

**Speaker's name:** Ryohei Nakagawa

**Affiliation:** Associate Professor, Faculty of Global Management, the University of Nagano, Japan

**Email addresses:** ryohei.nakagawa@gmail.com / nakagawa.ryohei@u-nagano.ac.jp

**Five keywords:** subordinate voice; vertical relations; employment relations; Japaneseness

**Title:**

Submissive or vocal? Reexamining organizational and social subordinate voices in Japan

**Abstract:**

Feudalistic and top-down features have been considered as prevailing belief of conventional “Japaneseness” in organizations and society, where subordinates were regarded as not having chances or freedom to voice (to either express their constructive opinions or to ask for better treatments to the superiors). Yet if we look into the ancient time, the medieval period, and to the present, the strict top-down superior-subordinate relations cannot be considered as a typical structural “Japaneseness,” as we can find various cases of utilizing subordinate voices to organizations and societies. Rather, this article demonstrates that one of the organizational and social “Japanesenesses” can be found in incorporating subordinate voices. Cases include *kanehitsu-no-sei* (鐘櫃の制; complaint box) in the ancient time (around the Taika Reform circa 650 A.D.) (Kokushi-Daijiten-Henshu-Iinkai, 1979), *shukun-oshikomi* (主君押込; confinement of superiors by subordinates) in medieval and early-modern periods (Kasaya, 1988; Yamamoto, 2006; Yoshimura, 2012), and formulation of the post-World War II employment “Japaneseness” (Aoki, 2001; Gordon, 2001; Hisamoto, 2015), as well as very recent transition of employment relations in the chemical and chemical-fiber manufacturers in Japan (Nakagawa, 2024). A common feature in these cases can be found in the fact that subordinates have been able to voice to their superiors, which stands against the commonly conceived images that organizational and social characteristics in Japan are in implicit and top-down structure.

(227 words)

**References:**

Aoki, M. (2001). *Toward a comparative institutional analysis*, MIT Press.

Gordon, A. (2001). *The wages of affluence – Labor and management in postwar Japan*, Harvard University Press.

Hisamoto, N. (2015). Nihon no roshi-kosho roshi-kyogi no shikumi no keisei-hensen soshite kadai (Formulation and transition of employment negotiations and discussion in Japan and their issues), *The Japanese Journal of Labour Studies* (Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi), 661, 4-14.

Kokushidaijiten Henshu Iinkai (1979). *Kokushidaijiten* (The grand encyclopedia of national history), Volume 7, Yoshikawakobunkan.

Nakagawa, R. (2024). *Organizational Behaviour of Employment Relations – Employee Voices Heard and Unheard* (『労使関係の組織行動論—従業員の伝わる声・伝わらない声』), Chuo Keizaisha (forthcoming in March 2024).

Yamamoto, S. (2006). *Nihonjin toha nanika – Shinwa no sekai kara kindai made sono kodogenri wo saguru* (What is Japanese? Investigating behavioral principles from the mythological age to the present), Shodensha.

Yoshimura, N. (2012). *Kaisha wo shihaisurunoha dareka – Nihon no kigyo-tochi* (Who controls companies? Corporate governance in Japan), Kodansha Metier.

**Short bio:**

Ryohei NAKAGAWA is Associate Professor at the University of Nagano, Japan. Ryohei's research interests include Japanese economy, corporate governance and employment relations. He has professional experiences in corporate finance, economic and industry research, and international conference management in Japan, U.S., and Switzerland. Ryohei has co-authored “Japanese Political Economy Revisited – Abenomics and Institutional Change” in 2017 (Routledge) and his single authored book titled “Organizational Behaviour of Employment Relations – Employee Voices Heard and Unheard” (『労使関係の組織行動論—従業員の伝わる声・伝わらない声』) will be released in March 2024.