

# Of Those Who Dared to Dream: Student Activists' Contestation of Hierarchy in the Thai Youth-led Protest

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## ABSTRACT

*This thesis examines the perception of hierarchy and how student activists have challenged hierarchy in the youth-led protests through attacking symbols of hierarchy and authority. Hereby, the research is based on in-depth interviews with student activists from Bangkok, linking it to the contemporary and historical development of the Thai social order. The findings are analysed through meaning-making in social movements and held against the backdrop of the legitimacy challenges to the hegemonic political order. A decline in popularity of the military and a new monarch have opened the door for the youth, to bring the long taboo of discussing the monarchy into the forefront of the protests. Findings show that contemporary hierarchy is an ever-present influence on the lives of young Thais, it is inherently linked to the experienced inequality in the country and dictates social norms and behaviours. Symbols chosen for contestation are linked to the royal family as the top of the political and hierarchical order, and to visual outward expression of hierarchical belonging such as uniforms, or linguistic expression of hierarchy. Despite the contestation of hierarchy, existing habitual constraints mean that a foundational change to the social order will be a slow process.*

## KEYWORDS:

Student Protests, Student Activists, Thai Hierarchy, Monarchy, Junta, Protest Symbols

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