

HOW ARE YOUNG PEOPLE MOVED
BY LITERATURE? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
ON JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ELICITING
FACTORS OF AND RESPONSES
TO BEING MOVED BY LITERARY WORKS

Nonaka S., Zhao D.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-425-2-39>

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been growing interest in empirical literary research based on various experimental approaches. Research teams, notably led by Don Kuiken and David Miall at the University of Alberta in Canada, have made significant progress in empirical studies related to the act of reading literary works or reception¹. Furthermore, Fialho² (2019) suggests that after exposing participants to several literary works in settings such as schools or companies, there can be effects concerning self-transformation, deepened self-understanding, and an enhanced comprehension of the world.

In this paper, building upon these global research trends, we aim to conduct empirical research on the reception of literary works through interdisciplinary studies between literary research and psychology. Specifically, we will focus on the phenomenon of the emotional state of being moved.

Being moved in Japanese is called "kandoh", generally defined as "feeling deeply and profoundly touching the heart"³ or "experiencing a sense of touching the human ideal when witnessing or hearing beautiful actions, stories, or artistic creations, resulting in a feeling of fulfillment"⁴.

¹ Miall, D. (2006). *Literary Reading: Empirical & Theoretical Studies*. Peter Lang.

Kuiken, D., Miall, D., & Sikora, S. (2004). Forms of self-implication in literary reading. *Poetics Today*, 25(2), 171–203.

² Fialho, O. (2019). What is literature for? The role of transformative reading. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 6, 1–16.

³ Shinmura, I. (ed.) (2008). *Kojien Japanese Dictionary*. 6th edition. Iwanami Publ.

⁴ Kindaichi, K. et al. (eds.) (1991). *Shinmeikai Japanese Dictionary*, 4th edition, Sanseido Publ.

In psychology, being moved is considered a form of attachment-related emotion and is associated with fundamental human motivations such as belonging to a group and forming connections with others⁵. It is believed that being moved has played a crucial role in the evolutionary process of humanity while being moved is deeply connected to the world of art and is regarded as one of the three major elements of aesthetics, alongside aesthetic awe and thrills/chills (the aesthetic trinity)⁶. The emotional experience of art is closely related to the concept of the sublime and leaves a lasting impression in human memory as a peak life experience⁷. In the context of literature as a linguistic art form, being moved has the power to stir the reader's heart, leave a deep imprint in their memory, and potentially contribute to the formation of their life's path. From these perspectives, the study of being moved in the reception of literature holds both academic and societal significance.

However, empirical research on being moved in the reception of literature is still relatively limited at this point. There have been some studies from the perspective of psychology. For instance, Djikic et al.⁸ conducted experiments that demonstrated how being moved by novels could change the personalities of university students. Wassiliwizky and Menninghaus⁹ (2022) carried out empirical research on the relationship between being moved by poetry and its expressive techniques.

Furthermore, concerning the differences between being moved through art and being moved by real-life events, Menninghaus et al.¹⁰ (2015) compared being moved in art, real life, and media reporting. They pointed out that in the case of being moved through art, sadness is stronger compared to being moved in real life or through media reporting. In connection with

⁵ Koelsch, S., Jacobs, A., Menninghaus, W., Liebal, K., Klann-Delius, G., von Scheve, C., & Gebauer, C. (2015). The quartet theory of human emotions: An integrative and neurofunctional model. *Physics of Life Reviews*, 13, 1–27.

⁶ Konečni, V. J. (2005). The aesthetic trinity: Awe, being moved, thrills. *Bulletin of Psychology and the Arts*, 5, 27–44.

Konečni V. J. (2011). Aesthetic trinity theory and the sublime. *Philosophy Today*, 55, 64–73.

⁷ Gabrielsson, A. (2001). Emotions in strong experiences with music. In P. N. Juslin & J. A. Sloboda (eds.), *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, pp. 431–452. Oxford University Press.

⁸ Djikic, M., Oatley, K., Zoeterman, S., & Peterson, B. (2009). On being moved by art: How reading fiction transforms the self. *Creativity Research Journal*, 21(1), 24–29.

⁹ Wassiliwizky, E., & Menninghaus, W. (2022). The Power of Poetry. In A. Chatterjee & E. R. Cardillo (eds.), *Brain, Beauty, and Art: Essays Bringing Neurasthenics into Focus* (pp. 182–187). Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Kuehnast, M., & Jacobsen, T. (2015). Towards a psychological construct of being moved. *PLOS One*, 10, 1–33.

this, Menninghaus, Wagner, Hanich et al.¹¹ (2017) proposed the Distancing-Embracing model, which explains the relationship between art reception and negative elements. According to this model, there are two psychological mechanisms at play in the recipients (readers, viewers) of artworks: "distancing" and "embracing" negative elements. The first mechanism, distancing, involves the awareness that the artwork is not real life, and as a result, recipients know they can choose whether to continue reading or viewing the work while feeling a sense of personal safety. Through this mechanism, recipients gain a sense of comfort and control, which leads to the second mechanism of positively embracing the negative elements of the work. Recipients can actively embrace the negative elements (events or emotions) of the work, allowing them to be moved by it. This model explains the paradox of why we seek pleasure in art while appreciating negative elements within it¹².

Based on these research findings, our goal is to combine methods from literary research and psychology to conduct the following research on the phenomenon of being moved by literature. Specifically, we aim to explore: (1) What reactions occur in readers when they are moved by literature? (2) What factors evoke being moved in readers? (3) How does being moved by literature differ from being moved by real-life events? In this paper we report a piece of research on the above issues by targeting Japanese university students.

1. Empirical approaches to literary Research with a Focus on Being Moved

1.1. Reader's responses and factors eliciting being moved by literature

When considering the reader's responses when being moved by literary works, reference can be made to previous studies on being moved. Previous research generally considers emotions during moving experiences as fundamentally positive¹³. However, it is noted that a mix of various positive emotions (such as joy) and negative emotions (such as sadness) can be present within this emotional response¹⁴. Additionally, emotions can also be

¹¹ Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Jacobsen, T., & Koelsch, S. (2017). The Distancing-Embracing model of the enjoyment of negative emotions in art reception. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 40, 1–63.

¹² Hume, D. (1757). Of tragedy. In: D. Hume, *Four Dissertations*, pp. 185–200. Millar.

¹³ Seibt, B., Schubert, T. W., Zickfeld, J. H., Zhu, L., Arriaga, P., Simão, C., & Fiske, A. P. (2018). Kama muta: Similar emotional responses to touching videos across the United States, Norway, China, Israel, and Portugal. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 39, 55–74.

¹⁴ Kuehnast, M., Wagner, V., Wassiliwizky, E., Jacobsen, T., Menninghaus, W. (2014). Being moved: Linguistic representation and conceptual structure. *Frontiers Psychology*, 5, 1242.

seen as a form of moral sentiment¹⁵. Physiological responses such as shedding tears¹⁶, experiencing goosebumps¹⁷, feeling warmth in the chest and a racing heart, or having a choked throat¹⁸ have been identified. However, these insights are derived from various moving experiences, including real-life events and art, and we would like to investigate what kinds of responses can be observed specifically in the context of literature.

Regarding the factors eliciting being moved by literature, it is necessary to consider both sides, the work itself and the reader. On the side of the work, two crucial aspects are the content (theme) and expression (technique) of the work. Particularly with regard to the content (theme), it should be considered how it relates to being moved in real life. Previous research on being moved in real life has reported events related to human relationships like parental love or friendship, life events such as birth, death, and separation, and achievements¹⁹. These events are characterized as those in which individuals deeply relate to or empathize with²⁰, events that align with social norms, moral values, and self-ideals²¹, and events beyond an individual's personal control²². We would like to explore the similarities and differences between being moved by literature and by real-life events.

Regarding the expressive (technique) elements of being moved by literature, it is possible to examine them while relying on literary theories.

¹⁵ Landmann, H., Cova, F., & Hess, U. (2019). Being moved by meaningfulness: Appraisals of surpassing internal standards elicit being moved by relationships and achievements, *Cognition and Emotion*, 33, 1387–1409.

¹⁶ Scherer, K.R., Zentner, M.R., & Schacht, A. (2002). Emotional states generated by music: An exploratory study of music experts. *Musicae Scientiae*, 5, 149–71.

¹⁷ Benedek, M., Kaernbach, C. (2011). Physiological correlates and emotional specificity of human piloerection. *Biological Psychology*, 86, 320–329.

¹⁸ Cova, F., & Deonna, J. (2014). Being moved. *Philosophical Studies*, 169, 447–466.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Landmann, H., Cova, F., & Hess, U. (2019). Being moved by meaningfulness: Appraisals of surpassing internal standards elicit being moved by relationships and achievements, *Cognition and Emotion*, 33, 1387–1409.

Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Kuehnast, M., & Jacobsen, T. (2015). Towards a psychological construct of being moved. *PLOS One*, 10, 1–33.

²⁰ Tokaji, A. (2010). Being moved and the transformation of psychology [in Japanese]. In H. Kaihō & N. Matsubara (eds.), *Scientific Encyclopedia of Emotions and Thinking* (pp. 290–291). Asakura Publ.

²¹ Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Kuehnast, M., & Jacobsen, T. (2015). Towards a psychological construct of being moved. *PLOS One*, 10, 1–33.

²² Kato, J., Murata, K. (2013). The influence of finite manifestation and social value orientation on emotion accompanied by sadness [in Japanese]. *Shinrigaku-Kenkyu (Psychological Research)*, 84, 138–145.

Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Kuehnast, M., & Jacobsen, T. (2015). Towards a psychological construct of being moved. *PLOS One*, 10, 1–33.

Tan, E. S. H. (2009). Being moved. In D. Sander & K. R. Scherer (eds.), *Oxford Companion to Emotion and the Affective Sciences, Series in Affective Science* (p. 74). Oxford University Press.

Considering the significance of an empirical approach in literary research, it is also important to re-evaluate the literary theories accumulated in the 20th century. While it is true that, as Miall²³ (2006) criticized, 20th-century literary research was generally theory-focused, important concepts concerning to the expression and technique of literary works have been generated during that time. Notably, the concepts of "defamiliarization" from Russian Formalism²⁴ and "dialogue" from Mikhail Bakhtin²⁵ are of important relevance. These concepts are believed to be valuable in constructing models of the relationship between literary works and readers²⁶.

"Defamiliarization" literally means "making strange". It is an artistic principle that represents familiar objects in everyday life from different perspectives or in different ways, leading to a sense of "freshness" or "discomfort". In this study we expect these two meanings to emerge from the answers to the survey questions. On the other hand, "dialogue" emphasizes the multiplicity of human subjectivity, highlighting a relationship in which multiple values or "voices" continue to engage in an ongoing dialogue without converging into a single voice. The general expression that corresponds to this concept can be "the clash of multiple values", which we expect to emerge from the answers to the survey questions.

In addition, research findings on metaphors, especially the complementarity of metaphor and metonymy²⁷ in linguistic expression, are also important. Empirical research in psychology has shown that poetic techniques such as rhyme, alliteration, and meter make poetry more moving²⁸.

In this study we will investigate whether the above-mentioned literary theories help explain the nature of being moved by literature. Additionally, we also examine reader-related factors including age, gender, reading habits while our study particularly focused on reading habits.

²³ Miall, D. (2006). *Literary Reading: Empirical & Theoretical Studies*. Peter Lang.

²⁴ Shklovsky, V. (1990). *Theory of Prose*. Translated by B. Sher. Dalkey Archive Press.

²⁵ Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by M. Holquist. Translated by C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

²⁶ Miall, D., & Kuiken, D. (1994). Foregrounding, defamiliarization, and affect: Response to literary stories. *Poetics*, 22, 389–407.

²⁷ Jakobson, R. (1990). *On Language*. L. R. Waugh & M. Monville-Burston (Ed.), Harvard University Press.

²⁸ Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Wassiliwizky, E., Jacobsen, T., & Knoop, C. (2017). The emotional and aesthetic powers of parallelistic diction. *Poetics*, 63, 47–59.

1.2. Research Objectives

Based on the discussions above, the research objectives of this study are as follows:

Objective 1: To determine responses which readers (Japanese university students) show when they get moved by literature.

Objective 2: To identify major eliciting factors by which readers (Japanese university students) get moved reading literature.

2. Methods

2.1. Procedures and Participants

From June to July 2022, we conducted a survey on the reading habits of university students at a national university in Japan. This survey was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Review Committee at Saitama University (Approval number R4-E-3).

The survey was carried out by having students complete worksheets in introductory literature courses for first and second-year students, and in literature theory courses for third-year students up to second-year master course students. Prior to participation, the researchers explained the research overview, objectives, estimated time required, and assured participants that there would be no disadvantages if they chose not to participate. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before they filled out the worksheets.

Responses were obtained from 34 participants, and all 34 responses were valid. The breakdown of participants included 12 male, 21 female, and 1 participant with undisclosed gender. The average age of participants was 19.2 years, with a standard deviation of 1.50.

2.2. Worksheet composition

The worksheet was structured as follows:

Basic information of the relevant work: Participants were asked to provide the title, author, and the time and place where they read the literary work that deeply moved them.

Responses when moved and subsequent re-reading frequency: Participants were asked about their physiological responses when they were moved and the duration. They were also asked how many times they reread the work after being moved.

Eliciting factors (work-related): Participants were asked to provide free-text responses regarding why they were moved by the work, as well as the specific content that moved them. Additionally, they were asked about the expressions used in the parts of the work that evoked being moved, through both free-text responses and multiple-choice questions.

Eliciting factors (reader-related): Participants were asked about their age, gender, and reading habits. Regarding reading habits, they were asked about their daily reading frequency and favorite genres during elementary school, middle school, high school, and at the present time.

3. Results and discussion

The survey results will be presented and discussed in three sections: "3.1 Basic Information of the Relevant Work", "3.2 Responses When Moved and Subsequent Re-reading Frequency", and "3.3 Eliciting Factors".

The content of free-text responses was categorized through consensus between Author 1 and Author 2. Subsequently, a graduate student independently reviewed the categorization, and in cases of discrepancies, Author 2 and the graduate student re-evaluated the classification to finalize the categorization.

3.1. Basic information of the relevant works

The literary works that respondents were deeply moved by numbered a total of 31. Excluding three works (one of which was mentioned by an international student), all were written by Japanese authors. Among the mentioned Japanese authors, only two (Motojiro Kajii and Kenji Miyazawa) belong to generations before World War II. While most of the mentioned works are the novels, there were also a few children's literature, fairy tale-like works, and collections of tanka (a traditional genre of Japanese poetry). Overall, the literary interests of respondents are predominantly focused on Japanese literature, particularly contemporary Japanese literature, which suggests that their literary knowledge and interests are somewhat limited.

Most respondents (35.3%) reported that they read the works during high school, followed by middle school and university (each at 23.5%), with elementary school accounting for 17.6%. In other words, over 80% read these works during their adolescence. This aligns with Erikson's developmental stage theory²⁹ (Erikson, 1959), which suggests that the primary task from ages 12 to 20 is the formation of an individual's identity. Failing to accomplish this task can lead to a state of "identity diffusion", making it difficult to thrive in society. The period from middle school to the first and second years of university falls within this developmental stage, during which students often grapple with and explore how to establish their own sense of "self".

As for the locations where respondents read the works, the majority read them at home (85.3%), followed by school (11.8%). It seems necessary to have a comfortable environment such as one's own home to be moved by literature.

²⁹ Erikson, E. H. (1959). *Identity and life cycle: Selected papers. Psychological Issues, 1*, 1–171.

3.2. Responses when being moved and subsequent re-reading frequency

When asked about the physical reactions that occurred when they were moved by literary works (multiple answers were allowed), the most common responses were a warmth in the chest (35.3%) and a lump in the throat (35.3%). Following closely were tears (29.4%) and a "gentle warmth" (29.4%). These findings are consistent with previous research³⁰. On the other hand, some respondents mentioned restlessness of the heart (2.9%), insomnia (2.9%), and sighs (2.9%). These results are novel in this study and suggest that literary emotions can tolerate more negative elements than real-life emotions. This aligns with the findings of Menninghaus et al.³¹ (2015) and Menninghaus et al.³² (2017) mentioned in Introduction.

Regarding the duration of being moved, the majority of respondents (38.2%) reported that they lasted from one day to several days, followed by one hour to several hours (32.4%), and only during the reading (20.6%). However, some respondents mentioned longer durations, for over one month (5%). Overall, being moved by literature tends to last longer compared to that by real-life events³³ (Zhao, 2023).

When asked how many times they revisited the work after being moved, the most common response is two to three times (52.9%), followed by zero (26.5%). However, a notable portion of respondents mentioned revisiting the work every few years (20.6%).

3.3. Eliciting Factors

When analyzing the factors eliciting being moved, we first discuss the overall characteristics of the works mentioned by the respondents in section 3.3.1. Subsequently, in sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3, we will focus on the specific aspects that particularly moved the respondents, delving into the factors

³⁰ Scherer, K.R., Zentner, M.R., & Schacht, A. (2002). Emotional states generated by music: An exploratory study of music experts. *Musicae Scientiae*, 5, 149–71.

Benedek, M., Kaernbach, C. (2011). Physiological correlates and emotional specificity of human piloerection. *Biological Psychology*, 86, 320–329.

Cova, F., & Deonna, J. (2014). Being moved. *Philosophical Studies*, 169, 447–466.

³¹ Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Kuehnast, M., & Jacobsen, T. (2015). Towards a psychological construct of being moved. *PLOS One*, 10, 1–33.

³² Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Wassiliwizky, E., Jacobsen, T., & Knop, C. (2017). The emotional and aesthetic powers of parallelistic diction. *Poetics*, 63, 47–59.

Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Jacobsen, T., & Koelsch, S. (2017). The Distancing-Embracing model of the enjoyment of negative emotions in art reception. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 40, 1–63.

³³ Zhao, D. (2023). When people are moved, their Experience transcends their culture: Examining own-life experiences of being moved among Japanese, Chinese, and Germans. *Saitama University Review (Faculty of Liberal Arts)*, 58(1), 57–77.

on the side of the works. Finally, in section 3.3.4, we will examine the factors on the reader's side that contributed to being moved in their reading habits.

3.3.1. Overall characteristics of the Works

The free-text responses about the reasons for being moved were categorized into four categories: "Theme and content", "Expression and technique", "Alignment with one's circumstances and expectations", and "Misc."

Table 1

Reasons for Being Moved by the work

Category	Subcategory	<i>N</i>	%
Theme and contents	Love (especially family love)	7	21.2
	Fragility of human weakness, sorrow, and vulnerability	5	15.2
	Self-sacrifice	3	9.1
	Growth	3	9.1
	Life is actually not ordinary	2	6.1
	The protagonist's way of life	2	6.1
	<i>overall</i>		22
Expression and techniques	Foreshadowing and mysteries came together in the end	2	6.1
	Contrast	2	6.1
	Incorporating flashbacks into the narrative	1	3.0
	Impressive depictions of everyday life	1	3.0
	<i>overall</i>		6
Alignment with one's circumstances and expectations	A similar situation to my own	2	6.1
	The good of living authentically	2	6.1
	Striving toward life goals	1	3.0
	<i>overall</i>		5
Misc.		1	3.0
overall		33	100.0

Theme and content

Among the reasons for being moved, responses in "Theme and content of the work" category were the most common, accounting for over 60% of the total. Particularly, themes related to "love" were mentioned frequently,

with a focus on family love. Many of these works were from contemporary literature (e.g., *The Sleeping Mermaid's House* and *And Then, the Baton Was Passed* were mentioned multiple times). In modern literature, Kajii Motojiro's short story "Past" was mentioned, which also revolves around the theme of love for a family living far away. Overall, there seems to be a high level of interest in works centered around family themes. This result aligns with the findings that in real-life emotionally charged events, relationships with family members and important people are the most common triggers³⁴.

There were also many responses related to "Fragility of human weakness, sorrow, and vulnerability". In these cases, many respondents mentioned literary works with an extraordinary and often unrealistic plot, such as science fiction, fantasy or mystery novels (*The End of the World and the Hard-Boiled Wonderland; Genocidal Organ*, etc.). Readers' attention was drawn to the struggles of protagonists placed in extraordinary circumstances and the fragility of everyday life. This is related to the subcategory "Life is actually not ordinary". Some responses included statements like "I felt that the concept of 'ordinary people' was overturned, and I was shocked" (*Convenience Store Woman*) and "I realized that our current peaceful daily life is built upon the efforts and sacrifices of those who came before us" (*The Eternal Zero*). By combining these two categories we can infer that readers are often moved by works that depict human vulnerability, the fragility of daily life, and the transience of life. This aligns with previous research that suggests real-life emotions often involve a recognition of events beyond human control³⁵.

In the category of theme and content that moved respondents, there is also a subcategory of "self-sacrifice". The novel with a plot concerning organ donation (*The Sleeping Mermaid's House*) or fantastic stories where individuals use the remaining days of their lives for the sake of others (*A Messenger without a Name; Three Days of Happiness*) were mentioned.

³⁴ Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Kuehnast, M., & Jacobsen, T. (2015). Towards a psychological construct of being moved. *PLOS One*, *10*, 1–33.

Zhao, D. (2023). When people are moved, their Experience transcends their culture: Examining own-life experiences of being moved among Japanese, Chinese, and Germans. *Saitama University Review (Faculty of Liberal Arts)*, *58(1)*, 57–77.

³⁵ Kato, J., Murata, K. (2013). The influence of finite manifestation and social value orientation on emotion accompanied by sadness [in Japanese]. *Shinrigaku-Kenkyu (Psychological Research)*, *84*, 138–145.

Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Kuehnast, M., & Jacobsen, T. (2015). Towards a psychological construct of being moved. *PLOS One*, *10*, 1–33.

Tan, E. S. H. (2009). Being moved. In D. Sander & K. R. Scherer (eds.), *Oxford Companion to Emotion and the Affective Sciences, Series in Affective Science* (p. 74). Oxford University Press.

This aligns with the understanding that being moved often involves altruistic emotions³⁶.

There were an equal number of responses related to "growth". For example, there were works where a mother and a son discuss racial and inequality issues to overcome prejudiced thinking (*I'm Yellow, White, and a little Blue*). Somewhat related to this is the subcategory of "the protagonist's way of life", where there were responses about protagonists who would stop at nothing to achieve their desires, such as a character described as a "strong-willed, somewhat cool figure" in *White Nights*. This highlights that growth and ways of living are significant topics of interest for adolescent readers.

Expression and technique

Among the reasons for being moved, the category of "the expression and technique used in the work" was the second most common after "the theme and content of the work", accounting for nearly 20% of the total responses. Notably, responses related to the technique of "foreshadowing and mystery" stand out. Responses include: "When I understood the meaning behind the title, everything in the story connected in my mind, and it was satisfying" (*And Then, the Baton Was Passed*); "I was made to contemplate the value of life and happiness, and I was surprised by the foreshadowing and clues, leaving a lingering impact" (*Three Days of Happiness*); "The satisfaction of everything coming together" (*Lonely Castle of Mirror*). These responses all point out the technique of "foreshadowing and mystery resolution", where various clues and hints in the plot become clear at the end to make readers moved more strongly.

There were an equal number of responses related to the technique of "contrast". Responses include: "Although it seems as if something opposite is said at first glance, I deeply empathized because of it" (*Salad Anniversary*); "I felt an indescribable sense of sadness and sorrow, but also warmth. It prompted me to think about what I would do when faced with the irrationality of a loved one's death" (*Night on the Galactic Railroad*). Related to this, there were responses that focused on such a temporal structure as "flashbacks at various points": "It's not just about the content where the protagonist retraces her memories, but the structure of including flashbacks throughout the story significantly increased being moved" (*I Want to Tell You My 10-Year Blank*). These examples highlight the understanding that artistic devices can enhance the extent of being moved by literature.

³⁶ Cova, F., & Deonna, J. (2014). Being moved. *Philosophical Studies*, 169, 447–466.

Landmann, H., Cova, F., & Hess, U. (2019). Being moved by meaningfulness: Appraisals of surpassing internal standards elicit being moved by relationships and achievements. *Cognition and Emotion*, 33, 1387–1409.

There was one response that mentioned "impressive depictions of everyday life" as a factor for being moved: "While there were no major events throughout the work, the attention to detail in depicting everyday life and the subtle changes in people's movements and relationships in the overall quietness were touching" (*Subtle Crystals*). However, it is worth noting that this work is a dystopian novel set on an island where important elements of human life are gradually taken away by state power, which shows the popularity of works with an fantastic, unrealistic plot as previously mentioned.

Alignment with one's circumstances and expectations

Among the reasons for being moved, the category of "alignment with one's circumstances and expectations" is the same in terms of frequency as the previously mentioned "expression and technique used in the work", accounting for nearly 20% of the total responses. It is possible to assume that being moved by a literary work can be evoked when readers relate it to their own lives.

First, there are responses that mention "being able to live as oneself". Readers who feel their personality doesn't fit in with their surroundings and struggle with interpersonal relationships may find encouragement in the theme of being able to find happiness even when not conforming to others. Additionally, there are responses that mention "similar situations to oneself". Readers who share a similar age or circumstances with the protagonist may find common themes and relatability in the work. Some respondents even mentioned that they recognized personal life goals after reading the work and got a motivation to strive for them.

In this way, it has been shown that being moved is closely related to individual circumstances and expectations. It can be said that literary emotions are often evoked when they deeply resonate with one's own self³⁷.

Having examined the overall characteristics of the works that moved the respondents, the next section will focus on the specific parts within the works that were moving and delve deeper into the factors that trigger being moved.

3.3.2. Content of the moving parts

The free responses about the content of the specific parts within the works that particularly moved them are categorized as follows:

³⁷ Tokaji, A. (2010). Being moved and the transformation of psychology [in Japanese]. In H. Kaiho & N. Matsubara (eds.), *Scientific Encyclopedia of Emotions and Thinking* (pp. 290–291). Asakura Publ.

Table 2

Content of the moving part		
Category	<i>N</i>	%
Love (especially family love)	11	32.4
Becoming happy despite unfortunate circumstances	7	20.6
Protagonist's personality and worldview	6	17.6
Sense of loss and its recovery	4	11.8
Growth and reunion	3	8.8
Thrilling and chilling content	3	8.8
overall	34	100.0

The content that moved readers falls primarily under the category of "Love", much like the theme of the work itself. The most responses revolve around the theme of parent and child love. The second-ranking category is "becoming happy despite unfortunate circumstances", which is closely related to the previously discussed "Fragility of human weakness, sorrow, and vulnerability". Rather than the theme of human frailty itself, readers seem moved by the parts conveying the message of "even in weakness, one can find happiness".

There were also many responses related to the "Protagonist's personality and worldview". These mean the readers' admiration for protagonists leading lives beyond their expectations and moral values, which suggest an expansion of the readers' worldview and the importance of role models for adolescents. While there were multiple responses related to "The sense of loss and its recovery", they often involved plots where protagonists face significant losses as death, and despite carrying a sense of profound loss, they experienced some form of recovery. This suggests that the acceptance of life's limitations can also be a significant trigger for being moved.

Additionally, "Growth and reunion" were also mentioned while there were responses related to "Thrilling and chilling content". Readers mentioned being moved by content filled with fear and sorrow such as that in which protagonists are forced to choose death. As mentioned in Introduction, thrill and suspense are considered essential elements in art³⁸. Our survey confirmed that thrill contributes to eliciting being moved by literature.

³⁸ Konečni, V. J. (2005). The aesthetic trinity: Awe, being moved, thrills. *Bulletin of Psychology and the Arts*, 5, 27–44.

Konečni V. J. (2011). Aesthetic trinity theory and the sublime. *Philosophy Today*, 55, 64–73.

While the content varied, a common thread in participants' responses is a question they posed to themselves "What would I do in that situation?" Regardless of the genre, readers were often drawn into the text by imagining themselves in similar circumstances, which engaged them emotionally. For instance, even in a fairy tale-like work such as *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, one respondent mentioned that it made him imagine how he would react if faced with the death of loved ones. We could call such reading "self-engaged reading", which might be important to understand how readers get moved by literature.

3.3.3. Expressions in the emotionally moving parts

Free responses regarding expressions in the emotionally moving parts of the works were categorized as follows:

Table 3

Expression of the moving parts			
Category	Subcategory	N	%
Freshness	Contrast	4	14.8
	Description of death	4	14.8
	Metaphor	3	11.1
	Giving meaning to one's existence	3	11.1
	Realizing the depth of life through everyday nuances (realism)	1	3.7
	Depiction of scenes	1	3.7
	Structure of the work	1	3.7
	<i>overall</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>63.0</i>
The clash of multiple values	The clash of multiple values	6	22.2
Resignation	Resignation	2	7.4
Resolution of mysteries and foreshadowing	Resolution of mysteries and foreshadowing	1	3.7
Discomfort	Physical grotesque	1	3.7
overall		27	100.0

The responses regarding the expressions that evoked being moved were obtained through both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Firstly, the most chosen factor was "freshness" mentioned as a general paraphrase of "defamiliarization"³⁹, which accounted for over 60% of the responses. This result aligns with the understanding that novelty is necessary for eliciting being moved⁴⁰.

³⁹ Shklovsky, V. (1990). *Theory of Prose*. Translated by B. Sher. Dalkey Archive Press.

⁴⁰ Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Kuehnast, M., & Jacobsen, T. (2015). Towards a psychological construct of being moved. *PLOS One*, *10*, 1–33.

Responses regarding how "freshness" was achieved included references to "contrast", "depictions of death", "metaphors", and "assigning meaning to one's existence". There were many responses related to "contrast", featuring expressions contrasting cold and warmth, inner and outer aspects, strength and weakness, or the "insignificant self" and "others who overcome", and so on. These contrasts not only enliven the expressions but also have the effect of "granting strength to ideas"⁴¹. Regarding "depictions of death," since death is an event that many young readers may not have a strong personal connection with, it might have brought a sense of freshness. On the other hand, as for another meaning of defamiliarization as 'discomfort', only one response was given. It was suggested that "discomfort" in relation to expression is unlikely to be associated with being moved.

Additionally, "metaphors" received considerable attention. One respondent paid an attention to a metaphor "wear someone else's shoes" which he interprets means imagining someone else's situation. It is possible to assume that understanding metaphoric expressions can help elicit being moved.

Responses also touched on the theme of "assigning meaning to one's existence". Establishing an identity of being a meaningful existence is a developmental task during adolescence⁴². For young adults, understanding the meaning of their own existence, particularly in the context of their relationships with others, is a crucial issue. Given that Japanese youth have consistently shown low levels of self-esteem (e.g., Cabinet Office, 2019), it can be inferred that discovering the meaning of one's existence can provide a sense of novelty and elicit being moved.

The second most frequently chosen option was "clash of multiple values", used as a paraphrase for "dialogue"⁴³, which accounted for over 20% of the total responses. The expressions related to this option often revolved around thematic conflicts like "life and death" or "good and evil". Many responses showed an awareness of the connection between the theme and the expression.

In summary, when considering expressions that evoked being moved, most responses demonstrated an awareness of the relationship between the theme and expression, which reflects an understanding of the central role of

Zhao, D., Kaneko, K., Houzou, Y., & Fujii, K. (2017). Comparison of cultural differences regarding the characteristics of moving experiences: Approval in Japan, coincidence in China, shock in Germany [in Japanese]. *Proceedings of 81st Japanese Psychological Research*, 173.

⁴¹ Preminger, A. & Brogan T.V.F. (eds.) (1993). *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. MJF Books.

⁴² Erikson, E. H. (1959). *Identity and life cycle: Selected papers. Psychological Issues, 1*, 1–171.

⁴³ Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by M. Holquist. Translated by C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

this aspect in literature. However, we should acknowledge that participants may not have been consciously aware of the relationship between the theme and expression before participating in this survey. The very question asking about memorable expressions in literary works may have prompted participants to focus on the interplay between the theme and expression. This aspect is significant not only for the methodological rigor of our research but also for its educational implications. It suggests that such questions can stimulate readers to pay more attention to expressions in literary works, potentially enhancing their appreciation and understanding of literature.

3.3.4. Participants' reading habits

The reading frequency of participants during their elementary school years was as follows: "Read every day" 41.2%, "At least once a week" 26.5%, "At least once a month" 8.8%, and "Hardly read" 17.6%. Similarly, during their middle school years, the reading frequency was: "Read every day" 20.6%, "At least once a week" 32.4%, "At least once a month" 26.5%, and "Hardly read" 14.7%. As for high school, the reading frequency was: "Read every day" 5.9%, "At least once a week" 23.5%, "At least once a month" 32.4%, and "Hardly read" 32.4%. In their current university years, the reading frequency is: "Read every day" 11.8%, "At least once a week" 26.5%, "At least once a month" 20.6%, and "Hardly read" 35.3%. True, we notice a general tendency of decreasing reading frequency as students move up the grades. However, during university years, there is an increase in the number of people who read daily or at least once a week compared to high school, indicating a polarization in reading habits.

Answers which indicate losing the reading habit during high school are prominent. This result is likely due to the distinctive busyness of high school life, including exam preparation, club activities, and social media engagement. On the other hand, as reported in section 3.1, the works that participants felt moved by the most were those they read during high school. This result suggests that reading frequency is not the sole factor in eliciting literary emotions. This is also an important point in that even during a busy schedule that leaves no room for reading, high school students often get moved by literary works and remember them, which suggests how influential literary emotions can be on younger generations.

As far as university students are concerned, as stated above, a polarization in reading habits is observed with those who enjoy reading literature more frequently than during high school. However, as reported in section 3.1, responses mentioning modern literature were relatively few, with most responses mentioning contemporary literature, particularly youth literature.

Furthermore, when it comes to the genres of books participants usually read literary fiction including youth literature is the most common choice (61.8%), followed by mystery novels (41.2%), and light novels (23.5%). Additionally, there were mentions of science fiction novels (14.7%), non-fiction (11.8%), and essays (11.8%). It is noteworthy that youth literature and mystery novels are particularly popular choices.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion we provide a general review of the analysis results mentioned above. It is true that our survey has an exploratory nature, and we should be cautious of the extent to which our discussions hold general validity. Nevertheless, the analysis results and discussions from this survey are expected to have a certain level of validity as hypotheses or assumptions for future research.

What characteristics are noticed as to being moved by literature?

Firstly, concerning the readers' responses when moved by literary works, we found that "tears" were the most common response. In moving experience in real life as well, "tears" were a common bodily response, along with "heartbeat". This could be considered a commonality between the two types of being moved.

In terms of themes and content, many respondents mentioned tragic plots, negative outcomes, and thrilling or horrifying content. In the case of literary works which are fictional, the presence of negative content and corresponding emotions like grief and fear can enhance the emotional impact or elicit being moved.

It is also worth noting that the duration of being moved by literature appears to be longer than in real-life. From this, we can infer that literary emotions may have a more extended influence on individuals over time.

Regarding the content of the works mentioned by the respondents, many of them dealt with everyday themes such as "family love". On the other hand, when it comes to the plot level, works with non-everyday settings in mystery or fantasy styles stand out. Plots with mysteries and foreshadowing are highly appreciated, and many respondents mentioned being moved by the skillful solution of foreshadowing.

The combination of "familiar themes" and "mysterious fun" could facilitate "self-engaged reading" by which readers imagine themselves in similar circumstances described in literary works (with questioning "What would I do in that situation?"). We would say that the self-engaged reading might be an important factor in making young readers moved by literary works.

SUMMARY

In the 21st century empirical literary research has made a considerable progress in the study of reception, that is, literary reading research. In our survey we investigate a phenomenon of "being moved" by literary works using an interdisciplinary approach of literary studies and psychology. We focused on 1) reader responses and 2) eliciting factors (both of the literary work itself and of the reader). We conducted a survey among 34 Japanese university students to investigate what emotional responses they had when moved by literary works, what elements of the works (content and style) elicited being moved, and what reading habits they had.

The findings of this survey are following: 1) Regarding reader responses, the most frequently mentioned responses were similar to real-life moving events, such as a warm feeling in the chest, a lump in the throat, and tears. However, negative responses such as uneasiness, insomnia, and sighs were also quite common. This suggests the possibility that responses to moving literature may encompass more negative elements compared to moving real-life events; 2) Concerning eliciting factors, on the side of the literary work, thematic elements such as "love", "the vulnerability of everyday life", and "finding happiness even in unfortunate circumstances" were found. Overall, a tendency was shown that the combination of "familiar themes" such as family love and "mysterious intrigue" including mysteries and foreshadowing is preferred. It can be speculated that such a combination of thematic and stylistic elements captivates readers to "self-engaged reading" which might be a strong factor in making them moved by literature.

Bibliography

1. Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by M. Holquist. Translated by C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

2. Benedek, M., Kaernbach, C. (2011). Physiological correlates and emotional specificity of human piloerection. *Biological Psychology*, 86, 320–329.

3. Cova, F., & Deonna, J. (2014). Being moved. *Philosophical Studies*, 169, 447–466.

4. Djikic, M., Oatley, K., Zoeterman, S., & Peterson, B. (2009). On being moved by art: How reading fiction transforms the self. *Creativity Research Journal*, 21(1), 24–29.

5. Erikson, E. H. (1959). *Identity and life cycle: Selected papers. Psychological Issues*, 1, 1–171.

6. Fialho, O. (2019). What is literature for? The role of transformative reading. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 6, 1–16.

7. Fialho, O., Zyngier, S., & Miall, D. (2011). Interpretation and Experience: Two Pedagogical Interventions Observed. *English in Education*, 40, 236–253.
8. Gabrielsson, A. (2001). Emotions in strong experiences with music. In P. N. Juslin & J. A. Sloboda (eds.), *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, pp. 431–452. Oxford University Press.
9. Hume, D. (1757). Of tragedy. In: D. Hume, *Four Dissertations*, pp. 185–200. Millar.
10. Jakobson, R. (1990). *On Language*. L. R. Waugh & M. Monville-Burston (Ed.), Harvard University Press.
11. Japanese Cabinet Office. (2019). *White Paper on Children and Young People 2019* [in Japanese]. Nikkei Publ.
12. Kato, J., Murata, K. (2013). The influence of finite manifestation and social value orientation on emotion accompanied by sadness [in Japanese]. *Shinrigaku-Kenkyu (Psychological Research)*, 84, 138–145.
13. Kindaichi, K. et al. (eds.) (1991). *Shinmeikai Japanese Dictionary*, 4th edition, Sanseido Publ.
14. Koelsch, S., Jacobs, A., Menninghaus, W., Liebal, K., Klann-Delius, G., von Scheve, C., & Gebauer, C. (2015). The quartet theory of human emotions: An integrative and neurofunctional model. *Physics of Life Reviews*, 13, 1–27.
15. Konečni, V. J. (2005). The aesthetic trinity: Awe, being moved, thrills. *Bulletin of Psychology and the Arts*, 5, 27–44.
16. Konečni V. J. (2011). Aesthetic trinity theory and the sublime. *Philosophy Today*, 55, 64–73.
17. Kuehnast, M., Wagner, V., Wassiliwizky, E., Jacobsen, T., Menninghaus, W. (2014). Being moved: Linguistic representation and conceptual structure. *Frontiers Psychology*, 5, 1242.
18. Kuiken, D., Miall, D., & Sikora, S. (2004). Forms of self-implication in literary reading. *Poetics Today*, 25(2), 171–203.
19. Landmann, H., Cova, F., & Hess, U. (2019). Being moved by meaningfulness: Appraisals of surpassing internal standards elicit being moved by relationships and achievements, *Cognition and Emotion*, 33, 1387–1409.
20. Madelijn, S., & Jantine van S. (2018). Against the odds: human values arising in unfavourable circumstances elicit the feeling of being moved, *Cognition and Emotion*, 32, 1231–1246.
21. Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Kuehnast, M., & Jacobsen, T. (2015). Towards a psychological construct of being moved. *PLOS One*, 10, 1–33.

22. Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Wassiliwizky, E., Jacobsen, T., & Knoop, C. (2017). The emotional and aesthetic powers of parallelistic diction. *Poetics*, 63, 47–59.
23. Menninghaus, W., Wagner, V., Hanich, J., Wassiliwizky, E., Jacobsen, T., & Koelsch, S. (2017). The Distancing-Embracing model of the enjoyment of negative emotions in art reception. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 40, 1–63.
24. Miall, D. (2006). *Literary Reading: Empirical & Theoretical Studies*. Peter Lang.
25. Miall, D., & Kuiken, D. (1994). Foregrounding, defamiliarization, and affect: Response to literary stories. *Poetics*, 22, 389–407.
26. Preminger, A. & Brogan T.V.F. (eds.) (1993). *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. MJF Books.
27. Scherer, K.R., Zentner, M.R., & Schacht, A. (2002). Emotional states generated by music: An exploratory study of music experts. *Musicae Scientiae*, 5, 149–71.
28. Shinmura, I. (ed.) (2008). *Kojien Japanese Dictionary*. 6th edition. Iwanami Publ.
29. Seibt, B., Schubert, T. W., Zickfeld, J. H., Zhu, L., Arriaga, P., Simão, C., & Fiske, A. P. (2018). Kama muta: Similar emotional responses to touching videos across the United States, Norway, China, Israel, and Portugal. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 39, 55–74.
30. Shklovsky, V. (1990). *Theory of Prose*. Translated by B. Sher. Dalkey Archive Press.
31. Tan, E. S. H. (2009). Being moved. In D. Sander & K. R. Scherer (eds.), *Oxford Companion to Emotion and the Affective Sciences, Series in Affective Science* (p. 74). Oxford University Press.
32. Tokaji, A. (2010). Being moved and the transformation of psychology [in Japanese]. In H. Kaiho & N. Matsubara (eds.), *Scientific Encyclopedia of Emotions and Thinking* (pp. 290–291). Asakura Publ.
33. Van Schooten, E., Oostdam, R., & de Glopper, K. (2001). Dimensions and predictors of literary response. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 33(1), 1–32.
34. Wassiliwizky, E., & Menninghaus, W. (2022). The Power of Poetry. In A. Chatterjee & E. R. Cardillo (eds.), *Brain, Beauty, and Art: Essays Bringing Neurasthenics into Focus* (pp. 182–187). Oxford University Press.
35. Zhao, D. (2021). Constructs and Influences of Moving Experiences as Autobiographical Memories: an Exploratory Study in Japan and China [in Japanese]. *Saitama University Review (Faculty of Liberal Arts)*, 57(1), 1–17.
36. Zhao, D. (2023). When people are moved, their Experience transcends their culture: Examining own-life experiences of being moved

among Japanese, Chinese, and Germans. *Saitama University Review (Faculty of Liberal Arts)*, 58(1), 57–77.

37. Zhao, D., Kaneko, K., Houzou, Y., & Fuji, K. (2017). Comparison of cultural differences regarding the characteristics of moving experiences: Approval in Japan, coincidence in China, shock in Germany [in Japanese]. *Proceedings of 81st Japanese Psychological Research*, 173.

38. Zyngier, S., & Fialho, O. (2010). Pedagogical stylistics, literary awareness and empowerment: a critical perspective. *Language and Literature*, 19(1), 13–33.

Information about the authors:

Susumu Nonaka,

PhD, Professor,

Director of Institute for Education

Saitama University

Shimo-Okubo 255, Sakura-ku, Saitama-city, 338-8570, Japan

Danning Zhao,

MA, Psychological Counsellor, International Office

Saitama University

Shimo-Okubo 255, Sakura-ku, Saitama-city, 338-8570, Japan