

Exploring Seng Zhao's Middle Way Thought —Taking “On the Immutability of Things, from the Zhao Lun” as an Example

Chao Hai

Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social sciences, University of Peradeniya,
Kandy, Sir Lanka
1370345108@qq.com

Abstract: The core idea of Buddhism is prajna wisdom, through which all sentient beings attain liberation from the bondage of birth and death, becoming revered saints among humans and heavenly beings. It is clear that understanding and realizing the prajna middle way is an essential course for Buddhist practitioners. Seng Zhao, recognized as the “foremost exponent of emptiness in China”, presents prajna thought that merits study by future generations. Among the existing works on Seng Zhao, “Zhao Lun” best represents his Buddhist philosophy. The section “On the Immutability of Things” in “Zhao Lun” is a classic work in which Seng Zhao uses prajna thought as a guide to interpret the nature of reality through the phrases of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. Therefore, I believe this treatise best embodies Sengzhao's middle way philosophy. This paper focuses on “On the Immutability of Things”, combining the commentaries of ancient masters and related scriptures, aiming to elucidate Seng Zhao's middle way Buddhist thought.

Keywords: Moral, Seng Zhao, Middle Way Thought, Buddhist Knowledge, On the Immutability of Things.

1. INTRODUCTION

Prajna wisdom is the core of both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism, and it represents a unique teaching of Buddhism that distinguishes it from other religions. Ordinary beings become enlightened and attain the status of saints in the three vehicles through the realization of prajna wisdom. Only by accurately understanding prajna wisdom and aligning one's body and mind with it can one cultivate insight based on teachings and develop wisdom from that insight, ultimately benefiting oneself and others (Dewi, 2023). Before Yuyama, local monks in China and renowned scholars primarily interpreted the meaning of prajna through the lens of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, leading to the emergence of “conceptual Buddhism” (Yuyama, 1970). Ji Zang noted in the first volume of his commentary on the “Madhyamaka”: “The wise teacher said: since before Kumārajīva's arrival, the discussions have been circuitous and deviate from the essence, with the Six Schools being biased and not direct.” (Bernofsky, 2021) Therefore,

apart from the “conceptual Buddhism” represented by the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, there were also the “non-sectarian” schools, both of which distorted the Mahayana prajna thought. From a dissemination perspective, this can be seen as a process of integrating prajna thought with the prevalent local culture of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. Only by merging with the cultural and philosophical context of the time could prajna thought gain recognition and lay the foundation for its future development and dissemination. Therefore, when Kumārajīva arrived in Chang'an and translated prajna scriptures and Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka texts, the orthodox Mahayana Buddhist view of the middle way began to flourish in China. With Kumārajīva's monastic community spreading prajna thought, the Sinicized understanding of prajna gradually replaced the earlier “conceptual Buddhism (Meshram & Nagar, 2022).” Particularly, the publication of Seng Zhao's “Zhao Lun”, which addresses the thoughts of the Six Schools and Seven Religions, significantly advanced the proper understanding of prajna in China. As one of the four philosophers under Kumārajīva, Seng Zhao's thought naturally continued Kumārajīva's Madhyamaka teachings (the transmission of the lineage), which in turn originated from Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka thought, with Nāgārjuna being the progenitor of this doctrine. Therefore, it can be said that Seng Zhao and others were among the first local monks in China to embrace the orthodox theory of prajna reality, comprehend Madhyamaka thought, and promote the true teachings of prajna and emptiness. Thus, I believe it is necessary to explore Seng Zhao's Madhyamaka thought. This paper focuses on the content of “On the Immutability of Things” from the “Zhao Lun”, along with commentaries from Han Shan, Zun Shi, Yuan Kang, and others, to analyze and discuss Sengzhao's middle way thought. Ordinary people perceive things based on their surface phenomena and believe that things undergo processes of birth and decay. This leads to the understanding that things are impermanent and subject to change; however, they fail to recognize the intrinsic emptiness of all phenomena, preventing them from seeing prajna. Although the Two Vehicles can understand the impermanence of all phenomena and realize that there is no true self, overcoming the notions of self and grasping, they still believe in the existence of real dharmas, failing to perceive the emptiness of dharmas. This perspective belongs to the realm of abandoning life and death to attain nirvana, which, from the ultimate perspective, is also a realm of birth and decay (albeit different from that of ordinary beings). Mahayana prajna, however, transcends existence and non-existence, and

the realm of nirvana is neither born nor destroyed. Not only do the natures of phenomena remain unchanged, but their appearances do as well; all dharmas manifest as they are. Seng Zhao's "On the Immutability of Things" also elucidates this principle.

2. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND WRITING MOTIVATION OF "ON THE IMMUTABILITY OF THINGS"

Brief Overview of the Historical Context of "On the Immutability of Things" Every period has its prevailing philosophies and historical backgrounds. In the era of Sengzhao, the dominant thought was Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi's philosophy, along with the rise of the "Xuanxue" trend. This phenomenon was closely related to the social turmoil of the time, which caused widespread suffering and displacement among the populace. The Mahayana prajnaparamita teachings share several similarities with the values of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, making it difficult for the average person to distinguish between them. As a result, many conflated the concept of the emptiness of prajna with the ideas of Xuanxue, giving rise to what is known as "Ge Yi Buddhism" (a form of Buddhism that interprets Buddhist concepts through local philosophical terms). Moreover, as Buddhism was an external culture, it faced challenges in gaining acceptance among local populations. To propagate effectively in the region, Buddhism inevitably had to integrate with the prevailing cultural currents of the time, which sometimes led to a loss of its original character. However, this very context also created conditions conducive to the dissemination of orthodox prajnaparamita thought. As the opportunity to promote Mahayana prajnaparamita teachings matured, eminent monks emerged to advocate for the core ideas of Buddhism, thereby benefiting sentient beings and fulfilling the Buddha's original intention of teaching and guiding them. As one of the representatives of Kumarajiva's monastic group, Seng Zhao's thoughts were undoubtedly influenced by Wei-Jin Xuanxue before he encountered Kumarajiva. After studying under Kumarajiva, he came into contact with orthodox prajnaparamita and Madhyamaka thought, ultimately achieving mastery and receiving Kumarajiva's endorsement. Jizang stated in "The Treatise on the Pure Name", Volume 6: "Kumarajiva remarked: Among the Qin people, Seng Zhao is the foremost in understanding emptiness." (Orzech, 2006) This indicates the high esteem in which Seng Zhao was held during that time.

3.THE LIFE AND WORKS OF SENG ZHAO

Regarding the life and works of Seng Zhao, Liang Dynasty Hui Jiao in *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, Volume 6, states: “Seng Zhao, a monk, hails from Jingzhao. His family was poor, and he made a living by copying texts. Through this, he managed to read extensively across all texts and histories. He was fond of the subtle and profound, often taking Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi as his core teachings.....Thus, he became a monk, studying the skillful and comprehensive teachings of the Three Baskets, and gained fame in the Guanfang region at a young age.”(Li, 2023) From this, it can be seen that Sengzhao was from Jingzhao (present-day Xi'an, Shaanxi), and his secular surname was Zhang. He was born in 384 CE, and due to his family's poverty, he could only support himself by copying texts for wealthy families. This circumstance allowed him to read widely, laying a foundation for his future studies. Although he was very fond of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi's philosophy, he felt it was not a stable ground for his life. After reading the old translation of the Sutra on the Pure Name, he realized that the Buddhist path was where he could find stability, and thus he became a monk (Berry, 2022). Before long, he was able to comprehend both the Mahayana teachings and the teachings of the Hinayana. Around the age of twenty, he had already gained a reputation in Guanfang. After Kumarajiva arrived in Guzang, Seng Zhao, undeterred by hardship, traveled to pay his respects to Kumarajiva. Due to his intelligence and eagerness to learn, he received high praise from Kumarajiva. In 401 CE, when Kumarajiva began translating scriptures in Chang'an, Seng Zhao was commissioned by Yao Xing to participate in proofreading the translated texts (Cheng & Fan, 2012). After Kumarajiva translated the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra, Seng Zhao composed the Treatise on the Non-Existence of Wisdom to expound on the Mahayana concept of prajna. He submitted this work to Kumarajiva for correction and received his approval, along with praise, saying: “I am grateful for your understanding; your words will surely resonate.” Liu Yimin, a layman, was also highly impressed by Seng Zhao's writings, comparing him to He Yan. Liu later sent this treatise to Yuan Gong, who also praised it as an extraordinary work. Thus, the three engaged in mutual discussions on the teachings of prajna and emptiness. After Kumarajiva's passing in 413 CE, Seng Zhao composed the Treatise on the Namelessness of Nirvana in remembrance of him. The following year (414 CE), Seng Zhao passed away in Chang'an, having lived approximately 31 years. According to research by Dong Qun, Seng Zhao was revered as the “Evil-Breaking Arhat” during the Qianlong period, and

a statue was erected for him in the Arhat Hall (Mou, 2023). Due to his contributions to Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka thought, later scholars of the Three Treatises School regarded him as the second patriarch of the school (with Kumarajiva as the first). Hong Xiuping further considered Sengzhao to be “the pioneer of the Sinicization of Buddhist philosophical systems.” According to Liang's Biographies of Eminent Monks, the following works are attributed to Seng Zhao: Treatise on the Non-Existence of Wisdom, Treatise on the Non-True Emptiness, Treatise on the Non-Migration of Things, Treatise on the Namelessness of Nirvana, along with “commentaries on the Vimalakirti Sutra and prefaces to various scriptures.” (Xu, 2024) Additionally, although the Treatise on the Treasure is attributed to Seng Zhao, scholarly investigations suggest it was not authored by him. The Zhao Lun currently in circulation is a compilation of the main works representing Seng Zhao's thoughts, although the “Essence of the School” and the Treatise on the Namelessness of Nirvana are questioned by scholars as not being written by Seng Zhao. Since this article primarily focuses on exploring Sengzhao's Middle Way thought through the Treatise on the Non-Migration of Things, a detailed analysis of his other works will not be conducted (ter Haar, 2022).

4.THE REASONS FOR WRITING ON THE IMMUTABILITY OF THINGS

The reason for Seng Zhao writing On the Immutability of Things is interpreted by Zhang Ruiling as follows: “Seng Zhao’s fundamental thought in Buddhist philosophy is the concept of ‘non-true emptiness’, which explains that all phenomena are empty if they are not truly existent. On the Immutability of Things is intended to prepare public opinion for On Non-True Emptiness.”(Zeng, 2022) The reason for this is that it is difficult for people to understand the meaning of non-true emptiness through their daily experiences. Therefore, Seng Zhao analyzes and proves that the phenomena of change in all things are an illusion rather than reality, and further discusses the prajna thought that all phenomena are empty if they are not true (Mecsi, 2004). Based on the content of On the Immutability of Things, I find that Seng Zhao's purpose in writing this treatise is to dismantle the incomplete understanding of impermanence held by ordinary people and those following the lesser vehicle. They cling to the belief that all phenomena are inherently impermanent, failing to recognize that the Buddha spoke of impermanence to eliminate sentient

beings' fixed views (Yamada, 1967). While they may comprehend the emptiness of impermanence and non-self, they still hold a biased view that overlooks the true nature of phenomena. In other words, they cannot grasp the genuine meaning of the two truths—ultimate (true) and conventional (false)—and without an accurate understanding of these truths, they cannot realize prajna's ultimate reality. Without this realization, they cannot attain the supreme Buddhist path. Thus, Seng Zhao states in *On the Immutability of Things*: “Life and death intersect, cold and heat alternate, things are in motion---this is human nature. I, however, say otherwise.”(Zhang, 2018) Seng Zhao, with a middle-way perspective, understands that all phenomena are neither born nor extinguished, and do not belong to permanence or impermanence, because the ultimate reality is beyond form and cannot be articulated. To help sentient beings understand the Buddha's knowledge, he is compelled to express it in words. Therefore, Seng Zhao also says:

Motion and stillness are not fundamentally different, yet the confused ones are varied; due to this, the true words are caught in debate, and the path of the school is bent towards distinctions. ... Yet they cannot help themselves, and casually place their hearts in the midst of motion and stillness. Can it be said to be inevitable?

From this perspective, Seng Zhao sees that from the standpoint of the ultimate reality of all phenomena, there is no distinction between birth and extinction; the arising and ceasing of all phenomena in the present moment is precisely non-birth and non-extinction (Palumbo, 2017). Because people fail to recognize the truth of all phenomena, they argue about doctrines, each holding their own views, which prevents the true dharma from circulating. To help the world understand the ultimate reality of all phenomena, Seng Zhao explains commonly used terms such as motion and stillness within the framework of the prajna middle-way thought. Readers can thus eliminate their incorrect understandings of prajna. Deqing, in his *Brief Annotations on Sengzhao's Writings*, Volume 1, explains: “This refers to the intention of writing this treatise. Out of compassion for the confused, he feels sorrow in his heart and cannot help himself. He casually places his heart between motion and stillness to clarify that motion and stillness are not two.” It is evident that Seng Zhao, out of compassion for all beings, seeks to dispel heretical views and reveal the correct doctrine by using prajna's correct perspective to explain phenomena commonly observed by people and the philosophical terminology of his time. From the above, it can be understood that Sengzhao wrote *On the Immutability of Things* to eliminate the biases of those who cling to the belief that all phenomena are necessarily impermanent. Thus, using the phenomenon of

impermanence, he reveals that the moment of all phenomena's impermanence is precisely the ultimate reality of non-birth and non-extinction, and therefore asserts that “things do not move.”

4.1. The Middle Way Thought in on the Immutability of Things

4.1.1. The Meaning of the Title “On the Immutability of Things”

The title “On the Immutability of Things” can be understood literally as an exploration of the idea that all things do not undergo change. “Things” refers to everything in the world that has a name and form. Zun Shi states that “things refer to phenomena and laws; in the world, there are three categories, and beyond the world, there are only two fruits.” Therefore, “things” can encompass all laws such as the five aggregates, the twelve sense bases, and the eighteen realms, as well as the out-of-world fruits of the hearers and Buddhas. Thus, “things” refers to all phenomena in both the mundane and transcendent realms. The term “immutability” indicates that there is no migration or transformation of all laws. Zunshi also discusses that within the conventional truth, all phenomena cannot migrate or change. In his work *Commentary on the Zhao Lun*, Volume 2, he states:

There are three meanings in the door of conventional truth; hence, all things cannot be altered. First, the nature of things; second, the characteristics of things; third, the time of things. The heat of fire, the motion of wind, the moisture of water, and the hardness of earth—these are their unchanging characteristics. The exalted position of heaven and the humble position of earth, the height of mountains and the clarity of water, the purity of sages and the impurities of ordinary people—these are their unchanging appearances. Ancient and modern, morning and evening, the moments before and after are all fixed; thus, time is also unchanging.

As can be seen from this text, Zun Shi argues that the nature, characteristics, and time of all phenomena are unchangeable from the perspective of conventional truth. For example, regarding the four great elements: fire has the quality of heat, wind has the quality of motion, water has the quality of moisture, and earth has the quality of hardness—these qualities do not change. From the perspective of appearance, people perceive heaven as exalted and earth as humble, believing that mountains are tall and water is clear, and they see sages as pure and ordinary people as impure. These definitions are conventions that cannot be altered. In terms of time, the ancient is in the ancient, and the present is in the present. The rising of the sun marks morning, and the setting of the sun marks evening. Additionally, regarding the present moment: the moment preceding this moment is the prior moment, and the moment following this moment is

the subsequent moment; thus, the previous moment is fixed before, and the subsequent moment is fixed after, making the distinctions between them unchangeable. Therefore, time is also unchanging.

Yuan Kang states in *Commentary on the Zhao Lun*, Volume 1:

People say that all things migrate and change, being impermanent. However, it is clear that things fundamentally do not migrate. Although there are various opinions in the world, they still align with the principle; hence it is called the “On the Immutability of Things”.

Yuan Kang believes that people generally perceive “things” as being impermanent and subject to change. For example, people know that after birth, an individual gradually transforms from a child into an old person, and that people throughout history have worked at sunrise and rested at sunset, indicating that time is cyclical and thus “things” are impermanent (Cahill, 1996). However, Seng Zhao’s meaning of “immutability” indicates that all laws remain established in the present and do not undergo migration or change from one place to another (Zhang, 2018). Although this view differs from the common perceptions of the world, it aligns with the principle of the ultimate reality of phenomena that neither come nor go; thus, the treatise is titled *On the Immutability of Things*.

De Qing explains the meaning of “immutability” as follows:

This discussion of conventional truth is indeed true. It pertains to the observed realm. “Things” refers to all observable phenomena. “Immutability” points to the ultimate reality of phenomena as they are. Due to ordinary perceptions, people mistakenly see phenomena as having migration. However, when viewed through prajna, the true nature of phenomena is immediately realized; their inherent tranquility reveals the ultimate reality, with no appearance of migration.

De Qing posits that the main theme of this treatise is to illustrate that conventional truth in the present moment is the true truth; the ultimate and conventional cannot be oppositional, and one cannot leave the conventional truth to realize prajna. One must understand the truth of non-birth and non-extinction within the context of conventional truth. “Things” refer to all observable phenomena. “Immutability” means that all phenomena arise dependent on conditions and have no inherent self-nature. The present moment of all phenomena is the true reality; without understanding phenomena, one cannot comprehend the truth about them. Therefore, all phenomena embody the meaning of immutability in the present. Thus, “immutability” refers to the essence of the ultimate reality of phenomena, which is not subject to birth and extinction. All Buddhas realize this prajna reality, thereby achieving the path to ultimate nirvana.

Ordinary beings, through their discriminative minds, mistakenly perceive phenomena as having birth and extinction, and thus cannot see this prajna principle. When viewed through prajna wisdom, one understands that all phenomena are fundamentally as they are, without birth and extinction. Thus, one can directly perceive the principle of ultimate reality and recognize that all phenomena do not migrate. This is the true meaning of “On the Immutability of Things” (that is, things are true). Since the notion that phenomena are impermanent is the initial doorway to expressing the emptiness of all phenomena, Seng Zhao uses the recognition of “impermanence” by ordinary people and those of the lesser vehicle to illustrate that phenomena are “immutable”. In Commentary on the Vimalakirti Sutra, Volume 3, it states: “Kumārajīva says... that discussing the permanence of a thing means its cessation. To dwell is not to dwell; this is true impermanence. Originally, to dwell is to exist. Now, without dwelling, there is no existence. Without existence, there is ultimate emptiness. Ultimate emptiness is the subtle meaning of impermanence.” (Baggio, 2019) From this, it can be seen that Kumārajīva believes that the present moment of phenomena is precisely the moment of non-dwelling, illustrating that phenomena are ultimately empty. If one considers the dwelling of phenomena to be existence, then non-dwelling of phenomena is non-existence, and non-existence is ultimate emptiness. Therefore, Kumārajīva says that the present moment of phenomena is indeed non-dwelling, which leads to the understanding that the present moment of impermanence of all phenomena embodies the principle of ultimate emptiness. This conveys the true significance of the Buddha's teaching on the impermanence of all phenomena.

4.2. The Interpretation of Seng Zhao's Thought of “Movement and Stillness are Not Essentially Different”

4.2.1. The Middle Way Doctrine in the System of Nāgārjuna

Nāgārjuna is regarded as the initiator of the Mahayana philosophy of emptiness, and the two truths of conventional and ultimate are fundamental to his thought. Conventional truth refers to the relative reality established in the world, while ultimate truth transcends worldly reality. All Buddhas throughout the three times teach according to these two truths, providing teachings that help sentient beings realize the true nature of reality. In the “Madhyamaka Karika”, it states: “All phenomena arise from causes and conditions; I say they are empty; they are merely designations, and this is the Middle Way.” In my view, this verse best embodies Nāgārjuna's concept of the Middle Way. According to Nāgārjuna, all

phenomena arising from the four conditions lack inherent self-nature, hence they are described as “empty”. This refers to ultimate truth. Although all phenomena arising from conditions do not possess real self-nature, they still manifest in various illusory forms, unlike the nonexistent hairs of a tortoise. Thus, all phenomena that arise dependently are merely nominally established, not existing in a true sense; this is the meaning of conventional truth. The two vehicles get stuck on emptiness (self-emptiness), while ordinary beings cling to existence (dependent existence), both failing to realize the true nature of reality. If one can understand the dependent arising and self-emptiness of all phenomena, then self-emptiness inherently possesses all dependent phenomena at that moment. Dependent arising is inseparable from self-emptiness, and self-emptiness does not obstruct dependent arising. By viewing all phenomena equally without clinging to existence or non-existence, one can develop a Middle Way perspective that neither clings to conditioned existence nor abides in non-existence. This is the essence of Nāgārjuna's Middle Way doctrine. The “Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sūtra” states: “Shariputra! Form is not different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form; form is precisely emptiness, emptiness is precisely form.” Thus, we can see that the non-difference between form and emptiness, and their immediate relationship, embodies the Middle Way. The principles expressed in this sutra and the Middle Way doctrine discussed in the “Madhyamaka Karika”, while differing in textual expression, share the same underlying meaning.

The “Sutra of the Non-Movement of All Phenomena” states:

Manjushri! All phenomena return to suchness, are identical with the nature of phenomena; this nature is neither graspable nor relinquishable. With no aspirations or wishes, all aspirations are cut off. From the very beginning, it is eternally quiescent, just like empty space; therefore, not grasping or relinquishing is called the state of non-movement.

According to this scripture, all phenomena fundamentally possess the state of suchness and are inherently still, similar to empty space, which is naturally quiescent. Therefore, one should not have a mind of grasping or relinquishing towards any phenomena. Not having a mind of grasping or relinquishing indicates dwelling in the Middle Way. Nāgārjuna believes that dependent phenomena lack inherent self-nature, hence all phenomena are essentially empty. Although their self-nature is empty, it does not imply an absolute emptiness of nothingness; dependent phenomena still arise. From this perspective, “form is empty, emptiness is form”. Thus, we can understand that all phenomena inherently possess suchness, and all

phenomena arising at any moment are without any origination. Therefore, all phenomena at that moment are empty, false, and in the Middle Way; they are inherently quiescent. Hence, the Buddha teaches that not grasping or relinquishing all phenomena is the state of non-movement. Non-movement refers to not clinging to existence or non-existence. By not clinging to all phenomena, one dwells in the Middle Way, free from signs and words. Since Seng Zhao learned from the translator Kumarajiva, who is a successor of Nāgārjuna's thought, it is essential to briefly explain the ideas of Nāgārjuna's lineage.

4.2.2. 'The Proposal of Sengzhao's Doctrine of "Movement and Stillness Are Not Essentially Different"

Seng Zhao posits that although movement and stillness manifest as two different forms of phenomena, from the perspective of the true nature of dependent arising and self-emptiness, they are "not essentially different". Seng Zhao states: "In seeking the stillness of the unmoving, is one to abandon movement in search of stillness? One must seek stillness within all movement. Therefore, though there is movement, there is always stillness; and though there is stillness, it is not apart from movement. Thus, movement and stillness are not essentially different. However, those who are confused become caught in debates, while the path is hindered by their preference for differences." This suggests that the two externally manifested forms are not essentially different; they represent the display of essence and function (Zeng, 2022). The essence represents ultimate truth, while function expresses conventional truth. Function cannot be separated from essence, and essence is present within function; the two cannot be entirely separated. Furthermore, since movement and stillness mutually establish their nature, both are empty; thus, one should not cling to either ultimate truth or conventional truth. Hence, to say "both ultimate and conventional are the Middle Way" is appropriate. Tang Yongtong proposes that the theoretical foundation of Seng Zhao's doctrine is constructed based on his ideas of essence and function, and movement and stillness, found in his "Theory of Non-Movement" (Zhang, 2018). Dong Qun believes that in the "Theory of Non-Movement", Seng Zhao uses the relationship between movement and stillness to express the Middle Way, highlighting that the relationship between movement and stillness is also a relationship between ultimate and conventional truths (Zhang, 2018). Seng Zhao deeply understands the principles of the Middle Way inherent in the wisdom of emptiness, aiming to eradicate the deluded view of ordinary beings and the two vehicles who cling to all phenomena as impermanent

(Zhouxiang, 2019). He cites from the “Prajnaparamita Sutra” Volume 5: “All phenomena do not shake. They neither go nor come, nor do they have a place to abide.” Based on this scripture, Seng Zhao arrives at the conclusion of “movement and stillness are not essentially different”, meaning the true nature of phenomena is inherently such, without coming or going. Since all phenomena do not come or go, it follows that they are without migration or change. Thus, Seng Zhao states “things do not migrate”. In short, Seng Zhao uses the impermanent nature of all phenomena to illustrate that all phenomena are also non-birth and non-death. Therefore, those who cling to the view of impermanence, upon hearing teachings about the non-coming and non-going of phenomena, can attain realization of the true nature of phenomena which is non-coming and non-going.

4.2.3. The Interpretation of Sengzhao's Thought of “Seeking Stillness Within Movement”

The phrase “seeking stillness within movement” implies that one should not try to understand ultimate truth by departing from conventional truth; rather, one should realize ultimate truth within conventional truth. Therefore, it is clear that “seeking stillness within movement” represents the first truth of the Middle Way, which does not lean towards existence nor towards non-existence (DeSPeux, 2020). To support his assertion that “movement and stillness are not essentially different”, Seng Zhao references the “Sutra on the Path of Prajna”: “Emptiness originally does not arise; it does not go anywhere, and thus the Buddha is the same.” This scripture extends to the idea that “all phenomena originally do not come from anywhere, nor do they go to any place.” (Zhang, 2018) This is Seng Zhao's perspective derived from the non-duality of form and emptiness, emphasizing that phenomena have not been born from the very beginning, nor have they been destroyed. In other words, all phenomena are inherently neither born nor extinguished. Since phenomena do not possess the characteristics of coming or going, Seng Zhao concludes that “things do not migrate”. When all phenomena are not present, they have no place from which they arise; therefore, if phenomena were to be born, it would have to arise from one of four kinds of birth: dependent birth, self-birth, mutual birth, or natural birth. Since all four kinds of birth have many faults, they cannot serve as causes for the arising of phenomena (Kieschnick, 2022). Thus, the Mahayana scriptures extensively refute the four types of birth, enabling sentient beings to realize the non-birth of all phenomena. Given that all phenomena are non-born, how can it be said that they arise

from anywhere? Hence, it is said that phenomena “do not come from anywhere”. If phenomena are not born, then there can be no extinction; birth and extinction are merely nominal designations established in a relative sense. Since phenomena are non-born, naturally, they do not experience extinction; therefore, it is said that “they go nowhere”. Han Shan’s interpretation of Seng Zhao’s text states: “This citation from scripture establishes the ultimate of the doctrine of non-migration. All phenomena, by their nature, are quiescent and inherently non-born. They arise from conditions and thus have no origin. When conditions disperse, they extinguish, and thus go nowhere.”(Kwok-Yiu, 2017) Han Shan believes that Seng Zhao, through the wisdom of emptiness, understands that all phenomena arise from the coming together of numerous causes and conditions, without true self-nature, and that because of sentient beings’ clinging to reality, many faults arise. This is what is said in the Lotus Sutra: “These teachings abide in their rightful place; the characteristics of the world are ever-present (Daňková, 2006).”

4.2.4. The Interpretation of Seng Zhao's Idea of “Things Each Abiding in Their Own Time”

The phras “things each abiding in their own time” is a point proposed by Sengzhao to argue that “things do not migrate”. It means that although the ever-changing phenomena of the world may present the illusion of birth and death, in reality, all things are at peace within their respective moments without any migration. This is because past things exist only in the past and will not appear in the present or future in exactly the same form as before. Seng Zhao's purpose in stating this is to dispel the common misconception that all things are inherently impermanent.

From the perspective of common understanding, Seng Zhao says:

What people refer to as “movement” is based on the notion that past things do not arrive in the present; hence it is called “movement” and not “stillness”. What I refer to as “stillness” is also based on the idea that past things do not arrive in the present; thus, it is called “stillness” and not “movement”.

“Movement” signifies the notion of birth and death being impermanent. The perception of things as “movement” is a view held by ordinary people and the two vehicles (two types of practitioners). Since past things cannot arrive in the present (just as water flows eastward, never to return, only appearing as a similar continuous illusion), common people believe that phenomena are impermanent and thus describe them as “movement”, rather than seeing them as still and unchanging. Seng Zhao seeks to refute

the views of the two vehicles and ordinary people by clarifying from the perspective that “past things do not arrive in the present” that phenomena are “still”, rather than flowing and changing. “Stillness” refers to the fact that phenomena neither come nor go. To dispel the notion among beings that phenomena are “movement”, Seng Zhao argues for the view that phenomena are “still” rather than moving, saying:

When seeking something from the past, it has never been absent; when concerning the present, it has never been present. Since it has never been present, this illustrates that things do not come; since it has never been absent, we know that things do not go. In seeking the present, the present does not depart. This means that past things are at peace in the past, not migrating from the present to the past; present things are at peace in the present, not migrating from the past to the present.

The viewpoint of “the past does not come to the present” is commonly accepted by both ordinary people and Seng Zhao, although they arrive at a different understanding of the same phenomenon (Assandri, 2019). Seng Zhao argues that phenomena are “static” rather than “dynamic” because past things can only exist at their respective points in time and cannot exist in the present. Since past things cannot migrate to the present, he asserts that “things do not come”; moreover, since past things existed in the past and do not exist in the present, it follows that “things do not go”. Thus, it is evident that Seng Zhao concludes from the phenomenon of “the past does not come to the present” that phenomena are neither coming nor going. Since there is no coming or going, how can one say that phenomena are born or perish? Since phenomena are neither born nor perish, this leads Seng Zhao to the view of “things do not migrate”, which suggests that phenomena are ultimately empty (Hamar, 2007). To support his theory of “things do not migrate”, Seng Zhao cites a statement from Zhuang Zi, where Confucius says to Yan Hui: “I have spent my whole life in the company of you, only to lose an arm.” (Goossaert) Seng Zhao interprets this by saying, “Thus, Confucius said: Hui perceives the new; the crossing of arms is not the old.” Seng Zhao believes that this statement implies that in the crossing of arms, the things are no longer what they originally were. Because things are impermanent and changeable, they cannot maintain their original form, which is why he asserts “the past does not come to the present.” If it were not for the perception of the new being distinct from the old, and if the old were indeed the same as the old, then one could not claim that things are subject to migration and change. This would lead to a common misconception. It is precisely because the new is distinct from the old that it indicates “things do not migrate”.

In Volume 2 of the Commentary on Zhao Lun, Zun Shi states:

The term 'seeing the new' refers to the things that exist in the present. The term 'not the old' refers to the things that existed in the past. Just a moment ago, the present and past each occupy their own realm, not to mention the days, months, years, and eons.

Zun Shi believes that “seeing the new” refers to the things currently in sight. Since things are in a constant state of change, one can only recognize the present as something new; thus, it is said “things exist in the present”. Moreover, the things present at one moment have already become past things in the next moment, which is why it is referred to as “not the old”(Sure, 2003). This means “things existed in the past”. Through this analysis, it can be seen that although things are in constant flux, they do not undergo actual migration or change.

The Vimalakirti Sutra, Volume 1, also states: All dharmas ultimately do not arise or cease; this is the meaning of impermanence.

The Lankavatara Sutra, Volume 4, says: All dharmas do not arise; I speak of the momentary nature; when things arise, there is cessation; this is not to be spoken of to the foolish.

Fa Zang explains in Volume 2 of the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana: Due to momentary flow, there must be no self-nature. Because there is no self-nature, there is no arising. If there were no non-arising, there would be no flow. Therefore, only those who understand non-arising can see the moment.

From the above, we can see that the phenomenon of birth and death and impermanence contains the middle path of non-arising and non-ceasing. However, ordinary beings and those of the two vehicles cannot comprehend the ultimate truth within (Deleanu, 2018). Ordinary beings see only the phenomenon of birth and death, failing to see emptiness; those of the two vehicles understand the emptiness of dharmas through the lens of impermanence, but see only emptiness, not the non-empty. Both fail to grasp the true meaning of the Buddha's teaching on impermanence, which is why Fa Zang states, “Only those who understand non-arising can see the moment.”

Therefore, I believe that Seng Zhao, by utilizing the phenomena of birth and death, demonstrates that things in the present are, in fact, non-arising, non-ceasing, and not coming or going. Seng Zhao continues by saying:

The sage has said: “Human life passes quickly, faster than the flow of a river.” Thus, the stream-enterer realizes the impermanent to attain the path, while the pratyekabuddha realizes the dependent to reach the truth. If all is movement without transformation, how can one seek

transformation to ascend the path?

From the above, it is evident that the sages of the three vehicles attain their fruition through the dependent origination of birth and death, albeit with varying degrees of understanding of emptiness. Thus, the Diamond Sutra states: “All wise and holy beings differ in the law of non-doing.” From the perspective of the Mahayana's ultimate reality, all dharmas are inherently suchness, without coming, going, or the characteristics of birth and death; the present moment is, therefore, non-arising. The wise one states in Volume 6 of the Lotus Sutra: “Dependent origination of dharmas, whether form or fragrance, is all in the middle path.” This reveals that although dharmas may exhibit the illusion of birth and death, they themselves do not come or go. Thus, dharmas are simultaneously arising yet non-arising, and non-arising yet arising. Therefore, one should not seek the middle path of non-arising beyond the phenomena of birth and death. This is the essence of Seng Zhao's statement, “The past cannot arrive in the present”. From the perspective of ultimate reality, the terms “movement” and “stillness” are merely conventional expressions; one should not rigidly assert that phenomena are either “moving” or “still”. This is because the ultimate reality of phenomena is the absence of characteristics (beyond verbal designations). Thus, when it is said that phenomena are going (impermanent), one should not assume that they must necessarily be going; it is essential to understand that this is aimed at dispelling the common views of sentient beings, guiding them to realize that phenomena are neither permanent nor impermanent, but embody the Middle Way of reality. Conversely, when it is stated that phenomena are staying (permanent), the intention is to negate the biased belief that phenomena must be impermanent. It does not imply that phenomena are necessarily eternal and unchanging; rather, it aims to help sentient beings realize the constant yet non-permanent Middle Way, which is explained through the method of negation. Therefore, Seng Zhao states: “Searching the sacred words is subtle and difficult to measure. If moving is still, it seems to go yet remain. It can be understood intuitively, yet is hard to seek through worldly means. Thus, to say ‘going’ does not necessarily mean going, as is commonly thought; to say ‘staying’ does not necessarily mean staying, according to the so-called statements of the enlightened. Can it be said that going can be dismissed, or that staying can be retained?” To support his viewpoint that both permanence and impermanence cannot be grasped, Seng Zhao cites: “The Chengju states that the Bodhisattva resides amidst the permanent yet teaches the impermanent doctrine. The Mahāyāna Sutra says that all phenomena are unchanging, without a place

of going or coming.”(Zhang, 2018) From this, it is not difficult to see that although the teachings of the scriptures differ, their purpose is to allow sentient beings to experience the uncreated and imperishable Middle Way. Because sentient beings have different capacities, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas expound various teachings to help them comprehend the insights of Buddhahood. Thus, Seng Zhao further states: “Therefore, to speak of permanence yet not to dwell, to speak of departure yet not to move. Not moving, thus although going, it is always still; not dwelling, thus although still, it is always going. Though still, it is always going; though going, it does not move; though moving, it does not remain.” It is evident that Sengzhao believes that the “permanence” spoken of by the Buddhas is a permanence that does not dwell; it cannot be taken as an immutable law. For example, while the dharmakaya of the Buddhas is eternally abiding, it also manifests according to the conditions of sentient beings, appearing in whatever form is needed for teaching. This conveys the meaning of “permanence without dwelling”. The true implication of the “impermanence” discussed in the sutras is that, in the moment of impermanence, there is also no birth and no death. For instance, although the sage teaches beings in the six paths, they are always abiding in the undwelling nirvana. Thus, Sengzhao concludes that while all phenomena are in constant flux, they are also fundamentally unchanging in the present moment. To dispel sentient beings’ attachment to the notion of impermanence, “things do not move”.

The Sutra on the Profound Meaning states:

Those sages, in this matter, with holy wisdom and insight, transcending names and words, manifest equal awakening; in order to enable others to attain the same awakening, they provisionally establish conceptual labels, referring to them as conditioned and unconditioned.

Hui Neng also said:

By clinging to the notion of impermanence, the Buddha speaks of an inherent permanence; those who do not understand this expedient are like someone picking up pebbles in a spring pool.

From the materials cited above, it is evident that the true nature of all phenomena is inconceivable and transcends verbal description. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, for the benefit of sentient beings, skillfully expound various expedient teachings and establish numerous conceptual labels to help them realize the true nature of phenomena. Therefore, one should not think that the teachings of the Buddhas are absolute and unchangeable. If such a view arises, it especially reflects attachment to views that cannot perceive the true middle way. Seng Zhao deeply

understood the principles of the middle way, thus he stated, “Could one say that one can send away the departing and keep the abiding?” This embodies the idea of the middle way as deconstructing while not establishing. Hence, Seng Zhao also said: “Thus, in discussing true existence, we speak of non-movement, and in guiding the ordinary, we talk about flow. Even if there are a thousand different paths, they ultimately converge into the same truth.”

4.2.5. The Interpretation of Seng Zhao's Thought on “The Unfading Achievements of the Tathāgata”

The phrase “the unfading achievements of the Tathāgata” refers to the boundless merits accrued by the Tathāgata through self-benefit and benefiting others. Because these merits are inexhaustible, they are described as “unmoving”. Seng Zhao states in the Zhao Lun:

Thus, the Tathāgata’s merits flow through the ages and endure forever; the path traverses’ countless eons and becomes more steadfast. Just as a mountain is built upon the first shovel of earth, and a journey begins with the first step, this is because achievements cannot decay. Because they cannot decay, they do not transform; because they do not transform, they are unmoving. Thus, they are profoundly clear. From this text, it is evident that Sengzhao uses the perspective of the Tathāgata's ability to continuously engage in self-benefiting and benefiting others to explain the Middle Way theory of “things do not move”. Seng Zhao believes that the supreme Buddhahood is attained by bodhisattvas through countless eons of practicing the six perfections. From a temporal perspective, the merits accumulated by bodhisattvas in past lives exist solely in the past and are not present now (Jülch, 2019). Therefore, the merits gathered in the past only exist in the past, and they are not present in the current moment. Although the wisdom and virtues accumulated earlier are not visible in the present, the bodhisattvas’ attainment of Buddhahood does not come from abandoning the merits they previously cultivated. For instance, building an artificial mountain is achieved by accumulating earth starting from the first shovel; similarly, a long journey is made by taking the first step toward a destination in one’s heart. Without the initial shovel of earth and the first step, there would be no formation of the mountain or arrival at the destination. Thus, it can be concluded that the merits cultivated by the Tathāgata are unchanging and everlasting, which embodies the meaning of “unmoving”. Because the Tathāgata’s merits are indestructible and unlost, sentient beings can endlessly engage in self-benefit and benefit others after attaining Buddhahood, leading all beings into the state of final nirvana

(TRANSLATED, 2018). Yuan Kang also states in the Commentary on the Zhao Lun, Volume 1: “Accumulating merits through countless ages, past merits remain in the past. Accumulating the path over hundreds of eons indicates that the path of old belongs to the past; this is unfading and unlost, becoming ever more solid.” From this, it can be seen that although all phenomena are empty and arise dependent on conditions, the deeds of good and evil will not be lost. The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa, Volume 1 states: “The Dharma is neither existent nor non-existent; due to causes and conditions, all phenomena arise. There is no self, no creator, and no recipient, yet the deeds of good and evil also do not perish.” This is how Seng Zhao skillfully elucidates the true meaning of the non-arising and non-perishing nature of phenomena from a worldly perspective. Thus, one must discover and awaken to the truth through the myriad affairs and objects of the world. The Mādhyamaka Śāstra, Volume 4 says: “If one does not rely on the conventional truth, one cannot attain the ultimate reality; without the ultimate reality, one cannot attain Nirvāṇa.” It is evident that the conventional truth and the ultimate truth are neither identical nor separate; the two cannot be divided. If one does not comprehend the principle of non-arising and non-perishing from the phenomena that are subject to birth and death, one cannot attain complete Nirvāṇa.

4.3 The Concept of “Non-Concurrent Causes and Effects” in Seng Zhao's Thought

The concept of “non-concurrent causes and effects” is a theoretical basis proposed by Seng Zhao to explain the Middle Way thought of “things do not change”. Why is “non-concurrent causes and effects” a reflection of Seng Zhao's Middle Way philosophy? In the Zhao Lun, it states: “Effects do not accompany causes; causes lead to effects. Causes lead to effects, and the cause does not perish; effects do not accompany causes, and causes do not come to the present. If they do not perish and do not come, then the non-migratory nature is evident!” Seng Zhao believes that from the perspective of conventional truth, all phenomena arise from their respective primary causes and supportive conditions. Analyzing phenomena shows that causes and effects cannot exist simultaneously; when a cause arises, the effect is not yet present, and when the effect matures, the cause is no longer there. Thus, it is understood that causes and effects reside in their own domains without the phenomenon of coming and going (Zhang, 2020). Since the cause leads to the effect, it is clear that the cause exists in the past and does not perish. Moreover, since there is

no cause present when the effect arises, it is known that the cause does not come from the past to the present, hence it is said that “the cause does not come to the present.” It is evident that causes and effects are “not perishing and not coming”, thus Seng Zhao concludes that the principle of no migration or change among phenomena is thoroughly expounded here. Yuan Kang explains: “Since there is no destruction, and it does not come again, it is thus said to be non-migratory.” “Not perishing and not coming” means that phenomena are without birth. Without birth, there is no destruction; since there is neither birth nor destruction, it is said that phenomena are “non-migratory.” Therefore, it can be concluded that “non-concurrent causes and effects” is an embodiment of Seng Zhao's Middle Way philosophy.

4.3.1. The Practical Significance of Seng Zhao's “Theory of Non-Migration”

In today's society, we are in an era of global cultural exchange. How to disseminate Buddhist teachings in this age of globalization is a matter that contemporary monks and youth should seriously contemplate. I believe we can glimpse insights from Sengzhao's “Theory of Non-Migration.” During the Wei and Jin dynasties, the predominant ideology was “Xuanxue”. The philosophy of prajna shares similarities with “Xuanxue”, which laid the groundwork for the dissemination of prajna thought. The general public finds it difficult to distinguish between the two, often confusing their ideas. To clarify such issues, Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka thought was introduced to China. Thus, it can be said that Nagarjuna's ideas solidified the foundation for the sinicization of Buddhism. In this process of sinicization, one of the most outstanding representatives was Seng Zhao. From the content of “Theory of Non-Migration”, it is evident that he references many classics from Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi, and Confucian texts to elucidate prajna principles. This shows that Seng Zhao adeptly employed contemporary mainstream thought to promote orthodox prajna while remaining faithful to the Middle Way. Given Seng Zhao's reputation, his works certainly brought fresh perspectives to the cultural scene of his time, injecting new vitality into intellectual discourse and allowing correct prajna thought to spread among both monastic and lay communities, thereby establishing a solid foundation for Buddhism's popularity in China (Sheng, 2020). This exemplifies the perfect integration of Indian Madhyamaka thought with native Chinese culture. Hong Xiuping posits that after Buddhism was introduced to China, it had to undergo a process of localization to take root and spread effectively. The localization of

Buddhism must merge with traditional Chinese culture and exert its influence on Chinese society. The emergence of Seng Zhao's Buddhist philosophy marks the completion of Buddhism's sinicization and lays the groundwork for its future development in the region (Yang, 1992). In this context, can the principles of Buddhism be leveraged to explore its development path in contemporary society? To ensure the correct promotion of Buddhist teachings, it is essential first to understand Buddhism accurately, and then to identify the most popular cultural ideas that meet people's current needs, attempting to find both commonalities and differences between the two, and using those commonalities to promote the Dharma. This approach could indeed serve as a valuable exploration. The Middle Way philosophy serves as a guide for beings to transform suffering and attain Buddhahood. In today's fast-paced society, many people experience significant stress, which can lead to various physical ailments and negative emotions over time. If individuals could understand the concept of dependent origination and emptiness, and apply this wisdom in their daily lives, they could alleviate their internal negative emotions, let go of rigid views, and achieve mental and emotional stability. Over time, this would enhance their wisdom in both worldly and spiritual matters, leading to a more fulfilling life free from external disturbances. Thus, promoting the non-attachment to existence and non-existence in contemporary times aligns well with the needs of sentient beings. Understanding and grasping the Middle Way can enable beings to attain supreme Buddhahood in the long run, while also addressing harmful factors arising from negative emotions that affect personal and societal well-being. This, in turn, would enhance happiness for individuals and families. In life, it is essential to cultivate the wisdom of being able to navigate both existence and emptiness and to master the methodology of their mutual application, thereby reaching a state of complete freedom and fulfillment. Thus, the teachings of the emptiness of dependent origination are an essential education for all beings.

4.4. Zhen Cheng's Thoughts on the Doubts Regarding "The Theory of Non-Migration"

De Haas believes that Seng Zhao's Zhao Lun is, overall, a commendable work, especially the sections like "The Theory of Wisdom of Emptiness" and "The Theory of Non-True Emptiness", which accurately articulate the Middle Way of the Mahayana concept of dependent origination and emptiness (*De Haas, 2014*). However, he finds that "The Theory of Non-Migration" strays from the principle of emptiness. He argues that the

meaning of “non-migration” presented in this work is similar to the concept but fundamentally flawed. Zhen Cheng posits that Seng Zhao explains the migration and non-migration of all phenomena through a perspective of simultaneous motion and stillness, which aligns with the wisdom articulated in texts like the Prajna and Avatamsaka Suttas. Yet, due to the erroneous method discussed by Seng Zhao, Zhen Cheng refers to it as “similar in principle but fundamentally incorrect”. According to Zhen Cheng, the discussion in “The Theory of Non-Migration” pertains to the notion of inherent existence rather than the emptiness of prajna. He states in The Correct Measure of Non-Migration:

The term 'inherent existence' refers to the idea that past phenomena remain in the past and do not come into the present, while present phenomena remain in the present and do not move into the past. This includes all things, whether new, old, young, or decaying, each residing in its own position without interaction; thus, this applies to all. However, anything that exists in this manner is classified as conditioned phenomena; since conditioned phenomena are subject to birth and death, they do not truly remain. From this, it is clear that Zhen Cheng's concept of “nature residing” refers to the existence of an unchanging substance that exists throughout time, with each entity residing in its own position and not interacting with others. If there is indeed a substance that resides, it falls into the category of conditioned phenomena; as such, it is subject to birth and decay, which contradicts the idea of “not migrating”. Therefore, Zhen Cheng claims that Sengzhao's “Theory of Non-Migration” is “similar in appearance but fundamentally incorrect.” However, while this viewpoint critiques the methodology described by Sengzhao, whether Sengzhao's “Theory of Non-Migration” aligns with Zhen Cheng's “ature residing” concept remains a matter for further discussion. The author will briefly express their views based on the original text of “Non-Migration” and the annotations by Yuan Kang and Han Shan. The intention is not to criticize Zhen Cheng's perspective, but to interpret Seng Zhao's Middle Way thought (*Li & Dessein, 2015*). I believe both monks aimed to elucidate the true Dharma when interpreting Buddhist scriptures, and such differences in interpretation would unlikely occur if they were contemporaries. Thus, I approach this discussion with that mindset. In my opinion, Zhen Cheng asserts that Seng Zhao establishes the existence of an unchanging, non-migratory reality, referred to as “nature residing”. However, from the content of “Non-Migration”, it appears Seng Zhao's purpose is to dismantle the dualistic and impermanent views held by the two vehicles and ordinary beings. By adopting the perspective of worldly truth and using

the concept of “non-migration”, he aims to guide sentient beings to realize the true nature of all phenomena as non-born and non-perishing. From the Buddha's understanding, all phenomena are seen as resting in their own nature, devoid of notions like coming and going or birth and death. Everything is inherently such, beyond words; otherwise, one falls into the distinctions of the sixth consciousness. Thus, Seng Zhao states: Seeking the sacred words, they are subtle and difficult to measure. If moving, they seem still; if leaving, they seem to remain. One can comprehend through the mind, but it is difficult to seek through actions. Therefore, it is said that leaving does not necessarily mean departing, as commonly thought; residing does not necessarily mean remaining, as understood by the liberated. Can we say that what departs can be sent away or what resides can be kept?

From this, it is evident that Seng Zhao believes the scriptures spoken by the Buddha are profound and difficult to fathom, akin to a finger pointing at the moon. One should not merely explore the text's literal meaning but should understand the real significance expressed behind the words. By listening to and contemplating the Buddha's teachings, one can attain the Buddha's perspective; thus, the scriptures function like a finger pointing to the moon. The ultimate reality of Mahayana teachings does not belong to “being” or “non-being”. Although the ultimate reality is formless and empty, it can simultaneously manifest all forms based on conditions. Therefore, the ultimate reality is neither “permanent” nor “impermanent”, but rather, permanence in the present moment constitutes a state of impermanence. The Buddha's use of “permanence” or “impermanence” in Mahayana texts aims to dispel sentient beings' erroneous perceptions that phenomena are either “permanent” or “impermanent”. Seng Zhao believes that the view of phenomena as changing and impermanent can be countered by the principle of “non-migration”, but this does not imply that the concept of “non-migration” can be retained. Thus, while Seng Zhao speaks of “non-migration”, he does not assert that there exists a truly unchanging “thing”.

The “Zhao Lun” states: From ancient times to the present, the present should include the ancient. If the present does not include the ancient, it shows that it does not come; if the ancient does not include the present, it shows that it does not go. If the ancient does not reach the present, then the present also does not reach the ancient. Each thing resides in its own existence; what is there that can come or go?

Seng Zhao analyzes the principle of non-coming and non-going of all dharmas based on the temporal names established in the conventional

truth. Because the ancient and the present cannot exist simultaneously, there is no phenomenon of interaction between them. Since the present does not come to the ancient and the ancient does not come to the present, one cannot say there is a so-called time that passes between the two. Thus, it is understood that both the present and the ancient are conventional truths of dependent origination and emptiness (the present can represent the ancient, and the ancient can represent the present). Although the present does not come to the ancient, and the ancient does not come to the present, in reality, there still exists the illusory concept of the ancient and the present. Therefore, it is known that the ancient and the present also serve the function of dependent origination and emptiness (Bumbacher, 2016). Struve, in his commentary on the “Zhao Lun”, states: “Thus, the swirling wind stills the mountains, the rivers flow quietly without rushing, the wild horses drift without moving, and the sun and moon traverse the heavens without returning (Struve, 2012).” This passage says: “The wind at the front does not know the wind at the back, thus stilling the mountains.....The Avatamsaka Sutra says: ‘Just like a great wind arises, it stirs and creates movement; both do not know each other.’..... Master Zhao did not see the Avatamsaka, yet he wrote this treatise in perfect harmony. If he did not deeply comprehend the profound principles of emptiness, how could he have expressed the truth so accurately without having seen that sutra?” (Baggio, 2019) This shows that Yuan Kang uses the “Avatamsaka Sutra” to support Seng Zhao's idea of “non-migration”, asserting that if Seng Zhao did not realize the profound principles of Prajnaparamita, how could he articulate the truth so precisely without having encountered that scripture?

De Qing's “Brief Commentary on the Zhao Lun” states: I read this text when I was young, and I had doubts about the four meanings of “non-movement” for many years. Later, while staying at Dongpu Mountain with my esteemed teacher, I reprinted this work and studied it. Suddenly, I had an awakening regarding the meaning of “non-movement”. Thus, my earlier doubts about the “permanence of worldly phenomena” discussed in the Lotus Sutra were completely resolved. I realized that the arguments in this text are subtle and profound; those who lack true understanding but attempt to interpret it through their own views cannot avoid feelings of doubt. From Shmushko's writings, we can see that De Qing, in his early study of the Zhao Lun, also had doubts about Sengzhao's idea of “non-movement” (Shmushko, 2019). However, after reprinting the text and studying the meaning of “non-movement”, he suddenly attained insight, and his doubts vanished. He then personally experienced the realm of

“non-movement” and was thus moved to exclaim that the meaning of the Zhao Lun is indeed profound and subtle. He asserted that those who attempt to interpret this text without genuine realization will inevitably encounter confusion. Therefore, I believe Han Shan, as a respected figure, certainly spoke from a place of true insight, and his views serve as a validation that the principles articulated in the Zhao Lun align with the Mahayana prajna teachings. From this analysis, it can be understood that Seng Zhao approached the analysis of the changing nature of phenomena from the perspective of conventional truth while simultaneously revealing the underlying principle of non-movement. Thus, I argue that Seng Zhao's idea of “things of the past not arriving in the present” is not the same as Zhen Cheng's “substantial permanence” concept. For instance, concepts like precepts and causality are discussed from the perspective of conventional truth and cannot be negated by ultimate truth. The Buddha speaks according to the two truths to guide sentient beings toward realization. Therefore, one should use conventional truth to understand ultimate truth and vice versa.

5. CONCLUSION

The “Non-Moving Argument” presents profound ideas and elegant language that resonate with the aesthetic sensibilities and cognitive patterns of the Chinese people. It is a classic work that embodies the fusion of Indian Buddhist thought and Chinese culture. The entire argument centers on the notion of the Middle Way in Prajñā, drawing on the teachings of Prajñā texts while incorporating various cultural elements from Chinese scriptures, literature, and philosophy. This article focuses on the “Non-Moving Argument” and examines the relevant commentaries by Ancestor De, alongside various Prajñā scriptures, to explore Sengzhao's idea of “motion and stillness being fundamentally indistinguishable”. It addresses four aspects: “seeking stillness in motion”, “things residing in their respective states”, “the permanence of the Tathāgata's works”, and “the inseparability of cause and effect”, illustrating that “non-moving” reflects the Middle Way that transcends the ordinary and the profound. In summary, “non-moving” aims to elucidate the ungraspable nature of change in phenomena, dispelling common misconceptions regarding the external world as being in motion, coming and going, or being subject to birth and death. From the content of the “Non-Moving Argument”, it is evident that Sengzhao's notion of “non-moving” is based on the principle

of impermanence. By analyzing the phenomena of arising and ceasing, he reveals that all phenomena are ultimately tranquil and devoid of birth and death. If phenomena lack birth and death, how can they possess motion or stillness? Everything is merely the skillful means of the Buddhas. Therefore, Seng Zhao asserts that “things do not move”. While “non-moving” negates the notion that phenomena are in a constant state of flux, Seng Zhao does not claim that they are unchanging. In terms of the ultimate reality of phenomena, one cannot assert that they are “moving” or “non-moving”. The ultimate reality is formless yet capable of manifesting various forms, transcending the concepts of “motion” and “stillness”. As discussed above, the overarching aim of Seng Zhao's work is to dismantle false views without establishing definitive truths. His methodological approach resonates with the expression of the Middle Way. “Non-moving” is a skillful, provisional term used by Seng Zhao to elucidate the ultimate reality of phenomena, and one should not interpret it as indicating the existence of a genuinely unchanging essence. Seng Zhao intends to utilize the incessantly changing myriad phenomena to clarify the Middle Way's ultimate reality of neither coming nor going, thereby dispelling beings' delusions of phenomena being “permanent” or “impermanent”, ultimately guiding them toward the wisdom of the Buddha.

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