The Cause of the Secretary Corruption in the Perspectives of Guanxi and Hidden Rules

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Abstract: In recent violent anti-corruption measures of China government, the secretary corruption draws much attention. Compared to the high rank official corruption, the secretary corruption is hidden and unnoticeable. Many researchers suggest that the improvement of the morality of the secretary would curbed the secretary corruption. However, the key to curb such corruption seems not to lie in the improvement of morality, as the main cause of the corruption is not of morality. The paper set out to analyze the cause of the secretary corruption, in the perspectives of guanxi and qian guize, which provides the secretary with the informal power. Such informal power is invisible superficially, but it is effective in most of the cases. Results showed that the special guanxi between the secretary and official he or she serves provides the secretary with the informal power. With the informal power, the secretary’s rent-seeking activities cause the corruption. To curb such corruption, the erase of the secretary and official is important. In recent years, the violent anti-corruption measures of China government have curbed the corruption of both secretary and the corresponding official effectively.

Key words: secretary corruption; guanxi; qian guize; rent-seeking; informal power

INTRODUCTION

The corruption of secretary is serious in China according the reports in the press. When the corrupted officials are convicted, secretaries work beside the officials would also be convicted, because that the secretaries are collusive with their leaders in most of the cases (Sohu, 2014). In many reports of the press, secretary corruption is eye-catching and popular.

It would be noticed that the secretary positions in China is ubiquitous (Li W, Pye I.W, 1992). There would be secretary, which in Chinese is called as mishu, in all kinds of units, such as governments, factories, institutions, schools, organizations and companies. The corruption of secretary happened mainly in government secretary groups.

As for the secretary corruption, many researchers gave the different reasons and counter-measures. Shen Heqing (2008) noticed that “the secretary corruption is a kind of special phenomenon that is stired up by the leadership, and impels the leadership corruption” (Shen H Q. 2008). Some researchers such as Lv Jinru(2001) believed that “the main causes of secretary corruption are the mon professionalism system and the corruptible mechanism of professional culture” (Jin-Ru L. V. 2001), so the realization of secretary professionalism is the fundamental way to restrain secretary corruption. Yang Shuolin (2001) also advocated the professionalism to prevent the secretary corruption (Yang S L. 2001), Jiang Li (2011), from the perspective of ethics, pointed out that the secretary corruption reflected the ethics predication which is caused by diverse reasons (Li J. 2011), so he believed that the secretary corruption can be restrained by the improvement of secretary’s morality. There is also some researchers, such as Feng Shizheng (2003) believed that the secretary corruption is a kind of rent-seeking with public power (gonggong quanli xunzu) (Feng Shizheng. 2003).

Although secretary corruption has been a key problem in the government corruption of China, previous research often provided the explanation in the perspective of the secretary, but not the relationship between the secretary and leader.

It must be noted that secretary corruption happened with the combination with the leader. So, in this sense, understanding the guanxi (connection) between secretary and leader is the premise to interpret the phenomenon of secretary corruption. In many cases, the responsibility and accountability of secretary and the leader are blurred, and the secretary is constantly acting with the authority of their bosses (Li W, Pye I.W. 1992).

This paper argues that the guanxi (connection) between the secretary and leader is the critical factors that causes the
corruption of secretary. The overall structure of the papers takes the forms of five sections. Section one analyzes the selection of secretary; section two deals with the guanxi between the secretary and leader in daily life and routine works; section three addresses the guanxi between secretary and leader in the perspective of Qian guize(hidden rules); In the next section, the paper discusses the informal power of secretary, on the basis of the contents of the previous sections; section five discusses the problem of secretary conduct with the authority of the leader in the perspective of rent-seeking of public power and the forming of secretary corruption. Throughout the paper, the term guanxi (connection) means a special connection between the secretary and leader, which is like the gift exchange between the leader and secretary. With guanxi, they benefit and support each other, mostly in personal and private matters. The term Qian guize(hidden rules) refers to the rules that beyond the laws, stipulations and regulations which are formal. Those rules are recognized widely, and are acquiesced in and abided by the most of people in the respective spheres (Wu Si. 2001: 201-202). Secretary in Chinese is called mishu. In this paper, the term mishu mainly refers to the secretary in government. In other words, mishu and secretary are only the different name of the same position in government.

One of the valuable materials of the research comes from Canmou zhushou lun: wei shouzhang fuwu de yishu (Adviser and Assistant: the Art of Serving the Leader), which was compiled by Wang Huaizhi and Guo Zheng. The book has once been the teaching materials in Xi'an Politics Institution of Liberation Army, but soon was stopped in classroom, because the supervisor of the school believed that the teaching material was unsuitable in classroom (Zhu Xiaojia. 2011). Compared to other teaching materials, this book reflects the reality of secretary’s works honestly. The other common teaching materials are mostly of the similar content and introduce the secretary history, secretary works and secretary management superficially (e.g. Ding Boquan, Zhang Jianqin, 1995; Yue Kaihu, 2001). Therefore, even some researchers propose that the secretary science course should be cancelled, because the content of the teaching materials is too simple to be studied by the students. That is, the content of the teaching materials is not as theoretical as it claims, on the other hand, the content is not instructive for the students to practice, in that it cannot detail the reality of the secretary works and daily life.

The theories applied in the paper include the rent-seeking with public power theory and the theory of Qian guize (hidden rules). Rent-seeking theory describes the personal unlawful incomes from the privilege that is caused by the governmental interference with and administration on the enterprise and individual’s economic activities, which hampers the function of market competition. Hidden rule has been studied by many researchers, in this paper, I will apply the research results of the previous studies to analyze the secretary corruption in contemporary China.

THE SELECTION OF SECRETARY

According to the stipulations of government, secretary works for the leader should be born in a good class (chengfen hao), have a clear political history, the pure social relationship, the reliability in politics, decent behavior, healthy body, and some working experience, qualities of politics and knowledge, besides, he or she should be the member of Communist Party of China (Zhonggong Zhongyang Bangongting, 1980). However, the selection of secretary is decided by the leaders critically (Sohu. 2014), that is, the leader can decide his or her own secretary generally. The selection of the secretary by the leader means that the secretary would be the decided arbitrarily. On the other hand, the selected secretary would have special relationship with the leader. From the selection pressure of secretary, we would find that the secretary would keep the intimate and special relationship with the leader from the first beginning.

Of course, the ability and the quality of the secretary is the basis for the selection. However, the decision of the leader is critical to the selection. So the special relationship between the secretary and leader is established from beginning.

There would be many criteria to select the secretary, for instance, the knowledge, professional ability, practical ability and age, political qualification, morality are all required. However, one criterion, the ability to write documentation, is important to the selection. Many speeches are written by the secretaries, so the writing ability is serious important for secretary’s work. Although the stipulations of CCP rules that the speech should not be written completely by the secretary, in actual works, the secretary would write many speeches for the leader(Sohu.2014). For instance, one secretary had
written the documentations for more than 20 years, he could not find any documentation with his own signature when such documentations were needed for his promotion. One wonderful speech was written by him, but the audience of the meeting believed that the leader, who read the speech, wrote the documentation. And believed that the secretaries beside the leader were of no use (Wang Huaizhi, Guo Zheng. 2012: 4).

Besides the requirements mentioned above, the secretary should be loyal to the leader. One criterion to select mentioned in Wei shouzhang fuwu de yishu (Adviser and Assistant: the Art of Serving the Leader) is that the secretary should be so reliable that the leader can trust him or her with the transferring of the confidential messages, no matter private or official, to him or her (Wang Huaizhi, Guo Zheng. 2012: 4). Another criterion of selection of secretary is that the secretary should be competent in the investigation and produce the investigation report with analysis, suggestion and factual information (Wang Huaizhi, Guo Zheng. 2012: 16).

From this point, we would find that the reliance of the leader on the secretary. The work of the secretary is critical to the efficiency of the leader, besides, more important is that the secretary should be reliable, no matter in the private or official matters.

GUANXI BETWEEN THE SECRETARY AND THE LEADER IN PRIVATE AND OFFICIAL MATTERS

From the perspective of the relationship between the secretary and leader, the book Adviser and Assistant: the Art of Serving the Leader describes the guanxi between secretary and leader.

Obviously, it would find that the book Adviser and Assistant: the Art of Serving the Leader discusses how to maintain the good guanxi between the secretary and leader. It also should be noticed that, the book does not teaches the readers to attain such good maintenance of the guanxi through the unlawful measures. However, the book details the complicated guanxi in the daily life and routine works.

In this book, the guanxi between the secretary and leader can be divided into the guanxi in daily life and guanxi in routine works. In daily life, the secretary should cope with the relationship among the leaders, the relationship between the secretary and family numbers of the leader, and the relationship between the secretary and leader.

In daily life, the secretary should keep good relationship with the leader, for example, the book suggests that, when the secretary plays game with the leader, the secretary should not always defeat the leader. On the contrary, even the secretary would be more competent in the game according to his or her ability, he or she should pretend to be incompetent in the game and let the leader win the game at least for one time. In such condition, the leader would not lose his or her mianzi (face), and be pleased. If the secretary always defeat the leader in the game, the leader would lose his or her face and be unpleasant. In addition, the book also suggests that, in the game, the secretary should prepare the game facility, company with the leader, maintain the good mood of the leader and care about the emotions of the leader for the win or lose the game (Wang Huaizhi, Guo Zheng. 2012: 16). In the routine works, the secretary should adapt to the leaders with different dispositions. In the suggestions, the book lists five kinds of leaders with different dispositions: the confident leaders, the bold leaders, the democratic leaders, the leaders who judge the persons with stereotypes and the leaders with changing disposition, and it also suggests the measures the secretary should take for the such five kinds of leaders respectively (Wang Huaizhi, Guo Zheng. 2012: 113-121).

From the description of the guanxi between the leader and secretary, we would find that there are many works the secretary should do to cope with the relationship between him or her and the leader except the works stipulated in the official rules. Most of such works are informal and unofficial.

GUANXI AND THE HIDDEN RULES

Such informal and unofficial works are not stipulated in the official rules, so those are outside of the official stipulations, that is, such informal and unofficial works belonged to the domain of hidden rules.

The hidden rules play important role in the guanxi between the secretary and leader. Keeping good relationship with the leader is important for the promotion and other benefits of the secretary. For example, the secretary should aware of the dignity of the leader all the time, although there would be no stipulations about that in official rules. The secretary should not flap the shoulder of the leader, no matter what official grade of the leader of. If the secretary flaps the leader’s shoulder, the leader would feel indignant and lose
face. “The secretary should maintain the dignity of the leader whenever and wherever. That is not only the need of the leader, but also the need of the secretary. The leader would not think that the secretary is incapable because of the secretary’s generosity and the acceptance for the responsibility. On the contrary, the leader would trust you and promote you, so that you will have the more functions.” (Wang Huaizhi, Guo Zheng. 2012: 62). There would be no stipulations in the official stipulations that rule the secretary should not flap the shoulder of the leader, however, in practical works, the secretary should not flap the shoulder of the leader, or he or she would infringe the leader’s dignity. Consequently, the secretary would lose the opportunity to be promoted or other benefits. Besides the guanxi between the secretary and the leader, the guanxi between the family numbers of the leader and the secretary should also be well maintained by the secretary. If the secretary keeps good guanxi with the family numbers, he or she would solve the problems more easily. For example, when the problems cannot be solved by the communication with the leader, the secretary can solicit help from the family numbers of the leader, especially the wife of the leader. When this happens, the secretary can solve the problems (Wang Huaiizhi, Guo Zheng. 2012: 270-271). That is, the secretary can solve the problem through soliciting help from the family numbers of the leader, but not from the leader directly.

It is easy to understand that the leader, as the immediate boss of the secretary, has the critical notion to decide the promotion and other benefits of the secretary. So the secretary should cope with the guanxi between the leader and secretary meticulously. Nevertheless, the guanxi should be maintained mainly by the chores outside of the official works. In other words, the secretary should notice the hidden rules and follow the rules to maintain such guanxi.

Informality is the most important feature of such guanxi between secretary and leader. There is no specific stipulation about the guanxi between the secretary and leader officially. In most cases, such informal chores are for the maintenance of the good guanxi between the secretary and leader.

In Adviser and Assistant: the Art of Serving the Leader, Wang Huaiizhi and Guo Zheng list many informal works the secretary should do in daily life and routine works, most of which are out of the works stipulated in the official rules. However, such informal works almost decide the promotion and other benefits of the secretary. Admittedly, the works that stipulated in the official rules are also important to the promotion of the secretary. But such informal works are more important than the formal works in most of the time, because the formal works of the secretary would not be difficult and most of the secretary are competent to accomplish those, therefore the informal works would be critical to the secretary.

The formal works that ruled in official stipulations are well known by people, however, the informal works which belongs to the domain of hidden rules are obscure for many people. In other words, the hidden rules are hidden from the scope of population. Besides the feature of obscurity, the hidden rules also have the character of illegality, seeking for the private benefit, universality and binding (Chen Hongyan. 2012). We would find that the guanxi between the secretary and leader also has such features, since such guanxi belonged to the domain of hidden rules. As such hidden rules are outside of the official stipulations, those are also illegal. For instance, that the promotion or not are decided by the maintenance of the leader and that the decision-making is decided by the family number of the leader are all illegal. Following the hidden rules, what the secretary does is for seeking the private benefit. However, such guanxi between the secretary and leader are so popular or universal even that few people would deny it instinctively. However, such guanxi of hidden rules are binding for both the secretary and leader. In the guanxi between the secretary and leader, the hidden rules are followed by the secretary and leader tacitly. Once one of them breaks such rules, both of the benefits would be damaged.

Wu Si, a scholar who put forward with the concept of hidden rule in 2000, believes that the hidden rules are binding to the ones who follow the hidden rules, so stability would be achieved, and on the other hand, the hidden rules can reduce the conflicts among the participants, as the participants act spontaneously according to their benefit and lose (Wu Si. 2001: 56-59). So in the guanxi between the secretary and leader, following the hidden rules is one efficient way to maintain the benefit of both the leader and secretary.

THE INFORMAL POWER OF SECRETARY

Superficially, secretary has no power to interfere with the political activities, however, secretary would have great
power to decide many promotion of many officials. For instance, Li Zhen, the secretary of a high rank official, could decide the promotion of many officials with only one telephone call or one brief note (Beifang Xinbao. 2014). The power of the secretary to decide the promotion of the officials would come from the guanxi of him or her with the leader. However, such power is not stipulated in the official documents, so such power is informal.

Generally speaking, the secretary units do not belong to the categories of leading or function organizations. On the contrary, the secretary units are only the assisting organization, so secretary units do not have the political power. Zhou Qinghao (2006) believed that the power of secretary comes from the following origins. First, the secretary shares the leader’s power through involving in the policy-making with the leader; second, the secretary is entitled by the leader to handle some political matters, that is, the secretary represents the leader to cope with many political matters; third, the secretary get political power through the intimate relationship with the leader, or in some cases, both the leader and secretary would be corrupted and conspire with each other in the corruption (Zhu Qinghao. 2006). Nevertheless, the secretary’s informal power would mainly come from the guanxi of him or her with the leader, because, as a matter of fact, the secretary would not have the power without the entitling and approval of the leader. Anyway, as the immediate leader of the secretary, the leader would decide the promotion and other benefits of the secretary, so the leader has great control for the secretary. So analyzing the informal power of the secretary, one should discuss the problem on the basis of the analysis of guanxi between the secretary and the leader.

From the analysis of guanxi between the sectary and the leader in above section, we could find that the guanxi between the secretary and leader permeates in both the routine works and daily life. In addition, the guanxi belongs to the domain of the hidden rules, that is, such guanxi is not stipulated legally in the official rules. Although such guanxi seems illegal, but such guanxi between the secretary and the leader would reduce the detrimental effects of the relationship between the secretary and leader greatly. In other words, such guanxi between the secretary and the leader benefits both the leader and secretary. So, consequently, such guanxi has the corresponding market in the official circle.

The informal power mainly derived from such guanxi. Since such guanxi has market in the official circle, the share of the power between the secretary and leader would be possible. Just like the hidden rules, the informal power exists in the form of hiding. Kou Zhengwen (2012) believed that the informal power of the corrupted secretary has the following features: first, the secretary would try to share the power through any possible ways, such as maintain good relationship with the leader through doing extra works for the leader and the family numbers of the leader; claiming himself or herself as the trusted fellow of the leader, cheating the leader, or even threatening the leader through the collection of the detrimental information of the leader; second, as the hidden power, such informal power tries to seek the power, the authority, the economic profit or the higher official position (Kou Zhengwen. 2012). Consequently, some secretary would corrupt in the process.

Additionally, such informal power of secretary would not be easily erased. Some researchers suggested that, in order to constrain the informal power of the secretary, the leader should be integral and exemplify himself or herself as the model for his or her secretary, and on the other hand, the leader should control and supervise his or her secretary (Kou Zhengwen. 2012). There are also some researchers suggested that the secretary vocation should be more professionalism, therefore the corruption would be constrained to some extent (Cai Mao. 2011). However, one should notice that the intimate relationship between the secretary and leader is inevitable because of the routine works of secretary (Wang Huaizhi, Guo Zheng. 2012: 9-11), and even the family number of leader would keep in frequent touch with the secretary (Wang Huaizhi, Guo Zheng.2012: 278-285). So in routine works and daily life, the private affection between the secretary and the leader would arise and, as a result, the secretary would have the critical influence on the decision of the leader in the political activities, and on the other hand, the secretary would share other power with the leader. Besides, most of the secretaries in government would be promoted in future. As in this situation, the secretary position is regarded as the cradle of the higher rank official. Many officials would have the experience as the secretary, as a matter of fact, the secretary position is acquiesced by the government to cultivate the higher rank officials (Xun Lei.2013.). Eventually, the secretary would be more be entitled with
some power to some extent, because he or she would be deemed as the future officials and the authorities would be gained by him or her in the process.

So there are some contradictory attitudes toward the secretary position. On one hand, the secretary is the regarded as a position without political power, however, on the other hand, the secretary have critical political power derives from his or her guanxi with leader. Besides, the secretary position is endowed with some political authorities because of the future promotion.

The informal power of the secretary mainly comes from the guanxi between the secretary and leader, so, to erase such illegal power of secretary, such guanxi belonged to the domain of hidden rules should be regulated in the first place.

RENT-SEEKING AND THE CORRUPTION OF SECRETARY

In above section, the paper argued that the power of the secretary to corrupt, which is mainly the informal power, is derived from the guanxi between the secretary and the leader. The corrupted secretary is mainly to seek the illegal benefit. So it is interesting to ask about how the informal power brings the benefit for the corrupted secretary.

In the perspective of political sociology, the secretary corruption is a kind of rent-seeking activity (Feng Shizheng. 2003). Social individual will try to gain the profits as much as possible according to his or her ability, among which process, the individual has two sorts of possible means: profit-seeking and rent-seeking (He Wei. Xunzu Jingjixue. 1993). The profit-seeking activity is to gain the income through the labor, which can create the wealth for the society, however, the rent-seeking activity is to gain the income through the renting of privilege, which cannot create the wealth for society.

The secretary would gain the benefit from his or her privilege, so he or she would find the clients of his or her rent-seeking. The secretary has profuse power from the guanxi with the leader. Commonly, such power cannot be used for the benefit of the secretary, because the secretary has no right to use the power legally. However, since social individual will pursuit for the benefit as much as possible according to his or her capability. So the secretary would make use of such guanxi and the corresponding informal power. In the theory of social guanxi net, the guanxi has two functions: the instrumental function and the capital function(Zhang Lu. 2014). The secretary can use the power to seek the benefit for himself or herself. In the process, the wealth cannot be created for society. On the contrary, such activity can only does harm to society.

However, such rent-seeking activity would be unnoticeable in many cases. For one thing, the secretary’s vocation requires the secretary should downplay in politics, as the secretary is only in the service for the leader, so there would be few people notice the significant power of the secretary. For another, generally, the secretary position has no any political power in the stipulations of the government. Compared to the leader, the secretary is seemed as the one who only does the assistant works. Nevertheless, the secretary has great informal power derived from the guanxi with the leader, besides, the secretary would also gain much other informal power from the resources, which the secretary position, as a pivot of many governmental works, provided.

The corrupted official’s rent-seeking activity would apparent, for the obvious official position in society and public media. Compared to the activities of corrupted official, the corrupted secretary’s activities would have the same adverse effect to the society, but in most of the cases, such corrupted activities are concealed better that those of the corrupted official. The rent-seeking activities refers to the secretary make use of privileged guanxi with the leader to gain the amount of information and power, and to interfere with the market, which results in the new economic rent (Zhang Lu. 2014).

Some researchers argued that the avoidance of the secretary can be achieved by the promotion of the secretary’s morality (e.g. Xing Jiyang. 2015; Jiang Li. 2011). There are some other researches suggested that making and enforcing the more strict regulations on the secretary is one way to curb the secretary corruption (Lv Jinru. 2001). However, without the erase of the informal power, the special guanxi and the rent-seeking activities, the corruption would not be curbed easily.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to analyze the cause of the secretary corruption in China government, in the perspectives of qian guize(hidden rules) and guanxi (connection). The research has shown that the corruption has rarely to do with the morality of the secretary. The corruption is mainly caused by
the special guanxi between the official and his or her secretary. Such special guanxi provides the secretary with informal power. In such condition, the secretary would make use of the special guanxi regulated by hidden rules, through the rent-seeking activities, to gain the private profit. The improvement of the secretary morality singularly would not be effective to curb the corruption, because the corruption of secretary is mainly caused by the informal power resulted from the special guanxi with the official he or she serves. So, to erase the secretary corruption, one effective way is to deconstruct the special guanxi. Nevertheless, the guanxi is a traditional social and cultural institution, that is, the guanxi cannot be erased easily. Additionally, the qian guize is also a kind of rules that has the in-depth root in Chinese culture. In other words, the individual of society would obey the qian guize and the rules of guanxi unconsciously or consciously, so almost no one would like to infringe the tradition, as the infringement would cause the damage and unpredictable instability. This research extended the knowledge about the causes of secretary corruption. In recent years, China government reinforced the execution of rigid anti-corruption law, with numerous officials in different levels punished. The corruption of both the secretary and official is curbed effectively.

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