

IKIGAI AMONG JAPANESE: INDIVIDUAL INTERPRETATIONS AND INSTITUTIONALISATION

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Abstract: Ikigai is a combination of "*iki*" (生き), signifying life, and "*kai*" (甲斐), representing the realization of expectations and hopes. The emergence of this concept has proven to significantly contribute to a better lifestyle. This study aimed to explore the perception of personal *ikigai* and its institutionalisation. The results from the analysis of 5400 Japanese articles using Leximancer have shown a positive correlation between *ikigai* and one's personal passions, meaning, and purpose. Beyond that, *ikigai* can also be perceived through contributing to others' well-being. The study reveals *ikigai*'s dynamic adaptability to life's challenges and its role in prompting a reevaluation of life purpose during significant events. This adaptive quality emphasises the resilience and relevance of *ikigai* in navigating the complexities of existence. Finally, institutions and community initiatives do help in fostering *ikigai* within communities.

Keywords: *ikigai*, theme, Japanese, Individual Interpretations, Institutionalisation

INTRODUCTION

In the rich tapestry of Japanese culture, the concept of *ikigai* has transcended its cultural origins, becoming a focal point for individuals seeking purpose, well-being, and a meaningful life. Amidst diverse translations and interpretations by scholars, we adopt a definition that encapsulates the essence of *ikigai* as "a sense of joy and well-being derived from the realisation of the value of life"³. The resonance of *ikigai* has extended far beyond the borders of Japan, captivating the attention of researchers, practitioners, and the public alike.

The significance of *ikigai* within Japanese society is underscored by its integration into national initiatives, as evidenced by the SDGs Action Plan 2022. The Japanese government envisions a society where every individual can embrace the concept of *ikigai*, aligning with the broader mission of sustainable development⁴. This emphasis is not a recent phenomenon; it is deeply rooted in a historical commitment to fostering well-lived lives. Dating back to 1978, the Ministry of Health and Welfare initiated National Health Promotion Measures, emphasizing a healthy lifestyle and the cultivation of a sense that life is worth living—essentially, *ikigai*⁵.

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³ Mori, Kentaro, Yu Kaiho, Yasutake Tomata, Mamoru Narita, Fumiya Tanji, Kemmyo Sugiyama, Yumi Sugawara, and Ichiro Tsuji. "Sense of life worth living (ikigai) and incident functional disability in elderly Japanese: The Tsurugaya Project." *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 95 (2017): 62-67.

⁴ SDGs Promotion Headquarters. SDGs Action Plan 2022. (2021).

<https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/sdgs/dai11/actionplan2022.pdf>

⁵ Nakanishi, Noriyuki. "Ikigai'in older Japanese people." *Age and ageing* 28, no. 3 (1999): 323-324.

A growing body of research, including studies by Shirai et al.⁶ and Kabasawa et al.⁷, consistently highlights the positive effects of embracing *ikigai* on health, longevity, and disability prevention in later life stages. *Ikigai*, intricately linked with the concept of purpose in life (PIL), motivates individuals to adopt behaviours that promote health, contributing to overall well-being. Additionally, in the face of adversity, *ikigai* serves as a wellspring of hope and optimism, influencing life satisfaction and self-esteem, ultimately imparting happiness and profound purpose to the lives of individuals in Japan.

Despite the extensive research on the concept of *ikigai*, a critical gap persists in our understanding of how *ikigai* is perceived and manifested among the Japanese population. While existing studies touch upon various aspects of *ikigai* (see Hasegawa⁸), there is limited insight into the nuanced cultural and societal factors that influence the identification and pursuit of *ikigai* among individuals in Japan. This gap is particularly notable given the dynamic nature of Japanese society. As a result, there is a need for a focused investigation into the unique elements that contribute to the construction of *ikigai* within the Japanese cultural context. Additionally, examining the institutionalisation of *ikigai* in Japan is imperative for a comprehensive understanding of its role in Japanese societal life. Nevertheless, there is a considerable lack of research on how *ikigai* is being institutionalised in Japan.

The concept of *ikigai* has permeated public discourse, evident in its frequent mention in Japanese news articles. As reflected in these media sources, *ikigai* is discussed in various contexts, ranging from personal well-being to societal structures. However, despite the abundance of textual data, a gap persists in our understanding of the nuanced themes and cultural influences embedded in the representation of *ikigai* within these news articles. This study seeks to utilize Leximancer to uncover and analyse prevalent themes and concepts related to *ikigai* in Japanese news articles, aiming to achieve a more profound and nuanced understanding of the cultural, societal, individual, and institutional dimensions associated with this vital aspect of human flourishing. Specifically, this study has two objectives: to understand diverse individual interpretations of *ikigai* and to examine the institutionalisation of *ikigai* in Japan as portrayed by the news articles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of *ikigai* has deep roots in Japanese culture, particularly among older adults. This term, which has gained international attention, has become a subject of academic exploration, with recent efforts to align it with Western well-being literature. In Randall et al.'s study, they employed a mixed methods research design, incorporating 20 interviews with older adults, a survey of 50 participants, and 10 interviews with family caregivers⁹. The qualitative aspect of the study involved probing older adults about their sources of *ikigai*, happiness, and social support, alongside their perceptions of home robot designed to promote *ikigai*.

⁶ Shirai, Kokoro, Hiroyasu Iso, Hideki Fukuda, Yasuhiro Toyoda, Toshio Takatorige, and Kozo Tatara. "Factors associated with "Ikigai" among members of a public temporary employment agency for seniors (Silver Human Resources Centre) in Japan; gender differences." *Health and quality of life outcomes* 4 (2006): 1-6.

⁷ Kabasawa, Keiko, Junta Tanaka, Yumi Ito, Kinya Yoshida, Kaori Kitamura, Shoichiro Tsugane, Kazutoshi Nakamura, and Ichiei Narita. "Associations of physical activity in rural life with happiness and *ikigai*: a cross-sectional study." *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1-10.

⁸ Hasegawa, Akihiro. Latest trends in "ikigai" and "ikigai" research ~ Future research on *ikigai* is expected. *Healthy Longevity Net*. (May 29, 2020). <https://www.tyojyu.or.jp/net/topics/tokushu/kenkochoju-ikigai/Ikigai-research-doko.html>

⁹ Randall, Natasha, Waki Kamino, Swapna Joshi, Wei-Chu Chen, Long-Jing Hsu, Katherine M. Tsui, and Selma Šabanović. "Understanding the connection among *Ikigai*, well-being, and home robot acceptance in Japanese older adults: mixed methods study." *JMIR aging* 6 (2023): e45442.

The results of the study revealed several key findings. Health emerged as the most common source of *ikigai* among older adults. Interestingly, self-rated health correlated moderately with *ikigai* and other well-being measures, while reported physical limitations did not. In terms of social roles, *ikigai* was found to be more strongly related to satisfaction with discretionary social activities (leisure, hobbies, and friends) than to work and family roles. Furthermore, the study identified the sources of *ikigai* among older adults, encompassing eudaimonic aspects such as vitality, positive relations with others, contribution, accomplishment, purpose, and personal growth. The hedonic aspects of positive affect, life satisfaction, and lack of negative affect were also explored, with *ikigai* being most strongly related to eudaimonic well-being, particularly meaning in life along the dimension of significance. In the realm of robotics, Japanese older adults expressed high expectations for a home robot designed for well-being, specifying that it should offer multifaceted support before they would consider adopting it.

While Randall et al. focused on exploring how Japanese older adults experience *ikigai* and the perception of a home robot designed to promote it¹⁰, Mathews (takes a critical stance, examining the concept of ‘productive aging’ and its potential normative implications in the Japanese context¹¹. Mathews argues that, despite emerging as an effort to support older individuals, the term may carry normative and potentially coercive undertones¹². The study primarily drawing insights from interviews conducted over decades and an analysis of advice books for Japanese seniors spanning two decades. Through this exploration, Mathews contends that Japan is transitioning from ‘productive aging’ to ‘happy aging,’ emphasizing personal contentment in old age without the pressure of ‘contributing to society.’¹³

Hasegawa who conducted a comprehensive review of research trends on ‘*IKIGAI*’ (in Japanese) and ‘*ikigai*’ (in English) as of February 2020 notably found that, research on ‘*IKIGAI*’ extends beyond the elderly, encompassing various generations, including adolescents, children, and working individuals¹⁴. Conversely, research on ‘*ikigai*’ has explored contexts such as marriage, love, work, and women’s independence. This broadening scope suggests a dynamic evolution in the study of *ikigai* across different demographics.

In principle, Kamiya (1966, 1980, 2004), a pioneer in *ikigai* research, emphasised that to achieve *ikigai*, individuals must satisfy seven personal needs, including “the need for life satisfaction, the ability to embrace change, a belief in a bright future (*mirai-sei*), alignment with one’s surroundings (*hankyo*), freedom, self-actualisation, and a sense of meaning and value in life”¹⁵¹⁶. Building upon this foundation, Winn introduced the *Ikigai* Venn Diagram, intertwining passion, mission, profession, and vocation¹⁷. Garcia and Miralles expanded this

¹⁰ Randall, Natasha, Waki Kamino, Swapna Joshi, Wei-Chu Chen, Long-Jing Hsu, Katherine M. Tsui, and Selma Šabanović. "Understanding the connection among Ikigai, well-being, and home robot acceptance in Japanese older adults: mixed methods study." *JMIR aging* 6 (2023): e45442.

¹¹ Mathews, Gordon. "Beyond ‘Productive Aging’: An Argument for ‘Happy Aging’." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* (2023): 1-17.

¹² Mathews, Gordon. "Beyond ‘Productive Aging’: An Argument for ‘Happy Aging’." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* (2023): 1-17.

¹³ Mathews, Gordon. "Beyond ‘Productive Aging’: An Argument for ‘Happy Aging’." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* (2023): 1-17.

¹⁴ Hasegawa, Akihiro. Latest trends in “ikigai” and “ikigai” research ~ Future research on ikigai is expected. Healthy Longevity Net. (May 29, 2020). <https://www.tyojyu.or.jp/net/topics/tokushu/kenkochoju-ikigai/Ikigai-research-doko.html>

¹⁵ Bilash, Olenka. "Study Abroad, Transformation, and" Ikigai": A Case Study." In *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 245-260. Lehigh University Library and Technology Services. 8A East Packer Avenue, Fairchild Martindale Library Room 514, Bethlehem, PA 18015, 2019.

¹⁶ Kono, Shintaro, and Gordon Walker. "Theorizing the interpersonal aspect of ikigai (‘life worth living’) among Japanese university students: A mixed-methods approach." *International Journal of Wellbeing* 10, no. 2 (2020).

¹⁷ Winn, Marc. What is Your Ikigai? The View Inside Me. (2014). <https://theviewinside.me/what-is-your-ikigai/>.

framework, discovering ten principles during their exploration of Okinawan Island¹⁸. The ten principles include staying active, taking life at a relaxed pace, eating in moderation, surrounding oneself with good friends, preparing for the next birthday, wearing a smile, reconnecting with nature, expressing gratitude, living in the moment, and pursuing one's *ikigai*.

Previously, in his exploration of the Japanese self, Mathews identifies *ikigai* as a key motivation, often expressed through family, work, or personal dreams¹⁹. This is aligned with his argument that *ikigai* is formulated and justified by culturally shaped selves, contributing to the uniqueness of individual *ikigai* across different cultures²⁰. Mathews delves into a cross-cultural comparison of how Japanese and Americans pursue lives worth living within their respective societal structures²¹. The study highlights a broadly common sense of *ikigai* as what one deeply lives for in both societies. Cultural, social, and institutional factors such as employment system and gender imbalance significantly influence the formulation and negotiation of *ikigai*, leading to intriguing contrasts, such as the most individualistic pursuers of *ikigai* being Japanese rather than American, challenging stereotypes²².

Park's study extends the discussion to East Asian countries, demonstrating commonalities in relationships and support systems contributing to a sense of *ikigai*²³. On 2021, Takahashi, as reported by Kono and Walker, contrasts relationships in Japan and the West, emphasizing the shift in *ikigai* experiences as Japanese society globalises.²⁴ Bilash's case study on a Japanese individual participating in a study abroad program offers a unique perspective on the impact of cultural exposure on *ikigai*²⁵. The transformative effect of *ikigai* in shaping professional change and providing meaning in life is highlighted, contributing valuable insights to the broader discourse.²⁶

METHODOLOGY

In the course of this narrative inquiry study, we employed Leximancer, a text analysis tool specifically chosen for its efficacy in exploratory investigations and its capability to manage extensive datasets²⁷, as underscored by Sotiriadou et al. The selection of Leximancer was based on its specialised functionalities, particularly automated concept extraction, making it well-suited for revealing nuanced patterns within the expansive dataset. This study utilises qualitative methods to explore prevalent social norms among the Japanese population that

¹⁸ García, Héctor, and Francesc Miralles. *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*. New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2017.

¹⁹ Mathews, Gordon. The stuff of dreams, fading: *Ikigai* and "the Japanese self." *Ethos* 24, no. 4 (1996): 718-747. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/640520>

²⁰ Mathews, Gordon. The stuff of dreams, fading: *Ikigai* and "the Japanese self." *Ethos* 24, no. 4 (1996): 718-747. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/640520>

²¹ Mathews, Gordon. The pursuit of a life worth living in Japan and the United States. *Ethnology* 35, no. 1 (1996): 51-62. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3774024>

²² Mathews, Gordon. The pursuit of a life worth living in Japan and the United States. *Ethnology* 35, no. 1 (1996): 51-62. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3774024>

²³ Park, Yoosung. "Sense of "Ikigai"(reason for living) and social support in the Asia-Pacific region." *Behaviormetrika* 42, no. 2 (2015): 191-208.

²⁴ Kono, Shintaro, and Gordon Walker. "Theorizing the interpersonal aspect of *ikigai* ('life worth living') among Japanese university students: A mixed-methods approach." *International Journal of Wellbeing* 10, no. 2 (2020).

²⁵ Bilash, Olenka. "Study Abroad, Transformation, and" *Ikigai*": A Case Study." In *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 245-260. Lehigh University Library and Technology Services. 8A East Packer Avenue, Fairchild Martindale Library Room 514, Bethlehem, PA 18015, 2019.

²⁶ Bilash, Olenka. "Study Abroad, Transformation, and" *Ikigai*": A Case Study." In *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 245-260. Lehigh University Library and Technology Services. 8A East Packer Avenue, Fairchild Martindale Library Room 514, Bethlehem, PA 18015, 2019.

²⁷ Sotiriadou, Popi, Jessie Brouwers, and Tuan-Anh Le. "Choosing a qualitative data analysis tool: A comparison of NVivo and Leximancer." *Annals of leisure research* 17, no. 2 (2014): 218-234.

contribute significantly to their understanding of *ikigai*. The use of Leximancer facilitates the identification of themes and patterns within the data, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the nuanced relationships between these social norms and the concept of *ikigai*. Thematic analysis was then conducted after obtaining results from Leximancer with the purpose of identifying more detailed categories of concepts that belong to each larger theme.

This approach is aligned with our objective of deriving empirical insights from the analysis of a corpus comprising 5400 translated excerpts from Japanese news articles. This corpus was sourced from the Asahi Shimbun database, spanning the period from June 2009 to August 2023. The excerpts underwent translation into English with the assistance of ChatGPT. In acknowledging potential limitations, this study recognises that the translation process may introduce biases, leaning towards predetermined (mis)interpretations of the *ikigai* concept within Western nuanced perspectives. To address this concern, the study takes precautions and maintains transparency regarding the potential impact of translation on the interpretation of findings.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In a broad context, the notion of *ikigai* in Japan is intricately tied to two primary themes: ‘purpose’ and ‘event.’ While the emergence of the ‘purpose’ theme was anticipated, the revelation of the ‘event’ theme presented a novel perspective.

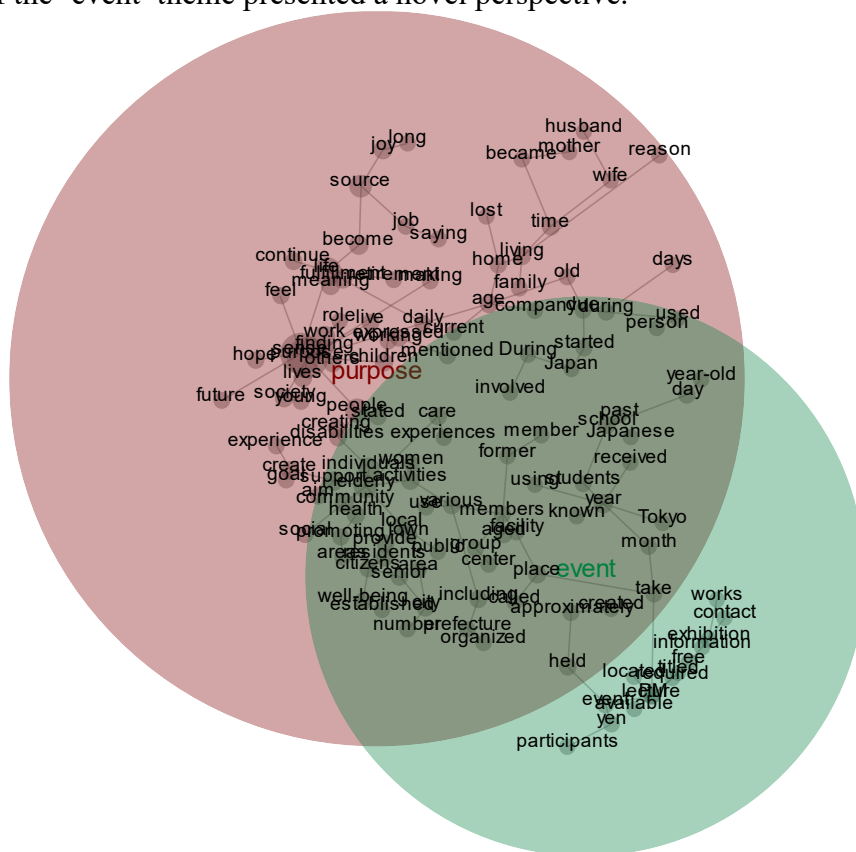


Figure 1: Results of Leximancer Concept Map

The extensive scope of the ‘purpose’ theme, highlighted in approximately 9,355 instances, reveals a rich tapestry of concepts. These encompass a wide array of ideas, including purpose, sense, life, people, elderly, source, individuals, work, become, community, support, year, activities, fulfilment, joy, local, meaning, age, create, society, health, lives, children, time,

place, creating, including, care, school, provide, living, residents, city, continue, live, finding, various, well-being, working, aim, citizens, home, town, expressed, hope, others, promoting, feel, during, disabilities, senior, social, young, stated, old, mentioned, job, saying, future, due, retirement, making, goal, experience, family, became, women, daily, long, role, areas, use, experiences, lost, during, reason, current, involved, company, mother, wife, and husband. These concepts neatly fall into eight overarching categories: life and existence, purpose and meaning, work and activities, challenges and changes, health and care, family and relationships, community and society, and location and home as listed in Table 1. The number in brackets shows the total number of text context blocks across the data with which each concept is identified. This classification offers a structured framework to better understand the diverse facets associated with *ikigai*, organising them into coherent themes.

Table 1: Categories of Concepts Belonging to the ‘Purpose’ Theme and Examples of Narrations

<p>Purpose and Meaning (12144)</p> <p>purpose (3638) sense (3627) source (1167) joy (635) fulfilment (521) meaning (484) hope (278) finding (276) feel (256) expressed (254) saying (227) aim (222) stated (192) reason (187) goal (180)</p>	<p>“When you have something that ignites your passion, your sense of <i>ikigai</i> increases.” - Yaeko Higashikawa (Ouji). The author’s statement suggests that having the enthusiasm to take on new challenges leads to the discovery of previously unknown things, which in turn kindles even more motivation. As your sense of <i>ikigai</i> grows, the author believes that life becomes more enjoyable and fulfilling, making each day more exciting. (Jan 19, 2023)</p> <p>Choir singing is their <i>ikigai</i>. These sisters have continued singing for nearly 40 years and are once again taking the stage this year. (Jul 6, 2012)</p> <p>She gives her creations as presents to her sister-in-law and friends who have been kind to her, and the joy they express is the source of her creative inspiration. She says, “Folding origami cranes is my <i>ikigai</i>. I want to keep folding new creations.” (Jan 29, 2013)</p> <p>Throughout the day, except for the time I spend sleeping, I’m constantly thinking about books. I want to read that book quickly, I don’t want to leave the world of that book, I want to create even more interesting book displays. It’s become my <i>ikigai</i>. - Hiroshi Imabayashi (Sep 5, 2021)</p> <p>In the past 2 to 3 years, I have been going to traditional Japanese inns in Tokyo where Western backpackers stay, and I perform a seat for the guests. The joy I feel when it is well-received is immense. There are times in the morning when I think, “I don’t want to do this,” but “striving for that is also an <i>ikigai</i>” for me. - Hideki Inoue (Oct 7, 2016)</p>
<p>Community and Support (7375)</p> <p>people (1247) elderly (958) support (536) community (511) local (430) living (404) society (353) care (337) including (333) provide (326) city (325) home (307) residents (305) town (254) citizens (227) social (210) promoting (177) areas (135)</p>	<p>Supporting others, making a difference in people’s lives, is in itself a source of joy and purpose, creating a sense of <i>ikigai</i>. We refer to the collective efforts of these individuals as the “new public,” and by supporting this power, we aim to build a human-centric society based on independence and coexistence, revitalizing community bonds, and slimming down the bloated bureaucracy. (Jan 30, 2010)</p> <p>What truly saved me from the depths of despair were the people around me. They would encourage me with words like “Cheer up” and bring me mangoes as a gift. They understood the difficulties I was going through and would help with chores like weeding or grocery shopping. This made me even more determined to “repay their kindness,” and it was through this that I regained my sense of <i>ikigai</i>, even more so than before. (Jun 5, 2016)</p> <p>I believe that seniors who are skilled at raising grandchildren can become a valuable support system for society. By assisting mothers in childcare, they can contribute to women’s participation in the workforce, and by teaching traditional games to local children, they can contribute to the preservation of education and culture. Creating networks of such support groups in each elementary school district is a way for seniors to find <i>ikigai</i> and lead a healthy life. (Sep 4, 2014)</p> <p>Preparations for an aging society are also urgently needed. Although the population in Fukuoka City is currently increasing, the city’s projections indicate that it will begin to decline around 2035. As of the end of March this year, the elderly population ratio was 19.2%. However, it is estimated to reach around 25% by 2025 and exceed 30% by 2040. Measures to enhance the <i>ikigai</i> for the elderly and strategies to control social security expenses are needed in response to this demographic shift. (Nov 14, 2014)</p>

	The school aims to create a town where anyone can grow their own vegetable garden and become healthy and have <i>ikigai</i> . (Apr 7, 2019)
Life and Existence (6095) life (2012) individuals (743) time (503) age (480) place (395) lives (378) live (334) well-being (263) young (207) experience (190) women (163) daily (154) experiences (138) current (135)	<p>On fishing days, they set sail a little after 1 a.m. The main fishing grounds are located about 30 kilometers off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture. At the docks, family and friends wave goodbye, eagerly awaiting their return. Together, they bring in catches like flounder, sea bass, and monkfish, taking them to the auction. It's a collective effort involving family and the entire community, that's what being a fisherman is all about. "It's not as simple as saying, 'It's fine if the fish don't sell, we'll be compensated.' Denying the fish we've brought in is like denying the <i>ikigai</i> of a fisherman," says Nishibori Gakuro. (Aug 22, 2023)</p> <p>My daughter has been encouraging me to write a blog. I take a walk along the Shiga River nearby every morning and enjoy the changing seasons. I hope to write in a simple and unadorned style, capturing the casual moments of everyday life. I'd also like to write about my childhood memories and my parents. My sisters back in my hometown in Izumo City, Shimane Prefecture, will probably appreciate it. I also want to use the photos I've been collecting for 15 years. The plan is expanding like a dream. It should not only give me a sense of <i>ikigai</i> but also help prevent brain aging. (Jan 1, 2015)</p> <p>Around 2010, I had a profound moment of reflection. My son passed away, and it created a significant rift in my life. Approaching the late autumn of life at the age of 60, I was searching for a different way of living when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, making me think about starting anew. However, the reality of starting over was challenging. Gradually, I began to think, "Even if it's not happiness, there can still be a life with <i>ikigai</i>." After all, happiness is something quite close to an illusion. Yet, what we ultimately seek tends to be quite similar. (Jan 1, 2023)</p>
Work and Employment (4574) work (841) become (607) activities (481) school (388) create (370) working (310) creating (301) job (230) became (221) making (208) retirement (192) role (156) use (137) company (132)	<p>Many people express concerns about their retirement funds and pensions, and they wish to continue working as a means of finding <i>ikigai</i>. As a result, "second careers" are gaining attention as a prominent challenge in the latter half of one's life. This trend involves individuals who are betting on reemployment, those who are embarking on new journeys in different fields, and initiatives that support entrepreneurship, among other endeavours. (Feb 10, 2020)</p> <p>During my active years, I longed for a carefree life every day. I used to sing about loving to sleep in, having a morning drink, and enjoying a morning bath... But I realized that without <i>ikigai</i>, I didn't know why I should continue living. As I approached my late 60s, I made a momentous decision. I found a new job through Hello Work (a public employment service in Japan) and re-entered the workforce. Through my work, I've found motivation in being of service to everyone. - Kengo Egawa (Mar 29, 2023)</p> <p>When employment is stable, employees can work with peace of mind. While individual skills improve, trust and confidence in the company also grow. What business owners should prioritize is not wage restraint measures. It is about how employees can find <i>ikigai</i> in their work and lead fulfilling lives. (Apr 21, 2018)</p>
Challenges and Changes (3712) year (631) health (381) continue (370) various (310) during (281) old (241) future (231) due (220) mentioned (215) long (189) senior (188) disabilities (180) lost (144) involved (131)	<p>It's also important to be moved by delicious food and beautiful scenery. Try expressing it in words. Those who live for the happiness of others are full of life. Supporting one's <i>ikigai</i> involves putting oneself in someone else's shoes. Paradoxically, this can lead to one's own good health and longevity, don't you think? (Feb 11, 2014)</p> <p>Takao Umeyama from Hisayoda in the same city took up the challenge. He opened a bicycle shop at the age of 23 and later expanded his business to include motorcycles and cars. He passed on the shop to his children and currently serves as the chairman. Umeyama made riding a bicycle his <i>ikigai</i>, saying it helps him forget the troubles. He mentions, "In Europe, there's a saying that goes, 'One bicycle is worth more than a truckload of medicine.' For health, a bicycle is the best." (Nov 17, 2011)</p> <p>"For both Hiroki and us as parents, wheelchair soccer has been an <i>ikigai</i>. Even if there are disabilities, we want him to find his own <i>ikigai</i> and get out of the house rather than isolating himself. We believe that when people with disabilities go out into the world, society itself changes," Hiroaki hopes. (Apr 1, 2010)</p>
Family and Relationships (1321) children (429) others (271)	In Tomioka Town, Sumie Nemoto (75) reflects on the two years since the earthquake. She believes that there's no choice but to stay positive. Her current <i>ikigai</i> is watching her grandson, Rintaro, grow up. Even though he can be cheeky, he always says, "I love grandma's cooking" when he comes over. (Mar 18, 2013)

<p>family (200) mother (148) wife (140) husband (133)</p>	<p>For me, having children is a kind of “uncontrollable force.” It involves unexpected accidents, surprising growth, and taking me to places I couldn’t have imagined. That’s why parenting is enjoyable, and my children are my <i>ikigai</i>. (Aug 28, 2021)</p> <p>Visits from family and friends provide comfort and encouragement to elderly individuals and patients, and it’s difficult to quantify just how much they uplift and console them. These moments of warm interaction are like medicine for the heart. They provide an <i>ikigai</i> and enhance the “quality of life.” They may also have positive effects on physical health. (Oct 21, 2020)</p>
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The ‘event’ theme, on the other hand, appears around 4,928 times and incorporates various concepts such as events, held, members, day, take, aged, started, group, yen, PM, students, approximately, prefecture, facility, free, centre, established, organized, month, former, number, public, year-old, participants, exhibition, used, using, days, Japanese, called, area, received, information, contact, past, member, available, Japan, Tokyo, works, created, person, located, titled, lecture, known, and required. Organizing these concepts into four distinct categories (events and activities, participants and members, location and establishment, organisation and information) and one miscellaneous category as shown in Table 2 can offer a more structured and organized understanding of this theme.

Table 2: Categories of Concepts Belonging to the ‘Event’ Theme and Examples of Narrations

<p>Events and Activities (2082)</p> <p>day (348) event (343) held (305) started (258) group (212) month (168) days (168) exhibition (167) lecture (113)</p>	<p>I create bamboo instruments like <i>shakuhachi</i>, <i>kena</i>, and <i>shakubyoshi</i>. It’s been my hobby and <i>ikigai</i> for 20 years. I play my self-made flutes for about an hour every day. Without lower teeth, I can manage to produce some sound with transverse flutes, but I couldn’t make any sound at all with vertical flutes. (Sep 22, 2022)</p> <p>The theme for this event is “In the Land of Fire, Ignite the Passion! The Niigata National Senior Games - Dreams and the Future.” The Niigata National Senior Games started in 1988 with the aim of promoting the <i>ikigai</i> and health of senior citizens, as well as fostering intergenerational connections. Throughout the event, the prefecture expects to attract around 500,000 participants, including spectators. (Oct 15, 2011)</p> <p>The group was founded four years ago by Kyohei Terada (69), the representative of Miyaki Town, who was enchanted by watching actual dances. Now it has grown to 33 members and is frequently invited to events and performances. Terada says, “It makes us happy to see people enjoy our performances. It has become our <i>ikigai</i>.” (Aug 16, 2014)</p>
<p>Organisation and Information (1826)</p> <p>contact (328) take (288) information (166) organized (134) available (130) called (124) past (122) works (118) titled (114) required (113) created (103) known (86)</p>	<p>On December 4th, from 1:30 PM to 3:30 PM, there will be a public lecture on community collaboration at Niigata University. The theme is “Promoting the Health and <i>Ikigai</i> of the Elderly in the Age of COVID-19,” focusing on topics like nutrition and exercise for health improvement. The lecture will be delivered via Zoom. Registration is required by November 30th. For more details, please visit the university’s website. This event is free of charge. For inquiries, you can contact Niigata University’s Community Collaboration Promotion Centre at 025-368-8225. (Nov 22, 2022)</p> <p>Mr. Kitagawa expresses his desire to support community development while assisting everyone in pursuing their dreams and finding <i>ikigai</i>. The summer festival will take place on the 31st from around 5 PM to 9 PM and will feature various attractions, including stalls serving dishes like Matsusaka beef skewers and myoga (Japanese ginger) <i>manju</i>, a game area, jazz and flamenco performances, as well as taiko drumming. (Jul 30, 2010)</p> <p>On the 9th, the “Self-Satisfaction Contest” to compete in the quality of agricultural products was held in Kanazawa-Nakano, Yokote City. The aim was to provide enjoyment to people by letting them see the agricultural products grown by farmers, thereby adding a sense of fulfilment and <i>ikigai</i> to their daily work. This event was organized by the JA Akita Furusato Women’s Division Kanazawa Branch. It marked the 46th edition of the contest, including the period when it was organized by the predecessor agricultural cooperative organisation. (Nov 10, 2022)</p>

<p>Participants and Members (1472)</p> <p>members (294) aged (224) students (213) participants (178) year-old (176) number (156) person (125) member (106)</p>	<p>On the 20th (Saturday) from 10 AM to 3 PM at the <i>Ikigai Koryu Hiroba</i> in Tsumacho, Nishito City, there will be a workshop where members of the “<i>Saito Takumi no Kai</i>” will teach you how to make “fabric slippers.” (Oct 11, 2012)</p> <p>Mita City mayoral candidate: Tetsuo Mori (age 71) Party Affiliation: Independent Former Prefectural President of “<i>Ikigai</i> Creation Association” and Head of “Hanshin North Citizens’ Bureau” Graduate of Osaka University (Jul 17, 2023)</p> <p>Ministry of Culture and Education’s “<i>Ikigai</i> Art Exhibition” Date: From the 22nd to the 28th Location: Bunkyo-cho, Tamba City, at the Bunkyo-cho Art Promenade within the Ministry of Culture and Education (Contact: 0796-22-4407). Approximately 20 artworks by instructors and students from the <i>Ikigai</i> Creative Academy’s painting classes. Admission is free. (Jun 2, 2016)</p>
<p>Location and Establishment (1143)</p> <p>prefecture (186) facility (164) center (158) established (144) former (143) public (132) area (116) located (100)</p>	<p>The Longevity and <i>Ikigai</i> Promotion Office of the prefecture announced on the 5th that Mr. Juemon Minamizono (105), who was the oldest man in the prefecture and resided in Satsumasendai City, passed away on the 4th. (Apr 7, 2013)</p> <p>A facility that supports the creative arts produced by people with disabilities, known as Art Brut, has opened this month in a traditional Japanese house in Shichijo, Kamitate Town. It aims to provide a space for individuals to freely engage in activities such as painting, embroidery, gardening, music, and more, with the goal of helping them discover hidden talents and find new <i>ikigai</i>. (Apr 17, 2015)</p> <p>At Akita University, since December 2020, students and the elderly have been engaging in online interactions several times a week, with each session lasting about 30 minutes. This initiative has continued even after the opening of the centre. Vice Centre Director Hisanaga Sasaki, who has been working on suicide prevention for about 25 years, shares positive feedback, stating, “Loneliness is a background to suicide. There are older people who say, ‘Talking to students has become an <i>ikigai</i>.’” (Oct 7, 2022)</p>
<p>Miscellaneous (1219)</p> <p>yen (300) free (264) approximately (207) used (176) using (140) received (132)</p>	<p>According to Adachi Ward, it is believed that Mr. Kato received approximately 116,000-yen worth of gift vouchers through the “<i>Ikigai</i> Grant” program, which is provided to individuals aged 70 and older, starting from 1990. He also applied for the “Healthy Elderly Commemorative Gift” program for those aged 90 and above, and in 2008-2009, he received 20,000-yen worth of gift vouchers in his name. In January of this year, after receiving inquiries about Mr. Kato’s well-being from local welfare commissioners, ward staff visited his family multiple times. The family initially claimed that Mr. Kato was giving sermons at a temple in Gifu, but he was not found at that temple. (Jul 30, 2010)</p> <p>The goal of the “New Elderly People’s Association,” which I founded, is to increase the number of elderly individuals who remain healthy and maintain an <i>ikigai</i> even in their old age, and who can contribute the wisdom and experiences they’ve accumulated throughout their lives to society. I believe that the circle of our companions can expand further, and with this in mind, I am currently experimenting with activities on the internet, specifically through the free service “Facebook.” (Jan 19, 2013)</p>

IKIGAI ASSOCIATION WITH PURPOSE AND MEANING

Although Leximancer separately counts the word ‘purpose’ and ‘sense,’ in the translated excerpts, these two words actually appear together as ‘sense of purpose.’ It turns out that this term records the highest number of queries, reaching up to 3600 queries. Excerpts containing this term demonstrate the social norms among the Japanese population that contribute significantly to their understanding of *ikigai*. Here, social norms related to *ikigai* encompass expectations regarding the sources of *ikigai* as well as expression of *ikigai*.

Examples in Table 1 consistently emphasise the interconnection of *ikigai* with purpose and meaning in individuals’ lives. Whether pursuing new challenges, engaging in meaningful pursuits like choir singing or crafting origami cranes, or contemplating books, the narratives

underscore the integral connection of *ikigai* with activities aligned with personal passions. These engagements contribute significantly to cultivating a profound sense of purpose and meaning.

IKIGAI ASSOCIATION WITH COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT

This study highlights a significant correlation between *ikigai* and community support, showcasing how individuals derive a sense of purpose through assistance from those around them. Examples in Table 1 emphasise the transformative influence of communal support during challenging periods, contributing to the restoration of an individual's sense of *ikigai*. The involvement of experienced seniors in childcare and initiatives like creating a town for cultivating vegetable gardens exemplify the role of community in addressing social issues. *Ikigai* is portrayed not solely as an individual concept but deeply intertwined with community relationships and social support.

IKIGAI ASSOCIATION WITH LIFE AND EXISTENCE

The narrations in Table 1 portray the association of *ikigai* with life and existence as a recurring theme. From the profound link between fishing and the purpose of a fisherman's life to the contemplation of starting a blog as a quest for meaning in everyday life, *ikigai* is depicted as woven into the fabric of individuals' existence. Whether reflecting on profound life events, overcoming challenges, or realising that life can have *ikigai* beyond happiness, these narratives illustrate the multifaceted nature of *ikigai* deeply embedded in human experiences.

IKIGAI ASSOCIATION WITH WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

Insights from the narrations in Table 1 provide a glimpse into the association of *ikigai* with work and employment. The examples emphasise the significance of finding purpose and fulfilment in one's professional life. Whether through "second careers," re-entering the workforce, or prioritising stable employment, the narrations collectively underscore the idea that work, when aligned with one's passions and sense of purpose, significantly contributes to a meaningful and fulfilling life.

IKIGAI ASSOCIATION WITH CHALLENGES AND CHANGES

The narrations in Table 1 highlight the association of *ikigai* with confronting challenges and embracing change. From finding joy in simple pleasures to taking up challenges like starting a business or engaging in wheelchair soccer, the narratives illustrate that navigating challenges and adapting to change contribute significantly to a sense of *ikigai*. The transformative potential of positive experiences and the interconnectedness between personal fulfilment and contributing to the well-being of others are key themes.

IKIGAI ASSOCIATION WITH FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS

The narrations in Table 1 underscore the profound association of *ikigai* with family and relationships, emphasising how these connections serve as sources of joy, purpose, and support. Whether finding *ikigai* in watching a grandson grow up, parenting as a source of purpose, or the significance of visits from family and friends for elderly individuals, these examples

collectively highlight the vital role that family and relationships play in shaping individuals' sense of *ikigai*.

***IKIGAI* ASSOCIATION WITH EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES**

The narrations in Table 2 vividly illustrate the profound association of *ikigai* with events and activities. Whether through crafting bamboo instruments, participating in community sports events like the Niigata National Senior Games, or engaging in group performances, these examples showcase how events and activities contribute to the cultivation of *ikigai*. Engagement in meaningful activities emerges as a powerful catalyst for discovering and sustaining a sense of purpose and fulfilment in life.

***IKIGAI* ASSOCIATION WITH ORGANIZATION AND INFORMATION**

The narrations in Table 2 highlight the significant association of *ikigai* with organisation and information dissemination. Examples such as Niigata University's public lecture, Mr. Kitagawa's summer festival, and the "Self-Satisfaction Contest" underscore the role of organised events and initiatives in fostering *ikigai*. The deliberate organisation of such events reflects a commitment to promoting *ikigai* and enhancing the quality of life for individuals and communities alike.

***IKIGAI* ASSOCIATION WITH PARTICIPANTS AND MEMBERS**

The narrations in Table 2 emphasise that *ikigai* is not only an individual pursuit but often involves active participation and collaboration within groups and communities. Whether through workshops, organisational affiliations, or artistic exhibitions, the engagement of participants and members contributes significantly to the vibrant tapestry of *ikigai*, highlighting its communal and shared nature.

***IKIGAI* ASSOCIATION WITH LOCATION AND ESTABLISHMENT**

The narrations in Table 2 underscore the dynamic association of *ikigai* with specific locations and establishments, emphasising how the environment can play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' sense of purpose and fulfilment. Whether it's the influence of a local community, the deliberate design of a creative space, or the facilitation of intergenerational interactions within an educational institution, the physical context plays a crucial role in shaping and enhancing individuals' pursuit of purpose and fulfilment.

OTHER ASSOCIATIONS OF *IKIGAI*

Initiatives like the "*Ikigai* Grant" and the "Healthy Elderly Commemorative Gift" program reflect a longstanding tradition in Japan of implementing programs to support individuals, particularly the elderly, in finding and maintaining *ikigai*. These programs demonstrate a cultural and societal recognition of the importance of *ikigai* in individuals' lives, showcasing continuous efforts to address the well-being and sense of purpose of the elderly in Japan.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings suggest that Japanese individual interpretations of *ikigai* are highly subjective, diverse, and context-dependent. The pursuit of passion, meaning, social connections, and adaptability to life's challenges emerges as central themes characterising how individuals understand and incorporate *ikigai* into their lives. The multifaceted nature of *ikigai* is revealed as a dynamic and personal concept that evolves based on individual experiences, values, and the cultural and societal context.

For instance, the narrations showcase a wide range of activities and pursuits associated with *ikigai*, spanning from traditional hobbies like crafting bamboo instruments to more unconventional pursuits such as participating in the Niigata National Senior Games or joining a dance group. This diversity underscores that *ikigai* is highly personalised, manifesting in various forms based on individual interests and passions.

A common theme across the narrations is the connection of *ikigai* to personal passions, meaning, and purpose. Whether deriving joy from activities aligned with personal interests, finding a sense of purpose in supporting others, or experiencing fulfilment through creative expression, *ikigai* consistently emerges as deeply intertwined with the pursuit of passion and meaning in life²⁸.

Moreover, the findings emphasise the role of community and social connections in shaping individuals' sense of *ikigai*. Whether through communal support during challenging periods, participation in group activities, or mentorship and skill-sharing in workshops, *ikigai* is often intertwined with social interactions and a sense of belonging to a larger community²⁹.

Furthermore, the examples highlight that *ikigai* is not static; rather, it adapts to challenges and changes in life. Whether overcoming personal or professional challenges, embracing change, or finding joy in simple pleasures, individuals demonstrate resilience and flexibility in their pursuit of *ikigai*. This adaptability is a key aspect of how individuals interpret and incorporate *ikigai* into their lives³⁰.

The association of *ikigai* with significant life events, such as the passing of a loved one or personal reflections on aging, underscores the deep existential and reflective nature of *ikigai*. Individuals often reevaluate their sense of purpose in the face of life-changing events, leading to a nuanced understanding of *ikigai* that goes beyond immediate happiness and encompasses a broader sense of meaning in life³¹.

The study's findings also corroborate and extend the assertion made by Bilash regarding the transformative effect of *ikigai*³². The narration about Kengo Egawa's personal journey highlights the transformative power of *ikigai* in the context of work. This narrative illustrates that *ikigai* is not only about personal satisfaction but also about contributing to the well-being of others, reinforcing the idea that meaningful work can be a pathway to a fulfilling life³³.

What becomes evident from this study is the influence of institutions and community initiatives on individual interpretations of *ikigai*. Whether through support programs, community festivals, or educational lectures, individuals often find *ikigai* within the frameworks and opportunities created by larger institutions and community structures. This

²⁸ Winn, Marc. What is Your Ikigai? The View Inside Me. (2014). <https://theviewinside.me/what-is-your-ikigai/>.

²⁹ Kono, Shintaro, and Gordon Walker. "Theorizing the interpersonal aspect of ikigai ('life worth living') among Japanese university students: A mixed-methods approach." *International Journal of Wellbeing* 10, no. 2 (2020)

³⁰ Ishida, Riichiro. "Enormous earthquake in Japan: Coping with stress using purpose-in-life/ikigai." *Psychology* 2, no. 8 (2011): 773.

³¹ Mathews, Gordon. The stuff of dreams, fading: Ikigai and "the Japanese self." *Ethos* 24, no. 4 (1996): 718-747. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/640520>

³² Bilash, Olenka. "Study Abroad, Transformation, and" Ikigai": A Case Study." In *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 245-260. Lehigh University Library and Technology Services. 8A East Packer Avenue, Fairchild Martindale Library Room 514, Bethlehem, PA 18015, 2019.

³³ Ishida, Riichiro. "Enormous earthquake in Japan: Coping with stress using purpose-in-life/ikigai." *Psychology* 2, no. 8 (2011): 773.

suggests that individual interpretations of *ikigai* are not isolated but can be influenced by the broader societal context³⁴.

The findings of this study align with Mathews' contention that Japan is undergoing a transition from 'productive aging' to 'happy aging'.³⁵ The narrations in the study illustrate how individuals find and cultivate *ikigai* in various ways, emphasising personal contentment and fulfilment in their later years. This shift is particularly evident in the diverse range of activities individuals engage in, from traditional hobbies and community events to personal reflections on life events.

With regards to the institutionalisation of *ikigai*, while the term "institutionalisation" often conveys a formalised and standardised process, in the context of *ikigai*, it appears to manifest through a combination of formal programs, community initiatives, and adaptability within institutions to address the diverse facets of well-being and purpose in individuals' lives. For example, the "*Ikigai* Grant" program and the "Healthy Elderly Commemorative Gift" program are notable examples of institutions in Japan actively supporting *ikigai*. These programs, spanning over several decades, demonstrate a systematic effort to provide financial support and resources to individuals, particularly the elderly, to enhance their well-being and sense of purpose. The continuity of these programs suggests an institutionalised approach to fostering *ikigai*.

The example of Niigata University organising a public lecture on community collaboration, specifically focused on promoting the health and *ikigai* of the elderly, illustrates how educational institutions play a role in disseminating information related to *ikigai*. The deliberate organisation of events by universities reflects an institutional commitment to promoting *ikigai* through knowledge sharing and community engagement. The case of Mr. Kitagawa's summer festival, aimed at supporting community development and individuals' pursuit of *ikigai*, showcases how community-level initiatives can be organised to foster a sense of purpose and enjoyment. The intentional planning of events and festivals by individuals and organisations within a community suggests an institutionalised effort to enhance communal well-being.

The establishment supporting creative arts by individuals with disabilities, situated in a traditional Japanese house, reflects an institutional effort to create a specific environment conducive to artistic expression and personal exploration. The deliberate choice of location and the existence of such establishments indicate an institutionalised approach to providing spaces that facilitate the discovery of *ikigai*. The mention of the "New Elderly People's Association" founding and adapting activities, such as those on the internet, to meet the evolving needs of the elderly population suggests institutional flexibility and responsiveness. This adaptability implies an ongoing commitment to experimenting with new approaches to ensure the continuation of programs that support *ikigai*.

The findings do provide glimpses into the institutionalisation of *ikigai* in Japan, highlighting how institutions, organisations, and programs have been structured to support and promote *ikigai* at various levels of society. However, further research is needed to delve deeper into the policies, structures, and long-term impacts of these institutionalised efforts to support *ikigai* in Japan.

CONCLUSION

³⁴ Shirai, Kokoro, Hiroyasu Iso, Hideki Fukuda, Yasuhiro Toyoda, Toshio Takatorige, and Kozo Tatara. "Factors associated with "Ikigai" among members of a public temporary employment agency for seniors (Silver Human Resources Centre) in Japan; gender differences." *Health and quality of life outcomes* 4 (2006): 1-6.

³⁵ Mathews, Gordon. "Beyond 'Productive Aging': An Argument for 'Happy Aging'." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* (2023): 1-17.

In conclusion, this study reveals that *ikigai* among the Japanese can be understood by identifying two broad themes, namely ‘purpose’ and ‘event.’ Under the ‘purpose’ theme, it can be divided into several smaller themes, such as purpose and meaning, community and support, life and existence, work and employment, challenges and changes, and family and relationships. Meanwhile, under the ‘event’ theme, it can be further understood through sub-themes such as events and activities, organisation and information, participants and members, location and establishment, and so on.

This focused investigation into the nuances of *ikigai* in the Japanese cultural context highlights its profound importance. *Ikigai* extends beyond personal goals, embodying cultural norms, societal structures, and community well-being. The results demonstrate a cultural dedication to sustaining *ikigai* through longstanding programs, revealing the concept’s adaptability to meet the changing needs of various age groups. Understanding *ikigai* in its cultural context offers valuable insights for policymakers, healthcare professionals, and communities seeking to enhance well-being and purposeful living. Future research can explore the longitudinal impact of *ikigai* support programs and further investigate the evolving nature of *ikigai* across generations in the dynamic landscape of Japanese society.

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