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CONSTRUCTING THE SYMBOLIC
MEANING OF THE THAI MONARCHY IN
THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Master's Thesis

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Hereby I declare that I worked out this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature, and I did not present it to obtain another academic degree.

Prague, 7 August 2015

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SUMMARY

This thesis focuses on the fabricated image and the public representation of King Bhumibol - the current King of Thailand in two contemporary documentary films “My King” in 2012 and “Bhumibol - The People’s King” in 2013. The primary purpose of this study is to examine how the fabricated image of the current King of Thailand has been constructed through the utilization of contemporary documentary films.

The study argued that Bhumibol has borrowed the fabricated image and public representation from the European context, i.e. the fabricated public representation of Louis XIV. Indeed, the study has been inspired by the work of Peter Burke in 1992 entitled “The Fabrication of Louis XIV”. The aforementioned work of Burke, articles on the analysis of documentary films, literatures about the importance of images in Thai society were considered altogether in the empirical part of this study. The study pinpointed eleven specific attributes of the public representation of Bhumibol from the two documentary films. The characteristics consisted of “August”, “Father of the People”, “Generous”, “Godlike”, “Glorious”, “Hero of the Nation”, “Invincible”, “Laborious”, “Modernized”, “Pious”, and “Wise”.

On the basis of the results of this research, it can be concluded that the public representation of Bhumibol does not radically differ from that of Louis. The Thai King has adopted the essence of the fabricated image from the European role model. The Monarch has integrated it with the concept of globalization and modernity. The favorable fabricated image and the enforcement of the regime of images, the specific form of power that prevents negative comments and representations on the monarchical institution, have thoroughly legitimized and strengthened the Thai kingship.

Keywords: public image, monarchy, Bhumibol, Thailand, documentary films, regime of images

RÉSUMÉ

Cette recherche se concentre sur l'image fabriquée et la présentation publique du roi Bhumibol - le roi actuel de la Thaïlande - sur deux films documentaires contemporains "My King" en 2012 et "Bhumibol - The People's King" en 2013. Le but principal de cette étude est premièrement, d'examiner comment le roi actuel de la Thaïlande a représenté son image fabriquée par l'utilisation des documentaires contemporains.

L'étude a soutenu l'hypothèse que Bhumibol a emprunté l'image fabriquée et la représentation publique du contexte européen, c'est-à-dire, la représentation publique fabriquée de Louis XIV. En effet, l'étude a été inspirée par le travail de Peter Burke en 1992 intitulé "The Fabrication of Louis XIV". Le travail mentionné de Burke, des articles de l'analyse de films documentaires, les littératures de l'importance d'images dans la société thaïe ont été prise en compte dans la partie empirique de cette étude. L'étude a défini exactement onze attributs spécifiques de la représentation publique de Bhumibol à partir de deux films documentaires. Les caractéristiques ont consisté en "auguste", "le père du peuple", "généreux", "divin", "glorieux", "le héros de la nation", "invincible", "laborieux", "modernisé", "pieux" et "sage".

Sur la base des résultats de cette recherche, on peut conclure que la représentation publique de Bhumibol ne diffère pas radicalement de celui de Louis. Le Roi thaï a adopté l'essence de l'image fabriquée à partir du modèle européen. Le Monarque thaïe l'avait intégré ensemble avec le concept de la mondialisation et de la modernité. L'image fabriquée est donc favorable. L'exécution du régime d'images, la forme spécifique de pouvoir qui interdit des commentaires et des représentations négatifs portant sur l'institution monarchique, a à fond légitimé et ont renforcé la royauté thaïe.

Mot clés : Image publique, monarchie, Bhumibol, la Thaïlande, films documentaires, régime d'images

SHRNUTÍ

Tato práce se zaměřuje na konstruování veřejného obrazu krále Bhumibola - současného thajského krále, ve dvou novodobých dokumentárních filmech "Můj král" z roku 2012 a "Bhumibol - král lidu" z roku 2013. Hlavním cílem této studie je především zkoumat jak je za využití současného dokumentárního filmu vytvářen obraz současného thajského krále.

Studie vychází z předpokladu, že Bhumibol si propůjčuje způsob vytváření veřejného obrazu a reprezentace z evropského kontextu, tak jak byla popsána Peterm Burkem na příkladu konstruování veřejné reprezentace u Ludvíka XIV v díle "Výroba Ludvíka XIV" (The Fabrication of Louis XIV). Základ empirické části studie tak tvoří výše zmíněná Burkeho práce, články o analýze dokumentárních filmů a literatura o významu obrazů v thajské společnosti. Ze zmiňovaných dvou dokumentárních filmů bylo pak vybráno jedenáct specifických atributů veřejného obrazu krále Bhumibola: "Respektovaný", "Otec lidu", "Velkorysý", "Božský", "Slavný", "Hrdina národa", "Neporazitelný", "Pracovitý", "Moderní", "Zbožný", a "Znalý".

Na základě výsledků tohoto výzkumu je možné učinit závěr, že vytváření veřejného obrazu krále Bhumibola není radikálně odlišné od obdobného procesu u krále Ludvíka XIV. Thajský král tak převzal podstatu vytváření veřejného obrazu z evropského vzoru, přičemž ji obohatil a spojil se současnými jevy globalizace a modernity. Konstruovaný veřejný obraz thajského krále a prosazování způsobu držení moci za pomoci vlády obrazem, který se brání negativním komentářům a vyjádřením se k vládním institucím, tak legitimizoval a posílil současný thajský královský majestát.

Klíčová slova: veřejný obraz, monarchie, Bhumibol, Thajsko, dokumentární filmy, vláda obrazů

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Introduction

Peter Burke has argued that “the image-making of Louis XIV was a model for other monarchs” and that “the French monarch and his assistants were solicitous about the public representation”. Altogether, Burke asserts that “Louis [was] the monarch with ideology, propaganda, and the manipulation of public opinion” (Burke 1992, 2-4). To affirm the argument that Louis was a role model for other monarchs and rulers, Burke conducted a comparative study on the public representation of Louis and other precedent rulers, not only his contemporaries, but also some modern heads of state.¹ Burke’s study has proven that his argument was accurate. Nevertheless, Burke investigated merely the public representation within the European context. What would be the result if Burke had studied the public representation of the monarch from a different context, e.g., the Thai context? This research, therefore, examines the public representation of King Bhumibol, the current King of Thailand, in contemporary times. Principal assumptions of this study are that Bhumibol has borrowed his public image from Louis and that the status of the Thai kingship has been legitimized by his public image.

Bhumibol succeeded to the throne in 1946 and he has become the world’s longest ruling monarch. However, the King struggled to construct his public image in the face of many difficulties. Thai absolute monarchy was overthrown in 1932 and the aura of the kingship was defamed. The new administrative system was mostly led by the military junta that was hostile to the monarchical institution. Until the beginning of the 1950s, Bhumibol gradually rehabilitated the royal image. Subsequently, the kingship was fully restored when Bhumibol formed an alliance with military leaders. Since then, the King has reconstructed his public image effectively. Bhumibol and his network of princes initiated national visits in remote areas to expand the visibility of the kingship. Moreover, various apolitical activities, for instance, charitable donations to temples, hospitals, and schools were carried out. Bhumibol also started royal initiatives and projects that helped to develop the country.

Although Burke studied the public representation of Louis throughout his reign in all kinds of media, this study has limited its territory within the media and time frame. In other words, this research has concentrated on the public representation of Bhumibol in contemporary times, i.e., during 2012-2013. Additionally, the selection of analyzed media is restricted to documentary films. Two documentary films chosen for the research are “My King” in 2012 and “Bhumibol - The People’s King” in 2013. Both movies have furnished fruitful

¹ See “XII LOUIS IN PERSPECTIVE” page 179-203

resources to the study. They combine footage, still photographs, and narration that authors of the movies intended to convey to audiences. A reason to confine the time frame only to the contemporary time can be explained by the fact that the public representation of Bhumibol did not fundamentally change from the beginning of its construction. This can be seen from an old documentary film of the Thai royal family produced in 1979 by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) entitled “Soul of a Nation”.² In it, the story shows several national visits by Bhumibol. The Thai monarch also represented himself as the laborious king who carried out his royal duties industriously in order to develop and modernize the country. Indeed, the two documentaries in modern times illustrate the same public image of the King. However, they have the advantage of covering a longer period of time from the 1950s until the present time.

In order to examine the public representation of Bhumibol presented in the documentary films, the two movies are contemplated deliberately. Both movies are analyzed on the basis of literature from documentary film analysis, and most importantly the aforementioned work of Burke. The research attempts to extract specific characteristics of the public representation of Bhumibol as found in both documentaries. Then they are compared and contrasted with the fabricated image of Louis as pinpointed by Burke.

The thesis is thus divided into three parts. Firstly, the study provides theoretical and methodological considerations employed in the study. The second part discusses the importance of images in Thai society along with the introduction of the concept of divine kingship in Thailand, a specific form of power that prevents unfavorable representations towards the monarchical institution, and subsequently, a historical timeline on how Bhumibol has achieved the construction of his public image. The last part of the study is the analytical chapter. The two documentaries are contextualized and specific characteristics of the public image of Bhumibol are extracted. They are compared with the public image of Louis in order to find similarities and differences. This research is an empirical study therefore the outcomes are fundamentally based on an observation of the two documentaries. Therefore, some limitations such as the strengths and limitations of observation and the reading of documentaries are acknowledged. Moreover, the researcher is Thai by origin, hence, cautions

² The BBC documentary film entitled “Soul of a Nation” was produced in 1978 and broadcast in 1979. The production was granted access to follow Bhumibol and his family at the end of the 1970s when the King was performing his official duties.
See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2518829.stm>

such as making assumptions and being judgmental are also avoided throughout the analytical procedure.

The study on the public representation of Bhumibol in comparison with the European context has been under-examined. This lack of attention is significant because it will provide benefits to this study by conducting a new outcome to this field of research.

Chapter I: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

The crucial question of this research focuses how the fabricated image of the current King of Thailand has been constructed through the utilization of contemporary documentary films. Therefore, to find an answer to this research question, theoretical and methodological considerations are contemplated in this chapter.

The premise of a study of the fabricated image of the King in this research was inspired by the work of Peter Burke, entitled “The Fabrication of Louis XIV”. Burke examined invented image of Louis that were employed in public representations. His accomplishment was conducted chronologically. It started from the beginning of Louis’ reign and subsequently followed the success of the King in self-representation, and finally the downfall of the King’s image. Burke concluded that this study of the public image of Louis could be considered as a study of “propaganda”. It had the intention of transmitting social and political values, it also attempted to mold or manipulate public opinion (Burke 1992, 4). The process of the fabrication of the public image of Louis was deliberated by his assistants and eminent artists of that period (59). The concoction of these attributes served to glorify the King. Burke added that the intention of this study was to be “a contribution to the history of communication, the history of the production, circulation and reception of symbolic forms” (1). Therefore, numerous media in the public representations of Louis were exemplified. The King, for instance, appeared in paintings and portraits that also served as his substitutes, statues, equestrians, medals, prints, ballet, opera, and literature works.

Moreover, Louis also possessed some specific characteristics. The French king, for example, represented the center of the state and the whole commonwealth (9). Louis was also the father of his people (35). A feature of Louis as “godlike” was explained by Burke as meaning that rulers, for instance, Louis, were “the living images of God”. Also, the King was occasionally depicted in “the Renaissance tradition of identifying individuals with particular gods or heroes” (28). The public image of Louis was also associated with heroes from the past. The King was believed to be the new Alexander, the new Clovis, and the new Charlemagne (35). Portraits of Louis were intended to illustrate him as a handsome king. Gian Lorenzo Bernini said that the portraits were intended to “exaggerate what is fine, add a touch of grandeur and diminish what is ugly...or even suppress it when this is possible without flattery” (23). Louis triumphed over the forces of evil and disorder, therefore, he obtained the image of an invincible, omniscient, and triumphant King (200). In addition, an attribute of the just king depicted Louis as a restorer of laws and the arbiter of peace and glory (35). The pious Louis

was the most Catholic king (35). Likewise, Louis was presented as the laborious king who worked all night long while his people were sleeping (200). Moreover, lavish costumes (22) and magnificent palaces took part in this procedure as well. For Louis, the palace was a symbol of its owner and an extension of his personality (18). To this extent, people were bombarded with innumerable representations of the King.

In addition, Burke suggested that the image-making of Louis was a model for other monarchs and even modern Heads of State in the twentieth century (3). To demonstrate this argument, Burke carried out a comparative study of the self-representation of Louis and other kings who shared the same period with Louis and also preceding kings. Louis was claimed to have emulated and developed his public image from Philip IV - who was his uncle and also his father-in-law. According to Burke, the two potentates represented themselves with the same norms. They both believed in the idea of an elegant residential palace (181). Likewise, the two kings were likened to “the sun”. Philip was depicted as “the planet king”. Louis also represented himself as “the sun” to depict a connotation of the supreme leader (180). However, the mightiness of the Habsburg Empire of Philip did not require much presentation and glorification, while Louis required these means to secure and strengthen his position (184).

For our purposes, the most interesting part of Burke’s comparative analysis that can be related to this research is when he compared Louis with some modern Heads of State in the twentieth century such as Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and Lenin.³ Burke considered that “the means of persuasions employed by twentieth-century rulers...are analogous in certain important respects to the means employed by Louis XIV”. Likewise, the twentieth century leaders were shown as “products”. They were also “eulogized in the manner that was once reserved for princes” (199). Mutual features of Louis and the twentieth century rulers are a concept of hero of the nation, omniscient, invisible, and laborious king or leader. The rulers such as Stalin and Lenin, also inaugurated official statues of themselves. Burke mentioned that the writing of a title of Mussolini in capitals as “DUCE” was adopted from “LOUIS”. Likewise, the myth of the hero as omniscient, invincible, and destined to triumph over any evil and disorder was employed by the modern rulers (200). Mussolini adopted an image of “the leader working during the night while his people sleep” (200).

However, there were of course differences. The discrepancy can be divided into two groups: the form of delivery and the content. Contemporary media was employed in the representations of modern rulers. While Louis represented himself through works of art by

³ See “XII Louis in Perspective” page 179-203.

famous artists of his reign, the twentieth century leaders used photographic newspapers, and posters that were more quickly replicated. Audiovisual technology, for example, cinema, television, and short and simple film, that transmitted clear messages to audiences were adopted. Moreover, in terms of content, Louis represented “God” and also possessed “God power”, whereas the rulers represented “the nation” and gained power from “vote” (203).

Subsequently, Burke also reported a “reversal” of the image of Louis. Despite the fact that the public representations of Louis gained huge success, illness and immobility brought decline and the downfall of his representations.⁴ The artists encountered a discrepancy between the official image of the King and the everyday reality. In other word, it complicated the task of artists and writers.⁵

Indeed, the use of public image is not limited only to a European context. These rulers from the twentieth century lived in a European context, therefore, they shared the same background as Louis. However, it might be interesting to have a closer look at the Thai context. Consequently, this research therefore questions the public representations in contemporary times of the current Thai king, King Bhumibol. It can be speculated that two traditions have merged together between the Thai tradition of the monarchy and the modernized image of the ruler. Indubitably, there are similarities in the public representation of Louis and the twentieth century rulers such as the means of persuasion. Nevertheless, there were also differences in the content. The hypothesis of this research conjectures that the means of persuasion of Bhumibol might not be different from Louis and the form of his public representation could be inspired by the modern heads of state. Subsequently, we can assume that the public image of the Thai king has safeguarded the Thai monarchical institution from downfall. Consequently, the key goal of this thesis is to test this hypothesis in this research.

1.1 Sources

Due to the limited extent of the Master’s thesis, this research cannot be expanded to the whole period of the reign of Bhumibol and all kinds of media. Instead, the main interest of this research has been restricted to the examination of the representation of fabricated image of the current King of Thailand to contemporary times. The media selected for this study is audiovisual. The reason for choosing audiovisual can be explained by the fact that this type of media is one of the most powerful by which to disseminate propaganda. It is also the most

⁴ See “X THE REVERSE OF THE MEDAL” page 135-149

⁵ See “IX THE CRISIS OF REPRESENTATIONS” page 125-133

effective communication method in contemporary times. Audiences perceive and digest messages easily through sight and sound. The medium also carries a high chance of recall. Likewise, audiovisual benefits from easy access as people can reach the media readily and rapidly through proliferation of television channels and online video-sharing websites. According to Schnettler and Raab, audiovisual media influence the perception of reality of audiences fundamentally (Schnettler & Raab 2008, 17-18). In general, Godmilow said that “documentary is the conceit of the real which substantiates the truth claims made by these films (Godmilow 1997, 81). Most audiences presume that information presented in these films is factual information (Department). Bill Nichols, an American film critic and founder of the contemporary study of documentary, asserts that documentary film can be regarded as “discourses of sobriety”. Often, documentary presents an “epistemic knowledge” because it provides “an economy of analysis and historical and ideological processes” (Nichols 1991, 35).

Undeniably, the fabrication of public image through audiovisual was not originally invented by the Thai monarchical institution. It is perfectly plausible that the Thai king was inspired by other monarchs. One of the most famous examples is a British documentary from 1953 entitled “A Queen is Crowned”. The film was labeled as the most successful non-fiction film at the British Box Office in 1953. The movie received great acclaim throughout Great Britain and also in the United States. Indeed, the coronation of Elizabeth II did not only “reflect popular attitudes towards the monarchy, it also elevated “the institution of monarchy in the modern era” (Chapman 2002, 82, 85). From the above, one can say that audiovisual is important in the process of the fabrication of a public image. Therefore, it can be studied as a tool of image fabrication in this research.

The audiovisual medium that has been selected for this research is documentary films. Two documentaries, “My King” from 2012 and “Bhumibol - The People’s King” from 2013 are taken into consideration. The two films present the life and works of the King since his childhood and include his works from the 1950s up to the present day. The two films can be regarded as royal propaganda. It is stated in the final credits that they were made under the supervision of the royal household. The reasons for selecting these two movies are as follows: firstly, they are easy to access, they can be downloaded and studied outside of Thailand with only internet access. Secondly, both documentaries are successful and well-known amongst Thai audiences. Moreover, they present all important events from the coronation of Bhumibol in 1950 until the celebration of the enthronement of Bhumibol as the world’s longest ruling monarch in 2006.

The first documentary, “My King”, was created in 2012. The supervisor of this project was the President of the Royal Foundation, Dr. Sumeth Tantivejakul. The film was part of a colossal plan to celebrate the eighty-fifth birthday of Bhumibol in 2012. The script of the movie proceeds chronologically from Bhumibol’s early life until the present day. Moreover, it is designed to portray nine aspects of intelligence of the King that have been exploited to develop the country and the livelihood of the people. In addition, National Geographic is stated on the documentary box and cover as one of the associated partners of this documentary. The knowledge of cooperation with National Geographic brought huge attention from people in Thailand.

In 2013, “Bhumibol - The People’s King” was launched to celebrate the eighty-sixth birthday of Bhumibol. It was made under the guidance of Preecha Songkittisuntorn, the director of the Office of His Majesty’s Principal Private Secretary (OHMPPS). The movie was claimed to have been scheduled for airing on the History Channel. The content of the documentary was clearly adapted from the one in 2012. The length of the movie, however, is shorter than the previous version. The plot of the film aims to depict Bhumibol as the hero of the nation hence the beginning of the movie differs from the one produced in 2012. It commences with a political uprising against the government that is eventually smoothed over by an admonition from Bhumibol. The two documentaries were produced by an entertainment company entitled STG Multimedia Limited. The agency is the national exclusive distributor of various leading foreign channels, for instance, the Discovery Channel, National Geographic channels, and the History Channel.⁶

Nevertheless, this research is well aware of a notable documentary film produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1979 entitled “Soul of a Nation”. The crucial storyline of the movie focuses mainly on the royal initiatives of the Thai royal family, particularly on their national visits. Additionally, the filmmaker also depicts geographical images and living conditions of Thailand at that time. The movie from the late 70s, however, merely focuses on a short period from 1977-1978. Although it illustrates Thai ancient court rituals and the life and works of the royal couple, this dated documentary film does not deliver the whole story of Bhumibol up until the present time. Consequently, it does not fulfill the goal of this research which is to study the contemporary image of the Thai monarch.

⁶ See <http://stg.co.th>

1.2 Method of Analysis of Documentaries

To develop a solid analysis, the hidden message in the two selected documentaries will be analyzed on the basis of two literatures. The first piece of literature deals with techniques applied in documentary film, and is entitled “Introduction to Documentary” by Bill Nichols. The second is entitled “Looking at Documentaries: Educational Resource” by Alexandra Anderson. Anderson suggests a list of things that should be looked for in a documentary. The first and foremost thing to look for is any “intention” that lies behind the film or video. The second thing is a “point of view” in the documentary, the viewer should investigate what has been included and excluded from the documentary. It also helps the viewer to see any bias of the filmmakers. However, Anderson claims that sometimes “bias can be difficult to detect in the documentary because of the overt realism of its image” (Anderson n.d., 6). A “voice of documentary” is also eminent. The documentary reader should be able to tell whether it is sympathetic, critical, or impartial. Likewise, the “camera angles” are crucial. This includes whether the subject of the documentary is depicted at eye-level, high angle, or low angle. Indeed, Anderson advises that the viewer should analyze “images or shots” of the documentary. “Close-ups” highlight important messages assumed by the filmmakers. “Medium shots” serve as the scope of human visions in an impartial way. “Wide shots” give “information about the context and the relationship of the subject to his or her environment”. Lastly, “evidence” such as an archive of past events, news footage, home movies, photographs, images of text, and headlines from newspapers can boost the “veracity” of the documentary. Nevertheless, Anderson seems to overlook other important evidence that can depict accuracy in the documentary which is interview. This common technique of the documentary permits people to speak directly about events or subjects of the documentary. Interview also gives the viewer a sense of realism and validity as the point of view of the filmmakers is mutually shared by another person or source.

Bill Nichols also offers methods of writing about documentaries effectively.⁷ Nichols adds that note taking while watching a documentary is beneficial as it supplies “raw material” that will later serve to support the stage of analytical and critical writing. Furthermore, Nichols states that “an emotional response has to be shaped into a critical analysis” (Nichols 2001, 170). An adequate way to analyze the documentary is to “make a point” first then “provide supporting evidence” (170). Likewise, Nichols strongly recommends that the documentary critic should avoid giving “opinions that lack supporting evidence” at all cost (171).

⁷ See Chapter 8 How Can We Write Effectively about Documentary? page 168-177

Nevertheless, Nichols and Anderson also pointed out a limitations of the documentary analysis. Nichols says that the documentary reader may have to choose what to focus on as “[one] cannot concentrate on everything at once” (Nichols 2001, 170). Likewise, Anderson asserts that “there is no right or wrong way to read a documentary”. A diverse cultural background and national contexts act as a main factor in a way that a documentary is read and understood differently (Anderson n.d., 7).

The public image of Bhumibol as found in the two movies is classified into sets of attributes in an analytical procedure. The two films are contextualized. The analysis is not taken from what the King did. Instead, what matters is what the film says the King has done throughout the two movies. The attributes of the contemporary King of Thailand can be divided into eleven attributes: “august”, “father of the People”, “generous”, “godlike”, “glorious”, “hero of the nation”, “invincible”, “laborious”, “modernized”, “pious”, and “wise”. Scenes and footage from the movies are picked up and used as a supporting evidence of each attributes of the King.

Indeed, the attributes presented in this research are inspired by the aforementioned specific characteristics of Louis in the work of Burke. Burke presented an interesting aspect where the monarch is praised by employing only positive adjectives. In general, Louis was narrated as august, brilliant, glorious, laborious, heroic, and invincible for instance (Burke 1992, 35). Nevertheless, Burke also informs us that “they [these adjectives] should not be taken out of context and treated as a lie invented by the writer to flatter the monarch”. It was normal for poets and writers, in the seventeenth century, to follow this strict rule of using favorable adjectives in every form of panegyric. However, Burke insists that “some poets were skilled in praising while appearing not to do so”. Moreover, due to cultural difference and the passing of time, the employment of these adjectives provokes “anachronistic judgments” for modern viewers (36). It is probable to say that the specific features of the Thai king as presented in the two documentary films were developed from the favorable characteristics of Louis. Nevertheless, there might be some similarities and some differences based on dissimilar cultures and traditions.

The aforementioned list of attributes of the Thai king can be exemplified here. The first attribute, “august” illustrates the respect and affection of the Thai population toward Bhumibol, as depicted in the movies. The King is claimed to be loved by the Thai population because he has developed their way of life. The feature of “father of the people” is illustrated by the idea of equality of people under the reign of Bhumibol, and the idea of the patriarch who guides the

country and the accessible king. The feature of “generous” is demonstrated through charitable projects and large donations to victims of natural disasters. The sacred image of “godlike” is similar to that of the French King, except that the idea of God in this case is derived from Hinduism. Bhumibol also represents the universe. Great respect from other worldly monarchs and institutions outside Thailand is presented as an attribute of the “gloriousness” of Bhumibol. The Thai King also possesses an image of “hero of the nation” who defends against any threat to the Thai nation. The “invincible” attributes of Bhumibol is also close to that of the French monarch. Bhumibol is claimed to be able to paint an oil painting in an ill health to prove that the sickness cannot defeat him. An image of “laborious” is the core of the two movies. The royal family is alleged to devote their time to visiting the population in every region. Bhumibol is also presented as a laborious and industrious King who works even during episodes of ill-health. The trait of “modernizing” king has been related to the idea of progress that Bhumibol adopted in the development of the country. According to ancient tradition, Thai kings are upholders of the Buddhism faith. Therefore, Bhumibol is depicted as a “pious” king who supports all religions in the Thai kingdom equally. Lastly, Kingship cannot be achieved only by blood, the Thai king is shown as having acquired a superhuman trait of being “wise”. This trait is also represented as the core of the two movies. The reason for selecting these features is because not only can they be clearly seen in the two movies, but they are also similar to the features that were employed in the public representation of Louis.

The perception of audiences of the two monarchs are alike. The viewers of Louis’ presentations were familiar with the norms of positive presentation, therefore, “their expectations and interpretations were shaped”. Indeed, seventeenth century audiences seemed to “have had no objection” to the representation of Louis (Burke 1992, 19). It might sound anachronistic to say this, but, Thai audiences still have the same reactions as those audiences in the seventeenth century had of Louis. They do not seem to show any objection towards the presentation of Bhumibol either.

However, a dissimilarity in the interpretation of panegyric of Louis and Bhumibol needs to be clarified. For Louis, “a panegyric is not necessarily a pure praise”. Burke indicated that the eulogy was a thoughtful form of advice suggesting the prince “not as he was but as one hoped he might be” (Burke 1992, 37). For Bhumibol, Thai audiences have taken the representation of Bhumibol and solemnly believe that this is how the monarch is.

Eventually, the techniques of documentary films and the examination of the attributes of the public image of Bhumibol are considered. Nevertheless, some limitations such as the strengths and limitations of observation and reading documentaries are acknowledged.

Cautions such as making assumptions and being judgmental are also avoided throughout the analytical procedure.

Chapter II: Image of the King in the Thai Society

Although this research is formed on the basis of the public representation of Bhumibol that is inspired from a European context, the Thai local culture of kingship and image of the King is also significant. The dissimilarity between the social contexts alters the perception of the audiences. This chapter, therefore, concentrates on, firstly, a notion of Asian divine kingship, the importance of images in the Thai society and, subsequently, provides a historical discussion on the procedures undertaken by Bhumibol in order to gain and develop his public image.

2.1 Divine Kingship

The notion of the Southeast Asian kingship was established on the concept of the Universal Monarch. The foundation of this belief in Thai divine kingship in Thailand commenced in the fifteenth century and adheres to a *mélange* of Brahmanism, Hindu gods, and Buddhism. The Thai divinity of the king derives from an accumulation of good acts and “religious merit” from the past. (Heine-Geldern 1942, 22, 24). In addition to Heine-Geldern, Maurizio Peleggi argued that the Thai overlords exercise their absolute power in the form of “lords of life” in their godly kingship (Peleggi 2007, 92). In the Brahman doctrine, there is a central continent called “*Jambudvipa*”. In it are contained seven oceans and seven continents. In the center of *Jambudvipa* emerges Mount *Meru*. The sun and the moon circulate around this cosmic mountain. In Buddhism, Mount *Meru* is “the center of the universe” surrounded by seven mountains and seven seas. However, Buddhists consider that *Jambudvipa*, where men lived, is situated at the south of the mountain. And at the summit of the mountain is an abode of the four Great Kings who served as the guardians of the world. The relationship between Mount *Meru* and the sanctity of the king can be perceived from coronation rituals. The throne where the king is seated is represented by the mountain. Indeed, the allegation of the god power of the king is also used as “a justification for usurpation of the throne” (Heine-Geldern 1942, 16-17, 21, 23). The sacredness of the kingship is displayed through the importance of regalia, a nine-tiered umbrella and the crown. These objects possess “a cosmological meaning”. The umbrella is referred to as “the seat of the protective genius who advises the king in any critical moment”. Indeed, kings who can retain these magical items are considered as having supernatural might (26).

2.2 Importance of Images in Thai Society

Image is a key factor in Thai society. The significance of images prompts a specific form of power entitled “the Regime of Images”. This regime is an internal power that supervises actions and discourse in the private and public spheres to make sure that any unwanted representations do not appear in the society (Jackson, “Thai Regime” 181). In addition to Jackson, Rosalind Morris argues that Thai society loves “the disciplined surface” and “an over-investment in appearances” (qtd. in Jackson, “Thai Regime” 181). Likewise, Niels Mulder asserts that “Thai society is a presentational society...in which outside appearance is taken to be the essence of social life (qtd. in Jackson, “Thai Regime” 189). In addition, Penny Van Esterik agrees that Thai society promotes “an essentialism of appearances or surfaces...the real is hidden and unchallenged [and] the surface is taken for the real” (Van Esterik 2000, 4). The Thai regime of images observes intensely “surface effect, images, public behavior, and representations” (181). This form of power is enforced fully by legal authorities. Jackson asserts that when a representation is considered to upset the smooth calmness of social life, it can be made invisible by the power of the state (184). In the following paragraphs, the origin of this regime is discussed.

The Thai regime of images emerged originally in the nineteenth century from a critical colonial treat. As part of responses to Western imperial power, Siam (the former name of Thailand) assembled an image of a civilized state to preserve its independence. The modernization of the state in the nineteenth century was “a necessary measure to save the country by satisfying the Europeans or minimizing the precondition of colonization”. The Siamese elites, however, were not hostile to Westerners (Winichakul, 532). Indeed, those elites and monarchs were well aware that only projected images of civilization were sufficient to impress Westerners (Jackson, “Performative State” 220). At first, a performative impression was implemented. Royal plays such as dramatic dances were chosen as the main performances for depicting a divine royalty. The dances were claimed to display “the symbolic representations of the authority, legitimacy, and power of the Siamese court” (Jackson, “Performative State” 225). Likewise, Mary Louise Grow mentioned that “[these performances were] hoped [to] entertain and impress foreign visitors...and encouraging them to reevaluate their negative perspectives of the kingdom” (qtd. in Jackson, “Performative Stage” 236). Subsequently, the Siamese monarch realized that it would be better to refine its state by itself. Davis Wyatt stated that Siam decided to adopt an auto colony procedure by borrowing the systems of many European colonies such as Singapore, Burma, and India. Consequently, Siam transformed its state into a miniature European colony (qtd. in Jackson, “Performative State”

233). The auto colonial state, however, only operated on the public surface. Jackson argued that the civilized image only appeared on the surface of the public sphere while the private context remained local (Jackson, “Performative State” 222).

At the beginning of the modern period, the regime of images was operated for different reasons from those of the pre-modern time. The intention of the regime of images was not to impress Westerners anymore. The modern regime of images became a foundation for the Thai modern state. The modern regime has developed into “the national identity and culture of Thailand” (Jackson, “Performative State” 242). Undeniably, the Thai regime of images that was created by monarchs in the pre-modern period served as a tool to convert state bureaucracy and to organize people in the name of civilization (242). Nevertheless, after the abolition of Thai absolute monarchy in 1932, the regime of images has been applied as a scheme for modern civil servants to display respectable images of themselves while portraying monarchs with prodigal images (242). A new constitutional system in Thailand was implemented mostly by military bureaucrats. The main military leader was field marshal Phibun (in office 1938-44, 1948-57). The regime of images under the government of Phibun was fully employed to modernize the public sphere of the Thai nation and to display the right to rule of the military. David Wyatt argued that Phibun banned pictures of the former king and queen from being displayed in households and in government offices (qtd. in Jackson, “Performative State” 214).

It was only in the 1950s and 1960s that the monarchy could rehabilitate the regime of images. The regime of images was returned to its original purpose of portraying positive images of the king. The military leader in the 1960s bolstered the importance of the monarchy extensively (Jackson, “Performative State” 246). The modern Thai monarchy has revitalized the traditional charisma of the king. The Thai monarchy now represents a timeless institution. The Thai dynasty enjoys its historical continuity and an image of righteous kingship. (Ünaldi 2012, 23). Søren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager also assert that images of the contemporary Thai king are depicted in “a hagiographical literature” in which they replicate an “idealist notion of kingly virtue, power and benevolence”. Moreover, since the 1960s, the Thai royal family has been protected by strict lese-majeste laws (Ivarsson and Isager 2010, 3). Additionally, Jackson asserts that “the greatest domain of unspeakability in modern Thailand surrounds the monarchy” (Jackson, “Thai Regime” 194). This authoritarian control severely punishes those who make negative comments about the monarchy (Jackson, “Thai Regime” 194). In addition to Jackson, Patrick Jory argues that public discussion or comments about the royal family can only be accepted when they are in a eulogy (Jory 2001, 204).

Indeed, Thai monarchs possess the same norms in public representations. The modern regime of images considers that the notorious reputation of the late Thai king affects the image of the current king. Control over representations of former monarchs is therefore in operation. The ban of the movie “Anna and the King” serves as an illustrative example of the operation of such control mechanisms. The story of “Anna and the King” is a controversial issue within the Thai regime of images due to the fact that it concerns the public image of king Mongkut (r.1851-1868). Anna Leonowens served as governess to Mongkut’s children in Siam during the period 1862-67. After five years in Siam, Leonowens returned home and published two books entitled “The English Governess at the Siamese Court” in 1870 and “The Romance of the Harem” in 1873. The two books gained huge success and were adapted into a plays and movie. However, Patrick Jory reported that the illustrated images of Mongkut by Westerners contrasted with the norms of image of the King within the Thai regime of images. Mongkut was portrayed by foreigners as “a capricious, cruel, and often foolish tyrant” (Jory 2001, 203). In contrast, the Thai regime of images depicted Mongkut as “the king who saved the nation from imperialism”, “the first modern king”, “a Buddhist intellectual and reformer”, “a political and cultural reformer”, and “a national hero” (206). Therefore, the story of Anna and the King remains taboo in Thailand. In consecutive paragraphs, the notion of Southeast Asian kingship and the historical process of how Bhumibol acquired his crucial public representation are discussed.

2.3 King Bhumibol

Bhumibol is the ninth king from House of *Chakri* which has established in 1782. He was born as the youngest son of Mahidol’s family on December 5, 1927, in Boston. The other two siblings of Bhumibol were born in 1923 and in 1925 (Ananda, later became Rama VIII). His father, Prince Mahidol, was son of Rama V (r.1868-1910). Bhumibol’s mother, Sangwal, was a commoner. Prince Mahidol was the half-brother of Rama VII (r.1925-1935), therefore, his two sons were elevated to the status of High Prince (Handley 2006, 14).

A situation of the Mahidols in Thailand was unrest. Rama VII (r. 1925-1935) was incapable of governing the country and was claimed to have misspent palace finances (Handley 2006, 16, 39). The failure of the king caused a resistance from some people. Rama VII was aware of this opposition, therefore, the King emphasized his public image by making himself accessible to the public by journeying across the country to remote areas and promoting “new agricultural methods” (39). Rama VII also showed up at academic lectures and bestowed diplomas to newly graduated college students to promote himself as the cultivated monarch

(39). The regime of images prevented and banned negative comments about Rama VII. The royalist newspapers were promoted whereas the critical ones were closed (40). Nevertheless, on 24 June, 1932, a group of well-educated civil servants who called themselves “the People’s Party” had seized power and had replaced the Thai absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy bloodlessly. On the same day, the revolutionists announced their declaration. The People’s Party stated that their aim was not to abolish the kingship. However, the king must be under the law of a constitutional monarchy and cannot do anything independently without the approval of the assembly of the people’s representatives (Yimprasert 2010, 38). Rama VII accepted the change and signed the first constitution. The seventh king, nevertheless, attempted to request the right to control the government. The constitutional government refused to accept this request. The King went into exile. He abdicated in England in 1935 and suggested the government pass the throne to the Mahidols (49). The accession to the throne went as Rama VII planned. The Mahidols accepted the throne but insisted on remaining in Europe.

After the downfall of the monarchical system, Thailand was governed by a military government. The entity that had the most significant negative effect on the era of the kingship was the aforementioned regime of Field-Marshal Phibun (in office 1938-44, 1948-57). The Thai leader refused to acknowledge the existence of the monarchical institution. Phibun constructed a huge monument entitled “Democracy Monument” on the main avenue in Bangkok. He also cut off all royal power by limiting “travels and activities of senior royals”. Pictures and portraits of the former king and queen were excluded from households, shops, and government offices. Only pictures of Phibun were allowed to be shown in these places (Handley 2006, 60; Jory 2001, 214). When Rama VII passed away in 1941, Phibun’s government did not seem to care about the royal cremation. Handley asserted that “there was no cremation pyre representing Mount *Meru*, the Hindu abode of the gods, and the ambassador sent only a wreath, on behalf of King Ananda but not the government” (Handley 2006, 60). The gigantic victory over the monarchy was presented by establishing June 24, which was the date of the abolition of the absolute monarchy, as the Thai National Day (61). Moreover, the leader changed the name of the country from “Siam” to “Thailand” in 1949. He also commanded people to stop paying respect to the monarchy, instead, they should show respect to national icons such as the national anthem and the flag (61). Eventually, the downfall of Phibun occurred when he supported Japan during the Second World War and allowed Japanese troops to occupy the country in 1941 (62). The People’s Party cabinet did not agree with Phibun’s decision. An assembly of anti-Japanese troops and anti-Phibun sympathizers was set up. Phibun was forced to resign.

After the era of Phibun, the monarchy attempt to restore the regime of images. Bhumibol and Ananda attempted to fabricate their ritual images. The monarchs visited people in nearby provinces to promote the visibility of the kingship (69). Nevertheless, a serious loss was sustained by the Mahidols. On the morning of June 9, 1946, Ananda was found dead in his bedroom with a gunshot wound to his forehead (4). His death remains a mystery to this day. On the same day, Bhumibol was appointed Rama IX. Handley argues that the mysterious death of Rama VIII, however, had magnified the importance of the monarchical institution. The monarchy grew much more alive and essential with newspapers and radio reporting the demise of the late king repeatedly (81).

The political situation in Thailand was unstable. There was coup after coup. Also, Phibun sought to reclaim his power in the government. By the end of 1951, a sudden, massive political change occurred. On November 29, 1951, Phibun and his close civil servant, Sarit, seized power and overthrew the constitution that had been in operation since 1949. Phibun also appointed himself as Regent of Bhumibol (113). Moreover, Phibun elected himself as Prime Minister and expelled royalist representatives from the parliament (115).

The rehabilitation of the monarchical regime of images ceased. To fight back, Bhumibol struggled to build up a positive royal image. A network of princes and nobles was set up to plot all procedures for Bhumibol (119). McCargo argues that the network monarchy represented a certain nostalgia for the pre-1932 absolute monarchy that the Thai king and his allies had forged as a para political institution” (McCargo 2005, 501). In accordance with McCargo, Chris Baker notes that “[the network monarchy] is a very practical fact in a society where institutions do not always work as they should and personal contacts are what get things done” (qtd. in Ünaldi, “Modern Monarch” 11). This network aimed to promote visibility of the kingship to peasants. Therefore, a national tour was set up for Bhumibol. The plan however was turned down by Phibun with the reason that it would be dangerous for the King to travel to remote areas. To make sure that the royal network would not accomplish this goal, Phibun also cancelled the royal budget. Handley asserts that Phibun snatched this opportunity to commence his own rural tour (Handley 2006, 120). With no hope of having a tour across the country, Bhumibol changed his plan and focused on charitable activities. The King donated to temples, schools, and hospitals. Most of the donations were made in the King’s name. Handley explains that the reason behind the donations for healthcare were that they were apolitical and would not be stopped by Phibun (122). Likewise, the royal network urged Bhumibol to carry out royal duties which Bhumibol still follows to this day. The second attempt of Bhumibol to take a national tour as an excuse to prevent Communism came in 1954. Again, the government

did not allow it to happen. Nevertheless, this time the royal network had a better strategy for fighting back. Rama IX started a national radio station and transmitted a message to people in the border areas that he would visit them in the near future (127).

Eventually, Phibun allowed Bhumibol to make a national tour in 1955. However, it seemed to be a wrong decision on Phibun behalf. Rama IX went to the most problematic areas in the north-eastern part of the country. He was greatly welcomed by huge crowds and people were excited to see the living monarch. This success frightened the fascist leader and he suspended the other tours of the King (128). The King returned to the old strategy of charitable donations. The network encouraged him to donate large sums of money to natural disaster victims (130). Bhumibol also developed a religious image by entering the monkhood for a short period in 1956. The public image of Bhumibol has been prosperous from this period.

The public image of Bhumibol became popular at the same time political situations of Phibun went downhill. Sarit, the closest civil servant of Phibun who had helped him seize power over the monarchy, had particularly changed his attitude. Sarit wanted to become important in politics and he realized that it would be better to get support from the palace by showing fealty toward the King. Sarit began to criticize the government for defaming the monarchy and encouraged the use of the lese-majeste law. The objections against Phibun increased. In September 1957, Phibun went to meet the King and asked for royal support. Bhumibol, by that time, was so confident in Sarit that he told Phibun to resign to prevent a coup. Phibun, however, refused this order and, later that evening, Sarit did what the King had predicted (138). The palace showed supportive acknowledgement toward Sarit's coup. Chakrabongs argued that the action of Sarit was regarded as a good deed and that Sarit would have His Majesty's full blessing due to the fact that Sarit had protected the people, safeguarding national welfare, and the monarchy (qtd. in Handley 2006, 337).

It was indeed under the regime of Sarit that Bhumibol finally succeeded in fabricating his favorable public image. The monarchical institution was returned to the central orbit of Thai society. Patrick Jory claims that Bhumibol represented his favored image as "the jazz player", "the head of the family", "the development planner", "the father of the nation", "the Head of State", and "the pious Buddhist". In other words, the image of the Thai king was "multi-faceted". Jory claims that the presentation of images of Bhumibol appeared in various forms. Photographs and portraits of Bhumibol and the royal family were put in "prominent places" in every household, shop, government and business office, temple, and school. A short report of the daily royal news was aired at prime time on every TV channel and short TV documentaries praising the King for his dedication to the nation were frequently screened.

Indeed, these images of Bhumibol accumulated at “certain times of the year” such as in December, the month of the King’s birthday (Jory 2001, 208). The royal monarch became more essential while Sarit could strengthen his political position. Sarit adopted the idea of being grateful and obedient to the lord of life (Handley 2006, 140). The National Day was shifted from the date of the overthrow of the monarchy to Bhumibol’s birthday. Queen Sirikit was honored with the title of Commanding Colonel (144). The official royal budget was steadily increased. The renovation of the royal residential palace was financed by the government budget. Moreover, Sarit allowed Bhumibol to go on a national tour again. The King went to the northern provinces for two weeks and a year later the trip was resumed in the southern provinces (143). In addition, the King also embraced world tours to promote the visibility of his kingship to other worldly monarchs. Bhumibol visited fifteen anti-communist countries in the West and fourteen capital cities in Europe between 1960 and 1963 (145-47). The royal network launched a new program to remunerate the upper-class and elites who had been big donors to the royal family. The selected donors would be invited to the royal charity and their children would be accepted into the royal school, *Chittlada*, established in the palace (149-50). Sarit went further and revived the lese-majeste law. Streckfuss asserts that under the regime of Sarit, any offense against the monarchy was considered to be against national security as well (qtd. in Peleggi 2007, 99). Bhumibol was grateful to the regime of Sarit. The King proclaimed that the country owed Sarit (Handley 2006, 154). Sarit died in 1963. His funeral was elevated to the same level as princes and his body was placed under a royal five-tier umbrella (155).

The position of the King had strengthened under the regime of Sarit. Bhumibol had legitimized the full extent of his power. The death of Sarit did not lessen the prominence of the monarchy. From the 1960s until the present, the King has maintained the same patterns and strategies that were deliberated by the royal network. Bhumibol gained affection and respect from the people and overcame political power. Bhumibol is now regarded as the Head of State and the Hero of the Nation. These successes derived from perfect strategies and a strong alliance with military power. Once the foundation of the kingship became stable, Bhumibol did not take national tours quite as often as before. The promotion of the kingship shifted into a new format. Documentaries and the media were employed to propagate the virtuous and positive image of the King. In 2006, Bhumibol was also proclaimed as the world’s longest-ruling monarch. Nowadays, the 87-year old King visits a hospital often due to ill health. However, the public image of Bhumibol remains unchanged. The ill health does not affect his

image and does not cause the downfall of his public representation as happened to Louis.⁸ Bhumibol's royal network still performs all royal activities in the King's name. Whenever the King stays in hospital for a long time, the royal team changes its strategy. Therefore, Bhumibol is presented often to people in the hallway of the hospital to show that his health is in a good state and that he can come down and greet the public. From now on, it will be compelling to see what will happen after the reign of Bhumibol. The royal household still has not signaled any indication of new strategies to protect the throne in the modern world. The monarchical regime of images will have to prove its power in order to legitimize and strengthen the throne.

⁸ See "VIII SUNSET" page 107-123

Chapter III: Analysis of Documentary Films

This chapter analyzes the fabricated image of the current Thai king from two contemporary documentary films: “My King” in 2012 and “Bhumibol - The People’s King” in 2013. The structure of this chapter firstly focuses on general information and the narrative of the two documentaries. Later, the point of view of the two films is discussed to give some examples of what has been included and excluded from the two films. Subsequently, an analysis of the fabricated image of Bhumibol as presented in the movies on the basis of specific attributes derived from the work of Burke is contextualized. The specific attributes of Bhumibol comprises eleven fabricated image: “august”, “father of the people”, “generous”, “godlike”, “glorious”, “hero of the nation”, “invincible”, “laborious”, “modernized”, “pious”, and “wise”.

3.1 The Documentaries

The National Geographic biographical documentary of King Bhumibol of Thailand, “My King”, was produced in 2012 (figure 1). The film was created in order to celebrate the eighty-fifth birthday anniversary of Bhumibol. It was aired nationwide on December 5, which is the King’s birthday and the Thai National Day. The director of the project is Sumeth Tantivejkul who also serves as the Chairman of the royal organization, *Chaipattana* (Victory of Development).⁹ Moreover, the success of the movie has been attributed to Sumeth. Sumeth who has been working with the King since the beginning of the foundation of the organization gave an interview to a Thai newspaper that the story for the movie was inspired by many years of experience which he gained while working with Bhumibol (Variety Team, 9 Genius).

⁹ *Chaipattana* Foundation was established in 1988 by Bhumibol. The royal organization is claimed to be independent from the government as its budget comes from the royal privy purse. The object of this organization is to serve as a center for all royal initiatives. The missions of the foundation as claimed in its website relate to “promoting and supporting sustainable development and self-reliance” and taking care of farmers who are the “backbone of the country”. Additionally, areas of work of the royal organization circulate around, for instance, an agricultural development, water and natural resources management, and natural disaster relief and cover. Bhumibol claimed that this foundation holds a public spirit to contribute to national and social development. See http://www.chaipat.or.th/chaipat_english/index.php



Fig. (1) Cover of the Box set of 'My King' 2015. www.chaoprayanews.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/630.jpg, n.p.

The scenario of “My King” mainly consists of a biography of Bhumibol and a presentation of the royal projects initiated to improve the living condition of the Thai population. The crucial message which the director of the movie wants to deliver is the wisdom of the contemporary Thai king that has been developed from his early days and which has contributed exceedingly to the development of the country.

The author divided the documentary into nine parts. Number nine has a symbolic meaning. It relates to the reign of Bhumibol as he is the ninth king of the *Chakri* house. The first part interpreted Bhumibol as having “power over nature”. Its content focuses on an artificial rain-making project and the exploitation of vetiver grass. Secondly, “music”, one of many hobbies of Bhumibol, is mentioned. The movie claims that the King turned his hobby into a charitable campaign to raise donations for natural disasters. Another leisure activity of Bhumibol relating to “photography” is mentioned. Bhumibol has created a signature look by having a camera dangling around his neck at every occasion. The ability of the king in the field of “arts and literature” is described. Moreover, the King is also an “athlete”. He is stated to be good at sailing. In addition, the movie also represents a religious aspect to the King. Bhumibol is depicted as a pious Buddhist. The “inventive mind” of the Thai potentate is emphasized through an example of the invention of a water aerator to solve water pollution. The Monarch also worked on modernizing missions such as “educational development”. Lastly, Bhumibol is depicted as a symbol of the nation. He is simply illustrated as “happiness of the nation”. Indeed, all these aspects are in a way similar to attributes discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

The second documentary “Bhumibol - The People’s King” released in 2013 is a reworked version of the first documentary due to the great success (figure 2). The length of the

movie was modified to be concise by cutting out an in-depth details of the royal initiatives. Still, the movie presents the same aspects of the King as in the 2012 documentary. An intention of the edited version was to celebrate the eighty-sixth birthday anniversary of Bhumibol. An advisor to this project is Preecha Songkittisuntorn who also serves as a principal assistant of The Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary (OHMPPS).¹⁰ “Bhumibol - The People’s King” develops a pivotal theme of a heroic king. Consequently, the beginning of the documentary starts with footage of the 1992 political uprising. Bhumibol was heralded as the national savior who defused the insurgence. The rest of the movie develops this theme.

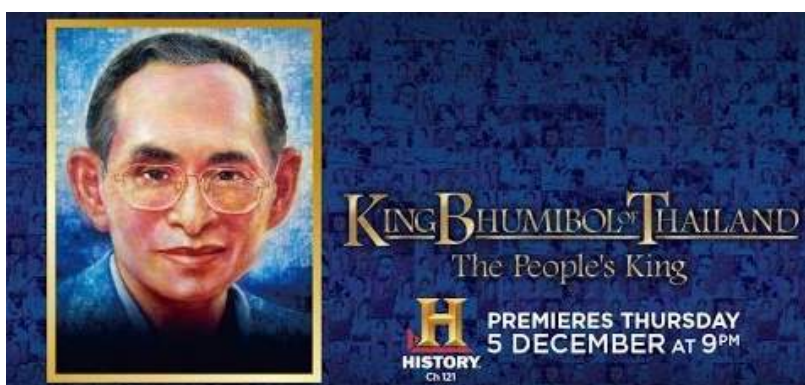


Fig. (2) The Cover of Bhumibol - The People's King. 2013. Youtube. Web. May 2014.

3.2 A Synopsis of the Documentaries

The two documentaries are derived from the same material therefore the narratives of the two documentaries are discussed together. The general narrative structure of both movies can be divided into two parts. In the first part, both movies presented the childhood of Bhumibol and his fate of being destined to become the king. The movies start with the birth of Bhumibol. His parents, Prince Mahidol and Sangwal, meet in the United States where they are studying. Bhumibol is born on December 5, 1927, in Boston. The filmmakers decided deliberately to present the meaning of the newly born baby: Bhumibol means “the great strength of the land”. The Mahidols return to Thailand in 1928. However, the peaceful life of the royal family is shortly ended. Sorrow befalls the Mahidols in the following year when Prince Mahidol passes

¹⁰ The Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary (OHMPPS) was founded by Rama V in 1890. The OHMPPS is a government agency which is responsible for official correspondences that have been submitted to His Majesty both in private and public submissions. Additionally, the agency also transmits royal words and thoughts to related individuals or government agencies. To sum up, this agency works as the coordinator between the King and the government. See <http://www.ohm.go.th/en/>

away. The road to sovereignty of Bhumibol begins in 1932. A massive revolution in Thailand has led to the abolition of the Thai absolute monarchy. Rama VII, the current king in this period, abdicates three years later in England and decides to pass the throne to the Mahidols. Prince Ananda, the older son of the Mahidols, accepts the throne. Nonetheless, Ananda is not foreordained to be the king. During the last days of his visit to Thailand in 1946, Ananda is found dead in his royal bedroom with a gunshot wound to his forehead. Bhumibol is, therefore, elevated to the throne on the same day.

The second part of the movies emphasizes how Bhumibol rules the country in order to become the people's king. The story commences at the beginning of the 1950s after Bhumibol and his Queen, Sirikit, have settled in Thailand permanently. However, the private life of Bhumibol is little shown. The filmmakers aim to highlight Bhumibol as the laborious king by projecting his works and devotions, for instance, the royal national visits to remoteness areas all over the country and various projects and initiatives for developing the living conditions of the Thai population and the country. The filmmakers have attempted to convey an image of a victorious King who has not given in despite difficulties and problematic times during the national visits. Likewise, the image of a laborious king is planned to appear throughout the two documentary films. Bhumibol is alleged to work all the time even in ill-health or even under melancholic circumstances such as during the funeral of his mother. Indeed, various avocations of the Monarch are demonstrated. Bhumibol is claimed to be fond of photography, painting, and jazz. The movies tend to assert that these hobbies have also contributed to some royal projects. The filmmakers assert that Thai citizens revere their King due to all the devotion Bhumibol has put into the country. In the end, the filmmakers conclude that Bhumibol is the happiness of the nation.

In conclusion, the intention of the two documentary films is specifically to eulogize the contemporary Thai king. Both movies present Bhumibol in a hagiography. The voice of the movie is sympathetic. No critical or impartial comments appear in the documentaries.

It is compelling to look at what has been chosen to include and exclude from the two movies. The films, for instance, give an impression that poverty and natural disasters are eradicated by royal initiatives. Numerous projects of Bhumibol are mentioned in the documentaries, however, the films do not speak about the outcome and how these projects have solved or diminished the problems. The movies decide to be silent about any sensitive circumstances. The death of Ananda, for instance, is not given an explanation or a reason for the real cause of death. The movies describe this misery as a mysterious death and avoid saying whether it is a murder, an accident or a suicide. Likewise, the abolition of the Thai absolute

monarchy in 1932 and the failure of the administration of Rama VII that led to the revolution are not presented with full historical description. In addition, government agencies do not appear as having helped the King develop the country. Indeed, the agencies are seen as having brought problems and troubles to the country. The reason for this is to show the traditional image of politicians. Politicians hold an image as having divided society as they belong to parties. In contrast, the King who views problems of the country from a superior position possesses an image of one who has united the kingdom. Additionally, it can be understood that the filmmakers intended to emphasize the importance of the King over the political authority. Indeed, Thailand under the reign of Bhumibol is presented as a utopian kingdom. Social problems, apart from poverty, are not seen in the documentaries. Bhumibol has simply accomplished modernizing activities that relate to ideas of progress such as illiteracy.

3.3 Fabricated Image of Bhumibol

Attributes found in the two documentary films of Bhumibol are inspired by the fruitful work of Burke. The aforementioned work of Burke examines the public representation of Louis XIV. Burke has also proved that self-representation of certain modern heads of state in the twentieth century was motivated by the strategies of Louis.

The public representation of Bhumibol is speculated to have been adapted and imitated from Louis and the twentieth century heads of state. The two selected documentary films serve as flawless examples reflecting mutual features and fabricated images of Bhumibol and Louis in public representation. The attributes of the representation of Bhumibol are utterly unambiguous and are decidedly positive. Bhumibol is illustrated as an august, generous, and laborious king, for instance. Additionally, viewers are deluged repeatedly with identical, favorable features of the King.

In the consecutive paragraphs, “My King” is indicated as (2012) and “Bhumibol - The People’s King” is cited as (2013). Additionally, most scenes and footages are taken from “My King” due to its better quality. The movie “My King” is divided into five parts, thus, in captions of figure, the part and the minute the scenes taken are stated.

3.3.1 “August”

The august attribute of Louis is fully presented as a panegyric through various kinds of media such as literature works, paints, prints, and medals by poets, writers, and historians in Louis’ reign.

As for the Thai monarch, Bhumibol is presented as an august king and the king who is loved by the nation in both documentaries. The image of an august monarch is illustrated mostly in scenes where the monarch appears in public. Scenes in 1936 when Bhumibol visits Siam for the first time and in 1946 when the Monarch pays a visit to his homeland for the second time can serve as examples of this feature. The voiceover claims that the Thai population all over the country are welcoming their King warmly by lining the route where the royal family will pass (2012, 2013).

Indeed, a repetition of the august characteristic of Bhumibol is presented in an overwhelming reaction of the Thai people when Bhumibol is in sight. It is unusual to cry in public when Thai people see any public figure. Nevertheless, this extraordinary reaction is only reserved for the King. Additionally, people always carry the Thai flag and the royal flag (the yellow flag) and portraits of Bhumibol in order to praise and pay respect to him (figure 3).



Fig. (3) The crowd rejoices at seeing Bhumibol. The word on the Thai flag states “Long Live the King”, My King. Part 5, 10:05. 2015.

The authors of the movies also play a significant role in emphasize the august trait of Bhumibol. Materials such as evidences and footages are created to enhance the veracity of the argument. As mentioned, both movies state that in 1946 people waited along the royal route to welcome Bhumibol affectionately. Nevertheless, it is obvious to viewers that footage employed in these scenes was taken in modern times. This can be confirmed by observing the faces and dress code of people who appeared in the scenes (figure 4-5). It can be conjectured that the

visit in 1946 was a rare occasion and the filmmakers could not find original footage of this event and therefore it was necessary to include artificial modern footages.



Fig. (4) People gathered at the river bank to see Bhumibol, My King. Part 2, 04:59. 2015.



Fig. (5) The footage attempted to show cheerfulness of people when they see Bhumibol, My King. Part 2, 05:03. 2015.

3.3.2 “Father of the People”

Indeed, the demotic representation of monarchs as ordinary people has been developed only recently in modern times. Modern leaders had to abolish a social distance due to the fact that any sign that could imply remoteness such as dignity was dangerous. Therefore, Burke stated that “the illusion of intimacy with people is necessary” (Burke 1992, 204-205).

The public representation of Louis as the father of the people is ambiguous and also anachronistic. Burke argued that Louis represented himself as a monarch who was “accessible to his subjects” (35). Nevertheless, the monarchical tradition of the seventeenth century did not seem to provide Louis with much opportunity to put himself close to his people.

Bhumibol has borrowed the idea of the father of the nation from modern rulers. This feature of father of the people in the public representation of Bhumibol can be divided into three aspects: a modest king who is close to people, a patriarch who guides the country, and a symbol of unity and permanence of the nation.

Firstly, Bhumibol's need to be close to people is depicted through scenes of national visits in both movies. The Thai monarch is presented as a father who is accessible to his subjects. To support this argument, the filmmakers chose footages and photographs that capture Bhumibol in a modest light. Photographs of Bhumibol are often taken at an eye-lines level with Bhumibol sitting on the ground and talking in a friendly way to commoners. The photograph below shows that there is no remoteness between the Monarch and his people (figure 6).



Fig. (6) Bhumibol listened to villagers in a friendly manner, *My King*. Part 1, 01:58. 2015.

The father is the leader of family. The authors of the documentaries, therefore, have chosen deliberately to interpret this feature of Bhumibol as the patriarch who guides the family or the country. Both movies introduced Bhumibol as the father who guides his children or government agencies towards improvement of themselves. Scenes of Bhumibol visiting his royal projects to follow up their progress depict this trait of Bhumibol. In these scenes, Bhumibol is always in the middle of the frame amid ministers and scholars and is admonishing them. To confirm that Bhumibol has been guiding his projects since the early days of his reign,

the authors of the films inserted purposely both old (figure 7) and modern footage of Bhumibol (figure 8).



Fig. (7) Bhumibol in early days of his reign visiting his projects, *My King*. Part 5, 02:48. 2015.



Fig. (8) Bhumibol followed up his projects and giving advice to ministers, *My King*. Part1, 04:21. 2015.

Finally, the father of the people is presented in the sense of Bhumibol as a symbol of the unity and permanence of the nation. The public representation of this characteristic of Bhumibol takes place in a scene of his official visit to the Chinese community in Bangkok in 1946. The movie narrates that during this time there was intense political turmoil between Thais and Chinese due to the fact that the Thai government had allowed Japanese troops to use Thailand as a military base (2013). Indeed, the movie claims that the appearance of Bhumibol in the Chinese community eradicated the dissension between the two communities and thus united them. Likewise, the film asserts that the Chinese welcomed the King warmly. Shops and houses are adorned with Thai flags. The authors of the documentary selected close-up footage to show a crowded group of people around the king (figure 9). Likewise, wider-shots

taken from a high-level are inserted to affirm the argument of a warm welcome from the Chinese community and the environment around the subject of the movies (figure 10).



Fig. (9) An official visit to the Chinese Community in Bangkok, My King. Part 2, 11:29. 2015.



Fig. (10) Chinese shops and households were embellished with Thai flags, My King. Part 2, 11:32. 2015.

3.3.3 “Generous”

Thee generous characteristic appears in the public representation of both Louis and Bhumibol. The generous feature of Louis was presented in the form of foundation and financial support to academies and the award of gratifications to men of letters (Burke 1992, 66). Louis was mentioned as “father and patron of the liberal arts” (23). Burke cited from an Italian poet Girolamo Graziani that “His Majesty makes gift to people of merit for no other motive than that of acting in a royal manner in every way and absolutely not in order to be praised...that the gratifications will seem the more noble the more they seem disinterested” (52).

In Bhumibol's public representation, the Thai king presents his generous trait through donations for victims of natural disasters, the use of music in order to gain more donations, and free medical services. A scene in 1962 when the southern provinces of Thailand were hit by typhoon Harriet is used to display the generosity of the Monarch (2012). The movie asserts that Bhumibol has accumulated huge donations both in cash and goods from his privy purse and the public. Bhumibol is also claimed to have gone to the affected areas and handed the donated goods to the people by himself. The technique that the filmmakers used in this scene is to insert a photograph of Bhumibol standing in the middle of a scene with huge stacks of donations behind him (figure 11).



Fig. (11) Bhumibol and goods from the donation, My King. Part 4, 05:56. 2015.

It can be postulated that the intention behind this photograph is to give an impression to viewers that the King is the only one who has provided these donations. Additionally, the filmmakers assert that the remainder of the donations in cash have been used to establish a foundation entitled *Rajaprajanukroh* (King and Men's Mutual Aid) as a direct center to help victims of the natural disasters (2012, 2013). The foundation was claimed to have founded four schools for students in the areas affected by the South Asian tsunami in 2004 (2012, 2013).

Another scene that depicts the generous trait of Bhumibol relates to music. Both movies assert that Bhumibol is fond of jazz. The Thai monarch is claimed to have transformed his passion for jazz into another channel for donation (2012, 2013). Both movies state that Bhumibol performs live performances with his band so that people can call in to make requests for songs and to make donations for sufferers of the natural disasters. Footage selected for this scene is when Bhumibol is performing jazz with his band. The filmmakers carefully selected a photograph taken at eye-level to give the impression that he did not consider himself superior

to other people. Moreover, a wide-shot of this photograph perfectly depicts the relationship of Bhumibol to other people around him (figure 12).



Fig. (12) The King performed live jazz with his band, broadcasted on a radio station from his palace, My King. Part 2, 09:16. 2015.

The benevolent attribute of Bhumibol is inserted in a scene showing free medical services. The documentaries allege that Bhumibol has funded a medical vessel sailing on the *Chao Phraya* River in Bangkok which is on a mission to provide free medical services to the poor. Moreover, the 2012 documentary also stated that during the communist insurgency, The king visited critical areas and took all wounded fighters under royal care.

3.3.4 “Godlike”

The godlike attribute of Louis appeared in paintings. In the Renaissance tradition, Louis was represented indirectly or allegorically by identifying individuals with gods or heroes. Therefore, paintings of Louis were designed to illustrate the monarch in the place of Apollo, Jupiter, Hercules or Neptune (Burke 1992, 28). Louis also represented Christ (29). Additionally, Louis appeared in paintings with rich clothes and magnificent objects to demonstrate his high status and power (22). Another form of the godlike attribute of Louis can be seen from a belief that he could touch the sick in order to cure them (17). Likewise, twentieth century leaders adopted this godlike characteristic from Louis. Mussolini, for instance, represented himself with Augustus as Louis once did (200).

According to the aforementioned ancient Thai tradition in the chapter of Importance of Images, Thai monarchs hold the position of divine kingship in Thai society. The godlike characteristic of Bhumibol reflects explicitly the culture of Hindu gods and semi-divine kings. And his omnipotent power is exercised in the form of “Lord of Life” (Peleggi 2007, 92).

Additionally, the godlike feature of Bhumibol is illustrated implicitly in the form of a god who can control the patterns of the weather. A scene showing Bhumibol's artificial rain-making project whose goal is to reduce the effects of drought in the northeastern region of Thailand is represented as an example of this argument (2012, 2013).

Bhumibol appears in the scenes in 1950 seated on a throne and surrounded by objects associated with power and magnificence such as nine-tiered umbrellas (figure 13). The throne represents the universe and Bhumibol sitting on it connotes his superior position over the universe.¹¹



Fig. (13) Bhumibol seated in the throne and surrounded by magnificence objects, *My King*. Part 3, 06:53. 2015.

The movies show more scenes of the coronation when Bhumibol is dressed in rich clothes and is being carried on a palanquin to the grand palace (figure 14). Inside the throne hall, Bhumibol has crowned himself which also reaffirms his superior status as no one can ordain the King (figure 15). Additionally, the ancient ritual of the enthronement is also conducted to invoke a glorious pre-modern past. It illustrates the continuity of the kingdom and the dynasty (Jory 2001, 209). Likewise, footage and photographs accompanying these scenes are taken from a low angle where Bhumibol's eye-level is higher than that of the viewers to elevate his higher status.

¹¹ See "2.1 Divine kingship"



Fig. (14) Bhumibol being carried on a palanquin to the Grand Palace for the coronation ceremony, My King. Part 3, 07:10. 2015.



Fig. (15) Bhumibol crowded himself as the king, My King. Part 3, 06:56. 2015.

3.3.5 “Glorious”

The glorious feature is visible in the public representations of the two monarchs. For Louis, firstly, his glorious characteristic appeared in various favorable adjectives used in panegyrics that are the source of inspiration for this research. Additionally, the glorious trait became visible, for instance, through “the grandiosity of official architecture and sculpture” which made spectators “conscious of the power of the ruler” (Burke 1992, 200). Moreover, Louis was often compared to “the sacred monarchy of Saul and David from the Old Testament” (23). All in all, the fabricated image of Louis as the glorious king, as described by Burke, points out that Louis was believed to be an inspiration for all the successes of his reign attributing them to his wisdom, his prudence, his courage, and his direction (26). However, Bhumibol’s characteristic

of glorious king is interpreted slightly different from that of Louis. For Bhumibol, both documentaries present him as a monarch who is well-respected in the world by other worldly monarchs and international organizations.

The glory of the Thai potentate appears, firstly, in a scene that shows a good relationship between the British and Thai monarchies (2012). The documentary claims that Queen Victoria of Great Britain once called King Rama IV “Sir, my brother”. In 1972, Queen Elizabeth conducts a first state visit to Thailand. Likewise, the British Queen addresses Bhumibol with the same term (figure 16).



Fig. (16) Queen Elizabeth giving a speech during a banquet in 1972. My King. Part 5, 03:30. 2015

Another scene that displays the glorious characteristic of Bhumibol takes place during the Diamond Jubilee celebration of Bhumibol’s enthronement as the longest-ruling monarch in the world in 2006. Kings and royal representatives converge in Thailand to be part of this glorious banquet (figure 17). The grandiosity of Bhumibol’s palace and traditional Thai adornments is claimed to enhance the glorious characteristic of the Thai ruler (figure 18).



Fig. (17) Kings and royal representative gathered for a photograph at the Grand Palace, Bangkok, Thailand. My King. Part 5, 10:45. 2015.



Fig. (18) The elegance of the Bhumibol's palace and ornaments of the banquet, My King. Part 5, 10:55-10:58. 2015.

Likewise, awards from international institutions provide an assertion for the glorious trait of Bhumibol. Both movies claim that the International Erosion Control Association (IECA) bestowed “The Natural Pro Futura Award” and “The World’s Prominent Soil and Water” awards to the Thai King to promote his acumen in using vetiver grass to protect the surface of soils (2012). The Brussels Eureka also awarded Bhumibol with the “World Outstanding Invention Award” for developing innovative sustainable energies from plants in 2001 (2012). In addition, the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, honors Bhumibol with

the First UNDP Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006 (2012, 2013) (figure 19).



Fig. (19) Kofi Annan honored Bhumibol under the name of UN, My King. Part 5, 10:40. 2015.

3.3.6 “Hero of the Nation”

Burke argues that the heroic public representation of Louis was a myth. It is a *mélange* of heroic, omniscient, and invincible features (Burke 1992, 200). Moreover, the heroic image of Louis was also represented as Hercules. Burke claimed that “[it] was much more than a metaphor saying that he [Louis] is strong, or even that he will solve the problems of his kingdom with as much ease as Hercules accomplished his various labours [sic]” (127).

The attribute of Bhumibol as the hero of the nation occurs consistently in the form of one who defuses problems and facilitates the kingdom to move forward. All in all, Bhumibol is presented in both movies as the nation’s savior. The apolitical King is claimed to also defuse political problems in both movies.

Bhumibol is depicted typically in scenes that relate to political and governmental problems. Scenes from both movies of a massive student uprising against the junta government in May 1992 serve as crucial evidence. The movies narrate that control over the public demonstration of the government escalated into the use of arms. The demonstration became violent and the insurrection seemed to have no solution (figure 20). The films assert that, eventually, before the political chaos got out of hand, the moral authority had healed the differences (2012). Bhumibol was mentioned to have ordered an end to the conflict by calling the two political leaders to meet in his palace.



Fig. (20) The violence of the government control, My King. Part 5, 01:28. 2015.

Footage of the military leader and the head of the demonstration meeting with Bhumibol in his palace are introduced. The filmmakers decided to use footage of the two persons involved knelt at the feet of the Dynast while listening to the royal admonition. Moreover, the footages selected were shot from a low angle to show compliance of the politicians and also the heroic characteristic of Bhumibol (figure 21).



Fig. (21) The Prime Minister and the leader of the demonstration agreed to take a step back and stopped the insurgence, My King. Part 5, 01:48. 2015.

Bhumibol's image as the nation's savior is also depicted in scenes showing the failure of government agencies. The two documentaries state that the government agencies are incapable of accomplishing their duties without Bhumibol's assistance. A scene from 1995 when the government agencies had failed to manage and lessen a flood is mentioned (2012, 2013). The

films narrate that Bhumibol has granted audiences to all involved government agencies to discuss the issue and, eventually, the flooding problem is alleviated quickly (figure 22).



Fig. (22) Bhumibol advising government agencies to ease flooding, *My King*. Part 5, 03:00. 2015.

Another scene of Bhumibol defusing insurrection in the kingdom occurs in 2004. The movies present a political insurgence in the southern provinces against the government's aggressive drug suppression policy (2012). The movie does not provide many details of the chaos, instead they simply say that Bhumibol has stepped in and advocated understanding, accessibility and development as the approach to ease their plight.

The heroic trait of Bhumibol also becomes visible in a scene related to the Asian financial crisis. The '*Tom Yam Kung*' economic problem hit Thailand in 1997. The movies depict that Bhumibol has awoken the nation from despair by introducing his philosophy of 'sufficiency economy' (2012, 2013). The movies explain that the concept of Bhumibol's theory is focused on living a self-dependent life and a return to agriculture. The Thai Ruler asserts that this philosophy of sufficiency of economy depends on three pillars: "moderation" — not doing something too little or too much; "reasonableness" — be rational with the outcome; and "risk management" — prepare to cope with impacts and changes ("Chaipattana" n.d., n.p.). Moreover, both documentaries affirm that this concept is a practical way of life because it has been crystalized over the years from the King's childhood combined with long years of working experience.

3.3.7 “Invincible”

The invincible trait is linguistically close to the heroic characteristic. However, they are somewhat different from each other. Burke pointed out that in the fabricated representation of Louis, the Monarch was destined to triumph over the forces of evil and disorder (Burke 1992, 200). Additionally, the convalescence of Louis was celebrated in 1663. Burke remarked that Racine had composed an ode described “the perfidy of the insolent malady which had dared threaten the king” (22). Likewise, this invincible feature of Louis was echoed in 1687 when the king recuperated from a serious operation. Moreover, a tremendous victory of Louis in the Devotion in 1672 also depicted the invincible trait of the King. Subsequently, the invincible feature of Louis was also included in showing his equestrian skills (22). The image of Louis as an athlete was borrowed by the modern leaders. Mussolini, for instance, also appeared in public as a sportsman and even an athlete (205).

The invincible trait of Bhumibol is no different from Louis. Both movies depict Bhumibol as an invincible king who won over an illness, as an athlete, and as the one who triumphs over all difficulties.

Firstly, the 2012 documentary asserts that the sickness could not intervene in the artistic skills of Bhumibol. A scene showing Bhumibol creating an oil painting called “Red Hand” is selected to prove this statement and to emphasize the invincibility of the Monarch (figure 23).



Fig. (23) The oil painting called “Red Hand” of Bhumibol, My King. Part 5, 07:44. 2015.

As mentioned before, Bhumibol is represented by an image of an athlete in his public representations. A scene from both documentaries refers to a sail boat race in 1967. The two

documentaries mention that the King won a gold medal in the OK Dinghy class at the Fourth Southeast Asian Peninsular Games (SEAP) held in Thailand (figure 24).



Fig. (24) Thai flag was raised over the one of Malaysia and Myanmar when Bhumibol won the gold medal, *My King*. Part 4, 10:44. 2015.

Likewise, the invincible characteristic of Bhumibol is illustrated in scenes related to difficulties the King was claimed to have encountered during national visits to rural areas across the country. The crucial message is to demonstrate that despite all the hindrances and difficulties, they could not win over the invincible ruler. Therefore, the filmmakers selected to mention only dreadful visitations. Footage of the visitation in 1955 to the northeastern region of Thailand, for instance, is asserted. The voiceover narrates that this region is well known for its harsh conditions due to extensive deforestation, droughts, and flood. The authors of the documentaries and the filmmakers see an opportunity to communicate with audiences through different angles of photographs. They chose photographs of obstacles taken with close-up shots to make sure that the viewers will assume that this evidence is factual information. Consequently, close-up shots of the royal motorcade getting stuck in the mud on the way to a village are introduced (figure 25). Additionally, a wide-shot to depict the awful condition of the route that Bhumibol had to take is included (figure 26).



Fig. (25) The difficulty Bhumibol was claimed to overcome, My King. Part 3, 10:18. 2015.



Fig. (26) The unpleasant journey of Bhumibol, My King. Part 3, 10:21. 2015.

Lastly, the invincible feature of Bhumibol is also presented in a scene of a visit to southern Thailand. The movies state that there is intense conflict between Thais and Muslims in the area (2012). The documentary claims that the turmoil does not prevent the invincible king from bringing numerous developments to the regions. Scenes of royal visits to police outposts, army camps, and border patrol police camps are added.

3.3.8 “Laborious”

Louis employed a laborious attribute in his public representation which inspired other rulers and leaders in the subsequent period. La Bruyère eulogized Louis in his work that “we rest while this king...watches alone over us and over the whole state”. Modern rulers such as Napoleon and Mussolini also adopted the image of a laborious leader who worked during the night while his people slept (Burke 1992, 200).

Bhumibol does not miss a chance to apply this feature to his fabricated image. The Thai king is presented as a monarch who works all day and night even when he is sick (2012). The movie asserts that, indeed, the sickness of the King also brings benefit to the people. The frequency of journeys of the King from his palace to visit the hospital brings about road development projects in Bangkok (2012).

Additionally, the laborious trait of Bhumibol is also illustrated through a scene when Bhumibol is grieving. In 1955, the movie mentions the death of the prince's mother. However, at the same time, Thailand is hit by monsoon rains which result in widespread flooding throughout the morning of the royal funeral (2012). The mourning monarch is claimed to be concerned for his people, footage of Bhumibol listening to a report from government agencies and giving them advice every morning on the way to the funeral is inserted to affirm the laborious characteristic (figure 27).



Fig. (27) Bhumibol advised government agencies on a mitigation of the inundation in the morning of the funeral, My King. Part 5, 02:42. 2015.

Indeed, the laborious characteristic in the Thai monarchy is not limited only to Bhumibol. Correspondingly, the prince's father, Prince Mahidol, is described as a frail but hard working prince who died from overwork (2012, 2013).

3.3.9 “Modernizing”

The modernizing trait of Louis is linked to the idea of progress. The seventeenth century French sovereign is claimed to have modernized the publication of the official newspaper, and for organizing writers into official academies. Louis also supported a publication of prestigious dictionaries and an encyclopedia (Burke 1992, 200).

Nevertheless, the Thai monarch still had to overcome the mission of progress in the twentieth century. The modernizing trait of Bhumibol is presented in scenes relating to educational development. The movies say that the Ruler realizes that the development of the country depends on efficient human resources. Bhumibol, therefore, attempts to provide effective education to students. The authors of the documentaries point out extensively Bhumibol's visits to villages and hill tribe people in 1955 (figure 28).



Fig. (28) Hill tribe students lined up in the lawn every morning to sing the Thai national anthem and pray before starting the school, *My King*, Part 3, 03:20. 2015.

The movies claim that educational development in these areas is urgent. It can be contemplated that the real intention behind educational improvement was in fact aimed at fighting against a communist insurgency that spread in these areas during the 1950s (Jory 2001, 211). Additionally, Bhumibol also appears in scenes showing educational development for urban students. The Sovereign is said to have introduced an excursion to schools. The filmmakers insist that the King sometimes goes on some excursions as a guide for students (figure 29).



Fig. (29) Bhumibol joins a student's excursion as a guide, My King. Part 3, 03:45. 2015.

Additionally, the modernizing feature of Bhumibol is depicted through the advancement of educational technology. The King is alleged to have initiated a program of broadcasting distance learning programs from his summer palace via satellite to its school network nationwide (footage 30).



Fig. (30) The broadcasting of the distance learning programs, My King. Part 3, 03:29. 2015.

Likewise, the Thai king also represents his modernizing trait in the same manner of Louis in the publication of an encyclopedia. Both documentaries state that a Thai junior encyclopedia was published in 1973 with further new volumes nearly every year (figure 31).



Fig. (31) Thai junior encyclopedia initiated by Bhumibol, My King. Part 3, 01:36. 2015.

3.3.10 “Pious”

In the public representation of Louis, the French king was described as the most Catholic king and the tamer of heresy (Burke 1992, 35).

For the Thai king, Bhumibol is depicted as a pious king who follows the Buddhist ritual. The movies present a scene showing Bhumibol entered into the monkhood (figure 32).



Fig. (32) Bhumibol as a monk in 1956, My King. Part 4, 01:08. 2015.

The movies state that the ordination of the King is a right of passage and that all Thai men should follow it. The movies affirm that renovations of temples have prospered during Bhumibol’s reign. The movies insist that Bhumibol often goes to discuss virtue codes with the Buddhist supreme patriarch (figure 33). Additionally, Bhumibol is said to have made amulets as gifts for his court attendants and cast a hundred units of the Buddha image and distributed them to nationwide temples (2012).



Fig. (33) Bhumibol paid respect to the supreme patriarch, My King. Part 4, 05:16. 2015.

The public representation of Bhumibol represents the pious characteristic through his support of all religions equally. The documentary claims that Bhumibol has financed the translation and revision of *Bali* and Thai versions of the *Tri Pitaka* in print and online versions. The Thai ruler is alleged to have never failed to respond favorably to invitations from all religious institutions and always graces their activities. Moreover, a translation of the English version of the *Koran* received from Saudi Arabia into the vernacular is stated to have been supported by Bhumibol (figure 34).

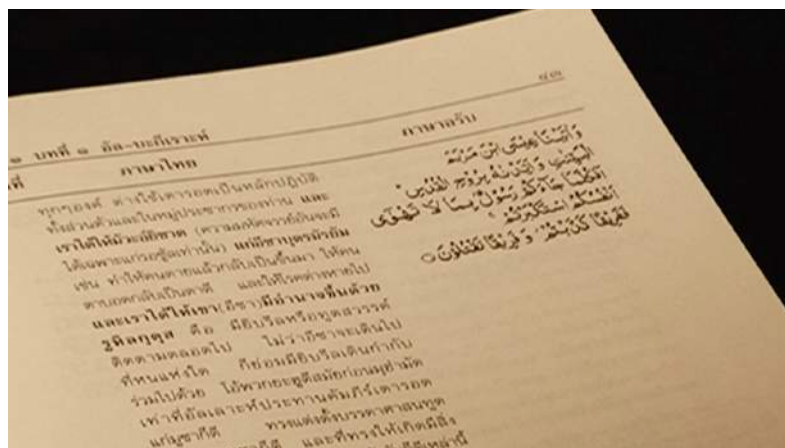


Fig. (34) The translation of Koran alleged to be financed by Bhumibol, My King. Part 4, 05:01. 2015.

3.3.11 “Wise”

Burke argued that Louis was portrayed as a monarch who could take a good responsibility for his royal duties without relying on his ministers. Altogether, Louis was described as “informed of everything, aware at every moment of the number and quality of his troops, and the state of his fortress” (Burke 1992, 62). Additionally, the cultivated image of Louis was associated with scientific research by funding the French Academy of Sciences (Académie des Sciences).

Likewise, the wise attribute was illustrated through Louis's collection of paintings, statues, medals, manuscripts, and books (54).

The wise characteristic of Bhumibol connotes an omniscient trait. Bhumibol is depicted as an intelligent young prince. Both movies assert that Bhumibol has possessed the wise trait since his youth. The documentaries state that the young crown prince has learnt everything from his early days while enjoying playing games with his siblings and that these game inspired thousands of royal initiatives later on (2012, 2013). A wooden jigsaw puzzle of a Siamese map that the young Bhumibol enjoyed playing with, for instance, was claimed to be the most useful resource for the brilliant King during his numerous visits. In addition, the filmmakers focus on scenes related to water and soil protection and presented that these projects were inspired by experience from Bhumibol's early days. Scenes showing the adolescent prince relishing making ditches and little canals from soil and sticking little twigs along the ditches to prevent the banks from being washed away are introduced (figure 35). The ditches in Bhumibol's childhood are mentioned to have been transformed into reservoirs and dams in his adulthood and the twigs were converted into the planting of vetiver grass to protect the surface of the soil (figure 36).



Fig. (35) Bhumibol and his siblings enjoying making ditches, *My King*. Part 1, 05:41. 2015.



Fig. (36) Bhumibol went to plant vetiver grass, My King. Part 1, 06:48. 2015.

The wise trait of Bhumibol depicts as an all-knowing King. The astute crowned head is claimed to speak seven European languages. He is also claimed to be good at science, music, painting, photography, and literature, agriculture, architecture, comparative studies of European geography, and history (2012, 2013). Both movies affirm that Bhumibol has taught himself piano by reading musical notes and that he started writing songs at eighteen. And the Thai potentate is said to have developed his love for photography when he was only six years old. Moreover, the documentaries also attest that Bhumibol's photographs are valuable in terms of historical evidence and artistic perspectives as they were taken from angles no other photographers could rival. Symbolic appearances of Bhumibol going everywhere with a camera dangling around his neck are highlighted (figure 37). Eventually, the films assume that many years of living in Thailand and the King's engagement in many royal-initiated projects has greatly contributed to the consistent improvement of his photographic skills.



Fig. (37) A collage showing that Bhumibol always has a camera with him everywhere, My King. (37.1 Part 5, 04:35; 37.2 Part 5, 00:50; 37.3 Part 1, 04:21; 37.4 Part 1, 05:29). 2015.

Likewise, Bhumibol is asserted to be skilled in arts and literature. Footages of Bhumibol's paintings are inserted to make the wise trait more explicit. The movie (2012) alleges that the King started painting by himself and has made a portfolio of a hundred pieces of artwork (figure 38). In addition, the Thai king is said to have initiated a project to translate two books entitled "A Man Called Intrepid" and "Tito" into Thai (2012). Moreover, the film presents a book of Buddhist tales called "The Story of Mahajanaka" that is claimed to have been composed by Bhumibol. The movie attests that this crucial book demonstrates the teaching to be found in Buddhist tales and the inner thoughts of Bhumibol. The purpose of the book is mentioned as reflecting royal initiatives and Bhumibol's pool of knowledge of Buddhism, science, satellite, maps, history, geography, social science, nature and the environment (figure 39-40).



Fig. (38) Examples of Bhumibol's paintings. My King. Part 4, 00:29.



Fig. (39) Excerpt from Bhumibol's book of Buddhist tales. *My King*. Part 4, 01:13. 2015.



Fig. (40) Two Thai words in the excerpt are “preserve” and “develop” which seemed to imply the wise and crucial duties of Bhumibol, *My King*. Part 4, 02:12. 2015.

The wise trait of Bhumibol is represented through his inventive mind. The young Bhumibol is claimed to have invented his own toys (2012, 2013). His inventive skills have been developed more effectively during his reign. The filmmakers have inserted a scene showing Bhumibol innovating agricultural machines for farmers (figure 41). Likewise, scenes of Bhumibol inventing an antenna for a low-cost radio transceiver called ‘royal sausage’ and an invention of a water aerator to solve a problem of polluted water are introduced (figure 42).

Eventually, the wise characteristic of Bhumibol also appears in scenes related to sustainable energies. Bhumibol is said to have initiated hydraulic, wind and solar energy projects (2012). Ethyl alcohol and biodiesel developed from Bhumibol's projects are used to run the royal vehicles (2012, 2013).



Fig. (41) The inventive skills of Bhumibol, My King. Part 4, 10:20. 2015.



Fig. (42) The water aerator, My King. Part 2, 03:03. 2015.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the fabricated image in the public representation of King Bhumibol - the current King of Thailand through contemporary documentary films. The general theoretical literature and considerations examined the fabricated image of Louis XIV as a role model of public representation to other monarchs and also as fruitful inspiration for this dissertation. The study sought to answer the crucial question of this research on how the fabricated image of the current King of Thailand has been constructed through the utilization of contemporary documentary films.

The study of the public representation of Bhumibol and Louis was conducted deliberately. Firstly, the dissertation proposed theoretical and methodological considerations from the literature of Peter Burke on the fabricated image of Louis and the literature on the analysis of documentary films. Secondly, the study discussed the importance of images in Thai society in which the surface of public representation is taken as the truth to emphasize the reason Bhumibol has to fabricate a positive and impressive public representation. The study examined the historical timeline of the fabrication of the public image of Bhumibol. Lastly, the analytical chapter answered the aforementioned crucial questions of the dissertation. This chapter sought to find similarities in the public image of the two monarchs on the basis of specific attributes.

The thesis argues that the public image and the public representation of Bhumibol do not fundamentally differ from the ones of Louis. Most of the characteristics of Bhumibol coincide with those of Louis. Although the two monarchs are three centuries away from each other, time and technological advancement do not exceedingly alter the construction of their public representation. Nevertheless, there is an imperceptible variation in the public representation of Bhumibol due to the fact that the modern king has to embrace his image with globalization and the idea of export of modernity. With the positive public representation and the regime of images, altogether, Bhumibol has achieved the strengthening and stabilization of his kingship and his Dynast in the present time.

Certainly, the two documentary films about Bhumibol have signified crucial messages. The eleven specific attributes of Bhumibol found in both movies echoed the public image of Louis as pinpointed by Burke. The two monarchs were presented in the same way. Bhumibol and Louis were the august Kings who were loved and respected by their people. Moreover, Bhumibol was also represented by the symbolic image as the happiness of the nation. They were claimed to possess the fatherly figure, i.e., the Sovereigns who were accessible to their

subjects. However, Bhumibol has also developed his fatherly image into the figurative image of the one who unite the nation. Their generousness was expressed in the form of charitable donations. Additionally, the two Monarchs were represented God and have retained the supernatural power. The two Monarchs were the nation's savior in their heroic image. They were invincible and omniscient that they could triumph over the forces of evils and disorder. They were also presented as the athlete. They were described as the most pious king. Ultimately, they were wise and omniscient. They were informed of everything and owned the inhuman trait of being good at everything. In other word, they were informed of everything.

This study has certainly provided a new perspective of the fabricated image and the public representation of Bhumibol in comparison with the European context as this kind of study has not been conducted widely in this area of research.

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