I. Introduction

Thai dance-drama (*lakhon/ lakon*) has three major genres: *lakhon ram*, *lakhon rong*, and *lakhon phut*. *Lakhon ram*, the oldest genre, has a close relationship with religious and agricultural ceremonies, traditions, and customs, and has various styles including both classical and folk. Generally, it received a warm welcome throughout the country until nineteenth century. The other two genres, *lakhon rong* and *lakhon phut* were influenced by western dramatic forms introduced during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Rama V (1868-1910).

An ongoing debate continues to question the origin of *lakhon rong* (singing dance drama). Mattani Mojdara Rutnin (1993: 138) pointed that, on one hand, according to the letter from

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1) A dance drama with poetic narratives sung by a chorus and solo singers and poetic prose dialogue spoken by the dancers-actors.  
2) An operetta with narratives sung by a chorus and dialogue sung and spoken by the actors-singers.  
3) A spoken drama in poetry or prose.
King Chulalongkorn to his wife, Chao Dararatsami, princess consort of Chiengmai, *lakhon rong* was introduced by Prince Narathip⁴ and was influenced by western opera. For instance, *Sao Khrua Fa*, the most popular *lakhon rong* of the period, was inspired by Puccini’s opera *Madame Butterfly*. On the other hand, according to Prince Damrong,⁵ *lakhon rong* was influenced by *Lakhon Bangsawan Malayu*,⁶ the Malay opera which was performed for King Chulalongkorn at Saiburi during his royal tour of the Malay Peninsula.

In the beginning, *lakhon rong* did not attract Thai audiences because it was a new genre. However, the genre became very popular when Prince Narathip introduced more exotic, romantic, melodramatic, and adventurous stories. Since then, there were many companies producing *lakhon rong*, and later it was called *lakhon pridalai* which was the name of Prince Narathip’s theatre. Many stories were an adaptation of western and eastern romantic adventures with their popular love songs. The casts were mostly female, except for the comedians. *Lakhon rong*’s popularity gradually declined and ended after World War II while audio-visual media were increasingly popular. Ubonrat Siriyuwasak (2007: 57-67)

In recent times, few Thai people have recognized the genre of *lakhon rong*. Instead, they are more attracted to Thai

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⁴ Prince Narathip was one of King Chulalongkorn’s brothers.
⁵ Prince Damrong was one of King Chulalongkorn’s brothers.
⁶ A Malay opera with orchestra comprising both indigenous and Western instruments, and songs sung by the main actress. The golden age of Bangsawan was between 1905-1935.