WABICHA AND THE PERCEPTION OF BEAUTY IN WOOD-FIRED CERAMICS

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Declaration of Originality

I, Ian Nicholas Jones ………………………..( ), 2016 hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.
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Abstract

Wabicha and the Perception of Beauty in Wood-fired Ceramics

I developed a passion for the surface effects found on Japanese wood-fired pottery when I read the book, The Heritage of Japanese Ceramics, by Fujio Koyama in 1975. In retrospect this was a significant moment in my life, for the unglazed ceramics from Shigaraki, Bizen, Tokoname, and Tamba that are shown in that book set the trajectory of my making career—unglazed pottery fired in large cross-draught kilns with the deposits of ash from the fire melting and glazing the surface.

In recent years, wood-firing has become a major contributor to the world of contemporary ceramics. My research started as an attempt to better understand the sources that contributed to the aesthetic of wood-firing that was reported and discussed in conferences and magazines.

This Dissertation contends that the seminal process, which formed an aesthetic of wood-firing, was the development of the philosophy of wabi in the period between 1450 and 1600 during the creation of the wabi Tea ceremony, wabicha. I maintain that without wabi and wabicha, the surface effects of wood-firing would not be seen as beautiful.

In my Dissertation I investigate the sources of wabi, its development alongside the development of the Japanese Tea Ceremony, its transmission through to the twentieth century, its role in the aestheticisation of wood-firing, and its rediscovery and re-invention in the 1930s. I then look at its cross-cultural transfer to the global ceramic community as a foundation for the current widespread interest in wood-firing.

This Dissertation constitutes two-thirds of my theory-led research project.
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Note to the Reader

Natural ash glazed wood-firing is the primary ceramic process explored in this dissertation. There are many terms used to define the qualities that can be described as the ‘wood-fire aesthetic’—terms such as the Japanese term shizen-yu (lit. natural glazing), the Bizen-Shigaraki aesthetic (named after two pottery centres in Japan), long wood-firing (as kilns are normally fired for three, four or more days to achieve the sought-after qualities)\(^1\) or the anagama aesthetic, after the type of kiln that historically generated these qualities. For the sake of simplicity, within this dissertation I will, unless otherwise noted, restrict the meaning of the terms ‘wood-firing’ or ‘wood-fire aesthetic’ to the types of wares mentioned above, disregarding the fact that wood-firing has historically been the main source of fuel utilised in a myriad of different methods of producing ceramics, varying from low-temperature bonfire firing through to the production of ornate Sèvres porcelain figures.

Where a term is used to describe both a historical period or person and a type of ware I will italicise it where it is used for the type of ware, for example Silla Dynasty, *silla* pottery.

The wood-fire aesthetic that is of interest in my research utilises the wood-ash produced by the combustion of wood in the kiln, allowing it to interact with the clay of the ceramic forms, where it changes the colour of the clay bodies or melts to form a glass on the surface—a natural glazing process.

Within this dissertation, I have chosen to capitalise first letter of the word Tea when it is used in reference to the ritualised consumption of tea to differentiate it from the dried leaf used in the preparation of the beverage, or tea consumed in a non-ritualised fashion.

I have utilised the modified Hepburn system for Romanizing Japanese words. Japanese names are presented in the traditional Japanese order, family name followed by given name, except in the cases of Japanese-Americans such as Isamu

\(^1\) Generally, one of the requirements of this type of firing is that pots are fired over long periods of time, usually three days or more, and that large quantities of fuel are burned. The ash component of wood, the non-organic mineral oxides that react with the silica in clay to produce a glazed surface are typically around 0.2% of the dry weight of wood so large amounts of fuel are required to produce a small volume of ash.
Noguchi where the person is generally known in the Western manner. There are also instances within medieval Japan where this rule does not apply uniformly, as in the case of Furuta Oribe (known as Oribe) and Korobi Enshu (known as Enshu).
Introduction

It is my contention in this dissertation that the seminal process which formed an aesthetic of wood-firing was the development of the philosophy of wabi in the period between 1450 and 1600 during the creation of the wabi Tea-ceremony, wabicha. The introduction of simple, unglazed wood-fired ceramics into the Tea-ceremony placed them in a position where their qualities were studied, categorised, aestheticised and reproduced. I maintain that without the development of the aesthetic of wabi and wabicha, potters would not produce the wood-fired work they make today, and should they accidently produce those qualities of surface, we would not see these effects as ‘beautiful’. This dissertation seeks to make a contribution to an understanding of wood-fired ceramics by establishing the roots of this aesthetic in late-medieval Japan and tracing its transmission over time and space to the contemporary international context.

Since the late 1970s, wood-firing has gained importance as a process utilised by potters in many countries around the world in their production of ceramic objects, both sculptural and functional. This new wood-firing movement has not been based just on the combustion of wood for the generation of the heat necessary for the melting of glazes and the maturing of clay bodies as has historically occurred; rather, it has been based on an aesthetic that uses the wood fire as a partner in the decorative processes involved in the production of ceramics. This aesthetic originally developed in Japan, and it is only within Japan that this style of ceramic has been traditionally valued and aestheticised. In this dissertation I will explore the relationship between this wood-fire aesthetic and the development of the aesthetic known as wabi in the period between 1450 and 1600 in Japan. Much of this development was fostered by social changes that occurred in the port city of Sakai, caused by the blurring of the social boundaries between the aristocracy and the military classes on the one hand and the merchant class on the other, as the military became dependant on the merchants for weapons and gun-powder during the decades of turmoil that enveloped Japan. The aesthetic of wabi was created in the context of the developing ritual of wabicha—the style of presentation of tea that evolved into chanoyu, the Japanese Tea ceremony. This relationship between the Tea-ceremony and wabi is significant as it has meant that wabi, as an aesthetic, has a
focus on the object. It is my contention that it is this development of the aesthetic of wabi that has encouraged and guided the development of an aesthetic of wood-fired ceramics; it is wabi that allows us to see wood-fired ceramics as beautiful. From the beginnings in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the aesthetic of wabi, and the impact it has had on the development of an aesthetic of the wood-fired object has undergone many transformations and transfers, both temporal and spatial, leading to a contemporary wood-fired practice that is far removed from its conception in the simple Tea-room. However, my thesis is that, in Japan and elsewhere in the world, our ability today to see the wood-fired surface as beautiful is an outcome of the development of the aesthetic of wabi during the period in which the modern chanoyu developed in Japan.

Japanese wood-fired works: Bizen and Shigaraki Wares

The wood-fired wares that were introduced into the Tea-ceremony, and therefore are the source of the wood-fire aesthetic at the centre of this dissertation, came from the kilns of Shigaraki and Bizen. While I explore the qualities of wood-fired ceramics more thoroughly in Chapter 5, something should be said at this point about the qualities of these pots and the effects of the wood-firing process on these wares. Bizen-yaki and Shigaraki-yaki are the pots from, respectively, the district of Imbe in Okayama Prefecture (in what was the old Bizen Prefecture) and the valley of Shigaraki in Ōmi province (modern day Shiga Prefecture). Bizen and Shigaraki are regarded as two of the Rokukoyo, the six ancient kiln sites of Japan, and probably developed out of the Sue-period (6th century to end of 12th century) ceramic tradition, although there is little evidence of a continuity of tradition from Sue to medieval in regard to Shigaraki. During the Sue and medieval periods, the wares were fired in anagama, tunnel kilns originally dug out of hillsides, and using the slope of the hill to provide a natural draught, which enabled temperatures of over twelve-hundred degrees Celsius to be achieved. This style of kiln was used until the end of the sixteenth century when the technology for noborigama, multi-chambered climbing

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2 Uenishi Setsuo, “Bizen-ware Ceramics” in Chanoyu Quarterly, no 38, 1984, 7. The concept of the six ancient kilns—Shigaraki, Bizen, Echizen, Tokoname, Tamba, and Seto—is a fairly arbitrary one; as Ueneshi Setsuo points out in “Bizen Ware Ceramics” there are now known to be twenty or more medieval kiln sites.
kilns, was transferred from Korea by potters brought to Japan during Hideyoshi’s invasions of the Korean peninsula in the early 1590s.

Figure 1: Momoyama Period Bizen flower vase said to have been made under the guidance of Furuta Oribe.
The characteristic qualities of the wares from Bizen and Shigaraki come from the interaction between the ash produced by the wood used to fire the anagama-style kilns with the local clays found in the particular pottery districts. The kilns were relatively inefficient, and firings of three or four days would be required to successfully achieve the stoneware temperatures necessary to provide a vitreous product from the unglazed clay, and the long firing meant that large quantities of ash from the wood used as fuel would be deposited on the clay surface.

*Bizen-yaki* uses a high-iron, fine and plastic clay which is dug from under rice fields and from the surrounding mountains. It produces reddish-brown stoneware with blues and greys where the ash builds up. The high plasticity makes it a very good clay for wheel-work, but prone to cracking during firing, requiring slow temperature rise and long firing times.

*Shigaraki-yaki* uses clay with lower iron content, which is essentially decomposed granite. The clay is textured by a fine, feldspathic gravel, which makes it only suitable for coil-building and crude wheel-work unless heavily refined. The inferior working characteristics of Shigaraki clay, combined with the poor skills of the farmer/potters gave a clumsy and rough, often asymmetrical, form and surface to the medieval wares. The finished pots tended to orange-brown surfaces with white spots from melting feldspar. Heavy ash deposits produced a green running glass, contrasting with the orange tones of the clay.

The aesthetic paradigm shift required to place these peasant pots into the refined space of the Tea-ceremony on an equal standing with the perfection of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) celadon-glazed vases and tenmoku-glazed Tea-bowls is what makes the development of the *wabi*-style Tea-ceremony and the aesthetic of *wabi* so important. This aesthetic appreciation of the wood-fired object was rediscovered and reinvented in Shigaraki and Bizen in the twentieth century, eventually leading to the creation of a vibrant international wood-fire movement today.
Figure 2: *Utsukumaru* jar with cypress fence pattern. Shigaraki, Muromachi Period, 15th century.
Synopsis of Chapters

In the first chapter I consider the development of tea drinking in China and the introduction of tea into Japan. I examine the styles of consumption of tea used prior to the development of wabicha, and the nature of the ceramics used in performance of this earlier drinking of tea in Muromachi Japan.

Chapter 2 explores the transformation of these earlier styles of tea drinking into wabicha, looking at the roles of the three tea-masters credited with developing the modern Tea-ceremony: Murata Jukō, Takeno Jōō and Sen no Rikyū. This was a time of great change and disruption in Japanese society where social barriers between merchants, samurai and the aristocracy were lowered for a brief period. This allowed tea-masters from the merchant classes to have great influence on Japanese society, turning what had been a display of wealth, into a performance of ‘rusticity’ defined by wabi, a word with an original meaning of poverty.

Buddhist concepts of the mind have impacted on the development of much Asian art, in particular Japanese poetry. Chapter 3 examines the sources of the aesthetic of wabi within earlier Japanese culture, looking at earlier aesthetic concerns such as yo-jō (lingering emotion), yūgen (mystery and depth) and yatsushi (beauty hidden below a drab surface). I then consider the impact of wabi on Japanese culture. Finally in this chapter I try to define the wabi aesthetic and look at the modern understanding of wabi, and the associated concept of wabi-sabi in the West.

After Rikyū’s death, wabi continued to change under the guidance of Furuta Oribe and the impact of the 250 years of the Tokugawa Shogunate. This period, when the understanding of wabi was formalised and permeated throughout Japanese culture, is considered in Chapter 4, as is the development of the Tea-schools that were to transfer the knowledge and understanding of wabi and an appreciation of wood-fired ceramics through to the twentieth century.

Chapter 5 first looks at literature that considers the relationship between wabi and the development of an aesthetic of wood-fired ceramics. It then explores the development of the anagama kiln from the Shang Dynasty kilns of 3000 years ago and considers role that the nature of these kilns had on developing a wood-fire aesthetic. In this chapter I then examine the characteristics of the wood-fired surface,
making reference to effects described and defined in the world of Tea and in Japanese potteries.

In Chapter 6 perceptions of how the wabi-influenced ceramics of the Momoyama period were regarded at the time of the Meiji Restoration are explored, looking from the perspective of the Western observer. By 1900, although wood was still commonly used as a fuel in kilns, the aesthetic of wood-firing and the processes that generated such qualities were largely forgotten. The wabi pottery of the Momoyama period was in family storehouses and only used in what was, at this time, known in the West as ‘the cult of Tea’. The ceramics that were desirable to the Western observer, and hence to the rapidly Westernising Japanese society were decorated porcelains, often influenced by Western industrial techniques such as slip casting and mechanisation of production and new pigments and enamels.3

Chapter 7 is concerned with the renewal of interest in Japanese pottery in the early twentieth century, firstly through the development of the Mingei movement of Yanagi, and then with the renewed interest in wabi-influenced tea ceremony ceramics of the Momoyama period and the wood-firing aesthetic that developed into the Momoyama Revival movement during the 1920s and 1930s. This was a time when the ‘continuing tradition’ of Japanese ceramics was reinvented as elite groups within Japanese society searched for ways of forging new Japanese identities for a modernising society. This chapter concludes with consideration of the role of some of the individual players in these developments, looking in particular to the part played by Kaneshige Tōyō and Arakawa Toyozu.

Chapter 8 looks at the development of wood-fired ceramics as an international movement, looking at the methods of transfer from Japan. After World War II interest in the wood-fire aesthetic began to develop among potters in countries other than Japan. I look at this movement, and follow it through to recent times, looking at case studies of individual artists, such as Isamu Noguchi, who engaged with wood-firing in Japan, and Peter Voulkos, who engaged with the aesthetic although not originally producing wood-fired objects. I consider the relationship between the

ceramics of these artists and the development and spread of the wood-fire aesthetic to potters working in the West, largely looking at potters in the United States and Australia. I make no attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the development of wood-firing in Australia, or about the importance of wood-firing in Australia today; this is outside the scope of this dissertation and has, to some small extent, been covered by Steve Harrison in his self-published book, *Australian Woodfiring* first published in 2003.  

Finally, I summarise the research presented in the preceding chapters and draw my conclusions.

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Chapter 1. Tea before *Wabi*

Tea and Zen Buddhism have been linked together in Japan since the Chinese Song Dynasty custom of the consumption of *matcha*-style tea, powdered green tea vigorously whisked with hot water, was brought to Japan in the late 1100s. The drinking of tea had developed in China as early as 1000 BCE, where it was valued for perceived medicinal virtues, and was first introduced into Japan in the eighth century, but at that time it largely failed to become established in Japanese culture. The Tang Dynasty style brick tea, or *dancha*, was introduced into the Heian-period court of Emperor Saga (782–842) who emulated the culture of Tang China.

The earliest record of the consumption of tea in Japan occurs with the monk Eichū (743–816) serving tea to Saga in the fourth month of 815 at the temples Sūfukuji and Bonkakuji which he (Eichū) supervised on his return after 30 years in China. The tea camellia was quite possibly naturally occurring in Japan and two months after this experience, in the sixth month in 815, Saga ordered that tea should be grown in provinces including Kinai, Ōmi and Harima and presented as an annual tribute to the court.

Drinking of tea in Japan has tended to be linked to aesthetics and ceremony, and in the poetry written in Chinese by Japanese courtiers and gathered in the *Ryōunshū* (The Anthology from above the Clouds) there are references to Taoist thought and aesthetics. At this time, tea drinking seems to have been “a pastime enjoyed by noblemen as they placidly dangled fishing lines in the waters of the pond in the spacious garden surrounding a courtier’s residence and listened to the strains of *koto* music from within”. Consumption of tea declined after Saga’s death and would appear to have been largely restricted to medicinal usage by the Buddhist priesthood

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8 Ibid., 6, see also Watanabe, “Breaking Down the Boundaries,” 48.

at various temples, as well as being drunk by priests as part of the *naorai*, the banquet held at the end of the ceremony during the spring and autumn seasonal readings of *sutras* (Buddhist texts) held at court.

After the false start at the beginning of the Heian period, the real history of tea in Japan begins with the return from China to Japan of the monk Eisai (1141–1215), the founder of the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism in Japan. Eisai is credited with bringing to Japan seeds and seedlings of *Camellia sinensis* and the Song Dynasty method of tea drinking, the drinking of the whipped powdered tea known as *matcha*. Eisai founded tea fields at Senkōji Temple on Hirado Island, and at Tendaijiin in the Seburi Mountains, and also gave tea to the Kōzanji Temple in Kyoto. This last tea thrived in the mountain setting of Toganoo, and was highly valued, becoming known as *honcha*, (real tea).

Eisai wrote a two-volume text dealing with tea and mulberries, called the *Kissa Yōjōki*, in which he praised the medicinal qualities of tea, recommending tea “with its bitter taste as beneficial to the heart and as an elixir of long life”. Eisai wrote that the taste of this new powdered tea was better than the Tang Dynasty style *dancha* in which slivers were shaved off the brick and brewed, then served with salt. This better taste would have helped the adoption of this powdered tea. He makes the interesting observation that the drinking of *matcha* in Japan is the preservation of an aspect of Song Dynasty culture that was soon to be forgotten in China.

Initially the drinking of tea was largely restricted to the Zen monasteries where it was valued for its medicinal purposes and used as a stimulant to help monks remain alert during meditation; however, during Eisai’s time, there seem to have been no spiritual associations between Zen and tea. Within monasteries *sarei*, protocols for the preparation and drinking of tea, were established. These generally featured *Jian*

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ware tenmoku-glazed Tea-bowls presented on lacquer stands, a style of Tea that was utilised in the shoin-daisu tea of the Muromachi Period. At Kenninji, a Zen temple in Kyoto founded by Eisai, a version of this sarei known as yotsugashira sarei (four hosts) is still practiced to celebrate Eisai’s birthday.\textsuperscript{15} Other sarei practices have continued through to today, one example of which is the mid-thirteenth century practice of ōchamori at Saidaiji Temple. Today this is a ceremony in which Tea is prepared in a forty-centimetre diameter bowl and is offered to many people.\textsuperscript{16}

As Zen practices spread to the ruling military class, tea drinking spread outward from the temples, and tea began to be appreciated for its flavour. Along with the increase in interest in drinking tea there was an expansion in the number of tea fields. With the move out of the temples and into ‘peasant tea fields’, tea became an object of a feudal levy.\textsuperscript{17}

Towards the end of the Kamakura period tea began to be involved in social gatherings at which tea-tasting contests, tōcha, were held. Originally the aim of these contests was to pick the Toganoo tea, the honcha (real-tea), from the tea produced in other regions, tea known as hicha, (non-tea). Later, using procedures established in competitions judging incense, contestants were presented with three cups of three teas, and one cup of what was called the ‘guest’ tea, the aim in these ‘four-tea ten-cup’ competitions was to discern the regional origins of the different teas served.

As tea competitions became more important, and the wagers on the outcomes increased, “the value of tōcha as entertainment grew correspondingly.”\textsuperscript{18} In Chapter 3, I consider in detail the concept of suki, the pursuit of an aesthetic interest to its ultimate end. There are two directions in which an intense focus on the aesthetics of a performative event can go. It can lead to a quest for simplicity and calm, or it can lead to an attachment “to what is novel and unusual, the exotic and bizarre.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15} Watanabe, “Breaking Down the Boundaries,” 49.
\textsuperscript{16} Murai, “The Development of Chanoyu,” 9-10.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{19} Kumakura Isao, “Reexamining Tea,” Monumenta Japonica Vol. 57, No1 (Spring 2002), 27.
would seem that Japanese aesthetics are constantly pulled between these two extremes, austere simplicity or extravagance and novelty.

During the Muromachi period, daimyo (military governors) competed in displays of wealth and culture as well as in battle, and the tōcha competitions developed into extravagant parties at which “rare foods, poetry and wine” were combined with tea competitions of up to a 100 rounds—ten rounds of ten teas. This display of extravagance and novelty was described by the term basara (from the Sanskrit vajra) meaning an ostentatious, wild and exotic style (both in attire and life). Their style was likened “to the brilliant vajra thunderbolt representing power in Esoteric Buddhist iconography.” Kumakura Isao’s diagram (Figure 13, Chapter 3), that addresses suki, locates basara as an aesthetic involved with the strange and bizarre, and the breaking of norms. Basara, which incorporates a concept of undisciplined freedom and was “applied to men who relished a life of luxury carried to excess”, developed during the imperial lineage split that lead to the period of Northern and Southern Courts (1333–92), a time when there was a disruption in the sense of social position and authority.

![Figure 3: Mon-ami, Scroll showing decoration of reception room, 1522.](image)

Basara was exemplified by Sasaki Dōyo (1306–1373), lord of Ōmi Province (present day Shiga Prefecture). Dōyo is famous for the twenty-day-long cherry blossom viewing party held at Ōharano at which guests were seated on leopard and

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22 Hayashiya et al., Japanese Arts and the Tea-ceremony, 12.
tiger skins, imported incense wafted through the trees, molten copper was poured around trees to make huge vases and hundred-round töcha were held. He was also highly regarded as a poet of waka and renga, and was a supporter of nō, which displays basara style in its costumes. Dōyo has been regarded as a pioneer in recognising the talents of artistes such as Kan’ami (1333–1384) and his son Zeami (1363–1443) who largely developed the art of nō. Zeami wrote texts developing a theory of nō and which discussed the aim of producing the form of beauty known as yūgen in the performance. These texts were important in the development of wabi in the tea ceremony.

Dōyo’s patronage brought Kan’ami and Zeami to the attention of the third Ashikaga Shogun, Yoshimitsu (1358–1408) involving them in the court culture at his Kitayama Palace. Yoshimitsu was to become Dōyo’s successor as the leading exponent of basara with his construction of the Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku-ji) at his Kitayama estate.

Wabicha developed out of the formal shoin-daisu style of tea ritual that had developed under the guidance of the aesthetic advisors (the dōbōshū) to the Ashikaga Shogunate. The change in architecture that indicated a shoin style room was the addition of a study, lit by a bay window. The daisu was a Tea-utensil stand on which collected treasures, both Chinese and Japanese, were displayed.

Shoin chanoyu matured during the term of Yoshinori as Shogun. Little is known about the actual performance of this shoin-style Tea, but diagrams of the formal display of Chinese ceramics and paintings used during these ceremonies indicate that it was about the display of wealth and social status. The role of the dōbōshū such as Noami (1397–1471) and his son Gei’ami (1431–85), was to value, catalogue and

24 A waka is a 31-syllable, 5-line poem.
25 Renga are linked verse poems where successive couplets are added by different contributors.
26 Watanabe, “Breaking Down the Boundaries,” 50.
29 Murai Yasuhiro states in “The Development of Chanoyu” p18, “Shoin chanoyu was chanoyu held in a kaisho room done in the shoin manner.” A kaisho room was a structure built in gardens and intended for entertainment. Shoin was the new style of residential architecture based around the introduction of the tokonoma.
verify the Chinese artworks that were the essential objects of the display involved in this style of tea.

Figure 4: Drawing of *shoin* ornamentation, from *Kundaikan Sa-u Choki* (Catalogue of Ahikaga Yoshimasa’s Collection, by Noami. 1566).

The presentation of these artworks during the tea event was seen as a statement about the nature of the host:

One of the reasons why display and appreciation (*furumai*) became an important component of Shogunal entertainment is not only the ritual value of art objects, but also the fact that art objects could be taken as a substitute of their owners…art objects had to be appreciated not only for
their own aesthetic value, but as an extension of the owner’s self, his social status and political might.  

Figure 5: Interior of Yohen tenmoku Tea-bowl named Inaba Tenmoku. Southern Song Dynasty, 13th century. Seikado, Tokyo.

Figure 6: Chinese Jian Ware Tea-bowl 11th–13th centuries.

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30 Herbert E. Plutschow, Rediscovering Rikyū and the Beginnings of the Japanese Tea-ceremony (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2003), 58.
Plutschow points out that the Ashikaga Shoguns were the first political leaders in Japan recorded as collecting art objects, and that this occurred at a time when renewed relations with Ming Dynasty China allowed the import of Chinese paintings and ceramics.  

In his role as dōbōshū, Noami established the terms shin (formal) gyō (semi-formal) and sō (informal) to describe different modes of calligraphy. This system is used to categorise the “mood” of an art form. These terms would later be used to describe styles in many of the Japanese arts, and, in particular, the styles of tea-masters. The term shin usually refers to the Chinese, formal style, with the Japanese version being categorised as less formal.

The wabi-style Tea-ceremony developed towards the end of the Ashikaga Shogunate (1392–1573), a period of turmoil and civil war leading up to the unification of Japan by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) at the end of the sixteenth century. Its development started during the period of chaos that occurred before and after the Ōnin War, from approximately 1450. Crop failures, famine and epidemics took a vast toll in Kyoto in 1457. In 1460, the death rate from starvation in the city was 500 per day, and in the first two months of 1461 there were 80,000 deaths. Then, in 1466, the decade-long Ōnin War began.

The Tea-ceremony developed for many reasons, social, economic, and aesthetic, but Herbert Plutschow proposes that in becoming a highly refined ritual art it functioned as a transformatory ritual which could overcome the turmoil of the time. Wabicha was to provide a ritual space of equality and peace at a time when society was undergoing great disruption, and allowed interactions across social boundaries that traditionally stood between the merchant classes on the one hand and the aristocracy and warrior class on the other.

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31 Plutschow, Rediscovering Rikyū, 56-57. Plutschow points out that the use of an object by a Shogun or Emperor heightened the value of an object, and Japanese emperors avoided any problems “by discarding all they touched.”


34 Plutschow, Rediscovering Rikyū, 19, 20. Plutschow quotes from Evan M Zuesse Encyclopedia of Religion “Writing generally about rituals in human society Zuesse divided ritual into ‘conformatory’ and ‘transformatory’. Conformatory ritual was one that supported the socia-political status quo. Transformatory ritual was one that aimed at transforming society, especially in times of crisis.
Okakura Kakuzo opens his book about the *wabi* tea ceremony, *The Book of Tea*, with these lines:

> Tea began as a medicine and grew into a beverage. In China, in the eighth century, it entered the realm of poetry as one of the polite amusements. The fifteenth century saw Japan ennoble it into a religion of aestheticism—Teaism.35

The credit for the development of this “religion of aestheticism”, *wabicha* and the aesthetic concept generally referred to in Western culture as *wabi-sabi*, is traditionally given to three men, Murata Jukō (1423?–1502), Takenō Jōō (1502–1555) and Sen-no-Rikyū (1522–1591). Chapter 2 explores the historical detail of this development, following it through to Sen-no-Rikyū’s suicide in 1591, by which time the aesthetic expression of *wabi* had been refined to its most restricted range of expression, as typified by the *raku* Tea-bowl.

Okakura further states that:

> Teaism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It inculcates purity and harmony…. It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life.36

Looking back over the period from when Eisai returned from China with tea seedlings in the twelfth century to the late fifteenth century, we see a steady integration of tea drinking into Japanese culture, a culture of tea consumption with strong linkages both to the Zen temples, and at the same time, to the *basara* inclinations of the aristocracy and the military classes. This remnant of Song Dynasty culture, transferred to Japan, was ready to be the catalyst for a transformation in the way that objects are viewed within Japanese culture, ready to set the ground for the development of *wabi*.

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Chapter 2. The Development of Wabicha in Japan: The Social and Historical Context

It was within the wabi-style Tea-ceremony, wabicha, that the aestheticisation of the wood-fired ceramics produced in pre-modern Japan occurred. The development of wabicha occurred in the period between approximately 1450 and 1600 during a time of many changes in social and cultural life in the society of Muromachi Japan. It encouraged mixing between the military classes (buke), the merchant class, and to some extent the imperial aristocracy (kuge). The wabi style tea ceremony led to changes that have influenced almost all aspects of Japanese culture, and of particular interest to this dissertation, the way in which ceramics are viewed in Japan. Louise Alison Cort describes the impact of wabicha in these words:

The wabi ceremony was conceived and developed, and flourished and declined in little more than a century; and even in its heyday its power derived in part from its contrast to contemporary ceremonies in the orthodox style. Yet the wabi ceremony has claimed the Japanese imagination with a power that far outlasted its period of vitality. It has permanently affected the way in which Japanese think about material objects; and to the extent that the thinking has become familiar to the West, it affects our imagination also.\(^{37}\)

Inherent in Okakura’s description of the Tea-ceremony as a “religion of aestheticism” is the appreciation and valuing of the objects used in the performance of Tea. By 1600, the ritual consumption of tea had evolved from the large rooms with the formal display of wealth inherent in the shoin–zashiki style of Tea, to the restrained, quiet, aesthetic of wabi and the sense of hospitality displayed when the host made Tea in the smaller space of the free-standing Tea-hut specially constructed for the Tea-ceremony. In its extreme form it was performed in a space reduced to a two-and-a-half-mat,\(^{38}\) or even a one-and-a-half-mat room, enforcing a level of intimacy between the host and guest, and a penetrating focus on the items used. It was in this space that the qualities of surface produced by the long wood-fire process

\(^{37}\) Cort, Shigaraki, 129.
\(^{38}\) A tatami mat is a woven straw or rush mat used as flooring, in the Kyoto region it is traditionally 0.955 m by 1.91 m.
were categorised, valued and seen to be beautiful. This chapter considers the social and historical forces that led to this development.

2.1 Setting the Scene for the Development of Wabi

The Ashikaga Shogunate constituted a period of vast social and economic change and many of these changes had impacts on the finances of the bakufu (the military government). The income for the Ashikaga bakufu came from three major sources, taxes and income from land, taxes on commercial activity and income and taxes from overseas trade. However, this income was generally inadequate to finance the government and the indulgences of the Shoguns, particularly Ashikaga Yoshimitsu during the Kitayama period and Ashikaga Yoshimasa around the time of the Ônin War.  

Prior to the Muromachi period the major source for government income was income from and taxes on land, while the merchant sector was largely ignored. For the Ashikaga Shogunate, taxes on the developing merchant sector became a major source of income, in particular the taxes on the sakaya dosō, money lenders who used their financial strength to finance sake breweries. It was therefore in the interest of the Shogunate to encourage commercial development.

The increasing strength of the merchant classes was accentuated by the re-establishment of official ‘tally trade’ (kangō bōeki) with the Ming court in China by Yoshimitsu in 1403, as these expeditions were ventures that incorporated both official representatives and merchants. Chinese copper coins became a major import into Japan, and by allowing the development of a reliable means of exchange they further fostered the development of commercial activity and helped the merchants grow into a social class with its own values life-style and culture.

This tally trade with China was to have an important effect on the development of Sakai as a major port city, and therefore on the development of Tea after Jukō. It was in the interaction between the merchants of Sakai, and their Merchant-tea, and

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40 Ibid., 76-78.
41 Plutschow, Rediscovering Rikyū, 56.
the *daimyo* of the warrior class who were reliant on these merchants for the importation of gunpowder and armaments, that the aesthetic of *wabi* developed.

The development of Sakai as a major port began in the mid-1460s and was encouraged by the turmoil enveloping the Kyoto region with the beginning of the Ōnin War. The expedition to China, which left the port of Hyōgo (held by the Hosokawa family) in 1467, was unable to return to Hyōgo in 1469 due to this period of chaos. The Ōnin War was essentially between the Hosokawa and Yamana families. As the way between Hyōgo and Kyoto was occupied by the Ōuchi, allies of the Yamana and enemies of the Hosokawa, another port had to be found. The Shogun’s vessel and the vessels belonging to the Hosokawa were forced to travel around Shikoku and to land at Sakai, beginning the city’s association with the tally trade and leading to Sakai’s development as a leading mercantile city.\(^{42}\)

The importation of *karamono*, Chinese ceramics and art, was an important part of this tally trade. Merchant cities like Sakai, and merchant quarters in Kyoto thrived in the more open social environment. During the Ashikaga Shogunate merchants enjoyed a level of social freedom which had not existed in earlier times and which disappeared again in the neo-Confucianism of the Edo period.\(^{43}\) Merchants in Kyoto and other towns joined together to protect their interests, and raised militia to defend them during civil unrest. During the late Muromachi period Sakai was free of feudal control, almost self governing in a manner that has been compared with the Hanseatic cities and ‘free’ cities of medieval Europe, and was ruled by a council of citizens, the *egōshū*.\(^{44}\)

The chaos of the Ōnin War and the following Sengoku period helped to distribute the refined central culture of Kyoto to the provinces and to Sakai. As Kazue states:

> Due to the Ōnin war the imperial capital’s peace and order had been destroyed and poverty stricken intellectuals had to flee from the capital, seeking the protection of *shugodaimyo*…During the Sengoku period, Kyoto’s central culture was scattered to the eastern and western provinces, and the newly established merchant city of Sakai, due to both good geographical and economic conditions, became a suitable place of

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43 Chinese Confucian philosophy placed the merchant at the bottom of the social scale.

refuge...poverty stricken kuge, who as a group lived by teaching renga, chanoyu, tachibana [flower arranging] and kaori [incense] continuously flowed into Sakai.45

As merchants developed financial power they adopted the cultural movements of the military and the court. Renga poetry, nō and Tea entered their world. Perhaps due to their low social position merchants were prohibited from lavish display of wealth, so a practice of Tea, such as Jukō’s ‘chilled and withered’ style, that made a virtue of lack of ostentation appealed to them. In keeping with this lack of ostentation, the Tea-rooms used by these merchants were smaller than the shoin-kaisho rooms utilised by the aristocracy and warrior classes. The development of the merchant class in Sakai was important to the development of wabicha as both Takeno Jōō and Sen no Rikyū were born into Sakai merchant families.

2.2 The Development of Wabicha: Jukō, Jōō and Rikyū

2.2.1 Murata Jukō and the ‘Chilled and Withered’ Beauty

The introduction of the restraint that developed into the wabicha Tea-ceremony is credited to the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1435–1490) or to the man who it is suggested was his advisor on such things, Murata Jukō. The Ashikaga Shoguns are renowned for their extravagant and lavish building programs and lifestyles, with Yoshimasa regarded as having led the most indulgent period of extravagance, indecisive government and corruption during the time of chaos leading up to the events of 1466. The opening passages of the Chronicle of Ōnin describe these indulgences and the effects the taxation to pay for them had on the common people.46 The Ōnin War would appear to have had a profound effect on Yoshimasa, and Varley points out that in a major change of his “aesthetic canons,” Yoshimasa turned to a period of “restraint and refinement.”47

It is at this time in the development of the wabi Tea-ceremony, known as the Higashiyama period (after the site of Yoshimasa’s villa in the eastern hills of Kyoto),

47 Paul Varley, The Ōnin War, 134.
that native Japanese ceramics began to be used in Tea. In particular the unglazed wood-fired ceramics from Bizen and Shigaraki, ‘found objects’ made for farm and domestic use, were introduced into the refined spaces of the Tea-ceremony at this time. Cort points out that the chaos and devastation of the Ōnin War allowed the introduction of Japanese natural-ash glazed ceramics into the Tea-rooms of the day, since large numbers of Chinese treasures had been destroyed and had to be replaced with locally acquired articles.\(^4^8\) It was perhaps necessity, as much as virtue, which led to the choice of these native Japanese ceramics. Murata Jukō is credited with this introduction of \textit{wamono} (Japanese things) into a Tea-ceremony that relied on \textit{karamono} (Chinese things). Kumakura states:

Shukō [Jukō], however, understood also the beauty of the “cold and withered” as found in \textit{renge}, and the beauty of the imperfect and incomplete. He perceived this latter beauty in such \textit{wamono} as Shigaraki and Bizen ceramic ware, which, when compared to the art and craft of China, was imperfect and rough. Shukō sought to discover a new beauty in the contrasting tastes of \textit{kara} (Chinese) perfection and \textit{wa} (Japanese) crudeness and imperfection. To the people of his age, the injunction to “harmonise Japanese and Chinese tastes” probably called to mind the mixed form of Chinese and Japanese poetry that was then popular. It appears that Shukō attempted to apply to \textit{chanoyu} the artistic principles used in [this] mixing of the poetry of China and Japan.\(^4^9\)

Little is known about Jukō’s life, as there is little evidence of him in the historical record. In \textit{Wabi: wabicha no keifu}, Kazue Kyōichi describes what is known of Jukō’s life. Jukō is said to have been born in Nara, to have entered the monastic life as a youth, and for some somewhat unsavoury reason he had to leave the Shōmyōji temple in Nara. He is said to have drifted around various provinces before ending up at around the age of thirty studying Zen meditation with Ikkyū Sōjun (1394–1481) and living at Daitokuji temple’s Shinjuan. There is some mention of a Jukō-an-su in the records of Shinjuan. Kazue then goes to state that “Jukō’s personal history is unclear, but in relation to Tea he occupies an unshakeable position as the founder of \textit{wabicha}.”\(^5^0\)

In the introduction to the *Yamanoue Sōji Ki*, written in 1589 by Yamanoue Sōji, which Kazue has translated into contemporary Japanese, Jukō comes to significance as a Tea-master when he is introduced to the former shogun Yoshimasa, by Yoshimasa’s dōbōshū Noami, when Yoshimasa asked if there was a pastime that wouldn’t be as hard on his body as deer-hunting. Noami is reputed to have replied “There is no entertainment such as you ask for except for chanoyu. The sound of water boiling in the kettle resembles the sound of the wind blowing through the pines. Also you can enjoy chanoyu in any season and chanoyu involves many things such as collecting famous antiques,” and to have suggested that Murata Jukō who had studied Zen with Ikkyū, was the best person to teach the Shogun chanoyu.  

The involvement of Jukō and Noami (1397–1471) is not impossible but Kazue points out that, as Noami had died before Yoshimasa retired to Higashiyama, this story obviously does not fit the facts. However, by the Momoyama period, it was believed to be fact that Jukō had studied with Ikkyū. Ikkyū, who as an eccentric Zen master received the nickname ‘Mad Cloud’, was at the centre of a group of painters, poets and nō masters, who were breaking new ground in their artistic fields. Theodore M. Ludwig credits Ikkyū and the circle of artists who gathered around him with making important contributions to Jukō’s aesthetic development, stating:

> Under Ikkyū’s influence it appears that Shukō [Jukō] began to practice the Tea-ceremony as an artistic ‘way’ with a definite sōan [grass hut] flavour, making for himself a small four-and-a-half mat tea-room in Kyoto in the hermit-hut style and deliberately choosing tea vessels which seemed to some people to be artless and crude in texture and colour tone.  

Jukō’s Tea not only changed the mix of utensils used in the Tea-ceremony, championing the combining of Japanese and Chinese objects, but as Cort says he is credited with removing Tea from the large shoin-zashiki style room with a capacity for dozens of people to the freestanding Tea-house based on the thatched hut ideal of the poetic tradition.

The significance of Jukō in the development of wabicha is based firstly on his “Letter from the Heart” (*kokoro no fumi*) written for Furuichi Harima (1452?–1508)  

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who was also known as Choin. Secondly, his importance is based on the regard in which he was held by the later developers of wabicha, Jōō and Rikyū. Jukō did not use the term wabi, but his aesthetic incorporated the concept of hiekareta ‘chilled and dried up or withered’ and hieyaseru ‘become chilled and emaciated’. These were concepts that were in common contemporary usage in the world of renga poetry. In Sasamegoto, the Tendai priest and poet Shinkei’s treatise on the art of renga written in 1463 for the renga practitioners in his home in Kii province, section 41 of the question and response style theoretical work is titled “Toward the Chill and Desolate”. The question is about how one should go about composing a poem, and in a passage embodies the nature of what later became known as wabi, Shinkei states, “…one must turn at heart to what lies beyond words and awaken to knowledge of the chill and desolate.”54 While there is no direct evidence linking Jukō with Shinkei, the former was in all probability familiar with Shinkei’s work.55

The new aesthetic developing under the guidance of Murata Jukō, who introduced the ‘inferior’ products of provincial Chinese kilns and combined the unglazed native Japanese wares from Shigaraki and Bizen with the Song Dynasty pots that had long been treasured in Japan, had the effect of allowing the qualities derived from the process of wood-firing to be valued. As Cort says about the necessity following the Ōnin War, for the highest levels of Kyoto society to use Shigaraki tea storage jars that had earlier been assigned to inferior grades of tea drunk by commoners:

… a somewhat humiliating necessity was tempered by the emergence of a new aesthetic governing the selection of Tea-ceremony utensils, which not only accepted such rough and un-pedigreed objects as Bizen and Shigaraki jars, but welcomed them.56

Jukō’s kokoro no fumi is often quoted as signifying the importance of the introduction of native Japanese ceramics into the Tea-ceremony, and as pointing to the importance of these ceramics in the development of the aesthetic of wabi. Jukō stated:


55 Ibid., 39.

56 Cort, Shigaraki, 109.
The most important thing on this road is to dissolve the boundaries between Japanese and Chinese objects, and it is important to be cautious of the problems in doing this. Again, in these times, the seemingly inexperienced are gathering Bizen and Shigaraki objects and, styling it as “chilled and withered,” are attempting a subtle and profound tea without being challenged by others, and this is unforgivable. To say ‘withered’ (karuru) means to possess excellent utensils, and knowing well their flavour, to allow a sense of ripeness to develop in the depths of the heart. Only after this can one develop a ‘chilled’ (hie) and ‘lean’ (yase) style that is of interest.\textsuperscript{57}

The significance of this document to this dissertation lies in indicating the importance seen in the usage of the unglazed, wood-fired ceramics from Bizen and Shigaraki within the developing Tea-ceremony of Jukō’s time. The passage quoted above indicates a complex aesthetic developing around the usage of these objects, an aesthetic of the ‘chilled and withered’ that was to develop into what is now called wabi.

Jukō was using the rough ‘country’ wares from Korean kilns, from the inferior Chinese kilns, and from the kilns of Bizen and Shigaraki, and introducing them into the refined space of the Tea-ceremony where they were contrasted with the treasured Chinese heirlooms of the Ashikaga Shogunate. He used the analogy of “penning a magnificent stallion in a straw hut”, in which the unglazed Shigaraki and Bizen pots were seen as the ‘straw hut’ and the Chinese wares were the ‘stallion’.\textsuperscript{58} This analogy is probably not flattering of the Bizen and Shigaraki wares as it places them as a plain background which served to focus attention on the qualities of the fewer Chinese utensils then displayed. However, it is clear from his kokoro no fumi that the usage of the wares from Bizen and Shigaraki is more complex than just being a contrast to the ‘excellent’ Chinese objects and represented an aesthetic challenge requiring deep consideration.

In summary, Jukō’s contribution to the development of Tea is the introduction of a Zen-based spirituality to the practice of Tea, the introduction of the aesthetic concepts used in describing renga poetry, such as “chilled and withered”, to the


description of objects, and the move towards a smaller four-and-a-half-mat room for Tea. Of particular importance to this dissertation, he is credited with the introduction of ceramics from inferior Chinese and Korean kilns such as the *O-ido* Tea-bowl in Figure 7 and, more importantly, native Japanese utensils such as the unglazed ceramics from Bizen and Shigaraki, to the Tea-ceremony.

![Figure 7: Tea-bowl named *Tsutsuzutsu*. *O-ido* ware Yi Dynasty Korea.](image)

2.2.2 **The development of the Four-and-a-half-mat Tea-house.**

As Jukō is credited with introducing the smaller Tea-room to *chanoyu* I will look briefly at the significance of the four-and-a-half mat room to the Tea-ceremony. The smaller free-standing Tea-house and the development of *wabi* are intimately linked. Within Japanese literary culture the origins of the four-and-a-half mat room can be found in the writings of Kamo no Chōmei (1155–1216), in his powerful and influential essay *Hōjōki* (Writings from a ten foot square hut), written at the beginning of the Kamakura period in 1212. In this essay Chōmei, after describing a series of disastrous events that befell the capital of Heian-Kyo (Kyoto) in the latter half of the twelfth century, describes contentment of living in the hut in the mountains that he has built, far removed from the disappointments and disasters of life in the capital. His hut is small, and designed to be easily pulled down and reconstructed when he wants to move it. In his 1928 translation of *Hōjōki*, Sadler
translates Chômei’s description of his hut, which gives the image of a Tea-house from a later period:

It is a cottage of a most peculiar kind, for it is only ten feet square and less than seven feet high... the walls are of rough plastered earth and the roof is thatch. I have put up eaves projecting on the south side to keep off the sun, and a small bamboo veranda beneath them. On the west is the shelf for the offerings of water and flowers to Buddha... on the eastern side is a bundle of fern fronds and a mat of straw on which I sleep at night... To the north of my little hut I have made a tiny garden surrounded by a thin low brushwood fence... As to my surroundings, on the south there is a little basin that I have made of piled-up rocks to receive the water that runs down from a bamboo spout above it."

Sadler suggests that the common use of a room the size of Chômei’s hut, a four-and-a-half mat room, for Tea indicates “its descent from the cell of the Buddhist recluse Vimalakirrti who miraculously entertained in it the Buddha and three thousand five hundred of his saints and disciples, and has as it were crystallized and handed down the mood of Chômei as a historico-philosophical ‘retreat’ for all who wish to refresh their souls by temporary retirement.” Perhaps just as important as the physical structure of Chômei’s hut for the development of the wabi style tea ceremony, is this sense of contentment and freedom that it gives him, approaching the Buddhist ideal of non-attachment. In describing this sense of contentment Chômei writes:

Since I forsook the world and broke off all ties, I have felt neither fear nor resentment. I commit my life to fate without special wish to live or desire to die. My only luxury is a sound sleep and all I look forward to is the beauty of the changing seasons... With this lonely cottage of mine, this hut of one room, I am quite content.

It is this isolation from the world of cares that was one of the motivating forces for the development of the tea house, for, as Kumakura states, it provided the stage for Tea as “a performing art that took the form of a temporary reclusion, from which, once it was ended, the participants had to return to everyday life.” Chômei’s writings make him one of the better-known exponents of the hermit-poet tradition that developed in Japan, and his hut becomes a model for the ‘grass hermitage’ or ‘grass hut’ (sōan) of later generations of poets and tea-masters.

60 Sadler, The Ten Foot Square Hut..., iii.
61 Kamo no Chômei, Ibid., 19.
62 Kumakura, “Reexamining Tea”, 35.
2.2.3 Takeno Jōō and Merchant Tea

Takeno Jōō (1502–1555) is the second of the three men given credit for the development of *wabicha*. He was born into a family of leatherworkers in Sakai, and moved to Kyoto in 1525 where he studied *renka* and *waka*, the classical Japanese poetry form, with Sanjōnishi Sanetaka (1455–1537). As stated earlier, it is interesting to note that Sanetaka, a courtier associated with Yoshimasa, had moved a six-mat house in 1502 to a corner of his estate where he had reconstructed it as a four-and-a-half-mat *shoin*-style structure, perhaps modelled on the room Dōjinsai in Yoshimasa’s Higashiyama estate. It is suggested that Jōō developed an interest in Tea after hearing a lecture by Sanetaka on Teika’s (1162–1241) *Eigataigai*, a treatise on the writing of *waka*, during which he is said to have understood the true meaning of *chanoyu*. Jōō studied Zen under Kogaku Sosen and Dairin Soto of Daitoku-ji, became a priest in 1532 and took the name Jōō. He was the leading tea master of the 1540s. As will be explored in more detail later, Jōō is credited with using the word *wabi* to describe the “chilled and withered” aesthetic espoused by Jukō. Jōō constructed a four-and-a-half-mat hut called Daikoku-an in Kyoto, and studied Tea with two disciples of Jukō’s, Fujita Sōri and Jūshiya Sōgo.

Jukō’s son Soju should have been the inheritor of Jukō’s style of Tea, but it would seem that he preferred a more elegant and refined Tea, rather than Jukō’s style of *chanoyu*. He was criticised for letting go of famous objects he received from his father, such as the large jar known as *Matsuhana*, and it seems that he was not fundamentally a person who could enjoy the austere Tea of his father. Kazue states that Jōō’s penetrating eye quickly saw the artificiality of Sojū’s elegant tea, and that he was attracted to the more humble Tea of Jūshiya Sōgo. Sōgo did not posses any famous Tea objects, but was known as a *chanoyu suki* (passionate about *chanoyu*)

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63 Leatherwork included making leather armour.
64 Minna Torniainen, *From Austere Wabi to Golden Wabi: Philosophical and Aesthetic Aspects of Wabi in the Way of Tea* (Finnish Oriental Society, 2000), 86.
and a *mekikasu* (connoisseur) who in the Buddhist sense of non-attachment did not care about owning ‘named’, famous utensils.⁶⁷

Two letters related to Jōō are important to the development of *wabi*, and passed down to the current day. These are *Jōō Wabi no Fumi* (Jōō’s Wabi Letter), and *Jōō Montei e no Hatto* (Jōō’s Instructions to his Disciples) that within Tea culture is claimed to have been written by one of his students. Jōō states:

> When one struggles to create beauty, it becomes a superficial décor. Likewise, when one strives for *wabi* it becomes unsightly, and both turn into a fake. You must take special care [not to fall into this trap].⁶⁸

In *The Culture of Tea*, Varley and Elison analyse the development of Tea as a century-long process of change starting with the *shoin-kaisho* Tea of the early Muromachi period through to the *wabicha* of the end of the sixteenth century.⁶⁹ They claim it was a process that “was experimental and gradual rather than coming in a flash of enlightenment.”⁷⁰ If Jukō’s Tea is, in the categorisation established by Noami, described as *shin* (formal), then Jōō’s tea is *gyō* (semi-formal). This less formal approach was seen in the architecture of the Tea hut. Jukō’s Tea-room began the change from the *shoin*-style interior of the *kaisho-zashiki* room used in Tea by reducing it to a four-and-a-half-mat size, and papering the walls of the *tokonoma* with plain white paper rather than painted landscapes. Jōō eliminated the paper from the walls, leaving them plainly plastered, used bamboo rather than wood for lattices, and used plain or lightly varnished wooden surfaces rather than the heavily varnished surfaces of earlier rooms.

Jōō is credited with introducing the use of the word *wabi*, taking it from the poetic–recluse tradition that his study of *waka* and *renga* had made him familiar with, and using it to describe Jukō’s aesthetics of the Tea-ceremony.⁷¹ As Hirota states in his essay, “The *Wabi* Tea of Takeno Jōō”:

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⁷⁰ Varley and Elison, “The Culture of Tea,” 206.

Before the Muromachi period (1392-1568), the word “wabi” was used to express feelings of distress and loneliness in straitened circumstances… the desolation of a forsaken lover or the uncertainty of life in exile. As a verb (wabu), it meant to be discouraged and dispirited, as an adjective (wabishi), it implied a cheerless and inconsolable emotional state…

In the period before Jōō was born, privations of the daily life of the hermit monk and those who lived in the countryside began to be viewed through the “strong negative connotations of wabi”, and there began a reversal of values that allowed wabi to be viewed in a more positive manner, “implying a profound and hard-won appreciation of conditions normally shunned, extending to the slight, insignificant details of such a life.”

Figure 8: White Tenmoku glazed Tea-bowl, Koyama states that it was reputedly owned by Jōō, Muromachi Period.

Jōō’s gyō or semi-formal Tea incorporated the use of found objects. For instance, on one occasion he used a wooden bucket as the water container, on another he used a simple section of bamboo as a lid rest. Of more relevance to the use of Japanese unglazed ceramics in Tea was his use of found objects produced in Shigaraki as mizusashi (water jars). The most

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73 Ibid., 13.
famous of these was a flax bucket used in the Ômi region surrounding Shigaraki known as an ogoke (ο meaning flax in this context). Cort points out that this form became known as onioke (devil bucket) in the tea ceremony, and proposes that this name was a pun on the name ogoke made by Tsuji Gen’ya, a leading student of Jōō’s who is credited with passing some of Jōō’s secret teachings on to Rikyū.74

![Figure 9: Old Shigaraki onioke water pot, Momoyama period. Koyama states that Jōō was fond of this pot.](image)

This use of found objects from Shigaraki as water jars was important in the acceptance of these native ceramics. The first mention of the use of any native Japanese ceramic in the Tea-ceremony was the use by Jōō of a Shigaraki mizusashi,

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74 Louise Allison Cort, “Gen’ya’s Devil Bucket,” in Chanoyu Quarterly, Issue No. 30, (1982): 33-34. “As a student of renga, Gen’ya would have been familiar with one of the forms of classical verse as described by Teika, the so called devil (oni) form, and the particular interest evinced in it by Shinkei.” Cort quotes a contemporary treatise on aesthetics by Komparu Zempō (1454–1532): “The true meaning of oni is to be unmoving, showing a fierce mien, yet in practice possessing the quality of a flower”.
in 1542, as recorded in the *Matsuya Kaiki.* During Jōō’s time the Shigaraki kilns had not yet begun making pots specifically for use as *mizusashi.*

### 2.2.4 Sen no Rikyū: Extreme Wabi

The last of the three Great Tea Masters of *wabicha* is Sen no Rikyū, born in Sakai in 1522. Much of our knowledge of Rikyū’s life comes from the *Nambōroku*, a document discovered approximately a hundred years after his death by Jitsuzan Tachibana. There are however, serious questions about the authenticity of this document. It is claimed that it was written by the Buddhist monk Nanbō Sōkei of the temple Nansō-ji, in Sakai, during the last few years of Rikyū’s life. There “is no definite information indicating whether a person called Nanbō Sōkei ever lived... Apparently Sōkei was a disciple of Rikyū who wrote down what he heard and saw while studying Tea under Rikyū”.

The first five books are said to have Rikyū’s sign. The sixth is said to have no sign as Rikyū rejected it due to it containing a secret transmission and being too detailed in information, and the seventh book is said to have been finished three years after his death. However there are suggestions that the book is a forgery by Jitsuzan to commemorate the centenary of Rikyū’s death.

It is said that Rikyū’s father was Tanaka Yohei, a Sakai fish merchant. In the records of Nobunaga, Rikyū is known under his family name of Tanaka. He was originally known under his given name of Yojiro or Yoshirō. He was given the Buddhist lay
name Sōeki when he studied Zen under the priest Dairin Soto. There is doubt about the origin of the name Sen, as it was not used during his lifetime, and would appear to be an attempt by later descendants to further legitimise his memory by claiming connections to the dōbōshū of the Ashikaga, Sen’ami, who Tea historians suggest escaped the Ōnin War by fleeing to Sakai. It is not my intention to further analyse the ambiguities surrounding Rikyū’s biography. Instead, I will concentrate on his ideas and influence on the development of an extreme interpretation of wabi.

Rikyū entered the world of Tea at an early age, and was reputed to have studied Tea with Kitamuki Dōchin at the age of seventeen. Dōchin is said to have introduced him to Jōō. He is first mentioned in the Tea records on 13 September 1537, in the diary of a Nara merchant Matsuya Hisami’s who studied under Jōō. He quickly became a prominent Tea man in the Sakai area, acquiring some famous utensils such as a Tea-bowl that had belonged to Jukō.

In 1568 the daimyo Oda Nobunaga came to prominence, receiving permission from the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshiaki to remove the Miyoshi clan from Kyoto. Nobunaga soon usurped the position of the Ashikaga, and set out to unify the warring nation. Nobunaga had a strong interest in chanoyu and collecting Tea utensils. Tea utensils were used as a way of building loyalties, by demanding famous objects as tribute, and distributing them to allies.

Nobunaga also restricted his generals from giving Tea parties without his permission; the granting of this permission being a reward for achievements. The giving of symbolic gifts, such as permission to perform Tea ceremonies, and gifts of famous utensils to his generals, had the added advantage of not increasing the power-base of his generals in the way that money or grants of land would have.

As stated earlier, daimyo were reliant on merchants to provide their weapons, and particularly nitre for production of gunpowder. Nitre wasn’t produced in Japan, and had to be imported, and Sakai was an important point of entry. The merchant and Tea-master Imai Sokyu provided gunpowder and weapons to Nobunaga, and,

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82 Plutschow, Rediscovering Rikyū, 75.
83 Ibid., 76.
84 Fujikawa Asako, Chanoyu and Hideyoshi, 33.
together with Tsuda Sogyu, was paid by Nobunaga to provide services as a Tea-
master. Rikyū (at this time known as Sōeki) joined Nobunaga’s staff at the
recommendation of Sokyu.  

During the period that Rikyū was associated with Nobunaga, he was involved in
large extravagances such as the victory celebration following the 1575 establishment
of peace in Kaga and Echizen held at the Myōkōji Temple. Rikyū acted as Tea-
master for Nobunaga at this meeting, which included seventeen Tea-men from
Kyoto and Sakai. It is apparent in letters that Rikyū’s role with Nobunaga
developed into more than just that of Tea-master and that Rikyū became “a go-
between able to mediate and to convey Nobunaga’s private feelings and thoughts
about important political and military issues.”

In 1582 Nobunaga was assassinated and his successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–
1598) continued with Nobunaga’s intention of unifying Japan. Under Hideyoshi,
Rikyū continued to be the leading Tea-master of the era. Rikyū’s real importance to
the world of chanoyu comes from these last ten years of his life, the period from
1582 to 1591 when he was the Tea-master to Hideyoshi. Kumakura says of this
period that at Rikyū who at 61 was considered fairly old by the standards of the day,
“ignited explosions in every aspect of chanoyu” over the next decade. His Tea
became increasingly individualistic and “even appeared heretical” to outsiders.

One of the profound changes introduced by Rikyū which had an ongoing effect on
both Tea and the development of Japanese ceramics occurred at this stage, when as
Cort points out, Rikyū started to use especially made utensils, that were “…neither
‘found’ in the marketplace nor hazarded by rural potters…vessels were ordered and
made through the cooperation of tea man and craftsman.” Rikyū started a
collaboration with Kyoto potter Chōjirō (1516–92), founder of the Raku kiln, in a
significant development that extended the Tea master’s role and has been considered
“the beginning of a radical transformation in Japanese ceramics…”

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85 Fujikawa, Chanoyu and Hideyoshi, 31.
87 Plutschow, Rediscovering Rikyū, 82.
89 Ibid., 138.
These changes are pertinent to this dissertation as under the guidance of Rikyū, and Tea-masters who followed such as Furuta Oribe, the natural-ash glazed ceramics of Bizen and Shigaraki continued to develop, and the “extreme” wood-firing effects displayed on the Tea wares produced in Iga came into being. It would seem that the dynamic tensions between Hideyoshi and Rikyū forced developments in Rikyū’s Tea; his position as Hideyoshi’s Tea-master provided the stimulus for these changes in chanoyu.

So what were the developments that Rikyū introduced to the world of Tea? Rikyū is said to have been trained in the secrets of the shoin style of Tea, initially by Kitamuki Dōchin. Hata Kohei states that Rikyū’s original training included this formal style of Tea of the court, which incorporated the use of the daisu stand, and that it was probably this knowledge that enabled him to achieve access to firstly, the Ashikaga Shogun, and then Nobunaga. However, once his position was established the Tea he was able to promote “was neither the tea of the court or of the daisu, but the tea of the sōan or small space.”

This was the Merchant-tea from Sakai, the Tea of Jukō and Jōō, but taken to a more and more extreme wabi style. Rikyū reduced the size of the tearoom from four-and-a-half mats to two, or even one-and-a-half mats. He is credited with introducing the nijiriguchi, the 1.2 metre tall small entrance directly into the chashitsu (Tea-room), which by forcing all guests to enter the space at sitting height emphasised the equality amongst all participants. The two-mat room was popular from 1587 to 1592. Nakamura Shosei states that the “philosophy behind this architecture was that if the space were small, no distance between the host and guest would exist.”

In this reduced space, Rikyū set out to remove the focus from objects and furnishings and to achieve a sense of wabi without any focal point at all, which Nakamura describes as kiwabi. By doing away with the daisu, the display stand traditionally used during the Tea-ceremony, all utensils were set out on the tatami mat, to be

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91 Cort, Shigaraki, 138.
93 Ibid., 38.
treated equally, without reference to their relative value. These changes meant that Rikyū’s Tea emphasised relationships between host and guests through enforced proximity. It is in this space that Rikyū is said to have introduced the simple Raku Tea-bowl, reducing the ceremonial aspect to “boil water, make tea.”

Kurokawa Kisho sees Rikyū’s style of Tea as being based on an extreme form of *wabi*.

Kurokawa believes that the extreme form of *wabi* that Rikyū developed in the last decade of his life, what Kurokawa describes as “an aesthetic of nothingness, of death”, developed in response to Hideyoshi’s tendency towards ostentatious display. He sees Rikyū pursuing this struggle “as rigorously as a Zen monk pursues the way of enlightenment.”

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The physical manifestation of this “aesthetic of nothingness” is the Raku Tea-bowl. Hand-built rather than wheel-thrown, made of low-fired earthenware clay covered with a lead glaze and often showing marks from tongs used to draw the piece from the kiln, the Raku bowl suited Rikyū’s vision of an austere sense of wabi without a focal point.

It is said that Rikyū originally conceived of the Raku Tea-bowl as a manifestation of wabi-tea and the concretization of artlessness. The accepted story of the development of the original Raku Tea-bowls is that they were made to Rikyū’s order by Chōjirō and the feeling sought by Rikyū in these utensils was one of “modesty, honesty, and plainness.” Morgan Pitelka points out that, although there is some evidence that a roof tile maker named Chōjirō existed there doubt about his connection with either Tea-bowls or Rikyū. He also notes that recent archaeological explorations indicate a much wider use of low temperature lead-glaze technology to produce Tea-ware in pre-1600 Kyoto, using glazes similar to the three-colour wares from the kilns in Zhangzhou, Fujian, China.

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It is thought that the first usage of these lead-glazed earthenware Tea-bowls in the Tea-ceremony dates from around 1580, when Rikyū is reported as using Sōeki-gata chawan (Sōeki, i.e. Rikyū, shaped Tea-bowl) and imayaki chawan (Tea-bowls in the new fashion). It has long been assumed that these are references to Raku wares.

In 1591 Hideyoshi ordered Rikyū to commit ritual suicide, which he did on the 28th of February. Fujikawa Asako provides the common explanations for why this suicide was ordered. One explanation is that a statue of Rikyū was placed upon the gate of the Daitoku-ji in a position where Hideyoshi would be obliged to walk beneath it. Another is that Hideyoshi wished to take Rikyū’s daughter Ogin as his mistress, but that Rikyū refused to permit this. Plutschow suggests that artistic differences in the performance of chanoyu might have played a part, and cites a recently discovered document written by Kōshin Sosa (Rikyū’s great grandson) that supports this view.

Politics no doubt played a part, and the death of Hideyoshi’s brother, Hidenaga, on the 21st of January, 1591, meant that Rikyū lost a great supporter within the political machinations surrounding Hideyoshi. Promoters of the invasion of Korea following the 1587 unification of Japan, were a group of direct vassals headed by Ishida Mitsunari and Maeda Gen’i. One of the effects of the proposed invasion was that it placed attention on Hakata in Kyushu as a military base and resulted in the displacement of Sakai from a position of prominence. Rikyū was closer to the opposing group of military leaders including Maeda Toshiie and Tokugawa Ieyasu. With the death of Hidenaga, the balance between the two groups broke down, clashes occurred between the groups and Rikyū was offered up “as a blood sacrifice”.

It would also seem apparent that once Hideyoshi had achieved hegemony over all Japan, a style of Tea that encouraged interaction between merchant and samurai

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99 Fujikawa, Chanoyu and Hideyoshi, 47.
100 Plutschow, Rediscovering Rikyū, 106.
classes on an equal footing, a Tea that was in the spirit of *gekokujō*, the turning of ‘earth over heaven’, a Tea in which Rikyū had an authority that was superior to Hideyoshi, would ultimately be seen as a threat to the new order.

As a symbol of this necessary change in the role of the Tea-ceremony within Japanese society, Furuta Oribe, the samurai disciple of Rikyū who became the next major Tea-master, would increase the size of the Tea-room to a size known as *sanjo daime*, which consisted of three tatami, and a special three-quarter size mat known as the *daime*, in order that “When a man of high rank is invited to a tea house, there should exist some space distinction between him and the host.” This was in contrast to Rikyū’s assertion that no space should exist between host and guest.

The development of *wabi* as an aesthetic had allowed the introduction of wood-fired Japanese ceramics into the refined space of the Tea-ceremony, where the qualities inherent in these wares would be studied and aestheticised. The intense focus of the Tea-masters, and the tendency within aspects of Tea to move towards the extremes had two consequences. One was the tendency towards the extreme of *basara* (and the very similar fashion of the early Edo period, *kabuki*, which lead to the ornateness of *oribe* wares and would encourage the development of extreme wood-fired qualities such as those displayed on Tea-wares from the Iga kilns). The other was towards the ascetic minimalism of Bizen wares, the Seto Black wares produced in Mino, and the *Raku* wares favoured by Rikyū. I suggest that the aestheticisation within the Tea-ceremony that placed such a high value on Tea-wares enabled an economic environment where hugely inefficient firing techniques, using vast quantities of fire-wood to achieve ash deposits displayed on Iga wares could be supported.

With Rikyū’s death, the development of the concept of *wabi* through the efforts of the three main players credited with its creation, Murata Jukō, Takeno Jōō, and Sen no Rikyū, had reached its extreme limits. It had had many effects on the arts within Japan; in particular, it had encouraged the development of an aesthetic that looked at the interaction between clay and the firing process, of what is called *yakishime*, the unglazed wares of Iga, Shigaraki, Tamba, Echizen and other kiln areas within Japan.

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Wabi continued to evolve for a few decades under the guidance of Furuta Oribe and Korobi Enshu, and was then preserved and transmitted forward through the period of the Tokugawa regime within the various schools of Tea that developed. Wabi would be introduced to the twentieth century largely by the three Tea-schools established by Rikyū’s descendants. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4.
Chapter 3. The Aesthetic of Wabi

This chapter explores the sources and origins of the aesthetic concepts which are at the heart of wabi. As perhaps is the case in many Asian countries, Japanese critical thought and exploration of art began in the world of literature, in particular with the analysis of the peculiarly Japanese form of poetry, the waka. When wabi was developed as an aesthetic during the Sengoku and Azuchi/Momoyama periods many concepts such as a beauty that is ‘chilled and withered’ (hiekakeru) and ‘deep and mysterious’ (yūgen) were drawn directly from scholars and poets such as Fujiwara no Teika, and Zeami, the creator of nō. More fundamentally, I believe these writers created the patterns of thought that led to and enabled the development of the wabi-style Tea that became chanoyu. My analysis is based on the work of several Japanese scholars who have made substantial contributions to the understanding of the wabi aesthetic. Izutsu Toshihiko and Izutsu Toyo have provided a deep analysis of the relationship between the mind and thought in the writings of Teika about waka, and Zeami’s writings about nō. They look at Teika’s and Zeami’s writings in relation to the concept of yūgen and the metaphysical underpinnings of wabi. Kumakura Isao locates wabi as an aesthetic of asceticism in relationship to other aesthetic paths within Japanese culture. Haga Koshiro writes about the sources and meaning of wabi.

3.1 Sources of the Wabi Aesthetic

The aesthetic of wabi evolved over the 150-year period from 1450 to 1600, as the social rituals around the drinking of tea in Japan changed from the display of wealth and power inherent in the shoin-daisu Tea of the Ashikaga shoguns to the simplicity of Rikyū’s Tea, where the emphasis was on the relationship between the host and the guest. This was seen as a relationship built on equality regardless of social standing. This development did not occur in a vacuum; it was based on centuries of religious thought and aesthetic analysis of literature and poetry that preceded this time.
Much of Buddhist thought relates to the mind, and the relationship between the Buddha-nature, the mind and reality. *Nirvana* is the state of mind that Buddhist practice aims to achieve, free from anger and craving, the primordial non-dualistic mind that Yanagi Soetsu (1889–1961) referred to, as discussed below.

In Japanese Buddhist practice the understanding of the relationship between humanity and Buddha-nature changed over time from the Holy Way sects of the Nara (710–794) and Heian (794–1185) Periods through the teachings of the Pure Land schools starting in the late Heian Period and continuing through the Kamakura Period (1185–1333) and developed further as Zen evolved, largely in the Muromachi Period (1392–1573). According to Ishida Ichirō, the Holy Way sects’ view of this relationship was that “man rose to Buddhahood in the next life”, whereas for the followers of the Pure Land Doctrine “Buddha gradually came down to man.” As the Rinzai Zen of Musō (1275–1351) developed during Muromachi Era, it was seen that “Buddha existed naturally within man, not outside … [and] the heart of man was considered to be Buddha.”

The word for “heart” in Japanese is *kokoro*, but *kokoro* also has meanings such as mind, spirit, idea, thought and will. Once it was understood that Buddha was to be found in the heart/mind of man, the *kokoro* that was not attached to the things of the world, then the function of art becomes that of reproducing that Buddha-mind in the world. Thus, a non-dualistic view of the world became an important condition for the production of art that foregrounded individual subjectivity.

Yanagi Soetsu’s book *The Unknown Craftsman* as adapted by the English potter Bernard Leach, has a chapter titled “The Buddhist Idea of Beauty” wherein it is stated that:

The object of Buddhist aesthetics is the clarification of the following truths:

1. That the inherent nature of man is non-dualistic; the non-dual entirety is the primordial home of us all; that that place is purity itself.

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104 Ibid., 419.
2. That the division of things into two is merely a later event and is unnatural, that the distinction between the beautiful and the ugly is based on human delusion and is wholly artificial.

3. That we must accordingly forsake the dualistic fallacy and return to our home of non-duality, where our salvation is promised.¹⁰⁵

These philosophical developments implied a greater value being placed on individual agency, allowing the radical changes that occurred in the Muromachi Period development of the wabi aesthetic.

3.1.1 Kokoro, Omoi and Kotoba Expressed through Waka

Japanese aesthetics first explored the relation between the Buddhist concept of mind and art while looking at the form of poetry known as waka over a thousand years ago. A waka is a 31-syllable poem in five lines, with a set number of syllables to each line. The structure is 5/7/5, 7/7. It is this particular arrangement of syllables that distinguishes waka from a prose sentence consisting of the same number of syllables. This idea that structure is only thing that distinguishes waka from simple prose became important to me in my view of ‘function’ in my practice. The ability to hold water, to ‘contain’, is all that distinguishes my pots from burned lumps of clay.

Kino Tsurayuki (d. 946) separated the concept of mind (kokoro) from the concept of thoughts (omoi), where kokoro gave rise to omoi as the result of external stimuli. This division between kokoro and omoi is important to an understanding of waka, but also to an understanding of Japanese aesthetic awareness in relation to the arts that were associated with the wabi-style tea ceremony.

The waka poet uses techniques of word association and reference, borrowing phrases from other famous waka, as well as metaphors, similes and allegories to create a “poetic art which puts disproportionately strong emphasis on the semantic rather than syntactic aspect of language, depends heavily upon it, and develops it to the

extreme limit of possibility.”¹⁰⁶ The 31-syllable limit and the peculiar arrangement of 5/7/5, 7/7 provide a framework within which the entire semantic content of the poem can be perceived as a simultaneous spatial expanse rather than the conventional temporal succession.

Fujiwara no Teika (1251–1338), the poet and critical writer about poetry, played a major part in the further development of the concept of poetic creation in waka and his poetry influenced the development of wabi. Teika defined ten styles or modes found in traditional waka with some of these being the modes of yoen (ethereal beauty), onihisigitei (demon quelling force), sabi (loneliness, related to aware, a sense of sadness), yūgen (mystery or depth) and ushin (with-mind). Many of these concepts, particularly yoen, sabi, and yūgen are important in the development of wabi and will be explored later in this chapter. For Teika, the mode of ushin was the most important, for it described a quality that should be present in the other modes.¹⁰⁷

Takeno Jōō is said to have reached an understanding of the Tea while listening to Sanetaka’s lecture on Teika’s Eigataigai. Jōō states that “anybody who wants to know the true taste of wabi should savour this waka by Teika from the Shinkokinshu.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miwataseba</th>
<th>Looking about</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hana mo momiji mo</td>
<td>Neither flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakarikeri</td>
<td>Nor scarlet leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ura no tomaya no</td>
<td>A bayside reed hovel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aki no yūgare</td>
<td>In the autumn dusk ¹⁰⁸</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will explore interpretations of this poem and its relevance to wabi in more detail later in this chapter.

In his *Maigetsushō*, Teika further explored the importance of *kokoro* and *omoi* in relation to the act of creation in writing poetry. For Teika the “focal point of poetic consciousness moves…from the stage of the actual poetic-linguistic expression to its prior stage, i.e.. the *kokoro* in its narrow sense”. *Kokoro* in its narrow sense, is the pre-verbal, pre-phenomenal Mind which is “intrinsically connected with the process of expression only in the sense that the fermentative act of expression takes place there and potentially determines the way it will be verbalized”.

According to Izutsu and Izutsu *kokoro* is:

…primarily a peculiar mental domain transcending all phenomena relating to inner language. As soon as it finds itself phenomenally articulated or linguistically articulated, the *kokoro* (in its narrow sense, the “state of mind”) can no longer remain *kokoro*. Losing its essence it necessarily turns into *omoi* (thought, thinking and imagery) or *jō* (feeling, emotion).

The aim of the *waka* poet is to find the *kotoba* (the external language, the words) directly from the *kokoro* without the intercession of the *omoi* (the articulated mind). Therefore the *kokoro* is the creative ground from which *kotoba* emerges spontaneously, without any exertion from the *omoi* itself. Rather, “control must necessarily be exercised through the rectification of the *kokoro* which itself lies beyond all conscious activity.”

In the ‘ideal’ *waka* (the *shūitsu*, a poem that springs fully formed into the linguistic form from the *kokoro*, without intervention of thought) the *omoi* “crystallizes itself, almost without any manipulation on the part of the creative subject, into the perfect form” producing a *waka* with a “peculiar charm of ineffable beauty, an undefinable aesthetic equilibrium”. However in the more usual case, the *kotoba* of the poem is produced in a process of elaboration within the general aesthetic framework of *waka* in which elaboration should be “exercised with *omoi* … as immediately activated by *kokoro* (state of mind) … as its necessary basis”. The quality of *ushin*, (with–mind) is to be found in this “peculiar linkage of *kokoro*, *omoi* (inner language) and *kotoba* (external language)” and is, for Teika, “the indispensable basis commonly shared by

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109 Izutsu and Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty*, 8, 9. In its broad sense the *kokoro* consists of the ‘not-yet-activated’ pre-phenomenal *kokoro* and the ‘already-activated’ *omoi* (thoughts) and *jō* (non verbal feelings and emotions).


111 Ibid, 10.
all the aesthetic modes and values he has established in his treatise”. Haga Koshiro states that Teika used the word *ushin* (with mind), favouring it over *yūgen* (mystery, depth), although there is only a subtle difference.

### 3.1.2 Yo-jō: Lingering emotion

As noted above, the phenomenally articulated *kokoro* (in its narrow sense) necessarily turns into *omoi* (thought, thinking and imagery) or *jō* (feeling, emotion). *Jō*, as distinct from *omoi*, is a non-semantic, non-articulated aspect of the phenomenally articulated *kokoro*, and is considered “an integral, unarticulated whole” even though it may be identified as common emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, pleasure, etc. Because *jō* is the non-semantic aspect of the phenomenally articulated *kokoro*, it was felt by the *waka* poets to have closer links to the *kokoro* (in its narrow sense) than *omoi* (thought, thinking and imagery), and hence it was desirable to express *jō* in their poetry. However, as it is not possible to directly express the ineffable quality of *jō*, the *waka*-poet noted that *omoi* and *jō* both develop from *kokoro* and that as:

…they are thus structurally interrelated with each other in an inseparable and organic way, [this] leads his creative consciousness toward developing a peculiar mode of poetic expression in which the internal relationship…between *omoi* and *jō* would be wholly transferred as it is to the external dimension of language without losing its organic interrelationship. This will be the case only when a linguistic expression is made in such a way that it is directly connected with *omoi* as an immediate phenomenalization of *kokoro* itself. For, then it maybe expected that the very linguistic expression of *omoi* will necessarily be permeated with *jō* lingering around it.

This externalised *jō* is known as *yo-jō* or *amari-no-kokoro* (surplus-mind), and as a trans-linguistic phenomenon that “can be induced and actualized only as a concurrent phenomenon of linguistic expression, in the dimension of linguistic expression by the linguistic expression itself” becomes “the highest aesthetic ideal that directly incites in the creative consciousness of the *waka*-poet an aspiration towards its actualization in his work”. The key aesthetic ideas of classical and early

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medieval Japanese literature, aware (sadness) and yūgen (mystery and depth), are thus held to be merely specific derivatives of the aesthetic value of yo-jō, and that they share trans-linguistic configuration.\(^{116}\)

### 3.1.3 Yūgen: mystery and depth

The word yūgen consists of two components, the first of which, yū connotes faintness and insubstantiality. The second component, gen refers to a dim or dark state caused by profundity. It thus implies a state beyond visibility, or unknowable depth.\(^{117}\) When Kino Tsurayuki wrote the preface to the Kokin-shū in the tenth century his ideal was that the kokoro (as the field from which poetry was formed) and the kotoba (as the external language of the poem) should be equal in the finished poem. This implied a balance between emotion and expression, “the correspondence of heart and words, the complimentary of fruit and flower”. Tsurayuki was critical of waka-poets whose work was lacking in kokoro, but he was also critical of poetry in which he saw the balance too strongly in favour of kokoro. Haga quotes Tsurayuki’s criticism of the poetry of Ariwara no Narihira (825–880) as “overflowing with heart, inadequate in words. It is like a faded flower drained of colour but with the scent still lingering”.\(^{118}\) As Haga states, it is apparent that the quality of lingering emotion that became known as yo-jō or the mysterious quality of yūgen were not valued at this time.

Towards the end of the twelfth century the poet Fujiwara Shunzei (1114–1204) came to regard yūgen as being “derived from the sense of longing for an unseen world, or sometimes a sense of wonder at the innate mystery of things.”\(^{119}\) He and other late-Heian Period poets like Fujiwara no Mototoshi linked the term yūgen with yo-jō resulting in the yo-jō yūgen style.

These waka-poets came to the understanding that the yo-jō (lingering emotion) style of writing allowed greater expression within the restricted, 31-syllable form. Haga states that for Shunzei:

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 16.
\(^{117}\) Ibid., 27.
... superior poems were those that ‘over and above the diction (kotoba) and general configuration (sugata) of the verse’ are suffused with a lingering subtlety of thought and vagueness of emotion ‘like a trail of mist around spring flowers, or the cry of a deer before an autumn moon, or the scent of spring wind by a plum blossom hedge, or the patter of soft rain on autumn maple leaves among the crags.’

Shunzei’s son Fujiwara no Teika wrote his Maigetsushu further proposing the greater importance of kokoro over kotoba, and by end of the twelfth century, Kamo no Chōmei (1155-1216) came to suggest that poetic expressions that held kokoro and kotoba in equal importance were inferior in aesthetic quality.

By the early Muromachi period, the popularity of waka was declining, being replaced with the ‘linked verse’ poetry known as renga, and further development of the concept of yūgen occurred in the writings of Zeami (1363–1443) in the world of nō. During the period of the Kitayama culture of the third Ashikaga Shogun, Yoshimitsu, Zeami developed a theory of the dramatic art of nō. Nō developed out of the Yamoto saragaku tradition of mime when Zeami, and his father, the actor Kan’ami Kiyosugu incorporated the “singing and dancing styles of Ōmi saragaku and dengaku (field music).”

Zeami wrote about the spirit of nō in his Fushi Kaden, and The Nine Stages (probably written before 1427). In The Nine Stages, Zeami defined nine stages of performance, divided into three groupings, the “Three High Flowers”, “The Middle Three Stages”, and the “Low Three Stages”. Each of the Zeami’s Nine Stages begins with an epigram and is followed by a short passage of explanation. The highest of the nine Modes, “Flower of Mysterious Singularity” (The highest of the “Three High Flowers”) starts with the quote of a phrase used in Zen texts,

At dead of night, the sun shines in Shinra...

Toyo and Toshihiko Izutsu write “the articulating function of the human mind as well as all that has been articulated dissolve into the abyss of darkness. However,

120 Haga, “The Wabi Aesthetic Through the Ages.” 203
121 Ibid., 204. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Chomei was unusual as, when confronted with reversals in his life retired to a hut in Hino (in 1204) and lived there until his death. He wrote Mumyōshō, Hosshinshū, and Hōjōki living in reclusion, establishing what became known as sōan bungaku (grass hut literature) and helping to establish the concept of the grass hut which influenced the later development of the smaller tea house. Chomei’s hut was a one room structure 10 feet square and became a model for the tea house.
this abysmal darkness can be at the same time the brilliance of sunlight.” Therefore, the highest of Zeami’s “Three High Flowers”, the “Flower of Mysterious Singularity” corresponds with the aim of the ideal waka as an expression of the void, the emptiness, of the un-articulated kokoro that the waka poets were trying to express, and which was to be significant in the development of wabi. This is not the Western style void full of nothingness, but rather, a void brimming with potential.

The contemporary architect Kurokawa Kisho writes that, for Zeami, hana, the flower, was the life of nō. For Kurokawa, “Zeami’s aesthetic is a characteristically Japanese one of symbiosis that has much in common with the original meaning of wabi.” Based on Zeami’s use of the word hana as peak of the aesthetic of nō, Kurokawa invents a new term hanasuki as a substitute for the word wabi, proposing that the original meaning of wabi has been distorted over time. I will explore this later in this chapter.

3.1.4 The Metaphysics of Wabi

As we have seen above, any understanding of wabi of necessity involves an understanding of how Buddhist thought has effected the development of this philosophy. In Nambō Sōkei’s Nambōroku, two poems are quoted as holding the essence of wabi, the poem by Teika quoted earlier and a poem by Fujiwara no Ietaka which Sen no Rikyū said held the essence of wabi. These poems are regarded as containing a symbolic representation of wabi. I will present both of them here, and discuss them in relation to a metaphysical understanding of wabi.

Firstly, Teika’s poem from the Shinkokin-shu:

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123 Izutsu and Izutsu, The Theory and Beauty of Japanese Aesthetics, 43.
124 Kurokawa, “Hanasuki.”
125 The metaphors of these poems are explained in the Nambōroku. I have relied on the translation of that text in Toshihiko and Toyō Izutsu’s The Theory of Beauty in Classical Japanese Aesthetics.
Miwataseba

Looking about

Hana mo momiji mo

Neither flowers

Nakarikeri

Nor scarlet leaves

Ura no tomaya no

A bayside reed hovel

Aki no yūgure

In the autumn dusk

And then Ietaka’s:

Hana o nomi

To those who wait

Matsuran hito ni

Only for flowers,

Yamazato no

Show them a spring

Yukima no kusa no

Of grass amid the snow

Haru o misebaya

In a mountain village

The Nambōroku aligns the momoji, the flowers and scarlet leaves, of Teika’s Miwateseba, with the luxurious elegance of the shoin-daisu Tea that preceded the time of Jukō, and no doubt continued in some form up to Rikyū’s time. According to the Nambōroku ‘Master Jōō’ saw that: “Only after having thoroughly experienced the gazing and pondering upon these ‘flowers and tinted leaves’, can one appreciatively recognize the bleak, austere simplicity of the ‘fisherman’s hut’.” The Nambōroku then states that ‘Master Sōeki’ (Rikyū) always kept Teika’s poem (Miwataseba) with him as well as the second poem by Ietaka.126 The Nambōroku explains the significance of this second poem in this way. The ‘longing for flowers’ leads people to live in anxiety searching mountain and forest for the perfect blossom or autumn colour, not recognizing “that the ‘flowers and tinted leaves’ exist right there, in their own minds.”127 Mountain villages and fishermen’s huts are symbolic of austerity and simplicity (sabi), where non-being is signaled through the disappearance of colourful flowers and leaves. Again, this idea is the state of

muichibutsu, the primordial kokoro, the pre-verbal, pre-phenomenal Mind. The Nambōroku then draws an analogy between the grass breaking through the snow, and to the spontaneous development of the functions of sense and sensation, the omoi, as it “manifests itself sporadically here and there” out of the Buddhist state of Nothingness. The development of this ‘thought’ is seen as occurring in a manner similar to the “evolvement of the scenery” described in the poem “[a]s the earth, which has turned into a sheet of snow during the winter, receives the first spring warmth, the young sprouts of grasses, each two or three leaves, in their sprightly green, peep from among the snows, sporadically here and there.”

Haga says of the first of these poems, Teika’s Miwataseba:

… the notion of beauty that Jōō derives from this poem is that of a tranquil, austere beauty which transcends the vivid beauty of spring light or the striking beauty of autumn leaves. His ideal is closer to that of an inkwash monochrome, the lonely beauty of ‘a bayside reed hovel in the autumn dusk’, a faded beauty of emptiness.

For Rikyū this poem represents the important Zen metaphysical concept of muichibutsu no kyōgai ‘the domain where there is not a single thing’ or ‘the state of no possession.

The importance of these two poems to both Jōō and Rikyū, reinforces the connections between the critical assessment of waka poetry during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods and the intellectual development of wabi. It also indicates that the concepts that were of concern to the waka poets, the promotion of the ‘lingering emotion, deep and mysterious’ beauty of the yo-jō yūgen style of poetry were also striven for in the beauty that was promoted in wabi.

3.1.5 Yūgen and Yatsushi

The Zen monk Seigen Shōtetsu (1381–1459) who studied waka under Imagawa Ryōshun of the Reizei School wrote about the quality of yo-jō yūgen in his treatise Shōtetsu Monogatari:

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130 Izutsu and Izutsu, The Theory of Beauty, 50.
What is called yūgen is something in the heart that cannot be expressed in words. The moon lightly veiled in clouds or the reddening autumn hills shrouded in mist are viewed as forms of yūgen. But when asked where exactly is the yūgen in these things, we find it hard to say.\textsuperscript{131}

Haga writes that Shōtetsu saw the yūgen ideal of beauty as “an elegant, flamboyant and femininely voluptuous beauty” and that “as such it was close to the earlier Zeami model of the yūgen aesthetic”.\textsuperscript{132}

The inner/outer relationship that was valued in the yo-jō yūgen style of waka and in Zeami’s nō, where the inner kokoro (the pre-semantic ‘state of mind’) is regarded as being of much greater importance than the external expression, whether that be the kotoba (the semantic expression) of the poem or the actions on the nō stage, becomes an important background for the development of wabi as an aesthetic. As Haga says:

> The aesthetic consciousness of wabi, then, suppresses the outward display of expression while storing within itself a rich depth of emotion. In this it realizes a profound and simple inner beauty in which wabi is a differentially structured ‘inner outer’ beauty.\textsuperscript{133}

In this suppression of the outward display of beauty is found the concept of yatsushi. Kumakura Isao defines yatsushi as usually having the meaning of “to appear miserable, to change one’s shape or figure in order to avoid drawing attention to oneself, to omit things”, but he chooses to emphasise a slightly different meaning, where yatsushi implies “that behind a temporarily assumed, worn, miserable appearance is something that in its original form has perfect beauty.”\textsuperscript{134}

Kumakura sees this yatsushi as appearing frequently in The Tale of Genji and refers to a section where, after the death of his consort, Genji is still wearing summer garments although autumn has come. Kumakura sees this wearing of “somber, out of season” clothing as making Genji’s beauty even more appealing, and identifies the beauty of yatsushi in this covering of something noble with something drab. Kumakura sees yatsushi as a significant concept in the understanding of wabi, and describes the wabi-Tea as a situation where yatsushi was the dominant process in train. Within wabi-Tea yatsushi made possible the temporary transformation of

\textsuperscript{131}Seigen Shōtetsu, Shōtetsu Monagatari, quoted in Haga, “The Wabi Aesthetic Through the Ages”, 213.

\textsuperscript{132} Haga, “The Wabi Aesthetic Through the Ages,” 213.

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Ibid.}, 204-205.

\textsuperscript{134} Kumakura, “Reexamining Tea,” 31.
sophisticated circumstances into the seemingly unrefined. It enabled the creation of metaphorical mountain dwellings within the boundaries of the city where participants could temporarily become suki recluses.135

Kumakura sees the process of yatsushi exemplified in the changes of the structure of the teahouse from the formal (shin) style of Jukō, through Jōō’s gyō (semi-formal) style, and then on to Rikyū’s sō (informal) style. A particular example of this is the treatment of the walls in the tokonoma (alcove) in the Tea-room. In the shoin-daisu tea towards the end of the Ashikaga Shogunate the walls of the tokonoma were papered with painted landscapes. The four-and-a-half-mat room constructed by Jukō in the formal (shin) style had tokonoma walls papered with plain white. Jōō left the walls un-papered leaving the clay and straw of the walls exposed. Kumakura goes on to say that “the beauty of yatsushi lies in the plain and unadorned. Jōō discovered this fact, and Rikyū used it to perfect the aesthetic of wabi.”136

Figure 12: Un-papered walls of the tokonoma of Tai-an Tea-room, attributed to Sen no Rikyū.

135 Ibid., 35.
136 Ibid., 60.
In this section we have looked at the aesthetic concepts developed during the Kamakura and Muromachi Periods that by 1450 CE had combined to provide the fundamental ingredients that would become wabi. I believe that the aim of these aesthetic concepts, yūgen, yo-jō and yatsushi is to strive to promote, in the audience of the relevant art form, a response that is greater than the structural components of the art should be able to provide, a ‘perfect beauty’, and that wabi, as it developed, was an attempt to apply these concepts to the object. I would argue that the concept of yatsushi as a component of wabi is of particular importance to our appreciation of the natural-ash-glazed wood-fired ceramics at the heart of this dissertation, as the quiet tones and clay colours of the fired objects, once studied, can present as a perfect beauty.

3.2 The Wabi Aesthetic in Japanese Culture

3.2.1 Suki … taste or refinement, with a touch of eccentricity

In the period during which wabicha was developed by Jukō, Jōō, Rikyū and others, a word commonly used to describe the developing style of tea was suki. The word suki is the commonly used word for ‘to like’ in Japanese, and is generally written using the kanji, 好き, which is a combination of the characters for woman and child. However, within the world of the aesthete, the characters for number (su) and odd /strangeness (ki), (suki 数奇), or another ki, meaning ‘let approach, bring near, collect, add up’ (suki 数寄), were used. The first of these two combinations of characters used for writing suki gives a sense of asymmetry and unevenness. Haga points out that in the section of the Zencha-Roku that discusses suki, the original meaning of suki is given as “a form in which the parts are uneven, and do not match” and further as “lacking essential parity, being asymmetrical, unbalanced”\footnote{Haga, “The Wabi Aesthetic Through the Ages,” 198.}

During the Heian period the word written with these characters had two meanings, originally as “a predilection for amorous affairs”, and the second sense as “a fondness for elegant pastimes”. By the Kamakura period it had fewer connotations of a sexual nature and had come to mean “to pursue one’s attachment to its realization”
and was associated with poetry and music.\textsuperscript{138} It is this ‘attachment’ that defines *suki*. Izutsu and Izutsu state:

\begin{quote}
\ldots the word *suki* originally meant ‘artistic ardor’, a particular subjective attitude of man in his life-style giving unproportionate preponderance to aesthetic sense and sensibility over the pragmatic sense of utility.\textsuperscript{139}
\end{quote}

By the early sixteenth century, and prior to the association of the word *wabi* with the world of Tea, the word *suki* was associated with Tea. By the time of Murata Jukō it was used to differentiate this new style of Tea from the prior forms of tea drinking, such as the tea-tasting competitions (*tōcha*). It would seem that for a period in the late sixteenth century, during the development of the *wabi*-style Tea-ceremony, the terms *suki* and *wabi* were both used to describe the newly developing form of Tea. João Rodrigues, also known as ‘Rodrigues the Interpreter’, a Jesuit who arrived in Japan in 1577 as a boy and lived there for some thirty years, is quoted as writing that there was “a special rite with which they show visitors exceptional honor and welcome. This used to be called *chanoyu*, but is now called *suki*.”\textsuperscript{140} It is in the pursuit of an aesthetic interest to its ultimate end that is *suki*, that the Izutsus see the source of the asceticism that is associated with the concept of *wabi* as it came to be applied in Tea. They see that this “non-pragmatic value system” can develop either into an aesthetic that is celebratory and exuberant, or into one that idealises asceticism to the point of “having essential compatibility with the metaphysical-ethical austerity of a hermit.”\textsuperscript{141}

It is inherent in the concept of *suki* that whichever path was followed, the outcome would be followed to its logical extreme. The first of the two pathways leads to an “attachment to what is novel and unusual, the exotic and bizarre (*ifū itai* 異風異体).” This attachment to the novel and bizarre, leads to *monozuki* (物数寄) an “obsessive taste for the idiosyncratic”, which Kumakura defines as “delighting in novelty and

\textsuperscript{138} Kumakura, “Reexamining Tea,” 14-15.
\textsuperscript{139} Izutsu and Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty*, 48.
\textsuperscript{141} Izutsu and Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty*, 49.
being somewhat maniacal in one’s amassing of striking objects” and to the excesses of the tōcha competitions, and the basara, and kabuki fashions.\textsuperscript{142}

It is from the second pathway, the ethical-austere aspect of suki, that the quest “for the wabi beauty of simplicity, non-attachment and spiritual calm” was to develop. However, the ethical-austere aspect always contained hints of the monozuki, as wabi developed this would lead to the asceticism of Rikyū’s extreme practice.

Kumakura provides a diagram that attempts to give a visual understanding of suki.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{kumakura_diagram.png}
\caption{Kumakura Isao’s Structure of suki.}
\end{figure}

In this figure the top plane of the diagram (C-A-B) is the plane of theory, the ‘ideal’, and the bottom plane represents objects or things (F-D-E). The vertical line in the foreground, (C-F), represents Noami’s category of shin tai (formal mode), the formal shoin Tea using karamono (Chinese objects).

\textsuperscript{142} Kumakura, “Reexamining Tea,” 27-28. Kumakura says that ifū itai is “exemplified by the styles described as basara (basara) furyū (風流) and kabuki カブキ” Basara is where “the love of the extraordinary and accumulation of objects was paramount” and was a term associated with challenges to the traditional aesthetics of the Nanbokuchō period of the Muromachi period, furyū “implies something audacious in its visual appeal” and kabuki “came to mean to act in an imbalanced or strange way”.

Moving towards the line D-A on the left of the diagram in the plane C-F-D-A (the plane that encompasses the flamboyant aesthetics of basara, and kabuki) we are moving into the aspect of suki which is characterised by exuberance and profusion. On the right of the diagram moving towards the line B-E in the plane C-F-B-E (the plane of yatsushi, the plane of hidden, disguised beauty), we are moving towards Naomi’s category of sō tai, the informal style and the aspect of suki characterised by austerity.

As suki is the pursuit of an aesthetic interest to its logical end, it will be seen that A-B-D-E is the plane that defines suki, and I would argue that it is along this plane that the wood-fired object is to be found. On the line D-E at point E would be found the extreme wabi objects, objects that are quiet and unassuming, objects that display shibui (astringency, sobriety or quietness), such as simple Bizen forms. As we move along the line towards the point D we would find more flamboyant, extreme objects such as Iga forms like the famous water jar known as Yaburebukuro (Torn Pouch, Figure 15), forms that are more extreme in their shaping and in their firing, forms that are more challenging in their application and function.

3.2.2 Wabi

It is from the mix of aesthetic concepts I have attempted to explain in Section 3.1 above that the peculiar aesthetic concept of wabi was formed. To summarise them, we have the aesthetics of waka poetry in which the kokoro is seen as the pre-phenomenal field that controls the form that the omoi of the articulated mind will take. The aim of waka-poets of the yo-jō yūgen style of waka was to use words in a way as to evoke in the audience emotions and feelings that were inexpressible in words, and within nō these same outcomes were to be achieved through performance. The Tea Masters set out to achieve this same sense of yo-jō yūgen within the context of drinking tea. They accomplished this through stylizing the performance of Tea, and through redefining the objects and the environment utilised during this performance. This new aesthetic was wabi.

Cort says of the development of wabi that:

The wabi ceremony has claimed the Japanese imagination with a power that far outlasted its period of vitality. It has permanently affected the way in which Japanese think about material objects, and to the extent that
that thinking has become familiar in the West, it affects our imagination also.\textsuperscript{141}

The kanji used to write \textit{wabi} (侘) is defined in the Nelson Japanese English Character Dictionary as:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{wabi}(ru) be worried, be grieved, pine for.
  \item \textit{wabi} subdued taste.
  \item \textit{wabi}(shii) wretched, comfortless, lonesome.
\end{itemize}

Haga states that the original sense of \textit{wabi} “embraces disappointment, frustration and poverty”.\textsuperscript{144} Yuriko Saito, in her exploration in English of this aesthetic avoids the use of the word \textit{wabi}, and instead uses the phrase, “the Japanese aesthetic of imperfection and insufficiency.”\textsuperscript{145} Clearly, a reversal in values is involved in turning such negative concepts as “be worried for”, “pine for”, “wretched”, “lonesome”, “imperfect”, and “insufficient” into an aesthetic that sees the beauty in objects. Izutsu and Izutsu see the introduction of \textit{wabi} into the Tea-ceremony as “drastically chang[ing] the significance of the entire range of aesthetic life-style as well as the patterns of artistic expression and appreciation of the Japanese.” This change created a genuine reversal of values “to the extent that in some cases what had hitherto been regarded as positive values turned negative while what had been negative became positive.” The Izutsus see the external aspects of \textit{wabi} as a preference for subdued tones and ashen and charcoal colours matched with forms that displayed asymmetrical, imperfect and crude plainness instead of fineness and symmetry.\textsuperscript{146}

As noted in Chapter 2, the evolution of \textit{wabi} in \textit{chanoyu} began with Murata Jukō in the later half of the fifteenth century, was further developed by Takeno Jōō in the first half of the sixteenth century, and was drawn to its \textit{suki} extreme towards the end of the sixteenth century by Sen no Rikyū. Following Rikyū’s death in 1592 \textit{wabi} incorporated more \textit{basara} or \textit{kabuki} aspects under the guidance of Furuta Oribe, then moved back a little in the direction of the more formal, Chinese model under the

\textsuperscript{141} Cort, \textit{Shigaraki}, 129
\textsuperscript{144} Haga, “The Wabi Aesthetic Through the Ages,” 197.
\textsuperscript{146} Izutsu and Izutsu, \textit{The Theory of Beauty}, 46, 47.
ki-rei wabi (beautiful wabi) of Kobori Enshu before being reclaimed and formalised by Rikyū’s descendants.

Although the concept of wabi developed from a range of influences, it was within the Tea Ceremony that wabi developed into a way of seeing positive values in objects that would have been disregarded had wabi not developed. Murai Yasuhiko points out that:

Wabi was taken into the world of chanoyu and made its aesthetic because at the height of the craze for mono-suki (the taste for material things) chanoyu encountered wabi as an aesthetic based on things. … Yet we have noted that wabi originally implied a lack of things. The point however is not to be completely bereft of material possessions (since there would then be no need for an aesthetic): Wabi does not mean to deny things, but rather to penetrate as far as possible to their true essence and therein discern beauty. In the beauty of the plain lies the ultimate sense of beauty that the Japanese have discovered. It is a beauty of restraint. Wabi goes beyond the beauty of things and becomes a state of mind. 147

This aspect of wabi, that it is an aesthetic based on things, is important, for it is often said that wabi is an aesthetic of nothingness or void (mu 空).148 But the relationship with chanoyu during the development of the aesthetic of wabi dictates a relationship with the object.

3.3 Wabi: a definition

Wabi as an aesthetic is difficult to define. Izutsu and Izutsu argue the need to consider wabi as having two separate aspects, the wabi-taste of the external expression of wabi, and the “genuine essence of the idea of wabi as an aesthetic value.” They argue that the exceptional character of wabi is to be found in this simplicity of external surface and form contrasted with “the positive potentials and rich vestiges of inner articulation.”

This idea of wabi as an aesthetic in which a poverty of external expression disguises an internal expression rich in emotion is an expression of the yo-jō yūgen beauty so valued in waka and reinforces Kumakura’s emphasis on the importance of the

148 Kurokawa “Hanasuki.”
149 Izutsu and Izutsu, The Theory of Beauty, 48-52.
concept of yatsushi (as discussed earlier) within the aesthetic framework of wabi. Reinforcing the importance of the role of yo-jō yūgen and the concept of yatsushi within wabi, Haga writes of Rikyū’s wabi that:

…viewed externally, it is impoverished, cold, and withered. At the same time, internally, it has a beauty which brims with vitality. While it may appear to be the faded beauty of the passive recluse, or the remnant beauty of old age, it has within it the beauty of non-being, latent with unlimited energy and change.¹⁵⁰

This ‘non-being’ must be seen as the Buddhist concept of the void, brimming with potential, and should not be mistaken for empty ‘nothingness’.

For Haga, wabi is difficult to describe with a simple definition as it is “an aesthetic that brings together many diverse elements”, but having three main aspects. He sees it as being like a three-sided pyramid, with the sides being:

“Simple, unpretentious beauty.”

“Imperfect, irregular beauty.”

“Austere, stark beauty.”¹⁵¹

Haga continues on to comment on each of these three aspects of wabi.

Simple and Unpretentious Beauty

For the first of these, the ‘simple, unpretentious beauty’, he says wabi is “a kind of beauty which stores a nobility, a richness of spirit, and a purity within what may appear to be a rough exterior. … It is a beauty, in a word, that detests excesses of expression and loves reticence, that hates arrogance and respects the poverty that is humility.” The root of the word wabi is bound up with concepts of poverty, failure and frustration in achieving ones goals.¹⁵² Therefore, the beauty of wabi is, of necessity, linked to the reversal of values that sees beauty in objects that display a restricted range of expression. Wabi does not display ornate decoration or ostentatious materials, but as stated above, it displays an inner beauty beneath what

¹⁵² Ibid., 195, 197.
might seem to be “a rough exterior.” This is the concept of *yatsushi* as described by Kumakura.¹⁵³

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Imperfect, Irregular Beauty

The second of these aspects involves what Haga describes as one of the major characteristics of wabi, that it “finds a deeper beauty in the blemished rather than the unblemished.” The term suki, a precursor to the use of the word wabi, has a strong sense of asymmetry and irregularity, which can be seen in this aspect of wabi. Yuriko Saito points out that the introduction of imperfect items into the Tea-ceremony began with “‘found objects’ which have already been damaged, aged or blemished.”

By far the most conspicuous examples can be found in Tea wares and utensils for the ceremony. Impoverished-looking and irregularly shaped Korean peasants’ bowls, often with chips and cracks, were highly esteemed for use in the tea ceremony. The accidental damages to Tea wares or signs of their age did not stop their use; either the bowls were left unrepaired, or the trace of the repair was left visible. Furthermore, many Tea wares were cherished precisely because of these seeming defects.

My particular interest in this dissertation lies in the effect that the development of wabi had on the way that ceramics, in particular wood-fired ceramics, were ‘seen’. It is of interest to note that the nature of the cross-draft anagama-style kilns used in Japan up to the end of the Momoyama period inevitably gave an irregular quality to the surface effects on the ceramics. The long, inefficient firings in the kilns in Shigaraki, Bizen and particularly Iga, built up ash deposits on the surface facing the firebox producing thick and irregular natural ash glaze deposits. The length of the firing at high temperatures would lead to distortion, cracking and collapse as the clays became soft with heat. The famous ceramics from Iga, such as the vase known as Yaburebukuro (torn pouch, figure 15), are defined by the heavy ash deposits and the splits and cracks that developed during the firing, and were valued precisely because of these ‘flaws’. Saito quotes Yanagi Sōetsu as seeing the attraction to the imperfect and irregular as founded on the mystery that is created when “there is … a little something left unaccounted for.”

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158 Ibid., 379.
Austere Stark Beauty

Haga’s third aspect of wabi is “a tranquil, austere beauty, the cool stark beauty of the original non-being, muichibutsu.”159 This is the beauty of the ‘chilled and withered’ seen by Jōō in the phrase ‘a bayside reed hovel, in the autumn dusk’ in Teika’s poem Miwataseba, and in Jukō’s kokoro no fumi where he cautions against the use of the

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‘cold’ and ‘withered’ wares from Bizen and Shigaraki by those who do not have the understanding of how to properly use them. This is the beauty of grey winter, “a lonely cold and desolate world,” but “latent with unlimited energy and change.”\textsuperscript{160}

\begin{figure}[h]
\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{vase.jpg}
\end{center}
\caption{Old Bizen flower vase, Dated 1557. An example of a ‘Stark and Austere’ beauty.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 200.
These visions of the meaning of wabi start to give us a definition of the aesthetic: It is an aesthetic that sees beauty in the stark, the simple and the irregular, it is an aesthetic that sees a beauty below the poverty of surface, and it is a beauty that allows and values the imperfections of age and use.

In his book, *Wabi Sabi: the Japanese Art of Impermanence*, Andrew Juniper gives the following definition of the combined word wabi-sabi:

\[
\text{Wabi-sabi} \text{ is an intuitive appreciation of a transient beauty in the physical world that reflects the irreversible flow of life in the spiritual world. It is an understated beauty that exists in the modest, rustic, or even decayed, an aesthetic sensibility that finds a melancholic beauty in the impermanence of all things.}^{163}
\]

Looking again at the wood-fired surfaces that are the interest of this dissertation we can see the natural fit between the effects that are generated on the surface of these wares and the aesthetic of wabi as it developed. The palette of colours generated by the natural-ash glazed surfaces are muted greens and greys, the cross-draft kilns give uneven and irregular qualities, and the process meant that many works had flaws, cracks and scars. It is my contention that the wood-fired surface was a perfect match for the developing aesthetic of wabi, and that with wabi-tea encompassing the wood-fired object, the aesthetic of wabi and the aestheticisation of the wood-fired surface developed in tandem.

**Kurokawa, Wabi and Hanasuki**

As mentioned above, the architect and architectural theorist, Kurokawa Kisho argues for the use of a new term hanasuki rather than the word wabi, as he believes that wabi as a concept has been interpreted in too narrow a manner.

Traditionally wabi has been thought of as silence opposed to loquacity, darkness as opposed to light; simplicity opposed to complexity; spareness as opposed to decoration; monochrome as opposed to color; the grass hut not the aristocrat’s mansion. Even in school texts, wabi is defined as an aesthetic of nothingness.\(^{164}\)

Kurokawa contends that wabi developed into an “aesthetic of nothingness, of death” due to the struggle of personalities between Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Sen no Rikyū.

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\(^{164}\) Kurokawa “Hanasuki”.
Kurokawa sees this as a political and aesthetic struggle, in which “though Hideyoshi was the supreme master of all Japan and brooked no opposition from anyone, in the art of Tea Rikyū was his superior”. Hideyoshi’s inclination towards extreme ostentation forced Rikyū into developing a more and more austere and stark form of wabi, and “in the struggle he refined and distilled his aesthetic ideal until he arrived at the nearly inconceivable extreme of simplicity of a tea room of one-and-a-half mat”.

Kurokawa questions whether wabi is really an aesthetic of ‘nothingness’, and refers to Teika’s poem Miwataseba that we have discussed above, the poem in the Shinkokinshu that is quoted in the Nambōroku as the essence of Jukō’s wabi.

To quote Kurokawa,

... this is not an aesthetic of nothingness by any means. It is an aesthetic of double code, in which we are asked to gaze at the roughly thatched hut while recalling the gorgeous flowers and leaves. It is an ambiguous, symbiotic aesthetic, which simultaneously embraces splendour and simplicity.

Kurokawa refers to the novelist Tanizaki Jun’ichiro who wrote an essay, In Praise of Shadows, about how garish gold-lacquer objects become sombre when in a dark space lit by a single candle:

... suddenly those garish objects turn sombre, refined, dignified ... a double code – the absolute opposite: gorgeous golden decoration and the shadows of the night. In his dramatic phrase ‘the brocade of night itself’ we detect in lineage an aesthetic of wabi that is very far indeed from a philosophy of nothingness.

In this essay, Tanizaki points out that, in pre-modern times, internal rooms were always dark, and lighting was limited to candles which did little to dispel the darkness. It was in this type of dim architectural environment that wabi developed.

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165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 Tanizaki Jun’ichiro, In Praise of Shadows (Sedgwick, ME: Leete’s Island Books, 1977.)
Kurokawa sees the extreme minimalism of Rikyü’s Tea as denying the intent of the original developers of wabi, an aesthetic double code in which we “asked to gaze at a roughly thatched hut while recalling the gorgeous flowers and leaves.” The origin of wabi with Jukō, positioned it as an aesthetic of contrast: “penning a magnificent stallion in a straw hut.” Kurokawa looks to the Tea of Rikyü’s disciples, men such as Furuta Oribe, Oda Uraku, and the later Kobori Enshu for a more balanced concept of wabi, which allows for this richness to once again be present. He proposes that the traditional interpretation of wabi as a “restrained and anti-decorative concept[s] is badly skewed” and suggests a new word of hanasuki as a way to “restore the present vulgarized and corrupted version of wabi to its original meaning.” The word hanasuki is based on Zeami’s belief that hana, ‘the flower’, was at the core of nō. For Kurokawa, “the aesthetic of hana is one of the symbiosis of heterogeneous elements, of disparate moods and feelings”.

3.4 The Wabi Aesthetic and Wabi-sabi

The words wabi and sabi have come to be used almost interchangeably when talking about aesthetics, and in Western usage, the combined word, wabi-sabi is perhaps the most commonly used and understood term applied to this aesthetic. As noted above the kanji commonly used for wabi has meanings of “be worried, grieve for, wretched, comfortless, lonesome”, while the Nelson dictionary gives the character used for sabi, when used as an adjective (sabishii) meanings of “lonely, solitary, deserted.” As a noun, sabi, the definitions are patina, antique look, and elegant simplicity.

3.4.1 The Western awareness of Wabi, and Wabi-sabi

An awareness of the qualities represented by the aesthetic of wabi started to enter Western culture post-World War Two. The popularization of this philosophy came through various channels, including the introduction of Zen Buddhist ideas, particularly in California, and through the greater awareness of the arts and crafts in Japan, however, outside of academic papers the word ‘wabi’ is largely absent from this discussion. I explore this in greater detail in Chapter 8.

169 Kurokawa, “Hanasuki.”
The first popular text, for the Western reader that looked at wabi-sabi, and therefore at the aesthetic of wabi, would seem to be Leonard Koren’s *Wabi-sabi for Artists Designers Poets and Philosophers*, published in 1994. This book presented the commonly used definition of wabi-sabi:

> Wabi-sabi is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete.

> It is a beauty of things modest and humble.

> It is a beauty of things unconventional.170

Koren sets out to broaden the understanding of wabi-sabi by contrasting it with modernism, seeking both similarities and differences. Among the similarities he discerns are that they “[b]oth apply to all manner of manmade objects, spaces, and design”, “[b]oth are strong reactions against the dominant, established sensibilities of their time…”, and “[b]oth have readily identifiable surface characteristics. Modernism is seamless, polished and smooth. Wabi-sabi is earthy, imperfect and variegated.” Koren sees the differences as including modernism being “primarily expressed in the public domain” contrasted with wabi-sabi being in “… the private domain”, modernism having a “…logical, rational worldview” contrasted with “…an intuitive worldview”, “Absolute” contrasted with “Relative”, and “Geometric organization of form (sharp, precise, definite shapes and edges)” contrasted with the “Organic organization of form (soft, vague shapes and edges)” of wabi-sabi.171

Interestingly, Koren sees the wabi-sabi object as a momentary and transient phenomena, stating that “An object obtains the state of wabi-sabi only for the moment it is appreciated as such” and goes on to say in the attached notes that “[o]nce something becomes too valuable… it ceases to be wabi-sabi. It becomes, instead, only an expensive reminder of what was once a dynamic moment.”172

Although I can understand this is one way of viewing wabi-sabi (and wabi), as a maker of objects I have a view that the quality of wabi is inherent in the object, not in the moment.

172 Ibid., 61, 85.
In 2003, Andrew Juniper published the next book that set out to popularise the concept of wabi and wabi-sabi for the West. His book is titled *Wabi-Sabi: The Japanese art of impermanence*.\(^{173}\) Juniper places great emphasis on the role of Rikyū in developing the aesthetic of wabi, downplaying the involvement of Jukō and Jōō.

Today the concept wabi-sabi has entered into the domain of pop psychology, and become a theme in popular culture; found in books ranging from self-help such as *Living Wabi Sabi: The True Beauty of Your Life*\(^{174}\), by Taro Gold, to interior design such as *The Wabi-sabi House: The Japanese Art of Imperfect Beauty*\(^{175}\), by Robyn Griggs Lawrence; and as a philosophy for software programing.


Chapter 4.  *Wabi*: Transfers From Rikyū to the Meiji Restoration

In this Chapter I will look the period from the end of the Momoyama period, generally considered to be from 1573 to 1600,\(^{176}\) shortly after the death of Hideyoshi through to the Meiji Restoration of 1868. During the period from 1600 to 1615, Furuta Oribe (1543–1615) played a major role as the leading Tea-master of the period, and the aesthetics of the Tea-wares of the time reflected the more robust taste of this warrior.

The end of the Momoyama Period and the rise of the Tokugawa Shogunate based in Edo was the start of a period of 250 years for seclusion of Japan. This was an inward looking period during which a rigid neo-Confucian social stratification was enforced. Donald Richie, the critic of Japanese film, in his *Tractate on Japanese Aesthetics* says of this time:

> In the Edo period, aestheticisation reached extraordinary heights. It was now that *bushidō*, the way of the warrior, was first rationalized and codified. Specific mention of *bushidō* as a readiness to die a beautifully noble death (an aesthetic decision) first came at a time when there was no longer a military need for any samurai to die by the sword. Necessary to a full and fixed aesthetic was, it seems, enforced seclusion, military peace, and a society near stagnation.\(^{177}\)

The first three-quarters of a century of the new Tokugawa Shogunate, from the start of the seventeenth century to around 1670, is referred to as the Kan’ei culture. It takes its name from, and is centred around, the Kan’ei era from 1624 to 1643.\(^{178}\) The first period of the Kan’ei culture, which was “characterized by the spread of a fierce struggle between the politics of centralized power and the culture of *gekokujō*”, ended in 1615 with the ‘Laws of the Court and the Courtier Houses’, and the ritual suicide of Furuta Oribe.\(^{179}\)

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\(^{176}\) Some historians place the end of the Momoyama at 1615.


\(^{179}\) Kumakura, “Kan’ei Culture and Chanoyu,” 136.
4.1 Rikyū’s Wabi and Momoyama Ceramics

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the aesthetic trajectory of the wabi Tea-ceremony from the time of Murata Jukō in the late 1400s through to the death of Rikyū in 1591 was a move away from the beauty of Song and Ming Dynasty Chinese ceramics towards the simplicity of and artlessness of native Japanese objects. It is in this period that the “artistic ardour” of suki, the pursuing of an aesthetic interest to its ultimate end, led the wabi Tea-ceremony to its most stripped-back extreme, “an aesthetic idealism having an essential compatibility with the metaphysical-ethical austerity of a hermit”. 180

In his later years, Rikyū’s philosophy had led to the use of newly made utensils, objects made to his taste, rather than the Chinese objects or items made for agricultural or domestic use by Japanese potters that were repurposed to suit the tea ceremony. To suit Rikyū’s taste for Tea-bowls that were “modestly shaped and focused inward” it is said that a Korean tile maker named Chōjirō made low-fired, lead-glazed bowls that culminated in the development of the Raku Tea-bowl, the undecorated rustic matte black or red earthenware tea-bowl “that became the heart of the Raku tradition”. 181

The development of Raku ware is significant because it is first time in Japanese Tea ceramics where it can be documented that “the users of wares directly influenced the nature of pieces created for their use”. 182 In other words, from this point Tea-wares, most notably Tea-bowls, began to be ‘made to order’ to suit the taste of the Tea connoisseur, allowing the explosion of the range of different ceramics produced during the late 1590s and early 1600s, including Setogoro, kuroseto, ki-seto, shino, Oribe and the wood-fired tea-wares from Bizen, Shigaraki and Iga. The importance of this ‘making to order’ cannot be overestimated; it led to what must be considered

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180 Izutsu and Izutsu, The Theory of Beauty, 49.
the most creative period in Japanese pottery, the *wabi* Tea-wares of the Momoyama Period.

The acceptance of the *wabi* qualities of the Raku Tea-bowl, for use within *chanoyu*, is important not only for starting this process of Tea-masters ordering Tea-wares to their tastes. I believe that the *wabi* qualities inherent in the Raku Tea-bowl, that is, the hand-formed quality of the clay, the unassuming nature of the lead glaze, and the imperfections of the glaze surface left by the iron tongs used to remove the pots from the kiln, combine to give an object that, when accepted as the new standard for use in the Tea-ceremony, allowed for the somewhat similar qualities of a wood-fired Tea-bowl to be valued.

As mentioned at the end of Chapter 3, Kurokawa Kisho sees the extremity of Rikyū’s pursuit of an austere *wabi* as the outcome of his relationship with Hideyoshi, seeing that these “particular circumstances are what let Rikyū to develop *wabi* into an aesthetic of nothingness, of death.”

Perhaps the Raku Tea-bowl, which Richard L. Wilson describes in his essay, “Oribe Ceramics and the Oribe Imagination,” as “nothing less than an implosion of style: pottery moving towards self-effacement”, can be seen as the reification of the extremity of this view of *wabi*. It is from this extremity of an ‘aesthetic of nothingness, of death’ that the Tea-ceremony continued to grow and change after Rikyū’s death in 1591.

4.2 Extension and Transformation: Oribe and Enshū

4.2.1 Oribe and Warrior Tea

The first major influence on the Tea ceremony, and on the world of ceramics in Japan after Rikyū’s suicide, was the warrior and Tea-master Furuta Oribe (1543-1615).

There are records of Oribe attending Tea ceremonies from 1585, and correspondence with Sen no Rikyū from about the same time indicates that he learned the

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183 Kurokawa, “Hanasuki”
fundamentals of *chanoyu* from Rikyū. Oribe was one of Rikyū’s followers from the warrior class who were identified as Rikyū’s ‘seven sages’, the others being Gamō Ujisato, Takayama Ukon, Hosokawa Sansai, Shibayama Kenmotsu, Seta Kamon, and Makimura Hyōbu.¹⁸⁵ Oribe and Hosokawa Sansai travelled with Rikyū as far as the boat landing at Yodo, when Hideyoshi ordered Rikyū to return to Sakai just before he was ordered to commit suicide, indicating Oribe’s closeness to Rikyū.

Kumakura points out that after Rikyū’s death Oribe was the leading Tea connoisseur in Japan, and his more robust style of *daimyo* Tea-ceremony (also known as Warrior Tea) became the preferred Tea of the day. This was a move away from the Merchant Tea of the *machishū* (merchant class) of Sakai, and indicative of the tightening of movement between the classes that was the natural outcome of Hideyoshi’s hegemony over Japan. It was the success of Hideyoshi’s attempts to restrict social mobility that became the basis of the stable rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate.¹⁸⁶ From this time *chanoyu* changed from the transformatory ritual it had been during the turmoil of the latter half of the sixteenth century, becoming the conformatory ritual of the Edo period.¹⁸⁷ To quote Kumakura, “A movement that emerged from the vigorous spirit of *gekokujō* (those below overthrow those above) and gave rise to a steady stream of aesthetic discoveries was brought to an abrupt halt by Hideyoshi’s unification of the country”.¹⁸⁸ Within Oribe’s own practice this *gekokujō* spirit lived on, and his aesthetic influenced pottery until he was commanded to suicide in 1615.

Oribe was born in a wealthy landowning family in Mino province, in 1543 or 1544.¹⁸⁹ His birth in Mino might explain the relationship between Oribe the man, and Oribe pottery, the ceramic wares with green glaze and iron painted patterns produced in Mino that came to be named after him following his death. Whether or not Oribe directly influenced the development of what is now referred to as Oribe-ware, there was a sudden and massive change in the style of ceramics used in the Tea-ceremony following Rikyū’s death and coincident with Oribe becoming the new arbiter of


¹⁸⁶ Watanabe, “Breaking Down the Boundaries,” 70.


¹⁸⁸ Kumakura, “Kan’ei Culture and Chanoyu,” 135.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 138.
taste. Murayama makes the point that the term Oribe applied to pottery “may be interpreted as encompassing all the Mino wares … Shino, Yellow Seto, as well as Oribe in the strict sense” because these wares “belong to what is known as ‘Oribe-gonomi’, that is they were liked and chosen … by Furuta Oribe”.

The belief that Oribe was directly involved in designing the explosion of new forms and patterns that developed between 1592 and 1615 is encouraged by texts, including Ryoichi Fujioka’s contribution to the series Arts Of Japan (volume three Tea ceremony Utensils), which make statements such as “The hallmarks of Oribe Tea-bowls …named for their designer the master Furuta Oribe...perhaps no other Tea-master was responsible for such bold and individualized designs”. However, there are few texts of the time that refer to Furuta Oribe and ceramics, and the links between Oribe the man and the ceramics of his time are circumstantial. As Richard L. Wilson points out, one of the limited number of texts more or less contemporary to Oribe’s life that provide a linkage between him and ceramics is Sōjinboku, a text on the Tea-ceremony, printed in 1626 some eleven years after Oribe’s suicide. This text credits Oribe with using “recently fired warped bowls” from Seto which could well be the “clog shaped” (kutsugata) Tea-bowls made at the Mino kilns.

Oribe’s aesthetics in chanoyu displayed a man with a “heterodox character that went against the trend of the times. Indeed it possessed an inherent destructiveness that paralleled the political behaviour that led to his physical destruction after the siege of Osaka Castle.” Perhaps Oribe’s tastes and judgements were still too rooted in the gekokujo spirit of the Momoyama Period for him to survive long in the new realities of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Oribe’s taste tended to be exuberant; his namesake ware features now-modernistic-appearing, abstract designs inspired by textile patterns, and exaggerated, misshapen forms that hark back to basara flamboyance.

In Kumakura Isao’s diagram depicting the aspects of suki which I show again here, the plane that moves towards the breaking of norms and the strange and bizarre, the

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193 Kumakura, “Kan’ei Culture and Chanoyu,” 139.
194 Watanabe, “Breaking Down the Boundaries,” 70.
plane that locates *basara* also contains the concept of *kabuki*. *Kabuki* might be a better term than *basara* to use in describing aspects of the culture of the Keichō era (1596–1615) in which Oribe was active as the leading Tea-master, and also might be suitable for describing the ceramics produced at that time. *Kabuki* is a word derived from a verb meaning “not to stand straight” and was used to describe groups of disenchanted youths who were “embracing unconventional styles and ways … and opposed the existing order” in the first decades of the seventeenth century, as the Tokugawa Shogunate was becoming established. Kumakura states: “The *kabuki* beauty of the crooked, the bent, and the radically altered appeared as the age of *gekokujō* expired”, and also makes the point that Oribe’s choice of ceramics for *chanoyu* was based on the extremely deformed:

… a misshapen tea bowl in which it was difficult to use a whisk or a water pitcher with large cracks which, although of extremely interesting shape, leaked when water was poured into it.

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**Figure 17: Kumakura Isao’s Structure of suki.**

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195 Kumakura, “Kan’ei Culture and Chanoyu,” 140.
196 Kumakura, “Kan’ei Culture and Chanoyu,” 140.
It is interesting that the eccentrically shaped *kutsugata* Mino tea bowls, and the wares from Iga and Karatsu that appeared during the Momoyama period are no longer seen as “oddities” and “improperly baked” as they were described at the time.\(^{197}\) Rather they are seen as the epitome of *wabi* ceramics, and it was the renewed interest in these wares that created the Momoyama Revival Movement of the 1930s.

From the time of the first recorded Tea gathering held by Oribe in 1585, his approach to Tea defied the existing paradigms, no famous Tea utensils were displayed, probably no scroll was hanging in the *tokonoma*, and a newly made Seto (Mino?) Tea-bowl was used.\(^{198}\) At his second recorded Tea gathering Oribe used a newly made bamboo basket in the shape of a fishing creel, more than 14 inches (350mm) high, as a vase in the *tokonoma*, and for five out of the eleven recorded Tea gatherings hosted by Oribe this basket was used. This was far larger than vases used for this role by Rikyū and earlier hosts, and the influence of its use spread to Iga and Mino ceramics with the difficult-to-use fishing-creel shape rapidly becoming popular as the water jar (*mizusashi*) in Tea.\(^{199}\) Perhaps the most famous of the fishing-creel shaped *mizusashi* is the natural ash glazed Iga Water Jar known as *Yaburebukuro* (torn or burst pouch. Figure 15). This jar is directly associated with Oribe’s taste, as there was, until it was destroyed in the fire after the Tokyo earthquake of 1923, a letter by Oribe declaring “the likes of it will not be achieved again” and that “although it has large cracks, they too are part of its charm.”\(^{200}\)

It is the wares of the Mino kilns that are primarily said to be associated with Oribe’s taste and influenced by his Tea preferences. These wares are *Black Seto* (*kuro-seto*, which was withdrawn from the hot kiln using iron tongs), *Yellow Seto* (*ki-seto* an ash and clay glaze), *shino* (a white, feldspathic-glaze), and the decorated wares now known as *Oribe* which use a copper green glaze. There are some questions about the period of time over which these wares were made, but it is generally accepted that they were produced from about 1570 through to 1615, and declined quickly after

\(^{197}\) *Ibid.*, 139.


\(^{199}\) Takeuchi, “Furuta Oribe and the Tea-ceremony,” 24-25.

that time. In their book *Shino and Oribe Kiln Sites*, published in conjunction with an exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, Faulkner and Impey do not give precise dates for the production of the different wares as such, but rather relate the different wares to the changing architecture of the kilns in which they were fired. However, in what could be a circular argument, the stages of the development of the ōgama kiln (the modification of anagama kilns that developed in Mino towards the end of the sixteenth century) are defined and dated by the glazes fired on the shards found in the kiln remains. The production of Black Seto and Yellow Seto glazes are what define the stage three ōgama, the first of the Momoyama Period ōgama. Yellow Seto and Black Oribe glazes were also found in the stage four ōgama but stage four ōgama “are by definition those that produced shino wares.” Faulkner and Impey limit shino production from about 1580 to shortly after 1600. 201

In the last few years of the sixteenth century, new kiln technology entered the Mino district probably from Karatsu in Kyushu, with the construction of the Motoyashiki noborigama multi-chamber climbing kiln. This style of kiln generally replaced the ōgama due to its greater efficiency. Once the climbing kiln was introduced, the nature of the shino glazes changed due to the higher temperatures and more even firing conditions, evolving into what is called Shino-Oribe. Then the use of a copper green glaze was popularised in what are today known as Oribe wares, green glazes combined with iron brushed decoration. By the second quarter of the seventeenth century, the production of Oribe wares was already in decline.

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Figure 18: Vase, Iga ware, Momoyama Period, stoneware with natural ash glaze. Fujioka states that it was made to the taste of Furuta Oribe.

There is a major problem with this dating sequence of pottery relating to the shino-glazed wares. Shards of shino-glazed wares in Mino kilns are assumed to date from the first half of the Momoyama period, between 1580 and 1600, and Rikyū was still alive and the leading Tea-master only during the first ten years of this period, dying
in 1591. It has been assumed that shino-glazed wares were used by Rikyū, and his name is linked with the famous shino tea-bowl named Unohanagaki. Koyama dates the production of the best shino to the time before the introduction of new kiln technology in the Keicho era (1596–1615) stating “the most highly prized of the shino Tea-wares have been those veritable masterpieces which were produced during the eras of Tensho and Bunroku (1573–1596). However, this conflicts with the archaeological record as “in consumer cities like Kyoto, Osaka and Sakai” shards of shino wares “were found in stratum dating to 1598–1615”. For example, although built in the period from 1583 to 1588, Hideyoshi’s Osaka Castle contains no shino-glazed ware in layers earlier than 1600. Takeuchi draws the conclusion from this that the production of shino and Oribe wares was more or less contemporaneous with Oribe’s time as an active Tea-master, and that “Tea-masters only came to recognize Tea-bowls decorated with designs or pictorial motifs as chanoyu utensils in the time of Furuta Oribe”.

![Figure 19: Shino tea-bowl named Unohanagaki.](image)

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The significance of the date of the introduction of shino wares into the Tea-ceremony relates to Oribe’s legacy as a Tea-master. Rikyū’s Tea-ceremony practice emphasised the austere and simple aspects of wabi as epitomised by the austere, earthy Raku Tea-bowl, and if the archaeological evidence suggesting that shino-glazed wares were not introduced into the Tea-ceremony until around 1600 proves to be correct, then it is likely that these wares were first popularised during Oribe’s time as the leading Tea-master. Oribe’s practice of Tea was based on Rikyū’s austere wabi style, and continued many of the traditions established by Rikyū. However, he did not see chanoyu as a fixed and finalised procedure, but in the same way that Rikyū continued to innovate until the end of his life, Oribe also chose to introduce new elements into Tea. Although the foundation of Oribe’s Tea was Rikyū’s wabicha, Oribe incorporated influences from the kabuki ethic of the time.

Historically, there has been a sense that Oribe’s contributions to Tea are not worthy of great consideration. It is clear that in the world of chanoyu Oribe has been given less recognition than he is due, and Takeuchi proposes that this is due to Oribe being “deemed to have betrayed the Tokugawa bakufu” and therefore “for a long time his status in history was not fairly assessed”. However I argue that if the shino Tea-bowl, that most highly regarded body of Tea-wares, a group of pots that are considered to express wabi in every sense, the pots that were to inspire the Momoyama Period revival of wabi ceramics in Japan in the 1930s, were introduced into the Tea-room under Oribe’s guidance, then Oribe must be held in high regard as a contributor to the ongoing growth and development of the aesthetic of wabi.

The thrust of this dissertation is to look at the impact of the development of wabi as an aesthetic of objects with particular emphasis on the way it has impacted on the shapes and the qualities of wood-fired pots, on the way that wood-fired pots are seen as beautiful. Prior to the Momoyama period the unglazed, wood-fired wares used in Tea were ‘found objects’ repurposed for their use in chanoyu. It was only towards the end of the Momoyama Period that ceramics were made to the taste of the Tea-masters in the kilns of Shigaraki, and also at this time, in the Iga kilns.

The first recorded use in a Tea-ceremony of that completely new utensil from the Shigaraki kilns, a Tea-bowl unglazed except for naturally deposited ash glaze, was in 1599, well into the period of Oribe’s dominance as the leading Tea-master.\footnote{Cort, Shigaraki, 167.}

Looking at Oribe’s influence from the perspective of natural ash glazed wood-firing it is perhaps in the wares from Iga that his taste has had the most impact. Medieval ceramics from Iga were almost indistinguishable from the contemporary Shigaraki wares, and little is known of the medieval kiln sites. The Iga Tea-wares produced at the time of Oribe’s influence developed when Tsutsui Sadatsugu (1562–1615) a close associate of Oribe, was master of Ueno Castle in the Iga district.\footnote{Ibid., 167.} Cort states that:

\begin{quote}
The so-called Tsutsui Iga wares may be the quintessential tea wares of about 1600, with their powerful sculpted forms, brilliant splashes of green glaze, and idiosyncratic ornamentation of handles, knobs and stamped patterns. Certain Iga pieces, such as the “split-pouch” \textit{mizusashi}, raise natural kiln effects, or the imitation thereof, to a new height of dramatic impact.\footnote{Ibid., 167.}
\end{quote}

These pots such as the vase shown in Figure 22, with their thick drapes of heavy natural ash glaze that could only be achieved in very long or multiple firings. Their cracks, and the sections blackened by the fire contrasting with the orange burned clay, epitomise the interest in deformity expressed in the \textit{kabuki} nature of Oribe’s

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{shigaraki_bowl.jpg}
\caption{Shigaraki ‘shoe shaped’ Tea-bowl named \textit{Hatsushigure}. Early 17\textsuperscript{th} century. Kyūsei Atami Art Museum, Atami.}
\end{figure}
taste. Perhaps the connection between Furuta Oribe and this style of work would be acknowledged by potters today who reference Iga ware in their own work.

However, the forms referenced by many of today’s wood-firing ceramic artists in the approach to the way that clay is handled, to the potted “feel” of the finished object, whether or not it is an item that is designed to have a function, whether it is has applied glaze or natural ash deposits and flashing, is the Momoyama period shino Tea-bowl. The connection between Oribe the man and Momoyama shino wares is less well understood than his presumed relationship with the green ‘Oribe’ glazed wares. However, it can be assumed from the archaeological record that these wares were made, and introduced into the Tea-ceremony after Rikyū’s death in 1591, and therefore should be credited to Oribe’s influence. The “one genre” theory discussed by Jun’ichi Takeuchi in Turning Point, indeed, proposes that shino-ware and Oribe-ware can be regarded as one and the same, and that “Shino and Oribe can both be understood as wares of the early seventeenth century.”

The Black Oribe Tea-bowl shown in Figure 23 demonstrates this point. Black Oribe wares were mostly fired in the Motoyashiki kiln, the first Korean style climbing kiln built in the Mino district. The white glaze on this kutsugata (clog- or shoe-shaped) Tea-bowl is most probably a shino glaze fired in the more efficient and even temperature of this climbing-kiln.

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Figure 21: Old Iga vase named *Namazume* (Fingernails). Koyama reports that this vase was owned by Furuta Oribe.
Figure 22: Old Iga Vase named Karatachi (Chinese Orange, or perhaps Chinese Sword) Momoyama Period, Hatakeyama Museum, Tokyo.
Figure 23: Black-Oribe clog-shaped Tea-bowl with checked roundels. 
Early 17th century.

The first period of Kan’ei culture ended in 1615 coincident with the death of Furuta Oribe, and this signalled the end of the dynamic pottery aesthetic that has come to be associated with Oribe. As Murase Miyako states:

This triumphal flowering was terminated as abruptly as a comet after the forced suicide of Furuta Oribe in 1615; the demise of the daring and forward-looking master of the tea ceremony coincided with the promulgation of a new feudal order by the Tokugawas, who promoted conservative policies in all phases of Japanese life, including the arts.212

Tea drinking “became a well codified mode of social interaction rather than the experimental aesthetic adventure it had been during the sixteenth century. Tea ceramics made for daimyo, therefore, tended to forsake the assertively individual shapes of the Momoyama period and return to conservative Chinese and Korean models”.213

Following Oribe’s death in 1615, the Mino kilns went into a decline, so much so that they disappeared from the history of chanoyu to the extent that it was thought that the Momoyama period Tea-wares, kuro-seto, setogoro, ki-seto, shino and Oribe wares, had been made in the nearby Seto district.

212 Murase, Turning point, 15.
213 Louise Alison Cort, Seto and Mino Ceramics (Smithsonian Institution,1992), 118-119.
As Cort points out this was perhaps due to political and economic reasons, for, with
the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the Mino and Seto kilns came under
the control of the Owari Tokugawa house whose patronage favoured the Seto kilns,
in particular those in the village of Akazu, over kilns in the Mino district. These
Seto kilns provided “Chinese influenced tea utensils, including tea caddies, tea-leaf
storage Jars and *tenmoku*-style tea bowls” while the merchant sponsored kilns
developing in Kyoto became centres for innovation.\(^214\)

4.2.2 Kobori Enshū: *Kirei Wabi*

The next Tea-master to be recognised as the central figure in *daimyo*-Tea (warrior-
tea) following Oribe’s demise was Kobori Enshū (1579–1647), who was associated
with Oribe while still in his teen years, and is considered as Oribe’s disciple. As
Kumakura notes, by 1636 he was serving Tea to the Shogun Iemitsu, and “this
function was sufficient to bring him recognition as the realm’s leading tea master”.
As well as being governor of Tōtōmi Province, Enshū was a construction magistrate
and “achieved great fame in architecture and garden construction”.\(^215\)

Enshū revived classicism in Tea, and his taste in the Tea-ceremony is described as
*kirei wabi* (beautiful wabi). Enshū developed the *kirei* aesthetic from his contact with
courtier culture, and it has the meaning of a “refined beauty”. Kumakura sees:

\[
\text{… three components in Enshū’s *kirei* taste: first, a strongly ornamental
brilliance and subtlety of expression taken to the point of delicacy; second, clear sharp
lines and colouring; third, a symbolism that is found in the literature of China and Japan
in all periods.}\(^216\)
\]

Cort states that the interest in classical poetry and the culture of the court coincided
with a widespread naming of Tea utensils, and the names Enshū gave to objects
showed a “scholarly refinement” with allusions to court poetry that has been
continued through to today. In contrast to “Oribe’s delight in robust assertive forms
… Enshū favoured thin polished shapes”.\(^217\)

Kumakura gives an example of the differences in Enshū’s Tea from Rikyū and
Oribe’s contrasting styles saying:

\(^214\) Cort, *Seto and Mino Ceramics*, 119.
\(^215\) Kumakura, “Kan’ei Culture and Chanoyu,” 143, 144.
\(^217\) Cort, *Shigarak*, 170, 171.
Although the vocabulary was the same as that used to describe the chanoyu of Rikyū and Oribe, the character of the aesthetics involved was quite at variance. For example, a bowl … was called a “warped” Korean piece (Kōrai hizumi). But this warped bowl was definitely not the roughly twisted, radically deformed ceramic ware we found in Furuta Oribe’s chanoyu. Rather, it was “warped” in the sense of an emphasis given to the beauty of its flowing line achieved by gracefully bending the bowl’s thinly constructed rim. Enshū’s “warped” was clearly distinguished from Oribe’s “warped” by the sense of kirei.\footnote{Kumakura, “Kan’ei Culture and Chanoyu,” 146.}

Enshū’s Tea can be seen as the end of interest in the wood-fired qualities chosen by earlier Tea-masters. Although he continued to use the Japanese ceramics, combined with wood, bamboo and metal objects, that had been the components used by Rikyū in wabi Tea, “thinly potted crisply glazed ceramics came to the fore”. Enshū’s kirei wabi (pretty-wabi) featured “the brilliant, mirror like glazed surface” rather than the subdued tones and surfaces of earlier wood-fired ‘found’ wares.\footnote{Cort, Shigaraki, 170.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{shigaraki_base.png}
\caption{Base of Shigaraki Tea-bowl named Hana no Tachibana. Early 17th century.}
\end{figure}
With these changes in the aesthetics of Tea, and with the introduction of the more efficient multi-chamber noborigama kilns in which less ash was deposited on the wares, the production of natural ash glazes Tea-wares diminished.

Cort points out that by the mid-1600s, fashions had changed to the extent that “the follower of wabi-tea was reduced to a joke”, and only in the practice of the Senke (the three Tea-schools established by Rikyū’s great-grandsons) did Shigaraki tea jars continue to maintain their former status.220

From this period until the emergence of the Momoyama Revival Movement of the 1930s, the natural ash glazed wood-fire aesthetic wares that had been introduced into wabi-tea as it developed slipped into the background, passed down through the years and valued as famous objects connected to the legendary founders of the tea-ceremony. The understanding of how these items were produced was largely forgotten.

4.3 Formalisation of Chanoyu and Wabi: 1600-1868

4.3.1 The Senke and the preservation of Rikyū’s wabi

Many schools of Tea became established in the period following Rikyū, Oribe and Enshū. Varley describes how, among the warrior-elites, schools of Tea developed following the Confucian classical aesthetics of Enshū and the Tea of Katagire Sekishū (1605-1673), whose Tea rejected the extreme wabi of Rikyū and looked back to the shoin-chanoyu of Jukō and Jōō.221 Under Sekishū’s guidance the foundations were laid for a “theory of chanoyu as an entertainment not only for daimyo but also for the merchant class”, as his Tea incorporated aspects of Rikyū’s “religious severity”, Enshū’s “cultural intelligence” and Jukō’s “aristocratic taste”.222

Rikyū’s Tea was revived in the schools of tea established by his great grandsons around the mid 1600s. In 1594, only a few years after Rikyū’s suicide, Hideyoshi permitted Sen no Rikyū’s adopted son, Sen Shōan, to return, impoverished, to Kyoto. Rikyū’s wabi-tea lived on in the Tea established by Shōan’s son, Sen Sōtan,

220 Ibid., 117.
222 Hayashiya et al., Japanese Arts and the Tea-ceremony, 106.
who became head of the Sen household in 1600. Sōtan set out to “codify and perpetuate Rikyū’s style of Tea”. Three of Sōtan’s sons established the three schools of Tea known as the Senke. Sōtan’s son Sōshu established the Mushanokoji Senke, Sōsa founded the Omotesenke, and his youngest son Sōshitsu founded the Urasenke in 1645.223

The decades of peace following from the social stability instituted by the Tokugawa Shogunate led to great prosperity for the merchant classes. By the latter quarter of the seventeenth century (the Genroku period) this led to a resurgence of the yūgei, the ‘elegant pastimes’ such as chanoyu, ikebana (flower arranging), and incense identification, in all social classes.224

During this period, the foundations of the iemoto system (family headship system) became established with particular impact on Tea and the arts surrounding it, such as Raku pottery and ikebana. In the iemoto system as it exists today the head of a family connected to a traditional school of one of the yūgei, such as the schools of chanoyu or ikebana assumes the authority to bestow certificates of proficiency on students of the art, also defining what was aesthetically acceptable. A major role and source of income for the iemoto of a Tea school lay in authenticating Tea-wares and writing inscriptions on the associated boxes.

The development of the iemoto system coincided with the requirement for a more conservative, conformatory Tea under the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate. This led to a conservatism in the ceramics used in the Tea-ceremony, and the reproduction of famous Tea-wares. Within the Senke:

Reproduction was at the very heart of the iemoto system, which was, above all, constructed on the notion that the taste (suki) of the founder, Rikyū, and of his direct successors, the Sen iemoto, was supreme and therefore to be reproduced.225

Reproductions of many famous Tea objects, known as utsushi, were made to order and this became one of the “fundamental modes of production in Raku pottery”, as well as other famous kilns.226 Cort notes that in 1937 a Tea ware collection

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223 Kumakura, “Kan’ei Culture and Chanoyu”, 150.
224 Varley, “Chanoyu; From the Genroku Epoch to Modern Times,” 163.
225 Pitelka, Handmade Culture, 104.
226 Ibid., 104.
containing “two ‘Hana no Tachibana’ tea-bowls and a set of five ‘Old Shigaraki ‘Hana no Tachibana’ mukōzuke’ was discovered in Osaka in the storehouse of the Hirano family that had connections with the Kobori family during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.\footnote{Cort, Shigaraki, 171.}

Morgan Pitelka’s study of the progression of Raku pottery through this period, \textit{Handmade Culture: Raku Potters Patrons and Tea Practitioners in Japan} gives an insight into the way this type of system developed, and, within the developing Tea-schools, transmitted and formalised the aesthetic of \textit{wabi}. \textit{\footnote{Pitelka, \textit{Handmade Culture}, 148.}}

It was this \textit{iemoto} system that transmitted the aesthetic of \textit{wabi}, and the appreciation of the Momoyama Period Tea ceramics, and, therefore, the appreciation of wood-fired ceramics in the Shigaraki/Bizen aesthetic, through to the Meiji Restoration and the twentieth century. The history of this period is outside the scope of this dissertation except for the fact of its role in this preservation and transmission of \textit{wabi} ceramics.

The reforms of the Meiji Restoration led to a period of all-out Westernisation, and as Kumakura states, coincided with a general decline in the creative state of Japanese art.\footnote{Varley, “Chanoyu; From the Genroku Epoch to Modern Times,” 188-189.} The dissolution of the \textit{daimyo} class badly affected the patronage of traditional arts, and weakened the \textit{iemoto} system. The Tea schools found themselves with financial difficulties, and were forced to adapt to the changing times. The Urasenke weathered this period of change better than the Omotesenke and the Mushankōji Senke due to the maturity of its leader at the time of the Meiji Restoration. The 57-year-old Sen Sōshitsu XI, Gengasai (1810–1877) was the most influential Sen family leader at the time of the Restoration, and his success at that time set the Urasenke on the path to be the dominant Tea school of the twentieth century.\footnote{Pitelka, \textit{Handmade Culture}, 148.}

In the next chapter I look at the aesthetics of the wood-fired object, with particular reference to the effects that are defined and named within the practice of wood-fired ceramics in Japan. However, as stated in the introduction, having in the preceeding
chapters established a historical context for the development of *wabi*, I begin by looking at the literature that is available in the Anglophone world in relation to the sources of the aesthetic of wood-fired ceramics.
Chapter 5. The Aesthetics of natural ash-glazed ceramics.

5.1 The Wood-fire Aesthetic and Wabi, a Literature Review.

Many authors mention the relationship between the development of the Tea-ceremony and the use of ‘native’ Japanese ceramics, in particular the introduction of the wood-fired wares from Shigaraki and Bizen. However, my Thesis goes one step further than this: I argue that appreciation of the wood-fired surface as beautiful is, in a sense, counter to conventional perceptions of beauty. A process of education is required for this surface to be seen as beautiful. I argue that it was the reversal of values which occurred during the sixteenth century with the development of wabi as an aesthetic dealing with the beauty of objects, that allowed the introduction of these rustic wares into the Tea-room. Furthermore, I argue that without the process of aestheticisation that occurred once wood-fired ceramics were introduced into Tea, these wares would not have been seen, and would not now be seen as beautiful in Japan. I further contend that the contemporary spread of interest in the wood-fired aesthetic throughout the Western ceramic world is subsequent to, and dependent on a sequence of events. This includes: the sixteenth century connoisseurship within the Tea-ceremony that explored and categorised this beauty; the revival of the processes and techniques of wood-firing in the 1930s (the Momoyama Revival); and the post-World War II transfer to Western culture of both this aesthetic and the techniques required to produce it (although largely without the use of the word wabi).

Most of the literature which discusses wabi, wabicha, or Tea is not concerned with the wood-fired object, or the aesthetics of it, and therefore draws no conclusions regarding the sources of this aesthetic. This is perhaps due to the tendency of Japanese connoisseurs of ceramics to view works in categories specific to their place of manufacture, for instance Bizen, Shigaraki or Iga, and to not see these objects as falling into the category of ‘wood-fired object’. Therefore it is within literature that
specifically looks at wood-fired ceramics that we are likely to find any study of the influences on and the sources of contemporary wood-fired practice.

In the introduction to his book *Wood-Fired Stoneware and Porcelain*, Jack Troy identifies the dilemma of the Western potter in being confronted with wood-fired wares, saying:

> It had been sixteen years since I had made my first pots, and nothing had confused me more than photographs of natural-ash (or “kiln-glazed”) pots. Such pieces flew in the face of my values, which equated “mastery of materials” with success in the ceramic arts.\(^{230}\)

As explored in Chapter 6, the Western observer of Japanese ceramics in the early 1900s found it incomprehensible that the wood-fired pots treasured within Tea could be seen as beautiful, and as Jack Troy’s statement above shows, these works were still troubling to the Western potter in the second half of the twentieth century. However, while perceptions had obviously changed by 1995 when Troy’s book was published, his book gives little analysis of how this change came about, or of the original sources of the aestheticisation of wood-fired ceramics within the Tea-ceremony.

In their book *Wood-fired ceramics: Contemporary Practices* Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson consider in some detail the historical development of wood-kilns in China, Korea and Japan. However, the authors do not discuss the sources of this aesthetic apart from mentioning that “[p]otters…have looked to the ceramic cultures of China, Korea, Thailand and predominately Japan, for points of reference for their individual approaches to wood-firing.”\(^{231}\)

Louise Alison Cort extensively explores the relationship between the development of the Tea-ceremony under the guidance of Murata Jukō, Takeno Jōō and Sen no Rikyū in her comprehensive study of Shigaraki pottery, *Shigaraki: Potters’ Valley*. Cort makes observations about the impact of the development of wabicha on pottery, but she also implies that the pottery had an impact on the development of wabi when she states:


The inversion of taste represented by the introduction of Shigaraki and Bizen wares to the tea ceremony was to have an extraordinarily invigorating effect on connoisseurship throughout the whole of the sixteenth century. Whereas the appreciation of Chinese masterpieces of acknowledged value had been a largely passive activity, the selection of native Japanese pots, as well as more modest imported goods—Korean bowls and namban jars—presented an active challenge to the individual imagination.\textsuperscript{232}

In this paragraph, Cort indicates the importance of the development of \textit{wabi} to the evolution of a connoisseurship that could find beauty in the wood-fired surface. Towards the end of this book, Cort comes closer to making the argument that it is only through the \textit{wabi}-style Tea-ceremony that we, today, can see these objects as beautiful when, talking about the enthusiasm for Shigaraki jars in the 1960s, she proposes that:

The tea ceremony also taught contemporary connoisseurs the value of ‘chance’ in creating the surface of the jar: the ash, the scorch, the glaze, and the uneven contour are produced within the kiln, out of reach of the potter. Chance, the absence of human will, is the manifestation of natural innocence. Yet nature, according to this aesthetic, possesses a will of its own: the pots emerge as the creation of the ‘combat between the clay and the fire’ within the kiln. Collectively, the features created by this awesome combat are termed the ‘scenery’ of the pot.\textsuperscript{233}

I understand ‘chance’ as used in this paragraph as being a manifestation of \textit{wabi}, and argue that it is only through the great value placed on these effects within Tea that these qualities would be studied, and analysed. Only once this high aesthetic and monetary value was placed on the works, would potters seek to reproduce these qualities at great expense in fuel and labour.

In \textit{Japanese Wood-Fired Ceramics}, the potters Masakazu Kusakabe and Marc Lancet give a comprehensive overview of the process of wood-firing and a detailed description of the effects that can be produced in wood-firings lasting for longer periods of time. In describing the beauty possible with the wood-fired object, Kusakabe and Lancet comment on an “intriguing sense of beauty” that characterises wood-fired ceramics, “whether they are the rich green tones of an Iga vase, the speckled flame-warmed volume of a Shigaraki storage jar, or the red and purple

\textsuperscript{232} Cort, \textit{Shigaraki}, 128.  
\textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 297.
markings of a Bizen plate.”234 They then comment on the relationship between the concepts of wabi and sabi, saying:

It is no coincidence that wood-firing has become so deeply rooted in Japan, where it has developed subtlety and breadth of expression. Aesthetic principles unique to Japan, known as wabi and sabi, honour the beauty found in nature. Wood-fired ceramics match these principles, and the medium is suited perfectly to express them.235

Kusakabe and Lancet link the concept of wabi with the appreciation of wood-fired ceramics, but do not make the point that it was only within the discipline of Tea and the aesthetic of wabi that this perception of beauty could occur.

*The Log Book* is a wood-fire specialist magazine edited by Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson, which began publishing in 2000. This magazine looks at ceramics fired in a variety of styles of kilns, not just those works that fall into the aesthetic of ‘wood-fire’ as I am using it in this dissertation; that is, not just that which might be termed the ‘Bizen/Shigaraki’ aesthetic. Most of the articles are personal stories of potters designing, building and firing kilns, and have little discussion of the origins of the wood-fire aesthetic.

However, beginning with an essay by Ted Adler in 2007, some discussion of aesthetics develops. I will consider these essays in some detail as they constitute one of the few English language dialogues that address the aesthetics of wood-firing, with this dialogue framing the general level of discussion that occurs within the wood-firing community. Adler’s contribution is titled “Questioning Wood-fired Aesthetics”, and within it he challenges potters to engage with contemporary theory and criticism. He asks: “Can we say that the aesthetic focus of Western wood-firing is anything but an extension of [this] colonialist practice of turning the East into a mythical place of secret treasures for our Western acquisition?” Adler sees “… a need to examine the expressly Nippon-centric attitudes that pervade contemporary Western wood-fire practice.” He places the source of the contemporary wood-fire aesthetic in the coming together of ideas from the Mingei movement and Abstract Expressionism.236 However, as I argue in Chapters 7 and 8, the Mingei movement

largely ignored wood-fired ceramics (as wood-firing is understood in this dissertation), and had little impact on the development of Western wood-fire practice. I also argue that the role of Abstract Expressionism in the development of post-World War II ceramics in the United States has been greatly exaggerated.

Adler asks us to “…look at contemporary wood-firing and its aesthetics within the context that it is produced, here and now”, and sees the framework for carrying out this analysis as existing within art criticism in areas such as “… semiotics, Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject, and Roland Barthes’ theories of the Text.” According to Adler “What is at issue…is how well we as artists engage ourselves in the production of meaning through the medium of wood-fired ceramics”\textsuperscript{237}

Adler’s essay generated a response in a subsequent issue of \textit{The Log Book} from Adam Welch. In an article titled “Excursus on Ted Adler’s Essay on Wood-fired Aesthetics”, Welch discusses and analyses Adler’s arguments, and starts by asking: “What do we mean when we use the term wood-fired aesthetics?” Contending that contemporary aesthetic inquiry ranges across three branches, “the observable qualities of art, the experience of art, and the concept of art”, Welch argues that most ceramic criticism, particularly that addressing wood-fired ceramics, deals with the observable qualities.\textsuperscript{238}

Welch rejects Adler’s argument that the Western adoption of Japanese wood-fire practice is colonialistic, instead stating: “What Adler characterizes as colonialism is in fact diffusionism – the spread of cultural attributes from one culture to another through social contact and interaction.” Welch doesn’t explore the sources of the wood-fire aesthetic in Japanese culture, making no mention of \textit{wabi} or the Tea-ceremony, but makes the point that “if wood-firing’s values are Japanese in origin, then endeavouring to understand those values from the perspective of Western analytic discourse is inherently flawed.”\textsuperscript{239} I see the point that Welch makes here as being quite significant. One of the criticisms that is pointed at ceramics in the world of contemporary art is that its aesthetics are not based on an body of criticism dealing

\textsuperscript{237} Adler, “Questioning Wood-fired Aesthetics,” 5
\textsuperscript{239} Welch, “Excursus on Ted Adler’s Essay on Wood-fired Ceramics,” 12.
with the history of ceramics; rather the ceramic object is viewed in the light of its sculptural qualities, or painted surface. Given my intention to seek the source of the wood-fired aesthetic as it is practiced today, I am convinced that its origins lie in the development of wabi and the Tea-ceremony.

Welch further states that: “Adler’s suggestion of making meaning specifically implies meaning in regards to some relevance within ‘the artworld’.” Welch then argues that “creating pottery and promoting community, ritual, contemplation, and humanistic values in an age characterized by alienation and isolation seems meaningful.” His position on the aesthetics wood-fired ceramics is quite clearly aligned to observable effects and visual or tactile experience, “or to gain understanding of the concept of art through its practice.”

I suggest that this dialogue between Welch and Adler sets the parameters not only for subsequent discussions occurring in The Log Book, but also for the majority of Anglophone discussions of wood-fired aesthetics. On the one hand, we have the argument that for wood-fired ceramics (the natural-ash glazed works meant by wood-fire in this dissertation) to be seen as art they must be positioned in a theoretical space described by contemporary art theory; on the other hand, as Welch says, the observable characteristics of the work and the experience of viewing or using the ceramics provide a meaning adequate to justify these objects as art.

This discussion continues with contributions from Owen Rye with his essay “Head or Heart”, followed by a reply to Rye’s essay titled “Rye’s Rejoinder” by Ted Adler. In his essay, Rye discusses the Japanese influence on the wood-fire aesthetic. He sees it as being a lesser influence on potters in Australia than in the US, where more potters had actively studied in Japan, and argues that there is some sort of relationship between Western and Japanese potters working in this aesthetic, but postulates that “the main connection is that particular types of kilns produce generally related works.” Rye seems to be signalling that the spread of the anagama kiln is central to the currency of the aesthetic.

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240 Ibid., 13.
In his essay, “Woodfire: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back”, in the catalogue DIFFERENT STROKES, published in 1999, Rye says:

The anagama…is no longer a purely Japanese tool. It would be of great interest to know just how many anagama kilns there are around the world and where they are distributed. I suspect that there are more outside Japan than in. At a recent wood-fire event in Australia a well known Japanese potter was troubled by the variety of approaches by Australian ‘kilnmasters’ to firing the anagama and suggested that none of them knew the ‘proper’ way to fire this type of kiln. He had not realised that there is no longer a proper way, but there are as many ways as there are kilns and the people who use them. Westernisation of a technique involves individualisation, and promotes forward looking rather than the unproductive romance (and rules) of looking backward.242

Rye also asks questions pertinent to the contemporary potter, which touch on the essence of the question asked in this dissertation: “What is our aesthetic? Can the very Japanese concepts of wabi and sabi…be internationalised and reinterpreted across cultural borders?”243

From this discussion it seems clear that there is some understanding that the source of the contemporary wood-fired aesthetic is to be found in Japan, and that it probably had something to do with the word wabi. However I find no acknowledgment of the viewpoint that this aesthetic could not have developed without the development of the aesthetic of wabi, and wabicha.

The following discussion attempts to look at the aesthetics of wood-fire largely through the ‘observable qualities of art’. I aim to analyse the characteristics of wood-fired ceramics, attempting to describe and define the effects that the Tea-ceremony identified in wood-fired natural ash glazed ceramics within the traditional kiln-sites in Japan. I aim to describe a vocabulary of effects, and will make considerable reference to Bizen-ware Ceramics as well as to Marc Lancet and Kusakabe’s recently published text, Japanese Wood-fired Ceramics.244 As these wood-fired effects are dependent on the kilns that produce them, I will begin with a brief look at the development of the anagama kiln in first in China and then Japan.

5.2 The Anagama Kiln

The side of the jar facing the fire tends to be brighter, while the back is pale, only lightly touched by tongues of flame. This distinction between front and back is markedly strong in wares fired in tunnel kilns, and it disappears with the even heat of the more recent climbing kilns.\footnote{Cort, Shigaraki, 101.}

The surface qualities that the Tea-masters were to see as interesting and beautiful, and that were important in the process of developing the aesthetic of \textit{wabi}, were the outcome of firing a particular type of pot (unglazed vessels of low value made for agricultural and domestic usage) in a particular type of kiln (a cross-draft, wood-fired, and relatively inefficient tunnel kiln capable of achieving stoneware temperatures)—the \textit{anagama}.

I will look at the development of this wood-fired kiln, and then at the variety of effects that are available from wood firing, especially as they were aestheticised during the period of the development of the \textit{wabi}-style Tea ceremony. The relationship between the structure and design of the kiln, the fuel used to generate heat, and the clay from which the pottery was constructed were integral to the surface generated on these works.

As will be seen below, Chinese kiln technology can be separated into two major styles of kilns—the northern-Chinese short and round \textit{man-tou} kilns and the longer and narrower southern-Chinese dragon kiln. Over time, the \textit{man-tou} kilns came to be fired largely with coal, while the dragon kilns were designed to optimise the thermal characteristics of the wood used as a fuel. This distinction in fuel used is important to the finished results: the ash from burning coal is very refractory, and leaves a rough residue which will not melt on the surface of pots exposed to the flame, so pots have to be protected from the open atmosphere of the kiln by being placed in refractory containers called saggars. The ash from wood used as fuel will also travel through the kiln, landing on the works in the kiln; however, this ash will melt at stoneware temperatures forming a natural glaze on the surface of the wares. In \textit{Science and Civilization in China}, Kerr and Wood write that the first Chinese glazes would have developed from the observation that at temperatures from 1150 to
1200°C a reaction developed between the silica in the clay body and the “oxides of calcium and potassium present in wood” creating a natural gloss.\textsuperscript{246}

The origin of stoneware glazing therefore most probably lies in this natural outcome of the wood-firing process once temperatures much above 1150°C were achieved, and the refractory nature of the highly siliceous southern-Chinese stoneware clays would have encouraged higher temperatures in order to develop fired-body strength. Observation of this phenomenon would have led to the sieving of wood-ash directly onto the greenware before packing into kilns as is exhibited on the “fading” glazes common on wares from the late-Warring States period to the late-Eastern Han Dynasty.\textsuperscript{247} However, as early as the Shang Dynasty wood ash was combined with clay and applied to the leather-hard pottery, either by brush or by dipping.\textsuperscript{248}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{TypicalSouthernChineseDragonKiln.png}
\caption{Design of typical southern Chinese dragon kiln.}
\end{figure}

The wood-fired qualities that came to be valued in Japan during the period from 1450 to 1600 are the natural outcome of firing ceramics in the kilns that were the mainstay of Japanese ceramic production up until the late 1500s. These kilns were


\textsuperscript{247} Kerr and Wood, \textit{Science and Civilisation in China}, 463. It should be noted that the aesthetic of this “ash” glazing is fundamentally different than the \textit{wabi} inspired wood fired ceramic produced in Japan.

\textsuperscript{248} \textit{Ibid.}, 462.
relatively small cross-draft kilns, perhaps five or six metres in length, built on a slope or tunnelled into a hillside. The gradient of the slope at which they were built, or a small chimney, provided the chimney effect necessary to generate stoneware temperatures, and the cross-draft nature of the fire, proceeding from the firebox at the lower end of the kiln towards the chimney to the higher end of the kiln, gave an uneven deposition of ash, with more landing on the face of the pot facing the firebox. The ability to achieve temperatures above 1200°C meant that the clay could be fired to a vitreous state, and that the ash deposited on the surface of the pot would react with the silica in the clay and melt to form a natural ash glaze. In Japan these kilns are known as anagama which can be translated as hole or cave kiln.

The technology for high-temperature firings (temperatures above 1200°C) developed in China during the Shang Dynasty (c. 1520-1050 BCE). This technology of the high-temperature cross-draft kiln did not come to Japan directly from China, but rather via the Korean Peninsula during the fifth and sixth centuries CE, brought by refugees from dynastic upheavals in Korea. The design for these kilns had travelled from Southern China to Korea, and were of the wood-fired ‘dragon kiln’ type that was typical of the southern China pottery kilns rather than the ‘bun’ shaped coal fired man-tou kiln typical of northern China.

As described by Kerr and Wood, one of the earliest examples of this type of kiln has been excavated at Shang-yu in Chekiang Province. The excavation indicates a kiln clearly divided into a firebox and a ware chamber, built on a slope of about 16 degrees. The length of the kiln is 5.1 metres, it is 1.22 metres wide and the setting area is .2 metres higher than the firebox. Temperatures above 1200°C were achieved in the chamber. This early kiln has been described as “a single slightly swollen chamber, a few metres long, fired entirely by the large firebox at its lower end, and with a small exit flue at the top.” This could easily define the anagama kiln as it existed through to the sixteenth century in Japan. The long flame produced by using wood as the fuel (compared to coal) moves the heat through the setting area, but when fired solely from the main firebox the functional setting area in the kiln is restricted to something of the length of the Shang-yu kiln as the temperature drops

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249 Cort, Shigaraki, 9.
250 Kerr and Wood, Science and Civilisation in China, 348-351.
off quickly towards the chimney. This style of kiln from the Shang Dynasty was the precursor of all of the long cross-draft kilns that developed in southern China.

Figure 26: Movement of kiln technology from China to Korea.

Figure 27: Remains of Shang Dynasty kiln.
These southern kilns would evolve into the ‘dragon kilns’ that produced the Song Dynasty glazed work in locations such as Jingdezhen and spread throughout Southeast Asia, where they are still fired today. Close contact between Han Dynasty China and the kingdoms on the Korean peninsula ensured the spread of this kiln technology to Korea.

The grey-coloured Korean wares produced in anagama kilns in the Silla Kingdom are referred to as Silla ware. Refugees from dynastic troubles in Korea in the mid-fifth century brought the technology to Japan and the wares they produced are known as Sue wares, after a kiln group found at Sue, south of Osaka. These wares are predominately wheel-thrown, grey-fired ceramic in the style of the Silla Dynasty grey-ware produced in Korea. This style of ceramic rapidly dispersed throughout Japan.

Figure 28: Japanese anagama kiln with flame dividing pillar.

The Korean Silla ware and the Japanese Sue ware were fired in a heavily reducing atmosphere in a method derived from Chinese Neolithic wares. This reducing

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251 Koyama, The Heritage of Japanese Ceramics, 23. Koyama Fujio says that the name Sue comes from the verb sueru, to offer, as most early Sue-ware objects were religious utensils.

252 Cort, Shigaraki, 12. Cort, Seto and Mino Ceramics, 30.
atmosphere changes the iron component in the clay body, turning the red iron oxide ($\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$) to black iron oxide ($\text{FeO}$). At temperatures above 900°C black iron oxide will act as a body-flux, promoting greater fired strength at lower temperatures than will be achieved in oxidation.\textsuperscript{253} It is assumed that these early kilns were reduced by smothering the fire at the end of the firing cycle, and cooling the kiln in this smoky atmosphere, trapping carbon in the pores of the clay and producing a grey pottery.\textsuperscript{254}

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\textsuperscript{254} Cort, *Seto and Mino Ceramics*, 50.
a firing achieving top temperature in a reducing atmosphere. A late seventh century Sue kiln in the Sanage group was built on a slope of 29 degrees (the greater slope encourages a stronger reduction of the wares), and was 13.7 m in length and 1.5 m high internally.\textsuperscript{256}

It is difficult to judge whether Sue wares were valued for the naturally occurring ash glaze effects generated by the firing process. However the overall impression of these works is that the desired aesthetic quality was the production of grey surfaces. Sue ware continued to be one of the main types of ceramic produced in Japan until the decline of the Heian period around 1185 CE. The other main type of ceramic produced in the Heian period was the Shirashi ash-glazed wares made from the eighth century on in imitation of imported Chinese ceramics. Production of Shirashi wares began in the Sanage district in the Tokai area, and, while focused in eastern Japan, spread to other areas. These wares were distinguished by the use of white clay and the application of ash glazes. Shirashi wares were fired in the same anagama style kilns as the Sue wares, however these kilns were “built in such a way that a middle to oxidizing fire could be readily achieved”, with modifications that included the introduction of the flame-dividing pillar in late Shirashi kilns.

It was this move from the heavily reduced Sue wares to the less-reduced firing style of the Shirashi tradition that allowed the flashing effects and natural ash glaze qualities possible in wood-firing to be seen and appreciated in the wares of the medieval-period kilns. As can be seen from the seventh century long-necked Jar shown in Figure 30, considerable ash glaze was developed on the surface of some Sue wares. The move to a more oxidising atmosphere as demonstrated by wares fired in the Shirashi tradition allowed this ash to develop as a blue/green glaze. At the end of the Heian period, the Sue traditions were stronger in western Japan, for instance in Bizen, while the Shirashi style of wares were focused in the east, in areas around Seto. During the eleventh century, increasing demand from the more prosperous rural population led to a focus on the production of small bowls and dishes and “an overall decline in quality” in the Shirashi wares.

Japanese scholars define the medieval period in Japanese ceramics by the decline in production of a wide variety of small articles and greater emphasis on the production of three types of wares for the prospering and changing rural economy: “the narrow necked jar (tsubo) the wide-mouthed jar (kame) and the grating dish or mortar

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262 Faulkner and Impey, *Shino and Oribe Kiln Sites*, 17.
263 Ibid., 17.
(suribachi)”. These items were made for the storage of seeds, the production and storage of miso paste, and grinding the protein rich soybeans that were the mainstay of the cuisine introduced by Zen monks returning from China. They were not made to be beautiful; they were made to be used. In post-medieval Japan the importance of these three items in the range of products from Japanese kilns once again declined.

Figure 31: Long Necked Sue Ware Jar. Late Kofun period 7th century showing natural-ash glaze. British Museum

264 Cort, Shigaraki, 21.
More than 30 medieval kiln groups have been identified in Japan, largely through rescue archaeology, and can be separated into two major groups, kilns derived from the *Sue* tradition and those kilns, largely based in the Tokai area and identifiable by having a flame dividing pillar, derived from the *Shirashi* tradition. Within the *Shirashi*-tradition kilns of the Tokai area the production of *tsubo*, *kame* and *suribachi* occurred in the kiln groups of the Atsumi and Tokoname areas. Other areas either produced what is known as *Yamachawan* wares, a range of small unglazed dishes and bowls, or produced the high quality glazed wares made in the Seto district.  

The well known medieval kiln sites include Bizen, Shigaraki, Echizen and Tamba. In the 1960s these kilns, along with Seto and Tokoname, were branded as the “Six Old Kilns” and it was assumed that, following the decline of the *Sue* kilns at the end of the Heian period, production of medieval ceramics in Japan was centred on and restricted to these kilns. However, as stated above, more than 30 kiln sites have now been identified through archaeological research and the “Six Old Kilns” theory is no longer considered valid.

Thus, in the medieval period we have some 30 kiln areas producing unglazed *tsubo*, *kame* and *suribachi* in *anagama* kilns fired with wood, in a lighter reducing atmosphere than present in the *Sue* kilns and using the clay local to their area. The pots were made for the rural market, often by part-time potters who farmed during the summer. In Shigaraki, “skills did not have a chance to be polished; refinements were gradually forgotten, as part-time potters trained their sons.” This lead to an unsophisticated form that would contrast with the *karamono* (Chinese objects) used for the ritual drinking of tea. All of these kilns were now firing in the more oxidised manner first found in the *Shirashi* tradition, and the grey-fired work of the original *Sue* kilns was no longer in evidence. At the end of the eleventh century, the conditions were present for the wood-fired surface to be seen and appreciated. All that was missing was the observer who could see the form and surfaces of these pots as beautiful.

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269 Faulkner and Impey, *Shino and Oribe Kiln Sites*, 18, 21.
272 Cort, *Shigaraki*, 81.
5.3 The Wood-fired Surface.

Until a little before 1600CE all high temperature wood-kilns used in Japan were variations of anagama-style kilns, similar to the wood kilns that developed in China some 3000 years before. The cross draft nature of these kilns, and the closeness of the pots to the firebox were major factors in dictating the effects that occur on the works. As Hatanaka says:

Generally, the pots placed in front of the flames—near the fire and near the fuel door in an anagama kiln—are touched by the flames and scorched, while those a bit further back from the flames develop natural glaze effects, and behind those, pots develop a red, so called fire colour.

The firing of each work would be unique, depending on its dimensions, shape and firing circumstances. This contributes to both a lack of predictability (and as such, a negative for quality control), and the possibility of unforeseeable and interesting effects.

Essentially all effects that occur in the wood-fired kiln fall under the category of the Japanese word yohen, translated as kiln change. As a general term, yohen refers to effects on the clay (or glaze surface) caused by atmospheric reduction in a kiln, such as the effect on the high-iron glaze known as tenmoku that produces qualities such as those called hare’s fur, or oil spot effects in the glazed ware. Kusakabe and Lancet state that “yohen can be said to encompass the wide-ranging, subtle effects of wood-firing, including all that can be changed by fire in the kiln”.

5.3.1 The Zones in the Anagama-style Kiln

The quote from Hatanaka above describes the three basic zones in an anagama and the effects produced on the pots in each zone. The yohen effects in each zone will differ, and I will explore these zones and some of the qualities that occur in each zone in the following section. As well, I add a fourth area that exists when the kiln

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is side-stoked and charcoal builds up below the side-stoking door. Using examples from my own studio research as well as some examples from the potter Moraig Mckenna, I will look at the Japanese terms used to identify these qualities. I offer these examples here as a way of creating a real and tangible understanding of what the effects look like. The four zones are:

Zone 1: The area around the main firebox, where charcoal and ash will intermittently wash over the wares.

Zone 2: The area a little farther from the fire where ash carried on the flames is deposited on the shoulder and side of the pot facing the firebox and where, on the sheltered faces of the work, the volatile salts released by the breakdown of the ash react with the silica in the clay bodies to form hi-iro, fire-colour, generally referred to as flashing in English.

Zone 3: The area where most of the ash has dropped out of the draft and hi-iro or flashing is the predominant effect.

Zone 4: The area where side-stoking fuel will bury pots in charcoal and also introduce more floating ash onto the works.

Figure 32: Diagram of author’s kiln showing different zones typical of an anagama-style kiln
Zone 1 Effects
This is the area that immediately surrounds the main firebox of the kiln. Typically the wares in this area will become buried in the bed of incandescent charcoal and ash that is pushed forward by the subsequent stoking, and the works in this area are described as *haikaburi* (ash covered). \(^{275}\) The ash from this charcoal will melt, coating the works with a heavy coating of *shizen-yu* (natural ash glaze that can cover the surface of the work in a layer of thick, runny ash). Sections of the pots towards the floor of the kiln may be blackened and burned from being buried in the charcoal. This is known as *koge*, which refers to burned food. \(^{276}\) Due to the long period of time that this area is at very high temperatures, and the large deposits of ash landing on the wares, heavy ash runs can etch or erode the clay in this zone, an effect called *shinshoku*. \(^{277}\)

![Figure 3: Vase by Ian Jones showing Zone 1 effects of heavy shizen-yu and koge.](image)

\(^{275}\) Hatanaka “Shigaraki during Japan’s Medieval Period,” 244-245.
\(^{276}\) Ibid., 244. Kusakabe and Lancet, *Japanese Wood-fired Ceramics*, 55. (Koge is not necessarily a negative term as it is used to describe the crust of rice in the pot when cooking *kama-meishi*.)
Zone 2 Effects
This is the zone where the combination of heavy natural ash (*shizen-yu*) deposits on the surface facing the firebox and the strong flashing on the more sheltered surfaces of the pot facing the chimney of the kiln combine to give a rich effect. The colour of the natural ash glaze will vary depending on the variety of wood used for firing the kiln and the atmospheric conditions during the firing. Under the right firing conditions (a long firing ending at high temperature and then followed by a fast cooling) the ash from pine, the preferred fuel in Japan, will form a transparent green or blue green glass known within the Tea-ceremony as *biidoro* (after the Portuguese word for glass *vidro*). Kusakabe and Lancet’s book defines *biidoro* as the “glossy running drip; a glossy green or blue ball appears at the end of each *biidoro*.”278 Both Hatanaka and Cort use the term *biidoro* in reference to an ash

coated surface that has melted to form a fluid green glass, whether or not it has formed a teardrop of glaze. This seems to be a slightly different usage than Kusakabe and Lancet’s definition.279

![Figure 35: Natural ash glaze biidoro and flashing on clay body. Ian Jones.](image)

Long runs of ash melting down a pot are called *shidare or tama(no)shidare* (running balls) and “tea men were delighted when the well melted glaze ran in rivulets, terminating in a globule they termed ‘dragonfly eye’ or *tombo-no-me*.”280

Lighter deposits of ash that leave speckled deposits, or small dots of ash reminiscent of sesame seeds are known as *goma* or *gomabai*, (lit. sesame ash). In *Bizen-Ware*, James Orange discusses and rejects several theories from the early twentieth century that actual sesame seeds produced this effect and argues that it is just a “fanciful” descriptive phrase, and that the results were due to “the method of firing”.281

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281 James Orange, *Bizen Ware*. (Yokohama, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore: Kelly and Walsh Ltd. 1916), 12.
Figure 36: Tamashidare ash runs terminating in a *tombo-no-me*. Ian Jones.

**Zone 3 Effects**

Larger and heavier particles of ash from the main firebox will fall first; hence, the farther away from the firebox that pots are set the smaller the volume of ash, and the finer the particles of ash that will land on the wares. Therefore, as we move farther from the main firebox, there will be less glass forming on the surface of the pot facing the firebox. It is in this area that the predominant mark of the kiln is the *hi-iro*
or flashing produced by the vapours of volatilised salts formed from the sodium, potassium and calcium oxides that are a major component of wood-ash. Flashing is fundamentally a reaction between these vapours and the clay that the work is made from, and different clays will react very differently. Generally, Shigaraki clay is low in iron, basically a white clay, and this small amount of iron reacts with the fire to “form colours on the surface of the vessel ranging from light or dark brown to red”. On the other hand, Bizen clay has a higher iron content and will flash to a rich dark colour, rich chocolates and browns.

Perhaps the most well known hi-iro effect is the red patterning known as hidasuki (lit. red cords, after cords used to tie up sleeves of kimono) found on some pottery from Bizen. During the medieval period, potters in Bizen used silica-rich rice straw to separate unglazed pots stacked one in another, rather than using saggars or kiln shelves, and the strong red markings produced by the rice straw became valued and were produced intentionally for their aesthetic effect. Research by Kusano Yoshihiro and others show that when pots are separated by rice straw during the firing, the potassium in the rice straw reduces the melting point of the ceramic surface allowing the development of complex iron and alumina crystal structures based on corundum rather than the mullite-based crystals typical in the absence of the potassium, and the red colouration of hidasuki may be generated. This research gives a probable explanation of the normal flashing that occurs in the wood-kilns, when the potassium and other oxides in the wood ash from the fuel cause a red flashing on the clay. It is well known that clay bodies that are higher in the ratio of alumina to silica will develop better flashing colours, tending to produce redder colours. When enough ash is deposited on the surface to form a glass, the iron that causes the flashing will be dissolved into a pale celadon-like ash glaze.

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282 Hatanaka, “Shigaraki during Japan’s Medieval Period,” 244.
285 Authors observation.
Figure 37: *Hi-iro* flashing on a high-alumina porcelain clay with pale, celadon-like effect of ash deposits. Work by Moraig McKenna.

Figure 38: Flashing on coarse decomposed-granite based clay showing silica and feldspar stones. Ian Jones.
Zone 4 Effects
The section of the kiln around the side-stoke holes provides a special situation where charcoal can build up around the wares without the extreme heat found in the main firebox. One specific effect that occurs in this situation is known as *sangiri* (shelf bound), and occurs when charcoal builds up around wares and an intense reduction flame from the embers travels between the shelf and the surface of the pot. In modern Bizen, *sangiri* effects are often achieved by shovelling charcoal directly onto and around the pots where they are set in the stacks of kiln shelves.

Figure 39: The *sangiri* effect can record and display the passage of the intense flames from the embers across the surface of the clay. Work by Moraig McKenna.

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Figure 40: Sangiri effect on high-iron clay. Ian Jones.
Other Kiln Effects

Many other effects may occur in the wood-fired kiln that have been described, aestheticised and appreciated by those interested in the Tea-ceremony. These include *nuke* (exclusions), pale areas where the clay surface is protected from the ash fall and flashing by other pots or the wads used to set the wares in the kiln. Another form of *nuke* occurs when organic materials in the clay burn out leaving “hollows on the clay which appear as depressions in the surface of the vessel”.²⁸⁷

The arches of medieval kilns would tend to flake, dropping clay particles onto the shoulders of pots. This is called *furimono* (fallen things) and any molten ash glaze that fell from the arch is also regarded as a type of *furimono*, and is known as *kamashizuku* or *kamadare* (kiln drippings).²⁸⁸ *Hitsuki* occur when adjacent pots or kiln furniture adhere to one another leaving part of another object fused onto a pot by the ash on its surface.²⁸⁹

![Figure 41: Hitsuki caused by a bowl collapsing onto a lid. Ian Jones.](image)

Stones that are embedded on the clay body cause several types of effect. Small feldspathic stones, such as are commonly found in Shigaraki clay, start to soften and appear on the surface of the clay as a series of white spots, an effect known as ‘crab’s eyes’ or *kani-no-me*.²⁹⁰ Siliceous pebbles will not melt at the temperatures

²⁸⁷ Hatanaka, “Shigaraki during Japan’s Medieval Period,” 244.
²⁸⁹ Hatanaka, “Shigaraki during Japan’s Medieval Period,” 244.
achieved in the *anagama* kiln, but the clay will shrink and crack around the stone, leaving a star shaped pattern, a surface quality that is known as *ishihaze*.

Cracks and tears in the clay are not necessarily seen as flaws, but looked at from the perspective of *wabi* and considered for their aesthetic qualities. Broken and chipped pots are mended using *kin-tsugi*, a repair with gold lacquer, which “is intended to accent, rather than hide, firing flaws”. It is the variety of these effects occurring across the surface of the one vessel, the interaction between the contrasting areas of ash deposit and flashing, that provide the interest in the fired objects. As Cort says:

> The vocabulary to appreciate those effects has been given to us by tea men, whose eyes were already alert in the sixteenth century to the pleasing irregularities of the jars they found in local markets and put to use in the tea ceremony. The tea masters called the overall appearance of the surface of the Shigaraki pot its “scenery”; and as they would have studied a garden or a landscape painting, so they studied the pot and named the phenomena they found there.

There are many more specific terms for effects that develop on the wood-fired surface, and a more comprehensive illustrated list of these is to be found in Kusakabe and Lancet’s book, *Japanese Wood-fired Ceramics*. However, perhaps due to regional differences, some of their definitions seem to be slightly at odds with Cort, Uenishi and Hatanaka’s usage of the same terms.

There is some discussion within the contemporary wood-firing community about the value of this naming of effects; the American wood-fire potter Dick Lehman writing in *Ceramic Monthly* in 2004 asks “if there might be, for us here in the West, some actual benefits from having a deficient vocabulary…some ultimate betterment for not having developed or inherited a tradition-of-terms.” Lehman’s difficulty with the idea of developing a specific Western glossary to describe wood-fired effects is based on the sense that a simple word cannot describe the complexity of effect that occurs. Lehman proposes that the lack of traditional vocabulary of effects has

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291 Hatanaka, “Shigaraki during Japan’s Medieval Period,” 244.
293 Cort, *Shigaraki*, 84 and 101.
allowed the Western potter “to approach this wood-fire process fewer limitations and greater freedom.”

I agree that it is impossible to have individual words that can describe the complexity displayed in the variety of wood-fired surfaces, and that the lack of understanding of a traditional Japanese vocabulary of effects has broadened the Western potter’s exploration of wood-fire. However, I argue that it is the categorisation of these effects by the terms used in Japan by exponents of the Tea-ceremony that allowed the wood-fired surface to be seen and studied and introduced to the Western potter.

5.4 The Aestheticisation of the Wood-fired Surface.

Prior to the development of the wabi Tea-ceremony, ceramics were wood-fired in anagama kilns, so inevitably a natural process of flashing and ash deposit occurred producing a natural-ash glaze deposit on the work. Indeed, observation of this process is thought to have led to the development of the high-temperature glazes in the Chinese ceramic tradition. It is ambiguous whether the surface on Shang Dynasty wares is an accidental or a deliberately applied glaze as “the thin glazes on these early vessels can show the characteristic patchiness of fly-ash glazes, but this could also be due to some sketchiness in the application of deliberate glazes”, however, it is certain that within a relatively short time glazes were being applied to wares.

As mentioned before, it would appear that wood ash was sifted or sprinkled on pots to produce the stoneware ‘fading glaze’ common from the late Warring States period (475 to 221 BCE) to the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25 to 220 CE). It is clear that the Chinese potter was seeking more control over the glaze surface than the natural deposit of ash during the firing allowed. Kerr and Wood also observe that “a rare but occasionally seen feature of Chinese ash-glazed ceramics of the Han period are


round splashes of thicker glaze, spaced regularly on the shoulders of the vessels” and that “this style of decoration may have been inspired by the drops of ash-rich glass that tend to fall accidentally on high-fired wares from the inside of roofs of wood-fired kilns”. Kerr and Wood postulate that pulverised slag from the kiln walls might have been placed on the glazed pots to achieve this, showing an aesthetic not based on the natural or random events within the kiln, but on a situation where control and perfection is aimed for.296

From these early days the aesthetic displayed throughout the history of Chinese ceramics is one based on symmetry and control of form and perfection and control of the glaze surface—an aesthetic that allowed little room for seeing the beauty that could develop when the clay and fire were allowed to interact naturally. To avoid the interference of the ash from the firing process the Chinese potter adopted the use of saggars from the sixth century.297

The Korean Silla ware, and the Sue pottery based on that tradition in Japan, often display significant ash deposits as can be seen on the seventh century Sue long-neck jar shown above (Figure 31). However, it can be assumed that pottery produced in Japan in this tradition was not valued for the quality of the ash deposited on the surface, nor for the flashing that would have sometimes appeared, as any observation of Sue pottery gives the impression that what the potter was trying to achieve was a uniform, all-over-grey tone. Indeed, as mentioned above, over time the angle of slope on which these kilns were built changed from the approximately 15° of the early kilns, to later kilns with an angle of up to 35°. A kiln built on this slope generated a stronger reduction atmosphere throughout the firing, which penetrated deep into the body of the pot generating stronger grey colours. The inconvenience and inefficiency inherent in packing a kiln built on such a steep slope must have been compensated for by the consequent result on the fired work, implying a strong preference for these grey surfaces. This, in addition to the generally symmetrical forms made on the pottery wheel, indicates an aesthetic far removed from that of wabi which developed under the guidance of Tea-masters.

296 Ibid., 463.
297 Ibid., 341-344.
By around 1450, the objects chosen for the display that surrounded the drinking of tea were Song and Ming Dynasty Chinese ceramics, the *karamono* which had been passed down and preserved as heirlooms. It was at this time that Murata Jukō became an influential Tea-master and started introducing native Japanese ceramics into the much smaller Tea-room that he championed. It would seem that these objects were initially introduced into the Tea-room as a plain backdrop against which one or two *karamono* items would stand out, in contrast to the overwhelming display of Chinese objects which were the essence of the *shoin-daisu* tea of the earlier era. In *Yamanoue Sōji Kī*, Jukō described the contrast between the “chilled and withered” native objects and the one or two prized imported pieces as “penning a magnificent stallion in a straw hut”, and, as Cort states, “within the confined, unobtrusive setting, the individual utensils, seen closer at hand, took on an increased visual interest and significance”.

Speaking of the contrast between the Chinese ceramics and the native Shigaraki flax bucket known as Gen’ya’s *onioke* (devil bucket) used as a water jar in the Tea-ceremony in 1571, about a century after the first introduction of native Japanese ceramics into the Tea-ceremony, Cort says “one can imagine the effective contrast of the sleek, sky-blue Chinese vase in the alcove and the massive, craggy reddish–orange cylindrical *mizushashi* next to the black iron kettle.” Once introduced into the Tea-room, the characteristics of the wood-fired surface were observed named and aestheticised, and from Rikyū’s time, rather than just repurposing ceramics made for other uses, potters were making items specifically for the *wabi* style of Tea.

The beauty that the Tea-masters saw in the ‘scenery’ of the surface of these objects was the beauty of nature, the beauty that allowed for asymmetry and naturalness rather than the display of skill and control. Writing in response to Donald Keene’s paper “Japanese Aesthetics,” Earle Ernst identifies an “ancient and still vital sense of oneness with nature, a sense which differs both in degree and kind from any Western ‘love of nature’ or identification with it” as as a clear differentiation between Japanese and Western aesthetics. Ernst goes on to make the point that this “shared attitude toward actuality” is the fact that “makes possible the reduction of

\[\text{Cort, Shigaraki, 113.}\]
\[\text{Cort, “Gen’ya’s Devil Bucket”, 38.}\]
the aesthetic surface … the gesture of the Nō actor, the stylization of the painted waterfall, the economy of the haiku” and, I would contend, the appreciation of the restricted surface, the ‘scenery’ that the Tea-masters saw in the natural deposit of ash on the ceramic surface.300

The Tea-ceremony provides a space where aesthetic appreciation could be focused on the objects that were used. The appreciation of the natural ash glazed, wood-fired surface developed hand in hand with the development of the aesthetic of wabi and the development of the wabi-style Tea-ceremony.

Wabi does not mean to deny things, but rather to penetrate as far as possible to their true essence and therein discern beauty. In the beauty of the plain lies the ultimate sense of beauty that the Japanese have discovered.301

As shown in Chapter 3, wabi developed out of myriad sources: from Buddhist ideals, from writing about the aesthetics of waka poetry and Nō drama, and from the tendency to take aesthetics to the extremes of suki, the ‘artistic ardour’ that necessitates pursuing one’s attachment to its logical extreme.

Donald Keene identifies four main qualities that identify what are seen as typical Japanese aesthetic qualities: suggestion, irregularity, simplicity, and perishability.302 These words could be presented as a definition of the aesthetic of wabi, and although these qualities were present within Japanese culture, Zen, and in criticism applied to theatre and poetry before the development of the aesthetic of wabi, it is within the wabi-style of Tea that these concepts were rigorously applied to the object.

Suggestion, irregularity, simplicity and perishability: these qualities resonate with Haga Koshiro’s three aspects of wabi, which I repeat here:

“Simple and unpretentious beauty

Imperfect irregular beauty

Austere stark beauty”

The ceramics created for the Tea-ceremony in the golden age of Japanese ceramics, the Momoyama period, are the outcome of the application of *wabi* to the pottery form. Earlier in this chapter I have described some of the surface effects that occur in the *anagama* kiln, or in other kilns when fired for long periods. Here, I would like to explore the impact of *wabi* on the totality of the pot, on its form as it existed both in the Momoyama period, and since the re-exploration of *wabi* in pottery since the Momoyama Revival of the 1930s.

Perhaps the major impact of *wabi* on ceramic form has been the allowance of irregularity and imperfection to be seen as beautiful. It is perhaps in the *chawan*, the Tea-bowl, that this is most noticeable. The Chinese objects used in the consumption of tea, prior to the development of *wabi* as an aesthetic, sought perfection in form and glaze. As objects predominately made on the pottery wheel, radial symmetry and even, level rims that are the features of wheel-made ceramics were important. In contrast, the Momoyama period *shino*-glazed *chawan* shown below features an undulating rim, and sides that are not parallel, as well as a glaze surface that is flawed with pin-holes and crawling.

![Figure 42: Momoyama e-Shino Tea-bowl, named Autumn Shower.](image-url)
Ryōichi Fujioka describes these *shino* tea-bowls as “exemplify(ing) the new developments in Momoyama period ceramics in their gentle, highly sculptural shapes.”

In keeping with the reading of Tea-ceremony ceramics as scenery or landscape, the undulating rim of the tea bowl is said to represent the mountains surrounding Kyoto.

With the renewed interest in *wabi*-inspired ceramics during the Momoyama Revival in the 1930s, the irregularity and imperfection displayed in Momoyama-period ceramics were once again accepted in the canon of Japanese ceramics. This rejection of perfection enabled a *chawan* such as Kawakita Handeishi’s Tea-bowl known as *Osabi* (Figure 43) to be seen as beautiful. Although the primary interest of this dissertation relates to the manner in which *wabi*, and the Tea-ceremony, changed the way in which wood-fired surfaces were viewed and allowed these surfaces to be seen as beautiful, it should be clear that the influence of *wabi* on Japanese ceramics was far greater than that, and changed all aspects of the Japanese ceramic tradition.

![Image of a chawan](image)

Figure 43: Kawakita Handeishi, Momoyama Revival *Shino* Tea-bowl, named *Osabi*. Private Collection.

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As will be seen in Chapter 8, one of the major impacts, apart from the aestheticisation of the wood-fired surface, that the *wabi* ceramics from Japan have had on contemporary ceramics in the West and in Japan, is in this acceptance of irregularity and imperfection.
Chapter 6. Wood-fired ceramics from Meiji to Taishō

It is my contention that the contemporary viewer of wood-fired ceramics has been educated by the renewal of interest in this aesthetic within Japan and its dissemination outside Japan during the twentieth century. It is this education in the aesthetic that allows us to see these objects as beautiful. The understanding of this beauty was transmitted forward from the early 1700s to the period of the Meiji Restoration within the various Tea-schools. However, by the start of the twentieth century wabi ceramics were largely stored in family collections and rarely seen. Over the next three Chapters, I will look at the changes in the awareness of these ceramics that occurred in the twentieth century and that have lead to the current situation where anagama-style kilns are being used in many countries to create ceramics in which the main surface features and glaze qualities are achieved by the effects of multi-day wood-firings.

6.1. Western observations at the start of the twentieth century

In this Chapter, I begin by looking at the awareness of Japanese ceramics in the early 1900s, with particular focus on how natural-ash-glazed, wood-fired ceramics were regarded at the time, by the European observer. I will look particularly at books published in English, produced by Brinkley, and Audsley and Bowes. Their writings at this time indicate the thoughts that must have been typical of the manner in which the Western connoisseur regarded wabi-influenced wood-fired ceramics. In the Meiji period, Japanese scholarship on ceramics largely followed the lead of European ‘scientific’ scholarship, and therefore also favoured the decorated porcelain works over the wabi aesthetic of what was described as the ‘cult of Tea’.

This commentary was rarely based on any understanding of the process of wood-firing as a contributory factor in development of the fired surface of the finished pot; rather the ceramics which displayed a strong influence of the aesthetic of wabi
tended to be categorised and disparaged as belonging to the taste of the ‘Tea-clubs’. This would include the glazed works from Karatsu, Seto, Mino and Hagi, as well as the naturally deposited ash glazed wares from Bizen and Shigaraki. In contrast, Figures 44, 45 and 46 show examples of the style of ceramics valued by Brinkley and other Western observers.

Figure 44: Early Hizen Porcelain Dish. Early Edo Period.
Figure 45: Kakiemon Covered Bowl. Early Edo Period.

Around 1900 Captain Frank Brinkley (1841–1912) published a series of books entitled *Japan and China: Their History Arts and Literature*. Volume 8 of this series looks at the ceramics of Japan, and for the current-day reader betrays many prejudices and biases, both cultural and aesthetic, that must have been widespread at the start of the twentieth century. Brinkley was born in Ireland in 1841 and, after studying at the Royal Military Academy in London, became an artillery officer. Japan had opened up to Western influences after Commodore Mathew Perry had sailed the USS Powhatan and the ‘black ships’ into Tokyo Bay on July 8th 1853, and Brinkley moved to Japan in 1867, the year in which the Tokugawa Shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu resigned. The Emperor made a formal declaration of the restoration of his power on January 3rd 1868. Brinkley lived in Japan for forty-five years until his death in 1912. At various times he was a professor at the Naval Gunnery School, taught mathematics at Tokyo University, was publisher and editor of the *Japan Mail* and was a correspondent for the London *Times*. Brinkley was married to a Japanese woman, Tanaka Yasuko, spoke and wrote Japanese well, had
close contact with members of the Japanese government, and often supported Japan’s side in arguments between Britain and Japan.  

Brinkley was deeply immersed in Japanese culture. I will look in some detail at his attitudes towards the ceramics that were developed within the ‘taste of the Tea-clubs’, for Brinkley’s taste and judgment were those of a nineteenth century British gentleman, and were congruent with the prevalent taste of Japanese elites during the period of rapid Westernisation in the Meiji period. Brinkley was a great exponent of the superiority of Japanese ceramics, but his interest lay in the porcelains of Imari and Nabeshima, and in the decorated pottery of artists such as Ninsei (Nonomura Seisuke, birth and death dates unknown) and Kenzan (Ogata Shinsei 1663–1743). Brinkley wrote favourably of the Japanese style of decoration developed by artists such as Ninsei, writing of Ninsei that “he was the first to shake himself entirely free from alien influences, whether Chinese or Korean, and to adopt the ‘natural style’

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now universally regarded as representative of Japan.” And further on that “it is scarcely too much to assert that almost every decorative fashion, which by its grace and artistic fidelity has excited the admiration of Western critics, owes a large debt to Nonomura Ninsei and those whom he educated.”

Figure 47: Ninsei Tea-bowl, Middle Edo Period.

Figure 48: Tea-bowl by Kenzan, Middle Edo Period.

While Brinkley appreciated the pervasive changes that the development of the aesthetic of wabi had allowed within the Japanese style of decoration by the second half of the seventeenth century, he had little time for the specifically wabi pottery that was used within wabi-style Tea. I will look in some detail at Brinkley’s descriptions of various wares, beginning with the Korean-produced ceramics, in particular the ido Tea-bowls, treasured by connoisseurs within wabicha. Discussing the absence of many examples of ‘fine’ Korean celadon and white semi-porcelains in Japanese collections he states that the Tea-clubs favoured the crude and the rustic over the “technical excellence of which Korean keramists were certainly capable five hundred years ago.” He regarded wares in Japanese collections as falling “ludicrously below any common-sense standard.”

Brinkley then describes various styles of Korean ceramics including the several styles of white-slip decorated mishima pottery and continues:

> Passing from these varieties, good specimens of which present features at least interesting if not pretty, wares are reached that could never be tolerated outside the atmosphere of the Tea-clubs. Of these the general character is repellent homeliness. One and all suggest the idea of pottery primitive in the extreme. They admirably illustrate the morbid aestheticism and perverted tastes of the Tea-clubs.

Brinkley’s general attitude to wabi Tea wares was frankly incredulous. He could not understand why, despite their lack of decoration and “abundance of blemishes”, these wares were treasured by the Japanese cha-jin, or indeed, why “a patched old cup looking as though it had been cut out of rusty iron” could command a price of several hundred dollars. Brinkley was unable to see the beauty in these objects that is readily seen and valued today, one hundred years later. However, he was correct in his assessment of the importance of “tradition and association” for the appreciation of these works, and the history of ownership certainly adds additional value to understanding the qualities of these ceramics.

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307 Brinkley, Japan and China: Their History Arts and Literature, 50.
308 Ibid., 51.
309 Ibid., 51-53.
310 Louise Allison Cort, “Looking at White Dew” Studio Potter Vol 10 No 2, (June 1982). In this article Cort describes the accumulation of layers of history and provenance represented by the layers of accessories that provided protection for the chaire known as “White Dew”. Cort laments the loss of this provenance for many of these pieces as they moved from the hands of Western collectors into museums where “the layers of accessories were just so much space-taking clutter and the ink scribbles on the boxes were illegible,” and so were discarded. Given that the creative act that made many of
In discussing the products of the *Raku-yaki* potters of Tokyo, Brinkley was more kind to the products which in one sense are the most *wabi* of the pots produced in Japan, having initially been produced to suit the taste of Sen-no-Rikyū. Brinkley’s critique of *raku* was that its attractiveness derived from technical freedom, terming it “impressionistic faience.”

However, he is aware of the historical importance of *raku* pottery and says:

...the very features that detract from its decorative aspect were those that recommended it to Rikiu [sic] as a type of rustic simplicity which he desired to impose in the observances of his cult...

Figure 49: Raku Tea-bowl credited to Chojiro, Named Toyobo. Early Edo Period.

Brinkley gives a commentary on ceramics produced all over Japan, including brief observations of ceramics from locations such as Shigaraki, Iga and Bizen. It is these objects into works of art lay, not in the hands of the potter, but in the judgments of the Tea-master, then the loss of this history diminishes the work.

It is clear that in today’s ‘art world’, provenance is of as great importance with Western as it is with Eastern art.

311 Brinkley, *Japan and China: Their History Arts and Literature*, 34.
Perhaps with these wares that Brinkley’s inability to see and understand the beauty of the wood-fired aesthetic in ceramics is most obvious.

Figure 50: Shigaraki *Uzukumaru* Jar, Muromachi – Azuchimomoyama period.313

When Brinkley was writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Shigaraki’s production was “limited to coarse household utensils”.314 The kilns in use at that time were the *noborigama* multi-chamber kilns that are still to be seen but largely no longer used in the back streets of the Ogamamachi, and as much as possible the work would have been sheltered from the ash produced by wood firing by the use of

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313 This jar shows the orange flashing, the included feldspar and silica from the coarse clay, and runs of naturally deposited shizen-yu ash glaze.

saggars and the design of these kilns. Brinkley briefly discusses the earlier ceramics produced for the Tea-ceremony, with reference to the Tea-masters Shōō (Jōō), Sen-no-Rikyū and Kobori Enshu and the wares made to their tastes. He characterises Shigaraki ware of that time, made to the taste of the Tea-clubs, as being a:

...hard, close faience, having a body glaze of amber red, over which was run semi-diaphanous green or brown glaze ...and occasionally they resorted to the curious device of imbedding little fragments of quartz in the glaze; a fashion said to have been suggested by the Chinese habit of jewelling choice bronzes.315

This is a fair description of the wood-fired qualities produced in the anagama-style kilns used in Shigaraki until the early 1600s, with the body flashing in reddish tones from the passing of the flames, the deposit of a natural ash glaze on the surfaces facing the firebox, and the quartz and feldspar gravel found in unrefined Shigaraki clay melting out on the surface. He does not, however, give a sense of understanding or concern about the process that generate these surfaces. He makes descriptive observations of these objects without any acknowledgement that they might be seen as objects of beauty.

Figure 51: 19th century Bizen Saikumono Temple Lion showing thin glaze with no ash deposits that became popular during the Edo Period.

315 Ibid., 369.
Discussing ceramics from Bizen, Brinkley is full of praise for the Edo period *saikumono*, modelled animals which Brinkley describes as possessing “an instinct for life and unerringly correct form” and of which he says “without doubt choice specimens of their work during the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century are among the very highest achievements of Japanese plastic art.”

Brinkley does notice the effects of the wood-firing process as it applies to products of the Bizen kilns, saying of *Bizen-yaki* that it was distinguished by superior workmanship and better technique.

By-and-by, however, the patches of accidental glazing that appeared occasionally on specimens of the *Kō-Bizen-yaki* were replaced by a regular coating of thin diaphanous glaze.

The “patches of accidental glazing” are the ash deposited in an irregular manner on the ceramics stacked in the large, cross-draft kilns, some parts of pots in the shadow of neighbouring pots and just receiving the flashing effects of the passing flame, other sections of pots collecting the particles of ash as they fly from the firebox onto the works, where they melt with the silica in the clay to form a glaze. I interpret this as Brinkley saying that the quality of the work improved as the Bizen-wares moved from the more random, *wabi* qualities of earlier Tea-ceremony wares, towards the more controlled and, therefore, aesthetically more satisfactory outcome (for Brinkley) of the “regular coating of thin diaphanous glaze.”

![Bizen Saikumono by Isezaki Yazan (1902–1961), post Momoyama Revival work with ash deposits encouraged on clay surface.](image)

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Later Brinkley goes to some length to describe the effect known as *hidasuki*, which is a decorative process restricted to the ceramics produced in Bizen. Brinkley correctly observes that the red lines of *hidasuki* are produced by tying rice straw ropes around the works as they are packed into the kiln.\textsuperscript{318}

I should point out here that *hidasuki* would have originally been an accidental by-product of the firing process. At the temperatures that *Bizen-yaki* were fired, the pots would have started to stick to each other where they were touching in the kiln. When rice-straw ropes were tied around pots that were stacked one inside the other many more pots could be placed in the kiln, and as the rice-straw was very high in silica, it would burn away leaving enough silica between the pots to resist sticking. The red effect of *hidasuki* is generated where the alkaline straw is trapped in the confined space between two stacked pots and reacts with the high iron clay.

However, Brinkley saw no value in ceramics with *hidasuki*, and was unable to see any beauty in these effects, expressing contempt for “a water-holder that might easily be mistaken for a section of drain-pipe, partially blackened by fire and ornamented with patches…”\textsuperscript{319}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{hidasuki_water_jar.png}
\caption{Old Bizen *Hidasuki* Water Jar. Momoyama Period.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{318} Brinkley, *Japan and China: Their History Arts and Literature*, 332.
\textsuperscript{319} Brinkley, *Japan and China: Their History Arts and Literature*, 332.
Brinkley was severe in his criticism of the “conservative orthodoxy” and “severe idealism” of the Tea-clubs where “aesthetic affectation” produced a “violence to Japan’s] own natural genius in deference to the dictates of an artificial and perverse dilettante-ism.” While wary of foreign influences diluting Japanese aesthetic spirit, Brinkley declared that such influences would “atone for this crime by finally discrediting the cramping canons of the Cha-no-Yu cult.”

Brinkley’s assessment of the wabi-influenced ceramics of the Japanese Tea-ceremony can be summarised as being aware of the existence of these ceramics, of being aware that Japanese connoisseurs valued them, and as being aware that he, himself did not understand them. Writing of the ceramics treasured by the cha-jin he says that their “inherited perception” of refinement and elegance in these wares had no significance outside their immediate circle.

Perhaps his use of the phrase “inherited perception” implies a view that the wabi qualities inherent to the tea wares could only ever be appreciated by a certain class of Japanese people. At the very least, these comments reinforce the idea that the positive appreciation of wood-fired ceramics in the West relies on a process of education dependent on exposure to these works, and on the creation of an environment in which these works can be valued and aestheticised.

I have chosen to look in some detail at Brinkley’s writings where they mention the wood-fired qualities that are the subject of this dissertation. I propose that the attitudes that are presented in his book would be typical of most Western viewers of Japanese ceramics of the time, and perhaps would also have represented the viewpoint of the Westernised Japanese of the time. Rather than appreciating or valuing wood-fired ceramics Brinkley held the view that Western influence would signal the end of the interest in these objects, and that this would be a desirable outcome.

Writing in 1971, Soames Jenyns declared that Brinkley never understood the meaning or importance of Japanese concepts such as wabi. Brinkley was unable to recognise an aesthetics that valued freedom from restraint (kishiku); irregularity and coarseness of texture contributing to tactile pleasure (zankurushita) that

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320 Ibid., 410.
characterised wares from Bizen, shino and Oribe, concluding, “…these are the qualities which the Japanese search for and value in their pottery, and which a European must endeavour to understand when he is faced by such an apparent monstrosity as an Iga flower vase.”

In order to place Brinkley’s observations on the wood-fired ceramics from Shigaraki and Bizen in context, it is of interest to see how the ceramics that are influenced by the aesthetic of *wabi* are dealt with in other books on ceramics of a similar time. George Audsley and James Bowes, in their *Keramic Art of Japan* (1881), briefly mention the pottery from Shigaraki, saying of it:

…these were of the rudest character, and of small size, comprising tea bowls and small vases, or jars, for holding rice or powdered tea…It is all of coarse earthenware, rudely fashioned, either partially or wholly glazed, and splashed with green and brown, but none of it is noteworthy from an artistic point of view.

Audsley and Bowes are less judgmental of Japanese *wabi* ceramics than Brinkley. Importantly, their book was dedicated to “the most distinguished collector and patron of Japanese art…the Duke of Edinburgh” conveying a sense that *Japonisme* was well and truly established as a fashion in the taste of the British elite of the time. They give a reasonable history of Raku wares and their association with Tea, but see little beauty in the wares regarding them as “not…at all beautiful” but interesting due to their use in the Tea-ceremony.

Another Anglophone observer who should be mentioned here is Edward S. Morse, who built up a collection of some five thousand pieces of Japanese pottery that he donated to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Reviewing Audsley and Bowes’ book, Morse wrote of “pieces noted for their age or ugliness, which excite the admiration of Tea lovers, not for their beauty (for they have none) but because they came from the site of a famous kiln or were used by some celebrated man in past time.” Morse’s collection was quite comprehensive, and although some of his attributions would seem to be inaccurate, it included examples of Muromachi Period Shigarki

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wares, and *hidasuki* wares from Bizen. However it would seem that these were not seen as objects of beauty within his collection, as he writes of *hidasuki* in the catalogue of his collection as:

...a coarse unglazed product showing glistening light red marks crossing the surface irregularly...It is impossible to find the slightest merit in the pottery save what its rusticity might suggest, though a Japanese authority in 1700 says that the best forms among the old Bizen, and those most esteemed, are *Hidasuke*\(^\text{325}\).

In summary, the attitude of the late nineteenth century Anglophone observer of Japanese ceramics was that the *wabi* influenced ceramics utilised in Tea were objects of little artistic or aesthetic interest, and that their only real value lay in their role as examples of how ‘perverted’ the taste of the ‘Tea-clubs’ had become. As such, these pots become examples of the ‘inscrutable oriental’ and enable the ‘enlightened’ Western eye to disparage the taste, judgment and intellect of the Japanese. This ‘Orientalism’ is “an integral part of the discipline for studying Japanese art, and has been particularly evident in the way the Occident defined Japan as medieval and primitive, and as a country of ‘decorative art’ without ‘fine art’”\(^\text{326}\).

At a time when a large percentage of ceramics were fired by wood, late-nineteenth century Western observers saw little of note in the qualities produced by the deposit of ash on the surface of the clay during the firing process, seeing them at best as “patches of accidental glazing”, and placed no apparent value on the beauty of the clay surface and this natural deposit of glaze that has come to be regarded as the ‘wood-fire aesthetic’. This is not totally unexpected, as within Japan the knowledge of how these *shizen-yu*, *yakishime* qualities of Muromachi/Momoyama period wood-fired surfaces were produced had largely been forgotten, and would not be rediscovered until the renewal of interest in these wares that led to the Momoyama Revival Movement of the 1930s.

The writings of Brinkley, Audsley and Bowes, and Morse, demonstrate the low regard that *wabi* ceramics associated with the Tea-ceremony, particularly wood-fired ceramics from Shigaraki and Bizen, were held in at the start of the twentieth century.

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In the next section, I examine the changes in the Taishō and early Showa periods which led to the development of the Mingei movement, and explore the role of this movement in contemporary international adoption of this aesthetic.

6.2 Yanagi, Leach and the Mingei movement

The Taishō and early Showa periods were a time when Japan tried to find a national identity within its ceramic history. This was initially based on a turning away from the decorated porcelains of interest to Brinkley and a re-assessment of the daily use wares made in village based potteries all over Japan in what came to be known as the Mingei movement. Subsequently, the Mingei-influenced pottery of Bernard Leach (1887-1979) and his Anglo-Oriental style of pottery introduced aspects of this aesthetic to a wider audience through Leach’s apprentices and his writings.

The film theorist and historian David Bardwell, looking at the traditions of art within Japan has observed that there are historical ambivalences and redefinitions involved in the development of Japanese aesthetic concepts such as wabi, yūgen, iki, and mono-no-aware. According to Bardwell, “a great many ‘distinctively Japanese’ traditions, from emperor worship to the rules of sumo were devised in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by elite factions forging new national identities for a modernising society…” He points to what Hobsbawm has termed “the invention of tradition” both in respect of Japanese understandings of their own history and the West’s essentialising tendencies regarding this.327

At the start of the twentieth century, the ceramic practices that we currently regard as constituting a continuous tradition of ‘Japanese traditional pottery’ had largely disappeared. The rediscovery and reinvention of these traditions in the first half of the century was an important process in the spread of the wabi-influenced wood-fire aesthetic. Within Japan, the study of the history of Japanese ceramics began in the early Taishō period (1912–1926) as prized wares were released from collections of the former Edo-period lords and collected by financiers and businessmen such Masuda Donno, Hara Sankei and Nezu Seizan. The high values that began to be placed on these works meant that works that had not been seen for generations

327 David Bardwell quoted in Richie, A Tractate on Japanese Aesthetics, 58. See also, Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)
started appearing on the market. This led to the ‘scientific’ study of works from earlier periods in Japan. The early model for the study of these wares, by groups such as the Saikokai, was the European studies of Oriental ceramics, and this biased the choice of wares studied towards those written about appreciatively by Brinkley and Audsley and Bowes; decorated porcelains such as Kutani and Kakiemon, and Kyoto based ceramic in the styles of Ninsei and Kenzan. This ‘scientific’ approach invited a move away from the reliance on connoisseurship which “tended to devolve into antiquarianism and discourses on the tastes and interests of those versed in the Tea-ceremony” and a movement “towards extremely detailed classification.”

Beginning in the Taishō period the process of re-assessing traditional Japanese pottery, and of educating the Western world about the qualities inherent in the wabi-influenced pots described by Jenyns above began with the development of the Mingei (folk craft) movement in Japan, and the related Leach, or Anglo-oriental tradition in England.

6.2.1 The Development of Mingei

The Taishō period (1912-26) was a time during which Japan, having rapidly modernised in the Meiji period, tried to resolve various ideological and philosophical problems generated by integrating the Japanese mind and Western knowledge as intellectuals sought to define Japanese originality and a Japanese identity. The Mingei movement can be said to have begun during the 1920s, and was largely created by Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889–1961) also known as Yanagi Sōetsu. Yanagi’s father was of high rank in the navy and Yanagi was educated at the Gakushuin, an educational institution for the children of the Japanese aristocracy, where he became a member of a group of young intellectuals called the Shirakaba (White Birch) group whose “members opposed militarism and aristocratic feudalism, taking Tolstoyan idealism and individualism as their guiding principle.” Bernard Leach (1887–1979) met Yanagi in 1910, shortly after Yanagi had graduated from the Gakushuin,

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and introduced him to the work of William Blake; in 1914 Yanagi published a book on Blake’s work.

The Shirakaba group produced a magazine, Shirakaba, between 1910 and 1923, which aimed to “introduce new Western ideas and fine art” to Japan, and featured articles on mysticism as well as European art from ancient Greece to the Post-Impressionists. Later issues of the magazine began to look at Japanese and Korean art, coinciding with Yanagi’s developing interest in Korean folk crafts after his visit there in 1916. According to Kikuchi this might “hint at a symbolic shift away from total subservience to Western art and reflect the Shirakaba group’s spiritual search for national identity and dignity.” Yanagi re-evaluated Japanese and Oriental art using the theories learned through reading about ‘Gothic art’ and ‘medievalism’. Kikuchi states that:

> It united his research into philosophy and religion with art and gave him the theoretical rhetoric to define aesthetic qualities such as ‘moral beauty’, the beauty of the ‘grotesque’ and ‘irregularity’ as represented in Gothic art.

As part of the Taishō period search for a Japanese identity, Yanagi combined this re-evaluation of Oriental art with aspects of the philosophy and aesthetic ideals of John Ruskin and William Morris. Yanagi was introduced to Yi (Chosŏn) Dynasty (1392–1910) art and craft in Korea by his friend Asakawa Noritaka, starting in 1916. Korea had been annexed by Japan in 1910. Yanagi became active in promoting and collecting the overlooked ceramics and other crafts of the Yi Dynasty, and was active in establishing the Korean Folk Art Museum, which was opened in 1924. In that year, through the discovery of the carved Buddhas left by the sixteenth century priest and wood-carver, Mokujiki Shōnin (1718–1810), he became interested in the crafts of his native Japan. With some inputs from Bernard Leach and Tomimoto Kenkichi he developed an aesthetic philosophy based

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333 Kikuchi points out that Yanagi denied the influence of Ruskin and Morris claiming to have not read them until 1927, however in her 1994 paper, “The Myth of Yanagi’s Originality” she indicates that it would be very unlikely that he was not influenced by their writings earlier than that.
on anonymously produced folk-crafts. This development did not occur in isolation as there were other ‘peasant’ and folkcraft movements such as the Nōmin Bijutsu Undō (Peasant Art Movement) led by the printmaker Yamamoto Kanae, and the Rasu Chijin Kyōkai (Rasu Association of the People of Land) based on a Tolstoyan communal philosophy started by Miyazaki Kenji in 1926.336

In 1926, on a trip to Mt. Koya in Wakayama Prefecture, following the path of Mokujiki, Yanagi and the potters Kawai Kanjiro and Hamada Shōji invented the word Mingei (folk or people craft) as a substitute for the more vulgar getemono (meaning cheap rough things) and decided to start a national collection of folk arts.337 Yanagi translated the term into English as folkcraft, rather than folk art. In 1927 his thoughts on the essential beauty of folkcrafts were published as Kōgei no Michi (The Way of Craft), and from this the Mingei movement began.

There is much academic writing about the founding of the Mingei movement, about the relationship of Mingei theory and nationalism and Japan’s colonial ambitions within Asia, however this largely falls outside the scope of this dissertation. I will try to limit the analysis of Mingei to its impact on the way Japanese ceramics were seen, on the relation with wabi and Japanese aesthetics, and on the Mingei movement’s role in spreading an awareness of Japanese pottery and aesthetics to a Western audience, and hence to its role in the spreading of an awareness of the wood-fired aesthetic of Shigaraki and Bizen-style wares to a wider audience.

6.2.2 The Mingei Philosophy

The book that introduced Yanagi’s writings to the Anglophone world is The Unknown Craftsman: An Insight into Japanese Beauty. This title hints at the core principle of the Mingei movement—that true beauty is to be found in the work of anonymous artisans producing wares for everyday use by the common people. The philosophy of Mingei as formulated by Hamada emphasised the importance of three

337 This event is described in both Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsman, 101, and Bernard Leach, Hamada Potter (Tokyo, New York: Kodansha International, 1976), 90.
linterlinked terms: “health, naturalness, and beauty”, emphasising that these attributes were produced by “going along with natural forces.”

Yanagi saw questions of beauty in a deeply spiritual way, bound up with Buddhist beliefs. He saw the Meimei-kan folkcraft museum as a “meeting place where one may come into contact with the religion of beauty.” Yanagi’s criteria for beauty are summarised by Kikuchi as ‘beauty of handicrafts’, ‘beauty of intimacy’, ‘beauty of health’, ‘beauty of naturalness’, ‘beauty of simplicity’, ‘beauty of tradition’, ‘beauty of irregularity’, ‘beauty of inexpensiveness’, ‘beauty of plurality’, ‘beauty of sincerity and honest toil’ and ‘beauty of selflessness and anonymity’. There are moral judgments inherent in these criteria, and Yanagi transferred this ideal onto the potters and artisans of Korea who he categorised as operating in an ideal world of Buddhist non-duality.

Yanagi writes:

As we study Yi pottery, we discover that its beauty is not that which is attained by eliminating ugliness but rather that which bursts out before the duality even occurs to man. The pottery is produced before there is any question of knowing or not knowing. To apply to it, therefore, the criterions of beauty and ugliness, skill and awkwardness, and the like make no sense. Indeed, Yi pottery renders all critical comment meaningless. The pieces assume no pretensions, they are simply there, in all their naturalness...

For Yanagi, the ultimate proof of this lies with the Kizaemon Tea-bowl, a Korean bowl of the Ō-Ido variety, to which one essay in his book is dedicated. This bowl is considered to be the finest of the twenty-six Ō-Ido bowls rated as meibutsu and is “said to contain the essence of Tea.”

Yanagi sees the making of this Tea-bowl as occurring in two steps. The first step was the making of the bowl as an everyday rice bowl in Korea; the second was the seeing of the deep beauty of the pot by the Tea-masters. “The Koreans made rice bowls; the Japanese masters made them into Tea-bowls”.

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338 Hamada, quoted in Leach, Hamada: Potter, 123.
339 Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsman, 105.
341 Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsman, 122-23, 142-43.
342 Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsman, 142.
343 Ibid., 190.
344 Ibid., 193. As Brandt points out (Kingdom of Beauty pp31-35) Yanagi’s view of Korean crafts was tied up in a colonial vision which saw the “colonial object as child” and that “the theme of the
bowls that “emerging from a squalid kitchen, the *Ido* bowl took its seat on the highest throne of Beauty”. Yanagi sees the role of the potter in the making of these bowls as being one of degredation and squalor saying:

The shape revealed no particular thought: it was one of many. The work had been fast; the turning was rough, done with dirty hands; the throwing slipshod; the glaze had run over the foot. … The kiln was a wretched affair; the firing careless. Sand stuck to the pot, but nobody minded; no one invested the thing with any dreams. It is enough to make one give up working as a potter. In Korea such work was left to the lowest…The people who did this were clumsy yokels.\(^{345}\)

![Image of Ido Tea-bowl, Yi Dynasty (sixteenth century), Korea.](image)

Figure 54: The *Kizaemon* Ido Tea-bowl, Yi Dynasty (sixteenth century), Korea.

Yanagi emphasises the lack of care and concern that he sees in the role of the potter producing this work. It is worth considering the possible nationalistic and colonial motives for describing Yi Dynasty Korean potters as non thinking automatons, and

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\(^{345}\) *Ibid.*, 191-192. As a potter I find this description of the making process troubling. Perhaps I am romanticizing the potters role, but in my experience there is a concern for a ‘rightness’ of form, and a joy in the fluency of skill that is inherent in the making process, and an enjoyment of trying to do the best one can that is part of being human, and these pots would not be good if the potter had not possessed this.
no doubt Yanagi plays down the origin of these bowls to emphasize the surprising factor of these pots being seen as possessing the ultimate in Beauty.

Intimately involved in the philosophy of beauty that Yanagi postulates for the *Mingei* movement was the aesthetic of *wabi* as developed by Jukō, Jōō, and Rikyū. Yanagi sees in modern art “a pursuit of deformation, discarding conventional form, as an expression of man’s quest for freedom”, using the word “irregular” in reference to this.\(^346\) He considers this irregular beauty as akin to the aesthetics developed within *wabi*-Tea and mounts a defence of the imperfect as denoting freedom as opposed to the static and passionless regularity of the perfect.

However, Yanagi rejects the idea of consciously adding imperfection as a way of attaining irregularity, as for him, this irregularity needs to come from a position where one is neither concerned about perfection or imperfection, working “in a realm where such distinctions have ceased to exist, where the imperfect is identified with the perfect.”\(^347\) For this reason he sees the *Raku* Tea-bowl as being inferior to the *Ido* Tea-bowls: the former being made with deliberate effort, while the latter were products of everyday life without the purposefulness associated with the *Raku* bowl.\(^348\)

Yanagi’s idea of beauty is, therefore, based on a concept of work being made in an unconscious, uncontrived manner for everyday use. It was the honed perception of the Tea-master that would discover the beauty inherent in such wares. Yanagi felt (possibly correctly) that the Tea practice of his day had lost the creative vision of the original Tea-masters and fallen into what Brandt describes as an “increasingly stylized and imitative formalism.” Yanagi claimed that with his promotion of Yi Dynasty ceramics and Japanese rural crafts he was “reviving the true spirit of the early Tea-masters.”\(^349\)

It is important to point out that Yanagi’s promotion of Yi (Choson) Dynasty Korean ceramics, and his ‘discovery’ of Mingei in Japan occurred in a context where, as young writers and intellectuals Yanagi and his friends were trying to establish

\(^{346}\) Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman*, 119.

\(^{347}\) *Ibid.*, 121.


cultural capital in an environment where the Tea aficionados were the established cultural elites. As Brandt says “For men such as Yanagi, colonial Korea offered special opportunities to counter the hegemony, reinforced by big money, of the Tea tradition over the production and consumption of art ceramics in Japan.” In this context, it is natural that the developing Mingei aesthetic would be opposed to the aesthetic presented by the Tea schools.

6.2.3 The Role of Mingei in spreading the aesthetic of Wood-firing

It would seem clear that Yanagi and the Mingei movement either did not see, or ignored the wood-fired ceramics made from the Kamakura Period through to the end of the Momoyama Period. This could be for many reasons: for instance, there was no continuity of practice in which the Momoyama aesthetic of Bizen and Shigaraki could have been transmitted to Yanagi’s times. Historical examples were generally contained in private collections of Tea aficionados, and did not enter public museums and galleries until the later Meiji and Taishō Periods. I think that the main reason for ignoring of these wood-fired ceramics (and also of other Momoyama Period Tea-wares, such as shino, Karatsu and Oribe wares) was that they had been consciously made to satisfy the developing market for tea-wares in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Therefore, for Yanagi, and similarly to his views on Raku wares, the Momoyama Period wares from Mino and wood-fired wares of Bizen and Shigaraki were inferior to unselfconsciously made Korean Ido Tea-bowls. Being made with deliberate effort, Momoyama wares could not be seen as truly beautiful from the philosophical viewpoint of the Mingei movement.

Yanagi and mingei played an important role in preserving the idea of the handmade against the encroaching industrialisation of ceramic production. Further, their role was one of preparing the ground for a general acceptance of Japanese pottery (as against Japanese porcelain), and, although the mingei movement largely ignored the wabi Tea-wares, preparing the ground for an acceptance of wabi-based aesthetics. Tours of England and the United States by Leach, Hamada and Yanagi in the early 1950s paved the way for a wider appreciation of wabi, and the aesthetic of wood-fired Japanese pottery.

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350 Ibid., 15.
Chapter 7. The Momoyama Revival and the Reinvention of Wood-fire Aesthetics in Japan

Among the responses to the social and nationalist pressures that led to the need to redefine Japanese originality and identity during the late Taishō and early Showa periods was what has become known as the Momoyama Revival. As mentioned earlier, groups such as the Saikokai based their pioneering academic studies of old Japanese ceramics on the model of the European study of Oriental ceramics. The main focus of their activities were enamelled porcelains such as those of Kutani, Kakiemon and Kyoto-based artists such as Ninsei. The *Mingei* movement of Yanagi had begun to draw attention to the beauty of the common everyday-wares produced in Japanese kilns, such as the Seto horse-eye plates, and the brushwork-decorated teapots from Shigaraki. However, the Momoyama Revival movement was different from the *Mingei* movement as it was largely inspired by art historians and connoisseurs who set out to re-examine the Momoyama-period pieces that had been preserved and passed down through the existing Tea networks, or as Cort says “to examine them seriously for the first time”.351

Therefore the Momoyama Revival movement had direct connections with the Tea schools, and inspired by the Tea-utensils of the Momoyama Period, potters initially set out to reproduce the types of wares made during that time. What changed the Momoyama Revival from a pure imitation of the works of a bygone era was that, with the influence of ceramic artists such as Kawakita Handeishi (1878–1963), the potters transformed the traditional techniques into their own individual styles. The importance of the potters of the Momoyama Revival is that they reintroduced the aesthetic of *wabi* as the central aesthetic of Japanese ceramics. For potters working in the pottery centres where the qualities of wood-firing were central to the Momoyama period ceramics, the “twentieth-century renewal of interest in the ‘chance’ elegance of unglazed medieval pieces had its effect in the workshops of the

potters as well” as they rediscovered the aesthetics and techniques of natural ash-glazed wood-firing.\textsuperscript{352}

This rediscovery and re-interpretation of wabi-inspired Momoyama-period ceramics is the particular importance of the Momoyama Revival to this dissertation, as it was within this movement that the aesthetic qualities of the Momoyama-period wood-fired ceramics from Shigaraki, Iga and Bizen were reassessed, and the processes of manufacture were re-discovered. This rediscovery of technique and aesthetic was to provide the foundation for the spread of the wood-fire aesthetic throughout Japan, and the post-war transfer of this aesthetic and technique to the Western potter.

Kitaoji Rosanjin (1883–1959) was important in the rediscovery and reassessment of the works of the Momoyama period, and he influenced other potters in researching these works. The other main protagonists in this movement were Kaneshige Tōyō (1896–1967), who rediscovered the techniques of Ko-Bizen (Old Bizen) wares, Arakawa Toyozu (1894–1959) who discovered the site of manufacture of shino glazed wares in Mino, where the later Oribe wares had also been made, Miwa Kyuwa (1895–1981) from Hagi and Kawakita Handeishi (1878–1963).

In reference to the rediscovery of natural ash glazed ceramics the important players were the above mentioned Kaneshige Tōyō, and post-World War II, the Shigaraki potters Takahashi Rokusai (1898–1976) and Ueda Naokata (1899–1975). Below, I look at some of these potters in more detail. In particular I will look at the processes involved in re-discovering techniques that had fallen out of usage.

7.1 Kitaoji Rosanjin

Rosanjin was a calligrapher, gourmand, ceramist, and great eccentric, as Robert Yellin describes him, “one of Japan's greatest 20th-century artists, the boisterous, arrogant and brilliant Rosanjin.”\textsuperscript{353} Rosanjin played a pivotal role in the development of the interest in antique Japanese pottery that lead to the Momoyama Revival of the 1930s. He was born in 1883 in Kitaoji, Kyoto, and brought up in difficult circumstances, in several foster homes, before being adopted by Fukuda

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid., 298.

\textsuperscript{353} Robert Yellin for The Japan Times, Feb. 12, 2003.
Takiezo, a wood carver and seal engraver. Rosanjin set out to be a calligrapher, but due to lack of connections was unable to study with the successful artists he approached. Nevertheless he managed to forge an artistic career as a calligrapher and engraver of seals. He initially called himself Fukuda Taikan, and around 1920 he changed his name to Rokyo (‘foolish lord’), and by 1925 had changed it again to Rosanjin (‘foolish mountain man’).354

Rosanjin’s great passions were food and antiques, and he combined these passions when he established the Bishoku Club in 1921, a restaurant where food was served on antique plates. When most of his collection was destroyed in the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake he set out to make the plates for his new restaurant, and ultimately established his ceramic workshop and kiln Hoshigaoka-yo at his Kita-Kamakura residence. His teacher in this enterprise was the collection of three and a half thousand examples he had amassed. This collection of old ceramics included 1350 works from Mino and Seto, including works by potters such as Ogata Kenzan (1663-1743) and up to 100,000 shards from Seto, Mino, Karatsu and Chosen (Korea).355

Rosanjin made ceramics in the style of many of the Japanese kilns, sourcing the clays from those districts. His pots were fired in a noborigama, which gave his forms a light wood-fired surface flashing, and it would seem that he largely used glaze to reproduce the effects of ash deposits on pots in the style of Shigaraki and Iga pots from earlier periods, as shown on the Iga (Figure 55) and Shigaraki-style (Figure 56) pots below. He employed artisans to make the forms, which he then modified and decorated, enabling him to make many pots.

Rosanjin worked across many styles of ceramics within the Japanese pottery tradition, and the majority of the pots he produced were not specifically ‘about’ the qualities of the ‘Shigaraki/Bizen’ wood-fired surface. However, his works were fired in the Hoshigaoka-yo noborigama at Kita-Kamakura, and the works were dependent on the qualities of surface flashing on the unglazed surfaces generated in this wood-fired kiln for their success.

355 Kida, “Modern Revival of Momoyama Ceramics”, 16.
Rosanjin’s interactions with other potters were an important part of the redevelopment of interest in the works of the Momoyama Period. As will be seen later, Rosanjin employed Arakawa Toyozo at the time that Arakawa realised that shino wares had been produced in the Mino area and found the important shino shard at the site of the Mutabora kiln in Ogaya. The publicity around this and other discoveries started a craze for excavating kiln-sites and, in addition to Arakawa and Rosanjin, other artists such as Kato Hajime, Kato Tokuro and Koyama Fujio were involved with excavating kilns in the Mino district.

In 1952, Rosanjin, along with the American-Japanese artist Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), spent a week working in Kaneshige Tōyō’s workshop in Imbe producing work in the Bizen style, and in August the three artists held an exhibition of work produced in the firing in Okayama. Later that year, Kaneshige constructed a Bizen-style wood-fired kiln at Rosanjin’s Kita Kamakura workshop. Rosanjin is credited with inventing the oblong flat serving dish which has become a mainstay of Japanese ceramic production, and the example of this form shown above, the Bizen oblong flat dish (Figure 57), unlike the Shigaraki and Iga bowls shown, has the genuine feel of a work fired in a long wood-firing for natural-ash deposits. It was probably fired

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in Kaneshige’s kiln in Imbe, as Rosanjin didn’t construct his Bizen-style kiln until the 1952.

Figure 56: Rosanjin, Large Bowl, Shigaraki ware, 1956.

Figure 57. Rosanjin, Bizen-style Oblong flat dish, 1950.
Figure 58: Rosanjin, *Oribe* dish, 1939.

Although he was most famous for his *Oribe*-green glazed ceramics, Rosanjin played a significant role early in the process of the ‘rediscovering’ of the Shigaraki/Bizen aesthetic. Many of his pots might have reproduced the *wabi* qualities of pottery from earlier eras using glaze instead of natural-ash-fall during the firing; however, he helped to create an awareness of this aesthetic within Japan. He inspired Japanese artists such as Arakawa to work in this *wabi*-inspired aesthetic, and in the 1950s he helped to spread this aesthetic to the wider ceramic world through his exhibitions and tours in the United States and his interactions with foreign artists.

### 7.2 Arakawa Toyozu and Mino Ceramics

As a case study of the process of the rediscovery and reinvention of tradition, the story of *shino*-glazed wares and Arakawa Toyozu’s (1894–1985) discovery of the original kiln sites in the Mino district is well documented. *Shino* is a feldspathic glaze produced for a short period of time at the end of the sixteenth century through to the early seventeenth century. Arakawa says of *shino* that it “gave birth to the
The name *shino* is not used to describe this type of ware until the eighteenth century, however works described variously as “white Seto tea bowls”, “white plates”, “new tea bowls” and “white crackled plates” and other descriptions in Tea diaries are considered most likely to be *shino* glazed.  

Figure 59: *Shino* shards with bamboo motif found by Arakawa.

Arakawa was working at Kitaoji Rosanjin’s kiln *Hoshigaoka-yo* when, in April 1930, he accompanied Rosanjin to Nagoya for a show of work from this kiln. Visiting the Sekido family in Nagoya he saw the tea bowl named *Tamagawa*, a cylindrical *shino* Tea-bowl in the Sekido family collection.  

Within Tea culture, it was believed that this white-glazed ware was a product of the Seto district; however, when looking at the foot of this *shino* Tea-bowl with its bamboo shoot motif, Arakawa, who was from Tajimi, felt that the reddish clay on the base of the pot could not have come from Seto, and saw similarities with that clay and clays from the Mino area. He searched in the hills around the village of Ōgaya, and discovered a shard (Figure 59) with a similar motif in the ruins of the

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358 Kida, “Modern Revival of Momoyama Ceramics”, 15

sixteenth-century kiln site known as Mutabora. This indicated that the source of the shino wares was Mino, not the Seto district, and subsequently Mino has also proved to be the source of the Oribe and ki-seto ceramics treasured within the Tea-ceremony.

Rosanjin immediately invested funds to excavate old Mino kilns, and Arakawa spent about a year excavating kilns in Ogaya, Ohira and Kujiri, sending shards to Rosanjin.

The interaction of technological change, economics and fashion that led to the development of shino and its subsequent fading away is of interest, as it indicates the way that changes in kiln design affected the types of wares produced. At the start of the sixteenth century a new style of kiln known as the ōgama took over from the earlier Sue style anagama kilns in the Seto and Mino districts. The changes in firebox design made the kiln more efficient, the domed roof supported by pillars gave a partial down-draught providing more even heat distribution, and the use of

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361 Kida, “Modern Revival of Momoyama Ceramics”, 16.
saggars for setting the wares into the kiln gave a denser setting, all of which would have had economic benefits for the potter.  

The majority of the wares produced in these kilns were ash iron and iron slip glazes, while the shino, Yellow-Seto (ki-seto) and Black Seto (kuro-seto) wares “should be regarded as products made for a specialized market.” Shino-glazed ceramics would appear to have been made from approximately 1570 (although, as has been pointed out earlier there is significant doubt as to the dating of the earliest shino-wares), and the production of shino-glazed wares is what defines the fourth stage in the development of the ōgama-style kilns. Shino production continued through to the early sixteen hundreds, when the changed firing conditions within the more efficient noborigama, introduced from the potteries in Karatsu at the Motoyashiki kiln in 1597, seem to dictate that the qualities that defined the shino glaze no longer appeared. Due to the higher temperatures, faster firing times, and more consistent

Figure 61: Arakawa, shino Tea-bowl, named Homecoming. 1942.

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362 Faulkner and Impey, Shino and Oribe Kiln Sites, 23.
363 Ibid., 26, 28.
364 Barriskill, Visiting the Mino Kilns; the noborigama at Motoyashiki was built in 1597.
reducing atmosphere in these noborigama-style kilns introduced at this time, “the glaze lost the semi-opaqueness typical of earlier shino products and the underglaze iron designs showed through much more strongly. This allowed greater scope for underglaze painting, an opportunity that the Motoyashiki potters exploited to the fullest. The result was the range of products known as shino-oribe ware.”

Arakawa realised that in order to reproduce the qualities of the Momoyama period shino wares he would have to rebuild the type of kiln that had generated those qualities. Arakawa reproduced the original Mutabora ōgama kiln in 1933, firing it for the first time in December, and set out to recreate the glazes and styles of the ceramics of the Momoyama Period Tea-wares.

Figure 62: Diagram of Mino Ōgama-style kiln.

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365 Faulkner and Impey, Shino and Oribe Kiln Sites, 35.
366 Ibid., 24.
He successfully produced shino, setoguro and ki-seto wares equal to wares from the Momoyama period, and began a revival of these styles of work in the Mino district that has continued through to today. Initially he attempted to reproduce the glaze qualities and forms of the Momoyama Period Tea-wares, but over time his pots evolved into what became known as Arakawa-shino wares in which the glazes were fired to slightly lower temperatures and had softer tones and more orange and salmon tones than found in the Momoyama models. Critics such as Kamiguchi Guro “considered the firing to be inadequate, resulting in the bowls becoming stained by tea”, however this would eventually become “recognized as Arakawa’s ingenuity”.368

7.3 Kato Tokuro

Kato Tokuro (1898-1985) was perhaps the most prone to controversy of the potters involved in the Momoyama Revival Movement, and like Arakawa, worked in the area of Seto/Mino style shino, Ki-seto and Setoguro Tea-ware. At an early age he began collecting shards from ancient kiln sites, and in 1914, at the age of 16, took over the family kiln.369 Inspired by the shards he had collected Tokuro set out to recreate the historical styles of shino, Oribe, ki-seto and setoguro, and in 1930 received much recognition for his shino Tea-bowl Tsurara (icicle).

368 Kida, “Modern Revival of Momoyama Ceramics,” 16.
369 Robert Yellin, “Maverick Tokuro” The Japan Times, September 13, 1997
Similar to Arakawa, Tokuro doubted the accepted story that the Seto district was the source of the famed Tea-wares of the Momoyama Period. Based on the shards he had collected, he proposed that the ki-seto wares were not actually produced in Seto, but came from the area around Tajimi, in Gifu prefecture. His publishing of this theory in a book in 1933 led to a book burning incident when this was seen “as a ‘slander’ against the ancestors of Seto.” Tokuro made ki-seto, and Oribe wares as well as shino, and in 1952 his Oribe wares were recognized as “Intangible Cultural Property”. Yellin says of Tokuro’s work “his chawan are arguably the finest ever made since the Momoyama period”.

7.4 Kaneshige Tōyō and Bizen Ceramics

At the end of the Taishō era in Bizen, the focus of ceramic production remained on the highly sculpted “delicately crafted ornaments and incense burners called saikumono.” This was the style of ceramic that Brinkley was so enthused by some

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370 Yellin, “Maverick Tokuro.” The other controversy that Kato was involved in was the famous Einin no Tsubo Scandal, in which Kato was involved in the making, burial and rediscovery of what was purported to be a dated Kamakura period jar.

371 Ibid.

372 Kida, “Modern Revival of Momoyama Ceramics,” 16.
thirty years earlier that he described them as being “among the very highest achievements of Japanese plastic art.” Kaneshige Tōyō (1896–1967) was a master potter working in the saikumono tradition who, when he turned 40 in 1936 “turned away from his craft to become a potter producing Tea-wares using a potter’s wheel and began to focus his attention on old Bizen ware of the Momoyama era.” Kida postulates that Kaneshige’s interest in historical Bizen wares was stimulated by his observations of the investigations into the history of these wares carried out by Katsura Matasuboro. Katsura also involved Kaneshige in “verification of the clay and techniques used in old Bizen.” This, similar to the process Arakawa had followed in Mino, included the study of shards, but in the case of Bizen also included umiagari, pots that were salvaged from shipwrecks along the coastline.

The saikumono (see Figures 50 and 51) were made using a very fine clay-body produced from clay under rice paddies through the suihī process of water levigation. This produced works with a shiny, polished bronze-like surface. During the late 1930s Kaneshige abandoned that way of working and rediscovered the processes of preparing clay and firing work in the wood-fired kiln that had produced the qualities of kō-bizen from the Muromachi and Momoyama periods. Kaneshige used unrefined clays and studied kiln design and firing techniques to reproduce effects such as the goma (sesame seed) ash effects and sangiri (red flashing from charcoal). In 1938 Kaneshige held his first solo exhibition at the Hankyū Department store in Osaka, and in the following year he managed to produces the red lines on Bizen wares that are known as hidasuki.

For this dissertation, Kaneshige’s importance lies not only his rediscovering the qualities of wood-firing that had been present on works produced in the Muromachi and Momoyama periods, but that he was able to promote these works to a larger audience. Within the Bizen pottery village of Imbe the majority of potters turned away from the production of saikumono and started producing wabi Tea-wares. Kaneshige was followed by artists such as Fujiwara Kei (1899–1983) who studied

373 Brinkley, Japan and China: Their History Arts and Literature, 330-332.
374 Kida, “Modern Revival of Momoyama Ceramics,” 16, 17.
375 Ibid., 17.
376 Cort and Winther-Tamaki, Isamu Noguchi, 212.
with Kaneshige at the age of 40, after a career as a writer. In 1942, Kaneshige was recognised by the Japanese government as ‘a holder of Bizen-ware skills’.

Figure 65: Kaneshige Tōyō, Bizen-ware Tea kettle, 1938.

Figure 66: Kaneshige Tōyō, Bizen-ware flower vase, named Auspicious Clouds, 1942–43.

Cort and Winther-Tamaki, Isamu Noguchi, 212.
As will be seen in Chapter 8, Kaneshige would play an important role in spreading the awareness of the *wabi*-inspired wood-fired ceramics of Japan to the Western ceramic world through having foreign apprentices and artists, such as Isamu Noguchi, work in his studio. He also demonstrated his pottery technique during his visit to the United States from November 1957 to February 1958, which included three exhibitions, in Honolulu, Los Angeles and Ann Arbor, Michigan.\(^\text{378}\)

![Figure 67: Kaneshige Tōyō, Water container (*mizusashi*), 1958. Tōkyō Contemporary Art Museum.](image)

7.5 Takahashi Rakusai, Ueda Naokata and Shigaraki Ceramics.
In the other important center for the rediscovery of the wood-firing aesthetic and technique, Shigaraki, the process of reviving the wood-fired effects of the earlier works had begun by 1914. This began with potters firing these pieces in the *fuse* or *hibuse* area at the front of the kiln where contact with the ash and charcoal from the timber used as fuel would adversely affect the standard glazed wares. Takahashi Rakusai (1898–1976) and Ueda Naokata (1899–1975), who were named as ‘Important Intangible Cultural Properties’ by Shiga Prefecture in 1964, were among the potters who utilized the *fuse* area of the kilns, originally firing work that had been bisqued and coated with thick transparent green glaze. According to Cort, it wasn’t until after the Second World War that the potter and historian Hirano Toshizō observed from looking at shards that the earlier works “had been fired raw and that their glaze was accidental and natural” and pointed this out to Takahashi and Ueda. The potters sought techniques that would give the desired effect and although Takahashi continued to fire his work in the front two chambers of a ten-chamber *noborigama*, Ueda constructed the first modern *anagama* kiln in Shigaraki.³⁷⁹

The understanding of the beauty of Shigaraki wood-fired ceramics reached new heights in the mid 1960s. In 1965, the photographer Domon Ken produced a book titled *Shigaraki Ōtsubo*,³⁸⁰ which brought to public attention the large wood-fired jars produced in Shigaraki during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods and touched off the Shigaraki boom of the late 1960s.³⁸¹ In his essay in the catalogue of the exhibition *Ko-Shigaraki, Jars from Shigaraki’s Medieval Kilns*, Yabe Yoshiaki (Head Curator of Japanese Archaeology, Tokyo National Museum) says of this process of aestheticising these jars that:

> After World War II, aficionados of antique ceramics were both liberated from the control of the tea ceremony strictures, and, at the same time they were able to use the connoisseurship skills which the tea world had fostered over the centuries. These ceramic fans turned their attention to large Old Shigaraki jars as a form of pure, abstract art. They were able to fully fathom the true flavour of these works in their sheer artlessness

³⁷⁹ Cort, *Shigaraki*, 298.
³⁸¹ Cort, *Shigaraki*, 296.
underscored by an endless sense of completeness, with surfaces free of all human artifice.  

The rediscovery by Takhashi and Ueda of the techniques used in producing Shigaraki works of the Momoyama period completed the initial stage of the re-establishment of the wood-fire aesthetic within the Japanese ceramic world. This *wabi*-inspired pottery now constitutes a significant percentage of Japanese contemporary ceramics. As Yabe states above, the appreciation of the wood-fired surface was based on the skills of connoisseurship developed within the Tea-ceremony, but was now able to be seen and valued by a wider audience of collectors and potters. The wood-fire aesthetic was no longer restricted to the Tea-room. The next step was onto the international stage.

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An awareness of the natural-ash/wood-fire aesthetic in the West first developed in the United States in the early 1950s. This process seems to have occurred in three stages.

The initial stage was the introduction of Japanese pottery of the Mingei School, wares from wabi-style Tea-ceremony, and concepts of Zen Buddhism through the visits of Yanagi, Leach and Hamada and later potters such as Rosanjin and Kaneshige. Leach’s tours and writings are credited with encouraging an interest not just in Japanese ceramics but also in the “underlying identity of Zen Buddhism.” Through these visits aspects of the wabi aesthetic were introduced to potters in the United States.

The second stage of the establishment of this aesthetic in the West was the assimilation of the specifically wabi acceptance of and delight in asymmetry and imperfection or incompleteness. I believe that the development of what came to be known as “Abstract Expressionist” ceramics, centering around Peter Voulkos (1924-2002) and his students at the Otis Art Institute (Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles) during the mid-to-late 1950s was an important moment in introducing this aesthetic to the USA and beyond. The changes these artists made in their own work created a window through which the aesthetic of Shigaraki and Bizen wares could be appreciated by more Western viewers. I will use Garth Clark’s comments on this movement to assist in understanding the importance of Japanese ceramics for this movement. I believe that 20th century ceramics in the United States and much of the Anglophone world can be divided into pre-Voulkos and post-Voulkos, and this chapter will be organised along those lines.

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During the Otis period, Voulkos did not wood-fire his work, so the importance of the period does not lie specifically in the spreading of the process of the wood-fired surface. Rather, the importance was to be found in the way that Voulkos and his associates interpreted the form of the Japanese pots from Bizen and Shigaraki into a dynamic and changing style that broke the shackles that had been forged by the Anglo-Oriental ceramics of the Leach school and the design-based forms of potters from Northern Europe. In a short time Voulkos and his students managed to take and blend influences ranging from Jazz music, the ceramics of Picasso, contemporary painting and sculpture, the work of contemporary Japanese potters such as Rosanjin and Kaneshige, and from:

...the rugged wares of Shigaraki and Bizen, and their celebration of happenstance [that] gave them license to allow cracks, warping, crawling and kiln accidents to become part of their syntax, in the process subverting the stultifying search for perfection embedded in the Western ceramic sensibility. 384

I will argue that these developments were based on exposure to the wabi-influenced pots from the Momoyama Period as well as to exposure to the works of visiting Japanese artists, Rosanjin and Kaneshige, whose work was steeped in this aesthetic.

Voulkos’ works from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s laid the foundations for the acceptance of natural-ash glazed Japanese wabi ceramics in the USA. Although his early works were not wood-fired and so do not show natural-ash glazed surfaces of the wood-fire aesthetic, I argue that the qualities that Voulkos sought to produce on the surfaces of many of these works was an attempt to reproduce the feeling of Japanese wabi influenced ceramics made in the wood-fired aesthetic. Voulkos’ post 1978, wood-fired pieces played an important role in further disseminating this aesthetic.

The third stage of the transfer of wood-firing and the wood-fire aesthetic onto the world stage occurred as Western potters such as Peter Callas, Rob Barnard, Richard Bresnahan and others studied wood-firing in Japanese studios, and then returned to their own countries to make ceramics in wood-fired kilns, and to disseminate these skills by training younger artists. The initial visits by Leach, Yanagi and Hamada had prepared the ground for the acceptance of the wabi-inspired natural-ash wood-

384 Clark, Shards, 275.
fired aesthetic, and the visits and exhibitions held by Rosanjin and Kaneshige introduced this style of work, but it was not until this third stage occurred, where young American potters would work in the studios of potters such as Rosanjin and Kaneshige, that the knowledge of the techniques and processes necessary to achieve the natural-ash, Bizen/Shigaraki aesthetic would spread to the West.

At the end of this chapter, I turn to contemporary sources such as journals, articles and books on wood-firing by Jack Troy, and Minogue and Sanderson, to try and gain an understanding of the spread of the Shigaraki/ Bizen aesthetic around the globe in the latter half of the twentieth century.

8.1 Leach, Yanagi and the Anglo Oriental School

Arguably the pivotal moment for Western ceramics in the twentieth century occurred in the mid-1950s when Peter Voulkos took up a teaching position at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. This event led to the development of what came to be known as Abstract Expressionist ceramics, which is seen as having been influenced by the New York School of ‘action’ painting of artists such as de Kooning and Pollock. However, as Clark points out, the changes coming out of the Otis Art Institute were also part of a new awareness of Japanese ceramics that was spread through the United States with visits from Leach, Hamada and Yanagi in the early 1950s.385

Bernard Leach published his A Potter’s Book in 1940, which became the Bible for the “Anglo-Oriental” or “Leach Tradition” of studio pottery. Leach also had a direct influence on pottery in the United States as students of his such as Warren McKenzie returned to the United States after working in Leach’s studio in St. Ives in Cornwall. In 1949 Leach toured the United States, introducing his ideas to large numbers of potters.

In 1952 Leach returned to the US, as part of a world tour accompanied by Yanagi and Hamada, after travelling first to an international conference of potters and weavers at Dartington Hall in England. They then spent three months giving

385 Clark, “Abstract Expressionism Revisited — Part One” in Shards, 274
seminars across the United States organised by the Society of Contemporary Arts in Washington DC. It is interesting to note the scale of their reception: in Los Angeles, they spoke in front of an audience of more than a thousand people, with hundreds more turned away.\footnote{Clark, \textit{American Ceramics, 1876 to the Present}, 100.} It would seem that the time was right for a new interest in things Japanese, especially on the west coast of the United States. It is possible that the defeat of Japan not very many years before was a factor in this developing enthusiasm. As part of their United States tour, Leach, Hamada and Yanagi visited the Archie Bray brickworks in Montana, where Peter Voulkos, along with Rudy Autio, had set up a workshop that became the Archie Bray Foundation.\footnote{Rose Slivka, \textit{Peter Voulkos: A Dialogue with Clay}. (New York: Little Brown, 1978), 14.} On this journey, Yanagi was talking about \textit{mingei} and “explaining the Zen concept of beauty and the Tea ceremony”.\footnote{Leach, \textit{Hamada Potter}, 116.} At this time Voulkos would have been introduced to Japanese pottery and aesthetic theories. Leach, Yanagi and Hamada then travelled around Japan giving reports of their overseas experience to craftsmen and other interested people.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Figure 70: Peter Voulkos, Bottle, 1949. Collection: Margaret Voulkos.}
\end{figure}
These tours were important in spreading awareness of Japanese *mingei* ceramics of potters such as Hamada, but played only a secondary role in transferring any understanding of the wood-fired works from Japan, such as the wares of potters from Bizen and Shigaraki. As Jack Troy points out, there is complete absence in Leach’s writings of any mention of the wood-fired ‘kiln-glazed’ ceramic work. It is also significant to note that Leach’s time in Japan predated the Momoyama Revival of the 1930s and 1940s.\textsuperscript{389}

![Figure 71: Yanagi, Leach, Autio, Voulkos and Hamada at the Archie Bray Foundation in 1952.](image)

Yanagi and Hamada were followed by other Japanese potters travelling to the USA. Rosanjin toured and exhibited in 1954, and he was followed by Kaneshige Tōyō whose dynamic presentations made a mark. He is recalled as somebody,

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\ldots \text{who gave extraordinary demonstrations. He would swiftly pummel his thrown form and, after a moment's contemplation, declare it good or bad and so consign it to either the kiln or to the soak bin.}\textsuperscript{390}
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\textsuperscript{389} Troy, *Wood-fired Stoneware and Porcelain*, xi, 15.

\textsuperscript{390} Clark, *American Ceramics, 1876 to the Present*, 101.
8.2. Peter Voulkos and the Otis Artists

At the height of this new awareness of Japanese pottery, in 1954, Voulkos was appointed to set up the ceramics department at the Otis Art Institute, arriving in Los Angeles in August. From then through to May 1959, when he was fired from his position, a group of extraordinary students gathered around the charismatic Voulkos. Paul Soldner was the first student to come, followed by John Mason, Billy Al Bengston, Michael Frinkess, Ken Price, Henry Takemoto and Jerry Rothman among others. By encouraging the acceptance of imperfection and chance, of a dynamic manipulation of clay, and of asymmetry of form, the works that came out of this period at the Otis Institute radically changed the concept of ceramic art in the Western world. It represented a rejection of the conservative search for perfection of glaze surface and form that was the accepted norm at the time. These works were characterised by many of the concepts displayed by the wabi ceramics of the Japanese Tea-ceremony.

The ceramics from this period have been labelled with the title of “Abstract Expressionist Ceramics” after the 1966 exhibition of that title organised by John Copland. From 1957 non-vessel ceramic sculpture started to emerge, but this was often constructed from wheel thrown segments. However the popular image of the work of this period has become one of a movement away from the use of the potter’s wheel, a point that Clark makes efforts to clarify, pointing out the continuing importance of the potter’s wheel at Otis.

The California of the 1950s was a place of massive cultural change: it was marked by the work of the Beat poets, the jazz of Miles Davis, and growing interest in Eastern philosophy and Zen Buddhism. This environment fostered the ceramic developments of Voulkos and the Otis Group. Clark points out that the Otis artists were “thirsty sponges” who adapted influence from every exhibition of interest that was shown in Los Angeles, and lists many of the influences on the group including Picasso’s ceramics and Matisse’s cut-outs, the collages of Conrad Marca-Relli

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392 Clark, *Shards*, 299. Clark argues that this title was misleading, and did the artists a disservice as it relegated the developments of Voulkos and the other artists as “a Johnny-come-lately passenger on the Abstract Expressionist bandwagon”, whereas Clark argues that the peak developments of the Otis years occurred before 1958 when “Voulkos developed his interest in the work of the action painters.”
(1913–2000) and the work of the Viennese sculptor Fritz Wotruba (1907–1975). However, Clark makes the clear point that Voulkos and the Otis artists did not reject ceramic history as such; rather they rejected the restrictive tastes found in most Western pottery. Clark points out that the contemporary ceramics of most interest to Voulkos were those of Picasso, but that historical examples from books and magazines were of great importance and that “Voulkos was fascinated by the rich history of ceramics and was curious about where he and his group fit within the millennia-long annals of the art.”

Jim Leedy, the Abstract Expressionist ceramic artist and friend of Voulkos, states that “…Peter is aware of Oriental pottery, especially those…Japanese pots in which chance-taking was evident”. The hallmarks of Voulkos’ work: acceptance of cracking and denting, the use of clay slabs, partially glazed or thinly glazed surfaces come from his awareness of Japanese ceramics.

The transgressive nature of the changes that Voulkos and the Otis artists brought to Western pottery can best be seen in a concrete example. Voulkos’ 1956 work Rocking Pot is a long way removed from his bottle of 1949 (Figure 56). The holes cut in Rocking Pot destroy the integrity of the thrown form, but allow the interior of the pot to be seen, and are reminiscent of the openings in Japanese Haniwa (terracotta funerary figures made from the 3rd to 6th centuries in the Yayoi era). At 350 mm high, this piece is of the scale of much ‘pottery’ but has a monumental quality that makes it seem much larger and sculptural. Slivka says of this work that: “This was one of Voulkos’ earliest outright sculptures. The pottery technique is evident, while pottery function is subverted to the formal invention”; however, she also quotes Voulkos as saying of this work, “I claim this as a Pot”. I think that this is an important point, for although Otis group artists such as John Mason clearly saw their work as sculpture, the majority of Voulkos’ ceramic work, except for works of clearly sculptural intent such as the sculpture Gallas Rock (1960), is based within the aesthetic sphere of pottery.

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394 Clark, Shards, 273, 276.
396 Slivka, Peter Voulkos: A Dialogue with Clay, 36. Rose Slivka was the influential editor of Craft Horizons, the journal of the American Crafts Council. Clark enlarges the discussion on this point in his essay “Subversive Majesty: Peter Voulkos’ Rocking Pot,” in Shards pages 227 to 231.
For example, I would consider that the 1961 vase (Figure 73), could have existed as a pot from the Iga kilns and, except for the scale of the object at 60 centimetres high, would have no problem appearing in the Tea-room of Furuta Oribe. I strongly believe that the aesthetic intent of this work, consciously or unconsciously, is to produce a wood-fired quality inspired by Momoyama-period ceramics, at a time when the process of wood-firing was not well understood by Western potters.

It is clear that Voulkos was not in any sense working within the tradition of Japanese ceramics during the 1950s and 1960s. No doubt he was aware of Zen Buddhism and he might have heard of the aesthetic of wabi through Hamada, Yanagi or other Japanese sources. Voulkos was clearly aware of the wabi-influenced ceramics of Japan from both the original Momoyama Period works from Shigaraki and Bizen, and through the works of Momoyama Revival artists such as Kaneshige Tōyō and Kitaoji Rosanjin, and in his work one can see qualities that are identifiable as coming from within this aesthetic. The surfaces of Voulkos’ pots are not hidden under layers of concealing glaze, they are clearly about clay, in the way that Bizen and Shigaraki wood-fired pots are about clay. Voulkos’ use of thinly sprayed clear glazes or
colemanite washes on the stoneware clays produced surfaces with the qualities of wood-firing. Jim Leedy says that Voulkos’ use of “a conservative clear glaze suggests an interest in the flash of flame on the clay surface, more typical of wood-firing than gas firing.”

Figure 73: Peter Voulkos, *Vase*, 1961. Collection, Josephine Blumenfeld.

I argue that the surfaces of Voulkos’ early works were an attempt to reproduce in gas or oil-fired kilns the qualities of Japanese unglazed wood-fired ceramics, of the type

397 Leedy, *Voulkos*, 36.
produced in anagama-style kilns, at a time when there was little or no knowledge of the process of firing wood-kilns for natural-ash effects in the West. The plate shown in Figure 80 exemplifies this point: although displaying surface effects similar to wood-fired flashing, it is described as having a “lightly sprayed glaze.”

Voulkos’ 1961 vase (Figure 73) also shows this quality of surface, and the splash of copper glaze on the shoulder is reminiscent of the fall of ash on the shoulder of a Shigaraki tsubo. In the glazing of Turtle Bowl 1963 (Figure 74), a turquoise glaze and colemanite wash appears to refer to the tradition of Oribe wares from Japan. The 1959 work Plate (Figure 75) also uses blue green slip in a manner reminiscent of Oribe wares, and also openly uses epoxy to repair cracks in the same way that gold lacquer was used to repair Japanese Tea-wares.

Figure 74: Peter Voulkos, Turtle Bowl, 13.3 x 46.4 x 36.2cm, 1963. Collection of Baltimore Museum of Art.

398 Slivka, Peter Voulkos, p. 111.
Figure 75: Peter Voulkos, Plate 1959. Collection of Oakland Museum.

Figure 76: Peter Voulkos, Plate, 1963. Collection of Fred Mayer.

Figure 78: Peter Voulkos, *Sculptured Vase*, 1963. Collection of Gerald Nordland.
Voulkos’ work introduced concepts from the aesthetic of *wabi* such as asymmetry, imperfection and incompleteness into the vocabulary of the Western potter. Whether or not Voulkos was aware of the aesthetic of *wabi* as a specific term is a question to which I have found no answer. However, it is clear that in his work he assimilated the form and feeling of Japanese medieval pottery, the dynamic treatment of the clay, and the surface quality produced by the wood-fired kilns of Shigaraki and Bizen. The work of Voulkos and the other Otis artists took these Japanese influences, combined them with Jazz, and contemporary art, and presented them to the contemporary world.

Voulkos’ art of the 1950s and early 1960s was done in the same spirit of *gekokujo* (turning the world upside down) that had driven the early Tea-masters in their development of *wabicha*. The publication of the article “The New Ceramic Presence” by Rose Slivka in *Craft Horizons* in 1961 indicates the radical nature of their work at the time with many subscribers seeing Voulkos and the other Otis potters as setting out to destroy the foundations of Western ceramic art. Slivka says of this article that it “caused a furore: I was blamed for everything the bad boys of ceramics had been doing in the basement of the Art Institute. Letters of praise and damnation poured in for over two years. Everyone was all fired up about clay in those years.”

The significance of the work of Voulkos and the other members of the Otis group lies in the influence their work had on following generations of aspiring potters. Clark says of the outcome of this period that:

> A new ceramic vocabulary had been forged among this nucleus of artists by the end of the 1950s … They saw themselves as artists, not craftsmen. They were passionately interested in what was happening in the fine arts and allowed this to inform their ceramic work...Furthermore, they became role models (whether they liked this or not) for the younger generations of potters and ceramists that were graduating in ever growing numbers from the art schools and university art departments of the United States. The genie was out of the bottle…

Voulkos largely withdrew from making ceramics from 1963 to the early 1970s to work with bronze sculpture. After seven years he returned to ceramics beginning with a series of two hundred plates. Much of Voulkos’ later work returned to the

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400 Clark, *Shards*, 282.
sources of Japanese influence—the medieval ceramics of Bizen and Shigaraki. This work was wood-fired in *anagama*-style kilns, initially collaborating with Peter Callas from 1979, and from 1998 to 2002 with John Balistreri. These works have been hugely influential in popularizing the qualities of wood-fired natural-ash glazed ceramics.

Figure 79: Two Peter Voulkos Stacks and three Plates in the 1993 firing of Peter Callas’s kiln, Belvidere, New Jersey.

Voulkos was influential in turning Western ceramics away from a search for the perfection inherent in the symmetry of the potter’s wheel, and towards a dynamic exploration of the plasticity and character of clay that incorporated and, indeed, exaggerated aspects characteristic of the *wabi*-tea wares of the Momoyama period in Japan. Therefore, although there is no evidence that Voulkos was aware of the aesthetic of *wabi* as such, or consciously influenced by it, he certainly was influenced by the secondary impacts of *wabi*, the Japanese Tea-ceramics of the Momoyama period, by the contemporary Japanese *wabi*-inspired potters Kaneshige and Rosanjin, and by the general awareness of Zen Buddhism that permeated California in the 1950s.

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Figure 80: Peter Voulkos, *Plate*, 1975. Collection: Rose Slivka

Figure 81: Peter Voulkos, *anagama* fired platter, 1981. 11.4cm x 55.9cm. Collection of the artist.
As noted above, Voulkus’ early gas- or oil-fired works attempted to achieve surfaces that reproduced the qualities of medieval period pots from Shigaraki and Bizen. The introduction of wood-firing in his work at the end of the 1970s, such as the plate in Figure 81, led to a more dynamic exploration of these qualities. However, I see the wood-fired surfaces and the earlier lightly glazed surfaces as an aesthetic whole. This early exploration of a wood-fire aesthetic and his post-1979 embrace of the anagama were hugely influential in spreading awareness of the wood-fire aesthetic amongst a cohort of younger potters. The acceptance of his work opened up a space where potters who followed were able to have heavily wood-fired unglazed clays, cracks and imperfections, torn edges and ripped surfaces and other ‘defects’ in their ceramics, in other words to embrace the characteristics inherent in the aesthetic of wabi.

Figure 82: Peter Voulkos, Ice-bucket named Asturias, 1990. Anagama fired, 30.5 x 34.3cm. Collection: Sam Jorlin, Oakland.
8.3 Learning the Process of Wood-Firing: Western Artists Working in Japanese Studios

The third stage in the movement of the wood-fire aesthetic into the Western ceramic world involved potters and ceramic artists working in the studios of Japanese potters, learning techniques and processes, and then returning to their home country to make work and educate the wider community in the aesthetic of wood-fired ceramics. Although he was not to continue making ceramics upon returning to the United States, the first American artist who was to work with the process of wood-firing, producing objects that were wood-fired for the natural-ash glazed affects was the Japanese-American artist Isamu Noguchi. He first arrived in Japan in 1931, and from April to August of that year worked in the workshop of the Kyoto potter Uno Ninmatsu. He returned to Japan 1950, and again in 1952, and made ceramics each time. During the 1950 trip, Noguchi spent a short time working at the Oriental Decorative Ceramic Sculpture Research Institute in Seto, where he made 20
unglazed stoneware sculptures. However, it was during his 1952 visit that he engaged with the aesthetics of wood-firing.

In 1952 Noguchi worked with clay over a period of several months while he stayed in a small cottage at the Kita-Kamakura residence of Kitaoji Rosanjin. During this time Noguchi worked with two of the major figures in the Momoyama Revival, Rosanjin and Kaneshige, and made a large number of ceramic pieces and clay studies. Winther-Tamaki quotes Noguchi’s answer to the question posed by a journalist: “Just what is it that you find appealing about Japan?” to which Noguchi responds:

It’s the earth, the coarse earth which only Japanese people have. It is not in America. I am drawn to the skin of the pottery, the Japanese earth.402

Figure 83: Isamu Noguchi, Dish (Sara), Imbe, 1952. Unglazed Bizen stoneware 3.5 x 39.7 x 18.4cm. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation Inc. New York.

Any observation of Noguchi’s works from this time will show that the surface of these works is touched by the process of wood-firing; and that integral to the aesthetic qualities of these works is an appreciation of the surface affects of flashing and natural ash glazing due to the use of wood as fuel. This is particularly so with the 50 or so pieces Noguchi made in May of 1952 whilst he and Rosanjin worked for

402 Noguchi cited in Winther-Tamaki, Isamu Noguchi, 38, 40.
one week in the Imbe studio of Kaneshige Tōyō. However, even the works fired in Rosanjin’s noborigama kiln at Kita-Kamakura, such as the work Buson (figure 84), owe much to the flashing of the fire. This work makes reference to the ideal of the poet recluse in the ten foot square hut, fundamental to the creation of the wabi Tea-house. The title of this work refers to a leading haiku poet and painter of the Edo period and “commemorates one of the ideals of Buson’s milieu, the reclusion of a cultivated individual in a lonely hut in the wilds.”

Winther-Tamaki says that Noguchi’s works from this period involved investigating new uses for clays from Bizen and Iga, and Oribe-style glazes. He makes the point that Noguchi’s “coarse earth” was not just a matter of process and techniques, but involved “larger complex values that Noguchi associated with Japanese culture including a rustic aesthetic, an ideal closeness to nature, and a rich craft

Figure 84: Isamu Noguchi. Buson, Kita-Kamakura, 1952. 21x 16.5x 8.6 cm. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation Inc. New York.

403 Winther-Tamaki, Isamu Noguchi, 46.
Noguchi described this “rustic aesthetic” as a “doctrine of renunciation”. Influenced by the writings of D.T. Suzuki in his understanding of wabi and sabi, he wrote of them being “the worn away and remaining shadow of materiality.”

The ceramic works from Noguchi’s time in Kita-Kamakura were shown in the United States in three exhibitions in 1954–55, beginning with an exhibition at the Stable Gallery in New York in November, 1954, but they appear to have had little direct impact on American ceramics. Voulkos was the most likely ceramic artist to have been influenced by Noguchi’s work as he had an exhibition in New York shortly before Noguchi’s Stable Gallery show. However it seems that Voulkos did not see the exhibition and did not become acquainted with Noguchi’s work until later.

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404 Ibid., 40.
405 Noguchi cited in Ibid., 52.
However, Noguchi’s time in Kita-Kamakura influenced the Western ceramic world indirectly through two separate channels. The first of these was through his influence on younger potters within Japan, such as Yagi Kazuo, Suzuki Osamu and Yamada Hikaru, members of the Sōdeisha group “for whom cultural conditions were right for triggering a sense of avant-gardist liberation.”\textsuperscript{407} Yamada Hikaru is quoted as saying:

We took for granted the use of glaze on ceramics, whether in China, Korea or Japan, but Noguchi’s work startled us by appearing in final form without any glaze at all.\textsuperscript{408}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Figure 86: Isamu Noguchi. Dish (Sara) Japan, Imbe, 1952. Unglazed Bizen stoneware, 6.8 x 30.5 x 28.9 cm. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation, Inc., New York.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{407} \textit{Ibid.}, 202.

Members of the group started producing works made from unglazed Shigaraki clay, coloured by the flashing from the wood-fired kilns, in the years after Noguchi’s 1952 stay with Rosanjin. It is interesting here that it took the influence of an outsider to educate the next generation, the avant-garde, of Japanese potters about the potential of the wood-fired surface. These artists then had a direct impact on Western ceramics. For instance, the influential wood-firing potter Rob Barnard studied with, and was heavily influenced by the philosophy of Yagi Kazuo, at the Kyoto City University of Fine Arts before returning to the United States in 1978.409

The second channel through which Noguchi influenced the increased awareness of Japanese-style, wood-fired ceramics in the United States was through his introduction to Rosanjin of the first American potter who was to study in Japan, J.B. Blunk. In an interview with Blunk made by Glenn Adamson for the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Museum, Blunk remembers how he met Noguchi in a mingei ceramic shop, and how Noguchi’s wife Yoshiko introduced him to Rosanjin.410 Blunk worked in Rosanjin’s workshop, and travelled to Imbe in July 1952 when Rosanjin and Noguchi visited Kaneshige Tōyō’s studio. Later he returned, uninvited, to Kaneshige’s house to become Kaneshige’s apprentice, and stayed there for eighteen months. On his return to the United States he built a small wood-fired kiln in California. As Cort states this “may have been the first Japanese inspired wood-firing in America, but it did not yet have an audience, even in California.”411 Blunk left ceramics behind and became a respected wood sculptor and furniture maker, but assisted with Kaneshige’s tours of the United States in 1954 and the late 1950s. These tours in turn attracted more American potters to travel to Japan. Several potters who followed Blunk, for instance, Marie Woo and Toshiko Takaetzu, worked with Kaneshige in the mid-1950s. On returning to the United States, Woo and Takaetzu spread awareness of unglazed yakishime stoneware

410 Interview with Blunk at http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-ib-blunk-13312 retrieved 1/6/20013
ceramics from Bizen to their students, and subsequently to a wider American audience.⁴¹²

This is the point from which the wood-fire aesthetic began to be established in the Western ceramic vocabulary, but it was a slow beginning. It was not until the 1970s that a number of potters who had worked in studios in Japan with a specific focus on the wood-fire aesthetic returned to the United States, bringing an understanding of the aesthetic and the process with them.

8.4 Bringing it home: The Anagama Kiln and the Wood-fire Aesthetic Transfer to the World Stage.

The modality for the transfer techniques of wood-firing from Japan to the West falls into what John Clark describes as “producer transfer”:

… the demand for access to techniques and styles that involves a primary shift from a sending to a receiving culture.⁴¹³

This process occurred initially in the studios of potters in Japan, but led to a secondary process of transfer in the studios established by the visitors on their return to their home countries.

An example of one of the channels for the transfer of techniques occurred in the area of kiln construction, essential for the reproduction of the ‘natural-ash glaze’ wood-fire aesthetic in the West. In the early 1960s the US potter Fred Olsen became the first Westerner to study at the Kyoto City College of Fine Arts (Bide) Ceramic Department. In 1973 he published The Kiln Book, which introduced the Japanese-style kilns such as anagama and noborigama to Western potters, making plans of these style of kilns available to those potters who had seen them in Japan, and also those who had not travelled to Japan but were interested in Japanese wood-fired ceramics.

The credit for the construction of the first anagama in the United States is generally given to Peter Callas, who constructed his kiln in New York State in 1976 after

visiting kilns in Japan. In an online review of Callas’s 2009 exhibition ‘Sparks’ the American Contemporary Ceramics website speaks of Callas’s work in a way which clearly talks of the aesthetic concepts which relate to wabi:

Callas has developed his own unique style and made his mark on the wood-firing scene with pots as well as sculpture. The beauty of wood-fired ceramics lies in subtlety, abstraction, asymmetry, and imperfection. Pieces that are fired in this way have an ancient look about them, as if they had been sitting on the bottom of the sea for thousands of years.

Figure 87: Peter Callas. The Hara Kiri, 1981. 60 x 60 cm.

As mentioned before, it was in Peter Callas’s kiln that much of Peter Voulkos’ work was fired after 1980, playing an important role in the further dissemination of the wood-fire aesthetic.

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Callas’s kiln was the first of the many *anagama* to follow, and the potters constructing this first generation of these kilns was directly influenced by studies in Japan. By 1979 Rob Barnard, who had studied in Japan with Kazuo Yagi and Otani Shiro, was firing his *anagama* in Timberville, Virginia.\textsuperscript{416}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image1.jpg}
\caption{Rob Barnard’s *anagama*, Timberville, Virginia. 1979.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image2.jpg}
\caption{Rob Barnard, Bottle, 1980s. Wood-fired stoneware, natural ash glaze, 21.5 x 11.5 cm.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{416} Cort “Short History of Woodfiring, Part 3,” 14.
Callas’s kiln was the first of the many anagama to follow, and the potters constructing this first generation of these kilns was directly influenced by studies in Japan. By 1979 Rob Barnard, who had studied in Japan with Kazuo Yagi and Otani Shiro, was firing his anagama in Timberville, Virginia.417

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 90:** Richard Bresnahan’s takigama kiln. Collegeville, Minnesota.

In 1980, Richard Bresnahan, who had undertaken an apprenticeship with Nakazato Takashi in Karatsu from 1975 to 1979, was building the takigama kiln at Saint John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota.418

In 1982, *The Studio Potter* magazine dedicated the December issue to wood-firing (in the sense of its use as a fuel source rather than the more specific reference to the natural-ash-glaze aesthetic) and in the results of a survey of wood-firing kilns in use in the USA at that time Malcolm Wright recorded that there were eight anagama kilns and eight climbing kilns out of some 61 wood-fired kilns. Twenty-one potters reported firings lasting from more than one day up to a ten-day period, and although some of these potters would have not been motivated by the ‘natural-ash-glaze aesthetic’ to wood-fire, some percentage of these twenty-one would have been using wood as a fuel to achieve these outcomes. This issue of Studio Potter includes article by six potters who had studied in Japan, Peter Callas, Fred Olsen, Richard Bresnahan, Paul Chaleff, Randy Johnston, and Rob Barnard.

Australian potters have explored the natural ash glaze aesthetic from the mid-1970s. The first *anagama* kiln constructed in Australia was the Arakawa-style kiln built in Summertown, South Australia by Milton Moon in 1975, after he studied in Japan in 1974 as a Myer Foundation Geijutsu Fellow. Milton Moon has in recent years written several books exploring his interaction with Japanese ceramic culture and Zen Buddhism, such as *The Zen Master, the Potter and the Poet*.

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Figure 92: Milton Moon’s *anagama*, Summertown, SA.

Figure 93: Milton Moon pot fired in the Summertown *anagama*1975-76. Collection, Milton Moon.
The 1982 issue of *The Studio Potter* focusing on wood-firing includes only one article on an Australian potter, Col Levy, who studied in Japan with Fujiwara Yu, the son of Kujiwara Kei, for 6 months in 1973–74 and built his Bizen-inspired *noborigama* kiln later in that decade.\(^{421}\) Dr. Owen Rye says of Levy’s wood-fired work that:

> I believe that more than anyone else he was responsible for starting the wood-fire movement as such in Australia, through establishing a curatorial/collector interest in his Bizen derived work of the later 1970s and early eighties.\(^{422}\)

Levy’s works from this period were certainly influential on younger potters such as myself, and I believe that they still stand as some of the best works fired in the natural-ash-glaze aesthetic that have been produced in Australia.

The next *anagama*-style kiln built in Australia would seem to be the small kiln built at what was then the Bendigo College of Advanced Education by the visiting Japanese potter Hiroshi Seto, during his six-month residency from May 1978. Since that time numerous *anagama* style kilns have been constructed in Australia.

I make no attempt to be comprehensive in the listing of potters who were to transfer this wood-fire aesthetic from Japan to Australia and the United States; for the purposes of this dissertation the important point is the development of this aesthetic


\(^{422}\) [http://www.owenrye.com/articles/article10.html](http://www.owenrye.com/articles/article10.html)
occurred in conjunction with the development of the aesthetic of *wabi*, that this transfer of process and aesthetics occurred, and that no other sources are apparent.

Also, the current status and experience of wood-firing potters in Australia is outside the scope of this dissertation. My focus is on the development and source of this aesthetic, and the actuality of its transfer forward to contemporary ceramic practice. Those readers who are seeking a better understanding of contemporary wood-fire practice within Australia might be advised to look at Steven Harrisons PhD dissertation “Wood-firing in Australia”

The potters who studied wood-firing in Japan were followed by a generation of potters of which I am an example—potters who learned the process of wood-firing through secondary sources. In my own case, inspired by images of Japanese wood-fired ceramics in Koyama Fujio’s book, *The Heritage of Japanese Ceramics*, I spent from 1979 to 1982 trying to produce the surface qualities of these works in Bourry Box wood-fired kilns, before purchasing the site to build my first *anagama* kiln in Gundaroo in 1982. My kiln was designed after kilns shown in the 1982 wood-firing edition of *The Studio Potter*, as well as kilns I had seen in England fired by Svend Bayer and Mike Dodd.

![Figure 95: The East Creek Anagama in Oregon.](image)
Inherent in firing a kiln for a period of four or more days is the need for a team of stokers to help to manage the firings. I believe this need for the involvement of a community of potters, as well as the drama of the process of firing a kiln for long periods of time, has been of major assistance in spreading the awareness of this firing process and the results that are potentially available. In the United States, the spread of the techniques of long firings in wood-fired kilns, and the wood-fire aesthetic that is associated with it has also been assisted by the construction of several community-owned anagama kilns. These include the Peter’s Valley anagama constructed by Sakazume Katsuyuki, the kiln at Arrowmont designed by Shiro Otani, built in 1981, and the East Creek Anagama built by Nils Lou, Tom Coleman and Frank Boyden in Oregon completed in 1983.

8.5 The Current State of Play: Wood-firing Today

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the wood-fire aesthetic has become a standard tool amongst the variety of ceramic processes utilised by potters in much of the world. Conferences and symposia have been dedicated to wood firing in Australia, the United States, Japan, Korea and Europe.

Books such as Jack Troy’s Wood-fired Stoneware and Porcelain, published in 1995, and Col Minogue and Robert Sanderson’s Wood-fired Ceramics: Contemporary Practices, from 2000, show works from potters in a multiplicity of countries, exposing the variety of practices that occur under the label of wood-firing. The international wood-fired ceramics magazine, The Log Book, edited by Minogue and Sanderson provides a regular insight into new directions in wood-fired work. Not all of these potters make work that is in the natural ash glazed ‘wood-fire’ tradition but a large percentage of them do.

In his 2011 article in The Log Book, Jason Hess draws an analogy between the American experience of wood-firing and the way in which American artists interacted with the ceramic process of Japanese Raku. In America, Raku developed into a new way of working with clay based on the Japanese process of removing works from the heat at top temperature. However, American potters extended the concept of Raku by introducing the new process of post-firing reduction using all
varieties of organic materials. Hess argues that for the American artist mere mimicry “runs counter to our artistic aims” and that it is “an American phenomenon to take or borrow ideas and information from a variety of sources and then combine them into something that is hopefully unique.” He again presents the question that was presented in the 1982 The Studio Potter (Volume 11, No. 1) that focused on wood-firing, “Why Wood-fire?” The answers he provides are varied: economics and sustainability, the sense of community, through to the presence of wood-fire kilns in universities as teaching tools “for all aspects of ceramics—from aesthetics, chemistry and materials, to history.” Perhaps the most compelling answer that Hess provides to this question is that:

For many serious ceramic artists wood-firing is the only way to achieve the aesthetic end that their work demands.

Having moved from Japan in the 1970s and 1980s the wood-fire aesthetic has placed extra distance between the original sources and current practice. Although many potters still reference Japanese works from Momoyama or earlier periods, or from contemporary Japanese potters, many other potters take their inspiration for their work from other sources but see the natural-ash-glazing process as the most suitable method for achieving the desired aesthetic outcomes. These potters might produce their ceramics in kilns that are reproductions of Kamakura period Japanese kilns, or in kilns inspired by the ‘Train’ kilns designed by John Neely or the extended throat bourry-box kilns developed by Steve Harrison, they might have learned about wood-firing in Japan, or the influence could be second or third hand. Potters working with the wood-fire aesthetic have developed new firing processes and kiln designs, clay-bodies and forms, but I argue that any contemporary artist whose aesthetic is based on the natural deposit of ash, on the flashing of clay, on the contact between their works and the wood in the kiln owes a debt to the wood-fired ceramics of Japan, and ultimately to the developers of the wabi tea ceremony in the sixteenth century.

425 Ibid., 25.
426 The bourry-box is a firebox in which the timber, cut to length, is supported over a pile of embers by bricks. “Train Kilns” and extended throat bourry-box kilns utilize the tendency of the falling ash generated during combustion to be pulled onto the pots in the chamber, giving a larger ash deposit in a shorter time than is possible in the anagama kiln.
In this dissertation I have set out to explore the sources of an aesthetic based on firing unglazed pots in wood-firings of long duration. Objects that seemed to Brinkley repellent, homely, primitive, morbid and perverse at the beginning of the twentieth century had, by the end of that century, gained international acceptance and valuation. The particular aesthetic I have sought to investigate relies on the glazing effects of naturally deposited wood ash melting at temperatures above 1200 degrees centigrade, and on other changes to the clay surface that occur in firings measured in days rather than hours. This aesthetic is known by many names, “The Bizen/Shigaraki aesthetic”, “the natural ash glazing aesthetic”, “the anagama aesthetic”, or the “wood-fire aesthetic”. Throughout this dissertation, for the sake of simplicity, I have referred to it as wood-firing or the wood-fire aesthetic, reserving these terms for an aesthetic resulting from long duration wood-firing. In doing this I have consciously decided to restrict my purview to the aestheticisation (and therefore, valuing) of the specific effects that only this process of long duration wood-firing can produce. Therefore, I have chosen not to focus on the aesthetics of a large part of the history of ceramic practice with wood being the dominant fuel for firing in historical times. This dissertation has investigated the origins of this aesthetic, and followed its transfer from its beginnings in Japan through to its international spread today.

I have sought to demonstrate that the development of the wood-fire aesthetic occurred in conjunction with, and contributed to, the development of the Japanese concept of wabi. Furthermore, I have argued that our ability to value the aesthetic

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427 Brinkley, Japan and China: Their History Arts and Literature, 51-53.
qualities of wood-fired ceramics is dependant on the development of this aesthetic of \textit{wabi}. I have shown that the aesthetic of \textit{wabi} itself was created during the development of the Japanese Tea-ceremony: the ritualised consumption of tea that was known as \textit{wabicha} in the period from 1450 to 1600. Tea, \textit{wabi}, and the wood-fire aesthetic are integrally linked.

The development of the aesthetic of \textit{wabi} and the acceptance of wood-fired objects into situations of intense social performance, and the subsequent high valuation placed on these objects required a massive shake up in the fundamental values of Japanese society. In Chapters 1 and 2, I have examined the social and political situations that allowed this to occur, and offered a treatment of the role of major individuals involved with these developments.

The consumption of the whisked green tea known as \textit{matcha} was introduced to Japan by the Buddhist monk Eisai, and initially the consumption of tea largely remained within the temples where it was valued for medicinal purposes and as a stimulant. As Zen practices spread to the military class, tea drinking spread outward from the temples, and tea began to be appreciated for its flavour.

There is a concept in Japanese, \textit{suki}, which today is used as the common word for ‘liking’ something. However, in the Muromachi period it had a meaning of “the pursuit of an aesthetic interest to its ultimate end”. I have shown that there are two outcomes that the intense focus of \textit{suki} can have on the aesthetics of a performative: it can lead to a quest for simplicity and calm, or it can contribute to a gravitation towards unusual, exotic and even bizarre objects and practices. It would seem that Japanese aesthetics are constantly pulled between these two extremes: austerity and simplicity, and extravagance and novelty. During the Muromachi period the trend in the tea competitions was towards extravagance and novelty. This lead to the aesthetic fashion known as \textit{basara} meaning an ostentatious, wild and exotic style (both in attire and life).

The \textit{wabi}-style tea ceremony developed towards the end of the Ashikaga Shogunate (1392–1573), a period of turmoil and civil war leading up to the unification of Japan by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) at the end of the sixteenth century. Its development started during the period of chaos that occurred before and after the
Onin Wars, from around 1450. The Tea-ceremony developed for many reasons, social, economic, and aesthetic, but one of its major functions was to provide a transformatory ritual.

*Wabicha* provided a ritual space of equality and peace at a time when society was undergoing great disruption, and allowed interactions across social boundaries that traditionally stood between the merchant classes on the one hand and the aristocracy and warrior class on the other.

In Chapter 2 I have provided a historical account of the role of three individuals who are credited with the development of ritualised *wabicha* that Okakura Kakuzō described as a “religion of aestheticism”, and therefore for the development of the aesthetic of *wabi*. These are: Murata Jukō who introduced a “chilled and withered” aesthetic using concepts from critical writing about early poetry; Takenō Joō who introduced the term *wabi*; and Sen-no-Rikyū who took *wabi* to its logical extreme of austerity. I have explored the historical detail of this development, following it through to Sen-no-Rikyū’s ritual suicide in 1591, by which time the aesthetic expression of *wabi* had been refined to its most restricted range of expression, as typified by the *Raku* tea bowl.

The socio-political changes that occurred in the 150-year period during which the *wabi* tea ceremony developed coincided with the introduction of, and the placing of value on, simple Korean wares and unglazed wood-fired ceramics from Shigaraki, and Bizen. Simultaneously, the size of the room used for the performance of tea was reduced, with Murata Jukō reducing it to a four-and-a-half-tatami-mat space, and Rikyū ultimately reducing it to as little as one-and-a-half mats. The trajectory of the changes leading to *wabicha*, and Tea as it now exists, was a move from formality to informality, a move towards an equality in the relationship between the guest and host, and a move towards the use of more natural materials, simpler finishes and muted colours. It was a move towards the development of the aesthetic of *wabi*.

An understanding of the historical processes that led to the development of this aesthetic is important for an understanding of the contemporary significance of *wabi*. Without this historical view, it is difficult to comprehend the radical nature of *wabi* as it evolved, and to understand the way in which it has transformed Japanese
culture. Beginning with meanings of loneliness and poverty, it has evolved into an aesthetic of beauty, requiring a massive reversal of meaning. Today wabi so permeates Japanese culture that it has largely become invisible, but is fundamental to Japanese art.

In Chapter 3 I explored the conceptual sources of wabi. These can be traced back to Buddhist philosophy and the Buddhist view of the ideal mind and ‘non-attachment’ to the issues of the world. I discussed Zeami’s writings on no drama, and critical commentary about waka poetry in the Kamakura and Muromachi times with particular reference to the relationship between the Buddhist ideal of the non-attached mind (the kokoro) and the articulated mind (the omoi) which is divided into thoughts (kotoba) and emotions (jō). Amongst the concepts that contribute to wabi are yūgen, an ethereal beauty of mystery and depth, which was valued from the time the Tale of Genji was written, yatsushi, the deep beauty hidden beneath a plain exterior, and yo-jō, or lingering emotion.

I have attempted to explain how the peculiar aesthetic of wabi was formed from this mix of aesthetic concepts. To summarise them, we have the aesthetics of waka poetry in which the aim of poets of the yo-jō yūgen style was to use words in a way as to evoke in the audience emotions and feelings that were inexpressible in words. Within no drama, these same outcomes were to be achieved through performance. The Tea-masters set out to achieve this same sense of yo-jō yūgen within the context of drinking tea, which they accomplished through stylizing the performance of Tea, and through redefining the objects and the environment utilised during this performance. This new aesthetic was wabi.

Haga Koshiro’s formulation of three aspects of wabi, (simple and unpretentious, imperfect and irregular, austere and stark) start to give us a definition of the aesthetic: it sees beauty in the stark, the simple and the irregular, it sees a beauty below the poverty of surface, and it allows and values the imperfections of age and use. Haga’s three aspects of wabi were also important to my studio research, allowing me to make three bodies of work each of which tried to bring one of these aspects to the fore.
Chapter 4 looks at changes in Tea and the associated wabi aesthetic from the time of Sen no Rikyū through to the Meiji Restoration of the late nineteenth century. I follow Kurokawa Kisho’s argument that Rikyū developed wabi into an “aesthetic of nothingness, of death”, and discuss the role of Furuta Oribe and Kobori Enshu who followed Rikyū. Oribe and Enshu pursued a more balanced concept of wabi that incorporates a symbiotic attitude towards heterogeneity of moods and emotions, reinterpreting wabi for their times. Oribe created a more dynamic “warrior tea” and popularised shino and other wares from the Mino area and “extreme” wood-fired ceramics from Iga, which are today seen as the peak of Momoyama period ceramics. Enshu responded to the neo-Confucianism of the Tokugawa Period and his taste looked back to the classical beauty of Chinese ceramics producing an changed aesthetic known as kirei-wabi (beautiful-wabi).

Chapter 5 considers contemporary discussions within the literature related to the sources of the aesthetic of wood-firing in the Anglophone world, and then looks at the qualities of the wood-fired surface, referring to the anagama-style kilns and the effects that they impart to the finished works. One of my interests in this dissertation is with the effect that the development of wabi had on the way that ceramics were ‘seen’. It is of interest to note that the nature of the cross-draft anagama style kilns used in Japan up to the end of the Momoyama period inevitably gave an irregular quality to the surface effects on the ceramics. The long inefficient firings in the kilns in Shigaraki, Bizen and particularly Iga, built up ash deposits on the surface facing the firebox producing thick and irregular natural ash glaze deposits. The length of the firing at high temperatures would lead to distortion, cracking and collapse as the clays became soft with heat. The famous ceramics from Iga, such as the vase known as Yaburebukuro (torn pouch), are defined by the heavy ash deposits and the splits and cracks that developed during the firing. Rather than being rejected for these flaws, these were highly valued precisely because of these imperfections.

As part of the process of aestheticisation of the wood-fired utensils introduced to the Tea-ceremony, connoisseurs named and categorised the various effects produced in these kilns. It is through this naming and categorization that effects are made easily ‘visible’, and it is my contention that this study of the qualities of the wood-fired surface enabled their aestheticisation. I have described and shown examples of some
of the large range of wood-fired effects, and referred to the Japanese words used to
describe them. By recognising and naming the effects produced in the wood-fired
kiln, Tea connoisseurs placed value on these qualities which encouraged potters to
discover more effective ways of producing them during the Momoyama and early
Edo periods.

Following Hideyoshi’s incursions into Korea in the 1590s, the more efficient Korean
noborigama climbing kilns replaced the anagama. From the early 1600s, the “wood-
fire aesthetic” largely disappeared from Japanese ceramics, being replaced by glazed
wares of various types. From 1600 to the Meiji Restoration of the late 1800s the
transmission of the philosophy of wabi was restricted within the Tea schools. These
schools became more conservative as the Tokugawa Shogunate of Edo period Japan
necessitated that the ‘transformatory’ Tea of Jukō, Jōō and Rikyū became a ritual
that was ‘conformatory’ of existing society.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the wood-fire aesthetic was restricted to the appreciation
of heirloom objects passed down within Tea-ceremony circles at the beginning of the
twentieth century. Japanese taste and scholarship itself favoured decorated
porcelains following the judgements of Western ‘scientific’ scholarship, in keeping
with more general tendencies in Meiji Japan. Foreign observers of Japanese ceramics
placed great value on the decorated porcelain wares from Imari, Nabeshima and
other ceramic centres in Japan. However they were largely bemused by wares
created in the aesthetic of wabi. In the early 1900s an interst in native Japanese
pottery redeveloped through Mingei, and later the Momoyama Revival movements.

The significance of the Mingei movement in spreading an awareness of Japanese
pottery to the West was described in Chapter 7. However, Mingei largely ignored
wabi-inspired Tea-wares, and would appear to have totally overlooked wood-fired
ceramics from Bizen, Shigaraki and Iga. A renewal of interest in Tea-wares starting
around the beginning of the Taishō Period (1912–1926) had developed, by the
1930s, into what has become known as the Momoyama Revival. Inspired by Tea-
wares emerging from family store-houses, potters set out to recreate the qualities of
ceramics from the Momoyama period. There were a number of important players in
this revival including the eccentric artist Rosanjin, banker and industrialist Kawakita
Handeishi, Arakawa Toyozo who reinvented shino wares, and Kaneshige Tôyô who returned the focus of Bizen ceramics to its Momoyama Period heritage.

In 1930 Arakawa discovered shino glazed shards at a kiln site named Mutabora in the Mino district. Subsequent investigation proved that Mino, not the Seto area, was the source of the famous Momoyama period wares such as shino, ki-seto and Oribe. Based on excavation of Momoyama period kilns, Arakawa set out to rebuild the variation of the anagama that had been used to produce shino wares, the Mino Ōgama. Arakawa’s significance to this dissertation is largely based on his understanding that the nature of the kiln used to fire these wares was important to developing the qualities found on the Momoyama shino wares. In more than one sense the glaze was a product of the kiln, an important understanding when applied to the role played by the kiln in developing the wood-fired surface. The revival of interest in the wood-fire aesthetic of Bizen ceramics was led by Kaneshige Tôyô in the late 1930s. Kaneshige played an important role in spreading the interest in the wood-fire aesthetic, not just within Japan, but also during travels to the United States in the 1950s.

In Chapter 8 I considered the post-1945 transfer of the wabi-inspired, wood-fire aesthetic from Japan to the United States. It discussed the significance of this transfer which underlies the internalisation of this aesthetic in contemporary ceramic practice. The transfer of the wood-fire aesthetic to the ceramic community outside Japan began with two very different sequences of events. The first was the preparation of the ground through visits to the US by potters including Bernard Leach, Hamada Shoji, Kaneshige and Rosanjin in the 1950s. The second event was the artistic developments that occurred at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles under Peter Voulkos from 1953, whose practice brought together the aesthetic of Japanese tea wares and the ceramics of Picasso. He and a group of his students including Paul Soldner and John Mason re-imagined what ceramics could be. I showed how Voulkos was influential in turning Western ceramics away from a search for the perfection inherent in the symmetry of the potter’s wheel, and towards a dynamic exploration of the plasticity and character of clay that incorporated and exaggerated aspects characteristic of the wabi Tea-wares of the Momoyama period in Japan. While there is no evidence that Voulkos was aware of the aesthetic of wabi as such, or consciously influenced by it, he certainly was influenced by the secondary
impacts of *wabi*. An awareness of Japanese Tea ceramics of the Momoyama period, the work of contemporary Japanese *wabi* inspired potters Kaneshige and Rosanjin, and the growing awareness of Zen Buddhism that permeated California in the 1950s were instrumental factors in Voulkos’ development.

The final stage in the process of transfer of the Wood-fire aesthetic to the West was for foreign artists to engage with wood-firing in Japanese studios and to bring these skills back home. The first American artist to engage with the wood-fire aesthetic and to actively engage with *wabi* was the Japanese-American Isamu Noguchi. In 1952 Noguchi worked with two of the major figures in the Momoyama Revival, Rosanjin and Kaneshige. Noguchi described *wabi*, this “rustic aesthetic”, as a “doctrine of renunciation”, and was influenced in his understanding of *wabi* by the writings of D.T. Suzuki.

Following Noguchi other international potters worked in studios in Japan, returning with an understanding of the kilns and firing processes necessary to produce ceramics displaying the wood-fired. From these beginnings we now have a situation where *anagama* kilns, and potters working in the “wood-fire aesthetic” are to be found all around the globe.

This dissertation has shown that without the development of *wabi* during the creation of *wabicha*, and the subsequent aestheticisation of the wood-fired surface by practitioners of Tea, the aesthetic that these modern potters are working within would not exist. An understanding of the sources, history and development of this aesthetic makes a contribution to contemporary discussions of wood-fired ceramic practice. Potters making natural-ash glazed ceramics may not need any knowledge of the aesthetic of *wabi* to produce their art, but their works are only possible because of the history and development of *wabi* and *wabicha* as shown in this dissertation. Initially the natural ash glaze surfaces that became sought after for Tea-ceremony use were an incidental by-product of the inefficient *anagama*-style kilns in use until the end of the sixteenth century, selected by Tea-masters as ‘found objects’. It was the developing aesthetic of *wabi* that created the reversal of values that allowed these works that were imperfect, irregular, cracked and burned black by the fire to be
valued more highly than the heirloom Chinese ceramics of the Song and Ming Dynasties.

In the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, potters from many nations embraced the aesthetic of natural-ash glazed wood-firing, with varied levels of understanding of its relationship to the aesthetic of *wabi*. Many of these potters reject any linkages with Japanese ceramic traditions. Contemporary Western practitioners of wood-firing may not have any knowledge of the aesthetic of *wabi*, and are achieving wood-fired qualities in John Neely style ‘train kilns’ or the extended throat borry-box kilns developed by Steve Harrison; kilns that are far removed from the Japanese *anagama*-style kiln. In a similar process to the changes that occurred with Raku upon its adoption by Western potters, the aesthetic of wood-fire has been released from any rigid linkages with the Tea-ceremony. Without the constraints imposed by the traditions of Tea, wood-firing has developed into a tool used for all types of objects from functional to sculptural. The changes in this aesthetic started by artists from the United States and other countries have transferred back to Japan, influencing the direction of ceramics there. Noguchi’s work in Japan had a large impact on members of the Sōdeisha group, and subsequently Japanese and American wood-fire practice has been impacted by members of that group, particularly Yagi Kazuo. Wood-fired sculptural objects are now a regular aspect of both the Japanese and international ceramic scene.

There is a general understanding that the source of contemporary wood-fire practice is to be found in Japan, although it is often mistakenly seen as continuing practice, unbroken for a thousand years. There is also an awareness of a connection with the Tea-ceremony in Japan. This dissertation has demonstrated that the sources of this aesthetic are to be found specifically in the aesthetic of wabi in the period from 1450 to 1600, and that there is a traceable geneology from this development of *wabi* in late-medieval Japan through to contemporary international wood-fire practice. For the twenty-first century potter to create wood-fired objects an understanding of the late medieval philosophical developments leading to the creation of *wabi* are not necessary, however I have shown that those aesthetic changes were instrumental in the formation of contemporary wood-fire practice.
Appendix A: Divisions of Japanese History

Jōmon (14,000 B.C.E – 300 B.C.E.)

Yayoi (300 B.C.E – 250 C.E)

Kofun (250 C.E.- 538 C.E.

Asuka (538 C.E. – 710 C.E.)

Nara period (710 C.E. - 794 C.E.)

Heian period (794 C.E. - 1185 C.E.)

Kamakura period (1185 C.E. - 1333 C.E.)

Nanbokuchō period (1333 C.E. - 1392 C.E.)

Muromachi period (Ashikaga Shogunate) (1392 C.E. - 1573 C.E.)

Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568 C.E. - 1600 C.E.) some scholars date the end of the Momoyama period as 1603 or as late as 1615

Tokugawa (Edo) period (1603 C.E. - 1867 C.E.)

Meiji period (1868 C.E. - 1912 C.E.)

Taishō period (1912 C.E. - 1926 C.E.)

Showa period (1926 C.E. - 1989 C.E.)

Heisei period (1989 C.E. - today)
Appendix B: Divisions of Chinese History

Chinese Dynasties

Xia dynasty (2070 B.C.E. - 1600 B.C.E.)

Shang dynasty (1600 B.C.E. - 1050 B.C.E.)

Western Zhou dynasty (1050 B.C.E. - 770 B.C.E.)

Eastern Zhou dynasty (770 B.C.E. - 250 B.C.E.)

Spring and Autumn period (770 B.C.E. - 479 B.C.E.)

Warring States period (476 B.C.E. - 221 B.C.E.)

Qin dynasty (221 B.C.E. - 206 B.C.E.)

Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. or 202 B.C.E. - 9 C.E. or 25 C.E.)

Xin dynasty (9 C.E. - 23 C.E.)

Eastern Han dynasty (25 C.E. - 220 C.E.)

Three Kingdoms (220 C.E. - 125 C.E. or 280 C.E.)

Western Jin dynasty (265 C.E. - 317 C.E.)

Eastern Jin dynasty (317 C.E. - 420 C.E.)

Southern and Northern dynasties (386 C.E. or 420 C.E. - 589 C.E.)

Sui dynasty (581 C.E. - 618 C.E.)
Tang dynasty (618 C.E. - 907 C.E.)

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907 C.E. - 960 C.E.)

Kingdom of Dali (937 C.E. - 1253 C.E.)

Northern Song dynasty (960 C.E. - 1127 C.E.)

Southern Song dynasty (1127 C.E. - 1279 C.E.)

Liao dynasty (907 C.E. or 916 C.E. - 1125 C.E.)

Jin dynasty (1115 C.E. -1234 C.E.)

Western Xia (1038 C.E. - 1227 C.E.)

Yuan dynasty (1271 C.E. - 1368 C.E.)

Ming dynasty (1368 C.E. -1644 C.E. or 1662 C.E.)

Qing dynasty (1636 C.E. or 1644 C.E. - 1911 C.E.)
**Glossary of Japanese Words**

*anagama*: a tunnel kiln usually built on a slope of 15 to 20 degrees and capable of reaching temperatures of above 1200°C

*basara*: an aesthetic based on the display of extravagance and novelty

*buke*: the military class

*bushidō*: the ritualised art of being a *samurai*

*chanoyu*: hot water for tea, the Tea-ceremony

*chaire*: a small lidded jar used to hold powdered tea for use during the Tea-ceremony

*chajin*: a practitioner of Tea

*chashitsu*: Tea-room

*dancha*: Tang Dynasty-style brick tea

*daimyo*: A military governor.

*daisu*: a Tea-utensil stand used to display treasured Chinese or Japanese objects

*dōbōshū*: an aesthetic advisor to the Shogun

*furumai*: behaviour, entertaining people.

*fuse*: The area at the front of the kiln where pots were likely to covered with ash and overfired.

*gekokujō*: the turning of earth over heaven, upsetting the accepted norms

*haniwa*: Terracotta funerary figures made from the 3rd to 6th centuries in the Yayoi era.

*hicha*: false tea, the ordinary tea used in Tea competitions.

*honcha*: real tea, the tea used as the main tea in tea competitions.

*iemoto*: the head of a household which controlled a traditional art or craft such as the Tea-ceremony

*jō*: emotion.

*kame*: a wide-mouthed jar used for storage
**karamono:** Chinese ceramics and art imported to Japan.

**koge:** blackened by burning, scorching.

**kokoro:** heart, mind

**kotoba:** words

**kuge:** the aristocracy

**matcha:** whipped green tea

**mishima:** ceramics decorated with inlaid white slip

**muichibutsu:** a symbolic expression for the awareness of the reality of Nothingness in Zen Buddhism.

**namban jars:** jars from the Philippines or Vietnam imported to Japan

**nijiriguchi:** the small entrance into the Tea-room

**nō:** a form of theatre

**ōgama:** the modification of the *anagama* style kiln used in Mino in the late-1500s

**omoi:** thoughts

**renga:** linked verse poetry.

**sarei:** formalised rules for the consumption of tea.

**sōan:** lit., a grass hut or hermitage, a hut used as a poets retreat

**shin-gyō-sō:** a system that categorises the mood of an artwork, *shin* / formal, *gyō* / semi-formal, *sō* / informal

**shizen-yu:** lit., natural glazing

**shoin:** a style of room architecture based on the addition of a bay window

**suki:** to like, to be passionate about, to follow an artistic pursuit to its ultimate end

**suribachi:** a mortar used for grinding soybeans

**tatami:** thick matting used as flooring

**tōcha:** a tea-tasting competition, often with extravagant prizes
| **tokonoma:** | an alcove used for the display of flowers and art in the Tea-room |
| **tsubo:** | a narrow necked storage jar |
| **ushin:** | literally ‘with mind’ |
| **yakishime:** | lit., baked and shrunk; unglazed stoneware ceramics often with natural ash glaze effects |
| **yatsushi:** | a beauty that is disguised by a plain or unattractive exterior |
| **yūgen:** | a beauty of mystery and depth |
| **wabicha:** | the *wabi*-style Tea-ceremony |
| **waka:** | a 5 line poem with 31 syllables in a structure of 5/7/5, 7/7 |
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