

14

Change and continuity in the civil service of Taiwan under democratisation: With Hong Kong as a benchmark for assessment

Bennis Wai Yip So and Chih-Wei Hsieh¹

Abstract

This chapter reviews change and continuity of Taiwan's civil service under democratisation since the 1990s, and makes use of Hong Kong's Western-style civil service as a benchmark to assess the impact of the development. This study shows how the legacy of Chinese tradition laid the foundation and shaped the development path of the civil service. The change and continuity is demonstrated by its evolution with constantly absorbing Western institutions and reform experiences before and after democratisation. The 1990s witnessed a climax of legalisation and institution building, strengthening of the original exam-based selection of civil servants while hybridising with the old Western tradition of public administration. The early twenty-first century witnessed the diffusion of the new tradition of Western public administration (new public management) into Taiwan,

¹ This study is sponsored by the Ministry of Science and Technology of Taiwan (MOST 107-2410-H-004-144-; MOST 108-2410-H-004-161-).

which had a significant impact on performance management. However, other reform initiatives for the civil service have hit stumbling blocks. Despite the setbacks, a comparative survey with Hong Kong's civil servants shows that Taiwan's civil service, driven by democratisation, outperforms Hong Kong's in professional autonomy and public responsiveness.

Keywords: civil service system; Taiwan; Hong Kong; professional autonomy; responsiveness.

Introduction

This chapter gives an account of the development of Taiwan's civil service system under democratisation since the 1990s. The 1990s witnessed the building of institutions as well as reforms to the civil service, developing it into a more legalised and protected (depoliticised) service. It further strengthened the exam-based selection of government workers. Further reforms continued in the early twenty-first century by adopting new public management (NPM)-style performance management approaches to enhance the quality of service and responsiveness of government agencies as well as the performance of their staff. At the same time, reform efforts faced setbacks in the attempts to set up a senior civil service, impose a forced distribution of performance ratings and adopt multiple assessment tools in the selection of civil servants. The above development reflects change and continuity of the civil service as an institution.

This study makes use of a comparative survey between Taiwan's and Hong Kong's civil services to illustrate the impact of these developments in Taiwan and to compare the relative position of the government workforce of a post-authoritarian democracy (Taiwan) with that of a postcolonial administrative state (Hong Kong). Hong Kong is used as a benchmark to measure Taiwan's civil service against Western-style modern bureaucracy. However, it is worth noting that the survey was conducted during Hong Kong's anti-extradition movement in 2019, a critical turning point of Hong Kong's politics that might have impinged on its original Western-style civil service. Thus, caution is warranted as our findings reflect an evolving de-Westernising situation in Hong Kong. However, that may help reveal the impact of democratisation of Taiwan at this point.

Background: Inheritance of the legacy of Chinese tradition and (mis)adaptation of Western elements to the tradition before democratisation

Before examining development from the 1990s, we first review the earlier background of Taiwan's civil service system. The island's civil service system was founded on the Kuomintang's (KMT, Nationalist) rule in Mainland China, as the Republic of China, in the 1930–1940s and then transplanted into Taiwan after World War II. As Cheung (2010) notes, it is Republican China and post-1949 Taiwan that inherited the legacy of China's administrative tradition, while Communist China took the Soviet model in 1949. This is especially true for the civil service system.

The main features of the Chinese bureaucratic tradition include: (1) a generalist-oriented rank-in-person mandarin system; (2) allowing promotion from the lowest grade/rank to the highest; (3) recruitment and selection of government officials through open and competitive examinations; (4) no demarcation of the civil service between central and local governments (Hwa 2001; So and Liao 2019). These basic institutional features further evolved in Republican China. As Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the new republic, considered the Chinese examination system to be an institution which could remedy the defect of electoral democracy that was not based on merit and failed to guarantee the quality of government officials (Bill 2015), a separate 'examination power' was devised to check against the personnel authority exercised by the state's executive branch.

The Examination Yuan was set up in 1930 in Nanjing to realise Sun's idea. This new state organ mirrored an 'examination-appointment dual system' in the imperial era (So 2015). Within the Yuan, the Ministry of Rite and the Ministry of Personnel respectively took charge of examinations, and appointments of officials and other personnel administrative affairs. The former organised written tests for selection and supplied the latter with candidates for appointment. The latter assigned the entrants to various positions across the empire. It is a supply-driven job assignment system in which public managers of employing agencies are absent from the selection process (So 2015). Taiwan's Examination Yuan followed the same logic with two subsidiary agencies, the Examination Commission (reshuffled into the Ministry of Examination in 1948) and the Ministry

of Civil Service. The Examination Yuan is more powerful than public/civil service commissions in other countries, because its authority covers not only the selection of civil servants, but also public personnel policymaking and personnel management of all government agencies, and all examinations for professional and technical qualification.

The institutional evolution did not take place in isolation, without any influence from other countries. The classification system underwent three systemic overhauls in 1954, 1969 and 1987. In 1954, after the retreat of the KMT Government from Mainland China, the civil service system adopted a rank-in-person system with three ranks (elementary, junior and senior ranks), each of which contained three grades. The overhaul in 1969 tried to replace it with the US position classification system in order to promote scientific management and professionalisation. The position classification system divided job positions horizontally and scientifically into 159 class series and vertically into 14 position grades.

The 1969 experimental reform suffered from a backlash from government officials due to the rigidity of the classification system, which did not allow deployment as flexible as the original rank-in-person system. As a result, a new system that integrated the rank-in-person system with the position classification system into a unique system called 'joint rank-in-person and in-position' was launched in 1987 and has been functioning ever since (Hsu 2006).

The current system merged the 14 position grades into the traditional three-rank system. All career civil servants, except for several specialist services such as police, customs, judiciary and public transport, fit into a single 3-rank and 14-grade ranking system: grades 1 to 5 lie in the elementary rank; grades 6 to 9 lie in the junior rank, and grades 10 to 14 lie in the senior rank. Job positions are classified into numerous professional groups. The professional groups are broadly divided into two categories: administrative and technical. Similar professional groups form a professional cluster. A free transfer to any position of the same grade in the same professional group, or in various groups but in the same cluster, or related professional groups in diverse clusters, is allowed. This setting helps keep the generalist-oriented nature of the civil service.

The basic framework of the civil service system kept most features of the original Chinese tradition, but some Western elements were absorbed into the tradition with (mis)adaptation for a modernisation cause. Apart from

the position classification, there has been some demarcation of political officials and career officials, drawing from modern Western systems since the founding of the republic in 1912. However, in the KMT authoritarian regime, politics and administration were fused together. Career officials could be promoted to political positions and they were not politically neutral. The disciplinary mechanism for the civil service also combined a judicial element from the German system with the local tradition of ‘impeachment’² originally exercised by the censorate in imperial China (Weng 1990). All the above formed a unique but somewhat odd system.

Development under democratisation: Strengthening Taiwan’s own tradition while hybridising the old and new Western traditions

The transition to democracy from the end of the 1980s spurred across-the-board institutional reforms in the 1990s. Civil service reform was one of them and could be regarded as part of the political reforms introducing democracy. Foremost was diffracting the fused politics–administration structure: politics needed to be taken out of administration. The civil service system was thus further institutionalised and reformed to serve this purpose. Specifically, the civil service was to be depoliticised and legally protected from political interference. This also justified further consolidation of the original meritocratic civil service to enhance the legitimacy of the new democracy. To an extent, these changes replayed the development of a ‘protected service’ that occurred in Western countries in the mid-nineteenth century (Raadschelders and Rutgers 1996). At the same time, interestingly, the 1990s also experienced a global wave of public sector reforms with new public management (NPM) as its hallmark. Democratising Taiwan also drew on this ‘new’ Western tradition. The latter significantly influenced the orientation of the island’s reforms in the early twenty-first century.

2 ‘Impeachment’ in Western democracies is usually applied to top political leaders only, but the counterpart in imperial China was applied to all mandarins from the lowest to the highest grades. Even now, it is still applied to senior career officers in the government in Taiwan.

Reforms in the 1990s

Driven by this reform wave in the 1990s, the Examination Yuan spearheaded significant reforms and thus boosted its status. The most important was the enactment of the Civil Service Protection Act in 1996, by which a comprehensive mechanism and related procedures (copied from Germany) for protecting civil servants' status and various legal rights against administrative and political infringements were established.

Alongside the legislation, a new ministry-level agency, the Civil Service Protection and Training Commission, affiliated with the Examination Yuan, was established to enforce the new law. The new commission was also given responsibility for training and development of the civil service. This new establishment obviously expanded the jurisdiction of the Examination Yuan. To achieve depoliticisation, the Examination Yuan attempted to regulate the political activities of civil servants by the enactment of the Civil Service Administrative Neutrality Act (a Bill put forward in 1994, but only approved as late as 2009).

Meanwhile, the Examination Yuan further strengthened the reputation of civil service entrance examinations (CSEEs). 'Hiring by exam' has been locally regarded as the equivalent of 'hiring by merit' in the West. However, not all permanent staff in the government were recruited through the CSEEs. The Examination Yuan in the 1990s strived to close the gap to attain the ideal of exam-centred meritocracy (So 2015). From 1991, all new entrants of government technical staff, who had previously included anyone with relevant educational qualifications and relevant work experiences, had to be recruited through the CSEEs. From 1997 onwards, government agencies were no longer allowed to directly recruit any permanent 'government employees' who had not passed the CSEEs and had been allowed to be promoted to elementary-rank positions. From then on, new elementary-level CSEEs were organised to recruit grade-1 civil servants. So the tradition of centralised exam-centred meritocracy was not weakened but strengthened under democratisation. This also reversed the NPM trends of decentralisation, non-exam-based selection, managerial flexibility, and expansion of (performance-based) temporary/contract employment in place of tenured civil service in public human resources management (Lægreid and Wise 2007; So 2015).

The 1990s witnessed a climax of legalisation and institution-building for Taiwan's civil service. During this process, the original Chinese features of the system remained intact and the exam-based selection process was further

strengthened. The institution-building was, to a certain extent, hybridised with the old tradition of Western public administration (depoliticisation and legal protection) to meet the demands of democratisation.

Reforms in the twenty-first century

NPM reform ideas had already diffused into East Asia in the 1990s. Taiwan absorbed some of them into its public sector reforms, aimed at democratisation. Reforms in the 1990s had already applied privatisation, deregulation, administrative downsizing and contracting out of public services (Cheung 2003). However, the NPM ideas did not trigger an NPM-style reform in the civil service, except for performance management.

Taiwan's initiative in performance management reform was not fully driven by the NPM movement, but the NPM ideas did redirect its purpose from 'enhancing implementation to improving bureaucratic responsiveness' (So 2020). The management reforms were not within the jurisdiction of the Examination Yuan but conducted by a ministry-level agency under the Executive Yuan (Taiwan's executive branch): the Research, Development and Evaluation Commission (reshuffled into the National Development Council in 2014).

The earliest NPM-related initiative was quality management, introduced in 1996. Frontline officials were required to adopt a customer-oriented approach, devise their own innovative way to deliver services and directly respond to the public. Subsequently, a series of government quality/service awards were organised to encourage government agencies to actively improve their services.

With the first accession to power of the Democratic Progressive Party in 2000, the government pursued more NPM-style reform initiatives. A result-oriented performance evaluation scheme was adopted to link evaluation to preset performance indicators. The evaluations became more quantitative, and reports and results were disclosed to the public. This laid down a foundation of 'accountability for performance' (So 2020).

Under the performance management reform and electoral democratisation, civil service has become a more challenging job, even though lifetime job security remains guaranteed. The new ruling party tried to ensure political responsiveness from career officials who had served the KMT for decades, in order to ensure their compliance with the elected government's new

democratic principles. However, trying to enhance responsive competence raises the risk of undermining neutral competence (Aberbach and Rockman 1994). The civil service has come under pressure of re-politicisation.

In addition, personnel reform efforts in the twenty-first century faced numerous setbacks. Many substantial reform initiatives by the Examination Yuan were blocked. The first was the amendment of the Civil Service Appraisal Act in 2010. This included an attempt to impose a forced distribution of ratings to dismiss poor performers in the government. This reform initiative faced an intense backlash from civil servants, as it is difficult to measure the performance of individual workers in the public sector. Civil servants were doubtful about the fairness of the appraisal. As a result, the legislature did not pass the bill.

The second was establishing a separate senior civil service (SCS). This has been a significant initiative in the West. After the establishment of the Senior Executive Service in the United States in 1978, this development diffused into other Western countries in the 1980s–90s. The purpose of the SCS was to enhance the competence and leadership of top civil servants; to overcome the fragmentation of ministries and create a corporate culture across ministries; and to make more flexible the recruitment and deployment of senior officials (Halligan 1996; OECD 2008). The idea of establishing a SCS in Taiwan was initiated as early as 2002; a formal proposal was formulated in 2010 by the Examination Yuan, which would take charge of training and selection of the SCS. However, the proposal was not supported by the Executive Yuan as the establishment would *de facto* deprive the executive branch of the appointment power of the SCS. The idea of opening-up SCS positions to public competition was also claimed to reduce the promotion opportunities for junior staff (So 2019). As a result, the proposal was only ever tabled and remains on the table today.

The Examination Yuan has attempted to improve the institution of the CSEEs but no significant change has been made. The exam-based selection, without any interview for the majority of applicants, has been criticised for a long time (Peng 2009, 2016). The huge number of examinees has provided the Ministry of Examination with a good excuse for not conducting interviews. Adopting multiple assessment tools, including aptitude tests and expanding the use of interviews, and establishing multiple stages of selection, were recommended to respectively improve the validity of the examinations and to lower the cost of interviews for a final selection (Peng 2009, 2016).

The Civil Servant Examination Act was amended in 2014 to allow the application of more assessment tools, and the law originally allowed multiple stages of selection. However, the ministry has not yet attempted to expand the use of these new tools: it seems more interested in improving the validity of existing written tests.

The civil service reforms in the twenty-first century hit many stumbling blocks. Although the Western performance movement has merged into the civil service at the organisational level, reforms to individual appraisal arrangements failed to take root. The new NPM tradition has proven to be more compatible with other aspects of administration (e.g. service delivery) than with the personnel system. Besides the issue of civil service selection and the SCS, expanding the employment of non-permanent contract staff to achieve greater flexibility is not on Taiwan's reform agenda. The use of non-civil-service staff is always publicly criticised as a way to sabotage exam-centred meritocracy. Any official attempt to legalise a non-civil-service personnel system has been controversial, because it was considered to encourage nepotism and patronage. This reflects how deep-seated the Chinese tradition of exam-based selection is.

Impacts of the development: A comparative survey with Hong Kong's civil servants

The above review reveals the persistence of many longstanding principles and conventions of Taiwan's civil service system, especially the exam-based selection. At the same time, the civil service has had to undergo a transformation to better serve the democratic system. It is supposed to become a nonpartisan (depoliticised) and responsive (re-politicised) workforce. What are the impacts on the civil service of the developments of the last 30 years? To resolve this question, this study makes use of a survey to compare and contrast the quality of recruitment and selection, and the work behaviour of civil servants in terms of job-environment fit, professional autonomy and public responsiveness. The survey targets street-level civil servants working respectively at district/township offices in Taiwan and at executive agencies in Hong Kong. The latter is taken as a point of reference to help expose the strengths and weaknesses of civil servants in Taiwan.

Why Hong Kong's civil service? Hong Kong is another Chinese society and has a long history of merit-based appointment of government officials, but it does not follow the abovementioned Chinese-style. Hong Kong applies

British-style selection, which relies less on written tests. The employing agencies can select their own staff in accordance with merit principles. This comparison can help measure the impacts of these two styles of civil service selection.

Hong Kong developed a strong bureaucratic state under British colonial rule, but has not evolved into a democracy after the handover to China. The civil service *de facto* governed the colony and self-claimed to be a nonpartisan steward of public interest so that the Hong Kong civil service enjoyed a high degree of professional autonomy (Cheung 2011). Nevertheless, since the rise of party politics in the 1990s and the handover in 1997, its civil service has been increasingly politicised, even though the civil service generally maintained a rule-driven Weberian tradition (Scott and Gong 2014). However, Since the CY Leung administration (2012–2017), politicisation has reportedly trickled down to the lower-level civil service (Wong and Yuen 2020). It is therefore interesting to compare the impacts of ‘politicisation with democracy’ (Taiwan) and ‘politicisation without democracy’ (Hong Kong) upon street-level civil service.

Survey design

Procedures and samples

We conducted a mail survey of frontline civil servants to assess and compare meritocracy in the wake of politicisation and its effect on public service behaviour between Taiwan and Hong Kong. In Taiwan, the questionnaire was administered to civil servants in the line units of district/township offices. In November 2018, we pretested the questionnaire in a pilot study of 55 employees from four district offices across various geographical regions. After we ensured questions are clear and appropriate to the target population, we commenced the official survey in December 2018. To achieve geographic representativeness, civil servants from different regions of Taiwan (three district offices in North Taiwan; one in Central Taiwan; one in South Taiwan and one district office and one township office from East Taiwan) were invited to participate in the survey. Altogether, we distributed 451 copies of the questionnaire and collected 385 by March 2019. Of them, 383 were valid, yielding a response rate of 84.92 per cent.

In Hong Kong, we selected frontline staff who worked at executive agencies and performed line functions as the survey targets. To certify the validity of the questionnaire, we conducted a pilot survey in November 2019 using a sample of 31 civil servants. Pilot testing galvanised us to modify answer options for some demographic questions due to the contextual differences between Taiwan and Hong Kong, while the wording of all other items remained unchanged. Shortly after the pilot study, we surveyed frontline staff of five executive agencies, including Housing Department, Home Affairs Department, Social Welfare Department, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, and Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The civil servants in these departments have more opportunities for direct contact with citizens. It is against this backdrop that they were selected. We obtained in total 6,263 junior officials' contact information via the Government Telephone Directory and sent out an invitation (with the online survey link included) by email. By the end of February 2020, we collected 226 valid responses, resulting in a response rate of 3.61 per cent. Nearly 40 per cent of the responses came from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (90), whereas the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department produced the fewest responses (26). The low response rate is usual for online surveys, but this was the best means available to conduct such a survey during this politically sensitive time. Caution is thus warranted with all our generalisations surrounding this sample.

Measures

In this study, we measured the extent to which the employee selection system shapes the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) of civil servants, as a proxy of meritocracy, as well as professional autonomy and public responsiveness. To capture the effectiveness of civil service selection, we drew upon our conceptualisation of meritocracy, coupled with the theory of person–environment fit (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005), to develop relevant measures. In total, we employed four measures to operationalise the concept of employee selection effectiveness, including competencies, selection validity, person–organisation fit (P-O fit), and person–job fit (P-J fit). Briefly put, the first construct, competencies, was designed to reveal the degree of job-related KSAs civil servants developed before embarking on a public service career, while the second construct, selection validity, assessed the extent to which the civil service examination tested the required KSAs for the first public service job of respondents. As for the measures of P-O fit and P-J fit, each captured the compatibility between civil servants and their organisation or between them and their job. Sample items of these constructs include, for example,

‘Before taking the civil service examination, I had possessed related skills (e.g. writing skills and computer skills) required by my first job’, ‘I believe the current civil service examination is able to select qualified talents for my current job’, ‘My values match my current organization’s values and culture’, and ‘My skills and abilities fit the demands of my current job’.

We also developed instruments to measure professional autonomy and public responsiveness. Autonomy has long been studied by scholars of occupational psychology (Hackman and Oldham 1980). By definition, it is the freedom and discretion granted to employees to perform the tasks of their job. To fit the scope of the present study, however, we adopted and modified existing scales (e.g. the Breaugh’s Work Autonomy Scale (Breaugh 1985)), to capture the level of discretion allowed for civil servants to act independently when carrying out public service duties. A sample item is ‘I can freely choose how to complete my job tasks’. As far as the last construct is concerned, because there was no scale readily available to measure public responsiveness, we developed one from scratch. Five survey items were formed to assess how much respondents perceive their organisations as attentive and responsive to service recipients’ needs and demands. A sample item of this construct is ‘My organization treats every service recipient seriously’.

All of the abovementioned constructs were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). To further conduct a comparative test of the constructs, measurement of these latent variables should be equivalent across the Taiwan and Hong Kong samples. Accordingly, we performed multigroup confirmatory factor analysis to test measurement invariance. The test showed that Taiwan and Hong Kong samples are indeed configurally and metrically invariant. Although further testing failed to support scalar invariance, suffice it to say that all of the constructs and their underlying structures are equivalent across Taiwan and Hong Kong samples. Therefore, following on Jilke, Meuleman and Van de Walle (2015), we were able to make a meaningful comparison of constructs across the two groups.

In terms of the reliability, or internal consistency, of these constructs, we conducted reliability analysis. The values of Cronbach’s α show that most of the constructs had good and even high reliabilities, as most values were greater than the suggested cut-off point of .7 (Kline 2000). Among them, the P-J fit scale had relatively low reliability, $\alpha = .643$. However, given that it did not fall far from the generally accepted cut-off value and sometimes slightly lower values could be expected (Field 2018), we deemed the reliability of this construct acceptable.

Findings

Sample characteristics

Table 14.1 outlines the characteristics of the Taiwan and Hong Kong samples. By and large, the two groups of respondents have a lot in common. For instance, females slightly outnumber males (i.e. 220 versus 163 in Taiwan and 122 versus 104 in Hong Kong). Both could also be characterised as young and well-educated, as nearly 70 per cent or more are under 50 and roughly 80 per cent hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. About half of them have worked in government for less than 10 years. Moreover, these young civil servants mainly engage in providing direct service to citizens, 68.4 per cent in Taiwan and 71.9 per cent in Hong Kong.

Table 14.1: Sample characteristics.

	Taiwan		Hong Kong	
	Total	Frequency (Percentage)	Total	Frequency (Percentage)
Gender	383	Male: 163 (42.6%) Female: 220 (57.4%)	226	Male: 104 (46.0%) Female: 122 (54.0%)
Age	370	20–29: 52 (14.1%) 30–39: 118 (31.9%) 40–49: 84 (22.7%) 50–59: 97 (26.2%) 60 and above: 19 (5.1%)	224	20–29: 22 (9.8%) 30–39: 89 (39.7%) 40–49: 65 (29.0%) 50–59: 48 (21.4%)
Education	381	High school: 16 (4.2%) College: 60 (15.7%) Bachelor’s: 243 (63.8%) Master’s: 62 (16.3%)	224	Lower than high school: 1 (0.45%) High school: 9 (4.0%) Associate: 30 (13.4%) Bachelor’s: 114 (50.9%) Master’s: 69 (30.8%) Doctoral: 1 (0.45%)
Tenure	380	Less than 1 year: 24 (6.3%) 1–9 years: 176 (46.3%) 10–19 years: 71 (18.7%) 20–29 years: 96 (25.3%) 30 years and above: 13 (3.4%)	224	Less than 1 year: 7 (3.13%) 1–9 years: 100 (44.64%) 10–19 years: 50 (22.32%) 20–29 years: 41 (18.3%) 30 years and above: 26 (11.61%)
Job nature	377	Direct service: 258 (68.4%) Internal service: 119 (31.6%)	224	Direct service: 161 (71.9%) Internal service: 63 (28.1%)

Source: Authors’ summary of survey results.

Analytical results

This study aims to compare meritocracy in the wake of politicisation and its effect on professional autonomy and public responsiveness between Taiwan and Hong Kong frontline civil servants. Before solving the puzzle of meritocracy combined with politicisation, it is important to compare the means of study variables between the two samples. As mentioned above, the constructs were considered reliable. Thus, we first computed the mean score for each construct and then obtained the sample mean by averaging the scores of the respective respondents. These sample means are displayed in Table 14.2.

Table 14.2: Mean comparisons.

Variable	Sample	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
Competencies	Taiwan	379	3.116	.866	-6.302**
	Hong Kong	226	3.571	.846	
Selection validity	Taiwan	377	3.018	.857	-6.095**
	Hong Kong	226	3.457	.854	
P-O fit	Taiwan	379	3.346	.684	2.982**
	Hong Kong	226	3.150	.830	
P-J fit	Taiwan	380	3.635	.644	-7.135**
	Hong Kong	226	4.027	.668	
Professional autonomy	Taiwan	381	3.620	.669	5.133**
	Hong Kong	226	3.277	.864	
Public responsiveness	Taiwan	381	3.966	.636	2.098*
	Hong Kong	226	3.834	.811	

Note: * less than .05; ** less than .01.

Source: Authors' summary of survey results.

All things considered, the Hong Kong sample shows a higher degree of meritocracy, compared to Taiwan, as it outscores in areas of competencies (3.571 versus 3.116), selection validity (3.457 versus 3.018), and P-J fit (4.027 versus 3.635). These mean differences are all statistically discernible at $\alpha = .05$ level. By contrast, Taiwan has a marginal but statistically significant lead over Hong Kong in the category of P-O fit ($t = 2.982$, $p = .003$), suggesting that, compared to Hong Kong respondents, those in Taiwan tend to experience a greater degree of compatibility between themselves and their organisation, because their personal values align with organisational values and culture. As far as professional autonomy and public responsiveness

are concerned, Taiwanese respondents also have the edge over their Hong Kong counterparts. They score on average 3.620 in the scale of professional autonomy, compared to 3.277 for Hong Kong respondents. In terms of the level of public responsiveness, the Taiwan sample takes a slight lead, 3.966 versus 3.834, though Hong Kongers do not fall too much behind. These differences are statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$ level.

To test the effect of meritocracy on professional autonomy and public responsiveness, we performed structural equation modelling (SEM). SEM, instead of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, was used because we intended to examine if there is a complex relationship, such as mediation, that links the study variables. It is widely believed that SEM can better test and visualise mediation than OLS (Kline 2015). Here, we would like to make clear that, because there are no good accounts in existing literature about how these variables may influence each other, our SEM is exploratory in nature. We have tested different models until reaching an acceptable model fit (i.e. $\chi^2(df = 402) = 1032.791$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.569$, CFI = .917, RMSEA = .051).

Figure 14.1 summarises the noteworthy results of multi-group SEM, a comparison between Taiwan and Hong Kong samples. Numbers shown are standardised coefficients, which enables us to compare the two groups. All of the paths we have identified between variables are statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$ level, as insignificant paths have been discarded. Overall, the two diagrams, (a) and (b), reveal that Taiwan's and Hong Kong's samples share similarities, particularly the path structure, as well as noticeable differences.

In terms of the relationship among the variables related to meritocracy, Taiwan's and Hong Kong's samples are more alike than unlike. Competencies have a direct, positive relationship with P-O fit and P-J fit, whereas selection validity increases the perception of P-O fit but not P-J fit. The standardised coefficients for these paths are similar between the two groups. However, when it comes to the effect of meritocracy on professional autonomy and public responsiveness, the differences between our samples start to surface. Comparing Taiwan with Hong Kong, the positive effect of P-O fit on professional autonomy is apparently weaker ($\beta_{\text{Taiwan}} = .169$ versus $\beta_{\text{Hong Kong}} = .612$), and that of selection validity on public responsiveness is especially marginal ($\beta_{\text{Taiwan}} = .097$ versus $\beta_{\text{Hong Kong}} = .295$). In contrast, the variable P-J fit exerts a stronger positive effect on both professional autonomy ($\beta_{\text{Taiwan}} = .738$ versus $\beta_{\text{Hong Kong}} = .334$) and public responsiveness ($\beta_{\text{Taiwan}} = .597$ versus $\beta_{\text{Hong Kong}} = .386$) among Taiwanese than Hong Kong respondents.

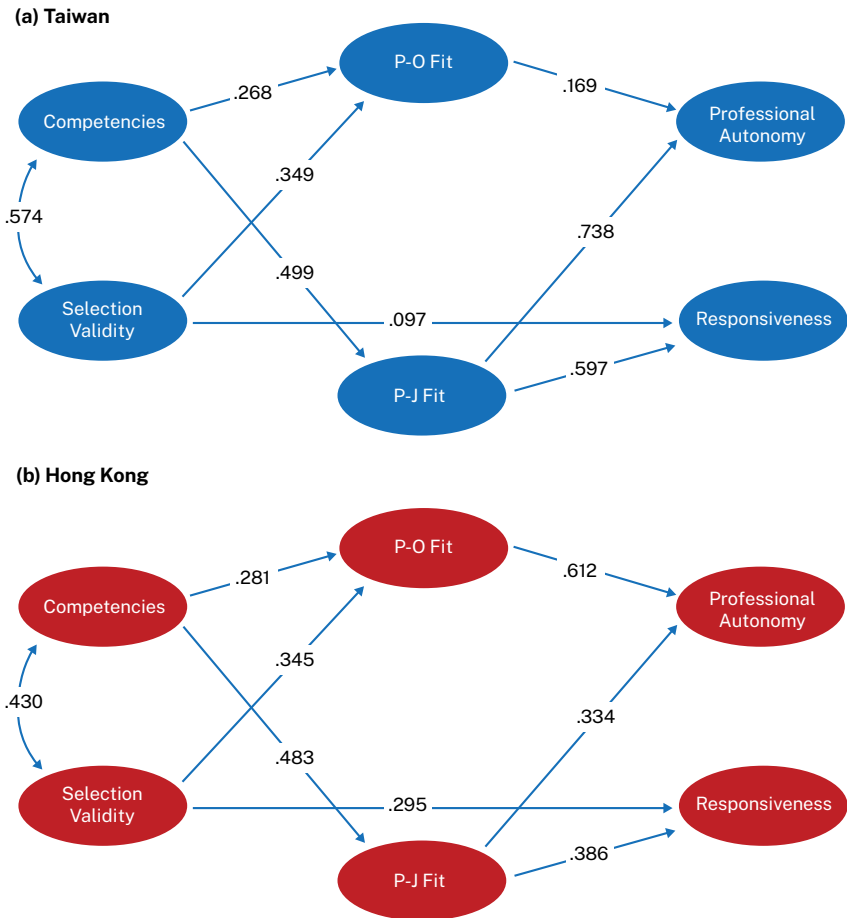


Figure 14.1: Results of SEM.

Source: Authors' summary of SEM results.

Tables 14.3 and 14.4 present the decomposition of the standardised effects of meritocracy on professional autonomy and public responsiveness. Through direct and/or indirect paths, the four meritocracy-related variables, namely competencies, selection validity, P-O fit and P-J fit, all exert a positive effect on professional autonomy. However, if we look more closely, the effect of P-J fit outweighs that of the other three variables for our Taiwan sample, whereas P-O fit is the predominant predictor in the Hong Kong sample. As for public responsiveness, both Taiwan and Hong Kong data show P-J fit is the most influential factor. Moreover, P-O fit is the lone non-factor among the four predictors.

Table 14.3: Standardised effects of meritocracy on professional autonomy.

	Sample	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
Competencies	Taiwan	.000	.413	.413
	Hong Kong	.000	.333	.333
Selection validity	Taiwan	.000	.059	.059
	Hong Kong	.000	.211	.211
P-O fit	Taiwan	.169	.000	.169
	Hong Kong	.612	.000	.612
P-J fit	Taiwan	.738	.000	.738
	Hong Kong	.334	.000	.334

Source: Authors' summary, based on survey results.

Table 14.4: Standardised effects of meritocracy on public responsiveness.

	Sample	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
Competencies	Taiwan	.000	.298	.298
	Hong Kong	.000	.186	.186
Selection validity	Taiwan	.097	.000	.097
	Hong Kong	.295	.000	.295
P-O fit	Taiwan	.000	.000	.000
	Hong Kong	.000	.000	.000
P-J fit	Taiwan	.597	.000	.597
	Hong Kong	.386	.000	.386

Source: Authors' summary, based on survey results.

Discussion and conclusion

This comparative survey might help to uncover the pluses and minuses of the exam-based selection of civil servants in Taiwan. First and foremost, Taiwanese respondents, compared to their Hong Kong counterparts, were conscious that they were not very competent when they assumed their assigned first jobs. They also reported that the selection mechanism was less able to test the job-related KSAs. The supply-driven job assignment system may exacerbate this situation.

Although the free transfer of jobs after recruitment may mitigate job mismatching, not all entrants have opportunities to rematch themselves to a new job or profession. Moreover, the degree of professionalisation under

the free transfer mechanism may be compromised. That accounts for why P-J fit is significantly lower for Taiwan's samples. On the other hand, the significantly higher P-O fit of the Taiwan sample may reflect the effect of a flexible internal labour market in which civil servants are better able to select a workplace through a job transfer. In contrast, the Hong Kong counterparts are only allowed to select a profession during the entry stage of their career, but their workplaces are centrally assigned and subsequent job transfers are difficult. These findings substantiate the notion that Taiwan preserves its generalist-oriented tradition of the civil service at the expense of professionalisation in recruitment/selection and career advancement.

Surprisingly, our analysis also reveals a significantly higher degree of professional autonomy among Taiwanese than Hong Kong respondents. It is possibly caused by the timing of the survey—conducted during Hong Kong's anti-extradition movement in 2019. Alongside the trickle-down effect of politicisation since the CY Leung administration, the professional autonomy of street-level civil servants in Hong Kong may have suffered a drastic decline.

Another notable finding is that P-J fit in the Taiwan sample seems to better predict professional autonomy, while P-O fit is a more predominant predictor in the Hong Kong sample. That means, despite P-J fit itself being relatively lower in Taiwan, it is actually a critical factor in determining the degree of professional autonomy among Taiwanese respondents. In other words, for those Taiwanese respondents who are better equipped to assume job responsibilities, they will be allowed to have more control over their work. However, P-O fit is more critical for Hong Kong's civil servants, probably because of the abovementioned politicisation. The lower professional autonomy in Hong Kong may reflect in part politicisation disrupting organisational harmony and generating some distrust between managers and junior officials. Only those who pledge loyalty to the organisation can exercise more discretion and independent judgment. Therefore, a more substantial nexus between P-O fit and professional autonomy is more likely to occur in Hong Kong than Taiwan.

If the account of differences in professional autonomy is somewhat complicated, the basis for a higher degree of public responsiveness in the Taiwan sample is crystal clear. Democratisation should be credited for it. The variables concerning the selection mechanism (competencies and

selection validity) are weak at predicting public responsiveness. But the P-J fit is sharply more significant than other variables. An adequate level of job fitness may sway the degree of public responsiveness.

In conclusion, Taiwan's civil service has been evolving under a persistent tradition since the founding of the system. Despite absorbing some modern settings from the West, the recent waves of reforms have not yet touched the foundation of the institution, especially exam-based selection. The personnel system looks stable and has undergone no significant change, but some managerial reforms (including performance management reform) have spurred changes to service delivery and quality. The performance of the civil service, driven by democratisation, is improving. 'Politicisation with democracy' exerts more positive than negative influences upon the civil service.

References

- Aberbach, Joel D. and Bert A. Rockman (1994). 'Civil servants and policymakers: neutral or responsive competence', *Governance* 7(4): 461–69. doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.1994.tb00192.x.
- Bill, Daniel A. (2015). *The China model: Political meritocracy and the limits of democracy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Breaugh, James A. (1985). 'The measurement of work autonomy', *Human Relations* 38(6): 551–70. doi.org/10.1177/001872678503800604.
- Cheung, Anthony B.L. (2003). 'Government reinvention in Taiwan: administrative modernization and regime tradition', in Anthony B.L. Cheung and Ian Scott (eds), *Governance and public sector reform in Asia: paradigm shifts or business as usual*, Routledge Curzon, London.
- Cheung, Anthony B.L. (2010). 'Checks and balance in China's administrative traditions: A preliminary assessment', in Martin Painter and B. Guy Peters (eds), *Tradition and public administration*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York. doi.org/10.1057/9780230289635_3.
- Cheung, Chor-Yung (2011). 'How political accountability undermines public service ethics: The case of Hong Kong', *Journal of Contemporary China* 20(70): 499–515. doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2011.565180.
- Field, Andy (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics*, 5th edn, Sage Publications, Los Angeles.

- Hackman, J.R. and G.R. Oldham (1980). *Work redesign*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- Halligan, John (1996). 'The diffusion of civil service reform', in Hans A.G.M. Bekke, James L. Perry and Theo A.J. Toonen (eds), *Civil service systems in comparative perspective*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.
- Hsu, Y.-S. (2006). *Theory and structure of joint rank-in-person and in-position classification system: Review of current public personnel system*, Commercial Press, Taipei.
- Hwa, Lee-Jinn (2001). 'The public administration of the Republic of China on Taiwan', in Ali Farazmand (ed.), *Handbook of comparative and development public administration*, 2nd edn, Marcel Dekker, New York.
- Jilke, Sebastian, Bart Meuleman and Steven Van de Walle (2015). 'We need to compare, but how? Measurement equivalence in comparative public administration', *Public Administration Review* 75(1):36–48. doi.org/10.1111/puar.12318.
- Kline, Paul (2000). *The handbook of psychological testing*, 2nd edn, Routledge, London.
- Kline, Rex B. (2015). *Principles and practice of structural equation modelling*, Guilford publications, New York.
- Kristof-Brown, Amy L., Ryan D. Zimmerman and Erin C. Johnson (2005). 'Consequences of individuals' fit at work: A meta-analysis of person–job, person–organization, person–group, and person–supervisor fit', *Personnel Psychology* 58(2):281–342.
- Lægreid, Per and Lois Recascino Wise (2007). 'Reforming human resource management in civil service systems: Recruitment, mobility, and representativeness', in Jos C.N. Raadschelders, Theo A.J. Toonen and Frits M. Van der Meer (eds), *The civil service in the 21st century*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2008). *The state of the public service*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris.
- Peng, T.C.-P. (2009). 'Practices of Taiwan civil service examination reconsidered', *National Elite* 5(1): 49–67.
- Peng, T.C.-P. (2016). 'Case study on selection process and methods of Taiwan national public employees: Comparing with international experience', *National Elite* 12(1): 19–35.

- Raadschelders, Jos C.N. and Mark R. Rutgers (1996). 'The Evolution of Civil Service Systems', in Hans A.G.M. Bekke, James L. Perry and Theo A.J. Toonen (eds), *Civil service systems in comparative perspective*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.
- Scott, Ian and Ting Gong (2014). 'Administrative values in the mainland Chinese and Hong Kong public services: A comparative analysis', *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* 36(1):22–33. doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2014.892271.
- So, Bennis Wai Yip (2015). 'Exam-centred meritocracy in Taiwan: Hiring by merit or examination', *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 74(3):312–23. doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12139.
- So, Bennis Wai Yip (2019). 'The unique development of civil service system under a unique public personnel system in Taiwan: Should we let it go on?', *Policy and Personnel Management* 10(1): 1–24. doi.org/10.29944/PPM.201906_10(1).0001.
- So, Bennis Wai Yip (2020). 'The performance regime of public governance in Taiwan', in Andrew Podger, Tsai-tsu Su, John Wanna, Hon S. Chan and Meili Niu (eds), *Designing governance structures for performance and accountability*, ANU Press, Canberra. doi.org/10.22459/DGSPA.2020.11.
- So, Bennis Wai Yip and Hsin-Chung Liao (2019). 'Managerial flexibility versus employee-friendly flexibility: the internal labour market of Taiwan's civil service', *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* 41(3):157–68. doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2019.1660481.
- Weng, Y.-S. (1990). *Administrative law and rule of law*, Editorial Broad of Book Collections for Jurisprudence of National Taiwan University, Taipei.
- Wong, Wilson Wai-Ho and Raymond Hau-Yin Yuen (2020). 'Politicisation of the civil service under the C. Y. Leung Administration: Unprecedented Control', in J.Y.S. Cheng (ed.), *Evaluation of the C. Y. Leung Administration*, City University of Hong Kong Press, Hong Kong.

This text is taken from *Dilemmas in Public Management in Greater China and Australia: Rising Tensions but Common Challenges*, edited by Andrew Podger, Hon S. Chan, Tsai-tsu Su and John Wanna, published 2023 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/DPMGCA.2023.14