



# The Early Years of Music Business in Thailand: History and Development, A.C. 1851-1950

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## ***Abstract***

This study focuses on the music business in Thailand: 1851 to 1950. The methodology of this research is based on historical methodology by collecting information from books, dissertations, historically recorded documents, recorded personal diaries and interviewing musicologists. All collected information would be interpreted and analyzed in the conceptual frame of historical, diffusion and home - temple - palace theories. The research is divided into two periods, first-fifty-years “the root and development of music business in Thailand (1851-1900),” and second-fifty-years “technological advances and trades (1901-1950)”, including “music industry, publication and theater.”

The first period (1851-1900), it was found out that there are three important parts to the music business in Thailand; live music performance, publishing and recording. In the first-fifty-years of study, the live performance was found in three places, home - temple - palace. These three places played a significant role in training musicians from a basic level up to high performing skills and at the same time they had been providing job opportunities to those musicians. Court musicians of palaces occasionally exercised ceremonies by arranging twelve month royal ceremonial music performances. On His and Her Majesty's, (including royal family's) remarkable celebrations in a year would be elaborately set with live music performance and other entertainments. The palace has been associated with live music performing management ever since, that has made Thais look to the palace as the real model of live performing management. Thereafter, Thailand opened the door to the outside world, foreign cultures gradually influenced Thai culture started in the beginning of King Rama IV reign (ruling from 1851 to 1868). The first foreign culture that came to influence palace was a brass band which appeared in the archives.

The second period (1901-1950): an increase in western culture influenced Thai culture. The new technology and invention was imported to Thailand by foreign educated, foreigners, traders and missionaries. The cultural influence from the outside world has affected Thai society, the economy and politics. The number of middle class people is increased, and education was also improved. Trains (1892), telegraph (1881) and radio (1930) were first used in Thailand. The high performance of the gramophone record player and the high quality of gramophone disc became popular in Thailand because of price reductions.

The music industry, publishing and theater had flourished in the second period. In particular, many record companies owned by Thais and foreigners were found in Thailand. Publication was largely used in the music business. In the music business, many posters were popularly used for gramophone records, gramophone record players, musical instruments, concerts and radio etc. Responding to the entertainment demand of Thais, theaters were built in many areas of Bangkok and other major cities.

***Key words:*** music business in Thailand, history of Thai music business

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## Introduction

Career opportunities in music business have been recorded since the earliest time in mankind. These opportunities have not always been in the complicated forms that we recognize today, but there have always been opportunities for making money in the field of music. Music has been performed by humans for a variety of reasons. Throughout history, music has been used to support important events of people's lives, such as religious ceremonies, weddings, and funerals, among others, and other less important events. Music has been used for both art and entertainment in nearly every conceivable form. It can be found in virtually every part of the world, and has an endless amount of uses. It is difficult to separate music from the human experience.

Nowadays, music has become a multi-billion dollar business. Thousands of people work in the music industry with the purpose of generating income through the enjoyment of music.

The beginning of music business in Thailand occurs at the same time as the birth of organized Thai traditional music. Thai music business has a long history but this study will focus on the 100-year-period from 1851 to 1950. Regarding the early years of Thai music business, the term *music business* is quite different from what people today understand to be music business, which involves selling recordings, concert tickets, artists' merchandise, and music technology, among others. This study will investigate Thai music business during the study period that is in the support by particular patronage, including from Kings, aristocracy, master music houses, and temples. This study focused on employment of the virtuosos, Thai music artists who normally worked under Kings, aristocracies, master music houses and temples. Job opportunities of Thai and foreign musicians, by gaining support, clearly show the roots and patterns of Thai music business. Furthermore, other factors should be considered, including the effect of cultural exchanging between Thailand and Western countries

and how they made a significant impact on the evolution of Thai music business, especially during the period of the study. Besides the cultural interaction between Thailand and Western countries, the technology for music recordings was a part of developing Thai music business to the new era of music business, allowing Thai musicians and music businessmen to gain economically.

For a brief study of music business before 1851, music and theater developed in the temples and palaces since the Ayutthaya period. Music business occurred in the Ayutthaya period, which existed from 1350 to 1767, where Thai music business was not motivated only by Kings, aristocracies and temples but also by foreigners from The Western countries. It was the arrival of people from Western countries such as missionaries, traders and professional soldiers, among others. Their arrival brought different cultures to the Thais in various aspects. This heritage of cultural interaction was eventually handed down from generation to generation.

The brass and string instruments were imported from Western countries to Ayutthaya during the reign of King Naria the Great (1656 to 1688). The first Thai music notation written was found in the Ayutthaya period and was penned by De La Loubee (1693). This is concrete evidence that clearly shows that the development of Thai music business had begun since the Ayutthaya period.

This study focuses on music business in Thailand from 1851 to 1950. The methodology of research is based on historical methodology by collecting information from books, dissertations, historical recorded documents, recorded personal diaries and from interviewing musicologists. All collected information will be interpreted and analyzed using the conceptual framework of historical background, diffusion and "home - temple - palace" theories. The research is divided into two periods, the first fifty years: "the root and development of music business in Thailand (1851-1900)" and the second fifty years: "technological ad-

vances and trades (1901-1950.)”

### Objectives

1. To examine the roots of Thai music business during the period of the 1850-1950.
2. To examine new technologies from Western countries as a part of Thai music business.
3. To determine how music industry and performing arts venues were an important factor in music development and other entertainment markets.

### Hypothesis

Roots and patterns in music business have appeared in Thailand for many years. A large number of research (1851-1950) has determined that the home - temple - palace were the initial locations of Thai music business and were also the very first places to open the door to Western culture and advanced technology.

### Scope of the Study

This study involves all businesses of music that occurred in Thailand during the period of 1851-1950, during the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868) until the end of World War II (1945). The scope of study covers the history of Thai traditional music business, including lives and careers in the music industry. This includes selling instruments and supplies, music education, music skills training and other successes in professional music careers. Regarding music recording technology, in Thailand this started with the period of the Edison cylinder and electrical recording, followed by the period of HIFI technology. Regarding music and Thai theater professions, the birth of Thai motion pictures in Thailand will be mentioned in this scope of study. It also covers other music events that influenced music businesses in Thailand during 1851-1950, including several aspects such as the birth of Thai radio broadcasting stations (1930), certain live music concerts, Thai professional music groups, music and record companies owned by Thai

people and Thai record labels, as well as the copyright and law.

Regarding masters' music houses, temples and palaces, there is a lack of information because it was not recorded. Sources of information for these areas of study are very limited for the scope of this study. Also, this study will not mention the background of record technology, stereo technology, or tape recording technology because it is beyond the period of this study.

### Methodology

This study will use three anthropological theories to select and analyze the data, including Historicalism, Diffusionism, and Home - Temple - Palace theory. The study is divided into two periods which each cover a fifty-year-round. The first period, 1851-1901, is “the root and development era,” and the second period, 1902-1950, is the “technological advances and trades era.” Each period contains important events and activities for Thai music business development. The information researched pertains to Thai music industries, publications and performing locations. The information used for analysis focuses on the factors motivating Thai music business in those days.

The primary sources were derived from historical records in the studied period, including personal diaries, recordings, letters, archives, advertising posters, and newspapers. Secondary sources utilized include analyzed and published works, including books, articles and dissertations. The content of these secondary information sources are relative to Thai music history, Thai society, culture, economy and Western music business. The information was also derived from interviewing people who are in the field of musicology who are directly involved with historical music business in Thailand.

### Research Questions

- (1) What was the root and development of mu-

music business in Thailand from 1851 to 1901?

(2) What were the technological advances in Thai music business from 1902 to 1950?

(3) How were music industry, publication, and theater motivated by music business in Thailand?

### Research Benefits

(1) To provide historical knowledge of music business in Thailand to the public, current music industry, and educational institutions.

(2) To provide information of how the music business industry in Thailand in the past influenced the development of music business.

(3) To provide information for how technological advances and Western culture influenced music business in Thailand.

(4) To provide foundational knowledge for future research.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. The Concept of Thai Music Business Research

There were three theories, Historicalism, Diffusionism and "Home - Temple - Palace," used as the conceptual framework in this study. Historicalism concentrates on studying the events that occurred in the past by interpreting their sources of information. Diffusionism focuses on how civilization diffuses from one society to another, blending the new culture from a region to others which makes a new diffused culture in those societies. The final theory used in this research is "Home - Temple - Palace" theory. It describes the structure of Thai society in these three locations and how they played a significant role in Thai music business.

Interpreting and analyzing primary and secondary information using these three theories, this research found that the evolution of music business in Thailand started a long time ago. The Home - Temple - Palace theory reveals that Thai music business was

developed during the hundred years of the study (1852-1950). The most significant impact on the development of Thai music business was with the arrival of Eastern and Western cultures. From interpreting and analyzing information, Thai music business historical events appear as a combination of the ideas of the Thai and foreign music industries. The combination of ideas in Thai music business is the main factor that increased the value of the music market. This can be seen by the growth of recording business, which first began with phonograph cylinders during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Rama V (1853-1910).

Besides the three theories, the article by Smith presents theories of music business in the United States and Europe as a brief history of the music industry. There are seven main parts of the history of music business, with the first three being the most important. The first three important parts include the live music industry, music publishing industry, and the recording industry which, which can be used to explain research in the 100 years of this study. In the history of music business in Thailand, it has the same features as the first three parts of Smith's Brief History of the Music Industry. Part one, the live music industry, in Thailand can be generally found in the entertainment of ordinary people, noble people, and in the King's palace and the royal families' palaces. The live music industry in Thailand can be divided into two categories: public and royal. Part two, the music publishing industry, developed greatly during the hundred years of research. Many types of music businesses used posters to advertise music works such as sheet music, concerts, performances, music instruments, music and recordings. When Thailand began having radio stations, the music publishing industry developed quickly. With this music business was not limited just to Bangkok and could be expanded to other parts of the country. Part three, the recording music industry, was recognized by Thais after it was introduced to Thailand during the reign of King Rama

V (1868-1910). Also, there were many foreign recording companies that were in Thailand. Thai artists were employed by these companies for musical performance recording. A few years later Thais began owning recording companies and started to expand the

recording industry. The Thai recording industry was successful in those days as can be seen in historical evidences, including the number of Gramophone discs found in national museums, national libraries, university libraries, and personal collections.

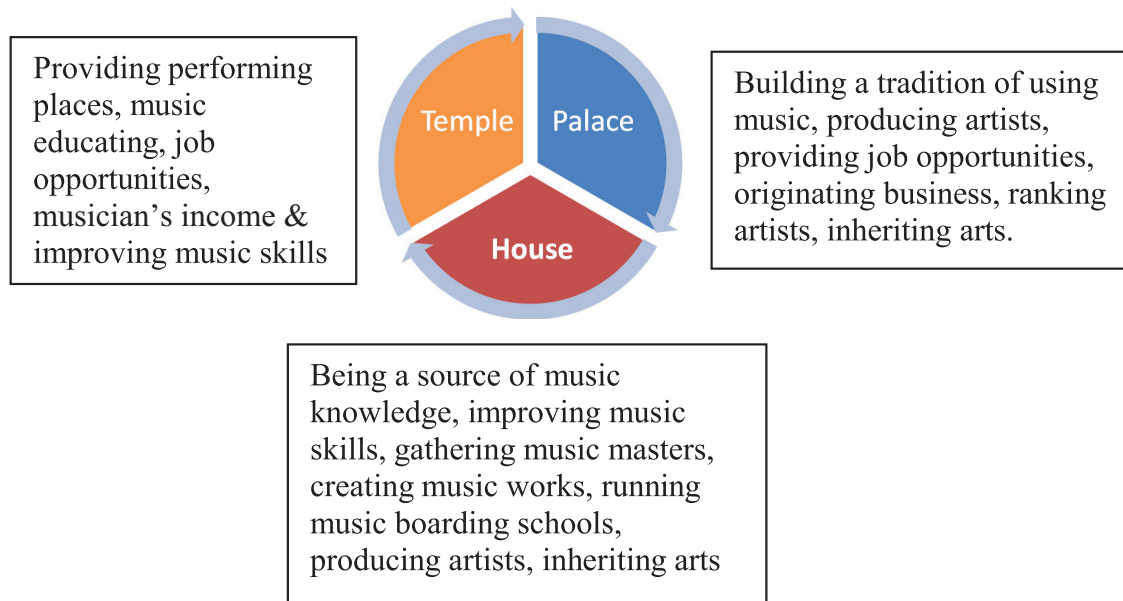


Figure 1

## 2. Music Business: Root and Development, 1851-1900

The theory of Home - Temple - Palace presents a clear picture of the development of the live music industry, which is part one of Thai music business root. The first fifty years (1851-1900) of this research contains the root and development of Thai music business. The home, temple, and palace were the starting places of Thai music business and in these places could be found a remarkable gathering of Thai professional musicians from low to high skill levels. Additionally, these places played a major role in providing job opportunities and becoming the foundation of Thai music business development for Thai musicians.

The home and master's house was a source of musical knowledge, place of improving musical skills, and a center of originating Thai music business. Additionally, it was a place for musicians to live and

work. When aristocrats demanded virtuoso musicians for their private house ensembles, they usually recruited from recognized masters' homes.

The temple (Buddhist temple) was the place for musicians or a group of musicians to obtain job opportunities since a large number of musical activities were arranged in the temple for both sacred and secular ceremonies. Using live music performances for various ceremonies, some temples had their own Thai traditional music ensembles. Many musicians at that time relied on the job opportunities at temples. Temples took care of its musicians by providing shelter, food, and financial support. Similar to the home, temples would have music masters to conduct the ensembles and train new music students. Live music performances were normally found in ordinary ceremonies, funerals, and annual Buddhist celebrations. Besides live performances at temples, musicians and groups of musicians occasionally were hired to per-

form outside of temples.

The palaces (royal palaces) conducted a large number of live music performances. Live music can be divided into three kinds of ceremonies: twelve-month royal ceremonies, His Majesty the King's royal ceremonies, and state ceremonies. Twelve-month royal ceremonies were arranged every month by royal palace officers. During the reign of King *Chulalongkorn* (1853-1910), there were many departments involved in arranging live music and other entertainments. In the early years of King *Chulalongkorn's* reign (1868 to 1910), His Majesty the King gave an order to set up an entertainment department for organizing live music performances and other entertainment for royal ceremonies and state ceremonies.

State ceremonies were concerned with state guests mostly from Western countries. During the reign of King *Chulalongkorn*, there were several royal family members from Europe and Russia that visited Thailand. The royal palace had to prepare live music and other entertainment for the royal receptions. The reception music consisted of Thai music influenced by Western music and was played by Thai music ensembles. These events reflect the influence of Western Culture on Thai culture.

The live music industry was significantly involved with home - temple - palace and is the first important part of music business in Thailand. It has been summarized in the following Figure 2.



Figure 2 Scheme of Music Business Originating

Nevertheless, home - temple - palace laid down the root and development of Thai music business, however, Western culture and influence also played an important part informing and motivating Thai music business. For example, historical records confirm that a brass band teacher was employed by King *Mongkut* and a royal brass band was set up in the King's palace. Western music influence was also disseminated to Thais by missionaries, traders, diplomats, professional soldiers and Thais that were educated abroad. King *Chulalongkorn*, King *Mongkut's* son, continued to open the country and allowed a number of Westerners to come to Thailand, and at the same time many of royal family members and Thais also traveled to Western countries more than ever.

The consequence of the influence of Western culture can be especially seen in the theatre business, in terms of ticket sales. The history of selling tickets for admission for staged dramas started around 1858-9, during the reign of King Rama V, in the theater of a noble man named *Chao Praya Mahin-Darasak-Thamrong* (unknow-1894). He built a theater in his own house located next to the *Chao-Phraya* river near the west wall of the grand palace in Bangkok. It was named the "Prince Theater." The theatre was designed and constructed in a European style and was a place to perform new Thai music. Some of the compositions of HRH Prince *Narisaranuvatiwongse* (1863-1947) borrowed melodies from some Western music. A new accompanying ensemble was set up for his new music compositional styles.

Edison cylinders were introduced to Thailand (around 1894) and a few years later the recording business was started in Bangkok. Since 1897, recordings were produced by foreigners, mostly from Europe (Germany, British and France), and later from India. Singers and musicians would be paid after the recording was finished but song copyright fees were not paid because the composer's names were largely unknown because they were mostly traditional songs. This extended music business since that time. In 1907,

after King Rama V traveled for his second visit to Europe, some famous traditional Thai music was performed by Thai professional artists and recorded on the phonograph and gramophone disc. Around 1907, at *Wang Baan Mor*, a palace of the *Gunchon* clan, a recording company from Belgium for the first time produced a Berliner Record of Thai musicians and artists. After that many other recording companies from Europe came to Thailand to run recording companies. The recording industry gradually grew up from decade to decade since that time. This became another important development of music business in Thailand. Music was given a higher market value than ever before because of recording technology. The music industry was firmly established in Thailand, and as the result, a large number of Thai music recordings were made by foreign and Thai recording companies. Later on, music recording became popular among Thais.

**Example brands of Berliner Records:**

- (1) Cubic brand
- (2) Red elephant brand by *Ketz* Brothers and Son Record Company.
- (3) Building brand by *Odeon* Record Company, Germany.
- (4) Speaker brand by *Lyrophone* Record Company, Germany.
- (5) Roosterbrand by *Pathe* Record Company, France.

All historical events occurring in Thailand during the period of 1851-1900, can be viewed clearly with diffusion theory. Western influence in Thailand since the reigns of King Rama IV and King Rama V can be summarized in the following Figure 3.

The second period of research (1901-1950) describes the adoption of new technologies in music business. From the time King *Mongkut* began to open the country to outside influence during this reign, Thailand made more contacts with Western countries. Many Thais paid attention to the new technologies from Western countries. Trading in the second fifty

years of this research paper between Thais and foreigners was more increasing than before. While this happened, the role of home - temple - palace gradually declined due to the changing of the Thai social structure, allowing foreign traders and middle class Thais to participate more in Thai music business activities. Increasing of international and national trading became an important factor that helped to improve music business's market value. New record and radio technologies (1930) were also factors that made music business quickly expand to remote areas of the country.

During the early years of the second period, in the royal palace of King *Vajiravudh*, Rama VI (1881-1925), there was a continuation to make musical works by founding a royal entertaining department which was divided into several divisions and each division had different duties (Figure 4).

In 1912, in setting up amid-size orchestra during the reign of King *Vajiravudh*, the Royal Entertainment Department appointed a European musician to be a music teacher and orchestra conductor. This established Western music knowledge in Thailand. All Thai musicians in the mid-size orchestra gained Western music knowledge and experience playing Western music instruments which they could apply to their professional music careers. This was an important part of musical career development in Thailand. From historical music records, Thai musicians who served as members of this mid-size orchestra were successful in the live music industry. This group of musicians were hired in pubs, clubs, hotels and other places of entertainment in Bangkok, reflected a rather larger development in the Thai music business during these years.

Social, culture and political changes in the second fifty years of the research study (1901-1950) clearly affected the development of music business. Home - temple -palace previously had a great role in the music industry, but their roles basically came to an end with the political change in 1932. The music

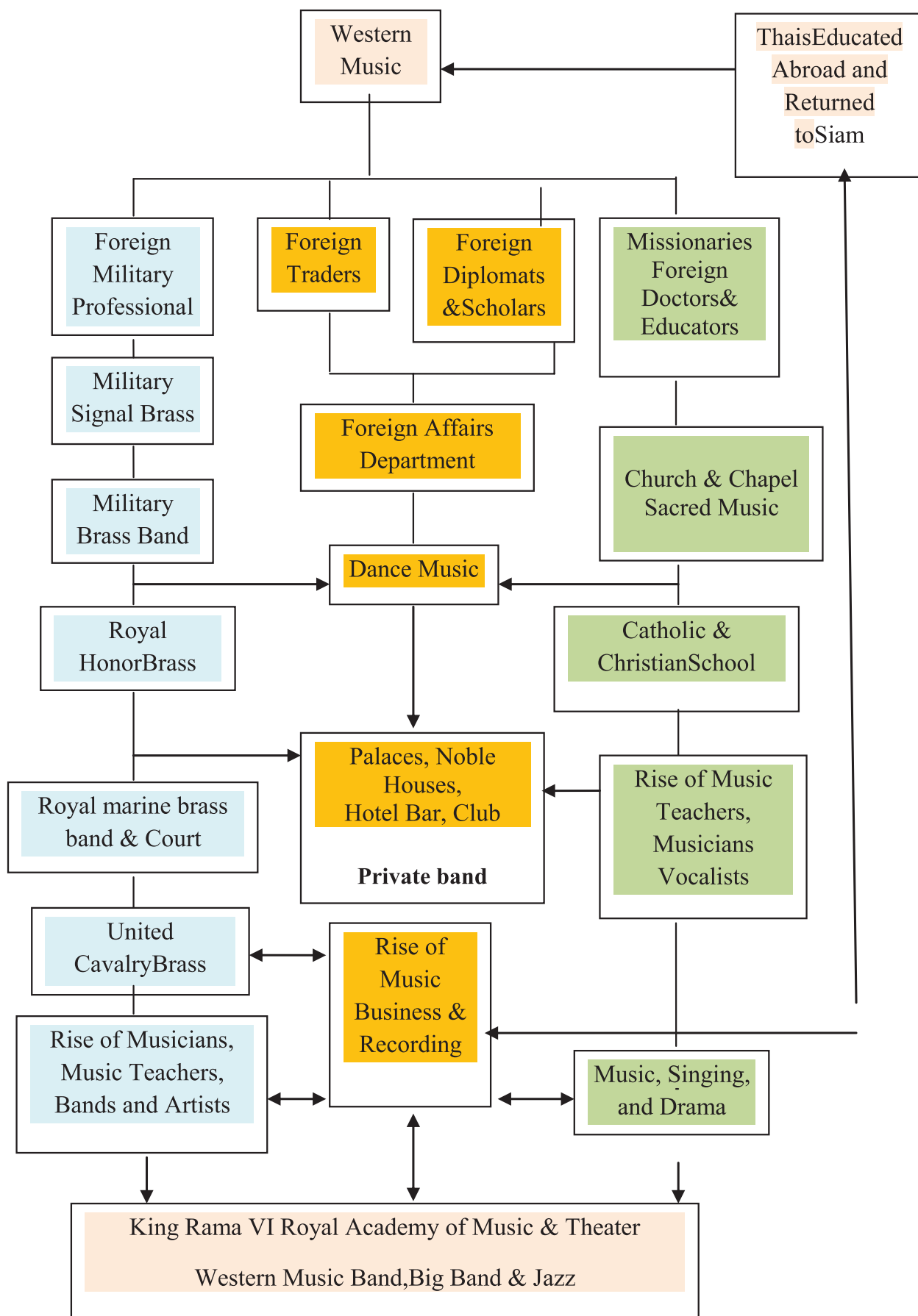


Figure 3 Technological Advances in Music Business, 1901-1950





**Figure 4** Flow Chart of Royal Entertaining Department in the reign of King Vajiravudh

industry was transferred to public and privatized organizations. Some musicians in the Entertainment Department moved to the Department of Fine Arts and some decided to work in private organizations.

The high quality of the recording disc player and playing machine are a great representation of the technological advances in the music business during 1901-1950. This could easily purchase recording products from shops located around Bangkok. The growth of the recording industry could be seen by the number of recording companies which were mostly owned by Thais. Another technological advance in the music business was the first radio station in Thailand (1930), during the reign of King *Phra Pok Klao*, King Rama VII, from 1925 -1935. Music business received great benefit on radio as advertising media could be disseminated to public. These technological advances proved to further develop music business in Thailand.

#### **Music Industry, Publication and Theater**

The advance of technology made the music industry in Thailand rapidly progress from decade to decade in the second fifty-year period of this research study. The music industry in Thailand was continuously developed by technological advances and publications. There were more Thai and foreign recording companies than in the first fifty-year-period of this research study. Publications were variously used in the music business, and an increasing number of theaters were built, not only in Bangkok but also in other cities of Thailand.

The development of the Thai music industry has relied on various factors.

The following diagram presents a summary and relationships of the music industry in Thailand (Figure 5).

Printed materials like posters and newspapers were popularly used for advertising of technological advances in the music business era from 1894 to 1950. In historical records and historical documents this is confirmed by a number of old posters, photographs, and old newspapers found in Asomvitaya, Mahidol University. All historical posters and documents become concrete evidence of the growth of the publication business advances in music the business era from 1894 to 1950. Music recordings, gramophone discs, disc players, accessories, music books, sheet music, movies, plays and play scripts have been advertised in posters and newspapers. Printed materials have been an important media for music business in the country.

Throughout the hundred years of research, the entertainment business has been continuously grown along with the increasing number of theaters around Bangkok and other cities in the country. Around 19 theaters were found in the historical records which prove that the live music industry was quite successful. Thai musicians could make a living from performing at concerts besides performing for recordings.

In summary, the Thai music business developed throughout the hundred year period of 1851-1950. Even though Thai music business struggled with political and economic changes, it has adapted itself well to survive in the highly competitive world. When-



Figure 5 Diagram of the Thai Recording Industry, 1894 - 1950

ever there is support of music business, Thai music business has taken advantage of this and has used it for business improvement. Thai musicians are the key factor in music productions and can keep a sustaining career in music by working in different kinds of

entertainment venues, depending on the demands of the market. Finally, this historical research study of music business in Thailand can serve as fundamental knowledge and an original source for future music business research.

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