

THE DYNAMICS OF INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS IN JAPAN UNDER THE INDUSTRIAL TRAINING AND TECHNICAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

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Abstract Attracted by Japan's prosperity and motivated by desire for gaining higher income, many Indonesians have been migrating to Japan in increasing numbers since the mid-1990s. Different from other destination countries, most of Indonesian workers who came to Japan is under the program called "Industrial Training and Technical Internship Program" with the main objective to get the use of actual work to obtain new knowledge and technical skills. In fact, it is widely believed that many of them are just treated to fulfill Japan's labor shortage as cheap manual labor. On the other hand, as Japan is extremely different from Indonesia in many aspects, making life in Japan is not easy for Indonesian. However, it is considered that, in spite of many problems in the implementation of the current 'training program' of Japan, as long as the significant difference remains in employment opportunity and earning between Japan and Indonesia, the efforts of dispatching more Indonesians to Japan is still an important policy for both countries.

Key words: Indonesian workers, Japan, Industrial Training and Technical Internship Program

1. Introduction

Japan is one of the destination countries for Indonesians in search of employment. Although the number is quite small compared to other destination countries, it can be predicted that the number of Indonesians migrating to Japan will continue to grow in the future. At any events, because of the significant different in earning and employment opportunity between two countries will remain for the foreseeable future for Indonesia as a sending country. Moreover, increasingly internationalized Japanese companies also raises new opportunities and inflow of workers from Indonesia to work in Japan. It is because Japan is also one of the important leading economic partners of Indonesia. In the future, it is widely believed that the contour of between Indonesia and Japan economic relations will be increasingly influenced by the flows of people between the two countries.

In a more competitive global environment, the mutual understanding the issue and the prospect of foreign migrant workers are very important for reaping optimal benefits. Indonesia, as the country that has sent large number of international migrant workers, should pay substantial attention to this issue. Therefore, study on Indonesian migrant workers in Japan is of great interest and importance. This is especially true considering lack of dedicated study on this issue. This paper aims to describe the Japan's industrial training and technical internship program and the condition of Indonesian trainees who coming under that program. The bulk of empirical data in this paper is drawn from a field study on Indonesians trainee in Mie Prefecture Japan. Primarily, the study includes a questionnaire survey as well as extended interviews with key informants, field observation and related literature study.

2. International Labor Migration in Indonesia

From historical point of view, international labor migration in Indonesia has been on going process since very

long time ago. According to Bandiono (2000), it began with the period when there was a wave of migrants from mainland Asian, was followed by the coming of the Europeans, and then by the wave of Indonesia to Madagascar [1]. In early 1800, it is noted that many Indonesians working at plantation and construction sites in Singapore and Malaysia. This migration practiced either spontaneous or ruled by Dutch or Japanese government during that colonial era. After independent period in 1945, international migration of Indonesian continued spontaneously and in 1970, the government of Indonesia put sending its labor as a strategic national development policy [2]. Since then, for many Indonesians working in abroad is not a new phenomenon and is seen as a significant socio cultural change in Indonesian's society today.

Saudi Arabia and Malaysia are the two dominant destination countries for Indonesian to find a job in abroad, followed by Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Brunei. Most of them were sent to these countries by the Indonesian government as semi-skilled and unskilled workers. They were sent to that country to meet the demand for many types of job. For example in Malaysia, most of Indonesian workers were engaged in plantation area, while the rest engaged in construction, manufacturing and certain service sector. In Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore most of the Indonesian workers engaged in 3 D (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) type of jobs such as domestic maids, construction workers, manufacturing, marine and service industries. Similarly, in the Middle East countries, such as Saudi Arabia, UEA, Qatar and Kuwait, most of the Indonesian workers there work as the domestic helpers [3].

2.1 Indonesian Workers in Japan

Despite the bursting of the "bubble economy" in 1991, the rapid economic development from the 1970's to the 1980's made Japan an economic superpower. This condition created

the idea among people, especially from so-called “Third World” countries, that Japan is a rich land of opportunity. Moreover, many foreigners have been coming to Japan since then. Most of them came to Japan to find job opportunities, earn more money or gain experience. As most Japanese moved into white color jobs, this condition then created a new demand for laborers in blue-collar industries. The construction, manufacture and service industries have been employing foreigners in great number ever since.

Indonesian migrant workers in Japan can be said to be the “new comers” of the “new comers”, having arrived relatively late in the new comer trends of immigration since 1980s, and being still in small in number in comparison with the other dominant national groups. However, their numbers are expected to rise in the future as Indonesian workers are in general preferred by Japanese employers because of their docility, eagerness, and patience in carrying out hard work. Additionally, it costs less to recruit Southeast Asian workers than to hire other nationals, and Indonesian workers are willing to accept jobs whose condition may be unacceptable to other foreign workers like the South American *nikkeijin* [4].

Historically, the first stage of migration of Indonesian workers to Japan came about when The Japanese government started to accept Indonesian as trainees (*kenshusei*) in 1982, in proportion to promote international cooperation and extend assistance to developing countries and in response to the rapid postwar expansion of the Japanese economy and accompanying labor shortages. Since then, the number of Indonesian workers deployed in Japan increased year by year, especially after the training period was extended to a maximum of 3 years in 1993.

Table.1. Number of Indonesian in Japan by Status of Resident, 2000-2007

Resident Status	2000	2002	2004	2006	2007
A. General Status	953	1,148	1,740	787	430
Entertainer	1,385	1,806	1,943	1,281	963
Temporary visitor	1,448	1,607	1,651	1,710	1,869
College student	4,506	3,813	4,189	4,407	5,099
Trainee	5,518	6,426	6,211	6,639	6,390
Designated Activities	1,039	1,384	1,337	1,509	1,590
Dependent	462	792	1,404	2,034	2,436
Dependent of Per.Resident	1,877	2,335	2,592	3,009	3,129
Japanese Spouse	973	1,183	1,310	1,588	1,691
Permanent Resident	920	1,177	1,513	1,894	2,053
Others	19,346	21,671	23,890	24,858	25,620
Sub Total					
B. Seafarers	2,724	2,730	2,872	3,146	3,062
Seamen	317	347	473	547	661
C. Over stay	4,947	6,393	7,246	6,926	6,354
Total	27,334	31,141	34,481	35,477	35,717

Source: Japan’s Ministry of Justice, 2008

Based on data from Japan’s Ministry of Justice in 2007, the number of Indonesians in Japan is placed at the rank 9th (25,620 people) accounting for about 1.2 percent of the total number of foreigners in Japan. The dominant visas statuses of Indonesian in Japan are ‘trainee’ and ‘designated activities’ (that is, 2nd and 3rd year trainees), which account for 11,459 individuals, the second highest number among the total foreign trainees in Japan (10.8%) in 2007. Moreover, since 2000 the

number of Indonesians in Japan with status of resident as “spouse or child of Japanese resident or *nikkeijin*”, has also been increasing significantly, from 1,877 individuals in 2000, increased became 3,129 individuals in 2007 (Table.1).

For many Indonesians, Japan is one of the most attractive destinations because it offers a relatively high salary. To be able to work in Japan is also can be a personal pride for many Indonesians as it is often associated with higher social status and reputation in the current Indonesian society. Working in Japan is clearly has a different image for Indonesians than those in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, where most Indonesians are employed in domestic work, logging factory and plantations. Therefore, it is understandable that many experts have predicted that the number of Indonesian in Japan will remain increasing in the future.

2.2 Coming to Japan as Trainee

Indonesia began to send their workers officially into Japan in early 1993 under the new program called “*The Industrial Training and Technical Internship Program*”, after a cooperation agreement was signed by Directorate General of Training and Productivity Development Department, Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration of Indonesia and Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (JITCO). Through this program, after finishing up to 3 years training program in small and middle size industries in Japan, the trainees are expected to be able to use their technology, skills and knowledge that they obtained in their host country. Moreover, most of Indonesian trainees who coming to Japan are sponsored through an organization called IMM Japan (Association for International Manpower Development of Medium and Small Enterprises, Japan)

Table. 2. Number of JITCO-Supported Trainees by Country of Origin in 2007

Country of Origin	Number	Percentage	Comparison with Previous Year
China	58,707	81.8	5.2
Indonesia	3,397	4.7	-6.6
Vietnam	3,379	4.7	20.9
The Philippines	3,351	4.7	8.7
Thailand	1,707	2.4	3.0
Mongolia	239	0.3	-4.0
Myanmar	231	0.3	128.7
Malaysia	111	0.2	-47.9
Laos	77	0.1	37.5
Other	536	0.8	-33.1
Total	71,762	100.0	5.1

Source: JITCO White Paper 2008

Since a revision of the trainee program has been released in 1992, the number of Indonesian workers in Japan, classified as trainee, has been modest but increasing-from 1,438 people in 1995 to 5,972 people in 1998. By the beginning of 2000, the total number of Indonesian deployed to Japan by that program had reached 12,396, including the 4,968 who have completed the program, the 6,163 who were currently enrolled, and the 1,265 who had returned to Indonesia without completing the program for various reasons [5]. According to JITCO Report

2008, the number of Indonesian trainees supported by JITCO in 2007 compare to previous year was shown trend of decreasing – 6,6 percent at level 3.397, comprising 4.7 percent of nationally [6]. This was only one-fifty of the Chinese figure, but higher than Vietnamese (2.795), The Philippines (3.083) and Thailand (1.658).

3. Keywords on Japan Industrial Training and Technical Internship Program

According to JITCO (2007), “Industrial Training Program” is designed to secure the “transfer of technology, skills, and knowledge of Japan’s Industry as a mean of contributing to the development of the human and industrial resources of others countries, particularly developing countries. In order to ensure these objectives are fulfilled, corporate plans for the accepting trainees must meet the following conditions:

1. The technology, skills, and/or knowledge that the trainee is to obtain in Japan must not be of the type that could be obtained mostly through the repetition of simple work.
2. The trainee is expected to engage in a job requiring the technology, skills, and/or knowledge obtained in Japan after returning to his or her country of nationality or habitual residence.
3. The trainee must be at least 18 years of age.
4. It must be impossible or difficult for the trainee to obtain the desired technology, skills, and/or knowledge in the country where he or she resident.

Meanwhile, “Technical Internship Program” is designed as a training system of broader cooperation with transfer of more practical technology, skills and knowledge to developing countries and with the cultivation of human resource to lead their economic advancement. This program concerns practical of the same category of skills and at the same time as in the regular training.

Table.3 General Outline of Industrial Training and Technical Internship Program: Indonesian Case

4 Months Pre Departure Training	Entering into Japan Trainees undergo 1 year’s training program		Technical Internship 2 years
Learning Japanese language, customs and practices at vocational training centers in Indonesia prior to coming to Japan	Intensive Japanese language Training (4 weeks)	Trainees take mainly part in on-the-job training at small and medium enterprises for 11 months	Trainees take part in technical internships at small and medium enterprises as employees and return to Indonesia after finish 2 years

Source: IMM Japan

Through industrial training and technical internship program, Japan has accepted many foreign trainees, particularly from Asian countries and it is widely believed their presence has been playing important role in Japan’s economic. The trainees, who are highly selected in host country and sent to Japan, are characterized with well-disciplined, enthusiastic

and energetic youths. Most of them are in their 20s, and have graduated from high school or equivalent institution. In order to be able to come to Japan, they have to passed some screening tests whit high competition. The tests are including an ability test (a paper exam which is tests candidate’s basic intelligence, independence and attitude for training), physical test (candidates must complete a three-kilometer run within 15 minutes, do not less than 35 push-ups and 25 sit-ups), interview test, and medical test.

4. Its Reality and Issues

Since released in 1993, many problems and critics have been pointed out related to Japan’s Industrial Training and Technical Internship Program. The main issue is the gap between its goal to achieve ‘transfer technology, knowledge and skills’ through a scheme called ‘international cooperation’ and the real aim of ‘securing labor from a severe labor shortage’ mainly in Japan’s small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Therefore, in order to understand clearly on this issue, this study has distributed 100 questioners and interviewed some Indonesian trainees and technical interns who currently working and living in Japan. They are currently assigned in metal, plastic, electrical machinery, rubber, and marine foods industries in Mie Prefecture.

4.1. The Issue of Menial Labor

Some trainees and technical interns interviewed on this study said that they obtained useful techniques or skills, but most of them complained that they were not gaining any new technical skills. This fact found especially from those who currently engaged in metal, plastic, rubber and food industries, which is the type of job mainly in menial labor, such as digging, filling, cutting, carrying and packaging. Only some of them who currently engaged in electrical machinery said that their jobs are challenging and offering some new skills.

Furthermore, data from survey’s result shows that 78 percent of those questioned stated that the training area, which is, they are assigning to be is not the same as their preference. Only 14 percent answered that they are acquiring an assigned area agreed in broad categories but not in the specific area. Another fact from this survey also found that the majority of Indonesian trainees and technical interns are preferred to receive training in the field of electrical equipment or machinery and automotive sector. This is because these types of training area are offering new technical skill and will be very useful and demandable when they return to Indonesia.

4.2. The Issue of Technical and Skills Transfer

This study also questioned Indonesian migrant workers in Japan related to actual work duties, whether they were gaining new technique, knowledge and skills or not. The result shows that only 18 percent of them feel that they had learned useful new techniques, knowledge and skills, while the remaining 79 percent do not feel gaining new technique and skills. Most of these later respondents stated that it is either because their work duties are too simple or doesn’t need any learned skill. For example, most of the trainees and technical interns who trained in food manufacturing felt no interest in finding such work when return to Indonesia. Moreover, most of them who had

studied engineering in vocational school in Indonesia before coming to Japan, felt disappointed. To some extent, the trainees and technical interns' preference were in most cases ignored and their assignment area determined without concerning their previous background and solely base on Japan's industries demand.

When asked about their working condition after becoming technical interns (2nd and 3rd year), majority of the trainees stated that they still assigned in the same work duties as previous, usually in marginal works or assigned to a small part of the operation. Only 16 percent stated that their work duties are better than in the 1st year of their training program. From the interview also found that the evaluation exam of training achievement, which the trainee must pass in order to continue the program (technical intern), is in reality a mere formality. Some of the technical interns stated that the exam was far a way from their duty area and the questions were too easily to answer.

4.3. Training Stipend and Wages.

Under Japan's industrial training and technical internship program, trainees are allowed to stay in Japan under a "training" visa for 1 year and when they entered 2nd and 3rd year program as technical interns, their visa status changes to be "designated activities". When the trainees hold "designated activities visa", they enter employment relation with their company and so becomes subject to the relevant of Japanese labor law standard. During their stay in Japan, trainees and technical interns also have a right to receive monthly stipend and wages. According to JITCO (2008), it should be note that training stipend are for the actual living expenses, such as food, daily commodities, and cloths of trainees during their stay in Japan. In addition, accepting organization normally pay the costs of round-trip transit to and from Japan, housing expenses, utilities expenses, health and accident insurance, etc.

This study found that, most of Indonesian workers who coming to Japan as trainee in their first year received monthly stipend about Rp.8 million (80.000 Yen). This amount of training stipend actually base on fixed standard regulated by IMM Japan, as accepting organization for Indonesian trainees. Moreover, this amount of monthly stipend was informed to all Indonesian trainees during their preliminary training session in Indonesia. However, after becoming technical interns, the amount of monthly allowance received varies among them and usually those who engaged overtime works receives wages higher than those who worked at company, which doesn't offer overtime works.

From the survey shows that about 68 percent of Indonesian technical interns questioned in this study received monthly salary ranging between Rp.11 million (110.000 Yen) to Rp.12 million (110.000 Yen) and only 12 percent answered that they received ranging between Rp 13 million (130.000 yen) to Rp.14 million (140.000 Yen). This amount of salary actually barely reaches the Japan's legal minimum wages and can be said that the amount is not equivalent to an average Japanese workers. According to Japan Statistical Yearbook (2002), Japanese workers, age 20-29, in the manufacturing sector, approximately received salary 240,000-280,000 yen for male and 190,000-210,000 for female. However, as the current condition

of Japanese Yen to Indonesian Rupiah exchange rates are very high and strong, many of Indonesian interviewed were very happy to receive that amount of salary. A respondent interviewed on this study expressed his feeling by saying that "how come we can get such big amount of money if we were working in Indonesia?"

4.4. Remittances

It is also widely well known that many Indonesian workers working in abroad has given many positive contributions to the nations economy. Apart from reducing the unemployment problem, it also contributes to foreign exchange earnings; a major part is usually remitted to the origin-based family for its basic support and to invest in productive activity to improve the well being of family member [7].

This study also found that most of Indonesian trainees and technical interns in Japan stated that they were able to remit their salary to their family at home. However, the amount of money remitted varies among them. About 66 percent of the respondents (mostly in 2nd and 3rd year program) said that they were able to remit to their family at home ranging from Rp. 8 million (80.000 Yen) to Rp 12 million (120.000 Yen) per one period of sending remittance. These remittances mostly used for the purpose of working capital for establishing small business, paying educational fees for the member of family, and daily family needs. This fact indicates that Indonesian workers in Japan were able to save their income even though their income are very less compare to an average Japanese workers as instructed in the Ministry of Justice guidelines.

5. Conclusion

As mentioned previously at the beginning of this paper, Japan's industrial training and technical internship is designed to give opportunities to young people from mostly developing countries, to learn technology, skills and knowledge of Japan's industry. However, base on answered questioners and interviews on this study clearly found that there are still serious problems on the implementation of this program. The reality is still far from the stated objectives. Many of young Indonesian participated on this program are just treated to fulfill Japan's labor shortage as menial labor. Most of them are also engaged in marginal works or assigned to a small part of the operation, such as cutting, packaging, lifting, digging, etc. The condition continues the same event after they became technical interns from their second year.

Therefore, learning from this small survey finding and many critics on the implementation of current Japan's training and technical internship program, there is a need for both governments to review and give serious attention to this program, with the intention of improving it. On the Japan side, it should be there is a comprehensive monitoring mechanism on the implementation of this program, particularly monitoring at the level of accepting company or industry. The program should be clearly designed to ensure that the trainees and technical interns acquires appropriate technical skills effectively that will be use to both themselves and their countries. Meanwhile, on the Indonesian side, there is a need for the government to facilitate young Indonesian which will be sent to Japan by giving appropriate information, not only

about true condition of training and internship program but also information related to the dynamics of Japanese society, culture, and custom. Furthermore, there is also a need for the Indonesian government to set policies to manage the returning trainees as these returning migrants have many experiences obtained. Benefit can be optimized, and finally, only can be realized when there is serious concern and mutual understanding between both governments, Japan and Indonesia.

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