
Sūnyatā Doctrine of Nāgārjuna As seen by Chinese Commentator -Sheng Zhao

The main issue at the Buddha's time was about the soul/self(Ātman=Pali Atta) put forward by many religious teachers, specially the Upanisadic teachings. The Buddha had to show that the belief in an 'Ātman' is false. So, he emphasized Anatta-no soul doctrine.

But the issue Ācārya Nāgārjuna had to face was not about the soul but about the **own-nature** (Sva-bhāva) of the Sarvāstivādins and other similar substantialist and realist views of Sautrāntikas etc. These schools believed in some unchanging permanent entity that continues. They, while accepting that there is no individual soul (Puggala-nairātmya) agreed that Dharmas or the factors that constitute the person and the world exist in some form. Ācārya Nāgārjuna's main task was to show that this, too, is not the Buddha's teaching. Therefore he utilized the more wider concept used by the Buddha himself, and adopted the word Suññata (skt. |ūnyatā) to show that everything is empty of any permanent, non-changing entity or substance. Thus Ācārya Nāgārjuna emphasized both Pudgalanairātmya (that there is no individual soul)and Dharmanairātmya (that Dharmas are without a soul). To include both these ideas he employed the wider term |ūnya or |ūnyatā, and presented it as the main teaching of his philosophy. He never claims this to be his view, for he like the Buddha did not have personal views. He was only trying to show the true nature of reality.

In fact that he was very knowledgeable about the early Suttas, is seen by many facts. It was pointed out that even the Chinese tradition accept that at the out set Ācārya Nāgārjuna learnt Hīnayāna that means, early Buddhist texts, the Suttas. Besides, there are many similes used by Ācārya Nāgārjuna which find their parallels, the snake parable used in the "Alagaddūpamasutta" is very effectively used by Ācārya Nāgārjuna (chpt. 24 stanza 11) in this stanza: " *A wrongly perceived emptiness ruin a person of meager intelligence. It is like a snake that is wrongly grasped or knowledge that is wrongly cultivated*"(1).

Scholars, specially Kalupahana has pointed out that Ācārya Nāgārjuna refers to “Kaccānagottasutta” of the *Sa-yuttanikāya*, where the Buddha admonish Kaccāna as to how he should see reality. This Sutta is referred by Ācārya Nāgārjuna in chp.15, stanza 7 as below: “ *In the admonition to Katyayana two theories (implying) ‘exists’ and ‘does not’ have been reflected by the Blessed One who is adopted in existence as well as in non-existence*”(2).

Thus, it is beyond doubt that Ācārya Nāgārjuna was very well learned in early Buddhist teaching found in the early Suttas of the *Nikāyas*. He quotes them as authority to refute the later substantialist and realist views put forward by Sarvāstivāda and other schools. Yet, it is not only these teachings that inspired him to present his philosophy. There was another source of inspiration. This was the early Mahāyāna Sūtrās. Scholars have pointed out that early Mahāyāna Sūtrās were composed to criticize the Buddhist views put forward by some of the Hīnayāna schools, specially, Sarvāstivāda and to some extent Sautrāntikas. After the Buddhist council held in Kashmira under the patronage of King Kaṣhka, Sarāstivāda became very powerful and popular spreading even to Central Asia. The *Mahāvibhāṣā* the great commentary of Sarvāstivāda 7 Abhidhamma texts, specially the *Jñānaprasthāna*, was composed, and it became the most accepted authoritative book on Buddhism.

By about the 1st century A.D. the new Mahāyāna texts began to gradually appear. In these texts one find among other doctrines, the doctrine of |ūnyatā. Thus, one of the earliest of such texts, the A•□asāhasrikā-mahā-prajñā-pāramitā, clearly put forward this teaching as |ūnyatā (emptiness) of everything. Chinese tradition says that the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā •āstra* was composed by Ācārya Nāgārjuna . If this is accepted, then it clearly shows his deep understanding of the Prajñāpāramitā texts. The Prajñāpāramitā clearly shifts the emphasis from Anicca (skt.Anitya) to |ūnya (empty). This is a mark deviation from early Buddhism. Early Buddhism always presented Anicca (change, impermanency) as the fundamental principle applicable to all phenomena. Prajñāpāramitā did not stop at this; change, nihilism, cessation, coming, going, etc, can be spoken of only when there is some ‘thing’, Prajñāpāramitā directly reputed the belief there is a ‘thing’, any substance and entity whatever one may call. Therefore, thus new

group of literature highlighted ‘| ūnya’ or ‘| ūnyatā’ of everything. Thus, it pointed out, if everything is | ūnya then birth, death, appearance-disappearance, rising-ceasing etc are not applicable, for there is no ‘thing’ to which these could be applied.

It is this trend of thought that Ācārya Nāgārjuna developed further and systematically presented in his *Kārikā*. In doing this Ācārya Nāgārjuna uses a dialectical method. It is this that has led to much confusion among the interpreters of his philosophy. In fact there appear to have arisen two different kinds of interpretation. One is by Buddhapālita which was later developed by well known commentator Candrakīrti in his *Prasannapadā*. This is known as The Prāsaṅgika method of interpretation which holds that Ācārya Nāgārjuna is using the dialectical method to show the inner conflicts in the views put forward by teachers of other Buddhist school of thought. By showing these inner contradictions Nāgārjuna completely refutes and shows their absurdity. The Prāsaṅgika system says that Ācārya Nāgārjuna, after refuting others views, does not himself present a views, become a Madhyamaka is a person who has given up all views.

Bhāvaviveka’s method of interpretation is called Svatāntrika. This school holds that refuting the opponent view is not enough, and there should be a view that Ācārya Nāgārjuna presents. While it is true that a Madhyamaka cannot have view of his to present in place of the views he refutes, Madhyamaka philosophy becomes meaningless if we assume that it presents no view. Though Ācārya Nāgārjuna presents no counter views, he has some objective and this is to present the real teaching of the Buddha. In other words, the cleans the Buddhist thought of all wrong views, and take it back to its original purity.

| ūnyatā and Pratītyasamutpāda

To achieve this objective he presents the doctrine of | ūnyatā. In many places in the *Kārikā*. itself. Ācārya Nāgārjuna says that his doctrine of | ūnya/| ūnyatā has been misunderstood; some take it as nihilism (Uccheda). So he asks the readers not to blame him for their misunderstanding and also not to misunderstand it, for it will be harmful like taking hold of a snake in the wrong way. What is clear from Ācārya Nāgārjuna ’s

explanation of |ūnya is that it is same as Pratītya-samutpāda doctrine of the Buddha. . This Pratītya-samutpāda is a theory of relativity, a theory which explains that rising and falling of things, depending on other things. As thing are related to other things, there is no ‘thing’ in itself. Relativity means mutual dependency. One ‘thing’ is relative to another ‘thing’ means the two things are mutually dependent, and therefore, neither of them has an independent existence. In this sense what is relative is empty, for it has no inner essence of any kind. In other words, it has no Svabhāva(own nature) as Sarvāstivādins attempted to show. Taken in this sense Ācārya Nāgārjuna identifies |ūnyatā with Pratītyasamutpāda teaching of the Buddha. In chapter 24; stanzas 18,19, Ācārya Nāgārjuna makes this very clear:

“We state that whatever is arising in relation to other things, it is emptiness. It is dependant on convention. This itself is the middle way”(3)

“There is no thing that is not dependently arises. Therefore, there is not to be seen anything that is not empty” (4).

In this manner Ācārya Nāgārjuna identifies Pratītyasamutpāda, Madhyamapratipadā and |ūnyatā. The three are not different. If everything is relative, then everything is |ūnya, that is devoid of any essence. Once again what is clear is that while in early Buddhism what is emphasized is dependency, in Madhyamaka, it is relativity that is found to be stressed. In fact, in essence the two teachings are not different, for both try to show the absence of any underlying essence, the impossibility of there being any ‘thing’ that exists independently.

|ūnyatā not another view

It has to be clearly understood that Ācārya Nāgārjuna is not presenting |ūnyatā as another doctrine, a doctrine to be held and grasped, and carried on the head as the best of theories. He presents |ūnyatā as to mode to be used in viewing all phenomena. It is a method to be employed to get rid of views. By doing so, one should be careful not to make |ūnyatā another view. Thus, |ūnyatā is not a view but the way of ‘viewing’ all things. If we fail to understand this religious significance of |ūnyatā and take it as a view, then we are bound to get destroyed like the one getting hold of the snake in the wrong way. But it is not uncommon to find |ūnyatā being interpreted as a super-mundane

reality. While it is held that everything is | ūnya, | ūnyatā itself is raised to the state of ultimate reality. This leads to the belief that | ūnyatā is the only reality, and therefore, | ūnyatā is not empty. But Ācārya Nāgārjuna does not, by any means, present such a view; | ūnyatā itself is | ūnya. | ūnyatā is be used as a mode to get at true understanding and correct view of reality. It is not another view, it is the true nature of things.

Thus, | ūnyatā is made use of by Ācārya Nāgārjuna to demonstrate the absence of any essence in anything. It is this in sense, that is in the sense of there being no particular essence that distinguishes Saṁsāra from Nirvāṇa, that Ācārya Nāgārjuna says that the two are same. Thus in chapter 25. stanza 20 Ācārya Nāgārjuna says; Whatever is the limit of Nirvāṇa and whatever is the limit of Saṁsāra, between them there is nothing even very subtle thing to be seen. He said: “ *Whatever is the extremity of freedom and the extremity of the life process, between no even a subtle something is evident* ” (5).

It is very important to understand that the identity of Nirvāṇa and Saṁsāra is made only as the ground that there is not even a very subtle essence that make one different from the other. In that sense both are | ūnya. This does not mean that they are not there. What is attempted to be brought out is the relativity of Nirvāṇa and Saṁsāra. Thus, it is very clearly seen that | ūnyatā presented by Ācārya Nāgārjuna is not an ‘emptiness’ the literal sense of the word, but ‘empty’ of any essence or substance. This is the true religious meaning of | ūnyatā.

Sheng Zhao’s interpretation of | ūnyatā

The first Chinese study of | ūnyatā can be found in the Chinese translations of Sanskrit Prajñāpāramitāsūtrās. In these translations the word | ūnyatā was translated in to Chinese as ‘Běn wú’ (本无). The first Chinese translator of Mahāyāna Prajñāpāramitāsūtrās, Zhi Lou jia Cheng, (short name- Zhi Chen, Sanskrit name- Lokakṣema) in his translation of Aśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra, | ūnyatā has been translated as ‘ Běn wú’ (本无) (6). Zhi Cheng’s student’s Zhi Qian, too, in his translation of the Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra, used this term -“Běn wú” (本无) for the

Sanskrit | ūnyatā.(7). Prof; Paul Williams says that ‘the early translator Chih-Chien (=Zhi Cheng-third century), for example, chose to translate ‘♣ūnya’, ‘♣ūnyatā’, ‘tatathā’, (suchness/ thusness; the ultimate way of things) by ‘Pen wu’(this term ‘pen wu’ is used for ‘ben wu’ by some scholars) -original non existence -a term used by the Taoist commentator Wang –pi.’(8). We can agree with the first part of Paul William’s view, but it is impossible to agree with his second view: that this term ‘Běn wú’ which both Zhi Cheng (and Zhi Qian) used or imitated the same term which had been used by Wang Bi, in his commentary to the great book of Daoism, namely, the *Dao de jing*, because, Wang Bi lived from 226 A.D to 249 A.D, during the period of Wei dynasty, which started right after the Han dynasty(9). Our great translator, Zhi Cheng lived in between 178 A.D to 189 A.D., during the end of Han dynasty.(10)Prof Ren ji yu says that Zhi Chen and Anshi gao were belonged to the same period. So, Wang Bi lived after Zhi Cheng, and therefore, it is very difficult to say that Zhi Cheng used Wang Bi’s term of ‘ben wu’ . Here, more plausible view is that both these teachers, Zhi Cheng and Wang Bi tried to explain their own two fundamental concepts; | ūnyatā and Dao according to their original two texts, namely, A•□asāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra and *Dao De Jing*.

After translation of | ūnyatā in to Chinese as ‘Běn wú’ there were lots of interpretations arisen around it, and as a result of it many schools grew around this concept. Those schools were known as ‘Liu Jia Qi Zong’(六家七宗) Those are: 1. School of Ben Wu (本无) 2. School of Ben Wu Yi (本无异) (1 and 2 are considered as one school). 4☉ School of Ji Si (即色), 5☉ School of Shi Han (识含-☉ 6☉ School of Huan Hua (幻化)☉ 7☉ School of Xin Wu (心无) 8 School of Yuan Hui (缘会). We can point out it as the development of | ūyatā in China. Teaching of these schools can be classified into three main groups; I . Xin Wu Zong (心无宗) ii. Ji Ze Zong (即色宗), iii. Ben Wu Zong (本无宗). Master Seng Zhao, in his book, *Bu Zheng Kong Lun*, (不真空论- pointed out that all the Chinese philosophical views of those six schools can be grouped and discussed within these three main theories of three schools.

The real meaning of |ūnyatā is the meaning which was revealed by Nāgārjuna in his book named *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (it is explained above in page 8). This real meaning of |ūnyatā was known by Chinese after Kumārjīva's translation of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and other of Madhyamaka tradition, They are as follows: i. *Zhong Lun*, II. *Bai Lun*, III. *Shi Er Men Lun*, IV. *Da Hui Du Lun*. Considering three of these as belonging to Madhyamaka tradition it was called “**San Lun**” in China, and also considering all these four as books of Madhyamaka tradition, it was called “**Si Lun**” in China. Another name was “**Zhong Guang Pai**” for the Madhyamaka school. According to prefaces of the books of ‘*Bora Wu Zhe Lun*’ and ‘*Gao Seng Zhuang*’ Kumārjīva translated these books after he was brought to China as a prisoner in 401 A.D. He lived in Cao Chang temple in the ancient city of Chang An in China. (Modern Xi'an in Sha'anzi province). When we compare Kumārjīva's translations with Prajñāpāramitāsūtrās that was translated by early translators in China, there is a special characteristic that can be found in Kumārjīva's books. It is that Kumārjīva used the term ‘Xing kong’ (性空) which means the empty of self-nature (Sva-bhāva♣ūnyatā). This is the real meaning of |ūnyatā put forward by the Ācārya Nāgārjuna . Kumārjīva only introduced it to China with the translations of Nagarjuna's works such as *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* etc. Seng Zhao who was one of the Kumarajiva's students, propagated the concept of |ūnyatā in China.

Seng Zhao has written many books and articles. But among them four books are prominent, and they are; i. *Wu Buqian Lun*, ii. *Buzheng Knog Lun*, iii. *Bora Wuzhe Lun*. Iv. *Wuming Neipan* . The book, ‘*Bu Zheng Kong Lun*’ discusses the real meaning of |ūnyatā and its content can be divided in to six divisions as follows: **i. The theory of mental non existence, ii. The theory of matter in itself, iii. The theory of original non existence, iv. The problem of Language, v. The two truths vi. Dependant Origination**

(1) The theory of mental non existence (Xin Wu Zong).

The founder of this of theory is Zhi Min Du, and the school was known as Xin Wu Zong. It is considered that Zhi Min Du was very familiar with the |ūtras like

Prajñāpāramitā, Wimalakīrtinirdeśa etc. The theory of was explained by Seng Zhao in his book; ***“The theory of mental non-existence depicts that the mind is on matter, therefore, the matter is not non-exist. The voidness of matter can be known by meditation”***. (11.) According to this explanation the mind does not exist on the matter and it does not mean that matter is nothing or empty. This school only says that the mind is nothing or void. Therefore, there main idea can be expressed shortly as follows, ***“wu xin, se you”***(心无色有) ***“The mind is non-existent, but the matter exists”***. This view of the school of Xin Wu Zong is explained again in *Zhao Lun Shu*, written by Yuan kan during the Tang period. According to Yuan kan’s explanation this Xin Wu theory says: ***“neither mind exists on matter nor non-exist out of matter”***. (12) So, they deny the idea that all is empty. Qi Zang’s *Zhong Lun Shu* too, describes the ideas of this school as: ***“The emptiness understood by the school of Xin Wu is that the mind is only empty, but not matter. So, they accept only the internal emptiness, reject the external emptiness”*** (不空外物)。 (13) According to this too, it is clear that the school of Xin Wu understands that it is only the mind that is empty, and they did not say that the outside matter or body is empty. It means that they only talk about inside emptiness but not the outside emptiness.

(II) The theory of matter in itself (Ji Se Zong)

Qi Zhang’s *Zhong Guan Lun Shu* (commentary to *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*) divided this school in to two as: i. Guan Nei Ji Ze, ii. Zhi Dao Lin Ji Se Yi. In An Cheng’s ‘*Zhong Lun Shu ji*’ the view of the school of ‘**Guan Nei Ji se**’ is explained as this: ***“Though matter is no matter, it can be realized because it has been given rise to by cause and relative cause but element of matters cannot be known. It is empty though it looks like existence, it is not true; it is false”*** (14). The View of the school of ‘**Zhi Dao Lin Ji Se**’ is: ***“matter arises according to the dependant origination, matter can be explained relatively. Though matter is empty, arises on dependent origination and relatively, can be explained it is not empty”***. (15) According to An Cheng’s above mentioned sub-commentary professor Lai Yong Hai gives a sufficient out line of the school of ‘Zhi Dao Lin’. He said that the ‘view of empty’ put forward by the School of ‘Zhi Dao Lin’ is that the matter does not independently exist, hence, there is emptiness.

He further added that this view can be compared with the saying that there really is no emptiness. In the book named ‘Miao Guan Pian’ it is explained: “ *Matter does not posses of itself as matter, so it is matter, yet non- matter, it is empty*”. (16) According to this passage matter is non matter itself, therefore, it is non -matter (empty), though it is matter. Seng Zhao, too points out the teaching of this school as this: “ *The theory of matter in itself, holds that the matter does not posses itself as matter, so, it is matter yet non-matter*”(17). According to him, this school holds that the matter does not posses itself as matter, matter is not independently existing (即色”者) therefore, **it is matter but, it is non-matter**, because it is arisen from causes and relativity . So the matter is empty.

Seng Zhao explains this further saying that ‘the matter is matter, at the same time it is called matter, so no need to wait for to be arisen from causes and relatively; **therefore matter is non -matter (empty) at the same time it is called matter.** (但当色即色 **dang, dang se ji se**)’. Therefore this school does not understand that the matter is really non- matter (empty) .

III. The theory of original non existence (Ben Wu Zong)

This school is divided in to two as: i. Ben Wu Zong. ii. Ben Wu Yi.

The leader of the ‘**Ben Wu Yi**’ was Zhu Fa Sheng. His idea is that “Wu” (无) was before the “You” (有) , “You” (有) was arisen from “Wu” (无) (*无在有先 **wu zai you xian,** 从无生有 **cong wu sheng you***). This idea is quite far away from the sense of Buddhist concept of |ūnyatā, and it is similar to “Wu”(无), and “Dao” (道) concepts in China. Dao An is considered as the leader of this school of **Ben Wu Zong**. Some are of the view that the teaching of the school of Ben Wu Yi is very much similar to |ūnyatā concept in Prajñāpāramitāsūtrās. But professor Ren Ji Yu Says that it is not totally similar to it or loyal to it. Because, if it is so Seng Zhao had no need to criticize it again in his book *Bu Zheng Kong Lun*. (18). It appears that Professor, Ren Ji Yu opines that the Dao An’s concept of “Běn wú” is not quite similar to the meaning of |ūnyatā put forward by Nāgārjuna in his book named *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Anyway when we

observe Seng Zhao's statement on this regarding, we can find the reason clearly. He said:

“寻夫立文之本旨者，直以非有非真有，非无非真无耳。何必非有无此有，非无无彼无？此直好无之谈，岂谓顺通事实，即物之情哉？”(19). some interpreters attribute the part of ‘neither existence nor non existence’ (非无非真无耳) to Buddhist Sūtrās while some attribute this to school of Ben Wu Zong. But my understanding is that this is presented by Seng Zhao as the part of Buddhist Sūtrās. Then Seng Zhao questions about the sayings of this Buddhist Sūtrās that ‘this **neither existence is it really non existence? Does this mean nihilism?** Therefore he wants to point out that the Buddhist concept of |ūnyatā does not mean merely nothingness or nihilism. So he tries to reveal the real meaning of |ūnyatā and wrote this *Bu Zheng Kong Lun* which means Unreal Voidness. We can say that his aim was to depict the difference between the concept of ‘Běn wú’ of the school of ‘Ben Wu’ and the Buddhist concept of ‘|ūnyatā’, because this school emphasized strongly emptiness in the sense of nihilism, through the concept of ‘Běn wú’

iv. Neither existence no non existence

Seng Zhao pays attention to explain the truth of the world, of |ūnyatā by the means of the phrase “**neither existence nor non existence**” He gives reference to Mahāyāna-āstra: “*All Dharma is neither existent nor non-existent in phenomenal appearance*” *Mahāyāna-āstra*,(20), and to *Madhyamakakārikā*: “*According to the first truth All Dharma is neither existent nor non-existent*” (21). In this context he points out that the term “neither existence nor non-existence **does not mean** that the every thing in the universe should be removed and our sense organs are blocked then the truth of emptiness is attained. Here, Seng Zhao attempts to reveal the **meaning of the real nature of the things (matter) not as destruction of things (matter), or in other words nature of the thing is not a nihilism** . According to the Sūtrās, he supplies the most important explanation of his thesis. It is as follows, “*The nature of matter is void, it is not that being destroyed matter then is void.*” (22)。

v. The problem of Language

Next, he pays attention to the inadequacy of language to explain this kind of deep and subtle concept which should be perceived by one's own sense or extra sensory perception as follow:

“...as the name matter is applied to matter that which is thus nominated can be called matter, as the name matter is applied to non-matter, it is still non matter though called matter. A thing does not come to actuality by following it's name. Therefore, the real truth alone remains silent beyond nominations and descriptions. How can it be define by words?” (23).

Pāli Buddhism also discusses the problem of language and points out that it is not adequate to explain the some deep concepts such as Nibbāna. Most of the time, it is seen the problem of the language has arisen in discussions with regard to the subjects such as supra-mundane and extrasensory perceptions. Seng Zhao too says that the real truth of the world (真谛-Sanskrit; Paramārtha satya, Pāli; Paramattha sacca) is ineffable; beyond language . To denote this meaning he has given the example of the connection between matter and it's name. Matter does not come to actuality by following it's name and name does not convey the reality by following the matter. But, we can see every thing in the world has two kind of meanings as deep and normal, of which the former is similar to the first truth(第一真谛); the real truth or Paramattha sacca(真谛), and the later is similar to the second truth; conventional truth; Sammuti sacca(俗谛). But we can point out that the problem of language has not only arisen in the explanation of the first truth but also in the second truth. But it does not mean that the language should be completely rejected in explaining the real truth. It is very clear that Seng Zhao too agrees as the possibility of using language to explain the real truth (24).

iv. Double truths

Next he talks about emptiness in connection with **first and second truth**. They are called 'Paramattha sacca' and 'Sammuti sacca' in Pāli texts. According to Pāli sources these two truths can be completely matched with '**Nītattha**' and '**Neyyattha**'. The 'Nītattha-(/Nī, to infer +Attha=meaning) - 'those of direct meaning and the 'Neyyattha'- 'those of indirect meaning'. The important of distinction

between the two, types of discourses is stressed and it is said that those who confuse the two misrepresent the Buddha. Which two?; He who represents a discourse of indirect meaning as a discourse of direct meaning and he who represents a discourse of direct meaning as a discourse of indirect meaning. The *Aṅguttaranikāya* commentary tries to illustrate the difference: A discourse referring to persons says: “there is one individual (one person) O monks” “there are two individuals (two persons) O monks” “there are three individuals (three persons)O monks” etc, In this instance this reference has to be taken as is a discourse of ‘indirect meaning’. Here although the perfectly Enlightened One speaks of “there is one person O monks” etc its true sense has to be inferred, since there is no individual in the absolute sense (Paramattha). But a person, because of his folly may take this as a discourse of ‘direct meaning’ and would argue that the Tathāgata would not have said “there is one individual; O monks” etc, unless a person existed in a absolute sense. Thus, he represents a discourse of indirect meaning as discourse of direct meaning (25). But the commentaries on *Aṅguttaranikāya* and *Kathāvatthu* go a step further. They characterize these two kinds of discourse the direct (Nītattha) and the indirect (Neyyattha) as two kinds of truths:

“ *The perfectly Unlighted one, the best of teachers, spoke two truths, viz. conventional and absolute,- one does not come across a third; a conventional statement is true because of convention and an absolute statement is true as the true characteristics of things’* ” (26).

The great master Nāgārjuna also divides the truth in to two as Saṃvṛti and Paramārtha saying that the Buddha, when he delivers the Dhamma based on the two truths(27). The master Nāgārjuna said: “ *The teaching of the doctrine by the Buddha is based upon two truths; truth related to worldly convention and truth in terms of ultimate fruit*”. According to these two truths, Seng Zhao gives a unique explanation as this: “***In the light of the first real truth, there is neither accomplishment nor attainment, but according to conventional conception there is accomplishment as well as attainment***”(28). The most important idea that put forward by Seng Zhao is that ***these are not two truths but the two ways of expression of one truth; it means truth is only one (其致一也)***(29). This idea was recorded in the Pāli *Suttanipāta* as view of the

early Buddhist teachings; it is: *“Truths indeed are not many and various” (Neheva saccāni bahūni nānā). “truth is one without a second” (Ekamhi saccaṃ na dutiyamatthi)* (30). Therefore, we can clearly point out that the definition of truth by Seng Zhao is more similar to early Buddhism than the explanation given by the Nāgārjuna and Pāli commentators. This is a very important fact that can be seen in *Bu Zhen Kong Lun*, by Seng Zhao. Next he describes the connection between emptiness and the theory of cause and effect. (Paṭiccasamuppāda) He says that the things arise from causes and relative causes, so they are non-existent, but because they do arise there from, so they are not non-existent.(31) Further more, he says that if being cannot be itself being, and must depend upon causes and relative causes for coming into existence, then it can be known that it is not real being. **As it is no real being, it cannot be called Being though existent.** He explains that therefore, all dharma cannot be regarded as existent, because ultimately there is the reason for their being non-existent; and cannot be regarded as non-existent as well because there is equally reason for their not being non-existent. And also he says that if we say all is existent, this existent is not produced from reality. If we say all is non-existent we see all phenomena are obviously there. **The phenomenal appearances are not really existent, yet they are unreal. As they are unreal, they are then not really existent. Up to this point the meaning of the Unreal-void becomes quite clear.** He further added that, therefore, all dharma are under false name, and unreal. (假号不真). **They are comparable to a human figure created by magic (Māyā). It is not that there is no human figure but that human figure is not a real man.** Therefore, the name does not correspond to the substance and the substance does not correspond to the name. Seng Zhao questioned: ‘If names and substances do not coincide where are the objects in the universe?, and he says that it is merely a wrong names which have been used for a long time. (故知万物非真, 假号久矣)。 (32). Seng Zhao also says: *“The Sage rides on a thousand of transformations and remains unchanged. He steps on ten thousand of doubts and remains always unperplexed, because he understood the selflessness of everything.”* (以其即万物之自虚, 不假虚而虚物也) (33).

. According to the above mentioned facts we can come to the conclusion of that Seng Zhao, understood the voidness as selflessness. In that instance he uses the term ‘Xing kong’. (性空) He also used the terms ‘Zi xu’ 自虚, ‘Wu xu, 无虚. All these terms mean only the **selflessness(sva-bhāva ❀ūnyatā)** of the things. And also it is clear that the real nature of the things cannot be expressed as it is, with the language we use, and but it does not mean that there are no-things.

End Notes

1) *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Chapter, 24, Stanza, 11.

“ **Vinā❀ayati durd❀❀ā- ❀ūnyatā mandamedhasa❀
sarpo yathā durg❀hito- vidyā vā du❀prasādhitā**”.

See David J Kalupahana’s *N❀g❀rjuna*, p335, State University of
New

Yoke, United State of America, 1986.

2) *Ibid* , Chapter, 15, Stanza , 07.

**Katyāyanavāde cāstīti nāstīti cobhaya❀
pra❀i❀iddha❀ bhagavatā- bhāvābhāva vibhāvinā**

See David J Kalupahana’s *N❀g❀rjuna*, p 232.

3) *Ibid* , Chapter, 24, Stanza, 18,.

4) *Ibid* Chapter, 24. Stanza 19,

5) *Ibid* Chapter, 25. Stanza 20,

**Nirv❀asya ca y❀ ko❀ /ko❀ /sa❀sara ❀ya ca
na tayor antara❀ ki❀cit sus (k❀amam pi vidyate..**

See David J Kalupahana’s *N❀g❀rjuna*, p367.

6) # Abstracted from *A❀❀asāhāsrikprajñāpāramitā ❀ūtra*, translated into Chinese by Zhi
Chen, *Da Zheng Zang*, 8 Juan, No: 0225, p 0478.

《道行般若经》第五《照明品》解释“本无”说：
怛萨阿竭知色之本无。如知色本无。痛痒思想生死识亦尔。何谓知识。知识之本无。何所是本无。
是欲有所得者。是亦本无。怛萨阿竭亦本无因慧如住。何谓所本无。世间亦是本无。何所是本无
者。一切诸法亦本无。如诸法本无。须陀洹道亦本无。斯陀含道亦本无。阿那含道亦本无。阿罗汉
道辟支佛道亦本无。怛萨阿竭亦复本无。一本无无有异。无所不入。悉知一切。是者须菩提。般若

波罗蜜即是本无。怛萨阿竭因般若波罗蜜。自致成阿耨多罗三耶三佛。照明持世间。是为示现。怛萨阿竭因般若波罗蜜。悉知世间本无无有异。如是须菩提。怛萨阿竭悉知本无。

7) # Abstracted from *Aśāhāsrikprajñāpāramitā sūtra*, translated into Chinese by Zhi Qian, *Da Zheng Zang*, 8 Juan, No; 0224, p 0425. 在三国时期支谦所译《大明度經》中也是如此：如本无五阴亦尔，如来五阴何等为知。如本无五阴本无。如来本无。作是见本无。五阴本无。世本无。诸法亦本无。沟港频来不还仪缘一觉本无。如来亦本无。一本无无异无所往无所止无想无尽。如是本无无异如来。

8). Williams, Paul., *Mahayana Buddhism*, (England : Routledge,1996), 74.

9) # Wang Xiaoyi, *A Critical Biography of Wang Bi*, (Nanjing: Nanjing Daxue Chuban Shi, , 1990) 363.

10) # Ren Ji Yu, *Zhongguo Fojiao Shi*, (Beijing: Zhongguo Shihui Ke xue Zhuban Shi, 1997), I, 314.

11) *Three Thesis of Seng Zhao, (Zhao Lun)* trans, Hsu Fan-Cheng, (Beijing: Chinese Social Science Publishing House, 1985), 25. “心无”者，无心于万物，万物为尝无。此得在于禅静，现在于万物。

12) # Lai Yong Hai, *Zhongguo Fojiao Bai ke Chuan Shu*, , (Shanghai: Tilakaratne A, Shanghai Gujing Chuban Shi, No Year), Zhong Pai Lei 11.

13) Ibid..... 11.

14) Ibid .12 “后者认为，“色”由“因缘”和合而成；或相对而言“色”，故“色”是空，而“因缘”与相对物不空。

15) - Ibid- 13,“

“安澄厕认为，支道林“色不自有，虽色而空”思想，“即同于不真空也”。

16) - Ibid -13, “未色之性也，不自有色。色不自有，虽色而空。故曰：色即为空，色复异空”。

17) *Three Thesis of Seng Zhao, (Zhao Lun)* trans., Hsu Fan-Cheng, 25.

“即色”者，明色不色，故虽色而非色也。未言色者，但当色即色，岂得色色而后为色，此真语色不自色，未领色之非色也。

18) Ren Ji Yu, *A Taoist Classic – The Book of Lao Zi*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1993),5.

19) *Three Thesis of Seng Zhao, (Zhao Lun)* trans., Hsu Fan-Cheng, 25.

20) ...Ibid... 29.

《磨诃衍论》云：诸法亦非有相，亦非无相。《中论》云，诸法不有不无者，第一真谛也。

21)Ibid , 29.

《中论》云，诸法不有不无者，第一真谛也。

22)Ibid, 29.

色之性空，非色败空。以明夫圣人之于物也，即万物之自虚。

23)Ibid, ...27.

夫义物物于物，厕所物而可物；以物物非物，故虽物而非物。是以物不即名而就实，名不即物而。真。然厕真谛独静于名教之外，岂日文言之能辨哉？。

24)ibid,.....27. 然不能杜默，聊复。。以拟之。

25) *Aṅguttaranikāya* , (London : Pali Text Society,),1, 60,

26) *Aṅguttaranikāya Commentary*, (London : Pāli Text Society), II, 118.

“Dveme bhikkhave tathāgataṃ abbhāqikkhanti katame dve? You ca neyatta suttaṃ
nītattho suttanto ‘ti dīpeti, you ca nītatatha suttaṃ, neyitto suttanto ti dīpeti”.

See also Jayatilaka, K.N. *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, (Delhi : Motilal
Banarasisidass, 1953), 363.

27) Tilakaratne A, */ūnyatāvādaye Darśanaya hā Charaṇāya*,_(Nugegoda, Tivira
prakasana, 2001), Chapter 24, versa, 08.

“Dve satye samupāṇṇiritya buddhānaṃ tatha lakkhanaṃ
loka saṃvṛtīsatyaṃ ca-satyaṃ ca paramārthataḥ”.

See David J Kalupahana’s *Nāgārjuna*,p 331.

28) *Three Thesis of Seng Zhao*, (Zhao Lun) trans., Hsu Fan-Cheng , 31.

“第一真谛，无成无得；世俗谛故，使有成有得”。

29)Ibid....31,

“若有不即真，无不夷迹然则有无称异，其致一也”。

30) *Suttanipāta*, ed: Jayawikrama, N.A., (Homagama: Post-Graduate Institute Of Pāli
and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, 2001), Stanza, 886, 884,.

31) *Three Thesis of Seng Zhao*, (Zhao Lun) trans., Hsu Fan-Cheng, 31.

“物从因缘故不有，缘起故不无。

32)Ibid....39.

33)Ibid.....41.