

# Literary techniques used to identify King Mahajanaka from the Mahajanaka Jataka with King Bhumibol

Dr.Ratchaneekorn Ratchatakortrakoon<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract**—This article aims to study the literary techniques used to identify the character of King Mahajanaka from the Mahajanaka Jataka with King Bhumibol in dramatic performances developed from King Bhumibol’s The Story of Mahajanaka.

The study reveals that in the various dramatic productions of the Mahajanaka Jataka developed from King Bhumibol’s written version of the Mahajanaka Jataka, King Bhumibol is glorified through the character of King Mahajanaka using a number of literary techniques. These techniques include emphasizing motifs taken 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. The purpose of these techniques is to have the readers identify King Mahajanaka with King Bhumibol in order to glorify King Bhumibol.

**Keywords:** Literary techniques, King Mahajanaka, the Mahajanaka Jataka, King Bhumibol’s The Story of Mahajanaka.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The royal institution has played a significant role in the production and consumption of Jataka in Thai society. In the reign of King Bhumibol, His Majesty adapted the second tale, The Story of Mahajanaka, from The Last Ten Jataka Tales into his royal writing version. King Bhumibol had changed the ending of the Commentary of Mahajanaka Jataka from The Mahajanaka King turning into monkhood as he felt sympathetic after seeing the vandalization of a fruitful mango tree into The Mahajanaka King using nine methods to restore the mango tree and establishing Putalay University as an academic institution for Mithila citizens. King Bhumibol’s The Story of Mahajanaka was first published in 1996 in the auspicious occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary (Golden Jubilee) Celebrations of His Majesty’s Accession to the throne.

In 1999, the Auspicious Occasion of His Majesty the King’s 6th Cycle Birthday Anniversary, King Bhumibol official approved the publication of The Story of Mahajanaka: Cartoon Edition because the first version might be too complicated for some readers.

After the first publication in 1996, there were reproductions in many forms and through different media such as Likay (Thai

This article is part of the research, called “Narratives from The Story of Mahajanaka of King Bhumibol: Dynamic of the Panegyric in Contemporary media” which was supported by The Thailand Research Fund (TRF).

Researcher at Institute of Thai Studies Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. email: ratchaekorn.r@chula.ac.th.

traditional dramatic performance) and stage play. It can be said that King Bhumibol’s The Story of Mahajanaka was reproduced in the highest numbers comparing to his other royal writings. The possible reason is that this royal writing based on The Last Ten Jataka Tales which is the widely known Buddhist tales in Thai society. When His Majesty had adapted the tales of Mahajanaka into his royal version, the Jataka has then been more widespread.

Although the exact number of the reproduced narratives from King Bhumibol’s The Story of Mahajanaka since 1996 cannot be indicated, it can be said that almost all narratives share the same objectives in the reproduction with the original version and cartoon version; that is to glorify King Bhumibol. The time frame for the reproduction was carefully selected; they were mostly closed to His Majesty the King’s Birthday or the Anniversary of His Majesty’s Accession to the Throne. Because of their objectives and context of time when these works were reproduced, the selected narratives from The Story of Mahajanaka are interesting; the contents of the narratives from The Story of Mahajanaka were adjusted to glorify King Bhumibol and to fit with various forms of media. The primary analysis showed that the main techniques used for glorifying is to honour King Bhumibol through The Mahajanaka King character by connecting the meaning of “Mahajanaka” or “the Great Father” with “the Beloved Royal Father” of the Thais.

## II. 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 "Phra Mahajanaka"</i>	Likay	2000
<i>Mahattakum Tandtrakarn Mahajanaka</i>	Stage play	2006
<i>Operatic Symphony: "Mahajanaka"</i>	Symphony orchestra and sand drawing performance	2011
<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

### III. RESULTS OF STUDY

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 motifs 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:

[1] 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

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

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.

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 sustainability 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.

TABLE 2.

THE ADAPTION OF 16 TREASURES SO AS TO BE RELATED WITH THE ROYAL PROJECTS

Mahajanaka Jataka	Likay Charity “Phramahachanok”
[1] In the Mahajanaka, now water is called rebaka, so he had the water of the royal lake drawn off and it then revealed a treasure. “The treasure at the ends of the trees.” – he drew out the jars of treasure buried within the circles of shade thrown at midday under the great tall trees in the royal garden.	[2] “We are treasure in the city’s irrigation. To make all its people healthy grows crops” “The treasure is agriculture to make the country prosperous and civilized” B.K.P. International

Another example can be found in Mahajanaka—the Panegyric Play where a new 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

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” 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 Rajapranugroh Foundation [4]. 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...” [5]

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 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 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:

[6]1st angel: “King Mahajanaka is considered a great virtuous man.”

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



FIGURE 1. King Mahajanaka paying farewell to his mother (left), King Bhumibol paying respect to his mother, Princess Mother Srinagarindra.

Source: Left photo (Kruphairaj Dejaratanangkul, 2014). Right photo:

[http://oknation.nationtv.tv/blog/home/blog\\_data/597/14597/image/s/photo18/king10.jpg](http://oknation.nationtv.tv/blog/home/blog_data/597/14597/image/s/photo18/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 Suthaisawan Prasart Throne after His Majesty's coronation [7]. 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.

#### CREATING DIALOGUE SIMILAR TO KING BHUMIBOL'S ROYAL REMARKS



FIGURE 2. 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"[8].



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/ผู้รับทานนิตย๑๑/media/File:The\\_mercy\\_king.jpg](https://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/ผู้รับทานนิตย๑๑/media/File:The_mercy_king.jpg)

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.

### 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" [9]

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:

[10] 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.

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 [11]

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:

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

Sivali Devi: You make Mithila realizes 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.

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 December 5, 2009: "My happiness and goodness will be preserved if our nation has prosperity and security with peace" [13] 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 as king 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 August 19, 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?" [14]

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"[15]. 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.

### IV. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSTION

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’ [16].

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

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 were 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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to Assistant Professor Dr. Warangkana Srikamnerd, research advisor, Miss Chutinan Maladhram, research assistant, and friends in the Jujaka group, who are my intellectual friends. I am also thankful to Miss Kaweeworn Punthong and Mr. Frederick B. Goss whose support has helped uplift this research to an international level with English interpretation and editing.

I dedicate any merit brought about by this research to King Bhumibol, the beloved King who lives eternally in the heart of all Thais.

REFERENCES

[1] Surapongse Satansathien. (2011). The discussion about the Royal Writing: The Story of Mahajanaka. Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, pp. 122.  
 [2] Cowell, E.B. (1907). The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, Vol. VI. Cambridge: University Press.pp.24

[3] B.K.P. International (Producer) and Boonlerd Najpinij (Director). (2000). Likay Charity “Phramahachanok” [Motion Picture]. Thailand: A.G. Entertainment.  
 [4] Danai Preechaprempravit and Kanita Homsab (2014). Buddha Bhumibol: Ten Virtues of His Majesty the King. Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing. , pp. 53-55.  
 [5] Bhumibol Adulyadej (1999). Teachings of Father: The complication of Royal Address and Royal Remark about Youth. Toyota Thailand Foundation and Sod Srikritwong Foundation. Bangkok: Bangkok Printing, pp.49.  
 [6] Kruphairoj Dejaratanangkul. (2014, December 7.) Phramahachanok ep.1-7. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdG7plExCpU>.  
 [7] Praew special issue. (2015, November) 38 (893), pp. 43.  
 [8] Broderick, R. (2013). King by virtue: Reflections on the life-long Endeavor of King Bhumibol of Thailand. Bangkok, Amarin. pp.104.  
 [9] Grossman, N. and Faulder, D. [editors]. (2011). King Bhumibol Adulyadej: a life's work: Thailand's monarchy in perspective. Bangkok: Editions Didier. pp.11.  
 [10] Family News Channel 3. (2014, December 7.) The Story of Mahajanaka. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoV8h2K-T0A>.  
 [11] Praew special issue. (2015, November) 38 (893), pp. 75.  
 [12] Family News Channel 3. (2014, December 7.) The Story of Mahajanaka. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoV8h2K-T0A>  
 [13] Daily News. (2009, December 6). p. 1.  
 [14] Bhumibol Adulyadej. (1995). “The Royal Writing: When I departed from Siam to Switzerland”. Thai Culture. 33 (December) p. 12-18.  
 [15] Kruphairoj Dejaratanangkul. (2014, December 7.) Phramahachanok ep.1-7. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdG7plExCpU>.  
 [16] Hall, S., Evan, J. and Nixon, S. (2013). ed. Representation. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, pp.3.



Author Biography

Dr. Ratchaneekorn Ratchatrakorntrakoon currently works as a researcher at Institute of Thai Studies Chulalongkorn University. Her research interest is Buddhist Studies and literary techniques in narratives. In 2013, She finished Doctor of Philosophy in Department of Thai from Faculty of Arts Chulalongkorn University. Her doctoral dissertation names “Food Metaphors in . . . . . cause and cessation of suffering

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” [17]