



Illusory Abiding: The Cultural Construction of the Chan Monk Zhongfeng Mingben (Harvard East Asian Monographs)

Natasha Heller

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A groundbreaking monograph on Yuan dynasty Buddhism, *Illusory Abiding* offers a cultural history of Buddhism through a case study of the eminent Chan master Zhongfeng Mingben. Natasha Heller demonstrates that Mingben, and other monks of his stature, developed a range of cultural competencies through which they navigated social and intellectual relationships. They mastered repertoires internal to their tradition—for example, guidelines for monastic life—as well as those that allowed them to interact with broader elite audiences, such as the ability to compose verses on plum blossoms. These cultural exchanges took place within local, religious, and social networks—and at the same time, they comprised some of the very forces that formed these networks in the first place. This monograph contributes to a more robust account of Chinese Buddhism in late imperial China, and demonstrates the importance of situating monks as actors within broader sociocultural fields of practice and exchange.

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