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Exploring the Significance of “Discerning the Zong (Bian Zong 辨宗)” in the Sectarianization of Buddhism

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Abstract: The prelude holds dual significance. Firstly, it denotes the initial exploration of sectarian Buddhism by the Sanlun zong and the Tiantai zong. Secondly, it signifies the act of “exploring” itself as a means of establishing a distinct sect. The concept of “Discerning the Zong” not only permeates the context of the sectarianization of Buddhism but also exerts influence on the evolution trajectory of the Sinicization of Buddhism to some extent. Sectarian Buddhism is rooted in the foundational principles and overarching framework of the Sanlun zong and the Tiantai zong, presenting a continuous portrayal of the development of Chinese Buddhist sects.

Keywords: “Discerning the Zong”; Sanlun zong; Tiantai zong; sectarian Buddhism; Chineseization of Buddhism

1. Introduction

In Chinese philosophy, the term “zong” is multifaceted, encompassing various meanings such as ancestor, patriarch, clan, sect, and more. These meanings entail notions of veneration, worship, patriarchal systems, ethical units, and organized institutions for indoctrination. These connotations existed prior to the introduction of Buddhism to China and new implications emerged after its arrival. Within Chinese Buddhist philosophy, the concept of “discernment of sects” is closely linked to processes of judgment and sect formation. This discernment not only pertains to sectarian Buddhism but also extends to the differentiation of diverse cultural elements during the sectarianization of Buddhism in China. Therefore, it serves as the foundation for harmonizing and integrating diverse cultures and underpins the enduring evolution of Sinicized Buddhist sects.

The sectarianization (宗派化) of Buddhist philosophy represents a significant effort towards achieving a balance between diversity and uniformity within a patriarchal framework¹ (宗法性). It entails a dialectical progression beyond the original patriarchal lineage structure by fostering non-lineage group relationships. This process leads to the enhancement and evolution of the native concept of unity and the unity system through a longitudinal perspective.

The initial examination of Chinese Buddhist sects can be traced back to the works of the Japanese scholar Gyōnen (凝然), specifically “Thirteen Sects of Chinese Buddhism” (中国佛教十三宗) and “Essentials of the Eight Sects” (Hasshu kōyō 八宗纲要). These works, however, erroneously conflated the schools of the Northern and Southern Dynasties with the sects of the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Yang Wenhui attempted to address this confusion with his “Ten Sections”, a proposal countered by Tang Xiyu (汤用彤, 字锡予) who argued that “Chinese Buddhism does not adhere to a “ten sects” framework” (中国佛教无“十宗”).² Subsequently, the distinction between schools and sects, as well as the nuances between different types of “sects”, has become a pivotal focus in the analysis of Chinese Buddhism.

Sakaino Kōyō (境野黄洋) investigates the development of Buddhist sects in contemporary China as part of his survey on the history of Buddhism in the country (Sakaino 1907). Nogami, Shunshizu Nogami (野上俊静), along with other scholars, discusses sects



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in “Bukkyōshi Gaisetsu: Chugoku Hen (佛教史概略: 中国篇)” [An Introduction to Buddhist History: China] (Nogami et al. 1968). Chen Jidong seizes this opportunity to delve into the sectarian awareness of Buddhism during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Then, he focuses on Hešeri Rushan’s *Eight Schools and Two Practices* (“Ba Zong Er Xing 八宗二行”) to explore the origin and role of the Buddhist taxonomic category “zong” (“sect” or “school” 宗) in the formation of modern Buddhism in China³. Ibuki (2022) has also addressed such issues in “The Influx of Academic Understandings of Buddhism and the Transformed Perception of Buddhism in Modern China: The Theories of the Ten Schools, the Mahayana Doctrine as Not Having Been Taught by Buddha, and the Awakening of the Faith as Apocrypha”.

This thesis aims to academically engage with the Sanlun zong (三论宗) and the Tiantai zong (天台宗) as pivotal in the inception of sectarian Buddhist exploration. It delves into the essence of “discerning the sects”, the interpretation of “zong” within sectarian Buddhism, as well as the interconnectedness among the Three Religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism 儒、道、佛三教) and Chinese Buddhism’s relationship with Indian Buddhism. The inquiry focuses on unraveling the significance of the “discernment of sects”.

Both the systems of cession and hereditary succession, as well as the “zong” dedicated to benefiting all living beings and the “zong” associated with the king’s method of teaching and educating the populace, serve to uphold the overarching patriarchal structure. Despite variations in terminology and practices during Buddhism’s eastern dissemination, the essence of “zong” remains consistent. The progression of Buddhism in China aligns harmoniously with the foundational patriarchal framework of local traditions, leading to a gradual evolution in the perpetuation of the concept of “zong”.

This thesis investigates the foundation for identifying “zongs” through the lenses of diverse cultural exchanges and the Sinicization of Buddhism. It recognizes the importance of the initial investigation into the two religious entities, Sanlun zong and Tiantai zong, and delves into the development and evolution of the concept of “zong” in classical texts. The thesis argues that the act of “Discerning the Zong” not only transcends sectarian Buddhism but also influences the evolutionary path of the Sinicization of Buddhism to a certain extent. This exploration guides the progression of sectarian Buddhism, leading to the continual advancement and transformation of Sinicized Buddhism. Through gradual evolution, it integrates with the original local culture, ultimately forming a new doctrine in China. Furthermore, by analyzing the concept of “zong” and the early exploration of the Sanlun zong and Tiantai zong, which laid the groundwork for sect Buddhism, the inclination towards the Sinicization of Buddhism becomes clearer.

2. Exploring the Expansion of the Sanlun Zong and Tiantai Zong’s “Purpose of Discernment”

The Sanlun zong and Tiantai zong were pioneering developments in sectarian Buddhism. The Sanlun zong originated from the Sanlun School, while the Tiantai zong was established in China. Through examining existing research, an analysis of the distinctive characteristics of the Sanlun zong and Tiantai zong can elucidate the process of localizing Indian Buddhist philosophy and establish a connection with the broader Chinese philosophical tradition.

In his work *A General History of the Sanlun zong in China* (《中国三论宗通史》), Dong Qun (董群) explores the essence of the Sanlun zong through a series of questions: Does the Sanlun zong constitute a sect? Is the Sanlun zong the first sect in Chinese Buddhist history? What defines the Sanlun zong as a sect? The discussion also delves into the teachers of the Sanlun zong. Dong Qun concludes that “from a comprehensive perspective, the Sanlun zong stands as one of the earliest sects established in the history of Chinese Buddhism”⁴. In *A General History of the Tiantai zong in China* (《中国天台宗通史》), Pan Guiming (潘桂明) elaborates on the development of the Tiantai zong from its historical progression as a school to its classification as a “zong”. This approach differs from the analysis in the *General History of the Sanlun zong in China*, which directly asserts that the

Tiantai zong satisfies the criteria for sect establishment, including the enumeration of sects. Pan Guiming asserts the Tiantai zong as the “earliest and foremost Buddhist sect in China with profound significance”.⁵

It is vital to note that the criteria enabling the discernment and formation of a sect can also serve as a crucial foundation for the establishment of a sect. However, these criteria appear to offer more of a reflective value rather than being a sole justification for initiating a sect. While scholars often link “Doctrinal Classification (判教)” with the process of sect creation, it should be emphasized that while “Doctrinal Classification” lays a significant theoretical foundation for the shift from scholastic to sectarian Buddhism, it does not directly equate to the establishment of a sect. For instance, Zhu Daosheng’s (竺道生) “Four Wheels (四轮)”⁶ represents one of the earliest systems of judgment.

The process of sect formation necessitates supportive groundwork. Recent research suggests that sectarian Buddhism can be categorized into conceptual sects and institutional sects, with the Sanlun zong falling under the former category and the Tiantai zong under the latter. Additionally, the study of sectarian Buddhism, from its genesis to evolution, underwent a gradual developmental phase. Innovations in doctrines, academic exchanges, historical documentation, as well as the propagation and societal impact of the doctrines all entail a period of incubation.

From an accepted perspective, the Sanlun zong and the Tiantai zong are categorized under the same Buddhist sects originating from the Sui and Tang Dynasties. According to Li Shangquan (李尚全), “Zhiyi (智顓) was the first monk in Chinese Buddhist history to present the theoretical framework of a ‘zong’” (S. Li 2011, p. 80). Jizang (吉藏) established the theoretical structure for the True Meaning and the Mundane Meaning in Chinese Buddhism. For Zhiyi, “zong” predominantly denotes the “tenet” and the essence of Buddhism, whereas “teaching” primarily signifies doctrinal teachings. The term “teaching” encompasses instructing principles, doctrines, and so forth. Consequently, it is noted that assessments are conducted concerning the “teaching” rather than the “zong”, with the evaluation of teachings also serving to identify the specific “zong”.

The establishment of the Sui and Tang sects marked a pivotal advancement in the development of the philosophical and theoretical framework of Chinese Buddhism. Both the Tiantai zong and the Sanlun zong contributed significantly by formulating a system of doctrinal interpretation and a theoretical structure, respectively. Specifically, Zhiyi assimilated methodologies from the Northern and Southern Dynasties and introduced the concept of the “Five Periods and Eight Teachings” (五时八教), and “This initiative laid the foundation for the establishment of the Tiantai zong, solidifying its prominent position” (Du 2008, p. 235). Conversely, Jizang’s scholarly pursuits entailed a critical amalgamation of the “Five Periods and Eight Teachings”. While Jizang’s teachings gained widespread acceptance and contributed to the post-unification study of Chinese Buddhism (Tang 2000, p. 571), they lacked substantial novel theoretical insights and were eventually incorporated and reshaped by the Tiantai zong and other sects.⁷

Based on the existing literature, both the Sanlun and Tiantai sects emerged as early manifestations of sectarian Buddhism during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. The Sanlun zong was among the initial sects established, whereas the Tiantai zong stands as the earliest Buddhist sect characterized by national traits. Notably, the Sanlun zong’s lineage dwindled after one generation, in contrast to the continuous generational legacy of the Tiantai zong. This historical reality necessitates distinct recognition. Within the cultural landscape dominated by Confucian ideologies, the Zhongguang (中观) school followed by Sanlun scholars gradually declined after the Sui and Tang Dynasties, giving way to diverse syncretic doctrines aligned with regal governance (G. Pan 2009, p. 248).

In addition to underscoring the “national traits” of the Tiantai zong and its alignment with the requisites of the newly unified dynasty, references are frequently made to its association with the Sui governance. Conversely, Jizang of the Sanlun zong employed doctrinal teachings to dismantle the “lost scriptures (‘迷经’), critique attachments, and dispel enigmatic concepts, thus reflecting the Buddhist perspective on the inclination towards

national consolidation. Simultaneously, he accommodated the diverse Buddhist schools and societal factions, aligning with the unification aspirations of the Sui and Tang Dynasties, emphasizing the transcendence of dualistic perceptions. Conversely, the Tiantai zong integrated the theory of the “Three Truths” to synthesize the Mahayana Emptiness and Existence Sects, highlighting the unity of emptiness and existence, the transformative nature of challenges, and positing that earthly existence embodies purity—a paradigm that greatly influenced contemporaneous and succeeding eras (Z. Yang 2014, p. 99).

In this context, Liang Qichao (梁启超) has long held the belief that Buddhism, having been assimilated into Chinese Buddhism through Tiantai zong, Huayan zong (华严宗), Chan zong (禅宗), etc., has evolved to reflect a distinctly Chinese ethos rather than maintaining its purely Indian origins. While the three schools—Tiantai, Huayan, and Chan—originated from India, they have also undergone a transformation imbued with unique Chinese attributes.⁸ Tang Xiyu compared the two sects using “Dharma China” as an example, highlighting distinct characteristics in the approaches of the two masters: “Jizang concentrated on expounding the doctrines of the Triratna Sect and extensively criticised the doctrines of other schools”. Conversely, Zhiyi devoted great effort to establishing his own system, focusing primarily on the development of the Tiantai zong with a more innovative approach, while displaying a partiality towards textual exegesis. Furthermore, Jizang, known for his erudition, leaned towards theoretical discussions, whereas Zhiyi, a Chan master, emphasized the “cessation of conceptual attachments”. As documented in the Biography of Eminent Monks (《续高僧传》), Jizang’s contributions are expounded in the segment on “Righteous Doctrine”, whereas Zhiyi’s teachings are discussed in the chapter on religious Practice, further delineating the contrasting methodologies of the two eminent figures.⁹

Furthermore, the distinct depiction of the Sanlun zong in the existing literature is a subject of particular interest. For instance, the Historical Manuscripts of Chinese Buddhist Thought mention that the Sanlun zong’s unique identity aligns with the “no-gain (无所得)”¹⁰ Middle Way principle it promotes; it serves as a pathway to attaining truth and delineating the boundaries of truth. Yang Weizhong (杨维中) posits that Jizang interprets the Middle Way and the Two Noble Truths by defining the “highest truth” as “absolute through the four sentences (绝于四句)”. Additionally, he offers individuals a path to liberation that manifests a rational approach beyond verbal expression, employing language as a contemplative aid, showcasing an advancement in Chinese monastic contemplation of the Middle Way.¹¹

Guo Peng (郭朋) utilizes the phrase “looks like Western Sanskrit, but speaks like Eastern China” to illustrate the Sinicization of the Sanlun zong teachings. While the concept of “emptiness” remains central in their discussions, Jizang’s interpretations exhibit distinct Chinese nuances. Jizang strived to tailor this ideology to suit the dictates of the feudal governance prevalent during his era, enhancing it with innovative dimensions (albeit not entirely completed) (Guo 2012, p. 106). In comparison, the Tiantai zong, established by Zhiyi, appears to have excelled in this aspect.

In contrast to the distinctiveness of the Sanlun zong, the Tiantai zong is considered exemplary. Within the realm of sectarian Buddhism research, the Tiantai zong is often regarded as a quintessential representation of a Chinese Buddhist sect. By examining this exemplar and reviewing the founding figures, Zhiyi hailed from Hubei, specifically originating from Yingchuan (modern-day Yuzhou, Henan Province), while Huiwen (慧文) and Huisi (慧思) were both Han Chinese monks, emphasizing their authentic Han Chinese lineage. Jizang, being a second-generation Hua, although his ancestors relocated to Jinling and were skilled in both Hua and Han languages, delved into the study of both Chinese and Indian cultures (the word “Hua” in this context denotes the Huans, a generic term used in ancient China to refer to people from the western regions of China). Despite this, Jizang, often referred to as “Hu Ji Zang (胡吉藏)”, adhered to some degree to asserting the significance of his national attributes.

The theory of “five lifetimes and chopping (五世而斩)”,¹² developed since the Han Dynasty, offers an intriguing perspective. While Jizang and Zhiyi did not span the “five lifetimes”, Zhiyi garnered more acceptance from local monastic and lay communities. During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, where meditative practices were paramount alongside theoretical teachings,¹³ Tiantai zong nurtured a comprehensive system integrating philosophical concepts and meditation techniques, specifically advocating the koan method. Zhiyi’s contributions included the refinement of Hui-wen and Hui-si’s principles, promoting the integration of diverse doctrinal traditions, and advocating for both unity and autonomy. The establishment of the Tiantai zong signaled the emergence of sectarian Buddhism, marking a significant juncture where Chinese Buddhism embarked on a path of independent evolution, mirroring the broader trend of innovative ideological advancements.¹⁴

Furthermore, the Tiantai zong intertwines with China’s inherent patriarchal nature. Sheng Kai’s (圣凯) research highlights Zhiyi as the pioneering Chinese monk¹⁵ who expounded on penance and established a comprehensive penance system. Zhiyi’s work, *The Precepts of the Bodhisattva Yishu* (《菩萨戒义疏》), significantly contributed to the evolution of precepts within the Tripitaka, leaving a lasting impact. Noteworthy masters of the Sui Dynasty, such as Huiyuan (慧远) and Jizang, recognized variances in precepts among major and minor schools of thought. However, Zhiyi uniquely synthesized these ideas, advocating a doctrine of “non-action” and extending the application of such precepts beyond ritualistic boundaries to encompass fixed and shared precepts, Daoist precepts, and the three pure precepts. This endeavor culminated in a comprehensive Mahayana precept system, addressing theoretical gaps in the Brahma-net Sutra, significantly advancing Bodhisattva precepts in Chinese Buddhism.¹⁶

As highlighted by Xia Demei (夏德美), the text *Yishu* symbolizes the advancement of Bodhisattva precepts in China, marking a significant milestone in their development. Throughout Zhiyi’s comprehensive doctrinal framework, despite the substantial emphasis on precepts, “they were initially intertwined with various practices in the Chan tradition and later integrated within the context of ‘Stopping and Viewing’ (止观) (S. Li 2003, pp. 62–63). In essence, the Tiantai zong underscores both teachings and perspectives, advocates for the observance of precepts, and propagates Pure Land teachings, embodying depth and breadth, yet maintaining simplicity and accessibility—a hallmark of Chinese Buddhism.¹⁷ This defining characteristic is rooted in the assimilation of Confucian and Taoist philosophies by the Sui and Tang Buddhist sects, aligning with the broader trends in Chinese culture. Independently establishing a distinctive Buddhist philosophical system, their autonomy, creativity, and independence manifest as notable components of the Sinicization of Buddhist philosophy.¹⁸

When examining the unique attributes of the Sanlun zong from the standpoint of “foundational cultural identity (根本的文化认同)”,¹⁹ it becomes evident that Jizang’s Sanlun zong exhibited a degree of autonomy concerning the relationship between the clergy and the state, as well as between monastic and secular lifestyles. Distinctively, this independence was notably characterized by a strong inclination towards righteousness, emphasizing profound philosophical discourse and the relentless pursuit of ultimate truth. In contrast, the later Chan zong’s independence predominantly manifested in a similar vein, showcasing profound philosophical insight and an unwavering quest for truth. Furthermore, viewed through the lens of historical progression, both Jizang’s Sanlun zong and Zhiyi’s Tiantai zong encountered inherent limitations in their exploration of the era. While interplay with preceding doctrines and incorporation of personal traits and experiences were inevitable, these factors enriched their respective philosophical explorations.

Studies on the Sanlun zong and Tiantai zong in academia frequently adopt later paradigms to compile an overview of Buddhist sects, which can lead to a perceived holistic perspective while risking biases towards known entities over unknown elements across different time periods. Therefore, the scrutiny of the “zong” concept within the Sanlun and Tiantai zong should not merely encompass national, religious, philosophical, or cultural dimensions; it should also consider cultural identity. By placing the Sanlun and Tiantai

zong within the broader context of the early explorations of sectarian Buddhism, a more fitting and precise classification can be established, sometimes transcending national and state boundaries. Furthermore, it is necessary to offer a suitable positioning for the initial exploration of the sect-like Buddhism practiced in these schools from the viewpoint of cultural identity.

3. Investigating the Concept of “Zong” in Classical Chinese Texts

The Sanlun sect and Tiantai zong represent the initial foray into sectarian Buddhism, a significant phase in the Sinicization of Buddhism in China. While the examination of the concept of a “zong” in the context of Sanlun zong and Tiantai zong remains largely unexplored, establishing a coherent understanding is conceivable by retracing the origins of the three religious sects. Sectarian Buddhism, integral to the Sinicization of Buddhism, intertwines with the key principles of Chinese philosophy and the interrelations among the Three Religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism). By delving into the notion of “zong”, a thorough exploration can unravel the convergence and development of sectarian Buddhism within the realms of Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism and Taoism, and the teachings of Indian Buddhism.

In fact, traditional Chinese philosophy, rooted in the cultural ethos of “ritual” since the Western Zhou Dynasty, has long upheld the societal harmony of filial piety and loyalty intertwined with the family and the state, providing a theoretical foundation for validating the Mandate of Heaven succession. Therefore, the introduction of Buddhism into China’s political and cultural landscape necessitated the establishment of theoretical justifications to harmonize its teachings with the patriarchal hierarchical order and local customs. Exploring the seamless integration of Buddhist culture with indigenous beliefs in the concept of “zong” is crucial in this context, aligning with the evolution of philosophical thought. The history of Chinese philosophy encompasses not only Confucian socio-political and ethical doctrines but should also include the intertwined essence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism as seminal components.²⁰

In Chinese scholarship, the introduction of Buddhism is often seen not only as the infusion of a pure religious belief and spiritual quest but also as the incorporation of a transcendental spiritual philosophy. Overseas scholars highlight how Buddhism has adapted and integrated into local cultures, such as in China where it harmonized with Confucianism and Taoism while also facing suppression. While Buddhism holds significance in various societies, it does not define a distinct Buddhist civilization. Instead, it functions as a major religious entity within the broader cultural context.²¹ The dichotomy between the treatment of culture and politics is apparent in differing perspectives: internationally, culture and politics are typically viewed separately, whereas in the Chinese tradition, they are perceived as intertwined from the outset.

Upon reviewing texts dating back to the pre-Qin period, four primary meanings associated with the term “zong” emerge. Initially, it is linked to clan and temple, denoting the ceremonial site, activities, and worshiping profession. Zuo Zhuan: “The Jin Fan Wenzi rebelled against Yan Ling and had his Zhu Zong pray for his demise”. Note: “Zhu Zong”, or Zhu Shi in other words, was the official responsible for recording the historical accounts of the matter. 《左传》：晋范文子反自鄢陵，使其祝宗祈死。注：祝宗，当即祝史，司祭神记史之事。(Zuo 2008, pp. 349–50). “When he was in the ruler’s ancestral temple or at court. 其在宗庙朝廷。” (Burton Watson Translation 2007, p. 66). “Invoker Tuo was appointed to oversee the ancestral temples. 祝鮀治宗庙。” (Burton Watson Translation 2007, p. 99). There are additional interpretations in the *Analects* (《论语》), such as symbolizing trustworthy righteousness or delineating a blood-bonded ethnic community. “One who consistently demonstrates discernment in their choices can effectively serve as a leader. 因不失其亲，亦可宗也。” (Burton Watson Translation 2007, p. 18). “He is commended for his filial conduct within his clan and for his brotherly qualities within his village or community. 宗族称孝，乡党称弟焉。” (Burton Watson Translation 2007, p. 92). This semantic shift likely evolved directly from etymological developments. The character “宗”

in “zong” resembles a house, and “示” resembling a deity, connotes a sacred space, leading to its extended usage for ancestors and clans (巫史分野).²² This transition signifies a shift from venerating “mysterious powers and disordered gods” (怪力乱神) to the ethical expectations of loyalty, filial piety (忠、孝), and moral virtues, reflecting a shift from superstition to ethical norms and historical significance.

The concept of “zong” was developed by Confucius into a form of hereditary patriarchal lineage with “benevolence” (仁) at its core. Originally denoting “ancestors have merit, clan has virtue” (祖有功, 宗有德), the term evolved into lineage-based ancestor worship. This religious practice transitioned into a form of humanism that differs from the worship of other deities. Honoring ancestors serves as a means of honoring humanity itself, rather than revering a supernatural being controlling human affairs. While ancestors are considered divine, this divinity is intrinsically linked to one’s own bloodline, aligning them with human nature. Thus, even within the realm of religion, China embraces humanistic values.²³ The ethical framework, centered on bloodline patriarchy, utilizes ritual as a norm, benevolence as a foundation, and loyalty, filial piety, and other virtues as accompanying ethical tenets. This construction of patriarchalism encompasses hierarchy and differentiation. Throughout the transformation from primitive Confucianism to institutionalized systems, particularly in Han Dynasty Confucianism, the original “five Confucian virtues” (五伦) evolved into the “three principles” (三纲 that is, a supposedly outdated, pre-modern ethic of power that urges unconditional obedience to hierarchy²⁴), reflecting an archaic ethic of unyielding hierarchy. Loyalty and filial (忠、孝) piety, once dual-directional virtues, transformed into unidirectional principles. This transition towards institutionalization and societal detachment signaled the shift from humanistic religion (人文宗教) to state religion (国家宗教).

In addition, since the beginning of the Western Zhou Dynasty, China has established the first-born son inheritance system based on patriarchal law; similarly, Taoism has seen the emergence of “inheritance from the Ming” (袭明) and other inheritance claims. During the sectarian Buddhism of the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the concepts of “passing on doctrines from master to disciple (Buddhism)” (付法) and “transmission of the light of Buddha” (传灯) formed vital categories of lineage transmission concepts. These ideas later evolved into the “Dharma lineage” (法统) theory and, in the Chan tradition, extended to the “ancestral lineage” theory. “In contrast to Indian Buddhist sects, which emphasize doctrinal similarities and differences, Chinese Buddhist lineages often prioritize doctrinal transmission over discussions of teacher lineages, as evident in works like *The Treatise on the Wheel of Different Sectors*” (《异部宗轮论》). This approach, emphasizing comparative analysis of lineage transmission alongside doctrinal teachings, was also embraced by Confucian scholar Han Yu who advocated for a revival of the “Taoist tradition” (道统).

Secondly, the concept of “Tao” (道) embodies either the essence or the observance and adherence to the contained principles. For instance, in the words of *Laozi* (《老子》), “Nature flows and operates whether it is acknowledged or not, resembling the abyss, like all things. 道冲而用之或不盈, 渊兮, 似万物之宗。” (G. Chen 2016, p. 18). Additionally, in *Zhuangzi* (《庄子》), “I have demonstrated that I have not fully embraced my own school of thought; now I will further establish my distinct perspective. 乡吾示之以未始出吾宗。” (Wang 2013, p. 96). “The Tao serves as the teacher, and the Patriarch as the leader. 以道为师也。宗者, 主也。” (Wang 2013, p. 71). “Remaining within the Zong, one is deemed the Heavenly Man; abiding in the Essence makes one the Divine Man; staying true to the True leads to being recognized as the Supreme Man. 不离于宗, 谓之天人; 不离于精, 谓之神人;

不离于真, 谓之至人。” (Wang 2013, p. 391). “The true describer seems to view our clan as never emerging in the first place”. “To take the Tao as teacher; zong, as the master”. “If one adheres to the zong, they are referred to as the harmonious individual; if one adheres to the essence, they are considered the divine individual; if one adheres to the truth, they are described as the ultimate individual”. The evolution of the concept of “zong” from Laozi to Zhuangzi spans from the ontological significance of “essence” to encompass

both ontology and practice. Exploring the term “great master” (大宗师), Yang Guorong (杨国荣) posits that in Zhuangzi, the connection between the “true man” (真人) and “true knowledge” (真知) epitomizes the essence of “Zong”.²⁵

Zhang Wenjiang (张文江) defines a “great master” as one who has reached the pinnacle of mastery. The term “supreme man” (至人) contrasts with the “true man” (真人), symbolizing the traditional principles of Taoism; where the “true man” embodies a comprehensive ideal from top to bottom. Conversely, the “supreme man” embodies the concept of development from the ground up, akin to traditional Confucianism. This exemplifies the humanistic ethos of Chinese culture, striving for the advancement of an ideal life.²⁶ Lao Siguang (劳思光) contends that Zhuangzi expands upon Laozi’s ambiguous teachings as a culmination of Taoist doctrine rather than a mere reiteration of Laozi’s words (Lao 2005, p. 190).

Thirdly, the concept of “zong” is linked to scriptures and teachings, representing reverence and interpretation of the scriptures or respect for the Dharma. Buddhism, originating from a different cultural background, comprises a “zong” in relation to “jiao” (教), denoting the compilation of sutras expounded by Shakyamuni (释迦牟尼), and “zong” involves the scripture interpretation. Following the passing of Shakyamuni, Buddhism continued to emphasize “the Dharma and the precepts” (以法和戒为师). Similarly, local interpretations of Confucianism and Taoism evolved from classic texts to sutras, mirroring the development of Buddhist sutra interpretations into a variety of “teacher’s sayings” (师说). During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the Sanlun zong established its sect centered around the Three Treatises (《中论》、《百论》和《十二门论》是三论宗“立宗”的经典。Zhong Lun、Bai Lun and Shi Er Men Lun, which are the three important classics of the Chinese Sanlun zong) to elucidate Buddhist doctrine; the Tiantai zong’s foundation rested on the *Saddharmapundarikasūtra* (《法华经》) as its fundamental scripture; and the Huayan zong embraced the *Avatamsakasūtra* (《华严经》) as its doctrinal cornerstone, with its third-generation patriarch, Fa-tsang, advocating for a sect that aligned with the sutras’ teachings. The Chan zong, on the contrary, transitioned from prior emphasis on Buddhist scripture recitations to actualizing and expanding upon these teachings. Speaking on the significance of the Chan zong in Indian Buddhist history, it was noted that the designation of “sect” based on the collective teachings was particularly essential. Such developments were underscored as unique occurrences in the realm of Indian Buddhism, symbolic of distinctive Chinese influences.²⁷ Following Hui Neng, despite references to the “Tanjing” (《坛经》), the emphasis shifted towards the “non-attachment to thoughts (无念)”²⁸ principle, notably exemplified by Heze Shen Hui’s (菏泽神会) successor, focusing on the cultivation of “non-attachment to thoughts”.

Fourthly, the concept of “zong” is associated with schools and denominations, embodying distinct doctrines or schools of thought. Throughout history, various philosophical schools, such as Confucianism and Taoism since the pre-Qin period, the “schools of thought” (家,指学派, such as different scholarly factions), and the “six schools and seven branches. (‘六家七宗’)²⁹ during the Eastern Jin Dynasty have influenced the interpretation of sutras and theories by different scholars (e.g., Chengshi, Sanlun school of thought). This includes the existence of prominent sects like the Sanlun zong, Tiantai zong, Huayan zong, and Chan zong during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, along with Taoism, which underwent an evolution from both Taoism and Buddhism. Tang Xiyu, in his “Historical Manuscripts of Sui and Tang Dynasty Buddhism” (《隋唐佛教史稿》), outlined the characteristics of sects as encapsulating the clarity of doctrines, distinct methodologies, the path to profound insights, freedom from constraints, and the transmission of their unique lineage.

In terms of Chinese Buddhism’s evolution, prior to the Sui and Tang Dynasties, distinct schools of thought dominated the landscape. However, the post-Sui and Tang Dynasties period witnessed intensified contention for Taoist lineage, leading to the proliferation of various sects. This period marked the emergence of new sects from existing schools, exemplified by the transformation of Sanlun zong into a formal sect and the establishment of new sects like Tiantai zong. The focal point of this era was the significant dispute over

Taoist lineage, which fueled the diversification of Chinese Buddhist sects and the transition from schools of thought to independent sects.

Shi Jun (石峻) offers insights into the distinction between a school and a sect from various angles: “Firstly, a sect possesses an independent monastic economy; secondly, it adheres to a distinctive system of dharma lineage transmission; thirdly, it embodies unique monasteries and doctrinal frameworks; and finally, it exhibits distinct preaching practices and spheres of influence. Conversely, schools revolve around specialized perspectives on doctrines or specific aspects of canonical texts.... The fundamental similarities of Sui and Tang Buddhist sects lie in their distinctive features: each sect demonstrates sectarian individuality with separate monastic establishments (excluding the Chan zong) and distinct regulations, as well as organizational exclusivity within the dharma system”.³⁰

In summary, the concept of “zong” in the Three Religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) focuses on spiritual refinement, seeking enlightenment and validation. Generally, it pertains to achieving Buddhahood and sainthood, involving the cultivation of the body, mind, and soul. This encompasses the striving for both spiritual attainments and the methods to reach them.³¹ In the context of China’s cultural context and practical demands, embracing the concept of “zong” not only shapes the structural foundation and progression but also defines the national style and contemporary features of Chinese Buddhist philosophical ideology.³²

4. The Development of the Concept of “Zong” in the Stages of the Sinicization Chinese Buddhism

In addition to tracing the origins of “zong” in the context of the Three Religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism), examining the concept of “zong” within Sanlun zong and Tiantai zong should also involve revisiting the broader Chinese Buddhist Sinicization process to uncover the evolutionary trajectory of the notion of “zong”. The process known as the Sinicization of Buddhism is frequently examined through the concept of “zong” in academic studies. Scholars, influenced by their respective research perspectives and domains, have articulated the stages of Sinicization diversity. Hence, delving into the developmental trajectory of zong implicit in these stages (分期) is undeniably crucial for accurately “Discerning the Zong”.

From the perspective of the reviewed literature, there are four main stages in the development of Chinese Buddhism in academic circles. The first stage categorizes Chinese Buddhism into the “Buddhism and Taoism” (佛教哲学和道家哲学) phase, also known as the “Buddhism of the Han Dynasty” (汉代之佛教). The second stage is the “Buddhism and Metaphysics” (佛教哲学和魏晋玄学) era, corresponding to the “Buddhism of the Wei, Jin, and North-South Dynasties” (魏晋南北朝佛教). The third stage marks independent development, with Sui and Tang sectarian Buddhism reaching its peak. Lastly, there is a stage of independent and autonomous development, with Sui and Tang sectarian Buddhism continuing to thrive. Following the Five Dynasties period (五代, Historical Period in China), Fang Litian (方立天) supplemented a phase where “Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism merge into one”.³³ (儒、道、佛三教合一) Fang Litian further outlines the historical progression of Chinese Buddhist philosophy: the emergence of a philosophical style known as “Geyi” (格义式哲学); the prevalence of metaphysical philosophy (玄学化哲学); the development of scholastic philosophy (学派哲学); the flourishing of sectarian philosophy (宗派哲学); and the integration of core philosophical tenets (心性哲学). In his later writings, Feng Youlan (冯友兰) explores the theme of subjective and objective idealism to elucidate the three stages of Chinese Buddhism’s evolution: Geyi philosophy (格义), sectarian teachings (教门), and sectarian doctrines (宗门).³⁴

The second approach focuses on the cultural history of Buddhism, highlighting the historical progression of Chinese Buddhism. It begins with the introduction and dissemination of foreign Buddhism, followed by the establishment of Chinese Buddhist schools. Subsequently, various Buddhist sects emerged, leading to the peak of Chinese Buddhism characterized by a distinct national identity known as “Han Buddhism” (汉传佛学). This

phase is then followed by a period of gradual decline marked by increasing secularization (世俗化) and popularization (通俗化).³⁵

Furthermore, the evolution of Buddhist Thought is categorized into distinct phases: from the initial spread of Buddhism to the era of the two Jin Dynasties (两晋, Historical Period in China), and from the Northern and Southern Dynasties (南北朝) to the flourishing period of independent Chinese Buddhism during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. The Sui and Tang Dynasties witnessed the emergence of Chinese-oriented Buddhist sects such as Tiantai zong, Huayan zong, and Chan zong (禅宗), marking the completion of the Sinicization of Buddhism. Subsequently, from the Northern Song Dynasty (北宋, Chinese Dynasty Name) onwards, Chinese Buddhism experienced continuous growth and development.³⁶

From the perspective of form and content, several factors influence the understanding of Chinese Buddhism. In terms of form, these factors include aspects such as the Translation of Scriptures (译经), Geyi (格义) philosophy, Doctrinal Classification (Doctrine Classification Methods), Establishment of Sects (创宗), and Ancestral Genealogy Determination (定祖). Regarding content, the Sinicization of Buddhism encompasses (佛教中国化) the internalization of mind (心性化) and faith (信仰化), along with the secularization of Buddhist practices (世俗化).³⁷

This study adopts a chronological approach to the Sinicization of Buddhism, suggesting that during the periods of the two Han, Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties (两汉至魏晋南北朝), Buddhism underwent a preparatory phase. Subsequently, a systematic doctrine evolved through stages like scripture translation, interpretation, preaching, doctrinal exploration, and interpretation. The sectarian Buddhism of the Sui and Tang Dynasties transitioned from an initial stage of blending Buddhist theories and establishing doctrinal systems to a later stage of integrating conceptual, institutional, and practical aspects (观念-制度-生活的一体化). After the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Buddhism entered a phase of evolution and variability, marked by shifts in pedagogy, teaching methodologies, and doctrinal interpretation.

The transformation of Buddhism into a Chinese context, facilitated by the scholarly community, was not solely influenced by “Dialectization (方术化)”, “Metaphysics (玄学化)”, and “Confucianism” (儒学化). While this perspective offers insights into the evolution of the concept of “zong” and associated cultural adaptations, it remains incomplete. These cultural shifts were often shaped by contemporary social demands, particularly the needs of the era and societal classes (Du 1987, pp. 29–36).

Hence, decisions influenced by societal realities align with Chinese patriarchal and humanistic reasoning. For instance, Daoan’s initiative to unite monks worldwide under the title of “Shi (释)” and his assertion that “without adherence to the state leader, establishing laws becomes challenging” (不依国主, 则法事难立) (S. Shi 1995, p. 562) reflects a strategy rooted in Chinese political culture. This approach, viewed as an adaptation of patriarchal norms through non-bloodline affiliations, demonstrates alignment with state religious models and patriarchal hierarchies. These strategic choices showcase the inclination of Chinese or non-native Han Chinese monks towards the Sinicization of Buddhism, a trajectory that Buddhism has consistently followed through ongoing exploration. Throughout its evolution, Buddhism has harmonized and integrated with local cultures.

5. Evolution of Sinicization in Chinese Buddhism

The concept of “zong” within the framework of the Three Religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) and Chinese Buddhism represents a synthesis of diverse cultures. Sanlun zong and Tiantai zong form part of sectarian Buddhism, playing a pivotal role in the Sinicization of Buddhism. The progressive exploration of Buddhism through the lenses of Sanlun zong and Tiantai zong serves as a significant aspect in the evolutionary process of the concept of “zong”. This evolution indicates that local culture assimilates foreign elements resulting in transformations and advancements, while foreign cultures must adapt to the original local culture for assimilation in the native cultural environment. Moreover, Chinese Buddhism, in comparison to Indian Buddhism, has formulated a distinct doctrinal

system that, while rooted in Indian origins, has evolved into an autonomous intellectual framework deeply integrated into Chinese culture.

The necessity to establish new cultural paradigms is inherently rooted in historical imperatives. The upheaval during the Wang Mang reign in the two Han Dynasties shattered the aspirational vision of a virtuous monarchy amongst intellectuals. Historically, China has maintained a hereditary system based on paternal lineage dating back to the early Western Zhou Dynasty, where a decision was made between lineage succession and alternative systems, with primogeniture being the norm. While the adoption of primogeniture marked a significant historical juncture, it was a decisive choice rather than a compromise. This selection endorsed the patriarchal succession model without forsaking the esteemed “Xianxian”³⁸ status within the chanyang system.

Furthermore, this decision demonstrates utmost reverence for order and the resulting unity and harmony, without impeding the adulation of virtue. Instead, it appears that the recognition and allocation of virtue have evolved into a universal moral imperative. The teachings of pre-Qin scholars, centered on the concept of “the king’s teacher,” can be viewed as acknowledging the importance of bloodline patriarchy and the hierarchical structure it establishes. Undoubtedly, as an immeasurable virtue, these principles form the cornerstone of scholarly doctrines. Taoism emphasizes the concept of “not benevolence” in heaven and earth as a fundamental aspect of nature, advocating for alignment with the natural order as a guiding principle. On the other hand, Confucianism highlights the importance of “benevolence” in constructing ethical practices, underpinning the establishment of societal order through ethical norms and rituals.

At an idealistic level, the system of abdication represents a complement to and transcendence of the hereditary system. This transcendence signifies a move beyond the patriarchal bloodline order, emphasizing the sustainability of the Mandate of Heaven based on the alignment of virtue with one’s position. However, in practicality, such transcendence may risk undermining the established patriarchal bloodline order. Additionally, “virtue” stands distinctly apart from blood, posing challenges in quantification, determination, and inheritance. Consequently, the stability resulting from the inheritance of virtue often proves less robust compared to the stability derived from bloodline patriarchy. This discrepancy may explain why bloodline patriarchal and hereditary systems have held significant importance in China since the Western Zhou Dynasty. Both the chancellorship and the hereditary system embody or endorse patriarchal laws, albeit in different forms. Nonetheless, in societal implementation, the hereditary system, tethered to blood ties, offers greater practicality and certainty, aligning with the maintenance of a stable social order.

On the contrary, the hereditary system centered on the inheritance of virtues posed controversies due to its uncontrollability. This system could potentially serve as a tool for usurpers to justify their actions during certain historical eras, thereby disrupting societal order. Although bloodline patriarchy offers a more practical structure, it runs the risk of stagnation upon maturation, necessitating continuous recognition, innovation, reformulation, and regulation by individuals.

Historical circumstances and resulting collapses have underscored the necessity of Buddhist culture. Du Jiwen posits that Buddhism, amidst its exchange with native cultures, has retained essential attributes to complement and enhance existing cultural aspects. Furthermore, during its initial dissemination, Buddhism underwent modifications through interactions with Confucianism. These engagements were influenced by political and ethical considerations within specific historical contexts, emblematic of distinct societal periods. Du Jiwen notes, “Buddhism exhibits a close affinity with Confucianism, as Confucianism effectively mirrors the fundamental feudal structure in China”.

The *General History of Buddhism in China* adopts a “tradition” perspective, attributing both the Sanlun and Tiantai sects as the legacies of Longshu, with the former being an assimilation and the latter being a refinement. Zhiyi’s ideology, under the “grand tradition (大传统)” framework, embodies a Chinese reinterpretation of Nāgārjuna’s (龙树) mādhya-

maka school and the Dharma Flower Sutra; in the “small tradition (小传统)” context, it represents the evolution and progression of Huiwen and Huisi’s doctrines. This “tradition” not only mirrors the assimilation of Buddhism into the local patriarchal system during its Sinicization but also illustrates a commitment to the patriarchal hierarchy while upholding its doctrinal legitimacy. This non-hereditary link symbolizes a cultural transmission, akin to the later concepts of “Taoism” or “Dharma tradition”, serving as a dialectical transcendence beyond the bloodline patriarchal structure.³⁹

On the other hand, this link aligns with the overarching trajectory of Chinese Buddhism theory development, wherein “Chinese Buddhism transitioned from Prajñā emptiness to Nirvana existence, ultimately amalgamating Prajñā and Nirvana into the theory of mind”.⁴⁰ During the initial phase of sectarian Buddhism, which stemmed from the transition from Prajñā to Ru Laizang (如来藏), Jizang advocated for the adoption of Nirvana and Vaisnavism under the Prajñā framework. By leveraging Long Shu’s distinctive Zhongguang (中观) perspective, he refuted the doctrines of schools established since the Northern and Southern Dynasties, thus “re-establishing the principle of ‘origination’ as the foundation of Chinese Buddhism” and paving the way for its continued evolution.

In reality, patriarchal inheritance typically signifies a smooth transfer of wealth, social ties, and ideological assets. The challenges arising from this process are intricately linked to human relationships—particularly the dynamics between individuals, such as fathers and sons or teachers and disciples—and human nature itself at a moral level. Humanistic dialogues that emerged during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, along with discussions on “unity” within and beyond the sphere of the Three Religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism), find their roots in this context. Sheng Kai interprets the “Taoist unity debate” as a distinctive feature differentiating the “schools” of Buddhism in the Northern and Southern Dynasties from the “sects” in the Sui and Tang Dynasties. This distinction revolves around whether the transmission process is anchored in the concept of “Dharma tradition” or the “Ancestral Tradition” (祖统) centered on human connections.⁴¹

The original cultural traditions and their evolution, along with the historical circumstances of the two Han Dynasties, spurred the emergence of new cultural norms. The inclusive essence of Chinese philosophy and the spiritual elements of Buddhism aligned with the native cultural objectives, facilitating the amalgamation of Chinese indigenous culture and Indian Buddhism. Through conscious cultural recognition, Chinese monks, including many Han Chinese non-native monks, drove forth the Sinicization of Buddhism. This foundational cultural identity emanates deep cultural self-assurance, revitalizing the local culture through interactions and collisions with foreign Buddhist cultures. These exchanges not only enhance the local culture but also instigate a revitalized cultural vitality. Although this cultural rejuvenation did not significantly impact China’s political and ethical systems initially, it gradually assimilated and carved out a niche for its development. The establishment and growth of sectarian Buddhism during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, and its subsequent evolution, epitomize the harmonious blend of Buddhism with the indigenous culture. However, fundamentally, it signifies the refinement and innovative adaptation of Buddhism in pursuit of the evolutionary trajectory of the “zong”.

6. Conclusions

In a broader context, Chineseized sectarian Buddhism entails the fusion of both the inherited minor traditions and the transcendence of the significant traditions of ancestor veneration. It encompasses preserving the fundamental essence of Indian Buddhism while adhering to the qualities and ethos of local Chinese culture, which is essential for authentic Chinese Buddhism. Both the Sanlun and Tiantai sects represent the pioneering endeavors in sectarian Buddhism exploration. A progressive investigation into the concept of “zong” within the Sinicization of Buddhism by analyzing these sects aligns with the historical evolution of philosophy and ideology. This exploration serves to identify the essence of Chinese Buddhism through the prism of sect Buddhism, placing it within the broader framework of Chinese philosophy and culture. Such a thorough examination guides the advance-

ment of sectarian Buddhism, steering the course of Chinese Buddhism towards alignment with its indigenous culture. It signifies a substantial step towards the culmination of a novel doctrine in China.

Sanlun zong, as a conceptual sect, has followed an evolutionary path from scholastic to sectarian Buddhism. While it did not fully embrace the institutional sect model in the Chinese evolution process, it marked the initial foray into sectarian Buddhism. The founding significance of Sanlun zong in pioneering sectarian Buddhism must be recognized. Moreover, its theoretical perspective on the Sinicization of Buddhism holds importance in shaping both the past and future narratives. The shift from scholastic Buddhism to sectarian Buddhism represents a significant stride towards the Sinicization of Buddhism. The exploration of sectarian Buddhism offers directional insights for the continued evolution and transformative journey of Buddhism in the future. Delving into the debate over the founders of Chinese Chan—Dharma, Daoxin (道信), Hongneng (弘忍), and Huineng (慧能)—sheds light on their role in shaping Chinese Chan, marking its inception, evolution, and transformation from Indian Zen. The Sinicization of scholastic Buddhism and sectarian Buddhism predates that of Chan, yet they form a crucial part of Buddhism's localization ("Sutra is the language of the Buddha, Chan is the meaning of the Buddha" 经是佛语, 禅是佛意). They interplay in theoretical development, with their unique formations serving as mutual reference points. Historically and culturally, the Sinicization journey from scholastic Buddhism to sectarian Buddhism guides the evolution from Indian Zen to Chinese Chan. Additionally, the progression from conceptual sects to institutional sects underscores the essence of Sinicization.

Additionally, both the Sanlun zong and the Tiantai zong, positioned at the initial stages of exploration, encounter pressing issues that demand resolution. These challenges include the harmonization of diverse ideologies stemming from different periods of Buddhism (Mahayana, Hinayana, emptiness, existence, and Ru Lai Zang 大、小乘, 空、有和如来藏等), amalgamating teachings from various masters across preparatory stages, as well as integrating principles from the Three Religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism). Their aim is to offer more tailored spiritual guidance that aligns with the societal context of the time (the political consolidation during the Sui and Tang Dynasties) to benefit all beings. From a propagation perspective, both Jizang and Zhiyi's Doctrinal Classification should emphasize the propagation of Dharma rather than the Establishment of Sects. Sanlun zong, as a conceptual sect, delves into theoretical inquiries rooted in the principle of Prajña "non-attainment", while Tiantai zong, serving as a systematic sect, underscores the significance of "cessation and contemplation" along with the practice of meditation and wisdom, focusing on practical application. The propagation of Dharma should be central to Jizo and Zhiyi's teachings, steering away from the fixation on sect formation. Tiantai zong, as an institutional sect, places equal emphasis on "cessation and contemplation" and "mediation and wisdom practice" while projecting concerns on current issues. Notably, Jizang's apparent disinterest in personnel affairs, contrasting with Guanding's (灌顶) substantial personnel management, may explain the incomplete development of sectarian aspects in Sanlun zong, given the broader audience appeal and realism of Tiantai zong. In comparison, Sanlun zong did not establish a comprehensive religious organization, nor did it institutionalize and systematize its actual construction. Conversely, the Tiantai zong excelled in both theoretical development and practical engagement through its structured religious organization.

In essence, the "zong" of Sanlun zong delves into the exploration and tracing of Buddhist doctrine origins and truths. However, it tends to overlook the crucial aspect of "unity" that encompasses horizontal evaluation and adjustment. This oversight neglects to maintain equilibrium and order within the overall "zong" framework. The notion of "dharma-unification" involves not only the "zong" of truth and its conveyance but also the "zong" of political unity, relating to secular leadership. Tiantai zong appears to effectively harmonize these realms, integrating the "zong" of Shakyamuni's teachings with the monarch's doctrinal authority. Through an examination of the "zong" concept, the Sanlun zong and

Tiantai zong, both positioned at the initial exploratory stage, not only established the fundamental basis of sectarian Buddhism but also elucidated the direction of Buddhism's Sini-cization more explicitly.

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Notes

¹ Patriarchal social hierarchies are structured around familial lineage.

² (Y. Tang 1962, pp. 47–54). The thesis addresses the assertion that there have been “thirteen sects” of Chinese Buddhism following Gyōnen.

³ The concept of “zong” discernment is explored in (Chen 2024, pp. 1–35). This thesis argues for the importance of “Discerning the Zong” (Bian Zong 辨宗) as an essential precursor to the sectarianization of Buddhism.

⁴ See a detailed discussion in (Q. Dong 2008, pp. Introduction 1–6).

⁵ See a detailed discussion in (Pan and Wu 2008, pp. Preamble 1–7).

⁶ Dawson’s “Four Wheels” represents one of the earliest systems of Doctrinal Classification.

⁷ See (Shi and Fang 1981, pp. 68–72). The thesis discusses the evolution of Buddhist sects during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, proposing that the Tiantai zong adopted and modified the Sanlun zong without significant theoretical innovation.

⁸ See (Q. Liang 2014, p. 118). Liang Qichao (梁启超) classified the Sui and Tang Dynasties based on the significant influence of Sinicization.

⁹ See (Y. Tang 2000, p. 220). Tang Yongtong (汤用彤) differentiated the Sanlun and Tiantai schools by employing the terms “Chan (禅) practice” and “Doctrine”.

¹⁰ The concept of unearned income in doctrine, is often known as “no gain”. As the Dharma nature is void and unattainable, the mind does not grasp the concept of acquisition.

¹¹ See (W. Yang 2009, p. 196). The author perceives the uniqueness of Trinitarianism from his own viewpoint.

¹² In the Han Dynasty of China, the concept of “five generations and termination” emerged to address ancestral veneration and the patriarchal lineage, addressing the weakening blood connections across generations.

¹³ The practice guidelines for unhindered practice during the Sui and Tang Dynasties are outlined in (J. Ren 2010, p. 302).

¹⁴ See (C. Sun 2010, p. 2321). Sun Changwu posits that the establishment of the Tiantai zong heralded a new era in the autonomous progression of Chinese Buddhism.

¹⁵ See (K. Sheng 2004, p. 13, 89). The implementation of the penance system by the Tiantai zong is a significant representation of the fusion of the inherent patriarchal essence within Chinese culture.

¹⁶ See (D. Xia 2015, p. 220). *The Precepts of the Bodhisattva Yishu* of the Tiantai zong exemplifies the Sinicization of precepts.

¹⁷ See (Y. Shi 2010, p. 41). This can be viewed as a significant summarization of the Tiantai zong in the sectarianization of Buddhism.

¹⁸ A comprehensive exploration of the independence, autonomy, and creativity of the Sui and Tang Buddhist sects is available in (L. Fang 2014, pp. 42–43).

¹⁹ This viewpoint is discussed in (Z. Zhang 2016, pp. 21–29). Fundamental cultural identity.

²⁰ (J. Zhou 2019, pp. Preface 2). The fundamental cultural identity is discussed in Zhou’s understanding of the Sinicization of Buddhism, rooted in Chinese cultural traditions (J. Zhou 2019, p. Preface 2).

²¹ (Huntington and Jervis 1997, p. 47). This thesis posits that Huntington’s interpretation of the Sinicization of Buddhism is founded on non-Chinese cultural traditions.

²² See (B. Chen 1988, pp. 141–60). The divide between Wu and Shi cultures can to some extent symbolize the transformation of Chinese culture from primitive to humanistic belief systems.

²³ See (P. Pang 1988, p. 83). Here is a well-articulated explanation of the incorporation of ancestor deities that characterizes Chinese religious traditions.

²⁴ The concept of the “Three Principles and Five Constants” is elaborated on in (Song 2021, pp. 1–24).

²⁵ (G. Yang 2021, p. 217). This is Yang Guorong’s (杨国荣) interpretation of Zhuangzi’s “Zong” Dao.

²⁶ (W. Zhang 2018, p. 158). This is Zhang Wenjiang’s (张文江) interpretation of traditional Confucianism and Taoism.

²⁷ This viewpoint is discussed in (Shi and Fang, pp. 68–72). This passage represents the foundational analysis of the sect in Tang Yutong’s “Historical Manuscripts of Sui and Tang Dynasty Buddhism”. Tang Yutong explores the distinctions among schools and sects in Chinese Buddhism through a historical Buddhist lens.

- 28 Absence of Thoughts in Tantra. The absence of thoughts and distractions does not imply complete emptiness of mind; a mind without thoughts of the past, present, and future signifies not nothing, but rather a state of clarity where one's focus is undivided. By letting go of distractions and delusions, the heart becomes centered.
- 29 The "Six Schools and Seven Sects" were prominent in the study of Buddhist Prajñāparamita during the Eastern Jin Dynasty in ancient China, showcasing the diverse interpretations of Buddhist scholars regarding the concept of the emptiness of Prajñāparamita's nature.
- 30 (Zhong Guo Ren Min Da Xue Zhe Xue Yuan Zhong Guo Zhe Xue Xi 中国人民大学哲学院中国哲学系 [Zhong Guo Ren Min Da Xue Zhe Xue Yuan Zhong Guo Zhe Xue Jiao Yan Shi](#) 中国人民大学哲学院中国哲学教研室 Department of Chinese Philosophy, School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China 2012, p. 263). This paper offers an in-depth exploration of schools and sects by Shi Jun, a significant disciple of Tang Yutong.
- 31 (Y. Tang 2015, p. 247). He posits that Buddhism and Confucianism share similarities in cultivating the concept of "zong" (宗).
- 32 (L. Fang 1992, pp. 100–12). His research thesis constitutes a vital component of the synthesis outlined in this section.
- 33 (L. Fang 2003, pp. 324–39). His studies offer a valuable complement to the synthesis outlined in this section.
- 34 (J. Zhao 2020, pp. 9–16). His research thesis plays a crucial role in the synthesis outlined in this section.
- 35 (C. Sun 2010, pp. 2733–34). His research thesis constitutes a vital component of the synthesis detailed in this section.
- 36 (X. Hong 2014, pp. 24–25). His research thesis serves as a critical component of the synthesis outlined in this section.
- 37 (H. Han 2002, pp. 5–7). His research thesis constitutes a pivotal element of the synthesis delineated in this section.
- 38 This form of reverence embodies an intrinsic virtue and serves as the internal manifestation of Shanrang (禅让).
- 39 See (Y. Lai 2010, pp. 2–11). The paper provides an in-depth analysis of both grand and minor traditions in addition to acknowledging the pioneering efforts of Jizo's Sanlun zong in the development of sectarian Buddhism.
- 40 See (Y. Ran 2000, pp. 419–29). Ran Yunhua contends that the fundamental development in Chinese Buddhism involves a transition from the concept of emptiness in Prajñā to the realization of nirvana, culminating in the integration of Prajñā and nirvana through the doctrine of mindfulness.
- 41 See (K. Sheng 2022, pp. 3–8). The distinction between schools and sects lies in the practice of Dharma and the ancestral lineages.

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