

LIVING ON INSECTS

~THE APPROACH OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY~

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Insects are an important natural resource, both for self-sufficiency and as commercial food products in many parts of the world. They also reflect regional preferences and socio-cultural significance, which can be described in terms of regional differences. Insects used for food are regarded as cultural resources reflecting a rich bio-diversity. They are a source of alternative resources in remote or mountainous areas. However, increases in demand could lead to competition and over-exploitation, resulting in the future decline of these resources. In areas affected by over-development, insect habitats are also likely to decline. It is necessary to raise people's awareness of the importance of the use of insects for food in order to ensure that they are used in a sustainable manner, and to promote their proper use and conservation.

Cultural geography can clarify the inter-relationship of practices and its regional characteristics in terms of its socio-cultural and environmental aspects. This study focuses on systems of traditional practices as the socio-cultural implications of people's preferences. Case studies presented in these posters such as the selling of insects on markets in Lao PDR, the cooking of insects among the San in the Kalahari Desert in Botswana, and the continuation of the traditional practice of insect-eating in Japan's mountainous regions, describe the uniqueness or special characteristics of the custom, and the reason for its existence in the social sphere.



Study Area



DELIGHTFUL GIFTS FROM THE WILD ~EDIBLE INSECTS IN THE MARKET LAO PDR~

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Insects represent one of the most important natural resources in Lao PDR. Large numbers of many species of insects are used as food. They are cooked in various ways and served as side dishes eaten with sticky rice. Activities associated with collecting insects, and their habitats, are related to subsistence farming, which mainly consists of rice cultivation in the rural areas, where land use patterns are a combination of paddy fields and surrounding forests. Marketing of edible insects has increased since the 1990s, along with urban development and the introduction of a cash economy into rural areas. Many people, including children, have become involved in the collecting of insects as resources to provide cash income. Insects are regarded as both bio-resources and cultural resources, reflecting a rich biodiversity. If more people become engaged in collecting insects, however, this could lead to competition for this resource and overexploitation. Insect forest habitats will decline as further urban development takes place in the Vientiane Plain. Management strategies need to be designed to assure that wild insect populations are sustainable and can continue to contribute to human nutrition in the future.



Insects sold at the market



Insects are carried daily by the middle women from neighboring villages. They still alive but never fly away

Cooked insects are also common.

Insect cuisines



Aquatic insect soup

Roasted bug

Simmered pumpkin with weaver ants

Deep-fried cicada

At home paste (chew) is favorite dishes. Insects, vegetables and herbs are mixed together.

Collecting insects



Locust collecting by net

Cricket collecting by digging holes in the soil

Weaver ant collecting by basket

KALAHARI *Dessert*

~EDIBLE INSECTS AND COOKING AMONG THE SAN~

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The San living in the Central Kalahari desert in Botswana, who is known as the last hunter-gatherer uses many of the natural resources in their environment for food. Insects are one of them. Among them several species of caterpillar, termite, and grasshopper, were collected easily and were potentially an important dietary resource under the good conditions in certain seasons or situations. They have established the habit of using caterpillars for food. Caterpillars are resources that can be accessed easily without effort. They are associated with subsistence activities and daily life - hunting and gathering. They take out the intestines from the body and only the abdomen is eaten after roasting in the hot ash. This is a common way applied for the caterpillar. Even small caterpillars such as noctuid moth are expected for taking out them. As they are too small to treat one by one in the same way, women grasp the caterpillars and squeezed by hands.



The contribution of insects to the diet as a food resource, however, was seasonally limited in rainy seasons with noted annual fluctuation. They also collected and ate some species of insects even though they were always available in small quantities. They mentioned that these insects were tasty, and used as spices to add flavor to other foods. These facts show that edible insects are utilized for food because of their quality. They make good use of edible insects, increasing the variety and repertory of their diet. As a result, it is concluded that edible insects in general, in spite of their scarcity, provide these peoples' diets with more spice than substance.

Insect collecting



Insects are collected by hands.

Insect cooking



The intestines are removed off before cooking

Stamping insects with other food materials are common among the San.

Insect food



Sweet, sour and fatty - Wild berries with jewel beetles

Ant Salad Dressing - Wild vegetables with formicine ants

LOVING YELLOW-JACKET

~SOCIO AND CULTURAL MEANINGS OF INSECT EATING IN JAPAN~

Kenichi Nonaka (Rikkyo University) and Nozomi Yanahara (Manga-Artist)



Wasps, in particular yellow jacket (*Vespula spp.*) are regarded as very tasty and relished. Besides collecting wild wasps, people bring a small nest back home to put it in a box in the garden and carefully rear the larvae. Moreover, some people even mate the next-generation queen wasp to breed them in their own house. This fact is important to show the regional reproduction and semi-domestication from the bio-geographical view with human activities.

Their enthusiasm provides the basis on which their relations with the wasp are sustained. It is well expressed by the words of an old man who cherish wasps. He said, "To me, the queen wasp is like my lover" standing his little finger.

The social context of the habit is also important to understand the succession of the traditional habit as well. Among his family members, however, there are differences in the way of treating wasps. What is important in integrating sociological aspects to give comprehensive consideration to humans and the environment is to understand subtle differences in the interest in and treatment of wasps even among the community members according to age and sex.

We describe the above habit by visualization of values for the yellow jacket and social relations consisted of the habit.

This picture shows typical rural dining in Japan. We sit and have meal sitting on the tatami floor at the low table. This is normal scene of family enjoying the dinner if there is no yellow jacket sitting with them. Looking out of the window, Landscape stretching unique mountain shape and planted trees is seen. This view introduces the area is located in mountainous Central Japan. Then turning your eyes to persons, Grandpa who keeps wasps seems happy with smiling face. Grandpa cares about wasps more than his wife and family with his back toward them.

A queen wasp sitting at the table is eating sumptuous food such as wine and meat than humans. This is not realistic, however this symbolizes their value, as wasps are given fresh meat and fishes and special wine with honey everyday in order to lay as many eggs and rear larvae as possible.

On the contrary, other family members have less interest in wasps. The expression of the faces is different from grandpa's. But, they eat dishes including wasps such as mixed rice or rice cake with wasps as their ingredients. Grandpa drinks a wine in which wasps are soaked. These foods indicate the eating wasp is the cultural habit in this area through generations.

Other items drawn in this picture such as a cap of a society of wasp lovers hanging on and the calendar bearing a picture of wasps copulating indicate eagerness of wasp.



You can get more information in this book.