

# **An Outlook to Records and Archives Management in Thailand**

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This article was written with the focus to the records and archives management approaches of the Thai government departments.

## **Legislations Related to Records Management**

In Thailand, there are several laws which affect how the Thai government departments manage their records. The Regulations of the Prime Minister Office on Records Management B.E. 2526 and second and additional version, B.E. 2548 provide procedure guidelines for handling government records from creation and maintenance to disposition. The Thai Official Information Act B.E. 2540 also sets out guidelines for conducting official information which is included government records. The Regulations on Maintenance of Public Classified/Confidential Records B.E. 2544 provide guidelines for managing classified public records.

Other laws may apply to some government departments, for example, the Electronic Transactions Act B.E. 2544 which provides the procedures for conducting records that generate, send, receive, store or otherwise processing through electronic communications.

## **Records Management Practies**

The typical practices of records management among the government departments in Thailand can be concluded as the followings:

1. Records management responsibilities are decentralised models, with multiple units in each department providing services for recordkeeping activities. The so-called “Ngan Saraban unit” is the common name of unit with responsibility for controlling over the current records.

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2. The personnel who carry out the recordkeeping work vary from one place to another in terms of position titles, grades, academic qualifications and experience in recordkeeping operations and scope of duties and responsibilities. Some, frequently the heads of the records units, have the title of 'general administrative officer.' The majority have the title of 'clerical officer.' Some have the title of 'data entry officer.'

3. The basic practices for current records control is the registry system. According to The Regulations of the Prime Minister Office on Records Management B.E. 2526 article 35 to 51 and second & additional version, B.E. 2548 article 8-9, the followings are the basic practices of records control.

Each item of incoming correspondence regardless of its importance was registered by recording in the pre-printed registration book or sheet as required. The date of receipt and inward registration number were written on the first page of document.

The incoming document is numbered sequentially in the order in which it was received and a new sequence is started each year.

The type of outward registration number in use is an annual number system. Each outward registration number consists of the symbol of the creating agency and an annual consecutive number.

The code of the creating agency is a unique permanent symbol for each department. The code of each creating agency consists of two letters allocated to each ministry and a four-digit number allocated to each department of that ministry.

Apart from the registration book and inward and outward registration numbers, another essential register used to control a record was either a 'receipt slip' or a 'delivery booklet.'

However, in some government departments which have been used electronic recordkeeping systems, the registration book, receipt slip and delivery booklet are not in use.

4. The term “government documents” according to the Regulations on Records Management, second & additional version, B.E. 2548 (article 5) is defined as *documents as evidence of government services and composed of 1) documents which come in and go out between/among government departments, 2) documents that government departments send to non-government agencies or individuals outside, 3) documents that other non-government agencies or individuals outside send to government agencies, 4) documents that government agencies create as evidence of their actions or services and 5) documents that government agencies create in pursuance of government laws, regulations or rules., and those information or documents receipted through electronic recordkeeping system.* There are six types of government documents. They are external letters, internal letters, authorised sealed letters, directives (rules; regulations; orders), public relations documents (proclamations; announcements; news) and those documents created or received by the officers on duty as evidence of government service (the Regulations of the Prime Minister Office on Records Management B.E. 2526 article 10).

Each type of Thai government document has its own standard form of recording medium in terms of type, shape, size, and weight of material/paper as well as layout of writing or formatting and type, size, and colour of script. Also the use of words of salutation, personal pronouns, and complimentary clauses appropriate to the recipients is essential. In the appendices of the Regulations on Records Management B.E. 2526, a list of appropriate words of salutation, personal pronouns and complimentary clauses are given for each class of person, and a list of royal language is also given.

In addition, the official original letters/documents of government departments must be affixed with handwritten signatures of officials with authority. Generally, the officials who have authority to sign official documents are those officials appointed as heads of the departments of each ministry.

As part of documentary form, the annotations such as inward and outward registration numbers, date stamps, notes of transmission (degree of urgency and level of confidentiality), date of hearing or reading, note of transaction, date of office receipt, and personnel concerned with that document are added to the original documents. It

Each type of Thai government document could be divided into three major elements/areas. They are **protocol** or opening section (i.e. letterhead, indication of creating agency, time and place, salutation and subject), **text** or body of document, and **eschatocol** or closing section (i.e. complimentary clause and superscription of those who took part in the issuing the document). Different types of documents have different elements.

5. In article 6 of the regulations on records management, the term of 'records management' is defined as the *work concerned with the administration of records from creation, receipt, distribution, maintenance, lending and disposal*. Unfortunately, the operational instructions for maintenance and disposal of government documents are not given in detail. Only, guidelines are given.

6. It is unfortunate that the filing systems such as classification of government records and references to documents and files, indexes, file titles, file numbers, or location of files do not guided in any Regulations and rarely seen in any records units.

In recent decades media for recording information have changed rapidly. Each government department is required to use electronic devices in the conduct of its business. Government documents in electronic form will be increasingly created, communicated and stored. It is expected that a new approach for management of electronic records will be necessary and need to be further developed in the near future.

### **Archives Management**

In Thailand, it has been widely recognised that archives administration responsibilities are separated from records management responsibilities.

The National Archives of Thailand under the supervision of the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture is recognised as the government department with the responsibility for collecting and preserving those historical records of the government departments which are transferred to the National Archives of Thailand and those valuable records donated by individuals who are interested in the archives affairs.

Also, the position title of 'archivist' is available only in the National Archives of Thailand. In the recent years, several Thai government departments particularly; universities have established archives units with different status. Some government departments are in the process of initiating archives projects.

Since 2002, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University has established graduate archival and records management education programmes. Today (2009) about 15 graduate students were completed their Master Degree on Archives and Records Management and nearly all of them have worked with records management or care for archives in various types of government departments. In 2002 the Thai Archives Association was formed by those persons who work with or are interested in archives work. Annual meetings and training programs on archives management were the basic activities provided by the Association in the past.

It is expected in the future many changes in archives management occurred. This is because there are several signs indicating the recognition of the importance of archives from many top-management. Also a few personnel who had professional training are available.

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January 2009