

Engaging the Angst of Unemployed Youth
in Post-Industrial Japan:
A Narrative Self-Help Approach

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the experience of indefinable angst (*ikizurasa*) among youth who are in a long-term period of unemployment in post-industrial Japan. The current dominant model for unemployment support is largely based on activation policies, which assume that users can identify their problems and clarify their needs in regard to job seeking. However, the effectiveness of activation policies is limited for individuals with long-term unemployment precisely because of their angst, which prevents them from acting rationally. This thesis explores another model to support such youth by using empirical data collected from those with a strong sense of *ikizurasa*. It addresses two questions: 1) What is *ikizurasa* angst? and 2) What sort of approach can be effective to mitigate it? For answering these questions, two research methods are adopted: 1) participant observation in a self-help group where unemployed youth with *ikizurasa* gather to help themselves by sharing their own narratives, and 2) in-depth interviews of ten participants of the group.

This thesis argues that the term *ikizurasa* is a reflection of individualised marginalisation in a post-industrial society where a life career becomes de-standardised, the form of marginalisation is diversified and individualised, and the collective expression of marginalisation is weakened. Since the term *ikizurasa* denotes only subjective pain and not objective situations, it enables people to express their feelings of alienation and share them with others. This study found that through dialogical interactions, participants were able to re-interpret the meaning of *ikizurasa* from a narrative of isolation to that of connectedness.

The thesis further notes that for meaningful support of someone with *ikizurasa*, (re)constructing human relationships through the sharing of narratives may be a prerequisite before making an attempt to find work. The participant observation of the narrative self-help practice showed that members could renew their sense of self and also clarify their needs in a practical manner, which had been difficult to achieve in existing activation schemes. The effectiveness of the self-help group is based on 'indirect aim-setting', which means that the goal is not getting a job, but rather self-help and enhancing the users' subjectivity.

This thesis concludes that a relational approach that enables youth to reconnect themselves to society is especially effective in an increasingly individualised world, and suggests an institutional framework to enhance relational support, as well as employment and welfare assistance for youth with *Ikizurasa*.

DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Special thanks also go to Dr Philip White and Mr Mark Benton, for their professional editing work on my thesis. Dr White read the earlier drafts and provided critical suggestions with understanding of the Japanese text. Mr Benton proofread the final version under the pressure of deadline. I am also indebted to Dr Kate Cadman and Dr Adam Broinowski for their editing work and stimulating comments on my paper, 'The Angst of Youth in Post-Industrial Japan: A Narrative Self-Help approach', *New Voices In Japanese Studies vol. 8* (pp. 98-117) published by The Japan Foundation (Sydney), which, though small in scale, formed a basis of this thesis in its earlier stage.

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NOTES ON STYLE

Japanese names are written in the Japanese style, with the family names given first followed by given name, except for the cases where to refer to the person in English style is well established in the English-speaking world.

Quotations from publications in Japanese as well as interview data and essays from the field, the main resource for the major part of the analyses of from which this thesis is derived, were translated by the author unless otherwise noted. For some quotations, which are particularly difficult to translate into English without losing the nuance in the original passage, the original Japanese sentences are provided in the footnote.

The words '*ikizurasa*', '*futōkō*', '*hikikomori*' and '*ibasho*' have been maintained in the text, as those Japanese expressions carry a particular nuance that cannot be easily preserved when translated into English. The meanings of these terms are listed in the Glossary, while brief English translations of them, such as 'a sense of indefinable angst', 'school non-attendance', 'social withdrawal' and 'a place to "be"', are provided whenever these terms first appear or when deemed necessary for the convenience of the reader. Frequently used names of Japanese organisations converted into English are not direct translations, but retain to some extent the original nuance or meaning, such as 'the Z-meetings' [*Zura-ken*] and 'Generative Garden' [*Naru-niwa*]. Likewise, titles of Japanese publications are presented following translation into English with the original Japanese included for the reference, for example, 'In-between' [*Aida*] (Kimura 2005b).

Japanese words are rendered in the style of Hepburn Romanisation and italicised with macrons indicating long vowels, such as '*ō*' as in '*futōkō*', except for names of places that are familiar to English readers, such as Tokyo and Osaka.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Ikizurasa* or Indefinable Angst among Youth

'*Ikizurasa*' [生きづらさ, literally 'pain of living'] is a keyword that refers to a sense of angst widely experienced by youth in twenty-first century Japan. Amamiya Karin, an activist and writer, regards herself as 'always having had *ikizurasa* and suicidal tendency' and states that the suicidal tendency was at its strongest when she held an insecure job (Amamiya 2007:12). She explains:

When I was a *freeter* [young non-regular worker], my suicidal tendency was stronger than at any other time in my life....What I was supposed to do was menial jobs that could be done by anyone. There was a negative spiral that the more I worked, the more I denied myself. Even if I questioned the situation, the result would have been just to be fired, as I was replaceable. My unstable job status intensified my unstable mental condition, and feelings of not being needed by society deprived me of my self-esteem easily.¹ (Amamiya 2007: 12)

Such angst can include feelings of solitude, anxiety, low self-esteem, hopelessness, and/or anger. Although it is often associated with unemployment, mental illness, family problems, and/or being a school misfit, Amamiya holds that 'many young people constantly experience vague *ikizurasa* without knowing the reasons for it' (Amamiya 2007: 13).

¹ All English translations of Japanese source texts are by Rie Kido, unless noted otherwise.

Kayano and Amamiya (2008) argue that this condition has two aspects; socio-economic angst and personal-mental angst (pp. 8-9). Socio-economic angst comes from degrading work conditions, lack of equality due to a widening socio-economic gap (Satō 2000; Tachibanaki 2006), and the pressures of poverty (Yuasa 2008; Abe 2011), while personal-mental angst comes from a lack of self-worth and/or difficulty in relating with others. In reality, however, both socio-economic and personal-mental angst are intertwined in complex experiences, making it difficult for individuals to narrate their experiences of *ikizurasa* in an understandable form. Yuasa and Nihei (2007) divided the youth unemployment discourse in Japan in the 2000s into: 1) 'youth bashing' (pp. 330), in which youth were reproached for their lack of motivation; and 2) criticism that emphasised that youth are motivated but lack employment opportunities, and noted that neither discourse can satisfactorily explain the reality of youth who either 'do not want to work' or who 'want to work but can neither work nor move on' (Yuasa and Nihei 2007: 330). Their point is that in cases of youth who have experienced hardships in their life, such as mal-treatment in childhood, poverty, and/or homelessness, the sense of self can become unstable, which might result in communication that may appear to show a lack of motivation. This absence of an interpretive frame exacerbates isolation felt by youths and can generate a sense of *ikizurasa*.

Hijikata Yukiko (2010) describes this complexity as 'nested pain (*ireko-shiki no kurushisa*)', which refers to 'plural pains, invisible in daily situations...hard to be understood by both oneself and others, all of which amplify one's difficulties' (pp. 262). In short, the problem is not simply unemployment and financial insecurity, but is compounded by marginalisation from society as a result of unemployment or employment that is felt to be meaningless, which in turn can lead to a sense of alienation, isolation, and hopelessness. Such pain, derived from the subjective perception of marginalised youth, shows the most pressing issues for those who are directly concerned.

It is noteworthy, however, that because of the vague and all-encompassing meaning of the term '*ikizurasa*', it can work for all sorts of marginalised people who come together to share their angst in an inclusive manner, eventually helping them make their issues more visible and thus more understandable. For instance, Amamiya reports a labour

movement held mainly by youth in central Tokyo in 2008 called *May Day of Liberty and Life: Growing Precariats in Solidarity*:

That day, a thousand of us demonstrated dancing in Shinjuku. With the music loudly coming out from the sound system on a truck, we went on shouting, laughing and dancing....This May Day, started by *freeters*, now seems to attract every kind of people other than 'the rich' under the banner of 'Let us Live [*kisasero*]!' A middle-aged homeless man protested with a card-board-box placard which says, 'We are all alive [*washi-ra wa min'na ikite iru*].' A disabled person on a wheelchair carried a placard with the message, 'I cannot be supported by the *Services and Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act*.' Petrol station workers displayed a banner which read, 'When you fire casual workers, you will kill regular workers by overwork.' There were dispatched workers [*haken-shain*], regular workers, 'nominal managers [*na-bakari kanri-shoku*]' and girls in *gosurori* fashion marching all together. Girls whose wrists were covered with cut wounds, school students and public officers were also there. All of us got together in front of *Aruta* Building and shouted in unison, 'Give us!' Give us life. Give us liberty, a decent job, somewhere to live, something to eat, a job tomorrow, social security, and, most of all, our future.... Although we may have different kinds of '*ikizurasa*', we are the same in that all of us have been hurt in this country, where just to live is extremely difficult (Amamiya 2008a: 19).

Here, the term *ikizurasa* is used as a key concept that covers a broad range of issues from poverty to self-injury, thus enabling different kinds of people to gather with the same objective: 'to live'. It also shows that *ikizurasa* can be a useful common denominator with which individuals can link arms regardless of their particular problems, because it does not specify the reason for their angst. By claiming that they are suffering from *ikizurasa*, a thus united group can attract public attention not only to the phenomenon of unemployment or under-employment, but more broadly to the lack of respect for human life that is felt to be pervasive in society. Citing the phrase from *May Day for Liberty and Life* 2007: 'To live is good. Do not devalue life [*ikiru koto wa yoi. Seizon o otoshimeruna*]', Sugita Shunsuke, an *ex-freeter* writer, remarks:

Our survival, life, and living [*生存 seizon, 生命 seimei, 生活 seikatsu*] must be more valued than labour --- this simple declaration constitutes the core ethics of contemporary labour movement.... What we are deprived of most is not just employment opportunities or wages but life itself [*seizon/seimei*] (Sugita 2008: 10).

Sugita's insight points to the possibility that even though *ikizurasa* is used to denote diverse pain in diverse situations including alienating labour conditions, it is fundamentally about the very foundation of human existence: *life*. If so, *ikizurasa* may work as a key word to challenge rampant individualism, which emphasises self-liability and accelerates alienation. It may also be able to help marginalised youth restore their relationship-making ability, to share their problems with others, and inspire each other to work collaboratively to make a 'better' society.

This thesis focuses on marginalised Japanese youth and explores: 1) how they experience *ikizurasa* in real life situations, and 2) how to overcome the limitations of existing support systems for people with *ikizurasa*. In order to explore these issues, this thesis introduces a Self-Help Group [SHG] in Osaka in which about ten to twenty marginalised youth meet once a month to discuss their feelings of angst. The monthly meetings are called 'the Z-meetings', and most participants have experienced/are experiencing a state of *futōkō* [school non-attendance], *hikikomori* [retreat from social life], unemployment, NEET, and/or *freeter*. Notably, the aim of the Z-meetings is set to provide a space where participants can explore their problems by sharing them with others, but not to help them get a job nor to 'rescue' them from hardships. Run by a separate non-profit organisation [NPO], the Z-meetings are not funded by a government agency, as such support is generally focused on employment support including career education, job matching, and/or training (Tsutsui et al. 2014: 31). The Z-meetings, in contrast, can remain free from and institutional framework, and flexibly and practically respond to the on-going daily problems of the participants.

I was involved in establishment of the Z-meetings group in 2011 and have participated in meetings as a coordinator since then. This research project was developed through this experience. Based on analysis of data collected from in-depth interviews with participants and participant observations during the Z-meetings, I will argue that young people who suffer from *ikizurasa* tend to have difficulty identifying their problems and clarifying needs that are necessary to set out to find a job, while underlying their angst is a deep sense of disconnectedness from others and from society. This thesis shows how individuals participating in the Z-meetings become more capable of articulating their needs and constructing their sense of self by sharing their narratives with others. It further discusses how that was made possible, not so much by attempting to fix the

participants' 'problems', but rather more *indirectly* through providing a place to build new kinds of relationships with others based on interactive dialogues. I suggest that establishment of a new kind of relationality is key to redressing the participants' sense of pain and rekindling their self-worth, and that the availability of a place like the Z-meetings is essential to develop such relationality. Based on case studies performed in Japan, this thesis also argues that a relational approach, such as the narrative self-help approach (Katz and Bender 1976; White and Epston 1990; Anderson and Goolishian 1992; Noguchi 2002), is effective for supporting marginalised youth who experience a debilitating sense of alienation in post-industrial societies. Qualitative data are also presented, which suggest an institutional framework that can enhance relational support, and, in due course, employment and welfare assistance for youth with *ikizurasa*.

1.2. Background of Youth Angst

Ikizurasa is exacerbated by economic pressure and often leads to alienation at work, and a characteristic of post-industrial societies, where marginalisation of workers is common (Beck 1992; Furlong and Cartmel 2006; Berardi 2009; Standing 2011). For example, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi (2009) discusses 'alienation of the soul', which can be understood as a similar phenomenon to *ikizurasa* (Allison 2013). He argues that in late capitalism, a 'cognitariat', a compound of 'cognitive' and 'proletariat', emerges in response to the advent of a newly flexible labour force. A key characteristic of the cognitariat, he continues, is that their cognitive dimensions, including desires, emotions and understandings of the meaning of life, have been affected by work conditions to such an extent that they have been influenced at the level of their 'soul', with the consequence that their lives in their entirety become subject to relations determined by capital (Berardi 2009, 23). These alienating conditions aggravate states of panic or depression (Berardi 2009, 22–23).

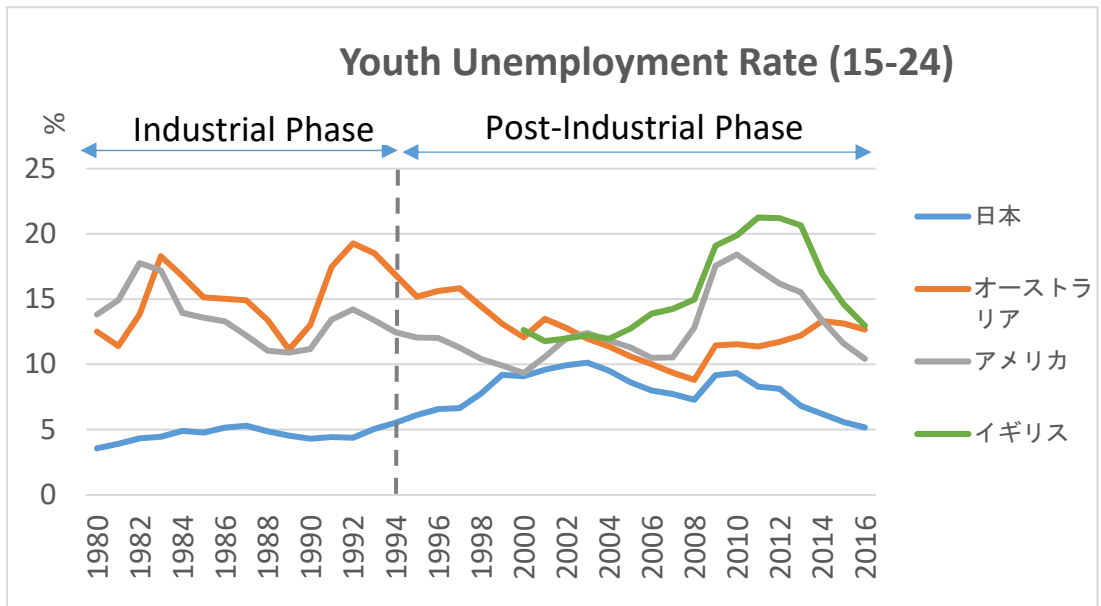
Japan entered its post-industrial phase around 1994, when the service industry started to employ more people than the manufacturing industry (Oguma 2014, 17). In that year, the term '*Shūshoku Hyōgaki*' (Ice age of job hunting) won the annual popular word

award in the wake of the bursting of the economic bubble in 1991-1993. After the economic bubble burst in 1992, the economic growth rate in terms of GDP dropped to approximately 1% on average per year.² In 1995, the Japan Business Federation (*Nikkeiren [Nihon keieisha dantai renmei]*),³ an employers' organisation, published a report entitled Japanese-style Management for a New Era [*Shin-jidai no nihon-teki keiei*], advocating flexible employment practices to make it easier to place employees on casual or short-term fixed contracts, and move away from a more traditional model of permanent employment contracts in return for the employee's company loyalty. This report proposed dividing Japanese employees into three categories: 1) core regular workers who develop firm-specific skills based on secure tenure; 2) highly skilled specialists employed for a short term but rewarded with high wages; and 3) low-skilled workers employed temporarily with low wages. Employers were encouraged to use these different types of employment (Japan Business Federation 1995). In line with this, the *Haken Law (Rōdōsha Haken Hō, [Dispatched Workers Law])* was repeatedly revised during the 1990s and 2000s to enable employers to harness a dispatched workforce in more low-skilled areas over a longer term in a more flexible manner (Fu 2012: 62-63). Around the same period, OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] labour market statistics showed a substantial increase in job insecurity among young people. The youth unemployment rate, which had been 4–5% during the 1980s and early 1990s, notably low as compared with Western countries, rose to around 10% in the 2000s, reaching closer to the levels of other countries (see Figure 1). Correspondingly, the non-regular employment rate increased significantly among young people from the mid-1990s (Figure 2). In parallel, the word *ikizurasa* started to gain public recognition from the mid-1990s (Figure 3). According to the Cabinet Office in a report published in 2012, 54% of young people in their 20s felt that 'they have experienced hardship in their social or daily life' (Figure 4).

² According to National Accounts Statistics [SNA], Japan's economic growth rate was around 10% on average from 1955 to 1973, and then slowed to about 4% on average from 1975 to 1991 (Cabinet Office 1955-1968 '*Chōki sokyū shuyō keiretsu [Main series on long-term basis]*' in SNA; Cabinet Office 1975-1991 SNA).

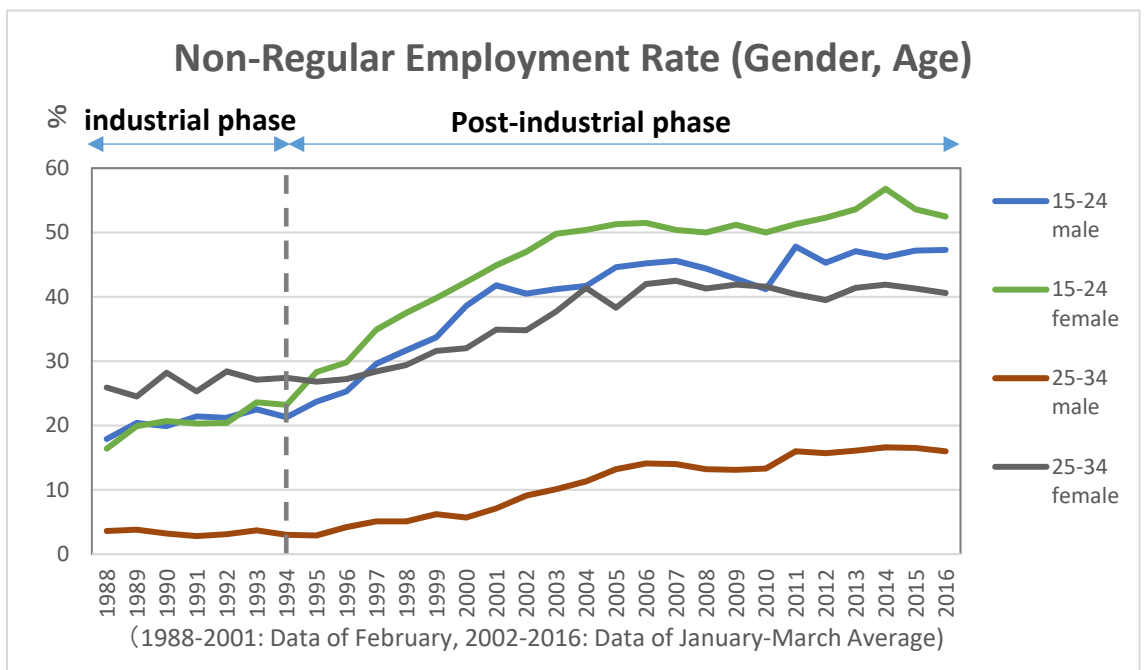
³ This organisation has since changed its name to the Japan Federation of Economic Organisations (*Keidanren [Keiei dantai rengōkai]*).

Figure 1. Youth Unemployment Rate (15-24)



Resource: OECD (2017), Youth unemployment rate (indicator).

Figure 2. Non-Regular Employee Rate in Japan (1988-2016), (Gender, Age)



Resource: MIAC [Ministry of International Affairs and Communications] Labour Force Survey

Figure 3 Total Number of Hits of 'Ikizurasa' by Key Word Search in Kikuzō 2 (Asahi Newspaper Article Search Engine) and National Diet Library [NDL] Search

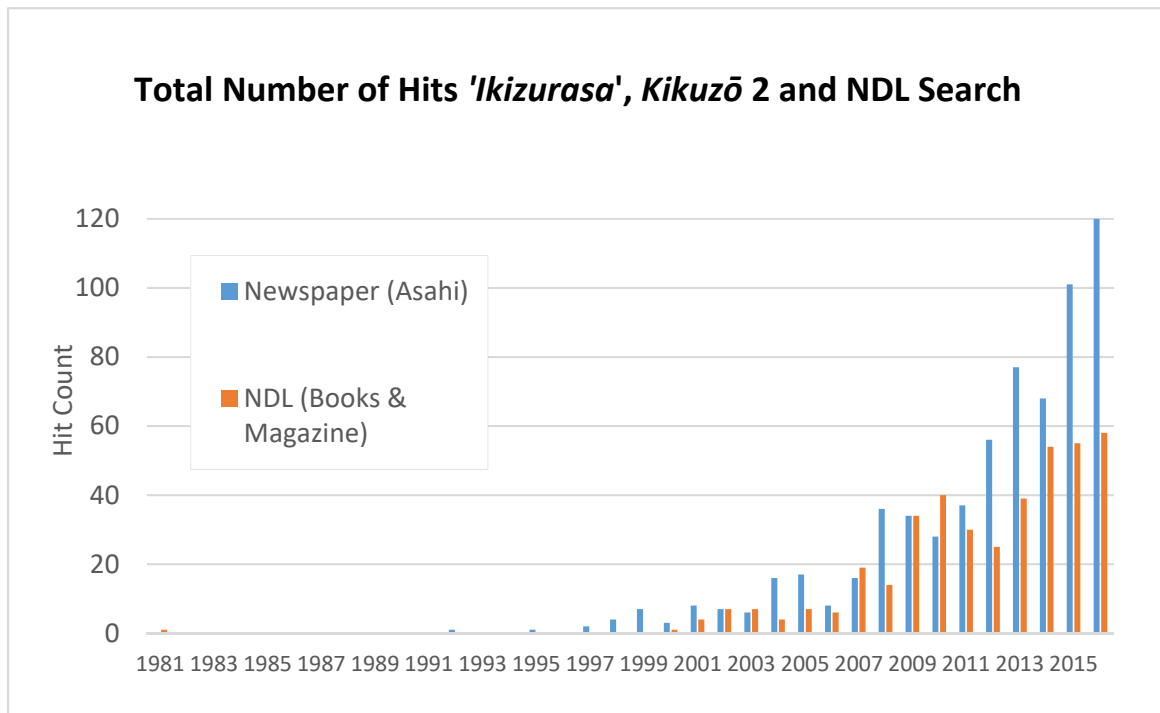
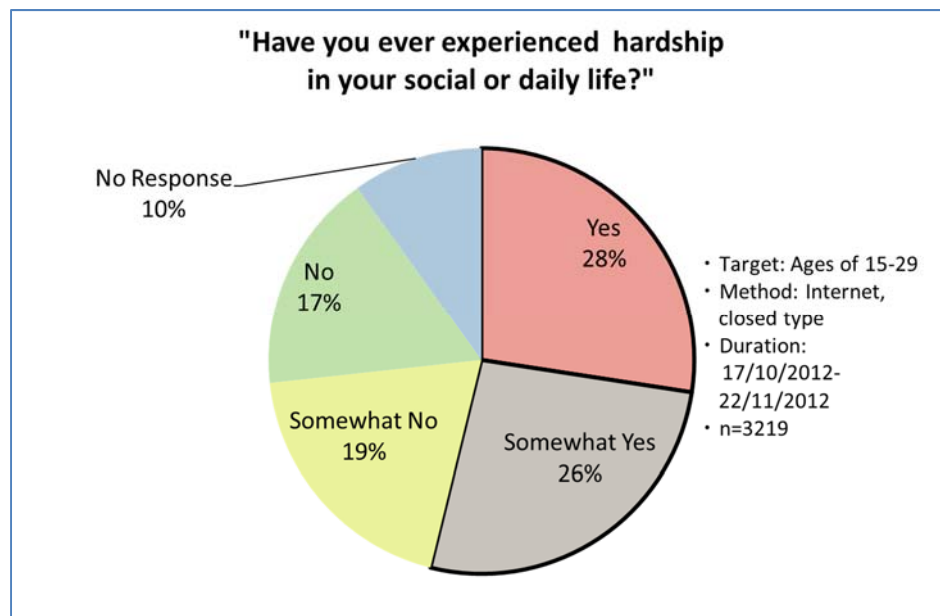


Figure 4 Rate of young people who have experienced hardship in their social or daily life



Resource: Cabinet Office 2013a 'Survey on Perceptions of Japanese Youth'

While youth marginalisation is a common phenomenon among highly-industrialised countries, it can occur differently depending on the socio-cultural context specific to each society. Allison points out that *ikizurasa* angst can be thought of as not only associated with the post-industrial situation but also with principles underlying Japanese society on a more long-term basis (Allison 2013: 16). She explains that in post-industrial Japan, as a result of impasse of family and work as a ‘de facto welfare society’, ‘a very particular kind of precarity and precariat has emerged’ (pp. 10). She continues, ‘It is the way that insecurity or precariousness registers on the senses in the first place—as a sense of being out of place, out of sorts, disconnected (*fuan, fuantei, ibasho ga nai*)’ (pp. 14). Here, Allison describes ‘loss of *ibasho*’ as ‘a sense of being disconnected’. *Ibasho* [居場所, literally ‘place to be’] is referred to as a ‘space with a receptive atmosphere [*juyōteki na kūkan*]’ (Abiru 2012: 37), where relationships in which people are accepted are generated. *Ibasho*, which originated in the *futōkō* movement in the 1980s (Tanaka and Hagiwara 2012), is also a key word of this thesis that has a possibility to mitigate *ikizurasa* by providing a space where users can stay, feel ‘safe’, and associate with others.

In the background, there is a social system established during industrialisation where labour seeps into and merges with life. In this system, achievement in life largely depends upon how well the individual lives up to the social roles they take in the company, school or family: a *sararīman* who spends his private time with his boss and co-workers; a housewife who regards children’s educational attainment as the goal of her motherhood; and a child who tries to be recognised by achieving high academic scores. After its dislocation in the post-industrial era, this system generated particularly complex angst consisting of loss of economic sturdiness and life security, and the sense of self being disconnected from others and society.

This social system has functioned through the societal systems ‘school-mediated job search [*gakkō keiyu no shūshoku*]’ (Honda 2005) and ‘Japanese life security system [*nihon-gata seikatsu hoshō shisutemu*]’ (Miyamoto et al. 2003). The school-mediated job search is a type of transitional system from school to work, where students start searching for a job before graduation, supported by vocational guidance at school based on the premise that companies give priority for employment exclusively to new

graduates (Honda 2005). The Japanese life security system means that corporation and family take more responsibility for people's life security, compensating the lack of public social welfare (Miyamoto et al. 2003). These systems were established through the economic growth era and boosted Japan's economic prosperity. Under them, the possibility of career development and life security is largely based on the individual's membership and association with a school, company, or family. Here, once someone drops out from these institutions and loses membership, they tend to lose accessibility to career development and life security. For example, eligibility for unemployment benefits is strictly limited to regular workers who are indeed likely to have more employment security. As a result, in 2006, 77% of unemployed people were not eligible for unemployment benefits, marking the lowest level in developed countries (International Labour Office [ILO] 2009).¹⁶ Moreover, under the tradition of school-mediated job search, individuals who graduated from a school have less chance of getting a decent job offer and, once they are thrown into the precarious job market, it becomes very difficult to turn the situation around. The political sociologist Suzuki Kenji (2015) points out that 32.4% of Japan's unemployed youth in 2013 had been unemployed for more than one year, a duration longest among OECD countries (pp. 134-135). An *ex-freeter* writer, Akagi Tomohiro (2007), describes the difficulty with changing the *freeter* life, as follows:

People would say 'you should look for a regular employment'. But how can I do so? In this society where being employed on a regular basis right after graduating from university is the 'right path as a human', decent companies only accept resumes from new-graduates (Akagi 2007: 54).

This social background exacerbates the hardship of non-regular workers, by making them feel that they dropped out from 'the right path as a human' and their future career has become deadlocked. This thesis refers to the systems where eligibility for life security and possibility of career development are determined on the basis of organisation membership as the 'membership-based system' (Hamaguchi 2009; Kido 2012) (Chapter 2).

1.3. Research Questions

This thesis focuses on young people who have *ikizurasa* angst and work collaboratively to help themselves envisage a 'better' life. It explores the following questions:

1) What is *ikizurasa* angst among marginalised youth in post-industrial Japan and how is it actually experienced?

2) What sort of approaches can be effective to mitigate this angst and how can they be implemented?

In order to explore these issues, I will conduct interviews and participant observations in the SHG, called the Z-meeting group, where marginalised youth who feel *ikizurasa* angst get together once a month to explore themselves by sharing their problems. Based on analysis of the data collected, this thesis argues that *ikizurasa* should not only be seen as a problem, but can also provide the basis whereby socially isolated individuals can (re)connect to others and society. This thesis further questions the adequacy of the non-relational concept of 'individual' as a framework to interpret contemporary youth angst as well as effective means of support for them. It also suggests the significance of a relational framework inspired by Kenneth Gergen's concept of 'relational being' (Gergen 2009) and Kimura Bin's notion of 'in-between' (Kimura 2005), which have not been taken into account as much as the concept of individuals.

1.4. Definition of Key Words

Having provided a brief introduction, I will now define key terms used in this thesis and explain the ways they are used.

Youth

Youth is commonly used to indicate a life stage between childhood and adulthood, and the age ranges that are denoted by 'youth' can vary according to contexts, periods and situations (Goodman et al. 2012: 16). In Japan, for official statistics, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Welfare (MHLW) defines 'youth [*wakamono*]' as those whose ages

are from 15 to 34, which is also used in the definitions of both NEET and *freeters*. It covers a broader range than, for example, the USA which uses The United Nations General Assembly definition of ‘youth’ as those who fall between the ages of 15 and 24.

This thesis does not set a strict age limitation in selecting the participants. Most participants are in their twenties and early thirties, though some are in their late thirties or even forties. I regard those people as ‘youth’ too, as the main purpose for using this term is to illuminate the angst that is related to the difficulties in becoming an adult member of society, including relationships with others and hardships at work. Thus, this thesis will call those who have angst somewhere in the process of becoming adult members of society as ‘youth’, regardless of their actual age.

Futōkō

Futōkō is the youth-related issue that this thesis is especially focused on as both a cause of *ikizurasa*, and a resource of accumulated discussions of how to interpret and mitigate the pain. MEXT officially defines *futōkō* as ‘students who are absent from school intermittently or continuously for thirty days in a school year for the reason of ‘*futōkō*’. *Futōkō* as a reason of absence means “a situation in which students do not or cannot go to school for psychological, emotional, physical or social reasons/background other than ‘illness’ and ‘economic reasons’” (MEXT 2015). MEXT has been counting the number of *futōkō* students since 1966, and in 2015 the number was estimated to be 126,009 in total of primary and junior high school students, representing 0.4% of primary school students and 2.8% of junior high school students.

Based on this definition, however, I will use this category in more flexible and practical ways in an attempt to use it the manner in which the participants of this study actually use it to refer to themselves. For example, even though *futōkō* is officially applied only to primary and junior high school students, I will also use this term for high school and university students, if the individuals affected use it in such a way. The following words, *hikikomori*, *freeteer*, and NEET, will also be used in the same manner.

Futōkō can be thought of as one of the most lingering issues facing children and youth in Japan (Yoneyama 1999; Wong 2007). Under the close connection between going to school and finding a job in the school-mediated job search system (Honda 2005), to do *futōkō* means to abandon school membership, which was thought of as ‘indispensable’ for a smooth transition to the job world, and thus represents the ultimate perversion of post-war Japan’s ideal. During the 1980s, the MoE [Ministry of Education, now MEXT] publicly ascribed *futōkō* to abnormal personalities of children and parents, defining it as an illness or deviancy that was a totally negative situation to become fixed in (MoE 1983). This social context generated strong angst among *futōkō* children and, in order to ameliorate the situation, the *futōkō* movement embarked around the mid-1980s. In this movement, children, parents, and specialists who supported them cooperatively claimed freedom from school and the right to be *futōkō* (Asakura 1995; Yoneyama: 1999; Wong 2007). It created a place called ‘*ibasho*’, a place for children to stay without being pushed to school, as well as the *futōkō* movement discourse that provided a framework to interpret the angst of children (Okuchi 1989; 1991; *Tokyo Shūre no Kodomo tachi* 1991; 1996). In the course of this analysis, I especially focus on *futōkō* to approach what *ikizurasa* angst is, how it is connected with Japan’s social system, and in what way it has been changing. Details of the *futōkō* movement and its influence on the contemporary interpretive frame of youth angst will be discussed in Chapter 2, while the impact of the concept of *ibasho* will be detailed in Chapter 3.

Hikikomori

Hikikomori, another youth problem this research pays great attention to, was defined by psychiatrist Saitō Tamaki (1998) as ‘a state that becomes a problem by the late twenties, that involves cooping oneself up in one’s own home and not participating in society for six months or longer, but that does not seem to have another psychological problem as its principal source’⁴ (pp. 25). This affected the MHLW’s definition in ‘*Hikikomori* Guidelines’ published in 2010, where *hikikomori* is described as ‘a phenomenal concept which indicates a state that avoids social participation (education, work, companionship outside home, etc.), mostly coping oneself up in one’s own home

⁴ Translation from (Saitō 2013).

for six months or longer'. In 2006, the number of *hikikomori* households was estimated to be 2.6 million (*Kōsei rōdō kagaku kenkyū* 2006).

One of the origins of the concept of *hikikomori* is 'student apathy [*suchūdento apashī*]', as proposed by psychiatrist Kasahara Yomishi in the 1970s⁵ (Saitō 1998: 69-72; Kasahara 1996; 1977). Student apathy was described as withdrawal from social participation induced by an unreasonable enervation that is seen among (mostly male) young people who are in late adolescence or of university student age. Later, Kasahara reconceptualised this as 'withdrawal neurosis' that is also akin to *hikikomori* (Kasahara 1988). The main difference between Kasahara's student apathy/withdrawal neurosis and Saitō's *hikikomori* is that while Kasahara emphasises a pathological condition of individual mentality, Saitō focuses on a '*hikikomori* system' where individual, family, and society are disconnected and deadlocked. Saitō argues:

It cannot be simply said that society is problematic. However, it is not true that family or individuals are problematic, either. The problem is, I would venture to say, always in the 'relationships': relationships between individuals and family, individuals and society, and/or family and society. [...] Some sort of 'pathology' takes place between 'individuals without pathology' and 'society without pathology' (Saitō 2007: 26-27).

In this sense, *hikikomori* can be thought of as a related concept of *futōkō*, because *futōkō* also refers to the condition of children who cannot go to school without being clearly ill. While both *freeter* and NEET are concepts that are defined in relation to work, *hikikomori* and *futōkō* are more associated with the paralysis of relationship between individuals and society. Indeed, Kasahara situated *futōkō* as an 'early adolescence version of student apathy', finding much in common between those phenomena (Kasahara 1976: 6). In effect, data show that there are some people who experience *futōkō* and then move to *hikikomori* afterward. The rate of *hikikomori* individuals who had experienced *futōkō* is assumed to be from 60%-90% by Ide Sōhei, who scrutinised several existing data sets (Ide 2007). However, it does not mean that most doing *futōkō*

⁵ Kasahara refers to '*iyoku gentai gakusei* (apathetic students)', proposed by the psychiatrist and educator Marui Fumio in 1968, as a concept that preceded 'student apathy' in Japan (Kasahara 1977: 190).

would experience *hikikomori*. Based on the data (Morita 2003), Saitō estimates that merely 15-20% of *futōkō* individuals move on to *hikikomori* (Saitō 2007).

In terms of global concern, *hikikomori* was primarily introduced as a cultural phenomenon that is particular to Japan (Jones 2006). However, studies after 2010 show that *hikikomori* is also seen in other countries such as Korea, Italy, France, UK, US, Australia, New Zealand, India, Iran, Taiwan, and Thailand, as well as others (Kato, Tateno et al. 2012; Suzuki, Furuhashi et al. 2014; Li and Won 2015).⁶ In such a globalised context, more young people seem to be experiencing difficulty in becoming adult members of society and rampant individualism forces them to ascribe the failure in career to their own fault. This could be the background for *hikikomori* beginning to be seen globally. However, it is important to recognise that in Japan, *hikikomori* has been problematised since the 1970s and thus is not a phenomenon limited to the post-industrial context. As a phenomenon that denotes paralysed relations between individuals and society, *hikikomori* in Japan can provide a considerable source of hints for investigation into *ikizurasa* angst among marginalised youth.

Freeter

The Cabinet Office defines *freeters* as ‘People aged between fifteen and thirty-four who are not students or, in the case of women, married, and among the following: 1) employed as so-called ‘part-time’ or ‘*arubaito* [casual work]’; 2) unemployed and looking for ‘part-time’ or ‘*arubaito*’ jobs, or; 3) unemployed, not looking for a job at the moment, not offered a job or work in the near future, but hoping to work ‘part-time’ or as ‘*arubaito*’. The number of *freeters* increased from around 1 million in the early 1990s to 2.17 million at its peak in 2003. The number started to decline after 2004 and in 2016 was 1.55 million. However, this decrease can be partly understood as the second baby boomer generation [born around 1971-1974] becoming out of the age

⁶ The differences between *hikikomori* in Japan and other countries are variously argued. For example, Suzuki (2014) argues the differences between Japanese and French cases as: 1) French cases tend to have visible triggers that make one be in a state of *hikikomori* while Japanese cases do not; 2) French cases are more likely to happen in peripheral layers of society such as immigrants while Japanese cases are primarily reported as ‘middle class’ phenomena; 3) French cases often have a girlfriend/boyfriend while Japanese cases do not (pp. 12).

limitation of the definition of *freeter*. After the late 2000s, the ‘aging of *freeters* [*furitā no kōrei-ka*]’ became a point of investigation (Cabinet Office 2013b).

Obviously, *freeter* is a gender-biased category. While men are regarded as *freeter* only based on their employment condition, marital status is also considered in the case of women. This definition reflects the male breadwinner model where women’s casual employment is not taken seriously as long as they have husbands to support them. Kurita Ryūko (2007) illuminates the absence of the category of ‘female *freeter*’ by pointing out the fact that, in the 2005 NHK TV documentary program ‘*Furitā Hyōryū* [Drifting *Freeters*]’ (Matsumiya 2006), women were only represented as ‘a wife of a *freeter*’, even though they also worked under the same condition.

The term *freeter* was first introduced by the popular recruitment magazine ‘*Furomu Ē* [From A]’ in 1985. Under the deeply-rooted belief that it is ‘normal’ or ‘normative’ to become a regular worker after the completion of education and devote oneself to work for one company, *freeter* was given a positive meaning of rejecting ‘the existing path [*shikareta rēru*]’ and continuing to have a dream. However, in the 2000s, after the deterioration of the labour environment, it became an unfavourable job status that individuals fall into when they are not offered regular employment (Kosugi 2003; Sugita 2005; Hori 2007).

NEETs

NEET is defined by Kosugi Reiko as people aged between fifteen and 34 who are not in education, employment, housework, or seeking a job (Kosugi 2005: 6). In Britain, the origin of this notion, NEET refers to people aged between sixteen and eighteen who are not in education, employment, or job training (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). When ‘imported’ in the early 2000s, the original definition was purposely changed to suit the Japan context by Japanese scholars engaged in ‘the comparative study of youth policy project’ of The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training [JILPT], of which Kosugi was a member. Compared to the original one, the Japanese definition 1) expands the age range; 2) excludes job seekers; and 3) is limited to those who are unmarried and not engaged in housework. The reason given for the change was to shed light on those who have not been considered as a target of Japan’s labour policy (Kosugi 2005: 5-6).

Genda Yūji and Maganuma Miho's book 'Nīto [NEET]' (2004) provided the spark for this term to spread. In their book, Genda and Maganuma regarded NEET as 'Young people who cannot have hope in their future that is attained by work [*shigoto ni yotte jibun no mirai o kirihiraite iku koto ni kibō o motenai wakamono*]' (pp. 10). Because the definition excludes job seekers, NEET implies individuals who do not have energy or motivation toward finding a job. Although the authors emphasised the structural background that made young people lose their motivation, NEET was associated with a derogatory nuance and fuelled youth bashing in the 2000s in Japan (Gotō 2006). In 2006, Honda (2006) argued that the term NEET should not be used because it misleads people to attribute youth labour problems to young people's mentality, distracting public attention from the market condition and arbitrary requirements from the employer side. After the late-2000s, the popularity of the term NEET faded. Since the 2010s, the Cabinet Office has used the term 'Unemployed Youth [*jakunen mugyōsha*]' in its official documents, which is akin to 'NEET' but includes job-seekers. In 2015, the number of unemployed youth was approximately 56,000 (Cabinet Office 2016). In spite of this official change, the term NEET is still used in daily situations, mostly with a derogatory nuance.

1.5. Scope and Structure of the Thesis

Research questions specified above will be examined in the following chapters as outlined below.

Chapter 2 discusses the socio-structural background of youth marginalisation in post-industrial Japan. From around the mid-1990s, when Japan entered its post-industrial phase, security in work life for young people started to deteriorate precipitously in the ever-shrinking job market for full-time employee. The point is that Japan experienced its post-industrial phase while retaining the industrial traditions of 1) school-mediated job search (Honda 2005), 2) family-corporation-based life security (Miyamoto et.al 2003), and 3) membership-based employment system (Hamaguchi 2009), all of which is based on 'membership principle'. As a result, many young people are 'doubly marginalised' both from the 'membership principle' of the industrial age as well as from

the ideology of 'free-market competition' of the post-industrial age. In this situation, they tend to experience a sense of angst, *ikizurasa*, a vague feeling of alienation whereby they cannot either clarify their needs nor have a sense of self. By scrutinising the *futōkō* movement discourse and the criticism toward it after the 2000s, I will describe how the symbolic expression of youth marginalisation has changed from *futōkō* to *ikizurasa*.

Chapter 3 reviews existing literature on youth unemployment support in order to clarify the theoretical framework and specific foci of the present study. The current dominant model for unemployment support is largely based on activation policies, which assume that users can identify their problems and clarify their needs in regard to job seeking. However, the effectiveness of activation policies is limited for individuals with long-term unemployment precisely because of their angst, which prevents them from acting rationally. Existing literature on youth policies also point out the need for relational support (Toivonen 2013; Tsutsui et al. 2014). The possibilities of a relational approach therefore will be explored in three related fields: 1) *futōkō* movement discourse on *ibasho*; 2) relational approaches in psychiatry and psychotherapy; and 3) Kimura Bin's concept of 'in-between [*aida*]' (Kimura 1972; 2005a; 2005b; 2014). The chapter thus identifies relational approach as the theoretical framework for the study of *ikizurasa*. It also identifies a gap in empirical data in the study of youth support/unemployment policies: 1) existing research focuses only on government-oriented support practices and NPO-based support practices are not adequately researched; and 2) users' voices have not yet sufficiently examined.

Chapter 4 clarifies the method used to explore the possibilities presented by the particular theoretical framework, relational approach, while addressing the research gaps identified in the previous chapter, NPO setting and the voices of youth with *ikizurasa*. The methods used in this thesis are 1) participant observations, and 2) semi-structured narrative interviews and written texts collected from youth who had *ikizurasa*. More specifically, data was collected from a social space called 'the Z-meetings', where 10-20 participants 'study' their own *ikizurasa* through dialogues and discussions. The objective of the meetings is neither for participants to get a job nor to recover from illness, but to collaborate with others in a way that is focused on self-exploration. They are one of the activities of *ibasho* for marginalised youth called

'Generative Garden' run by an NPO, which was originally established to support *futōkō* children. I have been involved as a coordinator of the Z-meetings since their start in 2011. The period of fieldwork was from January to December 2015. I observed twelve meetings and conducted seventeen interviews, including three females and fourteen males, with ten narratives introduced in detail in chapter 5. My position in the fieldwork was a mixture of 'ex-*futōkō* participant, a coordinator, and a researcher'. Based on the 'Toroidal Island' model (Miyaji 2007), I argue that this positioning help enhance dialogue between the interviewer and interviewees, and collect data at a deeper level.

Chapter 5 present the interview data in the form of life stories. The theme of the interviews included *ikizurasa* experiences such as *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, mental illness, and/or human relationships, as well as work, future, and participation in the Z-meetings. According to the narrators' positions and frequency of participation in the Z-meetings, the interviewees are divided into four categories: mentor; core participant; occasional participant; and other participants. While core participants who cannot clarify their aim for future narrate that their *ikizurasa* was mitigated through the participation in the Z-meetings, a few occasional participants with a relatively clear plan about their career are sometimes critical of the practice. It will be revealed that the ambiguous concept of *ikizurasa* is taken as being useful to express their feelings of marginalisation, and as a result, connects people by enabling them to verbalise the 'similarity in the different "us"'.

Chapter 6 provides further analysis of the narrative data presented in Chapter 5, organised in accordance with particular themes. *Ikizurasa* angst narrated in the interviews illuminates a 'double marginalisation' where they can neither enjoy the industrial fruit of stability nor the post-industrial fruit of freedom. In this situation, young adults in long-term unemployment cannot clarify their sense of self and needs. In the Z-meetings, constructive relationships with others and the sharing process of individual experiences lead the participants to a clearer sense of self and needs. The keys to the Z-meetings are: 1) indirect aim-setting, which means the goal is self-help and not getting a job; 2) enhancement of dialogue, through which narratives are dynamically produced; and 3) externalising, which objectifies problems as a separate entity to the narrator. This study will find that through dialogical interactions,

participants are able to re-interpret the meaning of *ikizurasa* from a narrative of isolation to that of connectedness. It argues that narrative self-help practice, which has hitherto been largely unrecognised in this context, is an effective means to support youth with *ikizurasa*. The chapter further suggests the need to incorporate relational support as part of the institutional support system for such youth.

Chapter 7 will provide answers to the research questions set in Chapter 1. As for the first question, ‘What is *ikizurasa* angst among marginalised youth in post-industrial Japan?’, I will argue that the term *ikizurasa* is a reflection of ‘individualised marginalisation’ in a post-industrial society where the form of marginalisation is diversified, and the collective expression of marginalisation is weakened. Since the term *ikizurasa* denotes only subjective pain and not objective situations, it enables people to express their feelings of alienation and share them with others. Regarding the second question, ‘What sort of approach can be effective to mitigate *ikizurasa*?’, I will argue that narrative self-help/*ibasho* practices are effective and thus should be included as a part of institutional frameworks. Practically, the ‘half-welfare half-employment’ model (Tsutsui et al. 2014) accompanied by relational support will be suggested. Based on the research findings, the thesis concludes that in an increasingly individualised world, relational support as well as a relation-based manner of viewing is a pressing priority for supporting youth with *ikizurasa*.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL BACKGROUND

In this Chapter, I will focus on the socio-structural context where *ikizurasa* among youth emerges. First, I discuss the increasing instability in establishing one's career and research findings on youth marginalisation. Japan has experienced a deterioration of the work environment surrounding youth after entering the post-industrial phase in a specific way that was coloured by its socio-cultural and institutional contexts. I argue that underlying these contexts is a principle, which I call 'membership principle'. Second, by showing examples of *futōkō*, I describe how the form of youth marginalisation has changed. Focusing on the trajectory of the *futōkō* movement that occurred in the industrial phase and gradually lost its momentum in the post-industrial context, I argue that youth marginalisation is now more often expressed with the term *ikizurasa* instead of *futōkō*. Based on these arguments, I will show in section 2.3 that youth in contemporary Japan with *ikizurasa* are in a situation of 'double marginalisation', where they are excluded from both the industrial fruit of stability and post-industrial fruit of freedom.

2.1. Post-Industrialisation Experienced by Japanese Youth

2.1.1. Increasing Instability in Japan as well as in Western Societies

In a post-industrial society, characterised by a growing service sector and declining manufacturing, the work environment deteriorates, while individual life-courses diversify and become unstable. Regarding western societies that have experienced this

process, it has been argued that a de-standardisation of work conditions aggravates young people's career development. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) pointed out risks that young people face with high modernity, such as increasingly diversifying and destabilising pathways that lead them to adulthood, protraction of school-to-work transition, and an extended period of semi-dependency on family. In these situations, youths are supposed to overcome the risks as individuals, even though class structure remains in existence (pp.3-5). On the one hand, there is a subjective reality of greater possibilities of individual choices, while on the other hand, there is an objective fact of remaining class factors. The concurrency of these two contradictory realities can cause 'epistemological fallacy' (pp.5), where individuals are forced to attribute their unpleasant situations to their own failures. Such a situation can cause severe stress, potentially resulting in mental health problems.

Alienated youth in Japan has much in common with those in other advanced societies in the West. However, it is likely that their experience is perhaps more directly influenced and dictated by institutional settings in Japan than elsewhere. De-standardisation of career occurred with the loss of effectiveness of the school-to-work transitional system that was once praised as a highly institutionalised social arrangement for connecting young adults to the labour market (Honda 2005; Brinton 2008; Inui 2010). One of the most striking changes occurred during the 1990s after the economic bubble had burst, as the recruitment market for high school new-graduates precipitously shrank, with the number of job openings declining by approximately one-sixth (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2002).

Along with this, young people who do not/cannot advance to tertiary education began to have a greater possibility to become a *freeter* after graduation. It has been pointed out that the likelihood to become a *freeter* is highly co-related with such social attributions as age [young], gender [female], and educational qualification [non-university graduate] (Hori 2007; Tarōmaru 2009). However, even for university graduates, the process of job hunt became extremely ruthless and competitive under the tendency of the 'strictly-careful selection' [*gensen-saiyō*] process of company recruitment. University graduates who are not successfully employed on a regular basis can also become *freeters*, or advance to graduate school to form a reservoir of 'highly-educated working poor [*kōgakureki wākingu puā*]' (Mizuki 2007). As a result, the

number of *freeters* increased from around 1 million in the early 1990s to 2.17 million at the peak in 2003, in step with the second baby boomer generation aged in their late teens and twenties.

Moreover, being a *freeteer* can itself be a humiliating experience under the disseminated image of ‘not being independent’ or having made ‘a stupid career choice’. As referred to in Chapter 1, Amamiya wrote that she had the strongest suicidal tendency when she was a *freeteer* (Amamiya 2007). This derogatory nuance is even more ruthless in the case of NEETs, who are often referred to as ‘even worse than *freeters* who at least work’. In 2002, the population of people aged 15-34 and not students, not employed, and not married was reported to be 2.13 million, of whom 850 thousand were problematised as ‘Japanese NEET’—people who fulfil the above description and are not seeking a job (Genda and Maganuma 2004). This term was sensationally reported by the mass media during the mid-2000s with negative images, such as individuals lacking motivation or good-for-nothing being bailed out with taxpayers’ money (Goodman et al. 2011). As will be referred to by participants’ narratives in Chapter 5, this fuelled the self-blaming tendency in unemployed youths, making them feel as if they were reproached by all of society.

Another point to consider is that insecure employment results in vulnerable income security. In 2014, the ratio of non-regulars’ income to that of regulars was 80% for both genders⁷ and the gap is expected to widen as they get older, constituting a peak of 54% for men and 61% for women at age 50-54 (MHLW 2014a). The annual income of *freeters* is difficult to determine, but is assumed to be approximately 1.4-1.5 million yen (Tachibanaki 2006: 77; Kumazawa 2007: 142). Considering the fact that the poverty line in Japan is estimated to be at about 1.5 million yen for a single household and 2.12 million yen for a two-person household (Hashimoto 2009: 32), the income level of *freeters* is at a level at which they can hardly support themselves, let alone a family.

This condition can suspend those unemployed/insecurely employed youths into a [half-] dependant position at home. In 2014, 39.1% of men and 31.8% of women aged

⁷ In 2014, annual wages of non-regular workers (age 25-29) were 1,951 thousand yen for men and 1,812 thousand for women while regular workers’ wages were 2,432 thousand and 2,263 each (MHLW 2014a).

30-34 were living with their parents (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2014). The possibility of marriage is strongly related to wage level and type of employment. In 2011, the percentage of men in their twenties and thirties whose annual income was less than 3 million yen was 8-10%, and 25-40% for those with an annual income greater than that (Cabinet Office 2011a).

These situations confirm that Japan has been experiencing the same phenomena that Furlong and Cartmel pointed out have occurred in highly advanced societies in the West, such as de-standardisation of life career, prolongation of an era of being dependant, and continuation of structural inequality, with increasing level of 'self-choice' and 'epistemological fallacy' as results.

2.1.2. Legacy of Industrial Japan: Membership Principle

At the same time, Japan has undergone structural change and there has been change in youth marginalisation that is specific to Japan. Before explaining what they are, I will look at the basic principle that underlies the social systems that characterised Japanese society until the 1980s, such as school-to-work transition (Honda 2005) and family-corporation-based life security (Miyamoto, Ito Peng et al. 2003). With these systems, individuals are entitled access to job introduction and skills training, income and employment security, and a stable livelihood, not as an individual but as a member of a social organisation based on school, company, or family. Using the term of the Japanese labour law scholar Hamaguchi Keiichirō 'membership-based employment', I refer to the core characteristics of those systems as the 'membership principle' (Kido 2014). With the appearance of Japan's post-industrialisation, an increasing number of people became excluded from membership in those organisations.

In regard to the term membership-based employment, Hamaguchi argues that Japanese employment tradition, including 'life-long employment', 'seniority-based salary', and 'company-based labour unions', is a derivative of Japan's peculiar employment contract (Hamaguchi 2009: 1-4). According to Hamaguchi, Japan's typical employment contract does not clarify workers' duties, hours, and locations, leaving

those changeable by companies at their whim, while a typical employment system in Western countries is 'job-based' and places clear limitations on these conditions. For example, as Hamaguchi (2013) notes, Japan's Part-Time Employment Act does not recognise workers with a flexible job description and assignments as regular employees, even if they work under conditions of direct employment, full-time hours, and an unlimited employment term—factors that are usually seen as adequate to define regular workers in Western societies. Moreover, he points out that the Japanese Supreme Court has ruled that regular employees have no right to specify their duties, decline overtime work, or refuse unfavourable transfers. The membership-based employment system was so named because 'accepting employment at such enterprises is tantamount to becoming a member of a community' (Hamaguchi 2013). In exchange for accepting this arbitrariness, Japanese regular workers can enjoy exceptional employment security. When the job an employee was engaged in ceases to exist, the membership-based contract obligates companies to continue the employment by transferring the person to another location or assigning another job, while the job-based one legitimatises dismissal in such a case. Therefore, it is the membership-based contract that enables 'life-long employment'.

Based on this background, I argue that the phrase 'membership-based' is also effective to specify the broader social system in industrial Japan. Drawing attention to the underlying principle of both the school-to-work transitional system and the family-corporation based life security system, I have defined the membership principle as a principle 'such that, in the general process of youth becoming full members of society, organisational prestige and organisation membership are regarded more highly than the individual's specific role in the organisation or his/her qualification' (Kido 2014: 368). Such a group-based orientation seen in the Japanese social system is also thought of as a key by US sociologist Mary Brinton, who explained how high schools became dysfunctional to connect their students to work in post-industrialised society (Brinton 2008; 2011). She refers to '*ba*', or 'social location' as 'an organization or bounded collective to which individuals belong and from which they derive a sense of identity and security', and something 'important for their material success in life and important also for their identity and sense of well-being' (Brinton 2011: 3). *Ba* can be understood

as a space through which the membership-based system at school or company performs and affects people.

The point is that such a notion of ‘the social’ overlaps with ‘the normal/normative’ in individual life-course. Symbolically, the Income Survey conducted by MHLW defines ‘*hyōjun rōdōsha* [standard workers] as ‘those who are employed by companies immediately after graduation from school and have continued to work for the company to the present time’ (MHLW 2015). There is another category of ‘*ippan rōdōsha* [general worker]’, which refers to ‘those workers other than “*tan-jikan rōdōsha* [part-time workers]”. In English, ‘standard worker’ commonly means one who works regularly with a decent level of income and employment security, which nearly corresponds to ‘*ippan rōdōsha*’, and there are no expressions for ‘workers whose life-course is standard’ such as ‘*hyōjun rōdōsha*’. Although the social structure began to deteriorate after the 1990s, the category of *hyōjun rōdōsha* continues to exist as well as that of ‘norm to be normal’. This has also limited the image of ‘the social’ in Japan to such a narrow meaning as ‘legitimacy in individual life-course coloured by conjugation of school and firm’. For example, *shakai-jin*, which literally means ‘social person’, is a common expression for ‘(no-longer-student) working person’. For parents, when their sons and daughters became ‘*shakai-jin*’, this signifies the completion of the era of child rearing and the independence of their children as fully fledged members of society.

What has occurred in post-industrial Japan is that membership principle remains as the fundamental organising mechanism in the social system, though there is an increasing population that has lost accessibility to membership. In a membership-based system where it is seen ‘normal’ as well as ‘normative’ to belong continuously to organisations one after another, previous membership is highly referred to when a person aims at gaining another membership in the next stage: i.e., in order to be targeted by the periodic recruitment for new-graduates [*shinsotsu saiyō*], which is the largest employment market for ‘decent’ jobs exclusively opened for new graduates, one must belong to a school. Under this condition, having a non-standard career can become fatal for stable career development. For example, once one becomes a non-regular worker at one place, it tends to be difficult to gain regular employment even in a different place. The 2012 Basic Survey on Employment Structure [*Shūgyō kōzō kihon*

chōsa] reported that 59.7% of regular employees were employed regularly after a job transfer, while only 24.2% of non-regular employees were (MIAC 2012). Also, according to the 2005 *White Paper on the Labour Economy* [*Rōdō kēzai hakusho*], merely 3.6% of companies gave an evaluation of previous *freeter* experience as positive by answering that they ‘are willing to employ *freeters* as regular workers by providing job skills training for them’, while 41.8% responded negatively, confessing that they ‘are not willing to employ *freeters* as either regular workers or non-regular workers’ (MHLW 2005: 333). Here, *freeter* is regarded as even more disadvantaged than those who have no work experience at all, such as new graduates. In other words, companies do not accept non-regular workers not only because they are ‘less skilled’, but also because they are considered to be ‘such thoughtless people that they became *freeters*’. It is under this condition of being completely alienated in a membership-based society, that Amamiya as a *freeter* expressed her *ikizurasa* – to the extent that she wanted to take her own life.

2.2. Change in the Quality of Angst: From *Futōkō* to *Ikizurasa*

Alienation from membership-based society is most typically embodied in *futōkō* and *hikikomori*, that is seen to represent a situation of not belonging to a school or company, respectively. In situations where ‘social’ refers to having membership in a school or company, individuals without such membership tend to be seen as ‘unsocial’. Indeed, in 1990, White Paper on Youth [*Seishōnen hakusho*]⁸ classified *futōkō* and *hikikomori* into ‘unsocial problem behaviours [非社会的問題行動, *hi-shakai-teki mondai kōdō*].’⁹ Such ‘official labelling’ as well as more general labelling in the public have generated considerable pain in individuals in those situations. In this section, I will describe how

⁸ From 2010, ‘White Paper on Children and Youth’.

⁹ The paper divided problem behaviours by youth into ‘antisocial problem behaviours [反社会的問題行動, *han-shakai-teki mondai kōdō*]’ and ‘unsocial problem behaviours [非社会的問題行動, *hi-shakai-teki mondai kōdō*].’ The former includes tangible expressions of alienation often acted out against society such as school violence, whereas the latter includes less tangible unsocial behaviour such as ‘to become unable to fit into or make positive effort to adapt oneself to the social environment, such as *hikikomori*, apathy, school refusal [now *futōkō*], and/or suicide’ (Task Force on Youth in Management and Coordination Agency [*Sōmuchō seishōnen taisaku honbu*] 1990: 5).

this pain has been experienced and dealt with by people by tracing the *futōkō* movement discourse. I will then show how the quality of the pain has changed along with decay in the membership principle in recent years. My point in this section is that as post-industrial aspect of Japanese society advanced, the symbolic representation of social exclusion shifted from a clearly definable phenomenon of *futōkō* to *ikizurasa*, to a far more ambiguous and indefinable one, that can be captured only in terms of subjective feelings, *ikizurasa*.

2.2.1. *Futōkō* Movement Discourse: Challenge to Membership Principle

MEXT ('MoE [Ministry of Education]' before 2000) has been counting the number of *futōkō* students since 1966, and in 2014 the number including those enrolled in primary and junior high school was estimated to be 122,655, representing 0.39% of primary school students and 2.76% of junior high school students. The longitudinal trend of *futōkō* students' rate shows a steady increase from the late 1970s to the end of the 1990s, and has remained high but at the same level with only slight ups-and-downs since around 2000. The time when this increasing trend stopped was not long after Japan entered into the post-industrial phase in the mid-1990s (see Chapter 1). While the 'increasing era of *futōkō* (the late 1970s-1990s)' is considered to still be in the industrial phase, the 'plain era' (since the 2000s) can be nearly completely placed in the post-industrial phase.

Shoko Yoneyama (1999) examined *futōkō* discourses in the industrial era and classified them into four categories: psychiatric discourse; behavioural discourse; citizen's discourse; and socio-medical discourse (pp. 191). The *Futōkō* movement discourse I am referring to corresponds to the 'citizen's discourse', where *futōkō* is understood as a 'structural problem caused by school' and 'not illness' (Yoneyama 1999: 191). In the background, there is a dominance of psychiatric/psychological discourse on *futōkō* that it is a reflection of personal maladjustment. Affected by this dominant discourse, in 1984 the MoE depicted typical personalities of *futōkō* children and guardians as follows:

Children's character tendency: having strong anxiety tendency, being indecisive, lacking adaptability, having poor flexibility, being immature both socially and emotionally, and having strong nervous tendency. ... Guardians' character tendency: When father has poor sociality, is reticent and withdrawn, and/or lacking masculinity, positive attitude or confidence, it would be difficult to suggest a model of father in the developmental process of a child and this can be the condition that leads to school refusal [*tōkōkyōhi*]. Also, in the case of father who is autocratic, work-centred and does not relate well with a child, the model of father can hardly be constructed.... When mother have anxiety tendency, lacks in confidence, emotionally immature, dependant and/or timid, generally speaking, her attitude toward her child tends to be over-protective. The combination of such character tendencies and child-rearing attitudes can be considered as a serious background of school refusal (MoE 1984).

As such, the government's official interpretation of *futōkō* during the 1980s was maladjustment caused by personal abnormalities. Reflecting such an understanding, the critical eye toward *futōkō* from the general public was relentless during that time. Even medical intervention for children including medication and hospitalisation was not an uncommon option (Kado et al. 1998).

The *Futōkō* movement was generated under this background, and based on an urgent necessity among *futōkō* children and their parents to protect their self-worth, and reconstruct a 'different' way of social participation from attending school. The movement originated from a group of *futōkō* parents called '*Kibō-kai* [group of 'hope']', which was organised in 1972 for group counselling in *Kokufudai* Hospital under the supervision of a child psychiatrist Watanabe Takashi (*Tōkōkyōhi o kangaeru kai* 1987:30). Based on the network there, in 1984, '*Tōkōkyōhi o kangaeru kai* [Parental Meeting Group for *Tōkōkyōhi*]' was established (*Tōkōkyōhi o kangaeru kai* 1987:34) and, inspired by this, other similar meeting groups were generated in various places. In 1985, Okuchi Keiko, one of the core members of both *Kibō-kai* and *Tōkōkyōhi o kangaeru kai*, established an alternative place, later called free-school *Tōkyō Shūre*, for *futōkō* children to 'make friends, study, and do various activities outside of school' (Okuchi 1991: 6). In 1998, *Futōkō Shinbun* [*Futōkō* Newspaper] was established to

report phenomena related to *futōkō* and *hikikomori* from the perspective of children and youth who are in such situations.

The *futōkō* movement discourse emphasised the ‘right for children to become *futōkō*’, while criticising structural problems of school (*Tōkōkyōhi o kangaeru kai* 1987; Okuchi 1989; Watanabe 1996). Its assertion is well represented by the phrase ‘*Tōkōkyōhi* is not illness [*Tōkōkyōhi wa byōki ja nai*’ (Okuchi 1989) written by Okuchi Keiko, who was a participant in *Kibō-kai*, as well as a mother of *futōkō* children and founder of one of the earliest and most successful free-schools ‘Tokyo Shūre’. In her book, Okuchi argues that *futōko* is not necessarily a condition to be ‘cured’ or ‘overcome’, but rather a message from children alerting that it is rather the school environment that is to be ‘cured’. Okuchi states:

If we regard school refusal as illness, such recognition will accelerate prejudice to school refusal and decrease tolerance toward children in school refusal in many social phases such as school, job world, relative network or local community. Rather, it is more important to respect for children in school refusal as a human, seeing them neither abnormal nor inferior without ‘school faith [*gakkō shinkō*]’, and to provide them with *ibasho* [a place with receptive atmosphere] where they can stay safe and be supported to deal with their difficulties in the process of development (Okuchi 1989: 224).

The term ‘school faith’ referred to the situation where individuals believe that all children should go to school and that school is an indispensable step by which children become adult members of society [Okuchi 1987: 28-29]. During the 1980s, under the monolithic values of the membership-based system, *futōko* was regarded as such a fatal state that once a child falls into, he/she will not have a decent career in the future (this point will be further discussed in 2.2.3). Thus, the *futōkō* movement discourse attempted to challenge ‘school faith’ and open the possibility for children to positively reconsider their identity as a *futōkō* student, and critically reappraise school (Asakura 1995).

Moreover, the *futōkō* movement had a certain influence on public opinion and political decisions about *futōkō*. For example, Asakura traced the title of magazine articles regarding *futōkō* published during the 1980s and noted that after 1988, when the *futōkō* movement symbolically indicated its presence by protest against a newspaper

article written by Inamura Hiroshi, a prominent psychiatrist, that promoted the ‘illness’ image of *futōkō*, the tone of the articles changed from pointing out abnormalities of children and family to focusing more on the painful realities of *futōkō* students or structural problems of school (Asakura 1995: 73). Pushed by such a change, after 1992 MoE finally turned its view of *futōkō* from deviancy/illness caused by problematic personality traits to a situation that ‘can happen to any child’. The guideline for the recommended attitude toward *futōkō* also changed from just bringing children back to school to ‘waiting until children start to want to attend school, staying attentive to their condition [*mimamoru*]’. The *futōkō*-bashing mood, though remained strong, gradually came to have less impact upon people concerned than previously. Regarded as being ‘one of the most powerful social movements in contemporary Japan’ (Yoneyama 1999: 215), the *futōkō* movement, beyond the educational context, critically rethought wider issues of social system, social value, human rights, and individual identities, in loose coordination with other fields such as feminism and the disability movement (Wong 2007).

2.2.2. ‘Successful Career after *Futōkō*’?

While critiquing the *futōkō*-bashing mood, the *futōkō*-movement discourse included the proposition that children can grow up to become working members of society even if they do not go through school. In the 2000s, as the first generation ‘graduates’ of Tokyo Shūre [one of the earliest free-schools for school non-attendant children] reached their twenties and thirties, successful stories of ‘career after *futōko*’ started to be produced (NPO Tokyo Shūre 2000: 224-223; 2005). Underlying this was a need for successful stories: many *futōkō* students had difficulties with the socially imposed negative image of future career associated with *futōkō*. Indeed, individuals who experienced *futōkō* in the 1980s often expressed a fear of becoming a homeless person excluded from both company and family (Tsuneno 1991: 104; Ueyama 2001: 40). For example, a man (b. 1968) recalls his *futōkō* days in the early 1980s when he was fourteen as follows:

I couldn't concentrate on study at all. It felt like I had lead in my head. It was extremely scary. 'I am supposed to become a homeless when I grow up if I continue to live like this.' I was forced to have an idea that there is 'the only path' to become an adult in this society. As long as they want to participate in society, people must be on the path and compete for how far they can go. Dropping out from it just means death. I was scared (Ueyama 2001: 40).

However, in the case of women, the future was differently imagined. A woman (b. 1975) who started *futōkō* when she was in fifth grade of primary school remembers her teacher's words during her time of *futōkō*: 'Such a child who cannot go to primary school would never be able to work anywhere in future, except in the sex industry' (Kado 2005: 86). At this time, *futōkō* meant exclusion from the membership-based system, or 'society' at large, and was an extremely painful experience for children.

Resisting this social situation, stories of successful careers after *futōkō* were considered to be a key to transcend all barriers that could be caused by the *futōkō* experience and protect the child's self-esteem. For example, the book written by graduates of *Tokyo Shūre*, 'How We Connected Ourselves to Job without Going through School [*gakkō ni ikanakatta watashi-tachi no harō-wāku*]' introduces eighteen *ex-futōkō* students who are now working (NPO *Tokyo Shūre* 2005). The story of Nakazawa Jun (b.1975) was one of the most successful cases presented. According to Nakazawa (2005), he started his *futōkō* when he was in the fourth grade in primary school and never went back to school education in Japan thereafter. He was a member [*kaiin*] of *Tokyo Shūre* from 12-18 years old, and actively organised and participated in various activities there. Interested in foreign countries and languages, he travelled to 26 countries and studied French in Paris. After coming back to Japan when he was 22, he was employed by a travel agency. His rich experiences in travelling helped him achieve a top sales rank and he was promoted to manager among co-workers who included many university graduates. As such, Nakazawa's case embodies the message from the *futōkō* movement discourse that '*Futōkō* does not matter to get a successful career'. Other than Nakazawa, the book introduces the stories of a patissier, a ballet dancer, a childcare worker, and a magazine editor, who used to be *futōkō* children, who found their future paths after encountering the *futōkō* movement (NPO *Tokyo Shūre* 2005).

Unquestionably, these were ‘encouraging’ stories that show and prove the possibility of an alternative life career to the school-mediated career.

Nevertheless, the *futōkō* movement discourse does not seem to fully succeed in grasping the realities of youth marginalisation in the post-industrial situation. The strategy of emphasising a successful career after *futōkō* came to be less effective as the membership-based system started to decay after the late 1990s, from which emerged many non-*futōkō* young adults who were forced to drop out from a legitimate career path, let alone *futōkō*-experienced people. In this new situation, *futōkō* children did not have to associate their future as homelessness or a sex industry worker, and students who keep going to school can no longer imagine their career safely being achieved with the school-to-work transition. Thus, both sides have been more or less thrown into unpredictability with the de-standardisation of life career.

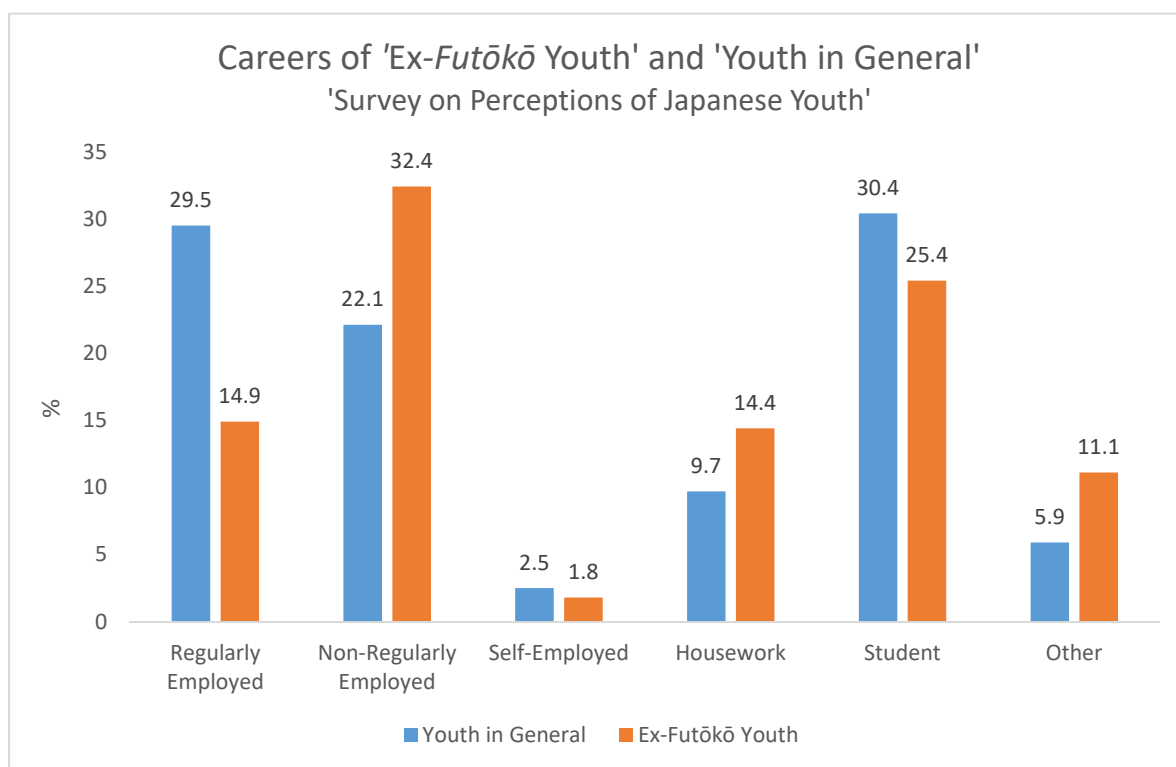
A follow-up survey on *futōkō* (MEXT 2014)¹⁰ showed that a *futōkō* experience can make the future career of individuals more unstable. According to those findings, the high school advancement rate of ex-*futōkō* students was 85.1%, while it was 98.2% for the entire population of the same generation. The tertiary education advancement rate of ex-*futōkō* students turned out to be 22.8%, while that of the general high school graduates was 53.9%. Moreover, 18.1% of ex-*futōkō* students had experienced neither education nor work after *futōkō*, while the overall rate of individuals who neither went to school nor began to work after junior high school was 5.4%. Similarly, the Cabinet Office (2012) reported that young people who experienced *futōkō* tend to work more on a non-regular basis and less on a regular basis (Figure 5).

There are certainly ex-*futōkō* individuals who later find themselves in a state of *hikikomori*, NEET, or *freeter*, and for them, the *futōkō* movement discourse can hardly provide a positive framework in which they can narrate their life story. Importantly, however, the condition of ‘youth in general’ and ‘ex-*futōkō* youth’ should not be considered as substantially different. As discussed in 2.1, in the post-industrial situation,

¹⁰ This survey targeted students who were counted as *futōkō* when they were in the third grade of junior high school (age 14-15) in the 2006 school year (April 2006-March 2007), and performed research in 2011 about the situation of their education and work after *futōkō*. It consists of three parts: 1) Survey A, a basic survey of junior high schools (number of responses: 28,388) ; 2) Survey B, a basic survey of students who experienced *futōkō* (N=1604); and 3) interviews with those students (N=379).

'youth in general' are also exposed to risks in regard to career development, only with slightly more protection.

Figure 5 Careers of 'Ex-Futōkō Youth' and 'Youth in General'



Source: Cabinet Office 2012

In line with this, a critical perspective for obtaining a 'successful career after *futōkō*' started to be held by those *ex-futōkō* students who were once affected by the movement's discourse and became aware of the need to rethink it. An example of this can be seen in the practice of '*Shūre Daigaku*' [Shūre University]. *Shūre Daigaku* is referred to as an 'alternative university' or a free school for people older than eighteen. Established in 1999 as an organisation related to *Tokyo Shūre*, *Shūre Saigaku* is not based on the School Educational Ordinance [*Gakkō kyōiku hō*], and was established by graduates and staff of *Tokyo Shūre*. According to the chief of staff Asakura (2010), *Shūre Daigaku* is 'a university created by students' (pp. 12) where students 'create a new way of self and a new way of relationships between themselves and others or society' (pp. 24). Here, stories of 'successful graduates' are not told. Instead, the gap between society where [it is generally thought that] 'to work is necessary to live' and a self who [they think] cannot smoothly fit to it becomes the focus of discussion. Below is an example of a *Shūre Daigaku* student, a man who experienced *futōkō* in junior high

school, went to *Tokyo Shūre* from age sixteen to eighteen, and was mostly unemployed or casually employed at the time of his late twenties. He writes:

I try to live. But I am not sure how to live. When I say ‘how to live’, some people may think that it means ‘how to make a living’. This confusion is one of the causes of my sense of suffocation. I want to think how I want to live my life, but regardless of what kind of life I want, it is already determined that I should get a job and earn my living anyhow. Not only work but many other things are imposed on me as something that I must do well, and I am upset because I cannot do them well (Nobuta 2010:175-176).

He has been affected by the *futōkō* movement discourse from which he obtained an understanding about his school drop-out experience. When younger, he even told his *futōkō* story in front of people at open symposiums at *Tokyo Shūre*, and emphasised that *futōkō* does not matter for becoming an adult member of society (Nobuta 2010). But as he got older and his problems shifted from the level of school to the level of work and life, he started to question such a self-narrative.

When I ask ‘Are there any places where I [who does not have a good academic credential] can be employed?’, some people would encourage me saying that ‘the meaning of academic credentials are declining’. Without being encouraged like that, I already know that there are many people who transcended the lack of academic credentials. It might be true that I could be like them, who break through the society where academic credential serves the key role, if I would make several-fold more efforts than ordinary people as they did. However, I could never think of myself being able to work like that....I believe that I have positively accepted my *futōkō*. Indeed, now I think neither *futōkō* is bad nor *futōkō* children are less able.... However, I realised that I deeply internalise the notion that I am less able and less valuable because of my *futōkō* experience. Working, as well as being paid, felt very high-threshold for me (Nobuta 2010: 186)

What he expresses here is different from the pain associated with the *futōkō* experience itself, but rather can be understood as *ikizurasa*, which is more related to the vague anxiety related to searching for a career after *futōkō*. Through interaction with other members in *Shūre Daigaku*, he gradually understands what he feels is *ikizurasa*, and came to rethink his firmly internalised notion that he should be

employed after graduating from school, or in the case where he could not, should 'make several-fold more effort than ordinary people' to live and work in society. Then, he started to work for a web design company launched with other members of *Shūre Daigaku*, combining side jobs when needed. His case cannot be reduced to a typical success story, as the story does not have a plot that starts with the predicament of *futōkō* and ends in career accomplishment. Rather, it unravels the assertions of the *futōkō* movement discourse that '*futōkō* does not matter to get a successful career' and shows that they might not be effective in the post-industrial situation, because such discourse can relegate those who remain to be unemployed into a degraded position (Kido 2004).

2.3.3. From *Futōkō* to *Ikizurasa*

The transformation of the social context discussed above can be summarised as follows. In the 1980s, when the boundary between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' career paths was clearly drawn, there was a strong presumption about the connection between school and company, as well as *futōkō* and homelessness. *Futōkō* was itself regarded as a personal abnormality and symbol of marginalisation from society, and the response to these labelling paradoxically became a foundation for a social movement that attracted considerable attention from the general public in alliance with other minorities' movements. In the post-industrial phase, however, the boundary between the 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' career path became blurred and life career de-standardised, and *futōkō* ceased to be seen as a major problem by itself. In this new situation, society became more accepting to diversely and created non-standard careers, including an ex-*futōkō* salary-man who transcended the loss of academic credentials by his own ability and experiences, while being intolerant to those who are in conditions of *freeter*, NEET, and/or *hikikomori* after completing school education. Although there remains a considerable difference between 'general youth' and 'ex-*futōkō* youth' in the possibility of being excluded from regular jobs in the future (Figure 5), *futōkō* started to be regarded as 'risk in career', not as the end of career, which is therefore interpreted as something individuals should avoid. As a result, the *futōkō* movement gradually lost its momentum as a collective protest to society, though

affected individuals kept working as ground level supporters for *futōkō* children in each local context (Yamashita 2009).

This situation seems to well exemplify what Beck called individualisation (Beck 1994; 2002), which is explained below.

[C]ollective and group-specific sources of meaning (for instance, class consciousness or faith in progress) in industrial society culture are suffering from exhaustion, break-up and disenchantment. These had supported democracies and economic societies well into the twentieth century and their loss leads to the imposition of all definition effort upon the individuals; that is what the concept of the 'individualization process' means. (Beck 1994: 7)

Interpreting Beck's concept of individualisation in the context of youth career, Furlong and Cartmel point out, 'The individualization of risk may mean that situations which would once have led to a call for political action are now interpreted as something which can only be solved on an individual level through personal action' (Furlong and Cartmel 2006: 4-5). With this framework, *futōkō* is understood to become one of the risks that individuals must be aware of and control by themselves.

Here, *ikizurasa*, or vague angst about living, emerges as a symbolic term of marginalisation instead of *futōkō*. *Ikizurasa* is a useful term that can be used to express the pain of being excluded from society regardless of a concrete situation where each individual is situated. This transformation of social situation and the related shift of the symbol of marginalisation from *futōkō* to *ikizurasa* is illustrated below in Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Change in the symbol of marginalisation can be also confirmed by searching for the number of Asahi newspaper articles with keywords *futōkō/tōkōkyōhi* [school refusal, the equivalent expression of *futōkō* mainly used until the 1990s] and *ikizurasa*. As shown in Figure 8, from around 2000, the word *ikizurasa* started to be used more often, while occurrences of the terms *futōkō/tōkō-kyōhi* began to be less.

Figure 6 Symbol of Marginalisation in industrial System (1980s)

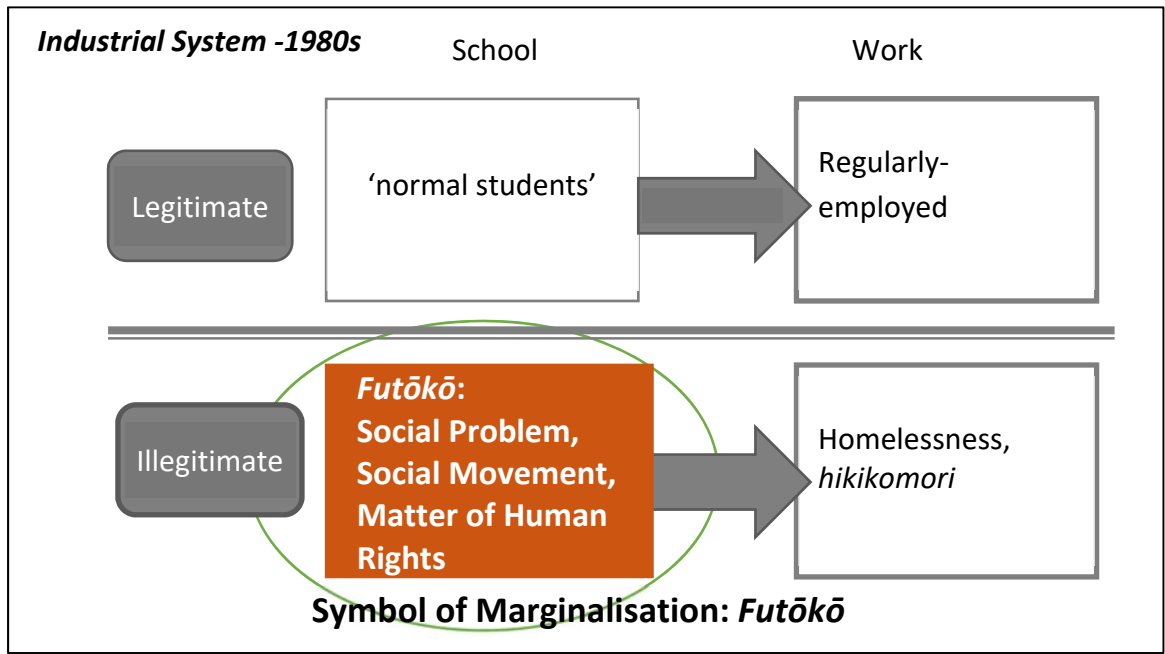


Figure 7. Symbol of Marginalisation in Post-industrial System (1990s-)

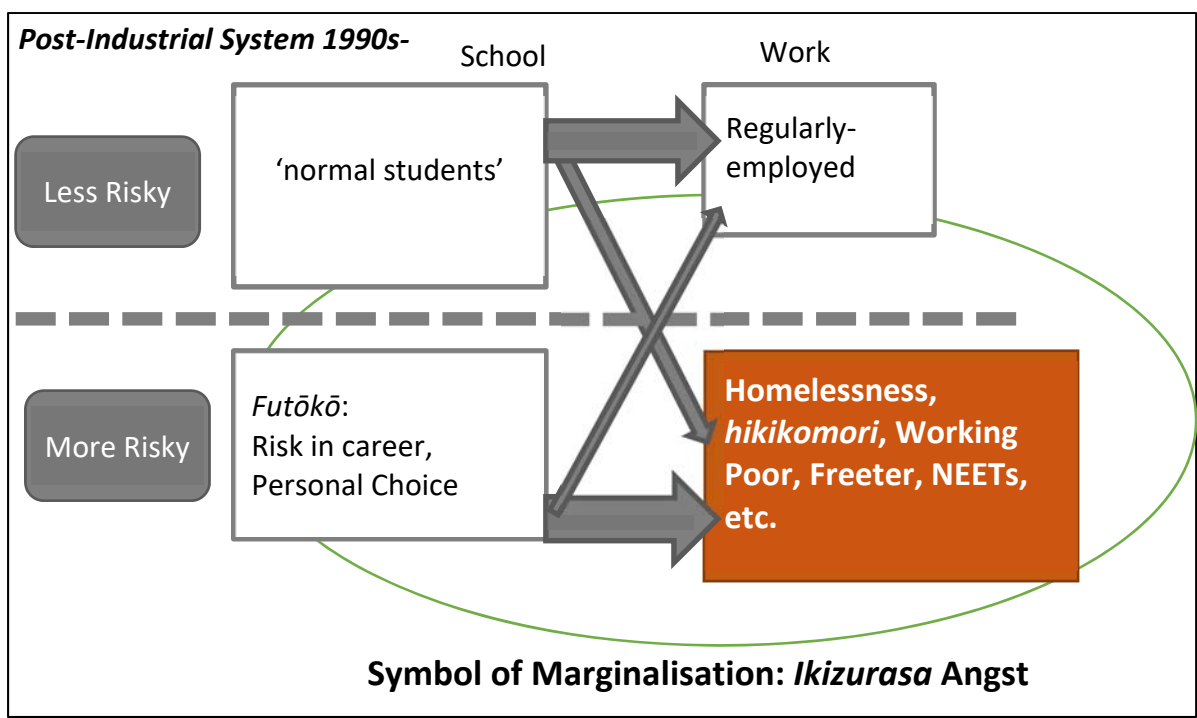
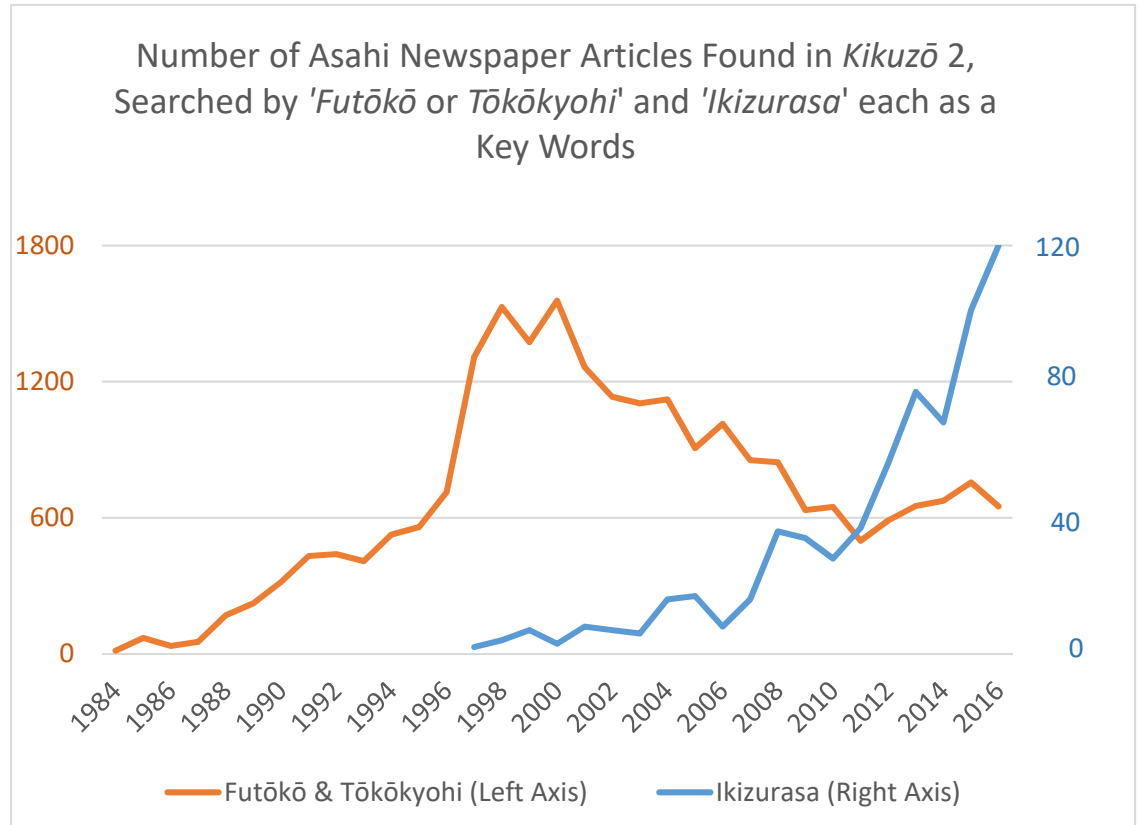


Figure 8 Number of Asahi Newspaper Articles Found regarding *Kikuzō 2* in Keyword Searches for ‘*Futōkō* or *Tōkō-kyōhi*’ and ‘*Ikizurasa*’



2.4. Double Marginalisation

Having described the social change, I will now turn to consider how this change was accepted [or rejected] by Japanese youth. Unarguably, there would be a variety of ways to react, from those who have been able to become proud of their *futōkō* as a ‘meaningful’ experience that led him/her to a unique and successful career afterward, to those who finally find themselves in the unpleasant situation of *freeter*, NEET, or *hikikomori*, though having kept their previous life in line with a so-called legitimate career path and feel *ikizurasa*. It would be valuable for this thesis to look at possible patterns of those responses, as it could help locating the target of this thesis, marginalised youth who have *ikizurasa*, in a broader context. I will conclude this section by noting that youth with *ikizurasa* are in a ‘doubly marginalised’ position being

marginalised both from the goal of industrial society as well as from the expectation in the post-industrial society.

In order to pursue this point, the study presented by Toivonen et al. (2011) provides valuable reference and a very useful conceptual framework to be developed for the particular focus adopted in this thesis. Exploring the response patterns of Japanese youth to globalisation, they point out that the concept of anomie explains the situation where 'institutionalized means' and 'cultural goals' are disconnected. In their study, 'cultural goals' mean the dominant aims of a successful life in society, such as academic excellence, family formation, and economic independence, whereas 'institutionalized means' refers to a socially accepted procedure for achievement, such as education and decent work. The authors recognise four different motivational patterns that are logically extracted by the combination of 'accept/reject' response to 'cultural goals' and 'institutionalized means'. They name and describe each quality, as follows:

1) 'Conformists' (Accepting both 'Cultural goals' and 'Institutional means'), those who 'conform to goals and are able to access legitimate means; can hope to enjoy culturally expected rewards. For example, middle-class "salarymen" at large corporations'.

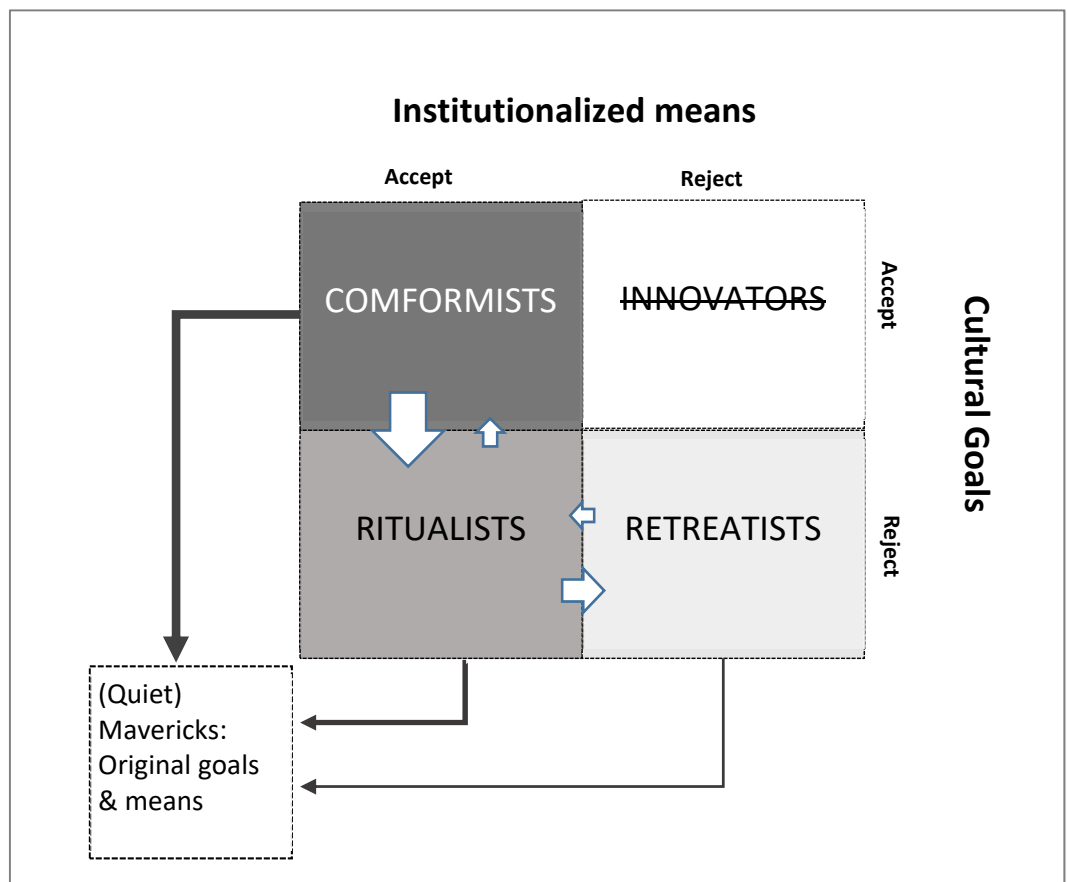
2) 'Innovators' (Accepting 'Cultural goals' but rejecting 'Institutional means'), those who 'reach toward dominant goals through innovative, less legitimate means; may enjoy culturally expected rewards'.

3) 'Ritualists' (Rejecting/Rejected by 'Cultural goals' but accepting 'Institutional means'), those who 'conform to legitimate means but have little hope for culturally expected rewards. The default adaptation in conformist societies. For example, those among non-standard workers (*freeters*) who hold middle-class expectations'.

4) 'Retreatists' (Rejecting/Rejected by both 'Cultural goals' and 'Institutional means'), those who are 'disillusioned with both dominant goals and means; disengage from mainstream society in various ways; receive no rewards; burdened by stigma. For example, socially withdrawn *hikikomori* and workless "NEETs"' (Toivonen et al. 2011: 4).

The authors point out that one of these, 'Innovators', is missing in conformist societies like Japan and alternatively suggest a fifth category, 'Quiet Mavericks'. 'Quiet Mavericks' are 'the main group driving social change' who invent original goals and means and take "quieter" tactful forms of resistance' (Toivonen et al. 2011: 4). Including dynamic transfers between the categories, the authors show those patterns in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Adaptation Model of Young People to Globalisation in Japan



Resource: (Toivonen et al. 2011: 5)

Although the authors' categorisation of the response patterns is highly suggestive, there are two points that need to be considered to develop a conceptual model that is more relevant to locate the target of the present research – youth with *ikizurasa*. First, unlike broader youth population, it is quite possible that youth with a strong sense of *ikizurasa* cannot 'accept' or 'reject' the means or goals based on their will. This is because, as I will explain in the next chapter, long-term unemployment can deprive them of capacity to clarify and express their will (see the section 3.1). This means that for youth who suffer from a strong sense of *ikizurasa*, the parameter to grasp their

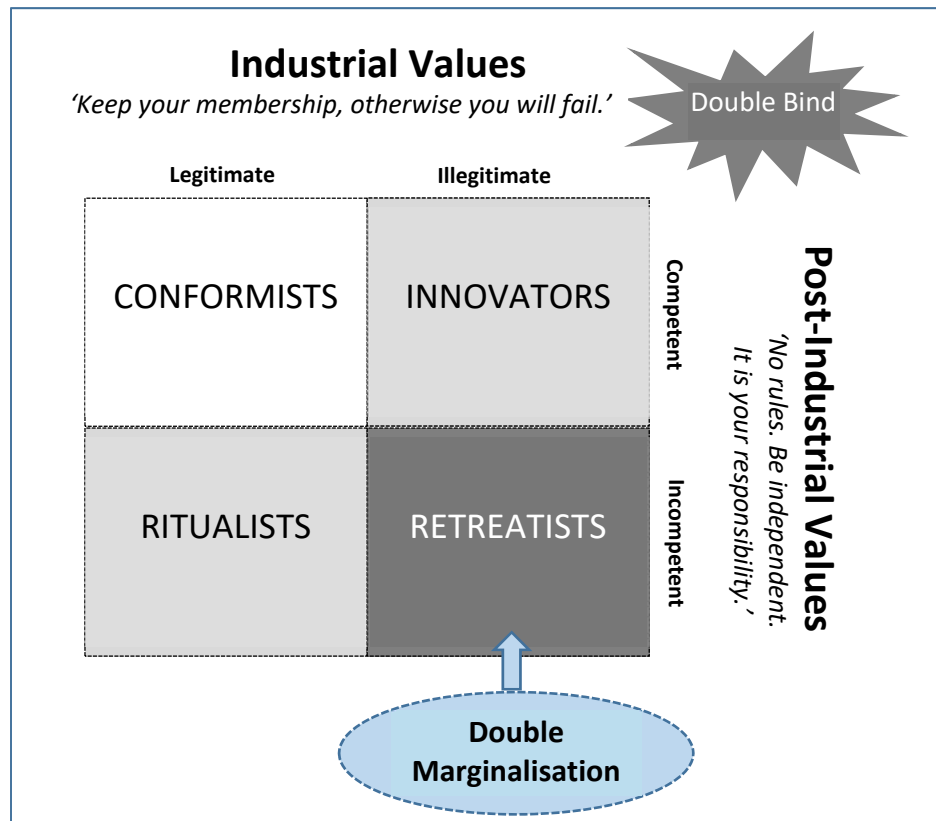
situation is *marginalisation* rather than *adaptation*. Reflecting on the fact that youth with *ikizurasa* often do not feel that they have a solid foundation as an individual as to how to adapt to society, and hence more exposed to the external pressure, an alternative: 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate', instead of 'accept' and 'reject' might be more useful for the purpose of this thesis.

Another point concerns the appropriateness of the concept of 'anomie' for the particular focus of this thesis – youth with *ikizurasa*. Anomie is the concept that as Merton (1957) presented refers to the sense of loss associated with 'a breakdown in the cultural structure' or 'norm' that leads to social mal-integration. What occurs in post-industrial society where globalisation is an integral part is not simply a breakdown of conventional values. It can be understood, rather, as a transformation of the core social value from something that supported the industrial phase to something else that underpins the post-industrial phase. However, the transformation in this case may not be clear-cut. In the post-industrial phase, different values can co-exist, being intertwined with each other. I argue that two different kinds of social values exist side-by-side and affect young people in post-industrial Japan. One is 'membership principle' handed down from the industrial phase, and the other is the ideology of 'free-market competition' that was strengthened with the rise of neoliberalism in the mid-1990s (Yoneyama 2008). These two values sometimes deliver contradictory messages, creating confusion in the minds of young people as to how to respond to the competing demands. That is, the membership principle basically gives the message: 'Keep your membership, otherwise you will fail', while intensifying market competition delivers the message: 'No rules, just be independent and help yourself'. In other words, while 'anomie' grasps well the collapse of a solid system of values cherished by a whole society, the collapse can also be interpreted as the co-existence of competing and contradictory values. In order to accentuate this aspect, the term 'double bind' seems particularly relevant. According to Bateson et.al (1956), double bind refers to the situation of 'unresolvable sequences of experiences' (pp.253) where 'no matter what a person does, he [sic] "can't win"' (pp. 251).

Based on this, Figure 10 below shows *patterns of marginalisation* that was developed based on the *adaptation models of young people to globalisation* presented by Toivonen et al. Here the same four categories are presented as derived from the

combination of 'Industrial Values' (Legitimate/Illegitimate) and 'Post-Industrial Values' (Competent/Incompetent). This figure also shows the 'density' of marginalisation by the filled colour for each category. 'Retreatists' can be understood as doubly marginalised both from industrial and post-industrial values.

Figure 10. Double Marginalisation



Although these categories are logically extracted ideal types and may not be directly applicable to real situations, they can help us understand the tricky situation surrounding Japanese youth in the post-industrial society – especially those who have a strong sense of *ikizurasa*. Here, 'Conformists' refers to those who are successful both in 'membership legitimacy' and 'market competence', for example, those who complete higher education and get a regular job in a big company. They have no/little marginalisation. 'Innovators' have difficulty in keeping 'membership legitimacy', but have 'market competence', which helps them become successful in the job world, just like cases seen as have a 'successful career after *futōkō*'. Although the Innovators do not fit into the school-to-work transitional system, they can make the most of their abilities, networks, or opportunities to develop their career in various ways. They may

experience some marginalisation. **'Ritualists'** are those who have 'membership legitimacy' at the moment but not 'market competence', so can lose their membership when exposed to market competition. They are also likely to experience some marginalisation. Finally, **'Retreatists'** are those who are doubly marginalised in both industrial and post-industrial values, unable to actualise oneself neither to the school-to-work transition system nor to the job world. It includes those who have experienced *futōkō* when they were of school age and, after that, may become NEET, *hikikomori*, and/or *freeter*. Individuals in this category can be understood as in double marginalisation in a way that causes them to suffer both from the industrial defects including less diversity and less choice, and post-industrial defects such as unpredictability in career.

This thesis mainly focuses on those who are in this 'Retreatists' category. It is especially difficult for such individuals to clarify their goals and means, because they cannot find a place either the industrial or post-industrial value system. Their *ikizurasa* angst can be derived from a well-functioning membership-based system, including family expectations of academic excellence and conformity pressure to be in line with the standardised career path, as well as from the dysfunction of this system, such as the deteriorating work environment and capitalistic 'evaluating stare' in their everyday life that often appraises them as 'worthless'.

CHAPTER 3

FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I will present a theoretical framework for supporting youth who have *ikizurasa*. First, limitations of the existing framework are discussed, in which I point out that the dominant model for youth unemployment support based on activation policies is largely ineffective for youth who face serious issues of *ikizurasa*. Drawing upon existing studies, I argue that ground level support practices have pressing needs for relational approaches that focus more on restoring users' self-esteem by accepting relationships rather than direct intervention for employment. Second, I introduce the origin of relational approaches in Japan, known as '*ibasho*' [a place to 'be']. *Ibasho* originally referred to a gathering space for *futōkō* children outside school but has recently become more relevant to a broader range of people. Third, narrative approaches used in psychiatry and psychotherapy will be examined. Through examinations of Self-Help Groups [SHGs], narrative therapy, 'Open Dialogue' and 'Self-Study' [*tōjisha kenkyū*], this chapter reveals that the Z-meetings, the target of this study, are based on a narrative self-help approach. Finally, I will revisit the conceptual foundation of the narrative self-help approach. By elucidation of the concepts of 'relational being' by Kenneth Gergen and 'in-between' by Kimura Bin, I argue that in order to redress youth long-term unemployment, it is important to include a relational perspective to development of effective counter-measures.

3.1. Limitations of Existing Support System

3.1.1. Activation Policies in Japan

Since the early 2000s the Japanese government has taken measures to support youth in what can be regarded as activation policies (Duell et al. 2010). According to the OECD, such activation aims:

to bring more people into the effective labour force, to counteract the potentially negative effects of unemployment and related benefits on work incentives by enforcing their conditionality on active job search and participation in measures to improve employability, and to manage employment services and other labour market measures so that they effectively promote and assist the return to work. (OECD Employment Outlook 2013: 132)

As noted above, these activation policies place emphasis on changing the present situation in which the related benefits could discourage unemployed individual's motivation toward a job search. However, this is less applicable in Japan context. Since a low level of social security is available for the younger generations,¹¹ most Japanese are not able to remain unemployed and receive benefits. As I referred to in Chapter 1, in a study conducted in 2006, it was found that 77% of the unemployed were not eligible for unemployment benefits, marking the lowest level in developed countries (International Labour Office [ILO] 2009, 16). As a result, Japan's relatively low rate of unemployment is caused not by a highly motivated work force, but rather because there are no choices other than (re-)commodifying oneself, even by engaging in a precarious job. In the context of this background, the activation scheme has taken a different form in Japan. Tuukka Toivonen argues that Japan's peculiar policies for non-working youth is a symbolic activation where 'normative, universally diffused youth labels----rather than "carrots and sticks" in the form of social benefits conditional on participation in state activation schemes----are deployed to prompt young adults to seek jobs' (Toivonen 2013: 17).

¹¹ This is related to Japan's family-corporation life security system that assumes family and firms as welfare providers and safety net. See Chapter 2 in detail.

Despite the differences in the system, activation policies were vigorously introduced after the 2000s. In 2000, the 'Trial Employment Project for Youth' [*jakunen-sha toraiaru koyō jigyō*] was started and companies that employed youth who had registered at a job-placement office were granted 40 thousand yen monthly per person for 3 months. In 2003, the 'Plan of Challenge and Independence for Youth' [*wakamono jiritu/chōsen puran*] was developed by a combination of MEXT, MHLW, and METI [Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry] with the Cabinet Office. Based on this plan, a series of youth-related projects, such as 'Job Cafe' [*jobu kafe*, community-based, comprehensive employment support centre for youth], 'Japanese Dual System' [*Nihon-ban dyuaru shisutemu*, training program with the dual focus of education and employment skills offered by the private sector], and 'Youth Independence Camp' [*Wakamono jiritsu-juku*, camp program for NEET people organised by private organisations such as non-profit organisations [NPOs], ended in 2009] were developed. In 2006, the 'Community-based Youth Support Station' [*Chiiki wakamono sapōto sutēshon*] was established and run by local governments as a base for building a support network. Also, the 'Job Card System' [*jobu kādo sei*] was started in 2008, under which those seeking jobs are issued with a 'job card', on which is recorded their participation in offered guidance or education that can be referred to by future employers, and potentially lead to successful job hunting.

Despite such initiatives, it is doubtful how effective the activation framework can be in addressing non-working youth, because activation policies primarily presuppose the participation of individuals who can clarify their own needs to both supporters and themselves. It is especially difficult for those who suffer from various underlying problems to motivate themselves to work. For example, Weil et al. (2005) investigated activation policies in Europe and pointed out that for individuals whose sense of self is unstable because of life hardships, to simply to create pressure for them to work can hardly be effective. This is because they often lack the social and psychological resources on which to base their future and move on. The following is an example provided by in their study:

Take Bob for example, an apparent 'gentle giant' carrying the burden of a lost childhood—in and out of care homes, a mother that couldn't cope, a father he did not get on with, an unsuccessful school career, low self-esteem, and a life of emotional

turmoil—and at the time of our study, homelessness too. Whilst Bob had many skills and aptitudes, he had a problem engaging with ‘life out there’—outside the project. In this situation, coaching Bob into the hard realities of labor market participation and the threatening loss of benefit would not give rise to any sustainable solution to the social exclusion that characterized his life. Nor would it help him in getting or keeping a job. (Weil et al. 2005: 143)

In Japan, too, it has been pointed out that there are unemployed people who have problems outside the existing support programs. Kudō Kei, head of the ‘Raising-up Network’ [*sodate age netto*], an NPO that aims to provide job support for young people, argues that for unemployed youth to ask for support, it is necessary for them to ‘recognise what to consult’, and to have ‘trust in a person to consult with’ (Kudō and Nishida 2014, 118). However, according to Kudo’s survey report, more than 70% of unemployed youth who visited a support institution answered they ‘did not even know how to manage unemployment [*dōshitara inoka sura wakaranakatta*]’, and this rate reached above 90% in cases of with an unemployment period that lasted for more than three years (Kudō and Nishida 2014, 118-119). Thus, it has been shown that prolonged unemployment can deprive individuals of the capacity to clarify their problems and needs, as well as trust in supporters and society.

Japan’s youth policies have been criticised by specialists, mainly for the following three points: 1) not having a large enough budget for the problems to be solved; 2) putting too much emphasis on individual motivation such as ‘develop human skills’ [*ningen-ryoku o takameru*] or ‘cultivation of diligent attitudes’ [*kinrō-kan no ikusei*], and 3) being too comprehensive to deal with specific cases in practice [OECD 2010: 113-114, Inui 2010: 55-56]. However, the more critical point is that the activation policies cannot be effective for those cases where the ‘self’ to be activated is blurred or fragile. Considering this, it is clear that support for unemployed youth who experience *ikizurasa* and can neither clarify their needs nor trust in others should occur at a different level, and a different approach should be employed. Then, what approach and at what level might work best?

Weil et al. suggest a possible method of support for Bob in the above case. They point out that ‘in cases such as this, a period of non-engagement may be more productive’

because ‘this can help the young person focus on what is required to bring about stability and build up their own capacity for social and economic participation’ (pp. 143). They also cite a professional’s comment: ‘You shouldn’t exert much pressure; after all they have plenty on their minds’ (Weil, Wildemeersch et al. 2005: 143). They therefore suggest that a short-term goal such as employment should not be adopted as it can exert pressure on the fragile self, and suggest instead that a space should be provided where they are related to by others with care without being pushed to engage in any activities. These points have also been recognised in studies of Japan’s activation policies, which will be discussed as a relational approach in the following section.

3.1.2. Emerging Attention to Relational Approaches: Studies on Activation Policies

In this section, I examine two studies that targeted job support provided by Japanese local governments and show how relational approaches are gaining recognition. Relational approaches postpone direct intervention towards employment, and rather focus on the recovery of self-esteem or relationship with others. I will then discuss future perspectives highlighted by the two studies.

The first work is ‘Rethinking Job Support’ (Tsutsui, Sakurai et al. 2014). Based on fieldwork on job support implemented by two local governments, Yokohama and Toyonaka, it focuses on ‘people who have difficulty in employment [*shūrō kon’nansha*’ and explores effective job support for them. ‘People who have difficulty in employment’ includes ‘not only those who fall into welfare category, but also those who are in a grey zone and suffer from poverty or are dissociated from society’ (pp. 1). The authors question the adequacy of the existing job support framework where the goal is narrowly set as ‘to be normally/regularly employed [*futsū ni shūshoku suru*’], because it means that those who have difficulty with using the support system are likely to be put on benefits and excluded from society because of the associated stigma. The authors propose an alternative ‘half-welfare-half-employment [*han-fukushi, han-shūrō*’] model ‘that is supported by a combination of public income assistance including livelihood subsidies or disability benefits and individual job income’ (pp. 8). The authors noted that though this model is not yet included in the government activation scheme, it reflects the lived reality of affected individuals. They found through their fieldwork

that there are people who could not move directly on to employment training for various reasons, such as having a *hikikomori*-like disposition or tendency toward developmental disorder, or difficulty in relating with people as a result of long-term unemployment. They sometimes received welfare benefit and could even work at other times, but could rarely work regularly. A local government has tried to connect those people to full-time employment to enable them to build their life step by step, but it remained challenging. Tsutsui et al. therefore propose that a job support framework should adopt a 'half-welfare-half-employment' model.

They also report that the possibility of 'half-welfare-half-employment' is particularly useful for non-employment-specific support practices, which are less demanding and relationship focused. For example, for those who have difficulty finding employment, local government sometimes offers an open space where people can associate with others through various activities such as gardening, crafts, or a round-table talk with a monk (pp. 195-197). Such an open space is called '*ibasho*' [literally, place to be], which is a key word in Japan's youth support that signifies a space where people can stay without being expected to achieve anything. By using the term *ibasho*, it is suggested that the aim of employment is suspended, and the priority is given to help people relate with others and secure their self-esteem. This is well demonstrated by the following local government staff member's remark cited by Tsutsui et al., 'We are focusing on heightening users' self-esteem and helping each individual find a job, based on what he/she is good at' (pp. 197). The authors value these *ibasho*-like practices as a part of job support, because they provide opportunities for the unemployed to acquire a habit of going out, communicating with others, working collaboratively in a group, and interacting with other people who are in a similar situation, thus inspiring each other's motivation towards employment. As shown in the following section (3.2), as compared to grass-root groups, this type of *ibasho*-like practice implemented by the government is simplistic, though it cannot embrace the theory of *ibasho* at its deepest level. On the other hand, such a non-purpose specific, relation-focused space like *ibasho* is recognised to be an effective government supported practice.

The other study is 'Japan's Emerging Youth Policy' by Toivonen (2013), in which the author presents ethnographic descriptions of two practices of implementing activation policies in the 2000s; Youth Independence Camp and Youth Support Station. Toivonen

illustrates how individual supporters on the ground negotiate regarding the support scheme designed by government and transform it to fit the real needs of the users. The authors see a possibility of redressing Japan's existing activation scheme through these ground-level support strategies; one is 'a community of recognition' and the other, exploring the user. Community of recognition is the strategy adopted by Youth Independent Camp, which refers to an approach that helps users restore their self-esteem in an accepting community setting, as they have been stigmatised as deviant or lazy by mainstream society (Toivonen 2013: 170). This community of recognition shares many characteristics with *ibasho*, in that it is also a relation-focused place without pressure of achievement, as Toivonen explains:

To achieve this [community of recognition], they employ various practices of recognition, beginning with giving youth space and time to "be themselves" (which is the essential definition of *ibasho* in Japan) and the celebration of various small successes and accomplishments in a community setting. Rigid normative expectations, including those held by many parents, are negotiated and strong judgements about what a person 'should do' are suspended. (Toivonen 2013: 170)

The other strategy, 'exploring the user' is mainly observed in Youth Support Station. This refers to a way that supporters relate with users on a long-term basis, including collecting case-specific information so as to respond effectively at a deeper level to the complicated problems confronted by each. The strategies of 'community of recognition' and 'exploring the user' can be combined. As Toivonen remarks, '[e]xploration necessarily unfolds within communities of recognition...which provide secure and destigmatized spaces for exploration' (Toivonen 2013: 172). With these activation strategies, it seems that frontline supporters do not directly try to bring unemployed individuals to the labour market, but indirectly approach them by changing the relational context that they exist in. In other words, they suggest that it is not effective to reduce youth employment by explicit practices such as job skills training or employment referral. Instead, they suggest that practices not so directly related to employment, such as recognising users as equal members of society and trying to gain an in-depth understanding each individual as a person, are crucial.

Although these studies have made significant empirical and theoretical contributions for highlighting the importance of relational approaches in an activation scheme, two significant gaps can be identified. First, both studies only focus on government supported practices whose aim is clearly set as bringing the unemployed back to the labour market. In order to achieve effective accountability, government supported practices are required to follow the Plan-Do-Check-Action [PDCA] cycle. Thus, in most cases, the outcome of the support is appraised in a statistical manner, i.e., how many people have used the support and what percentage of them have successfully found a job. However, this assessment procedure does not fit relational approaches whose outcome takes a qualitative form, i.e., how participants (re-)build trust in themselves, others, and society. Under this circumstance, relation-focused approaches are likely to have been more intensively developed in private sectors, such as NPOs. This thesis examines practices in the private sector, in particular 'the Z-meetings' held by a youth supporting NPO.

Second, very few in-depth interviews of users of the support system were conducted in those two studies because their research focuses on the support provider, i.e., the government. In order to explore how best to support marginalised youth, it is crucial to investigate actual experiences of those people in their own words. Indeed, Toivonen writes, 'I agree that one cannot fully comprehend the state of Japanese youth without actually talking to individuals', but continues 'Due to the vulnerable state of many of the young people I encountered, I refrained from trying to conduct interviews with more than a handful of individuals' (Toivonen 2013: 26). The present thesis also draws attention to the vulnerability of the interviewees, but endeavours to fill in the gap in existing literature by providing in-depth qualitative data collected from young people who have a strong sense of *ikizurasa*. The interviewees who participated in this research sometimes narrate their 'severe' experiences, such as self harm, attempted suicide, and/or hospitalisation in a psychiatric ward. As will be elaborated in Chapter 4, this is possible because of my four-year experience as a coordinator of the Z-meetings as well as the approach adopted there, i.e., narrative self-help, has enabled me to collect first-hand accounts of *ikizurasa* from vulnerable young people, without making them feel uncomfortable during the interviews.

By filling these two gaps in existing literature, this thesis aims to address the following fundamental questions: Why is it important to have a relational approach to mitigate *ikizurasa* among marginalised youth? How exactly does that work? Or, more practically, how can relation-oriented methods be effectively used for marginalised young people and what is their significance in a broader social context? In order to further detail these questions theoretically, I will examine the existing relation-oriented framework for support for marginalised people.

3.2. *Ibasho*: A Relational Approach Originated from the *Futōkō* Movement

3.2.1. Why is *Ibasho* Needed in the *Futōkō* Movement?

Ibasho [居場所, literally ‘place to be’] refers to a ‘space with a receptive atmosphere (*juyōteki na kūkan*)’ (Abiru 2012: 37) where people are accepted as they are and relationships emerge as a result. As shown previously, this is a key concept in support of children and youth in Japan, especially for those who are in a vulnerable condition. It denotes a space where a practical aim [i.e., getting a job or going back to school] is suspended and users are not forced to engage in any activities. There, they can relate themselves with others in a safe and informal environment without having the fear of being labelled as deviant. Originating in the *futōkō* movement in the 1980s (See Chapter 2), the concept of *ibasho* came to be applied for many other youth-related practices (Tanaka and Hagiwara 2012). In this section, how *ibasho* came to be necessary and how the *futōkō* movement established it for *futōkō* children will be discussed.

Before the concepts and place of *ibasho* were established, there was strong criticism and ‘bashing’ toward *futōkō*. As discussed in Chapter 2, in the 1980s the government officially regarded *futōkō* children as having ‘anxious tendency, undecidedness, less adaptability, less flexibility, social and emotional immaturity, and a strong neurotic tendency’ (MoE 1984), and ascribed *futōkō* to these children’s abnormal personalities and their parents’ inappropriate rearing. Being framed like this, to be a *futōkō* child or a *futōkō* parent could itself be a threat to their self-esteem. Resisting these conditions,

the *futōkō* movement insisted that *futōkō* children are neither to be reproached nor expected to be cured from their 'illness', and that there should be a right for children to do *futōkō*. As discussed in Chapter 2, the *futōkō* movement was established by *futōkō* parents who organised parental meetings and shared stories about their children's *futōkō*, which could not be talked about in another place. The *futōkō* movement discourse criticised the dominant method of bringing children back to school, and proposed to create an alternative space where children can stay and relate with others without feeling fear of being reproached about their *futōkō* (Yoneyama 1999; Wong 2007).

Through her experiences with parental meetings, Okuchi Keiko, a prominent figure in the *futōkō* movement who is a mother of *futōkō* children and founder of one of the earliest and most successful free-schools 'Tokyo Shūre', found that an accepting attitude by people around *futōkō* children is crucial to mitigate their pain.

It is seen in parental meetings that at the beginning of *futōkō*, parents themselves usually have anxiety and angst, hoping frantically to get their children back to school and cannot accept the children as they are. If parents continue to have this school-centred value and stick to forcing them to go to school, affected children will possibly suffer more and react with violence, compulsive neurosis, *tojikomori* [shutting themselves], or regression [*yōji gaeri*], let alone the lasting angst. On the other hand, if parents change their values and start to understand their children with an attitude of accepting them not going to school, the children can start to be able to become peaceful, feel secure, take adequate rest, and charge their energy. They can sort out their internal thoughts, improve their low sense of self-worth, and come to want to do something new such as meeting people. (Tokyo Shūre 2000: 23-24)

Ibasho, where *futōkō* children can go and meet people outside school, was spontaneously created in this process as a space for these children to restore positive energy toward their lives. Okuchi explains how this led her and other members of the parental meeting to establish Tokyo Shūre, and writes:

Here we [members of parental meetings, *futōkō* parents] faced the next task. Even after children are accepted for not going to school and can live peacefully at home, it is not enough to meet their basic needs for development, such as wanting to have friends,

study, try various things, or get out of the boring life.... [Parents say such things as:] ‘How nice it would be if there was an *ibasho* for our children’, ‘We told our children that you don’t have to force yourself to go back to school, but it would be our lack of responsibility if we cannot prepare an alternative place for them to go [*hokani ikeru tokoro*] because a child’s life cannot be fulfilled by being only at home [*kodomo wa katei dakeja monotarinaï*]’, ‘I wish we had a place where we can meet our children’s needs without bringing them back to school’. In discussions of statements like these, we gradually decided to create such a place by ourselves, or parents and citizens....This is how we established Tokyo Shūre in June 1985 as a place for children to relate with others and study outside school. Namely, it was an ‘alternative school [*mōhitotsu no gakkō*]’ or ‘*ibasho* for children’ created by parents and citizens at the grass-roots level. (Okuchi 1991: 6-7)

Launched successfully, Tokyo Shūre became one of the most successful models for *ibasho* for *futōkō* children.

The effectiveness of *ibasho* has also been proven from the perspective of the affected children. Books edited by *futōkō* children at Tokyo Shūre (*Tokyo Shūre no Kodomo tachi* 1991; 1995) present various stories showing that through the *futōkō* movement *futōkō* children recovered their self-esteem and vitality that were once diminished at school. For example, a girl who experienced *futōkō* when she was in junior high school during the 1980s narrates in the book that she used to suffer from a poor school environment, such as high pressure for academic excellence, frequent bullying, and disguised cooperativeness revealed in mandatory participations in group activities after school (Takano 1991: 36). She describes when she started to have difficulty with going to school as follows:

Finally, I was too exhausted to go to school. My condition was such that, in the morning, I got a fever and a headache or stomach-ache, but was fine in the afternoon. However, at night, I couldn’t sleep well because of anxiety, or if I could, I had a nightmare. ... I was so afraid of the term school refusal [*tōkōkyōhi*, now *futōkō*] that I couldn’t admit that I was doing it. (Takano 1991: 37-38)

By joining Tokyo Shūre, however, her condition dramatically changed. In the new environment, there was no one who reproached her for not going to school. She continued:

The impression of Shūre was that everyone there was surprisingly cheerful and sociable. I made lots of friends and they are all good. Shūre is a homey place [*yasuragi no ba*] for me. I enjoy it a lot'. (Takano 1991: 47)

As such, an encounter with Tokyo Shūre became a positive turning point for many *futōkō* children. In this *ibasho*, they could restore their self-esteem and rebuild their healthy life. Then, what specific aspect of *ibasho* enabled this process?

3.2.2. Significance of *ibasho*: Conceptualisation

The significance of *ibasho* explained by Okuchi (1991):

The most important aspect of '*ibasho*' in the context of school refusal is to accept and recognise a person who tries to be him/herself [*arino mama de irukoto o mitomeru*]. '*ibasho*' is the place where children feel secure to stay. Therefore, it may be difficult for those places to become '*ibasho*' that accommodate children in order to 'cure' their 'pathological situation' of school refusal. In such places, children are expected to deny 'the self in school refusal' and to become 'another self'. Under this condition, their current mode of being that is different from normal people [*minnato chigau sonzaino shikata o shiteiru jibun*] is to be self-reproached. Children can neither feel really secure nor comfortable when they are in those places where they always have to think that they are not okay to stay the way they are. That's why a place and time in which school-refusal children can accept themselves and develop self-esteem is needed. (Okuchi 1991: 288)

Under the harsh environment in the 1980s, *futōkō* children were denied the right to be themselves by not going to school and exposed to the pressure to become 'another self'. Their self-worth was threatened. Okuchi's argument notes that in such a situation, there needs to be a place where they can just 'be themselves' without any conditions, with *ibasho* suggested to be such a place. This was a radical mode of thinking generated

from the *futōkō* movement discourse involving individuals not only at personal and socio-structural levels, but also at the level of ‘being’, as I elaborate regarding below.

Hagiwara Kenjirō (2012), an educational anthropologist, presents the understanding of ‘*ibasho*’ at a conceptual level as a place where a new concept of ‘self’ emerges. First, regarding ‘a place to be’, Hagiwara asks ‘for what to be?’ [*naniga iru no ka?*], and answers ‘a place for LIFE to be’ [*seimei-ba*, 生命場]. He remarks that while the term ‘be’ in English can be used for both life and non-life forms [i.e., ‘There is a dog’, ‘There is a house’], the Japanese term that connotes ‘be’ is divided into ‘*aru*’ for non-life forms and ‘*iru*’ for life forms. For example, ‘is’ for ‘there is a house’ is translated as ‘*aru*’, but ‘is’ for ‘there is a dog’ should be translated as ‘*iru*’. The term ‘*ibasho*’ consists of ‘*i(ru)*’, a life form to be, and ‘*basho*’, place. Hence, it is a place for life to be. Inspired by this language use, Hagiwara argues that ‘*ibasho*’ implies ‘the place where ‘you’ or ‘I’ can be animatedly expressed [*watashi ya kimi ga iki-iki to utsushidaseru basho*], not being treated as an object or an exchangeable part by others or society’ (Hagiwara 2012: 27). In other words, he suggests that ‘*ibasho*’ is a place for a person to be able to exist happily as a life, without a sense of reification.

Moreover, Hagiwara also argues that ‘self’ emerges from within the process of relating with others (or) at a place where one can comfortably exist as a life (i.e., *ibasho*). According to Hagiwara, ‘I’ do not exist prior to *ibasho*, because self is derived from *ibasho*. To put it more precisely, he holds that it is not ‘I lose *ibasho*’ or ‘I find *ibasho*’, but rather that ‘I emerge by being connected to *ibasho*’. Hagiwara further maintains that this concept of self includes a sense of being connected to the ‘life world’ [*seimei sekai*, 生命世界], and that the sense is generated from within the relationship with others (or) at a place where each person can exist and relate with each other as life [*inochi/seimeī*], as a unique ‘flesh-and-blood human being’ [*namami no ningen*] (Hagiwara 2012: 29-31).

Such interpretations of *ibasho* as ‘a place for a life-form to be’ and as ‘a place where “I” emerge’ are also helpful to understand why the concept of *ibasho* attracts attention for ground level job support. As shown in the previous section (3.1), the effectiveness of the activation framework is limited for those young people whose ‘self to be

activated' is vulnerable. The conceptualisation of *ibasho* shown above suggests that it is needed for providing an opportunity and space where self is recognised, cared for, and connected to others and society, and where as a result, individuals are able to reconstruct a stronger sense of self and self-worth. The concept of *ibasho* suggests the possibility of making up for the insufficiency of existing employment support that is based predominantly on the activation theory.

However, it should be noted that the *ibasho*-like practices used by local governments are a means for employment support, i.e., to provide opportunities to acquire a habit of going out (Tsutsui et al. 2014). There is still pressure, if weak, towards finding a job, and thus there exists a division between those who can successfully transform from *ibasho* to the employment support system and those who cannot. This is shown in a supporter's remark regarding their future task cited by Tsutsui et al., '[The task is that] many users [who are happy in *ibasho*] get gradually exhausted and drop out when they move on to the employment step' (Tsutsui et al. 2014: 197). Considering that *ibasho* as suggested by the *futōkō* movement was primarily set as a place where people can be recognised for who they are without any condition, strictly speaking, government supported *ibasho* practices should not be regarded as *ibasho* at their core.

While exploring *ikizurasa* [pain of living], this research will focus on *ibasho* as 'a place for life-forms to be' or 'a place where "I" emerge', as suggested by the *futōkō* movement. Indeed, the organiser of the Z-meetings group, the target of this research, was a *futōkō* movement activist who tries to inherit the essence of *futōkō* movement discourse and bring it to the current issue of youth unemployment support (Chapters 4 and 5). In this process, an *ibasho* for youth was initially organised and then the Z-meetings started as one of the activities of the *ibasho*. As discussed in Chapter 2, the symbolic form of youth angst transformed from *futōkō* to *ikizurasa*, and the appropriate form of *ibasho* is changing accordingly. Through examination of the Z-meetings, this research will show what positive effects *ibasho* can exert on the problems of marginalised youth and how the legacy of the *futōkō* movement, thinking humans at the level of 'life', remains extremely valuable.

3.3. Relational Approaches in Psychiatry and Psychotherapy

In this section, I will examine the existing framework for relation-focused support provided by psychiatry and psychotherapy. In particular, I will focus on the impact of creating/sharing narratives, because narrative skills are considered to be a key in the context of supporting unemployed youth. In their critique of activation policies to unemployed youth, Weil et al. (2005) indicates the importance of ‘support for narrative skills’ in post-industrial societies as follows:

Reflexivity—in other words, the capacity to construct and re-construct our identities and new narratives of self in relation to constantly changing notions of the labor market—becomes an essential skill for survival. We might therefore expect support for the development of such capacity to be made integral to notions of ‘activation’. (Weil, Wilemeersch et al. 2005: 8)

In a social-constructionist view, a narrative approach regards people as interpreting their experience as a narrated reality that is constructed through discursive interaction with others (White and Epston 1990; Anderson and Goolishian 1992). The narrative approach originated in family therapy and has spread to many other fields including sociology, anthropology, and management (Noguchi 2009). Although it can include broad areas, I will focus on the ones used in clinical practice that are especially relevant to understand the target of this research, the Z-meetings groups, which include: 1) Narrative Therapy, 2) Self-Help Groups [SHGs], 3) Open Dialogue, and 4) Self-Study [*Tōjisha Kenkyū* 当事者研究]. I will examine each.

1) Narrative therapy. Developed as a method in family therapy in the 1980s, it emphasises the significance of linguistic interaction as a conceptual framework that proceeds and constructs a social system or individual self. People live their experience, or interpret their experience as a narrated reality that is organised and constructed through discursive interaction with others (White and Epston 1990; Anderson and Goolishian 1992). In this approach, a problem of a person or a family is externalised from the people and redefined as a ‘problem-saturated’ description of the dominant story. This is to be converted into an alternative story where the people can ‘re-author’ their lives and relations for the better description (White & Epston 1990: 16). Narrative

therapy aims to provide a clinical context that inspires and generates this outcome. Here, clients are regarded as 'meaning-generating beings' and not as 'information processing machines', while experts are put in the 'position of not knowing', where they become a participant in the clinical relationship, apart from the authorised subject of observation, to facilitate the generation of the outcome (Anderson and Goolishian 1992).

2) An SHG is a group that offers mutual assistance. It consists of individuals who experience similar problems and has its origin in the establishment of Alcoholic Anonymous [AA] in 1933 in the USA. AA is a mutual aid group consisting of people who suffer from alcohol dependence, and is one of the largest and most widely known practitioners of SHGs (Kubo 2004: 138). Below is the classical definition of SHG by Katz and Bender.

Self-help groups are voluntary, small group structures for mutual aid and the accomplishment of a special purpose. They are usually satisfying a common need, overcoming a common handicap or life-disrupting problem, and bringing about desired social and/or personal change. The initiators and members of such groups perceive that their needs are not, or cannot be, met by or through existing social institutions. Self-help groups emphasize face to face social interactions and the assumption of personal responsibility by members. They often provide material assistance, as well as emotional support; they are frequently "cause"-oriented, and promulgate an ideology or values through which members may attain an enhanced sense of personal identity. (Katz and Bender 1976)

As for the typology of SHGs, Katz (1981), classifies them into five categories in terms of 'what observers perceive as their primary or central focus', as follows: 1) groups that focus primarily on individual self-fulfilment or personal growth, 2) groups that focus primarily on social advocacy, 3) groups whose primary focus is to create alternative patterns for living, 4) groups that provide refuge (usually residential) for desperate people who are seeking protection from the pressures of life and society, and 5) groups in which no single focus of activity is primary, though several important directions of effort or attention coexist (pp. 140). Although it is an ambiguous and broad category, the essence of SHGs is a group for people who have similar problems to gather and help themselves to address their problems through face-to-face interactions. They

have been applied in various fields, including treatment of addiction and chronic disease (Gartner et al. 1971).

3) While narrative therapy and SHGs are traditional methods with about 40-50 years of history and applied in various areas, Open Dialogue is a relatively new method developed in the 1980s by a particular clinical practice. It is 'a network-based, language approach to psychiatric care' (Seikkula and Olson 2003: 403) that was established in Finnish Western Lapland and has proven to be effective in reducing schizophrenia¹² (Seikkula et al. 2000). This method is now situated as a part of Finnish Need-Adopted Treatment.

According to Jaakko Seikkula, a leading figure in development of the method, in Open Dialogue, patients, the people in their social networks, and crisis intervention teams hold open treatment meetings together from the first contact to the end of the intervention (Seikkula 2002). Treatment plans, including decisions about hospitalisation, medication, or psychotherapy, are made through the meetings, with the reflections of the individual who is suffering from the disease. The aim is explained as 'to create a joint space for a new language, in which things can start to have different meanings' (Seikkula 2002: 266) and that is achieved through dialogue. Seikkula describes how the dialogue operates:

In open dialogue, the 'tactic' is to build up dialogical discourse. In dialogue, new understanding starts to emerge as a social, shared phenomenon. The individuals present at the meeting are speaking about their most difficult experiences. In terms of psychotic speech, people are speaking about things that do not yet have any other words than those of hallucinations or delusions. Once this reality can be shared, then new resources become available. What first takes place in outer dialogue in the social domain may thereafter be evaporated into an inner dialogue. (Seikkula 2002: 265)

To enhance dialogue, a 'reflective conversation' is held among the team members. This does not mean formation of a separate reflective team, but rather the reflective

¹² It was indicated that 'In a nonrandomized, 2-year follow up of first-episode schizophrenia, hospitalization decreased to approximately 19 days; neuroleptic medication was needed in 35% of cases; 82% had no, or only mild, psychotic symptoms remaining; and only 23% were on disability allowance'. (Seikkula and Olson 2003)

conversation is done in the original treatment meeting and includes the patient. The process of reflecting is described as below:

... the team members move flexibly from constructing questions and comments to having reflective discussions with other team members. Sometimes this presupposes that the team asks for permission to do this: 'I wonder if you could wait a moment so that we might discuss what we have started to think about. I would prefer it if you could sit quietly and either listen, if you want, or not if you don't want that. Afterwards we will ask your comments about what we have said'. (Seikkula 2002: 265)

Here, it is indicated that sharing narrative in a transparent, non-authoritative way enables patients to have a 'new language' with which they can express their realities without hallucinations or delusions.

Open Dialogue was introduced to Japan in 2015 by Saitō Tamaki, a prominent *hikikomori* specialist, and soon attracted wide attention for its practical effectiveness and simplicity¹³ (Saitō 2015). The possibility of its application for Japanese was vigorously researched in those with clinical practices for *hikikomori*, addiction, and schizophrenia (Seikkula et al. 2016). Saitō stated that the essence of Open Dialogue is to restore the subjectivity of clients to change themselves. In a round-table talk organised as an opening project for a volume that featured Open Dialogue in the magazine '*Gendai Shisō*' ['Contemporary Thoughts', a commercial magazine focused on academic discussion], Saitō explained:

Open Dialogue does result in curing clients, but while it is on-going, or curers are working as a part of the system, there is a rule that they should remove the aim of 'cure' from their brain. ...Open Dialogue values the concept of 'space' where clients can subjectively change themselves. Curers' intent toward cure can paradoxically deprive them of the space. I really think this is true as a curer. ... It is important to leave clients a space undetermined, where they can explore various ideas, and when they can envisage

¹³ In 2016, Open Dialogue was featured in the magazine '*Gendai Shisō*' [Contemporary Thoughts] (vol. 44-17), one of the leading commercial magazines on contemporary thought and philosophy, '*Seishin Kango*' [Mental Care] (vol. 19-5), and '*N: Narrative and Care*' (vol. 8). Seikkula's book was translated into Japanese (Seikkula and Arnkil 2016), and the author was invited to Japan in 2016 (Seikkula et al. 2016).

starting to work, that is a moment toward cure. This also means that they are gaining subjectivity. (Saitō and Murakami 2016: 47)

Regarding this point for valuing clients' subjectivity, Open Dialogue has much in common with Self-Study at Bethel House, which is introduced next.

4) Self-Study or *Tōjisha Kenkyū*, is a self-help project that emerged in a psychiatric care community known as Bethel House [*Beteru no Ie*] in Hokkaido, Japan. In Self-Study, people who have various problems including schizophrenia get together and 'study' themselves through communication with others who are in a similar condition (Urakawa *Beteru no Ie* 2005; Kumagaya 2015). The Japanese expression *Tōjisha Kenkyū* is a compound of *tōjisha* [当事者¹⁴] and *kenkyū* [研究], with *tōjisha* meaning people who are directly affected by a problem, such as therapy clients or sufferers, and *kenkyū* meaning study or research.

Self-Study started in 2001 when Kawasaki Hiroshi began to conduct 'A Study of My Explosion' [*Bakuhatsu no Kenkyū*] with Mukaiyachi Ikuyoshi, a social worker at Bethel House. Kawasaki suffered from schizophrenia and had violent impulses. In the study, Kawasaki set 'the aim of the research' as to 'clarify the mechanism of my 'explosion' [sudden and severe occurrences of violence], and to make myself and my parents happy'. His 'research method' was explained as 'to talk about myself to other people in the Bethel community in order to know myself better' [Urakawa *Beteru no Ie* 2002: 140]. His main finding was that his 'explosions' were similar to a 'water flood'. Just like river water increased by rain from a storm, his stress inside gradually increased to reach its limit and finally burst into violence. In order to control this, Kawasaki suggested to not try to completely refrain from 'explosion', but to do a 'healthy explosion' in the early stage of stress accumulation. His prescription is 'recognise the signs of my "explosion" by myself in the early stage, and go to other people and talk to them so

¹⁴ The term *tōjisha* came to be known as a subject of focus by minority movements, especially after Nakanishi Shōji and Ueno Chizuko (2003) introduced the concept of '*tōjisha shuken*' [当事者主権, individual autonomy]. In Japan, since around the 1970-80s, marginalised people who had been objectified by professional intervention, such as disabled people, women, aged people, patients, and *futōkō* children, started to protest the dominant society and assert their own rights. Nakanishi and Ueno recognise the common characteristic of those and describe it as '*tōjisha shuken*'. This is explained as an ethical principle that self-determination of marginalised people should be respected prior to any other parties. (Ueno 2011: 67)

that they also recognise the signs' (Urakawa Beteru no Ie 2002: 145). Kawasaki remarked that 'when other people recognise my "explosion", it can become a healthy one'. Finally, he concluded his research by pointing out that 'I was addicted to the "explosion"....My worries cannot be dealt with properly until I share them with others' (pp. 144-145). This research successfully mitigated Kawasaki's violent impulses. Although he remained not completely free, he states that 'now it is harder to burst into "explosion" than before because I clarified the mechanism to the people around me. My "explosion" became like a magic trick that everyone knows (pp. 146).

The basic principle of Self-Study is concisely described as 'by oneself, with others' [*jibun-jishin de, tomo ni*] (Urakawa Beteru no Ie 2005). This means: 1) doing research by oneself and 2) doing it with peers, who are well connected to each other. Mukaiyachi Ikuyoshi (2009), a social worker at Bethel House, emphasises that in the process of Self-Study, a key is to have other people who get together in a place and share their experiences or thoughts. According to Mukaiyachi, most symptoms that cause suffering in clients' lives are also a way of expression of their desire for connection with others or society. Thus, by inducing problems or symptoms, sufferers attempt to relate themselves to society. For example, in Kawasaki's case, the police were called or he was hospitalised as a result of his 'explosion', which was the [only] form of connecting himself to society. If so, the remedy should not be to suppress the symptoms, but rather to find a better way to express the desire for connectedness both for the sufferer and the world around him/her. Self-Study needs to be conducted as interaction with people precisely because finding a better way to express the desire for connectedness itself is the remedy. People who are engaged in Self-Study are supported in their existential foundation by feeling that they are sharing their experiences of suffering with others and redefining those experiences as 'precious data' for others who are also dealing with similar problems (Mukaiyachi 2009).

Importantly, a new sense of self emerges in this process. Kumagaya Shin'ichirō, a paediatrician who has cerebral palsy and a leading figure in the Self-Study movement, describes the reality of a participant in Self-Study:

When rejected, I get hurt. When sympathised with, I doubt. With anxiety that no one will be able to understand me, I fearfully start applying words to my undefined

experiences. I hesitate first, but as I keep trying various words, suddenly some words get accepted clearly and strongly by other people who exist in front of me as real people. At that moment, my vague experience, which I myself was not certain of its existence, emerges with a clear shape. Given an expression in this way, I have a better understanding of what my experience was and what I have been, than ever before. (Kumagaya 2013b: 302)

These words well describe the process in which, by recovering the relationship with others, self is recaptured as a real person who is connected to a concrete society.

Since the late 2000s, as the applicability of Self-Study has been vigorously explored, it has been applied to various kinds of chronic difficulties, such as addiction and autism (Ayaya and Kumagaya 2008; Kamioka and Ōshima 2010). Not only at the ground level but researchers also started to incorporate Self-Study to enhance understanding of human life. For example, The University of Tokyo launched 'Field of *Tōjisha-Kenkyū* [Self-Study]' in 2015 at the Research Center for Advanced Science and Technology [RCAST]. Moreover, the principles of Self-Study have been introduced overseas and were especially received enthusiastically in Korea (Mukaiyachi 2016).

While these narrative approaches share a framework that sees people as interpreting their experiences as a narrated reality constructed via discursive interaction with others, there are variations regarding which point each focuses on the most at its core. Narrative therapy stresses 'stories' that are narrated by a client and can redefine the clients' reality to a more encouraging description, while Open Dialogue emphasises 'dialogue' or interactive relationships that operate to share clients' problems. In contrast, SHGs and Self-Study can be understood as being centred on a 'place [*ba*]' itself, where stories and relationships are generated.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, the Z-meetings group has many characteristics of the above-mentioned relational approaches. However, it does not completely fit into any one of those. It emphasises the process of narrative generation, places much value on face-to-face interactions, and attempts to generate a relational context where participants can restore their subjectivity. On the other hand, there are no interventions by specialists including a therapist, counsellor, or doctor such as in

narrative therapy and Open Dialogue. While SHGs tend to focus on a specific problem such as alcoholism, the Z-meetings are open to the public and any people who agree with the core ideas are welcome regardless of their attributes or conditions (though, as a result, there are many participants who have experienced *futōkō* and *hikikomori*). They have much in common with Self-Study, but do not necessarily focus on individuals to explore their situation. In the Z-meetings, as will be shown in Chapter 4, there are such activities as ‘free discussion where people freely talk about a particular theme, or a ‘short lecture’ where a coordinator [me] gives a short lecture and participants discuss it. Compared to these other approaches, the Z-meetings group is salient in the following two points: 1) there is no expectation for the participants to have the same problem or attribute, and 2) the aim is self-exploration through dialogue but not cure or problem resolution. It might possibly be classified as an SHG under its inclusive and broad definition. Considering these, the practice in the Z-meetings can be framed as a narrative self-help approach.

3.4. Beyond the Concept of Individual: ‘In-Between’ by Kimura Bin

The previous examination of the limitations of the activation framework revealed that existing career support systems cannot be effective in cases of users who suffer from a complex set of problems and hold *ikizurasa* angst. Because it is difficult for these people to clarify their aims or needs in regard to career, job skills training and employment referral are too simplistic, and can hardly help them resolve their problems. It seems that a relational approach can provide a better frame for dealing with those individuals because they function in a phase of human relationship where individual subjectivity, which can be expressed in forms of aim, needs, intention, hope, and/or decision, is developed.

In the present post-industrial society, with growth in the service sector and decline in manufacturing, the work environment especially for the younger generation is deteriorated, and individual life-courses become diverse and unstable. In this context, individuals are more exposed to pressure to subjectively explore and construct their career. However, what is paradoxical is that, as individualisation proceeds, it is

becoming harder to secure the relational foundation on which people can develop their own aims or needs. For example, in 2007, a *freeter* man wrote an article titled 'Wishing to slap Maruyama Masao: as a *freeter* aged 31, my hope is war' (Akagi 2007). There, he claimed that in Japanese society today there is little chance for social-class mobility for *freeters* who are stuck with a humiliating and dead-end life, thus only war can be a source of hope because it will disintegrate the status quo, and both haves and have-nots will be thrown into the same tragedy (Akagi 2007: 58-59). This article stirred up controversy in academic circles and media, inducing various critical reactions.¹⁵ Usually, the criticisms point out his ignorance about a real war and note that it is extremely doubtful if it is appropriate to desire an advent of violence as real hope. However, such a desire can be better understood when considering that under the condition of alienation, individuals can scarcely build their needs in a practical or constructive way. This seems to show the limitation of the unitary concept of 'individual' when considering the matter of career in isolated situations.

Pointing out the impasse of the western concept of the individual as a completely free and responsible entity, Gergen proposes the concept of 'relational being' (Gergen 2009). Relational being refers to a way of understanding the human existence, which challenges the concept of 'individual' as a bounded entity with an inner mentality separated by a clear line from the outer environment. Rather, it sees individuals as a product of multiple relationships. Applying this concept to particular social practices such as education or therapy, Gergen argues that 'knowledge' or 'recovery' is not a personally attained goal, but the fruit of effective co-action. Thus, as Gergen continues, in such practices, it is more important to create a relationship that can bring adequate results than to directly intervene in the lives of individuals. Although the notion of relational being is not necessarily a new idea,¹⁶ the significance of Gergen is that he applies the concept of 'relational being' to more general social phenomena such as

¹⁵ Ronza, the monthly magazine that published Akagi's article, established a special topic of 'Responses to "Wishing to slap Maruyama Masao: Hope of war"' in April 2007, and published criticisms from notable public figures including specialists and artists. (Sugita 2008: 41)

¹⁶ As Gergen himself points out, through intellectual exploration western modern thinking, which gave rise to the concept of individualism, has accumulated various perceptions that overcome the absolute concept of the individual. Moreover, minority studies such as feminism and disability studies have critically argued that 'absolute individuals' tend to include only those who are white, male, not-disabled, and heterosexual.

collapse of community, rise of neoliberalism, and deepening political and religious conflicts; and then proposes 'relational being' to be adopted at a grass-roots level to redress these phenomena and reduce conflicts by fostering social bonds through dialogue.

Meanwhile, non-western societies have long embraced the importance of relationship to the formation of self. In Japan as well, there is a series of scholarly works in the fields of sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and psychiatry about how self is generated from and 'in-between' relations (Nishida 1933; Hamaguchi 2003; Kimura 2005b). Here, I will focus on the thoughts of the psychopathologist Kimura Bin who radically reconsiders the concept of individual based on his clinical experience as a doctor specialised in schizophrenia. While the concept of relational being still focuses on a 'human being' as an outcome of dialogical processes, Kimura's uniqueness is that he gives more attention to the 'place' of 'in-between', the phase where each individual has not yet been differentiated, and tries to understand humans deeply at the level of species or life. This is especially suggestive to this thesis, which attempts to describe a place where individual self is given its shape through interactive discussions

Based on phenomenological insight into schizophrenia and the transcultural perspective, Kimura realised the limitation of the 'individual as a separated entity [*ko toshite no kojiri*]', and wrote 'before being connected with others through ... social relations, each individual has a place called 'in-between' with other individuals as other organisms of the same species, or rather, we may even say that such a place exists a priori to an individual' (Kimura 2005a: 153).¹⁷¹⁸ Kimura critically reconsiders the predominance of humans over other life forms and regards humans as one species among many. Based on this stance, he tries to understand how each human's self can be smoothly derived when it is well situated on the basis of 'life in general', which refers

¹⁷ As Kimura's theory of in-between is expressed in a highly abstract, conceptual level, I will add footnotes to show the original Japanese texts of Kimura's citations presented in this section.

¹⁸ 個人と個人は、そのような社会的対人関係を結ぶ以前に、というよりむしろ個人である以前に、同種固体である他人（たち）との〈あいだ〉という〈場〉を構成している。

to a shared, undifferentiated life as a species, or as all living beings that substantiates each individual life. Kimura writes:

On earth, there is what may be called the foundation of life in general. The fact that each of us is alive means that our existences sustain, through our actions and senses, the connectedness with this foundation of life in general. (Kimura 2005b: 12)¹⁹

Based on this, Kimura expresses insight into the duality of self that constructs ‘*aida* [in-between]’ between ‘life which generates self’ [*jiko o umidasu seimei*, or life in general] and ‘life generated as self’ [*jiko toshite umidasareta seimei*, or each individual self] (Kimura 2005a: 16). With references to the legacy of philosophy from the Greek notions of ‘*zoe*’ and ‘*bios*’ to the Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō’s concept of ‘absolute nothingness [*zettai no mu*]’, Kimura describes this ‘life which generates self’ as follows.

When I say that I am alive, this ‘alive’ may involve not only my own physical life, but also something that is rather non-personal and non-individual. It may entail the nuance that I am let live [*ika-sarete-iru*], or more accurately, that I am lived [*iki-rarete-iru*] by something that might be called ‘life in general’. In many cases, it would not be the case that I experience that ‘I am alive’ not actively, based on my own will, but rather passively, as a state whereby I have been given a life. ...In such a case, what is ‘alive’ is not ‘me’, but ‘life in general’, so to speak, which does not belong to anyone specific, but is shared by all living beings. In this case, self becomes no more than a ‘place’ where life in general is living ‘here and now’. (Kimura 2014: 102)²⁰

Here, each individual’s physical life is understood as merely a vessel that is incidentally taken by ‘life in general’. In other words, the level of permeation of and distance from

¹⁹ この地球上には、生命一般の根拠とでも言うべきものがある、われわれ一人ひとりが生きているということは、われわれの存在が行為的および感覚的にこの生命一般の根拠とのつながりを維持しているということである。

²⁰ 私が生きているという場合、この「生きている」には、そのような私自身の身体的生命を生きているというだけにはとどまらない、もう少し人称性を離れた、非・人称的、非・個体的な意味も含まれているのではないか。そこにはどこか、この私が非人称の「生命一般」のようなものの働きによって「生かされている」、あるいはより正確には「生きられている」というニュアンスが含まれているのではないだろうか。多くの場合、私は自分自身が「生きている」ことを、自力で、自分の意志で能動的に生きているのではなく、むしろ受動的に、生を与えられている状態として経験しているのではないだろうか。

その場合には、「生きている」のはこの「私」ではなくて、だれのものでもない、あるいは「生きとし生ける」すべてのものに共通する「生命一般」とでも言うべきものであって、私はその生命一般が生きている「いまここ」という「場所」にすぎないということになるだろう。

'life in general' constitute the basis on which each individual self is developed. In-between [*aida*] conceptualises this space between 'life in general' and 'individual self'. Kimura understands that schizophrenia develops from dis-formation of this in-between space.

Kimura's theory seems to substantiate Hagiwara's interpretation of *ibasho*, 'a place for life to be', which was presented previously (3.2.2). Describing *ibasho* as a place where a person can exist happily as a life without a sense of reification, Hagiwara argued that individual self is not prior to *ibasho*, but derived from *ibasho*. It is also maintained that such a concept of self includes a sense of being connected to the 'life world [*seimei sekai*]', because in *ibasho* each person can exist as a unique 'flesh-and-blood human being' as a life. Highlighting the relationship with the 'life world' that is beyond each life form, Hagiwara's interpretation of *ibasho* has much in common with Kimura's concept of *aida*.

Indeed, Kimura applies his theory about life to interpret human relationships in the social context of narrative generation and writes:

A 'place' has its particular subjectivity as the 'place', which exerts a big influence on the subjectivity of an individual who acts in the place. Here, what (and how) the individual narrates and how he/she receives words from the other are determined by the tension 'between [*aida*]' the subjectivity of the place and the subjectivity of the individual. (Kimura 2005a: 141)²¹

Here, subjectivity is argued as something that can be held not only by individuals but also by place, and the place of subjectivity is understood to affect individual subjectivity. This can be well exemplified in an episode narrated by a member of Bethel House, a group home of people with schizophrenia and birthplace of Self-Study, in a round table talk with Kimura (Kimura et al. 2010). During the talk, a woman who suffered from schizophrenia narrated her critical experience about place, as follows.

²¹ <場>には<場>固有の主体性が備わっていて、これがその場で行動する個人の主体性の動向に大きな影響を与える。そしてその場合、その個人が何をどのように語り、相手の言葉をどのように受け取るかを決定的に方向付けるのは、場の主体性と個の主体性との<あいだ>の緊張関係だといってよい。

In my case, it was when I was chatting happily [*waiwai gayagaya*] with others that I felt my disease would be cured for the first time. Until then, I thought that life would be over, or I would no longer be human if I failed to be employed after graduating from university. However, when I was first hospitalised, there was a variety of people with different ages, experiences, and diseases blended together in the hospital. I really felt that I could get better by being there. Before that, I had lived by killing my feelings. But then I felt relaxed when I was in the atmosphere of happy chatting. Everyone has experiences of suffering, such as being hospitalised because of an attempted suicide, or throwing him/herself into a river. We know that each of us have had a hard time. It was the feeling that we understood it without saying anything. A person who had depression told how he/she seriously decided to die and jumped into a river, but was not successful because of being a really good swimmer, and could finally swim to the river bank by themselves. Hearing the story, everyone burst out laughing. It was not derisive laughter, but warm laughter that accepted and responded to the suffering experiences everyone had had. It really made me relax. I felt that I did not have to kill my feelings and I can be as I am. (Nishisaka 2010: 6)

It should be noted here that it was not the person or the content of the conversation that was critical, but that the accepting mood of the place was more important. Interpreting this narrative, Kimura responded:

There is something like happy chatting [*waiwai gayagaya*] ... in the phase of the foundation where 'self' is generated. I think that there is a space where self and other are not yet differentiated, from which we pull our 'selves' out. (Kimura 2010: 7)²²

This interaction briefly illustrates that to have a place where people feel themselves accepted as they are is prior to the sturdiness of individual self.

The above examination of the concepts of 'relational being' by Gergen and 'in-between' by Kimura suggests that in order to have a deep understanding of humans it is crucial to consider the relational context they are in. In the field of youth unemployment support, the activation scheme would naturally be less effective when the 'self to be

²² なにか「自分」というものが成立するもとなるところに今の「わいわいがやがや」・・・みたいなものがあるんじゃないでしょうか。自分も相手もない、それがまだ分かれていない世界みたいなものあって、そこから「自分」というものを引っ張り出してくるんだと僕は思っているんですよ。

activated' is unclear for various reasons, including prolonged unemployment itself. The theses by Gergen (2009) and Kimura (1972; 2005a; 2005b; 2014) suggest that in such a case it might be beneficial to apply a relational approach. They suggest the possibility that relational approach allows a clearer focus on the quality of the social space surrounding youth with long-term unemployment, and the possibility to provide countermeasures against long-term youth unemployment somewhat different from the existing ones. With this theoretical interest in mind, I will explain in the next chapter the research methods adopted for producing this thesis.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHOD

In this chapter, the target group and research method used in this study will be discussed. First, I will present the target of this research, 'the Z-meetings' group (4.1). The Z-meetings group is a self-help group where youth who define themselves as experiencing *ikizurasa* get together and share their experiences through conversation. Its objective is neither for participants to get a job nor to recover from illness, but rather to collaborate with others to focus on self-exploration and examination through communication. I was involved in establishing the group in 2011 and have participated in the meetings as a coordinator since. Next, I will describe methodology and data collection (4.2). This research focuses on interpreting the narratives of group participants in a context where the researcher is actively involved in coordinating group meetings. Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative methodology. Data collected include: 1) semi-structured narrative interviews with participants; 2) participant observations; and 3) written texts made available by participants. The position of the researcher is a hybrid of researcher and an ex-*futōkō* individual. Based on the 'Toroidal Island' model suggested by Miyaji (2007), I argue that this positioning can have positive effects on the research.

4.1. The Z-Meetings

4.1.1. Background

In order to explore how marginalised Japanese youth experience *ikizurasa* angst in real life situations and how they address their angst in a co-action situation, this thesis introduces the case of a self-help group called the Z-meetings group, in which about ten to twenty marginalised youth get together once a month to discuss their feelings of angst. Initiated in 2011, the Z-meetings have been commonly held once a month in Osaka for up to four hours each time. Most participants are in their twenties or thirties, and have experienced *futōkō* [school non-attendance], unemployment/casual employment; *hikikomori* [social withdrawal]; addiction; mental illness, and/or family-related problems. Originally in Japanese, this type of meeting was named '*ikizurasa karano tōjisha kenkyū-kai*' [self-study meeting from the perspective of different types of angst], with the nickname 'zura-ken' [づら研] (Noda and Yamashita 2017: 203). For the sake of simplicity in this research, I will use the term 'Z-meetings' instead of the original long name. The aim of the Z-meetings is 'exploring oneself and sharing one's own *ikizurasa* with others' [*ikizurasa o kenkyū toyū kirikuchi de tasha to kyōyū suru*].²³ Through dialogues at the meetings, the participants clarify, share and positively (re-)interpret their issues. As indicated in Chapter 3, I call the practices at the Z-meetings 'narrative self-help'.

A large number of self-help groups have been established for marginalised youth in contemporary Japan (Sekimizu 2016; Fujine 2015; Itō 2014), ranging from groups supported by the government to those established by private NPOs. Some adopt an employment-centred approach, while others take an *ibasho*-centred approach. This thesis focuses on only one of these groups, the Z-meetings. This is because my long-term involvement in that group has enabled me to conduct in-depth interviews with its participants and collect highly sensitive qualitative data that include rare narratives of *ikizurasa* experienced by youth at risk. Comparative analyses of this group with another group that has adopted a contrasting approach would no doubt generate another set of useful data. However, to obtain such highly sensitive data of equivalent

²³ Cited by the website of the Z-meetings (<http://www.foro.jp/nar'nywa/dzuraken.html>).

quality would eventually require a collaborative research framework, i.e., involvement with other researchers working for other groups whose relationship with their 'participants' enable them to collect highly sensitive data. For me to be involved in two groups that have adopted contrasting methods would have created an ethical dilemma, as it would have seemed as if I were engaged in an experiment involving youth at risk.

What characterises the Z-meetings group is that it presents the term *ikizurasa* as a key word in its name instead of specific conditions, such as *futōkō* or *hikikomori*. As a result, participants in the Z-meetings have various backgrounds, from early school leavers to graduate school students, or from the unemployed to full-time workers, with or without experiences of *futōkō*, *hikikomori* or NEET. This means that participants in the Z-meetings are not necessarily expected to experience the same problems and thus are not assumed to share concrete interests. Since a young person's career is more diversified and accompanied with risk, it becomes less predictable that steady participation in compulsory education or obtaining a higher degree can save individuals from becoming marginalised in society. The use of the term *ikizurasa* allows the Z-meetings to accept people with diverse backgrounds and needs who are nonetheless bound by their *ikizurasa* experience. Thinking of the post-industrial tendency described in chapter 2, i.e., individuals becoming marginalised in untypical ways, the Z-meetings group is considered to be an adequate field for an examination of youth marginalisation in contemporary Japan.

The Z-meetings are one of the components of an organisation called 'Generative Garden'. Generative Garden is an *ibasho* space [a space with a receptive atmosphere where marginalised people can feel safe] for youth run by an NPO [non-profit organisation]. The NPO also runs a free-school for *futōkō* children where they can stay and relate with other children without being pressured to go back to school. While the free-school targets young people from six to nineteen years old, Generative Garden caters to those over twenty. Although the users are assumed to be unemployed and have experienced *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, NEET, and/or other difficulties in their lives, Generative Garden does not define its aim as employment support or livelihood support. Rather, Generative Garden offers a space where people are not forced to participate in any activities or programs, nor are they judged by their achievement, but can just stay and relate to others in a safe and secure social atmosphere with no

coercion. Meanwhile, Generative Garden has many projects the participants can join if they wish, including ‘periodic salon’ (a home-based project as *ibasho*, where people get together in a room and spend their time together doing what they like), ‘music time’ (where people who like listening to music bring their favourite music and share with others), ‘Generative Garden radio’ (making a radio broadcast for distribution through the Internet, especially for listeners who might have *ikizurasa*), and ‘creative writing’ (where participants learn how to create *haiku* with instructions provided by a professional *haiku* creator). The Z-meetings, the focus of this research, is one of those activities. Indeed, the name ‘Generative Garden’ is nearly a direct translation of the original Japanese ‘*naruniwa*’, which represents an image of a garden-like space where various projects generate and flourish like garden trees. The relationships between different components of the NPO and Generative Garden are illustrated in Figure 10 and Figure 11.

The Z-meetings group and Generative Garden are not funded by the government. By their own choice, neither applied for government funding because one of the conditions for eligibility is to provide job support. By placing their groups outside the institutional scheme, both the Z-meeting group and Generative Garden have been able to maintain independence so as to focus on *ibasho* and narrative self-help practices, and provide a place where marginalised youth can concentrate on addressing the meanings of their *ikizurasa* instead of being pushed into the job market.

Figure 11. The NPO and Generative Garden

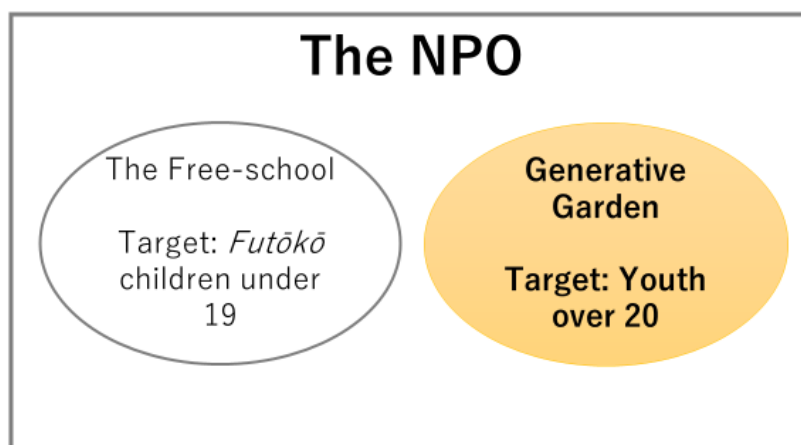


Figure 12 Generative Garden and The Z-Meetings



The Z-meetings were established in June 2011 by Yamashita Kōhei and myself. Yamashita Kōhei is director general of the NPO and founder of Generative Garden, and also one of the interviewees of this research. The Z-meetings were set up based on our involvement in *futōkō*.

Kōhei was one of the prominent activists in the *futōkō* movement. He started his career as a staff member of the free-school Tokyo Shūre, one of the earliest and most successful places for *futōkō* children to stay as an alternative to school (See Chapter 2 and 3). While serving as chief editor of the *Futōkō Shinbun* [newspaper focussed on school non-attenders]²⁴, he and his co-workers established the NPO in 1998 to launch their own free-school in Osaka. The free-school was centred on providing an *ibasho* for *futōkō* children where they can stay without being pushed to go back to school. However, under the social changes that occurred in Japan after the late 1990s, including the deteriorating youth labour condition and weakening school-to-work bridging system (see Chapter 2), Kōhei started to recognise the expanding need for *ibasho* not only for *futōkō* children but also for young adults or older who are

²⁴ 'The only newspaper in Japan that focuses specifically...on the issue of *futōkō*' (Wong 2007:141), established in 1998 by individuals engaged in the *futōkō* movement. On the background of increasing interest in school problems, sales of the newspaper totalled 6000 copies by 2002 (Wong 2007: 141).

unemployed/casually employed and feel *ikizurasa*. Drawing attention to the social sentiment that focuses too much on competition in the job market, Kōhei insists on the significance to keep *ibasho* as a niche or a space that is exempt from being a ‘battlefield’ for winners/losers.²⁵ The free-school targets young people aged six to nineteen, thus while working for the free-school as a member of its executive board he established Generative Garden in 2006 as an *ibasho* for individuals who are twenty years or older. Generative Garden is located in the same place as the free-school and shares its facilities. As participants shared their *ikizurasa* at Generative Garden, Kōhei realised their need to explore their *ikizurasa* more deeply with a sophisticated understanding of their social background. He designed a new project where the participants can ‘study’ their *ikizurasa* and contacted me, an *ex-futōkō* sociologist who had published on the topic.

My monograph, *Futōkō wa owaranai* [*futōkō* does not have an end-point, 不登校は終わらない] (Kido 2004), is an empirical study of *ex-futōkō* students that examines their identity strategies and interpretations of their school drop-out experiences. The book is based on my MA thesis submitted to The University of Tokyo (conferred in 2004). The other book I co-authored, *Futōkō eranda wakeja nainda-ze* [*Futōkō* is not a chosen life, 不登校、選んだわけじゃないんだぜ] (Kido and Tsuneno 2005), includes an essay regarding my own *futōkō* experience and career search, including how I restored the connection between society and myself in particular. As stated in the book, I did not attend primary school from Years 7 to 12, which has become the basis of my research interest. Without a clear understanding of the reasons for my school non-attendance, such as bullying, learning difficulty, or family problems, my *futōkō* might well fall into the category of ‘neurotic school-refusal seen in middle class children’ (Satō 1996). The 1980s, when I did not attend school, was the time that bashing toward *futōkō* was especially harsh, as described in Chapter 2. I blamed myself for being *futōkō*, but an encounter with the *futōkō* movement discourse helped change my perception and restored my self-esteem. When I turned twelve, I started attending junior high school and did not become *futōkō* again. Although my case might not be regarded as a ‘severe’ one, the *futōkō* experience still remained enigmatic, which has driven my sociological

²⁵ Kōhei’s thoughts on *ibasho* will be looked at more closely in the next chapter (5.1.1).

interest in forms of (dis)connection between children/youth and society. Because my research interest has generally been focussed on *futōkō* and individual's interpretation of their own *futōkō* experiences, Kōhei's suggestion of starting the new project immediately caught my interest. Also as an ex-*futōkō* person, the idea of relating with other people who have experienced *futōkō* or other marginalisation sounded attractive.

My direct involvement with the Z-meetings may be seen as problematic by those who hold that such research must be conducted from a neutral and impersonal perspective (Atkinson 1997; Buzard 2003; Delamont 2009). My moral framework and political inclination as an ex-*futōkō* person indeed constitute motivation for my research, and may be seen as a breach of 'objectivity' in regard to social scientific method. However, in regard to the value 'freedom', Max Weber suggests that when inquiring about human cultural affairs, objectivity is never attainable in the sense of pure neutrality, but rather an ideal for social scientists to strive for (Blum 1944). Weber goes on to say that 'an attitude of moral indifference has no connection with scientific "objectivity"' (Weber 1949: 60). Moreover, the developments of postmodernism and post-colonialism since the 1970s have inspired a re-conception of the aims and forms of the canonical way of social science (Lyotard 1984; Kuhn 1996; Derrida 1978), and resistance to cultural exploitation in colonialist, authoritative relationships in various ways (Said 1978; Spivak 1988). Interpretivists have criticised objectivity and neutrality as a 'synonym for estrangement' and 'euphemism for indifference' (Jackson 1989: 4). In this stance, an understanding of others' realities that are lived in complexity, meaningfulness and constitutiveness is more emphasised than capturing universal 'facts' and 'truths' (Geertz 1973; Ellis 2004; Flick 2014).

In this research, instead of endeavouring to eliminate any influence that my position may have upon data collection and analyses, I attempt to use my experiences to deepen understanding of the lived realities of youth with *ikizurasa*. At the same time, I attempt to be self-reflective by clarifying as much as possible how 'I cannot be neutral' in this study. My methodological stance is based on research methodology methods used in such fields as feminist research, participatory action research and auto-ethnography. In feminist research based on criticism against 'value neutrality,' which can cover patriarchal values that seep into every aspect of society, researchers try to defy others and exploit their marginalised participants by holding empowered and

empathetic research attitudes (Collins 1991; Hardings 1991; Kleinman 2007). Action research is also oriented by 'change and improvement' (MicNiff 2013; 54), and operates in practical fields, such as education, with a particular strength of focus on a continuous cycle of plan-action-reflection, with the researcher(s) involved throughout (Lewin 1946; Elliot 1991; MicNiff 2013). Auto-ethnography is defined as 'an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)' (Ellis 2004; Holman Jones 2005; Ellis et al. 2011). Based on a recognition that it is impossible to provide a universal narrative, autho-ethnography allows researchers to tell and analyse their own stories, which can open a new possibility for uniqueness in expression, interpretation, and relationship between author and audience (Ellis et al. 2011). Common among these methodologies is research conducted on the basis of a particular orientation or interest, and the researchers acknowledge their positions in their research. The meanings of my positions will be further elaborated and clarified in 4.2.2.

The Z-meetings are run with two mentors present: a coordinator (me) and a moderator (Kōhei). Since the program began, I have participated as coordinator in 48 of the 51 meetings, mainly to facilitate the sharing of narratives by interpreting or providing the social context for the participants. The moderator is Kōhei, who organises the meetings and facilitates the generation of narratives. While Generative Garden is an *ibasho* mainly for unemployed youth where they can be free from pressure to (find) work, the Z-meetings are open to the public and anyone can take part as a member. There are approximately 10-20 participants in a meeting.

4.1.2. Aim, Method, and Principle

Aim

The aim of the Z-meetings is to provide a space where each participant can explore their issues and share them with others to find better ways to deal with them. Its

objective is not for participants to get a job nor to recover from their condition, but rather to collaborate with others to explore one's self. In order to do this, each participant asks themselves the most important questions: 'What is my *ikizurasa* about?' and 'How should I deal with it?'. Questions such as 'What makes them stay unemployed?' or 'How do they find an employment?' are not asked because, in the Z-meetings, 'first-person' questions about 'me' are preferred to be asked by 'me' and the goal is not in regard to finding employment. Thus, questions about *ikizurasa* are formed and investigated through the narrative sharing process among the participants. Finding an answer is not emphasised. In some cases the participants do find an answer to the original question, but there are also cases where the question itself changes or ceases to exist as they listen to and are listened to by other people. The Z-meetings embrace this entire process. Unlike a job support program, there is no standard of assessment for how successfully the aim is achieved.

There is no specific eligibility or condition to participate in the Z-meetings. Anyone who believes that they are experiencing *ikizurasa* can take part in the Z-meetings regardless of the type of *ikizurasa*. In reality, most participants are in their twenties or thirties, and have experienced *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, and/or other difficulties. However, the participants are not only those young people who have experiences of marginalisation, as there are also university students, supporters of *futōkō* or *hikikomori*, parents of these young people, researchers, and newspaper editors often in attendance. Some of them have complex positions such as 'a university student who has experienced *futōkō*', or 'a researcher who used to do *hikikomori*'. Given the diversity of backgrounds, it is repeatedly emphasised in the Z-meetings that all participants are there primarily as people who have their own *ikizurasa* rather than as parents, supporters, or specialists. The key is to be there as an individual who is willing to approach his/her own issues by talking about him/herself.

Although the coordinator and moderator play key roles in the Z-meetings, it is emphasised in all meetings that they are there primarily as participants rather than supporters or specialists. This follows the 'equal', or less paternalistic, relationship between client and therapist that characterises the narrative approach. In contrast, in a traditional therapeutic situation, the 'equal' relationship is limited to a clearly defined patient-therapist relationship because: 1) it is the client who suffers from a problem;

and 2) experts are paid for their expertise to take responsibility according to industry standards as skilled practitioners.

Although the moderator (Yamashita Kōhei) has twenty years of experience with supporting *futōkō* and *hikikomori* children and youth, and the coordinator (myself) has ten years of research experience in this area, neither of us who play the role of mentor in the Z-meetings has been trained in either psychology or psychiatry. We also gain no financial benefit from being involved in this activity, and our commitment is founded upon our own personal interests in regard to supporting youth with *ikizurasa*. My contributions to the group include covering the cost of the room rental from my research allowance provided by my university [Kwansei-Gakuin University]. Other participants are asked to pay ¥500 for each meeting to cover such costs as photocopying and the mentors are exempt only from this.²⁶ The ‘equal’ relationships that are a defining characteristic of a self-help group are important because they help participants feel more comfortable in relating with others and address problems through their own initiative, rather than under specialists’ directions. Indeed, in a post-industrial neoliberal environment of precarious employment and increased stress, both the caregiver/supporter/mentor and clients are exposed to angst, albeit not at the same level. Thus, in the Z-meetings, given that the mentors are not paid and are also exploring their *ikizurasa*, both of whom have written about their *ikizurasa* and reported their writing in the Z-meetings (Yamashita 2013; Kido 2014), the relationship between the mentors and participants is on a more equal footing.

Method

Then, how are the Z-meetings specifically carried out? In order to make the process of ‘studying’ about *ikizurasa* more focused and explorative, several different means to organise the meetings have been adopted.

²⁶ This does not mean that the mentors are exempt from their responsibilities as organisers. Should something go wrong, the mentors must assure that the participants have access to qualified psychological or psychiatric support personnel outside the Z-meetings.

1) 'Individual Report': A self-nominated *Reporter of the Day* prepares a written text about a specific personal difficulty, to which other participants give feedback by referring to their own experiences (used 27 times in 54 sessions).

2) 'Free Talk': The participants discuss freely about *The Theme of the Day*. This method is suggested when there is a topic for discussion but no particular candidate reporting on it (15 times).

3) 'KJ analysis': The KJ method is a Japanese home-grown method of qualitative data analysis, which enhances group work and stimulates a 'creative development [創造的開発]' in cooperation (Kawakita 1970). The Z-meetings apply this method in a simplified way. The participants produce information on the topic of the day and write it on small cards, which are to be analysed and configured on a large Japanese vellum through discussion and hands-on practice. This style is suitable for visualisation of personal images for a certain word or topic, such as 'school', 'hurting words', or 'strategy for survival in a painful life' (5 times).

4) 'Special Guest Meetings': A guest who is involved in activities related to *ikizurasa* is invited to give a short talk and discussion is held afterwards. The guests have included 'a *hikikomori* writer', 'an alcoholic poet', and 'an *ex-futōkō* newspaper editor'. The meetings are announced through Generative Garden's homepage, calling for public participation (3 times).

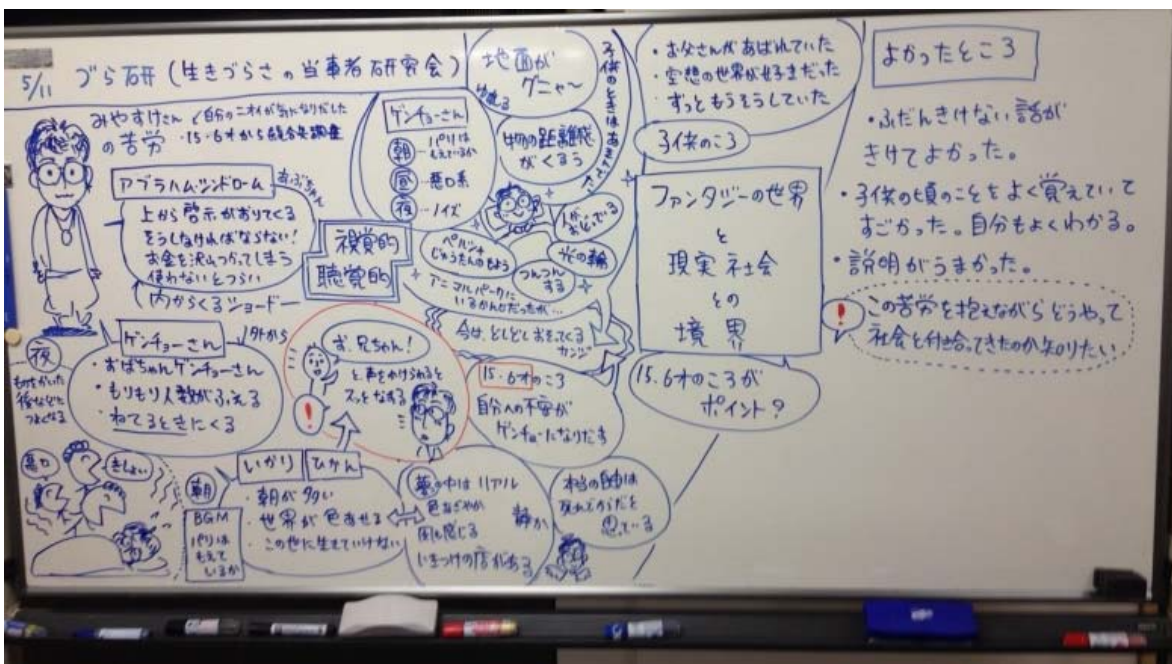
5) 'Short Lecture': After a 30- to 40-minute lecture given by the coordinator, participants freely discuss the topic. This is applied when it is assumed helpful that the participants gain knowledge of social backgrounds of their *ikizurasa*, such as 'gender roles as socially constructed' or 'school-to-work transitional system in post-war Japan' (2 times).

6) 'Interactive Cartoon': A focused person of the day talks about him/herself by interacting with other participants while a cartoonist draws the talk in a graphic form live on a whiteboard. This style is suitable when a focused person is ready to talk about his/her issue in a conversation rather than by verbalising the issue (2 times). Figure 14 shows an example of a whiteboard showing the interactive cartoon style created on

11th May 2015. The topic of that meeting was Self-Study of Kōsuke. Kōsuke is a man who suffers from schizophrenia and one of the interviewees for this research (5.2.2). During the meetings, Kōsuke talked about his hallucinations and people asked questions such as ‘When did they start?’ or ‘What do you feel about them?’ while sharing his story. The conversation was led and facilitated by two mentors. A cartoonist, who was also a participant of the meeting, put the story into graphic form on a whiteboard.

7) ‘Gender-separated Meeting’: Participants are divided into male/female groups and discuss gender-related issues. This style was applied when there was a risk that ‘honest’ disclosure of gender-related thoughts from the engendered perspective could unintentionally ‘hurt’ the other party (1 time).

Figure 13. An Image for ‘Interactive Cartoon’



Resource: Photo provided by Yamashita Kōhei ©Kaoru Ichinose [the cartoonist].

The documents produced in the Z-meetings, such as *Individual Reports*, are compiled as annual reports. They are open to public access via Generative Garden’s homepage, with a message asking for contributions of JP¥ 400 per printed copy. As shown in Figure 15, there are photos of kitsch or humorous looking faces from a Japanese local art craft

or stone carvings in the cover pages collected by Kōhei. When I asked the meaning of these faces, Kōhei answered 'I liked them because they are never commercially acceptable. They are neither cute nor cool at all. People won't buy them, but they are still there with their own strong presence' (Yamashita 2010). This is a message to people who also have *ikizurasa* angst and might find those reports online that 'We are still here surviving this life, even if we are not attractive labour-force commodities'. The Japanese written on the cover pages 'づら研やっています' [*zura-ken yattemasu*] means 'We are holding the Z-meetings here'.

Figure 14 Cover Pages of Annual Reports (vol.1-vol.3)



Resource: <http://www.foro.jp/nar'nywa/dzuraken02.html>

Principle

Since its inception, we have laid out 'guidelines for the Z-meetings' [*zura-ken no sahō*]. In order to secure a safe and comfortable environment for the participants, keeping a free, open, and informal atmosphere is considered to be important. At the same time, it is seen essential that all participants share and respect specific guidelines. Thus, Kōhei suggested the guidelines for the Z-meetings when we established the project and emphasised that the principles contained therein are especially important, because the meetings do not have a rigid procedure and we may lose sight of its original objective as a result of adjusting ourselves to the individual needs of participants. When that

happens, the principles established by the guidelines can pull the participants back to the original place and remind them of the core significance of the project.

Guidelines of the Z-Meetings

1) Do self-study not for the public good but for yourself.

This is the most basic principle that represents the aim of the Z-meetings, that is, to explore oneself. As previously stated, the original Japanese of the name of the Z-meetings, '*Ikizurasa karano tōjisha kenkyū-kai*' [Self-Study meetings from the perspective of each different *ikizurasa*], contains the term 'study', which evokes the image of academic research. This usage is important because it enhances the participants' self-esteem and excitement by putting them in a position of researchers of themselves instead of research objects. However, such research of oneself is different from an academic enquiry in fundamental ways. While academic research aims at contributing to universal knowledge, the process of self-exploration in the Z-meetings thoroughly focuses on knowledge derived from unique experiences. In this sense, the participants are encouraged to focus not on 'what seems to be socially valuable' but thoroughly on producing their own narratives. Such personal experiences are redefined as a rich resource of 'lived knowledge' for other participants who might have also experienced *ikizurasa* at some stage in their lives.

2) Disclose your *ikizurasa* and share it with others.

This means that self-exploration should be conducted with others by sharing narratives about *ikizurasa*. However, this is not always easy for participants because most have been pressured to think that they should not express their own 'negative' emotions regarding their experiences. There is a strong sentiment in society that people should be fully independent and strong enough to be able to solve their personal problems by themselves. Under those circumstances, individuals with *ikizurasa* tend to deny the fact that they have *ikizurasa* and pretend to be positive, tough, and insensitive. However, denial can hinder recognition of a radical problem and thus aggravate *ikizurasa*. This principle

encourages the participants to realise that they do not have to be strong and independent to relate with other people. Indeed, narratives about *ikizurasa* experiences often inspire related narratives by other participants, thus generating a sharing atmosphere, and showing that their vulnerability does not mean that they are wrong or weak. Rather, disclosing their *ikizurasa* is a sign of strength.

3) When you feel pain, you are addressing an important point for you.

It is not easy for individuals who have tried very hard to pretend to be strong in their lives to disclose their weakness. They may become upset or flustered, feeling as if they are losing some 'armour' with which they have managed to cope with the world. Thus, narrating *ikizurasa* is sometimes accompanied with pain. Thus, participants need to be reminded that such pain is a 'good sign' that deserves to be recognised.

4) Listen to others' narratives with care and respect.

Narrating ones' own *ikizurasa* can be painful for the narrator even if they do not appear to be in pain or aware of such pain. Therefore, other participants are required to listen to and share the expression of *ikizurasa* as attentively as possible.

5) Do not try to be 'a good person'.

Maintaining a cautious attitude does not mean that the participants should remain distant from the core of the problem. If the participants as listeners provide only innocuous comments, the investigation into *ikizurasa* will likely not be deepened. The participants are expected to be honest and frank as a real person, but not to act like a mealy-mouthed 'good' person.

6) Remember that others might be like you, but they are NOT you.

When listening to others who have similar experiences, a listener can sometimes become confused, feeling as if the narrator is representing their own voice, and

become angry or sad themselves. This is unavoidable to some extent, but can be limited if this principle can be stated and remind the participants of the tricky situation they are in.

These guidelines indicate the basic philosophy of the Z-meetings as a place for people who have *ikizurasa* to share their narratives. They are presented on the Z-meetings' homepage, reminded of at the beginning of most meetings, and are also referred to when problems occur. At the outset, there were only five guidelines, with the sixth added afterwards to address newly identified needs.

4.2. Methodological Framework and Research Methods

4.2.1. Appropriateness of Qualitative Research and Procedure of Data Collection

This research focuses on interpreting the narratives of group participants in a context where the researcher is actively involved in coordinating group meetings. Therefore, it adopts a qualitative methodology. Specifically, in-depth narrative interviews and participant observations will be employed.

Qualitative methods will be used to primarily focus on empirical data collected from a local context, and followed by a search for suitable categories or theories to interpret the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Jessor et al. 1996; Minoura 1999; Flick 2014). In line with this, qualitative methods focus more on 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser and Strauss 1967) than random sampling, limiting the number of descriptive analyses of human actions as compared to large scale, numerical analysis (Atkinson and Hammersley 1998), as well as the plausibility of relevance in textual interpretation rather than the reproducibility or consistency of the experiments. It has been recognised that qualitative and quantitative methods are not binary, but rather compatible in 'mixed methods' (Punch 1998; Creswell 2003; Bryman 2006).

In this study, the data collection methods include: 1) participant observations; 2) semi-structured narrative interviews with participants; and 3) written texts made available by the participants, including their *Individual Reports* and other related essays. Participant observations of the Z-meetings were conducted from January to December 2015, for a total of twelve meetings. My position in the Z-meetings during this time was as a participant, coordinator, and researcher. For all but one session held in January during my fieldwork in Japan, video conferencing software [Skype] was used to observe from Australia the Z-meetings being held in Japan. When the 'KJ method' or 'Interactive Cartoon' was used during the meetings, a photocopy of the whiteboard or vellum was later sent via email. Although face-to-face participation would have been better, my physical absence did not cause a major problem because my 4-year experience as a coordinator enabled me to have clear understanding of what was happening in each meeting.

Seventeen in-depth interviews were conducted in January 2015 in Hyogo and Osaka, Japan. At that point, 54 Z-meetings had been held, with more than 120 participants estimated to have attended. This was calculated based on the idea of 12 participants attending each session, of whom ten are repeaters and two are new. About half of new participants return to attend again. This research targeted only those who have attended more than three times, which is regarded as the minimum standard for 'regular' participation. Participants have various backgrounds, but most have such experiences as *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, long-term unemployment, precarious employment, difficulty with human relationships, family trouble, mental illness and/or self-harm. Seventeen interviewees were selected because they are typical in terms of their involvement in some of these situations that are often identified with sources of *ikizurasa*. The interviewees included 3 females and 14 males, thus there is gender imbalance in this research. However, the lower number of women in fact reflects the actual gender imbalance observed in the Z-meetings, where the average ratio of female participants is about one-fifth that of males.

Based on their position in the Z-meetings and frequency, the participants are divided into four categories of: 1) mentor; 2) core participants; 3) occasional participants; and 4) other participants. As it is assumed that people who find the Z-meetings more meaningful attend more frequently, the interviewees are selected to cover all of these

categories. The mentor refers to Kōhei and myself. I focus on Kōhei's narrative, including discussion between him and myself. The core participants are those who were originally members of Generative Garden and have participated in the Z-meetings regularly since their inception, while occasional participants are those who have participated in the Z-meetings not from the beginning but one or more years after, and continued to come intermittently for a few years. The other participants' category includes those whose involvement in the Z-meetings is more limited than others noted above.

In the end, ten narratives out of seventeen were selected as case reports to be analysed.²⁷ In the selecting process, I: 1) excluded narratives that are fragmentary and fail to address more than two key topics of: *ikizurasa* experience, family, the Z-meetings, and future, which were considered essential to conduct balanced analysis; 2) preferentially incorporated narratives on *futōkō* and *hikikomori* that are typical topics in the Z-meetings as well as other *ikizurasa* narratives such as developmental disorder and mental illness which also represent widely shared issues among the participants in the group; 3) tried to represent the age distribution of the group, by selecting narratives of the participants whose ages are from the mid-twenties to early thirties, which constitute the majority, while at the same time including a case of a man in his fifties to represent the small presence of this age group as well as to relativise the mode of *ikizurasa* held by the younger generation; 4) selected three cases each for the 'core', 'occasional' and 'other' participants in order to describe the variety within the group. As a result of the first process, two women's cases were decided not to be taken as case reports. Their narratives are mainly about their painful experiences of sexual deviance and severe bullying, that seemed occupied them too much to be interpreted and elaborated into a coherent story. This results in gender imbalance and I acknowledge that it makes a limitation of this research. Their narratives will be touched upon, however, in chapter 6, to indicate issues that are very rarely narrated and analysed in formal research. The profile of the ten interviewees is shown below.

²⁷ Some details of the stories have been modified to protect privacy, but with due care so as to not change the import of the narrative or interfere with analysis.

Table 1 Face Sheet of Interviewees

	Name	Age	Gender	Self-identified <i>ikizurasa</i>
‘Core’ Participants	Sasaki Mai	27	Female	<i>futōko, hikikomori, self harm, work</i>
	Noguchi Kōsuke	27	Male	mental illness, communication, family, violence
	Hirako Tomohisa	32	Male	<i>futōko, hikikomori, communication, academic pressure</i>
‘Occasional’ Participants	Onodera Mikio	35	Male	<i>hikikomori, mental illness, communication, family, violence, work, academic pressure</i>
	Kondō Wataru	23	Male	<i>futōkō, mental illness, bullying, communication, family, violence, work, academic pressure</i>
	Yamamoto Rio	31	Male	<i>futōkō, hikikomori, mental illness, family, violence, academic pressure</i>
‘Other’ Participants	Saeki Jun'ichirō	57	Male	<i>quasi-hikikomori</i>
	Endō Masaya	27	Male	<i>mental illness, communication, family, violence, self harm, academic pressure</i>
	Tokita Yoshinari	27	Male	<i>hikikomori, bullying, developmental disorder, violence, self harm</i>
Mentor	Yamashita Kōhei	41	male	<i>quasi-hikikomori</i>

As shown in the table, many interviewees identify themselves as having *ikizurasa* in regard to family, school (*futōkō* or academic pressure) and/or work, and have experienced a mental crisis accompanied by violence or self harm. The kind of difficulties experienced by the ten individuals are largely shared by the Z-meeting participants in general. We are not selective in regard to the kind of difficulties participants bring to the group, as their *ikizurasa* experience and the mood of the Z-meetings is probably similar to that of other self-help groups for youth with *hikikomori*, developmental disorder or addiction. As for the ‘severity’ of their *ikizurasa* experience in terms of being life-threatening, that of the Z-meeting participants would not be as

critical as those in groups for alcoholics or individuals with drug dependence, relatively speaking. However, it is *not rare* for the Z-meeting participants to narrate stories of attempted suicide and hospitalisation in a psychiatric ward (as shown in the profile table above). This means that overall, their *ikizurasa* is not so mild that it can be removed by a ‘change of mind’ or ‘acquiring positive attitudes’, but rather derived from prolonged hardships with complexity. Thus, in order for them to feel safe and secure when narrating their stories, it was essential for me to collect data that is highly sensitive and personal in nature, and this was possible only because the interviewer (myself) had developed relationships of trust with them through long-term involvement in the group as a co-actor.

The highly sensitive nature of the data collected for this thesis was identified at the stage of research design. The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) required a ‘full review’, which applies to research ‘involving more than “low-risk research” as defined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research’ (Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council 2015). The exceptionally high level of sensitivity required for data collection from this group of youth, who are no longer minors, was thus recognised by the HREC. Ethics approval was granted to the research project on the basis of the researcher’s career and long-term involvement in the field, as well as because of the detailed research design following protocol (Project H-2014-247, RM No.0000019577).

Of the ten interviewees who were included in data analysis, three core participants are long-term participants of the Z-meetings, and have had *ikizurasa* experience that is ‘typical’ and ‘plausible’ among its participants, including *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, mental illness, violence, anxiety in human relationships, family problems and disorders with working. This does not mean that they represent *ikizurasa* in contemporary Japan, as there is no such thing as ‘average *ikizurasa*’, because *ikizurasa* refers to subjective realities and not an observable status. As far as the Z-meetings are concerned, however, the *ikizurasa* experiences of the core members are not only typical of its participants but more importantly, ‘plausible’, which is a key strength of qualitative research methods that are different from quantitative research methods, where representativeness and reproducibility are the key concerns (Flick 2014).

Occasional participants and other types of participants are also included in order to show the variety of individuals present at the Z-meetings, as well as to highlight the characteristics of the core participants. Those occasional participants have *ikizurasa* similar to the core participants and feel that the Z-meetings' methods are meaningful, but their commitment is more limited and they try to address their *ikizurasa* in different ways. Other participants include two who also have similar *ikizurasa* experiences, but sometimes look at the Z-meetings with critical eyes, including one who is in his fifties who might help to relativise the typical *ikizurasa* status shared by the group. The narratives of these non-core participants are expected to identify the limitations of the Z-meetings by illuminating how and for whom the methods of self-help are effective.

The places of the interviews included cafés, a meeting room in Generative Garden, and a university classroom. Each session lasted for approximately 1.5-3 hours. The interviewees were mostly young adults aged in their twenties and thirties who had participated in the Z-meetings at least three times previously, and they were each asked to narrate their stories of *ikizurasa*, their work experience, and how they felt about the Z-meetings, including, if relevant, how their lives had changed during their participation. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Texts that the interviewees had written were used to supplement their narratives.

The participants were mainly recruited through the Z-meetings. I called for participation in this research by using the group mailing list of the Z-meetings, which includes participants who have voluntarily registered. Those who expressed a will to participate were invited to the research. Two participants who were not included in this mailing list were introduced by one of those who earlier participated in the research.²⁸

²⁸ In accordance with the Ethics Code of The University of Adelaide, a 'participant information sheet' was handed to the participants at the beginning of the interview sessions in order to explain the brief outline of the research without 'jargon'. The interviews were recorded with the interviewee's permission. 'Contacts and complaints forms' were handed over to the participant upon completion of the interview so that they could ask questions or make claims if needed.

4.2.2. My Position: Hybrid Researcher and ex-*Futōkō*

In this section, I will discuss my position as a hybrid researcher and ex-*futōkō* individual. In the Z-meetings, I introduce myself to new participants with the statement ‘I did not go to school when I was in primary school and now I teach at a university’. I proactively share my *futōkō* experience in the meetings, especially when school-related *ikizurasa* is narrated. Meanwhile, as a researcher I sometimes make a sociological comment on participants’ narratives and give a short lecture on the social background of their *ikizurasa*. What does my hybrid position mean to this research? Does it make the researcher’s views biased and thus compromise the reliability of the research outcome? How does the hybrid position affect the informants?

It has been argued that specialists who have a shared experience with their clients see a positive effect on their practices. From the perspective of the Family System Approach, McDaniel et al. (1997) noted that the illness experiences of therapists or their family members could enhance their therapy for clients by sharing various associated predicaments with them. For example, Jo Ellen Paterson (1997), a therapist who herself was forced to confront infertility and who offered family therapy to parents of a child who had a disability, maintains, ‘Empathy, born out of the therapist’s own struggles, can be shared with all patients who are also in pain’ (pp.26), and ‘I remind myself that being a medical family therapist is not just a job but a relationship that requires flexibility and commitment’ (pp.27). My background might have allowed me to build a relatively close relationship with the participants of the Z-meetings in the hybrid position of both a participant and specialist. Although it should be reminded that excessive empathy based on identification with participants can impede the smooth performance of research, there is a possibility for narrative generation more in detail and depth in the case when a researcher shares experiences with participants.

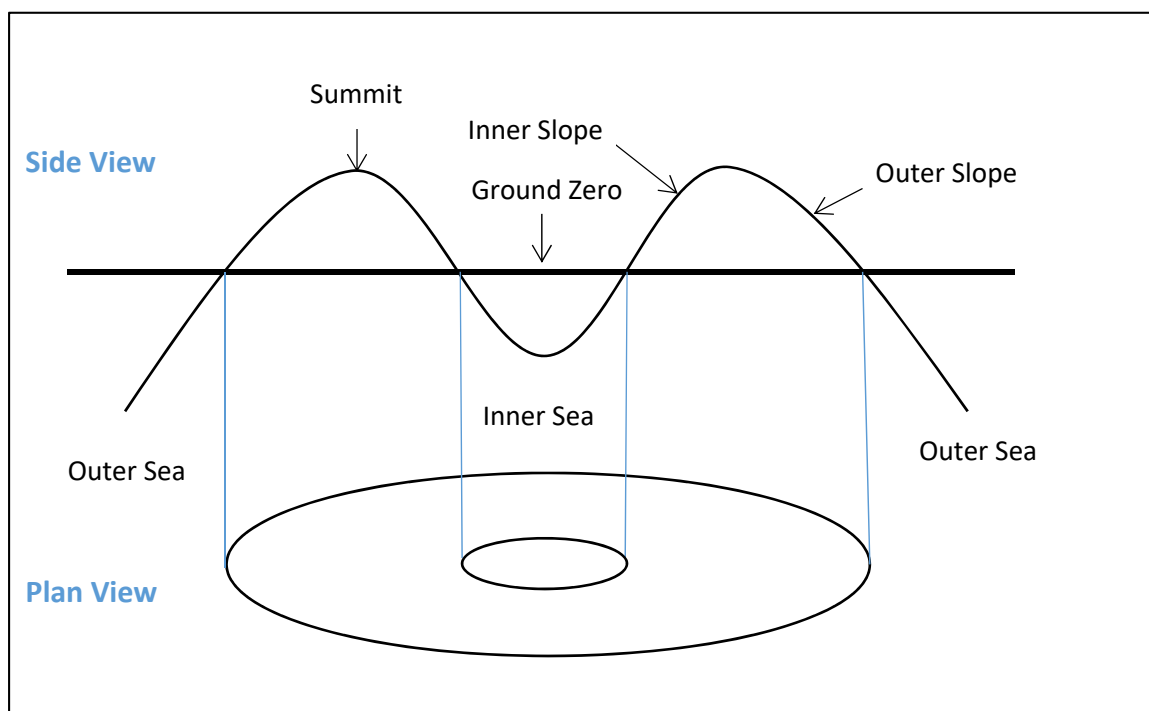
Nevertheless, having shared experiences is not necessary. Kōhei has not experienced *futōkō* himself, though he has been engaged in supporting *futōkō* children for more than twenty years. Based on that experience, he is skilled at listening to participants with care while sharing their *ikizurasa* and is highly trusted by the participants. As will be stated in Chapter 5, when I asked him about his career as a supporter, he emphasised that he had not intended to ‘support *futōkō* children’, but focused on

‘thinking about himself and society from the perspective of *futōkō* [*futōkō kara kangaeru*]’. Holding this mind-set, Kōhei’s supportive attitude focuses not on trying one-sidedly to push children and youth back to society, but rather on listening to them attentively and thinking together. His stance can be understood as a ‘non-supporting supporter’.

My stance as an ‘*ex-fūtoko* researcher’ and Kōhei’s as a ‘non-supporting supporter’ enhance the dialogue between participants and mentors by blurring the line between them. It is true, however, that power imbalance exists between the other participants and mentors. In each specific situation, Kōhei provides ‘support’ for the participants in various ways, and I explain social backgrounds and interpret narratives by using sociological categories. However, Kōhei and I still do not hesitate to disclose personal stories in the Z-meetings. As previously stated, each of us has presented an ‘individual report’ as a participant. Kōhei wrote about his struggle in fatherhood as an ‘non-authoritative father’ (Yamashita 2013), and I reported my family story and the conflict between being a researcher and a person who had *futōkō* experience (Kido 2014).

The position of a researcher and its effects on the field of study have been considered as an ethical matter in researcher-researched relationships, including informed consent, confidentiality, and exploitation (Fetterman 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Miyauchi 2007; Hollway and Jefferson 2013). In this context, it is often emphasised that there is a clear gap between the positions of the participants and researchers. On the other hand, Miyaji Naoko (2007; 2014), refers to a case of an individual who has had marginalised experiences and then becomes a researcher to study about the experience in an academic manner. As a psychiatrist who specialises in trauma care, Miyaji criticises the general assumption that ‘a victim with more severe trauma has more legitimacy and ability to narrate the experience’ and argues that a person with the severest damage cannot survive, or if they manage to survive, cannot speak out about the experience. In order to illustrate this situation, Miyaji (2007; 2014) proposes the ‘Toroidal Island [TI] Model’. A *toroidal* island stands for a doughnut-shaped island which has a land-locked inner sea (Figure 16).

Figure 15 The Toroidal Island



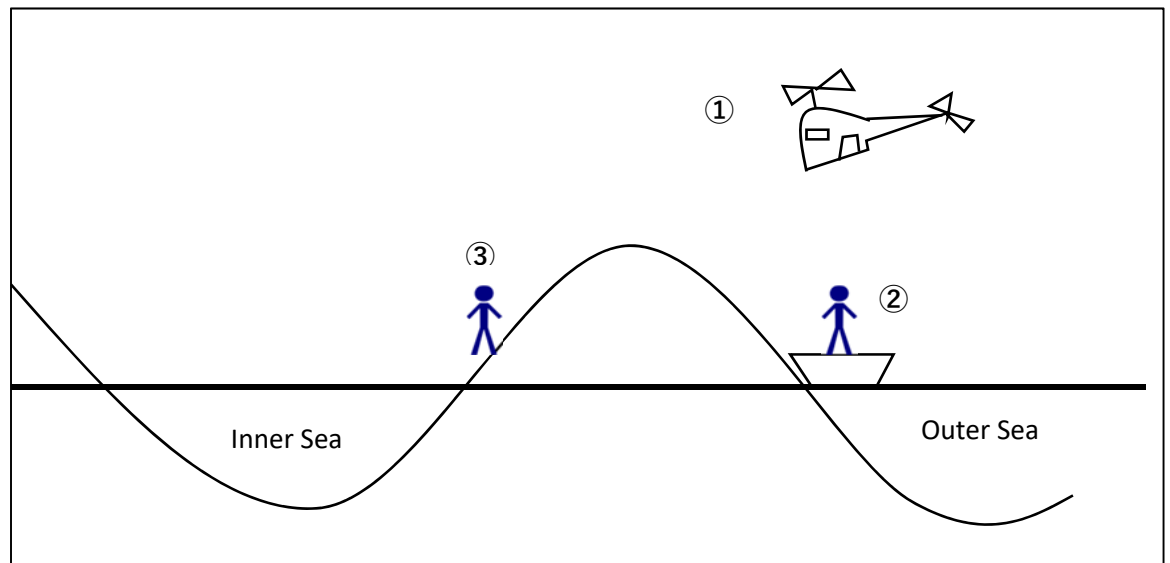
Resource: (Miyaji 2007: 10)

Here, the 'Inner Sea' stands for the place for people who could not survive and thus have no opportunities to testify. Sufferers able to survive are placed somewhere on the 'Inner Slope', while those who are involved in the problem but do not have direct experiences, such as 'family' or 'supporters', are situated on the 'Outer Slope'. The 'Outer Sea' denotes the area where disinterested people live. The ability to narrate the phenomenon increases as one climbs up higher on both the 'inner' and 'outer' slopes, reaching the peak at the 'Summit'²⁹. For example, a person who survived but is suffering from trauma so severely that they cannot narrate can be situated on the edge

²⁹ Miyaji also proposed such metaphors as 'gravity', 'wind', and 'water level' to demonstrate the dynamism of speaking and trauma. 'Gravity' refers to symptoms of trauma that put constant pressure on sufferers, keeping them from speaking. 'Wind' represents interpersonal conflicts and 'water level' shows the sensitivity of society to the speaker's voice (Miyaji 2007; 2014).

of the water inside. As this person recovers from their trauma, he/she starts to climb up the slope and begins to have a voice. However, Miyaji also explains that there is a constant strong 'wind' blowing near the 'Summit', which will bear down on the speaker on the slope. As a metaphor of interpersonal conflict, the 'wind' suggests the difficulty for the sufferer to keep having a voice. Based on this model, Miyaji illustrates three ways of researchers to approach trauma Figure 17.

Figure 16 Three Positions of Researchers in TI Model



Resource: (Miyaji 2007: 173)

The first position, which is represented by a helicopter, illustrates modern academics who emphasise objectivity and universality. This position has advantages for drawing the whole picture, but is only available to those who are authorised to use the helicopter [or authoritarian academics], and sometimes overwhelms local people with its mechanical sounds [insensitiveness of nuisance/hurt]. The second position, which is shown as a person in a small boat, is that of one of the fieldworkers. It opens up the possibility for researchers to approach a problem from the proximity of the sufferers. As the researcher climbs up higher and reaches the summit, he/she might be able to look at the inner slope and the surface of inner sea, which the sufferers have always looked at and feared that they could be pulled back down into it again. The third position refers to a case where a sufferer becomes a researcher. According to Miyaji, it is not a static position but rather a dynamic process where a person who has suffered from trauma comes to have a voice and develops a career as a researcher (Miyaji 2007: 181).

My position in the Z-meetings and in this research can be understood as the third position in this TI Model. I used to be a *futōkō* child, but am now a researcher. Having published some books, I might be near the 'Summit' where my speaking ability has come to its peak. However, there is also the pressure from the 'wind', making it difficult to keep my balance at the top. If I cease to refer to my own experience, my position will become nearer to that of the modern researcher who tries to find universal facts. But if there, I would have to go down the outer slope toward the outer sea, thus I would not focus on the *ikizurasa* angst inside myself and thus not be able to join the Z-meetings as a participant.

The participants in the Z-meetings are also considered to be in the third position. They get together with their difficult-to-narrate experiences and through the dialogical process gradually gain power to narrate them. Kōhei's position, 'non-supporting supporter', can be understood such that he used to be in the second position, ascended the 'outer slope' and went over the 'summit', stepping onto the 'inner slope'. He described his motivation to create Generative Garden, youth supporting NPO, by stating that 'I could not see the participants as a clearly separate entity from myself or having nothing to do with myself. I also needed a supportive relationship where I could share my questions about society and myself with others' (Yamashita 2010). Here, Kōhei reached the summit and stepped down on to the 'inner slope', thus shares the same scenery with the other participants.

Working with these people, I do not hesitate to become a part of the fieldwork myself. My personal experience has given me a primary motivation to conduct this research and helped me to develop a career in academia. This self-reflexivity grown out of my own personal *ikizurasa* would connect me to the participants of this study who focus on their own *ikizurasa* and explore it with their peers. Here, I as a researcher merge into the field by relating with the research field not only in the partial role of a specialist, but also as an integrated human being.

This stance is also based on the realisation that in the field, knowledge is created not by the researcher alone but through interactions between the researcher and participants. Kenneth Gergen criticises the traditional academic style of knowledge generation that is conducted by specialists as sources of alienation and suggests to

regard knowledge as ‘an outcome of relational processes’ (Gargen 2009: 204). He suggests the following alternative method of academic writing:

What if we abandon the formalisms of traditional academic writing, and attempt to ‘fully be there’ for the reader? Here our writing might convey to the reader that ‘I am available to you, not as a partial, carefully monitored façade, but as fully fragile and many-sided human being’. Rather than positioning ourselves as fully rational agents, bounded, and superior, we might become more recognizably human and companionate (Gargen 2009: 225-226).

This relationship between writer and reader can be compared to the relationship between me [and Kōhei] and the participants in this research. When I conducted interviews, while listening attentively as a trained researcher bound to an array of ethical requirements, I touched on my *futōkō* experiences and related *ikizurasa* of my own at times. Although I did not target my narrative for analysis, the participants’ narratives were generated from the active dialogue between them and myself. Thus, in this study, my own input is incorporated in the research process. In the next chapter, I will present the narratives of *ikizurasa* generated from such relationships.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVES OF *IKIZURASA*

This chapter presents interview data collected from ten individuals who expressed a strong sense of *ikizurasa*. As explained in the previous chapter, they were all participants of the Z-meetings and the content of the interview covers key themes, including *ikizurasa* experiences such as *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, mental illness, and/or human relationships; family; work; the Z-meetings; and the future. This chapter presents each interviewee's life story individually rather than presenting the data by theme. This way, the lived experiences of each person are better shown along with their life trajectory. According to the narrators' positions and frequency of participation in the Z-meetings, the interviewees are divided into four categories: mentor; core participants, who have participated for more than four years; occasional participants, those who have participated for one to three years; and other participants, who have participated only occasionally, but more than three times. As indicated in Chapter 4, my position during the field work was a sort of hybrid of a researcher and *ex-futōkō* participant. Thus, my narrative is also included when needed. The face-sheet of the participants and the list of interviews and essays from the field will be indicated in Appendix 2 and 3.

5.1. Mentor

In the Z-meetings, there are two mentors: Yamashita Kōhei and Kido Rie [myself]. In this section, Kōhei's narrative will receive focus. He is the founder of the Z-meetings and the youth-supporting NPO 'Generative Garden', which a wide range of activities

including the Z-meetings. As well as his life story, Kōhei's vision and philosophy for the Z-meetings as well as his life history will be illustrated. My stance as the other moderator will also be presented through the results of discussions between Kōhei and myself.

5.1.1. Yamashita Kōhei (age 41, male)

Encounter with *futōkō*

Yamashita Kōhei began his career as a volunteer at a free-school, and has been engaged in supporting *futōkō* children and marginalised youth for over 20 years. However, he does not see himself as 'a supporter' in relation to *futōkō* children.

I haven't felt a desire to support or save *futōkō* children. I know it sounds strange. I don't have *futōkō* experience myself. But I just wanted to think about things around them from the perspective of those who are experiencing *futōkō*. I might be talking too simply to be real. But basically I've been thinking this way. (Yamashita 2010)

As such, he has put himself in an ambiguous position as neither a supporter nor a person who experienced *futōkō*.

Although he constantly attended school, Kōhei has felt a sense of discomfort or strangeness about school and work, and was in 'a situation that would now be called *hikikomori*' (Yamashita 2010) for about a year at the age of eighteen, when he was preparing for his university entrance exam after graduating from high school. During that period, he rarely talked to his family, let alone others. 'My previous set of values was eroded. I didn't know why I should study and was just reading novels' (Yamashita 2010). However, he did not know what else to do either and entered the university the next year. At that school, Kōhei joined a student newspaper circle, most of whose members were university students involved in political movements. He followed his colleagues to street demonstrations and gathering sites for various civil movements. Through these encounters with people with different values, 'I felt that my views broadened' (Yamashita 2010).

The *futōkō* movement was one of the civil movements Kōhei encountered through the newspaper circle. To collect information for a story, he first visited a free-school where children who did not attend school gathered and was impressed by the narratives of the *futōkō* children there.

I asked some children to tell me their experiences. But as I listened more to them, the question I asked, 'Why do you not go to school?' was reversed and returned to me. I then questioned myself about why I went to school. It was really shocking when there was no answer and all I found inside myself was a vacuum. It was like a 'paradigm shift' in my life. Since then, I think my stance has not been 'I think about *futōkō* from my point of view', but rather 'I rethink about myself or society, which binds me to the perspective of people who have experienced *futōkō*'. (Yamashita 2010)

Kōhei began to visit the free-school regularly and served as a volunteer there. Since he worked as a staff member, Kōhei faced a contradiction between being a university student and 'on the side of' *futōkō* children. He decided to quit university halfway through and work regularly at the free-school.

[During the volunteer work] I somehow felt that I understood *futōkō* children. I myself thought that there is another way of life outside school just like the *futōkō* children talked about. But gradually I noticed the difference between the *futōkō* children and myself. University students, including myself, are privileged. Even when they do something undesirable in the public eye, such as deferring academic studies due to volunteer work at a free-school, they are accepted because they are university students. I started to feel that I was deluding myself. The more I got involved in the free-school, the more I felt the contradiction. I realised that there was no way that I could continue to be in such contradiction. I couldn't imagine that someday I would say 'thank you, it was a good experience' and leave the free-school to become what a university graduate is supposed to become [*osamaru tokoro ni osamaru*]. After a struggle with my father, who didn't want me to quit university, I finally left school. There is a conflict when people decide to not graduate from university, let alone compulsory education. Even though I quit university, I knew my situation and the *futōkō* children's situation were still different, because in my case I chose to leave university, whereas most of them didn't. But I felt relieved and refreshed [*sukkiri shita*] after quitting university. (Yamashita 2010)

After six years of experience as a regular staff member, Kōhei started his own free-school, Freeschool Foro, with his colleagues. Since 2006, he has focused on an *ibasho* [a gathering place] for youth, Generative Garden. About his career, Kōhei said:

I've got a sense of being led [*michibikarete kita*]. I didn't intentionally choose this life. I was led by the relationships I had each time, especially with *futōkō* children. I'm not sure I am talking correctly, but I've been thinking that I cannot 'betray [*uragiru*]' those people. I feel that this sense brings me here. (Yamashita 2010)

ibasho

Throughout his career of being on the side of *futōkō* children and youth, *ibasho* has been a key concept in Kōhei's philosophy of support. As discussed in Chapter 3, *ibasho* is a 'space with a receptive atmosphere [*juyōteki na kūkan*]' (Abiru 2012: 37) where a relationship to flourish acceptance is generated. The importance of *ibasho* has been emphasised in the *futōkō* movement as a place where *futōkō* children 'are neither seen as abnormal nor inferior' and 'can stay safe' (Okuchi 1989: 224) without being reproached. Kōhei explained his philosophy about organising an *ibasho* for marginalised people in his conversation with me as follows:

Me: How would you like to create an *ibasho* or have *ibasho* with you? In *ibasho*, people get together and build various relationships, which can make the place different each time. It seems difficult to keep such a place as planned.

Kōhei: If *ibasho* is like that, I think I myself could be a part of it, because I am also changeable according to relationships. In my case, creating an *ibasho* involves neither predetermining objectives nor providing support 'for children or youth'. I am not a supporter but a participant in the relationships in the same way as the other participants. Of course, it would not be true to say that the relationship between them and me is totally equal. But I think that I need such relationships where I can share my questions about this society. (Yamashita 2010)

Throughout the interview, Kōhei emphasised that not only children and youth, but also *he himself* needs *ibasho*. This realisation blurs the boundary between the supporter and the supported. Among various types of youth support programs including alternative learning environments and job supports, Kōhei seems to see the greatest

possibility in *ibasho*. He understands that an *ibasho* is a place where ‘children/youth feel okay just to be there’ (Yamashita 2010). The aim of *ibasho* is to accept children or youth for they truly are, and by doing so, to challenge the existing values and beliefs which make the children or youth feel devalued and feel *ikizurasa*. Promote learning or job support is not appropriate because values underpinning such support programs are ‘academic achievement is good’ and ‘to have a job is good’. Those who fail to meet expectations tend to be regarded as ‘not good’. Kōhei insists that the learning and job supports would be needed, but must be accompanied by establishment of an *ibasho* where people can feel they are okay just to be there, regardless of how hard they have tried or what goal they have achieved. Thus, the aim of *ibasho*, which is accepting people as they are, can be understood as ‘not to set a direct aim’. Based on this understanding, *ibasho* does not/should not need a supporter to help people attain goals.

Kōhei emphasises that the post-industrial situation in Japan explains why there is an increasing need for *ibasho*. According to him, the general characteristics and problems of post-industrial society are:

Market-mediated relationships have spread throughout society and it’s hard to build other relationships In the past, people were engrossed in school, company, and family, and those places could naturally define who they were and what to do. But now, life is not like that. The school, company, and family cannot be as functional as they have been in the past, and there seem to be more and more vacant spaces [*sukima*] in society. Now, individuals need to prove their own identity actively and continuously. There is a huge need for something that can fill the void, but the problem is what on earth can fulfil the space *Futōkō* people are also exposed to this issue. Many choose psychotherapy or psychiatric care. But those services don’t seem to satisfy their needs in the end Free-school can be another option if it can guarantee that ‘we educate children much better than a traditional school to make them competitive in the labour market’. But I don’t like that very much. First, because it’s simply impossible. Second, because if I do so, I would have to set an attractive goal and encourage people to have the illusion of success. (Yamashita 2010)

Kōhei recognises that in the present day, people are uprooted from organisations such as family, school, and firm, which used to provide them with a sense of belongingness

and life goal, and as a result of this disconnection, more get lost in setting and attaining a life goal, ultimately suffering from identity anxiety. To mitigate this situation, Kōhei suggests *ibasho* can be an option. He argues that the possibility of *ibasho* lies in ‘functioning in a different value system’ (Yamashita 2010) or relativizing an existing social value. He continued:

My image of *ibasho* is something that grows and spreads into spaces in society just like fungi fermentation.... For example, *futōkō* children usually suffer from the criticism that ‘*Futōkō* is bad, you should go back to school’. Against this, some people would say ‘*futōkō* is okay, you can still imagine a good future’. [But, both stances are based on the same value that children should become successful adults.] Rather, I would prefer, for example, a middle-aged man saying ‘Okay, why not come to the horse races with me’. ‘Okay’ here doesn’t mean ‘you are okay because you can be independent in the future’. But it suggests that there can be a totally different value system. Indeed, a *futōkō* girl I met before told me that she used to live near a baseball stadium and watched baseball games in the daytime during the week. You know, adults she met there enjoyed the games instead of going to work in ties and suits every day. They were ‘beyond the bounds in some ways [*ironna imi de kyōkai o koechatteru*]’. They told her ‘It is great to come to the game instead of school. You are an elite member of our cheer group’, and her self-esteem was saved in this way. You know, this shows the potentiality that a different value system can present. (Yamashita 2010)

Just like the baseball stadium for the *futōkō* girl, Kōhei hopes that Generative Garden can be a place where people are valued regardless of whether they go to school or work, and he calls such a place *ibasho*.

At the same time, Kōhei is aware that the ‘social void’ cannot be filled by a single *ibasho*. He names what he is doing as an ‘*ibasho* restoring movement [*ibasho no shitti-kaifuku undō*]’ where he envisages ‘filling in the social void through various efforts by many people, a part of which is Generative Garden’. (Yamashita 2010)

Everyone might have a desire to be accepted for they truly are without being judged by their status or achievement. But, you know, if people come to our place and say ‘please accept me in my entirety’, I can only say ‘Sorry, we can’t’. It can only be partial. It’s too much for one place or one relationship to do everything So, people should be able to have plural *ibasho*, not expecting too much of each. I recommend a ‘lifestyle of collecting

ibasho [*ibasho o kakiatsumeru kurashi-kata*]. What is ideal is that one has several *ibasho* in their social life and can remain okay if one of them stops functioning. I think it is a sort of wisdom for living. (Yamashita 2010)

As such, in Kōhei's view, *ibasho* is a way of supporting marginalised people, a social movement, and a way of life at the same time. However, this concept is hardly understood by the general public.

Kōhei: It would be simple if I said, 'I'm helping them get a job'. But I say 'this is not job support'. So people may ask 'what are you doing then?' and I would just say, 'Uh...'. It's very vague and hard to understand. My British friend said, 'These days I often hear the word *ikizurasa* in Japan, but it's hard to translate it into English'. I agree, and maybe so is *ibasho*. It's hard to explain in words, even in Japanese. But I suppose, as a result of the loss of such a basic thing that cannot be verbalised, unclear angst such as *ikizurasa* emerged. Some people might find it strange that we 'create' *ibasho*. If it's a place to be oneself, it should just naturally be there like air. That's also true. Maybe we used to have such places here and there without knowing it. But now we don't. It seems to still exist to some extent in families, but not too much any more.

Me: I get the idea that *ibasho* is something that cannot be classified within the existing framework. There is a place or a relationship we eagerly need but cannot explain, and we call it *ibasho*. So it might be something like, 'we did this together and as a result it became our *ibasho*'.

Kōhei: We try to explain as much as we can. But for people who really need it, the explanation does not really matter. Logic or theory does not really matter when people encounter each other. It is hard to explain *ibasho*, but it sometimes means that we can get a feeling of mutual understanding beyond words. I think the relationship built there is important for people. (Yamashita 2010)

Kōhei does not want to situate his *ibasho* practice in the existing institutional framework such as welfare or education. Also, he does not want it to be a service to be purchased in the marketplace. He insists that '*ibasho* is unfit for institutionalisation, let alone commodification'. Rather, he believes it is important for humans to have relationships outside the institution or market, outside the purpose-specific places. This stance is supported by his view of human and nature. He assumes that, as living

beings, humans naturally have needs deep down in their heart for non-instrumental relationships, relationships that are not for any specific purposes or bound to any instrumental objectives.

Humans are also living beings [*ikimono*]. Life is complex, so as part of natural law, it's hard to logically presume in a simple way what is good for living beings I think, when people want something like *ibasho*, or when they say things like 'being is important', they may be trying to express their sense of being a part of nature. Probably they feel, at an unconscious level, a kind of scepticism about the idea that with more the world develops, the better things become. Underlying this is a sense that 'something wrong is going on'. It's a warning to the situation where all human relationships are created artificially or instrumentally. I think they want to have connectedness that is not like that ... something not intentional or conscious. (Yamashita 2010)

Kōhei's insight into *ibasho* at the level of 'life' broadens the possibility of the concept of *ibasho* not only as a means of youth support but also as a pivotal place where humans can reflect on themselves as a part of nature.

However, this stance means that Generative Garden cannot be situated as part of a governmental project for youth support and cannot receive financial aid from the government. As a result, Kōhei does not intend to make his living by organising *ibasho*. Then, how is he supporting himself, and what thoughts on work does he have?

Work

Kōhei works regularly for Generative Garden, but does not receive a salary from the work. As a staff member of Freeschool Foro, he used to receive about JP¥ two million annually. However, when he started Generative Garden, Kōhei decided to make his position different.

I just felt there would be something wrong if I made money from *ibasho* for young people. When I was a free-school staff member, it was reasonable for me to be paid as an adult supporter who supports children who are in need. But when it comes to young adults, it was hard for me to draw a line between me and them. I was not 'young' anymore, but I had a sense of sharing the problem with them. I just simply couldn't take money from

those people in the name of support. Most of all, people wouldn't be able to come if I set the membership fee high enough to make a living. (Yamashita 2010)

While Freeschool Foro targets *futōkō* children under eighteen, Generative Garden focuses mainly on youth aged twenty to forty. Having decided not to support himself through Generative Garden, Kōhei started to work part-time at a bakery. Other than this, he irregularly takes on jobs writing articles or giving talks on his *ibasho* practice. By combining several income sources, Kōhei manages to make a living. He explained his philosophy about work as follows:

By working for a bakery, I feel I'm partly selling my soul to capitalism. But it's my strategy of making a living. In order to maintain my soul in the non-profit world, it is necessary to give up sometimes. If I tried to live only in the non-profit world, it would be more suffocating. (Yamashita 2010)

Kōhei commented that sometimes people criticise his way of living, saying that it will not be sustainable in the future. In response to this, Kōhei said, 'No, but this is not just my problem; it is a problem of the social structure that many young people find themselves in'. (Yamashita 2010)

The Z-meetings

As discussed above, Kōhei's stance in Generative Garden is that he does not assume the role of 'supporter [*shien-sha*]' but position himself as a participant. It also means that in Generative Garden, the users are not seen as 'the supported [*hi-shien-sha*]'. Rather, they are also ones who are expected to be involved in management. Indeed, the prospectus of Generative Garden was written by volunteer participants and many their activities, such as 'Music Time', 'Tea Talk', and 'Generative Garden Radio', were suggested and are carried out by the participants. This principle that participants commit to project management is maintained also in the Z-meetings, one of the activities of Generative Garden. However, it is sometimes challenging for participants whose condition is vulnerable condition to act energetically in the activities. Kōhei feels a conflict between 'accepting participants as they are' and 'encouraging them to act subjectively'. He narrated the conflict as follows in his conversation with me.

Me: Youth supporting NPOs are regularly short-handed. I believe that one option is to produce skilled staff from the Z-meeting participants who can help you. The Z-meetings focus very much on thinking and writing, so, participants can be those who, for example, can write application forms for foundation sponsorship or prepare documents for the general assembly of the administrative board.

Kōhei: I know what you mean. I think it is also relevant to other things such as the aim of Generative Garden, the Z-meetings, and probably the meaning of this interview I am doing now. In short, we want to respect participants' subjectivity, but this is not always successful because people who can naturally act as a subject are not likely to have *ikizurasa*.

Me: I know.

Kōhei: In Generative Garden and the Z-meetings, I want to help them unload their burdens of pressure and responsibility. But it's like a matter of balance. If the 'accepting' part grows too much, Generative Garden and the Z-meetings couldn't continue to exist. It's like an everlasting dilemma And it's a difficult point for users, too. When they are in a good condition, they can do it, but once they are upset, it suddenly becomes difficult. (Yamashita 2015)

As a moderator and coordinator of the Z-meetings, Kōhei and I have discussed this topic from time to time. We agree that pushing the participants too far could do more harm pushing them deeper into depression. But our views differ in terms of the emphasis we place on 'accepting being' and 'encouraging to step out'. While I stress encouragement, Kōhei rather emphasises acceptance. This difference helps our activities to be more balanced and diverse. Our differences are illustrated below.

Me: I am not sure about 'accepting as they are'. I understand it's very important for children to develop their self-esteem. For example, I was *futōkō* during my primary school age and it was indeed a threat to my self-esteem What saved me were people around me who told me that I'm okay as I am regardless of whether I go to school or not. So I think I know how important it is. But while I was growing up, I gradually felt it's not enough to be told I am accepted. When I was at university, I commenced studying sociology and wrote some essays on *futōkō* from a sociological perspective. My supervisors praised me but also gave critical comments, and it was an eye-opener for

me, being 'partially' accepted As I mature as an academic, it became more important for me to be recognised for the arguments I developed based on my skills and knowledge, rather than my *futōkō* experience itself What I want to say is that there are two different resources of self-esteem, one is to accept an individual at an existential level and the other is to recognise their achievement. I believe, for those who are over twenty, the latter might be more important.

Kōhei: I get your point I'm not saying that acceptance of being can make up for the lack of recognition of achievement. It's true that even if people are accepted for their 'being', they'd still want recognition for 'doing'. If a person did a good job and was just told 'you are all good whether your job is good or bad', the person would get frustrated. But the recognition of achievement cannot be the answer either. Both of them are important. And it seems to me that acceptance of 'being' has priority because it is a foundation on which recognition of 'doing' can be possible. Now in our society, many people are without foundation and are keen to get recognition in social status to make up for the lack of low-esteem. If people cannot feel 'I am all good whether my job is good or bad', they might have to stay successful in the workplace to retain their self-esteem. Such people would compete with each other, get resentment towards each other, and finally fall down collapse. (Yamashita 2010)

In this discussion, while I insisted as an *ex-futōkō* child that there is a positive aspect of 'evaluating achievement' as far as support for young adults is concerned, Kōhei rather puts his priority on 'accepting being' without evaluation of achievement, even in the case of young adults. However, basically, Kōhei and I are in agreement in believing that both sides are important. As we reflect on the Z-meetings, comparing our differences stimulates our discussion, as the following conversation on the future of the Z-meetings indicates.

Me: (Although accepting people as they are would be important) I cannot help hoping that a substantial outcome is built up each year. I know that without the proper foundation people can't build things up. But I think, in some cases, a sense of achievement can compensate to some extent for the lack of acceptance for who they are.

Kōhei: Well, the image in my mind is like '*Sai-no-kawara no tsumi-ishi* [building a stone stupa forever in vain]'. I used to hope for the same outcome as you. When I started this

job, I also wanted to build on achievements each year. But soon I realised that even if I had tried hard, things still fell apart easily. I used to wonder why things didn't work. But now I understand those efforts to create achievements were bound to fail. As I speak, I still hope we build up something strong but I no longer believe whatever we build would not fall apart.... Probably it's important to hold onto both sides and retain such contradiction. (Yamashita 2015)

As a coordinator, I here express my 'hope' to help people advance every year, for example, by setting goals and roadmaps by which they might be able to see their progress. On the other hand, as an experienced supporter, Kōhei posits that such a way of support would fail. He does not criticise having the hope to advance the participants, nor does he believe that those efforts should not fail. Rather, based on his experience, he believes that it is important to be reminded of the fact that even if a goal is set, it would not be attained, and it is not because something is wrong but simply because such a plan is supposed to fail. He suggests that one needs to learn to live with contradiction.

The contradiction is also seen in his standpoint on Generative Garden and the Z-meetings. Kōhei remarks that although he does not express his intention to 'support' other participants, he cannot deny he functions as a supporter to them.

I say 'I am one of the participants, we are peers' and it's true. But there is another side. I sometimes act as a supporter to them because they need it. When they feel fine, they can cheerfully participate in activities. But their condition changes moment by moment and they often break down. You know, that's why they are here. They need support. So, in reality I sometimes take the role of the supporter. If I insist I and other participants are in a completely equal position, it would be deceptive. But if I declare that I am a supporter, then they would have to be 'the supported', then, in a sense, they might lose an opportunity to take responsibility for their own career. You know, people who are suffering from problems are often exempt from social responsibilities. So, at times, people start to claim all their difficulties in life are supporters' responsibilities, feeling 'Why don't they save me? They lie to me!' I don't want to be trapped in such a situation. I cannot define my position clearly. It's like an endless contradiction [*owaranai mujun*]. (Yamashita 2015)

In the interview, Kōhei repeatedly emphasised that his position and policy contain this ‘contradiction’. But he does not necessarily hold this as a negative. In his ‘supporting’ practices on the ground, there are no one-hundred-percent correct methods to lead to the right goal. Thus, ‘suspended in contradiction’ seems to be his strategy. It reminds him of the importance of facing the real people who have *ikizurasa* and keeps him away from being over-confident, which would distort his reflection on his practice.

Compared to many other youth supporting programs provided by the government and grass-rooted NPOs [Toivonen 2013; Tsutsui et al. 2014], Kōhei’s stance is outstanding in that he does not aim at ‘changing them to become better’ in the name of ‘support’, but thoroughly focuses on providing a space where young people can feel safe and relate with one another without being reproached for their unemployment. During the fieldwork, I occasionally heard participants talking: ‘It is good that no one is keen to save me here’ [see Mai’s narrative in 5.3.1]. Such a stance of suspending ‘aims’ is effective for the participants who feel bad about ‘being supported’. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Kōhei does have an intention to help the participants get better, although he does not always explicitly state it. The significance of this stance will be further analysed in Chapter 6.

5.2. Core Participants

In this section, narratives of core participants are presented. Here, core participants refer to those who have participated in the Z-meetings regularly for over four years since the inception of the group in 2011 for more than four years. They were originally members of Generative Garden and then decided to participate in the Z-meetings. They are committed to making the Z-meetings sustainable and meaningful, and their narratives show how they have changed through the relationships they have built during their long-term participation in both Generative Garden and the Z-meetings.

5.2.1. Sasaki Mai (age 27, female)

Futōkō experience

Sasaki Mai (b. 1988) started *futōkō* when she was nine, then spent her teenage years mostly shut up in her house. The reason for her *futōkō* was not clear. She was a ‘good student’ and the teacher expected her to become a model student. But she felt pain when she saw other classmates being reproached by the teacher for not ‘acting like others’. When being ranked in numerical order according to test scores, she could not help feeling as if her ‘human dignity’ was violated. She went to school for a few months after entering junior high school. At this time, students entering their adolescent years become ‘ranked’ in most aspects of their lives, including test scores, talent in a sport, appearance, and/or personal belongings. Popular students seemed to be those who could make the class laugh by ridiculing others. It was too painful for her to stay in such an atmosphere. She stopped going to school and never wanted to return to school thereafter.

She spent most of her teenage life without any ‘affiliation [*shozoku*]’, just staying at home. Mass media reported eagerly on NEET and *hikikomori* in a bashing mood, and she felt as if that directly denied her life.

Media reports on NEET and *hikikomori* at the time really hurt me. I was always blaming myself for being less productive and not worthy to live. Every minute felt very long. I could not do anything, feeling that even breathing was painful. I couldn’t take public transportation, like trains or buses. I think it was the hardest time in my life.³⁰

Her mental condition worsened and she started cutting her wrist when she was eighteen. Daily troubles, such as small misunderstandings in relationships with others, could trigger wrist-cutting. ‘I think I did it just because I wanted to show my mum how much I hurt’, she recalls. She felt tranquil only when she read books and wrote essays. ‘There was no one who shared my feelings in my real life, but in books there were. Books were like my lifeline.’

³⁰ In this section Mai’s words are from Sasaki (2015a), unless otherwise noted.

Family

Mai's family is comprised of a housewife mother, a salary-man father, herself, and a younger sister; in other words, a typical Japanese middle-class family. Her parents did not criticise her *futōkō* or unemployment explicitly, and tried to accept her. Her sister went to school and keeps going on a socially acceptable path. When Mai stopped going to school, her mother started participating in parental meetings about *futōkō* and collected information, and told Mai that she was proud of her for 'bravely selecting *futōkō* life in this society where everyone goes to school'. Anxious about his daughter, Mai's father thought she should go back to school someday, but he did not say anything in her face. 'Last year, my dad told me that he knew I was an earnest girl and I would have gone to school if I could without being told', said Mai. However, she still sensed her parents' expectation of social participation and participated in some school tours of high schools. But she finally gave up. 'This is a bit embarrassing to tell, but what pushed me was a heroine of the comic '*Shōnen wa Kōya o Mezasu* [A boy sets out for the wilderness]', who tries to stick to her own sense and values even if they contradict those of the world around her.' Mai realised that she did not really want school and chose a life outside it.

Ibasho

Mai went to '*tekiō shidō kyōshitsu* [adaptation instruction classroom]' from age eleven to twelve. It was a place provided by local government for *futōkō* children to come and prepare for returning to school, and she enjoyed it. *Futōkō* children in *tekiō shidō kyōshitsu* were sensitive about communication and did not ask inconsiderately the reason for her *futōkō*, and she liked that. Based on this good impression, she searched for free-schools for adults when she was eighteen and found Generative Garden.

Before joining Generative Garden, Mai thought of it as a place where 'a motherly middle-aged woman takes care of and rescues young people who have problems'. But it was nothing like what she had expected it to be. Mai remembers that when she first visited Generative Garden people were enthusiastically discussing their time of birth, the hospitals they were born in, or the first memory they had. The discussion was inspired by their visit to a maternity centre the week before. Kōhei did not seem keen

to rescue her. Kōsuke, the earliest member of Generative Garden and the Z-meetings, was already there, eating crackers with plum jam in pyjama-like sweat pants. The atmosphere was odd, but it was relaxing for her. Mai thought 'I can breathe naturally here' and decided to join Generative Garden. She especially liked talking and thinking with other people about the meaning of *ikizurasa*.

Since the time I encountered Generative Garden, I have been addressing the meaning of my previous life [*jibun no jinsei no toinaoshi*]. Actually, I had questioned it by myself since I was nine, but didn't find an answer and finally got tired of it. In Generative Garden, I could think about my life with Mr Yamashita and other members, and could find some answers to those questions. Now I want to talk to my younger self, telling her, 'your sense of discomfort actually means that ...'.

It was through the accepting human relationships at Generative Garden that Mai became capable of verbalising her *ikizurasa* angst.

The Z-meetings

After recovering cheerfulness and energy, Mai started to participate in the Z-meetings and explored the meaning of her *ikizurasa*. As one of the earliest and keenest members, she has written personal reports about the meetings several times. Her project themes include 'pain and anger', 'the relationship between my mother and me', 'pain of being a woman', and 'writing myself out'.

Asked how the Z-meetings helped her to change herself, Mai answered:

In the early days of participation, I thought that I was to be blamed. I felt that it was my fault that I felt *ikizurasa* and I needed to fix it all by myself. I lived in a world where only I and people around me existed. But as I listened to other the projects of others in the Z-meetings and learned sociological ways of thinking, my perception changed. I could really feel it was not my own fault and came to think that there may be something structural in my experience. In such a problematic social structure, there would be many other people who feel the same pain I stopped seeing my *ikizurasa* as negative and started to feel that I am okay with it. I still have pain, but it is okay. My life is as hard as ever, but it is okay. Almost all my life I have been thinking and having a tough time, but

that is my life. I think the important thing is that now I can accept myself. My 'acceptable range' has become wider than before.

Through dialogue with the participants at the Z-meetings and communication at Generative Garden, she came to articulate what her *ikizurasa* is.

I used to think I was totally no good because I could not go to school or work. But now I know it is not my nature to become a part of a system. A system underlies school and work, giving those social places mechanical characteristics. My *futōkō* was just like a biological rejection [*kyōhi-han'nō*]. I don't want to correct my nature to fit into the existing system. Rather, I would like to think about what kind of society I can live in and what kind of life I want to live as a human. This is my way of living. When I think in this way, I have an actual feeling of living. In my case, *ikizurasa* is a window through which I can see my own life. I still have *ikizurasa*, but I gradually stopped seeing it as negative. I started to feel I am okay with my *ikizurasa*.

Together with other members who have various *ikizurasa* and with whom she shared her narratives, Mai stopped reproaching herself and recovered her self-worth. Here, *ikizurasa* ceased to have a negative meaning and started to be taken positively as 'a window' that showed her life.

Work

Mai's image of work is strongly affected by her father who 'is a regular worker for a company and goes to work every morning during the week'. This image has scared her, as she explained:

Workers are expected to get up at the same time, take the same train and do the same thing every day. It is as if they are told to become a machine. They are humans not machines, so there can be imbalance in their condition and they can be different every day. That's how humans are and I like it. But 'able workers' are supposed to kill the flesh-and-blood part of themselves and pretend to be machines.

Although she was afraid of working, Mai used to pressure herself to go to work, based on the notion that staying at home doing nothing is unproductive, and thus bad.

Mai's first work experience was when she was nineteen. It was a seasonal short term job sorting *nengajō* [new-year's greeting cards] at a post office at the end of the year. The job, standing up and sorting many post cards according to their post codes, was easy for her. But the communication with co-workers, high school girls, was extremely stressful. On the last day of the contract, she could not help cutting her wrist at the work place and went back home, abandoning the job. This experience pulled her back from the idea of working again, but she was always feeling pressure that she had to work someday. When she was twenty-one, she applied for a job as a cleaner at a food court in a shopping mall and was successfully employed. However, she was very confused and could not listen to instructions while doing her job. The manager became angry when she could not follow the instructions and she reproached herself in confusion. Two weeks later, she left the job in a bad state, unable to tell 'right' from 'left'. These frustrated job experiences made Mai lose confidence and think of herself a 'no good', such that she could not complete such easy, short-term jobs.

After joining Generative Garden, however, this recognition changed as she was able to explain what had happened to her in words. During the interview, Mai explained the reason why she could not continue the jobs:

Now I know that my recognition system is just different from others. I think I am supersensitive to noise, so I am better at processing information by reading than listening. The food court was very noisy.

With this new understanding, she again tried the job of sorting *nengajō* at a post office when she was twenty-five. This time she was successful because: 1) she had clear motivation that she wanted to buy a DVD of her favourite singer; and 2) she could ask Kōhei and other participants at Generative Garden for help.

I hated filling out the *rirekisho* [resume]. I don't really have much to write about my career: 'graduated from junior high school', just that. It was as if the value of my life only deserves one line. Anyway, I hated filling out a resume by myself. So, this time I did it at Generative Garden. While doing it I was complaining, like 'I don't like this!' or 'I really have messy writing', but people encouraged me saying, 'Oh, your writing is fine', or 'You've done enough, take a break'. Mr Yamashita advised me, 'You will get employed if you can just greet people and be on time'.

The latest job she did was writing a series of newspaper articles. It was offered by an editor who visited the Z-meetings. She worked for a small newspaper that focuses on labour problems, and wrote on her experiences and thoughts. Mai happily said, 'I liked writing essays and it was my dream to be offered a writing job. The dream came true earlier than I had expected'. The job was challenging for her because she needed to thoroughly reflect on herself, but she thought it was worth the struggle. Further, the job opened a new perspective to her. As she worked on the articles, she realised her writing topics were limited to her personal experiences and perceptions, which might be of interest to those who know her but not those who do not. In light of this realisation, she started to think:

I need a breakthrough in my writing. I want to write things that can be shared with people who think and live in a different way from me. I think this means opening myself to others. Maybe it is okay to start from myself. From my position, my point of view, I want to relate and connect what I write to things that many people can share in their lives. I think in that way I might be able to touch 'society'. I am a part of this society and live in this world, even though I sometimes cannot fit into it. If so, I may have to write something related to society. (Sasaki 2015b)

This new job experience seems to have changed Mai's image of work. The following conversation with me shows her wavering between a rigid image of 'being a machine' and a more flexible image.

Me: Writing newspaper articles is really a good job for you. Do you still think working is frightening after taking this job?

Mai: Yes. I don't know why. It might be because I am aware that I cannot make my living only by writing jobs, and my image of work is strongly connected to something that I make my living by.

Me: But, you know, there are a variety of ways of working, and you don't have to make your living only by one job.

Mai: I know. Maybe I'm not afraid of work itself, but I'm just afraid of a situation where I cannot do what I am expected to do. Yes, I admit I'm using the term 'work' in a very limited way.

Mai is aware of the limitation of her perception of 'work', but she still considers work negative, believing it means 'being a salary-man' or 'doing what I am very bad at'.

Future

Mai does not have a concrete vision about her future. Going to school is not an appealing option, because 'I know I can learn things and meet interesting people without going to school. I like studying, but I don't want to toil to get credits in a university system'. Mai lives in her parents' house and has vaguely indicated that she expects to continue to live in the same way. She thinks she should take care of her parents when they get older. At the same time, she vaguely holds out hope that one day she would 'becoming independent', but her image of this independence is not clear.

Me: How do you expect independent life to be?

Mai: Let's see It's not an image of living by myself. I wish I could have a partner to live with.

Me: Do you mean a boyfriend or a husband?

Mai: Well, I don't know. Just a friendship may be fine, so a woman can be the partner. But in that case, what if she finds a boyfriend to live with? I'm not sure. I cannot imagine any sexual relationships for myself.

Me: Then, how about a sister-brother-like relationship, like 'Matthew' and 'Marilla' in 'Anne of Green Gables'?

Mai: Yeah, I'd like that

Me: You can live with someone you can trust and rely on, and become an apparent partner and do housework.

Mai: But I don't even know how to use a washing machine. My mum does all of our housework. In this sense, I sometimes think I should leave home and live by myself.

Mai's image of 'independent life' has not taken a practical form. Making plans for future seems to be a real challenge for Mai.

5.2.2. Noguchi Kōsuke (age 27, male)

Byōki [illness] experience

Noguchi Kōsuke (b. 1987) was one of the earliest members of the Z-meetings. When he was in junior high school, he started to have a strong fear of others without any rational reasons. He could not state his opinion in front of people and was always trying to gauge the feelings of others around him. In this condition, Kōsuke could not meet anyone he could think of as a 'real friend' and usually spent recess time alone hanging around the school building (Noguchi 2015a).³¹ Before long, Kōsuke became scared with the idea that he had an unpleasant body odour. As his mental condition worsened, Kōsuke quit school when he was 16. Since around then, he has been obsessed with the idea of 'investigating the truth of the universe' (Noguchi 2012). In his *Individual Report* of the Z-meetings, he wrote about this time:

I have 'him' inside me. 'He' ordered me to find the truth that never changes forever. The order was fiercely strong and I could never resist it. Obsessed by 'his' voice, I read books one after another, everything I could lay my hands on. The more I did so, the gap between ideal and reality grew bigger. I couldn't understand the contents of those books very much. But I was unable to stop reading them. I started to have severe delusions. (Noguchi 2012)

It was between sixteen and eighteen that Kōsuke suffered from his symptoms the worst, and he was hospitalised in a mental hospital when he was eighteen. He took fourteen pills a day and was repeatedly manic-depressive, then was diagnosed as having schizophrenia when he was twenty.

³¹ In this section Kōsuke's words are from Noguchi (2015a), unless otherwise noted.

Family

He was raised in a family comprising a salary-man father, a housewife mother, himself, and a little sister. When he was young, Kōsuke could not feel affection from his family. His father was a serious worker, but drank at home and was abusive toward Kōsuke, while being affectionate to his sister. He wrote: ‘Dad hit my miso-soup bowl away when he thought I was late for dinner. When he was in a bad mood, he kicked me saying, “Get out of my way” He always took his stress out on me’ (Noguchi 2013). His mother tried to stop the violence, but it did not work. Kōsuke wrote about his impression toward his father as follows:

I remember dad often told lies. When I was a child, at dinner time, he sometimes said, ‘Let’s go to an amusement park this weekend’. He looked happy, and promised again and again every evening during the week. The idea of going to an amusement park was very unusual for me. I was so excited and really looking forward to it. But when the weekend had arrived, he would say he was exhausted and never got up. It made me despair, and my emotions gradually dried up. I decided to never trust him. (Noguchi 2013)

Kōsuke started to hate his father and felt lonely. He does not remember very much about his family in his teenage years. ‘I never had a conversation with dad while I was of school age. To be honest, I don’t remember if I had any communication with dad’ (Noguchi 2013). After becoming mentally ill, Kōsuke started to suffer from homicidal impulses toward his father. It was the hardest moment in his life, but this consequently opened him to new relationships.

Kōsuke: When I was eighteen, I was obsessed with hallucinations of killing my dad. I can say this now, or I think I’ve told you before? I don’t know. But anyway, one time I went to a police office at midnight and said, ‘I might kill my dad’. Then a police officer said, ‘Oh, it must be hard. Leave your name and address here’, so I wrote them down. It was such an extreme condition. I was like this, holding my head, literally wriggling overnight Then, I turned on the TV and accidentally came across a documentary of Yamaguchi Yumiko.³²

³² In May 2000, a male high school student aged 17 hijacked a Nishitetsu highway bus on the way from Saga to Fukuoka. Among 22 passengers, one was killed and 4 were injured by a knife. Yamaguchi

Me: One of the victims of the *Nishi-tetsu* Bus Hijacking ...

Kōsuke: Right. I just thought I needed to talk to her. I searched on the internet and found her newspaper articles, so I called the newspaper company to ask if I could get her contact number. She was running an *ibasho* in Saga prefecture and I said I wanted to go there. But she said it was too far to come from my place. Instead, she introduced Generative Garden to me. It was just about to open very soon.

Me: That was how you were connected to Generative Garden. I think you really made the best choice.

Kōsuke: Yes. Without that choice, I might have killed my dad and myself. Yes, it was really an important encounter.

Me: You didn't really need to look for a way to help you out in the Z-meetings! You already helped yourself perfectly.

Kōsuke: I don't know. Maybe. (Noguchi 2015a)

As directed by Ms Yamaguchi, Kōsuke visited Generative Garden. As he related himself to Kōhei and other members of Generative Garden, Kōsuke's violent impulses subsided. In 2011, he left his home and started to live with Tomohisa, another male member of Generative Garden and the Z-meetings. By gaining distance from his parents, his attitude towards them changed. In a Z-meetings' *Individual Report*, he wrote:

When I was young, I just felt angry and empty, and could not understand my parents. But now I know my dad had to work to support his family even if he wanted to escape from it. He must have felt resentment and sorrow about his situation. Mum, struggling to bring up my sister and me, and to do never-ending housework, confined her emotions without any ways to express them. Such an environment might have been suffocating for both my parents and myself. (Noguchi 2013)

Yumiko was one of the injured and a friend of the killed. After knowing that the offender was in state of *futōkō* and *hikikomori* without having anyone to accept him, Yamaguchi tried to understand the situation that pushed him to commit the crime. As a victim, she met the offender for his correctional education and gave many lectures to inspire social understanding for marginalised young people. (Saga Newspaper 29/4/2010).

Despite the fact that his family, with an abusive father and a helpless mother, had never been to a safe place, Kōsuke does not express his resentment towards them and indicates that he started to understand them by imagining their life simply as adults. It should be noted here that such an attitude only became possible after he had encountered participants in Generative Garden and the Z-meetings.

Ibasho

Although his encounter with Generative Garden resulted in positive change, it was not like that when he first started to participate in the group. At first, he did not know how to relate with other people, feeling especially confused about the physical distance he should keep from others. In spite of that confusion, Kōsuke was accepted by the Generative Garden members.

I think I might have been sometimes rude and annoying to other people. I wondered how they could be so tolerant of me. I can keep an appropriate distance now, but at first I couldn't. They even gave me some positive comments. When I asked them to say something good about me, they really did so. It was good. If I were them, I wouldn't have been able to do so. Maybe not, even just in my mind. (Noguchi 2015a)

Through these accepting relationships, Kōsuke gradually recovered his mental stability and came to be able to maintain an appropriate physical distance from others. He deeply feels that Generative Garden made a positive effect on his life. When I asked, 'Do you feel gratitude to the members and want to keep the relationships?' he promptly replied, 'Yes, of course' (Noguchi 2015a).

The Z-meetings

Kōsuke has participated in the Z-meetings since the commencement of the program. He considered his expectations of the Z-meetings and wrote:

I just thought it could be fun. When I started, I still dreamed of becoming a scholar, so the sound '*kenkyū* [research]' was catchy for me. But in reality, I could not envisage my career very well. It was because my mental condition was not ready yet and because I

could not trust society. With my mental illness, resentments piled up in my mind. At the Z-meetings I tried to understand how this happens. (Noguchi 2015b)

At the beginning, Kōsuke thought himself disconnected from society and vaguely expected to get better by participating in the Z-meetings. At the same time, his participation was not necessarily a conscious choice for him.

I didn't think very much when I joined the Z-meetings. I was there accidentally and was naturally interested in them. So I didn't have to dream, like, 'I can be somebody by doing this'. After the first session, I found it was really fun. I think this is why I continue to attend the Z-meetings. It's awkward to talk about the significance of the Z-meetings in words. Now I can say this, but when I started, I didn't necessarily think like this. I wonder how I can start something based on a clear decision or aim from the beginning. (Noguchi 2015b)

Kōsuke wrote Z-meetings narratives about 'My mental illness', 'The relationship between father and me', and 'How to deal with other's anger toward me'. After completing his first report, he got a sense of fulfilment and contentment. He wrote:

I felt a warm affection for my own words that came from the bottom of my heart. I felt that my words gained energy when others reacted positively toward them.... I felt that I wanted to release my thoughts and let them travel around others through communication.... It also led me to listen to others and make comments on others' projects. (Noguchi 2015b)

In his report, and during the discussion about it at the meetings, Kōsuke reorganised the meanings of the incidents in his life. He analysed his passion towards 'the truth of the universe' as admiration for something eternal and absolute as 'a substitute for the intimate affection which I was deprived of' (Noguchi 2012). His mental illness still remains, but the narratives of the symptoms were shared by others through interactions. An example is:

Kōhei: What is your trouble these days?

Kōsuke: I'm short of money. A voice from heaven tells me 'you must buy this stuff' and I've spent JP¥ two million from my savings. It is just like Abraham who was obsessed with the voice of God.

Kōhei: I hear his voice. It's lashing out. An auditory hallucination of *Ab-chan*. (Field Note at Z-meeting May 2015)

In this narrative, Kōsuke's auditory hallucination was humorously named '*Ab-chan*' and opened to communication. It is still there, but is not obsessively held only by him. As a result, his mental condition improved during his participation in the Z-meetings and Generative Garden.

Work

As his mental condition became stable, Kōsuke started to think of his career. From 2014, he worked in disability care 7 hours a day, 5-6 days a week. This was his first experience of working regularly. He felt the job fit him well because the field of disability care includes 'basic human relationships'. He thinks he 'cannot live in the world of business men who seem to be always competing to become a manager' (Noguchi 2015a). At the same time, he analyses the difficulties in the job as follows:

As a care-giver, I was told during the instruction course that the goal of this job is to improve the clients' quality of life and to help them to 'stay happy and cheerful [*akaruku genki de iru*]' in their everyday life. But I am not sure if it is really appropriate for them to stay happy and cheerful every day.... I am engaged in the care of two severely disabled individuals and an intellectually disabled person. They have clear disadvantages in this world, physically and intellectually. What is 'being happy and cheerful every day' for those people? Healthy individuals do not necessarily stay happy and cheerful every day, do they? ... The clients always need a care-giver in their private space, and it is natural for them to become sensitive or short tempered towards them.... I think it is important for clients to be able to live with stability and reliance, even if they have emotional disturbance or depression that is unavoidable.... Moreover, I should not get involved too much in their lives. This is the point where I think my job is difficult. (Noguchi 2015b)

Kōsuke's narrative regarding work is as convincing as that of a professional. Although he has questions and problems regarding his work, Kōsuke can articulate them and address them based on his experiences on the ground.

In addition, the work experience led him to rethink about his father, who was responsible for supporting his family.

When I started to work, I came to know how stressful it is to work as a part of an organisation, and that is just what my dad has been doing. As a young man in his twenties, having children and a wife must have been like an accident for my dad. But once he had a family, he had no choice for another life and had to sacrifice himself for his family. I didn't realise this until I had my own job.... I can never work like my father, not complaining, not resisting, but just getting along with his boss for the sake of his family. I think I want to say 'good job' and 'Thank you' to him. (Noguchi 2013)

It was at least partly because of his own work experience that Kōsuke became able to objectify his ex-abusive father as a man who had also had a difficult time in life.

Future

In 2011, Kōsuke started to live with Tomohisa, but left that house 2 years later and began to live by himself. Throughout their time together, Kōsuke and Tomohisa have maintained a good relationship. Kōsuke does not have clear plans for the future, because he thinks, 'Everything I planned for previously turned out to be a failure.... Rather it seems to go well when I do not think too much' (Noguchi 2015a). His dream to become a scholar, desire to 'investigate the truth of the universe' resulted in failure, while the encounters with Generative Garden and the Z-meetings were not based on his clear intention. He emphasises the importance of relationships at the moment, as follows:

I am not sure if I have *ikizurasa* these days. If I quit my job, I would possibly have *ikizurasa*, but, you know, it is nonsense to worry about the unclear future of losing my job. I want to focus more on the relationships I have at each moment. For me, *ikizurasa* is just easy, convenient words, like 'I quit my job, I've got *ikizurasa* [*shigoto yametashi ikizurai wa*]'.

If I hear it, I would say ‘All right, come to stay at my house tonight’, or, ‘I’m coming to your place with *Shōchū*’. You know, just that. (Noguchi 2015a)

Kōsuke had had severe *ikizurasa* that could even induce homicide and/or suicide. However, after being connected to *ibasho* and encountering people who he could share his narratives with, he does not think he has *ikizurasa* in the way that he used to any more. At the time of the interview, his impression regarding the term *ikizurasa* was something casual, with which he would invite friends for a drink at home. Similar to Mai, in Kōsuke’s case as well, the meaning of *ikizurasa* was changed from negative to positive as a result of being connected to accepting relationships.

5.2.3. Hirako Tomohisa (age 32, male)

***Futōkō* Experience**

Hirako Tomohisa started his *futōkō* when he was in the first grade of junior high school. He moved to a new town when he was in the fifth grade of primary school. There, the local children were apparently kind to him, but Tomohisa felt that they looked at him as an outsider. With a vague sense of alienation, he still went to school when he was in primary school. However, things changed when he entered junior high school, which was a rough place. There were a few specific students with violent tendencies who sometimes hit and kicked other children, and Tomohisa felt he could not stand watching it even though he was not targeted. He stopped going to school and stayed at home. He did not communicate with anyone, even with his parents. Tomohisa was not given an individual room, but was in the *butsuma* room [a shared room where the family Buddhist altar is placed] where he was always reading a book.

When he was fifteen, Tomohisa took the entrance exam for a high school and began going there. Not long after, however, he quit high school and decided to study by himself to pass the high school equivalency test [*dai-ken*]. Tomohisa successfully passed and entered a university, but again ceased going there after commencing the courses. Every time he left school, he did not have a clear reason such as bullying or

learning difficulty. Tomohisa referred to the reason for his *futōkō* in the interview as follows:

Tomohisa: I should have noticed earlier that I didn't fit in at school. I think I've taken such a roundabout trip.

Me: Do you think that is the reason for your *futōkō*: not fitting in at school?

Tomohisa: Yes, I think so. The details are different in each *futōkō* case—in junior high, high school, and university—but all in all.

Me: What specific aspect of school made you feel reluctance?

Tomohisa: Humans. I just couldn't help resisting the atmosphere of boisterous young people jabbering away. I believed that I should act like them as one of those young people, but I couldn't. That was the point I struggled with the most. (Hirako 2015)

Tomohisa spent most of his teenage years reading books at home, without going to school or *ibasho*/free-school.

A Wannabe Doctor

In his late teens, Tomohisa began to hope to become a doctor and prepared for the entrance exam for medical school. In order to 'recover the loss of *futōkō*', he thought he 'should become stronger and more excellent than other people' (Hirako 2015). A doctor was the specific figure he could think of. To become a doctor, people must graduate from medical school, which is known for highly competitive entrance exams and expensive tuition fees.

When I was home, I was all by myself without friends or conversations. The internet was already there, but I wasn't interested in it very much. I didn't use the internet, such as online chatting. If I had friends around me like ordinary people, I might have not had such a burdensome dream. I think I had a twisted self-consciousness. I thought I should prove that I was not weak even though I experienced *futōkō*. (Hirako 2015)

Tomohisa's dream of becoming a doctor was not supported very much by his parents. His parents expected him to 'become an ordinary business man [*futsū ni shūshoku suru*]' rather than to have a 'great' career. However, they were happy to pay the tuition fee when he passed the entrance exam. He was 23 and left his parents' house to live by himself near the university.

At the beginning of his life at medical school, Tomohisa decided to make friends and 'become a part of a colourful group'. He actively spoke to other freshmen, participated in several '*Shin-kan Konpa* [freshmen welcome parties]' of club activities, went to freshmen's gatherings and sang Karaoke, even though he did not really like it very much. Tomohisa thought he must 'find a good position in this new environment' (Hirako 2013). He remembers the advice from a senior student to 'Find your place anywhere in a group as soon as possible. Groups are formed so quickly'. He followed the advice, thinking it was extremely right (Hirako 2013). Tomohisa recalled this later in the *Individual Report* as follows:

I went to a popular group, hoping to become an accepted member [*nakama*]. I kept my distance from people who seemed low-key or unfriendly, thinking 'it's hopeless [*ariehen*] to hang out with a person like him'. Similarly, I might have been wished for the company of some people or being avoided by others as 'hopeless'. I was too afraid of being judged as less interesting and not worth hanging out with. Now I know it's painfully ridiculous. But I couldn't laugh at myself at the time. (Hirako 2013)

His effort was rewarded by becoming a part of the group he had targeted. Soon, however, he started to feel an unfillable gap between himself, as he had to push himself hard just to be in the group, while other people seemed to do it naturally. Too exhausted to keep going, Tomohisa absented himself from lectures and stopped going to university.

I spent several months in darkness. Not going to lectures or part-time jobs, and not having any friends to keep in touch with, I returned to living in a world without human relationships again. I shut myself in my room reading books and walked round at nights without knowing where to go. It was a hard time, but I didn't hate that darkness and felt secure. It was like I had come back to my familiar place. (Hirako 2013)

After taking several leaves of absence, he finally quit the university at the age of 27. It took about ten years to give up his dream of becoming a doctor.

Significant Others

During the interview, he spoke of two significant others who affected Tomohisa's life. One is a university counsellor. She carefully listened to him talking about his awkwardness in human relationships and repeatedly told him, 'You don't have to pretend when you relate with others. It is better if you are there just as you are and other people naturally find something good in you' (Hirako 2013). At that point, he could not accept the meaning of these words. However, after a few years, Tomohisa felt gratitude to her for her words. 'I came to be able to relax my shoulders when I relate with someone' (Hirako 2013), he wrote in the Z-meetings report.

The other significant person is a woman he met at a *futōkō*-related symposium after quitting university. As an MA student in the education department, the woman had an interest in *futōkō* and participated in the symposium. Tomohisa had lunch with her and spent hours talking. When the conversation touched on Tomohisa's experience of *futōkō*, she carefully listened to his story but did not try to pretend to have complete understanding. Tomohisa liked her style, but did not know what to do after that.

I vaguely thought she was the kind of a person who is liked by everyone. Friendly, open-minded, never making people feel embarrassed, even if she's meeting them for the first time, and not pushy. I just wanted to be like her, and felt admiration and inferiority at the same time ... 'See you again soon,' she said when we parted. I tried to satisfy myself with these words, thinking it would be too much to hope to make friends with her. (Hirako 2013)

One month later, they met again when she contacted him by text mail. Surprising to Tomohisa, she said she wanted to know more about him and make friends with him, and they spent three hours having a conversation. The experience made him rethink what the word 'friend' means.

I didn't have relationships with people of my own age after becoming *futōkō*, let alone friends to share my feelings with. But I didn't find it all that painful. I thought that's just

what my life is like. But being asked to tell her more about myself, I came to understand the simple fact that it's okay for me to speak about my thoughts and feelings. What she meant by the word 'friend' was different from what I strived for at university. I felt as if I had come back to the long-forgotten warm home. (Hirako 2013)

Although he did not have an opportunity to meet her again, Tomohisa thinks she is one of the individuals who changed his life.

I just felt it's not bad to relate with people more proactively if there is an encounter with such an attractive person. That feeling made me go and look around at some free-schools and *ibasho*. Generative Garden was one of them. (Hirako 2013)

As such, the encounter with the woman boosted him to further encounters with Generative Garden and the people there.

Generative Garden

When he retreated from university, Tomohisa started to think about the reason why he had failed. The thought brought him to the recognition below:

I was wrong from the start. The gap between me and other students couldn't be reduced to differences in taste in clothes or hobbies. Even if I could follow them in those points, there would still remain an unbridgeable gap.... I gradually thought my *futōkō* experience, which I had unintentionally avoided touching, could have something to do with it. (Hirako 2013)

Based on this recognition, Tomohisa looked around at some free-schools and participated in *futōkō*-related symposiums. Spending his time of *futōkō* all alone at home, it was refreshing for him to get to know the gathering spots for *futōkō* children outside school. Tomohisa liked those places and from among of the several free-schools he visited, he started to do volunteer work at Freeschool Foro once a week and joined Generative Garden.

When Tomohisa first visited Generative Garden, Kōhei was not there yet and the door was locked. Suddenly, a spaced-out young man in ragged sweat pants approached him and said, 'Are you here to join Generative Garden? Let's wait for Yamashita-san

together', while eating cup noodles. 'It was Kōsuke. I didn't feel nervous even though he was a new person to me' (Hirako 2015). Tomohisa came to Generative Garden regularly and related with other members. His involvement there changed his stance toward human relationships. In an *Individual Report* for the Z-meetings, Tomohisa wrote:

I've been thinking of human relationships [*hito tono tsunagari*] as something that I have to try very hard to keep. But the harder I tried, I felt the more effort I wasted, until at last I threw it all out, breaking off all relationships. I thought that's just what human relationships are like and nothing can be done about it. But I came to Generative Garden and I started to feel human relationships as something more natural, closer to me (Hirako 2013).

As I related closer and closer with other members, I naturally got involved in the chain of hurting them and being hurt by them. I really felt dismal about it. When I was *futōkō*, I just kept my distance from people or places I didn't like. But that became different. This time, I thought that the annoying and suffocating relationships can save me at the same time. I was confused.... I couldn't give up human relationships. (Hirako 2013)

Tomohisa experienced natural communications where he could be both helped and hurt at Generative Garden. In spite of some tough times, Tomohisa did not withdraw from the group. After quitting university, he moved to Osaka to live with Kōsuke. Now, almost all of his human relationships have something to do with Generative Garden.

The Z-Meetings

It was quite natural for Tomohisa to participate in the Z-meetings as a part of Generative Garden activities. He created *Individual Reports* about 'My feeling of failure in communication' (Hirako 2012) and 'My significant others' (Hirako 2013). Tomohisa thinks the Z-meetings helped him to articulate his *ikizurasa* and make the situation better.

Me: You've been focusing on *ikizurasa* around human relationships or communications. What is it like now?

Tomohisa: I used to think, like, 'I want you to understand me completely through my words', but such an obsession has quieted down. Now, if I get frustrated about the discommunication, I give up soon, thinking that it's just natural and nothing can be done about it. I also think, even if my words are not understood completely, some messages might have been sent to a person in front of me. Words are never enough to express myself, but anyway I need to make do with what I have. The idea of complete communication can't be realised on the ground.

Me: The problem remains, but it became less serious?

Tomohisa: It doesn't matter for me that much anymore. (Hirako 2015)

With this feeling, Tomohisa searches for a new way to maintain human relationships.

I used to cut off all connections and retreat from human society when relationships got entangled. But now I know if I continue to do so, my relationships just get worse.... It'll make my life difficult.... I think I need another way to keep involved in human relationships that are not always comfortable. Yes, that's what I'm thinking now. (Hirako 2015)

Here, Tomohisa reveals that his understanding about communication changed from what is 'all-or-nothing', or 'complete understanding' or 'disconnection', to what is more realistic, a state of being connected without complete understandings.

Work

Introduced by Kōsuke, Tomohisa started to work doing disability care when he was 28. After a training period, he began to experience caring for individuals who have muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis [ALS]. He works on a regular basis, including night shifts. Depending on the case, the job requires extremely sensitive consideration. Originally, Tomohisa looked for slow work that he could do on his own pace, but care work is not like that. Thus, it was sometimes nerve-fraying and made him feel inferior when he met other carers who seemed to be able to perform the work completely. However, Tomohisa wants to keep on doing this job.

Tomohisa: There are workers who are almost like a ‘caring angel [*kidzukai-tenshi*]’. When they take care of people who can’t move their body, those workers can patiently search for the right position that is set within a tolerance of two or three millimetres. They reach that accuracy by looking at the ALS patients’ eyes, which are the only parts the patients can move. They can never forget to consider the patients’ emotions and must keep their temper even though the patients take out their stress. Really great carers-givers. I think I will never reach that high level. I am a mediocre care-giver at best.

Me: Do you want to change your job?

Tomohisa: I like my current job. Basically it’s an emotionally rewarding job. I like to help intellectually disabled people to go out. They do what I can’t anticipate. Some of them are friendly, while others have autism tendency and are hard to communicate with, but anyway it’s fun to be with them. (Hirako 2015)

Asked about his stance on the job, Tomohisa answered ‘I basically do what I am required to do in the required way... I understand my job is to be accustomed to remaining in the background. So I don’t want to make them do something from my side’ (Hirako 2015). Just like Kōsuke, Tomohisa also expressed his own thoughts about the job as an experienced worker. Although a care-giver is different from his original dream of being a doctor, Tomohisa seemed satisfied with his current job.

Future

As for his future, Tomohisa vaguely thinks that he will continue live in line with his current life. He is not sure about his family in the future.

Tomohisa: What I think these days is that I might not be able to make my own family. For example, I might not be able to get married or have children.

Me: What makes you think so?

Tomohisa: I don’t know. But I feel the possibilities are becoming narrowed year by year. (Hirako 2015)

This ‘negative’ vision, however, does not come from his desperate attitude toward life.

Me: But when people think 'I can't do it', at a deep level they are likely to wish they could do it, aren't they?

Tomohisa: Yes, I think so.

Me: You could ask 'How can I do it' instead of deciding 'I can't'.

Tomohisa: I said 'I might not be able to do it', but not 'I want to do it but I can't'. This difference is important.

Me: 'Might not' means that you don't intend to think how to do it or to act toward it?

Tomohisa: That's right. I don't feel like moving toward it. It's because I feel, all my life, my intentional efforts always ended in failure. The good things, such as my work and Generative Garden relationships, came to me when I surrendered to the flow of life.

Me: I see. That's interesting.

Tomohisa: I just want to respect the power of chance. It would be a better attitude in my case. (Hirako 2015)

Through the relationships in Generative Garden and the Z-meetings, Tomohisa came to think of his life as something that is naturally there in front of him, but not something that is taken by individual intention or will. This narrative can be seen as being overlapped with Kōsuke's narrative, 'Everything I planned for previously turned out to be a failure.... Rather it seems to go well when I do not think too much' (Noguchi 2015a). The point is that by suspending the power of 'intention' or 'will', they became able to unload their individual liability for their life that had put pressure on them and partly caused their *ikizurasa*. Moreover, the attitude of 'surrendering to the flow of life' and 'respecting the power of chance' shows their recovered trust in other people and society, which was once lost in their life.

The participants introduced here are those who think that their life has changed in their own ways after encountering Generative Garden and the Z-meetings. Their dedication

and commitment made Generative Garden and the Z-meetings rich with ideas and insights. They are getting ready to reconnect themselves to society in various ways, one of which is getting a job. From these points, the core participants can be thought of as the most successful model resulted from a narrative self-help practice. The mechanisms of the positive changes they have experienced will be clarified more in Chapter 6.

5.3. Occasional Participants

Occasional participants are those who participate in the Z-meetings only occasionally, but still enjoy them and have a positive outcome from the meetings. Their narratives suggest that the Z-meetings could offer an option to mitigate their various kinds of *ikizurasa* angst.

5.3.1. Onodera Mikio (age 35, male)

Pressure for Academic Excellence and *Hikikomori*

Mikio was good at studies when he was in primary and junior high school. His mother expected him to become a doctor, which was his father's vocation. She exerted much pressure on him to achieve academic excellence. Trying very hard to meet her expectation, Mikio managed to enter the highest-ranked high school in his school district. Immediately after, however, he ceased to be able to push himself as he had before.

I even studied in the toilet to pass the exam. But mum said, 'This is only the first step. Next you should enter a medical school and become a doctor, not an ordinary doctor but an excellent, money-making one'. There was still far to go and the goal was totally out of my reach. I knew mum had 'all or nothing' thinking, so if I frustrated her expectations mid-way, she would never accept me. I gave up. I burned out from study stress. (Onodera 2015)

The pressure of academic excellence also came from his father. Every evening at dinner time, his father checked his test scores and critically said, 'It's normal to achieve a perfect score [*hyaku-ten totte atarimae*]' (Onodera 2015).

Mikio scraped through high school life, but could not gain admission to a medical school. After one year of *rōnin* [preparing for university entrance exams], he entered a non-medical university and left his parents' house. Burned out again, Mikio shut himself in a house where he lived alone.

Mikio: I couldn't go to university and became *hikikomori* for one and a half years. It might rather be called *futōkō*, as I was a student? I don't know.... Until high school I could go to school just because I was scared of my mum. It was much better for me to be at school than at home. Without mum, I was not interested in going to school. I stocked up on enough food to last about three days in a fridge so that I wouldn't need to go out for a while.

Me: Did you feel relieved when you started to separate from your parents?

Mikio: Yes, but then I felt depression. I kept my face down and couldn't go out except at night time.... [During the *hikikomori* time] I was always thinking that I haven't tried my best, I haven't done anything yet, so I must change my life. (Onodera 2015)

After repeating a few school years, Mikio graduated from university when he was 25. But he was too exhausted to look for a job. 'I didn't have any self-esteem at all. I thought I didn't deserve to be employed by any companies.... This might sound strange, but it was my reality', he narrated (Onodera 2015). His image of *shakai-jin* [a working adult] was his father who stood for a standard that was too high to achieve.

Mikio started to study acupuncture at a vocational school and became qualified as an acupuncturist when he was 28. From around that time, he started to suffer from various mental symptoms such as insomnia and trembling. He visited a mental hospital and was diagnosed as having mood disorder and social anxiety disorder. This experience made him doubt the values that his parents had imprinted on him since he was little.

Family

The attitudes of his parents toward him hampered him from developing a healthy self-esteem. His father usually judged him based on his test scores and his mother pressured him to become an ideal ego-comforting son, never caring about Mikio's own intentions or emotions. As the wife of a doctor, she was afraid of being blamed by her relatives if her children were not academically excellent enough to succeed their father as a doctor. As he grew older, Mikio realised there was a gap between the values of others and of his parents.

One of my friends went to a medical school and I asked him why he did so. He simply answered, 'because I didn't want to become a salary-man'. It was surprising, because he said nothing about his parents' expectations. What he said was only about his own intentions: 'I thought like this, I want this, so I decided to do this'. I was shocked. He was not forced to become a doctor by his parents in exchange for good care at home. It was very different from my case. (Onodera 2015)

Mikio started to feel that something about his family was wrong, but first he tried not to focus on it. He did not really know other values than those of his parents and could not easily give them up. 'I couldn't talk about my parents for a long time. I tried to keep it under wraps' (Onodera 2015). After having experienced a succession of setbacks in his life, Mikio started to face his family's problems when he was in his late twenties. He tried to understand the situation he and his parents were in by using some psychological concepts including 'adult children' and '*hikikomori*'. Through these trials, Mikio was gradually able to narrate his experiences and address the sense of difference that he had always felt in his life. But it has not been easy to heal his deep-rooted pain.

Even now, mum's voice criticising me pops up in my head, something like, 'You lack motivation', or 'You are such a lazy bone'.... Now I basically don't talk to my parents. Sometimes I talk to mum, but don't tell her what I'm really thinking. (Onodera 2015)

Work

Until the time of the interview, Mikio had experienced several jobs including unloading carriages from trucks, private tutoring, massage, and website building. He narrated

that he does not dislike working, but his unstable mental condition and frictions in human relationships derived from it usually make it difficult for him to continue a job.

Me: Have you had a fear of work? Or, have you experienced any hardship in your jobs where you thought you don't want to work anymore?

Mikio: I've never thought that I don't want to work anymore.... Well, my problem is always human relationships rather than work itself. I don't know what the 'natural human relationship' is. When I work, I feel pleased, maybe too pleased so that I try too hard. I sometimes worked even at night time with too little sleep and got burnt-out. But I've never thought that I don't want to work, though I've thought many times that I want to keep away from humans. (Onodera 2015)

After quitting the last job of website building, he moved to his grandmother's house to take care of her. It was his mother's order and he concentrated on caring for her from age 28 to 31, though he did not really want to do it. 'Mum used to say it's a child's duty to please their parents. But she didn't want to take the duty as a child and just sacrificed me. I believe she can't even recognise her logical inconsistency', Mikio added.

Ibasho Experience

When his grandmother went to be taken care of in a hospital, Mikio suddenly had free time and started to think about his identity. He searched for categories that he thought explained his situation and bumped into the term *hikikomori*.

I started to wonder who I am. I thought 'Am I NEET?' but NEET wasn't like the concept I needed.... About *hikikomori*, I really felt it fit me, like, 'Yes, this is it'. It was a relief. I'd thought no one could understand me, but I felt this word explained my situation. I was pleased, really pleased, feeling, 'I'm not a strange, solitary man. There must be someone like me and I would be understood by them'. (Onodera 2015)

In the late 2000s, when he found that the term *hikikomori* could be the key to understand himself, there were already some *ex-hikikomori* writers who published essays about their experiences (Ueyama 2001; Katsuyama 2001; Ichino 2006). They argued the importance for understanding *hikikomori* from the perspective of those who experienced *hikikomori* and there emerged more self-help meeting groups for

hikikomori individuals, whose aims were not ‘to cure them’ or ‘to make them back to work’, but that they can safely stay there and relate with other participants who also had *hikikomori* experiences. Mikio visited some of these meeting groups. Relationships there were fresh for him and he liked the *hikikomori* people there very much.

It was relaxing. I don’t have to conceal my *hikikomori*-like unemployed life. Well, to tell the truth, staying alone at home would be more relaxing, but having human relationship was really good, because I didn’t have them at all at that moment. (Onodera 2015)

After participating in those gathering groups, Mikio started to organise his *hikikomori* events on a regular basis in 2014. About fifteen *hikikomori* individuals come to the events and just talked about their experiences or shared their hobbies, spending fun time together. Reflecting his personality, Mikio’s events have a humorous atmosphere that enables people to laugh at their painful experiences.

Mikio: I always think of things in a negative way. But one of my friends is as negative as me, so we talk and share our negative way of thinking. For example, when we were at school and heard some girls saying ‘Annoying!’ we thought ‘It must be me [*zettai ore ya*]’ right away.

Me: It’s ‘must be’ but not ‘might be’?

Mikio: It ‘must be’, and we felt pain. Or, we imagine the station ticket gate would close shutting us out, like ‘Non-*hikikomori* only [*hikikomori okotowari*]’.

Me: Like a comedy. (Onodera 2015)

Such a practice that makes painful reality into ‘a funny story’ can mitigate the pain and enhance communication, especially when it is done as a co-action with others without a derogatory nuance. In the Z-meetings, too, this sort of ‘strategy of humour’ is often seen. For example, as is stated in 5.2.2, Kōsuke, who has schizophrenia, and Kōhei, the moderator, named Kōsuke’s hallucination ‘ab-chan’ in a humorous way, and it helped Kōsuke be relaxed to narrate about his mental illness. Mikio also thinks humour is a key to making the self-help meetings relaxing for *hikikomori* individuals.

I'm thinking that it might be important just to spend fun time together. We felt like we wasted our adolescence being *futōkō* or *hikikomori*. We wish we could have joined other students with joyful laughter when we were younger. But now, we can make another try in a self-help group. (Onodera 2015)

The experience of organising events and their success brought him a sense of power. Mikio said, 'I think I'm doing well now. I realised that I can do what is not directly related to earning money' (Onodera 2015).

In terms of 'activation' policies, Mikio's case might not be seen as 'successful', because creating a new gathering opportunity for *hikikomori* individuals will not be taken as a 'job' in the existing framework. However, it should be noted that without the relaxing relationships where he does not have to pretend, he would not be able to continue to work even if he can make himself go 'back to work'. As he narrated in the previous part that 'I've never thought that I don't want to work, [but] I've thought many times that I want to keep away from humans' (Onodera 2015), his problem is not primarily work itself, but rather related to relationships with others. These relationships have enabled him to articulate his own issue and to take actions to deal with it.

The Z-Meetings

As one of the *hikikomori*-related places he visited, Mikio has participated in the Z-meetings on a non-regular basis for three years. He created *Individual Reports* on 'My family story' and 'Appearance and Self-consciousness'. When he first visited the Z-meetings, Mikio brought his self-made autobiography bound as a thick book. He wrote it when he was 31 over a period of one year, and came to the Z-meetings to share it.

Me: What made you write that book?

Mikio: I can say this now, but when I wrote the autobiography, I decided to kill myself after completion. So it was originally written as a suicide note.

Me: I see.

Mikio: I went to talk to a counsellor while I was writing. I didn't tell him it was supposed to be a suicide note. But when it was completed and printed out, I felt like binding it up as a book.

Me: Despite the original intention, it brought you motivation toward life?

Mikio: Well, yes, it made me feel confident, sometimes to the point of arrogance that I think 'I have a pretty good sense of writing'.

Me: It's a necessary quality when you write. (Onodera 2015)

His tone was humorous even when he narrated his previous intention of killing himself. In the Z-meetings, other participants listened to his story with interest and care, and shared the difficulties he had had with his parents. Mikio was pleased and became motivated to write *Individual Reports*. 'When I wrote those reports, I enjoyed thinking about people in the Z-meetings, like 'Kōsuke will like this joke' or 'I'm going too far, but Yamashita-san will be able to handle this', he said with smile (Onodera 2015). It seems that for Mikio, 'how the narratives are shared by others' is more important, rather than the content of the narratives itself.

At the same time, Mikio sometimes finds the words used in the Z-meetings difficult for him to understand.

To be honest with you, people in the Z-meetings use too difficult words, so I sometimes get lost in the middle of a discussion. I get confused when people say 'minority and majority' or 'post-modern'. I think like, 'post-modern?' and the image of 'a modern post' starts to circulate in my brain. (Onodera 2015)

Compared to other self-help groups he participates in, Mikio feels that the Z-meetings focus more on discussion and analysis rather than just having a fun time talking. When he needs a more casual atmosphere, he goes to other places. It's just like the 'lifestyle of collecting *ibasho*' Kōhei suggested as 'a wisdom of living' (Yamashita 2010), where 'one has several *ibasho* in their social life and can remain okay if one of those stops functioning'.

Future

Mikio does not have a clear plan for his future. However, this fact does not mean that he refuses to face reality. Mikio had decided that he would get a job before turning thirty, but his mother required him to continue his grandmother's care and he could not resist her. When he was over thirty, which he thought was the limit of developing a decent career, Mikio gave up and felt a sense of release.

I decided I will live as long as I am allowed, and then accept my death whatever it will be.... Now I have given up making my life 'normal' and feel relieved. I used to be obsessed by 'do-something' pressure, but now I don't have to feel that way any more. It makes me feel relaxed. (Onodera 2015)

In his life, a plan to 'live normally by getting a decent job' resulted in obsession, pressure, low self-esteem, and suicidal tendency. Thus, his apparently 'passive' attitude of not setting a clear goal for a career can be thought of as a realistic living strategy by which he will be able to avoid the severe condition he used to be in.

On the other hand, regarding his own *hikikomori* events, Mikio has a vague but positive vision.

Hikikomori individuals can generate value in this society. For example, we can talk about our *hikikomori* experiences in front of people and get some *osaisen* [a money offering], with which we can eat and chat at *Saizeria* [a cheap chain restaurant].... People might not believe it, but I really think *hikikomori* people are able and good at fun talk. They are sensitive enough to feel others' emotions just like their own, so they can entertain others while never hurting them. I want them, including myself, to express and present their good points. (Onodera 2015)

He seemed to feel that *hikikomori* individuals including himself, have great potential to live a full life, and hopes to create more opportunities where they are recognised as participants in society, without feeling an inferiority complex or self-denial.

5.3.2. Kondō Wataru (age 23, male)

Bullying, School Drop-Out, and Difficulty with Human Relationships

Wataru is a university student and the youngest member in the Z-meetings. In spite of his socially approved status as a member of a university, he still has *ikizurasa* from his earlier life. ‘About my school life, I only have painful memories’, Wataru narrated. He had been a victim of bullying throughout his life in junior high school and high school. Wataru was usually a quiet child just bearing up under the teasing he received, but he sometimes became enraged and lost control when the situation was too much to handle. Such a response accelerated the bullying by students who made fun of him. When he sought help from his parents, they just advised him to concentrate on his studies. They told him ‘if you become smarter, no one will bully you. Students who bully you will be bullied at high school because they didn’t study’. Wataru took it seriously and studied hard, but the bullying did not end at high school. His test scores were top-notch when he entered high school, but they gradually dropped as a result of difficulties in his daily life.

As an adolescent, Wataru’s self-esteem was especially hurt when he felt girls in the class mocking him. He remembers:

It was 3 days after entering high school. I flung myself facedown on the desk. Then, two girls who thought I was sleeping started to talk about me. One was one of the prettiest girls in the class and her seat was just next to me. She was asked ‘Do you like him?’ and she answered; ‘Not a chance. I don’t like his gross looks’. They could say anything, because to them it was as if I was not there, but I was awake and listening to everything. After that, I was afraid of girls.... I started to think my face was really ugly and that I should be ranked at the bottom of the bottom. (Kondō 2015)

After spending two years in high school, Wataru finally could not keep going to school and left in the third grade. He passed the high school equivalence test and entered a private university.

There was no bullying at university. In the early days, Wataru felt relieved and enjoyed university life. He actively attended classes and started volunteer work helping *futōkō*

children. In his new life, Wataru made many friends and even had a girlfriend. However, such days did not last. He started to suffer from depression and his unstable mental condition hampered his smooth communication with his friends at times. Wataru depended on his girlfriend when he felt himself to be worthless.

His girlfriend left him, as she got tired of trying hard to support his self-esteem. The fatal incident was when he panicked because of his mental instability and absent-mindedly posted insulting messages on SNS that were broadly shared by his university friends. In fear of being abandoned by all of his friends, Wataru attempted suicide. After being hospitalised in a psychiatric ward, he took one year's leave of absence from university.

Family

Wataru was born as the second child of a salary-man father and a housewife mother. Both of his parents placed high value on academic excellence. They always told him, 'If you are ahead of others in your studies, so will be your happiness'. He now thinks it was 'terribly wrong', but when he was little he could only accept that value. Looking at his brother, who entered one of the most prestigious national universities in Japan, Wataru always felt pressure and fear of being left behind.

When Wataru started his *futōkō* at high school, his parents became very angry. One morning, both of them violently came into his room, where he had shut himself up, and pulled him out. They forced him to change clothes and drove him to school without asking his will.

It was so painful and I hated it. I pretended to go to school, but went to the river instead. I thought about buying a cutter knife at a convenience store or somewhere and cutting my wrist. But I couldn't. I thought about it many times after that, but I've never done it. (Kondō 2015)

The violent impulse that arose inside him exploded as physical violence toward his mother. On other occasions, he hit his head on the wall or with a pan.

Wataru started to live by himself when he entered university. He sometimes visits his parents' house but he does not want to tell them what he really thinks. 'Now I know they will never understand me. I've been disappointed with them too much to have any hope in their acceptance or help.' He is unable to trust his parents, and their relationship remains to be hostile or superficial if apparently tranquil.

The Z-Meetings

Wataru got to know about the Z-meetings when Kōhei came to give a lecture at his university and talked about *ikizurasa* among contemporary youth. He joined the Z-meetings from 2012 to 2014, and created an Individual Report about 'dependency and being accepted'. Wataru understood the Z-meetings as 'a place where people think about their own *ikizurasa* by narrating their experiences' (Kondō 2015). It was like 'an encounter with another world', and he enjoyed it.

In the Z-meetings, Wataru sometimes feels out of place when he remembers that he is a university student who has a possibility of being regularly employed after graduation, while other members are mostly unemployed or casually employed.

Wataru: To be honest with you, I feel uneasy at times, wondering if it is really okay for me to be there. I am sure I have pain in my life, but, you know, I still belong to a university. I sometimes feel that my pain is silly and small compared to that of others.

Me: Then, have you thought, like, 'I'm different from those people who are real social misfits'?

Wataru: No, I haven't. I didn't mean that. I was just worried about how I was accepted by the people there. My worry is that my pain might be much less serious than theirs and it might be impolite to narrate my problems as if they were very serious. Anyway I have an affiliation, a place to go back to.

Me: Have you been told such things or blamed by other participants?

Wataru: Never. Yamashita-san told me, 'It doesn't matter. This is a place to talk about your own *ikizurasa*', and I felt accepted.

Me: Yeah. I think people can feel *ikizurasa* regardless of their social position. Even a person who goes to school or work could feel *ikizurasa* because it is related to being human. (Kondō 2015)

Wataru uncovers his feeling of ‘uneasiness’ which comes from his social position as ‘a university student’. Because of this position, he thinks that he might not be accepted by other participants as one of ‘us’. Such a feeling would possibly be based on the recognition that members of a group are tied by a sort of ‘sameness’ in their social position or experience, in the way that they might insist ‘we suffer from the same difficulty, we have common interest, so we act together’. Such a recognition has been underlying minority social movements, where the majority/minority dichotomy is inevitably highlighted, such as the women’s liberation, disability, and *futōkō* movements. However, Kōhei told Wataru that the difference in social positions does not matter when *ikizurasa* is narrated and during our conversation I also pointed out that *ikizurasa* can be felt by people in all social positions. The mentors of the Z-meetings state that *ikizurasa* can be a varied and as the backgrounds of the participants, but can still be shared with a feeling of connectedness. The quality of *ikizurasa*, which is diverse and elusive, but is able to connect people from different backgrounds, will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

In relating with other participants at the Z-meetings, Wataru came to stop thinking that being *hikikomori* is less valuable than being a university student. He said;

One time Kōsuke told me that I should do *hikikomori* with him and it sounded good to me. I could do so if I failed to find a job after graduation. I can stay with them. (Kondō 2015)

Here, *hikikomori* is regarded as a state of life, an option he can take in case he fails to find a good job.

Future

After returning to university after his leave of absence, Wataru was in a third year student at the time of the interview. It was the time when Japanese university students are supposed to start *Shūshoku-Katsudō* [new graduates’ job search], which includes

participating in company orientation meetings, creating resumes that reflect a 'motivated person', and taking interviews that might be conducted in a tension-filled atmosphere. He does not think he can do it. His mental condition does not yet allow him to socialise with people without tranquilisers. Now, Wataru can go to university and positively participate in volunteer work when his condition is good, but he needs to take a long rest after working actively. Asked about his future, Wataru answered:

As a dream, I want to work hard as an able worker and make a decent amount of money. But it's only a dream. I might burst if I work hard. That's what I've learnt from my past experiences. So, my primary hope is to live a healthy life. I want to work slowly if I can find such a job.... I don't know if there are any companies that would be willing to employ me and, even if there are, the job could be a hard one. I might possibly become a *freeter*. (Kondō 2015)

Now Wataru has a girlfriend, but he has not thought seriously about getting married or having children. He has not told his girlfriend about his mental instability, let alone his ambivalence and fears about the future. Wataru thinks that she would not accept him if he became a *freeter*, but 'anyway, my primary aim is to continue to live, even as a *freeter*' (Kondō 2015). He seems to vacillate between the social norm that states that becoming an able worker after graduation from university is important, and the alternative value that becoming a *freeter* or *hikikomori* may not be bad.

5.3.3. Yamamoto Rio (age 31, male)

Family

Rio was born as the only child of a mother who worked as a chemist and father who worked as an architect. His mother had a greater voice than his father in most decisions regarding family matters, especially Rio's education. 'Mum was always at home before I came home. She asked me about homework and what happened at school, and helped me do homework sitting next to me.... She was like an 'ideal' family figure' (Yamamoto 2013). However, her dedication to her son's education became neurotically obsessive.

When I was in fourth grade at primary school, one day I came home with a brooding look. I was just tired, but mum asked me what had happened. I said nothing's wrong, but she wasn't satisfied with the answer. She said, 'If really nothing happened, you shouldn't look like that', gradually raising her voice. I felt browned off and was a bit scared by her unusual tone of voice, and continued to give her non-committal answers. Then she mentioned the name of the naughtiest boy in my class and labelled him as an offender towards me. Of course I told her he had done no such thing as bullying me, but she was too angry to listen. I was scared and couldn't say anything further. Mum reported to school that the boy was teasing me and he was scolded by our teacher. I could only watch him being rebuked without saying anything. (Yamamoto 2013)

Similar things happened at other times. His mother said she wanted to know about Rio, but she never listened to what he really said. Rio started to feel empty and hopeless about life from around then. After he entered junior high school, his mother became even more obsessed about his education. She attached the emblem of the highest level high school of the local region on the fridge door and told him 'you will go here' (Yamamoto 2013). His junior high school returned the mid-term and end-term test scores with individual rankings. When his rank was not satisfactory, his mother shouted angrily and hit him mercilessly. Without realising that there was something abnormal about her, Rio cried and apologised when he was hit. However, when he was in the second grade of junior high school, his perception changed.

One time, I scored 85 [out of 100] in a math test, and felt seriously nervous because mum especially cared about English and math, and hit me if my scores were below 90. Tears came up in my eyes. Then, a boy sitting next to me complained to me saying, 'Why are you crying with such a good score?' Suddenly, I realised that there was no reason for me to endure being hit by mum. That evening, mum got violent about the test, but I shouted and hit her back. (Yamamoto 2015)

After this, the relationship between the two became violent.

***Futōkō* and Free-school**

Soon after this, Rio stopped going to school. There were no school-related reasons such as bullying or academic failings. In an *Individual Report* presented at the Z-meetings, Rio analysed the reason for his *futōkō* as follows:

When I became *futōkō*, I think I was in despair for my life. People might wonder why a good student from a good family had to have such despair, but I surely did. The despair was not about the current situation but about the future.... For my mum, education was like a race track of life that holds the goal of ‘becoming a good adult’. She tried to remove any obstacles on the track so that I could smoothly run through to cross the finish line.... For me, there was always the track of a ‘good life’ prepared by mum.... But, what is ‘good’? Isn’t it imagined as a life of graduating from primary school, junior high school, high school, and university, and then working for a firm until retiring, one after another?... I couldn’t find any hope or pleasure in living such a ‘good’ life, the type valued by society [*seken*] and mum. I rejected this ‘good’ life and now I assume that my *futōkō* was an expression of that rejection, even if I was not aware of it at the time. (Yamamoto 2013)

Rio shut himself in his home and spent time all alone without friends for 2 years between the ages of fourteen and fifteen. His mother learned about *futōkō* and suggested going to a local free-school while refraining from pushing him toward school. When he was sixteen, Rio decided to go there and kept going until he was twenty-one. He enjoyed the free-school. The thing he liked about it was narrated as follows:

I was allowed to do what I wanted to do. Even if not always successful, at least I could always have a try. For example, I wanted to make a video for a presentation at an anniversary party of the free-school and told a staff member. There was no video equipment at the school, but the staff somehow prepared what was needed and finally I was able to make it with the help of other members and staff. It was good. (Yamamoto 2015)

At the same time, Rio continued to feel pressure to become a ‘good adult’. Although she learned that parents should not push *futōkō* children to school, it was difficult for his mother to give up her dream for her son’s good career. Nearly every day after coming back from free school, she told him, ‘You are wrong if you think it’s good

enough to go to free-school. You should go back to regular school someday' (Yamamoto 2015). First Rio refused her suggestion, but as he approached the age of twenty-one, which was the maximum age of acceptance at the free-school, he gradually thought about what he could do after graduation.

From Wanting to Become a Teacher to Critical Analysis of Education

Rio decided to become an English teacher, took the high school equivalence test, and entered a university that had a teacher-training course when he was twenty-four. He explained that the reason why he hoped to become a teacher despite his original dislike of school was that '[he] was blinded with money [*kane ni mega kuranda*]' (Yamamoto 2015). Although teachers generally do not earn as much as salary-men in a big firm, Rio thought 'anyway it is a stable job and I would be able to support myself. It was much better than becoming a *freeter*'. As shown in Chapter 2, under the system of periodic recruitment for new-graduates, a CV with blank periods could be fatal for a job search. For Rio who entered university six years later than typical, the chance of being employed as a new graduate was extremely slim and *freeter* was the most likely future. Under such a condition, a teacher was one of the few options he could choose when he wished to have a decent career.

However, he soon found that it was not the right way for him, because he could not feel any sympathy toward the adult-oriented educational strategies discussed in the teacher-training course. He managed to complete the course, but lost motivation to become a teacher. Instead, Rio came to be interested in specialising in educational sociology at graduate school. He explained the reason for this change as follows:

I didn't like the classes in the teacher's course, such as 'class management', 'how to make a learning community', and 'how to keep students awake during lectures'. On the other hand, there were other kinds of classes at university that placed more emphasis on learner-centred learning. In those, I realised that education can be looked at from the learner's perspective. It seemed interesting to study further about the learner's side of education. The other reason was that I was unsatisfied with the existing academic discussion about free-schools. Some of them seemed to oversimplify the complex realities of free-schools.... I wanted to create my own research about free-schools based on the perspective of learner-centred theory. (Yamamoto 2015)

In order to pursue his research about free-schools, Rio abandoned his plan to become a teacher and started an MA course at a national university. He was happy because it was what he really wanted to do.

Me: Weren't you excited when you got an idea about your research?

Rio: I was very excited.... [As I worked on my research] I realised I could narrate my own experience. Until then, my experience was just something that could not be understood by myself, let alone others. But I came to realise that it could be made into words in an understandable form and I did so. It was fun. For my BA thesis, I did fieldwork at free-schools and researched about how young people there learned in a learner-centred manner. (Yamamoto 2015)

During this process, Rio changed his position from 'a *futōkō* child who goes to a free-school' to 'a researcher who interprets the realities of *futōkō* people based on his own experience'. Rio successfully completed the MA course and started a PhD in 2015. His research interest has consistently been focussed on Japanese free-schools and he believes that his job is to deliver the words to academia by converting them into a universally understandable form.

The Z-Meetings

At first, Rio came to visit Freeschool Foro as part his study and did volunteer work there. As part of his interest in Freeschool Foro, he also participated in Generative Garden and first came to the Z-meetings in 2012. Rio created an *Individual Report* titled 'Denial and Criticism of Education'. About the meaning of the Z-meetings, he said:

I think that narrating experiences is important. It's not a matter of good or bad, or effective or not, but life just needs it. For me, the Z-meetings are one of those places where we can do it.... I was affected a lot by Paulo Freire. In his 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', he emphasised that oppressed Brazilian adults learned to read and write not in order to become the 'oppressor', but what happened there was restoring their own view of the world by acquiring their expression. I look at the Z-meetings as something related to this. (Yamamoto 2015)

Asked whether his participation was for his research or personal needs, Rio answered:

It was not for my research, so maybe for my own needs. I believe that in the Z-meetings I can narrate what I can't in other places and be accepted....Well, in the Z-meetings I can narrate what is difficult to narrate while saying, 'This is very hard to explain'. (Yamamoto 2015)

Rio needed to share his narrative with others and the Z-meetings provided him with rare opportunities to do so.

Future

Rio thinks that free-school research is suitable work for him and believes that he will continue it in the future. However, he has a long way to go before becoming an academic with a tenured position at a university. After completing his Master's thesis, Rio felt he had spent all the energy inside him both physically and mentally, and was suffering from depression. 'I was burned out and completely sick. At that time I was always thinking, "What should I do?" "What am I doing?" "What is my aim?" It was like I had returned to the past when I did *futōkō*' (Yamamoto 2015). However, ten months later, his mental condition became better and he went back to his research. Now he is planning to conduct a historical research on Japanese free-schools and *futōkō*.

As described above, occasional participants are those who have participated in the Z-meetings one year or more after its commencement in 2011 and continued to come intermittently for more than a few years. They enjoy the Z-meetings and contributed to the narrative sharing process by creating *Individual Reports*. At the same time, they have activities or affiliations outside the Z-meetings and Generative Garden that they are more engaged in. For example, Mikio organises his own self-help meetings, Wataru is a senior student at university, and Rio is a PhD student. Thus, the influence the Z-meetings has had on their lives would be more limited as compared to the core participants.

5.4. Other Participants

In this section, ‘other participants’ are those whose involvement in the Z-meetings is more limited than the participants introduced previously. Since the Z-meetings are open to the public, there is often new participants, including some who never come back or who leave after a few times, while there are others who have become regular members. The people in this section are those who found the Z-meetings to be effective in their own way and participated more than three times, but did not continue to participate on a long-term basis. I will introduce their narratives in order to highlight the various dimensions of the Z-meetings and analyse it a multi-faceted manner.

5.4.1. Saeki Jun’ichirō (age 57, male)

Jun’ichirō is one of the oldest participants in the Z-meetings. As a man in his fifties, the social background of his career is considerably different from that of the younger members and thus his narrative cannot be considered as typical. However, it will provide a different standpoint to relativise the *ikizurasa* experiences of other participants in their twenties or thirties.

Jun’ichirō is a managing editor of a small newspaper company. The newspaper originally started as a New Leftists’ medium and now focuses on various work-related issues, including *freeters*, NEET, and *hikikomori*. He came to the Z-meetings both for news coverage and for his own aim of sharing *ikizurasa* narratives. As a middle-aged working man, his presence positively added a different dimension to the Z-meetings and helped younger participants gain a new perspective.

Career

Spending his childhood as an academically excellent boy, Jun’ichirō entered a highly ranked high school in the Shikoku area of Japan. His father was a serious salary-man and he wanted his son to be the same. He hated his father because he sometimes became violent and oppressive toward his mother. At high school, he felt a sense of failure in comparison to other similarly ‘excellent’ students. He began to question his previous career-crazed life. Jun’ichirō spent his high school years hanging out with

disaffected students, drinking, playing mah-jong, and discussing philosophy and politics. At university, he joined a New Left group and enjoyed its activities, including *Genchi-Tōsō* [land strike] at Sanrizuka and Narita. After graduating from university, Jun'ichirō decided to become a member of the 'proletariat' and participate in the labour movement.

I found some fulfilment in the New Left movement. But a senior student who was a leader of our group suddenly quit the activities just before graduating and entered a stock company. I thought 'What is this [*Nan'yanen*]?' I decided to never become like him and live in line with Leftist principles. (Saeki 2015)

Jun'ichirō quit university mid-way through and became a full-time manual worker at an iron company. The majority of workers there and graduated from junior high school at the age of fifteen and started working right after that, and Jun'ichirō felt himself as singularly old and unnecessarily highly educated. 'I thought I must work hard. That was the only way I could be accepted in this place', Jun'ichirō remembered. His job was to hit a steel sheet with a hammer based on the instruction of a senior craftsman. He devoted himself to the job and gradually gained recognition in the workplace. Then, Jun'ichirō started to encourage other workers to become involved in the labour movement. However, company managers were alerted by his actions and decided to change his work position in order to dissociate him from other workers. 'I was inexperienced and could not inspire other workers', he recalled. After ten years of working there, Jun'ichirō left the iron company.

Until he got his position in the newspaper company when he was 38, Jun'ichirō spent most of his thirties doing various jobs, such as working in a café, as a salesperson at an advertising company, and as a staff member at a community workshop for disabled people. Now he accepts that his career journey was meant to happen in order to bring him to his current job.

I like my current job the best. Luckily, all of my previous jobs have something to do with my present one, which reports labour-related problems in various workplaces. In most of the places I visit, I am able to feel 'I know what's happening here'. Especially, I believe that the 10 years of work experience at the iron company formed the basis of my

perspective.... Each job is disconnected, but they are all relevant to my current job. (Saeki 2015)

In spite of his unstable career flow, Jun'ichirō does not feel despair or anxiety. He narrated:

Jun'ichirō: The biggest difference about me from younger people is that there were plenty of jobs available in my time. If young people wished to work, they had a job the next moment. You know, I dropped out from university, changed jobs, experienced being a *freeter*, but still got a stable job, even if I'm not sure it was really stable. I've never felt anxious about being out of a job.

Me: Are you sure? Haven't you felt anxiety thinking like, 'I might lose my job?' or 'What if I can't make a living'?

Jun'ichirō: Well, I would say no. My sense is, 'Anyway, I'll be able to get by somehow'. (Saeki 2015)

From the late 1980s to the 1990s he drifted from one job to the next. The work environment was not as deteriorated as in the 2000s [see Chapter 2] and he had a positive perspective that he could be regularly employed whenever he wished. As stated in Chapter 1, the image of *freeter* entails a positive meaning of rejecting 'the existing path [*shikareta rēru*]' and continuing to have a dream'. All in all, Jun'ichirō did not have despair or self-blaming feelings about his unstable job condition.

Role Models of Non-Work-Centred Life

His positive perception comes not only from the social situation, but also from some 'role models' Jun'ichirō had in his life. One of the most impressive models was his grandfather.

My grandfather ran a small hairdresser business in Ehime Prefecture. At that time, people didn't go to the local hairdresser in the countryside just to get haircut. There were *shogi*, *igo*, and a tea set in the waiting room, and people could just stay, relax, and talk there. Grandfather joined them when there were no appointments. It was like a community place [*ba*]. He was kind of like a fast liver, often going to play with *geisha*

when he was young, so he was good at *shamisen* and loved having parties.... Cutting his work short if he wanted, he boozed up at home with singing and playing *shami [-sen]*....On Mondays when he was off work, Grandfather went fishing with his company and had a party afterwards with fresh fish. During the party he sometimes called me, 'Come here Jun'ichirō', putting me on his knees, and I slept there with the smell of *sake* on his body. I vaguely thought, 'I want to live like him'. Work was not the centre of his life at all. He was always playing and having fun. (Saeki 2015)

His grandfather, who developed his career before the high economic growth era, was not employed by a company like his salary-man father and was deeply rooted in his local community even when he worked. In his life, the areas of play and work merged, and for him, both were resources of pleasure in his life. As his grandson, Jun'ichirō had an alternative career model as compared to the model of 'graduating from a good school and being employed by a famous firm'.

Another model was 'people who were in social movements'. They were also the kind of people who did not put work at the centre of their lives.

Some were supported by a wife and others were working part-time while they focused on the social movement. Spending time with them, I came to believe they could get by somehow even if there were hard times. Most people around me were something like that. Thus, I'm not very familiar with work-centred salary-man life. (Saeki 2015)

Other than those particular people he met, Jun'ichirō emphasised that it would be a common experience for people of his age.

When I was a kid, strange middle-aged 'what-are-you?' people were still around. There was a man among my relatives, who was not working and sometimes came to my house during the day. He said, 'Hey Jun'ichirō, what's up?' or 'I'll tell you what life is' boastfully, and ate and drank and left. It was strange and I was like, 'What is he?' but at least he made me feel that 'Everyone might think he is okay and this is a way of life'. (Saeki 2015)

The perception that there are various ways of life in this world and that people can get through somehow in any case has been lost in the younger participants. Not only because of the unstable job situation itself, but also loss of an alternative model that can be vividly experienced can aggravate *ikizurasa* angst.

The Z-Meetings

Jun'ichirō came to the Z-meetings for about 2 years intermittently. The Z-meetings have accepted a few visits from newspaper reporters, but Jun'ichirō visited there not only as a reporter but also as a participant. Jun'ichirō's impression of the Z-meetings was positive, as narrated below:

I feel the content of discussion is mostly reasonable. Participants' comments about school and parents are understandable for me. The topics may seem to be disconnected but, there is a consistent direction. There is always a sense of tension and I enjoy it... Talking about oneself and comparing it with others' expressions, people get to know 'I'm similar to them in this part, but not in that part'. There is something more than a catharsis of speaking oneself out. (Saeki 2015)

Although he did not create an *Individual Report*, Jun'ichirō suggested the theme 'men's gender-related pain' for free discussion. Although he was quite free from work pressure, he was bound by the belief that men should be strong enough to be a stoic activist, which used to constitute his *ikizurasa*. Based on his experience that he felt relieved after he encountered the Men's Liberation movement and critically rethought the burdensome roles that were partially assigned to men, he thought that he might be able to share the experience with younger participants. He brought a documentary film of three middle-aged Japanese men disclosing their frustration about masculinity and led a discussion after the group watched it.

I got to know that my *ikizurasa* had something to do with masculinity. If not exactly that word, there is pressure to be a stoic activist, or to be strong enough to conceal my emotions and feelings and stick to logical reasoning. Basically, it's a pressure to become someone who is not me. When I recognised this, I just felt that 'this was it'. Knowing the structure, my pain was mitigated and I felt much easier talking to women.... So, I wanted to tell younger participants that relieving oneself from masculinity might be a good way to relax oneself. (Saeki 2015)

In spite of his intention, the discussion of this topic was not very active. I assume that having not experienced being a husband or a father, male participants in the Z-meetings could not feel the reality of typical masculine pain, such as the pressure of

supporting a family or overwhelming workloads. However, Jun'ichirō indicated the possibility for the male participants to reconsider their *ikizurasa* in relation to masculinity and that it could be realised in the future if not at the moment. Other than this, Jun'ichirō has positively brought different values into the Z-meetings that affected the participants in various ways. For example, it was he who discovered Mai's talent in writing and offered her a newspaper column.

5.4.2. Endō Masaya (age 27, male)

Frustrated Dream and Mental illness

During childhood, Masaya was good at studying and drawing pictures. Based on his mother's expectation, he studied a lot and passed the entrance exam for a famous private high school. His parents were proud of him, but when Masaya expressed his hope to become a painter and not to go to university, his mother got angry and threw his paints and drawing materials out the window. She felt as if her son was going to 'ruin her plan' for him to become a graduate of a prestigious university and a salary-man in a big, famous firm. Masaya's self-analysis is that he became ill because his mother did not approve of his dream and tried to mould him to her expectations.

I just wanted to specialise in painting at a professional training college. But my mum didn't like the idea. From around then, my mental condition started to become unstable. I had a feeling of oppression and couldn't stay still at school.... Later, I was diagnosed as having panic disorder and personality disorder. (Endō 2015)

Despite the conflict in his mind, Masaya continued to go to school and entered university as his mother had wanted. However, his mental condition got worse in university. He could not attend classes consistently and was forced to repeat an academic year. He narrated that he came to question his life and noted the following:

Masaya: Until then, I completely believed that my life would be successful as long as I studied hard and worked on each task that emerged in front of me one after another. But I was wrong.... When I entered university, I still believed in it—namely, in getting

good scores at university and being employed by a firm. As long as I believed, I could distract myself from my pain. But I gradually noticed that it was an illusion.

Me: What made you notice it?

Masaya: My body and soul became ill. I couldn't control them and I could not keep myself adapted to society.... I asked myself, 'If my belief is an illusion, what should I do?' I lost my aim and without an aim I couldn't do anything meaningful. That's why I couldn't go to university. When I listened to the lecturer, I started to think, 'What is this for?' Finally I left the classroom. I couldn't stand the gap between myself and other students, who were listening to the lecture and believing in something without any doubt. (Endō 2015)

Feeling empty and hopeless, Masaya repeatedly cut his wrist and sometimes overdosed. He could not find any meaning to his life. Five years after entering university he quit, in spite of his mother's strong protest. Masaya felt refreshed when he gave up the 'last possibility' to anchor his career to the 'socially legitimate path' (Endō 2015). During the time he belonged to university, he could not take a rest even though he did not attend classes. Masaya remembered, 'My brain kept fully working all the time. I was always thinking about whether to go to university. I couldn't have a rest at all' (Endō 2015). After leaving university, he did not work or study for about half a year, letting his brain rest.

After taking enough rest, he started to go to a local art-oriented job support centre for handicapped people. Being allowed to do what he liked, his mental condition improved dramatically. The centre stores a special computer for graphics and he was allowed to use it freely to create his original graphics. Although he still takes some pills for stabilising his mental condition, his everyday life is less disturbed by illness.

Family

Masaya is the first child of a restaurant owner father and a university lecturer mother. He has a little sister, but their mother laid her hopes disproportionately on Masaya, who was an 'academically excellent first son [*dekino ii chōnan*]'. His mother was an energetic woman who tried to combine her parenting and work perfectly. His father

was quiet and busy, allowing his wife to have her way, especially about their children's education. When Masaya was in junior high school and high school, his mother took him to the US, where she studied English and took an MA course. She hoped this experience of living abroad would increase her son's prestige as a 'returnee' student. However, Masaya, as a sensitive teenager in his early adolescence, could not adapt himself to the new environment. Feeling inconvenience with communication in English, he started to focus his interest entirely on his paintings. His mother was anxious about her son, but she withdrew her affection when Masaya expressed his desire to specialise in art. Masaya believes this experience is the root of his *ikizurasa*, but his mother refuses to admit that her attitude was one of the main causes of his problem.

Masaya's feeling toward his mother is ambivalent. He has anger and affection at the same time. Living with her, he tries not to touch the point of conflict during everyday life. 'Well, the relationship with my mother and me is quite okay now, as long as I don't accuse her of throwing out my paints and materials', he said. However, Masaya hopes that someday she will understand how much she hurt him. This ambivalent emotion sometimes leads him to self-harm.

Masaya: I can't stop hurting myself yet. Last time, I burned a wire hanger with a lighter and impressed it on my arm. It happened right after I fought with mum. She turns her face and never admits I have mental illness. So, I injured myself in order just to show her how crazy I am.... I hope someday I can discuss my condition with my mum with a third party.

Me: Do you think the discussion will change her?

Masaya: I don't know, but I hope she'd look at the real me.

Me: You want her to understand the real you?

Masaya: Yes, someday before I die. I think I want her to apologise for what happened in my life, even if it's just a single word. But it will take time and there is nothing I can do about it. I might have to give up, thinking that's what she is like. (Endō 2015)

His relationship with his mother is excessively close and imbalanced, and it seems better for his mental health to keep more distance from her. But he said he does not think of leaving his parents' house at the moment. His father usually does not step in between the mother-son relationship, but he cares about his son's condition. Masaya and his father go to church on Sundays and spend time together there. However, they never talk about the crucial matters around them including Masaya's future career, or the co-dependency between Masaya and his mother.

The Z-Meetings

I invited Masaya was invited to the Z-meetings. I was his lecturer at the at the university from which he quit and we initially met there. During his 'rest time' after leaving university, he participated in the Z-meetings a few times and created an *Individual Report* about 'an eternal child-ness inside me'. It was fun for him to talk about family problems with other participants, but he thought it was not the right place for him.

What I felt about the Z-meetings is that it is a place to share *ikizurasa* together. I'm sure it's important, but I felt, this might be impolite, but it could be just that. You know, people get irritate and nurse their old wounds again and again, not going anywhere. I wanted to move on somewhere from there. (Endō 2015)

For Masaya, the Z-meetings were just like a way station for moving to the next step, but not a place for a long stay. What made him differ from the core participants [Mai, Kōsuke, and Tomohisa] was that Masaya had a clear idea of what he wanted to become in the future when he came to the Z-meetings. As described in 5.2., Mai, Kōsuke, and Tomohisa did not know what they wanted at the outset and then gradually found out their aim as they related with other participants. This indicates that the Z-meetings are especially effective for those who cannot clarify their needs before experiencing the self-help narrative and thus cannot be helped by other supporting programs. This point will be further analysed in Chapter 6. After leaving the Z-meetings, Masaya found that an art-related job support centre was more helpful for him.

Future

Now Masaya is working as a ‘freelance illustrator’ at the job support centre. Although his income is not enough to support himself, he sometimes gets illustrator jobs that cover his daily expenses. He likes the job and hopes he can live by it. But he is sceptical about setting clear goals in his life. This attitude is based on his faith in Christianity.

It would be a good idea to have my own family, but I am not strongly attached to it. I think I can do it someday if I am allowed by God in his plan.... I simply want to experience various things. There might be many traps in this world that would hurt me, but that’s okay. I would dare to step on it even if I knew it was a trap, because that’s how God shows me the world. I would be able to gain something by experiencing those things.
(Endō 2015)

Unlike Kōsuke and Tomohisa, who emphasised the importance of accepting relationships as the basis for bringing about changes in the future, Masaya places his future in God’s hands.

5.4.3 Yoshinari Tokita (age 27, male)

Developmental Disorder and Bullying

Yoshinari completed an MA course at a private university and works for a high school as a part-time English teacher. Despite his seemingly successful academic career, Yoshinari experienced hardship in his early school life. He was diagnosed with developmental disorder when he was four or five, and was sent to a rehabilitation centre for disabled children. However, as the level of his developmental disorder was borderline, when he entered primary school he was put in a normal class with a visiting adult helper. In the first 3 years, Yoshinari enjoyed school and other children were kind to him based on their recognition of his weakness. But as he grew older, he started to feel inferior about being the only one who needed help in the classroom and he tried to make himself look strong. As he did so, other students gradually changed their attitudes and Yoshinari became a target of bullying. ‘I didn’t know how to relate to

other children. Bullying included severe violence and sometimes I even felt I might be killed at school', Yoshinari narrated. Despite such an environment, he kept going to school.

The bullying lasted until he was in second grade of junior high school and it deeply hurt his self-esteem. One afternoon, after being bullied especially severely at school, Yoshinari attempted to kill himself by trying to hang his neck up on a wire hanging from a curtain rail at home. Fortunately, the wire broke and he was safe. In panic and confusion after his failed suicide, he rushed to school where students were still there doing club activities and hit out at the students who bullied him.

My neck was injured by the cut wire and hurt so much that I screamed 'Ah---!' At that moment, I got really mad at the student who bullied me and I ran to the school ground to find him. He was the captain of the baseball club. I rained blows on him in front of the other students, so they might be scared of me and decide not to bully me any more for their own safety. Several months later, I became one of the strongest students at school and there was no one to bully me. (Tokita 2015)

This experience imprinted on him the effectiveness of physical strength and violence. Yoshinari started to hang out with local rogues. With his companions, he smoked, shoplifted, and got into fights, but did not take it seriously. This relationship lasted after he entered high school. However, there was a turning point when he was seventeen. One day, Yoshinari became violent with his friends in a restaurant from a slight provocation. It became a serious case where a few people were severely injured and the restaurant kitchen was so damaged that it might not be possible to operate for a while. He could not control himself when he got angry. When he realised what he had done, Yoshinari panicked and attempted suicide again by overdosing and cutting his wrist. When he woke after being unconscious for two days, Yoshinari was told that his case could reach an out-of-court settlement, under the condition that he work with no pay at the restaurant for a certain period of time. This was the outcome of consultation between the related adults, including his parents, the restaurant owner, his school teacher, and a police officer. Yoshinari felt relieved and grateful to the adults, whom he had not previously trusted, and started to reflect on his past deeds.

When I heard the decision, I just realised, I was no match for them. Until then, I wildly opposed adults and society, trying to cause trouble for them. But even though I did so, they didn't hate me, and even forgave me and thought of the best way for me, with the hint of education. As I realised this, it became meaningless to continue to act rebelliously. I was violent and had hurt many people, but what did I do it for? I started to think in this way. (Tokita 2015)

Yoshinari decided to leave the rogues and started to work for the restaurant seriously, while preparing for university entrance exams. Because some of his rogue companions came to him and threatened him when they found out about his intention to cut off the relationship, it took a while to extract himself. To avoid his former companions, Yoshinari spent two years before entering university mostly shutting himself at home, except when he went to work at the restaurant and to cram school. Finally, he had worked for the restaurant for four years in total. To his surprise, when he quit the job, Yoshinari was paid for all his work with a statement, and was informed of the fact that the restaurant owner had saved Yoshinari's salary to be paid at the appropriate time. The owner was watching how patiently he could continue to provide redress by working without getting paid. Asked how he felt at the time, he answered, 'I cried in gratitude to him. I learned how important it is to accept advice without protest'.

Interest in Supporting Children

At university, Yoshinari started volunteer work that included providing learning support for children with a developmental disorder. 'I wanted to help children who were similar to me in my childhood', he narrated. Interested in the job, he decided to do a Master's course and majored in educational sociology. Through his Master's work on supporting the needs of children with a developmental disorder and their parents, Yoshinari came to have the idea of running what he calls a 'plan & action school [*keikaku jikkō juku*]', a place for 'learning how to live' for young people. (Tokita 2015)

Children in their adolescence, maybe high school students, must have their own goal in their heart, even if they haven't seen it clearly. There must be something they can really enjoy and don't have to worry about others as long as they are doing it. But I assume most young people wouldn't be able to utilise their hidden talents because of the frustrating environment including family and school. I'm thinking about helping them

find what they really want. I'll focus on motivated young people, and make a detailed career plan together and help them turn it into action. (Tokita 2015)

Now, Yoshinari is working in a school as an English teacher 4 days a week and preparing to establish his 'plan & action school'. He wants to make it 'a business by which I can support myself, and a place that can give people hope'. (Tokita 2015)

The Z-Meetings

Yoshinari visited Freeschool Foro for the purpose of using it as a reference for his future plan and found out about the Z-meetings by chance. He participated in the Z-meetings several times, but did not create an *Individual Report*. The Z-meetings reminded him of when he was in his late teens mostly staying at home. 'The participants were all like me in the past during the hardest time in my life', he said (Tokita 2015). His impression of the Z-meetings is narrated as follows:

I think it is okay if they feel fun or provide comfort to people by releasing their emotions or thoughts in that place. But it seems to me that they just 'lick each other's wounds', charge their negative energy, and go home. I don't think it can be good for them. (Tokita 2015)

Yoshinari thinks that narrating about *ikizurasa* would not really have a positive effect on the narrator's life even though it might console their feelings. Instead, he plans to create his own supporting place where he would be able to provide hope to teenagers. As he looked at the other participants as 'me in the past', Yoshinari draws a line between himself and them. He regards himself as a supporter [or 'plan & action counsellor'] who guides the users to success, and tries to make it a business.

However, as is described through this chapter, for people who have *ikizurasa*, it is not easy to 'be positive' or to 'have hope' before they clarify what they really suffer from and what they really want to do. Yoshinari's criticism of the Z-meetings seems to ignore the multi-layered difficulties that would hamper marginalised youth from facing their life straightforwardly in a positive mode. For those, sharing narratives including negative aspects by clarifying their problems is essential, because it is the basis on which they can develop a positive attitude toward life. Without insight into this aspect,

the 'positive' support would not be able to provide on-target support for youth who have *ikizurasa*.

As is illustrated in this section, the narratives of 'other participants' showed the diversity of the participants of the Z-meetings. Jun'ichirō's case illuminates that when seen from the older generation's perspective, that younger people today are more exposed to fear of unemployment because they do not have an alternative career model other than 'graduating from a university and being employed by a firm'. Masaya and Yoshinari's narratives indicated that the Z-meetings are not always effective for anyone with *ikizurasa*. For whom and in what condition a narrative self-help practice like the Z-meetings can be effective will be discussed in Chapter 6.

5.5. Conclusion: *Ikizurasa*, Similarity in Different 'Us'

This chapter has demonstrated in detail how participants in the Z-meetings, narrative self-help practice for marginalised youth, have experienced *ikizurasa* in life. Ten narratives collected from a mentor, core participants, occasional participants, and other participants have been presented in order to shed light on the Z-meetings from various and different perspectives.

First of all, a variety of types of *ikizurasa* angst and its background have been addressed. The topics associated with *ikizurasa* have included *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, work, mental illness, pressure from parents, child abuse, bullying, human relationships, self-injury, and violent impulses, as well as other. As the Z-meetings do not limit participants to those who fall into a certain symbolic category, such as *futōkō* or *hikikomori*, and are open for any individuals who have experienced *ikizurasa*, there is more diversity among the participants of the Z-meetings as compared to those in other topic-focused self-help groups. There, it is possible that people with dissimilar experiences can get together to share their similar pain of *ikizurasa*. In the following chapter, each experience will be decontextualised from personal stories and analysed 'horizontally'

according to the theme/issue. By doing so, what each specific *ikizurasa* theme/issue contributes will be specified.

Also, the diversity of meanings given by those who have *ikizurasa* was demonstrated in this chapter. That ranges from indicating a sense of wanting to injure oneself [Mai, Mikio, Wataru, Masaya, and Yoshinari] to a casual expression that can be used like ‘I quit my job, I’ve got *ikizurasa*. Why don’t we drink together?’ [Kōsuke]. It was also indicated that through participation in the Z-meetings, the meaning of *ikizurasa* can change to something positive, as Mai narrated ‘I stopped seeing my *ikizurasa* as something negative and started to feel I am okay with it’ (Sasaki 2015). This change was most clearly observed in the narratives of the core participants. The following chapter will address the more specific question of in what process and under what condition such a positive change can occur.

In the narrative of the mentor Yamashita Kōhei, the important points about the underlying logic of support in the Z-meetings were revealed as not setting a direct aim of getting the participants back to school or work, rather accepting them without judgemental eyes, and blurring the boundary between the supporter and supported, while still intending to support them to be in a ‘better’ condition; thus living with contradiction. This attitude is taken from the *futōkō* movement that focuses on *ibasho* [a space with a receptive atmosphere where children can stay and feel safe]. In its critical reconstruction of the concept of ‘support’, this logic is distinctive from the existing activation scheme where the aim of ‘getting them back to work’ can never be questioned. It is true that some job supports are also involved in developing an *ibasho*-like space. However, as they do not have an appropriate framework to situate such a practice, ground-level support staff tend to explain it to outsiders using an existing category, such as ‘youth employment support’ (Toivonen 2013: 163). Kōhei also faces a similar problem. As he narrated: ‘It would be simple if I said, “I’m helping them get a job”. But I say “this is not job support”. So people may ask “what are you doing then?” and I would just say, “Uh...”. It’s very vague and hard to be understood’ (Yamashita 2010). Yet, he consistently refrained from using the term ‘employment support’. It was because his words were addressed primarily to the clients and not to government or outsiders, as his objective is ‘to be on the side of individuals who have *ikizurasa*’. Kōhei accepted the situation where he cannot support himself by his *ibasho* practice, thinking

that an *ibasho* practice is unfit for institutionalisation or commodification. It was found that this sort of ‘selfless devotion’ of the founder made the Z-meetings an exceptionally comfortable place for the users.

This leads to some crucial questions. If the effectiveness of the Z-meetings relies on Kōhei’s personal dedication, can the support sustain its quality if or when he leaves the practice? If *ibasho* is needed, should it not be appropriately reflected and articulated in an institutional framework, instead of being translated as ‘employment support’? Otherwise, do we have to give up hope about institutional recognition itself? In order to delineate an effective and sustainable support scheme, it seems essential for researchers to not only collect the voices of youth who have *ikizurasa*, but also to bridge them to the policy-making space. This will mean to interpret their ‘naive’ words into ‘strategic’ words that are institutionally understandable and acceptable. In Chapter 6, I will examine these issues by further analysis of the mechanism of *ibasho* practice.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, narratives referred to in the previous chapter will be analysed. In addition, answers to the following questions proposed in Chapter 1 will be answered:

- 1) What is *ikizurasa* among marginalised youth in post-industrial Japan and how is it actually experienced by them on the ground?; and
- 2) What sort of approaches can be effective to mitigate *ikizurasa* and how can they be implemented?

6.1. Narrated *Ikizurasa*

In this section, *ikizurasa* narrated in the previous chapter is approached through particular themes such as *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, human relationships, bullying, child abuse, mental illness, and violence/self-harm. In other words, individual stories are decontextualised from their personal backgrounds and re-contextualised according to these themes. While individual case reports focus on the flow of consistency in each self-story, the inter-contextual analysis applied here places more emphasis on identifying and collating key elements that cross the boundary of each story.

6.1.1. *Futōkō*

Three participants, Mai [a ‘core participant’ who likes writing essays], Tomohisa [a ‘core participant’ who works as a care worker], and Rio [an ‘occasional participant’ who is a PhD student], experienced long-term school non-attendance at some time during their compulsory education (primary and junior high school) and used the word *futōkō* to describe it. Mai began experiencing *futōkō* when she was ten years old in fourth grade of primary school and did not return to school thereafter, except for a short term at the beginning of junior high school. Tomohisa left junior high school in the first grade.

He entered high school but quit soon thereafter, and later quit medical university. Rio stopped going to school when he was in the second grade of junior high school and spent time alone without friends for two years. Instead of going to high school, he attended free-school, which he enjoyed a lot.

Even though the term *futōkō* was not used, there were several interviewees who had experienced school non-attendance or drop-out. For example, Kōsuke [a core participant who works as a care worker and has schizophrenia] could not continue going to high school due to his mental illness; Wataru [an occasional participant who is a university student] quit high school where he was a target of bullying; Mikio [an ‘occasional participant’ who organises a space for individuals with *hikikomori*], Masaya [an ‘other participant’ who attempts to work as a freelance illustrator] had difficulty continuing to go to university and took a leave of absence; and Kōhei [a ‘mentor’] and Jun’ichirō [an ‘other participant’ who is a fifty-seven-year-old newspaper editor] also left university half-way through when they questioned the fact that their life was leading them towards the life of a salary-man.

It should be noted here that having an experience of school non-attendance does not necessarily mean defining oneself as an (ex-)*futōkō* person.³³ Then, what makes the interviewees use the term ‘*futōkō*’ to identify themselves? The reason that it comes up first is that the word *futōkō* is officially defined as a phenomenon of compulsory education (see Chapter 1) and the narrators’ self-definition follows this. Students who do not attend primary or junior high school would be called *futōkō*, whereas older students who do not go to high school or university would not be officially referred to by this term. Mai, Tomohisa, and Rio, who narrated themselves as having experienced *futōkō*, did not go to school during the time of primary or junior high school, while those who did not define themselves as *futōkō* experienced school drop-out while in high school or pursuing higher education.

³³ The Survey on Perception of Youth (Cabinet Office 2013a) revealed that ‘to have a *futōkō* experience’ and ‘to recognise *futōkō* as something that brings hardship’ are different. The survey asked young people aged 15-29 if they had experienced *futōkō*, if they had experienced ‘hardship’, and if they recognised that the reason for the hardship was *futōkō*. According to the survey, among those who experienced *futōkō*, 26% answered that they have not experienced hardship, 48% that they have experienced hardship but the reason for it was not *futōkō*, and 26% remarked that they have experienced hardship and the reason was *futōkō* (Kido 2013). This shows that ‘to have a *futōkō* experience’, ‘to have hardship’, and ‘to ascribe the hardship to the *futōkō* experience’ are separate experiences.

More importantly, however, the term *futōkō* tends to be used in situations where there are no clear reasons for non-attendance of school. If there are clear reasons, *ikizurasa* would be more commonly associated with that reason than *futōkō*. For example, in Kōsuke's case, it was mental illness that kept him from continuing school. In Wataru's case, the reason for school drop-out was bullying. Kōhei and Jun'ichirō, the two oldest narrators who were both involved in a 'new leftist' newspaper, quit university halfway through and entered into the *futōkō* movement and labour movement, respectively, and narrated this as their individual motive to criticise the social norm and to find an alternative one. The cases of Mikio and Masaya were less clear, though Mikio found the term *hikikomori* to be more suitable for his case and Masaya has ascribed his problem to a lack of acceptance by his mother.

On the other hand, of the individuals who defined themselves with the term *futōkō*, Mai, Tomohisa, and Rio did not have easy-to-grasp reasons. They were neither truant nor defiant, but rather 'good' students, and they were neither targeted for bullying nor suffered from mental illness prior to experiencing *futōkō*. They did not intentionally start their *futōkō* for social critique and each was from a middle class family who well recognised the significance of education. For them, the reasons for *futōkō* were variously narrated in an abstract, personal, and existential manner. Mai told how she felt absolute discomfort about 'numerical ordering by test scores' or 'student rankings based on appearance or popularity' (Sasaki 2015). She could not accept a system that classifies humans into 'the useful' and 'the useless' as if they were machines, and school was perceived as one of those systems. Tomohisa was a transfer student and did not feel like 'watching rough kids bullying other students' (Hirako 2015). He could not relate naturally with other students at school and had experienced trouble getting along with other people of his age. Rio explained his reason as 'despair about the future as the track of a "good life" prepared by mum' (Yamamoto 2012). For Rio, *futōkō* was an expression of burnout from racing for the goal of a 'good life' and a declaration of his intention not to follow it. As these expressions were based on individually perceived discomfort or pain in connecting oneself to the social world, it is sometimes hard for others to understand these as 'reasonable reasons'. It seems that individuals who do not have clear reasons for their school misfit tend to recognise themselves as doing *futōkō*.

First problematised in the 1950s as a ‘mysterious phenomenon’ (Takigawa 2012) in which school children do not attend school without apparent reasons, such as poverty or illness, *futōkō* can be considered as an expression of an indefinable misfit between individuals and associations. In this point, it has commonality with the concept of *ikizurasa* that highlights ambiguity and complexity of pain (Hijikata 2010: 262). Considering this, the interviewees who explained their *ikizurasa* by using the term *futōkō* especially embody the ambiguous pain in post-industrial situations.

Another point to consider regarding *futōkō* is how the experience makes the individual’s future career unstable. As shown in Chapter 2, the advancement rate to high school and tertiary education of *ex-futōkō* students was lower than the general population in the same generation, and *ex-futōkō* students were more likely to experience ‘neither education nor work’ after *futōkō* (MEXT 2014). Among the participants of this research who experienced *futōkō* in junior high school, Mai, Tomohisa, and Rio, only Tomohisa entered high school but then soon quit. Later, Tomohisa and Rio took the high school equivalency test and entered university. Again, Tomohisa left university halfway through and now is working full time in the field of disability care. Rio graduated from university and entered graduate school, hoping to become a scholar. Mai did not go to school after *futōkō*, thinking that ‘I know I can learn things and meet interesting people without going to school’ (Sasaki 2015). She has experienced a few short-term jobs including her ‘dream job’ of writing articles. Although caution is needed when applying macro data to real people, it seems that the ‘career after *futōkō*’ of Mai, Tomohisa, and Rio is in relatively good condition as compared to the macro trend of *ex-futōkō* students.

However, it is more important to focus on the qualitative aspects. The participants’ narratives suggest that their *futōkō* experience should not necessarily be regarded as negative, as experienced by other *ex-futōkō* students (Yoneyama 1999). Rather, it might be a turning point where they rethink about a socially legitimate career path that they had thought was absolute until they did *futōkō*, ‘going to a good school and becoming employed by a famous company’, and set out to search for an alternative way of life. Moreover, in the process of their search, the *futōkō* experience itself helped them develop a new way. Rio, a PhD student, created his research question, ‘the significance of free school from the perspective of learner-centred theory’, based on his experience at free school, where he attended when he was *futōkō*. For Rio, the

futōkō experience became a precious resource of inspiration for his research. In the cases of Mai and Tomohisa, their *futōkō* experience led them to encounter Kōhei and other members of the Generative Garden [a youth supporting NPO]. At Generative Garden and the Z-meetings, she discussed her *ikizurasa* with insight and productively created her own narratives. Consequently, she was offered a writing job, which was her dream, from a newspaper editor [Jun'ichirō] who visited the Z-meetings. Tomohisa tried to rethink about his *futōkō* experience and participated in a '*futōkō*-related symposium, where he met a woman who gave him a supportive push to encounter new people. Thanks to her push, he finally got to know Generative Garden, where he said was where most of his relationships at the time of the interview were generated from. Although it was at times a severe experience, they found their *futōkō* as a key to address their problems and their lives changed as a result of earnestly engaging with this experience.

6.1.2 Hikikomori

While *futōkō* is understood as a problem of school children, *hikikomori* can be understood as a problem of adults in regard to their human relationships and career. In the interview, the term *hikikomori* was used by Mikio as the most suitable word to express his *ikizurasa*. As the son of a doctor, Mikio had been expected to excel academically since he was little. He had tried first, but burned out after noticing that his parents' expectations were out of his reach. When he entered university and started to live separately from his parents, he became *hikikomori*, shutting himself at home except for going out at night. During the *hikikomori* time, he reproached himself, not knowing how to call his own situation. In his late twenties when he started to search for his identity, he bumped into the term *hikikomori*, which he believed to be an effective way of explaining his situation (Onodera 2015). Mikio went to a self-help meeting for *hikikomori* people and enjoyed it. Later he started to organise one by himself.

Other participants have also experienced similar situations, even though they may not have used the term *hikikomori* as a key word to express their problem. The three *futōkō* individuals introduced in the previous section, Mai, Tomohisa, and Rio, commented how they spent most of their time neither going out nor communicating with others

after they became *futōkō*. Kōhei felt a vague sense of discomfort about school and work when he was eighteen, and was in ‘a situation which would now be called *hikikomori*’ (Yamashita 2010). Yoshinari [an ‘other participant’ who is a part-time high school teacher] also narrated that, in order to cut off relationships with ‘local rogues’ whom he used to hang out with, he mostly stayed at home without human relationships ‘other than going to a part-time job or cram school’ (Tokita 2015). Except for Yoshinari, whose reason for *hikikomori* was to avoid those local relationships, these interviewees did not have a clearly explainable reason for *hikikomori*.

Just like *futōkō*, the term *hikikomori* is also used when people feel pain for not going to school or work, and not having relationships with others, without ‘reasonable reasons’. Regarding this point, this term also seems to stand for the individually perceived, indefinable pain of *ikizurasa*.³⁴ For example, Mikio was in a painful situation but did not know where it came from or how to explain it to others. His condition did not appear ‘bad enough’ to explain the seriousness of *ikizurasa* in his subjective reality, as he was from a wealthy middle-class family, graduated from university, obtained an acupuncturist qualification, and had normal motivation toward work. Nevertheless, his life was challenged by set-backs, including unstable mental conditions, frequent frictions in human relationships, and a recurring cycle of ‘overwork’ and ‘burn-out’ in his attitude toward career. For Mikio, who was not even allowed to drop out from school----‘Until high school I would go to school just because I was scared of my mum. It was much better for me to be at school than at home’ (Onodera 2015)---- thus *hikikomori* was the best expression to represent the not easy-to-grasp hardship in his life.

It should be pointed out that the category of *hikikomori* was subjectively applied by the narrator who attempted to address his own problems. As defined in Chapter 1, this term signifies disconnectedness of a person from others and society in terms of both human relations and work. However, interestingly, Mikio positively applied this term in regard to connecting himself to others and society. He visited some self-help meeting groups for *hikikomori* people, and found them comfortable and meaningful, and pointed out that *hikikomori* individuals who often feel that they wasted their

³⁴ The definition of *hikikomori* includes ‘that does not seem to have another psychological problem as its principal source’ (Saitō 1998: 25), that is, except for cases that have a reasonable reason such as ‘illness’. See Chapter 1 for more details.

adolescence can make another try by spending fun time together in such a group. Further, Mikio believed that *hikikomori* individuals are 'able' and 'can generate value in this society' (Onodera 2015). *Hikikomori* experiences themselves can be painful and negative, but when this term is strategically used for sharing experiences with others who have similar experiences, it could be reinterpreted as something positive, enjoyable, and valuable, both for themselves and even for society.

Another noticeable point regarding *hikikomori* is that during their *hikikomori* time, the participants contemplated their connection to society as pain, which is often caused by self-reproach of a situation where one cannot be what they are expected to be. Mai remembered her *hikikomori* days as 'the hardest time' in her life, and narrated that the bashing mood toward NEET and *hikikomori* made her think she was not productive, and therefore not worthy of living (Sasaki 2015a). Similarly, Mikio blamed himself for his depression because of lacking motivation. On the other hand, there are cases in which people try to critically rethink about their society standard that partially values the 'legitimate career path' and disvalues other ways of life as 'illegitimate' or 'less productive'. Remembering his '*hikikomori*-like' time, Kōhei said, 'My previous set of values was eroded. I didn't know what I was studying for and was just reading novels' (Yamashita 2010). After this time, he entered university and belonged to a 'new-left coloured' student newspaper circle, through which he encountered *futōkō* individuals who 'led' his life thereafter. It seems that his contemplation of society and himself during the *hikikomori* time provided the foundation for his career of supporting people who have *ikizurasa*.

Throughout the examination above, *hikikomori* seems to throw critical questions to our society: What is a 'socially legitimate career'?; Why is it valuable?; Are there any other ways of living in this society?; and, most of all, What are 'social' and 'social participation'? These questions are naturally generated from the subjective realities of people who have experienced *hikikomori*, but can never be addressed in the field of job support where there is a firm assumption that 'the problem is solved when the user gets a job'. Under this assumption, those questions presented above tend to be regarded as something that could hamper a person from wanting to get a job, or even worse, an 'excuse for not seriously searching for a job'. However, those are such radical questions that shed light on the limitations of post-war Japan where the 'membership-

based system' (Chapter 2) prevailed and suggest a prospect for post-industrial situations where the 'socially legitimate career path' is being eroded.

6.1.3 Human relationships

From the examination above, *futōkō* and *hikikomori* can be understood, in the subjective realities of those who experience such situations, as a failure of smooth connection between an individual and society. This failure is experienced mainly in two phases: human relationships and career. In the following part, I will investigate, from interview data, how such difficulties with human relationships were experienced by the participants.

As a resource of *ikizurasa*, human relationships are especially emphasised by Tomohisa, Mikio, Wataru, and Yoshinari. Tomohisa became *futōkō* when he was in junior high school and spent his teenage years without communicating with young people his age. When asked by me about what specific aspect of school made him feel reluctant, he answered instantly, 'humans', expressing a sense of misfit in 'the atmosphere of boisterous young people jabbering away' (Hirako 2015). When he entered university, he tried hard to speak to new people, even went to *karaoke* with others though he did not really like it, but soon felt an unfillable gap between other students and himself, and gradually stopped going. In Mikio's case, his difficulty with human relationships was understood to have its roots in his problematic family where he was pressured to become an ideal son and was never cared about his own intentions or emotions. As a result, he could not develop a healthy self-esteem and 'did not know what a "natural human relationship" is' (Onodera 2015). For Wataru, it was his long-term victimhood of bullying that made it difficult to create stable friendships. He had been bullied throughout junior high and high school, and his self-esteem was especially damaged when he heard girls in his class talking about him, 'I don't like his gross looks' (Kondō 2015). Triggered by this, he started to feel his face was ugly and 'should be ranked at the bottom of the bottom' (Kondō 2015). Even after entering university where there was no bullying, his strong fear of being abandoned made him search for 'absolute' approval from a girlfriend and friends, resulting in break-up of the relationships. Yoshinari had been diagnosed with developmental disorder, and was also a victim of bullying at primary and junior high school. The bullying stopped when he attacked back

the student who bullied him, but this made him realise the effectiveness of violence and led him to hang out with local rogues.

For these participants, human relationships are not generated and do not flow 'naturally'. Instead, they try hard to create and keep them, or search for what is expected in a situation each time and pretend to fit in. This is difficult and not sustainable. Tomohisa narrated, 'The harder I tried, the more effort I felt I had wasted, until at last I threw it all out, breaking off all of relationships' (Hirako 2015). This awkwardness can be exacerbated by low self-esteem caused by abusive parents or bullying, and lack of relating experience in *futōkō/hikikomori* time. Other than Yoshinari, who felt that he could control human relationships by physical power, most participants came to realise that human relationships are out of their control however hard they try to manage them. This made it difficult for them to continue to try to have human relations. Tomohisa stopped going to university and came back to his 'familiar place', where 'I shut myself in my room reading books and walked round at nights without knowing where to go' (Hirako 2012). Wataru, too, cut off his university relationships and took a leave of absence. Mikio could not continue his job at times because of friction with human relationships and an unstable mental condition.

It should be noted that there is a socio-structural background that can generate and aggravate difficulties with human relationships. It has been argued that school communication becomes suffocating for children, by requiring them to give sensitive attention to the classroom atmosphere (Doi 2008), and ranking them informally according to their popularity, or 'communication ability' (Suzuki 2012). Doi points out that young people in a school classroom often form 'gentle relationships' [*yasashii kankei*] where they 'primarily try to avoid conflict' (Doi 2008: 8). In this relationship, they attentively observe the mood and reflect on their reactions in order not to hurt others, thus accelerating the careful attitude towards one another in a spiral. Students do not have the option of disengaging from communication because human relationships are almost the only resource for them to extract their self-worth from (Doi 2009: 9). In such a situation, students who can manage relationships well and lead the mood become popular, while those who cannot express themselves in harmony with the mood are labelled as 'not being able to read the situation' [*kūki yomenai*] and ranked lower in the 'classroom hierarchy' (Suzuki 2012, Yoneyama 2008). Considering such a background, Tomohisa tried painfully hard to become a part of the 'popular

group' while keeping a distance from 'people who seemed low-key or unfriendly' (Hirako 2012), and Wataru was forced to think that he 'should be ranked at the bottom of the bottom' (Kondō 2015). For Mai, the atmosphere of the school classroom, where students check their 'rank' in every aspect from test scores to personal belongings, was a reason for her *futōkō*.

Another important point to consider is that even if the participants have a certain awkwardness in relating to others, they can communicate with people in the 'right' place where they can feel safe without pretending to be like someone else. Tomohisa wrote, 'I came to Generative Garden and started to feel human relationships as something more natural, closer to me' (Hirako 2011). Different from previous relationships that were superficial and easily cut off, there he experienced deep and lasting relations. The relationships in Generative Garden were not always comfortable, but he never wanted to retreat from them. Tomohisa narrated, 'As I related closer and closer with other members, I naturally got involved in the chain of hurting them and being hurt by them....When I did *futōkō*, I just kept my distance from people or places I didn't like. But...this time, the annoying and suffocating relationships can save me at the same time.' (Hirako 2012). There, as he experienced complex, 'real' human relationships, his extreme 'black or white' image of relations gradually changed. Mikio visited a self-help group for *hikikomori* and found it relaxing because he did not have to conceal his unemployed status there. He said, 'To tell the truth, staying alone at home would be more relaxing, but having human relationships was really good' (Onodera 2015). For Mai, the relationships in Generative Garden were ones where she could address the meanings of *ikizurasa* that she had experienced in her previous life with other people who had also experienced hardships. When she first visited Generative Garden, she felt 'I can breathe naturally here' (Sasaki 2015a). It means that, in other places, such as school or work place, she had to try very hard to make herself fit into them, but in Generative Garden she could share her own feelings smoothly. There, the human relationships were not only ones in which she could hang out and spend a fun time with friends, but also ones in which she could investigate her *ikizurasa* and generate new meaning about life by talking with others. The effectiveness of narrative-based self-help groups will be discussed in 6.3.

6.1.4 Work and Future

Work was the other aspect where the narrators experienced failure in a smooth connection between society and themselves. What is characteristic about the interviewees' images of work is that they are strongly associated with typical successful careers in a 'membership-based system', in which graduating from [a good] school and then being employed by a [good] firm is looked at as a legitimate career. The concrete vocations the narrators referred to were salary-man, doctor, and teacher. It seems that they naturally have those images as a result of looking at their parents' work lives, taking on their parents' expectations, or just wanting to be viewed as 'successful'. Mikio was told to become a doctor as a doctor's first son and Tomohisa set his goal of becoming a doctor so that this prominent career could compensate for his 'negative' *futōkō* experience. Here, 'doctor' is imagined as a glorious representation of academic excellence, affluence, and high prestige, but not as a specialist job. In narratives, neither specific aspects of the doctors' job nor concrete images of a doctor's life were referred to for expressing their hope to become a doctor----the only practical vision was about how to enter a competitive medical school. In the cases of Rio, Wataru and Masaya [a 'freelance illustrator' who cuts his wrist], the ideal career path of their parents' expectation was a salary-man in a big firm, which is also prestigious but usually more attainable than a doctor. A salary-man is a symbolic figure of a 'legitimate and stable' career, though individuals usually do not know what specific job they would be assigned to. Later, Rio wanted to become a teacher when he graduated from free school and took a teacher-training course at university. However, his reason for such a hope was not based on the teachers' job itself, but rather its employment and income security. For Rio, who was twenty-four years old when he entered university, there was little hope of being employed as a new graduate by a company. A teacher, on the other hand, is a qualified job that is less susceptible to the 'CV with blank period'. Although Rio did not like schools, 'it was much better than becoming a *freeter*' (Yamamoto 2015). All in all, they imagined work as something through which their career would be recognised as successful or decent, rather than as a specific job they would be engaged in.

Such an abstract but obsessive job image sometimes evokes a vague fear of work. Looking at her father, a salary-man who left home early in the morning and came home

late at night, Mai started to think of workers as machine-like beings and work as something to fear. She thought she could not 'pretend to be a machine', therefore could not work, and reproached herself as 'less productive'. It was an abstract fear that was not based on her own concrete experiences, so she did not know how to overcome it. Even after she experienced a few part-time jobs that she soon quit, including sorting New Year greeting cards at a post office and cleaning a food court in a shopping centre, she did not know what specific problem hampered her from continuing to work.

It was after encountering Generative Garden and the Z-meetings that Mai was able to reconstruct a rigid work image and sort out the practical reasons why she could not continue those jobs. In talking with people at Generative Garden, Mai realised that the cleaning job at a shopping centre was just unsuitable for her: she had trouble 'processing information by listening' and the noise in the shopping centre further aggravated this tendency. Sorting New Year cards in the post office was better, but she still felt an ambiguous reluctance toward the action of 'working' in general. This second time, as a result of being helped by other members of Generative Garden, she could complete the job term working for the post office. This episode suggests that people who are in a long-term unemployment situation and have fears or anxieties about working can step out toward work by clarifying their problems and sharing those in a receptive relationship. In other words, whether a person can work or not depends not only on his/her individual ability, but also on the quality of relationships where he/she is situated. The significance of relationships in job searching will be examined in another section in this chapter (6.3).

In regard to employment status, most of the jobs the interviewees had experienced were unstable, or their mental condition did not allow them to work on a long-term basis. As such, Mai has worked at the post office and a shopping centre as a cleaner, and wrote essays for a newspaper, all of which were temporary jobs. Masaya goes to a job support centre where he seeks art-related jobs and calls himself a 'freelance illustrator', but job offers do not come regularly and the income is not enough to support himself. Mikio has experienced unloading carriages from trucks, private tutoring, massage, and website building. Massage and website building could have been regular jobs, but it was difficult for him to continue working with his poor mental condition. Yoshinari worked for a high school as an English teacher, but his employment

status was non-regular, which means that he would not know if he could be employed next year before his contract was renewed every year.

Among them, Kōsuke and Tomohisa were working regularly as care workers at the time of the interview. As regular workers, their narratives regarding work included concrete episodes and details. Kōsuke touched on the conflict between his own thoughts on what care workers do and what he is told to do. He wrote, 'I was told...that the goal of this job is...to help them to "stay happy and cheerful" in their everyday life. But I am not sure.... Healthy individuals do not necessarily stay happy and cheerful every day, do they? ... I think it is important for users to be able to live with stability and reliance even if they have emotional disturbance or depression that is unavoidable' (Noguchi 2015c). It seemed that as a professional, Kōsuke tried to learn from his experiences on the ground and develop his own attitude toward his job. The working experience also enabled him to rethink about his father as a man who worked hard for his family. 'I could never work like my father, not complaining, not resisting but just getting along with his boss for the sake of his family', he wrote (Noguchi 2012), and this realisation gradually changed the relationship between him and his father in a positive way. Tomohisa also narrated that it is a hard job and he is a mediocre worker at best, but it is emotionally rewarding and he does not think of changing it.³⁵

A key point here is that Kōsuke and Tomohisa started working as noted above after being connected to Generative Garden. Kōsuke was able to work full time after relating himself to members of Generative Garden and recovering his mental health. In Tomohisa's case, it was Kōsuke who introduced the job to him. Disability care was not Tomohisa's original goal, but he seemed quite happy with a career that was accidentally held out in front of him.

Working experiences are not reduced to paid work. Wataru, Mikio and Yoshinari were engaged in volunteer work. Wataru started helping *futōkō* children study when he entered university and still continues to do so when his mental condition allows. Mikio organises a place for *hikikomori* people to get together, both for himself and other

³⁵ It should be noted that care work is a field that has a shortage of workers and the qualification is relatively easy to obtain, but the wages are low. According to a recent Income Survey (MHLW 2015), the monthly income of care workers [*kaigo-fukushi-shi*] falls in a range between about JP¥ 150 thousand and 268 thousand, while annual income is between JP¥ 2.7 hundred thousand and 4 hundred thousand, which is higher than *freeters* but lower than average. The duration of service is estimated at 5.7 years on average, which suggests that this type of work is not easy to maintain.

people. Yoshinari used to provide learning support for children with developmental disorders, from which he also suffered. Although they do not get paid, through those activities they are able to put their past experiences to practical use and the activities can be the basis on which they connect themselves to society.

Two older participants, Kōhei and Jun'ichirō, are working, but not as ordinary salary-men. Supporting themselves as a youth supporter in NPO and an editor of a new-leftist newspaper, both of them have carried a critical view of society and have never tried to follow the 'typical success model' in their career. In regard to this point, they could be career models for young participants whose image of work is mostly limited to 'be employed by a decent company after graduating from university'.

Another type of job the interviewees narrated about was their 'dream job'. Mai said that writing was her 'dream job' and was very pleased when she was asked by Jun'ichirō to write an essay about her *ikizurasa* experiences for the newspaper. It was not only exciting but also challenging, because she needed to thoroughly reflect on herself, though she finally thought it worth the struggle. Rio thought conducting research about *futōkō* and *free-school* was suitable for him, and he hoped to become an academic. Although it is unsure if he can secure a tenured position at a university someday, he decided to keep himself in the track. Masaya was working at a job support centre as a 'freelance illustrator' when there was a job. He was happy about the job, but at the same time, he realised that it would be difficult to support himself by this job. Yoshinari hoped to start a business, 'Plan & Action School', that aims at helping and inspiring high school students to 'find what they really want'. His plan was to support himself by doing this business while giving people 'hope'. Those jobs were found outside the 'legitimate career path' and regarded as what they could personally extract positive meanings from.

It is important to be aware of the fact that, originally, their image of work was strictly limited to the salary-man model, as I discussed at the beginning of this section. When the participants were in adolescence, most of them were not allowed to follow their own dream as a career. It could result in a situation where they feel an ambiguous but deep-rooted fear of work, suffer from low self-esteem, and hamper themselves from further trials toward obtaining a job. However, holding a dream job, on the other hand, brings hope and excitement into their career plans. It helps them reflect on how their

image of work was restricted to the salary-man model and encourages them to search for an alternative career option. For example, Mai enjoyed doing the writing job, but still thought she was 'afraid of work itself'. When the inconsistency was pointed out by the researcher, '[Do you still think so?] You know there is a variety of ways of working', Mai replied, 'Yes, I admit I'm using the term "work" in a very limited way' (Sasaki 2015a). Here, her existing image of work was dislocated by the new experience of an 'enjoyable job' where she could actualise her talent. Such an experience enhances Mai's self-esteem and provides relief from an extreme way of thinking about work ['Working is all good, not working is all bad']. Moreover, Mai's case shows that work experiences, even if the job does not earn a living, can develop a sense of connectedness to society in marginalised people. After completing the writing job, Mai wrote, 'From my position, from my point of view, I want to relate and connect what I write to things that many people can share in their lives. I think there I might be able to touch "society". I am a part of this society and live in this world, even though I sometimes cannot fit into it' (Sasaki 2015b). Here, her horizon was broadened through her work experience and she came to be aware that she was included in society in spite of her feelings of alienation. Therefore, it might be meaningless to criticise these dream jobs as unrealistic or unreliable. Even if they would not be able to support themselves, the dream jobs could enhance their confidence and trust in society, and as a result, become a foundation on which they make another try for a new job.

Then, how do those work-related experiences affect or not affect their images of a future career? Relatively clear future plans were narrated by Rio and Yoshinari. Rio is studying for his PhD at a national university, and will continue his research on *futōkō* and free school toward becoming a scholar. He knows it will be a long road to gain tenure at a university, but is on the path nevertheless. Yoshinari plans to establish a career consulting service for high school students called a 'plan & action school' where he can give people 'hope' while supporting himself. He energetically narrated his plan in detail and practically prepares for it by earning money teaching part-time at a high school, but he did not refer to the risks involved.

Other interviewees did not present a concrete vision about their future plans. Mai vaguely hopes that she can live independently someday, but her image of an 'independent life' was unclear. Wataru's dream is to 'become an able worker and make a decent amount of money', but he thinks he could only work slowly at best, because

if he works hard he will burst himself. Masaya likes the idea of having his own family, but he does not feel like stepping out to make it happen because, as a Christian, he thinks 'I can do it someday if I am allowed by God' (Endō: 2015). Mikio was not searching for a job at the time of the interview and narrated that he had 'decided to live as long as he is allowed' (Onodera 2015). He hopes he will find some ways for *hikikomori* people, including himself, to connect themselves to society by using their particular experiences.

It might seem immature and careless that most interviewees did not have a clear image of their future. However, such an attitude can be based on their past experiences in which careful planning did not make their lives good. They spent their teenage years studying in order to become 'a salary-man in a big firm' (Rio, Wataru, Masaya) or 'a doctor' (Tomohisa, Mikio), distracting themselves from happiness at that moment, but were not successful. From those experiences, they have learned that individual effort to achieve the ready-set goal is not always the answer. Instead, some of them came to realise what accidentally happens beyond their intention could be more important. For example, Tomohisa said, 'All my life, my intentional effort has always ended in failure. The good things, such as my work and Generative Garden relationships, came to me when I surrendered to the flow of life' (Hirako 2015). Similarly, Kōsuke narrated, 'Everything I planned for previously turned out to be a failure. [...] Rather it seems to go well when I do not think too much' (Noguchi 2015a). Here, what moved them to the next step were the incidental encounters and relationships with people that brought new opportunities in life to them. Therefore, the attitude of not setting a clear goal should not be regarded as only an expression of their immaturity or carelessness. The significance of this 'aimlessness' will be further discussed in another section (6.3.2).

6.1.5. Violence: Family Pressure and Bullying

In the background of the interviewees' *ikizurasa*, including the topics of *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, human relationships, and work, there is a dark shadow of violence involving their family and/or school. Their experiences of victimhood at home as well as at school are analysed in the following section.

Experiences with family violence were narrated by Kōsuke, Rio, Mikio, Masaya, and Wataru. In Kōsuke's case, his father often got drunk and acted violently toward him, while being somewhat affectionate toward his sister. His mother tried to stop his father, but could not. 'It made me feel despair and my emotions gradually dried up', he wrote (Noguchi 2012b). In the other cases, parents, especially mothers, forced them to become an 'ideal adult', which was typically imagined as graduating from a prestigious school and getting a well-paying job. It might have been 'becoming an able doctor' [Mikio's case], 'entering a prestigious national university' [Wataru's case], or just a vague image of 'going to a good school and becoming a salary-man at a famous company' [Rio and Masaya's cases]. Mothers withdrew their love when their children did not behave as expected and prioritised pushing them towards the ideal career path over accepting them as they are. For example, when Masaya expressed his will of specialising in art, Masaya's mother threw his paints and related materials out the window, expressing her feeling that her son was going to 'ruin her plan'. Rio's mother was excessively dedicated herself to her son's education at a neurotically thorough level. Mikio's mother forced him to study hard to become a doctor when he was a child and ordered him to take care of his grandmother after he became an adult regardless of his own intention. Under such a family condition, his self-esteem was so damaged that he thought 'I don't deserve to be employed by any company' (Onodera 2015). Wataru's education devoted parents got angry when he started to have difficulty going to high school and never cared about his emotions. Wataru narrated, 'Now [at the time of the interview] I know they will never understand me. I've been disappointed at them too much to have any hope for their acceptance or help' (Kondō 2015). Considering the above, in most cases, mothers seemed to think that they did this for their child's own good. However, from the perspective of the child, such an attitude severely shakes the basis of their self-esteem. During their childhood, they unconsciously learned that they could only be accepted when their performance was satisfactory.

Nevertheless, it is not easy for the children to realise that their parents' high expectations are problematic. It was not until he entered junior high school that Rio realised 'there was no reason to endure being hit by mother' (Yamamoto 2015). Mikio was surprised to know that his friend had aimed at becoming a doctor not based on his parents' but his own intention, and became aware of the abnormality of his own situation where he was forced to become a doctor 'in exchange for good care at home'

(Onodera 2015). He tried hard not to dwell on his troubled relationship with his family, but could not help being affected by it and gradually started to suffer from various mental instabilities.

Regarding family background, most interviewees who narrated about family problems are from the middle class. All the fathers are primary bread-winners: a salary-man (Kōsuke's and Wataru's fathers), a doctor (Mikio's father), an architect (Rio's father), and a restaurant owner (Masaya's father). The mothers are each housewives except for Masaya's mother, who works for a university as a part-time lecturer, and Rio's mother, who is a chemist. As a whole, they are typical Japanese middle class families where fathers devote themselves to supporting the family, while mothers are responsible for caring for the children and/or other family members who need care even if they have their own vocation. Fathers tend to be less involved in child rearing, mainly because of working long hours.

Under this tradition of sexual division of labour, mothers are exposed to feeling pressure that their children's educational attainment is a measure of their performance as a 'good mother'. For example, Mikio's mother, as the wife of a doctor, was afraid of being blamed by relatives if her children were not academically excellent enough to follow their father's profession. In another occasion, Rio wrote of his mother, 'Mum was always at home before I came home. She asked me about homework and what happened at school, and helped me do homework sitting next to me.... She was like an "ideal family figure"' (Yamamoto 2012). Such an 'ideal' mother, however, can thwart their child's healthy development when the ideal is forced on their child against their will.

This problem, that mothers who take control of child rearing suffocate their children,³⁶ is neither a newly emerged phenomenon nor a 'private' problem of extreme cases. As

³⁶ Furushō and Isozaki (2015) suggest that it is best to understand such parental attitudes as 'educational abuse'. Furushō defines educational abuse as 'direct or indirect detrimental actions to children from adults who instruct them in person' and argues that this includes cases where adults intend to do good for the children but consequently children suffer from severe affliction or mental pressure (Furushō and Isozaki 2015: 46). Further, Furushō points out that while educational neglect has its roots in poverty or comes from less educated parents who place less value on education, 'educational abuse is more seen in apparently more wealthy families from the middle class' (44). This seems to explain the above experiences quite well. However, Furushō's analysis mainly focuses on problems of each individual parent, and lacks a structural/historical perspective.

described in Chapter 2, family plays an essential role in ‘family-corporation based life security’ (Miyamoto, Ito Peng et al. 2003), which has been a vehicle of economic growth in Japanese society. There, women have been expected to shoulder the responsibilities for care and education, while their husbands dedicate themselves to work. Against this background, since the high economic growth era, mothers who stay at home and force their children to study have been critically referred to as ‘education mums [*kyōiku mama*]’. The mothers presented in this section seem to be a contemporary version of such an ‘education mum’.³⁷

However, the historical background is different in the present post-industrial context. Although post-industrial ‘education mums’ in twenty-first century Japan still believe in the ‘good life’ of going to a prestigious school and becoming ‘a salary-man’, the transitional system from school to work is not as reliable as in the past (See Chapter 2). Children of education mums in the 1970s would be rewarded by a ‘good life’ with long-term employment and income security. However, children in the 1990s or after who are exposed to more risk may not gain a fair return even if they endure the suffocating education pressure.

Moreover, what makes the problem serious is that, in post-industrial Japan, family is becoming more and more the ‘last resort’ for children to rely on, as there are fewer relationships available in the local community or through kinship. For example, Jun’ichirō, a man in his fifties, told how he hated his father because he sometimes became violent and oppressive toward his mother. His father was a serious salary-man, who wanted his son to become like himself. However, 40-50 years ago, when Jun’ichirō was growing up, there were other adult role models around him, such as his hair-dresser grandfather who never put work at the centre of his life and ‘was always playing and having fun’, or the ‘strange middle-aged relative’ who never worked but was accepted by the community (Saeki 2015). In relating himself with these people, he felt ‘Everyone might think he is okay and this is a way of life’ (Saeki 2015). Among his human relationships, his oppressive father did not hold a dominant position. As a result, Jun’ichirō never experienced damage to his self-esteem and remained a positive attitude toward his non-salary-man life----‘Anyway, I’ll be able to get by somehow’

³⁷ Similar types of mothers in China are referred to as ‘tiger mothers’, who make their children work hard for an excellent future and, for this purpose, override the child’s own preferences and disvalue their self-esteem (Chua 2011).

(Saeki 2015). In this regard, the problem seems to lie in the decline of other relationships that surrounded family rather than family dysfunction itself.

Another power-dominant human relationship other than family that was narrated was bullying. Bullying is one of the most difficult topics to narrate because it can fatally damage the victim's self-esteem. Among the 10 narrators, people who spoke clearly about bullying were Yoshinari, who was bullied at primary and junior high school, and Wataru, who was bullied at junior high and high school. Yoshinari was diagnosed with developmental disorder and became a target of bullying. 'Bullying included severe violence, and sometimes I even felt I might be killed at school', he narrated (Tokita 2015). With his self-esteem deeply hurt, Yoshinari attempted suicide by hanging his neck on a wire at home. In another occasion, Wataru said, 'About my school life, I only have painful memories' (Kondō 2015). Students insulted him and laughed at him, causing him to feel enraged. Unfortunately, his parents did not take his claims of bullying seriously and Wataru's self-worth was severely damaged. Although bullying was not one of the prominent factors reported by the participants of the Z-meetings, it has left a long-lasting trauma to those affected³⁸.

It has been argued that bullying damages the victim's self-esteem at a deep level and reported that such victims are more likely to suffer from mental diseases in their life thereafter (Takizawa et.al 2014). Saitō (2002) argues that these victims are characterised by a high level of aggressiveness in general and strong doubt in humans imprinted by severe victimhood, which may reach the level of post-traumatic stress disorder and could even induce suicide (pp.191). Amamiya, who was bullied at junior high school, wrote, 'Those who have been bullied cannot trust people because the bullying relationship becomes the prototype of their way of relating to others. So the experience of being bullied affects our life for as long as we live' (Amamiya 2008b: 66).

³⁸ For example, a woman in her late twenties, who has participated in the Z-meetings but was not an interviewee for this research, told me of her experience of being bullied in junior high school. Because of this experience, she was forced to think of her value as at the 'bottom of the hierarchy' in the classroom and she could not be free from this perception even after graduation. In order to recover her damaged self-esteem, she tried to make herself sexually attractive to men, even though this sometimes got her involved in an undesirable sexual relationship and was self-harming. Another example is the case of a man in his mid-thirties who had been bullied for a long time from primary school to junior high school. He asked his parents for help, but they did not protect him and even blamed him for not fighting back. Twenty years after the experience, he is still suffering from mental instability, which makes it difficult for him to trust others.

Those experiences of being exposed to violence can induce new violence as a reaction. In the cases of Kōsuke, Wataru, Rio and Yoshinari, it is clear that their violent actions and impulses, such as battering their mother or wanting to kill their father, emerged as a reaction against their previous victimhood. In the cases of Masaya, Wataru and Yoshinari, the violent impulse is directed toward oneself and becomes self-harm, including wrist cutting, overdosing and even attempted suicide. Wataru and Yoshinari even attempted suicide.

These acts of violence and self-harm seem to have happened when they could not articulate their angst in words, but wanted to somehow express their pain. When they were disconnected from others and alone with a vague sense of angst, they could not clarify where the angst was from or what situation they really wanted to be in. Thus, if something they could not bear happened, they could not call for help by articulating their problem. Instead, they burst into violence toward others or themselves.

Another aspect of victimhood is that it damages the narrators' mental illness. Mental illness was narrated by Kōsuke [schizophrenia, violent impulse, *jikoshū kyōfu*/olfactory reference syndrome], Mikio [mood disorder, social anxiety disorder], Wataru [depression], Rio [depression] and Masaya [panic disorder, personality disorder], and each was raised in dysfunctional families involving violence, lack of approval and/or neurotically education-devoted attitudes.

In conclusion, violence, including child abuse and bullying, can seriously affect the victim's life afterward. Such violence can damage the victim's self-esteem, distort their recognition of the situation, and hamper them from making healthy relationships with others. Moreover, such power-dominant relationships can induce new violence as a reaction and cause various mental illnesses. Another important aspect is that the victims are too isolated to share their feelings with others, and thus can neither clarify their problems nor ask for help. As such, the victimhood of violence is one of the key backgrounds of *ikizurasa*.

6.1.6 The Z-Meetings

Participants' perceptions of the Z-meetings vary, though individuals with a higher level of participation valued them more. The core participants, Mai, Kōsuke, and Tomohisa,

believe that their encounter with Generative Garden has changed their life and that the Z-meetings have helped them clarify their *ikizurasa*. They have participated in the Z meetings since the start, leading the discussion on several occasions. Mai narrated, 'In the early days of participation... I felt that it was my fault that I felt *ikizurasa*. ...But as I listened to other people's projects in the Z-meetings... my perception changed. I could really feel it was not my own fault and... there would be many other people who feel the same pain' (Sasaki 2015a). For Mai, the Z-meetings are a place of investigation into her *ikizurasa* with help from other people. Kōsuke especially enjoyed the narrative sharing process. He wrote, 'I felt a warm affection for my own words that came out from the bottom of my heart. I felt that my words gained energy when others reacted positively toward them.... It also led me to listen to others and make comments on others' projects' (Noguchi 2015b). At the same time, he emphasised that he 'did not think very much' when he joined the Z-meetings but continued to attend just because they were fun (Noguchi 2015b). Tomohisa addressed his difficulty with human relationships. About the effect of the investigation in the Z-meetings, he narrated, 'I used to think, like, "I want you to understand me completely through my words", but such an obsession has quieted down' (Hirako 2015). Through real human interactions in the Z-meetings, Tomohisa learned to compromise in communication. He also said, 'Even if my words are not understood completely, some messages might have been sent to a person in front of me. Words are never enough to express myself, but anyway I need to make do with what I have' (Hirako 2015). For each of them, the Z-meetings played critical roles to mitigate their *ikizurasa*. Although it has not been washed away, they have come to grasp the pattern of their *ikizurasa* and understand how to deal with it through the narrative sharing process. As a result, some parts of their *ikizurasa* were reduced or qualitatively changed.

Such positive effects of the Z-meetings on the core participants are supported by their regular participation in Generative Garden. They encountered this youth supporting place during a hard time in their lives and felt comfortable there. Mai encountered Generative Garden when she was mostly shutting herself at home and soon found it to be a suitable place for her. Kōsuke visited Generative Garden when he was in the most difficult mental condition in his life, as he suffered from homicidal impulses toward his father. Kōhei remembered when he first talked to Kōsuke on a phone. 'Kōsuke suddenly said "I want to kill my dad [*oyaji o koroshitain'yakedo*]". So, I said, "Oh, okay,

why don't we meet and talk?" That was the first time' (Yamashita 2015). First, he did not know how to relate with others, but other members accepted him including his mental instability. Kōsuke narrated, 'I think I might have sometimes been rude and annoying to other people. I wonder how they could be so tolerant of me.... They even gave me some positive comments....It was good' (Noguchi 2015a). By relating himself with other members, his mental condition improved. Tomohisa, who had thought of human relationships as requiring special effort to sustain, found those Generative Garden 'natural and close' (Hirako 2015). As he became involved, Tomohisa moved to Osaka to live with Kōsuke and started to work for disability care centre that was introduced by him. From these core participants' stories, it should be noted that their effective narrative generation regarding the Z-meetings is deeply founded in the trustful relationships experienced in Generative Garden.

As 'occasional participants', Mikio, Rio, and Wataru are not regular members of Generative Garden, and have not participated in the Z-meetings for as long or deeply as the core participants. However, they have led some discussions through their Individual Report and enjoyed it. They understand the significance of the Z-meetings and have good impressions of them. Mikio chose the Z-meetings as a place to share his self-made autobiography. He felt pleased when other participants listened to him with care and interest. At the same time, he attends other *hikikomori* self-help meetings and remarked in the interview that, as compared with those, the Z-meetings centred on discussions and verbal communications that were sometimes difficult for him to keep up with. Rio believes that 'narrating things is important for life' and the Z-meetings are opportunities where people can do this (Yamamoto 2015). Wataru understands the Z-meetings as 'a place where people think about their own *ikizurasa* by narrating their experiences' and enjoys them (Kondō 2015). For him as a university student, participation in the Z-meetings was 'an encounter with another world', because he had not met and talked with many *futōkō* or *hikikomori* people previously. All in all, the 'occasional participants' have other places to go and connect themselves to others, but still find the Z-meetings meaningful.

'Other participants', Jun'ichirō, Masaya, and Yoshinari, have never participated in Generative Garden and their participation in the Z-meetings is limited, and their evaluations and understanding of the Z-meetings vary. Jun'ichirō first visited the Z-meetings for newspaper coverage. However, he not only gained information for

coverage but also positively participated in discussions. Jun'ichirō thinks that interactions in the Z-meetings help participants to understand both others and themselves, and the contents of the discussions are 'mostly reasonable' (Saeki 2015). On the other hand, Masaya and Yoshinari did not regard sharing narratives itself as so important, and thus had critical perspectives regarding the Z-meetings. Masaya said that although he enjoyed relating his story in front of other participants, the Z-meetings could provide 'only that'. It seemed to him that the participants 'irritate and nurse old wounds again and again, and are not going anywhere' (Endō 2015). From a similar perspective, Yoshinari looked critically at the Z-meetings as a place where participants 'just lick each other's wounds, charge negative energy, and go home' (Tokita 2015).

As such, the Z-meetings were perceived as effective by the 'core participants' and 'occasional participants', but some of the 'other participants' did not think of them as very meaningful. While Kōsuke thought of the narrative sharing process itself as meaningful, Masaya and Yoshinari questioned 'What is it for?' The narrative self-help approach is not necessarily effective for all cases of *ikizurasa*. Then, to whom is this approach especially needed, and with what mechanism can it be effective in practice? These points will be further examined in 6.3.

6.1.7 Gender and Sexuality: What has not been Narrated

In the previous analysis, I have focused on what has been narrated at the Z-meetings. Because the Z-meetings focus on various feelings of *ikizurasa*, narratives cover various topics, including *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, abusive parents and/or mental illness. However, there are topics that are seldom narrated, but are important when *ikizurasa* is considered. Gender and sexuality are examples of these topics. One reason for the scarcity of gender and sexuality narratives is related to the fact that there have been fewer women attending since the meetings started, thus fewer narratives of gender and sexuality from women's perspectives have been given. Men usually comprise about 80% or more of the attenders, and it was often heard during field work that this also applies to other *hikikomori* self-help groups. This is also reflected in the gender imbalance of the interviewees in this research. What I have observed is that with this male dominance, female attenders tend to avoid talking about their experiences involving gender and sexuality, or, if they feel the need, they talk in a figurative way

that most other participants would not recognise. To change this situation, gender separated meetings were suggested by a female attender and held a few times (See Chapter 4). This worked to some extent and stories that could not be narrated in the regular meetings were shared. However, the situation where they cannot talk in the mixed meetings continues.

In the interviews, the only female narrator, Mai, did not talk very much about her gender or sexuality. The only thing she offered was a narrative of aversion: she does not imagine living with a boyfriend or husband in the future, and her ideal life is co-habitation with somebody in a non-sexual relationship, just like Matthew and Marilla in 'Anne of Green Gables'. As a daughter who lives with her parents, Mai vaguely thought about the future in which she would care for her aged parents. However, it was just an abstract image based on the norm of gender roles. In reality, her housewife mother takes all the responsibilities of housework and she did not know even 'how to use the washing machine' (Sasaki 2015a).

Men's narratives on gender and sexuality were heard more often, both in the Z-meetings and interviews, but were still not common. One type of men's gender narrative is an image of a girl who shares the narrator's *ikizurasa* experiences and accepts him as a partner. For example, Wataru said that he was so dependent on his girlfriend in his mal mental condition that he wanted her to accept everything about him. The girlfriend grew tired of trying hard to support his self-esteem and finally left him. Wataru's case is rather typical for male participants, who think they did not experience being loved enough by their mother and try to compensate for it with a perfect girlfriend.

Another type of men's gender narrative is regarding their becoming a successful male breadwinner model, which is often imagined as the only way to become a part of society. Hopes of becoming a money-making salary-man or doctor, which have been often narrated, can be understood as a desire for an independent, respectable man who can support his wife and children. Even after they came to understand that this imprinted model can cause distress for themselves, their underlying sense of inferiority would not easily vanish. The point is that this distress involving manhood is not based on real experiences, such as work or marriage, and therefore remains at an abstract level. When Jun'ichirō suggested discussing masculinity for rethinking their *ikizurasa*,

younger participants could not find much to say about it in their real life. Overall, their pain is not directly involved in difficulties regarding their gender or sexuality experiences, but in 'not being able to experience real difficulties' around these topics.

I have so far examined individual feelings of *ikizurasa* expressed in personal stories. The interviewees' *ikizurasa* came from: *futōkō*; *hikikomori*; difficult human relationships; unstable work; abusive family; bullying; mental illness; and/or masculinity pressure. Each individual narrative is unique, but there are underlying commonalities that characterise the contemporary angst of *ikizurasa*. Then, what are the characteristics of *ikizurasa* in post-industrial Japan? In the following section, I will investigate this question from a structural perspective.

6-2. *Ikizurasa* in Post-Industrial Japan

6.2.1 Indefinable *Ikizurasa*

Based on the narrative data and analysis of them, I argue that *ikizurasa*, as an expression of youth marginalisation in post-industrial Japan, can be characterised by its 'ambiguity'. Focusing on intra-personal feelings of angst, the word *ikizurasa* can refer to any kind of hardship that is held in subjective reality, including mental illness, *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, human relationships, and/or gender-related discomfort. As indicated in Chapter 2, this word first emerged in The Asahi Shimbun newspaper in 1994, when Japanese society was entering into the post-industrial phase. It seems that the word *ikizurasa* presents a new manifestation of marginalisation in a post-industrial society, where people become marginalised in different, fragmented, and individualised ways. There, situations or attributes that might have contributed to an individual becoming marginalised, such as being a woman or having experienced *futōkō*, can neither form a common difficulty nor develop collective identities, and thus, fails to form a basis for collective actions to be taken.

In this sense, *ikizurasa* is very different from *futōkō*, for example, in the 1980s that was strongly associated with an unsuccessful future for children and failure in parenting. *Futōkō* parents therefore felt the need to take collective action in order to appeal their cause. However, as the number of support vehicles and greater diversity in career

options became available for *futōkō* children, *futōkō* became something that could be overcome by individual choice and effort. While this decreased the social bashing of *futōkō* children and their parents, there appeared a greater expectation for each individual child and their parents to overcome their problems by themselves, instead of calling for collective action. Individuals around them would no longer reproach them for doing *futōkō*, but the opportunity for sharing their *ikizurasa* became harder to find. In this situation, *futōkō* can generate more ambiguous angst in those who have experienced it. Throughout my field work, I often heard the expressions of ‘hardly-visible [*mienikui*] *ikizurasa*’ or ‘unexplainable [*wakarinikui*] *ikizurasa*’ in the context where the participants tried to share their experiences. Related to this, it is sometimes stated in the Z-meetings that the *futōkō* phenomenon was part of a historical change from ‘era of acute pain [*gekitsū-jidai*]’ to ‘era of dull ache [*dontsū-jidai*]’. ‘Era of acute pain’ corresponds to the time from about the 1980s or before to the mid-1990s, and ‘era of dull ache’ is the time after that. While ‘acute pain’ is severe but more recognisable, ‘dull ache’ is less recognisable both for the *futōkō* person and others around them. As a result, such a ‘dull ache’ tends to be left neglected, and become chronic and complex. Under these circumstances, there is no guarantee that *futōkō* individuals are experiencing a shared problem for which they can develop collective actions.

Is there, then, a possibility to deal with this ambiguous *ikizurasa* collectively? Examining social movements in the globalising process, Kevin McDonald (2004) argues that the grammar of movements transforms from ‘oneself as a part of “we”’ to ‘oneself as another’, specifically in examination of cases of the *qigong* movement in China and anti-globalisation movements in Europe, North America and Australia. He points out the impasse of the ‘strong continuity thesis’, which is based upon the effectiveness of collective identity, and regards individuals as ‘serviceable agents’ for the collective. Instead, in the cases he analyses, McDonald illuminates that actors experience new encounters with a ‘concrete and personal other’. He expressed it as follows:

Rather, the grammar of this experience is one that involves an experience of the self and the other, space and temporality, that is neither one of fusion, nor separation, but a mode of subjectivity that is constructed around experiences of ambiguity and the ‘in-between’. (McDonald 2004: 587)

Based on the indication by Pierre Rasanvallon (1998) of a shift from ‘movements of identification’ to ‘movements of expression’, McDonald demonstrates the transformation from ‘social movements’ to ‘experience movements’, which are new types of movements in which new social relationships and new meanings are generated instead of merely representing an existing group of people.

I argue that what is happening in the Z-meetings can be understood as one form of experience movement. In the Z-meetings as well, each individual self is seen to be unique in his/her *ikizurasa* and the attitude toward it, and it is difficult to reduce this to a part of ‘we-ness’. It should be remembered here that Wataru---an ‘occasional participant’ who is a university student--- felt ‘unease’ about having an affiliation, thinking that ‘my pain is silly and small as compared to that of others [who are more deprived]’ (Kondō 2015). This ‘unease’ was generated because Wataru thought of himself different from others and believed that the difference should be reduced in order to be included in their ‘we-ness’. However, Kōhei told Wataru that ‘It doesn’t matter, this is a place to talk about your own *ikizurasa*’ (Kondō 2015). Here, it is advised that there is no such kind of ‘we-ness’ there and being a part of ‘we’ is not a condition of a new encounter with others. Instead, a new form of connection seems to be suggested---the connection between a person who has similar pain, or ‘another as oneself’, and ‘oneself as another’. Being told this, Wataru felt accepted.

Further, in the Z-meetings, attenders generated new meanings of key concepts including *ikizurasa*. For example, Mai used to think of *ikizurasa* as negative, as she narrated ‘It was my fault that I felt *ikizurasa*’, but after her five-year participation in the Z-meetings, she came to think of it as what connects herself with others or society. She narrated, ‘I am okay with *ikizurasa*’, and ‘It was not my fault. There is something structural in my pain. In such a problematic structure, there would be many other people who feel the same pain’ (Sasaki 2015). Here, *ikizurasa* is given a new meaning as a ‘window’ from which ‘another as oneself’ and ‘oneself as another’ can look into the same scenery. Also, I, as a coordinator of the Z-meetings, described this new type of connectedness that is developed through *ikizurasa* in an essay, which was published as a part of ‘the Z-meetings Report vol.2’ (2013)³⁹.

³⁹ Since I wrote this as a coordinator and a participant of the Z-meetings, but not as a researcher, I have analysed it as a part of the field data here.

As a coordinator, I suggest to 'utilise' *ikizurasa*, instead of removing it.... To change perspectives, *ikizurasa* can be our common heritage and a proof of how we are 'rich' and 'full' in our lives even in hardships. It is a waste to throw this affluence away.

First of all, we found each other because of our *ikizurasa*. *Ikizurasa* connect people together. Moreover, it is an endless resource of curiosity toward people and society, implying that they are asking such questions as 'Who am I?' and/or 'What is this society like?' It is also a source of not-too-small energy to maintain the Z-meetings, which provide neither money nor career experiences....Of course, we must hold in mind that there are structural problems to be tackled which generate hardships in young people's lives. However, we can still have hope in the fact that the reaction from youth toward such structural problems takes the form of *ikizurasa*, because they try to question, earnestly in a constructive manner, who they are and what the society is, instead of giving in to despair to damage themselves and society (Kido 2013).

Here, it is emphasised that in the Z-meetings, a new social relationship is generated and the meaning of *ikizurasa* is positively reinterpreted. With this generation of a new social value, the practice in the Z-meetings can be regarded as a form of expression movement.

6.2.2 Double Bind

As is stated above, *ikizurasa* is an ambiguous expression that does not have a clear-cut contour, but rather can refer to a broad range of intra-personal feelings of angst. The term emerged in the Asahi Shinbun newspaper in the mid-1990s and came to be in more frequent use during the 2000s. With this in mind, I argue in this section that there is a 'double-bind situation'. As shown in Chapter 2, the double bind refers to the situation where Japanese youth are caught by the contradiction between industrial and post-industrial values (Toivonen, Norasakkunkit et al. 2011). There, they cannot enjoy either the post-industrial fruit of 'freedom' or the industrial fruit of 'stability'. Rather, they suffer from both the post-industrial disadvantage of 'unpredictability in the future' and the industrial disadvantage of a 'narrowly set socially-legitimate career path'.

This is supported by interview data shown in the previous chapter. The interviewees were often under pressure and made efforts to become 'successful' in terms of industrial values, which define 'success' as academic excellence and becoming a salary-

man in a big firm. However, in reality, such school-to-work transition has become dysfunctional and there are fewer possibilities for them to be rewarded for this effort. A typical story in the case reports was that their family wanted them to become a stable salary-man [Wataru, Rio, Masaya] or an able doctor [Mikio], and at one stage they took this as their own aim, but they could not follow through and, as a consequence, their self-esteem was ruined. On the other hand, post-industrial values emphasise finding one's own way through diversifying career paths by utilising one's communication skills and individual 'charm'. It was also hard for the participants to follow this.

Honda Yuki (2005b) defines 'industrial abilities' and 'post-industrial abilities' in contrast. While industrial abilities are characterised by standardisation, adaptability and/or conformity, post-industrial abilities involve diversity, creativity, subjectivity and/or ability to construct a human network (Honda 2005b: 22). Honda argues that, as Japanese society enters into the post-industrial phase, post-industrial abilities are more emphasised for young people than industrial abilities. In reality, however, the interview data revealed that post-industrial abilities are not required 'in place of' industrial abilities, but 'on the top of' them. Moreover, post-industrial abilities sometimes contradict with industrial abilities. For example, in the cases of Mikio, Rio, and Masaya, their parents obsessively required them to acquire industrial values [standardised life-course], and they tried to follow and did achieve this notion at the outset, but could not carry it through. In this process, they were forced to feel that they would not be worth being loved if they failed to meet the parents' expectation----for example, Mikio studied hard at school 'in exchange for good care at home'----and this severely deprived him of self-esteem. As a result, the development of post-industrial abilities [subjectivity, creating a human network] was disturbed. Under such circumstances, people feel pain in their life, but cannot clarify what makes them feel that pain. They are likely to be left with such questions as 'Is it because I failed to achieve the standardised life-course? Or, is it because I sacrificed my subjectivity or free will? What is the problem? What should I do?' They can neither rely on the post-industrial value nor the industrial value. In order to express their pain in such an ambiguous situation, the term *ikizurasa* is convenient.

This indefinability of the problem again highlights the difference from the *futōkō* movement. As stated in Chapter 2, in the *futōkō* movement discourse, *futōkō* was referred to as 'a way of life that children choose', and the problem was defined as

‘school faith that hampers children from choosing *futōkō* life’. This is well embodied in the case of Nakazawa Jun, one of the most successful figures of ex- *futōkō* individuals. As introduced in Chapter 2, Jun was energetic and full of curiosity, and spent his teenage years traveling around the world, then was employed without an academic credential by a famous travel agency that valued his unique experience and ability. The message from this case is clear and simple: ‘Reject the uniformity in life-course, and create a unique career by one’s own ability and resourcefulness’. In other words, in the *futōkō* movement discourse, post-industrial values, such as diversity and uniqueness, were looked at as ‘hope’, while industrial values, such as pressure of conformity, were regarded as what should be overcome. However, this research has revealed that a new type of ambiguous pain----*ikizurasa*----has emerged under the predominance of post-industrial values.

6.2.3. Dedifferentiation

Another aspect of the indefinable *ikizurasa* is that it can make the boundaries between supporter, the supported, and researcher blurred. For example, in the interviews, there are individuals who used to be recipients of support who later became supporters or researchers. Mikio, as a man who experienced *hikikomori*, joined existing *hikikomori* support groups and decided to create one by himself as a coordinator. Similarly, Yoshinari, who has developmental disorder and was a victim of bullying, envisioned establishing a support institution for young people. Rio, who experienced *futōkō* and went to free school in his teens, is now writing a PhD thesis on alternative schools for *futōkō* children. I, as the researcher of this thesis, did not go to school when I was in primary school and became a researcher of *futōkō* afterward. These examples suggest that it might be meaningless to delineate who is a supporter, the supported, or a researcher.

The positions of supporters and the supported in the Z-meetings and Generative Garden also did not have a clear boundary. The border between them was based on a process of construction through negotiation by the actors in daily interactions. Although participants visit Generative Garden based on their genuine needs, they do not necessarily like the idea of ‘being supported’. For Mai, a good aspect of Generative Garden was that Kōhei did not seem ‘keen to rescue’ people. This is because a keen

supporter is sometimes too eager to do too much for the supported in order to confirm his/her sense of power to help people. During the fieldwork, I heard the words '*shien-shū* [supporter smell]', which refers to a hint of keen but annoying supporters who wear a patronising look of having a desire to save people. To avoid inducing this, in the Z-meetings it is emphasised that a mentor does not observe as a third person or make comments as a specialist, but joins discussions as one of the participants.

In the interview, Kōhei narrated his attitude of 'not becoming a supporter' and its meaning as follows:

If I declare that I am a supporter, the participants are positioned as the supported. I don't like that because it will deprive the participants of the subjectivity to address the problem by themselves. Moreover, in a sense—well, how can I say this—those people who are supported tend to be exempt from social obligations....There is such a social mechanism which allows them to only complain about what is provided without doing anything by themselves. They could become like a complainer toward supporters, and this is not good for either side. So I have never wanted the relationship between me and participants to be a supporter-supported one. (Yamashita 2015)

The situation he referred to as 'not good for either side' means the following: when people have ambiguous *ikizurasa*, it is difficult for them to clarify their needs and this often turns their needs into a call for an 'absolute saviour', someone who does everything to rescue them. In the first stage, they might take a supporter as the saviour and believe in him/her completely. However, sooner or later they realise that the supporter cannot do it, and start to regard him/her as an 'enemy' who does not help them at all. In this extreme situation, supporter-supported relationships are likely to become hostile, or otherwise, co-dependent. Thus, for Kōhei, 'not becoming a supporter' is not only an ethical attitude but a strategy to avoid such a trap.

Kōhei narrated in the interview that he himself had a *hikikomori*-like experience after high school and quit university midway through. Based on this narrative, I asked if he had ever held *ikizurasa* like the participants, in other words, regarded himself as one of the supported. He responded as follows.

What makes the participants different from supporters or parents is that they cannot abandon their *ikizurasa* by their own will. They cannot play their cards well, cannot act smart like other people in this world, and these things make them feel *ikizurasa*. I think

this is true for those who are in what we call *futōkō* or *hikikomori*. But, in my case, I rather chose it, albeit not one hundred percent. I could have chosen a 'stable career path' when I was in university, but I just did not want it. And, I think, I got my important relationships because I disregarded the ordinary career path and entered the field of *futōkō* support. So, I rather 'gained' than 'lost' by quitting university. (Yamashita 2015)

Here, Kōhei did not put himself in the position of those who have *ikizurasa* because he 'chose' his situation while they are 'forced' to be there. However, this does not mean that he thinks himself different from those who have *ikizurasa*. As he narrated 'It was hard for me to draw a line between me and them.... I had a sense of sharing the problem with them' (Yamashita 2010), he stresses his stance of 'being on the side of people who have *ikizurasa*'. Especially in the insecure job condition, he has the same problem with the participants.

[Although I said I chose my situation], it would be challenging for me now to look for a well-paying job. It would be true from such an economic perspective [that I have *ikizurasa*]. (Yamashita 2015)

Other than Kōhei's case, it is likely that youth support at the grassroots level is provided by individuals whose employment and income are extremely insecure. In those cases, the supporter and supported share the same problem, as Kōhei insightfully pointed out: 'This is not just my problem; it is a problem of the social structure where many young people find themselves in' (Yamashita 2010).

Such fusion of supporter, the supported and researcher is well understood by the concept of 'dedifferentiation' that Scott Lash (1988) suggested as a characteristic of post-modernity. 'Dedifferentiation' indicates fusion between the boundaries of binomial oppositions, such as subject/object or specialist/amateur, a reversal of differentiation or specialisation observed in the modern era. The 'contradiction' in Kōhei's attitudes can be understood as a result of facing and dealing with this new situation.

As such, as the key expression to make people vie for the collective action changes from *futōkō* to *ikizurasa*, the positions of the people who are concerned are shaken and reconstructed. While *futōkō* indicates an objective situation where people are placed, *ikizurasa* emphasises subjective interpretations of such a situation. Thus, in the former case, people concerned may fall into different positions, such as medical

specialists, parents, supporters, researchers and *futōkō* children, who are placed in the middle of the target of concerns. In the case of *ikizurasa*, however, by focusing on intra-personal feelings, one can make the boundaries of these positions blur. As the following table shows, while *futōkō* refers to a socially recognisable situation with acute pain in an industrial era where each involved individual can be allocated to a separate social position, *ikizurasa* stands for post-industrial angst that encompasses subjective realities of hardly-visible pain where the positions of the individuals concerned are more interrelated and vague.

Table 2 *Difference Between Futōkō and Ikizurasa*

Dimension of the Concept	<i>Futōkō</i>	<i>Ikizurasa</i>
Focus	Objective Situation	Subjective Interpretation
Position of Individuals	Differentiated	De-differentiated
Background	Industrial Phase	Post-Industrial Phase
Form of Pain	Acute and Visible	Dull and Hardly Visible

6.3 Effectiveness of Self-Help Groups: From Vague Angst to Clear Needs

6.3.1 What is Happening in the Z-Meetings?

In this section, I will examine the second question, ‘What sort of approaches can be effective to mitigate *ikizurasa*, and how can they be performed?’ By focusing especially on the core participants, Kōsuke and Mai, I will present the changes that were observed in my participant observations as a coordinator. The point of the discussion below is not to make generalisations based on the two cases about the effectiveness of the Self-Help Group in bringing people into the workforce. Rather, it is to describe, by using these cases as references, how difficult it is to solve prolonged unemployment involving *ikizurasa* by conventional methods, when these presume the presence of a robust and rational self, which is to be activated to achieve heightened motivation and changed attitudes. Here, drawing upon the qualitative narrative data of the cases, I

argue that employment can be better achieved by illuminating the foundation of relationality, in which the sense of selfhood, as a precondition of long-term employment, can be (re)constructed.

In the early stage, most Z-meeting participants expressed that they felt ambiguous pain and a sense of isolation. Society appeared to be antagonistic towards them and was thus alienating. As a result, participants felt as if they could not be understood by others. Painful experiences in the past, such as being rejected by family or failure in school, brought indefinable anxiety and impulsive anger. While such emotions were real, few could see where they came from. The questions they asked themselves therefore tended to be obscure and unreal, such as 'Why am I so bad?' (Mai) or 'What is the truth of the universe?' (Kōsuke). In short, at this stage, participants seemed to be deprived of a sense of self through which they could articulate concrete needs.

In the latter stages, however, this situation began to change, especially in regard to human relationships. Through discussions in the Z-meetings, participants experienced being listened to by others as well as listening to others with care in a situation where one needs to be nothing but oneself. Kōsuke started to 'feel an affection for' his narrative as other participants positively accepted it. Mai realised that she was not the only one who suffers from *ikizurasa*, as she listened to others' stories. Such narratives of recovering relationality are often heard in the Z-meetings.

The experience of being able to relate positively to others has allowed participants to redefine past events so that what used to be perceived in a negative light became a valuable theme to be investigated within oneself. Mai thus replaced her sense of being 'socially unfit' with the notion that 'there is something structural' in her personal trouble. With an understanding of the social background, Kōsuke came to regard his violent father as 'a business man who worked to support his family'. Such redefinition potentially helps participants to (re)generate a new sense of self. Mai felt herself as 'being a part of this society' and Kōsuke started to grasp a sense of being accepted by others. Those new selves were something they could be proud of and were firmly founded in practical realities shared by other people.

Figure 17 What Happens in the Z-Meeting? Early Stage: Self vs. Society

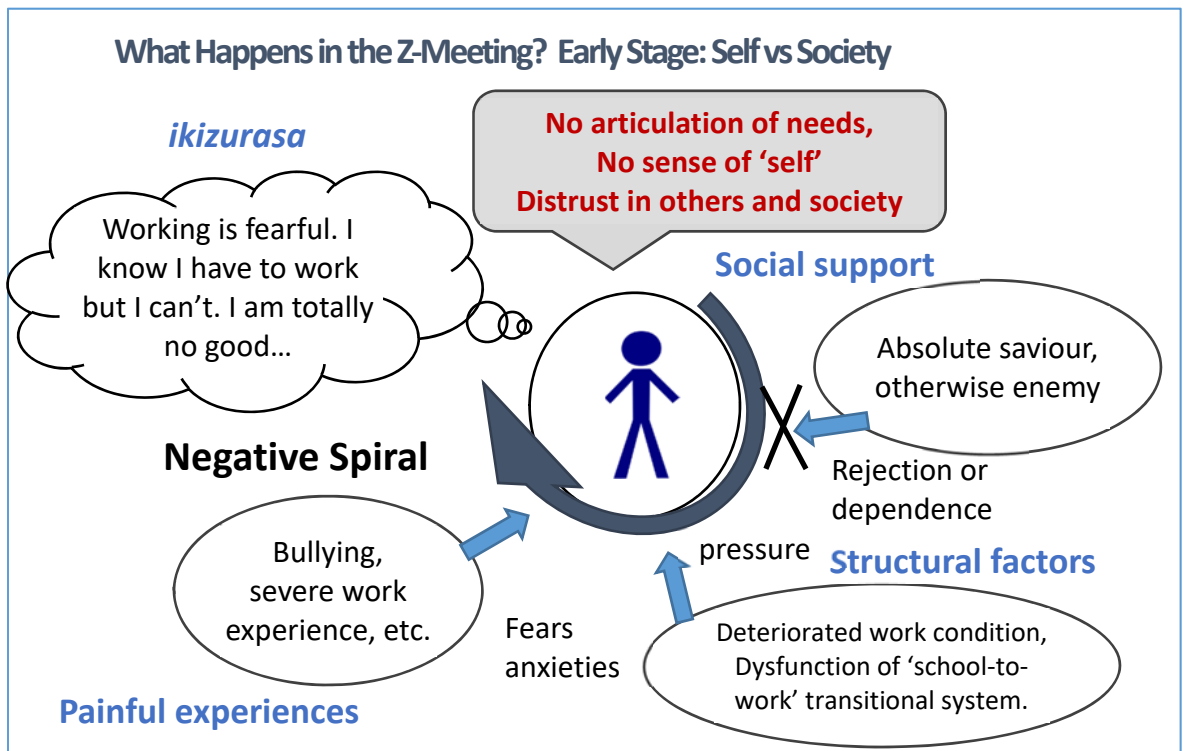
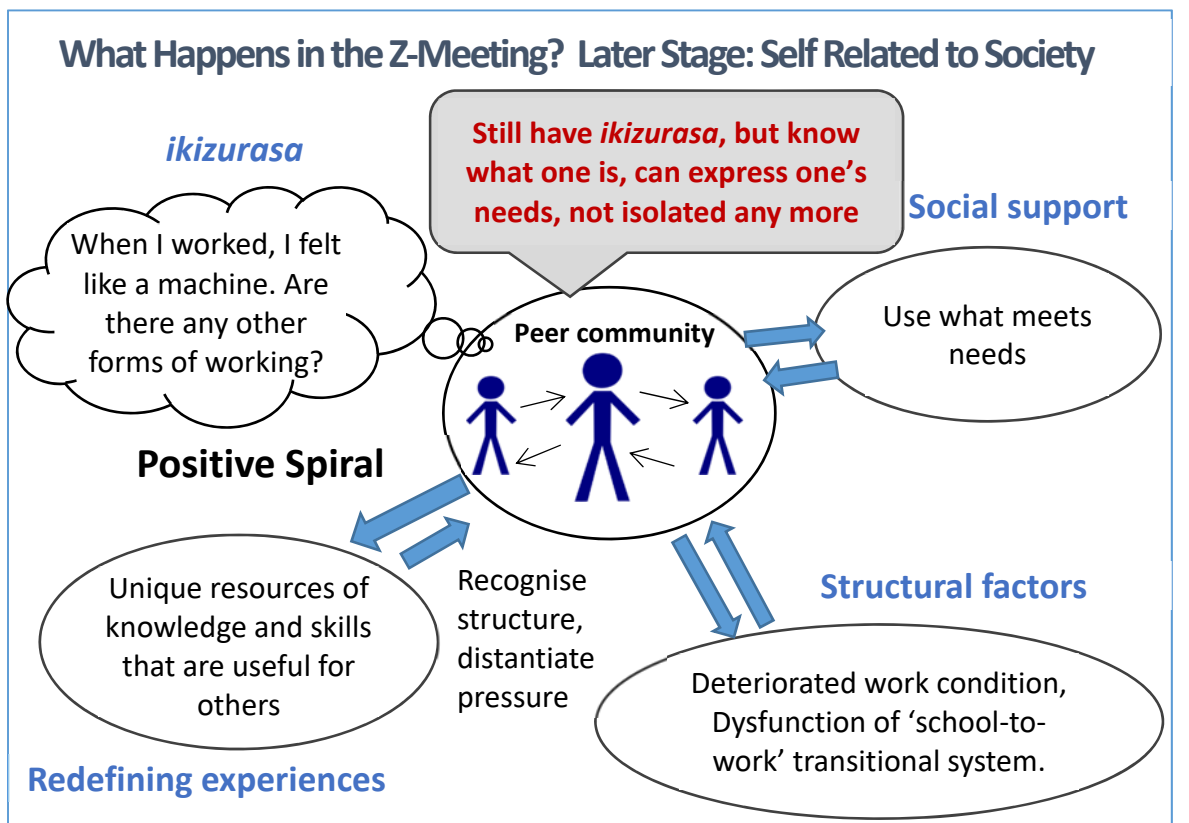


Figure 18 Later Stage: Development of a Relational Self



Participation in the Z-meetings also brought about clarity in the minds of the participants about their own needs. Vague thoughts, such as ‘I cannot become like my father’ (Kōsuke) or ‘I am scared of work’ (Mai), become more realistic questions like ‘What would be a suitable mode of work for me?’ Thus, if founded on a robust self-image and after a thorough identification of one’s own needs, employment can be a practical and sustainable option. Disability care in Kōsuke’s case and writing newspaper articles in Mai’s case suggest that they could work when engaged in appropriate jobs at the right time and at a reasonable pace for them. This change can be shown in the Figure 18 and Figure 19.

6.3.2 Indirect Aim-setting

A crucial question that emerges from these narrative reconstructions is, what are the conditions that foster such generation of positive narratives? I argue that ‘indirect aim-setting’, ‘enhancement of dialogue’, and ‘externalising’ are key factors. Indirect aim-setting is represented by the fact that the Z-meetings aim to offer participants the opportunity to deeply explore their own experiences in structured dialogues, but do not specifically help them find a job. Thus, even if the participants finally do find a job, this can be interpreted as a by-product of a clearer understanding of self and trustful relationships with others. This also means that those individuals who do not gain the result of finding a job would not be regarded here as unsuccessful.

This indirect aim-setting can also be considered as a core element of *ibasho* [a space with receptive atmosphere]. Araya Shūhei (2012) attempts to understand ‘*ibasho*’ in terms of two elements, which he poses as being of pivotal significance: 1) ‘claiming process created by a minority group’ [*mainoriti ni yoru kotoage*]; and 2) ‘indirect aim setting’ [*ito no kansetu-ka*] (Araya 2012). 1) ‘Claiming process made by a minority group’ suggests a historical context in which the concept of ‘*ibasho*’ has been advocated by the *futōkō* movement since the mid-1980s, creating for children who refused (or were ‘forced’ to refuse) to go to school, a place where they could ‘feel secure’ [*anshin dekiru*] and ‘be themselves’ [*arino mama de irareru*]. Related to this, 2) ‘Indirect aim setting’ means that ‘*ibasho*’ is not an instrumental place where people are pushed into achieving a ready-made goal such as re-entering school, getting a job, or recovering health, but primarily a place for people just to be.

In the Z-meetings, indirect aim-setting is particularly important because it enables all group members, including mentors, to participate. It stimulates dialogue and helps facilitate problem solving. If the direct aim is 'to get a job', there is a clear boundary between the supporters and the supported, and the participants are easily regarded as recipients of support services. This sets up the definition of success as getting a job, and a gap emerges between those who are successful and those who are not. But when the target is for participants 'to address their own problems', the participants are inspired to become active investigators of their own lives. The three 'core' participants shown in the case studies, Mai, Kōsuke and Tomohisa, naturally related themselves to the job world through their experiences in the Z-meetings. Although this was not always the case, the Z-meetings represent possibilities to connect people to the outer society when conditions allow for that.

Although it is crucial that mentors facilitate communication in meetings, it is also important that other participants provide help as peers and feel equally invested in the group. It was observed that this process almost inadvertently brought back participants' pride, regenerated a sense of capacity, and rekindled excitement in living with a sense of autonomy in their own lives. These qualities are seriously lacking in the conditions typically established in support services.

The significance of indirect aim-setting is particularly applicable for 'Generative Garden'. In the context of youth support, an *ibasho* is structured to avoid setting short-term goals, such as going (back) to school or work, and allowing people to focus on resting in an environment free from pressure. This attitude of 'offering no explicitly productive activities' can, in appropriate circumstances, help people develop self-esteem, through which they can begin to think of ways to relate to society (NPO Tōkyō Shūre 2000; Tsutsui et al. 2014). It should be recalled here that some participants narrated in the interviews that their lives went better when they did not set clear aims beforehand and just followed what accidental encounters brought to them.

6.3.3 Enhancement of Dialogue

A narrative produces positive impact when it is supported by people who listen to it carefully and respond to it positively. When it is reinforced through another's genuine

acknowledgement, the narrator feels greater confidence in its validity. In order for this to occur, the Z-meetings' protocol emphasises the following points. First, comments are encouraged to start with 'I' as much as possible. Although it is best for narrators to be positively accepted, it is unavoidable that there are cases where another participant thinks he/she cannot accept the previous narratives. When this happens, the person would say, 'I do not think so' instead of 'It is not true', so that he/she can express critical feelings without attacking the narrator. Second, value judgements should be minimised as much as possible in the responses. For example, when a *futōkō* experience is narrated, responses such as 'School non-attendance is bad/good' should be avoided, and accepting responses, such as 'You really had a hard time', are preferred. Discussions are held primarily to share feelings but not to reach the 'right answer'. Last but not least, when responding to a narrative, the respondents share their stories in turns, saying, e.g., 'That sometimes happens to me, too. In my case...'. As such, narrators and respondents change and the narrative flows into dialogue. While the mentors participate in this process, they also guide the conversations to ensure that they remain within these parameters.

Seikkula (2002:266) argues that while speech or a story is produced by an individual, dialogue is 'a process', a primary outcome of which is to create relationality. Thus, in enhancing dialogue, relationships are more focused on as compared to what is narrated or whose narrative it is. In the Z-meetings, too, words are thought of not as instruments for mutual understanding, but as a consummatory process toward relationality. The following statement by Kōhei seems to indicate this point.

You know, Kōsuke's narrative is not structured and is mostly hard to understand. So I try to interpret for the audience as much as I can, but then he always gets mad, saying 'you stole my words'. I'm just kidding.... But, one time, he suddenly said, something like, 'I don't like building things up, rather, I like looking at a scene in front of me at the moment [*biru o tateru mitaino wa chigaunjanaika, motto futto mieru kōkei mitaina monode iinjanaika*].' People would say, 'What are you talking about?' and he wouldn't have the words to answer it. But I felt, 'I know what you want to say [*nanka wakaru*]'. His narrative is really good when 'word tuning' goes well, but it usually fails. The words he utters cannot signify what he means. But I still think I mostly understand what he means. Yes, this happens again and again. And I think it is very important to keep touching on such an aspect of narratives. (Yamashita 2015)

Similarly, in a conversation with Jun'ichirō, I, as a coordinator, commented on the specificity of words used in the Z-meetings, as follows.

Explaining with words, enhancing verbal communication, and deepening discussion...those are not really important. Rather, interactions among people who share the place [*ba*] is more important. If people can feel 'My words were accepted', it would be good. It's much better than 'I learned a lot from the discussion today'. (Kido 2015)

The self which is (re)constructed in this process can be seen as a 'relational being', as proposed by Gergen (2009). Challenging the concept of the individual as an entirely free and rational entity who takes all responsibility for their actions, Gergen understands human beings as products of multiple relationships, and argues that knowledge or recovery that is brought about by social practices such as education or therapy is not an individual achievement but rather a fruit of effective co-action (Gergen 2009, 240-309). The Z-meetings facilitate self-exploration for young people by creating a forum for hearing and accepting each other's narratives, allowing a kind of relationality to be achieved. Thus, it seems that enhancement of dialogue fosters a more positive self-image in young people who experience angst in their work and living conditions.

6.3.4 Externalising

Narratives on *ikizurasa* sometimes include severe experiences and induce various negative emotions both for the narrators and the other participants, such as anger, antipathy, sorrow, anxiety, emptiness, self-denial, and/or loneliness. One of the 'Principles of the Z-meetings' (Chapter 4) states, 'When you feel pain, you are addressing an important point for you.' Therefore, those emotions are not necessarily thought of as bad. At the same time, facing those negative emotions is tough and sometimes intolerable for participants. To mitigate this pain, the Z-meetings attempt to hold those situations with humorous expressions. A good example is Kōsuke's hallucination, which was named 'Ab-chan' by Kōhei (Chapter 5). Such a practice is referred to as 'externalising' in narrative therapy. White and Epston (1990) define it as follows.

“Externalizing” is an approach to therapy that encourages persons to objectify and, at time, to personify the problems that they experience as oppressive. In this process, the problem becomes a separate entity and thus external to the person or relationship that was ascribed as the problem. Those problems that are considered to be inherent, as well as those relatively fixed qualities that are attributed to persons and to relationships, are rendered less fixed and less restricting (White and Epston 1991:38).

In the following paragraphs, I look at three examples of externalising that are often used in the Z-meetings: 1) ‘Ghost is here [*obake ga deta*]; 2) ‘Mr Extreme’ [*kyokutan-san*]; and 3) ‘Let’s make a yard [*oniwa o tsukurimashō*].’

‘Ghost’ especially refers to the aggressiveness among those negative emotions. The process of narrative sharing cannot always be spoken in fine words. It sometimes happens that when listening to a narrative, people project the narrator as someone who was critical toward them in the past and feel as if they were criticised by the narrator in front of them. For example, a person who used to attend job support sessions but was not successful because of the distrustful relationship with the job support staff could have antipathy to a narrator who speaks positively about job support. While listening to the narrator, the person could remember how the job support staff derogated from his/her personality as a lazy, half-fledged person, and might start to see the narrator as also degrading him/her. This confusion may result in undesirable behaviours, such as sending extremely aggressive emails to the narrator or to the coordinators. Such a behaviour would hurt both the narrator and the person, and could result in one [or both] of them leaving the Z-meetings. In order to deal with such a situation, participants in the Z-meetings would say, ‘Ghost is here’, instead of ‘It’s not fair of you to send such an offensive email’. By using the term ‘ghost’, the problem can be externalised from the person, thus enabling the participants to consider ‘how to deal with the problem this person is facing’, rather than ‘how to deal with this problematic person’. Because *ikizurasa* deprives people of their self-esteem, those who have *ikizurasa* tend to cause troubles in human relationships. Therefore, in order to support marginalised youth, excluding such a ‘troublemaker’ is not an appropriate answer: it is their *ikizurasa* that leads them to cause troubles and makes them need support. In this situation, externalising trouble as a ‘ghost’ is a useful strategy to recognise the trouble without ejecting the person who caused the trouble.

Similarly, 'Mr Extreme' is the name for a tendency of people to think of the situation they are in or an individual they relate with as 'perfect' or 'no good'. In such black-or-white extremeness, people tend to repeat the cycle where first they idealise the situation or person, then realise that the reality is not as they had expected to be, and finally feel despair and leave. This is also true about their physical and mental condition. Their condition often swings like a pendulum between extreme cheerfulness and severe depression. The expression 'Mar. Extreme' encourages them to objectify their situation and thus to become conscious about the trick they are easily caught in. Although knowing and doing could be different, this helps them to live their lives in less extreme ways.

'Let's make a yard' is an expression that mentors would say to other participants. Related to 'Mr Extreme', some participants cannot manage appropriately the balance between 'the private' and 'the public'. When people who are usually at home go out and meet people after a long time, they might feel as if they are attending an official meeting. Thus, they force themselves to gather all of their power both mentally and physically, and pretend to be 'ordinarily cheerful'. However, such tension cannot be sustained for long. It is likely that they will be burnt out when they return home after meeting people and not even be able to stay up. This gap between 'the private' and 'the public' raises their threshold of going out, and as a result, could accelerate their *hikikomori*. To get out from this mal-circulation, mentors suggest that participants 'make an interval between "the private" and "the public"'. Kōhei explains to the participants;

You are like a house which occupies as much ground as it can. Living in such a house, when you open the door, you will look at a busy road just in front of you. So, you cannot go out unless you get dressed completely formally. I understand how fearful it must be. My suggestion is that we make a yard between your house and the public road, where you can go out in your pajamas. (Yamashita 2010)

Here, 'a yard' stands for *ibasho*, where people can 'be themselves' while relating with others.

The participants' problems indicated above have been understood as 'immaturity' by specialists. As a psychiatrist who specialises in *hikikomori*, Saitō (2002) argues that 'maturity' is one of the key factors to understand *hikikomori*. Defining mature people

as 'those who obtain a stable self-image as a member of society and are not hurt excessively by encounters with others'. He identifies the conditions of this as: 1) not judging values in an extreme way; 2) being able to wait for realisation of desires; and 3) being able to emotionally communicate with others (Saitō 2002: 66-67). About the first point, which seems best related to the participants in this research, Saitō argues:

In other words, [maturity means] being able to admit a 'grey-zone' between 'all black' and 'all white'. As long as they live in a world where there are only black and white, it is difficult for them to become mature. Because, in such a world, human communications are also defined in the naïve binary of 'friend or foe'. Here, they can easily make friends with those who they recognise to be friends. But in exchange for this, they easily break up over trivial things. As such, they can only build extremely unstable relationships. (Saitō 2002: 67)

This explanation is one way of understanding the problematic situations the participants tend to become trapped in. However, what is important here is to develop words that express the situation not from a specialists' perspective, but from the participants' subjective reality. When we use the term 'maturity', it ascribes the problem to 'a person who is immature'. Here, the relationship around the person naturally becomes 'a problematic client and a specialist who rescues him/her'. This personalises the problem, and the person loses an opportunity to address it in relationship with others who share his/her experiences. Conversely, the expression 'Let's make a yard' externalises the problem. It can then be tackled by the person and the people around him/her together. Such a method used for reconstructing a problem enhances the person's motivation to address the problem, as well as enrich his/her self-esteem as an active subject to help him/herself.

6.3.5 Limitations of the Z-Meetings

While their fruit is variously shown above, the Z-meetings are not a perfect way of supporting marginalised youth. In this section, I will show the limitations of the Z-meetings: 1) no provision of practical career support; 2) specialisation in 'words'; and 3) weak institutional scheme. By examining these, the prospect of how the narrative self-help approach can be most effective will be discussed.

First, the Z-meetings do not provide practical career support, thus their effectiveness is limited for those who have already clarified their career vision. As the previous analysis has illuminated, the effectiveness of the Z-meetings was especially shown in the process where those who could not clarify their needs became able to 'verbalise' their problems by sharing narratives with others and recover a sense of pride as an active subject to address the problems. However, two out of ten interviewees, Masaya and Yoshinari, were critical of the Z-meetings. The core of their criticism can be summarised by the question, 'What is this good for?' For Masaya, who aims to work as a designer, and Yoshinari, who plans to run a support institution, the Z-meetings did not appear to be helpful for their career. To them, the Z-meetings just encouraged people 'to lick each other's wounds' by talking about 'negative' experiences. Also, those who need specific things, such as training opportunities, a job, medical therapy, or financial aid, would find it difficult to see the effectiveness of the Z-meetings.

The other point is 'specialisation in words', which is related to the quality of the Z-meetings. Compared to other support practices, it more expects participants to 'verbalise' their problems and feelings to be shared by others. Thus, it sometimes happens that those who are not good at narrating or discussing tend to refrain from participating. In reality, there are some members of Generative Garden [a space for youth who have *ikizurasa* to gather, with one of its activities is the Z-meetings] who enjoy participating in more relaxing activities, such as 'Music Time', but not the Z-meetings because of its word-centred mood. Similarly, Mikio narrated, 'People in the Z-meetings use too difficult words, so I sometimes get lost in the middle of a discussion' (Onodera 2015).

As a matter of fact, there are a lot of aspects of *ikizurasa* that cannot be put into words. When people narrate their stories in the Z-meetings, they sometimes add, for example, 'I can tell this now, but before I couldn't. Now my condition is not as bad as before, so I can keep a bit of a distance from my *ikizurasa* and talk about it.' Such a narrative indicates that people can verbalise their painful experiences only after the hardest time has gone. In other words, at the moment when they are caught in severe *ikizurasa*, they would not be able to express their feelings in appropriate words----if they try, the expression could take an aggressive form, just like 'ghost', as presented in the previous section. Although this research has targeted relatively comprehensive sets of narratives, it should be noted that those narratives do not represent *ikizurasa* in its

severest form. As illuminated in the Troidel Island model by Miyachi (2007), a person who is in the severest place of damage cannot speak (See Chapter 4). Considering those points, it remains a task for the Z-meeting group to keep in mind that there are always non-narrated aspects of *ikizurasa* in the background of the narrated ones.

6.4. Conclusion

6.4.1. *Ikizurasa* and Narrative Self-Help Approach

By analysing the interview data from the fieldwork in the Z-meetings and self-help meetings for people who have *ikizurasa*, this chapter endeavours to address the research questions: 1) What is *ikizurasa* among marginalised youth in post-industrial Japan, and how is it actually experienced by these people on the ground?; and 2) What sort of approaches can be effective to mitigate *ikizurasa* and how can they be done? *Ikizurasa* literally means ‘pain of living’, and is characterised by its focus on a subjective interpretation of pain without referring to concrete experiences or attributes in the background. The term *ikizurasa* would be used when people have a painful feeling but know neither where the pain came from nor what they want to do with it.

In the Z-meetings, there were a variety of people gathering in the key word of *ikizurasa*: a woman who did *futōkō* in primary school and never came back to school afterward; a man who was diagnosed as having schizophrenia and working full time; a university student who suffered from depression; a *hikikomori* man who organised self-help meetings for *hikikomori* people; an *ex-futōkō* PhD student who specialised in education; an ex-activist editor of a leftist newspaper, etc. Their experiences, backgrounds and/or current statuses vary, but still shared feelings that they had *ikizurasa* in some manner in their life. Such a diversity of participants would not have been seen if the Z-meetings were a topic-focused self-help practice, such as ‘*futōkō*’ or ‘*hikikomori*’ meetings, or focussed on job support.

Here, the term *ikizurasa* appeared to be a new manifestation of youth marginalisation in post-industrial Japan. With a background where life-course becomes less standardised, people become marginalised in more individualised and complex ways. In line with this, a particular experience or attribute does not mean having a common difficulty. In contrast to *futōkō* in the 1980s, which was a symbolic figure of drop-out

from a 'membership-based system', *futōkō* after the late-1990s cannot mean the same experience for each individual. Here, *ikizurasa* can be a useful, as an umbrella concept that enables people to connect themselves to others who might not share a collective identity but could have similar feelings of pain in each individual life. Drawing on the concept of McDonald (2004), I have argued that the expression for the new type of connectedness seen in the Z-meetings can be called an 'experience movement', where people are connected not as a part of 'we-ness' but as 'oneself as another'.

Ikizurasa is characterised by its indefinability that individuals can clarify neither where the pain is from nor how to deal with it. In the background of this ambiguity, I have argued that there is a double bind situation where youth are caught by the contradiction between industrial values and post-industrial values. In the interviewees' narratives, it was uncovered that there is still strong pressure for a 'successful life' as part of the industrial values, or achieving academic excellence and being employed by a big firm, while such a life-course is becoming less available. On the other hand, under post-industrial values, young people are expected to be active and motivated enough to create their own career path by utilising their charm and developing human networks. This is also difficult, especially in cases where, as a result of their self-esteem damaged by excessive family pressure, the interviewees could not develop a sturdy sense of self or ability to smoothly communicate with other people, without knowing what they really wanted to do.

Another point that characterised *ikizurasa* was that the boundaries between supporter, the supported, and researcher were unclear. As *ikizurasa* involves painful feelings held in individual life, no one can be completely detached from it, even if he/she was a supporter or researcher. Kōhei, a mentor of the Z-meetings, situated himself not as a supporter but as a participant, narrating the reason, 'I could not draw a line between me and them'. As was shown in the interview data, there were also those who used to be recipients of support and later became supporters or researcher, such as Mikio, Rio, and Yoshinari. This fusion of positions is well described by the concept of 'dedifferentiation' (Lash 1988).

In order to mitigate *ikizurasa*, I have argued that narrative self-help practice can be an effective option. The limitation of the existing support framework, such as job support, is that users are expected to already have motivation toward work or because of their

need for a job. However, as is indicated above, it is not easy for people who have *ikizurasa* to clarify their needs because they tend to lack a sturdy sense of self. Narrative self-help practice focuses more on accepting relationships where *ikizurasa* narratives are listened to and shared with care. I argued, based on the interview data from the 'core' participants, that these cases show how greater self-acceptance through positive feedback from others can be more helpful to the individual in fostering a desire to seek employment and taking interest in other life objectives.

Based on the fieldwork in the Z-meetings, I have analysed the effectiveness of the practice based on: 1) indirect aim-setting; 2) enhancement of dialogue; and 3) externalising problems. Indirect aim-setting refers to the basic principle that the Z-meetings aim to offer the participants an opportunity to investigate their *ikizurasa* experiences, but not directly help them find them a job. Through participation, some participants find a job and others do not. However, finding a job is interpreted as a 'by-product' of a clearer understanding of self and development of trustful relationships with others, and the state of not yet finding a job is never regarded as unsuccessful. Indirect aim-setting is particularly important because it is the foundation on which people can feel safe to share narratives. It also helps participants to become active investigators of their lives instead of being passive recipients of support. As seen in the cases of Mai, Kōsuke and Tomohisa, there are people who naturally related themselves to the job market through their experiences in the Z-meetings.

6.4.2. Toward a Possibility of Institutionalisation

In the existing youth support scheme, an association like the Z-meetings is difficult to be institutionalised. As indicated above, the Z-meetings did not set direct aims, which is a key to their effectiveness. Unfortunately, in the institutional setting of Japan today, government youth support programs are established in a more paternalistic relationship, where the aim is to directly find the client a jobs. Following the plan-do-check-act [PDCA] cycle, government youth support programs must set a numerical target and are assessed regarding its degree of attainment. The narrative self-help practices, however, can hardly be included in this cycle. While job support can present its service contents to the users, narrative self-help practices can hardly do this because

the relationships will change after including new users. As a result, it makes little sense for the narrative self-help practices to be planned beforehand in detail. Moreover, the narrative self-help practices defy short-term goal setting. Their aims, which are to help individuals come to accept themselves and better clarify their needs, are supposed to require a long term to be achieved. In addition, achievement cannot be measured in numerical terms, in such a way that 'Eight people out of ten got employed through the support'. The most important thing about the narrative self-help practices is that, ten or twenty years later, people can recall themselves, with actual feelings, as having been accepted and having their *ikizurasa* shared by others.

A narrative self-help approach is more needed in a situation where *ikizurasa* is proliferating and individuals easily get lost attempting to set a practical aim for their career. As I pointed out in Chapter 3, it is being gradually realised by local governments that having more human relationships can be effective for career development (Toivonen 2013; Tsutsui et al. 2014). Relation-oriented support has been mainly provided by grass-root organisations, mostly without governmental aid. Cabinet Office survey findings show that in local supporting practices for children and youth who have problems, supporters are in a severe condition regarding employment and income.⁴⁰ It is an urgent task for the government to readjust their institutional framework to be able to include these practices. In the next chapter, I will explore, on the basis of the findings of this thesis, how relational approaches can be institutionalised in a governmental scheme.

⁴⁰ According to the 'Survey of Supporters for Children and Youth who have Difficulties' (Cabinet Office 2011c), the top reason for becoming a supporter for children and youth with difficulties, such as *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, and/or developmental disorder, was 'wanting to contribute to society and community by helping others' [49.2%]. The survey also indicates that as an answer to 'problems to be solved in the work', 22.4% of supporters, the largest proportion, chose 'Job condition including income security is not satisfactory'.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This thesis has focused on individuals who hold *ikizurasa* angst as a result of experiences related to unemployment, mental illness, family problems, and/or not being able to fit in at school, and who worked collaboratively on a project to help themselves. In this concluding chapter, I will summarise the significance of this research, then respond to the research questions posed in the Introduction: 1) What is *ikizurasa* angst among marginalised youth in post-industrial Japan? and 2) What sort of (co-)actions can be effective to mitigate such angst? As for the first question, it is important to understand the term *ikizurasa* as an expression for a type of marginalisation that especially emerges in post-industrial social settings, an individualised marginalisation (7.1). At the same time, *ikizurasa* can (re-)connect people by enabling affected individuals to express their experiences of alienation. Regarding the second question, I will argue that narrative self-help/*ibasho* practices are effective and thus should be included as a part of institutional frameworks (7.2). Practically, based on the ‘half-welfare-half-employment’ model of unemployment support suggested by Tsutsui et al. (2014), I will propose that the model should be accompanied by narrative self-help/*ibasho* practices. Then, in (7.3), the significance of relational support is presented as mitigating the individualising tendency through (re)creating human relationships. Then I will show how the concept of ‘individual’ is exposing its limitation in respect to interpreting *ikizurasa* experiences and related narrative self-help practices by referring back to the arguments of Kenneth Gergen and Kimura Bin that were examined in Chapter 3. Finally, I will conclude the thesis by summarising its significance and showing a prospect for the future of *ikizurasa*.

7.1. *Ikizurasa*: An Expression for Individualised Marginalisation

To begin this concluding chapter, I will return to the most critical question posed by this research, ‘What is *ikizurasa*?’ As presented in Chapter 1, this term refers to personal pain compounded by social situations and is highly associated with the adjectives ‘indefinable’, ‘unclear’, and/or ‘invisible’ (Kayano and Amamiya 2008; Hijikata 2010). Throughout the examinations in this thesis, I argue that *ikizurasa* is an expression of an individualised type of marginalisation in a post-industrial society, which is characterised by a growing service sector and decline of manufacturing jobs, a deteriorating work environment and diversified individual life-courses that are often unstable.⁴¹ This situation involves what Beck called individualisation (Beck 1994; 2002). According to Beck, under individualisation, ‘standard biography becomes a chosen biography’ where individuals are required ‘to plan, understand, design and act’ as an individual or ‘suffer the consequences which will have been self-inflicted in case of failure’ (Beck 1994:15).

Under this social tendency, youth marginalisation has also become individualised. As discussed in Chapter 2, *Futōkō*, which was formerly regarded monolithically as a symbolic figure of dropping-out from a normative career path and becoming exposed to social accusation as a whole, has come to be decomposed into those who can successfully connect themselves to society through their career after *futōkō* and those who cannot, leaving only the latter for accusation. In this new situation, *futōkō* individuals can no longer regard themselves as having the ‘same’ experience and thus able to share their pain just because they did *futōkō*. Moreover, as a result of the newly emerged possibility of a ‘successful career after *futōkō*’, individuals in ‘non-successful’ situations are left with no choice but to blame themselves for a ‘low level of effort’ or ‘low motivation’ before considering structural factors or organising a social movement.

The concept of *ikizurasa* was generated from this highly individualised context of marginalisation, in which marginalised individuals have a vague sense of alienation,

⁴¹ How this occurred in Japan is argued in Chapter 2.

though do not know how to describe it. Without being shared, their pain becomes aggravated and more entangled with time. Not being able to articulate problems, they cannot clarify their needs or hopes, which hampers them from moving on to the next step. In isolation and with a feeling of not being understood by others, affected individuals barely speak about themselves, though note the ‘pain of living’, or *ikizurasa*. *Ikizurasa* is a ‘last-resort’ expression that calls for mere understanding of the individualised experience of marginalisation, and does not refer to any objective situations or attributes, but only focuses on personally felt pain. In this sense, the term *ikizurasa* itself is individualised.

At the same time, however, this research revealed that *ikizurasa* has a possibility to function as a protest against isolation or alienation. As revealed in the interview data presented in Chapter 5, when spoken about, *ikizurasa* can connect individuals in a new type of relationship based on a pain sharing process. It is important to remember that in the field data there were both negative and positive interpretations of this word. Mai’s narrative, ‘In such a problematic social structure, there would be many other people who feel the same pain.... I stopped seeing my *ikizurasa* as negative, and started to feel I am okay with it’ (Sasaki 2015a), shows how this term can inspire a connectedness with others, and become a ‘window’ through which an individual can better understand oneself and one’s issues. These possibilities are explicitly suggested in an essay written by me as a coordinator for ‘the Z-meetings Report vol. 2’ (Kido 2013), in which I suggest to ‘utilise *ikizurasa*, instead of removing it’ and that ‘*Ikizurasa* can be our common heritage and proof of how we are “rich” and “full” in our lives, even in hardships’.

As such, *ikizurasa* is a paradoxical term that embraces contradicting aspects around the individualised marginalisation ----the sharable and un-sharable, the narrated and un-narrated, connectedness and disconnectedness, etc. The Z-meetings provided a trial for narrative self-help where such a turn from negative to positive could occur through dialogues. It would be valuable to cite Rio’s words here again. ‘Well, in the Z-meetings I can narrate what is difficult to narrate while saying, “This is very hard to narrate”’ (Yamamoto 2015). In individualised marginalisation, hardship is so compounded and complex depending on each case that individuals struggle to explain it in a broadly sharable framework. However, as Rio suggested here, paradoxically, individuals can

start from narrating that they cannot truly narrate, or sharing the fact that there is nothing that can be truly shared, within the narrative for self-help practice.

Some individuals may inappropriately advise that sticking too much to the interpretation of *ikizurasa* can hinder their chances for employment. However, the advice to 'Start working anyway, then you will be better in *ikizurasa*' cannot mitigate the situation.⁴² In such cases where painful experiences in the past have damaged trust in both society and themselves, 'start working anyway' is not a sustainable solution. As shown in Chapter 5, Mikio, a *hikikomori* man who suffered from an educationally abusive mother, worked anyway as an attempt to distract himself from his *ikizurasa*. However, each time he did so, he soon became burned out or could not get along with his co-workers, and then left the job. Here, there is a priority to articulate their issues by engaging with their own emotions and experiences and sharing them with others. Mai, who started to work from normal pressure, also quit her jobs prematurely. However, later, when she shared her stories with others at Generative Garden [*ibasho* for youth], she was able to choose suitable jobs and complete them with others' help (See Mai's story 5.2.1). Mikio, after joining *hikikomori* Self-Help Groups and the Z-meetings, also came to feel better about his *ikizurasa* ('I'm not a strange, solitary man. There must be someone like me. And I would be understood by them') (Onodera 2015), though he still does not work regularly.

Even if it may seem to be a widely circuitous route to tackle youth unemployment, it is important to remain focused on *ikizurasa*, or the entangled feelings of anxiety, loneliness, fear, anger, disconnectedness, and/or self-disvalue, because *ikizurasa* is the key for marginalised youth to address their own marginalisation by themselves with others' help. As has been discussed, *ikizurasa* is their expression for resistance against the increasing social mood of individualisation and pressure from the self-liability

⁴² For example, Genda Yūji, a prominent figure in NEET discussions in the mid-late 2000s, insisted that it is important for youth stuck in the process of applying for jobs while thinking 'too much' about the meaning of work to start working anyway, then such meaning will be found later. He illustrated this with the example of a 'conveyor belt sushi bar' [*kaiten-zushi*], saying that 'unless you sit at the counter, you will never have a chance to get your favourite'. Refuting this, Ueyama Kazuki, an ex-*hikikomori* writer, argues that *hikikomori* individuals are like those who have experienced food poisoning by sushi in the past and cannot easily 'start doing anyway before thinking' (Ishikawa 2006). As Ueyama notably points out, what hampers them from searching for a job is the painful experiences of failures in the past, and thus it is primarily important for them to interpret the meanings of these experiences and recover trust both in society and themselves.

theory that further isolates them and deprives them of their sense of being included in society. Developed under painful situations over time, *ikizurasa* cannot be easily washed away. Or, perhaps we should not be in a hurry to wash it away. Paterson, a family therapist, focused on the significance of the process of exploration of meanings of pain and wrote:

I found myself feeling humbled and respectful of the power of human suffering. I did not have a therapeutic technique to take away my patients' pain or solve their medical problems. Instead, I developed what might be called a reverence for my patients' attempts to make meaning of their pain (Paterson 1997: 28-29).

The experience of suffering from pain is not always involved with placing negative meanings, but also positive meanings can be given. Thus, what is important when dealing with *ikizurasa* is to change the meaning of the angst from the un-sharable to the sharable, disconnectedness to connectedness, and/or the un-narrated to the narrated. In the following section, I will discuss about narrative as a part of self-help practice, where this change can take place.

7.2. Institutionalising Relational Supports

7.2.1 The Effectiveness of Narrative Self-help

As presented in the previous section, *ikizurasa* is an expression for pain resulting from not only being marginalised but also being individualised. Paradoxically, the problem here is that individuals are too individualised to be live a happy and fulfilling life. Without presuming a community or collective sources of meanings, which underpin each individual who is a part, it is difficult to clarify their individual determinations, intentions, or hopes. This has also been confirmed by the traditional sociology of self and society. In his 'Mind, Self and Society', George H. Mead (1934) argued that individuals can gain self through interplay with other members of society and acquisition of common attitudes there. Mead wrote:

What goes to make up the organized self is the organization of the attitudes which are common to the group. A person is a personality because he belongs to a community, because he takes over the institutions of that community into his own conduct. He takes its language as a medium by which he gets his personality and then through a process of taking the different roles that all the others furnish he comes to get the attitude of the members of the community. Such, in a certain sense, is the structure of a man's personality. There are certain common responses which each individual has toward certain common things, and in so far as those common responses are awakened in the individual when he is affecting other persons he arouses his own self. The structure, then, on which the self is built is this response which is common to all, for one has to be a member of a community to be a self (Mead 1934: 162).

In post-industrial situations, such a community that assures its members of self is eroding in various ways (Sennett 1992; Putnam 2000). In line with this is the notion that marginalised individuals cannot have a sturdy sense of self while in dissociation from society and human relations.

As shown in the fieldwork in the Z-meetings, narrative self-help practices can construct a space where individuals can feel generation of 'self' through dialogue with others. Kōsuke wrote, 'I felt a warm affection for my own words that came from the bottom of my heart. I felt that my words gained energy when others reacted positively toward them' (Noguchi 2015b). Here, it is expressed that by being accepted warmly by others, he (re)interprets 'my own words from the bottom of my heart', or 'myself', as something positive and energetic that deserves to receive affection. This process has much in common with what Kumagaya described happens in Self-Study [*tōjisha-kenkyū*], as introduced in Chapter 3; a sense of self that takes a clearer shape by being shared with others (Kumagaya 2013b: 302). As such, in narrative self-help practices, by recovering relationships with others, self is recaptured as a real person who is connected to a concrete society.

It should be emphasised that narrative self-help approaches are not a means of pushing people towards social participation such as job support. Rather, the aim is set as an on-going process of dialogue itself. Human relationships there are not regarded as a springboard from which participants take off to a real and grim society, but itself is a new form of society. There, individuals are not expected to play social roles, such as a

supporter, the supported, a specialist, or a client, and their narratives are equally heard and valued regardless of the narrator's social position. In the Z-meetings, the backgrounds of the participants varied. Some worked and others did not. Some had graduated from a university and some had left school halfway through their compulsory education. In spite of these differences, they try to share their *ikizurasa* as equal flesh-and-blood humans. They explored such questions as: 'How did I feel pain about my school experiences?'; 'What part of work made me feel fear?'; 'In what condition do I get anxious about relating with people?', etc. Being treated equally with respect regardless of social positions is especially important for those who experienced *futōkō* or *hikikomori* because, in those experiences, affiliation [*shozoku*] or membership in a school or company become lost, and they tend to feel disconnected from society.

Indirect aim-setting was found to be a key factor that enabled such non-hierarchical relationships. A characteristic of the Z-meetings is that the aim is not set directly, such as helping to get a job, but rather an opportunity to explore problems by sharing narratives regarding *ikizurasa* experiences. As a result of this stance, many participants feel better in their *ikizurasa*, some of whom could connect themselves to the job world. Such indirect aim-setting enabled the Z-meetings to withhold value judgements on participants' situations at work and facilitate dialogues. By taking some distance from paternalism in a supporter-supported relationship, it rekindles participants as subjects to help themselves with excitement. As such, indirect aim-setting is a critical condition of the Z-meetings to become a space where people can communicate with others as 'humans' regardless of their social positions.

7.2.2. Indirect Aim-Setting or Vacuum of Aim?

Meanwhile, there emerges a question. When the 'aim' of supporting practices is a point of concern, 'whose' aim is it and 'for what' purpose will it be? To help individuals get a job is an aim given by government under its activation policies or based on the social norm that 'working is virtue/obligation'. Therefore, employment-focused youth support can be well institutionalised in the existing framework by functioning as an

agent of government or society. On the other hand, the Z-meetings group thoroughly focuses on the perspective of marginalised youth and sets its aim at exploring oneself with others. Admittedly, it is not an 'objective' aim, with a degree of achievement that can indicate how the social participation rate of youth is improved. Instead, the goal is subjectively set as reconstructing human relationships in personal daily situations. In the institutional framework, however, this can appear as a 'vacuum of aim', and thus, a vacuum of significance.

Indirect aim-setting is suggested as a bridging category from the aim set by individuals who have *ikizurasa* [rekindling connectedness] to a socially set aim [reducing unemployment]. By using the expression 'indirect aim-setting', I have tried to 'translate' the native explanation for the significance of the Z-meetings to a more open, institutionally understandable form. In fact, the 'aim' for indirect aim-setting refers to helping people get a job, which is based on a government perspective. To put it simply, I posit that the Z-meetings exist to help people get a job by avoiding the statement 'We will help you get a job'. Indeed, this is the same structure of the strategy of Open Dialogue discussed in Chapter 3---The aim of the cure should be suspended because the intention of the curer to cure can deprive patients of a space where they subjectively change themselves (Saitō 2016). As such, indirect aim-setting is a strategic expression to combine the Z-meetings' principle, 'accepting people as they are without making them change', and the institutional framework, 'helping them get a job', in a consistent form. By doing this, I intend to shed light on the significance of the seemingly meaningless 'vacuum of aim'.

In contemporary Japan, there are fewer 'non-purpose-specific' areas in places where children and youth can spend their daily life, such as school, day care/afterschool care, or even free-school for *futōkō* children. For example, day care/afterschool care has been developed for working/single parents and is chiefly based on their needs for securing their child's life during their work. For the children, it was good enough to go and stay there in a healthy and safe environment. However, with diversification and commodification of those places, especially after the 2000s with a background of a reduced birth rate and deregulation oriented by neo-liberal government policies, there emerged care providers that provide various additional services, such as 'staff talking to kids in English' (Kido 2017). In such a place, children are supposed to not only to stay

there safe, but also learn English. Similarly, some free-schools for *futōkō* children started to announce an aim of ‘helping them pass the high school equivalent test’ or ‘providing better education than traditional schools’, instead of being ‘*ibasho*’, or a space just to be without being expected to do anything (Chapter 3). At such free-schools, *futōkō* children would not be able to rest by themselves in a secure, accepting atmosphere, but are pushed to move on towards goals. Under these conditions, children and youth are more exposed to pressure to spend their time ‘focussing on’ newly set aims one after another. Their everyday life and human relations become a means ‘to’ something, and not an aim in themselves. These situations seem to make young people’s lives busier and deprive them of a space where they can feel safe without being pushed to reach a pre-set goal.

As a criticism of the current situation around children and youth, Kōhei, a founder and a mentor of the Z-meetings, emphasised that it is important for humans to have relationships outside purpose-specific places (Yamashita 2010). As presented in Chapter 5, Kōhei refers to his *ibasho* practice and holds that an aspect of humans as ‘living beings [*ikimono*]’ is that they want to relate with others without any specific purposes or instrumental objectives, thus, *ibasho* is not only a means for youth support but also a pivotal place where humans can reflect on themselves as a part of nature (Yamashita 2010, Chapter 5). Based on this stance, he insisted, ‘*ibasho* is unfit for institutionalisation, let alone commodification’ (Yamashita 2010).

However, I argue that securing a non-purpose-specific space for young people is an urgent social task, and thus, narrative self-help practices and *ibasho* practices should be situated within the institutional framework. Purpose-specific support, such as job training or employment support, is effective, but its effectiveness will be markedly enhanced and reaching out to more in distress when combined with non-purpose-specific, relational support. It is because job training and employment support presuppose that the users have already clarified their needs for job skills or employment, even though many marginalised individuals cannot clarify those in advance. As illustrated in Figure 18 and 19 in Chapter 6, the Z-meetings participants could not know their needs at the first stage, and then they found their aims unintentionally through encounters and interactions with others. Through this process of interaction, some people naturally connected themselves to the job world. For

example, Tomohisa, an ex-*futōkō* care worker, started to work in the field of disability care because Kōsuke, another member of the Z-meetings group, was working there. Although he did not originally intend to become a care worker, he was happy with his job. Moreover, such relationships can give people power to get through hardships that they come across in the process of achieving their goals. This was well demonstrated in Mai's story, where she could complete her post office job by sharing her anxiety and fear with other members of Generative Garden. Without such a supportive community, employment would not become sustainable, even if it was once provided. As such, *ibasho* and narrative self-help practices contribute to the social task of reducing youth unemployment, thus deserve to be institutionalised, as a result of refraining from setting short-term goals. Indirect aim-setting is an expression that illustrates this mechanism by explaining the significance of the 'vacuum of aim' within an institutional framework. Then, how can it be effectively institutionalised?

7.2.3. Rethinking Institutional Settings

A crucial question that should be addressed before discussing institutional settings in practice is: What is held as 'being socially included' in a Japanese context? As presented in Chapter 2, under the family corporation-based life security (Miyamoto, Ito Peng et al. 2003) and membership-based (Kido 2012; Hamaguchi 2013) systems, there is a strongly shared sense that individuals become a full-fledged member of society when they become a regular member of a corporation or a wife of such a person. Because eligibility for unemployment benefits and livelihood subsidies are strictly limited, a welfare-dependent life cannot be an option for many people. Thus, 'to be normally/regularly employed [*futsū ni shūshoku suru*]' (Tsutsui et al. 2014) is imagined as the only way to be included in society as well as a social norm to conform to. Under this condition, the unemployment rate is kept at a relatively lower level even after entering the post-industrial phase because of fewer choices available for individuals other than pushing themselves into the labour market. However, this also means that unemployed/ casually employed youth are exposed to a relentless fear of not having a socially acknowledged place to anchor themselves to.

As shown in Chapters 5 and 6, the participants in this research are such people who can hardly be judged as eligible for livelihood subsidies despite their genuine difficulties in connecting themselves to regular jobs. They were caught in *ikizurasa* that was involved in what I called double marginalisation in Chapter 2, where individuals are trapped in getting the worst of both industrial society [conformity pressure] and post-industrial society [insecurity]. In other words, in spite of the pressure toward ‘working normally’ remaining strong, precarious jobs are the only option available for the interviewees. In effect, as presented in Chapter 5, jobs that the interviewees are engaged in are more or less those that provide only a short-term contract, monotonous, or lowly paid, even though they felt rewarding at times. Additionally, their vulnerability in connecting themselves to society would make it difficult to keep working on a regular basis. Mai was able to complete the seasonal post office job through help from other members of Generative Garden, but considering her fragility in social relationships, it would be taxing or unrealistic for her to make her living only by performing that job. Kōsuke was working full time as a disability care worker and could support himself by the job at the time of the interview, though he would have to reduce or quit the job when his mental condition stops allowing him to work full time.

Here, the presupposition that ‘working normally’ is the [only] legitimate form of being included in society should be called into question. As I introduced in Chapter 3, Tsutsui et al. suggest that government employment support should include ‘half-welfare half employment [*han-fukushi han-shūrō*]’, which is a model for life ‘that is supported by a combination of public income assistance, including livelihood subsidies or disability benefits, and individual job income’ (Tsutsui et al. 2014: 8). This model would also be effective for supporting marginalised youth who have *ikizurasa*.

On top of that, I argue, based on the findings of this research, that *ibasho* and narrative self-help practices should be tagged with this model. It is important for marginalised youths to have a space with an accepting atmosphere where they can return to and feel safe without fear of being judged or feeling inferior in competition, and have interactive relationships where they can explore their *ikizurasa* and how they came to have it. While ‘half-welfare half-employment’ responds to the economic need, *ibasho*/narrative self-help practices respond to relational needs. The support for relationship will be a key to make this model effective, because it can assist in making

the participant's work life to become meaningful and their 'welfare-user' life something to be proud of, thus a sustainable, sharing process. This will be applicable not only for marginalised youth but also for individuals of all ages who have difficulties with working. Figure 20 illustrates this model.

Figure 19 Model of Social Participation for Individuals who have Difficulties with Working



Admittedly, as was shown in Chapter 3, Tsutsui et al. (2014) and Toivonen (2013) found through their fieldwork that an *ibasha*-like approach was already included in ground level practices within the government activation framework. However, it was finally situated as the 'first step' in a step-by-step employment support process whose goal is rigidly set at working regularly. Under this condition, users cannot be free from judgement or competition, or who is advanced or hindered, or successful or unsuccessful, which will isolate them in their individual positions. Moreover, the boundary between supporters and the supported is clearly set, which means that if the support results in frustration, it would be attributed to failure of either the supported or the supporter. In this situation, trustful and equal relationships between the supported and the supporter can be more difficult.

Here, I argue that *ibasha* and narrative self-help practices that are developed in the private sector, such as Generative Garden and the Z-meetings, are more effective. Setting a goal of exploring oneself with others by sharing *ikizurasa* narratives, the Z-meetings did not bring a division of participants as successful or unsuccessful. Further,

as shown by the fact that the mentors were regarded as participants, there are fewer boundaries between supporters and the supported.

Such a form of support became possible under the quality of 'indirect aim-setting'. Therefore, as I argued in the previous section, *ibasho*/narrative self-help practices should be situated in a government scheme and be given institutional backup without changing the aim of 'exploring self with others by sharing *ikizurasa* narratives'.

By situating it as a public project, there would be concerns regarding how to achieve accountability to the public. For effective institutionalisation of *ibasho*/narrative self-help practices, I suggest that: 1) considerable discretion is given to the organisers of local practices, and 2) quantitative indicators but also qualitative aspects are assessed. Under circumstances where young people experience marginalisation in individualised, complicated ways, problems can only be figured out by those supporters who deeply relate to the users on a long-term basis with care and patience. The new framework should value and assist the daily practices, but never cripple them. If quality control is needed, it can focus more on qualitative aspects, including organising symposiums, developing a network with other support practices, providing support staff with instruction opportunities, creating artworks, and/or other various activities based on user needs.

7.3. Significance of Relational Approaches: Resistance against *Individualisation*

Having demonstrated that *ikizurasa* is an expression of individualised marginalisation, the significance of relational support is considered to reduce it by mitigating the individualising tendency through (re)creating human relationships. In the process of individualisation, individuals are exposed to relentless pressure to create their life career as one they have chosen, thus the self-responsibility theory will be applied when an attempt fails. In contrast, the relational approach highlights what is not chosen. It was telling that in their narratives regarding future career, the participants of this thesis emphasised the points of 'not deciding' and 'surrendering to the flow of life' (Chapter 5). It seems that there remains room for the undecided as a form of resistance against

individualisation through embracing a dialogical encounter, relationships, and unpredictability that are beyond individual decisions.

By scrutinising the narratives of unemployed youth, this research uncovered what is usually considered to be 'individual' qualities or possessions, such as personal needs, hopes, desires, and/or intentions, which are also seen as necessary for a career search, but do not exist in-person at the outset. After retreating into their own world of isolation, the participants had a vague fear about associating with people or working, though without knowing why or how. Under this condition, they could neither have a sturdy sense of self nor clarify their needs for social participation. However, through the sharing of *ikizurasa* narratives with others, they came to identify parts of social situations and how they feel *ikizurasa*. This is the very process in which they encounter themselves as not isolated anymore and gain a better understanding of their needs. Here, the sense of self and individual needs are understood as generated through interpersonal co-actions.

In order to interpret this process, the concepts of 'relational being' suggested by Gergen (2009) and 'in-between [*aida*]' proposed by Kimura are helpful. Both criticise the Western traditions of social sciences and philosophy noting that they, even in cases where interactions that affect individual mentality or behaviour are discussed, understand relationships as a derivative of separate individuals coming into contact. Instead, those authors attempted 'to reverse the order, and treat what is taken to be individual units as derivatives of the relational process' (Gergen 2009: xxi), or '[to understand that] before being connected with others through...social relations, each individual has a place called "in-between" with other individuals as other organisms of the same species, or rather, we may even say that such a place exists a priori to an individual' (Kimura 2005a: 153). This argument well explains what happens in the Z-meetings, that is individual needs, aims, hopes, and perseverance, or the sense of 'self', are generated as a result of interacting processes but do not reside inside the individual preceding the interactions.

As Gergen points out, such a way of viewing humans allows us to understand educational achievement or therapeutic effect as a result of co-action, which means that intervention should not target each individual but rather relationships (Gergen

2009). This viewpoint seems especially required in Japan because, in the context where the activation scheme takes a 'symbolic' form (Toivonen 2013) that employs particular symbolic categories instead of controlling the condition of benefit to fuel activation policies, individuals tend to suffer from the derogatory nuance of a symbolic category, such as 'NEET', and blame themselves. This thesis has shown that for some people who have had a severe *ikizurasa* experience, such a self-blaming tendency can be aggravated by an attempt to provide employment 'support', because such an attempt implies that they themselves need to change in order to be employed. In these cases, a relational approach might be more effective, *especially at the initial stage*, because it focuses on the human relationship that surrounds them and may help to alleviate the self-blaming tendency itself, instead of trying to change the individual, which may aggravate self-blame even further.

Another important point is, as mainly indicated by Kimura, the critical significance of a 'place'. While stories and dialogues highlight 'a person' who is the author of the stories and 'persons' with whom the dialogic interactions are held, 'place' focuses more on the context itself where 'a person' or 'persons' can emerge (Hagiwara 2012). In the participants' narratives, it was sometimes heard that a sense of being accepted or shared is more important than the meanings of words. For example, Kōsuke talked about 'warm affection' in a narrative sharing process without referring to what exactly the narrative was about or in what words they were shared (Noguchi 2015b). Similarly, Rio noted, 'in the Z-meetings I can narrate what is difficult to narrate while saying, "This is very hard to narrate"' (Rio 2015), implying that sharing the sense of difficulty is more important than creating words for hard-to-narrate experiences. What is happening here can be understood by Kimura's concept, 'place subjectivity' [subjectivity that dwells in place beyond each individual and affects individual subjectivities, see Chapter 3] (Kimura 2005a: 141). In entrusting oneself to the companionate mood in the place, individual *ikizurasa* can be connected to others' *ikizurasa*, and then transform its meaning from something abject to something even proud.

As such, it has been illuminated in this thesis that relational models can open a new possibility for capturing the lived realities of youth who have *ikizurasa*, as well as describing what is happening in narrative self-help and *ibasho* practices.

7.4. Significance and the limitations of the Thesis

To conclude the thesis, I will summarise the significance of this research. First and foremost, it contributes to Japanese studies from the viewpoint of *ikizurasa* among unemployed youth. It provides an interpretation of the characteristics of Japanese society and its transformation from the perspective of individuals who have *ikizurasa*. It grasps contemporary Japan as a blend of 'industrial Japan' and 'post-industrial Japan', in which those with *ikizurasa* are relegated to a doubly marginalised position where they can neither enjoy the industrial fruit of stability nor the post-industrial fruit of freedom. Based on this interpretation, the thesis analysed the realities of Japanese young people with empirical data collected through the fieldwork, which delves into personal experiences and subjective interpretations in detail. The field was the Z-meetings group, where people who have experienced various career-related hardships gather, thus youth marginalisation in contemporary Japan could be epitomised. I especially focused on three 'core' participants who have *ikizurasa* typical of the members of the group. Their narratives clearly indicated how they redefined their situations and clarified their needs using narrative self-help practices. Their cases are reinforced by data from seven others that indicated the variety of *ikizurasa* as well as the participants' attitudes toward the Z-meetings. These results are also valuable in and of themselves as first-hand materials, because it is usually difficult to conduct in-depth interviews with vulnerable informants without being invasive. The findings presented are the outcome of long-term relationships of the researcher with the participants, and a particular context where the researcher and participants share *futōkō* experiences, and took part in the same project on a long-term basis.

Second, by taking the example of Japanese society, this thesis has attempted to illuminate problems of post-modernity and searched for countermeasures. Most developed countries have individuals who become alienated from society under the predominance of individualisation. As a result, they can abandon themselves to despair or have violent impulses toward society. This thesis saw in this situation the limitation of the concept of the fully independent individual. It points out that for such marginalised people it is crucial to create social relationships where they can

(re)construct a sturdy sense of 'self'. Under this realisation, it argues that support for marginalised people should include narrative self-help practices, especially focusing on a space where they can get together and share their experiences, i.e., *ibasho*. It employed relational theories such as those proposed by Gergen and Kimura to interpret this situation, and at the same time, substantiates their theses by empirical case studies.

Last but not least, this research overcame the limitations of the *futōkō* movement theory and updated its significance by adjusting it to the post-industrial situation. Although *futōkō* was one of the symbolic figures of marginalisation among youth and children during the industrial age, in the new situation where the transitional system from school to work has been damaged, long-term unemployment with *ikizurasa* has become more salient as a figure of youth marginalisation. This thesis took over one of the most fruitful outcomes of the *futōkō* movement, *ibasho*, and accordingly applied it to the post-industrial context. Especially, it contributes to knowledge by spelling out the quality of *ibasho* as 'indirect aim-setting' and presents a model of institutionalisation as a part of a government activation scheme. In these processes, this thesis describes in English young people's *futōkō* and *hikikomori* experiences, and their self-help practices, with key words such as *ibasho* and *ikizurasa*.

On the other hand, this research has some limitations.

First, the thesis is based on the analysis of data collected from ten individuals who took part in one project organised by an NPO, the Z-meetings. While the size of the data is justified by the qualitative research method, and analysis of the extremely rare and sensitive data has generated new knowledge both in terms of theory and practice, its validity will need to be investigated further in a broader context. This thesis has not addressed the diversity of ground-level supporting practices within Japanese society. As there are many other types of relational support systems in both the public and private sectors, a systematic comparative research of those practices will be needed to further examine the theoretical and practical implications of the thesis, which is beyond the scope of this study. A systematic comparative examination will also be needed to further explore the theoretical and practical implications of the thesis. In order to do so, it will first be necessary to locate *ikizurasa* in Japan in a broader

international contexts. For example, Korea shares various youth marginalisation with Japan, such as *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, deterioration of youth labour market and growing hopelessness whereas it is experiencing more compressed modernisation in terms of declining birth-rate and aging population and rapid post-industrialisation. The method of narrative self-help approach is likely to be useful in societies like Korea which exhibits many similarities with Japan, but the examination of the proposition will have to be left to future studies, as well as even larger-scale comparative studies involving diverse socio-cultural milieu with regard to unemployed youth.

Within the scope of this study, one limitation of the thesis is that the socio-economic aspects of *ikizurasa* could not be sufficiently analysed. By setting its focus mainly on narratives and individual identities, this research only touched on the participants' economic conditions as they were spontaneously narrated, and could not target the supports of shelter or livelihood. A future task will be to approach the question of how economic deprivation or a violent upbringing environment can constitute *ikizurasa* in adult life.

Likewise, the analysis on gender difference was an obvious limitation of this research. This partly reflects the fact that, *futōkō*, *hikikomori*, and/or *freeter* are still seen predominantly as 'male' problems (Kurita 2007). Gender and sexuality in *ikizurasa* are clearly the aspects that need to be addressed in future research.

All in all, it is acknowledged that the data presented in this thesis is highly qualitative in nature. However, the method worked well to delve deep into sociologically the issue of youth *ikizurasa* and its relationship with youth unemployment in the post-industrial Japan, and enabled me to identify the significance of relationality as a key factor hitherto disregarded in the theory and practice concerning the long-term youth unemployment issue. The implications of this new theoretical and practical focus is significant, although its actual effectiveness will have to be examined in broader and comparative contexts in the future.

This thesis has also made a contribution for illuminating the state of *ikizurasa* and the ground level effort to deal with it in post-industrial Japan. As discussed, *ikizurasa* is an individualised expression for marginalisation under individualisation, while at the same

time an expression of those marginalised youth regarding their hope for connectedness with others and society. The data demonstrated that by experiencing dialogical interactions and a sense of being accepted, some participants finally came to see their *ikizurasa* as something acceptable, useful, or even precious. This practice of 're-authoring' the meaning of *ikizurasa* is the very process in which they have been able to re-connect themselves to society.

If individualisation is an inevitable trend that many developed societies have been caught in, there would be increasing needs for a relational foundation where individuals are derived, developed, supported and sustained. Narrative self-help and *ibasho* practices are a suggestion for such a foundation. Importantly, these practices also suggest the possibility to mitigate the tendency toward individualisation by focusing on human relations. Individuals are 'in-dividable' from the context in which they are derived from, a space where flesh-and-blood humans get together and generate relationships. In order to address and ameliorate the 'alienation of the soul' (Berardi 2009: 23) that is typical to late capitalist societies, a pressing priority is to deliver relational support that can be effective for the well-being and career development of young people.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Theme and Style of the Z-Meetings

	Year	Month	THEME	STYLE
1	2011	Jun	From Pain to Anger	Individual Report
2	2011	Jul	Communication	Individual Report
3	2011	Aug	How to Spend Time?	Individual Report
4	2011	Sep	Images for Work	KJ analysis
5	2011	Oct	How to Survive Without Working?	Public Meeting
6	2011	Nov	Feelings of Emptiness	Individual Report
7	2011	Dec	Social Background of Gender Roles	Short Lecture
8	2012	Feb	Recognition and Dependence	Individual Report
9	2012	Mar	My Pain	Individual Report
10	2012	Apr	Relationship between Mother and Me	Free Discussion
11	2012	May	Relationship between Mother and Me, vol. 2	Individual Report
12	2012	Jun	Internal Childhood	Individual Report
13	2012	Jul	Relationship between Father and Me	Individual Report
14	2012	Aug	Essay on University Life	Individual Report
15	2012	Sep	Anger, Pain, Violence, 'Magma' Inside	Free Discussion
16	2012	Nov	Isolation	Individual Report
17	2012	Nov	Festival for Pain of Living	Public Meeting
18	2012	Dec	Gap between 'Us' and 'Ordinary People'	Free Discussion
19	2013	Jan	Existence and Dependence	Individual Report
20	2013	Feb	Wishing to Become a Non-authoritative Father	Individual Report
21	2013	Apr	<i>Hikikomori</i>	Individual Report
22	2013	May	School	KJ analysis
23	2013	Jun	Friendship	Free Discussion
24	2013	Jul	Membership System in Japan	Short Lecture
25	2013	Aug	<i>Ibasho</i>	Individual Report
26	2013	Sep	Unveiling Clumsiness	Free Discussion
27	2013	Oct	Gender-separated Meetings	gender-separated meeting

28	2013	Oct	Is <i>Futōkō</i> My Identity?	Public Meeting
29	2013	Dec	Journey to My Pain of Living	Individual Report
30	2014	Jan	Pain without Name	Free Discussion
31	2014	Feb	Why do I Define Myself as <i>Tōjisha</i> ?	Individual Report
32	2014	Feb	About Future Z-Meetings	Free Discussion
33	2014	Apr	Pain of Living just like Phantom Assault	Individual Report
34	2014	Apr	Extreme Self-consciousness	Free Discussion
35	2014	May	Staying Alone	Free Discussion
36	2014	Jun	Appearance and Self-consciousness	Individual Report
37	2014	Jul	Writing Experiences	Individual Report
38	2014	Aug	Fear of Being Judged	Individual Report
39	2014	Sep	Men's Marginalization	Free Discussion
40	2014	Oct	Strategies in Daily Life	KJ analysis
41	2014	Nov	Counselling	Individual Report
42	2014	Dec	How to Deal with Anger	Free Discussion
43	2015	Jan	What is <i>Tōjisha-kenkyū</i>	Free Discussion
44	2015	Feb	Hurting Words	KJ analysis
45	2015	Mar	Unveiling My Dependency	Individual Report
46	2015	Apr	<i>Hikikomori</i>	Individual Report
47	2015	May	Self-analysis	Interactive Cartoon
48	2015	Jun	Counselling	Individual Report
49	2015	Jul	Fears	KJ analysis
50	2015	Aug	Lack of Confidence	Free Discussion
51	2015	Sep	<i>Hikikomori</i> & Sexuality	Individual Report
52	2015	Oct	Report of Alternative Education Overseas	Individual Report
53	2015	Nov	Fears of Being Targeted for Anger	Interactive Cartoon
54	2015	Dec	How to Get Angry	Free Discussion

Appendix 2. List of Interviews and Essays from the Field.

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GLOSSARY

***futōkō* (不登校)**: school non-attendance for reasons other than illness or economic problems

***hikikomori* (ひきこもり)**: a person who isolates themselves inside their house and does not participate in society, or the state of doing so; becomes a problem by the late twenties

***ibasho* (居場所)**: lit., a place to 'be'; an open (and opened) space where a person is free to participate in any activities and can relate with others in a safe and secure social atmosphere without coercion

***ikizurasa* (生きづらさ)**: lit., 'pain of living'; a form of anxiety or angst experienced by youth in post-industrial Japanese society, often associated with a sense of disconnectedness and self-blaming or suicidal tendencies

***Tōjisha Kenkyū* (当事者研究)**: 'Self Study'; a self-help method that emerged in a psychiatric care community in Japan where people get together and 'study' themselves in communication with others who may have similar problems

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