

The Representation of a Bodhisatta: Identification of King Mahajanaka from the Mahajanaka Jataka with King Bhumibol of Thailand¹

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Abstract

In the dramatic productions of the Mahajanaka Jataka developed from King Bhumibol's version of this Jataka, King Bhumibol is glorified through the character, King Mahajanaka, using several techniques: emphasizing motifs from King Bhumibol's biography, imitating real life events related to King Bhumibol and creating dialogue similar to King Bhumibol's speeches and writings. The purpose of these techniques is to identify King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol. These methods create a system of representations, representing His Majesty as a Bodhisatta of perseverance and wisdom, as a father of the people, and as one committed to fulfilling the principles of a righteous king.

Introduction

The production and consumption of Jataka stories has long existed in Thai culture and society. The royal institution has played an important role in this process, composing, or directing scholars to compose, different versions of the Jatakas. In the reign of King

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Bhumibol, His Majesty followed this tradition by adapting the Mahajanaka Jataka from the last ten Jatakas into a royal version. Originally composed in 1989, King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* was first published in 1996 on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary (Golden Jubilee) Celebrations of His Majesty's accession to the throne. In 1999, for His Majesty 6th Cycle Birthday Anniversary, King Bhumibol approved the publication of *The Story of Mahajanaka: Cartoon Edition* because he thought that the first version might be too complicated for some readers. His intention was mentioned in the preface of this edition:

In the Auspicious Occasion of His Majesty the King's 6th Cycle Birthday Anniversary (B.E. 2542) His Majesty the King's approved the publication of The Story of Mahajanaka: Cartoon Edition. He requested that the illustration be done by the most skillful artists and that the books be published on Thai paper in order to save cost and make them accessible to everyone (B.E. 2542, p. (3) text high-lighted by the researcher).

King Bhumibol's royal version begins with Phra Artithajanaka, the king of Mithila, misunderstanding so that he sends his younger brother Phra Polajanaka to prison. However, Phra Polajanaka later escapes and returns with an army to kill Phra Artithajanaka. The pregnant consort of Phra Artithajanaka flees to Kalachampaka and gives birth to a son named Mahajanaka Kumara. When Mahajanaka Kumara grows up, he has a strong determination to take his father's throne back. On the way to Suvarnaburmi, the ship on which he travels sinks and many people die. Nonetheless, Mahajanaka Kumara does not give up hope, but swims in the ocean seven days until the angel, Mani Mekhala, realizes his perseverance and brings him to Mithila. Mahajanaka Kumara solves the four riddles left by dying Phra Polajanaka, after which he is given the throne. While he is king, King Mahajanaka learns a precious lesson from situations involving two mango trees. According to Mani Mekhala's advice, he establishes a university to bring wisdom and good living to the people. It should be noted that "His Majesty the King modified the original story in Mahajanaka Jataka to suit contemporary society, with the view that King Mahajanaka would have been able to achieve supreme tranquility

more readily if he had completely fulfilled his worldly duties first” (Bhumibol Adulyadej 1999 B, (10)).

Among King Bhumibol’s many writings and compositions, *The Story of Mahajanaka* is the one that has been used the most to be reproduced in various forms and media. Included among these are a number of dramatic productions, such as *likay* (Thai traditional dramatic performance) and as a stage play. Apart from CD or DVD, these performances are reproduced in social media, such as on YouTube. It is these dramatic productions that form the primary data for this study.

A possible reason for such frequent production of this narrative is that the Mahajanaka Jataka is one of the most widely known Buddhist tales in Thai society. After His Majesty adapted the story of Mahajanaka into his royal version, this Jataka then became even more widespread and popular. Although the exact number of dramatic productions based on King Bhumibol’s *The Story of Mahajanaka* is not known for sure, almost all the dramatic productions share the same objectives –to glorify King Bhumibol.

An important aspect of the written versions and staging of the dramatic productions has to do with the time frame for their release. It appears that King Bhumibol carefully selected the timing of his publications to correspond to economic crises that continued to impact the country, particularly in 1999. In addition, the exact dates of release of the written versions, as well as the dramatic productions, have almost always been close to His Majesty birthday or the anniversary of His Majesty’s Accession to the Throne. While His Majesty announced this was to offer a “present” to the people, it would also appear to maximize the impact of the publication and production.

In analyzing the various dramatic productions based on King Bhumibol’s *The Story of Mahajanaka*, it is interesting to see that the content has often been revised and adapted to enhance the glorification of King Bhumibol. The analysis shows that the primary technique employed for such glorification is to honour King Bhumibol through the character of King Mahajanaka by connecting “Mahajanaka”, meaning the “Great Father”, with the “Beloved Royal Father” of the Thai people, that being King Bhumibol.

A review of related research indicates that although King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* has been produced many times through many forms of production, research on such works has been limited – relevant research includes only Kittisak Gerdarundsuk (2009), Aksrawadee Saingdaung (2011), Rujipas Phudhanun-Naruepat (2012) and Supak Mahavarakorn (2013). Moreover, such research only focuses on how the story was adjusted to various forms of media, such as stage plays and concert dances with orchestra. So far, there has been no research that has studied the Mahajanaka Jataka as a whole, especially in terms of the glorification of King Bhumibol through the character of King Mahajanaka. Therefore, this study researched the techniques of identifying King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol and to study the representation of King Bhumibol through the techniques of associating various characters, images and scenes in King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* with real life events.

Data selection

Although the Mahajanaka Jataka has been produced in many forms through various media, access to some of the productions is limited since they were not recorded. Therefore, the selected versions of the story used in this study are those based on King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* that have been recorded in various forms. The names and details of the source of information are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: A list of selected productions of King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* used in this study.

Name	Type of Media	Year of Production
<i>Likay Charity "Phramahachanok"</i>	Likay	2000
<i>Mahanattakum Terdprakert Mahajanaka</i>	Stageplay	2006
<i>Operatic Symphony: "Mahajanaka"</i>	Symphony orchestra and sand drawing performance	2011

Name	Type of Media	Year of Production
<i>Mahajanaka, The Phenomenon Live Show</i>	Light and sound and mixed media performance	2014
<i>Mahajanaka-the Panegyric Play</i>	Mixed media	2014
<i>The Story of Mahajanaka</i>	Animated version	2014

Techniques Used to Identify King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol

The study of the dramatic productions based on King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* shows that there are three main techniques used to identify King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol: emphasis on motifs¹ from the biography of King Bhumibol; imitating real life events related to King Bhumibol; and creating dialogue similar to King Bhumibol's speeches and writings.

Emphasizing Motifs That Conform to the Biography of King Bhumibol

Surapongse Satansathien analysed the similarity between the biography of King Mahajanaka and that of King Bhumibol, stating:

It might be claimed that THE STORY OF MAHAJANAKA reflects the way of life of the King. The King here is Mahajanaka who is also the Father of the country and his life does not differ from King Bhumibol's life. Similar to the life of Mahajanaka King, His Majesty had lost his father at young age and had to live with his mother in a foreign country and later was invited to ascend the throne. Despite his position as the head of the country, King Bhumibol has an obligation to maintain his perseverance (2011, 122).

This idea of connecting King Mahajanaka and King Bhumibol through the principle of perseverance was established early with the release of a commemorative coin sold together with the 1996 release of King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka*. One side of the coin illustrates the main motif of the tale – King Mahajanaka's seven-day-

swimming across the ocean. The other side bears a portrait of His Majesty while working. The selection of the two images is intended to convey the message of perseverance, the main theme of the Jataka, by connecting the image of King Bhumibol tirelessly working with that of King Mahajanaka who indefatigably swam in the ocean even though he could not see the shore



Figure 1: Mahajanaka coin

After this, each time the Mahajanaka Jataka has been produced through various media, emphasis has been placed on showing motifs that relate to the biography of King Bhumibol. The first important motif is the release of the Grand Chariot in order to find a righteous man with full virtue who is able to solve King Polajanaka's four riddles. The content of this part was elaborated in the Commentary of Mahajanaka Jataka:

“O king, to whom shall we give the kingdom when thou art become a god?” and he had said, “Give it to him who can please the princess, my daughter, Sīvalī, or who knows which is the head of the square bed, or who can string the bow which requires the strength of a thousand men, or who can draw out the sixteen great treasures.” “O king, tell us the list of the treasures”(Cowell 1907, 24).

In King Bhumibol's version, this part was shortened to read: “Later the Great Being was able to solve King Polajanaka's four riddles;

then asked if there were any other riddles; the courtier said there were none” (Bhumibol Adulyadej 1999B, 19).

However, many of the dramatic productions based on King Bhumibol’s *The Story of Mahajanaka* went back and used the Commentary of Mahajanaka Jataka that gave details of the four riddles. Inclusion of the more elaborated content enables the adaptation of certain details that helps identify King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol. For example, in *Likay Charity “Phramahachanok”*, at the end of the story, the two treasure were changed into “water treasure” and “tree treasure”, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The adaption of 16 treasures so as to be related with the royal projects.

Mahajanaka Jataka	<i>Likay Charity</i> “Phramahachanok”
“In the <i>kebuka</i> ”; now water is called <i>kebuka</i> ; so he had the water of the royal lake drawn off and there revealed a treasure; “The treasure at the ends of the trees,” – he drew out the jars of treasure buried within the circle of shade thrown at midday under the <i>greatsāl</i> trees in the royal garden (Cowell 1907, 24).	“Water treasure is the city’s irrigation. To make all its people wealthy growing crops” “Tree treasure is agriculture to make the country prosperous and civilized” B.K.P. International (Producer) and Boonlerd Najpinij (Director) (2000).

The last two treasures were changed from being treasures in the royal lake and the trees to being water as the treasure that can lead to the tree treasure or abundant agriculture, the force that moves the country forward. The new interpretation, substituting “natural resources” for “the treasure”, not only is intended to refer to King Bhumibol’s royal projects on water resource and agriculture, but also can be connected with the idea of sustainable development.

King Bhumibol considered the value of the natural resources as “treasure” that can bring life sustain ability because this “treasure” is the fundamental basis of agricultural work – a renewable treasure that does not necessarily bring prosperity in the form of wealth, but paves the way to sustainable living.

Another example can be found in *Mahajanaka - the Panegyric Play* where anew interpretation of the 16 types of treasure appears. Instead of referring to treasure as “valuable things”, the word “scholars” or experts in certain fields was used. These scholars are: 1) a botanist; 2) a theologian; 3) a local scholar; 4) a nutritionist; 5) a scholar in politics; 6) a scholar in economics; 7) an expert artist; 8) an expert in handcraft; 9) a scholar in modern medicine; 10) a scholar in arts and literature; 11) a scientist; 12) an expert musician in voice control and tuning; 13) a scholar in geography; 14) a creator or inventor; 15) an astronomer; and 16) a scholar who is expert in laws (Kruphairoj Dejaratanangkul 2014).

The meaning of scholar also was given a new interpretation: “no treasure in the world can compare to the wisdom of a scholar or a great intellectual” (Kruphairoj Dejaratanangkul 2014). The purpose of this revision is not only to conform to the final content of King Bhumibol’s *The Story of Mahajanaka* that emphasizes the importance of education through the establishment of a university, Pudalay Mahavijalaya, but also to relate the meaning of treasure with King Bhumibol’s idea that education and knowledgeable human resources are crucial factors for the country’s development. His Majesty’s vision on education was clearly perceptible throughout his reign by the donation of his personal wealth for the establishment of many scholarship funds, such as King Bhumibol Scholar, the Ananda Mahidol Foundation and the Rajaprajanugroh Foundation (Danai Preechapremprasit and Kanita Homsab 2014, 53-55). His Majesty’s vision regarding education can also be seen in some royal addresses and remarks given on many occasions. For instance, in King Bhumibol’s speech given to library members from all over the country on November 25, 1971, he said: “Books are accumulations of knowledge and all that we humans have created, done and thought up from the old days. They are therefore important as knowledge banks, as savings banks, for human progress...” (Bhumibol Adulyadej 1999A, 49).

In *Mahajanaka, The Phenomenon Live Show*, the order of King Mahajanaka's reply to the four riddles was rearranged. The lifting of the bow that requires the strength of a thousand men was set as the last riddle. In addition, a new scene was added – when King Mahajanaka lifts the bow and releases an arrow into the sky, fireworks were then set off and there was the proclamation, “Long Live the King”. This new scene is similar to what has occurred in yearly celebrations of King Bhumibol's birthday when candles and fireworks have been lighted as a blessing, with large numbers of people gathered at the Royal Field or city halls in provinces, proclaiming “Long Live the King”.

The adaptation of the motif of the search for the Grand Chariot in order to find a righteous man with full virtue who is able to solve King Polajanaka's four riddles emphasizes the image of King Mahajanaka as one filled with virtue, wisdom and strength. Moreover, the adaptation of the core content from *The Story of Mahajanaka* that combines reference to King Bhumibol's outstanding duties or royal projects, as well as events in His Majesty's birthday celebration in which the Thai people participate every year, enables the reader to recall the images and identify King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol.

The motif of the widow's son has also been enhanced by creating King Mahajanaka as a man with gratitude and a strong bond with his mother. Such characterization enables the reader to connect images shown in the dramatic productions with images of King Bhumibol, a son grateful to his mother. This technique can be clearly seen in *Mahajanaka - the Panegyric Play* where this motif of King Mahajanaka as the grateful son is represented through actions, as well as the dialogue of two angels functioning as narrators:

1st angel: “King Mahajanaka is considered a great virtuous man.”

2nd angel: “He has qualities of a Bodhisatta”

(Kruphairoj Dejaratanangkul 2014)



Figure 2: King Mahajanaka paying farewell to his mother (left), King Bhumibol paying respect to his mother, Princess Mother Srinagarindra.

Source: Left photo (Kruphairoj Dejaratanangkul, 2014). Right photo: http://oknation.nationtv.tv/blog/home/blog_data/597/14597/images/sphoto18/king10.jpg

Imitating Events Related to King Bhumibol

Photographs and royal portraits of King Bhumibol performing his royal duties, including visits to rural areas to meet the people, have long been familiar to Thais. The reason is that those photographs and portraits have been continually reproduced through television, publication and social media.

A prime example is a photograph of Their Majesties taken on May 7, 1950. On that day, King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit made their first public appearance on the Royal Balcony of Sutthaisawan Prasart Throne after His Majesty's coronation (*Praew special issue*, 2016, 43.) This image was used in the animated version of *The Story of Mahajanaka* in a scene of the royal wedding of King Mahajanaka and Sivali Devi, followed by his accession to the throne of Mithila City.

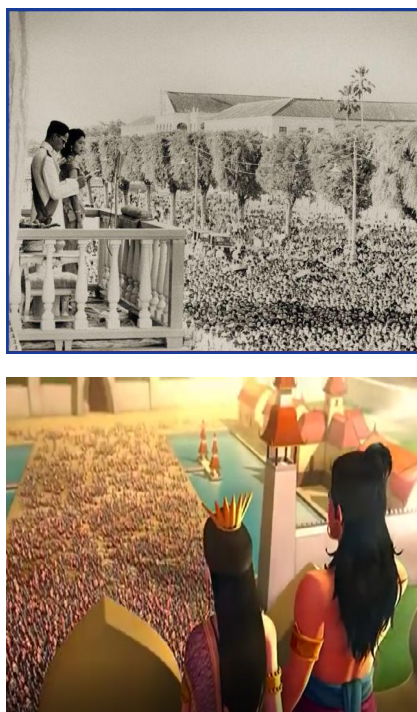


Figure 3: King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit making their first public appearance on the Royal Balcony (left); the royal wedding of King Mahajanaka and Sivali Devi in the animated version of *The Story of Mahajanaka*.

Source: Left: <http://www.komchadluek.net/news/royal/146429>. Right: Family News Channel 3(2014).

Another example is a photograph taken of elder Thum giving King Bhumibol wilted lotuses during a tour of Thailand's northeast quadrant by King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit in 1955, the first time the royal couple had visited the region. This picture is a favorite among Thai people, "...not simply because of the aesthetic appeal of its simple, yet dramatic composition, or even because of the way it radiates a complex of positive impressions – compassion, gratitude, and peace" (Broderick 2013, 104).



Figure 4: King Bhumibol receiving lotuses from elder Thum (middle) and the scene when King Mahajanaka receives lotuses from an old lady in *Mahanattakum Terdprakert Mahajanaka* (left) and in the animated version of *The Story of Mahajanaka* (right).

Source: Left: JSL Global Media (2016); Middle: https://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/คุ้มจันทนิษฐ์#/media/File:The_mercy_king.jpg; Right: Family News Channel 3(2014).

In the stage play, *Mahanattakum Terdprakert Mahajanaka*, a scene showing this event appears in Act 5 when King Mahajanaka rides back to Mithila to ascend the throne. The people of Mithila are gathered to welcome the new king. Among the crowd, an old lady tries to give lotuses to the king, but the procession does not stop. Seeing this, King Mahajanaka orders his chariot to stop and he goes to receive the flowers from the old lady's hand. In the animated version of *The Story of Mahajanaka*, this event appears in Act 3 when Uthijja Brahma explains the ten principles of a righteous king to Jevaka by showing the scene of King Mahajanaka receiving wilted lotuses

from an elderly woman as an explanation of *maddava*, which refers to King Mahajanaka's kindness. These two productions of *The Story of Mahajanaka* not only reproduce the event when King Bhumibol received the wilted lotuses from elder Thum, but also use this image to elaborate the theme of kindness and thoughtfulness. This clearly identifies King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol because the images and contexts of the event in the two dramatic productions of the story can be easily connected with the image and context of the actual event.



Figure 5: King Bhumibol performing his duties with perspiration on the tip of his nose (left); King Mahajanaka at work in the animated version of *The Story of Mahajanaka* (right).

Source: left: <http://www.chaoprayanews.com/2009/03/26/พระราชประวัติโดยสังเขป/>; right: Family News Channel 3(2014).

The famous photograph of King Bhumibol performing his duties with perspiration on the tip of his nose was taken by Ekkachai Keawchaum, a personal photographer of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, when King Bhumibol and Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn visited Narathiwat province in the south of Thailand. At first this photograph was not published since some considered that there was too much perspiration on His Majesty's face. Nevertheless, on King Bhumibol's 60th Birthday Anniversary in 1987, this photograph was first publicly released, impressing the general public so much that it has been widely reproduced since (*Koosangkoosom* 2012, 8-9).

In the animated version of *The Story of Mahajanaka*, a similar event appears in Act3 when Uthijja Brahma explains the ten principles of a righteous king to Jevaka. The image explains the virtue of “perseverance” or *tapa*. Relating King Bhumibol through this image to the explanation of the ten principles of a righteous king not only connects King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol, but also implies that King Bhumibol had the qualifications of a great king who possessed such righteous virtues.

Creating Dialogue Similar to King Bhumibol’s Royal Remarks

There have been many royal addresses and writing of King Bhumibol given on different occasions that have been collected in books and publicized through various media, such as television, radio broadcasting and billboards. The widespread publication of these have made them well-known to the general Thai public. Using the techniques of allusion and adaptation, parts of some of these addresses have been incorporated into dialogue in various dramatic productions of the Mahajanaka Jataka, further establishing the connection between King Mahajanaka and King Bhumibol.

One royal address imprinted in the hearts of the Thai people is King Bhumibol’s oath given at his coronation on May 5, 1950. King Bhumibol made a promise to the nation: “We shall reign with righteousness for the benefit and happiness of the Siamese people” (Grossman 2011, 11).

The animated, *The Story of Mahajanaka*, contains dialogue similar to this oath in a scene when a group of people came to ask King Mahajanaka for help after their hometown had been damaged by natural disaster and they could no longer plant food to support their living. King Mahajanaka promised to solve their problem, stating that the homes of the people are his homes as well:

This is our home. Home... that we gained from my perseverance, which we had done until we fairly accede the throne. So with the ten principles of kingship and righteousness, we would reign over this land.

Family News Channel 3 (2014).

This dialogue is quite similar to not only King Bhumibol's coronation oath, but also to another of his statements: "My place in the world is to be among my people. That is being among the Thai people." This was part of a letter King Bhumibol wrote to his old classmate in Europe after ascending to the throne (*Praew special issue* 2016, 75).

The use of dialogue similar to the two royal addresses in the scenes where King Mahajanaka is seen helping the people is a skillful literary technique. This reinforces the identification of King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol and also conveys the message that throughout King Bhumibol's reign the Thai people realized that the king had kept his oath made on Coronation Day by not abandoning the people, but strived to relieve the people's sufferings to the best of his ability.

In addition to the dialogue similar to King Bhumibol's oath on the day of his coronation, in the animated version of *The Story of Mahajanaka* there is an interchange between King Mahajanaka and Sivali Devi about King Mahajanaka's happiness:

Mahajanaka King: Seeing all the people in Mithila become knowledgeable really makes us happy.

Sivali Devi: You make Mithila realize that she is not yet at a loss for good people.

Mithila People: Long live the king! Long live the king!

Mahajanaka King: This is the path to our absolute happiness.

Family News Channel 3 (2014).

The closing part of the animated version of *The Story of Mahajanaka* cited above is similar to the address King Bhumibol gave on his 82nd Birthday Anniversary on 5 December 2009: "My happiness and goodness will be preserved if our nation has prosperity and security with peace" (*Daily News* 2009, 1). Closing this production of the Mahajanaka Jataka with words similar to King Bhumibol's address completes the string that fastens this technique of using words from the His Majesty's addresses into one piece of unified art. In other words, the closing dialogue mentioning King Mahajanaka's happiness represents "the result" of the previous passage about solving the

problems for the people. This implies that the happiness of the King Mahajanaka and that of King Bhumibol is the same; that is, both have happiness in the well-being of the people as a result of their dedication asking of the country.

Another memorable proclamation of King Bhumibol is a statement found in “When I Was Leaving Thailand for Switzerland” that recorded incidents when His Majesty returned from Thailand to Switzerland to pursue his study on 19 August 1946. Among the crowd who came to send His Majesty off, a voice shouted out: “Please do not abandon the people.” King Bhumibol did reply right away. Instead, His Majesty wrote the reply he had had in his mind: “If the people do not ‘abandon’ me, how can I abandon them?” (Bhumibol Adulyadej 1995, 12-13).

In the 1994 version of King Bhumibol’s *The Story of Mahajanaka*, King Mahajanaka is determined to return to Mithila so as to “take back the throne that once belonged to my father.” In the *Mahajanaka-Panegyric Play*, there is a monologue of King Mahajanaka with similar thoughts lamenting his fate: “I was born the son of the King, but was estranged to live in this distant country. I feel as if I had abandoned my people. It is about time I returned home to take care of my people and to bring them the well-being” (Kruphairoj Dejaratanangkul 2014). Although revised somewhat from King Bhumibol’s words, this dialogue helps connect King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol, as well as demonstrate the firm determination of both King Mahajanaka, in the story, and King Bhumibol, in real life, to bring prosperity to the people.

The Representations of King Bhumibol That Appear in the Dramatic Productions of *The Story of Mahajanaka*

From the discussion above regarding the three techniques used to connect King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol, it can be seen that the technique of associating images of King Bhumibol with the character of King Mahajanaka conforms with Stuart Hall’s System of Representation. Hall explained this representation technique as follows:

At the heart of the meaning process in culture, then, are two related ‘systems of representation.’ The first enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondence or a chain of equivalence between things-people, objects, events, abstract ideas, etc.-and our system of concepts, our conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts. The relation between ‘things’, concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call ‘representation’ (2013, 3).

Accordingly, to construct the representation of a person or an object, the perceivers of the representation must have a clear conception of the thing connected to the actual person or object. These conceptions are the key mechanism to connect “a set of signs” that are the representation of the concepts. When the connection between “things”, conceptions and signs is in place, then the construction of the representation is complete. This study of techniques used to connect King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol signifies that the “system of concepts” are photographs of King Bhumibol, along with his royal addresses and duties that have been imprinted in the hearts and minds of the Thai people. When Thai people see “a set of signs” in the dramatic productions based on King Bhumibol’s *The Story of Mahajanaka* that emphasize motifs from the biography of King Bhumibol, replicate real life events related to King Bhumibol and use dialogue similar to his royal remarks, the creation of a system of representation of King Bhumibol is complete.

It is clear that representation is not necessarily a reflection of the truth, but instead, is an assembly of “a set of signs” used to connect with existing objects, which, in this case, is King Bhumibol. Such representation of His Majesty that appears in the dramatic productions based on King Bhumibol’s *The Story of Mahajanaka* can be divided into three parts.

A Bodhisatta Who Attained Perfection in Perseverance and Wisdom

Many books convey a message that King Bhumibol himself was a Bodhisatta; see, for instance, the work of Chaipruk Penvijitara (2007) and Danai Preechapremprasit and Kanita Homsab (2014). While these works focus on an analysis of His Majesty's royal duties that could be compared to a Bodhisatta's striving for perfection, they do not analyze the creation of images of being a Bodhisatta.

The creation of the image of King Bhumibol as a Bodhisatta, in this case through identification with King Mahajanaka, serves to glorify His Majesty in accordance with the objectives of the dramatic performances based on King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka*. This has long been a characteristic of Thai traditional panegyric literature. In addition, the identification of King Bhumibol with King Mahajanaka highlights the perfection of perseverance in the way King Bhumibol dedicated himself to his royal duties for the benefit of the Thai people. His Majesty worked continually and tirelessly, and despite not seeing the immediate results, kept on persevering. This connects to one of the objectives of the Mahajanaka Jataka – “to teach about the virtue of perseverance” through concrete actions of King Mahajanaka that can be connected to the concrete actions of King Bhumibol.

In addition to perfection of perseverance, the representation as a Bodhisatta who has attained perfection in wisdom is another aspect that is emphasized in the Mahajanaka Jataka. The word “wisdom” here refers to unworldly or spiritual wisdom:

...insight, which can be explained as the ability to have a clear and deep understanding into the true nature of reality. To be insightful can be elaborated as understanding cause and effect, goodness or evil, right and wrong, proper and improper, usefulness and uselessness, advantage and disadvantage, physique, root causes and their components or factors, being fully aware of suffering and the impermanent nature of things, the relations of things, know how to think, contemplate, diagnose, and manage things (Prabrahamgunabhorn 2009, 22-23).

The image of a Bodhisatta who has attained perfection in wisdom, therefore, is closely related to the context of when and why

King Bhumibol created his version of the Mahajanaka Jataka. Not only does the work aims to teach readers about values of perseverance, it also accentuates the importance of “wisdom”, or to be aware of desire. This is clearly shown through the timing of release of the cartoon version of *The Story of Mahajanaka* during the Thai economic crisis in 1997.

It was a propitious moment for the message contained in the King’s book. The following spring, the economics of the so-called Asian Tiger, which by now included Thailand, collapsed following Thailand’s decision to no longer fix the dollar value of its national currency... Suddenly, the dangers posed to the country by the forces of globalization and financial speculation—dangers the king has been warning about for years... (Broderick 2013, 192-193).

The image of King Mahajanaka bringing wisdom to the people of Mithila by establishing Pudalay Mahavijalaya in King Bhumibol’s *The Story of Mahajanaka* is comparable to the image of King Bhumibol teaching Thai people to “be blessed with pure perseverance, sharp wisdom, and complete physical health” (Bhumibol Adulyadej 1999, (11)).

Another clear representation of King Bhumibol as a Bodhisatta who attained perfection in perseverance and wisdom appears in His Majesty’s New Year greeting cards given to the Thais every year.

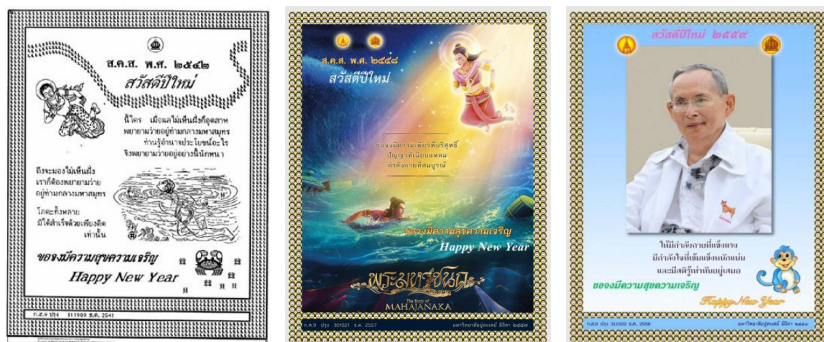


Figure 6: His Majesty’s New Year greeting cards in 1999, 2015, and 2016 (left to right)

Source: <http://www.posttoday.com/social/royal/460571>

In 1999, three years after the publication of the first version of King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* was published, an illustration and message taken from the story was used in the His Majesty's Royal Greeting Cards, as can be seen in the image to the left in Figure 6. This was his only composition from which an illustration and messages were selected and used in His Majesty's Royal Greeting over the many years. In 2015, an illustration of King Mahajanaka and Mani Mekhala from the animated version of *The Story of Mahajanaka* was used in place of the photograph of King Bhumibol, which had appeared between 2006 and 2014. This clearly reinforces the connection between King Mahajanaka and King Bhumibol.

The Well-beloved Father of the people

In addition to being identified as a Bodhisatta with perfection, the word "Mahajanaka" conveys the meaning of the "Great Father", which can be compared to the "father of the nation." King Bhumibol was considered the father of the nation because he took care of the people as if he had been a father nurturing his children. Such an idea is restated in the lyrics sung in the end of *Operatic Symphony "Mahajanaka"*:

Let us be good and do good for our homeland,
 Similar to what His Majesty has continuously done for us.
 Despite tiredness, plan and try to achieve because we can
 Use the perseverance we've seen from our Father as the
 guidance.

(Rujipas Phundhanan-naruepat 2012, 27)

These lyrics not only refer to King Bhumibol as "Father", signifying the level of love and closeness between the His Majesty and the people, but can also be related to the image of a Bodhisatta who has attained perfection in perseverance. On the surface, the image of a father-like and well beloved king might not conform to the image of the high status of being a Bodhisatta. However, fatherhood refers to unconditional love of the father who protects and looks after his children, which is similar to the endless mercy of a Bodhisatta who

has complete willingness to help all living beings. This refers to King Bhumibol's tireless work for the people of Thailand. Therefore, the representation as a well-beloved father helps strengthen the profound meaning of being "Mahajanaka", the "Great Father".

The King Who Upholds the Ten Principle of a Righteous King

In many pieces of panegyric literature for King Bhumibol, there is glorification of the His Majesty for upholding the ten principles of a righteous king (Thongchai Disho, 2004, 132-134). The creation of the image in the dramatic performances of one who upholds the ten principles of a righteous king can be connected with the performance of King Bhumibol's royal duties and accentuates the objective of glorification by the insertion of both illustrations and images in the dramatic productions that support the validity of this message.

Moreover, the representation of one who upholds the ten principles of a righteous king supports the image of being a Bodhisatta who strives to attain perfection of perseverance and wisdom. At the same time, the virtue of *maddava*, or thoughtful kindness, conforms to the image of the loving and caring father who takes care of his children. Therefore, the representation of the king who upholds the ten righteous principles helps combine the three representations into one complete image, as shown in Figure 7:

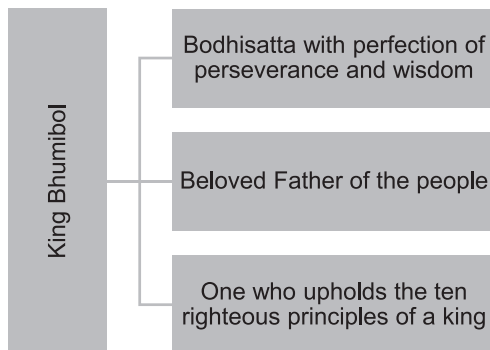


Figure 7: The combination of the three images of representation: a Bodhisatta who attained Perfection in Perseverance and Wisdom; the well- beloved father of the people, and a king who upholds the ten righteous principles.

Conclusion and discussion

The dramatic productions based on King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* indicate the long existence and significant role of the Buddhist Jataka tales in Thai culture. The reproduction of King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* illustrates the relationship of two pillars of Thai society: Buddhism and the king. On the one hand, these dramatic productions are modern forms of Buddhist tales that can be easily understood through the presentation in contemporary medium. On the other hand, they show a transformation in the dynamics of Thai royal panegyric literature that has changed the traditional glorification of the king using verses to one in which royal writings are reproducing with skillful use of techniques to add glorification to the content. Moreover, dissemination of these dramatic productions in social media, such as YouTube, not only expands the audience, but also accomplishes the objective of glorification since it is convenient for people to view the dramatic production anytime, anywhere and as often as they like. This is in contrast to written panegyric literature published in magazines and newspapers that audiences today rarely look at more than once. It can be concluded that social media has a prominent role in the existence and dissemination of the "modern Thai royal panegyric literature".

The analysis of the techniques of identifying and associating the character of King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol shows that the genesis of this concept started with the publication of King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka*. Such a concept has been increasingly reinforced as dramatic productions based on King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* have been created, in particular, the latest production of the animated version of *The Story of Mahajanaka*. In this version, there are many components that clearly connect King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol. This has had an influence on the later Thai royal panegyric literature in which King Mahajanaka is a metaphor for King Bhumibol.

The identification of King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol results in three images that form a system of representation of King Bhumibol: a Bodhisatta with perfection of perseverance and

wisdom; the beloved father of the people; and one who upholds the ten principles of a righteous king. These three representations conform to the purpose of the messages from the dramatic productions based on King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka*—to glorify King Bhumibol and to honour him as a virtuous king in both the secular and spiritual world. These representations reflect how Thai people respect the king, especially King Bhumibol who worked so hard during the 70 years of his reign, and how Buddhism is important in the worldview of Thai people. Furthermore, these representations are valid evidence to prove that the king and Buddhism continue to be strong pillars of Thai culture from the past and will likely continue on into the future.

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ⁱ This term in this article is used according to Stith Thompson's definition: "A motif can be defined as the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition. In order to have this power it must have something unusual and striking about it. Most motifs fall into three classes. First are the actors...second come certain items in the background of the action...In the third place there are single incidents" (Thompson 1977, 415).