

Inputs from International Shinto Foundation, Inc.

Selected Theme: “Right to Work and Access to the Labour Market”

Input title: "Issues of Aged People's Job Market in Japan"

Japan is by far the most advanced nation in the world in declining birth rate and aging population, and its labor population has been steadily decreasing. For maintaining the lively power of economic society, it has become indispensable in Japan that aged people over 65 years old with intention and capability can work and contribute to the society as its important part by making the most of their accumulated knowledge and experiences acquired through their active career. Indeed, it would be ideal if one can work and realize himself/herself without regard to his/her age and does not lose his/her contact with the society through the job.

There are some important issues, however, for aged people, mostly after retirement, to work again in Japan. The first is that the working places for aged people tend to mostly be labor-intensive industries, in other words, so-called simple or unskilled jobs. Unskilled labor is of course necessary and important, but it usually does not require any expertise skills or any substantial additional value, so that aged people are often employed in unstable form such as part-time or temporary with low wage. Also since aged labor power is basically buyer's market, it could be expected that short-term mass employment as well as mass separation from employment are repeated, resulting in less productivity and significant loss for both sides.

Particularly in Japan, one's aged and second working field tend to become different from that of his/her past or first active career in most cases, which often hurt aged people's self-confidence and self-esteem. Most of Japanese men have been dedicating their lives principally to their jobs. If they cannot make the most of their wisdom, knowledge, techniques and experiences for their second career, it would be difficult for them to keep themselves motivated and productive. Reasonable wage for aged workers would be indispensable, first of all, to avoid such negative aspects. It is important for them to have the feeling of achievement and fulfillment through their jobs. For this purpose an effective way would be to distinguish the jobs for young workers and those for aged workers. It is often argued that promotion of aged and once-retired people to work again may encroach on young workers' jobs, but it is not true because there is a fundamental difference between the both. Young workers can absorb new knowledge and technology and actively challenge unknown or difficult field, while aged workers can directly and immediately contribute to the organization's achievements they belong, making the most of their accumulated insights and experiences for long years. We believe aged workers' accumulated insights, wisdom, techniques and know-hows are invisible treasure which should be valued appropriately and inherited and taken over as much as possible. And the working time for aged workers should be, say, 4 – 6 hours per day or flexible, as appropriate.

If aged people keep working for unskilled or physical jobs, in the worst case scenario, there may arise a risk that product quality or service security could be threatened. Industry or companys' excessive cost reduction policy could often lead to make aged workers provide services at low wage without regard to the their and even consumers' safety. As a typical example of such a worst case, in January 2016, a midnight bus that was heading to a ski resort in Nagano Prefecture in Japan fell over a precipice, causing 15 lost lives including the driver's. The driver was a 65 years old man who had joined the tourism company running the bus as a contracting worker just a month ago. He was not familiar to drive such a large bus, did not have any health test before driving, and was living alone without any family members to take care of his health including diet, fitness etc. It was obvious that the company had to

make him work under such poor and inappropriate circumstances because of the company's manpower shortage and cost reduction policy.

Needless to say, aged people have certainly deteriorated situation assessment capability than younger's, and tend to have more heart failure, stroke and other acute sickness. Without appropriate and right labor management not only the aged workers' but also consumers' lives could be exposed to serious risk. Thus, it should be understood that aged workers are not simple supplementary addition to manpower shortage, and that environmental preparation by governmental authority for aged workers to be able to work healthily, happily and sustainably would be indispensable.】