



Universiteit Leiden

Faculty of Humanities

CIVIL SERVICE FEVER IN CHINA

AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC SECTOR MOTIVATION AMONG PROSPECTIVE CIVIL
SERVANTS

by

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Thesis for the degree of Master of Arts

wordcount: 13860

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June 2017

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since the reform of the civil service system in the 1990s, China encounters an annual socioeconomic phenomenon that has come to be known as the "civil servant fever" (Sun and Gu, 2016: 2). With the start of the registration period for China's annual civil servant exam (国家公务员考试), millions of students begin to prepare and compete for an extremely limited number of government posts. In 2016, 1.38 million applicants competed for 27,817 positions in the civil service; this implied a vacancy/applicant ratio of 33:1 (Chinagwy.org, 2016). Even though the number of applicants has decreased in the recent years, one cannot observe a significant cool down in the demand for governmental posts. In spite of the constantly reoccurring cases of corruption, the hierarchical and authoritarian organization structure, and the relatively low salary it has to offer, the large number of applicants illustrates the apparent attractiveness of the public service.

This study examines how these large application numbers come into being. In particular, it investigates the motivation behind a prospective Chinese civil servant's choice of career in the public sector: why do individuals want to work for the government? What attracts such a large number of people towards pursuing a career in the civil service? Do individuals have a unique motivation in serving the public as claimed by the theory of

Public Service Motivation (PSM)? In other words, do public servants want to work for the government because they are motivated to contribute to society or are other motivators predominant, and public servants are merely self-interested and benefit-maximizing individuals?

While the field of public administration has shown considerable interest in public sector motivation, most of its literature focuses on incumbent civil servants and not on prospective civil servants before they enter the civil service system. The neglect of this subject is even more apparent in the East Asian context, and particularly, in the Chinese context. As cultural and socioeconomic peculiarities in China affect society's perceptions towards the civil service system as well as positions within the civil service, findings on public sector motivation in Western societies do not necessarily allow the formation of conclusions on public sector motivation of the Chinese people.

Regarding the high numbers and the highly competitive application procedure for governmental jobs, personnel managers might consider it unnecessary to study public sector motivation in China; however, large numbers of applicants does not guarantee a high level of public service motivation among prospective civil servants. Instead, people working in public personnel management need to find employees with a high level of public service spirit. Public servants who are strongly motivated by altruistic factors, such as helping contribute to society, and lesser extrinsic motives, such as a high salary, stay motivated for longer periods of time and thus contribute to the overall efficiency of the public service.

In order to shed light on the factors that drive people to pursue a civil service career, a survey and follow-up interviews were conducted among the applicants who were preparing for the Civil Servant Exam of 2016.

Chapter 2

China's Civil Service System

2.1 Development

At the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in December 1978, it was decided to launch the reform and open-door policy (改革开放) that set off China's economy and has come to be known as 'China's economic miracle'. Along with the economic transition away from the planned economy, new modes of governance became urgently required in order to meet with the new challenges of a more liberal and market-oriented economic system. Improving the accountability, the transparency, and the overall efficiency of China's political system became a core part of these reforms. Central to the reforming of China's administrative system was the introduction of a civil service system (Liou et al., 2014: 109). Before the reform, China's old cadre system was based on political career and loyalty at the expense of criteria such as education, talent, and qualification (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2005). With advanced economic develop-

ment, however, the civil service's work became more diversified, and the work and the duties of public servants became increasingly specialized (Burns, 2007: 7).

At the 13th Party Congress in 1987, Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang proposed a new civil service system as a part of the public administration reform. This proposal provided a dual-track structure with public servants selected by meritocratic examinations. However, the proposal met with opposition and with Zhao Ziyang's political decline, it was removed as an aspect of the public civil service reform.¹ Only in 1993, after Deng Xiaoping reinvigorated China's economic reform agenda during his Southern Tour, was an official civil service system officially announced with "Provisional Regulations on State Civil Servants". The aim of this system was to apply scientific management principles to the civil service and thereby to develop a modern, merit-based civil service system. The regulations addressed numerous aspects of civil service, including performance rewards, discipline, promotion, payment, duties, and recruitment (Liou et al., 2014: 110). These measure achieved visible success; according to Jing: "Recruitment, training, retirement, compensation, evaluation, and promotion of personnel were normalized gradually. Chinese bureaucrats grew younger, better educated, and more professional" (Jing, 2010: 41).

2.2 China's Civil Service System today

The provisional regulation was replaced by the "Law of Civil Servants", which came into effect on January 1, 2006 (Liou et al., 2014: 110). An important difference from

¹Pieke notes the sensibility of this issue at the time: "[...] it included the radical proposal that the party should relinquish its control over leading appointments in government [...]. If implemented the proposal would have left the party with much reduced power to steer the evolution of Chinese politics and society". (2009, 33)

its forerunner, the "Provisional Regulation on State Civil Servants", was the control exerted over civil service. The "Law of Civil Servants" empowered the Communist Party to maintain firm control over the civil service system by reinforcing the traditional principle of "the Party managing cadres" (党管干部) (Burns and Wang, 2010: 60) as stated in Article 4 of Chapter 1:

“公务员制度坚持以马克思列宁主义、毛泽东思想、邓小平理论和三个代表重要思想为指导，贯彻社会主义初级阶段的基本路线，贯彻中国共产党的干部路线和方针，坚持党管干部原则”

(The civil servant system adheres to Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the important ideas of the 'Three Representations'; the civil service system takes these ideas as its guidance. It carries out the primary stage of socialism as well as the Chinese Communist Party's cadre route and guiding principles, and adheres to the Chinese Communist Party's cadre administration principles)

(National People's Congress, 2005; Own translation)

The practical application of these principles is being achieved through the structure of China's political system. The People's Republic of China has designed a parallel structure between the party and the state, with party committees (党委) existing at all levels of government (Figure 2.1). Sometimes, as Jing (2010: 39) notes, "party and governmental agencies are just one group of people with two signs—for example, the State Council Information Office and the CCP's External Propaganda Office".

The law also defined the term "civil service", and regulated who and which organizations were to be included in the civil service system: "civil servants' should include all

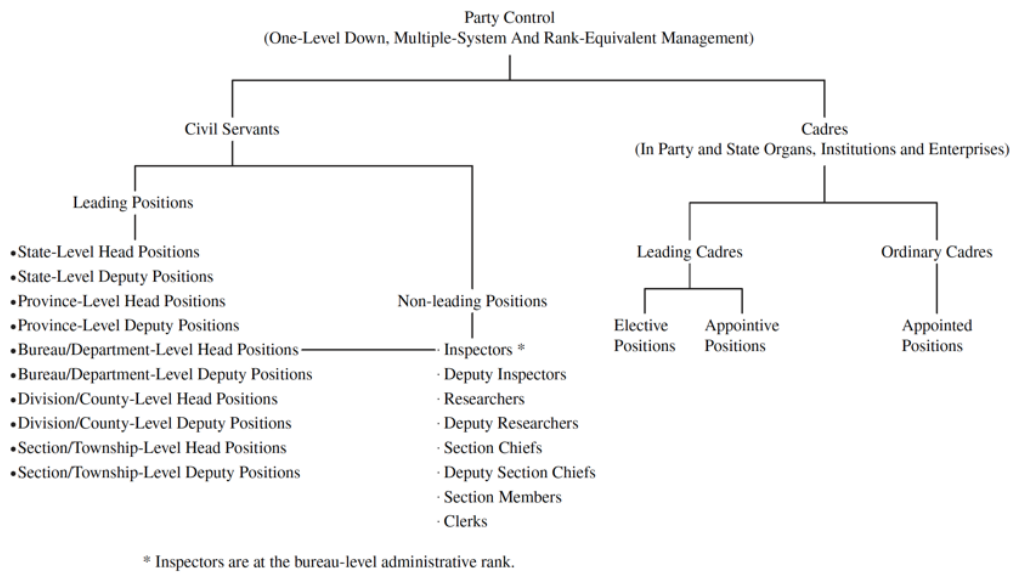


Figure 2.1: Party control over personell management

employees who execute state functions (*guojia gongzhi*) according to the law and who are hired according to the administrative establishment plan (*xingzheng bianzhi*), and are paid by the state treasury” [italics in original] (Wang, 2012: 22).² The adaption of new criteria extended the scope of the number of people employed in the civil service. While there were around 4.9 million civil servants in 2003, the number increased to 6.3 million afterwards (Chan et al., 2007: 389); as of 2016, it reached 7.17 million in 2015 (ifeng.com, 2016).³

²For an overview of all the units included in the civil service system in 2007, please refer to the work of Wang et al. (2007, 385ff).

³Other scholars claim that the new criteria actually did not lead to the expected expansion of the civil service owing to conflicting data and interpretation results from the different interpretations of the term ”civil servant” against other terms such as ”cadre” and ”officials”. For an in-depth discussion on this subject, please refer to Wang (2012: 21ff).

2.3 Recruitment

Under the old cadre system, recruitment was overcentralized and ineffective. Candidates were not selected and appointed in a competitive, fair, and open-recruitment process, but were hired based on their loyalty towards the Communist Party (Pieke, 2009: 32) and social class background. Furthermore, "university students were assigned to some government jobs upon graduation, demobilized soldiers from the People's Liberty Army filled other government job positions, and cadres from factories or other public service units, such as hospitals and schools, were transferred to fill the remaining positions" (Wang, 2012: 39). In government agencies, mismatches between candidates and positions often occurred. While candidates did not possess the required skills to perform specific tasks in some positions, in other cases, they were insufficiently challenged by their work (Wang, 2012: 39). In addition, chances for advancement or changing position were limited. All this had negative consequences on the motivation of public-sector employees.

It is thus not surprising that recruitment was identified as a key element of civil service reform. After this identification, the aim was to find the "best and the brightest" employees for the public sector and for each position within it. In order to achieve this, the following nationwide standardized exams with merit-based criteria were set up: the National Civil Service Exam (国家公务员考试), which is organized by the Organization Department of the Communist Party of China (中国共产党中央组织部), and the Provincial Civil Service Exam (各省公务员考试), which is organized by the Organizational Departments of the respective provincial Party committees (各省省委组织部). The national examination was institutionalized in 2001 (Li, 2016: 137) and is held

once a year (in 2016, the written examination was held on 30 November); the provincial examination, on the other hand, is held once or twice a year.⁴

Candidates who pass the National Civil Service Exam qualify to work in positions at the central level, whereas successful provincial applicants take office at the provincial level (or below). Another difference concerns the difficulty of the exams, with the national exam being more difficult (Chinagwy.org). Applicants can enroll in both the exams as often they want as long as they meet the minimum requirements; these requirements include being a citizen of the People's Republic of China and holding a university degree. Owing to the latter requirement, the number of civil servants holding university degrees is continuously rising (Burns, 2017). Other requirements include age restrictions (applicants have to be between 18 and 35 years), vacancy-related specific requirements as well as 'softer requirements' such as "good morality" or the necessity to "endorse the constitution of the People's Republic of China", among others.⁵ The first part of both exams is a written examination. Successful test-takers are invited for an oral examination, and depending on the available vacancy, they have to take specialized exams.

From the implementation of the modernized examination system, the number of applicants had dramatically increased from 130,000 applicants in 2003 up to 1,520,000 in 2014; in the same time period, however, the number of available positions increased from 5,475 to 19,538. The competition for public service posts became increasingly fierce, peaking in 2010 with an applicant–post ratio of 59:1. Only in the last two years have the number of applicants stagnated while more governmental posts have become available. From 2015 to 2016 alone, the number of available posts at the central level

⁴In his research on cadre management (2003–2007), Pieke (2009) only found provincial examinations and examinations for specific posts. National examinations were only held in a few sites or on a trial basis and people even in the organization departments never mentioned national exams.

⁵For a complete overview of the minimum requirements for enrollment in the 2016 Civil Service Exam, please refer to (Zhonggong jiaoyu, 2018).

has increased by 25 percent, while the number of applicants has only increased by three percent during the same time period. Accordingly, through these years, the applicant–post ratio arrived at the lowest ratio since 2004 (see Table 2.1). However, the applicant–post ratio strongly depends on the respective post. The most popular vacancy attracted 9,837 applicants, which marks an all-time peak (China News, 2016). For other positions, finding a proper candidate is more difficult. Three days before the registration deadline for the 2016/2017 exam, there were around 1,000 positions open that had not attracted any applicants at all (Xinhua News, 2016).

Year	Available posts (A)	Number of Applicants (in millions)	Test-Takers (B)	Ratio B/A
2016	27,817	1.39	930,000	33:01
2015	22,249	1.41	900,000	40:01
2014	19,538	1.52	990,000	51:01
2013	20,839	1.38	1,110,000	53:01
2012	17,941	1.3	960,000	53:01
2011	15,29	1.42	902,000	59:01
2010	15,526	1.44	927,000	59:01
2009	13,566	1.05	775,000	58:01
2008	13,787	0.8	640,000	46:01
2007	12,724	0.74	535,000	42:01
2006	10,282	0.54	500,000	49:01
2005	8,271	0.31	290,000	35:01
2004	7,572	0.18	120,000	15:01
2003	5,475	0.13	87,000	16:01

Table 2.1: China’s National Civil Service Exam. Development of applicants and available posts (own illustration, adapted from: www.eol.cn, 2016)

Regarding the fierce competition for government posts, it is hardly surprising that cases of corruption and cheating occur. In 2008 alone, around 1,000 cases of cheating during the exam were been uncovered (Burns and Wang, 2010). Corruption is another occurring problem during the recruitment process. Burns notes that ‘the sale and purchase of official positions has become a serious problem’ (Burns, 2007; see also: Burns, 2010: 68f, Xue and Zhong, 2012). During the second stage of recruitment, when *guanxi* (关系) can influence the outcome of an interview, the process is relatively open for corruption. This is especially true for the Provincial Service Exam, which is said to be more vulnerable to corruption as family networks and connections at local levels are said to have a greater influence than contacts at the the central level. The unscientific content of the exams is another point of criticism (Ko and Han, 2013).

2.4 Challenges for China’s Civil Service System

According to the World Bank Government Effectiveness Indicator, China is ranked only at 68th percentile (World Bank, 2017).⁶ On the one hand, the Indicator suggests that China is still lacking efficiency with an estimated 32 percent of the countries possessing a better worldwide ranking than China; on the other hand, in comparison to the other four BRICS countries, China ranks the highest, and has also made considerable improvements from 2013 (percentile rank: 55) up to today (ibid.)⁷

⁶The World Bank Group (2017): “Government effectiveness captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies”.

⁷Percentile rank of BRICS countries in 2015: Brazil (48), Russia (48), India (56) China (68), South Africa (65) (The World Bank Group, 2017).

Despite visible success in reforming the management of personnel, further enhancement of the efficiency of China's civil service remains an important aspect of China's future development; recruitment is a significant factor that will determine the success of this plan. As shown above, large numbers of applicants have resulted in fierce competition for government posts. This popularity of the test might be interpreted as the result of China's improved recruitment procedure, a better reward system, and increased publicity. Nowadays, the civil service offers better remuneration than in the past, the requirement to have at least two years of work experience for entry-level posts has been abolished, and modern technology is being used to attract skilled applicants. This development might suggest that examining civil service motivation is not an urgent issue, and indeed, Chinese literature has rarely addressed this subject, but, as Xue and Zhong claim, why does 'the current civil service system [...] [have] its limitations in fostering the new generation of civil servants that the government needs' (Xue and Zhong 2012)?

The large numbers of applications do not necessarily reflect a public spirit among public sector job-seekers. Owing to a high number of applicants, however, the importance of the public spirit for the efficiency of the civil service has been neglected by China's public administrators. The fact that a high level of public service spirit among public servants positively affects the efficiency and motivation of public servants has been underestimated (Ko and Han, 2013: 192). Conversely, this means that if civil servants pursue a career mainly because of personal interest, the quality of the civil service will be negatively affected.

This claim leads to the research question of this thesis: what is it that actually motivates China's prospective civil servants to pursue a career in the civil service? Past research suggests two contradictory explanations for the 'public service fever'. The first interpretation is that the Chinese are pursuing a career in public service as they seek to maximize their own benefits, such as job security or vacation pay. According to another

interpretation, proponents of the public service motivation theory argue that public servants obtain a special public service spirit and choose a career in the public service because they expect the public sector to match with their motivations. In the next chapter, these contradictory perspectives will be discussed from a theoretical perspective.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Background

3.1 Public sector motivation versus public service motivation

”Public *sector* motivation” is not to be equated with ”public *service* motivation”. Preliminary remarks on the difference between these two terms will help foster a better understanding of this chapter.

Public sector motivation can be defined as a general motivation of individuals to join the public sector. The motivations behind this decision can be manifold. Public service motivation, on the other hand, is a concept that literally refers to ‘the desire to serve public interest and offers an explanation for the reasons why public service activities take place’ (Gao, 2015). Perry and Wise broadly defined public service motivation as ‘an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations’ (Perry and Wise, 1990: 368). It is, therefore,

closely linked to altruism and was later being described as ‘an individual’s orientation to delivering services to people with a purpose to do good for others and society’ (Perry and Hongheem, 2008: vii).

The aim of this thesis is to explore the public sector motivation of China’s prospective civil servants. However, the examination of public sector motivation cannot be undertaken without paying special attention to the concept of public service motivation. In the past 25 years, for the most part, the motives of individuals to work for the government have been studied in the name of public service motivation. A wide variety of definitions and attempts at conceptualization have been made, and some evidence for public service motivation has been produced. Despite the growing literature on public service motivation and considerable achievements in this direction, the conceptualization is far from being complete. In fact, it was this popularity that led to many varying interdisciplinary attempts to conceptualize public service motivation, which ultimately led to the elusiveness of the concept today; thus no consensus has been reached on how to define and measure public service motivation. This elusiveness causes the blurring of boundaries between public service motivation and public sector motivation. Many studies have regarded public service motivation as the only dimension of job choice (Neumann and Ritz, 2015: 365). As the aim of this thesis is not to measure public service motivation in the public sector in comparison to the private sector, but rather to investigate the motivation of students in joining the public service in general, public service motivation in this study is only being understood as one dimension of public sector motivation. As it will be shown in this and the following chapter, public service motivation in this thesis will be equated with altruism and measured with respect to other factors such as extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, and prestige.

This chapter forms the theoretical background for this thesis. The first section of this chapter introduces the major assumptions of public service motivation, its origin, devel-

opment, and remaining ambiguities. In the course of this section, it will be shown why public service motivation is only taken as one dimension of public sector motivation amongst others and not as the ultimate dimension that determines public sector choice. The second section depicts the peculiarities of the Chinese context and shows the limitations of the adaption of public service motivation across different cultural settings. This section will provide the background to formulate informed hypotheses in the following chapter.

Theoretically, the assumption that public servants have unique career-choice motives contrasts with the claims of the New Public Management (NPM). Based on assumptions from the rational-choice theory, the NPM perceives all individuals as self-interested and personal-utility maximizing decision-makers, who seek maximal benefits (Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins, 2006: 605). Economists claim that public servants ‘are mainly attracted to the public sector by good employment conditions, high job security and low (and difficult) monitoring of individual performance’ (Van der Walle et al., 2015: 834). These contrasting views are the focal point of an ongoing debate on public sector choice: one stream researching job sector choice considers public service motivation as the only dimension to determine sector or job choice, whereas another other stream includes other incentives such as extrinsic and intrinsic rewards as sector choice determinants.

The term ‘public service motivation’ has gained increased attention since Perry and Wise published their seminal essay ‘The Motivational Bases of Public Service’ in 1990. This essay was published against the background of a public service crisis in the United States. At the core of this crisis was a decline in public trust towards the public service, which was perceived as overly bureaucratic and ineffective. In consideration of this situation, Perry and Wise connected the crisis of public service directly to the motivation of public servants:

“Calls for a recommitment of Americans to values associated with government service, among them personal sacrifice and duty to the public interest, raise practical questions about the power of these values to stimulate and direct human behavior. At their core, calls for a renewal of public service motivation assume the importance of such motivations for an effective and efficient public service.” (Perry and Wise, 1990: 367).

Six years later, Perry advanced the concepts and offered an instrument to measure public service motivation. He found that public servants are uniquely (i) attracted to policy-making, (ii) committed to the public interest, (iii) have compassion, and (iv) are prone to putting others interests before personal interest. A strong agreement with these dimensions ensures a high degree of public service motivation. Since then, the literature on public service motivation has grown significantly, but after 27 years of extensive research, there is still a “considerable amount [of] ambiguity in regard to the meaning of public service motivation”, as Gao states (2015: 10).¹ No consensus has been reached on how to define, operationalize, and measure public service motivation.

Scholars have altered Perry’s conceptualization and the measurement of public service motives, and have also offered alternative definitions from several disciplines and research perspectives.² This popularity has further complicated the conceptualization of public service motivation, which remains incomplete. In order to clarify how this thesis understands public service motivation, first, it is necessary to show the ambiguities that

¹For a systematic literature review on PSM and its growth since 1990, please refer to Ritz (2016), and Bozeman and Su (2015).

²Perry (1996) has developed a method to measure PSM, which included the following components: a) attraction to policy-making; b) commitment to the public interest; c) compassion; and d) self-sacrifice. Critique and alternations came from e.g. Brewer, Selden and Facer (2000), Vandenabeele (2007), Lewis and Frank (2002).

complicate the understanding of the concept. This study finds three major ambiguities that contribute to a concept's elusiveness.

The first ambiguity considers the definition of public service motivation itself. Perry and Hondeghem "like to think of "public service motivation" as an individual's orientation to[wards] delivering services to people with a purpose to do good for others and society" (Perry and Hondeghem, 2008: Preface). With this definition, they narrowly confine the meaning of public service motivation within the semantic scope of altruism; however, they also acknowledge that besides altruism, extrinsic rewards also attract employees to the public service (for example: job security, personal benefits, and fixed working hours). Rather than being attracted by only one factor, individuals have diverse motivations to pursue a career in the public sector. In order to clarify the meaning and differentiate the concept of public service motivation from other concepts, Perry and Hondeghem assert that a definition that includes these additional extrinsic motivators is not what they mean by their concept of public service motivation. They contrast public service motivation to public sector motivation, with the former excluding other motives besides altruism, and the latter including them. Perry and Hondeghem's attempt to distinguish public service motivation from public sector motivation shows that the aforementioned ambiguity persists.

A second ambiguity that adds to the elusiveness of public service motivation is that the concept has not only been sometimes equated and sometimes differentiated with public sector motivation (as mentioned above) but it has also been directly equated with work-related preferences such as pro-social behavior, intrinsic job motivators, or altruism (Bozeman and Su, 2014: 701). Indeed, the differentiation between public service motivation and altruism appears to be particularly problematic when the definition of the concept is being confined to altruist values in the first place. This has also been recognized by Perry and Hondeghem (2008: 4), but their understanding of public service

motivation does not really help in solving the problem; they state: ‘We construe public service motivation as referring to individual motives that are largely, but not exclusively, altruistic and are grounded in public institutions’ (ibid.).³ This further complicates the differentiation between public service motivation and altruism, with the latter already being a vague concept; its similarity to public service motivation becomes clear when looking at a well-known definition of altruism, i.e., ”a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare” (Batson and Shaw; as cited by Bozeman and Sum, 2014: 703).

Thirdly (and this is interrelated with the problematic definition and conceptualization of public service motivation), there is also no consensus on how to operationalize the concept. As shown above, Perry and Hondeghem use the most narrow definition of public service motivation: ”public service motivation’ [is] an individual’s orientation to delivering services to people with a purpose to do good for others and society” (2008: Preface). Yet, evidence has shown that rather than being motivated by only one factor, individuals make their decisions based on more complex motivational patterns. The theory of public service motivation is not solely able to explain the motivation for a career choice in the public sector. As shown later, this ambiguity might have further relevance in the Chinese context. Instead, multiple motivators influence the career choice of individuals. As this thesis does not seek to solely test public service motivation but also to investigate the motivation of individuals working in the public sector, multiple motivators are being regarded as possible factors, which determine public sector motivation.

With an awareness of these ambiguities, which cause overlaps between public sector motivation, public service motivation, and altruism, among others, it is practical to restate how this thesis understands these concepts and how it relates and differentiates them

³Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise (2010) have shown that PSM is not unique to public organizations.

from each other: in this thesis, public service motivation is being considered as one dimension of public sector motivation. In terms of operationalization and measurement, it will be equated with altruism and examined among the other factors.

3.2 Investigating the motivation of public servants in a non-Western context

With the general ambiguities that surround the scholarship on public service motivation, it is not surprising that the application of public service motivation to non-Western contexts also has to deal with a lack of clarity in the conceptualization and measurement of public service motivation. In extant literature, however, there is a consensus which suggests that ‘the motivation of public service officials in non-Western contexts might be spurred by a range of extrinsic motivations [...] or at least by mixed motives extending beyond just PSM [public service motivation]’ (Van der Wal, 2014: 83). Van der Wal claims that individual public service motivation needs to be connected with a greater degree of clarity to other factors such as extrinsic or intrinsic motives: ‘public sector motivation may crowd out or at least co-exist with public service motivation in the make-up of the motivational spectrum of public sector employees in non-Western settings’ (ibid.). Accordingly, this thesis examines altruism—which is treated as the determinant of public service motivation—against other factors.

With a large time delay, scholars began to extend research to non-Western societies in general and North-East Asian countries in particular (especially in Greater China and Korea). In the past, most studies on public sector motivation have almost exclusively focused on Western democratic societies. Van der Wal showed that between 1990 (the

year in which Perry and Wise published their essay) and 2013, 80 percent of all publications on public service motivation were focused either on the situation in the United States or in European countries (Van der Wal, 2015: 70). Yet, empirical data from the results obtained in a Western democratic context are not necessarily applicable to other cultural and societal settings (Gao, 2015: 39ff). Gao (2015) noted that "different regions and countries possess different values that constitute public service". It is only since 2011 that a new scholarship on public service motivation in the non-Western context has emerged (Van der Wal, 2015: 72). Since then, the number of publications has considerably increased. In North-East Asia, this new scholarship has questioned the applicability of Western public service motivation to the particular characteristics of the region, thus finding that applying the same understanding and operationalization to the cultural peculiarities of the region is problematic (Van der Wal, 2015: 80). It can, however, be noted that while in 2014, when Sun and Gu observed that in literature, "the nature of government and associated sociopolitical contexts have not been explicitly accommodated, especially [...] [in] the case of China" (Sun and Gu, 2014), this gap has been bridged in the last three years or so.⁴

3.3 Intermediate Conclusion

The scholarship on public service motivation has drawn attention to the connection between public sector motivation and public service efficiency. In order to enhance government efficiency, it is crucial to find the "right" employees. Public service motivation scholars claim that the "right" employee is someone with high public service motiva-

⁴Notable scholars performing research on public service motivation in China and taking the cultural context into account are Liu (2009, 2011, 2012, and 2014), Ko (2013 and 2015), and Sun (2015).

tion. Against this background, many comparative studies have investigated whether public servants obtain higher public service motivation (the will to do work that makes a helpful contribution to society) than their private counterparts and have produced evidence supporting that public servants do indeed show higher degrees of public service motivation.

However, it is not difficult to find limitations and research gaps in the aforementioned field of research. Firstly, as shown above, the ambiguity and elusiveness of the concept of "public service motivation" and the difficulty of differentiating it from other concepts such as "altruism" or "public sector motivation" remains. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the aim of this study is not to compare the level of public service motivation of public and private sector employees. Instead, the objective of this study is to find out the by which factors by which prospective public servants are attracted to join the public service (public sector motivation). Public service motivation—measured through the dimension of altruism—will be taken as one factor against extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, and prestigious factors. Secondly, past research has largely focused on incumbent public sector employees; insufficient information exists on public sector motivation in the next generation of public servants, which is even more true in the case of East Asia, and in particular, in the case of China.

Chapter 4

Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Survey Instrument

In order to investigate the complex motives of public sector motivation, studies have elaborated different sets of job motivators.¹ The most comprehensive set came from Jurkiewicz et al., who used fifteen work-related motivational items, which included extrinsic factors such as "high salary" and "a stable and secure future", intrinsic factors such as the "chance to use [one's] special abilities" and a "variety in work assignments", and items that can be assigned to the categories of altruism and prestige as well as social work values (Jurkiewicz et al., 1998). In a later study, Lyons et al. used a very similar list of factors, assigning items into four categories: extrinsic and intrinsic factors, altruism, and prestige (Lyons et al., 2006). After a literature review on job motivators, the scales of Jurkiewicz and Lyons et al. were chosen as references for this thesis' operationaliza-

¹For an overview of the motivational factors used in several studies, please refer to Ko (2012: 137).

tion as they not only offer the most comprehensive list of factors but also as these items that they used to survey public servants are, after introducing minor changes, applicable to the Chinese context. Aside from this, the list of Lyons et al. is also easy to understand can also be used to examine the public service motivation of individuals at the pre-entry level.

4.2 Independent Variables and Hypotheses

Four job motivators are the independent variables. Aside from (i) altruism, which will be the determinant of public service motivation against the other factors, (ii) extrinsic factors, (iii) intrinsic factors, and (iv) prestige are the independent variables to determine why Chinese people chose a career in the civil service. Very little evidence for job sector motivation in people exists before they become public servants. As most of the existing evidence has been acquired by Kilkon Ko, his findings have been used as a reference in this section. In the following section, each job motivator will be introduced. In the course of this introduction, hypotheses will be developed.

4.2.1 Extrinsic motivators

Extrinsic rewards include salary, job security, and other benefits such as a vacation or a pension plan. Crewson defines extrinsic rewards as "rewards given to the individual by someone else" (2007: 501). Studies have shown that public servants are risk-averse and tend to highly value security (Bellante and Link, 1981), especially towards the beginning of their careers (Burmam et al., 2012). Studies have produced evidence suggesting that extrinsic motivation also plays a very more important role in non-Western settings (Van

der Wal, 2014). Recently, Ko and Han have shown "that a stable and promising future, [the] chance to exercise leadership, [the] chance to benefit society, high prestige and social status as well as high salary are the most important motivators [···] [for] public sector job-seekers". In their study, "a stable and promising future" was ranked as the factor of highest importance by Chinese students who chose a public sector career (Ko and Han, 2013). In addition, in Ko and Jun's comparative analysis on job motivation and the career preferences of Asian undergraduate students, "a stable and promising future" was ranked as the most important job motivator of prospective public servants (Ko and Jun, 2013). Especially in times of economic transition and socioeconomic changes, the public sector has strong extrinsic rewards to offer. Although the new Civil Service Law abandoned the guarantee of long-life employment (铁饭碗) in 2005, the risk to be dismissed is still very low (Ko and Jun, 2013). Job security, a stable income as well as other personal benefits can, therefore, be expected to be the most important motivators. This might be even more important at the pre-entry level. Most often, young people do not have relevant work experience, and therefore, lack clear a perception of their respective job sectors. It is, therefore, conceivable that they place a lot of emphasis on extrinsic rewards. This leads to the first two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: People pursue a career in the civil service primarily because of extrinsic factors.

Hypothesis 1b: Job security will be the most important public sector job motivator.

In the questionnaire used in this study, the following items are used to measure extrinsic motivation:

1. Having benefits that meet my personal benefits (vacation pay, health insurance, pension plan, etc.)

2. Having the assurance of Job security
3. Doing work that guarantees a good salary

4.2.2 Intrinsic motivators

In contrast to extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards are ‘rewards individuals give to themselves for successfully performing a task’ (Crewson, 2007: 501); these include the opportunity to do challenging and stimulating work, using one’s creativity, and learning new things. Intrinsic motivation is important for job satisfaction because intrinsically-motivated employees become satisfied by successfully accomplishing certain tasks (Kalleberg, 1977: 135). With the rather negative image of public sector work, it can be expected that intrinsic motivators play a rather insignificant role for the applicants; this has also been found in Ko’s aforementioned studies. In the questionnaire, the following items are assigned to intrinsic motivation:

1. Doing work that allow me to use my abilities and my knowledge
2. Doing interesting work
3. Learning new things
4. Doing work that is intellectually stimulating

4.2.3 Altruism

As previously depicted, the meaning of altruism overlaps with public service motivation as well as public sector motivation. Owing to this ambiguity, altruism is not only a work-related job motivator but also the determinant of public service motivation. As the

concept of public service motivation has already been introduced above, a further introduction of this job motivator is not necessary. Altruism is measured with the following items:

1. Doing work that makes a helpful contribution to society
2. Doing work that is consistent with my moral values
3. Helping to implement policies and programs that are fairness and impartiality

4.2.4 Prestige

Several studies have pointed out the importance of Confucianism as a decisive factor that changes the meaning of public spirit and public service motivation in the Chinese context (Liu, 2011; Van der Wal, 2014; Ko and Han, 2013). For thousands of years, Confucianism has influenced the people's attitude towards the government. In Confucianism philosophy, studying enjoys a high esteem: "the worth of other pursuits is small, the study of books excels them all" (万般皆下品，惟有读书高). By linking the public service occupation to an excellence in studying, a career as an official is being perceived as the ultimate goal: "those who excel in studying can become an official (学而优则仕)" (Su and Gu, 2014: 4). Sun and Gu state:

"These sociocultural values combined with the power distance and hierarchical nature of the society underpin the ultimate career goal of Confucianism as a desire to 'glorify and illuminate one's family and ancestors (光宗耀祖)' by working for the government." (2014: 4)

Public sector careers can, therefore, be expected to be considered as prestigious professional paths. This has been confirmed in a study by Ko and Jun, who examined public

service motivation among Chinese, Singaporean, and Korean students, and found that public servants put a strong emphasis on prestige as a job motivator. In order to find out to what degree Chinese public servants at the pre-entry level value prestige against the other job motivators, the following items have been included:

1. Having the authority to organize and direct others
2. Doing work that is prestigious and regarded highly by others
3. Having work that improves my standing in the society

Besides these public sector motivators, public sector motivation is also controlled for two demographic variables. These are introduced in the following section.

4.3 Demographic variables

Furthermore, it can be expected that the individual background of the participants influence their motivation in joining the public sector. In this thesis, gender and household registration are used as control variables.

Gender. Some evidence from surveys conducted in Western settings suggest that women have a higher public service motivation (attracted by the altruist motives) than men (Naff and Crum, 1999), and that they are more strongly motivated by intrinsic factors (which refers to doing meaningful work) (Houston, 2000). In the Korean context, studies have found that women are more strongly attracted by intrinsic motivators than men (Kim, 2005). Other studies, however, did not find any significant variance in gender-dependent public service motivation (DeHart-Davis, Marlowe, and Pandey, 2006). In the Chinese context, for instance, this phenomenon has been detected by Liu et al. (2012). Overall,

findings on gender differences in public sector motivation between women and men, especially in the Chinese context and with regard to the pre-entry level, are almost nonexistent. Although the results on public sector motivation will be controlled for gender, I am aware that the validity will be limited due to a biased sample towards female participants.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no significant differences in public sector motivation between male and female public sector job-seekers.

Hukou. (户口). China's household registration system was implemented in the late 1950s with the objective of curbing down the effects of massive migration from the countryside to urban areas. Every Chinese citizen either has an agricultural registration (农民户口) or an urban registration (居民户口). This system determines where a citizen lives, where he has to go to school, where he works, and if he gets health insurance. This policy has been successful in tackling the typical problems of developing countries such as the emergence of slums in urban areas. It has, however, been criticized for discriminating against the non-urban population. In 2014, the government announced to comprehensively reform the system until 2020. As non-urban citizens who become civil servants are given the chance to apply for a urban registration, it can be expected that participants with a rural registration are more strongly motivated to work in the public service because of extrinsic factors, especially owing to the chance of "hav[ing] benefits that meet personal benefits (vacation pay, health/dental insurance, pension plan, etc.)" (Item 1). (For results, please refer to pages x and y).

Hypothesis 3: Public sector job seekers with a rural Hukou registration will be more strongly motivated by extrinsic factors than those with an urban Hukou registration.

4.4 Sample and Data Collection

To examine the motivation of China's prospective civil servants, I surveyed those who were already preparing for the interview of the National or the Provincial Civil Service Exams and/or were taking preparation classes which were subject to charges. Past studies have solely trusted the statements of people who claimed that they would pursue a career in the public service. As shown in Table 2, however, even those who enrolled for the exam did not necessarily take it. In 2016, almost 1.4 million people enrolled for the national civil service exam, but as many as 460,000 who enrolled for the exam did not show up. This demonstrates a drop-out rate of 33 percent. It can be expected that the applicants who have already passed the first part of the exam and/or paid substantial fees for private classes were seriously determined to pursue a career in the civil service.

This study was conducted in Jinan (Shandong Province) and Taiyuan (Shanxi Province), but not confined to the participants from these two provinces. In addition, in contrast to other studies, this study did not choose a sample group that consisted of students from the political science departments of top universities. The few studies on job sector motivation in the East Asian context have argued that political science students have a better understanding of the civil service and were thus chosen as a sample group (for example: Ko and Han, 2013). On the contrary, I argue that choosing such an exclusive sample group is not only unnecessary when the aim is to find out about public sector motivation among prospective civil servants but it might also lead to biased results. Students from political science departments who take the civil service exam account for only a small share of the total number of applicants. Studies that confined their sample to students from a certain major, therefore, cannot rightfully claim to produce representative results for public sector motivation among China's prospective civil servants in general.

A printed version as well as an online version was prepared to conduct the survey. In order to avoid misunderstandings due to linguistic problems, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese by a Chinese native speaker who teaches English as a second language at Shandong University in Jinan. After the translation, it was double-checked by two Chinese native speakers, who were both fluent in English.

The survey was conducted in December 2016 and January 2017. All the participants were informed that their participation was anonymous and voluntary. In total, 98 copies were valid and usable. The data was collected in three ways. Firstly, the copies were distributed during an on-campus preparation course at Jinan's Shandong University. In this course, the students were preparing for the interview stage of the civil service exam. This guaranteed that all the participants had already passed the first part of the exam. Twenty-one copies were distributed, of which 100 percent were returned and were valid. Secondly, I went to the Jinan and the Taiyuan offices of Zhonggong jiaoyu (中公教育), which is one of the biggest providers of civil servant preparation courses in China. Both offices agreed to share the link of my online survey, which I had prepared on Wenjuanwang (问卷网). The link was shared in Wechat (微信) groups, which consisted of applicants who also were preparing for the second part of the civil servant exams. Eighty-one people filled out the online survey, out of which four questionnaires were not valid as significant information was missing. Another three people initially agreed to fill out the questionnaire, but then mentioned in the group chat that they would not finish it as they found the third part of the questionnaire ("Personal Information") too personal.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part asked the participants to indicate the degree of agreement with each of the 13 public sector motivators (as introduced in the previous section) on a Likert-scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The only dependent variable was public sector motivation. As shown, independent vari-

ables included extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruist job motivators as well as prestige. In the second part of the questionnaire, participants indicated the role that parents played in their decision to become civil servants. Furthermore, they were asked to indicate the degree of the external factor's influence on their decision to pursue a career in the civil service. Eventually, this part was not used in this study as it became clear that it would go beyond the scope and aim of this study. The last part of the questionnaire asked the participants to provide personal details about themselves and their family background. Table xxx summarizes the descriptive statistics of this part.

Aside from quantitative data from a survey, written follow-up and semi-structured interviews with two survey participants were conducted in May and June 2017. Questions were asked via a private chat on Wechat. This method had several advantages. Firstly, it helped overcome miscommunication in verbal language; nevertheless, I am aware that the possibility of spontaneous answers was thereby limited and the interviewees might have answered more carefully and even more strategically than they would have in case of face-to-face interviews. The second advantage of this method was in regard to time and cost. Owing to these limitations, conducting face-to-face interviews was not possible and written interviews were the only means to realize these interviews. Video calling, my preferred method, was rejected by the interviewees and was thus not feasible.

4.5 Descriptive Statistics of the sample

Among the 98 participants, the majority was from the Shandong Province and the Shanxi Province (accounting for 77.6 percent in total).² Regarding household registration, this sample is slightly biased towards urban hukou residents (城市户口). This might, however, be a reflection of unequal distribution of diverse populations in Chinese universities. According to the People's Daily's report from 2012, the share of survey participants with a rural household registration was 30 percent at Zhejiang University (浙江大学) and Nanjing University (南京大学); in China's top school, Tsinghua University (清华大学), it was even lower at 15 percent (Cao, 2012).

In terms of gender, the sample is strongly unbalanced. In 2015's National Civil Service Exam, 53.01 percent of the enrolled test takers were male (Sohu, 2015). With a proportion of 75.5 percent women, therefore, this study is strongly biased towards female applicants.

Regarding age, the majority of the participants were born between 1992 and 1995 (68.4 percent). In total, 26.5 percent of the participants indicated that one of their parents was working in the civil service and 37.8 percent of the participants had at least one parent with a university degree.

²Outside the aforementioned provinces, participants were from Hebei (3 participants), Heilongjiang (2 participants), Henan (2 participants) as well as Anhui, Beijing, Fujian, Hainan, Hubei, Hunan, Inner Mongolia, Jiangsu, Liaoning, Tianjin, Xinjiang, and Zhejiang (one participant from each province).

Gender	Frequency	%
Female	74	75.5
Male	24	24.5

Year of birth		
before 1992	25	25.5
between 1992 and 1995	67	68.4
after 1995	6	6.1

Household Registration		
Urban Hukou	55	56.1
Rural Hukou	43	43.9

Education parents	Mother (Father)	
Middle school or below	42 (40)	42.9 (40.8)
Highschool	30 (28)	30.6 (28.6)
University or above	26 (30)	26.5 (30.6)

At least one parent obtaining a university degree?		
Yes	37	37.8
No	61	62.2

Birthplace (province)		
Shandong	49	50
Shanxi	27	27.6
Other	23	23.4

At least one of the parents working in the civil service?		
Yes	26	26.5
No	72	73.5

Exam type		
National exam	53	51.4
Provincial exam	41	41

Missing	4	4.1
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Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics of the sample

Chapter 5

Analysis results

5.1 Quantitative data: survey

5.1.1 Reliability

The data was analysed by using the SPSS 13 software. As repeating the survey in a second round was not feasible, the internal consistency of the public sector motivation scale was tested by performing a reliability analysis, namely, Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha assumes that a scale is deemed to be consistent if $\alpha \geq 0.7$. This is the case for the scale used to measure public sector motivation ($\alpha = 0.801$) (see Table 5.1).

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.801	.798	13

Table 5.1: Cronbach's Alpha results

In the second step, descriptive studies were run to extract the mean, the standard deviations as well as the answer distribution for all the thirteen items (Table xx). Following this, four dimension variables were computed from these 13 items (extrinsic motivators, intrinsic motivators, altruism, and prestige) to get the mean and the standard deviation of the four dimensions (Table xxx). In the last step, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to control for gender and household registration.

5.1.2 Public Sector Motivation

Overall, the results suggest that China's prospective civil servants are primarily motivated by extrinsic factors. The mean of the three extrinsic motivators is $M = 3.89$ (Table 5.2). Two of the three extrinsic motivators received the highest approval among all the items (Table 5.3). As many as 93.7 percent of the participants indicated agreement (53.3 percent) or strong agreement (40.4 percent) towards "having the assurance of job security" (Item 2), which has the highest mean ($M = 4.35$). This is followed by "having benefits that meet my personal needs" (Item 1). A strong agreement towards the item covering "Personal Benefits" (60.6 percent and 30.3 percent, respectively) was observed in 90.9 percent of the participants. One extrinsic factor, however, fell far behind the other two: "Doing work that guarantees a good salary" was indicated as the least important (Item 3; $M = 3.17$) extrinsic motivator. Only 33.3 percent agreed that a good salary was a public sector motivator. Among all the job motivators, this item ranks second from the bottom. The data indicates that Hypothesis 1a cannot be rejected. People pursue a career in the civil service primarily because of extrinsic factors. In addition, the data suggests that job security constitutes the most important form motivation to join the civil service. Hypothesis 1b, therefore, cannot be rejected.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Extrinsic job motivation	98	3.8912	0.55567
Altruism	98	3.8741	0.65193
Prestige	98	3.6973	0.67365
Intrinsic job motivation	98	3.199	0.69605
Valid N (listwise)	98		

Table 5.2: Dimensions of public sector motivation

The overall mean of altruist motivation ($M = 3.87$) closely follows extrinsic motivation. Among the three altruist motivators "Doing work that makes a helpful contribution to society" (Item 8) ranks the highest. Besides the two top extrinsic motivators, "Doing work that makes a helpful contribution to society" is the only item with a mean higher than 4.0 ($M = 4.01$). In total, 83.9 percent of the participants indicated agreement with this item. The other two items, "Doing work that is consistent with my moral values" and "Helping to implement policies and programs that are guided by fairness and impartiality" rank fifth and seventh, respectively.

While prestige as dimension of public sector motivation also receives relatively high agreement ($M = 3.70$) with "Doing work that is prestigious and regarded highly by others" (Item 12, rank 4, $M = 3.85$), intrinsic factors do not appear to be of importance as a public service motivator ($M = 3.20$). "Doing interesting work" (Item 5) ranks last with a mean of $M = 2.92$. Only four percent indicated strong agreement and 19.2 percent agreed with this item. In addition, "Doing work that is intellectually stimulating" (Item 7) is positioned in the third last rank ($M = 3.17$).

ing work that is consistent with my moral values (item 9)	1.00%	5.10%	18.20%	60.60%	14.10%	3.83	0.774
ing work that improves my standing in the society (item 13)	1.00%	5.10%	21.20%	55.60%	16.20%	3.82	0.804
ing to implement policies and programs that are fairness and impartiality (item 10)	1.00%	4.00%	29.30%	45.50%	19.20%	3.79	0.84
ing new things (item 6)	2.00%	9.10%	32.30%	48.50%	7.10%	3.5	0.84
ing the authority to organize and direct others (item 11)	3.00%	15.20%	27.30%	43.40%	10.10%	3.43	0.974
ing work that allow me to use my abilities and my knowledge (item 4)	3.00%	15.20%	45.50%	29.30%	6.10%	3.2	0.885
ing work that is intellectually stimulating (item 7)	5.10%	17.20%	36.40%	36.40%	4.00%	3.17	0.942
ing work that guarantees a good salary (item 3)	3.00%	25.30%	37.40%	22.20%	11.10%	3.13	1.022

Table 5.3: Public sector job motivators

5.1.3 Controlling Demographic Variables: Gender and *Hukou*

Independent-samples t-tests were performed to control gender and Hukou, and thereby to test Hypothesis 2: "There will be no significant differences in public sector motivation between male and female public sector job seekers" and Hypothesis 3: "Public sector job seekers with a rural Hukou registration will be stronger motivated by extrinsic factors than those with a urban Hukou registration". The following decision rule was applied: if $p \leq 0.05$, the difference is statistically significant (i.e., the level of agreement with a motivational dimension (extrinsic, intrinsic, altruism, and prestige)). If $p > 0.05$, the difference is statistically not significant (and the level of agreement does not differ).

Gender. The results of the independent-samples t-test on gender suggest that there was no significant gender-related difference in any of the four dimensions of public sector motivation (Table 5.4 and Appendix A). Hypothesis 2, therefore, cannot be rejected.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Extrinsic	Female	74	3.8694	0.47404	0.05511
	Male	24	3.9583	0.76337	0.15582
Intrinsic	Female	74	3.1959	0.65855	0.07655
	Male	24	3.2083	0.8165	0.16667
Altruism	Female	74	3.6622	0.67233	0.07816
	Male	24	3.8056	0.68041	0.13889
Prestige	Female	74	3.6577	0.57065	0.06634
	Male	24	3.7778	0.69273	0.1414

Table 5.4: Group statistics gender: dimensions of public sector motivation

Hukou. Results on Hukou registration suggest no statistically significant differences in the scores between urban Hukou ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.53$) and rural Hukou holders ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.59$) when it comes to the degree of extrinsic motivation; $t(96) = -0.492$, p

= 0.624 (Table 5.5 and Appendix B). This data, therefore, provides support to reject the third Hypothesis.

	Household Registration	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Extrinsic Motivation	Urban Hukou	55	3.8667	0.52744	0.07112
	Rural Hukou	43	3.9225	0.59467	0.09069

Table 5.5: Group statistics *hukou*: extrinsic motivation

5.2 Qualitative Data: Follow-up Interviews

In many aspects, the follow-up interviews confirmed the quantitative results. All the interviewees emphasized the importance of job security as the most decisive motivator to choose a career in the civil service. In addition, statements were made that can be classified in the category of "Having personal benefits". For instance, Interviewee 2 brought up annual paid holidays, which would allow her to travel once a year. She also praised social welfare and other benefits, such as the eligibility for a housing fund and a pension. She added that in the third- or fourth-tier city she lives in, career opportunities in jobs that offer such benefits were quite rare.

With regard to intrinsic motivation, the interviewees confirmed that they were not motivated to work as public servants because they could do intellectually stimulating work. This is in accordance with the quantitative results; it can, however, also be observed that "Doing interesting work", an intrinsic motivator, which ranked last among all public sector motivators in the survey ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.9$), has been put into context by the interviewees: although the interviewees indicated that interest in the work is not an important factor in influencing their decision to become civil servants (only 23.3 per-

cent indicated agreement with this item), it is notable that some aspects of the work, nevertheless, were actually indicated as interesting—most importantly, it would offer the interviewees the opportunity to serve the people. By this statement, the interviewees made a connection between an intrinsic factor and altruism.

Altruism—or public service motivation—was mentioned multiple times by the interviewees as a decisive factor for their public sector motivation. They stated that the work was consistent with their moral values, and as mentioned before, the chance to serve their country and their people was an important factor for their decision to pursue a civil service career. Only one interviewee noted that doing work that was consistent with his moral values was not a decisive factor in influencing their decision to become a civil servant. One interviewee, once again, established the connection with altruism and the intrinsic factor "Doing interesting work". For her, it was okay if the work was slightly boring as long as she could serve the people. Overall, altruism as a factor for public sector motivation played a considerable role for the interviewees.

With respect to prestige, it was mentioned that civil servants still have a high standing and their work is being perceived as honorable because they serve the people as well as their proximity to power. Two interviewees connected prestige to the reputation that civil servants enjoyed in the past. This reputation still influences how people perceive civil servants today. One aspect that was not captured by the questionnaire was related to work-life balance and leisure time. For Interviewee 1a, a job in the public sector gives her the opportunity to balance her work with her family and her child. Interviewee 2 provided an even clearer stance: for her, working as a civil servant allowed her to enjoy her life. According to her, as civil servants barely work extra hours, they are able to freely arrange their pastimes. This also provides the opportunity to study new things in a civil servant's free time. Having the opportunity to continuously work on oneself, according to Interviewee 2, is more important than a good salary.

Another aspect that was emphasized in the interviews was the parental and the family influence on the decision to become civil servants. This is in accordance with results of the questionnaire. The participants were asked to answer a simple single-answer question about the involvement of the parents in the decision-making of the participants (Appendix C). Indeed, while 41.2 percent have indicated that they made their decision by themselves, there were 52.6 percent who stated a greater or lesser degree of parental involvement in reaching the decision to become a civil servant.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Limitations

With regard to the different dimensions of public sector motivation, it can be seen that as expected and phrased in Hypotheses 1a and 1b, the results confirm the earlier studies which claimed that prospective civil sector employees highly value extrinsic factors, especially job security. In this study, job security not only ranks first among all items but it was also emphasized in every follow-up interview. Burmann et al. (2012) have shown that public servants are risk-averse and attach high importance to security, especially towards the beginning of their careers. In China, where the last few decades brought profound socioeconomic changes, which led to the end of the "Iron rice bowl" and introduced market-based competition, employment has become increasingly competitive with the result that Chinese college graduates face enormous unemployment pressures. In 2009, over 7 million graduates remained unemployed (Ross, 2013). It is, therefore, not surprising that job security is an important factor that drives people to pursue a civil service career. The results of the follow-up interviews suggest that for similar reasons, personal benefits such as vacation pay, health insurance, and a pension plan play an important role for the public sector job choice. Becoming a civil servant offers a chance

to live a stable life. Owing to the discriminating character of the urban–rural dichotomy and the disadvantages faced by rural hukou holders, I expected public sector job-seekers with a rural Hukou registration to more strongly pursue a public sector career than urban Hukou holders because of the extrinsic factors of the public sector. However, this hypothesis has been rejected. There was no significant difference between prospective public servants with urban or rural registrations. While job security and personal benefits are important factors for choosing a career in the public sector, the salary paid in the public sector does not decisively attract people.

Besides of extrinsic factors, altruism plays a crucial role for China’s prospective civil servants. This result confirms the claims of former public service motivation studies. For China’s future public sector employees, it appears to be of great importance to do work that makes a helpful contribution to society. This is important for practitioners in China’s public personnel management. Finding the “right” future public sector employee cannot be guaranteed by solely counting on high applicant numbers. As noted before, the “right employee” needs to have a high level of public service motivation. Studies on public service motivation have shown that if job seekers only pursue a career because of personal interest, then the negative effects for public service efficiency can be expected. On the contrary, when public servants are motivated by their will to do good for the society, positive impacts on the efficiency of the civil service system are likely. The results of this study provide public personnel administrators a good reason to be optimistic about the future development of China’s service-oriented public sector.

With regard to the intrinsic factors, this study finds that applicants do not expect the public sector to offer stimulating or interesting work. Intrinsic motivators rank far behind the other three dimensions of public sector motivation. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ko and Jun (2015) in their comparative study on Asian undergraduate students. It is conceivable that enhancing the intrinsic rewards would attract more job

seekers, who would otherwise seek private sector employment. The interviewees have confirmed quantitative results, claiming that they do not think that public sector work is as dynamic and interesting as private sector employment.

However, there is a third factor besides extrinsic and altruist motives, which induces Chinese people to join the civil service: prestige plays a considerable role for China's prospective civil servants. This constitutes a major difference in comparison to many Western societies, where the public sector has a negative reputation (Light, 1999: 129) or neutral reputation at best (Luoma-aho, 2007). This can possibly be traced back to the lingering influence of Confucianism on people's attitudes towards the public sector—despite the many and widely-known cases of corruption in China's governmental institutions as well as the perception of public sector work as not being challenging, stimulating, or interesting. One interviewee established a connection between prestige and altruism, claiming that the public sector was perceived as prestigious because its ultimate aim was serving the people.

Overall, the results suggest that the extrinsic and the altruist factors are the most important public sector motivators for China's prospective public servants. While prestige also plays a considerable role in the decisions directing Chinese citizens towards pursuing a public sector career, future public sector employees are not attracted by intrinsic factors.

The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature. These findings provide additional evidence with respect to the scholarship of public sector motivation and public service motivation. It complements the findings of earlier studies, especially with regard to the Chinese context. By being the first study on the public sector motivation of China's prospective civil servants, it assists in a better understanding of why such a large number of people attend China's highly competitive civil service exam

to gain a governmental post. It is also the first study that focuses on prospective civil servants who have already passed the first part of the civil service exam. This guarantees that the sample consists of applicants who are truly determined to join the civil service rather than those who simply claim that they will pursue a career in this sector.

However, this study also comes with several limitations. Firstly, the relatively small sample size might lead to biased results. This might be the case when it comes to statistical comparisons between groups, as it seen in this study with the independent samples t-tests while controlling for gender and Hukou. The reason behind why no significant differences have been found between male and female public sector job-seekers as well as between rural and urban Hukou holders might lie in the limited explanatory power of this small sample size. Secondly, external factors have only been queried by a single-answer question about the involvement of parents on career decision-making. Yet, other external factors such as friends, media, and the learning environment, among others, might be important factors that influence career decision-making. More research is needed to better understand external influence on job sector decision-making. Lastly, the interviews revealed that motivational factors might have been neglected in the applied questionnaire. This became apparent when one interviewee made clear that her motivation stemmed from the fact that in the public sector, she would have fixed working hours, generally more pastime, and less pressure in comparison to private sector employees. These limitations are also a starting point for further research. Research with a larger sample size can achieve even more reliable results.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

What attracts people to pursue a career in the civil service? Is it self-interest and personal-utility maximizing as the New Public Management suggests? Or do public servants obtain a public service spirit which induces them to pursue a career that would allow them to do work in a field that is beneficial for society? This study set out to answer these questions and by doing so it aimed to explain the socioeconomic phenomenon of China's civil service exam, where, every year, millions of job seekers compete for government jobs. Quantitative as well as qualitative results suggest that the most decisive factors that drive applicants to pursue a career in the civil service are of an extrinsic nature. It can be observed that China's public sector job-seekers highly value job security. However, it would be an oversimplification to assume that the extrinsic dimension solely determines public sector career decisions. The results of this study show that altruist motives and prestige are also important public sector motivators. Neither the New Public Management nor the concept of PSM can solely explain why an individual pursues a career in the civil service. Instead, the decision to pursue a career in the public sector is affected by multiple factors. The large numbers of applicants for China's annual civil service exam

comes about not only because the public sector offers personal benefits but also, to a slightly lesser degree, because it embodies altruistic values and because it is regarded as a prestigious career path by many Chinese people. Taken together, these findings can be positively considered by China's public personnel managers. Future public servants who seek a job in the civil service not only do so because of personal benefit maximization but also because of altruism, among other reasons.

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	Equal variances assumed	2.277	0.135	-0.075	96	0.94	-0.01239	0.16435	-0.33862	0.31384
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.538	28.97	0.595	-0.08896	0.16528	-0.42701	0.24908
istic	Equal variances assumed	2.277	0.135	-0.075	96	0.94	-0.01239	0.16435	-0.33862	0.31384
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.068	33.262	0.947	-0.01239	0.18341	-0.38542	0.36065
ism	Equal variances assumed	0.148	0.702	-0.905	96	0.368	-0.14339	0.15839	-0.4578	0.17101
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.9	38.652	0.374	-0.14339	0.15937	-0.46584	0.17906
ige	Equal variances assumed	0.391	0.533	-0.849	96	0.398	-0.12012	0.14145	-0.40089	0.16065
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.769	33.723	0.447	-0.12012	0.15619	-0.43763	0.19739

APPENDIX B: Independent samples t-test: Hukou

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
istic	Equal variances assumed	0.176	0.676	-0.492	96	0.624	-0.05581	0.11356	-0.28122	0.1696
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.484	84.646	0.629	-0.05581	0.11525	-0.28497	0.17334

parents and me discussed my career choice, but my parents made the final decision	10	10.2	10.3
parents alone made this choice	2	2	2.1
one of the above	6	6.1	6.2
<hr/>			
al	97	99	100
using	1	1	
al	98	100	