

*The Trend of Betonamujinron Research in Japan:
Implications for Mutual Cultural Understanding and Policy*

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The Asian Political and International Studies Association Annual Congress 2023
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The increasing number of foreign residents in Japan is a positive factor contributing to the country's sustainability, but it also poses policy and social challenges arising from inadequate mutual cultural understanding. Notably, with the trends of labor migration and international student mobility, the Vietnamese population in Japan has rapidly increased ten-fold from over 44,000 in 2011 to 450,000 in 2021 (MOJ, 2021), becoming the second most populous foreigner group. In Japan, there seems to be an increased interest in researching about Vietnam and Vietnamese people. We conducted a rapid literature review to investigate this trend by searching Google Scholar using relevant keywords for the period from 1965 to 2023. Our results revealed a clear increasing trend in the number of publications conducted in Japan related to "betonamujinron," or the field of study that focuses on the characteristics, culture, customs, and values of Vietnamese people. We found that the trend has been particularly prominent over the last decade. Our research suggests that there is an increasing interest in Japan in understanding foreign characteristics and culture. This trend can help promote mutual cultural understanding and pave the way for more effective policies that can address the challenges associated with the growing diversity of Japan's population.

Keywords: Betonamujinron, Vietnamese, Japan, Cross-Cultural Awareness, Diversity, Publication, Technical Trainee, International Student, Study in Japan

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Introduction

The study of cultural characteristics, customs, and values of Japanese people has a long history in Japan. Nihonjinron, is a theory, writing, or report that discusses Japanese people, refers to the theories that explores the unique qualities of Japanese culture and society (Nomura Research Institute, 1978). The term was first used in the 1970s, and since then, nihonjinron has become an influential field of study in Japan, shaping the way Japanese people understand themselves and how they interact with the rest of the world. Research on nihonjinron has been conducted extensively in Japan for several decades, with various studies exploring different aspects of Japanese culture and society. For example, some studies have focused on the concept of *amae* (the idea of indulging in a dependent relationship), while others have examined the role of group harmony (*wa*) in Japanese society.

In contrast, "Gaikokujinron" (foreigner theory) is a term in Japanese that can be translated as "discourse on foreigners" or "theory of foreigners." It refers to a body of literature and intellectual debate in Japan that has been concerned with the role and place of foreigners in Japanese society. The term "gaikokujinron" was first used in the late 19th century, during a period of rapid modernization and opening of Japan to the world. It was a time when Japan was trying to come to terms with the fact that it was no longer a completely isolated island nation, and that it needed to engage with other countries and cultures to modernize and compete in the world. At the time, "gaikokujinron" referred to a debate about whether Japan should embrace foreign ideas and technologies, or whether it should maintain its traditional isolationism and cultural purity. Over time, however, the term has come to encompass a broader range of issues related to foreigners in Japan, including questions of immigration, integration, cultural exchange, and discrimination. Today, "gaikokujinron" remains an active and sometimes contentious topic in Japan. On the one hand, there are those who argue that Japan should be more open to immigration and cultural diversity in order to address its aging population and labor shortages. On the other hand, there are those who believe that Japan's unique culture and traditions must be preserved and protected from the influence of foreign ideas and people. Overall, "gaikokujinron" reflects Japan's ongoing struggle to balance its desire for global engagement and economic competitiveness with its strong sense of cultural identity and national pride. Over the time, there are also fields of study that focus on specific foreign populations in Japan, such as *chuugokujinron* (the study of Chinese people) (Lee, n.d.; Takahashi, 2010) and *zainichichosenjinron* (the study of Korean people), as well as the other ethnic groups. These domains have gained attention as the number of foreign residents in Japan has increased. Basically, these studies have focused on the cultural differences between these populations and Japanese people, highlighting the challenges of mutual cultural understanding.

Overall, these fields of study have contributed to a better understanding of Japanese culture and society, as well as the experiences of foreign populations in Japan. However, there have also been criticisms of these fields of study for their tendency to generalize and stereotype cultural groups. As Japan becomes increasingly diverse, there is a need for more nuanced and complex understandings of cultural differences and similarities, and more research that goes beyond simple categorizations of cultural groups (Okano & Sugimoto, 2019).

The increasing diversity of Japan's population presents both opportunities and challenges for the country's sustainability. On the one hand, the influx of foreign residents can contribute to economic growth, cultural exchange, and social innovation. On the other hand, inadequate mutual cultural understanding can lead to tensions and exclusion. Considering these

challenges, there is a growing interest in Japan in understanding the characteristics, culture, customs, and values of foreign populations.

Notably, the Vietnamese population in Japan has rapidly increased ten-fold from over 44,000 in 2011 to 450,000 in 2021, becoming the second most populous foreigner group. In this context, there seems to be an increasing interest about Vietnam and Vietnamese people in Japan (Tran & Matsuura, 2020). There seems to be a need in Japan to understand the Vietnamese traits and to develop effective policies that promote mutual understanding and social inclusion.

Conceptual Framework

We designed a conceptual framework to make clear the goals and purpose of this attempt. In Figure 1, we hypothesize that the upcoming trend of *Betonamujinron* has come up from the recent flush of Vietnamese workers and students into Japan during the last decade. The cornerstone for this immigration trend was started since 1990s', after the breakdown of the Soviet bloc causing influence on Vietnam. Labor exporting increasing trend in Vietnam is also coinciding with the growing economic development in Vietnam (World Bank, n.d.). We hypothesize that with the economic development in Vietnam, people become more interested in discovering, experiencing and obtaining external values from abroad, as well as become more capable to finance their experience. As a highly developed country, having favorable labor importing policies, and located in proximity, Japan together with Taiwan and South Korea has become a favorite destination for Vietnamese trainees and students. Influx of foreigners may inflict social issues that induces the need in Japan to study about foreign cultures in order to facilitate social adaptation of foreigners in Japan. This research trend will contribute to better cross-cultural understanding and finally contribute to long-term sustainability of both countries (Figure 1).

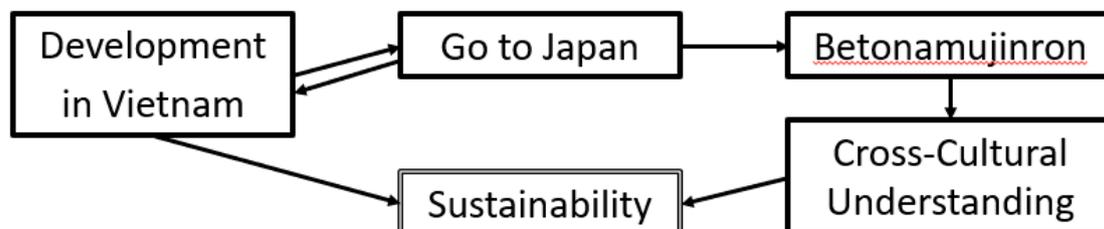


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Our research aimed to investigate: (1) is there a trend of “*betonamujinron*” - an increased interest in researching about Vietnamese people in Japan; and (2) what are the common topics of “*betonamujinron*” over time. Our study tries to confirm the existence of “*betonamujinron*,” to explain some common themes of “*betonamujinron*,” as well as to fill the gap in the literature about the common trends of cultural anthropology research in Japan. Our findings can contribute to a better understanding of the factors driving the trend and can inform future research on cultural diversity and social inclusion in Japan.

Method

We conducted both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate this trend of “*betonamujinron*.” For qualitative analysis, we conducted a websearch on Google Scholar for

the keyword “betonamujin” (Vietnamese person in Japanese) for the period 1960~2023 (until 8th May 2023) to record the number of papers published in Japanese language per year. The keyword should appear in the title or in the full text of the paper. We recorded the number of publications based on the year of publication.

For qualitative analysis, we conducted content analysis by record the first title hit by the search for each year, translating the title from Japanese into English by Google translation. We conducted coding the titles and calculating the word frequency and co-occurrence by using KH Coder (KH Coder, n.d.) and word cloud generator. Inclusion criteria: the first title hit from the search on the keyword “betonamujin” in Japanese in a specific year during 1960-2023 period. The process followed the systematic review framework based on PRISMA (Page et al., 2021).

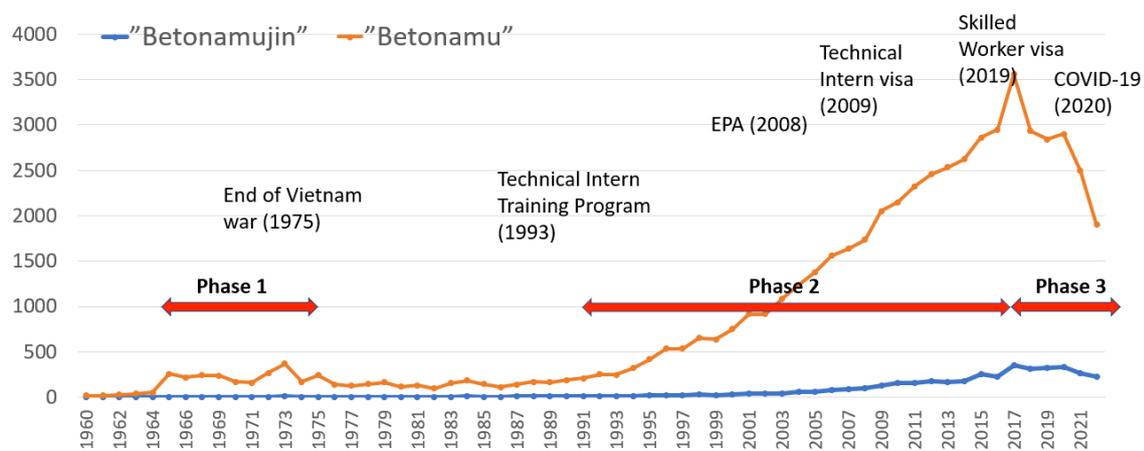


Figure 2. Number of Japanese papers by the keyword “Betonamujin” (Vietnamese) vs “Betonamu”(Vietnam)

In Figure 2, we observe an increasing trend of publications related to Vietnam, especially Vietnamese people. The marks emphasis the events that may influence human mobility. From Figure 2, we can clearly observe three phases of development. Phase 1 started with rising in the number of papers about Vietnam during the period from 1964 to the end of Vietnam war in 1975. Phase 2 started from around 1991 until the peak in 2017, marking a drastic increase in the number of papers. Phase 3 started from 1998 onwards, marking the decline of the number of papers.

The number of Vietnamese individuals residing in Japan has shown a consistent increase over the years. It started with 4.39 thousand in 1986 and reached a peak of 476.35 thousand in 2022. The decision to migrate to Japan may not be solely driven by economic factors but influenced by other social, cultural, or personal considerations as well. The increase in the Vietnamese residing in Japan appear to be influenced by factors, such as immigration policies, labor market opportunities, or community networks etc.

Table 1 shows the progressive increase of number of “betonamujinron” papers along with number of Vietnamese residing in Japan, and the theme patterns of the papers. We picked up from the search a total of 64 papers, all published in Japanese and written by Japanese authors. Most of the publications were journal articles, but a few were book chapters, conference proceedings, and other types of publications.

Table 1. Number of Vietnamese in Japan, number of “betonamujinron” papers and the themes of content

	<i>Vietnamese in Japan (1,000)</i>	<i>"Vietna -mese</i>	<i>"Viet -nam"</i>	<i>First title picked. (translated by Google translator)</i>	<i>Theme</i>
1960		1	17	About the Family Law of the Republic of Vietnam	Governance
1961		1	20	About the recent prizhevi	War
1962		0	27		
1963		0	39		
1964	0.099	0	52		
1965		5	255	Vietnamese and Japanese--Letters from the National Front for Liberation	War
1966		5	214	Basic Concept of the Vietnam Problem	War
1967		3	238	Seeing the North Bombed Country--Vietnamese Smiles and Beliefs	War
1969	0.352	3	237	Sino-Vietnamese Relations Historical Overview	Diplomacy
1970		4	164	How to Control the Military by J.K. Galbraith	War
1971		3	155	The Current Situation and Historical Background of the Vietnamese Problem in Cambodia	Diplomacy
1972		3	265	The Tet Offensive as a major turning point in the Vietnam War	War
1973		11	360	What Victory Means for Vietnamese	War
1974	1.087	5	167	The World-Historical Significance of the Korean War: The First Round of the US vs. Sino-Soviet War	War
1975		5	240	Fatherland Liberation Day in Prison--Japan for Vietnamese Students	War
1976		2	137	Japan's policy toward Indochina during the Pacific War: Two peculiarities	Diplomacy
1977		5	122	The Current Situation and Challenges of Vietnam's Domestic and Diplomacy	Diplomacy
1978		3	141	An Unlucky Nation, an Unlucky Citizen--A Reporter's Mistake--Reading "Battlefield Village" with a Vietnamese Student	War
1979		5	161	The same writing & race the same issues	Relation w J
1980		4	110	O-Hayagoe on the Indochina Peninsula - Focusing on local reports -	Diplomacy
1981		6	125	Utility of "reversal" in Vietnamese	Relation w J
1982		6	90	Attempts to Cooperate with Asian & Vietnamese Residents in Japan in the Late Meiji Era: Regarding the "ToA Domei Kai" or the "Asia Peace Friendship Association"	
1983		3	154	Socialist Vietnam's Relations with ASEAN	Diplomacy
1984	3.911	9	178	Today's Vietnamese Law and Vietnamese Legal Awareness	Governance
1985		5	142	Criticism/Introduction> Kenji Tsuchiya and Takashi Shiraishi eds.	Relation w J
1986	4.388	2	108	On the Formation of Modern Vietnamese Literature	Literature
1987		8	132	The End of the Movement for Visiting the East by Vietnamese Residents in Japan -1- Concerning the Deportation of Ban Pezhu	Relation w J
1988	4.763	9	162	Formation of Vietnamese Villages: Villages	Vietnam History
1989		9	156	Responses of Japanese and French Authorities to the Toyu Movement	Relation w J

	<i>Vietnamese in Japan (1,000)</i>	<i>"Vietna -mese</i>	<i>"Viet -nam"</i>	<i>First title picked. (translated by Google translator)</i>	<i>Theme</i>
1990	6.233	9	181	The Imperial Consciousness of the French People in 1945: Newspaper Reports on the Syrian Turmoil and the August Revolution in Vietnam	French era
1991		12	199	Overseas Chinese Policy in French Colonial Vietnam: Focusing on Cochinchina	French era
1992	6.883	10	241	The Impact of the Vietnam War on the South Korean Economy: Forming the Foundation for "NIEs-like Development" in South Korea	Korea
1993		11	236	The End of the Vietnam War and Southeast Asia: Reorganization of the Regional International System	Diplomacy
1994	8.229	13	309	In memory of Dr. Masahiro Kawahara	
1995	9.099	19	400	The Current State of Cultural Heritage in Vietnam and the Ideals of International Cooperation	Diplomacy
1996	10.228	20	517	A Study on the Composition of Villages and Housing Forms of the White Tai People in Northern Vietnam	Social Awareness
1997	11.897	23	514	Residential situation of Vietnamese residents in Kobe City: Changes before and after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake	Social Awareness
1998	13.505	31	620	Guidance to enhance analogy of Chinese for Vietnamese learners of Japanese	Japanese language
1999	14.898	25	613	Cross-Border Families: Networks and Living Strategies of Vietnamese Residents in Japan	Social Awareness
2000	16.908	27	724	Vietnam Independence Movement and Japan during World War II	War
2001	19.14	44	870	His Helicobacter pylori infection in Vietnamese and Japanese, comparative observation of background gastric mucosa	Health
2002	21.05	45	869	Fact-finding Survey on Employment and Livelihood of Vietnamese Permanent Residents: Summary of Survey Results	Employment
2003	23.853	45	1040	Premodern Korean View of Vietnam	Korea
2004	26.018	57	1180	Life Culture and Communication: Japan and Vietnam	Japan
2005	28.932	60	1320	Awareness survey on work and values of Vietnamese employees	Social Awareness
2006	32.485	81	1480	The adaptation process of Vietnamese living in Japan: Relationship between experience of prejudice and culture of origin	Social Awareness
2007	36.86	89	1550	Practical Report on Pronunciation Class for Vietnamese Learners	Japanese language
2008	41.136	95	1640	Social Awareness of Vietnamese People: Focusing on Surveys on Rural Living Conditions	Social Awareness
2009	41	132	1920	Perceptions and Learning Strategies of Motivation and Foreign Language Anxiety: A Comparison of Vietnamese and Chinese Learners	Japanese language
2010	41.781	161	1990	Japanese Language Education Issues for Vietnamese Nurse Candidates and Care Worker Candidates	Japanese language
2011	44.69	154	2170	Awareness of University Students' Career Environment in Hanoi, Vietnam	Social Awareness
2012	52.367	175	2280	"Settlement" Process of "Vietnamese Refugees"	Refugees
2013	72.256	165	2370	Japanese Interpersonal Communication Schema by Vietnamese Students	Japanese language

	<i>Vietnamese in Japan (1,000)</i>	<i>"Vietna-mese"</i>	<i>"Viet-nam"</i>	<i>First title picked. (translated by Google translator)</i>	<i>Theme</i>
2014	99.865	181	2440	About the 6th National Congress of Nursing Science in Vietnam: Background focusing on the education of Vietnamese EPA candidates who came to Japan	Nursing trainee
2015	146.956	253	2610	Career development of Vietnamese government-sponsored science students	International student
2016	199.99	229	2720	40 Years of Conflict: The Transformation of Political Conflict between the Vietnamese Government and Vietnamese in America	Diplomacy
2017	262.405	348	3210	A Study on the Sustainability of Japanese Language Schools in Vietnam: Focusing on the Dong Du Japanese School	Japanese language
2018	330.835	313	2620	Consideration of Technical Intern Trainees' Post-Return Careers: Through Interviews with Returned Vietnamese Technical Intern Trainees	Technical Trainees
2019	411.968	323	2520	Survey on Employment Status of Returned Vietnamese Technical Intern Trainees	Technical Trainees
2020	448.053	338	2560	Coverage of the Comprehensive Insurance System for Foreign Technical Intern Trainees: Two Cases of Underage Vietnamese Women Who Found Out About a Congenital Disease After Entering Japan	Technical Trainees
2021	432.934	266	2230	Thinking by Vietnamese Japanese learners	Japanese language
2022	476.346	222	1680	A case study of the use of Han Yue in reading comprehension of the national exam questions for care workers by Vietnamese caregivers	Nursing trainee
2023		54	381	A Trial of Teaching Kanji for the Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students in Vietnam	Japanese language

These results revealed a clear increasing trend in the number of publications related to "betonamujinron" in Japan, with a marked increase over the last decade. The majority of the publications covered topics related to culture and society, followed by language and education, history and politics, and economics and business. The table provides a column indicating the theme or category of the selected titles, coded by the authors. The themes include governance, war, diplomacy, literature, social awareness, Japanese language, health, employment, Vietnam history, French era, Korea, refugees, nursing trainee, international student, technical intern trainees, and others. It appears that in the Phase I, the papers show the themes of war, diplomacy, and history, while Phase II turns into refugees, social awareness, Japanese language education, healthcare etc.

Figure 3 shows the word cloud generated by the first title for each year picked from the search for "betonamujin," which likely provides a visual representation of the recurring themes or prominent keywords associated with the selected titles. By analyzing the word cloud, we can gain insights into the predominant subjects and concepts discussed in the chosen articles or topics throughout the years. The size and prominence of each word in the word cloud would reflect its frequency or significance in the titles. This visualization would offer a concise summary, allowing us to quickly identify the recurring themes or areas of focus within the context of "betonamujin." It could serve as a useful tool for researchers or individuals interested in exploring the evolving landscape of topics related to "betonamujin" over time.

discrimination and exclusion. The findings of our literature review have important implications for trainee and international student policies in Japan. Specifically:

- Trainee policies: Many Vietnamese people come to Japan as technical trainees, and our review suggests that these trainees face significant challenges related to cultural differences, language barriers, healthcare and social isolation. To promote greater mutual cultural understanding and social inclusion, it is important for trainee policies to provide more support for cultural exchange and language learning. This could include language classes, cultural exchange programs, and opportunities for trainees to interact with Japanese people outside of their work environment.
- International student policies: Vietnamese students are one of the largest groups of international students in Japan, and our review suggests that they face similar challenges related to cultural differences and social isolation. To promote greater mutual cultural understanding and social inclusion, it is important for international student policies to provide more support for cultural exchange and language learning. This could include language classes, cultural exchange programs, and opportunities for students to interact with Japanese people outside of their academic environment.

More broadly, our findings suggest that trainee and international student policies should be developed with a greater awareness of cultural diversity and the challenges of mutual cultural understanding. Policies that focus solely on the technical skills or academic achievements of trainees and students may overlook the importance of cultural exchange and social inclusion, which are critical for promoting greater mutual understanding and creating a more inclusive society.

Conclusion

The increasing number of publications on "betonamujinron" reflects a heightened interest in understanding the Vietnamese population in Japan. This trend signifies a growing recognition of the importance of cultural understanding in a diverse society and can guide policy development. The rise in research on Vietnam and the Vietnamese people can be attributed to labor migration and international student mobility trends. This highlights the need for further research to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of the Vietnamese population in Japan and to develop tailored policies to meet their specific needs. The findings of this study contribute to promoting diversity and inclusion in Japan and underscore the importance of ongoing research to inform effective policies that address the challenges associated with the country's growing population diversity.

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