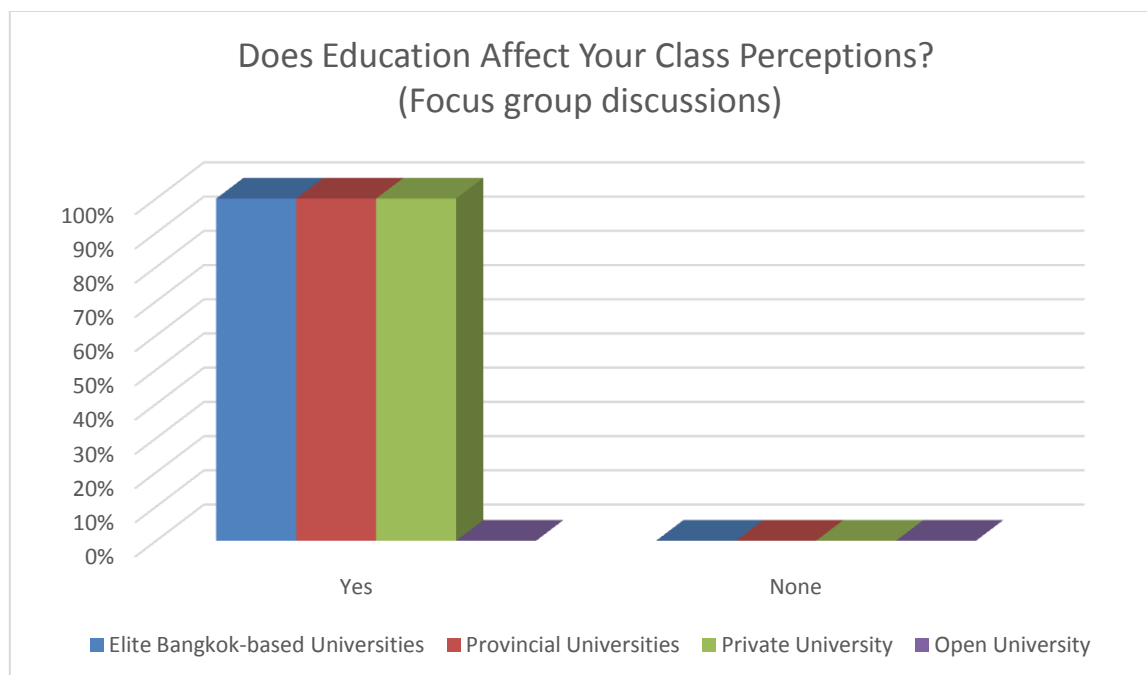
Figure 4-26: Does Education Affect Your Class Perceptions? (Questionnaires)



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

The majority of students from every participating university shared the same view that higher education affected their class perception with only a few claiming the effect is little to none. In order to double check the result, students were asked during focus group discussions the same question. All participants from every subject university shared the same view that education affected their class perceptions.

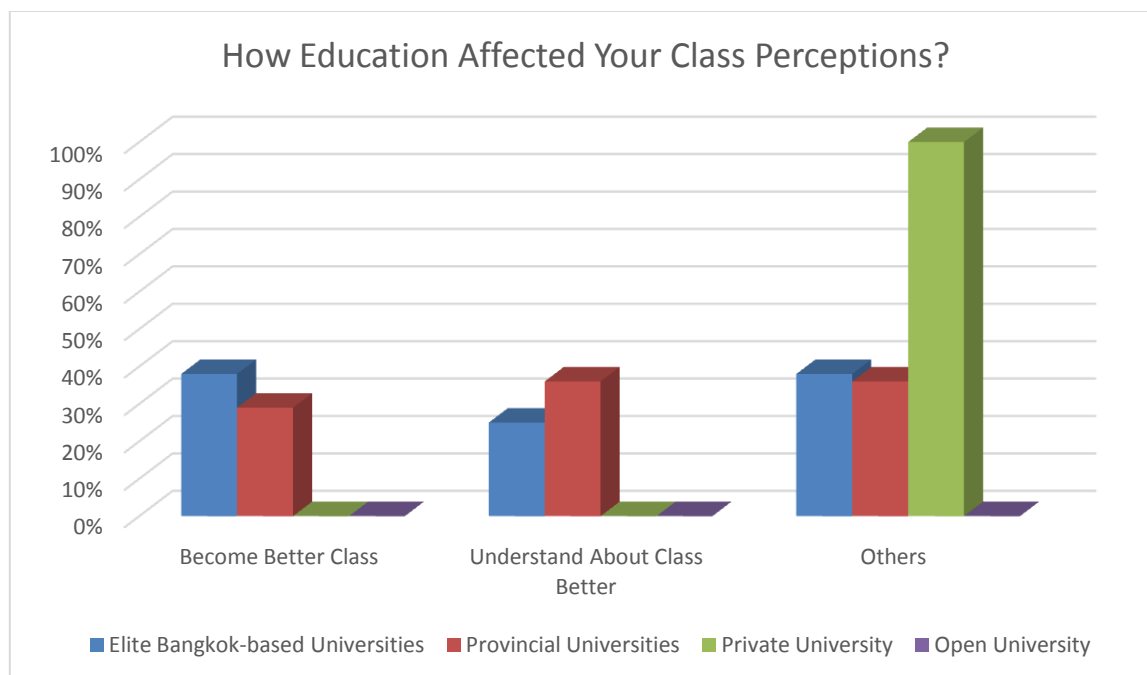
Figure 4-27: Does Education Affect Your Class Perceptions? (Focus Group Discussions)



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Unfortunately, no students from the open university participated in this question. The differences between the two question techniques may come from the differences in number of participants from both methods. The questionnaire method included a higher number of participants than focus group discussions and reflected more variety of opinion. However, despite having significantly fewer, the focus group discussions provided greater detail and the reasons behind their opinions. It is clear that, for students, education affected their class perception.

Nonetheless, despite sharing the same view, students have various reasons for their beliefs. As shows in the figure below, their reasons can be categorized into 2 major themes; education puts them in a better class and education helps them understand class better. Their answers emphasize the importance of higher education as noted in the hypothesis that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.

Figure 4-28: How Education Affected Your Class Perceptions?

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

In the first category, students believed they increase their class status because they have an education. Students in this category perceived education as a tool for class mobility, although it is impossible to know whether they received this idea from education itself or from society. This indicates the importance of education towards class status and in the responses implies that a university degree is the minimum requirement for the middle class. For example, two students from a provincial university believed their class can be changed by education, even though they could not reach elite status, education can put them in the middle class¹⁷¹. Their view reflects the idea that education only has importance for the middle class with less importance for the upper class.

Responses also indicate that students think education can separate people into classes. For example, two students from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that, since they are

¹⁷¹ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

students of high reputation university, they may even be superior to other university students¹⁷². This indicates the fractions within the middle class. One student added that Thais always admire people with high educational backgrounds therefore, according to him, it is not surprising to see outsiders as well as students think some universities are better than others¹⁷³. A male student from a provincial university argued further that education not only changes his class but also his way of thinking as well. He claimed that, after he has a higher education, it is harder for him to communicate with some of his uneducated friend. In his words, “in the past, I and my friend can talk with each other. However, after studying at university, it seems like we cannot communicate anymore”.¹⁷⁴

In the second category, participants believed education helps them better understand class. As noted by a male student from an elite Bangkok-based university, people would perceive class generally but education would help them see deeper and wider¹⁷⁵. However, higher education consists of many different concepts and not all relate to class. As pointed out by a female student, without studying in a specialized faculty like Political Science, she would not understand class in depth¹⁷⁶.

Many participants shared this view and claimed to understand more about class because of higher education, especially in political science. One female student explained that, before studying at the university, she identified class through only one dimension; economic background. However, after studying at university, she is now seeing class in a

¹⁷² Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁷³ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹⁷⁵ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

¹⁷⁶ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

multidimensional way¹⁷⁷. A female student noted that “class is something I experienced but did not understand. However, since I learned about class in university, I can look back and understand now that class is dominating us and we are under a class structure”.¹⁷⁸ This example reveals how higher education can affect students’ class perceptions in accordance with the hypothesis that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society. Clearly, their understandings are under the influence of education or, to be precise, under influence from lecturers since they are the ones who pass along knowledge about class.

There are answers from students that could not be grouped into either category as well. For example, one student from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that the education system created stronger classes and people will be more divided by class if they have a higher education¹⁷⁹. His view reflects the importance of education towards class status. Education in general not only helps students to understand class, it also helps reproducing Thai values. As one male student from a provincial university claimed, “in subjects like sociology, we studied about history which encourages us to admire or want to be someone important”.¹⁸⁰ Another student added that, despite pre-university education level not directly talking about class, it cultivated in him love of the nation and the King, pride in the national anthem and the Thai alphabet. He argued that he understood the socialization process because his eyes were opened after he studied about class in university. He also explained that class in Thailand does not change and it will be the same since only a few can learn in university while a lot could not¹⁸¹. His view reflects that higher education is not for everyone and is limited to

¹⁷⁷ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹⁷⁸ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹⁸¹ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

people with a certain economic background. It also implies that, in his view, people without higher education would not understand class. One more student from the same university argued even further that education also preserves the power of the Monarchy by providing only the good side¹⁸². His friend further explained that education has implanted the idea that an uneducated person is lower class and they will always be lower class since it is impossible for them to climb up the class ladder¹⁸³. Students in this category mainly pointed out that education may not directly teach them about class. Instead, it reproduces the class culture and Thai values in them. However, as students noted, higher education allows them to understand this socialization.

In sum, data from this part revealed that students believed higher education affected their class perceptions. According to collected data, there are 3 ways for higher education to affect student's class perceptions. Firstly, it is confirmed by level of education. As university students, participants' class perceptions have been affected. They now believe that they are better than previously, or better than others without higher education and, maybe, in the eyes of others as well. This emphasizes the importance of education in terms of class mobility. Secondly, it is not only the level of education that affects their perception but also the institution that differentiates them from others at the same level. The reputation of each university plays a major role in this effect. Not only in the way they see themselves but also in the way they think others would see them. Thirdly, they are affected by knowledge from the classroom. Most participants claimed that higher education helps them understand class better.

Data indicates that, for many students, higher education is not only about knowledge and, as we saw earlier, behavior, but also for class mobility. Students believed, by having

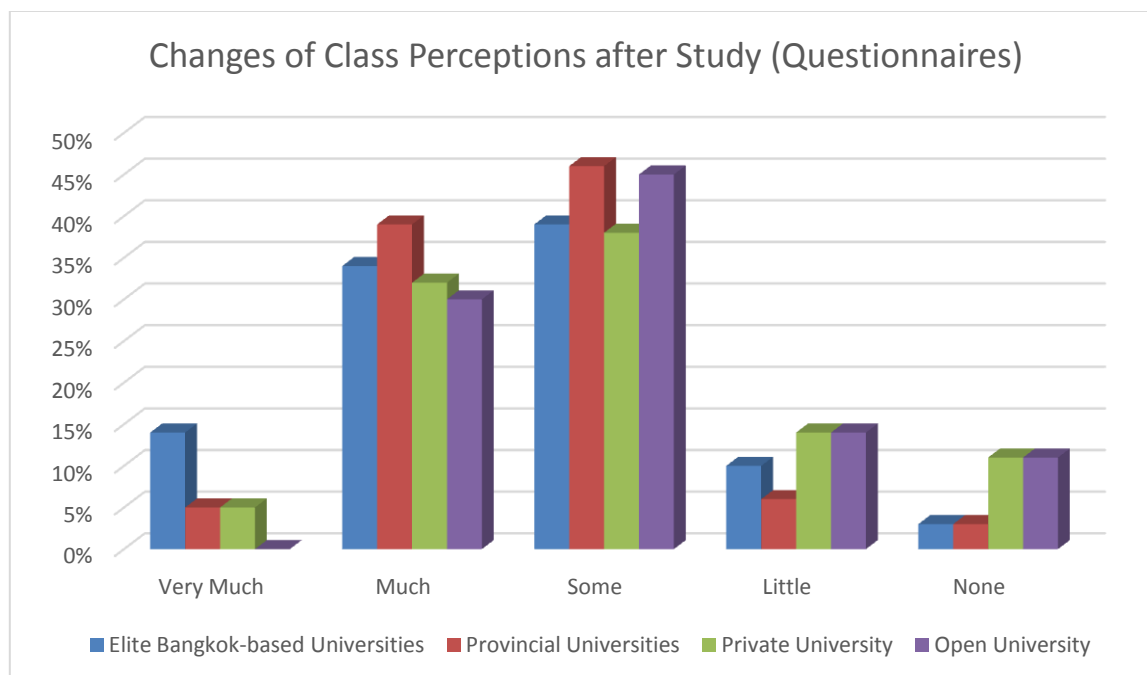
¹⁸² Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹⁸³ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

higher education degree, they can become middle class, regardless of their economic background. However, there are some participants from the questionnaire who claimed there was no effect from higher education. Unfortunately, there is no similar data from focus group discussions. Therefore it is impossible to evaluate their claims. Nonetheless, these findings are in accordance with the hypothesis that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.

Output

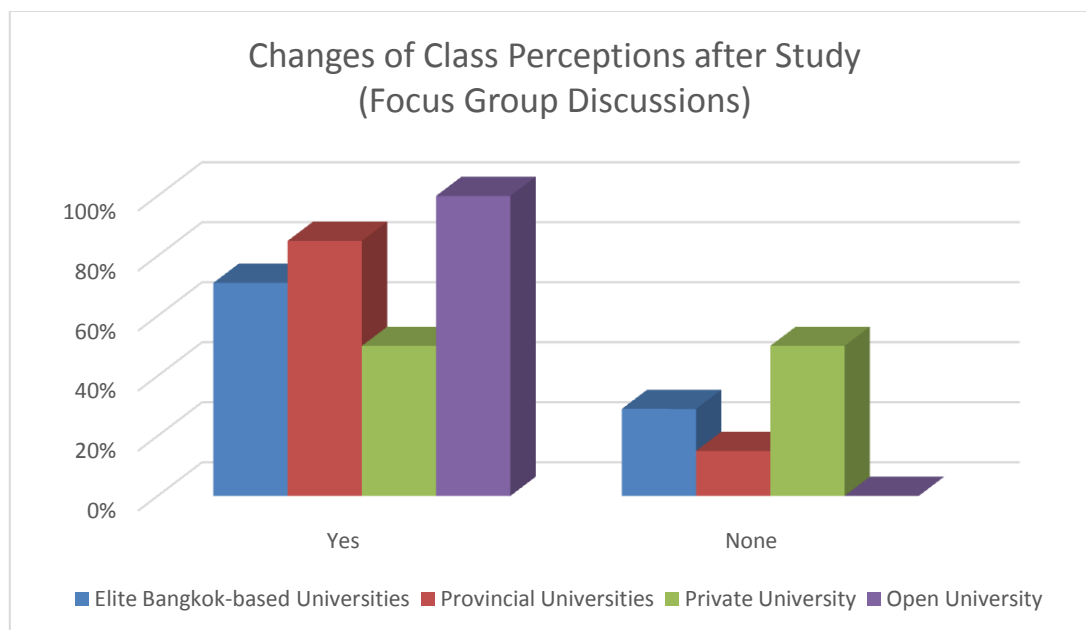
The previous part revealed that participants believed their class perceptions were affected by higher education. This part investigates further how it affected class perceptions and whether their perceptions were changed by education. This part evaluates the hypothesis that education, particularly at the university level, plays a major role in implementing and shaping class perceptions. Students were asked in questionnaires whether their class perceptions have changed after studying about class in university. Results are divided and balanced between changed and not much changed.

Figure 4-29: Changes of Class Perceptions after Study (Questionnaires)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

As shown in the figure above, data indicates that participants are mostly divided into 2 categories. Slightly less than half of overall participants believed their class perceptions were very much or much changed. Slightly more than half of overall participants claimed their perceptions were changed only some. A small percentage of participants believed their perceptions were not changed at all.

In order to double check students' evaluation, they were asked if their class perceptions have changed after studying again during focus group discussions but with only two choices, yes and no. Although participants were not in the same group with questionnaires, getting students to make a clear decision may reveal their actual thoughts. As shown in the figure below, a majority of participants believed their class perceptions have changed since studying about class at university, with only participants from the private university that were equally divided. (No student from Thammasat University participated in this focus group discussion.)

Figure 4-30: Changes of Class Perceptions after Study (Focus Group Discussions)

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

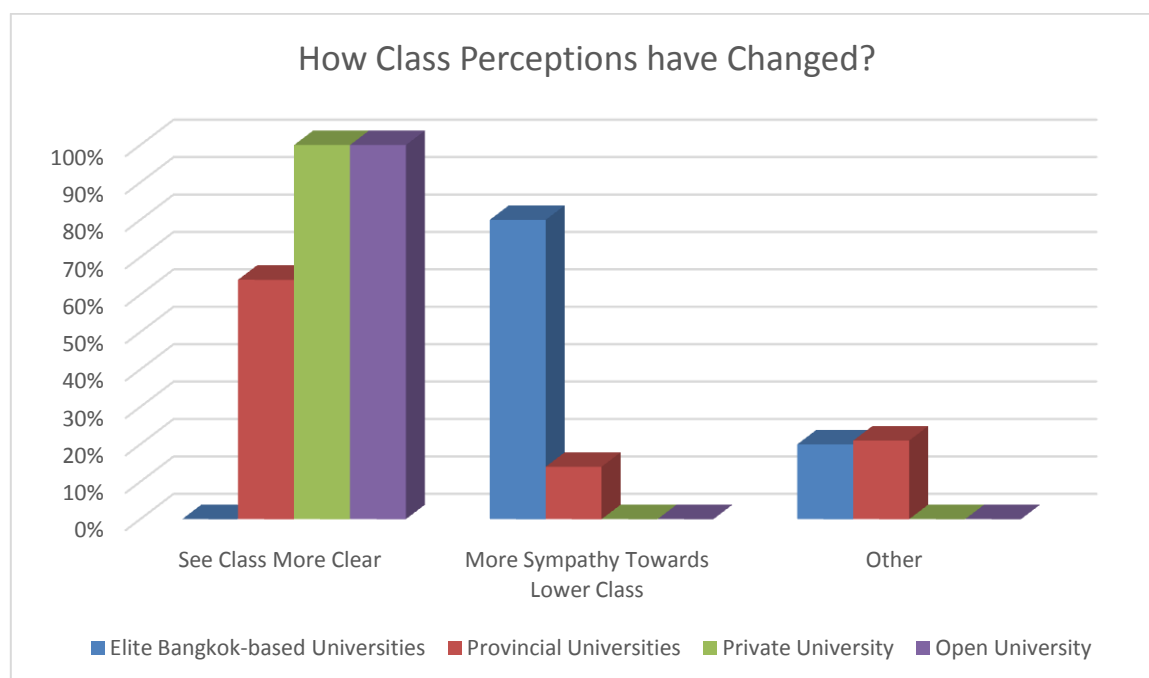
To better understand how students' class perceptions changed, it may be worth looking first at participants who claimed to not change their perceptions at all. Apparently, participants in this category totally rejected the idea that education can change an individual's class perceptions. Data indicates that participants in this category may be divided roughly into 2 groups. In one group, students believed knowledge of class from education is cannot be used in their real life hence they denied that it can change their perceptions. For example, a student from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that, although he can see class clearer and realize the problem, it is impossible to change or do anything about it, particularly in Thais society where the hierarchical order is dominant. In his words, "it is pointless to study about class since there are some things we cannot change".¹⁸⁴ In the second group, students did not see any differences between what they already knew and new knowledge from higher

¹⁸⁴ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

education, hence their perceptions did not change. For example, one male student from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that he studied only in theory about class and since he did not care about class and learned nothing about it from high school, his perceptions about class are the same¹⁸⁵. Two participants from a provincial university shared similar views but insist that knowledge about class in higher education is not different from what they have learned in high school, since they both only taught that class structure can be divided into the upper class, middle class and lower class¹⁸⁶.

In contrast, these findings may indicate that participants who believed their class perception has changed would think this “new knowledge” has had some effect on their life and is different from what they have learned in high school.

Figure 4-31: How Class Perceptions Have Changed?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

¹⁸⁵ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁸⁶ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

According to collected data, reasons from participants who believed their perceptions have changed can be categorized into 2 major themes; they see class more clearly and they have more sympathy towards the lower class. The figures show very interesting results. No one from the elite Bangkok-based university claimed to see class more clearly while the majority of participants from other universities disagreed. In contrast, most participants from the elite Bangkok-based university and a few from provincial universities claimed to have more sympathy towards the lower class.

In the first category, the majority of participants from provincial universities, the private university and the open university claimed to see class more clearly as a result of education. Most students believed their understanding of class is broader due to higher education, particularly since they studied in the political science faculty. Students pointed out that the knowledge about class they received from higher education helped them understand the social values and the relationships between people from different classes, particularly in provincial areas. For example, one student from a provincial university argued that, “in the past, I knew nothing about class. When members of parliament or candidates come to our village, we think of them highly and believe that we are fortunate to meet them. However, after studying at university, I know now that they are ordinary people like us”.¹⁸⁷ Another one claimed that, when he was young, education socialized him to believe in karma and make him accept society’s hierarchy. However, since he has studied in university, his perceptions have changed and he understands that karma has nothing to do with class. In his words, “when I was a kid, I asked my mom “where is the King?” she then replied to me that the King is in the sky. I believe this reflects how provincial society accepts their class and the relationship with the higher class”.¹⁸⁸ The last one claimed he now understands that being

¹⁸⁷ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹⁸⁸ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

poor has no relationship with karma, rather it is related to inequality, unfairness and exploitation from one class on another¹⁸⁹. Their answers suggest that their perceptions related to class have been changed as a result of higher education in accordance with the hypothesis that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.

In the second category, as revealed in previous chapters, students at elite Bangkok-based universities are from good economic status families, and, together with their educational qualification, they could be described as, at least, middle class. Therefore, it may not be surprising to see most of them think of themselves as middle class, which is reflected in their answers to this question. Since they believe they are in a better position than the lower class, it is reasonable to have sympathy towards the less fortunate. As reflected in students' answers, a female student from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that, since she could not change anything, she has learned to understand each class and now she has more sympathy towards the lower class¹⁹⁰. One male student claimed to change his perceptions. He used to understand the lower class as having no ability to improve themselves. However, since studying at university, he can see that, in fact, the lower class is oppressed by the bourgeoisie which prevents them from improving their class status¹⁹¹. Another female student admitted that she used to discriminate against lower class people but now she understands class and behaves better¹⁹². One male student from a provincial university also showed sympathy towards the lower class by lowering himself to the lower classes than him. He explained that, since he is a student, he lowers himself to people who

¹⁸⁹ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

¹⁹⁰ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁹¹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

¹⁹² Focus group discussion, February 2013.

could not afford to study to see how they live or feel¹⁹³. Their views imply that they considered themselves, at least, as middle class, not lower class. Based on the fact that all participants from an elite Bangkok-based university and only a few from provincial universities chose this category, this may suggest that students in certain universities came from specific class fraction which correlate to the hypothesis that university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions. Moreover, data indicates that the university teaches students to emphasize the lower classes, not help.

A few students provided some answers that cannot be included in any other categories. For example, one male student from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that the class situation in Thailand is improving and changing¹⁹⁴. Another participant from a provincial university claimed, after studying about class, he can understand his role and status as a university student and his future in the middle class¹⁹⁵. These views show in accordance with the hypotheses that the university plays a major role in implementing class perceptions in Thai society, and university lecturers help shape and reproduce class perceptions to students and society.

This part revealed that most students believed their class perceptions have changed after studying about class at university. In contrast, some claimed to see no difference between higher education and high school, hence there is no change in class perception. Their reason is not impossible, since teaching about class in each university would be different and reflect on what lecturer choices. Nonetheless, the way they see class more clearly, or change their perceptions, is under the influence of education. Most were directed to see or provided

¹⁹³ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

¹⁹⁴ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

¹⁹⁵ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

the tools to see and understand class in a certain way. The next chapter would reveal how education can dictate the way students understand class.

Conclusion

From this chapter, we found that almost all participants believed they are the middle class. Although participants, as university students, can be categorized as the middle class, their differences are divided them into fractions within the middle class. They are divided into each type of university in accordance to their fractions, better fractions mean better type of universities students can enter. Within the university, students have studied about class from relating subjects, passing to them by lecturers. Moreover, data indicates that the university environment is equally important, if not more, for students in shaping their class perceptions.

Data shows that, because of the university's reputation, students from higher economic status fraction have more advantages in studying at high reputation universities. Study at high reputation universities did not put students into higher class status instantly. It created a sense of superiority and have provided better life chances to students at high reputation universities. Since most students study at high reputation universities came from the higher fractions of the middle class, most of their friends would come from the similar backgrounds. The finding suggests that students are preferred to stay with their own fractions, not intermingle with other. Therefore, students' peer groups did not create new class behavior, but do provide students a familiar atmosphere, where they can mutually practice the behavior that they destined to.

The facility of each university is another university environment, which can affect students' class perceptions. Data indicates that students from better fraction are studied at universities with better facilities than students from the lower fractions. Data also show that

students have a certain expectation and ideas of what does the middle class look like, which is differently in each fraction. We found that students mostly content with their university facilities as they are matched their expectations. In some cases, students claimed their universities did not meet the middle class standard. Their frustration did not limit to university facilities, but includes an unequal treatment or unable to access facilities within the university.

The surrounding areas of universities are another university environment, which can affect students' class perceptions. Data indicates that most students believed their universities' surrounding areas are matched with their expectations and fractions' lifestyles. Some students discontent with the surrounding areas of their universities as they are not up to their expectations as the middle class.

In addition, data reveals that not all Bangkok-based middle class members are the same. This is clear in the differences between students at elite Bangkok-based universities and students at the open university and the private university which are also located in Bangkok. This emphasizes that there are fractions within the middle class, even in Bangkok.

There are 3 important aspects found from students' answers in this chapter. Firstly, the way they identified the class identity of themselves and their friends. Secondly, how different factors in higher education may affect students' chances of having a better social class in the future, Thirdly, how students comprehend the meaning of middle class.

Firstly, this chapter found that most students identified themselves and their friends as middle class. In some exceptional cases, students identified their friends as upper class but none identified themselves and their friends as lower class. Level of education was the most often provided reason for their beliefs, regardless of their families' backgrounds. In some cases, students admitted that their families were farmers and poor. But students insisted that they, as university students, are becoming middle class. This indicates that students used level

of education to identify middle class status. This is not a surprise since most of them have no occupation or income that could match middle class status. So they used what they have – education. Many of them did understand that there are other elements to become middle class such as level of income or type of occupation. However, as a university student, they identified as middle class.

Secondly, as noted earlier, a university degree will lead to a better income. Therefore, it can be seen that university students would have a better future than those without a degree. However, this chapter revealed that there are other factors affecting students' life chances. Many students, regardless of their backgrounds, believed they are becoming middle class. Nonetheless, not all of them will end up in the same fraction. There are factors that affect their chances of achieving a better fraction or class. This thesis revealed that students in each subject university have different life chances, depending on where they study. Students in high reputation universities appear to have better life chances than students at lower reputation universities. This indicates that the first factor is the ability to enter a high reputation university which is heavily reliant on economic background of students. Another factor is the university environment that socialises students into a specific fraction. We found that most students in each type of university came from similar backgrounds and have similar lifestyles. We found that most students socialised with friends that shared the same tastes. We also found that the university environment in general in each university is different and related to the lifestyle and buying power of students. Since most students have been put in certain universities based on their class fraction, students would be socialised into that fraction, not a higher one. Therefore, the role of higher education is to perpetuating students' class fractions. This means that the mobility between classes is very limited. But the movement between fractions while limited is somewhat more still possible. Some students with provincial background and average family income may be able to study at elite

Bangkok-based universities. They would have to adapt themselves to the new class fraction environment and make themselves acceptable to their friends, but it is achievable. However, according to data collection, one lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university mentioned that some students from provincial areas have serious problems settling themselves into the new environment¹⁹⁶. This may indicate that slumping down the class fraction ladder is easier than moving up.

Thirdly, this chapter found that students' understanding of class is based on their life experiences inside and outside university more than knowledge from education. As revealed, students learned only a little about social class through education but understand how to fit in certain class fractions mainly through the socialization process within their student years. Therefore, the meaning of class for students is not clear or based on an academic understanding. Students understand that level of education can lead them to be part of the middle class and some occupations are recognized as middle class occupations. Lifestyle and way of consumption are also established in students' consciousness through the socialization process in their university years.

These findings help answer the core questions of this chapter. Firstly, who is the middle class? This chapter found that, at least in the eyes of students, the middle class are those with a higher education credential who would enjoy a middle occupation, middle class salary and middle class lifestyle in the future. Secondly, how does education shape social class? This chapter found that the socialization process in higher education helps shape students' class consciousness. Higher education becomes a tool to achieve middle class status as well as a process for shaping middle class behavior. Thirdly, the importance of the university environment in shaping class perception. This chapter revealed that the socialization process is very importance for students and their class perceptions. The university environment

¹⁹⁶ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

provided them a living example of how the middle class behaves, what it consumes and what students could expect as a middle class. In addition, students will graduate and become members of society. Their understanding about class will always be with them and spread out to society. Their understandings about class will become a standard for other members of society to follow.

Overall, in this chapter, we found much evidence leading to the conclusion that there are fractions within the middle class. These fractions have different level of expectations; the higher fractions have higher expectations as the middle class. Data also reveal that there is the resentment between fractions within the middle class, not between classes. Class mobility is expected to happen between fractions, not classes. The university environment in each university has provided a ground for students, with similar background, to interact and emulate fraction's behavior, not creating the new one. The next chapter will further look at the role of another important environment of university; lecturers, and their influences on students' class perceptions.

Chapter 5 : Lecturers, students and social class

In the last chapter, students' perceptions on class and the effect of higher education towards them have been revealed. We have learned that, firstly, not all students heard or have had any conversation about class and pre-university level of education does not clarify class to them. Secondly, the majority of students referred to economic status as their first thought when hearing the word "class". Thirdly, class matters to most students, at different levels. While some argued that class does not matter to them, none of the students wanted to be lower class and almost all of them wanted to be middle class. Fourthly, almost all students identified themselves and their friends as middle class, by using mainly on level of education and economic status to indicate their class. Fifthly, most of them see lifestyle of the middle class in the same way. Sixthly, all students agreed that ordinary Thais would learn about class from their daily life experience however, as for students themselves, higher education and daily life experience are equally important. Seventhly, at different levels, university environment has affected students' class perception. Eighthly, higher education has strongly affected their class perception. And, lastly, higher education does not totally change students' class perception. Overall, the last chapter showed and proved the hypotheses that education helps shape students' perception on class. However, the last chapter only focused on students, which is only one part of education.

This chapter will show how students' perceptions on class have been changed and how they perceived class after they studied about it in university. Moreover, it investigates the other elements of higher education, the lecturers and curriculums. This chapter will assess the hypotheses that, firstly, the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society. Secondly, university lecturers and curricula help shape and reproduce class

perceptions to students and society. Thirdly, the university environment and student peers are important factors. And, lastly, university facilities and the university environment in general are essential for producing class perceptions. Undoubtedly, lecturers are one of very important parts of higher education hence the role of lecturers, regarding class perception, is highly important. This chapter will show the importance of lecturers towards students' class perceptions, lecturers' views about class and how lecturers pass their ideas and knowledge to students.

In addition, this chapter will investigate the definition of the middle class, at least in the eyes of lecturers and students. Secondly, how does education shape social class? This chapter looks at one of the components in higher education, the lecturers, and investigates their ideas about class which influence students' perceptions and society more generally. Lastly, what is the importance of the university environment toward shaping class perceptions of students and Thai society? This chapter looks at how students' perceptions have been shaped inside the university environment, particularly due to the influence of their lecturers.

Lecturers and their world

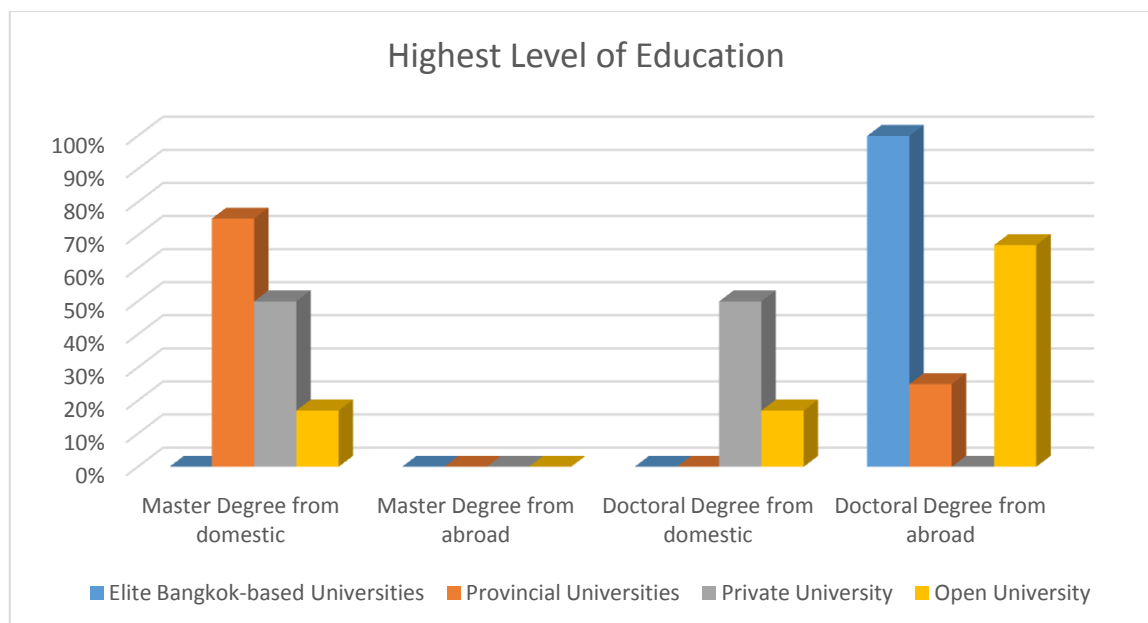
In order to investigate the influence of education towards students, it is importance to understand lecturers, the educators who pass knowledge to students. Clearly, at university level, lecturers play an important role. At pre-university level, the direction of education comes from the ministry of education including choice of textbooks and major contents. All schools must follow this path with the exception of private schools where, arguably, more sophisticated methods and contents are used. Thus, even before university level, students were separated by their family background. The wealthy one could have a more exclusive education. At university level, however, knowledge is no longer controlled directly by the

government. Lecturers enjoy greater freedom than school teachers in directing their teaching. They can choose contents and even create subjects to suit their interest.

Therefore, lecturers can be seen as one of the most important parts of university education. Lecturers are the one who choose which knowledge should be passed through to students and how. Understanding lecturers' understanding of class may indicate how students understand class as well. There are 22 lecturers participated in this thesis. All of them are from the Political Science faculty of each university and teach mainly about class. There are 3 lecturers from Chulalongkorn University, 3 lecturers from Thammasat University, 4 lecturers from Chiangmai University, 2 lecturers from Mahasarakham University, 2 lecturers from Prince of Songkla University (Pattani), 2 lecturers from Rangsit University and 6 lecturers from Ramkhamhaeng University.

Background of lecturers

Obviously, lecturers have different academic backgrounds. To be a lecturer in Thailand, at least a Master's degree is required, though a Doctoral degree preferred. According to collected data, all participants from elite Bangkok-based universities are Doctoral degree holders and graduated from abroad. In contrast, the majority of lecturers at provincial universities are Master's degree holders from domestic institutions. Participants from private universities are equally divided while the majority of lecturers from open universities are Doctoral degree holders from abroad.

Figure 5-1: Lecturers' Highest Level of Education

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

This data indicates that lecturers may teach at different universities according to their academic background. It is possible that elite universities have higher requirements, disclosed publicly or not, than their rural counterparts. Because of their elite status, elite universities may attract better educational people. However, this does not explain why open universities have a high percentage of lecturers holding Doctoral degrees.

Possible explanations are, firstly, elite Bangkok-based universities receive prestige not only by academic achievement or ranking but also by the fact that they were founded a very long time ago. The long history of Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University make people perceive these universities as elite Bangkok-based universities. This could be the same as Ramkhamhaeng University, an open university, which has a unique image in the education market where poor can be educated, as well as its long history. In contrast, many provincial universities are recently founded, including one of the subject universities; Maharakham University. This may affect the way people perceive its status. Moreover, the

fact that elite Bangkok-based universities and the open university, in this thesis, are located in Bangkok may be crucial. Since the middle class is urban based, location of their workplace may affect their decisions to teach at certain universities. A metropolitan city like Bangkok has all facilities the middle class desired while a provincial city like Pattani is lacking. Aspects like alumni or university facilities could have affected lecturers' decision as well.

It is worth pointing out that this data is not conclusive. Not all lecturers from each subject university are in this figure. Moreover, this data represents 2 elite Bangkok-based universities, 4 provincial universities, 1 private university and 1 open university from hundreds of institutions. Therefore, it may not represent the actual percentage of degree holders in each type of university.

Views of lecturers

The primary element of university education is the lecturer. Understanding their views will reveal how students' class perceptions have been shaped within the university. In order to understand the influence of lecturers towards students, we need to investigate how lecturers understand the concept of class first, as lecturers would teach according to their understandings. Therefore, this section will reveal the understanding of class and how lecturers perceive it.

The meanings of class

To understand how lecturers perceive class, we must first know the meanings of class in their views. Lecturers were asked (through open-ended questions) the meaning of class and

their answers can be divided into, roughly, 8 categories, which are – economic status, power, education, social status, living and life, roles and duties, as in Marxist theory and other.

This thesis found that lecturers provided diverse meanings of class, both in Western and Thai ideas. Almost all of them see class as a form of differentiation between individuals. According to collected data, 18 out of 22 lecturers defined class in terms of the difference in indicators such as wealth, education and power. Only 3 lecturers from provincial universities and the open university used Marxist theory to provide the meaning of class. In fact, one lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university who chose “other” also provided the meaning of class in terms of difference, but without specifying an indicator¹⁹⁷. It could be seen that, for most lecturers, class is based on comparison between individuals on various indicators.

Answers from lecturers of elite Bangkok-based universities can be divided into 2 categories; difference in economic status and other. One lecturer who chose other claimed that class is the process of self-definition and definition by others through indications like income or social status¹⁹⁸. In contrast, participants from provincial universities provided a wider variety of answers. In fact, their answers spread out into 7 categories, except “other” category. It could be a result from the higher number of participants from provincial universities or it could be that lecturers from provincial universities have less shared understanding of class with each other. Lecturers from the private university see the meaning of class as in the “difference in power” and “difference in education” categories. However, lecturers from the open university answered in “difference in social status”, “difference in living and life” and “difference in roles and duties” categories. In addition, almost half of the lecturers from the open university and some from provincial universities believed Marxist

¹⁹⁷ Interview with lecturer, April 2013.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

theory could provide the meaning of class. Lecturers who viewed the meaning of class as in Marxist theory focused on various aspects; one claimed it is social structure¹⁹⁹ while another believed it is about class consciousness²⁰⁰.

Collected data suggest that lecturers with degrees from abroad looked at class in a more Western way, while lecturers with domestic degrees provided the meaning of class in a more Thai way. According to the collected data, lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities mostly graduated with doctoral degrees from abroad and half of them gave the meaning of class in Western ideas (“difference in economic status” category). In contrast, lecturers with domestic degrees leaned towards domestic ideas of class (“difference in social status”, “difference in roles and duties”, and “difference in living and life” categories). This suggests there are shared conception in seeing class in terms of status differences; however, data also revealed the differences between domestically and internationally graduated lecturers.

Do we still have class?

Since the end of the Sakdina system in Thailand, the overt graded structure of class does not exist anymore. Moreover, as Thailand adopted constitutional monarchy, the legal status of Thais is equal. Of course, this does not necessarily mean class no longer exists. Lecturers were asked whether Thailand still has classes or not. By knowing their views, it will reveal how important class issues are for lecturers. It is highly likely that lecturers who believe class does not exist, would not teach about class to their students. Therefore, lecturers’ views on the existence of class are one of the most fundamental aspects.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁰⁰ Interview with lecturer, September 2012.

Almost all lecturers believed Thailand still has classes with only one lecturer (from a provincial university) rejected this idea. Despite their differences in the specific meaning of class as shown in the previous section, 65 percent of participants believed Thailand still has classes in terms of economic disparity. The rest claimed class has transformed, whether it is more flexible or more complex while only participants who did not believe Thailand still has classes argued that class is only personal perception²⁰¹.

Lecturers provided many reasons supporting their beliefs that class still exists. However, most of them believed class exists in economic terms. A lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that class in Thailand is mixed, based on both the traditional Sakdina system and capitalism²⁰². One lecturer from a provincial university claimed it was his deep feeling that class still exists since there are divisions among Thais²⁰³. One lecturer from the open university pointed out that capitalism divided people into classes²⁰⁴.

Data shows, again, the common view about class from lecturers in every type of university and indicates that economic is one of the most common terms and heavily relates to people classes. It also shows that, at least in the eyes of lecturers, Thailand has moved from the Sakdina system where economic status is less relevant than indicators like aristocratic background.

²⁰¹ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²⁰² Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁰³ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²⁰⁴ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

Born into a class

Since class still exists in Thailand in the perception of lecturers. When or where is a person's class established? Do we have class since the beginning of our life? Answers for these questions can be found in lecturers' views. Lecturers were asked whether people are born into a class or not. The answers were mixed.

Almost all of lecturers believed Thais are born into a class with only 3 lecturers from provincial universities and the open university against this idea. Their reasons include that class is part of the structure of Thai society, no one can choose their own class, and class is determined by a person's family. One lecturer from a provincial university explained further that people born in a lower class family would have limited life chances hence may well end up in the same lower class²⁰⁵. Another lecturer from another provincial university argued that people are born with class, which can be noticed from the beginning through their families' backgrounds²⁰⁶. One lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university shared the same view and pointed out that class status started the day Thais were born²⁰⁷.

In contrast, lecturers who refused the idea of Thais being born into a class argued that class depended solely on individual's perceptions and how others perceive another person's class. Therefore, for them, class is not with a person at birth and people are born free from class, though others may perceive them in terms of class. One lecturer from the open university claimed that it was only in the Sakdina era that people were born into a class, which is no longer use in Thailand; hence Thais are not born into a class anymore²⁰⁸.

²⁰⁵ Interview with lecturer, September 2012.

²⁰⁶ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²⁰⁷ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁰⁸ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

Collected data shows the majority of lecturers understand class in the same way that, in the Thai context, people are born into a class but class can be changed. However, some lecturers believed differently. Despite their agreement on the existence of class, the starting point of class is debatable and largely depends on lecturers' views and interpretations of class. Despite only one lecturer believing class no longer exists in the previous question, this question shows more lecturers who believed that Thais are not born into a class. Thus, some lecturers, who believed class exists in Thailand, did not believe Thais are born into a class. So when does a person's class get established? And where do we start on the class ladder? Answers from lecturers who rejected that Thais are born into a class pointed out that class is merely a perception, perceived by ourselves and others, hence it may start anywhere and anytime.

Class is part of Thai culture?

While only a few lecturers did not believe Thais are born into a class, views on class and culture are more divided. Since class exists and many believed that Thais are born into a class, there must be some processes to maintain its existence. Culture is one of many mechanisms to shape members of society. Culture helps people to understand how to behave in a specific community. Therefore, culture provides a model for people to behave according to their status, including class status. Lecturers were asked whether class is part of Thai culture or not. The answers will show whether they believe culture can transform a person without class perception to behave in accordance with class.

The answers are more diverse than previous section. Lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities are divided equally, half of them agreed with the question while another half rejected the idea. However, the majority of participants from provincial universities and

the private university believe that class is part of Thai culture. But slightly more than half of participants from the open university argued against this idea.

This emphasizes that there is no single understanding about class, and each lecturer may interpret it according to their own beliefs. Their opinions are divided and not as shared as in the existence of class and origin of class.

According to collected data, most lecturers who believed class is part of Thais culture did not provide any specific explanation. However, some lecturers did and those reasons include; Thais are still under the influence of monarchy²⁰⁹, class is always part of Thai society but we use other wordings such as the difference in economic status or life chances²¹⁰, and class is universal and exists in every culture²¹¹. Lecturers who did not provide any explanation added further comments on their answers such as class is flexible and can be changed. Interestingly, one lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university answered both yes and no. According to him, class in the classical way is part of Thais culture. However, class as in the Western concept is not part of Thais culture²¹². His answer was similar to other lecturers who believe class is part of culture and clarify that only class in the traditional form is part of Thais culture, not the Western one.

In contrast, a considerable number of participants believed class is not part of Thai culture. However, they did not reject the notion of class in Thai society. In fact, some lecturers believed class is very common in Thailand and widely accepted. Only it is not Thai culture. Around half of lecturers who chose “no” believed that Thai culture is a patronage system, not class oriented. One lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university argued,

²⁰⁹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²¹⁰ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²¹¹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²¹² Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

social class is not a part of Thai culture but social status is²¹³. One lecturer from a provincial university claimed that social class is not part of Thai culture per Marxism as it is based more on patron-client relationships²¹⁴.

Apparently, there is no right or wrong answer to this question since culture is based on each lecturer's definition. However, this data reveals that the status of class is not clear. Although almost all lecturers believed class exists there is still no agreement on which forms. If class is not part of culture, then what is class? It is likely that each lecturer may use a certain meaning of culture. However, this meaning may not be the same for other lecturers. For example, Thailand is a constitutional monarchy and has a set of practice towards royalty. Some lecturers may see this practice as culture, some may not. In any case, this data presents that each lecturer has their own interpretation and ideas about class which may affect students in the same way. Students who study with one lecturer may not understand class in the same way as students who study with other lecturers.

The Sakdina System and Class in the Contemporary Era

Since the Sakdina system has officially ended in Thailand, an overt structure of class became less obvious. However, in the recent political conflicts in Thailand, class in the form of the Sakdina system was mentioned frequently by protesters, media and academics. Therefore, it is important to understand whether class in the form of the Sakdina system still exists or has been transformed. Moreover, lecturers' views on current forms of class and Sakdina will indicate how lecturers teach their students regarding the class situation in

²¹³ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²¹⁴ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

Thailand. Lecturers were asked whether Thais society has changed from Sakdina system or not.

We found that all lecturers believed class as in the original Sakdina system no longer exists, at least in the traditional form. However, not all of them totally agreed with this idea. Participants from elite Bangkok-based universities and the open university seem to agree less strongly that it has changed than lecturers from provincial universities and the private university.

Participants from elite Bangkok-based universities and the private university seemed to believe that Thailand is still under the influence of the Sakdina system. In their views, the Sakdina system no longer exists, practically. However, one lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that class in present Thailand is based on the economy; however the spirit or belief of Sakdina still exists, such as dissatisfaction when others have more than us²¹⁵. A lecturer from the private university argued that current class still overlaps Sakdina and Western concepts, since the current elite is still related to the ruling class in the old system²¹⁶.

In contrast, lecturers who fully agreed that class has changed from the Sakdina system pointed out that economic status or abilities to access resources have become more important and can dictate a person's class²¹⁷. Moreover, class is not as clearly divided as in the Sakdina system and has better mobility²¹⁸. The importance of this finding is not only limited to lecturers' views of class but also includes lecturers' views on recent political conflicts and has a possible effect on their students. For example, lecturers who oppose the notion that Thai

²¹⁵ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²¹⁶ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²¹⁷ Interview with lecturer, January 2013.

²¹⁸ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

still have “Ammart” as in Sakdina, would reject the idea of Red shirts that political conflicts were mainly about “Ammart” and the lower class, and may teach about Red shirts differently from lecturers who believed in the notion of “Ammart”. In addition, this data also emphasizes that lecturers have few shared perceptions in terms of class when investigated in detail. Their differences in ideas may come from their various educational backgrounds or life experiences, the same will likely happen to their students.

Is the foreign concept of class the same as the Thai Concept?

Since Thais still have class but not in the form of Sakdina then what kind of class structure exists in Thailand? Beside the Sakdina system, there are no formal concepts of class in Thailand. In education, class was taught based mainly on foreign concepts, whether it Western or Eastern. But the effectiveness of these concepts in explaining the class situation in Thailand is questionable. Can it fully explain the recent political conflict between Red and Yellow Shirts? If yes, does it mean Thailand shares the same concept of class as other countries? Is the Thais middle class the same middle class as in Western countries like England? In this part, lecturers were asked whether foreign concepts of class are the same as in Thailand or not.

This section found that lecturers’ opinions on the similarity between foreign concept of class and Thai are divided. None from the private university believed foreign concept of class has any similarity as Thai. In contrast, two-third of lecturers from elite Bangkok-based and provincial universities noticed the similarity, while half of participants from the open university saw the same. Data indicates that class is not a universal concept and may not be able to use a concept in one society to explain another. Moreover, data suggests that types of universities do not have a clear link to the teaching of foreign or domestic concepts of class.

Lecturers, who believed foreign concept of class and in Thailand are similar, were asked further about the original of that foreign concept. Most of them answered with Western concept. Some lecturers pointed out that the similarity also came from the Eastern ideas such as Karma. Although the Western concept of class was mentioned the most by lecturers, data indicates that using only one concept may not fully explain the class situation in Thailand, and the indigenous element must be included in any considerations.

Despite all lecturers agreeing that class in Thailand has changed from the Sakdina system, not all of them believed class concepts from abroad can fully explain the class situation in Thailand. Does this mean class in Thailand is unique? Or there are no universal concepts of class?

Collected data indicates a variety of understandings and beliefs. Lecturers who answered “yes” believed class in Thailand is the same as that outlined in Western concept. However, one lecturer argued that, despite having the same structure as in Western nations, Thais still have a mindset as in Ayutthaya which did not respected other people’s rights²¹⁹. Another lecturer believed Weberian notions of class can explain the Thai context and also added that Marxism could not fully explain the class situation in Thailand²²⁰. Of the participants who less strongly agree that foreign concepts and Thai are similar did not reject conceptions of class from abroad. Instead, they believed the nature of class in Thailand is similar to other forms of class, both Western and Eastern as in India. However, around 40 percent of participants argued that class in Thailand has a unique aspect. Karma and religion plays a major role in class formation and belief which means foreign concepts cannot solely explain the Thais context. One lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university argued, social

²¹⁹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²²⁰ Interview with lecturer, June 2013

class in Thailand is not about economic status but is mainly about the concept of karma and is more symbolic than the Western concept²²¹.

In contrast, participants who rejected the explanation of Thai context using concepts from abroad argued that foreign concepts could not truly explain class situation in Thailand. Western concepts could not be used since they focused on the ownership of land while classical Marxism failed to acknowledge the importance of the middle class, proving problematic for the Thai context. Moreover, the influence of the monarchy system and karma are unique which makes it difficult for foreign conceptions of class to fully explain the Thai case. For example, one lecturer from the private university claimed that the elite in Thailand is related to the Royal family which is different from the Western concept²²².

This data shows that lecturers see class in Thailand differently. Unsurprisingly, there is no shared conception of class in Thailand as each lecturer perceives it differently. Data indicates that there is no connection between type of university and how lecturers teach foreign or indigenous aspects of class. When lecturers teach about class, they would presumably teach according to their own translations and understanding, particularly in the case of Thailand. On one hand, lecturers who believed the class situation in Thailand can be explained by Western concepts may neglect some foundational beliefs of Thais such as Karma and teach their students by using mainly Western concept to explain Thai society. On the other hand, lecturers who believed class situation in Thailand is unique may face difficulty to explain the class situation systematically and comparatively. Obviously, it will affect students' knowledge and perception on class.

²²¹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²²² Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

Class and identification

In this part, we will consider more specific indicators in identifying each class.

How to identify class

Lecturers were asked what the indicators of each person's class are. Knowing how to identify class would show a general idea on how to separate people into classes. Although Thailand does not have any formal line between classes, as in the past, there are some general acknowledgements that class can be divided mainly by income. However, income alone cannot truly reflect each person's class. There are many more indications that can be useful and cannot be ignored.

Their answers are varied. However, economic status is seen as the most important indicator for social class. Half of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities, a third of participants from provincial universities and a quarter of participants from the open university believed economic status can identify class.

Nonetheless, it is obvious that there are many ways to identify a person's class. Lecturers from provincial universities and the open university seemed to have wider views on class indicators than lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities, who believed class can be identified by economic status and sophistication. Lecturers from provincial universities and the open university answered with various definitions. Educational level, occupation, lifestyle, culture, ideas, and accessibility to resources are mentioned by those lecturers.

Unfortunately, none of the participants from the private university answered this question. In addition, it is worth pointing out that this figure only represents the big picture on how to identify class. Any line of separation line for each class would need further and intensive study.

According to the data, lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities believed sophistication is an important indicator for class on the same level as economic status. Interestingly, participants from elite Bangkok-based universities did not consider other criteria as important as economic status and sophistication. This shows that, for elite Bangkok-based university lecturers, to be in a certain class needs more than wealth which may too easy to acquire. This may also reflect a division of old rich and new rich (who are often seen to be lacking in sophistication). In contrast, participants from provincial universities and the open universities not only recognized the importance of economic indicators but also pointed out such indications as culture and way of thinking. Though again economic indicators seem to be the most important. One lecturer from a provincial university claimed that there are, at least, two important factors to be middle class – wealth and education²²³. Another lecturer from another provincial university argued that class depended on a person's occupation and wealth²²⁴. One lecturer from the open university identified the middle class by income, occupation, lifestyle and political ideas²²⁵.

From this data, economic indicators are frequently used to identify class, particularly in research, as it is less complicated and more substantial than other forms of indicators. Arguably, it is easier to separate the rich from the poor and put them into classes according to their wealth rather than separate people by their ideas, culture or even sophistication. Unsurprisingly, the educational level is also mentioned by many lecturers as a middle class indicator, since lecturers are highly educated and educational level is their precious qualification. Answers from each lecturer show that each of them has their own expectation of each class. In their views, a person needs to meet expectations to become a member of

²²³ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²²⁴ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²²⁵ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

certain class. However, the acceptance from one lecturer may not be perceived in the same way by another lecturer. For example, one person may be middle class according to sophistication in the eyes of lecturers from provincial universities but may not be perceived as such by lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities since this person lacks “proper” taste. Nonetheless, this does not show some lecturers are right and others wrong, this data only emphasizes the difference in ideas and perceptions of lecturers about class which may result from their personal preferences or even education background.

Positives and Negatives of the middle class

Since there is no clear line in terms of economic status for separating class, lecturers’ views on pros and cons of the middle class will provide a general idea on who the middle class are. Lecturers were asked to point out the advantages and disadvantages of the middle class and results are varied. Lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities’ answers can be equally divided into 4 categories – value to overall economy, openness to information, good occupation, and freedom in consumption²²⁶. Lecturers from provincial universities are divided into 6 groups of answers – good education, better life chances, open to information, good occupation, buffer/bridge between the upper and lower classes, and none²²⁷.

Unfortunately, only one participant from the private university answered this question hence the result cannot be taken to be representative. Lecturers from the open university pointed out good education, better life chances and foundation to democracy as the positives of the middle class²²⁸.

²²⁶ Interviews with lecturers, February 2013.

²²⁷ Interviews with lecturers, June – July 2013.

²²⁸ Interviews with lecturers, February 2013.

This data provides many interesting points. Firstly, many lecturers used the middle class indicators as advantages of the middle class; for example, good education and good occupation. Secondly, there are 3 categories which were answered by single type of university; foundation to democracy, freedom in consumption and bridge/buffer between the upper and lower classes. Being bridge or buffer between the upper and lower classes means that, on the one hand, the middle class helps easing tensions and prevents the clash between the upper and lower classes by acting as transitional class, which easier for class mobility. On the other hand, the middle class acts as the wall separating the upper and lower classes and preventing them from intermingling with each other. Thirdly, some lecturers from provincial universities and the open university believed the middle class does not have any good side. Fourthly, almost all participants identified the advantages of the middle class in terms of comparison to inferior classes; only lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities compared the middle class directly to the upper class in the “freedom in consumption” category.

Although “bridge/buffer” category seems to cover all classes, “value to overall economy” can be seen as a more neutral opinion. Other categories are compared directly to the lower class. Does this mean the middle class has nothing better than the upper class? Or do most participants look down on the lower class? “Good education”, “good occupation” and “better life chances” need a comparative reference, which generally is the lower class. Lecturers’ views are not surprising since many academics pointed out that the middle class is believed in their superiority and separating themselves from others (Frykman & Lofgren 1987, Smail 1994, Kocka 1995, Young 2003, Skeggs 2004). This indicates that lecturers’ views may had been influenced by Western conception of class.

Moreover, lecturers appear to be defining the middle class in terms of what lower class lack. For example, lack education, have less prestigious jobs and limited life chances.

Lecturers also believed the middle class is valuable to economy since they are the largest group of consumers in the society.

Three of the categories of responses are particularly interesting. Firstly, “foundation of Democracy” which may reflect political theory rather than the actual behavior of the middle class in Thailand. Although the Thai middle class is keen to promote democracy, they are unconvinced about the lower class (Funatsu & Kagoya 2003: 248) and only support democracy when their interest form of government are in the same direction (Albritton & Bureekul 2007: 30-31). Secondly, “freedom in consumption” pointed out the freedom of the middle class to consume products of any classes, unlike the upper class that limited themselves to upper class products. And lastly, “bridge/buffer between the upper and lower class” indicates that middle class have a major role in mediating in the society. By being a bridge or buffer, the middle class would prevent direct confrontation between the upper and lower class. Without the middle class, class mobility would be impossible and confrontation may occur. With the middle class, on the one hand, people can still have a dream to move up the class ladder to better life; on the other hand, its presence manipulates people to believe in mobility and prevents any direct confrontation. People would compare themselves with the middle class and set their goal as such, instead of the upper class.

Their answers may also reflect the way participants see themselves. The lecturer occupation can be categorized as a middle class occupation. With their educational background and income, lecturers could be easily identified as, at least, middle class. Therefore, their opinions regarding the positive aspects of the middle class could represent the positive side of themselves that they are in better position than the lower class.

In contrast, it seems less difficult for participants to identify negatives of the middle class. There are a lot of answers from participants which could not be placed in categories. However, the rest can be grouped into 5 main categories – selfish, rely greatly on capital,

uncertain, may not prefer democracy, and easy to manipulate. Their answers are divided closely in all categories, except those that cannot be grouped. For example, one lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university believed the middle class wanted to imitate taste of the upper class²²⁹. A lecture from a provincial university argued that the middle class are selfish and do not contribute anything to society without needing something in return²³⁰. Another lecturer from another provincial university claimed that, in developing countries, the middle class did not support democracy as much as in developed countries²³¹. A lecturer from the private university pointed out that the middle class has a stressful life due to relying heavily on making enough money to maintain middle class status²³². One lecturer from the open university also recognized the middle class as selfish and not caring much about democracy²³³.

As revealed, the negatives of the middle class are based on their behavior: the “self-interest/selfish/no public mind” category can be seen as a result of their middle class status. Since the middle class does not possess the same level of capital as elite and need to work harder than the lower class to maintain their middle class status, it is not a surprise to see the middle class would put priority on their own benefits. Perhaps, to achieve and maintain middle class status, economic capital is needed. Therefore, the behavior of protecting the capital of the middle class is understandable.

Most lecturers see the negatives of the middle class in terms of their controversial behaviors. However, some negativity cannot be grouped with any of the categories. Data

²²⁹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²³⁰ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²³¹ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²³² Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²³³ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

indicates the wide opinions on the negatives of the middle class and shows no relationship with educational backgrounds or places where lecturers graduated. Interestingly, some lecturers believed the middle class is easy to manipulate, which was frequently labeled as the lower class behavior in politics. As Suchit (1996: 194) and Anek (1996: 205-206) noted, the lower class can be mobilized and can be bought in exchange with their votes in elections.

Since the opinions about the negativity of the middle class were spread out and have no obvious link to lecturers' academic backgrounds, data may indicate that these negative aspects of the middle class are not conceptual ones. This suggests that lecturers may have described the negativity of the middle class based on their experiences, particularly in the case of the Thai middle class. Over the years, the Thai middle class has had a controversial role in politics (Anek 1996: 221, Albritton & Bureekul 2007: 30-31) which may also explain "uncertain", "conservative/may not prefer Democracy" and "easy to manipulate" categories. The "other" category is similar. Most answers in this category are not conceptual, such as "cannot afford the upper class lifestyle", "translate information the way they want", "cannot live out of the middle class lifestyle since not rich or poor" and "stress from retaining their status".

This shows that; firstly, there is no shared conception of the negatives of the middle class; secondly, answers from lecturers were based on their experiences, not concept. Nonetheless, it can be seen that the middle class, in the eyes of lecturers, can be simply defined as those who are in better position than the lower class in terms of education, lifestyle and life chances. However, they are also selfish and uncertain.

Positives and negatives of the lower class

In comparison to the middle class, lecturers were asked to point out the positives and negatives of the lower class. Unsurprisingly, it was difficult for lecturers to identify positives of the lower class. Compared to the middle class, the lower class is seen to have fewer positive sides. Moreover, according to data, the positives of the lower class may not actually be positive. Positives of the lower class can be categorized into 4 main categories – basic life, contribute to democracy, could be a force for change, and none. For example, a lecturer from a provincial university claimed that the lower class has no positives and no one would want to be lower class²³⁴. Another lecturer believed the lower class can be a force for democracy²³⁵. One more lecturer from another provincial university argued that expectations of the lower class is low hence they do not have a stressful life²³⁶. A lecturer from the private university also noted that the lower class did not need to care about their appearance which leads to a less stressful life²³⁷.

“Could be force of change” category seems to be wishful thinking since it is phrased as a conditional. Moreover, “basic life/no stress” category is not so positive. Lecturers who chose this category give reasons that the lower class lives day to day, with a basic life and not much pressure since there are few expectations on them. It is clear that their reasons are not so convincing since the lower class themselves may not want this way of life. The real positives of the lower class may be in the “contribute to democracy” category. As noted in earlier chapters, the lower class prefers democracy and participated heavily in protests against dictatorship or undemocratic governments. Obviously, not all lower class prefer democracy. However, as perceived by academics, the role of the Thai middle class towards democracy is

²³⁴ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²³⁵ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²³⁶ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²³⁷ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

questionable while the lower class is less controversial. Interestingly, only lecturers from provincial universities chose this category. “Other” includes reasons such as making products and services, work hard, and understand hardship, and the majority in developing country which, again, may not be considered as positive.

Data indicates that almost all lecturers from every type of universities shared the same conceptions about the lower class, which are; firstly, the middle class is better than the lower class; secondly, the lower class does not have many positivity. Data also suggest that there is no pattern of relationship between type of university and the positives of the lower class, since almost all of them agreed that the lower class is inferior to the middle class.

To investigate further, lecturers were asked about the negatives of the lower class as well. Interestingly, the lower class seems to have fewer negatives than the middle class. Answers from lecturers can be categorized into 4 main categories – easy to manipulate, no class consciousness, lack things, and other. The “no class consciousness” category was mentioned only by lecturers from the open university. One of them argued that the lower class is weak and will never be a leading force of change as they have no class consciousness²³⁸.

In contrast, the “easy to manipulate” category was mentioned by participants from provincial universities, the private university and the open university. “Lack things” category was answered by participants from elite Bangkok-based universities, provincial universities and the open university. However, around half of lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities and provincial universities answered uniquely and can only be grouped in the “other” category. For example, one lecturer from a provincial university stated that the lower class is easily manipulated by politicians²³⁹. Another lecturer from another provincial

²³⁸ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²³⁹ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

university claimed that the lower class are poor, hence they have a dependent nature²⁴⁰. A lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university argued similarly that the lower class are poor but this was a result of capitalism²⁴¹.

It can be seen that the negatives about the lower class may not be from their own choice or behaviour. Unlike the middle class, the lower class would not want to be poor or lack things. Answers from lecturers in the “other” category such as “less educated”, “weak” and “limited economic chances” also emphasize that it is not their choice of living. Interestingly, the “easy to manipulate” category is used in negatives of the middle class and the lower class and may be for the same reason; personal interest. It may reflect the nature of human beings, not a certain class. Or maybe reflects lecturers’ attitudes as they see others as less capable of understanding or are easy to be manipulated. Data suggests that there is no obvious link between type of university and lecturers’ views, although all of them seem to see the lower class in the same direction.

Obviously, by their occupation, education and income, lecturers are not the lower class. Therefore, their views on positives and negatives of the lower class are in different terms than in the case of the middle class. When asked about the middle class, lecturers’ views reflected the way they see themselves. But, when asked about the lower class, they speak as superior class which may not truly reflect the lower class. Since it is not the views from those who actually experience the lower class life, lecturers’ opinions may only reflect their feeling towards the lower class. Answers such “need to develop”, “no self-reliance”, “unsystematic thoughts” and “need to stimulate” may reflect the middle class “poor opinion” towards their “inferior” counterparts.

²⁴⁰ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²⁴¹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

Middle class lifestyle

The previous section shows that lecturers draw a strong line separating the middle class from the lower classes. However, the previous data does not specify or narrow down who are the members of each class, though it provided ideas. Since lifestyle is one of the indicators for class and was mentioned as both a positive and negative for the middle class and the lower class, to understand the middle class lifestyle may lead to a clearer line in differentiating each class.

As the middle class themselves, lecturers' answers to this question are likely reflecting their own lifestyle. Their answers can be categorized into 6 main categories – urban based lifestyle, technology consumer, have education and open to information, enjoy entertainment, imitate the upper class, and good occupation and income – with some unique answers that did not fit into any category. Answers from lecturers are spread out in every category, including the “other” category. However, most lecturers' answers are concentrated in “imitate the upper class” and “good occupation and income” categories. All participants from elite Bangkok-based universities and close to half of participants from provincial universities answered with “imitate the upper class” while two-third of participants from the private university see the lifestyle of the middle class as “good occupation and income”.

For example, one lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that members of the middle class wanted to be upper class but economically it was impossible to reach such a goal. So, the middle class imitate the lifestyle of the upper class but in an affordable way²⁴². A lecturer from a provincial university claimed that the lifestyle of the middle class reflected their middle class income and occupation which is enough for a comfortable living

²⁴² Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

but not rich²⁴³. Another lecturer from another provincial university pointed out that the lifestyle of the middle class is related to the Western and urban lifestyle²⁴⁴. One lecturer from the open university believed the lifestyle of the middle class is linked to technology as well as consumption of information from the internet²⁴⁵.

According to collected data, most categories seem to be quite broad but one seems to be negative. It is possible that, as the middle class, lecturers would not want to disclose their troublesome life. “Other” category includes “have freedom of living” and “under Western influence”. Nonetheless, “imitate the upper class” category proved that the middle class lifestyle is not all about a happy life. All lecturers from elite universities pointed out that, in fact, the middle class wanted to be the upper class but could not reach that point. Therefore, they tried to consume the same way as the upper class and pretend to have the upper class lifestyle. However, since the middle class does not possess the same taste or same level of capital, they could not truly replicate the upper class.

Unlike the previous section, it seems that the middle class wants to share lifestyle of the upper class as revealed in categories such “have education and open for information” or “imitate the upper class”, while all categories have nothing link to the lower class.

Data indicates that lifestyle of the middle class is heavily related to personal economic status. Almost all categories given by lecturers needed decent financial support. The middle class lifestyle that consumes technology, is urban based and enjoys entertainment would need a considerable amount of money, setting it apart from the lower class. Nonetheless, the lifestyle of the middle class varies and not all lecturers see it in the same way. This indicates that the definition of the middle class remains unclear and largely relies on each person’s

²⁴³ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²⁴⁴ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²⁴⁵ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

standard and perception. It is also emphasizes the importance of economic for the middle class and points out that the middle class is highly likely concentrate in urban areas where they can enjoy this lifestyle. Data suggests that, in the eyes of lecturers, the middle class open their doors to the upper class while close it to the lower class. It may indicate that the middle class want to be the upper class.

Education divide people into classes?

This section looks into lecturers' opinions regarding the importance of education towards class. Lecturers were asked whether education divides people into classes. Their answers will reveal how important education is for class, in the views of university lecturers.

The majority of participants agreed that education divides people into classes, though for some, only in part. However, some lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities and the open university did not see it this way. Lecturers from all provincial universities have entirely agreed on the role of education, although most of their students come from the lower fraction of middle class. This may indicate that education may be able to revoke the provincial effect in middle class ladder. Interestingly, a third of lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities and a fifth of lecturers from the open university did not believe that education can divide people into classes. It is also worth pointing out that participants are educators so they may give more importance towards education.

For lecturers who believed education can divide people into classes, their reasons are diverse and difficult to categorize. Lecturers provided reasons such "it is clearly the case in Thailand", "education can change students' vision and make them know better" and "it is an

indicator that separates classes”. However, there are shared views between them as well. Lecturers believed education not only divides students into classes but also reflect students’ family economic status and affected students’ chances in education. One lecturer from a provincial university argued that, from the start, poor students could not get into a good school or university since these institutions may require “donations” from students’ parents²⁴⁶. Another group of lecturers believed that education helps shape and change students’ class to a better one. One lecturer pointed out the middle class environment in educational institutions will shape students into such a class²⁴⁷. Another lecturer also argued that, within educational institutions, taste and lifestyle of students have been cultivated²⁴⁸. This is a direct support of the hypothesis that university environment is essential for students’ class perception.

Lecturers who are not fully convinced about the role of education, however, also shared the same view. They believed education may partly help divide people into classes. Participants pointed out the possibility of moving upwards on the social class ladder and better life chances as well. In contrast, one participant who denied the role of education in dividing people into classes argued that education does not create class, but chances for students²⁴⁹. Interestingly, another lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university stated that class is already divided according to students’ economic background. The upper class would send their children to study abroad while students from the lower classes study at domestic and maybe lower reputation institutions. The middle class would look for institutions with a good reputation since they believe it is a class ladder but in fact it is just a mechanism of

²⁴⁶ Interview with lecturer, January 2013.

²⁴⁷ Interview with lecturer, September 2012.

²⁴⁸ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²⁴⁹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

middle class reproduction²⁵⁰. His view is, in fact, the same as a lecturer who believed education divides people into classes and argued that economic background blocks certain students from certain universities. Apparently, the same view can be perceived in different ways. Although there is no consensus, lecturers shared the same conception that class background can influence chances of students in studying at high reputation universities, which support the hypothesis that the university reputation and entrance examination divide students into classes.

In sum, lecturers' answers for this question not only represent view of educators but also the middle class. From collected data, majority of participants believed that class can be moved because of education. However, not everyone can enjoy the same level of education and the same institution. Obviously, education is not free. Higher level of education means higher amount of money required. On one hand, education can help improving people class. On the other hand, education also prevent certain people from becoming a certain class.

What is your class?

In order to fully understand lecturers' views on class, lecturers were asked about their class which can demonstrate their perception of class. Interestingly, lecturers claimed to be from all possible classes, including no class. The majority of them, however, categorized themselves as the middle class. Participants from elite Bangkok-based universities are in all classes, except the lower class, while lecturers from the open university seem to identify themselves least as the middle class. Participants from provincial universities identified themselves in various classes including no class while none from elite Bangkok-based universities so identified.

²⁵⁰ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

In this question, some lecturers answered more than once and used different criteria in analyzing their class. For example, a lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university identified himself economically as the middle class but as upper class in terms of his educational level as he has a doctoral degree²⁵¹. Collected data indicates that workplace or educational institution may not relate to lecturers' class, at least none of them identified it. Nonetheless, lecturers from provincial universities or the open university are not necessarily of a lower class than participants from elite Bangkok-based universities.

Clearly, there are many reasons behind their class identity. Education was used to identify the middle class and above. For example, a lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that he is middle class according to his educational level²⁵². One lecturer from a provincial university shared the same view and claimed that his education made him upper middle class²⁵³. This indicates the perceived importance of education for the middle class and above. However, not all lecturers have the same level of education, some are Doctoral degree holders while some are Master degree holders. For lecturers, some believed they are upper class because of their Doctoral degree while some believed themselves to be lower because of their Master degree. However, there are some lecturers with different degrees who see themselves in the same class. Therefore, the level of education needed to be a certain class may depend on perception.

Occupation was used for the upper class, the middle class and the lower class categories. A lecturer from a provincial university argued that, since he is an employee, he is lower class²⁵⁴. However, another lecturer from another provincial university believed, as a

²⁵¹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁵² Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁵³ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²⁵⁴ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

lecturer, he is middle class²⁵⁵. Although all lecturers are in the same occupation, they categorized themselves in different classes. There are no clear lines on which occupation belongs to which class. Another possible explanation could be each lecturer sees the importance of their job differently. Some may believe in the high prestige of the lecturer occupation, others may not perceive it as such.

Although income or economic related indicators are frequently referred to in a person's class identification, according to collected data, lecturers did not see money as necessary to the upper class. For example, a lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university identified himself as lower middle class based on his income²⁵⁶. One lecturer from a provincial university shared the same view and believed she is middle class because of her economic status²⁵⁷. Income is one of the reasons lecturers claimed themselves to be the upper middle class, the middle class and the lower middle class but not the upper class. Does this mean income is not as important as educational level or occupation? Or, alternatively, none of them are rich? It is possible that income can be easily acquired and not unique while education and occupation at high level and prestige needed more than just money to achieve. Therefore, for some lecturers, the upper class needs additional criteria which would separate them from crudely new rich.

Class consciousness and lifestyle are also mentioned as reasons for choosing a certain class. However, this was only at the middle class level. One possible explanation could be, for lecturers, only one prominent condition is required to be in a certain class. Therefore, for lecturers who believed themselves to be upper class, lifestyle and class consciousness may be

²⁵⁵ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²⁵⁶ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁵⁷ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

important but not as much as occupation or education. Nonetheless, lecturers who believed themselves to be lower class claimed to be lower class as a salaried worker who did not own any means of production, a Marxist definition.

Lecturers who claimed to not have any class provided reasons that they are without any class. One lecturer from a provincial university argued that, as a Muslim, he does not believe in class²⁵⁸. In short, this data shows various reasons to be in certain class, for lecturers. It also indicates how they see class beyond themselves. It is highly likely that they would use the same method of analysis to identify other people's class as well. Therefore, their opinions on their own class could as well represent their opinion about others and how they teach about class. Data indicates that lecturers, who identified themselves according to academic concepts as Marx, would teach their students based on Marxist's literature. Lecturers who identified themselves as the middle class or fractions within the middle class, which is similar to Weberian concept, would point out to their students the important and diversity of the middle class. Nonetheless, data suggests that most lecturers teach their students based on their experiences about the middle class, not the conceptual one. Moreover, this indicates that basic conditions such as income and occupation are much more practical in identifying class than more complicate criteria such as class consciousness. In addition, it also reinstates that class is largely depend on individual perception and not yet clearly defined.

Class and education

Higher education does not necessarily provide knowledge about class to students. Most likely students in social sciences may study about class while students in sciences may not study about class at all. It is dependent on lecturers to insert some knowledge about class in

²⁵⁸ Interview with lecturer, September 2012.

their subjects. In this section lecturers were asked about how mainstream education teaches about class to students.

Lecturers answered this question in various ways. However, there are 3 main themes in their answers. Firstly, mainstream education teaches about class only for examinations, not understanding. Secondly, it teaches about class only in social science. And, thirdly, it teaches little to nothing about class. There are also some unique answers which are categorized in the “other” category.

Unfortunately, only one lecturer from the private university answered this question. However, this data still provides interesting views of lecturers on mainstream education and class. Answers from participants seem to emphasize that only students in social sciences may study about class, this is not surprising since studying about class would be extra-disciplinary for students in engineering. For example, a lecturer from the private university stated that mainstream education does not teach about class, it is only in political science that lecturers may teach about class to students²⁵⁹. However, at pre-university level or high school, students are not separated clearly between science and social sciences hence they all may have studied about class in some subjects. This may explain why not all lecturers believe class is taught only in social sciences. In fact, most of the lecturers are cynical. They believed class is barely, if at all, taught in mainstream education. Even if it is, it is only for students to remember for examinations, not for understanding. A lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university and lecturer from the open university claimed, since most students study only for examinations, education did not improve their class consciousness²⁶⁰. Thus, for lecturers, mainstream education does not provide much knowledge about class. This may indicate a belief that knowledge about class is not considered important for students or having any value

²⁵⁹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁶⁰ Interviews with lecturers, February and July 2013.

for national development. Or the knowledge of class may create conflict in society which is undesirable for any government, hence the state deliberately plays it down? To answer this question, unfortunately, more intensive research would be needed.

There are various reasons for lecturers who chose “other” category. One from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed mainstream media teach students about class, but only to accept and stay in their class²⁶¹. One from a provincial university argued that any knowledge about class in mainstream education would be in the form of the Monarchy or Sakdina system²⁶². One from the open university believed mainstream education pays more attention to creating “good citizens”²⁶³. It can be seen that lecturers who chose “other”, in fact, believe that class has been taught but not the way it should be. This indicates that education is important for students’ class perceptions whether they teach about class or not. On the one hand, education can provide knowledge of class. On the other hand, education can also prevent the knowledge of class by students, by using other concepts or playing down its significance.

Overall, it seems lecturers were not satisfied with the level of class knowledge provided to students. However, as educators, not all of them were willing to improve the situation. Maybe they believe knowledge about class is no longer important or necessary for current society or it may be just because of a lack of lecturers specializing in this field. In any case, this data shows that education alone may not be sufficient for students to learn about class and their life experiences may play a more important role. Even those who has clear academic’s view about class, may not think about class in practical terms. Moreover, lecturers seem to use more experiences in their teaching than concept of class.

²⁶¹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁶² Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²⁶³ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

How do ordinary people understand class?

Since mainstream education does not give much attention to knowledge about class, the following parts will investigate how ordinary people and students understand class. Lecturers were asked, in their opinions, how do ordinary people understand class? From education, daily life experiences or not understand at all?

The majority of participants believed that daily life experiences are the most important source of knowledge of class for ordinary people with only a few believed education can make ordinary people understand class. As one lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university argued, ordinary people did not study about class but they are experiencing it every day²⁶⁴. Another lecturer from a provincial university argued that class can be seen everyday when people go to work or shopping²⁶⁵.

Since this part aims to compare between ordinary people with university students in the next part, ordinary people would include every Thai with any level of education below university as well as non-educated. Therefore, “education” in this part would refer to any level of education beside university level, most likely the high school level. According to this definition, the data indicates that pre-university level education in Thailand does not give importance to the knowledge of class and class is clearer in people’s daily life.

Some lecturers argued even further that ordinary Thais may not care or understand about class at all. One lecturer from the open university argued that ordinary people did not even notice the existence of class²⁶⁶. This may result from education or maybe class is not obvious in Thai society or culture. One of possible explanations is that Thais have been

²⁶⁴ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁶⁵ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²⁶⁶ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

taught with false consciousness, where class is mentioned only little at a level that will not create any tension and made students think class does not matter. However, some lecturers still believe in education. One lecturer from a provincial university claimed that ordinary people would have learned something about class in school such as the difference between the King and ordinary people²⁶⁷.

Since ordinary people would understand about class from their daily life experience, their understanding would not be in the form of class concepts or theory. Ordinary people would perceive class in terms of inequality or economic disparity they experienced in their life. As one lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university explained, to understand how ordinary people perceive class, “just look how they wait for public buses in rainy season while others use private cars, that is how they know about class”²⁶⁸.

Lecturers’ views on how students understand about class.

The previous section shows the views of lecturers on how ordinary people understand class. This figure focuses only on university students in order to investigate the difference between students and ordinary people. Moreover, it investigates the importance of education towards class understanding. There are 3 categories in lecturers’ answers, same as the previous section. However, the responses show a higher proportion of lecturers believed education is a source of class for university students than the previous section. Comparing the 2 sections, we can see some interesting developments. None from elite Bangkok-based universities believed students understand class from their education. Interestingly, 80 percent of them claimed daily life experiences are a more important source while 20 percent of them

²⁶⁷ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²⁶⁸ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

believed students understand class only a little to none or do not care about it. As one lecturer noted, students may have studied about class in university but their understanding came from their life experiences²⁶⁹. However, some lecturers did not believe their students even cared about class. One of them said that, students of this generation do not care much about class, particularly students who study outside social science fields²⁷⁰.

However, looking back to the previous section, it shows that some lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities believed ordinary people understand class through education. One possible explanation is lecturers, as educators, realized that, even with education at the university level, students cannot understand class without experiencing it. Daily life experiences are needed to better understand any concept of class. As one lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university argued, students realize the existence of class from daily life experience but do not understand what it is or why it happens²⁷¹.

In contrast, lecturers from the private university and the open university believed students understand class better from education. One lecturer from the open university claimed that his students understand about class in theory but, to understand deeper, students need to study further at Master or Doctoral degree levels²⁷². This may indicate that, since pre-university level did not provide any knowledge about class, class as a concept can be learned from university only. Therefore, in the views of lecturers from the private university and the open university, education is a good source of class for students who are starting to learn about class and to understand why or how it happens. Lecturers from provincial universities seemed to have more diverse opinions than other types of university and their

²⁶⁹ Interview with lecturer, January 2013.

²⁷⁰ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁷¹ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²⁷² Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

answers spread out through all categories. One lecturer from a provincial university argued that only students from lower class families would care about class since it may help explain their situation. However, students from rich families would not care about it²⁷³. In contrast, some lecturers believed, without higher education, students would not understand class at all since it provides students a basic understanding of their class situation²⁷⁴.

Data indicate that, in the eyes of lecturers, life experiences is as important as academic knowledge in teaching class. Data also suggest that some lecturers would teach about class based not only on academic terms, but also based on their experiences. However, there are good percentage of lecturers that believed class does not matter in the eyes of students, which may be resulted from false consciousness as mentioned earlier.

Education's influence on class perception/ does it provide a framework for students to see class?

Lecturers were asked further on education's influence on students' class perception, especially does education provides a framework for students to see class. Their answers are varied but can be grouped into 3 categories – yes, maybe and no. A third of lecturers from provincial universities, a half from the private university and almost a half from the open university fully agree that education creates a framework for students to see class. However, some lecturers did not fully convince by education as all participants from elite Bangkok-based universities, a third from provincial universities and two third from the open university

²⁷³ Interview with lecturer, January 2013.

²⁷⁴ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

answered with “some”. The rest of lecturers did not believe in its effect and answered with “no”.

Since lecturers believed students did not care much about class and education is not the best source of class knowledge, it is not surprising to see a high proportion of lecturers refused to believe education creates a framework for students to perceive class. However, less than half of lecturers from provincial universities and private university answered “no” while none from elite Bangkok-based universities and the open university believed the same way. In fact, there are a high percentage of lecturers who believe that education affects students’ class perceptions. On the one hand, lecturers who answered “yes” believed education helps create members of a particular class. They explained that education makes students understand their class as well as creates class culture and consciousness. As pointed out by a lecturer from a provincial university, education creates class culture for students. The university environment enables them to understand how to change their class to the middle class²⁷⁵. On the other hand, lecturers who chose “maybe” seem not so convinced about the role of education, but they also did not reject the importance of it. One lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university pointed out that higher education provides basic theory of class to students but it is up to students to understand it²⁷⁶. Lecturers in this category believed that there are limits on what education could do to students. Some lecturers believed only students in social sciences would have learned about class, other lecturers claimed education provides knowledge about class based on Western concepts which may not truly explain the Thai context.

In contrast, lecturers who answered “no” believed education does not make students think critically but teaches them to accept their class and not want to change it. A lecturer

²⁷⁵ Interview with lecturer, September 2012.

²⁷⁶ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

from the private university argued even further that students are not under the influence of education and choose their own path²⁷⁷. Interestingly, there is one reason, though slightly different in detail, lecturers used in all categories: education enables students to understand their class. On the positive side, education creates class awareness for students and enables them to understand their life chances. On the negative side, education prevents students from moving up the class ladder, as they accept their status.

Overall, this data emphasizes that education is important for students' class perceptions. Education not only shows students the concept of class but also helps them realize their place in society. Within higher education, class culture and consciousness have been nurtured. However, these processes may not always be positive. This may also convince students to accept their status and not look to improve. Moreover, this data emphasizes that only social sciences provide extensive knowledge of class to students while students in other fields may learn about class from their experiences. This supports the hypotheses that education and lifestyle at the university level play a major part in students' class perceptions.

Moreover, data shows that many lecturers, even those with Doctoral degree at elite Bangkok-based universities, not so convinced about class consciousness that students can develop through education. It indicates that education is not only about knowledge but also life experience within university that can affect students' class perception and help develop their consciousness. In addition, education may affect students' class status, not in terms of knowledge, but through qualification and socialization.

²⁷⁷ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

Effect from university environment

Higher education is not only significant in terms of career opportunities but higher education institutions are also a place where the middle class lifestyle, culture and consciousness have been created. Lecturers were asked whether the university environment (such as surrounding area, reputation, students' peer groups and facilities) have any effect on students' perceptions of class. Their answers can be divided into 3 categories – yes, maybe and no. According to collected data, all lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities fully agreed that the university environment affects their students' perception of class. All lecturers from private universities and the open university believed in the same way, though not so convincingly as their elite counterparts as they divided almost equally in “yes” and “maybe” categories. Interestingly, almost 60 percent of lecturers from provincial universities refused the idea that the university environment affected students' perception of class.

Although an underwhelming number of participants fully believed that education creates a framework for students to perceive class, this figure shows a relatively considerably high proportion of lecturers believed university environment affected students' class perception. University level education, perhaps other levels of education as well, not only provide knowledge to students but also offer life experiences within a controlled environment which shapes students' understanding of their position in society. The university environment includes students' peer group, university reputation, surrounding area and other aspects.

According to collected data, the majority of lecturers believed, to different degree, the university environment affected students' class perceptions. From previous chapters, it is noticeable that students from certain universities come from certain class and family backgrounds. Generally, students from elite Bangkok-based universities are from higher income families than students from provincial universities and the open university, and likely the private university as well. Moreover, each university is located in different areas and

provinces which also indicates the difference between urban and provincial environment or developed and less developed provinces. From the subject universities, elite Bangkok-based universities are situated at the capital city, the centre of development. Some provincial universities are located far away from the city centre in their provinces, some near the city centre but still less urbanized than universities in Bangkok. The private university is located not far from Bangkok, in a suburb, and has all amenities nearby. The open university sits in one of the busiest areas in Bangkok and is surrounded by large middle class communities. Not to mention the reputation of each university is different in terms of academic standards. Therefore, each university has its own unique environment, hence lecturers answered this question based on their university only.

Lecturers who believed the influence of the university environment affects perception provided their reasons as shown in above figure. Clearly, the reputation of the university is the most important university characteristic in the eyes of lecturers from every type of university. One lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that university reputation can make students feel superior, in terms of knowledge²⁷⁸. One lecturer from a private university argued that a reputation as a private university makes students link themselves to the middle class, since they are paying high tuition fees²⁷⁹. The same reason was also used by one lecturer from the open university, that the image and reputation of Ramkhamhaeng University are linked to the poor²⁸⁰.

As for peer group, lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities and provincial universities are less convinced of its influence while none from the open university believed in its influence. One lecturer from a provincial university and one from a private university

²⁷⁸ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁷⁹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁸⁰ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

shared the same view, they argued that students associate mainly with students who share the same lifestyle and culture, hence students must act the same as their friends to be accepted²⁸¹. However, a lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university argued, slightly differently, that, since students at university are more mixed and mostly from the same class, students need to create their own identity based on their region or province²⁸². This information indicates that the peer group in each university is vary but everyone think it is important. Each university has their unique peer group. Although they are all unified as the middle class, it has variations. Students from provincial universities and the private university may be divided based on their economic status. However, students from elite Bangkok-based universities are divided by other criteria such as place of birth since the disparity of income may not so obvious.

As for the surrounding area, only lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities and provincial universities believed it influences students. One lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university noted that the surrounding area shows students clearly their class and makes them understand that this is middle class environment, or upper class environment. It will not change their class, but they may imitate those social classes²⁸³. In addition, one lecturer from a provincial university argued that the surrounding area forced poor students to recognize their limits²⁸⁴. Answers indicate that the surrounding area shows the lifestyle of a certain class and it is up to students to climb the social ladder or be satisfied with their current position. There are some lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities and the open university who answered with “other” as well. One from an elite Bangkok-based university

²⁸¹ Interviews with lecturers, September 2012 and February 2013.

²⁸² Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁸³ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²⁸⁴ Interview with lecturer, January 2013.

believed that students who choose to study here are part of the upper middle class already²⁸⁵. One from a provincial university claimed that the university environment is an inspiration for students to get some privileges and a high income²⁸⁶.

Lecturers from the private university and the open university did not fully agree and believed the university environment partly affects students' class perception. As pointed out by one lecturer from the open university, life experiences are more important to class perceptions²⁸⁷.

By way of contrast, many lecturers from provincial universities did not believe in the influence of university environment. Two of them claimed class is an individual perception and outside influences are less important²⁸⁸. Another lecturer explained that there are no classes within university since everyone parks in the same area or learns in the same building²⁸⁹. Another lecturer argued further that without touching this concept, students would not even notice class, except those who face hardships every day and can see it clearly²⁹⁰.

These data show that the effect of the university environment towards the class perceptions of students may be related to the location and reputation of the university. Firstly, for surrounding area, students from universities in the capital city and more urban provinces are under influences of modernity and materialism, more so than students from provincial and open universities. Secondly, reputation creates clear division of students who study in certain universities. As claimed by some lecturers, elite Bangkok-based universities are for rich

²⁸⁵ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁸⁶ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²⁸⁷ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁸⁸ Interviews with lecturers, January 2013 and June 2013.

²⁸⁹ Interview with lecturer, September 2012.

²⁹⁰ Interview with lecturer, January 2013.

students while the open university is for poor students. Thirdly, lifestyle and students' peer group are highly related. Students from certain universities have a particular lifestyle which is divided mainly by location and reputation. As mentioned by some lecturers, students from urban cities have a different lifestyle than students from provincial cities. Most importantly, students need to adapt the same lifestyle as their friends in university which means reproducing class culture. These results support the hypotheses that the university environment such as surrounding area, peer group and reputation are influencing students' class perception. In addition, data indicates that there are fractions within the middle class: namely, the upper middle class and the lower middle class, and the urban middle class and the provincial middle class.

Class within university

It is worth pointing out that only one participant from the private university answered this question, therefore this data may not truly represent the views of private university lecturers. However, this collected data indicates how lecturers see class among their students. Lecturers were asked whether there are classes among their students.

The majority of lecturers from every type of university, except the private university, believed there are no classes among their students. It is also worth mentioning that lecturers were asked about class among students in their own university only, not all students. Therefore, one possible explanation for lecturers' answers is students were divided according to class before they got into each university.

As revealed in previous chapters, students in each university are likely to come from the same economic background and students from certain classes are likely to be in different types of university. For this reason, it is no surprise that most lecturers believed there are no

classes among students. However, this does not mean there are no disparities among students at all. Lecturers from elite Bangkok-based universities claimed that students are not mainly separated by class but, mostly, by fractions within the middle class. A male lecturer from Thammasat University believed there is no difference in class between students. However, participants are separated by their origins: urban or provincial²⁹¹. A lecturer at Chulalongkorn University also noted the difference between students from urban and provincial areas. Although their differences may not be much, as these students are the provincial upper middle class, students from provincial provinces are still different from students from Bangkok²⁹².

By way of contrast, another lecturer from Thammasat University argued that only in BMIR (the international program), are students from a similar class, hence there is no obvious separation in terms of class. But, for normal programs (at Rangsit campus), he claimed that students are obviously separated by class. He argued that students are divided into groups such as groups of students with luxury cars, groups of students who live in luxury apartments, or groups of students who live in university dormitories. He also added that these different types of students can be seen by the way they dress and they will sit with their own groups in the classroom²⁹³.

Lecturers from provincial universities share the same view. Most participants claimed that students in provincial universities are not clearly divided into classes. Lecturers argued that the differences between students, in terms of economic status, are not obvious and most students are likely to have similar family backgrounds. A male lecturer from Chiangmai

²⁹¹ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

²⁹² Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁹³ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

University argued that, since students live in dormitories, they blend together²⁹⁴. However, other lecturers argued that some differences in terms of economic status do exist, but the notion of seniority is more important. Only one male lecturer from Mahasarakham University claimed students group themselves according to their economic status²⁹⁵. In the case of the open university, a lecturer argued that the relationships between students in the open university are not based on class²⁹⁶. Lecturers claimed most students at Ramkhamhaeng University are from similar backgrounds. However, they divided by their hometown. Lecturers claimed that students from the same province would stay together. In some cases, a male lecturer noted, they fought with others groups from different regions or provinces²⁹⁷. By way of contrast, a male lecturer from the private university argued that students at Rangsit University divided into 2 major groups; scholarship receivers and students with good economic background. He added that these two major groups can be separated by their lifestyle²⁹⁸. In any cases, these data indicate that class is less obvious since students were screened before they could enter university which clearly indicates that generally students from a certain class study at each university. This means that students, through peer groups, live entirely with the middle class through 4 years of university, which unavoidably shape their attitudes per their fractions.

To investigate further, lecturers were asked about class among themselves. Between lecturers, most participants from elite Bangkok-based universities believed they are not

²⁹⁴ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

²⁹⁵ Interview with lecturer, January 2013.

²⁹⁶ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁹⁷ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

²⁹⁸ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

divided by class. A female lecturer claimed there is no class among lecturers²⁹⁹. A male lecturer claimed there is some difference in seniority among lecturers but not class³⁰⁰. Another male lecturer argued that class differences between lecturers are rare since all of them need to invest a lot of time in their studies and most of the upper class people would not think it is a good investment, hence most lecturers are middle class³⁰¹. However, some lecturers claimed there are some differences. A male lecturer claimed that, in terms of class consciousness, there is no separation between lecturers. However, in terms of lifestyle or economic status, it is unavoidable that some would have more money than others³⁰². One male lecturer argued that, since lecturers drive and dress differently, there is class among them³⁰³.

The relationships among lecturers in provincial universities are not different. Most lecturers from Chiangmai University, Mahasarakham University and Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) claimed there were class differences between them but not mainly in economic terms. Many lecturers argued that divisions between lecturers are based on academic and administrative positions. None of them claimed to be differentiated by economic background³⁰⁴.

Participants from the private university claimed to see no class at all while participants from the open university seemed to agree with their provincial counterparts. Participants claimed to have no class, in terms of economic status, among lecturers; however, there are

²⁹⁹ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

³⁰⁰ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

³⁰¹ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

³⁰² Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

³⁰³ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

³⁰⁴ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

divisions between lecturers regarding administrative position and power³⁰⁵. Nonetheless, two lecturers added that, besides administrative position, lecturers are divided by their educational background. They added that lecturers are divided not only by their highest degree but also by their institutions' reputation and whether it was domestic or international³⁰⁶.

This data indicates that, in terms of economic status, class between lecturers is not obvious and may not exist in some universities. However, divisions of lecturers are present. Lecturers are divided by other criteria such as academic background and administrative position. This can be as simple as job position or more complicated as a power struggle between lecturers. It is interesting that such differences do not appear to reinforce class divisions.

However, answers from participants seem to be different when lecturers were asked even further to comment on the idea of class among lecturers, university staff and students. Interestingly, only at the open university do the majority of lecturers claim to have no class differences between lecturers, staff and students. In contrast, all participants in elite Bangkok-based universities, provincial universities and the private university believed there are classes among lecturers, staff and students.

Clearly, lecturers, staff and students are from dissimilar classes. Therefore, it is expected to see class among them. However, the case of elite Bangkok-based universities seems to be very interesting. The relationships between lecturers, staff and students in elite Bangkok-based universities are more complex than other universities. Not only did they mention class among themselves, they also mentioned class in their elite counterparts. A male lecturer from Chulalongkorn University claimed that lecturers mostly are middle class, staff

³⁰⁵ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

³⁰⁶ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

mostly are lower middle class while students are from various classes³⁰⁷. However, the most important part can be found in their relationships. One female lecturer claimed that,

This place [Chulalongkorn University] is a Sakdina institution, hence students are at the bottom of the class structure. Between lecturers and staff, staff would greatly respect and pamper lecturers. Unlike Thammasat University, lecturers and staff relationship is more professional. But the relationship between lecturers and staff here is in a hierarchical order. Lecturers can even order what they want to eat and staff would find it for them. And staff do the same to students, since students need to please staff³⁰⁸.

Interestingly, a male lecturer from Thammasat University agreed with the hierarchical order inside elite Bangkok-based universities but claimed the opposite. In his words, “This university [Thammasat University] is a “Prai” [peasant] university, but behaves like “Ammart” [elite] the most. Staff need to pamper lecturers by buying their food, washing their dishes.” He added that, during his time as an assistant lecturer at Chulalongkorn University, there was only a few cases like this and only when lecturers were really busy that staff would need to buy food for them. But, at Thammasat University, he believed it is considered the duty of staff and is the culture of this place. In turn, students would pamper staff. He gave an example that some students give money to security guards so they can park their cars. Another male lecturer from Thammasat University gave an example that, in faculty meeting, staff and lecturers would meet and interact. However, only lecturers would have drinks and snacks while there is “no budget” for drinks and snacks for staff. He also added that, between

³⁰⁷ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

³⁰⁸ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

staff and students, students would look down on staff mainly on their inefficiency but, he believed, it may be due to the class of staff³⁰⁹.

The relationship of lecturers, staff and students in provincial universities and private universities seems to be less interesting. Participants from provincial universities and the private university claimed that students respect lecturers more than staff, since lecturers are providing knowledge to students. Interestingly, none of these lecturers discussed their relationship with staff in the same manner as elite Bangkok-based universities.

In contrast, the majority of lecturers claimed that, in the open university, the relationship between lecturers, staff and students is more “professional” and not about class, in that each of them only do their jobs. Its status as an open university may reduce the traditional relationships within university. The hierarchical order, in terms of age, is less important since some students may be older than staff or even lecturers. Although the hierarchical order in terms of job status still remains, at the open university students interact less with lecturers or staff, hence there are less formal relationships. Nonetheless, during interviews, it was clear that staff, at Ramkhamhaeng University, also bought lunch and cleaned dishes for lecturers. Moreover, in one case, a lecturer asked university staff to cut trees and do the garden at his house³¹⁰.

In sum, the relationships between lecturers, staff and students also reflected the hierarchy order in terms of age and job status in Thailand. Lecturers and staff are in a higher position than students because of their respective ages. However, lecturers and staff are not of the same status because of their jobs. Lecturers would receive greater respect from students and staff. As shown in collected data, almost all of lecturers claimed to be in the highest status within the university. In the case of elite Bangkok-based universities, staff also

³⁰⁹ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

³¹⁰ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

pampered lecturers while students did the same for both. In provincial universities, the relationships are not different but none of the lecturers mentioned that staff pampered them. Of course, this does not mean such “treatment” does not exist. It is clear that actors in universities are divided into statuses. However, this is not in economic terms but the division is in terms of occupation and authority or power as well as the hierarchical order in terms of age. Apparently, lecturers are in the highest position. In contrast, staff and students are contesting each other for the middle place and the result is far from clear. These relationships, unavoidably, affect students’ class perception. Students learn their position from university life which will continue affecting them after graduation. Students understand their position in society, learn who their superior is and how to behave according to their class or, in some cases, age.

We found that students’, or even lecturers, understanding of class is not so clear. They may have confused between class and status or hierarchy order. The influence of Sakdina system on many Thais made them see the relationship in society as “big brother/little brother”. This may cause Thais to think of class in terms of hierarchy. Moreover, the bureaucratic practice, those who order and those who serve, also encourage many Thais to think it is class, although it is status.

Perception of change after study

The last lecturers’ section will investigate lecturers’ opinions on whether students’ perceptions have changed after they studied at university. Lecturers’ answers are divided into 3 categories – yes, maybe and no.

It is clear that their opinions are divided. Most lecturers seem to be less convinced that students' perception have changed after their study. In fact, the majority of lecturers choosing "maybe" lean towards "no".

Lecturers who were fully convinced that students' perceptions have changed argued that increased class consciousness might make students more aware of their status and divisions and stimulated them to question their identities. To be more specific, one lecturer from a provincial university argued that, after studying about class, students may be divided into 2 groups. In one group, students can raise their class status based on new skills and knowledge from education. In the other group, since they can gain new and better status, students would hide or erase their background, including friends and pre-university level education³¹¹. According to this lecturer, students would become the middle class after they graduated. However, some students may feel ashamed of their lower class background. One lecturer from the open university also believed that students' class will change after study since education gives students greater chances for class mobility. However, their behavior would change as well. Since they perceive class differently from pre-university level, students may struggle with their new perception. But some students would want to blend into their new status by rejecting their old one which they may believe it was not good enough³¹². This shows education teaches students to recognize which is the middle class lifestyle and what is acceptable for the middle class. Therefore, to blend in, some students may choose to erase their lower class background.

However, there are many lecturers who were not so convinced about the role of education. More than half of them believed, if education influences students' perceptions of class, it would be only at a small level. Interestingly, most lecturers in this category claimed it

³¹¹ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

³¹² Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

is students who do not care about class, not that education did not provide the knowledge. One lecturer from an elite Bangkok-based university believed only 10 percent of students may change positively such as being more sympathetic towards the lower classes, while the rest would not even care about class³¹³. One lecturer from a provincial university argued further that students would understand class better, if they are not in university environment³¹⁴. One lecturer from the open university claimed that Thai society is peacefully co-existence hence no need to understand about class or inequality³¹⁵. Lecturers' views indicate that, firstly, class perception may depend mostly on students' life experiences, backgrounds and consciousness, not knowledge from education. Many lecturers pointed out that students simply do not care about class, which maybe the case of false consciousness. However, it is also possible that, as educators, lecturers would not want to point to themselves or the educational system as they failed to clarify or provide students with knowledge on class. Secondly, students would perceive class from the university environment as well. However, students were screened before they study in university hence there may not be much difference in class among students in each university. Their answers reveal that education plays its role in implementing class perception for students, which started from the entrance examination. When students are inside the university environment, their class consciousness have been shaped with a little or none help from knowledge.

In contrast, lecturers who refuted the idea that education influences students' perceptions of class argued that students do not care or understand about class and they never have class consciousness from the start. One lecturer from the open university claimed less

³¹³ Interview with lecturer, July 2013.

³¹⁴ Interview with lecturer, June 2013.

³¹⁵ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

harshly that education within university is just a guideline and students would perceive class from other elements outside university³¹⁶.

Overall, this figure reveals how lecturers think about class and about their students. There is no connection between lecturers' views and type of university since their views are spread out in all categories. However, there is a pattern where lecturers are not convinced of the role of higher education in terms of conveying knowledge to students that shape their perception of class. This suggests that the understanding of class of students did not come from literature. Instead, life experiences within the university environment are the most important source of class consciousness for students. As noted earlier in this thesis, elements such as peer groups, facilities or university reputation have greater effect on students. Nonetheless, there is a possibility that lecturers did not notice any changes in students; perceptions from the socialization process within the university are limited, since most students were screened and shared a common background in each university.

Views of students

The following sections will look at students' views on class related issues and how higher education can affect their class perceptions. We first look at the curriculum from each university to see how students learn about class.

³¹⁶ Interview with lecturer, February 2013.

The curriculum

Figure 5-2: Curriculums from Participating Universities

Chulalongkorn University	Thammasat University	Chiangmai University	Maharakham University	Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)	Rangsit University	Ramkhamhang University
Introduction to Marxist Political Theory	Elite, Power structure, Political leadership and Power	Classical Political Philosophy and Ethics	Elite and Political leaders	Elite, Power Structure in Economy Society and Politics of Thailand	Introduction to Political Philosophy	Political Elites
Modern Marxist Political Analysis	Theories on Society and Politics	Modern Political Philosophy and Ethics	Social and Political Theory	Political Theory and Philosophy		Political Theory and Ethics
Political Elites	Concepts and Theories of Comparative Politics	Concepts and Theories of Comparative Politics	Introduction to Marxist Political Theory			Political Theory Analysis
Human Dimensions		Concepts and Theories of Political and Social Changes	Modern Marxist Political Analysis			Thai Political Thoughts
Sociology of Health and Illness						
Sociology of Celebrity						
Sociology of Law						

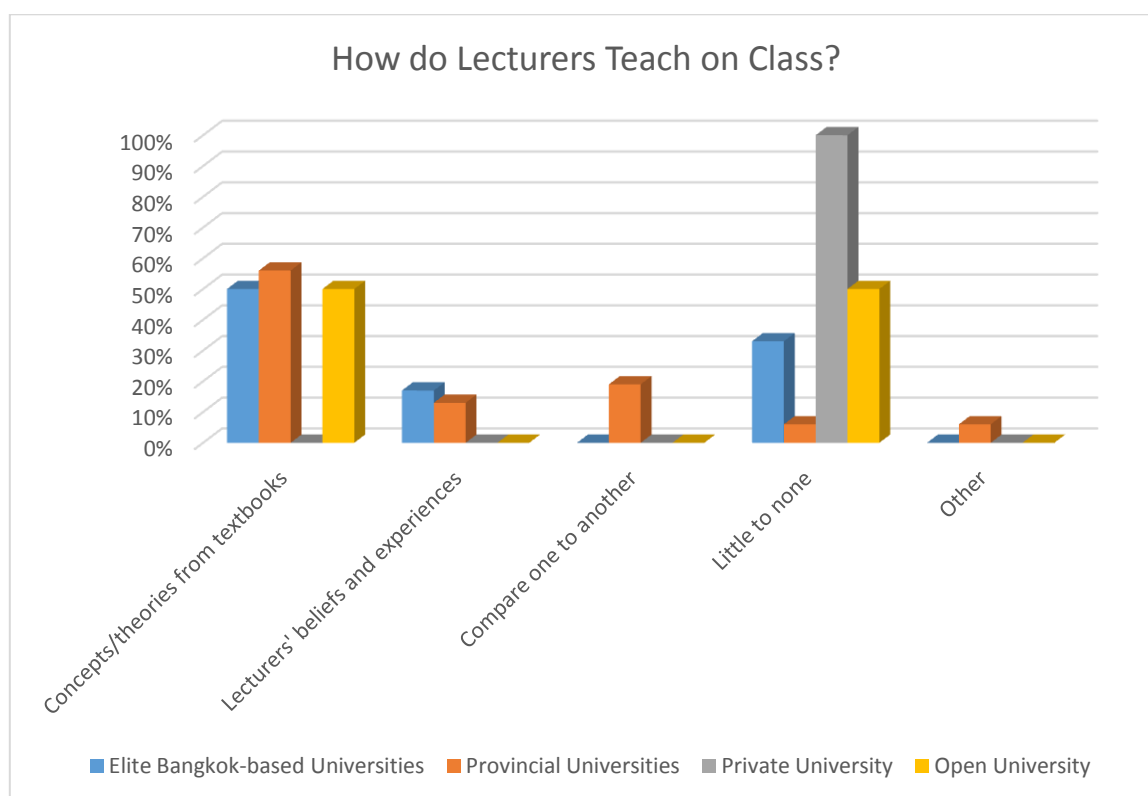
The above figure shows the curriculums of all participating universities made from subjects that clearly relate to class, from the view of the researcher. Lecturers can also insert the concept of class in other subjects as they see fit so the teaching of class may not be limited to these subjects in the above figure. The chart reveals that Chulalongkorn University, an elite Bangkok-based university, has more subjects relating to class than any other university. In contrast, Rangsit University, a private university, has only one subject

relating to class. Moreover, these subjects may not necessary be available to students. Most of the time, course needs to meet the minimum number of students before opening for enrolment. The availability of lecturers is also very important.

Nonetheless, the data reveals that the importance given to teaching about class seems to differ in each university. Only two universities have subjects dedicated to Marxist thought. Interestingly, one of them is Chulalongkorn University, an elite Bangkok-based university. Most subjects are based on concepts and theories, with only Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) and Ramkhamhaeng University having subjects directly related to domestic structure. This indicates that; firstly, knowledge about class in the classroom would be in the form of concept; secondly, it is most likely to be the Western concept of class; thirdly, class is not considered fundamental knowledge within higher education as shown in the case of Rangsit University where only one subject is related to class; fourthly, this may suggest that students need other sources to understand class, such as the university environment; lastly, data suggests that lecturers control the direction of knowledge. They choose what to teach and how. In this case, some lecturers believed Marxist concept are necessary for understanding class while other lecturers may not agree. Lecturers in some universities place more attention on social class, hence they have more subjects relating to it. This is in accordance with the hypothesis that lecturers play a major role in shaping students' class perceptions.

The knowledge

Figure 5-3: How do Lecturers Teach on Class?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

According to students, class was taught mainly through concepts and theories from textbooks which is, arguably, the standard of practice in almost all universities. It is worth pointing out that participants from the private university claimed to not study specifically about class yet, since they are first year students. However, one student claimed to study about class in one general subject³¹⁷. According to collected data, most lecturers teach about class based on theories and textbooks, not much on current contexts. As shown in the previous figure, class concepts like Marxist theories of class seem to be very popular among

³¹⁷ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

lecturers. However, students claimed that most lecturers would teach solely based on concepts of class but not analyze or use these concepts with Thai cases. For example, one student from a provincial university claimed that his lecturers taught him on the concept of class and let him compare with Thai situation by himself³¹⁸. Some students claimed differently and argued that some lecturers used their own belief to analyze these concepts to students while some argued even further that lecturers used their own belief, not concepts, in teaching, particularly about the current class situation. For example, one student from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that her lecturer taught about class based on his preference in Thai politics and tried to convince her to take the same side as him³¹⁹.

There are some cases as well that lecturers compare one case to another so students can see class clearly such as class in India and Thailand, or compare royalty and ordinary people. Nonetheless, there are many students who claimed to study about class only a little, if at all. Some students claimed lecturers did not want to talk about class. For example, one student from a provincial university claimed that, in the case of Thailand, we cannot speak openly about class³²⁰.

This data indicates that, firstly, lecturers are the key element of education since lecturers are the ones who control which kind of knowledge is suited for students. Lecturers choose which theories they want to teach and how. Since the concepts of class are mostly from abroad, they highly depend on lecturers' interpretations. For example, who are the elite as in Marxist theory in case of Thailand? Secondly, some lecturers used their own beliefs in teaching. Lecturers may, deliberately or not, influence students' class perception by pointing out specific class issues that lecturers are concerned. Nonetheless, data supports that lecturers

³¹⁸ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

³¹⁹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³²⁰ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

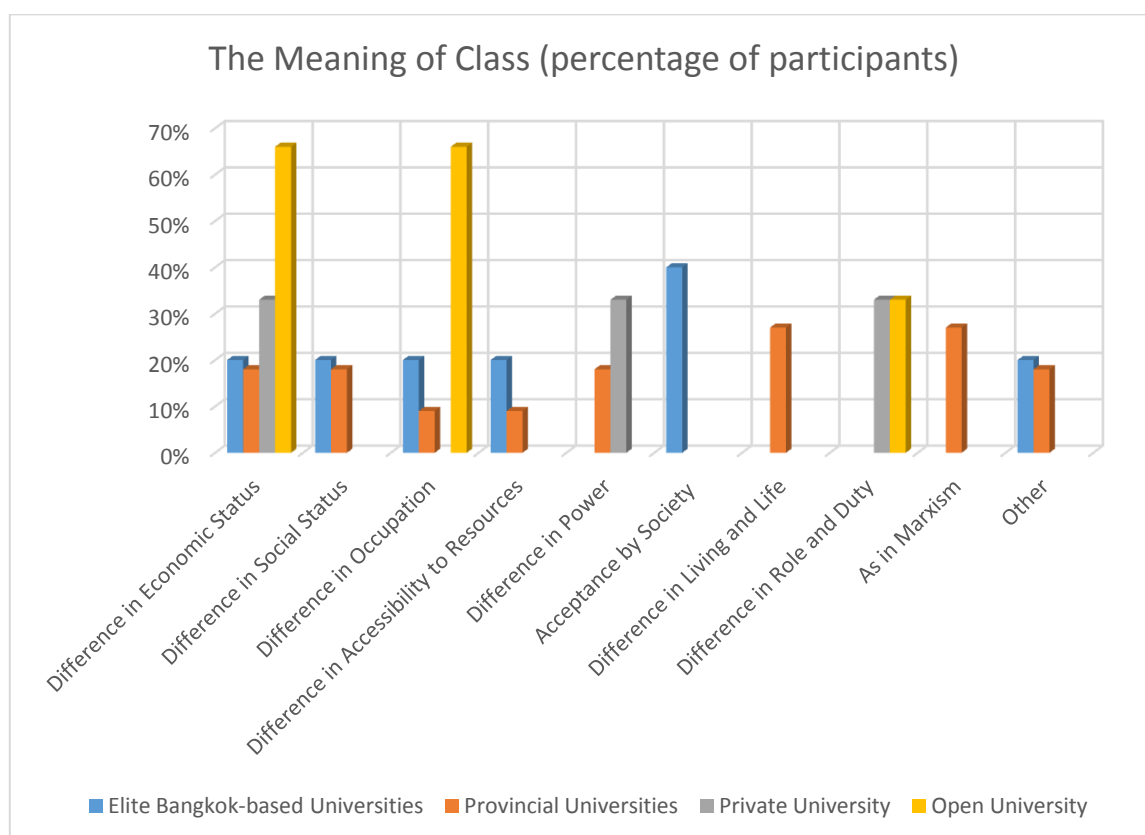
are the one who control the direction of teaching, hence it supports the hypotheses that university lecturers help shape and reproduce class perceptions to students and society.

General knowledge of class

The meaning of class

Participants were asked during focus group discussions to provide the meaning of class based on their understanding. Some participants gave more than one meaning. Answers can be categorized as in the figure below.

Figure 5-4: The Meaning of Class



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

As shown above, the majority of participants provided the meaning of class in terms of comparison between individuals on specific criteria such as social status or occupation. It is not surprising to see the difference in economic status is answered by students from all types of university, since class and economic status are heavily related as noted earlier in this thesis by many scholars (Bourdieu 1986: 241-258, Lynch & O’Riordan 1998: 470, Young 2003: 50, Mathur 2010: 220, etc.).

However, many participants responded with the difference in economic status together with the difference in social status and occupation when providing the meaning of class. This shows that, for students, economic status alone does not fully explain the class of each person. The social status and occupation of each person is also vital in the eyes of students and linked to individual economic status.

It is not only the difference in specific criteria that define class, acceptance from society is also important for participants from elite universities. Two students from Thammasat University believed that the meaning of class is not only about money or power but also based on the acceptance of society, at a given time, such as, at present, the upper class would be the one with a lot of wealth, not just power like in the past³²¹. In contrast, the acceptance of society as such was not mentioned by any participants from other universities. Apparently, class has complex meanings to students; however, to be in a specific class, meeting the criteria may not sufficient for students from elite Bangkok-based universities. One possible explanation is, for students from elite Bangkok-based universities, the “normal criteria” of a certain class is not enough to differentiate people. For example, a person can be middle class from their educational level hence all university graduates can be categorized as middle class. However, these graduates may not actually be middle class in the eyes of some in the middle

³²¹ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

class. Therefore, the acceptance by society as such was mentioned is another indication to separate the “real middle class” from the “wannabe middle class”.

Answers from provincial university students are the most varied: there are only 2 categories without them (acceptance by society and difference in role and duty) and there are 2 categories with only them (difference in living and life, and as in Marxism). This indicates that, although they see class in the same way as others, students from provincial universities are also concern about the condition or standard of living and life. A possible explanation is the difference in living conditions between urban and provincial areas which inevitably affect the way provincial people feel (inferior in terms of standard of living). Moreover, a participant from a provincial university (in “other” category) answered that class is about how parents invest their children with a sense of superiority. For example, “we are bureaucrats, we are better than farmers”³²².

Another interesting point from provincial university participants is some perceived class in Marxist terms. One student saw class as a form of oppression³²³ while another believed it is about capitalists and labor³²⁴.

The private university and the open university are almost alike. Students from both universities answered only in 3 categories and shared in 2 categories (difference in economic status and difference in role and duty). The interesting category is the difference in role and duty. Students from Rangsit University and Ramkhamhaeng University shared the same view that class is divided by the duty of each person. One female student from Rangsit University

³²² Focus group discussion, June 2013.

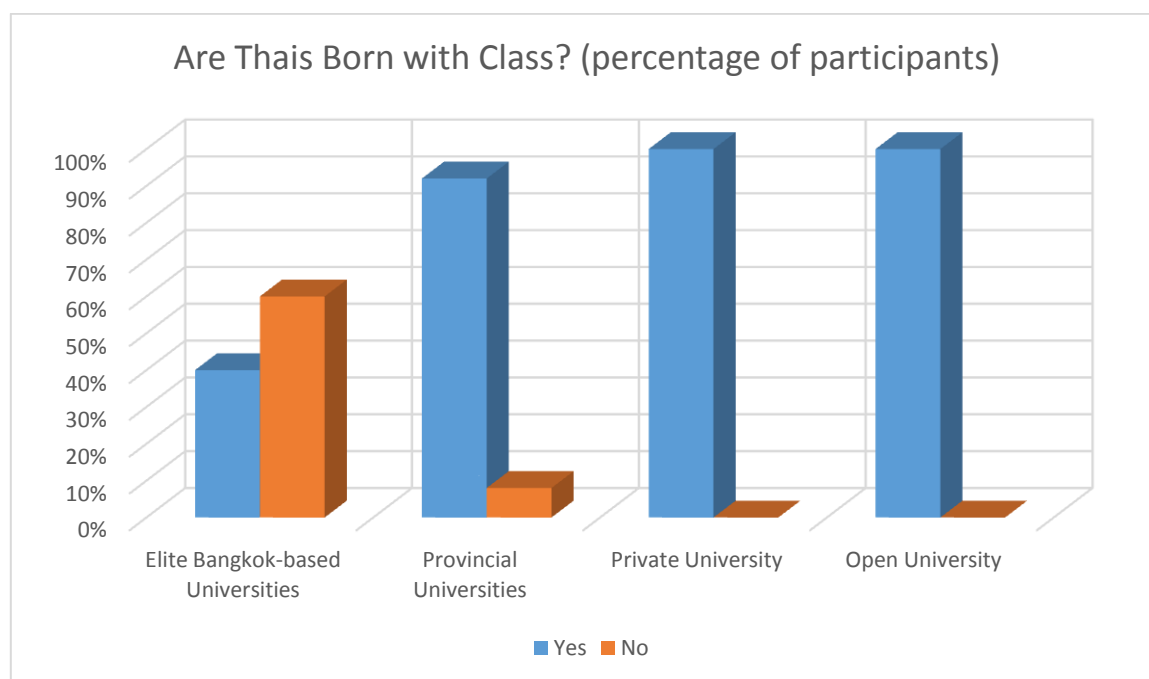
³²³ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

³²⁴ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

argued that king and people are clearly separated. The king has a duty to govern while people have different duties hence there are different classes³²⁵.

Are Thais born into a class?

Figure 5-5: Are Thais Born into a class?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

As shown in the figure above, elite Bangkok-based universities have a higher proportion of students who do not believe Thais are born into a class, while almost all students from provincial, private and open universities shared the view that Thais are born into a class, though their reasons are varied. Participants who believed Thais are born into a class pointed out the difference between rich and poor, between royalty and ordinary people, and between ruling class and ruled class. One student argued that Thais are born into a class

³²⁵ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

only when others know who the parents of the newborn are³²⁶. This shows that students look at class in terms of economic and social status as well as power and authority.

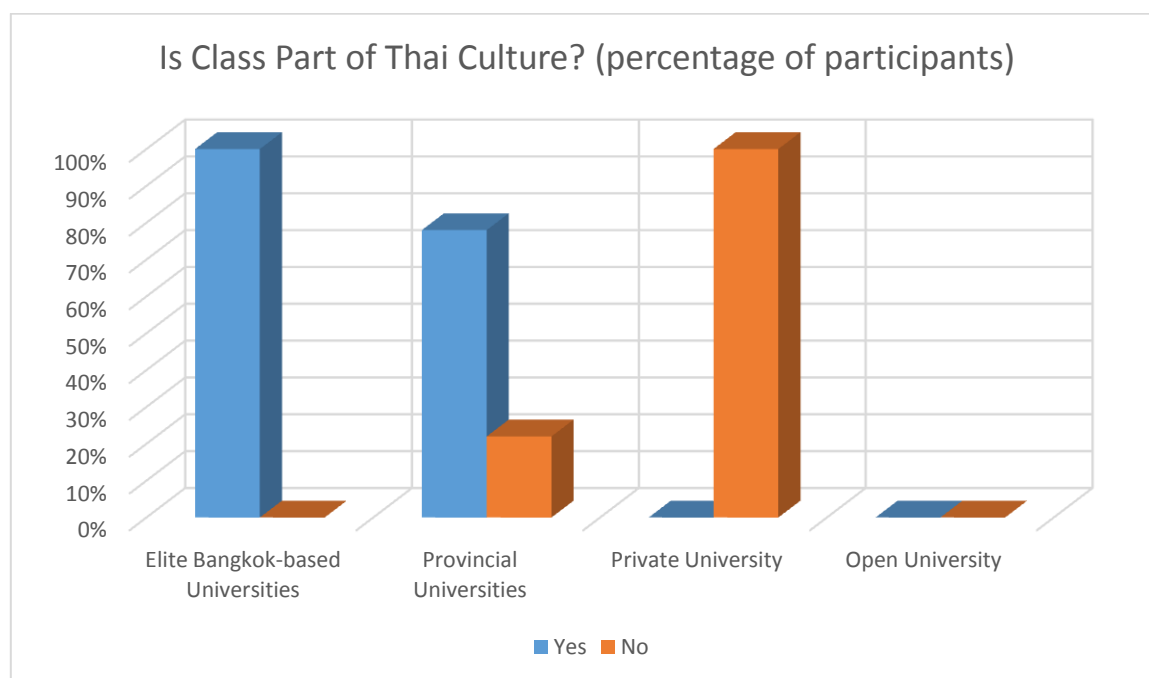
Students from elite Bangkok-based universities believed that Thais are born free of class and class is flexible while the only student from a provincial university who claimed Thais are not born into a class argued that it is because class in Thailand is not obvious as in India where people are born into a specific class³²⁷. However, this does not mean that participants who believed Thais are not born into a class rejected the idea of class in Thailand. In fact, since many of them believed class is flexible, this suggests that they accepted the idea of class. As for participants who believed Thais are born into a class, it is clear that they also believed Thailand has class and people are divided across generations according to their classes.

³²⁶ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

³²⁷ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

Is class part of Thai culture?

Figure 5-6: Is Class Part of Thai Culture?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013. *no data from Ramkhamhaeng University (the open university)

As shown in the figure above, the result here is extremely diverse. All participants from elite Bangkok-based universities and most participants from provincial universities believed class is part of Thai culture while none of the participants from the private university believed the same. Participants who claimed class is part of Thai culture provided several interesting reasons. One from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that class is not only part of culture but also part of the nature of Thais, to use their power and show their wealth³²⁸, while another from the same university pointed out the royal language which clearly represents class in Thailand³²⁹. One from a provincial university believed that it was implanted and

³²⁸ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³²⁹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

became the culture of Thailand, passed down from the Sakdina system³³⁰. The rest argued further that it was not only part of culture but also part of religion, history and beliefs.

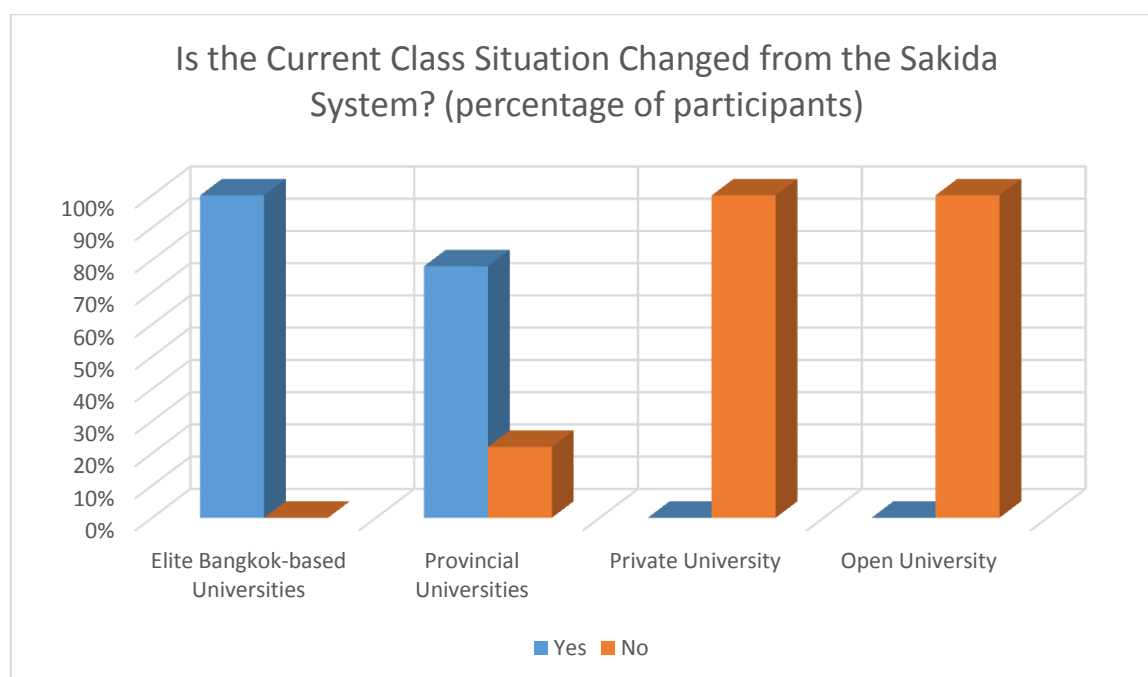
On the other hand, participants who rejected the idea that class is part of Thai culture gave various explanations, such as it is not as obvious as in India, it is result from economic disparity or it is only personal perception. This shows that their disagreement with participants from elite Bangkok-based universities and the majority of students from provincial universities is not based on their definition of Thai culture but on definition of what is class. Since they believed class in Thailand is not obvious or as systematic as in India³³¹, it is not part of Thai culture. And, since class is a result from economic disparity, it is not something widely practiced and accepted by Thais compared to cultures.

³³⁰ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

³³¹ The possibility of recent lecture on caste system in India or similar may affecting students' answers which may show the importance of lecturers towards students' class perceptions.

Is the current class situation changed from the Sakdina system?

Figure 5-7: Is the Current Class Situation Changed from the Sakdina System?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

The figure shows extremely different answers again. All participants from elite Bangkok-based universities believed current class has changed from the Sakdina system while all participants from the private and open universities rejected that idea. Almost all students who claimed class has changed were not claiming that there is no class anymore. In fact, they still believed class exists but it has changed into another less tightly structured form. For example, 5 out of 12 participants from elite Bangkok-based and provincial universities believed it is easier to change classes now than in the Sakdina system. Another 5 out of 12 believed economic status was become the new indicator of class, instead of land ownership as in the Sakdina system.

Some students believed the current class situation has not changed from the Sakdina system because they did not see any difference between now and then. Some students argued that the lower class now and in the Sakdina system are the same group and the overall structure is not different. For example, one student from a provincial university argued that the lower class does not yet receive equality, which is not really different from what it was in Sakdina system³³². A student from the private university claimed that, at present, we still have slave, although in a different form³³³. Another student pointed out that money has become central to the new class system; however, the system has not changed and people are still slaves as in the Sakdina system³³⁴. It can be seen that, in fact, participants from the private and open universities did not reject that class has changed. It may have changed to some degree but not fundamentally, therefore, students at the private and open universities, said that class did not actually change.

Since both groups believed class has changed and agreed, to some degree, that money has become more important than land ownership, it appears that one group looks at class development in a more positive way while the other group looks at it negatively. One possible reason is the transformation from land ownership to money or economic status makes it easier for them to improve their class status, or they may be part of the new rich, hence the positive attitude toward those changes. In contrast, students who look at it negatively believed the essence of the class system did not change since people still belong to a certain class according to their possession of some indicators. It can be seen that the change did not positively affect them hence the negative perception.

³³² Focus group discussion, January 2013.

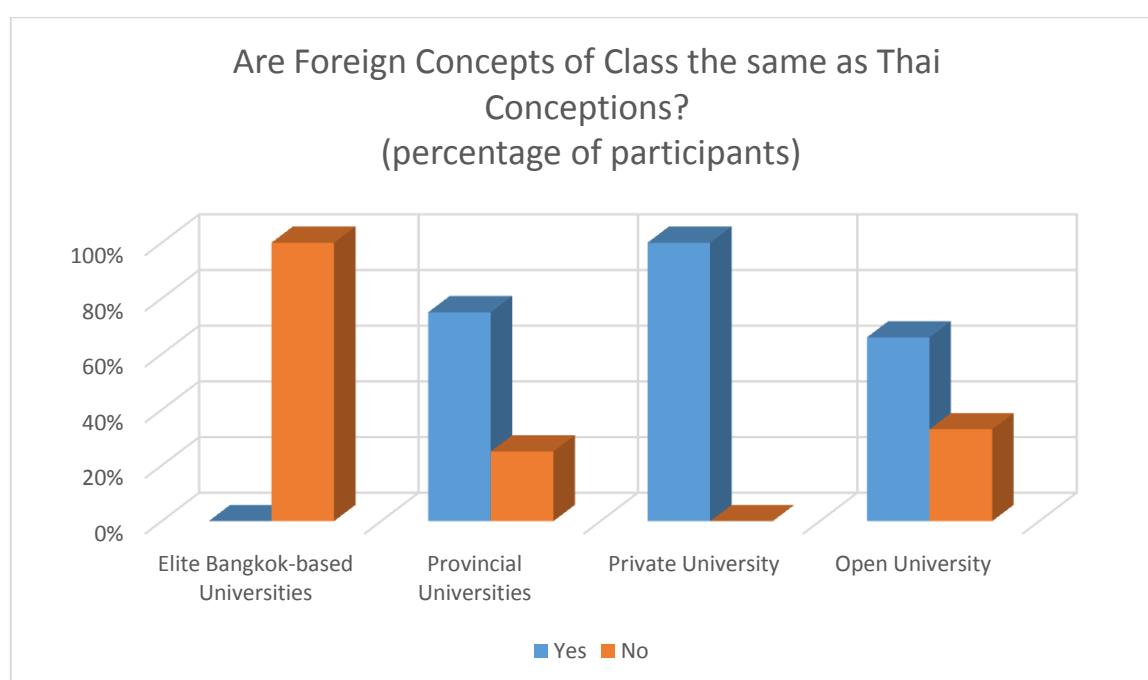
³³³ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³³⁴ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

This part and the previous part are correlated. Students believed class may have changed in many ways, but still be a system where people are born into a class.

Are foreign concepts of class the same as Thai conception?

Figure 5-8: Are Foreign Concepts of Class the same as Thai Conception?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

The above figure shown that the majority of participants from provincial, private and open universities believed foreign concepts of class are the same as in Thailand. In contrast, none of the participants from elite Bangkok-based universities thought so. Students from elite Bangkok-based universities claimed that the class system in Thailand is more about power and authority while foreign concepts of class, like in Western countries, are based more on economic status and they believed each country has different class system. For example, one

student claimed that, based on his understanding, Western concept of class is developed from capitalism³³⁵. Provincial university students also shared this view and believed class in Thailand is based on the Sakdina system or religious belief. One student from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that concept of class from foreign countries could not fully explain the Thai context, hence there are differences³³⁶. In contrast, students who believed Thai conception of class concept are the same as foreign countries provided quite varied reasons. Some claimed it is the same as the Feudal system in Western countries while others claimed it is like India. One student concluded that they are all the same system of oppression³³⁷.

These data show students' class perception after they studied about it in university. It is clear that there are differences in perceptions of class and shows that there is no shared definition of class. The differences in their views may come from the difference in learning in each university. For example, it is impossible for students to experience the Sakdina system themselves, therefore their knowledge about it must be from their education.

It seems that participants from elite Bangkok-based universities think quite differently from participants at other universities. This may relate to the different fractions of students in each university, although this time is not about urban and provincial fractions but upper and lower fractions of the middle class. Therefore, data suggests that there is a connection between the upper fraction of middle class and how they play down the foreign concept of the middle class.

³³⁵ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

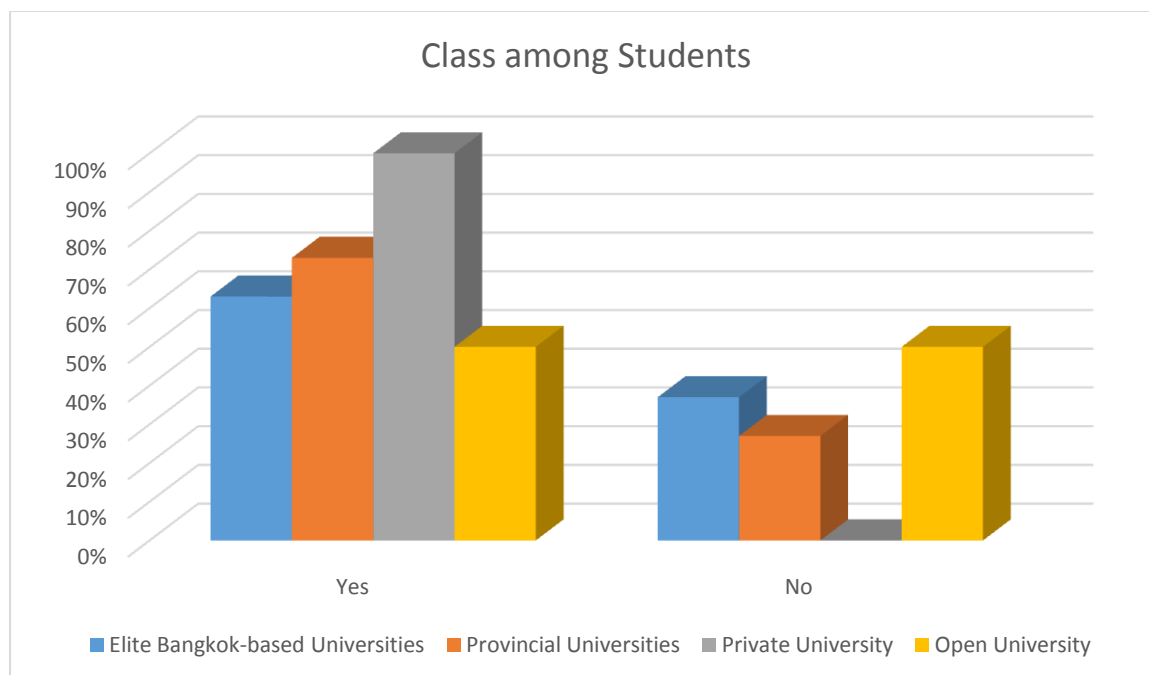
³³⁶ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

³³⁷ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

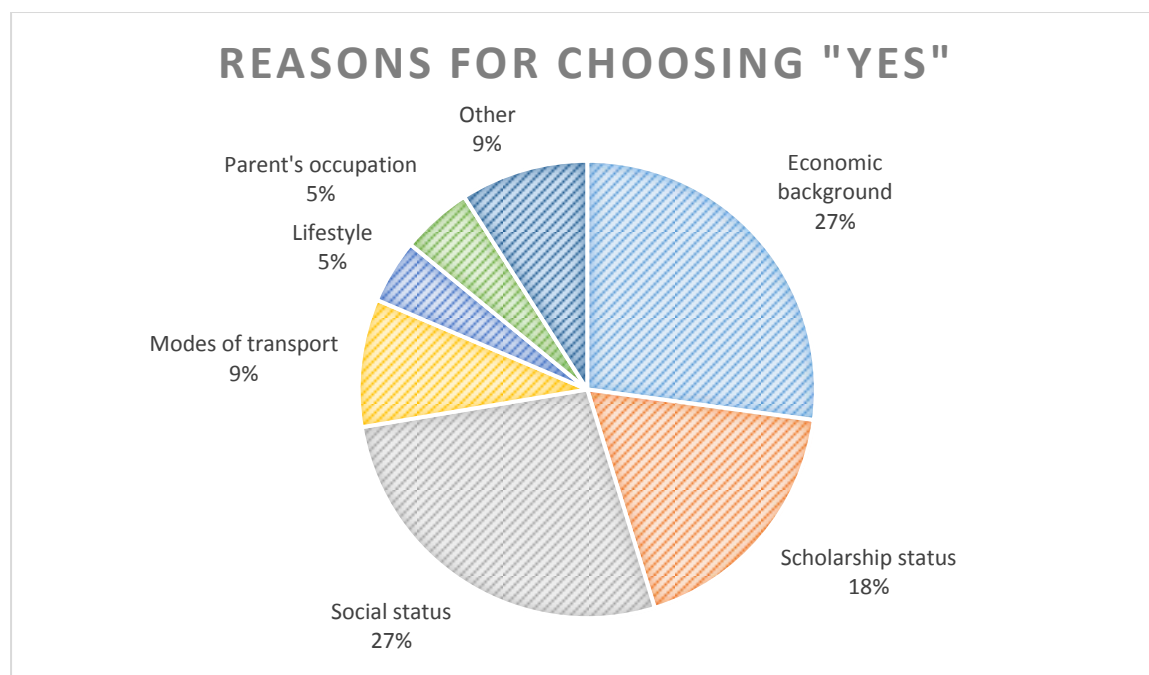
Class within university

As stated in the previous chapter, knowledge or what lecturers teach inside the university is not the only source of class perception for students. Within the university environment such factors as university reputation, students' peer group and surrounding areas, influence class perceptions and may transform perceptions to match the characteristics of each institution. This part will look further at relationships between 3 main actors within university (lecturers, staff, and students) in terms of class and how it affects students' class perception which will respond to the hypothesis that university, university lecturers and university environment help shape and reproduce class perceptions to students as well as society.

Participants were asked about class inside their faculty. Questions were divided into 3 phrases; firstly, participants were asked about class between students; secondly, class between lecturers; lastly, class between lecturers, students and university administrative staff. This data will reveal that class is not only about economic status or wealth but also about power or authority in certain places such as universities. Moreover, it will show that hierarchical order inside universities help contribute to students' class perception.

Figure 5-9: Class among Students

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Figure 5-10: Yes, There is Class among Students

Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

According to collected data, the majority of students believed there are classes among them. Only at the open university are students equally divided while participants from other universities seem to agreed that they are divided by class. Data indicates that class in the open university may not be as clear as in private universities. Despite its status as a private university, perceived by many Thais as a university for rich students who could not enter public universities, the private university also provides a considerable amount of scholarships for provincial students. Therefore, not only students from high income families study here. There is an intermingling between rich and poor students, which may explain why class at Rangsit University is quite obvious.

There are various reasons for students who chose “yes”. Students gave importance to criteria such economic background, social status and scholarship status. Economic background is straightforward; however social status contains many interesting points. Students from provincial universities pointed out that seniority between students was the reason behind their answers. A male student from a provincial university argued further that class also exists in the form of student parliament, club and classroom leaders. These groups of students always have advantages over other students such as scholarships³³⁸. This indicates that class is also conceived in form of the difference in power or authority among students, and perhaps an unclear distinction between class and status. Another interesting point is from the private university. Students believed they are divided into classes between students and celebrities. One student claimed that there is class between “ordinary” students and “celebrity” students. He argued that “celebrity” students, who are movie stars do not need to attend class but can get good grades easily by making a request directly to lecturers³³⁹. One female student agreed and added that it is a clear example of a double standard and bias

³³⁸ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

³³⁹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

from lecturers. Moreover, celebrity students can be seen taking higher class than other students³⁴⁰.

As for scholarship status, it could easily be included in economic background; however, it is more complicated than a matter of money. Students from elite Bangkok-based universities argued that scholarship students, mostly from provincial provinces, only stay with their own group and communicate little with other students³⁴¹. This may indicate that scholarship status is not only related to economic background of students but also heavily linked to their origin and urban/provincial status. Although students from urban areas may not intentionally alienate students from provincial provinces, the urban lifestyle could lead to difficulty in adapting to new culture and lifestyle for students from provincial provinces. As one student pointed out students who have scholarship and rural backgrounds mostly stay with their own group, not intermingling with other³⁴².

Another indication used by students is parents' occupation. It is related to, and can be included in the economic background category. However, in the case of Thailand, some occupations may not provide good income but give power, status, or authority instead. One student claimed that class also depended on student's parents' occupation such as a son of a farmer and a son of bureaucrat³⁴³.

There are some interesting reasons in the "other" category. Two participants claimed students are separated by their looks. They claimed that good-looking students or students with whiter skin can be seen as of a better class than them³⁴⁴. The appearances of a person

³⁴⁰ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³⁴¹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³⁴² Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³⁴³ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

³⁴⁴ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

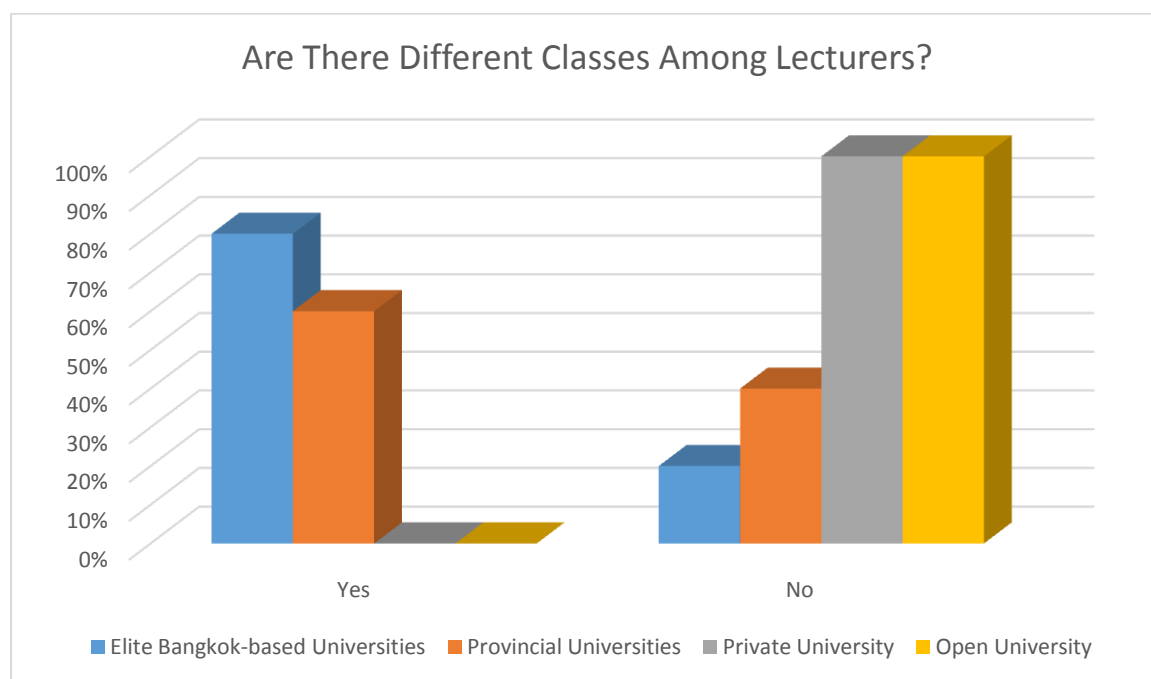
(in terms of body, not accessories) may relate to their economic status or occupation. Students with whiter skin or who are good-looking may well be perceived as “Louk Kun Nou” (children of rich family) since they can take good care of themselves with medical/cosmetic treatment. In terms of occupation, people with darker skin may remind students of people who works outside like farmers, which are considered by many as the lower class. Nonetheless, this shows that, even when economic status is not clear, students perceive each other in terms of class or status. On the other hand, a number of students claimed to have no class among students in their universities. Students believed friendship is more important than class or economic background and they adapted their character to interact apparently.

Although data in chapter 2 indicates that most students were screened and put in each university according to their class fractions. Moreover, students in each university seem to have a similar background. This section reveals that students believed they are divided into classes within their universities. In the most cases, students argued that economic background is the most importance factor. However, there are several cases that students are confused between class and social status such as social status of some students. Nonetheless, data indicates that there are fractions of the middle class in each university; both urban and provincial fractions and upper and lower middle class fractions. In addition, it shows that students understanding of class, in terms of concept, is not clear.

Class among lecturers

Within university environment, not only students' peer groups that can affect students' class perceptions. Lecturers are another main factor that contribute largely on nurturing students' class. Lecturers are the one who control the knowledge within university. But lecturers' behavior or lifestyles can be seen as a role model for students to learn and become a full member of the middle class.

Figure 5-11: Are There Different Classes among Lecturers?



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

When students were asked about classes among lecturers, the result was clearly different from the previous figure. However, only a small number of participants from the private university and the open university answered this question so it may not truly reflect overall views of those students. More students believed there is no class among lecturers,

though students from elite Bangkok-based universities seem to be more convinced that class exists among their mentors.

The majority of students from elite Bangkok-based universities claimed to see disparity among their lecturers and even some students who chose “no” did not entirely refute class differences among their university lecturers. In fact, their answers may indicate that class exists. One student answered with “no, no class in terms of wealth” which may indicate that lecturers are divided into classes in other terms³⁴⁵. Students from every subject university who answered “yes” mainly mentioned the difference in academic background and academic position of lecturers, not economic background. For example, one male student from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that he is close with some lecturers and, according to them, lecturers are divided into classes based on their academic background. As in his words, “lecturers told me a lot of things, one example for this issue was two lecturers are not talking to each other because one lecturer graduated from here [Thammasat University] and studied further in England while another lecturer graduated in international relations and was riding a horse at Oxford University”³⁴⁶. This is another example that students are confused between class and status. Another student from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that lecturers who did not graduate from here [Chulalongkorn University] would find it hard to stay and move upward³⁴⁷. This shows that, in student’s view, university is not only shaping class perceptions or class mobility but also can dictate life chances. One student from a provincial university argued even further that lecturers are divided into classes by their opinions about Red and Yellow shirts³⁴⁸, though he did not explain which class each lecturer belongs to.

³⁴⁵ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

³⁴⁶ Focus group discussion, July 2013.

³⁴⁷ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³⁴⁸ Focus group discussion, November 2012.

This indicates that Red and Yellow shirt conflict relates to the class issue maybe in terms of class consciousness, at least for this student's perception. It can be seen that class between lecturers was perceived by students mostly in the form of academic background but it is also related to economic status of each lecturer. Graduation from a domestic university would cost less than study abroad which reflects economic background of each lecturer.

In contrast, many students who chose "no" claimed they are not close enough to lecturers to identify them in terms of class. This may indicate that, by appearances, lecturers do not look different and share the same lifestyle. One student from the open university argued that lecturers are all down to earth³⁴⁹. One from a provincial university also mentioned that every lecturer is the same and not different from students since lecturers at Mahasarakham University are from agricultural background, the same family background as students³⁵⁰.

Based on collected data, when it comes to lecturers, students believed class can be separated not mainly by economic terms as in the case of students but mainly by their academic background. However, students who refused the idea of classes among lecturers looked into economic related indications and claimed there is no class. This may indicate that class, in terms of economic status, among lecturers is not clear in any university since lecturers, have similar salaries hence there is not much difference in lifestyle. Therefore, students used academic background, which is more of a status symbol, as an indication or, in case of "no", believed there is no class at all.

³⁴⁹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

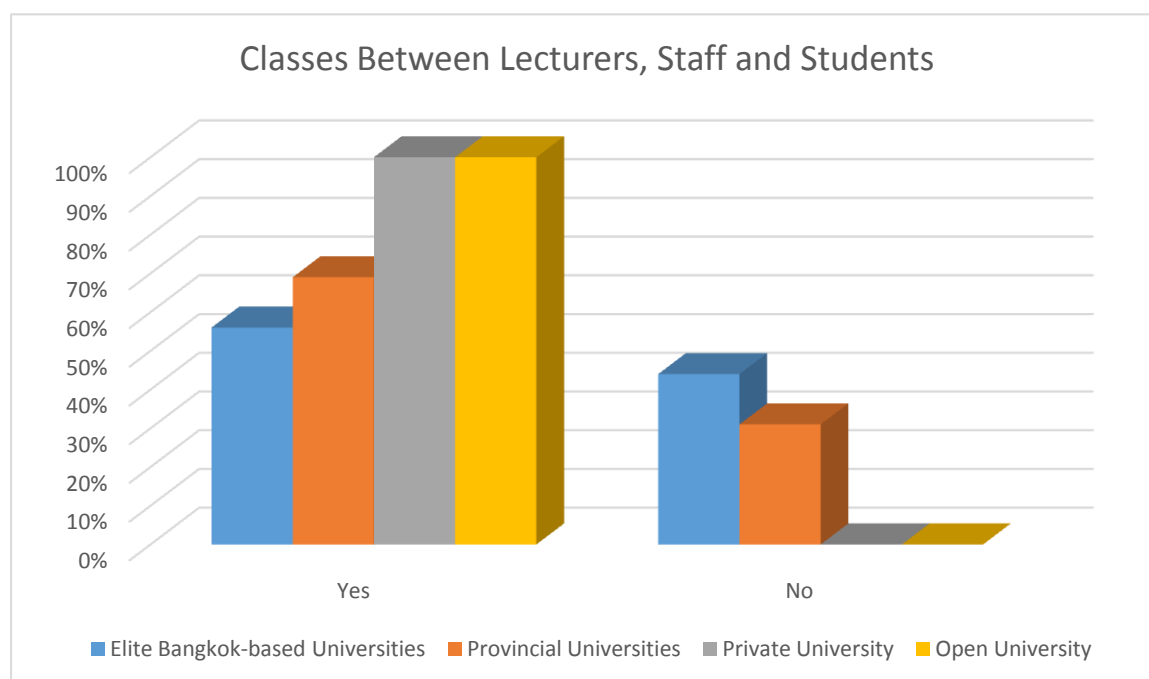
³⁵⁰ Focus group discussion, January 2013.

Moreover, data emphasizes that students understanding of class is based on hierarchy and status, which is not always wrong. Lecturers' academic backgrounds lead to status; however, it is also about class. Lecturers with high economic background can study further than the one with limited budget, hence status can be reinforced by class.

Class between lecturers, students and staff

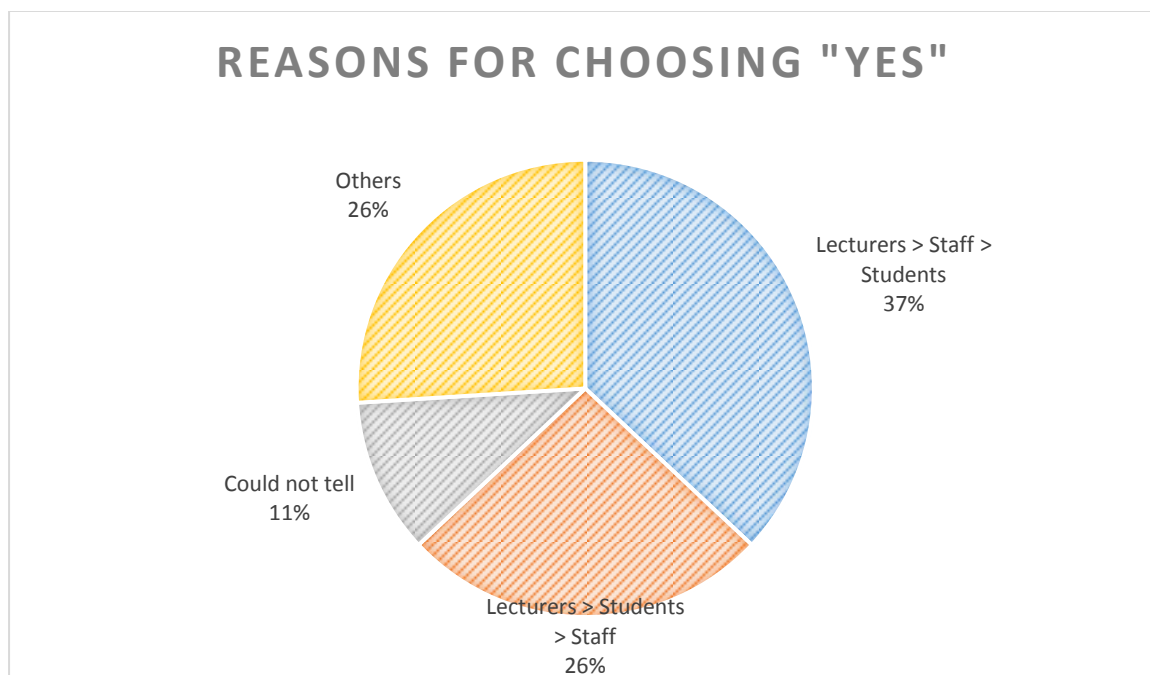
More evidence of class and how relationship within university can shape students' perception of class can be found in the relationships between lecturers, staff and students.

Figure 5-12: Classes between Lecturers, Staff and Students



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Figure 5-13: Yes, There are Classes among Lecturers, Staff and Students



Source: Data from field research during 2012 and 2013.

Although students' opinions are divided in the previous figure, this figure shows the majority of students from every university believed there are classes between lecturers, staff and students. As shown, less than half of participants from elite Bangkok-based universities and provincial universities answered "no". Half of those who answered "no" from elite Bangkok-based universities did not totally refute the idea, but instead they explained that there is no class "between staff and students", not including lecturers. This may indicate that, in fact, there are classes but they avoided mentioning it since it is clear that lecturers are in a higher class than them. However, the rest of students who answered believed they are divided only by job positions, not class.

In contrast, all students who answered "yes" from every university regarded lecturers as the highest class among all actors. However, there are differences from participants in the way they see staff and themselves. The main reasons for students can be separated into 2

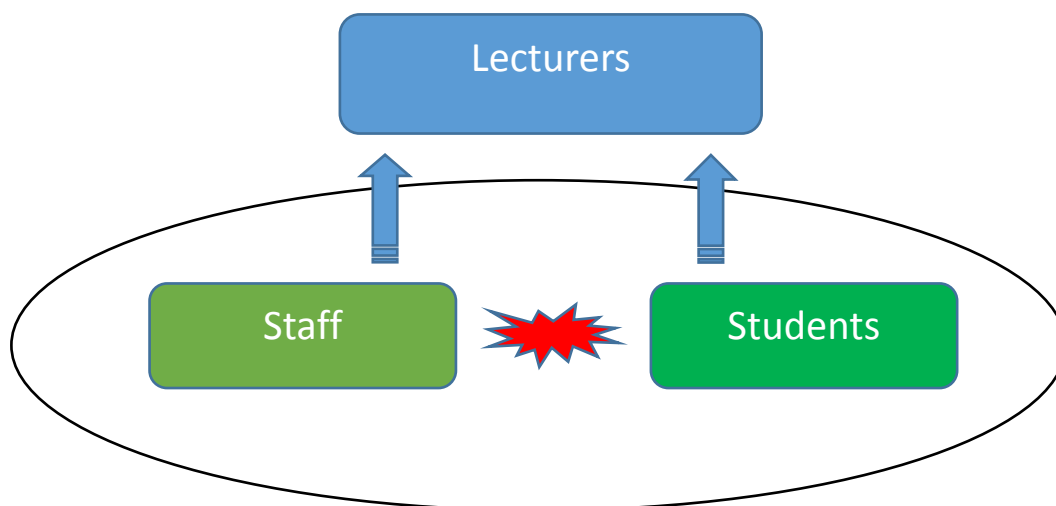
major categories which put staff and students in different classes. On the one hand, students believed the hierarchical order or class formation within university can be explained as “lecturers > staff > students”. Some students regarded lecturers as the highest class because their grades are in lecturers’ hands which indicates the power or authority status of lecturers in their relationships. Most students claimed to respect staff and their relationships have nothing to do with class however some students believed staff are in a better class than students. One female student from an elite Bangkok-based university argued that since staff are work in administrative, students need to respect them. She gave an example that, when she contacted staff about her internship, she need to plead with them. She added that, since she is just a student, she is merely a customer of the education system; therefore, she needs to listen to staff³⁵¹. Another female student from an elite Bangkok-based university claimed that Thai society is based on seniority, therefore academic staff or lecturers who are, obviously, elders, are to be respected³⁵². One male student from a provincial university claimed that lecturer is in the highest class followed by academic staff and then students in the lowest class. He explained that student must follow the rules and direction from lecturer while staff are the ones who coordinate between students and lecturers, hence they are the middle class³⁵³. Most of these views are again represent status, not class.

³⁵¹ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³⁵² Focus group discussion, July 2013.

³⁵³ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

Figure 5-14: Relationship between Lecturers, Staff and Students



Some students believed students are in higher class than staff. One student from a provincial university argued that staff have to service students and also students can formally complain about them³⁵⁴. One student from the private university shared this view and argued that students are in a higher class than staff since staff's duty is to serve students³⁵⁵. Another student from the same university claimed that, in terms of class, it can be divided into lecturer as the highest class, student is the middle class and cleaning staff are the lowest class³⁵⁶.

It appears that relationships between staff and students depend on what kind of staff they referred to. If students referred to cleaners, obviously, students believed themselves in a higher class. In contrast, if students referred to administrative staff, students would think staff is in higher position. Although some students claimed to respect all staff in the same way, this

³⁵⁴ Focus group discussion, June 2013.

³⁵⁵ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

³⁵⁶ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

indicates that a person's class is heavily linked to occupation, some are more prestigious than others. Since income is varied because of occupation, it also leads to lifestyle and status of each person.

Some students pointed out other reason for choosing "yes". One participant from Ramkhamahaeng University revealed the complicated relationship among lecturers, staff and students. He argued that a lecturer or even the head of university is not necessarily the most powerful actor. Moreover, the student association could not make any decision by themselves even though they came through election, because every decision has been made by someone else already³⁵⁷.

Data indicates that students believed lecturers are the highest "class" in the relationship between lecturers, staff and students. This is not surprising since lecturers have a better level of education, have a better occupation and have a better salary which contributes greatly to lecturers' economic status and lifestyle. However, this ranking is not actually based on class. Students seem to confuse class and status. Students frequently used status in place of class when they answered questions regarding to class. This suggests that students' understandings of class are not clear. Students are unable to fully distinguish between class and status. This may indicate that class is closely associated with status for Thai students, and perhaps the middle class more generally, and may align more closely with traditional notions of hierarchy than other definitions of class.

³⁵⁷ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

Conclusion

This chapter reveals the results of interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions with lecturers and students regarding higher education and its influence towards students' perceptions of class. These results show that students' perceptions are influenced by education as well as the university environment. Knowledge from education can provide students a framework for the ideas of class. Life experiences within the university environment can provide students examples on how life "should" be, according to students' class fractions.

In the process, students are taught to understand their positions in society and how to behave accordingly. Through lecturers, students learn not only knowledge of class but also lecturers' experiences and views. Since there are almost no specific courses on class, students learn about it mainly from lecturers, not textbooks. However, the concepts of class in contemporary Thailand are from abroad, hence the knowledge is based on lecturers' interpretations. Nonetheless, the data support the hypothesis, that university lecturers help shape and reproduce class perceptions to students and thus to society.

Although knowledge provided by lecturers is undoubtedly important for students' class perceptions, lecturers alone do not shape students' ways of thinking. There are many elements within and around higher education institutions that are essential. Firstly, areas surrounding each university are a source of class perceptions. Universities in urban areas are surrounded by commercial buildings which offer international products and services while shops around universities in provincial areas are less sophisticated. These surrounding areas, according to collected data, help shape students' behaviors and, indirectly, transform them. Secondly, students in high reputation universities are likely to be perceived as, at least, the middle class by others. To study in these "prestigious" universities, students need to compete with each other and most of the survivors came from good income families, and can choose

from many universities. In contrast, students at provincial universities and the open university are perceived as less fortunate, with some exceptions of high reputation university in provincial provinces such as Chiangmai University where many students are from high income families. They needed to study at a certain university as they have fewer choices which reflected their lower class status. Thirdly, relationships within university make students adapt so they can be part of the group. Students' peer group is crucial for students' life. According to collected data, students with different lifestyle can feel alienated. Therefore, in university, students learn to behave in accordance with class culture of the university, another way class has been reproduced. These points support the hypotheses that students' peer group and university environment are important for producing class perceptions.

There is one interesting pattern found in this chapter. Students are unable to distinguish between class and status, and frequently used status to analyze their class situation. Students do not understand the concept of class and used many different indicators to answers researcher's questions, which shows diverse conceptions of class. However, students seem to understand and have a shared concept of status with their friends, mostly in terms of hierarchy. Students tended to use status like age, power or authority in identifying a person's class. This indicates that higher education did not provide students a clear conception of class. University environment seems to be more practical for students as they are aware of class, but cannot describe it in academic ways, hence they develop their ideas of class in form of status, in line with traditional cultural hierarchies.

In addition, the findings from this chapter can help answer the 3 core questions. Firstly, who are the middle class? We found that, at least in the eyes of lecturers and students, social classes can be differentiated by indicators such economic status, educational level, occupation, lifestyle, culture, ideas, accessibility to resources and even sophistication of a

person. Obviously, the middle class are generally “better” in these indicators than the lower class. However, this does not mean the upper class are “better” in these indicators than the middle class. According to collected data, some participants claimed that the middle class are “better” than the upper class. They have more freedom to consume products of all classes while the upper class limited themselves to upper class products. It is ironic, however, since some participants also believed the middle class imitates the upper class lifestyle and consumption. We also found that the middle class is likely to compare themselves directly to the lower class, not the upper class. This may indicate that the middle class looks down on the lower class. Interestingly, we found no link between the middle class and democratic value. Only a few participants believed the middle class is a force for democracy, which is contrary to most Western ideas of the middle class. The middle class also has an urban lifestyle since they are urban based. They are more open to information due to their high education and access to knowledge such as through the internet which means they also are technology consumers. However, this lifestyle relies heavily on their ability to earn sufficient income. Therefore, middle class status is uncertain, relying greatly on capital and focused mainly on self-interest. This may explain why the middle class does not prefer a democratic system since their prosperity may be at risk. In addition, we found that there are fractions within the middle class. Many participants believed there are differences among students and among lecturers, mainly based on economic status. This indicates that all of the participants are not the same middle class. In short, the middle class are those who have advantages based on class status, are divided into fractions, and want to retain their status at the cost of other classes.

Secondly, how does education shape social class? And, thirdly, what is the importance of the university environment toward shaping class perceptions to students and Thai society? These questions can be answered more clearly in this chapter than previous ones. This thesis

found that education, as a knowledge, does not help shape social class. However, higher education, as a whole, can influence students' perception on class and society alike. In the eyes of participants, the university environment has a greater effect than knowledge from education. This chapter found that the university environment helps greatly in the socialization process of students in their university years. The university environment provided an example of how the middle class should be. Lecturers are not only an example of how the middle class consumes but also how it should behave. The relationship between lecturers, students and staff is a model for students. The interaction between lecturers, who are regarded as middle class, and some staff, who are regarded as lower class, shows students, who are regarded as middle class or future middle class, how to interact with other classes. These examples influence students and their behavior. The peer group also contributes to students' behavior. We found that students behave similarly to their friends as the acceptance from the peer group is important. So, the peer group helps dictate the lifestyle of students. However, we found that the lifestyle of students in subject universities is different based on type, location and reputation of university. Many participants revealed that they or their students could not adapt to a different lifestyle from their backgrounds. This supports the idea that there are fractions within the middle class and students from certain fractions study in certain universities. In addition, the surrounding area of each university also plays a role in shaping class perceptions. Shopping malls in the heart of the capital city show students what they can expect as middle class graduates from elite Bangkok-based universities. In contrast, small local shops around some universities in provincial areas remind students of their limitations and their fractions. The surrounding area helps students better understand the middle class environment that matches their fractions. Students who get through the socialization process in higher education would understand their position in society, know what to consume, have the right tastes, and think and behave according to their

class. When they graduate, these new members of society will bring those behaviors with them and influence the society, because they will have leading jobs in private and public sectors and be in positions to influence others. The next chapter will revisit the hypotheses and provide limitations, suggestions and implications of this thesis.

Chapter 6 : Conclusion

The goal of this thesis is to answer the core questions: firstly, who are the middle class: secondly, how does education shape social classes: thirdly, what is the importance of the university environment toward shaping class perceptions of students and Thai society. We examine literature, both in Thai and English, relating to social class and the influence of education. We went through the data collected from university lecturers and students who participated in face to face interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions. Collected data from students and lecturers from 7 universities across Thailand has been analyzed and presented in previous chapters.

In the first chapter, we, before the 2014 coup, found that Thai society was divided into 2 major sides: Red and Yellow shirts. Both claimed to represent different groups of people. The Red shirts claimed to represent the rural poor and to protect democracy. The Yellow shirts, on the other hand, declared themselves as protectors of virtue and representatives of the middle and upper class. We found that their claims are not far from the truth. The majority of Red shirts were from provincial areas and had a lower level of income and education than the Yellow shirts. In contrast, the majority of Yellow shirts were Bangkok-based with a high level of income and education. We discovered that scholars (Pasuk & Baker 2008, Giles 2009) and the media believed the conflict between both sides was a conflict between classes. This thesis looked back to earlier coups and found that the middle class plays a major role in Thai politics and their involvement led to many coups in the past. The 1973 demonstration was led by the middle class in search of democracy. However, the

same middle class turned their backs on democracy and supported dictatorship in 1976. In 1991, the middle class did not oppose the coup; however, in 1992, the middle class protested the military government, resulting in bloodshed. The bloodless coup in 2006 was supported by the middle class and as was the coup in 2014. These examples indicate that the middle class has erratic political behavior, and democracy may not be what they want. Nevertheless, we found that the middle class is an important factor in politics. But who are they? We investigated further and found a strong link between middle class, level of income and level of education.

In chapter two, we continued investigating the identity of the middle class. This thesis went through literature on definitions of the middle class and we found that there is no clear and single definition of middle class. We found that there are many indicators that can identify the middle class, such as income or occupation. However, we also found that culture, identity and taste are all important. This thesis looked back to the creation of middle classes in other countries and discovered that middle class distanced themselves from others because they believed in their superiority. We found that the middle class differentiated themselves from others based on their income and consumption. Moreover, they are self-interest and may not care about democracy. In the case of Thailand, we found that they can be identified by income, occupation and lifestyle. They are also very much urban based. We investigated further and found that higher education is very important for the middle class. It can be briefly concluded that high level of education lead to high status occupations with high incomes which are needed by the middle class to enjoy a middle class lifestyle. However, we discovered that the role of education is more complex. It not only provided the middle class with marketable skills but also provided a place for socializing in the middle class. The future members of the middle class have been nurtured within education institutions. We discovered that the socialization process within universities taught them how to consume, think, taste,

and behave as middle class. These findings could be a preliminary answer for the core questions of how education shapes social classes, and of the importance of the university environment toward shaping class perceptions of students and the Thai society. This thesis then sought a clearer answer to the core questions by studying university lecturers, who can be identified as middle class, and university students, who may be identified at least as the future middle class.

In chapter three, we started by examining how higher education has developed in Thailand. We discovered that higher education was first developed to educate an elite who would rule the country. Only after the overthrow of the absolute monarchy was higher education expanded to serve the growing needs of the bureaucracy. We found that the emergence of the middle class and their search for higher education helped accelerated the expansion of high education to the middle class and beyond Bangkok. However, we discovered that the high reputation universities are still concentrated in Bangkok with only some universities in highly developed provinces in the same league. We also discovered that the higher the reputation universities have, the more difficult it is for students to enter. Then we went through results from case study universities. We discovered that students in each type of university share many similar traits. Most students at elite Bangkok-based universities came from Bangkok and the surrounding area. Most students at provincial universities came from the same region as their universities. Students at the private university and the open university came from various origins. We discovered that most students at elite Bangkok-based universities came from families with a better economic background than students at other types of universities. We discovered a difference in lifestyles between Bangkok-based universities and provincial universities. Moreover, students' life chances also varied, depending on where they studied. Although university students can be seen at least as the future middle class, we discovered that not all of them are the same. This led to a conclusion

that the middle class is not a single unit, there are fractions within it. This finding helped us better understand and better answer the core question of who the middle class are.

In chapter four, we attempted to answer the core questions by investigating university students and their understanding of class. This chapter attempted to understand how education shapes social classes and the importance of the university environment in shaping class perceptions of students and Thai society. We found that social class was not a distant topic for most students. They learned about class from high school but it was not in-depth and their understanding of class is limited. We discovered that, for students, class is mostly about economic status and inequality – a common explanation. We found that students did not care much about class but, when asked, almost all of them wanted to be middle class and identified themselves as such. Again, most students used indicators such economic status, however, some mentioned educational level and occupation. They also identified their friends based on the same indicators. We also found that the university is a middle class institution. This also emphasizes that, based on the findings from the previous chapter, students in each type of university are different; there are fractions within the middle class. We investigated further to find out the influence of higher education and the university environment on students' class and class perception. It turned out that higher education in the form of knowledge did not increase students' understanding of class. In fact, we discovered that daily life experience was more important for students' class perceptions. We found that the university environment influenced students' class perceptions. We discovered that, by study at high reputation universities, students saw themselves as superior to others and believed it increased their life chances. Students were not convinced that peer groups influenced their class perception. However, we found that this was because students only associated with friends who shared a similar lifestyle and alienated others. This indicates that peer group worked in a subtle way. We found that the university facilities influenced students' ideas of

what middle class facilities should be, how to consume as members of the middle class and what they can expect according to their class fraction. The surrounding areas of universities worked similarly to university facilities. We found that students were not convinced about the influence of surrounding areas but this was because the existing surrounding areas matched their class fractions' expectations. Some complained because it did not match their fractions' expectations. These findings answer how education and the university environment shape class perceptions of students. This thesis explored further and found that students believed higher education shaped their class and class perceptions by provided them better life chances, better class fraction mobility and the ability to see class more clearly.

In chapter five, we continued investigating university students and expanded to university lecturers. We discovered that lecturers' views and understandings of the middle class varied. This indicates that identifying the middle class is complicated and there is no single definition. However, there were common aspects such as class still exists and Thais are born into a class. We found that lecturers identified themselves as belonging to different classes, although most of them declared themselves middle class. We discovered that, in the eyes of lecturers, middle class is often identified by comparing them to the lower classes. Interestingly, some also compared to the upper classes and still believed in the superiority of the middle class. We found that most lecturers, as educators, believed education divided people into classes and students from certain backgrounds enter higher education. However, as we discovered, lecturers admitted that higher education through knowledge influenced students' class perceptions only a little, while the university environment has a greater effect. This emphasizes the importance of the university environment toward shaping class perceptions of students and Thai society. However, one explanation of why higher education as knowledge did not influence students' perceptions as much as it might is that only a little

knowledge of class has been taught in university. Thus, it was the relationships between lecturers, staff and students that became an example of classes interactions.

In short, this thesis found that higher education in the form of knowledge has little influence on students' class perceptions. However, the university environment played a more important role in shaping students' class perceptions.

In order to better understand the role of the university in shaping class perceptions, this thesis hypothesized that; firstly, the university reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions; secondly, by shaping students' perception, the university plays a major role in shaping class perception of Thai society; thirdly, university lecturers help shape and reproduce class perceptions to students and society; lastly, the university environment, including students' peer groups, university facilities and environment in general, is an important factor and essential for producing class perceptions. The results for each hypothesis are set out below.

University reputation and the entrance process divide students into class fractions

From this thesis, we have learned that higher education can be one of the indicators of middle class status. Moreover, higher education is also a tool to produce and reproduce middle classness. Higher education has at least two components: knowledge from the classroom and life experience within the university. This thesis has investigated both components and revealed their differences and importance for transforming university students into a middle class.

The development of higher education in Thailand is an example of how education can separate people into classes and class fractions. Historically, higher education in Thailand was reserved for the elite, then opened more widely for the middle class in Bangkok and to some provincial areas with high economic development, but did not spread to the lower classes. This indicates that higher education in Thailand has become, in fact, a middle class institution.

To enter university, students in Thailand must get through the entrance system which is based on how well students did in high school: the higher score they have, the better university they can enter. However, this is not the only condition facing prospective students. As revealed in chapter 3, there are conditions such as location of university or tuition fees to be considered by students, especially for students from low income families. Students' chances in entering high reputation universities is also affected by their academic background and location since high reputation high schools are mostly concentrated in Bangkok or large cities. In addition, half of the top ten universities in Thailand are located in Bangkok and surrounding areas as shown in chapter 3.

In general, the majority of university students can be categorized as middle class and are so categorized by their friends or themselves. However, when looking at the data from each university, we can see clear differences among students. Certain types of universities have a majority of students come from certain class fractions of the middle class. The division of middle class students can result from differences in income and life chances of students in each type of university as shown in chapter 3. Before entering university, high school students may not be recognized as middle class, since they do not have occupations, incomes or higher education degrees. They may have the same lifestyle as the middle class but it does not come from their own incomes or occupations. Nonetheless, the middle class in Asia can also be categorized by the income of their families (Hughes & Woldekidan 1994:

141). In addition, most, if not all, students who can enter the university come from families with good economic backgrounds (as shown in chapter 3) while students from the lower classes would face difficulties in entering. Therefore, despite their differences, this group of youth on entering university is generally part of the middle class, although we need to examine which fractions they belong to.

Based on data presented in chapter 3, we can conclude that, in terms of background, students at elite Bangkok-based universities (Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University) considered mostly reputation in choosing their universities. This indicates that there is no economic constraint for them since they do not need to care about relocation or tuition fees. However, data in chapter 3 revealed that more than half of students at elite Bangkok-based universities originated from Bangkok and surrounding areas. This indicates that, firstly, students from Bangkok and surrounding areas have greater opportunities in high reputation universities; secondly, due to decades of unequal development, high reputation schools and universities are concentrated in Bangkok and surrounding areas which is an advantage for Bangkok and surrounding areas' students; thirdly, students at elite Bangkok-based universities are more likely to be from high income families since the average income for Bangkok residents is almost double the rest of the country. Moreover, data from chapter 3 supported this observation, as students' parents at elite Bangkok-based universities have high income occupations or more middle class occupations such as managers or professionals and the majority of them have average income of more than 300,000 Baht per month compared to the average income of Thais at around 12,000 Baht per month. This indicates that students from elite Bangkok-based universities are from a higher income fraction of the middle class, if not the upper class.

By contrast, for students at provincial universities (Chiangmai University, Mahasarakham University and Prince of Songkla University (Pattani)), location was more important. Unlike their elite Bangkok-based university counterparts, there is no clear difference between location and reputation in the case of provincial universities. This indicates that students from provincial universities have some conditions in choosing a university, and do not freely choose as do students at elite Bangkok-based universities. Looking at their backgrounds reveals the conditions students at provincial universities faced. Students at each provincial university mostly came from nearby provinces in the region which indicates that: firstly, provincial universities serve mainly provincial people; secondly, students at provincial universities are likely to be mostly from lower income families than their elite Bangkok-based counterparts since the average income in provincial areas is significantly lower than Bangkok. The data shown in chapter 3 also revealed that, overall, students from provincial universities did have parents with lower income occupations, and average income is only half of their elite counterparts. This data indicates that students from provincial universities came from low income families hence having fewer choices in higher education. Students need to consider the cost of relocation and living in other provinces in order to enter their preferred university, far away from their hometown. Because of their economic status, students at provincial universities have fewer choices and can be described as a lower fraction of the middle class. This indicates that students at elite Bangkok-based universities and provincial universities come from different fractions of the middle class. However, not all students at provincial universities followed this trend. Students at Chiangmai University have some characteristics similar to students at elite Bangkok-based universities because Chiangmai is a large city and highly developed in economic terms. Since Chiangmai University has a high reputation, students are likely to study there because it is the best choice for them and not only for its location. In fact, students at Chiangmai University or

other high reputation universities in highly developed provincial areas could be mixed with other fractions within the middle class. As in the case of Chiangmai University, we found that students can be divided into upper middle class and lower middle class based on their families' backgrounds and lifestyles.

Students at the private university come from a similar background with elite Bangkok-based university students as chapter 3 revealed. Students here used reputation as their main reason for choosing a university. They come from high income families and their parents' occupations are divided between high and low income occupations. This characteristic is similar to Chiangmai University which indicates the possibility that students are the same group. However, students at the private university come from various provinces which indicates that there is no economic constraint for them in relocating to Bangkok. Moreover, tuition fees at the private university are considerably higher than public universities; students here would need a high amount of financial support from their families. This shows that students here share some characteristics with both elite Bangkok-based and provincial universities. Students at the private university are not entirely urban based but are also middle class. This indicates that there may be another fraction of the middle class in provincial areas since students here came from better income families than their provincial university counterparts and can be considered as the upper middle class in provincial areas. However, it does not mean that all students at the private university must be rich. There are good number of students that studied there because of receiving scholarship or students loan.

There is no entrance examination, tuition fees are low and there are unlimited seats at the open university. Most students at the open university are not concerned about reputation or location. Students here are from various provinces but that does not mean they are as rich as their private counterparts. However, the open university is still a middle class institution, parents' occupations and parents' income of most students are in the same pattern with

provincial universities and the private university. This indicates that students here are not from the lower class or very poor, although judging from income and the lower reputation of the open university they are clearly not in the same fraction of the middle class as students from elite Bangkok-based universities, perhaps not even the same as students from the private university.

It is not only background that can reveal students from each type of university come from different fractions, students' lifestyles and life chances also differentiate them into fractions. According to collected data presented in chapter 3, students in each university type have significantly different lifestyles and life chances. In general, students at elite Bangkok-based universities enjoy a more expensive lifestyle than students in other types of university. They received higher monthly allowances than their provincial counterparts. Almost all of them were using smart mobile phones, which reflect the status of owners, as a symbol of wealth. The mode of transport for elite Bangkok-based universities' students reflects their urban lifestyle where the use of public transport is the most reasonable choice. However, for many students, private cars better represent their superiority, although cars are not as convenient as public transport. This indicates that some students trade convenience for status symbols. Moreover, more than half of students at elite Bangkok-based universities spent their free time on leisure activities, which shows their ability to spend without being concerned about money. In addition, more than half of students were looking for further study which mean no immediate need for a job or money as well as indicating their families' financial standing.

In contrast, students at provincial universities have a significantly different lifestyle and life chances from their elite counterparts, although they are seemingly from the same middle class. As revealed in chapter 3, students at provincial universities received a lower monthly allowance than students from elite Bangkok-based universities, even students from

Chiangmai University which is more urban than other provincial universities. The ownership of mobile phones also reveals the differences as the majority of students, reaching half only in the case of Chiangmai University, use standard mobile phones which reflects their lower economic status. Although private cars seem to be the best choice for provincial areas, economic constraints forced students to use motorcycles instead. This also reveals the unequal development in terms of public transport between Bangkok and the rest of Thailand. Provincial students also spend more time on non-leisure activities because of the limitation of resources. Life chances is another point of difference where students at provincial universities did not share the same future as their elite counterparts. Most of them need to find jobs as soon as they graduate which will limit their chances for further education and a better salary. This will also create a cycle where people from low income families have a more limited future since most of them would have to work for lower salaries as higher degrees can lead to higher income. This is true for all provincial universities, although students from Chiangmai University share some urban background with the elite Bangkok-based universities.

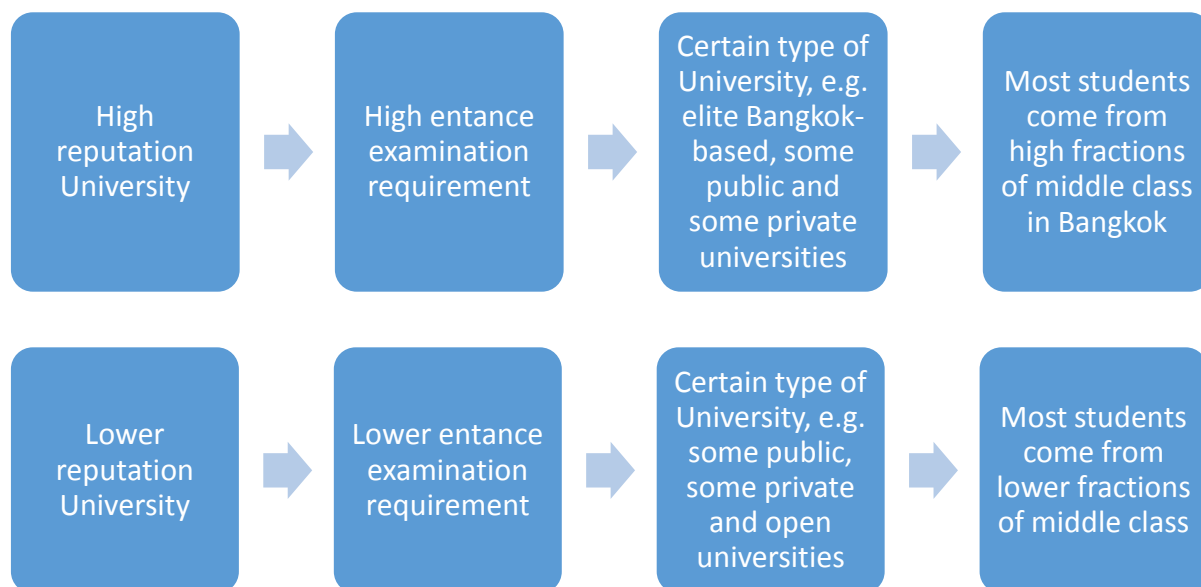
Students at the private university have a similar lifestyle and life chances with students from elite Bangkok-based universities. As revealed in chapter 3, they have high monthly allowances, use smart mobile phones, use more public transport and some students also use private cars as do their elite Bangkok-based universities counterparts. However, their free time activities are closer to students from provincial universities which may show the difference in class fractions. Their future plans also are not at the same level with elite Bangkok-based university students although they do not need jobs as much as students from provincial universities. Data indicates that students from the private university have some similarity with students from elite Bangkok-based universities but also some significant differences. The fact that most students at the private university come from provinces around

the country may contribute to the different lifestyle and life chances which imply that they are the provincial middle class that migrate to urban city.

Another type of university is the open university. Students at the open university mostly come from other provinces, like students at the private university. Students' monthly allowances are low and shared the same pattern with provincial universities as well as the usage of mobile phone and the ownership of computer. However, their modes of transport are similar to the private university where walk is an important mode of transport. Their activities are also similar to provincial universities as well as their life chances. These shows that students at the open university have many similarity with students from provincial universities. But they have more urban lifestyle since the position of their university is very close to Bangkok. This shows that students at open university are mixed with provincial and urban lifestyle.

Data indicates that lifestyle and life chances are different between students at elite Bangkok-based universities, provincial universities, the private university and the open university. This reinforces students' background where students in each type of university come from different backgrounds. A university degree is essential for the middle class since it leads to middle class occupations, income and to class mobility. Moreover, university is also a place where people can learn how to be middle class. Data demonstrated that they are, in fact, not all the same middle class. Data indicated that there are fractions within the middle class and students in each fraction study at a certain type of university, which divides by the entrance system. The relationship between university reputation, entrance examination and class fractions can be crudely illustrated as;

Figure 6-1: The relationship between university reputation, entrance examination and class fractions



This does not necessarily mean that students will become part of a certain class fraction as soon as they enter each university. Life within university and students' experiences in the university environment affect perceptions, and will be explained further in the following hypotheses.

By shaping students' perceptions, the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions in Thai society.

We found that, from the previous hypothesis and collected data, university students are divided into types of university according to their parents' class fractions. We argue that, within the university environment, class perception has been produced, reproduced and

transferred to students. The role of education in shaping class is not only limited to campus, however, but also expands to affect class perception to society in general. Those who shape perceptions in Thai society are generally university graduates. For example, academics, journalists, broadcasters, writers, and advertisers.

Historically, class in the Thai context was far different from the modern day meaning. Class was all about birth right which was almost impossible to change. Modern day class is malleable and largely depends on economic conditions. Western and modern education have contributed heavily to the shifting class perception in Thai society, providing academic constructs which have spread widely.

Not every university teaches or provides knowledge in the same way since they are not using the same texts and lecturers did not graduate from the same place, as revealed in chapter 5. However, the mainstream knowledge is similar in most universities as well as the concept of class. As shown in chapter 5, although lecturers defined class differently, some features are shared, in particular, that class is based on differences in power or economic status. This supports the contention that education is a major contributor of class perceptions in Thai society, at the conceptual level.

Data collected from participants supported this claim as shown in chapter 4. The majority of students see class in a similar way. Participants almost all wanted to be middle class which shows their belief that the middle class is superior. This results from middle class oriented education. It is an obvious example of how middle class institutions can influence people's class perceptions.

Participants also saw the lifestyle of each class similarly, they agreed that each class has certain expectations such as educational level, occupation or lifestyle; they believed classes can be separated by economic background; and they believed that education is a tool for class mobility. Students admitted to knowing little about class before they entered university and

they say their perceptions have changed after studying about class. Moreover, students believed the upper class is based on wealth while they, as a middle class, are more linked to education. These concepts of class have been transferred to students by higher education through channels like the university environment, relationships within university and, at the conceptual level by lecturers.

University graduates work in many fields that can spread class perceptions to society such as lecturers, journalists or media. Their contributions to the society cannot be ignored, nor can their role in promoting middle class consciousness and interests.

University lecturers help shape and reproduce class perceptions to students and society.

Another human factor within the university environment is the lecturer. Naturally, in educational institutions, the main goal of lecturers would be transferring knowledge to students. However, this is not the only role of lecturers in higher education. There are several tasks that lecturers, aware or not, perform within universities and in their teaching. For example, they control the ethical standards of students such as falsifying, cheating, plagiarism or stealing which creates the sense of fairness (Moiseyenko 2005: 89-95). They transfer values for students through speeches, subjects, rules and punishments (Channan & Gilchrist 1975: 121). They are also role models of middle class lifestyles to students (Bensman & Vidich 1970: 34-35) and help reproduce middle class culture (Forsey 2010: 68). Thus, education shapes middle class culture and lifestyle with lecturers playing an important role in the process.

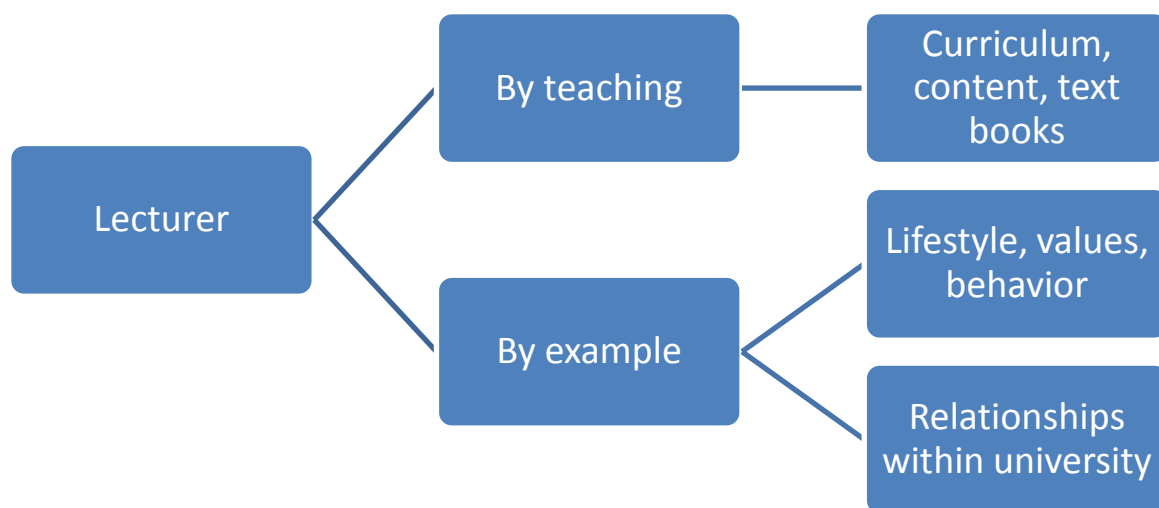
Lecturers received greater freedom in their teaching compared to teachers in high school which left them in control of content, curriculum and the direction of each subject. Therefore, it is up to each lecturer to design how and what they would teach their students about class. This is a clear indication of the important role played by lecturers in shaping students' class perceptions. However, the importance of lecturers is not only in transferring and directing knowledge to students but also as a role model for students. Willingly or not, lecturers become a model of middle class behavior for students. Clearly, lecturers can be considered to be, at least, middle class, and their behavior can be considered as middle class lifestyle. The way lecturers dress, eat or behave, what kind of accessories lecturers have, what kind of transport they use, these are examples of a middle class lifestyle that students could learn from their mentors. Students may set their expectations based on lecturer's lifestyles.

As revealed in chapter 5, the relationship between lecturers, staff and students in daily life may be another example of the relationship between classes. According to collected data, lecturers themselves did not believe that there were class differences among students and around half believed there are class differences among lecturers. However, the majority of them believed that class differences exist among lecturers, staff and students. Answers from students also shared the same view as shown in chapter 5. Most students believed there are class differences between lecturers, staff and students. The relationship within university between these actors provides students with knowledge on how to react to certain classes, how the social hierarchy would be, what to expect from certain classes and what they look like. These experiences will create class perceptions for students. Students will understand their position in the class hierarchy, they will understand how to behave toward upper and lower classes, and they will understand class mobility between classes. For example, students will notice that educational level can make a difference in terms of occupation, income and social status by looking at lecturers and the faculty's staff, which lecturers mostly hold at

least a master degree while only a few staff have a master degree. Students will also notice the class hierarchy and understand that it is not only about seniority, but also social status and prestige received from occupation, with lecturers regarded higher than other staff, regardless of their ages.

In short, lecturers' roles in shaping class perception can be illustrated as shown in Figure 6-2;

Figure 6-2: Lecturers' roles in shaping class perception



Within the university classroom, the lecturer is the one with the most influence on class knowledge. However, class perceptions of students can also be created by observing or emulating their mentor. Willingly or not, the lecturer becomes a role model for students to learn what the middle class looks like. Students spend most of their university life within university and look upwards to lecturers as their role models. Lecturers did not put pressure or socialize students to become like them. Instead, students imitate lecturers' way of life as an example of the middle class.

The university facilities, students' peer groups and the university environment in general are important factors and essential for producing class perception.

We found from the previous part that the university plays a major role in shaping class perceptions of students and society alike. This hypothesis looked further at how the university shapes such perceptions. University level education not only provides knowledge about class to students but also an environment of a certain fraction of the middle class, a community where most members come from the similar background. This part will answer the hypotheses that, firstly, the university environment and students' peers are important factors; and, secondly, university facilities and the university environment in general are essential for producing class perceptions.

Why is the university environment so important for students' class perceptions? The simple answer is students spend most of their university life within the university environment, it is unavoidable that the environment will affect their idea of class.

Class culture and identity originates from a common experience (Smail 1994: 45); however, it is shaped differently through institution like education which "structure people's lives differently by class" (Rose 1997: 473-474). Therefore, when students spend most of their time together with others from a certain class background, they would develop similar values, beliefs and expectations. Kocka (1995: 785-787) explained that the European middle class was created through common interests, experiences, a sense of belonging and ideologies which separated them from others. The would-be middle class must also know how to consume and appreciate middle class symbols (Young 2003: 91-154).

In the case of Thailand, the university provides the arena for students from a certain class to interact and become more fully members of the middle class. Thus university environment, in general, can help shape class perceptions. University environment in this section refers to university facilities and equipment, surrounding areas and students' peer groups.

University facilities and equipment can be seen as one big component of university environment that the university itself can control or improve. In contrast, the university may have less control over students' peer groups, although it does screen students through entrance examination and separates them based not only on how intelligent they are but also on their family background.

As shown in chapter 4, almost all students see themselves and their friends as middle class, although evidence shows that they are from different fractions within the middle class. Collected data as shown in chapter 4 also reveals that around two-thirds of participants claimed to understand class from their daily life experience, not knowledge from the classroom. In addition, most of participants believed class is more than a theory and can be experienced in real life. Moreover, the majority of students believed in the influence of the university environment on their class perceptions with only a few claiming there was no influence.

In term of university facilities and equipment, Giddens (1981: 185) noted that a poor state of equipment or facilities can affect the intellectual development of students. Although this thesis did not investigate the intellectual development of students, poor facilities and equipment can also affect students' class perceptions. The state of university facilities or equipment can also work as a symbol of class in the same way as other middle class accessories such as brand name products, where the higher the standard the better. There is

also a certain level of expectation for middle class students regarding their university facilities and equipment.

Collected data as shown in chapter 4 indicates that the majority of students believed there was an effect of university facilities and equipment on their class perception. In general, the condition or state of university facilities and equipment correlated to the status of the university; the higher status ones tend to have better facilities and equipment. Clearly, the preference of each student depends on their values, perceptions and expectations. For some, an old building can be seen as part of a heritage with a long proud history. For others, the same building may be seen as outdated, underdeveloped or poor. Yet, there are also other elements that affect perceptions. The status of the university itself could also persuade students to see facilities and equipment in a certain way. Data suggested that old buildings within elite Bangkok-based universities would look more “classic” than the same kind of building within lower reputation universities.

However, this persuasion may not work with other facilities such as toilets or classroom equipment where “classic” has no use. As noted by Frykman and Lofgren (1987: 202), cleanliness was one of the aspects in building English middle class culture. It became a symbol that separated the middle class from others. Data in chapter 4 suggested that students have a certain level of expectation in cleanliness of their university facilities. Cleanliness can be seen as a standard of the middle class, at least, in the eyes of participants. Students at all universities complained about the cleanliness of their university facilities such as toilets or sewage.

In terms of equipment, the consumerist culture of the middle class has made equipment like air conditioning systems part of a middle class standard of living. Collected data suggested that it is something they think they deserved to have, most likely because they are middle class. However, the state or condition of university facilities and equipment is not the

only concern of students. Who can and who cannot use the certain facilities and equipment can reflect class clearly. Data in chapter 4 revealed that some universities reserved good facilities and equipment for students who paid higher tuition fees, mostly post graduate or English program students. This finding clearly shows differences among students and provides first-hand experience in status inequality.

In short, university facilities and equipment can affect students' class perceptions. They allow students to recognize what a middle class environment looks like, what kind of facilities and equipment they would use, what their limitations are, or what differentiates them from other classes. These experiences provide a linkage between goods, service and social class.

Another environment that can affect students' class perception is the surrounding area of the university. Interestingly, collected data shown in chapter 4 revealed that students did not believe in the effect of surrounding area as much as the internal university environment. In fact, many students denied the impact of the surrounding area of their universities on their class perceptions.

Surrounding area could influence students' perception in the same manner as other aspects of university environment. However, the surrounding area is not owned or operated by most universities. Therefore, it is not under university control or development. It includes everything around the university; it can be a rice field or a luxury shopping complex. The development of surrounding areas would target mainly university students, with the exception of pre-existing developed areas around the university. Therefore, surrounding areas can reflect the wealth of each university's students in general, how outsiders perceive the economic status of students, and the difference in class fraction of university students. Although many students did not believe in the surrounding area's influence, it can indicate the status of each university. Collected data shown in chapter 4 reveals that the surrounding

area of the universities differs widely. Surrounding areas of elite and urban based universities have been developed significantly differently from their lower status and provincial counterparts. These areas are more vibrant, cosmopolitan and best serve a wealthier fraction of the middle class. In contrast, surrounding areas of provincial universities, the open university and even the private university offered something different. There are more small local shops, less sophisticated and catering to a less wealthy fraction of the middle class. The surrounding area functioned as a showroom for students to learn what products to consume as middle class, what products they could consume, what their limitations are and what their lifestyle could be in accordance with their class. Students may perceive these experiences as their inspiration for class mobility. However, these experiences may also negatively affect students as they may learn that they could not move up any further in class status.

In short, the surrounding area may not influence students' class perceptions as much as the internal university environment, as claimed by participants in chapter 4. However, its role as a living showroom of class may be significant for students' class perceptions.

The last aspect of university environment is students' peer groups. Although we have found that students are from various family backgrounds, they can be generally categorized as middle class. This is largely because they were screened before they could enter higher education hence their university lives are full of members from similar backgrounds as shown in chapter 3.

Haveman and Smeeding (2006: 134-140) noted that students from high income families have an advantage over students from lower income families in the academic foundations required for higher education. In the case of Thailand, students must pass the entrance examination which only well-prepared students can achieve. As preparation for exams consumes resources, both time and money, it can be seen that most university students would have a good economic background. Collected data in chapter 4 supported this claim and

revealed that almost all participants believed themselves and their friends are middle class, which makes the university a ground for middle class socialization and influences students' class perceptions.

Mathur (2010: 223-224) provided an example of Indian students where peer group dictates the way they consume products and become consumerist. He argued that, within a peer group, students judge their friends by clothing and accessories, and have certain expectations on members to have the same level of accessories. This shows the process of socialization within peer groups that puts pressure on members to become the same class. Kaufman (2005) noted that the middle class student who is socialized with middle-class friends is largely linked to "middle-class orientations" (Kaufman 2005: 258) and the unity within peer group is so strong that students could not make it on their own (Kaufman 2005: 252-257).

Collected data as shown in chapter 4 seemingly contradicted these arguments, since it shows that students denied the effect of peer group on their class perceptions. However, the data did not suggest that peer group has no effect at all. Instead, students' peer group appears to have socialized students in a subtle and mutual way. From chapter 3, we found that university students mostly have middle class families' backgrounds, although different in fractions. They have learned from their families how to be middle class, but these backgrounds vary somewhat. When these students go to universities, they would not face any great culture shock from intermingling with different classes and cultures. Moreover, the finding in chapter 3 indicates that students from a certain fraction would study in a certain university. This supports that there is no major difference between classes or fractions within a university. Hence, the socialization process from peer group is not obvious, but subtle and mutual. They are refining attitudes that are generally similar, not entirely changing

perceptions. This may be the reason why students claimed to have no affect from their peer group.

Furthermore, data in chapter 4 indicates that the socialization process by peer group was not always subtle and mutual, and only effective when students come from the similar fractions. Data revealed in chapter 4 that students of different background from the majority would be alienated by their friend. In some cases, students from better fraction were alienated by their lower fraction friends and vice versa in other cases. Therefore, there is a possibility of cross-university friendship, if students come from similar fractions.

We can divide the university environment into 2 factors: human factors and nonhuman factors. The human factor, which is lecturers and peer groups, has pressuring, modelling and socializing of students so they can become a full member of certain fractions. The nonhuman factor has shown students an example of middle class symbols so they will know what they are aiming for. Both factors are important for nurturing class perceptions of students. Although most students have middle class backgrounds from their families, being middle class is far from complete. At university level, students learn to interact with their friends from both similar and different backgrounds, they have a role model in lecturers, they see the relationship between classes, they understand which symbols represent which fractions, and they know what they can expect for their life. These processes could not be fulfilled by their families. They also learn to distinguish between family attitudes and wider middle class attitudes.

Implications for the literature

We found that the meaning of middle class is unclear to students and lecturers alike. As Skeggs (2004: 41) noted there is no single universally accepted definition of the middle class. Hamil (2010) seem to provide a more practical meaning, which we can use to analyze the Thai middle class. Hamil (2010: 316) argued that the middle class are people who can take care of themselves or families, live in comfortable circumstances and are able to have a college degree at least. However, in the case of Thailand, the educational qualification must generally be the university degree, not college. According to the data presented in figure 1-10, the average income of those with an education lower than bachelor degree may not be able to live in comfortable circumstances or take care of their families. University degree is widely seen as necessary to middle class status, and is not only due to income. University degree becomes a status symbol for the middle class as Juree (1979: 4-6) noted high prestige comes from high education.

We found that the middle class is diverse. This thesis shows that there is more than one middle class or, put differently, there are several fractions within the middle class in Thai society. In addition to the consumer middle class and the occupational middle class distinction made by Ockey (1999), the middle class in Thailand can be divided, at least, into the upper middle class and the lower middle class, which is similar to Howe (1992)'s division of the US class formation (upper upper/ lower upper/ upper middle/ lower middle/ upper lower/ lower lower). On the other hand, the middle class in Thailand can be described geographically as, at least, the urban middle class and the provincial middle class. Similar to Ockey (1992) and Anek (1996) who underlined that the Thai middle class is urban based, this thesis found that many middle class students from provincial areas migrated to urban areas pursuing their higher education. This means that the percentage of the "native" urban middle class in urban cities may be not significantly higher than the provincial middle class in urban

cities. Yet there is also a separate middle class fraction in provincial universities, whose life chances may confine them to provincial areas, and whose role was unexplored by Ockey and Anek. This group, which was covered briefly by Logerfo (2000), deserves more attention in future studies.

As pointed out by Giddens (1980: 42-43), educational qualifications separated skilled workers from manual workers. This is clear in the case of Thailand where, as this thesis demonstrated, a bachelor degree is the minimum requirement for the well-paid occupations. Nonetheless, higher education is not only important for the future careers of students, but also is a place where students' perception is shaped. As Ockey (1992: 306) pointed out, the educational system created shared experiences, values, and knowledge between its members. We found that university is a place for students to gain class-based experiences by interacting with others, which is also noted by Smail (1994: 45) who argued that class experience is necessary for class identity. Rose (1997: 473-474) argued that class cultures are shaped differently through institutions like families and schools. This thesis found that, even within the education institution, class cultures have been shaped differently in each university based on which fractions students belong to.

According to the findings in chapter 5, students are not always able to distinguish between class and status, and frequently used status to analyze their class situation. Students tended to use aspects of status like age, power or authority in identifying a person's class. As chapter 5 revealed, some students believed staff are in a lower class than them since they have no authority over them, some students believed lecturers are in the upper class because they control students' grades and some students believed staff are in a higher class than them because staff are older than students.

These findings show that students' understanding of class is far from clear. Their understanding of class seems to be partly under the influence of traditional concept of the

Sakdina system in terms of hierarchy. This may indicate that there are limits on the generalizability of the middle class across cultures, as each middle class will have some unique features based on culture. This does not mean that students are not aware of class. In fact, it shows that class is part of their everyday life and is noticeable. But students could not entirely differentiate class outside the cultural context. This may also suggest that higher education did not provide enough knowledge about class to them and their life experiences seem to be a better source of class perception.

This thesis shows that higher education in Thailand is not currently designed to cater for everyone. Most students come from families with good economic backgrounds, which is in accordance with Giddens (1981: 168-169) who noted that education is sometimes limited to a narrow group of privileged people. Therefore, most university students have similar background and can be categorized as having a middle class family background before arriving at university. Thus, university has become a place where students from similar backgrounds socialize with each other.

We found that students at high reputation universities come from relatively better families' backgrounds than students at lower reputation universities. The finding is in accordance with Lynch and O'Riordan (1998: 459) that financial support is very important for taking full advantage of higher education, as the poor would have fewer choices. In addition, to Giddens (1981), the quality of facilities not only affects intellectual development, it also provides middle class examples. Moreover, life within the university helps students realize what the middle class lifestyle is or which products to use. As Young (2003) noted, the middle class must be able to realize how or what to consume tastefully. We found that experiences within the university environment contribute greatly to this process.

Although students did not always notice, students' peer group influences students' perceptions. Data reveals that students mostly avoided interacting with students who have a

different lifestyle or background. Therefore, to be accepted by friends, students must have the same lifestyle or similar, whether pretending or not, which is in accordance with Young (2003) that the acceptance from other members is very important for the middle class. The thesis also revealed that lecturers are another source of class perception, which is in accordance with Young (2003: 153-154) that lecturers are one of important tools for passing knowledge and values within university, and Bensman & Vidich (1970: 34) that lecturers also model behavior for students. In addition, this thesis found that students believed they are the middle class and are better than other classes. This finding is in accord with Frykman & Lofgren (1987: 8) that the middle class believes they are the best.

Although Forsey (2010)'s work focused on high school teachers, it can also be applied to university lecturers. Forsey (2010: 71-72) argued that middle class teachers would look for middle class students and middle class institutions. In the case of Thailand, we found that lecturers with doctoral degrees mostly teach at universities in urban cities such as Bangkok, which is similar to Forsey's concept. Even though a university like Ramkhamhaeng University, an open university, may cater to a lower fraction of the middle class, its location in Bangkok (where the middle class lifestyle is) may encourage highly qualified lecturers to teach there. In contrast, provincial universities, some with high reputations, are less "urban", hence smaller numbers of lecturers with doctoral degrees are willing to teach there. This does not mean that lecturers with lower degrees are not middle class. However, lecturers with doctoral degrees may come from a better fraction of the middle class since they need to invest significantly more than master degree holders, which may reflect their financial ability. Therefore, it is possible that they would want to teach or live in a city that suits their backgrounds. Further evidence that Forsey's concept may work in the case of Thailand is that lecturers may choose to teach in a certain university that have students similar to them. As

one student from the open university pointed out, lecturers at their university have a similar lifestyle to the students³⁵⁸.

This thesis found that the birthplace of students can dictate their chances in higher education. As Funatsu and Kagoya (2003: 257) noted, although educational credentials could nullify the effect of an individual's birthplace, students from provincial areas are limited in opportunities. Although their work is more than a decade old, it is still relevant to the current education situation in Thailand and similar to the finding that students from a provincial background or lower economic status faced limitations on their educational path. As shown in chapter 3, figure 3-2, students from elite Bangkok-based universities have significantly more opportunities in higher education than those at other types of universities. Students at elite Bangkok-based universities can choose their place of study based on their preferences, while students at other types of universities were constrained by factors such as location. For many, location become an obstacle for higher education since the cost of relocation may exceed the financial ability of students' families. As shown in figure 3-6, parents' income of elite Bangkok-based university students was significantly higher than other types of universities, hence they have greater chances in education.

The finding indicates that the lifestyle of the Thai middle class is similar to their Asian counterparts. Consuming of higher quality goods and services can be seen as a symbol of higher status (Mathur 2010: 212-213) and by having some middle class symbols such as cars, persons can identify themselves as middle class (Souchow 1996: 339). These examples of India and Singapore are not unlike the Thai middle class. As this thesis demonstrated, middle class products and services such as smart mobile phones, cars or luxury shopping malls were seen by students as status symbols. Although it is not necessary, many students have cars or smart mobile phones for the purpose of status. Many times, students traded their convenience

³⁵⁸ Focus group discussion, February 2013.

for status symbols, which may not necessary be economically reasonable, but rather indicates conspicuous consumption.

As noted by Ockey (1999: 245), the consumer middle class, which is based on possessing status symbols, generally belongs to the new rich and is not necessarily highly educated. However, data shows that the identification of this group may be problematic. We know that the middle class wants to differentiate themselves from the upper class and the lower class, by creating a different culture, and lifestyle and thus downplay the importance of wealth. Therefore, those who have only wealth but cannot act accordingly to the middle class culture and lifestyle may be excluded from the middle class. In addition, at present, it is very difficult to analyze person's class based on their consumption behavior. The lower classes may also have cars, or other middle class products by taking on debt. The upper class can also have middle class products as they possess enough wealth to do so. We would not call these groups middle class. This shows the complication of identifying the middle class according to consumption.

However, this thesis suggests that education can be the main indicator of the middle class, given its selective recruiting and its role in shaping middle class perceptions, which would make identifying the middle class easier. We found in the thesis that the lack of education of the lower class, in the perceptions of middle class students, is a clear indicator. While the upper class can also have education and maybe even higher than the middle class, it is not necessary for them. However, the importance of education is not only as noted. Having a university degree will lead to a middle class occupation and income. Moreover, within the university, students' perceptions and lifestyles have been shaped through elements like university reputation, facilities, peer groups and lecturers. These processes can differentiate the middle class from other classes.

This thesis found that there are many areas which the literature, particularly in the Thai language, has not fully covered. In particular, middle classness is often assumed and not defined in much of the literature. Other than in this thesis, the importance of the university environment on students' perceptions is yet to be systematically analyzed. The importance of students' family backgrounds in the entrance examination is not widely accepted. Motivations and limitations of students in choosing their universities are not studied enough, nor how the backgrounds of parents can affect students' higher education. Perhaps most importantly, the differences within the middle class have received relatively little attention.

The implications for Thai society

Education can play an important role in social mobility. However, in Thailand, mostly people who are already middle class are getting into universities so class mobility is actually constrained and classes are reinforced by the educational system. Social mobility is further limited because the middle class is divided into clear fractions with different life chances, and it is difficult to cross that line. Moreover, education has become an investment for many students as well as their parents. Since the university degree has become very important for the middle class status, it is in high demand. To supply the need, universities are opening more courses and even opening more universities. At the same time, the position of elite Bangkok-based universities is stronger since they have higher reputation and are in high demand. This would lead to more competition in the entrance examination and, in turn, only the well-prepared students can enter, which is mostly those one with good economic backgrounds. Thus, the divide between fractions is likely to become even deeper. Moreover, the newly opened courses are usually special courses: either it is an English-language program or after hours' program. Either way, they are always more expensive than the

normal tuition fees. This can also lead to a tension between class fractions. Such tensions deepen because education is limited and now in high demand.

The opportunities for the lower classes to enter higher education, especially the elite Bangkok-based universities, may also have declined. Previously, lower class students with good academic records were able to study in universities based their abilities, through scholarships. However, since higher education has increasingly become a market, middle class students with money, even if not as smart as lower class students, can easily enter higher education. Ironically this has resulted from a decrease in the number of 18 year old in Thailand, and consequent high levels of competition for tuition. It seems that higher education is expanding to serve all fractions of the middle class, but not all classes. Now, lower fractions of the middle class with less wealth can enter universities while lessening the opportunities for the lower classes. This will surely create frustration that people in Bangkok have better life chances, even though the lower class are struggling harder to gain opportunities.

This finding also underlines that the middle class is loosely defined and diverse. The middle class fractions share the same class consciousness but are different in lifestyle, income and life chance. Their differences in lifestyle and opportunity may create resentment within the middle class, between urban and provincial fractions. As noted, the gaps between urban and provincial areas resulted from extensive unequal economic development. However, the creation of different conceptions of middle classness also contributes. Urban and provincial middle class fractions do not have the same right or future opportunities, which may help explain the urban/provincial dimension to the contemporary political conflict in Thailand. It indicates that there is no mobility between classes, limited mobility between fractions, and that divide is not only between classes, it is urban and provincial. So, the provincial middle classes are trapped at the bottom. By lessening the gaps between urban and provincial class

fractions, particularly in terms of politics and economics, the common consciousness can be reinforced and perhaps limit future struggles.

The resentment within the middle class may not be as severe as the current conflict and the sharp distinctions make it seem. We found that the middle class, including all fractions, shared the same view toward the lower class. For the middle class, the lower class is to be pitied. At the same time, the lower class is needed by the middle class as a manual workforce to do unpleasant jobs for them. Shared feelings of superiority and pity may ease tensions within the middle class.

Since the middle class and the lower class can be separated from the lower by level of education, it is not surprising that the middle class seemingly believe they are smarter than their lower class counterparts. This seemingly has led the middle class to believe that the lower class is less politically sophisticated, can be easily manipulated and is not capable of democracy (Ockey 2001: 313-337). The clean politics that the middle class wanted (LoGerfo 2000: 227 and Thongchai 2008: 24-30) may not really come from their democratic enthusiasm but instead they may want a clean politics where the lower class is not included.

We can see that education is a key to self-development but educational system does not provide an equal opportunity for everyone. It is important for us to learn from the past to avoid an unfortunate future. History shows that there has been conflict between classes, between well-educated and less-educated and between urban and provincial populations. By providing equal opportunities in life, education and development, many conflicts can be prevented. Opening up the educational system, which is, in theory, populated by the most progressive elements in society, to greater social mobility and greater acceptance of differences across class divides would be a good beginning to alleviate conflict. The finding of such inequality of opportunities in higher education could lead to a positive change.

This thesis is among the first to systematically study the role of higher education on class perceptions in Thailand. Therefore, the findings in this thesis can be used as a baseline for further studies. Moreover, this thesis provides support for a simple definition of the middle class in future studies, in identifying the centrality of education, which could lead to a better understanding of the nature of the Thai middle class.

Finally, this thesis demonstrated the existence of clear fractions within the middle class, which is crucial for any future political analysis. We have seen many conflicts regarded as “classes conflicts”, although their causes or origins may not truly be between classes, but rather within them. Therefore, any further studies or analyses about Thai politics may need to consider the possibility that conflicts originated from different fractions.

Future study

The findings in this thesis provide information that can help future research relating to education, social class and conflict. There are several examples that can be researched in the future as follows;

1. Future research on conflict between Red and Yellow shirts should consider the possibility that the conflict may not only be between classes, but also between fractions within the middle class.
2. Future research on higher education should include the role of lecturer. Not only for transferring knowledge, but also as a role model for students.
3. The role of higher education in perpetuating a certain class and deterring social mobility should be studied further.

4. Future research should include a greater number of participants and include more types of university such as the military university, Rajaphat universities, or community colleges.
5. A study outside political science could provide an interesting comparison and ideas about class from different perspectives.

Limitations and solutions

This section considers the limitations in conducting this thesis as well as the possible solutions. This section will also provide the implications of this thesis towards Thai society.

Firstly, the voluntary basis of this research made it difficult to have participation from students for the focus group discussion. Most students that the researcher witnessed were quite apathetic in terms of expressing their willingness to participate and expressing their opinions during focus group discussions. Only a few students in each classroom quickly volunteered while the majority of students did not seem willing to participate. It was only when the lecturer in each classroom encouraged and pointed out specific people that students could not avoid participation. However, after the focus group discussions had started, students gradually enjoyed expressing their opinions. Therefore, the limitation was that students were not truly a volunteer.

The focus group discussions were conducted during 2012 and 2013, and this may be the root of this difficulty. In 2014, Thailand had a military coup following conflict that can be traced back long beyond 2012. At that time, the conflict between classes was immense, Thai society was divided and class was not a topic people wanted to talk about. Therefore, conducting the study at a time with less focus on conflict between classes may help reduce

the tension and could provide greater participation from students. Students were more willing to participate in the questionnaire method which was secret and anonymous.

Secondly, since this thesis represents only 7 universities, it may not be fully representative. Although this thesis can be seen as limited in the number of participating universities, this was addressed by considering the characteristics of participating universities and what they were represented. This thesis sought to include universities that represent, firstly, each type of university in Thailand and, secondly, each status of university. With a short period of time for gathering data for this research, the quality is more important than quantity. These universities fit the categories we expected. Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University represented universities with elite Bangkok-based status, where only a few in Thailand could have such status. Chiangmai University, Mahasarakham University and Prince of Songkla University (Pattani) represent the provincial university in each region and also leading universities in their areas. Rangsit University represents a private university while Ramkhamhaeng University represents the open university. Yet, this thesis may be short of some types of university such as Rajabhat or the military academy which could be very useful for future research.

Thirdly, the number of lecturers seem to be low, which could affect the quality of the analysis. Again, this research was conducted on a voluntary basis which created the possibility of a fewer participants than expected. This thesis has also limited itself to only lecturers who teach subjects related to social class, also affected the number of participants. The possible solution in this case is to expand the range of participants.

Fourthly, this thesis did not include Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, which is another form of elite university in Thailand. Participants' opinions from this institution would be very interesting since this institution produce many leaders of the arm forced and their alumni were behind several coups in Thailand.

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