

PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF EXISTENTIAL EMPTINESS AND THE MEANING OF LIFE IN JAPANESE CULTURAL ARCHETYPES

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Abstract. This thesis examines existential emptiness through a philosophical reading of selected Japanese cultural motifs rather than treating Japanese culture as a fixed psychological type. The analysis distinguishes three layers of emptiness: ontological finitude, axiological disorientation, and relational disconnection. Concepts associated with impermanence, interval, relationality, disciplined practice, and everyday purpose are interpreted as symbolic resources that can transform the experience of “nothing to live for” into a reflective search for orientation. The study combines existential, axiological, hermeneutic, and comparative approaches. Special attention is given to the difference between emptiness as nihilistic loss and emptiness as an open field in which new commitments may emerge. The argument is that meaning is not merely discovered as an abstract idea; it is gradually constituted through interpretation, relationships, and concrete responsibility.

Keywords: existential emptiness, meaning of life, Japanese philosophy, impermanence, ma, relational self, values, responsibility, cultural archetype, existential interpretation.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of meaning becomes especially acute when a person experiences a gap between daily activity and an intelligible reason for continuing it. Philosophical literature usually approaches this gap not simply as sadness or social dissatisfaction, but as a crisis of orientation: the individual no longer sees how personal acts, values, and future possibilities belong to one coherent life. Uzbek philosophical scholarship also emphasizes that human existence acquires direction through value, self-consciousness, moral responsibility, and participation in culture [1; 2; 5].

Japanese thought offers a useful comparative field because it contains traditions in which absence, silence, impermanence, and relationality are not automatically equated with failure. Yet these categories should not be romanticized. A philosophical analysis must distinguish cultural symbols from stereotypes about a supposedly uniform 'Japanese mind'. In this paper, the term cultural archetype is used in a limited hermeneutic sense: a recurrent symbolic pattern through which a culture gives intelligible form to experiences such as loss, transience, social dependence, discipline, and purposeful action [3; 4].

The aim of the thesis is to show how selected Japanese cultural-philosophical motifs can illuminate three forms of existential emptiness: the emptiness produced by finitude, the emptiness produced by value loss, and the emptiness produced by weakened relations. The central claim is that meaning arises when these forms of emptiness are interpreted rather than merely suppressed. This approach differs from a purely psychological account because it asks what kind of world, value order, and relation to others makes a life appear worth continuing.

MAIN DISCUSSION

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The first dimension may be called ontological emptiness. It appears when a person encounters mortality, change, irreversibility, or the collapse of an expected future. Japanese reflections on impermanence, often associated with *mujō* and with aesthetic sensitivity to passing forms, do not remove loss; instead, they make transience itself part of the structure of value. Something can matter precisely because it does not last. In this sense, impermanence challenges the assumption that meaning requires permanence. The insight is close to a broader Eastern philosophical tendency to regard change as constitutive of existence rather than as an accidental defect [3; 7].

A second dimension is axiological emptiness: the inability to rank what is important. Here the Japanese category of *ma* - interval, pause, or meaningful spacing - can be read metaphorically. A pause is not identical with absence of content. It can create the conditions under which distinctions become visible. Applied to existential experience, this means that a temporary interruption of established goals may become a space for re-evaluating priorities. Frankl similarly argues that meaning is connected with concrete responsibility rather than with a general formula imposed on every life [8]. The philosophical point is not that every crisis is beneficial, but that a crisis need not be interpreted as final meaninglessness.

The third dimension is relational emptiness. Watsuji's ethics emphasizes that human existence is not adequately described by an isolated individual model; persons emerge within relations, obligations, and shared forms of life [10]. This perspective is important because existential emptiness is often intensified when the subject experiences the self as detached from any meaningful 'between'. Uzbek works on culture and axiology likewise describe values as socially mediated and historically embodied rather than as purely private preferences [4; 5]. Meaning therefore has a relational grammar: to matter is often to matter for someone, with someone, or within a practice whose significance is shared.

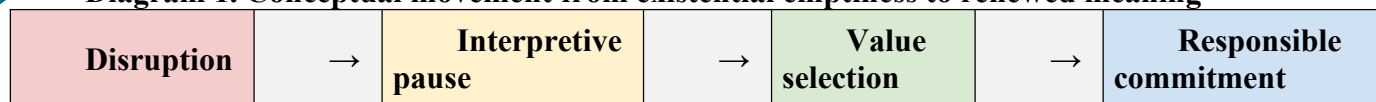
Table 1. Three forms of existential emptiness and their interpretive resources

Dimension	Typical experience	Japanese interpretive motif	Possible philosophical function
Ontological	Finitude, irreversible change, loss	Impermanence / <i>mujō</i>	Accepting limits without reducing life to futility
Axiological	Loss of priorities and value hierarchy	<i>Ma</i> as reflective interval	Re-evaluating what deserves commitment
Relational	Isolation, weak belonging, fragmented identity	Relational self / betweenness	Reconstructing meaning through shared responsibility
Practical	Activity without inward significance	Disciplined everyday practice	Connecting meaning with repeated concrete action

The table shows that cultural motifs become philosophically relevant not because they erase suffering, but because they change its interpretation. Nishitani's treatment of nihility is especially important here: the experience of nothingness may undermine inherited certainties, yet it can also force the subject to question the very standpoint from which the world appeared empty [9]. This differs from a simple motivational theory. The issue is not to 'think positively', but to examine the framework through which reality is judged meaningful or meaningless.

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Diagram 1. Conceptual movement from existential emptiness to renewed meaning



Note: The diagram is a philosophical model, not a clinical or statistical scale. It represents a sequence of interpretation rather than a guaranteed psychological outcome.

The movement represented above places interpretation between disruption and commitment. This is significant because human beings do not respond to events only by reacting; they also narrate, compare, remember, and evaluate. Ethical meaning is therefore inseparable from interpretation. Uzbek ethical thought also stresses that freedom becomes morally significant only when joined with responsibility and a conscious orientation toward values [5; 6]. The Japanese material sharpens this point by showing that silence, interval, and restraint can sometimes function as conditions for judgment rather than as passive withdrawal.

A further difference from the previous aesthetic reading of Japanese archetypes is the emphasis on practice. Meaning may be stabilized through recurring actions even when a person does not possess a complete philosophical answer to the question 'Why do I live?'. Care for family, professional craftsmanship, study, ritualized attention, or service can produce a practical continuity between self and world. Such continuity does not eliminate existential questioning; it gives the question a lived context. In this sense, the meaning of life is less a single proposition than a structure connecting values, relations, and action [2; 4; 8].

Diagram 2. Conceptual “meaning ecology” in the reconstructed life-world

Sphere	Question	Resource	Meaning effect
Self	What can I accept?	Impermanence / reflection	Realistic self-understanding
Relations	With whom do I belong?	Betweenness / shared obligation	Relational significance
Action	What deserves repetition?	Disciplined practice / responsibility	Practical continuity

This model avoids reducing meaning to private satisfaction. A life may feel meaningful because it is intelligible to the self, connected to others, and embodied in commitments that can be enacted. If one sphere collapses, the remaining spheres may temporarily sustain orientation, but long-term meaning is more stable when the three are integrated. From an axiological perspective, this integration is important because value is not merely declared; it is confirmed through durable relations and practices [1; 5].

CONCLUSION

The philosophical analysis of Japanese cultural archetypes reveals that existential emptiness is not a single phenomenon. It may arise from confrontation with finitude, from the collapse of value priorities, from relational isolation, or from action that no longer feels internally justified. Japanese motifs of impermanence, interval, relationality, and disciplined practice provide distinct interpretive responses to these forms of emptiness. Their significance lies not in offering a universal recipe for happiness, but in showing that absence can sometimes be interpreted as a space for reorientation rather than as proof that life is meaningless.

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The study also indicates that meaning should be understood as a dynamic configuration of value, relationship, and responsibility. Frankl's emphasis on concrete meaning, Nishitani's inquiry into nihility, and Watsuji's relational ethics can be placed in productive dialogue with Uzbek philosophical works on personhood, culture, axiology, and morality. Such a comparison supports a broader conclusion: the meaning of life is neither purely subjective nor mechanically inherited from tradition. It is continually reconstructed where a person interprets finitude, recognizes values, enters relations, and assumes responsibility for action.

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