論文

Theoretical Position of Social Work in Japan and its Role in Democracy :
Discourse on the Crisis of Democracy Today

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【Abstract】

　IFSW probably assumes that the best political system is democracy, since it accepts the social change and development as well as the cohesion of social workers.

　Today democracy is, however, questioned and challenged from two aspects: as an institution and as a spirit. As for social work in Japan, its role in democracy has not been thoroughly considered since Japan is already a democratic and relatively peaceful consumer society. Moreover, since the perception of democracy is somewhat depoliticized, the connection between micro-practices and macro-politics is difficult to observe.

　From the perspective of consumer society, this study examines the theoretical position of social work and its role in democracy in Japan since the 2010s.

　What are the serious problems resulting from populism with consumerism are anti-pluralism and threatening the social norms that underpin the modern state such as constitutionalism.

　Social workers must protect human dignity, include people in a community based on pluralism and confirm the importance of social norms.

Introduction

　According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the global definition of social work is "a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work." In this regard, the IFSW probably assumes that the best political system is democracy, since it accepts the social change and development as well as the cohesion of social workers.

Meanwhile, if it is just necessary that social insurance is equipped or social worker coordinate needs of people and social service, democracy is not necessary. Additionally, the global definition include criticism against Western centeredness in the wake of postcolonial or postmodern trends. Actually, some nations practice their own social work without democratic political system. However, democracy is supposed to be the legitimate and best form at least for social workers.

In general, social work deals with numerous social problems, due to the structural defects of capitalism. In Great Britain, the birthplace of social policy and social work, social democracy urges moderate improvements in capitalism through parliament rather than through revolution. Additionally, social democracy has built the foundation of a welfare state. Some recent statements by the IFSW obviously consider democracy as the ideal political system, or at least, a crucial condition of such a system（IFSW 2016; IFSW 2019; IFSW 2021）.

Democracy is, however, questioned and challenged from two aspects: as an institution and as a spirit. This ideology is usually discussed from a macro-level perspective such as democratization following the decolonization after World War Ⅱ, that following the end of the Cold War, and that in the Arab Spring during the early 2010s. Recent discussions on the disappointment with democracy are also based on international trends such as President Donald Trump's administration, Great Britain's exit from the European Union, and the strong interventions against citizens by the police and military at various locations around the world. In Japan, the government and parliament have also been criticized for their lack of democracy since 2015, although the ramifications have been less severe. As for social work in Japan, its role in democracy has not been thoroughly considered since Japan is already a democratic and relatively peaceful consumer society. Moreover, since the perception of democracy is somewhat depoliticized, the connection between micro-practices and macro-politics is difficult to observe.

Therefore, from the perspective of consumer society, this study examines the theoretical position of social work and its role in democracy in Japan since the 2010s.

1. What is democracy, as a spirit in social work?

According to the IFSW, Donald Trump's victory in 2016 represents "the failure of contemporary democratic systems" because approximately 50% of the population did not participate in the democratic process（IFSW 2016）. Additionally, this weak form of democracy

simply asked those who did participate to vote "yes" or "no" to the next four years of political leadership.

Meanwhile, social workers are supposed to delve deeper into the needs of the people and help them find solutions with respect to democracy. If we consider democracy as an important spirit, then social work has certainly incorporated this ideology into its fundamental perception of humans and society. In this regard, Mary Richmond, the pioneer of social work theory, stated the following:

Democracy, however, is not a form of organization but a daily habit of life. It is not enough for social workers to speak the language of democracy; they must have in their hearts its spiritual conviction of the infinite worth of our common humanity before they can be fit to do any form of social work whatsoever. Life itself achieves significance and the value not from the esoteric things shared by the few, but from the great common experiences of the race——from the birth and death, of affection satisfied and affection frustrated, from those chances and hazards of daily living that come to all men. (Richmond 1922: 249)

Subsequently, Hamilton argued that a symptom of peaceful and amicable living in inter-family, inter-civic, inter-ethnic, and international relations is a deep conviction of the value of the individual in the development of democracy, and trust in the human capacity to participate in one's own destiny and politics (Hamilton 1950). Hamilton also stated that various problems in daily living can be explained from one's personality, and that belief is the fundamental concept of democracy (Hamilton 1950). Similarly, Towle stated that inherent in the American conception of democracy is the belief in the worth and potential of humans, and that they are ultimately trustworthy (Towle 1957). According to Towle, moreover, engaging in any type of work under social security law is an opportunity to advance and realize the idea of democracy (Towle 1957: 1). Based on these studies, improving democracy and social security is complementary in the field of social work.

2. Context of democracy in social work in Japan:
Can support for consumers be considered democracy?

The study of social welfare in Japan, including social work, has assumed democracy in Japan as post-war democracy. Specifically, social workers have attempted to expand social security through a democratic spirit and process based on the Constitution of Japan which is the symbol and the actual function of division between pre- and post-war Japan. Interestingly, the word "democracy" is written as "民主主義" and pronounced as "minshu-shugi" in Japanese. In this case, the word "主義= shugi" means "-ism." However, "democracy" is never called "democrat-ism."

In Japan, after World War Ⅱ, an enlightened spiritual modification occurred, which made it seem like a value, rather than a governance system. In 1948, the Ministry of Education published the book "Democracy" and educated the people about this ideology as a spirit under the supervision of the United States.

Between 1960 and 1970, although national pension and insurance systems were established and the income of the people significantly increased, serious problems, such as increased urban populations, heavy traffic, crowded residential areas, pollution, and lack of childcare emerged. Over time, labor, student, and environmental movements appeared. According to Sanada, the people began to recognize that they required solidarity and democratic support based on the Constitution of Japan（Sanada 1975）.

In 1973, the high economic growth ended, due to the first oil shock. This forced the Japanese government to make budget cuts and find an alternative solution to the welfare state. In regard to democracy, Japanese social welfare experienced two changes: An emphasis on community development and an emphasis on consumerism. As for the former, democracy in social welfare has contributed more to community development than to the rights of social welfare by the government. As for the latter, since the 1970s, Japan has accelerated consumerism to symbolize consumption beyond basic needs. Meanwhile, since the rise of neoliberalism in 1980, social workers with a democratic spirit have supported consumer-clients. In this case, their clients purchase aspects that are related to their basic needs as humans.

For social workers, acknowledging individuals as consumers is a type of democratic attitude in which the clients are somehow liberated from political control and governmental oppression. In this regard, Furukawa argued that the privatization of service providers, information disclosure, accountability, third-party evaluations, complaint response systems, care management

systems, and advocacy —— all of which were introduced as necessary policies to enable users to make self-determinations under the basic structural reform of social welfare —— are measures that promote "user democracy" (Furukawa 2008). Conversely, this approach promotes the marketization of social welfare services, thus increasing the sense of withdrawal from public responsibility.

In a related study, Ferguson argued that since the 1990s, the private for-profit sector in Great Britain has exploded (Ferguson 2008). Due to its dependence on government funding, the field has become competitive and unstable, making it difficult for local community-based organizations to revitalize their respective neighborhoods. Additionally, the individualization of social services has resulted in ambivalent and contradictory programs, since they simultaneously promote individual empowerment and withdrawal from state responsibility (Ferguson 2008). In this regard, bottom-up democracy for community development is difficult under consumerism and individualism.

Moreover, Banks found that social workers are mere mediators between the state and consumer-citizens (Banks 2012). In other words, they simply distribute resources according to certain criteria, rather than providing support based on professional knowledge, methods, and values.

Finally, since 2015, the crisis of democracy in Japan has been expressed in symbolic terms such as anti-intellectualism, post-truth, and populism. However, the first two are terms that have already almost expired in Japan.

Hence, when thinking about democracy from the standpoint of social work in Japan —— where the political system and social order are relatively stable —— it would be useful to consider the aspects of democracy in regard to consumer society and populism.

3. Populism with consumerism

Populism generally includes anti-elitist mass politics as its common denominator, but history has shown that each region includes its own context, e.g., with Russia and the United States in the 19th century and Latin America from the Great Depression of 1929 to the 1960s (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). However, populism today is a movement that arose in the 21st century, including regions that are relatively rich.

Populism is a kind of identity politics. Populism, however, is not a full-fledged ideology, such

as fascism, liberalism, or socialism, but a thinly centered concept that merely claims that they themselves express the general will of the "people" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). According to Muller, populists are anti-pluralists, who claim that they represent the people the most (Muller 2016). Meanwhile, democracy is created by identity and affiliation. Although populism itself does not contradict democracy, it should be noted that populism includes an aspect that invigorates democracy: participation (Mizushima 2016).

Populism also hinders our political maturity by individualization, even if digital technology urges participation. Whereas democracy was institutionalized at a time when nation-states were being established and a sense of belonging for them was emerging, global markets, and digital technologies have remained unconnected to such nations.

As for democracy, it is not based on technological advancements, but it is rooted in the analog not the digital world (Bartlett 2018). Meanwhile, digital technology has facilitated information exchange and communication as well as satisfied consumers seeking immediate gratification in not only products, but also in society and politics (Roberts 2014). Barber pointed out that consumerism has transformed kids into consumers and adults into "kidults," i.e., infantilized adults (2007). For them, "easy" is superior to "hard," "simple" is superior to "complex," and "fast" is superior to "slow." As consumers, we also customize our environment, as in the phenomenon known as the "filter bubble" or "echo chamber," in which we only surround ourselves with "easy," "simple," and "fast" information.

Since the 1960s, the consumer society in Japan has been negatively called "private-ism" or "my-home-ism." Numerous sociologists have also feared that consumer society can influence people to lose social interest and only be concerned with themselves or their surroundings (Mamada 2021). In the subsequent period of low growth, people's selfish spirit, known as "life conservatism," has affected politics in Japan (Yamaguchi 2017). In this regard, Uchida stated that the Japanese people are now "employees" (Uchida 2016). The employees that have no say in management policies, and in return, they bear no responsibilities. Specifically, the market and the United States will decide whether the management policies of the state are acceptable. In this case, if the results are unsatisfactory, then the president is simply replaced.

Our image of human beings today is similar to employees and consumers. In this regard, consumers do not collectively participate in the manufacturing process of a product, but they only decide whether to individually purchase or "like" a previously prepared product. As for democracy, the IFSW stated the following:

Voting every four years without further involvement is the weakest form of democracy. Such a simple concept of democracy only asks people to say 'yes' or 'no' to a political future in which they are not engaged. (IFSW 2016; paragraphs 3–4)

At this point, what are the serious problems resulting from populism with consumerism? The first is anti-pluralism. Muller pointed out that since pluralism is a precondition for democracy, anti-pluralism is a problem for democracy (Muller 2016). It. Thus, it is a serious issue when consumerists accelerate anti-pluralism through digital technologies. Specifically, mere consumerists only give one star on Amazon reviews for products that they do not like in order to remove them from the market. Meanwhile, consumerists in the grip of anti-pluralism criticize or ignore others that they do not like and attempt to banish them from society. For consumerists, the two aspects are the same.

The second is that democracy, as populism, is threatening the social norms that underpin the modern state, such as constitutionalism, since we are more concerned with whose opinions take precedence, over a reasonable established system. The 2015 Japan-U.S. Security Treaty is an example of the relationship between democracy and constitutionalism. Presently, the government's "democratic" power, supported by the apathy or hope for a status quo by the people, is becoming superior to constitutionalism. As for the 2015 constitutional interpretation debate, there has been some disenchantment with the elite constitutional scholars who preach the truth and protest the government. In addition, the initiatives of the government have been somewhat welcomed from the standpoint of life conservatism and by those who aim to maintain the affluence of consumer society.

The presidents of societies of study of social welfare made a Joint Statement "On August 15, the 70th Anniversary of the End of World War II" on August 15 in 2015. The statement briefly mentioned that constitutional scholars pointed out the governmental constitutional violations. Meanwhile, it did not mention democracy and its tone of the argument was modest.

4. What we can do: Empowerment rather than enlightenment

In general, social workers in Japan must respond to at least the two aforementioned issues. Specifically, social workers can convey to the clients that supporting relationships and helping those in need are more important and provide greater pleasure than obtaining cash for

unnecessary entertainment and luxury products. This is not the same as creating more rational and reasonable human beings through enlightenment. Instead, protecting human dignity, being included in a community based on pluralism, and becoming responsible subjects are all related to empowerment.

With such emotions, social workers must confirm the importance of social norms, especially legal rights and obligations. Meanwhile, as sovereign citizens, we should never think of ourselves as customers when it comes to interpreting the constitution. In addition, we should not become "stray sheep" subject to elite constitutional scholars, nor should we become customers of Amazon who choose the legal interpretation of our choice.

In sum, social workers should not be passive agents that simply provide services to meet people's needs. Instead, they should be legislators who collaborate with the people（and the local politicians who represent them）in order to support democracy as a whole.

Conclusion

Democracy in social work is, as Richmond stated a belief in and respect for human values. The key is to support individuals' personalities in order to prevent them from withdrawing or excluding themselves from democracy, as an institutional system based on community values. Banks referred to a form of democratic professionalism in which educated professionals that strictly adhere to a code of ethics treat and empower service users as more active participants （Banks 2012）. It. This also expands the concept of self-determination and entails the meaningful participation of service users.

Overall, the present study focused on how social workers can become involved in the discussions of democracy in Japan today, especially from the perspective of consumer society. However, future studies pursue a more precise political discussion about the human image of consumer society and expand the idea of connecting this aspect to the actions of social workers.

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