

SUMMARY
WOMEN OFFICIALS IN THE GOVERNMENT SERVICE

by Utai Hirantoe

In Thailand, a government official enjoys a high social status; hence, there is keen competition to enter the government service, and in this matter women have been extended the same rights as men, thanks to the country's first civil service statute—The Civil Service Act of B.E. 2471 (A.D. 1928). Although Thai women have been eligible for government service the same length of time as the men, their interest in exercising the right was not manifest until a much later date. One of the reasons for this was that education in this country had its beginning in the Wats (temples), with priests as teachers and only boys were admitted. Even during the reigns of King Rama IV (1851-1868) and King Rama V (1868-1910) when western civilization and culture began its trek into this country, education for girls was still severely restricted. It was not until the reign of King Rama VII (1925-1932) that Thai women entered the universities for the first time. The period also saw Thai women beginning to take jobs outside their homes. It was therefore not surprising that when the first Civil Service Act was passed in this country, the number of women applicants for civil service posts was negligible.

To-day there are almost 7,000 women officials working in government offices in the Bangkok and Dhonburi areas alone. Spurred by the democratic concept of sex equality in the executive, judicial, legislative and social spheres, Thai women today have become formidable rivals and competitors to men.

How "equal" should the women be in their rights to enter the government service?

In essence, there are 3 approaches to this question of "equality" of rights to enter the government service.

1. Legal approach

Legally, a Thai woman is a man's equal. In some laws, however, women's rights even transcend the men's, as witnessed in the following:

1. Regarding the enforcement of court decisions, according to the Code of Criminal Law Procedures B.E. 2477 (A.D. 1934) (a) Section 246, if any accused is pregnant for 7 months or over or if the accused has given birth to a child and a period of one month has not yet elapsed, she may have her imprisonment suspended until the cause of suspension has ceased, (b) Section 247,
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in the case where a woman sentenced to death is found to be with child, execution of the sentence shall be suspended until after her delivery.

2. According to the Civil and Commercial Code, Section 15, "a child en ventre sa mère is capable of rights provided that it is thereafter born alive." This gives the legitimate child the right of inheritance

On the other hand, restriction is found in Article 7 of the Civil Service Act of B.E. 2497 (A.D. 1954), an act which is currently in force, in that a ministry is empowered, the Civil Service Commission concurring, to determine which of its positions are barred to women. Again one finds a regulation laid down by the Police Department which provides for the dismissal of from women members of the service upon the termination of their spinsterhood.

2. Psychological Approach

It is argued by many that while a woman's ability in many fields of work is doubtlessly equal to that of a man, her ability in many others is not, in which case, the arguers go on to say, she should confine her activities to the realms in which she excels, namely the 3 Cs-cooking, children and church. This is clearly evidenced in the British Civil Service where the difference in salary scales exists not only for reasons of age and location but also because of sex.

In creativeness and decisiveness, psychologists and public administrators are prone to believe, women are inferior to men. Hence, there is a comparatively small number of outstanding women leaders in the various spheres of work. The main reason lies, perhaps, in the difference in ambitions of the two sexes.

3. The aptitudinal approach

Aptitude varies according to structure and conditions-bodily, mentally, temperamentally, environmentally, etc. A cowardly and blunt-witted person will not be successful in such tasks as engaging in war or fighting bandits; a harsh-mannered, dour and arrogant person will not make good in public relations; girls are less tongue-tied than boys; boys have a higher flair for mathematics than girls, and so on. Of aptitudes of Thai women, the author quotes Dr. Tooi Xomsai,* a noted Thai psychologist, who cites teaching in kindergartens and primary schools, nursing, librarianship, secretarial work, accountancy, typing, stenography, medicine and public relations as typical fields.

* Tooi Xomsai, *A Psychiatrist for everyday life* (Bangkok : Thai Watana Panich Press, 1949).

Measures restricting women's work efficiency

It is a common practice in Thailand for a government agency to transfer its officials to provincial posts from time to time. This, if past experiences are any yardstick, is a sizable drawback and in some cases a hardship for women officials to the extent that transfers of many women officials are unduly limited. Such situations, for many offices, created a veritable short-comings in the execution of their tasks. Again, in some cases, when an official is transferred to a provincial post, it was not uncommon for his wife to request her office to transfer her to the same province or district. Many compliances with such requests, needless to say, are made at the risk of impairing the efficiency of the office in question.

It is generally felt that promotions for women officials in Thailand are not by and large as rapid as those for men. This is due mainly to the work performance of the women themselves. This slow promotion, on the other hand, adversely effects the morale of many women and thus their work performance.

Also in being allowed 60 days' leave for every childbirth, women officials are criticised, because their working days are less than the men's, making them less efficient or at least unavoidably restricting their work efficiency. Moreover, as leadership is often found wanting in women officials, they are thus accused of being inefficient leaders in various work situations. It is the belief of many that this reason, more than any other, answers the question of why few women officials get to the top. Another notable deficiency in a woman official's work performance is her comparative lack of physical endurance which, it must be admitted, is an important cog in the wheel of work efficiency.

In conclusion it is discernible that women take outside work not only for economic reasons or for reasons of wishing to get away from the boredom of household routine but also for social reasons including an eye on marriage.

Labouring under so many restrictive factors, it would be well, therefore, for women to confine themselves to fields of work which best suit their disposition, aptitude and skill or in which they can excel or at least equal men-all this, however, should be in tune with the social structure, social sensibilities and culture of the country.

Summarized by Patom Jarnson
