



Kintsugi

Akari Takenishi

MA in international and Intercultural Communication, Royal Roads University, Canada

What is it?

Kintsugi is a Japanese traditional method of repairing broken ceramics with lacquer and powdered gold. *Kintsugi* (金継ぎ) or *Kintsukuroi* (金繕い) literally translates as mending with gold. It is practiced by craftsmen, joining broken pieces into a whole and giving it a new aesthetic value. It gained a recognition as an art form, as the principles of *sado* (茶道), tea ceremony or the way of serving and appreciating tea, spread. Appreciating things as they are is one of the lessons in *sado*, and imperfection is considered something to be valued. No two *kintsugi* ceramics are the same; all have different scars and lines which make each unique and beautiful in its own way. *Kintsugi* is transformative repair, showing how the broken becomes beautiful not through hiding flaws but by turning them into something new.

Who uses the concept?

Today, *kintsugi* is used in 3 ways: as a traditional practice, a philosophical concept, or a metaphorical term. As a mending method, craftsmen have given broken objects another life since the 16th century. Philosophically, *kintsugi* ceramics take a Zen Buddhist approach by not only presenting the beauty of a traditional art but challenging the audience to first accept flaws, and second to consider the role of consumerism and disposability in the modern world. *Kintsugi* as a metaphor challenges viewers to celebrate failures and imperfections as inevitable parts of life. Mostly *kintsugi* has been studied as an art and craft, by art historians.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

In the context of intercultural dialogue, *kintsugi* as a metaphor offers alternative values and viewpoints. It brings new perspectives to what beauty is and how we perceive failures and imperfections. *Kintsugi* helps in understanding alternative ways of looking at life, therefore it can serve as a tool in intercultural dialogue. The obvious use in this context is as a metaphor for the repair of broken relationships, whether between individuals, communities, or countries. The fact that *kintsugi* repairs are viewed as more valuable than the original ceramics is critical, as it holds hope that fractured relationships are worthy of repair and can become even stronger and more valuable as a result of a break.

What work remains?

In its literal and philosophical senses, the term has achieved some international recognition in recent years. Little work has been done on the metaphor of *kintsugi*, including as related to intercultural dialogue, so the possibilities are wide open. One direction would study how it brings new insight to the modern goods-abundant economy and to social mindsets on disposability, as it will be useful in future discussion of international environmental and socio-economic sustainability.

Resources

- Evans, D. (2014). [*Kintsugi: The art of broken pieces*](#). Greatcoat Films.
- Keulemans, G. (2016). [The geo-cultural conditions of kintsugi](#). *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 9(1), 15-34.