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Performing Fatherhood: A narrative study of a Japanese man navigating fatherhood in Japan and Denmark

MDP in East Asian Studies / Faculty of Social Science

Master's thesis

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Abstract

The discourse on fatherhood in Japan has evolved, with increasing recognition of diverse paternal identities that challenge the traditional image of the absent, breadwinning father. This shift is further reflected in the family-friendly initiatives aimed at encouraging men's participation in domestic life. The primary aim of this thesis is to examine Japanese fatherhood from a cross-cultural perspective by comparing how individuals navigate paternal practices and norms in Japan and Denmark. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is employed to analyse how fatherhood and masculinity are enacted across contexts and to assess whether these performances conform to or depart from societal norms. Utilising a qualitative life story interview with one Japanese father, the study provides a contextually bound and nuanced analysis of the construction of gendered practices and identities over time and across societies. Three key themes were identified from an inductive-deductive thematic analysis: (1) Japan's work culture reinforcing traditional fatherhood, (2) Towards more involved fatherhood in Denmark, and (3) Masculinity as a spatio-temporal transformation. The first theme demonstrates that, despite governmental efforts and greater societal acceptance of fathers' caregiving, Japanese corporate culture continues to reinforce the salaryman ideal and a gendered division of labour, thereby hindering paternal involvement. The second theme depicts how Danish societal values of gender equality and workplace norms encourage a more active paternal role, reshaping the informant's understanding of his roles as both father and husband. These themes underscore the influence of institutional and cultural contexts on paternal performances, simultaneously revealing more subtle spatial dynamics that shape these enactments. The third theme emphasises how masculine identity is renegotiated not only across different spaces but also over time through various life trajectories and experiences. Together, these findings highlight the importance of attending to contextual nuances in the construction of masculinity and paternal identity, demonstrating that these are fluid concepts shaped by individuals' interactions with multiple spatial levels and temporal dimensions. While these themes support Butler's theory, the findings also raise questions about its limitations, particularly regarding agency and the influence of circumstantial factors on masculine and paternal performances. Furthermore, the study underlines the need for institutions to actively enforce government initiatives, such as paternity leave, to ensure the realisation of family-friendly policies in everyday practices within societies.

Key words: Japan, fatherhood, masculinity, gender performativity, cross-cultural research.

Declaration of the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In this thesis, Grammarly's free browser version (excluding two free trials of the pro version) was used throughout the writing process. The tool was used solely for grammar proofreading and editing of my original text.

I reviewed all refinements suggested by Grammarly to ensure the content accurately reflected my own work and maintained academic integrity.

No AI tools were used to generate any content or to assist with data analysis, data collection, or other related research tasks.

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1 Introduction

During recent years, discourses on masculinity and fatherhood in Japan have gained increasing public and academic interest (Cook, 2019; Hirayama, 2020). This thesis, too, aims to contribute to this continually evolving discourse by examining Japanese fatherhood from a cross-cultural perspective.

News articles discussing issues such as the importance of detecting postpartum depression in Japanese fathers and offering them appropriate support (Mainichi Shinbun, 2025) reflect the broader, albeit slow, shifts in the cultural imagery of fatherhood in contemporary Japan. An image that has long been characterised with the notion of 'absent father' (Taga, 2016), as during the post-Second World War era of high economic growth, the middle-class nuclear family, with a breadwinner husband and a full-time housewife (*sengyō shufu*), became the normative ideal (Ronald & Allison, 2011; Dasgupta, 2015). The breadwinner-husband ideal of that era was typically a full-time white-collar worker dedicating his life to a single company—also known as the salaryman—while his stay-at-home wife raised the children and managed the home (e.g., Taga, 2003; Dasgupta, 2010, 2015). However, this idealised family model with its clear division of labour has become less attainable following Japan's economic stagnation in the early 1990s (McCormack & Kawabata, 2019; Watanabe, 2020), as Japan's employment market has grown more precarious, with fewer full-time contracts and a rise in non-regular employment (e.g., Taga, 2003; Watanabe, 2020; Slater & Galbraith, 2011; Cook, 2013). Moreover, the growing number of women entering the workforce and the increase in dual-income households (North, 2015; Ishii-Kuntz, 2015) have further called for reconsideration of the sustainability of traditional gender expectations, especially in terms of fatherhood and the paternal role in caregiving. Not only do these shifts in the family model and paternal role reflect the economic changes, but they also intertwine with Japan's broader demographic challenges.

Japan is currently facing a demographic crisis, with an ageing population and a record-low birth rate (NHK, 2025; Suzuki, 2013). Some research suggests that one factor behind the declining fertility rate is the continuous fall in marriage numbers, as well as later marital age (Suzuki, 2013). Although dual-income households are increasing and women's participation in the labour market is gradually growing, the traditional division of labour remains embedded. As a result, many working women struggle to balance the responsibilities for work and family life (Nagase, 2006; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019b). The prevalence of gendered corporate culture (Nemoto, 2008; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019a) further strengthens the imbalance of work-family

expectations, with many women still resigning upon pregnancy (Abe, 2010; Inoue, 2018). Moreover, the welfare system continues to rely heavily on women's uncompensated caregiving for children and the elderly (Ochiai et al., 2012; Yamane, 2020; Tamiya, 2020; Ueno, 2021). These pressures have left many women reluctant to marry or have children (Nemoto, 2008), and there is a growing dissatisfaction with the 'traditional' family model based on economic interdependence and emotionally absent husbands (Alexy, 2020). This dissatisfaction is evident in the phenomenon of later-life divorces (*jukunen rikon*), with a growing number of older women choosing to leave long-term marriages (Alexy, 2020). Declining marriage and birth rates thus highlight the declining legitimacy of the salaryman-based family model while simultaneously underlining the need to reconsider Japan's persistent gendered division of labour. In response to these demographic challenges and the weakened legitimacy of the 'traditional' family, the Japanese state has attempted to halt falling birthrates through policies designed to meet the evolving needs of Japanese families.

For instance, the Japanese state has tried to address the struggles of working women by implementing policies such as the Basic Act for a Gender-Equal Society (1999) and the Angel Plan (1999), aiming to reduce gender-based discrimination in the workplace and promote balance between work and childcare (Takahashi et al., 2013, p. 99). To further encourage men's involvement in family life (Taga, 2016), in 2010, the government launched the *ikumen* campaign promoting childrearing fathers as cool (North, 2015; Ishii-Kuntz, 2015; Mizukoshi et al., 2016; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019a). More recently, in 2017, two additional policies were introduced: one requiring employers to inform their workers about the childcare leave system, and another prescribing measures to prevent maternity and paternity harassment when planning or taking childcare leave (Kawamura & Totake, 2024). While Japanese fathers' involvement in childcare has indeed been gradually increasing (Statista, 2024), substantial challenges remain. For instance, North (2015) notes the absence of legal repercussions for companies failing to promote family-friendly policies, raising questions about the actual effectiveness of such measures implemented in 2017. Nevertheless, the rise in paternal involvement and the emergence of alternative fathering images, such as *ikumen*, new fathers, and househusbands, suggest a gradually transforming imagination and practice of paternal roles, which has often been viewed as secondary (Alexy, 2020), considering the prevalence of salaryman hegemony. Evolving policy initiatives and cultural imaginaries provide the setting against which individual fathers negotiate their parenting and masculine identities.

To move beyond how Japanese fathers negotiate their identities solely within Japan, this thesis

seeks to examine how migrating to another society with differing norms on parental roles may reshape individuals' understanding and performance of fatherhood. Therefore, this study focuses on 'Nakamura'[1], a Japanese man who spent much of his adult life in Japan before relocating to Denmark, a country ranked notably higher than Japan in terms of gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2024). Using the life story interview method, which spans across time (Atkinson, 1998) and, in this instance, geographical space, provides a useful tool for comparing Nakamura's experience negotiating masculine and fatherhood roles across two culturally distinct contexts. This way, the thesis can offer an in-depth understanding of how fatherhood is enacted, reinforced, or reshaped through everyday practices, depending on the surrounding environment. While focusing on a one-person study does not yield generalisable results, the method allows for a more nuanced exploration of Nakamura's narrative, providing contextually rich insights into how his fatherhood and masculine identities have been constructed and perceived over time (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Ahmed, 2025). In doing so, this thesis contributes a cross-cultural perspective to the continuously growing literature on Japanese fatherhood, a field in which earlier research has often relied on the perspectives of Japanese men's wives and children (Ishii-Kuntz et al., 2004; Holthus & Tanaka, 2013), or framed fatherhood primarily through the lens of women's issues (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019a). This study further highlights the need for a deeper understanding of cross-cultural impact on Japanese fatherhood experiences (Taniguchi et al., 2015). Thereby, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1) How does cross-cultural context influence and shape Japanese men's performances of fatherhood?

2) In what ways is masculine identity constructed and reshaped?

The first question focuses more directly on the influence of cultural context on paternal practices, whereas the second examines more the construction of masculine identity, which is essential considering fatherhood, as these two notions are deeply interwoven. Furthermore, this study's focus on *fatherhood performance* (my emphasis) draws on Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, which argues that gender is constructed through repeated acts influenced by societally set norms and is either reinforced or subverted through these performances. Thus, gender performativity serves as the theoretical lens through which this

[1] To protect the participant's privacy, a pseudonym has been used.

thesis examines the various ways fatherhood can be performed, and how much its construction is based on culturally preset norms.

To answer these questions, this thesis is structured into the following sections: (Chapter 2) literature review, (Chapter 3) theoretical framework, (Chapter 4) methodology, (Chapter 5) analysis, (Chapter 6) discussion and conclusion. The literature review explores the existing academic literature on Japanese fatherhood, including the importance of concepts such as masculinity and family in Japan, in order to examine the hegemonic ideals within Japanese society and evaluate the extent to which Nakamura's fatherhood performance reinforced or diverged from these norms. The study then provides a brief explanation of the theoretical framework before outlining the methodological choices. This study employed a qualitative life story interview method, which is a non-structured interview format that emphasises participants' agency over their own narrative (Atkinson, 1998). The interviews were conducted in two separate sessions, each lasting approximately two hours. The data was analysed applying inductive-deductive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process. The themes identified from the interview data are examined in depth in the analysis, followed by the discussion and conclusion.

2 Continuity and Change in Family, Masculinity, and Fatherhood – a Review of the Literature

To examine how Japanese men negotiate and perform fatherhood, it is essential to understand how these notions are constructed in the Japanese context. In this chapter, I seek to illustrate not only the societal expectations placed on men but also the intersecting dynamics that shape masculine and paternal roles, family life, as well as the influence of socio-economic and socio-political changes in Japan. In the last section, I will address existing research gaps and explain how this thesis aims to contribute to the literature on fatherhood.

2.1 Family – Institution Influencing Gender Roles

In Japan, the family is one of the most influential institutions that continues to set the tone for society and the ideal norms regarding gender. The arrival of Confucianism is a prime example, as in Japan it was transformed and utilised to serve the rulers' aims, leading to the family's growing importance as an institution emphasising paternalistic benevolence and hierarchical system (see, e.g. Chapman, 2019; Gordon, 2014, pp. 7-9,18; Ochiai, 2020; Ronald & Allison, 2011). However, as Ochiai (2020) notes, while the family institution, also known as the '*ie*' (家) system, gained a male bias, it was not a pure patrilineal system. It first reached the entire Japanese population during the Meiji era when Confucianism was mobilised and institutionalised as a 'tradition' to create an ideology supporting the state (Ochiai, 2020). Through the introduction and revision of the Civil Code in 1898, the patriarchal approach to the family structure was institutionalised through the household system (*ie seido*) with a legal framework known as *koseki* (Chapman, 2019). It placed the eldest male in a family as the head of the household, granting him rights and responsibility over other family members (Ronald & Allison, 2011). Furthermore, *koseki*, the household registration system originating in Confucian ideology, enforced identification of Japanese nationals based on a familial relationship, placing gender identity and role at the centre of an individual's legal identity (Chapman, 2019).

After the Second World War, the dominating image of a family emphasised the standard of middle-class nuclear families in urban settings, with "breadwinning husbands, full-time housewives (*sengyō shufu*) and educationally-minded kids" (Ronald & Allison, 2011, p. 1). Marriage has therefore played an important role in the formation of gender roles as well as the division of labour, with the ideal family consisting of a breadwinner husband and a full-time housewife. This setting further emphasised marriage as an economic arrangement rather than

something founded on romantic affection (Kumagai, 1986). The division of labour created a dynamic, in which spouses recognised their dependence and need for each other, while often simultaneously leading emotionally and socially disconnected lives – a phenomenon Alexy (2020) refers to as "disconnected dependence" (Alexy, 2020, p. 48). Alexy (2020) further notes that these rather traditional marriages based on disconnected dependence have gradually given way to new marital desires where spouses are expected to be emotionally connected in a more companionate relationship with equal responsibility (see also Nakatani, 2006). The changing marital ideals and the growing dissatisfaction with the traditional marriage model, especially among women, are notable in the phenomenon of later-life divorces (*jukunen rikon*) with an increasing number of particularly older women divorcing their long-term husbands (Alexy, 2020, p. 5). At the same time, Japan's economic challenges, which will be discussed in the following section, have made it clear that the traditional breadwinner-housewife model no longer meets the economic and social realities of many families, as dual-income homes have increased in number (Ishii-Kuntz, 2015).

While some people in Japan regarded the *ie* system as abandoned following the 1947 revision of the Civil Code, which emphasised marriage and nuclear families (e.g., Ninomiya, 2014), others still view *ie* to remain as a strong social force among Japanese families for its enduring customs and values (Davies & Ikeno, 2002). This prevalence is evident in the legal system's rigidness and insufficiency in recognising diverse family forms (Mackie, 2014). For example, in the case of a divorce, children of the parents can legally belong to only one household, as the household structure still stems from the *koseki*, which remains inflexible towards parents hoping for joint custody[2] (Alexy, 2020, p. 112). Even if Japan's family has been in 'crisis' marked by demographic, social and economic transformations (Ronald & Allison, 2011), the *ie* system has proven to be a resilient institution. Despite changes such as an ageing society, declining fertility and marriage rates, it continues to influence marriage, divorce, and family formation, demonstrating the enduring power of the traditional household structure (Alexy, 2020). Nevertheless, the changing marital ideals emphasising emotional connection indicate how gendered dynamics within households are undergoing a revaluation, including the demands placed on men's masculine roles as husbands and fathers. The continuously evolving meaning and constitution of the family shape the socio-political and economic landscapes

[2] However, in October 2025, the Japanese government decided on a partial revision of the Civil Code that will now allow joint custody after divorce. This revision is set to take effect on 1 April 2026 (Japan's Ministry of Justice).

(Ronald & Allison, 2011), influencing how individuals position themselves within the ramifications of gender, further reshaping contemporary understandings and performances of fatherhood in Japan.

2.2 Masculine Construction

Gender studies and the exploration of masculinities have gathered increasing attention, both internationally and within Japan (Cook, 2019; Hirayama, 2020). The concept of men and masculinities contains multifaceted meanings that are constructed in different times and places across historical, social, and class contexts (Frühstück & Walthall, 2011). For instance, samurai once represented the epitome of masculinity, but this ideal evolved with modernisation and the state's empire-building projects, showcasing how masculine ideals are transformed over time (Frühstück & Walthall, 2011). R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt (2005) similarly emphasise how masculine norms are dynamic and subject to change. Hence, in this section, I delve into the academic discourse on masculinities in Japan and examine the factors influencing the construction of masculine identities.

2.2.1 Hegemonic Masculinity – The Birth and Prevalence of the 'Salaryman'

As noted by Cook (2019a), "By far the most dominant discourse with which masculinities studies in Japan continues to grapple, turn to, lean on, or attempt to escape from, is that of the ubiquitous 'salaryman'" (Cook, 2019a, p. 50). In other words, many studies examining men's gender roles in Japan rely on the concept of a salaryman (*sarariiman*) masculinity (henceforth salaryman) as a standard against which alternative ways of performing masculinities are measured. The salaryman, typically employed in a white-collar position at a large company, has long been considered the personification of hegemonic masculinity in Japan (e.g., Taga, 2003; Dasgupta, 2010). Drawing on R.W. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic masculinity represents the culturally idealised form of masculinity characterised by unequal power relations not only relative to women but also concerning other masculinities. Connell (2004, 2005) further observed that those conforming to the hegemonic ideals are not necessarily the most powerful people in terms of wealth or status, nor do they always embody the normative masculinity, which in this context is the salaryman. Dasgupta (2010) similarly notes that this embodiment of hegemony is not based on representing the statistical majority or on conveying the most comfortable lifestyle, but rather stems from its "greatest ideological power, both in relation to women and femininity/ies, and in relation to other coexisting

masculinities" (Dasgupta, 2010, endnote 4).

The salaryman's embodiment of hegemony coincided with their central role during Japan's postwar economic boom (Dasgupta, 2010). Following the Second World War, Japan underwent a significant transformation to rebuild society, shifting towards an economic model characterised by "lifetime employment" (*shūshin koyō*) and "seniority pay and promotion" (*nenkō joretsu*) (Watanabe, 2020, pp. 90-91). While elements of this economic model already existed before the war, it was first institutionalised during the 1960s economic boom (Watanabe, 2020). This model increased the number of middle-class households and strengthened the ideal family structure with husbands as breadwinners and wives as stay-at-home mothers (Dasgupta, 2015). Dasgupta (2015) further notes that 'lifetime employment' and stable contracts predominantly applied to men, who are often viewed as *daikokubashira* – the central supporting pillars of the family, whose primary role is to provide. Cook (2017) similarly points out how employment benefits for permanent male employees, such as tax relief benefits for dependents, health care, and subsidised mortgages, further promote heterosexual marriages centred on the breadwinner-husband/housewife ideal (Cook, 2017, para 1). Thus, the economic model served as a catalyst for the salaryman to be viewed as embodying ideals of male productivity and specific familial responsibilities centred on breadwinning.

However, with the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in the early 1990s, the salaryman hegemony and the social security system based on the male breadwinner model (Tamiya, 2020) were challenged. As the economy plunged, companies shifted away from the 'lifetime employment' model towards a more flexible and cost-effective system by increasing the number of non-regular contracts (Watanabe, 2020). This rise in non-regular employment was also driven by neoliberal ideology, which emphasised the principle of competition in the market and self-responsibility (Ueno, 2017). By endorsing a market-based economy and deregulation, neoliberal reforms provided corporations greater flexibility and self-management (e.g., Gagné, 2019; Suzuki, 2015; Kawai, 2009).While these neoliberalist reforms did not dismantle the male-centred working style—based on married men with 'no family responsibilities' and who can therefore comply with any employer demands under the lifetime employment—they widened inequality and the division between regular and non-regular workers (Ueno, 2017). Many non-regular workers do not enjoy the same level of protection and benefits, despite often working similar hours to their counterparts with full-time contracts (Watanabe, 2020). While women have been more directly affected by the employment reforms, given that approximately 70% of non-regular workers are women (Ueno, 2017), the decline in stable employment opportunities

and rise in non-regular male workers has arguably undermined the hegemony of the salaryman. After all, as Mathews (2003) notes, work has long been central to Japanese men's *ikigai* (something giving meaning to one's life), and this shift in the labour market has made it harder to express masculine identity through work.

Furthermore, as observed by Alexy (2020), with the growing emphasis on marriages with emotionally connected spouses, the work-dedicated and emotionally distant salaryman became a symbol of "all that is wrong with Japanese marriages" (Alexy, 2020, p. 29). Moreover, the work-centred lifestyle of the salaryman is increasingly viewed as less desirable, especially among the youth, who are rejecting the salaryman values by leaving urban areas in increasing numbers and embracing lifestyles that challenge the "neoliberal emphasis on material gain and achievement" (Klien, 2021, p. 41). Taga (2003) argues that as the legitimacy of traditional masculinity decreases, many Japanese men are confronted with a gender identity crisis. These changes, combined with the prolonged recession and reduced government welfare support (McCormack & Kawabata, 2019), have made it more challenging for men to attain hegemonic masculinity. Many men who previously embodied the salaryman ideal have expressed feelings of abandonment by the very system that shaped their masculine identities (Dasgupta, 2010). Dasgupta (2010) further notes that the ideal model has become too narrow, resulting in growing anxiety and stress, even among former salarymen, contributing to rising male suicide rates. Other scholars agree that linking masculinity and work has become increasingly problematic given the economic situation and the difficulty of securing regular work contracts (e.g., Slater & Galbraith, 2011; Cook, 2013). Beyond economic precarity and evolving marriage ideals, other factors also have contributed to the diminished appeal of the salaryman ideal, including the renewal of gender equality legislation, women's increased labour participation, and changes in attitudes towards family roles (see Ishii-Kuntz, 2003; Roberson & Suzuki, 2003; Taga, 2003).

Despite these challenges, the salaryman prevails as the hegemonic ideal in Japan. Frühstück and Walthall (2011) argue that its endurance lies in its naturalisation and institutionalisation. Moreover, Hidaka (2010) similarly points out how the salaryman remains a cultural standard for becoming a full-fledged adult (*shakaijin ni naru*) by achieving essential milestones, such as employment as a white-collar worker after graduating from a higher education level (Hidaka, 2010). Carrigan et al. (2004) further note that even when the hegemonic model appears unattainable, a significant portion of men remain complicit in reproducing and validating it, believing that adhering to hegemonic ideals offers an effective way to preserve gendered hierarchy. It is also essential to recognise that salarymen are not exclusively corporate men, as

the term can also encompass those fulfilling the characteristic role of heterosexual father and breadwinner (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hidaka, 2010). Despite not reflecting the lived experiences of most men, the salaryman endures as the masculine ideal through a broader institutionalisation of the breadwinner role, heterosexuality, and work-dedicated identity. Nevertheless, salaryman is a dynamic identity, subject to influences from alternative ways of performing masculinities and societal roles (e.g., Demelius & Yoshida, 2025; Klien, 2022).

2.2.2 Masculinities – Expectations and Lived Realities

As noted in the previous section, the image of the salaryman persists as the hegemonic ideal despite often conflicting with individuals' lived realities. This tension opens up space for alternative masculinities to emerge. Tokuhiro (2010) highlights that the hegemonic model "is always under threat from other non-mainstream discourses" (Tokuhiro, 2010, p. 58), and masculinities in Japan are shaped by intersections of age, class, and social circumstances. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) similarly emphasise the contested nature of hegemonic masculinity, noting its ability to adapt and transform by including traits from other masculinities. While the decline of stable full-time employment has undermined normative masculinity, it is important not to oversimplify alternative masculinities as mere responses to economic precarity. Cook (2017), for instance, cautions against framing men expressing 'unconventional' lifestyles solely as men's gender role struggles or as victims of a changed employment system, despite the intertwinement of labour and masculinity (see also Cook, 2019a).

The cultural industry, particularly the media, plays a significant role in constructing gender identities and societal expectations (McLaren, 2019). Dominated by male control, Japanese media reinforces hegemonic masculinity while offering limited representation of minorities and unconventional masculinities (McLaren, 2019). According to Seifert (2020), "Discourse does not only influence but also actually constructs gender images in social reality" (Seifert, 2020, p. 392). While this thesis does not focus on media portrayals, their influence on the construction of masculinity cannot be overlooked, especially regarding alternative masculinities. For instance, the term 'otaku', initially describing fans of anime and manga, began to surface in the early 1980s and was used in 1983 in an article by author Akio Nakamori to critique obsessive pop culture fans as lacking social skills and being sexually uninterested in real women (see, e.g. Galbraith, 2015a; Galbraith, 2015b; Toivonen & Imoto, 2013). However, the term gained wider media attention and became stigmatised following the Miyazaki incident of 1989, as the

murderer's actions were linked to the otaku label without much consideration (Kamm, 2015). This simplified and negative discourse persists, overshadowing more nuanced understandings of otaku identities and demonstrating how certain actors can influence the circulation and understanding of labels (Kamm, 2015). While otaku men are often contrasted with the salaryman ideal as 'failed men' (Galbraith, 2015a), some individuals, such as former Prime Minister Aso Taro, embody both identities simultaneously by participating in the corporate world while embracing otaku culture (Toivonen & Imoto, 2013).

Similarly, the term herbivore man (*shōushokukei danshi*), first popularised by Maki Fukasawa in 2006 through a buzzword contest, describes heterosexual men who prioritise aesthetic consumption and personal leisure over traditional career ambitions and romantic pursuits (Chen, 2012; Morioka, 2013). Herbivore men are often perceived by the media as 'girly men' (Charlebois, 2013), and their consumption practices are portrayed as sensational and deviant from the masculine ideals, ignoring the broader societal and economic conditions influencing their behaviour (Chen, 2012). Charlebois (2013) argues that rather than lacking professional ambition, these men define their masculine identity through alternative practices, such as work-life balance, regarding work merely as a tool to support their lifestyles. However, this narrative can be oversimplified, as many herbivore men may aspire to full-time jobs but face structural barriers preventing them from achieving these aspirations (Charlebois, 2013; Cook, 2013).

Japan's labour environment remains particularly challenging for youth striving to enter the employment market or secure full-time jobs. Structural barriers, such as age-based restrictions on hiring and uncertain employment opportunities, hinder attempts to achieve normative adult milestones such as financial independence and marriage (Cook, 2013). Freeters – part-time workers aged 15 to 34 without student or housewife statutes – are "the poster child of today's structural precarity" (Cook, 2013, p. 29) and are often framed in media as being parasitic, ambitionless or irresponsible (Slater, 2010; Cook, 2013). Cook (2013), however, notes that male freeters navigate these challenges with agency, exploring alternative lifestyles and personal aspirations. While many freeters do not view their status as part-time workers as problematic (Toivonen & Imoto, 2013), societal pressures, particularly expectations tied to marriage and financial stability, often push freeters to conform towards a normative life course (Cook, 2013). After all, many male freeters find marriage and relationships impossible without financial stability, where they can provide for their partner (Cook, 2013), echoing the prevalent gender ideal of a male breadwinner.

Discourses surrounding masculinity frequently intersect with expectations related to intimacy, sex, and marriage. *Otaku* and herbivore men, for example, are often perceived as lacking interest in heteronormative relationships, thereby challenging the norm of men as proactive and assertive in pursuing women (Morioka, 2013; Charlebois, 2013; Galbraith, 2015b). However, scholars argue that this perception may oversimplify these men's priorities and choices. Charlebois (2013) suggests that herbivore men value emotional intimacy over physical relationships, while Morioka (2013) describes them as "safe" partners who prioritise stability in relationships. Chen (2012) links herbivore men's low sexual engagement to economic constraints rather than a lack of interest. Similarly, Cook (2019b) highlights how irregular male workers struggle with societal expectations of masculinity in relationships, where women often expect traditional breadwinner roles (Nemoto et al., 2013). The construction of masculinity also extends to bodily practices. As Connell (2005) states, "True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about male body" (Connell, 2005, p. 45). This is evident in education and sports, where hegemonic masculinity is often reinforced (Light, 2003; Manzenreiter, 2013). For instance, Japanese sports films and ethnographic studies on sports demonstrate the reproduction of traits such as toughness and competitiveness (Barber, 2014; Chapman, 2004) while also offering space for alternative expressions (Chapman, 2004; Manzenreiter, 2011, 2013). In non-sporting contexts, herbivore men challenge traditional masculinity through bodily practices such as hair styling, dieting, and skincare (Chen, 2012). Charlebois (2013) notes that "soft" masculinities are increasingly idolised in East Asia, suggesting changing gender norms. Even salarymen adopt lifestyle and appearance-improving practices (Dasgupta, 2010), blurring the line between hegemonic and alternative masculinities.

To sum up, the construction of masculinity in Japan goes beyond one's work occupation and economic status, including debates on relationships, bodily practices, and individual agency. While the salaryman prevails as the normative masculine ideal, its hegemony is continually negotiated with the emergence of alternative masculinities such as *otaku*, herbivore men, and freeters, which symbolise the diversity and interdependence of masculine practices and identities. These examples further demonstrate how masculine construction is multilayered. Following Butler's (1990/1999) notion of gender as performative, masculine enactment can be influenced by various components, such as individuals' aspirations, life stage, experiences, and structural constraints. Therefore, to understand masculinities in Japan, it is essential to consider both agency and context. It is equally important to recognise the various ways men negotiate

and construct their identities, including gendered roles such as fatherhood.

2.3 Situating the Research Gap – A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Japanese Fatherhood

The scholarly interest in fatherhood has increased concurrently with the growing number of women entering the workforce (Ishii-Kuntz et al., 2004), which has challenged the traditional notion of division of labour and called for a rethinking of gendered roles. Despite this evolving interest, the earlier research on Japanese fatherhood has relied strongly on the accounts of women and children (Ishii-Kuntz et al., 2004; Holthus & Tanaka, 2013), resulting in a rather scarce understanding of fatherhood from men's point of view. Even though this gap is gradually narrowing, with more studies giving attention to fathers' personal experiences and their role within family (see e.g., Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019a, 2019b, 2022), the literature still lacks in terms of cross-cultural influence on Japanese men's experience and attitudes towards fatherhood, particularly of those residing in more egalitarian societies such as Denmark (Taniguchi et al., 2015).

In my aim to address this gap, this thesis situates Japanese fatherhood in a cross-cultural setting by employing a life story method to examine how Mr Nakamura, a Japanese man in his 40s and a father of two, views fatherhood after relocating to Denmark. Denmark, which ranks 2nd in work-life balance among OECD countries (OECD) and 15th on the global gender gap index, provides a noteworthy contrast to Japan, which is placed 118th on the same index (World Economic Forum, 2024). Without disclosing Nakamura's personal or professional information in detail to respect his privacy, it is relevant to note that he is a white-collar worker. This background detail offers an essential element to the analysis, given that white-collar employment parallels the breadwinner model and hegemonic masculine ideal (Dasgupta, 2015). By exploring how Nakamura enacts and renegotiates fatherhood across cultures with considerably different norms regarding fatherhood and gender, I aspire to contribute to the existing research with a more nuanced understanding of fatherhood as a contextually bound performativity and culturally constructed identity. Therefore, in the following subsections, I will discuss the existing literature on fatherhood in Japan, particularly its close intertwinement with concepts such as work and masculinity.

2.3.1 Breadwinner Ideal Guiding Fatherhood Practices

The hegemonic ideal of fatherhood in Japan has long been tied to economic productivity, with the paternal role primarily associated with work outside the home (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019; Dasgupta, 2015). During Japan's high-growth era, fathers who only performed a disciplinary role at home while otherwise prioritising work-centred lives were characterised as absent fathers (*chichioya-fuzai*) (Taga, 2016). As noted by Kersten (1996), during that time, especially salarymen fathers seemed more like guests in their own homes rather than fully involved family members. Moreover, their ability to focus exclusively on work depended on their stay-at-home wives managing family and community responsibilities (Ogasawara, 2016). This dynamic moulded the marriage into a unit based on economic dependency, largely disconnected in everyday life (Alexy, 2020) and emphasised paternal identity through the breadwinner ideal with a stable employment deemed worthier than irregular work (North, 2015). The high-growth era, thereby, came to idealise the salaryman way of paternal performance, in which fatherhood was less about being available for one's family emotionally and physically, and more about dedicating oneself to work.

With declining job security and the rise of dual-income households, this breadwinner/housewife framework has become increasingly unrealistic (North, 2015). After all, salarymen represent only a small portion of men (Dasgupta, 2010), and fathering images based solely on the breadwinner dynamic seem rather outdated given the growing diversity of men's identities and the increasing opposition to the gendered division of labour in present-day Japan (Taga, 2003). Moreover, younger generations, particularly women, face challenges in juggling career and family life and have become increasingly reluctant to get married under the traditional model (Nagase, 2006) which normalises fathers' absence from family life and caregiving, with fathers spending only an average of 17 minutes daily with their children (North, 2015). These dynamics have led to a decline in marriage rates (Suzuki, 2013), arguably contributing to the country's declining birth rate, considering that having children out of wedlock is not common in Japan (Alexy, 2020). The Japanese government has sought to respond to the declining marriage rates, as well as to strengthen economic competitiveness and productivity (Takahashi et al., 2013), by advocating gender-equal policies and family-friendly initiatives (Taga, 2016).

Despite initiatives, such as the campaign in 1999 urging greater paternal involvement by declaring that "A man cannot be called a father unless he takes care of a child" (Ogasawara, 2016, p. 172), the breadwinner framework continues to prevail in fatherhood imagery. One

reason for this prevalence is the ongoing resistance to reforms, especially among conservative groups and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) (North, 2015), as this model has proved essential for the low-cost welfare system that has been heavily relying on women's unpaid caregiving of the elderly and children (Hirayama, 2020; Yamane, 2020; Ueno, 2021). Another reason is the disparity in parental involvement, fathers dedicating significantly less time to childcare compared to mothers (Ishii-Kuntz, 2008; Bureau of Statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2017). Ogasawara (2016) observed that working men in their 30s and 40s spend, on average, less than 12 hours at home daily, including time dedicated to sleeping and eating.

While parental allocation time for childrearing remains unequal between genders, in recent years, there has been a notable shift in fathers' involvement. In 2023, approximately 30% of Japanese men took parental leave (Statista, 2024)[3], which is a significant increase from just 1.4% in 2010 (Takahashi et al., 2013). This indicates that fatherhood practices and attitudes in Japan are evolving, with growing emphasis towards paternal involvement.

2.3.2 Emergence of Nurturing Fatherhood

In the 1990s, imagery idealising nurturing fatherhood began to emerge simultaneously with the growing public attention to fathers' roles at home (Nakatani, 2006). Nakatani (2006) identifies three key reasons behind the increasing attention and idealisation towards involved fatherhood, understood as men taking an active role in early childcare. First, youth-related problems such as bullying and suicides were perceived to have originated from family malfunctions caused by a mixture of excessive maternal care and paternal absence. Second, the perception that traditional gender norms were contributing to Japan's declining birthrate. Third, the gradually evolving masculine ideals fuelled by economic changes, men's studies, and men's movements began to question the work-oriented life and imbalance of work and personal life (Nakatani, 2006, p. 96). Together, these developments have pushed for altering fatherhood imageries, challenging the normative assumption[4] that fathers' role in caregiving should be secondary (Alexy, 2020).

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[3] Since most fathers take less than one month of leave (Uchida et al., 2024; Inoue, 2018), one should exercise caution when interpreting such statistics, as they do not specify the actual duration. Thus, a leave of one day or several weeks is counted equally as taking parental leave.

[4] The recent policy developments, allowing joint custody after a divorce from 1 April 2026 (Japan's Ministry of Justice), signal yet another challenge to the traditional narrative that assumes fathers' caregiving roles as secondary.

One of the significant symbols for this changing fatherhood imagery is the neologism *ikumen*, coined by an advertising company Hakuhōdō in the early 2000s, combining the words *ikuji* (childcare) and *ikemen* (good-looking man), and which framed childrearing fathers as cool (North, 2015; Ishii-Kuntz, 2015; Mizukoshi et al., 2016; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019). The term reached its public popularity after being part of a Buzzwords-of-the-Year Contest (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019) and being chosen as one of the top ten words of the year (Mizukoshi et al., 2016). Further media representations, including books, magazines, online platforms, and advertisements, were essential in bolstering the appeal of the *ikumen* (Mizukoshi et al., 2016), underlining once again mass media's influence in constructing cultural understanding of masculine roles. North (2015), however, cautions that such approaches and portrayals risk a superficial and skewed understanding of *ikumen* practices and requirements.

According to Ishii-Kuntz (2015), the *ikumen* neologism gained popularity for two underlying reasons. The first reason is the Japanese government's introduction of new policies, as well as revisions to the old laws, aiming to increase fathers' involvement in childcare. For instance, in 2010, the government revised the childcare leave law alongside the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's (MHLW) *Ikumen* Project campaign, both seeking to encourage individual and corporate support for men wanting to be more involved with family (Ishii-Kuntz, 2015). The second reason is that studies focusing on mothers' caregiving practices have challenged the idea of maternal instinct, stressing the importance of fathers' participation in housework and childrearing (Ishii-Kuntz, 2015).

Despite its popularity, *ikumen* has been criticised for its vagueness. Vassallo (2017) argues that it promotes an ideal of 'good fathers who perform childcare' without specifying what it entails, hence opening a platform for diverse understandings. Moreover, *ikumen* imagery often aligns with salaryman masculinity, ignoring the more feminine and bohemian representations of fatherhood. Some fathers report feeling that their casual appearance has made them seem more like an unemployed 'loser' rather than a 'cool' father (Ishii-Kuntz, 2015, p. 164). A fathering magazine, *FQ Japan*, depicted *ikumen* as fathers who should engage in fun free-time activities with their children while providing limited advice relating to routine childcare activities or housework (Vassallo, 2017). Such interpretations of *ikumen* are leaving little challenge to the work-dedicated father and husband norm. Nevertheless, the buzzword has contributed to a more positive cultural image of child rearing fathers (Vassallo, 2017), paving the way for other paternal identities.

Beyond *ikumen*, other fatherhood imageries have emerged. Vassallo's (2017) research on the non-profit organisation *Fathering Japan* (henceforth FJ) shows how *ikumen* has been the catalyst for the conceptualisation of the 'new fathering' movement. FJ promotes fathers' involvement at both macro and micro levels, emphasising the importance of improving the new fatherhood model at an individual and national level (Vassallo, 2017). For example. FJ promotes supportive workplace practices through initiatives such as the promotion of *ikuboss*, which refers to employers "declaring their commitment to facilitating a good balance between the commitment to work and the joy of the family and the home" (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019, p. 369). FJ's efforts further include activities such as hosting workshops and seminars, as well as the publication of texts and textbooks, which aim to normalise involved fatherhood (Vassallo, 2017; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019).

A smaller group of men have gone further by identifying as househusbands, rejecting the former groups' prevalent emphasis on men's roles and identities through work outside the home (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2022). Househusbands' subversion from the work-centred masculinity and breadwinner fathering is evident in the stigma they experience, including being called *gokutsubushi* (good-for-nothing parasite) or *himo* (a man financially dependent on a woman), when seen at home during daytime or enacting alternative ways (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2022, p. 549). While some househusbands consciously practice agency by resisting the hegemonic manliness, they nevertheless form their identities by both relating and distancing themselves from the notions of salaryman, *ikumen*, and housewife (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2022). Goldstein-Gidoni (2022) interestingly views this crafting of househusband identity as a way of undoing gender, since through agency, these men can "resist and/or potentially undo hegemonic gender relations of work and family" (Medved 2016, p. 16 in Goldstein-Gidoni, 2022, p. 552). While these alternative paternal identities are yet to become part of a broader social consensus, they suggest a gradually growing acceptance towards greater paternal involvement.

2.3.3 Prevalent Barriers Hindering Involved Fatherhood

Movements such as *ikumen* have arguably influenced the growing acceptance towards paternal involvement, evident, for instance, in the younger generation's way of practising fatherhood by taking children to daycare or taking time off for infant health check appointments (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019b). Government initiatives, including the 1992 Childcare Leave Act with its policy reforms, together with a generous childcare leave benefit system (Inoue, 2018), have raised Japan's parental leave scheme among the most generous within the OECD and European Union

(EU) countries (Takayama, 2023). The current Childcare Leave Act allows employees to take parental leave until the day a child reaches one year (Asai, 2015), with the possibility of extending it up to two years if they are unable to enrol on childcare (Takayama, 2023; Inoue, 2018). Despite this generous parental leave system, the actual take-up remains much lower compared to Nordic countries (Takayama, 2023), such as Sweden, whose system Japan's is said to parallel (Atō, 2017). This suggests that lingering barriers continue to prevent fathers' greater involvement.

One significant barrier to men's leave take-up is the structure of economic support during parental leave. The leave benefit is paid through the national employment insurance as income replacement, and employees have to contribute to this scheme themselves (Asai, 2015). The amount of benefit received depends on the employee's average income six months before childbirth (Asai, 2015). During the first six months, employees receive 67% of their pre-leave salary, which thereafter is reduced to 50% (Uchida et al., 2024; Inoue, 2018). Although there is an upper limit to the benefit, it rarely affects mothers, as their income is often lower (Asai, 2015). The limit, however, may seem unattractive to higher-earning men (Inoue, 2018), as the reduction in income may put pressure on household finances (Takayama, 2023). This can help explain why most fathers take less than one month of leave (Uchida et al., 2024; Inoue, 2018), while 60% of mothers continue parental leave for 10 to 18 months (Takayama, 2023). Even the special paternity leave, allowing fathers a maximum of four weeks of leave within the first eight weeks after childbirth and which can be split up to two times, has been limited in prompting the utilisation rates (Inoue, 2018). It may, however, explain why men's take-up rate has increased, despite most fathers still taking less than one month.

Policy limitations also hinder paternal involvement. While the government has indeed attempted to increase paternal involvement and end gender-based discrimination at workplaces through various incentives, there are no actual penalties for companies failing to implement family-friendly policies or encourage leave take-up. As pointed by North "Japanese civil law is frequently more suggestive than substantial" (North, 2015, p. 58). A broader support system for families trying to balance childrearing and work are also lacking. For instance, long waiting lists and difficulty in enrolling public daycare (Inoue, 2018) may result in fathers' leave becoming a secondary priority, as families need to start the application process early (Takayama, 2023). This can also help explain why women, especially with non-regular contracts, are more likely to end up terminating their jobs upon giving birth (Inoue, 2018; Abe, 2010) and take full-time caregiving roles. Takahashi et al. (2013) further note that other existing

bills, such as the 1986 Equal Opportunity Act, which aims to eliminate gender-based discrimination in the workplace in case of pregnancy and childbirth, ironically contradict some of these 'gender-neutral' policies. For instance, measures, such as tax reductions for part-time earners and pensions for housewives, reward women for remaining in the domestic sphere (Takahashi et al., 2013), revealing the paradox between increasing acceptance of involved fatherhood and gender equality while simultaneously upholding traditional gender norms.

Another significant barrier is presented by the corporate culture, as long working hours and overwork remain deeply ingrained in corporate practises (Takahashi et al., 2013; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019a). Takahashi et al. (2013) notes how working overtime is often internalised by employees – some afraid to appear disloyal or selfish if they prioritise family, and others reluctant to cause *meiwaku* (inconvenience to others), which is a cultural norm that may discourage people from leaving early or using their full paid vacation days (Cole, 1992; North, 2015; e.g.). Moreover, Japan's collectivist culture (Hirota et al., 2023) emphasises group harmony over individualism (Davies & Ikeno, 2002), perpetuating a sense of duty and obligation to one's colleagues. This, in turn, puts pressure on individuals to conform to workplace expectations. Employees, especially fathers, attempting to balance work and family, are stigmatised within the gendered corporate culture. Williams et al. (2013) describe the 'flexibility stigma', referring to "workplace flexibility policies" often viewed as arrangements for females, that discourage men from using parental leave or other family-friendly policies. Therefore, many men hide their parental leave behind their annual paid vacation to avoid stigma (North, 2015). Even within large corporations that offer better work-life balance policies, the expectations arising from the deeply ingrained gendered culture and the valued tradition of company loyalty often prevent fathers from fully employing them (Ishii-Kuntz, 2003). The research has further indicated that the use of paternity leave and other family-friendly policies is also dependent on workplace atmosphere and class and employment type, with middle-class men being more likely to benefit from these policies than their working-class counterparts (Ishii-Kuntz, 2003). Takahashi et al., (2013) further note that employees considered competent and irreplaceable have an easier time utilising family-friendly policies or making special arrangements without the fear of stigma, as they usually enjoy the support of their superiors and colleagues. However, most employees face disapproval and harassment when trying to be more actively involved in childcare (Takahashi et al., 2013). Thus, highlighting the lingering tension between workplace performance, group harmony, and fathers' personal desires.

The prevalence of traditional family norms further restricts fathers' involvement. Gendered

expectations place immense pressure on mothers to fulfil the expected childrearing responsibilities, indirectly limiting fathers' caregiving roles (Nakatani, 2006; Ishii-Kuntz, 2015). Not only are working mothers subject to fierce criticism, but they also often feel guilty for not living up to the idealised standard of a proper mother (Nakatani, 2006). Meanwhile, fathers are often praised for minimal involvement in childcare activities (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2022). These expectations could explain why many women want to leave their jobs and focus on childrearing (Abe, 2010) – a practice that reinforces traditional gender roles. After all, many mothers may internalise the normative notion of being primary caregivers, leaving little space for fathers to assume more active roles (Nakatani, 2006). As Nakatani notes, "for as long as their wives are around, the husbands tend to be deprived of practising housework and childcare at their own pace" (Nakatani, 2006, p. 101). This maternal dominance in the home sphere and lack of paternal role models can further discourage men's involvement. Ishii-Kuntz observes that "Many Asian men may feel ambivalent and inadequate about their fathering roles, and they may not be well prepared to take on the parental role partly because they have few role models and mentors who can give them constructive advice (Ishii-Kuntz, 2015, p. 172). Furthermore, institutions such as healthcare providers also continue to imagine mothers as the primary caregivers (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2022), further reinforcing the traditional norms. Research has observed that in communities where paternal involvement in childrearing is expected, fathers' engagement has shown to be greater than in places where it is not the norm (Uchida et al., 2024), suggesting that the overall attitudes and practices in the family and the surrounding community can either encourage or prevent paternal involvement.

Overall, while fatherhood in Japan is indeed transforming, with an increasing emphasis on paternal involvement, progress remains hindered by the barriers within the institutional triangle of corporate culture, governmental policies, and family (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019a). Despite individual action being crucial for increasing awareness of existing options regarding family-friendly initiatives (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019), these three institutions continue to dictate broader parental practices in Japan, making it harder for fathers to challenge the deeply embedded gender norms and the work-centred masculine ideal.

3 Theoretical Framework – Gender Performativity

This chapter provides a brief explanation of the theoretical framework guiding this thesis – specifically, Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity – and outlines how it will be applied to the study of fatherhood in Japan and Denmark. Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), drawing inspiration from thinkers such as Gayle Rubin, Michel Foucault, and Simone de Beauvoir, challenges dominant narratives on gender by arguing that both sex and gender are culturally constructed.

Comparable with the post-structuralist worldview that sees meaning as fluid (Barker, 2010; Devetak, 2022), Butler proposes that gender is not a fixed identity or essence, but something continually influenced and reshaped by one's cultural, political, social, and economic conditions (Butler, 1990/1999). Following Simone de Beauvoir's famous notion "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 293), Butler similarly argues that gender is not something one is, but rather something one does. In other words, a series of stylised actions, such as bodily gestures, speech, and behaviour, which are repeated over time, create the illusion that gender is something inherently natural (Butler, 1990/1999). These repeated performances are often shaped by cultural norms and expectations. In the Japanese context, for instance, normative masculine performance is often associated with the embodiment of the salaryman, whose identity centres on work and breadwinning (e.g., Dasgupta, 2003; Hidaka, 2010; Cook, 2019a). Of course, depending on the manner of these enactments, they can either challenge or naturalise and reproduce the cultural blueprint of gender (Butler, 1990/1999). While the concept of performativity has received criticism, particularly concerning its implications regarding transgender identities (see e.g., Prosser, 1998), it remains a valuable theoretical lens for exploring how cultural context shapes the construction of fatherhood.

By framing gender as a verb rather than a noun, Butler's theory offers a foundation to examine fatherhood in similar terms: as a role performatively constituted through repeated actions. With this framework in mind, it is possible to explore how cultural settings shape the way fatherhood is 'done', by identifying which enactments reinforce hegemonic norms and which subvert them. Figure 1, introduced on the following page, provides a visual outline of how gender performativity is applied in this thesis. Going from the theoretical foundation, through examining the role of cultural norms surrounding fatherhood and masculinity in Japan, to the cross-cultural comparison of Japan and Denmark.

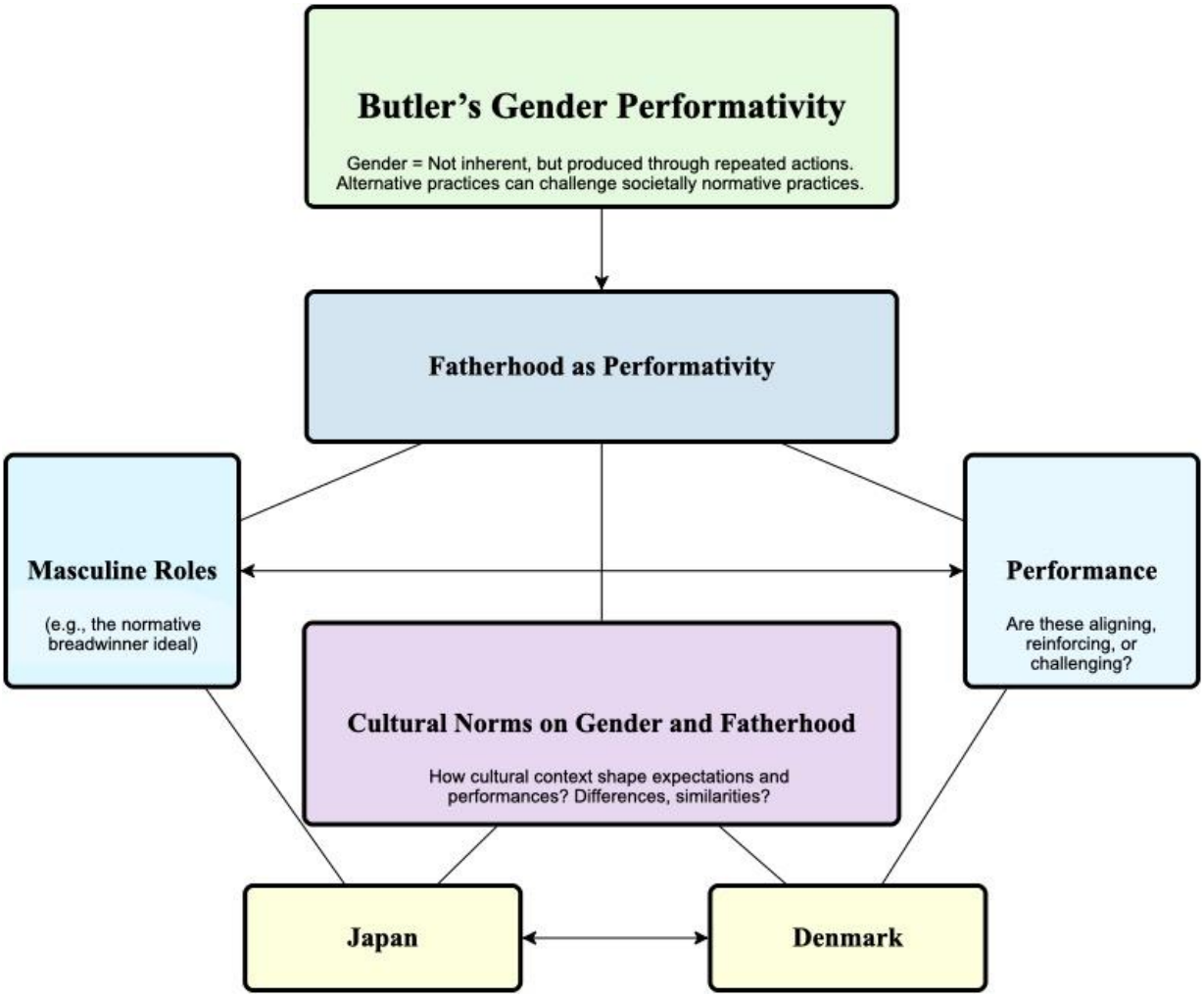

Figure 1. Conceptual map created in NVivo to illustrate the relationship between the theoretical framework and the key concepts of this study.

In this thesis, Butler's concept is applied to assess whether Nakamura's paternal practices align with, reinforce, or challenge the hegemonic masculine norm prevalent in Japan. The hegemonic masculine ideal of a salaryman provides the cultural backdrop against which Nakamura's actions are analysed, while also considering the contrasting cultural expectations surrounding fatherhood and gender following his relocation to Denmark. Without separately analysing Danish norms, this study focuses on how Nakamura, with his past practices and experiences in Japan, negotiates and challenges these, sometimes conflicting norms in his everyday life. In this way, this theoretical framework becomes a useful tool for analysing how different environments can either validate or restrain the performances of fatherhood and gender. However, I must note that while Butler's framework offers a convincing theoretical lens for analysing fatherhood, I am hesitant to use the term 'subversion', which she frequently employs in her work. I interpret 'subversion' as implying a conscious and active effort to dismantle heteronormative gender structures. While this term may be appropriate, for instance, in a study about self-declared

househusbands, it feels less suitable in a context where the degree of intentionality behind practices is yet to be assessed. Moreover, as Goldstein-Gidoni, (2019a) notes, individual action alone is insufficient in acquiring societal change. Therefore, in a single case study such as this, I prefer to rely instead on terms such as ‘differ’, ‘alters’, or ‘departs from’ that encompass both conscious and unconscious practices that diverge from the normative gender structures without implying a deliberate attempt to dismantle such systems.

4 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology employed in this thesis, beginning with a discussion on the life story method as the primary research approach. Followed by an explanation of the data collection procedures and finally concluding with the challenges and limitations of the chosen approach.

4.1 Life Story as the Method

Emerging from the traditions of oral history and ethnographic research, the life story interview, also referred to as the life history interview, is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand individuals' lives, experiences and roles within society (Atkinson, 1998). This method aims to achieve a deeper understanding of how individuals perceive their lives across time and how their narratives interact with broader societal contexts (Atkinson, 1998). Usually, the life story method involves in-depth interviews, which can be supplemented with photographs, letters, diaries, or other personal items that may provide more context and enhance the narrative of the participants (Atkinson, 1998; Lincoln & Lanford, 2019; Tierney & Lanford, 2019).

As a dynamic process between the researcher and the participant, the life story method aims to discover how individuals make sense of their lives over time and how these narratives intersect with broader social structures and cultural norms (Atkinson, 1998; Ritchie, 2014). The researcher has a crucial role in facilitating a comfortable environment where participants feel encouraged and safe in revisiting and reflecting on their experiences, even those experiences they may not have previously considered extensively (Atkinson, 1998). Interpreting and contextualising these narratives requires careful attention, especially when recognising the various narrative forms that arise within social and cultural contexts (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Therefore, when using the life story method, researchers should have a critical stance, treating narratives not just as linear accounts but as "performances" and "accounts" shaped by the social environment (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p.166).

Since the life story interviews entail inherent subjectivity, the method raises some ethical concerns regarding the researcher's assumptions, positionality, and the trustworthiness of the data (Tompson, 2004). Furthermore, qualitative studies are often critiqued for their limited generalisability, particularly when based on small sample sizes (Anderson & Vingrys, 2001). In this study, only one participant was interviewed, making me aware of the potential critique.

However, I do not aim to generalise findings or present broader statistical conclusions on fatherhood performances among Japanese fathers in a cross-cultural setting. Rather, this study utilises the life story method to explore the individual experiences of Nakamura, a Japanese expatriate father residing in Denmark (for a more detailed introduction, see the literature review section 2.3). As a form of narrative research, the rich and contextually sensitive life story method can provide a sufficient study even with only one participant (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As Ahmed (2025) notes, "exploratory studies often benefit from smaller, focused samples that facilitate in-depth explorations of participants' lived experience" (Ahmed, 2025, p. 3). In fact, too large sample size might risk undermining the nuance and depth of perspectives, especially considering the 'why' and 'how' questions which are central to qualitative research (Ahmed, 2025). The life story method allows for an in-depth understanding of how individuals construct and perceive their identities over time (Creswell & Poth, 2016), which makes it particularly suitable given the theoretical lens guiding this study. Moreover, as Nakamura's narrative spans both Japanese and Danish contexts, the life story method not only offers unique potential for examining how masculinity is constructed over time but also across cultural environments (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Frühstück & Walthall, 2011). The sole focus on Nakamura's life story enables contextual sensitivity to his experiences, ensuring that the emerging themes are grounded in his narrative, providing him with agency over his story (Atkinson, 1998).

Furthermore, as Atkinson (1998) emphasises, maintaining ethical integrity and trust between the researcher and the participant is essential, which can be done by requesting their feedback and collaboration throughout the research process (Atkinson, 1998; Tierney & Lanford, 2019). To establish transparency, reliability, and validity throughout this research process, I strive to incorporate the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability. With these four principles in mind, I seek to provide a representation of Nakamura's life that is contextually liable and reflective of his experiences.

4.1.1 Outline of the Process – Participant Search and Choosing the Interview Placement

My first step in conducting life story research was to recruit potential participants who were compatible with the requirements of being Japanese expatriate fathers residing in Denmark. To accomplish this mission, I reached out through various Facebook groups and organisations, briefly describing my research aims and what can be expected from the participant, along with providing contact information for further inquiries. This is how I came in contact with

Nakamura, who expressed interest in participating. I had initially hoped that Nakamura's potential agreement to participate would lead to a snowball sampling effect – where he might recommend the research to his contacts who fit the requirements, potentially resulting in another participant volunteering and thus increasing the sample size (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019). Ideally, I aimed to recruit at least two, and up to three participants. However, due to time constraints, I was unable to find any additional participants who met the criteria by the time I had to end the recruitment process in order to leave sufficient time for the analytical process and completion of the thesis. However, I did not experience this sample size as an issue due to the reasons explained in the previous section. The number of participants would have just impacted the nature of my study. Once Nakamura had expressed interest, I provided him with an information sheet in Japanese outlining the research topic and expectations. I emphasised the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any time, which is an important part of conducting ethical research (James & Busher, 2009).

After I received informed consent from Nakamura, we agreed to have the interviews online. I considered the online format more suitable than in-person meetings due to its flexibility (James & Busher, 2016). This proved especially helpful when a scheduling conflict arose, allowing last-minute rescheduling that would have been more challenging had the interview been in person. In addition, the online format enables the interview to be conducted in one's personal space, which can help both the participant and the researcher to feel comfortable and safe (Hanna, 2012). This was valuable given that Nakamura and I had not met before the interview. I also found this personally very helpful, as conducting my first interview from the comfort of my home reduced some of the nervousness I was experiencing. Furthermore, research suggests that the online format provides greater authority to the interviewee, allowing them to shape the process and determine the direction of the conversation, thus sustaining the credibility and authenticity of the interview (James & Busher, 2016; Kähäri & Edelman, 2023). This aligns well with the principles of the life story interview, which emphasises the participants' agency in constructing their stories (Atkinson, 1998).

To support the conversational and narrative nature of life story interviews, I prepared a thematic framework of open-ended descriptive questions (outlined in Appendix One), drawing inspiration from the model proposed by Robert Atkinson (1998). I designed the questions to guide the conversation only if needed while still allowing Nakamura to share his experiences and reflections freely. After all, as suggested by Paul Thompson (2004), an interviewer should avoid interrupting and introduce the eventual questions once the participant's telling is flowing.

4.1.2 Interviews

The first interview with Nakamura lasted approximately two hours, and it began with a brief introduction and a review of the information sheet. I received permission to record the interview using Microsoft Teams. Additionally, I asked permission to record using my phone as a backup in case of any technical issues. After each session, I uploaded the recorded interviews to a cloud service that aligns with university guidelines for safe data storage.

During both interviews, the second lasting roughly an hour and a half, I employed a note-taking method using keywords to capture important points of our conversation. Later on the same day, when the conversation was still fresh in my memory, I went through the notes and wrote a summary of the interview, including my own reflections on the conversation. I found note-taking and summary writing beneficial, as these allowed me to engage with the data early on and identify potential key points and themes. Both interviews were also transcribed verbatim, excluding my comments. To be more engaging with the data, I transcribed the interviews manually, which required approximately nine hours to transcribe 3.5 hours of interview material. Despite the time-consuming nature of manual transcription, similar to the note-taking method, it made me feel more confident with the data at hand.

Overall, this process was educational as it taught me the importance of handling the data accurately and paying attention to detail. The process of note-taking, summary writing, and manual transcription allowed me to have a deeper engagement and understanding of the interview, ensuring that the participant's narrative was accurately captured and fully engaged with from the start of the research process.

4.1.3 Challenges – Positionality and Ethical Confinements

One of the initial concerns I had regarding my research was related to my positionality, which I find essential to reflect upon, as it may have influenced this study both in terms of the data collection and interpretation. As I am a woman and a Finnish national, I feared that I might be perceived as biased concerning gender roles, especially considering the prevalent 'women vs. men' discourse. The fact that Japan ranks 118th and Finland 2nd on the Gender Gap index (World Economic Forum, 2024) could create an impression that I was approaching the topic of gender and fatherhood from a place of judgment or 'moral superiority' that could negatively impact what Nakamura felt comfortable sharing. To avoid this, I made a conscious effort to emphasise my motivations – namely, a genuine curiosity and sincere desire to understand his

personal experiences, especially regarding fatherhood and masculinity.

However, as Mason-Bish (2019) notes, the researchers' insider/outsider statuses are not fixed. Rather the research process is dynamic and shaped by our 'situational' identities, as the participants may "vary in their degree of reluctance or openness depending upon the role that the researcher takes on" (Mason-Bish, 2019, p. 265). Thus, I also came to view my position as a non-Japanese woman (a 'non-native') as a potential advantage, similar to the observations made by Klien (2022) and Alexy (2020), both of whom conducted research in topic areas where 'non-native female' status proved beneficial. For instance, Klien (2022), as a woman observing a male-dominated hip-hop scene in Hokkaido, experienced that her non-native female position encouraged some of her male informants to open up in ways that might not have been possible had she been a male and an insider of that hip-hop culture, which is often perceived as 'misogynistic'. Alexy (2022), on the other hand, who studied divorce in Japan, found that informants who might otherwise fear judgement had she been Japanese were more willing to share their experiences due to her position as a foreigner. While 'native' position has often been regarded as an advantage, due to its 'insider' perception (Narayan, 1993), I, too, felt that Nakamura could share his personal reflections more openly than he might have done had I been a Japanese national or a man, underlining that 'nativeness' may not necessarily bring an inherent advantage to accessing information. At the same time, Narayan (1993), notes how the researcher's position is an ongoing process, shifting between the knowing and unknowing, and familiarity and unfamiliarity between the researcher and the interviewee. While I assumed a non-native status regarding Japan, the fact that we are both migrants in Denmark may have positioned me partially as an 'insider' in terms of our shared familiarity of being non-natives in the Danish context. This may have potentially provided a less biased counter of his experiences in Denmark, as he might not have felt the need to provide me with the 'ideal' or 'polite' responses when discussing life here. Perhaps this dynamic of juggling between positionalities may have provided a space where sharing more intimate or reflective thoughts felt less constraining and could be expressed more comfortably.

Another challenge was balancing the roles of attentive listener and interviewer during the life story interviews. Since the essence of the life story method is to provide participants with the space to freely reflect on their lives and experiences (Atkinson, 1998; Thompson, 2004), I had to avoid becoming overly interrogative. At times, this approach made me concerned that we were delving into topic areas that were too personal and which might compromise Nakamura's anonymity, leaving me with valuable yet ethically sensitive data that I would not be able to

share in detail. There are instances where I chose to omit certain specifics, such as the work details of Nakamura and his wife, to ensure his and his family's privacy. However, I could still incorporate some of that data under the emerging themes without disclosing potentially identifying information.

Despite these minor challenges, I found this interview approach to be highly effective. It worked as a great icebreaker, creating a more comfortable environment, which encouraged a more natural flow of the conversation. This allowed the emergence of themes that might have otherwise remained blurred if I followed a more rigid interview structure. Had my questions guided the interview too much, it might have limited the authenticity of Nakamura's narrative by imposing my own assumptions or expectations. These considerations were vital following my desire to provide an accurate and ethically responsible representation of Nakamura's reflections and experiences.

5 Analysis

This chapter outlines the analytical process used to identify key themes from the life story interviews with Nakamura, followed by a detailed presentation of the identified themes and a discussion of their significance for understanding his experiences with fatherhood in a cross-cultural context.

5.1 Analytical Process – Thematic Analysis

To analyse the data from the interviews with Nakamura, I applied a thematic analysis approach that combined both inductive and deductive elements (Braun & Clarke, 2006), leaning more toward the inductive side. Thematic analysis is a versatile and systematic method well-suited for interpreting qualitative data and identifying patterns or themes within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2017). Its adaptability makes it particularly compatible with life story interviews, which emphasise the participant's agency in narrating their story and therefore follow a flexible interview structure (Atkinson, 1998).

In the early stages of analysis, I derived the themes and insights inductively from the data to remain grounded in Nakamura's narrative. Pre-established codes or themes might have risked turning attention away from the narrative itself (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). After the initial coding steps, I applied Butler's theory of gender performativity deductively as an interpretative tool to connect the emerging themes to the broader conceptual framework of this thesis. Combining inductive and deductive elements allowed the analysis to remain grounded in the data while also engaging the theoretical framework guiding this study.

The process of identifying, evaluating, and refining codes was iterative, requiring active reflection and engagement on my part as the researcher (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). To ensure transparency and credibility (Malterud, 2001), I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process: (1) Becoming familiar with the data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing themes; (5) Defining and naming themes; and (6) Producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Although these steps are presented in chronological order, the process involved constant movement between phases to refine insights (Nowell et al., 2017).

5.1.1 Data Familiarisation and Initial Categorisation

Following Braun's and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, the analysis began with data familiarisation by transcribing and summarising the interview material. To organise the dataset,

I implemented an initial categorisation system, organising the data into three categories: '*Not Important'*, '*Moderately Important*', and '*Important*'.

- The 'Not Important' category consisted of data unrelated to the research area. This category also included information that could compromise Nakamura's privacy.
- The 'Moderately important' category contained data that I found interesting and that might become relevant for future reference.
- The 'Important' category included information directly related to the research topics, offering a coherent foundation for the analysis.

This preliminary categorisation proved effective in managing the data, as during the coding and theme-development phases, it helped me filter the data and focus only on the material deemed coherent and relevant to the topic of fatherhood.

5.1.2 From Coding to Final Themes

After the initial categorisation, I began manually creating initial codes from the interview data, using Microsoft Excel to track the recurring patterns and themes. The first round of coding produced the following categories: *masculinity*, *fatherhood*, *family roles*, *work in Japan*, *work in Denmark*, *expat experience*, and *education* (see Figure 2 for details). Then, each code was linked directly to the corresponding section in the transcript, allowing me to see not only where themes appeared but also how often. This visual overview of code frequency in Excel proved convenient later, when I began reviewing and refining codes.

In the second review, I re-examined the initial codes, merging overlapping codes into sub-themes. At the same time, I excluded '*education*' and '*sports*' from the final sub-themes despite both playing a role in masculine construction and highlighting intersections between gender norms, institutions, and culture (Barber, 2014; Hidaka, 2010). Although relevant, they felt somewhat disjointed from the other emerging themes, and their contribution to the overall research focus seemed limited. These refinements were done with the research questions in mind, which shall be restated here:

1) How does cross-cultural context influence and shape Japanese men's performances of fatherhood?
2) In what ways is masculine identity constructed and reshaped?

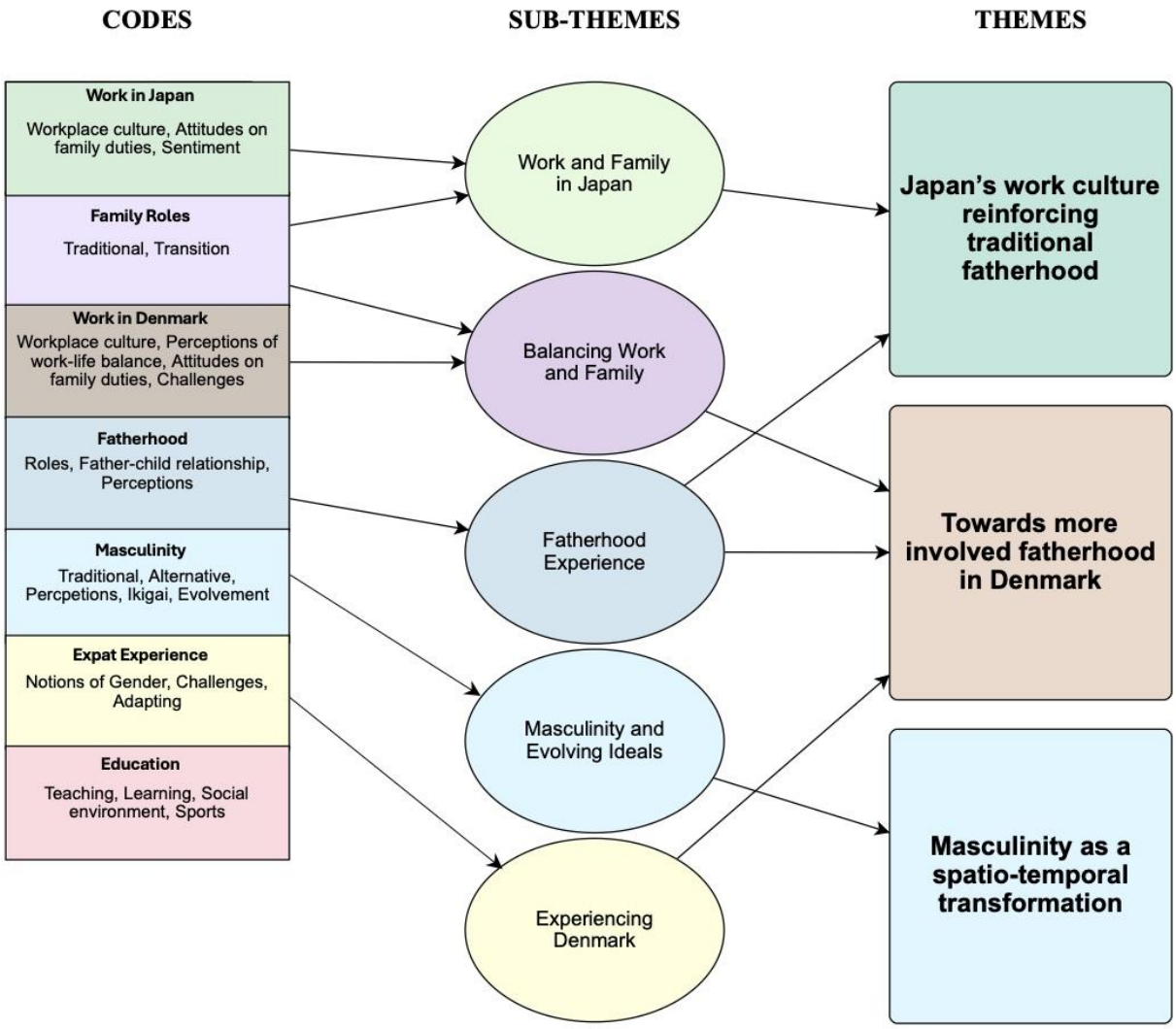

Figure 2. Visual representation of the coding and theme development process. Created with Nvivo and Microsoft Word.

In the final phase of the analysis, I refined the inductively generated codes and sub-themes into three core themes, formulating them to align with the theoretical lens of this thesis. These themes are: (1) *Japan's work culture reinforcing traditional fatherhood*; (2) *Towards more involved fatherhood in Denmark*; and (3) *Masculinity as a spatio-temporal transformation*. The following section will explore each theme in depth.

5.2 Themes

5.2.1 Japan's work culture reinforcing traditional fatherhood

Having grown up with a father who was very strict, yet supportive, Nakamura initially believed that he should parent in a similar disciplinary manner. However, after becoming a father himself, his ideals began to shift towards a more nurturing approach, grounded in patience, support, and the desire to encourage happiness in his children's lives. Despite this, Nakamura's actual performance of fatherhood often contradicted his ideals. As he reflected:

> *"In reality, it was not the same because I was so exhausted and I was super busy with my work tasks, so I did not have enough time to talk or chat with my kids."*

Nakamura's statement reflects a clear conflict between his shifted ideals regarding fatherhood and his actions. In his case, Japan's cultural environment, particularly its work culture, entailed both physical and psychological obstacles that made active participation in childcare challenging. These barriers not only limited Nakamura's involvement but also created conditions that reinforced traditional fatherhood centred on work outside the home (e.g., Dasgupta, 2015; Hidaka, 2010).

The physical constraints affecting Nakamura's fatherhood performance included working hours and commuting time. The reason I chose to highlight these as physical constraints is that they reflect Nakamura's actual absence from the home, showcasing the difficulty of engaging in parenting with such limited presence. These constraints are not unique to him but reflect the reality faced by many Japanese men in their 30s and 40s, who spend an average of less than 12 hours at home during weekdays (Ogasawara, 2016), making involvement in childcare activities less likely (Ishii-Kuntz, 2008). As Nakamura explained:

> *"I usually came home super exhausted from the daily work. It started from 6 am until 10 pm, and I commuted for 1 or 2 hours every day… it was super stressful."*

In Japan, the home is often considered as one's *ibasho* (居場所) – a place where one feels at home and has a sense of safety, acceptance and belonging (Tanaka, 2021). This raises the question of how such prolonged absence influences a father's sense of *ibasho* if it is tied to one's home? During the high-growth era, the normative absence of fathers in Japan meant that, particularly, salarymen were often perceived as guests in their own homes (Kersten, 1996). If the sense of *ibasho* arises from having good relations with others and from receiving their

acceptance (Tanaka, 2021; Otaya, 2012), then such limited time with family members may weaken this sense of belonging, especially when love and close ties with family are considered as essential components of *ibasho* (Tanaka, 2021). At the same time, *ibasho* can refer to any other place where a person feels a sense of belonging, safety and acceptance. This could be, for instance, a person's workplace (Bamba & Haight, 2007), which is particularly significant given that masculine identity in Japan is often tied with work (Mathews, 2003), and identity and sense of self are also crucial components of forming one's *ibasho* (Tanaka, 2021). Thus, a loss of belonging at home may be compensated by a stronger sense of belonging at work. Although we did not explicitly discuss this concept with Nakamura, it is relevant here as the feelings of 'not belonging' are always interconnected with the places where one experiences 'belonging' (Otaya, 2012). These very actions of working long hours and commuting long distances are therefore not solely personal choices or physical barriers but reflect the ongoing psychological aspects of negotiating between belonging and not belonging, while simultaneously highlighting the tension between the roles of nurturing father and dedicated employee. These dynamics are further explored through other aspects I identified as psychological constraints, which reveal the invisible yet powerful role of cultural norms in influencing Nakamura's ability to perform the nurturing paternal role he initially desired.

The following passage from Nakamura's narrative offers a glimpse into the ingrained cultural norms that constrained his ideal performance of fatherhood:

> *"You know, if we have the boss in the workplace, we cannot leave until he leaves. Of course, we can leave, but it is kind of the pressure we always have. Hierarchy is one of the problems. [If someone leaves early] I think the boss needs to show acceptance, but if I need to leave earlier than my boss or earlier than my colleagues, well, I think that they do not have good feelings towards me because there are a lot of tasks remaining that day. So [leaving early] was probably wrong. That is how I felt. We call that peer pressure, right, so the peer pressure exists in the Japanese culture."*

This passage reveals two distinct psychological barriers. The first is hierarchy, which is a social structure rooted in Confucianism that shapes relational dynamics (Sekiguchi & Ikeda, 2025). Within Japanese organisational culture, the informal seniority-based structure of *senpai* (seniors), *kohai* (Juniors), and *dōki* (Peers), and the formal job-based hierarchy – referring to the chain of command, job titles, and overall responsibility – typically coexist, especially within larger companies (Sekiguchi & Ikeda, 2025). This combination of informal and formal

hierarchy is intended to promote a sense of community and belonging, thereby contributing to organisational stability and harmony (Sekiguchi & Ikeda, 2025). In Nakamura's case, his chief held more authority, and leaving before him would have disrupted this harmony. The other barrier apparent in Nakamura's passage is peer pressure, which roughly translates to *dōchō atsuryoku* (同調圧力). As Asai et al (2022) note, "'peer pressure' may be completely external or internalised, and in the latter case, the individual unconsciously 'surmises' or refrains from doing what they truly want to do" (Asai et al., 2022, p. 139). The community encourages a set of norms that its members are expected to follow by behaving in a certain manner through peer pressure (Asai et al., 2022). In Nakamura's case, the norm that one should not leave before the boss or one's colleagues had been acquired at the workplace. A norm he adhered to due to peer pressure. This further reflects Taga's (2005) observation that, particularly male employees, are encouraged to behave and think in accordance with the company goals, and priority should be placed on group harmony and acceptance rather than individual needs.

The notion of peer pressure was particularly evident throughout Nakamura's narrative and appeared to play a significant role in his paternal absence from home. For instance, Nakamura discussed the conflict between organisational practices and the realities faced by employees with families. He highlighted the discrepancy between diverse individual needs and peer pressure by stating:

> *"[For example], if we have a child, we should accept that [the parent] needs to go home to take care of the child, but at the same time, there is peer pressure, right? If there are some tasks remaining at work, why should we need to accept them to go home earlier?"*

Nakamura's observation demonstrates the tension between parenting and feeling accountable to one's colleagues. The reluctance to leave early or be absent from work out of fear of letting others down seems to persist – a common practice in the corporate world during Japan's economic boom (see e.g., Cole, 1992). This observation further highlights the tension between paternal and employee roles, as maintaining acceptance among colleagues often conflicts with the desire to be involved at home. From this perspective, the need to secure a sense of belonging at work may outweigh the sense of belonging associated with fatherhood and family relations. The sense of peer pressure was also apparent when Nakamura discussed holidays, highlighting another persistent practice of refraining from using full paid vacation time due to discomfort and pressure (Cole, 1992; North, 2015). His reflection also revealed how such behaviour becomes a performance, not only for colleagues, but also for superiors, as he explained:

> *"I think there are many opportunities to take a holiday in Japan as well, but we do not want to take a lot of holidays because of peer pressure. We always think of the chance to show our focus on work to our bosses when we omit taking a holiday because that is kind of the, well, I do not want to say the performance, but it is a performance to show our eagerness for the work. Opportunity is also in Japan, but we did not take many holidays. Only 2 or 3 days per year. That is very common in Japan."*

The fact that Nakamura himself describes minimising holiday intake as a way of 'performing' the role of an ideal worker offers a valuable point regarding Butler's notion of gender performativity. While Nakamura's notion gives the impression that the action is made consciously to perform a role, Butler argues that "gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express" (Butler, 1991, p. 31). In this sense, the very repetition of omitting holidays and staying late at work does not simply reflect the reliable employee but rather produces it. Moreover, Japan's masculine corporate culture (Nemoto, 2013) appears to make this enactment compulsory, as failing to conform to the norms could invite punishment in forms including stigmatisation, dissatisfaction among colleagues, or receiving a bad work evaluation (Butler, 1991; Takahashi et al., 2013; North, 2015). Thus, the workplace becomes a 'scene of constraint' (Butler, 2004) in which Nakamura is recognised as a 'good employee' through performances aligning salaryman masculinity and productivity outside the home (Dasgupta, 2000). The norms within corporate culture directly influenced his paternal role. The very performance that ensured recognition at work simultaneously constrained his desire to be a nurturing father, as the repeated absence from home in itself is an act of fatherhood which produced a paternal role conflicting with Nakamura's ideal. This prioritisation of the ideal worker becomes further apparent when he shared:

> *"When my first kid was born, it was lucky that it was a holiday, so I could be there. […] It was a super exciting time [to be there when his first child was born]."*

If this interpretation is accurate, it implies that work performance held greater pressure, reflecting a more traditional performance of fatherhood. From Nakamura's account, it can be presumed that had the birth of his first child not coincided with a holiday, he might not have been able to participate. This again highlights the constraint between fatherhood and work. His calling it being "lucky" for having been present at the first birth, while not mentioning the

second, suggests that participation was a unique opportunity rather than a normative expectation. This aligns with studies noting the prevalence of the traditional perception of men as the breadwinners, which has resulted in their exclusion from childbirth (Taniguchi, 2012; Taniguchi et al., 2013). Nakamura also hinted at this custom of exclusion when he reflected on the few occasions he accompanied his wife to pregnancy ultrasounds. He noted the absence of other men and the tiny space allocated to husbands, which made him feel nervous. Perhaps this 'out of placeness' could be read as a form of 'gender trouble' (1990/1999), as his presence may have disrupted the normative gendered expectations of that setting, thus risking the undoing of the masculine identity aligned with the breadwinner role (Butler, 2004). At the same time, research shows that participating to childbirth can strengthen men's senses of becoming a father (Iwata, 2014) and improve spousal relations (Taniguchi, 2012). Therefore, the action of not participating to childbirth could simultaneously risk diminishing both the paternal role and the role of a husband. North (2015) notes that fathers in Japan often hide their use of childcare leave behind paid vacations, due to stigma associated with men prioritising family over work. Williams et al. (2013) similarly argue that stigma is a common reason why men avoid openly using family-friendly policies. While Nakamura did not explicitly state that taking additional vacation days would have exposed him to such stigma, it could, however, help explain why he might not have attended the birth had it not conveniently coincided with a holiday, as doing so would have defied the workplace norms and risked punitive consequences (Butler, 1991).

Interestingly, when we discussed paternity leave, Nakamura told me that he had not considered taking such leave and did not think it was something he should do. He stated that he did not even think about it, reflecting an internalised enactment of culturally normative roles of a dedicated colleague, and a man. Nakamura's account gave the impression that he was simply unaware of his legal rights. After all, when he became a father, the Japanese government's efforts to encourage fathers to take paternity leave and increase childcare involvement were still relatively new in terms of the notion of involved fatherhood. It would also align with research noting that workers in Japan are often unaware of their rights since these are not actively promoted within companies (Takahashi et al., 2013), which is a crucial point considering that the usage rate of family-friendly policies is highly dependent on workplace atmosphere (Ishii-Kuntz, 2003). Thus, it can be concluded that the more family-friendly the company, the more likely employees are to utilise their rights, as such practices become normative within that environment (Uchida et al., 2024). The fact that Nakamura did not consider the possibility of taking paternity leave suggests that, within his working environment, paternity leave is not

something men do, and hence Nakamura's performance complied with company norms. This again highlights the confinement of the masculine notion within the corporate context and how Nakamura negotiates within this societally defined structure (Butler,1990/1999). Even if adherence to gendered norms may have been unconscious, the enactment itself reinforces the traditional masculine norm of a publicly productive breadwinner.

The prioritisation of the productive employee role over fatherhood became further evident when Nakamura explained that in cases where his children were sick, he considered it his wife's responsibility to care for them. Only if she were unavailable would he consider seeking his boss to request some time off. As he put it:

> *"If she [wife] could not manage to take care of them [children], I should show responsibility in those situations, and I would need to pursue my boss. When I was in Japan, my thought was that my wife should take the first priority in taking care of them."*

This response reflects the gendered division of caregiving in Japan, with the primary responsibility directed at wives (Yamane, 2020; Tamiya, 2020) even within dual-income households. Thus, this idea that fatherhood is viewed as a secondary option – a backup – aligns with research noting the prevalence of viewing fathers' role as secondary caregiver, and who step in with a 'helpers role' (Iwata, 2014). This positioning of oneself in a secondary role could also signal a weakened sense of *ibasho* within the home, as the caregiving aspect did not seem to provide Nakamura with a 'natural' sense of belonging or appreciation. Perhaps not recognising oneself as the primary caregiver could diminish a sense of belonging, given that close family relations are viewed as crucial to achieving *ibasho* (Tanaka, 2021). While it was not stated whether this distribution of caregiving tasks was a joint decision, nor how Nakamura's wife approached the allocation of responsibility, family dynamics are essential to consider in relation to fatherhood, as they can complement or counter the gendered work culture (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019). In this case, however, the notion of viewing the wife as the primary caregiver and stepping in as the second option aligns with the societally accepted gendered norm. Hence, this performance of fatherhood reinforced the normative gendered dynamics, with the masculine role directed outside.

The demanding work environment, characterised by physical and psychological barriers, constrained Nakamura's ability to spend time with his family and to enact the paternal role aligned with his ideal. His weekday performance, which consisted of absence, aligned with salaryman masculinity and the breadwinning model (e.g., Dasgupta, 2015; Hidaka, 2010;

Roberson & Suzuki, 2003) – Notions that conflict with involved fatherhood. However, as Butler notes, "'contexts'" are themselves posited unities that undergo temporal change and expose their essential disunity" (Butler, 1990/1999, p. xxi). Although Butler refers to the instability of subversiveness and unsubversiveness, the notion could also be applied to fatherhood since performances always "constitute and contest the coherence of that 'I'" (Butler, 1991, p. 26), highlighting its temporality. Whereas the weekdays constituted the 'I' for Nakamura, whose performance produced the reliable employee and absent father, the weekend opened possibilities for enactment that contested the coherence of this performance. Nakamura shared that during weekends, he made an effort to spend time with his children and to engage in shared activities, which he remembers fondly. He also noted that he and his wife shared responsibilities for childcare and some housekeeping tasks. While it was not specified when these tasks were allocated, it is reasonable to assume that they mainly occurred on weekends, given his limited time at home during the week. Therefore, this weekend narrative indicates a dimension of fatherhood that departs from the normative weekday performance. This underlines the temporality of paternal identity, despite the appearance of continuity and coherence (Butler, 1991) in the 'absent father' produced during the weekdays. Unlike the traditional fathering role centred on work outside the home, Nakamura's weekend involvement reflected a more nurturing and supportive approach. One that aligns more closely with his personal ideal of fatherhood. Thus, his fatherhood performance in Japan appears to have varied across the week, shifting between traditional on weekdays, and greater involvement on weekends.

Nevertheless, workplace pressures created a tension between his actual performance and his ideal of a nurturing father, ultimately leading to a sense of regret when reflecting on his time in Japan, as he shared:

> *"When I remember the working time in Japan, I was always exhausted from the daily work, and I never saw the kids' faces. I just ate something very briefly, bathed and went to sleep. There was a lack of talking to my wife about her life and my kids' lives. I feel it was a big shame to lose some of the experience as a father or husband with my family."*

Beike et al. (2008) note that 'lost opportunities'—occasions that cannot be rectified or altered in the present—play a significant role in generating regret. In Nakamura's case, his retrospective reflections suggest he perceived his time in Japan as a 'lost opportunity' in relation to his roles as a parent and a husband, particularly given the fleeting nature of early childhood.

These moments cannot be relived nor redeemed. A realisation Nakamura may have reached through his increased involvement after moving to Denmark.

5.2.2 Towards more involved fatherhood in Denmark

Nakamura's relocation to Denmark with his family was motivated by Nakamura's professional aspirations. Since expatriates need to recreate their lives in the new host country, both professionally and privately (Bakel & Vance, 2023), it is likely that the move required his wife's acceptance, as such action brings considerable changes to one's life. This perception is plausible given that relocation to Denmark did not involve a fixed-term assignment with a Japanese transnational company, but rather an undefined work contract with a Danish employer. However, whether the decision was made jointly or mainly by Nakamura himself remains unclear, as this was not discussed during the interview. This reflects my choice to allow Nakamura to narrate his experience freely within the principles of a life story interview, rather than steering the conversation in ways that may appear questioning. The absence of his wife's standpoint highlights the subjectivity of his experience. Hence, it might be beneficial if future studies examined spousal dynamics more closely, as fatherhood performance cannot be fully understood in isolation from them.

Nevertheless, Nakamura's wife's limited proficiency in both English and Danish—a factor that may have influenced the decision-making process—resulted in Nakamura finding himself taking complete responsibility for practicalities, such as interacting with schools and taking care of healthcare appointments. This broadened responsibility, brought by his wife's language circumstances, unexpectedly opened new possibilities for fatherhood while simultaneously challenging the familiar role of the devoted employee he had embodied in Japan. Nakamura found this shift challenging, as he reflected on how he had internalised Japanese workplace expectations by stating:

> *"My first thought [when experiencing the Danish working culture] was similar to that in Japan – I should focus on work. Because if I cannot focus on work due to parenting or any other issue at home [...] I felt a little bit worried about losing my job in Denmark."*

This statement reflects Butler's notion of 'gender trouble' (1990/1999), as the anxiety Nakamura experienced reveals the destabilisation of his previously acquired masculine identity tied with breadwinning. The increased involvement with familial affairs was at odds with

Nakamura's previously enacted role in Japan, where work had been central to his expression of the self. As House et al. (2004) note, culture shapes our thoughts, emotions, and interactions, thus impacting our values, attitudes and behaviours in the workplace. In Nakamura's case, his experience in Japan had conditioned him to believe that a devoted employee prioritises work and avoids taking time off for family matters, as such absences might be viewed negatively, and hence be punitive in nature (Butler, 1991). This internalised expectation led to a temporary imbalance between his roles as a father and an employee, causing stress and fear of underperformance. However, as Nakamura adjusted to his new working environment, these worries gradually subsided. The cultural context in Denmark opened new perspectives, which created space for a more involved fatherhood performance.

One of the key notions transforming Nakamura's views on fatherhood and family involvement was the support he experienced within the workplace. Nakamura shared that shortly after relocating, he came to realise that his colleagues in Denmark were supportive and understanding of his situation, which helped reduce the stress he felt from not being able to fully focus on work due to family responsibilities and the practical challenges that came with settling into a new country. His experience aligns with findings suggesting that receiving support when expatriates face controllable stressors (e.g., navigating daily tasks) or less controllable ones (e.g., feeling homesickness) can significantly ease their adjustment process (Podsiadlowski et al., 2013, in Bakel & Vance, 2023, p. 23). Reflecting on the shift in his mindset, Nakamura noted:

> *"Here [Denmark], it is very flexible [to balance work and family]. Everybody shows flexibility. We all know that bringing up a child is an important task. Bringing up the child and taking care of the child is our important task as adults, so we help each other if there are still some remaining tasks [at work] [...]. Here, I feel it is much more comfortable to take care of the kids, and I have been thinking more about spending time with my family. But when I was in Japan, well, there was a chance maybe, but I had no time or thought about that because I was so busy."*

His account highlights contrasting priorities between Japanese and Danish cultures regarding work and family. In Denmark, Nakamura experienced that allocating time to children and family was not only accepted but considered a meaningful priority. In contrast, his experience in Japan had been shaped by a stronger pressure to perform at work, at the expense of family involvement. This contrast resonates with Butler's (2004) notion that workplace environments,

through their normative expectations, can either ‘do’ or ‘undo’ gendered identities. Initially, the increased familial responsibility in Denmark created a ‘scene of constraint’ for Nakamura’s working identity, temporarily undoing the masculine role previously enacted in Japan. At the same time, the Danish workplace environment seemed to reduce constraints on Nakamura’s paternal role, allowing him more space to perform involved fatherhood aligned with his ideals.

The culture of greater acceptance towards men taking care of family in Denmark (Bloksgaard, 2015) encouraged Nakamura to enact a more nurturing fatherhood, and his performance gradually aligned with the norms of the Danish working environment, where time spent with family is supported. However, it is essential to note that despite the strong societal consensus in Denmark for gender equality and paternal involvement, the ideal of a man as the provider also prevails (Bloksgaard, 2015). Moreover, while Danish men’s display of care and emotions at home is widely accepted, these traits are perceived as unsuitable enactments in a work context, as these are considered to undermine the masculine ideal (Bloksgaard et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the cultural norm of involved fatherhood and work-life balance prompted a change in Nakamura’s mindset, as he began to think more about his family and feel increasingly comfortable caring for his children – actions that could be perceived as producing a more nurturing father and a husband. This emphasises the importance of one’s surroundings in naturalising paternal involvement, as the more men allocate time to their family, the more likely others are to do so (Uchida et al., 2024). As Butler notes, “There is only taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very ‘taking up’ is enabled by the tool lying there” (Butler, 1990/1999, p. 185). In other words, when the norm is already ‘there’, it becomes easier to reproduce it through performance, and these repeated performances allow the very naturalisation of gender norms.

The previous quote is also connected to another perspective that influences Nakamura’s evolving views on fatherhood and family – Namely, the Danish notion of work-life balance. Nakamura shared that after moving to Denmark, he came to realise that work is just one part of life, and that fatherhood is also important. As Nakamura shared:

> *“The work-life balance is much more improved [in Denmark]. There is definitely more enjoyment in work and with my family, and I have the opportunity to share the enjoyment with my children. It is much more beneficial for us - especially for me. I think it is also good for my kids’ future and their lives. So, I am super happy about moving here.”*

Work-life balance provides an interesting lens concerning Butler's (2004) 'scenes of constraints'. In Japan, and during the early stages of his relocation to Denmark, the workplace and the domestic sphere seemed to create conflicting environments where the roles of devoted employee and nurturing father could not coexist. However, in Denmark, Nakamura experienced joy in being able to balance work and family life, suggesting that these roles no longer constrained one another. His earlier stress and exhaustion in Japan reflected the imbalance between these roles, whereas the shorter workdays in Denmark allowed him to engage in family life in ways he had not been able to before. As Greenhaus et al. (2003) note, individuals who can balance work and family tend to feel greater well-being, as they experience lower stress when managing roles important to them. The work-life balance in Denmark further encouraged Nakamura to take as many vacation days as possible to spend time with his family, a sharp contrast to his earlier habits in Japan, where he took two to three days per year. Reflecting on his working schedule back in Japan, Nakamura stated that he considered it normal and acceptable. A mindset that shifted after experiencing life in Denmark. As he noted:

> *"[In Japan] Everybody is always working, so it did not make any sense why I would need to complain about that. But now, I know the different lifestyle in Denmark"*

Another factor that may have influenced Nakamura's changing view of fatherhood is his exposure to gender dynamics in Danish workplaces. After moving to Denmark, Nakamura had a conversation with his friends in Japan who were curious about the working environment for women. Reflecting on this conversation, Nakamura had noted that while leadership and senior positions in Japan are predominantly held by men, his own superior in Denmark is a woman. Hence, showcasing a contrast in cultural differences regarding gender representation. Nakamura further experienced the workplace culture in Denmark as more gender equal and perceived that within the overall society there are no significant differences between the two genders. While he did not explicitly connect this to fatherhood, such exposure to distinct gender dynamics may have subtly reshaped his understanding of both parental and professional roles. In a context where equal parental responsibility is widely expected, failing to align with this norm may result in subtle forms of punishment, echoing Butler's argument that "those who fail to do their gender right" risk social punishment (Butler, 1990/1999, p. 178).

The conditions in Denmark forced Nakamura to take on a more active role in the family sphere, an enactment that 'undid' the devoted employee role he had regularly produced in Japan, initially increasing his stress levels due to fear of losing his place (Butler, 1991). Yet the

growing familial responsibility, combined with the support he received from his workplace and colleagues, encouraged Nakamura to rethink his roles as a father, husband, and employee. Through repeated performance of caring for his family while fulfilling his professional responsibilities, Nakamura developed a more balanced identity as an employee, father, and husband, replacing earlier anxiety and stress with a greater sense of happiness. His experience aligns with findings noting that fathers who spend more time with their families report higher satisfaction levels (Ishii-Kuntz, 2008). While Butler (1991) argues that performance always contests the coherence of the 'I', Nakamura's narrative indicates that his paternal performance in Denmark became more coherent throughout the week than it had been in Japan, as family involvement was no longer limited to weekends. The happiness Nakamura gained from increased family time, alongside his emphasis on his wife's happiness in Denmark, indicates a deepening of relational ties in which his role as a husband and as a father became increasingly recognised. This suggests that he began to experience a stronger sense of belonging at home (Tanaka, 2021).

5.2.3 Masculinity as a spatio-temporal transformation

Masculinities are fluid, contested and vary across space and time (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Robinson & Hockey, 2011; Frühstück & Walthall, 2011; Hopkins & Giazitzoglu, 2024). The spatiality in this context refers to the places men interact within, and that play a significant role in the construction of gender. These spaces can vary from smaller places within local, all the way to regional and global (McDowell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gorman-Murray, 2008).

The notion of spatiality is particularly evident when considering public and private spaces, which have historically positioned women within the domestic and men within the public realms of paid work (Gorman-Murray, 2008). McDowell (2005) has similarly noted how "the very definition of hegemonic masculinity in industrial societies is bound up with labour market participation" (McDowell, 2005, p. 38). This notion aligns closely with the hegemonic salaryman ideal in Japan, where masculine identity is closely intertwined with breadwinning and workplace devotion (Cook, 2019a). While spaces can also be psychological, considering, for instance the concept of *ibasho* which has strong emotional aspect (e.g., Otaya, 2012; Tanaka, 2021), this theme focuses on the physical spaces that were central in Nakamura's narrative. That is, Japan and Denmark, and the home and workplace within them. Japan and Denmark offer broader cultural and socio-political contexts in which hegemonic masculinity is

constructed, and as these constructions are context-specific (Butler, 1990/1999; Connell, 2005), different spatial contexts produce different types of masculine performances (Robinson & Hockey, 2011).

Temporality refers to time, which also shapes masculinity (Hopkins & Giazitzoglu, 2024). Time itself is gendered through its temporality and intertwinement with spaces; separating work from leisure, and private from public (Leccardi, 1996; Odih, 1999), and masculine time is therefore often conceptualised as linear and future-oriented (Odih, 1999; Bonner-Thompson et al., 2026). This aligns with scholars noting the importance of ageing and transitioning through life stages in stabilising or reconfiguring hegemonic masculinity (Hidaka, 2010; Robinson & Hockey, 2011; Dasgupta, 2013; Leontowitsch, 2023). In Japan, key milestones such as graduating from higher education and entering white-collar employment, marrying, and having children form a linear path by which men are expected to become productive members of society (Hidaka, 2010; Cook, 2013). These milestones highlight the temporality and fluctuation of masculinity, as transitions through them reshape men's sense of responsibility and their performances (Dasgupta, 2013).

The influence of space on Nakamura's masculinity became evident when comparing his experiences in Japan and Denmark. In Japan, he demonstrated what is often described as salaryman masculinity: a work-centred life with limited involvement at home or with caregiving activities. Meanwhile, in Denmark, the circumstances forced Nakamura to take on new responsibilities that temporarily challenged his identity as a devoted worker. Over time, he came to understand that in Denmark, paternal involvement does not undermine one's masculine identity as a good worker or breadwinner. Rather, these roles coexist, and Nakamura was able to enact a more balanced masculinity with hegemonic notions related to work simultaneously with the evolved caregiving identity, which differs from the Japanese norm while aligning with the Danish one. Nakamura's narrative highlights the importance of context in the construction of masculine identity, echoing Butler's argument that gender is "performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence" (Butler, 1990/1999, p. 33). In other words, masculinity is performed through norms that are culturally conditioned.

The role of time in constructing and reconfiguring Nakamura's masculinity was evident throughout Nakamura's narrative. For instance, when reflecting on his ikigai (the Japanese concept of what gives life meaning), he stated:

> *"*Ikigai*…well, my* ikigai *is my work. But I need to add one higher priority* ikigai*, which*

is my family. So after marrying and after having the kids, family is a priority for me."

In Japan, *ikigai* has been closely tied with the normative masculine ideal of work, as Japanese men often prioritise work and personal interests, rarely considering family as their source of *ikigai* (Mathews, 2003). At the same time, masculine construction is often tied to one's identity and key life changes, such as family formation (Robinson & Hockey, 2011). While Nakamura's initial response to his *ikigai* was work, which he continues to hold in high regard and which seemed to compose an essential part of his identity, he also expressed that his family is now the number one priority in his life. This transformed perception diverges from the normative Japanese ideal, where men's work aspirations usually remain rather unchanged after marriage and children (Hara, 2023). Nakamura's response suggests that the passing of time and progressing through important life stages altered his priorities.

At the same time, spatiality also played a role. In Denmark, Nakamura's narrative indicated a greater emotional investment towards his family, aligning with the Danish masculine ideal that emphasises balancing work and caregiving (Bloksgaard, 2015). This reflects the role of place in influencing gender performances (Robinson & Hockey, 2011) and supports Butler's (1990/1999) argument that cultural and sociopolitical contexts shape gender enactment. If gendered 'knowledge' is temporal and shaped by the cultural and sociopolitical contexts we inhabit (Robinson & Hockey, 2011), then changing context could change that very knowledge. In Japan, Nakamura considered it normal to work long hours and did not question his absence from family life. However, encountering the Danish lifestyle altered this sense of 'normalcy', and when reflecting on his time in Japan, he expressed regret for not spending more time with his children. Thereby recognising the temporality of fatherhood, especially of small children. Interestingly, this reflection complicates notions that masculinity rejects the past (Bonne-Thompson et al., 2026). While Nakamura did not express regret in a way that made him vulnerable by remaining future-oriented, his narrative suggests that time can also 'undo' or reshape gendered performance. As Butler (2004) argues, gender is continually done and undone, and in Nakamura's case, the retrospective reflection on his past perhaps altered his understanding of how he should enact in the future, hence reshaping his masculinity.

The role of time in constructing Nakamura's masculine performance became even clearer when he discussed his ideal life (*risōtekina jinsei*), revealing how his aspirations had shifted depending on the stage he had been in life. He explained how he used to be more competitive in his youth, aiming for a high position and sufficient income to enjoy life. Goals that were,

however, subject to change. As Nakamura reflected:

> *"[regarding* risōtekina jinsei*] Well, I feel that the ideal life for me is the life what I want to be. It depends on what is the priority, I guess. […] The 'what I want to be' is not stable, right? We can always change our mind. […] It also depends on the age right. When I was young, I had super high expectations to be higher positioned and to get more money. But now, I am getting old […] and life goals are much closer than when I was young. Then my mind might be changed, and I want to be more relaxed […]and spend more time with them [family] as well."*

This aligns with arguments noting that masculine time is future-oriented (Odih, 1999; Bonne-Thompson et al., 2026) and reshaped by age and life course transitions (Robinson & Hockey, 2011; Dasgupta, 2013; Leontowitsch, 2023). For instance, his reflection echoes research proposing that younger men tend to express maleness through heteronormative and hegemonic masculine ideals such as competitiveness (Barber, 2014), whereas older men draw their identity from responsibility toward their families (Dasgupta, 2013), usually through breadwinning (Matthews, 2003). Whether the changes in Nakamura's priorities were resulted from achieving earlier goals or from gaining greater life experience, the shift in his ideal life indicates how temporality of time reshapes masculinity. This was further emphasised when Nakamura shared how, after becoming a father, his focus shifted from self-development to prioritising the needs of his children, highlighting the emergence of a more nurturing aspect within his masculine identity.

Nakamura's narrative further depicts the fluidity of masculinity and how non-normative and normative masculinity can coexist within a single individual (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This became evident when he shared his personal view on masculinity:

> *"[regarding masculinity '*otokorashisa'*] In my opinion,* otokorashisa *means just to be gentle. Yeah, not something powerful and to get some power. [...] In my opinion, gentleness would be very important. To sit calmly and think deeply, to decide which way is the best."*

The emphasis Nakamura placed on gentleness and calm presence contrasts with the general hegemonic masculine ideals of proactiveness and assertiveness (Morioka, 2013; Charlebois, 2013), suggesting a slightly altering practice. At the same time, Nakamura's notion of masculinity being a 'decision maker' could reflect a more normative understanding, as men in

Japan are traditionally positioned as heads of the households (Ronald & Allison, 2011; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019b). This aligns with Butler's notion that performance is never the same but always contests the coherence of the 'subject' (Butler, 1991). The fact that masculinity itself is temporal highlights the continuous movement between normative and non-normative elements, and how performing one simultaneously can undo the other (Butler, 2004).

Overall, Nakamura's narrative demonstrates that masculine embodiment is multifaceted and influenced by space. As a white-collar worker in Japan, Nakamura embodied traits aligned with hegemonic masculinity, as his role was primarily centred on professional identity. However, after relocating to Denmark, the previously embodied masculine identity was disrupted by a different cultural blueprint that emphasises a greater balance between work and family roles, thereby broadening the masculine notion beyond the breadwinning model by including nurturing aspects. This highlights the impact of cultural context on the construction and temporal transformations of masculine identity. Time also played a central role in framing his masculinity: moving away from the self-focused ambitions of his youth to new perspectives and priorities after forming a family, suggesting a linear and temporal movement of masculinity. While such future-oriented linear timelines are not unique to Japan, one must consider how the imaginaries differ across contexts. Socialisation to gender norms begins early through various spaces, such as school, sports, and home (McDowell, 2005). In Japan, this socialisation for men would mean emphasising the milestones tied with salaryman masculinity, especially breadwinning as a requirement for marriage. For instance, Cook (2013) notes that young male freeters who initially pursue alternative personal aspirations often end up conforming to normative expectations over time to ensure financial stability that is perceived as necessary in order to pursue marriage. Thus, these masculine 'future goals' seem tied to the hegemonic context in which they appear. In Denmark, a more balanced notion of private and public roles for both men and women (Bloksgaard, 2015) may shape differing imaginaries of adulthood. However, as the breadwinning role is also central to masculine construction (Bloksgaard, 2015), men who cannot secure this position or form a family risk social exclusion (Christensen, 2019). Therefore, while future masculine ambitions may differ across cultural contexts, the linearity of time and the punitive consequences of failing to meet hegemonic expectations (Butler, 1991) remain similar. Thus, masculine identity is constructed through these very spatio-temporal conditions that individuals navigate. These findings also demonstrate why the life story method was a particularly appropriate method for this study. Tracing Nakamura's experiences over time and across contexts, this method enabled the very

unfolding of the spatio-temporal dimensions of his masculine identity and revealed how his masculinity was continually remade through the cultural contexts of Denmark and Japan and through temporal life stages.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Nakamura's narrative suggests that cross-cultural context can refine one's perception of what is considered 'normal', thereby influencing fatherhood and masculine performance. His experience aligns with Butler's (1990/1999) argument that socially established gendered norms are either reinforced or challenged depending on the repeated performances. In Japan, the socially expected routine of prioritising work reinforced the societal norm of a work-oriented Japanese father (Dasgupta, 2010, 2012, 2015; Hidaka, 2010), which is a role Nakamura did not question and therefore reproduced through his enactment. The close link between hegemonic masculinity and work in Japan positioned Nakamura to embody traits aligning with the salaryman ethos. Not only had he achieved white-collar employment, even if non-regular, he had also acquired a higher education level, which are markers considered essential of a full-fledged adult and a member of a society, and which have been particularly expected of men (Hidaka, 2010). His dedication towards his colleagues and work further highlighted this alignment, as in Japan, hegemonic masculinity is closely tied with responsibility to the group, work devotion and self-sacrifice (Roberson & Suzuki, 2003; Taga, 2005). However, in Denmark, the absence of a clear-cut gendered corporate culture and the emphasis on work-life balance blurred the lines of his previously internalised norms regarding gender roles, encouraging him to expand his paternal performance. In Denmark, fathers' active involvement in their children's lives is becoming an expected standard, and parity between genders in work and family life is highly valued, although attitudes still vary across social class and employment status (Rostgaard & Ejrnæs, 2021; Rostgaard & Lausten, 2015). While initially challenged by conflicting expectations, after some time Nakamura aligned with the Danish masculine norm in which work and caregiving roles are more balanced (Bloksgaard, 2015), thereby impacting his paternal role and expanding his responsibilities from outside to the home sphere.

Nakamura's experience, therefore, aligns with Butler's (1990/1999) argument that societally established norms compel gendered performance, and that enactments can either reinforce or challenge these norms depending on the manner of these performances. At the same time, his narrative also exposes tensions within Butler's conceptualisation. While Nakamura's reproduction of the salaryman in Japan mostly appeared unconscious, there were instances when he seemed aware of performing a certain role. For instance, when he reflected on 'performing' the dedicated employee to his boss. This contradicts Butler's (1991) claim that subjects do not choose the performances they do, as these are only an effect of the very subject

they appear to express. If Nakamura consciously performed the role of a dedicated employee, could this indeed be an effect of the subject, or did he demonstrate agency in choosing? His calling it a 'performance' raises a question about how individuals navigate roles that may conflict with one another, such as salaryman and involved fatherhood. How does an individual 'subvert' gender norms if one is not 'electing' to do so? Is it accidental, dependent on the circumstances rather than intention? In Nakamura's case, circumstances in Denmark pushed him towards a more involved fatherhood role, which he initially felt uncomfortable with for fear of risking the work identity he was accustomed to. This aligns with research showing that men often try to secure hegemonic masculinity even after migrating to a new country (Hopkins & Giazitzoglu, 2024). Thus, it is likely that he would have initially preferred to continue performing as he did in Japan had the situation allowed. Therefore, while Butler's (1990/1999) notion of performativity is useful for examining fatherhood performance across contexts, it also raises questions about agency, conflict between roles, and the role of circumstances in compelling or reshaping gendered performances. This is also why the word subversion feels inadequate, as it implies a dramatic detaching from the normative, despite the reality that many performances perceived as 'deviating' from hegemonic masculinity are neither intentional nor confrontational. Therefore, I would argue that words such as differ, departs from, or alters are more suitable, as these are better in encompassing performances that emerge circumstantially, accidentally, or through moments of conscious agency. These wordings are better at noting that altering gender practices does not always represent resistance. After all, Nakamura's narrative highlighted how these performances are shaped by multifaceted meanings, including context and temporality, and how one relates to these conditions.

Proceeding with Butler's notion that gender performance is 'compelled by the regulatory practices of gendered coherence' (Butler, 1990/1999, p. 33) and is contextually bound, I further argue that for a performance to become a norm, it requires broader cooperation across institutions, as policies and laws alone are not enough to influence people's performances. On paper, Denmark and Japan appear to share similar policy goals regarding family-friendly initiatives and increasing men's participation at home (see, e.g., North, 2015; Ishii-Kuntz, 2015; Mizukoshi et al., 2016; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019, 2022). However, research has shown that the paternal leave take-up in Denmark has been largely influenced not only by the legislation but also by institutional factors, such as workplace agreements (Bloksgaard, 2015) This, together with the introduction of a fathers' quota in 2022, increased the take-up of paternal leave across all education levels (Denmark Statistics, 2023). Prior to this quota, Danish fathers have been

taking the least parental leave among Nordic countries, despite being supportive of an equal share of family and work life (Bloksgaard, 2015; Rostgaard & Ejrnæs, 2021). In contrast, it seems that in Japan, the policy goals among the macro-level institutions, such as the government and the corporate sector, often conflict rather than complement one another. This could explain why the policy aims are not realised in everyday life and why Japan lacks the general supportive attitude towards involved fatherhood seen in Denmark. This contrast is particularly evident when considering the paternity leave rates. Although the special paternity leave in Japan exists (Inoue, 2018), fathers' actual leave take-up is still often less than a month (Uchida et al., 2024; Inoue, 2018), and in some cases, hidden behind paid vacation days (North, 2015). Given the power of the work institution in reinforcing gendered norms, especially in Japan, legislative and institutional support must align to result in meaningful change. Nakamura's narrative reflects this dynamic, as the corporate environment, and particularly the support from his colleagues, was crucial regarding his transformation toward a more involved fatherhood, confirming the importance of having a work culture that reflects the societal legislations. His absence from home in Japan, echoed the research noting the structural barriers to paternal involvement ingrained in corporate culture, including long working hours, overwork, gendered work culture, and obligation to colleagues that discourage disrupting group harmony (see e.g., Cole, 1992; Davies & Ikeno, 2002; Takahashi et al., 2013; North, 2015; Ogasawara, 2016; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019a; Hirota et al., 2023).

As gender norms are introduced and reinforced through various everyday spaces in which individuals interact (McDowell, 2005), it is essential to examine the more subtle spatial forces that shape gendered perceptions and performances. Beyond macro-level institutions, Nakamura's narrative also hinted at the importance of meso-level influences in shaping gendered performances across different cultural settings. One such influence, briefly mentioned in Nakamura's narrative, concerns the degree to which individuals socialise with their co-nationals, host-country nationals (hereafter HCNs), or other foreigners within that environment. While Nakamura's migration to Denmark was also professionally motivated—defined as a 'self-initiated' expatriate (Andresen et al., 2020)—he chose to fully embrace Denmark as his new cultural setting. He reflected on encountering a small Japanese community but felt reluctant to be part of it, highlighting how such groups can seem exclusive to non-Japanese speakers. Instead, he emphasised the importance of embracing the international aspects of living abroad and acknowledged his preference for a more introverted lifestyle. This contrasts with the experiences of Japanese migrants who aim to maintain the 'Japanese way of life' through co-

national communities (Liu et al., 2011) or with research suggesting that expatriates often seek connection with co-nationals or other foreigners with similar backgrounds (Manev & Stevenson, 2001), which can challenge adaptation to host-country norms, especially when individuals have limited understanding and exposure to the local culture (Bakel & Vance, 2023). The interaction or disengagement with parallel societies is interesting as it can result in differing fatherhood enactments. For instance, active engagement with the co-national community may reinforce traditional norms, resulting in a more traditional fathering enactment than Nakamura's. At the same time, participation in such communities does not necessarily mean that members fully agree with all cultural norms and act in those manners, since socialisation with co-nationals could also provide needed support and well-being when starting a life in a new culture, where one is yet to form social relations (Bakel & Vance, 2023). Thus, Nakamura's narrative and deliberate distancing from co-national groups underscore the role of individual agency in positioning themselves and choosing the extent to which one reproduces familiar cultural frameworks or engages with others. Moreover, exposure to diverse expatriate groups can foster a hybrid system of values (O'Brien, 2015), providing an even broader set of perspectives on gendered practices. As O'Brien notes, it is essential to explore whether the Nordic ideal of gender equality can co-exist with various ways of 'doing' fathering and mothering in an increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-religious context (O'Brien, 2015, p. 386). Studies have shown that expatriates in Scandinavian countries often struggle to form meaningful friendships with locals (Bakel & Vance, 2023), and especially in Denmark, they are more likely to socialise with other expatriates rather than with Danes (Oxford Research Report, 2020, p. 48). However, frequent socialisation with HCNs is important for building positive feelings towards the locals, contributing to smoother integration into the culture (Kraimer et al., 2001). Nakamura's colleagues provided crucial support during his early adjustment, but he found it difficult to build friendships with Danes outside work. Nevertheless, expatriate interactions warrant more in-depth examination in terms of cross-cultural fatherhood research. Whether individuals avoid interactions with co-national communities, join them, or seek to build relations with HCNs and other foreigners, such choices indicate how individuals locate themselves within these parallel frameworks. Moreover, the simultaneous interaction with differing norms among smaller communities provides a meso-level perspective on how fatherhood is enacted and reshaped abroad, highlighting the potential adjustments, diversions, or fusions of fatherhood practices.

Another essential influence on gendered enactment operating within the home sphere at the

micro-level is family dynamics, particularly through the meaning of husbandhood and marriage. While Nakamura's narrative did not focus specifically on his marital life, it nevertheless revealed the importance of spousal relationships in constructing gendered and paternal identity. This is especially relevant in Japan, where marriage is still strongly considered as the precondition for family building (Alexy, 2020). Cook (2013) has emphasised the need to evaluate romantic relationships, as these showcase the complexity of how one constructs and negotiates their gendered identities, while Goldstein-Gidoni (2019b) has similarly noted how husband and wife actively co-construct gender. During the interviews, Nakamura occasionally reflected on his marital role, indicating that the work requirements in Japan not only resulted in his absence as a father but also enforced the performance of an absent husband. He expressed regret for not talking much with his wife and about her life during that period. Nakamura's wife was the primary caregiver despite also working, signalling a normative division of labour in Japan. Many working women struggle to balance work and family responsibilities (Nagase, 2006), and some feel frustrated that husbands are praised for minimal caregiving while mothers' caregiving is taken for granted (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019b). Research has shown that in relationships where wives are career-oriented, husbands can feel conflicted yet encouraged to rethink gender relations (Taga, 2005, p. 135). At the same time, due to pressures to live up to the gendered expectations, some working mothers decline workplace benefits to preserve the image of the husband as the head of the household (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019b).

Although Nakamura did not specify how his wife experienced being the primary caregiver, her performance in this role, as well as the decision to resign upon childbirth, suggests marital dynamics aligned with Japanese norms. However, the move to Denmark, a decision that likely required his wife's support, reshaped these familial roles in significant ways. As O'Brien notes, "Any new environment provides opportunities and constraints, a new set of values, beliefs and standards and new norms which may change the balance of authority within the family" (O'Brien, 2015, p. 386). In Nakamura's case, the relocation disrupted the established patterns and required both to renegotiate their roles. His wife's limited English proficiency meant that Nakamura assumed greater responsibility in everyday life, which was initially challenging but ultimately resulted in his increased involvement in childcare and marital life. Nakamura's reflections suggest that these changes have strengthened the partner's communication. He, for instance, mentioned discussing the interview conversations with his wife afterwards, indicating a value for shared reflection of the past. Nakamura further emphasised how his wife's happiness correlated with his own. Research conducted in Nordic countries has shown a correlation

between paternal involvement and marital satisfaction, with divorce becoming less likely if the father took parental leave (Uchida et al., 2024). This suggests that paternal involvement in childrearing is closely tied to marital happiness, which was a dynamic also visible in Nakamura's narrative. Now, in Denmark, both Nakamura and his wife are employed and able to spend time together as a family, indicating that not only the husband's increased paternal responsibility but also a more balanced share of roles can contribute to marital happiness. This aligns with the new marital ideals in Japan that emphasise emotional connection and shared responsibility (Nakatani, 2006; Alexy, 2020). However, I must note that the relative absence of detailed husband/wife dynamics in Nakamura's narrative is likely connected to my research's focus on the fatherhood experience. I believe that if I had delved more deeply into his role as a husband, I might be writing another kind of project, as different themes may have emerged from his narrative. However, I chose to follow the natural flow of Nakamura's telling, which happened to focus mainly on his subjective experience of fatherhood. This interview method, nevertheless, offered small insights into his marital life that reveal how spousal dynamics and fatherhood are intertwined, and therefore reshaped together by cross-cultural context.

As noted in the analysis, spaces also include non-physical environments that operate on psychological and emotional levels (e.g., Tanaka, 2021), shaping how individuals understand themselves and their place in the world. Drawing on Anderson's (1983) conceptualisation of "imagined communities", media constructs imageries that people may relate due to shared emotional familiarity even if they are not physically present. While Anderson (1983) applied this concept to nationalism, similar logic can be extended to the notion of gender. Media representations can influence how individuals imagine and relate to, for instance, fatherhood, motherhood, and masculinity. Therefore, the role of media institutions also warrants consideration, as it plays a powerful role in constructing and circulating gendered imaginaries (McLaren, 2019; Seifert, 2020). Media further offers an important platform for discourse, and discourse itself is central part of gender construction according to Butler (1990/1999). Even if media consumption was not discussed directly with Nakamura, the sociopolitical environments he has been exposed to in Japan, Denmark, and international settings have inevitably influenced his understanding of gender. These very images reflected in the media, shaped by ongoing dialogue with surrounding sociopolitical environments and the public's attitudes and values (Gill, 2007), also determine which gendered discourses receive a platform and which are excluded (Eze et al., 2025). For instance, traditional Japanese media would likely reinforce the hegemonic notions of salaryman, housewife, and absent fatherhood (McLaren, 2019), whereas

unconventional media, such as films, can also offer alternative representations to the hegemonic discourse (Barber, 2018). Following Butler's argument that gendered constraints and possibilities are what the discourse "constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender" (Butler, 1990/1999, p. 13), the media individuals consume form part of the discursive environment that shapes how gender is perceived and performed. In cross-cultural settings, these differing media portrayals may contribute to hybrid imaginings of fatherhood and masculinity, as well as offer alternative places for belonging. Similar to the interpersonal interactions with co-nationals, HCNs, or other migrants, exposure to various media spaces can encourage individuals to negotiate between competing representations, potentially resulting in acts of agency in how they relate to the narratives rather than being passive recipients.

All things considered, the macro-, meso-, and micro-level dynamics evident in Nakamura's narrative demonstrate the importance of examining the various spatial layers through which gendered construction operate in cross-cultural fatherhood. This aligns with Butler's notion that gender is the "effect of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin" (Butler, 1990/1999, p. xxix). Even though the impact of corporate institutions emerged more pronounced in Nakamura's narrative, these layers are in constant interaction, both top-down and bottom-up, influencing the environment in which fatherhood is negotiated. Focusing on such nuances in future studies can enable a more comprehensive understanding of how normative fatherhood can be aligned with, challenged, or reinforced across cultural contexts.

This thesis explored how cross-cultural contexts influence Japanese fatherhood performance and examined how masculinity is constructed and reshaped through the lens of Butler's framework of gender performativity. By utilising an inductive-deductive thematic analysis of life story interviews with Nakamura, three themes emerged that showcase how fatherhood is negotiated across various levels within a society.

The influence of macro-level institutions on gendered performance was evident throughout Nakamura's narrative. In Japan, the corporate sector played a central role in reinforcing the societal norm of a work-centred father with limited paternal responsibilities (Dasgupta, 2015). His long working hours and restricted presence at home during the weekdays reflected the gendered expectations embedded in Japanese work culture, in which men are expected to prioritise work, while women are presumed to be the primary caregivers (e.g., Ueno, 2021; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019a; Takahashi et al., 2013). In Denmark, however, the working culture aligned more closely with broader societal aims of gender equality, encouraging Nakamura to

take on a more active paternal role. Although this transition to greater responsibilities was not without challenges, as established spousal roles were disrupted by circumstances, support from colleagues and the workplace led by a female superior facilitated a more balanced distribution between work and parenting roles. This reflects the Danish masculine norm where work and increased parental involvement are closely linked (Bloksgaard et al., 2015). In essence, Nakamura's fatherhood performances reflected the norms of his immediate environment, supporting Butler's theory that gender is a social construct reinforced or challenged through repeated actions, rather than being an inherent quality within a person (Butler, 1990/1999). At the same time, his narrative revealed some limitations to Butler's framework, especially in terms of intentionality, circumstantiality and the role of agency within performance. After all, the narrative highlighted how performative transformations are an effect of a complex exposure to varying discursive environments, including the internalisation of previously acquired norms and the agency individuals possess in renegotiating such gendered expectations.

Since society consists of multiple levels beyond macro-level structures, the narrative also highlights the dynamic interplay among macro-, meso-, and micro-level influences that together shape how one negotiates gendered performances such as fatherhood. How one interacts with these various spatial levels can influence the extent to which one aligns and reflects the cultural agreement on fatherhood and masculinity. For instance, how expatriates engage with HCNs, other foreigners, or fellow nationals can affect which norms they internalise and reproduce. These community-level and interpersonal interactions should receive further attention in future studies examining fatherhood in cross-cultural settings.

A notable insight gained from this research is that, while fatherhood appears highly sensitive to contextual changes, especially regarding work institutions and cultural values in Denmark, the intertwinement of spatial and temporal aspects became more visible in the construction of masculinity. Spatiality refers not only to the physical contexts of Denmark and Japan, or to the division between home and work, but also to the psychological space evoked by the concept of *ibasho*, which refers to a sense of belonging and feeling accepted (Otaya, 2012; Tanaka, 2021). Temporality, in turn, refers to time, which shapes masculinity through, for instance, life stages and ageing (Robinson & Hockey, 2011). Nakamura's evolving life goals, strongly influenced by his life stage and accumulated experience, indicate a temporal dimension to masculinity. At the same time, his reflections on regret and greater emotional engagement within the family highlight the contextual factors that shape it. Together, these findings demonstrate the intertwinement of spatial and temporal processes (Leccardi, 1996; Odih, 1999) and highlight

how fatherhood and masculinity—though also connected—may exhibit differing sensitivity to temporal and spatial shifts.

While this study contributes to Japanese fatherhood and gender studies by demonstrating how cross-cultural encounters can reshape fatherhood performance, it is important to acknowledge some limitations. Nakamura's experience as a white-collar employee working under a female superior in Denmark may not reflect the experiences of Japanese fathers across other social or educational backgrounds. Research has shown, for instance, that through general support for traditional masculinity in Denmark is low, men with lower levels of education are more likely to adhere to traditional ideals of the breadwinning role with minimal caregiving involvement (Bloksgaard et al., 2015; Rostgaard & Ejrnæs, 2021), and gendered attitudes remain more pronounced in certain blue-collar occupations, ultimately influencing family life and the division of household and caregiving tasks (Bloksgaard et al., 2015). These perspectives may influence how Japanese men with differing occupational settings experience fatherhood abroad. Additionally, I acknowledge that my limited proficiency in Japanese may have led to potential oversight of essential studies written in Japanese. Liu and Yamashita (2020) have noted the dominance of English in academic literature, and I, too, have relied primarily on English-language scholarly sources. However, I have endeavoured to pay close attention to contextual nuances throughout the writing of this thesis.

Nevertheless, by examining Nakamura's life trajectory, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on Japanese fatherhood by incorporating a cross-cultural dimension. It highlights the substantial influence of external environments in reinforcing or reshaping fatherhood performance, and underlines the persistent structural barriers embedded in Japanese work institutions. The study also explores the discrepancy between legal reforms and Japan's continued reliance on the traditional gendered division of labour. These insights stress the importance of viewing fatherhood and masculinity as dynamic, context-dependent, and continually negotiated constructs through everyday enactments.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

Note that these questions were only prepared as optional guidance should the life story interview need assistance to flow.

A: Growing up and Family

1. How would you describe your childhood?
2. What were some significant moments or memories from your upbringing?
3. How would you describe your family dynamic during childhood?
4. Did you have a good relationship with your family members growing up?
5. What do you remember about your grandparents?
6. How would you describe your parents?
7. What traits or qualities do you believe you got from your parents?
8. How was discipline handled in your family?
9. Were you encouraged to try new things?
10. What were some of the things you did as a child? Could you describe what your daily life was like?
11. What were some of the challenges you faced as a young person in Japan, and how did they shape your view on life?
12. How did your childhood differ from your teen years?
13. As a teenager, what kind of pressures did you feel and where did they come from?
14. How was it being a teenager? What was the most important event during those years?
15. What inspired you?
16. Is there something you wish would have been different about your childhood?

B: Education

1. What were your early memories in attending school?
2. Did you go to a boy-only school or a co-education school?
3. How far did you go on your education? When did you decide on the educational path?
4. How was your school's curriculum organised in terms of boys and girls? Were there differences depending on the level of the education?
5. Were there classes for boys/or girls only?
6. How did the school environment shape your idea about gender roles and masculinity/femininity? Did the idea change or strengthen going into a higher education?
7. What were your dreams and ambitions?
8. What are your best memories of school?
9. How do you view the role of education?
10. As a parent, are there differences in the educational system between Japan and Denmark? If so, what are some key differences you have noticed?

C: Cultural Values and Traditions

1. How would you describe the cultural values and traditions you grew up with in Japan?
2. Was religion important in your family?
3. What important beliefs or cultural values were passed on to you, and by whom?
4. What family or cultural traditions were important in your life?
5. In what ways do you find the cultural norms and expectations different between Japan and Denmark?
6. How have you experienced the values and traditions in Denmark?
7. What values would you not want to give up on?

D: Social Influences

1. How would you describe your social life?
2. Did you make friends easily?
3. Were your friends only boys/or also girls?
4. Were you part of any clubs or organisations? Can you tell me about it, and whether it was for boys only or mixed gender?
5. Can you describe the atmosphere of the club/organisation? Did you do things together outside the activity?
6. How did participating in the club/organisation influence you?
7. Do you find sense of community important to you?
8. Has social class ever been important to you in your life? What were the views of your parents to this matter?
9. Who has influenced your life the most?
10. How have you experienced the social life after moving to Denmark? Are there lot of changes? How do you experience these?
11. What relationships in your life has been most significant?

E: Adulthood and Masculinity

1. When did you consider yourself as an adult?
2. How did you imagine your adulthood, and does your current life reflect those imaginations?
3. How would you describe the ideal manhood?
4. How has this ideal impacted you?
5. Has your notion of ideal masculinity transformed during your life? If yes, in what ways?
6. Has your understanding of masculinity changed after moving to Denmark?

7. What have been the challenges of adulthood?
8. How do you feel about your current age?
9. How do you experience adulthood in Denmark?

F: Fatherhood

1. How do you envision fatherhood?
2. How does that relate to your own experience in relation to your father?
3. Do you have an ideal role as a father?
4. What were your first feelings when you heard that you were going to become a parent for the first time?
5. Could you explain me how you experienced the time of your partners pregnancy and the birth of your child?
6. How did you experience your new status as a father?
7. Were there things that surprised you in relation to being a parent?
8. What things have you found most rewarding in being a father?
9. What has been one of the most challenging moments you have had as a father?
10. Are there things you wished you had done differently as a father?
11. How did having children impact your life?
12. Has living in Denmark impacted your idea of fatherhood in any ways?
13. What similarities and differences can you notice between you and your children?
14. What lessons and values do you hope to give to them?

G: Work and Family

1. What are you working with?
2. How did you end up on this line of work?
3. Do you enjoy your work?

4. How do you view the meaning of work?
5. When you got children, did you go on a paternity leave? Could you explain me the reasons for going or for the decision to not to go?
6. How did you end up moving to Denmark?
7. Are you married?
8. Where did you meet?
9. What does your partner do?
10. What cultural background is your partner from?
11. How would you describe your relationship?
12. Is your partner the mother of your children?
13. As a family, how do you manage situations to care for a sick child in Japan? How about in Denmark?
14. How would you describe the working culture in Japan? How about in Denmark?
15. Is it important to you to have enough free time outside of work?
16. How would you describe a good work-life balance?
17. How do you maintain a good work-life balance in Japan? How about in Denmark?

H. Past and Future

1. How would you describe the ideal life course (理想的な人生)?
2. Do you feel that you have achieved the ideal life?
3. What have been some crucial decisions in your life?
4. Is there anything you regret, or are you satisfied with the life choices you have made?
5. What has been the happiest time in your life?
6. How have you overcome challenges, and how do you deal with disappointment?

7. What are your biggest worries?
8. Where do you see yourself in the future?
9. Do you wish to return to Japan one day?
10. How do you see Japan in the future?
11. Where do you hope to see your children in the future?
12. Are there things you would still hope to experience?
13. Have you found your *Ikigai*?
14. Are there any life lessons you would like to share with younger generations?