Patronage or Prebendalism?
The Mishu/Shouzhang Relationship and Corruption in Chinese Politics

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Abstract
This article examines the mishu/shouzhang (personal secretary/boss) relationship as an institution in contemporary Chinese politics in the context of the comparative politics literature on patron-clientelism. Li and Pye referred to the relationship as an “institutionalized patron-client tie in Chinese politics.” We consider where this particular relationship fits among the many variations of patron-clientelism described in the literature, and discuss how the post-Mao economic reforms have altered that relationship. The opportunities for corruption inherent in Chinese economic reform policies, while increasing mishu avenues to pursue their own interests, have bound the mishu and shouzhang even more closely together, to protect each others’ criminal activities. The government’s anti-secretary-corruption measures have largely failed because the corruption is systemic and institutionalized in ways that have defied government efforts to date.

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