

Characteristics of Ancient China Secretary Vocation in Confucian Culture and Feudal Politics Background

Han Ruihui,

Humanities School, Jinan University, Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, China.

Abstract: *There is a classic confusion in the understanding of secretary vocation. From the renowned encyclopedias in China, the secretary is mainly about the clerks who process the documentations for leaders. However, it seems not true in some condition. Some researchers classifies the secretary vocation into civil secretary and affairs secretary. That solved the problem partly, but could not clear the confusion thoroughly. It is meaningful to understand this problem through analysis of ancient China secretary vocation. This research set out to analyze the characteristics of secretary vocation in feudal China. The principle findings of this research are that ancient China secretary vocation involved in the political conflicts from beginning to end. The secretaries were not the clerks who only processed the documentations. This situation has unique cultural and political background. The Confucian culture and reliance of emperors on secretary institutions are the main cause of secretary's involvement in political conflicts. This findings presented in this thesis can contribute a better understanding of secretary vocation in ancient China.*

Key words: *secretary; emperor; minister; Confucian thoughts; political conflicts*

I. Introduction

Secretary vocation has a pivotal role in modern society. The secretaries are active in governments, factories, companies and schools. With the development of China in recent years, the need of society for secretary is more urgent. However, the society has ambivalent attitudes towards secretary vocation. On the one hand, China society believes that the secretary is one of the rare professions that could result in the swift promotion, especially in government. On the other hand, society holds the opinion that secretary vocation belongs to service profession, so the secretary would not have a better future since such profession has less techniques.

The concepts of the secretary is also a primary concern for the secretary vocation research. That is especially important for the secretary education. The secretary education in high school has existed for many years. Commonly the secretary major is set in Chinese department, although some researchers believe that the secretary studies belongs to science of public administration and management.(Huang Ruoqian.2006) The courses in this major can be divided into Chinese language and literature, social science, law and social practice ordinarily. However, one confusion about the major is that direction of the secretary education. Most of the students would not choose the secretary as their vocation since the students in Chinese language and literature have the most diversified vocational choices. The professionalism is required more in the future, so does the secretary vocation. The educational direction for secretary major is the concern therefore.

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in the classification of secretary. Some researchers notice that the secretary in China can be divided into the civil secretary and affairs secretary. (Zhang Wenjie. 2012) The finding inspires us that the confusion about secretary vocation is caused by the blur classification of secretary vocation.

Culture is the leading cause for many problems. It is necessary to discuss the influence of China culture on the secretary vocation.

A considerable amount of literature has be published on China culture and secretary vocation. Yang Xiaoyan believed that the secretary's Confucian morality, the rules of the official circles and the pursuit for both of the power and ethics are caused by the traditional culture of China. (Yang Xiaoyan& Li Rongxing. 2014) China traditional culture has the influence on the phenomenon that the secretary beside the leader has the profound power. (Zhang Meiping. 2005) The secretary has intimate connection with the tea culture of China. The secretary would resort to tea for solve the pain of their emotion. (Xin Jianhua. 2009) From this article, it would find that the secretary is often in the complicated and high-pressure circumstance. Some researchers also find that the alcohol culture of China also has the intimate secretary group, because secretary has high pressure, so they would resort to the alcohol to escape the reality temporarily. (Dai Zhipeng.2010) Confucian culture influenced greatly on secretary vocation in that the secretary had the function of advising for the leader. The advising had two forms: the direct and indirect. Both of the forms were the embodiments of Confucian thoughts. (Sun Xuhui. 2012) The Confucian thoughts have both the positive and negative effects on the secretary vocation

in China. The positive effects are that Confucian thoughts teach the secretary should be loyal to their leader, keep moderate and be active in the administration, have more self-discipline. The negative effects are that the Confucian thoughts caused that the secretary have no ego and the consciousness of innovation, and resign to their mundane fate. (Huang Ruoqian. 2006)

There has been no detailed investigation of the relationship between classification of secretary vocation and China culture and history. Most studies about the relationship between secretary vocation and China culture have only focused on the influence of China culture on secretary specific daily work. To date, however, there has been almost no reliable discussion about the relationship between role of secretary and China culture. Nonetheless, the relationship between the role of secretary and China culture is the key to clear the confusion about the secretary function in contemporary China.

In this article, I argue that there is intimate relationship between the secretary role and China traditional culture and political situation. The aim of this study is to develop the a better understanding of the relationship between secretary role and China cultural and political situation. This study provides a new perspective to advance our knowledge of secretary science.

This article begins by analyzing current condition of secretary vocation in China. In the next part, it will describe the origin of secretary vocation and its development. It will then go on to traditional Confucian culture related with the secretary vocation. The following part will discuss the political conflicts that secretary vocation involved in among feudal times. The next part will address on the political background of secretary vocation in ancient China.

The current condition of the secretary vocation condition in China

There is different opinions about secretary vocation in China and other countries. Here the article will introduce the opinions about the secretary vocation in China first and then the opinions of the other countries.

The main opinion about secretary vocation is that the secretary is the assistant of the leader. This opinion is defined in *Ci Hai*. (Shu Xincheng&Ci Hai. 1979) *Civil Hai* is one most authoritative encyclopedia book in China, so the definition of secretary is authoritative and typical. The other typical definition of secretary is that the secretary is one kind of vocation in administrative government, institutional organization and company for the document process and assistance of the leader. (Mao Hande. 1982) It can be derived from the opinions that in China, the most popular opinion about secretary vocation is that the secretary is the assistant of leader.

The opinions about secretary vocation in other countries are different. For example, in the western countries, the secretary is deemed as the clerk in the office who can decide what to do in the right range without the supervision of the leader. (Chang Chongyi. 1992) The Japanese opinion of secretary is that the secretary is the clerk who help the leader to process the different affairs. (Chang Chongyi. 1992) The opinion in former Soviet Union believed that the secretary was the one who provided the information and routine help for the leader. (Chang Chongyi. 1992)

The difference between the opinions about secretary in China and other countries is that in China, the secretary is the one who plays important role beside the leader. Even he or she would influence the decision of the leader. The secretary is defined as the clerk who processes the document and assists the leader for the routine affairs in both *Ci Hai* and *Modern Chinese Dictionary*. Both the reference books are most authoritative in China. The implication of the definitions is that secretary would influence the decision of the leader. In other countries, such as in the west or Japan, the secretary plays the role of assisting the leader. However, they would not influence the decision of the leader so profoundly as the secretary in China.

Some researchers point out that secretary in China, especially the secretary in government, would have the power of the leader. The secretary would be easily be promoted in government, which is the open secret in China. Besides, secretary would share the power of the leader. (Cai Mao. 2011) The blur of the secretary identity which caused by special situation of secretary in government would result in the corruption. Some researchers find that this sort of corruption is rooted in the secretary vocation in China. (Li Xiaojun. & You Jia. 2008)

However, some other researchers believe that the secretary position in China government has some advantage which has Chinese features. The typical opinion of this sort perspective is that the secretary in China government can be easily examined and cultivated in the ranges of political ability, political loyalty and relationship capital. They have more advantages than the other officials have and that will benefit the efficiency of government. (Xun Lei. 2013)

Some researchers believe that the contradictory opinions about China government secretary are caused by the dim classification of secretary vocations in China. One article divided the secretary vocations in China government into the civil secretary and affairs secretary. The civil secretary is one who assist the leader to decide and administrate, and the affairs secretary is one who process the routine affairs and the routine service. (Zhang Wenjie. 2012) It seems that the civil secretary would get more chances of being promoted. Nonetheless,

the fact is that all the secretary would get more chances of being promoted because of their convenience to approach the leader. That the convenient approach to leader can cause the swift promotion is common in China. One typical example is that the county level cadre in China would not get promotion easily, for one reason is that they have almost no opportunities to approach the leader. (Kostka Genia & Yu Xiaofan, 2015)

In contemporary China, the governmental secretary vocation is totally different from that in many other countries. On the one hand, secretary can be promoted swiftly and that is one advantage of Chinese feature, but sometimes the secretary vocation easily result in corruption. With the typical definition of secretary in China, it can find that the secretary can be regarded as another sort of official. The corruption of governmental secretary is only one kind of official corruption, which is inevitable.

The origin of secretary vocation and its development in ancient China

In ancient China, secretary had different meanings. In Chinese language, the pronunciation is mishu. Mishu has the following meanings: 1) the books collected in palace; 2) the mystery books 3) the name of officials; 4) the name of governmental institution. In actual works, the matters mentioned above had rare relationship with the meanings of modern secretary. (Yang Jianyu. 1994)

China ancient secretary was derived from the function of tribal chief. In primitive society, tribal chief's work was comprehensive, which included the military activities, the sacrifice, information and administration of the tribe etc. when the tribal society was transformed into kingdom, the work of the tribal chief was also transformed. One of his work became executive and another part of his work became the secretary function. The transformation happened before 6,000 years ago. (Zhao Yuntian. 1997) From this point, some researchers believed that the secretary was not the official leader for that secretary only had the function of implementing decision of leader. (Zhao Yuntian.1997)

Numerous secretaries would not be recorded in history, so in this aspect, secretaries would not be obvious in ancient China. According to some researches about ancient secretary works in China. The secretaries in ancient China who were not accomplished would not be recorded. Those who were accomplished would be recorded in history, such as Pu Songling, who was renowned for his masterpiece *Liaozhaizhiyi*. (Yang Jianyu.1994)

However, the secretaries mentioned above were the secretaries who had no power. Many secretaries in ancient China became the powerful officials, such as Dianqian secretaries in Song dynasty, who got the trust of the emperor and became the powerful officials. So in this perspective, we would find that the secretaries in ancient China can be divided into two sorts: the secretaries who had no power and the secretaries who were powerful. The former were those who process the routine affairs. The later were those who got power and had some resources. These two sorts of secretaries composed the secretary groups in ancient China.

From this point, we would find that the secretary in ancient China is different from the function of secretary mentioned in modern times. According to the general functions of modern secretary, ancient China secretaries were those who process the routine affairs, but in ancient China, many secretaries had the official power.

Some senior secretaries in ancient China had official power in ancient China, beside the secretaries being promoted to the officials, such as Hanlin scholars in Tang and Song dynasties. What is more interesting is that some ancient secretary institutions would expand to the administrative organizations which had the decision-making power and executive power. They even threatened the royal power in this situation. When this happened, the emperors would constrict, weaken or dismiss the organizations, and set up a new and weak secretary institution which followed the order of him. (Yang Jianyu. 1994)

So it is convincing that ancient China secretary institutions were general powerful organizations as some researchers claimed, because the activities of the secretary belongs to the leader's activities in nature. Although the mission and power of secretary are totally different from those of the leader, their activities are in the same system. (Dong Xintai. 1994)

There is another reason for believing that the secretary institutions were the general powerful organizations. The secretary work in ancient China can be divided into four sorts: 1) recording the events and keeping the documents; 2) providing information for the leader and transferring the order of the leader to subordinates; 3) receipting the petitioners and transferring the information between the leader and petitioners; 4) processing the routine affairs in office. (Yang Jianyu. 1994) From this description, we would find that the position of secretary in government was significant important and he or she would had more opportunities to communicate with the leader. So in the process, the secretary would have more power than others.

That the secretary institutions were powerful in ancient China has another reason that those institutions would be involved in the power struggles and become the implements of the leader. In about 2,000 years of ancient feudal history of China, the conflict between emperor and Xiangquan was being continued. The general trend of the conflict result was that the power of emperor was strengthened and the power of the Xiangquan was weakened. In the process, the secretary institutions became the implement of the emperor because that the

secretaries were selected from the national competition examination, and most of them came from the ordinary families. So they did not represent the benefit pursuit of the local power, therefore they followed the order of the emperors more. The phenomenon was more obvious after Song dynasty, when the national competition examination was reinforced. So it can be said that secretary institutions got more power in the course. (Sun Weixia. 2006)

It can be concluded that the secretary in ancient China had more power than the general definition of secretary in modern times. The origin of secretary was from the power of tribal chief. In the development of feudalism society, the power of secretary got reinforced. The power was so huge that some secretary would act without the authorization of emperors. (Sun Weixia. 2006)

The political pursuit of secretary vocation and Confucian influence in ancient China

China traditional culture is influenced by Confucian thoughts significantly. The Confucian school emphasized loyalty to emperors and the etiquettes, so Confucian school were welcomed by emperors in ancient China. The Confucian thoughts permeated in every corner of China when national competition examination for official career. The emperors elected the talents for their service in the examination. In the feudal society, the emperors made every efforts to keep their power above all. The secretary institutions became the extension of emperors' power. In order to have the loyalty of the secretary institutions, emperors would select the talents with low status as the secretaries. Such secretaries would keep more loyalty to emperors because of their low status. (Chen Xiaoka. 2000)

Therefore, the national competition examination was extremely important for the emperors. Confucian thoughts occupied the main content of the examination. So the Confucian thoughts were inherited and spread by ancient China intellectuals.

The pursuit for official career is one distinctive feature of Confucian thoughts. The pursuit influence the secretary modes in ancient China. Most of the officials were selected in the national competition examination after Tang dynasty, with the examinees' intention to be officials. The Confucian well-known saying "cultivate one's morality and rule of the world" embodies the pursuit.

The Confucian responsibility for the politics also influenced the secretary modes. The esteemed deeds and characters in ancient Confucian school were spread and inherited in later intellectual groups, which composed the main part of the examinees of the national competition examination. Much of Confucian morality is about the political responsibility. So the secretaries selected from the national examination would have the political pursuit.

The benevolence is another morality of Confucian pursuit. It requires the secretaries should be modest, tolerant, honest and active, beneficial to others. (Zhang Hong. 2005)The secretaries in ancient China would followed the rules more or less. Even in modern secretary work, the benevolence morality is also valued.

So it would find that the secretary vocation in ancient China had distinctive feature of political pursuit and the Confucian morality. That is especially true after Tang dynasty, because most of the secretaries were selected by the national competition examination, which was influenced extremely by Confucian thoughts.

Political conflicts and secretary vocation

Secretary vocation involved in political conflicts inevitably, since they had the political pursuit.

The political pursuit was embodied in the royal control over the subordinates firstly. Since Qin dynasty, the political conflicts between emperors and the ministers began. On one hand, the emperors relied on the ministers, on the other hand, the emperors feared that the ministers would have more power than them. So the emperors would weaken the power of the ministers. The secretary institution was one important tool of the emperors in the process. The secretary institutions in central government had irregular forms, because the central secretary institutions and selecting of secretaries were decided by the emperors themselves according to the need of the political conflicts. Even the emperors would avoid the ministers knowing their intention to setup of abolishing the secretary institutions in order to have the smooth control over them. (Chen Xiaoka. 2000) The power of secretary institutions expanded in the process. The secretary institution was the aid of the emperors in the beginning. Their work was mainly about the document process, however, the power of secretary institutions expanded because they had more intimate relationship with the emperors than other ministers and understood the emperors more easily. So the emperors gave them more work to do, therefore their power expanded. (Shen Yue. 2014)

The secretary institutions were also the threat to the emperors sometimes in China history. Shang Shu Tai, a secretary institution in East Han Dynasty, was a secretary institution, which processed the document, in the beginning. However, Shang Shu Tai became the powerful institution because of the distrust of the emperor on the ministers. The emperor wanted to control all the important political events, so he did not entitle the ministers to solve all the important political events. Thus the secretary institution, Shang Shu Tai, became the efficient institution for him to control the situation. Gradually Shang Shu Tai became the powerful institution

because of the trust of the emperor. Later Shang Shu Tai became the central powerful institution formally. Another example is that the famous politician Cao Cao set up Mi Shu Ling, a secretary institution, to control the emperor. (Zhao Qi, 1988)

The combination of secretary institution and other minister would be more huge threat to the emperor. So the emperor should be treat the matter scrupulously, for example, the Capital Privy Council had only 36 secretaries to deal with the relevant matters about military. The secretaries were selected from the subordinate officials by the military minister for the emperor. The emperor decided to employed them or not. It was ruled that the secretaries who had followed the ministers above third rank should quilt Capital Privy Council. Even the ministers who they followed were promoted above the third rank should also quilt the institution. (Li Zhangcheng, 2008) It is convincing that the rule indicate the emperor's worries. If the secretaries collude with the minister above third rank, the emperor would be threatened.

The transgression happened intermittently in ancient feudal China because of the expansion of secretary institution. In west Han dynasty, the emperor weakened the ministers' power through strengthening the status of Shang Shu Tai, a secretary institution close to emperor. While in East Han, Shang Shu Tai became the institution above the ministers. Some of the emperors in East Han indulged in sexual life and had little time to communicate with the ministers, or some of the emperors were immature when they ascended the throne, so the secretary institution had the chance to manipulate the political events. The malignant expansion of secretary institution power in Han dynasty was the tumor of political system. (Huang Zeyuan & Lv Wenying, 1997) Another example was in Ming dynasty. In Ming dynasty, the emperors wanted to hold all the power, therefore he dealt with almost all the important events. Hence the emperors felt tired. Thus the emperors began to organize the ministers to deal with the events. However, the ministers' power incurred the vigilance of the emperors. The secretary institution power expanded with the emperors' intention therefore. Many emperors in Ming dynasty were lazy in dealing with politics, so the secretary institution had more chance for transgression and caused many political turbulence thereafter.

So it can conclude that the secretary in feudal China was relevant to the political events. The secretary did not only deal with the documentations superficially. The reliance of emperors on secretary institution caused the power expansion of it, therefore the secretary institution had intimate relationship with political conflicts in feudal history of China.

The political background of secretary institution's power

The political background resulted in the secretary institution's power in ancient China. Different from some other countries, feudal China was a extremely hierarchical empire with the emperor on the top of the hierarchical power pyramid. Another unique feature of China political background is that its administration relied on system of civil servants.

The hierarchical power pyramid made the emperors have the supreme power, but on the other hand, the emperors must rely on the ministers to handle the situation. However, the emperors' reliance caused the power of ministers expand. So the emperors began to rely on the secretary institution to balance the power and control the situation. However, in the process, the power of secretary institution expanded even sometimes transgress the boundary.

The civil servant system is another factor caused the power expansion of secretary institution. The civil servant status was inherited in pre-Qin dynasty period. In the period between Qin and Wei Jin dynasty, the civil servants status was got through recommendation. After Sui dynasty, the civil servant status was got by the national competition examination. The former two forms of civil servant status could be handled by the local powers, so those would be unfair sometimes. Through national competition examination, the talents from ordinary families could be selected to the official circle. The emperors needed the talents come from ordinary families in that such talents had no intimate connection with the powerful ministers groups, who formed the threat to the emperors. Some of the talents came to the secretary institution being intimate with the emperors. Their reliance on emperors made them above law, then their power expanded.

The civil servant process numerous documentations of the empire, so in the process, they had the opportunities to interfere with the politics. To administrate the vast land of the empire needs numerous documentations for the emperors to get the information and send out the orders. The position of secretary institutions enabled them had more opportunities to handle the situation, especially in the condition that the emperors were stupid or immature.

The criterion of morality about national political system is the nutrition for unscrupulous power expansion of secretary institutions. In feudal China, the morality was the criterion above all. However, the beneath the so-called morality, the benefit or lose actually mattered. (Huang Congchao, 2010) So many functions of officials could be above the law, then the unstability of secretary institution function would happen.

II. Conclusion

This article set out to analyze the characters of secretary vocation's characters. The research has shown that the ancient China secretary vocation is influenced by the unique cultural and political background, although the secretary's routine is mainly about process the documentations. The origin of China secretary vocation is the branch of the ancient tribal chief's duties. However, because of the complicate political situation, especially the conflicts between the emperors and ministers, the secretary institutions would be involved in the political conflicts. This situation resulted in the expansion of secretary institution's power. Sometimes the expanded power would threaten the normal political orders, especially in the condition the emperors were immature or stupid. In the cultural perspective, the secretary's intention of interference with politics is rooted in the Confucian thoughts, which is the main content of national competition examination for official career. Through the examination, the examinees could get the official position. The secretaries after Sui dynasty were mainly selected through the examination. So they would have the instinctive intention to interfere with politics. The emphasis of Confucian school on morality more than legality made the secretaries follow the ethic rule superficially at least. However, the benefit decided the their action in nature. So the corruption and unbalance of secretary institutions happened in China history intermittently without enough emphasis on legality. The end of conflicts between secretary institutions and ministers is that the emperors weakened the ministers' right gradually and relied on the secretary institutions more. Even in Qing dynasty, the last dynasty, the emperors controlled the political situation thoroughly through an effective secretary institution. This research has provided a deep insight into the secretary phenomenon in ancient China. The main strength of this research is that it analyze the characteristics of ancient China in the perspective of unique cultural and political background. Through this analysis, it would find that the secretary in ancient China is not only the groups processed the documentations, but also the ones involved with the political conflicts from beginning to end.

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