

Do you Know How to Live a Desirable Life?: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the “Guidance for Life” self-help Books in Thai¹

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ABSTRACT

“Guidance for life” self-help or “how-to” books have been increasingly popular in Thai society. A preliminary study reveals that these books not only provide certain advices for the readers but also represent certain ideological concepts which may cause unfavorable impact upon readers. The present study aims at investigating the Thai spiritual self-help books in order to see the relationship between language and ideology represented therein. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is adopted in order to examine how ideology regarding living a “desirable life” is linguistically represented. The analysis reveals that these books attempt to define the meaning of a “desirable life” by adopting several linguistic strategies including lexical selection, using metaphors, using implication, using an authoritative voice, claiming something as common fact, citing other texts, using rhetorical questions, and using casual style. Accordingly, “desirable life” means an ego-centric life with a definite goal to pursue success and happiness. In order to achieve such goal(s), an individual should not rely on others or destiny but rather on her/his own self. Further, it is represented that the authors of self-help books are those who will enable an individual to easily achieve her/his goal(s) by revealing the secrets of life improvement. What the readers have to do is to follow such advice. Consequently, a “self-reliant” individual who should be determined to “take control of her/his life” has to ironically subject her/himself to the control of the producers of these discourses.

Key words: critical discourse analysis, language and ideology, spiritual self-help books

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หนังสือแนะนำแนวทางการดำเนินชีวิต หรือ “ฮาวทู” เป็นที่นิยมมากขึ้นเรื่อย ๆ ในประเทศไทย ผลการศึกษาเบื้องต้นชี้ให้เห็นว่าหนังสือเหล่านี้ไม่เพียงแต่จะให้คำแนะนำเกี่ยวกับการดำเนินชีวิต หากแต่ยังเสนอชุดความคิดบางประการ ซึ่งอาจจะก่อให้เกิดผลกระทบที่ไม่พึงประสงค์แก่ผู้อ่านบางคน งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งศึกษาวิเคราะห์หนังสือแนะนำการดำเนินชีวิตของไทยเพื่อหาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างภาษากับอุดมการณ์ที่น่าเสนอ ผู้วิจัยใช้มุมมองวาทกรรมวิเคราะห์เชิงวิพากษ์ในการวิเคราะห์ ผลการศึกษาพบว่าหนังสือเหล่านี้พยายามนิยามความหมายของ “ชีวิตที่พึงประสงค์” โดยใช้กลวิธีทางภาษา ได้แก่ การเลือกใช้คำศัพท์ การใช้อุปลักษณ์ การเน้นความ การใช้เสียงที่มีอำนาจ การกล่าวอ้างว่าเป็นความจริงทั่วไป การอ้างตัวบอกรับ การใช้คำถามเชิงวาทศิลป์ และการใช้ลีลาแบบเป็นกันเอง ชุดความคิดดังกล่าวนำเสนอว่า “ชีวิตที่พึงประสงค์” คือชีวิตที่มีเป้าหมายแน่ชัดที่จะไขว่คว้าหาความสำเร็จและความสุขและเน้นตนเองเป็นสำคัญ การจะบรรลุเป้าหมายนั้นปัจเจกบุคคลจะต้องไม่หวังพึ่งผู้อื่นหรือโชคชะตาแต่จะต้องลงมือทำด้วยตนเอง ยิ่งไปกว่านั้น มีการนำเสนอความคิดว่าผู้เขียนหนังสือเหล่านี้เป็นผู้ที่ช่วยให้ปัจเจกบุคคลสามารถบรรลุเป้าหมายได้อย่างง่ายดายด้วยการเผยให้รู้เคล็ดลับเกี่ยวกับการพัฒนาชีวิต สิ่งที่ผู้อ่านต้องทำคือปฏิบัติตามคำแนะนำดังกล่าว ผลที่ตามมาคือ ปัจเจกชนผู้เน้นการ “พึ่งตนเอง” และมุ่งมั่นที่จะ “ควบคุมลิขิตชีวิตตนเอง” กลับต้องยอมอยู่ใต้อำนาจของผู้สร้างวาทกรรมนี้

คำสำคัญ: วาทกรรมวิเคราะห์เชิงวิพากษ์ ภาษากับอุดมการณ์ หนังสือแนะนำแนวทางการดำเนินชีวิต

1. Introduction

Spiritual self-help books are known in Thai society as “guidance for life” or “How-to” books.² These books are among the bestseller publications in the Thai market (www.toptenthailand.com; Bangkok Today, January 12, 2010). In particular, those entitled *Khem Thit Chewit*; Volume 1, 2, and 3 have been published all together for more than a million copies (Thitinart Na Pattalung, *Khem Thit Chewit*; Volume 3). Also, in most leading bookstores, a section entitled “applied psychology” or “applied psychology-self improvement” is allocated for distributing these books. In addition to the growing circulation and extensive distribution, the “practical” and “effective” advice provided makes these books more appealing. Many authors claim that the step-by-step advice they offer will enable readers to dramatically and effectively improve their lives. To illustrate, titles of these books; for instance, 34 *Witheekhit Phlik Chewit Su Khwam Samret* (34 Ways of Thinking for

² In Thailand, the term “How-to” is casually adopted for referring to self-help books as they provide instruction or advice regarding “how to do or achieve something.” As for the spiritual self-help books, the term “guidance for life” can also be used for this sub-type.

Turning Your Life to Success) and *Phaenthee Chewit Khemthit Su Khwam Samret* (Map of Life and Compass to Success), tend to lure buyers to spend money for such enticing advice.

Despite the success of these books, there exist some criticisms against them. Some people complain that reading these books has the effect of making them anxious and hopeless. Moreover, a preliminary study shows that these books not only provide advice for the readers but also represent certain ideology which may cause unfavorable impact upon some readers. Hence, it is worthwhile to further take a critical look at such ideological concepts linguistically represented by this discourse and to discuss them in terms of socio-cultural practice in order to see the relationship between this discourse and Thai society.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1) To analyze the ideological concepts linguistically represented in Thai “guidance for life” self-help books.

2) To examine the linguistic strategies adopted for representing these ideological concepts.

In so doing, this study attempts to reveal the relationship between language and ideology in Thai “guidance for life” self-help books. Based on a primary research, it is hypothesized that these self-help discourses represent a set of ideological concepts regarding living a “desirable life” which emphasizes the significance of self and self-interest. Several linguistic devices especially lexical selection and the use of authoritative voice are adopted for representing these ideological concepts.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Data

To achieve the two research objectives, this study adopts textually oriented critical discourse analysis as its main framework. Twenty “guidance for life” self-help

books in Thai were collected by means of purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- The book was published during the last five years, namely between the years 2007 and 2011.
- It was written by a Thai author.
- The term ชีวิต *chi:wit* 'life' is a part of the title which can serve as an indicator that the book is about "guidance for life".

The three dimension framework for critical discourse analysis proposed by Fairclough (1992, 1995) was mainly adopted. As for the textual analysis, the texts of these self-help books were analyzed focusing on the remarkable linguistic features found therein and on certain ideological concepts conveyed by such linguistic strategies. In addition, a contextual study focusing on the production and distribution of self-help books in Thai society and on related social situations was conducted in order to shed light on discursive practice as well as socio-cultural practice regarding these books.

3.2 The approach of Critical Discourse Analysis

As mentioned, this study investigates the spiritual self-help books by adopting the approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA focuses on ideologies represented by a discourse (Fairclough, 1992, 1995; van Dijk, 1993, 2001, 2003). According to van Dijk (1993, 2003, 2006), it aims to unmask the relationship between discourse and manipulation or the abuse of power in favor of the power dominance.

Fairclough (1992, 1995) proposes a three-dimensional framework for analyzing a discourse. Accordingly, a discourse consists of three elements, namely a spoken or written text, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice. Text refers to the linguistic elements of the discourse. The discursive practice includes the process of text production and distribution as well as that of text consumption and interpretation. In terms of socio-cultural practice, a piece of text is embedded within a number of levels of socio-cultural context, including the immediate situation, in the wider institution or organization, and at a societal level. Fairclough (1995, p. 97) argues that a systematic and critical analysis of language use in

the text of a discourse can reveal traces of the relationship between the text and the socio-cultural practice which is mediated by the discursive practice. Also, it can reveal ideologies, hegemonies, social changes represented through the text. Since the aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between discourse and ideology conveyed in the self-help books, CDA is an appropriate approach to be adopted.

4. Previous studies on self-help texts

It has been argued that self-help texts have received comparatively little attention despite their growing circulation and remarkable features (Hazleden, 2003, p. 414). As for research on self-help discourses in English, some sub-genres of self-help discourse have been examined. For instance, Redden (2002), Askehave (2004), Erjavec and Volčič (2009) investigate the genre of spiritual self-help. In addition, there are some works focusing on relationship self-help texts (Hazleden, 2003; Crawford, 2004; and Cullen, 2009) while some drawing attention to those on self-care issues (Boni, 2002) and on sexual relation issues (Tyler, 2008).

In terms of approach as well as topic of study, some studies examine self-help discourses from a critical perspective (i.e., Rimke, 2000; Barker, 2002; Cowlshaw, 2002; Hazleden, 2003; Crawford 2004; Tyler, 2008; and Woodstock, 2005, 2006, 2007). Among these, Crawford (2004) and Tyler (2008) adopt critical feministic discourse analysis to investigate marital relationship self-help books and sex self-help texts respectively. Several works (i.e., Glasgow, Schafer, and O'Neill, 1981; Starker, 1988a, 1988b; Pantalon, Lubetkin, and Fishmen, 1995; Wilson and Cash, 2000; Kaldo et al, 2007; Redding, Herbert, and Forman, 2008; and Cheng, 2012) focus on the application of self-help books or articles as psychological therapeutic devices.

Foucault's concept of technologies of the self has been adopted to study the roles and functions of self-help discourses in liberal democratic societies (Rimke, 2003; Hazleden, 2003; and Cullen, 2009). It has been argued in these studies that by encouraging the readers to discipline themselves, self-help texts aim to generate "a

politically able self” which links an individual’s personal goals and desire to social order and stability. In other words, an achievement of individuals’ goals will also stabilize the well-being of the society and help maintain social order.

In particular, some studies (i.e., Askehave, 2004; Erjavec and Volčič, 2009; and Cullen, 2009) adopt critical discourse analysis for examining self-help texts. Askehave (2004) analyzes the discourse of spiritual self-help book entitled “*If Life is a Game, There are the Rules*” by Chéric Carter-Scott (1999) by focusing on recontextualized words, metaphors, personifications, and parables. In so doing, the study demonstrates the ways in which the intuitive, individualistic, and holistic ideology of the New Age manifests itself in the spiritual self-help text.

Next, Erjavec and Volčič (2009) analyze articles in *Manager* – one of Slovenia’s most influential management magazines. The study reveals that this leading magazine has re-contextualized spiritual self-help discourse into management discourse by means of lexical choice, metaphor, over-lexicalization and re-contextualized words. They further argue that the integration of self-help discourse in this magazine helps promote neo-liberal capitalist ideology in a post-socialist context of Slovenia. Cullen (2009) analyzes Steven Covey’s popular book entitled “*7 habits of highly effective people*” and attempts to shed light on the means by which this work induces a transformation in the reader’s sense of selfhood and proposes the adoption of an alternative sense of “effective selfhood”.

As for the Thai academic realm, despite the increasing popularity of self-help texts in Thai society, these texts have received relatively minor academic attention. Research on self-help discourses especially one adopting critical discourse analysis is scarce. The related works found include Phichitphongphao (2010) and Phakdeephassook (2010). The former focuses on conceptual metaphors about life in Thai spiritual self-help books while the latter provides a critical discourse analysis on the concept of femininity represented in Thai self-help articles health and beauty magazines. Therefore, this study will respond to the scarcity of works on self-help discourse in Thai academics.

4.1 Discursive practice regarding spiritual self-help books in Thai

In terms of text production, the spiritual self-help books were written by people with “successful” life experience and/or expertise in life coaching. Many authors are professional life coaches. Some of them not only write self-help books but also offer life improvement program. For instance, Thitinart Na Pattalung, the author of the best-seller books “*Khemthit Chewit* I, II, and III (The Compass of Life I, II, and III) regularly offers a life improvement course entitled *Khamthit Jittaisamnuk* (Compass healing trance) “to inspire, encourage and guide participants to make changes to their lives in order to create happiness and success by their own” (Thairath, August 14, 2012). Other authors are teachers, retired government officers, and Dharma lecturers. Owing to their success, life experience, and life training expertise, the advice provided in the self-help books may be construed voices of the authority.

As for text distribution, these books have been distributed nationwide. As mentioned, in most leading bookstores, a section entitled “applied psychology for life improvement” is allotted for these books. Moreover, these books once could be found even in some convenient stores. Consequently, the advice as well as the ideological concepts represented in these texts can reach an extensive group of readers. The wide scope of distribution and the authoritative voice asserted in these texts make them considerably influential discourses.

In terms of discursive consumption, self-help books show increasing sales numbers and are often on the bestseller lists (www.se-ed.com). These may indicate that they were well received by readers in Thai society. Generally, the target readers are lay people, especially those looking for advice to improve their life. As for discourse interpretation, it is likely that the readers will believe in the advice given in these books since the authors occupy a position of spiritual superiority. Moreover, some readers may also decide to participate in life coaching programs offered by the authors of the books (Thairath, August 14, 2012). This more or less indicates the influence these books have upon their readers.

After giving an overview of the discursive practice of the self-help books, in the next section, the analysis of the text will be presented.

5. Analysis

In this section, the analysis of the ideology regarding living a “desirable life” represented in the spiritual self-help books and the linguistic strategies adopted to represent this set of ideas will be presented.

5.1 Ideology regarding living a “desirable life” represented in the spiritual self-help books

It is found that the main ideological concepts represented in these texts are those regarding living a “desirable life”. That is, these self-help texts attempt to authoritatively define the meaning of a “desirable life”, to specify the ways to achieve a “desirable life” and to emphasize the power of the authors of these texts as follows:

Concept 1: The definition of “desirable life” as the pursuit of success and happiness

A “desirable life” is a life with a clear goal of achieving happiness and success. To live a desirable and meaningful life means to be determined to pursue happiness and success. Those without such clear determination to attain happiness and success are living a trivial and regrettable life.

Concept 2: Self-reliance and life improvement as the ways to achieve a “desirable life”

To achieve such goals of life, an individual must rely on her/himself rather than on others or on fate. An individual should be determined to take control of and to improve her/his own life.

Concept 3: Self-help books as powerful and reliable tool for achieving a “desirable life”

In order to achieve goals of her/his life on her/his own, it is essential that an individual know secrets or rules of life improvement. Such secrets are revealed by the authors of self-help books. Therefore, an individual should rely on the advice provided by the authors of these books.

Next, an analysis of linguistic strategies, language use or linguistic features adopted for some purposes, for constructing and representing the ideological concepts of “desirable life” will be provided in order to elaborate the points being made in this section and to demonstrate the relationship between language and ideology in the Thai spiritual self-help books.

5.2 Linguistic strategies for representing ideology regarding living a “desirable life” in the spiritual self-help books

The linguistic analysis of the self-help texts reveals that eight linguistic strategies have been adopted to represent the ideology regarding living a “desirable life”. These strategies include lexical selection, using metaphors, using authoritative voice, using implication, claiming something as common fact, citing other texts, using rhetorical questions, and using casual style.

1) Lexical selection

Lexicon selection can be considered a key strategy adopted. Three sub-strategies regarding the use of lexical choice include the frequent use of lexical choices regarding life improvement, the collocation of some lexical choices, and the use of referring terms with positive or negative connotation.

1.1) The frequent use of some lexical choices regarding life improvement

According to Simpson (1993), the frequent use of some lexical choices indicates that they are the key subject matter of the texts. In the self-help texts, it can be noticed that some lexical choices are frequently used. In the present study, the criterion for a lexical choice to be considered a remarkable feature is that it must appear more than twenty times in the texts. The lexical choices frequently used in these self-help books include:

<i>ตัวเอง tua?eŋ, ตนเอง ton?eŋ, ตน ton</i> ‘oneself’	<i>ความสุข khwa:msùk</i> ‘happiness’
<i>ความสำเร็จ khwa:msămrèt</i> ‘success’	<i>พัฒนา phátthana:</i> ‘to improve’
<i>เปลี่ยนแปลง plianplæ:ŋ</i> ‘to change’	<i>เลือก ìak</i> ‘to decide’

กล้า klâ: 'to dare'

(วาง)แผน (wa:ŋ)phæ:n '(set) a plan'

เคล็ดลับ khlétláp 'secret(s)'

อย่ากลัว ?yà:klua 'not be afraid of'

มุ่งมั่น mûŋmân ตั้งใจ tâŋcai 'to be determined'

กฎ kòt 'a rule'

The frequent use of the terms stated above signals that they constitute the major concern of the self-help texts. The following extracts demonstrate the use of these terms.

Extract 1: เมื่อหวังแล้ว จงตั้งใจมั่น สร้างความฝันให้เป็นจริง เป็นได้ได้อย่างมีเหตุผล เชื่อมั่นว่า ตนคือที่พึ่งแห่งตน ตนเป็นนายตนเอง เตือนตนเอง สอนตนเอง สร้างตนเอง ความสำเร็จต้องลงมือทำ ไม่มีใครหยิบยื่นความสำเร็จให้เราได้

(50 ความคิดเปลี่ยนชีวิตให้ดีกว่าเดิม: 11)

When you have hopes, you should be determined to make your dreams come true in a reasonable manner. You should be confident that you can rely on yourself; your self is your own boss. Remind your own self. Teach your own self. Build your own self. Success is what you have to achieve by your own self. No one can achieve that success for you.

(50 Ideas for a Better Life: 11)

Extract 2: ความสุขสร้างได้ ด้วยตัวเราเอง

(14 วิธีคิดเปลี่ยนชีวิตให้ดีขึ้น: 15)

Happiness can be built by our own selves.

(14 Ways of Thinking for a Better Life: 15)

Extract 3: ผู้เขียนอยากจะบอกได้ว่าเวลาแล้วที่เราจะลุกขึ้นมาแล้วบอกกับตัวเองว่า ต่อจากนี้ไปชีวิตเราจะมีความสุขทุกนาที ทุกชั่วโมง ทุกวันและทุกปี ขอเพียงมีกุญแจดอกแรกเท่านั้นที่จะเดินไปข้างหน้า กุญแจดอกที่ว่านี้ก็คือ ความกล้า เป็นความกล้าที่จะก้าวเพื่อเปลี่ยนแปลงชีวิตของตัวเอง

(80 วิธีคิดเพื่อชีวิตที่มีความสุข: 27)

I wish to say that it's time for us to tell ourselves that from this moment on our lives will be filled with happiness in every minute,

every hour, every day, and every year. You need only the first key for moving forward. That key is courage. It is the courage to move forward to change your own lives.

(80 Ways of Thinking for a Happy Life: 27)

Extract 4: เคล็ดลับแห่งความสุขข้างต้น เป็นเรื่องง่าย ๆ ไม่ยาก แต่เคล็ดลับของเคล็ดลับก็คือความตั้งใจที่จะเริ่มปฏิบัติตามกฎที่ว่า

(80 วิธีคิดเพื่อชีวิตที่มีความสุข: 49)

The secrets of happiness mentioned are simple. But the secret of secrets is determination to take action according to these rules.

(80 Ways of Thinking for a Happy Life: 49)

It can be construed from the high frequent use of the term ตัวเอง *tua?eŋ* ตนเอง *ton?eŋ* 'oneself' in the above examples that the concepts of self-reliance and self interest play a significant role in the self-help texts. Next, the use of the terms ความสุข *khwa:msùk* 'happiness' and ความสำเร็จ *khwa:msămrèt* 'success' partly indicates that these two things are considered the major concern or the goal of life. The terms พัฒนา *phátthana:* 'to improve', เปลี่ยนแปลง *plianplæ:ŋ* 'to change', เลือก *lúak* 'to decide', วางแผน *wa:ŋphæ:n* 'to plan', กล้า *klâ:* 'to dare', and อย่ากลัว *?yà:klua* 'not be afraid of' signify that one should be determined and dare to make changes to one's life. Last, the terms กฎ *kòt* 'rules' and เคล็ดลับ *khlétláp* 'secrets' are frequently used to hint and emphasize that there exist the rules and secrets for living a valuable life.

1.2) The collocations of some lexical choices

It is found that some terms are often paired together. The remarkable lexical collocations in the data include:

- ชีวิต + กำหนด ลีขิต เลือก ควบคุม พัฒนา วางแผน จัดการ ยกระดับ ขับเคลื่อน
chi:wít + ka:mnòt, líkhít, lúak, khúapkhum, phátthana:, wa:ŋphæ:n,
càtka:n, yókradàp, khàpkhlûan

Life + to determine, to set a destiny, to decide/ choose, to control,

to improve, to plan, to manage, to uplift, to drive

- อยาก ต้องการ ปรารถนา + ความสุข ความสำเร็จ ฐานะมั่งคั่ง การงานที่ดี
ก้าวหน้าในการงาน สุขภาพดี ครอบครัวที่ดี

yà:k, tǝŋka:n, prà:tthană: + khwa:msùk, khwa:msămrèt, thă:námàŋkhâŋ,
ka:nŋa:nthî:di:, kă:wnâ:naika:nŋa:n,
sùkkhaphâ:pdi:, khrǝ:pkhruathî:di:

To want, to desire + happiness, success, wealth, good job position,
advance in career path, wellbeing, a good family

The frequent collocations of these terms imply and emphasize the concepts of living a desirable life. That is, life is something to be controlled, managed, and improved. Happiness, success, wealth, health, and warm family are desirable goals in life. Last, changes, improvement, and dream pursuit are what one should do as they reflect one's courage. The following extracts serve as illustrations of this strategy.

Extract 5: ใครที่มีการวางแผนชีวิต มีการจัดระบบระเบียบของชีวิตไว้ก่อนคนอื่น หรือจัด
ระเบียบได้ดีกว่าคนอื่น รับรองได้ว่าคนคนนั้นจะสามารถนำชีวิตตนเองไปสู่
ความสำเร็จได้ดีกว่าและเร็วกว่าคนอื่นที่ไม่มีการวางแผนชีวิตแน่นอน
(แผนที่ชีวิต เข็มทิศสู่ความสำเร็จ: 22)

Those who *have a plan for their lives* and *organize their lives* before others or better than others are guaranteed to be able *to guide their lives to achieve success* better and faster than those without any plan.

(Map of Life and Compass to Success: 22)

Extract 6: ผมใช้เรื่องราวนี้เพื่อเป็นการขับเคลื่อนชีวิตเสมอ
(ถอดรหัสความคิดเพื่อชีวิตที่มีคุณค่า: 50)

I always use this story as a *driving force to steer my life* onwards.

(Decoding thoughts for valuable life: 50)

It can be seen from extracts 5-6 that the terms ชีวิต *chi:wit* 'life' co-occurs with the verbs meaning 'to plan', 'to organize', 'to guide', and 'to steer'. The collocation of

these words signifies that ‘life’ is something to be managed or controlled over in order to achieve desirable outcomes.

Extract 7: ถ้าคุณปรารถนาที่จะประสบความสำเร็จ ก็ต้องตัดสินใจที่จะประสบความสำเร็จให้จงได้ ไม่ว่าจะอะไรจะเกิดขึ้น ...ถ้าคุณต้องการคู่ครองที่ดีเยี่ยม คุณก็ต้องตัดสินใจว่าคุณจะมีคู่ครองที่ดีเยี่ยมเท่านั้น

(คู่มือชีวิต: 35)

If you desire to attain success, you must be determined to pursue it no matter what will happen. If you want to have a perfect spouse, you must aim only for a perfect one.

(Handbook of Life: 35)

Extract 8: ฉะนั้น หากเราอยากลิ้มรสความหอมหวานของความสำเร็จ เราต้องกล้าออกเดินทางตามหาความฝัน

(ตั้งเป้าให้ชีวิต พิชิตความสำเร็จ: 25)

Therefore, if you want to taste the sweetness of success, you must dare to pursue your dream.

(Setting a Goal in Your Life, Achieving Success: 25)

Extracts 7 - 8 illustrate the collocation of the verb meaning ‘to desire’ and ‘success’ and ‘a perfect spouse’ and that of the terms ‘to dare’ and ‘to pursue one’ dream’. The linguistic strategies adopted in these examples represent the idea that success, happiness, and happy family life are desirable goals in life. Also, in order to achieve what one desires for, one should dare to make changes to one’s life and to pursue one’s dream.

1.3) Using referring terms with positive or negative connotation

In the spiritual self-help books, terms with positive connotation are used to refer to those who decide to make changes to their lives in order to achieve their ultimate goals. These terms include คนกล้า *khonklá*: ‘brave persons’, คนที่อยู่เพื่อก้าว *khonthi: ?yú: phûakâ:w* ‘those who live to step forward’, คนสำเร็จ *khonsămrét* ‘people of success’, นักฝัน *nâkfăn* ‘dream pursuer’ are used to positively define those who will

follow the advice given in these books as admirable people. The terms *ชีวิตที่มีคุณค่า* *chi:witthi:mi:khunkhâ*: ‘a valuable life’, *การเดินทางฝัน* *ka:ndø:nta:mfân* ‘dream pursuit’, and *ถนน/หนทางของคนสำเร็จ* *thanön/höntha:ŋkhǎ:ŋkhonsämrèt* ‘street/pathway of successful people’ are employed to favorably describe the process of life improvement as shown in the following examples.

Extract 9: หนังสือสำหรับคนกล้าเปลี่ยนชีวิต

(คู่มือชีวิต: ปก)

A book for those who dare to alter their lives.

(Handbook of Life: Front cover)

Extract 10: เราได้เริ่มต้นบนถนนคนสำเร็จแล้วหรือยัง

(ถอดรหัสความคิดเพื่อชีวิตที่มีคุณค่า: 174)

Have we got started on the road of people of success?

(Decoding the Ideas to Achieve a Meaningful Life: 174)

These referring terms with positive connotation are adopted to represent the ideological concept that life improvement is favorable and admirable. It should be pointed out here that, on the contrary, terms with negative connotation such as *คนมักใหญ่ใฝ่สูง* *khonmákyáifáisǎ:ŋ* *คนทะเยอทะยาน* *khonthayø:thaya:n* ‘an overly ambitious person’ which are considered unfavorable in Thai culture can also be used for referring to a person who is very determined to achieve a high goal in life. In so doing, the very same person who takes similar action would be construed as overly ambitious and undesirable.

The following extract is another example to illustrate the use of referring terms with negative connotation for those who are simply satisfied with their lives and do not want to make changes to their lives.

Extract 11: คนที่คิดว่าชีวิตนี้ไม่ขอเป็นอะไรมากไปกว่าเป็นนกน้อยทำรังแต่พอตัวตลอดชีวิตจะ
เป็นได้เพียงนกกระจอกผสมตามความปรารถนา

(ถอดรหัสความคิดเพื่อชีวิตที่มีคุณค่า: 38)

Those who think that in this life they do not want to be anything more than little birds who are satisfied with their tiny nest can become just poor house sparrows as they have wished.

(Decoding the Ideas to Achieve a Meaningful Life: 38)

In this extract, the referring term “poor house sparrows” which has negative connotation metaphorically refers to those who do not do anything to improve their lives. In addition, the term *เพียง phiang* ‘just’ negatively implies and emphasizes that being metaphorically poor sparrows is undesirable. The two strategies all together suggest that those who are simply satisfied with what they have got are poor and unfavorable and pitiful.

2) Metaphors

Among different conceptual metaphors found in the data, two main LIFE metaphors are LIFE IS A JOURNEY and LIFE IS A BATTLE. The LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor is considerably pervasive in the spiritual self-help books. The titles of some books (i.e., *Khem Thit Chewit (Compass of Life)* and *Phanthee Chewit Khemthit Su Khwam Samret (Map of Life; Compass to Success)*) also reflect this metaphorical concept. This metaphor is used to emphasize the significance of determining a goal of life and the necessity of advice for achieving such goal. That is, every journey must have a destination. To safely reach such destination, one must rely on some tools such as advice from the self-help books. The rules or advice given by the authors will serve as a compass or a map for a traveler in a journey of life. The following two extracts also demonstrate the use of this metaphor.

Extract 12: ถ้าหากไม่รู้ความลับของชีวิต ไม่เข้าใจกระบวนการสร้างความสุขในชีวิตที่มั่นคง ยั่งยืน เราก็จะกำหนดเป้าหมายชีวิตผิดพลาด บริหารชีวิตผิดวิธี เหมือนคนเดินทางสู่ดินแดนที่ไม่เคยไป โดยไม่มีแผนที่ ไม่มีเข็มทิศ ได้แต่ทำตาม ๆ กันไป ทั้งที่เห็นว่าคนที่ เดินไปข้างหน้าสะดุด ล้มคว่ำ หลงทาง ... จนวันสุดท้ายของชีวิต จะมีสักกี่คนที่ไปถึงเป้าหมายสวยงามอย่างที่วาดหวัง”

(เข็มทิศชีวิต: 23)

If you don't perceive the secrets of life and don't understand the process for building sustainable happiness in your life, you will set the wrong goals in life, manage your life inappropriately like those who travel to an unexplored land without a map and a compass. What you can do is just to follow what others have done despite seeing that they have tripped over, fallen down, and lost their way until the last day of their lives. How many people can reach the beautiful goal that they have set?

(Compass of Life: 23)

Extract 13: เป้าหมายคือเข็มทิศที่จะคอยบอกเส้นทางไปสู่ความสำเร็จของเรา...หากคิดในทางกลับกัน ถ้าเราไม่มีเป้าหมายก็เหมือนเราไม่มีเข็มทิศ เราก็คอาจเดินสะเปะสะปะ ไม่รู้ทิศรู้ทาง และอาจหลงทางได้ในที่สุด

(ตั้งเป้าให้ชีวิต พิชิตความสำเร็จ: 76)

A goal is tantamount to a compass guiding us to our success. On the other way around, if we do not set a goal, it is like we do not have a compass. We may wander off course without directions and may finally get lost.

(Setting a Goal in Your Life, Achieving Success: 25)

Another key metaphor found in the self-help discourse is LIFE IS A BATTLE. This metaphor is adopted to represent the concept that life is full of obstacles and that an individual should be prepared for dealing with obstacles in life. Therefore, an individual should follow the advice provided by the authors which will enable her/him to win the fight. The following extracts illustrate the use of this metaphor.

Extract 14: ในสนามรบชีวิต เป็นสนามของนักสู้ ผู้คิดก้าวไกล ใจมุ่งมั่น สักวันหนึ่งความสำเร็จ จะบำเรอชีวิตที่แสนลำบาก

(50 ความคิด เปลี่ยนชีวิตให้ดีกว่าเดิม: 18)

The battlefield of life is a place for a fighter who aims to move forward with serious determination. One day, success will nurture the harsh life they have endured.

(50 Ideas for a Better Life: 18)

3) Using implication

The analysis reveals that some ideological concepts are subtly represented by means of implication. First, as shown in the following extracts, an individual currently has not attained happiness and success yet. Happiness and success are awaiting somewhere and an individual is supposed to pursue them.

Extract 15: 10 เรื่องที่ต้องเตรียมให้พร้อมเพื่อเดินไปหาความสุข
(80 วิธีคิดเพื่อชีวิตที่มีความสุข: 29)

10 things that must be prepared with whom
going in search for happiness.

(80 Ways of Thinking for Happy Life: 29)

Extract 16: จงวิ่งไปหาความสำเร็จในชีวิตด้วยตัวคุณเอง
(แผนที่ชีวิต เข็มทิศสู่ความสำเร็จ: ปกหลัง)

Run after the success of your life yourself.

(Map of Life; Compass to Success: Back cover)

The verb phrases วิ่งไปหา *wiŋ pai hǎ:* 'to run after' and เดินไปหา *də:n paihǎ:* 'walk towards to search for' imply that the readers have not attained success and happiness yet. They should fulfill their lives by pursuing success and happiness.

Secondly, in the extracts below, the clause เพียงเรารู้วิธี *phianŋ raw rú: wíthi:* 'only if we know the method' and the phrases ไม่รู้ความลับของชีวิต *mâi rú: khwa:mláp khǎŋ chi:wít* 'don't know the secrets of life' as well as ไม่เข้าใจกระบวนการสร้างความสุขที่มั่นคงยั่งยืน *mâi khâucaí krabuanka:n sâ:ŋ khwa:msùk thî: mânkhoŋ yâŋyũ:n* 'don't understand the process for building sustainable happiness in life' presuppose that there exist ways to push forward our lives to their best position, the secrets of life and the methods for building

sustainable happiness in life respectively. Also, the sub-titles of the books “Rules of Happiness” imply that the book will offer the readers insight into these secrets.

Extract 17: ทุกอย่างเกิดขึ้นเพื่อส่งชีวิตเราไปอยู่ในจุดที่ดีที่สุดเสมอ เพียงเรารู้วิธี

(เข็มทิศชีวิต 3 ตอนกฎแห่งความสุข)

Everything happens just in order to push our life to its best position only if we know the methods.

(Compass of Life 3: Rules of Happiness)

Extract 18: “ถ้าหากไม่รู้ความลับของชีวิต ไม่เข้าใจกระบวนการสร้างความสุขในชีวิต ที่มั่นคง ยั่งยืน เราก็จะกำหนดเป้าหมายชีวิตผิดพลาด บริหารชีวิตผิดวิธี”

(เข็มทิศชีวิต: 23)

“If we don't know the secrets of life and don't understand the process for building sustainable happiness in life, we will set a wrong goal of life, and manage our life inappropriately.

(Compass of Life: 23)

4) Using an authoritative voice

It can be obviously noticed that the authors of the spiritual self-help books express their ideas by using an authoritative voice. The authoritative voice is articulated by adopting three sub-strategies including using commands, conditional sentence structures, and modality. The use of authoritative voice asserts the credibility of the ideological concepts represented in these texts. Also, it suggests that the readers should heed the advice provided in the self-help books in order to improve their lives. Let us take a look at some examples below.

Extract 19: ถ้าคุณต้องการจะยกระดับชีวิตตัวเองให้สูงขึ้น ก็ต้องตัดสิ่งใจที่จะยกชีวิตให้สูงขึ้น โดยไม่มีข้ออ้างหรือตั้งเงื่อนไขใด ๆ ให้กับตนเองทั้งสิ้น

(คู่มือชีวิต: 33)

If you want to uplift your life, you must be determined to lift it up without any excuse or condition for yourself.

(Handbook of Life: 33)

In the extract above, it can be seen that all the three strategies mentioned have been used. Conditional sentence, command, modality ต้อง “must” as well as the expression โดยไม่มีข้ออ้างหรือเงื่อนไขใด ๆ ‘without any excuse or condition for yourself’ are employed in order to advise the readers in an assertive manner. The use of authoritative voice hints that the authors of the self-help books are superior to the readers since they already know the rules or secrets for life improvement.

5) Claiming something as common fact

Claiming something as common fact serve as a strategy to increase the credibility of the ideas presented in the self-help books. Claiming that the ideological concepts are shared by many people make them sound more convincing. The following example clearly illustrates the use of this strategy.

Extract 20: มนุษย์ทุกคนบนโลกใบนี้ ต่างแสวงหาความสุขด้วยกันทั้งสิ้น

(14 วิธีคิดเปลี่ยนชีวิตให้ดีขึ้น: 12)

All human beings in this world is entirely searching for happiness.

(14 Ways of Thinking for a Better Life: 12)

It can be obviously recognized that the expressions มนุษย์ทุกคนบนโลกใบนี้ ‘all human beings in this world’ and ต่าง ‘entirely’ emphasize the concept that happiness is a common goal in life for every people.

6) Citing other texts

In the self-help books, several other texts have been cited and quoted in order to support the ideological concepts being represented. These texts include religious teachings, proverbs, sayings, academic comments, research findings, personal narratives, and folk tales. The analysis shows that citing these texts either directly or indirectly serves two functions. First, it demonstrates that the concept(s) represented is in line with other authoritative texts or ideas. Next, another text is cited as an illustration

of the point being made. In the following two extracts, the opinion of psychologists and the teachings of the Lord Buddha are cited.

Extract 21: นักจิตวิทยาบางคนเชื่อว่าการเปลี่ยนแปลงเป็นเครื่องหมายของความเจริญก้าวหน้าของบุคคล แสดงให้เห็นว่าบุคคลกำลังแสวงหาการเรียนรู้สิ่งใหม่ ๆ ในชีวิต

(ตั้งเป้าให้ชีวิต พิชิตความสำเร็จ: 49)

Some psychologists believe that change is an indication of progress of a person. It indicates that the person is learning new things in life.

(Setting a Goal of Your Life, Achieving Success: 49)

Extract 22: 6. ปลอ่ยวางให้เป็น

คำพระท่านสอนว่า อย่ายึดมั่นถือมั่น คือข้อที่เรากำลังจะพูดถึงกันนี้ ทุกข์ที่หนักที่สุดในชีวิตคนคือทุกข์จากการยึดถือ จงปลอ่ยให้สิ่งต่าง ๆ เป็นไปตาม แนวทางของมันเถอะ อย่าไปฝืน อย่าดันทุรัง พึงระลึกว่าอะไรที่ไม่ได้ดั่งใจนั้น พักสักประเดี๋ยวลแล้วค่อยเริ่มใหม่ก็ไม่สาย รู้ไหมว่ากาลเวลาเป็นยารักษาความผิดหวัง เจ็บปวดชั้นยอด ต้องให้โอกาสและเวลาแก่ตัวเองเพื่อเริ่มใหม่ ลองใหม่ และแก้ไขสิ่งที่เราเรียนรู้จากความผิดพลาด ไม่ว่าจะความผิดพลาดนั้นจะเกิดขึ้นจากเราหรือใคร หรืออะไรก็ตาม จงให้อภัยและให้เวลา

(80 วิธีคิดเพื่อชีวิตที่มีความสุข: 37)

6. Learn to let go

According to the Lord Buddha's teachings, we should not hold fast to anything. This is what we are talking about. The worst suffering in human's life is that caused by holding fast to something. Let things go on their ways. Don't try to force it. Don't be dogmatic. Keep in mind that when something disappoints you, take a short break before resuming what you have been doing is not a waste of time. Do you know that time is an excellent remedy for

...disappointment? You must give yourself a chance and some time to get started and try again. You must fix the mistake no matter who caused it. Forgive yourself and give yourself some time.

(80 Ways of Thinking for a Happy Life: 37)

In extract 21, psychologists' opinion is inserted in order to reemphasize the concept that an individual should make change to her/his life since it indicates life improvement and progress. In extract 22, one of the Lord Buddha's teachings is cited. However, notice that the point being made here is not to ultimately let things go as the teaching originally states. Rather, it is to let things go just temporarily in order to allow readers some more time before resuming the same activity later. Hence, it is ironic that the extract paradoxically guides its readers to hold fast to what they have decided to do.

7) Using rhetorical questions

A rhetorical question is a question being asked without any expectation for an answer. Rather, a rhetorical question is intended for drawing the attention of the readers to the issue being discussed. The following extracts illustrate the use of rhetorical questions in these self-help books.

Extract 23: เราได้เริ่มต้นบนถนนคนสำเร็จแล้วหรือยัง

(ถอดรหัสความคิดเพื่อชีวิตที่มีคุณค่า: 174)

Have we got started on the road of successful people?

(Decoding the Ideas to Achieve a Meaningful Life: 174)

Extract 24: เราพร้อมที่จะเปลี่ยนแปลงความคิดอะไรบางอย่าง เพื่อเปลี่ยนแปลงคุณค่าของชีวิตแล้วหรือยัง

(ถอดรหัสความคิดเพื่อชีวิตที่มีคุณค่า: 38)

Are we ready to change our thoughts in order to improve the value of our life?

(Decoding the Ideas to Achieve a Meaningful Life: 38)

The use of rhetorical questions in these three examples is aimed at drawing attention to the concept of life improvement. The phrase แล้วหรือยัง *læ:w rǔ: ?yan* ‘Are you ready?’ suggests that knowing what one wants and changing one’s way of thinking in order to increase the value of one’s life are what is supposed to be done.

8) Using casual style

Despite the fact that the authors of the self-help texts express their authoritative voices in the texts, most of them do it in a casual communicative style. This can be noticed from the use of informal language. The casual communicative style makes the self-help texts a “discourse of the buddy” (Stibbes, 2004). According to Stibbes (2004), this kind of discourse functions more effectively in giving advice as well as manipulating the readers’ ways of thinking. The casual communicative style can make the readers feel that they are listening to a friend who has more life experience rather than being taught by an expert or a teacher.

Extract 25: ถ้าคุณอยากจะทำ ซื้อ ซื้อเลย ถ้าของสิ่งนั้นไม่เหลือปากว่าแรงในด้านทุนทรัพย์ของคุณจนเกินไป เก็บเงินไปเรื่อย ๆ แล้วซื้อ มัน ถือซะว่าเป็นรางวัลให้ชีวิต ในการที่ต้องทำงานหนักทุก ๆ วัน เพราะการซื้อของที่ตัวคุณเองอยากได้ก็เหมือนกับเป็นการปลดปล่อยความอยากที่ก่อให้เกิดความทุกข์อย่างหนึ่งของคุณ แต่อย่าบ่อยนักนะ เดี่ยวจะเป็นการสิ้นเปลืองเงินทองตัวเองมากเกินไป นาน ๆ ครั้งไม่ว่ากัน เพื่อรางวัลชีวิต

(14 วิธีคิด เปลี่ยนชีวิตให้ดีขึ้น หน้า 20)

If you want to buy something, just buy it. If that item is not affordable for you, save up some money and then buy it. Just think of it as a reward for your life and for all your hard work. This is because buying what you want is like releasing the desire which causes suffering. However, don’t do it too often, all right? Otherwise, you will waste too much of your money. Do it just once in a while to reward your life is okay.

(14 Ways of Thinking for a Better Life: 12)

Notice that this extract begins with an authoritative voice instructing the readers to spend money if they want to. However, the style adopted here is casual. The use of informal language such as *ซื้อเลย sù: lə:y* ‘just buy it’, *ถือซะว่า thǎ: sá? wá:* ‘just think of it as’ *แต่อย่าบ่อยนักนะ tæ: ?yà bǝi nák ná?* ‘don’t do it too often, all right?’ and *นาน ๆ ครั้งไม่ ว่ากัน na:nna:n khráŋ mái wá: kan* ‘just once in a while is okay’ tones down the authoritative voice and makes the advice sound more casual and friendly.

It can be seen that various linguistic strategies have been employed in the spiritual self-help texts in order to represent ideological concepts of living a desirable life. Lexical selection, using metaphors, using implication, using rhetorical questions are adopted for mainly constructing each concepts while using an authoritative voice, citing other texts, and using casual style help strengthen the persuasiveness of such concepts.

To elaborate on the relationship between language and ideology, the linguistic strategies adopted for representing concept 1 (the definition of a “desirable life” as the pursuit of success and happiness) include: 1) the frequent use of the terms *khwa:msùk* (ความสุข) ‘happiness’ and *khwa:msǎmrèt* (ความสำเร็จ) ‘success’; 2) the collocation of the terms *yà:k* (อยาก) ‘would like to’, *tǝŋka:n* (ต้องการ) ‘want’, and *prà:tthanǎ:* (ปรารถนา) and the terms *khwa:msùk* (ความสุข) ‘happiness’, *khwa:msǎmrèt* (ความสำเร็จ) ‘success’, *thǎ:námâŋkhâŋ* ฐานะมั่งคั่ง ‘wealth’, *kâ:wnâ:anaika:nŋa:n* (ก้าวหน้าในการงาน) ‘advance in career path’, *sùkkhaphâ:pdi:* (สุขภาพดี) ‘healthy’, and *khrǝ:pkhruathǝ:di:* (ครอบครัวที่ดี) ‘a good family’; 3) the use of LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor; 4) the use of implication and rhetorical questions to hint that happiness and success are awaiting somewhere and an individual is supposed to pursue them; 5) the use of claiming such concept as common fact; and 6) the use of an authoritative voice.

Next, concept 2 (self-reliance and life improvement as the ways to achieve a “desirable life”) is constructed by 1) the frequent use of the terms meaning ‘oneself’ namely *tua?eŋ* (ตัวเอง), *ton?eŋ* (ตนเอง), and *ton* (ตน); 2) the collocation of the terms

chi:wít (ชีวิต) ‘life’ with the terms *ka:mnòt* (กำหนด) ‘to determine’, *likhit* (ลิขิต) ‘to set a destiny’, *l̥ak* (เลือก) ‘to choose or decide’, *khûapkhum* (ควบคุม) ‘to control’, *phátthana:* (พัฒนา) ‘to improve’, *wa:ŋphæ:n* (วางแผน) ‘to plan’, *càtka:n* (จัดการ) ‘to manage’, *yókradáp* (ยกระดับ) ‘to uplift’, and *khàpkhl̥ián* (ขับเคลื่อน) ‘to drive’; 3) the collocation of the term *klá:* (กล้า) ‘to dare’ and the terms *plianplæ:ŋ* (เปลี่ยนแปลง) ‘to change’, *phátthana:* (พัฒนา) ‘to improve’, and *lá:fān* (ล่าฝัน) ‘to pursue one’s dream’; 4) the use of referring terms with positive connotation for those who decide to improve their lives and pursue success and happiness; 5) the use of LIFE IS A BATTLE and LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphors; and 6) the use of an authoritative voice.

Last, concept 3 (self-help books as powerful and reliable tool for achieving a “desirable life”) is conveyed by means of the following strategies: 1) the frequent use of the terms เค็ด็ด็ด *khlétláp* ‘secret(s)’ and กฎ *kòt* ‘a rule’; 2) the use of LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor which highlights the significance of self-help books as a map and a compass for life improvement; 3) using an authoritative voice; and 4) using a casual communicative style. In the next section, the socio-cultural practice of this discourse will be discussed.

5.3 Discussion: Socio-cultural issues involving the main ideology represented by the spiritual self-help discourse

Socio-cultural issues involving the main ideology represented by the spiritual self-help discourse to be discussed here include 1) ideological effects of the discourse of spiritual self-help, 2) the relationship between self-help discourse and other discourses involving life guidance in Thai society and 3) the relationship between the self-help discourse and the global flow of ideas, specifically the New Age ideology and the concept of individualism.

1) Ideological effects of the discourse of spiritual self-help

It can be seen these self-help books attempt to ideologically define the meaning and features of a “desirable life” and reveal the “secrets” for living a valuable life.

Despite this beneficent intention, it can be argued that the ideological concepts of the self-help discourse may also cause some impact on the readers' perception of life.

First, by defining that to live a "desirable life" means to be determined to pursue happiness and success, the authors of these books assume that life is currently undesirable or at least not desirable enough. Therefore, the readers are encouraged to pursue more happiness and success. This seems to imply that those who are satisfied with their current status and do not want to make any changes to their lives are living a meaningless and trivial life. Likewise, Cullen (2009: 1249) states that "the vast range of self-help books creates an awareness of imperfection previously unknown and produces a market for pain." Also, Cullen points out that the interest in self-improvement is fed by a general understanding that most people are not happy with their lives.

Secondly, the ideology regarding a meaningful way of life represented in the self-help books stresses the significant role of the individual in life improvement. Namely, an individual should take control over her/his own life instead of subjecting her/his life to fate or other people. Moreover, according to this ideology, an individual should take control of her/his life in order to pursue happiness, wealth, and success primarily and basically for her/himself. In these self-help books, doing something for others is not a major concern. Therefore, it may be argued that the self-help discourse places high value on self-reliance and self-interest. Some might even further argue that these books tend to promote an ego-centric perspective towards life.

Last, the self-help discourse always claims that there exist certain rules or ways that enable the individual to easily and effectively achieve happiness and success. Based on this assumption, authors of self-help books propose to reveal these secrets to the readers. However, by taking the advice of these authors, the individuals who feel empowered and aim to control their own destiny are simultaneously subject to the power of these authors. Thus, it can be argued here that it is these authors who are truly powerful since they can manipulate the ways of life of other individuals and consequently they themselves become financially successful.

2) The relationship between self-help discourse and other discourse involving life guidance in Thai society

Self-help books are not the first and only discourse of life guidance in Thai society. Before the introduction of self-help books in Thai society, there existed other discourses serving a similar function; for instance, proverbs, textbooks, Buddhist teaching and Dharma books. Also, fortune telling is another discourse that remarkably plays the role of life coaching (See Puapattanakul, 2013). The differences between the concepts of living a “desirable life” in the self-help books and other related discourses are worthwhile for discussion here. Specifically, I would like to draw attention to the discussion on the relationship between self-help books and dharma books as well as fortune-telling discourse.

First, one of the predominant discourses of guidance for life in Thai society is the Buddhist teachings presented in many dharma books. In these books, life is construed as something truly short and valuable. People should therefore live a mindful life by using Buddhist teachings or dharma to guide their ways of life (Obpat, 2009). According to Buddhist ideology, specifically the concepts of *Tri Laksana*, life is impermanent and full of sufferings. Nothing is truly substantial. Hence, Buddhists should not be too occupied with worldly desire and concerns. In other words, they should learn to let things go or *ploywang* (Podhisita, 1999). On the contrary, the concepts of living a desirable and meaningful life represented in the self-help books are concerned primarily about worldly happiness including wealth, good health, happy family, and success. Even though the authors of some self-help books sometimes cite Buddhist teachings in their works, most of this is done in order to ultimately support their own definition of a desirable way of life as shown in Extract 22 discussed above. At first, it seems that the author intends to adopt the Buddhist teachings to guide the readers to learn to let things go. However, later the author adds that this should be done just temporarily when things do not work the way the readers want. After giving themselves a short break, the readers should resume and continue doing the same thing. Therefore, this extract is in fact intended to instruct the readers to hold fast to what they have decided to do, namely to pursue happiness and success.

Another type of discourse that also provides guidance for life is fortune telling. Besides predicting the unforeseeable future, the discourse of fortune telling conveys ideological concepts of desirable life in Thai society (Puapattanakul, 2013). That is, to be an acceptable member of society, an individual should know her/his social position and behave appropriately in accordance with the social norms and social expectations. More importantly, individuals are all subject to the power of fate. In order to have good luck and to avoid misfortune, an individual is advised to conform to social rules governing proper behaviors of the members of each social group. The power of fate is absolute and in contradictory to the concepts of self-reliance and self-assertion highlighted in the self-help books. It can be argued that the self-help discourse which is newly introduced to the Thai society tends to implicitly challenge the pre-existing and predominant concept of desirable ways of life represented by the fortune telling discourse.

It can be noticed that the ideology represented by the self-help books seems to provide a different perception of a desirable life which places higher value on the individual. The individual can and should take control of her/his life in order to achieve the goals designed by her/himself and for her/himself. This concept of living a desirable life is not the issue highlighted in the traditional discourses in Thai society discussed here.

3) The relationship between the self-help discourse and the global flow of ideas

Another issue to be discussed in this section is the relationship between the Thai self-help discourse and the global cultural flows. The genre of spiritual self-help discourse has its long history and development in the Western culture (Woodstock 2007). It can be argued that owing to the global flows of ideas, and media, to use Appadurai's (1996) concept of globalization, this genre was introduced to the Thai society. At first, self-help books written by foreign authors were translated into Thai. Later, Thai authors began to write their own self-help books. Nowadays, more and more self-help books written by Thai authors can be easily found in the Thai bookstores.

Together with the genre of self-help books, the ideology conveyed in this discourse reflects the new concepts of desirable life influenced partly by New Age ideology

(Askehave, 2004; Cullen, 2009). According to Askehave (2004: 11-12), one aspect of the New Age ideology that is distinctively articulated in spiritual self-help books is the concept of creative and potential self-responsibility. In line with Askehave (2004), the analysis of the present study shows that the ideological concepts represented in the Thai self-help books also lay emphasis on self-responsibility and self-reliance. That is, individuals should not rely on others and on fate, but rather they should rely on themselves to improve their lives in order to attain a desirable life. It is not fate but individuals' responsibility that has a major role in their lives. Consequently, it may be argued that the concept of living a meaningful life as proposed in the Thai self-help books is indirectly influenced at least partly by the New Age ideology.

6. Conclusion

This paper attempts to investigate the Thai spiritual self-help books in order to see the relationship between language and ideology represented in these books. The analysis reveals that the self-help books attempt to give a definition of “desirable life” and ways for living a meaningful life. Accordingly, a valuable and desirable life is one with a clear goal to pursue happiness and success. To have a desirable and meaningful life, the individual must be determined to achieve the goal of life. In order to achieve her/his goal, the person has to rely not on others or fate but rather on her/himself. Further, the spiritual self-help books can reveal the secrets of life improvement that will enable them to have a “desirable life”. Hence, it is the authors of these books that individuals should ultimately rely on. Several linguistic strategies including lexical selection, metaphors, using implication, using an authoritative voice, claiming something as common fact, citing other texts, using rhetorical questions, and using casual style are adopted for representing these ideological concepts.

As discussed, the concepts of living a “desirable life” represented in the self-help books are considerably different from those presented in other traditional discourses in Thai society. Owing to the increasing production and extensive distribution of the self-

help books in Thai society, it can be argued that the concepts of living a “desirable life” represented in these texts which is relatively ego-centric may cause some ideological effects upon the perception of life and the way of living in contemporary Thai society.

Ultimately, it is crucial to note that at first it seems that the authors of these books intend to encourage the readers to become more self-reliant and be determined to take control of their destiny and their lives. However, by persuading the readers to take their “practical” and “effective” advice, these authors in fact are taking control of the readers’ cognition and action. In other words, the individuals who want to take control over their own destiny are ironically subjecting themselves to the control of the authors of these books.

To conclude, it should be clearly stated that this study ultimately aims to create an awareness that in fact there is not any single and absolute way of living a desirable and meaningful life. Everyone can live a valuable life in their own way. The definition of a desirable life represented in the self-help books is just one version socially constructed by means of linguistic strategies. This awareness will empower and enable the readers to fully make use of these books without being manipulated.

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