MIKAILALSYS
Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences

e-ISSN : 2987-2286
p-ISSN : 2987-3924

Index: Harvard, Boston, Sydney, Copernicus, Sinta 4, Scilit, Semantic, Google, etc

https://doi.org/10.58578/mikailalsys.v4i3.11378

Colonial Legacy and Strategic HRM in Indonesia's Civil Service: A Southeast Asian Comparison

Johanna Novita, Harry Nenobais, Sri Lalanawati Octaviani
Prof. Dr. Moestopo (Beragama) University, Jakarta, Indonesia
napitupulujohanna@gmail.com

Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Jun 8, 2026	Jul 6, 2026	Jul 18, 2026	Jul 23, 2026

Abstract

Bureaucratic reform in Indonesia has substantially modernized administrative procedures; however, improvements in bureaucratic performance remain uneven, suggesting that procedural reform alone cannot resolve persistent institutional constraints. This study aimed to examine the configuration of public-sector human resource management in Indonesia through a comparative analysis of five Southeast Asian administrative systems: Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. A qualitative comparative approach was employed using document analysis guided by Berman's Strategic Human Resource Management framework and historical institutionalism. The findings indicate that Indonesia has achieved considerable procedural modernization in merit-based recruitment through the Computer Assisted Test (CAT), but these advances have not been consistently sustained in bureaucratic neutrality and performance-based compensation. The analysis identifies a pattern of asymmetrical strategic alignment in which recruitment reforms coexist with persistent organizational and institutional constraints across subsequent stages of the civil service career cycle. These constraints are rooted in historically embedded administrative routines that continue to shape authority relations,

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personnel management, and performance governance. The study extends Strategic Human Resource Management by demonstrating that strategic alignment is institutionally contingent rather than determined solely by the coherence of human resource policies. It concludes that sustainable civil service reform requires institutional transformation beyond procedural modernization, particularly through stronger merit-system governance, enhanced protection of bureaucratic neutrality, and the redesign of performance management toward outcome-oriented evaluation. These findings provide a comparative framework for understanding civil service reform and offer practical guidance for strengthening public-sector human resource governance in Indonesia.

Keywords: Civil Service Reform; Comparative Public Administration; Historical Institutionalism; Merit-System Governance; Strategic Human Resource Management

INTRODUCTION

Despite more than two decades of bureaucratic reform across Southeast Asia, countries implementing remarkably similar civil service reforms continue to exhibit substantially different governance outcomes (Aruan, 2015; Iida, 2024; Mujahidin & Kusuma, 2025). Merit-based recruitment, digital personnel management, and performance-based incentive systems have become the dominant instruments of administrative modernization, reflecting the global diffusion of New Public Management (NPM) principles into developing countries. Nevertheless, empirical evidence demonstrates that the adoption of similar reform instruments does not necessarily produce comparable improvements in bureaucratic effectiveness, public service quality, or institutional performance (Cheung, 2005; Knox & Sharipova, 2023). This paradox challenges the conventional assumption that procedural modernization alone is sufficient to transform public bureaucracy. Instead, it suggests that the effectiveness of administrative reform is conditioned by broader institutional contexts that extend beyond formal policy design and regulatory change.

Indonesia represents one of the most compelling examples of this paradox. Since the implementation of the Computer Assisted Test (CAT) for national civil service recruitment in 2013, the strengthening of merit-system oversight, and the digitalization of performance evaluation through the Tunjangan Kinerja scheme, Indonesia has frequently been portrayed as one of the leading reformers of public sector human resource management in Southeast Asia. These reforms have substantially improved procedural transparency, reduced

opportunities for recruitment-related corruption, and strengthened the institutional foundation of merit-based governance (Azam & Bouckaert, 2025; Wijayanti et al., 2025). Yet the expected transformation of bureaucratic behaviour has remained incomplete. Despite considerable progress in recruitment procedures and administrative digitalization, persistent problems of bureaucratic politicization, organizational formalism, weak performance orientation, and uneven public service delivery continue to characterize Indonesia's civil service. The coexistence of procedural modernization and persistent bureaucratic dysfunction raises a fundamental question: why do sophisticated administrative reforms fail to generate equally substantive improvements in bureaucratic performance?

Existing studies have largely approached this question from the perspective of policy implementation, administrative modernization, digital governance, or merit-system development (Cinar et al., 2023; Danar et al., 2020). These studies have significantly advanced understanding of how reform policies are designed and implemented, yet they generally evaluate administrative progress through the successful adoption of formal institutions and technological innovations. Consequently, they provide limited explanation for why countries adopting comparable reform instruments continue to display markedly different organizational outcomes. More importantly, the existing literature rarely examines how historical institutional structures shape the effectiveness of contemporary human resource reforms, thereby leaving the relationship between colonial legacy and present-day bureaucratic performance insufficiently understood. As a result, administrative reform is frequently interpreted as a technical process of institutional redesign rather than as a historically embedded process constrained by long-standing organizational norms, bureaucratic culture, and institutional path dependency.

This limitation also reflects a broader theoretical fragmentation within the public administration literature. Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) explains that civil service management should strategically align recruitment, bureaucratic neutrality, and compensation systems with organizational objectives in order to improve public sector performance (Berman, 2011). However, the SHRM perspective primarily emphasizes how human resource systems should function, while offering limited explanation for why identical HRM arrangements generate contrasting outcomes across different institutional settings. Conversely, historical institutionalism argues that institutional choices established during critical historical junctures continue to shape subsequent policy trajectories through mechanisms of path dependency (Capoccia, 2016). Although this perspective successfully

explains institutional persistence, it pays relatively little attention to how those historical legacies influence the strategic alignment of contemporary human resource management across the civil service career cycle. Consequently, neither perspective independently provides a sufficiently comprehensive explanation of why countries implementing similar bureaucratic reforms continue to experience fundamentally different governance outcomes.

The comparative experiences of Southeast Asian administrative systems further demonstrate that bureaucratic reform cannot be understood solely through contemporary policy instruments. As comprehensively documented by Berman (2011), the civil service systems of Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines evolved along markedly different institutional trajectories despite facing similar modernization pressures. Hong Kong and Macau developed highly autonomous and meritocratic bureaucracies characterized by strong professional norms and limited political intervention. Malaysia combined bureaucratic professionalism with affirmative public policies, enabling relatively stable administrative development. In contrast, Thailand and the Philippines continue to experience stronger political interference in personnel management, resulting in weaker bureaucratic neutrality and greater vulnerability to patronage practices. These contrasting experiences suggest that institutional effectiveness depends not merely on the adoption of modern administrative reforms but also on the historical institutional environments within which those reforms are embedded. Subsequent comparative studies reinforce this conclusion by showing that Hong Kong's reforms were primarily driven by managerial principles, whereas Thailand remained considerably more exposed to domestic political contestation (Huque & Jongruck, 2020). Likewise, Malaysia's relatively successful reform trajectory has been attributed to the continuity of its colonial administrative institutions, while the Philippine experience illustrates how extensive political appointments can undermine the long-term professionalism of the career civil service (Mahmoud & Othman, 2021; Monsod, 2017; Siddiquee et al., 2019).

Indonesia occupies a distinctive position within this regional landscape because its contemporary bureaucracy reflects the interaction of multiple historical institutional legacies. During the Dutch colonial period, public administration was organized through a dual bureaucratic structure separating the Europeesch Bestuur from the indigenous Pangreh Praja, the latter functioning primarily as an instrument of territorial control rather than public service. This administrative structure was subsequently reinforced by Japanese military rule, which emphasized centralized authority, rigid hierarchy, and unquestioned bureaucratic

obedience. Together, these historical experiences produced institutional characteristics that continue to influence bureaucratic culture, organizational behaviour, and patterns of authority within Indonesia's civil service (Berman, 2011; Mozin et al., 2026; Tjiptoherijanto, 2018). Consequently, although Indonesia has successfully modernized many formal aspects of civil service management, deeply embedded institutional norms inherited from colonial administration may continue to constrain the substantive effectiveness of contemporary reforms.

This study argues that Indonesia's bureaucratic paradox cannot be adequately explained by evaluating reform instruments alone. Rather, the persistence of bureaucratic misalignment across recruitment, neutrality, and compensation reflects the interaction between contemporary human resource reforms and historically embedded institutional structures. From this perspective, procedural modernization represents only one dimension of bureaucratic transformation, while organizational behaviour remains strongly conditioned by institutional path dependency established through colonial administrative development. Understanding this interaction is therefore essential for explaining why countries implementing similar civil service reforms continue to produce fundamentally different governance outcomes.

The novelty of this study lies not merely in combining Strategic Human Resource Management and historical institutionalism, but in using both perspectives to develop an integrated comparative explanation of Indonesia's civil service reform. Unlike previous studies that primarily evaluate the implementation of merit systems, digital governance, or bureaucratic reform policies in isolation, this study examines how colonial institutional legacies influence the strategic alignment of recruitment, bureaucratic neutrality, and compensation across the entire civil service career cycle. By positioning Indonesia within the broader comparative spectrum of five Southeast Asian administrative systems, this research moves beyond policy evaluation toward a more comprehensive explanation of why similar administrative reforms generate different institutional outcomes. In doing so, the study contributes to comparative public administration by strengthening the analytical linkage between contemporary Strategic Human Resource Management and long-term historical institutional development in explaining bureaucratic reform.

Accordingly, this study aims to compare the strategic alignment of Indonesia's civil service human resource management with those of Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Thailand,

and the Philippines, while examining the extent to which colonial institutional legacies explain contemporary patterns of bureaucratic misalignment. Through this comparative perspective, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of bureaucratic reform in Southeast Asia and to enrich the theoretical development of comparative public administration by demonstrating that the effectiveness of modern human resource reforms cannot be separated from the historical institutions within which they evolve.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative comparative research design employing qualitative content analysis of documentary evidence. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research seeks to explain how historical institutional trajectories shape contemporary civil service human resource management across different national contexts rather than to measure causal relationships statistically (Aprila et al., 2023; Aprila & Dwiharyadi, 2026; Creswell, 2014). Specifically, the study applies a comparative public administration perspective by examining Indonesia alongside five Southeast Asian administrative systems Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines to identify similarities and differences in the strategic alignment of civil service management.

Rather than evaluating individual reform policies in isolation, this research investigates the interaction between colonial institutional legacies and contemporary human resource management across the civil service career cycle. Accordingly, the study adopts a comparative-analytical design in which Indonesia serves as the principal unit of analysis, while the five regional administrative systems function as comparative reference cases derived from Berman's (2011) Public Administration in Southeast Asia. This design enables systematic comparison of institutional characteristics while preserving the historical and contextual specificity of each administrative system.

Data Sources

The study relies exclusively on secondary documentary data obtained through purposive document selection. Documents were included when they directly addressed civil service management, bureaucratic reform, or administrative institutional development within the selected countries. The documentary corpus comprised three categories of sources. First, Indonesian legal and policy documents governing civil service management, including

regulations concerning the Computer Assisted Test (CAT), the merit system, and the Tunjangan Kinerja performance allowance. Second, official government publications and policy documents issued by institutions responsible for civil service administration and bureaucratic reform in Indonesia. Third, peer-reviewed scholarly publications examining civil service reform in Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, primarily published during the last decade. Classical works were retained where they constitute the principal theoretical foundation of Strategic Human Resource Management and historical institutionalism, particularly Berman (2011), Painter and Peters (2010), and Capoccia (2016). Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that all selected documents possessed direct analytical relevance to the research objectives rather than merely describing administrative reforms..

Data Collection and Coding Procedure

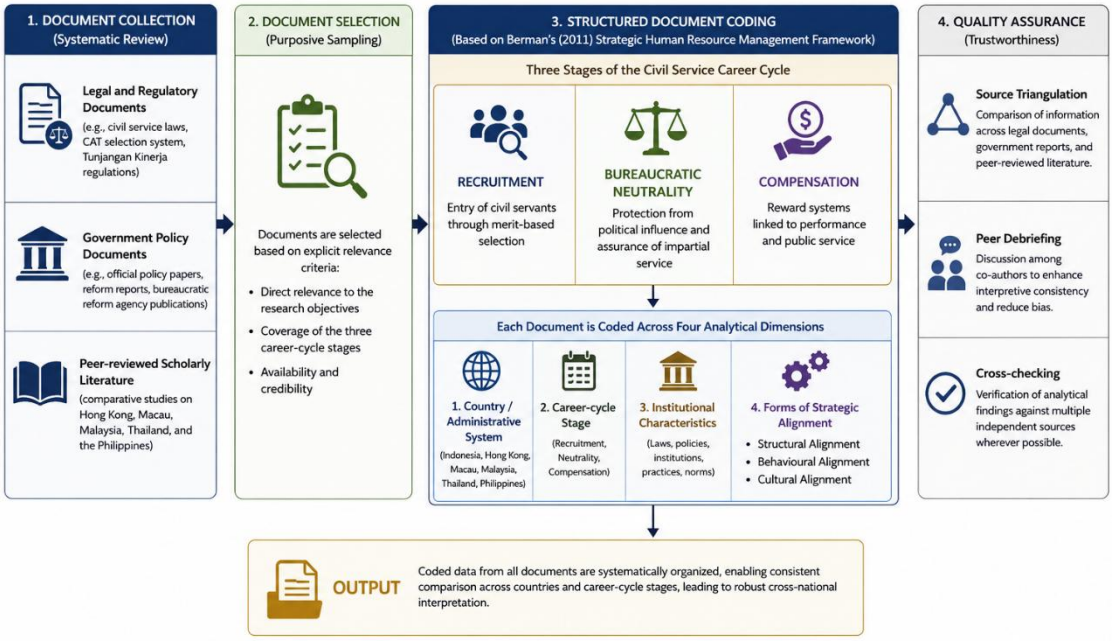


Figure 1. Data Collection and Coding Procedure

Figure 1 illustrates the overall procedure of document collection and coding employed in this study. The process began with systematic document collection from three principal sources, namely Indonesian legal and regulatory documents, official government policy publications, and peer-reviewed comparative literature concerning civil service reform in Southeast Asia. Subsequently, purposive document selection was conducted to ensure that only documents directly relevant to the research objectives, the three stages of the civil service career cycle, and institutional analysis were included in the study.

The selected documents were then analysed using a structured coding framework developed from Berman's (2011) Strategic Human Resource Management model. The coding process was organized around the three stages of the civil service career cycle recruitment, bureaucratic neutrality, and compensation. Each document was further coded according to four analytical dimensions, namely the country or administrative system under investigation, the relevant career-cycle stage, institutional characteristics, and forms of strategic alignment comprising structural, behavioural, and cultural alignment. Applying a standardized coding framework enabled systematic comparison across different administrative systems while maintaining analytical consistency.

To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the coding results were subjected to several trustworthiness procedures, including source triangulation across legal documents, government reports, and scholarly publications, peer debriefing among the authors, and repeated cross-checking of analytical interpretations using multiple independent sources (Rahmadhani et al., 2023, 2025; Suminar et al., 2025). The coded data were subsequently synthesized through cross-country comparison to identify patterns of strategic alignment and institutional differences across Southeast Asian civil service systems, providing the basis for interpreting Indonesia's strategic human resource management within a comparative historical institutional perspective.

Data Analysis

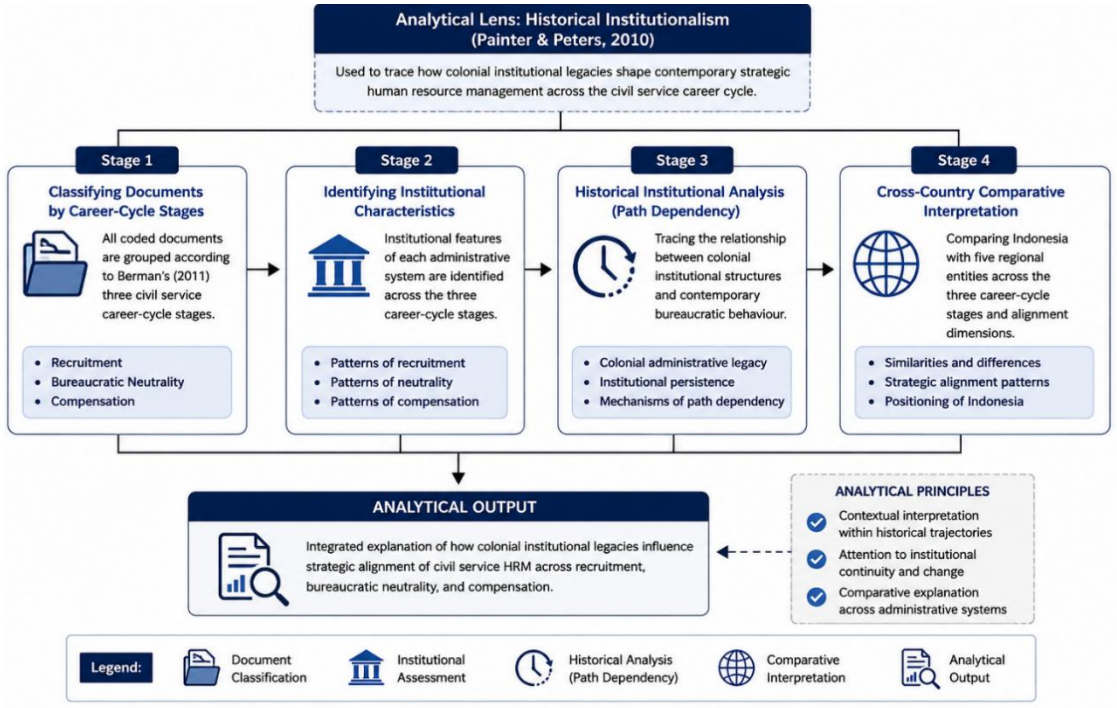


Figure 2. Data Analysis Procedure

Figure 2 summarizes the analytical procedure adopted in this study. Guided by historical institutionalism (Painter & Peters, 2010), the analysis was conducted through four sequential stages: (1) classifying documents according to Berman's (2011) civil service career-cycle framework; (2) identifying institutional characteristics within each administrative system; (3) tracing the influence of colonial institutional legacies through path dependency analysis; and (4) conducting cross-country comparative interpretation to position Indonesia within the Southeast Asian civil service context. This procedure enabled systematic comparison across countries while providing a theoretically grounded explanation of strategic human resource management alignment.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis identifies a consistent pattern of asymmetrical strategic alignment across Indonesia's civil service career cycle. Rather than demonstrating comprehensive institutional modernization, Indonesia's bureaucratic reform exhibits uneven development across recruitment, bureaucratic neutrality, and compensation. Although substantial progress has been achieved in strengthening formal administrative procedures, similar improvements are not consistently observed in organizational behaviour and institutional performance. This finding indicates that procedural modernization alone has been insufficient to generate comprehensive transformation of Indonesia's civil service system.

Table 1. Comparative Patterns of Strategic Human Resource Management Across the Civil Service Career Cycle in Southeast Asia

Civil Service Career Cycle	Comparative Regional Pattern	Empirical Findings: Indonesia's Institutional Position
Recruitment (Entry Stage)	Southeast Asian civil service systems exhibit two dominant recruitment models. Hong Kong and Macau represent highly competitive merit-based systems, Malaysia combines merit principles with constitutionally mandated affirmative action, while Thailand and the Philippines continue to experience recruitment distortions associated with patronage and political influence.	Indonesia has substantially modernized recruitment through the Computer Assisted Test (CAT), resulting in greater procedural transparency and reduced opportunities for nepotism. However, improvements at the recruitment stage are not consistently followed by equivalent institutional development during subsequent career management, where organizational practices remain influenced by rigid seniority, hierarchical authority, and bureaucratic formalism rooted in the Pangreh Praja administrative tradition.
Bureaucratic Neutrality	Regional administrative systems demonstrate varying degrees of	Although Indonesia formally adopts merit-system regulations protecting

Civil Service Career Cycle	Comparative Regional Pattern	Empirical Findings: Indonesia's Institutional Position
(Career Management)	bureaucratic autonomy. Hong Kong institutionalizes strong political insulation, Malaysia integrates the bureaucracy with long-term governmental development agendas, whereas Thailand and the Philippines remain vulnerable to patron-client relations and political intervention in personnel management.	bureaucratic neutrality, decentralized personnel authority creates persistent political influence over career progression. The authority of Regional Heads (Kepala Daerah) as Pejabat Pembina Kepegawaian generates dual accountability between professional merit and political interests, limiting the effective implementation of bureaucratic neutrality.
Compensation (Performance and Retention)	Compensation systems across the region differ in their strategic orientation. Hong Kong emphasizes competitive remuneration to strengthen professionalism and reduce corruption, whereas Thailand and the Philippines continue to experience weak incentive structures associated with low motivation and informal rent-seeking behaviour.	Indonesia has expanded performance-based remuneration through the Tunjangan Kinerja system. Nevertheless, documentary evidence indicates that performance assessment remains predominantly activity-based rather than outcome-oriented. Digital reporting systems reinforce administrative compliance but provide limited incentives for improving organizational performance and public service quality.

Source: Developed by the authors through comparative synthesis based on Berman (2011) and supporting documentary evidence.

Table 1 reveals a consistent pattern of uneven institutional development across Indonesia's civil service career cycle when compared with other Southeast Asian administrative systems. The comparative synthesis indicates that Indonesia has achieved substantial progress in strengthening procedural aspects of recruitment through merit-based digital selection, positioning it closer to the institutional characteristics observed in Hong Kong and Malaysia at the entry stage. However, this procedural advancement is not consistently sustained throughout the subsequent stages of the career cycle. Bureaucratic neutrality remains vulnerable to political influence under decentralized personnel management, while the compensation system continues to emphasize administrative compliance rather than performance outcomes. Consequently, Indonesia exhibits a hybrid institutional configuration in which modern recruitment practices coexist with persistent organizational constraints in career management and performance governance. This asymmetrical pattern suggests that civil service reform has progressed unevenly across the three dimensions of the career cycle, providing the principal empirical finding that underpins the subsequent discussion on the role of historical institutional legacies.

Finding 1: Asymmetrical Strategic Alignment Across the Civil Service Career Cycle

The first finding demonstrates that Indonesia's bureaucratic reform has progressed unevenly across the three stages of the civil service career cycle. Among the three dimensions analysed, recruitment represents the most advanced stage of institutional modernization. The implementation of the Computer Assisted Test (CAT) has substantially improved procedural transparency, minimized opportunities for informal intervention, and strengthened merit-based recruitment. Compared with Thailand and the Philippines, Indonesia demonstrates considerably stronger procedural safeguards during the entry stage of the civil service system.

However, these improvements are not consistently sustained throughout the subsequent stages of the career cycle. Documentary evidence indicates that bureaucratic neutrality and compensation continue to exhibit weaker strategic alignment despite the existence of formal reform policies. Consequently, institutional modernization has occurred primarily at the procedural level rather than across the entire human resource management system. This uneven progression suggests that Indonesia's civil service reform remains fragmented, with recruitment developing more rapidly than the institutional mechanisms responsible for maintaining bureaucratic professionalism and performance after entry into the civil service.

Finding 2: Institutional Decoupling Between Formal Reform and Bureaucratic Practice

The second finding reveals a persistent gap between formal institutional reform and its practical implementation. Across all three stages of the civil service career cycle, documentary evidence consistently indicates that legal and administrative reforms have strengthened formal governance arrangements, yet these improvements are not always translated into everyday bureaucratic practice.

This pattern is particularly evident at the neutrality stage. Although the Indonesian civil service formally operates under a merit-based legal framework that prohibits political intervention, personnel management continues to be influenced by decentralized political authority. Regional Heads (Kepala Daerah) retain substantial control over appointments, transfers, and career advancement through their authority as Pejabat Pembina Kepegawaian. Consequently, bureaucratic neutrality is institutionally protected de jure, but remains vulnerable de facto to political patronage and career dependency.

A similar pattern is observed within the compensation system. The implementation of Tunjangan Kinerja has strengthened performance-based remuneration and digital performance reporting. Nevertheless, the evaluation system remains largely oriented toward administrative compliance, emphasizing attendance records, digital reporting, and procedural completion rather than substantive improvements in organizational performance or public service outcomes. These findings collectively indicate that institutional reform has strengthened procedural accountability more rapidly than organizational behaviour.

Finding 3: Indonesia's Hybrid Position Within the Southeast Asian Civil Service Spectrum

The third finding concerns Indonesia's comparative institutional position among Southeast Asian administrative systems. The comparative analysis demonstrates that Indonesia cannot be fully categorized alongside either the highly meritocratic systems represented by Hong Kong and Macau or the politically vulnerable bureaucracies represented by Thailand and the Philippines. Instead, Indonesia occupies an intermediate position characterized by the coexistence of advanced procedural reforms and persistent institutional constraints.

At the recruitment stage, Indonesia displays institutional characteristics comparable to the merit-oriented systems of Hong Kong and Malaysia through transparent and competitive recruitment procedures. However, the neutrality and compensation stages exhibit patterns more closely resembling those observed in Thailand and the Philippines, where bureaucratic management remains influenced by political authority and organizational formalism. Consequently, Indonesia's civil service combines relatively advanced procedural modernization with organizational characteristics commonly associated with less mature administrative systems. This hybrid configuration distinguishes Indonesia from other Southeast Asian comparator countries and illustrates that institutional modernization does not necessarily occur uniformly across all dimensions of civil service management.

DISCUSSION

The principal contribution of this study lies in explaining why Indonesia's civil service reform has produced procedural modernization without equivalent strategic alignment across the civil service career cycle. Although the comparative analysis demonstrates substantial progress in merit-based recruitment through the implementation of the

Computer Assisted Test (CAT), similar improvements are not evident in bureaucratic neutrality and compensation. This finding reveals a fundamental paradox in Indonesia's bureaucratic reform. Conventional Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) assumes that improvements in one component of the career cycle will reinforce organizational effectiveness throughout the system. However, the Indonesian experience demonstrates that modernization at the recruitment stage does not automatically generate corresponding improvements in subsequent stages of career management. Rather than functioning as an integrated system, the three stages operate within different institutional environments that shape the effectiveness of reform instruments in distinct ways.

This finding extends Berman's (2011) SHRM framework by demonstrating that strategic alignment should not be understood merely as the integration of recruitment, neutrality, and compensation policies. The Indonesian case suggests that alignment is fundamentally institutionally contingent. Human resource policies may be internally coherent at the regulatory level while remaining fragmented during implementation because each stage of the career cycle is embedded within different organizational structures, authority relations, and governance arrangements. Consequently, strategic alignment depends not only on the quality of policy design but also on the compatibility between reform instruments and the institutional contexts governing their implementation. This perspective broadens SHRM beyond its managerial orientation by emphasizing that institutional conditions determine whether modern human resource policies can generate sustained organizational change.

Historical institutionalism provides an explanation for this institutional fragmentation. The findings indicate that colonial administrative legacies continue to influence Indonesia's bureaucracy not through the persistence of colonial regulations themselves but through enduring organizational routines, authority structures, and behavioural expectations. Recruitment reform has achieved relatively stronger institutional change because the CAT system operates through highly standardized national procedures that minimize discretionary intervention and political influence. By contrast, bureaucratic neutrality and compensation depend on continuous organizational interaction, managerial discretion, and decentralized personnel management, making them substantially more vulnerable to historically embedded administrative practices. Consequently, path dependency operates unevenly across the civil service career cycle. Institutional change occurs where standardized procedures reduce organizational discretion, whereas historically embedded governance arrangements remain dominant where implementation depends on everyday

bureaucratic interaction. This explains why modernization has progressed unevenly despite nationally uniform reform policies.

The comparative analysis further demonstrates that Indonesia represents neither a fully meritocratic bureaucracy nor a conventionally patronage-based administrative system. Instead, Indonesia occupies a hybrid institutional configuration within the Southeast Asian administrative landscape. Recruitment increasingly resembles the merit-oriented systems of Hong Kong through transparent and competitive entry mechanisms, while bureaucratic neutrality and compensation display institutional characteristics more comparable to Thailand and the Philippines, where political influence and administrative formalism continue to shape personnel management. This finding suggests that administrative modernization does not necessarily lead to institutional convergence. Countries may selectively modernize particular components of the civil service while simultaneously preserving historically rooted governance arrangements in other dimensions. The Indonesian experience therefore illustrates that institutional hybridization, rather than convergence, may constitute a more accurate description of bureaucratic reform trajectories in developing administrative systems.

The present findings are broadly consistent with previous studies while offering a more comprehensive institutional explanation. Rakhmawanto (2020) similarly reported that improvements in merit-based recruitment have not been accompanied by equally transparent competency-based career development, supporting the argument that recruitment reform alone cannot sustain organizational transformation. Likewise, studies by Sadikin et al. (2022), Pratama et al. (2023), Yulvia et al. (2024), and Hasibuan (2026) consistently demonstrate that bureaucratic neutrality remains vulnerable to political intervention under decentralized governance despite the formal implementation of merit-system regulations. In contrast, Hong Kong's stronger bureaucratic autonomy, as documented by Cheung (2005), reflects institutional arrangements that provide greater insulation from political intervention. The compensation findings also reinforce the observations of Karningsih and Wibowo (2024), who argue that Indonesian bureaucratic reform has strengthened procedural accountability more rapidly than organizational performance, while also aligning with Knox and Sharipova's (2023) conclusion that post-New Public Management reforms in many developing countries frequently generate formal compliance without equivalent improvements in public service outcomes. Rather than merely confirming these earlier studies, the present research integrates them within a single explanatory framework by demonstrating that these apparently separate

reform challenges are manifestations of the same institutional phenomenon: uneven strategic alignment across the civil service career cycle.

Taken together, these findings lead to a broader theoretical proposition. Strategic alignment is not merely a managerial achievement but an institutional achievement. The effectiveness of civil service reform depends less on the sophistication of individual human resource instruments than on the institutional environments within which those instruments operate. Modern recruitment systems, merit regulations, and performance-based compensation can substantially improve procedural quality; however, they cannot independently transform bureaucratic behaviour when organizational routines, authority structures, and governance incentives remain historically unchanged. The Indonesian case therefore demonstrates that the limitations of civil service reform arise not primarily from weaknesses in policy design but from incomplete institutional transformation. Administrative modernization without institutional transformation is consequently unlikely to produce coherent strategic alignment across the civil service career cycle.

These findings also carry important practical implications for public sector reform. Future reform initiatives should move beyond strengthening recruitment procedures, an area where Indonesia has already achieved considerable progress, and instead prioritize institutional reforms governing bureaucratic neutrality, merit-based career progression, and outcome-oriented performance management. Particular attention should be directed toward reducing discretionary political influence in personnel administration and redesigning performance evaluation systems to reward organizational outcomes rather than procedural compliance. Without addressing these institutional constraints, additional investments in administrative modernization are likely to generate diminishing returns because procedural innovations will continue to operate within organizational environments that inhibit their intended effects.

This study is not without limitations. The analysis relies primarily on secondary documentary evidence and therefore cannot capture variations in organizational behaviour across ministries, local governments, and administrative contexts within Indonesia. Furthermore, the qualitative comparative design identifies institutional mechanisms but does not estimate the causal influence of individual reform interventions. Future research should therefore employ mixed-methods approaches, comparative organizational case studies, or longitudinal analyses to examine how institutional change evolves across different

administrative settings and how recent governance reforms, including the dissolution of the Civil Service Commission (KASN), reshape the long-term trajectory of bureaucratic modernization in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Indonesia's civil service reform has produced procedural modernization without equivalent institutional transformation across the civil service career cycle. The comparative analysis shows that while merit-based recruitment has advanced considerably through the implementation of the Computer Assisted Test (CAT), similar progress has not been achieved in bureaucratic neutrality and performance-based compensation. Consequently, improvements at the recruitment stage have not generated corresponding gains in organizational professionalism or public service performance. These findings indicate that bureaucratic reform cannot be evaluated solely through the adoption of modern administrative instruments because their effectiveness remains conditioned by organizational practices and institutional environments that continue to shape bureaucratic behaviour.

The study contributes to the public administration literature by extending Strategic Human Resource Management beyond its conventional managerial perspective. Rather than viewing recruitment, neutrality, and compensation as inherently complementary components of an integrated human resource system, this study argues that strategic alignment is institutionally contingent. By integrating Strategic Human Resource Management with historical institutionalism, the study demonstrates that the effectiveness of human resource reforms depends not only on the design of policy instruments but also on the historical and organizational contexts governing their implementation. The Indonesian case further illustrates that administrative modernization may coexist with institutional continuity, producing asymmetrical strategic alignment in which procedural reforms advance more rapidly than organizational transformation.

From a policy perspective, strengthening merit-based recruitment alone is unlikely to produce a professional and high-performing civil service unless accompanied by broader institutional reforms throughout the career cycle. Greater priority should therefore be directed toward reinforcing bureaucratic neutrality through stronger merit-system oversight, reducing discretionary political influence in personnel management, and redesigning performance evaluation systems toward outcome-based indicators that emphasize service

quality rather than administrative compliance. More broadly, the findings suggest that sustainable bureaucratic reform requires a shift from a narrow focus on procedural modernization toward comprehensive institutional transformation, ensuring that modern human resource policies are supported by governance arrangements capable of translating reform into substantive improvements in public administration.

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