

## Process of Composing lyrics and melodies for Thai Musical Theater: The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai

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### Abstract

This article aims to present the process of composing lyrics and melodies for ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’, a novel (1952-1953) written by Woramai Kabilsingh. Qualitative research was conducted in order to collect data and analyze the concept and value of the novel, which then allowed the process of composing lyrics and melodies for it. The novel ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ promotes female rights by glorifying a heroine who goes through phases in proving herself worthy. It not only portrays sexual diversity which goes beyond the boundaries set by society but also discusses various forms of injustice in the ideal world of democracy, including the heterosexual ideology. The Queer Theory is incorporated in the novel to find answers which are not bound by any sexual standpoint. The composition of lyrics and melodies for ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ was inspired by the Preedalai musical theatre, with the main theme being ‘gender does not define the value of life.’ Musical and vocal composition is based on Thai songs with Khak (Malay and Javanese) accents used in Khon (traditional Thai masked dance) and Thai traditional theatre as well as Nora (traditional, folk performing arts which is popular in the southern region of Thailand) and Ronggeng music (music used in Ronggeng dance which is a type of muslim dance with singing, accompanied by a violin, rammana (goblet drum), accordion and a gong), which is appropriate for the characters and the settings of the novel.

**Keywords:** Thai Music; Thai Musical Theatre; Composition

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## Introduction

The genius of musical theatre is comprised of melodies and lyrics. In the past, the performers of Thai traditional theatres such as Lakorn Nai (female court theatre) would only dance while the singing was done by the singers. However, with the birth of musicals, Prince Narathip Praphanphong adapted songs that were used in plays in the past so that the performers could sing by themselves with some singing from the chorus. According to Pratern Mahakan (2013: 17), this was the beginning of a new way of singing, which promoted collaboration between performers and singers. It has added excitement for both the performers and the audience.

The concept of the Preedalai musicals was used as an inspiration for this composition. The adaptation of ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’, written by Woramai Kabilsingh, resulted in a solo singing script with chorus. ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ portrays female oppression by males. the Princess Palalerslaksanawalai is the main character who thinks differently from her family and males around her. She makes a decision to choose a life that breaks away from the societal norms of male domination and patriarchal family. The Preedalai musical theatre is a Thai musical that was established by Prince Narathip Praphanphong towards the end of King Rama V’s reign. His creation of this particular musical theatre was the first one in Thailand. He established the Naruemit theatre group with two other important people in the musical industry – Royal Mother Khian and his wife M.L. Tuan Worawan. The Royal Mother took part in choreography whereas M.L. Tuan was responsible for singing, music and management. The plays were usually performed by all female, without any dancing. The performers would be singing to one another with a chorus. Krap (wooden rhythm clapper) was used for percussion.

Chantima Promchotekul (1975: 75) mentioned that the songs in Preedalai’s musical theatre have been adjusted to match people’s emotions and feelings, with some singing, talking, and comedy to make it more entertaining. Commonly used in the plays were fast-tempo songs. Medium-tempo songs were also used with accompaniment of Sor-U (low pitch fiddle), krap (wooden rhythm clappers), thon (globet drum) and rammana (vessel hand drum). The type of Piphat used is the Piphat Mai Nuam (an indoor ensemble with a pair of style soft mullets), so that the sound would not be louder than the singers’ voice. Other than singing, the performers had to present the dialogues which was in the same context as the singing. When speaking, they speak normally without any special accent.

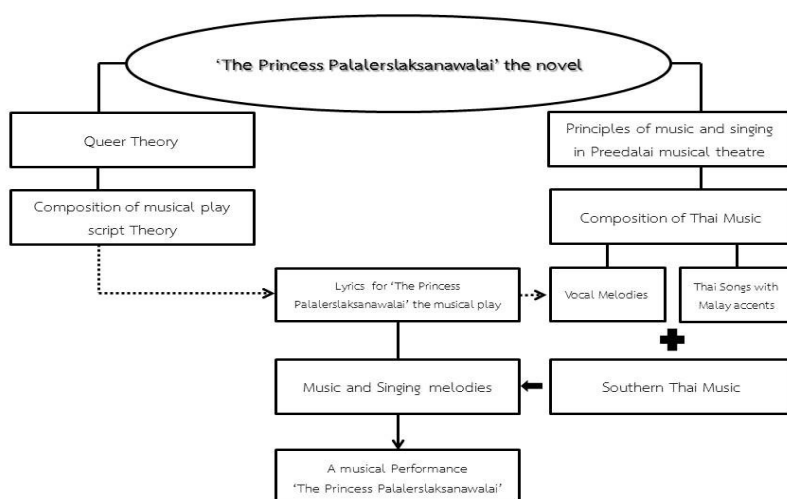
Therefore, the researcher has decided to follow and apply the principles of the Preedalai musical theatre as an inspiration to create a musical that portrays sexual diversity which goes beyond the boundaries set by society. It also discusses various forms of injustice in the ideal world of democracy, including the heterosexual ideology. The idea is to embrace self expression and diverse sexual orientations, taking into account the people who are overlooked, marginalised, or seen as freaks. There are not just men and women in the society, but those of other sexual orientations that exist and are contributing to our society as well. Mythologies in ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ such as “women cannot be leaders” or “women have to be wives, combined with the author Woramai Kabil Singh’s intents regarding Buddhism are to point out the diversity of gender identity and sexual orientations that exist in society. The concept is presented through the character of Princess Palalerslaksanawalai

## Research objectives

2.1 To analyze the history, concepts, and values of the novel ‘Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’.

2.2 To compose lyrics, melodies, and singing techniques for ‘Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ musical performance.

Figure 1 Research Framework



Source: Sanchai Uaesilapa

## Research Methodology

During the process of the research, qualitative research methods were implemented. Information, which was collected through various sources such as academic papers, research articles, books, textbooks, and interviews were then studied and analyzed in related areas. A literature review was conducted and important information was organized into topics including Feminist Theory, Queer Theory, Preedalai Musical theatre, vocal music and instrumental music for Thai theatre, and music of the southern part of Thailand. Interviews were conducted with musicians and experts who are experienced in the performing arts. Thai songs sung with foreign accents which are often used in Thai theatre were studied in order to compose lyrics and melodies for ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’.

## Research findings

The research findings are threefold as follows:

### 1. History and analysis of ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’

‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ was a fiction series published in the Thai Mhai Wan-Jan newspaper during the year 1952-1953. The author was Woramai Kabilsingh or Luang Ya (Grandmother as female monk). She was the person who established the Songdhammakalyani Monastery. She was a tall and light-skinned woman. A disciplined person, soft yet tough, Luang Ya was born on April 6, 2018 in Nhong Pladuk, Banpong, Ratchaburi Province. She was the sixth child in the family. Her mother was called Somjeen and her father was called Tiang. She received her education at Mahaprutaram Girls’ School and Assumption Girls’ College. She briefly went to Penang to study physical education and came back to be the first physical education teacher in Thailand. She was married to Kokiad (Wuang) Satsen. Luang Ya was an important person in the religious context of Thailand. She spent 48 years following Buddha’s footsteps and passed away when she was 95 years old.

‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ is a novel that reflects how the society was in the past. There was a lot of pressure from politics, religion, economics, and culture. This novel is one of the novels in Thailand to express the notion of feminism. The story is about how men, who are of the stronger gender, oppress women because they think that gender identity is determined by biological sex. The author wants to address and discuss women’s rights in ways that were unprecedented as follows:

1.1 The fight for the throne between a man and a woman, the divided power and the idea that women are the weaker sex

## 1.2 Homosexuality or the absence of boundaries in sexual identity

‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ is therefore a feminist novel. It glorifies a heroine who tries to prove herself worthy of being a leader and holding political power the way men can. Having won numerous battles, she proves herself becoming a decorated war hero. Other than that, the novel touches upon homosexuality in various scenes such as when the princess disguises herself as a man, making all the girls fall in love, or when she disguises herself as a maid, enchanting all the men with her beauty. Moreover, the novel portrays the female character to be a smart, skilled, and committed person - comparable to any men. The character of the Princess Palalerslaksanawalai is a complex one. She is a daughter, a heroine, a husband, and a king.

### 2. The script composition for ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’

The proposition of this research article is to compose the script of musical play for a solo performance using a central conflict. The conflict that has been used in this composition is the conflict of being a female leader, the lifting of a woman’s social status to be king in the society of heterosexual ideology.

The Queer Theory was used to analyze how different terminologies are used to identify different sexual orientations such as gay, trans, tomboy, lesbian, bisexual, etc. Each of these identities is a mix of male and female. Furthermore, there are those who do not identify themselves based on gender identity or sexual orientation. The most important mission of this research article is to see, acknowledge, and feel the existence of individuals when there may be more than one answer to the question. Society’s paradigm of sexuality is gradually changing from generation to generation. The aim of this research is to create an understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation, which may be tied down to the idea of being male and female. It has been found that the way of Buddha can explain the differences in sexuality in a way that is more understandable presented a viewpoint of being male and female:

*The root of being male or female is tied to both conditions.*

*As long as humans are restrained to them, they will remain.*

(Dungrin, 2015: 80-81)

Isara Nakhon City is interpreted to be a community of people of diverse sexuality. It is a democratic land that embraces differences in people. The main character is Princess Palalerslaksanawalai. This female character gets to talk about things that happened to her and how she decides to lead a life that is not bound by other people’s opinions and

expectations. Love and relationship are the main theme to be portrayed. While watching the play, the audience may discern peculiarity from what they have, what they are, what they see, and what they want. They may base it on rules or regulations laid by themselves or by society. Terms used to indicate the weirdness or peculiarity, that divides classes of people by biology, are therefore the stimuli for audience to look around them, look at what is happening in front of them, and listen to the main character's story.

The bird is used as a symbol of spreading sexual bias in the beginning of the story. The bird broadcasts the news that King Isararat is sick and tells Princess Palalerslaksanawalai to come back to Isara Nakhon City to fight an enemy. After winning the battle, the princess brings the good news to King Isararat and finds out that the bird has been killed by Prince Intanon. The meaning behind the bird character is the construction of the word "freedom". After various problems die down, she goes to her grandfather's Sikrin Nakhon and gets herself another bird.

Photo 1 Birds as a symbol on the stage



Source: Thanwa Panpim

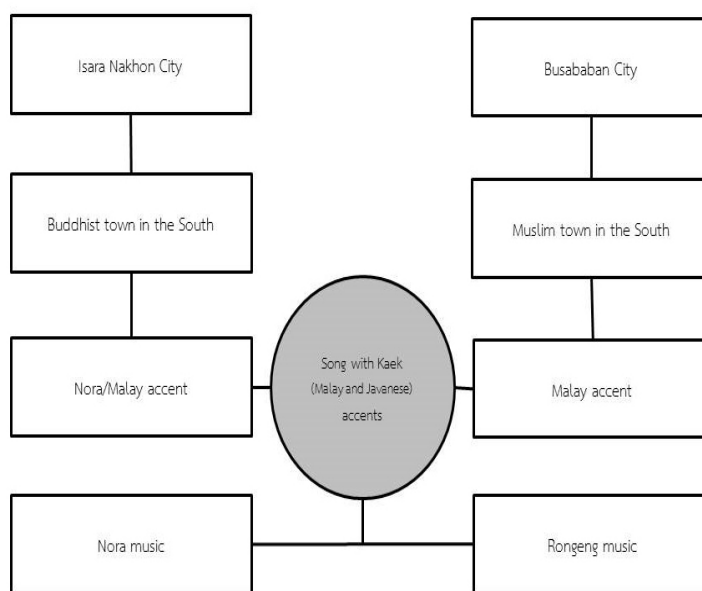
The adaptation of 'The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai' the novel which resulted in the script has four main characters. The main protagonist is Princess Palalerslaksanawalai. The antagonists are Prince Intanon and Prince Patima. The supporting character is Princess Butsabamintra. A chorus would be narrating the story with a main narrator. The conflict of the story happens when King Isararat is ill and weak. Social inequality comes back again when Prince Intanon tries to possess the throne and takes over political power. The script of the play includes lyrics for solo singing, lyrics for the chorus, monologue and dialogue.

### 3. The music composition for ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’

The music composition is based on feelings and desires of each character in the story. The process is as follows.

3.1 The setting of the story is Isara Nakhon City, AD 1857. The city is in the south of Thailand, near the border. The researcher thought that the music should have a relation to the ethnicity or the background of the characters. Therefore, southern Thai music with foreign accents is used to highlight the geographic background of the characters. Fictionally, Isara Nakhon City is in the south of Thailand and Busababan City is a muslim town in the south of Thailand. The music that fits the characters and their background was designed follows:

Figure 2 Music Composition for the Characters’ Ethnicity



Source: Sanchai Uaesilapa

3.2 Chorus is used to tell the story. Percussion is performed by a chorus using krap, a set of wooden clappers.

3.3 The researcher has set the mood and tone of the performance to be realistic and to be truthful to the characters. Therefore, the melody was created brand new without vibrato.

3.4 piphat mai nuam is used for instrumental music with the sor-u as the main instrument accompanied with the vocal lines. krap is used for percussion. Percussions from Nora performance are used as well as a violin and an accordion from the Rongeng ensemble.

3.5 Songs with foreign accents that are used in Khon, Nora music, and Rongeng are incorporated in the music composition for ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’. This is to be consistent with the characters and their locations.

3.6 The approach to composing the music is to be in accordance with the emotions and objective of the characters. The mood of the song is consistent with the events in the story.

3.7 Types of songs used in the musical performance of ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ can be divided into three types:

3.7.1 Prelude is a short piece of music before the performance begins.

3.7.2 Vocal music is composed to express the needs, feelings and thoughts of the characters. It also narrates the story. Vocal music can be divided into two types:

3.7.2.1 Vocal melodies that express needs, feelings and desires of the main character, sung by the main character.

3.7.2.2 Vocal melodies that narrate the story and explain the events sung by the chorus.

3.7.3 Instrumental music - A piece of music played to create an atmosphere and express the mood of the story and the characters. In a musical play, it is usually short and is placed at the beginning or the end of the scene to connect with the mood and feelings in the current situation in which the character is facing.

3.8 The approach to creating the lyrics and melody - The order of the events and actions of the characters were analyzed creatively. The approach can be divided into the following points.

3.8.1 Thai songs with foreign accents that are commonly used in Khon are used in this musical play in order to indicate the ethnicity and environment the characters are in.

3.8.2 The feelings and truth of the characters are considered in order to control the mood and tone of the music.

3.8.3 The Nora melodies are incorporated in the composition of the melody.

3.8.4 The movements such as when a character is riding a horse, the burning of flames, or the fights between characters are analyzed and used to determine the beats and rhythm.

3.8.5 The breathing patterns and the mood are observed as to control the rhythm and create the melodies.

3.8.6 krap is incorporated in the composition of the music with leading and supporting instruments. Verses are exchanged with repetition of words.

3.9 Scale - The scale is the most important part in composing music. For ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’, the music has to reflect the characters’ ethnicity and background. The scale plays an important role in creating the mood and tone for the story. The principles in creating the melody for this play is as follows.

3.9.1 The composition of the music is determined by the interpretation of the mood and atmosphere of the scene. For example, the G - scale (G A B x D E x) creates a lively feeling which fits for a morning scene.

3.9.2 The foreign accents (Malay and Javanese) are used to identify the background and ethnicity of the characters. The gimmicks of the songs are the followings.

3.9.2.1 Actual Thai songs which are sung with foreign accents were researched and used as a prototype in composing the accent and the melody of the songs.

3.9.2.2 A scale was selected first then the notes were put close together in order to create a foreign accent in the song.

3.9.2.3 The techniques in playing the music is to “repeat the sound and emphasize the accent”, as shown in the example below.

Table 1 Thai Music Notation from the composing

|         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| -- G G  | -- G G  | -- G G  | -- G G  | --- A   | -- B A  | -- B A  | G E - G |
| B B A B | B B A B | A A B A | G E - G | B B A B | B B A B | A A B A | G E - G |
| --- D   | --- E   | --- G   | --- A   | ----    | ----    | ----    | ----    |
| B B A B | B B A B | A A B A | G E - G | B B A B | B B A B | A A B A | G E - G |
| --- D   | --- B   | --- A   | --- G   | --- D   | --- C   | --- B   | --- A   |
| A A B A | G A B A | A A B A | G E - G | B B A B | B B A B | A A B A | G E - G |

From the melodies in the example, it can be seen that repeating the sequences of melodies also helps in emphasizing the foreign accents. This is a common technique in music composition.

3.10 Rhythmic patterns - The determination of rhythmic patterns allows the melody to convey feelings or express what the composer wants according to the duration of the rhythm. The relation between rhythmic patterns and melodies is unique and is based on the researcher's inspiration. The rhythmic patterns can be divided as follows.

3.10.1 to emphasize the foreign accents.

3.10.2 to describe the movements of the characters.

3.10.3 to express and convey feelings of the main character.

3.11 Tempo and rhythm patterns - Tempo is an important component in the music for 'The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai'. Thai songs with foreign accents are mainly used, and mood influences the direction of the composition. As a result, the songs for this play are short pieces of music with a fast tempo, medium tempo, and free tempo with a pair of cymbals.

Percussion instruments used are *klong khaek* (double-headed barrel drum), *klong Nora* (one-headed barrel drum), *thap* (goblet-shaped drum), *cymbals*, *krap* and *trae* (wooden clappers). From the requirements to incorporate songs with foreign accents and take into account feelings and nature of the characters, rhythmic patterns used in the composition are relative to the melodies and accents, as shown in the example below.

Figure 3 rhythmic patterns of southern percussion' s style

## - Klong Norah, Tab

|             |               |                     |               |                     |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Tab         | - Chab Chab - | - - - -             | - Chab Chab - | - - - -             |
| Klong Norah | - - - -       | Tung Tung Tung Tung | - - - -       | Tung Tung Tung Tung |

## - Rammana

|         |             |                |
|---------|-------------|----------------|
| Rammana | - Jong Pa - | Jong Pa – Prum |
|---------|-------------|----------------|

## Conclusion

The novel “Princess Palalerslaksanavalai” was written by Vorramai Kabillasingha. It reflects the reality of our past, which was highly influenced by politics, religion, economics, and culture. It is the first feminist novel in Thailand. The story addresses men who see themselves as the stronger gender because they see gender identity as something that is defined by assigned sex and therefore, oppress women. The author mentions women rights and freedom in unprecedented ways. The novel “The Princess Palalerslaksanavalai” tells a story about conflicts raised by the ascension to the throne of a woman. The story begins with King Israrat of Isara Nakhon City being ill and looking for someone to inherit the throne. His first choice Princess Palalerslaksanavalai, his half-sister who is qualified to govern and skilled at combat. He then makes a decision to give the throne to her. This decision is against social norms in that time because only men can govern and take possession of the throne. As a result, disapproval spurred among aristocrats. “The Princess Palalerslaksanavalai” is a novel with Princess Palalerslaksanavalai as a female main character.

The Queer Theory was used to analyze how different terminologies are used to identify different sexual orientations such as gay, trans, tomboy, lesbian, bisexual, etc. Each of these identities is a mix of male and female. Furthermore, there are those who do not identify themselves based on gender identity or sexual orientation. The fact that the main character in “The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai” allows the audience to see that the value of being human does not depend on gender. The most important mission of this research article is to see, acknowledge, and feel the existence of individuals when there may be more than one answer to the question. Society’s paradigm of sexuality is gradually changing from generation to generation. Isara Nakhon can be interpreted as a representative

of a community of people with different sexual orientations and everyone accepts each other on the base of democracy. The Queer Theory aims to give a new explanation about sexuality by taking into account diversity in humans. In this research, the notions of love and sexual orientation are presented through Princess Palalerslaksanawalai. The aim is to create an understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation, which may be tied down to the idea of being male and female. It has been found that the way of Buddha can explain the differences in sexuality in a way that is more understandable.

Songs used in musical plays are an important tool to convey feelings, emotions and objective of the characters through performers. Therefore, in singing these songs, the performers must have a good understanding of the characters and the situations in the story. Moreover, the performers must understand the components of the music played. The songs in ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ do not have vibrato and are short, but they allow the audience to see through the characters and share the feelings and emotions with them as they are experiencing different situations. Using wooden clappers with chorus as characters are making exchanges is a charm of Preedalai’s musical theatre, which have been used as inspiration. Other than foreign accents which are unique to ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’, the repetitive singing technique of the chorus supports the main character. A chorus also helps to amplify the emotions and emphasize the significance of each event in the story. The singing tactics in the play are as follows:

- Solo singing by the main character Princess Palalerslaksanawalai who is the one doing the solo part. Each song varies upon her feelings and the situations.
- Group singing (chorus) by a chorus that sings along with the main singers and the main character.
- Singing with instruments sung by the performers along with the piphat mai nuam ensemble. Some songs sung accompanied by the sor-u, some with a violin, and some with khlui phiang aw (flute).

Photo 2 Performance on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019



Source: Thanwa Panpim

## Discussion

The music in the play has been created in a manner that the feelings of the characters are conveyed through musical sound, singing, accents, melodies and tempo which are relative to the truths of the characters. When the character is sad, happy, or angry, the performer and the singer must be able to connect with the characters and their emotions, desires, and motives. Every song in the play can be sung in a way that can bring the characters to life by creating beliefs and inducing imagination. Having composed music for ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’, the author could summarize the approach to convey the characters’ emotions as they are advancing through situations as follow:

1. Feelings of the character -The singers and musicians are able to convey the characters’ feelings in various situations through music and vocalizing in ways that the characters would like to express themselves.
2. Lyrics interpretation - The lyrics play an important part in the singing because the composer is the one who determines the story. The singers can analyze the direct and indirect meaning behind the lyrics.
3. Mood and tone - The lyrics and the melodies are created in a way that emotions and feelings of the characters in different situations are conveyed. The singers must have correct pronunciation and must be able to get into the mood of the songs.
4. Breathing - Controlling breathing patterns and pausing between verses are important in performing musical plays. The reason is that breathing is the body’s mechanism

to show happiness, fear, concerns, love, anger, etc. Therefore, if the singer observes her own breathing pattern, she will be able to implement breathing techniques in singing the script. The songs in ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ allows each singer to be able to control and execute breathing patterns in order to convey emotions in the songs.

The composition of music for the musical play ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ is a production which incorporates different fields of knowledge. Many aspects such as emotions in the songs, the desires and motives of the characters and the occurrences in the story have been analyzed to develop a concept for a musical play. It requires application of Thai musical theories and knowledge in composing Thai music and the adaptation of Preedalai musical concepts and the composition of Thai songs with foreign accents. Moreover, it requires a great deal of literary knowledge, ability to analyze play scripts, and principles of acting. This article evokes a realization that roots of conflict and discord is a lack of morals. A lack of morals in humans makes them unable to see what their minds truly want.

## Recommendations

### General recommendations

1. The lyrical composition for ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ in this research was meant for a solo performance. There are ways to adapt and develop the composition to be fitting for a group performance or adjust the concept of the story according to other composers’ perspectives and interpretations.
2. The melodic composition for ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ can be developed differently based on other composers’ standpoints towards the novel and the character or attitudes and beliefs about the subject matters that the novel discusses.

### Recommendations for future research

1. There should be more compositions from other composers of different sexual orientations because different beliefs and perspectives would help to portray ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ in other ways that are not bound by gender, class, religion, or ethnicity.
2. The music in ‘The Princess Palalerslaksanawalai’ should be played by different Thai musical instruments or those of other countries such as Malaysia’s.

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