



DIJ Forum

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Japanese Labor Imaginaries: From Postwar Working Class Womanhood to Cultural Mediation of Corporate Identity

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Hiromichi Hasebe, Nihon University

Popular imaginations of Japanese society are deeply intertwined with work, often oscillating between stark stereotypes of the exhausted salaryman and idealized concepts of optimization (kaizen) or life purpose (ikigai). While work has been a celebrated pillar of Japan's postwar identity, it has also faced scrutiny for fostering inequality and precarity. Today, as demographic pressures and rapid automation push the country to a societal crossroads, Japan serves as a critical bellwether for nations navigating similar global transitions. Beyond the familiar tropes, our keynote speakers unpack the complexities of Japanese labor history and corporate culture. Chelsea S. Schieder will present her research on the 1971 Mitsui Miike coal mine lawsuit following Japan's largest postwar industrial accident. Initiated by miners' wives and spanning nearly three decades, her talk highlights this vital archive of working-class women's frequently neglected perspectives on gendered labor. Shifting the focus to the everyday intersection of corporate life and culture, Hiromichi Hasebe explores how Hitachi corporation actively shaped organizational identity through its in-house magazine, *Music*. Going beyond the traditional narrative of corporate histories, Hasebe illustrates how company media functions as essential infrastructure designed to culturally embed employees within the fabric of corporate life. Together, these presentations provide a nuanced re-evaluation of how Japan's labor landscape from postwar factories to today's AI-powered workplaces, continuously negotiates the meaning of work.

Chelsea Szendi Schieder is Professor in the College of Economics at Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo. She writes about protest, women, violence, and Japan for academic and general audiences. Her 2021 book *Coed Revolution: The Female Student in the Japanese New Left* (Duke UP) contextualizes the gendered meaning of the female student activist in postwar Japanese society and social movements. It became the basis for a fictionalized graphic novel both in French and English (forthcoming). She also works as a curator, and is a section editor of the *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*. Her current monograph in progress is on gendered work, disability, and justice at the Miike coal mines.

Hiromichi Hasebe is Associate Professor of Business Administration at the College of Commerce, Nihon University, Tokyo. His research lies at the intersection of business history, organizational theory, and the sociology of technology, with a focus on rhetorical history, corporate memory, and innovation processes in Japanese firms. His recent work examines how corporations such as Sony, Panasonic, or Kyocera reconstruct their past to shape organizational identity and strategic decision-making. His publications have appeared in leading Japanese academic journals, including *Soshiki Kagaku* and *Keiei Shigaku*.

The event will be held in English, admission is free. Both speakers will hold a presentation, which will be followed by a Q&A session and a small reception. To participate onsite, please register via email to forum@diptokyo.org. To participate online, please register via our website. This is a public event. Please be aware that audio-visual recordings may be made, stored, and published during and after the event.