The Present state of Work and Retirement of Aged Workers in France and Japan

It is a well-known fact that the Japanese elderly remain active in work, while their French counterparts retire as early as possible. In these two respects, both countries rank at the top among highly industrialized nations. In 1998 about eighty percent of the Japanese male workers between 55 and 64 years old were still active in work and this is the highest ratio among the 14 OECD countries, while only thirty-eight percent of their French counterparts were still working, the lowest ratio (OECD-Statistiques de la population active 2000.).

This extreme contrast can be observed since 1970, when many European countries and Japan had recovered from the devastating socio-economic situation immediately after the end of World War II. Actually, in 1971, workers of the same age-category in these countries were relatively active; approximately eighty percent of them were in the workforce. The lowest ratio was in France, seventy-three percent, and the highest was in Japan, eighty-five percent. During the period between 1971 and 1998, the ratio decreased by 48% in France and by 6.4% in Japan.

Facing these facts, one cannot help but raise the question: why is this so? As for the factors of institutions, we have to consider differences of social security policies and labor markets in these two countries. Our colleague in France, Anne-Marie Guillemard, a specialist in the analysis of French institutions and policies, has thoroughly examined institutional and policy factors in the case of French early exit culture in her papers read at the Symposia in 1998 and 2001. True, the question is very complicated even on the institutional levels. There are many divergent types of employment after the mandatory retirement age, ranging from part-timer to full-time workers, with corresponding payment systems. Re-education of older workers in terms of newly developed skills and technology is also a precondition for them to be re-engaged in the labor force. Her analysis develops along the line of cause and effects, beginning from public policies, and their influence on behaviors of enterprises, to workers’ decision-making. Among other things, according to Guillemard, social security policies and forms of employment of the aged workers (in connection with the governmental subsidies) are important factors for these workers to decide whether they stay or quit their jobs. In France during the period between 1970 and 1990, a large compensation was paid to retired persons even at the age of fifty. Early retirement was rather encouraged because unemployment was a serious problem and unions, management, and the government agreed to distribute more jobs to younger workers. It was said that one of the most important functions of retirement was “control of unemployment.”

Key words: work and retirement, aged workers in France and Japan, work ethics, compulsory retirement

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1) One of the most striking paradoxes of today’s OECD societies (except Japan) is that, although people live longer, they also tend to retire earlier—a situation which is clearly unsustainable from both the economic and social point of view. This is why expanding the range and quality of labor market opportunities open to older workers has become increasingly important. Early retirement places an unsustainable burden on pension financing—how to pay for future public pension liabilities. There is no easy solution, but delaying retirement could help. Concerning the cases of France and Japan in terms of ‘aging and social policy,’ see Cockerham, W.C. This Aging Society. Prentice Hall, 1997.

2) “During the 1980 s and 1990 s, France experienced high unemployment: the total unemployment rate was 11.7% in 1993 and 11.3% in 1999 as compared with, respectively, 2.5% and 4.7% in Japan. Given this situation, France gave

Since 1991, the public policy in France, as is widely known, was radically changed, partly in order to contain the increasing expenditures for early retirement and partly in order to prepare for the reform of the retirement system in view of the ‘aging society,’ which is demographically inevitable in the dawn of the third millennium (The end of the Golden Age of Pre-retirement). In other words, it was to lengthen the worker’s active life, by restricting and controlling early retirement, by encouraging companies to retain or even hire aged workers, and by developing programs for reeducation and re-qualification of elderly workers. Despite these efforts, as we saw above, substantial results (to prolong the work life) have not been achieved in the last decade. The reasons for this poor performance, according to Guillemand, were, among other things, inconsistencies of public policies. “Public authorities did not withstand the temptation to continue rationing jobs for older workers, yielding easily to it whenever the war against unemployment or the defense of jobs came back on the political agenda.” (Guillemand 2001)

In Japan, to the contrary, promotion has been constantly seen in the employment of aged workers as the result of concerted efforts among unions, companies, and the government. The compulsory retirement age which at first was 55 has been raised to 60 and then to 65 years old, although, in reality, there are only 30% of companies where all the employees who want to continue to work until age 65 can work. A law aiming to stabilize employment of elderly workers (高齢者雇用安定法) dictates that the compulsory retirement age should be 60 or over after 1998. This law was enacted in 1986 when 88.5% of companies with 30 employees or more adopted the compulsory retirement system, of which 56.6% fixed the age of 60 or more as their “teinen” (定年). Companies were also encouraged to maintain their payment as usual until the worker reached 65 years old. For this program to be attained, the government decided to give financial supports to companies who employ older workers and tried to help them find jobs, for example, through the “Silver Human Resource Center.” Despite all of this, the reality is that the aged workers, once they lose a job, have tremendous difficulty in finding a new job. In 2002, the ratio of jobs offered against job-seekers (active openings ratio) for workers between 60–65 years old was only 0.15. In fact, a substantial number of seniors who are active in the labor force in Japan are self-employed, including farmers.

What is Work?—A classification of work

It has been said that since 1945, the system of retirement has become an important element of social cohesion and solidarity in France, which makes it possible for retired people to live a life completely free from occupational obligations with appreciable financial security. Taking into consideration the fact that
people live longer these days, this “free” life could consist of many years. Thus, many preferred to leave their jobs as early as possible, although recent policy changes hold that the minimum retirement age should be 60 years old. (www.retraites.gouv.fr/) As seen in the case of “vacances d’été,” French workers (and their families) really seem to enjoy the time in the countryside (usually several weeks) emancipated from routine occupational lives. The conventional explanation for it is that French people, just like other Latin peoples, have a predilection for ‘enjoying life’ and are very good at it. Now, it is necessary to consider what the meaning of “work” is to them.

When M. Weber discussed the “spirit of capitalism,” he was dealing with the idea of occupation or a kind of ‘work ethic’ in connection with the Protestant ethics based on Calvinism. His popular hypothesis is that the Calvinist idea of secular occupational activities created a foundation for the ethics of working hard among Protestants, which led successfully to the rise of modern capitalism. He argues that secular occupational activities (Beruf) are our obligations called by God. People have to work faithfully and skillfully and to repress their hedonistic desires (secular asceticism). Their hard work is only for “im majorem gloriam Dei.” In this sense, we are all the “instrument of God” in His Great Project. Weber names it “Value-Rationality.”

The squarely opposite idea of work is called “End-Rationality.” Here secular occupational activities are regarded as necessary means to earn money for living, but they are nothing more or less than that. Work is purely ‘instrumental’ in the sense that people work for ‘something’ without finding any ‘significant meaning’ in it. They may work harder if they expect higher pay for their work, but higher pay might induce them to work less simply because they do not need any ‘more’ pay. This kind of work, to Weber, could not be the precondition of capitalism, where both workers and capitalists should be diligent and industrious enough to build the foundation of a modern capitalist economy.

Conventionally, secular occupational jobs in modern society have been regarded as necessary for mature citizens to be involved in social life because they are not only means to earn money for supporting their family members, but also contributions to society by sharing their part for functions necessary to the society as a whole. In addition, it is through these activities that citizens can reveal their talents and capabilities and fulfill their ‘self-realization.’ Sometimes, people are proud of what they are doing and mould their personal identity through it. However, it is true that work in capitalist systems has been viewed as ‘wage labor,’ which was the only thing that Proletariats could sell to Capitalists. Working class people had no alternatives except working for money although their labor was exploited and alienated in the sense that they completely lacked control over production and disposal of their product. In this Marxian sense, work (to the working class) was a ‘necessary evil.’ The shortest working time was best for them. Based on these discussions, the author proposes four types of work, which would benefit the following analysis of ‘work’ in two cultures, France and Japan.

First, there is a type of work, which is generally apart from the realization of self-interest (altruism) and committed to something valuable beyond self-interest. The remuneration for work is, basically, not pecuniary. Some professional occupations like doctors, lawyers, and clergymen (three classic professions) have been regarded as this kind of work (or jobs), of which the priority is not the interest of the workers themselves, but the welfare of the clients. They were often called ‘sacred’ professions (roughly corresponding to Weber’s value-rationality.) This kind of work will be called ‘the sacred occupation’.

Second, there is a type of work which is the opposite of the first. This category includes roughly all varieties of ‘secular’ jobs, of which the foremost priority is to earn money for living and to fulfill personal desires ranging from material goods to human services and amenities, frequently even at the sacrifice of

6) “Workers feel themselves and easy when they do not work, while they feel not themselves and uneasy when they do work. Therefore, their work is not spontaneous, but forced labor.” Marx, K. The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts 1932.
others. Self-interest is dominant in this secular activity and industriousness is a mere instrument of something else. Often times, people do not find pleasure and satisfaction in the work itself. In the 1950s, the study of industrial sociology revealed dissatisfaction and alienation among factory workers whose job was simple, routine, and repetitive due to mechanization of their work settings. This kind of work is typified in jobs related to large-scale automated modern factories and offices (roughly corresponding to Weber's end-rationality). People only endure the job because they are paid. This kind of work will be called 'the secular occupation'.

The third type of work is very closely related to the work ethics of traditional craftsmen. They worked only for work's sake, finding pleasure and pride in the work itself. Here one can say that work is an art. Great work might be followed by secular benefits such as money and reputation, but these are sub-products of this type of work. With pride in their craftsmanship, they work sincerely and seriously. They control the whole process of production and are entirely responsible for what they make. It is easy to imagine that this kind of work is least fit to modern factory work where workers are allocated to specialized, but fragmented jobs and separated from the final products. This kind of occupation will be called 'the art occupation'.

Finally, for the fourth type of work, there exists the idea of work as 'self-discipline.' According to this view, work provides people with the opportunity for self-discipline or self-perfection. Hard work and frugality give them the way to attain moral perfection, becoming true human beings. When Sontoku Ninomiya (1787–1856) persuaded impoverished farmers to work hard at the end of the Edo period, he emphasized the moral aspect of work, which would contribute to develop the noble character of a person. R. Owen (1771–1858) also thought that occupation (or useful employment), together with 'rational' education, is one of the pre-requisites to goodwill, wisdom and happiness of human beings. This kind of occupation will be called 'the moral occupation'.

Needless to say, these four types of work (or occupations) are ideal-typical and real types appear somehow a mixture of different degrees. As early as the 1970s in Japan, there was a case of a young Todai (Tokyo University) graduate who got a job in a famous electric company. The story goes that he quit the job to become a carpenter. He had been a “do-it-yourself” Sunday carpenter, but he became skillful enough to earn a substantial amount of money by working only two weeks a month. He decided to quit the company (being not fully satisfied with his jobs) and spent the 'free' time, five days to play and ten days to study at a university. Here we can see a mixture of work types 2 and 3.

**Compulsory Retirement and Work Ethics**

Until quite recently, French workers tended to retire as early as possible, while their Japanese counterparts remained working even after their sixties. Some hypothetical explanations seem to be possible. First, French workers do not like to work, while Japanese workers do. Second, French workers find something more worthwhile to do than work, while Japanese workers don't. Third, French workers do not need to work for money because when retired they are financially secured (Matilda op. cit: 87–88), while Japanese workers need to work after their retirement because they are not (Matilda op. cit: 89).

The reality is complicated and cannot be explained only by applying one of these hypotheses. It was true that French workers could afford to retire early without worrying about their finances because a substantial sum of pension was offered. Was this the only reason why they retired early from the secular occupational activities? In Ancient Greek Democracy, manual labor was performed by slaves and free citizens could pour their time and energy into human activities of higher quality like politics, arts, and literature. In a modern capitalist society, as we saw above, wage labor was a 'necessary evil' to working class people. Such a negative idea of 'work' inevitably resulted in people's negative attitude toward work. Consequently, they try to avoid 'work' as much as possible and to be engaged in activities they thought more worthwhile to do, whatever it may be.
At the dawn of industrialization, manufacturing factories in industrialized countries needed a large number of factory workers. In the United States immigrants from abroad filled this need and in Japan farmers became factory workers. In France the traditional craftsmen were mobilized to work for newly developing industries, and they were unhappy simply because they were deprived of the opportunity to make use of their skills and knowledge (Encarta Encyclopedia 2001). In Germany, Weber pointed to the fact in a comparative way between Catholics and Protestants that the former lagged far behind the latter in terms of the percentage of students who graduated from the institutions preparing, in particular, for technical studies and industrial and commercial occupations. Catholics, he argued, preferred the sort of training the humanistic Gymnasium afforded. Weber continued by observing; it is well known that the factory has taken its skilled labor to a large extent from young men in the handicrafts. Among journeymen, the Catholics showed a strong propensity to remain in their crafts, that is they more often became master craftsmen, whereas the Protestants were attracted to a larger extent into the factories in order to fill the upper ranks of skilled labor and administrative positions (M. Weber 1992: 38–39.) In the case of French workers, do they still have an idea of work as art and face the mismatch between their ideal and reality?

In 1982, 86% of Japanese male workers aged between 55 and 69 years old said that they worked for a living. Today, thanks to the progress in the social security system, fewer older people work for a living alone. In 2000, the percentage of male workers active in the labor force was 89.9% for those aged 55–59, 66.5% for those aged 60–64, and 51.6% for those aged 65–69. Among the elderly unemployed, 40–50% of these workers wanted to get a job and the reasons they wanted to work was; it’s good for their health, or they want to keep connected with society or other people, although one third of them still confessed that they have to work for money. ([內閣府編 平成 15 年版『高齢社会白書』28—29 頁])

As for the Japanese work ethic, the author has suggested some explanations. Particularly after the Meiji Restoration, an ideology was invented to mobilize people to modernize the nation by appealing to their nationalistic feeling—“we have to work hard, or the nation will perish.” Group consciousness was also utilized so that personal failure in work was not only their individual shame, but also their groups’ disgrace (family, community, etc.) Confucian teachings were rich resources, which emphasized the public (national) welfare over personal happiness (To kill one’s self in order to serve the public. 凄私奉公). Talented youth of lower class origin were encouraged to work hard and attain high social rank, and to come back home with glory, thus contributing to enhance the name of their family and village. Also among favorable factors of the Japanese work ethic was the rice cultivating culture of the nation, where nature was neither too severe nor too friendly. This means that Japanese paddy farmers could appreciate their efforts of hard work. The harder they worked, the more harvest they gained, although there would have been a certain limit of ‘marginal utility.’ (Nakano, H. 1995: 8–35.) The outstanding farmers were called tokunouka（篤農家）and regarded as persons of noble character. Although this traditional ethic did not continue to exist in the same way after the end of World War II, we can find its influence in many salaried-men, who were thoroughly devoted themselves to the companies (会社人間) in the postwar Japanese economic recovery. Here we can see an influence of the first and third types of work.

Concerning ‘early exit from work’ in Western countries, some macro-societal independent variables have been suggested such as economic growth, urbanization, demographic dependency rates, and on the micro level, individual workers were thought to be rational enough to select work or retirement according to a simple arithmetic calculation of costs and benefits. It was thought that any person would choose leisure over work in the effort to maximize personal utility. However, this explanation does not seem to

7) “It is suspected that in France the general trend of early exit from work has been promoted by the institutional arrangements, particularly pension and tax systems where early retirement is simply more advantageous than longer work in terms of ‘income.’ It is necessary to reduce early retirement incentives, by decreasing the replacement rate (lesser income prior to retirement) and by increasing future pension gains when working longer.”

Guillemand, A-M. “Le modèle de fin de carrière en France et japon: deux modèles contrastes d’interaction entre stratégies des entreprises et politique publique”
fit the ideas of the Japanese older workers. This is why the author has suggested that there are some cultural differences between the two cultures of France and Japan, in terms of work ethics.

“New” Work Ethics and the Elderly

Some argue that not only work or occupational jobs in the secular sense, but also many other human activities are worthwhile to do and valuable. Therefore, it does not automatically mean that the exit from work is the end of meaningful activities in society. To the contrary, it creates opportunities for the retirees to engage in voluntary work (unpaid), self-help activities, intensified household production, and so on. However, it is suspected that the early retired French people, sooner or later, may come to feel ‘ennui’ without anything to do. To enjoy vacations (worthwhile to do) may be a false ideology to rationalize it. The time to be spent after retirement is sometimes called “unstructured, implying a negative connotation of emptiness (opposite to the time for work as “structured” (Andrejs Plakans). Maybe it corresponds to a Japanese expression for the doing-nothing state in life after retirement: “Everyday is Sunday.”

In a highly productive economy based on highly advanced technologies, employable persons saturate the market and access to the world of work is deliberately diminished for older people. Marx once dreamed of a world in which all people could do whatever they liked, whenever they wanted (the true communist society.) This kind of society has to be based on very high productivity where, for example, one man’s work could sustain many people’s living. Work is not an absolute necessity for survival and working hard is not a virtue any more. But people have to ‘structure’ their time again, in order to realize a regular way of their living, needed by others, and have a sense of social participation. Is this the kind of society we can achieve today?

One thing is clear: we need some means to survive, and there are two choices, to earn by ourselves or to be provided by someone else. Mandatory retirement systems can coexist with dependable and stable pension systems, which guarantee our living. Then we can do whatever we like without worrying about our financial situation after retirement. However, is there any difference between the money we earn and money someone provides? When we work, we can not only earn our living expenses by ourselves, but also pay taxes and a variety of insurance premiums. The retired persons only receive. How can compulsory retirement institutions (depriving someone of the right to work for a living at certain age) be legitimized? In 1967 in the United States, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act was passed to protect older workers (forty-five to sixty-four) from a variety of discriminatory employment practices, including age-based discrimination in hiring and firing, training, and so forth. Later legislation extended this protection to all employees aged forty to sixty-nine, and also banned mandatory retirement before age seventy. The underlying belief is that older age should be more highly valued as a period during which a continuing contribution to society is possible and that it is not a period of loss, dependency, and debilitation. Particularly important is that the criteria of employment, dismissal, wage, promotion, and other employment related matters are not age dependent, but based on the ability of the individual workers.

This kind of policy trend can be seen in Japan, too, and the government has organized an advisory committee to study feasible programs to realize a society where people could work regardless of their age. The basic premise is that instead of dividing the lifespan according to the age of education, work, and retirement in a timeline, people can enjoy flexible education, work, and leisure whenever they like throughout their whole lifetime. Age, as well as other once firmly established...
demarcating marks in life such as sex, race, and handicaps, is losing its traditional meanings today. However, in Japan, age has been playing such an important role in work-related customs, including the age-sliding pay system（年功序列賃金制）, that the abrupt prohibition of a retirement system would cause confusion in work settings where, for example, an ability evaluation system has not yet been well established.

In a recent article, the author proposed the concept of “ambiguity” to describe the state of affairs in the latest phase of modern society (some call this phase “postmodern”), which has also been described as the ‘end of Cartesian dichotomous thinking’ (Nakano, H. March, 2003). The conventional way of putting things in order, or of making sense of them, has been changing dramatically these days; to mention a few; health and illness in medical sociology, male and female roles in family (or other related) sociology, nature and culture in environmental sociology, and even subject and object in sociological methodology. In the sociology of work, too, the once clearly distinguished concepts; work and nonwork or work and retirement have come to be ambiguous, although it is still vivid in France where discontinuity between work and nonwork is abrupt. To the contrary in Japan where older workers mingle with the youth in the labor market, does the postmodern symptom come one step earlier than in France?

One final point to argue; although “activities” other than secular occupations can bring with them the characteristics, of which the author mentioned in different types of ‘occupations,’ can they be regarded the same as occupations? What is the difference between occupations (roughly corresponding to “work”) and other activities (roughly corresponding to “nonwork”)?

Any society needs certain kinds of functions to be performed successfully for its survival, and these functions are to be performed basically by its members. As society evolves, these functions increase and diversify, consequently making a complicated network of ‘division of labor.’ It has been an important sociological subject matter to ask; who does what function and in what way. In a modern industrial society, we have come to develop a well-organized occupational structure. Ideally at least in Japan, the occupation should have all four elements of the four types of occupation the author mentioned above, namely intrinsic meanings, instrumentality for living, self-realization, and pleasure and pride. In this sense, Japanese workers had the least influence of the Marxian view of ‘wage labor.’ Until very recently, having a secular job as an occupation either in the private or public sphere has been a necessary qualification of a ‘male’ matured adult. As the average life expectancy became longer, the traditional retirement age was naturally felt ‘too early,’ because the occupational life simply meant so much for many Japanese workers, particularly to male workers who were supposed to be the main breadwinner in the family. Accordingly, occupational jobs were not easily replaceable by other non-occupational activities. We can observe that leisure activities were, for the first time in Japanese history, widely encouraged and consumption was regarded as a virtue when this society came to be called ‘affluent’ and the economic trend showed pathological symptoms of overproduction.

Generally speaking, Japanese workers are not necessarily dissatisfied with work itself as many of them now work for self-realization, particularly among the youth, and their work is somehow worthwhile to do. It is not an instrument for earning money for living alone. This is why mandatory retirement is ‘irrational’ in this country. In France, work seems to be less meaningful by itself and early retirement is still welcomed. However, if the appreciable pension after retirement is not guaranteed any more, how would French workers respond to the new situation?

It is undeniable that in France the inexorable ‘early exit’ culture was, surely to some extent, the result of public policies to solve the severe unemployment problem these two decades. It seemed ‘rational’ to drive out the older workers from the labor market in order to absorb the young labor force. The policies were supported by both management and workers because they brought some merits to each of them. The former could recruit the younger workers who were often equipped with newer technology and skills, thus sparing money to be spent for re-training the aged workers. The latter could enjoy “free time” freed from obligations and responsibilities of secular occupations. At the same time, however, a kind of ideology has seemingly grown to detest and degrade secular industriousness in recent French society, which deprived
workers of pride and respect attached to their professional activities. Is it that those who were obliged to retire early tried to invent a kind of ideology to rationalize their non-work life? To the outside observer like the author, it seems that French people are driven by a sort of obsession to rush into "vacances" during summer time, leaving their seniors alone and helpless in the cities. (Remember what happened this summer in Paris! Where has French solidarity gone?)

Generally speaking, poverty makes one work hard and affluence deteriorates that motivation. However, the truth is much deeper. The above statement holds only when work is regarded as ‘instrumental.’ In this context, work is to be thoroughly reconsidered both in France and Japan, and for this matter, in human societies everywhere, today.10

Other WEB sites referred to:
http://www.ifop.com/europe/index.asp
http://www.tns-sofres.com/default.asp

9) French older workers, are they the victims of ‘age discrimination’?
"Since employees over 55 are deemed too old to keep working, those a little younger have become "nearly old." On the way out and with no future, they are encountering age discrimination in the workplace." (Guillemard, A-M. 2001)
The statutory retirement age in France was 60, but 55 was the real retirement age for French workers (Retirement at 55 is the law!) executed by companies and under the National Employment Fund.
The 1996 French Employment Survey discovered that a huge majority (71%) of those who left the labor market via pre-retirement answered in the negative questions about whether they would like to stay in their occupations. Firms have often repeatedly sent signals to them (old workers), sometimes as early as the age of 40, that in the future there would be no longer any room for them." (Guillemard, A-M. 2001) They were also discriminated against in promotions and re-training programs. Thus, an "early exit culture" has been constructed with the shared values and norms regarding the age to work and the age to stop working.

10) In the 1960s, Joffre Dumazedier, a French sociologist, declared the coming of ‘civilisation des loisirs.’ However, since then, the longitudinal opinion surveys show that except for the inactive persons the time for leisure has not been prolonged. In addition, those with the higher educational careers work longer than those with the lower. (http://www.insee.fr/fr/ffc/Fiche-doc.asp?)
Elderly People and Work
A comparative study of the compulsory retirement system in Japan and France

ABSTRACT

One of the common features in highly industrialized nations is the increase of the aged population and the decrease of newly born babies, which results in the so-called aged society with low fertility rate. This kind of society inevitably suffers, sooner or later, from labor shortage, leading to stagnancy and weakness in every sphere of social activity. The pension and medical insurance system cannot be adequately sustained as financial resources, mainly depending on working younger generations, are nearly coming to exhaustion. This is why older people are expected to work longer in Japan as well as even in France these days.

In connection with this new situation of the labor market, the compulsory retirement system thwarts the elderly from keeping their jobs longer in Japan, while in France the aged people habitually want to exit from work as early as possible so that they can enjoy other alternatives they think more worthwhile than work in their post-retirement life. Actually in Japan, it has been the target of labor union movements and governmental initiatives to raise the mandatory retirement age from fifty-five to sixty and then to sixty-five. In France their counterparts were trying to reduce it to the age of sixty in 1982 and, in addition, to prepare a kind of lucrative "pre-retirement" arrangement.

However, recently in France, reconsideration of the current retirement system has been in progress and the government has begun to encourage older workers to stay employed longer, simply because the present pension system cannot be maintained any more due to the sharp increase of retired people. If older workers continue to work beyond the statutory retirement age, society benefits from their experience and skills and at the same time, as taxpayers, they contribute to ameliorate the financial plight of the social security system.

In this paper, the author compares the meaning of the compulsory retirement system in the two countries, Japan and France, and examines the relationship between old age and work. In order to carry out this task, however, it is crucial to analyze the meaning of work in two cultures, and to this he devotes a substantial part of the paper.

Key Words: work and retirement, aged workers in France and Japan, work ethics, compulsory retirement