

Gummi Candy as a Realistic Representation of a Rhinoceros Beetle Larva

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In the study of insects in human dietary culture, many scholars and entomologists have focused on entomophagy for human survival in traditional societies from the viewpoint of ethnoentomology (e.g., Posey 1986, Defoliart 1999, Nonaka 2005, Meyer-Rochow et al. 2008). However, a new field of study named cultural entomology (in a narrow sense), which examines the influence of insects on cultural phenomena for the nourishment of the mind and soul in human societies (Hogue 1980, Hogue 1987, Takada 2013a), has made us aware of the use of insect imagery in food. Based on this perspective, a few Japanese cultural entomologists have investigated insect-shaped foods (such as candies, buns, and other easily molded confections) in Japanese society. For example, Miyanoshita (2008) discussed chocolates made in the form of rhinoceros beetle larvae as a design that is simultaneously cute and disgusting. Takada (2013b) examined a ladybug-shaped chocolate found on a citron mousse cake bought from a bakery and suggested that the ladybug was used due to its appealing form and its association with luck. Miyanoshita (2014) analyzed insect-shaped buns and concluded that the use of an insect design reflects an appreciation of the changing seasons of the year. However, more studies on the use of insect designs in food are needed, because the investigation of why insects are used as a design for food despite the marked bias against



Fig. 1. *Naizo-kun*, the gummi candy in the shape of a rhinoceros beetle larva, produced by Coffee Akaitento in Aomori Prefecture, Japan.

eating insects in Western and Westernized countries (Defoliart 1999), including Japan, has just begun, and the matter is not yet sufficiently understood.

In this short report, I document *Naizo-kun*, a gummi candy in the shape of a rhinoceros beetle larva. This gummi candy, which has become popular with the Japanese general public, is produced by a coffee shop named Coffee Akaitento in Aomori Prefecture, Japan, and it sells for ¥350. It is clearly different from other insect-shaped foods in that its representation of an insect is more realistic and impressive. The body is made of white gummi candy flavored like Calpis water (a non-carbonated soft drink with a milky, yogurt-like taste), with brown chocolate forming the face and spotted pattern on the body. The black internal organs are

made of blueberry jam, and are visible through the translucent body at the terminal part of the abdomen. In fact, the name *Naizo-kun* means “Mr. Internal Organs,” highlighting the unique appeal of their representation in this gummi larva. This level of realism has a strong visual impact on most people, who are surprised or startled at the sight of the gummi candy because of the marked cultural bias against eating insects (Defoliart 1999) and general aversion toward insects except for a few taxonomic groups (Kellert 1993, Kawakami and Ohtaki 1994) in Western and Westernized countries, including Japan. This gummi candy’s design utilizes the shock value of insects, providing a visual means of revealing negative attitudes (Coelho 2004), and the juxtaposition of food with a realistic insect form excites people’s curiosity and elicits surprise. The gummi candy might be accepted by part of the Japanese general public because of a concept among the younger generation known as *kimo-kawaii*, which is a compound word that consists of *kimoi* (disgusting) and *kawaii* (cute), as suggested by Miyanoshita (2008). This has received attention from the general public because of the high popularity of dynastine beetles in Japan, as mentioned by Takada (2010, 2012) and Hoshina and Takada (2012). It should be noted that actual rhinoceros beetle larvae are not edible due to their very bad flavor, which is strongly suggestive of humus (Uchiyama 2007).

Studies on the use of insect designs for food will contribute to understanding the general public's perspective on insects. In particular, such studies might be useful to understand why eating insects is disliked by many people in Western culture and to consider ways to encourage the general public to accept insects as an excellent source of nutrition. Recently, insects have been highlighted as a food resource that has the potential to resolve food problems or crises; thus, we need to solve issues such as the marked cultural bias against entomophagy.

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