

What is Awe for Modern Japanese People?

Sera MUTO

Graduate School of Education,
The University of Tokyo

sera_m@p.u-tokyo.ac.jp

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This research argues that awe is prototypically a negative emotion for (and being forgotten by) modern Japanese people. This is important because previous studies, especially in western countries, often consider awe as a positive emotion. This research shows important empirical findings from a series of my previous questionnaire studies on my own theoretical framework of the “respect-related emotions” (Muto, 2014) such as awe, admiration, adoration, and respect in Japanese people. Over 2,500 students in several universities participated in several paper-and-pencil questionnaires at their own university and about 800 adults sample ages 20–79 participated in an online survey. Collected data were all statistically analysed. First, I found that the two words “ifu” and “ikei,” both denoting awe in Japanese, take on negative affective valence compared with other respect-related emotion words. Surprisingly, about 30% of university students and 15% of adults participating in this study answered that they did not understand the meaning of either word. Next, I found prototypical emotion episodes of awe in Japanese university students and its shared and unshared characteristics with other respect-related emotions. Finally, I discovered that awe as an emotional trait in Japanese university students correlated negatively with their self-esteem and subjective well-being. These empirical data all suggest that awe is prototypically a negative emotion in modern Japanese people, contrary to western experience.