

THE THAI CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM

Boonlert Pairindra *

INTRODUCTION

Most developing countries are tempted to implement some of the more sophisticated administrative doctrines and techniques. The tendency to do so is rooted in the ambition to be as modern as the developed countries. Thailand is no exception. For instance, the civil service system tries to incorporate many modern concepts and techniques, especially local area network and world wide web telecommunications.

The objective of this paper is to provide a general perspective on the civil service system in Thailand. Accordingly, a brief historical background of the system will be sketched, and some other aspects of personnel administration in the system will also be discussed.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Thai civil service system has evolved from the Sukhothai period (1238 – 1378), Ayudhya period (1350 – 1767), and finally into the current Bangkok period (1782 – present). During the Sukhothai period, the relationship between the king and his people was paternalistic. In times of peace, everybody was occupied in earning a living as a civilian. On the other hand, when the kingdom was at war they united to fight the enemy. Thus, it was practically impossible to make a distinction between soldiers and civil servants.

The paternalistic form of government was later replaced by the master-servant form during the Ayudhya period. The power to rule was believed to have derived from God and was to be exercised through a king. It was the duty of every

* Senior Advisor on the Civil Service System, Office of the Civil Service Commission.

able-bodied man to serve the king by working for the state. For this reason, these men might appropriately be called “kharajakarn,” literally “servants of the king’s business.”

During the early Bangkok period, the main principles of public administration employed in Ayudhya remained in use. The reign of King Mongkut was the turning point in regard to contacts with the outside world, especially European countries. Following his father’s policy, King Rama V (Chulalongkorn) saw the need to develop further relationships with the West. Thus, Thailand had to face the internal and international problems caused by inappropriate administrative organizations.

By 1892, King Chulalongkorn had established a series of 12 ministries, organized along hierarchical lines, responsible for specific functions, and headed by ministers who collectively constituted a council or cabinet under the personal direction of the king. A few years earlier, a system of regular salary payments had been initiated for segments of the civil service. With the creation of the new ministries, a clear distinction was drawn for the first time between civil and military functions.

Before 1929, heads of departments had full authority to recruit officials on any basis they chose. Recruitment was chaotic. There were no sets of examinations, even of a qualifying character. However, such personnel practices were changed by the initiation of the first Civil Service Act of 1928, which took effect on April 1, 1929.

With the implementation of this Act, the structure of personnel administration underwent a tremendous change. A prototype Civil Service Commission (called the Committee for Maintenance of the Civil Service Act) was set up to enforce the merit system in the civil service.

After the political transition in 1932 had transformed government from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy, the role of the civil servant changed noticeably. It was also thought that the civil service regulations under the 1928 Act were no longer appropriate as they were not in line with the new democratic regime. Hence, the second Civil Service Act was passed in 1933 to replace it.

According to the 1933 Act, the position classification system was to replace the old rank classification system, and emphasis was placed upon duties and responsibilities. Consequently, matters relating to placement, appointment and rates of pay were to be determined by position alone.

After a 3-years implementation, the position classification system was abolished, and the rank classification system was reinstalled by the third Civil Service Act of 1936. The failure of position classification, under the 1933 Act, was partly due to a lack of preparation of the Civil Service Commission and its staff.

Personnel ranks of civil servants adopted in 1936 were different from those of the Civil Service Act of 1928 in that they were classified into 5 classes or grades, namely: 1) fourth (the lowest); 2) third; 3) second; 4) first; and 5) special classes. It should be noted that each class was further classified into different steps in a manner similar to that of the military ranking system. Positions used as a guideline were divided into the following categories: 1) clerk; 2) section official; 3) section chief; 4) division chief; 5) director-general; (6) permanent secretary of the ministry.

Afterwards, the Civil Service Acts of 1936, 1942, 1952 and 1954 were passed, but major principles were maintained. The alterations dealt mainly with authorities of the Civil Service Commission, personnel administration procedures, and salary schedules of civil servants.

For positions which differed from those given above, it was the duty of the Civil Service Commission to equate them. Nevertheless, this kind of rudimentary position classification based on duties and responsibilities was developed from past principles. In fact, some of these principles were later used as guidelines in shaping the current position classification system.

After more than twenty years of rank classification implementation according to the Civil Service Act of 1954, the position classification system was reinstalled under the Civil Service Act of 1975 again, as up till now.

CENTRAL PERSONNEL AGENCIES

As a matter of law, there are 11 central personnel agencies, each of which is responsible for all processes of personnel management of the Thai civil service system. However, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) is considered as the main central personnel agency in the system. Certain rules and regulations of the CSC are often adopted by other commissions.

Accordingly, civil servants are classified into 11 categories and are under the supervision of different central personnel agencies as follows:

1. Civil servants under the supervision of the Civil Service Commission;
2. Judges under the supervision of the Judicial Service Commission;
3. Teachers under the supervision of the Teacher Service Commission;
4. University officials under the supervision of the University Officials Commission;
5. Public prosecutors under the supervision of the Public Prosecutor Service Commission;
6. Provincial officers under the supervision of the Provincial Administration Commission;
7. Municipality officials under the supervision of the Municipality Officials Commission;
8. Bangkok Metropolitan officials under the supervision of the Bangkok Metropolitan Officials Commission;
9. Legislative Body officials under the supervision of the Legislative Body Officials Commission;
10. Sanitation officials under the supervision of the Sanitation Officials Commission;
11. Police officials under the supervision of the Police Officials Commission.

The CSC has three main groups of authorities and duties as follows: civil service policy proposals and recommendations to the cabinet; civil service policy formulation and development in itself; and civil service policy implementation and operation.

The composition of the CSC consists of the following committee members: The Prime Minister, a Deputy Prime Minister authorized by the Prime Minister as chairman, and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, the Director of the Bureau of the Budget, the Secretary General of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, and the Secretary General of the Civil Service Commission as Committee Commissioners *ex officio*; together with no fewer than 5 but not more than 7 commissioners selected and 5 commissioners elected under the rules and procedures prescribed in the CSC regulations and appointed by the King.

There is the Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC) which is directly accountable to the Prime Minister, and is headed by the Secretary General of the CSC, who is in charge of its civil servants and administration. The main functions of the OCSC are to act for the CSC in the performance of its official functions and to perform other duties as assigned by the CSC.

CLASSIFICATION

Most civil service positions, except police officials under the rank classification system, are classified under the position classification system. That is to say, positions are classified according to duties, responsibilities, difficulty and quality of jobs. The analysis of position levels involves the following 5 factors: 1) complexity of work; 2) level of responsibility; 3) knowledge and ability or skill necessary for each position level; 4) supervision exercised or received; and 5) working conditions.

At present, eleven common levels of overall civil service position have been found to be adequate to describe prevailing levels of responsibility and complexity of work, with Level 1 as the lowest and Level 11 as the highest. Class series specifications have been prepared for two main categories of class series: service wide and departmental series. The service wide type has been used for two or more departments, and the departmental class series has been employed only within a single department.

Under the Civil Service Act of 1992, all ordinary civil service positions are classified into three categories: 1) general positions; 2) professional and specialized positions as prescribed by Royal Decree; and 3) top executive and middle-level management positions as prescribed by Royal Decree.

The CSC itself, or any agency so authorized by the CSC, can determine titles, levels and number of positions in various civil government agencies, in accordance with the rules, standards and procedures prescribed by the CSC.

Determination of position level is made upon comparison of complexity and required quality of work of the position against the standards in the class specification.

The CSC establishes a class specification for every ordinary civil service position, specifying the type and class series entailing approximately equal work quality requirements in the same grouping and level, taking into consideration the kind of duties, responsibilities and quality of work required, in accordance with the principles outlined in the Act.

Where it appears that a position classification is not appropriate, or there is a change in duties, responsibilities, or required quality or quantity of a position already classified by the CSC, the CSC itself, or through a government agency so authorized, can reclassify the position as appropriate.

The present position classification system tries to introduce new and modern concepts and techniques into the Thai civil service system, such as a rotating three-year manpower plan, more authorization of position classification and other civil service transactions to civil government agencies, career advancement opportunities, freezing and reducing staff and so on.

COMPENSATION

According to the law, compensation determination for civil servants depends largely on the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and the ability-to-pay of the government. As a matter of fact, the Thai civil service compensation can be classified into two types, that is to say, salary with or without position allowances and fringe benefits.

Salary refers to direct compensation received by civil servants on a monthly basis. At the same time, position allowances are paid only to civil servants who can satisfy some specific requirements as follows:

1. Scarce professional position allowances are paid to those who hold hard-to-fill positions which require special technical and professional knowledge.
2. Professional position allowances are similar to the scarce professional position allowances. But, instead of being paid to new recruits, these allowances are paid to those professionals of level 7 and above who have already acquired certain experience in their profession.
3. Specialized position allowances are paid to position holders (level 9-11) with high expertise in the core business of any department.
4. Academic position allowances are paid to assistant professors, associate professors, and professors in any public university.
5. Managerial and executive position allowances are paid to those who hold a middle management position (level 8) and those who hold top executive positions (level 9-11).

Fringe benefits are considered as indirect compensation. They can be further divided into monetary and non-monetary benefits. Major monetary benefits include a variety of benefits, such as educational assistance for children, housing allowances, medical allowances, and old age benefits. Likewise, non-monetary benefits cover certain benefits, such as royal decorations, long service awards, personal leave, sick leave, maternity and ordination leave with pay, so on and so forth.

According to the Salaries and Position Allowances Act of 1995, the National Compensation Committee has been established to be in charge of public compensation determination. Consequently, any change or development in public compensation in the future depends mainly on this committee.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

The Civil Service Act of 1992 authorizes the Civil Service Commission to conduct competitive examinations for all ordinary civil servants. However, under

specific circumstances, the CSC may authorize other civil government agencies to assume responsibility for this function, but the examination contents, procedures, fail-pass criteria, and eligible lists are to be prepared by the CSC. At the same time, the CSC at its discretion can revoke or reassign successful applicants already listed for some position to other lists, for other positions, with similar minimum qualifications.

The competitive examination consists of three content areas. They are: general knowledge, specific knowledge, and position suitability.

General knowledge focuses on two subjects. The first subject comprises questions relating to general abilities, information acquisition, analytical and reasoning abilities. The second subject consists of questions aimed at measuring comprehension and utilization of the Thai language.

Specific knowledge may cover one or two subjects aimed at measuring professional knowledge and skills necessary for specific positions.

Position suitability attempts to evaluate overall appropriateness of any applicant for the position sought by a review of personal record, work experience and educational background, as well as by observation of behavior and conduct through interviews.

Successful applicants will be ranked on the basis of their scores and placed on the list for appointment to the positions for which they applied. The applicants will be summoned to fill any vacant positions in rank order, and the eligible list will remain current for a period of 2 years.

In special circumstances, when a competitive examination is deemed unnecessary by the CSC, the civil government agency may, under the rules and procedures prescribed by the CSC, select any person for instatement and appointment without competitive examination.

The future trends in recruitment and selection in the civil service system are as follows:

1. To establish a more active and proactive recruitment and selection system;
2. To utilize high technology in competitive examination implementation;

3. To utilize assessment center techniques for more appropriate appraisal of civil servants and, also, of job hunters;

4. To delegate more recruitment and selection functions to the civil government agencies.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The purpose of performance appraisal is to provide useful information for personnel administration transactions, for example, annual salary step increases, promotion, demotion, transfer, and training and development.

Legally and practically speaking, the CSC is authorized to set up policies, guidelines, regulations, and performance evaluation forms for civil ministries and departments. Each ministry or department has duties and responsibilities to evaluate performance of every civil servant under its jurisdiction in line with policies, the guidelines, regulations and flexible performance evaluation forms prescribed by the CSC.

The civil servant's performance evaluation will be carried out twice a year in early April and early September by his or her immediate supervisor with a review and recognition of the one-level higher manager, as well.

For the benefit of performance evaluation, civil officials of level 8 and below are divided into 2 groups, that is to say, supervisory position holders and non-supervisory position holders.

The factors or characteristics of non-supervisory position holders to be evaluated are slightly different from those of supervisory position holders.

The factors or characteristics of non-supervisory position holders to be evaluated are as follows: quality of work, quantity of work, timeliness, performance ability, discipline, conduct and ethics, industry, and accountability.

Moreover, the supervisory position holders have to have additional abilities to plan, organize, staff, direct, and control activities which will lead to fulfillment of the organization's objectives efficiently.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The CSC has been empowered to coordinate between and among civil ministries and departments for civil servant and leadership development and also to conduct, by itself, civil servant and leadership development delivery programmes, in line with the Act, the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001), and government policy as follows:

1. The Civil Service Act of 1992 stipulates that:

1.1 A person instated and appointed as an ordinary civil servant will undergo training to ensure that he understands civil service practices, rules and procedures, as well as the roles and responsibilities of an official under a democratic system with the King as Head of State, and will receive guidance in the conduct appropriate to an official.

1.2 A superior officer is obligated to improve the knowledge, skills attitudes, and moral and ethical values of his subordinates to ensure that they will perform their duties effectively.

1.3 Before an ordinary civil servant is promoted to certain positions, he will undergo appropriate orientation to enhance his knowledge, skills, attitudes and moral and ethical values to enable him to effectively perform his duties.

1.4 Except where otherwise prescribed by the Cabinet, professional development through further study, orientation or training programmes, observation visits, or research activities abroad will be governed by the rules and procedures prescribed in the CSC directives.

2. Similarly, the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001) states that the central personnel agencies should be encouraged to systematically organize regular training and development programmes for government officials in a continuous manner from the time of recruitment, promotion, or transfer, as well as to develop themselves.

3. The CSC has also been empowered by the cabinet's policy to be the central agency to perform functions of directing, controlling and determining goals and guidelines of civil servant development, together with setting systems and

developing necessary strategies for training and development policy implementation. At the same time, government policy further states that the Budget Bureau, the Office of the Civil Service Commission, the Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation, the Comptroller's General Department, civil service institutions, and academic institutions should work in collaboration with other ministries and departments to promote civil servant development in accordance with this policy in terms of budget, manpower, foreign aid and resource persons.

For effective functioning, the CSC set up a group of training and development experts and professionals to serve as the sub-commission on civil servant development, for the development of training and development policies, standards and guidelines. The Civil Service Training Institute, the Civil Service Executive College, and the Civil Service College were established in order to carry out and put the said mandates into practice for real and effective training and development implementation.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION

When it comes to the point that a disciplinary action must be taken against a civil servant, it is very important to make sure that the case will be taken through a fair and rapid investigation in search of truth.

Normally, when an accusation is lodged against a civil servant, or where there is a cause to suspect that a government officer has committed any official misconduct, the supervisor must investigate the matter as soon as possible and decide whether or not there are reasonable grounds for this accusation or suspicion. If he believes that there are no reasonable grounds, he can set the issue aside. But if he believes that such grounds exist, he then has to take further action as follows:

1. If the case is in connection with a non-gross breach of discipline, the superior authority will proceed as he deems appropriate.

2. If the case relates to a gross breach of discipline, the first action taken will be appointment of a commission of inquiry.

3. In order that the accused person can prepare a defense and explanation during the course of the inquiry, he will be officially informed of the grounds upon which the accusation is based, together with summary evidence supporting such accusation.

4. If the inquiry finds that the accused is in breach, action will be taken under the Civil Service Act as appropriate. However, if the inquiry finds there has been no breach, the disciplinary action will come to an end.

5. If the accused is found guilty of a breach of discipline not amounting to a gross breach, he will be punished by reprimand, reduction in salary, or a salary step demotion depending on the seriousness of the breach. But, if it is considered a gross breach of discipline, he will be punished by dismissal or expulsion, depending on the gravity of the case.

6. A civil servant who is punished under the Civil Service Act is entitled to appeal within thirty days from the day on which he is informed of the order of the punishment. Appeals can be submitted to the Civil Service Sub-commission (CSSC) of the province, of the department, or of the ministry, or can be submitted directly to the CSC. The consideration of appeals is governed by the rules and procedures as prescribed in the CSC regulations.

7. In addition to the abovementioned disciplinary actions, a civil servant may be discharged from service with compensatory gratuity or pension if he is found to be losing the ability to carry out his official duties, or to be conducting himself in a manner not befitting his position, or being deficient in his work, and the appointing authority finds that continuing his employment will be detrimental to the service. In this case, the discharged person can lodge a complaint with the CSC within thirty days from the day on which he is informed of the discharge order.

ETHICS PROMOTION

On March 8, 1994, the government announced the first code of professional ethics for civil servants in the Royal Gazette. This code of ethics was

developed and submitted to the government by OCSC as part of the civil service reform and development project.

The important principles for establishing this code of ethics are:

1. To ensure the appropriate conduct and accountability toward civil servants' duties;
2. To bring about efficient and effective work performance among civil servants; and
3. To uphold the honor and reputation of civil servants, so as to encourage admiration and respect among the general public.

In order to be able to implement the code of professional ethics for civil servants effectively, the OCSC submitted a plan to the cabinet which was approved in June, 1995. Some of the measures that need to be carried out are as follows:

1. It must be put in the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan of 1997-2001 that measures to implement the code of professional ethics for civil servants will be established and carried out with support from the government and agencies concerned.
2. The subject of professional ethics for civil servants should be included in training programs for civil servants at every level, especially at entry level.
3. A topic concerning professional ethics for civil servants must be included and tested in both competitive examinations for instatement into government service and selective examinations for promotion to higher positions.
4. An item related to civil servants' personal conduct conforming to professional ethics must be evaluated in performance appraisal for annual salary increase or promotion.

The success or failure in implementing the code of professional ethics for civil servants will depend upon the sincerity and continuing support from the government and strong commitment from department heads, together with good understanding and willingness to cooperate among civil servants.

CONCLUSION

Despite its long history, the Thai civil service system has been in the process of changing its role, duties and responsibilities in order to achieve more effective political, economic, and social development, and also for better service delivery to the people. Moreover, in a time of political turmoil the Thai civil service system has a heavier burden in the aforementioned role, duties and responsibilities. At the same time, the Thai civil service system needs more development and modernization for the betterment of Thailand as well as for our fellow ASEAN member countries.

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