

## Abstract

The study on “ Civil Service Code of Ethics : Ideological Mechanism for Political Resistance” is aimed to investigate functions and meanings of ethics as a means of implanting civil service ideology among Thai civil servants since the early periods of Thai bureaucracy until present.

Culture and way of life of Thai civil servants in different periods was examined in order to identify how they were related to changing social and political contexts. The study also seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of communication in passing on this ideology from one generation of civil servants to another.

The research conducted a nationwide survey on civil servants' perception and opinion of civil service code of ethics. Also examined was how civil service code of ethics were meant and functioned to serve as ideological mechanism for political resistance.

Conceptual framework of the study is based on Talcott Parsons' functional theory of communication, Max Weber's bureaucratic organization theory and normative theory. Documentary research, survey research and in-depth interview was used as methods of data collection.

Findings of the study are as follows:

1. Code of ethics as described in the first Civil Service Act and those that follow until the present one (from year 1929 to 2008 ) was found to change over the course of time to suit new political powers that sought to implant certain ideology among civil servants. Three phases of changes are found as follows:

- 1.1 The early years saw laying of foundation of Thai bureaucracy as a unified state institution. Aristotle's ideology of merit and integrity, devotion, respect of supervisors and discipline was found to be the central theme of civil service code of ethics in this period.

- 1.2 In the democratic era, civil service code of ethics was adjusted to fit into the new politics in which democracy was the highest value. Central theme focused on retaining state's confidential information, watching out for any “undesirable”

happenings in the society, and supporting for democracy. This period also saw life of Thai civil servants under strict rules and regulations, harsh punishment, concern for rights and freedom as well as political etiquettes and impartiality, which resembles Niccolo Machiavelli's idea on using rule of law as a tool to control people's morals.

1.3 In the present times, civil service code of ethics has changed under the new context of civil society and rising political movements. Accordingly, central theme of code of ethics is focused on honor and integrity of civil servants as influenced by society's calls for ethical politicians, civil servants and state officials. It was found that civil servants are required to adjust themselves in order to recognize their own "values" in choosing to and not to do anything wrong or unethical. Code of ethics for civil servants in this period is much related to Immanuel Kant's ideas that morals should emphasize human's dignity and their rights are to be treated with respect.

2. Results of survey on civil servants show high to very high level of perception and recognition of importance of the code of ethics. Civil servants were ready to adhere to the code of ethics, especially for the ethical issue of adhering to the rightness of their action (highest percentage at 99.7). Other ethical issues seen as important are honesty (95 percent) and responsibility (65.7 percent). They viewed these ethical issues as important because the issues promote decent, honorable, transparent, and fair practice among civil servants. Ethical issues that were seen as less important are transparency, and impartiality. However, it was found that ethical issues that were violated the most were adhering to the rightness of actions, impartiality and responsibility. This is due to the obstacles that supervisors did not act as good example for their subordinates to follow. Other obstacles include lack of trust in the fairness of justice system and lack of motivation or incentive to follow the code of ethics. To successfully enforce these ethical practices require support from senior officials or supervisors as well as from social values of justice. This is different from code of civil servants in that honesty relies on self-consciousness. This also aligns with findings from open-ended questions that most civil servants dared not to do the right things because they feared influences from unethical politicians and unfair, biased treatment. Accordingly, following the code of ethics was simply following its form not its essence.

3. Functions of code of ethics as mechanism of ideology for political resistance, as viewed by civil servants, are to serve as norm or guidelines for good practice in civil service. To resist political influence, there are other relevant factors involved such as civil servants' knowledge of their job, and strong adherence to ethics. The latter can be seen in such profession as medical doctors whose ethics are strongly adhered to in helping other people. Working out of their "heart" or "sense of devotion to others" is seen as highest ideology for medical profession, that results in public acceptance and support in times of political tension. Therefore, using civil service code of ethics alone may not be enough as a tool to resist political influence. Other factors must also be taken into consideration, which are a sense of public devotion, charismatic leadership, public acceptance and good economic and social status for Thai civil servants.