

Japan's formula for life satisfaction

Formed by combining "iki", meaning "life", and "gai", meaning "to be worthwhile", the term "ikigai" is a **succinct** way to describe what gets you up in the morning — be it work, family or a well-loved hobby — much like a **prosaic** version of the French term "raison d'être".

succinct 简洁的; 简明的

prosaic 平凡的; 乏味的

"It's something you live for," explained ex-corporate worker Masataka Shintoku, simply, when asked to define the ancient term.

However, while a burst of international attention has seen the term appear on lists of inspirational, untranslatable words, its homeland is struggling to unite concept and reality. The disconnect between the discovery of a deep motivation that makes life worth living and the reality of 14-hour days in front of computer screens seems stark, but not entirely **unfathomable**, when seen in context of Japan's drastic 20th-century development.

unfathomable 深不可测的

affluence 富裕

Soon after World War Two, Japan entered a new age of growth known as the "economic miracle". Offering **affluence** and increasingly extended life-expectancy, the newfound freedom allowed the topic of ikigai, which dates back as far as the 14th century, to return to the forefront of popular debate.

Japan's economic success and the re-emergence of a corresponding interest in a personal ikigai soon became irreversibly **entwined**, shaping the work-life balance for decades to come.

entwine 缠绕; 缠住

Although the traditional working environments remain strict in terms of hours and available leave, the economic downturn has opened up new opportunities. "Today there's a different Japanese world, and there's more freedom for people to find their own ikigai in a variety of different ways," explained Gordon Mathews, professor of **anthropology** at The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

anthropology 人类学