Silencing the Culture of Chosŏn Buddhism: The Ideology of Exclusion of the *Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok*

Abstract

*The culture of Buddhism and its history have been marginalized in the collective memories of the Chosŏn period. Due to the inclination of contemporary research to depend on “official” records, the patterns of Confucian biases have come to persist in current research. This paper examines the ideological biases and the historiographical legacy of the Chosŏn wangjo sillok, a source which has been privileged in the study of Chosŏn history and society. In light of ideologically driven historiography of the Sillok, this paper argues for a nuanced understanding of Chosŏn history and a reconsideration of the social and cultural role of Chosŏn Buddhism during a time which has generally been accepted as a period of Buddhist decline. Through alternative sources of history and new approaches to understanding Chosŏn Buddhism we are afforded a look into a side of Buddhist culture that did not declined. For instance, the literary culture of poetry exchanges, the tradition of scholar-officials composing biographical introductions to the collected works of eminent monks (munjip), and the sponsorship of temple works by the socio-political elites reveals a Buddhism that existed in the private social realm that were excluded from the government records and thus so far overlooked.*

Keywords: archives, *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, ideology of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, ideologized history, degeneration of Chosŏn Buddhism