



The Influence Of Mahayana Buddhism On Chinese Cultural Thought

Nguyen Minh Chinh

PhD Research Scholar, school of Buddhist Study and Civilization, Gautam Buddha University, Greater
Noida, UP, India

Under supervisor: **Dr Arvind Kuma Singh**

Abstract

This essay examines the profound and multifaceted influence of Mahayana Buddhism on Chinese cultural thought from its introduction during the Eastern Han Dynasty through its full integration in the Tang and beyond. Unlike other foreign religious traditions that entered China, Buddhism underwent a remarkable process of sinicization, becoming thoroughly integrated into Chinese civilization while simultaneously transforming it. The study traces Buddhism's historical development in China and analyzes the formation of distinctively Chinese Buddhist schools including Chan (Zen), Pure Land, Tiantai, and Huayan. It explores the philosophical dialogue between Buddhist concepts like emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and dependent origination and indigenous Chinese thought systems, culminating in the "harmony of the three teachings" paradigm that characterized Chinese intellectual history. The analysis further demonstrates how Buddhist influences permeated Chinese literature, poetry, visual arts, and architecture, creating new forms of cultural expression. Finally, the essay examines Buddhism's impact on Chinese social ethics, institutional structures, and ritual practices. This historical case study illustrates how cross-cultural religious transmission can produce creative synthesis rather than mere replacement or assimilation, offering insights into processes of cultural exchange that remain relevant in today's increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Mahayana Buddhism, Sinicization, Cultural synthesis, Chinese thought

I. Introduction

Buddhism's journey across the Himalayas into China represents one of the most significant cultural transmissions in world history. Unlike other foreign religions that entered China, Buddhism did not merely survive—it thrived, transformed, and ultimately became an inseparable component of Chinese civilization. This remarkable integration was particularly pronounced with Mahayana Buddhism, which found fertile ground in Chinese intellectual soil, eventually producing distinctively Chinese forms of Buddhist thought and practice.

Mahayana Buddhism, meaning the "Great Vehicle," emerged around the 1st century CE as a development within the Buddhist tradition. Distinguished by its emphasis on universal salvation, the bodhisattva ideal, and sophisticated philosophical doctrines of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and buddha-nature, Mahayana Buddhism offered intellectual and spiritual resources that both challenged and complemented indigenous Chinese worldviews.¹ While initially perceived as foreign, over centuries of translation, interpretation, and adaptation, Buddhism underwent what Holmes Welch aptly called a process of "domestication," becoming thoroughly integrated into the Chinese cultural landscape.²

This essay examines the profound influence of Mahayana Buddhism on Chinese cultural thought, exploring its historical development, philosophical integration with native traditions, and lasting impact on Chinese literature, art, and social life. Through this examination, we can better understand how Buddhism contributed to the creation of a distinctively Chinese religious and philosophical synthesis that continues to shape Chinese civilization today.

II. Historical Context and Formation of Sects

1. Spread Stages: From Eastern Han to Tang Dynasty

Buddhism's entry into China is traditionally dated to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 CE), with the semi-legendary account of Emperor Ming's dream leading to the arrival of the first Buddhist monks from India.³ While historical evidence suggests earlier contact through trade routes, the Han period marks the beginning of Buddhism's documented presence in China. Initially perceived as a foreign curiosity, Buddhism gradually gained imperial patronage and scholarly attention as political fragmentation following the Han collapse created space for alternative worldviews.

The period of division between the Han and Tang dynasties (220-618 CE) proved crucial for Buddhism's integration. As Kenneth Ch'en observes, "The breakdown of the Han dynasty and the resultant political chaos...provided a fertile field for the growth of Buddhism."⁴ During the Northern and Southern Dynasties

¹ Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 2008), 21-34

² Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900-1950* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 396

³ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 22-27.

⁴ Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 57

(420-589 CE), Buddhism flourished under the patronage of non-Chinese rulers in the north and educated elites in the south, who found in Buddhist doctrines both political legitimation and philosophical sophistication. The massive translation efforts of this period, exemplified by figures like Kumārajīva (344-413 CE), made Indian Buddhist texts accessible to Chinese readers, facilitating the development of indigenous Chinese interpretations.⁵

The Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) represented the golden age of Chinese Buddhism. Under imperial patronage, especially during Emperor Xuanzong's reign, Buddhist institutions expanded dramatically. Major pilgrimage sites, monastic centers, and translation bureaus were established, with thousands of monks and nuns participating in an increasingly Chinese Buddhist culture. As Stanley Weinstein notes, "By the early eighth century, Buddhism had become so thoroughly integrated into Chinese life that it no longer seemed alien to most Chinese."⁶ This period also witnessed the flourishing of distinctively Chinese Buddhist schools that would shape the religion's future development throughout East Asia.

2. Formation of Major Sects

The Sinicization of Buddhism reached its apex with the formation of native Chinese schools that reinterpreted Indian concepts through Chinese cultural lenses. Among these schools, Chan, Pure Land, Tiantai, and Huayan had the most lasting influence on Chinese thought.

Chan (Zen) Buddhism, traditionally attributed to the Indian monk Bodhidharma but substantially developed by Chinese masters, emphasized direct experience and intuitive wisdom over textual study. With its focus on meditation and sudden enlightenment, Chan appealed to Chinese pragmatism and resonated with Daoist inclinations toward naturalness and spontaneity. As D.T. Suzuki explains, "Chan represents the Chinese mind adapting Indian contemplative practices to its own practical orientation."⁷ The influential Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch synthesized Chinese aesthetics, ethics, and epistemology with Buddhist soteriology, creating a distinctively Chinese approach to enlightenment.

Pure Land Buddhism, centered on devotion to Amitabha Buddha and rebirth in his Western Paradise, became widely popular among ordinary Chinese. Under the guidance of masters like Tanluan (476-542 CE) and Shandao (613-681 CE), Pure Land practices were adapted to Chinese family-oriented piety and ancestor veneration. As Robert Sharf notes, "Pure Land devotionalism provided a bridge between elite Buddhist soteriology and popular religious sensibilities."⁸ The school's emphasis on faith and grace complemented Confucian ritual and helped make Buddhism accessible to all social classes.

The Tiantai school, systematized by Zhiyi (538-597 CE), developed a comprehensive Buddhist philosophical system based on the Lotus Sutra. Its doctrine of "perfect harmony" and classification of Buddhist teachings

⁵ Jan Nattier, *A Guide to the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations* (Tokyo: International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, 2008), 38-52.

⁶ Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism Under the T'ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 59

⁷ D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1949), 111

⁸ Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 277

into a coherent developmental framework appealed to Chinese intellectual sensibilities. Tiantai's integration of theory and practice, along with its sophisticated hermeneutics, established a model for Chinese scholastic Buddhism.⁹

Similarly, the Huayan school, based on the Avatamsaka Sutra and systematized by Fazang (643-712 CE), developed the doctrine of "mutual penetration and containment of all phenomena," which harmonized with traditional Chinese holistic worldviews. As Francis Cook argues, "Huayan philosophy represents the highest achievement of Chinese Buddhist metaphysical thought."¹⁰ Its vision of cosmic interpenetration and harmonious totality became a cornerstone of Chinese Buddhist philosophy.

III. Influence of Mahayana Buddhism on Traditional Thought Systems

1. Interaction with Confucianism and Taoism

The encounter between Buddhism and indigenous Chinese thought systems—particularly Confucianism and Daoism—produced one of the most creative philosophical dialogues in world history. This interaction was characterized by initial opposition, subsequent adaptation, and eventual integration.

Early Confucian scholars criticized Buddhism as undermining traditional family values through its monastic institutions and as economically unproductive due to its renunciatory ideals. As articulated by Han Yu's famous anti-Buddhist memorial: "Buddha was a barbarian who did not speak Chinese and wore clothes of a different fashion."¹¹ Yet over time, Buddhism responded by emphasizing its compatibility with filial piety and social ethics. The Buddhist concept of compassion (karuna) was aligned with Confucian benevolence (ren), while Buddhist precepts were presented as enhancing, rather than opposing, Confucian moral cultivation.

The relationship between Buddhism and Daoism was more immediately sympathetic, with early translators often using Daoist terminology to express Buddhist concepts. The Buddhist concept of emptiness (śūnyatā) was initially explained through the Daoist notion of non-action (wuwei), while nirvana was associated with the Daoist pursuit of immortality. As Erik Zürcher observes, "Early Chinese Buddhism was expressed in a Daoist idiom that made it more digestible to the Chinese elite."¹² This linguistic borrowing facilitated Buddhism's acceptance but also transformed both traditions through mutual influence.

A distinctive feature of this philosophical interaction was the development of the "harmony of the three teachings" (sanjiao heyi) paradigm. Rather than maintaining strict boundaries between traditions, Chinese thinkers increasingly viewed Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism as complementary approaches addressing different domains of human experience. As articulated by the Tang writer Liu Zongyuan:

⁹ Paul L. Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989), 83-97.

¹⁰ Francis H. Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 76

¹¹ Han Yu, "Memorial on Buddhism," in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, eds. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 583

¹² Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 288

"Confucianism governs the world, Daoism cultivates the body, and Buddhism purifies the heart."¹³ This integrative approach became characteristic of Chinese religious thought, allowing individuals to draw from multiple traditions without experiencing cognitive dissonance.

2. Formation of Three Teachings Harmonization

The "Three Teachings Harmonization" developed further during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE), when Neo-Confucian philosophers like Zhu Xi engaged deeply with Buddhist concepts even while criticizing Buddhism as a tradition. The Neo-Confucian revival, while ostensibly anti-Buddhist, incorporated Buddhist logical methods, meditation practices, and metaphysical insights into a revitalized Confucian framework.¹⁴ As Theodore de Bary notes, "The Neo-Confucians borrowed from Buddhism the tools they needed to refute it."¹⁵

This harmonization reached its apex during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE) when scholars like Lin Zhao'en explicitly promoted the unity of the three teachings. The late Ming intellectual Wang Yangming's School of Mind (xinxue) exhibited strong Chan Buddhist influences while maintaining a Confucian commitment to social ethics. As Judith Berling observes, "By the late imperial period, the boundaries between the three traditions had become increasingly porous, allowing for creative synthesis."¹⁶

3. Buddhist Philosophy and Chinese Thinking

Beyond surface-level interactions, Mahayana Buddhist philosophy transformed Chinese patterns of thought in profound ways. Two concepts in particular—emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*)—catalyzed developments in Chinese metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

The Madhyamaka school's doctrine of emptiness, introduced to China through Kumārajīva's translations of Nāgārjuna's works, challenged Chinese substantialist thinking with its radical critique of conceptual constructions. As interpreted by Chinese Buddhist philosophers, emptiness did not mean nihilism but rather pointed to the conventional nature of all phenomena and the limitations of language. Jizang (549-623 CE), founder of the Chinese Sanlun school, developed a "double truth" theory that influenced Chinese approaches to paradox and non-dualistic thinking.¹⁷

The concept of dependent origination similarly transformed Chinese cosmological thinking. While traditional Chinese thought already emphasized correlative relationships, Buddhist causality offered a more sophisticated analytical framework for understanding interconnectedness. The Huayan school's image of

¹³ Liu Zongyuan, "On the Three Teachings," translated in Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1993), 56.

¹⁴ Peter N. Gregory, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity: An Annotated Translation of Tsung-mi's Yuan jen lun with a Modern Commentary* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 22-35.

¹⁵ Wm. Theodore de Bary, *The Buddhist Tradition in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 142.

¹⁶ Judith Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 229.

¹⁷ Aaron K. Koseki, "Prajñāpāramitā and the Buddhahood of the Non-Sentient World: The San-Lun Assimilation of Buddha-Nature and Middle Path," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 3, no. 1 (1980): 16-33.

Indra's Net, where each jewel reflects all others infinitely, became a powerful metaphor for cosmic interdependence that resonated with Chinese holistic sensibilities. As Robert Gimello explains, "The Huayan vision of totality integrated Indian causality with Chinese organismic thinking to create a uniquely Chinese Buddhist cosmology."¹⁸

Perhaps most significantly, the Mahayana concept of buddha-nature (tathāgatagarbha)—the innate potential for enlightenment present in all sentient beings—found deep resonance with Chinese optimism about human nature. The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana, a text likely composed in China, synthesized Indian tathāgatagarbha theory with Chinese metaphysical concerns about substance and function. This concept influenced Neo-Confucian theories of human nature and provided philosophical grounds for the Chan claim that enlightenment could be achieved suddenly through recognizing one's original mind.¹⁹

IV. Influence on Literature and Art

1. Buddhist Literature and Chinese Prose

Buddhism's introduction to China catalyzed significant developments in Chinese literary forms and techniques. The massive translation project of Buddhist scriptures—estimated at over 1,700 texts by the Tang Dynasty—required innovations in Chinese vocabulary, syntax, and expository methods. As Victor Mair notes, "The Buddhist translation enterprise represents the largest and most sustained effort of cross-cultural transmission in premodern world history."²⁰

New literary genres emerged from Buddhist influence, including the transformation text (bianwen), which combined prose narration with verse passages to explain Buddhist teachings through stories. These innovative forms influenced the development of vernacular literature and storytelling traditions. Additionally, the recorded sayings (yulu) of Chan masters, with their dialogical format and paradoxical language, created distinctive literary styles that influenced both religious and secular Chinese writing.²¹

2. Buddhist Themes in Tang and Song Poetry

Buddhism profoundly influenced Chinese poetry, particularly during the Tang and Song dynasties when many leading poets were either Buddhist practitioners or deeply engaged with Buddhist ideas. Tang poets like Wang Wei, Bai Juyi, and Su Shi incorporated Buddhist themes of impermanence, non-attachment, and

¹⁸ Robert Gimello, "Apophatic and Kataphatic Discourse in Mahāyāna: A Chinese View," *Philosophy East and West* 26, no. 2 (1976): 117-136

¹⁹ William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield, eds., *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 265-273

²⁰ Victor H. Mair, *Tun-huang Popular Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 59.

²¹ John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 81-97.

contemplative insight into their verses. As Burton Watson observes, "Buddhism provided Chinese poets with a new vocabulary for expressing philosophical depth and psychological introspection."²²

The landscape poetry of Wang Wei exemplifies Buddhist-influenced aesthetics, with its emphasis on emptiness, tranquility, and the interpenetration of observer and observed. His famous lines "Empty mountain, no one to be seen / Yet hear—human voices resound" reflect both Chan Buddhist insights and Chinese aesthetic sensibilities.²³ Similarly, the Tang poet Han Shan (Cold Mountain) created verses that blended Daoist naturalness with Buddhist wisdom, becoming a model for later contemplative poetry.

During the Song Dynasty, literati poets like Su Shi (1037-1101 CE) elevated Buddhist-influenced poetry to new heights. Su's poems often express Buddhist insights through everyday experiences, as in his famous line: "The sound of the stream is the Buddha's long tongue," which captures the Mahayana teaching that enlightenment is found within ordinary reality.²⁴ The Chan-influenced aesthetic of "natural spontaneity" (ziran) became a central value in Chinese literary theory and practice.

3. Buddhist Visual Arts and Architecture

Buddhism transformed Chinese visual arts through the introduction of new iconography, aesthetic principles, and artistic techniques. The anthropomorphic representation of buddhas and bodhisattvas expanded Chinese artistic vocabulary, while the concept of "transformation tableaux" (bianxiang) depicting Buddhist narratives influenced Chinese pictorial composition. As Marilyn Rhie explains, "Buddhist art introduced new approaches to representing spiritual presence that changed Chinese artistic sensibilities."²⁵

Cave temples at sites like Dunhuang, Yungang, and Longmen showcase the development of a distinctive Sino-Buddhist artistic tradition that synthesized Indian iconography with Chinese aesthetic preferences for harmony, balance, and natural forms. The evolution of Buddha images from earlier Gandharan-influenced styles to more distinctively Chinese forms reflects the gradual Sinicization of Buddhist visual culture.²⁶

Buddhist architectural forms—particularly the pagoda (derived from the Indian stupa) and the Chinese-style monastery complex—fundamentally altered China's built environment. These structures not only served religious functions but also became important elements in Chinese geomantic (fengshui) practice and urban planning. The Tang-era Giant Wild Goose Pagoda in Xi'an exemplifies how Buddhist architectural forms were thoroughly integrated into Chinese aesthetic sensibilities while maintaining their religious significance.²⁷

²² Burton Watson, *Chinese Lyricism: Shih Poetry from the Second to the Twelfth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 118.

²³ Pauline Yu, *The Poetry of Wang Wei* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 165

²⁴ Beata Grant, *Mount Lu Revisited: Buddhism in the Life and Writings of Su Shih* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 178

²⁵ Marilyn M. Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 42-58

²⁶ Wu Hung, "Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art," *Artibus Asiae* 47, no. 3/4 (1986): 263-303

²⁷ Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Chinese Architecture in an Age of Turmoil, 200-600* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 329-345.

V. Influence on Social Life

1. Buddhism and Social Ethics

While often criticized by Confucian scholars as socially disruptive, Buddhism actually contributed significantly to Chinese social ethics through its emphasis on compassion, karma, and universal moral responsibility. Buddhist ethical precepts (śīla) complemented Confucian virtues, adding dimensions of universal compassion that extended beyond family and state obligations. As Kenneth Ch'en argues, "Buddhism supplemented Confucian social ethics with a more universal moral vision."²⁸

The Buddhist concept of karma introduced a cosmic dimension to Chinese moral thinking. While Confucianism had long emphasized the importance of moral cultivation, Buddhism provided a metaphysical framework explaining how moral actions generate consequences extending beyond a single lifetime. This perspective reinforced ethical behavior while adding motivational depth to Chinese moral psychology. As articulated in popular morality books (shanshu) that blended Buddhist and Confucian ethics: "Good and evil receive their due rewards as inevitably as the shadow follows the form."²⁹

2. The Role of Monasteries in Society

Buddhist monasteries functioned as multidimensional institutions within Chinese society, serving as centers of learning, social welfare, economic activity, and cultural production. Large monastery complexes like those at Wutai Mountain and Tiantai Mountain operated schools, libraries, medical clinics, and guest facilities that served both religious and secular needs. Jacques Gernet's research on medieval Chinese Buddhist institutions demonstrates their central role in Chinese social and economic life.³⁰

Monasteries provided social services that complemented and sometimes replaced state welfare systems. During the Tang Dynasty, Buddhist institutions established "compassion fields" (beitian) to grow food for the poor, "inexhaustible treasuries" (wujinzang) to provide interest-free loans, and medical dispensaries to treat the sick. Particularly during periods of political instability, Buddhist institutions provided crucial social safety nets and maintained cultural continuity.³¹

3. Influence on Rituals and Customs

Buddhist practices became thoroughly integrated into Chinese popular religion and family rituals. Funeral and memorial ceremonies incorporated Buddhist elements like sutra recitation and merit transfer, while

²⁸ Kenneth Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 281.

²⁹ Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 143.

³⁰ Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 142-169.

³¹ Jamie Hubbard, *Absolute Delusion, Perfect Buddhahood: The Rise and Fall of a Chinese Heresy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 204-218.

maintaining traditional Chinese ancestor veneration. The Ghost Festival (Yulanpen) exemplifies this synthesis, combining Buddhist concepts of karma and rebirth with Chinese familial piety.³²

Buddhist vegetarianism influenced Chinese dietary practices, particularly on specific calendar days associated with Buddhist observances. The concept of "releasing life" (fangsheng)—the practice of saving animals destined for slaughter—became a widespread expression of Buddhist compassion in Chinese society. As Valerie Hansen notes, "Buddhist moral values were incorporated into everyday practices that ordinary Chinese could perform without necessarily identifying as Buddhist."³³

Buddhist calendrical observances like the Buddha's Birthday celebration became important festivals in Chinese social life, while pilgrimage to sacred mountains associated with bodhisattvas (particularly Wutai Mountain for Manjusri and Putuo Island for Guanyin) created new patterns of sacred geography and religious tourism. These practices connected local communities to broader networks of Buddhist culture while adapting to Chinese spatial concepts and travel traditions.³⁴

VI. Conclusion

The integration of Mahayana Buddhism into Chinese civilization represents one of history's most successful examples of cultural adaptation and transformation. Over centuries of interaction, what began as a foreign religion became an integral component of Chinese identity, while simultaneously transforming to reflect Chinese values, aesthetics, and intellectual frameworks.

Buddhist influence on Chinese thought extended far beyond purely religious domains, contributing to developments in philosophy, literature, art, ethics, and social institutions. The Buddhist concepts of emptiness, dependent origination, and buddha-nature catalyzed new directions in Chinese metaphysics and epistemology. Buddhist literary and artistic forms enriched Chinese cultural expression, while Buddhist ethical principles complemented Confucian social values with a more universal moral vision.

Perhaps most significantly, Buddhism's integration with indigenous Chinese traditions produced a distinctive religious synthesis characterized by inclusivity rather than exclusivity. The "harmony of the three teachings" paradigm allowed Chinese civilization to incorporate foreign elements without abandoning its cultural foundations—a pattern that would repeat itself throughout Chinese history. As Arthur Wright concluded in his classic study, Buddhism allowed Chinese civilization to "absorb new ideas, yet maintain its essential continuity."³⁵

³² Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 136-159.

³³ Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 193 Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 22-39.

³⁴ Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 106.

The story of Buddhism in China demonstrates how religious traditions evolve through cross-cultural encounter, adapting to new environments while preserving core insights. The resulting synthesis—neither purely Indian nor purely Chinese—created spiritual and intellectual resources that continue to shape not only Chinese civilization but global Buddhist culture. In an age of increasing global cultural exchange, the historical experience of Buddhism in China offers valuable perspectives on how traditions can interact creatively while maintaining their distinctive contributions to human understanding.

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