

# **The myth behind civil service as the most popular career in China**

Francis Y.K. Leung and Lina Vyas

## **Abstract**

The China civil service system is always a myth to the outside world. However, the civil service has been becoming more and more popular as a career in China. In the 2013 central level civil servants employing written examination conducted in China, there were a total 1.52 million participants, with a 7192:1 ration for the most popular post. This study aims at analyzing the reasons why the civil service has been becoming a popular career for graduates in China recently. The researchers used a comparative approach to evaluate the civil service reform in China in the past few decades. A questionnaire survey was used to collect data for statistical analysis on what makes the civil service a popular career in China.

The research started with a discussion on the history of the civil services in China as the background of the study. The main theme of the research was on a broad questionnaire survey of 521 Chinese civil servants randomly selected by the interviewers in different provinces in China. This paper applies a comparative approach and analysis on the civil service reform in China and her western counterparts. We also looked into the present day levels and promotion system for the civil servants in the China.

What makes the civil service a popular career in China?

To some extent, the past two decade's civil service reform in China was able to institutionalize meritocracy into public personnel management. The elimination of secrecy and nepotism would directly contribute to the improvement and efficiency of the civil service. The civil service survey indicated that there were many factors of attractiveness for graduates to become a civil servant in China.

The survey results showed that civil servants are satisfied with their jobs as all aspects of working life, such as the sense of security for job and medical care, stable salary and working condition, important but less pressured workload, a greater sense of autonomy and freedom on work, social esteem, creativity, personal accomplishments and power etc., could be derived from the civil service career. We also asked China graduates to rank their intentions to join the civil service by using the Diamond Nine theory. Graduates' ranking of factors of attractiveness to join the civil service confirmed our hypotheses that personal accomplishments and power were the two

most prominent factors for joining the civil service in China. The results of the survey and the Diamond Nine vividly revealed that corruption within the civil service originated from graduates' intention to join the civil service as 'power' in China always associated with remuneration, money and profit, albeit people got it properly or not. Thus, power is one of the elements that propelled people to work hard for their actualization in China, yet unexpectedly and indirectly, it also helps to nurture corruption in the Chinese civil service- a result that the People's Republic of China Government would not like to see.

The research vividly revealed that civil service still ranked highest in graduates' choices of career in present day China. It is also clear that the civil service can recruit the best graduates to serve the people of China. Given that China could wipe out corruption within the civil service and maintains her economic prosperity, it is not accidental to see China become one of the most stable and prosperous power in the world.

*Keywords-* civil service, meritocracy, secrecy, nepotism, autonomy, social esteem, creativity, personal accomplishments, corruption, remuneration.