

原著論文

## The Image of Residents in a Rural Area of Japan about Vietnam: Future Needs for Intercultural Exchange

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ベトナムに対する日本の一地方都市住民のイメージ  
—外国人居住者との異文化交流における今後の課題—

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### Abstract

The increasing number of foreign residents in Japan is a positive factor contributing to regional revitalization and development, and local residents play an important role in the process of integration for foreign residents. Given the context of Yoshinogawa City – a small distant municipality of Tokushima Prefecture – this survey investigated the image of local residents regarding Vietnam as a target for intercultural exchange. It also identified the awareness of local residents about intercultural understanding and their future needs for intercultural exchange. The findings of this survey provide implications for future intercultural exchange needs and ways in which to strengthen the roles of local residents through promoting lifelong learning for sustainable regional development.

Keywords: Intercultural exchange, local resident, foreign resident, technical trainee, Vietnam

### Introduction and objectives

A declining birthrate, an aging population and a shrinking labor force are serious social problems in Japan, especially in non-metropolitan areas, which are having a negative impact on the economic growth of every locality. On the other hand, the numbers of foreign workers and students are increasing. A workforce of foreigners has been seen as a positive factor in terms of reviving the positive economic development of the country.

In this paper, the term “local resident” is used to describe a Japanese citizen residing in a specific

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locality, Yoshinogawa City, and the term “foreign resident” is used to address a foreign citizen who lives in the same locality.

At the end of June 2019, a record 2,829,416 foreign individuals, including 367,709 technical trainees, were registered as residents in Japan, up 3.6% from the previous year. Technical trainees, technical workers, and other work-linked visa holders saw a sharp rise in numbers amid a severe labor shortage. In terms of nationality, Vietnamese made up the third largest group at 371,755, behind Chinese at 786,241, and South Koreans at 451,543 [1].

Tokushima is a Japanese prefecture located in the east of Shikoku island, which, by the end of 2019, had a population of 728,633, ranked 44<sup>th</sup> among 47 prefectures within the country. There are 6,232 foreign residents in Tokushima, 91% of whom are from Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea, Cambodia, and Thailand. Tokushima’s major economic sectors are agriculture, forestry, and fishery; the prefecture is particularly well-known for agricultural products such as Naruto kintoki (sweet potatoes) and sudachi (citrus fruit) [1, 2].

Yoshinogawa City is one of the 24 municipalities of Tokushima Prefecture, Japan. As of June 1, 2019, the city has a population of 39,405 people [3]; there are 429 foreigners from 20 different nations, including East and Southeast Asia (Vietnam, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, etc.), South Asia (Pakistan, etc.), North America (the USA, Canada), Europa (England, Germany, etc.), and South America (Brazil). Foreigners from East and South East Asia constitute 91.1% (391/429) of this group. The number of Vietnamese has increased from 20 in 2004 to 145 in 2020 and is therefore the largest group from a single country at 33.8% [3].

Given the population decline tendency in the non-metropolitan areas of Japan and the downsizing process of industry, the ratio of foreign residents in these areas is expected to increase in the near future. To understand the context of this survey, it is first important to examine the transition of the foreign population in Yoshinogawa City. From 2004 to 2020, the total number of foreigners residing in the city has only slightly increased, but their nationality breakdown has changed significantly; the number of Vietnamese has been increased five times since 2014, replacing China as the largest group, whereas the number of Chinese and Filipino individuals has decreased over the same period and there have not been any significant changes to other groups (Figure 1). According to their visa status, most Vietnamese, Chinese, and other Asian foreign residents are technical trainees.

Looking at the broader picture of Tokushima Prefecture and Japan as a whole, similar patterns with technical trainees can be noticed. However, at the prefectural and country level, the number of Vietnamese students has also increased at unprecedented levels. Table 1 shows the latest ratio of Vietnamese, Chinese, and Filipino residents, as well as the foreign population as a whole, to the population of Japan, Tokushima Prefecture and Yoshinogawa City. The ratios of Vietnamese to the populations in Yoshinogawa City and

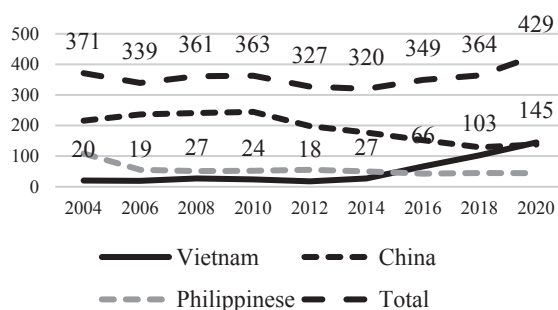


Figure 1. Transition of foreign population in Yoshinogawa City  
Source: Adapted from Yoshinogawa City Int'l Association data [4]

Tokushima Prefecture were 0.37% and 0.22%, respectively, compared to the ratio for Japan of 0.29%; in other words, the density of Vietnamese in Yoshinogawa City is higher than the density throughout the country. For reference, the density of both Chinese and Filipinos in Yoshinogawa City is almost half of the density in Japan. Moreover, in terms of residence status, most Vietnamese people in Yoshinogawa City, 90% in Tokushima, and more than half throughout Japan are technical trainees.

Table 1. Percentage of Vietnamese residents

	Total population	Foreigners (trainees)	Vietnamese (trainees)	Chinese	Filipino
Japan (May 1, 2019)	126,200,000	2,829,416 (367,709)	371,755 (189,021)	786,241	277,409
	100%	2.24%	0.29%	0.62%	0.22%
Tokushima Prefecture (Oct 1, 2019)	728,633	6,232 (2,916)	1,639 (1,445)	1,968	731
	100%	0.86%	0.22%	0.27%	0.10%
Yoshinogawa City (June 1, 2019)	39,405	429	145	138	44
	100%	1.09%	0.37%	0.35%	0.11%

Source: Adapted from various sources [1-4]

Moreover, Table 1 shows that Yoshinogawa City is a highly homogenous community with ratio of foreigners at 1.09%, less than half of Japan's total ratio. There is a similarly high homogeneity within Tokushima Prefecture. The new work visa system introduced since April 2019 could have started a new influx of foreign workers; whereas technical trainee visa status does not allow from families to emigrate, the new visa system may allow families to be brought to Japan under certain conditions. Furthermore, when foreign residents begin to settle into a new community, although with non-permanent status, they still have a need for

adaptation. The increasing number of foreign residents, predominantly technical trainees and technical workers, could pose a serious challenge in terms of providing community support, maintaining the multicultural balance between foreign groups, and preventing potential trouble and conflict that could occur on the basis of misunderstanding.

Yoshinogawa City, as a typical rural homogenous community in Japan, has put huge efforts into promoting coexistence with foreigners. The city's public bodies, associations and residents are currently actively involved in intercultural exchange, not only with local foreigners but also with visitors from abroad and from different parts of Japan. For example, foreign residents and visitors can enjoy various international exchange activities such as the Awa-dance festival, international cooking classes, rice-cake pounding events, Japanese classes, Japanese speech contests, English conversation classes, exchange with elementary school students, or even bus tours to famous spots outside Yoshinogawa City. Government and local public bodies are also working to expand the provision of multilingual administration, life-related information, disaster prevention information, and other initiatives [4].

So far, very few studies have been conducted to describe the image of local Japanese people regarding foreign countries and peoples. A study conducted in 2001 analyzed the views of citizens in Himeji city towards Vietnamese cohabitants, which found some relationship between prejudiced view and personal contacts [5]. Another survey conducted in 2018 investigated how cultural and language differences could become an obstacle for mutual understanding among Japanese and foreign residents in Hamamatsu City [6], while in Tokushima a recent study has been conducted to find out how foreign residents can be supported in their daily life [7].

This paper intends to explore (i) the image of local residents about Vietnam in relation to their exposure to Vietnamese people via intercultural exchange activities, and (ii) the awareness of local residents with regards to intercultural understanding and their future needs for intercultural exchange, future challenges for intercultural exchange, and how the roles of local residents can be strengthened through promoting lifelong learning for better regional development.

## Method

This survey was conducted following a 90-minute lecture (14:00 ~ 15:30) titled "Introduction about Vietnam's history, culture and health care", which was delivered to the local residents of Yoshinogawa City on 28 September 2019 (Saturday) at Yamakawa Public Hall, Yoshinogawa City. This lecture was part of a lecture series on human rights organized by the City municipality, aiming at promoting lifelong learning for local residents about current and emerging issues. The lecture consisted of the following sections: (i) Introduction to Vietnam; (ii) Vietnam's culture and society; (iii) Vietnamese people, ethnic groups and national characteristics; (iv) Vietnamese food culture and tourism; and (v) Vietnam's economy and business

implications.

About 40 local residents participated. Prior to the lecture, the participants were asked to write down their perceptions about Vietnam. After completing the lecture, participants were asked to submit a self-administered questionnaire outlining their general impressions, their level of satisfaction regarding the lecture, and their future needs to learn about Vietnam. All the data were collected anonymously.

The questionnaire consisted of: (i) general information about the participant; (ii) general evaluation of the lecture contents; and (iii) open-ended questions and specific comments regarding the contents of the lecture, individual needs for more intercultural exchange and knowledge about Vietnam, and suggestions for future lecture content. Data analysis was conducted based on the following sources of information: (i) data collected from interactions between the lecturer and participants during the lecture and during the discussion and Q&A session; and (ii) data collected from the questionnaire both before and after the lecture. The general information and overall satisfaction of the participants was calculated quantitatively, while answers to the open-ended questions were categorized and analyzed qualitatively.

## Results

### *Characteristics of participants*

As shown in the Table 2, most of the participants are in the 60-69 and 70-79 age groups. The average age of the participants is 59.3 years old, and almost two thirds (62.5%) of the participants are female. The high mean age might be partly due to the high mean age of the Yoshinogawa City population (53.0) and the high ratio of people over 65 (38.6%) [2].

*Table 2. Age of participants (n=40)*

<i>Age group</i>	<i>No. of answers</i>	<i>%</i>
20-29	1	2.5%
30-39	2	5.0%
40-49	7	17.5%
50-59	5	12.5%
60-69	16	40.0%
70-79	8	20.0%
>=80	1	2.5%

Table 3 shows the breakdown of the occupation of the participants. Over a quarter of participants are government officers, while the other participants are company employees, self-employees, part-timers, housewives, or retirees.

Table 3. Occupation of participants (n=38)

Occupation	No. of answers	%
Government officer	10	26.3%
Company employee	4	10.5%
Self-employee	4	10.5%
Part-time	1	2.6%
Housewife	4	10.5%
No employment	5	13.2%
Student	0	0%
Other	10	31.6%

#### Participants' satisfaction regarding the lecture

Figure 2 demonstrates the overall satisfaction of participants following the lecture. More than 90% were satisfied with the content and the method employed, which was based on quizzes and two-way interaction in addition to lecturing.

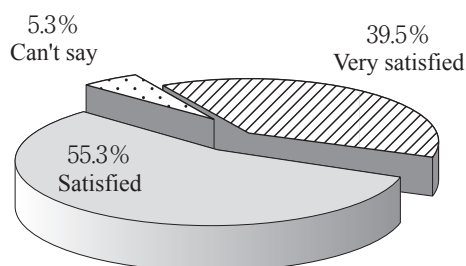


Figure 2. Overall satisfaction (n=38)

To explain what the participants were satisfied about, many said positive things such as “I didn’t know much about Vietnam, but I’m glad that I could learn about history and culture”, or “I was able to learn about a different culture, it was different from the image I had until now, which was helpful”. Humorous stories about Vietnam were highly appreciated as they helped to maintain a high level of engagement. Moreover, the majority of the comments emphasized the need to continue this kind of lecture “because it was a very good study about Vietnam and foreigners”. “I think it is important to keep doing similar events”.

Generally, the lecture was evaluated as exciting and well organized; however, some improvements were suggested. Some participants felt that there was too much content for the time limit and that the lecture could have been more effective if it simply focused on a certain topic, or alternatively more time could be allocated: “There was not enough time to interact with each other”.

*The image of Vietnam*

Prior to the lecture, the participants were asked to write down answers to the open-ended question “What is the first image that comes to your mind regarding Vietnam?”. They were free to write down whatever came to mind with regards to Vietnam, and their answers were categorized for analysis as shown in Table 4.

*Table 4. The spontaneous image of Vietnam*

<i>Category</i>	<i>Description (frequency)</i>
History	The Vietnam war (9). Defoliant (2), Movie “Platoon”, The twins Viet-chan & Duc-chan.
Political economy	A communist country. Successful economic reforms. One of the most rapid developing countries in Southeast Asia (3).
Geography	Hot and humid climate (3). An image of mountains and rivers. A country of rice making and agriculture. A long country with differences between north and south. There is a difference in poverty, and differences between rural and urban areas.
People	Vietnamese national are characterized as: Friendly. Hardworking (3). Diligent, serious. Cheery, happy. Vietnamese are emotionally similar to Japanese. A country friendly to Japan. Young population.
Culture	A thin and beautiful lady wearing Aodai as national costume (3). “I was impressed by the beauty of words and the scenery when I saw the movie ‘The Scent of Green Papaya’.” Many motorbikes (3), bicycles. Traditional music. Vietnam has similarity to Japan in terms of food, customs, and way of life.
Language	Vietnamese pronunciation is difficult. The language sounds soft.
Food	Vietnamese food is tasty, spicy. Pho (Rice noodles) (4), Banhmy (French bread), Coriander, Vietnamese coffee, fish sauce. “Recently, Pho noodles with fish sauce and coriander has become famous”. Eating pigeons and dogs.
Other	“During the Vietnam war, I lived near the Iwakuni base in Hiroshima and I could see American troops from there.” “I am teaching Japanese to trainees from Vietnam.” “I just have seen a recent live performance by an ethnic dance group from Vietnam who visited Yoshinogawa City.”

*New understanding gained about Vietnam following the lecture*

After the lecture, most of the participants wrote down that they gained some new knowledge and understanding about intercultural issues: “I didn’t know much about Vietnam, but I’m glad that I could learn

about history and culture”; “I was able to learn about a completely different culture from Japan. I got to know the life in Vietnam in a fun way, and I learned that it was different from the image I had until now, which was helpful”. Another key factor to mention is that awareness regarding the “importance of mutual understanding and respect of cultural diversity” was also mentioned.

Part of the lecture was devoted to Vietnamese national traits (national character). After the lecture, participants demonstrated a significant change in their impressions of Vietnamese character compared to general national traits shown during the lecture; they realized, for instance, that Vietnam has a multicultural diversity of 54 ethnic groups and each one has unique preserved cultural value. Some participants related the recent performance of the Hmong ethnic dance group as one way in which they had been exposed to multicultural values. The participants were extremely interested in the quiz about national traits of Vietnamese people, differences between ethnic minorities and geographic localities of Vietnam: “When I heard about the national character of Vietnamese people, I felt that it was necessary to be able to accept the ‘characteristics of the other person’ even in relation to people in their daily lives. It is practical to apply these in daily life”. Another quote demonstrating this interest is as follows: “It was good to understand each other’s national character. Also, I thought that it would be better not to spend time only in Japan, but to be more interested in foreign countries and understand foreign languages”.

In general, the participants in this study presented a positive or neutral image of Vietnamese people. When asked, some described a typical Vietnamese character as a young, cheery and hardworking person. Visually, a typical Vietnamese person was often described as a young girl dressed in her traditional Aodai dress. Since most of the participants have some experience of meeting local young Vietnamese, the positive stereotype of Vietnamese people is obviously a product of these previous interactions. Surprisingly, no one within this study provided a negative stereotype.

Overall, more than 90% of the participants indicated that the lecture had some stimulating impact on their interest towards human right issues (Figure 3). As highlighted by the open-ended feedback, a few were able to understand some relation between the culture and human rights issues: “It is easy to understand how a culture diversified during the history of the country, therefore, to be aware and accept the diversity with flexibly is very important for human rights”. Many participants also asserted that they wanted to hear more stories about human rights issues and how to manage them, especially in a multiethnic country such as Vietnam.

#### *Specific needs for new knowledge about Vietnam after the lecture*

Participants were sensitized by the lecture contents and gained some new interest regarding Vietnam. Table 5 shows the topics or specific knowledge that the participants expected to learn in the future. Some categories such as education, healthcare or economics are more related to pure knowledge and curiosity,



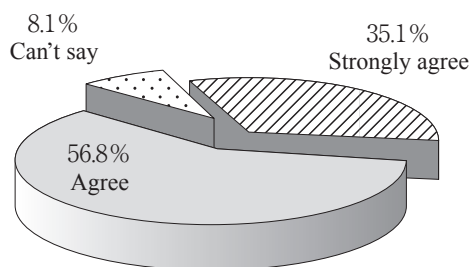


Figure 3. Did this lecture deepen your interest in human rights issues? (n=37)

whereas the others seem more practically related to intercultural exchange, for example tourism, food, human rights, and culture.

Table 5. Following this lecture, what aspects of Vietnam do you want to know more about?

Category	Description (frequency)
Tourism	Details on trips to Vietnam including budget estimation. Tourist destinations in Vietnam (2). Best sightseeing seasons.
Food	Vietnamese dishes (recipes made at home). Common foods and special foods in Vietnam.
Human rights	Details on human right issues (2). "Is there social stratification in Vietnam? E.g. the caste system or the racial discrimination by the Pol Pot regime." Human rights issues for foreigners in Japan as compared to human rights issues in Vietnam. Vietnamese culture related to human rights issues. Gender-based discrimination (against women, but it may be against men).
Education	"How do they educate (home discipline) the children and how different is this compared to Japan?". The parenting environment.
Health care	The medical system (2). Herbal medicine.
Economy	Vietnam's economic growth and prospects. The life and economy of people. Vietnam's long-term vision (2).
Culture	"What do the post-war Vietnamese people think about the Vietnam war?" Differences between past and present. Vietnam's modern culture. Love and marriage.

#### *Future needs for intercultural exchange*

During interactions with participants during the lecture, it became evident that many have already established some contact with foreign residents by joining exchange activities or through Japanese teaching. Participants seemed to recognize the importance of intercultural exchange with foreign residents: "It is important to know Vietnam and Japan well, value each culture, respect each other, and experience each other's

culture". Through intercultural exchange activities, it is possible to better understand people's viewpoints, better support their needs, and prevent potential difficulties caused by a lack of information or misunderstanding. One participant stated that: "We want to interact and help the foreign residents to settle well in our community, but we have difficulty understanding their mentality and culture. I gained some hints for how to treat Vietnamese residents on the situation".

Interestingly, rather than an obstacle, the cultural difference was merely viewed as a reason for making communication: "Though there is a difference between Vietnam and Japan, I thought it was important to help each other, to be in contact with each other". After the lecture, many participants specified their needs of strengthening their knowledge about intercultural exchange issues and becoming more actively involved in exchange activities (Table 6).

*Table 6. Future needs in terms of intercultural exchange*

<i>Category</i>	<i>Description</i>
Knowledge	"I would like to know more about the exchange activities between Vietnam and Japan in general." Knowledge about exchange with many nationalities is also important.
To be involved in exchange activities	"I learned a lot as an introduction to Vietnam. It would be nice if there was an explanation of how to make further communication and talk in person with Vietnamese people." "I want a Q&A to learn little more about what I can do to have more exchange." "I would like to have the opportunity to respect the other person and increase communication." "I want to deepen friendships with foreign residents." "I wanted to ask about your life at home." "Will there be fewer trainees in Vietnam in the future?"

Next, Table 7 highlights the need to understand what Vietnamese people think about Japan from outside or how they feel about their new lives from inside Japan.

*Table 7. The need to understand what Vietnamese people think about Japan*

<i>Category</i>	<i>Description</i>
Voices of Vietnamese residents in Japan	Likes and dislikes about Japan and Japanese people by foreigners living in Japan. Is Japan an attractive country? Problems with and expectations of people who have come to Japan from Vietnam. "I want to hear their voices through direct interaction." Vietnamese people's perspective regarding human rights.
From outside Japan	What do people in Vietnam think about Japanese people residing in Vietnam? What are people's impressions of Japan? What seems strange, and what is amazing to them?

## Discussion

### *Image of local residents about Vietnam*

Despite the drastically increased Vietnamese diaspora in Japan, very few studies have explored the image local residents have regarding Vietnam and Vietnamese people. This survey has shed some light on what the local residents think about a particular country, Vietnam, and its people. The results indicate that local residents have a more rounded perspective and a better understanding regarding some topics such as the Vietnam war, Vietnamese food and sightseeing. Moreover, their image about Vietnamese people is predominantly positive. Many people think of Vietnam as a country related to the “Vietnam war” which ended in 1975, or as a developing country with some successful economic reforms (Table 4). Taking into account the high mean age of the participants (Table 2), this positive image has likely been shaped by historical information originating from the media or movies about the war. In terms of culture, Vietnam is perceived as having streets crowded with motorbikes, traditional Aodai dress or Pho rice noodles. This image could originate from more recent information via the media or some actual travel experiences. The image of Vietnamese people as friendly, hardworking, diligent, serious, and cheery could come from a recent actual encounter or exchange with Vietnamese residents. This positive image is likely related to the fact that most Vietnamese in Yoshinogawa City are young technical trainees with non-permanent resident status living sparsely among the Japanese population, a situation that could prevent potential cultural conflict and troubles. This survey’s results show that local residents of Yoshinogawa City have high awareness of cultural diversity and they want to have more intercultural exchange with Vietnamese as well as other foreign groups (Table 6). It is also evident that local residents have an appreciation and sympathy towards foreign culture as some stated that Vietnam is a Japan-friendly country, or as specified by one individual “Vietnamese are emotionally similar to Japanese”.

The above results share some similarity with the data from a lecture series entitled “Introduction about Vietnamese language and culture”, which was conducted at the end of 2019 at Tokushima University (data not published). As most of the participants were over 50 years old, their image of Vietnam is either related to the war or to their experiences of recent travel to Vietnam. Some participants also have experience of teaching Japanese either inside Japan or abroad, and thus are better able to describe the characteristics of Vietnamese people.

In a different context, a study conducted in Himeji City has shown different results. At the time of study in 2001, Himeji City had 10,450 foreign residents, constituting 2.15% of the city’s population and almost double the ratio of 1.2% for the country as a whole. Himeji, a community with a high concentration of Vietnamese immigrants and thus higher interpersonal contact, has shown that the image of Vietnamese people could become more negative. Instead of showing sympathy or compassion with the foreign residents, the local residents in a different timing and context demonstrated a certain level of prejudice and even

discriminatory views [6]. The difference in attitude between these results could be explained by speculating that the local residents in Himeji two decades ago were more reserved with regards to intercultural issues and were more resistant to foreigners. Another explanation could be based on the difference in foreign population size, as well as the type of visa (three-year workers versus permanent immigrants, respectively). However, more evidence might be needed to confirm this speculation.

#### *Future needs of local residents in terms of intercultural exchange*

The results of this survey have emphasized the importance of mutual understanding and respect for co-living and prosperity of the local community. The participants also highlighted their desire to gain more intercultural exposure as well as further insights into multiculturalism in order to better support foreigners. These needs are consistent with the results of a recent survey in Tokushima Prefecture, which specified that Japanese residents should be cultivated by improving their awareness of multiculturalism in order to better understand the situation of foreigners [7].

A survey targeting Japanese residents in Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture [6], where 2.88% of the population are foreigners, has shown that cultural and language differences happened to be or sometimes will become an obstacle for mutual understanding. Local residents want to have more multicultural experiences such as watching traditional performances, cooking events, foreign language classes, etc. It is necessary for local residents to teach foreigners to be aware of the rules, to make daily greetings to each other, and to be aware about differences in terms of multicultural lifestyle and habit. These findings from a locality with a high ratio of foreigners may be useful for communities like Yoshinogawa City in the future. In addition, although Hamamatsu has a higher foreign resident ratio compared to Yoshinogawa, both surveys have identified very similar needs for multicultural events such as traditional performances or language classes. In the present survey, besides organizing Japanese language classes during the weekend, some participants have mentioned the need to learn foreign languages in order to communicate with foreigners or for the purpose of travelling. Some participants have also mentioned experiences of organizing traditional performances which have attracted high levels of interest among local residents.

In short, the participants have shown an interest in learning more about Vietnamese culture, what Vietnamese people residing in Japan think about Japan, how Vietnamese people outside Japan see Japan, as well as why they have chosen Japan as a destination for work and study. Other issues of interest include the image of Vietnamese towards Japanese people, the cultural differences, and what kind of things should be overcome for desirable coexistence in Tokushima. Moreover, are there any trouble that they must face during their life in Japan and what was the solution.

#### *The role of local residents in intercultural exchange*

In the current survey the participants have shown their diversified background, with the cohort including

government officers, company employees, self-employees, part-timers, housewives, and retirees. Throughout this range, the participants seem to share a similar interest towards interaction with foreign residents. According to the interactions during the lecture, government employees seems to be more interested in policy making and implementation for foreigners, company employees tend to focus on how to manage their foreign trainees, association members tend to be interested in delivering events and language classes, etc. Consequently, this survey may imply that each local resident may have an interest in exchange with different types of foreigners, namely technical trainees, students, company employees, language teachers, the families of Japanese residents, self-employed individuals, etc. On the other hand, each type of foreign resident has its own characteristics and needs; for example, during the lecture, a participant who was a private owner shared that she wanted to learn about Vietnamese culture and language because she expects to receive trainees from Vietnam and she wants to support their adaptation to the best of her ability. In this case, the participant has a specific need from the perspective of a business owner who wants to support her trainees.

Despite their various perspectives and needs, the local residents seem to play a very important role in the integration of foreigners to local life. Figure 4 proposes a theoretical map of local residents' role in intercultural exchange with foreigners. Although the foreign residents tend to go to public bodies for administrative procedures, they visit these bodies when having problems or trouble in daily life. A recent study on civil supporting systems for foreign residents in Tokushima Prefecture has shown that the current services are inadequate given the diversity of needs and consequently foreigners tend to solve their own problems through their own network [7]. In this scenario, individual contact between local residents and foreign residents appears to be particularly important in supporting the foreigners to solve their problems without causing trouble or resulting in wrong decisions based on misleading information or misunderstandings. Given the small scope of this survey, the specific roles and needs of each group of local residents with regards to intercultural exchange with foreign citizens could not be analyzed. In addition, it has not been possible to provide any information about troubles or negative aspects of the relationship between local residents and foreigners.

Local residents in Yoshinogawa City have demonstrated high levels of awareness and curiosity with regards to advancing their understanding about multiculturalism, but it is still really difficult for them to capture the reality of the problems and needs of foreign residents. It is a challenge for local communities to prepare for potential problems and problem-solving skills with foreigners. Local residents, as individual volunteers or as members of local associations, are already active in intercultural exchange activities. They could be involved with foreigners more effectively, if government, local associations or companies were to make more efforts and introduce more systems for supporting community development and revitalization. A further challenge for local residents is increased awareness of differences in the language, culture, and

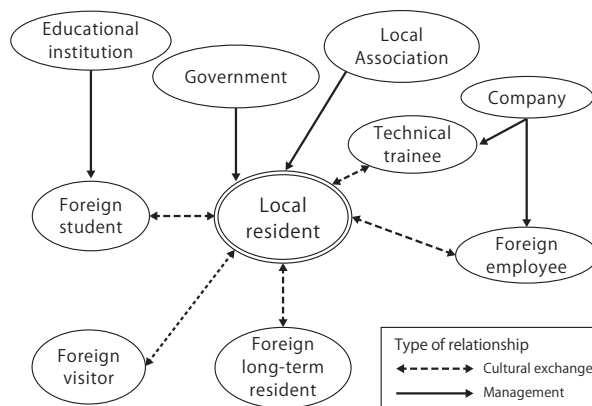


Figure 4. Local residents' role in intercultural exchange

customs of foreign residents and ensuring they can live together as members of the community. Local residents also need to be conscious of their linkage to the government, organizations, and companies in the locality.

#### *Limitations and future directions*

The results of this small-scale survey must be interpreted carefully as it has been conducted in a particular geographic locality of Japan with a limited number of participants, thus potentially not giving an accurate picture. The high mean age of the participants may also have produced some bias. The cross-sectional data and exploratory nature of this survey could pose the necessity for larger scale, not only to target diversified geographic localities but also to target a larger sample size which is representative of all age groups and backgrounds. Moreover, rather than a cross-sectional survey, a longitudinal, participatory action research could be designed to target different urban and rural areas and different foreign groups based on an action initiative among the local residents. Future studies may also investigate issues such as whether the good intercultural understanding could contribute to reducing problems of co-existing with foreign residents, the promotion of co-existence for regional revitalization, and how academic institutions could help with this process. Furthermore, this survey poses a need for future studies targeting Vietnamese people and other foreigner groups with regards to their image of Japan and Japanese people, along with their needs for international exchange and ways in which their integration can be further supported.

## Conclusion

The lecture "Introduction about Vietnam's history, culture and health care" has successfully triggered the curiosity and interest of local residents towards intercultural issues. The participants have shown some

interest towards Vietnam as a country which has become important to Japan as an economic and international exchange partner. The increasing number of Vietnamese residents in the local context has highlighted the need for intercultural exchange and mutual understanding. Local residents have an awareness that intercultural understanding could help foreign residents to adapt; accordingly, they have demonstrated their positive mentality and their willingness to learn about intercultural issues. They are willing to attend more lectures about Vietnam and also about other emerging countries. In order to broaden local residents' perspectives on intercultural issues, there is a need to provide lectures on multicultural topics with diversified contents as well as to create more exchange events between local residents and foreigners.

Local residents play a vital role in promoting an intercultural co-living environment and supporting the integration of foreign residents. Furthermore, the efforts of local government, public bodies, associations, companies, and academia can strengthen this role and facilitate more productive and effective intercultural exchange. Implementing a pilot capacity building project in a small community could serve as a model for replication, while academic institutions could contribute to capacity building of local residents by providing lifelong learning programs on multiculturalism, creating extension lectures and foreign language courses, providing visiting lecturers, introducing international exchange projects, and conducting studies on the relevant issues in collaboration with local communities. As a final point, involving international students in these activities could also enhance their understanding of Japanese culture.

## Acknowledgements

The authors express special thanks to the Yoshinogawa municipality office and the participants for their support and contribution to this survey.

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## 要旨

日本の外国人居住者の増加は、地域活性化の発展に貢献する要素である。地域住民は、外国人住民との地域共生において重要な役割を果たしている。本調査では、徳島県内の小規模な地方自治体である吉野川市において、地域住民に対してベトナムのイメージを調査し、異文化理解についての意識と異文化交流のための将来のニーズを分析した。本調査結果は、異文化交流の今後の課題と、持続的な地域発展のための生涯学習の促進を通じて地域住民の役割を強化する方法を示した。