A Study of Wang Ssu-shih's (1566-1648) Tu-i

Abstract

This thesis is a study of Wang Ssu-shih's (1566-1648) Tu-i. Wang Ssu-shih's work was written in 1645. However, it was not published and remained unnoticed for sixty years. With the publication of Chou Chao-ao's Variorum Edition of Tu Fu's Poetry in 1711 which contains many comments and notes from Wang's work, Wang Ssu-shih's life and work soon became known to Chinese scholars.

Tu-i is worth a careful study for many reasons: firstly, Chinese scholars and critics of all periods generally considered it as an important study on Tu Fu's poetry. Ch'ou Chao-ao has pointed out in Variorum Edition of Tu Fu's Poetry that Wang's book contains a great deal of insights which are valuable for understanding the poetry of Tu Fu. Ch'ou also had remarked that it is still the best of its kind even when compared with all the others since the Sung Dynasty, and all of them drew heavily on Wang's ideas and comments in Tu-i. Although it is the most influential work on Tu Fu's poetry, no adequate analysis of this book has been published. It is also surprising that in the volumes of Chinese literary criticism, there have been no reference made on this book.

This thesis is composed of six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction in which the purposes and sources of this study are analyzed. The second chapter gives an account of Wang Ssu-shih's life and his motive and experience during the writing of Tu-i. The third chapter deals with the circulation of the book, and the emphasis of this chapter is placed on the different readings of the two early editions of the manuscripts of the work. The organisation and topics of the book are analyzed in the fourth chapter. Also in this chapter, Wang Ssu-shih's criteria for judging Tu Fu's poetry is also discussed. The fifth chapter is devoted to a discussion of Wang's theory of feelings and emotions. Therefore, he stressed sincerity and spontaneity in poetry. The final chapter of this thesis (chapter six) gives a summary of the conclusions of the previous chapters.