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Panel 224 - Rethinking the Private Lives of Confucian Literati: Reconciling the Three Teachings in Premodern East Asia

The Venetian[®] Macao-Resort-Hotel // Room no. 1206 // Wednesday 26 June 11:00-13:00

Program:

[http://www.icas8.com/Content/Uploads/PDF/Wednesday_26_June_2013\(Panels190-298\).pdf](http://www.icas8.com/Content/Uploads/PDF/Wednesday_26_June_2013(Panels190-298).pdf)

Sung-Eun Thomas Kim

"The Cultural Adoption and Patronage of Buddhism by Korean Confucian Literati During the Joseon Dynasty: Boundaries as Touch Points"

Paper abstract:

Despite the official policy of "suppression of the heresies," of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), the Confucian elites have adopted in their private lives religious traditions that were deemed to be heresies. It is not an unknown secret that the high ranking Confucian scholar-officials and even the royal family patronized Buddhist temples and buried their ancestors according to *fungsui* practices during the time of orthodox neo-Confucianism.

This paper will mainly focus on the records of exchanges of poems and letters between monks and Confucian scholar-officials elites that are found in the personal anthologies of Buddhist monks. In addition, steles of eminent monks will be examined to highlight the Confucian-Buddhist relationship that was envisioned from the position of Buddhist monks. Interestingly, these interactions paint a picture of a dynamic cultural exchange between the Confucian scholar-officials and the monks during a time that was purported to be one of the most critical periods towards Buddhism as a heresy. Rather than attacks on Buddhism as a heterodox, these records reveal an intimate and active exchange between Confucian scholar-officials elites and Buddhist monks.

Such materials afford us an opportunity to get the Buddhist side of the story and not the usual Confucian representations. In this sense, the aim of this paper is to go beyond the traditional academic discussions that have uncritically accepted the conventional narrative of suppression of Buddhism, in an attempt to challenge the implied notion that Buddhism was cast into the mountains in isolation from the cultural life of the Confucian elites. The active exchanges between Confucian elites and Buddhist monks sketch a scene of cultural solidarity where the traditional model of conflict is shown to be an overly simplistic and naive understanding of the relationship.