

## **$Z_3$ -CONNECTED GRAPHS WITH NEIGHBORHOOD UNIONS AND MINIMUM DEGREE CONDITION**

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**Abstract.** Let  $G$  be a 2-edge-connected simple graph on  $n \geq 15$  vertices, and let  $A$  denote an abelian group with the identity element 0. If a graph  $G^*$  is obtained by repeatedly contracting nontrivial  $A$ -connected subgraphs of  $G$  until no such a subgraph left, we say  $G$  can be  $A$ -reduced to  $G^*$ . In this paper, we prove that if for every  $uv \notin E(G)$ ,  $|N(u) \cup N(v)| + \delta(G) \geq n$ , then  $G$  is not  $Z_3$ -connected if and only if  $G$  can be  $Z_3$ -reduced to one of  $\{C_3, K_4, K_4^-, L\}$ , where  $L$  is obtained from  $K_4$  by adding a new vertex which is joined to two vertices of  $K_4$ . Our results extend the early theorem by Li et al. (Graphs and Combin., 29 (2013): 1891–1898).

**Keywords:** neighborhood unions, minimum degree,  $Z_3$ -connectivity, 3-flow.

### 1. Introduction

Graphs in this paper are finite, loopless, and may have multiple edges. Terminology and notation not defined here are from [1].

For  $S \subseteq V(G)$ , let  $N_S(v)$  denote the set of vertices in  $S$  that are adjacent to  $v$  in  $G$  and  $d_S(v) = |N_S(v)|$ . If  $S = V(G)$ , we write  $N(v) = N_G(v)$ ,  $N[v] = N(v) \cup \{v\}$  and  $d(v) = d_G(v)$ . For a vertex  $v$ ,  $N(v)$  is called the *neighborhood* of  $v$ . For two subsets  $A, B \subseteq V(G)$ , let  $e_G(A, B)$  ( $e(A, B)$  for short) denote the number of edges with one endpoint in  $A$  and the other endpoint in  $B$ . For simplicity, if  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  are two subgraphs of  $G$ , we write  $e(H_1, H_2)$  instead of  $e(V(H_1), V(H_2))$ . A complete graph on  $n$  vertices is denoted by  $K_n$ , and  $K_n^-$  is the graph obtained from  $K_n$  by deleting one edge. A  $k$ -cycle, denoted by  $C_k$ , is a cycle of length  $k$ . For simplicity, we use  $\delta$  to denote  $\delta(G)$ , the minimum degree of  $G$ .

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Let  $G$  be a graph, and let  $D$  be an orientation of  $G$ . If an edge  $e \in E(G)$  is directed from a vertex  $u$  to a vertex  $v$ , then let  $\text{tail}(e) = u$  and  $\text{head}(e) = v$ . For a vertex  $v \in V(G)$ , let  $E^+(v)$  denote the set of edges with tail  $v$  and  $E^-(v)$  the set of edges with head  $v$ . Let  $A$  denote an (additive) abelian group with the identity element  $0$  and let  $A^* = A - \{0\}$ . We define  $F(G, A) = \{f | f : E(G) \rightarrow A\}$  and  $F^*(G, A) = \{f | f : E(G) \rightarrow A^*\}$ .

Given a function  $f \in F(G, A)$ , define  $\partial f : V(G) \rightarrow A$  by

$$\partial f(v) = \sum_{e \in E^+(v)} f(e) - \sum_{e \in E^-(v)} f(e),$$

where “ $\sum$ ” refers to the addition in  $A$ . The value  $\partial f(v)$  is known as the *net flow out of  $v$  under  $f$* .

For a graph  $G$ , a function  $b : V(G) \rightarrow A$  is an  *$A$ -valued zero-sum function* on  $G$  if  $\sum_{v \in V(G)} b(v) = 0$ . The set of all  $A$ -valued zero-sum functions on  $G$  is denoted by  $\mathbb{Z}(G, A)$ . Given  $b \in \mathbb{Z}(G, A)$ , a function  $f \in F^*(G, A)$  is an  *$(A, b)$ -nowhere-zero flow* if  $G$  has an orientation  $D$  such that  $\partial f = b$ . A graph  $G$  is  *$A$ -connected* if for every  $b \in \mathbb{Z}(G, A)$ ,  $G$  admits an  $(A, b)$ -nowhere-zero flow. A *nowhere-zero  $A$ -flow* is an  $(A, 0)$ -nowhere-zero flow. More specifically, a *nowhere-zero  $k$ -flow* is a nowhere-zero  $Z_k$ -flow, where  $Z_k$  is the cyclic group of order  $k$ . Tutte [18] proved that  $G$  admits a nowhere-zero  $A$ -flow with  $|A| = k$  if and only if  $G$  admits a nowhere-zero  $k$ -flow.

An edge is *contracted* if it is deleted and its two ends are identified into a single vertex. Let  $H$  be a connected subgraph of  $G$ . Let  $G/H$  denote the graph obtained from  $G$  by contracting all edges of  $H$  and deleting all the loops. A graph  $G$  is  *$A$ -reduced* if it contains no nontrivial  $A$ -connected subgraph. We say that a graph  $G^*$  is an  *$A$ -reduction* of  $G$  if  $G^*$  is  $A$ -reduced and if  $G^*$  can be obtained from  $G$  by contracting all maximally  $A$ -connected subgraphs of  $G$ . It is known that the  $A$ -reduction of a graph is  $A$ -reduced and an  $A$ -reduction of a reduced graph is itself.

Integer flow problems were introduced by Tutte [17, 18]. Group connectivity was introduced by Jaeger *et al.* [7] as a generalization of nowhere-zero flows. The following conjecture is due to Jaeger *et al.*.

**Conjecture 1.1.** ([7]) *Every 5-edge-connected graph is  $Z_3$ -connected.*

Recently, Thomassen [16] confirmed the weak 3-flow conjecture, and Lovász *et al.* [13] proved that every 6-edge-connected graph is  $Z_3$ -connected. However, Conjecture 1.1 is still open.

On the other hand, degree conditions, local structure and forbidden subgraphs are used to investigate the existence of nowhere-zero 3-flows and  $Z_3$ -connectivity of graphs. One can find sufficient conditions for the existence of nowhere-zero 3-flows and  $Z_3$ -connectivity, and such conditions are related with ones for hamiltonian graphs. It is known that every graph which contains a hamiltonian cycle admits a nowhere-zero 4-flow and there are infinite graphs

containing a hamiltonian cycle do not admit a nowhere-zero 3-flow [15]. For the literature, some results can be seen in [8, 14, 19, 20, 21].

In this paper, we still focus on the neighborhood unions condition, which was first introduced by Faudree *et al.* [6] as sufficient conditions for the existence of hamiltonian graphs. Faudree *et al.* [6] proved that if  $G$  is a 2-connected simple graph on  $n \geq 3$  vertices such that  $|N(u) \cup N(v)| \geq (2n - 1)/3$  for each pair of nonadjacent vertices  $u$  and  $v$ , then  $G$  is hamiltonian. For this Faudree *et al.*'s result, the first author and X. Li proved that if  $|N(u) \cup N(v)| \geq \lceil \frac{2n}{3} \rceil$  for any pair of nonadjacent vertices  $u$  and  $v$ , then  $G$  is  $Z_3$ -connected if and only if  $G$  cannot be  $Z_3$ -reduced one of four specified graphs  $\{C_3, K_4, K_4^-, L\}$ , where  $G$  is a 2-edge-connected graph. On the other hand, Faudree *et al.* [5] proved that if  $G$  is a graph on  $n$  vertices such that  $|N(u) \cup N(v)| + \delta \geq n$  for each pair of nonadjacent vertices  $u$  and  $v$ , then  $G$  is hamiltonian, which improved the result of Faudree *et al.* [6]. Motivated by above observations, we present the following theorem in this paper.

**Theorem 1.2.** *Let  $G$  be a 2-edge-connected simple graph on  $n \geq 15$  vertices. If  $|N(u) \cup N(v)| + \delta \geq n$  for every  $uv \notin E(G)$ , then  $G$  is not  $Z_3$ -connected if and only if  $G$  can be  $Z_3$ -reduced to one of  $\{C_3, K_4, K_4^-, L\}$ , where  $L$  is obtained from  $K_4$  by adding a new vertex which is joined to two vertices of  $K_4$ .*

## 2. Proof of the main result

For simplicity, define  $\mathcal{F}$  to be the set of all 2-edge-connected simple graphs on  $n \geq 15$  vertices such that  $G \in \mathcal{F}$  if and only if  $|N(u) \cup N(v)| + \delta \geq n$  for each  $uv \notin E(G)$ .

In order to prove Theorem 1.2, we need some lemmas. Some results [2, 3, 8, 9] on group connectivity are summarized as follows.

**Lemma 2.1** ([2, 3, 8, 9]). *Let  $A$  be an abelian group. Then the following results are known:*

- (1)  $K_1$  is  $A$ -connected.
- (2) If  $e \in E(G)$  and if  $G$  is  $A$ -connected, then  $G/e$  is  $A$ -connected.
- (3) If  $H$  is a subgraph of  $G$  and if both  $H$  and  $G/H$  are  $A$ -connected, then  $G$  is  $A$ -connected.
- (4) Each even wheel is  $Z_3$ -connected and each odd wheel is not.
- (5) Let  $G$  be a simple graph and  $H$  a nontrivial subgraphs of  $G$ . If  $H$  is  $Z_3$ -connected, then  $|V(H)| \geq 5$ .
- (6) Let  $H$  be a  $Z_3$ -connected subgraph of  $G$ . If  $e(v, V(H)) \geq 2$  for  $v \in V(G - H)$ , then the subgraph induced by  $V(H) \cup \{v\}$  is  $Z_3$ -connected.

Let  $G$  be a graph and let  $u, v, w$  be three vertices of  $G$  with  $uv, uw \in E(G)$ .  $G_{[uv, uw]}$  is defined to be the graph obtained from  $G$  by deleting two edges  $uv$  and  $uw$  and adding one edge  $vw$ . It is clear that  $d_{G_{[uv, uw]}}(u) = d(u) - 2$ .

**Lemma 2.2** ([2, 9]). *Let  $A$  be an abelian group. Let  $G$  be a graph and let  $u, v, w$  be three vertices of  $G$  with  $d(u) \geq 4$  and  $uv, uw \in E(G)$ . If  $G_{[uv, uw]}$  is  $A$ -connected, then so is  $G$ .*

Next we give two Theorems of  $Z_3$ -connectivity about degree conditions, which are important to prove our main Theorem.

**Theorem 2.3** (Theorem 1.8 of [14]). *If  $G$  is a simple graph satisfying the Ore-condition with at least three vertices, then  $G$  is not  $Z_3$ -connected if and only if  $G$  is one of the 12 specified graphs shown in Fig. 1.*

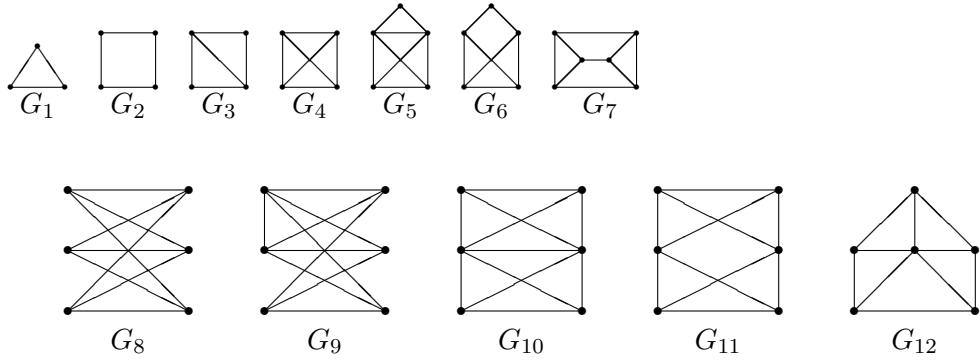


Fig. 1: 12 specified graphs for Theorem 2.3

**Theorem 2.4** (Theorem 1.5 of [10]). *Let  $G$  be a 2-edge-connected simple graphs on  $n \geq 14$  vertices. If  $|N(u) \cup N(v)| \geq \lceil \frac{2n}{3} \rceil$  for every  $uv \notin E(G)$ , then  $G$  is not  $Z_3$ -connected if and only if  $G$  can be  $Z_3$ -reduced to one of  $\{C_3, K_4, K_4^-, L\}$ .*

**Lemma 2.5** ([13]). *Every 6-edge-connected graph is  $Z_3$ -connected.*

Before proving Theorem 1.2, we summarize some characterizes of graphs in  $\mathcal{F}$  with  $\delta \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ .

**Lemma 2.6.** *Suppose that  $G \in \mathcal{F}$  with  $\delta \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ . If  $G$  contains a nontrivial  $Z_3$ -connected subgraph, then  $G$  is  $Z_3$ -connected.*

**Proof.** Assume that  $H$  is the maximum nontrivial  $Z_3$ -connected subgraph of  $G$ . If  $H = G$ , then we are done. Otherwise  $H$  is a proper subgraph of  $G$ . Let  $G' = G/H$  and let  $v'$  denote the new vertex which  $H$  is contracted to. By the choice of  $H$ , each vertex of  $V(G - H)$  has at most one neighbor in  $V(H)$ . It follows that  $G'$  is a simple graph. Since  $G$  is 2-edge-connected,  $G'$  is 2-edge-connected, and so  $d_{G'}(v') \geq 2$ .

We claim that  $|V(H)| > \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ . Firstly, we prove it for  $n \geq 21$ . Suppose otherwise that  $|V(H)| \leq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ . By Lemma 2.1(5),  $5 \leq |V(H)| \leq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ . Assume  $|V(H)| = t$ . Thus  $H$  contains at most  $t(t-1)/2$  edges. Since  $\delta \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ ,  $d_{G'}(v') \geq t(\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1) - t(t-1) = t(\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 2) - t^2$ . Define a real value function

$f(t) = t(\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 2) - t^2 - (n - t) = t(\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 3) - t^2 - n$ , where  $t \in [5, \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1]$ . When  $t \in [5, \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor - 1]$ , it is easy to verify that  $f(t) > 0$ . In this case, we get  $d_{G'}(v') > n - t = |V(G' - v')|$ . This contradicts that  $G'$  is a simple graph. This implies that  $t = \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor$  or  $\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ . We firstly assume that  $t = \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor$ . In this case, note that  $f(\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor) = 3\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor - n$  and  $d_{G'}(v') \geq 2\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor \geq 14$ . Let  $u$  and  $v$  be two adjacent vertices of  $N(v')$ . By the choice of  $H$  and Lemma 2.1 (4),  $|(N_{G'}(u) \cap N_{G'}(v)) \cap N(v')| \leq 1$ . When  $(N_{G'}(u) \cap N_{G'}(v)) \cap N(v') = \{w\}$ , then  $N_{G'}(u) \cup N_{G'}(v)$  has  $2\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor - 4$  vertices in  $N(v')$  other than  $w$  since  $d_{G'}(u) + d_{G'}(v) \geq 2\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 2$ . It is easy to see that  $G'_{[uv, vw]}$  contains a 2-cycle. Iteratively contracting 2-cycles generated in the processing leads eventually to a  $K_1$ , which is  $Z_3$ -connected. By Lemma 2.2 and 2.1(3),  $G$  is  $Z_3$ -connected. When  $(N_{G'}(u) \cap N_{G'}(v)) \cap N(v') = \emptyset$ , we know that  $|N_{G'}(u) \cup N_{G'}(v)| \geq 2\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor$ . Let  $z$  be a neighbor of  $u$  in  $N(v')$ . It is easy to see that  $G'_{[zu, zv']}$  contains a 2-cycle. Iteratively contracting 2-cycles generated in the processing leads eventually to a  $K_1$ , which is  $Z_3$ -connected. Therefore  $G$  is  $Z_3$ -connected by Lemmas 2.2 and 2.1(3). Now we assume that  $|V(H)| = \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ . Clearly  $G' - v' = G - H$ . In this case,  $d_{G'}(v') \geq (\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1)(\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 2) - (\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1)^2 = \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ . Hence  $d_{G'}(x) + d_{G'}(y) \geq 2(\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1) \geq n - (\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1) + 1 \geq |G'|$  for each two nonadjacent vertices  $x$  and  $y$  in  $G'$  and  $|V(G')| \geq d_{G'}(v) + 1 \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 2 \geq 7$ . By Lemmas 2.3 and 2.1 (3),  $G$  is  $Z_3$ -connected.

Now we claim that  $|V(H)| \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 2$  for  $15 \leq n \leq 20$ . Similarly, we get  $5 \leq |V(H)| \leq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ . For  $15 \leq n \leq 17$ , note that  $\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor = 5$ . In this case, the proof is similarly to the case  $|V(H)| = \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor, \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$  for  $n \geq 21$ . Therefore  $|V(H)| \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 2$  for  $15 \leq n \leq 17$ . For  $18 \leq n \leq 20$ , we firstly verify that  $|V(H)| \neq 5$ . Suppose otherwise that  $|V(H)| = 5$ . Since  $\delta \geq 7$ ,  $d(v') \geq 15$ . If  $n = 18$  or  $19$ , then  $d(v') \geq |G - H|$ . It contradicts that  $G'$  is simple. If  $n = 20$ , then we get  $N(v') = V(G) - V(H)$ . Let  $x, y \in N(v')$  be two adjacent vertices in  $G'$ . Consider the graph  $G'_{[xv', xy]}$ . It is easy to see that  $G'_{[xv', xy]}$  contains at least five 2-cycles with one common vertex  $v'$ . Iteratively contracting 2-cycles generated in the processing leads eventually to the graph  $G''$ . Denote the new vertex by  $v''$ . If  $G'' = K_1$ , then  $G'$  is  $Z_3$ -connected by Lemmas 2.2 and 2.1 (3). We may assume that  $G'' \neq K_1$ . It is easy to verify that  $d_{G'' - v''}(v) \geq 6$  for  $v \in V(G'') - \{x, v''\}$ . This implies that  $G'' - v''$  satisfies Ore-condition. Therefore,  $G'' - v''$  is  $Z_3$ -connected by Theorem 2.3. By Lemmas 2.1 and 2.2,  $G'$  is  $Z_3$ -connected. Thus,  $G$  is  $Z_3$ -connected by Lemma 2.1. Then we get  $|V(H)| \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor = 6$  for  $18 \leq n \leq 20$ . When  $|V(H)| = \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor$  or  $\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$  for  $18 \leq n \leq 20$ , the proof is similarly to the case  $n \geq 21$ . Therefore,  $|V(H)| \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 2$ .

Thus, we may assume that  $|V(H)| \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 2$ . Note that  $|V(G' - v')| = n - |V(H)| \leq n - \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor - 2 = \lceil \frac{2n}{3} \rceil - 2$ . Since  $e(v, H) \leq 1$  for each  $v \in V(G - H)$  and  $n \geq 15$ ,  $\delta(G' - v') \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor \geq 5$ . Hence  $d_{G' - v'}(x) + d_{G' - v'}(y) \geq 2\delta(G' - v') \geq 2\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor \geq |V(G' - v')|$  for every two nonadjacent vertices  $x$  and  $y$  of  $G' - v'$ . Hence  $G' - v'$  satisfies the Ore-condition. Since  $\delta(G' - v') \geq 5$ ,  $G' - v'$  is  $Z_3$ -connected

by Lemma 2.3. For  $e(v', V(G - H)) \geq 2$ ,  $G'$  is  $Z_3$ -connected by Lemma 2.1 (6). Therefore,  $G$  is  $Z_3$ -connected by Lemma 2.1 (3).  $\square$

**Lemma 2.7.** *Let  $G \in \mathcal{F}$  and  $\delta \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ . If  $G$  contains no  $Z_3$ -connected subgraph, then  $G$  is 6-edge-connected.*

**Proof.** Suppose that  $E_0 = (X, Y)$  is minimum edge cut of the graph  $G$  such that  $|X|$  is smallest. If  $e(X, Y) \geq 6$ , then we have done. Otherwise we assume that  $2 \leq e(X, Y) \leq 5$ . Now we claim that  $G[X]$  contains a  $Z_3$ -connected subgraph. Note that  $\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1 \leq |X| \leq \frac{n}{2}$ . Without loss of generality, we assume that  $x_1, x_2, \dots, x_l \in X$  are incident to the edge of  $E_0$ , where  $1 \leq l \leq 5$ . When  $l = 1$ , we consider the graph  $H = G[X - \{x_1\}]$ . Since  $X - x_1$  is not adjacent to any vertex of  $Y$ ,  $\delta(H) \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor \geq 5$ . Thus,  $d_H(x) + d_H(y) \geq 2\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor \geq |H|$  for nonadjacent two vertices  $x, y$  in  $H$ . By Theorem 2.3,  $H$  is  $Z_3$ -connected. When  $l = 2$ , we consider the graph  $H = G[X - \{x_1, x_2\}]$ . In this case  $\delta(H) \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor - 1 \geq 4$ . Therefore, for nonadjacent two vertices  $x, y$  in  $H$ ,  $d_H(x) + d_H(y) \geq 2(\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor - 1) = 2\lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor - 2 \geq |H|$ . Thus  $H$  is  $Z_3$ -connected by Theorem 2.3. When  $l = 3, 4, 5$ , it is easy to verify that  $G[X]$  satisfies the Ore-condition. Therefore, by Theroem 2.3,  $G[X]$  is  $Z_3$ -connected. It contradicts that  $G$  contains no  $Z_3$ -connected subgraph. This complete the proof of the lemma.  $\square$

**Proof of Theorem 1.2** If  $|N(u) \cup N(v)| \geq \lceil \frac{2n}{3} \rceil$  for every pair of nonadjacent vertices  $u$  and  $v$  of  $G$ , then  $G$  is  $Z_3$ -connected or can be  $Z_3$ -reduced to one of  $\{C_3, K_4, K_4^-, L\}$  by Theorem 2.4. Therefore, in the following, we may assume that there are at least a pair of nonadjacent vertices  $u$  and  $v$  such that  $|N(u) \cup N(v)| \leq \lceil \frac{2n}{3} \rceil - 1$ .

Since  $G$  is 2-edge-connected,  $\delta \geq 2$ . When  $2 \leq \delta \leq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor$ ,  $|N(u) \cup N(v)| \geq \lceil \frac{2n}{3} \rceil$  for each  $uv \notin E(G)$ . In this case we are done. Therefore, without loss of generality, we may assume that  $\delta(G) \geq \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor + 1$ . If  $G$  contains a nontrivial  $Z_3$ -connected graph, then  $G$  is  $Z_3$ -connected by Lemma 2.6. If  $G$  contains no nontrivial  $Z_3$ -connected graph, then, by Lemma 2.7,  $G$  is 6-edge-connected. Thus, by Lemma 2.5,  $G$  is  $Z_3$ -connected. This complete the proof of the theorem.

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