

A Shared Cultural Realm: Literary Exchanges between Scholar-Officials and Poet-Monks in the Mid Joseon Period*

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The intent of this paper is to challenge the notion that Buddhism under the oppressive policies of the Joseon state became isolated and limited mostly to popular religious practices. When we shift our focus away from state polemics and elite ideologies, we can perceive Buddhist cultural activities in which monks were active participants in a larger burgeoning literary culture, if not part of the cultural elite of Joseon society. In the literary realm of the scholar-officials, what we notice are active exchanges between Confucian scholar-officials and Buddhist “poet-monks.” This portrays a picture of cultural solidarity wherein Confucian-Buddhist exchanges seem more important than the inter-traditional conflict or separateness. Similarly, Buddhist temples were in fact cultural centers of literary activities that were intimately connected to the lives of the literary elites, including the scholar-officials.

Keywords: Joseon Buddhism, Buddhist-Confucian cultural exchange, Buddhist literary culture, Joseon scholar-officials, poet-monks, recitation exchanges

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