

Research Article

Research on Confusion of *Mishu* Conception in China*Ruihui Han*

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

Abstract: Recently, there has been increasing interest on the secretary conception in secretarial teaching. It also can be found that the literal secretary conception is in conflict with the secretary practice in real work. Such confusion of secretary conception influence both secretarial science teaching classroom and the academic researches about secretary profession. However, the confusion of secretary conception have yet to be addressed on. The aim of this study was to investigate the cause of the confusion of secretary conception. The study showed that the conflict between the western knowledge, which was introduced to China eagerly in recent years, and the traditional secretary practice, which still exists firmly in China, is the main cause of the confusion of secretary conception. The economic foundation and form is also another cause for this confusion. These findings can contribute to a better understanding of China secretary.

Keywords: secretary definition; western knowledge; China secretary; mishu; economic foundation.

Introduction

In the teaching of secretarial science, confusion arises in classroom in China. The confusion is because of the teaching content: lots of the students and teachers think the teaching content is too simple to be learned. The teaching content generally consists of Introduction to secretarial science, the history of secretary vocation in China and western countries, the routine works of secretary, including the document process, meeting arrangement, complaint letters process and so on, taking Liu Mengyu's *Xiandai mishuxue* as the example (Liu Mengyu, 1988.). In the anticorruption movement in recent years in China, some researchers argued that the corrupted secretary in government violated their position to hold the undeserved power to corrupt (Zhu Qinghao, 2006). The secretary controls the public power and takes part in the policy-decision, so the corruption became possible (Zhu Qinghao, 2006).

Such above opinions are based on the notion that the secretary vocation is mainly confined in the office routines, such as document process, telephone and telegraph process, clearing the office and arranging the meeting for the leaders and others. In the routines of the secretary, he or she should not take part in the power. The definition of secretary is also blurred in both China and England dictionaries. In China, the secretary is called *mishu*. In China, the *Xiandai hanyu cidian* and *hanyu cihai* are two authoritative dictionaries in China. Here we can find the authoritative definitions in such two dictionaries. In *Xiandai hanyu cidian*, *mishu* is defined as following: 1. The one who handles the documents and assists the section's leader to process the routines; 2. The secretarial position (Xiandai hanyu cidian, 1978). However, in *Hanyu cihai*, the definition are follows: 1. The one who handles the documents and assists the leader to process routine works; 2. The official title in the government, especially the

governments in ancient China; 3. The collect books in court; 4. The superstitious books; 5. The official whose title between councilor and retinue (Hanyu Cihai, 1999). In England dictionary Oxford Dictionary, the secretary is defined as following: "A person employed by an individual or in an office to assist with correspondence, make appointments, and carry out administrative tasks." To be concrete, such definition can be divided into three sub-meanings: 1. "An official of a society or other organization who conducts its correspondence and keeps its records.", 2. "The principal assistant of a UK government minister or ambassador."; 3. "An official in charge of a US government department." (Oxford, 2010). It can be found that *mishu*, or secretary, has the blurred definitions in both China and England at least, with the blurred territory between processing the documents or other office routines and assisting the leaders for administration. In all the dictionaries mentioned above, the secretary, or *mishu*, is deemed as the one who involves in both the office routines and administration works, which can be thought as taking part in the decision making.

That is, the secretary shares some administrative power. What is more interesting is that the sub-meanings of definition of "secretary" in Oxford Dictionary are all about the powerful officials: an official or the principal assistant. In China *Cihai*, *mishu* is defined as the assistant beside the leader, the official title and book. In China *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian*, *mishu* is defined as the leader's assistant for routines and a kind of vocation. The definition in *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* is in conflict with another two dictionaries' definitions in that it does not contain in the official title meanings, that is, in this definition, the secretary does not have any official power for administration. However, in another two dictionaries, especially in Oxford Dictionary, the secretary, or *mishu*, is regarded as an important official in some cases. So in such

cases, the secretary will have vital power in administration. There is little attention has been paid to the confusion of secretary definition about China secretarial vocation and secretarial science teaching in academic sphere. With the confusion of secretary definition, the confusion in secretarial science teaching classroom will exist continually and the debate about the secretary corruption in anticorruption movement in China of recent years will last.

The aim of this paper is to examine the definition of secretary, or mishu in China, which contains the functions and duties of secretary or mishu. It provides new insight into the secretarial science teaching and the analysis on the secretary corruption.

This article is composed of three themed sections. The first section gives a brief review of the secretary position in China and Europe in history and modern times. The second section discusses the definition of secretary in contemporary times in three senses: an official title, the leader's assistant with great power and the ordinary clerk processing the office routines. The third section of the article discusses on the causes of secretary definition in contemporary times.

Throughout the paper, the term "secretary" will refer to both secretary in Europe and mishu in China. The Chinese word "mishu" is translated into English as "secretary". Although, compared with secretary, mishu has the some other meanings influenced by China culture and history, the meanings of secretary and mishu are similar to each other.

History of secretary positions in China and Europe

The origin of secretary position in both China and Europe was related with the court and politics. The Yellow Emperor(about 2717BC-2599BC) has two secretary beside him: one to record his behavior, and another to record his speech(Liu Mengyu, 1998: a). The first kind of secretary in Europe was the one who assisted the chief in in the tribe to cope with the different events. They could be elected the new chief after the chief died. Such account of secretary can be deemed as the origin of secretary in Europe and America(Lu Yufang, 2001).

The developments of secretary position in Europe and China were similar in feudal times. In both China and Europe at that times, the secretary was an important official title, which beside the kings, emperors or officials with high status and power. The period from Qin dynasty to Qing dynasty, which is from 221BC to 1912AD, saw the critical function of the secretary institution to the feudal emperors. In Qin dynasty, the institutions beside the emperor were chengxiang fu(the prime minister institution), taiwei fu(the military affairs official institution), yushidafu si(the institution for drafting the documents) (Liu Mengyu, 1998: b). Yushi dafu si had the similar function of secretary in modern times in the sense that it focused on the document drafting and process.

One significant change of the name happened in Cao Cao period, which is about from 155AD-220AD. Cao Cao reformed the central political institution, with the establishment of mishu ling. Until now, the word "mishu"

appeared, and the function of it had nothing different from the secretary in previous periods. Until late Qing dynasty, the secretary position's function did not change much. After late Qing dynasty, which was around 1900, the secretary's function changed under the influence of the western political institution.

After the establishment of the Republic of China, the new kind of secretary institution was introduced to China from the western. The government in that times selected from the secretary candidates for secretary position with examination, however, because of serious corruption, many secretaries were selected according to the nepotism(Wang Qin, 2000). In the period of People's Republic of China, the secretary system was reformed, but in this period, the secretary was generally referred to the officials worked in government beside the leaders. After the period of Reform and Opening, with the flourishing of economy, more women joint into the secretarial profession, which involved in the market economy. So in that times, many gossips about affairs between the young female secretaries and the male upstarts outburst. After 2000, such gossip became less and, in most cases, the secretaries were referred to the ones in governments again.

It can be found that the secretarial profession's function was according to the economic foundation in different times. In the feudal times, the secretarial profession mainly served for the feudal owners, while with the change of economic foundation, the secretarial profession began to serve the private enterprise owners, most of whom were upstarts. With the freshness of female secretaries in society, the focus of public opinions turned on the secretaries in government, as the many secretaries were involved in the corruption after the Reform and Opening(Lollar & Hamilton, 2010).

Similar to the origin of secretary in China, the secretary originated in Europe with the assistance for the tribal chief. The term "secretary" in English is derived from Latin word Secernere. From the origin of the word, it can be found that the word has connotation of "confidential" and "secret", and the profession is near the king or some other powerful figures to cope with the important information(Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014.).

From Renaissance until late 19th century, men assumed such position in most cases. After 19th, more women took part in the position, and the in the same time, the private secretary appeared. On the other hand, the secretary position is also a kind of administrative assistant and officer. In other words, the secretary position was divided into more different sub-positions.

With the invention of typewriter, more women joined into the profession. Especially ever since World War I, the secretary positions were occupied almost all by women. After 1950s, the market need for the secretaries was great, especially in USA, and many women in England came to USA for secretary position.

In contemporary times, the secretary in Europe and American

mainly cope with the routines in the office. However, those duties are different with those of the executive assistant, who should take part in the executive administration and be responsible to interact with different customers, general public and others. So here we can find that, in the function of secretary duties, the secretary position can be divided into the different kinds.

The definitions of secretary in contemporary China

The meanings of secretary in contemporary China has three different meanings: an official title, the leader's assistant and the common clerk processing the office routines.

Many high officials are entitled as "secretary" in both China and the western countries. For example, the municipal party secretary and the secretary of a provincial party committee refer to the heads of the city and province respectively. In American, the secretary of the State is the senior official of the federal government.

As to its meaning of "the common clerk processing the office routines", one can find the position in many companies, governments and schools. Their routines are about the telephone recording, typing, clear the office room and others. So it can be found that their power is limited. That is, they do not involved in the policy decision and administrative management.

As the leader's assistant, the secretary will hold the critical power in decision-making and administrative management. In some American companies, the experienced secretary will influence the management of the company decisively. In other word, such kind of secretary is belonged to the kind of secretary in early 20th century, who mainly cope with the routine drudgery in office. In China, there are also many of such kind of secretary, such as the secretary-general in government.

However, there are many confusing stipulations about the duties of secretary in government. The secretary beside the leaders is regarded as only the assistant for the leader. Such secretary serve the leader in the routine works and have no right to influence the policy making and decision making. But, the problem is, many secretaries do influence the decision making and policy making in practical works. When the corruption erupts and be found the public, the public would attribute the corruption to the interference of the secretary to the power function. Nevertheless, such blame is in conflict with the definition of the secretary's duty in many teaching materials of secretarial science. According to the secretarial science, the secretary should think actively and assist the leader to cope with the different situations and works. Li and Pye(1992) pointed out many of the blurred duties of secretary in government, such as major adviser, ghost writer and personal representative *et al.*. The duties of the secretary mentioned above are interesting and blurred in that they are the leader's duties actually in many cases. For example, as the major adviser for the leader, the secretary functions to influence on the decision and policy making in fact. As the

ghost writer, the secretary should systemize and complete the leader's thought, because "a leader has only some rough idea, being unable to spell it out clearly but wish to 'trade a brick for a piece jade'(pao zhuan yin yu)". (Wu Shaozu, 1998). Therefore, when there is no corruption found, the secretary is regarded as the important assistant beside the leader. However, when the corruption is found, the secretary's function mentioned above is deemed as the illegal interference with political power(Liu Lili, 2016). In the transition period, the corruption in China is higher than before(He, 2000), and in the anti-corruption movement in recent years, the news of the secretary corruption is often eye-catching, while the blurred definition of secretary function of secretary emerged in the process.

Therefore, we can find that the definitions of secretary is blurred in in the aspect of assistance for the leader. In some teaching materials of secretarial science, the office routines are described to be confined in the office. However, in some other teaching materials, the secretary assistance for the leader is emphasized. Especially in one teaching material "mishu canmou zhineng gailun"(The Introduction to Adviser Function of Secretary), the adviser function of secretary is emphasized extremely(Zhang Mingqing, 2001).

In this book, the author asserted that the secretary is the close and intimate adviser for the leader, therefore, the function of secretary is extremely critical. Noticing the function of secretary as the intimate adviser for the leader, Wang Huaizhi and Guo Zheng analyzed the relationship between the secretary and the corresponding leader(Wang Huaizhi & Guo Zheng, 2012). This book has been the teaching materials of secretarial science for a while in Xi'an Xi'an Politics Institution of Liberation Army, but soon it was abolished as the teaching material because of the content, which violated some principals, was not suitable for class teaching(Zhu Xiaojia, 2011).

The causes of the blur of secretary definition

When discussing about the blur of secretary definition, which mentioned above, we should notice that the times in which the secretary function changed in China history. According to many secretarial teaching materials(e.g. Hu Hongjie et al, 2005; Shiyuqiao, 2001), the reform of secretary function happened in late Qing dynasty and the Republic of China period. During that times, many officials and intellectuals realized the backward of China, and began to learn the western civilization to reform China. Especially in the period of Republic, the government set up the secretary system in government according to the western modern political institution.

Nevertheless, the secretary system in that time was under the influence of modern economic characters, which were featured that the secretary served the economic activities mainly. In the government, the secretary function was divided, and the most important function of secretary in government was to cope with the routines in office, which was different

with the secretary function of previous times in China, especially shiye group. Shiye, an important secretary group in Qing dynasty, influenced China history greatly. Almost all the officials' activities had relationship with shiye. To some extent, they were the secretary who acted as the adviser and manager for the officials they served(Wang Wentao, 2007). Shiye's activities mainly served as the adviser for the official, but not for the routines in the office. While in the period of the Republic of China, the secretary's function changed according to the western political institution. Although superficially, the secretary's function changed according to the western political institution, the appointment and the real function of secretary was decided by the official the secretary served. So in the real practice, the official in government still appointed the secretary he or she trusted and the secretary's function was not confined in the office. For example, the president Jiang Jieshi in that time only appointed his fellow townsmen to be his secretaries besides him.

From the description above, we can find that the secretary's real function was different from the superficial description in that time. In other words, the real function of secretary did not confirm to the secretary function in the western political institution.

In contemporary China, the confusion still exists. In some teaching materials of secretarial science, the secretary is defined as the clerks in the office, and copes with the routines in the office(e.g. Hu Hongjie et al., 2005). While in some other teaching materials, the advice function of secretary is emphasized(e.g. Zhang Mingqing, 2001). Even some teaching materials discusses the relationship between secretary and the corresponding official(Wang Huaizhi & Guo Zheng, 2012), which was not regarded to be suitable for classroom teaching.

From the academic research materials, we can find that different researchers gave different explanations for this confusion. Some researchers pointed out that the secretary should be confined in the office and only cope with the office routines, therefore, their interference with the political decision and policy-making deviated from the legal stipulation for their duties, and caused corruption(Zhang M, 2015). However, some other researchers argued that secretary have the duty to give advice for official on policy making and political decision(Zhang Mingqing, 2001). Wei Li and Luciano W. Pye(1992) described the aiding duty of the secretary for leader on political decision and policy making(Li & Pye, 1992).

It can be found that the secretary duty and function is defined according to the western political science, however, in practice, the secretary is influenced by the traditional secretary conception. For more than one hundred years, China learned eagerly from the western world for the modern civilization and technology. Secretary function and duty is embedded in China secretarial science according to the western secretarial science, which is in conflict with the traditional secretary conception of China. Therefore, in practice, the duty and function of secretary is blurred and confusing.

Another cause for the blur and confusion of secretary concept in China is related the economic foundation. The enterprise in China and be divided into three kinds: the state-owned enterprise, the private enterprise and the overseas enterprise. In the mainland of China, the state-owned enterprise is the mainstream economic entity, which has the most ties with government(Luo, Huang, & Wang, 2012). The government still controls the economic operation greatly and easily. In this situation, the political institution cannot be changed easily, so the secretary duty and function will not change soon. But on the other hand, the secretarial science course is still learning from the western world, which is under the influence of extreme market economy situation and the prevalence of private enterprise.

The secretarial science teaching in high schools exacerbates the confusion of secretary conception in recent years. In the teaching of secretarial science, most of the teaching materials are similar with each other and do not change much ever since 1990s. Such teaching materials define the secretary as the one whose work mainly as the routines in office. Therefore, when such secretary apprentices go to work, they will find that the Knowledge in classroom is different from the work in practice.

Conclusion

In this paper, the aim is to investigate the confusion of secretary conception in China. This study has shown that China secretary duty and function are different from the description in most secretarial science teaching materials. On the other hand, in Chinese language, secretary is called as "mishu", which has many different definitions in dictionaries, but in contemporary times, superficially and literally, mishu is defined as the one who works in the office for routines. Such mainstream definition still in conflict with the real duty and function of secretary in practice.

Many academic researchers pointed out the secretary corruption is caused by the deviation of legal secretary duty and function, however, such researchers did notice the confusion of secretary conception and the conflict between literal secretary definition and secretary work practice. This study has identified the incompatibility between learning from the western secretarial science and the real situation in China is the main cause for the confusion of secretary conception in China. The economic foundation and form in China is another cause for the confusion of secretary confusion. This study appears to be the first study discuss on the secretary conception confusion and the results in China and sheds new light on the secretary conception in China.

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