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Disputes and Doctrines of the Threefold Middle Way in the Early Sanlun School

Yoon Kyung Cho

Department of Eastern Philosophy, Andong National University, Andong 36729, Republic of Korea; ipiipi33@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper examines the development of the Sanlun School's Threefold Middle Way doctrine, focusing on the contributions of Sengquan and Falang. Often seen as pillars of Sanlun thought preceding Jizang, their teachings remain under-explored in scholarship. This study combines a close reading of their philosophical texts with historical context to generate an in-depth understanding of how the Threefold Middle Way evolved over generations. Sengquan introduced a complex double negation to amplify the transcendental quality of his theory, contrasting with the simpler "neither A nor B" negation of Chengshi masters. Falang, building on this, solidified his interpretation of the middle way and provisional names amidst disputes with contemporary masters. He formulated Three Types of Utterance; the First is directly inherited from Sengquan, while the Second and Third represent the two axes of his two truths theory: gradual abandonment and equality. Falang's critical response to his fellow masters, particularly his removal of provisional names, heightens the transcendental quality of his theories. A thorough understanding of Sengquan and Falang's doctrines provides an informed basis to assess the true scope of Jizang's contributions to Sanlun thought.

Keywords: Sanlun School; Sengquan; Falang; Jizang; Threefold Middle Way; eightfold negation; two truths; *Daeseung Saron Hyeonui Gi*; *Zhongguanlun Shu*; *Dacheng Xuanlun*

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1. Introduction

The Sanlun School 三論宗 (Three Treatises School) is one of the most representative schools of Mādhyamaka thought in China. Although many of the School's teachings originated from the ones of Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (350–409 or 344–413) and his renowned disciples, scholars commonly recognize that the School itself started with Senglang 僧朗 (K. Seungnang, born in the Goguryeo dynasty sometime in the 5th century) and, according to existing historical records, was then inherited by Sengquan 僧詮 (?–558), Falang 法朗 (507–581), and Jizang 吉藏 (549–623) in turn (Liu 1994, pp. 82–84).

Most of the Sanlun School's records disappeared during the Middle Ages in China. Many key texts including Jizang's writings, however, have been preserved in Japan. In fact, recent studies of this School have mainly focused on the philosophies present in Jizang's texts. In addition, there have been some historical and philosophical studies regarding Senglang's life and ideas, mostly conducted by contemporary Korean scholars. On the other hand, the philosophies of Sengquan and Falang have not been sufficiently examined or highlighted, despite the enormous influence they had in developing the Sanlun School.

Although no extant pieces of work written by Sengquan or Falang remain, their ideas were quoted and preserved by successors such as Jizang and Hyegyun 慧均, both of whom were Falang's disciples (Plassen 2009, p. 118). By extracting records from the work of Jizang and Hyegyun and then examining the original meanings, it is possible to reconstruct the outlined philosophies of Sengquan and Falang. The Threefold Middle Way 三種中道 is a core methodology of the Sanlun School, adopted to interpret the eightfold negation 八不 in the *Zhonglun* 中論 (*Middle Treatise*) through the concepts of the two truths. As such, most Sanlun masters interpreted the eightfold negation by developing the discourses of the

Threefold Middle Way, and records of Sengquan's and Falang's Threefold Middle Way are found in Hyegyun's *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi*[1] 大乘四論玄義記 (*Records of Profound Meaning of the Four Mahāyāna Treatises*) and Jizang's *Zhongguanlun shu* 中觀論疏 (*Commentary on the Middle Treatise*), respectively. Therefore, reconstructing the Threefold Middle Way doctrines of Sengquan and Falang in the context of existing records enables us to perceive the continuity and discontinuity of the development of the middle way throughout the history of the Sanlun School.

This paper primarily focuses on the Threefold Middle Way theories of Sengquan and Falang through an analysis of extant texts and an investigation into the historical and philosophical backgrounds of the doctrines. Sengquan and Falang's Threefold Middle Way teachings have appeared in three separate texts: *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi*, *Zhongguanlun shu*, and *Dacheng xuanlun* 大乘玄論 (*Treatise on the Profound Teaching of the Mahāyāna*). This exposition considers the first two texts as primary sources and excludes the *Dacheng xuanlun* for the following two reasons.

Firstly, it was discovered that *Dacheng xuanlun* was not Jizang's original work and that the unknown creator of the text did not comprehend the theories of the Sanlun School. Conventionally, the *Dacheng xuanlun* text has indeed been regarded as embodying the essential thoughts of the Sanlun School and thus has been highly valued as the most representative work of Jizang's later years. However, the analyses of Muranaka Yūshō 村中祐生 (Muranaka 1966), Ito Takatoshi 伊藤隆壽 (Ito 1971, 1972), and Okuno Mitsuyoshi 奥野光賢 (Okuno 2009) have indicated that substantial parts of the work stemmed from multiple other texts besides those of Jizang. Moreover, the first chapter "Meaning of the Two Truths" 二諦義 (Erdi yi) contains significant misunderstandings about the two truths theory, a seminal Sanlun School teaching, thus revealing the impossibility of Jizang's authorship (Cho 2014, pp. 334–55). Overall, the nature of the text's compilation clearly reveals a superficial understanding of the Sanlun theories (Cho 2014, pp. 325–33). This paper, therefore, does not reference *Dacheng xuanlun* as a basis for the School's teachings.

Secondly, the Three Types of Utterance (lit., dialect) 三種方言, a specific section in the *Dacheng xuanlun* describing Falang's Threefold Middle Way, also contains critical issues. This text was copied from *Zhongguanlun shu*, Jizang's commentary of the *Zhonglun*, with significant changes. Specifically, Jizang's original text describing the Three Types of Utterance was shortened to an alternative version through the elimination of multiple phrases. At the same time, various letters and phrases were added. It is thus not very explicit which part of the Three Types of Utterance originated from *Zhongguanlun shu* and which part has been modified. The resulting version in the *Dacheng xuanlun* is inaccurate, leading readers to misinterpret the original meaning.

Both Sengquan and Falang's Threefold Middle Way doctrines are centered around the concept of the eightfold negation. In fact, the most well-known definition of the eightfold negation comes from the Sanlun masters' teachings in the *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* and *Zhongguanlun shu* texts. However, their tradition of explaining this concept in association with the two truths goes back to Tanying 曇影, who is one of the outstanding eight disciples of Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 and the author of a commentary on the *Zhonglun* (Hirai 1976, pp. 106–7). According to Jizang's explanation, Tanying defines the middle way only in terms of the two truths 二諦中道義. Specifically, he states that the ultimate truth is not restricted by the concept of nothingness, and the conventional truth is not constrained by the concept of existence, thus arriving at a middle way of "neither existence nor nothingness" 不有不無. From this fundamental premise, he then maps the negation of nothingness to "non–annihilation" 不斷 and the negation of existence to "non-eternity" 不常, so that the argument of "neither existence nor nothingness" also applies to "neither annihilative nor eternal" 不斷不常, which is the second pair of concepts of the eightfold negation (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 26a29–b6). The implication of his argument is that the two truths encompass all dharmas without exception, and thus, there is no need to establish a third truth 三諦; when the conventional truth and the ultimate truth are thoroughly under-

stood, the principle of the middle way, free from the two antithetical extremes, will also be inherently understood.

As for the eightfold negation itself, the concept comes from the *Zhonglun*, occurring in both the opening verse of reverence 歸敬偈 and at the beginning of the chapter "Causes and Conditions" 因緣品 (Yinyuan pin). *Zhonglun*, Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of the *Mādhyamaka-śāstra*, including Piṅgala's 青目 comments as well as Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhya maka-kārikā*, specifies the eightfold negation: "neither arising nor ceasing; neither eternal nor annihilative; neither identical nor different; neither coming nor going" 不生亦不滅, 不常亦不斷, 不一亦不異, 不來亦不出 (*Zhonglun* T30, no. 1564, p. 1b14–15; p. 1c8–9).

The eightfold negation—in which the antithetical concepts of arising and ceasing 生滅, eternal and annihilative 常斷, identical and different 一異, and coming and going 來出 are simultaneously negated—has been regarded as representing the essential ideas of the foundational *Zhonglun* text. The Sanlun masters explained that the reason the eightfold negation occurred at the beginning of the *Zhonglun* was that it was the most important teaching. The eightfold negation has accordingly attracted the attention of many Buddhist masters, whose views were not always aligned. Among these is the Chinese Sanlun School.

In the view of the Sanlun masters, the eightfold negation found in the *Zhonglun* is typically explained in terms of the Threefold Middle Way, that is, the middle way at the level of the conventional truth 世諦中道, the level of the ultimate truth 真諦中道, and as a combination of the two previous levels 二諦合明中道. This particular approach—using the Threefold Middle Way to explain the eightfold negation—occurs for several reasons. Firstly, the Sanlun School, which descends from the Mādhyamaka thought of Kumārajīva, inherited the hermeneutical tradition of associating the eightfold negation with the two truths (ascribed to Tanying, also a disciple of Kumārajīva). Secondly, the Sanlun masters believe that the two truths encompass all Buddhist teachings so that the eightfold negation must be explained by the former concept. The other side of this is that the eightfold negation—whose simultaneous negation is a depiction of the middle way—can also illuminate the correct 正 essence of the two truths.

Thirdly, because of the relationship between the eightfold negation and the two truths specified above, the Sanlun masters believed that the eightfold negation, through its connection to the two truths, could lead to the attainment of correct contemplation 正觀. Regarding this point, Jizang states:

> Through the eightfold negation, the two truths are correctly understood; when the two truths are correctly understood, the two types of wisdom arise; when the two types of wisdom arise, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas exist. 由八不即二諦正, 二諦正即二慧生, 二慧生即有佛菩薩. (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 20b16–17)

According to the Sanlun School, when an individual realizes the middle way through the teaching of the two truths (which is founded upon the eightfold negation), this individual accordingly attains the two types of wisdom—and the ensuing skillful means 方便—required to teach sentient beings. This acquisition process is cyclical, abbreviated and characterized as "realization through teaching" (i.e., attaining enlightenment through the teachings of the awakened ones) and "teaching through realization" (i.e., teaching others after attaining one's own wisdom). Within this process, Jizang makes the comparison of the eightfold negation as the great grandparents, the two truths as the grandparents, and the two types of wisdom—the wisdom of real characteristics 實相慧 and the wisdom of skillful means 方便慧—as the parents. In other words, reaching enlightenment is founded upon the two types of wisdom, which is founded upon the two truths, which is founded upon the eightfold negation (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 21b1–5).

Therefore, the Threefold Middle Way doctrines of the Sanlun School, including Sengquan's and Falang's, aim to achieve the absolute enlightenment of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas through an accurate understanding of the two truths stemming from the eightfold negation. Once an individual achieves the non-dual realization of absolute enlightenment (i.e., the middle way), they will then be spontaneously inspired by two types of wisdom

and lead other sentient beings towards the same enlightenment with skillful teachings arising from their own wisdom.

2. Sengquan's Interpretations of the Threefold Middle Way

2.1. Sengquan's Historical Background

To understand Sengquan's development of the Threefold Middle Way doctrine, the relevant historical background must first be considered. Few records exist detailing his life and Buddhist philosophy; however, the evolution and influence of his ideas can be reconstructed by piecing together various historical sources. The modern Buddhist scholar Sung Chul Kim was able to pinpoint the year of Sengquan's death as 558 C.E. by matching historical dates to the movements of Senquan's contemporaries; for example, the relocation of Sengquan's disciple Falang to the urban Xingwang Temple 興皇寺 (Kim 2011, pp. 150–59). Other existent historical records illustrate how Sengquan became a disciple of Senglang, the founder of the Sanlun School who largely shaped Sengquan's philosophy. According to the records of later scholar-monks Jizang and Hyegyun, who were the disciples of Falang, who himself became Sengquan's disciple, Sengquan was one of ten monks ordered by Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty 梁武帝 (r. 502–549) to study at Senglang's temple. The following paragraphs translated from the original Sanlun texts, written by Jizang and Hyegyun, respectively, describe Sengquan's journey:

> Emperor Wu of Liang first studied *Chengshi lun* 成實論 and *Abhidharma* 毘曇 but [later] heard the news that Senglang, a master originally from Goguryeo, who previously went to the Northern Mountain, and now resides at Qixia temple 栖霞寺 of She Mountain 攝山, was able to accurately interpret the Three Treatises and master Mahāyāna thought. Therefore, the emperor dispatched ten of his men including Zhiji 智寂 to She Mountain to study Senglang's interpretations and deliver them [to the emperor himself]. As a result, Emperor Wu converted from Hīnayāna Buddhism to Mahāyāna Buddhism. 梁武初學成實毘曇, 聞攝山栖霞寺高麗朗法師, 從北山來, 善解三論, 妙達大乘. 遣智寂等十人, 就山學之而傳授. 梁武因此遂改小從大. (*Weimo jing yishu* T38, no. 1781, p. 912a11–14)

> The ten monks were all disciples of the Chengshi masters and each was a brilliant and intelligent man. Although they were intelligent, they already retained loyalties to different teachers. The monks were asked to follow Senglang's new teachings, but they later failed to correct their attachments to Hīnayāna Buddhism and did not believe in and accept [the new teachings]. As soon as the lecture was over, nine out of the ten monks departed from She Mountain for a cedar-tree-filled mountain, where they played dice and cracked jokes together, never concentrating, even as they announced later that they had learned the teachings with the blessing of the emperor's edict. Only the master Sengquan, who was a disciple of the master Sengmin 僧旻 (467–527) at Zhuangyan 莊嚴 temple, stood out distinctly from the others and came to a spiritual realization. By concentrating on learning, he could attain the teaching of non-dependence and non-acquisition 無依無得. The master Senglang noticed that this monk, upon achieving such realization, had corrected the fixed mindset that he had held. The master taught him every detail, line by line, enabling Sengquan to attain the meaning of this treatise. 十法師並是成論弟子, 能穎悟聰明者. 雉聰明而各各有師, 囑致不輕, 後着小乘, 執着不改, 都不收信. 十人中九人雖後宣傳敕令聽學, 一山講竟, 乃往杉樹山, 擲博戲咲, 不專聽學. 唯一莊嚴法師學士名詮法師, 神悟大異諸人, 專聽學得悟無依無得法門. 道朗師知此得悟改常心. 法師一一教授, 得斯論義字指. (*Sanron soshiden shū* DNBZ111, p. 520)

Emperor Wu of Liang had previously invited Senglang to teach him the profound meaning of Mahāyāna several times, but Senglang refused each invitation and remained at She Mountain. The emperor, therefore, dispatched the ten monks including Sengquan and Zhiji to She Mountain to learn Senglang's interpretations of the Mahāyāna scriptures

and the Three Treatises in 512 C.E. According to the record of "Sheshan Qixiasi beiming" 攝山棲霞寺碑銘 (an inscription at Qixia temple of She Mountain written by Jiang Zong 江總), preserved in *Jinling fancha zhi* 金陵梵刹志, there was also Shi Senghuai 釋僧懷 at Zhong temple 中寺 and Shi Huiling 釋慧令 at Linggen temple 靈根寺 among these ten masters. The second excerpt comes from Hyegyun's *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* and has been preserved in the *Sanron soshiden shū* 三論祖師傳集 (*Collection of the Sanlun Masters' Biographies*), where it is quoted by an unknown author. According to Hyegyun's explanation, Sengquan was originally a disciple of Sengmin 僧旻, one of the three famous Chengshi masters of the Liang dynasty. Sengquan was the sole monk of the ten monks who renounced his preceding doctrines and successfully absorbed the essence of Senglang's new teaching. He eventually ascended to the position of the second master of the Sanlun School. While residing at Zhiguan temple 止觀寺 on She Mountain, Sengquan developed an integrated meditation practice, harmoniously uniting śamatha 止 and vipaśyanā 觀 (Park 2000a, pp. 204–5; 2000b, pp. 13–14).

2.2. The Philosophical Context of Sengquan's Threefold Middle Way

Sengquan's most renowned doctrine is the Threefold Middle Way, which describes the middle way at the level of the conventional truth, the level of the ultimate truth, and, thirdly, as a combination of both previous levels. Fortunately, the complete form of Sengquan's Threefold Middle Way is preserved by Hyegyun, in a chapter detailing the "Meaning of Eightfold Negation" 八不義 (Palbul ui), which was later compiled within *Dacheng xuanlun*. This valuable source is one of the few records that exists to understand Sengquan's philosophy regarding the two truths and the middle way. It is true that Jizang also mentions Sengquan's "*Commentary on the Two Truths*" 二諦疏 within his *Erdi yi* 二諦義 (T45, no. 1854, p. 86b1–4). However, Jizang merely quotes Sengquan's definition of the two truths—perhaps a direct inheritance of his teacher Senglang's definition—and does not elaborate on the content of the philosophical work.

In another chapter of Hyegyun's *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* on the "Meaning of Chuzhang and Zhongjia" 初章中假義 (Chojang jungga ui), there is a brief explanation of Sengquan's view of the middle way. Specifically, Sengquan employed various analytical frameworks to interpret the concept, of which the most common and essential are the eightfold negation, the two truths, and single or multiple layers 單複. By employing these three central concepts in his explanation of the Threefold Middle Way, Sengquan thus asserts the fundamental importance of the middle way doctrine itself.

While the Threefold Middle Way doctrine has become the dominant theory of the Sanlun School to which Sengquan belonged, it did not originate there. Sengquan's explanation of the Threefold Middle Way was first articulated as a critique of Zhiji's Threefold Middle Way theory (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 2009, p. 130; *Dacheng xuanlun* T45, no. 1853, p. 27b18–19), which was already in existence. Zhiji, a Chengshi master, was another of the ten monks dispatched by the emperor to study with Senglang. Presumably one of the figures of the mainstream scholastic trend of the time, Zhiji later ascended to the highest ecclesiastical rank of the sangha.

The original Threefold Middle Way theory stems from the Chengshi masters' doctrines interpreting the eightfold negation (Liu 1985, p. 183). The Sanlun masters then adopted this pre-existing doctrine, reinterpreting it creatively while retaining the original framework. The Sanlun School's conception of the Threefold Middle Way subsequently served as the basic doctrine, which was leveraged to criticize the Chengshi masters' views (Liu 1985, p. 183). Although both schools adopted the doctrinal scheme of the Threefold Middle Way to explain the relationship between the two truths and the middle way, the Sanlun and Chengshi masters did not arrive at a consensus in their interpretations of the eightfold negation.

Specifically, the concept of the eightfold negation originates from the *Zhonglun* text (T30, no. 1564, p. 1b14–15; p. 1c8–9): "Neither arising nor ceasing; neither eternal nor annihilative; neither identical nor different; neither coming nor going". The Sanlun and Cheng-

shi Schools later interpreted this concept in distinct ways with regard to the Threefold Middle Way (Lai 1980, pp. 144–52). According to Hyegyun, the Chengshi masters advocated for two interpretations of the eightfold negation. The first view was that every one of the eight negations constitutes the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 2009, pp. 121–22; *Dacheng xuanlun* T45, no. 1853, p. 25c15–16). On the contrary, the second perspective indicates that only the first two negations, "neither arising nor ceasing" 不生不滅, correspond to the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth; the other six negations 六不 sit at the level of the conventional truth (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 2009, p. 122; *Dacheng xuanlun* T45, no. 1853, p. 25c16–18). However, in criticizing the Chengshi masters' views that the two truths—ultimate and conventional—can be separated, the Sanlun masters argued that each of the eight negations contains the full truth of the Threefold Middle Way (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 2009, p. 122; *Dacheng xuanlun* T45, no. 1853, p. 25c19–20): the conventional truth, the ultimate truth, and non-dualistic simultaneous acceptance of both truths.

In this context, Sengquan's Threefold Middle Way theory (presented by Hyegyun) is only one of his diverse hermeneutic explanations of the Threefold Middle Way concept. This suggests that Sengquan's Threefold Middle Way doctrine does not take on a fixed form; instead, the details can be altered in response to other theories. In this specific case, because Sengquan formulated his version of the Threefold Middle Way to criticize that of Zhiji, the explanation of each level in Sengquan's doctrine must directly correspond to the levels in Zhiji's theory. This raises questions as to the specifics of Zhiji's Threefold Middle Way theory.

Unfortunately, no records of Zhiji's Threefold Middle Way theory exist, but clues can be discerned from the corresponding theory of another representative Chengshi master, Zhizang 智藏 (458–522). The concept of the middle way as understood by Chengshi masters such as Zhizang and Zhiji was primarily influenced by the eightfold negation in the *Zhonglun*, but also drew substantial inspiration from the following definition found in the *Chengshi lun*: "In the context of ultimate truth, one speaks of nothingness, while in the realm of conventional truth, one speaks of existence. This approach signifies the abandonment of both extremes and the practice of the middle way" 若第一義諦故說無, 世諦故說有, 名捨二邊行於中道 (T32, no. 1646, p. 316c10–11).

As can be gleaned from the passage above, the *Chengshi lun* advocates for a transcendental understanding of the middle way, which in turn establishes the framework of the Threefold Middle Way adopted by both Chengshi masters and later Sanlun masters. Zhizang's Threefold Middle Way, as it was later explained by Jizang, can thus be separated into its treatment of the middle way at the level of the conventional truth, the ultimate truth, and the combination of the two. This marks a notable point of similarity, as Sanlun masters adopted and modified a conceptual framework developed previously by Chengshi masters. At the level of the conventional truth, the theory lists different versions of the middle way through three lenses: cause and effect 因果中道 (i.e., the relationship between cause and effect neither exists nor is nothingness, as in "非有非無"), continuity 相續中道 (i.e., the nature of continuity as "neither eternal nor annihilative", as in "不常不斷"), and lastly, mutual dependence 相待中道, which is given no further explanation in Jizang's *Erdi yi* (T45, no. 1854, p. 108a13–16). Thus, Zhizang relates the Threefold Middle Way theory to the Three Provisional Names 三假 (i.e., a way of explaining phenomena from the perspectives of cause and effect, continuity, and mutual dependence). At the level of the ultimate truth, Zhizang's middle way theory is simply described as "neither existence nor nothingness", without any further explanation (*Erdi yi* T45, no. 1854, p. 108a16–17). Similarly, at the combination of the two levels of truth, the middle way is also briefly described as "neither the ultimate nor the conventional" (*Erdi yi* T45, no. 1854, p. 108a17–20). Although few details are provided in the record, the following can be concluded:

- First, the middle way of the Chengshi masters was commonly characterized by the abandonment of both opposing concepts ("neither A nor B").

- Second, the Chengshi masters formulated their Threefold Middle Way through a gradual process of transcending provisional names. While the level of the conventional truth mentions specific provisional names, the second and third levels are more abstract, depicting an increasing transcendental quality to the theory.

2.3. The Analysis of Sengquan's Threefold Middle Way

Sengquan's Threefold Middle Way doctrine must be examined in the context of the historical and philosophical influences outlined previously. In the following quotations, Sengquan explains the middle way at the level of the conventional truth and ultimate truth. Regarding the conventional truth, Sengquan states:

> A word is dependent on its negation; the negation of the word is dependent on the word. A word and its negation are both provisional names, which are mutually dependent. Hence, the word as a provisional name cannot be a [real] word; the negation as a provisional name cannot be a [real] negation of the word. What is not named as the negation of a word cannot be regarded as nothingness; what is not named as a word cannot be regarded as existence. This refers exactly to the middle way at the level of the conventional truth, which corresponds to "neither existence nor nothingness". However, these provisional names are mutually dependent. Thus, what can be named as existence refers to arising; what can be named as nothingness refers to ceasing. Therefore, "arising and ceasing" together constitute the conventional truth. 語待不語, 不語待語. 語不語並是相待假名, 故假語不名語, 假不語不名不語. 不名不語不為無, 不名語不為有, 即是不有不無世諦中道. 但相待假故, 可有說生, 可無說滅, 故以生滅合為世諦也. (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi*, p. 130; *Dacheng xuanlun* T45, no. 1853, p. 27b19–23)

Sengquan focuses on the relationship between the affirmative form and the negative form of a word, establishing their interdependence. He then utilizes this relationship of mutual dependence, which is one of the principles of the provisional names, to explain that neither a word nor its negation is a real name of any substance. Since the names for each word and their negation are provisional—arbitrarily given and mutually dependent—they cannot be in the realm of real existence and real nothingness. Given this understanding, Sengquan argues that such names correspond to "neither existence nor nothingness" 不有不無. This simultaneous negation of antithetical concepts is exactly the form of the middle way. Thus, Sengquan derives the middle way at the level of the conventional truth through the use of the mutual dependence of the provisional names.

Sengquan identifies this connection partway through his explanation, but instead of reaching a conclusion, he establishes another link between the provisional names and the middle way at the level of conventional truth. He returns to the concept of mutual dependence, now emphasizing the opposing nature of existence and nothingness, which he directly maps onto "arising and ceasing", respectively. As part of the eightfold negation, these concepts of "arising and ceasing" are integral to Sengquan's explanation of the conventional truth, thus allowing him again to connect the provisional names (through mutual dependence) to the two truths doctrine.

Sengquan's explanation of the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth is as follows:

> The ultimate truth is also like this. The "negation as a provisional name" is not the [real] negation of a word; the "double negation as a provisional name" is not the "[real] double negation of a word". What is not named as the "double negation of a word" cannot be non-nothingness; what is not named as the negation cannot be non-existence. This refers exactly to the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth, which corresponds to "neither non-existence nor non-nothingness" 非不有非不無. These provisional names are mutually dependent, and thus what can be named as existence refers to non-ceasing; what can be named as nothingness refers to non-arising. Therefore, "non-arising and non-ceasing" together constitute the ultimate truth. 真諦亦然. 假不語不名不語, 假非不語不名非不語. 不名非不語, 不為非[2]不無, 不名不語, 不為非[3]不有, 則是非不有非

> 不無真諦中道也. 相待假故, 可有說不滅, 可無說不生, 即是不生不滅, 故合為真諦也. (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi*, p. 130; *Dacheng xuanlun* T45, no. 1853, p. 27b23–28)

The argument in the excerpt above, which explains how the ultimate truth is also derived from provisional names, has exactly the same structure as the explanation of the middle way at the level of the conventional truth. Here, Sengquan focuses on the relationship between the negation 不語 and the double negation of a word 非不語, following the same thought process. Specifically, the negation and the double negation of a word are not real names, but rather elected provisional names. These provisional names cannot be in real non-existence nor real non-nothingness 非不有非不無. As such, they must instead be referred to as "neither non-existence nor non-nothingness", which is the definition of the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth.

Similar to the level of the conventional truth, Sengquan again establishes a deeper connection between "arising and ceasing" and the provisional names, now with the added negation of the ultimate truth. Sengquan slightly alters the relationship, pairing existence with "non-ceasing" 不滅 and nothingness with "non-arising" 不生. He subsequently derives the ultimate truth, which is the paired concept of "non-arising and non-ceasing", from the mutual dependence of the provisional names. This concept of "non-arising and non-ceasing" is part of the eightfold negation and is thus connected to the two truths theory. Furthermore, at both levels of truth, he defines the two truths from the perspective of the middle way. The middle way and provisional names are therefore inextricably linked and closely related to each other.

The framework of Sengquan's argument, when closely analyzed, is influenced by Zhiji's own doctrine since he is the intended audience for this discourse. Specifically, Sengquan repeatedly refers to the provisional name of mutual dependence, using this concept throughout his explanation. At the level of the conventional truth, Sengquan explicates the middle way, that is, "neither existence nor nothingness", on the basis of the mutual dependence between a word and its negation. Moreover, he draws the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth, that is, "neither non-existence nor non-nothingness" from the mutual dependence between the negation and the double negation of a word. Thus, the provisional name of mutual dependence is central to the explanation of the middle way.

As noted before, the application of mutual dependence to the provisional names was a core element of Zhizang's Threefold Middle Way theory. It should be noted that Zhizang and Zhiji were contemporaries, both Chengshi masters sharing a school of thought. Thus, although records of Zhiji's own philosophy do not exist, the lens of mutual dependence in relation to provisional names was most likely a fundamental aspect of Zhiji's doctrines as well. This insight consequently speaks to why Sengquan possibly pinpointed "provisional names that are mutually dependent" 相待假 as their primary characteristic in his discourse. Specifically, Sengquan's utilization of mutual dependence may not relate to his own understanding, but rather to Zhiji's thought processes. In this manner, Sengquan developed his Threefold Middle Way discourse to dispute that of the Chengshi masters, including Zhiji, by borrowing their concepts and then disproving their logic.

However, Sengquan draws up a more transcendental proposition by leveraging the relationship between "provisional names that are mutually dependent", particularly, the mutual dependence between the negation and the double negation of a word at the level of the ultimate truth. From this mutual dependence, he derives his formal scheme of the middle way at the ultimate level of truth, that is, "neither non-existence nor non-nothingness" 非不有非不無. This structure of the double negation is strikingly more sophisticated than the Chengshi masters' structure of the middle way, that is, "neither existence nor nothingness" 非有非無. Moreover, Sengquan's transcendental formula of the middle way at the ultimate level determines the structure of the "middle way explained as a combination of both levels of the two truths"—"neither existence nor non-existence" 非有非不有 as well as "neither nothingness nor non-nothingness" 非無非不無, which also differs from that of the Chengshi masters.

Following a discussion of the middle way at the levels of the conventional and ultimate truths, Sengquan discusses the "middle way explained as a combination of both levels of the two truths" as follows:

> As for the "middle way explained as a combination of both levels of the two truths", a word as a provisional name is not a [real] word; the negation as a provisional name is not a [real] negation. [Both the word and the negation] are neither the [real] word nor the [real] negation 非語非不語. In other words, they refer to "neither existence nor non-existence 非有非不有, as well as neither nothingness nor non-nothingness 非無非不無", that is, the "middle way explained as a combination of both levels of the two truths". Regarding the "explanation as a combination of both 'arising and ceasing' and 'non-arising and non-ceasing'", you will know [the explanation] according to the previous logic. 二諦合明中道者, 假語不名語, 假不語不名不語, 非語非不語, 即是非有非不有非無非不無二諦合明中道也. 生滅不生滅合明, 類此可尋也. (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi*, p. 130; *Dacheng xuanlun* T45, no. 1853, p. 27b28–c2)

In the above excerpt, Sengquan defines the "middle way explained as a combination of both levels of the two truths" as "neither existence nor non-existence 非有非不有 as well as neither nothingness nor non-nothingness 非無非不無". This argument is an integration of the middle way at the level of the conventional truth (i.e., "neither existence nor nothingness" 不有不無) and the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth (i.e., "neither non-existence nor non-nothingness" 非不有非不無). He then states that the same scheme may be applied to "arising and ceasing" 生滅, one of the antithetical concepts of the eightfold negation. If the term "arising and ceasing" is substituted within the concept of "neither a word nor its negation" 非語非不語, then it would take the form of "neither 'arising-or-ceasing' nor 'non-arising-or-non-ceasing'" 非生滅非不生滅. This logic is essentially the doctrine of Sengquan's disciple Falang, the "middle way explained as a combination of both levels of the two truths".

It must be examined whether this final middle way, which merges both levels of the two truths, is the mere combination of the middle way at the levels of the conventional and ultimate truths or whether it is something more. Although no direct record of Sengquan's explanation exists, his disciple Falang included an interpretation of the Threefold Middle Way in his own theories, largely based on Sengquan's original writings. In turn, Falang's disciple Jizang commented on this version of the Threefold Middle Way doctrine. From Jizang's analysis (The Four Levels of Understanding the Middle Way 四重階級), insights into Sengquan's understanding of the final middle way (i.e., at both levels of the two truths) can be gained.

Based on Jizang's analysis, Sengquan's final middle way is distinct from the middle way at the levels of the conventional and ultimate truths. Jizang elucidates this difference by introducing the Four Levels of Understanding the Middle Way: the "middle way that refutes substantial natures" 破性中, the "two truths" 二諦, the "middle way in terms of function" 用中, and the "middle way in terms of essence" 體中 (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11b22–c1). Jizang particularly used the third and fourth levels of understanding to explain the Threefold Middle Way doctrine. Jizang clarifies that the middle way separately at the levels of the conventional and ultimate truths corresponds to the "middle way in terms of function", which has no substantial self-nature. On the contrary, the "middle way explained as a combination of both levels of the two truths" corresponds to the "middle way in terms of essence", in which the two provisional names—conventional and ultimate—are both extinguished 雙泯二假, 稱為體中 (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11b22). With this interpretation, this middle way of essence indicates ultimate enlightenment in which the two provisional names are transformed into the middle way of nonduality. According to the Sanlun School, the middle way of function allows for the abandonment of self-nature. However, the final middle way extends even further to serve as the most superior realization, transcending a mere combination of the meanings of the middle way at the previous levels.

Consequently, Sengquan's interpretation of the Threefold Middle Way reflects the doctrinal contrast between the Sanlun masters and the Chengshi masters. First, Sengquan's formal scheme of the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth, that is, "neither non-existence nor non-nothingness" 非不有非不無, is more sophisticated than the Chengshi masters' "neither existence nor nothingness" 非有非無. Moreover, without the double negation, an extension of the Chengshi masters' doctrine to a third level combining the conventional and ultimate truths would still take the simpler form of "neither existence nor nothingness" 非有非無. On the contrary, Sengquan's doctrine of the "middle way explained as a combination of both levels of the two truths"—described as "neither existence nor non-existence" 非有非不有 as well as "neither nothingness nor non-nothingness" 非無非不無—exudes a multifaceted meaning. It is clear that Sengquan devised this advanced form of the middle way to pose a serious challenge to, and provide a substantial criticism of, the contemporary Chengshi masters' Threefold Middle Way.

Sengquan explained that the concept of the two truths does not encompass self-nature, which is often expressed as two antithetical concepts (such as "arising or non-arising" and "non-arising or non-non-arising"), based on the mutual dependence of the provisional names. He also clarified the use of provisional names as ultimately directed toward the transcendental enlightenment of the middle way. However, his argument does not conclude with this transcendental perspective, as he goes on to reinterpret the two truths from the perspective of the middle way of non-duality. In addition, he views the conventional truth and the ultimate truth equally from the perspective of dependent origination. This point is also reflected in his criticism of the contemporary scholastic trend, according to which the conventional truth should be abandoned, whereas the ultimate truth should be pursued. Further, as reflected in his time, provisional names were despised for being illusory, whereas the middle way was admired for being real.

3. Falang's Interpretations of the Threefold Middle Way

3.1. Falang's Historical Background

Falang is well known as a disciple of Sengquan and the teacher of Jizang. In fact, he had a distinct role in the development of the Sanlun School of thought. He inherited the middle way doctrine from his Sanlun predecessors Senglang and Sengquan. Falang's philosophical disputes with contemporary internal Sanlun masters, as well as external Chengshi masters, led to a breakthrough ideological transformation of the Sanlun teachings. Specifically, his views on the middle way and provisional names differed even from those of his fellow Sanlun masters. Most Sanlun philosophy as we know it is based on the existent texts written by Falang's disciples and is thus derived from Falang's own philosophy. Despite the significant role he played in the development of the Sanlun School, the research conducted on his life and thoughts, as well as those of his master Sengquan, is still limited.

According to Falang's biography recorded in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (*Additional Collection of Biographies of Eminent Buddhist Monks*), he originally came from a distinguished family of government officers (Shih 2004, p. 14). When he was young, he joined a military expedition to conquer the north. One day he put his weapon under a big tree and said: "Arms are deadly weapons, and the body is the cause of suffering. How can one achieve enlightenment in a sea of craving and a forest of wrong?" 兵者凶器，身曰苦因，慾海邪林，安能覺者？(*Xu gaoseng zhuan* T50, no. 2060, p. 477b10–11). At the age of twenty-one, he formally renounced worldly life in March of 528 C.E., a date that is recorded as February 2nd in the Chinese lunar calendar (Hirai 1976, p. 290). After becoming a monk, Falang absorbed various Buddhist teachings. He practiced the ways of Chan (Zen) meditation from Chan-master Baozhi 寶誌禪師 and, in parallel, learned Buddhist precepts from Vinaya-master Tuan 彖律師 at Daming temple 大明寺. He also studied *Chengshi lun* thought from master Xian 仙師 at Nanjian temple 南澗寺 and accepted *Abhidharma* 毘曇 thought from master Jing 靖公 at Zhujian temple 竹澗寺 (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* T50, no. 2060, p. 477b11–15). However, after meeting Sengquan, Falang concentrated solely on the four

Mādhyamaka treatises and various Mahāyāna scriptures including the *Avatamsaka sūtra* and the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* T50, no. 2060, p. 477b18–23).

After his master Sengquan passed away in 558 C.E., Falang, as commanded by Emperor Wu of Chen's 陳武帝 (r. 557–559) Edict, left She Mountain and moved to the capital city Jiankang 建康 (Hirai 1976, pp. 290–91; Kim 2011, pp. 150–59). He resided in the urban Xingwang Temple and began to dispute other masters' philosophies and thoughts actively. Falang's behavior was distinct from his Sanlun predecessors Senglang and Sengquan. They had mostly stayed at She Mountain peacefully, refusing external activities such as debates with the competing Chengshi masters; their teachings, however, did include critical responses to Chengshi masters' theories.

Falang, on the other hand, had an extroverted and disputatious character (Park 2000a, pp. 215–16). After his master's death, he began to compete with fellow Sanlun masters as well as the Chengshi masters; he severely criticized both. Criticisms of Falang's disputes are documented in *Wuzheng lun* 無諍論 (*the Treatise on Non-dispute*). Although the text presents the author as Dharma-master Daxin Gao 大心暠法師, later written as Dharma-master Taixin Song 太心嵩法師 in the *Jushizhuan* 居士傳 (X88, no. 1646, p. 192b24), the actual identity is unclear. Another writer, Fuzai 傅縡 (531–585), who was a student of Falang's Sanlun teachings, later wrote *Mingdao lun* 明道論 (*the Treatise on the Elucidation of the Dao*) in response to this criticism in *Wuzheng lun* (Hirai 1976, p. 276). A shortened version of Fuzai's text is preserved in the *Chen shu* 陳書 (*History of the Chen Dynasty*). Fuzai's *Mingdao lun*, in defense of Falang's disputes, includes various abbreviated quotes from the earlier *Wuzheng lun* (Park 2000a, p. 215). The first is a question revealing the impression of Falang in *Wuzheng lun*:

> *Wuzheng lun* states: Recently, there is a person who spreads the Sanlun theory. In his criticism and blame, unoriginal echoes of past words, and unrestrained charges against others, he slanders all kinds of [Buddhist] teachers and ostracizes all types of [Buddhist] studies. He speaks of the middle way but persists with a biased mind. He talks of detaching [from worldly things] but competes to triumph alone. He learns *Abidharma* and *Chengshi lun* [philosophies], then makes the masters enemies even more. If the enemies are already made, abundant disputes must arise. With such a mindset, sinful deeds are formed; his sinful deeds do not stop, so how could he not further add to the gathering of the great pain of life and death? 無諍論言: 比有弘三論者, 雷同訶詆, 恣言罪狀, 歷毀諸師, 非斥眾學. 論中道而執偏心. 語忘懷而競獨勝. 方學數論, 更為仇敵. 仇敵既搆, 諍斗大生. 以此之心, 而成罪業, 罪業不止, 豈不重增生死太苦聚集? (*Chen shu* 1972, p. 401)

In the question above, the writer of *Wuzheng lun* severely criticizes Falang's disputes. He describes Falang as a fierce character who always competes with others. While this description is subjective, it allows the reader to infer how intense the disputes between Falang and the other *Chenshi lun* masters were (Hirai 1968, p. 772).

The second question from *Wuzheng lun* (included in abbreviated form in *Mingdao lun*) mentions Falang's great master Senglang:

> *Wuzheng lun* states: The great master Senglang of She Mountain gradually guided and transformed people toward enlightenment. Unlike [his later successor, Falang], [Senglang] practiced in the way of non-dispute. The virtue which leads to enlightenment has disappeared, and the simple and pure style of [the School] has already faded. Desires to fight and triumph, distortions [of words] into slander, flourish in this way. I wish to put such disputes to rest in order to reach the Dao, to let others win to let go of [our] virtues. What is the point of ostracizing other schools and provoking their anger? If [you] carry the middle way [in your mind], practicing the *Chengshi lun* [theory] as such, you will also be able to not dispute [others]. If [you] possess a biased heart, speaking of the *Zhonglun* [in those ways], then there must also be conflict. Thus, know that disputing and non-disputing are both [biased] one-sided approaches. 無諍論言: 攝山大師誘進化導, 則不如此, 即習行於無諍者也. 導悟之德既往, 淳一之風已澆. 競勝之心, 呵毀之曲, 盛於茲矣.

> 吾願息諍以通道, 讓勝以忘德. 何必排拂異家, 生其恚怒者乎? 若以中道之心行於成實, 亦能不諍. 若以偏著之心說於中論, 亦得有諍. 固知諍與不諍, 偏在一法. (*Chen shu* 1972, p. 402)

The writer of *Wuzheng lun* praises the great master Senglang of the Sanlun School for his harmonious attitude toward others (Dong 2008, p. 195). He then criticizes Falang for not inheriting this noble spirit of non-dispute, instead competing and arguing with the masters of other schools. The author insists that the way Falang edifies others is wrong because it only provokes anger and conflict. According to *Wuzheng lun*, these disputes stem from the biased nature of Falang's mind. In other words, the author criticizes Falang for not having attained the middle way.

However, Fuzai defends Falang against this critique as follows:

> Answer [to *Wuzheng lun*]: The great master Senglang of She Mountain truly had no disputes, but this [aspect]—praised by the author of *Wuzheng lun*—does not fit the current times. Senglang resided peacefully in the deep valley, practicing silence and non-action. He still gave all the instruction and encouragement; it was never that there was no one to share his will. He spoke or remained silent always with calmness, engaging with the world without idleness. Thus, even though his meaning was deep, his speech was very simple. But the landscape for the edification of today is not the same. [Falang] resides in a corner of the capital city, lives within a clustered village, breathes in the wanderings of visitors, exchanges words with scholars who are unrestrained, strives toward sharp viewpoints and supporting [arguments]... If the great master [Senglang] was in such lands, it would not be necessary [for him] to keep silent in the way treasured by the author [of *Wuzheng lun*]. 答曰: 攝山大師實無諍矣, 但法師所賞, 未衷其節. 彼靜守幽谷, 寂爾無為. 凡有訓勉, 莫匪同志. 從容語嘿, 物無閒然. 故其意雖深, 其言甚約. 今之敷暢, 地勢不然. 處王城之隅, 居聚落之內, 呼吸顧望之客, 脣吻縱橫之士, 奮鋒穎勵羽翼. … 若令大師當此之地, 亦何必默已, 而為法師所貴耶? (*Chen shu* 1972, pp. 402–3)

In the above answer to *Wuzheng lun*, Fuzai admits that the great master Senglang pursued a serene lifestyle contrasting with that of Falang. However, Fuzai advocates for Falang's disputes with other masters, stating that the times and circumstances had completely changed by then. Falang—unlike his predecessors—dealt with many visitors and scholars, so he had to find his own way of edification, different from that of Senglang. Fuzai also presumes that even Senglang would not have kept silent in such situations. Fuzai then continues to write:

> The master [of *Wuzheng lun*] also states: "I wish to put such disputes to rest in order to reach the Dao, to let others win to let go of [our] virtues". The affairs of the Dao and of virtues extend beyond [the questions of] disputing versus non-disputing, conceding versus non-conceding. This statement holds value only for ordinary people, [yet] the master [of *Wuzheng lun*] speaks it with adoration. How can you concede if you do not know you will win in the end? If the other's Dao is superior, then there is no need to make an effort to concede victory. If the other's Dao is inferior, there is no benefit in making concessions. Is it not pointless to talk about a wish to concede? 法師又言: "吾願息諍以通道, 讓勝以忘德". 道德之事, 不止在諍與不諍, 讓與不讓也. 此語直是人間所重, 法師慕而言之. 竟未知勝, 若為可讓也? 若他人道高, 則自勝不勞讓矣; 他人道劣, 則雖讓而無益矣. 欲讓之辭, 將非虛設? (*Chen shu* 1972, p. 403)

In the excerpt above, Fuzai further criticizes the argument in *Wuzheng lun*. He analyzes the main statement in which the author insists on the value of non-dispute and concession, pointing out its self-contradiction. According to Fuzai, this argument contains a logical inconsistency in both possible cases: when the other person's Dao is superior, conceding victory is not necessary. On the other hand, when the other's Dao is inferior, there is similarly no reason to concede; making a concession does not benefit anyone. Through

this argument, Fuzai advocates that Falang's fierce disputes are effective in pursuing the Dao. He evaluates the author's distinction between disputing and non-disputing, conceding and non-conceding, as an attachment to technicalities befitting ordinary people.

Fuzai insists that the elucidation of the Dao is not a matter of dispute or non-dispute. Instead, he argues that the dichotomous approach of "dispute is wrong; non-dispute is right" in *Wuzheng lun* is a sophistical argument. Fuzai clearly expresses that, contrary to the contention in *Wuzheng lun*, he uses both dispute and non-dispute in pursuit of the Dao. This approach is presumably influenced by the mindset of his teacher Falang, who maintained that only his belief in the Dao mattered. Falang was willing to sacrifice every relationship, arguing with anyone who opposed his beliefs, including both the masters of other schools and his fellow Sanlun masters.

The fellow Sanlun School masters with whom Falang most fiercely disputed included other disciples of his teacher.

According to the record of Hyegyun's *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* preserved in the *Sanron soshiden shū*, Sengquan's disciples were as numerous as strands of an ox's fur, but the ones who truly understood his profound teaching were as few as an ox's horns (Kim 2011, pp. 164–67). Specifically, during the Houjing Rebellion 候景之亂 (548–557), many scholars found refuge on She Mountain where they learned the Sanlun doctrines from Sengquan (Kim 2011, p. 167). Among these students, however, Hyegyun pointed out that only three disciples—Falang, Zhibian 智辯, and Huiyong 慧勇 (515–583)—later moved to the capital city and spread the Mahāyāna teaching of non-acquisition widely.

Fahua xuanyi shiqian 法華玄義釋籤, written by Zhanran 湛然 (711–782), contains a similar record, which further supports the above disciples as the few notable ones of Sengquan. According to Zhanran, Sengquan had four great disciples who were considered his representatives and whom he even at times taught privately; these protégés were closely taught as the successors of Sengquan's philosophy. They include Falang, who later abided at Xinghuang temple, Huibu 慧布 at Qixia temple 栖霞寺, Zhibian at Changgan temple 長干寺, and Huiyong at Chanzhong temple 禪衆寺. Zhanran also records that their contemporaries describe Falang as famous for his fierceness 伏虎 (a crouching tiger), Huibu for his great understanding 得意, Zhibian for his distilled eloquence 領語, and Huiyong for his excellent writing 文章 (*Fahua xuanyi shiqian* T33, no. 1717, p. 951a25–27; Yang 1989, p. 25).

Although Falang had a number of opponents in his disputes, he criticized these "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names" 中假師—a title he gave to his fellow members of the Sanlun School—most harshly. He stated: "They will never see the Buddha for all of eternity" (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 25c1–2). Although the "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names" appear in recent studies, this title had been largely forgotten throughout history. It is true that one reference connecting this title to Huiyong and Zhibian does exist in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* (T50, no. 2060, p. 477c15–18; Hirai 1974, p. 588; Hirai 1976, pp. 278–79, 443). However, Zhanran who wrote about Sengquan's four great disciples two hundred years after their lifetimes likely did not know that Huiyong and Zhibian were referred to as the "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names". This is evidenced by the fact that Zhanran's disciples Xingman 行滿 and Daoxian 道暹 referenced the title of the "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names" but could not specify who these masters were. Such confusion only two centuries after Falang's lifetime proves that Falang and his disciples were the winners of history in their disputes with the "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names". Falang was eventually regarded as the successor of the Sanlun School.

In bitterly criticizing his fellows Huiyong and Zhibian, who were also the great disciples of Sengquan, Falang required specific justification. According to the later records of Jizang and Hyegyun, the "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names"—including Huiyong and Zhibian—were obsessed with the specific linguistic forms of Zhongjia 中假 (the relationship between the middle way and provisional names), which are the core doc-

trines of the Sanlun School (Hirai 1976, p. 443). This obsession subsequently resulted in misinterpretations of the middle way and provisional names.

In particular, Jizang and his disciple Dharma-master Shuo 碩法師 defined the "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names" as those who regard "neither existence nor nothingness as the middle way" 非有非無為中 and "both existence and nothingness as provisional names" 而有而無為假 (*Sanlun xuanyi* 三論玄義 T45, no. 1852, p. 14c27–28; *Sanlun youyi yi* 三論遊意義 T45, no. 1855, p. 119c26–27). This phrase, however, did not originate from Falang's fellow masters; it is actually derived from the great master Senglang and his disciple Sengquan's definition of the middle way. Sengquan previously used the concept of ice to draw the comparison: a man who "because of the ice has fallen; because of the ice has arisen" 因氷而倒, 還因氷而起 (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 2009, p. 78). Hyegyun's explanation of Sengquan's quote connects this metaphorical ice to the middle way and provisional names. Partially borrowing the format of Sengquan's original wording, Hyegyun states: "because of 'neither existence nor nothingness' [which is the middle way], existence and nothingness have fallen; because of 'neither existence nor nothingness' [which is the middle way], 'existence and nothingness' have arisen" 因非有非無, 倒於有無, 還因非有非無, 起而有而無 (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 2009, p. 78). In Hyegyun's version, "neither existence nor nothingness"—which is the definition of the middle way—takes the place of ice, grammatically speaking; rather than a man collapsing due to the ice, we have existence and nothingness collapsing due to the middle way. This refutation of existence and nothingness is the elimination of the self-natures necessary to reach the middle way. Once the middle way is established, similar to the man who then rises from the ice, that which arises in Hyegyun's quote is the state of "being nonetheless existence and being nonetheless nothingness" 而有而無, which is the definition of provisional names. Thus, the wording used as far back as by Jizang and Dharma-master Shuo to describe the "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names" reflects Sengquan's original teachings. Huiyong and Zhibian's interpretations were a direct inheritance from Sengquan and shared by Falang and his disciples.

Despite these common definitions, Falang focused on the deeper underlying meaning of the concepts, claiming that his fellow masters obsessed over the superficial linguistic aspects. He maintained that Huiyong and Zhibian interpreted the middle way solely as the negative form of the phrase, "neither existence nor nothingness" 非有非無, and provisional names only as the affirmative form of the phrase, "being nonetheless existence and being nonetheless nothingness" 而有而無. They thus divided the middle way and provisional names into two mutually exclusive semantic forms. According to Falang and his disciples, the esteemed masters Huiyong and Zhibian followed in the traditions of the Sanlun School—negating self-natures through mutual dependence—which contrasted with other contemporary teachings. However, these masters remained excessively attached to the core concepts of the Sanlun School, becoming overly fixated on the specific wording used to describe the middle way and provisional names. This is similar to a person taking medicine to cure a preexisting illness, whose reliance on the medicine then becomes a new disease. Falang severely criticized Huiyong and Zhibian for distorting the teachings of the Sanlun School, expressing that this sin was even greater than those committed by the masters of other Buddhist schools. He thus declared that these fellow Sanlun masters would never behold the Buddha, implying they would never achieve enlightenment. This condemnation was especially scathing, given that Huiyong, Zhibian, Huipu and Falang were all allied thinkers within the Sanlun School, collectively referred to by contemporaries as the "four leading disciples of master Sengquan" 詮公四友 (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* T50, no. 2060, p. 480c16).

The intricacies of the various perspectives within the Sanlun School can be understood further through a passage recorded in Hyegyun's *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* on the "Meaning of Chuzhang and Zhongjia". The specific passage describes a great altercation between Falang and a fellow master, presumably Huiyong, whose definition of the middle way is referenced in the preceding paragraph. The fellow master criticizes Falang's

definition of the middle way from two perspectives. First, the master states that Falang defines the middle way as "neither existence nor nothingness", without connecting it to the phrase "being nonetheless existence and being nonetheless nothingness", which indicates provisional names. The fellow master thus insists that the definitions of the middle way and provisional names must go hand in hand; by not referencing the two terms together, Falang's definition becomes a false proposition (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 2009, p. 103). Second, Falang occasionally used another expression of "non-duality" 不二 to define the middle way, instead of the previously stated "neither existence nor nothingness". The fellow master insists that "neither existence nor nothingness" is the only definition of the middle way since it is the counterpart of "existence and nothingness" (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 2009, p. 103).

The aforementioned arguments reveal that the fellow master in the passage adheres to a fixed definition of "neither existence nor nothingness" for the middle way and "both existence and nothingness" for provisional names. On the contrary, Falang was unconstrained by the linguistic form itself, interpreting the middle way as non-duality 不二中道 (an emphasis on the middle way as simultaneous transcendence of the confrontation between the two opposites) as well as "neither existence nor nothingness". It is because of this difference in interpretation that Falang criticized his fellow masters for obsessing over the linguistic form to the extent of losing the essential meaning of the middle way. Indeed, Falang formed his differentiated interpretation of the middle way through these philosophical disagreements with his fellows. A refusal to adhere to a particular wording also influenced Falang's doctrine of the Threefold Middle Way, which is discussed later in this paper.

It is important to note that Hyegyun's description of the altercation stops after the event itself; he does not record any further consequences following the argument. Falang subsequently became the winner of history—the names and teachings of the other masters were forgotten in the next centuries—and the title "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names" was mostly used in disparaging contexts by Falang's disciples. Because there are no records of Huiyong and Zhibian's original theories, Hyegyun's text—in favor of Falang's perspective—naturally contains limitations in objectivity. However, Hyegyun's description of the altercation details the arguments given by both sides and provides a specific account of the events, compared with other texts by Jizang that rely more on negative commentary. It is thus possible to distinguish between the individual viewpoints of Falang and his fellow masters, giving the reader a clue to understanding the main philosophical arguments between them.

In conclusion, Falang's style of teaching marked a turning point in the history of the Sanlun School. He evidently had his own interpretation of the middle way and provisional names, distinct from those of his fellow Sanlun masters. Falang's theories were widely promulgated through numerous disputes with fellow masters as well as with masters of other schools such as those of the Chengshi School. Falang thus established a new mainstream direction of the Sanlun School, which was inherited by his disciples including Jizang and Hyegyun. They practiced the same style of dispute, particularly by engaging in radical arguments with all other masters.

3.2. The Analysis of Falang's Threefold Middle Way

3.2.1. The First Utterance

Falang's Three Types of Utterance 三種方言, preserved in Jizang's *Zhongguanlun shu*, indicates Falang's three types of discourses on the Threefold Middle Way (Yasumoto 1970, pp. 497–98). Among these three, the First Utterance is directly inherited from his master Sengquan, whereas the Second and Third are likely Falang's own creations. In the First Utterance, Falang drew the middle way at the levels of the conventional and ultimate truth by following the example of Sengquan's Threefold Middle Way. Falang states:

> "Neither arising nor non-arising" 非生非不生 constitutes the middle way, and thus "arising and non-arising" 而生而不生 constitutes provisional names. "Aris-

> ing as a provisional name" and "non-arising as a provisional name" constitute the two truths. Therefore, the "arising and ceasing" devoid of "arising and ceasing" 無生滅生滅 is regarded as the conventional truth; the "non-arising and non-ceasing" [which appears in the form of] "arising and ceasing" 生滅無生滅 is regarded as the ultimate truth. However, "arising as a provisional name" can neither be called "arising" nor "non-arising", and thus constitutes the middle way at the level of the conventional truth; "non-arising as a provisional name" can neither be called "non-arising" nor "non-non-arising", and thus constitutes the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth. This is the middle way that is discussed in terms of each of the two truths. 然"非生非不生"既是中道, "而生而不生"即是假名. 此假生假不生, 即是二諦, 故以無生滅生滅以為世諦, 以生滅無生滅為第一義諦. 然假生不可言"生", 不可言"不生", 即是世諦中道. 假不生不可言"不生", 不可言"非不生", 名為真諦中道. 此是二諦各論中道. (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 10c21–27).

In the First Utterance, Falang's logical scheme follows that of Sengquan. Where Sengquan refers to the "word", the "negation of the word", and the "double negation of the word" (see Section 2.3. *The Analysis of Sengquan's Threefold Middle Way*), Falang refers to "arising", "non-arising", and "non-non-arising". In other words, Falang replaces the "word" with "arising", the first concept of the eightfold negation. He explicates the concept of provisional names, that is, "arising and non-arising", by applying the mutual dependence between a word and its negation. He also derives the middle way, that is, "neither arising nor non-arising", from the mutual dependence between the negation and the double negation of a word.

However, the Utterance of Sengquan and the First Utterance of Falang are distinct in the detailed way in which each arrives at the two truths. Sengquan focuses on mutual dependence between the concepts of "arising" and "ceasing", using these provisional names to define the two truths. The mutually dependent "arising" and "ceasing" form the conventional truth, and the mutually dependent "non-arising" and "non-ceasing" form the ultimate truth. Falang, in contrast, derives the two truths by illustrating the mutual dependence between the entire concept of "arising and ceasing" and its negation of "non-arising and non-ceasing". In other words, Falang does not identify mutual dependence between the two concepts of "arising" and "ceasing" as Sengquan does, but rather groups these concepts together. Specifically, in Falang's Utterance, the provisional name of "arising and ceasing", which can be devoid of the substantial meaning of "arising and ceasing", is referred to as the conventional truth. Similarly, "non-arising and non-ceasing", which contains the function of "arising and ceasing", is referred to as the ultimate truth. While Falang's explanation goes further than that of Sengquan by adopting the symmetrical relationship between the two truths, the overall structure of their Utterances is identical.

"Neither arising nor non-arising" 非生非不生 at the start of the above quote is akin to what Jizang describes as the "middle way that refutes substantial natures". This is the middle way where substantial existence and substantial nothingness are both negated because existence (e.g., arising) and nothingness (e.g., non-arising) themselves are empty. Many interpret the Sanlun School teachings of the middle way as implying that once substantial natures are refuted, ultimate reality immediately appears. However, the refutation of substantial natures is only the first step. From there, Falang believes that once these distorted delusions are completely destroyed, a nihilistic view may arise. The teachings then turn to the two truths, which are provisional names representing mutually dependent origination, to cure this nihilistic view. More specifically, Falang eradicated the nihilistic perspective through the provisional names of "arising and non-arising", which are in a mutually dependent relationship. Similar to Sengquan, Falang also argues that the provisional names of "arising and non-arising", which represent the two truths, do not contain any self-natures of the word (i.e., arising), its negation (i.e., non-arising), and its double negation (i.e., non-non-arising). The middle way at the levels of the conventional and ultimate truth is thus naturally derived from the provisional names of "arising" and

"non-arising", respectively. They have no substantial self-natures themselves and thus are equivalent to the "middle way in terms of function", one of the Four Levels of Understanding the Middle Way as defined by Jizang.

In conclusion, Sengquan's discourse started with an understanding of provisional names (i.e., the word and its negation) and ended with the two truths; Falang's teachings instead begin with the two truths, leading to an understanding of the middle way through provisional names. In other words, both Sengquan and Falang's discourses adhere to the same logical structure, but with different emphases.

Next, Falang discusses the "middle way explained as a combination of both previous levels" as follows:

> However, "arising and ceasing" at the level of the conventional truth is the "arising and ceasing" devoid of "arising and ceasing"; "non-arising and non-ceasing" at the level of the ultimate truth is the "non-arising and non-ceasing" [which appears in the form of] "arising and ceasing". Hence, how can the "arising and ceasing" devoid of "arising and ceasing" be [real] "arising and ceasing"; how can the "non-arising and non-ceasing" [which appears in the form of] "arising and ceasing" be [real] "non-arising and non-ceasing"? Therefore, "neither 'arising-or-ceasing' nor 'non-arising-or-non-ceasing'" 非生滅非無生滅 is called the "middle way explained as both levels of the two truths combined". 然世諦生滅是"無生滅生滅", 第一義無生滅是"生滅無生滅". 然無生滅生滅, 豈是生滅? 生滅無生滅, 豈是無生滅? 故"非生滅非無生滅", 名二諦合明中道也. (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 10c27–11a02)

In the above excerpt, Falang begins the discussion from the two truths: the "arising and ceasing" devoid of the substantial meaning of "arising and ceasing" and the "non-arising and non-ceasing" which appears in the form of "arising and ceasing". Through the simultaneous negation of the two truths, Falang derives "neither 'arising-or-ceasing' nor 'non-arising-or-non-ceasing'" 非生滅非無生滅, which is the "middle way explained as both levels of the two truths combined". This third middle way is distinguished from that of the conventional and ultimate truths, which are only derived from either "arising" or "non-arising", respectively. In fact, Falang's "neither 'arising-or-ceasing' nor 'non-arising-or-non-ceasing'" is an example of Sengquan's middle way explained as a combination of both previous levels, "neither a word nor its negation". Therefore, this final middle way of Falang's First Utterance corresponds to the "middle way in terms of essence". This approach is similar to Sengquan's understanding of the middle way at both levels combined, indicating the most fundamental and transcendental dimension of the middle way.

3.2.2. The Second Utterance

As mentioned above, the Second and Third Utterances are assumed to be Falang's own creations, distinct from the previous one, which was based on Sengquan's logical framework. The Second Utterance, described in Jizang's *Zhongguanlun shu*, also appears in a chapter of Hyegyun's *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* on the meaning of the eightfold negation. This second appearance in the manuscript version of Hyegyun's text attributes the creation of the Utterance to Falang, by referring to it as "tenets of the mountain gate" 山門意 (*Gyogam Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 2009, p. 130). Here, the mountain gate specifically refers to Falang's text *Shanmen xuanyi* 山門玄義 (lit., *The Profound Meaning of the Mountain Gate*), serving as further confirmation of Falang's authorship of the Second Utterance.

In the Second Utterance, Falang deduces the middle way at the level of the conventional truth as follows:

> Question: How would you explain the Threefold Middle Way? 問: 云何辨三種中耶?
>
> Answer: According to other schools, there are things that can exist [by themselves] 有可有; and then there is "arising" that can arise [by itself]; if there is arising that can arise [by itself], then there is "ceasing" that can cease [by itself]. There is arising that can arise [by itself], and thus this arising does not depend

> upon ceasing; there is ceasing that can cease [by itself], and thus this ceasing does not depend upon arising. Since arising does not depend upon ceasing, arising is not the arising that can cease; since ceasing does not depend on arising, ceasing is not the ceasing that can arise. Since arising is not the arising that can cease, arising arises by itself; since ceasing is not the ceasing that can arise, ceasing ceases by itself. Arising that arises by itself is the substantial arising; ceasing that ceases by itself is the substantial ceasing. Arising and ceasing that are substantial are none other than two extremes, and thus they are not [what is explained as] the middle way. 答: 他有有可有, 則有生可生, 則有生可生, 則有滅可滅. 有生可生, 生不由滅, 有滅可滅, 滅不由生. 生不由滅, 生非滅生, 滅不由生, 滅非生滅. 生非滅生, 故生是自生, 滅非生滅, 故滅是自滅. 自生則是實生, 自滅則是實滅. 實生實滅, 則是二邊, 故非中道.
>
> Now [the Sanlun School] clarifies that there is no such thing that can exist [by itself] because emptiness is the base of existence, and therefore there is no such thing as arising that can arise [by itself]; likewise, there is no such thing as ceasing that can cease [by itself]. Since there is no such thing as the arising that can arise [by itself], arising happens by depending on ceasing; since there is no such thing as the ceasing that can cease [by itself], ceasing happens by depending on arising. Since arising happens by depending on ceasing, arising refers to the arising that can cease; since ceasing happens by depending on arising, ceasing refers to the ceasing that can arise. Since arising refers to the arising that can cease, arising does not arise by itself; since ceasing refers to the ceasing that can arise, ceasing does not cease by itself. Although arising is not the arising by itself, only at the level of the conventional truth, it is provisionally referred to as arising; although ceasing is not the ceasing by itself, only at the level of the conventional truth, it is provisionally referred to as ceasing. Therefore, the arising as a provisional name is not [real] arising, and the ceasing as a provisional name is not [real] ceasing, which becomes "neither arising nor ceasing", thereby constituting the middle way at the level of the conventional truth. 今明無有可有, 以空故有, 則無生可生, 亦無滅可滅. 無生可生, 由滅故生, 無滅可滅, 由生故滅. 由滅故生, 生是滅生, 由生故滅, 滅是生滅. 生是滅生, 生不自生, 滅是生滅, 滅不自滅. 生非自生, 但世諦故假說生, 滅非自滅, 但世諦故假說滅. 假生不生, 假滅不滅, 不生不滅, 名世諦中道. (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11a28–b12)

Falang's Utterance above recalls the phrases in the Chuzhang 初章 (lit., first chapter), which is the most foundational doctrine taught by the Sanlun School and illustrates the Sanlun School principles. In particular, the overall structure of Falang's argument—representative of the Sanlun School's distinct views on the middle way, in contrast with the views of other schools—is very similar to this foundational text. Specifically, the nature of the logical development in Falang's Second Utterance is likely adopted from that of the Chuzhang. Furthermore, the first phrase—"now [the Sanlun School] clarifies that there is no such thing that can exist [by itself] because emptiness is the base of existence"—is identical to a corresponding phrase in the Chuzhang (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 28a13–22).

Indeed, most of Falang's Utterances have structural similarities with the Chuzhang. Unlike his teachers Sengquan and Senglang, Falang fiercely argued with other masters after leaving the mountain, including fellow Sanlun masters and external Chengshi masters. In arguments with the Chengshi masters, he likely refuted their viewpoints using the logical structure of the Chuzhang more often than using other Sanlun doctrines. In the Chuzhang itself, the Sanlun School's specific view of existence and nothingness in a mutually dependent relationship is already juxtaposed with other schools' teachings of existence and nothingness as having independent self-natures. This dichotomy illustrates how criticism of other schools' thoughts is inherent in the Chuzhang.

Similar to the Chuzhang, the Second Utterance quoted above also begins with criticism of other schools' views. Falang shows that their explanations of arising and ceasing in terms of self-natures form an explicit antithesis to the next paragraph stating the Sanlun

School's view: arising and ceasing are in an indivisible relationship. Based on the provisional aspects of the terms "arising" and "ceasing", Falang's argument arrives at the concept of "neither arising nor ceasing", the first pair in the eightfold negation referring to the middle way at the level of the conventional truth. From this logical analysis, Falang argues that the middle way, even that of the conventional truth, cannot be properly explained by the doctrines of other schools, but only by the Sanlun Schools' doctrine.

Falang's explanation of the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth is as follows:

> In contrast to arising and ceasing at the level of the conventional truth, the ultimate truth is explained by non-arising and non-ceasing. Existence which is empty 空有 constitutes the conventional truth, and thus the conventional truth is explained as the provisional arising and provisional ceasing; emptiness which is existent 有空 constitutes the ultimate truth, and thus the ultimate truth is explained as "neither arising nor ceasing". This "neither arising nor ceasing" is not the "neither arising nor ceasing" in itself. Relying on the [fact of] arising as a provisional name at the level of the conventional truth, non-arising as a provisional name at the level of the ultimate truth is explained [by the same logic]; relying on the [fact of] ceasing as a provisional name at the level of the conventional truth, non-ceasing as a provisional name at the level of the ultimate truth is explained [by the same logic]. "Neither non-arising nor non-ceasing" thus constitutes the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth. 對世諦生滅, 明真諦不生滅. 以空有為世諦, 世諦假生假滅, 有空為真諦, 真諦不生不滅. 此不生不滅, 非自不生不滅, 待世諦假生, 明真諦假不生, 待世諦假滅, 明真諦假不滅, 非不生非不滅, 為真諦中道. (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11b12–16)

The above paragraph, in which the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth is discussed, has a very different structure from the two prior paragraphs. Falang states that the ultimate truth as a provisional name is dependent on the conventional truth as a provisional name. This statement means that "neither arising nor ceasing", which constitutes the ultimate truth, is not an independently meaningful concept but is rather dependent on the concepts of arising and ceasing at the level of the conventional truth. The ultimate truth as a provisional name does not represent real "non-arising" and real "non-ceasing", meaning it intrinsically contains "neither non-arising nor non-ceasing" 非不生非不滅. This concept of "neither non-arising nor non-ceasing" transcends both non-arising and non-ceasing and constitutes the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth.

Falang then continues to explain the middle way at the level of both the conventional and ultimate truths:

> As for the "middle way explained as the combination of both levels of the two truths", "arising and ceasing" devoid of "arising and ceasing" constitutes the conventional truth; "non-arising and non-ceasing" [which appears in the form of] "arising and ceasing" constitutes the ultimate truth. Then, how can "arising and ceasing" devoid of "arising and ceasing" be [real] "arising and ceasing"? How can "non-arising and non-ceasing" [which appears in the form of] "arising and ceasing" be [real] "non-arising and non-ceasing"? As a consequence, "neither 'arising-or-ceasing' nor 'non-arising-or-non-ceasing'" 非生滅非無生滅 is called the "middle way explained as the combination of both levels of the two truths". 二諦合明中道者, "無生滅生滅"為世諦, "生滅無生滅"為真諦, 無生滅生滅, 豈是生滅? 生滅無生滅, 豈是無生滅? 故"非生滅非無生滅", 名二諦合明中道. (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11b16–20)

Meanwhile, in this final excerpt of the Second Utterance, the "middle way explained as the combination of both levels of the two truths" is deduced through the interdependent relationship between the conventional truth as a provisional name and the ultimate truth as a provisional name. Although the phrasing of this paragraph is similar to that of the First Utterance, the implications differ. According to Jizang's comments on the Utterances, gradual abandonment 漸捨義 is pursued in the Second Utterance (*Zhongguanlun shu*

T42, no. 1824, p. 11c11–12), which distinguishes this teaching from the First Utterance. In particular, the Second Utterance reaches the first two versions of the middle way—at the level of the conventional and ultimate truths—by abandoning self-natures and provisional names at each respective level. This stands in contrast to the First Utterance, which solely refutes the concept of self-natures at these levels. The Second Utterance is thus uniquely characterized by multiple, gradual stages designed for the abandonment of attachments, serving as a pathway toward enlightenment. This structural gradation is a recurring feature in Falang's other doctrines, including the Three Levels of the Two Truths 三重二諦 and the Four Levels of the Two Truths 四重二諦.

Jizang more specifically states that each of the three stages in the Second Utterance has a distinct function. The middle way at the level of the conventional truth is focused on refuting the view that the concepts of arising and ceasing have self-natures 破性生滅 (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11c12–13). Subsequently, the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth further removes the idea of the provisional names of arising and ceasing 破假生滅 (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11c13). Lastly, in the "middle way explained as the combination of both levels of the two truths", the provisional names and self-natures are simultaneously extinguished 雙泯假性 (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11c14). As a result, nothing remains regarding arising and ceasing. This complete absence signifies enlightenment. Jizang further elaborates that in this final stage of enlightenment, neither the conventional truth nor the ultimate truth retains the meaning of "arising" (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11c14–15).

Given this understanding, it may be extrapolated that the Second Utterance introduces a new stage of the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth, in which the provisional names are refuted. The Second Utterance also explains the three versions of the middle way as a gradual process of abandonment from the conventional truth to the combination of the two truths. In fact, the Sanlun School's foundational theory of the middle way is based on the use of provisional names. The idea that the provisional names should be refuted is not found in the teachings of Falang's master Sengquan. Falang, however, may have introduced the refutation of provisional names to contend with fellow masters Huiyong and Zhibian in the Sanlun School. Indeed, Falang referred to them as the "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names", criticizing their adherence to separate language in describing these two concepts. Falang believed this adherence revealed an attachment to provisional names separate from the middle way. It is most likely in this context that Falang argued for such an attachment to be removed.

3.2.3. The Third Utterance

Considering the linguistic expressions in the Third Utterance, this Utterance is merely an abbreviated version of the preceding two. Falang states:

> The conventional truth refers to arising as a provisional name and ceasing as a provisional name. The arising as a provisional name does not arise; the ceasing as a provisional name does not cease. Hence, "neither arising nor ceasing" constitutes the middle way at the level of the conventional truth; "neither non-arising nor non-ceasing" constitutes the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth. As for the "middle way explained as the combination of both levels of the two truths", "neither 'arising-or-ceasing' nor 'non-arising-or-non-ceasing'" 非生滅非不生滅 is called the "middle way explained as the combination of both levels". 師又一時方言云, 世諦即假生假滅, 假生不生, 假滅不滅, "不生不滅"為世諦中道, "非不生非不滅"為真諦中道, 二諦合明中道者, "非生滅非不生滅"則是合明中道也. (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11c21–25)

The structure of the Third Utterance is very simple. This paragraph does not contain any expressions that are markedly distinct from those of the former two Utterances. The only difference is that, in Falang's original text, the concept of "neither 'arising-or-ceasing' nor 'non-arising-or-non-ceasing'" changes from "fei shengmie fei wu shengmie" 非生滅非無生滅 in the preceding two Utterances to "fei shengmie fei bu shengmie" 非生滅

非不生滅 in the above excerpt. This change occurs due to the use of the Chinese character bù 不 (lit., not) instead of wú 無 (lit., there is not; nothingness), but there is no actual distinction in meaning. To deduce further meaning in the Third Utterance that distinguishes it from the other teachings, it is essential to examine Jizang's commentary. Specifically, he presents two interpretations.

The first interpretation rests on "equality" 平等義, which is one of Falang's main concepts together with that of gradual abandonment. Jizang's explanation of the Third Utterance thus conforms to Falang's original meaning: the two truths and the middle way are in an equal relationship of mutual identity. Based on the logic of "form is emptiness" 色即是空 in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, Jizang elucidates that the "arising" of the conventional truth itself is none other than "non-arising" (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11c25–27). In other words, "arising" is equal to "non-arising". He further posits that the "non-arising" of the ultimate truth relies on the "arising" of the conventional truth, and thus the ultimate truth is deduced to be the "non-arising" from the "non-arising" of the conventional truth (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11c27–28). Because "arising" and "non-arising" are in a relationship of mutual identity, the conventional and ultimate truths are also inherently equal to each other.

In the above explanation, Jizang focuses only on the relationship between the two truths and does not explicitly describe the central concept of the middle way. The relationship between the two truths and the middle way, however, can be extrapolated based on the idea of equality. Here, Jizang provides an understanding of what equality means by quoting "form is emptiness" from the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*. In this sense, an object known as "A" is also "non-A" intrinsically. This thesis means that equality consists of mutual identity: everything encompasses every other thing at the same time. Based on this understanding of equality, it can be inferred that the two truths are indistinguishable from the middle way. From the standpoint of enlightenment, the two truths themselves are indeed the middle way, and extending this enlightened perspective to a deeper, fundamental understanding reveals that the various provisional names are also equal in nature.

The concept of equality goes further to differentiate this Third Utterance from the first two. While the previous Utterances created a hierarchy of stages between the levels of truth, the Third Utterance is unique in emphasizing the complete equality of the truths. This differentiation is done through the condition of mutual identity, where the provisional names of the two truths are equal to the middle way. For example, in the first two Utterances, Jizang explains the middle way through a negation of the conventional and ultimate truths (i.e., if the conventional truth was "arising or ceasing", then the middle way was deduced from "neither arising nor ceasing"). On the contrary, in the Third Utterance, his commentary does not consider the middle way at all. Based on Jizang's notes, the Third Utterance is explained as an abbreviated version of the previous Utterances, with simplified expressions of the conventional and ultimate truths. Despite Jizang's omission of the middle way, this central concept must still be interpreted in the context of the Third Utterance, which means it must be interpreted through the lens of equality. In such a context, the middle way can be understood not as a negation of the provisional names (as in the previous Utterances) but as equal—in a relationship of mutual identity—to the provisional names.

The second explanation is made through the concept of a "progression by gradual steps" 階漸明義 (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11c28–29). Although Jizang asserts that the first interpretation of Falang's Third Utterance, as described above, is the one that is in line with his master's intention (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 11c25–28), the second explanation can be regarded as an additional interpretation by himself or his master Falang. In this second view, the mutual identity between the two truths actuates the form of a gradual progression, in which the conventional truth moves toward the ultimate truth. This gradual progression is affirmative in nature—provisional names are not refuted—which distinguishes it from the gradual abandonment of previous Utterances. Specifically, Jizang states that "neither arising nor ceasing", which is the middle way at the level of the conventional truth, is none other than the provisional name of the ultimate truth

真諦之假 (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, pp. 11c28–12a1). In other words, he equates the "middle way at the level of the conventional truth" to the ultimate truth, connecting the middle way at the previous level to the provisional name at the next level, without any abandonment of concepts. This reveals a significant implication: the middle way and the provisional names are not separate concepts but closely intertwined in mutual identity.

Supporting this gradual progression, Jizang further explains that the middle way in the Third Utterance is not "what is manifested by refuting self-natures" 破性明中 (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 12a1), but rather that self-natures did not exist in the first place. Specifically, he writes that, at the level of the conventional truth, "arising and ceasing clearly appear but there has never been 'arising and ceasing'" 生滅宛然而未曾生滅 (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 12a2–3). Similarly, at the level of the ultimate truth, "non-arising and non-ceasing clearly appear but there has never been 'non-arising or non-ceasing'" 不生不滅宛然而未曾無生無滅 (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 12a3–5). The philosophy that self-natures "[have] never been" 未曾 is a distinct feature of the Third Utterance, emphasizing the fundamental emptiness of provisional names. Provisional names are intrinsically free from any self-natures; therefore, rather than a negative removal of self-natures and provisional names, the Third Utterance is affirmative in nature, whereby one level of truth leads to the next. Specifically, the middle way at each level indicates the further meaning of the next level. For example, the "middle way at the level of the conventional truth" and the provisional name of the ultimate truth are both expressed as "neither arising nor ceasing". With this interpretation, the middle way at the level of the conventional truth does not remove the self-natures of "arising and ceasing" through negation but rather emphasizes the transcendental meaning of this provisional name by noting its shared expression with the ultimate truth.

While it is true that in the former Utterances, the "middle way at the level of the conventional truth" and the ultimate truth itself also share the single definition of "neither arising nor ceasing", these Utterances emphasize hierarchical levels of meaning. Specifically, in the Second Utterance, the middle way at the level of the conventional truth first achieves correctness 正 by refuting the self-natures of "arising and ceasing". According to this Utterance, the subsequent level of the ultimate truth—identified as a provisional name—is only attained after self-natures have been refuted. Eventually, the provisional names themselves are refuted through negation to reach the middle way at the level of the ultimate truth. Through this process, the concept of gradual abandonment in the Second Utterance creates a hierarchical progression where each level is based on the previous one. Despite the common language, this framework is distinct from that of the Third Utterance where mutual identity equates the various levels of truth.

It should be noted, however, that the gradual abandonment—observed most clearly in the Second Utterance—is one of the main concepts of Falang's teachings. As such, while it does not appear directly in the Third Utterance, the gradual aspects of this concept are retained. In Jizang's second interpretation, the gradual progression—which mainly adheres to the concept of equality 平等—also possesses the multiple stages found in the gradual abandonment. For reference, in Jizang's first interpretation, the middle way at the level of the conventional truth and the conventional truth as a provisional name are not separate concepts; Jizang equates the conventional truth itself to the ultimate truth. Instead, the stage-by-stage nature appears in the second interpretation, when Jizang divides the conventional truth (as a provisional name) and the middle way at the level of the conventional truth; the latter is then equated with the ultimate truth. These multiple stages function as stair steps, leading linearly from the middle way at the level of the conventional truth to a more transcendental middle way (at the level of the ultimate truth and beyond).

In parallel, Jizang's second interpretation builds on the main concepts of the first interpretation, emphasizing a direct bridge or connection between the levels of the conventional and ultimate truth; this is the primary and fundamental idea of equality.[4]

Jizang further elaborates on the concept of the middle way through the noble truth of suffering. He posits that suffering 苦 is not confined to its literal meaning, but also carries

the implication of emptiness (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 12a10–11). Likewise, the conventional truth does not simply contain the literal meaning of the conventional truth, but also of the ultimate truth; the two truths, in turn, represent not just themselves but also embody the transcendental non-duality of the middle way (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 12a11–15). In this way, Jizang explains how the conventional and ultimate truths can share a mutual identity, revealing the idea of equality. He also emphasizes the transcendental implications of equality.

This core principle of equality in the Third Utterance is also the ultimate state of enlightenment in Mahāyāna Buddhism, with which the Sanlun School strongly identified. Falang elucidated the central meaning of the Mahāyāna scriptures to his disciples as follows: "words are grounded in 'non-abidingness' 不住 and mind is centered on 'non-acquisition' 無得" (*Zhongguanlun shu* T42, no. 1824, p. 12a7–8; *Shengman baoku* 勝鬘寶窟 T37, no. 1744, p. 5c9–10). Non-abidingness refers to the linguistic expressions implemented in various teachings. Falang asserted that these expressions are not anchored to unchanging self-natures. Regarding the teachings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, one ought not to cling to the words in and of themselves, as they do not have real substance. According to Falang, the primary objective of all Buddhist scriptures is the cultivation of non-attachment (Liu 1994, p. 99). Non-abidingness subsequently progresses to the notion of "non-acquisition", epitomizing absolute liberation. If words do not have substances, then they are provisional names; one should not become entangled with the surface-level expressions of these provisional names but should search for deeper meaning. By centering on the meaning beyond superficial linguistic expressions, one can attain the ultimate state of non-acquisition, where the mind is not attached to any particular object. This signifies a state where all objects are perceived as being equal. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, this equality is the central achievement.

The fundamental importance of equality already appears in Jizang's first interpretation of Falang's Third Utterance; this begs the question of why there is a second interpretation with the additional concept of graduality. The current paper argues that Jizang introduces the idea of a progression toward equality by gradual steps, to provide validity to all the diverse teachings expressed in the Mahāyāna scriptures. Achieving equality means achieving the ultimate state of enlightenment. Nonetheless, many people cannot reach this single state of equality at once. Creating gradual steps allows room for intermediate processes and teachings at multiple stages. This interpretation means that combining equality with a gradual progression opens the door to the different teachings that work for different practitioners. Each of these teachings has a transcendental dimension.

In conclusion, Falang's Three Utterances illustrate his various discourses on the Threefold Middle Way. Whereas the First Utterance is inherited from Sengquan's doctrine and logical framework, Falang's Second and Third Utterances represent his own central philosophies: gradual abandonment and equality. These ideas form the most essential part of Falang's two truths theory and were later inherited and incorporated into the two truths theory of Jizang.

4. Conclusions

The doctrinal evolution of the Sanlun School, especially concerning the Threefold Middle Way, is deeply rooted in the philosophical contributions of its early-period masters, Sengquan and Falang. They articulated the middle way through the close relationship between the two truths and the eightfold negation. Each master applied the varying levels of the Threefold Middle Way to expound upon their own two truths theory.

The key difference between Falang and Sengquan's theories lies in the extent to which they employ the concept of negation. In particular, Sengquan adopted the double negation framework to increase the transcendental quality of his theory compared to those of the Chengshi masters. Sengquan's middle way at the level of the ultimate truth is specifically expressed as "neither non-existence nor non-nothingness" 非不有非不無. The "middle way explained as a combination of both levels of the two truths" is similarly referred to

as "neither existence nor non-existence" 非有非不有, as well as "neither nothingness nor non-nothingness" 非無非不無. This teaching is in contrast to the simpler form of "neither A nor B"—without the double negation—presented by the competing Chengshi masters. By negating the negation at the level of the ultimate truth and beyond, Sengquan adds complexity to confer transcendentality. This choice is motivated by Sengquan's direct critique of Zhiji's Threefold Middle Way theory.

In comparison, Sengquan's disciple Falang further enhanced the transcendental nature of the Threefold Middle Way theory by introducing a higher level of negation than his master, particularly with regard to provisional names. He achieved this through the gradual abandonment in the Second Utterance, where he insisted that both self-natures and provisional names must be refuted. According to the Sanlun School's teachings, provisional names themselves are viewed as pure, but Falang establishes a greater level of transcendentality by removing them. This choice is related to Falang's discourse as a criticism of the teachings of the "Masters of the Middle Way and Provisional Names", specifically his fellow Sanlun School colleagues, Huiyong and Zhibian. Although he goes further than his master in negating provisional names, Falang preserved Sengquan's framework of the Threefold Middle Way, retaining the same double negation at the level of the ultimate truth and beyond. For example, Falang's middle way at the ultimate level is expressed as "neither non-arising nor non-ceasing" 非不生非不滅, and his "middle way explained as a combination of both levels of the two truths" is "neither 'arising-or-ceasing' nor 'non-arising-or-non-ceasing'" 非生滅非無生滅. This form is similarly embodied by Sengquan's framework of the Threefold Middle Way.

Undoubtedly, Sengquan and Falang's interpretations of the Threefold Middle Way were directly inherited by Jizang, the successor of the Sanlun School, and preserved in his *Zhongguanlun shu*. While Jizang incorporates interpretations from the former masters to a certain extent, he also presents his own Threefold Middle Way doctrine, with new implications for the middle way and provisional names. Although Jizang's new theory diverged from those of his predecessors, Falang's doctrines in the Three Types of Utterance still influenced Jizang to develop his interpretation of the middle way at three different levels of truth. In fact, Jizang's doctrine synthesizes the two axes of Falang's two truths theory: gradual abandonment and equality. Similar to the levels of truth in Falang's theory, those in Jizang's teachings deepen stage by stage from the conventional truth to the two truths combined. Jizang also repeatedly references the principle of equality, emphasizing the mutual identity of provisional names and the middle way. However, this use of equality to elevate the doctrinal position of the provisional names can be understood as Jizang's adoption of his master's theoretical framework for his own purposes.

The Sanlun School profoundly integrated the framework of the Threefold Middle Way, with each master formulating a meticulous interpretation of this doctrine. While Sengquan and Falang explicated the Threefold Middle Way through a complex and transcendental double negation—such as "neither non-arising nor non-ceasing"—Jizang revised his masters' theories into the simplified negation of "neither arising nor ceasing". Beyond the intrinsic value of understanding this doctrinal evolution, this linearity allows us to methodically retrace the progression of thought throughout the foundational phase of the Sanlun School. Based on the schema outlined in this paper, future research into Sanlun thought should continue to examine Jizang's Threefold Middle Way in comparison to his predecessors to shed light on the significance and originality of Jizang's own philosophy. An additional path for future research could employ the framework of reconstructing Sengquan and Falang's Threefold Middle Way doctrines as a stepping stone to more holistic interpretations of these thinkers' philosophies. Although the doctrines of Sengquan and Falang remain largely unassessed by academia—primarily due to the loss of the original texts—their influence on subsequent Sanlun masters, especially Jizang, is evident through the recurring citations and detailed discussions of these thinkers found in later Sanlun writings. Such references offer an invaluable perspective, facilitating a critical examination of the continuities and divergences between Jizang's theory and those of his predecessors.

Delving deeper into this analysis promises not only to illuminate the doctrinal trajectory within the Sanlun School but also to enrich the broader discourse on the historical evolution of Chinese Buddhist thought. A comparative, evolutionary approach to early Sanlun thinkers could prove fruitful in recovering the legacy of Chinese Buddhism.

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Abbreviations

T	*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 *[Revised Version of the Canon Compiled During the Taisho Era]*. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭 et al. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai 大正一切經刊行會, 1924–1935.
X	*Shinsan Dainihon zokuzōkyō* 卍新纂大日本續藏經 *[Manji Newly Compiled Great Japanese Supplementary Canon]*. Edited by Kawamura Kōshō 河村考照. 90 vols. Tokyo: Kokusho kangyōkai 國書刊行會, 1975–1989.
DNBZ	*Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho* 大曰本佛教全書 *[Complete Collection of Japanese Buddhist Texts]*. Edited by Bussho kankōkai 佛書刊行会. 150 vols. Tokyo: Bussho Kankōkai 佛書刊行会, 1912–1922.

Notes

1 Various hypotheses have been proposed regarding Hyegyun and his origin; however, in an influential study, Choe (2007) posits that the *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* was written by Hyegyun during the Baekje dynasty. This claim is substantiated by an archaeological find: a wooden tablet inscribed with the characters "Bohui sa" 寶憙寺, unearthed at the Neungsan-ri temple site in April 2000 (Choe 2007, pp. 17–18). Numerous monks from the Goguryeo and Baekje kingdoms were known to have followed the teachings of the Sanlun School and to have traveled to China to study Sanlun philosophy.

2 This "fei" 非 character seems to be redundant based on the context. In fact, according to Mitsugiri (1970, p. 36; 1973, pp. 32–33), the manuscript of the "Meaning of Eightfold Negation" 八不義 also does not contain "fei" 非.

3 As above, the "fei" 非 character here is redundant.

4 This mutual identity of the Third Utterance is in contrast to the Second Utterance, where the stages of truth, while signaling a gradual progression, are still independent. In the Second Utterance, if the middle way cannot be attained at the level of the conventional truth, one can reach the concept directly at the level of the ultimate truth, or, using the same logic, at the level of both truths combined. In the process, the middle way becomes a more transcendental form of itself.

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