

Revisiting PSM-Attraction Proposition: The Moderating Effect of Civil Service Recruitment Methods

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Abstract

Prior studies have argued that the greater individuals' public service motivation (PSM), the more likely they will search for a job in the public sector. However, some doubt exists as to whether this expectation will be held across regimes in which different kinds of recruitment approaches in the civil service have been adopted. Accordingly, the present study aimed to revisit the PSM-attraction argument and explore the extent to which the effect of PSM on the intention of public employment, if any, will be weakened when government recruitment methods provide limited opportunities to evaluate applicants' personality, skills and motivation in addition to professional knowledge. Based on the 2017 survey data of 477 senior PA students from five universities in Taiwan ($n = 313$), one university in Hong Kong ($n = 110$), and one university in Singapore ($n = 54$), the present study showed that the overall PSM and the attraction to public service (APS) sub-dimension are positively associated with the tendency to search for membership in the public sector. Moreover, the positive impact of APS is likely to be weakened in the regimes

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in which exam-based recruitment approach (as opposed to the diverse recruitment methods) was adopted in the civil service although similar patterns were not found for overall PSM and the self-sacrifice sub-dimension. Our findings shed light on the importance of institutional contexts when examining PSM outcomes.

Keywords: public service motivation, civil service recruitment method, public employment intention, cross-national study

I. Introduction

Public institutions are expected to deal with complex problems that often present contradictory goals or a situation in which goods and services may not be available for the disadvantaged unless they are allocated by public authority. Given that suitable employees matter for achievement of goals and objectives of public institutions (Olufemi et al., 2020), it is relevant for public managers to understand how to attract people who have required capacity, both knowledge and passion, and what factors may determine individuals' willingness to work in the public sector.

Among others, prior studies have indicated that public service motivation (PSM) may be a relevant factor that would drive people to seek membership in the public sector (Ko & Jun, 2014; Tschirhart et al., 2008; Vandenabeele, 2008) because public employment provides them with more opportunities to contribute to the well-being of society. For those who hold a belief that public interest should be protected and every citizen is responsible for its pursuit, working for the public coincides with their self-identity. Accordingly, individuals with a higher level of PSM are likely to have a greater willingness to choose civil service careers.

Based on the literature review that we explored more in the next section, however, the attraction effect of PSM to the public sector may not always exist. We suspect that recruitment methods in the civil service could be one factor that moderates the association between PSM and interest in civil service careers. In a paper-based exam recruitment system, for instance, the public sector may have little chance to assess the examinees' level of PSM. As a result, the exam-based recruitment system may be more likely to attract the people who are good at taking exams but end up with almost no effect in choosing high-PSM individuals to join government since PSM-related attributes are not evaluated during the process. The public sector in Taiwan represents one of the cases adopting the exam-based recruitment approach.

However, some other countries designed the recruitment system of civil servants with a different logic. For instance, Singapore and Hong Kong are also societies that have been heavily influenced by the Confucianism, but have developed more diverse ways to evaluate their applicants, such as interviews and psychological

tests. Through this approach, applicants' educational background, professional achievements, personal experience, psychological characteristics, and/or work motivation, rather than simply professional knowledge, can be comprehensively examined. We are thus interested in knowing whether the effect of PSM on public employment would be more notable in those regimes.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to empirically examine whether the PSM attraction proposition is only supported when a recruitment system in the civil service provides the possibility to value prospective employees' PSM-related characteristics or to put it another way, to examine whether the relationship between individuals' PSM and their preferences for civil service careers tends to be influenced by the type of recruitment approaches in the civil service. Data for this study were obtained from a 2017 survey of 477 senior undergraduate students majoring in public administration at five universities in Taiwan, one university in Hong Kong, and one university in Singapore. Results of this study contribute to the existing literature by elucidating the conditions under which the PSM attraction proposition may be held or not.

II. Literature review

PSM was first formally defined by Perry and Wise (1990, p. 368) as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations". Although Perry and Wise's definition implies that PSM only has something to do with public organizations, other authors extended the concept to cover a broader sense. Rainey and Steinbauer (1999, p. 23) presented a more general definition of PSM as "a general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation, or humankind". Vandenabeele (2007, p. 547) further defines PSM as "the belief, values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate".

Perry and Wise (1990) indicated that PSM consists of three motive bases, including rational, normative, and affective motives, which encourage public

service. Rational motive represents individuals' desire to maximize personal utility through the process of contributing to policy planning and formulation. Norm-based motive refers to individuals' desire to do the right thing after they confirm what the right thing is (e.g., safeguard the spirit of social equity). Affective motive indicates extensive love for other people, which is highly correlated with patriotism of benevolence. Extending from the three motive bases, Perry (1996) further indicated that the concept of PSM consists of four sub-dimensions: (1) attraction to public policy making (APM), (2) commitment to public interest (CPI), (3) compassion (COM), and (4) self-sacrifice (SS).

The impact of PSM on occupation preferences/choices. In addition to defining PSM, Perry and Wise (1990) discussed behavioral implications of PSM. Perry and Wise argued that individuals having a higher level of PSM are more likely to seek employment in the public sector as it fits with their public service values. After the PSM-attraction proposition was proposed, several studies were conducted across different countries to test its validity, and some of them provide supportive evidence for such a proposition (Asseburg & Homberg, 2020; Brewer et al., 2000; Bullock et al., 2015; Cable & Judge, 1996; Carpenter et al., 2012; Van der Wal & Oosterbaan, 2013; Van de Walle et al., 2015).

For instance, Bullock et al. (2015) conducted a study to compare altruistic and societal motives held between government employees and their counterparts in the private sector using data gathered by International Social Survey Programme from 30 nations. Their analysis illustrated that public sector employees generally have stronger orientation toward public services and greater perceptions of social impact regarding their jobs than private employees do. Furthermore, their study also showed that public sector employees are less motivated by monetary incentives compared to their counterpart.

Asseburg and Homberg (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of 42 quantitative studies examining the association between PSM and sector attraction and found out that PSM is a significant indicator of sector attraction. They also employed a survey of 600 Master's students from different majors in Germany to examine how powerful PSM is as a predictor to public sector attraction compared to other reward preferences (such as pay, security, personal development, and others) that

individuals may consider when seeking for a job. Compared to sector rewards, such as pay or personal development opportunities, their analysis showed that PSM is a stronger predictor of intention to work in the public sector.

Although some authors provided evidence to support the PSM-attraction proposition, other studies showed that the influence of PSM on preferences/choices of employment sector seems to be mixed. For instance, Wright and Christensen (2010) measured United States lawyers' PSM in both pre- and post-entry stages of their career in order to better understand the relationship between PSM and choice of employment sector. Their study showed that PSM cannot explain the employment sector of the respondents' first legal job although it increases the probability that subsequent jobs are in the public sector. In other words, lawyers with a higher level of PSM may eventually switch to the public sector, while they may not initially seek a career in the public sector. The authors suggested that it will be the key question for future research as regards when and under what conditions PSM may affect employee attraction and retention in the public sector.

Bright (2011) conducted a study showing the relationship between PSM and the occupation choices of individuals working in public organizations in Indiana, Kentucky, and Oregon. Although the respondents were all public employees, they represented diverse public sector occupations, which were further classified as public service versus non-public service occupations by the authors. The research finding illustrated that individuals' PSM has little to do with the choice of working in public or non-public service occupations.

Liu et al. (2011) analyzed the association between PSM and the employment sector preferences among 584 undergraduate students from two universities in Eastern China. Although they found that students with higher levels of overall PSM are more likely to choose a career in the public sector, only the SS sub-dimension was found to have a positive association with interest in public sector jobs when looking at each dimension of PSM.

Lee and Choi (2016) conducted a study to explore the effects of PSM on Korean students' sector choices by including various kinds of work values, prosocial behaviors, and volunteering. The results of their study showed that PSM and prosocial behaviors are insignificant predictors of public sector choice of college

students in Korea. Instead, the field of study (major) is the strongest predictor of public sector employment intention. Students majoring in public administration are more likely to prefer to working in the public sector compared to those majoring in other disciplines.

Several observations derive from our literature review. First, it seems that no firm conclusions can be drawn on the influence of PSM on public employment intention or preference. Secondly, relevant studies were conducted in various counties and local contexts across regimes were usually not taken into consideration. Third, each sub-dimension of PSM may lead to different results, while most studies only focused on the impact of overall PSM.

Moderating Effect of Civil Service Recruitment Methods. Inconsistent findings of the current literature make us wonder whether the PSM-attraction proposition is conditioned by other factors. As indicated in Wright and Christensen (2010), differences in contexts and conditions in which empirical studies were conducted may explain the mixed findings they presented for the PSM-attraction proposition. One context-related factor that is particularly relevant when examining the relationship between PSM and attraction to the public sector is the differences in civil service recruitment methods across regimes.

Given that the recruitment methods are carried out by public organizations with the purpose of identifying suitable employees, it signifies the capability and personality that are desirable for the public sectors (Barber, 1998). It is thus reasonable to expect that individuals who are satisfied with the expectation will be more likely to have an “intention” to seek membership in the public sector, and vice versa. Asseburg et al. (2018) reported that recruitment messages conveying the possibility that the opening positions could help make one’s hometown a better place to live/work are likely to evoke individuals’ intention to work in the public sector by increasing their perceived person and organization fit, especially for those who hold a higher level of PSM. In other words, the recruitment methods (and implicit messages they deliver) not only function as filters, which ensures that only the individuals who are qualified based on the determined criteria can become civil servants, they also play a role of signals implying whom are the ones the public sector is looking for. The extent to which high-PSM individuals will be attracted and

screened into public sectors may thus depend upon the recruitment methods adopted by the government.

One way to distinguish recruitment systems in civil service across regimes is to analyze the extent to which diverse channels or tools have been adopted to help identify various competencies. According to the iceberg model proposed by Spencer and Spencer (1993), five different types of competencies, including skills, knowledge, self-concept, traits, and motives, exist. The selection method through paper-and-pencil tests mainly aims at testing the “knowledge of candidates” for a given job (Cardona, 2006), but may be insufficient to discover other types of capacities that the candidates possess. Although it might be a convenient means to ensure the value of equity and fairness, such a recruitment approach may cause the applicants to only master the test itself not the relevant capacity necessary for the job (Sundell, 2014). On the other hand, the selection methods conducted through more diverse tools, such as interviews with a selecting committee, may do a better job at screening other competencies, such as strategic thinking, innovative capabilities, work motivation, psychological attributes, the ability of practical problem-solving, and others. Based on the discussion above, the present study classifies two general types of recruitment approaches in the public sector: (1) the “Exam-based Approach” with Taiwan as a representative case, and (2) the “Diverse Assessment Approach,” which is exemplified by Singapore and Hong Kong.

The Exam-based Approach in Taiwan. Taiwanese society has a long history of considering standardized exams as desirable ways to determine who can hold a position in government (Keju system), and these exams are essential for equity (Chen et al., 2020). The current system of civil service recruitment in Taiwan is thus performed through competitive examinations that are aimed at evaluating the professional knowledge and cognition capacities of civil servant candidates. Professional knowledge refers particularly to the field of academic and legal knowledge (So, 2015). Exam questions are in general true/false, multiple choice, or essay type formats that students are expected to answer from textbooks (Chen et al., 2020). Examinees will be ranked according to their exam scores, and the vacant positions are arranged based on score rankings.

As a public sector career is often considered one of the most ideal jobs in

Taiwan, a high entry threshold for the government jobs exists (Elman, 2013; Chen et al., 2020). Individuals who are interested in working in the public sector will need to spend excessive time in preparing for the exams. On average, an examinee has to take the exam 2.7 times before he/she can pass it, and the average age of the first-admitted public employees is approximately 28-29 years old (Yang, 2021).

This exam-centered approach is considered an objective method of assessing the suitability of potential candidates, leading to the absence of selection power of public managers (So, 2015). Only a very small opportunity exists for public managers to evaluate other capacities or traits of the candidates, which are hard to evaluate using examinations. In other words, the exam-based approach in Taiwan signifies that the candidates with the best professional knowledge for the job, not those with the most suitable skills or great passion, would be rewarded. Consequently, individuals who intend to become civil servants are bound to push themselves to excel on the test itself rather than on the skills or personality that are also important to serve as civil servants (Sundell, 2014).

Accordingly, we may expect that this exam-centered recruitment approach may hamper the PSM-attraction effect to the public sector to some extent. Based upon the survey of 3,075 Taiwanese people who participated in civil servant exams, Chen et al. (2020) reported that competitive public service exam results in the fact that individuals with high PSM are less likely than those with low PSM to be selected into the public sector, leading to adverse selection. The privilege and pride that can come with being a civil servant motivate individuals to focus on exam preparation, and the exams that mainly value professional knowledge and cognitive capacity make the motivation to serve the public somehow irrelevant.

The Approach Allowing Diverse Recruiting Channels: Singapore. Although many Asian countries adopt an exam-based approach to screen their civil servants (such as China, Korea, Vietnam, and others), some exceptions still exist, and one notable example is Singapore. Singapore emphasizes applicants' abilities to perform public service well, and therefore, considers that these job applicants should not be evaluated simply by written examinations. As a result, the civil service in Singapore mainly takes approaches similar to the private sector, which empowers government agencies to recruit employees based on their specific needs. Applicants' work

experience, professional knowledge, skills, and credentials needed for the jobs will be comprehensively assessed. Written examinations, on the other hand, are only one of many other diverse evaluation approaches in the process (Low, 2023).

Generally, talent in Singapore can be recruited into the public sector via two channels: (1) For administrative service: pre-service bonded scholarships and (2) For the rest: open recruitments. To attract the best and brightest to administrative service, the Public Service Commission (PSC) offers pre-service scholarships to outstanding high school students who are evaluated based on their personal statement, school report, psychological interview report, co-curricular activity achievements, community involvement program records, academic performance, and other notable achievements (Public Service Commission, 2016). The scholarship holders are required to participate in the Management Associate Program (MAP) after graduating from universities in Singapore or abroad. The four-year MAP training would help them gain work experiences in different ministries (Poocharoen & Lee, 2013). At the conclusion of the MAP training, they may stay in the ministry that they currently work at or be further interviewed for entry into the Administrative Service (AS) if recommended by the ministry (Neo & Chen, 2007). Those who are successfully screened into the AS may get the chance in the future to be promoted to a higher rank.

For anyone who is interested in a government career in Singapore, he/she may go through the channel of open recruitment. Government vacancies are advertised on the job portal *Careers@Gov* and may also be posted in local newspapers. Those interested in joining public sectors may submit their applications either online or directly to the relevant agencies. Each recruiting agency formulates its own selection criteria, which may change from job to job, and the minimum entry level requirement is typically contingent upon previous academic background and educational qualifications (Moon & Hwang, 2013).

To select individuals who are the best fit for the jobs and to evaluate their abilities, the applicants usually have to go through several stages of qualification screening and assessments (Low, 2023). During the evaluation process, the applicants' problem-solving skills, leadership qualities, communication skills, personal attributes, motivation, and commitment to public service will be evaluated

through practical tests, case studies, psychometric tests, and interviews (Public Service Division, n.d.). The recruitment system adopted in Singapore enables the agencies to assess the applicants from all aspects. From the standpoint of the job applicants, they may as well evaluate their own strengths and weakness before making decisions about their future jobs.

The Approach Applying Different Selection Tools: Hong Kong. Another example that is opposite to the exam-based recruitment approach is the one adopted by Hong Kong. Recruitment advertisements for all government jobs are typically posted online and sometimes in local newspapers. Applicants are allowed to apply for more than one job. The recruitment process encompasses two stages: (1) recruitment examinations and (2) selection interviews. The Civil Service Bureau is in charge of the first stage of the examination, and the recruiting agencies are responsible for the second stage of examination.

During the first stage, applicants who meet the entry requirements, such as educational qualifications, need to participate in three public service exams: (1) Common Recruitment Examination (CRE); (2) Basic Law Test (BLT); (3) Joint Recruitment Examination (JRE). The CRE encompasses language proficiency tests (Chinese and English) as well as an aptitude test in a multiple-choice format; the pass results of language proficiency tests and the score of aptitude test are of permanent validity. The BLT was introduced since 2008, and it assesses applicants' knowledge of the Basic Law using multiple-choice questions. Starting from 2022, all applicants have to pass the "National Security Law Test" in order to be considered for appointment (Wong & Yuen, 2023). Individuals who pass these two examinations will be considered qualified. Qualified applicants can later apply for the jobs depending on the vacancy of each position. The JRE is held for recruitment of entry ranks of civil service depending on the manpower needs in different government bureaus or departments. Job applicants' analytical and written communication abilities will be assessed through scenario cases analysis. Even though these are all written examinations, applicants' potential to perform their jobs can be better assessed.

The second stage of the evaluation focuses on applicants' expertise and knowledge, and evaluation processes are held by the corresponding agencies in

the form of interviews, written tests, and/or other relevant skills tests designed specifically to the positions. Also, all applicants need to undertake medical examination and integrity check before being appointed (Wong & Yuen, 2023). All these processes are designed to ensure that their civil servants are the best fit for those positions.

In the case of several candidates who meet the job requirements, the recruiting agency may create a shortlist of criteria, and only the candidates who satisfied those criteria will be invited to attend skill examinations and/or sequential interviews. The final decision will be made by the recruitment board of the recruiting agency based on candidates' performance on skill examinations and/or interviews. Similar to Singapore, the recruitment process in Hong Kong provides opportunities for public managers to evaluate applicants' knowledge, motivations, personal skills, and other capacities that may not be adequately evaluated in the paper-based exams.

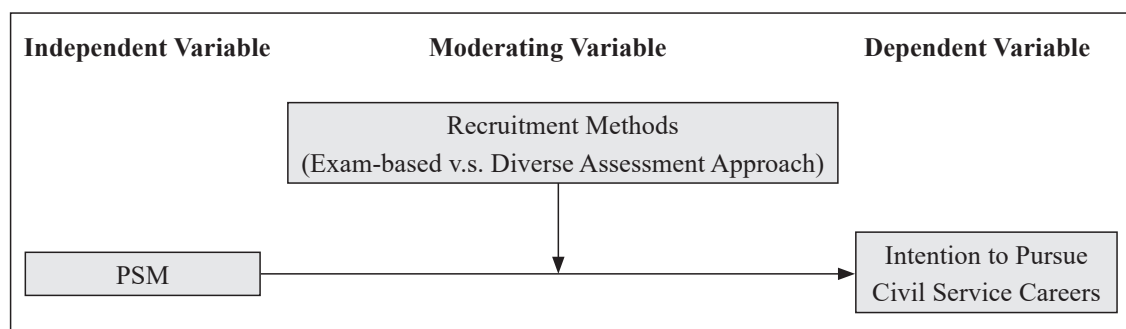
Accordingly, we may expect that individuals having higher levels of PSM will display a greater intention to become civil servants under the conditions in which their government recruitment methods provide opportunities for recruitment agencies to evaluate applicants' personality, motivation, and skills in addition to their knowledge levels. Yung (2014) conducted 32 in-depth interviews of government officials in Hong Kong to determine the extent to which PSM acts as a reason for being interested in government employment in Hong Kong. This study illustrates that although the level of PSM varies with different types of work and is higher especially among those who directly serve the public, PSM is generally the reason for choosing employment in the public sector for government officials in Hong Kong.

In summary, the present study hypothesizes that civil service recruitment methods will moderate the relationship between PSM and intention to serve in the public sector. Specifically, high-PSM individuals will be more likely to search for a position/role in the public sector if they are in the context in which the government recruitment system provides opportunities for PSM to be considered during the selection process (as in Singapore and Hong Kong) compared to others without such opportunities (such as Taiwan). In contrast, the positive relationship between PSM and intention to work in the public sector may be attenuated if government adopts

the exam-centered approach that offers limited opportunities for individuals with high-PSM but weak exam skills to be rewarded.

Given that PSM is a multidimensional concept, prior studies have suggested that its sub-dimensions may result in different outcomes (Chen & Xu, 2016). The PSM sub-dimensions that reflect the rational or norm-based motives (such as APM/CPI) focus more on gaining power to affect or improve society; the sub-dimensions that reflect the affective motives (such as COM/SS) describe people's feeling and their willingness to give up a certain number of self-interests for the benefit of others. Because individuals' ability and attraction to policy making/public service may be more easily identified through community service records, interviews or practical examinations, the moderating effect of diverse recruitment methods may be more notable for these sub-dimensions. In contrast, affective motives, such as compassion or tendency to self-sacrifice, are less likely to be manifested and thus relatively difficult to recognize. Having diverse assessment approaches may not be a distinct advantage for altruistic candidates. Based on the discussion above, we expect that the moderating effect of recruitment methods may vary across different PSM sub-dimensions. Our conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Source: Compiled by the authors.

III. Data and measures

A. Data description

Data for this study were obtained from a research project, titled the Asian Public Administration Education Research (APAER), which was conducted by scholars in the field of public administration in Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Thailand, and China. The purpose of APAER was to investigate outcomes of public administration education in Asian contexts by collecting three-wave panel data of PA students who were enrolled in college across regimes in the 2017 (the survey was distributed in 2017, 2019, and 2021).¹ In addition, APAER surveyed senior PA students in 2017 and 2020, individually, for cross-cohort comparison research. The present study used the 2017 survey data of 477 senior PA students from five universities in Taiwan ($n = 313$), the City University of Hong Kong ($n = 110$), and the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore ($n = 54$).² The five universities in Taiwan that participated in the 2017 survey included the National Chengchi University (NCCU), National Taipei University (NTPU), Tamkang University (TKU), Tunghai University (THU), and Shih Hsin University (SHU). The first two are public universities, and the rest are private universities. In terms of the universities outside Taiwan, both the City University of Hong Kong and Nanyang Technological University in Singapore are public universities. Given that we did not select our samples on the basis of a random strategy, it is not suitable to over-generalize our finding to the PA students of other universities in the three regimes.

B. Measures

Dependent variable. The dependent variable of this study was the *Intention to Pursue Civil Service Careers*. This variable was measured using a question asking the respondents what they thought about public service careers. This variable was

¹ The questionnaire distributed to Taiwan samples was written in traditional Chinese, and the one administered to Singapore and Hong Kong samples was translated into English.

² The original number of responses were 514. We removed the respondents who did not reply to all the questions used to measure the variables of interest. For our analysis, 477 samples were included.

coded one if the respondents revealed that they have had an intention to pursue a public service career; otherwise, it was coded zero.

Independent variable. The primary independent variable in this study was the *PSM*. In line with Alonso and Lewis (2001), this variable was operationalized by averaging the level of respondents' agreement with the following statements (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.672$): (1) Meaningful public service is very important to me, (2) I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another, (3) Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements, (4) I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society, and (5) I am not afraid to go bat for the rights of others even if it means that I will be ridiculed. This variable was measured using a Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree with a mean of 2.83.³ Higher values indicate that respondents reported a higher level of PSM.

In addition to examining the impact of overall PSM, we also investigated the relationship between PSM sub-dimensions and intention to pursue civil service careers. Concerning face validity and suggestion by Kim et al. (2013), Q1 and Q2 were used as indicators to measure APS and Q3 to Q5 were employed to measure SS.

Moderating variable. The moderating variable in this study was the *Diverse Assessment Approach*. This variable was coded one if the respondents were college students in Hong Kong or Singapore in which interviews or methods other than paper-based exams were adopted during the selection process; it was coded zero if the respondents were college students in Taiwan in which the selection of civil servants is primarily based on applicants' written assessment.

Control variables. The present study also controlled for some factors that may affect students' intentions to search for positions in the public sector. The control variables in this study included negative perception of government, job stability, self-actualization, job prestige, confidence in knowledge, double majors, and minors.

³ There has been a debate about whether it is better to have an odd number of scales or not. Some scholars suggested using midpoint scales (Adelson & McCoach, 2010), while there are also authors arguing that an even number of response options is preferred when measuring individuals' attitudes (Wu, 1996). We adopted a 4-point scale because social desirability bias is likely to occur in measuring public service motivation (Kim & Kim, 2016), and an even number of scales may help eliminate this bias (Garland, 1991).

Given that individuals who have negative image of government may opt for private employment, *Negative Perception of Government* was included. This variable was operationalized by averaging the level of respondents' agreement to the following statements (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.636$): (1) The salary and benefits of public servants exceed their contributions to the country, (2) The public sector is too conservative. Government employees do not move forward unless people push them, and (3) Public agencies do not solve real problems. They look at problems superficially. These items were measured using a Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree with a mean of 2.86. Higher values represented more negative perceptions toward the government.

Prior studies indicated that public and private employees vary in terms of their work values; public sector employees tend to prioritize a stable and security future, while those in private sector value more on the opportunity for advancement and job prestige (Jurkiewicz et al., 1998). We thus controlled the preference for job stability, self-actualization, and job prestige. *Job Stability* was measured by the level of importance of stability (job security) for the respondents when considering their future career. This item was measured using a Likert scale ranging from (1) not important at all to (4) very important with a mean of 3.32. Higher values indicate that job stability was considered more important than other job characteristics for the respondents.

Self-actualization was measured by averaging the level of importance of two factors for the respondents when considering their future career (Correlation = 0.560; $p < 0.001$): (1) Self-actualization, and (2) Learning and growth. These items were measured using a Likert scale ranging from (1) not important at all to (4) very important with a mean of 3.29. Higher values indicate that self-actualization was considered more important than other job characteristics for the respondents.

Job Prestige was measured by averaging the level of importance of two factors for the respondents when considering their future career (Correlation = 0.417; $p < 0.001$): (1) Image of the occupation (how people view this job), and (2) A job that glorifies the family name. These items were measured using a Likert scale ranging from (1) not important at all to (4) very important with a mean of 2.66. Higher values indicate that job prestige was considered more important than other job

characteristics for the respondents.

Individuals who have a higher level of confidence in knowledge related to public governance may show a greater intention to become civil servants because they may expect that the knowledge would help them to perform better at work. *Confidence in Knowledge* was measured by averaging the level of confidence the respondents reported in the following areas (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.589$): (1) Public policy analysis, (2) Government institutions (including elections), (3) Management in the public sector, and (4) Legal knowledge. These items were measured using a Likert scale ranging from (1) not confident at all to (4) very confident with a mean of 2.62. Higher values indicate that the respondents were more confident in the related areas of knowledge and abilities.

Respondents who received interdisciplinary training other than in public administration may expect more job opportunities after graduation, thereby presenting a lower level of intention to become civil servants. Interdisciplinary training was captured by two variables: *Double Majors* and *Minors*. The former was coded one if the respondents were enrolled in (or had already completed) a second major. The latter was coded one if the respondents were enrolled in (or had already completed) a minor. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables included in the analysis. Correlations among continuous variables are shown in Table 2. Table 3 and Table 4 further display associations between main variables of interest and *Intention to Pursue Civil Service Careers*.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

Categorical Variables		All Sample				Taiwan Sample				Singapore Sample				Hong Kong Sample							
		Value	Frequency	%		Value	Frequency	%		Value	Frequency	%		Value	Frequency	%					
1	Intention to Pursue Civil Service Careers	0	179	37.53	0	134	42.81	0	9	16.67	0	36	32.73								
		1	298	62.47	1	179	57.19	1	45	83.33	1	74	67.27								
2	Diverse Assessment Approach	0	313	65.62	0	313	100.00	0	0	0.00	0	0	0.00								
		1	164	34.38	1	0	0.00	1	54	100.00	1	110	100.00								
3	Double Majors	0	447	93.71	0	295	94.25	0	46	85.19	0	106	96.36								
		1	30	6.29	1	18	5.75	1	8	14.81	1	4	3.64								
4	Minors	0	415	87.00	0	275	87.86	0	47	87.04	0	93	84.55								
		1	62	13.00	1	38	12.14	1	7	12.96	1	17	15.45								
Continuous Variables		All Sample				Taiwan Sample				Singapore Sample				Hong Kong Sample							
		Obs	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	Obs	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	Obs	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max					
1	PSM	477	2.83	0.43	1.6	4	313	2.80	0.40	1.8	4	54	3.06	0.50	2.0	4	110	2.80	0.47	1.6	4
2	APS	477	3.11	0.49	1.5	4	313	3.10	0.46	1.5	4	54	3.31	0.53	2.0	4	110	3.01	0.55	1.5	4
3	SS	477	2.64	0.54	1.0	4	313	2.60	0.50	1.0	4	54	2.89	0.61	2.0	4	110	2.66	0.60	1.0	4
4	Negative Perception of Government	477	2.86	0.54	1.0	4	313	2.90	0.49	1.0	4	54	2.45	0.65	1.0	4	110	2.96	0.52	1.7	4
5	Job Stability	477	3.32	0.61	1.0	4	313	3.34	0.58	1.0	4	54	3.39	0.56	2.0	4	110	3.25	0.72	1.0	4
6	Self-actualization	477	3.29	0.59	1.0	4	313	3.28	0.58	1.0	4	54	3.62	0.49	2.0	4	110	3.15	0.59	1.5	4
7	Job Prestige	477	2.66	0.69	1.0	4	313	2.73	0.61	1.0	4	54	2.25	0.88	1.0	4	110	2.65	0.74	1.0	4
8	Confidence in Knowledge	477	2.62	0.52	0.8	4	313	2.74	0.45	1.0	4	54	2.10	0.43	0.8	3	110	2.53	0.56	1.0	4

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Table 2*Pearson's Correlation among Continuous Variables*

Continuous Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 PSM	1.00							
2 APS	0.70*	1.00						
3 SS	0.90*	0.33*	1.00					
4 Negative Perception of Government	0.06	0.10*	0.02	1.00				
5 Job Stability	0.06	0.10*	0.01	0.06	1.00			
6 Self-actualization	0.34*	0.26*	0.29*	0.03	0.02	1.00		
7 Job Prestige	0.04	0.07	0.02	0.14*	0.13*	0.10*	1.00	
8 Confidence in Knowledge	0.10*	0.06	0.10*	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.25*	1.00

Note. * $p < 0.05$.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Table 3*Chi-Square Test of Association between Recruitment Methods and Public Employment Intention*

Having the Intention to Pursue Civil Service Careers	Yes	No	Total	Chi-square test
Exam-based Approach	134 42.81%	179 57.19%	313 100.00%	Chi-square($df=1$)=10.847 $p=0.001$
Diverse Assessment Approach	45 27.44%	119 72.56%	164 100.00%	

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Table 4*T-Test for Equality of Mean*

Variables	Having the Intention to Pursue Civil Service Careers	Obs	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	t value	p value
PSM	Yes	179	2.80	0.41	1.80	4.00	-1.22	0.224
	No	298	2.85	0.44	1.60	4.00		
APS	Yes	179	3.03	0.52	1.50	4.00	-2.63	0.009 ^a
	No	298	3.15	0.47	2.00	4.00		
SS	Yes	179	2.64	0.51	1.00	4.00	0.0005	1.000
	No	298	2.64	0.57	1.00	4.00		

Note. ^a Welch's t test is adopted because the assumption of homogeneity of variance is violated.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

IV. Results

Table 5 presents the results of logistic regression for *Intention to Pursue Civil Service Careers*. Model 1 included *PSM* as the variable of interest in addition to other control variables to examine the effect of overall PSM. Models 3 and 5 were almost identical to Model 1 except that two PSM sub-dimensions (*APS* and *SS*) instead of overall PSM were included. Models 2, 4, and 6 in which the *Diverse Assessment Approach* and its interaction with *PSM*, *APS*, and *SS* were included was conducted to test whether the moderating effect of government recruitment methods exists or not. In those models, *PSM* (*APS* and *SS*) were mean-centered to alleviate the multicollinearity problem. The interaction terms were the product of the *Diverse Assessment Approach* and mean-centered *PSM* (*APS* and *SS*).⁴

In terms of the overall PSM, Model 1 indicates that *PSM* is positively associated with the intention to search for a position in the public sector ($p < 0.05$). Model 2 further revealed that the respondents who are from the places in which the diverse assessment approach was adopted for civil servant recruitment are more likely to report an intention to become civil servants compared to their counterpart ($p < 0.01$). However, the interaction term between *Diverse Assessment Approach* and *PSM* was not statistically significant, meaning that the effect of PSM on the public sector employment intention may not vary between the regimes adopting the exam-based and diverse assessment approaches.

In addition to the overall PSM, we also investigated the relationships between the intention to pursue civil service careers and two PSM sub-dimensions (*APS* and *SS*). According to Model 3, students with a higher level of *APS* are more likely to pursue careers in public service ($p < 0.01$). Model 4 further displayed that both the *Diverse Assessment Approach* and its interaction term with *APS* were positively associated with the public sector employment intentions ($p < 0.001$; $p < 0.1$), meaning that diverse recruitment approaches have the significant moderating effect on the relationship between *APS* and an applicant's employment intention in the

⁴ In those moderation models, the variance inflation factor (VIF) score of the independent variables are all below 2, implying that there may not be severe collinearity problems in our analyses.

Table 5
Results of Logistic Regression

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5			Model 6		
	Coef.	SE	OR	Coef.	SE	OR	Coef.	SE	OR	Coef.	SE	OR	Coef.	SE	OR	Coef.	SE	OR
PSM	0.62*	0.26	1.85	0.49	0.34	1.64												
APS							0.82**	0.24	2.26	0.48	0.29	1.62						
SS													0.17	0.20	1.19	0.22	0.26	1.25
Diverse Assessment Approach				0.82**	0.26	2.26				0.96***	0.26	2.61				0.88**	0.26	2.42
Diverse Assessment Approach * PSM				0.05	0.55	1.05												
Diverse Assessment Approach * APS										0.93†	0.53	2.52						
Diverse Assessment Approach * SS																-0.43	0.40	0.65
Negative Perception of Government	-0.80***	0.21	0.45	-0.77***	0.22	0.46	-0.84***	0.21	0.43	-0.84***	0.21	0.43	-0.77***	0.21	0.46	-0.76***	0.21	0.47
Job Stability	1.18***	0.19	3.26	1.20***	0.19	3.31	1.16***	0.19	3.20	1.16***	0.19	3.19	1.19***	0.19	3.29	1.22***	0.19	3.37
Self-actualization	-0.71***	0.20	0.49	-0.70**	0.20	0.49	-0.74***	0.20	0.48	-0.78***	0.20	0.46	-0.61**	0.20	0.54	-0.59**	0.20	0.55
Job Prestige	-0.29†	0.16	0.74	-0.26	0.17	0.77	-0.31†	0.16	0.73	-0.27	0.17	0.76	-0.29†	0.16	0.75	-0.25	0.16	0.78
Confidence in Knowledge	0.19	0.22	1.21	0.42†	0.23	1.53	0.23	0.22	1.25	0.50*	0.24	1.66	0.22	0.22	1.24	0.45*	0.23	1.57
Double Majors	-0.50	0.41	0.61	-0.51	0.42	0.60	-0.51	0.42	0.60	-0.55	0.46	0.58	-0.46	0.41	0.63	-0.45	0.42	0.64
Minors	0.62†	0.34	1.86	0.58†	0.34	1.78	0.60†	0.34	1.82	0.51	0.34	1.67	0.63†	0.34	1.88	0.59†	0.34	1.81
Constant	-0.24	1.13	0.79	0.44	1.15	1.55	-0.76	1.15	0.47	0.80	1.20	2.22	0.53	1.07	1.69	-0.16	1.11	0.85
N of Observation	477			477			477			477			477			477		
Wald Chi ² (df)	65.07 (8)***			71.40 (10)***			72.15 (8)***			82.10 (10)***			57.48 (8)***			63.65 (10)***		
Pseudo R Squared	0.13			0.15			0.14			0.17			0.12			0.14		
Log likelihood	-275.11			-341.18			-271.36			-262.64			-277.49			-270.40		

Note. † $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

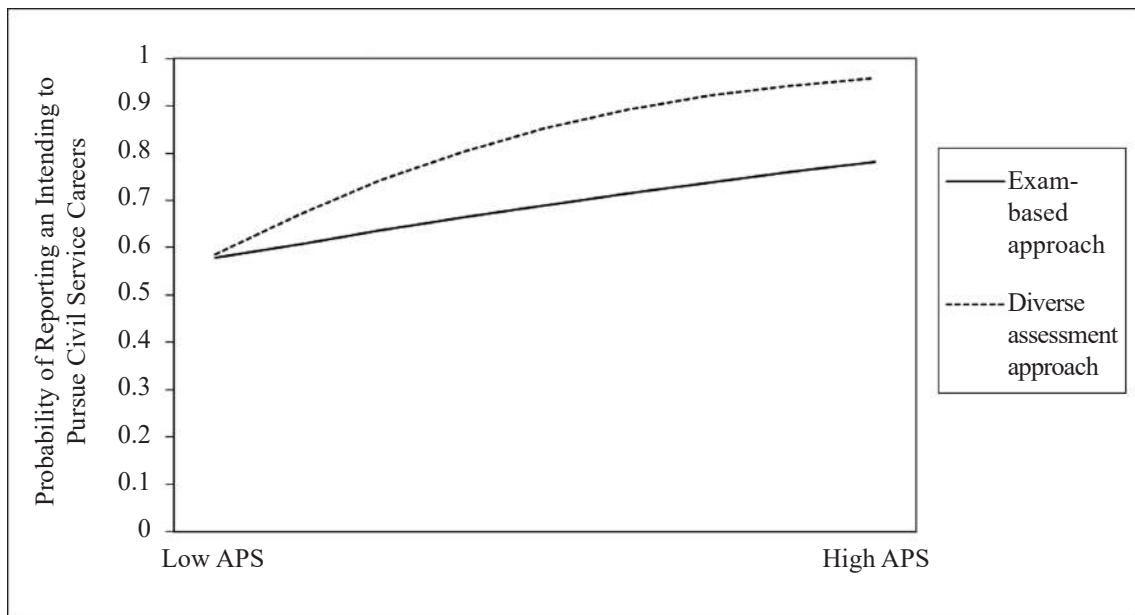
Source: Compiled by the authors.

public sector. After plotting the interaction effect (Figure 2), it is clear that APS tends to have stronger influence on an applicant's intention to pursue civil service careers in the places in which the diverse assessment was adopted.

As we previously argued, the government recruitment methods in Hong Kong and Singapore provide diverse approaches to evaluate candidates' eligibility (such as motivation, personal traits, and others), which may evoke high-PSM individuals' interest in public employment because their passion for public service is likely to be appreciated. Conversely, high-PSM students with weak exam skills in Taiwan may hesitate to take the national examinations since they do not have the chance to show their personal traits, communication skills, leadership skills, or other abilities. Therefore, we speculate that the positive results on the interaction term may derive from the fact that the exam-only method weakened the positive impacts of APS on applicants' employment intentions in the public sector. As a result, prospective civil servants who hold a greater APS may be put in an advantaged position only when diverse assessment methods are applied in the recruitment process.

Figure 2

The Moderating Effect of Recruitment Methods on APS-Public Employment Intention Relation



Source: Compiled by the authors.

In terms of the SS sub-dimension, Model 5 shows that SS was found to be positively associated with the intention to pursue civil service careers, while the relationship is not statistically significant. Moreover, Model 6 indicated that the diverse recruitment methods in the public sector may be related to stronger intentions to become civil servants reported by college students ($p < 0.01$), while the interaction terms between *Diverse Assessment Approach* and SS is not statistically significant. It means that the SS sub-dimension has a similar effect on public employment intentions across the regimes adopting different kinds of recruitment systems.

The results from the analysis of control variables are fairly consistent across models. The respondents who indicated stronger negative perception of government and valued more on self-actualization or job prestige are less inclined to seek employment in government jobs. In contrast, those who reported strong work value on stability are more prone to pursue civil service careers. Moreover, the respondents who studied a minor were found to be more likely to show public employment intentions.

V. Discussion

Several things regarding our findings are noteworthy for further discussion. First, APS should, theoretically, enhance individuals' willingness to seek positions in the public sector, and our study found that, if the recruitment methods fail to assess the diverse capacity of the candidates (such as motivation, personality, and other related traits), it indeed lowers the likelihood for APS to arouse individuals' interest in government jobs. In other words, the exam-only assessment approach may create a "screening" effect prior to the point where we can select the high-PSM candidates in the pool. Such "self-selection mechanism" may not be beneficial to the effective human resources management in the public sector.

Besides all other factors that may drive people to seek careers in the public sector, the exam-only assessment approach implicitly delivers the message that good memorization and exam-taking skills are the most important abilities to be considered. However, some people may think that memorizing information in the

textbook or going to cram schools is not beneficial to them, so they may decide not to choose this path even though they have a strong passion to serve in the public sector. Such a phenomenon may have determined “who will be in the pool” long before we can select everyone in the society.

Imagine a situation in which we stop a person on the street and ask him: “What is the most important characteristic that our civil servants should have?” A very reasonable and commonly-received answer would be: “I hope that he/she is willing to contribute himself/herself to the public and willing to help the people.” However, such a wish may not be well realized in the context in which the single-dimensional assessment approach was adopted since this willing-to-help characteristic is simply not evaluated during the process. Even worse, the standardized single-dimensional public service exam may deter the high-APS individuals from generating an intention to enter the public sector (Chen et al., 2020).

Second, it seems that SS generally has a trivial influence on students’ intentions to pursue civil service careers. That is, those who reported a higher level of willingness to sacrifice for public interest may not show a particular preference for civil service careers. One explanation is that only few of the jobs in the public sector (such as police or fire fighters) may encounter situations in which self-sacrifice of public workers is strongly demanded. Given that we asked the respondents about their intention for seeking a role in the general public sector, students who possess a stronger self-sacrifice tendency may not consider civil service the career that can satisfies their motives. This result also echoed the perspective that each PSM sub-dimensions may lead to different outcomes (Chen & Xu, 2016).

More importantly, the above weak relationship may not be reinforced even if diverse assessment approaches are adopted by the public sector. Echoing our research hypotheses, affective motive tends to be more difficult to identify even with the usage of interviews, practical tests, and psychometric tests, among others, thereby reducing influence of diverse assessment approaches on changing the relationship between SS and intention to pursue civil service careers. Moreover, some jobs outside public sectors (e.g., teachers or doctors) also require personal sacrifices for the achievement of organizational missions. Civil service careers may not always be the top choice for the students who possess a stronger self-sacrifice

tendency no matter the recruitment methods of the public sector value this personal trait or not.

Last, our findings displayed that the effect of overall PSM on the attraction to public sector did not notably vary across regimes adopting different recruitment approaches. One explanation is that not all relevant sub-concepts of PSM were incorporated into the present study because we measured PSM using the short version of questionnaire revised by Alonso and Lewis (2001). Another possibility is that the measurement of PSM includes different nature of attributes, the APS and SS sub-dimensions, altogether. Since recruitment methods did not generate a notable moderating effect for SS, its moderating influence for overall PSM may be naturally weakened as well.

VI. Conclusion

Prior studies have reported mixed conclusions regarding whether the PSM attraction proposition proposed by Perry and Wise (1990) can be supported or not. However, existing literature provides minimal information about the factors that may explain this inconsistency. This study is particularly interested in the possible moderating effect of government recruitment methods on the relationship between PSM and career intention in the public sector. Our analysis revealed that overall PSM and APS (one of its sub-dimensions) are positively related to the intention to pursue civil service careers, which seems to provide evidence to support the PSM attraction proposition. On the other hand, we also found that the adoption of exam-only recruitment may weaken the relationship between APS and the attraction to the public sector although no significant impact was associated with the SS sub-dimension and overall PSM.

Our findings shed light on the implications of complexity for understanding PSM. Not only the concept and measures of PSM could vary across different cultures (Giauque et al., 2011), contextual factors associated with research arenas may also matter when examining the effect of PSM. Future studies should pay more attention to the possibility that contextual factors may interfere the effect of PSM on the relevant outcomes that have been widely discussed in the literature.

Moreover, it is likely that various PSM sub-dimensions may have different impact on the attraction to public sector. We call for more studies to investigate influence of PSM sub-dimensions separately, with particular attention to distinguishing PSM sub-dimensions grounded in affective motives from other types of sub-dimensions. Finally, our study also contributes to the literature by expanding the research arenas of PSM from Western countries to Asian contexts, which may help respond to the big question: “To what extent can the propositions Perry and Wise (1990) proposed be supported outside the western world from which the concept of PSM originally derives?”

Despite its promises, this research also suffers from several limitations. First, the present study used the regimes from which the respondents come as a proxy to measure the type of recruitment methods. However, the regimes may contain distinct characteristics other than government recruitment methods. It is thus possible that the findings of this study present the mixed influence of recruitment methods and other regime-level factors. Second, the questions used to measure variables of interest in the present study have relatively lower reliability. Our samples consist of the respondents from three different regimes and the questionnaire distributed to those regimes was written in different languages. Variances in local contexts and languages may cause diverse interpretations of the same questions, resulting in threats to measurement reliability. Third, it should also be noted that the present study may experience a common source bias given that the independent and dependent variables were collected from the same group of people in one survey (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Finally, the quantitative research approach adopted by the present study prevents us from having a deep understanding of exactly *how* recruitment methods interact with individuals’ PSM. We may not capture the full impacts of examination on selecting the civil servants since the connotations and implications of having exams are different from country to country. The moderating impact we found in this study may not apply to other exam-based cases. We thus call for more qualitative research to complement our study with more contextualized information in addition to subjective interpretation of diverse assessment methods from the studied respondents.

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公共服務動機「吸引命題」之再檢視：文官進用方式的調節效果

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摘要

過去有研究指出，具有較高公共服務動機者，想要進入公部門服務的可能性也會愈高。然而，亦有學者質疑，各國的文官進用制度不盡相同，前述結果在不同地區是否依然成立，仍是文獻上有待進一步探討的問題。有鑑於此，本研究試圖分析公共服務動機對公部門工作的吸引效果，是否會因為各國文官進用方式的不同而有所差異。特別是除了專業知識的評測之外，當選才制度未能將應徵者人格特質、技能與動機等面向納入考量時，公共服務動機的影響力是否會被弱化。本研究於 2017 年針對 477 位學生進行問卷調查，受訪者分別來自於臺灣五所大學（313 位）、香港一所大學（110 位）以及新加坡一所大學（54 位）之公共行政相關科系。資料分析結果顯示，整體公共服務動機以及「嚮往公共服務」子構面，對公部門工作的偏好有正向且顯著的影響。然而，在以紙筆測驗作為主要選才方式的地區中，嚮往公共服務的正向影響力會被弱化，儘管類似的調節作用並未出現於整體公共服務動機以及「自我犧牲」構面的模型中。本研究凸顯了在檢視公共服務動機可能帶來之結果時，將制度系絡因素納入考量的重要性。

關鍵詞：公共服務動機、文官進用方式、公部門任職意圖、跨國研究

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