

“Primeval Chaos” and “Mental Void”
in Early Tokugawa Ideology
— Fujiwara Seika, Suzuki Shōsan and Yamazaki Ansai —

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Tokugawa ideology has traditionally been identified with Neo-Confucianism. However, Fujiwara Seika and Hayashi Razan, the founders of Tokugawa Neo-Confucianism, were not the only teachers that were closely associated with the early Tokugawa bakufu. And neither was Neo-Confucianism the only tradition that was mined for the construction of early Tokugawa ideology. Zen Buddhism, through Suzuki Shōsan, and Shinto, through Yamazaki Ansai, were also marshalled for ideological purposes. Ansai, as all scholars agree, was in addition *the* seventeenth century expert on Neo-Confucianism.

It is striking how central the concept of undifferentiatedness was to the Neo-Confucian, Buddhist and Shinto teachings of Seika, Shōsan and Ansai, respectively. A state of undifferentiatedness in the various guises of a state of mind before thoughts arise, an empty void, or the primeval chaos was not merely one element of their teachings; it was a cardinal concept of their constructs.

However one wishes to qualify these notions of undifferentiatedness—as religious, ethical or even mystical—they certainly pertain to the category of the spiritual. Yet, Seika, Shōsan, and Ansai, genuinely preoccupied as they undoubtedly were with spiritual matters, are also said to have provided the Tokugawa bakufu with a fitting ideology—a doctrine that served political purposes. If indeed the concept of undifferentiatedness was central to their teachings, and if these were politically serviceable, it is perhaps not altogether clear what the link was—if there was any—between this nebulous concept and political values. In what way could a mental or primeval void be ideological? Or perhaps more precisely, how could such notions be manipulated to become ideological? It would be wrong, it seems, to assume that

they are inherently, always and under any circumstances bearers of a political message or that they are always political in the same way. The question thus comes down to the following specifically historical problem: how, at the early Tokugawa juncture, did Seika, Shōsan and Ansai politicize these concepts that share the notion of undifferentiatedness?

To elaborate a bit further, this question forms part of a larger problematic concerning the political status of Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism and Shinto during the early Tokugawa period. The reason is that much more was involved during the early seventeenth century than the emancipation of Neo-Confucianism from the confines of the Buddhist establishment. This traditional framing of the problem is incomplete. At the hands of Shōsan and Ansai respectively, Zen Buddhism and Shinto were also set free of institutional, clerical bondage. I would, however, not describe this process in only institutional terms because that conveys the impression that nothing happened at the level of doctrine; that only the locus of dispersion of these doctrines was displaced from monastic institutions and theological houses to unattached teachers. To a significant degree the character of these doctrines also changed. They became politicized or, to use an even more awkward term, "ideologized."

Perhaps this thesis may sound plausible as far as the practical and ethical aspects of these teachings are concerned, but can it also apply to the concept of undifferentiatedness which is far more elusive and vague? Still, if indeed this concept is central to these teachings, then one presumes it ought to have been affected by this ideological transformation. This is what I shall attempt to demonstrate.

Before engaging in this argument, something has to be said about the doctrinal affiliations and political connections of Seika, Shōsan and Ansai. All three of these men were for long periods of their life Zen monks. Seika (1561-1619) was for thirty years. Before turning to Neo-Confucianism, he held the position of Chief Seat, just below that of abbot, at a Gozan temple in Kyoto. Suzuki Shōsan (1579-1655) was a samurai in bakufu service when at age forty he became a monk. Yamazaki Ansai (1618-1682) left the monastery at age twenty-eight to establish a Neo-Confucian school in Kyoto and later in life wrought a synthesis between Neo-Confucianism and Shinto, thus becoming the founder of Kimon Neo-Confucianism and Suika Shinto. These three men had different links to the Tokugawa bakufu. Seika was at home in the capital's high society of courtiers and warriors, but he declined Ieyasu's offer to enter his service. He wrote only two short treatises (totaling no more than seventy pages in a modern edition) for daimyo friends.¹ Shōsan served *daikan* 代官 and *hatamoto* 旗本 in bakufu territories, preached to lower samurai and commoners and published about a dozen works.

Ansai lectured to commoners and daimyo and tutored Hoshina Masayuki, shogunal regent, for seven years (1665-1672). His teachings and publications are quite voluminous.

Fujiwara Seika

Fujiwara Seika was very ecumenical in his approach to Neo-Confucianism, or perhaps one should say to Chinese learning. He also held a holistic view of truth. Unlike his student Razan (SGT 13, pp. 85-86, 99, 108, 123), and certainly unlike Ansai, Seika refused to attach any importance to differences within the overall tradition. His focus was on the sameness underlying the differences (SGT 13, pp. 86, 90, 99). His aim was sagehood through a total immersion in the teachings by experiencing them in mind and body: to become totally suffused by the truth with a mind stilled and fully at ease (SGT 13, pp. 86, 91). He expressed his preference for those Chinese scholars who also stressed the experiential side of Neo-Confucianism. Hence his enthusiasm for Li T'ung's method of quiet sitting to reach the inner harmony of a subconscious state of mind (*seiza mihatsu no chū* 静坐未発の中), for Ch'en Hao's practice of "sincerity and reverence," and for Lin Chao-en's meditative practice of "stilling in the back" (SGT 13, p. 98; NST 28, pp. 195-196; de Bary and Bloom 1979, pp. 131-132).

This preoccupation with the "inner" marks Seika's teachings. He relied very heavily on the particular way the teachings of the Mind-and-Heart School and Lin Chao-en had developed the spiritualistic tenets of Neo-Confucianism, a tendency that he pushed even further. For instance, according to Seika, rites are not simply rules of etiquette. They are norms of heavenly principle (NST 28, p. 32). His interpretation of the key Neo-Confucian text, the *Great Learning*, is even more revealing in this respect.

This text, according to Seika, abolishes several distinctions: the one between "self" and "others" (because "illuminating virtue" consists of "nurturing the people") and the one between "inner" and "outer" (because "resting in the highest excellence" consists of the former two, "illuminating virtue" and "nurturing the people"; NST 28, pp. 51-52). Now, Seika stresses that these three categories are not, as Chu Hsi maintains, a matter of progressive functional learning. According to him they express ready-made essences. Illustrious virtue is not achieved; it is inborn in the form of the Five Relationships (NST 28, pp. 45, 47, 55). These secure order in the realm and hence are also called "order/submission virtues" (*juntoku* 順徳; NST 28, p. 46). The "resting of the mind" refers to the mind being ruled by reverence. "Supreme excellence" refers to the penetrating non-manifest state of total excellence, the sudden and total penetration of harmony. One notices

how the language is almost Zen-like. Now—and this is important—this state of supreme excellence, suffused with harmony, is the source of all action; the essence from which follow the functions of illuminating virtue and nurturing the people (NST 28, pp. 51-52).

This stillness of mind consists of the absence of all differentiating thought. This is crucial because it dictates Seika's inner-directed interpretation of the "investigation of things." "Things" for Seika are things of desire. Hence the whole phrase stands for the acquisition of the correct, innate knowledge of the mind (NST 28, pp. 43, 54). This knowledge is present from the beginning and cannot be tapped or activated, that is, brought out from the outside. Anything outer is a speck of defilement producing thoughts that are not born by themselves, naturally, from the harmonious, still, undifferentiated void of the highest excellence. Therefore, the "things" of "the investigation of things" must be avoided: they are the dust that clouds the mind's mirror and have to be "removed," not "investigated" (NST 28, p. 55).

This is a heady ideal of innerdirectedness that is almost hermetically, even hermitically, closed to the outside world. How could these highminded teachings of a pre-thought state of mind have any political value for Seika's audience, an audience, after all, that consisted of warlords preoccupied with maintaining the gains achieved by warfare and the use of brute force? Seika himself filled in the practical applications—if that is what they are. In this same short text, Seika also asserts that the people need teachings and nurturing but, he adds, if the teachings are not obeyed then one should resort to punishments (*kei* 刑) and military force (*hei* 兵). Moreover, the people ought to be productive. The occupations of the four classes of people should be useful. There should be no idlers; the fields should improve (NST 28, pp. 42, 75).

Thus, next to Seika's demanding innerworldly ascetic ideal of detachment, we find a blank support for military coercive force (one, it should be noticed, that ought to promote productivity, which is to say income for the warriors). There is obviously no intrinsic link between the two, between this ideal of an undifferentiated mind as the source of all action and military domination, and yet their very juxtaposition creates a connection, tenuous perhaps but real nevertheless; one that I would argue to be ideological.

Ideological in the following way. Elite members of a new ruling class had just come to power on the strength of sheer coercive force and were seeking foremost to preserve the fruits of their military victories. They came to Seika—he did not seek them out. By associating with him, they enhanced their image. Indeed they modified it for the better because now they were, for everyone to see, not simply warlords but also seekers of enlightenment. Their overriding concerns were strategic and political. However, in as far as

Seika's advice to them addressed solipsistic spiritual questions that had as their sole social dimension an assumed emanation of exemplary virtue (in a context, however, of rule by the sword), to that extent Seika showed them a way to obfuscate, or at least push into the background, the reality of their political domination by means of an ethico-metaphysical discourse. In addition, the message seemed to have been that teachings, that is words, can—or at least might be able to—function as a substitute for swords. Bare as this doctrine may appear, it looks very much like ideology; the kind that must have appealed to warlords during the first two decades of the seventeenth century when Seika was teaching and they were consolidating their domination.²

Suzuki Shōsan

Suzuki Shōsan's very career illustrates this relationship between the sword and the word, between domination and ideology. He had been an active samurai in three major campaigns against Tokugawa enemies (at Sekigahara and twice in Osaka) when in 1620 (one year after Fujiwara Seika died) he became a monk and made it his business to further the cause of Tokugawa power through his teachings in *daikan* and *hatamoto* territories (among others in Amakusa after the Shimabara rebellion). He provided, in other words, the teachings Seika had suggested could replace the sword.

Ideology, as we have seen, is among other things a continuation of warfare by other means. It does so by providing a certain perspective on the state of the world and one's place in it. As a perspective it is limited, but it does not admit to being merely a perspective, one opinion about the world. It presents itself as the complete truth. In that sense of course it is not unlike religion. Very specifically, however, ideology obfuscates a power perspective on society.

Since Shōsan, through his teachings, rendered a *political* service to the new bakufu, it is perhaps not unfair to characterize the world he lived in in political terms as a system of domination by a small warrior class over the mass of commoners. If this sounds too one-sided a perspective, one will have to admit at least that the world was *also* that. After all, the Shimabara rebellion of 1637 happens to mark the midpoint of Shōsan's Buddhist career which lasted from 1620 until his death in 1655; the Shimabara rebellion which Shōsan's brother helped crush and where, after the bakufu's victory, he himself helped in an ideological mopping-up operation (see Aomori 1979, pp. 3-18). Yet, Shōsan's whole endeavour consists of persuading his audience that domination did not exist—unlike Andō Shōeki who saw not only domination but outright exploitation all around him. In the sense that

he used Zen Buddhism to project such an image, one can say that Shōsan “ideologized” Zen Buddhism.

What then was society like according to Shōsan? Politically, Shōsan identified the Tokugawa regime with the dispensation of sagely government (*seiōseiji* 聖王正治; SZ, p. 291). He sees it as an ideal environment within which to achieve one’s spiritual destiny, one much better suited for this purpose than the monastery (SZ, p. 239). The laws of the government provide one, Shōsan maintains, with the indispensable ascetic setting within which to annihilate the self and attain Buddhahood (SZ, p. 226).

No other techniques are needed. Hence Shōsan’s emphasis, reiterated again and again, that the world’s teachings are the Buddha’s teachings (SZ, pp. 61, 64, 203, 233, 251, 293, 328). The two are not merely complementary—he implicitly rejects the two-wheels metaphor—but identical. There is no sacred realm separate from the world.

From this redefinition of the polity as a sacred totality follow a number of consequences. First of all, unlike in political society where man is defined along a domination-subordination axis as ruler or subject, superior or inferior, Shōsan sees all members of society as interlocked in multiple interdependency along *on* 恩 coordinates. In this way everyone relates not simply to a segment but to the whole that, because of its demands, provides everyone with ascetic opportunities for salvation.

Life is thus structured by obligations one contracts for being a recipient of *on*, generosity, that flows from multiple sources: Heaven and Earth, one’s teachers, the lord of the land (who provides peace) and one’s parents. But there are also the *on* of the peasants, tradesmen, cloth makers, merchants and of all occupations (SZ, pp. 52, 53, 63, 75, 77, 85, 291). All *kashoku* 家職, or family occupations, fill the needs of the world and not (primarily at least) private needs, and because they are thus redefined as service (*hōkō* 奉公), and their practitioners as officials (*yakunin* 役人) or servants, all occupations are Buddhist practice.³ In other words, one’s life task is to repay this *on* to the whole. In this way one abolishes the distinction between “self” and “others” (which, as we have seen was also a point made by Seika; SZ, p. 63). Even one’s body does not belong to oneself (SZ, pp. 50, 163, 228, 297).

Moreover, the totality one thus serves does not consist simply of all members of society added together, the “population.” Through the performance of one’s occupation (an assigned occupation, not a chosen one), one becomes an official of the Way of Heaven. Peasant labor is not heavy toil to meet tax quotas; it is transfigured into service to Heaven and an exercise in emptying the mind (SZ, pp. 68, 69). A doctor should not think of what he will charge for medicine or anything else, Shōsan suggests, but be firm in his mind that he is Heaven’s official, hurl his body and soul to the

world and, entrusting himself to Heaven, single-mindedly dispense his medical skills (SZ, p. 264).

Shōsan's ethical agenda is simple: through application to one's work one has to erase oneself, be one with emptiness, achieve no-mind, no-thought (*munen* 無念, *mushin* 無心, SZ, p. 160; *muga no kokoro* 無我の心, SZ, pp. 63, 290-291). The aim is to destroy the mind, the discriminating, calculating, evaluating, ratiocinating mind (SZ, p. 59). Like Fujiwara Seika, Shōsan held that all action stems from no-mind and no-thought. He once asked, on the subject of all virtues, what it was that showed up in action or practice; what, in other words, its substance was. To this question, a layman replied: "emancipation," meaning non-worldliness, detachment from desire (*shutsuri* 出離). "Emancipation is emancipation, all right," Shōsan commented, "but it would have been better if you had said that no-mind and no-thought is the substance. It is from there that everything comes into action. When you are in a state of no-mind and no-thought, you are in tune with everything" (SZ, p. 160). This state, he also said, is our original mind (SZ, p. 53).

Differentiating between things, even between good and evil, is bad. "What shall we judge to be good and bad?" Shōsan asks. His answer: "We must realize that all things are truly one" (SZ, p. 56). These matters, he seems to suggest, are decided for us by the world, by society, namely by the powers that be. (Shōsan was, perhaps even more so than Seika, an advocate of strong shogunal rule.)

The ideological dimension of Shōsan's thought stands out clearly. The main obstacle to the necessary functional integration of Tokugawa society was autonomy or secession from the whole whereby one pitted oneself or one's group, class or region against the larger whole. Yet, separateness or "apartheid" (*sabetsu* 差別) was a cardinal feature of the Tokugawa polity and had been imposed by coercive force: the new system served foremost the interests of a new class, set apart from the remainder of society. The problem of this ruling class consisted of maintaining such separateness, in order to continue reaping the fruits of military conquest, while minimizing the potential of secession or withdrawal this entailed. Shōsan provided *spiritual* (instead of real) ammunition to maintain people in that precarious balance between separateness and secession. This ideology is expressed unambiguously in his comments on the rōnin plot of 1651 against the bakufu, led by Yui Shōsetsu and Marubashi Chūya. The context for this discussion of politics is important and deserves full citation. One of Shōsan's disciples reports the episode as follows:

One day, a practitioner of Shingaku came and asked about the essence of the Teachings. The Master replied: "Buddha's teachings do not rule the body through judgmental distinctions

(*funbetsu* 分別). Unless one does not think of what will be left [after death], makes no judgments about the future, and goes beyond the emptying of the one thought of the present moment, one will not use [the mind, body, or self] in purity. The ancients, therefore, when they recommended foremost to value time, meant that by actively guarding one's mind and shaking off thoughts of good and evil, one should separate oneself from oneself. Moreover, to correct the mind, it is good to observe the principles of karma. For instance, although people hate me, I do not hate them back. Why would people hate me without reason? I should wonder whether it is not because of karma, and ponder what kind of karma it could be. That is the way I should criticize myself. Keeping the order of karma that governs everything, one should not act on judgment (*funbetsu no shioki subekarazu* 分別ノ仕置スベカラズ). Moreover to act on judgment is useless. Last year, two bad fellows, Chūya and Shōsetsu were killed instantly after they attempted a plot. They had swallowed whole the notion that if one makes good judgments, things will turn out alright. Be that as it may, Heaven forgave them! In all things, nothing happens in accordance with judgment. Everything happens according to the order of Heaven. If you observe this well, your mind will be greatly purified (SZ, pp. 175-176).

In this passage, Shōsan unveils the linkage between his teachings and politics. The "essence of the Teachings" his visitor inquires about points to a political stance so important that it rules over life and death. In this text, Shōsan contrasts two series of oppositions:

Negative	vs.	Positive
judgmental distinctions		shaking off thoughts of right and wrong
taking time seriously		concentrating on the present moment only
reacting in time, in accordance with judgments on society		emptying one's mind, self-criticism
basing judgments on perceived reason		reading situations according to karma

calculating that things could change according to reason	things happen according to Heaven
evaluation: uselessness	assumption: usefulness
result: death	result: purity

On the one hand, we see a negative value-perception-action cluster of political initiative culminating in death; on the other, the religious practice of guarding an undifferentiating mind to instill political acquiescence and achieve purity—a summation of the ideology that unifies all Shōsan's teachings. Perhaps the most salient aspect of Tokugawa society was the hierarchical social and political cleavage between rulers and ruled. Shōsan's stance toward this reality is that its political truth should not be objectified as such in thought but should be misrecognized through religious significations.

Perhaps students of religion will argue that Shōsan's teachings are Zen pure and simple and that one cannot label them as ideological unless one is ready to maintain that all Zen is ideology. One could respond, however, that Shōsan was an agent of the bakufu who very actively promoted these views. He even hoped that the bakufu would eventually declare his kind of Buddhism the only right one, the only useful one, the only true one (SZ, pp. 61, 141, 159, 161, 189, 225, 259). It is in this light that one should consider Shōsan's war on discriminating judgment and his emphasis on reducing in one's mind (but not in social reality) the distinction between oneself and others (SZ, p. 287). The only thing we have to fear, he says, is our mind. In Buddha's mind, there is no discrimination (*sabetsu*), only great compassion (SZ, p. 297). One therefore has to quit the mind that discriminates between all things, and dwell in the One Mind; this very mind is to be used in all endeavors whatsoever (SZ, p. 63). This one empty, rather than the discriminating, mind is the tool given to man to meet the preordained diversity of the world: "Although the blessings of Heaven and Earth do not change, there are differences between one thing and another. . . but we must realize that all things are truly one" (SZ, p. 56). Shōsan's mental discipline blinds one to the political importance of social apartheid. It asks one to falsely recognize a system of domination (which the world *also* is) as something completely different.

Yamazaki Ansai

The third thinker to be preoccupied with undifferentiatedness is Yamazaki Ansai. He rejected Buddhism with a passion and gave us the reasons why.

What he most objected to in Buddhism was the very point that Shōsan cherished most, indeed the only good thing that Shōsan found in Buddhism, namely its theory of the emptiness of mind. As we shall see, however, Ansai eventually found his way back to that very notion through Neo-Confucian and Shinto categories. In his maiden work, *Hekii* 闢異, or *Heresies Refuted*, written soon after he left the monastery, he states that Buddhism's crucial fallacy lay in the thesis that nature (*sei* 性) is emptiness or nothingness (NNS 17, p. 195)—a traditional Neo-Confucian argument. Consequently, Buddhism lacked a theory of mind-heart (NNS 17, pp. 234-235). Neo-Confucianism, on the other hand, held to a fullness of mind, programed as it was by the Five Relationships that were governed by the Five (inborn) Virtues (NNS 17, pp. 189-190, 230-233).

Actually, of course, the Buddhist theory of the mind's emptiness, rather than being a pronouncement about the metaphysical status of the mind as it de facto functions in the world, was an ethical normative ideal to be achieved—like the Five Relationships were—and clearly could, in the hands of a Suzuki Shōsan, serve as the linchpin for a concrete ethic that differed little from Confucian ethics. Nevertheless, in Ansai's view, Buddhism taught that the mind *was* empty and dead, whereas Neo-Confucianism taught that it was full and active. It was especially full, if one may say so, with *kei* (*tsutsushimi* 敬), reverence (NKB 9, p. 70).

Reverence was an ontological, *the* ontological, dimension of the mind—it separates man from the animals (DNB 15, p. 65). Yet Ansai admits what he refuses to admit in relation to the Buddhist *mu* or nothingness of the mind, namely that this “reverence” is also something very fragile and precarious which can be lost. Hence his unrelenting emphasis on the urgency and undivided energy with which one must preserve it: without idleness (*uka to naku* 浮となく), sternly (*kitto* 屹度), with a bouncy energy (*kappatsu hatchi* 活潑々地) and a single-minded concentration (*shuichi* 主一), and constant vigilance because man's moral predicament is an all-or-nothing proposition. The slightest mistake leads to the greatest disasters, which, interestingly enough, he usually exemplifies with the ultimate political evil, namely the killing of one's lord (NKB 9, pp. 72-73, 89). The mind, Ansai also asserts—and the theme is familiar now—is the source of everything (NKB 9, p. 90).

Now, if one looks into Ansai's further elaborations on what pure reverence is, one finds oneself again in the realm of undifferentiatedness, of the pre-thought or empty mind.

Ansai states that it is reverence that fosters Heaven's will, embedded in one's body as the Three Bonds and the Five Relationships—and this is important—at a yet *unmanifested level* (SGT 12, pp. 153-154, 170). Thus

reverence is much more than a modality of behaviour at the practical level or compliance with the ritualistic demands of a minutely hierarchic feudal society. Within the self reverence has no object. Moreover, that is also where it has to be fostered. In other words, reverence has to be cultivated *even in the absence of a social or political context which would enforce its expression*. Ansai mentions the sword only once or twice, almost in passing (NKB 9, pp. 54-55; NST 39, p. 170; DNB 17, pp. 145, 146). For him coercion is totally internal. We are back to the same inner-directedness that typified Seika's thought. Ansai's view of it, however, is more compelling.

How does one go about practicing reverence at an unmanifest level? According to Ansai, this cultivation is based on an *unobjectified* fear. In this context, he quotes two classical texts: the image of the fifty-first hexagram of the *I ching* and the introduction to the *Doctrine of the Mean* (I, 2-3). The first one reads: "Thunder repeated: the image of shock. Thus in fear and trembling the superior man sets his life in order and examines himself" (Wilhelm and Baynes 1950, p. 198). The latter reads: "The path may not be left for an instant. If it could be left, it would not be the path. On this account, the superior man does not wait till he sees things to be cautious, nor till he hears things to be apprehensive. . . . Therefore, the superior man is watchful over himself when he is alone" (Legge 1966, p. 350). Thus Ansai upholds the extreme ascetic ideal of uninterrupted self-watchfulness *even when circumstances do not require it*, a kind of red alert of the mind in a constant state of unmanifested reverence that is based on a purely interior terror of pervasive apprehension and fear that has no object (the "apprehension" of the *Mean* and the "fear and trembling" of the *I ching* are, in fact, the same characters 恐懼). In all fairness to Ansai, however, it should be noted that Seika and Shōsan also speak of the need of a never-abiding self-watchfulness (NST 28, pp. 60-61; SZ, pp. 83-84). Ansai, however, is much more alarmist in his emphasis on this point. Like Seika also, Ansai stressed sincere and total experiential self-realization (*taininjitoku* 体認自得), something that had to be achieved through a form of meditation, "quiet sitting" (*seiza* 静坐).

This ascetic effort, Ansai writes, should concentrate in that nebulous mental state between quietude and movement where the mind has been moved but has not yet manifested itself outward: between the void (*mu* 無), which it is not because the mind has been set in motion, and manifestation (*u* 有), which it is not because no outside traces have appeared yet—in the space (*ma* 間) between wanting to move and not-yet-moving (SGT 12, p. 173). Thus, reverence should penetrate both movement and quietness although it is primarily quietness (NST 13, pp. 103-104, 107).

For anyone with some basic understanding of the main tenets of Neo-

Confucianism, the seesaw movement of Ansai's ever self-qualifying argument, whereby as Derrida would say concepts are forwarded to be immediately erased, is reminiscent of Chu Hsi's discussion of the "Ultimateless yet Supreme Ultimate" from Chou Tun-yi's cosmic diagram. And such association is correct. As Judith Berling has so masterfully shown in her study of Lin Chao-en, that Diagram traces, from top to bottom, the gradual cosmic differentiation out of a primeval void. At the same time, however, it presents a scheme, from bottom to top, of the mind's meditative trajectory from phenomena to the noumenon of the one and empty mind (Berling 1980, p. 126-130). If, therefore, Ansai emphasizes the pre-thought mind, we may expect him to pay particular attention—perhaps more so than is usually done in Neo-Confucianism—to the primeval void of the "Ultimateless yet also Supreme Ultimate." This is indeed what he does.

In Neo-Confucianism, the notions that received the greatest attention were those of "creation" from Yin and Yang on downward and the binary functioning of the various principles within natural and human phenomena. The underlying unity of the cosmos through its emanation from the primeval void, while by no means neglected, was rarely the focus of discussion. Rather this principle of unity functioned as a given. After all, the "Ultimateless yet also Supreme Ultimate" was dangerously close to the empty-void theories of Buddhism. (In this respect it is interesting to note that Berling discusses the importance of the void in the work of a thinker who brought about a synthesis between Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism and who, she says, developed more than any other the religious dimensions of Neo-Confucianism.)

Ansai, however, never stops coming back to the One Principle, the source that penetrates everything, and he seems unconcerned with its proximity to Buddhist heresy (NNS 17, pp. 189-190; ZYAZ 3, pp. 14-29; YAZ 1, pp. 8, 26, 169). He highly privileged the view of the ontological oneness of things. For instance, Ansai published a collection of scholarly commentaries, including his own, on a phrase taken from the *Reflections on Things at Hand*. It reads as follows: "Empty and tranquil, and without any sign, and yet all things are luxuriantly present. The state before there is any response to it is not an earlier one, and the state after there has been response to it is not a later one."⁴ According to Ansai, this state of unperturbed fullness refers both to creation (*zōka* 造化) and to man's mind (*jinshin* 人心; ZYAZ 3, p. 78). He felt that this aspect of the pre-existence of principles and norms, even before they manifest themselves in concrete situations, had not been sufficiently noticed in the past. It is for this reason that he compiled those interpretations which emphasized this point.

Primeval chaos (*konton* 混沌) is also, of course, a Shinto concept. We find

it in the beginning of the creation story of the *Nihongi*. Yet Ansai revaluated this concept in a new way, turning it into a normative exemplar of the mind, and announced the following fundamental principle: “the beginnings of Heaven and Earth are today’s beginnings” (*tenchi no hajime wa kyō o hajime to suru*, NKB 9, p. 90; DNB 17, p. 150). What he means by this is that cosmogonic principles are still at work today, not simply in the “historical” sense that without an initial creation or starting point there would be no “today,” but metaphysically, as functional norms that govern man’s life in the present. More precisely, thoughts originate in man’s mind out of a void, a pregnant void, just like the world evolved out of the primeval chaos.

In Ansai’s teachings, and also in those of Yoshikawa Koretaru, his Shinto mentor, the mental and primeval state of undifferentiatedness is privileged.⁵ However, since they were dealing with the religious language of Shinto mythology, mental processes proceeding toward the original mind become divinization processes. The return to one’s original nature becomes a return to the (pre-creation) gods of Heaven. Men and women become respectively Izanagi and Izanami. Those with a true heart are identified with the first god to emerge out of the primeval chaos, Kunitokotachi. The divine world of undifferentiatedness is the homeland of the no-thought mind. If one reaches the no-thought state, one’s chest empties and a shapeless pillar rises within it. Gods dwell only in empty hearts.⁶ Even elements of folk belief get revalorized in this almost mystical way. The *kōshin* 庚申 monkey of Taoistic origin who covers up his ears, eyes and mouth with his hands—iconographically often pictured as the three hear-no-evil, see-no-evil and speak-no-evil monkeys—does not suggest an effort to block out the senses. Rather, it represents an embryo-like state (it does indeed squat in a crouching position), in other words, a state of undifferentiatedness where the senses are *not yet* activated (DNB 16, p. 443).

What does Ansai’s emphasis on states of undifferentiatedness enable him to say in the realm of ethics and politics? It seems that he proceeds from the notion of undifferentiatedness along two seemingly contradictory paths. One path highlights the discontinuity between the state of undifferentiated and not-yet-manifest being and any differentiations that flow from it; this line is applied to ethics. The other one, based more on the Shinto scheme than the Neo-Confucian diagram, stresses the continuity between that primal divine world (*zōka* 造化) and the world of human affairs (*jinji* 人事), especially the polity.

The former of these two lines highlights the incommensurable difference between the pure One and even the earliest differentiation into Yin and Yang. Yin and Yang are many steps removed from the concrete, individual phenomena, but they constitute the first degree of concreteness. As such,

they are part of the world of phenomena, and hence at the antipodes of the one noumenon. Put simply, it is the difference between nothingness and the world. A similar distance structures ethics. There is, so to speak, a world of difference between total perfection and the slightest mistake, but the tiniest selfish thought is essentially no different from the most hideous crime (“the slaying of the lord”). Cosmic difference and ethical alarmism, for Ansai, are of the same proportions.

The Shinto paradigm, however, allows Ansai to bridge this gap without loosing the tension it generates. Man’s ethical probity receives a divine reward. Man can become *kami*. Moreover, the polity is already sacralized in principle. The emperors and his ministers are descendants of Amaterasu and Kunitokotachi, and even the shogun, who has his divine exemplar in O-ana-muchi, participates in this sacrality. The polity is one, indivisible, and sacred.

Conclusion

In conclusion then, it appears as if the notion of undifferentiatedness in the thought of Seika, Shōsan, and Ansai played similar but increasingly wider ideological roles. Seika, who left us very few writings and who spent the last twenty years of his life in semi-seclusion, did not establish ideological linkages, although it is of some significance that his company was sought by a number of daimyo. Shōsan forged a dynamic ethic around the notion, one that enjoined commoners not simply to be apolitical but to exert themselves productively for society, the world and Heaven which meant the polity. Finally, Ansai established an ethical agenda that vibrated with a never-slackening urgency while at the same time sacralizing the policy (beyond what Shōsan did with his concept of Heaven) into a divine, indivisible whole.

Notes

This paper was first read at the National Convention of the American Academy of Religion in Dallas, Texas on 22 December, 1983. For a more detailed analysis of the thought of Fujiwara Seika, Suzuki Shōsan, and Yamazaki Ansai, see Ooms 1985, pp. 111-143 and 194-286.

1. Fujiwara Seika’s two works are the *Suntetsu roku* 才鉄録 (A record of pithy sayings) and the *Daigaku yōryaku* 大学要略 (Epitome of the *Great Learning*). NST 28, pp. 10-78.

2. The *Suntetsu roku* was written in 1606, the *Daigaku yōryaku* in 1619; the former for Asano Yoshinaga, lord of the 376,000 *koku* Wakayama domain; the latter for Hosokawa Tadatoshi who soon thereafter became daimyo of Kokura and later of Kumamoto (540,000 *koku*) and Yoshinaga's younger brother Nagashige, a retainer of Tokugawa Hidetada. Another famous daimyo disciple was Katō Kiyomasa.
3. *Kashoku*: SZ., pp. 85, 260-261, 295; "filling the world's needs," p. 70; *hōkō*, p. 239; *yakunin*, pp. 69, 71, 264; "Buddhist practice," pp. 68-70.
4. *Chūbakumuchinsetsu* 神漠無脱説. ZYAZ 3, pp. 78-86 (see also SGT 12, p. 178). For the phrase, see Chan 1967, pp. 25-26.
5. Koretaru: "The beginning of creation is the pattern according to which thoughts in man's heart arise." "Jindai no maki Koretaru kōsetsu" 神代卷惟足講説 (Manuscript, 1670. 10 fascicles in 3 vols. Kokuritsu Kōbunshokan Naikaku Bunko) 1, p. 8a.
6. "Gods of Heaven," DNB 15, p. 77; "Izanagi & Izanami," "Koretaru kōsetsu," 2, p. 19; "Kunitokotachi," p. 14; "no-thought mind," DNB 15, p. 291; "shapeless pillar," p. 309; "empty hearts," DNB 15, pp. 17-20 and 17, p. 16.

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- DNB *Dai Nihon bunko* 大日本文庫 (52 vols. Tokyo: Shunyōdō, 1934-1942). 15. *Yoshikawa Shinto* 吉川神道 (1939), 16. *Suika Shinto* (1) 垂加神道(1935), 17. *Suika Shinto* (2) (1937).
- NKB *Nihon kyōiku bunko* 日本教育文庫 (12 vols. Tokyo: Dōbunkan, 1910-1911). 9. *Kyōkasho* 教科書(1911).
- NNS *Nihon no shisō* 日本の思想(20 vols. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1968-1972). 17. *Fujiwara Seika, Nakae Tōju, Kumazawa Banzan, Yamazaki Ansai, Yamaga Sokō, Yamagata Daini shū* 藤原惺窩・中江藤樹・熊沢蕃山・山崎闇斎・山鹿素行・山県大弼集 (1970).
- NST *Nihon shisō taikai* 日本思想大系(67 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970-1982). 28. *Fujiwara Seika, Hayashi Razan* 藤原惺窩・林羅山 (1975), 31. *Yamazaki Ansai gakuha* 山崎闇斎学派 (1980), 39. *Kinsei Shintōron; Zenki Kokugaku* 近世神道論・前期国学 (1972).

- SGT *Shushigaku taikai* 朱子学大系 (15 vols. Tokyo: Meitoku Shuppansha (1974-). 12. *Chōsen no Shushigaku; Nihon no Shushigaku* (1) 朝鮮の朱子学・日本の朱子学 (上) (1977), 13. *Nihon no Shushigaku* (2) 日本の朱子学 (下) (1975).
- SZ *Suzuki Shōsan dōjin zenshū* 鈴木正三道人全集. Edited by Suzuki Tesshin 鈴木鉄心. Tokyo: Sankibo Busshorin, 1962.
- YAZ *Yamazaki Ansai zenshū* 山崎闇斎全集 . 2 vols. (consecutive pagination). Tokyo: Nihon Koten Gakkai, 1936.
- ZYAZ *Zoku Yamazaki Ansai zenshū* 続・山崎闇斎全集. 3 vols. Tokyo: Nihon Koten Gakkai, 1937.

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