The purpose of this paper is to examine how life paths toward dreams are selected in relation to ibasho, taking the case of rock musicians. Previous studies have focused on the lack of ibasho and pointed out various problems such as unstable transitions. In contrast, this paper focuses on the possession of ibasho and clarifies the process by which it leads to unstable transitions. The data used was obtained from an interview survey of dream-following musicians. As a result, it was found that musicians have multiple ibasho inside and outside school, and choose to pursue their dreams by complying with those ibasho; the ibasho inside school is club activities, and that outside school is live music clubs. They first started their musical activities through family influence and club activities, developing an ibasho inside the school. Then, in order to work in a more legitimate place, their activities overflowed the school. There, they gained new ibasho by meeting trusted colleagues and supporters, and chose the path of dream chasing with unstable transitions. Their life paths were strongly driven by the youth culture of rock bands, and their ibasho inside and outside school played an important role. In addition, they had the difficulties pointed out in previous studies due to the unstable transitions. However, they willingly took these difficulties upon themselves because they were “doing something they liked.”

The above findings show the paradox of not only following an unstable transition because there is no ibasho, but also doing so because there is one. The following problems have became clear; their difficulties were invisible and undertaken by themselves due to the characteristic of pursuing dreams. This is where attention should be paid by future youth support policy.

Keywords: The possession of ibasho; pursuing dreams; rock musician; transition driven by youth culture
1. Introduction

A long time has passed since the instability and difficulty for youths in transitioning from school to work was initially identified in several countries. As early as the 1970s in Europe as well as from the 1990s on in Japan, the number of unemployed or irregularly employed youths has increased. The presence of youths who cannot follow a conventional standard life course and who have been forced to make unstable transitions has become a social problem (Miyamoto, 2002; Furlong et al., 2018).

In response to this growing issue, various countries have developed support policies for young people. For example, the European Union was among the first to establish a comprehensive policy area specifically dedicated to youth, and various initiatives have since been implemented (Cullen et al., 2009; Malo & Moreno Mingüez eds., 2018). In contrast, since Japan formulated the “Plan for Young People to Stand and Face Challenges by Themselves” in 2003, various initiatives have been undertaken, including career education, youth self-reliance schools, and regional youth support stations (Komikawa, 2007; Oyamada, 2018).

The keyword in such policies in Japan is *ibasho*, or “a place or community where one feels at home.” Measures to promote employment and independence of young people were implemented in combination with *ibasho* support for youths who refuse to attend school or have become *hikikomori*, “young people who engage in severe social withdrawal.” Under the current youth support policy, while the creation of *ibasho* is conducted as expressive support for rewriting the negative self-image of the socially disadvantaged youth, instrumental support for employment and self-reliance is provided at the same time. For this reason, the current support policy for youths has been situated as a workfare type of support that positions employment as a condition for receiving welfare benefits (Yokoi, 2006). This type of support has been criticized for the difficulty of balancing expressive and instrumental support as well as for positioning employment as its goal (Ishikawa, 2007; Oyamada, 2018).

The presented information is extremely significant, particularly in Japan, where the development of youth support policies has tended to be insufficient. Although the lack of *ibasho* tends to be the premise of much political and academic discussion, there is still insufficient examination related to unintended consequences of youths having *ibasho*. In other words, while the issues associated with the lack of *ibasho* have been clarified, the problems associated with the possession of *ibasho* have rarely been discussed within the related issues.

For example, the lack of *ibasho* for youths can be perceived as both a cause and a consequence of many of the problems that young people face, including, but not limited to, school non-attendance and/or the resulting *hikikomori* (Tanaka ed., 2001; Tadai & Honma eds., 2006). Therefore, support should be provided in order to create *ibasho* for youths. Similarly, in previous research related to youths’ transition from school to work, it has been found that the number of youths’ connections affects their biography. Furthermore, the lack or paucity of *ibasho* can lead to a more unfavorable life (Walther et al., 2005; Inui ed., 2013). In contrast, the possession of *ibasho* tends to be positively presented, particularly in studies related to disadvantaged youths. It has been indicated that for youths who do not have *ibasho*, either in school or at work, the establishment of one, represented mainly by peer groups, can be the last line of defense in order for them to survive the transition (Walther et al., 2005; Inui ed., 2013).

Of course, some studies have discussed the issue of possessing *ibasho*. These studies
show that those who do not have an *ibasho* in school get involved with and conform to different groups outside school (e.g., young people or families), which could result in their choosing an unstable course (Araya, 2002; Hayashi, 2016). However, these studies focused solely on the lack of *ibasho* within the school.

In contrast, this paper reveals the mechanism by which young people who have *ibasho* inside school choose an unstable transition. In other words, this paper focuses on the *ibasho* that youths already possess both inside and outside school, and examines what kinds of impacts such possession may have on their life path formation, thereby revealing the unintended consequences of possessing *ibasho*. This paper indicates that having an *ibasho* at school encourages forming another *ibasho* outside school as well, resulting in unstable transitions.

This understanding can have important implications in terms of enhancing youth support policies, since it confirms the existence of youths who do not attempt to participate in available support due to already having *ibasho*. By clarifying these particular youths’ states, it may become possible to uncover the needs required for youth support. Such findings could then be directed toward broadening the scope of youth support policies. To summarize, the position of this paper is as follows: the scope of *ibasho* research has been broadened, and findings for enhancing youth support policies are derived by examining the situation caused by the existence of *ibasho* rather than from its lack.

To examine this particular issue, this paper studied youths who chose the path of pursuing their dreams after leaving school, namely individuals who perform as musicians in rock bands. These musicians work within the dream of “succeeding in music,” and their life path choices may seem “desirable” at first. However, there is a mechanism wherein they accept unstable positions, including becoming “freeters” (i.e., people who work primarily in part-time positions). In other words, these musicians experience unstable transitions while they choose the path of pursuing their dreams. By examining how this life path formation is carried out in relation to *ibasho*, this paper highlights the paradox of having existing *ibasho* inside and outside school. It has already been noted in previous studies that cultural practices such as a community for musical activities can function as an *ibasho* and become a space that promotes social participation (Araya, 2001; Tsutsui, 2012). Therefore, musicians’ future life path formation in relation to *ibasho* can be considered appropriate for discussing the issues raised in this paper.

2. Research outline

The data used in this study were obtained from interviews with musicians who were performing continuously between April 2016 and February 2020. While visiting several live music clubs in Aichi Prefecture, the author asked each musician encountered for their cooperation in this study. A total of 35 musicians (32 men and 3 women) participated, and relevant data were obtained. Their ages ranged from 20 to 32 years at the time of the survey, with one to four interviews conducted with each participant. All participants had, when leaving school, formed their life paths in the direction of pursuing their dreams. This article detailed the process followed from their school days to this choice. After coding all the data, the common denominators were examined and analyzed.

The following are the limitations of this study. First, because of the data gained from
the narratives of individuals whom the author had personally met, it was necessary for the author to be careful in generalizing the findings obtained. In addition, it should further be noted that the findings of this paper are not to meant to deny any existing *ibasho* support; rather, the paper aims to highlight some of the problems associated with possessing *ibasho* rather than those related to the lack of *ibasho*. This aim hinges on providing new insights into *ibasho* for future studies. Second, with regard to the research design, the study contains a mixture of both retrospective narrative regarding the life path selection of those who have already left school and the narrative of those who were, at the time of the study, making that life path choice. This paper mainly uses the former narrative; however, the validity of the findings has been confirmed by using the latter narrative. In the following section, when citing a narrative for analysis, an asterisk represents the author’s statement, while an ellipsis represents an omission.

3. The *Ibasho* of Rock Musicians

The author posed the following questions to guide the research:

1. How do musicians select a path on which to pursue their dreams and which includes an unstable transition?
2. What kind of *ibasho* is associated with this choice?

In order to answer these questions, this paper first examines the kind of *ibasho* that musicians conformed to at the stage of their life path selection. For this study’s purpose, it was necessary to examine what led these musicians to begin their band activities.

It was established that the two primary factors encouraging musicians to start their band activities are family and school. Regarding the former, band activities were started under the influence of family members with music experience, such as “My parents were musicians” or “My siblings played instruments.” Of the 35 musicians in this study, 17 started their band activities as a result of familial influence.

However, the influence of schools was found to be even more significant. Specifically, through extracurricular activities such as “light music” (rock music) afterschool clubs, even those whose family members had no musical experience started band activities in conjunction with various other contingencies. 23 participants were affiliated with a rock club; 14 of them began their band activities under the influence of family members and continued these activities while at school, and 9 participants started band activities for the first time while at school.

It has been noted that youth culture, including band activities, is inconsistent with school culture that emphasizes discipline (Otawa, 2014). For example, someone without an affinity for school culture may turn away from the “desirable” paths the school demands by conforming to the youth culture that exists outside the school, resulting in unstable employment after graduation or dropping out (Araya, 2002).

However, due to worsening employment and other factors, youth culture is beginning to seep into education at contemporary schools because youths’ life paths cannot be guaranteed the way they used to be in the past (Chiba & Otawa, 2007). Therefore, dance clubs (Tsutsui, 2012) and rock clubs (Koizumi, 2003) are important opportunities for young people to encounter youth culture within schools, and also play a role in promoting young people’s adapt-
tation to school. Just as Rio, below, described as “totally immersed there,” rock clubs were found to be an important *ibasho* for musicians in their school life.

Rio: My friend bought an acoustic guitar when I was in high school. I thought it was really cool, and he said, “Rio, you should buy one too.” So, when we went to buy one together and joined the rock club, that was the beginning. I was totally immersed there. Constantly spending time with other musicians.

Once it was determined that participants had found *ibasho* within their schools, it was necessary to determine where they went next. It was established that, even while they were still at school, participants’ *ibasho* did not necessarily remain inside the school. In other words, those who were more “immersed” in their respective rock clubs tended to advance to live music clubs, which are regarded as legitimate activity spaces for bands. Thus, conforming to the school’s *ibasho* led to participants’ outflow to *ibasho* outside the school. The participants’ live music club debuts tended to be live events held by school clubs (e.g., rock clubs). By building a relationship with the staff of the live music venues in question, the live music clubs gradually became participants’ new *ibasho*.

*: Is live music club X a place where you feel comfortable?
Ayano: Yes, it feels comfortable. I have been going there all this time since high school, and my first performance was there as well.

*: How did you end up performing live?
Ayano: At the graduation event of a rock club in high school. We decided to perform at a live music club, given the occasion. We did not make any particular decision, but we decided to do our graduation live at X. Since then, we have kept up a good relationship and they gave me lots of advice needed to get the band going and continued to let me play here.

In addition, in order for the live music clubs outside of the school to become participants’ *ibasho*, the existence of band peers who transcended the school was found to be important. Performing at shows enabled participants to develop friendships with other band members who were co-performers, and this facilitated them to acquire their own *ibasho* outside of school.

*: Do you have other bands that you get along with?
Satoshi: Generally, members of Band A and Band B are good friends, since I have known them since high school. These two bands were working pretty hard by the time we graduated from high school. Let’s say that I was inspired by them and they fanned the flame in me. Also, the members of Band C are younger, but we get along well.

*: You guys are really close musicians of the same age, acting as a single group.
Satoshi: I think so, too. We have a sense of camaraderie as well as a sense of rivalry.

This section has shown how extracurricular club activities inside school as well as live music clubs outside school can become *ibasho* by focusing on what led musicians to start
their band activities. Moreover, the two *ibasho* complement each other. In fact, the more deeply embedded the musicians interviewed were in the former, the more involved they were in the latter. In other words, these musicians obtained various *ibasho* both inside and outside school by venturing out of school—not because they were resisting school culture, but because they had the school as their base. How *ibasho* are tied to the path of musicians forming their life courses (i.e., their choice to pursue their dreams) is discussed in the next section.

4. Life Path Formation Driven by Youth Culture

First, it is necessary to highlight the characteristics of musicians’ life path formation. For participants who possessed *ibasho* inside and outside school, their utmost priority was not to achieve a stable transition. Rather, continuing their band activity had become a priority, even if some stability had to be abandoned in the process.

For example, those who chose their path early on often already had a dream of “succeeding in music” when they were in junior high school. Of particular importance is that rather than simply “having a dream,” these musicians had already begun putting their dreams into action when they were selecting high schools to attend. In other words, the noted participants selected high schools based on the presence of a rock club and how these clubs conducted their activities.

In addition, these active steps can be seen again when the participants entered university. As shown in the following case of Haruma, they would often select an undergraduate major wherein they could receive specialized education in order to contribute to band activities as much as possible.

*: Why did you decide on this department?

Haruma: I thought it would be very useful for the band. I can make friends at university who can make music videos, even if I can’t do that myself. I often have this image that I think our music matches animation. I think we will be making more music like that in the future. At our university, there are people who can create normal hand-drawn animation and those who can create CG animation; I think this will be quite useful. Also, I can study music quite a lot at my current university. So, I thought of going to this particular university so I can learn stuff like acoustics.

In this way, musicians form their life paths around their band activities. It is, then, necessary to determine how *ibasho* are involved in this process. First, the influence of *ibasho* within schools is noteworthy, since schools serve as the decisive factor for many of the participants to begin their band activities and pursue their current life paths. For example, the presence or absence of a rock club served as an important criterion for selecting a school or university, or, in some cases, the experience of joining a rock club led to participants entering a conservatory. In this way, the formation of a life path centered on band activities was promoted.

However, one thing that must be immediately taken into account is that *ibasho* within
the school environment was not the only factor that regulated the musicians’ life paths. Rather, although it was a necessary condition for selecting the path toward pursuing their dream, it alone was not a sufficient condition. Needless to say, there are many people who participate in rock clubs at school but do not continue playing in a band afterward or pursue dreams in this direction. Therefore, the researchers needed to establish what determined musicians’ choice to pursue their dreams. This paper found that the determining factor was the *ibasho* present outside of school; in other words, the participants’ conformance to live music clubs. This finding can be confirmed by the existence of musicians who willingly drop out of university due to their conformance to their live music club *ibasho*.

Riku was originally a singer specializing in Western pop. Therefore, he entered a university with a Faculty of International Studies to study languages. This aspect of university choice is similar to what Haruma described previously. However, he dropped out in his second year of university for the following reasons.

*: Why did you quit university?
Riku: Well, the original motive was impure to begin with, wasn’t it? There are a certain number of people who go to university to learn something. And then I did not fit in with the people around me. Because my place is a live music club. Well, we usually get along, such as in the department’s community. However, I did not feel like completing university. So, after about a year, I felt like giving up soon and decided to quit.

*: So, you felt like you did not fit in?
Riku: Yes, that is right. Well, I may have seemed like I was fooling around to those who were working properly. However, at the end of the day, at the time, I was thinking a lot of how to get the band into shape and how to turn live gigs and audio into a product. Because of this, I stopped going to classes.

*: When did your life become centered on the band?
Riku: Well, I got into university, formed a band, and then started playing. I then performed at live music clubs. Then I saw that they were recruiting for part-time jobs. So, I started working part-time. But at that time, I was still living with my parents and live music clubs close really late, right? Therefore, I’d naturally miss the last train. So, I guess it was when I started to stay at a live music club at the age of 21 or so.

Of primary interest in relation to these findings is the uniqueness of advancing to university with the hope of enhancing band activities. The statement “my place is the live music club” emphasizes Riku’s difference from his contemporaries. From there, the findings indicate that Riku was enthusiastically engaging in band activities at the time, and that working part-time at the live music club was decisive. In other words, his entire life started to revolve around the live music club *ibasho*. As a result, the importance of the university decreased, although he had initially chosen the university for band activities. In this way, Riku obtained an *ibasho* that was more important than the university, which led to his leaving university voluntarily and taking up the life path of pursuing his dream as a freeter.

It should be noted, however, that band-centered life path planning can also be seen among those who have completed university. Examples include musicians who have been en-
ergetically active in their live music club *ibasho*, such as Kazuma\(^9\). When these musicians were about to graduate from university, after agonizing about their future paths, they ultimately chose the life path of pursuing their dreams, accompanied by an unstable transition. This is because their desire to perform in a band was stronger than wanting to get a regular job.

*: Was there any part of you that did not want to become traditionally employed? 
Kazuma: No, that was not the case. If I did not have the desire within me to play in a band, I would probably have taken a regular job.

*: So, you felt like playing in a band rather than getting a regular job?
Kazuma: Oh, yes. I wonder why. My wish to play in the band was stronger.

From the presented findings, it can be asserted that the life path formation of musicians is entirely influenced by band activities. There is evidence that the musicians are following a process in which they increased the number of *ibasho* from inside to outside school, updated these *ibasho*, and ultimately became engrossed in band activities. Hence, by connecting *ibasho* inside school to those outside school, the formation of a life path enabling the pursuit of dreams with unstable work could be achieved, driven by the youth culture of rock bands. These musicians did not become unstable because they had no *ibasho*. Rather, it was because they had more than one that they actively, and willingly, forged their way through onto an unstable path. Thus, it is possible to conclude that this particular unstable life outcome is an unintended consequence of possessing *ibasho*.

What kind of career will these musicians follow after pursuing their dreams in an environment of instability? What kind of problems will they face? Let us come back to this point later. First, the two statuses that these musicians have—”pursuing their dreams” and “freeter”—should be clarified. As freeters, musicians occupy the same position as young people in an unstable situation, as has been discussed in previous studies; however, these musicians carry the additional characteristic of “pursuing their dreams.” This duality is one of the characteristics of dream-pursuing musicians who perform in a band, and it marks the beginning of their career as musicians. Becoming the professional musicians that they aspire to be is achieved by surpassing the status of freeter through the realization of their dreams—in other words, it is achieved by breaking out of both the “pursuing their dreams” and “freeter” statuses. The difficulty faced by participants who are pursuing their dreams is described below.

First, musicians are not simply freeters; rather, through the additional element of pursuing dreams by “doing something they like,” they begin to work toward this aim of social independence by rejecting reliance on their family. This, in itself, may seem desirable, but those who lose their home as a source of *ibasho* find themselves in a difficult position amid the unstable lifestyle of a freeter. These difficulties are their own responsibility, arising from “doing something they like.” Toma\(^{10}\) started living alone immediately after graduating from vocational school. His experience shows that the harder he works to realize his dream, the less time he can commit to even part-time work, and the greater his financial difficulties.

*: Did you decide to move out of your parents’ house?
Toma: No, it was not like that. Rather, staying with my parents would have meant going easy on myself. And I thought that if I were to try to do something I like, going
easy on myself wasn’t a good idea. On the contrary, I found myself, well, living in extreme difficulties.

*: You were?

Toma: Yes. I went on a live tour and I only carried around rice and a gas stove and did things like buying canned food at a 100-yen store and eating it in a park. We did things like that every day.

*: You had times like that? Really? And without even having a home base?

Toma: I couldn’t go back home because I was touring all the time. So I couldn’t really do any part-time jobs, and the travel costs were not cheap. I had an appalling life. It was nothing but hell.

The status of being a freeter is synonymous with youth leading unstable lives, as described in previous studies. The only difference is that participants are pursuing their dreams, placing the responsibility of the difficulties of being a freeter on their own shoulders. Masa\textsuperscript{11}) described this life as “lonely.” In other words, the dream-pursuant life path they chose could never be understood by others who hold an absolute view of a conventional life path. The musicians have to build their own career in the midst of this “loneliness.” During this time, the \textit{ibasho} to which they belong becomes definitively critical. This is because peers who are similarly pursuing their dreams and other people who support these pursuits exist in this \textit{ibasho}. Although the \textit{ibasho} for musicians promotes the selection of this unstable and dream-pursuant life path, it also functions to support their entire subsequent career. It is in this point that the significance of this paper, which examines the career paths of young people by focusing on their \textit{ibasho}, is to be found.

*: So, you keep on barely scraping by?

Masa: It is very difficult. Because when everyone around me is having fun, I have to keep playing the guitar in earnest. It is lonely, after all, since our perspectives are different to begin with. People who get it are rare, aren’t they? I’m trying to do something different but few people accept that. So, I always have pangs of loneliness, but people who do something creative need to be lonely. If I felt the same way as everybody else did, then I would no longer be doing something different. Well, it’s all about how we perceive this loneliness.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, the author examined the life path formation of musicians by focusing on the function of \textit{ibasho}. The study found that multiple \textit{ibasho} were formed by musicians inside and outside their school environments. Simultaneously, participants conformed to the youth culture of rock bands, and with these \textit{ibasho} operating in a complex manner, dream-pursuant life paths including unstable transitions were achieved.

The most important finding in this paper was that there indeed exist \textit{ibasho} for musicians. In particular, \textit{ibasho} within school were critical to understanding the unstable choice of pursuing one’s dream. Having an \textit{ibasho} at school, mainly through club activities, provided an opportunity to start music activities, which was a fundamental condition for sparking the
desire to pursue one’s dreams. In addition, youths also explored outside school, which led them to find another ibasho. This led to the formation of career paths centered on music, and ultimately choosing the life path of pursuing dreams, accompanied by unstable employment. This finding is unique as it reveals how an unstable path is selected not as a result of a lack of ibasho, but rather from having ibasho—from multiple sources including those within school.

In addition, participants also face various difficulties as freeters, as described in previous studies. Nevertheless, they accept this because they are pursuing their dreams. It is highly unlikely that musicians who have more than one ibasho partake in currently available youth support policies that aim to provide employment through the creation of an ibasho, as they already possess one, and they do not deem employment to be important. The very existence of an ibasho can render musicians’ difficulties invisible, and they may be left unattended, without any support provided.

What is important in future ibasho-based studies and practices is to continue providing the current support based on the assumption that a lack of ibasho is problematic, on the one hand, as well as to address youths who have an ibasho, but who may still encounter difficulties. By appropriately addressing the problems that arise through ibasho, and by taking the necessary support measures, it may become possible to realize more fulfilling youth support policies in general, and not only for young people without ibasho.

During this process, it is effective to pay more attention to youths who do not seem to have any problems, as was the focus in this paper. It is also necessary to emphasize that the findings presented in this paper were derived as a result of having selected participants (i.e., youths who are pursuing their dreams) who had not been adequately addressed in previous ibasho-based research.

Notes
1) The difficulty of defining “youths” has been pointed out in earlier studies (Kawasaki & Asano eds., 2016). In this paper, the term “young people” is used to indicate men and women in their late teens to mid-thirties, and more restrictively those engaged in band activities and pursuing their dreams in the field of music, who are the target of this research.

2) According to Araya (2012, 234-235), “instrumental support” is “support for acquiring means of living such as occupation, money, and career guidance and employment support” while “expressive support” is “support for building human relationships and acquiring emotional stability.” “Ibasho” is very ambiguous and difficult to define unconditionally. In this paper, with reference to Araya (2012), by broadly defining ibasho as a group that emotional stability is acquired, it has become clear that the paths of young people are affected by multiple ibasho.

3) Concerning the 12 participants who did not join a rock club, their reasoning included “There was no rock club in the first place,” and “I did not like the atmosphere of the club.” Most of these participants formed a band outside of school. For the purpose of this study, if a participant belonged to a rock club at the high school, vocational school, or university level, they were counted as having participated.

4) In the following section, the participants’ information is specified in the order of age at the time of the survey, gender, highest academic achievement, and employment status. For example, Rio (32 years old, male, vocational college graduate, freeter), interviewed on July 20, 2019.

5) Ayano (22 years old, female, vocational college graduate, freeter), interviewed on March 24, 2017.

6) Satoshi (21 years old, male, university graduate, full-time employee), interviewed on July 29, 2017.
7) Haruma (20 years old, male, university graduate, hopes to become a freeter), interviewed on November 4, 2018.
8) Riku (26 years old, male, university dropout, freeter), interviewed on February 4, 2020.
9) Kazuma (24 years old, male, university graduate, freeter), interviewed on April 9, 2016.
10) Toma (28 years old, male, vocational college graduate, freeter), interviewed on April 1, 2018.
11) Masa (28 years old, male, university graduate, freeter), interviewed on March 8, 2017.

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