

Thome H. Fang's Philosophical Position on Chinese Mahayana Buddhism as a Religion and Philosophy

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Abstract

Thome H. Fang was a modern Chinese philosopher who learned Western and Eastern philosophy thoroughly and contributed his efforts to the introduction of Chinese philosophy in the latter part of his life. He compared the three main Chinese schools, though finally believed in Buddhism, and also regarded the Chinese Mahayana Philosophy as the highest philosophical system in human history. The objective of this article is to define his Buddhist philosophy. Thome H. Fang first considered Chinese Mahayana Buddhism as a typical religion and also a philosophical system. Based on this, he spoke on the relation between the three main schools, and suggested that Chinese Mahayana Buddhism had been Sinicized completely. The spirit of Chinese Philosophy regarding containing the world as a united one was also the main position of Mahayana Buddhism, and he extended this belief, which was caused by his significantly expanded worldview. This article will criticize this position, indicating that the so-called Sinicizing characteristic was oriented from traditional Buddhist sutra, and did not occur after its coming to China. Thus, saying Mahayana Buddhism quite like Chinese philosophy was acceptable, though overemphasizing its Sinicizing dimension gave rise to serious debates between the three main Chinese philosophical schools. Furthermore, the issue reveals Thome H. Fang's Chinese philosophical position, which implies that among all the modern Chinese philosophers, Thome H. Fang is the most significant philosopher in upholding Buddhism compared to Confucianism and Taoism through philosophical approaches. This renders his system a different philosophical style than modern Neo-Confucianism.