

Life after Retirement

Should somebody who retires continue to carry some professional obligations, or should they stop work completely? On average, in Japan men live until they are 79 and women to 85 years old. So the average retirement age of 65 would seem too young to have to relinquish all professional obligations.

Income

I was sixty when I retired from the University of Tokyo in 2000. Most university professors in Japan move on to a private university after official retirement, and stay there until they are 70. I did not want to do the same; to be a teaching machine delivering eight to ten lectures a week was not my real ambition. Fortunately for me, my jobless life lasted only a few months; several companies then invited me to provide consulting services, usually for half a day per month. One also invited me to give presentations on photogrammetry, remote sensing and GIS; about thirty talks annually, which brought me some income. For the past four years I have been serving as a resource person for JICA-sponsored distance education in remote sensing and GIS for developing countries. In addition, last year I was appointed president of the Japan Association of Surveyors, a non-permanent position that also brings with it some income. Surprisingly, my present income exceeds my former professorial salary, though the contracts have to be renewed annually.

Mental Satisfaction

It seems that most university professors in Europe suddenly relinquish their professional obligations after retirement. A Swedish professor, a friend of mine, once retired began a life following his hobbies, as if everyday were Sunday. This is of course a good decision, is it not? Armin Gruen, professor at ETH Switzerland and another good friend, with a few years still to go told me, "Shunji, I am envious of how you live; your jobs are temporary and your obligations limited, while you are rich! Tell me how to find a temporary job with a small income yet, most of all, with mental satisfaction?" Well, it's a good question! My suggestion regarding retiring would be to stay involved in teaching and/or technology transfer on a temporary basis. Armin and I agreed to embark on two activities, not for money but for mental satisfaction: they are the Technology Transfer Caravan and the White Elephant Club.

Caravans and Elephants

Supported by ISPRS Commission VI, we organised Caravan Workshops at various places such as Ayutthaya (Thailand), Kunming (China), Yangon (Myanmar), Thimpu (Bhutan) and Hanoi (Vietnam). The host country lends help in the form of local expenses, while we pay our air tickets. Resource persons enjoy "caravan journeys" with our sales knowledge. The workshop is beneficial to both local people and to us.

Twenty senior and/or retired experts, mainly from ISPRS, formed the White Elephant Club in 2004, aiming at technology transfer to the young. We have so far organised four sessions providing three lectures on Thesis Writing, Project Proposal and Oral Presentation. Though targeted at students, many university lecturers and research associates have also joined these lectures. We are planning to organise a similar session at Beijing ISPRS Congress in July this year.

I suggest you think about your life after retirement, how to get satisfaction from it and at the same time let younger generations benefit from your experience. Money comes after satisfaction!