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Mothers' duty? Exploring interrelationships of class, gender and ethnicity in fathers' involvement in Japanese school PTAs

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ABSTRACT

Existing studies focus on parental involvement in Japanese school PTAs as a mothers' duty, due to the quasi-compulsory nature of PTA membership and the prevalence of mothers' participation. While the diversification of family structures may challenge the assumption that PTA involvement is solely the responsibility of mothers, these studies lack an understanding of the evolving role of fathers in PTA based on multiple social differences between parents within a family.

Through in-depth interviews with twenty-two parents from sixteen middle-class Chinese-Japanese inter-married families living in Japan, this study explores how class, gender, and ethnic differences between parents within each family interrelate to shape the division of PTA duties. Specifically, it examines whether fathers take on PTA duties and how they perceive their (non)involvement depending on the family structure. The study concludes by arguing that the diversification of family structures, along with the interplay of class, gender, and ethnicity between parents, shapes fathers' PTA involvement and may serve as a potential source for the transformation of inequalities in educational processes.

Introduction

It is evident that parental involvement in education is beneficial to the well-being and educational success of their children (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Davies, 1996; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Nechyba et al., 1999; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Smit et al., 2007; Epstein, 2011; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Mimizuka, 2013). These studies have validated parental involvement in education "as both the problem and the solution for" improving student achievement and have supported policymakers' views that parental involvement should been endorsed (de Carvalho, 2001, p. 12).

As part of social welfare policies aimed at ensuring children's well-being, various initiatives promote parental involvement in education in Japan (Toma, 2020). In an effort to promote parental involvement in education, emphasis is put on the welfare and education of children provided by the family (Kimura, 2017). This corresponds to Japanese-style welfare society (*Nihon-gata fukushi shakai)* policies, which place emphasis on welfare provision by the family rather than the state (Broadbent, 2003; Garon, 2010; Kimura, 2017; Tsutsui, 2020). A longstanding and symbolic part of these efforts has been the promotion of parental involvement in schools to support children's education through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), a 'volunteer' group associated with formal schools across Japan from pre-school to high school (Nakayama, 2016; Iwatake, 2017; Seo, 2018).

Although the rhetoric of the benefits of parental involvement for children has dominated academic and policy debates, it is important to recognise that the endorsement of parental involvement in education in terms of its positive impact on children's outcomes ignores the issues of inequalities and tensions associated with parental involvement in Japanese school PTAs.

Existing literature on parental involvement in the Japanese school PTAs

> Along with a child' s entrance into the Japanese school system comes another rite of passage for parents (read "mothers" in 99 percent of cases): experiencing the Japanese PTA system.
>
> -the Japan times, Kittaka, 2013

In Japan, involvement in school PTAs is regarded as a nearly universal "volunteer" practice for parents of children enrolled in formal education (Nakayama, 2016). School PTAs were introduced in Japan in March 1946 by the US-led Allied occupation as part of efforts to democratise education after the World War II. Today, however, parental

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participation in PTAs today is often quasi-compulsory family duty that parents with children enrolled in formal education are expected to fulfil (Sugimura, 2011; Iwatake, 2017; Mason, 2018; Seo, 2018; Morimura, 2019). First, parents automatically become PTA members when their child enters formal education (Kodama, 2007; Nakayama, 2016; Iwatake, 2017; Kurokawa, 2018; Morimura, 2019). In contrast to PTAs/PTOs in countries such as the US, which involve only 20 % of parents (Epstein, 2011, p. 98), quasi-compulsory PTA membership in Japan requires all families with children attending Japanese formal educational institutions to participate in PTAs. Second, unlike PTAs/PTOs in countries such as the US, which include parents as participants in school "decision-making, governance, and advocacy" (Epstein & Dauber, 1991, p. 291), parental participation in PTAs in Japan follows the principle of "one child at school, one parental duty" (Kodama, 2007; Nakayama, 2016; Iwatake, 2017; Kurokawa, 2018, 2019; Seo, 2018; Morimura, 2019). Since PTAs are associated with Japanese formal schools at all levels, except for tertiary education, almost all parents with children in Japanese formal educational institutions spend some time involved in PTAs (Iwatake, 2017, p. 10).

Japanese school PTAs have two main roles: service and fundraising. Service refers to the support that PTA members provide directly to schools, children, and parents. A major part of the service is supporting school facilities and activities (Iwatake, 2017; Kurokawa, 2018; Otsuka, 2021). These activities include volunteering at local community events and school events, mowing grass on school grounds or yards, cleaning school grounds, patrolling neighbourhood streets to ensure the safety of children going to and from school, greeting children at the school gates, reading to children or organising gatherings for parents at school, organising parent interest groups, publishing the PTA's newspaper, etc. (Nakano, 2005; Yamamoto, 2016; Kurokawa, 2018; Seo, 2018; Morimura, 2019; Otsuka, 2021).

Fundraising within Japanese school PTAs often involves the sale of items during a bazaar, notably through the Bell Mark programme (Nakano, 2005; Iwatake, 2017; Kurokawa, 2018; Seo, 2018). The Bell Mark, a logo found on various product packaging, displays points that PTAs collect and redeem for educational resources. PTA members sort and tally these points, which are exchanged for funds used to purchase school supplies, with 10 % of the total amount donated to the Bell Mark Education Foundation.

While all families with children in formal Japanese educational institutions are required to participate in PTAs, the term 'parents' often implicitly and explicitly refers to 'mothers' (Kodama, 2007; Kita, 2012; Kurokawa, 2018; Seo, 2018; Otsuka, 2021). As a result, the few studies that exist on the involvement of parents in school PTAs tend to focus on the involvement of mothers. Nakano (2005) describes how involvement in the PTA provided women with the opportunity to meet with other mothers and discuss school matters, so that they could complain and criticise specific incidents of misbehaviour at the school. Despite the fact that parents are not officially allowed to influence school governance through deliberation with schools, complaints made during these mothers' gatherings for PTA activities can put pressure on the headmaster and teachers and give women an unofficial voice in some school matters. Therefore, mothers' complaints and criticisms contributed to changes in some school affairs and had a larger social impact through their participation in the PTA, even though these complaints had "minimal effect" on bringing about significant changes in school policies (Nakano, 2005, p. 112).

In contrast, other studies have viewed mothers' involvement in PTAs as a menial, unpaid, non-professional and inefficient job (Kodama, 2007; Kita, 2012; Iwatake, 2017; Seo, 2018; Mason, 2018). The focus of these studies has been on how, in the name of child welfare, mothers with children enrolled in formal educational institutions, whether working or not, are mandated to perform jobs to support school processes through PTA participation. When converted into an hourly wage, the funds raised by the Bell Marks programme amount to less than 100 yen per hour, which is less than one-tenth of the minimum legal wage in Japan (Seo, 2018). Low-cost performance is not a problem for PTA activities if they are voluntary, but the problem lies in the fact that the participation of parents, in most cases mothers, is not voluntary but de facto compulsory (Seo, 2018).

Yamanaka (2006) describes a case where immigrant parents, aiming to recognise ethnic diversity and support their children's education, established their own PTA branch within local school communities. In the branch, mothers from different ethnic backgrounds gather to exchange cultural norms. However, such efforts to engage immigrant parents in school PTAs occur within the framework of traditional gender roles, both Japanese and immigrant, where mothers represent the family to be involved in school PTAs (Yamanaka, 2006).

Thus, existing literature demonstrates how gender and ethnicity influence the involvement of both Japanese and immigrant mothers in Japanese school PTAs. However, the existing literature has not addressed the evolving family dynamics in relation to the distribution of PTA duties within each family and the shifting gendered roles of fathers, whether Japanese or immigrant.

Developing a theoretical framework for the study

It is important to note that the class, gender and ethnicity of parents have a strong influence on whether or not they get involved in their children's school and how they do so (Lareau, 1987, 1989/2000, 2003/2011; Griffith & Smith, 2005; Reay, 1998, pp. 3–4; Desimone, 1999; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; de Carvalho, 2001; Barnard, 2004; Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Stefansen et al., 2018; Muro, 2024). Partly because of this, the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity has been discussed as a result of these multiple social inequalities in relation to parental involvement (Durand, 2018; Love et al., 2021). Yet, intersectional approaches emphasise how class, gender and ethnicity *act together* to shape the experiences of individuals, such as working-class black women (Collins et al., 1995; Weber, 1998; Acker, 2006). Thus, the interrelationships between the class, gender and ethnicity of individual parents when they are involved in their children's school education has yet to be explored. The theoretical gap in understanding the interrelationships between the class, gender and ethnicity of individual parents may be due to the fact that the gender and ethnicity of parents can be considered on an individual basis, whereas the class of parents is usually assessed as a family unit without distinguishing the class of each individual parent when it comes to parental involvement in education (Li, 2022).

From a Marxian perspective, classes can be conceptualised as occupational positions (Crompton, 1989, 2006; Acker, 2006). The present study employs the class classification system of Japanese society based on the occupational indicator developed by Hashimoto (2018, see Fig. 1) to measure the class position of parents because occupation strongly predicts income and is an outcome of education, both of which are commonly employed in class position measurement along with occupation (Hashimoto, 2018).

The question of whether individual members of a family or the family as a whole constitute a unit for class analysis has been a topic of considerable debate and controversy for some time. This is partly due to the fact that married women often hold contradictory class positions as individuals/workers or family members/wives (Erikson, 1984; Walby, 1986, 1990; Collins, 1988). In order to recognise the class position of individual family members, theoretical models of status-borrowing, status-sharing or dominance-status and the cross-class family have been proposed as a result of theoretical debates. The theoretical solution to these debates is to combine "different information about the *work position* of individual family members into one measure of *the family*'s" *class* (Leiulfsrud & Woodward, 1987; Sørensen, 1994, p. 40, italics added). In other words, the solution is to focus on the class structure of the family rather than on the class position of the individual.

Moreover, although the cross-class family refers to "a family in which both husband and wife are in paid employment but at very different

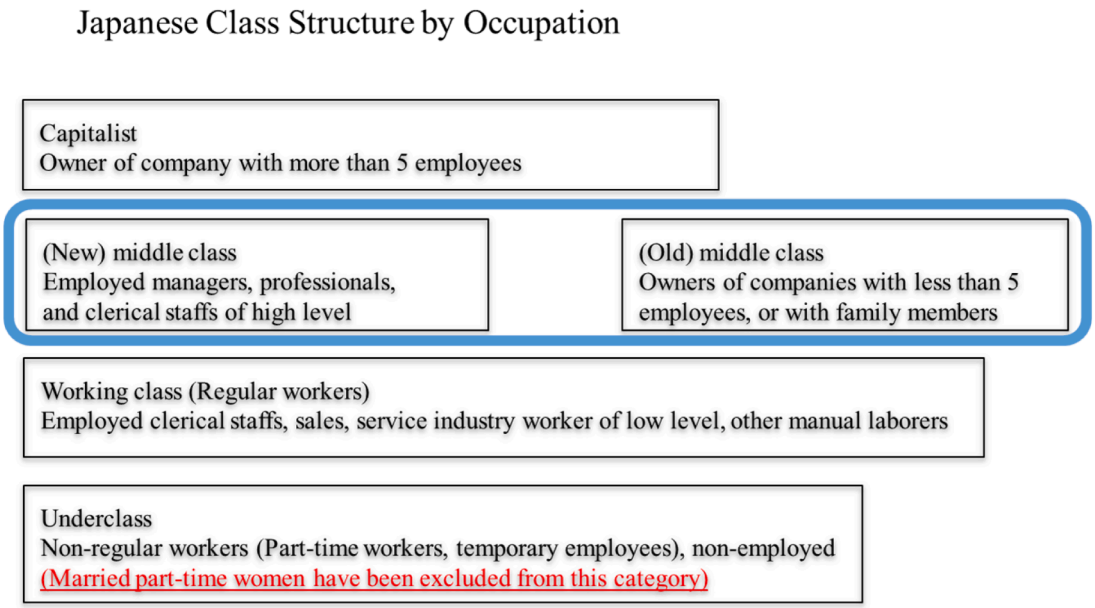

Fig. 1. Japanese class structure by occupation.

levels of the occupational structure", this concept focuses particularly on families in which "the wife has a higher level of occupation than her husband" (McRae, 1987, p. 98, original italics). This means that if the husband has a higher position, the family is considered to be class-homogeneous. As a result, women with lower occupational status are invisible in existing theoretical models, especially when it comes to middle-class and above families.

Rather than determining whether individual family members or the family as a whole constitute a unit for class analysis, this study proposes that family and individual class positions are relational, encompassing both the family and the individual parents within the unit for class analysis. As defined by Hashimoto (2018), middle-class families are those with at least one member in the class group. Using a family unit as the basis for class classification, Hashimoto (2018) excludes some married women from class classification based on their own occupations as workers but only on their family relationships as wives. The middle-class families in the study will be redefined using Hashimoto's (2018) class classification based on the occupations of both parents in order to highlight mothers' class positions as workers and identify class differences between parents of a child. Three types of middle-class families can be classified according to the occupational level of both parents in the study: male middle-class occupation families (hereafter MMOF), female middle-class occupation families (hereafter FMOF), and dual middle-class occupation families (hereafter DMOF). The MMOF or FMOF is the type of family in which only the husband (the father) or the wife (the mother) has a middle-class occupation, while the DMOF is the type of family in which both the husband and the wife (both the father and the mother) have middle-class occupations, as per Hashimoto's (2018) definition.

The quasi-compulsory nature of parental involvement in Japanese school PTAs, which requires the involvement of all families regardless of the class position of the family units, provides a unique opportunity to examine the interrelationships of the class, gender, and ethnicity of individual parents within each family during the PTA involvement. In light of the above, this study explores how the interrelationships of class, gender and ethnicity between parents within each family shape their PTA involvement and influence whether or not fathers get involved, as well as fathers' subjective perceptions of their (non-)involvement in PTAs.

Methodology

According to Bourdieu (1989, 1980/1990a), social structures and relations are maintained constantly through the practices of social actors and the meanings attached to them, through which practices are produced and perceived. This study follows Bourdieu's social praxeology, namely the theory of practice, which "weaves together a 'structuralist' and a 'constructivist' approach" (Wacquant, 1992, p. 11). This study follows Bourdieusian thinking by incorporating "double focus, double lens" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 7). The first reading takes an objectivist or structuralist approach, identifying objective structures that regulate or guide individuals' practices and understanding social actors' practices according to their position within those structures (Bourdieu, 1990b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The second reading focuses on "the immediate, lived experience of agents in order to explicate the categories of perception and appreciation" that guide their practices (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 11).

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative case study of a middle-class heterosexual Chinese-Japanese intermarried families in order to shed light on the class, gender and ethnic differences of parents within the family. In this study, gender is narrowly operationalised as "a system of social practices that constitute women and men as different" (Wharton, 2005, p. 23), with a special focus on heterosexual mothers and fathers. Ethnicity in this study is narrowly focused on Japanese and Chinese parents. As defined by Sugimoto, the term "Japanese" in the study refers to parents who were born and raised in Japan, are fluent in Japanese language and culture, and identify themselves as Japanese (Sugimoto, 2003/2020). Likewise, Chinese parents in the study are those who were born and raised in Mainland China, are fluent in Chinese language and culture, and identify themselves as Chinese. In addition to gender and ethnic differences, it is likely that class differences within a Chinese-Japanese heterosexual family will be identified. This is because while it is estimated that 65 % of the families are middle-class (OECD, 2019), Chinese immigrants are considered to be a distinct class-heterogeneous population group in Japan (Chiavacci, 2016).

Data collection and analysis

A combination of purposeful sampling and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants for this study during the fieldwork period between 2016 and 2020 in Japan. In order to recruit the parents, the

author employed three sources of contact: direct social networks, indirect social networks, and fieldwork at ethnic cultural events and in public spaces targeted at ethnic minorities. Two or fewer families were recruited from the same connection or site. From this larger group of potential participants, 22 parents from 16 Chinese-Japanese intermarried families living in urban Japan agreed to participate in this study. Ten of the 16 families consist of a Chinese mother and a Japanese father, while six consist of a Japanese mother and a Chinese father. A total of 13 families lived in the Kansai region of Japan, while three families lived in each of the following regions at the time of the interview: the East region, the Middle region, and the West region. Table 1 provides information on the participants when they were interviewed, with whom pseudonyms were only given to the interviewed parents. The study includes 12 mothers and 10 fathers, or 13 Chinese and nine Japanese parents. All families have at least one child in formal education, ranging from pre-school to university level.

For the data collection, semi-structured interviews were used to understand parents' perceptions of their involvement. A Research Ethical Review Application was filed and approved by the graduate school with which the author was affiliated prior to contacting the parents for interviews. Ethics were followed during all interviews. Seven parents were interviewed face-to-face between January and March 2020. The remaining 15 parents were interviewed online between May and November 2020 using Zoom, LINE, which is popular in Japan, or WeChat, which is popular in China and among overseas Chinese. Each interview lasted around one hour on average. Interviews were conducted one-on-one, with the exception of a joint interview with a Chinese mother and Japanese father. Individual interviews with all Japanese parents were conducted in the Japanese language, and interviews with Chinese parents were carried out in the Chinese language. The only joint interview was conducted in the Japanese language. The author asked how PTA duties in primary schools are divided between parents within each family and the reasons behind these divisions in the interviews. In the case of those whose children were not in primary school at the time of interview, the author asked about the plans or past experiences. One limitation of the data collection process is the inconsistency of the interview venue, whether in person or online. This may have an impact on the dynamics and depth of responses, as the context of

Table 1
Participants' information list (At the time of the interview).

	Mothers' Pseudonym	Occupation	Fathers' Pseudonym	Occupation
1	Manyi	Small-size company owner (Elderly care)	Yuma	Corporate executive officer (Educational service)
2	Yingjie	Small-size company owner (Transnational trade)	Noritaka	Regular employee (Logistics, Manager)
3	Jing	Fixed workplace location regular employee (Sales, cosmetic)	Naruto	Regular employee (Sales, Manager)
4	Nini	Part-time worker (drug store)	Takahiro	Public elementary school teacher
5	Xianji	Part-time worker (Chinese language teaching)	Tesuo	Regular employee (Human resources management)
6	Chun	Stay-at-home mother		National civil servant (Managerial position)
7	Ling	Stay-at-home mother		Corporate executive officer (Construction)
8	Yijuan	Stay-at-home mother		Regular employee (Sales, manager)
9	Bing	Partner&teacher (Japanese language school in China)		Regular employee & Partner (Translation company)
10		Stay-at-home mother	Hiroshi	Small-size company owner (Beauty Salon)
11	Kana	Stay-at-home mother	Hanyuan	Regular employee (Human resources management)
12	Yuki	Municipal civil servant (Managerial position)		Regular employee (Engineer)
13		Regular employee (University clerk)	Lianyang	University Facaulty (Tenure Associate professor)
14		Regular employee (Clerk)	Lun	Regular employee (Engineer)
15		Doctor (Physician)	Cheng	Doctor (Surgeon)
16	Naomi	University professor (Managerial position)		University lecturer

Chinese
Japanese

the interview may influence the way in which participants engage with the questions posed to them.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated by the author. Data from the transcribed interviews were anonymised before being coded. In line with Bourdieu's "double focus, double lens" approach mentioned above, the interview data is analysed as follows. It first identifies the objective structure of the family. There are ten MMOFs and six DMOFs based on the class differences defined by Hashimoto (2018) between parents within the 16 families (see Table 2). No FMOFs are identified in the study. This does not necessarily imply that there are no such families among Chinese-Japanese intermarried families. The small sample size of this study may have contributed to this result. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 22 parents, this study then analyses whether fathers in 16 families take on PTA duties depending on the family class structure. After identifying the division of PTA duties, the study then explores how these fathers perceive this division, employing a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development to identify recurring codes and themes related to class, gender or ethnicity in the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Finally, the codes and themes related to class, gender, and ethnicity are synthesised based on the family structures identified in the study. Thus, the theoretical framework developed in the study will guide the analysis of the research, which in turn will provide further insights into the theoretical relationships between these concepts of class, gender and ethnicity based on the findings.

Findings

Division of pta duties within a family

The findings reveal patterns in the division of PTA duties within the families of middle-class, intermarried fathers in the study. However, these findings should be understood within the context that the study does not aim to generalise, and the findings are difficult to generalise due to the small sample size. As shown in Table 2, none of the 10 fathers of MMOFs took on the PTA duties, regardless of their ethnic background. Three Japanese fathers of DMOFs took on the PTA duties, while three Chinese fathers of DMOFs did not. The findings suggest that in families where class differences between parents in a family align with gender norms, such as in MMOFs, the ethnicity of fathers has little impact on their non-participation, while the gender of the father plays an important role. In families where class differences between parents do not align with gender norms, such as in DMOFs, gender does not have a significant impact on fathers' involvement in PTAs but ethnicity is

Table 2
The key findings on which parent is involved in the PTAs.

	Mothers' Pseudonym	Occupation	Individual class position	Fathers' Pseudonym	Occupation	Individual class position	Family class structure	Parents involved in PTAs
3	Jing	Fixed workplace location regular employee (Sales, cosmetic)	Working class	Naruto	Regular employee (Sales, Manager)	(New) middle class	Male Middle-class Occupation Family (MMOF)	Mothers
4	Nini	Part-time worker (drug store)	Underclass	Takahiro	Public elementary school teacher	(New) middle class		
5	Xianji	Part-time worker (Chinese language teaching)	Underclass	Tesuo	Regular employee (Human resources management)	(New) middle class		
6	Chun	Stay-at-home mother	No class position		National civil servant (Managerial position)	(New) middle class		
7	Ling	Stay-at-home mother	No class position		Corporate executive officer (Construction)	(New) middle class		
8	Yijuan	Stay-at-home mother	No class position		Regular employee (Sales, manager)	(New) middle class		
10		Stay-at-home mother	No class position	Hiroshi	Small-size company owner (Beauty Salon)	(New) middle class		
11	Kana	Stay-at-home mother	No class position	Hanyuan	Regular employee (Human resources management)	(New) middle class		
13		Regular employee (University clerk)	Working class	Lianyang	University Facaulty (Tenure Associate professor)	(New) middle class		
14		Regular employee (Clerk)	Working class	Lun	Regular employee (Engineer)	(New) middle class		
1	Manyi	Small-size company owner (Elderly care)	(Old) middle class	Yuma	Corporate executive officer (Educational service)	(New) middle class	Dual Middle-class Occupation Family (DMOF)	Japanese parents (mothers and fathers)
2	Yingjie	Small-size company owner (Transnational trade)	(Old) middle class	Noritaka	Regular employee (Logistics, Manager)	(New) middle class		
9	Bing	Partner&teacher (Japanese language school in China)	(Old) middle class		Regular employee & Partner (Translation company)	(New) middle class		
12	Yuki	Municipal civil servant (Managerial position)	(New) middle class		Regular employee (Engineer)	(New) middle class		
15		Doctor (Physician)	(New) middle class	Cheng	Doctor (Surgeon)	(New) middle class		
16	Naomi	University professor (Managerial position)	(New) middle class		University lecturer	(New) middle class		

Chinese
Japanese

identified as an important difference in shaping fathers' PTA participation (or lack thereof). Table 3 summarises the key findings regarding how class, gender and ethnic differences between the parents of a child interrelate to shape fathers' PTA participation.

A total of 10 fathers participated in the study's interviews (see also Table 2). The key findings regarding how class, gender and ethnic differences between the parents of a child interrelate to shape fathers' interpretation are summarised in Table 4. The results of 10 fathers' interpretations are presented in the following sections.

MMOF fathers' interpretation of their absence

Japanese and Chinese fathers of MMOFs who are absent from PTAs employ different subjective strategies to justify their absence. Japanese fathers cite a lack of compatibility between their work and PTA participation, while Chinese fathers primarily emphasise their non-Japaneseness as well as their unfamiliarity with Japanese education. Different subjective strategies of justification for non-participation ultimately contribute to the same result: their absence from PTA duties.

"I have to work"

Almost unanimously, four Japanese fathers from MMOFs who did take on PTA duties attributed their absence to their busy work. The importance of paid work to these fathers outweighs family duties in school PTAs. Tetsuo believed that he was unable to participate in the PTA due to the necessity of working as a *salaryman*.

> Yan: Have you considered getting involved in the PTA?
>
> Tetsuo: Well, that's not an option. I don't have *time* to attend *such* meetings on weekdays. […] The *salarymen* can't do it, because there is no way to make it work.

Despite having stable jobs, family wages, and various social welfare benefits for their families, the salaryman in Japan is expected to work "based on the premise of long working hours" in the workplace (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019, p. 8). The salaryman devotes most of his time to work and fulfils "his male role as the breadwinner of the family", leaving little time for other family duties (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2012, p. 86).

It appears as though Takahiro does not participate in the school PTA either as a teacher or as a parent, despite his dual role. His work seems to be more important than his involvement in the PTA, from the standpoint of both a father and a teacher.

> Yan: Are you involved in the PTA as a parent?
>
> Takahiro: No.
>
> Yan: Is there a reason for this?
>
> Takahiro: That's because I have to work. Yeah, I've got work to do.
>
> Yan: That's true.
>
> Takahiro: When I have time, such as on weekends, I would like to get involved [in the PTA]. But it's difficult to ask for a half-day or full day off work just for these things. I don't ask for a paid leave for PTA involvement.
>
> Yan: I see. I'm wondering how you're involved in the PTA from a teacher's perspective, since you're also a teacher.
>
> Takahiro: Generally, teachers don't get involved in PTAs.
>
> Yan: Yeah?
>
> Takahiro: Yeah. Generally, only teachers in managerial positions, such as principals and deputy principals, are involved with PTAs.
>
> Yan: Only principals and deputy principals?
>
> Takahiro: Well, I am on the PTA list as a homeroom teacher. I don't get involved, though. Yeah, I'd be happy to participate in their activities on weekends if they ask me. But PTA activities are usually organised during weekdays when classes are in session. I can't leave my students for such activities.

Takahiro's narratives confirm that while PTAs should have parents and teachers, there are few fathers and teachers in Japan. His accounts reaffirm the inequalities between mothers and fathers in parental involvement in PTAs, as well as between parents and teachers. Despite the absence from PTAs, Takahiro expressed a willingness to participate to some extent, provided that his paid job responsibilities were not jeopardised.

"I didn't grow up in japan"

The overall message of Chinese fathers from MMOFs was that of ethnic unfamiliarity with Japanese education. During the interview, Lianyang mentioned that his first child would attend a local public primary school next year. Following this, I asked who would be responsible for PTA duties in the primary school.

> Lianyang: I think it would be my wife. Well, the thing is that, um, *I didn't grow up in Japan*. She's more familiar with the culture than me. She knows everything. There will probably be a lot of inconveniences if I'm involved. I know it sounds like I'm justifying myself, but I'm telling the truth. Yeah, she's the mom. Kids love being with their moms. Yeah, it has to do with the language; it has to do with the cultural background.
>
> Yan: Do you have any problems with the [Japanese] language?
>
> Lianyang: No. I don't have a problem with the [Japanese] language. It's the culture. Cultural background is the problem. It's because I'm unfamiliar with a lot of things. I didn't grow up in Japan. I haven't had an education like this since I was a kid. Yeah, there's a lot here I don't know.

Despite successfully integrating into the labour market of the host society and working as a tenured professor in higher education, Lianyang distances himself from the PTA community by emphasising his ethnic minority or immigrant status and his unfamiliarity with the PTA. As Lianyang explained, parental involvement in PTAs is a practice unique to Japanese culture or education, which he does not understand, but which his Japanese wife does. It is paradoxical that he demonstrates his familiarity with Japanese culture and education through his comments about his discomfort with PTA involvement. He was aware that the vast majority of participants in the school PTA are mothers. This situation makes it inconvenient for him to get involved but convenient for his wife.

DMOF fathers' interpretation of their (non)participation

Both Japanese fathers interviewed believe that their participation is

Table 3
Fathers' (non)participation and interrelationships of class, gender and ethnicity.

MMOFs	DMOFs
Fathers' non-participation in PTAs Class/Gender	*Fathers' (non)participation* in PTAs Class/Ethnicity

Table 4
Fathers' interpretation of (non-)participation and interrelationships of class, gender and ethnicity.

MMOFs		DMOFs	
Fathers' interpretation of non-participation		*Fathers' interpretation of (non-) participation*	
Japanese fathers: Class	*Chinese fathers:* Ethnicity	*Japanese fathers:* Ethnicity	*Chinese fathers:* Gender

influenced by the ethnic otherness of their Chinese wives. By contrast, there was no mention of ethnic otherness or immigrant status but an emphasis on gendered roles in the only interview with the Chinese father.

"I accepted it completely for my family"

As of the time of the interview, Yuma served as PTA president at the local primary school in which his two children were enrolled. In spite of Yuma's lack of previous experience in the PTA and his unwillingness to serve as president, he was offered the position of school PTA president, which is often held by men (Kodama, 2007). The accounts that Yuma gave suggest that he did not accept this position voluntarily, nor did he enjoy the duties associated with it.

Yan: Can you tell me what it's like to be the PTA president?

Yuma: What do you mean?

Yan: For example, why did you accept it?

Yuma: I accepted it completely for my family.

Yan: I see.

Yuma: Well, to be honest, I didn't want to do it.

Yan: I see.

Yuma: It's a pain in the neck.

Yan: I see.

Yuma: In the first place, I don't have time. I'm busy.

Yan: I see.

Yuma: Yeah, I was thinking that someone [from the family] would have to take care of it.

Yan: I see.

Although Yuma had a busy schedule similar to other salarymen of MMOFs, which made it challenging for him to fulfil PTA duties, he agreed to take on these responsibilities. He believed that PTA duties were a mandatory family obligation that needed to be fulfilled by one of the parents. He assumed the position of PTA president to please his wife as part of their mandatory family duties. It is noteworthy that Yuma's presidency has replicated the hierarchical relationship between men and women in PTAs. In Yuma's view, it was not his Chinese wife's middle-class job but rather her ethnic minority status that led to his participation in PTA.

Well, my wife would be happy if I took care of it. How do I say it? She's been comparing herself to other Japanese people. It's difficult to put it into words. She thinks she can't do things other Japanese people can do. She feels kinda *inferior*. Sometimes I feel her sense of *inferiority*, even though she doesn't express it explicitly. In other words, if I became the president of the PTA [she would be pleased]. [...]. *It was just for my wife's sake*, I thought. It's that simple. This is the real reason.

Among Asian immigrants who tend to be looked down upon by the Japanese (Creighton, 1997), Chinese immigrants constitute a model ethnic minority in Japan (Vasishth, 1997). Yuma's justification for his involvement reveals the view of Asian immigrants as being inferior in Japan. It is interesting to note that Yuma referred to PTA duties in relation to his wife, rather than his two children, who are the primary focus of parents fulfilling PTA duties. This implies that some parents perceive PTA to be largely irrelevant to children's wellbeing. His stories reveal his ambivalence and his struggles to fulfil the dual roles of salaryman and father. As Yuma's story illustrates, balancing the demands of work with the family's educational responsibilities can be challenging or painful for involved fathers, whose well-being may suffer as a result of busy middle-class jobs and children's educational responsibilities. It highlights the profound impact that family responsibilities have on fathers' quality of life in the context of increasingly diverse families, and the costs that fathers bear for quasi-compulsory educational responsibilities.

"I'm glad I've got two worlds"

Noritaka from a DMOF was serving on the primary school PTA at the time, while working as a salaryman like Yuma. However, while Yuma found participating in the PTA challenging or painful, Noritaka found it enjoyable and meaningful. Noritaka said that he took on PTA duties because his Chinese wife was unfamiliar with the Japanese educational system at the beginning. In response, I repeated what he said.

Yan: She's not familiar?

Noritaka: Not at all. She doesn't know about school stuff.

Yingjie (Noritaka's wife): That's true. I don't know. I didn't even try to get to know the PTA. Having a busy work schedule might be one reason. But I'm just not into what the PTA does in the first place. He [her husband] enjoys it a lot. He's into it.

Yan: Why?

Noritaka: Why? It's because I enjoy it. It's a lot of fun.

Yan: It's a lot of fun?

Noritaka: In other words, the [paid] work isn't as enjoyable. I'm not feeling the excitement or pure joy at work. Well, work isn't easy, is it? […] PTA is a lot of fun for me. I'm glad I've got two worlds. If I were an ordinary salaryman, I would go to an izakaya [Japanese-style pub] after work to blow off steam. However, I don't have to. I'm already blowing off steam by helping with PTA activities.

The social meaning of a married man was defined as providing for the family by working outside the home (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2012). Due to his dual role of salaryman and involved father, Noritaka believed that he was unusual, since he had two worlds. This differs from parents who have one world: mothers whose primary role is to take care of their children, and *ordinary* salarymen fathers whose primary role is to provide for their families.

Noritaka believes that fulfilling PTA duties alleviates work stress, similar to the way in which a salaryman blows off steam by drinking after a tiring day at work. Noritaka believes that men (human beings) would be happier if they embraced both worlds by fulfilling both work and family duties. One can see from Noritaka's stories that fulfilling educational duties of children offers men the opportunity to reshape their identity and their sense of self, as well as what it means to be a man/human.

In addition to challenging traditional gender norms and negotiating the personal meanings of PTA participation, Noritaka questioned the status quo of parental involvement in Japanese school PTAs.

I think parents should be an integral part of school governing bodies. But now parents [at the primary school PTA] are just spectators. That doesn't seem right to me. Parents are supposed to be able to offer educational suggestions to teachers and participate in the educational processes through the PTA participation. *Parents have acquired a wealth of knowledge and experience through working in various sectors and industries and with a variety of people*. Parents are able to provide teachers with suggestions on how to solve problems in the educational field through involvement in the PTA, such as bullying. But right now, *it's just parents doing a few insignificant things in the PTA*. Also, it's like inertia, repeating those things every year. *There's something wrong with it. We are heading in the wrong direction with the PTA*. In other words, it's not doing what it's supposed to be doing. *We need the PTA to democratise education. The PTA should function in a way that allows parents to become involved in school decision making.*

As Noritaka mentioned in the interview, the PTA was introduced to Japan as a means of democratising education (Sugimura, 2011; Iwatake, 2017; Morimura, 2019). In other words, parental involvement in school PTAs should not be *one child at school, one parental duty*, but rather *one child at school, one parental voice*. In the study, however, it was found that parents cannot voice their concerns or play a role in school governance or decision making through participation in Japanese school PTAs. This is consistent with Knipprath's (2004) observation that in Japanese formal schooling, "parents are requested to be supportive, but not to mount the territory of the teacher nor to be actively involved in governance" (Knipprath, 2004, p. 101). It is reaffirmed that parental participation in PTAs is not meant to allow parents to participate democratically in the school process, but rather to require them to perform menial tasks in school processes (Mason, 2018; Seo, 2018). Therefore, despite parents' experiential knowledge, it is not incorporated into school decision-making processes through participation in school PTAs as defined and evidenced in the US (see Epstein, 2011).

"My wife handles all of the details"

Among the three uninvolved Chinese fathers of DMOFs, only Cheng participated in the interview of the study. As I interviewed Cheng, he expressed an interest in this study and mentioned that he placed a high value on his children's education. When I asked who would be responsible for the PTA duties at the primary school, he seemed uninterested in discussing the "details" such as the PTA duties.

> I don't care. I'm busy with work. I don't worry about the details [in children's education]. My role is to set the strategic direction for my kids' education. My wife handles all of the details.

Despite the fact that both Cheng and his wife worked as doctors, there appeared to be a clear division of responsibilities regarding their children's education. Cheng took responsibility for making important decisions about their children's education, while his wife supported their children's education in and out of school on a daily basis, including PTA duties, which were not as important as his decisions. Cheng initially claimed the necessity of his work. Work probably did not sufficiently justify the absence of Chinese fathers from the PTA, since his Japanese wife is also a full-time doctor. Consequently, gendered divisions of family duties are articulated. In any case, the ethnic minority identity did not come into play in his subjective interpretation of his absence from PTAs. In light of the fact that only one Chinese father from DMOFs participated in the interview, this finding does not imply that other Chinese fathers from DMOFs would not articulate their ethnic otherness in justifying their nonparticipation.

Discussion

Fathers' (non)participation and interrelationships of class, gender and ethnicity

This study has illustrated how differences in class, gender and ethnicity between the parents of a child interrelate to shape the division of PTA duties within a family, and thus whether or not fathers take on these duties (see Table 5). As in MMOFs, in which intrafamily class differences follow a gendered division within the family, class and gender differences appear to have an impact on fathers' non-participation. As in DMOFs, in which intrafamily class differences contradict gender norms, class and ethnic differences appear to have an impact on fathers' (non-)participation.

According to Becker's theory of the family economy, to maximise the family's interests, husbands assume the role of the primary breadwinner, while wives, whose economic contribution is secondary, take primary responsibility for child-rearing (Becker, [1981]1991). It may be reasonable for fathers from MMOFs who prioritise their paid middle-class jobs that provide for their families to avoid PTA responsibilities. In this way, family class structures contribute to differences in the distribution of PTA responsibilities between fathers and mothers within their families, and the objective family class structure of MMOFs is maintained and reproduced in the division of PTA responsibilities.

Although three Japanese fathers of DMOFs who work long hours face challenges in balancing work and family duties, they fulfil PTA duties and manage to devise different strategies as individuals to "solve problems" for their families. The middle-class occupation of the mother, which qualifies her as a breadwinner for these middle-class families, may partly explain why three Japanese DMOF fathers are involved. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that men with (almost) equal breadwinner wives are more likely to be gender-egalitarian (Kelan, 2012), or married women's breadwinner status may lead to male partners taking on more family responsibilities than providing for the family (Zuo & Tang, 2000; Zuo, 2004). It is important to note, however, that this is only half of the story. There is more to the question of whether men will take on family education duties than is explained by class and gender differences in middle-class occupations between parents within a family.

Among the six fathers from DMOFs, while three Japanese men participate in PTAs, none of the three Chinese fathers do so. According to this finding, fathers' fulfilment of PTA duties cannot be explained solely by intrafamily class and gender differences, but also by their ethnic backgrounds. This finding supports previous research that suggests that immigrant parents are less likely to be involved in their children's education than host society parents, particularly in school (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009; Antony-Newman, 2018). It, however, contradicts previous research findings suggesting that men with breadwinner wives are more likely to be gender-egalitarian and take on more nonfinancial family responsibilities (Zuo & Tang, 2000; Zuo, 2004; Kelan, 2012). It is thus critical to understand the interplay between class, gender and ethnicity that shapes educational processes.

Fathers' interpretation of (non-)participation and interrelationships of class, gender and ethnicity

In spite of the objective structure of the family as well as the obligations imposed on the family, parents with multiple social differences construct subjective meanings of their (non-)participation in accordance with their own agendas. The findings provide insight into how class, gender and ethnic differences that influence fathers' (non-)participation are interrelated in their subjective experiences depending on the family structure. Among MMOFs, Japanese fathers justify their non-participation by citing the need for their paid work, while Chinese fathers emphasise their unfamiliarity with Japanese education. In the interpretation of MMOF fathers, a gendered division of family duties is downplayed in both Japanese and Chinese fathers' narratives. Among DMOFs, Japanese fathers attribute their participation in PTAs to their wives' ethnic otherness, while the uninvolved Chinese father emphasises gender-based divisions in parenting roles in their families. Neither the Japanese fathers who took on PTA duties nor the only one Chinese father who would not take on PTA duties among the DMOFs mention their wives' middle-class occupations. As such, social differences that influence the division of PTA duties may not necessarily be reflected in fathers' subjective interpretations of their practices, or social differences

Table 5
The key findings of the study.

MMOFs		DMOFs	
Fathers' non-participation		*Fathers' (non-)participation*	
Class/Gender		Class/Ethnicity	
Fathers' interpretation of non-participation		*Fathers' interpretation of (non-) participation*	
Japanese fathers:	*Chinese fathers:*	*Japanese fathers:*	*Chinese fathers:*
Class	Ethnicity	Ethnicity	Gender

that do not influence the division of PTA duties may come into play as fathers try to make sense of their practices.

Furthermore, whether or not ethnicity influences fathers' participation, it is cited by both non-participating Chinese fathers from MMOFs and participating Japanese fathers from DMOFs according to their own agendas. Simply put, when class differences within the family align with gender norms, such as in MMOFs, ethnicity is articulated in Chinese fathers' subjective interpretations of their non-participation. When class differences within the family do not align with gender norms, such as in DMOFs, ethnicity is articulated in Japanese fathers' subjective interpretations of their participation.

Moreover, despite the fact that MMOFs and DMOFs have different objective family class structures, the subjective meaning of ethnic otherness and the gendered division of educational duties contribute to the non-participation in PTAs of Chinese fathers in both MMOFs and DMOFs. As a result, regardless of the family class structure, no Chinese fathers are found to be involved in PTAs. The practices of uninvolved fathers, both Chinese and Japanese, regarding their quasi-compulsory PTA responsibilities perpetuate the class and gender differences between them and their wives.

The findings regarding the involvement of Japanese fathers of DMOFs suggest that they divide their family duties differently from MMOFs, bringing about changes to the gendered division of educational duties within their families. Some may argue that as mothers strive to establish middle-class careers that reshape the family class structure, the responsibility for their children's education may shift within the family. However, this does not mean that gendered divisions of family duties will change simply because mothers attain middle-class occupations. In light of the findings regarding the non-participation of Chinese fathers of DMOFs, even though the class structure violates gender norms, their ethnic otherness and perceptions of gender roles of fathers may lead to their non-participation and reproduction of gender norms within the family. The non-participation of Chinese fathers in DMOFs suggests that women's middle-class careers do not necessarily lead to gender equality in areas of children's educational responsibility when other social dimensions come into play. It can therefore be argued that the transformation of gender norms surrounding family educational responsibilities remains a challenge in Japanese society.

Furthermore, although fathers' involvement in PTAs has been recommended by some scholars as a way in which to promote gender equality (Iwatake, 2017; Seo, 2018), the study suggests that changing deeply ingrained institutionalised gendered practices beyond the family is challenging in Japan. As the involvement of Japanese fathers of DMOFs shows, fathers' involvement can lead to gender equality in the private sphere, but not necessarily in the public one. While this is true, the study argues that fathers sharing PTA responsibilities could be the first step in raising public awareness of the issues surrounding parental involvement in school PTAs, thus transforming the unequal relationship between men and women, as well as between families and schools, into one that allows parental voices to be heard in educational processes.

Conclusion

While a substantial body of literature focuses on the construction of parental involvement in school PTAs as primarily the duty of mothers, whether the parents are Japanese or non-Japanese, this paper highlights the evolving roles of fathers—particularly Japanese fathers—in school PTAs, which are shaped by the family class structures and interrelationships of class, gender and ethnicity of the parents of a child.

By employing a theoretical framework developed for this study, this paper addresses the theoretical challenge of defining class units, whether as families or individuals, enabling an analysis of family dynamics that goes beyond the traditional theoretical focus on gender and/or ethnicity. In contrast to intersectional approaches that highlight how class, gender, and ethnicity act together to shape individual experiences, the key findings of this study contribute to advancing both theoretical and empirical understandings of how differences in class, gender and ethnicity between the parents of a child interrelate to shape individual experiences. The theoretical framework informed the analysis and, in turn, provided insights into the theoretical interrelationships between class, gender, and ethnicity in the context of fathers' involvement in Japanese school PTAs. It opens up innovative approaches to addressing multiple inequalities in educational processes from a family perspective within Japanese society and beyond.

Limitations of the study

First and foremost, as stated in the findings section, the results should be understood in the context that the study was not designed to be generalisable, and the findings are difficult to generalise due to the small sample size. It is not possible to generalise the results of the study to all types of middle-class families or to other types of families, or to other types of parental involvement in education. This study has simplified the conceptualisation and operation of class, gender and ethnicity to some extent to illuminate their interplay in parental involvement in educational processes. Despite examining the interplay, the study could not explain why some social differences are articulated but others are muted in the interpretations of the interviewed parents. Other micro and macro factors that may play a role in immigrant parents' desires, decisions and abilities to become involved in PTAs were not explored in this study because of the already complex focus on the interplay of three social differences in PTA involvement.

Despite its limitations, the study makes a valuable theoretical and empirical contribution by highlighting how class, gender and ethnicity interrelate to shape fathers' experiences of PTA involvement. Future studies with larger sample sizes or in different contexts are needed.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Yan Li: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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