

# "Ibasho" Gram for Understanding of Identity in Adolescence<sup>\*1</sup>

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The purpose of this study is to present "Ibasho" Gram in order to understand Identity for adolescents. The word "Ibasho" is often heard in Japanese daily conversation. "Ibasho" means both a place where one lives in society and a feeling of the place for oneself. It is important to have "Ibasho" to live in society. Especially, it is thought that a vital "Ibasho" is a "niche" derived by Erikson (1959). Erikson wrote that one can gain Identity, that is, feel a sense of Identity, when one has a niche. Also, Life-Cycle that Erikson pointed out is assumed as whole "Ibasho" from one's birth to one's death. Because it is thought that Identity is that "I am Me", to gain Identity is to accept "Me" at whole "Ibasho". It presents the method to draw "Ibasho" Gram and one case study in Identity crisis. And it is discussed that drawing "Ibasho" Gram could lead to clarifying the psychological dynamism for self-understanding about Identity.

## 1. The Japanese Word "Ibasho"

### (1) What is "Ibasho"?

The word "Ibasho" is one frequently of the most frequently used words in Japanese daily conversation. The word "Ibasho" is literally translated as being in one place.

The word "Ibasho(居場所)" is composed of two Japanese words, "居(I)" and "場所(basho)". "居(I)" denotes being. "場所(basho)" denotes place. Also, "Ibasho" has two meanings. One is a concrete place where a person is, and the other is a feeling of the place for oneself. It is necessary and important for one to have "Ibasho" to live in society. "Ibasho" is like a bridge between an individual and society. In other words, an individual can touch society at "Ibasho".

The word "Ibasho" is often observed in the following situations.

A middle aged person says "I have an "Ibasho" in my company. But I have no "Ibasho" at home."

A junior high school student says "I have no "Ibasho" in school."

A Student finishing his/her undergraduate course says "I am looking for an "Ibasho" where I feel alive in society."

### (2) The word "Ibasho" related to Identity.

Erikson (1959) found that young adults in Identity crisis struggle to seek their own places in their societies and that they gain a sense of Identity finding "a niche in some section of his society".

An "Ibasho" where a person feels strongly comfortable and strongly vital is a "niche" that Erikson introduced. Erikson (1959) wrote the following.

"The period can be viewed as a psychosocial moratorium during which the individual through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society, a niche which is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for him. In finding it the young adult gains an assured sense of inner continuity and social sameness which will bridge what he was as a child and what he is about to become, and will reconcile his conception of himself and his community's

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recognition of him."

In the above statement Erikson revealed three important points.

First, "free role experimentation" enables one to lead to a niche. Because "free role experimentation" is an activity to look for an "Ibashi" where one feels strongly comfortable and vital, that is, a "niche".

Second, when one has a niche, one can feel "an assured sense of inner continuity and social sameness", that is, "a sense of Identity".

Third, Identity is related to unifying two bridges, a bridge between one in the past and one in the future, and between one and society, which forges the idea that living in Life-Cycle and living with others in society, these aspects play a significant role in gaining identity.

## 2. Identity

### (1) Identity and the Perspectives of Three Dimensions

Literally, Identity means "A is B", "A = B". For a person, Identity represents "I am Me", "I = Me", and "I am Me" is interpreted as "I accept Me".

What is "Me"? The perspectives of three dimensions are the substantial methods to define "Me".

First of all, "I" have some "Ibashi" in daily life. When "I" observe "Me", from the subjective perspective, "I" at each "Ibashi" changes to "Me" at each "Ibashi". And "Me" is "Me" being now and living daily life, that is, "Me" at each "Ibashi".

Next, from the developmental perspective, "Me" is "Me" in each developmental stage and taking a distance from one's birth to one's death (Life-Cycle), that is, "Me" at the whole "Ibashi", in other words, "Me" in Life-Cycle, and Life-Cycle is "Me" at the whole "Ibashi", that is, a distance from one's birth to one's death.

Finally, from the existential perspective, "Me" is "one's whole unique life". With this perspective one was born as "Me" and has lived in Life-Cycle as "Me". And "Me" is unique and different from any other person. It is fate that one was born and has lived in Life-Cycle as "Me" in terms of the religious and spiritual concept.

Observing oneself (taking the subjective perspective), then recalling "Me" at the past "Ibashi", looking to "Me" at the present "Ibashi" and expecting "Me" at the future "Ibashi" (taking the developmental perspective), thinking about fate that "I" was born and "I" have lived in this age and this society as "Me"(taking the existential perspective), "Me" is "Me" at each "Ibashi" in daily life, "Me" in Life-Cycle, and one's whole unique life. To gain a sense of Identity is to accept the view of "I am Me", that is, one's whole unique life.

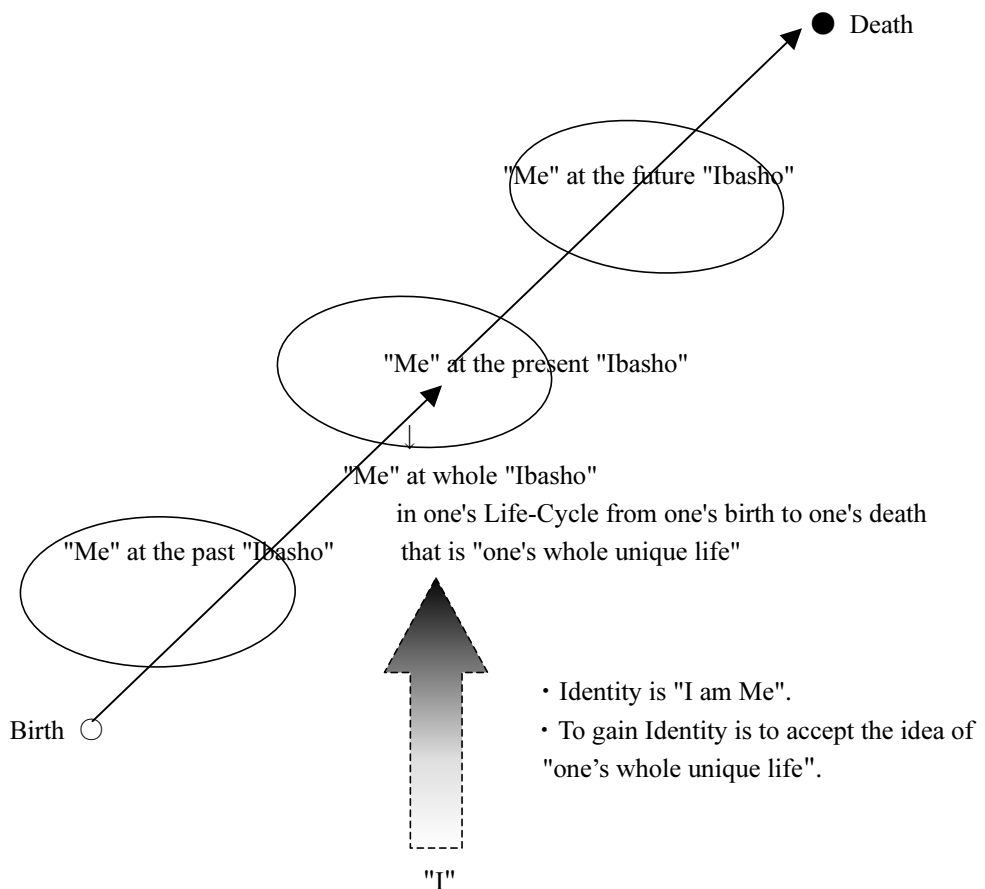


Fig1. Illustrating that to gain Identity is to accept "one's whole unique life"

## (2) Identity for Japanese

Japanese psychologists, who study Identity, have often faced some of the following questions. "Actually do Japanese adolescents experience an Identity crisis? "

"As the present day is different from those times when Erikson revealed the problem of Identity, is not there the problem of Identity for adolescents now?"

Over ages and over cultures, does the problem of Identity still remain? It is assumed that one can not avoid that the problem of Identity emerges from the situation that one psychologically becomes unstable and loses track of oneself.

As there is no word corresponding to Identity in Japanese, rewording this term to Japanese is difficult. Though some translations were tried, recently the word "Identity" has been used as it is, but expressed in Katakana, "アイデンティティ".

With the perspective that Identity is "I am Me", one was born as "Me" with no choice. Though One becomes capable of making choices in one's life with age, one cannot avoid tracing a distance of the whole "Ibashi" from one's birth to one's death in one's Life-Cycle as "Me".

Without stepping into the territory of the religious and the spiritual world, nobody can answer the reason why "I am Me", that is to say, Why one was born as "Me" and why one traces one's distance of the whole "Ibasho" in one's Life-Cycle from one's birth to one's death as unique "Me".

The Japanese word "縁 (en) " means unexplained and special relations between one person and the other person. For example it is used in the following.

"縁 (unexplained and special relationship) between parents and children. "

" The reason why I met you is that there is 縁 (unexplained and special relationship) between us. "

With the use of the word "縁 (unexplained and special relationship) "Japanese people can obtain a better understanding of "Identity". Identity is "I am Me", in other words, "縁 (unexplained and special relationship) " between "I" and "Me". The existential perspective above mentioned is related to the word "縁".

### (3) Identity Crisis and Criteria to accept one's whole unique life.

The subjective, the developmental and the existential perspectives are difficult to adopt. Therefore, it is not necessary to launch the subjective, the developmental and the existential perspectives without the experience of Identity crisis.

In adolescence, or any developmental stage, through doubting oneself and being denied by others, The question of "Who am I? " or "What am I? " arises. At this time, one must find unfitted feeling in oneself and must observe oneself objectively, which yields the possibility of the launch of the subjective, the developmental and the existential perspectives.

### (4) Applying Seiji Takeda's Phenomenology to understanding of Identity

A Japanese philosopher Seiji Takeda suggested that "the method of phenomenology is to clarify the conditions of belief establishment (Takeda, 1979). " The method of phenomenology could be applied to understanding Identity.

With the application of the method of phenomenology, it is misunderstanding that Identity is substance and material. If it is understood that one in Identity crisis may think that Identity is like treasure, gaining Identity is considered as treasure hunting. One would travel all around the world and search in one's unconscious mind to find Identity. Identity, however, must not be found in any place and in any unconscious mind. Because Identity sought for is not substance and not material, not what already exists anywhere, and not kept hidden anywhere. Erikson (1959) defined that a sense of Identity was "an assured sense of inner continuity and social sameness", to be concrete, a feeling of "This is the real me. " It is in danger of understanding that Identity is "the real me". Identity is not "the real me", which is of importance to comprehend.

How is Identity reached without understanding of Identity as substance and material? As Erikson (1959) wrote "a sense of Identity", it is granted that to reach Identity is to have a sense of Identity, which is "belief establishment" derived by Takeda (1979). In terms of "belief establishment", a sense of Identity is "belief establishment" that is regarded as "I am Me". Additionally, the question of "Who am I? " or "What am I? " in Identity crisis is risen from "belief establishment" of "I am not Me".

What are "the conditions of belief establishment" that defines "I am Me"? One of the

conditions is "the criteria of Identity". With the criteria of Identity fulfilled, one can perceive a sense of Identity, which is to acquire "belief establishment" of "I am Me".

When the question of "Who am I?" or "What am I?" is raised, one asks to oneself and faces an unfitted feeling in oneself. The reason is assumed that one loses criteria used for accepting one's whole unique life. The criteria are related to that "psycho-social prototype" derived by Erikson (1959) and also interpreted as "psycho-social value" developed by Ozawa (2003), which permits the criteria to be called "the criteria of Identity".

### 3. "Ibasho" Gram

#### (1) How to draw "Ibasho" Gram

Step1: Draw some "Ibasho" around "Me".

Write one's "Ibasho" around "Me" as many as possible. Then, put 4 kinds of oval lines around "Me" and each "Ibasho" according to the following example.

This question is asked for furthering the observation of oneself and perception of the subjective perspective.

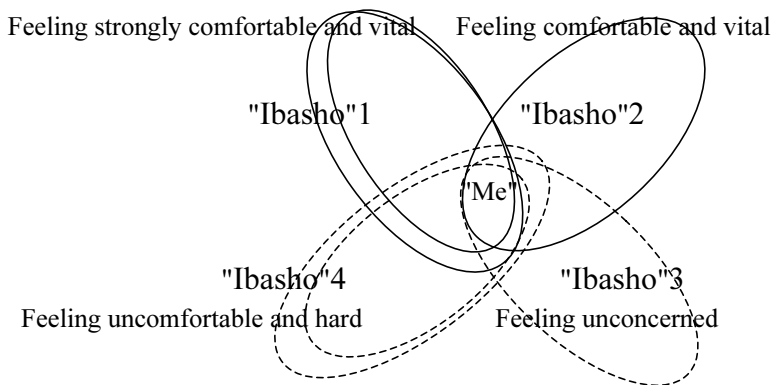


Fig2. Illustrating step1

Step 2: What do you gain from each "Ibasho"?

This question is asked for leading to the meanings of each "Ibasho". Each "Ibasho" imparts the necessity and importance to one to live. With the presumption that the meaning of each "Ibasho" is what one gains from each "Ibasho," if one takes the developmental perspective, some meanings of "Ibasho" correspond to each developmental stage. Therefore each "Ibasho" has different meanings.

Step3: What do you hope to accept your whole unique life?

Prior to this question being asked, one complies with instructions to take the existential perspective as follows: "Observing yourself, then "I" in the center of one's original "Ibasho" gram changes to "Me". Then, remembering "Me" at the past "Ibasho", looking to "Me" at the present "Ibasho" and expecting "Me" at the future "Ibasho", you can observe "Me" at the whole Ibasho in your Life-Cycle from one's birth to one's death. That enables you to summarize your whole unique life".

There are criteria to accept one's whole unique life. It is impossible to accept oneself as one is because the social influences and hope cannot be eliminated to live. The criteria to accept one's

whole unique life is assumed to be tied to what one hopes to accept one's whole unique life, which is the core of Identity.

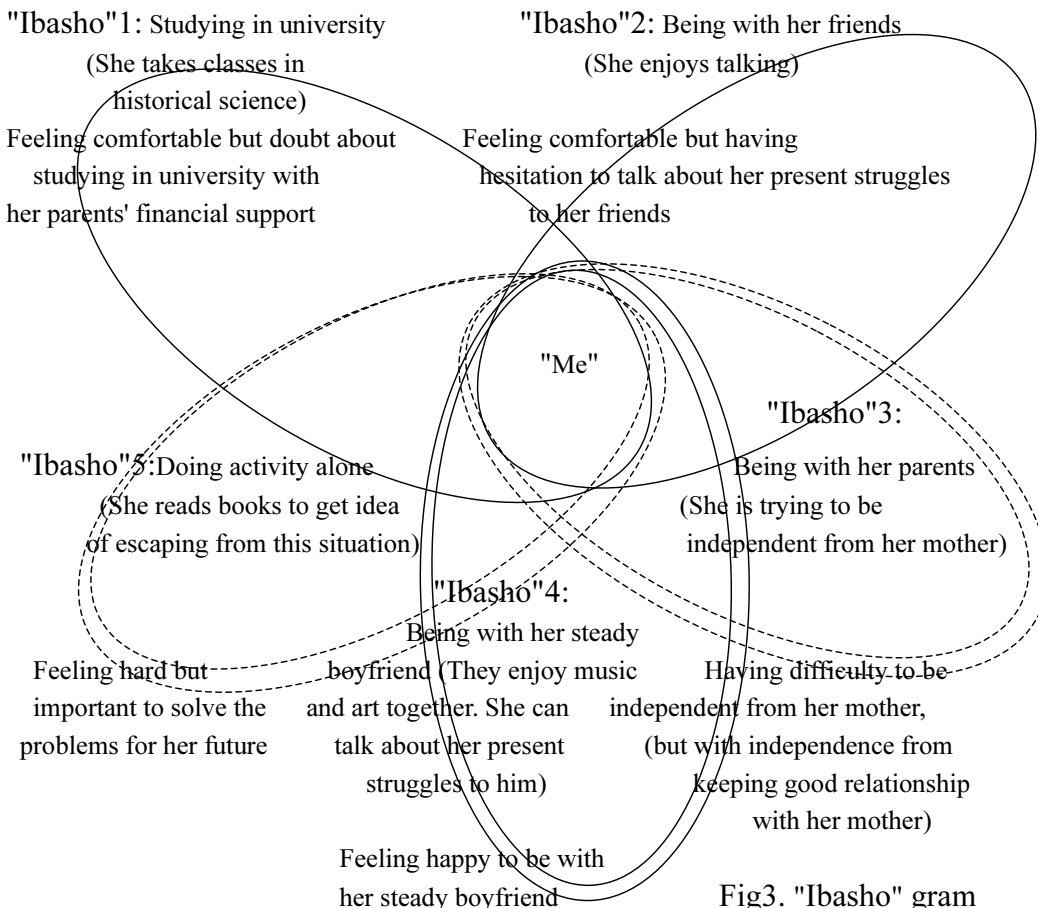
Upon fulfillment of what one hopes to accept one's whole unique life, one can accept one's whole unique life that is, however, uncommon. Many people struggle with fostering a hope to accept one's whole unique life.

#### 4. Case in Identity crisis

The Subject is a sophomore in a university. Using an interview, her "Ibasho" Gram is drawn. Some of her comments are presented as following.

When she started to practice piano she was three. She entered a high school for aspiring professional musicians. Some years after high school, she became unable to play the piano due to physical problems. Although she received many medical treatments, a couple of years later she gave up playing the piano. She proceeded to a university which was not in the music field, according to her father's advice. She looks back at her high school years and remembers that there was no doubt in the future and that all "Ibasho" was strongly comfortable and vital at that time. Now she is struggling with her new life.

Step1: What "Ibasho" does she have?



Step2: What does she gain from each "Ibasho"?

- **"Ibasho"1 studying in the university**

"Knowledge of historical science. But I don't know what I will gain from historical science study."

- **"Ibasho"2 being with her friends**

"Having fun."

- **"Ibasho"3 being with her parents**

"Financial support for tuition and love."

- **"Ibasho"4 being with her steady boyfriend**

"Fun, advice and mental support."

- **"Ibasho"5 doing activity alone**

"Looking for a new aim instead of piano."

Step3: What does she hope to accept her whole unique life?

"I need a new focus that I am involved in, instead of playing the piano. I hope that the new aim leads me to my future occupation I will exert my ability to the maximum. I also want to get married and have my own family."

Now she is struggling with her new life. As she gave up the piano, she lost her criteria to accept her whole unique life and all "Ibasho" of feeling strongly comfortable and vital. She has been in Identity crisis since then. She said, "Both "Ibasho" of doing activity alone and the "Ibasho" of being with my steady boyfriend support my present life".

#### 4. Discussions

In this case, she has been in Identity crisis and struggles to find a new aspiration. When she realizes it, it will become her new hope to accept her whole unique life, which is the criteria of Identity. Although some people retain only one hope in their entire life, she was compelled to change her hope.

Where will she find a new goal? Seeking of her aspiration is seen at each "Ibasho". As she has encountered various aims that others have, she decides if the aim is fit for her. "Role experimentation" that Erikson defined is an activity for seeking a new aspiration that contributes to a new hope to accept one's whole unique life.

Until one finds new hope, what does one support his/her life with lost hope? For her both of "Ibasho" of doing activity alone and of being with her steady boyfriend are of importance for personal support. In addition, it is important that one understands how one's previous hope have been formed under the influence of others such as parents, teachers and friends and that one finds a "root hope" that one want to accept one's whole unique life. It is also important that one builds the awareness of a "root hope" that one wants to accept one's whole unique life in one's mind. Because the "root hope" is the most basic hope that one has.

Drawing of "Ibasho" Gram for self-understanding is of help to clarify the reason why one has a feeling at each "Ibasho". It is assumed that the reason corresponds to one's hope to accept one's whole unique life.

According to what one hopes to accept one's whole unique life, one chooses new "Ibasho" and

leaves another "Ibasho". Shifting "Ibasho" from one to another leads one to reconsider what one hopes to accept one's whole unique life, that is, to gain Identity.

One that has been in Identity crisis must face a challenge to accepting one's whole unique life. Sometimes forgets it, sometimes remembers it, one asks to oneself "what is a hope to accept my whole unique life?" until one finds a new hope. Also, the challenge will continue on until the last day in one's life.

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