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Revisiting the Notion of *Zong*: Contextualizing the Dharma Drum Lineage of Modern Chan Buddhism*

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Abstract

The paper examines the historiography of *zong* 宗 in Chan/Zen studies in relation to Venerable Sheng Yen's Dharma Drum Lineage in the historical context of postwar Taiwanese religions. It also examines the evolution and the theoretical basis of Sheng Yen's formulation of Chinese Buddhist orthodoxy.

Keywords:

Chan, Dharma Drum Lineage, Folk religions, Orthodoxy,
Sectarian scholarship (*shūgaku*)

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再訪「宗」的概念 ——現代禪佛教的法鼓宗

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摘要

本文檢視「宗」在禪學史的定義以及聖嚴法師所創辦「法鼓宗」與戰後臺灣宗教近代史之關係。同時，本文也探討聖嚴法師建構正信漢傳佛教之發展與理論依據。

關鍵詞：禪、法鼓宗、民間信仰、正統、宗學

In 2006, the Buddhist monk Sheng Yen 聖嚴 (1931-2009), one of the most influential Chinese Buddhist clerics of modern times, founded a new lineage (*zong* 宗) of Chan Buddhism in Taiwan called the “Dharma Drum Lineage” (i.e., *Fagu zong* 法鼓宗; hereafter DDL).¹ This is an important historical development in Chinese and Taiwanese Buddhism, as it had been a thousand years since a new school of Chan had been created in Chinese Buddhism. Chan (popularly known as “Zen” in Japanese pronunciation) is arguably one of the most important Buddhist traditions in East Asia. The historical development of Chan in China has been an ongoing topic of scholarly discussion. Yet, most scholarly literature tends to focus on the formation and flourishing of Chan in premodern periods, based on genealogical records produced by Chan or Buddhist clerics themselves. The field of Chan/Zen studies as a whole has not moved to the modern period, much less to the formation of new lineages. The purpose of this paper is to fill these lacunae by historicizing Sheng Yen’s construction of his new lineage within the broader Taiwanese religious landscape.

The paper is divided into five parts, beginning with an examination of the historiography of Chan/Zen studies, leading into a history of Sheng Yen’s DDL in the context of Taiwanese religions—the social conditions through which he lived and made choices in the creation of his new Chan lineage—and ending with an analysis of the theoretical basis of Sheng Yen’s understanding of *zong*. I also examine the evolution of his understanding of Chinese Buddhism and Chan. One of the objectives of this paper is to address Sheng Yen’s rationale or motivation for establishing his DDL. For example: In what socio-religious contexts did Sheng Yen establish a new Chan *zong* or lineage, especially given his non-sectarian position throughout his writings? Why did the formation of the DDL come relatively late in his teaching career? How did he conceive of the notion of *zong*? What ends did it serve? Rather than limiting my sources to prescriptive Buddhist texts, I set the DDL in the wider context of Taiwanese religion and argue that for Sheng Yen, *zong* cannot be narrowly understood as “school” or “lineage” with distinct methods of practice that are associated with received notions of “Chan” or “Zen.” His *zong* was sectarian in nature, but not in the confines of prescriptive claims in the Chan genealogical literature or scholarly portrayals of Chan Buddhism. For him, *zong* was an organizing principle that allowed him to pragmatically unify and advance orthodoxy within Chinese Buddhism against what he saw

¹ The use of the term “lineage” to translate the Chinese *zong* 宗 is from the Dharma Drum Mountain organization itself.

as the threat of folk religion and the influx of non-Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan.

A History of *Zong* as a Constructed Category

In Buddhist studies, the term *zong* is commonly rendered as “school” or “lineage.”² But this rendering is shaped by nineteenth-century sectarian concerns that emerged with the rise of “religion” as a discrete universal category of human endeavor, separable from science and politics. *Zong* originally comprised a wide range of lexical valences,³ such as a specific doctrine, an essential theme or exegetical interpretation of a text, and direct “realization” in opposition to *jiao* 教, or “teaching.”⁴ *Zong* could even mean a progenitor of a clan or a house which enshrined ancestral tablets in ancient China.⁵ To differentiate what *zong* meant for Sheng Yen, it is productive to examine how this term was defined as “school” within Zen studies as a burgeoning academic field in nineteenth-century Meiji Japan. My aim here is not to abolish the translation as school all together, but rather to disconnect *zong* from the exclusivist conception tied to distinct sectarian practices.

The end of the nineteenth century was a time when notions of “world religions” first emerged in intellectual circles across the globe.⁶ In this context, Buddhism was promoted as a “religion” (*zongjiao* 宗教) on par with the major Western religions—especially Christianity. It had similar features: a historical founder, an ecclesiastic tradition, a canon of sacred texts embodying a set of doctrines, and distinct sectarian traditions. The term *zongjiao*, or “religion” in Chinese, was initially a Japanese neologism crafted during this

² See Foulk (1992, 18-31). He argues that “lineage” should be reserved for normative claims in Chan and “school” should be reserved as an analytical scholarly category.

³ See Weinstein (1987, 2: 482-87) and McRae (2005, 1235-41). Scholars have also argued that the formation of *zong* in Chan hinged on Chinese Confucian and imperial precedents; see Jorgensen (1987, 89-133).

⁴ The *locus classicus* distinction between *zong* 宗 and *jiao* 教 can be traced back to *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* (*Lengqie jing* 楞伽經), T 670, 16: 499b27-c6, but the distinction was made prominent by Zongmi 宗密 (780-841) in his *Chan Prolegomenon*, *Chanyuan zhu quanji duxu* 禪源諸詮集都序, T 2015, 48: 399. For a study of this work, see Broughton (2009).

⁵ See Schuessler (2007, 634); for a detailed discussion, see also Welter (2002, 31(1): 7, fn. 2).

⁶ See Masuzawa (2005, 121-46).

time and was used to express a Western idea that had not existed in East Asian discourses before—an idea that referred to the post-Reformation sense of systems of doctrine organized as churches separate from the state.⁷

This conception of Buddhism as a religion was made popular by Chinese intellectuals⁸ who absorbed the works of Western and Japanese scholars during the Meiji Restoration, which had a tremendous impact on China in its formation as a nation-state. During this time, the Japanese state felt the pressing need to establish a national ideology that could compete on an equal footing with Protestant Christianity, which was perceived as the unifying force behind the modern Western state. The Japanese state was determined to remove all obstacles to modernization. This meant abolishing the old, corrupt feudal institutions represented by the Tokugawa *bakufu* 幕府 and, along with it, Buddhist institutions, through the process called *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈 or “abolish Buddhism and destroy Shākyamuni.” The disestablishment of the temple affiliation or parish temple system by the state seriously affected the economic basis of Buddhism, and edicts mandating the separation of Shinto and Buddhism (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) completely reconfigured the religiosity of the people. Japanese Buddhist institutions faced with these imperial threats and inspired toward modernization sought new models for organizing themselves. One way was to reinvent Buddhism as Buddhist studies (*Bukkyō-gaku* 仏教学) and to establish Buddhist sectarian universities (each of the major Buddhist sects established its own university). Over the years, these powerful Japanese educational institutions would produce influential sectarian scholarship (*shūgaku* 宗学) that shaped subsequent new generations of both Japanese and Western scholars.⁹

Early Japanese scholars such as Nanjō Bun'yū 南条文雄 (1849-1927) and Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 (1866-1945) worked as students and research assistants with influential Western scholars such as Max Müller (1823-1900) and Sylvain Lévi (1863-1935), respectively, during the formative years of European Buddhist studies and religious studies. Adopting their mentors' perspective on the importance of the Buddha as founder and of doctrine as his primary contribution, these Japanese authors and their later colleagues portrayed Chinese Buddhism as constituted by different “founders,” “schools,” or “denominations” that were on a par with Western religious and

⁷ See Nedostup (2009, 4-11).

⁸ Most important among the Chinese intellectuals was Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929); see Bastid-Bruguière (1998, 70: 329-73).

⁹ For an overview of this phenomenon, see Stone (1990, 217-33).

philosophical traditions. Chinese religious practices were portrayed as sectarian entities similar to those which had crystallized in Japan during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), when the Japanese government imposed fixed administrative structures on the religion.¹⁰ In Chinese Buddhism nothing like these Japanese schools ever existed, with an integrated sectarian organization of prescribed doctrines and distinct practices and clearly defined institutional affiliations, priestly specialists, and lay membership.

The impact of this construction of Buddhism in academia can also be seen in the works of subsequent generations of Western scholars, many of whom were trained academically in Japan. Their works on Chan and Zen as a school resonated as well with the Western philosophical traditions of ancient Greece, where individual teachers guided small assemblies of (predominately male) students in different styles of intellectual discourse. These assemblies would continue in lineages of teachers and students. This depiction of Chan perpetuates a model that is of limited application to Chinese Chan Buddhism past and present, and ignores the institutional and social dimensions that facilitated the perpetuation of the tradition.

What is perhaps most troubling in this image of Chan studies is the prevailing view that the lineage model is the defining feature of religious praxis.¹¹ For example, the Chinese Caodong tradition is portrayed as an equivalent of the Japanese Sōtō sect, which teaches that one nourishes the buddha-nature within (i.e., one's fundamental and original enlightenment) by the practice of "just sitting," or *shikantaza* 只管打坐, which is equated with the Chinese practice of "silent illumination" (*mozhao* 默照; Jp. *mokushō*), where one "ritually enacts" the meaning of the Buddhist truth without seeking enlightenment.¹² This tradition is then typically framed in opposition to the Linji (Jp. Rinzai) tradition, where one demonstrates the active functioning of that buddha-mind in spontaneous interaction between enlightened master and aspiring students or, in later years, through interrogating famous examples of this interaction in one's meditation practice. The type of spontaneous and often nonverbal interaction depicted in Chan texts is what John McRae calls an "encounter dialogue" (*jiyuan wenda* 機緣問答),¹³ and the contemplation of pithy examples of encounter dialogue is known as "observing the critical

¹⁰ See, for example, Nanjō Bun'yū 南条文雄 (1886) and Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 (1947 [first edition]); for a brief summary, see McRae (2005, 1235).

¹¹ See, for example, Schlütter (2008, 144-74, esp. 172).

¹² See Leighton (2008, 167-84) and Schlütter (1999, 126).

¹³ See McRae (1992, 339-69).

phrase" (*kanhua* 看話; Jp. *kanna*) Chan (often referred to as *Kōan Zen* 公案禪), where the "critical phrase" is the climactic line of an anecdote that can only be understood by transcending ordinary thinking.¹⁴

The key problem here is the exclusivist formulation of *zong* as having distinct institutional association of *mozhaō* with Caodong and *kanhua* with Linji, where these methods of practice are polarized as opposites. This polarization is evident not only in D. T. Suzuki's popular writings on Zen,¹⁵ but also in nearly every subsequent scholarly study of Chan.¹⁶ However, the whole scholarly project of framing the supposed opposition between the Song dynasty Caodong "silent illumination Chan" of master Hongzhi Zhengjue 宏智正覺 (1091-1157) and the Linji "critical phrase or *kanhua* Chan" of master Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163) is nothing more than a replication of the Japanese sectarian rivalry between Rinzai Zen and Sōtō Zen during the Tokugawa period.¹⁷

This construction of *zong* really comes from understanding Chan through a literary angle. Indeed, the various Chinese Song dynasty Chan genealogical

¹⁴ See McRae (2005, 1240).

¹⁵ See Suzuki (1953, 2: 22).

¹⁶ See, for example, Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 (1973, 6(3): 1-20); Ishii Shūdō 石井修道 (1974, (1): 336-39 and 1977, 25(2): 257-61). Western scholars, although qualifying the *mozhaō-kanhua* debate with more nuance, basically repeat this genealogical association of the practices of Caodong and Linji; see, for example, Schlütter (2008, 104-21).

¹⁷ It was Hakuin Ekaku 白隱慧鶴 (1686-1769) who fixed the orthodox Rinzai *kōan* practice against what he perceived as the perverse "dead sitting of silent illumination" (*koza mokushō* 枯坐默照), and Mujaku Dōchū 無著道忠 (1653-1744) who established modern Rinzai scholarship and dismissed Dōgen's Zen as "pitiable." This Zen, according to Mujaku, simply clung to the notion that the deluded mind was itself Buddhahood (*mōjin sokubutsu* 盲人即佛) and ignored the transformative experience of enlightenment or *satori* 悟り. On the Sōtō Zen side, the critic of Rinzai Zen was Menzan Zuihō 面山瑞方 (1683-1769), who said that only Dōgen preserved the true teaching of the Buddha and that practitioners of *kanna* 看話 could never even dream of it. Mujaku's interpretations of Dōgen have been treated by Shibe Kenichi 志部憲一 (1982, 24: 72-7 and 1983, 25: 246-61). For a study of Mujaku Dōchū, see App (1987, 3: 155-74); for a study of Menzan Zuihō, see Riggs (2004, 16: 67-100); for an example of Hakuin's criticism in English, see Waddell (1999, 3) and Ahn (2008, 35(2): 202-11).

records embodied in lamp records (*denglu* 燈錄)¹⁸ and discourse records (*yulu* 語錄)¹⁹ have led Chan scholars to conclude that genealogy and lineage is the defining identity of Chan orthodoxy. Hence, scholarly attention has focused extensively on theories about the origin of this schema. Some scholars argue that Chan's success in its lineage-based claims drew in part from the rising elite interest in genealogy.²⁰ Others argue that the genealogical bond of the teacher-disciple relationship in Chan transferred to the more general social context of scholarly bureaucracy, implying a reverse flow of influence.²¹ Most researchers, however, would agree that Chan genealogy functioned as a strategy of legitimation, internal coherence, and continuity of the tradition with the rise of large public monastery systems.²² These recent studies have advanced the way we understand Chan historically, demystifying its genealogy of master-student succession.²³ However, scholars still continue to take Chan's self-representation as a "separate transmission outside the scriptures" (*jiaowai bie zhuan* 教外別傳)—the supposed defining feature of Chan—as a foil for historical criticism, fixating on notions of fact and fiction.

What has been described thus far are only some of the historical and methodological problems that plague Chan studies. Perhaps these problems

¹⁸ The earliest of which is the *Patriarch Hall Collection* (*Zutang ji* 祖堂集), compiled in 952; the more influential is the *Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Flame* (*Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄) completed in 1004; for an excellent study of these and other texts, see Foulk (1999, 220-94). While I do not agree with the conclusions drawn by Foulk, his overviews of these texts are very useful.

¹⁹ The first actual *yulu* 語錄 or discourse record was the *Fenyang Wude Chanshi yulu* 汾陽無德禪師語錄, compiled in 1004. For a survey of *yulu* as a distinct genre of literature and a critique of modern scholarly debates surrounding this genre, see Welter (2008, 45-80). Welter argues against the predominant Japanese Zen studies position, as represented by Ishii Shūdō 石井修道 and Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山, for an all-inclusive definition of *yulu* that incorporates most kinds of Chan literature.

²⁰ For seventh- and eighth-century aristocratic uses of genealogy, see, for example, Jorgensen (1987, 125-6) and Johnson (1970, 48-53). For the resurgent interest in genealogy in later periods, see Bossler (1998, 13-4) and Ebrey (2003, 107-43). For example of Song Chan scholarship, see Foulk (1999).

²¹ See, for example, McMullen (1988, 49).

²² For a summary of constructions of *zong* see Morrison (2010, 3-4).

²³ The romantic view of Chan lineage, proposed by the tradition itself, held that the true teaching of Buddhism was passed down from the Buddha Śākyamuni through a succession of Indian patriarchs to Bodhidharma, and then by a succession of Chinese patriarchs to the teachers of the present day.

can never be sorted out; we simply do not have the historical documents to cross reference prescriptive ideals, which are mostly built on a recovered, fragmented cache of manuscripts and short tracts from Dunhuang, supplemented with later discourse records and lamp histories, all of which are prescriptive, canonical texts and therefore inherently ahistorical in nature. Prescriptive texts do not tell us about descriptive realities. They preclude us from knowing how Chan clerics responded to the circumstances through which they lived and made their choices. For Song developments of Chan, the available historical documents are better and we are able to detail numerous practical and social concerns that impinged on the real life functioning of Chan communities and clerics, showing that the Chan soteriological aim was framed against the practical realities of social and institutional life. However, many of the questions asked by scholars on Song Chan are already theorized by paradigms set forth in earlier sectarian scholarship. Trying to write histories of developments of Chan based on these caveats leaves us with a very narrow portrayal of Chan.²⁴

We must not confuse ideal types with descriptive, empirical reality. Lineage is not history, in the same way that a map is not territory. There will always be a gap between a tradition's prescriptive claims and its concretization in life. Chan genealogies are abstract ideals—they do not reflect historical, social, and descriptive realities. What is perhaps a more fruitful way to examine Chan is to look outside of it, to bracket its normative claims and carefully examine its historical context. The prescriptive sources for the study of Chan in premodern times shed much light on the numerous practical concerns of the functioning of Chan communities and clerics. However, they are very limited in portraying the (non-Buddhist) social and political realities within which Chan movements responded. We must conclude that what we do know about Chan Buddhism, and especially about the supposed genealogical concerns that scholars have regarded as its very essence, only reflects an extremely small fragment of its whole story.²⁵

Contemporary formations of Chan, where numerous Buddhist and, more importantly, non-Buddhist sources are readily available, can tell us much about the social reality behind *zong*. The problem here is not of scarcity of

²⁴ For examples of exceptions—those who have historicized the social realities of genealogy—see Welch (1963, 50: 93-149 and 1967, 395-408) and Wu (2008).

²⁵ In this light, I take heed of what Erik Zürcher has said: that in order to understand Chinese Buddhism, one must look outside of Chinese Buddhism; see Zürcher (1982, 2: 161-76).

materials but of overabundance, spreading across different genres and interrelated subject matters. For this reason, and to reveal the complex historical and social processes that are often missed in premodern Chan studies, the focus of this paper is on the DDL's proximal historical contexts, its responses to socio-religious pressures, and its material manifestations. This study not only incorporates eyewitness accounts of the people involved and events taking place during the crucial stages of the DDL's history,²⁶ but it also sheds light on methodological flaws in Chan scholarship in general. A close examination of the DDL will reveal a much more nuanced picture of the socio-historical realities of Chan than is currently available in studies on this subject.

The Impact of Folk and Popular Religions in Taiwan

The different phases of Sheng Yen's career as a Buddhist teacher and thinker have already been well documented.²⁷ What is important to point out is that in the early phase of his career as a Buddhist teacher he was vociferous in his criticism of *zong* as a sectarian bias (*zongpai menhu* 宗派門戶). Yet, in 2006 he established his own *Fagu zong* or DDL. At the same time, he continued to be critical of those who guarded their own sectarian identities. How then did he conceive of *zong*? What were the conditions through which he established a new lineage? As I maintain below, the apparent shift in his usage of *zong* has more to do with his response to the widespread influence of folk religion on

²⁶ A deep reticence about revealing anything of our own religious stories is very much a part of the discipline of Buddhist studies and the ethos of religious studies. I believe it is time for scholars to be more transparent in their public autobiographical self-reflection when we explore the social, religious, and cultural grounds of our work, just as anthropologists no longer occlude themselves in the field. From 1982 to 2009, I have had a close relationship with Sheng Yen, both as his student and his attendant. Thus, I have personally witnessed the transformations of his teachings and the developments of the DDL. In an indirect way, this paper critiques the remnant biases of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Orientalist Buddhology that guarantees academic distance. It aims to undermine the confidence and the rigidity of "emic" and "etic" or "insider" and "outsider" categories. At the same time, this paper does not endorse normative values of Sheng Yen or the DDL. The challenge of this paper is to balance carefully and self-reflectively on the border between my voice and that of Sheng Yen and between subjectivism and objectivism. For a detailed discussion of the biases of religious studies as a discipline, see Orsi (2005, 184-95).

²⁷ See Yu (2010, 23: 3-38).

Buddhism and the presence of new forms of Buddhism in Taiwan—all of which are connected to the challenges of modernity posed by Taiwan's economic boom in the 1980s.

There are at least two discernible developments in the context of twentieth-century Taiwan's complex religious landscape that bear on the formation of the DDL. The first is an increase in local folk religious rituals that have flourished, as I explain below, under a market transaction model. The second is an increase in organized, universalist religions that resemble Western religions with modern sensibilities. These two kinds of religious trends appear to contradict one another—one obscures traditional moral values and the other advocates them. The simultaneous growth of these two religious trends is the result of the Taiwanese government's policies on religious practice, economic growth and technological development, as well as greater social mobility and exposure to foreign values and practices. The establishment of the DDL is a response to these challenges in a modernizing society.

Since the ending of Martial Law (*jiyuan ling* 戒嚴令) in 1987, local community-based cultic traditions and temple religions, which are broadly construed here as folk beliefs and practices (*minjian xinyang* 民間信仰),²⁸ have not only been able to exercise their religious freedom beyond state control, but they have also begun to influence the larger society as well as politics at the national level. The term *minjian xinyang* is not necessarily a pejorative term used by modern Buddhist clerics, Taiwanese academics, and government officials. "Folk religion" is an anthropological and sociological category, but is not much better and has its own history in Western religious discourses.²⁹ This article employs the term in light of Sheng Yen's usage. The important point here is that these traditions have stymied the predictions that market modernity would lead to an inevitable secularization.³⁰ On the contrary, Taiwan has witnessed more religious activity than ever before.³¹

²⁸ This is the general term used by Sheng Yen to include a whole array of popular cultic organizations and practices. Many of these folk beliefs and practices, known as Zhaijiao 齋教 or "vegetarian sect," have roots in sixteenth-century mainland China. Scholars have shown the extent of mingling and practical dependence between these vegetarian sects in Taiwan and Buddhism in Taiwan prior to 1945 during Japan's colonization; see Jones (2003, 16-19); Cheng (2003, 10: 39-56).

²⁹ See Bell (1989, 29 (1): 35-57).

³⁰ See Katz (2003, (174): 395-412); Jordan (1994, 137-60).

³¹ Based on the Taiwan Social Change Survey of 1985, funded by the National Science Council & Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, the percentage of

Even previously persecuted religions are thriving and expanding.³² Many local folk temple religions and deity worship traditions operate openly, are well connected in local communities to local elites, and continue to assert themselves as integral to individual, family, and communal life, and even to a national level. The existence of these traditions was not the issue of concern for Sheng Yen; rather, as we will read below, he was concerned about the ambivalent moral values espoused indirectly by some exceptional folk religions that would destabilize society and influence Buddhism.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Taiwan achieved significant monetary wealth for the first time, but it was a wealth that rested on capricious market economies. These economies are reflected in the relationships that people have with the numerous emerging deities and ghosts, who would grant any requests regardless of their moral outlook as long as people provided material gifts to the deities' host temples. These cultic traditions flourish on an economy of material exchange.³³ The ambivalent values indirectly espoused by these cultic traditions and folk religions can be seen in the way that several local folk temples are connected to the criminal world. Robert Weller's study of the Eighteen Lords (*Shiba wang gong* 十八王宮) in post-war Taiwan describes how the spirits of seventeen men and their canine companion regularly received offerings of cigarettes and other items from gangsters, gamblers, prostitutes, and people who wished to make a quick profit in an illegal lottery.³⁴ These gods lacked any ascriptive local community and pretense of morality. People believed in the gods' efficacy, and the offerings to them may be seen as bribes. The desire to win quick profits in gambling and have a

self-identified Buddhist in Taiwan was 43.7% (questionnaire 21); in 2004, the number of Buddhists had decreased to 24.8% (questionnaire 28). In 1985, the number of self-identified folk religious and Daoist followers was 34.5%; in 2004, it had increased to 46.9%. These statistical data are also complicated by the fact that in 1985, even though most people professed their affiliation with Buddhism (questionnaire 21), 86.1% of people reported that the kind of worship they usually engage in is actually worshipping of Mazhu, Guangong, the local deities, and other deities (questionnaire 28).

For 1985, see: http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Codebooks/TSC85_CB.asp, assessed on April 30, 2012;

for 2004, see: http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Codebooks/TSC04_CB.asp, assessed on April 30, 2012.

³² See Lu (2008, 63); Bosco (1994, 423-44).

³³ See Weller (1999a, 90); Song Guangyu 宋光宇 (1997, 141-275). Song, for example, has shown a direct correlation between economic growth and new temple constructions in Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s.

³⁴ See Weller (1999a, 352-56).

successful business, coupled with the inauguration of the Lotto lottery in January 2002, have caused a new wave of interest in worshipping Taiwan's ambivalent gods.³⁵

As many temples and shrines were becoming integrated into the capitalist mainstream, appealing increasingly to individuals rather than kin groups or local communities, and in which temples and ritual specialists competed against each other like firms in a market, popular religion that espoused ambivalent values mushroomed. Traditional community temples used to serve as the base for particular local political factions, whose members would also manage temples. In the 1980s, this tradition began to change as modernity gave way to greater mobility, but community temples' spheres of influence did not decrease. Instead, this influence grew because the influence of community temples was no longer bound to geographical regions or classes of people who voluntarily worshiped deities without regard for territorial or community affiliations.

Taiwanese politicians understood the growing influence of temples and shrines. They regularly campaigned at different temples to win election votes. In fact, their election outcomes were often interpreted as evidence of spiritual support from certain local gods and spirits. For example, during and after the 2000 presidential election campaign, candidates such as Chen Shui-bian 陳水扁, Hsu Hsinliang 許信良, Lien Chan 連戰, and Sung Ch'u-yu 宋楚瑜 all publicly venerated deities such as Mazu 媽祖 and Royal Lords (*wangye* 王爺) in hopes of gaining election. The Lien campaign actively publicized supposed miraculous events that occurred at temples during worship, indicating his likelihood to be elected. Other candidates also hosted divination rituals to demonstrate that certain deities were behind them in the election.³⁶ Popular cultic traditions were even involved in the performance of judicial rituals of oath and indictments made in the presence of gods of the underworld.

³⁵ For connections between local religions and the lottery in Taiwan, a Google search for "*shenming pai*" 神明牌 will turn up many results. The 2004 Taiwan Social Change Survey also shows that despite people's claims about their belief in the efficacy of self-cultivation as a reason for their religious belief (questionnaire 76; 21.6%), 54.9% of people actually said that they choose their belief just to follow the faith of their parents (questionnaire 91). Also, one of the main reasons why people go to shrines/temples is because they want to have a successful career. The statistic also shows that people generally have a high belief in the efficacy of fortune telling (questionnaires 116-148). See: http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Codebooks/TSC04_CB.asp, assessed on April 2, 2012.

³⁶ See Katz (2003, 406).

For example, candidates accused of vote-buying or lying sometimes behead live chickens in temples dedicated to gods of the underworld as a way to demonstrate their innocence.³⁷ These rituals cut across class divides and geographical boundaries.

Since the late 1980s, there also appears to be an increasing (although it may be just better publicized) social importance of spirit mediums, especially women mediums who exercise their power beyond the limits of folk temple religions. They are able to cater to the needs of their clientele much more effectively than temple gods by personally prognosticating the future, giving advice about deceased relatives, counseling the sick, healing illness or performing exorcisms, and foretelling the future or even the results of presidential elections.³⁸

These mediums are autonomous entrepreneurs.³⁹ Unlike temples, which are usually devoted to worshipping one primary deity, a spirit medium's private residence or shrine can sometimes house up to forty to fifty images, with each deity having its own specialty. This testifies to the utilitarian function of the gods. Sometimes spirit mediums are hired by Daoist temples to be part of their rituals (*jiao* 醮); other times they operate out of their own residences or shrines and are hired by private individuals. The nature of the relationship between the mediums and the gods has also changed. Many enter trances for personal profit, during which they "communicate" with gods without losing themselves entirely in them.⁴⁰

The impact of Taiwanese folk traditions follows Taiwan's thriving liberal market economy, which ultimately helped push the island to full democracy.⁴¹ However, from the perspective of Sheng Yen, they have had a deteriorating impact on traditional values as they affect the social and political stability of Taiwan. For example, he problematized the variety of folk beliefs and cultic practices as sharing a materialist and self-serving ethos (*gongli de* 功利的;

³⁷ See Li Yih-yuan 李亦園 (1983).

³⁸ For case studies and the kinds of services that a spirit medium provides for his/her clientele, and an autobiography of a spirit medium, see Suofeiya 索菲亞 (2009). Suofeiya (Sophia), for example, was counseling Chen Shui-bian before his presidential election. *Lingjie de yizhe* also discusses the economics and entrepreneurial aspects of being a spirit medium.

³⁹ Some spirit mediums can also be self-mortifiers (*jiajiang* 家將); see Sutton (2003, 265-89).

⁴⁰ See Marshall (2003, 31: 81-99).

⁴¹ See Katz (2003, 40).

gongyong de 功用的) that needed to be corrected and transformed (*jiucheng huadao* 糾正化導).⁴² While he believed that Buddhism is able to peacefully co-exist with all religious traditions, those traditions that propose unreasonable beliefs will definitely bring more trouble to an increasingly pluralistic society.⁴³

Internal Crisis within Chinese Buddhism

The ambivalent ethos of folk religion in Taiwan is quite evident in popular forms of Buddhism. There are numerous “imposter” Buddhist clerics who, as entrepreneurs, capitalize on the economies of ritual efficacy and merit-making practices in Buddhism. They appear as monastics, with shaved heads and yellow robes, but they have not received precepts and do not commit to any Buddhist practice. For them, donning the robe is a business. During the day they wear Buddhist robes, but return to their clan or families (sometimes with Mercedes Benzes) with their monetary collections. As I have personally witnessed, they can be seen at every large Buddhist event, precept transmission ceremony, and even conference (including those hosted by the Sheng Yen Education Foundation) standing with their begging bowl, praying on the passerby’s hope for merit-making and generosity. They are organized groups, not unlike underground gangsters, with territorial claims and criminal activities. If one group of these monks and nuns is already standing outside an event with their begging bowls and another group comes near the site, one will be chased away.⁴⁴

Another type of profit-oriented Buddhist group is the ritual specialist, whose temples function in similar ways to the folk religions. Some of these “monks” are not temple-based, but work directly for commercial funeral parlors.⁴⁵ These specialists’ main source of income is the commercialization

⁴² See Sheng Yen ([1988] 2005, 191).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁴⁴ This observation is based on my conversations over the years at some of the events hosted by Dharma Drum Mountain.

⁴⁵ In 2011, I spoke with one such monk, in his twenties, who worked for the Number One Funeral Parlor (*Diyi bingyiguan* 第一殯儀館), one of the largest in Taipei. This commercial funeral parlor is multistoried and had multiple rooms in different sizes to accommodate many families who would like to hold funerals there. The parlor offers multiple packages of services that supply all required objects, including the coffin, undertaking offerings, ritual specialists like monks, and so on. When the monk conducts a funeral, he wears the yellow Buddhist robe, but when the ceremony is over, he takes it off and leaves the place in lay clothes.

of ritual performance, which includes everything from small funeral rites to large weeklong water and land rituals involving hundreds and thousands of clients. Every ritual has a price. From Sheng Yen's perspective, the specialists' presence represents the pessimism (*xiaoji* 消極) and escapist attitudes (*taobi xianshi* 逃避現實) of Buddhism, which not only challenges the sangha's respected place within society, but also presents a grave threat to the very future of Chinese Buddhism.⁴⁶

It is in this context, beginning in the 1980s, that several universalist forms of Chinese Buddhism—such as Buddha Light International (Foguangshan 佛光山) and Compassionate Relief Merit Society (Ciji 慈濟)—emerged as correctives to help society. The former organization centers on propagating Buddhism through mass media and political engagement.⁴⁷ The latter focuses on philanthropy.⁴⁸ Dharma Drum Mountain, which focuses on reforming Buddhism through education and self-cultivation, developed relatively late in comparison to these two organizations, but should be included in the same category.⁴⁹ These large organizations are voluntary congregations of individuals with common beliefs and interests in actualizing Buddhist ideals. Generally speaking, these organizations have an active concern for evangelization and an interest in religious education, they embrace modern sensibilities for individual autonomy and self-cultivation, and they are quite compatible with a modern democratic political economy. They provide not only social fellowship, but also the element of personal salvation and cultivation. They also aspire to influence the way society takes care of its social problems by advocating for moral programs.⁵⁰

These organizations have contributed to a growing positive perception of Buddhism's social relevance in Taiwan. However, despite their efforts—with the exception of Dharma Drum Mountain, which follows the directions set

I am not aware of any studies on this phenomenon in Taiwan, only in Hong Kong; see Chan Yuk Wah (2003, 2: 139-60).

⁴⁶ See Sheng Yen (2004, 103).

⁴⁷ See Chandler (2005, 166-84 and 2004, 21, 108-17).

⁴⁸ See DeVido (2010, 49-61); Huang (2009).

⁴⁹ Dharma Drum Buddhist College in Taiwan promotes the academic study of Buddhism. In 2006, it claimed to be the first government-accredited "religious studies research institute" (*zongjiao yanxiu xueyuan* 宗教研修學院), and its various academic institutions have gained prominence as international educational institutes. See: http://www.ddbc.edu.tw/zh/school_introduction/ddbc_introduction.html, accessed on May 24, 2013.

⁵⁰ See Madsen (2007, 2-4).

forth by Sheng Yen—these organizations do not have an active and explicit agenda for promoting “Chinese Buddhism” (*hanchuan Fojiao* 漢傳佛教) per se. This focus is absent, along with specific regimens of spiritual self-cultivation.⁵¹ Instead, more emphasis is placed on maintaining the status quo in continuing traditional practices of scriptural recitation and ritual conduct— aspects of Chinese Buddhism that have been in place for millennia and that are associated with traditional, conservative, premodern forms of Chinese Buddhism. There are very few innovative, reinterpreted elements of Chinese Buddhist doctrine in these former two organizations, even though their embrace of modern technology and social engagement may be interpreted as new.

This lack of effort in explicitly promoting “Chinese Buddhism” cannot be described as a lack of concern for the absence of Chinese Buddhism on the stage of global “world religions.” However, Sheng Yen appears to be extremely concerned with this absence.⁵² As early as the 1990s, Sheng Yen gave talks to his monastic disciples and some lay followers about his concern for the “decline” of Chinese Buddhism. Unlike earlier constructions of decline narratives in medieval Chinese Buddhism, Sheng Yen never used scriptural evidence and traditional categories such as “Dharma decline” (*mofa* 末法) as rhetorical devices to support his concern; however, Sheng Yen wrote about the potential “extinction” (*taotai* 淘汰) of Chinese Buddhism if it did not become more socially relevant.⁵³ He wrote, “Buddhism of the twenty-first century must concretely engage with social issues. If Buddhists isolate themselves only to engage in self-cultivation, then Buddhism will inevitably be eliminated

⁵¹ Stuart Chandler’s description of the Chan meditation practices at Foguangshan merely focuses on how extravagant the meditation hall is. There is no real description on whether or not, or how, people actually practiced in it and utilized the space. He acknowledges that “this area [i.e., meditation] receives less attention than do the others,” which involves ritual, labor, and etiquette; see Chandler (2004, 15-16, 121). For *Ciji*, or Compassionate Relief, Julia Huang has shown that the thrust of this organization lies in its charity and philanthropic programs. It focuses on action over philosophy and charity over meditation, urging mainly middle-class women to extend their family values and roles to the wider society and to forge a new identity as mothers of the world; see Huang (2009).

⁵² Sheng Yen laments the lack of talents in the Chinese Buddhist circle to participate in and represent Chinese Buddhism on an international level, despite—as he claims—Buddhism’s universalist appeal ([1983] 2005, 25-6 [these pages are from the 2005 source]).

⁵³ See Sheng Yen ([1994] 2005, 113).

by modern times and society, succumbing to a fate of destruction.”⁵⁴ He was extremely keen on the role of Chinese Buddhism in the global context, and he used various demographic statistics of world religions as evidence to highlight the insignificant position of Chinese Buddhism in the world.

In 2006 he described the state of affairs of Chinese Buddhism and its place in world religions and Taiwan specifically:

There are, in the world today, approximately ten religions traditions. The majority of these ten religions occupy the smallest percentage of people. Statistics can always be debated, but supposedly the largest percentage of the world’s population belongs to Christianity, including the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and various Protestant churches, with an astounding two billion followers. The second largest percentage of the world’s population belongs to Islam, with over one billion followers. Then there are the various branches of Hinduism with 900 million followers. The Buddhists only add up to less than 400 million.⁵⁵

Where are the Buddhists located geographically? There are about six million Tibetan Buddhists in India, Tibet, Mongolia, and Nepal. In Thailand, theoretically 98% of the population is Buddhist, the rest being either Christian or Muslim. In Sri Lanka, surprisingly, the Buddhist population is less than that of Christianity, despite our common assumption... Now let’s examine the situation in mainland China. There are not many orthodox Buddhists, if by “orthodox” we mean those who have taken refuge in the Three Jewels (of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) and the five precepts. People who visit local Buddhist temples to perform incense offering or seek divine guidance from various fortune telling methods (which are forms of local folk belief) cannot really be considered Buddhists. Common people living in populated and busy cities generally have little respect for Buddhist monastics. Their common perception is that Buddhist monastics are of little value to society. Even when I visited sacred Buddhist sites and important Buddhist masters [in the 1990s], none of the visitors at those places were aware of the eminence of those masters. Naturally, they paid little attention to us as they walked past

⁵⁴ See Sheng Yen ([2002] 2006, 76).

⁵⁵ There are various sociological and statistical data. One can be found online here: http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html, accessed on October 12, 2009.

us on the monasteries' grounds. Their purpose at those monasteries was simply sightseeing or at most popular worship. For example, offering incense to statues of buddhas or other deities is part of the general Chinese religious custom. People who do this cannot be considered followers of the Three Jewels.

Currently the country with the highest percentage of orthodox Buddhists (out of the total population) happens to be Taiwan. However, even if all Taiwanese were to become Buddhists, the total number would only be a mere 23 million... Moreover, out of all the temples and monasteries in Taiwan, the percentage of Daoist monasteries is 78.4%, and that of Buddhism is 19.91%. Clearly, there is a big gap between these two traditions. But the disparity is even greater if we compare the number of Buddhist temples and monasteries to folk Daoist shrines and temples. So the question is this: How many Buddhists are there truly in Taiwan?⁵⁶

The figures that Sheng Yen cites are inaccurate, but his point comes through clearly: In his eyes, there are really very few "orthodox Buddhists" in the world, and in Taiwan there are even less. Sheng Yen's sense of crisis was exacerbated when non-Chinese Buddhist traditions began to spread to Taiwan. Most prominent of these were Tibetan Buddhism and *vipassana* Buddhism.

Competing Forms of Non-Chinese Buddhism

The growing presence of Tibetan Buddhism, especially of the Kagyu and Nyingma sects, filled this lacuna with something at once exotic and familiar to the Taiwanese. The global networks of Tibetan lamas who devoted much energy to establishing centers around the world also helped in bringing Tibetan Buddhism to Taiwan. Their effort was fruitful as Taiwan's economic boom provided the conditions for particularly generous donations to the Tibetan communities in Dharmasala, India. This made Taiwan a frequent destination for many Tibetan teachers. In 1997 with the visit of the Dalai Lama, who was perceived as a religious celebrity, Tibetan Buddhism became more of an exotic spirituality. In this vein, the popularity of Tibetan Buddhism dovetailed nicely with existing religious cultic practices in Taiwan and at the same time fascinated the Taiwanese.

⁵⁶ See Sheng Yen (2006, 21-25).

Tibetan Buddhism was at once familiar and exotic to the Taiwanese people, who were captivated by its esotericism (*mijiao* 密教),⁵⁷ partly because it resembled, in form and function, to their own native traditions.⁵⁸ The mystery surrounding Tibetan Buddhism, demonstrated through the magical efficacy of its rituals and empowerments—which promise better health, longer life, financial success, and marital and family harmony—was cultivated by the lamas and rinpoches themselves. Many were perceived by the Taiwanese as “living buddhas” (*huofo* 活佛).⁵⁹ The economy of material exchange and magical power in these rituals served similar functions as did Taiwan’s folk religions for the wealthy middle class. The deities may be different, but the ritual functions were basically the same. Even though the Dalai Lama discourages Tibetan teachers living in Taiwan from claiming magical powers, on his second visit to Taiwan in 2001, he himself sent eight monks to perform an earthquake prevention ritual in an area that had been devastated by an earthquake in 1999.⁶⁰ These elements have captured the hearts of Taiwanese who are hungry for worldly benefits amidst the uncertainty of economic prosperity.

The Taiwanese were also drawn to the self-conceit of Tibetan Buddhism as having more efficacious rituals and superior doctrinal systems. This appeal has had a history beginning with Taixu 太虛 (1890-1947) and his student Yinshun 印順 (1906-2005), in that both of these Chinese masters borrowed the doctrinal infrastructure of the Tibetan Gelukpa tradition in forming their own understanding of Buddhism and their doctrinal classification scheme (*panjiao* 判教).⁶¹ Taixu’s *panjiao* system rested squarely on Chinese Buddhist scriptures and doctrines. Yinshun’s system centered instead on Indian Buddhist treatises and intellectual historiography. His writings on history,⁶² especially that of Indian Buddhism, revalorized the earlier *Āgama* scriptures and Indian Madhyamaka thought over and against Chinese Mahāyāna literature. His impact has led to the general perception among

⁵⁷ See Cheng Yu-jiao (1990, 105-17).

⁵⁸ The resemblance of Tibetan Buddhism to native Taiwanese rituals can be seen in Daoist and temple ritual accoutrements and exorcistic functions; see the documentary film “The Revenge of Hanxin”.

⁵⁹ See Sheng Yen’s comments about this in his video, no. 346, *Dafagu* 大法鼓: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=5kmh5c6l4HI (accessed on 2/28/2013). The video dates back to approximately 1997.

⁶⁰ See Zablocki (2009, 393).

⁶¹ Sheng Yen ([1978] 1999, 338).

⁶² See Bingenheimer (2009, 10: 255-90).

contemporary Chinese Buddhists circles in Taiwan that true Buddhism exists only in early Indian Buddhist texts. Implicit in this claim is an attempt to undermine the authority and authenticity of later Chinese Buddhism,⁶³ which I believe paved the way for the search among Taiwanese Buddhists for an “original form” of Buddhism (*yuanshi fojiao* 原始佛教).

It was in this context, beginning in the late 1980s, that Taiwan welcomed the arrival of South Asian Buddhism and its practice of *vipassana*. During this time numerous translations poured into Taiwan, primarily from Theravāda Buddhist teachers’ writings and particularly the works by Ajahn Chah and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.⁶⁴ These books prepared Taiwanese students for the visit of the *vipassana* teacher, S.N. Goenka, to give a series of talks and lead a ten day *vipassana* retreat in Taiwan in 1995. Two hundred Taiwanese participated in this retreat. He also had a dialogue with Sheng Yen during his visit.⁶⁵ In July 1998 he returned and led more retreats. Subsequently, centers devoted to his teachings were established in Taiwan, other meditation teachers from the Theravāda tradition came to Taiwan, and their Taiwanese students established more centers.

With the great influence of Yinshun’s writings, which emphasized early Indian Buddhism, many Chinese monastics converted to *vipassana* Buddhism

⁶³ Most of Yinshun’s academic writings are on pre-Mahāyāna or early-Mahāyāna Indian Buddhism, except one: *A History of Chinese Chan (Zhongguo chanzong shi* 中國禪宗史).

⁶⁴ According to Lin Chong’an 林崇安, a professor at National Central University who first introduced *vipassana* Buddhism to Taiwan, the earliest translation of a contemporary Theravāda Buddhist teacher’s writing is of Ajahn Chah (Ajiang Cha 阿姜查), for example, his *Taste of Freedom*, which in Chinese is 我們真正的歸宿, and *A Gift of Dhamma* or 以法為贈禮. See: http://www.insights.org.tw/xoops/modules/xoopsfaq/index.php?cat_id=3#q8 (accessed on 2/28/2013). Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s (Foshi biqu 佛使比丘) books were translated and published in the early to late 1990s, including his *Handbook for Mankind* 人類手冊 (1994) (another 1996 translation for the same book is entitled, 人生錦囊), *Buddha-Dhamma for Students* 一問一智慧 (1994) (another 1997 translation for the same book is entitled, 學佛釋疑), *The Prison of Life: The Danger of I* 生命之囚 (1994), and a compilation that has no corresponding English title: *Bingzhong shengqi de guanghui: chaoyue binku de fojiao zhihui* 病中生起的光輝：超越病苦的佛教智慧 (1996). There is also Ajahn Maha Boowa’s 摩訶布瓦 *Biography of Achan Mun* 尊者阿迦曼傳 published in 1992. S.N. Goenka’s book, *The Art of Living*, was translated and published in 1999 as *Shenhua de yishu* 生活的藝術.

⁶⁵ The dialogue is published; see Sheng Yen (2001, 107-18).

and gave up Chinese Buddhist doctrinal outlook and practices, believing that the former was the “true” or “original” expression of Buddhism.⁶⁶ Some also retook tonsure in the Theravāda tradition. Sheng Yen also sent four of the senior monastics of Dharma Drum to Thailand as a sangha exchange program to learn Theravāda Buddhism. He stopped this exchange when one of the monks was so captivated by this tradition that at the end of the program he wanted to give up Chinese Buddhism to be re-ordained in the Theravāda monastic order.⁶⁷ The big wave of publication of *vipassana* literature in Taiwan, coupled with internal Taiwanese Buddhist tensions, led to an incredibly large following of Taiwanese *vipassana* practitioners.

Sheng Yen’s concern for the fate of contemporary Buddhism in Taiwan was intimately bound up with these factors. It was an apprehension that people did not appreciate the richness of their own tradition sufficiently to benefit from it. Instead, people turned away from Chinese Buddhism to study other forms of Buddhism.⁶⁸ Hence, he decided to establish a new Chan lineage for the propagation of what he considered “orthodox” Chinese Buddhism.

In the scholarly literature of medieval Chan Buddhism, the assertion of authority and the establishment of orthodoxy often went hand-in-hand with a narrative of Dharma decline, creating a fear of no legitimate authority or capacity for practice. Jamie Hubbard’s work on the suppressed Sanjie movement 三階教 founded by Xinxing 信行 (540-594) argues that those speaking the rhetoric of decline were more interested in establishing a particular orthodoxy of the “true teaching” than in voicing historical predictions of actual decline, prophetic warnings of moral failings, or

⁶⁶ An example is Xiangguang nunnery 香光寺, which became a leading promoter and publisher of *vipassana* Buddhism in Taiwan. Yü Chün-fang has written a book on this organization that will be available in May 2013 entitled *Passing the Light: The Incense Light Community and Contemporary Buddhist Nuns in Taiwan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

⁶⁷ The monk in question is venerable Guoyuan 果元, who wanted to leave the Chinese Buddhist order, although he eventually decided to stay with Master Sheng Yen. Guoxing 果醒, another monk sent to Thailand, was also extremely attracted to *vipassana* practice, such that he tried to teach the methods to other monks in the DDM sangha. The exchange program was between DDM and Dhammakaya international Buddhist organization in Thailand. The two organizations signed a contract of an exchange program in 1990. In 1992, monks were sent from respective organizations to study and learn. See Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies (2001, 172).

⁶⁸ See Sheng Yen (2006, 5).

existential statements about humankind's capacity for realization.⁶⁹ Sheng Yen believed in the moral failings of contemporary Chinese Buddhists and perceived the internal and external threats in Taiwanese religiosity. He states:

Chinese Buddhism is indeed in a state of crisis (*weiji* 危機), facing great challenges. The fact that many Chinese Buddhists subscribe to a bleak view of the future of Chinese Buddhism is also something lamentable. Many of them feel that they are better off practicing Tibetan or Theravāda Buddhism. Some are even ordained into the Tibetan or Theravāda traditions. There would not be any future for Chinese Buddhism if all Chinese Buddhists held such attitudes. In the past I have said the different forms of Buddhism are the same, whether it is Theravāda or Tibetan Buddhism. As long as either one of them exists, even if Chinese Buddhism is extinguished, Buddhism will still remain in the world. However, I say those words with great pain.⁷⁰

Sheng Yen's perception of the decline of Chinese Buddhism and creation of a new lineage is also related to specific historical circumstances. Timothy Barrett writes, "[In the seventh century,] I for one would see the overall backdrop of the Zen quest for an undeniable access to enlightenment, a shining transmission of the lamp amidst the encircling gloom, as being constituted by the staggering catastrophes of the sixth century, from the bloody fall of the Liang to the outright persecution of the Northern Zhou."⁷¹ I find his observations compelling and applicable to Sheng Yen's creation of the DDL, except that the historical circumstances of Sheng Yen were quite different.

Sheng Yen was a modernist faced with three significant historical challenges in contemporary Chinese Buddhism discussed above: 1) the widespread influence of folk or popular religion, 2) a perceived internal crisis within Chinese Buddhism, 3) and competing forms of non-Chinese Buddhism. Sheng Yen perceived these as real conditions that stymied the growth of Chinese Buddhism. In his response, he advocated orthodoxy with a modernist twist, which promoted sanctioned values that accorded with modern life, characterized as rational, respectful to persons, noncoercive, mature, agreeable to democracy, and emotionally controlled. At the same time, for Sheng Yen,

⁶⁹ See Hubbard (2001, 35, 37).

⁷⁰ See Sheng Yen (2006, 25).

⁷¹ See Timothy Barrett's review of *Seeing through Zen*. He has also discussed this issue in "Kill the Patriarch!" Citation from Morrison (2010, 45, fn. 118).

the challenges and conditions he faced also opened new doors of interpretive opportunities, allowing new formulations of doctrine.

The Historical Shift in and the Theoretical Basis of Sheng Yen's Understanding of *Zong*

Any lived religious movement is always conditioned by many factors, including but not limited to culture, political system, social values, economic conditions, religious traditions, and institutional structures. As these factors keep changing, so does the religious movement, even as it becomes a factor in the social construction of other areas of culture. In this section, I detail some of these changes in Sheng Yen's conception of Chan.

In his early teachings, Sheng Yen developed what he considered to be correct or orthodox Buddhism (*zhengxin de fojiao* 正信的佛教) founded on certain principles set forth in the *Āgama* Buddhadharmas (*Ahan fofa* 阿含佛法).⁷² All of his writings were polemical in that they focused on what he thought was correct Buddhism and what was not. Even though his interlocutors were not explicitly pointed out, what he wrote about always had a specific referent. For example, in his earliest writings on Chan, *vinaya*, and the *Āgamas*, he was critical of sectarianism and narrow-minded traditions that promoted exclusivity within Buddhism. He sought instead to promote Buddhism as a whole founded on the three studies of precepts, concentration, and wisdom from the *Āgama* scriptures. Not surprisingly, this is also the Buddhism that he had studied extensively in the first phase of his intellectual development and that had shaped his subsequent understanding.⁷³ In his later teachings, he would champion Chan as the quintessential carrier of orthodox Buddhism.

Beginning with his *Essentials of Vinaya Study* (*Jielüxue gangyao* 戒律學綱要), a seminal and an influential work on *vinaya*, he always avoided positioning himself in sectarian terms. His preface states, "This book is very much influenced by two masters, Ouyi and Hongyi. However, it neither advocates their positions nor completely aligns itself with their allegiance to

⁷² The *Āgamas*, or divisions of the early Indian scriptures, refer to four collections: *Dīrghāgama* (long works, cosmological in nature) or 長阿含經; *Mādhyamāgama* (metaphysical in nature) or 中阿含經; *Samyuktāgama* (general works on dhyāna, trance, etc.) or 雜阿含經; *Ekōttarāgama* (numerically arranged subjects) or 增一阿含經.

⁷³ See Yu (2010, 3-38).

the *vinaya* lineage of Mt. Nan. This is because precepts, in their essential nature, belong to the whole of Buddhism, guidelines that ought to be observed by all Buddhists—not the privilege of any specific lineage [i.e., *zong*] of Buddhism.”⁷⁴ Elsewhere he states, “Almost every Buddhist cleric who studies precepts will uphold his own sectarian views, including the recent master Hongyi... I maintain a position of no-positions and only highlight the spirit and purpose of Śākyamuni Buddha’s precepts for modern people so that precepts are accessible and applicable.”⁷⁵

His criticism of sectarianism can also be seen in the way he taught in the United States. Beginning in late 1976 and early 1977, he began to teach Chan to a handful of Americans. His talks were recorded, transcribed, and published in the *Chan Newsletter* and later, the *Chan Magazine*. During this time, we also see his criticism of sectarianism within the Chan tradition. In 1978, he published his first essay on Chan, wherein he discusses the significance of dharma transmission (*chuancheng* 傳承). He commented that “since the Tang dynasty, [various Chan lineages] established their own sects and their descendents vied for dominance. Such a phenomenon is indeed foolish and ignorant.”⁷⁶ In 1980 he published three works on Chan. In *Chanmen xiuzheng zhiyao* 禪門修證指要, which is an anthology of premodern tracts on Chan practice and enlightenment, he again articulated his nonsectarian orientation to Chan Buddhism. He understood Chan as none other than “the essence of the three studies of *śīla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā*.”⁷⁷ In other “Chan anthologies,” he consciously organized the various premodern discourse records on practice according to chronology instead of lineage. In so doing he was able to present the development of meditation techniques and include “non-Chan” methods as well. In *Chanmen lishu ji* 禪門驪珠集, he states, “This book does not hold sectarian views (*menhu zhijian* 門戶之見). Therefore, I did not organize the materials around the five houses and seven lineages (*wujia qizong* 五家七宗) emphasized by the Chan School or distinguish between orthodox and splinter groups (*zhengtong pangchu* 正統旁出). I organized the teachings chronologically.”⁷⁸ In these writings, he presents himself as someone outside of the Chan tradition, consciously and consistently avoiding sectarian affiliations, especially with regards to presenting Chan methods as

⁷⁴ See Sheng Yen (1965, 11).

⁷⁵ See Sheng Yen (1993, 64).

⁷⁶ See Sheng Yen ([1978] 2005, 62).

⁷⁷ See Sheng Yen (1980a, 2).

⁷⁸ See Sheng Yen (1984b, 2).

genealogically associated.⁷⁹ In fact, he even emphatically states that he was not a “Chan master,” even though by the late 1970s he had already inherited dharma transmission in two lines of Chan Buddhism.⁸⁰ For him, Chan methods pointed to the essence of the Buddhadharma.

His goal in editing these anthologies was to survey the Chinese Buddhist literature on effective methods of self-transformation—not to promote the perspective of any Chan lineage. However, in this process, he formulated his own version of orthodox Buddhist practice. He actively presented Chan as part of mainstream Buddhism, which is quite different than the received image from Chan genealogical literature as a tradition “outside of” traditional Buddhism. This is clearly stated in his own intellectual autobiography:

In terms of my own practice, I utilize the spirit of original Buddhism, which is to say the equal emphasis of *śīla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā*. Therefore, when I began my in depth study of Buddhism, I also began with various issues concerning *śīla*. Afterwards, I studied the various scriptures and literatures on meditation, from the gradual contemplation methods of Indian Buddhism to the sudden approaches of Chinese Chan School... in terms of my study of *prajñā*, I began with *Āgama* scriptures... therefore when I explain the fundamentals of Buddhadharma, I always begin with and return to this foundation. Even the Chan teachings that I propagate now, despite the literature left from past Chan masters, who belong to Tathāgatagarbha system of thought, I return my teachings back to the foundation of dependent origination and emptiness (*yuanqi xingkong* 緣起性空). Hence, I always point out the most basic position of Buddhadharma in my guidance of practice and theoretical exposition. This basic position is the three seals of dharma: impermanence, selflessness, and quiescence. If [the Buddhadharma] is taught separate from these three seals of the dharma, then it would be hardly distinguishable from the views of eternalism and nihilism of non-Buddhist paths...

In principle, I do not belong to any sect or school of thought (*zongpai yu xuepai* 宗派與學派). However, when I comment on

⁷⁹ For his critical appraisal of *kōan* study, see Sheng Yen (1987, 3). Elsewhere he also divorces Chan methods from the privilege of a specific Chan school; see Sheng Yen (1984a, 146).

⁸⁰ See Sheng Yen (1980b, 3). He states that what he taught was neither traditional Chinese Chan nor Japanese Zen, but his own systematization of practical methods of Buddhadharma for the benefit of modern people.

particular scriptures or treatises or writings of Chinese masters, I will not use original Buddhist teachings to explain them. Whatever they espouse, that is what I say. I use their doctrinal positions to introduce their teachings. For example, when I comment on the *Essay on the Five Teachings of Huayan*,⁸¹ I will not use the *Āgama* or *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*⁸² to critique it. When I comment on the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*⁸³ or *Scripture of Complete Enlightenment*,⁸⁴ I do not use the position of Consciousness-Only School to explain them. When I explain *Discourse on the Theory of*

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- 81 The full title of the *Essay on the Five Teachings of Huayan* or *Huayan wujiao zhang* is *Huayan yisheng jiaoyi fenzhai zhang* 華嚴一乘教義分齋章, which is also known as *Huayan yisheng jiaofen ji* 華嚴一乘教分記 and usually abbreviated as *Wujiao zhang* 五教章. See T 1866. This text is a relatively early treatise by the Huayan master Fazang 法藏 (643-712), who composed it in his thirty-eighth year. In this work he explains the special teaching of the One Vehicle 一乘 (as distinguished from the three-vehicle theory), showing the relative depth and shallowness of these two kinds of teachings. He also classifies the five teachings 五教 and ten tenets 十宗. There are three transmissions of this text: the Japanese version 和本, the Song version 宋本, and the Korean version 鍊本. Among these, the Japanese version is thought to be the earliest.
- 82 The *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* is attributed to Nāgārjuna 龍樹 (2nd-3rd century); see T 1564. This is a basic text for the study of Madhyamaka 中觀派 thought in East Asia.
- 83 The *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* 大乘起信論 is attributed to Aśvaghōṣa 馬鳴; see T 1666, 32: 575b-583b. It is one of the most important texts in the development of the East Asian Mahāyāna tradition. The author of this text sought to harmonize the two Indian-derived soteriological positions of the *tathāgatagarbha* 如來藏 and *ālayavijñāna* 阿賴耶識 systems into a synthetic vision based on the One Mind in Two Aspects (*yixin ermen* 一心二門).
- 84 The *Scripture of Complete Enlightenment* or the *Dafangguang yuanjue xiuduluo liaoyi jing* 大方廣圓覺修多羅了義經 or, in short, *Yuanjue jing* 圓覺經; see T 842, 17: 913a-922a. This scripture is considered by scholars to be a Chinese apocrypha scripture probably written in the early eighth century C.E. Divided into twelve chapters as a series of discussions on meditation practice, this text deals with issues such as the meaning and origin of ignorance, sudden and gradual enlightenment, original Buddhahood, etc.—all themes which were previously taken up in the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* 起信論. The *Yuanjue jing* was intended to resolve questions regarding doctrine and meditation for the earliest practitioners of the Chan School. The scripture was popular in the Chan of the Song period, as seen in its extensive citation in Chan anthologies.

Consciousness-Only,⁸⁵ I will not mix it up with the teaching of Tathāgatagarbha.

So far I do not see myself as belonging to any particular sectarian tradition (*zongpai* 宗派); I do not necessarily present myself as a Chan master within the Chan School or any other school. I believe that if one can clarify the principle teaching of Buddhadharma, return to the fundamental thought of the Buddha's teaching during his times, then one will be able to fully integrate oneself with the whole of Buddhadharma. One will be able to understand, sympathize, and recognize the validity of teachings in all schools of Buddhism and not be influenced by any sectarian rivalry among these schools. I should say I'm like a bystander appreciating all the fascinating scenery at a crossroads. This is my central thought and position.⁸⁶

These passages were written in New York in the end of 1992. We see that, in the early 1990s, Sheng Yen did not entertain ideas of establishing a *zong* or school for himself. Instead he avoided pigeonholing himself within one school or sect. Even in the mid-1990s, well into his campaign for the building of Dharma Drum Mountain, he still held fast to his nonsectarian position. He states, "Dharma Drum Mountain does not hold sectarian views (*zongpai de menhu zhi jian* 宗派的門戶之見). Instead we uphold the correct knowledge, views, beliefs, practices of orthodox Mahāyāna Buddhadharma."⁸⁷

However, his position began to change in the late 1990s when he interacted with other international Buddhist leaders. In 1998, around the same time he engaged in a dialogue with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama at Roseland in New York City on the wisdom traditions of Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism, he completed a commentary on Chan Master Shenhui's 神會

⁸⁵ The *Discourse on the Theory of Consciousness-only* or *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論 (Skt. reconstruction: *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi-śāstra*), ten fascicles, T 1585, 31: 1a-59a, was a composition/translation of Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664) of Dharmapāla's 護法 commentary on the *Thirty Verses on Consciousness-only* 唯識三十頌 by Vasubandhu 世親 (4th century). It also includes edited translations of other masters' works on the same verses. It is the primary text of the Faxiang 法相 or Chinese Consciousness-only School.

⁸⁶ See Sheng Yen (1993, 170-73).

⁸⁷ See Sheng Yen (1998a, 112). This passage is from "Fagushan shi guoji Fojiao de zhongzhen 法鼓山是國際佛教的重鎮," which is included in *Fagushan de fangxiang* 法鼓山的方向. The book is a collection of various essays; some date back to as late as 1998. This particular piece dates back to 1994.

(684-760) *Record of Illuminating the Principle* (*Xianzongji* 顯宗記), which is a medieval polemical work on the sudden enlightenment tradition of the southern Chan school.⁸⁸ Sheng Yen's dialogue with the Dalai Lama centered on the wisdom teachings of the nature of mind. The Dalai Lama mainly drew from the teachings of the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions in his conversation with Sheng Yen; Sheng Yen drew on the sudden enlightenment tradition of Chan Buddhism.

It was precisely during this time, when Taiwan was captivated by Tibetan Buddhism and *vipassana* Buddhism, that Sheng Yen completed his commentary on the *Record of Illuminating the Principle* in time for his dialogue with the Dalai Lama and to secure his own position squarely within Chan Buddhism. This shift from taking the Buddhadharma as the basis of Chan to using Chan as a lens to interpret the Buddhadharma is a subtle but important transition in Sheng Yen's thinking.

During this process of editing the *Record of Illuminating the Principle*, he recognized the value of Chan as the best organizing vehicle to comprehensively unify Chinese Buddhism. He states:

If we examine the contents of *Illuminating the Principle*, which is a powerfully terse and a learned text of Buddhist doctrine, we see that this work not only hinges on the "principle of non-thought" of the *Platform Scripture*, but schematizes around the threefold virtues of *nirvāṇa*: *prajñā*, *mokṣa*, and *dharmakāya*. Moreover, it structures itself on the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna paths and fruitions of the Three Vehicles of the *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and the bodhisattva. *Illuminating the Principle* also harmonizes the three systems of Mādhyamika, Yogācāra, and Tathāgatagarbha, and returns to the nonduality of the two truths of emptiness and existence. It not only places equal emphasis on the importance of theory and practice, but also stresses understanding and realization. Even though *Illuminating the Principle* does not explicitly cite any scriptures or treatises, its rich usage of terminologies and articulated ideas makes it apparent that numerous scriptures and treatises were used for its composition, including the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra*, *Āvatamsaka*

⁸⁸ For a study of Shenhui, see McRae (1987, 227-78). The full title of the work is *Heze dashi Xianzong ji* 荷澤大師顯宗記 (Great Master Heze's Record of Illuminating the Principle), which can be found in T 2076, 51: 458c25-459b6.

Sūtra, Mahāprajñāparamitā Śāstra, Mādhyamaka-kārikā, Discourse on the Theory of Consciousness-only, and the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith. The purpose of *Illuminating the Principle* is none other than to illuminate the cardinal principle of the *Platform Scripture* of Huineng...

The person who benefits the most is me. Writing this commentary gave me the opportunity to survey the whole of Buddhism from the angle of Chan. I feel as if I wrote a Chan Buddhist compendium on the Buddhadharma.⁸⁹

In explaining the meaning of *zong* as “principle” in the title *Illuminating the Principle* or *Xianzongji*, he states:

First, why [is this text] called *Illuminating the Principle*? The Chinese *zong* is an extremely nuanced word with many meanings. From the position of Chinese Chan Buddhism, which takes the non-dependence on words and language to directly reveal the human mind, this word *zong* means *essential principle, maxim, or foundation of Chan*. The purpose of “illuminating” this principle (*zong*), then, is to demonstrate the foundation of the *Platform Scripture*, which is none other than the teaching that “Non-thought is the principle” (*wunian wei zong* 無念為宗).⁹⁰

Often the character *zong* is coupled with *jiao* or “teachings” as in *zongjiao*, which in its modern usage means, “religion.” Yet *zong* and *jiao*, or principle and teachings, are traditionally set up as opposites. Ordinary “religion” involves a belief in a Supreme Being, deities, or mysterious force. In Chinese Buddhism, especially in Chan, however, *zong* refers to the “teaching of mind” whereas *jiao* refers to “teaching through doctrines.” Using words, language, meditation, and discourse to understand Buddhadharma is *jiao*; that which lies outside of the words, language, and discourse—“the teaching outside of words and language”—is called *zong*. The significance of *zong* must be personally experienced, like a person who drinks water; only this person knows whether the water is warm or cold. Therefore, the teaching by a person who has experienced Chan enlightenment is called a teaching of mind or buddha-nature. Mind in this context refers

⁸⁹ See Sheng Yen (1998a, 5-6).

⁹⁰ See *Platform Scripture (Liuzu dashi fabao tan jing* 六祖大師法寶壇經), T 2008, 48: 353a11.

to the wisdom mind or pure mind; buddha-nature refers to the unmoving nature of emptiness. Only with the wisdom mind that is pure, free from vexations, disturbing emotions, and discrimination can you see your unmoving and unchanging buddha-nature, the empty nature that is without any fixed marks whatsoever. This is the *zong* or principle of Chan, which is also the “nature” referred to in the expression, “illuminating the mind and seeing the [self-]nature.” Actually, illuminating the mind *is* illuminating the *zong* or principle; and this is identical to seeing one’s nature (emphasis mine).⁹¹

In this passage we see that for Sheng Yen, *zong* is the personal experience of the nature of mind as non-thought (*wunian* 無念), as espoused in the *Platform Scripture*. He defined non-thought as the letting go of attachment to thoughts, whether good or bad, correct or erroneous, where the natural luminosity of the mind free from attachments manifests.⁹² Yet, the social realities of this claim stemmed from the historical contexts of the 1980s and 1990s in Taiwan and from his interaction with the Dalai Lama in the United States. One may argue that he used *zong* to define what he understood as orthodox Buddhism. This understanding allows him, on the one hand, to retain his orthopraxis based on the three studies of *śīla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā* and, on the other hand, to secure his place in the Chan tradition. For him, *zong* was an organizing principle to promote Chinese Buddhism against the influx of internal and external threats.

1998 is the first instance in Sheng Yen’s writings that we see a shift in his self-identity, which may have been the seed that later germinated into his establishment of a new lineage of Chan in 2006. He finished his commentary on *Illuminating the Principle* in 1998, the same year that he had a dialogue on the wisdom tradition between Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism with the Dalai Lama. In a separate work published in the same year, he claims that “only Chan Buddhism as a school retains the spirit of Chinese civilization; only the Chan School can unify and absorb the essential teachings of all the various Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions without ever falling into deterioration.”⁹³ It was also in 1998, before the dialogue, that he drafted up his own doctrinal classification scheme in chart form to organize how the Chan “*zong*” could comprehensively unify the whole of Buddhism, including early Buddhism and

⁹¹ See Sheng Yen (1998a, 17-18).

⁹² Ibid, 29-30.

⁹³ See Sheng Yen (1998b, 1).

later Mahāyāna Buddhism, from India to China. In this chart, Chan is positioned as the culmination (*ji* 集) and perfection (*cheng* 成) of the development of Chinese Buddhism as a whole.

Sheng Yen's *zong* challenges scholarly notions of lineage formation in Chan/Zen studies as characterized by power struggles between distinct sectarian associations of practices (i.e., the Chinese Caodong practice = the Japanese Sōtō practice of *shikantaza*; the Chinese Linji practice = the Japanese practice of *kōan*). The *zong* of the DDL also complicates a simplistic understanding of the Chan as centered on genealogy, which conceals the rich diversity, historical contingency, and adaptability of this tradition. Sheng Yen's formation of a *zong* evolved in reaction to the historical changes of the religious landscapes of Taiwan and the West. His life choices and thought were deeply shaped by a perceived crisis in the development of Chinese Buddhism in modern times. I have shown that the DDL was sectarian in the sense that Sheng Yen actively promoted orthodoxy in response to folk religion and the presence of non-Chinese forms of Buddhism in Taiwan. But for him, *zong* was a vehicle for the preservation, reformulation, and institutionalization of what he perceived as the most useful aspects of Chinese Buddhism for modern society.

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