The Study of

Mahajanaka : The Virtue King

By Nantaporn Wongchestha

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Background

His Majesty King Bhumibol was interested in the sermon about King Mahahabaja’s visit to the Royal Park in the city of Mithila which done by the Reverend Somdej Pra Mahaviravongs of Rajpatikaram temple in 1977. Parts of the story was about King Mahajanaka entry the park, there were 2 standing mango trees, one bearing fruit and another barren. His Majesty was interested so he sought for the story of Mahajanaka in the Holy Tripitaka and translated it into the English language, straight from the Thai text with minor modifications for the sake of easier understanding of the text.

His Majesty completed the translation in 1988 and signified his desire to publish this book on the auspicious occasion of the Golden Jubilee of his reign in 1996. However, on the book launched date, His Majesty the King mentioned that Mahajanaka was his beloved one and considered to be the important one as well. “หนังสือนี้เป็นที่รักของข้าพเจ้า เป็นสิ่งที่เห็นว่ามีความสำคัญ”

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The theme concept of Mahajanaka was about King Mahajanaka practiced ultimate perseverance without the desire for reward which resulted in his gaining a throne and bringing prosperity and wealth to the city of Mithila.

However, upon arriving at the text concerning the mango trees, His Majesty the King thought that King Mahajanaka’s desire to leave the city on the quest for supreme tranquility was not yet opportune nor timely because Mithila’s prosperity had not yet reached an appropriate peak, because

... everyone “from the Viceroy down to the elephant mahouts and the horse handlers, and up from the horse handlers to the Viceroy, and especially the courtiers all live in the state of ignorance.”
His Majesty the King modified the original story in the 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. Because his subjects “lack wisdom as well as knowledge in technology; they do not see the essence of what is beneficial, even for their own good. Therefore, an institution of universal learning must be established.”

Moreover, King Mahajanaka had to advance his thoughts on how to revive the mango tree with nine modern methods.
State of problems

There was signs of Thailand's economy developed into a bubble fueled by "hot money" before the Asian financial crisis or "Tom Yum Gung Crisis" started in Thailand from financial collapse of the Thai baht in 1997.

Political turmoil during 1992-1996 started from Black May which the military crackdown protest against the government in Bangkok. The country faced leader crisis that it was run under military constitution of 1992 with 6 governments and 5 Prime Ministers.

On the coronation day, May 5th, 1950, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej affirmed in his accession speech in front of the grand audience that

"I shall reign with Dhamma for the benefit and happiness of all the Siamese (Thai people)."

This accession oath was uttered without any obligation under constitution or laws.
Objective

To find the meaning of “Mahajanaka”; the novel written by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej; in good governance dimension.

As Mahajanaka is His Majesty the King most beloved novel, and had been develop over 20 year before the launch in 1996 for his auspicious occasion 50th anniversary accession to the Throne.
Political philosophy of the Eastern approach:

In the East, Religion has a major role in politics as the social institute in order to create peaceful society. Religion mentions the realm of rulers as “norm” rather than obligation under constitution or laws.

“Dhamma” for the rulers refers to good governance as part of Buddhist teachings in Theravada Buddhism-based principles.

It appeared in the story that Mahajanaka applied Dasarajadhamma (ten rules of kingship) as principles of his governance that,

“The Great Being practiced the ten rules of kingship. He reigned with righteousness. He supported all the hermit buddhas.”
Theoretical Framework

Political philosophy of the Eastern approach:

- The good governance of the rulers in the study are the two concepts which normally are executed parallel to each other.
  - Dasarajadhamma (Ten rules of kingship)
  - Cakkavatti-vatta 12 (12 Ethical duties)

These two concepts are important to the King because in Thai administrative tradition, the king holds dual titles as both the Lord of Life and the Lord of the Land. With his unrestricted exercise of such powers, the King’s decision would possibly result in misery for the people. As a result, it is necessary to keep the powers in check and balance to the king whose virtue brings happiness to the people.

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Dasarajadhamma served as religious and moral principles that prevented the King from exercising his power at will, thereby adversely affecting his subjects.

The King who exercises his power accordance with “Raja-dhamma” is called “Dhamma Raja”

1. **Dana**: giving in a beneficial way
2. **Sila**: maintaining good conduct so as not to breach religious morals, laws and ethical norms
3. **Pariccaga**: making selfless sacrifice for the greater good
4. **Ajjava**: being loyalty, truthfulness and honesty
5. **Maddava**: being gentle and open-minded to reasonable advice and not being arrogant
6. **Tapa**: being diligence in consistently performing the royal duties, leading a simple life, and restraining mind from indulgence of sensual pleasure

7. **Akkodha**: not showing anger, not dwelling in hatred or vindictiveness against others, or being compassionate

8. **Avihimsa**: not afflicting harm on others including animals and all living things, adhering to peace and tranquility for all and not indulging himself in his power

9. **Khanti**: being patient and persevering against all emotions, be they greed, anger, ignorance or any kind of suffering and against abrasive words against him and maintaining calmness in his mind, composure, body and words

10. **Avirodhana**: being steadfast in righteousness, not allowing misdeeds, being just, rectifying those who do wrong and rewarding those who do right with justice.
12 Cakkavatti-vatta
(Duties of a Great Ruler)

1. Protect the members of the Royal household and Royal entourage.
2. Promote good relations with other states.
3. Provide for relatives in times of illness and death.
4. Support Brahmans, families, and all urban citizens.
5. Help those in the countryside and regions outside the capital.
6. Support the monks.
7. Protect animals and the environment.
8. Banish wrongdoing from the Kingdom.
10. Seek counsel from scholars and pious persons.
11. Exercise self-restraint, never going to places unbecoming of a king.
12. Avoid greed, and taking that to which one is not entitled.
The study found that Mahajanaka completed his Dasarajadhamma.

- Mahajanaka practiced Dana (giving in a beneficial way) by giving objects, forgiving and advising both human and goddess.

- Mahajanaka practiced Sila (maintaining good conduct so as not to breach religious morals, laws and ethical norms) as he committed to the Eight Precepts which stronger than that of The Five Precepts (abstain from harming living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication)

- Mahajanaka practiced Pariccaga (making selfless sacrifice for the greater good) through his concern about the greater prosperity and the wealth of the city than his own determination so he decided to establish an institution of universal learning in stead of leaving the city on a quest for supreme tranquility.
Mahajanaka’s Dasarajadhamma

- Mahajanaka practiced **Ajjava** (being loyalty, truthfulness and honesty) since he was young when he accepted teases as a “widow’s son” after knowing the truth. Later he admitted that he received more than he had planned from the perseverance, and honestly revealed his thought of Giant Sea Crab to the Brahmin, and he honored the promise he gave to Mani Mekhala to established the learning institute.

- Mahajanaka practiced **Maddava** (being gentle and open-minded to reasonable advice and not being arrogant) shown in the text that most of his interactive with others were done in open-minded and gentle manner, for example, he accepted deep sincerely apologies from Brahmin’s disciples from foolishly be parts of ripping mango tree apart.
Mahajanaka’s Dasarajadhamma

- **Mahajanaka practiced Tapa** (being diligence in consistently performing the royal duties, leading a simple life, and restraining mind from indulgence of sensual pleasure) **though his determination to bring back the throne of his King father**, later ruled the country by dhamma and his perseverance in seven day-swimming in the ocean.

- **Mahajanaka practiced Akkodha** (not showing anger, not dwelling in hatred or vindictiveness against others, or being compassionate) **that he did not express anger** when Mani Mekhala neglected on her duties while he was swimming in the ocean, his subjects pulled down the mango tree and the disciples admitted that they had part helping those subjects, even though he shown his anger once when he was teased by his playmates as a “widow’s son”.

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Mahajanaka’s Dasarajadhamma

Mahajanaka practiced **Avihimsa** (not afflicting harm on others including animals and all living things, adhering to peace and tranquility for all and not indulging himself in his power) by not afflicting harm on anyone shown when his subjects ripped down mango tree and in stead he decided to establish the learning institution.

Mahajanaka practiced **Khanti** (being patient and persevering against all emotions, be they greed, anger, ignorance or any kind of suffering and against abrasive words against him and maintaining calmness in his mind, composure, body and words) by being patient against his desire to have more of mangoes and be patient to the ignorance of his subjects at all level.

Mahajanaka practiced **Avirodhana** (being steadfast in righteousness, not allowing misdeeds, being just, rectifying those who do wrong and rewarding those who do right with justice) by preparing himself in order to survive when ship wrecked intellectually, fulfilling his duties as the rulers by establishing learning institution to solve problems of ignorance instead of ordaining.

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The study found that Mahajanaka completed his Dasarajadhamma.

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- Mahajanaka practiced **Sila** (maintaining good conduct so as not to breach religious morals, laws and ethical norms) as he committed to the Eight Precepts which stronger than that of The Five Precepts (abstain from harming living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication)
- Mahajanaka practiced **Pariccaga** (making selfless sacrifice for the greater good) through his concern about the greater prosperity and the wealth of the city than his own determination so he decided to establish an institution of universal learning in stead of leaving the city on a quest for supreme tranquility.
- Mahajanaka practiced **Ajjava** (being loyalty, truthfulness and honesty) since he was young when he accepted teases as a “widow’s son” after knowing the truth. Later he admitted that he received more than he had planned from the perseverance, and honestly revealed his thought of Giant Sea Crab to the Brahmin, and he honored the promise he gave to Mani Mekhala to established the learning institute.

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The Study found that Mahajanaka practiced 7 duties out of 12:

- Protect the members of the Royal household and Royal entourage.
- Provide for relatives in times of illness and death.
- Support Brahmans, families, and all urban citizens.
- Help those in the countryside and regions outside the capital.
- Support the monks.
- Banish wrongdoing from the Kingdom.
- Seek counsel from scholars and pious persons.

Duties that were not stated in the novel are

- Promote good relations with other states.
- Protect animals and the environment.
- Provide for the poor.
- Exercise self-restraint, never going to places unbecoming of a king.
- Avoid greed, and taking that to which one is not entitled.
The study found that Mahajanaka, the novel by His Majesty the King has further meaning beyond PERSEVERANCE which is known to be the main theme.

The study shown that Mahajanaka, the King of Mithila, had exercised his power through Dasarajadhamma and Cakkavatti-vatta 12. Dasarajadhamma was strongly presented in the story perfectly, while Cakkavatti-vatta 12 appeared partly. However, the story had convinced evidences that Mahajanaka had ruled his land by fulfilling both dhammas.

The study of Mahajanaka shown the characteristic of the Ruler and his good government so he is called “Dhamma Raja” or “the virtue King” in Eastern Political Philosophy approach.
Mahajanaka shown his being “Dhamma Raja” or the King of virtues which can be interpreted as the reflection in the dhamma of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej who is in Thai's hearts through his moral quality as the King throughout his long reign and proved that the King has lived up to the oath he took when he was crowned on 5 May 1950, which said,

“I shall reign with Dhamma for the benefit and happiness of all the Siamese (Thai people).”

When rounded up from close reading the novel with the context in Thailand at that time, it could be interpreted in good governance dimension that the important characters of the ruler is “Dhamma” especially in the turmoil.

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The story of Mahajanaka reflects the ruling realm by obtaining “dhamma” especially “Dasarajadhamma” in administration. The interpretation found that the meaning of Mahajanaka is far beyond PERSEVERANCE and should be practiced in every level in society.

His Majesty the King had wisely used the auspicious occasion of his 50th Anniversary Celebration of His Majesty’s Accession to the Throne to remind his subjects on profundity of “Dasarajadhamma” principles. As “Dasarajadhamma”, even though born over 2,500 years ago, remains contemporary in their essence and are compatible with modern administration concept globally.

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