7. CONCLUSIONS

This study has had three main goals: First, to show that wabi as an aesthetic and philosophical concept does exist in the Way of Tea (chadô), secondly, to indicate in concrete terms these characteristics of wabi in chadô, and thirdly, to show that familiar notions from the theory of literature should not be used in describing aesthetic and philosophical characteristics of wabi in chadô. I have also tried to show how aesthetic elements of Tea practice are related to the philosophical ideas articulated in classical writings on Tea.

First, my intent was to show that different kinds of wabi beauty exist not only in the rough and simple objects, as wabi is understood in previous studies (Section 6.1), but to ask: Where did these different forms of wabi come from and how did they develop? The answer has already been given: These different forms of wabi as aesthetics emerged from the philosophical basis of the wabi mind, which were combined with poetic ideas found in Teika's and Letaka's poems (Section 5.2). These were given in Nanpôroku to illustrate Jô-ô's and Rikyû's senses of wabi in chadô. The historical development of Tea has also influenced this process: Shukô focused on the philosophical aspects of Tea, calling Tea 'a Way' (michi) in his letter called Kokoro no Fumi. The style of his Tea is described in Yamanoue Sôjiki using the metaphor of 'the snowy trees on distant mountains', suggesting the sense of austerity in his Tea. Jô-ô emphasised the aesthetic aspects of Tea and continued Shukô's tradition by developing it more towards the austere and modest wabi style, but also by infusing Tea with an element of luxury. Jô-ô believed that the basis of Tea studies is studying the old masters and learning the proper style (studying the great famed, luxurious utensils), which he called, shôfûtei (Section 3.1). Rikyû turned this learning process around by saying that learning should proceed from the wabi style to the formal style. This means that the true understanding of the luxurious utensils is attained only after one has reached the full comprehension of the modest and humble style (Section 3.2). Both Tea masters, Jô-ô and Rikyû, did not deny the existence of the luxurious wabi, even though the nature of their Tea was different. Jô-ô's luxury was more stable and calm, which he expressed indirectly by using shadows to diminish its brilliance. Rikyû's luxury, on the other hand, was more direct and possessed the sense of lightness and vitality based on a minimalist concept of subtle beauty (sections 4.5, 5.2, and 6.2.1).

My second aim was to show that the different forms of wabi, such as the luxurious wabi, golden wabi, chill calmness, austerity and absolute subtleness de-
scribeing wabi as an aesthetic concept, are based on the realisation and true comprehension of the wabi mind; they can occur only if the state of wabi mind is attained. This state is an interaction between person, item and place. A person who has attained the state of wabi mind can choose and combine items suitable for the wabi style of Tea and can also select items illustrating the spirit of wabi on that occasion and in that place. In other words, a person may possess the wabi mind (wabi kokoro), but an item or a place may convey the wabi heart, the wabi spirit (wabi kokoro). Without the realisation of the wabi mind(heart), these are only expressions of a pitiful person or plain luxury and plain poverty in the outer appearance of the place or item.

In this study, it has been shown that the philosophical aspects of wabi focus on the idea of the wabi mind, which is also a necessary condition for the understanding of wabi beauty, the wabi spirit in objects. But what does this wabi mind really mean? It may sound like a complicated and abstract concept when it is described as cultivating one's mind through spiritual training in order to attain a higher level of consciousness, true understanding, and finally reaching the ultimate state of mind and becoming one with the original Buddha nature. In this state, all acts become natural and one has reached the absolute freedom of heart from the detachments of worldly affections for the true mastery in Tea. In practice, the wabi mind means the essential nature of the self that is found through spiritual training: living a modest life and being satisfied with one's life as such without having any desires for better conditions whatsoever. First of all, one has to possess a freedom from worldly matters in order to attain the freedom of the pure world of the Buddha. In between remains the spiritual training of everyday life (see Chapter 2 for details). Based on the chadô-related classical sources, I have set forth seven characteristics describing the wabi mind which are as follows: the absolute freedom of the heart (jiyû), straightforward heart (jikishin), candour (shôjikî), sincerity (makoto), the true nature of the Buddha (bushô), spiritual training (shugyô), and naturalness (tennen).

This raises a question: Why did these forms of wabi as an aesthetic and philosophical concept not occur in poetry, even though wabi was a term of poetry before it became a term of chadô? As a term of poetry, wabi was used mostly in negative connotations expressing melancholy, straitened circumstances in one's life, or desperate feelings because of unsatisfactory love affairs. The first clear change in the use of wabi in poetry occurred after it was introduced as a term of chadô through Bashô's poems, which turned the idea of poverty and straitened circumstances also to convey positive values (Section 5.1.2). Bashô's use of wabi seems, however, more like enduring or bearing the hardness of life than being satisfied with one's life as such. Even though Bashô admits insufficiency is he not
still bitter that life did not, after all, go as he wished. In this sense, Bashō’s wabi is close to the idea of wabi in Tea, yet it is not the same. Bashō’s name is usually connected to his use of the word sabi in poetry (Bashō’s sabi). After being adapted as a term of chadô, the word wabi came to possess philosophical and aesthetic meanings it did not have earlier in poetry. But it cannot be denied that the meanings of wabi in poetry may have been influenced by the meanings of wabi in chadô in its stoic asceticism and austerity.

The third aim of the study was to prove that wabi and sabi should be understood as separate terms in Tea. In previous studies in the field, wabi and sabi are used as a pair, wabi-sabi (sections 1.2.1 and 5.1.2), to describe primarily aesthetic values in Tea, but describing philosophical values as well, as found in Suzuki Daisetsu’s study Zen and Japanese Culture (1988). It has been shown in this study that wabi and sabi are both terms of literature and are closely related. Despite this relationship, wabi, not sabi, was adopted to be used to describe aesthetic and philosophical values in Tea during the time of the Great Tea Masters Shukô, Jô-ô and Rikyû. In Tea-related classics, sabi is used only a few times to illustrate a lonely place, the feeling of living in solitude (in Nampôroku), or on one occasion as an opposite idea to the old and valuable utensils, describing something plain, simple and ordinary (in Chawashigetsushû). In this latter meaning, sabi is used in a sense similar to the meanings of wabi in other Tea-related classical texts. However, it seems to refer to the outer features, lacking the idea of wabi mind or wabi spirit in objects. This leads to the one great difference in the use of these two terms: Wabi may describe some characteristics of a person (wabihito), but sabi is not used in this kind of compound word because sabi is essentially a term of style (fûtei) or feelings. Wabi can be used as a term of style (fûtei) or feelings, but it also describes some spiritual and physical characteristics of a person.

Last, I would like to discuss the two well-known sayings in Tea by Shukô and Jô-ô, which are quite frequently used to describe wabi as an aesthetic concept. Shukô’s sense of wabi in Tea is described in the saying ‘it is fine to tie a praised horse to a thatched hut’ and Jô-ô’s with the phrase that ‘tea should also, in the end, resemble the style of cold, lean and withered’ (karekashikete samui). Both of these metaphors express the sense of wabi in Tea, but which one is more wabi-like?

For me, Shukô’s words illustrate wabi in its original meaning (similar to the concept of honsuki, see Section 4.2.1.3), the idea of contrasting elements in Tea as

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869 See also Kurasawa 1992b, pp. 229-233. Kurasawa also sees that Bashô was not totally “free” from the idea of wabi conveying the ideas of insufficiency and lack of freedom in the hardness of everyday life.


871 Yamanoue Sôjiki, p. 97.
well as the acceptance of owning and using famed Chinese tea utensils in addition to the native Japanese or other foreign (mostly South-east Asian) tea utensils, which were plainer, simpler, and more modest in their feeling and outer appearance. More wabi-like is, however, Jô-ô's idea of wabi conveying the feeling of 'cold, lean and withered' (karekashikete samui) in the style and in the outer appearance of Tea in general, which Rikyû developed into the form of Tea known today. In tea-rooms this means small and modest tea-rooms like three or one-and-a-half-tatami rooms with earthen walls and a thatched roof. In tea utensils, the fresh-water container called Onioke (Devil's Bucket) is one of the most representative items of this group of wabi utensils. The sense and style of 'cold, lean and withered' means not only plain simplicity or plain modesty in the choice of tea utensils or in the building materials for the tea-room, but also simplicity and modesty born of a true understanding of the wabi mind (the essence of wabi/wabi no hon'i) as explained in Chapter 2. Moreover, the Great Tea Masters' realisation of the wabi mind has opened our eyes also to see wabi beauty in the objects that were not traditionally included in the group of wabi utensils, such as the sorori type of flower vase (Plate 17a), or tsurukubi (Crane's Neck; see 4.3.2 or 4.4.2 and the Appendix, item no. 76). Other examples include Eitoku's painting called Kaede, Maple Leaves, and Hideyoshi's Golden tea-room with its astonishing use of gold and colours, but their form, lines and construction are very simple if you imagine them without colours. The use of gold is typical of Japanese Buddhist paintings, in which gold is used to separate this world from the other world, the Buddha world, which is one of the leading themes in explaining wabi as a philosophical concept (Section 2.3.5). In Chapter 6, I have described these forms of wabi and discussed some of their variations.

The given characteristics of wabi as a philosophical and an aesthetic concept do not represent the absolute truth, or the only possibility, but rather one way of thinking and analysing the matter based on the material used at this time and place. It also leaves an open road for further studies to continue this theme and to introduce a different way of considering the aesthetic and philosophical aspects of wabi in chádô, the Way of Tea.