

Current Practices and Future Improvement Strategies of Oral Examinations in Taiwan's National Exams (English Version)*

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Abstract

This article gives a practical account of the framework and current practices of oral examinations in Taiwan's national exams and aims to enhance public trust in the effectiveness of oral exams used for talent selection, thereby helping create a widely accepted, reliable, just, and fair examination system that can keep up with global trends. The national exam system is gigantic and complex with a long history of development. Traditionally, paper-based testing has been used as the main method of evaluation, whereas in other democratic countries such as the US, the UK, Japan, and South Korea, oral exams play a weighted role in civil servant recruitment. Excepting foreign affairs and broadcasting positions for which oral exams are included, the majority of Taiwan's civil service junior, senior, and local government examinations use written exam scores as the sole basis for selection decisions. Although oral exams are used more widely in civil service special examinations, written exam scores remain required and count heavily towards total scores. Considering the complexity of oral exam design and use in national examinations, this article intends to provide a clear overview of oral exam development and implementation across different exam categories. A comparison with oral examination used in other democratic nations for civil service recruitment is presented as reference for improving oral examinations in Taiwan.

Keywords: national examination, oral examination, structured oral examination, hiring agencies

* This article was written by Director Jiang and translated into English by the Ministry of Examination.

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我國國家考試口試實施現況及未來精進策略 (英譯版)*

江宗正**

摘要

本篇係以介紹我國國家考試口試辦理架構及實施現況為主之實務性專文。撰文之目的，乃希冀透過本文之論述與比較分析，能夠提高國人對口試衡鑑人才的信任度，進而建立廣泛接受且信賴口試公平公正之友善環境，使國家考試制度與世界趨勢接軌。此一目標係基於國家考試體系龐大複雜且發展歷史源遠流長，惟向來皆以筆試為主要評測工具，然衡酌美、英、日、韓等民主國家之公務人員甄選過程，口試皆占極重要之篩選關鍵；然而我國各級政府進用人才最重要之公務人員高普考試與地方政府公務人員考試，除涉及外事或語言播音等少數類科設有口試外，絕大多數皆以筆試成績為唯一錄取條件；至公務人員特考運用口試雖較廣泛，但仍以筆試為前提且總成績占比甚高。有鑒於國家考試之口試運用及程序設計殊異繁複，本文力求清晰呈現口試發展歷程以及各類科目目前實施方式與現況，使讀者能夠一窺口試現制之全貌，復整理各民主國家公務人員甄選之口試運作情形，並比較其個別差異，從中擷取可供我國推動口試變革精進之參考。

關鍵詞：國家考試、口試、結構化口試、用人機關

* 本文由江宗正處長撰文，考選部翻譯為英文版

**本文原為考選部提報 2023 年 9 月 7 日考試院第 13 屆第 152 次院會重要業務報告，由時任綜合規劃司司長江宗正據以於是次院會中進行專題報告。江員現任考選部秘書處處長，並就本文依最新政策發展及相關資料予以通盤增補調整之。

I. Origin and Development

A. Origin

According to Article 14, Paragraph 1 of the Examination Affairs Act, examinations may be administered in the written, oral, psychometric, physical fitness, or practical examination forms, or through verification of authorship and inventions or education and work experience, or by any other method approved by the Examination Yuan. All examinations apart from pure written examinations must include at least two of the above methods. Article 10, Paragraph 1 of the Civil Service Examinations Act and Article 4, Paragraph 1 of the Professional and Technical Personnel Examinations Act also provide for the use of exams for Civil Service Examinations and Professional and Technical Personnel Examinations. Currently, national examinations for civil servants and professional and technical personnel are mainly done in written forms. To meet the needs of hiring agencies or professional practices, some exam categories include supplementary assessments, such as oral exams or physical fitness tests. Civil service special examinations are particular cases of the national examination system making extensive use of oral testing and with different exam formats.

To provide a thorough overview of oral testing used in national exams, this article takes a practical perspective on the development and current practice of oral exams across different exam categories. Oral testing practices in democratic countries such as the US, UK, Japan, and South Korea are also provided to help formulate future reform and improvement strategies, with hopes to deepen and broaden the scope of oral testing used in national examinations and thereby improving the effectiveness of assessment and selecting the most suitable candidates.

B. Development

Oral testing has been included as an assessment method since the establishment of the national examination system in 1912 (Table 1). However, it was not until 1958 that oral exam regulations were established according to the examination act at the time to provide comprehensive coverage for matters such as exam content and grading standards. After years of development and systematic reforms, the current legal framework for the administration of oral testing is based on two regulations established by the Ministry of Examination: Oral Examination Regulations in 2000 and Foreign Language Oral Examination Regulations in 2001. Table 2 shows the development of the legal basis for oral testing used in national examinations.

Table 1
Legal Bases for the Use of Oral Testing in National Examinations

Year	Legal base	Exams to which the regulations apply
1915	Civil Service Junior Examination Order and Civil Service Senior Examination Order were issued.	Third stage of junior examination Fourth stage of senior examination
1929	The Examinations Act was established.	Third stage of junior and senior examinations
1948	The Examinations Act was amended.	All national exams
1986	Civil Service Examinations Act and Professional and Technical Personnel Examinations Act were established. (Examinations Act was abolished.)	All national exams
1988	The Examination Affairs Act was established.	All national exams

Note. The table was compiled by the author.

Table 2
The Development of Oral Testing Regulations

Year	Title of Regulations	Remarks
1958	Oral Examination Regulations	
1987	Civil Service Oral Examination Regulations, Professional and Technical Personnel Examination Oral and Practical Examination Regulations	The 1958 oral examination regulations were abolished.
2000	Oral Examination Regulations	The 1987 regulations were abolished.
2001	Foreign Language Oral Examination Regulations	These regulations were established to show foreign language oral testing as a professional test subject.

Note. The table was compiled by the author.

II. Recent developments in oral examinations reforms

Current examination methods, regardless of the format, all aim to improve the reliability and effectiveness of talent selection through examinations. Oral testing has gradually become an important assessment tool in addition to pen-and-paper testing because it can assess different aspects of a candidate's performance, such as manners, cognitive abilities, organizational skills and logical reasoning, verbal communication skills, and character and qualities (余民寧, 2013). Both public and private sectors in the US have validated oral testing as an effective screening method based on a century of private sector's research experience and the public sector's hiring of more than 300 federal supervisory officials. Clearly, oral testing has played a crucial role in the

screening process. The world's major countries have included oral testing as a core component in their civil servant selection process (彭錦鵬, 2010). The following is a summary of the Ministry of Examination's recent reforms towards improving oral testing reliability and effectiveness.

A. The creation of National Examination Oral Testing Reference Manual

Oral testing is the second most common assessment tool after written tests. To ensure the objectiveness of oral tests, the exam administrating agency would call a meeting with oral examiners before the exam. However, the Ministry of Examination still intended to develop a standard oral testing reference manual to improve the testing process in terms of content, methods, and reliability. The manual, which serves as a reference for examiners, was developed by Professor Hu Yueh-Luen at National Chengchi University, who is devoted to oral testing topics. Based on the latest oral testing theories from home and abroad and practical operations, this manual was completed in mid-April, 2010. Its contents cover: (1) national exam oral testing methods and process; (2) attitude; (3) rules and principles; (4) question formulation; and (5) grading.

B. Development towards structured oral examination

A structured oral examination takes the standardized handling of exam content, procedures, and grading. In terms of exam content, questions must be pre-determined and able to be discriminated adequately. In terms of procedures, from before the exam to the exam itself to after the exam, all steps and details must be standardized. In terms of grading, examiners should compare a candidate's response to the pre-determined grading standards before assigning scores. The degree of structurization should progress gradually in three levels: unstructured, narrowly structured, and fully structured. Achieving a fully structured oral examination involves the standardization of 15 aspects, such as formulating questions, making sure each candidate is asked the same set of questions, standardizing duration and number of questions, and predetermining scoring standards (胡悅倫 et al., 2009). Hence, the degree of standardization across these aspects and the breadth and depth of implementation are basic conditions for what a structured oral examination can achieve.

Moreover, given the large number of oral examiners involved in national examinations, it is important to enhance their professional assessment skills. Examination Commissioners have indicated in meetings and publications the need to expediate the implementation of structured oral examinations to enhance screening effectiveness and to ensure fairness and justice. In August 2012, the Ministry of

Examination held a structured oral examination workshop to review the procedures and establish standards, hoping to maximize the effectiveness of oral testing and select the most suitable candidates through the practice of standardized procedures. Structured oral examinations were initially implemented for the “Special Examination for Consular and Diplomatic Personnel” and “Civil Service Professional and Technical Personnel Examinations” and would gradually expand to other examinations.

C. Reference to competency analysis results

The foundation of oral testing assessment is competency analysis. Through competency analysis, the core capabilities required for job positions, such as professional knowledge, work experience, personality traits, and background conditions, are identified and used as a reference for oral examiners to draft questions (余民寧, 2013). Analyzing important details associated with specific job positions and with the involvement of experts and scholars in specific field helps ensure the effectiveness of exam questions (胡悅倫 et al., 2010). Between 2011 and 2013, the Ministry of Examination completed competency analyses for a total of 178 exam categories of civil service examinations and professional and technical personnel examinations, providing reference for various examinations.

D. Enhanced regulations for practical requirements

To ensure fairness and justice of the oral testing process, the Ministry of Examination has amended the Oral Examination Regulations and Foreign Language Oral Examination Regulations. Additional provisions were made to Articles 11 and 12 of these regulations respectively for regrouping principles when there is a need for oral examiners to recuse on the day of the examination. These amendments were promulgated on August 7, 2015. To enhance the involvement of hiring agencies in the selection process, Article 4, Paragraph 3 of the Civil Service Examinations Act Enforcement Rules was amended, increasing the number of experts from agencies to one half of each Board of Examiners, giving hiring agencies more decision-making influence in the oral testing process. This amendment was promulgated on July 25, 2022.

III. Current practice of oral exams in national examinations

Oral testing, as an assessment of practical skills (陳柏熹, 2022) can be used to evaluate a candidate's professional knowledge, expression, and higher-level cognitive abilities including the candidate's attitude, manners, analytical thinking, and even values, which cannot be accessed through pen-and-paper testing. This is why oral testing can generally evaluate if the candidate is suitable for the intended position.

A. Definition of oral examinations and implementation goals

According to Article 12, Subparagraph 2 of the Examinations Affairs Act Enforcement Rules, an oral examination is defined as an assessment through oral question-and-answer or discussion of a candidate's knowledge and skills, attitude, personality, values, and behavior. Depending on the number of candidates and future job tasks, oral examinations and foreign language oral examinations may come in three formats: individual oral examination, group oral examination, and group discussion. Table 3 shows the definitions and goals of these three formats.

Table 3
Definitions and Goals of Different Oral Testing Formats

Format		Oral examination	Foreign language oral examination
Individual oral examination	Definition	Individual candidates answer questions asked by oral examiners.	Individual candidates answer questions asked by foreign language oral examiners in the designated foreign language.
	Goals	Assessing the candidate's manners, communication skills, character and qualities, professional knowledge, and problem-solving skills.	Assessing the candidate's verbal communication in the foreign language, pronunciation and intonation, and knowledge.
Group oral examination	Definition	Two or more candidates answer questions asked by oral examiners.	Two or more candidates answer questions asked by oral examiners in a designated order. If an examiner designates a group member to comment, the candidate shall respond.
	Goals	Assessing the candidates' manners, communication skills, character and qualities, professional knowledge, and problem-solving skills.	Assessing the candidates' verbal communication in the foreign language, pronunciation and intonation, knowledge, and problem-solving skills.
Group discussion	Definition	In turn, five or more candidates chair a discussion session.	In turn, five or more candidates chair a discussion session.
	Goals	Candidates are evaluated on their ability to chair a meeting, verbal communication, organization and analysis, social skills and empathy, decisiveness, influence within a discussion, analytical skills, teamwork, stress management, and proactivity.	Candidates are evaluated on their ability to chair a meeting, verbal communication in the foreign language, decisiveness, influence within a discussion, and proactivity.

Notes.

- Article 2 of the Oral Examination Regulations provides the definition and implementation of individual oral examinations, group oral examinations, and group discussions. The specific type of oral examination to be used for each category is regulated in each exam's respective regulations.
- The table was compiled by the author.

B. Details of oral testing implementation

(A) Duration

Oral examinations and foreign language oral examinations may be conducted in groups depending on exam level, category, number of candidates, and time allocation. Group oral examinations and group discussions may be conducted in separate sessions when necessary. As for duration, Article 7 of the Oral Examination Regulations and Article 8 of the Foreign Language Oral Examination Regulations provide time limits, while the actual duration is determined at an oral examination meeting (Table 4). Currently, most individual oral examinations last 20 minutes; for group oral examinations, each candidate is given 20 minutes (for example, the total test time for a group of 5 candidates is 100 minutes.) If the number of group discussion candidates is less than 5, individual oral examinations or a group oral examination may be conducted instead with the test time for each candidate being 50 minutes.

Table 4

Duration of an Oral Examination/Foreign Language Oral Examination

Type	Oral examination	Foreign language oral examination	Remarks
Individual oral examination	20~90 minutes	10~30 minutes	1. Duration may be adjusted according to exam level and category 2. Determined at the oral examination meeting
Group oral examination	1~2 hours	30~90 minutes	
Group discussion	2~4 hours	1~3 hours	

Note. The table was compiled by the author.

(B) Implementation method

An individual oral examination or a foreign language individual oral examination is a face-to-face question-and-answer sessions between the examiner and a single candidate. A group oral examination involves interactions between examiners and candidates and between candidates, making group oral examinations more dynamic and variable than individual oral examinations. A group discussion assesses a candidate's performance as chair and participant while examiners act as observers and do not ask questions (Table 5).

Candidates must leave the oral examination ends and are not allowed to interact with other candidates who will take the individual oral examination, a group oral examination, or a group discussion to maintain exam fairness. To ensure all candidates are assessed under consistent conditions, two sets of exam questions will be prepared

with the same number of questions (e.g., Special Examination for Judges and Prosecutors) and equivalent focuses and difficulty levels.

Table 5

How an Oral Examination/Foreign Language Oral Examination are Implemented

Format	Implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individual oral examination ● Foreign language individual oral examination 	Individual candidates answer questions asked by oral examiners.	Each examiner grades each section on the score sheet.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Group oral examination ● Foreign language group oral examination 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Candidates in the same group oral exam session will answer examiners' questions in order. 2. If an examiner designates a group member to comment, the candidate should respond. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Group discussion ● Foreign language group discussion 	Candidates determine the order to act as chair and topics by drawing lots. The chair should lead the discussion and make a summary before the end of the discussion. Examiners observe candidate performance and do not ask questions.	Examiners grade each section on the score sheet after an examiners' meeting.

Note. The table was compiled by the author.

(C) The determination of oral examination/foreign language oral examination topics

Before an oral examination is conducted, an oral examination meeting will be convened to discuss question scope or topics. In addition to the legally required oral examination meeting, other meetings may be held according to needs. A technical meeting may be held. For example, a preliminary meeting may be held half a month to a month prior to the oral examination. This helps examiners understand the core competencies of exam categories and assessment items, exam questions, and considerations for question formulation. Examiners will be asked to draft questions. Formal questions are determined at the legally required oral examination meeting by the oral examiners to ensure questions fully align with the core competencies of the respective exam categories.

(D) Number, qualifications, and recusal of examiners

The selection of oral examiners must consider their professional backgrounds and ensure diversity. Examiners consist of representatives from hiring agencies (or

professional supervisory agencies), experts with field-specific expertise (from industry), and scholars (from academia). Article 4 of the Oral Examination Regulations and Article 5 of the Foreign Language Oral Examination Regulations prescribe the number and qualifications of oral examiners (Table 6). Article 11 of the Oral Examination Regulations and Article 12 of the Foreign Language Oral Examination Regulations stipulate that oral examiners whose spouse, blood relative, or relative through marriage within three degrees of relation happens to take the exam, or those who happen to be the head in the candidate's workplace, or the candidate's direct superior at work, or thesis supervisor should recuse themselves to ensure exam fairness and justice.

Table 6

Number and Qualifications of Oral Examination/Foreign Language Oral Examiners

Examination format	Number of examiners		Qualifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individual oral examination ● Foreign language individual oral examination 	2~5	Alternate examiners may be assigned if necessary.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Members of the Board of Examiner. 2. Are from related hiring agencies, agencies requesting the examination, senior-level civil servants from the professional supervisory agency, or experts in the specific field.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Group oral examination ● Foreign language group oral examination 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Group discussion ● Foreign language group discussion 	3~5		

Note. The table was compiled by the author.

(E) Standardized legal framework

If necessary, a written question list for individual and group oral exams may be created. Candidates may be asked to submit a written report to oral examiners for their reference. The written report should include: the candidate's career aspirations, interests, professional knowledge, and expertise. Candidates in the same group oral exam session will answer by seating order. The order of first respondents should rotate to prevent unfairness.

To provide standardized principles for content, procedures, and scoring of oral examinations and to ensure all examiners receive consistent information and candidates

are treated equally, the Ministry of Examination has established a standardized framework (Table 7) to meet the requirements of a structured oral examination.

Table 7
Standardization and Current Legal Requirements for Oral Examinations

Standardized items	Regulation content	Oral Examination Regulations	Foreign Language Oral Examination Regulations
Content	Question scope and topic are determined before the oral examination is conducted.	Article 6	Article 7
Procedures	The number, qualifications, and recusal of oral examiners are stipulated.	Articles 4 and 11	Articles 5 and 12
	Time limit of an oral examination session is determined. The exact duration is determined before the oral examination is conducted.	Articles 6 and 7	Articles 7 and 8
	The implementation of oral examinations is stipulated.	Article 8	Article 8
Scoring	Scoring items, score weight, and standards are stipulated.	Articles 5 and 9	Articles 6 and 9
	Score calculations are stipulated.	Article 10	Article 11
Other	An oral examination meeting shall be held to discuss question scope and topics, scoring standards, time allotment, and other related matters. If necessary, an oral exam technical meeting may be held.	Article 6	Article 7

Note. The table was compiled by the author.

C. Current practices of the three oral examination formats

According to current examination regulations, oral examinations or foreign language oral examinations are used in 23 civil service examinations and two professional and technical personnel examinations (see Table 8). Additionally, Article 2 of Oral Examination Regulations and Article 3 of Foreign Language Oral Examination Regulations provide that exams may be conducted following one or two of these three formats. Currently, exams using two formats include: Level 3 Special Examination for Consular and Diplomatic Personnel (foreign language individual oral examination and group oral examination), the Special Examination for International Trade Personnel (foreign language individual oral examination and group oral examination) and the Special Examination for Civil Aviation Personnel-aviation flight control (foreign language individual oral examination and foreign language group oral examination).

Table 8

Current Use of Oral Testing in Civil Service Examinations and Professional and Technical Personnel Examinations

	Exam (Category)	Format (stage)			Duration (min/person)	Remarks
		Individual oral examination	Group oral examination	Group discussion		
1	Level 1 Civil Service Senior Examination	(3)		(3)	50(individual) 30 (group discuss)	Both formats can be used alone or together.
2	Level 2 Civil Service Senior Examination		(2)		20	Individual oral examinations will be held when only one candidate is present.
3	Level 3 Civil Service Senior Examination	14 public professional and technical personnel categories (including public civil engineer category)	(2)		20	
		Hakka affairs	(2)		20	In Hakka
		Overseas communities affairs, international cultural and educational administration, aviation pilots	(2)		20	Starting January 1, 2024
4	Junior examination	Hakka affairs	(2)		20	In Hakka
		Aviation pilots	(2)		20	Starting January 1, 2024
5	Grade 3 Special Examination for Judicial Personnel	Public defenders, enforcement officers, judicial associate officers		(2)	20	
		Prison wardens	(3)		20	
		Other categories except public defenders, enforcement officers, judicial associate officers, and prison wardens	(2)		20	
6	Special Examination for Judges and Prosecutors		(3)		20	

Current Practices and Future Improvement Strategies of Oral Examinations in Taiwan's National Exams

	Exam (Category)		Format (stage)			Duration (min/person)	Remarks
			Individual oral examination	Group oral examination	Group discussion		
7	Special Examination for Consular and Diplomatic Personnel	Grade 3 consular and diplomatic personnel	(2)	(2)		20 (group) 15(individual)	Individual oral examination is conducted in the designated foreign language.
		Grade 4 diplomatic administrative personnel	(2)			20	
8	Special Examination for International Trade Personnel		(1)	(2)		20 (group) 10(individual)	Individual oral examination is conducted in the designated foreign language.
9	Special Examination for Police Officers	Grade 3 foreign affairs police officers	(0)			10	In the designated foreign language First stage exam subject
10	Examination for General Police Officers	Grade 3 foreign affairs police officers	(1)			10	In the designated foreign language
11	Grades 3 and 4 Special Examination for Investigative Agents		(3)			20	
12	Special Examination for Intelligence Personnel	Grade 3 intelligence personnel		(3)		20	
		Grade 4 intelligence personnel	(3)			20	
13	Special Examination for Civil Aviation Personnel	Aviation control	(1)	(2)		10 (first stage) 15 (second stage)	In English (First oral exam is English conversation)
		Flight information service, aeronautical telecommunication, aviation management	(1) (2)			10 (first stage) 20 (second stage)	First oral exam is in English (English conversation)
		flight operations inspection and airworthiness inspection	(2)			15	In English

	Exam (Category)		Format (stage)			Duration (min/person)	Remarks
			Individual oral examination	Group oral examination	Group discussion		
14	Special Examination for Indigenous Peoples	Grade 1			(3)		Individual oral examinations will be held when fewer than 5 candidates are present. (has not be held in recent years)
		Grade 2			(2)	20	Individual oral examinations will be held when only one candidate is present.
15	Grades 3 and 4 Special Examination for Coast Guards		(3)			20	
16	Grade 2 Special Examination for Immigration Personnel			(3)		20	
17	Special Examination for Ministry of National Defense Administrative Personnel	Grade 1			(3)		Has not been held.
		Grade 2		(2)			
18	Transfer Examination for Military Personnel		(0)			30 (major general, lieutenant general) 20 (colonel)	Not staged.
19	Special Examinations for High-Tech or Rare Occupations		/	/	/	/	/
20	Qualification Examination for the Selection of Judges and Prosecutors		(0)			30	Not staged.
21	Promotional Examination for Senior-Rank Policemen and Police Officers			(0)		20	Not staged.
22	Promotional Examination for Senior-Level Customs Personnel			(0)		20	Not staged.
23	Special Examination for Local Governments	Grade 3 public social workers, public veterinarians, public architects	(2)			20	
		Grade 3 Hakka affairs	(2)			20	In Hakka
		Grade 4 Hakka affairs	(2)			20	In Hakka

	Exam (Category)	Format (stage)			Duration (min/person)	Remarks
		Individual oral examination	Group oral examination	Group discussion		
1	Senior Professional and Technical Examination for Marine Pilots	(0)			15	Not staged.
2	Professional and Technical Examination for Foreign Language Tour Guides	(2)			12	In the designated foreign language

Notes.

1. The table above shows format and oral testing stage. For example, “Level 3 Civil Service Senior Examination: Hakka affairs category” shows an individual oral examination is included in the second stage and is in Hakka. Hence the cell of the individual oral examination is marked (2); if the exam is not staged, (0) is marked.
2. The Examination for Tour Guides was first held by the Ministry of Transportation and Communications in July 2023.
3. Some exams have oral testing in the first stage. For example, the Special Examination for International Trade Personnel, first stage score is the combined score of the written exam and the foreign language individual oral exam.
4. The duration of a group oral examination session is calculated as 20 minutes per candidate multiplied by the number of the group members, and should meet regulations of Article 7, Paragraph 2 of Oral Examination Regulations.
5. The table was compiled by the author.

In terms of oral testing format, Table 8 shows that the individual oral examination is the most common. The assessment focus of group discussions includes candidates' abilities in chairing a meeting, organizational and analytical skills, and decision making. Group discussions are used in exams including Level 1 Civil Service Senior Examination, Grade 1 Civil Service Special Examination for Indigenous Peoples, and Grade 1 Special Examination for Ministry of National Defense Civilian Positions. However, from 2020 to 2022, group discussions for Level 1 Civil Service Senior Examination were not held due to the five-candidate legal requirement not being met. Individual oral examinations were held instead. From 2020 to 2022, Grade 1 Civil Service Special Examination for Indigenous Peoples and Grade 1 Special Examination for Ministry of National Defense Civilian Positions were not held because job vacancies were not submitted by the hiring agencies.

D. Differences in oral examination procedures

Table 8 shows that oral testing is used on levels 1, 2, and 3 Civil Service Senior Examinations and Junior examinations. Most special examinations also use oral testing

as an assessment tool. However, differences can still be seen between how oral examinations are conducted in terms of following:

(A) Implementation procedure

Oral examinations used as an elimination threshold. Some exams use oral testing in the second or third stage while some use oral testing as a first stage test.

(B) Inclusion in written exam scores

For exams where the oral examination is used, oral examination scores are combined with other written subject scores. For example, the Special Examination for International Trade Personnel; Grade 3 Special Examination for Police Officers: foreign affairs police officers category; and the Special Examination for Civil Aviation Personnel: aviation control category use a foreign language oral examination as a first stage professional test. Other exams where oral testing is used as the only test (such as in the second or third stage), oral examination scores are combined with scores from other exam formats as a total.

(C) Nature of hiring agencies

For some exams that include oral testing, the hiring agencies are specific, such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Civil Aviation Administration, and National Police Agency, which request special examinations. Levels 1, 2, and 3 civil service senior examination categories, on the other hand, are designed to meet the needs of a wide range of hiring agencies rather than specific agencies.

In 2024, oral examinations are used for 18 Level 3 Civil Service Senior Examination categories in the second stage. Oral examinations have long been included in the special examination for consular and diplomatic personnel. Table 9 compares the abovementioned two exams.

Table 9*Comparison of Oral Testing Used in Two Civil Service Examinations*

	Level 3 Civil Service Senior Examination (public professional and technical personnel categories)	Grade 3 Special Examination for Consular and Diplomatic Personnel	Remarks
Exam stage	Second stage	Second stage	Both first stage exams are written
Format	Individual oral examination	Group oral examinations and foreign language individual oral examination	Group oral examinations are adopted to screen candidates as an individual; foreign language oral examinations assess a candidate's discourse abilities in a foreign language by discussing specific topics.
Language	Chinese	Individual oral examination in the designated foreign language; group oral examination in Chinese	
Oral examination duration	20 minutes/candidate	15 minutes for each candidate in the foreign language individual oral examination; 20 minutes for each candidate in the group oral examination	1. Article 7, Paragraph 2 of Oral Examination Regulations stipulates that the time limit for an individual oral examination is 20 to 90 minutes; a group oral examination session should be 1 to 2 hours. 2. Article 8, Paragraph 2 of Foreign Language Oral Examination Regulations stipulates that the time limit for a foreign language individual oral examination is 10 to 30 minutes per candidate.
Oral exam score percentage of the final score	30%	With both oral testing formats accounting for 20% of the total score, oral testing scores account for 40% of the final score.	
Other	Candidates will be further assessed through oral examination if they are suited for the positions even though they have professional certifications and related work experience.	Candidates will be assessed their on-the-spot reactions through scenario-based questions. This will help determine if they possess the core competencies as diplomatic personnel.	

Notes.

1. Part of the information about Civil Service Special Examination for Consular and Diplomatic Personnel is from 林建璋 和 黃靖璇, 2022.
2. The table was compiled by the author.

From the table above, it can be observed that in both civil service junior and senior examinations and in the Special Examination for Consular and Diplomatic Personnel, the first stage written scores determines if the candidate can proceed to the second stage oral examination. Additionally, written exam scores outweigh oral examination scores in the final score. This is the basic framework in our nation's civil service selection process. In other words, even though oral testing is included in some civil service examination categories, oral exams are contingent on written exams and written exam scores hold a higher weight. Public skepticism about the fairness of oral exams can be seen in negative feedback in online discussions about the Ministry of Examination's plan to make Special Examination for Offshore Islands Personnel oral testing count towards 40% of final scores. Thus, enhancing public trust in oral testing as a selection tool and creating a supportive environment for the implementation of oral examinations are important issues for the nation to align its examination system with international practices.

IV. Implementation of Oral Examinations in other Democratic Nations

The civil service examination system in our country has evolved with its own characteristics. While the development of human resource systems in other democratic countries around the world may vary, in terms of screening process and features, oral examinations are commonly used as a key step in the selection process, making them a mainstream trend. Given that the United States and the United Kingdom are pioneers of modern democratic governments and have made relentless efforts in civil service reforms over the past decades, and considering that Japan and South Korea, like our country, are democratic nations in East Asia with frequent political, economic, and civil exchanges and that delegations from Taiwan's Examination Yuan and affiliated agencies have visited Japan and South Korea government agencies multiple times, this section provides an overview of the selection procedures and implementation of oral examinations for civil servants in the four nations.

A. The United States

Since 1996, the US federal government has delegated recruitment authority to hiring agencies for competitive service positions. Agencies may design selection methods and procedures suited to the characteristics of the positions, including structured interviews, tests (on topics such as job-related knowledge, situational judgment, and cognitive abilities), assessment centers, and competency questionnaires. Interviews are used as the most common assessment tool. According to the 2000 Merit Principles Survey, 95% of agencies used interviews, while a 2009 report by the U.S.

Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) indicated that structured interviews were the most commonly used interview type (董祥開, 高于涵, 2022). Structured interviews implemented by hiring agencies must be conducted by trained interviewers. Interviewer training includes note-taking, observing and recording interviewee responses, and managing the interview process to avoid the influence of non-verbal behavior, and scoring biases and errors. Interviews should be conducted in a comfortable setting for the interviewees, and the entire scoring process must be documented.

B. The United Kingdom

There are three pathways to the UK Civil Service: the general civil service pathway, the Fast Stream program, and the Senior Civil Service pathway. Excepting Senior Civil Service selection, which is conducted by the Civil Service Commission under the departmental decentralization system, the selection, employment, and promotion of civil servants is decided independently by hiring agencies. Respective agencies conduct their own selection and recruitment processes and decide whether tests should be involved. The testing process is divided into two stages. The first stage involves the evaluation of application materials, proof of work competency, and related test results, while the second stage involves interviews with candidates shortlisted from the first stage. The interviews are seen as oral testing, which is included in the general civil service pathway, Fast Stream, and Senior Civil Service recruitment. Oral testing is mostly competency-based, assessing whether candidates possess the abilities required for the position and serving as an opportunity for candidates to express themselves and demonstrate problem solving skills. Testing may include written exams, oral exams, and aptitude tests which assess skills in analysis, mathematics, social and decision-making skills. Exam methods may vary, but the principles of fairness and open competition established by the Civil Service Commission must be observed (李俊達, 2021).

C. Japan

National civil service examinations in Japan operate under a decentralized system that upholds local government autonomy. Both central and local governments can independently design their own selection methods based on their characteristics, administrative needs, and current human resource situations. Comprehensive service examination candidates at undergraduate and graduate levels have written exams in the first stage, with different exam contents. Candidates with higher first stage scores are selected for the second stage exam, which includes a face-to-face interview. The

interview length varies between exam categories. For graduate-level candidates, a policy discussion session in the second stage includes a six-candidate group discussion lasting 1.5 hours (including a group discussion and personal presentation) (彭錦鵬 et al., 2017). Undergraduate-level candidates who take the general education examination¹ also have a policy discussion session in the second stage, where expression and communication skills are assessed during group discussion (吳新興 et al., 2023).

Furthermore, both national and local civil servant recruitment in Japan strongly emphasize hiring agency involvement. Agencies usually play a decisive role in the interview process. Candidates who pass second stage interviews are qualified for a civil service position before applying to specific hiring agencies for an interview to officially become a civil servant, a vigorous process which differs from one hiring agency to another. Throughout the entire selection process-whether it involves written tests, interviews, or interviews with hiring agencies or whether the examination or interview is conducted at national or local levels-test questions and assessment techniques provided by the National Personnel Authority and the Japan Center for Examination Research play a crucial role (Ministry of Examination, 2023).

D. South Korea

In South Korea, civil servant positions are divided into three categories: general, special (including roles such as judges, prosecutors, and police officers), and political positions. General positions are equivalent to those in Taiwan's administrative agencies at large and can be further classified as senior civil servants, grades 3 to 9 civil servants, and new entrants (typically starting at grades 5, 7, or 9). Both written and oral exams are used across all grades. The highest-level grade 5 exam involves written testing in the first and second stage and oral testing in the third stage. The oral testing comes in three formats: group oral examination, group discussion, and individual oral examination. The average duration for each candidate is 240 minutes. Exams are held in two stages. Grade 7 exam involves written testing in the first stage and oral testing in the second stage. The oral testing comes in two formats: group discussion and individual oral examination. The average duration for each candidate is 135 minutes. The lowest level grade 9 exam involves written testing in the first stage and an individual oral examination in the second stage. The average duration for each candidate is 50 minutes (Ministry of Examination, 2022; 程挽華 et al., 2017). Candidates who fail oral testing will not be qualified. Candidates whose oral test scores

¹ The general education examination is intended to screen candidates with cross-disciplinary skills. Instead of being tested on professional subjects, candidates' comprehensive thinking and planning abilities are assessed.

are rated as “commonplace” may be able to enter public service based on their written exam scores. Candidates with “excellent” oral testing scores will be selected directly.

Table 10 shows recruitment process differences and the use of oral testing in the US, UK, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Table 10

Selection Processes and Use of Oral Testing in the US, UK, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan

	US	UK	Japan	South Korea	Taiwan
Degree of hiring agency involvement	Conducted separately by hiring agencies	Except for Senior Civil Service, hiring agencies conduct their own recruitment. (The Civil Service Commission has established principles of fairness and justice.)	Hiring agencies, at central or local levels, conduct their own recruitment. (National Personnel Authority provides exam questions and techniques)	Ministry of Personnel Management and hiring agencies conduct their own selection processes.	National examinations are centralized and held solely by the Examination Yuan and Ministry of Examination
Selection process	Written test + comprehensive testing + oral test	Online testing of math and reasoning abilities, verbal reasoning, situational judgement, and oral tests or in-depth interviews.	Subject-based written tests + oral tests in the second or third stages	Subject-based written tests + oral tests in the second or third stages	Testing is mainly written, except for a few categories that have additional oral testing.
Oral test content	Varies depending on the positions to be filled	Job-based. Candidates may be required to do presentations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individual interview 2. Policy discussion session (for some categories) 3. Interviews with hiring agencies 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Group oral examination 2. Group discussion 3. Individual oral examination (Grade 5) 	Individual oral exams; some categories may involve group oral exams
Duration of the oral testing	15 to 45 minutes	30 to 60 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individual interview: approx. 1.5 hours 2. Policy discussion session: approx. 1.5 hours 3. Interviews with hiring agencies: one week 	Approx. 240 minutes (Grade 5)	(See Table 4)

Note. The table was compiled by the author.

As can be seen above, the US, UK, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan all have a vigorous assessment and selection process for civil servants. However, in terms of the degree of hiring agency involvement in the selection process and the scale of the use

of oral examinations, there is a gap between Taiwan and the other countries. Our country is founded on a five-power constitution, a system where the examination branch is equally and independently operated from the other four branches (executive, legislative, judicial, and control). According to Article 86 of the ROC Constitution, qualifications for appointments as public servants shall be determined through examinations by the Examination Yuan in accordance with the law. Furthermore, the Examination Affairs Act prescribes the Examination Yuan's authority in the administration of examination, making it harder for Taiwan to have hiring agencies play the leading role in policy making and civil service recruitment than in the US, UK, Japan, and South Korea. The breadth and depth of the use of oral examinations, passing standards, structured oral examinations, and educational training are areas where Taiwan can learn to enhance the involvement of hiring agencies in oral examinations.

V. Strategies for improving future oral examinations and expanding their applications

Over the years, the Ministry of Examination has invested substantial manpower and resources to standardize and structure oral examinations. Efforts include staff training, the introduction of evaluation technologies, and the improvement of testing facilities. The goal is to create a rigorous and meticulous environment for structured oral examinations, enhancing their effectiveness and increasing public acceptance. Drawing on the nation's experience and practices of the US, UK, Japan, and South Korea, the following outlines strategies for improving and expanding the use of oral examinations:

A. Increasing the involvement of hiring agencies in oral examinations

Having hiring agencies lead the selection of talent is essential because civil servants, as frontline policy implementers, are most familiar with practical needs and public feedback. These agencies best understand the specific talents they require. Therefore, to meet the staffing needs of different agencies and considering the unique structure and regulations of our national examinations, properly increasing the involvement of hiring agencies in the selection process can help them choose candidates who best fit their needs. This approach aligns with practices in democratic countries worldwide. To support the Examination Yuan's policy of increasing hiring agencies' involvement in talent selection, an amendment to Article 4, Paragraph 3 of Civil Service Examinations Act Enforcement Rules was promulgated on July 25, 2022.

This amendment raises the participation rate of industry experts in examination affairs from one-third to one-half of the total number of examiners. The Ministry of Examination can further explore the feasibility of increasing the involvement of hiring agencies or industry experts in the talent selection process to enhance the alignment between oral testing candidates and the intended positions, ensuring that selected talents meet the needs of the hiring agencies.

B. Improving and implementing structured oral examination

Using oral examinations as a talent selection tool enables an in-depth evaluation of candidates' professional knowledge, skills, manners, personality, and communication and response abilities, ensuing the selection of suitable candidates. However, these exams can be subjective and dependent on personal judgement. To ensure fairness and objectivity, the Ministry of Examination focuses on operational standardization and incorporates international practices to improve the structuring of questions and scoring criteria, minimizing the influence of subjective factors. The Ministry regularly reviews related regulations, implementation procedures, and scoring standards, and exchanges ideas with scholars and experts, aiming to make structured oral examinations thorough and well-rounded.

C. Enhancing training and building an oral examination manpower database

Given the large number of oral exam candidates in some exam categories, it is often necessary to conduct examinations in groups or batches. The finer the grouping, the greater the potential for discrepancies in the scores given by different examiners, making it challenging to reach consensus through meetings alone. Therefore, oral examiners need comprehensive training in questioning and scoring to establish consistent questioning techniques and scoring standards. Testing equating techniques can be used to adjust and correct discrepancies within and between groups. In Japan, oral examiners are typically senior personnel from hiring agencies, which contrasts with our current reliance on scholars and experts. In the future, national examinations will increase the involvement of senior civil servants in oral examination training, having them train alongside scholars and experts to establish a well-round training system for oral examiners.

The Ministry of Examination has set up the “Information System for National

Examination Manpower Management,” which includes data on oral examiners. This system provides access to information about examiners' participation in national exams, detailing the types and frequencies of their involvement. After each exam, relevant data is updated in the system. To support the policy of expanding the involvement of hiring agencies, the Ministry will continue to recruit well-trained senior civil servants from these agencies and expand the database of oral examiners for a more complete and sufficient pool.

D. Developing training materials and improving the oral testing reference manual

Experienced oral examiners may only require an information session and consensus-building during oral examination meetings before conducting structured oral examinations. However, for first-time examiners or less experienced examiners, standardized training over a certain period (余民寧, 2013) is necessary to fully grasp questioning and scoring techniques and to align with the meeting's consensus. To ensure standardization and consistency among examiners during the testing process and ensure stable and consistent candidate evaluation, the Ministry of Examination will gather recent oral exam practices. Considering testing technology and practical hiring considerations, the Ministry will engage scholars and experts familiar with oral exam operations and collaborate with hiring agencies to develop training materials for oral exam training.

In 2010, the Ministry of Examination established a National Examination Oral Testing Reference Manual, offering a systematic explanation of assessment items, techniques, and methods to enhance scoring reliability. However, since its creation thirteen years ago, changes have occurred in domestic and international oral exam theories and practical operation methods. Therefore, the Ministry will review and amend the manual in line with trends in oral exam technology research and development to provide a reference for implementing oral exams in national examinations.

E. Building a comprehensive and optimal oral examination environment

To facilitate the digitalization of national examinations, the Ministry of Examination plans to build a versatile facility with three underground levels and thirteen aboveground levels. This facility will accommodate national examination

quarters and various examination rooms to meet diverse requirements. It will also feature designated areas for oral examination registration and dedicated rooms for conducting oral examinations. Additionally, the building will integrate a digitalized online environment to support the future development of oral examinations.

VI. Conclusion

Structured and standardized oral testing has been used in national examinations for many years, particularly in various civil service special examinations, without receiving negative feedback. However, the public remains skeptical about non-standardized oral examinations, which, unlike pen-and-paper tests, lack predefined answers. This skepticism contrasts with countries like the US, UK, Japan, and South Korea, where oral examinations are widely accepted. This discrepancy presents a significant challenge for our country. To diversify talent recruitment and increase the involvement of hiring agencies, the Ministry of Examination has made efforts to gradually reform examination methods with the premise of reducing written exam subjects. On March 2, 2023, during the 127th meeting of the Examination Yuan's 13th term, amendments were made to Civil Service Junior Examination and Level 3 Senior Examination Regulations. Starting from January 1, 2024, the number of written professional subjects will be reduced, and 18 categories in level 3 civil service examinations will include oral testing in the second stage. These changes aim to gradually expand the use of oral examinations and increase the participation of hiring agencies, thereby achieving the policy goals of authorizing hiring agencies to conduct oral examinations.

Regarding measures such as further expanding the use of oral examinations, increasing their weight in the selection process, and establishing them as key qualification thresholds, there is a need for increased promotion, starting at colleges and universities. By promoting these practices in the education system, a fair and trusted oral testing environment can be created. This will enable the national examination system to align with global trends, establish a new paradigm for selecting public servants among the younger generation, and effectively meet the professional requirements of hiring agencies. The Ministry of Examination will continue to develop and implement appropriate oral assessment techniques, strengthen examiner training, and enrich the database of oral examiners, fostering a new and mutually beneficial landscape for national human resources in education, examination, and civil service employment.

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