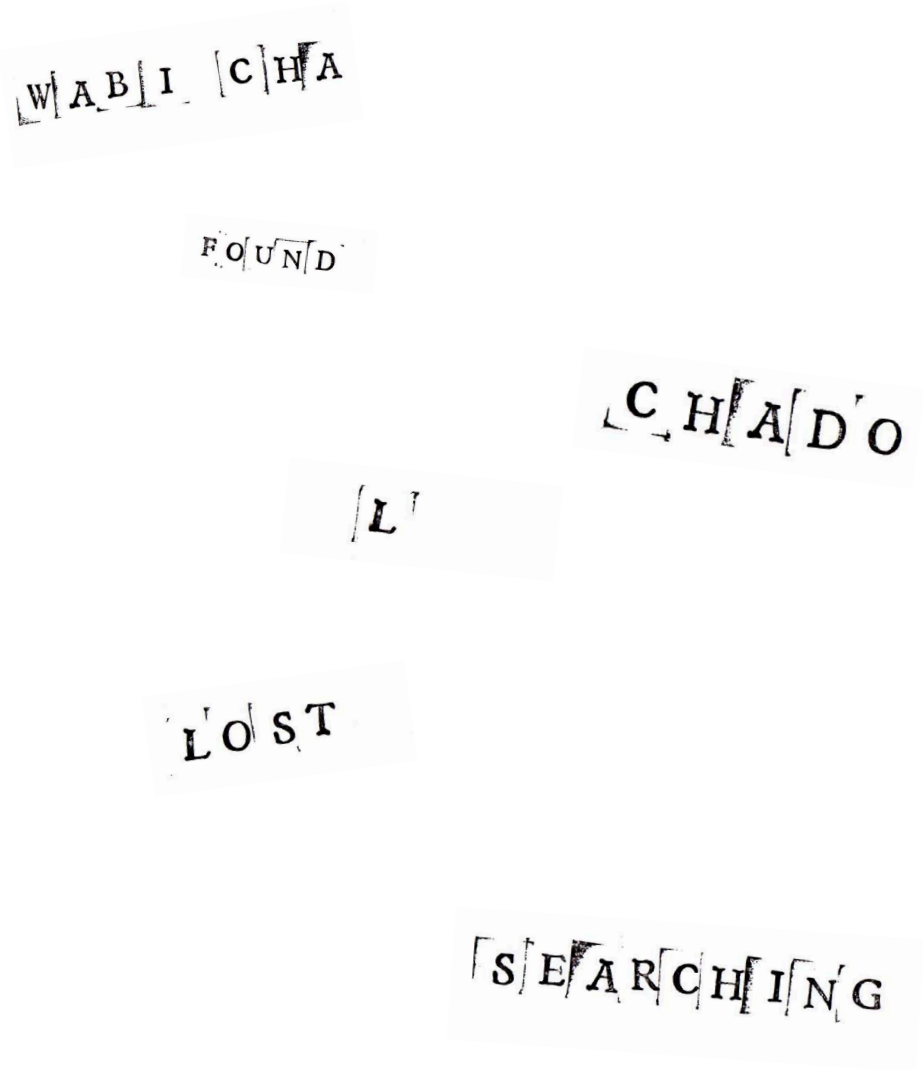

'Chado' - 'The Way of Tea' (that got lost along the way) : Uncovering Fragments of Sen no Rikyū's 'Wabi-Cha' in a Globalised World'

B. Warwick

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To Granny Warwick + her elephant tea caddies, my 'tea origin story'
To Mum and Dad, thank you for the primary research Starbucks visits and all your wisdom
To friends Kate and Keith Price, for introducing me to their friends Sue and Jon who kindly showed me there beautiful homemade 'Chashitsu' and 'Roji'
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Thanks to fellow designers Ola, Vienna and Pamela for your friendship in everything
Thank you to Sen no Rikyū for Wabi-Cha, this has been fascinating

INTRODUCTION

My personal motivations for carrying out research within this area stem from a pre-existing love of tea. I hope also to comment on what I believe to be a loss of 'soul' or 'humanity' within today's rapidly changing world, and believe tea is a relevant lens through which to observe. I believe, also, much of my approach to design seems to mirror that of 'Wabi.' I hope that I may one day travel to Japan and perhaps experience a traditional Wabi-cha. Until then, this has been an incredibly fulfilling project.

I begin with Japanese tea master Sen no Rikyū and his Tai-an teahouse, as the birthplace of his revolutionary style of tea ceremony 'Wabi-cha' which, based on concepts such as 'Wabi-sabi' promoted simplicity in daily living. Specifically, through examination of Wabi-cha's associated architecture, utensils and ritual, as formulated by Rikyū, I aim to understand both medicinal and spiritual motivations for the physical act of tea ceremony, 'Chanoyu', which ultimately exists to 'signpost' the abstract 'Chado' or 'Way of Tea.'

This study has been carried out through primary research in the form of visits to museums and teahouse replicas, and relevant secondary source material. In noticing how Chado presents itself, I aim to guide you, along patterns I have begun tracing between disparate tea cultures; fragments of which I believe point to this same 'Chado,' whilst in different physical form, Chapter 3 - 'Searching in a Globalised World' begins linking Wabi-cha and the recent 'Matcha Boom,' which as promoted by a'wellness' culture on social media appears to have similar motivations to that of Rikyū. This would support claims that tea has come 'full circle.' Tea, here, in regards the 'true tea' plant 'Camelia Sinensis' will be understood as it takes form as black, oolong, green and powdered green (matcha), however with particular interest given to the latter as the beverage of both original Japanese Wabi-cha and today's 'wellness' trends. These links are highlighted through the analysis of my local Starbucks branch as primary research, and comparisons drawn between that of its appearance and function as not unlike a teahouse space such as Taian. Again, relationship between the physical and the abstract is emphasised here, through theories such as Foucault's 'Biopower' and sociological term's such as 'Disneyfication,' as well as recent 'Glocalisation' strategies within 'Globalised' 'Hegemonic Brandscapes,' such as Starbucks. This form will be analised through contemporary architects John Pawson and Thomas Heatherwick who appear relevant to the Wabi theme. I believe tea's recent rediscovery reflects a 'soul searching' similar to that of Chado and so aim to understand this.

Chapter 2' bridges these two disparate tea cultures. It aims to provide context to the beginnings of the West's, in particular Britain's, relationship with Japanese culture and how this developed alongside the 'British tea ceremony,' or 'Afternoon tea' during the Victorian era. I explore claims that 'Globalisation' is the continuation of colonialism into late stage capitalism, therefore as vital understanding of how this colonial past may be continuing to fuel appropriation of 'exotic' to this day. As such, this chapter deals with an overarching 'loss' of direction in regards Chado, 'Way of Tea;' while fragments are discernible it is misconstrued motivations behind 'British tea ceremony' through the rise of industrialisation and consumerist culture which lead tea astray. Concepts such as Veblen's 'conspicuous consumption' are used here in order to highlight culture directly opposed to concepts such as Wabi. We do however, see the important role 'the British tea ceremony' played in the women's suffrage movement of the era, and discern tea's inextricable links as a vehicle of change in revolutionary acts, again 'avant-garde tradition.'

After beginning this nuanced study of tea and tea-culture, I began to understand it is far more extensive and intricate than first thought and so, I hope that I have done a respectful job in translating it to you..

Figure 1. Tea Master Sen no Rikyū (Tôhaku. 2019)

CHAPTER 1 - 'Found' - 'Avant-Garde Tradition'

"I put this
moment……here.
I put this moment……here.
I put this moment–

"Over here!"

"Over here!" (Bush, 2019)

We begin our journey at 待庵 (Tai-an), in Kyoto, Japan. 待 (tai) can be translated as 'to wait', while, 庵 (an) is a 'retreat.' This retreat comes in the form of a 茶室 (Chashitsu) or 'teahouse,' 茶 (Cha) -'tea,' combined with 室 (shitsu) - roughly 'hut.' So, Tai-an is a Teahouse (see Fig.2) Looking at etymology of these words is vital in beginning to understand tea's importance in shaping space and ritual, and ultimately the pivotal role it had in inspiring a way of life, Chado. Built between 1582 and 1583 (Kumakura, 2022), Tai-an is Japan's oldest existing Chashitsu and the only surviving example known to have been built by Japanese tea master Sen-no-Rikyū (1522–1591)(see Fig. 1), hence its designation as a National Treasure of Japan (Okamoto, n.d.). As the birthplace of Rikyū's Wabi-cha, Tai-an's being named a 'waiting place', a 'retreat' hints at his spiritualistic approach to what would become a cultural revolution. The humblest of beginnings; through emphasis on simplicity in daily living he instigated powerful and lasting change (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). Contemporary Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto (1948-), who's 'Glass tea house Mondrian' features briefly in Chapter 3, believes that, 'All traditions were avant-garde once,' (p17, 2015), a statement which has resonated with me and made me reflect in ways of seeing the past under new light. A statement, too, which I have come to believe is no truer of any tradition than that of Rikyū's 'Wabi-Cha.

Rikyū's Wabi-cha is a specific style of tea ceremony, which values this simplicity through both aesthetics, the physical, and ritual, actions as means of transcending the physical. He is credited with the full formulation of this type of tea ceremony as it is known and practiced to this day (Kumakura, 2022). Notice 'Cha' - 'tea' as the second half of this name also, again referring to the drink as focus of this ceremony. 'Wabi,' combined most often with 'Sabi' in 侘寂 (Wabi-sabi) becomes an elusive and nuanced concept. Freeman (2015) notes that translations often bring in unwanted connotations, though I have followed his as basis for understanding these ideas. The Japanese 侘 (Wabu) means "dejection, bitterness, being reduced to poverty," while 寂 (Sabu) is "to get old, to be discoloured" (2015). In there fragmented translations, both refer to what are generally understood to be negative states or emotions. Combined, however, a different meaning altogether is produced. Wabu, becomes 'Wabi', meaning something like 'simple aesthetics' and Sabu, 'Sabi' which is an 'appreciation for seeing beauty in old and used' (2015). 'Wabi-sabi' therefore, is "… essentially a worship of the Imperfect.." (Kakuzo Okakura, 2008). Combining this with the act of tea ceremony, Rikyu was the proponent of an everyday existence which encourages us to enter into closer relations with the natural world and ourselves(2008). Wabi-cha has been designed to point us in the direction of the Chado, 'The Way of Tea.'

As the heart of this 'way of life', the tea plant, or 'Camellia Sinensis' might be viewed as a life source itself (Kumakura, 2022). Introduced to the country by Japanese Monk 'Eisai Yōsai' (1141-1215), the Zen Buddhist wrote 喫茶養生記 (Kissa Yōjōki) or 'Drinking Tea to Nourish Life' to accompany the humble plant. As the source of black, oolong and green teas, the 'Sinensis,' Yōsai hailed it for medicinal properties which could aid 'all illnesses'. Freeman (2015) sets out production process of green tea, leaves are shielded as soon as buds appear, causing the plant to produce greater amounts of chlorophyll and resulting in large, sweet leaves. These are the heated immediately after picking, ground and further refined to become a green tea powder, or 抹茶 (Matcha). Stored in a 'tea caddy' (see fig..), water is then added to the matcha powder and whisked to create matcha tea. Not only used in traditional 'Wabi-cha', matcha is increasingly seen as a universal supplement to a 'healthy' diet in today's globalised world (see Chapter 3)(Bisgaard, 2017).

Key to understanding tea's lasting allure and as the heart of a 'way of life' (Chado), are these health benefits, combined also with its cognitive side effects; a fusion unique to the beverage, and now engrained in Wabi-Cha culture. Bisgaard (2017) introduces us to 'Catechins', compounds with antioxidant properties, present within all plants but in far greater amounts in the Sinensis. It is these which, alongside vitamins, gift tea with health benefits. Two other key components of the Sinensis, and therefore also found within Matcha tea, are caffeine and theanine, an amino acid. When consumed, caffeine produces increased alertness, while theanine acts as a strong relaxant. This unique combination is responsible for matcha's mediative properties. Rikyū inherited Yōsai's health-centric 'tea-ism' alongside more recent attempts by tea master Takeno Jōō (1502–1555) at fusing Zen Buddhism and Chanoyu (Kumakura, 2022). A Japanese tea culture now well established, Jōō, in dislike of the exclusive and formal affairs ceremonies had become among the upper classes, promoted through tea that 'sufficiency was to be found in insufficiency' (Kumakura, 2022). It is this fusion of health, as something physical and something felt, and spirituality, as something abstract yet which transformed meaning of the banal and the material, that is the dichotomy which created Rikyu's Wabi-Cha. In essence, it is Chado, a way of life, given 3-Dimension.

Tai-an**,** can itself be described as Rikyū's expression of Wabi in architectural form (Kumakura, 2022). A 'melting pot' of tradition (hence 'avant-garde'), the Chashitsu acts as a glossary of borrowed Japanese architectural proportions, materials and features (Freeman, 2015). If appreciating beauty in the old and the used (Sabi), we can infer here that Rikyū's, 'Elegance is frigid,' (Ryokū, as quoted in Tanizaki, 1999); denoting a 'lacking' but in the Wabi sense that, 'to be 'thingless' is to possess the world" (Chatwin as quoted in Speaks, 1994). Chado, in this way, has much in common with spiritual and religious 'ways of life'.

Figure 2. The Tai-an Teahouse Exterior (Discover Japan, 2022b)

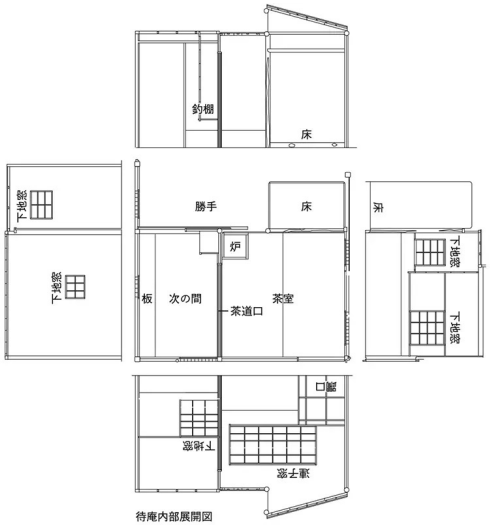

Figure 3. 待庵内部展開区 *or 'Taian international expansion area (Discover Japan,2022a)*

Let us start outside the Taian Chashitsu, as depicted in (Fig.2) and described by Kumukara (2022). The Chashitsu's special nature lies in its being secluded and this begins with its free standing form, akin to that of a temple or shrine which reflects Rikyūs almost hermetic approach to Chado (2022). This "realm apart" begins in the 露地(Roji) (literally, 'dewy ground' or 'garden approach') (Fig.3) a new feature also credited to Rikyū's avant-garde tradition. The approach, with its stepping stone path (Fig.2), most likely surrounded by moss and sheltered by a large tree (see right), draws inspiration from Japanese folklore, where passing through the mountains was said to lead to 'another world' (2022). This sense of escapism or reclusion reflects Wabi-cha's dichotomy, in that to engage with the everyday you aim to leave it temporarily. The Roji was especially effective for psychological separation within an urban setting (2022), a similar escapism Chado creates in succeeding tea cultures touched on in Chapters 2 and 3.

As we near crossing the threshold into the teahouse space (see Fig.2 lower-middle) we are faced with another Rikyu's 'borrowed features' (Freeman, 2015) and arguably most notable in its novelty and intention. The '躙口 (Nijiriguichi) (see also Fig.3, Fig.4); 躙 (nijiru) meaning 'to crawl' and 口 (kuchi/guchi) translating as 'mouth,' can be likened to similar anthropomorphic imagery, such as folk practice 胎内くぐり (tainai kugiri), where pilgrims pass through a cave entrance mimicking the motion of passing through the birth canal. The tea room can therefore be likened to a mother's womb (Kumukara, 2022)This feature also connects the Chashitsu to previous artistic spaces within Japanese culture such as 能 (Noh) and 歌舞伎 (Kabuki) theatres, where a square cut-out with sliding wooden panel led audiences to their box seating (Kumakura, 2022). Rikyū was intentionally setting out his Chashitsu as one equipped for an intensity of ceremony likened to that of performance art (Hrankovic, 2015). While the 亭主 (teishu) or 'host', in this case Rikyū, is granted full height access elsewhere, the 'crawl-through' required a physical 'stooping' which engenders humility in a way that bowing does. Another side effect, heightened anticipation; the world into which we have just struggled to gain access is completely transformed (Kumukara, 2022). On entering, the last guest slides shut the wooden panel, and so, in addition to two previous garden gates, has sealed the Chashitsu space off from earthly communication a third and final time (Kumukara, 2022). With this low entrance and one other small 窓 (Mado) or 'window', an air of a secret room is created, similar to that of religious seclusion.

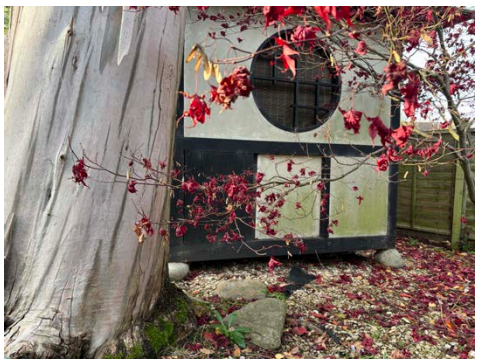

Figure 4. Sue and Jon's Teahouse - 'Nijiriguchi' (Warwick, 2025e)

Figure 5. 妙喜庵 待庵 Myokian Taian (1582) (Benrido ,n.d.).
To the left inside the Tokonoma, the 床柱 (Tokobashira) or corner pillar acts as somewhat as a focal point to offset the Tokonoma. あらかべ (Arakabe), translating as 'rough wall,' describes the clay plaster used throughout the space. This compliments the intentionally exposed underside of the roof; all Rikyū's expression of Wabi in physical form. As such, there appears in no other culture, a space which is both formally defined yet conventionally non-functional (Freeman, 2015). Visible (bottom left) is the 炉 (Ro) or 'hearth' which takes up the final quarter of the three and a quarter tatami mat floor space. It functions both practically, for Chanoyu, and symbolically, with the invitation of water and flame into a space already so connected with light and breeze, creating deeper connection with the natural world. Here, in this secluded, tatami-floored space, the tea ceremony can take place. This can last up to four hours, and is performed through two 'acts' (Freeman, 2015).

Now inside (see Fig.5), our eyes are drawn to the 床の間 (Tokonoma) or 'alcove,' ahead. Examining a particular quality of light surrounding it, we could say that the statement, 'a Japanese room might be likened to an ink-wash painting, the paper-panelled shoji being the expanse where the ink is thinnest, and the alcove where it is darkest,' holds true (Tanizaki, 1933). With this corner collecting darkness, the scrolls central placement (Fig.5) aims at giving, '…depth to the shadows' (Tanizaki, 1933).

Looking around now, we may be struck next by the dimensions of the Tai-an space (Fig…). An act of Wabi itself, Rikyū's shrinking of the overall footprint from four and a half 畳 (tatami mats), down to three and a quarter (1.8 sqm), is a reduction of the Chashitsu to its bare essentials (Freeman, 2015). Another borrowed feature, and something of a human 'ruler,' Japan uses the tatami as a measurement of space (Kumakura, 2022); a half-mat for sitting, a full mat for sleeping. Here, with Teishu and up to five guests considered, we can read Rikyūs alteration as a decisive closing of distance between guest and Teishu, rendering the Chashitsu a social-equaliser (Kumakura, 2022), a revolutionary act in a traditionally hierarchical society. Custom of the bestowal of an 'artistic name' () allows for similar intimacy and the ability to transcend both hierarchy and physical body temporarily.

Figure 6. 'Caddy for powdered tea' (1550-1600) (Warwick, 2025a)

Figure 7. 'Tea bowl' (1625-75) (Warwick, 2025b)

Whilst transcending a physical state, as reached now by the tea drinking itself, importance of encounters between person and object in cementing the 'abstract' that is Rikyū's Wabi-cha must be understood. (Fig.7) depicts a 棗 (natsume) or 'caddy for powdered tea,' which shines with, '…the colours and the sheen that call to mind the past that made them' (Tanizaki, 1933). Rikyū promoted imagination through use of the aged, the 'mis-matched' and the tactile; tea ware that engaged the senses (Hrankovic, 2015). Engagement was created also, since in closer proximity to one another, through observation of the Teishu's graceful movements, again resembling something of performance art (Hrankovic, 2015). Consequently, the everyday ritual of tea is raised to the level of art itself, in the way that 'Wabi' uplifts the 'aged' and viewed as 'beautiful'. 一期一会(Ichigo ichie), which describes this fleeting 'once in a lifetime encounter' between Teishu and guests, motivates the host in attaining to the highest levels of hospitality (Freeman, 2015). Rikyū introduced the custom of sharing one bowl of tea, 茶碗 (Chawan) (Fig.8) as a way of affirming bonds; 一味同心 (ichimi dōshin) 'one taste, same heart' (reading 4).

It is said that the Chashitsu and its accompanying utensils are the most lasting and visible expression of Rikyu's Wabi-cha ideals (Freeman, 2015), and therefore in revisiting these we begin to piece together how 'simplicity' and the 'everyday' are not only better appreciated through Chado, 'The Way of Tea,' but necessitated by it. The dichotomy in that "…we are asked to gaze at the roughly thatched hut while recalling the gorgeous flowers and leaves," as it, "simultaneously embraces splendour and simplicity" (Kurokawa), is essential to Chado. Therefore, familiarity with its architecture, tools and custom in this way aids in spotting similarities in succeeding tea cultures as in Chapters 2 and 3. These are the fragments that will point us in the direction of Chado; a path, a way, 'The Way of Tea.'

Figure 8. 'Tea service' (1876) (Warwick, 2025d)

CHAPTER 2 - 'Lost' - the Shallow West

"You never understood me
You never really tried" (Bush, 2019)

The 'Nanpōroku', the authoritative source on Sen-no-Rikyu's Chado (1690), predicted assuredly that, 'the way of tea will die out' (Kumakura, 2022) and this would happen, 'when tea becomes completely a matter of worldly amusement…' This statement inspires content covered in Chapter 2, beginning specifically at the time when Japan began trade with the West, and the implications of such an East-West exchange on what is assumed to be understood as a pre-established (tea) culture such as that of Victorian Britain.

We turn our attention first of all, then, to the 'tea service' pictured in (Fig.9). A British Royal Worcester set, mass produced in 1876 (Rooms Through Time, 2025), the transfer-printed porcelain capitalises on artistic design fashionable in the then Victorian Britain (1837-1901) for use in what had become the 'British tea ceremony'. Notice the design's blatant emulation of a 'Japanese' style (Rooms Through Time, 2025); the blue on white china design depicts 'Japanese' motifs such as bamboo stalks, fans and scrolls. These are characteristic of the 'Japonisme' style seen sweeping through Europe at that time. Some twenty years earlier, 1853, marked the beginning of Japanese trade with the West, forced under threat from American Commodore Matthew Perry who justified the act by writing in his diary that the United States was 'clearly superior to Japan' (Abou-Jaoude, 2016). Chiba (1998) sets out this attitude, seemingly adopted by Britain and the West as a whole, as the motivator for a renewed search for the 'exotic.' 'Japonisme' describes this intercultural phenomenon in relation to Japan's influence on European art and life specifically, art historian Gabriel P. Weisberg describing the period as an, "East-West Renaissance…a latter-day example of the kind of cultural diffusion which occurred during the Renaissance, when the excitement of classical discoveries stimulated imitation and veneration" (1998).

Figure 9. 'The Japanese Tea Ceremony' (Japanese GreenTea Co. , n.d.) Notice assimilation of Japanese style when viewing the two prints simultaneously.

These British venerations began integrating Japanese culture with its own through a process, which Chiba (1998) summarises as three broad steps. Beginning with 'Exoticism', this describes adoption of imported Japanese wares such as fans, scrolls and woodblock prints. Here, as 18th Century English porcelain factories were largely 'commercially unsuccessful' (Young, n.d.) interest in 'exotic' tea utensils would have peaked . 'Imitation' comes next (1998) as exemplified in (Fig.9). Direct reproduction of these exotic fans and other such newly traded pieces became commonplace. This could be viewed as the formation of social concepts such as 'stereotyping' (1998). Ironic then, that even though proclaiming a 'Japanese-ness' visually, the tea service derives so far from that of Rikyū's Wabi ideals. We see a 'repackaging' of traditional Eastern objects (later, 'Disneyfication' in Chapter 3). All that is translated, and incorrectly so, is that of visual importance. Any traces of the philosophical, of tactility of Rikyūs refined tea culture is lost. This becomes common practice of a nation who finds value in surface level qualities, and it seems already that Chado has got lost somewhere along its 'Way'. The third step, 'absorption,' (Chiba 1998) is not yet developed and will be expanded upon in Chapter 3.

Figure 10. 'Afternoon Tea Party' (1890-1891) By the late nineteenth-century, tea had officially been named, 'Britain's favourite non-alcoholic beverage' (Ellis, 2024) and saw the opening of tea rooms and shops within the English capital (UKTIA, n.d). These public spaces provided welcoming and respectable environments for women, with no accompaniment necessary (UKTIA, n.d). Women's British tea ceremony had broken out of the domestic sphere. A perfect base then, for the 'New Woman' of the 20th Century (Kelly, 2009) as members of the British suffragette movement (1903-1914) reappropriated the traditional mainstay of the 'feminine sphere.' Tea and discussion as a guise, Suffragettes joined in British tea ceremony, as seen as a socially acceptable manner in which to meet and recruit.

The British ‘Afternoon Tea’, was still in its infancy alongside the beginnings of this ‘East-West Renaissance’ (Weisberg) (Chiba, 1998). It is in this ‘British tea ceremony,’ a tea ceremony of sorts, where a greater degree of ritual is introduced and so may contain fragments recognisable as Chado, ‘The Way of Tea.’ As Victorian London underwent increasing industrialisation, the evening meal became later as the working day lengthened (Marks, 2020). Anna Maria Russell, Seventh Duchess of Bedford, described a ‘sinking feeling’ around 5 o’clock in the evening and requested tea, bread, butter and cake to her room; this was an afternoon tea (Marks, 2020). And so, the ritual was born. The practice would develop into an institution (Freeman, 2015). Confined to the domestic sphere, women began inviting others round as the ceremony culture progressed. A blurring of public and private space (‘third space’), for its time this came as social and practical liberation (Marks, 2020), and while seen as quintessentially British in todays standards, was once also of ‘avant-garde’ origins.

As host, the lady of the house usually prepared the tea (Young, n.d.). Both black and green teas were popular (U.K.T.I.A, n.d.), though not in powdered matcha form at present. The host was usually aided by a servant on hand with a silver hot water urn, reflecting a hierarchy reintroduced into the tea space. The silver (milk) jug and tray as depicted in (Fig.10) were used specifically in front of guests, reflecting a desire for ‘showiness’ (Young, n.d.) as tea sets were the mark of a ‘polite’ home and an opportunity to demonstrate fashionable taste, such as the striking blue porcelain tea-bowls also in (Fig.10). As opposed to (Fig.9) these bowls, whilst most likely mass produced, adhere more to a tactile experience promoted through Rikyūs Wabi-cha. This could show early signs of ‘absorption’ (Chia, 1998), of Japanese principles into Western culture instead of blatant imitation and stereotyping. Other art pieces of the era depict ‘polite’ ways of holding a tea bowl, intended to visually differentiate social class (Young, n.d.). Developing preference for the ‘plain’ reflected higher levels of class (Marks, 2020) which understands Japanese cultural assimilation as a facilitator in the development of ‘modernism’ (Abou-Jaoude, 2016).

Figure 11. ‘Tea caddy’ (About 1740) (Warwick, 2025e)

Contrast, however, is still seen in (Fig.12) as opposed to (Fig.7), where motivations surrounding tea culture have created a lockable mahogany tea caddy, used for storing tea leaves. Tea was regarded as sacred, but more so now in a sense of its monetary value, and so further supports a dividing of class based on appearance and material possession (Marks, 2020). Mahogany caddies such as this one would have been produced by enslaved Africans forced to harvest on plantations in Jamaica, further evidencing Britain’s complicated relationship with tea and its colonies (Rooms Through Time, 2025).

As a canvas on which disposable income could be expressed as ‘good taste,’ British tea ceremonies became displays of wealth. Guidebooks, such as ‘Hints on Household Taste’, first published 1868, responded to the increasing debate of the late nineteenth-century that was ‘taste’ (Rooms Through Time, 2025). Based on belief that possessions created or disrupted harmony in the home, Victorian Briton’s were advised to show restraint rather than excess (Rooms Through Time, 2025), though evidently not restraint akin to that of Wabi. ‘Refined’ interiors and utensils became a physical manifestation of the quintessentially British social institution of ‘politeness,’ in the way that Wabi dictated the make-up of Taian and its tools. Interpretations of ‘refined’ could not have been further apart.

While British ‘politeness’ appears stifling in the 21st Century, we see Chado instigating positive change within their tea ceremonies. Marks (2020) describes emancipating alterations made to womenswear for these specific occasions. Made of lighter, flowing fabrics and containing less boning in their shaping, guests were freed from some of the performative corsetry of the era. These dresses were designed specifically for indoor wear, meaning public approval was not of immediate concern. This ‘escapism’ feels akin to Wabi-cha ‘artistic names’ whereby the ritual’s customs allow you to become ‘someone else’ for a time. Marks (2020) describes the afternoon tea ritual as a, ‘radical feminist act.’

Returning to the idea of ‘displays of wealth,’ it could be said that, ‘Tea grew to be somewhat symbolic of leisure classes in Britain (Kelly, 2009). In the way that Rikyūs approach to tea ware engendered humility, here it became, “indispensable to accumulate… in order to retain one’s good name” (Trigg, 2001). We see Wabi-cha’s intense relationship between person and object completely misconstrued. Veblen’s theory of ‘Conspicuous Consumption’ understands acts of ‘leisure’ and their ensuing discourse as the transferal of materiality into status (Trigg, 2001) . His “trickle down” model describes how ‘taste’ is diffused from the top of social hierarchy, therefore to perform an afternoon tea is to open oneself up to scrutiny of fellow society in determining one’s class. However, in an increasingly mobilised society these displays of wealth, as visual signifiers, became more important than that of the activities themselves. This concept of ‘Conspicuous Consumption would motivate much of modern society in the 20th Century, and remains relevant to this day.

Despite these differences in motivation, in both cultures can be seen tea’s power in dictating its surroundings and ritual. In the same way Rikyū creates intimacy, the British ceremony too feels ‘cosy.’ Similar too, are descriptors of Rikyūs ‘avant-garde tradition’ and Kelly’s naming British tea, ’..a Subversive Tradition’ (2009). As far as feminism is concerned, in both public and private space and mixing of the two, tea was vital. Though certainly ‘lost’ from its original path, I feel threads of Chado can be seen here as running I parallel. As Chapter 3 explores, perhaps what diverted Chado in the West, is now motivation for its rediscovery in a globalised world.

Figure 12. 'Glass Tea House Mondrian' (Liawolf Cabinett, n.d.)

CHAPTER 3 - 'Searching' in a Globalised world

"It's changing in the big sky, now" (Bush, 2019)

Now entering a globalised world in the 21st Century, this chapter analyses the 'coffee chain' as a product of developed consumerist, individualistic and modernist ideals, in order to understand the recent global 'Cultural Renaissance' (Bisgaard, 2017) that is the 'Matcha Boom' (Chia, 2025). I shall use the example of the world's largest coffee chain, 'Starbucks' (Britannica, 2024) not only for its global influence but also as a first exporter of a specific kind of (coffee) culture (Grinshpun, 2012). In order to do so I will analyse relevant features found within my local Starbucks Sprucefield branch here in Northern Ireland and examine whether perhaps Chado / The way of tea has found its way here?

Standing outside the Starbucks Sprucefield branch, the first thing we may notice is its freestanding form. Not the case for every branch, and with this one recently finished in late 2024, we could assume this was a deliberate design decision that adheres with Starbucks' most recent values. Looking at their current 'About Us' webpage we read, '..Our Mission: With every cup, with every conversation, with every community - we nurture the limitless possibilities of human connection' (Starbucks, n.d), we can indeed begin to examine how these aims may have shaped the branch's physical 'make-up'. Semiotics (Barthes), being 'the concrete form of abstract ideas,' go some way in explaining how branding is crucial to chains, such as Starbucks, aiming to immerse customers in spatial expressions of 'community' and 'human connection;' the same way in which Tai-an was Rikyu's 'Wabi-cha' in 3-Dimensions and similarly, display of 'wealth' were projected via Victorian's extravagant tea tables. As the building promotes human connection, and aims to cultivate this through the activity of tea/coffee drinking, we are therefore reminded once more of the beverage's power to dictate suitable surroundings.

Figure 13 'Free-standing Coffee-House' (Warwick, 2025) : Here we can see connection to light, plants and the environment displays attempts by the brand at aiding customers in 'the act of inhabitation' (Tanizaki, 1933) whereby one feels a sense of 'belonging' to a place, however temporal. Tanizaki described this act as difficult within, 'the 'tumultuous present,' as contemporary architects such as Thomas Heatherwick would agree even a near-century later, stating our current 'postmodern consumer culture' (Reading 13 - Thompson/Arsel, 2004) has created a global, "Blandemic",(Gentleman, 2023). In this sense Heatherwick would argue that, 'place does not simply create a sense of belonging' (Reading 14 - Wurgaft, 2003)."Architecture is the art of reconciliation between ourselves and the world, and this mediation takes place through the senses," (Pallasmaa, 1966). Differences are obviously stark, and I must clarify that in making these comparisons, they are done so with acknowledgement that one is public and a commercial outlet and the other private. Though, perhaps not so far-fetched in light of recent 'Matcha Mania' (Reading 9 - Chia, 2025), that Sprucefield's 'free-standing garden structure' might have been subconsciously influenced by, 'Original tea rooms,' which, 'were light…with an air of impermanence' (Reading 5 - Freeman, 2007).

Increasingly present in global markets, Matcha saw exports reaching an increase of 25% to 36.4bn yen, or £180m, in 2024 (Chia, 2025). The powdered green tea appeals especially within highly developed culture such as Britain's (Bisgaard, 2017), due to the nation's pre-established everyday dependance on tea and continued colonial tendencies which favour the 'exotic.' I believe these comparisons to be crucial in beginning to understand this 'Cultural Renaissance' (Bisgaard, 2017), one which mimics that of the 'East-West exchange' of the 1850s and what may be the first signs of an entirely new globalised tea culture. I am again reminded of Sugimoto's, 'Once upon a time, all traditions were avant-garde' (pg 71, 2015).

Figure 14. 'The Refrigerated Alcove' (Warwick, 2025)

Crossing the threshold, the very first spot our eyes are drawn to on entering, intentionally so, is that of the refrigerated food cabinet. As a 'beacon' of consumerist ideals, with this given prominence I cannot help but be reminded of the 'Tokonama' (alcove) at Tai-an. (Fig 14) The cabinet itself is set into a recessed alcove and is immediately singled out visually though dramatised contrast of light and shadow, much in the same way (Tanizaki, 1933) described the visual effect of the Tokonama. The alcove is painted black, the

fridge casing of black metal and sleek shelf lighting which renders the foodstuff as museum objects. There is a certain Wabi quality in this elevating of the necessity which is sustenance. This both informs and reflects our modern day approach to food and drink, and how ideals of 'health' and 'community' are made visual.In an alcove, which is not dissimilar to an alter or a pedestal, where Rikyu allowed emptiness to reside, we have placed and highlighted something we value most in the society of today, "wellness."

A recently commercialised ideology, this describes a 'holistic integration of physical, mental and spiritual well-being' (Stoewen, 2017). Ever-increasing feelings of emptiness at the hands of the West's 'spiritual vacuum' (Bisgaard, 2017) alongside mistrust of food industries and 'big pharma' has led society to taking matters of 'health' into their own hands, furthering modernism's individualistic tendencies. Social media platforms such as 'Instagram' or 'Tik-Tok' allow for new attitudes towards food and body to 'trend'. As global awareness of Japanese goods increases, so to has the sharing of brewing tips, reviews and recipes of their Matcha tea online via 'influencers' (Chia, 2025). In promoting a particular 'way of life,' we understand that matcha's current popularity is inextricably linked with the digital sphere. Now, not only used in traditional 'Wabi-cha', matcha is becoming a universal supplement to a healthy diet (Reading 8 - Bisgaard, 2017).

Theories such as historian Michel Foucault's (1926-84) "Biopower" may help to understand the translation of Matcha tea drinking as an act of engaging in the everyday ceremony in Wabi-Cha, to becoming a part of the globalised world's habitual daily routines (Pylypa, 1998). Foucault's theory explains these individual acts of self-surveillance as a desire to conform and therefore one's own voluntary oppression (Pylypa, 1998). Matcha drinking is the physical act of self-discipline, and ensuing discourse comes here in the form of 'social media', a 'judging' of an individuals social standing, essentially as a continued evidence of Veblen's 'conspicuous consumption' theory, where material goods are translated into status (Trigg, 2001). Here, however, social media is used in combining both the product and the leisure activity through sharing of images. This mirrors the way in which Rikyū was able to combine the physical and immaterial through Wabi-cha. Whether consciously or not, matcha is once again inspiring a more thoughtful and holistic approach to living (Chado)(Bisgaard, 2017) and therefore could hint once more at tea having come full circle.

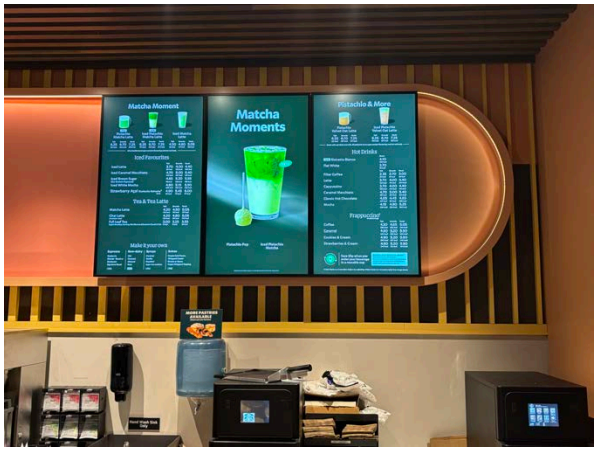

Figure 15. 'The Menu Scrolls' (Warwick, 2025) : A few steps from the fridge alcove (fig..), our eyes are now drawn up to the menu screens above the main service counter. Not to my surprise, predominance of the displays is given to Matcha advertisements, half of the six television screens listing Starbucks' 'hedonic' **(Reading 13 - Thompson/ Arsel, 2004)**, rich array of iced and hot powdered green tea beverages, most with optional added syrups or sweeteners. There was also much space given over to drinks like 'Frappucino's', something alien to Japanese and British minds of the past. The screen here appears as the scroll missing from what would be the 'Tokonama' (alcove), following a similar tradition to that of Chado in which scrolls are chosen to reflect the season. Here, seasonality comes in the form of capitalist marketing events such as seen through limited 'Christmas' and 'Fall/Autumn' ranges.)

From the menu 'scrolls' (fig..) I order a hot matcha tea latte, presuming it may be closest to a Wabi-cha offering, and gave my name. Catching a glimpse of the tea preparation process was difficult. The coffee machines have their back to the customer, perhaps so that the 'Starbucks partner' is facing their guests (Starbucks, n.d). I wondered if this was for sociability reasons or to make beverage production a more 'refined' process (think British 'polite'). In a digital age, this fast-paced and hidden process could be likened to that of a simulation and does not reflect the tea preparation process which was integral to both Wabi-cha and the British tea ceremony, whereby observing the making of tea was an active participation in the ritual.

Figure 16. 'Matcha ' (Warwick, 2025) The matcha arrives. My name is correct. Introduced in 2012, store partners began wearing name tags on their green aprons and in turn, the customer is asked for their name meaning, 'the 'Barista and customer were once again on a first-name basis' (Starbucks, n.d), though that was all we really got to know of one another. The idea of a 'name' within a tea-drinking space does however feel akin once more to Wabi-cha's 'artistic name' bestowal, whereby a cup of tea allows you to become somebody else temporarily, whilst the physical act itself grounds you in daily ritual. This is proof of Starbucks' aims to transcend the brand itself and become an everyday experience (Grinshpun, 2012).

Figure 17. 'Matcha Full' (Warwick, 2025) The green tea latte is extremely pale, in taste and in colour, due to the added milk. This results from globalisation strategy such as "Disneyfication" (1959). Coined by Lawrence Lipton (1898-1975), this is capitalism's acting upon aims of sanitisation of 'real' places, returning them 'repackaged' for wide-spread consumption, as seen in Chapter 2 (Grinshpun, 2012). By doing so, the matcha is detached from its local origin and form, "taming" its preparation, flavour and appearance into a 'user-friendly' product (Grinshpun, 2012). Since tea is the tool of choice for creating human connection, as 'core value of the product', its origins become irrelevant to the consumer and must appeal to a wider audience. Tea now in hand, I notice the weight and indelicacy of the ware. Another side effect of 'Disneyfication,' the oversized mug is far removed from that of a shared, tactile tea bowl.

Figure 18. 'Matcha Empty' (Warwick, 2025)

Figure 19. 'Pike Market Place Nostalgia" (Warwick, 2025)

As I turn to find a seat, I am struck immediately by a large image on the opposite wall. Certainly intended to be the focal point of the seating area, the collage-print appears to depict some kind of bustling street scene. I look up 'Pike Place Market' (see fig.. top left) to discover this is the farmer's market surrounding Starbucks' first coffee house in Seattle, US in 1971. What is perhaps most interesting about this choice of imagery, is its stark contrast to Starbucks' spaces of only 20 years ago. Previously, the brand profited off a 'commercialised nostalgia' in the form of an abundance of 'cultural references' linking them to the 'origins of coffee'; scenes of manual labour, indigenous farmers, hands holding raw coffee beans, hessian sacks and so on (Grinshpun, 2012). Now, by depicting only their own 'origin story', it is clear Starbucks as a product no longer need prove its authenticity to consumers. Also a result of the 'Disneyfication' strategy, sense of place and character has been traded for a new sense of 'commonality.' Thompson/Arsel (2004) explain this as nostalgia which is now a highly commercialised trope (2004), with contemporary coffee chains acting as, "postmodern simulations of a by-gone communal ethos that emerged in the formative period of modernity" (2004). As we were once citizens, we are now mere consumers (2004).

Known as a 'Hegemonic Brandscape,' Starbucks as a brand represents a "flow" of symbols, images and cultural connotations (Grinshpun, 2012), which when globalised allows this "flow" to generate new connectivities between different world locations. This 'Brandscape' allows for Starbucks to create their own kind of worldview (Chado?). (Thompson, Arsel, 2004) describe the overall appearance of one as having a, "sense of warmth coupled with a distinctive aesthetic flair." I take in the space around me now, noticing first this warmth which reflects colours within the large art print; muted yellows, 'peach' (decidedly peach and not the 'trendy' pink terracotta of the past few years), and the deep brown from the image is repeated on the ceiling, replacing usual white and so here I am reminded of Tanizaki's disgust at the Westerner who, '… spares no pains to eradicate even the minutest shadow,' as the, 'quest for a brighter light never ceases,' (Tanizaki, 1933). Usually bold for the 21st Century commercial premises, through colour and dimmed lighting; still artificial but warmer and not so distant, perhaps, from the glow of an evening Wabi-cha or a candlelit afternoon tea in winter. There appears more 'intimacy' inside than hinted at from the somewhat austere grey and glass exterior. As 'Americanised' consumer habits and their favoured coffee culture have contributed to the 21st Century's, "..mind-numbingly boring," appearance (Gentleman, 2023), a rediscovered Japanese tea culture, or Chado, may just be an antidote to this soullessness.

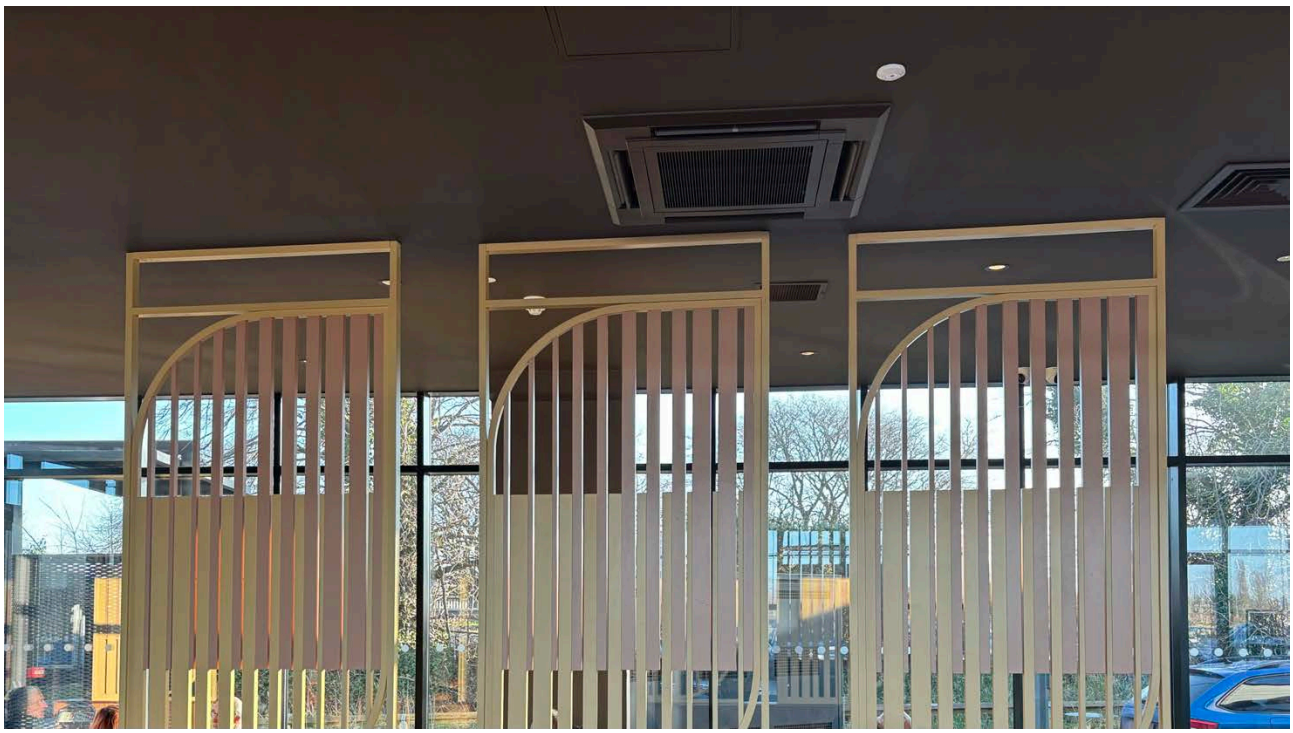

Figure 20. 'Starbucks Shoji" (Warwick, 2025)

Partitioned in places, Starbucks have aimed at creating intimacy in scale. Of much 21st Century design, Heatherwick puts it, "Buildings no longer have a human scale" (Gentleman, 2023). We are reminded of the genius of Japanese tatami 'measurements.' The linear, screen-like partitions call to mind, though are still distant from, ideas of shoji screens or the 'Tokobashira' pillar which flanks the Teahouse's alcove. The 'screens' here, which allow light to pass through and create a sense of airiness. It is clear that the, 'Ethos of Zen, hospitality and beauty..,' are becoming ever more ingrained into that of a globalised vernacular. Again, within a public space such as this we see motivations for such design as, '…Consumers seek a palliative for the distressing feelings of isolation, inauthenticity, and de-personalisation..,' (Thompson/Arsel, 2004). Even though these Brandscapes have been "Disneyfied," we feel appeased and believe we have been given a taste of something 'natural' and 'human.' This 'abbreviation' (of the decorative) and use of natural materials mimics how both within a Japanese space are, to this day, '…symbolic of one aspect of the tea world (Kumakura, 2022). The chairs, too, reflect an assimilation of other world cultures through form, colour and connotations. Until now, it feels a globalised reading of Ryokū's statement, 'Elegance is frigid' (Tanizaki, ? 1933) has been completely misunderstood. Perhaps we are reaching an equilibrium, between Pawson's architectural 'subtraction' (Speaks, 1994) and Heatherwick's designs which "nourish our senses" (Gentleman, 2023). Or, perhaps I am falling for this sense of surface level community as intended.

In conclusion…

At the time of Wabi-cha's conception, Rikyū and his culturally creative endeavours appeared as 'rays of light..in an age of turbulence' (Kumakura, 2022). Similarly, tea's invasion of our ever-less 'human' world in the globalised 21st-Century appears beacon-like. Definite 'soul-searching,' and perhaps also read as 'cry-for-help,' tea's trickling into what were our most bland and 'rootless' of spaces is proof of necessity and desire for 'something' more fulfilling. Wabi's appreciation of the everyday may be key to regaining something of this lost humanness. Additionally, increased awareness of global cultural exchange on such a level might begin to foster a more respectful approach to life; tea and Chado as a unifier amongst so much that decides us. These are possible conclusions; links from our past to the present, that we will inevitably, and perhaps should hope to, find in our future. I say this with optimism and hope, and in regards this project, I believe still in its infancy, with intention of continuing my understanding and integration of something similar to Chado into my practice and everyday existence. Tea needs us, but not in the way we depend upon it. We need it more than it needs us. We are mere facilitators, stewards and inheritors of Chado, its 'Way' already guaranteed long into the future. Whatever way we choose to interpret it, the 'Way of Tea' has certainly been inherited once more. Which 'way' will you go next tea?

Figure 21. 'Thank you' (Warwick, 2025)

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