

The August issue of *The Japan Society Review* presents five reviews that cover a diverse spread of media and topics related to Japan. The opening review explores a two-volume academic work focusing on public diplomacy, human rights, and modern slavery in Japan and the US. Providing an extensive collection of primary sources, *US-Japan Human Rights Diplomacy Post 1945*, written by Roger Buckley, offers an analysis of the historical context, debates, and documentation regarding sexual and labour trafficking in Japan and beyond during the postwar period.

Tokyo Junkie, the fascinating memoir of journalist and author Robert Whiting, is the subject of the second review of this issue. Robert Whiting has lived in Tokyo on and off for more than fifty years and in this book looks at the changes and history of the city as well as his personal experiences over the years, “a powerful case study on the emotional realities of prolonged expat living”.

In the field of literature, the prizewinning novel *Lonely Castle in the Mirror* by Tsujimura Mizuki is also reviewed in this issue. An innovative blend of contemporary social commentary and magical realism, Tsujimura’s work touches on issues related to children’s mental health, school bullying and human relations.

Departing from our usual focus on written works, the fourth review covers the most recent release from young Japanese musician Kaneko Ayano. *Yosuga* is Kaneko’s 6th full-length album and offers a powerful combination of striking vocals, spirited guitar riffs and poetic lyrics.

The final review of the August issue concentrates on the illustrated art book *Kintsugi: The Poetic Mend*, where Japanese tea ceremony student and author Bonnie Kemske guides us through the origins and techniques of this striking Japanese art form and the intricacies of the repair method in restoring broken objects using lacquer and gold.

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

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Cameron Bassindal, Eleonora Faina, Laurence Green, Ian Neary and Riyoko Shibe.

Image: Cover detail, *Lonely Castle in the Mirror* by Tsujimura Mizuki

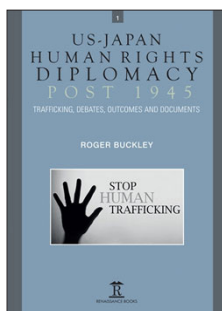
US-Japan Human Rights Diplomacy Post 1945: Trafficking, Debates, Outcomes and Documents

by Roger Buckley

Renaissance Books (2021)

ISBN-13: 978-1912961122

Review by Ian Neary



The UK government defines “human trafficking” as ‘the recruitment or movement of people, by the use of threat, force, fraud, or the abuse of vulnerability, for exploitation’. It is related to, although not identical with, on one hand “modern slavery” which may, but does not necessarily involve migrant labour and on the other “people smuggling” where the migrants may be more or less willing participants in the process.

These terms are notoriously difficult to define or ascribe numbers to but if a problem cannot be quantified it is not possible to assess whether interventions are effective. The Walk Free Foundation has worked with the International Labour Organisation and the International Organisation for Migration to develop the Global Slavery Index (GSI) which ranks countries according to the prevalence of modern slavery as part of its work to agitate for its elimination. The GSI report of 2018 shows Japan to be at the bottom (top?) of its international league table - 167th out of 167 – with an estimated 37,000 people living in slavery compared, for example, to 403,000 in the US ranked 158. Nothing to see here then? Well, not quite. Not, obviously, if you are one of the 37,000. Moreover, some argue that at least some elements of modern slavery in Japan result from the state sponsored Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) which is less about training in transferable skills for workers from developing countries than providing cheap labour to address acute shortages in low skilled sectors in ways that enables worker exploitation and human rights abuses through a system that amounts to “trafficking”.

The USA passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000 and in 2001 issued its first report to bring international attention to the ‘horrific practice of trafficking in persons’. The report describes the situation in each country and places them into one of three tiers: Tier I those which fully comply with the Act’s minimum standards, Tier II those which do not yet fully comply but are trying, and Tier III who are judged to neither comply with the minimum standards nor be making any significant effort to do so. In 2002 the

Japanese government was shocked to find that it had been placed into Tier II. This report noted the two issues of women trafficked for commercial sexual purposes and men trafficked for labour purposes. After being promoted to Tier I for a short while, the 2020 report placed Japan once more into Tier II noting *inter alia* cases of forced labour existing with the TITP schemes.

Roger Buckley provides an analysis and set of documentation to allow us to better understand the historical context to these developments. Specifically, ‘to examine how the US has deployed public diplomacy with Tokyo to confront Japanese sexual and labour trafficking, while also charting the successes and failures of the US’s own record’ (p. 1). Volume I of this two volume set begins with just over 100 pages of historical perspective and assessment starting with the immediate postwar period and ending with a postscript that brings the narrative up to April 2021.

This section is excellent particularly the first chapter which elegantly summarises the postwar rise of the discourse of human rights and the way this became embedded in various United Nations (UN) documents and practice from the 1940s through into the twenty-first century. Chapter 2 looks at the way these standards were incorporated into Japan’s new constitution largely at the insistence of the US occupiers. This is an area that Buckley is well qualified to write about having published extensively on the occupation period. Nevertheless, there was more that might have been written about the role played by domestic advocates of human rights. It is well documented that article 25 on social and economic rights was largely included as a result of pressure from the Japanese Socialist Party. Subsequent chapters trace the development of anti-trafficking policy in the US and Japan across the twentieth century before discussing at greater length developments since 2000. Clearly it is these recent developments that most interest the author and probably most of his readers, but I wondered about the influence of the UN system on Japan’s human rights policy making from the 1990s onwards. For example, Japan’s engagement with the reporting processes prescribed by the international conventions on rights generally and women and children more specifically. Surely there were some references in Japan’s reports and the UN committees’ comments on them to trafficking issues?

And what about the absence of a Human Rights Commission (HRC) in Japan despite several promises made in the late 1990s to create one? A truly independent HRC might have taken up the trafficking

issue and indicated problems with the TITP from an early stage. It might also have suggested early ratification of the UN Trafficking Protocol of 2000 something that did not take place until 2017, typically late and then with reservations that did not make human trafficking an offense in criminal law.

The explicit comparison of the US with Japan is very helpful. The US is described as providing 'leadership' and Japan engaged in 'catch-up' – but was there anything distinctive in their relationship in this policy area? And does the relationship remain the same today?

On the documents which make up three quarters of the two volumes: I wondered how many of them were needed now that most readers have internet access. Certainly, all the documents in the second half of Vol I, the Japanese constitution, the texts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and main covenants and conventions are readily available on-line. Readers could have been given the website addresses if they wanted

to check them out for themselves. The same may not be true for the documents in Vol II as some of them may be more difficult to locate. Often only the most recent report is available and sometimes older reports are actually made more difficult to access. Still, even there the inclusion of the website addresses where a reader can access these documents for themselves might help them locate subsequent years reports.

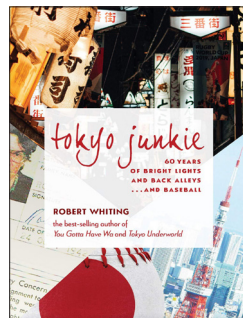
Overall though this is a handsome two volume set that introduces the reader to the debate on a serious human rights issue that is rarely covered by English language sources. It not only provides a background commentary introducing readers to the main contours of the problem but also provides them with ample material enabling them to conduct further research themselves. Japan's record in this policy area may be good by international comparison but as Buckley makes clear that there is still more that it needs to do to be accepted as a Tier I nation. §

Tokyo Junkie: 60 Years of Bright Lights and Back Alleys... and Baseball

by Robert Whiting

Stone Bridge Press (2021)
ISBN-13: 978-1611720679

Review by Laurence Green



Time has a way of getting to you. Half a century is a good spell of time, by anyone's measure. For Robert Whiting, a journalist and author who has lived in Tokyo on and off for more than fifty years, looking back over that vast spread of years comes in the form of a fascinating memoir - *Tokyo Junkie* - that plays out like a love letter to what Anthony Bourdain dubbed, 'the greatest city in the world'. Beginning as a series of articles for the *Japan Times* back in 2014, Whiting - whose previous books *You Gotta Have Wa* and *Tokyo Underworld* have also become Japanese best-sellers in their translated versions - has an ambitious task at hand with this expansive volume, interweaving his personal narrative into the unfolding backdrop of Japan's own great journey through time.

How does one set about capturing such scale? It helps to have a raconteur-like knack for good, old-fashioned storytelling, and with *Tokyo Junkie*, the tone is invariably brusque, to-the-point, straight talking. Whiting tells it like it was - and the account is all the

more engrossing for its candid nature, even if at times its sprawling trajectory threatens to lose us halfway between national history and anecdote. Japan's journey from postwar devastation to the pinnacle of urban modernity is well told, but it's the personal touches that linger most in the memory. As Whiting openly admits, many will come across as shocking or striking to modern readers, but are included by way of holding up a lens of accuracy to the times in which they occurred. As the famous LP Hartley quote goes: 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there'.

Hailing from rural California, and originally assigned to Tokyo as part of the United States Air Force, Whiting and his memoirs are initially presented through the lens of America's postwar military involvement in Japan; the scope, however, quickly becomes more expansive. One of Whiting's acquaintances in the early 60s is an eminent plastic surgeon in need of an English tutor. Whiting is happy to oblige. One of Japan's '1%', the surgeon has a lucrative line in 'augmenting' nightclub hostesses looking to 'enhance their professional appeal'. Later, at the surgeon's luxurious new Harajuku apartment, they sip Napoleon brandy, watching Tokyo's 1964 Olympic opening ceremony, in the company of two movie actresses 'wearing trendy Mary Quant miniskirts'. Japan's return to the world stage is complete.

These early passages are richly evocative of a world of sex, sultry nights and drinking. It was the swinging 60s, after all - and Japan could evidently swing with the best of them. It feels a lifetime away, another planet, almost. At other moments, the memoir offers more universal, timeless sentiments; a self-affirmation of feelings so many of us will have experienced ourselves, encapsulating that singular 'pull' the country's largest metropolis exerts on the wide-eyed foreigner:

'I was already heavily addicted to Tokyo. I liked the incredible energy, the activity, the politeness, the orderliness, the cleanliness, the efficiency, the trains that always arrived on time, the mix of the old and new, the temples, the shrines, the crowds, the bright neon lights, the charm, and the uniqueness of it all.'

There is no doubt that Whiting's account is unapologetically sentimental and sensational at moments. It looks at Tokyo not so much through rose-tinted glasses - after all, it is highly candid about its seedier side throughout - but through the gaze of one long since converted to its charms; the tight grip of a love affair from which there is no turning back. As Whiting continues to teach English to a succession of Japanese, he quickly discovers that it is invariably he who comes away from the experience having learnt the most, and many of his resultant insights into the Japanese mindset and way of life are vividly regaled. Another memorable anecdote: His local neighbourhood watchperson, who seemingly knows the social comings and goings of everyone, waves cheerily and informs him: 'You had visitors today,' - Whiting goes up the stairs to his tiny flat and opens the door to find two of his students have somehow let themselves in, cleaned the place spotlessly, and left him a little cake from the nearby bakery.

As the years march on, we hear Whiting's thoughts on topics ranging from politics to baseball.

Whiting's passion for the latter is clearly palpable, and even for those with no prior interest in the sport, his enthusiasm is catching - particularly the parallels he draws between the sport and the Zen-like qualities of its samurai spirit. Like many of Whiting's accounts though, there is often a darker story to tell beneath it all - most anecdotes coming back to the extreme sense of discipline and work ethic ingrained throughout Japanese life. Friends abandon a youth of political activism to 'grow up', join society and get married. Workers drink themselves to devastation to cope with the stress of Tokyo *salaryman* culture. The endless monotony of consensus-generating meetings. Young women hired by banks purely to serve as future wives for the male staff. All are conveyed in compelling detail, and Whiting's thought process as he tries to negotiate the gap between the America of his birth, and the Japan that he increasingly finds himself assimilating into, are a powerful case study on the emotional realities of prolonged expat living.

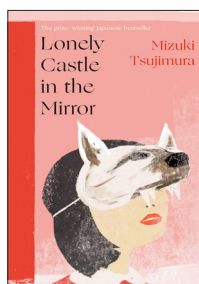
One hopes this memoir will find a home alongside other great recollections of 20th century Japan, such as Ian Buruma's *A Tokyo Romance* or Alex Kerr's *Lost Japan*. It is so easy for us all to be 'experts' in the nuances of Japanese culture these days, with a wealth of information at our fingertips via the Internet - but it is for precisely this reason that we owe it to ourselves to cherish accounts of this nature, of the individual, because they present us with an intimacy and trueness of feeling that with every year passes further into the past. These are more than picture postcards of history, or lines in a textbook. Japan changes, evolves, as it must - but the Japan of this book, and Whiting's journey through it, forms part of an account of moments in time that deserve to be remembered. Nation and individual, entangled together - a tale of a life, truly 'lived'. §

Lonely Castle in the Mirror

by Tsujimura Mizuki
translated by Philip Gabriel

Doubleday (2021)
ISBN-13: 978-0857527288

Review by Riyoko Shibe



the English translation by Philip Gabriel, titled *Lonely Castle in the Mirror*, published in 2021.

The story starts off like other fantasy novels. Instead of stumbling through the wardrobe to find Narnia, or falling down the rabbit hole to find Wonderland, seven children wake up one morning to find their mirrors glowing, and upon putting their hand against the glass, they are pulled through to find a castle guarded by a wolf and the Wolf Queen. They are set a task: they have a year to search for the key to

the wishing room, and whoever finds it will be granted a single wish.

The seven children brought to the castle have stopped attending school, having suffered some sort of trauma in their family or among their peers, and so, they are home to notice their mirrors glowing at 9am – the start of the school day. They learn that the castle is open for the duration of the academic year, and only during school hours, and they are free to come and go as they please within this time.

In this way, Tsujimura introduces us the social issue of *futoko*: children who stop going to school for extended periods of time, reasons for which are often reported as family circumstances or bullying. Tsujimura reveals seven diverse stories of *futoko*, thus presenting the people behind this phenomenon, giving depth and dimension to the issue. Empathising with teachers, parents, friends, and bullies themselves, she ponders why children would drop out of school, and explores the isolation which can colour and define people's lives from a young age. Given the problem of bullying in Japan, and associated public health issues among young people including suicide and *hikikomori*, the book's popularity should come as no surprise, winning the Japan Booksellers' Award in 2018.

The story unfolds through 12-year-old Kokoro's eyes. Having suffered a traumatic experience at school which led to her hiding in her house, fearing for her life while her bullies shouted and bashed on her door, Kokoro withdraws into herself, and finds herself unable to communicate with her parents and teachers. She becomes increasingly isolated from the world around her.

To Kokoro, it quickly becomes clear that each of the other children have a similar experience, but all appear reluctant to divulge their story. It is clear, though, that the castle – unlike other fantasy worlds – is a safe haven for the children, offering respite from the traumas of the outside world. They are given physical space, with each child having their own private room, as well as communal rooms for the group to congregate; and time, every school day for a whole year, to explore friendships, build connections, and slowly process their trauma.

Matching these themes of human connection and isolation, the pace of the book is appropriately slow and measured. Tension builds gradually, with hints of what is to come dropped close to the start and resolved only at the end. Apart from ominous howling that grows louder as 5pm approaches, and the knowledge that if they stay past this time, the wolf will come and eat

whole whoever is left, there is no dramatic plot line. Instead, we are given space to observe how the children form connections, resolve difficulties, communicate, and navigate the complexities of friendship. We see, through detailed accounts, shy exchanges of gifts, unreciprocated confessions of love, fights unfold and resolve, and birthday celebrations.

It is relevant that these social dynamics are not mediated by an adult. Outside the castle, beyond the mirror and in the real world, we see the children battle with the control and parameters inflicted on them by teachers, school systems and parents. But through the mirror and in the castle, they have freedom to live as they please, form connections with one another, and confront their anxieties and fears in their own time.

Despite the dark themes underlying the book, and visceral fear felt by the children in their respective real-world experiences, written from Kokoro's viewpoint – a child's perspective – the tone remains optimistic and hopeful. There is the sense that without support from friends, family and peers, and without apt processing of their experiences, the children could suffer later on in life: as well as the trauma of the bullying, the children express guilt for dropping out of school and missing classes, and worry they are letting down their parents. Some withdraw in total isolation and fear leaving their house entirely, while others rebel by dyeing their hair and getting into relationships. But from their stay in the castle, the children are given the space to learn and slowly heal. We see, in what feels like real time given the pace of the book, the importance of patience, trust, and time in healing, and of granting children autonomy in how they choose to process trauma.

And, as they are given space in the castle to be free from fear, on the outside, in the "real" world, they grow too; empathising teachers and parents come to speak to the children, who give them space as they try to recover; and we are introduced to the School, an alternative school for children who've dropped out of mainstream school, drawing parallels with free schools, which emerged in Japan in the 1980s in response to increasing truancy.

Lonely Castle in the Mirror – its success in Japan and beyond – perhaps points to a broader trend in increasing awareness of children's mental health, with bullying also the topic of Kawakami Mieko's highly anticipated *Heaven*, translated in 2021. Tsujimura, using fantasy and magical realism to amplify historical and current trends, commentary and research in bullying and mental health – adds hope and depth to the conversation. §

Yosuga

by Kaneko Ayano

Album released on 14 April 2021
<https://kanekoayano.net/special/yosuga/>

Review by Cameron Bassindale



Yosuga is the 6th full-length album from Kaneko Ayano, one of Japan's best kept musical secrets. Since 2014, Kaneko Ayano has released a body of work which charts her considerable progress as a musician. From the Britpop inspired riffs and melodies of her first two albums, she has evolved her sound to become the poster girl for the Japanese Pop-Folk scene. In Ayano's quest for fresh sounds and new audiences, in 2018 she released a track for the Japanese remake of the immensely popular *13 Reasons Why* on Netflix, and even collaborated with the popular Hip-Hop artist KID FRESINO earlier this year. It is a shame then that her latest offering does not go as far as her other albums do in pushing the envelope and developing her style. That being said, there is still much to like.

While she has never been in the mainstream proper, *Yosuga* is Kaneko's first album to break the Top 20 Apple Music charts in Japan. This is a testament to her prolific workrate. The album's first track and main single, 'Houyou' (抱擁) meaning embrace, encapsulates everything that is great about Kaneko Ayano. Her voice is at its cutting, soulful best. The lyrics too weave the melancholy picture that pervades this album. And then, there is the video. In front of a stunning mountain-top scene, coloured with pinks and whites, the visuals are as striking as the vocals on top. This combines for what is a truly stellar start to the album. From there on, it is a mixed bag.

On her last two albums, *Sansan* and *Shukusai*, Kaneko seemed to really situate herself nicely at the intersection between Rock, Pop and Folk. The result was albums loaded with loud, energetic tracks that were memorable, and replayable. So too were there songs that were more considered and soulful. On *Yosuga*, the balance is somewhat off. Take for instance the album's third song, 'Tegami' (手紙, letter). While it's a nicely put together song, and frontlines Ayano's incredible vocal range, it's pretty forgettable and doesn't sound dissimilar to a couple of other cuts from the album. This is a shame, since I expected an album like *Shukusai* in which practically every song lodges itself into your memory with their catchy, energetic rhythm.

Where *Yosuga* really comes into its own is when Kaneko's band gets in on the action. The four-piece band Kaneko has assembled on her way from playing acoustic sets to a few people in her hometown of Yokohama to main stage performances at some of Japan's biggest festivals have catalysed her development as an artist. I would urge anyone beginning to listen to Kaneko and her band for the first time to watch their performances at Ringo Festival, available on Youtube. The brash, punk-y performances are reminiscent of the best of British rock music, combined with a distinct Japanese musical flavour. These performances gripped me as a new fan, and will do so to any newcomer, I am sure. On the song 'Ranman' (爛漫, glorious) then, the penultimate from *Yosuga*, we have the blueprint for what makes a great Kaneko Ayano song, capturing that unique spirit. Principally, we have a stellar vocal performance, spirited guitar riffs and the band's backing vocals which have become synonymous with Kaneko's big hits over the past few years.

The final song, 'Tsuioku' (追憶, recollection) sadly ends the album with more of a whimper than a bang. It is short, sweet and melancholy as fitting with the album's theme, but is unlikely to go down as one of her greatest songs. What remains to be seen is what direction Kaneko Ayano will take this album. As has been made abundantly clear throughout this review, she is one of Japan's great contemporary musical innovators. With her previous albums, Kaneko has totally re-recorded every track and released *Hitorideni*, or acoustic albums which usually give the songs a whole other feel and sound. With her newest offering having a gentler sound, there is ample space to re-imagine *Yosuga*.

Overall, this may not be Kaneko's greatest album, but that is because that would be hard to do. If this review sounds at all overcritical or dismissive of *Yosuga*, it is only because she has set such consistently high standards through her music. The highs of this album are fantastic, and the 'lows' would be considered a lesser artist's best work. I implore anyone reading this review to take the time to really listen to everything Kaneko Ayano has released. From electric live performances to subtle, stripped back acoustic tracks she is an artist at the top of her craft; *Yosuga* is the latest in the discography of one of Japan's truly exceptional musical talents. §

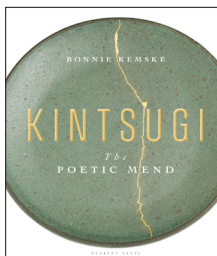
Kintsugi: The Poetic Mend

by Bonnie Kemske

Herbert Press (2021)

ISBN-13: 978-1912217991

Review by Eleonora Faina



Kintsugi: The Poetic Mend is a beautifully illustrated book where artist, Japanese tea ceremony student and author Bonnie Kemske guides us through the origins and techniques of kintsugi, a Japanese art form and repair method to restore broken objects using lacquer and gold. Born in Okinawa, raised in the US and currently living in England, Kemske gifts us with her second publication exploring kintsugi's history, its metaphorical power and her encounters with artists and ceramist both in Japan and in the West.

Its 175 pages' margins are connected by a golden line and it is immediately clear this book tells a story. The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese and Sasagawa Foundations sponsored the research trip Kemske took in 2019 to collect information and material for this book and I was lucky to be part of the homonymous webinar they hosted in late February 2021 which further ignited my interest in reviewing it.

The book is six chapters long, marked by their respective golden kanji: dives into kintsugi's origins, different types of kintsugi repair, its contemporary use and different interpretations of its metaphor which proved to be pivotal in its popularity abroad. Images understandably are dominant, yet the text is substantial, beautifully accompanying pictures of kintsugi repairs, step-by-step technique demonstrations, meetings with artists and shots of the Japanese landscape and its physical cracks.

Kintsugi literally means "to join with gold" and it is a mid-16th, 17th century Japanese repairing lacquer technique. It accentuates the gold seems between joined pieces. A notion probably not so popular in the West, mending is seen as inherently important in Japanese culture: affirming the scars, the imperfections can turn the broken piece into something even more beautiful than its original form. The original piece is not just repaired but is an entirely new, unique, stronger art element. It tells a story of the past whilst drawing attention to the now.

The technique of joining broken pieces with metal originated in China but its most articulated and artistic form is certainly Japanese. The first examples of kintsugi in Japan can be traced back to 1500 BC during the Jomon era where black lacquer extracted from toxic urushi trees started to be employed. With the

discovery of gold in 750 BC a fine powder was added on top of the lacquer, marking the advent of modern kintsugi.

The process is described as very time-consuming and requiring highly skilled artists to deliver the repaired piece in its enhanced beauty. Urushi trees only grow in East Asia; its secretions seasonally extracted are applied one layer at the time at specific temperatures, making its employment protract the repair for several months. It can be used with several materials like wood, lacquer, and glass but its best recognised form is pottery, specifically in *chanoyu* (tea ceremony).

It is really in the latter environment that kintsugi flourished as an aesthetic: *chanoyu* started to be considered as high art in the opulent Momoyama era (1573–1603) and its political and economic importance brought this *maki-e* (sprinkling gold powder on urushi) originated technique to be associated with status and prestige in the Japanese society. Tea utensils were used as a reward to reinforce loyalty within strict hierarchies. Japanese concepts like *wabi* (accepting irregularities translated as humbleness and simplicity in one's life), *mottainai* (do not waste, letting every object fulfil its function) and *mono no aware* (acceptance and appreciation of the impermanence of life) were pivotal in the establishment of kintsugi to this day.

Yet, Kemske reveals kintsugi constituted a "hidden art" in Japan; the artists, *kintsugi-shi*, have rarely been mentioned in the repairing documentation and this is mostly recognised as a "side-line job". Many *kintsugi-shi* back in the Tokugawa era were essentially *makie-shi* who employed their lacquers skills. Only recently kintsugi artists are embracing this as a proper profession in and out Japan although gold repairs are still offered by the majority of *makie-shi*.

Why, then, this Japanese art form got such a grip in Western societies in recent years, spurring artistic interpretations by Page Bradley, Ono Yoko, Paul Scott, Claudia Clare and endless publications of self-help books based on its concept? That is, according to the author, because of the power of a good metaphor: a visual one that also entails transformation. It is often referred to 'the art of resilience' in the West [1] or accepting imperfection and irregularities as part of something natural. In Japan honouring the fractures, the process towards renewal is more aesthetically powerful than a brand new, perfect, possibly mass-produced item.

Not surprisingly, the book points out kintsugi is deeply related to earthquakes as people in Japan are accustomed to living with over 150,000 earthquakes

per year. Its demand usually rises in their aftermath to remember lost ones or rebuild family tokens. Living with cracks and breaks is just natural and if anything, reinforces the precariousness and imperfection of the world we live in, stimulating a renewed appreciation for the beauty surrounding us.

I really enjoyed diving into this rich, weighty book. It is visually gorgeous, its selection of pictures exquisite and it taught me a great deal of kintsugi. I particularly appreciated the interviews and artists' personal stories such as Raku Kichizaemon XV's Nekowaride and the encounters with Suzuki Goro in Japan and John Domenico in the US. Each interpretation was different in style, size, concepts, and type of kintsugi used. Some of them broke items on purpose, some decided to turn into art a particularly unlucky pottery batch, others had their wives mending items of great sentimental value. Those are stories of redemption translating as lengthy, emotional projects.

Kemske's description of her time in Japan were quite vivid too: in her narration of surroundings and encounters with the artists she manages to reproduce a specific sense of tranquillity, measured movements and Shintoist reverence towards the environment (houses, trees, ceramics, and quality of light). Japanese literature connoisseurs and those who have experienced the country first-hand will be able to really visualise her description and appreciate how authentic they feel.

The author also refers several times throughout her book to Westerners spreading incorrect info and using kintsugi "promiscuously". Yet she recognises the beauty of kintsugi becoming more mainstream, largely more accessible, relevant, and exposed to audiences in different parts of the world. Timothy Toomey - UK coordinator of the Kintsugi Project and working at the Embassy of Japan in the UK - said in 2014 the aim of the project 'is to stimulate an interest in kintsugi in the West, leading to a commercial interest which will help revive a craft in Japan that time and a changing way of life have caused to be in danger of disappearing'.[2]

The last chapter, dedicated to kintsugi's symbolism opens with remarks of re-invention and renewal especially in the current pandemic' climate. It could be argued living throughout a pandemic has been a shared metaphorically seismic experience that

has reminded us of human frailty, the importance of reinventing ourselves and cherish what we have. It has triggered emotional and physical scars in each of us and the significance of kintsugi could be more relevant than ever nowadays. It encapsulates the renewed creativity, resilience, and innovation many of us had to turn to as a coping mechanism, transcending its purest art form. It also transcends the individual experience: companies like Forbes recognized it and NKD pointed out 'through the hardships we all weathered, the organisations who have been successful 'instead of yearning for the old days have filled the gap created by the pandemic with something better',[3] reinventing themselves.

The book is a testament of a narrative of loss and recovery, breakage and restoration, tragedy and ability to overcome it in respectful acceptance of loss and hardships. In her very last pages Kemske introduces the only ceramic bowl she ever made during a chanoyu class in Japan, over 30 years ago. The bowl broke shortly after, its remains kept away by an old friend of hers. Recently kintsugi repaired and delivered in conjunction with this publication, the bowl represents something much more meaningful that it would show at a first glance. It brings closure, it enriches loss and celebrates the past, encapsulating kintsugi's metaphor perfectly.

As the drive to repair is universal so it is the drive towards catharsis: 'a scar does not form on the dying. A scar means I survived'[4]. The gaps filled with gold represents the acceptance we need to exercise towards things not looking nor feeling like they used to. Learn how to heal our wounds and unapologetically reverence them might represents today's ultimate art form.

Notes

[1] Serge Maillard, "'Kintsugi' or the art of resilience", *Europa Star*, Editorial, May (2020).

[2] Quoted in Tony McNicol, 'What is kintsugi?', *WedoJapan*, 15 May (2014).

[3] Laura C, 'Coming out the other side of the coronavirus pandemic – not just stronger, but different', *NDK* (2021).

[4] Quoted in Kemske from Chris Cleave, *The Other Hand* (2008). §

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