



Creative Performing Arts Project: A case study from costumes design for the contemporary dance adaptation of “Mahajanaka Jataka: Royal Version” by HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej

Kittikorn Nopudomphan

Department of Performing Art, Faculty of Fine Arts, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

Corresponding author: tuisanyo@hotmail.com

Jataka (Sanskrit and Pali : **जातक**) means ‘story of birth’ , is a series of literatures describes previous births (jati) of Gautama Buddha as different creatures and humans to perform various good deeds, according to Buddhist belief. In other words, Jataka is a development of a being that maintained morality and quality of having higher-mind among others, until he finally achieved the enlightenment, became Buddha (Awakened one) in his last life and entered Nirvana (Liberation). The most famous and popular Jatakas are of his last 10 births, called ‘Dasa-Jataka’ (The Last 10 Jatakas)

Mahajanaka Jataka is the second of Dasa-Jataka which shows the quality of ‘Perseverance’, which is one of 10 necessities of Buddhahood. It is the tales of Mahajanaka Rajakumarn, a young prince in exile from Mithila who boarded a merchant vassal set for a thriving port where he planned to earn fortune for a campaign to win back his father’s throne. The ship wrecked and crews were drowned or fall prey to sea creatures.

The prince was not panic or lost his courage. He persistently swam, heading for Mithila, even though he was at the middle of a fierce ocean and there was no sight of island or shore. Finally, he reached Mithila and was crowned as a king after his uncle passed away. One day, he went to a royal park and witnessed the destruction of a once-flourish mango tress, which his courtiers recently ripped and pulled down in a fight for its delicious fruits. A nearby mango tree, however, was barren thus still majestically stood strong. King Mahajanaka was overwhelmed by the grief in laws and abdicated to become an ascetic. The tale emphasizes the perseverance of one to achieve the ultimate goal, even facing life threats and at lost of all hope. His/her persistent will bring the most desired success at the end. (Tipitaka No.28 : Sutta Pitaka 20)



Mahajanaka Jataka story ,Traditional Thai style art painting on temple's wall (1885) KiegKaow Temple : Samut Prakan province, Thailand



Mahajanaka Jataka story ,Traditional Thai style art painting on temple's wall (1826) Norputtangkul Temple : Suphanburi province, Thailand

Lord Buddha used Jataka as an example for his followers to understand that good deed will achieve through a long persistent practice of merit without fear or tired. At the end, one will enjoy the result of this hard working. (Smithtipon Natnimit : 2550)

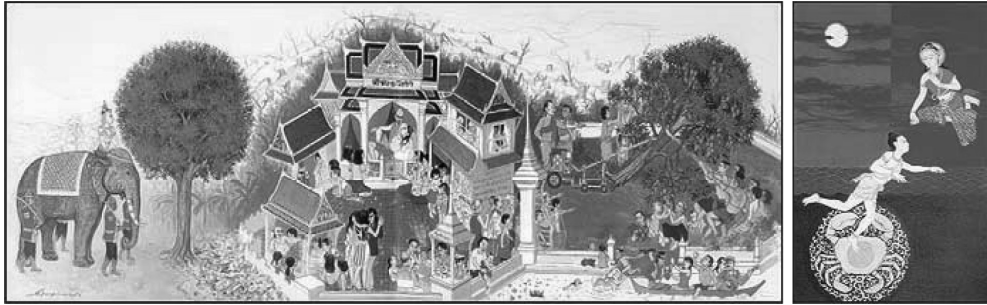
In royal adaptation, the story line was adapted to suit the contemporary society. His Majesty felt that King Mahajanaka had not yet fulfilled his earthly responsibilities and was bound to improve his people before he would abdicate and sought the Mokka-Dhamma (supreme tran-

quility). His subjects, from a noble viceroy to a poor stable boy and even his wise ministers, were so ignorant and still lived in the world of delusion. They were lack of proper knowledge and did not even know what is good for them. Thus, King Mahajanaka established an institute that will improve their mind. (Bhumibol Adulyadej, HM King : 2540)

In 1996, His Majesty the King granted permission to publish 'Mahajanaka Jataka : Royal Version' on the occasion to celebrate his Golden Jubilee with hope that this story might serve as formative contemplation for virtuous persons. As he said to his well-wishers at the gathering that mark the occasion, "May you all be blessed with pure perseverance, sharp wisdom and complete physical health."

For this reason, Srinakharinwirot University understands how this story can mirror the reality and a valuable lesson for Thais, leaders or subjects. Audiences will realize the significance of perseverance that bring prosperous and happiness to society, while aware of the destructive nature of lust, desire, anger and ignorance that bring inharmonious and downfall to society.

This has led to an adaptation of the tales of Mahajanaka to a contemporary dance performance, which would be understandable to the people in current society. The Performance consists of several forms of performing arts such as Thai and modern dance, puppets, shadow play and animation cartoon; in order to bring the story from royal composition to life, and easily comprehended by all.

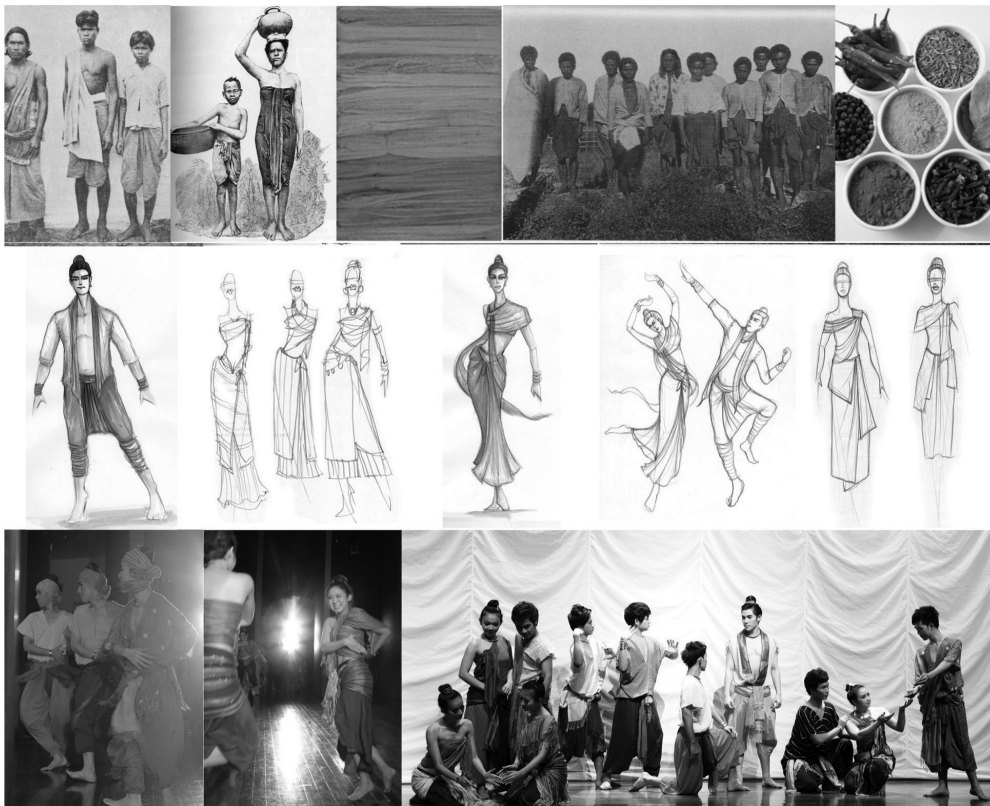


King Mahajanaka is saddened by the utter ignorance of his people in this painting by Preecha Thoathong. The giant sea crab that supported Prince Mahajanaka represents knowledge and wisdom. (Mahajanaka Jataka : Royal Version by HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 1996)

Inspiration for costumes design for the contemporary dance “Mahajanaka Jataka” By Kittikorn Nopudomphan

Costumes for this show are not a part of any designated historical period. The designer has divided costumes into three groups. First, the people of Champaka. Second, the imaginative world and third, the people of Mithila.

The people of Champaka – Inspired by tribal folk attire, from less development world. Using hand dye technique like ‘tie-dye’ with natural pigments to create simple patterns. Ornaments are made of colored-beads, coconut shell, wood, or silver (similar to hill tribe). It will represent a simple sufficiency, a life sensibly rely on nature. (Opposite to Mithila group)



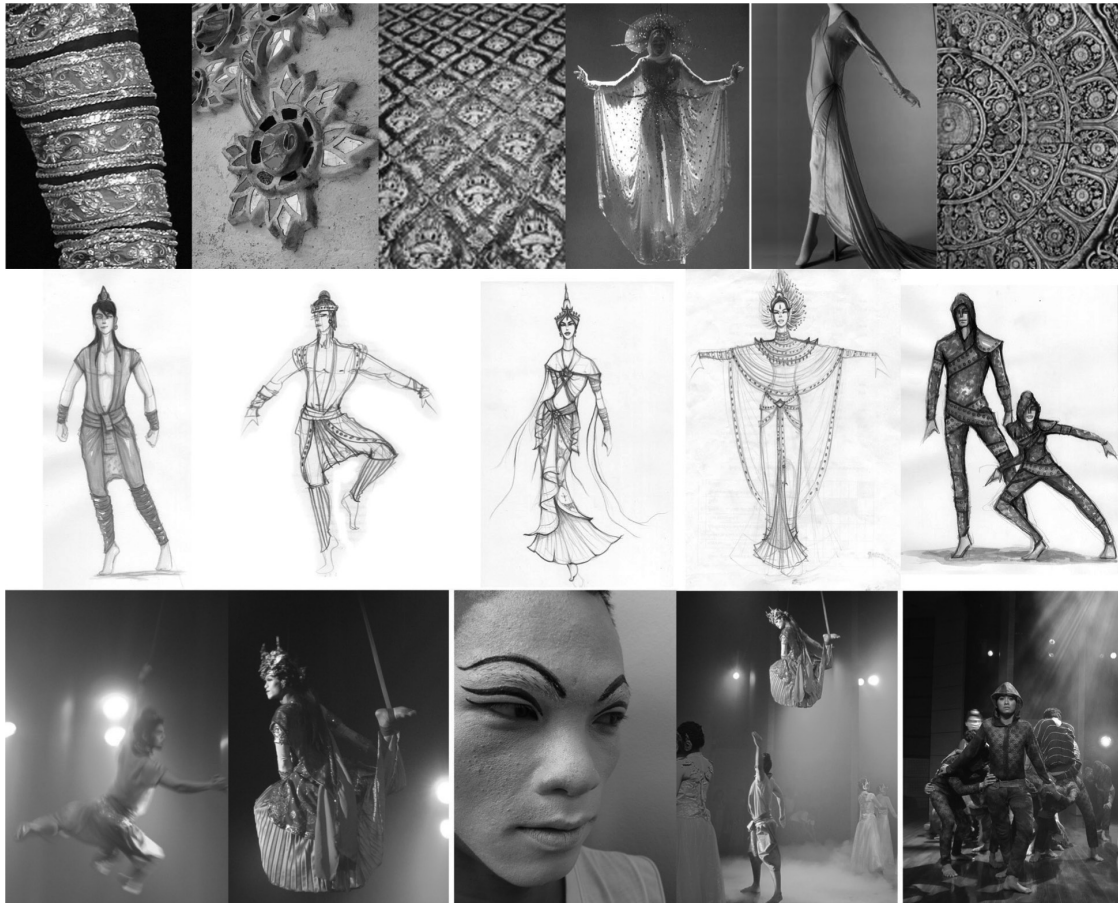
Row 1 Clothing model inspired by clothes of Thai local people and natural colors to show simplicity and sufficiency

Row 2 Sketch design of clothing of people in Champaka cultural group

Row 3 Overview of performance in the scene of Champaka

The Imaginative World - Costumes that represent the sea of desire, seduction, lust, anger, and fear. They are greatest enemy to perseverance as a deep ocean of sin that entices and drowns human. This has led to the design of abstract costumes with glamorous textiles in brilliant and lustrous motives, which represent the allure of

passion. The use of sensual design that reveal curves and lines of female bodies will represent the enticement of lust that trap human in a delusional world. Ornaments are an adaptation of Thai design, which may not exist in reality – the sign of imaginative world.



Row 1 Clothing model inspired by details of Thai beautiful and fascinating sculpture and light clothing structure indicating various concrete feelings such as Himmaphan creatures, junk, waves, storm, angles, etc.

Row 2 Sketch design of clothing of imaginative cultural group such as Mani Mekkhala Costume and junk

Row 3 Overview of performance in the scenes of appearance of Mani Mekkhala and travel by boat in the sea

The people of Mithila – inspired by attire of urban culture, a higher development world. Pattern and design are complex, composed of various details of shirts, pants and skirts. Using textiles with bright and contrast colors to represent chaotic and lavish life. Ornaments are silver, gold,

and valuable jewel; which represent undying greed and human lust for wealth, living in material world. (Opposite to Champaka group)



Row 1 Clothing model inspired by material progress and strongly-contrast colors indicating conflict, fight, and chaos

Row 2 Sketch design of clothing of people in Mithila Nakhon cultural group excessively emphasizing details

Row 3 Overview of performance in the scene of Mithila Nakhon people

Conclusion

First and Third group represent two contrast societies that hold different values. The first group's costumes represent idea of naturalism, sufficient, kindness and harmonious. The third group, the lavish and luxurious attires

represent a materialism society which people are selfish, amoral, and full of sinful passion.

Second group depicts the sea of carnality and lust, which lure those who have lost courage and fail to keep their persistent. Thus, they will never escape from suffering.

References

- Banlue Tham Institute. (2009). *The Ten Jataka Tales from Tipitaka*. Bangkok: Thammasapa.
- Bunman Sor. Nopphakun. (1997). *Tipitaka for general people/ Thammaraksa*. Bangkok: Sati.
- His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. (1997). *The story of Mahajanaka*. Bangkok: Amarin Printing & Publishing.
- Samitthiphon Netnimit. (2007). *Interdisciplinary in Jataka*. from http://www.mcu.ac.th/site/articlecontent_desc.php?article_id=104

