

**THE THAI POPULAR MUSIC INDUSTRY:
INDUSTRIAL FORM AND MUSICAL DESIGN**

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**Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

SEPTEMBER 2011

ABSTRACT

Popular music, as it is generally defined in its commercial existence, originated in the West and has been widely discussed in Anglophone academia. One of the key means of approaching it is in terms of political economy, by viewing the culture industry essentially as a model of capitalism, with the purpose of maximizing profit [Burnett, 1996; Frith, Straw and Street, 2001]. The debates between political economists and other popular music scholars have predominantly taken as their subject Western popular music. Yet it is important to point out that whilst studies focused upon cultural industries outside of Western contexts have been few and far between, many have proved extremely fruitful and enlightening, exploring issues not considered in Western-centered accounts.

This dissertation will attempt to examine and describe the causes and effects of corporate control over the major labels, which have been influential in the Thai popular music industry since 1982, when the first major label was established. Furthermore, this dissertation will argue that the popular music industry in Thailand presents something of a variation on Adorno's theme of mass culture, replicating certain aspects of his description while also diverging in important ways. The study of the development of Thai popular music in this dissertation can be divided into five important periods: the Pre-pop Era (from the emergence of The Impossible to 1982) and the Pop Era (1982-1994), the Indie Phenomenon (1994-1997), the Major Return (1997-2002) and the present day (2002 to today). These terms were used to emphasis the most prominent event happened in each period.

Acknowledgements

The idea of studying popular music and writing this thesis came to me many years ago when I was a graduate student in Jazz Performance at New York University. I had an assignment to write about the history of American music. While I was searching for information on American jazz and popular music in the NYU's library it suddenly struck me that if music students in Thailand would like to study our popular music (and, of course, other Thai music genres), where they could reach such information or learn about our music? Although there are a number of music departments and conservatories of music which have opened and taught popular music during the last decade in Thailand, there is no official textbook on Thai popular music. Moreover, these music schools lack scholars who essentially concentrate on studying and writing on Thai popular music. As I have received generous financial support from the Royal Thai Government and will have a position as a music instructor in a Thai public university after finishing my degree, it will thus be an advantage for Thai music students if I can now sow the seeds of knowledge on Thai popular music in my country.

This thesis has been finished as a result of support, advice and encouragement from a number of people who earn my thankfulness and gratitude. I would like to show my appreciation for the Royal Thai Government for financial support over the six years of my Master's and Ph.D study, as well as Professor Natcha Panchareon for giving me a chance to prove myself and receive this scholarship. I also thank the staff of the Office of Civil Service Commission and Office of Educational Affairs (the UK and the US branches), for taking care of me while I have been so far away from home.

A special mention must be reserved for my supervisor Professor Adam Krims, who has always generously supported and been patient with me throughout the whole four years. Before this, I was a performance music student who had never concentrated on reading, writing and thinking in an academic field. However, he serenely taught me how to think and express my ideas as a music scholar as well as advised me on my academic work at the deepest level. I am also indebted to my two examiners, Dr. David W. Hughes and Dr. Nicholas Baragwanath, for their profound reading of my thesis.

I would probably not survive without the support of all my friends here and everywhere in the world. First, I would like to thank my little sister Amie Kraisoraphong and Mr. James Disley for helping me on editing and proofreading my thesis. Second, credit must be given to Pam, Cherry, Ae and Dr. Joe for reading and translating my interviews. Third, my Nottingham gang (Soh, Jan and Jill) and my Oxford gang (B, Chris, Katie, Steve, Paul, Doug and Alex) deserve my thankfulness. Furthermore, I would like to give my appreciation to all the artists, producers, songwriters and other who gave me a chance to interview them and provided me with the information essential to this thesis.

Dr. Panote Prapansilp deserves tremendous thanks for his love, encouragement and support. I am really lucky that you are always beside me, for better or for worse. I really thank you for being my friend and partner (plus, of course, for being my dad sometimes!). I would also like to give my gratitude to the Prapansilp and Chuenpennit families for their love and support.

I could not be who I am today without my family; my super mom, Jaree, who always shared my dream and my soul, my dad, Chaowalit (“you are my hero!”), my sister, Noree (“I am the luckiest sister in the world”), and my auntie, Kannika, who always takes care of me as her little girl. I am so proud of being a “Wuttipong”.

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GLOSSARY

Phleenj: The word generally means ‘song’, but can be used to form nounal and adjectival compound terms which refer to specific types of music (for example, instrumental music is ‘Phleenj Banleenj’ and vocal music is ‘Phleenj Rɔɔʼŋ). ‘Phleenj’ may also be employed to refer to music more generally (‘Faj Phleenj’ meaning ‘to listen to music’).

Dontrii: There is some semantic overlap between this term and the word ‘Phleen’ as both may mean ‘music’. However, ‘Dontrii’ is generally employed as an umbrella term, one which encompasses multiple genres and types of songs (‘Phleen’, on the other hand, often more narrowly refers to a specific type or style of music). For instance, ‘Dontrii Thai’ is a term which covers all types of songs which may be deemed ‘traditional’ in the sense of having Thai lyrics and requiring Thai instruments, comprehending genres such as ‘Phleen Thai Dæm’, ‘Phleen Kiiiaa`w Khaa`w`, and ‘Phleen Chɔɔ`j`.

Saa`kon: The term's meaning is dependent upon context and it may be employed in several senses; it may denote that which is 'universal', that which is 'foreign' or 'international', or more specifically that which is 'Western'. For instance, 'Naa`n Naa`m Saa`kon' means 'international waters', 'Saa`kon Ca`gkra`waan', the 'universal' or 'worldwide', and 'Muuaaj Saa`kon', 'western boxing'. When employed in context of Thai music (both traditional and modern) the term refers, almost exclusively, to music which has been influenced by distinctly Western styles and forms (that is to say, the term normally does not encompass music influenced by other Eastern cultures).

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CHAKRI DYNASTY

Reign I	King Bhuda Yot Fa (Rama I)	6 April 1782 - 7 September 1809
Reign II	King Bhuda Loet La (Rama II)	7 September 1809 - 21 July 1824
Reign III	King Nang Klao (Rama III)	22 July 1824 - 2 April 1851
Reign IV	King Chom Klao (Mongkut/ Rama IV)	3 April 1851 - 1 October 1868
Reign V	King Chula Chom Klao (Chulalongkorn/ Rama V)	1 October 1868 - 23 October 1910
Reign VI	King Mongkut Klua (Vajiravudh/ Rama VI)	23 October 1910 - 26 November 1925
Reign VII	King Pok Klao (Prajadhipok/ Rama VII)	26 November 1925 - 2 March 1935
Reign VIII	King Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII)	2 March 1935 - 9 June 1946
Reign IX	King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX)	9 June 1946 - Present

Introduction

Popular music, as it is generally defined in its commercial existence, originated in the West and has been widely discussed in Anglophone academia. One of the key means of approaching it is in terms of political economy, by viewing the culture industry essentially as a model of capitalism, with the purpose of maximizing profit [Burnett, 1996; Frith, Straw and Street, 2001]. The term ‘culture industry’ was itself initially coined by Adorno and Horkheimer in their seminal work on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), and was used to replace the expression ‘mass culture’ ‘in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves, the contemporary form of popular art’ [Adorno and Rabinbach, 1975]. David Hesmondhalgh has pointed out that, since the 1980s, cultural industries and cultural production have developed and changed considerably in their nature. Hesmondhalgh has noted that, for one thing, cultural industries have increased appreciably in their significance and have come to be perceived as worthy of attention in their own right, rather than being regarded as merely ‘secondary to the “real” economy where durable, “useful” goods are manufactured’ [Hesmondhalgh, 2007]. Another important trend which Hesmondhalgh has touched upon is the tendency of conglomerates of small- and medium-sized cultural industry companies to form alliances, partnerships and joint ventures, as well as that of large companies to shift from specialisation in particular cultural industries towards operation and involvement within multiple and diverse ones. These particular trends have meant that the tendency towards monopolisation of different cultural industries has reduced considerably [Hesmondhalgh, 2007]. Additionally, the rise in the prevalence of conglomerates

has also led to an increased circulation and interchange of images, sounds and narratives from disparate and diverse places, across national borders, and even encouraged the creation of hybrid products. These factors have increased the complexity of the cultural tastes and habits of audiences [Hesmondhalgh, 2007]. Although the music industry has been variously likened to a 'sausage machine' [Harker, 1980], or a 'production line' [Ryan and Peterson, 1982], companies have indeed often been confronted with unpredictable markets and wide variety in consumer preferences, and hence various strategies have been implemented in order to deal with demand fluctuations. For instance, music genres have at times been expanded in order to increase product variety, some companies have exploited the public image of their artists, and many have resorted to cross-marketing with non-musical commodities (e.g. books, films or other related media) in order to increase revenue and to recover recording expenses [Negus, 1999]. A concern with profit maximization and commercial success, a need to survive in a highly competitive capitalized market, has meant not only that music companies have needed to be extremely competitive, but also that producers and songwriters have had to struggle to garner financial support for their work. In order to do so they have, if one is to align oneself with Adorno's view, tended to resort to employing conventional patterns of form, verse, and chorus, patterns previously employed and proven successful or particularly appealing to consumers [Adorno, 1976]. This view of music industries of course stands in contrast to those put forward by many practitioners of cultural studies; while some in political economy have emphasized the corporate behaviour of the cultural industries and the consequences of corporate control [George, 1988; Chapple and Garofalo, 1997; Manuel, 1991], others in cultural studies have stressed the more localized and

intimate effect of listeners and audiences.

These debates between political economists and other popular music scholars have predominantly taken as their subject Western popular music. Yet it is important to point out that whilst studies focused upon cultural industries outside of Western contexts have been few and far between, many have proved extremely fruitful and enlightening, exploring issues not considered in Western-centered accounts. For example, Kimura Atsuko has discussed how Japanese corporations have affected popular music in Japan, with popular music in Japan playing a significant role in improving the image of Japanese corporations [Kimura, 1991]. In addition, other studies concerning mass media and the cultural industries in Malaysia and South Asia have taken an approach informed by political economy [Chopyak, 1987; Manuel, 1992].

This dissertation will attempt to examine and describe the causes and effects of corporate control over the major labels, which have been influential in the Thai popular music industry since 1982, when the first major label was established. Furthermore, this dissertation will argue that the popular music industry in Thailand presents something of a variation on Adorno's theme of mass culture, replicating certain aspects of his description while also diverging in important ways. Although there are some scholars, both Thai and non-Thai, who have studied Thai popular music [Lockard, 1998; Hayes, 2004; Eamsa-Ard, 2006], the majority of these have focused on the fields of cultural studies and ethnomusicology, paying particular attention to Phleen Luu'kthuu'η (Rural Song) and Phleen Phyyaa' Chii Wi'd (Political Song). Moreover, whilst the term "Thai

popular music” has been widely employed by these scholars, it has, more often than not, been used as an umbrella term to refer to every music genre on the market except Thai classical music (including Phleen Luu`kkruun (Urban Song), Phleen Luu`kthuu`n (Rural Song) and Phleen Phyyaa` Chii Wi`d (Political Song)). This dissertation will, however, employ the term in a much more limited sense, to refer solely to Phleen String (mainstream pop music), as it may be argued that it is the only genre which should truly be considered to be Thai popular music (both due to the manner of its emergence and how it is perceived by the media and by Thai audiences). Further discussion regarding the definition of Thai popular music and other music genres will be provided in Chapter 1 (p.43-44).

There has been, to my knowledge, no scholarly work on the Thai mainstream pop music industry to date and, therefore, the Thai industry’s unique structure and dynamics have not yet had an impact on debates among primarily Western scholars concerned with the popular music industry. However, as my dissertation will argue, the contributions that could be made by such work are considerable. By the same token, as the study of Thai popular music only rarely occurs in both Thai and Anglophone academia, some difficulties inevitably arise during a study thereof. First, primary sources and secondary literature on the subject of Thai popular music are rather scarce, and the majority of these materials are written in the Thai language. Second, there are no official records about Thai popular music, such as music charts, album sales and releases, which could be used as official points of reference. Hence, such information has had to be compiled from newspapers, music magazines and personal interviews, etc. It has also been necessary at times to employ pseudonyms, as many interviewees have wished to

remain anonymous.

Popular Music and Popular Culture Theory

Popular culture theory has for its subject an entity that is not fixed and stable, but mercurial and constantly evolving. As popular culture may be seen to be born from social processes, it is inextricably bound to and contingent upon society, politics, and the historical context. Notions of fixed forms cannot truly be applied to it, as meaning is subject to, and may be altered by historical circumstances. It would, therefore, also be difficult attribute definite meanings to individual artefacts, which often have none [Lockard, 1998]. Yet there have, of course, been various attempts by scholars to come to terms with popular culture as an entity, and it would perhaps be useful to outline some of the key approaches taken, particularly the ways in which recent academic works have tried to explain the nature and significance of popular culture, as well as the ways in which it operates now. Lockard, for instance, points out the significance of popular culture as a medium for personal and political thought as well as for entertainment, which operates regardless of whether one adopts a negative, positive, or non-critical attitude towards it. Consequently, popular culture influences the ways in which people spend their recreational time, how they communicate, and even how they perceive themselves and the external world [Lockard, 1998]. Lockard argues that an appreciation of the fundamental significance of popularity is key to understanding popular culture; it is a 'majority culture', with various aspects of culture being widely disseminated and adopted by large numbers of people. Popular culture may be seen in terms of a wide range and variety of products and activities consumed, embraced, or participated in by a vast majority of the population for recreational

purposes. These products and activities may be seen to be produced, promoted and distributed by communications through various media [Lockard, 1998]. George Lewis has also noted communication to be a key function of popular culture. He goes so far as to say that, for the majority of people, the better part of communication comes in the form of popular culture, particularly through watching television, listening to music, the consumption of both goods and food, and so on [Lewis, 1978].

Issues of mass society and technological advancements, as well as globalisation and cultural imperialism, are often found to be at the heart of studies of popular culture. The emergence of a mass society (the result of commercialization, urbanization, and standardization) has, of course, been instrumental in the development of a mass culture, namely through the various new forms of technology which brought the media into domestic environments (e.g. the radio, television, recordings etc.). These technologies, as well as their social determinations, also led to the dissemination of Anglo-American cultural artefacts to other countries. This came hand in hand with fears of cultural imperialism but also a breaking down of various established social and cultural distinctions and hierarchies [Lockard, 1998]. Over years, the mass media evolved considerably, growing in complexity, influence and reach. This is certainly true of many Southeast Asian communities. Indeed, many Asians accrued such a great deal of knowledge through television that they were able to comprehend the experience of the average American or, really, a representation of that experience to the extent that anthropologists such as Conrad Kottak developed terms such as ‘teleconditioning’ [Irwin, 1996]. Ideas of globalisation and cultural imperialism

are, therefore, not merely relevant to the present study of Thai popular culture and the Thai popular music industry, but indeed central to it. These issues will be explored in much greater breadth and depth in the first chapter (p.45-61).

Another key issue in the field of popular culture is that of how it should be viewed in the context of, and differentiated from, other forms of culture. In the past, scholars often held a rather ungenerous view of the study of popular culture, of forms which catered to the general population rather than to groups deemed to be intellectually, culturally, or socially elite. Distinctions were made between what should be regarded as 'highbrow' or 'lowbrow' and what should be viewed as serious and what should not [Lockard, 1998]. Scholars such as Dwight MacDonald coined terms such as 'midcult' and 'masscult', as distinguished from 'high culture'. In recent years, this conservative approach has all but disappeared [Vulliamy, 1975], and it has lost much of its currency amongst academic circles, being regarded by most as being the product of partial, oversimple, and superficial thinking. Some later scholars have been more interested in making distinctions between urban and rural culture, particularly in light of the non-industrialized world and especially in the context of various Asian countries (where gulf between the two is perhaps most easily perceived). For example, in Laos, whilst cultural artefacts such as the Ramayana dance have long been associated with the (urban) middle and upper classes, Lam Luang has conventionally been enjoyed by the country's (rural) peasant population [Boyd-Barrette, 1977; Rattanaovong, 1992]. Again, such ideas are incontrovertibly core to an understanding of the subject of this thesis and will be given more attention in Chapter 1.

It is also important that I make note of the schools of thought which have influenced the thinking behind this dissertation. A key (although dated) way of addressing the nature of popular culture and that of mass society, and important influence upon this work, is the approach taken by the Frankfurt School (which is comprised of theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer). This tradition tends to argue that the emergence of capitalist culture led to social and political fragmentation and degeneration, which was itself reflected and reinforced in a mass culture that was largely impersonal and associated with mechanization and commodification, with music undergoing standardization at the hands of large corporations, becoming banal, trite, and meaningless, no longer a vehicle for genuine expression [Collins, 1989]. Theorists such as Adorno stressed the degree to which popular music could be regarded as a manufactured commodity, rather than as a partially-autonomous musical form and emphasized the extremely limited role of audiences, who became little more than passive consumers [Vulliamy, 1975]. Despite the fact that the key ideas which characterized the Frankfurt School of thought led to its being regarded as pessimistic and culturally elitist, and despite the fact that they have fallen out of favour or lost their currency amongst most academic circles, ideas such as the notion that the burgeoning culture industry has led to the standardization of taste and commodity orientation are nevertheless valuable in explaining the development and current conditions of the Thai popular music industry, as I will argue in this dissertation

Thailand: An Overview

Whilst most scholars will have little familiarity with the Thai nation, some knowledge of its historical development, culture, and geographical nature, as well as demographics, is clearly not only germane, but also key to any study of its

popular music industry. It would perhaps be useful, then, to provide a brief, although by no means comprehensive, overview of the country. Thailand is a country which may be viewed as being composed of various distinct regions, although the manner in which the country is partitioned often depends upon one's purpose of study. (E.g., geographical studies examine the country in terms of six different regions, but the Ministry of Interior only differentiates among four.¹) Thailand has as its capital Bangkok, although there are also several significant commercial provinces in each region, (e.g. Chiang Mai in the north, Nakhon Ratchasima in the northeast, and Songkhla and Phuket in the south). As these commercial provinces may be regarded as centres of trade and culture, they will be referred to as "urban areas" throughout this dissertation. The Thai population may be viewed as a rather multi-ethnic one, one comprised of individuals with diverse ethnic heritages (e.g. Thai, Chinese, Laotian, Mon, Vietnamese and Malay), but also one in which most citizens share a common religious faith (as 95 percent of Thais are Buddhists) [Eamsa-Ard, 2006]. Regional differences are manifested not only in language use (each region being associated with a distinct dialect: the North with *Kham Myyaaŋ*, the Northeast with *Iisaaˆn*, the South with *Phaasaaˆ Taaˆii*, and *Phaasaˆ Klaaŋ*, or Central Thai, serving as the official national language), but also distinct folk cultures. Whilst generalizations regarding the attitudes and beliefs of a people may be dangerous, they nevertheless quite often prove useful. This is certainly true with regards to the Thai people and the study of Thai popular culture now. The character of the Thai people has been described by Sanit Samakkan through a detailing of the social values most clearly reflected in Thai culture, which may themselves be divided into three main categories. The first is a concern with the Self, with what may be regarded as personally beneficial

or harmful. This leads on to ideas of individualism, permissive behaviour, as well as aversion to conflict in its various forms. The second is the value of self-gratification, of fun, which is linked to consumerism, disinclination towards hard work, and so on. The third is a preoccupation with the notion of karma, with previous and future states of existence, reincarnation, and the cycle of life [Samakkan, 1983].

Politically speaking, Thailand is governed under a democratic parliamentary system and a constitutional monarchy. Geographically located in Southeast Asia (SEA), it has a culture and an identity which are a source of distinction from its neighbours. It is also important to note that unlike many SEA countries, Thailand has remained independent and uncolonized by western or eastern (Japan) powers. Consequently, a significant characteristic of the Thai people is a particular sense of pride in their independence [Eamsa-Ard, 2006], which is even reflected in the name of the country (which was changed from ‘Siam’ to ‘Thailand’, or ‘Land of the Free’²). Yet the extent to which this sense of pride is well-founded, warranted, has indeed often been put to question. In the late 1930s, Prime Minister Phibunsongkhram, in the hopes of improving the nation and ‘civilising’ the Thai people, introduced social policies which encouraged the adoption of predominantly Western customs and beliefs [Reynolds, 1991] (although he professed a particular love of ‘Thainess’ and advocated pride in one’s national identity). It is also important to note that Thailand has promoted free trade with foreign nations since the Sukhothai period (13th century), and that although some sectors remained monopolized by the state for the purposes of controlling beneficial externalities and creating dynamic growth [Pupphavesa, 1998], the

cultural and social impact of free trade was significant, leading to an exchange of ideas, beliefs, values and customs. Thailand has adopted not only a markedly western capitalist economic model but also various western technologies and forms of scientific thought. Furthermore, Teechapira points out that, whilst many of the Thai upper classes profess a love of 'Thainess', there is latent irony in their patriotic claims, as many display a greater admiration for western culture than for other Thai people. Teechapira states that it is nevertheless important to note the prevalence of a nationalistic ethos in Thailand, although he also argues that whilst nationalist campaigns have become more and more common, vestiges of 'Thainess' within society itself are actually disappearing rather than being restored [Teechapira, 1999].

This controversial topic of 'Thainess' continues to be subject to much debate amongst scholars [Hayes, 2004], particularly in the context of music. Some genres are perceived to be more 'Thai' than others; for example, Phleng Luu^๑kthuu^๒, due to the manner of its emergence and the stylistic characteristics with which it is conventionally associated, is often considered to be more 'Thai' than Phleng String (mainstream popular music) [Siriya-vasak, 1990; Jirattikorn, 2006; Eamsa-Ard, 2006]. These issues, of course, lead on to questions of originality, creativity, and authenticity in Thai popular music, which will be discussed in the second chapter (p.140-154).

Thai Popular Music

Peter Manuel contends that there are two key ways of identifying popular music, as distinct from other types of music. The first is through the mode of

dissemination, as popular music may be regarded as being circulated to a large degree through the mass media. The second is through seeing popular music as a product of mass infrastructures for selling commodities [Manuel, 1993]. However, whilst the term ‘Thai popular music’ has already been employed by various scholars [Siriyuvasak, 1990; Eamsa-Ard, 2006; Lockard, 1998], it has most often been used to refer to all Thai music which incorporates elements of Western music (Phleeng Luu^ˆkthuu^ˆŋ, Phleeng Luu^ˆkkruuŋ, and Phleeng Phyyaa^ˆ Chii Wi^ˆd, as well as mainstream popular music, or Phleeng String). Yet if one were to define popular music in the same terms as those put forward by Manuel, only Phleeng String, which most readily lends itself to being regarded as a cultural commodity and is circulated by the mass media to a much larger extent than music from other genres, should be seen as popular music. It is this more restricted sense which will be employed throughout this dissertation. It is also important to note that the term ‘pop music’ (or Phleeng Poo^ˆb) has been used by both the media and consumers in Thai society to refer specifically to Phleeng String, or mainstream music. Other genre names may be seen to have their own distinct connotations and denotations. For instance, the term “Phleeng Luu^ˆkthuu^ˆŋ” is often employed to refer to a genre of music which imbues Thai folk music with predominantly Western stylistic features, and which is popular in rural areas, and the term “Phleeng Luu^ˆkkruuŋ” alludes to a genre in which Western and Thai traditional singing styles are intermixed, and which is favoured by urban consumers. Further examination of the origins and development of these musical genres, as well as a more detailed definition of each, will be provided in the first chapter (p.36-37).

To date, studies on Thai popular music have been few and far between. Most take

the form of magazine articles focusing upon Phleen Luu`kthuu`η and Phleen Phyyaa` Chii Wi`d [Aiewswong, 1999]. Others, such as Limpichai's study and Siriyuvasak's, examine the role of Thai popular music as a vehicle for mass communication [Limpichai, 1989; Siriyuvasak, 1990]. The issue of Western influence has also been an important one. Examining the Thai popular music industry, some Thai scholars have perceived contemporary Thai popular music to have more in common with its Western counterparts than with traditional Thai music, pointing out common aesthetic features as well as the influence of predominantly Western melodies and rhythmic patterns. Limpichai goes so far as to argue that Thai and Western popular music may be essentially regarded as synonymous, the former bearing no resemblance to either local musical precursors or Thai classical music [Limpichai, 1989]. This issue has, of course, arisen not only in Thailand, but also in other Asian countries and indeed beyond, as the influence of Anglo-American culture has been found to be extremely far-reaching. Windschuttle points out, for instance, that in Australia the most prevalent forms of popular music are the product not of the experience of the people, but rather of foreign (particularly American and British) multinational corporations [Windschuttle, 1989].

Windschuttle also notes that it is difficult to underestimate the influence of large corporations in the music industry, pointing to the fact that they have both legal and financial control not only over marketing facilities and recording studios but also over artists and their songs (governing, at times, not only their professional careers, but also their personal lives). According to Windschuttle, music itself has become a commodity, a product consumed recreationally, and the music industry,

an industry which resembles most others [Windschuttle, 1989]. This is arguably true of the Thai music industry; particularly following the establishment of the first major label in 1982, a company which essentially sought to mirror the business practices and models associated with its western counterparts, Thai popular music became more recognizably a cultural commodity than it had ever been before. Thai popular music was shaped accordingly, and a number of consequences and phenomena have arisen out of the emergence and management of the major labels.

From my observation, the development of Thai popular music can be divided into five important periods: the Pre-pop Era (from the emergence of The Impossible to 1982), the Pop Era (1982-1994), the Indie Phenomenon (1994-1997), the Major Return (1997-2002) and the present day (2002 to today). These terms were used to emphasize the most prominent event happened in each period.

A brief overview of each of these periods would perhaps be useful. The first, the Pre-pop era, began during the 1960s when the success of rock 'n' roll acts from the West (i.e. by artists such as Elvis Presley and Cliff Richard, as well as bands such as The Shadows), coupled with the deployment of the United States army to Thailand during the Vietnam War, led to an increase in the influence of western popular music upon contemporary Thai music. The practice of imitating the songs of well-liked western artists and bands became commonplace amongst musicians who performed in nightclubs, as well as four-piece bands in the manner of The Shadows. Band competitions in the late 1960s and early 1970s such as the 'Thailand String Combo Contest' (the term 'String Combo' connoting a band composed of two guitars, one bass, a drum set, and a brass section) contributed to

an increase in the fame and popularity of bands like The Impossible (who subsequently released their first single and album ('Pen Paaii Maaii` Daaii`, or 'impossible') in 1972). This was an era during which no one company handled the entire process of producing, recording, promoting and distributing music. Instead, there were various backers who owned recording studios and provided capital for artists to record and release their records to the market. At the same time, live performance persisted in being the most effective way to reach consumers (as the records of western artists remained much more widely available than those of Thai artists, and records and record players were themselves fairly expensive at that time). Following the epoch of band contests, the brass sections in String Combo bands were replaced by keyboards and the term 'String Combo' shortened to 'String'. The type of music that typified the work of bands such as The Impossible came to be known as 'Phleen String' (Phleen always refers to songs), resulting in the emergence of a new genre in Thai modern music. Many other String bands emerged following the success of The Impossible (namely, groups such as Grand X and Chaatrii). Their songs became extremely successful and resulted in Phleen String's dramatically increasing in popularity. Yet whilst the Pre-pop era was one in which the popularity of Phleen String skyrocketed, quite the opposite was true of that of Phleen Luu`kkruuŋ, although Phleen Luu`kthuu`ŋ retained its popularity in rural areas.

Subsequently, Phleen String, as a form of popular music in Thailand, became particularly commercially prominent with the establishment of two major record labels in the early 1980s (RS Promotion and Grammy). These labels organized themselves very much along the lines of their Western counterparts, marketing

their music primarily to Thai teenagers (RS having previously been known as Rose Sound Co., Ltd, a company that transferred songs from LPs to jukebox and cassette-tape format and distributed them). From this point onward, Thai popular music was established commercially, and the industry became dominated by the two major labels. Due to the power of market dominance, popular music from major labels from 1982 to 1994 became gradually more prosperous than other music genres (see Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2). Hence, I will refer to this period as the Pop Era. Whilst the Thai popular music industry may not be regarded as being either as large, or as competitive, as ones found in Western countries, or even in East Asia, Korea and Japan [Chun, Rossiter and Shoesmith, 2004], it is important to note that it has been subject to much discussion by groups such as music students, professional musicians, and critics, and that the issues which arise from such discussions are in many ways comparable to those which emerge in discussions of industries which operate upon a larger scale (e.g. those of corporate control).

The term ‘the Indie Phenomenon’ will be used here to refer to the independent music phenomenon, which exploded in 1994 and then rapidly faded out in 1997. During this time, audiences were enthused by the introduction of new sounds and live performances, clearly expressing admiration for artists with the ability to produce and play their own music and responding positively to the opportunity to admire artists not merely for their physical appearance. Noticeably, there were many indie concerts performed every week around the urban areas with massive audiences in attendance, as well as wide media coverage, including articles in magazines characterizing indie music as an alternative genre for a new generation.

I will examine the extent to which independent labels today maintain their autonomy and uniqueness within the industry [Negus, 1999; Lee, 1995] and the reasons for their declining popularity. The Indie Phenomenon emerged alongside the establishment of Bakery Music in 1994. Although independent labels such as Bakery Music did not own marketing channels (as did the major ones), the label benefited much from its rather novel policy of having artists create their own music. This was evident from the commercial success of Bakery Music's first release, an eponymous album by a group called Modern Dog in 1994. Bakery Music, with the success of Modern Dog, created almost single-handedly the Indie Phenomenon in Thailand, in which artists composed the music that they played, produced sounds and singing style which were innovative and distinct from those created by artists belonging to the major labels, and concentrated on live performance. The Indie Phenomenon defines the period when independent labels came to hold some significant share of the music market and stimulated the feverish generation of non-mainstream music. Without established connections to mass media, artists promoted themselves by collaborating with independent labels to set up live concerts, touring around universities and high schools in Bangkok. In the midst of the booming popular interest in indie album releases, more independent labels were founded, such as Stone Entertainment [1995], Eastern Sky [1995], and ร็อค η Siiaa η Lam Yaaii [1997], and employment opportunities for artists increased accordingly.

As a result of the impact of the Indie Phenomenon, major labels began losing their market share. Moreover, the indie scene took place in urban areas, which could be considered the national centres of cultural production and distribution. The major

labels responded by implementing policies similar to those employed by independent labels, by increasing the number of artists chosen for their music talent rather than their physical appearance, and by allowing them to produce their own works without putting excess corporate pressure on them. As the major labels attempted to emulate the business practices of independent labels in order to regain their market share, the slump of the Asian economy in 1997 meant that independent labels were confronted by a decrease in sales and financial difficulties of their own. Finally, the Indie Phenomenon ended in 1997, ushering in the Major Return

Only two major labels (Grammy and RS) and one independent label (Bakery) survived the Asian financial crisis of 1997. The decline in the fortunes of independent music labels and the waning of the Indie Phenomenon meant that major labels regained much control and influence over the Thai popular music industry. However, the effects of the economic recession were indeed not only far-reaching, but also enduring and coupled with the problems associated with various technological advancements (the development of MP3 technology and the Internet). These factors meant that, during the post-1997 period, major labels confronted substantial difficulties in managing their businesses and a downturn in their revenues. This period, 1997 to 2002, will be identified as the Major Return era.

These distinct stages in the development of the Thai popular music industry will of course be discussed in much greater depth in the course of this dissertation, which

has been divided into five chapters accordingly:

Chapter 1: A History of Thai Popular Music - Its definition and the Industry

This chapter will provide an overview of the history of Thai popular music. As Thai popular music and its industry have seldom been studied by Anglophone popular music scholars, this chapter will attempt briefly to chronicle the history of the Thai popular music industry, from its genesis to its present-day existence.

When Western music was introduced into Thailand in the early 1930s, it was a significant influence on an already-existing music genre, classical court music, which was played on traditional Thai instruments in traditional Thai style.

However, after 1945, Thai musicians more readily adopted predominantly Western stylistic features (from genres such as rock 'n' roll, disco, and jazz) and synthesized them with Thai ones, creating what was referred to as 'Phleeng Thai Saa'kon'. ('Phleeng Thai Saa'kon' was itself eventually divided into four genres: 'Phleeng Luu'kkruung', 'Phleeng Luu'kthuu'η', 'Phleeng Phyyaa' Chii Wi'd', and mainstream popular music or Phleeng String/ Phleeng Pop.) This dissertation will examine the emergence of each genre in order to differentiate and identify which may truly be regarded as popular music, in the Western sense, within the Thai music industry. Discussions of Western influence of course quite inevitably lead on to questions of cultural imperialism, globalization, and censorship, which will also be addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 2: The Pop Era - When Music Became a Cultural Commodity

Focusing on corporate behaviours, this chapter will examine the industry organization and the strategies of each major label during the first period of the

study, the early 1980s to 1994, to understand the processes behind the product. Subsequently, the issues relating to how the corporations used mass media to motivate consumers will be raised and discussed. In addition, the extent to which major labels imitated the so-called 'Brill Building system', for example by assembling songwriters in a company and then selecting the best songs from their work for release, together with the pros and cons of that system, will be assessed. Additionally, I will analyse those Thai songs that imitated Western hits in the early days of Thai pop music, adopting their melodies, chord progressions, and instrumental arrangements, and translating the lyrics into the Thai language. Such songs appeared continually after the emergence of the major labels. This leads to the discussion points: originality, creativity and authenticity.

Chapter 3: The Indie Phenomenon

This chapter will examine the state of the Thai popular music industry during the Indie Phenomenon (1994-1997). The sudden emergence of independent labels will be examined, in order to trace how they successfully competed with the major labels without the mass media interface that the larger labels enjoyed, as well as how Indie music created music scenes within urban areas of the country. The prominence of the movement indeed became such that it could not reasonably be ignored (even by forms of media which were owned by major labels and which served to promote their own products); the attention of the mass media, of course, provided further opportunities for indie artists to broadcast their works. I will also explore what was meant by the term 'indie' from different perspectives (i.e. that of audiences, that of artists and that of the mass media), what made indie music distinctive from mainstream music, and why it had such a profound influence upon

the music industry. The reasons for the short-lived existence of independent labels, as well as how the major labels responded to the Indie Phenomenon and to the emergence of independent labels, will also be analysed.

Chapter 4: The Major Return - The Slump in the Popular Music Industry

Although by 1997, the Indie Phenomenon and the boom in indie music had dramatically declined and the major labels had effectively prevailed over indie, the music industry still confronted financial difficulties brought on by the economic recession. Moreover, as technology such as MP3s and the Internet was progressively developed after the new millennium, the Thai popular music industry faced a downturn in revenue. Various strategies and policies were developed and implemented by major labels in the hopes of remedying these problems. These schemes and policies will be more thoroughly explored and analysed in the course of the chapter, along with their effects upon the artists of major labels, their production process and their promotion teams. Also, although by the Major Return period the Indie Phenomenon was over, some indie artists and community still survived. The development of an ‘indie culture’, with its own characteristics and identities, will therefore also be examined and the indie community and culture in Thai society will be analyzed in light of Pierre Boudier’s theories.

Chapter 5: Time for Celebrity and a New Business Model

In this day, the advances in technology and its effects on mass media have transformed the behaviours of music consumers, not only in Thailand, but also worldwide. Major labels have had to alter significantly the ways in which they

operate their businesses, as the chronic decline of album sales has made distribution an unreliable source of financial revenue. Consequently, companies have had to shift from concentrating on the recording industry to acting as content providers. Although technological advancements could be regarded as an advantage to independent labels and professional musicians, as it seems to lead to a reduction in the power of the major labels and a weakening of the barriers between artists and audiences [Gerbert, 2000; Fox, 2004], it is important to recognize the extent to which major labels have retained a great deal of influence and control over the Thai popular music industry. This chapter will examine how and why major labels have remained extremely puissant; it will also study how they have been responsible for what may be termed a celebrity culture, as well as benefited from its existence. The causes and effects of this celebrity culture will also be examined in the fifth chapter.

Notes

¹ Information from the Ministry of Interior, Thailand, 2010.

² Office of Thai National Culture Commission, 2002.

Romanisation

A fundamental problem encountered by scholars who write about Thailand is how to romanise the Thai language. Unlike with Mandarin Chinese, where the official system of romanisation is *pinyin*, or other languages such as Arabic and Persian, the Thai language has no official standard of romanisation. Dusadee Swangviboonpong suggests in his book *Thai Classical Singing: Its History, Musical Characteristics and Transmission* states that the romanisation problem in the Thai language is not about the language itself but rather about the lack of agreement among scholars, who have not been able to agree on a single standard [Swangviboonpong, 2003]. Therefore, we can apparently observe from journals or articles that one Thai word can be spelled in various ways. For example, the particular genre of Thai music which is a combination of folk and western popular music can be spelled as *Looktoong*, *Lookthoong*, *Lukthung*, *Lukthoong*, *Luktung* or *Lukthoong*. Again, in Sawangviboonpong's book, he illustrates the five major works in English on Thai music (Morton 1976, Roongruang 1990, Myers-Moro 1993, Miller and Chonpairot 1995 and Wong 2001) to show that 'there was no consensus – even worse: *every* author had made further modifications to existing systems' [Swangviboonpong, 2003] His consequent decision is to use the Haas system, explaining that 'it shows all possible relevant details: it distinguishes all consonants, all vowels, all tones and also shows vowel length consistently' [Swangviboonpong, 2003].

As a Thai native speaker, I personally find the romanisation systems of Miller and Chonpairot (following the ALA-LC system, although with exceptions), the Roongruang system (i.e. no system) and Wong's version of the Royal Institute system are probably easier to understand and read. However, they can cause confusion to

non-native Thai speakers as they are not able to show the different speech-tones in the words, which can lead to the misunderstanding of the meaning. For example, the word “Thao” can possibly have three different meanings depended on the speech-tones. Hence, without a symbol representing the speech-tone, it is undoubtedly difficult for non-native Thai speakers to pronounce and understand it. Therefore, in this dissertation, I have used the romanisation system used by Swangviboonpong in *Thai Classical Singing* (following the Haas system). Furthermore, I have added some Thai letters to the list of Roman consonants which are used in my dissertation but are not mentioned in Swangviboonpong’s work.

Speech tones

There are five different speech tones in Thai language according to Haas 1994 and Swangviboonpong 2003.

no tone mark	=	a mid-tone or ('common sound')
`	=	a low tone or('first sound')
ˆ	=	a falling tone or ...('second sound')
´	=	a high tone or.... ('third sound')
˘	=	a rising tone or ...('fourth sound')

Consonants

	beginning of a word	end of a word
b =	บ	บ ป ฝ
c =	จ	-
(c is pronounced as English j)		
ch =	ฉ ช ฌ	-
d =	ด ฎ	จ ช ด ฎ ฏ ฐ ฌ ฌ
f =	ฟ ฝ	-

g =	-	ก ข ค ฆ
h =	ห อ	-
i =	อ	-
j =	ย	ย
(j is pronounced as y)		
k =	ก	-
(k is pronounced as the g in the word ‘go’)		
kh =	ข ค ฆ	-
(kh is pronounced as k)		
l =	ล	ล
m =	ม	ม
n =	น	น ล ฬ
p =	ป	-
(p is pronounced somewhere between b and p; there is no English equivalent)		
ph =	ผ ฟ ภ	-
(ph is pronounced as p)		
r =	ร	-
(r is flapped or rarely trilled, with tongue tip pointing slightly back)		
ry =	ฤ	-
ryy =	ฤๅ	-
s =	ซ ศ ษ ส	-
t =	ด ฏ	-
(t is pronounced somewhere between d and t; there is no English equivalent)		
th =	ฐ ฑ ฒ ถ ฑ ฐ	-
(th is pronounced as t)		
w =	ว	ว
η =	ง	ง

Vowels

a = อะ	like	u in <u>cut</u>
aa = อา	like	a in <u>car</u>
i = อิ	like	i in <u>hint</u>
ii = อี	like	ee in <u>meet</u>
y = อึ	like	English <u>could</u> but with a slight smile (short)
yy = อือ	like	same as above (long)
u = อุ	like	u in <u>put</u>
uu = อู	like	oo in <u>boot</u>
e = เอะ	like	e in <u>net</u>
ee = เอ	like	a in <u>late</u>
ε = แอะ	like	a in <u>mare</u> (short)
εε = แอ	like	same as above (long)
o = โอะ	like	o in <u>host</u> (short)
oo = โอ	like	same as above (long)
ɔ = เอาะ	like	o in British <u>hot</u> or American <u>ought</u> (short)
ɔɔ = ออ	like	same as above (long)
ə = เออะ	like	e in <u>her</u> (short)
əə = เออ	like	same as above (long)

The above vowels can be combined in Thai, for example, iia (เฝีย) [swangviboonpong, 2003].

It is also worth noting that, although I follow the romanisation system from Swangviboonpong’s book, I do not aim for absolute consistency as some specific

names such as artists' names or their albums have an agreed roman form already in widespread use in the entertainment industry.

Chapter 1: A History of Thai Popular Music – Its definition and the Industry

The Thai culture (as that of other nations) may be regarded as being the product both of its own people and of interactions with other peoples and cultures (through war, trade, colonialism, globalization etc.). The early period in the country's history may be seen, as is true of many SEA countries, as one in which China and India constituted extremely significant cultural influences [Lockard, 1998]. In order to limit the scope of this study, I will focus upon the cultural environments which characterize various SEA nations. As is typical of most SEA countries, the Thai traditional culture may be regarded as being composed of two distinct strains: one associated with the upper, aristocratic classes, another associated with the lower, peasant population. Certain art forms were seen to belong to the court and enjoyed solely by the country's 'elite', whilst other (folk) art forms were performed and enjoyed predominantly by villagers [Lockard, 1998]. This is certainly true of Thai traditional music, which is conventionally divided into two recognizable genres: folk music and court music. Whilst classical court music was typically performed at various rituals and ceremonies, as well as royal events, folk music was widely performed for the masses and finally developed into popular music, a vein of the Thai popular culture. The task of defining Thai popular music is, however, by no means a straightforward or simple one.

Brian Shoesmith pointed out in his preface to *Refashioning Pop Music in Asia* that scholars had long neglected the field of Asian popular music since many have found it difficult to apply Western theories to Asian case studies [Shoesmith, 2004]. Whilst interest in the field has increased significantly within the last few decades, it is also important to note the ways in which the connotations of the term

‘popular music’ has changed over time. Particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, the phrase was employed in Asian countries primarily to refer to traditional music that was of the folk variety, as distinguished from what was deemed to be court music. Whilst the meaning of the term ‘popular music’ has evolved considerably in most Asian countries, the change is by no means uniform, the extent to which the term has altered in its sense varying from country to country [Lockard, 1998; Shoesmith, 2004; Heyes, 2004]. At the same time, it is important to point out that in almost all cases, the use of the term ‘popular music’ came to connote a combination between Western and domestic stylistic features and patterns, but also that ‘popular music’ was perceived as something evocative of Western, rather than Asian, culture.

In order to address the issue of Thai popular music, it is perhaps rather important to first consider the various musical genres and categories which exist in Thai culture, to attempt to define each and to examine how each emerged and evolved. Such knowledge is of course key to any understanding of popular music in Thailand and indeed not merely pertinent, but central to this dissertation.

Thai Popular Music: A Definition and Chronology of its Development

Attempts to define and categorize genres of music in Thai culture are quite inevitably fraught with difficulty as whilst scholarly works which deal with traditional and folk music abound, much less has been done on Thai popular music (partly because, as mentioned above, many have found it difficult to apply theories based upon Western case studies to Asian ones). This dissertation will, however, attempt to define and describe Thai popular music by both drawing upon the history of Thai musical culture and adopting and appropriating various popular

music theories which have been put forward by Western scholars. In order to do so, I will begin by examining the nature and development of two distinct strains of music in Thailand, ‘Dontrii Thai’ (Thai traditional music) and ‘Dontrii Thai Saa`kon’ (an intermixing of the Thai and the Western music).

Dontrii Thai is often seen as being composed of two subtypes or genres: folk music, which was produced by and performed for ordinary people, and court music, which was produced by courtiers and performed for the royal family as well as aristocrats. Folk music, or ‘Phleeng Phyy`n Myyaaŋ’ includes songs created in the different regions of Thailand by local people, for various occasions and to different ends. For instance, ‘Phleeng Kiiaa`w khaa`w’ a folk song widely known in the central region of Thailand, was composed by farmers and conventionally sung by agricultural workers whilst harvesting rice in order to cheer them up when they were tired. Phleeng Phyy`n Myyaaŋ is played with local instruments or unaccompanied and sung in different regional dialects [Encyclopedia, 1989]. By contrast, Thai classical court music, ‘Phleeng Thai Dæm’ was originally performed in the royal palace to entertain the royal family and their attendants. Many scholars have examined the origins of Thai classical music, and the belief that Thai classical music was influenced by Indian ‘classical’ music (a belief held by His Royal Highness (HRH) Krom Phra`jaa Damroŋ Raachaanu`Phaa`b) had become an extremely widespread one, particularly amongst Thai scholars [Lockard, 1998; <http://www.siamnt.com/culture-instrument/>]. Phleeng Thai Dæm is usually played by an ensemble with a greater combination of instruments than Phleeng Phyy`n Myyaaŋ. Furthermore, Phleeng Thai Dæm arrangements may generally be regarded as being more complex than Phleeng Phyy`n Myyaaŋ ones. Music of both types was

The reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868) was characterized by the development of good trade connections with Western countries and the adoption of elements of Western culture such as language, customs and beliefs, an absorption of different aspects of what was perceived to be the Western lifestyle, as well as an appropriation of scientific and medical innovations. An important example of this can be found in the introduction of military music into Thailand. This was also an era in which the threat of colonization, particularly by nations such as France and Great Britain, was a very real one [Sayamanon, 1982]; this perceived threat inevitably led to a recognition of the need to improve and modernize the Thai Army. Retired British officers such as Captain Impey were hired to restructure the Thai Army in the image of the British one. A Western style of marching became one of the activities adopted and practiced by the Thai Army; the King himself was known to be particularly fond of marching formations and music. Officers such as Captain Knox were hired to train soldiers to play music as part of a marching band at the palace of Prabad Somdet Phra Pinklao [Association-of-Thai-Composition, 1983: 2]. This introduction of Western marching music essentially constitutes the introduction Western music into Thailand. Yet the fact that such music was reserved solely for military use meant that it had no perceptible impact upon Thai folk and court music. At the same time, continued efforts to introduce the art of ceremonial marching during the reign of King Rama V, 1868-1910 [Wattana, 1993: 40-41] led to the introduction of Western music theories by the turn of the century, including Western forms of notation, harmonies, and methods of orchestration, as well as various musical techniques. This was encouraged and supported by members of the royal family such as HRH Bōōri'pha'd Su'khu'mphan, son of Rama V, and HRH Su'khu'maan Maara'srii'. However,

these music theories were still framed in a military context. During this time, Bōori'pha'd Su'khu'mphan (1881-1944), who was serving in the Royal Thai Navy, began to compose modern musical compositions which adapted melodies from Thai classical songs, but arranged them in a style that was markedly more Western [Patarasuk, 2004].

The terms 'Dontrii Thai Saa'kon' (can be usually called as Phleen Thai Saa'kon) were consequently introduced in order to refer to this new genre of music, which consisted of an intermixing of the Thai and the Western. Saa'kon: The term's meaning is dependent upon context and it may be employed in several senses; it may denote that which is 'universal', that which is 'foreign' or 'international', or more specifically that which is 'Western'. For instance, 'Naa'n Naa'm Saa'kon' means 'international waters', 'Saa'kon Ca'gkra'waan', the 'universal' or 'worldwide', and 'Muuaaj Saa'kon', 'western boxing'. When employed in context of Thai music (both traditional and modern) the term refers, almost exclusively, to music which has been influenced by distinctly Western styles and forms (that is to say, the term normally does not encompass music influenced by other Eastern cultures). HRH Bōori'pha'd Su'khu'mphan composed many Phleen Thai Saa'kon to be played by military bands, such as 'Su'd Sano'', which takes its melody from 'Sεε'n Sano'', a Thai classical song. Yet his oeuvre also included compositions with entirely original although distinctly Western melodies. A good example of this is 'The Noree Waltz', which was composed for Princess Noree of Sweden during her visit to Thailand. HRH Bōori'pha'd Su'khu'mphan contributions to the Thai culture eventually led to him being given the epithet *the Father of Modern Thai Music* [Wikamul, 1984].

Concurrent to the introduction of marching music to Thailand and the emergence of Phleeṅ Thai Saa`kon was the flourishing of Western-style drama in urban areas. Drama had been established as an art form during the reign of King Rama V, but experienced a boost in popularity when Phleeṅ Thai Saa`kon was introduced into plays. The combination of drama and Phleeṅ Thai Saa`kon came to be known as ‘Lakhōon Phanthaaj’ (Thai Musical). HRH Naraathi`b Pra`phanphon established the first musical troupe, ‘Lakhōon Luuaa`ṅ Na`ry`mi`d’ which hired musicians and songwriters from military bands to compose and perform for their shows. Consequently, many of the scores and songs employed in their musicals were composed in a Western style and Phleeṅ Thai Saa`kon became more widely available, accessible to civilians. Following the success of Lakhōon Luuaa`ṅ Na`ry`mi`d, numerous musical troupes cropped up, such as the ‘Bantəṅ Siam’ and the ‘Praamoo`d Na`khōon’ troupes [Limpichai 1989: 56]. The music which they produced became widely known, although accessible almost exclusively to those living in urban areas.

Later, in 1911, the first music school, Phraan Luuaa`ṅ, was established at Mi`sa`ka`wan Park in Bangkok by King Rama VI, to develop the skills of Thai musicians. The first Western-style orchestra was also formed during this period, 1910s under the direction of the King. The orchestra, ‘Woj Khryyaa`ṅ Saa`j Fa`ra` ṅ Luuaa`ṅ’, performed mostly at royal events and government parties, and reached its peak in terms of popularity during the reign of Rama VII, performing for the first time in public during this period using the ensemble name His Majesty The King’s Royal Orchestra. Interest in Dontrii Saa`kon and Western music

increased considerably in this era, as is evident from the number of both government and private music schools that were founded following the establishment of the Phraan Luuaa`ŋ School. However, this interest in Dontrii Saa`kon and Western music was essentially limited to urban areas, as were the music schools. Phleeng Phyy`n Myyaan remained the predominant form of music in rural areas.

By the 1930s, other Western musical genres had also been introduced into Thai culture. Jazz music, for instance, was imported by figures such as Luuaa`ŋ Su`khu`m Naaiipradi`d. Naaiipradi`d had received his university education from the United States, had studied jazz music, and had even formed his own band ('Rainbow'). Upon his return to Thailand, Naaiipradi`d brought with him musicians to play jazz for the Thai people (their venues included plays and government-controlled radio stations). By the 1930s was also the period during which sound films were first introduced. The first sound film company in Thailand, Sri`kruŋ Soundfilm, set up the first movie studio in the Baan Kaapi` district of Bangkok. Film scores quickly became a significant part of the movie industry in the early 1930s, and Western-style composers and musicians were hired to compose and perform for film. During this period movie theatres were of course limited to Bangkok, and audiences were predominantly middle and upper class. The original film scores of these films also became particularly popular amongst affluent teenagers. During this time, another sound film company, Thai Film, was also established, which hired many well-known artists to produce and perform songs, giving the position of bandleader to Luuaa`ŋ Su`khu`m Naaiipradi`d. The most notable songs produced during this time are those such as

‘Naaii Fa`n’ (In the Dream) and ‘Buuaa Kaa`w’ (White Lotus), which were included in the film score of a movie called *Thaa`n Faaii Kaaoo`* (*An Old Lover*) (the latter was written by ML Phuuaaṅṛṵṵṵ Sa`ni`dwoṅ, the first female Thai composer of note, and a songwriter who became rather famous as a result of the popularity of her songs). It could be said that the mid-1930s was the golden age of sound films, as it was an era in which movie theatres sprung up all around Bangkok and began to appear in various other cities all over the country.

During this time there were four musical bands that were rising in popularity: the Du`ri`ja`joothin Band (led by Jampaa Lamsa`mraan), the Public Relations Department Band (led by yyaa` Su`nthoṅsa`naa`n), the Crown Property Band (led by Naa`d Thaa`wṵṅbu`d), and the Chamber Music Band (led by Luuaa`n Khwantham) [Limpichi, 1989]. These bands composed and played film scores for various famous movies, their leaders came to be regarded as masters of Phleṅ Thai Saa`kon composition. This is especially true of yyaa` Su`nthoṅsa`naa`n, whose iconic status as a father of Phleṅ Luu`kkruuṅ was solidified when he founded the So`ntharaaphṵṅ Band at the end of the Second World War. During and after the WWII period, two genres of music, ‘Phleṅ Luu`kkruuṅ’ and ‘Phleṅ Luu`kthuu`ṅ’, emerged in Thailand as a result of the influence of Western popular music.

Phleṅ Luu`kkruuṅ may generally be described as romantic songs that express the sentiment of love in delicate, elaborate, and elevated language, and that are characterized by a slow rhythm. The melodies of Phleṅ Luu`kkruuṅ also tend to employ major and minor scales rather than the Thai scales, which compose of six

or seven pitches and the intervals do not match with piano's. Additionally, the articulation of sounds in Phleeng Luu'kkruung is closely akin to the singing style associated with Thai classical music. Phleeng Luu'kkruung was performed by bands with a rhythm and brass section, the most significant band who gained their fame from Phleeng Luu'kkruung being the So'ntharaaphoon Band². Phleeng Luu'kkruung found most of its admirers in urban areas. Some examples of famous singers during the period include Su'thee'b Wonkamhe'e'ng, Sawalii Pakaaphan and Charin Nanthanaakoon [Wikamul, 1984].

On the other hand, Phleeng Luu'kthuu'ng, which found most of its supporters in the countryside, may be seen as being characterized by songs with lively rhythms and simple, unsophisticated lyrics (which often dealt with different aspects of rural life). Moreover, the melodies of Phleeng Luu'kthuu'ng were mostly composed using Thai scales and minor scales, sometimes with melodies borrowed from Phleeng Phyy'n Myyaang which come from various parts of Thailand. Indeed although both Phleeng Luu'kthuu'ng and Phleeng Luu'kkruung made use of Western musical instruments and were harmonized in a Western style, the arrangement methods associated with the former still bore many resemblances to those employed in Phleeng Phyy'n Myyaang, and singing style associated with the latter was rather similar to that found in Phleeng Thai Dæm. As the adoption of Western elements in both forms may be regarded as partial and limited, both Phleeng Luu'kkruung and Phleeng Luu'kthuu'ng could be considered part of traditional Thai culture [Siriyuvasak, 1990]. Any study of the emergence and development of Phleeng Luu'kkruung and Phleeng Luu'kthuu'ng must also take into account issues of

geographical location, regional divisions and distinctions between rural and urban areas.

During the Second World War, the military occupation of major cities in Thailand by foreign forces meant that certain aspects of Western culture, particularly those pertaining to nightlife, were introduced into Thai society. A great number of nightclubs and bars emerged around Bangkok (where the majority of foreign military personnel were stationed) and many musicians were employed to play in these pubs and clubs (primarily playing jazz and blues music). Whilst Western art forms had long influenced Thai culture, musical styles, conventions and patterns being adapted to create the hybrid Dontrii Saa`kon, this type of music was initially, as had been mentioned, enjoyed almost exclusively by the upper classes, particularly the royal family (often being seen as a symbol of social status and sophistication). Even though Dontrii Saa`kon became more widely accessible, available to the general public, famous musicians and composers were more often than not government officials who worked under the patronage of the royal family. Consequently, Dontrii Saa`kon was developed primarily in the country's capital, Bangkok, and consumers of Western music and Dontrii Saa`kon were for the most part those who dwelt in urban areas. Conversely, whilst those who inhabited the rural provinces had some access to Dontrii Saa`kon (namely through the radio), the popularity of this new form of music in the countryside was by no means comparable to its popularity in large cities (Phleeng Phyy`n Myyaan and Phleeng Thai Dæm remaining favored by most as well as more widely available). Moreover, the growth of mass media at that time was very gradual, hindering the dissemination of the new genre of music. It becomes evident, through examining

the nature of music consumption in Thailand from the reign of King Rama IV to the end of WWII, that musical tastes varied greatly depending upon geographical location, access to mass media, and socio-economic status, the division between rural and urban being a prominent and significant one.

Even after the Second World War, the musical interests of those who lives in cities and those who inhabited the countryside remained extremely different (although the mass media continued to gradually develop in Thailand throughout this period). By 1952, the Public Relations Department created Channel 4 ('Baangkhu`nphrom'), the first television channel in Thailand, broadcasting in black and white. At the same time, the first radio station to be registered and to operate as a company was founded by the same government department, together with Thai Television Co. Ltd. [Siriyuvasak, 2007]. Both television and radio programmes were broadcast nation side and, as a result of this, Dontrii Saa`kon became accessible to people in rural areas. At the same time, people in urban areas and those in rural ones continued to consume music differently. Nevertheless, the growth of mass media and the birth of new music genres, Phleeng Luu`kkruuj and Phleeng Luu`kthuu`n, resulted in an increase in music consumption in both urban areas and the countryside. This was also the era during which the So`ntharaaphoon Band (known as a famous Phleeng Luu`kkruuj band) peaked in popularity, performing at the opening ceremony of Channel 4 (which was broadcast throughout the country). These two genres maintained their popularity until the arrival of 'Phleeng String', Thai popular music, in the late 1960s.

In examining the periods before, during, and after WWII, it becomes apparent that the popularity of music genres remained largely determined by geography and socio-economic class; that is to say, urban dwellers tended to favor the modern and sophisticated whilst those in rural areas remained fond of music that was deemed simple and uncomplicated. The music consumed in urban areas, which was generally more ornate and polished, was often meant to reflect more cultivated and refined tastes, as did as Phleeng Thai Dæm in the period before World War II. Conversely, the music consumed in rural areas often projected an impression of straightforwardness, simplicity, and spiritedness. This gap between rural and urban tastes remained a pronounced one even as a new music genre, Phleeng String, emerged.

Phleeng String as Thai Popular Music

The period from the 1960s to 1982 was one in which the Thai mass media experienced explosive growth. Privately owned rather than government run radio and television companies began to appear, and a new genre called Phleeng String emerged (this would become the mainstream form of music in the following period, from 1983 onwards).

Phleeng Luu^kkruuŋ, Phleeng Luu^kthuu^ŋ and So^ntharaaphoon Band maintained their popularity until the beginning of the Vietnam War (around 1959). The presence of large numbers of American military personnel in Thailand throughout the war had a lasting effect upon the music tastes of the Thai people. During this time, many bands gained renown by playing in nightclubs around the Bangkok area, they often performed rock and roll numbers, the songs of Elvis Presley, Cliff

Richard, and The Shadows etc. The more closely or accurately a band could imitate these artists in terms of their singing voices, dancing, mannerisms, attire, and music, the more popular that band became. Moreover, at that time, the standard composition of a band was two guitars, a bass and a drum set, which replicated that of The Shadows ('Shadow' therefore became a term employed to describe these types of band during this period) [Sirachaya, 2008].

The term 'Phleen String' was used for the first time in 1969 when the Music Association of Thailand, under the Patronage of HM the King Bhumipol Adulyadej (Rama IX), organized the Thailand String Combo Contest. This was in fact the first time that the term String Combo was used officially (String Combo connoting a band consisting of two electric guitars, an electric bass, a drum set and a brass section). During the competition, contestants had to perform three songs: a Western popular song, a song of either Phleen Luu`kkruun or Phleen Luu`kthuu`n genre. As King Rama IX was generally acknowledged by the Thai people to be an accomplished jazz composer and masterly saxophonist, the contestants were required to play a song from His Majesty's own oeuvre. The winning contestants in the first year were Joint Reaction, a band that had gained some prominence performing in various nightclubs around New Phe`dcha`burii Road (a major area for nightlife in Bangkok at that time), particularly due to the quality of its singers and brass section arrangements [Songpao, 2001].

Joint Reaction won not only the first String Combo Contest but also the second and third contests, growing dramatically in popularity after their initial success. Subsequently, they were renamed The Impossible. The term 'String Combo' was

eventually shortened simply to ‘String’ (as many bands replaced their brass sections with keyboards to reduce the division of income) and became a widely used term across Thailand. The songs that were played by bands of this type were known as ‘Phleey String’ (String Band songs).

In 1969, The Impossible was hired to act and perform in the extremely commercially successful movie *Thoon (Only)*. The Impossible went on to arrange and perform for many famous soundtracks and continued to perform in nightclubs around the Bangkok area, such as the Fire Cracker Club and The Impossible Café. The band also often performed in movie theatres before the first showing of the day (at 6 a.m.), a practice quite unique to Thai culture. Theatres were often packed, despite the early hour, an attestation to the band’s enormous popularity at the time.

In 1972, the band released their first single, ‘Pen Paaii Maaii` Daaii`’ (It’s impossible), as well as their eponymous first album. The songs, as was characteristic of Phleey String, were strongly influenced by stylistic features, melodies and arrangements which were typical of Western popular music, although they were sung in Thai. This was largely the result of the immense popularity of Western popular music, but also the absence of copyright laws to prevent such practices. It was indeed common practice to copy the melodies and chord progressions of existing Western pop songs, but replace the original lyrics with Thai ones. For example, the melody and chord progression from Harry Belafonte’s ‘Day-O’ was used in The Impossible’s ‘Dææ’d ɔɔ`g’ (Sunshine), and those used in Brewer and Shipley’s ‘One Toke Over the Line’, replicated in ‘Ny`ŋ

Naaii Duuaaŋ Caaii' (Only You). These examples will be discussed and analysed in greater depth the next chapter.

Although many String bands were popular during this era, The Impossible was the only band to release an album during the period of gramophones (which were very expensive and affordable to only a very small minority of Thais). The album itself was comprised mainly of Western songs, the rest being soundtrack pieces from Thai movies. At the time, recording companies were for the most part unwilling to invest in Phleen String artists and groups. The Impossible, despite their remarkable popularity, only released two albums: *Pen Paaii Maaii' Daaii' (Impossible)* and *Hot Pepper*. *Hot Pepper* was recorded in Sweden and consisted only of English-language songs. It was produced during the band's tour of Europe in 1975, but ultimately met little commercial success both in Europe and in Thailand.

This was an era during which recording companies neither provided artists with musical production teams, nor granted them royalties (they instead received a lump sum once recording had been completed). Furthermore, companies retained right to publish and distribute all albums, and received all the revenue generated from album sales [Sirachaya, 2008]. Although the organization of the Thai music industry at that time was quite dissimilar to the structure of Western industries, this is also the period during which one sees the beginnings of large-scale commercialization in the Thai popular music industry. In addition to being the first Thai band to release their own albums, The Impossible was also the first group to sell concert tickets [Songpao, 2001]. Moreover, in the early 1970s, the era in which The Impossible began to garner much popularity, the loanword 'pop music'

was introduced into the discourse of newspapers such as *Thai Rath* and *Daily News* as an alternative term for Phleeng String.

The term ‘popular music’ has been employed to connote that which is widely produced and consumed at any given place and period of time. This interpretation allows genres such as Phleeng Luu^kkruun and Phleeng Luu^kthuu^η to be included under the umbrella term ‘Thai popular music’. This is indeed the sense of the term employed by scholars such as Ubonrat Siriyuvasak. Siriyuvasak, a scholar in the field of mass media and communications studies, not only employs the term in this wider sense, but has also included these genres in her diagram illustrating the genealogy of contemporary Thai popular music in *Commercializing the Sound of People* [Siriyuvasak, 1990]. This dissertation will, however, employ the term in a much narrower sense, to refer Phleeng String (or mainstream popular music).

According to Gammond and Williams, ‘popular’ means ‘of the ordinary people’. The word ‘popular’ was first used to describe a type of music in William Chapple’s *Popular Music of the Olden Times*, which was published in installments from 1855 [1991, 1983]. The term ‘popular music’ has of course been variously defined by different scholars and the sense of the term employed in this thesis will be based upon the interpretations provided by several scholars. Key ways of identifying popular music have been those such as purpose of production (popular music being generated, as Burnett has argued, solely for commercial purposes [Burnett, 1996]) as well as scale of consumption (which can be gauged from radio charts, airplay time etc. [Clarke ed. 1990; Garofalo 1997]). Such definitions exclude genres such as Phleeng Luu^kkruun and Phleeng Luu^kthuu^η, which were rarely recorded at the very beginning of their emergence. Indeed, most of the

recordings sold in Thailand during this era were of Western ones; Thai music, of various genres, was not yet fully commercialized. It is also important to note that the term ‘popular music’ was taken as synonymous with term Phleen String by the mass media, which only developed after the emergence of Phleen Luu`kkruun and Phleen Luu`kthuu`n. The definition of popular music employed in the dissertation is centered upon the commercial aspects of the musical genre; by this measure The Impossible may be regarded as being the first true pop band in Thailand.

Whilst the late 1960s to the early 1970s was a period which saw the birth and the flourishing of Thai popular music, it was also an era of much political instability. This was largely the result of opposition to a version of the constitution which was written and introduced by the Ki`dti`khacoon government. Most opponents were university students whose protests and demonstrations often included performances by various bands, which played songs that encouraged people to fight for justice. This activity gave rise to an entirely new music genre, ‘Phleen Pyyaa` Chii Wi`d’ or ‘Songs For Life’, songs concerned with issues of freedom and justice. Caravan was the first Phleen Pyyaa` Chii Wi`d band to emerge during this period, although the members of this band, along with many government dissenters, were forced to flee from Bangkok and go into hiding in the mid-1970s, as the government acted to subdue and do away with political opposition [Patarasuk, 2004]. As a result, Phleen Pyyaa` Chii Wi`d movement gradually petered out, eventually receding from view until its brief return in 1984.³

What has been provided is a brief overview of the various genres of music which have emerged and developed in Thai culture as well as an attempt to define that which may be truly termed ‘Thai popular music’. The next section will examine

the case of Thailand in the context of various other SEA countries (such as Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia), exploring the popular music found in other countries as well as the influence of Western culture and business practices upon other music industries. I will begin by exploring issues of cultural imperialism and globalization and then move on to those of censorship in Thailand as well as examining how different the Thai popular music industry adopted Western-influenced business models.

Cultural Imperialism versus Globalization

Various forms of trade and of conflict (e.g. World Wars, colonialism etc.) inevitably led to cultural exchanges between Asia and Europe (although in instances of colonialism, nations were at times forced to adopt elements of the colonizer's culture). The (mainstream) popular music that exists in Asian countries today may be regarded as being largely the result of Western (particularly American) influence, which was most tangible during the Second World War. Subsequently, many Asian cultures went on to absorb genres such as rock and roll, with artists and bands emulating Western counterparts such as Elvis Presley and the Beatles. The rise in the popularity of these acquired forms eventually led to them essentially becoming the mainstream form in many countries; this was often coupled with a decline in the demand for traditional music, as seen in case studies of Thailand, Hong Kong and Indonesia [Lockard, 1998; Ho, 2003]. Of course contact with Western culture did not merely affect the musical tastes of Asians but also had an impact upon various other areas of popular culture, altering culinary tastes, cinematic tastes, and sartorial tastes. This inevitable led to discussions of national identities, cultural homogeneity, and cultural imperialism amongst many

cultural scholars (Thailand of course provides an interesting case study for scholars in this field). In order to examine the issue in greater depth it is perhaps necessary to first outline the cultural theories which will be drawn upon extensively in the following section, particularly two key terms: cultural imperialism and globalization.

Cultural Imperialism describes the process whereby developed countries, which are endowed with greater cultural and economic power, shape developing or third-world countries by exporting their cultural artifacts, which may be generally seen as a reflection of their own values, customs and manners [Tomlinson, 1991].

Berger and Portes have further explained that cultural imperialism during the 1950s and 1960s could be seen under the scheme of modernization theory [Berger, 1976; Portes, 1974]. Additionally, some scholars argue that, during the 1970s, the discrepancy between the economic power wielded by dominant countries and that held by third world nations increased, and it could be seen that the modernization programmes encouraged a dependency on the West rather than guiding them to being independent nations [Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975; Portes, 1974; Boyd-Barrett, 1982; Martin-Barbero, 1993]. This rather critical view is countered by exponents of globalization theory.

Globalization describes

[...] the growth and acceleration, especially in the last two decades, of economic and cultural networks operating on the basis of a worldwide scale and to that whole complex of flows and processes that increasingly transcend national boundaries as a result of accelerated growth. [Ryoo, 2004:5]

This shifting progress of culture at a global scale in the twentieth century may be regarded as being primarily the result of the development of markets and corporations and the advance of media technologies and communication, as well as capitalist reorganization [Castells, 2000]. Some scholars have defended the process of globalization on the grounds that it could possibly reduce the significance of national boundaries and increase international cooperation, as well as encourage economic and industrial growth in poorer countries [Ryoo, 2004]. Globalization theorists argue that the advantage of globalization is the way in which it enables people to explore the world and enjoy other cultures in spite of geographical barriers [Legrain, 2003]. Moreover, many predict that globalization will eventually lead to increased economic, industrial, cultural and communicative equality throughout the world [Ryoo, 2004; Morley, 2006].

While globalization theorists tend to argue that globalization can reduce class interests, cultural imperialism theory is seen as the other side of the coin [Ryoo, 2004]. The one-way relationship associated with the notion of cultural imperialism, with power flowing down from the top, or the dominant nations, to the third world, has of course been challenged by those who point out the complexities of power relationships and draw attention to the idea of counter-flow [Shim, 2006; Morley, 2006]. Today, it is not solely dominant countries like the US who are able to influence the cultures of other countries, as various countries in other parts of the world are able to be exporters, transmitting their cultural products and influencing other countries in their regions. Examples of this include the Indian film industry's influence upon that of other countries and the influence of the South Korean popular culture upon SEA [Morley, 2006]. Additionally,

Legrain points out that whilst the East might have experienced Westernization, the reverse is also true; that is to say, rather than Western foods such as burgers and pizzas, curries have become the number one takeaway option for British people, the ratio of Indian restaurants to McDonalds stores in 2003 being six to one [Legrain, 2003].

Yet many scholars have raised concerns over what they perceive to be a trend towards cultural homogenization, the dissolution of national identities. Some leftists argue that globalization has an influence on non-human causes; hence, some scholars see globalization as significantly threatening national sovereignty and indigenous cultures. This is not only the case in developing countries; rather, 'the effects of globalization are to weaken the cultural coherence of all individual nation-states, including the economically powerful ones' [Ryoo, 2004].

Globalization has also been painted as just another form of cultural imperialism, being perceived by Hardt and Negri as essentially the newest name for a new empire dominated by the US [Hardt and Negri, 2000; Ryoo, 2004]. Additionally, Herbert Schiller argues that the American corporate enterprise, which has been expanded worldwide by transnational corporations (TNCs), is an example of the contradictory nature of globalization [Schiller, 1979]. To support Schiller's idea, Ryoo mentions that

What is absent in such accounts, however, is a recognition that most globalized TNCs are not truly 'global' since there is a hierarchy in the internationalization of functional areas of management. [Ryoo, 2004:7]

Nevertheless, globalization critics respond to these arguments, stating that, first, it is impossible that globalization will blend all national identities into a tediously

uniform mass, since there are 6 billion people in this world [Rothkopf, 1997]. On the contrary, globalization actually, and perhaps surprisingly, stimulates people to pay attention to their 'local' cultures, which run the risk of being overlooked since they only concentrate on Western influences [Featherstone, 1993; Robertson, 1995]. Whilst theories, explanations and arguments abound upon the subject of cultural imperialism and that of globalization, this dissertation will attempt to identify the ones which best elucidate the case of Thailand, particularly in context of the emergence and existence of Thai popular music.

Although the currency of theories of cultural imperialism has indeed declined since being effectively replaced or superseded by globalization theory, there are nevertheless some scholars who feel that the idea of cultural imperialism can help explain the significant changes in the third-world culture. Woongjae Ryoo, for instance, suggested in his work *Reconsidering Globalism: A Korean Perspective* that it might be useful to revive theories of cultural imperialism when examining the conflicts of the capitalist world system, suggesting further that if third world nations were to recognize the fact that they are subject to such imperialistic cultural influence, they may become better equipped to resist against it [Ryoo, 2004]. I agree with Ryoo that cultural imperialism is still a useful explanation in the context of the third world and most scholars of globalization have neglected its importance; this is perhaps less perceptible to Western critics, who examine Asian popular culture from a different standpoint (arguably that of the colonizer rather than of the colonized) and often have a rather myopic view of history. At the same time, it is important to cultivate a sophisticated, qualified view of cultural imperialism and to recognize the value of globalization theory as a whole, since it

reasonably explains many of the advantages of current global cultural and economic trends in terms of business expansion and reducing cultural boundaries.

Globalization theory was popularized in Thailand during the early 1990s, quite inevitably leading to anxieties and fear of cultural homogenization and the weakening of national identity. Protests against the intervention of Western (as well as Japanese) military forces had in fact been commonplace in Thailand's political history. For example, demonstrations were held against the location of US military bases in Thailand and their financial support for the Thai Military during the Vietnam War [Lockard, 1998]. Similarly, Carabao⁴ released their single 'Made in Thailand'⁵ in 1984 in order to both disparage and ironize the westernized behaviour of Thai people, and to express concern over what they perceived to be the intrusion of foreign cultures into Thai society. As the influence of Western culture became more tangible in Thailand with the spread of globalization, many Thai scholars expressed their concern that such a growth of globalization in Thailand might possibly lead to an expungement or destruction of 'local wisdom', which they perceived to be at the heart of the nation's traditional values [Jory, 1999]. Although this view of globalization is one held by many Thai scholars, it is possible to argue that, in the Thai popular-music industry, globalization positively assists the expansion of the Thai popular-music market, as well as encouraging the mix of Western and indigenous culture in the mainstream music market.

In 1993, Thanee'd Wa'raakuunnu'khrō', a famous singer, songwriter and producer, released his single 'Rock Kra-tho'b Maaii'' with Grammy, with the intention of describing the many positive effects of globalization. The song's name

is a pun on the word ‘Lao Kra-tho’b Maaii’’, which is the name of a traditional children’s play. The gist of the lyrics is essentially this: that the world is getting smaller and smaller, that everyone should be friends, and that, rather than rejecting other cultures, the listener should choose amongst them, embracing the one which best suits them and adopting it to their own ends. The pro-globalization rhetoric is supported by an accompanying tune, which blends the Thai and the Western by employing the same rhythmic pattern and bamboo percussion used for the children’s play, but also arranging it in a way similar to Western rock music. The song itself attempts to break down cultural barriers by intermingling Western rock with old-fashioned, long-neglected, Thai cultural artifacts.

There have subsequently been numerous attempts to mingle mainstream popular music with indigenous forms such as Phleen Phyy’n Myyaan or Phleen Luu’kthuu’η (often by having Luu’kthuu’η singers feature with pop artists). These hybrid products are usually well received by Thai audiences. For example, Thon chaaii McIntyre, a Thai popular music superstar, released his fifteenth album *Chu’d Ra’b Khεε`g (Living Room)* in 2002 with songs featuring Cintaraa` Phuunlaa`b, a famous ‘Moo`-Lam’ singer (a type of Pleang Puen Muang from the Northeast region of Thailand). Phuunlaa`b’s music listenership is largely based in the Northeast region, her songs either sung in the Northeastern dialect or in Lao, while McIntyre, an iconic pop celebrity, has a much more widely spread fan base and followers nationwide. The commercial success of the joint project was considerable and resulted in five million album sales. Some journalists ridiculed the album’s popularity, describing Phuunlaa`b as McIntyre’s knight and savior, come to rescue him from his then declining popularity

[<http://imattha.blogspot.com>]. Thus, whilst it is possible to argue that globalization may have some negative effect upon local cultures in some respects, it can also be seen from the examples given that the concerns about cultural homogeneity are at times unfounded, since this concern has actually encouraged various aspects of indigenous culture to be rediscovered and to appear in the mainstream popular music industry.

One may also point out various other positive outcomes of globalization, such as the expansion of the popular music market, both in Thailand and Asia. During the 1960s and 1970s, popular music from the West dominated the music markets in almost all Asian countries and the Beatles, Elvis Presley and the Rolling Stones became names that every Asian teenager was familiar with [Lockard, 1998; Ho, 2003]. Later, with the establishment of Thai major labels in the early 1980s, the popularity of Western popular experienced a slight decline. Afterwards, the Thai music market came to be dominated by Thai popular music (though strongly influenced by its Western counterpart) as well as other genres such as Phleng Luu`kthuu`n. Thai popular music was also enjoyed almost exclusively by Thai audiences. However, as the effects of globalization became more palpable, the popular music of other countries around Asia was also imported. For example, in mid-1990s, Thais enthusiastically welcomed the Japanese rock band X-Japan and, after the success of X-Japan in Thailand, other Japanese rock and pop idols also entered the Thai popular music market. Furthermore, Thailand also started to export Thai artists and bands to neighboring countries. Grammy, one of the two major labels, for example, attempted to expand their market by exporting their artists to Taiwan in 1997 [<http://www.gmmgrammy.com>]. Whilst the attempt was

ultimately not a very successful one, it is indicative of the trend that existed towards the importation and exportation of popular music within Asia. In the last decade, the volume of Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese bands and artists that have been imported into Thailand has increased dramatically, as well as the number of collaborations amongst Asian artists of different nationalities. For instance, in 2006, Golf-Mike, a Thai duo boy band from Grammy, produced an album with Tomohisa Yamashita (or Yamapi), a famous pop idol from Japan. The album was in the Japanese language and mainly sold in Japan [<http://entertainment.hunsa.com/>]. Additionally, in 2005, Jung Ji-Hoon (or Rain), a South Korean superstar, released a special version of 'I do' featuring the Thai singer Panatda Ruangwut. The song itself became extremely successful in Thailand [www.gmember.com]. As a result of globalization, it is not merely Western popular music which has become familiar to Thai audiences, but also Asian popular music, with names such as Baby V.O.X and Rain from South Korea or Utada Hikaru from Japan being recognizable to a large majority of Thais.

Yet whilst one may accept that globalization brings with it some advantages, particularly for the Thai popular music industry itself, it cannot be denied that the identity of Thai popular music, as that of other Asian countries, is largely the product of Western influence. This paradigm may indeed be seen as a form of cultural imperialism:

After World War II, countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America started to be seen, and to see themselves, as 'underdeveloped,' and to be treated accordingly. To 'developed' became a fundamental problem for them; they thus embarked upon the task of un-underdeveloping themselves by subjecting their societies to systematic and minute observations and interventions that would

allow them to discover and eventually eradicate their problems once and for all. [Escobar, 1991: 675]

Thailand itself belongs to this category of underdeveloped countries and may be regarded as being part of the 'third world', as many other SEA nations. As the quotation above implies, Thailand has put much effort into escaping from the realm of the underdeveloped and becoming a developing or developed country by following the steps of the dominant paradigm, the West. At the same time it is important to point out that Western culture had had a significant influence upon Thailand even before the Second World War. Other SEA nations of course experienced Western cultural domination as a result of colonialization, and even after the era of colonialization had ended, the strong influence of Western cultural values still remained in many countries [Lockard, 1998]. Although Thailand was never itself colonized, the efforts of the royal family and the country's elite to re-model, 'civilize', and modernize the nation, to re-create it in the image of the West, had a profound and lasting impact upon the country's development. Many believed that in order to become 'developed', in order to be accepted by the West, the country needed to embrace Western values [Rhum, 1996]; many Western customs, beliefs, and cultural norms were therefore imported by the Thai elite, many of who received their education abroad and were in positions of political power. National development became synonymous with westernization as the country's leaders strove to rival western standards. Even whilst the system of absolute monarchy was eventually done away with in Thailand, nation-building programs were revived by Khana Rat (who led the 1932 revolution which replaced the system of absolute monarchy with a constitutional one). FM Plæ'g Pi'buunsoŋkhraam, who became the third prime minister in 1938, also

implemented various cultural Acts or *Ra'dtha'ni'jom* (State Conventions). These Acts dictated how Thais should comport themselves both publicly and privately, encouraging certain cultural practices whilst prohibiting others [Heyes, 2004]. For example, a husband was recommended to kiss his wife before he went to work [Reynolds, 1991:7]. Such directives were set down in the hopes of making Thais as 'civilized' as Westerners, in order to make the Thai culture more closely resemble the Western one. For example, the use of Western cutlery, forks and spoons, was encouraged, whilst the use of hands to consume food was condemned, and betel palm chewing was prohibited entirely.

What is apparent throughout Thailand's recent history is a general belief in the inherent inferiority of the underdeveloped, uncivilized, unsophisticated Self, and a desire to mirror the advanced and enlightened, Western, Other. This illuminates the paradox that the elites strongly desired to build the nation by unconsciously eradicating their own traditional culture. This was clearly seen in the case of traditional Thai music. The popularity of Thai folk and classical court music experienced inevitable decline after the performance of both became subject to state regulation, those who did not possess a license being banned from performing. In this era, the government was particularly strict with traditional musicians, who were, in its view, the furthest away from 'civilized behaviour'. The practice of sitting on the floor whilst playing instruments, for instance, was deemed to be highly unrefined behavior. Traditional musicians were therefore forced to perform seated on a chair, or with their instruments set upon a table, which was highly impractical as Thai instruments were designed to be played on the floor. As a result of this imposition on the part of the government, much of the

drama and music that was produced during the era carried subversive undertones, some even featuring lyrics and dialogue which were openly critical or derisive of the government. At the time, all scores and scripts were subject to state censorship and musicians and actors were required to submit them for approval by the government before performing. As a result of these constraints, together with the growth of *Dontrii Saa`kon*, folk music and Thai classical court music were produced and performed less and less.

By the second half of the twentieth century, the deployment of American military personnel during conflict in Indochina and Vietnam had also led to the importation of Western popular music into Thailand (as well as many other SEA countries) [Frith, 1987; Lockard, 1998]. As is most often the case when non-local musical forms are introduced into third-world countries, when Western popular music and various other Western artifacts were brought into Thailand, the Thai people tended to accept them in their original form, without modification. Thus, a cover band scene emerged and became widespread in many SEA countries, including Indonesia and Thailand [Shoesmith, 2004]. *The Impossible* is a good case study to explain the emergence of the cover band scene in Thailand during the late 1960s to 1970s.

The success of *The Impossible* made apparent the popularity of Western popular music in Thailand, much of the band's repute being a product of their ability to imitate the styles of recognized Western pop artists and groups. Their rise to fame also made evident the fact that Thai audiences were entirely unbothered by plagiarism, instead taking pleasure in listening to melodies that were already

familiar to them, but also accompanied by lyrics that were easier to understand and sing along with (as they were composed in Thai). See`dthaa` Si`ra`chaa`jaa, the lead vocalist of The Impossible, makes a similar point in an interview in 2008:

The Thai audience at that moment loved to sing along with songs that consisted of a melody and harmony from Western popular songs with Thai lyrics. Nobody cared about the plagiarism as long as the band dressed up the same as the Western pop artist. Another point is the audience would recognize and give an alias to the singer who could imitate the vocals of Western pop singers just like Rewat Buddhinan, another singer of The Impossible, was recognized as *Rod Stewart in Thailand*

This behavior was also imitated and caricatured in the 2007 film *Kaaoo` Kaaoo`* (*The Possible*), which deals with the Thai popular music industry from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s (the film also shows plagiarism, of the kind discussed above, to be characteristic of Thai popular music at that time) [<http://www.gmmtaihub.com/>].

Imitation of the Western remained a significant part of Thai popular music in the 1980s. The first half of the decade saw the establishment of the country's first two major labels: RS and Grammy. As both companies sought to model their systems of management and operation upon Western examples, the popular music put out by them may be therefore be seen as similar to that made by Western labels, particularly in terms of the production and distribution processes involved.

Although globalization entailed some advantages for the Thai popular music industry and culture, as mentioned above, it is also associated with an

appropriation of a Western identity. This will become evident as we examine the careers of Thai popular music artists such as Tata Young.

Amita Young (known as Tata) is an American-Thai singer who gained much fame from her first album released in 1995. The album, which was released by Grammy, became phenomenally commercially successful and a million copies were sold within the first five months of its being put on the market. As a result of her immense popularity, Young received the epithet *Amazing Girl* [<http://www.tatayoung.com/>]. In 2001, Young terminated her contract with Grammy, signing a new one with BEC Tero (now Sony Thailand). Subsequently, in 2004, Young signed with Columbia (under Sony Music), launching her first international album singing in English, *I Believe*, into many countries in Asia, including Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and India. Her first international album was rather well received and met with considerable commercial success; indeed Young sold 1.2 million albums and received platinum and gold records. It is important to note the Young is the first and only Thai singer, up to date, to have a contract with an international label and launch a solo album on the international market. Her second and third international albums, *Temperature Rising* (2006) and *Ready for Love* (2009), were aimed at the European market, but did not meet with as much success as did her first international album amongst Asian audiences. It is important to note the significance of these international albums of in terms of what they represented to the Thai popular-music industry.

Young altered her public image altered considerably when she opened herself to the international popular music market. When signed with Grammy and BEC

Tero, she was known by most as a confident, spirited, energetic, tomboyish girl, with a distinct sense of dress and zestful dancing style. Yet her first international single, ‘Sexy, Naughty, Bitchy Me’, highlighted qualities such as femininity and sexual attractiveness rather than boyish vigor; this was also true of the first single of her second album, ‘El-Ninyo!’. The extent to which Young reinvented herself following her international debut becomes evident when comparing the photographs used to promote her albums:



Figure 1.2 Tata Young images from Young’s first and third Thai album (Source: www.tatayoung.com and <http://www.civicesgroup.com/forum/topic31739>)



Figure 1.3 Tata Young images from Young’s international album (Source: www.tatayoung.com)

There is a clearly observable change in Young's look and demeanor; the second set of photographs is not merely more provocative, it also suggests that Young modified her appearance considerably in order to appear more Western, Caucasian rather than Asian, in order to appeal to an international market. This was also coupled with a marked change in the style of her music. It is of course understandable that, when targeting an international audience, all the songs chosen should be in English. Yet the nature of Young's songs and music videos, perhaps as a result of a desire to appeal to a wider audience, also became so similar to the works of artists such as Rihanna and Britney Spears that they lost much of their uniqueness, becoming indistinguishable from mainstream American popular music. The 'El-NinYO!' music video (as well as the song itself) was widely criticized on Internet music forums and YouTube by those who thought that Young was doing no more than imitating figures such as Jennifer Lopez and Britney Spears [Manager (B), 2007]. Moreover, the song 'Zoom', from Young's second international album, was re-recorded in 2007 by the American recording artist Ashley Tisdale (Warner Music), on her first album *Head Strong*. Although the song title was changed to 'Don't Touch (The Zoom Song)', its lyrics and rhythm remained unaltered and only small changes were made in arrangement.

Ultimately, it is evident that whilst globalization brings with it some advantages, whilst it has clearly simulated the expansion of the Thai music industry and enabled valuable cultural exchanges, and whilst globalization theorists may put forward the notion of future global cultural equality, it is clear that globalization is also closely tied to a loss of cultural identity. Whilst the Thai people may take

pride in the international commercial success of a Thai pop star, one may point out that, despite Young's national identity, there is nothing particularly 'Thai' about her international output. This is evidenced by the fact that Ashley Tisdale was able to do a cover of Young's song and introduce it into her own repertoire, having made no significant changes to it. That is to say, the song itself more closely resembles Western popular music than Thai and projects an entirely Western identity. Although some may argue that the time of Western cultural imperialism is at an end, that in today's world globalization enables cultural exchange upon an equal footing, this is clearly not entirely the case. Whilst Thai popular music might become as well-liked internationally as Thai cuisine, an important difference remains: whilst Thai dishes such as Tom Yum Kung and Pad Thai inevitably call to mind a distinctly Thai cultural identity, Thai popular music, as produced by Young for international audiences, is more redolent of Western culture than Thai.

The Western Popular Music Business Model and Censorship in Thai Popular Music

The success of *The Impossible* followed by a gradual and steady growth in the Thai popular-music industry, which was aided by the development of cassette tapes and players (that were much cheaper and more affordable than gramophones and LPs). As a result, there was an increase in the number of artists releasing pop albums, some of which met with considerable commercial success. This was still a period during which artists were not contractually bound to music companies but uncommitted, receiving lump sum payments for recording songs and albums, just as *The Impossible* had done. This was also an era in which plagiarism was still prevalent, artists often imitating the melodies and chord progressions of Western

songs rather than producing entirely original ones. This practice continued until the end of the 1970s, when the Copyright Act was introduced [Siriyuvasak, 1990]. Yet whilst artists had to become wary of blatant infringement of copyright, many still adapted and appropriated existing melodies and chord progressions, albeit more subtly. This will be further discussed in Chapter 2 (p.144-150).

From the late 1970s, the expansion of the mass media helped to create an environment in which many Thai teenagers turned their interest from Western popular music to Thai. Many popular artists found that the promoting and publicizing of their work had become easier than it had been in earlier decades. Additionally, there were several new sources of musical information that helped impel growth of popular music in Thailand, such as the emergence of *Doe-Rae-Me Music Magazine* and the *Loo^k Dontrii (Pop on Stage)* television program. Moreover, there were a number of solo singers and bands that gained renown through featuring in films, such as McIntosh (not to be confused with Thoonchaai McIntyre). However, a major-label system, along with production teams and promotion budgets, did not exist in this period, and few channels were open to those who wished to promote their work. As artists were rather limited in their ability to gain publicity, most concentrated on promoting their songs rather than themselves as a product.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were eras during which the Thai popular-music industry was characterized by imitation of the West, by the appropriation of typically, or distinctly, Western singing and musical styles, fashions, et cetera, or that of famous Western artists and bands. Even the composition of many Thai pop

bands mirrored that of existing American or British groups. Although the Copyright Act of 1979 resulted in a significant reduction in the occurrence of outright, blatant plagiarism, most Thai pop bands and artists still often closely resembled Western ones not only aurally but also visually (that is to say, in terms of dancing style and attire). The line-up of famous bands like Grand X and Chaatrii were the same as that of The Shadows, whilst the singing styles of famous Thai singers such as Da`nu`phon Kεε`wKaan (Grand X's lead vocalist) and Su`chaa`d Cha`waan`kuun (another famous solo singer at that time) seemed to imitate the soft and dulcet singing style of popular Western singers at the time.

During the late 1970s, various new recording companies were established such as Nite Spot, Ro`dfeeii Dontrii (Music Train), Azona, Rose Sound and Ni`thi`tha`d Promotion; however, these were essentially distributors, rather than music companies in the Western sense, as most did not employ production or promotion teams. Artists instead frequently worked with freelance production teams; upon completing their work, the artists and teams would sell the masters of their records on to the mentioned afore companies to distribute. It was not until 1978, when the Butterfly Sounds and Films Service Company was established by a group of musicians (Cira`phan Ansa`waanon, Su`ra`srii` Idthi`kun, Danuu Huntra`kuun and Kri`d Choo`gthi`bwa`dthanaa), that a production company that actually produced and recorded songs to order was established. The songs produced were mostly soundtracks; that is, songs for musicals and advertisements. The company also produced songs under its own label, including the *Butterfly I* and *II* albums, which were produced and recorded by the Butterfly team, and subsequently supplied songs to other major labels, such as Grammy [RaingansamunPrajumban, 1995].

The songs produced by the Butterfly team and released under its own label have some features that made them quite distinct and unique from other pop songs produced in that period. Most other pop songs were comprised of simple chord progressions, (e.g. I-vi-ii-V or I-iii-IV-V) with basic arrangements in binary form. In contrast, music from the *Butterfly* albums generally had more complex chord progressions, arrangements in binary or ternary form with transitions and lyrics that were subtle and complex, rather than merely conventional and formulaic (most popular songs at the time featured simple and stale love stories).

Whilst the *Butterfly* albums were neither immensely commercially successful, nor as highly publicized as the works of the most popular artists and bands at the time, they were regarded as innovative and avant-garde by the Thai media, as a significant contribution to Thai popular music [<http://www.oknation.net>]. The following extract (originally in Thai), taken from an article on the *O.K. Nation* website, reflects an attitude towards the *Butterfly* albums which is shared by many:

The quality of the music compiled in the second *Butterfly* album is indeed excellent, the songs created by talented musicians with considerable musical ability. The standard of the music to be found in the album rivals that of Western music. The composition of the songs is subtle and elaborate, and reflects the influence of artists and bands such as Genesis, Yes and Pink Floyd. It could be said that the Butterfly company was the leader of progressive and avant-garde music in Thailand.

Indeed the company launched many famous artists who came to have a significant influence upon Thai popular music, including artists such as A`dsa`nee Chootikun, Su`ra`sri~ Idthi`kun, Danuu Huntra`kuun and Rewat Bhuddhinan (one of the founders of Grammy). Although Butterfly was only a production company, a

major-label production structure and system was gradually to develop in the Thai popular-music industry.

In 1982 and 1983, two major labels were established which based their business practices upon the models provided by Western major labels. The Thai popular music industry became fully operational and grew dramatically in the years following their emergence.

Pop Era: The Arrival of Major Labels 1982-1994

During the late pre-pop era, from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, the music industry in Thailand began to develop in several significant ways. The appearance of publications such as *Doe-Rae-Me* magazine has been discussed, as has the founding of the Butterfly company (whose structure bore some similarity to that of a major-label system). Additionally, there was an ever-growing number of music review columns in newspapers, magazines and the music magazines.

1982 saw the transformation of the RS Sound Company into a major label, worth over 76,000 GBP. The company had begun as a jukebox and cassette tape production company, found by Kriiaaŋkraaii Chee^dchoo^dsa`g, which possessed little more than 1,200 GBP in capital [Bank of Thailand official website, <http://www.bot.ro.th>]. A year later, Grammy Entertainment, another major label, was formed by Phaaibuun Damronchaaiitham and Rewat Bhuddhinan, possessing just shy of 13,000 GBP in capital. Bhuddhinan had traveled with The Impossible during their tour of Europe and was involved in the production of *Hot Pepper*. When the time came to establish his own label company, Grammy Entertainment,

Bhuddhinan envisaged one which incorporated a full major-label system, which encompassed production and distribution. The RS Sound Company was similarly equipped with a distribution department.

A full major-label system, as it is defined in this paper, is based on Western models, consisting of a producing team, a production team, a promotion team and a distribution department. The process works somewhat as follows: an artist first signs a contract with the label, the producing team, led by the producer, then oversees the process of music production, the production team next attends to the marketing of the artist or band (often being responsible for determining the ‘look’ or ‘style’ of the artist, finding unique characteristics, and framing the album concept and music videos), the promotion team then promotes the artist through various kinds of media, and the distributor finally produces the actual albums, then copies and distributes the records to wholesalers and retailers. Before the introduction of major labels, this full-fledged production system was not in place; therefore, the period following the establishment of Thai major labels can be considered to be the start of the music business in Thailand, as it would be conceived in Western terms.

From the early 1980s to the early 1990s, the mass media in Thailand expanded enormously, encompassing many more businesses than it had previously. Moreover, the development of other entertainment businesses, such as the film industry, had quite inevitably had various effects upon the music business. The emergence of the two the major labels stimulated a dramatic growth in the industry, as each was releasing its own artists to compete with that of others.

Additionally, both of these companies were essentially capable of generating and manipulating popular music trends, as well as determining what it meant to be a pop singer. Consequently, it could be stated that this period was the golden age of both the Thai popular-music industry and that of major labels. The following section will examine how the major labels shaped trends of music consumption, introduced and popularized various genres of music, and built up Thai pop bands and artists (I will also chart the rise to popularity of these singers and groups).

Both major companies had a significant influence on popular music in this period, in terms of production method, musical style, and visual presentation. The production process for successful artists at this time was rather uniform. First, artists who had some potential to be label artists or matched with a proposed project album were screened and chosen by a producer or screening team within the companies and selected to sign contracts. Then, the artists were referred to the in-house production team, who, in addition to exerting much influence over musical decisions, helped to determine their physical presentation, to ensure consistency with the marketing concept of the album. This was the first decision that was made, before the music was composed. Then the music producing team composed songs, which the artists then recorded. Afterwards came the mix-down and mastering process, after which the master tape of the recording would be sent to the distributor for manufacturing and distribution.

One of the first priorities of the major labels was to create a marketable image for pop artists. As the above description can be taken to imply, most artists did not produce their own albums or compose their own songs (this was true even of very

successful Grammy rock bands such Nuvo and Micro). Producing teams provided bands with songs that were consistent with a desired, predetermined image. This also became standard practice in other major labels founded after Grammy and RS, such as Kita Records and Ni'thi'tha' Promotion. There were, however, a few artists that saw success by composing their own songs, some of these included the Chootikun Brothers (Grammy), who were members of Butterfly and Isn't, which existed in the pre-pop era, Rewat Bhuddhinan (Grammy), Stone Metal Fire (RS), a heavy metal band, and I'dthi' Pha'laarakuun (RS), a musician in the pre-pop era band The Belts (it is interesting to note that the artists who met with the most success performing their own songs were all musicians from the pre-pop era).

The two key major labels, RS and Grammy, also influenced the musical styles which became most prevalent in the pop era. Whilst pop and rock had been successful throughout this period, towards its end there was also an increasing trend toward 'bubblegum pop', which consisted of formulaic, memorable melodies, simple chords and harmonies, repetitive hooks, often rather unoriginal, uninspired love lyrics and a catchy dance rhythm. The rising popularity of 'bubblegum pop' during the late pop era can be deduced from examining contemporaneous album sales figures and music charts.

Although there exists no disinterested, impartial organization responsible for the collection of data on album sales in Thailand, one can more often than not obtain such information from newspaper reports (particularly when the sales figures are substantial). Chart figures may also be seen as key indicators of popularity and commercial success, particularly those provided by nonpartisan sources (i.e. forms

of media not owned by any of the major labels). Examples of this include the music charts provided by magazines such as *The Guitar*, those supplied by cable television music programs (which began to emerge at the end of the 1980s, beginning of the 1990s) such as the *Smile* Thai music chart from the Smile TV channel and the *I am Siam* chart from Channel V Thailand. These types of entertainment media reported music charts either weekly, monthly, or annually. The charts differed from those supplied by media sources owned or controlled by the major labels in that they included all artists in the music market at that period in time [Sukosol, 2007]. In addition, the Season Award was organized by *Season Music Magazine* in 1987, which became the first Thai popular music award to operate entirely independently from the major labels, eventually becoming recognized as the leading music award in Thailand. The following section will examine the influence of the major labels over the trends in the Thai popular music industry in the period between their emergence (1983) and that of the Indie Phenomenon (1994). Moreover, live concerts in Thailand at the time were reserved for outstanding singers or bands, as there were so few concert halls and the cost for organizing a live concert was so high. Consequently, the artists who had their own live concert can be seen as the most famous and popular singers/bands.

During the era following the appearance of major labels and before that of the Indie Phenomenon, the popular music industry saw the development of three distinct periods, or consecutive trends. The first of these is associated with the interval immediately following the inception of the major labels. Both RS and Grammy aimed to appeal to younger audiences, primarily targeting the teenage

market. RS began by signing on and producing groups like the Inthanin band, which met with some success, as well as those such as Kiiriibuun (Canary bird), Fruity, Six Senses, Brandy and Rainbow. By focusing upon producing bands rather than solo singers, RS was able to effectively appropriate the musical style developed and popularized by earlier bands such as Chaatrii and McIntosh in the late 1970s. Indeed these bands were highly successful in utilizing this 1970s style, reaping considerable commercial success. In 1984, the company released two albums which had a discernible impact upon the Thai popular music industry: *Ruuaam Daaw 1* and *Ruuaam Daaw 2 (Superstar Hits)*. These albums consisted of So`ntharaaphoon songs, which were rearranged and covered by teenage pop idols of that period, such as Su`dthi`phon Wa`dthana`can (the lead vocalist of Fruity) and Ronnachaaii Tho`mjaapa`ri`wa`d (the lead vocalist of Khiiriibuun). The albums were sold together and achieved the very high sales volume of two million copies. As a result of the success of *Ruuaam Daaw*, as well as that of other albums which the company released during this period, RS was acknowledged by the newspaper *Daily News* as the leader of teenage String music in Thailand [Peeksai (A), 1985].

Grammy, on the other hand, was relatively less successful in the period following its inception. The company started off by signing on a female singer name, Dr. Phanthi`waa Si`nra`cha`taanon, who soon released *Ni`jaajra`g caa`g Koo`nmee`g (Fairytale from the Clouds)* [Pramote Na Ayudhaya, 1998: 135]. The album was commercially unsuccessful, particularly because it was released simultaneously to *Ruuaam Daaw 1* and *2*, which received highly positive reviews backed by strong album sales. In its first few years, Grammy in fact quite consistently met with

failure in attempting to reach its market target. Consequently, the company wavered over which style of music it should focus on producing. At the same time, the popularity and influence of artists from the late 1970s, of String bands with easy-listening love songs and smooth, dulcet-toned leading vocalists, (such as Grand X and Chaatrii) remained considerable. RS of course had a number of popular String bands of its own, which dominated the music market at that time. In this early period, Grammy found it impossible to achieve its goal of being the frontrunner in the Thai music market [Peeksai (A), 1985] (even Bhuddinan's own album, *Таа I* (1983), met with little commercial success [Patarasuk, 2004]). However, although RS controlled much of the music market in the early period of the pop era, Grammy would eventually win over much of the market share through introducing rock and dance music into the Thai popular music industry. From the mid-1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, these two genres indeed became the most prevalent forms of popular music in Thailand.

Grammy strategically introduced rock and dance music into the Thai popular music market in the hopes of gaining new audiences, new consumers, as well as winning over some of its competitor's market share. In addition, the company took advantage of the new musical technology which became available during that period to make songs sound more similar to Western popular music; for example, the drum set was replaced by the drum machine, and new recording technology was used more extensively than it had been in previous times. Moreover, Grammy's strategy was not only to focus on the songs produced, but also to give attention to the public image of its artists. These artists were presented as trendsetters, trailblazers and torchbearers in terms of fashion and style. Artists

themselves became part of the product, which became an important component of being a pop artist in the late pop era. Grammy both met with much success and retained its market share through this approach; evidence for this is shown in the following section, which documents album sales, pop chart positions, and award outcomes.

After 1986, Grammy released several artists who were already well established and widely recognized in the entertainment industry, such as Thoonchaai McIntyre, who had been a soap opera actor, and Amphon Lamphuun, who had been a singer in the band Micro as well as a film star. These artists had little trouble garnering popularity and albums such as Thoonchaai McIntyre's *Haa'd Saa'j Lom Saa'j Raao* (*Beach, Wind and Us*), Micro's *Rock Le'g Le'g* (*Little Rock*) and the Chootikun Brothers' *Pha'g Chii Roj Naa'* (*Glossing Over in the Last Minute*) met with much commercial success, allowing Grammy to become the leader in the music industry during this period. A particularly noteworthy success was *Boomerang*, Thoonchaai McIntyre's third album, released in 1990, which sold two million copies, an accomplishment that has only been matched by other male singers in recent years. The easy-listening style of McIntyre's songs, along with his singing skill and voice (which may be characterized as soft and mild, yet powerful) also accounted for his success in the Siam Konlakaan Music Foundation Contest (the biggest contest of its kind in Thailand at the time). Whilst his later albums were not quite as successful as his third, they were nevertheless extremely popular. McIntyre is, moreover, the only singer in Thailand to have had his own live concert series with each show having over 30 performances. Indeed it is difficult to exaggerate McIntyre's popularity amongst Thai audiences, even

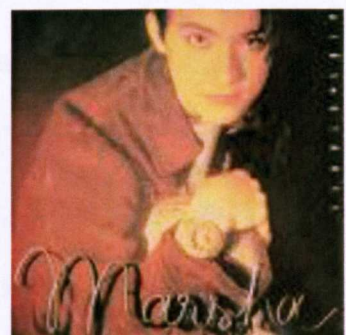
today. Conversely, the pop band trend that RS had pioneered was gradually waning, and RS had no artists it could call upon that could achieve the same success as those from its initial period [Patarasuk, 2004].

From 1989 to 1993, Grammy released numerous artists who were extremely successful not only in terms of the number of albums that they sold, but also the number of music awards that they received. For example, Maaii` Ca`rənpu`ra`, also a famous actress at the time, received the Best New Artist of the Year award from *Season Music Magazine* for her first album *Maaii` Muuaa`n* (the name for the Thai equivalent of the vowel 'i') [Season, 1989]. This was also a period during which Grammy released a number of female singers who were admired not only for their vocal abilities, but also their physical appearance. This included artists such as Christina Aguila, Maaii` Ca`rənpu`ra`, Marsha Wa`dthana`phaani`d, and Saaoo`wala`g Liilabu`d. Aguila, an artist of mixed heritage (Thai and Filipino), released several dance albums, often presenting herself as the modern woman: fashionable, sexy, dynamic and versatile. Her first album, *Ninja*, was a great success, with sales of over one million copies, backed by live concert performances. Maaii` Ca`rənpu`ra` and Marsha Wa`dthana`phaani`d released rock albums. Ca`rənpu`ra` became known for her uniquely deep, gravelly voice, rare in female singers from Asia, along with her confident, sexy public image. From 1989 to 1991, three albums of hers were released, and each of them became successful, especially the third, *Khwaam La`b Su`d Khəə`b Faa`h* (*A Secret That Lies Beneath the Horizon*); the album sold two million copies, reflecting a level of commercial success which none of her colleagues was able to rival. At the same time, Wa`dthana`phaani`d was marketed as refined and sophisticated. Her voice

was similarly rather distinct, though high-pitched rather than low; as well as being clear and crisp, her singing style made heavy use of vibrato. Wa'dthana'phaani'd released *Thaa'm Daaw* (*Ask the Star*) in 1991 and *Ro'd Chaa'd Khwaam Pen Khon* (*The Taste of Being Human*) in 1993. Although Wa'dthana'phaani'd's albums did not sell as well as Aguila's and Ca'rænpu'ra''s, she was recognized by the mass media as being of the same caliber as both female pop stars [Ratchaneekorn, 1993]. Saaoo'wala'g Liilabu'd launched her first album, a pop album called *Doo'g Maaii' Le'g* (*Metallic Flower*), in 1993. She had composed most of the songs herself and thus became recognized not only as a singer, but also as a songwriter. Liilabu'd also gained much renown as a result of her powerful singing voice as well as its emotional expressiveness. For *Doo'g Maaii' Le'g* she received the Best Female Artist Season Award [Season, 1993]. These four female singers essentially became exemplars upon which other female singers would model themselves in terms of singing style, both throughout this and later periods (indeed their songs are still played somewhat regularly on Thai radio stations and on television today).



Christina Aguila's *Red Beat*



Marsha Wa'dthana'phaani'd's

Thaa'm Daaw



Saa'o'wala'g Liilabu'd's *Metallic Flower* Mai Ca'rænpu'ra's *Khwaam La'b Su'd Khaw'b Faa'h*

Figure 1.4 *Album covers of four young female superstar singers from Grammy*

Grammy's lineup of successful pop stars included not only these four female singers and McIntire, but also artists such as Jeetrin Wa'dthana'si'n and the Inca band, who proved to be equally popular. Wa'dthana'si'n effectively introduced rap music to Thailand with his first album, *caw-e'-baw* (*H-U-R-T*), whilst Inca made its reputation as a country-rock band. Almost all Grammy artists in this period had been screened and produced by Bhuddhinan. Grammy's successful formula essentially involved churning out well-crafted and well-produced songs, as well as employing talented, characterful artists.

Concurrently, toward the end of the 1980s there began a period of horizontal media integration. Grammy established A-Time Media, a radio broadcasting company, subsequently creating its first two stations, Green Wave and Hot Wave, in 1991. Exact Company was founded as a subsidiary company of Grammy, responsible for producing television programs. The first program produced was the *Saa'm Nu'm Saa'm Mum* series (*The Three Brothers*). In addition, the Extra Organizer Company (EO) was established for organizing concerts and events. The establishment of subsidiary companies such as these allowed Grammy to expand

further into the entertainment industry. By 1992, RS had increased its capital to approximately 7.6 million GBP and renamed itself 'RS Promotion 1992'. The company also started to expand into other entertainment sectors, such as the film industry, and radio and television broadcasting. This horizontal media integration had a profound effect upon radio and television music charts, as the two major labels had control over a good majority of the music programs broadcast during this period.

The commercial success of Grammy's artists and the mass-media subsidiary companies which it had at its disposal to support its products, allowed the company to become one of the leading major labels, and consequently to exert a powerful influence on mainstream music trends in Thailand. In 1993, Grammy enhanced its success by releasing the sixth album of the Chootikun Brothers, *Ru'η Kin Naa'm (Rainbow)*. The album received the Best Album of the Year Award from Season [Season, 1993], and two songs from the album, 'Ra'g Təə Sa' Məə' (I'll Always Love You) and 'Laa Kəə'n' (Goodbye), became ranked amongst the top ten hits in various music charts [Guitar, 1993]. At the end of 1993, Grammy celebrated its first decade by launching the *Grammy 10th Year Celebration Book* and the *Son (Naughty)* compilation album onto the market.

Even though it was more often than not Grammy that was regarded by the mass media as being the leader of pop and rock music in the early 1990s [Patarasuk, 2004], RS also signed on various rock bands, such as SMF, a heavy metal group, releasing its first, *Khon Ju'g Le'g (Metallic Period)*, in 1993. This album became rather successful, selling over one million copies. Additionally, the band received

Season awards for the Best New Artist and Producer of the Year (as they produced their work themselves) [<http://stonemetalfire.com>].

After rebranding itself as RS Promotion 1992, the company began to target younger listeners, particularly by producing 'bubblegum' pop music. The label also marketed their artists as being young, dynamic, and attractive. Most of the artists had already been famous teenage actors, actresses, and models at that time, such as So'mchaaj Khe'mkla'd. Various 'boy bands', such as Boy Scout and Raptor, were also formed, meeting with much success amongst younger consumers. During this period, RS also set up the RS Star Club, a fan club for RS artist admirers and the first of its kind in Thailand.

The film industry also had a great deal of influence upon the music industry at that time. After 1986, many stand-alone theatres in Thailand were sold on to developers who demolished them to build shopping malls and commercial outlets; the stand-alone movie theatres were replaced by mini-theatres, which were usually housed in the new shopping malls. The popularity of home theatre was also rapidly increasing in Thailand. The middle-aged, working population generally preferred to watch films from the comfort of their own homes rather than going to the cinema [Uabamroongchit, 1997; 96]. Consequently, from the late 1980s to mid-1990s, the Thai film industry tended to target adolescent audiences, many of the films produced in this period dealing with issues of teenage life and love, school and friends.



Figure 1.5 Examples of So'mchaaj Khe'mkla'd and Boy Scout album covers

The boom in teen movies helped allow RS to win over large numbers of adolescent consumers with the ‘bubblegum pop’ music which it put on the market, and indeed the ‘bubblegum pop’ fad became a significant trend in popular music in the last period of the pop era (from 1992-1994). Additionally, RS started to expand itself into the film industry during this period. In 1992, RS Promotion produced and released *รองเท้า Le'b Ple'p* (*The Magic Shoes*), a film which integrated breakdancing and rap music (the first of its kind in Thailand); both the film itself and its soundtrack became extremely popular. Subsequently, both rap music and breakdancing became widely popular in Thailand.

Grammy responded to these trends by releasing artists with styles and appearances that matched those of RS’s singers and bands. Khwa'ntha'd Na Takuuaa'thuu'n's rap albums, for instance, were released concurrently to Wa'dthana'si'n's. The musical style and ‘look’ of both artists were strikingly similar, and they essentially found themselves in direct competition with one another. This type of practice, carried out by RS and Grammy as well as by other labels, persisted until the mid-1990s. Although it is fair to say that, throughout this period, RS and Grammy were the most important players in the Thai popular music industry, it is also important

to note that there were two other major labels which established themselves in the market during this time. First, there was Kita Record Co. Ltd., which was first set up in 1986 as a cassette tape distributing company (with approximately 50,000 GBP in capital).⁶ Second, there was Nititat Promotion, which was founded in 1984 by Wi'chiiaan A'dwi'see'dsi'wa'kun with the initial objective of distributing cassette tapes and recording materials (with approximately 25,000 GBP in capital).

7

Finally, and conspicuously, the outstanding artists on major labels in this period were usually well known or famous in the entertainment industry as actors, actresses or models prior to making an album. They had the appearance of models and actors, and this figured prominently in their public personae. Because of their appearance, their images were sold as a product. The audience recognized these performers not only as singers but also stars; this had not previously been the case.

From the beginning of the pop era to 1993, the popular music industry had experienced accelerated development and expansion, growing much more rapidly than it had done in the pre-pop era (as measured in terms of the number of albums released per annum). This was largely a result of the commercial success of the leading two major labels, Grammy and RS, with a smaller part of the market share held by Kita and Nititat. Apart from these four major labels, there were a number independent labels that released their own artists and gained a small market share, such as Creatia, Nite Spot Entertainment and Muzer. For the most part, these labels held market shares in non-urban areas, arguably because the influence of the major labels upon the mass media (particularly as a result of the process of

horizontal integration discussed earlier) was most tangible and powerful in the larger cities of Thailand. The artists who belonged to these independent labels generally either imitated the styles of those produced by the major labels (usually with little success, as most of the entertainment media was ultimately under the control of the major labels), or by attempting to develop their own unique styles. These independent labels ultimately had little real or enduring impact upon the Thai popular music industry, and almost all of them eventually ceased to operate. The major labels continued to benefit from their position of (essentially unrivaled) influence and dominance until around mid-1994, when a new independent label, Bakery Music, was established. The founding of this label also marked the birth of what would eventually become a trend highly significant to the Thai popular music industry, the 'Indie Phenomenon'.

The Thai Popular Music Industry, the Frankfurt School, and State Censorship

Before moving on to the birth of Bakery, as well as that of the Indie Phenomenon, it would perhaps be useful to briefly glance at issues of systematization, automatization, and commodification, which are indeed core to any enlightened discussion of the Thai popular music industry (although these ideas will of course be explored in much greater depth and breadth through the course of this dissertation). The Thai major-label practice of appropriating Western business models and strategies quite inevitably makes the Thai popular industry vulnerable to the same critiques applied to Western cultural industries, particularly those outlined by the Frankfurt School. The key ideas which characterize the Frankfurt school of thought have been quite succinctly outlined by Jim Collins:

Popular culture is so contaminated by mechanization and commodification that it cannot be seen as a genuine expression of anything other than the corporations that standardize it for their own ends [Collins, 1989:7].

Particularly since the establishment of major labels in Thailand, the Thai popular music industry has arguably been exposed to the mechanization, commodification, and standardization of which Collins speaks. Yet whilst further discussion of this will be postponed to the next chapter, which will be dedicated to the issue, it is also important to note that the rise of corporate control in the Thai popular music industry has not been the only contributing factor. That is to say, whilst it is clearly partly responsible for the ‘contamination’ of the industry, this may also be seen as the result of state censorship in Thailand.

Censorship is a process whereby an authoritative body suppresses and prevents or restricts access to information which it considers to be unacceptable, detrimental to the health of a country or society [Katz and Lai, 2009]. Censorship became particularly prevalent during the time of the Pi’buunsoṅkhraam administration, which put particular emphasis upon the importance of building and civilizing the nation, and saw censorship as a key tool in doing so, in dictating that which was and that which was not good or appropriate (the example previously given is that of the Cultural Acts, or *Ra’dtha’ni’jom*). Yet whilst the Thai government has had a long history of censorship, it is also hardly absent from Thai society today, with various state institutions being involved in the process, from the Ministry of Education and that of Culture, to the Royal Army, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Department of Religious Affairs. The rationales most often given for

censorship is that is protect the country from works which either undermine national security, or national culture [http://onknow.blogspot.com; Manager (A), 2010]. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's 2007 film *Sang Satawat (Syndromes and A Century)*, for instance, was banned in Thailand as it contained depictions of inappropriate behavior by doctors, which supposedly could destroy the reputation of Thai physicians [http://onknow.blogspot.com; Manager (C), 2007].⁸ Censorship is also present in other sectors of Thai popular culture, and particularly prevalent in the popular music industry. Many songs and music videos (of both the mainstream and Lookthung variety) have indeed been banned as they have been judged to contain overly vulgar language, sexually explicit content, and ideologically subversive lyrics (which are perceived to be a threat to the state and to national culture) [Siriuyvasak, 1990]. These banned works are generally the product of independent labels or underground music artists. Carabao's songs, for examples, are often banned from being broadcast on free TV, not because they contain inappropriate language, but because they deal with issues of political, governmental, corruption [Lockard, 1998] Similarly, some of the songs of the Bakery rapper Joey Boy were suppressed because they were concerned with issues of rape and domestic violence [Hayes, 2004].

This dissertation is of course entirely uninterested in the ethical dimensions of censorship, rather it is important to note how the presence of state censorship, particularly over the various cultural industries, has itself encouraged, or even engendered, standardization. In order for labels or artists to have works approved, they must ensure that they are acceptable, that they conform to certain criteria that they fit into a frame predetermined by certain authoritative bodies. The case is

perhaps comparable to that of African American artists in the 1950s, who were essentially only permitted to record songs with messages which were acceptable to white audiences (that which was deemed profane or sexually explicit was prohibited), their music had to have messages that could cross over to white audiences [Jones, 1991]. In Thailand, popular music artists hoping to reach a mass audience may essentially only do so by signing on with the major labels, who have the resources to record and promote their works, as well as exerting considerable influence over the mass media. Yet in order for labels to be able to release, market and promote the works of their artists and bands (via the television, the radio, billboards, and other forms of mass media) they must ensure that they receive the approval of various supervisory bodies.

This pressure to conform to certain rules and guidelines quite inevitably has an impact upon the music that artists can produce and labels and record. The case of the rapper Da Jim arguably provides an important illustration of this point. Da Jim had been an independent artist before signing on with Grammy in 2002. Previous to drawing up a contract with the major label, his music had often featured extremely explicit language and content, and dealt with issues of state authority, institutional regulation, and social convention. However, after being recruited by Grammy, the nature of Da Jim's music altered significantly (much of the explicit language and content disappeared as well as the socially and politically critical tenor). Rather than producing songs such as 'Syaa'g Tham Maaii' ('It's My Business'), a song concerned with individual rights and state control, Da Jim recorded songs such as 'Joo'g Jaa'j' ('Dancing'), which may best be characterized as mainstream dance music. It becomes evident that the presence of state

censorship affects the scope of popular music, of what it can communicate, as well as how. Standardization may therefore be seen of a by-product of not only corporate control, but also governmental regulation.

Indie Phenomenon: 1994-1997

The major labels retained their dominance, and 'bubblegum pop' its popularity, until around 1994, when Bakery Music was established and the Indie Phenomenon born. Three main aspects of the music produced by this trend stood in direct contrast to the characteristics which typified the music that had been produced by the major labels: production method, musical style, and visual presentation. Yet after the phenomenon took on a life of its own, what began as a movement amongst independent labels would indeed eventually be adopted and appropriated by the major labels.

The operating processes of the independent labels were of course very different from those of the major labels. For one thing, the production of music, as an artistic process, was not subject to the same standardization, artists were essentially given free rein over their own works and their own public image, rather than being under the thumb of a production team [Sukoson, 2007]. The indie phenomenon also came hand in hand with a diminishing of the perceived value or importance of the physical appearance and presentation of artists (consumers essentially became less concerned with whether the singers they listened to had been famous actors or models beforehand). Also, whilst the 'bubblegum pop' put on the market by the major labels remained relatively popular until the mid-1990s, the independent labels were also responsible for popularizing various other genres,

such as alternative rock and rhythm and blues (which the major labels were later forced to adopt in the second half of the 1990s in order to regain the market share they had lost to independent labels). The following section will attempt to chronicle developments in the Thai popular music industry in this period.

The mid-1990s was a period during which the major labels released a number of artists of multiracial heritage (many being half Thai, half American, or half Thai, half European). These Eurasian musicians were not merely quite often deemed by Thai audiences to be more exotic and attractive than artists who were simply Thai (by dint of their Caucasian features), but also often perceived to be more self-confident, daring and talented (perhaps partly because many were bilingual). Such qualities were indeed highly valued by many adolescent Thais in this era and from this period onwards, Eurasian presenters, actors, and models played a rather prominent role in the Thai entertainment industry. It becomes evident that, in this period, the major labels were not only selling their artist's songs, but also the artists themselves, their appearance, their style of dress and hairstyle, their personality, and so on; many of these features were of course determined by the label-owned creative teams. This practice remained commonplace throughout the mid-1990s. This was also the era during which both major labels expanded themselves into the Thai film industry, with Grammy listing itself on the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) in 1994 (becoming Grammy Entertainment Plc.) and establishing Grammy Film, and RS forming the subsidiary company RS Film in 1995. Whilst Grammy Film failed to produce any commercially successful movies until the late 1990s (*Ca`gkrajaan Sii` Dεεη* (*Red Bicycle*) in 1997 and *O-Negative* in 1998, both of which starred the extremely popular Tata Young), RS Film's first

release, *Loo`g Tha`ŋ Baaii Haaii` Naaj Khon Diiaaw (Romantic Blue)*, met with much commercial success as well as critical acclaim (receiving the highest Thai box office sales and winning seven National Film Awards in 1995 [Season, 1995: 15]). As a result of the expansion of Grammy and RS into the cinematic industry, several young recording artists entered the film business.

In contrast to the major labels, Bakery Music was essentially founded upon the talent of four friends: Kamon Su`kooso`n, Chiiwin Koosi`ja`phon (a UCLA graduate in music business), So`mkiaa`d Ari`ja`chaaiiphaani`d (an independent label artist), and Saa`li`nii Panjaara`chun (a famous radio DJ). The company had been the brainchild of Su`kooso`n, who had developed an interest in music during his studies in the United States and become involved in the Thai music industry after his return in 1992. Su`kooso`n had initially worked with various producing teams, including the Butterfly group. Su`kooso`n, Koosi`ja`phon, Ari`ja`chaaiiphaani`d, and Panjaara`chun shared the opinion that the popular music industry had become monopolized by the major labels, and the music making process had become one in which artists had little say and involvement in their work. The four therefore decided to form an independent label which would give artists carte blanche, the ability to work free from the pressures and restrictions associated with corporate control [Sukoson, 2007].

In late 1994, Bakery released its first album called *Modern Dog*, by the band of the same name. Modern Dog was a group of college friends that won the Coke Music Award Band Contest in 1993. The band's music was rock with a groove that was different to that of other Thai rock music at that time. In addition, the main

vocalist had a unique style of improvisational singing, which was a novelty for Thai rock singers. Modern Dog became moderately well known until their second single called ‘K๑๑`n’ (Before) was released. This single was a tremendous success and was on the hit parade for twelve consecutive weeks; it reached the number one spot in the Hot Wave Radio Chart, which is owned by Grammy [Sukoson, 2007]. This was new to the Thai music industry and was a remarkable achievement for Bakery and indie music, as, during that time, pop radio stations were owned by the major labels and they rarely played songs from other majors or from independent labels [Ratchanekorn, 1993]. However ‘K๑๑`n’ was exceptional. There were too many phone requests for it to be ignored.

Bakery did not have a large budget to promote the band and it was forced to promote itself through free live concerts at universities or other public places, and as the opening band for more famous artists. Subsequently, the Dog On Stage World Tour Concert, at the MBK Hall in Bangkok, which was the premier concert hall in Thailand at that time, was a huge event. Modern Dog had arrived as a top act in Thailand. Indie artists began promoting themselves in the same way as Bakery did and made university students the main target audience.

Following the success of Modern Dog and the influence of alternative rock music, which was booming in the West around this time, numerous independent labels were established, and most of the albums released were composed in an alternative rock style. The words “alter” (pronounced “an-t๑๑” in Thai) and “indie” (pronounced “in-dii” in Thai) were used to describe music that was released by an independent label. The main criteria for designating an artist as indie were the

ability to compose his/her own songs, musical skill, emotional performance, and the apparent lack of concern about his/her appearance. These were contrasted with the characteristics of a major-label artist, for whom, presumably, the ability to compose and the possession of musical skill were not essential. Examples of indie artists and their independent labels who achieved success in this period were the Smile Buffalo band from the E minor label, Praaw (Glitter) and Paradox band from Eastern Sky label, Thannathoon Paala`kawon Na` Aju`dthajaa from the Music X label, and Blackhead band from M Square [Season, 1995; Editorial, 1995].

In 1995, Bakery Music repeated its success by introducing another new music genre into Thailand, which was contemporary rhythm and blues (R&B). The first single from Boyd Kosiabong's album, called 'Ra`g Khun Khaao` Lεε`w' ('I Fall In Love With You') and featuring Thana`chaai U`dchin, lead vocalist of Modern Dog, was released and quickly became very successful [Sukoson, 2007]. This song was composed and sung in the R&B style, which was a novelty in Thailand, as the articulation of the Thai language is difficult to pronounce in an R&B style without changing the meaning of the words (This will be examined in further detail in Chapter 3). However, U`dchin could adapt his voice perfectly to sing R&B and he became recognized by music magazines and music critics as a very talented singer, as he has the ability to sing in various styles [Editorial, 2002]. Then, the album *Rhythm & Boyd* was released and received good feedback both commercially and critically [Sukoson, 2007; PhornHeng, 1997]. Following the success of the *Rhythm & Boyd* album, R&B music from Bakery gained its market share from alternative rock. Nevertheless, both of them were considered by the

media to be indie. As a result, indie was used to label not only alternative music but also other genres and artists which were released by independent labels [Season, 1995]. Furthermore, there were a number of indie artists releasing R&B albums that became well known, thus putting the popularity of R&B songs on a par with that of alter.

The indie period saw a great deal of change in the Thai music industry. First of all, the barriers between labels were lowered, as artists from different labels, including major and independent labels, were able to do various activities together, such as performing at the same concert. To retain their market share, major labels had to join with independent ones, or alternatively invite other labels' artists to be at their events [Season, 1996]. The strategy that major labels used to fight back the indie will be discussed in Chapter 3 (p.211-219). Second, artists from independent labels were now highly successful, for the first time. Many of their songs managed to reach the charts, including those owned or controlled by the major labels. Prior to this period, there was only a small number of promotional channels for artists from independent labels; however, because of the success of indie artists, resulting in a high demand for their songs, media owned or controlled by the major labels were obliged to play their songs. Newspapers and magazines were also keen to present news about indie artists and songs, which can be seen by surveying music news in newspapers and magazines during this period [Season, 1995, 1996]. Third, there were a number of new artists with some capability in music production. This was a direct result of the increase in live concerts, which was the indie movement's primary means of promotion. These concerts usually allowed amateur bands to perform their own songs, which they had composed in their own style [Sukoson,

2007]. Fourth, this period marked the first time that artists released Extended Play (EP) albums to test market response before releasing full albums. A final change came about in the realm of music criticism and media discourse about artists; in particular, music criticism in this period focused on praising artists who produced, recorded and performed their own songs and used their own ideas, as opposed to artists seemingly controlled by their labels and having only a small involvement in their work. Moreover, there were stronger negative critiques of the major labels in magazines than of independent ones [Season, 1995, 1996].

During the indie phenomenon, even though major labels were still releasing ‘bubblegum pop’ artists, they nevertheless started to fight independent labels with new strategies. First, they began to release alternative rock albums, which focused less on the artists’ appearance, such as the Y not 7 band from Grammy and Thana’phon Inthi’ri’d from RS. Second, some of the existing artists’ styles were changed to mimic the indie style, such as Achita` Praamoo`d Na` Ayu`dthayaa from Grammy and Pi’su`d Sa`bwi`ji`d from RS. Finally, apart from having a section of the company that searched for potential artists, major labels developed a new artist intake strategy that allowed amateur bands or artists to submit their music demos directly to them; outstanding bands were then selected to sign a contract with them. This new method of artist intake allowed the major labels to be perceived as being more indie, at least in their procedures.

The indie phenomenon boomed only until 1997 when the Asian financial crisis hit, meaning that many labels could not survive and even those that remained were hobbled by the experience; even some major labels such as Kita had to discontinue

their business in 2002. Some famous indie artists were absorbed by major labels: Paradox, Silly Fools and Blackhead signed contracts with Grammy, and Thannathoon Paala'kawon Na' Aju'dthajaa signed a contract with RS. However, Bakery Music survived the crisis and continued its business as an independent label with the financial support of the international BMG label. Consequently, this ended the indie phenomenon.

The Economic Recession, the Indie Phenomenon and the Major Return Period

With the economic recession all over Asia in 1997, Grammy and RS endured the financial crisis through a change of strategy. During the crisis, Damrongchaaiitham, the CEO of Grammy, addressed the decrease in sales by increasing the number of albums released whilst maintaining at previous levels the total capital budget. Consequently, the cost of production per album decreased dramatically. The increase in the number of albums released was to fill the vacuum in the market caused by the demise of the major and indie labels. Consequently, Grammy spun off twenty subsidiary companies to expand its central management power. Each subsidiary company was organized in a similar way to the mother company, including a music producing team, a production team and a promotional team. Moreover, these subsidiary companies had to manage their finances and produce yearly plans, submitting them to the parent company for approval. Most subsidiary company CEOs were previously accomplished producers or successful artists. Their specializations and the type of spin-off company were matched; for example, A'dsa'nee Chootikun, who was famous for rock music with the Chootikun Brothers band, was the CEO of More Music, which was a Grammy subsidiary

company that produced rock music. RS also used this strategy to cope with the crisis, albeit with fewer subsidiaries. This strategy helped Grammy and RS survive during the Asian financial crisis. However, it did not fully revive the pop music market. The rapid increase in the number of artists reduced the time spent in producing albums, as well. Some possible ramifications of this will be analysed in greater detail in Chapter 4 (p.260-275).

When the economy recovered, Grammy and RS expanded their business into movies, magazines, television and the radio industry, in addition to regaining their control over the Thai music market. Bakery Music also released albums consistently after the crisis. In addition, a number of indie labels emerged, such as Small Room, Black Sheep and the Monotone Group. These indie labels found audiences with college students and white-collar workers, especially in urban areas, by having their main channel for promotion through Fat Radio, which was established in 2002 as an indie radio station. Even though these indie labels could share part of the music market, their market share was not as large as in the indie period. Eventually, facing financial problems, Bakery was forced to cease trading in 2004. However, Boyd Kosiwabong himself established another independent label, Love Is, to produce music in his own style.

From the new millennium, with the development of communicational technology and, of course, the globalization trend, pop culture from Korea and Japan, including music, movies and drama series, entered Thailand, exerting a major influence on the Thai pop music scene. Musical arrangements, melodies, and the artists' appearance and fashion all reflected the influence of Korean and Japanese

pop styles. In addition, as I mentioned in the discussion of globalization, Grammy expanded its market into the Asia-Pacific region (see details in the above section p.46-62). Moreover, in 2004, True Corporation⁹ established a music reality show called Academy Fantasia (AF), which was, again, heavily influenced by the Western reality shows Pop Idol and American Idol. This was a great novelty in Thailand, and the first season was highly successful. All of the final competitors have released an album under Grammy, but most of them were not successful. Subsequently, True Corporation founded True Music as a major label to support its AF competitors. The final round competitors, starting from season two season five will now sign a contract as an artist with True Music and their album will be produced, promoted and distributed by the company. In fact, True Music almost has a complete system of mass media at its disposal. It is easy to promote its artists, and the company is thought by many music critics to have the potential to influence Thai music significantly in the future [Editorial, 2007].

Due to the profound international changes in the music business, the increase in music downloads instead of purchasing hard copies has resulted in a dramatic reduction in the revenue of the major labels. Major labels have reacted by generating income from related businesses, such as show business, digital business and management and collection of copyrights, to regain their revenue from the loss of album sales. This can be seen from the message from chairman and CEO of GMM Grammy on the company official website [<http://www.gmmgrammy.com/>]. The following is an excerpt from the article from Phaaibuun Damrongchaaiitham, Chairman of GMM Grammy, and Bu'dsa'baa Daawryyaan, CEO of the company:

In changing the format of music consumption in the industry, revenue channels in the business have also changed. Besides the sale of “physical music” like compact discs, additional revenue has streamed in from businesses related to music, such as artist management, show business, digital business and the management and collection of copyrights. These have begun to play a greater role in contributing to the Group’s revenues, as has been witnessed in music businesses around the world.

Consequently, the main income of Thai artists nowadays comes from concerts and shows, including live performances and television shows, and digital downloads rather than from CDs.

Conclusion

As this chapter is intended to sketch the overall picture of cultural popular musical in Thailand, it is directed to provide information rather than critical discussion. The in-depth discussion will be made in each chapter, dividing by the period of study: the Pop era (1982-1994), the Indie Phenomenon (1994-1997), the Major Return (1998-2002) and Thai Popular Music in the Present Day (2002-present). Nevertheless, it can be summarized that the influence of Western popular music and other forms of Western culture in Thailand has been introduced and adapted to the country in similar way to the other SEA countries. Additionally, most of the Western paradigms have been received in unmodified forms. Hence, the effects of them have inevitably happen the same way as they have been issued in Western academic such as the issue of corporate control on cultural industries. However, since Thailand has a very different background in terms of history, ethnic background, culture and tradition and politics to the West, and even to the other neighbours in the region, there are some distinctive aspects in Thai popular music, which may be distinct in the popular music field and worthy of further studies.

Notes

¹ For further reading on Thai musical notations see Miller, 1992, *The Theory and Practice of Thai Musical Notation*

² Towards the end of WWII, the Public Relations Department Band had turned itself into the Sọntharaaphọnband. This was Thailand's first 'big band'. The band played dance music in the big-band style; the songs were mainly composed with a melody using a Thai scale, which is the basic scale of Thai traditional music, and lyrics were written in Thai, whilst the arrangement was that of Western jazz music.

³ For further reading about 'Phleen Phyyaạ Chii Wi'd', see Lockard, 1998, Chapter 4, 'Thailand: Songs for Life, Songs for Struggle', *Dance for Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia*.

⁴ The most famous 'Phleen Phyyaạ Chii Wi'd' band who gained their reputation during the mid and early 1980s. For further details on the band see Lockard, 1998, Chapter 4, 'Dance for Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia'

⁵ 'Made in Thailand' translated lyric (Source: Lockard, 1998)

[...]Made in Thailand
We do it our own way
Even our singing and dancing
Are full of excellence admired by westerners
But unappreciated by Thais
Afraid that they are not up to the latest trends
Made in Thailand

We make trousers and jeans
And send them away by plane
Thais get the credit
But westerners reap the profits
Made in Thailand
As long as tags say Made in Japan things will sell
Guaranteed to be foreign made and from the latest fashion magazines
They don't cheat us
We only fool ourselves.

⁶ In 1989, Kita was transformed itself with increased capital of approximately 630,000 GBP, with the aim of forming a major label. This was a period of intense competition between Grammy and RS, and Kita chose not to produce the same type of music as Grammy and RS, instead targeting a different group of consumers. Their musical style foregrounded pop music that included the characteristics of 'traditional' Thai music, using devices such as the pentatonic scale, which is commonly used in Thai classical music, and using Thai musical instruments. Additionally, Kita artists' images were friendly and approachable [Lai-thong, 2008]. The best-selling artists on Kita were Phonpha'd Wa'chi'ra'bancon and Su'ni'saa' Su'gbunsa'η. During late 1993, there was a change in the administrative department in Kita: Sεε'ηchaaii Aphī'cha'dwɔɔraphon took charge after So'mphon Wi'si'dwaani'd, the former CEO, moved to the television industry [Editorial, 1993]. After this change, Kita started to compete directly against Grammy and RS by launching bubblegum pop artists.

⁷ In 1995, the capital was increased to approximately 250,000 GBP. Even though Nititat's initial objective was only to distribute recordings, it also eventually developed its own artists. Nititat's albums were, in the beginning, pop songs with

most of the songs' melodies obtained from songs throughout the Asian-Pacific region, such as 'Daaw Pra Da'b Caaii' ('You Are a Star in My Heart'), which obtained its melody and harmony from a Japanese song called 'Subaru'. Unlike the other labels already discussed, Nititat targeted the adult market. From 1989 onwards, Nititat tried to widen its market share to include teenagers, by releasing several artists in the same 'bubblegum' style as Grammy, RS and Kita, such as Carrot and Panama; however, these artists barely acquired any market share. However, in 1990, Si'ri'sa'g Nanthasee'n or Ti'g Shiro, who was the drummer with Ploy (A Precious Stone), which was a well known band during early 1980s, released his first album with Nititat called *Chaaiiyoo (Cheers)*, and it became a success. Ti'g Shiro's dancing skills resulted in his being recognized as *Thailand's Michael Jackson*. His voice is also highly distinctive; high-pitched, nasal and compressed. However, in the late 1990s, Nititat faded away from the mainstream music market but continued as a recording distributor. The company was unable to gain any market share from Grammy and RS at that time as well as being badly affected by the Asian Financial crisis

[<http://www.siamdara.com/Variety/00005603.html>].

⁸ Aphi'cha'dphon Wiira'se'dthakun, a Thai film director awarded the Palme d'Or for *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival.

⁹ Thailand's main cable company, UBC, was bought out by the True Corporation (an integrated communications solutions provider) in 1998, and subsequently rebranded as True Visions. The corporation itself deals not only in subscription-

based television services, but also mobile phone network services, internet services, electronic commerce, and digital content provision

[<http://www.truecorp.co.th>]. True's digital content provision services essentially changed the nature of music consumption in Thailand, raising the profile of digital content.

Chapter 2: The Pop Era - When Music Became a Cultural Commodity

Pe`d : What is this type of song called?
Khu`η : You've asked the right person, Ped. This type of song is called Rock.
Pe`d : What the hell is rock?
Khu`η : Rock has to be fast.
Pe`d : Oh, so what if the song is slow?
Khu`η : If it's slow then it's a love song.
Pe`d : So there are only two types of songs, Rock and love songs, right?
Khu`η : No, the two types of songs which exist are RS and Grammy.
What? You don't believe me?
Try turning on the radio, they are the only types of music you'll hear!!!

(A dialogue of Pe`d and Khu`η from the beginning of the movie *Suckseed* by GTH film)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Thailand has adapted musical forms from the West and created its own musical form, Dontrii Saa`kon, especially since the 1960s. However, before the 1950s, this music was seen as being primarily for royal entertainment and was performed at government events. Only since 1952, when the first television channel in Thailand was launched, was Dontrii Saa`kon commercialized. From the 1950s to the mid-1960s, Phleej Luu`kkruuj and Phleej Luu`kthuu`η were the mainstream music genres in the metropolis and the countryside, respectively. Later, around 1968, Phleej String emerged, under the cultural influence of the US army, during the Vietnam War. Figure 2.1 details the music genres and target audiences in Phleej Luu`kthuu`η, Phleej Luu`kkruuj and Phleej String, from the 1950s to the 1970s.

	Influenced by Thai Classical Music	Influenced by Thai Folk Music	Influenced by Western Music (Jazz, Pop, Classic etc.)	Target Audience
Phleej Luu^kkruuj	✓		✓	Middle to upper class in the metropolis
Phleej Luu^kthuu^j		✓	✓	Working class to middle class in rural areas
Phleej String			✓	Teenagers, university students and white-collar workers in the metropolis and significant provinces

Figure 2.1 *Combination and Target Audience of Three Music Genres in Thailand*
[Information from Siriyuvasak, 1990].

Figure 2.1 illustrates that Phleej Luu^kkruuj was a combination of Thai Classical Music and Western Music. Furthermore, Phleej Luu^kthuu^j was composed by using both Thai Folk Music with Western chord progressions and Western musical instruments. On the contrary, only Western music influenced Phleej String.

According to Siriyuvasak, during the 1980s, the three main music genres of Phleeng Luu^kthuu^η, Phleeng Luu^kkruun and Phleeng String shared the market at approximately a 40:20:30 ratio, respectively [1990]. However, under the influence of the two major labels, RS and Grammy, Thai popular music (Phleeng String) increased its market share rapidly in the early 1980s, while Phleeng Luu^kkruun was fading out. As a result, Phleeng String gained in popularity in the late 1980s, and this growth has continued to the present. Nowadays, popular music has become mainstream music, as the ratio of current overall market shares between popular music and Phleeng Luu^kthuu^η in Thailand's music industry is approximately 60:40 percent, respectively (data from Ministry of Commerce, Thailand).

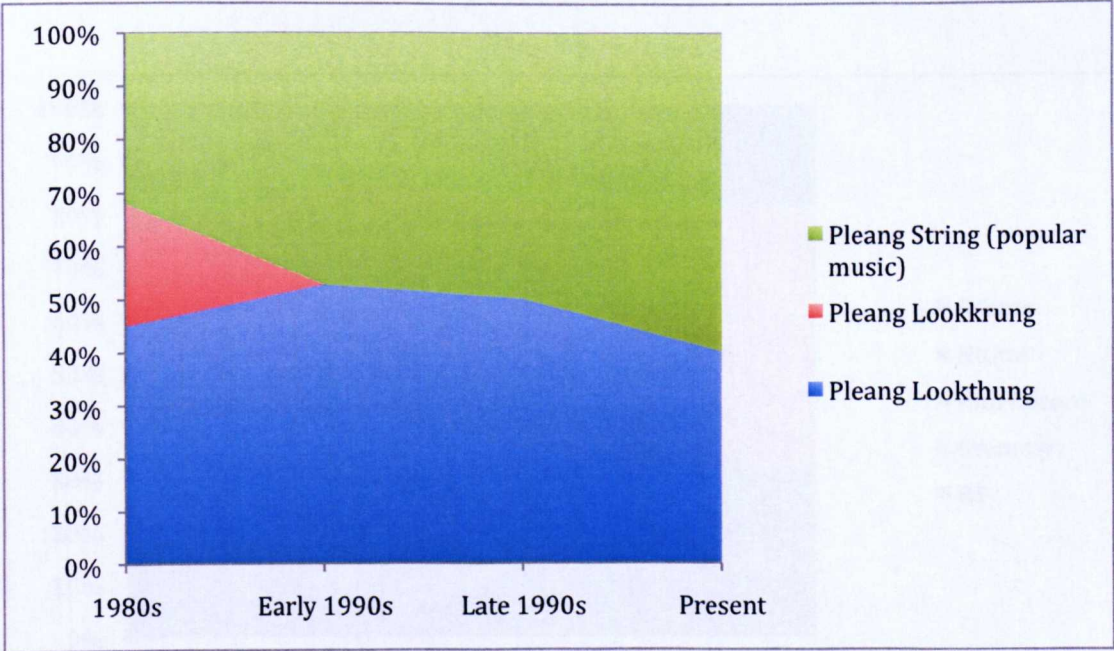


Figure 2.2 Market Share of Thai Music Industry from 1980s to Present

Focusing on the popular-music industry, the bar chart above illustrates that, since the two major labels were founded, popular music has become a mainstream music genre and has constituted the majority of the music market. Information regarding the market share held by other genres such as Thai classical and the King’s composition music have been excluded intentionally both because it is largely irrelevant to my study and due to the fact that the sources for such data have often proved unreliable. After the establishment of RS and Grammy, popular music as a business was grown up, and there were a few other major labels which were founded and competed with those two previous labels. RS and Grammy are the major labels which have held the majority of market share since the beginning of the popular music industry, and no other has managed to beat these two major labels nor survive and continue their business to the present day. The following chart shows the overall market share of major labels from 1982 to the present.

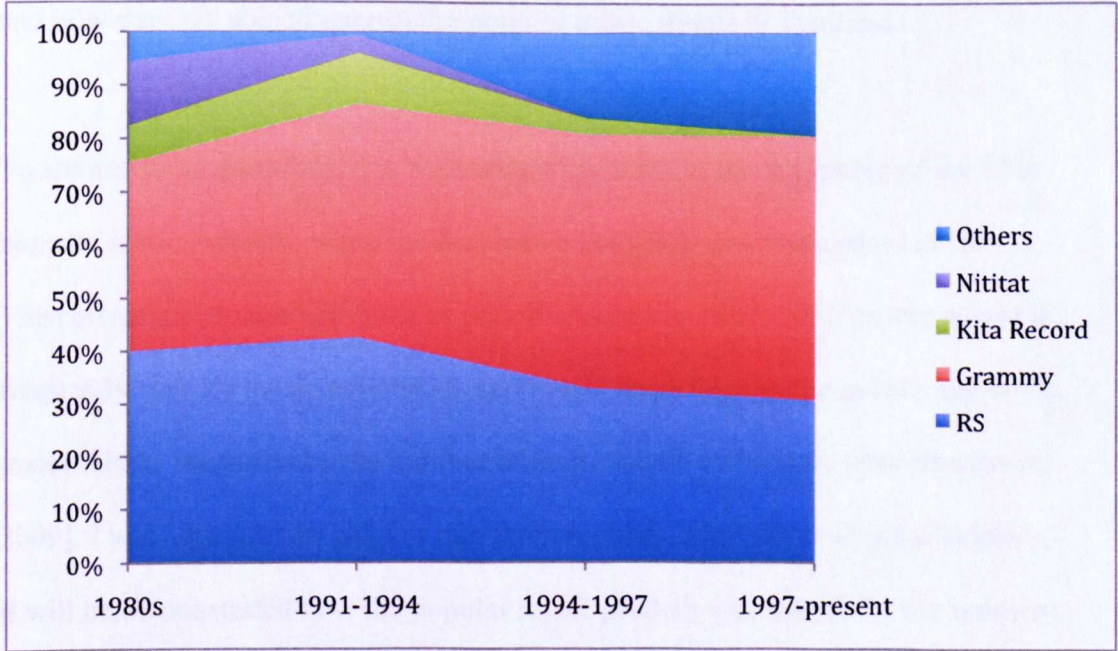


Figure 2.3 *Market Share of Album Sales in Thai Popular Music Industry from 1980s to Present*

The music business, in general, has confronted a problem about the unpredictable nature of the market, as it is difficult to calculate the trend of the market, and it cannot be predicted whether or not the products will succeed [Negus, 1995, 1999]. However, this uncertainty can be mitigated by market dominance. Thailand is a small country, and the music industry's major market is limited to the country. As a result, RS and Grammy having succeeded as a duopoly in the market for so long that their products have had the opportunity for greater success than products from other labels. Moreover, this has led to a predictable music trend in the market. This can be seen from the album sales from both RS and Grammy, which are always higher than those of other labels at any time. This fact leads to the questions in this chapter, namely, what the strategies are that they use for controlling the market, and how they are able to control the popular music trends in Thailand.

To answer these questions, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the Thai popular music industry, when the first music company was established in 1982. The current discussion will limit its period of study to 1982-1994, as this period is frequently seen by music columnists and music magazines as the golden age of the major labels, measured by the number of major labels and album sales [Boonorm, 2009]. I will separate this chapter into three sections. First, regarding the industry, it will be demonstrated how the popular music product was shaped by the industry. Second, it will be described how major labels manipulated consumers, commodifying the music with the aim of maximizing profit in ways specifically

described by the Mass Culture theory. Finally, the originality, creativity and authenticity of Thai popular music will be discussed in light of an analysis of selected songs.

Industry

Concerning the ‘culture industry’, Adorno and Horkheimer had the idea that cultural products were manufactured in enormous quantities, and their metaphor of the ‘assembly line’ suggested that all cultural products were produced with the same basic pattern, to reach standardization with an aim to maximize profit [1979]. This theory, perhaps surprisingly given the geographic and historical gaps, may go to explain how major labels in Thailand have operated their businesses. The Mass Culture theory put forward by Adorno and Horkheimer has been regarded by many scholars as deeply problematic, particularly in context of Western popular music [Frith, 1983; Gendron, 1986]. Many have also found Adorno’s critiques upon popular music to be less than satisfactory, regarding them as either rather partial or simply unconvincing [Paddison, 1982]. However, I will argue that this theory, perhaps surprisingly, can describe, without exaggeration, how popular music in Thailand, especially in the Pop Era, was standardized by the Thai music industry. If an assembly line represents standardization of procedure and product, the question is: what is standardized by the major labels in the Thai popular-music industry?

Assembly Line 1: What is a demo?

In 2005, I attended a music business class at New York University to listen to the guest speaker of the week, Steve Barnett, the CEO of the Epic label. The topic

was: what is the standard of artists required by a major label? The top four requirements were, in order of priority, first, to be able to sing: one must have the ability to sing very well. Second, one's musical skill should be good on some instrument. Third, one should have some compositional skill, and finally, one should have an interesting appearance. This might be an aspiration of a major label, and, in reality, some of their products might not reach this standard requirement. However, the ordering of these priorities demonstrates that the basic requirements of one well-known major American label was different from the priorities of record companies in Thailand from 1982 to 1994, where the most important issue was the appearance of the artist. Grammy's 10th year anniversary book reveals that about 75 per cent of the artists who released their albums with the label had been famous actors or actresses before beginning their musical careers [Grammy, 1993].

In the pre-pop era, almost all of the successful artists had musical skill or a musical experience. For example, The Impossible had been performing in bars and nightclubs where they built their following, as was discussed in Chapter 1. After that, they were hired to play music and to act in movies, subsequently releasing their own albums and becoming a famous band. Grand X and Butterfly were also good examples of this trend of experienced musicians' having produced and recorded their albums by themselves independently, then hiring the distribution company to distribute their works. Afterward, when major labels were initiated in Thailand in 1982, a production system was used to create artists; this had a starting point of finding an artist from a pool of popular actors or actresses, then creating

an album concept, producing songs, recording and mastering, promoting, and finally releasing the album. The first step was to discover the artists.

According to one member of the executive team who had worked for Grammy since the very beginning of the company, whom I will call Dave as his pseudonym throughout this dissertation (I interviewed him in person at Starbucks Coffee Shop, first floor of GMM Building, Bangkok, in July 2009). The major labels in the pop era first chose the artists on the basis of their appearance; this was the starting point of the music career. To avoid risk, the company used well-known people from the entertainment business at that time to become artists [Dave, 2009]. As a result, RS started with teenage bands, some of whose members were already in the entertainment industry as models, actors, and actresses. Certainly, some of them had the ability to play an instrument; however, the company refused to use their musical skills, instead using a production team to produce their songs, rather than allowing them to produce their own work. RS succeeded with this strategy, and many bands became famous during the period [Peeksai(A), 1985], while Grammy, in that same period, focused on more musically able artists such as Dr. Phanthi'waa and Rewat Bhuddinan, none of them achieving strong album sales. As Figure 2.3 showed, in that early period of the Thai popular music business, RS gained a higher market share than Grammy by 4.5 per cent. As a result, Grammy changed its strategy from selecting artists by their talent to selecting them by their physical appearance and their instant recognizability as celebrities [Grammy, 1993]. At its inception, Grammy only released artists with musical skills for the first three years. Then in 1986, Grammy signed on Thoonchaai McIntyre, who was a famous actor in Thai soap opera. McIntyre

released his first album, *Haa`d Saaj Saa`j Lom Sɔɔ`η Raaoo* (*Beach, Wind and the Two of Us*) in 1986, generating the highest sales volume of any album for Grammy up until that time. Yuttanaa Boonorm, in his interview with me, informed me that there is a rumor circulating in the Thai music industry that the first Grammy building was constructed from the revenue of Thoonchaai McIntyre's first album [Boonorm, 2009]. While I cannot confirm this, it suggests the dramatic impact that McIntire's album was felt to have on Grammy's fortunes.

As Chapter 1 established, from 1982 to 1992, approximately 75 per cent of both RS and Grammy's artist rosters had previously been successful in other entertainment industries; nearly 15 per cent of their artists were known as musicians from the previous period, such as Su`ra`srii` Idthi`kun (Butterfly group) and Chootikun's brothers, A`dsa`nee and Wa`sa`n Chotikul. Another approximately 5 percent of the artists signed up to the two major labels were selected from a production team. Moreover, almost 90 percent of the artists who attained between 500,000 and multiple millions of copies in album sales had been famous actors and actresses [Grammy, 1993: Boonorm, 2009]. These statistics demonstrate the market success of the strategy that the first two criteria which could persuade a major label to sign a contract with an artist during the above period were their physical appearance and fame, rather than their musical abilities. I will use the phrase 'basic standard' as a description of the artist screening system of RS and Grammy. This strategy has negatively affected many able musicians and singers who desired to get into the music business by making a demo recording and sending it to the company, as the system of artist screening was unapproachable by that means. In fact, no artists were selected to release an

album with RS and Grammy during 1982 to 1991 on the basis of their sending in their own demos. Over 80 per cent of artists from these labels who released albums from 1989 to 1994 were from the entertainment celebrity sphere, actors and actresses. The other major labels, at this moment, around 1982 to 1994, also adopted this standard. This policy was actually made explicit by other major labels, Kita and Nititat, who produced artists using the same formula. Between 1991 and 1994, over 90 per cent of Kita's artists had been actors, actresses, models and beauty queens [Lai-thong, 2008: Songwad, 1994]. In adopting this formula from the dominant companies, other music labels sharing the market produced very similar products to those of the major companies. I will call this a 'me-too' or 'copycat' strategy, borrowing the term from marketing to describe this method in the Thai popular music business. A me-too strategy is a method whereby the followers in a competitive market attempt to copy products or innovation from a competitor who has been successful with certain products and then offers these to the market, thereby avoiding loss in market share [Barron, 2000]. A product from a me-too strategy is known as a 'me-too product'. Other major labels during the Pop Era, such as Kita and Nititat, at first tried to differentiate their style in the market, thus looking for musical ability, rather than appearance and existing popularity, from their artists [Lai-thong, 2008]. They possessed musicians and singers with musical and compositional skill, as artists in the early period of these labels were presented as having the ability to perform music by themselves in live concerts. Some of them became involved in producing their own albums, such as Malila Brazilian and Coco Jazz. However, a few albums from these artists having been released, the companies were not able to generate much revenue from them, and they decided to profit by making me-too products and offering these, instead,

to the market. Consequently, these major labels chose artists from the television industry, as RS and Grammy had done previously.

Phusit Lai-thong, one of the Board Directors of Kita Records, spoke in an interview about adopting this strategy from RS and Grammy:

In the early day, Kita tried to introduce a new genre of music into the market by adapting Thai classical music to modern style and finding intelligent artists who are able to play music instruments and sing. However, the consumers did not find them attractive. They wanted to see music artists who are modern, smart, and well-groomed, with cool looks. They tended to see the look of the artists instead of their work and talent. The consumers made it feel as if they were looking for their hero more than real artist. Also, Kita did admit that we did business, therefore, we needed to find ways to survive the business by producing the product that meets the consumers' demands [Pitupakorn(B), 2009].

Other major labels were able to derive some market share from RS and Grammy with me-too product, although they could not gain the highest share in the market.

Major labels, in the early 1990s, began to provide the opportunity for musicians and singers to send their demos to the companies and, indeed, some were selected to sign contracts with major labels, such as Su`ni`taa Liiti`kun. Nevertheless, the 'basic standard' that requires good looks and popularity has remained constant in the business, especially after both RS and Grammy began a period of vertical and horizontal media integration almost at the same time, in the early 1990s. Both began to acquire radio stations and television programs, and to be involved in the film industry. The companies, of course, wished to promote their artists by using their proprietary media; artists were not only releasing records but also appeared in other entertainment sectors, as DJs, actors or actresses. For example, Pa`tipaan

Pa`thawiikaan, one of the ‘bubble gum’ pop idols in the early 1990s, appeared as an actor in *Saa`m Nu`m Saa`m Mum (The Three Brothers)* series, which was produced by Exact Co. Ltd., a Grammy subsidiary company. The expansion of the companies benefited both the company and the artist, since artists could now gain alternative resources to promote their careers; the more the major labels became involved in the entertainment media, the more their artists appeared throughout the media. Companies, meanwhile, were able to hire their own subsidiary companies to carry out promotional activities instead of subcontracting other media companies. This horizontal marketing, of course, also worked as an integrated system of promotion. Noticeably, in 1992, RS reformed its company not only by changing its name from Rose Sound Co. Ltd. to RS Promotion, but also by shifting its target audience to teenagers. Approximately 90 per cent of their artists, from 1992-1994, released their albums in ‘bubblegum pop’ style, as defined in Chapter 1. Moreover, about 80 per cent of them had been, before releasing albums, stars in the entertainment business or had become so subsequently and, certainly, all of them possessed outstanding physical appearances.

Following almost the same strategy as RS, Grammy began to produce and release ‘bubblegum pop’ during 1992-1994, although this was not such a high percentage of their releases as it was of RS’s. Grammy separated the market into two parts, first, the ‘bubblegum pop’ market for teenager consumers, and second, college students and young adults, whom they targeted with pop or rock artists. The ratio of albums in the ‘bubblegum pop’ style to those in the pop or rock styles which were released from 1992 to 1994 was about 40:60, respectively [Steve, 2009: Majang, 2009]. During this period, major labels also started presenting a number

of pop-idol artists who had hybrid ethnic identities. For example, major labels signed on many half-Thai and half-Western (such as American or English) artists, such as a boy-band group from RS called Raptor. The band consisted of two young boys: Joni Anwa, from an Indonesian-Scottish background, who was born and grew up in Thailand, and Louis Scott, also of Thai-Scott descent. The following, the cover of their first album, *Raptor*, released in 1994, will illustrate their image:



Figure 2.4 *The first album cover of Raptor*

These artists were presented as young, good-looking, self-confident pop idols. They could generate revenue for the companies not only in terms of record sales but also in other entertainment lines, such as acting as MCs in a television program. This tactic was also used in tandem with the development of the film industry, as was mentioned in Chapter 1, and was highly successful. It was also

manipulative of consumers, as I will show in the next section of this chapter.

Accordingly, during 1992-1994, even though some artists were still being selected for their musical reputation, there were a number being chosen primarily because of their appearance, which was higher proportion than that of artists selected for their musical talents; and subsequently, they were promoted by many channels of media to become 'idols'.

The proportion of artists chosen for their musical reputation and those chosen for their appearance can be calculated from interviews of; first, a Board of Director member of RS who I will call Thomas as his assumed name through the whole dissertation, and, second, Steve, an assumed name of a Board of Directors member of Grammy. From 1992 to 1994, the average number of albums released by Grammy and RS was approximately 50 per year, while the percentage of artists being selected for their musical reputation or for their appearance was 40:60, respectively [Thomas, 2009: Steve, 2009].

Assembly Line 2: What should I sing or what should I be?

After the artist selection process was made, the next step was creating the album. Artists, when chosen by major labels and signed up, become raw material, which will be polished by the companies to become a 'product'. The next step in creating a product is finding the artist's unique characteristic; then, the production team will produce songs suitable for the artist and introduce the finished product to the market. This can be coordinated between two departments, the production team and the creative team. The production teams can usefully be compared to those of the 'Brill Building' era.

The Brill Building, 1619 Broadway, in New York City, was known as a centre of American mainstream popular song creation, and it reached its peak activity during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Many songwriters, composers, producers and music publishers gathered in this building to provide, record, and institutionalize mainstream popular songs, including Carole King, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, Jeff Barry, and Ellie Greenwich. As one commentator describes it:

The Brill Building in the early '60s was a classic model of vertical integration. There you could write a song or make the rounds of publishers until someone bought it. Then you could go to another floor and get a quick arrangement and lead sheet for \$10 get some copies made at the duplication office; book an hour at a demo studio; hire some of the musicians and singers that hung around; and finally cut a demo of the song. Then you could take it around the building to the record companies, publishers, artist's managers or even the artists themselves. If you made a deal there were radio promoters available to sell the record.
[http://www.history-of-rock.com/brill_building.htm]

The working routine of songwriters and music publishers in the Brill Building has been compared to the efficiency of an assembly line [Emerson, 2005]. And, of course, an assembly line is also Adorno's model of how pop music is produced as a commodity, standardized for mass.

Thai major labels have been structured similarly to the Brill Building in operating their companies. If one entered the Brill Building, one would be able to choose the songs to suit one's style, since there would be a number of songs, in many different styles, available in the building. Moreover, there were other departments which encompassed production teams, promotion teams and publishing teams, all located in the building. The same functions are concentrated in the buildings of Thai major labels; the major labels there enjoy the same vertical integration that

characterized the Brill Building. In fact, a similar structure to that of the Brill Building was found in the two main buildings of the two major labels in Thailand, Grammy and RS.

C-Mic Tower Building was the first Grammy building; it was located on Sukhumvit 21, the centre of Bangkok. Then, in 2003, Grammy moved to a new site on the same road, the GMM building. Chetchotsak Building is RS Promotion's, located on Ladprao 15, Bangkok. All share the same functions as the Brill Building; these include the working routine of songwriters, producers, arrangers and publisher all in the same building.

There is, however, a key difference between the Brill Building and the Thai major-label system: the Brill Building structure was opened wide to any artists from any record company to choose songs which corresponded with their requirements. This was true despite that fact that in the early period of the Brill Building before World War II, when music was published, song pluggers would be sent from music publishers to famous bands or radio stations to persuade them to play the music [Emerson, 2005]. Another major difference is that, during much of the operation of the Brill Building, the song, rather than the recording, was the main item of promotion and sale.

By contrast, major labels in Thailand have had a closed system, since the working routine of the production team, set up in the building, has provided for only those artists who have been chosen and have signed a contract with the companies.

Additionally, Thai major labels have approached their product as a 'build to order'

(BTO) process. BTO is a product approach designed for making specialty or low-volume products and concentrates on customer requirement [Parry and Graves, 2008]. However, from 1982 to 1994, in Thai popular industry, 'customer requirement' did not refer to the real customer, the audience nor the singers; the requirements came from the Board of Directors of the Record Company [Thomas, 2009]. So the record company acted as the *ersatz* customer in the process, otherwise put.

During the early pop era in Thailand, there were fewer artists releasing albums *per annum* than at present, because of the size of the labels and the limited supply of musicians and producers; fewer than fifty albums were being released from each major label per year. This number of albums constituted low-volume product. Because of the limited number of songwriters, the major labels, at that time, had not required songwriters to write their songs and keep them in stock before choosing the singer. Songs would be composed when the production team had been identified and when it was determined which musical style was required by the Board of Directors. This system was used later, although songs have been written and 'made the lists', subsequently then being selected when artists have been sent to the production team.

When the product had been chosen, it had to be sent to the production team, who made the concept and composed the songs. The product was thus shaped by the production team, after having received orders from the company about what the product should be; then the BTO process could be started. Very often, the order looked to Western pop models. For example, if a company had the intention to

market dance music, they would seize upon some dance idol from the West, such as Madonna, and then send an order to the production team to build up another Madonna and put this on the market. It was a matter of conscious imitation of Western artists, as the companies believed that the imitation of superstars would reduce a risk of failure in the market share. In the Pop Era, most of the conscious imitation was of Western stars with limited influence from other countries such as Japan and Canto-pop. Later, especially after the Indie Phenomenon in 1994-1997, the Thai popular music industry has been extremely influenced by Korean and Japanese popular music. Here is what the three Boards of Directors of three major labels, Phusit Lai-thong from Kita, Steve from Grammy, and Thomas from RS, had to say, respectively, about the intention of this conscious of imitation.

It was all about marketing in that era. Kita wanted to share the market with Grammy and RS because, back then, both of them were major labels and owned most of the market share. So we needed to find ways to reduce the risk of losing in the business. One of the ways is to imitate a successful international music artist. It is because most music consumers want to look modern. If Thailand has something that is popular in other countries, the consumers will like it because they think it is cool. [Pitupakorn(B), 2009]

Grammy built the international image of itself. It helped us a lot when we gave out the instructions to create product based on what other countries are doing because most music consumers already knew who they are. When our own artists have the image of international artists, it made them look cool and modern. Music listeners will listen to our music because they think they will look cool and modern. [Pitupakorn(C), 2009]

I have to admit that back then, RS followed western trends because it was the beginning of popular music in Thailand. Actually, we almost took all of their culture and style. We really could not avoid it, because it was what people wanted to listen to. [Pitupakorn(D), 2009]

Afterwards, the production team would seek an outcome that had a character as close as possible to that of the model suggested. The advantage of the BTO system

for the Thai major labels was time. The production team was allowed to spend a lot of time over each album, to learn about the artist being recorded, to integrate his/her characteristics into the album, and to compose songs and record them. This process also leaves a long period to promote the product in the market.

Additionally, in the pop era, 1982 to 1994, only around four albums were released from each major label in a month; nowadays, this has increased to around twelve albums a month from each label (data from Department of Intellectual Properties, Thailand). As a result of the low volume of products in the pop era, there was a gap between each album, which allowed the consumer to spend more time gaining knowledge of the product and decide whether or not s/he wished to purchase. But there are a few disadvantages for major labels using the BTO system.

First, a Thai artist, in a major label operation, is set up to be what s/he is by the major labels. The product in a BTO system will be built when the customer has been identified; however, as the customer is the company and not the artist, the product in the Thai popular-music industry is controlled by the major labels and will be built following company requirements. Under the control of the major labels, artists sometimes do not have the authority to present themselves as they desire, and this probably leads to insecurity concerning their musical skill. The example of ‘vocal guide’ (Na’g R๖๖’η Kaaii’) can illustrate how the influence of BTO in a major label could affect to artist’s authority and decrease his/her musical confidence. As most of the major-label artists in the early pop era had been notable people in the entertainment industry, some of them did have some musical ability; however, others lacked musical skill. As a result, another employment position emerged in this period, a ‘vocal guide’ (Na’gr๖๖’η Kaaii’). Vocal guides

intervened when the chosen product could not sing the way that the producer desired, because of the limitation of her/his musical capability. A vocal guide would record her/his voice in the songs; following the guidance of the producer, the product would then duplicate the guide as accurately as possible. Rewat Bhuddhinan, one of the founders of Grammy (mentioned in Chapter 1), initiated this vocal guide in the Pop Era; almost 90 per cent of major-label artists in the period, not only Grammy but also all major labels, used a vocal guide [Dave, 2009]. This technique has been used widely in the Thai popular-music business, even up to the present day. I myself had the opportunity to work as a vocal guide from 2002 to 2005 at Grammy. On one occasion, working as a vocal guide on Christina Aguilera's 7th album, *Paradise*, I wondered why someone who is recognized as a dancing queen in Thailand like Aguilera had requested a vocal guide. I received an answer from the producer of that album, Waaru'd Rintharaanu'kun:

Bhuddhinan, as executive producer of her first three albums, had been her vocal guide and trained her to follow his guidance. She has been well trained to imitate every single word and breathe precisely as the guide had. However, even though she had been in music entertainment for 13 years, she professed still to lack the confidence to create her own singing style, and asked for someone to guide her voice. [Pitupakorn, 2009]

In the case of Aguilera, despite her professed lack of confidence in her singing abilities, her album sales are still in high volumes. Her reliance on a vocal guide and her vocal insecurities play a small part in the album sales equation. This proves my point that mass production reduces an artist's creativity, although this has no bearing on album sales since it has been packaged and marketed in a way that the artist plays no significant part.

Thus, even established artists in the pop era felt dependent on the BTO process, perhaps aware of the limitation in their musical skills, having been selected by other criteria.

Second, the BTO method also affected the production team, as the orders from the major companies built a barrier to creativity. When a company decides to invest in a dance album, for example, to revive the previous Madonna example, it will make an order to the production team to create another Madonna in Thailand. The producer receives this order and then arranges a meeting to distribute the project to a songwriter, a composer and an arranger. The producer would require that the production team use Madonna's songs as a reference and create songs that are almost identical. I will call this process of work the 'brain-block system' in this dissertation. To observe the effect of 'brain-block system' in the major labels, I possess an interview with fifteen songwriters and composers who worked for major labels during the pop era, and everyone had been trained with or required to use this 'brain-block system'. Eleven of them reported feeling uncomfortable and disagreed with this process. All agreed that brain blocking hampered their creativity. Even though this brain-block process was not designed specifically to build imitations, ten of the songwriters' samples revealed unconscious imitation of songs, especially in aspects of harmony and rhythm, still retaining the original sound of the models. Moreover, the song selected by the producer for recording would usually be a song which was closely similar to the reference one. Consequently, in the view of fifteen songwriters, brain block process rarely

encouraged creativity, since the songwriters had to employ a framework of reference songs, instead of using their own imagination and skill.

In a sense, this is unsurprising: this was not a new circumstance in Thailand, since popular music in Thailand had always been heavily influenced by that of the West, as Figure 2.1 showed, and as I detailed in Chapter 1. Additionally, in the pre-pop era, it was estimated by See`dthaa` Si`ra`chaa`jaa, the vocal leader of The Impossible that fifty percent of Thai popular music recorded by famous artists at that time was based on the melody and harmony of particular Western popular songs [Sirachaya, 2008]. Even though such imitation had been reduced by the restrictions of a 1979 Copyright Act in Thailand, using Western popular songs as references for composing Thai popular music has continued into the pop era and to this day.

Here, again, I can offer my own experience as evidence: as a trainee artist, in 2003, at Lucks Music Company, a subsidiary company of Grammy, I was required to compose songs for myself and other artists on the label. My assignment was to select which Western artists I admired and then bring their recordings to the company. Next, the producer chose one or two songs from my selections and then kept playing the tunes over and over, until I could remember every detail of them. I was then required to compose a song, following the model of that to which I had listened all day; my compositions were, inevitably, similar to my reference songs.

In the present day, the BTO process has been reduced, and Build to Stock (BTS), an approach referring to products built before the final customer had been

identified and produced in high-volume [Parry and Graves, 2008], had been introduced into the Thai popular-music industry by the very end of the pop era, according to a number of artists. Nevertheless, the Thai popular-music industry has continued to use some BTO aspects, as well as adopting BTS methodology to use in the production process. The result, it could be argued, is a 'hybrid BTO', which is the combination of characteristics of both BTO and BTS [Holweg and Pil, 2001]. Details of BTS and the hybrid BTO will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Assembly Line 3: Mass Culture

Roy Shuker defines 'Mass culture' in *Popular Music: The Key Concepts* as referring 'to the manufacture of culture as a commodity on a massive scale to mass markets, composed of indiscriminating consumers, for large-scale profit; as such, it clearly includes popular music' [Shuker, 2005]. The reputation of mass culture theory has been damaged by critics of scholars from the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School theorists proposed that cultural production has been transformed by mass culture to produce simple objects without critical thought and politically liberatory prospects [Negus and Pickering, 2004]. Adorno argues that the music industry has constructed formulas for, and standardized, popular music as mere products of the industry. Moreover, the motivations to compose songs has become targeting of the masses for commercial gain and social manipulation [Negus, 1996]. However, he claimed that the music itself (hit songs) 'remains at the handicraft stage' [1941]. In Thailand, the music industry has standardized popular music and how this was achieved may be explained through mass culture theory; it has become a commodity in a capitalist sense and, therefore, a commodity in the Pop Era.

Popular music scholars have maintained that popular music is one of the cultural industries, producing cultural goods as commodities in a particularly risky business environment [Garnham, 1990; Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Vogel, 1994]. The popular-music industry in Thailand during the period that I am calling the Pop Era, from 1982 to 1994, could be described by the mass culture theories of manipulation, rather than by cultural-studies models of popular culture in which meanings are negotiated. This is because, even though consumers obviously make choices to consume popular music, the market has been controlled by an oligopoly of music business companies and media industries.

According to Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, mass culture in Thailand has been characterized by three processes: market control, cultural commodification, and media manipulation [Siriyuvasak, 2007: 23]. In the next part of this chapter, I will examine how major labels have used something very much like Adorno's description of mass culture to gain their market share in the Thai popular-music industry, in the Pop Era, by following the study of mass culture in Thailand by Siriyuvasak. However, as the studies of market control and cultural commodities have some mutual influence, I will separate my examination into two parts, examining first the cultural commodity, and then examining market control and media manipulation.

Thai popular music as cultural commodity

The mass media in Thailand has largely been established and controlled by the Thai government. From 1927 to 1932, HRH Kampangetch Akarayothin initiated a radio station in Thailand as an experimental operation, which broadcasted only

in Bangkok and aimed to educate and entertain. This radio station was operated by the Post and Telegraph Department, organized by The Thai government [Phaowthongsuk, 1983]. Later, in 1939, the Department of Public Relations was founded to manage the experimental radio station, independently of the Post and Telegraph Department. Up to 1955, the only non-experimental radio station in Thailand, which registered as a radio company and broadcasted throughout the country, was the state radio Thai Thooratha'd Co. Ltd (TTT); this was operated by the Public Relations Department and other government agencies. Even though TTT was the first radio station broadcasting in FM, and approached in structure a radio company, it was controlled by the government, as the Public Relations Department was the major stockholder of the company [Siriyuvasak, 2007:103]. Thus, the mass media in its early period in Thailand was generally used as an intermediary between the government and the people, as the government exploited mass media to build culture, develop values, and inculcate the government's values and directions [Wirayasiri, 1994]. In later years, even though the government allowed private companies to operate in the media industry, they were still under the control of the state until the 1970s, since from 1958 to 1972, Thailand was under the administration of a military government. Under this system, Field Marshal Sa'ri'd Thana'ra'd, and radio scripts, news and every programme had to be approved by the government before broadcasting [Siriyuvasak, 2007: 104]. In the 1970s, because of the political revolutions of 1973 and 1976, the decline of power of the military government and the development of technology, media industries relatively independent of the government gradually developed in Thailand, with an increase in radio and television channels

[Siriyaivasak, 2007]. In the popular music industry, this was the starting point for music's turning into a cultural commodity.

The popular music industry in Thailand grew steadily until 1977, because of the technology of cassette tapes and the expansion of commercial radio in the country. Previously, artists did live performances of their work during music programmes, which were broadcast via radio, and the majority of the artists were government bands, such as the Public Relations Department Band, renamed later the So'ntharaaphoonBand (see Chapter 1). At that time, Western songs were the only music available on record, such as those of Elvis Presley, Cliff Richard, the Shadows and the Beatles. Hence, the main songs that were transmitted on the radio were Western rather than Thai songs. Later, these artists had the most significant influence on the formation of Thai popular music. Only in the 1970s did Thailand begin to produce its own vinyl records, being able to manufacture vinyl much cheaper than in the 1960s. However, vinyl was not popular for a mass audience, as, even though the price of vinyl was cheaper than previously, audio turntables were still expensive, and radio remained still hugely popular all over the country [Siriyaivasak, 1990, 2007].

In 1977, the cassette tape was introduced into Thailand, and, almost at the same time, a private radio channel which operated under a concession from the Thai government was established and broadcasted on both AM and FM (information from The Government Public Relations Department, Thailand). Similar to other developed countries, after the advent of cassettes in the 1960s by Phillips which became widely used in the 1970s [Manuel, 1993], cassettes and cassette players in

Thailand dramatically replaced vinyl, as they was cheaper and more portable than vinyl and phonograph. Furthermore, the cost of the mass production of cassettes was lower than pressing records [Manuel, 1993]. Consequently, some record distributors, such as Metro Co. Ltd. and Rose Sound Co. Ltd., selected some bands that were popular from their live performances, both on radio and in nightclubs at that time, to record an album and to release the recording on cassettes. The cassette business in Thailand operated for over 30 years; however, after 2000, the popularity of cassettes has dramatically declined, with a drop of approximately 90 percent as a result of CD and Internet download technology [*Kom Chat Luk* Newspaper, 26 June 2006].

Bernard Miege and Nicholas Garnham define a cultural commodity as a unique product or mass-reproduced product which is transmitted from the producer to the consumer in a non-material performance or material object [1979]. In the early pre-Pop Era, during the late 1960s to the early 1970s, Thai popular music had emerged from the bands who had gained their popularity from playing at nightclubs around metropolitan areas, in Bangkok and its peripheries. Some bands were invited to record for the film industry; however, The Impossible was the only band at that time that had their own record, which was released on vinyl by Metro Record Co., Ltd. and was also promoted on FM radio. The Impossible were already extremely famous, because of their performances and their work for the film industry. Metro Record Co. Ltd. decided to invest in this band, although vinyl was costly at that time [Sirachaya, 2008]. Additionally, after the release of their first album, The Impossible continued playing in nightclubs to promote their work. Consequently, it could be argued that Thai popular music had been becoming a

cultural commodity since the late 1960s, following Miege and Garnham's definition, as bands had been playing in clubs and some of them had released their own records. The products, songs, were transmitted from producer to consumer in both non-material performance and material object [1979].

Nevertheless, Thai popular music, at that time, as a cultural commodity, was not a product that one could simply sell or buy independently, as it had to depend for marketing on other cultural industries, such as radio and film. The mass-produced recording did not yet lie at the centre of the popular-music industry in Thailand. This limited consumption of popular music was resolved when cassettes emerged in Thailand in 1977 and, subsequently, Thai popular music expanded its popularity to consumers; recordings became cultural commodities which everyone could simply buy and consume on a much larger scale than before. Cassette technology expanded all over the country, not only in the metropolis but also in the provinces. Simultaneously, the impact of cassette technology affected the expansion of the music industry in Thailand, not only for popular music but also for Phleeng Luu^kthuu^η. However, the impact of cassette technology on Thai popular music was different from other countries. For example, in the Indian music industry, there was a significant difference in the degree of monopolization and standardization between the pre-cassette era and the contemporary period [Manuel, 1993:93-94]. During the pre-cassette era, India's music confronted monopolization and standardization. However, after the emergence of cassettes, the degree of monopolization and standardization in India actually reduced. On the other hand, for Thailand, the emergence of cassettes in the 1970s did not have the same effect. The Thai popular-music industry had just begun to run as a big business when

cassettes emerged. At that time, it was not obvious who could monopolize the market in Thailand. The role of cassette technology in Thailand actually helped in spreading musical content and increased the audience's demand for popular music consumption.

Market Control by Majors

The late pre-Pop Era, the late 1970s to 1982

During the late 1970s to the early 1980s, the political situation was more stable than in previous times; the uprisings by university students against the military dictatorship had declined and finally stopped in 1976. Popular music developed in this period as a serious cultural commodity, along with the growth of other cultural and media industries, such as private television channels and radio stations, which had more freedom to operate their programmes [Siriyuvasak, 2007]. Moreover, during the early 1980s, the government initiated the policy that Thailand should be developed to become a Newly Industrialized Country (NIC), together with other Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore (see further information from Bank of Thailand's website; www.bot.or.th). Thus, the culture and media industries, in this period, dramatically developed in the same direction as in other industrial countries in the world, which tended toward monopoly or oligopoly. As in the other industries, in the music industry the major trader had the opportunity to produce and sell products into the market on a larger scale than could the minor trader. For instance, in the newspaper industry, *Thairath* and *Delinews* were an oligopoly in the market, as their sales were 2.5 million units per day, while the sum total sales of the other ten Thai newspaper companies amounted to just 1.4 million units per day [Siriyuvasak, 2007].

In the Thai popular-music industry, during this period, it was not obvious who dominated the market, for businesses functioned as small companies and mainly as distributors, distributing both imported and local recording material such as cassette tapes and vinyl, rather than acting as music labels, producing their own artists and their albums. Plus, there was no centralized keeping of statistics. Companies promoted their artists by using the mass media, owned and managed by other private companies, to market their work to audiences. The labels had to pay for the airtime on both television programmes and commercial radio, as they did not own any media in the market; hence, the ratio of airtime per company did not vary very much, as all the companies were established with approximately the same amount of capital (information from Department of Business Development: Ministry of Commerce, Thailand).

Another thing that contributed to the low concentration of the popular music market during the late pre-Pop Era was the fact of there having been no music company that owned any mass-media outlet. Therefore, music television programmes, radio stations and music magazines could be wide open to artists from any company. This could be observed on the famous live music television program *Loo'g Dontrii (Pop on Stage)*, broadcast on Channel 5, a private television network, from 1971 to 2000. This programme broadcast live concerts featuring pop-music artists, with no concern for what company or label they were affiliated with. The artists who were chosen to perform on the show were not only famous bands or singers but also new artists chosen by the production team of the program [<http://www.oknation.net/blog/kilroy/2007/03/31/entry-1>].

Another instance that demonstrates a lack of monopoly in the Thai pre-pop era popular music can be observed in the film industry. Some pop bands were hired to compose music for, and act in, movies from the one film company, Saha'monkhon Film Co. Ltd., such as Chaatrii and McIntoch, although these bands were from different record companies (Metro Record Co. Ltd. and Azona Co. Ltd., respectively). Thus, the film industry during this time was not horizontally integrated with the music industry, as there was no partnership with any music company, and it did not tend to concentrate on promotion of any particular artists.

The Pop Era, 1982 to 1994

RS Promotion and Grammy Entertainment were founded with a substantial amount of venture capital (as discussed in Chapter 1) and operated as major labels. In the early years of business, both applied the same strategy as had the small companies in the Pre-Pop Era had to promote their product. However, because of the higher venture capital and the bigger size of the companies, the promotion budget from both major labels could purchase airtime from radio stations and television programmes in bigger blocks than the small companies were able to do, not only in the capital city Bangkok and its peripheries, but also in the significant trading provinces throughout the country, such as Chiang Mai, Phuket, Songkhla and Ubon Rachathani. According to government statistics, the ratio of pop songs which were played on music programmes on commercial radio between RS and Grammy, together, to the sum of that of the other small companies was 60:40 (data from the record on 1986, the Public Relations Department, Thailand).

Accordingly, RS and Grammy could enjoy the majority of the market share and album sales [Figure 2.3]. However, there was also the issue of DJ authority: some audiences and critics claimed that airtime-purchasing from major labels, and payola problems, had limited the variety of songs and monopolized the market. Even though some critics and journalists, such as the Peksai music column in the *Delinews* newspaper, raised this issue, no measure from any organization could document this problem, including the Censorship Department, which had responsibility for this issue [Siriyuvasak, 2007: 419]. In 2009, at the GMM Building, I interviewed Yutthana Boonorm, the founder of Fat Radio and the Director of Sanamluang Records, and one of the famous DJs from the 1980s to the 1990s. He gave his opinion about the problem of payola and the irresponsibility of the Censorship Department:

In the early times, most music companies did not have their own radio channel, and the DJs ran their own shows. It is like when I have enough budget to buy a slot of the channel, I have to buy it and run my own show, including cueing the songs, talking on the show, playing the music, and operating everything on my own. That way of operating made it easy for each music company, because they just have to contact us personally, make a deal, and pay us to play their music. The more they pay us, the more we play their music. If they have a large budget, their music is played a lot. The censorship department did see how it caused a problem, but they could not do anything because there was no proof. They were not able to investigate; therefore, they had to let it go. [Pitupakorn (A), 2009].

Subsequently, Grammy adopted a media-integration strategy in order to retain their market share and increase their control of the market. In the cultural industries, owning a mass media outlet can expand the business and decrease the number of rival companies, as the biggest company will produce a higher number of products and also hold the majority of the market share [Hesmondhalgh, 2007]. Grammy thus monopolized the popular-music market and maximized profit by

using horizontal integration [Hartley, et al., 1985]. In 1989, Grammy established A-Time Media Co. Ltd., which operated a radio concession granted by the Government Public Relations Department and CAT Telecom Public Company. The latter was a state enterprise handling telecommunications in the country, which was changed to a public limited company in 2003. The goal was to run a commercial radio business that targeted teenagers and the working class (information from the Government Public Relations Department, Thailand). The first two radio channels from this company were Hot Wave and Green Wave, which broadcast 24 hours a day. They were the first two radio stations in Thailand to have DJs operating programming all day. Previously, DJs had organized their programming from 8:00 am to 9:00 pm; after 9:00 pm, only songs and news were broadcast, without a DJ in the radio station [Boonorm, 2009].

Grammy radio stations mostly played songs by Grammy artists; however, 10 to 20 percent of the songs played were from other music companies. This was Grammy's attempt to defuse the tension caused by the critics of mass monopoly, mainly columnists in newspapers and magazines [Siriyuvasak, 2007: 419]. At the same time, Grammy also enlarged its focus by producing television shows and soap operas. By 1991, Exact Co. Ltd., had been started as a subsidiary company to create television programming; also, Extra Organizer Co. Ltd., had been created to organize concerts and events for the company. Within its first eight years, Grammy had integrated the mass media into its music business and had become the biggest company in the business.

Nine years later, RS followed the same direction as Grammy had done, and involved itself with other entertainment lines, such as movies, radio programmes and television programmes. Nevertheless, RS did not own a radio station and did not establish subsidiary companies as Grammy had done, until 1995, when RS Film was founded. In 1997, Shadow Entertainment Co. Ltd. and Magic Advertisement Co. Ltd. were founded as subsidiaries of the RS company, to produce television programmes and advertising, respectively.

Because of the vertical and horizontal integration of these two major labels, they could occupy mass media and advertise their products more frequently than other labels, and they enjoyed a duopoly within the Thai popular music industry. Their domination of the media and cultural industries has not only enhanced the economic power of the companies but has also limited the diversity of products and led to a cultural dominance and an opinion-forming influence over consumers [Murdock and Golding, 1977]. Hypothetically, this situation could have been ameliorated by the rise of medium-sized and small music companies. However, because of that media duopoly, other music companies found it difficult to enter the market. Figure 2.3 shows that, after the horizontal integration of the two major labels, the market share of other music companies remained stable in the case of Kita Records, while it decreased in the case of Nititat and others. In the Pop Era, medium-sized and small music companies found it very difficult to compete with the two major labels, as the majors owned mainstream media outlets and therefore dominated the media exposure to maintain their power in the Thai popular music industry.

The Interference of the Media in Consumer Behaviour

One of the presumed responsibilities of the mass media is to pass on culture and entertainment in various forms, in order to entertain and inform people in the society [Wright, 1960: McQuail, 1987]. However, major labels have utilized their advantage of media ownership to shape something approaching Adorno's dreaded mass culture, by influencing consumers' buying behaviour. In this section, I will borrow some methodologies from consumer-behaviour studies to flesh out how it is that Grammy and RS have managed to influence the decisions of pop-music consumers.

Consumer-behaviour studies are based on how people desire to buy or not to buy a product, drawing from the fields of psychology, sociology, social psychology, anthropology and economics [Sandhusen, 2000: 218]. The study of decision-making processes explains the method of a consumer's deliberation before the purchase decision has been made [Sandhusen, 2000]. Naturally, of course, companies study consumers in order to design marketing strategies to attain a greater market share [Perner, 1999]. Here, I will use the consumer-behavior studies theory in order to explain how the mass media in Thailand have influenced the decision-making processes of consumers to consume popular music in the Pop Era

According to the theory, there are three processes to negotiate before consumers make a decision to purchase products, namely problem recognition, information search, and alternative evaluation. Problem recognition is a stage at which the consumer has considered what s/he lacks or what s/he requires, which sometimes requires the separation of the necessary from the unnecessary requirements

[Sandhusen, 2000]. In essence, the Thai major labels stimulated consumers by using the mass media to arouse in them a stage of problem recognition, i.e., an emotional desire to own a copy of the music that they hear. Following this strategy, major labels have exploited an aspect of the consumer-behaviour theory, to motivate consumer desire, which is “perception”. The perception of consumers can be stimulated by the repetition of product exposure, as a single exposure to a certain product cannot have a great impact on the consumer [Perner, 1999]. Hence, the repetitive nature of product advertisement is the first way that major labels encourage consumers: repeatedly to play the songs on the radio. This was not always necessary, since, during the Pop Era, a certain number of major-label artists were well-known actors or actresses, and audiences easily recognized them. However, there was another type of artist from major labels who were not previously famous and were never recognized by the audience; thus, major labels advertised these via every channel of their media outlets, to ensure they entered into the consciousness of consumers as much as possible. The artists have been presented repeatedly in various forms, including appearing in music videos not only for their own album but also with other artists on the label, being a player or an MC in a game show, being a guest on a talk show, or appearing on other television programmes via both their own media channels and others – until any attentive consumer could recognize them. So, vertical and horizontal media integration earned major labels much of their media power, and artists had wide-ranging opportunities to be presented in the media. Moreover, in the Pop Era, there were a number of mainstream commodities whose manufacturers became official sponsors for major artists in each album and, if the artists became popular from their album sales, they were usually chosen by the manufacturer to be its presenter

and spokesperson for the product. This is, of course, very much how things often work in the West, and Thai popular music in the Pop Era adopted this formula. For example, Coca-Cola was always the official sponsor for Grammy's distinguished artists, popular television programmes and concerts, while Pepsi supported RS in exactly the same way as Coca-Cola did for Grammy. These sponsor companies had chosen artists from major labels to be their presenters and, as they were powerful companies with high advertising budgets, artists who were chosen as presenters gained an opportunity to market themselves to consumers.

Another way that major labels attempted to influence consumer desire in the problem recognition stage, during the Pop Era, was the use of propaganda. Randal Marlin quotes Bertrand Russell's definition of propaganda:

... any attempt by means of persuasion, to enlist human beings in the service of one party to any dispute. It is thus distinguished from instruction by its motive, which is not the dissemination of knowledge but the generating of a kind of party feeling [Marlin, 2003].

In Thai popular music, major labels use propaganda to convince the audience to appreciate an artist; this is no different to the actions of any other popular-music industry anywhere in the world. This will be shown from interviews conducted with several sound engineers who worked in one of the biggest Thai major labels from 1986 to 2000. These engineers, for professional reasons, have asked to remain anonymous, and I have honoured this request. The information that I obtained from them suggests misrepresentation of some aspects of the production process to build up the image of the artists. The main idea, agreed with by every engineer who gave an interview, is that most of the rock bands from the major label for which the source worked had frequently given interviews in the mass

media to say that they were 'involved' with every process of producing an album. Moreover, the label provided some 'scoops' to introduce these bands via television programmes, which contained scenes in the recording studio with members of the band themselves playing instruments and acting as they recorded the songs. In fact, according to these engineers, most of the rock bands from this major label did not record or compose the songs. Yet, the label required the image of the rock band to be that of skilled musicians. All of this has deceived audiences; it has aimed at confusing the understanding of consumers. Thus, it was implied that they produced and recorded the album by themselves. It appears that the major label used propaganda to promote, rather than simply advertise, its product. The label not only advertised the artist as a product to encourage album sales, but also misled the consumer to believe that this artist had a real talent and musical skill, or, at least, some skills that they did not possess. Unsurprisingly, using propaganda as a form of media manipulation does not just happen in the Thai popular music industry. However, during the Indie Phenomenon period from 1994 to 1997, questions were raised regarding artists who became famous based on their physical appearance alone (often with less musical talents), especially in the metropolis. During this period, propaganda came to be heavily critiqued by many musicians, columnists and audiences.

Information search, the second stage of the decision-making process, requires that the consumer search for information about the products and divides into two sources, an internal search and an external search [Perner, 1999]. The internal search is derived from his or her internal problem recognition. The repetition of product advertisement by the mass media encourages a consumer to memorize and

then purchase the product. The more the advertisement is broadcast, the more the consumer recognizes the product. Thus, when the consumer makes a decision to buy, s/he will initially choose the product from her/his memory. Then, the external search will be used, especially if the consumer decides to purchase a high-involvement product, which is a product that is essentially of high cost and has a long-term maintenance, such as a car [Perner, 1999]. As a producer of cultural commodities, the popular music industry is different from other producers of commodities, in that other commodities do not usually come with sales histories, while the consumer may be influenced by a popular music chart [Parker, 1991]. Even though popular music may not be considered a high-involvement product, sales figures could probably become an element of external search to support the purchasing decision, as advertisements prominently displaying a song's or record's chart status constitutes at least indirect evidence for that.

The popular music charts in the West have been supported by information taken from numerous media sources and have been analysed by market research organizations. The information has been collected not only from the airplay but also from sales figures, especially since Soundscan apparently offered a direct response from consumers to producers without using a mediator [McCourt, 1997]. However, Soundscan, for one thing, only works in certain kinds of stores; and airplay charts have long been subject to all kinds of manipulation, from the old payola method to all kinds of informal persuasion and coercion. In the Pop Era, the Thai popular music industry also had a music chart, which was reported on radio programmes. However, it showed a bias toward the major labels. The chart in this period reported from each radio programme individually, it was calculated from

only airplay, and it did not include album sales [Ratchanekorn, 1993: 133; Siriyuvasak, 2007]. As a result, the major labels took advantage of their media ownership, as they had direct control over radio playlists. The ratio of songs played by a major label versus small companies on the major label's radio stations was 9:1, making it extremely difficult for small companies to reach the charts [Ratchanekorn, 1993:133; Siriyuvasak, 2007]. Some pop music charts were reported independently of any major labels by some television or radio music programmes which were not owned or supported by major labels, such as Smile TV from cable television, Thai Sky TV, and Nite Spot radio. However, these charts convinced the consumer less than the music charts of the major labels did, as the reach of the major labels' music programmes was greater than those programmes not supported by the same major labels.

Additionally, according to Perner's theory, the more major labels could repeat their charts in the media, the more they could gain the opportunity to convince the consumer [1999]. This is a result of a logical fallacy called "appeal to authority" [Hansen and Pinto, 1995; Damer, 2000; www.nizkor.org/features/appeal-tp-authority.html]. In such an appeal to authority in an argument, the presumed authority is considered correct, since the person who is considered authoritative states the announcement [Hansen and Pinto, 1995]. It can be described in a logical form as: Authority A believes that P is true, therefore, P is true [Hansen and Pinto, 1995; <http://www.nizkor.org/features/fallacies/appeal-to-authority>]. The chart from the major labels, such as Hot Wave Weekly Chart and Radio No Problem Chart, had greater authority in Thailand, as they were generally used as reference

charts when any entertainment magazine, music magazine or newspaper reported the popularity of popular music [Ratchanekorn, 1993: 134; Boonorm, 2009].

Finally, in the alternative evaluation aspect of the model, the consumer will search for an alternative product to gather information before going on to the next step, the purchase decision [Perner, 1999]. In the Pop Era, every company intended to pitch to the same market by producing a me-too product, as the interview with Kita's executive, Phusit Lai-thong, has shown (p.107-108). Some labels, for example, in the early period of Kita, attempted to create a new style of Thai popular music by combining traditional Thai music style with a Western popular-music sound. However, they could not succeed in the market and, finally, the company produced a me-too product. When small companies could not present any alternative products into the market, and the consumer had recognized the product from the major labels more than from the small companies [Perner, 1999], the major labels could hold the advantage. With the major labels having been so successful in influencing the three stages of consumer behaviour before the purchasing decision, it is easy to see how they managed to control the market and retain their power.

Noteworthy Characteristics of Songs in the Pop Era

Western popular music has been introduced into virtually every country around the world. Similarly, every country might at least potentially have its own indigenous popular music style, because of local aesthetic and cultural priorities and the development of hybrid culture [Shim, 2006]. In Asia, many countries adopted Western pop and combined it with their own musical identity, therefore generating

their own particular popular music style such Canto-pop or J-pop [Witzleben, 1999]. However, discussions about the originality, identity or authenticity of such forms are ongoing in Asian popular music studies [Witzleben, 1999; Lockard, 1998; Chen, 2005].

Popular music in Thailand was strongly influenced by Western music (shown in Figure 2.1), at least partly as a result of the presence of a large number of US military personnel based in Thailand during the Vietnam War, as well as the rock 'n roll music trend from the West (detailed in Chapter 1). It was unsurprisingly recognized by Thai people that this genre was not their own traditional musical style. The term 'Phleen' ("Song") 'String' ('String Combo Band'), which was what popular music was called in the Thai language, was used to describe songs from string combo bands in the 1960s and later applied to other kinds of popular music. Moreover, this new genre was initiated in the country when Elvis Presley, Cliff Richard and the Beatles gained their popularity internationally. Thailand also particularly received this musical influence, especially in Bangkok and its peripheries. The music was widely played in nightclubs, on radio programmes and at parties [Siriyuvasak, 2007].

Because of the popularity of Western popular music, bands, in the late 1960s, directly presented themselves as similar to the original famous Western artists, as the bands had a stereotypical sound and image that audiences loved to hear and watch. According to Sirachaya, who I interviewed in 2008, since the musicians in the Pre-Pop Era widely believed that Thailand was a developing country, there were no concerts by international artists performed in Thailand during this period.

Also, no television or radio programmes from other countries were broadcast in Thailand. Thus, the closest that the audience could feel to seeing a Western band occurred when Thai bands dressed up, acted, and sang in the same way as superstars from the West [Sirachaya, 2008].

Another point to consider is the admiration of Western culture in Thailand. During the 1930s, under Prime Minister Pléë`g Pi`buunso`ṅkhraam, the third prime minister of Thailand, there was a noteworthy policy change in Thailand in relation to Thai culture. The idea of nationalism was spread and some of the old culture was revived [Siriyuvasak, 2007; The Secretariat of The Cabinet, http://www.cabinet.thaigov.go.th/pm_03.htm]. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the prime minister desired to lead the country to be as 'civilized' as western countries, and the government developed the policy that some aspects of Thai culture had to be improved. For example, chewing betel palm, which was traditional in Thailand, was prohibited; people were encouraged to use spoons and forks, instead of eating by hand; and the traditional outfit was discouraged and replaced by Western-style shirts, skirts, trousers and hats. All of this would imply that Thailand followed in the footsteps of the powerful nations of the West to become 'civilized'. These developments were reflected in the Thai movie *Hoo`m Roon* (*The Overture*), released in 2004 by Saha`monkhon Film International Co. Ltd., which depicted the environment and the controversial cultural change in the period of Prime Minister Pléë`g Pi`buunso`ṅkhraam [<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0415046/>].

After this period of official cultural change, Western culture, music, films and fashion expanded into Bangkok and its peripheries. Thai people in these areas, particularly teenagers, consumed and imitated these cultural products, to represent fashionability. For example, boys in the mid-1950s showed their coolness by dressing up and sporting a hair style that was similar to that of James Dean, and teenagers in the early 1960s attended rock 'n roll dancing parties to become fashionable [Sirachaya, 2008]. Both the popularity of Western popular music and the admiration of foreign culture by Thai youth probably contributed to the significant characteristics of popular music in its early days, in its imitation of a 'Western' sound. In short, Thai popular music has undoubtedly been significantly influenced by popular music from the West, including compositional style, instrumentation and singing style. Furthermore, when Thai popular music was envisioned as a commercial new music genre, much was composed with melodies and harmonies very similar to those of popular songs in the West. This circumstance raised the question of whether it developed its own style or whether it actually duplicated music from the West.

Originality in Thai Popular Music

Nelson Goodman carefully classifies the difference between the aesthetic *difference* and aesthetic *value* of an original painting and a visually identical forgery. Even though the original is essentially more aesthetically different, this does not imply that it also possesses more aesthetic value than the forgery [Goodman, 1976]. Additionally, Jack W. Meiland, in *Originals, Copies, and Aesthetic Value*, explains that the aesthetic value of a painting that can only be realized by visualization ("The Appearance Theory of Aesthetic Value") would

connote that it is equal in aesthetic value with the original, since they are visually indistinguishable [Meiland, 1983]. However, Meyer argues that

Our fundamental beliefs influence our sensations, feeling, and perceptions, what we know literally changes our responses to a work of art. Thus, once we know that a work is forgery, our whole set of attitudes and resulting responses is profoundly and necessarily altered. [Meyer, 1967:57].

Meyer's idea can be useful in describing why forgeries immediately unravel when they are recognized as fakes, as well as why a forgery is cheaper than the original [Meiland, 1983]. Nevertheless, there is an argument opposing Meyer's idea that the absolutely perfect copy should be appreciated independently from its original. Moreover, a number of great painters, especially the Impressionists, constructed their own style from learning to copy another's works in order to find the suitable mode for them [Germain, 1958]. Meiland shows another example to support Germain's idea; even though Alexander Graham Bell's first telephone was the original creation of the telephone, we, at the present time, prefer to use the improved version of the telephone rather than the original one. Hence, the original version of Bell's telephone held the original value as it represents the emergence of the telephone. However, although the present improved version of the telephone is probably not as valuable as the first innovation, it shows the value of improvements [Meiland, 1983]. Furthermore, Meiland explains about creativity and originality that 'creativity is a property of the artist, while originality is a property of the work', and we cannot judge that the work, which lacks creativity, can also be referred to as lacking in originality [Meiland, 1983].

Although it is the originality of visual art that is in question in the passages above, I would like to adapt this argument in order to attempt to describe the originality of Thai popular music from the Pre-pop to the Pop Era. As mentioned above, Thai popular music, as well as pop music in other countries in Asia, is heavily influenced by music from the West. Additionally, in the Pre-Pop Era, Thai bands that played Western rock 'n' roll songs in nightclubs were fashionable, as a result of the American military presence from the Vietnam War (as mentioned in chapter 1). After that, there were some bands that created another type of song, playing Western pop songs with exactly the same melody and harmony as the original, but changing the lyrics into the Thai language. Some were translated from the original lyrics, while others used new lyrics not bearing any relevance to the original lyrics. I will name this specific Western/Thai style the 'identical twin' style.

It can be acceptable to state that music from different artists, times and places can inspire or influence the people who are interested in them. However, the way that Thai pop songs in the Pre-pop Era were composed following the above style could not be classified as simply Western-inspired, since people could identify them as other Western songs, rather than as novel Thai pop songs. Additionally, according to Sirachaya, the attention of producers and musicians of popular music was focused on copying the Western style, rather than on producing original Thai popular music. As a result, songs in the 'identical twin' style were composed widely in this period.

The identical-twin style and its cultural nexus were portrayed in the movie *Kaaoo~ Kaaoo~ (The Possible)*, released in 2007, which depicted the popularity of copying

Western pop with Thai lyrics and the only slight concern for the original shown by the musicians and the audience during the 1960s

[<http://www.gimmtaihub.com/flash/homeGTH.html>]. Later on, bands often had mixed repertoires, recording their own compositions, as something of a novelty, while most of their music still remained in the identical-twin mode. There are some famous bands, in the pre-Pop Era, whose songs were identical twins with Western songs.

To show how this style worked, I will first compare a single ‘Ny`η Naaii Duuaan Caaii’ (‘Only You’) from The Impossible Band with the single ‘One Toke Over the Line’ by Brewer and Shipley. ‘Ny`η Naaii Duuaan Caaii’ exactly duplicates the chord progression and vocal melody line from ‘One Toke Over the Line’, while the tempo is slightly decreased from the original’s. The lyrics from both songs are not relevant here, as the Thai lyric was written independently, without using a translation from the original. Therefore, as Thai popular music in the Pre-pop Era was possibly considered as an attempt to copy Western pop, its originality is not present in the sense of aesthetic *difference* as Goodman described. However, the music possessed an aesthetic *value*, since it could connect with the Thai audience, as it was performed by Thai artists and sung in their language. Moreover, whether the identical-twin style of Thai popular music in the Pre-pop Era was considered in a positive or negative sense in regard to creativity, this could not affect its originality, since ‘while the production of a particular work may not be terribly creative (as when a copy is made), nevertheless that work might itself express much originality.’ [Meiland, 1983].

The Problems of Creativity and Authenticity

To create is to discover something new – to reveal in a timely and timeless *aperçu* some aspect of the world or some relationship of which we were previously unaware and, by doing so, to change forever our experience of the world and ourselves [Meyer, 1967: 58].

Even though the originality of Thai popular music is examined in the above section, its creativity and authenticity remain questionable (although ultimately one may very well argue the whole concept of ‘authenticity’ to be highly suspect in the first place). It could be argued that there might be a possibility that the ‘identical twin’ song is considered a creative work, since it could be a cover version. There was a slight difference in tempo, vocal timbre and, of course, the lyrics’ language, although it has maintained the original melody and harmony. Moreover, cover songs, parodies and musical arrangement can be perceived as a transformative appropriation rather than a copy of the work, since the US copyright law ‘purports to protect expressions of ideas, but not the ideas themselves.’ [Demers, 2006]. Additionally, variations upon original arrangements are not considered to be a form of plagiarism according to copyright laws, but rather a form of derivative work, if is given permission by the copyright owner [Demers, 2006]. Hence, it can possibly be implied that cover songs might not be judged as lacking in creativity, since they are not copies per se. They express their own ideas via their new arrangements, even though the original melodies and chord progression still remain.

Of course, the explanation of creativity in the previous paragraph would be true if the identical-twin song was a cover song, and the question of its creativity might

probably be solved. However, the identical-twin songs did not just simply borrow the idea of the original composition and interpret the expression via a new arrangement but were actually copies of the original songs. Although transformative appropriation is a common practice for European composers, borrowing someone's ideas without permission and without altering the borrowed work can be considered plagiarism [Demers, 2006].

The Impossible were a popular and influential band in the Pre-pop Era, and the band gained its popularity from identical-twin songs. Many other bands around the same period as The Impossible followed up the success of The Impossible by also including identical-twin songs on their albums. For example, on the first album of the Royal Sprite, *Genghis Khan*, released in 1979, almost every song borrowed the melodies, chord progressions and the arrangements from some Western song, accompanying them with a Thai lyric [http://www.oknation.net/blog/print.php?id=25625].

This plagiarism received little criticism in the popular-culture media. The audience most likely noticed that a number of Thai popular songs, in this specific style, were largely copied from Western songs, since most of these Western songs were already some of the world's most popular songs and, because of that, were also hit songs in Thailand, according to the reports in some newspaper columns [Dailynews, 1967]. Moreover, the original Western songs were performed widely in nightclubs around Bangkok and its peripheries; sometimes one band would play the original version, then another band the Thai version, as it was usually requested by the audience [Sirachaya, 2008:

album *The World is a Ghetto*. When the song was famous, Təəʔ was probably just a regular nightclub performer, and without a doubt, his band, The Oriental Funk band, had played this song, because Təəʔ was one of the few Thai musicians that liked funk music.

‘I believe that everyone has his/her own influences. So when someone said that to me, wow, I can certainly say that I took a hundred percent of the melody from “The Cisco Kid”. The song “Not Too Late” also copied the song “Smooth Operator” by Sade. The objectives are very clear, because Thai music is a hundred percent like Western music without any differences. If we were to contain it, then we would have had to sing in the Thai traditional style all the time. I confess to everything.’

Magazine: Təəʔ did not possess a single trace of pretentiousness, and he did not show any signs that he was bothered. He was sincere and satisfied with his actions.

‘Between the old and the new is growth. The song was similar to the style of War. I can say that it was me who came up with the idea. Who said I copied from them? I never did. I used the good parts of “The Cisco Kid” and rearranged everything again. My work is certainly better than “The Cisco Kid”.’

Magazine: Təəʔ admitted that Thoonchaai McIntyre’s song ‘Duuaaʔj Raʔg Ləʔ Phuuʔg Phan’ (‘Love and Relationship’) carried the same sound as James Taylor’s song ‘You’ve Got a Friend’; however, according to him, the idea belongs to the world, which is high self-esteem. Təəʔ commented on the motivation behind the song:

‘I had hoped to develop the music industry. Now I’ve done it. As I’ve mentioned before, I’ve found it, working-class listeners have accepted me. I’ve been successful at being the bridge extending towards the working-class listeners.’ [Chuchinnawat, 2009]

Was the popular-music audience in Thailand indeed divided up, class-wise, as Ter seems to imply? Generally, according to Figure 1, Thai popular music was targeted at teenagers, university students and white-collar workers in Bangkok and significant provinces, while the blue-collar workers were more interested in Phleeny Luuʔkthuuʔn than in popular music [Siriyuvasak, 1990]. However, when Bhuddhinan’s third album was launched with the song ‘Soʔmpooʔn Nooʔn Soʔmchaaii’, whose lyrics were about the blue-collar worker’s life in the capital

city, this single become popular among the working class, with listeners requesting that it be played on the Phleen Luu`kthuu`η radio station, a rare occurrence [Boonsiri, 2007]. In any case, because of this crossover airplay, Bhuddhinan claimed a success of crossover class-wise, in the music industry.

In the interview, Bhuddhinan plays down the significance of originality and creativity. Although he realized that his work would be criticized as plagiarism, he did not pay attention to such a potential criticism. On the contrary, he accepted that most of the songs from his third album were influenced by Western pop music. However, I would argue that his work was actually a copy of, rather than simply influenced by, the West. For example, ‘Sompong Nong Som Chai’ (‘Sompong’s Brother, Somchai’) which was mentioned in the interview, imitated ‘The Cisco Kid’. Though the variations here are greater than in the previous example, and Bhuddhinan might have modified some notation of the melody line, intro and solo of his song, the bass pattern, the combination of percussion, the chorus’s style and also the singing style were quite similar to those of the original.

It is also significant that, throughout the interview, an executive and a producer with the major label Grammy, such as Bhuddhinan, emphasized the idea that originality is not the most important thing for Thai popular music. He mentioned McIntire’s song ‘Duuaa`j Ra`g Le` Phuu`g Phan’ (‘Love and Relationship’) from his first album *Haa`d Saaj Saa`j Lom S๖๖`η Raaoo* (*Beach, Wind and the Two of Us*) saying that he, as producer of this album, took the idea from ‘You’ve Got a Friend’ by James Taylor. This demonstrates that this willful sidelining of originality had continued for some artists in the major label system, at the level of executive and producer.

This attitude had caused something of a me-too phenomenon to develop: when the biggest major label uses this technique to compose and release songs with great success, other major labels and small music companies have also felt compelled to do likewise, in order to attract a market share. Hence, a number of identical-twin songs were released from the start of the Pop Era to the very end of this period. It could be observed that, in 1992, RS Promotion released a single from the band Two called ‘Thəə Maaiiˆ Khəəj Taaj’ (‘You’ll Never Die’), and this single made it to the top 100 hit parade of the year, according to *The Guitar* chart 1992. A few years later, however, when Japanese popular music had successfully expanded into Thailand, there was a song called ‘Say Anything’ from the notorious Japanese rock band X Japan, which gained popularity in Thailand. Unexpectedly, ‘Say Anything’ by X Japan had been composed in the identical-twin style after ‘Thəə Maaiiˆ Khəəj Taaj’! This gave rise to the question of why a legendary Japanese rock band would copy a Thai popular song, and some criticism of X Japan ensued [Season, 1994; Songwad, 1994]. In fact, ‘Say Anything’ had been composed and released in 1991. It was a single on X Japan’s third album, *Jealousy*, which was released three years before the Japanese pop music boom in Thailand. Therefore, unbeknownst to Thai audiences, in fact, Two’s single was an identical twin to X Japan’s single. ‘Thəə Maaiiˆ Khəəj Taaj’ borrows the melody, harmony, intro, guitar solo and song form from ‘Say Anything’, without giving compositional credit to X Japan. Indeed, the credits in Two’s second album state that the melody was composed by one of Two’s members, Su`ra`phan Camlɔɔŋkun.

Even though music criticism in Thailand was developing during the Pop Era, as illustrated by the increasing number of music magazines, music columns and music critics [Siriyausak, 2007], concerns expressed by the critics about

originality and creativity of song composition were anathema to the Thai consumer; songs very similar to, or even identical to, songs by international artists have been successful in terms of album sales. Buddhinan's third album was an example: it was his most successful album in the Pop Era in terms of sales, with over ten-thousand copies sold, despite being heavily criticized for its plagiarism [*Quiet Storm Magazine*, 1986]. In addition, even though 'Thəə Maai' Khəəj Taaj' was criticized by a few writers, this had little impact on its popularity, as sale figures and the position of the single in music charts remained high in spite of unfavorable reviews. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the song became one of the hit pop songs of 1992 [*The Guitar* annual chart, 1992]. Even beyond the success of album sales, the artists who have applied the identical-twin process have also been accepted by audiences as talented musicians or singers. Bhuddhinan has been recognized as one of the most influential people in the Thai popular music industry and one of the all-time great musicians in Thai popular music [Patarasuk, 2004]. Moreover, somewhat ironically perhaps, his work has even been imitated by other artists. The following quotes are taken from interviews with audiences who attended the *Rawat Bhuddhinan Remembered in Tribute Concert* on 14 July 2007, at Impact Arena, Bangkok. The interviews have been placed in the DVD of the concert as an extra. It shows the respect that the audiences have for Buddhinan as an all-time great musician:

I have been following Bhuddhinan's work from when it first started until today. In my opinion, I have not found anyone who amazed me with his talent and been as farsighted as he was.

The music of Bhuddhinan is modern. No matter how many years go by, his music is still so fascinating.

Bhudhhanan is the most venerable person in music in our country. He is the best musician and a superb music producer. There is no one who is as good as him, either in the past or today. [Pitupakorn (E), 2009].

According to Meyer's quote at the beginning of this section, 'to create is to discover something new' [Meyer, 1967]. So, could the identical-twin song be recognized as a creative work? The identical-twin style certainly cannot be described as a transformative appropriation, since it copied other people's works rather than contributed something new into them (melodies, harmonies and re/arrangements were imitated without alteration, lyrics were often essentially translations of the original, and the mood and nuances of the songs were almost always preserved). Hence, although it had originality, this identical-twin style in the Pre-pop to the Pop era represented the lower level of creativity in the Thai popular music industry. Moreover, the consequences of this also affected its authenticity among other music genres in Thailand.

Another elusive word in many areas of cultural studies that is relevant to musical discourse is the rather loaded term 'authenticity'. Gilbert and Pearson point out that for rock music in the 1980s to have been considered authentic, it was necessary that artists were seen to have spoken the truth of their own situations (as well as those of others). Certain varieties of instrumentation were considered authentic, and the singer was regarded primarily as a sort of representative of his or her own culture [Gilbert and Pearson, 1999]. Authenticity is, of course, subject to interpretation and debate, and judgments are themselves made as well as defended by individuals who belong to specific cultures and historical eras. Authenticity is not inherent, but is a quality that may or may not be (subjectively)

attributed to music [Moore, 2002]. Additionally, Sarah Rubidge states that authenticity should not be considered a property of performance but instead a kind of gravity ascribed to it [Rubidge, 1996]. Hence, it 'depends on who we are' in order to label a performance as 'authentic' [Moore, 2002]. Peterson asserts that notions of authenticity in country music are all but fixed, being instead subject to variation and context as well as being constituted partly upon adjudication of various institutions [Peterson, 1997]. For Fornas, in music, conceptions of authenticity are often based upon the (highly ideologically influenced) perceived aesthetic value of different genres. For instance, folk music is regarded as authentic by some, but mass-produced popular music is regarded as inauthentic. Genre distinctions may themselves be seen as artificial and socially contingent [Fornas, 1994].

For music in Thailand, concentrating on the Pre-pop to the Pop Era, the idea of authenticity usually relates to the ideology of 'Thai-ness', since authenticity is often associated with the ideology of nationalism and the idea of building the nation. Thus, whatever can be appraised as 'authentic' (Thai Thai) is supposed to represent the sense of 'tradition' [Jirattikorn, 2006]. Thai popular music is normally perceived by music critics, music scholars and, of course, Thai audiences as less authentic than other genres in Thailand, since it represents the West rather than 'Thai-ness' [Jirattikorn, 2006]. I will compare Thai popular music with Phleng Luukhu, which is widely recognized as an authentic musical form in Thailand, in order to describe this issue.

It can be argued that Phleeŋ Luu^ˆkthuu^ˆŋ is also a mixture of Thai folk music and Western music. However, Thai music scholars such as Siriyuvasak and Jirattikorn obviously agree on its authenticity, since it is labeled ‘traditional’ music [Siriyuvasak, 1990; Jirattikorn, 2006]. Moreover, Jirattikorn describes the hybrid nature of Phleeŋ Luu^ˆkthuu^ˆŋ in the following terms: ‘From its beginnings, *lukthung* has always been hybrid. The elements of the music that are called “nontraditional” or “Western” are, in fact, as old as those called ‘traditional’” [Jitrattikorn, 2006: 30]. According to Jitrattikorn, the problem of Thai popular music in regard to authenticity is that, since its very beginnings, it was introduced, composed and performed within the image of Western imitation, obviously in terms of the identical-twin songs and the imitation of Western artists in the Pre-pop Era. However, if both Phleeŋ Luu^ˆkthuu^ˆŋ and Thai popular music (Phleeŋ String) are hybrids of Western-Thai music, what is the difference in the ratio between Thai and Western, which distinguish Phleeŋ Luu^ˆkthuu^ˆŋ “authentic Thai” and Phleeŋ String not?

Although the aesthetic values of Phleeŋ Luu^ˆkthuu^ˆŋ are situated in its synthesis of the traditional and the modern, which facilitates the negotiation of shared identities whether it be by individuals or by groups, the music still expresses the roots of Thai traditional symbols in both production and the artists themselves [Jirattikorn, 2006]. For example, Phleeŋ Luu^ˆkthuu^ˆŋ is sung in different regional dialects and the lyrics typically concern issues of socioeconomic inequality as experienced by those living in the rural parts of Thailand and specific groups, such as labourers, farmers or truck drivers [Jirattikorn, 2006]. Moreover, the performance of Phleeŋ Luu^ˆkthuu^ˆŋ comprises not only the singer but also a number of dancers called ‘Haa^ˆŋ Khryyaa^ˆŋ’, which Pasuk and Baker describe as lines of dancers with

glittery sequined costumes and ostrich plumes. This is a standard form of the performance of Phleeng Luu[^]kthuu[^]η [Pasuk and Baker, 1995]. Moreover, it is not only its production, but the Phleeng Luu[^]kthuu[^]η artists themselves also represent Thai traditional symbols. According to Kropthong, information about the birthplaces of singers and songwriters in Phleeng Luu[^]kthuu[^]η shows that most of them were from the rural areas of Thailand, with the majority from the Northeast. Furthermore, most earned their highest education at the primary school level [Kropthong, 2004]. The socioeconomic status, educational background, and lifestyle of many of these singers, the experiences they were exposed to growing up poor in the rural areas of Thailand, their lack of access to the Western cultural artefacts associated with wealthy city-dwellers, meant that they were regarded as more 'Thai'. By contrast, Thai popular music, in the Pre-pop to the Pop Era, basically adapted musical style (the identical-twin songs), singing style, fashion and performance patterns from the West, while the artists were usually urban residents with an image that could be described as 'western' rather than 'traditional'. Hence, since the beginning of the emergence of these music genres, it could be seen that Phleeng Luu[^]kthuu[^]η, although it was a hybrid, retained elements which could be called Thai-ness, while pop music looked to the West. Even though nowadays Phleeng Luu[^]kthuu[^]η has been modified and some criteria have been changed, the genre has been continually referred to as authentic Thai music and as representing Thai-ness. This can be illustrated using numerous events, which use Phleeng Luu[^]kthuu[^]η in order to encourage people to pay attention to Thai culture and to stimulate a certain level of opposition to Western influence in popular music [Jirattikorn, 2006]. Thus, from the Pre-pop to the Pop Era, Thai popular music was perceived by most to be not only less creative, since the

identical-twin songs could be considered as plagiarism, but was also less authentically Thai than other genres in Thailand.

Conclusion

In the Pop Era, the Thai popular music industry has inevitably confronted the same problems regarding cultural commoditization and business as other capitalist countries did, such as the monopoly market, media integration and the interference of the media. All of these issues have been germane, given the corporate control of the major labels. However, the strategies used by the major labels in Thailand in the Pop Era to maximize their profits were criticized by a group of musicians, labeled 'indie' artists, in the next period that will be discussed in this dissertation. The emergence of 'indie' had a critical impact on the popular music business in Thailand and will be examined in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: The Indie Phenomenon

In the middle of 1994, with the US ringing to the sound later to be known as ‘alternative rock’ and pioneered by Nirvana and other bands principally located in Seattle, the Thai music industry also adopted this sound. However, at the same time, not only did this new musical genre emerge in Thailand, but also a significant change in the Thai popular-music industry was brought about, with many of the systems and patterns of the major labels interrupted by small labels calling themselves ‘independent’ or ‘indie’ (‘indie’ is used in Thailand as transliterations from English or pronounced as In Dii^๕ in Thai). 1994 to 1997 was the period when music from independent labels had an extreme influence on the Thai popular music industry [see e.g. Sukoson, 2007; Boonorm, 2009]. In this dissertation, I call this the Indie Phenomenon.

Some scholars have defined the ‘indie’ part of the music industry in a western sense, as small record labels’ operating independently of major labels, claiming to be innovating and creating new sounds and genres, prioritizing creative production over profit [Larkin, 1993; Lee, 1995]. Additionally, ‘indie music’ could imply a wide-ranging musical style, for instance, grunge, emo, lo-fi and techno, and is principally associated with alternative rock [Desztich and McClung, 2007]. However, alternative rock emerged in the 1990s; this music has some connection to punk, since there was an attempt by alternative rock to revive some of punk’s aesthetic, including its critique of the commercial music industry and, significantly, a used do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic [Fairchild, 1995; Moore and Roberts, 2009].

Thailand rarely experienced the punk music of the 1970s, the music industry having not yet developed to the point of mass distribution; however, with the industry much changed by the 1990s, alternative music did have an impact on the Thai music industry. The questions to be addressed in this chapter are: what is ‘indie’ in the context of the Thai popular music business? How did the music develop its popularity? How did it affect the major label system? And why did the phenomenon grind to a halt after 1997? The chapter will be divided into four sections. First, I will explain what ‘indie’ means in Thai popular music, encompassing the views of artists, independent labels, the media and audiences. Second, I will study the character of indie artists and their work; to do so I will examine the first albums by Modern Dog and Boyd Kosiyabong – who were role models for indie artists – looking at the production process, music, lyrics, fashion and vocal style. Third, I will illustrate how the Indie Phenomenon affected the production process of major labels and how major labels counter-attacked this phenomenon. Finally, the actual reason for the end of the Indie Phenomenon will be determined.

What is ‘indie’ in the context of the Thai popular music industry?

As many scholars have pointed out, both in the popular music and sociological fields, alternative rock modified some of punk’s aesthetics, significantly the DIY aesthetic and the stressing of independence from the corporate control of the culture industry [Hibbett, 2005; Moore, 2007; Moore and Roberts, 2009].

Additionally, as an influence of youth culture, punks illustrated resistance to the norms of society, via their perspective, sound and image [Fox, 1987; Frith, 1980; Hebdige, 1979; Shank, 1994]. The idea of the opposition and rejection of society

by punk later had consequential associations with indie music, including alternative rock [Fairchild, 1995]. Historically, the Thai popular-music industry has mostly followed the steps of western popular music patterns, both in musical style and music production; hence, indie music in the Indie Phenomenon was basically influenced by the West and shared the ideas of anti-commercialism, social resistance and the DIY aesthetic.

The Indie Phenomenon was initiated when a small label called Bakery Music was established in 1994 (see Chapter 1 for the history of the company). Previously, in the early 1990s, when alternative rock came out and became successful in the US and UK, some Thai DJs such as Waa`dsa`naa` Wiira`cha`dphlii from the Radio Active programme frequently played songs from alternative rock bands such as Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Manic Street Preachers and Radiohead [Sukosol, 2007]. The music reached teenagers in Bangkok and its outlying areas through radio play [Sukosol, 2007]. However, alternative rock remained popular with only small numbers until the success of Modern Dog's eponymous debut album in July 1994. The word 'alternative' or 'alter'" (again, 'alter is used in Thailand as transliterations from English or pronounced as 'An Təə' in Thai) was introduced into the Thai popular-music industry by its label as a new music genre, promoting the idea that bands so labeled were in rebellion against the 'assembly line' of the major labels [Utchin, 2009; Sukosol, 2007]. After the success of Modern Dog, the number of alternative rock bands releasing albums associated with the concept of DIY increased dramatically, as did the number of independent labels. Only a year after Modern Dog's first album was released, almost 150 alternative rock albums had been released and about 50 new independent labels had been established

[Boonorm, 2009]. Simultaneously, when ‘alternative’ was used to describe a music genre in the media, another word, ‘indie’, arose in the Thai popular music industry to refer to an independent label and to describe the practice of artists who composed, recorded, produced and performed independently of major labels [Boonorm, 2009; Pinkaew, 2009]. Bakery and other independent labels, from the Indie Phenomenon to the present, distributed their work themselves without using a major distributor, which constituted a difference from the standard American practice. Kamon Su`koso`n, one of the founders of Bakery Music, claimed that he was the first person to introduce the word ‘indie’ into Thailand:

I am quite sure that I am the first person who uses the word ‘indie’ in Thailand. I was interviewed by many newspapers and television programmes when Bakery Music had just established, and they asked, ‘What is Bakery?’ My answer was, ‘it’s indie. It’s independent’. So we have been an independent music group since the very beginning. We don’t want to go into the mainstream business. We’d like to work with a ‘We do what we believe in and we believe in what we do’ concept and policy [Paothongkam (A), 2009].

The meaning of indie music and alternative rock in Thailand, in the view of artists and independent labels, was similar to that in the West. ‘Indie or independent’ implied a small record label without a connection to a major label and attributed to artists the authority to produce their work and be associated with creating a new music style [Negus, 1996]. The term ‘independent label’ could be applied to record companies that concentrated on niche markets and the music, which was risky and had little opportunity of reaching a mass market [Moore, 2007]. It cannot be said that Thai alternative rock was a novelty on a global scale. However, it was a new sound in Thailand, introduced and widely promulgated by independent labels. Alternative rock in Thailand, in the media and from producers’ point of

view, existed as a reaction to the tedious music of the Pop Era from major labels. Boonorm (the so-called “Godfather of Indie” in Thailand) and U’ dchin (the lead vocalist of Modern Dog) suggest some of the reasons that alternative rock was extremely successful during the Indie Phenomenon:

I would say that at that time, listeners were saturated with the Grammy and RS style of music. It was boring that we could easily recognize which songs were Grammy’s and which ones were RS’s. Everyone was bored with the same styles and sound. So when the unusual sound, alternative style of music, hot, hard and fun songs and also the artists’ weird dressing came about, it was not surprising that it was so popular. When Modern Dog became famous, the alternative style exploded. Teens were in love with this new style as it could represent their taste as a trendy person [Pitupakorn (A), 2009].

I think that teens were bored with pop music or simply they were sick of RS and Grammy. They waited for new things. Then Bakery was created, to answer the key marketing question. The people were waiting for the new leader of the revolution. Modern Dog was the group that they wanted. With an atypical sound, very few guitar solos, chord-oriented songs, and hip rhythms, people promptly jumped out of the shade of old styles. Alternative came to be the trend [Paothongkam (B), 2009].

However, this understanding of the meaning and the emerging of alternative rock and indie music in Thailand is from the perspective of the artists and independent labels. We must ask whether the Thai audience, at that time, understood the definition and the emergence of indie and alternative music in the same way as the artists and labels did. To study this, I administered surveys by setting up two sets of questions. First, there were questions about the understanding of audiences concerning the meaning of indie and alternative rock in the Indie Phenomenon period, 1994 to 1997. Second, there were questions on why audiences chose to listen to indie music in particular. Both surveys were managed by interview and the answers recorded on MP3 and camcorder. The target audiences were people born between 1969 and 1978, as audiences of this age, 16 to 25 years old during

the Indie Phenomenon, were the key consumers of indie music at the time, according to U`dchin, Boonorm (the so-called “Godfather of Indie”), Sukoson (one of the founders of Bakery music) and one of the members of Smile Buffalo (famous Indie Phenomenon artists) [Sukoson, 2007; Utchin, 2009; one of the members of Smile Buffalo Band, 2009, Boonorm, 2009].

The survey consists of 1000 people and is divided into two groups: 500 people who had been born and had remained in Bangkok and its peripheries at that time, and 500 people who had been born and had remained in four regions of Thailand; the North, the South, the Northeast and Central (125 people per region) at that time. With the collaboration between me and my university friends (working as musicians, music lecturers and owners of restaurants and music schools in each region of Thailand), the survey was run and collected data in three different ways. First, they were selected from the parents of the students in private music schools who had ages in the range of the study. Second, advertisements were promoted in some universities in Bangkok and other regions in Thailand and targeted at people who were in the age range of the study. Third, customers in some popular restaurants and nightclubs responded, as they were a place to gather after work for the target group.

The result of the first survey, the understanding of audiences as to the meaning of indie and alternative rock, shows that 95 percent of the sample group said that there was no difference between indie and alternative, while only 5 percent could understand the difference in meanings of ‘indie’ and ‘alternative’ in the same way as did the media and indie artists; furthermore, all of this 5 percent were from the

Bangkok and its peripheries sample group. However, in the 95 percent, the understanding of the indie and alternative definitions could be separated into three groups. First, 50 percent of the 95 percent considered 'indie' and 'alternative' to be the style of the bands; these consisted, in their conceptions, of a few members, normally three to four people, mainly composing songs by using a guitar-distortion effect and dressing in casual or 'weird' clothes. However, after a year of the Indie Phenomenon had passed, 45 of the 50 percent changed their understanding; they then thought that any bands, songs or albums released from any labels other than Grammy and RS were indie, while only 5 of the 50 percent realized the difference between 'indie' and 'alternative' in their original meanings. Second, 35 of 95 percent of the sample group recognized indie and alternative as 'anything but major' from the start. This sample group did not pay attention to musical style, singing style or the fashion of the indie artists, since they judged that anything that was outside of the major labels was indie and alternative. Moreover, in this group, only three percent could find a difference between indie and alternative after a year of the Indie Phenomenon, while the remaining 32 percent still held the same perception even though a year had passed by. Third, 10 of the 95 percent believed that 'indie' and 'alternative' implied any rock bands from any labels that released their album during the Indie Phenomenon.

It can be seen from the survey that there were some divergent understandings about the meaning of 'indie' and 'alternative' at the beginning of the Indie Phenomenon among the sender – the artists and the labels – and the receiver, i.e. the audiences. Most of the audience did not make the distinction that 'alternative' was a music genre while 'indie' referred to independent labels. In terms of the

media, the uses of 'alternative' and 'indie' as words to describe this new music style in Thailand was rather complicated. Although the media simply understood and usually used these two words in the same way as other senders, there was an attempt from major labels, which dominated the media ownership in the industry, to mislead and confuse the audience in order to gain back their market share. This could have partly caused the end of the Indie Phenomenon, and it will be discussed later in this chapter. Studies in alternative rock and indie music from some western scholars have described alternative music as a genre, intimately related to the independent label phenomenon and, of course, sometimes inevitably referred to as 'indie music' [Hibbett, 2005; Desztich and McClung, 2007]. However, most Thai audiences, at the beginning of the Indie Phenomenon, acted as if these two words could replace each other without any change of meaning.

This confusion was a result of the very close relationship between the words 'indie' and 'alternative' in Thailand. When Modern Dog's first album was released and gained popularity, the word 'alternative' was put on the cover of the promotional album, sent to the media; the album's details were sent to be broadcast on radio or to inform reviews from magazines or newspapers. Then, DJs, columnists and music critics used the word to describe and refer to the musical style of the band. At exactly the same time, Bakery Music gained fame and became a powerhouse in the Thai music industry and the media; thus, unsurprisingly; Modern Dog and Bakery Music were usually mentioned together in radio programmes, newspapers and magazines [Sukoson, 2007; Boonorm, 2009]. Additionally, after Sukoson said in a newspaper interview that Bakery Music was an independent label or 'indie' [Sukoson, 2007], 'indie' was thought to

represent both Bakery Music and Modern Dog's musical style. Moreover, during the early period of the Indie Phenomenon, there were a number of alternative bands releasing their albums under independent labels. Therefore, sometimes 'alternative' was unavoidably replaced by 'indie' [Boonorm, 2009].

This confusion of terms was slightly amended when Boyd Kosiyabong's first album, *Rhythm&Boyd*, was launched in early 1995 under the Bakery Music label. The album made another impact on Thai popular music, as it introduced a rhythm and blues sound to Thailand. (Details of this album will be discussed in the next section.) *Rhythm&Boyd* was very successful, and Kosiyabong came to be known in the media as the "King of R&B" [PhornHeng, 1997: 39]. Afterwards, a number of indie artists released R&B albums and gained popularity at the same time as alternative, including such artists as Ford and XL-Step (Stone Entertainment). The audiences realized that these artists with the R&B sound were continually referred to by the media as being 'indie', even though they were not playing alternative music. Hence, a year after the Indie Phenomenon had begun, audiences were more able to understand that alternative was a genre as well as R&B, and not exactly the same thing as indie. In other words, the success of Kosiyabong and others helped to de-couple 'alternative' from 'indie'. Then again, the ambiguous idea of 'indie' led some audiences to believe that any music without a connection to a major label was 'indie'; this circumstance brought about a marketing problem.

From late 1994 to 1996, about 200 independent labels were founded in just three years [Boonorm, 2009]. Also, a number of indie albums were extremely successful in terms of album sales; approximately 200,000-400,000 albums were sold, at a

time when just 40,000-100,000 were needed to reach break-even point [Sukosol, 2007; Boonorm, 2009]. 'Indie' became a fashionable word and was used in a broad sense not only in terms of music, but also for other cultural commodities, such as handmade books, films or things inspired by the idea of DIY [Pinkaw, 2009]. Because of the DIY aesthetic, the ideological concept that anybody could become a famous artist like Modern Dog and Kosiyabong or could be the owner of an independent label came into common currency, many albums were produced and released into the music market under the indie banner. Boonorm gave his opinion about this problem:

Because of its good pay, there was an overflow of indie artists. To be a millionaire by releasing an album easily attracted people. It seems that everyone could open a music company and could have her/his own album. The situation has changed from control by the big companies, Grammy and RS. Furnishing something with the title of 'indie' made things cool; even the song makers did not really know what indie meant. The drawback was that it came and went fast, because we could not control the market [Pitupakorn (A), 2009].

This lack of control in the music market turned out to be a serious problem, and a significant factor in the demise of the Indie Phenomenon, the details of which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

My second survey was about why audiences chose to consume indie music, and what led it to become popular during the Indie Phenomenon. It was certainly clear what artists believed about how audiences behaved: in personal interviews that I conducted with U'dchin, the lead vocalist of Modern Dog, with one of the members of Smile Buffalo who wished to be anonymous and with three other indie artists, all believed that the Indie Phenomenon existed at the right moment when audiences were oversupplied with songs from major labels. They also felt

that audiences felt more appreciated by indie artists, as they had a genuine ability to be real artists, since they composed songs themselves, performed colourfully and were not controlled by the major label career pattern. The question that my survey addressed, then, was whether the artists were correct about audiences' motivations in purchasing 'indie' titles. The survey divided into two sample groups, using the same people as in the first survey. Here, as before, the first sample group consisted of 500 people who were born and had remained in Bangkok and the boundaries, and the second sample group was 500 people in the previously identified four regions of Thailand (again, 125 people per region).

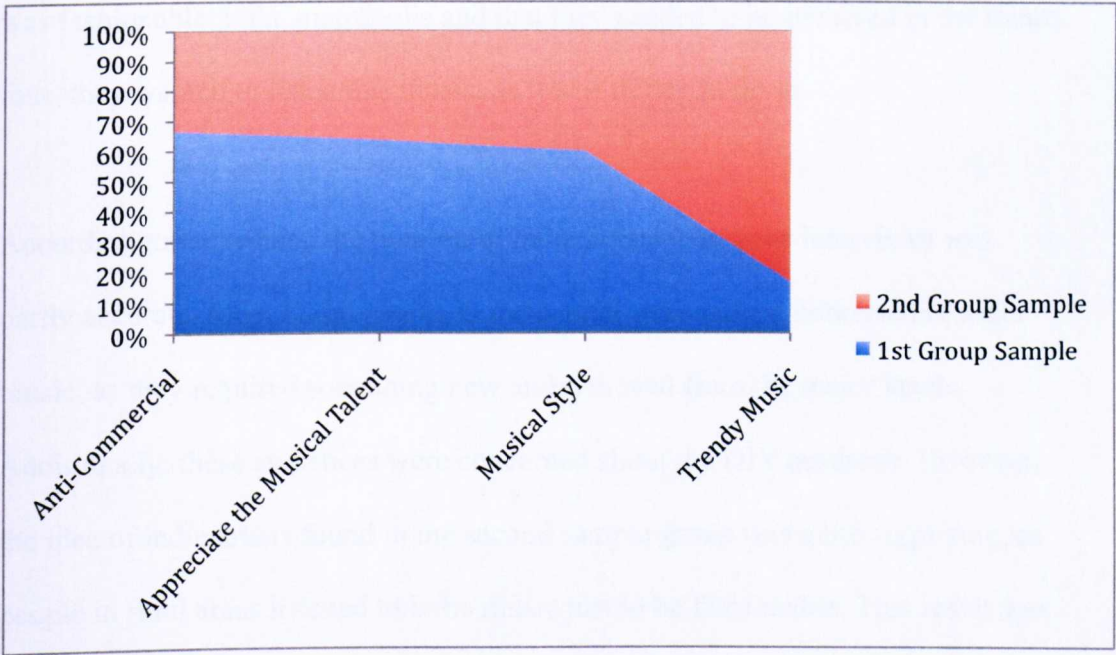


Figure 3.1 *A Survey of Why People are Interested in Indie Music in Thailand*

The outcome illustrated that 40 percent of the first group and 20 percent of the second listened to indie music because of the tediousness of major label songs and artists, as well as the commercial constraints imposed on them by major labels. 35 percent of the first group chose indie music as they appreciated the musical talent

of the indie artists and they believed that indie artists usually created a new sound in the music market in contrast to major artists; this was echoed by 20 percent in the second group. 15 percent of the first group and 10 percent of the second paid attention to the musical style of indie music. The latter group valued only the music, which was produced during the Indie Phenomenon, without any interest in who had produced that sound. Lastly, of the first group, 10 percent just listened to indie music as it was trendy at that moment. Unexpectedly, the second group sample, from the rural areas, showed an extremely different result to that of the first group: 50 percent of this group listened to indie music because they were influenced by the metropolis. These people had the perception that indie music was fashionable in the metropolis and that they needed to be involved in the trend; thus, they wanted to listen this music, as it was trendy to do so.

According to the results, the opinion of indie artists who gave interviews was partly accurate. Most of the people in the capital were indeed interested in indie music, as they required something new and removed from the major labels. Additionally, these audiences were concerned about the DIY aesthetic. However, the idea of indie artists found in the second sample group was quite surprising, as people in rural areas listened to indie music just to be fashionable. This result was relevant to the interview with Boomorn, who stated that indie music was for teenagers by teenagers in the capital city and could not actually expand all over the country. Even though Modern Dog was popular all over the country, this was exceptional; only a few bands achieved that [Boonorm, 2009].

The upshot of these results was that people in the countryside clearly had an interest in indie music because the music seemed trendy, rather than because of the musicological properties of the music. Social adaptation theory can be useful in trying to explain why this was the case. It can be said, from an evolutionary perspective, that people have evolved into complex collections of integrated mechanisms created by natural and sexual selection to be better adept at problem solving. Indeed, the social adaptive problem is just such a problem, which needs to be solved [Buss, 1996]. While a number of adaptive problems in human nature have been solved by human mechanism as ‘survival problems’ (for instance, sweat glands help to control the temperature of the human body), social adaptive problems, such as selecting a mate, apparently have not been solved by human mechanism [Buss, 1996]. In order to choose an appropriate mate, one might seek for some outstanding criteria from the mate rather than only his/her physical components of ‘human nature’ [Buss, 1996]. Additionally, the mate will be selected for his/her individual differences to solve social adaptive problems. Thus, the importance of the selection is that it cannot indicate which individual differences are more significant than others, unless they possess some criterion [Buss, 1996]. In accordance with an evolutionary psychology, social adaptation theory implies that human decisions are made from information, assisting the progress of adaptation [Kahle, 1985]. Thus, ‘indie’ music in Thailand during the Indie Phenomenon might be considered as adaptive significant information, since its novel style was not only different to other music genres at that time, but also represented the urban area, which could be practically useful for adaptation.

This can be more fully explained by comparison with the study of the urbanization of African music. In David Copland's [1982] *The Urbanization of African music: some theoretical observations*, unique African jazz forms (such as *marabi*, *tsaba-tsaba* and *kwela* and *mbaqanga*) were created during the 1920s to 1960s as, from the late 1920s, black South African jazz musicians often played jazz music, for western-educated audiences, in black American style, in order to represent urbanization. These musicians were able to absorb American arrangements and then created their own style; a novel African jazz. The principal audience for this unique jazz was working-class Africans, and the music could be used in order to declare an urban self-identification and the urban status of this working-class community [Copland, 1982]. Similarly, the reason that Thai audiences in the rural area selected indie music, as it was trendy, could illustrate the solution of a social adaptive problem. Indie music represented useful information for adapting this audience to urbanization.

It should be noted that, even though the Indie Phenomenon became part of Thai popular-music industry history, the market share of indie music was still small, standing at just 16 percent according to Figure 2 in Chapter 2, compared to the market share of the major labels, which was approximately 84 percent. When indie became a trend amongst teenagers, major labels produced the same style of music, promoted this as indie music, and then launched it into the market. Because of audiences' vagueness of perception about what indie music really was and the overarching media ownership structures of the major labels, it was easy to encourage people all over the country to listen to music from the major labels promoted to the masses as indie. This was one of the strategies of the labels to

regain their market share in the Indie Phenomenon. Further discussion of how major labels fought back against independent labels will be dealt with in the last section of this chapter. In the next section, I will discuss the process of production of the music, the characteristics of indie artists and indie music, and how those things were to result in the Indie Phenomenon. This will be done through a case analysis of the first albums of Modern Dog and Boyd Kosiyapong

It was called ‘indie’

Music from independent labels in Thailand did not begin in 1994. Previously, there had been some independent labels in operation during the Pop Era and labels such as Nite Spot and Butterfly Group had been recognized by the Thai audience. Audience recognition for independent labels was directed at any music genre, for example, heavy metal, death and progressive rock, except for mainstream music from major labels such pop, dance and rock. These independent labels could be simply identified as ‘Phleeng Taai` Din’ (Underground Music); this described the music movement, which was against commercially driven major labels and mainstream popular music. However, the underground music scene in Thailand during the Pop Era had a limited impact on the popular-music market, as it circulated among specific, small audiences and remained underground. Indeed, there was no sign of any significant change in Thai popular music until 1994 when the Indie Phenomenon began. As a result of this phenomenon, the ‘assembly line’ of the major labels was broken up when the band Modern Dog launched their first album *Modern Dog* and their first single ‘Bu`dsa`baa’ (Bu`dsa`baa’ is a Thai girl’s name). The band had massive crossover success in the pop charts and reached number one. Moreover, the album reached more than 400,000 album sales, the

highest album sales for the independent labels in Thailand at that time [Sukosol, 2007]. The band proved their success again when they arranged and performed their concert *Dog on Stage World Tour* on 15 December, 1994 at MBK Hall, which was the most famous concert hall in Thailand at that time; no other band from any independent label had performed in this hall. The success of the band illustrated that they were able to break through the assembly-line model, since the band were not carefully chosen from the celebrity sphere or picked according to their appearance, then, were not placed on a machine belt bringing them to a producing song department for practicing and recording ‘ready made’ songs and, finally, the process of media manipulation was exploited within the power of media ownership of the company before distributing their work. In other words, the Brill Building model did not apply to Modern Dog’s work or other indie artists during the Indie Phenomenon. To be indie artists, they could not just enter into one building and leave it with their complete album. Conversely, they had to have their own complete album or at least some of their works in order to present themselves to the independent labels [Sukoson, 2007; Boonorm, 2009]. To examine the breaking up of the assembly line, I will use the first album of Modern Dog as a case study.

Modern Dog: DIY vs. assembly line

When Bakery Music was established in 1992 it did not operate as a music label. Bakery was initially founded as ‘Bakery: A Complete Music Production Company’, creating and organizing everything about music with venture capital at approximately 1,400 GBP (approximately 40 GBP=1 BHT at that time). Details of the company are provided in Chapter 1. Afterwards, the label decided to change to

become an independent music label, Bakery Music, on 19 August 1994, when Modern Dog's first album was released.

What were the strategies that the band used to construct the Indie Phenomenon?

First of all, perhaps necessarily, comes 'basic standard', which is mentioned in Chapter 2 as the system of finding artists for major labels; this had been challenged by no-one.

If Thoonjchaai McIntyre or Pa'tipaan Pa'thawiikaan are perfect role models for the type of Thai popular music stars selected by Grammy to become major artists because of their earlier reputations as famous actors, Modern Dog can be an example describing resistance to such a model. The band consisted of four members: Thana'chaai U'dchin as lead vocalist, Meethii Noo'jcindaa as guitarist, Pawin Su'wanchii'b as drummer and So'ma'd Bunyara'dtawe'd as bass player [375 *Fahrenheit Magazine*, 2004]. They had been college friends at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, and all interested in rock and funk music. After the band won the Thailand Coke Music Award in 1992, the most famous university band competition in Thailand at that moment, U'dchin presented his band directly to Kamon Sukoson, one of the founders of Bakery Music. After the band had had an opportunity to showcase their musical ability, Sukoson decided to invest in them [Sukoson, 2007]. As college boys with no connections in the entertainment industry, Modern Dog gained their popularity from a base as an unknown group rather than through pre-existing celebrity. This was very different from other successful artists from major labels in the Pop Era, who had mostly been famous before releasing their own albums. Not only this, the band also

started a new fashion for adolescents following the Indie Phenomenon. This can be divided into two topics, clothes and album covers, which together illustrate the novelty of Modern Dog in Thai popular music.

For their first album, Modern Dog presented themselves in an unusual fashion not before seen in the Thai entertainment industry. In the Pop Era, artists dressed up following their album concept and normally related to western fashion or Japanese style. For example, rock artists or heavy bands such as Micro or Stone Metal Fire (SMF) usually wore black outfits and black leather jackets or skinny trousers, while bubblegum pop idols such as Pa`tipaan Pa`thawiikaan and Tata Young typically wore fashionable and colourful clothes. The following are some album covers and pictures from magazines showing the images of famous major artists in the Pop Era:



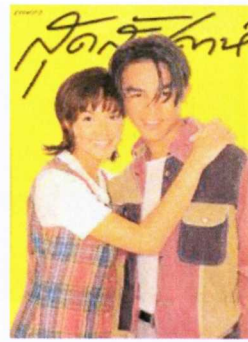
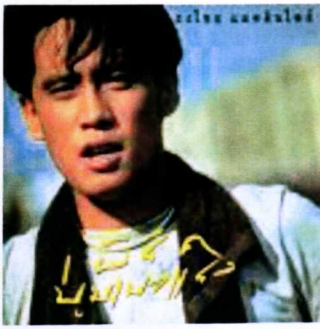


Figure 3.2 First line: (left) Micro Album Cover (right) SMF's Image, Second line: (left) Thoonchaaai McIntyre Album Cover (right) Mos and Tata Magazine Cover

Conversely, Modern Dog introduced a combination of western and Thai traditional fashion by merging Thai patterns in their outfits. They also used old-fashioned Thai accessories, for example, a brass belt with a perforated design used in Thai traditional dress. In addition, the band usually dressed in strange and unusual things to appear in public in Thailand. For instance, instead of trousers, in their performances Modern Dog wore loincloths or ankle-length skirts, a style normally worn in a private area such as one's house. Moreover, the band's outfits were of a dazzling, colourful and very close-fitting style, not the ordinary style for men in that period [375 Fahrenheit Magazine, 2004].



Figure 3.3 *An unusual fashion of Modern Dog*

The band’s representation implied rebellion and resistance and could be described as being a result of youth culture in similar ways to what was happening at that time in the West. Sociologists formerly criticized youth cultures as deviance, as actions that disrupted the cultural and social norms and required the authoritarian institution of society in order to censor and discipline youth [Becker, 1963; Berger, 1963; Cohen, 1972; Moore, 2005]. What young people expressed was done on purpose, intended to signal opposition to mainstream culture via their style of clothes, attitude and argot [Moore, 2007]. Even though, in the case of Modern Dog in the Indie Phenomenon, there was no significant evidence of any censorship or discipline from the authority of the society, the band’s image could be seen as opposition to a cultural norm, which, in this case, was set against the major artists who had to turn up in nice, elaborate and trendy clothes. After the success of

Modern Dog's first album, the colourful and very close-fitting shirt and T-shirt became popular in both the metropolis and the countryside.

Moreover, not only in the uniqueness of their fashion, Modern Dog made a further distinction with their album covers. The following is the cover of Modern Dog's first album:



Figure 3.4 *The Cover of Modern Dog's First Album*

Ian Inglis, in his work *'Nothing You Can See That Isn't Shown': The Album Covers of the Beatles*, explains that there were four purposes of an album cover; protection, advertisement, accompaniment and commodity [Inglis, 2001]. Deborah Wong, in her work *Thai Cassettes and Their Covers: Two Case Histories* in 1989, suggests that the role of the album cover is to visualize the components characteristic of the artists and their work [Wong, 1989]. Moreover, she also compared an album cover as an equal to the idea of Mark Slobin's work about American Jewish sheet music covers:

A piece of sheet music must be seen as a complex cultural package of various expressive and commercial media, all of which combine to create a pleasing product... [Slobin, 1982: 164]

Additionally, images of the artists, which were used in the album cover, depicted the interpretation of the work in their own language [Berger and Mohr, 1982]. The image of the album cover will be presented depending on the overview of the album, not only the image of the artists themselves but also including texts [Wong, 1989]. The ratio between the image and texts in one album cover was anticipated on which part needed to be promoted, and the relation between the image and texts could be manipulated in order to promote the product to consumers [Wong, 1989]. The relation between the image and texts of album covers from Thai major labels, from the beginning of the Pre-Pop Era to the Indie Phenomenon, illustrated that the artists and their name were the highest priority. The covers of famous artists' albums in the Pre-Pop Era and those of artists from the Pop Era regularly had their own design, in that three-quarters of the cover would be composed of the face of the artist with their name in bold letters (examples can be seen above in Figure 3.2). The image or icon of the artists, which dominates such album covers, is as vital in popular music in Thailand as in the West. Conversely, the album covers of indie artists basically showed images which could be related to their band's name or the concept of the albums, rather than presenting an image of the artists themselves. For example, the first album of Smile Buffalo (E-minor Record) (Figure 3.5 below), one of the most successful indie bands during the Indie Phenomenon, illustrates well how no members of the band appear on the album cover. The cover shows the ripples of water dropping on a blue screen with the shadow of a buffalo giving a wide smile under the circle wave. The large brown English words 'Smile Buffalo' appear, as well as a little grey Thai rendering of the band's name.

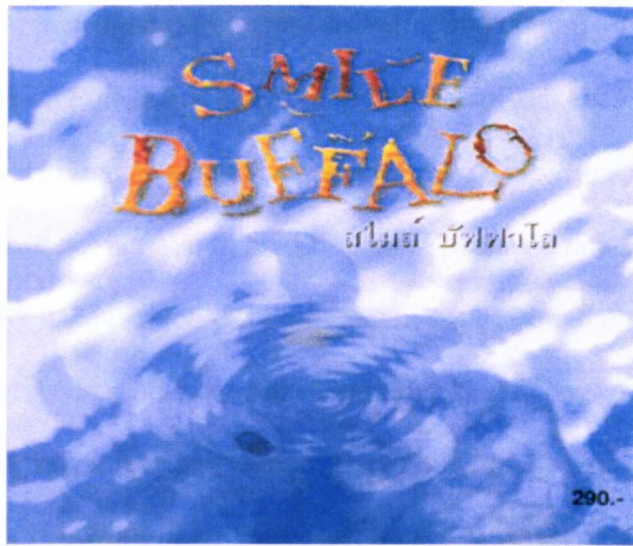


Figure 3.5 *The Cover of Smile Buffalo's First Album*

In addition to such techniques, some bands chose to present on their album cover a face that had nothing to do with the band, and one of them was the first album by Modern Dog. The cover of the *Modern Dog* album (figure 3.4) was completely different, in that an attractive girl's face appeared on the cover instead of the members of the band. The intention of the band and their producer, Sukoson, was to leave the audience to decide who they were [Sukoson, 2007; Utchin, 2009]. Throughout my personal interview with U'dchin, he insisted that the idea of using a girl's face on their album arose simply to grab an attention of the audience. He denied that the cover intended to satirize the major labels' approach [Utchin, 2009]. However, I argue that the cover of Modern Dog's first album implied opposition to the artist-screening system of the major labels, in the same way or in an analogous way to the way that the band had presented their appearance and outfits. The cover illustrated people who had no involvement with the band; they wanted the audience to listen to their work rather than be impressed with how they looked. To verify this idea, there was an interview with the designer, Wa'ru'd

Panyaarachun, who had created the cover of the *Modern Dog* album, published in *375 Fahrenheit Magazine* (a magazine celebrating 10 years of Bakery Music). The interview demonstrated that he chose the pretty woman's face (that of a young actress) since Modern Dog did not aim to present their appearance rather than their music. The audience, still used to the old style of album cover from the major labels that conveyed a very clear message about who sang these songs, could look at this woman instead of the artists' appearance. They could then decide whether or not to buy the album [375 Fahrenheit Magazine, 2004]. To study further in this case, I will, again, use the work of Deborah Wong to extend my explanation of how the cover of Modern Dog's first album satirized the major labels' 'basic standard'.

Wong's study in 1989 was about comparing two album covers of two Thai artists from two genres of Thai music; first, the album cover *Ny`ŋ Diiaw Khon Nii`* (*This Lonely Me*) of Anchalii Conkhadiiki`d, exceptionally popular during 1985 to 1987, and second, the album cover *Khlu`j: Lom Pa`d Chaaj Khaao`w* (*The Wind At the Foot of the Mountains*) of Khruu Thiiaa`b Khonlaajthoon, recognized master of khlu`j (the Thai recorder) in Thai classical music society.

Conkhadiiki`d's album cover could be taken as a model of a major label album cover, since the significant context on the cover was emphasized as being the artist herself. In addition, in order to transform such major artists from simply performer to icon, all of the components on the cover strongly supported and clearly depicted the image of the artists in the right direction that the company planned for them [Wong, 1989]. On the contrary, in the album *The Wind At the Foot of the Mountains*, instead of showing Khruu Thiiaa`b Khonlaajthoon's face on the album

cover, a famous actress of the time, Su`phansaa` Nyyaa`nphi`rom, appears on the cover. This was a normal practice in Thai classical circles, with album covers often having a pretty girl or a famous actress's image on them. Even though most of the masters of Thai classical music were genuinely famous, they intentionally used another's image rather than their own. Wong describes how, in such a period with cultural products being commercialized as a commodity, Thai classical recording desperately needed to attract the consumer and chose to do it by using famous actresses or pretty and youthful girls. Wong's study describes how

in one way or another, [...] a picture of a young girl is much more *na du* ("look-at-able", or better looking) than the old men and women who are often the best musicians, and that people would therefore be more apt to buy the cassette. [Wong, 1989:91]

It is ironic that although these masters were widely acknowledged by Thais for their musical skill, in order to be sold as part of the cultural industry, they still needed an image to encourage their sale figures. In the case of the first album of Modern Dog, it could be possible that the use of an image of a pretty girl on their album cover was also intended to grab the attention from the audience, as it did in the cover of Thai classical music cassette. Moreover, it could possibly hint, one way or another, that however good your musical talent, you must possess something called an image in order to be sold.

The other facet of Modern Dog's resistance to the 'assembly line' of the Thai major labels was the DIY concept. The DIY concept, transliterated from English, in this dissertation applies to artists authorized to compose, produce, record and perform their songs themselves, with less involvement from a music company in the producing process. As the previous chapter on the Pop Era showed, artists had

been mainly selected to sign a contract with Thai major labels by their reputation and physical appearance. Then, the music was prepared for them to sing by a producing team. The labels might argue that there were other groups of artists in the late Pop Era who had been selected from their demos, which had been sent directly to the producing team. However, the number of these was tiny compared to the most prominent groups, almost uniformly famous and good-looking. Hence, in the Pop Era, artists with musical talents who composed songs themselves rarely had the opportunity to present their work to the major labels, and were hardly ever signed as major artists. As a result, the way that these artists chose to introduce their work was through the underground. However, Modern Dog changed this and became very popular, even in the famous popular music charts such as Hot Wave Music Chart operated by major labels. More than just through popularity, Modern Dog assured their reputation as the best group of the year by receiving the 1995 Season Award, the most famous music award in Thailand, while Sukoson was acknowledged as best producer of the year at the same event [Sukoson, 2007]. It would be an exaggeration to say that only through the process of working by themselves did Modern Dog bring about the success of the band. However, Modern Dog, under the DIY idea, were able to produce an unfamiliar sound and style in Thai popular music, which led to the Indie Phenomenon. The different sound and style of Modern Dog can be demonstrated by three approaches: lyrics, singing style and performance.

Lyrics

As mentioned previously, Modern Dog started their music career by presenting their works directly to Sukoson, the owner of the label. After that, when the band

had impressed Sukoson with their music, Modern Dog's first album was begun and Sukoson became their producer. Sukoson had always declared in magazine interviews and in his own book, *Bakery&I*, that although he was the producer of the first album of Modern Dog and also other artists in Bakery, the artists still had the authority to compose and produce their work without any attempt being made to intervene in the working process or style of the artists [Sukoson, 2007]. Thus, in this first album, most of the songs were written and composed by the members of the band.

The first significant and interesting point of this album is the lyrics. The lyrics of mainstream popular music in Thailand had basically been romantic and melancholy love songs since the beginning. Some artists had attempted to launch some songs on social issues and philosophical ideas about life such as Butterfly Group had in their *Khiita`kawaii (The Artists)* album. However, those songs could not reach the pop charts where love songs still entirely held top position. The radical idea that it was not necessarily only love songs that could be popular occurred when 'Bu`dsa`baa', the first single by Modern Dog, was released in September 1994. This single became a new entry and reached number five in the first week of the Hot Wave Music Top Twenty Chart in September 1994. Three weeks after this, the song went to number one in the most popular music chart of the time [375 *Fahrenheit Magazine*, 2004; 8]. This was not a usual circumstance in Thailand at the time as, first, no songs from any independent label had ever reached number one in major labels charts and, second, 'Bu`dsa`baa' was not a romantic love song. What was the message that Modern Dog sent out to the audience and made the band successful?

The lyrics for the *Modern Dog* album were written by the lead vocalist Thana'chaaii U'dchin, except for 'Kəɔ'n' ('Before'), which was written by Phraaii. If Modern Dog's appearance, clothes, and their album cover could be considered as a result of youth culture aiming to oppose the mainstream culture, it could be claimed that their lyrics supported and stimulated this idea. While more than 90 percent of the albums launched by major labels were love songs, the first album of Modern Dog contained ten songs, only three of which could be considered love songs. The significant messages in the lyrics of the band concerned encouraging people to be positive with life, think outside the box and create a difference in society. To examine these ideas, I will select three songs from the *Modern Dog* album as lyric samples.

Firstly, we will look at the first single and track of the album 'Budsaba', for which Thana'chaaii U'dchin did the arranging and also the lyrics.

Bu'dsa'baa

Bu'dsa'baa was born with brightness. Her world has flowers at the heart.
All day she brightly makes garlands. The World is bright with her garlands.

Varieties of flowers, Diversity in colours,
The scent warms the air, Beautifying the World.

Merrily and intently making garlands;

All day, all night, never tired of making garlands.

One day she woke up in distress, today, The World once full of flowers is no more.

What happened to her bright World? It was there, and then it disappeared.

The flowers disappeared from the big bright World.

Then Bu`dsa`baa discovered the truth.

She discovered the cause of the flowerless World.

She has been picking too many flowers from the World.

Careless when picking the flowers,

How can there be any more left in the World?

As the above excerpt shows, the song is about a girl called Bu`dsa`baa who claimed that people destroyed beautiful flowers and this had led to a flower crisis.

In fact, she was the one who destroyed the flowers. U`dchin got the idea of writing this song from thinking about how people blamed others for the same things that they themselves did [375 *Fahrenheit Magazine*, 2004; 53]. Among the other twenty love song hits, this single was the only song without melancholy or romantic lyrics, which could stand on the top of the pop chart.

The second and third examples are part of the second and eighth tracks of the album, 'Kalaa' ('Coconut Shell') and 'Durian', respectively.

Kalaa

Don't be content with the old ways of living, going along with whatever others say.

Never knowing what is actually good or bad, parents and teachers have been telling us

what is good and bad.

But since there are many people with many different perspectives, we all have our own ways of thinking.

We should open our minds to new things to not restrict our hearts and minds.

The World is far and wide, we just need to open our eyes, break out of our shells and we will discover that there is always more.

Durian

What's real must have big green thorns, it might not look pretty,

But why do people love eating them? Because

Durians are not good because of their skin.

Durian, don't just look at the skin.

Both songs aspire to express the concepts of trying new things and finding out for yourself whether they are worthy or not. These concepts contradicted to some extent Thai culture, where 'De`g' ('The Younger') must obey what 'Phuu`yaaii`' ('The Older') teaches, as the older was born earlier and has had more experience.

Durian, which has the nickname "King of Fruit", has a terrible outer shell; however, inside that terrible shell is a delicious taste. This could imply that people are not supposed to concentrate only on appearance; they must deeply access the whole thing. Obviously, all three sample songs from the *Modern Dog* album had implications of rebelliousness against old-fashioned ideas; they wanted to create

something different. While such notions may be well-worn clichés in western popular culture, they were, in fact, quite novel in Thailand.

Singing style and performance

Modern Dog not only brought a new style of song writing to the Thai popular-music industry, it also initiated a new style of singing and performing. Journalists and music critics in Thailand saw Modern Dog as giving an amusing, outstanding and energetic performance. Moreover, U'dchin's voice and singing style were widely accepted as powerful and emotional [Season, 1995; *375 Fahrenheit Magazine*, 2004:37]. Furthermore, the marvelous live performances of the band were verified in that they were chosen to play as the opening band for Radiohead's "Creep" Tour in Thailand at MBK Hall, 14-15 October 1994 [*375 Fahrenheit Magazine*, 2004: 37]. In this performance, Modern Dog built up their own performing style, which was quite bizarre in Thai popular music at that time. Regularly, artists who were successful in the industry had some pattern of performance due to their musical style. For example, rock artists would present themselves on stage with a microphone stand, with less movement, and with a cruel face, while pop idol artists would offer a dance pattern and friendliness. Conversely, in the Modern Dog show, the band did not reach the criteria of rock performance as their show was not aggressive and they always moved about on the stage. However, theirs was not a pattern of dance like the pop stars had. Modern Dog was recognized by the audience as always creating new movements in their shows; this had previously never occurred in the Thai popular-music industry. For instance, U'dchin usually rolled on the stage when his emotion was out of control in both fast and slow songs. In addition, some dance styles created by U'dchin



Figure 3.6.1 *The main melody of 'Koo'n'*

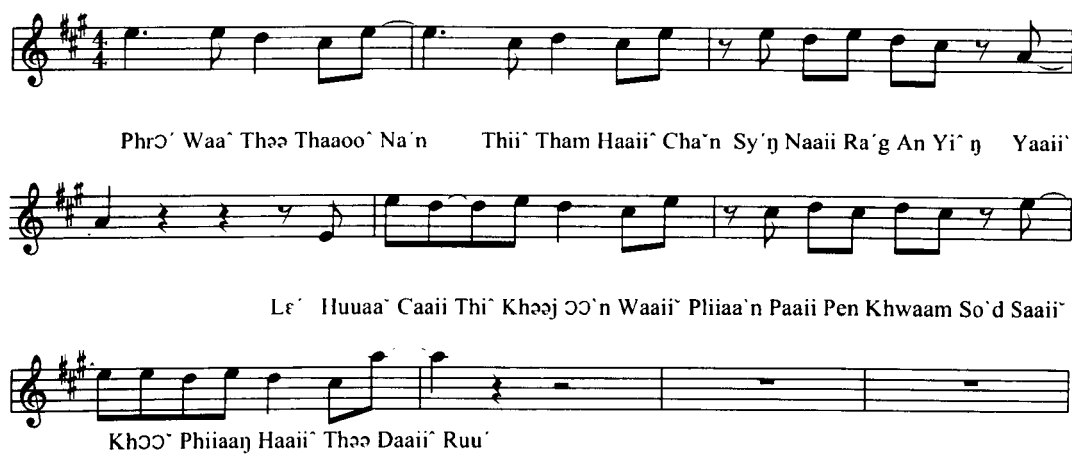


Figure 3.6.2 *The improvisation with new lyrics*



Figure 3.6.3 *The improvisation with melodies*

Figure 3.6 *Music Notation of 'Koo'n' in three versions, sung by Thana'chaaii*

U'dchin

Figures 3.6.1 and 3.6.3 are transcribed by me from minute 2.58 to 3.19 of the original version of the song and Figure 3.5.2 is a transcription from minute 3.37 to 3.58 of the special live performance album *The Very Common of ModernDogdocumentary*. The transcriptions represent various vocal lines of Thana'chaai U'dchin, the lead vocal of the band. From Figure 3.6, can be seen that Figure 3.6.1 is the original melody of the song 'Koo'n' and the second and third lines are improvisations by U'dchin. Figure 3.6.2 is illustrated in that he sang the new melody and new lyrics as a canon parallel with the original melody. This new lyric was performed for the first time in the Dog on Stage Concert, becoming well known to the audience and used in many later concerts. The third sample demonstrates that the melodies were used to improvise on the hook. Actually, this line was in the original version; however, U'dchin slightly modified this melody line in every concert given by the band. Hence, improvisation became one of the signatures of the band and influenced other artists in the Indie Phenomenon and the next period of the popular music industry in Thailand.

To support the presence of some improvisation in Modern Dog's recordings, I will draw on Mark Katz's book *Capturing Sound*. Recording technology had significant consequences for live performance, musicians and, indeed, listeners. One particular affect which I considered is the notion of invisibility [Katz, 2004]. In recording, musicians and audience have no opportunity to see each other, which is different from a live performance. This invisibility can affect the visual aspect of the performance, particularly in popular music, since the audience cannot be affected, stimulated or communicated with by the face or body language of the

performers, but only by their music on the record. Hence, recording artists feel a need to compensate for this lost visual aspect in order to keep the audience's imagination held in the same way as they might in live performance [Katz, 2004]. The image of Modern Dog and their characteristic lyrics, as discussed above, depicted the intention to experiment with novel things in order to resist the same practice of the major labels. The recordings of the Thai major labels, as, of course, in the western music industry, concentrated on a perfect recording; an elaborate and clear recording sound without any disturbing noise, perfect pitch correction and very quiet sound at the beginning and ending of the song. This elaboration directly influences the audience and causes what Katz called listener's expectation [Katz, 2004]. As the recording is listened to repeatedly, repeating sound from the record can lead to the problem of listener's expectation. When an audience keeps listening to one recording of a song repeatedly, they might also expect to hear the song live in a form as close as possible to the record [Katz, 2004]. This explains why major label artists in Thailand before the Indie Phenomenon hardly performed their songs different from their record.

The evidence could be seen from the case of the one and only so-called superstar in Thailand, Thoonchaai McIntyre, known as Bird in Thailand. According to my own experience working on the McIntire special album *Bird 20th Memories 1 and 2*, in 2004, even though the albums were released in 2004, work began in 2003. In 2003, McIntire had his own concert called 8th *Bee`b Bird Bird Show*. *Bee`b Bird Bird Show* was an astonishing concert and has been performed nine times between 1986 and the present day. The name *Bee`b Bird Bird Show* has been used every time that it has been performed, while the details of the show have been changed

depending on the theme of each show. The eighth show played for 21 rounds and McIntire totally lip-synched to his own recording. In fact, the show and the arrangement of songs in this concert were not identical to the original album. However, the whole scripts and songs of the show were prepared and given to McIntire, who then prepared the recording and lip-synched both script and songs in the show. Even though Thai audiences recognize McIntire as a very talented singer, the company Grammy, would not allow any mistakes during the 21 shows. 'The show had to be perfect like the audience listened to on his records': this is a statement from the producer of this show and I can still remember it today.

In Modern Dog's case, instead of making a perfectly elaborate record, the band deliberately made their album as close to 'live' as they could. Noise and imperfect pitch can be heard in many songs on *Modern Dog* and indeed on following albums. For instance, in a song 'Mo'd Wee Laa' ('Time's out'), the tenth track on their first album, a raw sound recording was released without editing and we can often hear U'dchin's breath in the song. In fact, the version of the song that appeared on the album was the demo version. The band did not intentionally record this track but only did a normal practice before recording. However, Sukoson, the producer of the album, incidentally recorded this practice and finally decided to use this first version of the track, as it gave the feeling of 'real' to him [Sukoson, 2007].

Another way that Modern Dog's album closely resembled live performance was the improvisation heard in certain songs. Instead of singing every chorus identically, U'dchin inserted some alternative lyrics and melodies in his singing, as

they are transcribed above. Katz describes how the important aspect of improvisation in jazz music is about its spontaneity and freedom. Its uniqueness depends on when and where it happens. A dilemma is created when jazz improvisation is recorded, since it is no longer spontaneous when it can be repeated [Katz, 2004]. In the Indie Phenomenon, I argue that the improvisation in Modern Dog's work was an attempt to create some differences in order to separate themselves from the major labels' practice. This, I feel, was more important than applying the aesthetic of improvisation taken from jazz music to their work. The band compensated for the lost visual aspect of live performance by creating the atmosphere of a live concert in their work, sound, noise and improvisation, all in order to better communicate with their listeners.

All of the above describes the beginning of the Indie Phenomenon through the Modern Dog first album. After the *Modern Dog* album was launched and had received extremely good feedback from the audience, many independent labels came about and indie artists introduced their work into the music market. The next section will determine the consequences brought about by the Indie Phenomenon.

The indie effect

After the success of Modern Dog, independent labels were founded and the indie music trend widely expanded, especially in Bangkok and its peripheries. This led to what was seen as a golden era of independent labels, since many artists were able to produce their own work and present them to the market with less corporate control from major labels. As a result, there were some truly novel occurrences in

the Thai popular music industry. I will divide the study into two topics, the audience and the music.

The Audience

Adorno's concern about the 'regression of listening' is a significant point in describing listening behaviour. According to his work *On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening* (1991), in popular music, to enjoy the music is very relatively close to recognizing it and to make the music familiar it has to be played frequently. Hence, this might possibly reduce the capability of concentrated listening behaviour, as, simultaneously, listeners instead of using their freedom of choice automatically accept everything as it is provided [Adorno, 1991]. Even though Adorno's metaphor of the 'assembly line' in the cultural industry could well apply to the Thai popular music industry, the argument about the popular music listener could partially explain the Thai popular music audience during the Indie Phenomenon.

Music from independent labels during the Indie Phenomenon was composed in a similar form to the popular songs in the previous period, normally including verses and chorus while a bridge appeared in a smaller number of songs. In addition, indie music retained a repetitive hook as well. Nevertheless, indie music was able to produce new sounds, alternative and rhythm and blues (details to be provided in the next section), lyrics, new singing styles and performances. It could be said that an alternative sound like that of Modern Dog or the rhythm and blues of Boyd Kosiwabong was a novelty for the music industry in Thailand, unfamiliar to a Thai audience. However, the audience responded to the unfamiliar sound with a

positive rather than a negative reaction. Evidence can be seen from indie artists' entry into the popular music chart, and the increasing number of indie concerts and album sales. For instance, according to the pop charts statistics from A-Time media, the subsidiary radio company of Grammy, there were more than 150 songs from indie artists entering the pop charts during the Indie Phenomenon, as well as almost a hundred concerts performed in Bangkok and its peripheries in 1995 alone [A-Time Media, 2008].

To start with the popular music chart, I mentioned in Chapter 2 (p.136-138) that the popular music chart in Thailand in the Pop Era was a tool of the media ownership of two major labels, used for manipulating consumers. The charts showed the frequency of songs played on the radio. Most of the hits in the charts were songs from the major label artists, as the radio stations were owned by the major labels. Surprisingly, during the Indie Phenomenon, there were a number of singles from indie artists which reached the major popular music charts, not only those of Modern Dog but also those of other indie artists such as Smile Buffalo, Prao and Boyd Kosiyapong. Yuttana Boonorm, the "Godfather of Indie" and famous DJ who used to work for Grammy Radio Company, gives an idea of what indie artists could achieve in the major charts:

When I worked at Hot Wave, I started playing indie music on the radio with Modern Dog songs, whose music I thought was very interesting. I played their songs and the band became quite popular. We had to keep playing them. There were a lot of requests from the listeners. Not long after that, unexpectedly, many songs from the band entered the hit parades. Major labels' audiences had shifted their interest to indie music. We, then, had no choice but to respond to the audience's needs. This Indie Phenomenon also happened in major label charts as well. [Pitupakorn (A), 2009]

Even though indie music could reach a high position in the pop charts, its acceptance and recognition from the audience might not be necessarily relevant to the music repetition on mass media, at least from the starting point. To foreground their anti-commercialism, indie artists normally promoted their works by concentrating on live performances in Bangkok and its peripheries or in media independent from the major labels, such as will be detailed later in this chapter. Simultaneously, as mentioned above, there were two famous DJs at that time, Yuttana Boonorm and Winij Lertratanachai, who were interesting in indie music and played it on their radio programs, despite them being owned by major labels until indie music crossed over to the charts. Despite this, I argue that the indie success was less influenced by media manipulation than the success of other songs from major labels as, in order to make songs from major labels popular, the songs must be played repeatedly on their media channels to arouse the recognition of the audience. Some of them might take a week for listeners to remember and accept, while some possibly take a longer time to be popular. In contrast, as Boonorm only had a three-hour timeslot once a day, there was only one chance to play a Modern Dog song, while other songs could have an opportunity to be heard every two or three hours in every slot of every major label radio programme. However, only a few days after Boonorm played ‘K๑๑`n’ (‘Before’), there were numerous telephone requests to play the song on every show on every station [Boonorm, 2009]. This illustrates that recognition and acceptance of Modern Dog’s song was not totally the result of repetition in the mass media, since it had substantially less airplay than a typical major label track.

So, we can say that, conversely, the recognition and acceptance emerged from the audience, with numerous song requests ensuring the song was played repeatedly. Since radio could not ignore audience interest in Modern Dog's work and other indie music, other indie songs also came to be often requested by the audience and played widely on the major label's radio programmes. This shows that the audience did not neglect to use their freedom of choice to listen to what music they wanted. They were able to choose rather than accepting everything provided and manipulated by major labels and their media ownership. Consequently, between 1994 and 1997, indie artists released over 400 albums and more than 200 independent labels were established. The average album sales of indie artists were roughly 200,000 to 400,000 albums [Sukoson, 2007; Boonorm, 2009]. Moreover, music critics and columnists wrote that the Indie Phenomenon was the golden period of indie music, as many indie concerts were in operation during the time [Season, 1995; Season, 2003].

The achievement of Modern Dog and other indie artists in the mass media showed there was a large audience who were interesting in non-mainstream music. This group was interested in complicated and sophisticated composition and lyrics. Moreover, they were concerned about music and could be considered a minority group compared to the majority of listeners who concentrated on the works from major labels. Previously, the boundary line between these two groups of audience, the mainstream and the minority one, was rarely obvious since the music industry was an oligopoly run by the major labels. In fact, there had long been some anti-commercialism in the industry, such as the music column in the *Bantəəŋ Khadii Magazine*; however, these were only vaguely delivered to the audience.

Accordingly, the minority listeners remained silent and were limited to a small number of people. Afterwards, in light of the Indie Phenomenon, the separation between a mainstream and a minority listener became gradually clearer as the indie trend stood out more in the mass media. The audience had more opportunity to be exposed to information about anti-commercial, more sophisticated music, the lyric style and the DIY concept, created by non-famous bands. The growth of the minority listener during the Indie Phenomenon can be inferred from two significant experiences of that time.

First, it was the period in which the mass media paid particular attention to independent music. There were an increasing number of music columns in newspapers and magazines, and also music information was inserted into the feature articles in magazines rather than being found only in album reviews or interviews with major artists. This information is corroborated by the interview of an editor of a famous music magazine in Thailand and I will call him as Joe through this dissertation:

In the Pop Era, when Grammy and RS had strong influence in the music industry, I have to admit that music magazines had shared mutual benefits with the major labels. We were forced to write articles with positive comments on their works, while they financially supported our magazines in return. Though we would have liked to write music articles with serious and critical content, those kinds of columns could not attract mass audiences and, as such, most columns in music magazines were either album reviews or artist interviews. Later, in 1994 to 1995, when the indie trend had become more popular in the metropolis, the magazines could shift direction to indie music in response to this new indie audience. The majority of the audiences were college students who sought in-depth information about music. As a columnist, I think that period gave us a sense of freedom and the ability to criticize and publish whatever we wanted [Tavarayuth, 2009].

In the television industry, indie artists were normally limited to presenting themselves on cable channels. However, during the Indie Phenomenon, some indie artists were invited on to programmes broadcast on free TV. One example, which was important in the growth of indie music and increased its audience, was the opportunity for indie artists to be interviewed on the *Twilight Show*. This was a variety show, broadcast every Sunday from 1990 to 2008. The talk show section was recognized among Thai audiences as the most famous talk show in Thailand during the 1990s. U'dchin stated that he used to ask Traaiipho'b Limphrapa'd, the owner and the host of *Twilight Show*, why he chose Modern Dog and other indie artists to be interviewed on this section of the show. The answer was that there had been a large number of letters from the audience written to him requesting it [Utchin, 2009]. This could be taken to indicate the power and growth of the indie audience in the Indie Phenomenon, i.e. that their request was acceptable despite the problematic media ownership.

Second, a number of events, showing interaction between indie artists and their audience not just only in their interest in non-mainstream music but also in other products with a DIY concept, were arranged by indie supporters (such as non-major label radio stations and music magazines), which basically happened in Bangkok and its peripheries. Such gatherings functioned to communicate and express an interest in DIY products. Not only was music which was composed, performed and recorded by the artist his/herself considered indie, but also other things which were produced according to the DIY aesthetic, such as handmade books, gifts and painted t-shirts. The audience consisted normally of teenagers and college students in Bangkok and its peripheries, who valued musical ability rather

than 'basic standard' artists from major labels [Utchin, 2009]. Thus, group events were usually based on university campuses and in hip venues. Concerts were central to this [Boonorm, 2009]. Many articles in the Thai media remarked on how this period illustrated an enormous success in gatherings between indie artists and their audience [Season, 1995; 1996; Sukoson, 2009; <http://www.patsonic.com/music/alternative-thai-festival/>]. There were plenty of indie concerts performed around the metropolis, performed by indie artists from various independent labels on the same stage, such as the Indie Fun Fair and Indie DN'A Rock Concert. Furthermore, this period not only supported independent labels but also gave opportunities to college students and musicians who aspired to present their works.

Thailand has held music competitions from the beginning of its popular music scene, although these competitions were aimed at seeking musicians with the best musical skill. Thus, musicians were selected to play difficult songs from both famous western and Thai artists, in order to show off their musical ability. However, no music competition had required composing skills, since no band played its own compositions. Additionally, there was no live venue for unknown musicians in Thailand to perform their own work, since pubs and restaurants wanted popular songs to be played in their venues. Consequently, the regular way to present work was to be a recording artist. Then again, in the Pop Era, the opportunity for a non-famous person or talented musician to produce and launch music was restricted, due to the practices of the major labels. However, owing to the forceful unification of the indie audience, some competitions and music events, which allowed unknown musicians to perform their own composition, came into

being. For instance, the College Artist Competition was managed by Maanoõ'd Phu'dtaan and *Bantāñ Khadii Magazine* to give college musicians the opportunity to showcase their work to a wider public. Simultaneously, Pirate Radio also operated at the Hard Rock Café, Bangkok. Every Sunday they opened up a stage for all musicians to present their songs [Sukoson, 2007]. All the music events provided not only the chance for independent labels to find a gifted artist, but also for artists to receive real feedback from the audience. Even though, as mentioned above, many music experts in Thailand claimed that the development of indie music and its community reached its peak in the Indie Phenomenon, there was a kind of success that I will call 'the metropolis success'. The metropolis success of indie music describes a music scene centered on Bangkok and its peripheries. A music scene was initially described by Will Straw as a cultural space, 'in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with one another with a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization' [Straw, 1991]. Peterson and Bennett supported this idea, adding that works created in such a scene by musicians, support facilities and audience were generally created for their own enjoyment and in order to differentiate themselves from others [Peterson and Bennett, 2004]. Similarly, Allen J. Scott his work *The Cultural Economy: Geography and the Creative Field* suggests that a musical scene or musical activities in individual spaces could create the emergence of a new and distinctive popular music form [Scott, 1999]. The co-operative of indie artists, media and publishing (independent from major labels) and audience in Thailand during the Indie Phenomenon built the music scene in Bangkok and its peripheries, allowing what Leyshon [2001] terms 'a set of stabling institutions' such as venues, record labels, music press, publishers and

specialized record stores. For example, there are approximately 50 universities in Bangkok, meaning that the scenes centered on them. Moreover, radio stations, music press and specialized music shops, as well as all independent labels, were all located in Bangkok and its peripheries. As every supporting institution was centered in the metropolis, this plus the geographical issue as well as the low promotional budget meant that the indie music scene was created in and restricted to a specific area. Hence, with the scene restricted to the metropolis, indie music inevitably evolved into an urban culture, which finally led to an emergence of subcultural identity and hierarchy in music society. This emergence will be critically discussed in the next chapter.

So, although it is a fact that there was a tremendous expansion of indie music in Thailand during 1994 to 1997, it was somewhat limited to the metropolis and the significant commercial provinces, such as Chiang Mai in the North and Phuket in the South, due to the low budget for promotion. To compensate for their low budgets for promoting their artists, indie labels applied a direct promotional strategy, such as having music events at universities or performing at various events for free [Sukoson, 2007]. Also, the independent labels did not own any mass media. The channel to promote their artists was basically a limited selection of radio programmes or cable television channels, which were not owned by the major labels. Although some indie artists could cross over to mass media and gain popularity all over the country, they were a minority group of indie artists, not to be compared in number with the famous artists from major labels. This ‘metropolis success’ became a weak point that, later on, the major labels exploited in order to gain back their market share.

Musical style

Another important and novel aspect of the Indie Phenomenon concerns the development of music. Many popular music scholars have observed, perhaps nostalgically, that various developments and music genres in popular music were initiated from independent labels [Chappel and Garofalo, 1977; Gillet, 1996; Laing, 1985; Wallis and Malm, 1992]. This proposal could absolutely apply to the popular music industry in Thailand from 1994 to 1997. At that time, a true diversity of music styles was extensively introduced and launched into the Thai popular music market. New sounds, such as alternative, rhythm and blues, rap and funk music, were launched into the market by indie artists, coming to co-exist with the Canto-pop style with Thai language, pop dance and pop rock of the major labels artists. In fact, all those various music genres had previously existed in Thailand and the songs were played on some radio programmes. However, all such songs were from international artists. In the Indie Phenomenon, after alternative music had been recognized by the Thai audience through the success of Modern Dog, other indie artists were encouraged to produce a different sound to offer the market. Thus, other genres were introduced to the Thai music industry. For example, Boyd Kosiwabong introduced rhythm and blues, introduced by his first album in 1995, *Rhythm&Boyd*, which also reminded people of the old-style rhythm and blues, the Motown sound and spiritual singing style. Additionally, the funk band Soul After Six was able to rouse the funk music trend in Thailand with its 1996 album *Soul After Six*. Furthermore, rap music became familiar to a wide Thai audience with the popularity of an indie artist named Joey Boy and his first single A-Pod (Traffic Jam), which was released in 1995. Moreover, as mentioned

above, the media in the Indie Phenomenon pursued the trend by introducing and explaining the new music genres in Thailand to the audience, familiarizing them with the new sounds. Consequently, even though indie artists were not actually creating a new sound on their own (since they were influenced by music from outside the country), the Indie Phenomenon was comprehensively considered by artists and music journalists as the most extreme development of popular music in Thailand [Season, 1996; Sukoson, 2007; Boonorm, 2009]. The diversity of music genres in the Indie Phenomenon also had an important impact on singing style in Thailand, and the effect has continued to the present day. This is most evident in the articulation of singing, improvisation technique and the language.

Articulation of singing

When Thailand adopted popular music from the West and other countries as Thai popular songs, it could be said that a distinct barrier separating western music and the Thai language was present. Like many Asian languages, Thai is a tonal language, meaning that pitch is actually a phonemic aspect that distinguishes words.

Unlike the English language the Thai language has a complex tonal system. There are five speech tones in Thai language (explaining in romanisation topic at the beginning of this dissertation). That is to say, whilst in English intonation often serves to communicate one's emotions or intentions (e.g. pitch often changes when one is posing a question and can at other times convey a sense of contempt or surprise etc.), in Thai a change in tone can effectively modify the meaning of a word (for example the syllable 'nah' when pronounced in a mid-level tone denotes

‘a paddy field’, with a falling tone denotes ‘face’, in a high tone it means ‘aunt’ or ‘uncle’ and in a rising tone means ‘thick’). Adapting western musical genres and styles was problematic at times, because correct pronunciation and intonation must often be sacrificed for the sake of a more tuneful melody and songwriters become to some extent confined by the rules and conventions of their chosen styles and genres whether it be rhythm & blues, rock, or bossa nova. As a result, sometimes the melody of Thai popular music must be restricted, as to break free could alter the meaning of the lyrics. Additionally, while other Asian countries, such as China, apparently simply ignore the various dialects in their language in their music, the Thai people have been taught from childhood the nationalistic belief that the Thai language is a pride of the nation. Therefore, the language has a high value in the culture, which, it is often believed, must be protected by its being used in a conservative way. However, in the Indie Phenomenon, articulation and singing style were greatly changed. The question is: what did they change and what developed from the changes?

Speech tones

Yoko Tanese-Ito, in her article *The relationship between speech-tones and vocal melody in Thai court songs*, outlines the relationship and some specific rules governing the relationship between speech tones and vocal melodies in Thai court songs [Tanese-Ito, 1988]. However, Swangviboonpong argues that, in the real performance of the vocal melodies of Thai court music, it appears that there are various exceptions to the rules identified by Tanese-Ito. He states that although Tanese-Ito’s work has value, it is limited in its applicability because its subject was a closed study group of Thai singers who were trained in the same school of

thought where the singing style strictly adhered to the rules [Swangviboonpong, 2003]. Swangviboonpong also referred to the formal views of Caræncaj S`untharawaathin (one of the most experienced Thai traditional vocalists), stating that, although in theory ‘the vocal melody must mirror the speech-tones of the lyrics, [...] in her performance these theories are submerged while instinctive aesthetic feeling come to the fore’ [Swangviboonpong, 2003].

When singing Thai popular music, I too found that it is difficult to identify and obey the rules governing the relationship between the vocal melody and the speech tones by following the study of Tanese-Ito, as various exceptions are found. Hence, I decided not to compare Thai classical singing and Thai popular singing. Instead of using Thai classical singing, I have narrowed the focus of the study by using only the singing style of Thai popular music in each period to compare the changes and the relationship between speech-tones and vocal melody, as well as certain further aspects of the articulation of singing in this section.

From the Pre-pop Era to the Pop Era, it is clear there was a relationship between speech-tones and vocal melody in pop songs. The melody was carefully written in order to fit one or two notes per word since an ornamented melody with more than two notes would probably cause the meaning to be distorted or a funny ambiguity. Hence, the songs during these periods were sung in a straightforward manner and remained accurate in relation to the melody, with only rare ornamentation and with the speech tones of the words pronounced accurately. The following is the melody and lyrics of Thoongchaai McIntyre’s song, ‘Kh`๑๑b Caaii Cii Cii’ (‘Thank you

very much’), reflecting the relationship between speech-tones and the vocal melody of songs in the Pop Era:



Figure 3.7 *The vocal melody and speech tones of Kh’əəb Caaii Cii Cii*

Later, in the Indie Phenomenon, the concentration on the relationship between the speech tones and vocal melody became slightly reduced. The indie artists paid more attention to the expression in their songs via the melody rather than concentrating on an accurate reflection of speech-tones and vocal melody. The melody was composed and sung regardless of whether its lyrics would cause a funny sound or a wrong meaning of word. For example, in Boyd Kosiyabong’s song ‘Season Change’, the second phrase of the song is supposed to be sung as

“M`yyaa Jaam S`uk L`on Con Caaii Man J`an M`aaaii J`uu”
(a correct speech-tone pronunciation)

However, in the recorded version of this song sung by Nop Pornchamni it was

“ M`yyaa J`aam S`uk L`on C`on Caaii M`an J`an M`aaaii J`uu”
The speech tones of a few words on the recording, as well as in its performance by

Pornchamni, were not reflected accurately and make funny sounds. The word “Con”, properly consisting of a mid tone, was pronounced as “C`on” (a rising tone), “J`an” (a high tone) was altered to “J`an” (a rising tone) and “M`aaaii” (a falling tone) and “J`uu” (a low tone) were sung as “M`aaaii “ and “J`uu” (a high

tone). These incorrect pronunciations by Pornchamni did not cause any distortion of the meaning of the lyrics, but they did create very funny and awkward sounds in the Thai language.

This neglect of the relationship between speech tones and the vocal melody was a general facet of songs produced during the Indie Phenomenon. Subsequently, this influence has continued to the present day. Many recording artists both from the major labels and independent companies keep using the wrong speech tones in their vocal melody in order to give their songs an interesting sound. I will provide another two examples of contemporary artists who use speech tones which are not truly reflected in Thai. First, I will compare the melody and lyrics of two songs; one is ‘W’i Maan Din’ (‘A Castle on Earth’) from Nant’idaa K^εεwbuaas~aaj (a famous singer from the Pop Era), which reflects accurate speech tones in the vocal melody, and the other is ‘F’aa’ (Sky) from Tatto Colour (a famous contemporary indie band), in which the singing does not reflect accurate speech tones and also causes the meaning to change. The words in brackets illustrate the accurate speech tone of the words in question.



[F`aa] [Th`aa M`aaii] [H`aaii]



Kham Pen Raaii

Figure 3.8 *The vocal melody and speech tones of W’i Maan Din and F’aa*

The word “F’aa” is pronounced in a high tone and translated as “Sky”. Kaewbuasai uses the accurate speech tone in his melody and represented the correct meaning. However, in the Tatto Colour song, “F’aa” is pronounced as “F~aa” (a rising tone), which alters the meaning from “sky” to “carapace”, “wall” or “lid” in Thai.

Another example is a phrase in the chorus of the song ‘Naal’ikaa Taaj’ (‘A dead watch’) from the most successful rock band of today, Bodyslam (Grammy). The phrase illustrates the ornamentation in melody, which causes a number of very funny and ambiguous sounds in the Thai language. The original pronunciation by Bodyslam will be illustrated and the correct pronunciation of the words will be shown in brackets.



T’əə Caa R’uu Maaii Ch’an J’an Khonj Pram P’əə

[Təə C’aa R’uu M’aaii Ch’an J’an Khonj Pr’am P’əə]

Figure 3.9 *The vocal melody and speech tones of Naal’ikaa Taaj*

Continuing Consonant

There is no continuing consonant between two syllables in the Thai language. It differs from the English language in that the last consonant of the previous word can continue to the first syllable of the next word, for instance, “what’s up” can be pronounced as “What’s-s-up”. Or else, in the sentence “Shall I go to school by bus?”, the consonant “L” from the word “Shall” continues into the next syllable “I”. In the singing styles of the Indie Phenomenon, this pronunciation was used widely as an influence of the rhythm and blues singing style in Thailand. Examples can be observed from the song ‘Ra’g Khun Khaaoo^ Lεε’w’ (‘I’m falling in love’), which was sung by Thana’chaaii U`dchin. This song was from the first album of Boyd Kosiyabong, *Rhythm&Boyd*:

Ra’g Khun Khaaoo^ Lεε’w

Time from start of song	1.37	1.40	1.44
Lyric (Correct Pronunciation)	Kh๑๑` η Ra’g Kan Daaii^ Yaa` Ki’d A-Raaii Ləəj Khun		
Lyric (Actual Pronunciation)	Kh๑๑` η Ra’g Kan Daaii^ Yaa` Ki’d-da-Raaii Ləəj Khun		
Meaning	We should fall in love.		

From the song sample above, it can be seen that, at the time point 1.40, the last consonant from the word ‘Ki’d’ (‘Think’) is shown running into the first syllable ‘A-Raaii’ (‘Anything’). The ‘D’ consonant from Ki’d is continued to A-Raaii and becomes Ki’d-da-Raaii instead of Ki’d A-Raaii, which is technically incorrect in the pronunciation system of the Thai language. However, this style of pronunciation has remained until the present.

Second, in the Thai language, a syllable has a short or a long vowel. If the word is built up with a syllable ending with a short consonant, it must be pronounced as a short sound. For example, the word ‘Ra’g’ (‘Love’) consists of a short sound of a syllable ending. It is not correct to pronounce the word ‘Raa’g’. Then again, indie artists introduced this style of pronunciation into the Thai music industry as a result of rhythm and blues music.

Both the linking sound and the long vowel of a syllable were influenced by the English language, and Thai scholars rebuked singers for this, saying that they could destroy the linguistic culture of Thailand. It can be observed from many articles, even to the present day, that accusations about the influence of foreign languages on Thai are frequently leveled against singers, actors and actresses in the entertainment industry. For instance, the article *Thai Language*, which was written for RSU News Online as a special article for Thai Language Day, criticized public figures, especially recording artists and actors/actresses, as the most important group who mixed foreign languages with Thai. As this group of people frequently appeared in the mass media, they could possibly have more chance to spread the influence of this mixed language [Yodmalai, 2009]. Another instance of the critique is found on the website www.99polls.com. This survey website has polls on various issues. On August 8, 2010, the website asked ‘Do you think Kamikaze’s artists are causing the collapse of the Thai language and Thai society?’ Kamikaze is a subsidiary record label of RS, producing ‘bubblegum pop’. The artists from this label are basically pre-teens and teenagers and their singing style relies heavily on the continuing consonant sound between two syllables first seen during the Indie Phenomenon. The poll illustrates that, from

129 total votes, 68 percent agree, while 16 percent disagree and the other 16 percent has no comment about this issue [http://www.99polls.com/poll_166208]. However, Sukoson, one of the founders of Bakery Music, believed that this linguistic practice was an advantage for Thai popular music, since the barrier between languages, melodies and singing styles could be reduced by this circumstance [Sukoson, 2007]. His opinion can be bolstered by the next modification in the singing style, melismatic singing style, which I consider to be a result of the two topics above.

The melismatic singing style, a singing style where the vocalist sings many notes in one syllable, started in the Indie Phenomenon and continues to the present. Previously, the singing style of Thai popular music was a ‘one by one’ style. The artist would sing straightforwardly one or possibly two notes in one word. Afterwards, singing more than one or two notes in one word was replaced by the melismatic style. One syllable is embellished with a bunch of notes, an innovation influenced by the improvisation in black music. This melismatic style was actually difficult to sing and keep to the traditional way of pronunciation in the Thai language. Hence, when an indie artist chose to ignore the obstacle of language as mentioned above, this embellishment produced a new sound into the Thai music industry (An example of the melismatic singing style can be observed in the song ‘Ra’g Khun Khaao[^] Lεε’w’ (‘I’m Falling in Love’), from the duration 1.26 to 1.36) The following is a transcription of ‘Ra’g Khun Khaao[^] Lεε’w’ from the duration 1.26 to 1.36. The transcription shows the vocal melody line of U’dchin in melismatic style.

1

Koo` Thii Pho`m Jan Ra`g Khun Koo^

4

Khun Ra`g... Baa`η Pen Raaii

Figure 3.7 Transcription of Vocal Melody Line of ‘Ra’g Khun Khaao’ Lεε’w’
from the duration 1.26 to 1.36

The final significant change in articulation occurring in the Indie Phenomenon was the use of a falsetto or head tone voice combined with the normal range voice. Even though popular music in Thailand had, from the beginning, mostly been influenced by the West and some Thai audience had probably got used to the falsetto singing style of some western artists such as the Bee Gees, the falsetto sound had never taken off in Thai popular music, especially with male singers. The trend of singing from the beginning of popular music in Thailand was what I call the ‘diva style’: famous singers, both male and female, who were recognized by the audience and the music critics as quality singers in the Pop Era, were able to sing with powerful voices, a high range and loads of vibrato. The role models for this were Nant`idaa K`εεwbuaas`aaj, for female singers, and Thoongchaaii McIntyre, for male singers. This was modified when the album *Rhythm&Boyd* was released in 1995. The album contained ten songs and every track was sung with the falsetto and head voice technique alternating with the chest voice. For instance, on track four, ‘Season Change’, the falsetto technique appears in the duration 3.25

to 3.40. Moreover, on track nine, ‘Doo`g Maaii’ (‘Flower’), the song was sung by the male singer, No`b Poonchamnii`, who used the falsetto technique for the whole song. This album was very successful, achieving high album sales for indie music. More than 500,000 copies were sold and its songs reached a high position in the popular music charts, with ‘Season Change’ getting to number 5 on the Hot Wave Popular Music Chart in its first week of airplay and to number the following week [Sukoson, 2007]. Moreover, ‘Season Change’ saw repeated success with the launch of an album of seven re-mixed versions of the song, the first time such an album had been released in Thailand. Additionally, rhythm and blues music came under the spotlight in the Thai music industry, while Boyd Kosiyabong, the producer of the album, was recognized as the “King of Rhythm and Blues” in Thailand [375 *Fahrenheit Magazine*, 2004]. As a result, a combination of the falsetto technique and chest voice has been made acceptable and has been extensively used since the Indie Phenomenon.

Improvisation technique

Once indie artists had accepted these singing styles, which concentrated less on the meaning of words and the short vowel of the ending sound, it became easier for them to improvise in their songs. An example of early improvisation in singing was shown in the previous section about Modern Dog. Afterwards, when rhythm and blues music became widely popular in 1995, the improvisation style became a distinguishing mark for the Indie Phenomenon artists, both from indie and major labels. The singers would show their singing skill in the way they ad libbed on melody and lyrics, creating new impromptu lyrics in their shows. Furthermore, the background vocals became more complicated than in the Pop Era. The background

vocals in many songs from the Indie Phenomenon were composed with complex harmonies rather than third and fifth intervals, which were a standard harmony for songs in the Pop Era.

An example of an indie song composed and performed in the improvisation style is ‘Season Change’. The song begins with two a cappella vocal lines, with a male singer as lead vocal line and black-female-singing-style singer as background vocals. Then, from verse to chorus, the male lead singer sings a melody with a little improvisation on the melody line of each chorus, while there are also lines of vocal background sung along by the black-female-singing-style singers with the lead vocal on the chorus. After the bridge, everything stays the same as before, except for improvisations on both lyric and melody from both male and female, added in order to increase the dynamic.

The indie language

The final influence on the diversity of music genres in the Indie Phenomenon was the importance of the spoken language rather than poetry or elaborated language. Formerly, popular music in Thailand was composed of rhetorical lyrics like poems or rhymes. The story would be told by the lyric as a rhyme with external and internal rhyme in Thai verse. The following example – part of a popular song in the Pop Era ‘Laakɔɔ’n’ (‘Goodbye’) – serves to illustrate this linguistic practice. The song was contained on the *Ru’η Kin Naa’m (The Rainbow)* album by Chootikun’s Brother Band, which was released in 1993 and earned the Best Album of the Year at the Season Awards that year.

จบแล้วรัก **นี้** ทั้ หนา มา

เห่บร้า เพราะรักที่ยาวไกล

Co`b Lee`w Ra`g *Nii` Thii`* Thon **Maa** Nyyaa`j **Laa`** Phro` Ra`g *Thii`* Jaaoo **Klaaii**

(It's over now, the relationship that we've struggled with for so long

I'm weary and disheartened after our journey)

จาก **กันฉัน** อาจต้องเสียใจ

แต่วันนี้ ฉันขอยอมตัดใจ จากเธอ

Caa`g *Kan Cha`n* Aa`d To`η Siiaa` **Caaii** Tee` Wannii` Cha`n Khoo` Yoom Ta`d **Caaii** Caa`g
Thoo

(Now that we have parted ways I may face greater grief and sorrow

But for now I am willing to accept that it's over and go my own way)

In the example above, the bold words represent the external rhyme while the italic words represent the internal rhyme in the song. It may be noticed that four sentences of the lyric were composed with a number of both external and internal rhymes. This was the normal style in the Pop Era. However, it was slightly amended during the Indie Phenomenon, in that the lyric was written in a 'telling a story' style rather than in rhyme. The internal rhyme was reduced and some external rhyme remained, while normal language was written replacing the beautiful and delicate language. This next example is from a part of 'Kalaa' ('Coconut Shell') by Modern Dog:

เมื่อมีหลายคน หลายความ ต่างคิดกันไปคนละทาง

Myyaa` Mii Laa`j Khon Laa`j Khwaam Taa` η Khi`d Kan Paaii Khon La` Thaan

("But since there are many people with many different perspectives, we all have our own ways of thinking.")

เปิดใจแล้วลองมารับสิ่งใหม่

หัวใจมันจะแคบไปทำไม หนา

Pəə'd Caai Lɛɛ'w Lɔɔŋ Maa Ra'b Si'ŋ **Maaii** Huuaa'caai Man Ca` Kheɛ'ɓ Paaii

Tham Maaii Na'

(“We should open our minds to new things and not restrict our hearts and minds.”)

โลกยังกว้างไกล แคลิ้มตา

ออกจากกะลา ให้รู้ว่ามันมีมากกว่า

Loo'g Yan Kwaa'ŋ **Klaaii** Kheɛ' Lyym **Taa** ɔɔ'g Caa'g **Kalaaa** Haaii' Ruu' Waa'

Man Mii Maa'g **Kwaa'**

(“The World is far and wide, we just need to open our eyes, break out of our shells and we will discover that there is always more.”)

A few external rhymes appear in the lyric, but the internal rhyme scheme has disappeared entirely, and this style of writing was common at that time.

The articulation of singing, the improvisation technique and the language were consequences of the diversity of musical genres in the Indie Phenomenon. They made an impact on the Thai popular-music industry as artists both indie and major finally adopted these changes in their works, all of which have continued to be used in the music industry in Thailand to the present day. Still, the booming of the Indie Phenomenon period came to an end in 1997 and in the next section I will discuss why this happened.

When the party comes to an end

A number of popular music scholars have claimed that, when an independent company, based on the positive idea of creating and being accessible to new

sounds, produces and generates an unusual type of music as well as gaining popularity from their audience, this could interrupt the dominant market control of the major labels. This was what led to the absorption of the independent artist, and the integration and the occupation of the independent labels by the major labels [Chapple and Garofalo, 1977; Harker, 1980; Powell, 1991; Lee, 1995; Myer and Kleck, 2007]. Moreover, when major labels have power over independent labels, there is a decline in diversity and multiplicity, and authenticity has to compromise with the business purpose in order to generate profit and target a mass audience, rather than simply focusing on music value [Myer and Kleck, 2007].

In the Thai case, the major labels reacted aggressively to the indie artists snatching some of their market share. Even though the major artists – especially the ‘bubblegum pop’ they produced – still dominated the music market in the Indie Phenomenon due to album sales (see Figure 3 in Chapter 2), the massive impact of the indie trend, including music style, the unified audience and the attention of the media, was certainly noticed by the majors. At the beginning of this era, the major labels in Thailand did not react to the phenomenon by absorbing indie artists to be their artists, nor did they interfere with independent labels to integrate or take over the companies, although some of these strategies were applied at the very end of the Indie Phenomenon. Instead, the major labels decided to form strategic ‘alliances’ in order to grasp back their market share.

When the indie movement had grown and some indie music such as Modern Dog and Smile Buffalo was entering the mainstream, the major labels could not remain silent, as this movement was affecting their market share in the industry. To retain

and grab back their popularity, the major labels reacted in a co-operative way to this situation rather than making the independent labels enemies. In the Indie Phenomenon, it was the first time that the mass media outlets, which were owned by major labels, became interested in giving a chance for independent artists to be interviewed, perform and appear on their programmes. Consequently, airtime for indie music increased from ten percent to approximately 40 or 50 percent in some radio programmes [Boonorm, 2009]. Furthermore, not only did major labels increase the opportunity for independent artists to be introduced into the mass media, the major labels also allowed their own artists to join with the indie artists at indie concerts, and sometimes the concerts were operated by the major labels themselves. An instance of such an event can be illustrated by the Rock Marathon Concert in December 1995 at Phebus Pup, Bangkok. The concert was managed by Hot Wave and A-Time Media, a subsidiary radio station and organization company, respectively, of Grammy. A number of artists from Grammy and independent labels performed at the event, showing a good relationship between majors and indies in Thailand [Season, 1996] or at least demonstrating a recognized mutual interest.

The reason for this gentle reaction from the major labels was the effect of a strong degree of unification of a non-controlled media and indie audience. Figure 3.1 showed that the significant reason why the people in Bangkok and its peripheries chose to consume indie music was because they had formed an idea celebrating anti-commercialism. Furthermore, this group of people was an important and powerful group, who frequently influenced many movements and developments in Thailand. For instance, the beginning of popular music in Thailand was initiated as

a result of the popularity of a string combo band in Bangkok (details in Chapter 1 p.40-45). Therefore, although artists from major labels could maintain their album sales all over the country at a higher level than could the independent labels, the major labels were agitated by the success of indie music in the metropolis. To retrieve their audience, the major labels had to compromise, since the main reason for the metropolis audience to consume indie music was the desire to hold their own against the major labels. Hence, the audiences in and around Bangkok were consciously resisting consuming the major labels – the majors were themselves the objects of the ‘resistance’. In response, the major labels behaved like a friend of independent companies in order to be accepted by the indie audience and gain their market share back from indie music. The following is a quotation from the one interview subject who asked to remain anonymous and I will therefore be referring to him throughout the entire dissertation by the pseudonym of Champion:

The majority of indie audiences were youngsters. They made it clear that they preferred indie to mainstream. They rejected Grammy and RS and regarded major labels as their enemy. This phenomenon negatively affected the major labels’ market share. Subsequently, major labels had to embrace the indie trend in an attempt to regain their market share. Many indie artists were therefore invited to join major labels’ *ad hoc* projects, such as concerts, to create positive image of major labels [Tavarayuth (A), 2010].

The second way the major labels became allies of indie music was to produce an indie artist. In accordance with the indie music trend, the ‘basic standard’ of major artists, heavily concentrated on only fame or appearance, was slightly changed. Apparently, the major labels tried to adopt the DIY aesthetic from a small company by starting to sign up artists who were outstanding in musical skill rather than concentrating on the ‘basic standard’. Therefore, some artists for major labels in the Indie Phenomenon were launched, and their album was composed, recorded

and produced by themselves. An example of this was Thana'phon Inthi'ri'd, who had previously worked as a songwriter and producer for many famous artists such as Raptor in RS Promotion. Inthi'ri'd started his career as a songwriter for RS in 1988, and his first song, 'Ke`b Tawaan' ('Keeping the Sun'), which was written for I`dthii' Phalaan'kuun's first album, became very famous. Like other songwriters in the Thai popular music industry, although his song was widely popular, the audience undoubtedly recognized the artist rather than the songwriter. Afterward, in 1995, his first album *Thii Khoo`n Syya` (It's My Time)* was released and he was a producer of this album. His musical talent was unquestionable, since he produced his own album. Moreover, two significant criteria of the 'basic standard' of major labels were neglected; first, he was not a famous person in any entertainment industries in Thailand; and second, his appearance could not be considered as particularly good-looking, especially in comparison with the majority of other artists from major labels during the period. From the Pop Era to the early days of the Indie Phenomenon, male artists from major labels basically had good looks, even some rock bands like Nuvo or Micro from Grammy, as they usually came from celebrity spheres. It is true that there were some rock bands, such as SMF from RS, who released their album with less concern about good appearance, but they were a rare case and were promoted as a band, not a solo artist like Inthi'ri'd. Hence, Inthi'ri'd was an example of the attempt by a major label to sign up an artist concentrating on his talent and being less concerned with a good appearance and fame.

Moreover, major labels accepted the new music genres the Indie Phenomenon had introduced into the mainstream market. New sounds introduced by independent

artists, such as alternative, rhythm and blues and hip-hop, were presented and extensively promoted by major label artists. And, of course, the major labels promoted all of them, especially the alternative sounds, as indie music. So, giving chances to talented artists and following the indie music trend were the major labels' endeavour to approach an indie music audience. However, this intention to seemingly become allied with indie music finally confused consumers in their understanding of indie music. This partially caused the end of the Indie Phenomenon.

Confusion over indie music and media ownership

The understanding of the Thai audience of the difference between independent or indie music and alternative rock has been obscure since the very beginning of the Indie Phenomenon. According to the first survey in the early part of this chapter, from the start 95 percent of the sample group was not able to differentiate between indie and alternative. Therefore, in the early period, the word 'indie' could apply to 'alternative' equally. In fact, the difference between 'indie' music and 'alternative' music is that 'indie' would mean 'produced by independent labels' and 'alternative' would be a music style. This vague meaning later happened to prove advantageous to major labels wishing to confuse the audience by using the power of their media ownership. When alternative rock was increasing in popularity due to the indie artists, the major labels, under the 'alliance' strategy, were also launching their own artists and promoting them as alternative music. Information about the album would be attached to the CD and sent to promoting channels, radio stations, television programmes and popular press by the promoting team. Indeed, information attached to albums about musical genre used

the word 'alternative' to describe the contents. The confusion about the meaning of indie and alternative had arisen because people recognized these two words as the same thing because they were close in meaning. After that, when the major labels released their products and called them alternative, the obscurity of indie increased as the audience understood that 'indie' was happening in the major label.

In the West, new genres in popular music, which were mostly initiated by independent labels, have long been developed and interfered in by the major labels, especially where the genres could succeed in the mainstream market. For example, R&B music, which was considered to have developed from independent labels, crossed over during the 1940s and early 1950s [Gillett, 1983]. Therefore, it was not surprising for Thai major labels in the Indie Phenomenon to follow the alternative trend, though the indie concepts, DIY and anti-commercialism, had disappeared. Although the musical trend could probably be an excuse for the major labels to explain this situation, the problem of the major labels' intention to misinform the audience on how 'alternative' and 'indie' were similar things still remained.

It cannot be denied that, in the first place, the misunderstanding about 'indie' and 'alternative' was not associated with the major labels. Rather was it a result of a very close relationship between 'alternative' and 'indie', which was used and promoted by the mass media. However, the major labels did not assist in clarifying that alternative music from the major labels was just an influence of the indie music trend and not related to the 'indie' concept and its aesthetic. It could possibly be explained with reference to the idea that 'indie' could be depicted as a

musical, personal or fashion style, not only as a more obscure business control issue. Thus, when major label artists released works similar to these characteristics of 'indie', they might legitimately call themselves 'indie'. However, it was difficult to explain in terms of the 'indie' aesthetic. The reasoning behind Modern Dog wearing such unusual outfits, composing songs using a different sound, writing lyrics encouraging people to try new things or to sing out of the old fashion style was a good match for them, as they truly desired to explore new things opposing the same old pattern of mainstream culture in Thai popular music. Additionally, Modern Dog and certain other indie artists produced their works following the DIY concept.

Major label artists who promoted themselves as 'alternative' or 'indie' contributed to the dilemma since, first, they could not deny that their works were promoted commercially on mass media by major labels' subsidiary companies, and, second, while some of them, such as Inthi'ri'd, had the ability to make their own album via the DIY concept, the majority of these major artists, for instance Ammarin Ni'ti'phon and Achita' Praamoo'd Na' Ayu'dthayaa, still very much required an assembly-line process to produce their work. Therefore, such mixing increasingly confused people as to why indie music now appeared in mainstream when its concept was originally anti-capitalist.

To be fair to the major labels, it could be said that the information they provided about their artists to the mass media might or might not have been intended to confuse audiences by manipulating the meaning of 'indie' and 'alternative'. Nevertheless, the way that major labels employed their media channels to raise the

confusion of the audience shows that the intention certainly was to confuse the audience. For example, on the radio programmes of major labels, the DJs usually played alternative music from major labels during the period that they announced as a period of indie songs [Boonorm, 2009]. Furthermore, after a year of the Indie Phenomenon, when other new music sounds were being introduced into Thailand such as rhythm and blues and rap music, the understanding of audiences that indie was a form of working process rather than a music genre, was greater than previously. Then again, the 'alliance' strategy was applied, since the major labels intervened into indie communities and their activities with such events as joint concerts, as already mentioned. All this was intended to build up the image of the major label as a friend of indie artists.

With the image of the major labels and the relationship between indie and majors being built in a friendly way, it became easy for major labels to gain back their market share from the independent labels. According to Figure 3.1, indie audiences who concentrated on anti-major labels were largely located in Bangkok and its peripheries. Simultaneously, half of audiences in the provinces around the country listened to indie music simply because they wanted to be on trend. Unlike the major labels, the independent labels did not have any connections with large distributors, as well as being established with low levels of venture capital. Therefore, as the distribution and promotion of indie music were restricted, it became difficult for indie music to be consumed by audiences in the countryside. This was an advantage for the major labels. Exploiting the confusion over what indie was at the beginning of the period plus the alliance strategy, the major labels were able to consistently dominate audiences in the countryside. Since indie music

was a significant requirement for audiences in rural areas to declare an urban self-identity, the image that the major label was in a partnership with indie music but took the form of a more approachable partner, able to encourage the audience to consume the major's music. As a result, even though indie music was commercially predominant in the metropolis, major labels were still able to occupy the majority of the market share.

After the major labels fought back and grasped back their popularity, independent labels started to struggle and found themselves confronted with two crucial problems. First, the album sales of indie artists dramatically decreased in 1997 as a result of the major labels fighting back and the large number of indie albums in the market. The major labels made a huge dent in the album sales figures of indie artists. Whilst the major labels could target rural areas all over the country, indie music was sold only a specific area, the metropolis. Moreover, because of the development of computers at that time, it became simple to build a home studio, plus it was the golden age of DIY music [Boonorm, 2009]. Thus, homemade albums from many musicians were released into the market. According to information from the DJ Siam Shop, the famous recording shop in Bangkok's Siam Square, and an important retailer for indie artists at that time, in 1997 there were more than one hundred indie albums per month released and sold at this shop. These included famous indie artists, but also new artists from independent labels and homemade work from unknown musicians [DJ Siam, 2009]. What this entailed in practice was market saturation, and the indies did not have the promotional budget to make their titles stand out in what was anyway a limited market. Consequently, the market share of indie music dramatically dropped and

the financial situation in many independent labels entered a state of chaos [Sukoson, 2007; Boonorm, 2009].

Second, the Asian Financial Crisis occurred in 1997 and caused an economic recession in Asia and certainly in Thailand. Many businesses were discontinued and purchasing power decreased dramatically. Most of the independent labels were terminated as they faced financial problems from both the major labels' interference and the crisis. Only Bakery Music remained as an independent label. However, Bakery was itself inevitably reduced, laying off some employees and closing some parts of the company [Sukoson, 2007]. Finally, the major labels absorbed a number of popular independent artists, and the Indie Phenomenon came to an end.

In conclusion, then, the Indie Phenomenon came about as a result of alternative rock music from the West, and the words 'alternative' and 'independent' were initially introduced into Thai popular music business. As these two words were novel in Thai society as well as the music itself, the understanding of the two words were obscured among Thai listeners, especially at the beginning of the period, and this became a weakness to finally be taken advantage of by the major labels that wished to intervene in the popular music market. The significant point was that indie music and artists were able to interrupt major labels at that moment in the mid-1990s, meaning that the normal practices of the major labels were challenged, especially the two previously essential elements of fame and appearance of the artists. The DIY aesthetic, as well as the gathering and collaboration of indie artists, independent mass media, press and publishers and

their audience, was able to build an indie music scene in the metropolis. Moreover, as indie music was supported by the scene, it was able to inject various new musical forms and practices into the Thai popular-music industry. As Peterson and Bennett suggest, a music scene is created by performers, audiences and supporting facilities in order to distinguish themselves from others [Peterson and Bennett, 2004]. Therefore, in order to be different from others, ‘individuality’ became an ideology of ‘indie’ music and artists. As a result, many novelties of music practices, such as singing style, lyrics and fashion, were created to distinguish indie artists from others.

However, according to the restrictions of geography and finance, the indie scene was limited to the metropolis and could be considered as an urban culture. Even though indie music was therefore not able to receive countrywide recognition, its locus as an urban culture effectively grabbed the attention of the major labels. Unfortunately, although indie music had an impact on Thai popular music, there was no miracle for independent music in Thailand, as usually happens in the world of capitalism. The phenomenon came to the end. Like other indies in other popular music industries, the majority of independent labels closed and some indie artists were absorbed into major labels. However, an indie music scene has continued in parallel with mainstream music. Even though its later impact on the Thai popular music industry has been restricted, it occupies an interesting space in the next period, the Major Return, where the indie music scene developed as a subculture and part of the hierarchy in popular music society.

Chapter 4: The Major Return

As the previous chapter has shown, indie music was able to take a share in the Thai popular-music market during the Indie Phenomenon, as well as affecting the major-label patterns and musical style. Moreover, indie music experienced its ultimate prosperity during the mid-1990s. Unfortunately, this fairy-tale situation was swiftly ended in 1997. The intervention of the major labels was probably inevitable and certainly ensured the decline of indie music. However, other factors clearly leading to the decline of the Indie Phenomenon were the oversupply of albums which labelled themselves 'indie' and the Asian financial crisis. These two conditions could have assisted the major labels in putting in less of an effort, forcing indie music into becoming powerless. However, whilst the major labels ultimately gained dominance in the popular-music market, they too did not escape the impact of the general downturn in the Thai popular-music industry.

From 1997 to 2006, the Thai popular-music industry encountered business difficulties as a result of the economic downturn and the development of technology, including the advance of the Internet and the expansion of MP3s in Thailand. The major labels were no exception to this. The graph below shows that, from 1997 on, the Thai popular-music industry's value, including both major and independent labels, decreased from 70 to 80 million GBP to 50 to 60 million GBP approximately (1 GBP being equal to 70BHT) (Kasikorn Research Centre statistics¹).

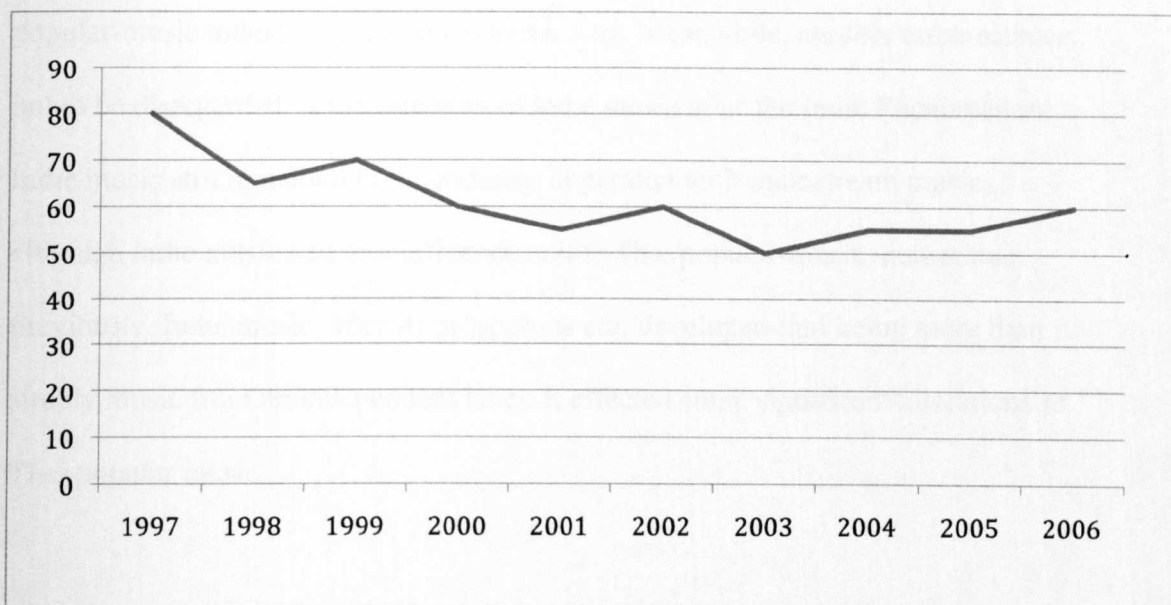


Figure 4.1 *The Value of the Thai Popular-Music Market from 1997 to 2006*

However, it should be noted that the graph depicts the whole popular-music entertainment sector, in which subsidiary companies, such as the media and the publishing companies of major labels, are included. This means the problem could actually go deeper if only the music section were considered, especially album sales. The major labels had to alter their strategies to cope with this situation.

This chapter will focus on the Thai popular-music industry from 1997 to 2006, which I described in Chapter 1 as the Major Return period. Whilst the period between 1982 and 1994 may be characterized as the golden age of Thai popular music, the period between 1997 and 2006 may be regarded as its polar opposite, an era during which album sales plummeted, piracy was prevalent, and the policies of musical corporations limited the financial investment in music production. It is necessary to examine how the major labels endured the downturn of the business, as this was the first time in Thailand that an economic recession influenced the

popular-music industry in such an extreme way. Meanwhile, another circumstance, not to be disregarded, is the direction of indie music after the Indie Phenomenon. Indie music still remained in the industry in parallel with mainstream music, although indie music had less influence on the Thai popular-music market than previously. Indie music, after its prosperous era, developed into being more than simply music from an independent label. It effected some significant alterations in Thai popular music.

The questions requiring answers in this chapter can be grouped under several topics. Firstly, after 1997, where did indie music in Thailand go? Secondly, to survive in the music industry, what have the major labels done to the Thai popular-music industry? Thirdly, has the process of music production developed and evolved or remained faithful to its established standardized practices?

Where did indie go?

Up to 1997, the number of independent labels in Thailand had increased, together with the albums labelled 'indie'. Unfortunately, from the end of 1997 to 1998, many independent labels suddenly discontinued their business; the number of independent labels rapidly reduced from about 200 to less than 10 in just a year [Boonorm, 2009]. Only Bakery Music could maintain its market share in the industry [Sukoson, 2007], but even Bakery finally succumbed and the company was liquidated in early 2005 [Sukoson, 2007].

Where did the indie artists go to after the Indie Phenomenon? The answer is the same as that provided by many popular-music scholars in the Anglophone world.

The explanation of how the Western popular-music industry encroached upon and influenced the production of independent music, such as R&B or salsa, could be described as the use of power control by the dominator in the market. For instance, Nelson George (1988) described 'the death of rhythm and blues' as a result of its transformation from a black form of expression to a commodity [George, 1988]. In addition, Peter Manuel's work in 1991 illustrates how the popular-music industry urged Latino artists to start producing easy-listening Spanish-language songs [Manuel, 1991].

In Thailand, at the end of the Indie Phenomenon, there was no difference in the Thai popular-music industry to the West. When the popularity of indie music subsided, those who possess the dominant power in the popular-music market absorbed many famous indie artists into their companies. Certainly, music scholars often raise the issues of authority, commerce and creativity when writing about the confrontation between 'major' and 'indie' [Negus, 1992; Frith and Horne, 1987]. These issues will be discussed in a further section in this chapter. On the other hand, after the Indie Phenomenon ended, while some famous indie artists were absorbed into major companies, many also ended their involvement in the music business altogether, while still others remained in the indie music market. Additionally, some of them became entrepreneurs running indie labels. For example, Jee'dtamon Ma'la'yootha, a guitarist in Phraaw (a famous indie band in the Indie Phenomenon), became one of the owners of Small Room Co. Ltd, a small independent label established in 2000. The next section of this study will

concentrate on the two latter groups who clung on in the indie music sector.

In the previous chapter, I described how indie artists distinguished themselves from mainstream pop music, which was produced by major labels, by examining their practices in terms of musical production and performance. Additionally, the success of indie music in the Indie Phenomenon could be perceived, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, as a form of metropolitan success, since the music scene was created in and limited to urban areas. Subsequently, in the Major Return era, the indie community steadily grew and created substantive presences in the Thai popular-music industry. Popular music can arouse or generate social harmony as well as expressing the standpoint of people in society [Chappel and Garofalo, 1977]. Although the Indie Phenomenon came to an end after 1997, Indie music in Thailand has still had a movement parallel with the mainstream popular-music market. Furthermore, the word 'indie', after the decline in the popularity of indie music, has modified its meaning and come to imply a social movement rather than just a music category. Indie has been interpreted and commonly occurs in initiating other cultural commodities, such as magazines, films and clothes produced non-commercially with a DIY aesthetic. Moreover, as in the Western context, indie not only consists of cultural products but also institutions [Newman, 2011]. This can be seen from news reports or magazines in which phrases such as 'indie magazine' or 'indie film' appear to categorize these cultural commodities [Maneerat, 2002]. Surprisingly, while the number of independent labels and indie artists has fallen dramatically, the indie community has taken a contrary direction. Indie society has slightly improved in solidarity, and has finally created significant

presences in the Thai popular-music industry, in what I will name them as ‘indie culture’.

Indie in the Major Return Period: Subculture or Music Scene?

The term ‘indie culture’ will be used throughout this dissertation to describe the substantive presences of the indie community in the Major Return period instead of the use of the scene or subculture theory, since they are both unable to stand alone in order to describe the growth of indie in this era. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the idea of a music scene, according to scholars such as Straw (1991) and Peterson and Bennette (2004), describes the ‘metropolitan success’ of indie music in the Indie Phenomenon, as the music was created, performed, and supported by both indie artists and their fans in order to articulate their own musical interest within a particular geography (place or space). However, I argue that the music scene theory is not able to describe the growth of the indie community in the Major Return period. Even though subculture theory, which was prevalent in the 1970s and favoured by many scholars, such as Stuart Hall and Dick Hebdige from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), University of Birmingham, has been heavily critiqued and Simon Frith observed that ‘[t]he long domination of IASPM (sociology division) by subcultural theory is over’ [quote from Hesmondhalgh, 2005], it is still useful in order to describe the indie community in Thailand during the Major Return era.

Subculture theory was normally described as deviant behaviour [Gelder and Thornton, 1997] and usually associated with the study of youth cultures in British post-war society [Bennett, 1999]. In addition, it contained the concept of resistance or action against everyday life or mainstream culture [Davis, 2006]. Furthermore,

Rupa Hug stated that “‘authentic’ subcultural identity was understood as being expressed by youth in terms of a cohesive and collective cultural resistance to dominant order’ [Hug, 2006]. However, subculture theory has been attacked in popular music for its sense of fixity and rigidity, with Peterson and Bennette describing how subculture ‘presumes that all of a participant’s actions are governed by subcultural standards’ [Peterson and Bennette, 2004]. Hence, the term ‘scene’ has been used instead of ‘subculture’, since it does not presume such fixity and rigidity. Moreover, Will Straw states:

For those who study popular music, ‘scene’ has the capacity to disengage phenomena from the more fixed and theoretically troubled unities of class-culture (even when it holds out the promise of their eventual rearticulation). [Straw, 2001: 248]

I agree that the term ‘scene’ is effective in order to describe the overview of indie music and its community in the Indie Phenomenon as described in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, the idea of resistant behaviour, which appeared regularly in subculture theory, such as the album cover, fashion and lyrics of indie music in the Indie Phenomenon, which were significant characteristics of indie music used to position artists as opposed to the mainstream culture (in this case mainstream pop music from major labels), seems to have reduced significance when ‘scene’ replaces ‘subculture’. Moreover, although David Hesmondhalgh argues that the study of popular music confronts the difficulty, since it usually intimately relates to the study of youth culture [Hesmondhalgh, 2005], it is inevitable that youths were the important group associated with the emergence and growth of indie music in Thailand. Therefore, this dissertation will use the term ‘subculture’ in a specific, limited sense: to connote the idea of resistant behaviour in order to

describe how the indie community established its identity. Similarly, I will draw on music scene theory to study the development of the indie community in the Major Return era rather than using ‘subculture’ in the sense used by Birmingham’s CCCS, which developed the notion of subcultures to explain youth culture. Therefore, to avoid confusion, I will use the phrase ‘indie culture’ throughout this dissertation to describe the substantive presences of the indie community in the Major Return period to articulate the idea of a ‘scene’, together with a ‘subculture’.

This analysis will draw on Raymond Williams’ concept of culture; it does not limit itself to an appreciation of so-called ‘high culture’, it can also be found in institutions and in ordinary behaviour [1965]. Following Williams’ definition, Dick Hebdige exploited the word ‘ordinary’ [1979]. While Hebdige used ‘ordinary’ to describe cultural conception, he illustrated the idea of subculture as a style of peculiar behaviours aiming to express a lifestyle and communicate to others in the general social milieu. These distinctive behaviours consisted of various fundamentals, such as clothes and languages used to create uniqueness, illustrating the difference between the subculture and the mainstream [Hebdige, 1979]. From the Pop Era to the Major Return period, major labels dominated mainstream pop and they also produced standardized products as a commodity. Since music had become a product anyone could easily consume, it could be considered a particular culture within wider Thai society. Conversely, indie music was different as, in the Major Return period, there were various elements built up as a consequence of indie music’s distinguishing itself from the mainstream to

institute its own community.

First, it is important to have a channel through which to communicate in order to constitute a society. Hence, during 1999 to 2000, Fat Radio and *A Day* magazine were established and appeared to be intermediaries in indie society. Fat Radio was a radio station under the umbrella of the Click Radio Company. This radio station was founded in 1999 and championed playing music without the barrier of labels². Fat Radio was the only radio station at the time that played songs from independent labels for more than 80 percent of airtime. The station played not only songs from independent labels but also songs composed by amateur artists who were not affiliated with either major or independent labels [Boonorm, 2009]. Furthermore, on 1 and 2 September 2001 at the old Thailand Tobacco Factory³ in Bangkok, Fat Radio initiated a music festival, the Heineken Fat Festival (recognized in Thailand as the Fat Festival or Fat Fes), where indie people gathered to show their work. The festival allowed indie bands, indie magazines, handmade books and clothes and other such things to be sold without collecting any fees, including entrance fees for audiences. The highlight of the festival was concerts by indie artists, and Heineken sponsored the total expense of the festival. The first festival achieved huge success, with more than 20,000 people attending [Boonorm, 2009; <http://thisisclick.com/main/company.php>]. Fat Festival has remained a success, as the attendance has been higher every year, and it continues to the present day [<http://thisisclick.com/main/company.php>]. In addition, Yuttana Boonorm, the ex-leader and director of the Fat Festival, as well as a Fat Radio DJ, was recognized by the media as *Caaoo` Phoo` De`g Neew* (The Godfather of Indie) [Majung, 2009; Sukoson, 2007; <http://www.thisisclick.com>].

The event expanded the communication channels for indie and, simultaneously, the solidarity of indie society increased. A further channel for the indie community, which gained its popularity from the Fat Festival, is the magazine *A Day*. *A Day* is a popular magazine in Bangkok and its peripheries, aimed at college students and young adults and founded in 2000 by Day Poets Co. Ltd. Its popularity dramatically increased after the first Fat Festival event. The content in the magazine has concentrated on indie products, plus certain freebies attached to each copy such as condoms or a special CD [<http://www.daypoets.com/aday/>]. In fact, this magazine's strategy is not to only target indie fans [Maneerat, 2002]. However, focusing on the content and the cover of the magazine, in the first 117 editions 70 percent of the guests invited for interview or mentioned in each edition are people acknowledged as 'indie' in Thai society, such as indie artists, indie film-makers or DJs from indie radio stations. Thus, explicitly, the magazine is usually designated by the mass media as an alternative magazine in the indie target market [Maneerat, 2002; Boonorm, 2009]. *A Day* magazine was first published in 2000, and Day Poets has since launched other publishing products: *Hamburger* entertainment magazine, *Knock Knock Knock* girls' magazine, television programmes, and their publishing company A Book. In fact, all of the products from this company have been recognized as indie rather than mainstream cultural commodities. Correspondingly, the strong growth of a sector of the media that has generally promoted indie culture encourages and supports a level of unity within the indie community.

The second characteristic of indie was fashion. Because of the success of the Indie Phenomenon, the style of the outfits from indie artists remained popular in the Major Return period. According to the previous chapter, the bizarre clothes popularized by Modern Dog were seen as opposing the pattern of the major-label artists. This characteristic continued from the Indie Phenomenon throughout the Major Return. The significant style of fashion for indie people was plain, odd, inharmonious, handmade and rag clothes. A slim-fitting long-sleeved shirt with ragged skinny jeans would be considered a common outfit for indie people, which would have been considered extraordinary by mainstream society at that time. Second-hand T-shirts with screen-prints of the logos of famous rock bands or catchy phrases were another popular uniform signaling an indie character. Thana'chaai U'dchin, the lead vocalist of Modern Dog, expressed the idea of the second-hand outfit (i.e. wrinkled, decayed and informal clothes) as representing a comfort and simplicity that could not be seen in mainstream culture [Utchin, 2009].

Another way that the indie community presented themselves was through a sound. Listening to every music genre outside the mainstream was another significant character of indie culture in this period. Yuttana Boonorm described the sound of indie as music one could not consume in the products of major labels, such as reggae, ska or funk [Boonorm, 2009]. Indie was able to achieve success in being distinguished from the mainstream culture by its unique characteristics, fashion, and sound. Thus, it was depicted by the mass media in such terms.

From the beginning of the Indie Phenomenon to the Major Return, the indie community in Thailand has received a number of designations, many of which have been coined by the mass media as a result of the prosperity of indie culture. The media has attempted to describe or categorize the unique characters of indie culture to its audience [Boonorm, 2009]. Consequently, a number of new words have been created and, finally, these have become another element of the character of the indie language. For instance, indie audience and artists were called *De`g Antaa* (*Alternative Kid*) during the early phase of the Indie Phenomenon, when alternative music reached its peak in the Thai popular-music business. Later, when other genres such as rap and R&B slightly regained their popularity and alternative music decreased in popularity, *De`g Antaa* was replaced by *De`g Neeu*. The meaning of ‘*De`g*’, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is ‘*children*’ and ‘*Neeu*’ has many meanings in the Thai language; however, in this sense, it applies to music genres. Boonorm, known as *Caaoo` Phoo` De`g Neeu* (The Godfather of Indie), described in an interview with me the definition of *De`g Neeu*. In the beginning, the phrase referred to the audience who listened to many music genres, such as rap, R&B, reggae and ska. This audience confused the media, as the media could not understand which style they preferred, and the group was usually composed of people interested in indie music [Boonorm, 2009]. Nowadays, the meaning of *De`g Neeu* is contained in the dictionary of Thai modern language, officially composed by the Royal Institute of Thailand. The meaning is slightly different from the original in that, instead of being described in terms of musical orientation, *De`g Neeu* is illustrated as a particular social behaviour pattern by Thai youth, which differs from normal culture [Dictionary of Thai Modern Language, 2007; 65]. Another word, created to represent the indie fashion, is *Saa*.

This term was abbreviated from ‘surrealism’ and originally designated the strange costumes worn by the indie artists in the early days of the Indie Phenomenon. After that, it applied to the style of indie clothes, as discussed in the previous section. It can be seen that all the examples of words which originated from the influence of indie culture were initially created by the media, which was attempting to describe indie culture to music consumers in Thailand. However, these words have become part of the language, and indie artists and their fans have accepted them in order to determine and describe themselves as indie.

The indie community has been extremely successful in distinguishing itself from mainstream culture as well as in articulating its resistance to normal culture, having founded its own institutions, fashions, sound, and language. Therefore, in the Major Return period, it can be claimed that indie has developed its own culture, rather than being just a music category. When indie became a culture in Thailand, it became relevant to another important situation in Thai popular music: the emergence of a socially perceived hierarchy among the audience in the Thai popular-music industry.

The Socially Perceived Hierarchy

When indie music emerged in Thailand around 1994, many of those who supported it also perceived it to be superior to mainstream varieties in its subversiveness, resistance of corporate influence and DIY aesthetic; this led to a music scene that had its birth in but was distinct from the prevalent popular music culture. This schism became more and more pronounced over time, meaning that, by the time of the Major Return era, the indie music scene had developed distinct

tastes. The indie scene not only perceived itself to be superior to mainstream music culture but was regarded as such by society at large, which led to a higher social value being placed upon it. Indie music, since its very beginnings in the Thai popular-music scene, has usually been perceived as being open to a metropolitan, trendy and sophisticated society. It has frequently been mentioned or reviewed in a positive framework, regarding its works as valuable. Conversely, while indie music has enjoyed its position, mainstream music has become seen by some media and music critics as something ordinary and mass-produced.

This seemingly points to an element of discrimination in the Thai music business. Evidence of this discrimination can be observed from the following paragraph, translated from the album review column by No'pphadon Phonsi'n in *Season Music Magazine* (12th edition of 2003, p. 83). The writer intended to review the indie artist album *Mini Mint* by Sawaanjaa Kεε'wmiichaaii:

It is as if the world is changing. If we examine carefully, many times we would find that people buy an album without knowing any songs of the artist, especially when the artist is a newcomer. Some buy it because they like a song, which was heavily promoted. And for many people, it can be said that they buy an album because of 1) a beautiful cover; 2) an interesting package; or 3) a good-looking artist.

Do not think this is impossible, as we can see this phenomenon very often at the music stall. Such an action prevents people from getting to know a good album that has no magnificent cover or luxurious package, no opportunity to be played and promoted in major radio stations, the artist is unknown and not from a [high-society] family, and the purpose is not to sell one hundred thousand copies. This would mean that many people miss the opportunity to know an album which attempts to show the intention and real talents of the artist and his/her team, because they are not as attractive as an album with an appealing look but that is in fact uninteresting [Tavarayuth, 2010].

The article seems to take a sarcastic approach towards mainstream music. The critical attitude towards mainstream music evinced by the article reflects a view that has become somewhat profoundly socially ingrained. This perceived distinction between indie and mainstream music has led to the formulation of a sort of hierarchy, which places the former above the latter. In the Major Return period, a comparison between indie music and mainstream music has frequently occurred in media and among the audience. Boonorm and U'dchin explain the environment among popular-music audience at that time: Grammy and RS were used as emblematic of mainstream music, while the indie side was normally represented by Bakery. In addition, the idea that real indie people were supposed to listen only to indie music, as if it had been a handicraft, implying the 'worthy to listen' concept, spread widely [Boonorm, 2009; Utchin, 2009]. For example, the website Pantip.com, one of the most popular online communities, contains a forum called '*Chalermkrung*', which is devoted entirely to the discussion of Thai popular music. I have searched in the topic section about the relationship between the words indie, RS, Grammy and Bakery and found that, during the early 2000s, there were hundreds of topics where people argued about the musical value of the mainstream (Grammy and RS) and indie (Bakery) [www.pantip.com/cafe/chalermkrung]. The discussion commonly upheld some ideas, such as, 'RS's music is crap', 'It's only an idiot that would listen to Grammy and RS' or 'Bakery is cool and the rest is rubbish'. Such examples reveal the emergence of the friction in musical taste. To examine the stratification of the audience, the socially perceived hierarchy in Thai popular-music society can be analysed by theorizing on the types of cultural capital involved.

According to Pierre Bourdieu's work on social stratification, people commit themselves to their aesthetic individuality in order to present their position and distinguish themselves from others. Additionally, the aesthetic taste of a culture can demonstrate one's class through what one consumes [Bourdieu, 1984]. In the Major Return era, the indie community successfully differentiated itself from the mainstream, since indie cultures, media, clothes, sound and language were widely noticed by the mass media. Therefore, stratification has been created in this attempt by indie fans to separate themselves from others, and this has vitally influenced the Thai popular-music industry. The next question is, if indie culture can establish a socially perceived hierarchy among the audience in Thai popular-music society, what position can it attain? To reach a conclusion, I will again apply Bourdieu's theory to the forms of capital to examine and answer the question. Bourdieu explained that one must possess certain types of capital in order to project oneself as having a high status in the social hierarchy [Bourdieu, 1986]. Two types of capital, cultural capital and social capital, will be exploited in order to analyse the status of indie music and its culture in the Thai popular-music society from the Indie Phenomenon to the Major Return era.

Indie as cultural capital

Cultural capital, in sociological terms, is described as a pattern of cultural knowledge that accrues in the individual and influences capacity and status [De Graaf, N; De Graaf, P; Kraaykamp, G, 2000]. For Bourdieu, cultural capital referred to higher education, special skills and knowledge, and any benefits that lift an individual to a higher status [Bourdieu, 1986]. This implies that, if one

possesses a higher education or any exceptional skills and is accepted by people in society as an intellectual, one is considered as being of high status. That could possibly explain why indie music has held a privileged status in Thai popular-music society, since it has been perceived by the audience as intellectual, complicated and unapproachable.

From the very beginning of the Indie Phenomenon, indie music has been seen by the mass media as a new toy for high-society kids, as the success of the Indie Phenomenon has inevitably been associated with the emergence of Bakery Music [Sukoson, 2007]. Bakery music was founded by four young adults, Boyd Kosiyabong, Kamon Su`kooso`n , So`mkiaa`d Ari`ja`chaaiiphaani`d and Saa`li`nii Panjaarachun. All of them were born into wealthy families and had at least a bachelor's degree from a famous institution, while three of them were continuing their studies in an international programme and had graduated with master's degrees from famous universities in the US. It could be seen that all of the founders of Bakery carried a high status in Thai society, not only in terms of economics but also in education. Moreover, all of the artists from Bakery were university students, international students or convent girls, and all of them were settled in Bangkok. Furthermore, indie music in the early period was targeted at university students, as was discussed in the previous chapter, and this group in Thailand were acknowledged as *Pan Jaa Chon* (wise people). Another significant aspect that informed the cultural capital of indie music was musical ability and performance. The DIY aesthetic of indie demonstrated that the artists had unquestionably acquired the musical skills to compose, arrange, record and perform their work by themselves without any mass media propaganda. Therefore,

with such a starting point for the emergence of indie music, it is automatically implied that indie music represented a sophisticated form of music for young people looking for novelty. These facts also circulated in the mass media, which could be observed from music articles in music magazines or music website implying that indie music, from its beginnings, was inevitably associated with university students and well-educated middle-class young people in urban areas [www.oknation.net/blog/ToMzInDyCluB/2007/12/12/entry-1]. In addition, in the pocket book *Indie Bible* by Pedcharapii Pinkaew, one chapter is dedicated to explaining that the significant value for which indie artists have been accepted and praised by the audience is that they possess a musical ability to compose, record and perform their work [Pinkaew, 2009].

Apart from education and musical talent, there were two other factors supported the privileging of indie music: geography and economy. First, as mentioned above, indie music was initially targeted at audiences in Bangkok and its peripheries. Promotional budgets were limited, as indie companies were established with low levels of venture capital. Thus, music and artists were limited to a specific area, and indie music could not be easily expanded to rural provinces around the country, meaning that it emerged as a pronouncedly metropolitan music. Second, an inequality in economic power was another obstacle impeding the rural audience's ability to consume indie music. Information from the Thailand Development Research Institute illustrates that the national income per capita of people in rural province is always lower than that of people in the metropolis [TDRI, 2010]; thus, the purchasing power of the rural citizen is usually lower than that of the metropolitan citizen. Indie music positioned itself as a handicraft

product [Panyarachun, 2004], and its records were produced in small numbers per album; therefore, its CDs were fixed at a price higher than those of mainstream products. During the Indie Phenomenon, the CD price of major labels was approximately 4 GBP per album, while it was around 5 to 6 GBP for independent labels (1 GBP=70BHT). Later, in 2002, under the influence of the economic recession and the development of technology problems, major labels lowered their CD price from 4 GBP to around 2.2 GBP. In fact, the consumer could purchase a CD from the retailers at about 1.8 GBP [Manager (A), 2002]. By contrast, however, independent labels kept the same price level for their CDs. Consequently, music consumers in the countryside could hardly afford products from independent labels. The low volume of manufactured editions, along with the limitations in the distribution channels of independent labels, evidently affected consumers' approach to indie music. Indeed, the unreachable nature of indie music could be considered an advantage to the major labels, although it also implied added value in indie music in terms of symbolic capital, as will be argued shortly. What is certain is that geographic concentration and economic inequality facilitated indie music's being considered a metropolitan culture, and being judged as an elite mode.

In conclusion, all of the above advantages of indie music – its being perceived as sophisticated, educated, metropolitan and inaccessible – could have led to the higher cultural capital of indie music in the Thai popular-music community. I will continue with a further theoretical examination of types of capital, to identify the status of indie music and its social capital and will demonstrate that these kinds of capital did, in fact, accrue to indie music during the periods that I am examining.

Indie as social capital

Social capital applies to social associations in both internal and external social networks [Portes, 1998]. James Coleman's concept of social capital expresses the concept as 'a variety of entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors- within the structure' [Coleman, 1988].

Bourdieu shared some of Coleman's ideas and contributed that social capital can be an advantage in producing and reproducing inequality [Bourdieu, 1986]. He explained the idea of social capital in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*:

Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or vital, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition [Bourdieu, 1992:119].

In the Major Return period, social capital in indie music appeared to be a reciprocal network between the mass media and indie labels. Moreover, indie music was generally acknowledged as superior by music specialists such as music journalists and columnists, widely accepted in Thai society as music scholars. To study social capital in indie music, I will divide the examination into two topics; the relationships between indie and the mass media, and the friendly connection between indie and the music scholar in Thailand.

First, indie music in the Indie Phenomenon had a positive relationship with the mass media, despite independent labels not having their own media channels.

Thus, the strategy indie companies chose to promote their work to a mass audience was their personal connection with the mass media. This strategy can be seen in

the case of Bakery Music's promotion. Bakery, at the very beginning of its existence, started as a production company, which composed songs for advertisements, events and television programmes. When the first album by Modern Dog was launched on 9 July 1994, Bakery had spent only 3,000 GBP in promoting the album, while major labels could spend at least 10,000 GBP per album on promotion. Saa'linii Panjaarachun, one of the founders of Bakery, devoted herself to the marketing section. As a famous DJ before being involved in Bakery Music, she had strong connections with a number of radio stations, newspapers, manufacturing companies and advertisement companies. She used these connections to promote Bakery's artists. Sukoson mentions that Bakery, to promote the artists, attached them to events, shows or free concerts, in which Panjaarachun had connections. The artists performed at the events for free [Sukosol, 2007]. The relationship between Bakery and the organizers was mutually beneficial, as indie artists were able to promote their own music for free and organizers were able to make events more appealing without incurring large costs. The reciprocal relationship between independent labels and promotional channels became obvious when indie music found it was able to reach one of the important mass media channels, such as radio. After Modern Dog launched its first single 'Bu'dsabaa' ('A Girl's Name'), the single was able to attract some of the most famous DJs at that moment such as Yuttana Boonorm and Wi'ni'd Ləə'd ra'dtana'chaaii, who played it on their radio programmes despite being employees of major labels [Boonorm, 2009]. Both Boonorm and Ləə'dra'dtana'chaaii became recognized as significant supporters of indie music [Boonorm, 2009]. Later, because of the influence of both Boonorm and Ləə'dra'dtana'chaaii, other DJs frequently played indie music and consequently adopted indie.

Second, indie music has been able to acquire consistent positive feedback and cultivate a beneficial relationship with music scholars in Thailand, ever since the first success of the Indie Phenomenon. Even though the media ownership of the major labels powerfully influences the Thai popular-music audience, the major labels were frequently questioned by society about their monopoly on media ownership control. For instance, in 2005, Phaaibuun Damrongchaiitham, the owner of Grammy, was severely criticized by the public and across social media when he decided to purchase Matichon and the Bangkok Post. Both companies are powerful publishing companies in Thailand who own five popular newspapers (Matichon, Prachachat, Kao Sod, Bangkok Post and the Post) with their total sales being more than a million copies per day [Positioning, 2005]. After intense negative feedback, Grammy chose to slow down its absorption of the companies; however, Grammy still invested in these two companies by taking 20 percent as a shareholder [Positioning, 2005]. This case is only one example of the popular doubts about the power of the major labels. Therefore, when there were comments on or recommendations for artists' work, which were usually (indeed, the major artists were) published under the major labels' media or mainstream channels, this was commonly judged or assumed as being the result of media manipulation from the mainstream. Of course, these kinds of critiques, and their alliance with indie music, very much parallel similar discourses in the Anglophone Western world. Conversely, some music columns in magazines or newspapers continued to write about and acknowledge people in popular music without or with less control from the major-label media power, such as the music column in *Season Music Magazine*. A section of the column provides album reviews from various Thai expert popular musicians or music critics. The review can be separated into two

parts; around 60 percent is composed of international album reviews, and another 40 percent is reviews of Thai artists. Perusing these Thai artist's reviews, I ascertained that, from 1995 to 2005, these album review columns usually consisted of indie album reviews, rather than reviews of major artists. In addition, the reviews of indie artists generally consisted of slightly to very positive comments and were usually rather mocking in regard to major labels. This style of writing is exemplified by the previous translation in this chapter of Noppadol Polsilp's review of Sawanya Kaewmeechai's album [Polsilp, 2003]. This group of critics and experts normally consists of people recognized in their field who have an interest in music, such as famous musicians, sociological and political writers, music columnists and magazine or newspaper's editors. Furthermore, since they were independent of the major labels and because of their background, they were affirmed as people educated about music; this could imply the authority of cultural capital in this group. Hence, indie music was able to appeal to this authority group and build up an admirable connection with them; indie assuredly came to possess social capital in Thai popular-music society.

Finally, with indie music committed to both types of capital, cultural and social, it could therefore raise itself to the highest level in musical society, according to Bourdieu's theory as mentioned above. Indie music earned reputation, honour and attention in the Thai popular-music industry. The consequence of this fame was an influence such that, in the Indie Phenomenon, anything could increase its value by branding itself as indie (this having been described in Chapter 3). Up to the Major Return period, the logo of indie was indispensable for branding musical products. For example, from 1998, major labels spun off their divisions to become many

subsidiary companies, and each company could respond to a specific music market segmentation (details of this major-label strategy will be discussed later). This is similar to what happened in much of the Anglophone West, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, and still to this day. Both Grammy and RS established one subsidiary company for their labels to produce indie music. Bu`dsa`baa Daawryyaan , the present CEO of Grammy, gave an interview in Positioning Magazine concerning operating an indie label under the wing of Grammy, remarking that having indie music in Grammy could improve the reputation of the company. She accepted that indie music after the Indie Phenomenon represented that which was ‘hip’ and ‘cool’ for adolescents and that major labels should and indeed could not therefore overlook it. Thus, the indie department in Grammy was able to build up a trendy image for the company [Manager (D), 2002]. So, the prestige of indie music became a brand, which possibly enhanced its product as a privileged one, although in fact this might not actually be the case. The way indie music had become a privileged thing, representing something authentic, hand-crafted and trendy, influenced people in wider society. This was a prestigious image, meaning that indie music earned another type of capital: symbolic capital [Bourdieu, 1986]. Indie music in the Major Return era was therefore able to possess three types of capital – cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. As a result, indie music in this period held a privileged status in Thai popular-music society. While indie music was thus held in high regard, as cool, metropolitan and somewhat inaccessible (in a good way), mainstream music automatically became thought of as ordinary and commonplace – this somewhat duplicated the ‘major’/‘indie’ discursive dichotomy that also exists (once again) in the Anglophone West. Indisputably, there was a hierarchy in Thailand. However, the symbolic capital and

prestigious status of indie music raises a few questions; for instance, in the Major Return era, was it really so different from the mainstream, or was all this prestige only the effect of symbolic capital? I will examine these questions in the next section of this chapter.

The Indie Brand

Social identity, following Laclau and Mouffe's work, is integration within the arrangement of social relationships, commonly composed of gender, class, race, taste, and so on [Laclau and Mouffe, 1985]. Additionally, some scholars also describe the word 'identification' as implying a sense of differentiation [Tomlinson, 1990; Kruse, 1993]. Indie music in Thailand initially started with two important elements; first, the DIY aesthetic against the standardized process of the major labels and, second, opposition to major-label ownership and the duopoly of the major-label market. Indie music, in the beginning, became extremely successful by projecting these two concepts as against the old-fashioned practices of the mainstream. Furthermore, it brought about notable changes, both musical and social, to the Thai popular-music market, such as music genres, singing style, lyrics and fashion. Moreover, its target audience was clearly young people in Bangkok and its peripheries, as well as those in the major commercial provinces. Later, this advantageously led to indie having a privileged status through which it was able to build its own substantive presence in the Thai popular-music business. Hence, indie music, from the Indie Phenomenon onwards, could be described as a social identity, since it articulated the foundation of a social relationship. Simultaneously, the value of its social status was elevated, as it was different from mainstream culture. However, when the Indie Phenomenon faded out and the

Major Return started, indie music was intentionally blended with the music from the major labels through its absorption by those same major labels.

Social identities are not strict [Laclau and Mouffe, 1985] and the subjects' 'identification', in terms of ideological interest, can possibly be renewed when meanings, social practices and social subject positions are changed [Hall, 1988]. Even though social identities can be affected if the social structures, such as social practices, are changed, this can force out oppositional identity, which actually leads to the concept of a shared identity [Kruse, 1993]. It can be observed from the alternative music scene in the West that an audience could purchase alternative music rather than mainstream music while both were being put out by major labels. Moreover, alternative audiences could imagine a shared identity when Nirvana could reach number one on the *Billboard* chart, and they could simultaneously find other more underground music in other independent labels [Kruse, 1993]. In Thailand, the major labels intended to co-opt some of indie music's identity since the Indie Phenomenon greatly expanded. The practices of major labels, as discussed in Chapter 3, including their 'alliance' strategy and the misleading concept of indie music, demonstrated their scheme to blend the indie identity with mainstream culture. Later, this sign of a shared identity became extremely obvious in the Major Return, when the social practice of indie music was altered by the impositions of the music industry. When the indie identity was shared by the mainstream, a certain level of homogeneity was reintroduced to the Thai popular-music market. Thus, according to Laclau and Mouffe on the value of the difference idea, indie music decreased in value as a result of the homogeneity between indie and mainstream music. However, I argue that, not only did the

major labels impose the shared identity, but also indie itself purposely harmonized with mainstream music. To analyse the more homogeneous identity in the Major Return period, I will divide the rest of this section about indie music in the Major Return period into two topics: the industry imposition of the major labels and the ways in which the indies acted like majors.

The Industry Imposition of the Major Labels

In the Major Return period, some previously independent artists were signed by the major labels. The reasons behind indie artists' moves to the major labels were that some could not continue in their old label, as their companies had left the music business, while others had simply received enticing offers. Meanwhile, both Grammy and RS established many subsidiary companies in their labels, and a few of these were promoted to concentrate on indie music, such as Gennie Records and Giraffe Records from Grammy and Melodica from RS. Even though indie music album sales, along with the number of independent labels, dramatically decreased in this period, the major labels could still conceive of an unceasing growth of indie culture. Thus, the majors became indirect, yet quite certain, suppliers of music to indie consumers. The evidence for this can be seen in a column from *Positioning Magazine* in July 2002 on the topic of *Grammy the Idol Maker*; Grammy issued a press release on the rationale for operating 'indie' subsidiaries – this music category could allow Grammy to reach an indie audience and, significantly, it could improve the image of the company, particularly as the music produced by major labels was often regarded as inferior to that produced by independent labels [Positioning, 2002]. Kruse argues that a certain set of social practices, those of consumption, production and interaction, were deemed to be a means of

identification and a source of homogeneity amongst participants in the alternative or college music scene [Kruse, 1993]. A distinct set of social practices arguably also existed in the indie music scene in Thailand. However, as a result of the absorption and production of indie music by major companies many such practices were impinged upon.

Indie music in Thailand was associated early on with music which had been composed and was performed by the artists themselves (in contrast to the music produced by major labels, which was often associated with the assembly-line process explored in Chapter 2, often seen as a means whereby they encouraged a more critical attitude towards conventional modes of thought (see Chapter 3 on indie lyrics). Furthermore, the significant distinction of indie music in Thailand was that it was set against the standard pattern of media ownership in the major labels. Hence, this new practice of indie subsidiaries caused a dilemma, since indie music was produced by a company operated and controlled a major label. In this dissertation, I will use the word ‘major indie’ to represent indie music and indie artists who had been absorbed into, or had launched their works, with subsidiaries of major labels. Whilst it appeared to the consumer that the production of music by ‘major indie’ artists (which includes the composition, arrangement and recording of music albums) was not significantly interfered with or influenced by their companies, this was not the case. Although on the surface it appeared that the DIY aesthetic, which was associated with indie music, was preserved, that the autonomy of the artists was maintained, and that the artists themselves were not being chosen to conform with the ‘basic standard’ criteria often employed by major labels (which placed importance upon qualities such as fame and physical

appearance), this was not the case.

In fact, there was significant standardization in ‘major indie’ but it was usually disguised, principally in the production and promotion processes. An example can be gleaned from an interview I conducted with one famous ‘major indie’ artist who was extremely successful during the Indie Phenomenon and was absorbed by Grammy after 1999. He asked to remain anonymous, as he remains well known in the Thai popular-music industry and is an executive of one of the subsidiary companies in Grammy. Hence I will call him Jamie throughout this dissertation. Jamie described that, though the ‘major indie’ artists in Grammy had the authority to compose and produce their own work, permission to do so was limited by the requirement for hit songs from the company. Every subsidiary company in the major labels commonly attended a meeting with a board of directors at least once a month. In the meeting, each subsidiary company normally presented its projects, including artists and songs, to the board for approval. It frequently occurred that the board of directors often required artists to include at least one or two songs on their albums to appeal to a larger base of consumers and which would be used to promote their albums, particularly to mainstream audiences. The approval boards often demanded that artists produce songs with simple chord progressions, romantic lyrics and a catchy hooks, often one slow or medium and another up-tempo song, to be hit songs [Jamie, 2010]. The interference of major labels influenced and altered not only the music produced by ‘major indie’ artists but also how they and their work were perceived by consumers. The music chosen by the boards to represent and promote artists often made it appear that the music they produced was essentially indistinguishable from mainstream varieties. An

interesting example of this is that of Dajim, an artist whose image altered significantly after having been enlisted by a major label. Dajim gained recognition amongst Thai audiences after he launched two albums with the independent label NYU in 2000 and 2001, and his songs had been primarily concerned with social and political problems and dealing with issues of corruption, domestic violence and crime, as well as marked by the prolific use of profane language (detailed in Chapter 1). In 2002, Dajim signed a contract and released his third album *Rap Thai* with Grammy. The single which was used to promote his album by the label, and which became exceedingly popular, ‘Joo^g Jaa^j’ (dancing), was chosen, according to Jamie, in order to appeal to a mass audience. In contrast to other songs on the album, which dealt with and took a critical and ironic attitude towards various social and political issues, ‘Joo^g Jaa^j’, a dance number, appealed instead to the desire for more lighthearted enjoyment. Hence, the image of Dajim was transformed by the label from that of a serious cultural critic to a nonchalant trendsetter after his first single with Grammy was launched. This example shows that, although major labels purportedly consented to a significant amount of artistic autonomy, in reality they retained a great deal of influence and that the hit songs produced by ‘major indie’ artists had more in common with their mainstream counterparts than independent labels (often containing conventional and formulaic features).

Distribution was also affected by the industry’s influence upon ‘major indie’ music. Generally, indie music tended to avoid any connection with the major company as, of course, it was attempting to avoid commercialism. However, the major companies inevitably distributed the ‘major indie’ albums. Even though this was probably advantageous in terms of album sales, since they could be widely

distributed throughout the country, this ruined the industrial practice of indie culture. Conclusively, the major labels interrupted the practice of production in indie culture, of producing, promoting and distributing, and, finally, modified indie to be industrial practice homogeneous with mainstream music. As a result, the ‘major indie’ artists in the major labels were probably perceived by the audience as simply another product of mainstream music.

A further interference in the set of social practices was the change to the practice of consumption. Inevitably, the disturbance of the practice of consumption in indie culture became primarily associated with the power of media manipulation from the major labels. In the previous era, indie music consumers generally consisted of college or university students centred in the capital city. This group of consumers consisted of the audience who concentrated on musical ability, performance and musical style, as mentioned in Chapter 3. Additionally, according to the fewer channels promoting them, it is actually possible to identify an appropriate audience really interested in the music. Then, even though there were attempts from the major labels to blend themselves with indie music during the Indie Phenomenon, such as major artists joining indie concerts, it would be an exaggeration to assume that this association was an intention to intervene in the consumption patterns of the indie audience. Moreover, the connection between indie music and mainstream pop from major labels, like a concert, was clearly temporary since indie and major labels were promoted as they were from different companies. However, in the Major Return era, when the ‘major indie’ artists released their albums under the auspices of a major company, their works, actually their hit-requirement works, both music videos and singles continued to be repetitively played in the mass media owned by the major companies, until they could be recognized by mass

consumers. This was no different from how major labels manipulated the audience to consume their product by using their media ownership power from the Pop Era (Chapter 2). Consequently, 'major indie' music necessarily got itself involved in what it had gotten away from; the production process of the major companies showed that the sector had submitted to major-media ownership control.

The impact of the industry imposition from major companies on a certain set of social practices (i.e. industrial practice and consumption practice) in indie culture demonstrates how mainstream and indie music in Thailand, during the Major Return period, shared their identities and decreased their differentiations.

Moreover, while major companies determinedly integrated indie music into the mainstream, indie itself adopted some aspects of major operation into their business, which further enhanced the sharing of identities.

When Indie Acted Major

As mentioned above, another explanation for the merging of the identities of indie music and mainstream popular music was the way that independent labels and their products rejected certain seeming essentials of indie music by accepting a certain manner of conducting commerce and also by following strategies from the major labels, which contradicted the DIY aesthetic. To demonstrate this argument, I will choose Bakery Music to examine the operating system of the company after the end of the Indie Phenomenon. The reason for choosing Bakery is that Bakery was a very significant independent company, which had influenced indie music and culture in Thailand ever since the Indie Phenomenon. In addition, Bakery safely conducted its company through the financial crisis of 1997 to the Major

Return, and was still considered the only powerful independent label until it was discontinued in the early 2005

Although Bakery Music was able to operate as an independent music company throughout the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the company did encounter financial difficulty. Kamon Su'kooso'n, as the Director of Bakery Music at that time, noted in his book *Bakery&I* that Bakery had had to find a way to increase its income since, in 1998, the company never had enough money to pay its employees' salaries [Sukoson, 2007]. Therefore, in 1998 Sukoson had decided to establish a small company, Dojo City, as a subsidiary of Bakery Music. Bakery Music positioned Dojo City as a Japanese-style girl pop label targeted at pre-teens and teenagers as well as male adolescents. It was placed under the management of So'mkiiaa'd Ari'ja'chaaiiphaani'd , one of the founders of Bakery. The reason given by Sukoson to explain why Bakery had started another subsidiary label was that Sukoson assumed that Dojo City could probably generate revenue for Bakery, since the label was aimed at the popular-music market [Sukoson, 2007]. However, I suggest that, in fact, the significant reason Bakery had to spin off its company was that BMG had become a shareholder of Bakery Music. According to the information from Sukoson's book, in 1998, Bakery could not run its business without financial support. Subsequently, BMG approved a venture capital injection for Bakery of approximately 6 million US dollars (1 USD= 50 BHT) and became a shareholder in Bakery Music while Sukoson was still a director [Sukoson, 2007]. After that, Bakery could not operate the company as it had done previously. The company had to present a year plan to BMG, along with a number of album releases and sales, and the revenue of the company was supposed to

reach the requirement set up by BMG [Sukoson, 2007]. Hence, Dojo City was founded not only to generate revenue but also to support the growth of the company. The case of Dojo City provides a good example of a company shifting from the business model favoured by most independent labels to one more closely akin to that of major labels.

Dojo City was managed differently to Bakery Music and other independent labels, since it created a product using the same assembly-line practice described in Chapter 2. The artists from Dojo City, although not famous in the Thai entertainment industry, were chosen for their appearance rather than their ability to sing or their musical skill [Co-Op, 2007]. The important characteristics of this label's artists, recognized by the media and the audience, were dance music with Japanese-style clothes, hair-styles, posture and manners [<http://www.oknation.net/blog/print.php?id=68608>]. These artists were not commonly mentioned by music columnists or music journalists in relation to their songs or their musical talents; rather, they frequently appeared in the entertainment news and were criticized about their lack of ability to sing as well as their improper dress and fashion [<http://www.oknation.net/blog/print.php?id=68608>; Sukoson, 2007]. Figure 4.2 shows an example of artists from Dojo City, a girl duo called Triumph Kingdom, heavily criticized in Thai society for their lack of ability to sing and their inappropriate fashion style.



Figure 4.2 *Triumph Kingdom and their fashion*

Credit from <http://www.oknation.net/blog/print.php?id=68608>

Even though Dojo City album sales were able to slightly increase Bakery's profits, the artists themselves were better known than their actual works. Another assembly-line process, adapted by the major labels, was the producing method. Dojo City artists, as with most artists on major labels, could not compose songs; thus, their works were provided by a production team and the artists put little effort into the production process. Moreover, the marketing sold not only the music itself but also the artists as cultural commodities. This can be seen in the first album of Kristin Marie Newel (known as Kristin in Thailand) called *Again*. Kristin is an American-Thai girl who gained her reputation from being one of the

chorus group backing Joey Boy, the famous rapper in Thailand who was very successful in the Indie Phenomenon under the Bakery label. Kristin's first album was released in 1998 by Dojo City in the Thai language. As she has dual nationality and studied in an international school, she did not even have the ability to speak Thai well, and her vocal ability was frequently doubted by many music critics. Boonorm mentioned, in my interview with him, that there were many rumours in the entertainment media, which he believed to be true, that in Kristin's hit song 'Daaw' ('Star'), her only successful hit single, there were at least six tracks by another female singer who had overdubbed Kristin's main vocal track to support her voice [Boonorm, 2009]. However, Dojo City did not expect high sales for Kristin's album; rather, the company had launched other Kristin products, for example, the Kristin doll, the Kristin pager and the Kristin cartoon book [Sukoson, 2007]. This illustrates how Dojo City attempted to build the pop idol in the music market, which was no different to what the major labels did. Therefore, Dojo City could be considered just another Brill Building model in the Thai popular-music industry where, provided one was physically attractive, one could simply walk in and come out with an album.

Even though Bakery still launched indie artists who produced their works following the indie practices, the Dojo City case seems to illustrate how indie accepted the sharing of identities with mainstream music. This process of identity sharing of course occurs in most music industries around the world and is not unique to the Thai popular-music industry. Conclusively, following the value theory of Laclau and Mouffe, that 'all values are values of opposition and are defined only by their difference' [1985], shared identities could decrease the differentiation [Kruse, 1993]. Thus, when indie music, in the Major Return era,

became homogenized, indie music's value supposedly degenerated. However, according to the proof of indie status in Thai popular-music society in the previous section, indie music and its culture still remained and continued to receive high acceptance in society during the Major Return. This could be described as a result of symbolic capital. Indie music and its culture was able to preserve its symbolic capital, attention and prestige in Thai society, as discussed above. The symbolic capital became a crucial source of power, convincing people to believe that everything branded 'indie' was worth consuming. Therefore, the 'indie' word can be analysed as a tool for both major and independent labels to use for taking advantage of its symbolic capital value.

All of the above serves to illustrate the indie picture as a whole in the Major Return period. It can be seen that, even though the indie community was able to dramatically grow and become widely acceptable, it inevitably confronted the problem of blending identities. In the next section, I will move to the other side of the Thai popular-music industry, the one always judged as the dark side in terms of creativity: the major labels.

The Major Labels in the Major Return Era

Since the financial crisis of 1997 across Asia, and especially in Thailand, every business was impacted to some extent with financial problems and the major labels in Thailand were no exception. Only two of the major labels in Thailand survived and operate their business today, Grammy and RS. Thus, during the Major Return period, it can be stated that mainstream Thai popular-music market was a duopoly.

Even though the number of rivals in the market dramatically declined, it was not so easy for the companies to run since the business situation of the two major labels had inescapably fluctuated not only with the economic recession but also with the advance of technology, which influenced consumer behaviour. The major labels, to endure in the business, had to apply new strategies for gaining profit. Plus, the direction of music consumption around the world has been changed due to the effects of MP3 technology, the Internet and file-sharing [Garofalo, 1999; Lam and Tan, 2001]. Hence, the major labels in Thailand essentially had to reinvent themselves to survive in the business. During the Major Return, the record companies could not hope for continued revenue from album sales, since MP3 technology and the file-sharing on the Internet had expanded their popularity all over the world including, of course, Thailand. The following graph depicts the evidence of this circumstance. The graph presents information on Grammy's music revenue from 2002 to 2006. The information is provided by the Grammy annual report.

Grammy Music Revenue Structure from 2002 to 2006

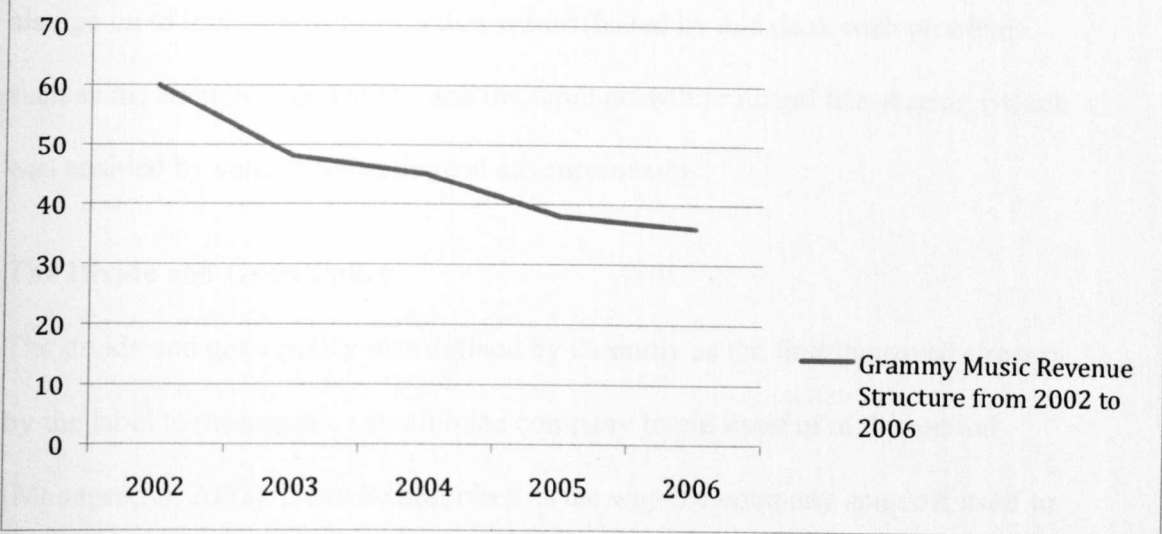


Figure 4.3 *Grammy Music Lower Case from 2002 to 2006*

The graph shows Grammy suffered a clear decline. Accordingly, the major labels in this period could not function solely as record labels. Thus, Grammy and RS modified themselves to be entertainment companies by increasingly integrating other cultural industries which could support their business, including magazine publishing, newspaper publishing, film companies and so on. This resulted in various strategies being applied in the music business which inevitably influenced artists and popular music in Thailand.

Both major labels remained standardized in terms of music production, continuing the ‘assembly line’ from the Pop Era, although some practices such as the ‘basic standard’ of artists or the producing process could be seen to have disappeared somewhat as a result of the Indie Phenomenon. Thus, in the following passages, I will not concentrate on a critique of the music-producing line or the standardization of popular music from the major labels; instead, the methods the

labels exploited to retain their business in the industry against the difficulties of the economy and changing music consumer behaviour will be determined. I will also go on to look at how most artists were affected by and dealt with problems such as the economic downturn, and the rapid growth in illegal file-sharing (which was enabled by various technological advancements).

The Divide and Grow Policy

The divide and grow policy was defined by Grammy as the first improved strategy by the label to manage the situation the company found itself in in this period [Manager(A), 2002]. It can be described as the way the company spun off itself to create a number of small labels, most of them under the control of Grammy, while the company acted as a shareholder in some (this of course echoes the strategies described by Negus in his *Music Genres and Corporate Culture*, 1999). Although Grammy was the first to apply this policy in the Thai popular-music business, RS followed suit. From 1998 to 2005, Grammy and RS operated almost 20 small labels and over 10 small labels, respectively, in their companies [Manager(A), 2002]. The major labels clarified that the reason for spinning off the companies was that the growth of the companies, with the result of listing the companies on a stock exchange, had increased every year; furthermore, the companies desired to establish a niche market by using market segmentation. Market segmentation helps content providers to segregate individual markets by following the individual desire of the customer; the providers can then more easily reach a specific target group [Dickson and Ginter, 1987]. To reach these individual targets, the major companies created separate subsidiary labels to supply specific music genres, including rock, pop, dance, alternative and, of course, indie, to specific audiences. Therefore, each small label in the major record companies generally produced

their works in their own particular approach (again, this is very akin to the strategy which Negus outlines in his seminal work). For example, Grammy, More Music and RPG responded to the rock market while Grammy Grand and Green Bean focused on easy-listening music [Manager(A), 2002]. The major labels calculated that this method could be used to somewhat stimulate increased revenue from consumers sometimes reluctant to consume music from the major labels, given that they did not represent what they preferred. To support this idea, looking at Damrongchaaiitham's interview in Manager 360 Degree, a business magazine in Thailand, we can see that, if one is a big fan of rock, one might not be comfortable buying a CD from Grammy, which also provides pop dance music through exactly the same label as it does rock music. Instead, the consumer will be more likely to purchase a rock album under other small labels, recognized in the market as rock labels, regardless of whether the music is actually produced under the control of Grammy [Manager, 1999]. Consequently, a divide and grow policy occurred as one of the important strategies in the Major Return period.

Another significant point occurred as a consequence of the policy. When the major record companies divided into many small labels, it was necessary to assign a managing director to each label. The major companies had a vision about the selection process and both Grammy and RS certainly developed a similar practice in mainly choosing managers to respond to these small labels by selecting from capable artists, backed up by a producing team and producers who had been well known and had been working with the major labels for a long time. The major companies had a vision about the choosing process as these people, chosen as managers in the subsidiary companies, were the excellent intellectual personnel of

the companies. Hence, the major labels seemingly rewarded these artists and producers by provided them with the chance to step up into a higher position; simultaneously, the major labels could deter them from moving to their rival labels [Manager(B), 2002].

However, the transition from a creative position to a management position had the potential to generate a degree of conflict between creativity and commerce. Negus, in his book *Popular Music in Theory*, describes the commonplace belief on the conflict between creativity and commerce as follows:

The idea of a conflict between creativity and commerce has also been used to illustrate the power of the music industry and has informed numerous everyday claims about how musician 'sell out' to the system. On one side are the heroes -the musicians, producers and performers (the creative artists); opposing them are the villains- record companies and entertainment corporations (the commercial corrupters and manipulators). [Negus, 1996:46]

Whilst Negus himself does not align himself with this point of view, the notion of such a conflict is crucial in the study of the Thai popular-music industry. I suggest that, when the major labels recruited artists who were already well established in the Thai entertainment industry to manage their subsidiary companies, these artists were inevitably confronted with the difficulty of balancing their creative and administrative roles.

Creative artists usually acted in opposition to the major labels. However, when the creative side was turned on itself to become its own rival, this became difficult. In the Thai popular music industry during the Major Return era, it could possibly be achieved in a few cases as well as being unsuccessful in others. Since the major

companies selected these artists and producers to operate the small labels from their work experience and their fame, mainly accumulated from their creative ability, these artists and producers admittedly encountered difficulties in management. There were two essential problems for this group of artists and producers in operating the small labels. First, they were amateurs in business management and, second, they were somewhat hesitant or confused about the balance between commerce and creativity, or, indeed, themselves as both artists and managers. A`dsa`nee Chootikun, a famous artist and producer who became managing director of More Music in Grammy, gave an interview to *Manager 360 Degree* magazine in July 2002 under the topic 'Music Entrepreneur 2002'. Being a manager was a difficult decision for him, as he could not perceive himself as having the ability to operate a business. Even though Grammy had sent a supporting team to help and teach him business methods, he always felt oppressed by his position. As an artist, the most essential idea for him was to create good quality music and earn the respect and applause of the audience. On the contrary, as a manager, his thoughts necessarily had to be led by generating revenue and profit for the company [Manager(B), 2002]. In the end, Chootikun is one of only a few cases of creative artists successfully turning to business and running a subsidiary company. Even though the major companies recognized the likelihood of there being a problem and supplied a business-support team, not everyone did as well as Chootikun. Thus, in mid-2005, Grammy slashed its subsidiary companies from almost 20 to just six labels, as did RS [Daily, 2005].

Anyone can be a Singer

In the meantime, Damrongchaiitham tries to solve the problem of the music business which has been his main income. He realizes that the purchasing

power of his regular customers has decreased. As such, it is impossible to sell 1 million copies per album like in the past. Instead, Phaaiboon uses a new, yet simple strategy. He increases the number of albums launched in each year while limiting (or even reducing) the production budget and the promotion cost. Within this strategy, he is able to launch 100 albums a year, instead of 20. [Tavarayuth(C), 2010]

This statement is part of a 2002 interview with Phaiiboon Damronchaaitham, the owner of Grammy, in the *Manager 360 Degree* magazine, on the topic 'I am the richest man on the Thai Stock Exchange' [Manager(C), 2002]. The article depicted another strategy that Grammy chose during the Major Return period to generate revenue for the company, which was increasing the number of albums available. This new strategy emerged in accordance with the market segmentation method and the divide and grow policy. During the Major Return, despite Damronchaaitham's reference to 100 albums a year, in fact, according to the annual reports of the company during this time, the average number of albums launched by Grammy was around 200 per year [Grammy Annual Report from 2002 to 2006]. The rapid growth in the number of albums significantly influenced a couple issues in this period: first, it limited the amount of time spent on the producing process; and, second, it resulted in problems in terms of promotion and an overflow of artists.

The Limits of Time in the Producing Process

In order to increase the number of albums, the producing teams reduced the duration of time spent on producing each album. The time taken in producing an album in the previous period, from the Pop Era to the Indie Phenomenon, was normally eight to 12 months from when the artist was assigned and the producing team started to work; however, this was reduced to only about three months per

album and sometimes just one to two months for famous artists [Manager(B), 2002; Manager(C), 2002]. Thus, the duration for producing in an album was approximately one-quarter of what it had been in the previous era. This rapid change directly affected the producing process and drew in the use of BTS and the ‘hybrid BTO’.

According to Chapter 2, in the Pop Era, the BTO system was used to explain how the major labels worked on their products, the artists, to produce an album.

Afterwards, in the Major Return, other processes were introduced; these were Build to Stock (BTS) and a ‘hybrid Build to Order’. First, as mentioned in Chapter 2, BTS is an approach referring to products built before the final customer had been identified and produced in high volume [Parry and Graves, 2008]. In this period, the rapidly increasing number of albums forced the producing teams to find ways to handle this situation. Therefore, songwriters and producers created a stock of ‘song-lists’. Songs, in the previous era, were composed when the producing team was informed by a board of directors regarding the singer for the album and what style the companies wanted to launch; the BTO process would then be started. Afterwards, since the length of producing time was negatively correlated with the increased number of albums, the producing team wrote and composed songs and stored them in stock as a ready-to-use ‘song list’. When the artist was sent to the producing team, the ‘song list’ could then be used to reduce the time for composing, as the team picked out songs which matched the orders from the company and the recording process could then start. Conversely, when the producing team came up with a new project album, where everything was on set (including songs, clothes, concept and even the promoting team) and the only

missing piece was the artist, then the company would take action by searching for someone to fill in the missing part. I will provide an example of the BTS process in the major labels during the Major Return period from my direct experience.

When I was working as a freelance vocalist for Grammy from 2002 to 2005, I was once asked for assistance from one of the producing team in the company to find four boys in order to fill a boy band project. The project demanded four boys who were very good looking, were excellent dancers, good singers and aged between 17 and 20. The producing team strongly emphasized that this project was extremely urgent since everything was ready and now only needed the singers to sing. In the event, I was not the one to find a boy band. Nonetheless, the project took only one and a half months to launch the album from when the four boys signed the contract with the label. This BTS process persuaded me to re-confirm the assembly-line theory of Adorno. Whilst Adorno's work places much emphasis upon the notion of rational standardization and the assembly-line metaphor, these ideas were also qualified by the belief that the production of popular songs still remained at the handicraft stage. That is, composers were not simply technicians but instead individuals faced with the pressure of conforming to recognized formula and patterns which would appeal to a commercial market [Adorno, 1990]. Whilst I would argue that Adorno's notion of the handicraft stage rings true, I would also suggest that the adoption of the BTS policy by major labels in Thailand led to standardization in the production of music to an extent that was in fact not dissimilar from that of the production of motor cars or cereals. Although a song could acceptably be perceived as a handicraft, it was in fact no different to a cereal-production machine; the songs were produced as goods and waited for

filling (i.e. the artists), as the machine belt carried the package onwards to the producing teams.

In addition to BTS, which was applied in the producing process to deal with the time limits on producing an album, another process called 'hybrid BTO' also arose in this period. 'Hybrid BTO' is a composite of the characteristics of BTO and BTS [Holweg and Pil, 2001]. When artists are chosen by the major labels for investment, some were admitted to the BTS process, while a number entered the 'hybrid BTO' process. 'Hybrid BTO' is where some of the songs were selected from a ready-to-use 'song list' and the rest were newly composed when the singer had already met and talked to the producing team. The producing team analysed the artists in terms of their habits, personalities, taste in food, music and movies and had them writing about their daily activities for the team [Manager(A), 2002]. After that, the producing team gathered together the artists' story and their characteristics in order to compose new songs to suit them, adding these into the album along with the songs chosen from the stock. There was no explicit criteria as to who would be designed by BTS or by the 'hybrid BTO', since this depended on the satisfaction of both the producing team and the board of directors. If both agreed that the album could be launched with only songs from the stock, the 'hybrid BTO' was not required, but if they could not perceive the hit songs being in that album, 'hybrid BTO' would probably be necessary. Again, I will explore the 'hybrid BTO' process from my own experience.

In 2001, I was in the producing team behind Kanlajaakoon Naa'gso'mpho'b's album. She was a Grammy artist and winner of the *Phræw Magazine* supermodel

competition in 2000. She was sent to the producing team and was designed by the producer and the company, it being decided that her album would be produced in a pop-rock style. After that, the producer in the album asked for the 'song list' and chose a number of songs, approximately 30, getting Naa`gso`mpho`b to try to sing them. Then, when the producer was able to roughly designate which were to be put in the album I, as a vocal guide (details in Chapter 2), was committed to sing the chosen songs and to give them to Naa`gso`mpho`b to practice before the recording process began. After the rough recording process was done, the producer attended the meeting with the committees of the company. As a result, the committees demanded new songs for promotion, as they were not satisfied with the songs from the stock list. Therefore, Naa`gso`mpho`b was requested by the producing team to write her diary and talk about herself to the songwriting team who would then compose new songs for her.

Both the BTS and 'hybrid BTO' formations were frequently used in the major labels' production process, while BTO was only occasionally observed during the Major Return period since it was a time-eater. However, it should be noted that there were a number of artists who were not particularly involved with the BTO, BTS and 'hybrid BTO' formations. This group of artists includes those able to write and compose songs themselves. They were allowed to take care of the whole process of producing their own album, producing songs, recording, mixing and mastering. Later, the master copy would be sent to the company, and then the company would pass the artist to the promoting process [Manager(A), 2002]. Nevertheless, this group of artists is usually considered to be rock and indie music artists, who were rare cases in the major-label rosters [Manager(B), 2002].

Moreover, their authority to produce the album was not entirely independent of corporate control: such a group was still partly restricted by the hit-song formula required by the company [Jamie, 2010]. As a result, the majority of the artists from the major labels were regularly involved with BTS and 'hybrid BTO' due to influence from the increasing number of albums and the new strategies of the labels in the period.

The Promotional Problem and the Overflow of Artists

The second problem, which followed from the increased number of albums, was the fall in the promotional budget and the overload of artists. These two complications cannot be separately explained, since they are related as a cause and an effect. When the numerous albums from the major labels were proposed by the companies to be released into the Thai popular-music market, the consequence was the rapidly increasing number of artists. The effect of this was a lowered budget for promotion. Although the number of albums increased, the whole budget of the company per year was maintained at the same amount. Therefore, the promotional budget for an album inevitably reduced. Information from the financial departments of both Grammy and RS shows that, during the Pop Era to the Indie Phenomenon, the promotional budget per artist and his/her album was established at around 10,000-20,000 GBP per album; this amount plummeted to about 2,000-6,000 GBP per album (1GBP=45 BHT) in the Major Return period. The allocation of the promotional budget was based upon the popularity of the artists themselves and the predicted album sales, meaning that better-recognized artists often received significantly more. Suthera Paweenapakorn, a creative who previously worked as a creative in ID Records, a subsidiary label of RS during

2002 to 2005 and now works in Grammy's Duck Bar Records, gave me an interview on 22 August 2009. The promotional budget was provided by the labels depending on the assumption of how much profit labels could earn from an artist's album [Paweenapakorn, 2009]. What was particularly considered was, first, the reputation of the artists and, second, the audience size according to musical style. Thus, the figure of the promotional budget would be entirely separate for such as if the artists were a 'famous-something' in the entertainment industry or successful artists from a previous album, where the promotional budget was set up at around 6,000 GBP. Moreover, the average new pop or dance artist would have a promotional budget of approximately 4,000 GBP per album. On the other hand, at 'major indie' labels or for new rock bands, the promotional budget was about 2,000 GBP per project [Paweenapakorn, 2009]. Thus, the unequal distribution of the promotional budget to artists based upon popularity and projected sales had a profound influence upon consumer behaviour.

Audience recognition of each artist was reduced as a result of the low promotional budget. In Chapter 2, how major labels use their media power to motivate consumer behaviour was discussed, as one of the consumer-behaviour theories, recognition, was stimulated by the media in order to encourage people to consume their products. By repeatedly exposing the products to the consumer via mass media channels, the consumers would recognize and make their own decision to consume this product rather than one with which they were not familiar [Perner, 1999]. However, in the Major Return period, the reduced promotional budget affected the frequency artists were able to show up in the mass media.

Consequently, artists with a very specific target group, such as 'major indie' or

rock artists, seemingly had less opportunity to promote their works in the mass media than did the pop or dance artists, who normally consisted of the 'basic standard' criteria of major-label artists; already famous, good looking and young. Hence, even though there were a large number of artists launching their works during the Major Return period – and it was probably perceived that the opportunity to be a singer in a major label was dramatically increased – in fact, the major labels maintained their concentration on 'basic standard' artists, who were not greatly different to those of the Pop Era. At the same time, whilst subsidiary companies were confronted with the problem of vying for airtime, of competing amongst themselves, the companies themselves profited greatly from this competition. This was due to the fact that the resources used to promote artists and their music (television and radio programmes as well as magazines) were owned and controlled by major labels themselves. This can be seen as cannibalization.

Cannibalization is a marketing strategy and can be described as a multiple-brand strategy. When a company launches products similar to other products in its company in order to expand the target group, the new product might affect the sales volume of those pre-existing products. However, according to the cannibalization strategy, even though those products, new and old, must compete and share the market within the same company, this is still more advantageous to the company than launching a different product and competing with other companies in the market [Mason and Milne, 1994]. To study the cannibalization strategy, I will look into the business model of Grammy. As mentioned above, Grammy divided itself into almost 20 small labels during the Major Return period, since Grammy decided to increase its market share by building a specific brand to

directly approach the right target [Manager, 1999]. The company decided to provide a variety of music genres which would cater for and appeal to diverse tastes and as many types of listeners as possible. Even though there were different musical genres available from each subsidiary label of Grammy, however, all shared the same category of music product. In such a competition, one way or another, some subsidiary labels would lose sales while others would gain; however, all the benefits would come to Grammy. Thus, separating the subsidiary labels and increasing the number of artists and albums was used to generate profits for the major labels and assist them in managing their music business, regardless of whether their strategies could cause difficulties for their artists, as alluded to above.

Artists as a Cultural Commodity

Apart from the recession, the Thai popular-music market encountered the development of the Internet and the emergence of MP3 technology as happened in the West. The MP3, described by Reebee Garofalo as a ‘software compression format that provides near-CD-quality, downloadable audio over the Internet.’ [Garofalo, 1999], began expanding in popularity in the late 1990s, since songs could easily be uploaded to the Internet and easily downloaded and shared with an innumerable number of people [Lam and Tan, 2001]. In the Thai popular-music business, from the beginning of 2000 to the present, this MP3 market has been the most significant rival to the Thai popular-music companies, since it has had a huge impact on album sales in both major labels and independent labels. Additionally, not only is there the problem of illegal downloading of MP3s using the Internet, but also an illegal MP3-selling business has emerged and continues to operate. At

the beginning of the 2000s, illegal companies have copied songs from both major labels and indies in MP3 format onto CD-ROMs without the permission of the original labels, selling them to the consumer at only about 2GBP per CD (1GBP=50 BHT). This illegal business has regularly been found in IT Centres all over the country. The biggest and most well-known market for illegal MP3s as well as pirated computer software, is the IT mall called Pantip Plaza. The Pantip Plaza Building is located in Petchaburi Road in Bangkok. In the seven-floor building, there are computer retailers, IT service shops and, of course, illegal MP3 movies and computer software. The whole second floor of the building is well known as a treasure house of MP3s.

The success of the illegal MP3 business in Thailand during the Major Return can be seen from how it affected the major labels. In 2002, the major labels in Thailand could not ignore the impact of the illegal MP3 business and fought back by generating events that encouraged people to consume the legal product and educated the consumer on intellectual property rights. During this time, the two major labels, in co-operation with the government, arranged a number of events. The main activities were selling CDs from the major labels at lower than half the price of the normal market price, as well as concerts with their artists [Manager(D), 2002]. Moreover, there was a campaign by high-profile artists to discourage the purchasing and downloading of illegally obtained music. Indeed, many did this by composing songs which were implicitly concerned with piracy. For example, See`gsa`n Su`gphi`maaj, known as Sek Loso, composed and released a single called 'Pantip' to rail against the illegal MP3s [Manager(E), 2002]. Unfortunately, although the song earned very successful feedback and reached

number one in many radio charts in Thailand, the MP3 illegal business still remains today.

Grammy has realized that consumer behaviour has changed since 2000; thus, an e-commerce business by Grammy was established as eotoday.com [Manager, 2000]. The website eotoday.com was established in 2000 and it contains songs, artists' profiles, and live chat with artists and news from the company. Grammy expected that this website would be able to be a new community for the popular-music audience and grasp some market share back from the illegal download and MP3 business. In addition, the company estimated that revenue from this website would come from advertisement banners on the web page rather than from downloaded songs in the website which, at that time, had not been launched due to issues with the payment system and management [Manager, 2000]. This was unsuccessful; eotoday.com was discontinued in 2003 since it could not solve the problem of MP3s and did not generate the revenue expected [Manager, 2003].

Along with eotoday.com, Grammy started to invest in the ringtone download business, since the mobile phone market in Thailand had grown from 5 million units in 2001 to 10 million units in a year [Manager, 2003]. Grammy invested in the ringtone business in 2001 and could generate 50,000 downloads in the first month of the business while, by the end of the year, downloads increased to 3 million units [Manager, 2003]. As a consequence, Grammy became intensely successful in the ringtone business, with the company perceiving that downloading a complete song from a mobile would generate more profit than album sales since, at that time, people had started to listen to the music via their mobile and MP3

player [Manager, 2003]. Further details about downloading MP3s from a music library provided by the major companies will be discussed in the last chapter.

Since MP3 technology expanded in Thailand, popular-music audiences have been pleased to pay the same prices to buy an MP 3 CD, with more than 130 songs from various artists on one CD, rather than only 12 songs found on a major label's audio CD. Paweenapakorn explains that, since album sales were so dramatically affected by the MP3 explosion, album sale figures have been going down a little every year, meaning nobody can expect that launching albums will continue to generate significant revenue [Paweenapakorn, 2009]. Of course, this is a problem which may be regarded as a global one. Therefore, small subsidiary labels in the major companies have not been concentrating on sales figures and aiming at releasing albums but rather at passing artists on to other entertainment industry lines [Paweenapakorn, 2009]. From the early 2000s, the manufacturing of albums declined from six figures to five, while sales figures were dramatically reduced to around 50,000 albums per artist [Paweenapakorn, 2009]. As a result, the promotional team are now associated with the producing team in order to plan how the artists could be sold into other entertainment lines, as presenters of goods, the film industry and television, after their albums were released [Paweenapakorn, 2009]. Once again, this group of artists have usually been those who had reached the 'basic standard' of the major labels and were well supported by the major companies. Thus, those artists who could be in no other entertainment business but the music industry have found life particularly difficult again.

Conclusion

The Major Return era was one in which the Thai popular-music industry encountered many problems (such as the economic crisis and illegal file-sharing), and one in which both major and independent labels met with various financial difficulties. Although the net profit of the major labels increased annually, the music sector within the companies did not contribute to this increase. In order to reduce or avoid the risk of profit loss in the music sector, the companies retained the same practices in producing artists as those employed throughout the Pop Era. This meant that standardization and the assembly-line process remained prevalent in the Thai popular-music industry. In addition, strategies such the ‘divide and grow’ policy and an ‘anyone can be a singer’ policy were introduced and adopted by large music companies in the hope of financial gain and remedying the problems brought on by technological advancements and the economic crisis.

The indie music scene, on the other hand, declined dramatically in popularity after the end of the Indie Phenomenon era. At the same time, the community which emerged as a result of it continued to flourish and developed into what has been termed the ‘indie culture’ in Thailand. Moreover, the term ‘indie’ itself became a sort of brand which was used to add value to other cultural commodities, such as books, magazines, films or even music from major labels (a value which most often was merely the result of symbolic capital rather than intrinsic qualities).

Although the Major Return era was purportedly one in which individuals with true musical ability had a greater chance of becoming enlisted by major labels, ultimately these artists were subjected to the same business practices as had

typified the preceding era. The next chapter will deal with various other repercussions from the problems encountered by the Thai popular-music industry, how they altered the nature of the industry itself, how the largest corporations essentially became content providers (as they could no longer profit from album sales) and how they turned to creating a celebrity culture in Thailand in order to boost consumption.

Notes

¹ The Kasikorn Research Centre is a subsidiary company of the Kasikorn Bank Group.

² Information from the official website of Click Radio Company:
<http://thisisclick.com/main/company.php>

³ The Thai government's tobacco monopoly business called Thailand Tobacco Monopoly, which operated under Ministry of Finance.

Chapter 5: Time for Celebrity and a New Business Model

In the new millennium, the influence of the advance of technologies such as MP3s and the Internet on the popular-music business around the world has been discussed widely among music scholars and experts on the music business [Garofalo, 1999; Lam and Bernard, 2001; Jones, 2002]. Major labels apparently cannot expect to generate major revenue from album sales since online communities, for instance MySpace, Facebook and YouTube, have become an alternative channel for artists, both amateur and professional, to present and sell their work. The convenience of the Internet encourages artists to build their own channel for broadcasting and launching their work. These circumstances seemingly lead to the idea that audiences can explore music by themselves, while artists themselves are able to communicate directly with their audiences and cut out the middleman, in this case the major labels [Kretschmer, 2001]. Even though the advance of technology and the growth of online communities cannot suddenly change the popular-music business and make the major labels disappear [Connolly and Krueger, 2006], it cannot be denied that the negotiation and controlling power of major labels has been profoundly challenged on a global scale. The evidence of this can be seen in the case of Madonna, who abandoned her long-term record company, Warner Music, and signed with Live Nation in 2007 [http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/media/article2636261.ece]. Thus, when artists have their own channels to promote and perform their work and can directly communicate with their target audiences, the traditional activities of the major record company – such as sourcing new talent, producing recordings, manufacturing a physical product, promoting the artist, distributing the product and finally generating revenue from the record and artists [Kretschmer,

2001] – may need to be modified. Peter Gabriel, the former lead vocalist of Genesis, appeared on BBC News Online on 14 July 2008 and gave an interview about record labels, saying the following:

There's still room for record companies but they should reinvent themselves as a service industry and not as owners. [...] The structure of the old album and waiting for that to be finished still has some merit but you can do a lot of other things and I think it should be a lot looser and mixed up. [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/7505108.stm>]

While the global direction of the popular-music business has been altered, it is illuminating to study how the Thai popular-music industry is handling this global change. The previous chapter described how this sector operated after the decline of the Indie Phenomenon and the economic recession in Asia. The chapter initially described how major labels encountered the difficulty of running their business under the pressure of MP3 technology and changing consumer behaviour. In this chapter, the impact of technology, extending from the previous chapter, and the changing role in the operations of major record companies will be the areas of focus.

Since 2000, Thai people have become increasingly familiar with the Internet, and its penetration has increased. However, in 2009, the estimated percentage of Internet users as a proportion of the population in Thailand was still only 20.1 [National Statistic Office of Thailand, 2009]. For comparison, the estimated percentages of Internet users in Europe and the US are 61.8 and 50.4, respectively [International Telecommunication Union, 2010]. Hence, although some artists have attempted to promote their work via technology and online communities, uploading their songs to their personal blog or MySpace page and building their

own online community, in doing so they can only reach a relatively small group of people. This is a clear advantage for major labels in Thailand, since their power to negotiate in the music business can be sustained whilst Internet usage remains restricted to a small number of people. Therefore, even though the power of major record labels at this present time in the West has been questioned, I argue that major labels in Thailand still maintain their power to control both artists and the popular-music market. Additionally, as referred to in the previous chapter, there is an attempt by the major labels to solve problems such as the limits of time in the production and promotional processes by creating artists through idol-making television programmes. Nevertheless, this introduces another issue for the Thai popular-music industry, namely a celebrity culture. In this chapter, I will address two main topics. First, how are celebrities created, why are they created and how do they influence the popular-music industry in Thailand? Second, is it true that major labels in Thailand can retain their power? If so, then how will they go about this?

After the Indie Phenomenon, the two major record companies in Thailand spun off their companies under the 'divide and grow' policy, which was intended to support the growth of the companies and to concentrate on niche markets (see Chapter 4). However, this policy entailed problems for production teams, promotional teams and also artists. The number of albums released dramatically increased, as well as the number of artists around, which meant that the time spent on producing and promoting music was reduced. This could be seen as a significant problem for the major record labels in Thailand, since the majority of their artists have been selected from 'basic standard', fame and appearance-based criteria (see Chapter 2

p.106). Even though most major artists, during the late 1990s to the present, have possessed one common characteristic in that they are good-looking people, it cannot be said that they were previously really famous in the Thai entertainment business. Some of them may be recognized as a model, having appeared in some advertisements or on magazine covers and music videos, but they are not the same as the artists in the Pop Era, who were already outstandingly famous actors or actresses in the entertainment business before they got involved in the music business (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, as the 'assembly line' has remained active in the Thai popular-music industry, consumer recognition for artists has essentially depended upon the media. Thus, cutting costs in terms of promotion and duration of promoting has unavoidably reduced the level of recognition of the consumer, also reducing the working life of this 'basic standard' artist. However, in late 2003 and mid-2004, the emergence of two television programmes – *The Star* and *Academy Fantasia* – could probably be seen as a resolution from major labels to solve the above problems.

In late 2003, Exact Company, a subsidiary of Grammy, launched *The Star* on Channel 9, a free-to-air television channel. The programme is very similar to pop idol shows in the West, such as *American Idol* and *X Factor*, in which the competitors essentially compete based on singing talent. They are chosen by the judges based on auditions, assessed by commentators on a weekly show, do various activities with other competitors during the week, practice and perform the show at the weekend and are then judged by popular vote from the audiences. However, there are some details that make *The Star* different. The competitors are selected from approximately 20,000 contestants around the country and only eight

people go through to the final round. Afterwards, all of them stay in the same house from the beginning of the season until the end, with one being voted out of the competition each week. The contestants are not allowed to communicate with anyone outside the house during the competition unless they get permission from the programme. During the week, the contestants have activities together in the house, including singing classes, acting classes and dancing classes, preparing for their performance on the Saturday night. *The Star* broadcasts via a free show lasting only about twenty minutes from Monday to Friday, reporting on the interesting activities and significant events that happened in the house each day. The Saturday night live performance is on air for almost three hours. Finally, a one-hour programme on Sunday announces the contestant who has received the lowest number of votes and has to leave the competition.

On the performance night, the candidates perform a song different for each one, with the theme for each week being assigned by the production team, and then they receive comments from Phe'd Mars, a famous Grammy producer, Aɔɔnna'phaa Kri'dsadii, a supermodel and fashion guru, and Su'thiisa'g Pha'gdiitheewaa, a distinguished choreographer. Ten percent of the votes used to decide the week's loser come from the audiences in the Saturday live performance concert and the rest from the audiences who watch the show on television and vote by SMS [<http://thestar.gmember.com>]. The winner, the first runner-up and the second runner-up will be signed by Grammy for five years, while the other five competitors will be signed for one year with Grammy. From the first season of *The Star* until the present, the programme has had seven seasons and there have been 56 artists signed through this idol show.

After *The Star* launched in October 2003, True Corporation Public Company Limited launched a similar programme, *True Academy Fantasia*, on the UBC cable television channel, which was re-named True Vision in 2007. *True Academy Fantasia*, known as *AF* in Thailand, is a franchise of a famous reality television programme in Mexico, *La Academia* [<http://af.truelife.com>]. *AF* generally selects the contestants from live auditions in the same way as *The Star*, and audition by clips was added in season four. Most of the competition formats in *AF* are similar to those of *The Star*, with all of the competitors staying at the same house, a singing competition, classes and activities during the week, performances on Saturday night and the elimination of the lowest-scoring competitor in each week. Nevertheless, they have slight differences. First, there are between 12 and 20 finalists on *AF*. Second, audiences can vote only via SMS through the True mobile network. Finally, *AF* broadcasts 24 hours a day and seven days a week, showing the real life of the contestants through hidden cameras in their house. Therefore, whereas audiences can only watch highlights of *The Star* each day, heavily edited by the production team, people who pay for True cable television can consume *AF* all day long. *AF* was shown on free-to-air television from season 3 (2006) to season 7. The programme has daily highlights on Channel 9 for about 15 minutes from Monday to Friday, an hour on Sunday and the whole live concert on Saturday [<http://af.truelife.com>].

AF initially began as a way to recruit actors, actresses and MCs for the True cable television channel. However, after the great success of the first season of *AF*, True decided to invest in this television programme as a channel for creating stars for the wider entertainment business [Nunthasukol (A), 2005]. Moreover, six of the

finalists of the first season of *AF* were signed as artists and released their solo albums with Grammy as a result of the cooperation between Grammy and True. That said, only Poonsa'g Ra'dtana'phon can be considered to be a truly successful singer, in terms of his album sales, hit songs on popular radio charts and awards¹ [Aekprathumchai, 2005]. After *AF* season two ended, UBC established its own record label called UBC Fantasia, later changed to True Fantasia in 2007, in order to manage and produce albums for their contestants instead of transferring them to Grammy [Aekprathumchai, 2005].

Both *The Star* and *AF* have been extraordinary successes and are extremely popular television programmes, especially *AF*, which is always mentioned in the mass media as the number-one reality show [Muanmart, 2008]. The popularity of the shows can be observed from the increasing number of contestants and the total votes of the audiences for *AF*. From 2004 to 2010, seasons one to seven, the number of contestants in the first round audition has increased from 13,000 to around 25,000, while the SMS votes from the audiences have increased from 9 million to 14 million [<http://af.truelife.com>]. The competition has commonly been promoted as a pathway for those who dream of being a star, who have talent and seek the opportunity to be involved in the music business as an artist. This idea is presented to the audience in the epigrams of both *The Star* and *AF* as 'Kon Fah Kua Dao' ('Seeking the Sky Finding Stars') and 'Patibad Karn Lah Fan' ('Dream Chasing'). Furthermore, it is not only the contestants who can follow the dream and make it a reality, but also the format enables the audience to get involved in choosing their favourite artists as, every week at the beginning of the Saturday live

performance, the host of the shows will repeatedly announce that ‘this is a moment that the Thai people will choose their star’.

However, among the finalists who finally step into the popular-music industry, only a few are successful and frequently appear after the programme ends. Thus, we have to ask why the artists who emerged from these idol shows such as *The Star* and *AF* cannot sustain their fame when the programme is done. Does this idol show really discover and generate talented artists or is it in fact just another tool, which is set up by major labels to prepare the fame for their artists before sending them to the ‘assembly line’? To examine the questions above, I will draw the argument into two parts. First, I argue that the idol shows in Thailand can be categorized as reality shows and, although they generally claim to be seeking a talented artist or increasing the chances for people who have a dream, in fact they intentionally generate a celebrity rather than a talented star. Second, such programmes encourage major record labels and capitalists to take advantage of the popularity of the competitors by using it to solve the problem of consumer recognition.

The Idol Show: Celebrity Factory

The ‘celebrity’ has been an interesting topic to discuss among scholars in media and cultural studies, business and music. Daniel Boorstin’s definition is the most popular description of celebrity: ‘The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness’ [1961:15]. For Boorstin, celebrity has emerged to respond to the need for ‘human greatness’. Celebrities have individualized themselves and differentiated themselves from others by presenting their personality and personal

life rather than their quality or their professional skill. Therefore, their development in fame has become a triviality [Boorstin, 1961]. To support Boorstin's idea of celebrity, Graeme Turner's book *Understanding Celebrity* shows that, nowadays, celebrities have frequently appeared in the media and are normally derived from the sport or entertainment industries. Crucially, a celebrity has drawn attention to her/his private life rather than to her/his skill or her/his specialist knowledge [2004]. Moreover, as a celebrity becomes interesting as s/he appears frequently in the public eye, a 'gossip game' is created, since s/he becomes a topic for chatting among people in the society. This 'gossip game' can be explained in that the celebrity is able to attract people with her/his rumours, focusing on both her/his good and bad sides, while people can gossip about her/him as a third person without considering the consequences [Franck and Nuesh, 2007]. The increasing number of reality shows, such as Big Brother or Survivor, in television culture these days has therefore created a new kind of celebrity [Turner, 2004].

A significant conceit in reality shows is that 'real' things are happening [Turner, 2006] and that what the audience is watching is real. Therefore, to make them appear 'real', the ordinariness of the people involved is implied in the show [Franck and Nuesh, 2007]. The contestants in reality shows are basically ordinary people with different backgrounds, looking for a change and a better life [Franck and Nuesh, 2007]. Such contestants build their fame on their personal life, which has been watched and judged by the audience, and, in order to win the competition, they accept being changed by the experts or by following the rules of the competition. Finally, the one who can best adjust her/himself to the realm of

the show will be rewarded with a better life and fame [Franck and Nuesh, 2007; Palmer, 2003]. Therefore, the reality shows locate the idea of celebrity in the media, since their fame derives ultimately from people's interest in the media, meaning that, after the show is done, most of them are gone. In the case of *The Star* and *AF* in Thailand, the programmes are often considered talent shows, as the competitors have to compete with each other by singing. However, I argue that *The Star* and *AF* can be classified as a combination of reality and talent show.

There is no question that *AF* is a reality show, since it is promoted by the company as a reality show, not least because the show broadcasts 24 hours a day and seven days a week. For *The Star*, even though the show does not broadcast constantly like *AF*, it is in a sense a reality show, because it is not only talent highlighted in the programme, but also the personal background of the contestants is involved in the competition. For example, in the first week, the show airs sections (around eight minutes per person) about the lives of the finalists. In this section, the finalist will talk about his/her life and friends in the past, what he/she would like to be in the future, why he/she decided to come on the show and explain how it feels to be a finalist. The programmes often end with a rather sensationalist segment which reveals the trials and tribulations each contestant faces in their private lives (e.g. financial difficulty etc. etc.). Although both shows are based on singing contests, the format and approach are different to the old-fashioned singing contests in Thailand, where the winner was judged by professional singers or musicians basically on their ability to sing and perform on the day of the competition. When *The Star* and *AF* emerged, the practice of singing contests in Thailand was modified. Even though both refrain from positioning themselves in the media as a

singing contest and always replace the word ‘singing’ with ‘star’ or ‘dream’, they inevitably accept that the main task the contestants have to accomplish each week is a singing performance. Additionally, whilst the programmes are purportedly interested in qualities beyond singing ability, when giving feedback the judges seem most concerned with the vocal skill of the contestants. Moreover, having watched *The Star* and *AF* by rerunning all episodes of the Saturday and Sunday contests from the first season to the present, I observed that the majority of the competitors state they want to be a singer. The dilemma occurs when a reality programme and a talent show are combined, such as is the case with *The Star* and *AF*, since whilst the format of these programmes is apparently intended to be a singing contest and the ambition of the participants is to be a singer, the primary objective of the programme is to create celebrities in order to support their business. Thus, instead of recruiting the finalists into the programmes on their singing ability (like the former singing contests in Thailand did), both *AF* and *The Star* particularly focus on some criteria of the finalists, such as their physical appearance and their personal characteristics, rather than their vocal or musical skill. Moreover, after the success of the first season of these shows, major corporations such as Grammy and True saw the advantage in these finalists, since they already possess fame and have their own fans. Therefore, signing these finalists to be a major label artist is inevitably perceived as a repetition of the ‘assembly line’ I explained in Chapter 2, when the Thai major labels in the Pop Era concentrated on recruiting their artists from ‘basic standard’, good looks and fame. These television programmes will be examined in order to describe how *AF* and *The Star* create celebrities rather than professional singers into Thai popular music industry, how these created celebrities build their reputation with the

audience and how the finalists from these programmes become a tool of major labels intended to solve the problem of consumer recognition.

From Professional to Ordinary

As mentioned above, there are some contrasts between reality shows and talent shows in that a reality show tends to make ordinary people famous by using the media to present them to the masses, while a talent show seeks someone who possesses some special knowledge or professional skill and the winner gains his/her popularity from that skill. It will be interesting to examine the end product of the combination of singing contest, which can be considered a talent show, and a reality television programme, such as *AF* and *The Star*, a combination I will call a 'reality talent' show in this dissertation.

We will begin by looking at how a reality talent show recruits contestants.

A'dthaphon Na' Baanjchaa'η, Director of Programming at True Vision and Executive Producer of *AF*, usually tells the mass media that the finalists of *AF* have basically been chosen for their interesting characteristics rather than their vocal abilities. Moreover, he has pointed out that *AF* is not a singing contest and not everyone who takes part will be launching his/her own album [Nunthasukol, 2005]. Additionally, Na' Baanjchaa'η has described how finalists on *AF* are ordinary teenagers who need a chance to make their dream come true who, when they step into the programme, will be trained by professionals in dancing, singing and acting, for the sake of improving their skills. Simultaneously, people will watch these contestants closely via the live show and support the contestant who has dedicated him/herself to practicing and shown the biggest signs of

improvement. In this scenario, an ordinary person who has an acceptable level of singing skill, interesting personal characteristics and good appearance, can depict a sense of improvement and encourage audiences to watch the programme, much more than one who already has good skills to start with [Nunthasukol, 2005]. Ultimately, however, this reality talent show cannot deny the fact that the show is about the singing contest, and all of the commentators therefore must concentrate on commenting on singing quality.

Since the finalists must show their moderate singing skills on the singing contest platform, a controversial discussion among the audiences and media has resulted. There have been some critiques from the media and also audiences in online communities during the course of every season about inappropriate finalists who audiences believe should not be in the show, as they cannot even sing. For instance, in the first season of *AF*, *Ki`dti`la`g Cunla`dthiaa`n* was criticized by the commentators in the show, the mass media and online communities, as she had less singing ability and always sang out of tune in her live performance. However, despite this, she stayed on the show for six of the nine weeks of the competition [www.pantip.com/cafe/chalermkrung; Nunthasukol, 2005]. Another example is *Na`wa`ko`dchamon Chyy`nkhro`ngtham*, a finalist of *The Star* season 6. In the Saturday concert of the second week of the programme on 20 March 2010, *Chyy`nkhro`ngtham* received ferocious feedback from *A`onna`phaa Kri`dsadii*, one of the commentators, who stated that she should be anything but a singer. Moreover, *Kri`dsadii* mentioned that *Chyy`nkhro`ngtham* should not even sing again in her life and if *Kri`dsadii* was the only one who had the right to choose the finalists for the show she would not have entertained the idea of choosing

Chyy'nkhrōṅtham. Cunla'dthiiaa'n and Chyy'nkhrōṅtham were two examples of finalists from the 'reality talent' shows who were recognized by the audiences because of their lack of singing ability. Naturally, they were no longer in the music business after their season finished. Their examples serve to illustrate that this reality talent show phenomenon has been established not for seeking talented singers but for making normal people instantly famous, in both positive and negative ways, in order to make the show interesting. This is the first instance to show that these reality talent shows to what extent reduce a quality of being an artist from professional to ordinary and intentionally create celebrities rather than artists into Thai popular music industry.

Another idea supporting the notion that the reality talent show occasionally requires skills of the contestants beyond making them the 'talk of the town' is that everyone needs to be changed. Guy Redden describes in his article *Making Over the Talent Show* that people who get involved with the type of television programme in which the personal lifestyle of the contestants is part of the show will expect to be changed at the end [Redden, 2008]. Additionally, to be the winner, the contestants need to be trained and modified by mentors with specific careers in the industries. The older talent shows basically concentrated on the moment in which the contestants performed, and the prize in such a competition could not promise to change their life. However, the new format, exemplified by *American Idol*, offers a real job in the business [Redden, 2008]. For a high stakes prize, finalists are prepared to completely change their life.

In Thailand, the former singing competition's format had at least three rounds (i.e. first round, semi-final and final). Each round, the contestants would meet the other contestants only on the day of the competition or sometimes they probably met and had some activities together with other competitors a few days before the final round depending on each competition. On the competition day, the contestants would perform their songs (up to two songs depending on the competition) and the judges' role was simply to choose the winner from criteria announced to the public before the competition began, basically meaning singing ability such as singing technique, timbre and performance. The judges would not give any comment on the contestants and the word 'judge' was used in the former singing competition in Thailand rather than 'commentator', which is used in the 'reality talent' show these days. The prize for the winner used to be money and a trophy or a certificate. As the contestants had only a few chances to perform in front of the judges, they passionately and professionally conducted themselves as a singer on the stage in order to win the competition.

Conversely, in the 'reality talent' show, with around twelve weeks of the contest, the finalists have to stay in the same place, learning from the same coaches in the same class, as well as being watched by the audience (all the time in the case of *AF*). What the programmes and also the audience expect of the finalists is driven not only by the Saturday night performance but also by a desire to see some development or some improvement each week [Nunthasukol, 2005]. In addition, in each week of the performance, the finalists will be assigned to sing a song following the theme of the week, for example, rock, dance, Western pop and

Korean pop. Therefore, the finalists have to show a variety of singing skills to the audience and commentators in each live performance.

On both *The Star* and *AF*, there are always three commentators each week. Their roles in the show are to give advice and express their opinion about the finalists' performance. Some of them have a tough character, like the notorious Simon Cowell, and give their comments in a curt manner, often insulting the performance and singing ability, as with A๓๓๓๓'phaa Kri`dsadii and her criticism of Chyy'nkhr๓๓tham mentioned earlier. Even though these commentators are not authorized to judge, since the competitors are judged by popular votes from the audience, their opinion to some extent can guide and convince the audience regarding who is strong or weak, since they are generally recognized as professionals and experts in the entertainment industries. It can therefore be assumed that the commentators in a reality talent show do, to some degree, possess the power to build a positive or negative impression of the finalists. Therefore, pleasing these commentators and acquiring positive comments from them can possibly be an alternative way to accomplish something in the show.

The evidence for this can be observed from a personal telephone interview between me and one of the *AF* finalists, season four, who requested anonymity as she is still under contract with True Fantasia Company. I will call her Penny as her pseudonym throughout the dissertation. Penny explained that when she was chosen to be one of the finalists, she was considered by the voice training team as a very talented singer. Moreover, she was widely held by online community groups specifically established to follow the show, such as the Reality Show Room

at www.pantip/cafe/chalermthai.com, the notorious online community in Thailand, to be the best singer in the season. This was borne out by the fact that, when the season was finished, she was designated *Tuuua Mee* (*Diva*) of the season. However, during the competition, even though she could sing well, she had to reduce her singing skills in the early weeks of the season, since she was told by the production team that if her performance was perfect right from the first show, she might not be able to show her improvement to the commentators in subsequent weeks [Penny, 2010]. Additionally, she confessed that the comments from commentators were very important to the contestants: ‘if you can make the commentators happy with your show, you are on halfway toward winning your audiences’ [Penny, 2010].

It can be seen that, in the old-fashioned singing competitions (mentioned on p.287-288), professional singing skills were the highest priority for the winner of the competition since the format of the contest provided few chances for the finalists to demonstrate their talent in front of the judges and audience. The better you could present at the performance, the better the opportunity a contestant had to win the contest. Conversely, in the reality talent show, the more improvement you can show to the audience and the commentators, the more acceptance you will receive from them. Hence, if you possess a high level of singing skill, it is probably not an advantage to show how professional you are in the reality talent show, at least in the early period of the show.

A further attempt to describe how ‘reality talent’ shows produce celebrities rather than artists for the Thai popular-music industry could start from the premise that

the 'reality talent' show has, to some degree, a latent power over the individual choices of the contestants. First, it is true that everybody who is trained responds to instruction and gets feedback; that is a normal part of training. However, in the old-fashioned singing competitions in Thailand, contestants were trained individually by his/her own trainer and judgment would only be passed once when he/she performed on the contest day, without any personal comment from the judges. The contestant had his/her own authority to choose which style he/she needed to perform or which song was appropriate for his/her voice. It could be argued that this contestant might not choose the song to perform by his/herself, since his/her trainer might choose it instead. However, the chosen song was at least picked and the contestant was trained individually by the individual mentor. On the other hand, in the 'reality talent' show, songs for all finalists are chosen by the same group of people (from the producing team) following the theme of the week and every finalist will be trained by the same singing, dancing and acting coaches, who are also chosen by the programme. Moreover, repertoires will also be limited depending on which label sponsors the programme, such that *The Star* only has songs from Grammy. Hence, individual choice is limited and the feedback finalists receive from the training is similarly limited to a specific group of people.

Second, the format of the reality talent show in which the song chosen follows the theme of each week limits contestants' chances of showing how professional they are. In the old singing contests, contestants were free to perform in the style that he/she could do the best and it was left to the judges to choose whether he/she was good enough to win. However, in the reality talent show, the theme changes each

week and finalists have to sing a song in the theme regardless of whether it is his/her style. The problem is that if a finalist is a talented rock singer and the only style he/she can sing is rock, although the rock theme will happen in the second week of the competition and the first week's theme is dance. Such a contestant may not be able to show his/her professional singing skills if he/she receives the lowest vote from the audience and is dumped out of the competition in the first week. It can be argued that a contestant who can sing every theme in the show presents some degree of professional singing skill rather than one who can only sing perfectly in a specific style. However, my point here is that this instance illustrates how the reality talent show's format reduces the opportunity for a professional artist to showcase his/her singing ability by leaving his/her professional skill hanging on his/her fortune.

Third, in line with the high stakes of the reality talent show, the finalist is willing to adjust his/herself in order to win and change his/her life. In the old-style singing contests, the winner would receive only some money (the amount of the prize depended on how big the competition was) and a trophy or a certificate. The judges would judge following the criteria assigned by the organizer (normally based on singing skill such as singing technique, timbre of the singer and his/her performance). The contest did not promise the winner would be signed as a recording artist or release an album, although some of the finalists from the old-fashioned singing contests were signed and launched recording careers, including the Thai superstar Thoonchaai McIntyre. However, 'reality talent' shows are very different, since all the finalists will be signed and release at least an album after the competition season ends. The promise of a real career in the entertainment

industry encourages finalists to adjust themselves to what the programme requires in order to win and become an artist in the industry. To be the winner, the finalists doubtless adjust themselves to please the programme's authorities, commentators and audiences, rather than simply being themselves and presenting their professional skill as an artist. In the case of the audience, they are technically the highest authority authorized to judge, since the winner of both *The Star* and *AF* are chosen by popular vote.

However, as mentioned above, the commentators in these reality talent shows also, to some degree, have an influence on the vote when they give the finalist good or bad feedback. Such evidence comes from my interview with Si'thi'chaai Chomphuuphaa`b, the second runner-up of *AF* season 3. Chomphuuphaa`b told me that, during the competition in his season, finalists frequently had to adjust their singing or performing to satisfy the commentators and obtain good feedback, as this feedback would be likely to have an influence on the voting of the audience. For instance, when the finalists were assigned songs to perform by the producing team, they would consult on singing, dancing and preparing the show with the trainer teams. After that, the trainers and the finalists would design the show, and then they would practice the performance until the Saturday concert. At the Saturday concert, when the finalists received comments from the commentators that they needed to fix something in the show, which would probably be a singing style, feeling in the song and so on, they would then adjust it, whether they agreed or disagreed with the comments. The only reason the finalists made such changes was that they then expected to receive a compliment the next week [Chompoopap, 2010]. This is different from the former singing competitions, since the judges in

the former mode could not suggest their personal preference to the finalists and, on the other hand, the finalists did not have to adjust themselves following the judges' comments. The judges only chose the winner from standard criteria agreed before the competition began. So, we can see that the commentator in a 'reality talent' show is considered an authority that the finalists must listen to. My argument is not to assess whether the commentators' opinion, as they are given to the contestants, are good or bad. Rather, I would like to pinpoint whether the improvement in the finalists results from the fact that they adjust themselves on purpose only to earn acknowledgement from the commentator, rather than present themselves in relation to their own professional singing career.

It can be seen that the way the 'reality talent' show recruits finalists, the way the programme presents a sense of making over of a finalist and a latent power of the programme over the individual's choices are factors that have caused a decline from professional to ordinary in the artists from the 'reality talent' show. These factors all help to create celebrities within the music industry rather than professional artists.

The More You Appear, The More Famous You Are

For Boorstin, the celebrity is exhibited as a result of a 'pseudo-event', which is planned out by the media, has little to do with 'real' life and is only 'real' if it is explored through different types of media [Boorstin, 1961; 1962]. In addition, Turner further describes a set of complex problems in the relationship between a celebrity and her/his public. He states that:

Celebrity is the product of a commercial process but it is worth remembering that the public expression of popular interest can operate, at times, as if it was entirely independent of this commercial process [Turner, 2004: 55].

Additionally, a celebrity can only continue to exist and retain her/his popularity if these two components – commercial process and public interest – function harmoniously [Turner, 2004]. To extend the ideas of Boorstin and Turner, I will describe how the finalists of a ‘reality talent’ show in Thailand can be considered a ‘pseudo-event’, set up by the media, illustrating how, simultaneously, the social interest of the audience in the contestants is developed as the audience are watching the show. Therefore, the interest that the audience feels in the finalists can be real as an influence of a ‘pseudo-event’, i.e. ‘real’ only if one is watched. The ‘reality talent’ shows in Thailand have been established not only for the sake of running a talent contest but also for using the contestants for other purposes in the entertainment industries [Muanmad (A), 2006]. Beyond the acceptable ability to sing, the programmes focus on characteristics, personal background, social status and, indeed, the physical appearance of the contestants, since they will be used as a catalyst to construct the group dynamic in the shows [Muanmad (A), 2006; Nunthasukol (B), 2005]. Even though *AF* has a certain amount of notoriety because of its 24/7 live broadcasting, the audience cannot watch every finalist at the same time. Even this depends on the editing team, who decide which camera feeds will be broadcast and who is in the scene at that moment. Hence, the ‘real’ event, which the audience has seen, could be ‘real’ only at the exact moment it has been watched. The programmes use this in order to stimulate the audience’s interest by presenting some parts of the whole events, which happen in the house, to encourage the ‘gossip game’ and manipulate the popularity to the contestants.

For instance, Na'wa'ko'dchamon Chyy'nkhrōṅtham was chosen to be a finalist in *The Star* season 6 in 2010. In her first round of the audition, beyond singing a song, she also showed her belly dancing skills to the judges. However, the only compliment that she received from all the judges was about her beauty [*The Star*, 21 February 2010]. Somewhat surprisingly, she gained entry into the final round of the competition and therefore became a controversial topic of discussion, even on the Grammy site itself, with many people casting aspersions on the quality control of the competition [www.pantip.com/cafe/chalermthai; <http://webboard.gmember.com/index.php?topic=34189.0;wap2>]. Moreover, in her interview, Chyy'nkhrōṅtham was interviewed mostly about her beauty. She stated that she would like to be a Miss Universe, as she was born beautiful, and her mother would be proud to have a beautiful daughter like her. Then, she asked the production team back in the show, 'Do you think I am beautiful?' After the tape was broadcast, Chyy'nkhrōṅtham received a lot of vicious criticism, with her confidence yet lack of singing ability, as well as rumours about plastic surgery, being widely discussed on the Internet [<http://www.oknation.net/blog/seedgirl/2010/03/06/entry-1>]. Chyy'nkhrōṅtham became 'talk of the town' overnight because of her notorious clause 'do you think I am beautiful?' and remained on the show until the fourth of the eight weeks of the competition. After the show ended, one of the trainers for *The Star*, who requested to be anonymous so I will call her Nanny throughout the dissertation, explained to me that the full version of Chyy'nkhrōṅtham's interview was heavily edited by the production team. Actually, the answers that were cut and shown in her interview came from a different question, and she did not in fact have any intention of showing how proud she was of her appearance. However, the

production team combined all of them and presented them as if they were the answer to the same question, meaning her communication was modified, and the public was intentionally misled [Nanny, 2010]. Although this trainer would like to remain anonymous, awareness of this issue can also be generally observed from the Internet communications, since it was widely discussed (see, for instance, one topic on the web board of Grammy:

<http://webboard.gmember.com/index.php?topic=30789.0;wap2>). It can be stated that Chyy' nkhroṅtham was a case study in how the 'reality talent' show creates a 'pseudo-event' in order to raise public interest in Thai popular music society and ensure that this individual was well known during the period she was on the show. After she was eliminated in the fourth week, she rarely appeared in the mass media, and even though she launched a single on the back of the series album, she was not able to reach the level of fame she had craved.

The above section illustrates that the 'reality talent' show in Thailand, from the mid-2000s to the present, has created a cult of celebrity in the Thai popular music business, reducing the professional aspect to ordinariness and using 'pseudo-events' rather than artists with high levels of ability. Consequently, *Manager Magazine*, one of the most famous business magazines in Thailand, called *AF* a 'celebrity-making machine' [Manager, 2007]. Although *AF* and *The Star* were not initially created to help the major labels reduce the risk in releasing new artists' albums and redress the consequences of the 'divide and grow' policy and the problem of consumer recognition, they certainly have had that effect.

Subsequently, celebrities from the reality talent shows become instant products with fame and fans, ripe for major labels to use. I will analyse in the following

section just where this celebrity fits in the ‘assembly line’ of the Thai popular music industry.

Making Artists

After a celebrity has been created by a ‘reality talent’ show in Thailand, s/he has earned her/his high status by becoming a ‘real’ artist signed to a major record label. Even though not all of them can launch their solo albums, they, at least, have a song on the compilation album of the finalists in each season. This type of programme, in the original approach, does not solely aim to build artists for the popular-music market, since *AF* has openly sought people who can possibly be actors or MCs in the entertainment business, while *The Star* initially positioned itself as a singing contest [Nunthasukol (A), 2005; Muanmart (B), 2008].

However, after the success of their first seasons, both *AF* and *The Star* realized that the advantage of this celebrity was that, after the show finished, this celebrity had become well known to the public and her/his fame rendered her/him a ‘ready-made’ major label artist, who therefore did not require as much time to promote. The compilation album of all the finalists in each season has been released a few weeks after a season finishes and on the final round day some seasons, in order to capitalize on the fact that the audience remembers the characters involved. After that, some who do have the potential to be singers will be chosen by the label to release a solo album and put into the ‘assembly line’ process. At the same time, the others who cannot be singers but still have value in the public sphere will be sent to other entertainment lines, while still others simply disappear from the public eye after the compilation album has been released.

The solo album of the 'ready-made' artist will be launched a few months after the season finished. There is no real difference in the working process between this case and the previous case of finding a boy band to place in the BTS process as mentioned in the previous chapter. These 'ready-made' artists are already well known and have their own fan club, willing to buy whatever products are then released. This is clearly an advantage for major labels, since the fame of the 'ready-made' artists can at least guarantee revenue for the companies, with a lower risk in the investment compared to the BTS boy band case. This is a serious advantage, since the promotional budget for major artists has been reduced as a result of the 'divide and grow' policy (see Chapter 4 p.261-264). Thakonkiiiaa'd Wiirawaan, the founder of Exact and Scenario Company and subsidiary companies of Grammy and the director of *The Star*, admitted the use of the finalists' fame to create pop idols in the present day imitates the successful process of creating famous artists in the Pop Era [Muanmart (B), 2008]. Before, artists chosen by people in the entertainment business passed through the 'assembly line' process, and media ownership was the power used to shape consumer behaviour. However, what the 'reality talent' programmes created is the fame of celebrity, derived from the media process and usually short-lived [Turner, 2004; Redden, 2008]. As a result, most of these individuals cannot maintain their fame in the music industry. Even though the major labels work to minimize the shortness of an artist's working life, they nonetheless frequently produce these 'ready-made' artists, as this type can generate massive short-term revenue. In addition, since they have a short working life, the companies can replace them with other 'ready-made' artists every year. By exploiting this cycle, the major labels therefore continue to survive in the popular music business, riding out the storm of the current shift in the global

popular-music industry.

Content is King

Since there are certain factors influencing the global popular-music industry, such as competition from computer games and the increasing ways for consumers to get free music from the Internet, there is a general decline in the sales figures of the physical products of popular music (such as CDs, cassettes tapes and vinyl records) all over the world [Fox, 2004]. Mark Fox describes how, according to the Diebold Group, a leading German consulting group, the sales figures for music worldwide dropped from 41.5 billion US dollars to 38.5 billion US dollars between 1995 and 1999. Moreover, the Recording Industry Association of America reported that, between mid-2000 and mid-2001, music purchases in the US fell from 6.2 billion US dollars to 5.9 billion US dollars, a 4.4 percent decline [Fox, 2004]. The prosperity of major record labels in the US, which is recognized as the world's most significant popular-music market, has dropped as a result of the significant effects of the advances in technologies and communication.

In the past, major labels generally owned and controlled, at least indirectly, almost all of the products in the market [Hill, 2000], while major artists were bound by contracts that formed a significant obstacle to them, since the labels effectively held the right to generate revenue in regard to every output from their artists. When the free download music revolution spread, the revenue of major labels, which derived from the advantage of their copyright ownership, was jeopardized by this new form of piracy [Fox, 2004]. Even though the growth of the Internet raised such issues about music piracy, it has a serious advantage for artists, both

professional and amateur, in allowing them to connect directly with their audience. The power of the major labels declined when the Internet boomed and online communities rose up to allow anyone to distribute her/his work without the traditionally high cost of the distribution [Gerbert, 2000]. As a result, independent labels can now easily distribute their artists' work via digital technologies instead of selling them through major labels. Furthermore, musicians and singers who are not signed but would like to introduce their work to the popular music market can also use the Internet channel to create an audience [Fox, 2004]. Hence, the business model in the US, and indeed in other countries, has had to adapt to survive this change. In Thailand, we have seen the same problem in the decline in sales figures of physical music products as happened in the West; however, the key cause of the decline is not free downloadable music on the Internet. The important factor in Thailand is actually the rise of the illegal MP3 business.

It is true that the popularity of the Internet in Thailand has encouraged people to access free sources of pirated music. However, as mentioned earlier, 80 percent of the citizens in Thailand do not use the Internet [National Statistic Office, 2009]. Additionally, broadband and high-speed Internet saw very little penetration in Thailand until the mid-2000s [National Telecommunications Commission, 2009]. Thus, from the late 1990s to mid-2000s, downloading free music was very difficult for Thai people, but MP3 technology arose as an alternative choice for consuming popular music. It is hard to ascertain exactly when MP3 technology was introduced into Thailand, but since the new millennium there has been a significant illegal MP3 business. As explained in Chapter 4, the biggest illegal MP3 market in Thailand is located at Pantip Plaza, an IT shopping mall building in

Bangkok where all of the second floor of the building is filled with pirated MP3s, DVDs, computer programs and digital games. More than a hundred popular songs from various artists, including both new releases and old songs from Thai and international artists, appear on one CD which sells for about 2GBP per CD (1GBP=50 BHT). Moreover, some new releases to be launched by major labels in the next couple of weeks can also be found. This business is not only a presence in Bangkok and its peripheries, but also has expanded to other provinces all over the country. Illegal MP3s are generally available, and people can consume various songs and artists by paying less than they pay for one album by an individual artist from major labels. Simultaneously, it is easier for the customer to consume the music by buying the illegal MP3s than by connecting to the Internet and downloading the songs to listen. The major labels have felt an extreme impact as a result of this piracy and have earnestly attempted to solve the problem (see Chapter 4). However, during the early half of the 2000s, no solution could be found. The reasons behind this can be explained by two significant factors, namely the difficulty in arresting the piracy perpetrators and the lack of knowledge of copyright laws amongst Thai music consumers.

First, the marketplace for buying and selling these products is not concealed; on the contrary, it can be found by walking into any IT shopping mall, weekend-market or night-market. Certainly, a question might pop up in everyone's mind that if pirate MP3s can be sold so flagrantly, why are the sellers not being arrested, as it is illegal? In fact, the retailers have occasionally been arrested by the police, as newspaper reports show, but police can only arrest small retailers with small numbers of pirate MP3s, as they do not stock the MP3s in their actual store

[Manager (B), 2003]. The stock of pirate MP3s is usually in a movable place, such as in vans or containers, making it fairly difficult to get hold of the stock and trace it back to the original manufacturer [Manager (B), 2003]. However, the Recording Industry Association of Thailand has also questioned this failure, suggesting in fact that there might be bribery occurring between the police organization and the retailers [Manager (B), 2003].

Second, people are generally not concerned about copyrighted matters. Even though there is no statistical research about the levels of pirate MP3s in Thai consumers' hands, it can be inferred from the number of retailers that the numbers will be huge. For example, my research in Pantip Plaza found almost one hundred shops selling pirated goods. Moreover, according to the report from Grammy to Manager Daily newspaper in 2003, Grammy has lost revenue amounting to almost 6 million GBP per year [Manager (B), 2003].

There were several festivals during 2002, coordinated by Grammy, RS and the government, to inform people about intellectual property rights and encourage them to avoid buying pirated products. Additionally, the price of a major label CD has been reduced from approximately 4 GBP per album to 1.8 GBP per album [Manager (A), 2002]. Even though the events themselves were a success, with large numbers of people in attendance, there was no significant effect on pirate sales. Therefore, simply encouraging concern in consumers might not be enough to gain revenue back from the piracy business, meaning that major labels need to modify their business model in order to deal with this situation. In the next section, my examination will focus on the changes in the business model of Thai major

labels, since they have been heavily affected by this circumstance.

Changing Business Model of Major Labels

Ultimately, the record industry cannot 'control' or 'determine' what is going to be commercially successful. All entertainment corporations can do is struggle to monopolize access to recording facilities, promotional outlets, manufacturing arrangements and distribution systems, and be in a position to appropriate the profits [Negus, 1992: 152].

During recent years, music columns, articles and music television programmes in Thailand have frequently picked up on the issue of the declining power of the major labels, the changing business model and the increasing opportunity to enter the music business. For instance, the music television program *108 Music*, broadcast on 12 November 2010 on the Thai PBS channel, arranged a discussion about the direction of the Thai popular music industry. The programme started the topic with a reference to Bono's statement that the music industry, as we know it, is over [Hemmai, 2010]. The panel consisted of four so-called gurus in the Thai popular- music industry, namely Maano'd Pu'dtaan, the owner of Mile Stone Records and a famous music critic and musician in Thailand, Kamon Su'kooso'n , one of the Bakery Music founders, Chaatrii Khonsu'waan, the famous producer and musician, and Yudthana Boonorm, the famous DJ and *Godfather of Indie*. Most of them believed that the importance of the record company as intermediary between artists and listeners would be reduced, while everyone agreed that the business model of major labels would have to be changed. The panel felt that the era of recording songs, manufacturing a record or CD, making a music video, promoting the artists then launching the CD to the market is at an end [Hemmai,

2010]. I agree with this idea that major labels in Thailand must modify their business model to address this rapid change in the industry. By realigning their business model to protect this access in order to regain their profit and the strategy, they will become more of a content provider than a record company as we have come to know it.

From Record Label to Content Provider

In this dissertation, the term ‘content provider’ will be applied to major labels which own huge bodies of artistic and entertainment content such as songs, films, TV series and, of course, artists, and provide them to the customer in various forms of commodity. The advantage the major labels have is that they possess numerous forms of ‘content’, and so the first step that major labels in Thailand took in re-gaining their profit was building channels to provide the content they had to consumers. In order to study this strategy, I will use Grammy as a model.

Phaaiibuun Damrongchaaiitham, chairman of Grammy, saw this dramatic shift in 1999. In *Manager 360 Degree Magazine* in May 1999 he stated that the Internet business would grow rapidly in comparison to the television business in Thailand, which required fourteen years to be popular, while only four years were needed in the Internet business. Even though, at that moment, the progress of the Internet was having little effect on the Thai popular-music industry, Dhamrongchaitham saw what it would come to [Manager, 1999]. Subsequently, Grammy’s e-commerce business began in 1999.

Initially, Grammy positioned this e-commerce business as a channel to gather 'content' and provide consumers with a centre of entertainment, as well as an established online community based on their fans. The site would consist of songs, artists' profiles, and entertainment news and activities involving Grammy's popular artists, such as allowing fans to chat with Thoonchaai McIntyre by email [Manager, 1999]. The company was certainly well-placed in this business, since Grammy owned the content, and Damronchaaiitham positively expected this e-commerce venture to succeed [Manager, 1999]. The site eotoday.com was launched in the next year, 2000.

However, although the content was strong, eotoday generated very little revenue for the company, and the website ceased trading in 2005. The reasons behind this were twofold. During 2000 to 2005, eotoday aimed not only to create an online community but was also intended to be a channel to distribute songs, since the website allowed members to download material. Nevertheless, there was a problem with the payment system, which made it difficult to purchase songs [Positioning (B), 2005]. Moreover, even though the Internet in Thailand had rapidly grown in a very short period, as Damronchaaiitham mentioned, listening to music from the Internet or purchasing songs by downloading them probably did not fit the lifestyle of the majority of Thai people, as online purchases were unfamiliar to Thai customers at that moment [Manager (A), 2006]. So, this first attempt by Grammy to exploit e-commerce in the music industry was a failure.

Along with the growth of the Internet, there was an enormous advance in the mobile telecommunications business in Thailand during the 2000s. In 2001, the

number of mobile phones sold increased from 5 million units to 10 million units in only one year [National Telecommunication Commission, 2009]. In addition, mobile phones developed to support various functions, including, for example, an MP3 player, radio, video and camera. In short, the mobile phone became more than just a telephone. Hence, in 2003, Grammy, in cooperation with a mobile phone network provider in Thailand, started to use the 'content provider' concept, launching a ringtone download business to market [Manager (A), 2003]. To download a ringtone, customers only sent an SMS with a nine-digit code for the ringtone that they wanted to their network provider, and the ringtone would be downloaded to their mobile. The payment would be charged and notified to the customer in the monthly bill (for pay-monthly customers) or deducted from the balance (for pay-as-you-go customers) [Manager (A), 2003]. Despite the fact that Grammy's first foray into the e-commerce business had failed, the ringtone business generated a substantial profit, as, after only three months of operations, Grammy earned approximately 42,000 GBP [Manager (A), 2003]. This shows that mobile phones rather than the Internet was the place to be, something borne out by the report of the National Telecommunication Commission of Thailand in 2004, which stated that the number of mobile phone users in the country was higher than the number of Internet users.

Therefore, from 2003 to today, telecommunications companies and the major labels have been intimately connected, since mobile phones have been an effective channel for major labels to distribute content and, at the same time, mobile phone network providers themselves have used content from the labels to promote their products. A number of joint campaigns have barraged the entertainment market.

For instance, in 2006, in cooperation with True Corporation Company, the largest media convergence company in Thailand, Grammy provided a download service that allowed the consumer unlimited full song downloads from Grammy via the True network, both True Move (the mobile network of True Corporation Company) and True Internet Broadband, at a cost of less than 2 GBP per month [Manager (B), 2006].

Moreover, songs and music videos from the major labels have been adapted to support the popularity of mobile phones and directly encourage consumers to buy the songs. Many songs and music videos, from 2003 to the present, have been produced relating to mobile phone activities, to increase the sales figures of both mobile network companies and the major labels. For example, in 2004, Advance Info Service Plc. (AIS), the largest mobile network provider in Thailand according to National Telecommunication of Thailand's information, decided to be a main sponsor of a special project album, Bird-Sek, featuring two superstars from Grammy, Thoonchaai McIntyre (Bird) and See`gsa`n Su`gphi`maaj (Sek Loso) [Manager (A), 2004]. In the music video called 'Khun Roo' Maai` Khra`b' ('Do You Know?'), the story is about a boy that tried to call and send a message to show his feelings about his girlfriend via mobile phone with the lyric of the song [Manager (A), 2004]. The figures show that this song was the highest-downloaded song of the year [Manager (A), 2004]. The success of the Bird-Sek project could, of course, be attributed to the reputation of the two superstars, who already had an enthusiastic fan base each, but we should not overlook the fact that the music video and the lyrics were also used to stimulate the need of the consumer to make

a purchase. Thus, while AIS enjoyed their revenue from the increasing use of the network by customers, Grammy also generated a huge profit from the downloads.

Additionally, as an impact of their partnerships with mobile network companies, Grammy also stimulated download purchases by composing songs in which the lyrics make references to mobile phones. For example, the song ‘Khεεˆ Khon Thoo Phiˆdˆ’ (‘Sorry, It’s Just A Wrong Number’) by Peˆg-Off-Ice from the album *Together*, launched in 2008. The following is the chorus, which illustrates how the lyric can possibly encourage people to download the song:

‘You may not need to answer my call if you are not lonely
(ไม่ต้องรับสาย ถ้าเธอไม่เหงา)

I could have been forgotten when he is around
(อยู่กับเขาก็รู้เธอคงไม่ครั่นคร้ามอย่างฉัน)

Sorry, I have just called the wrong number
(ฉันมันก็แค่คนโทรผิด)

Let him know it is just a wrong call
(บอกเขาฉันโทรผิด)

I have accepted it is my fault to love youˆ
(ผิดเองที่เป็นคนมาทิ่มหลัง แล้วยังไปรักเธอ)

This song not only became a number-one hit on the radio pop charts for more than five weeks, but was also the number-one download for both ringtones and full songs across all the mobile networks providing a download service [TVPool, 2008].

This example of songs intended by the major labels to generate revenue from downloading is only the tip of the iceberg. With the conspicuous success of

its partnership with mobile network companies and the arrival of broadband technology, introduced by True Corporation Plc in 2005, Grammy once again entered the e-business, closing eotoday.com and opening gmember.com. The advance of broadband and high-speed Internet technology, along with the decreased service cost as well as proper content from the company, have made gmember.com successful. Consumers can now download songs from the website by buying a Grammy e-card, with an amount of credit on the card, from a number of convenience stores around the country. The consumer then uses the code in the card to purchase songs from the website. This process solved the earlier purchasing problem, making it much easier for customers to make a purchase and for content-providers to get paid up front. Furthermore, the website also provides an 'online radio station' service, in which the customer who wishes only to download songs to listen to on her/his computer can set up her/his own radio station and download songs to her/his own radio station to listen to, storing them on her/his personal computer and being able to replay the station any time. Moreover, Thailand's major labels, both Grammy and RS, do not solely focus on their own sites but also cooperate with other popular entertainment websites in Thailand, such as Sanook.com, in order to provide their content to the customer across many platforms [Manager (A), 2006].

This attempt by the major labels to alter their business model to being a 'content provider' affects the attractiveness of the illegal MP3 business, since the customer is able to conveniently purchase products from the major labels through various channels, in ways connected to her/his lifestyle. Moreover, the service also costs less than illegal MP3 CDs. While a CD of illegal MP3s costs about 2 GBP, it costs

less than 5p to download a song, less than 1 GBP for an album and less than 2 GBP for unlimited downloads [Manager (A), 2006]. Therefore, through this cheaper service and more convenient purchasing, major labels have been able to regain some sales from the piracy business, although it should be said that piracy still remains a significant issue in the Thai entertainment industry.

A report on the main income sources of major label artists from the new millennium to 2007 stated that 20% of income came from album sales, while the rest came from the download business and shows, such as concerts, events or game shows [Manager (B), 2007]. These proportions in which the income of major label artists is mostly from their performance or others rather than from their recording sales, are similar to those in the US as mentioned in the work of Connolly and Krueger:

[...] it is clear that concerts provide a larger source of income for performers than record sales or publishing royalties. Only four of the top 35 income-earners made more money from recordings than from live concerts, and much of the record revenue for these artists probably represented an advance on a new album, not on-going royalties from CD sales. For the top 35 artists as a whole, income from touring exceeded income from record sales by a ratio of 7.5 to 1 in 2002. [Connolly and Krueger, 2004:670]

These proportions remain the same today in Thailand. Even though the online business has revived revenue for major labels, when the major labels could not efficiently operate simply as a record company, in order to generate profits for companies and artists, they turned themselves into ‘artist management’ companies. Along with producing, recording, and launching songs, the major labels also establish artists and, when record sales alone no longer generate enough revenue, artists themselves then become yet another product for sale in order to make up for

the lost revenue from album sales. In the past, artists from Thai major labels that sold other cultural products, such as the ‘bubble gum’ pop artists of the Pop Era (see Chapter 2), were generally those who could not be outstanding in musical or singing talent and specifically required media promotion to be successful in the music business. By Contrast, today it is not only ‘bubble gum’ pop artists who do this: other artists also need to be sold as cultural commodities, since they cannot make a living only from album sales. Today, those other artists generate their income mainly from being hired for events, such as grand openings and product launches, staff parties for large corporations or performing in restaurants and nightclubs [Boonorm, 2009]. Hence, the major companies have established the ‘artist management’ department as a subsidiary company, in order to manage jobs for their artists. Again, I will use Grammy as a model to describe the circumstances.

Aratist Co. Ltd. was founded in the early 2000s with the initial aim of being a gateway to becoming a Grammy artist [www.gmmgrammy.com]. However, from 2005, Grammy expanded the company business line into event marketing by investing 50 percent in Index Event Agency Plc. Thus, Aratist is now an entertainment gateway for Grammy. After their own album is released, Grammy artists will be sent to Aratist, which is then responsible for selling them to suitable events. As mentioned previously, not only ‘bubble gum’ pop artists but all artists will be sent to Aratist to arrange work, both in terms of music services (such as concerts or pub- and restaurant-based performances) and non-music services (actor/actress in film or television industry or model), including superstars like Thoonchaaai McIntyre . After that, Aratist will deal with the organizers of events,

informing them which artists are available at that time and who is a good fit for certain events. Sometimes, only one artist is appropriate, but Aratist will also arrange a package of artists who can probably serve as a substitute for one famous one [Sukshu, 2005]. The ratio of income generated from the event between the artists and Aratist is about 4:1.

Kriiaaŋkraaii Kaanchana 'phookhin, the managing director of Aratist Co. Ltd, has stated that the advantage Grammy has here is that there are more than 750 artists on its roster, and the company can generate profit from them by being a 'one-stop service for entertainment and gateway to entertainment', instead of expecting profits only from music sales [Sukshu, 2005]. Moreover, it is not only current artists but also the label's back catalogue of famous artists from the Pop Era, as well as the artists behind many hit songs from the past, which have become content that the major labels use to generate profit. For example, in only the last two years there have more than 50 concerts performed by individuals and groups from the Pre-pop Era, the Pop Era and the Indie Phenomenon. Some of them do not have a contract with the major labels, and some do. All of these concerts were successes, indicated in the very short time it took for tickets to sell out (only two hours for some concerts) [Boonorm, 2009]. Additionally, hit songs from very famous and major artists in the past have been selected and collected in one CD, then distributed as hit compilation albums, for example Grammy Best of the Year. Su'wa'd Damronchaaitham , a board member of Grammy and Managing Director of Grammy Big Co. Ltd, explained that these compilation CDs not only generated revenue for Grammy itself, but artists too could share a percentage of the revenue [Manager (E), 2002]. This is a positive development stemming from Grammy's

starting an artist management department, as the artists have an alternative channel to generate income, as well as the company. Even though the income from the events might not be able to generate equal income for all major artists, at least the companies have attempted to solve the income problem for their artists.

The above discussion shows how the major labels have adapted to overcome the technology problem and the changing landscape of the global music industry, changing their business model and adapting to the demands of being a 'content provider'. The indicator of the success of this new approach can be observed in the increased profit for the major labels. According to the annual reports of Grammy from 2007 to 2009, the company has seen a slight increase in the net profit margins every year since 2007 to the present, after a period in which their profit continuously declined from 2002 to 2006 as a result of the decline in the company's revenue (see Figure 4.3 in Chapter 4). Similarly, in 2009, RS, which switched to just being a 'content provider' in 2006, has redressed the losses it had suffered since 2004 [RS annual report 2004-2009; Manager (A), 2006]. Partly as a result of these figures, I argue that as long as the industry requires an intermediary between artists and the audience, which I cannot see changing, the major labels retain their power, for the following reasons.

First, the substantial benefit of owning content and being a respected 'content provider' may increase barriers not only for the pirate MP3 business but also for independent labels and would-be artists. The influence of the partnership among the major labels, the famous websites and significant mobile network providers can lead to their continued domination of the market. For example, if the

customers want to use the download service from their mobile phone, they will look for the network provider that can provide the best service for them. Major labels obviously have more content to provide than small independent labels, meaning that partnerships with major rather than small labels will continue to be the norm. Consequently, in order to gain access to popular websites or large mobile network companies, the small labels will need to deal with the major labels and be in partnership with them.

Second, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, even though the number of Internet users in Thailand has been continuously rising, it has still only reached about 20 per cent penetration among the whole population. This is not unrelated to the fact that, up to this day, there has been no report of anyone's building an artistic career by trying to connect directly to the audience, using social networks and online communities. Hence, the most important channel remains the real popular-music industry; if an artist is to earn the significant money needed in order to live whilst still satisfying her/his passion to perform, s/he must therefore sign with a major record label and be a major artist. Therefore, even though the power of major labels in the West has been challenged, they remain strong in the Thai popular music industry, at least for today.

Conclusion

Although the impact of advanced technologies and communication has had a critical influence on the popular-music industry, especially on major recording companies on a global scale, they can partly cause an effect in some aspect of Thai popular music industry. As argued above, Thai major labels cannot strongly insist

on operating their business with the same business model as in the past, concentrating on selling physical products, and they have inevitably had to adapt themselves to be a content provider and artist manager. However, Thai major labels still have the greatest power of negotiation in the market, as well as control over the artists. The reason that the major labels can continue to dominate the industry is that the important channels for Thai artists to promote their work and connect to their fans are not the Internet as in the West but media such as television, radio programmes and mobile networks. Moreover, these significant channels are still owned by or at least cooperate with the major labels. In addition, the ownership of an enormous number of songs and the huge artist rosters of the major labels will mean they retain their power in the Thai popular-music industry. Thus, whilst the barrier between artists and their fans and the negotiating power of the major recording companies in some countries, such as the US, have seemingly been reduced (such as is the case of Madonna), it may not be the case in the Thai popular music industry, at least in this present day.

Furthermore, although the business model has been adopted by the major labels, the processes of production (finding artists, producing songs and recording albums) have not significantly changed from the beginnings of the Thai popular-music industry. Conversely, there seems to be a reliving of what happened in the Pop Era, since in order to reduce the risk of releasing genuinely new artists' albums, the major labels create celebrities via the reality talent shows and take advantage of the fame and the fans of these finalists. Hence, this can be considered a recurrence of the major label artist process in the Pop Era, when, to avoid risk,

the artists were chosen from well-known actors/actresses or, in other words, from their fame.

Notes

¹ From 2005 to 2011, Poon̄sa`g Ra`dtana`phon̄ himself, his songs and his music video have received approximately 20 awards such as the Best Male Singer, the Best Album and the Best Song from various magazines and radio votes, polls from various companies and Season Music Awards [www.aofpongsak.com].

Conclusion

The five preceding chapters serve to illustrate the overall process whereby music is produced (recorded, promoted, distributed etc.) in the Thai popular-music industry as well as how this process has altered and evolved over time. I have also attempted to examine the influence and control which Thai major labels exert over the industry. The *modus operandi* of the major labels has inevitably had a profound and far-reaching influence upon not only Thai artists, but also others who earn their living in the industry. It can be seen that, since the birth of the Thai popular-music industry in the Pop Era, the business practices of the major labels, the strategies which they have employed their attempts to maximize financial profit (including expanding themselves into other entertainment industries), have led to a marked reduction in autonomy of artists, such as seen in the case of Dajim as well as that of other ‘major indie’ singers and bands. As discussed in the second chapter, media ownership by the major labels has also had an extensive influence upon the nature of music consumption in Thailand (as the various forms of mass communication have clearly been employed by the major labels to manipulate and create trends of consumption).

Throughout this dissertation, the ideas of Adorno as well as that of various other popular music scholars, particularly concerning popular music and issues of corporate control, have been discussed and appropriated, and have been found to be not only pertinent, but key to a full understanding of the Thai popular music industry. Adorno’s ‘assembly line’ theory, for example, may be quite enlightening when applied to the production processes that typify the Thai popular-music industry (and whilst the industry is indeed one which is ceaselessly changing and

evolving, this aspect of it seems to remain a constant). Adorno's notion of the 'handicraft stage' is also a rather valuable one in grasping the nature of the popular-music production. At the same time, whilst his ideas of mechanization and standardization are doubtless indispensable, the negation of individuality, originality, and creativity which comes hand in hand with the school of thought which he puts forward is perhaps not entirely applicable to the Thai popular-music industry, as the industry itself has arguably incorporated something beyond the commercial drive and social manipulation associated with the Frankfurt School, as seen throughout the Indie Phenomenon. In addition, although the phenomenon of indie music in Thailand dramatically faded, an 'indie culture' has nonetheless survived and continues to be perceived by Thai audiences and the Thai media as valuable (Chapter 4).

As the Thai major labels based their corporate practices upon the business models provided by Western counterparts (particularly American ones), the Thai popular-music industry has faced issues not dissimilar to those experienced by the music industries of other countries. Negus has indeed suggested that the conclusions which may be drawn from studies of popular music industries centering on political economy 'are often predictable, portraying corporate ownership leading to rigid forms of social control and having a detrimental impact upon the creative activities of musicians, the workers employed within the corporations and the audiences for recordings' [Negus, 1999]. At the same time, this dissertation has sought to illustrate that, whilst the adoption of Western business models have led to some foreseeable results, economical, political, geographical, cultural, historical, and demographical particularities have also had a profound influence

upon the strategies and practices of the major labels, making them distinct from that of other nations (as has been discussed throughout the dissertation).

The quotation cited at the beginning of Chapter 2, taken from the film *Suckseed*,¹ is indeed an extremely telling one. The dialogue, taken from a discussion about music between two schoolboys in 2000, is clearly intended to poke fun at the Thai popular- music industry, alluding to the dominance which the two main label companies, RS and Grammy, exert over the industry. Indeed most Thais (particularly the online community) would argue that this remains largely the case today. Particularly over the last decade, various scholars in the business field have attempted to analyse and predict the direction of music industries worldwide [Premkumar, 2003; Chohn, 2004; Kusek and Leonhard, 2005]. Their studies and speculations are essentially concerned with the new strategies that corporations operating in different industries will need to adopt in order to deal with the decline in album sales which was brought about by the emergence of illegal file-sharing technology on the Internet. Kusek and Leonhard suggest have suggested that it is in fact a misconception that the music industry is dying. They point out that between 2000 and 2005 music consumption actually increased, in spite of a decline in CD sales [Kusek and Leonhard, 2005]. Moreover, they note that technological advancements may actually enable artists to produce and distribute their work independently from the recording industry, since mediums such as the radio and television have been upstaged somewhat by the internet, a means whereby artists can advertise and sell their work directly (through their own websites, podcasting, internet radio sites, etc.) [Kusek and Leonhard, 2005]. As mentioned in the last chapter, these advancements bring with them the possibility

of weakening or even breaking down the barriers between artists and their audiences, of independent artists having access to different means of mass communication (and not merely major label ones).

Yet whilst this possibility seems an entirely realistic one, it seems to be one which has not yet been realized by those operating in the Thai popular-music industry, perhaps because Internet access is not yet widespread in Thailand and the television and radio remain significant forms of media (Chapter 5). As a result, major labels, which have long extended themselves into the other entertainment industries, remain extremely influential. Whilst many key questions arise from the study of the Thai popular-music industry, such as that of what the future holds for the label companies that have transformed themselves into content providers, whether the industry will ever operate upon the same scale as that of other Asian counterparts, whether Thai music has a sound that is in itself distinct and instantly recognizable, another question one might raise is whether technological advancement and the development of the Internet are the only significant factors in explaining the chronic decline in music sales which the Thai popular-music industry has experienced. Kusek and Leonhard have indeed questioned the assumption made by the recording industry that the decline in record sales may be explained by the popularity of illegal file-sharing, arguing further that oftentimes from the point of view of the consumer a CD is not ‘good value’ for money, especially in comparison to DVDs, computer software and video games [Kusek and Leonhard, 2005]. Premkumar has in fact pointed out that consumers more often than not agree to pay for music on the Internet if it is at the right price, in order to support their favourite artists [Premkumar, 2003]. This may suggest

another factor that has caused the decline in sales in Thailand, which is that, put simply, consumers have stopped agreeing to pay for something they no longer perceive to be valuable. Indeed the question of perceived value is an extremely interesting one, and closely tied to indie culture in Thailand.

The term 'indie' became synonymous with 'hipness' or 'coolness', and was employed to add value and uniqueness to various cultural artefacts (be it songs, films, clothing, or magazines), even though the processes used to create, advertise, and distribute those products were all but 'independent'. That is to say, whilst many products masqueraded themselves as 'indie' creations, they were in fact the fruit of large corporations and mass production. The question of why purportedly 'indie' products are deemed so much more valuable than those patently the fruit of mass manufacturing is doubtless an interesting one (one may examine the relevance of the idea of symbolic capital, discussed in the fourth chapter). Yet this is a subject for another study, perhaps a good starting point for other scholars, either in Thailand or abroad, interested in examining the Thai popular-music industry.

Notes

¹ A comedy film produced by GTH (a subsidiary company of Grammy) and released in Thailand on 17 March 2011.

ALTERNATIVE NAME

Names of artists and important public figures in Thailand normally are altered when they appear in media. The full Thai name is apparently too long to call these people. Therefore, alternative name is used to represent these artists and public figures. In this dissertation, I will use full name of them, however, I will provide alternative names of them, as they are called and recognized by Thai people, in this section.

Full Name	Alternative Name
Achita` Praamoo`d Na` Ayu`dthayaa	Ing
A`dsa`nee Chootikun	ป๊อ`ม A`dsa`nee
A๑๑nna`phaa Kri`dsadii	Phii` Maa`
Ammarin Ni`ti`phon	A`m
Amphon Lamphuun	Nu`j Amphon
Anchalii Conkhadiiki`d	Pu` Anchalii
Aphi`cha`dphon Wiira`se`dthakun	C๑๑j
Bu`dsa`baa Daawryyaan	Le`g Bu`dsa`baa
Chaatrii Khonsu`waan	Oom Chaatrii
Chiiwin Koosi`ja`phon	Boyd Kosiyaabong
Chootikun Brothers	A`dsa`nee&Wa`sa`n
Christina Aguila	Ti` Naa
Kamon Su`kooso`n	Su`kii`
Khwa`nthaa`d Na Takuuaa`thuu`n	Touch
Kanlajaak๑๑ Naa`gso`mpho`b	Earn Kanlajaak๑๑
Ki`dti`la`g Cunla`dthiiaa`n	Cu`m Ci`m AF1
Kriiaa๑kraaii Chee`dchoo`dsa`g	Hiiaa H๑๑`

Jeetrin Wa'dthana'si'n Maaii' Ca'raenpu'ra'	Jay Maaii'
Marsha Wa'dthana'phaani'd	Masha
Nant'idaa K'eebwuaas'aaj	Tuu'
Na'wa'ko'dchamon Chyy'nkhrongtham	Grace The Satr
Pa'tipaan Pa'thawiikaan	Mos
Phe'd Mars	Phii' Phe'd
Phaaiibuun Damrongchaaiitham	Aa Kuu'
Phongpha'd Wa'chi'ra'bancon	๖'b Phongpha'd
Pi'su'd Sa'bwij'i'd	Ciiaa'b Pi'su'd
Poon'sa'g Ra'dtana'phon	Off Poon'sa'g
Prime Minister Ple'e'g Pi'buunso'ghkraam	Coompon Phoo
Rewat Bhuddhinan	Tae'
Ronnachaaii Tho'mjaapa'ri'wa'd	๖'d Khiiriibuun
Saaoo'wala'g Liilabu'd	Am
Field Mashal Sa'ri'd Thana'ra'd	Coompon Sa'ri'd
See'dthaa' Si'ra'chaa'jaa	Too'j See'dthaa'
See'gsa'n Su'gphi'maaj	Sek Loso
Si'ri'sa'g Nanthasee'n	Ti'g Shiro
Si'thi'chaaii Chomphuuphaa'b	Boy AF3
So'mchaaj Khe'mkla'd	Taao'
So'mkiiiaa'd Ari'ja'chaaiiphaani'd	Z-Mix
Su'dthi'phon Wa'dthana'can	Chomphu Fruity

Su`ni`saa` Su`gbunsa`၇

သမ္မ Su`ni`saa`

Su`ni`taa Liiti`kun

Beau Su`ni`taa

Su`ra`phan Camlo၇kun

T၇၇

Su`thiisa`g Pha`gdiitheewaa

Phii` Coo`

Thakonkiiaa`d Wiirawaan

Boy Thakonkiiaa`d

Thana`chaaii U`dchin

Pod Modern Dong

Thana`phon Inthi`ri`d

Syyaa`

Thannath၇၇ Paala`kaw၇ Na` Aju`dthajaa

Uu` Thannath၇၇

Tho၇chaaii McIntyre

Bird or Phii` Bird

Traaiipho`b Limphrapa`d

T၇၇j Traaiipho`b

Yuttanaa Boonorm

Paa` Te`d

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF THAI AUDIENCES IN THAI INDIE MUSIC DURING THE INDIE PHENOMENON

Name :

Gender :

Date of Birth : **Age** :

Home Town :

Occupation :

Question

- 1. Did you grow up and spend your childhood and teenage life in your hometown?.....
- 2. Where did you live during 1994-1997?.....
- 3. Please describe the word “alternative music” from your understanding when you heard it at the first time?.....
.....
.....
.....
- 4. Please describe the word “indie music” from your understanding when you heard it at the first time?.....
.....
.....
.....
- 5. Did you realize the difference between “indie/independent music” and “alternative music” since the first time you knew these two words?

If yes, please describe the differences.....

-
-
-
6. Have your understanding on the meaning of “indie music” and “alternative music” been changed from what you understand at the first time you knew these two words? If yes, please describe when has the understanding of these two words been changed and why?.....

-
-
-
7. Please choose the main reason that you listened to “indie music” at the moment of the Indie Phenomenon (1994-1997).

..... Because of the tediousness of major label songs and artists, as well as the commercial constraints imposed on them by major labels.

..... You appreciated the musical talent of the indie artists and you believed that indie artists usually created a new sound in the music market in contrast to major artists.

..... The musical style of indie music was interesting.

..... “indie music” was a trendy music at that time

..... Other.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

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AUDIO EXAMPLES

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|------------------------------|--|
| 1. Khoõ Haaiĩ Myyaãn Dəəm | (Sũntharaapoon, Phleen Luũkkruun) |
| 2. Tãg Ka Təen Phuũg Boo | (Phuũmpuuaan Duuaanjan,
Phleen Luũkthuũn) |
| 3. Ciĩb Cuũ Ciĩ | (Royal Sprite, Phleen String Pre-pop
Era) |
| 4. Siiaãn Krã Sĩb | (Thoonchaaii McIntyre, Phleen
Sting) |
| 5. Bəə Dəəm | (D2B, Phleen String) |
| 6. Rãg Khun Khaaõ Ləə̃w | (Boyd Kosiyabong, Indie
Phenomenon) |
| 7. Bũdsabaa | (Modern Dog, Indie Phenomenon) |
| 8. Season Change | (Boyd Kosiyabong, Indie
Phenomenon) |