

## Etudes based on Melody “Accent” for Solo Piano

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### Abstract

Etudes based on Thai Melody “Accent” for Solo Piano is designed with three primary objectives in mind: 1) to explore methods of combining Thai and Western music, 2) to present an innovative approach to piano composition inspired by the Thai Melody “Accent”, and 3) to contribute new knowledge to the academic field of music composition. The composition draws its inspiration from the Thai Melody “Accent”, which is used as a connecting melody commonly found in Thai music and provides the composer with a rich source of creative material. The experience of attending Thai music concerts and seminars served as the foundation for the musical themes and motifs that characterize these piano etudes. The work reimagines the “Accent,” which traditionally incorporates influences from Burmese, Mon, Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese, Indian, Chinese, and Western. Accordingly, the composition consists of ten short etudes and blends Western musical techniques, incorporating a wide array of melodic lines, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic textures. The work highlights technically demanding aspects of piano performance, such as octaves, large leaps, and close-range intervals, as it weaves multiple independent melodies into a rich, intricate musical tapestry. This approach emphasizes the horizontal independence of each melodic line while allowing for a more flexible interpretation of vertical harmony. Given these components, it is more appropriate for the performer to have experience and knowledge of both Thai and international music to interpret the piece effectively. This will enable the performer to present the work appropriately. This study contributes to academic discourse by exploring other possibilities for combining Thai and Western music, aiming to produce several short practice

pieces for solo piano that will be useful to those interested in both piano technique and composition.

*Keywords: Creative research, Contemporary music, Piano etude, Accent*

## Introduction

In Thai classical tradition, “Accent” refers to medley-like compositions that sequentially present melodies associated with various cultural “accents” or national styles such as Burmese, Mon and Lao. Historically, court composers combined several of these accented tunes into a continuous performance (Inthanin, 1993). Such multi-ethnic medleys suggest a natural affinity with the etude form: both are relatively short pieces that can stand alone yet also form part of a larger cycle. An etude (study) is a short instrumental composition designed primarily to develop specific technical skills (e.g. scale passages, chordal technique) (Suttachitt, 1997). Many piano etudes – by Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, and Rachmaninoff – have transcended their pedagogical purpose to become concert repertoire, owing largely to the piano’s unique ability to combine melody and harmony simultaneously (Suttachitt, 1997).

Given these parallels, recomposing a Thai Accent melody as a set of piano etudes is both practical and meaningful. The piano’s rich range and versatility allow it to convey Thai modal ornaments and scales alongside Western harmonic progressions. Moreover, synthesizing Thai and Western elements exemplifies broader trends in Thai music: as Thai society has modernized, musicians increasingly blend traditional Thai idioms with Western techniques, creating new works that reflect a globalized cultural context (Khantachan & Sirimukdagul, 2022; Phonchuan, 2020). The present project, therefore, explores one avenue of Thai–Western musical fusion by crafting a set of etudes that incorporate the Thai “Accent” theme. In doing so, it draws on existing pedagogy and theory while pushing compositional boundaries. The creative outcome is intended to contribute to academic knowledge in music composition by providing novel examples of cross-cultural synthesis and by expanding the body of solo piano repertoire grounded in Thai tradition.

## Objectives

- 1) To study and apply methods for combining Thai melodic idioms with Western harmony and counterpoint in composition.
- 2) To create a set of technical piano etudes inspired by the Thai melody.
- 3) To contribute new knowledge to the academic field of music composition.

## Scope of Content

This creative research centers on the composition of solo piano etudes using the Thai “Accent” melody as source material. The work focuses on integrating key elements of Thai music—such as pentatonic or modal scale fragments and ornamentation—with Western music theory, particularly functional harmony and contrapuntal texture, within advanced pianistic settings. Each etude is intended as a self-contained study that develops specific performance skills, including interval leaps, polyphony, and rhythmic complexity, while embedding motifs from Thai musical tradition. The project encompasses both the compositional process and the analysis of the resulting works.

## Sources of Study

Primary research materials were obtained from specialized music collections and libraries, including Bangkokthonburi University Library, the Faculty of Music Library at Bangkokthonburi University, and the College of Music Library at Mahidol University.

These sources provided a theoretical background on Thai classical traditions and on Western piano technique. Additional references included scholarly writing on Thai-Western fusion (e.g. Khantachan & Sirimukdagul, 2022; Laokhonka et al., 2024; Phulaiyaw, 2021) and on the etude repertoire.

## Creative Process

The project followed a structured creative flow:

- 1) Collecting and studying examples of Thai Accent melodies and their cultural context to identify characteristic scales, rhythms, and ornaments.
- 2) Analyzing significant solo piano etudes by Czerny, Chopin, and Debussy to understand technical challenges and forms.
- 3) Synthesizing knowledge by integrating insights from Thai traditional

music and Western piano composition to determine how Thai modal melodies can be harmonized or transformed through Western compositional methods.

4) Composing a set of ten short piano etudes using the “Accent” melody material, with each piece incorporating a different regional motif or style and focusing on a particular technical element.

5) Analyzing and evaluating the completed etudes by examining their tonal organization, technique, and musical elements, and documenting how Thai melodic content and Western harmonic textures interact in each piece.

## Analysis of the Newly Composed Work

The completed suite comprises ten etudes for solo piano. Each etude is self-contained and can be performed independently. Collectively, the pieces reimagine the traditional “Accent” theme—including its variants named after Burmese, Mon, Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese, Indian, Chinese, and Western influences—in a piano context. The tonal plan spans diverse key centers (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Key Signatures of Dialects

No.	Dialect	Key Signature
1	Theme	F Major
2	Burmese	D Major
3	Mon	E-flat Major
4	Lao	D-flat Major
5	Khmer	C Major
6	Vietnamese	E Major
7	Indian	G-flat Major
8	Chinese	G Major
9	Western	A Major

Each etude has a distinct technical and musical focus, though all unite Thai motifs with Western idioms. For instance, the first etude cultivates legato technique across both single-note lines and widely spaced chords. It employs diminished and chromatic harmonies to avoid trivial repetition of tonic-dominant progressions, enriching the tonal palette. The second etude (Burmese) features sustained parallel fifths and alternates between legato and staccato articulation over intervallic expanses, octave-to-eleventh leaps. The left hand punctuates the texture with Thai “accent” tones in the style of traditional bass patterns to reinforce rhythmic drive.

Another piece, inspired by the Mon melody, expands a theme from narrow conjunct motion into sudden wide leaps, mirroring the expressive flexibility of Romantic-era piano writing. The Lao etude emphasizes syncopation and sharp alternations of touch: it juxtaposes sudden jumps between close and distant notes and weaves chromatic scalar passages within a seventh-spanning range. In the Khmer-influenced etude, the left hand plays a syncopated accompaniment under a broad, arching right-hand melody; the same melody is repeated at contrasting dynamic levels, training the pianist to maintain control and expression under varying intensity.

The Vietnamese etude is built around rapid, abrupt dynamic contrasts, forte-piano shifts, requiring agile control to execute sudden mood changes smoothly. The Indian etude begins with stepwise, narrow-range motifs that progressively expand into wide, dramatic leaps; it employs imitative (fugato-like) counterpoint, introducing polyphonic thinking as the melody splits across hands. The Chinese etude alternates fluid legato phrases with crisp staccato chords in wide registers, using rich chromaticism to blur the sense of simple triadic harmony – an homage to the more modal and pentatonic character of Chinese-derived sections. Finally, the Western-styled etude foregrounds complex rhythm and finger technique: it uses syncopations and finger substitution to facilitate octave displacements, and inserts quintuplet figures against duplets, demanding precise polyrhythmic coordination akin to modern Western piano repertoire.

Throughout the suite, Thai melodic and rhythmic elements, such as scale fragments or ornamental figures characteristic of each regional accent, are embedded within Western forms and textures. This horizontal melody emphasises the characteristic of the traditional Accent medley, which is preserved, while vertical harmony is rendered flexibly rather than strictly functional. The result is a set of etudes that both showcase piano virtuosity and carry the distinct flavor of Thai musical accents.

## Expected Benefits

The new etudes offer several artistic and educational benefits. Artistically, they bridge Thai traditional music and Western piano literature, presenting Thai melodic themes in a context accessible to global audiences. Prior research indicates that blending Western techniques with the folk musical idiom of Southeast Asia can modernize traditional music and widen its appeal (Laokhonka et al., 2024). For example, Laokhonka, Nesusin, and Pikulsri (2024) found that applying Western harmonic and formal playing methods to Isan folk songs modernized the traditional music, making it more appealing to audiences today. Likewise, Phulaiyaw (2021) observes that merging Western and Eastern musical modes in solo piano arrangements makes the work more

international in character. By this logic, the present etudes may help popularize Thai melodic heritage beyond Thailand and serve as culturally infused repertoire in international recitals and competitions.

Pedagogically, the suite presents piano teaching materials with original compositions inspired by non-Western sources. Each etude exercises specific techniques—wide leaps, contrapuntal independence, and rhythmic dexterity—in musically meaningful contexts. This offers students a dual benefit of technical development and cultural exposure. Moreover, as case studies in composition, these pieces contribute to scholarly discourse:

1) They exemplify one method of transcultural creativity, aligning with Khantachan & Sirimukdagul (2022);

2) They serve as a reference for future composers interested in fusing Thai themes with Western forms.

In summary, the work advances both artistic and academic understanding by demonstrating how a Thai “Accent” melody can be reframed through innovative compositional techniques, thereby preserving and reinterpreting Thai musical identity in a contemporary pianistic idiom.

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## Biography

Dr Bhannavichaya Vadhanasiriphongs, he was born in 1985 in Bangkok, Thailand. He started learning electone when he was in primary school at Siam Music Yamaha, Ladphrao campus. In Primary 4, he started taking piano lessons with Aj. Somboon Viriyasophon until he finished his bachelor's degree in Marketing from Chulalongkorn University in 2009. He finished his junior high school at Bodindecha 2 and senior high school at Triam Udom Suksa School. During this period, he became interested in writing music. He started learning private composition with Aj. Narongrit Dhamabuttra. After high school, he studied at the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy at Chulalongkorn University. His major was marketing. During this period, he passed the LTCL Diploma in piano recital from Trinity Guildhall. After he graduated from Chulalongkorn University, he took a master's degree in music composition at Rangsit University (2011–2014). Among his music instructors were: Aj. Boonrut, Aj. Jiradej, Aj. Narong, Aj. Denny, Aj. Zurazak and Aj. Wiboon. From 2014–2023, He was a DM student in music composition at Mahidol University under the supervision of Aj. Julia Bozone, Aj. Max Keller, Aj. Tyler Capp, Aj. Arsid Kedjuntra and Aj. Wannapha Yannavut. He graduated with a dissertation titled Symphony on a “Pin-Hatai” Theme.

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