

# **Friendly Authoritarianism and Neighborhood Associations in Rural Japan**

-A Case from Noto Peninsula-

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the characteristics of non-violent soft control in Japanese society through the case study of a neighborhood association (NHA) in rural Japan. Although today many foreign tourists to Japan are impressed by the orderliness of the towns and the high level of discipline of the people, Japanese society is so standardized that not a few Japanese have the somewhat uneasy feeling of being controlled by unseen power. This paper examines the characteristics and changes of Japanese NHAs by using the theory of ‘friendly authoritarianism’ (Sugimoto 2014) that views Japanese NHAs as a form of regimentation through which dominant ideologies and norms become shared and naturalized by people of the grassroots. The aims of the paper are descriptive and theoretical. Based on fieldwork on a rural Japanese NHA, the paper offers detailed description of a NHA in rural Japan and attempts to answer the questions: (1) What are the characteristics of soft social control on individuals in Japan?; (2) To what extent does the theory of friendly authoritarianism apply to the case of a NHA in rural Japan?; and (3) What changes has a rural NHA undergone and what do these changes imply for the theory of friendly authoritarianism?

**Keywords:** neighborhood association, social control, friendly authoritarianism, Noto, Japan

## **1. Introduction**

Although today many foreign tourists to Japan are impressed by the orderliness of the towns and the high level of discipline of the people, not a few Japanese, however, feel uneasy in being Japanese and living in Japanese society, for it is a highly standardized society that allows little room for alternative livelihoods or individual autonomy. In other words, Japanese society is a disciplined

society in which people have the somewhat uneasy feeling of being controlled by the mainstream norms and ideologies.

When one exercises power over others, the power is exercised either through violent or non-violent forms. In the latter case, legitimation of power by people is necessary. Japanese society seems intolerant of diversity of life-styles and individuals' autonomy. However, it is not that Japanese society violently and overtly works against the will of each individual, rather, the dominant norms and disciplines are so deeply and widely shared and naturalized among people that an individual unconsciously oppresses his/her own will and does not even know what he/she wants.

This paper examines this soft social control working on individuals in Japanese society through the case study of a rural Japanese neighborhood association (NHA). The paper describes and analyzes a rural Japanese NHA by using the theory of 'friendly authoritarianism' by Yoshio Sugimoto that argues that the Japanese NHA is one of the regimentations through which the dominant norms and ideologies are shared and naturalized among grassroots people (Sugimoto 2014). Thus, the paper is a case study of a contemporary NHA in rural Japan and tries to answer three theoretical questions:

1. What are the characteristics of soft social control on individuals in Japan?
2. To what extent does the theory of friendly authoritarianism apply to the case of a NHA in rural Japan?
3. What changes has a rural NHA undergone and what do these changes imply for the theory of friendly authoritarianism?

In the Japanese language, there are plenty of books on NHA, most of which are addressed to the general readership and teach how to manage or deal with the practical problems of NHA (Kamiya 2017, among others). On SNS and Web bulletin boards, we can find many negative messages and complaints about NHA.<sup>1</sup> This shows that many people feel uneasy and annoyed by pressures exercised by NHA, but most people take it for granted to be enlisted as a NHA member.

There is also a considerable amount of academic literature on Japanese NHAs. Some are social scientific studies and examine the Japanese NHA in varied aspects, such as general characteristics, functions of being a civil society organization, cooperation with local governments, and vote gathering (Tsujinaka et al. 2009; Kurasawa and Akimoto 1990). Others are more practical studies of NHA's problems and seek better ways for the NHAs to cooperate with governments and contribute to the community (Nakata 2017, among others). Recently, there have appeared studies

that view NHA in terms of social capital (Inaba 2011).

Some foreign researchers conducted fieldwork on the post-war Japanese NHAs (Bestor 1989; Dore 1958), but these works concentrate on NHAs in the metropolitan areas.<sup>2</sup> In the monographs on rural Japanese society, descriptions of rural Japanese NHAs are usually given only a small amount of space (Bernstein 1983; Dore 1978).

All these previous works do not view the Japanese NHA in terms of a regimentation of a non-violent and soft form of social control on individual Japanese. This paper, however, focuses on the Japanese NHA in order to elucidate a form of social control typical to Japanese society.

In August, 2005, a group comprised of four professors, including myself, and 10 students conducted 8 days of fieldwork in Suzuya Area, a rural Japanese community, followed by additional research by members of the research team. In order to bring about a holistic understanding of the lives Suzuya people, we conducted in-depth interviews with residents and engaged in participant observation of festivals, rituals, and NHA meetings. This paper relies mostly on the data collected by this research project in 2005-06.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Friendly Authoritarianism and Neighborhood Associations in Japan**

Sugimoto calls the non-violent, soft but very effective social control in Japan ‘friendly authoritarianism’, which is typically found in such areas as the total quality control (TQC) movement at companies, elementary school classes, and neighborhood associations (Sugimoto 2014).

Japanese society has various forms of regimentation that are designed to standardize the thought patterns and attitudes of the Japanese and make them toe the line in everyday life. .... It is authoritarian to the extent that it encourages each member of society to *internalize and share the value system* which regards control and regimentation as natural and to accept the instructions and orders of people in superordinate positions without questioning (Sugimoto 2014: 325, my italics).

[Friendly authoritarianism] uses small groups as the basis of mutual surveillance and deterrence of deviant behavior ..... and inculcates various forms of moralistic ideology into the psyche of every individual, with a particular stress on minute and trivial details (Sugimoto 2014: 326).

It is ‘friendly’ to the extent that it ..... resorts, wherever possible, to positive inducements rather than negative sanctions ..... to encourage competition to conform; ..... propagates the ideology of equality and the notion of a unique national homogeneity, ensuring that images of class cleavage are as blurred as possible; and relies upon joyful, amusing, and pleasant entertainments (Sugimoto 2014: 326).

Most frequently, friendly authoritarianism relies on small groups for peer pressure and mutual surveillance.

The first element of Japanese friendly authoritarianism relies on the capacity of small groups to evoke from members maximum compliance with the dominant norms of society ..... As each *han* [a small unit composed of five to ten individuals or households] is praised or blamed as a collective unit, there is constant intra-group pressure on members to comply with the expected standard (Sugimoto 2014: 327).

NHA is one of the typical organizations in which regimentation occurs through friendly authoritarianism:

Neighborhood associations are characterized by several features. First, they engage in a wide range of activities and function as all-purpose organizations. At a social level, their members organize and take part in community gatherings, fetes, outings, and festival dances. Once in a while they are called upon to clean gutters, engage in activities for the prevention of crime and fire, and collect donations for community causes. Many associations manage and maintain a community hall. Almost all of them serve as distribution networks for circulars, fliers, and information leaflets from their municipal government. Second, the unit of association membership is the household, not the individual ..... Third, it is semi-compulsory for a household to join a neighborhood association (Sugimoto 328-329).

As community-based *han* units, neighborhood associations cooperate in many ways with various branches of local government and semi-governmental agencies. .... A section of a *chōnaikai* [i.e., NHA] often collaborates with police in crime prevention programs in its area. *Chōnaikai* frequently act as the basic units in fire drills and other disaster prevention exercises organized by the local fire defense headquarters. Members of *chōnaikai* also come into close cooperative contact with government-backed associations concerned with local hygiene, social welfare, and compliance with tax laws (Sugimoto 2014: 329).

The *han* system is effective in ensuring attitudinal and behavioral conformity among its members precisely because it is not predicated upon the imposition of authority from above. Instead of vertical control, the system counts on a kind of horizontal control, where the policing of people of the same status in a small unit – classmates, work colleagues, or neighborhood acquaintances – makes it difficult for them to diverge from the standard expected (Sugimoto 2014: 330)

This is a summary of friendly authoritarianism and NHAs in Japanese society as described by Sugimoto (2014). Next, I will describe and analyze a case of NHA in Noto Peninsula, rural Japan.

### 3. Suzuya Neighborhood Association: A Case Study

#### 3.1 Changes of Suzuya community

Today, Suzuya Area (*chiku*) belongs to Machino Town, Wajima City, Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan, but ‘Suzuya’ as an administrative unit has undergone several changes. Suzuya had been a village (*mura*) in Tokugawa period and was a part of Machino Village between 1889 through 1940. In 1940, Machino Village was reformed as Machino Town under Fugeshi District (*Fugeshi Gun*) and it remained as such until 1956, when Fugeshi District was abolished and Machino Town was amalgamated into Wajima City.

Suzuya is located on both sides of the small Suzuya River, a branch of the Machino River which starts in a mountainous area and flows into the Japan Sea. Historically, Machino, including Suzuya, had better inland communications and had closer relationships with Yanagida Village, an interior village, and Ushitsu Town on the other verge of Noto Peninsula than with the Wajima City area.

Suzuya stands next to Awagura, which is a center of Machino Town and in which local government offices and a middle school have been located. Suzuya stretches out along the Suzuya River and is comprised of the Town and the Hill Areas, called ‘Suzuya Chōnai’ and, simply, ‘Suzuya’, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Before, there had been only a few houses in the Town Area but the present townscape was built by immigrant households during the Showa Period (1926-89) (Kagami 2006: 6).<sup>5</sup> Some households in the Town Area had been running small-size businesses, such as barbershops, fish shops, tofu shops, draper’s shops, and clothing stores, but now many of them are closed. On the other hand, households in the Hill Area have historically engaged in agriculture and forestry with the area being under the influence of people from a few rich and strong clans, called ‘oyassama’ (see below), which held large paddy and forest lands.

Table 1 shows changes in the population and the number of households in Suzuya. Except for a slight increase in 1980, the Suzuya population has been in constant decline to the degree that the 2015 population (157 people) is less than half of that of 1965 (331 people), whereas the decrease in the number of households is slight. This means that the major change in the Suzuya demography is the decrease in the average number of household members, 3.99 persons/household in 1965 to 2.18 persons/household in 2015, because of the move of young people to big cities for jobs and higher education as stated below.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1: Suzuya Area

Source: Google Map (accessed on June 30, 2017)

Table 1: Changes in Suzuya Demography

	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
population	331	318	303	311	299	284	248	229	203	176	157
- hill area	214	201	203	210	198	178	157	144	123	108	94
- town area	117	117	100	101	101	106	91	85	80	68	63
number of households	83	79	78	80	78	77	76	76	77	71	72
- hill area	47	48	51	52	49	48	47	49	48	45	42
- town area	36	31	27	28	29	29	29	27	29	26	30
avg. number of household members	3.99	4.03	3.88	3.89	3.83	3.69	3.26	3.01	2.64	2.48	2.18
- hill area	4.55	4.19	3.98	4.04	4.04	3.71	3.34	2.94	2.56	2.4	2.24
- town area	3.25	3.77	3.7	3.61	3.48	3.66	3.14	3.15	2.76	2.62	2.1

Source: National Census of Japan

Table2: Suzuya Population by Age Groups

	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-99	total
male population	4	5	11	7	10	31	10	20	10	2	110
female population	6	10	11	8	8	25	21	19	13	3	124
total population	10	15	22	15	18	56	31	39	23	5	234

Source: Basic Resident Register as per June 2005

Table 2 is a breakdown of the Suzuya population of 2005 according to age groups. At a glance one can see that the majority of the Suzuya population are over 50 years of age. Compared with that of the whole country at the same time, the Suzuya population has a larger portion in the ages of 50-59 and a lesser portion in ages of 30-39 by percentage than the national average (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan, ca. 2006). The aging ratio (*kōreika ritsu*), or the proportion of people more than 65 years of age, is 36.3%, which exceeds the whole

country's figure of 20.2% in 2005.

These figures reflect the economic and social changes that Suzuya people have experienced in the second half of the twentieth century. After WWII, the Japanese government endeavored to increase agricultural production, especially rice, the staple diet, but as the supply of rice exceeded its demand in the late 1960s, the government turned to enacting a policy to limit rice production through a conversion to growing non-rice crops. At the same time, under the government policies since the 1960s, Japanese agriculture has been modernized by mechanization, the introduction of the use of chemical inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides), and rearrangements of farmlands. Agriculture in Japan has changed from a labor-intensive to a capital-intensive enterprise. But most of all, the government made industrialization in the big cities a top priority, and the urban industrial sector began absorbing labor from rural farming areas.

The above economic and social changes at the national level have changed the rural life in Suzuya, as its agriculture and forestry, which had been the two main sources of income, failed. There has been a decline of agriculture since the 1960s, and rice farming is increasingly done by a small number of elderly people specialized in agriculture (*senryō nōka*), with the help of machines and chemical inputs. More young people are leaving the village for higher education and working in bigger cities, while more middle-aged people seek wage labor in urban areas. Because of changes in fuel consumption from charcoals to petroleum, gas, and electricity (*nenryō kakumei* or 'fuel revolution') and an increase of imported timbers, Suzuya's forestry business, which had relied on charcoal production and the growing and selling of timbers, also collapsed. The Suzuya community now faces depopulation and aging. In the daytime, it is rare to find children in the community and the residents often say, 'All young people have left Suzuya because there are no jobs here'.

### **3.2 Suzuya Neighborhood Association**

'Suzuya' is now Suzuya Area, Machino Town, Wajima City, Ishikawa Prefecture in the administrative system of Japan. Suzuya Area is the unit for constituting Suzuya Neighborhood Association or 'Suzuya Chōkai'.

Suzuya has a few different geographical sub-divisional units; some are more traditional and others are more modern. In the local vernacular, the basic division is between 'chōnai' and 'kami' ('above'), also referred to as 'yama no hō' ('mountainous'), which corresponds to the Town Area and the Hill Area mentioned above, respectively. There are many *bunke* houses, shops and

small enterprises in the Town Area, while many older and *honke* houses are located in the Hill Area.<sup>7</sup>

At the second division, the Town Area is called *Kawara-ji*, which literally means ‘riverbed land,’ while the Hill Area is divided into *Ejiri-aida* (literally, ‘river-end in-between land’), *Nakamura-ji* (‘village center land’), and *Yachi-ji* (‘inner valley land’). According to the NHA Chief (a 58 year-old male), these three areas are not governmental but traditional units of mutual assistance for funeral ceremonies.<sup>8</sup>

The third division concerns small groups called ‘han’. The Suzuya NHA’s miscellaneous administrative expenses are first collected in each *han* group and then given to the NHA. The *han* is the unit that has a role to carry a *kiriko* (big ceremonial lantern) for the village festivals. As shown in Table 3, the Town Area has two *han*, while the Hill Area has four *han*. However, the *han* division is not consistent with the second division stated above in that, for example, 3 *han* of the Upper Area straddle over *Nakamura-ji* and *Yachi-ji*. In short, the third *han* groups are more concerned with governmental matters than the groups of the first and second divisions which are traditional and were naturally formed ones.

Table 3: Divisions of Suzuya Village

Basic Division	Suzuya Town Area			Suzuya Upper Area / Hill Area				
Traditional Division	Kawara Area			Ejiri Area	Nakamura Area		Yachi Area	
house- holds	1~14	1~6	1~15	1~13	1~12	1~5	6~13	1~10
<i>Han</i> Division	<i>Han</i> 1	no <i>Han</i> (shops etc.)	<i>Han</i> 2	<i>Han</i> 1	<i>Han</i> 2	<i>Han</i> 3		<i>Han</i> 4

Source: Interview with the NHA Chief in 2005

The Suzuya NHA has three main offices (*sanyaku*) comprised of one NHA Chief and two deputy Chiefs, the latter of which are chosen one each from the Town Area and the Hill Area. Interestingly, the officers who make contact with the local government are not the NHA Chief but the two Deputy NHA Chiefs, and, although Suzuya is the unit for the Suzuya NHA, the Town Area (*Suzuya chō nai*) and the Hill Area (*Suzuya*) are two different units in the national census. Thus, the Suzuya NHA is not a perfect ideal because the overlapping of different group units theoretically works against the government smoothly communicating with and permeating its control into the

grassroots population.

The current NHA Chief is a 58 year-old man, working for a civil engineering company, and has been NHA Chief for 3 years. However, in the past, men from a so-called *oyassama* (Big Patron) clan used to hold the office long term and often life-long.<sup>9</sup> The former NHA Chief, who is 71 years old and had served as the NHA Chief for 14 years, now remains as an advisory figure for the Suzuya NHA due to his knowledge of the old local customs. The history of the Suzuya NHA Chiefs given by the former NHA Chief (Table 5) shows that no NHA Chiefs were ever selected from the Town Area or a newer settlement and that NHA Chiefs have been alternatively chosen from Nakamura-ji and Yachi-ji in the Hill Area. These facts shows that political power remains within a few households of older settlements.

Table 4: Offices of Suzuya Neighborhood Association

office	affiliation	no.	term	
Chief	-	1	2	
Deputy Chief	Town Area	1	1	
	Hill Area	1	2	
Secretary-cum-Accountant	-	1	none	
Committee member	Town Area	3	n.k.	
	Hill Area	<i>Han</i> 1	2	n.k.
		<i>Han</i> 2	2	n.k.
		<i>Han</i> 3	2	n.k.
		<i>Han</i> 4	2	n.k.

Source: fieldwork data

Table 5: History of the NHA heads

Initials (age) in the year 2005	Home	Term
N1(deceased)	Nakamura Area	20 years since 1958 (life-long)
H1(deceased)	Yachi Area	3 years since 1978 (life-long)
N2(deceased)	Nakamura Area	2 years since 1981
H2(88)	Yachi Area	3 years since 1983
Y(71)	Nakamura Area	14 years since 1986
S (58)	Nakamura Area	Currently in his third year

Source: Interview with the Suzuya NHA Chief

Two more offices, secretary (*shoki*) and accountant (*kaikei*), are borne by one person (a 50 year-old male). The secretary-cum-accountant says, ‘The office of secretary and accountant is new and was only made when the former NHA Chief changed to the current one. Before that, it was the NHA Chiefs who did these jobs’. But, it is apparent that the former NHA Chiefs made no systematic written records concerning NHA activities and financial movements, as the current NHA Chief explained that he had been transcribing the ‘memory in the former NHA Chief’s head’ into written documents for the NHA. In other words, information was limited to the *oyassama* NHA Chiefs in the past, while endeavors are now being made for wider access to information by NHA members. This can also be viewed as a strategy of the current NHA Chief against potential accusations, as he is not from an *oyassama* clan and has no traditional qualifications for the political power.

Table 6: Offices of Suzuya Shinto Shrine

Office	Affiliation		No.
NA Chief			1
ND Deputy Chief	Town Area		1
	Hill Area		1
Representative of the parishoners	Town Area		2
	Hill Area	Ejiri Area	2
		Nakamura Area	2
		Yachi Area	2
<i>Tomoto</i> (Households playing important roles in the Festival)	Town Area		2
	Hill Area	Ejiri Area	1
		Nakamura Area	1
		Yachi Area	1

Source: fieldwork data

Table 7: Suzuya Landlord Representatives

Town Area		2
Hill Area	Ejiri Area	2
	Nakamura Area	2
	Yachi Area	2

Source: fieldwork data

The current NHA Chief also mentioned offices for Suzuya village Shinto shrine (*ujiko sōdai*) and Suzuya ‘landlord representatives’ (*jinushi sōdai*), when we, the research team, inquired what other officials the Suzuya NHA had. Legally they may not be a part of the Suzuya NHA, however, local people generally see them as smaller groups attached to the NHA. Apparently, for the rural residents, Shinto is more of an old custom than a religion and a matter that their NHA are concerned with. As shown in Table 6, the Chief and Deputy-Chiefs of the Suzuya NHA are expected to be members of the Suzuya Shinto shrine committee. The other 8 committee members are chosen

both from the Town Area and Hill Area, from the latter of which two members each come from Ejiri-aida, Nakamura-ji, and Yachi-ji. *Tōmoto*, or households in charge of the Suzuya festival, are selected from the Town Area (2 households) and the Hill Area (1 each from Ejiri-aida, Nakamura-ji, and Yachi-ji).

The Suzuya NHA holds regular general meetings (*yoriai*) twice a year: the New Year meeting on the Sunday of the 4th week of January and the Year End meeting on a Sunday in December. Previously, the general meetings were held at the house of the NHA Chief, who were of the *oyassama* clan and could afford to have a large house to accommodate many attendants for general meetings. Today, all general meetings of the Suzuya NHA are held at their community hall (*chiku shūkaijo*), which was built on the grounds of the Suzuya village Shinto shrine. Here, again, people of Suzuya usually take the connection of NHA and Shinto to be beyond question.

Table 8: Procedures of the New Year General Meeting of Suzuya NHA in 2006

time	movements	number of participants
8:00	The NHA Chief starts preparation for the meeting at the community hall. He put big bottles of <i>sake</i> on the low tables, putting stoves in the meeting rooms, and read again the order of the meeting on the documents.	1
8:20	The NHA Chief's wife and his female relatives start preparation of the dishes.	
9:30	NHA members or household representatives arrive in the community hall.	14
9:40	Documents are distributed among the participants.	17
9:50	The NHA Chief speaks about the meeting's agenda.	23
10:00	The general meeting begins.	26
	1. The NHA Chief gives a greeting.	27
	2. The Secretary-cum-Accountant makes a report on the previous year's activities.	29
	3. The Secretary-cum-Accountant makes a report on the previous year's financial movements.	
	4. Participants discuss about the plan of major activities in the new year.	
	5. The NHA Chief presents plans for the new year's activities and budget.	
	6. The NHA Chief asks for approval of the plan for the new year's activities.	
	7. Participants discuss and approve the plan.	
	8. The NHA Chief reports about the <i>sake</i> usage and changes among NHA officers.	23
12:00	The meeting ends and participants and female helpers begin preparation for <i>hizanaoshi</i> (initiation ritual for new representatives of the NHA member households).	
12:10	<i>Hizanaoshi</i> begins.	
13:25	All participants give three cheers ( <i>banzai</i> ) and the general meeting ends.	
13:30	Drinking party ends.	

Source: Horie 2006

On the 29th of January, 2006, we had a chance to observe the Suzuya NHA's New Year general meeting. The items in the agenda of the meeting proceeded in the following order (Table 8):

Like other Japanese NHAs, the Suzuya NHA's membership unit is the household, not the individual, and the household representative is usually a male.<sup>10</sup> In fact, all participants of the 2006 New Year General Meeting were male. Females were asked to come and prepare foods for the New Year drinking party. Gender asymmetry is apparent.

The former NHA Chief related that in the past the number of households in Suzuya were limited to 51, and this membership was called 'tsura'.<sup>11</sup> Even if a non-eldest son, such as second-born or third-born son, splits from the *honke* (main clan) and starts his own *bunke* (branch clan), the new household could not automatically become a proper member of the NHA because he usually did not possess a *tsura*. Those who moved to the area or changed residence would face the same problem in the NHA too. *Bunke* households and immigrant households had to buy *tsura*, otherwise their status remained lower and their voice weaker in the community. Today, there are no longer *tsura* and related customs and some Suzuya people have not even heard of *tsura* (Horie 2006: 26-27). In the past, the NHA membership was also limited to the 51 old residential households, but today it is open equally to all households as long as their house is built in the Suzuya NHA's territory.

*Hizanaoshi*, or the initiation ritual for a new representative of a NHA member household, was included in the 'Others' of the 2006 New Year General Meeting's agenda. The ritual is performed only when there is a change from an old to a new household head. Before WWII, the ritual procedures were more complicated and difficult, but in the post-war period it has become much more simplified due to the loss of both detailed knowledge about the ritual procedures as well as skills needed to sing the ritual song 'Suzuya shōnai', which has not been sung since the 1960s. Although in the past the amount of money paid by a new household-head-to-be had varied depending on the socio-economic status of his clan, the amount was fixed at JPY 10,000 since ca. 1995 due to criticism regarding the inequality.<sup>12</sup> In spite of the simplification and, probably, the changes in the meanings of the ritual, today some Suzuya people, including the NHA Chief, reflect on the ritual and frequently refer to it as one of the 'important customs of Suzuya'.<sup>13</sup>

The Year End General Meeting (*kure no sōkai*) is also called *kayaku yoriai* because the main agenda of the meeting is the allocation of NHA expenditures to member households (*kayaku*). The Suzuya NHA has savings to pay miscellaneous expenses such as electricity fees and

maintenance fees of its community hall and, at the year end, allocates monetary contributions to the member households to cover the expenses paid. At the Year End General Meeting, a report on the year's activities is made and the new officials for the new year are selected.

For the year 2004, *kayaku* of JPY 2,370 was equally allocated to 83 member households, and the total amount was JPY 196,710 (*Suzuya Chōkai*, ca. 2004). As the 2004 case shows, today the same amount of money is allocated to all member households. However, in the past, *oyassama* households paid much more and, according to the former NHA Chief, '20 years ago, only 5 to 6 members, usually 'executive members' (*jūyaku*) and *oyassama*, attended the Year End Meeting and the Meeting itself was held only once in 3 to 4 years'. There have been changes in the Suzuya NHA management from primarily authoritarian to more democratic ways.<sup>14</sup>

Like other Japanese NHAs, the Suzuya NHA has diverse smaller associations attached to it. There are the Young Men's Association, the Middle-aged People's Association, the Women's Association, the Elderly People's Association as well as other smaller voluntary groups. However, it does not have a Children's Association due to the very small number of children in the community.<sup>15</sup>

The Young Men's Association is called '*wakarenjū*' (assembly of the young men) and is to be comprised of 12-35 year-old male members. In other words, a Suzuya man will become a member at the graduation of junior high school and leave the Association at the age of 35, theoretically. The Association's main activity is to carry a big lantern (*kiriko*) in the Suzuya Autumn Festival, which is held on the first Saturday and Sunday of September. It is said to need about 30 people to carry one *kiriko* in the Festival, but the Suzuya Young Men's Association only has 'less than 20' or 'around 10' members due to the population decrease and out-migration of younger people. Moreover, some members are not living in Suzuya because they are working or studying in cities, including the *wakarenjū* Chief himself who is living in Kanazawa, the capital of Ishikawa Prefecture.<sup>16</sup> In the cases whereby a *wakarenjū* member fails to participate in the Festival or a Suzuya NHA member household cannot afford to send a male for carrying the *kiriko* in the Festival, JPY 8,000 and JPY 16,000 is to be charged, respectively. By using this money, the Suzuya NHA and its *wakarenjū* hire males from nearby villages to be *kiriko* carriers.<sup>17</sup> At the drinking party after the Festival, a new *wakarenjū* Chief for the next term is chosen. The penalty money shows the compulsory nature of *wakarenjū* membership and of participation in the festival which is taken for granted by Suzuya people.

The Women's Association (*fujinkai*) in Japan is usually a group of married women under

the age of sixty. Regional Women's Associations in Japan are hierarchically organized and, in Suzuya's case, the Machino Town Women's Organization belongs to that of Wajima City, which, in turn, belongs that of Ishikawa Prefecture, which is a part of the organization for the larger Chubu Area, which then, finally, is a division of the National Federation of Regional Women's Organizations, the national organization. The Suzuya NHA does not have its own Women's Association and some adult women participate in the Machino Town Women's Association. Machino Town Women's Association conducts various activities, mainly at the Machino community hall (*Machino kōminkan*), including providing classes for drawing pictures on letters, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and cooking. Its members participate in a Machino Town festival called *Gosen-nin no saiten* ('Five Thousand People's Festival') by dancing *bon* dances. However, not many Suzuya people are participating in the Machino Women's Association's activities, and it seems that some women prefer to attend activities of the Women's Group of the Machino Town JA (Japan Agricultural Cooperative).

The Elderly People's Association (*rōjinkai*) in Japan is a group of people more than sixty years of age. Like the Women's Association, the Elderly People's Association also constitutes a hierarchy: from Community, Town, City, Province to the National bodies. The Suzuya NHA does not have its own elderly people's association and Suzuya's elderly people participate in the Suzuyo Elderly People's Association, one of the three elderly people's associations of Suzuya Town.<sup>18</sup> Suzuyo Elderly People's Association's annual membership fee is JPY 1,200 per person. Members pay JPY 5,000 to 6,000 for the Association's New Year party, at which they participate in such activities as enjoying a big meal at a good restaurant. At the general meeting held at a community hall in April, members also enjoy theatrical shows with lunch box meals as well as discuss and approve agendas. Some members pay around JPY 10,000 to have an over-night stay at a Japanese-style hot spring inn and enjoy light sports. Other main activities include playing ground golf and performing songs and dances at nursing homes (by the younger members).

In 2005, the proportion of the population of Japan over the age of 65 (*kōreika ritsu* or population aging rate) was 20.0%. Aging in Japan is so serious a problem that 65 to 74 year-old people are called 'prior elderly people' (*zenki kōreisha*) and people over 75 years old 'later elderly people' (*kōki kōreisha*), the former of which are called locally in Upper Noto Peninsula 'wakate' ('youngsters'). In Upper Noto Peninsula, the population aging rate in 2005 was 35.7% and in Suzuya 36.3%, both of which are much higher than that of the nation as a whole. In Upper Noto

Peninsula, it is often observed that in the major activities of the Elderly People's Association, *wakate* elderly people show gratitude to and entertain later elderly people with meals, songs and dance. Under these circumstances, the Elderly People's Association is often said to be the most active sub-association in the NHA.

In Japan, if there are such associations as Children's, Young Men's, Women's and Elderly People's Associations organized with NHAs, the former are usually provided with budgets by the NHAs as well as subsidies by the local governments. These groups are quasi-compulsory groups in whose participation by all residents is regarded as beyond question. In the Suzuya case, many of these affiliated associations are not organized along with the Suzuya NHA but rather at different levels.

The Suzuya NHA does not have its own Middle Aged People's Association and Suzuya's people of middle age participate in the *Sōseikai*, a middle aged people's association formed in Machino Town by the people who wanted to continue activities after the age of 35 when they had to leave Young Men's Association. *Sōseikai* is now comprised mainly of male members in the ages of from about 35 through 60 years. Today, *Sōseikai* stages a Town event, 'Five Thousand People's Festival', with subsidies from Wajima City and is involved in revitalizing the communities (*chiiki kasseika*). The close connection and collaborations between the local government and the *Sōseikai* is probably because of the fact that its leader (a male in his early 50s) is an employee of the Wajima City government.

There are two voluntary women's groups that are not affiliated to the Suzuya NHA. *Wakazuma-kai* (literally, 'Young Wives' Association') is a group comprised of 10 middle-aged female members between the ages of 35 to 60 (8 from *Nakamura-ji* and 2 from *Yachi-ji*). *Wakazuma-kai* was formed by the married women in *Nakamura-ji* because there happened to be many women married in the same period. *Wakazuma-kai*'s activities include an annual overnight trip by its members. Another women's group is the Women's Division of the Machino JA (Japan Agricultural Cooperative), which has activities similar to those of the Machino Town's Women's Association, such as providing culture classes of flower arrangement and drawing small pictures on postcards.

#### **4. Analysis: Suzuya NHA and Friendly Authoritarianism**

So far I have described Suzuya Area and its NHA. Now I turn to examining whether and to what

extent the theory of friendly authoritarianism is applicable to the case of Suzuya NHA. Generally speaking, Suzuya NHA can be viewed as one of the forms of regimentations that ‘encourage each member of rural Japanese society to internalize and share the value system which regards control and regimentation as natural’ (Sugimoto 2014: 325) through small groups of mutual surveillance and deterrence of deviant behavior. Suzuya NHA has a ‘friendly’ face in that, through various activities of the Suzuya NHA and related associations, ‘positive inducements rather than negative sanction ..... [are used] to encourage competition [among members of the NHA and between NHAs] to conform [to the dominant norms]’ (Sugimoto 2014: 329).

There are many characteristics of the Suzuya NHA that are in accordance with the ones pointed to by Sugimoto (2014: 329). Firstly, Suzuya NHA ‘is engaged in a wide range of activities and functioning as all-purpose organization’. Many activities are joyful and pleasant ones, such as, festivals, drinking parties, and travels. Secondly, the household, not the individual, is a membership unit, which, according to Sugimoto, is related to male dominance (Sugimoto 2014: 329), but which also works against individuals’ autonomy and free will. Thirdly, the Suzuya NHA is theoretically a voluntary association but, in reality, participation in the association is taken for granted by those who reside in its geographical realm. Fourthly, the Suzuya NHA is theoretically a civil voluntary association yet is functioning as semi-governmental agency; the boundary between the civil and the governmental is blurred. Finally, the Suzuya NHA, being a small organization with smaller groups, realizes the horizontal, rather than vertical, social control through peer pressure by its members with equal social statuses. On the whole, the Suzuya NHA, like many other Japanese NHAs, operates as an effective institution of friendly authoritarianism.

However, the soft control through the Suzuya NHA is not complete nor perfect because there are a few points that would be obstacles for the state control. Suzuya, which was the name for the area that comprised a village in the Tokugawa era as described above, and an ‘aza’, or village section, in the Meiji era, has three different division systems: division into the Town and the Hill Areas, into four traditional small areas, and into *hans* which were originally mutual assistance groups for funerals. While Suzuya as a whole has an *ōkuchō* (literally ‘big ward chief’) the Town and Hill Areas have their own *kuchō* (ward chief) who are in charge of liaisons with local governments. Although *hans* are considered as sub-units of the larger administrative units (Town and Hill areas), the overlapping of different divisional units of Suzuya makes less efficient the penetration of governmental control. Related to this is the existence of both a Suzuya NHA Chief

and two Deputy NHA Chiefs and the fact that the latter, not the former, are called ‘governmental Chiefs’ and are working as the liaisons with the local governments. Co-existence of different leadership offices is sometimes confusing.

Another potential obstacle against the permeating of the dominant norms is inequality among the NHA member households. During our research, for example, power of people from *oyassama* clans became evident:

S-san, the NHA Chief, is busy in preparation for the Suzuya Autumn Festival. Members of the Young Men’s Association, whose main duty is to play a central role in the Festival, are also very busy. They had had an appointment to meet at the open ground of the Suzuya Shinto Shrine at 1:00 pm. S-san came a little behind 1:00 pm and begun to give various instructions to the young men. Y-san, who had served as the NHA Chief before S-san for 14 years, came very late and, on his arrival, gave instructions both to the current NHA Chief and the young men. .... Y-san also nearly took over the current NHA Chief’s role to talk about things to be done on the night before the Festival, but S-san hurriedly went into his speech and took his role back. Both the former and the current NHA Chiefs seemed to feel uneasy about the incident (Honbu 2006: 80-81, my summarized translation).

Although the friendly authoritarianism theory does not exclude leader figures attached to the small groups (Sugimoto 2014: 330), presence of strong and bossy persons in the Suzuya NHA would make the mutual surveillance within small groups less effective by rendering the working of the state control vertical and more coercive. Thus, the state control becomes more apparent and less ‘friendly’, to which people would become more reluctant to conform.

Next, I will examine the implications that the changes in Suzuya and its NHA have for the effectiveness of social control by friendly authoritarianism. Except for a few small shops, most Suzuya households were engaged in agricultural and forestry works, but the Suzuya community underwent drastic social changes during the period of high economic growth in 1955-73. Demographically, they have been experiencing a population decrease, out-migration of younger people, and aging. More and more people living in Suzuya rely more on corporate jobs for their living than on agriculture and forestry, which has brought about more diverse lives in Suzuya.

These changes have affected the management of the Suzuya NHA. Firstly, depopulation and aging have weakened the basis of the NHA as many activities and the running of its sub-associations have become more difficult due to a shortage of active members. Thus, the ‘friendly’ methods of the NHA, such as ‘community gatherings, fetes, outings, and festival dances’ (Sugimoto 2014: 328), have become less effective. Secondly, diversification of the occupations

means diversification of life styles. When most NHA member households were engaged in the same occupations, participation in the NHA activities by almost all member households was easier, but today many members engaged in corporate jobs retain less control over their own working hours and are often unable to participate in the NHA activities. Furthermore, an increased sense of privacy and individualism as a result of the exposure to modernization works against the peer surveillance and pressure.

There are other significant changes that occurred in the leadership and management of Suzuya NHA. In the past, NHA Chiefs were from *oyassama* clans and one single *oyassama* NHA Chief was in office for a long period, sometimes until death. Economically, the rich and strong *oyassama* Chiefs contributed more while other ordinary member households less. Patron-like management by *oyassama* Chiefs was also found in the fact that the general meetings were held at the *oyassama*'s private house, and for that reason, some residents say, only strong and rich people who could afford such a big house could be the NHA Chief. The Suzuya NHA was rather an association of and for the small number of village elites than one that was of and for member households, all of whom would share an equal status.

In the post-war period, however, most *oyassama* clans have lost their economic and political power since their farming lands were taken for only a small compensation and distributed to landless farmers by the Land Reform (1947-50). Through many government policies and social changes, which villagers refer to as 'sengo no minshuka' (democratization in the post-war period), Japanese people have become more conscious about equality among people. Although some ex-*oyassama* clan people are still acting as elderly advisors of Suzuya's old customs and traditions in cases such as the village festival, affiliation to an *oyassama* clan is no longer an important qualification for the NHA Chief. In the past, 'dansama' ('patron') households carried most of and 'binbōnin' ('the poor') households carried only a small part of the economic responsibility for NHA expenditures; now the same amount of money is allocated to each member household. The current NHA Chief is endeavoring to put old NHA records, which he said were 'in the head of the previous NHA Chief' into written documents. This would enable more open and wider access to the NHA reports by member households, and make the NHA management more accountable. Both the leadership and management of the Suzuya NHA are now running on more egalitarian principles.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I will try to answer the research questions given at the outset. To the first question ‘What are the characteristics of the soft control on individuals in Japan?’, there are two distinctive features. One is mutual surveillance through small groups for compliance with the dominant norms, and the other is the ‘friendly’ nature found in the neighborhood associations’ ‘positive inducements, ideology of equality, and use of joyful, amusing, and pleasant entertainments’ (Sugimoto 2014: 326).

To the second question, ‘To what extent does the theory of friendly authoritarianism apply to the case of a neighborhood association in rural Japan?’, the theory has proved mostly applicable to this case, but there are some obstacles against the dominant norms to permeate into and become shared and naturalized among people of Suzuya. The obstacles include the overlapping of geographical divisions, the co-existence of the NHA Chief and ‘governmental’ (Deputy) Chiefs, and the unequal statuses among the member households. Sugimoto only analyzes the mechanism of friendly authoritarianism through NHAs but leaves the limitation of its control unexamined (Sugimoto 2014: 326).

To the third question, ‘What changes has a rural neighborhood association undergone and what do these changes imply to the theory of friendly authoritarianism?’, there are changes in the community’s demography and in the NHA management. The demographical changes have undermined the basis of the Suzuya NHA, thereby making social control by the state less effective. ‘Democratization’ of the NHA management reflects more egalitarian relationships among Suzuya people, which would, theoretically, lead to friendly authoritarianism’s more effective control through peer surveillance, yet the effect may be offset by the more diverse life styles and the increased sense of privacy and individualism among the residents.

Overall, it is difficult to assess whether the recent changes in Suzuya NHA have made the control by friendly authoritarianism more or less effective. In spite of its weakened demographical basis, the Suzuya NHA seems to be continuing to operate as an effective institution of friendly authoritarianism, as the association membership and participation in its activities continue to be taken for granted by the Suzuya residents.

I have described and analyzed a rural Japanese NHA with reference to the theory of friendly authoritarianism. Along with Sugimoto, I view the Japanese NHA as one of the typical and effective means of regimentation of social control by the people with power, for through the

Japanese NHA, people of the grassroots are molded according to the dominant norms and disciplines (Sugimoto 2014: 326). As one of the means of regimentation through friendly authoritarianism, the Japanese NHA has distinguished characteristics; the use of small groups for mutual surveillance, transduction of the vertical power from above (from the government) to horizontal mutual pressures by the residents, and the blurred boundary between being a voluntary association and being a de facto agency of the government. This last characteristic has further implications in that the boundary between the dominator and the dominated is also blurred and that, despite their subordinate status, grassroots people tends to identify themselves with the government.<sup>19</sup>

The Japanese NHA is a good case to study Japanese social structure, human relations, and interactions, through all of which contemporary rural Japanese society is formed. Yet, a more elaborate study of a contemporary Japanese NHA would need extended fieldwork, through which we could grasp how people in a NHA are interacting with one another in everyday life, as well as theories by such scholars as Weber, Gramsci, and Foucault, for understanding better the nature of non-violent and non-apparent social control. As a preliminary study, however, this paper has limited itself with short-term fieldwork of a NHA in rural Japan and with the theory of ‘friendly authoritarianism’ focused on soft control in Japanese society (Sugimoto 2014).

#### Notes

- 1 For example, we see discussions on the topic “Are neighborhood associations necessary?” at a Web bulletin board called ‘bakusai.com.’
- 2 Tamano (2005), one of a few extensive studies on the Japanese NHA written in the Japanese language, focuses on a NHA in Tokyo.
- 3 Laboratory of Cultural Anthropology, Kanazawa University (2006) is the report of the fieldwork. The information of Suzuya Area and its residents described in this paper are as per 2005. But, exceptions are information based on the latest statistical figures, such as the National Census 2015, and the description of the Suzuya NHA’s New Year General Meeting which was held on January 29, 2006.
- 4 ‘Suzuya’, the Hill Area, was once called ‘Suzuya Buraku’, but it seems to have dropped the term ‘buraku’, probably because of its negative connotation with ‘buraku min’, or former outcaste groups in Japan.
- 5 In 2005 there were 6 households who were in the third generation, 4 in the second generation, and 6 in the first generation in the town area. Their origins are various; some came from other areas of Machino Town, areas in Noto Peninsula (Najimi area of Wajima City and Yanagida Village of Noto-chō, Hōsu-Gun), and Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture.
- 6 Population of the Hill Area has always been more than that of the Town Area, but the difference has become

smaller during the period from 1960 through 2015. Although now the average number of household members in both areas shows only a little difference (2.24 and 2.10 persons/household), the difference was much larger in 1965 with 4.55 and 3.25 persons/household. In other words, households in the Hill Area had more members in the past than those in the Town Area and the population decrease in the following periods is due mainly to out-migration from the Hill Area. It is assumed that the Town Area, which has had several households engaged in small businesses, has been more resilient against the decline of agriculture and forestry in rural Japan.

7 Honke is the main clan that is usually transmitted through the line of first sons and that inherits house, farmland, fortune and surname, while bunke is usually started by people other than the first son, who are sometimes adopted.

8 In the past it was widely found in Japan that funeral ceremonies were held at the house of the deceased with the help of neighbors who were organized in mutual assistance groups.

9 Oyassama means both a man and clan who were rich and strong due to their possession of large paddy fields and mountain lands before the post-war Land Reform (1947-50). There are 2 oyassama in Kawara-ji, 1 in Ejiri-aida, and 2 in Nakamura-ji, that once possessed more than 5-6 tan (ca. 5-6 acres) of paddy fields. However, it is often said that an oyassama clan falls within three generations, a saying that matches the Suzuya case today, in which most oyassama households have only less than one tan of paddy fields.

10 For this reason, in this paper, I will use the term 'member household(s)' instead of just writing 'member(s).'

11 Editorial Committee of the History of Wajima City (1976: 664-66) writes that the tsura system originated in Tokugawa Era when villagers did not want an increase in the number of households, in order to avoid smaller farming plots and more difficulty of subsistence for member households.

12 Exchange rate is about 112 JPY per 1 USD per July 2017.

13 Horie (2006) includes a detailed description of the hizanaoshi ritual held on 29 January, 2006.

14 Hashimoto's research of two NHAs in Noto Peninsula reveal that the unequal monetary contributions were common in the past but most of the NHAs have changed to an equal-contribution system (Hashimoto 1995). Tamano (2005) describes that in a neighborhood of Tokyo there had been only a group limited to landlord members in the pre-war time, but in the course of war-time mobilization of ordinary people to the war campaign, a NHA constituted of all households was formed. The pre-war landlord group in Tokyo as described by Tamano seems similar to the past-time Suzuya NHA in that both are characterized by inequality.

15 According to the Basic Resident Register (Jūmin Kihon Daichō) as of June 2005, the number of Suzuya's 0-9 year-old population is 10 and that of 10-19 year-old is 15, which counts for only 4.3% and 6.4% of the total population of 234.

16 Kanazawa is about 130km away from Suzuya, or about two hour's drive by car.

17 As the nearby villages have the same problem of a lack of manpower, these villages are actually exchanging kiriko carriers for their festivals.

18 Machino Town is divided into three geographical areas, each of which has an elderly people's association.

19 Similar cases are found in the total quality control (TQC) described by Sugimoto (2014: 327) and the 'ethics retreat' (training program for the employees) studied by Kondo (1990).

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# 町内会を通したソフトな社会統制

## —石川県能登地方の事例—

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### 要旨

本稿は石川県能登地方の一町内会を事例に、日本社会における直接的な強制を伴わないソフトな社会統制の性質について検討する。Sugimoto (2014) は、日本の町内会は‘friendly authoritarianism’と呼びうる統治機構の一例であり、実際には同調圧力や相互監視を伴いながらも、理論的には住民が自主的に参加する行事や楽しみ会を通して、支配的なイデオロギーや規範が草の根レベルにまで、住民がはっきりと意識しない中で、浸透し共有されるしくみだと主張する。本稿は、能登の一町内会の事例を取りあげ、日本社会における社会統制の性質、‘friendly authoritarianism’理論の妥当性および近年の社会変化が社会統制機構としての町内会に及ぼした変化について検討する。

**キーワード** 町内会, 自治会, 社会統制, 能登, 日本社会