

Column 3

The Public Pension System in Japan

Retirement income security in Japan is supported by a universal public pension system, established in 1961 and restructured in 1985. This is a two-tier mandatory scheme, financed basically on a pay-as-you-go basis.

1st tier: Basic Pension (Mandatory Contributions)

The Basic Pension requires “flat-amount” contributions from all residents aged 20-59. The monthly per person (except employees) contribution of 15,020 yen (as of April 2011) will increase annually until 2017 when it will reach its upper limit (16,900 yen). Contributions can be reduced for low-income individuals.

Benefits

Individuals with a minimum of 25 years of contributions are eligible to receive old-age benefits at age 65. The monthly full amount, approximately 66,000 yen as of April 2011, requires over 40 years of

contributions. Basic Pension also provides benefits for people with disabilities and surviving dependents.

2nd tier: Employer-based Pension (Mandatory)

The second tier, called the Employee Pension Insurance (EPI) for private-sector employees and the Mutual Aid Association (MAA) for public-sector employees, comprises employer-based schemes with “earnings-related” contributions and benefits.

Contributions

As of September 2011, the contribution rate for EPI is 16.41% (this includes the contribution for the Basic Pension portion). EPI will increase annually until 2017 when it will reach its upper limit (18.3%). Contributions are equally shared between employers and employees.

Benefits

Benefits vary according to the income

level and contribution period. In 2011, an individual with an average income and 40 years of contributions can receive a monthly benefit (including Basic Pension portion) of approximately 166,000 yen and 66,000 yen for spouses. The entitlement age, currently being raised from 60 to 65, varies according to the beneficiaries' birthdays. EPI and MAA also provide benefits for people with disabilities and surviving dependents.

3rd tier: Corporate Pensions and Others (Optional)

In addition to the mandatory tiers, some forms of corporate pension plan, usually defined benefit pension plans, are provided for some employees.

Japanese corporate pension plans have evolved from retirement severance pay packages, but many companies still provide both corporate pensions and lump sum severance. The self-employed can voluntarily participate in the tax-

preferred "National Pension Fund Scheme" as the 3rd tier.

Challenges

The 2004 reform introduced a unique financial mechanism called "Macroeconomic Adjustment" to stabilize the system faced with rapid demographic change. This mechanism automatically adjusts benefits to compensate for a changing demography by offsetting two factors: (1) the decline in the number of active participants and (2) the increase in longevity. Under this system, the replacement rate (i.e., the ratio of the post retirement earnings to pre-retirement earnings), currently about 60%, can be reduced to its lower limit of 50%. The 2004 reform also increased the subsidy rate from general revenue to Basic Pension from 1/3 to 1/2 by 2009. However, securing tax revenues for this subsidy increase will be a major political agenda item in the next few years.

Great Centenarians

〈Population Aged 100 and Over by Prefecture〉 (see map P13)

| | per 100,000 people (people) | population aged 100 and over (people) |
|---------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Highest | Shimane 75,70 (P13 map No.32) | Tokyo 4,176 (P13 map No.13) |
| Lowest | Saitama 21,13 (P13 map No.11) | Tottori 344 (P13 map No.31) |

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2011



Okoi-san

Born in 1907 (Tokushima)

Her powerful performance of 60—year beloved *Shamisen* (a three-stringed musical instrument played with a plectrum called *bachi*) and mellow voice echoes in the practice room. Okoi-san, Ms. Koyurugi Tada got interested in *Shamisen* when she accompanied her friend's *Shamisen* lesson before school age. Then she started to take lessons spontaneously.

After graduating from elementary school, she made a debut as a *geisha* named “Utamaru.” Her first recording was in 1931, which led to spreading enjoyment of *awa-odori* (traditional folk dance in Tokushima Prefecture) all over Japan. She held the Centennial Memorial Concert, and released a CD.

She is full of curiosity about music, art, fashion, gourmet, etc.

She dedicates to practice every day, saying “I still have a lot I want to practice. There is no end in accomplishment.”