The possibility of “professionalized advocacy community” in Japan: From the comparison of advocacy-oriented NPO in the human services in Osaka and California

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Advocacy is the core idea for “civic and political engagement” which Frumkin (2005) defined as one of the four basic functions of NPOs. When it comes to advocacy, Skocpol (1999) called Washington-based advocacy groups which magnify polarized voice “advocates without members”. Reviewing reality in Japan and considering Skocpol’s idea, Pekkanen (2006) called Japanese civil society “members without advocates”, which means that “Japan has a civil society with networks of association that support social capital and effective government without sustaining a professionalized advocacy community that can contribute new policy ideas or challenge current policies.” One research question arises from his analysis: what is essential to make “professionalized advocacy community that can contribute new policy ideas or challenge current policies” in Japan?

To answer this question, the definition and the contents of advocacy must be argued more specifically. Ezell (2001) simplified the advocacy practice in four areas: namely, “Agency Advocacy”, “Legislative Advocacy”, “Legal Advocacy”, and “Community Advocacy”. This model leads to an extended question: What kind of advocacy do NPOs in the human service area in Japan accomplish and fail to, compared to those in the U.S.?

A comparative case study was conducted in the area of the health care for people with mental health difficulties in Japan and the United States. In both countries, there are lots of cases of infringement inside mental hospitals (Donnison 2009, Takebata 2009). In this presentation, a focus is placed on the specific advocacy-oriented third sector organizations in Osaka, Japan and California, the United States. The document analysis and the in-depth interviews were done at both organizations several times from 2005 to 2009.

The value of the result of this research lies in three fields. Firstly, both organizations respected the voices of clients as the first priority and worked eagerly to change the situations of them in the mental hospitals. These organizations used diverse tactics to negotiate with hospital staffs and local government officers to advocate the users. Their mission of “civic and political engagement” was accomplished to some extent.

Secondly, the accomplishment can be classified differently in the four categories of advocacy practices that Ezell (2001) pointed out. Staffs of both organizations visited mental hospitals in their area, heard the voices of the psychiatric service users, investigated the situation, and made their reports to the local government. In Osaka, these reports are discussed to make nonbinding deliverables by the committee consisting of the representatives of mental hospitals, local government, service user groups, and the above-mentioned organization. In California, on the other hand, such reports have been used as the source of the amendment of laws many times. In Osaka, visiting only means Agency Advocacy. But in California, Agency Advocacy links to other types of advocacy practices.

Finally, it was found that the above differences were caused by the different legal provisions of the organizations. In Osaka, the organization’s advocacy is guaranteed and granted on the ground of the discretion of the local government. In California, it is mandated both by federal and state laws. Both local governments of Osaka and California are facing desperate financial crisis in these days. However, the grant was sharply cut in Osaka but not in California. It is
because of the different legal characteristics of these projects, in other words, discretionary and mandatory characteristics.

Advocacy practices are indispensable for the service users regardless of the budgeted situation. Both NPOs succeed in taking the advocacy role in the respective communities. But the outcomes and results are different caused by the difference of their characteristics in many points. Through this analysis, the policy implications will be discussed how to realize “professionalized advocacy community” in Japan

References


