

Commentary on the “Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo (*Kabuto Tokyo* in Japanese)”, a Movie Exploring the Mystery of the Japanese Fascination with Insects, from the Aspect of Cultural Entomology

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Abstract This is a review of “Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo (*Kabuto Tokyo* in Japanese)”, a movie exploring the mystery of the Japanese fascination with insects, such as dynastine and stag beetles, from the aspect of cultural entomology. Indeed, this movie well portrayed the current state, history and background of Japanese culture associated with insects, such as the deep fascination of current Japanese with dynastine and stag beetles, and touched on points to explain the Japanese love affair with insects in conjunction with Japanese philosophy called “Mono no Aware”, which characterizes beauty as the transience of all things. However, the Japanese appreciation of insects and nature as explained by this movie seems to be inconsistent with current evidence of the widespread Japanese abuse of the environment, as well as their apparent indifference toward sound resource conservation and management practice, indicating that further explanation of the Japanese value and perception of insects is needed. This paradox can be partly explained by the finding that Japanese appreciation of nature and insects is very narrow and idealized, primarily focusing on particular species and lacking an ethical and ecological perspective.

Key words: cultural entomology, Japanese culture, appreciation for insects, Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo

The field of cultural entomology examines the influence of insects on human societies (HOGUE, 1987; MITSUHASHI, 2000; TAKADA, 2010 a). In the field of cultural entomology, Japan has been frequently spotlighted because insects have assumed a position of special cultural significance in Japanese culture (e.g. HOGUE, 1987; DUNN, 2000; TAKADA, 2010 a). In particular, some kinds of insects, such as dragonflies, singing insects and fireflies, have an important role in Japanese culture and history.

In recent Japan, dynastine and stag beetles have strongly fascinated the general public, with the result that they are popular as pets and thus have a large market (LAURENT, 2001; GULLAN & CRANSTON, 2004; TAKADA, 2010 a, b, c). In addition, they have been frequently used in such Japanese popular cultural media as movies, animations, cartoons, computer games and music (TAKADA, 2010 b, c; HOSHINA *et al.*, 2010). These practices are uncommon for people in other countries such as the USA and Europe, and thus they wonder at such attitudes towards insect of Japan (ORECK, 2011). However, it has always been a mystery why many Japanese people are strongly fascinated by insects such as dynastine and stag beetles, although some cultural entomologists have mentioned the Japanese special appreciation of insects.

Indeed, such practices in Japan have been spotlighted by an American naturalist, Jessica ORECK, who is an animal keeper and docent at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. She is strongly interested in and fascinated with the Japanese appreciation of insects, and as a result produced a documentary movie “Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo (*Kabuto Tokyo* in Japanese)” (ORECK, 2011) for the purpose of disseminating Japanese practices to the general public. This movie untangles

the web of cultural and historical ties underlying Japanese deep fascination with insects.

This movie explores the mystery of the Japanese love affair with insects and explains Japanese values and perceptions of insects associated with the essential concept of being Japanese. This movie portrays the current state of Japanese culture associated with insects as the strong fascination of Japanese with dynastine and stag beetles, as be mentioned above, and also introduces the history and background of Japanese culture as the symbolism of some kinds such as dragonflies and fireflies related to the old beliefs about nature in Japan, the origin of Japanese insects keeping being traced back to rearing singing insects and the expression of insects as a poetic seasonal event in traditional Japanese poetry, haiku. Based on the current state, history and background of Japanese culture, this movie explained that Japanese have a highly developed tradition of special appreciation of insects and Japanese people see aesthetic value in the transience of insects. In addition, this movie mentioned that this is related to the Japanese fundamental and essential concept of being Japanese called “Mono no Aware”, which characterizes beauty as the transience of all things and defines true beauty as being found in what does not last and includes the gentle sadness felt as it fades. This series of findings touches on points to explain the Japanese love affair with insects. The Japanese often distill and represent a single spontaneous moment of transient things of nature, such as insect life and flowering plants with cultural media such as haiku and photograph. In particular, haiku often praises insect, rejoicing in the minuscule as a definite feature of a particular time and space for insects (DUNN, 2000; YUMA, 2004).

However, the Japanese appreciation of insects and nature as explained by this movie seems to be inconsistent with current evidence of widespread Japanese abuse of the environment, as well as their apparent indifference toward sound resource conservation and management practice (KELLERT, 1991), indicating that further explanation of Japanese values and perceptions of insects is needed.

This paradox can be partly explained by the finding that Japanese appreciation for nature and insects is very narrow and idealized, primarily focusing on particular species and lacking an ethical and ecological perspective, as mentioned by some authors (e.g. KELLERT, 1991; TAKADA, 2011). For example, the extraordinarily biased attention of the Japanese to a small number of taxonomic groups, such as fireflies and dynastines of the coleopterans, has been revealed, due to their apparent and attractive characteristics, and their ignorance of a large number of other coleopteran groups (TAKADA, 2010 a, b), suggesting the indifference of Japanese to a wide range of environments. In addition, the unplanned introduction of a particular lampyrid species (Genji-fireflies, *Luciola cruciata* MOTSCHULSKY), which is very popular due to its conspicuous bioluminescence, has been conducted with little ecological and ethical perspective in Kanto region (OHBA, 2009), causing genetic disturbance of local populations. Although the Japanese recently become interested in the conservation of diverse insects and nature to a slight degree, the Japanese may need to acquire taxonomical, ethical and ecological perspectives through environmental education to become true insect lovers and to follow sound resource conservation and management practices for Japanese nature.

Finally I thanks to Dr. Viktor FURSOV (National Academy of Sciences in Ukraine) and anonymous referees for their kind helves and valuable comments.

要 約

高田兼太：映画「Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo (邦題:カブト東京)」の文化昆虫学的論評。——本報告文は、日本人が何故カブトムシやクワガタムシが好きなのかという謎を解明するドキュメンタリー映画「Beetle

Queen Conquers Tokyo (邦題：カブト東京)」の文化昆虫学的な観点からのレビューである。この映画では、実に日本人のカブトムシやクワガタムシ愛好をはじめとした日本における昆虫愛好文化の現状のみならず、歴史、背景がよく描かれており、特に日本人の昆虫好きの説明として、もののはかなさに美を感じるものが特徴的である「もののはなれ」という日本人の哲学と関連づけている点は的を射ているように思われた。しかしながら、これらの映画が説明するような日本人の昆虫に対する態度は、日本において自然破壊がおこなわれている現状や日本人が環境保全や維持管理に対して無関心であることと矛盾しているように思われ、よって日本人の昆虫や自然に対する価値観や認識について新たな説明が必要であると考えられる。この矛盾は、日本人がごく一部の特定の種のみ注目しがちであり、生物や自然に対する倫理的価値観や生態的価値観が不足しているという見解によって部分的に説明可能であろう。

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Manuscript received 13 September 2011;
revised and accepted 19 December 2011.