

The study on The Philosophy of Zhao Lun

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Abstract: Zhaolun is the master work written by Sengzhao. I will choose one of most precious commentaries, Zhao Lun Ji Jie Ling Mo Chao, which I study, and translate into English, as nobody has done this work till now. In the studies of Zhaolun, some unsolved questions and divergences still exist. Based on the works of scholars in China and abroad, I try to explain some questions more properly on grounds. Zhaolun deeply affected the Buddhism in China, as well in Korea and Japan. I study Zhaolun based on the general explanation to the notes and commentaries in different Dynasties.

1. Introduction

Seng Zhao (c. 378-413) is a famous Buddhist scholar in Chinese history of Buddhist philosophy, who exerted a great influence and was honored as the number one man to explain emptiness in China¹. Sengzhao lived during East-Jin dynasty (317-420), when Chinese Buddhism began to flourish. Sengzhao wrote his four Buddhist thesis which were famous in Chinese history of Buddhism and included “the Immutability of Things”, “Non-absolute Emptiness”, “the Unknowledgeability of Prajna”, and the Unnameability of Nirvana². He combined Indian Buddhist philosophy with Chinese Lao Zhuang metaphysics and finally, he not only brought the development of Buddhist thoughts in China into a new stage, but also greatly promoted the development of the whole Chinese philosophy³.

Zhaolun is the master work written by Sengzhao. I will choose one of most precious commentaries, Zhao Lun Ji Jie Ling Mo Chao, which I study, and translate into English, as nobody has done this work till now⁴. In the studies of Zhaolun, some unsolved questions and divergences still exist. Based on the works of scholars in China and abroad, I try to explain some questions more properly on grounds⁵⁻⁶.

2 Madhyamaka Teaching in China

2.1 The Introduction of Madhyamaka Teaching into China

Madhyamaka teaching was brought to China in the first decade of the fifth century A.D. by Kumarajiva. Born in Kucha in Central Asia, Kumarajiva followed his mother into the Buddhist order at the age of seven. He first came under the influence of the Sarvastivada School, and was converted to the Mahayana in his early youth⁷. Right after his conversion to the Mahayana, Kumarajiva studied the

Middle Treatise, the Twelve Topic Treatise and the Hundred Treatise. Known far and wide for his great learning and occult powers, Kumarajiva was eagerly sought after by the rulers of north China. In 401, Kumarajiva was welcomed to Chang’an, the capital of the Later Qin (384-417)⁸⁻⁹. Under the patronage of the imperial house, he rendered into Chinese a wide spectrum of Buddhist texts, the most important of which in our connection were the Four Treatises: the Hundred Treatise in 404, the Large Treatise in 405, and the Middle Treatise and the Twelve Topic Treatise in 409. In thus laying the foundation for the development of Chinese Madhyamaka, Kumarajiva was commonly regarded as the founder of the San-lun School by Chinese and Japanese historians of Buddhism¹⁰.

Among Kumarajiva’s followers, Sengzhao was one of Kumarajiva’s best and closest disciples. He was highly regarded by his contemporaries and by posterity for his philosophical acumen and his art of argument¹¹. Sengzhao was the only early Chinese Madhyamika who has left behind sizeable amounts of writings, which afford a clear picture of the initial impact of Madhyamaka teaching on Chinese Buddhist thought.

2.2 The Emptiness of Madhyamaka

When Nagarjuna defeated Sarvastivadins’ theory of svabhava, Nagarjuna’s critical weapon was pratitya-samutpada. Svabhava is the substantial entity that every dharma contains inside itself. However, pratitya-samutpada is the reality of all dharmas’s conditional arising and perishing. By definition, svabhava as a substantial entity cannot fulfill the circumstance of pratitya-samutpada which implies ceaseless change¹². Thus, entity in dharmas cannot be substantiated. As pratitya-samutpada is Nagarjuna’s philosophical fundamental and what Nagarjuna calls the “immortal message of the Buddhas”, it must not be thrown away. Svabhava has no place in the reality of pratitya-samutpada.

The nonexistence of svabhava is necessary and

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sufficient condition of pratitya-samutpada. Nagarjuna calls the nonexistence of svabhava “sunyata”, that is, emptiness. Since there is no svabhava, a dharma whose essence is svabhava is sunya, empty. Because a person consists of empty dharmas, the person is empty. Everything in the world of pratitya-samutpada is empty¹³. Nagarjuna’s Sunyatasaptati reads,

All phenomena must have either self-existence or non-self-existence. There is no phenomenon which is other the two, nor are there any expressions which do not come under these two categories. All phenomena which are the subject of this treatise are similar to nirvana because all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence. What is the reason for this? It is because the inherent existence of all phenomena is not to be found in causes, conditions, aggregations or individualities. Thus, all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence and are empty.

In this quoted phrase, Nagarjuna identifies the nonexistence of “inherent existence”, that is, svabhava, with the emptiness. A conditionally arising phenomenon is not supported by some limited causes, conditions, aggregations, or individualities. In other words, the pratitya-samutpada of a phenomenon expands toward the entire world as a whole. A phenomenon is linked with, and conditionally supported by, all other phenomena. In the case that a phenomenon appears to consist of some entities, those entities are conditionally arising phenomena as well¹⁴. There is no exception in pratitya-samutpada. As all things are conditional, all things are empty.

Sunyata derived from pratitya-samutpada is the reality of the world as a whole; thus, sunyata is the only reality of the world as a whole of pratitya-samutpada. Nonetheless, when sunyata is discussed, it is categorized into various sorts, such as the emptiness of a self, the emptiness of a dharma, the emptiness of nirvan, and so on. Why does the simplest idea of sunyata get divided into complicated categories? To look for the answer, the original target of Madhyamaka philosophy should be reminded. As seen above, the Sarvastivadins of Abhidharma tore the dharmadhatu, that is, the world of dharmas into shreds. Each and every of the dharmas has its own svabhava, and Madhyamika had to defeat all the svabhavas. Against the overwhelmingly analytic Sarvastivadins, Madhyamikas should show that all the dharmas are sunya, and should additionally warn that pratitya-samutpada, prajna, and even sunyata itself are not dharmas with svabhava but are sunya¹⁵.

Among the verifications of the sunyata of various dharmas, the sunyata of prajna is notable. Prajna in Madhyamaka philosophy is the intuitive experience of sunyata through the realization of the reality of pratitya-samutpada. From a superficial glance, prajna is sunya because the content of prajna is sunya. Yet, the sunyata of prajna does not have such uniqueness. Prajna depends on pratitya-samutpada, intuition, experience, realization, and ultimately on everything in the world as a whole. Unexceptionally, prajna, depending on other things, conditionally arises. Conditionally arising, prajna has no svabhava. Therefore, prajna is sunya.

In Mula-madhyamaka Karika, Dvadasamukha Sastra, and Sunyatasaptati, Nagarjuna defeats the analytic assertions of Sarvastivada one by one. Nagarjuna shows

that all the dharmas which Sarvastivadins claim to exist by themselves actually do not exist by themselves as they are conditionally dependent on other things, and then he denies the substantiality of all the dharmas one by one. Due to the denial of the substantiality of all dharmas and of the existence of what Abhidharma calls svabhava, it is said that Madhyamaka uses the logic of the double negation or of the fourfold negation. Although that more details about Madhyamaka’s logic of negation will be discussed in the following sections, one thing should be mentioned here.

Because Madhyamikas eliminate all the assertions of Abhidharma and set no other assertions of their own, Madhyamaka philosophy earned its name, the teaching of the “middle way”, that is, in Sanskrit language, Madhyamaka. Mula-madhyamaka Karika reads,

We state that whatever is dependent arising, that is emptiness. That is dependent upon convention. That itself is the middle way [madhyamaka].

In this verse, Nagarjuna defines that dependent arising, that is, pratitya-samutpada is emptiness, that is, sunyata. As seen above, pratitya-samutpada itself is empty. Yet, all phenomena appear within pratitya-samutpada. The phenomena are the results of causes and conditions. The phenomena are not definitive but conditional. In this sense, all phenomena are dependent on convention. Yet, sunyata within pratitya-samutpada is merely description of the reality, and is not an assertion about the reality. Sunyata is what remains after the denials of all the false assertions about the reality. After the denials, nothing actually remains. Therefore, the reality is empty. As nothing is declared, the middle way is not a way between any two roads. The middle way is related to all ways, and thus is free from all ways.

Although sunyata as the middle way is free from all ways, sunyata might become the ugliest bondage if someone gets attached to it. All dharmas do not contain any self-nature, so they are empty. However, in the case that someone considers sunyatas as a svabhava, an unrecoverable situation occurs. Mula-madhyamaka Karika warns,

If there were to be something non-empty, there would then be something called empty. However, there is nothing that is non-empty. How should there be something empty?... The victorious Ones have announced that emptiness is the relinquishing of all views. Those who are possessed of the emptiness are said to be incorrigible.

Here, emptiness, that is, sunyata, is the reality of everything. It denies all the substantiality. However, when someone characterizes something with emptiness, emptiness becomes substantial with the thing. All of Madhyamaka’s efforts might collapse due to the misunderstanding about, and the attachment to, emptiness. There is nothing called emptiness.

3 The Zhao Lun

3.1 The Chinese background of Zhao Lun

During Eastern Jin Dynasty, it was governed by families of power and gentries. China was in the condition of long-

term disunion and the society was unstable. Meantime, some northern minority nationalities and Han nationality merged, some rulers of northern minority nationalities established several dynasties backed up by the families of power and gentries. They supported Buddhism. The major change in Wei Jin Dynasty was the emerging and developing of xuanxue which fitted to their ideology. The emergence of xuanxue related to the decay and danger of Confucianism. Contents of xuanxue were very rich then. Generally speaking, the theories of He Yan, Wang Bi, Guo Xiang might represent the main aspects of xuanxue. Xuanxue was very popular then and the questions Daoists discussed and the philosophical concepts and categories they advanced affected deeply on the Buddhism at that time Zhao Lun merged under this social and cultural background.

After Western Jin Dynasty, Prajna schools of Buddhism sprung up progressively affected by xuanxue, meanwhile, the Buddhist monks formed different points of view and divided into six schools and seven clans. Sengzhao summed up them into three schools and proposed his own theories, i.e. Zhaolun. Using Prajna, Zhaolun discussed some important questions of Buddhism, Sengzhao combined Prajna and Chinese philosophy establishing his own way of thought, which has been affecting the development of Chinese Buddhism. Zhaolun is an epoch-making book in the history of Chinese philosophy.

3.2 The Life and Works of Seng Zhao

Sengzhao was born in 374 in the vicinity of Chang'an. As his family was poor, he had to earn his own living very early as a copyist. This occupation enabled him to acquire a wide knowledge of secular literature, and like most of the intellectuals of his time. He was especially fond of Neo-Taoism, but not entirely satisfied with it. After reading the Vimalakirti Sutra, Sengzhao was converted to Buddhism and promoted to be a monk. His wide learning and skill in debate earned him fame, as well as the jealousy of his contemporaries. Having learned that Kumarajiva was staying in Gu Zang, Seng Zhao went there to become his disciple. He accompanied Kumarajiva back to Chang'an in 401, and was appointed by Yao Qin to assist Kumarajiva in his translations, which gave him the opportunity to learn Kumarajiva's interpretations of the doctrine. After the translation of the Pancavimsati, he wrote an essay of more than two thousand characters, entitled *Bo re wuzhi lun* (Prajna Is Non-Knowing), which was highly acclaimed by Kumarajiva, saying: "My understanding does not differ from yours, and in phrasing we might borrow from each other."

In 408 Daoseng took his essay to Lushan where he showed it to the recluse Liu Yimin. He commented "I did not suspect that there might be a He Yan among the Buddhist clergy, too" and passed it on to Huiyuan, who also praised it, and circulated it in the Lushan community where it was very favorably received. Liu Yimin then wrote a letter to Sengzhao, who replied at some length.

Afterwards, he composed the *Bu zhen kong lu* (the Non-absolute of Emptiness) and the *Wu bu qian lu* (Things

Do Not Change). While mourning Kumarajiva's death, he wrote the *Niepan wuming lu* (Nirvana Is Nameless). These four treatises of Sengzhao were at first circulated separately. Sometime in the second half of the sixth century, they, together with the correspondence between Sengzhao and Liu Yimin, were brought together to form a single text, which was given the title of *Zhaolun* and presented to Yao Xing who praised it and had it copied for circulation among the royal relatives. This collection of essays constituted the main source materials for the study of Sengzhao's thought. Sengzhao also wrote a number of prefaces to Kumarajiva's translations and was the author of Kumarajiva's obituary and a commentary on the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. He passed away in his prime at the age of forty.

By the time of the appearance of Seng Zhao, Buddhism had already been imported into China for about four centuries, yet Chinese knowledge of the foreign religion still remained rather crude and rudimentary. Living in an age when Taoism was in fashion in the Chinese intellectual circles, Chinese Buddhist masters of Sengzhao's time were used to employing Taoism terms and phrases to explain Buddhist ideas and doctrines, and lack of discrimination had led to widespread misunderstanding and confusion. Sengzhao's works made liberal use of Taoist terminology like most of the Buddhist writings of his period. However, they demonstrated in the handling of distinctive Buddhist themes a level of accuracy and sophistication far above that of their contemporary counterparts, attesting to the great strides which Chinese Buddhist thought made under the stimulus of the newly imported Madhyamaka texts and teachings.

3.3 Sengzhao's conception of emptiness

Although both Buddhism and Taoism are concerned with cultivating non-attachment and non-discrimination, Taoism, unlike Buddhism, has not tried to support its teachings of non-attachment and non-discrimination with the teaching of emptiness. Thus, Sengzhao's teaching of emptiness provides a convenient focal point for assessing Sengzhao's level of knowledge of Buddhism.

The core idea of Zhaolun is the non-duality of everything. More precisely, Sengzhao denies all kinds of discrimination. Sengzhao brings up conflicting issues regarding discrimination case by case, as he quotes various Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts, and equalizes the two opposites in the discrimination. However, it is somewhat doubtful that the mere elimination of all discriminations is the final goal of Sengzhao's philosophy in Zhaolun. To defeat the cases of discrimination is merely Sengzhao's logical methodology.

Through the elimination of all discriminations, Sengzhao attempts to achieve the realm of the emptiness, *sunyata*. *Sunyata* is the key to the Madhyamaka philosophy and is the Madhyamaka's logical core amongst *pratityasamutpada*, *prajna*, and *nirvana*. Surrounding *sunyata*, and *pratitya-samutpada* as the situational explanation of *sunyata*, *prajna* is one's epistemological realization of it, and *nirvana* is one's empirical identification with it. *Sunyata* equalizes and harmonizes

all things, as the natures of all things are equally sunya. All things are sunya as all things conditionally arise and perish, that is, pratitya-samutpada. Sengzhao's logic, as well as Madhyamaka logic, is not as coherent as Aristotelian logic. Rather, it is circulating. It is illustrative and panoramic, since it is situational description. In many of Sengzhao's cases, intuitive watching is more adequate than analytic examinations.

However, Sengzhao rarely uses the term, sunyata, or its Chinese translation, kong in Zhaolun. Instead, Sengzhao draws Laozi's term, xuxuan, for sunyata. Similarly, Sengzhao uses xuanjian or mysterious mirror, for prajna, and xuandao, and mysterious way, for pratitya-samutpada. Here in the middle of Sengzhao's logical process is the previously mentioned key concept of Zhaolun, xuan. For Sengzhao, xuan is a magical tool used to eliminate discrimination and to describe cases that do not allow direct experience. Also, xuan is used as the glue to relate the phenomenal realm with the metaphysical realm.

Sengzhao borrows xuan from the first chapter of Laozi. Usually, xuan in Laozi is interpreted as the indication of the same origin for both existence and nonexistence. Yet, Sengzhao expands the original ontological meaning toward other fields of philosophy. Through the application of modern European philosophical categories, the various usage of xuan in Zhaolun can be revealed. Yet, for more obvious comparison, xuxuan and xuanjian can be the best examples.

Zhaolun repeatedly deals with the non-duality between the phenomenal reality, this is, the ordinary truth, and the absolute reality, that is, the real truth. Sengzhao's aims in Zhaolun are to identify the two realities and to identify existence and nonexistence and other dual opposites through the identification between the interdependent co-arising (pratitya-samutpada) and the emptiness (sunyata) or the denial of constant substantial beings.

Along with pratitya-samutpada, sunyata is the key concept of Madhyamaka philosophy, but is the most misunderstood Buddhist concept for the early Chinese Buddhists. It is not only because such concept did not exist in China before Buddhism got imported, but also because sunyata itself has somewhat complex layers of meanings.

As repeatedly mentioned above, when Nagarjuna brought up sunyata, it meant the denial of substantial self-existent entity, that is, svabhava. Since sunyata is the logical consequence of pratitya-samutpada as the reality, the two are deeply related and can often replace each other. However, sometimes, two truths are set distinctively: pratitya-samutpada as the ordinary truth and sunyata as the absolute truth. On one hand, pratitya-samutpada, the interdependent co-arising, is thought to be the foundation of all existing things despite that they are temporary, conditional and not substantial. Sunyata, on the other hand, is thought to be nothingness or nonexistence, derived as the pair with pratitya-samutpada. The distinction between the ordinary truth and the absolute truth as the analogy of existence and nonexistence appears in "Nirvana is no knowing".

It is truth that the categories of existence and nonexistence include dharma of all denominations, that is division is exhaustive, but all they include are of this world. A sutra says: 'What is supramundane (paramartha)? Nirvana. What is ordinary? The dharma, is existent and nonexistent'.

Nirvana is believed to be supramundane because nirvana is out of conditions. What Liebhenthal calls supramundane, that is, zhendi, is not conditional, thus it cannot be known and is not of this world. As discussed above, Madhyamaka philosophy and Sengzhao do not recognize another world besides this world we are living in, and all things in this world arise from causes and conditions. Therefore, the quoted phrase implies not the affirmation of supramundane nirvana but the denial of absolute and ultimate status.

Sunyata of atman, that is emptiness of self, and sunyata of dharma, that is emptiness of things, as mentioned in chapter 2.2, were the critical and contradictory issues between Madhyamaka and Abhidharma. Initially, Abhidharma brought up the matter about the situation of a self consisting of some substantial dharmas. It is the intrinsic nature of the matter of svabhava that while the substantiality of self is denied, the constant and independent entities forming self are affirmed. Sengzhao inherits the matter but transforms it to be matter of the emptiness between subject and object. "Non-absolute Emptiness" reads,

The Supreme Vacuity which neither comes into existence is probably the subtle principle in the reflection of mysterious mirror of prajna (wisdom) and the source of all existence. Unless one possesses the intelligence and special penetrating power of a sage, how can he harmonize his spirit with the realm of neither existence nor nonexistence?

Here, the Supreme Vacuity, zhixu, is the xuanxue style expression for sunyata. Sunyata is described in between existence and nonexistence, which implies sunyata includes both existence and nonexistence but does not lean toward either side. Then, Sengzhao clarifies that sunyata is both 'the subtle principle of reflection of mysterious mirror of prajna' and 'the source of all existences.' The first is the subject perceiving sunyata; and the latter is the object of perception. Through sunyata, the continuity of the subject of perception is denied, and the independence of all existence is avoided. Although Sengzhao says that sunyata is the source of all existences, sunyata differs from the lineal noumenalistic explanation of existing things coming to be existent by Laozi and Wang Bi. Compared to the point that Laozi and Wang Bi place all things in a line beginning with wu(nonexistence), Sengzhao presents sunyata implicating pratitya-samutpada. In other words, as all things causally and conditionally arise, all things are empty due to pratitya-samutpada.

As examined through out Nagarjuna's discourse in chapter 2.2, the interdependency between sunyata and pratitya-samutpada is one of the key points of Madhyamaka philosophy, and it is succeeded by Sengzhao. However, the idea is not directly and obviously exposed in Zhaolun. Instead, Sengzhao explains it with subtlety, again, through xuanxue style expressions. The "self-voidness of myriad things", wanwuzhixixu compactly includes the

interdependency between sunyata and pratitya-samutpada. It appears three times in Zhaolun, all in “the Non-absolute Emptiness”. For Sengzhao, ‘myriad things’ are the phenomena interdependently and conditionally arising through and within pratitya-samutpada. Thus, myriad things, implicate the interdependent co-arising in the self-voidness of myriad things. The self voidness, zixu, is a somewhat sarcastic expression against xuanxue and Lao-Zhuang. Regarding ziran of Lao-Zhuang, Sengzhao keeps self, zi, and replaces as it is, ran, with voidness, xu. The expression of the self-voidness of myriad things symbolizes the harmony and the unification between sunyata and pratitya-samutpada. The harmony and the unification are the necessary and sufficient conditions both for sunyata and for pratitya-samutpada. Without the denial of svabhava, which is sunyata, no phenomena can arise and perish; and without the dependency on causes and conditions, which is pratitya-samutpada, a thing comes to be independent and constant so that it cannot be sunya. Indeed, pratitya-samutpada and sunyata are mutually auxiliary to each other.

Although the relationship between sunyata and pratitya-samutpada was discussed above, the following part of “the Non-absolute Emptiness” needs to be examined once again.

The Middle Treatise says, “Because things come from causes and conditions, they are not existent; because they arise through conditions, they are not inexistent”

Here, the causes and conditions, which is pratitya-samutpada, are the reason for both existence and nonexistence. Because pratitya-samutpada is, as seen above mutually auxiliary with sunyata, the quoted phrase implicates that sunyata is neither existent nor non-existent. In between existence and nonexistence, sunyata, along with pratitya-samutpada, becomes Madhyamaka.

Another notable point in the quotation above is of prajna as the unknowledgeable direct experience of sunyata. There, Sengzhao manifests that the supreme vacuity, which is sunyata, is the object of the perception of prajna. Regarding this point, again, Sengzhao is a sincere descendent of Nagarjuna. Prajna of both Nagarjuna and Sengzhao does not allow any analytic knowledge. It is because the reality of sunyata does not include the distinctive object as the perception of prajna. Therefore, prajna has an only one way to perceive the world, which is to perceive the world as a whole at once.

4 Previous translation and analyses of Zhao Lun

Zhaolun is an important book of Buddhist philosophy, has a great impact on Buddhist history and history of Chinese philosophy. But there is no book that studies Zhaolun with its commentaries from different dynasties. Studies in the Zhaolun written by Tsukamoto. Zenryu and his colleagues from Japan is not a book with detailed explanation. In Chinese history, Zhao Lun Zhong Wu Ji Jie by Jing Yuan in Song Dynasty is not, either. In China and in the West, Zhaolun is studied by many scholars. However, they all neglect the commentaries written to Zhaolun.

The length of notes and commentaries of Zhaolun in different times are all much longer than Zhaolun itself. It is a hard work to systematize them. But it is much helpful for further studies. It has never been done before.

There are many notes and commentaries to Zhaolun in different Dynasties. There are still up to ten kinds except the lost ones. I made use of eight important and famous ones:

1. Zhao Lun shu by Huida in Chen, 2 volumns;
2. Zhao Lun shu by Yuankang in Tang Dynasty, 3 volumns;
3. Zhu Zhaolun shu by Zunshi in North Song, 6 volumns;
4. Zhaolun Zhong Wu Ji Jie by Jing Yuan in Song Dynasty;
5. Zhaolun Ji Jie ling mo chao by Jing Yuan in Song Dynasty;
6. Zhaolun xin su by Wencai in Yuan Dynasty, 3 volumns;
7. Zhaolun xin su you ren by Wencai in Yuan Dynasty, 3 volumns;
8. Zhaolun lue zhu by Te-ching in Ming Dynasty, 6 volumns.

Different part of Zhaolun were emphasized in different notes and commentaries, many of which were the development of the thoughts of writers, and was little helpful to understand the original meaning of Zhaolun, but these might help us to understand the effect of Zhaolun on the Buddhism history of China. All these notes and commentaries had some points of view which could be used as references and be benefit to understanding Zhaolun.

4.1 The Significance of Zhao Lun Ji Jie Ling Mo Chao

Zhaolun Ji Jie Ling Mo Chao is the work of Jing Yuan (1011-1088) in Song Dynasty. This book is the commentary of Zhaolun and Zhaolun Zhong Wu Ji Jie. It was wide spread in Yuan dynasty. But from that time, few people mentioned this book. In 1934, the Japanese scholar found this book in Gaoshan temple. When the book was found occasionally, Tokiwa Daijo was very happy. He wrote excitedly: “in Showa 9th from June 3rd to 6th, I traveled to Gaoshan temple, sorted out decade books of Song stored in Fagu Tai, obtained the book, couldn’t help being happy!” This Ling Mo Chao is not integrated one. This book in total includes the commentaries of six essays and two letters, among which, the commentaries of Things Do Not Move, Non-absolute Emptiness, the Correspondence with Liu Yimin (Liu Yimin Shu Wen and Seng Zhao Shu Da) are integrated; the commentaries of the Core and Fundamental Meaning (Zongbenyi) and Ji Jie Ti Ci are slightly lost; the commentaries of the Unknowledgeability of Prajna and the Unnameability of Nirvana are lost more. Although this Ling Mo Chao is a lost one, it’s still very precious. The Japanese scholar Kamata Shigeo repeatedly affirms the value of the book, says it possesses important ideological significance in the historical development of Huayan Buddhism.

This book has never been translated into English, and in the studies of Zhaolun, some unsolved questions and divergences still exist. Based on the works of scholars in China and abroad, I try to explain some questions more properly on grounds.

5 The Explanation of some key concept

The theory of Chinese Huayan School, possesses the feature of absorbing other schools. After entering Song Dynasty, under the influence of the new situation that the Zhao's court carried out the highly centralized policy, the feature not only remained, but also had some new changes. But what's the new change? The discovering of Ling Mo Chao, for our deeply understanding the question, provides important reference.

Before Jing Yuan, the famous scholars of Huayan school are Zhiyan, Fazang, Chengguan and Zongmi. In their theories, all of them absorb the thoughts of other schools. Especially for Chengguan, his works widely absorb the theories of the Prajna scholar Sengzhao. The aim is to enrich Huayan Buddhism. But, in the time of Jingyuan, a big change occurred, that Jingyuan had not absorbed useful things from the theory of Sengzhao, otherwise, using the theories of Huayan school to basically reform Sengzhao's theory. It can be said that, in the work Ling Mo Chao of Jingyuan, "Sengzhao" has already not been the original Sengzhao, almost like a scholar of Huayan school. Using own school's theory to reform other school, even for Sengzhao, such famous monk, is the new change of the development till Song Dynasty.

Sengzhao is the scholar of Prajna school, part of Madhyamaka; while the Huayan school is Xingzong. In the history of Buddhism thinking, originally there're big differences between the two schools. "The Madhyamaka take the non-form of all dharmas as the character, Xingzong regards the prudence abide with non-empty body as the character." It can be seen that the basic thought of Sengzhao is Emptiness; while the basic thinking of Huayan school is Existence. However, Jingyuan, for his own school reforming other school, goes so far as to change every place of emptiness for conforming with existence. This is an important content of Ling Mo Chao. I will choose some typical examples to illustrate the point.

5.1 The Explanation of "Non-absolute Emptiness"

Non-absolute emptiness is a new concept of Sengzhao. It contains the basic thinking toward the world, is the basic conception in Sengzhao's theory. What's is non-absolute emptiness? Tang Yuankang made an explanation before. He said: "all dharmas are void, so be called not real. As it is void and not real, it is emptiness." Yuankang is the scholar of San Lun School, and wrote Zhao Lun Shu, 3 volumn. San Lun Zong was formed by Sengzhao and others' study of Guanhe, so for the explanation of Zhaolun by Yuankang, it basically accords with the original meaning. The explanation of Lv Cheng for non-absolute emptiness, accords with Yuankang. He said: "the so-called 'non-absolute emptiness' is that the 'non-absolute' is identical with 'emptiness'." Tang Yongtong also explains

like this, he even criticized the wrong explanation. He said: "the non-absolute emptiness is the explanation of karma, saying the non-absolute is identical with emptiness, not saying the emptiness is not real to stand for the realism." Ling Mo Chao just explain non-absolute emptiness as "the emptiness is not real", and said Sengzhao stands for realism. The book says: "using the word "non" to deny it, so called non-absolute emptiness." Using the non to deny the "real emptiness", it really changes that the non-absolute is identical with emptiness into that it is not real empty. Being not real empty, is same as existence. In fact, as a notable monk Jingyuan, he must understand the real meaning of non-absolute emptiness, but he persists in holding this. This is very clear that he was on purpose to change Sengzhao's thought of kong, into "existence".

5.2 The Explanation of the basic thinking of Bu Zhen Kong Lun

Sengzhao is the scholar of Prajna of Madhyamaka, his essay Bu Zhen Kong Lun clearly shows the basic thinking of understanding the emptiness and destroying the existence. About this point, Yuankang has early pointed it out. He said: "Bu Zhen Kong Lun, shows the emptiness, declare the doctrine of the absolute truth." This explanation conforms to the original text. But the Ling Mo Chao makes the contrary explanation. It says: "only using the text of the myriad forms are self-void, and removing the grasping of non-absolute, it's lucky the essence of wisdom is emptiness." The so-called "removing the grasping of non-absolute" means destroying the view of the non-absolute of all dharmas, identical with admitting the "absolute" and admitting the "existence". If so, the basic thinking of Bu Zhen Kong Lun was turned over.

5.3 The Explanation of The Absolute Truth and The Ordinary Truth

The absolute truth and the ordinary truth are short for the "two truths". "Two truths" originated in the Indian Buddhism. As early as the second and third century AD, the scholar of Mahayana Nagarjuna developed it, and used it to explain the existence and nonexistence. As for the view of Nagarjuna using "two truths" to explain existence and nonexistence, Lv Cheng generally said: "using the ordinary truth to say all dharmas are existent, using the absolute truth to say all dharmas are empty." The illustration, is identical with the original meaning of Nagarjuna. Sengzhao's Buddhism thinking come from Nagarjuna. His explanation of "two truths" completely inherited Nagarjuna's opinion; the whole Zhaolun, every place taking about "two truths" are all like this. But Jing Yuan has another explanation for "two truths" in Zhaolun. He said: "the absolute truth, is identical with the branch of suchness." "The ordinary truth, is identical with the branch of birth and death" the suchness means the mind suchness; the birth and death also refer to the mind birth and death. Zongmi once illustrated it: "the mind suchness is the essence, the mind birth and death are the form and use. This only means the mind is not void so called absolute, not changeable so-called suchness." From here, we can see

that changing the absolute truth of Sengzhao into the mind suchness, is same as changing the emptiness of absolute truth of Sengzhao into the existence of the absolute truth. Since the mind suchness is the essence, “not void and mistakenly”, “not changeable”, isn’t it the “existence”?

6 Conclusions

Only the three examples, it generally shows some problems. Every place standing for the “emptiness” in Zhaolun, Ling Mo Chao change all of them into “existence”. And changing Sengzhao’s object to “existence” into agreement, is identical with the thinking of Huayan school.

From above, we can say that, Jing Yuan had not only absorbed other schools’ thinking, but also using own school’s thinking to reform Sengzhao’s theory. This is the new change in the development of Huayan School till Song Dynasty. The discovery of Ling Mo Chao, provides the evidence for us to know this change. This discovery, for clearing the characteristic of Song Dynasty Buddhism, for the research to the historical development of Buddhism and for clarifying and solving the mixed and difficult problems in previous Buddhism, possesses certain significance.

Zhaolun deeply affected the Buddhism in China, as well in Korea and Japan. Based on the general explanation to the notes and commentaries in different Dynasties, I study Zhaolun. It is a preliminary work. General explanation has not been completed and many questions have not been explained properly. I will consummate his work further later by absorbing the fruit of scholars in China and foreign countries.

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