“When Mistakes are Made in Music Playing, Someone Glanced”:
The Evolution of Allusion Zhoulang Gu

By Yeweitao Wu

Abstract

This thesis analyzes the origin of the historical allusion Zhoulang Gu, how it was firstly used in classical Chinese literature and how it developed into a literary imagery. The whole process started in Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589) (which is about three hundred years away from the actual Zhoulang Gu story happened) and stabilized after Song Dynasty (960-1279). This thesis will list and examine some selected literary works with the use of allusion Zhoulang Gu from this period. Zhoulang Gu “周郎顾” (“the Young Zhou glances”), literally means the young Zhou glances. Zhoulang is a laudatory title of the famous general Zhou Yu (175-210) at the end of Eastern Han Period (45-220). The story Zhoulang Gu was recorded in Records of the Three Kingdoms, the biography of Zhou Yu. It says that Zhou Yu is good at music, even if it is after drinking in a banquet, he can still recognize the mistakes made in music playing and will glance at the music player. So people at that time make this story a folk song and it says “(When) the music playing appear mistakes, Zhoulang will glance.” From close text reading, it shows that Zhoulang Gu’s development is closely related to qun “群” (“gathering”) among literati. Qun is a phrased that Confucius brings up to describe the function of Shijing “诗经” [Book of Songs]. And this thesis will analyze how gathering affected Zhoulang Gu’s evolution and how Zhoulang Gu helps literati’s social intercourse.