



Between Business and Intimacy: Mobilities and Challenges of Indonesian Migrant Workers to Japan

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Abstract.

This paper examines transnational labor mobility between Indonesia and Japan through the Technical Intern Training (TIT) program, which will be terminated in 2027 and replaced by the Employment for Skill Development (ESD) program. Although the TIT program was presented as a vehicle for skill transfer to developing countries, it has been widely criticized for exploitative labor practices, limited skill acquisition, and repeated violations of workers' rights. Yet Indonesia continues to send significant numbers of trainees, driven by structural economic inequality and limited domestic employment opportunities.

Drawing on the concept of "migration infrastructure" [Xiang & Lindquist 2014], the study focuses on the role of sending organizations and intermediaries, particularly vocational pre-training institution, Lembaga Pelatihan Kerja (LPK), operated by former trainees. Based on long-term fieldwork in eastern Indonesia, it shows how such institutions build recruitment networks grounded in intimacy and trust. The case of LPK Magokoro illustrates how "second-generation trainees," often children or relatives of earlier migrants, sustain a localized and self-reinforcing cycle of mobility.

While these institutions reproduce debt, training costs, and disciplinary practices, they also generate trust-based ties distinct from purely commercial brokerage. The analysis highlights the embeddedness of the TIT program in local Indonesian society and questions whether forthcoming frameworks such as ESD and SSW can resolve the structural contradictions of transnational labor mobility.

Keywords: Migration Infrastructure, Technical Intern Training (TIT) Program, Indonesia, Japan

1 Introduction

This paper aims to examine the factors which motivates the mobilities of people between Southeast Asia and Japan. Specifically, it will shed light on the "Technical Intern Training (hereafter abbreviated as TIT)" program, which is currently at a turning point in Japan's foreigner acceptance policy, and examine its transition and challenges for the future. In this paper, it focuses particularly on Indonesian technical intern trainees (hereafter referred to as "trainees" as appropriate), who ranks second after Vietnam in

the number of trainees sent out. The TIT program, which will soon be abolished and is being replaced by a new program, "Employment for Skill Development, hereafter referred to as ESD" in 2027, is being used to send out trainees from Indonesia on an ongoing basis so far.

Traditionally, the main factors driving transnational migration have been identified such as push and pull factors based on economic disparities and networks among immigrants, etc. Indeed, the flow of technical intern trainees from Indonesia to Japan can be partially explained by these existing analytical frameworks, but they are not sufficient. Today's migration of people is a complex process that intersects macro factors such as state policies and economic incentives with relatively mezzo and micro factors. With these points in mind, the "Migration Infrastructure" proposed by [Xiang & Lindquist 2014] is a concept that views the factors of migration as constellations consisting of migrants and non-migrants, of human and non-human actors [Xiang & Lindquist 2024: 124]. They stipulated five dimensions of migration infrastructure: the commercial (recruitment intermediaries), the regulatory (state apparatus and procedures for documentation, licensing, training and other purposes), the technological (communication and transport), the humanitarian (NGOs and international organizations), and the social (migrant networks). This paper especially focuses on the sending and intermediary business, which is the first among the 5 dimensions of the migration infrastructure. In particular, based on the field research that have been conducted intermittently since the mid-2010s and literature studies, it examines in detail the situation in which former trainees who have returned from Japan now turned to manage sending and vocational pre-training institutions (*lembaga pelatihan kerja*, hereafter referred to as LPK) in a relatively small capital K city in the Eastern part of Indonesia. As for the sending-out business engaged by former trainees, the previous studies have pointed out such features as "reproduction of an exploitative structure" due to the nature of military-style pre-training and the high training costs and brokerage fees charged to the trainee candidates [Sunai 2019; Yoshida 2021]. In addition to the military-style pre-training and high training costs, however, the case study discussed here reveals a close relationship between the sender and the being sent, which has not been pointed out in previous studies. This paper, thus, will clarify what kind of relationship is being created between the sender and the being sent in the sending program of trainees which conducted by former trainees in a local society in Indonesia, and how it creates a closed circulated flow of technical intern trainees from Indonesia to Japan. And finally, using the Japan's TIT program as an example, we will consider the current status and challenges of transnational human mobility from developing countries to developed countries.

2 Transition and Challenges in Japan's Policy for Accepting Foreigners: From TIT to ESD and connected to SSW

2.1 Transition and challenges of TIT program

First, we overview the transition and challenges of Japan's TIT program. TIT program

has been initiated in 1993 with the official aim that “international cooperation through transferring Japan’s technical skills to developing Countries”.

Currently, there are approximately 3.76 million foreigners residing in Japan, equivalent to about 3% of the total population of 260 million as of the end of 2024. By status of residence, the number of technical intern trainees is about 456,000 (13%), second only to permanent residents of 900,000 (26%, see Fig. 1). Approximately 70,000 of the technical intern trainees are Indonesian, second only to Vietnamese (approximately 120,000, see Fig. 1).

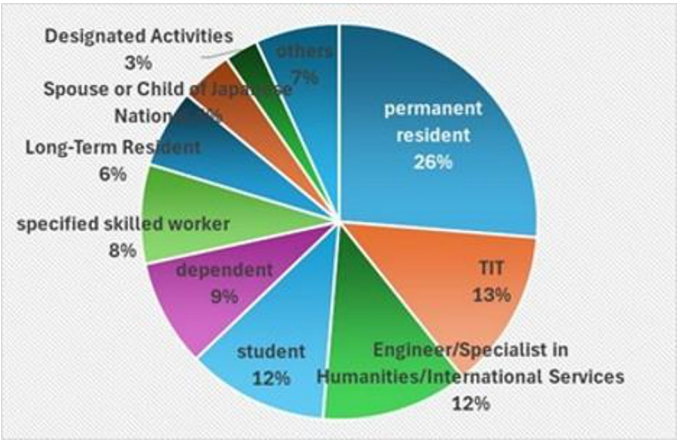


Fig. 1. Percentage of Foreign Nationals by Status of Residence in Japan (end of 2024)

[Source: Immigration Services Agency of Japan for 2025]

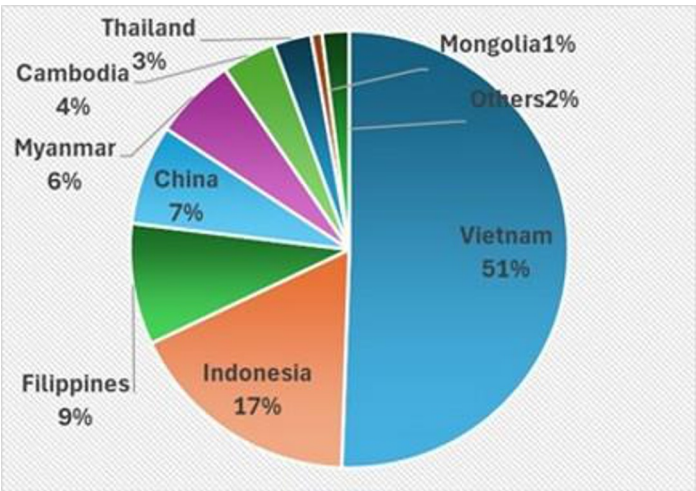


Fig. 2. Technical Intern Trainees by Nationality in Japan (end of 2024)

[Source: Immigration Services Agency of Japan for 2025]

Technical intern trainees are allowed to stay in Japan for a period of three to a maximum of five years and are engaged in 168 tasks in 91 occupations (as of 2024), including agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, construction, food manufacturing, textiles and clothing, and machinery and metal-related fields. The following multiple problems have been pointed out regarding the TIT program [Yamaguchi 2020].

Firstly, contrary to its ostensible purpose of transferring skills from developed countries to developing countries, many technical intern trainees are often engaged in low-paid simple labor, as evidenced by the fact that the above-mentioned occupations are not in advanced skill fields. Secondly, regarding the TIT program, reports have emerged regarding human rights violations such as bullying and discrimination in the workplace, in addition to restrictions such as not being able to change jobs or bring family members with them. 9,700 or so people fled from their training sites in 2023 because they cannot bear the hardships and problems at work. Thirdly, before coming to Japan, most of the trainees borrow large amounts of money from their relatives, banks, and often from LPK itself to pay for pre-training and brokerage fees, and travel expenses. Furthermore, because they cannot change jobs, many trainees have no choice but to persevere and continue their training even if they face difficulties in the work sites. Fourthly, although the new Immigration Control Act of 2009 made it possible for technical intern trainees to be subject to labor customary laws and regulations, including the guarantee of a minimum wage, the trainees continued to be institutionally treated as more immature “trainees” rather than “workers” even though they were actually “working” in Japan.

2.2 Transition from the decision to discontinue the TIT program to the ESD program, and toward the SSW

In response to these problems and inconsistencies in TIT program, the Japanese government decided to abolish the TIT program in the near future, and to implement a new program called the “Employment for Skill Developments, or ESD, in 2027. The ESD program is a new system to develop the skills of foreigners to the level of Specified Skilled Worker, or SSW.

The SSW was the status of residence which was established by the 2018 amendment to the Immigration Control Act (effective April 1, 2019) with the direct aim of compensating for the labor shortage caused by Japan's continuing declining birthrate and aging population. Under this status of residence, after a certain period of stay, if the foreigner with the status called SSW (i) meets certain conditions, such as Japanese language proficiency and specific skill requirements, as an SSW(ii), he/she will be able to change jobs, extend their period of stay indefinitely, and bring their family with them if they meet the requirements. There are 283,634 SSW (i) and 832 SSW (ii) residing in Japan (as of December 31, 2024). The SSW program is more in line with Japan's current situation and partly resolved the institutional contradiction of the TIT program stated above in the sense that it accepts foreign nationals as “workers” not as “trainees” anymore. However, because SSWs can change jobs, concerns about the concentration of SSWs in urban areas and problems similar to those of the TIT program, such as the

insufficiency of a system for developing Japanese language skills, discrimination, and human rights violations, have not been fully resolved [Yamaguchi 2020: 101-103].

3 The situation of Indonesia's sending out overseas migrant workers

3.1 Shifting Policies for Sending Workers Overseas in Indonesia

Indonesia is one of the world's largest archipelagic countries, consisting of more than 17,000 islands stretching approximately 5,000 km east to west along the equator, and has the world's fourth largest population of more than 270 million people. Currently, the working-age population accounts for about 70% of the total population (2020 statistics) and is expected to remain at a high level of 65% until around the 2040s [Central Statistics Agency of Indonesia, 2023]. Backed by this abundance of human resources, the Indonesian government has set forth the "Golden Indonesia Vision 2045 (Visi Indonesia Emas 2045)," which aims to make Indonesia a developed country by 2045, in the 100th anniversary year of the country's declaration of independence.

In recent years, developing countries have generally strengthened their policies to send workers abroad, and sending countries has been diversified. In Indonesia, where the demographic bonus period continues, the creation and promotion of employment has remained a top priority, and the government has promoted overseas migrant labor by setting numerical targets since the end of the 1970s, when the Five-Year Development Plan mentioned migrant labor [Hirano 2009: 30]. In the 1980s, the "feminization of migration" became prominent as the international migration of female domestic workers to the Middle East and other parts of Asia increased against the backdrop of the growing demand for domestic workers in newly industrializing Asian regions. Initially, Indonesia expanded its share of the international labor market through "dumping," sending its own citizens abroad as cheap labor, rather than paying placement fees afterwards and protecting workers as in the Philippines, a major migrant-sending country, and its remittances to its home country became one of the largest in Asia after China and the Philippines [Asado 2011].

However, as problems of abuse and human rights violations against foreign workers in host countries became more serious, international friction with sending countries, including Indonesia, was frequently reported. In addition, as citizens and NGOs became more concerned about immigration policies through the process of democratization in sending countries, the Indonesian government was required not only to promote sending but also to protect Indonesian immigrants abroad. In particular, while receiving countries such as Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan were emphasizing the protection of workers' rights, transparency of the recruitment process, and human resource development in advance, Indonesia shifted from a traditional policy of "dumping", i.e. free sending, to a "managed migration policy" [Asato 2011: 133; Yamaguchi 2024], which involved coordination with partner countries and management of the migration process, rather than the traditional free flow of migrants. Particularly in the

wake of the 1997 Asian currency crisis, the "migration bureaucracy" has been strengthening [Xiang & Lindquist 2014; Killias 2018]. From 2022 the Ministry of Migrant Workers Protection (Kemeterian Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia, abbreviated as KP2MI) has taken the lead. KP2MI was formerly known as Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (Badan Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia, or BPP2MI) under the Indonesian Ministry of Labor (Kementerian Ketenagakerjaan, or Kemnaker) and now is responsible for overseas employment policy and the management and protection of migrants. This upgrading of the relevant institution from "Agency" to "Ministry" is a testimony to the growing importance of migrant workers policy in Indonesia. However, the recent Indonesian government's management of migrant workers, which simultaneously promotes both of the protection and deployment of migrant workers for further economic growth, has been criticized for simultaneously slamming on the brakes and accelerator, lacking coordination, coherence, and sustainability among the actors, and not leading to a positive development of their situation [Mase 2025].

3.2 The position of TIT program in Indonesia

On the other hand, the legal status of technical intern trainees and the competent government agencies differ from that of the above-mentioned overseas migrant labors: according to Law No. 13 of 2003, "Republic Law on Labor (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia No 13 tahun 2003 tentang Ketenagakerjaan)," technical training is classified as "foreigners' training program" rather than overseas migrant labor [Waode 2023: 204]. The Law defines "training program (*pemagangan*)" as "a part of the vocational training system (*system pelatihan kerja*), which is implemented for the purpose of improving the competence, productivity and welfare of workers by working under the guidance and supervision of an instructor or experienced worker (Chapter I Article 1.11)". In addition, the procedures for sending out technical intern trainees and the approval of sending institutions are handled by the "Directorate General of Vocational Training and Productivity Development (Direktorat Jenderal Pembinaan Pelatihan Vokasi dan Produktivitas, abbreviated as Ditjen Binalavotas)". Thus, the jurisdiction of trainees is different from that of other migrant workers, and it has been pointed out that the rules on protection applicable to migrant workers also do not apply to trainees [Waode 2023: 183-184]. In addition, at present, the Indonesian government is indifferent to the issues of the TIT program that Japan has been facing as stated above [Yamaguchi 2024], and the speed at which it is sending out Indonesian workers is not likely to abate in the immediate future. It will be necessary to watch for changes in sending trends on the Indonesian side after the TIT program is abolished and the ESD program comes into effect.

4 Research on Returned former Trainees, Sending Organization and Brokerage

4.1 Follow-up research on Returned former Trainees

In Indonesia, follow-up research on trainees after completion of TIT program is a requirement for the licensed vocational training institution (Lembaga pelatihan kerja, hereafter abbreviated as LPK), but it is very rare for them to be implemented. In Japan, some institutions such as OTIT (Organization for Technical Intern Training), JILPT (the Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training), JITCO (Japan International Trainee & Skilled Worker Cooperation organization) have conducted surveys on trainees after their return, but the response rate is very low and the methods are problematic. Thus, Both Indonesian and Japanese public institutions have challenges with the system and methods of follow-up surveys for former trainees who have returned.

Several follow-up surveys have been conducted by some researchers from academic points of view. [Kimoto et al. 2018], for example, conducted field research in Java, Indonesia, in 2016, examining the current status and challenges of the TIT program through the careers of former trainees after their return from Japan. According to their study, Indonesian government authorities basically view the TIT program as part of the overseas employment policy and have low expectations that the trainees will acquire some certain “skill” in Japan, but have high expectations that Indonesian trainees will be able to earn a large income and remit them to the family in hometown while they are training in Japan, and that they will be able to start their own businesses and create derivative jobs by utilizing the Japanese language after returning to their home countries to contribute the development of Indonesia [Kimoto et al. 2018: 124]. The trainees themselves have low expectations of acquiring skills, and even after returning to their home countries, there are cases of trainees working in the same industries as in Japan through introductions by sending organizations or training sites in urban areas, but all of them have changed jobs due to resistance to doing the same work as in Japan at the same salary level as in Indonesia. There are other reported cases of former trainees in Jakarta and other major metropolitan areas finding employment at Japanese companies through introductions by the Indonesian Ministry of Labor and Japanese supervisory organizations, but the turnover rate is high [Waode 2023: 194]. In rural areas, on the contrary, industries are even more limited, so they choose to work in agriculture, which is the key industry in the region, self-employment based on the income earned from the TIT program, or as private Japanese language teachers, making use of the basic Japanese language skills they have learned during in Japan. It has also been reported that former trainees play a part in the business of reproducing technical intern trainees [Kimoto et.al 2018: 118-123; Yamaguchi 2020, 2024]. Thus, in effect, Japan's TIT program has become an international labor supply and demand system, both on the side of the sending Indonesian government and on the side of the Indonesian nationals being sent out.

[Iwashita 2018], on the other hand, interviewed Vietnamese technical intern trainees who had returned to their home countries about their careers. According to the survey,

the most important skill acquired through the TIT was Japanese, and none of the trainees claimed to have acquired the skills they practiced. In Vietnam, when trainees return to their hometown to find employment, information is shared between the related company conducting the internship training, the sending organization, and other local companies. The trainees who have returned to their home countries are sometimes involved in the management of the companies that implement the internship. There are also reports of former apprentices who have returned to Japan and worked for Japanese-affiliated companies, complaining that they are not treated any differently from other employees, a case similar to the above. However, from the company's point of view, they have not acquired the level of skills required by the company [Iwashita 2018: 37-41].

The above indicates that the expectations of trainees for acquiring skills are low, that Japanese is the most important skill actually acquired, that there are former trainees who will be involved in sending out programs after returning to their home countries, and that the sending organizations are almost the only opportunity where they can put their Japanese language skills to good use. Similar characteristics can also be seen in the case of a regional city in Indonesia, which I will discuss later in this paper.

4.2 Research on sending institutions and Brokerage

Cases of former trainees from Southeast Asia being involved in the operation of the TIT program in their home countries after returning have already been reported by [Kimoto et.al 2018; Iwashita 2018] and others as mentioned above. Furthermore, [Ratnayake & Silva 2020] found that a Japanese textile company B not only established a vocational pre-training company in Vietnam jointly with a local company and sent trainees to Japan but also created a recruitment cycle in which former trainees who had completed their training and returned home were recruited to B company's Vietnamese branch. The TIT program has conventionally been viewed as a problem in terms of the reproduction of an exploitative structure which consist of the sender and the being sent. In contrast, Piyadasa et al. positively evaluate this initiative by the B company, saying that the acceptance of technical intern trainees by B company has helped to improve the human resources of Vietnamese youth and reduce poverty, and that for Japan it has led to the solution of the labor shortage problem and the protection of the local economy. In addition, [Nishitani 2022], who conducted a life story interview with the Vietnamese president, who himself is a former trainee, of a technical intern sending organization in Vietnam, reported that the organization continues its sending business with the prospect of expanding possibilities for young people with few career and life options and "increasing Japan's fans" in the future. This suggests that the former trainees' sending-out business may be conducted under a delicate balance between business and ideals, a point in common with the case of former-trainee sending-out organizations in local communities in Indonesia, which will be discussed later in this paper.

[Kato 2022] conducted a comparative study of sending institutions in plural labor-sending countries in Asia, namely China, Vietnam, Nepal, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Myanmar. The results show that not only are there institutional differences between countries, but even within the same country there are variations in size, requirements

for obtaining government permits and licenses, and costs associated with such requirements, as well as costs associated with pre-apprenticeship training. As a result, it is clear that not all cases are "coming to Japan with a burden of large debts" as is often reported or imagined. These findings, however, should not be used to cover up or legitimize the negative aspects of the technical internship system, but it shows diverse aspects that request us to approach it from various angles.

5 A Sending & pre-training institution managed by former trainees: A case study from D City in Indonesia

5.1 Overview of "the second generation of Compatriot Recruit" and LPK "Magokoro (True Heart)"

Based on the above discussion of previous studies and a survey conducted by the author, the following part of this paper will examine the case study of a pre-training and sending out institution for TIT program (hereinafter referred to as LPK, abbreviation from *lembaga pelatihan kerja*), run by former trainees and located in a provincial D City with a population of over 350,000 in eastern Indonesia. The LPK, which has the Japanese name "Magokoro (anonym)", which means true heart, was established in 2018 in D City. The staff who run the LPK are from an outlying island of D City and they are so to say "the second generation of compatriot recruiters" in the sense that they themselves were sent to Japan as technical intern trainees by the first LPK Akari (which means Light), which was established by former trainees in D City.

The history of compatriot recruiting in this region is as follows. In this region, as in other local communities in Indonesia, from the mid-1990s, the Provincial Branch of the Directorate General of Training and Productivity Development, an agency of the then Ministry of Labor and Migration, took the lead in sending technical interns to Japan. The actual recruiting, selection, and pre-training were done by a Japan's largest supervising organization for foreign technical intern trainees and Public Interest Incorporated Foundation named the International Manpower Japan (IMM Japan). However, due to a series of disappearances of trainees, who were from this region, at the Japanese workplace which often happened in the late 1990s, the official sending of trainees through the Ministry of Labor and Immigration from the surrounding regions, including D City, was suspended after 2005.

However, in this region where industry is limited, there were many potential young people who would like to participate in TIT program in Japan. A former trainee named R (anonym) founded LPK Akari and provided pre-training on basic Japanese language and lifestyle, such as garbage separation and punctuality. From its founding in 2006 to the closing of LPK Akari in 2009 due to Mr. R's financial issues, approximately 50 youths were sent to prefectures of Shiga and Gunma in Japan to work as trainees. The staff who manage LPK Magokoro today are also former trainees who were sent out by LPK Akari during this period. The founders, Mr. Z and Mr. R, spoke in unison about their motivation for founding LPK Magokoro: "We learned discipline and diligence

while we were conducting training in Japan. There is no job opportunity or industry in our area. we want to give local young people the same opportunities like us”.



Photo 1.(left) Infront of the building of LPK Magokoro and its staffs

Photo 2. (right) : the former building of the training center of LPK Akari

The following chart illustrates the general sending-out process of Indonesian technical intern trainees via LPK (see Fig. 3).

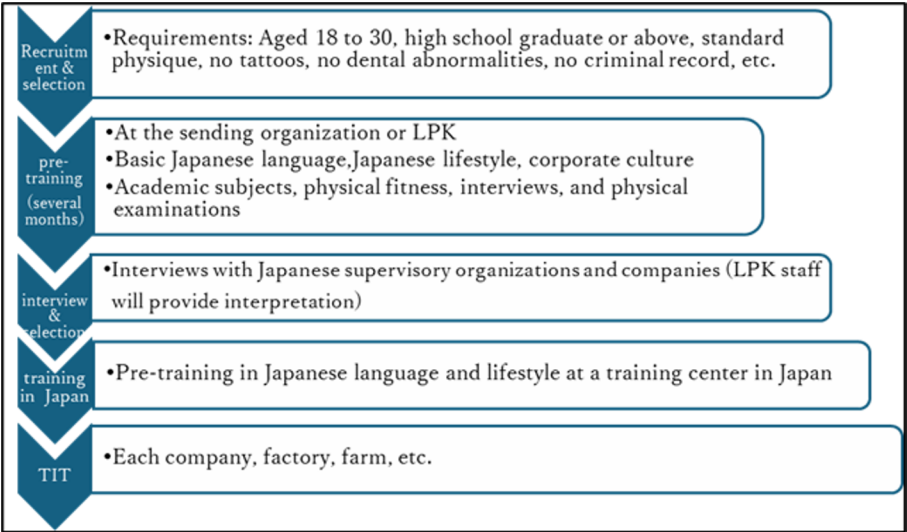


Fig. 3. General sending-out process of trainees to Japan via LPK

The present application requirements of LPK Magokoro are as follows:

- Age: 19-27 years old
- Must be healthy and have no tattoos
- Must have no history of serious illness
- Must be prepared to participate in language training
- Must be prepared to comply with LPK rules

In the past, only male applicants were considered, and requirements such as a minimum height of 160 cm and weight of 50 kg were listed, but since there are now female candidates, there is no mention of a physical size requirement. Also, since trainee candidates are now becoming more highly educated, as high school diploma become common, the present LPK Magokoro's application guidelines do not include any educational requirements which used to be specified as a high school or vocational school graduate or higher in the past. These requirements are almost the same for men and female candidates and among LPKs throughout Indonesia.

After passing the above requirements, the candidates will participate pre-training at LPK, where they will learn basic Japanese, rules of Japanese life such as garbage separation and collection, etiquette such as greetings, and workplace ethics and customs required by Japanese companies such as the 5Ss (Sorting, Setting in Order, Sweeping, Standardizing, Sustaining the Discipline), and "Ho (Houkoku, reporting), Ren (Renraku, communication), So (Soudan, consultation). From the author's observation, although LPK Magokoro's pre-training follows a curriculum that covers Japanese language and physical fitness from early morning until late in the evening, the classes are not necessarily "military-style" high-pressure. The candidates are allowed to commute from their homes or the homes of relatives and have a relatively high degree of freedom in their daily lives.



Photo 3.(left) Trainee candidates of LPK Magokoro

Photo 4. (right) Candidates learning basic Japanese. The girls had been studying Japanese for about three months and could easily write hiragana, katakana, and simple kanji.

The staffs who are running LPK Magokoro and the Japanese language instructors are

former trainees who have returned from Japan. They themselves are "second generations" in sending business in the sense that they came from another LPK in D City, which was also founded by former trainees. In addition, some staffs and Japanese language teachers were often relatives of the candidates of Magokoro.

When the author used to ask managers what motivated them to join the TIT program in Japan in the past, they would say that they wanted to have a new experience, learn hard work and discipline, and support their families financially [Yamaguchi 2024]. These are the very same reasons they gave for establishing LPK Magokoro as mentioned above. And also when author asked their students i.e., the trainee candidates, about their motivation for participating in the TIT program and their aspirations after returning home, they gave almost the same answers: "I want to have a new experience," "I want to learn diligence and discipline," "I want to send money home to my family," and "I want to start a business after I returned home". Thus, it can be seen that the teachers, former trainees, are teaching the trainee candidates exactly what they themselves had learned in the past repeatedly.

Even though the atmosphere is not as rigorous as that of the military, after several months of pre-training at the LPK, the candidates acquire the typical attitude suited for trainees, which has not changed over the past 20 years, such as arriving at LPK on time, putting on their ties, taking off their shoes at the entrance, bowing deeply and saying "*shitsureishimasu*(excuse me, may I come in?)" in Japanese as they enter the room, and then studying on their own without talking until their "sensei," instructor, arrives.

5.2 Intimacy and "the second generations": a case of a woman trainee from LPK Magokoro

In the case of LPK Magokoro, the relationship is also characterized by mutual closeness and intimacy, with former trainee teachers and candidates, and candidates often having kinship relationships with each other as stated earlier. For example, Yuriko (anonym) is a woman of 20-year-old who was sent by LPK Magokoro to work as a technical intern trainee at a building maintenance company in western part of Japan. Yuriko's father had also spent time in Japan as a trainee and gave her the Japanese name "Yuriko" in memory of his time in Japan. Now he has come back to Japan with a status of residence as SSW and is working for a food manufacturing company in western Japan. Yuriko's older sister was also a trainee at an automobile factory in the Chubu region until last year. When her term expired and she returned to her hometown and now is preparing to obtain the status of residence as SSW like her father. Yuriko decided to participate in the TIT program under the influence of her father and older sister, and took part in the pre-training at LPK Magokoro, which her sister also used to attend. Yuriko is now working hard every day in Japan as a trainee and, in about a year, expects to pay off the several hundreds of thousands of yen worth of debt she borrowed from Magokoro and a local bank to pay for the pre-training and travel expenses. Yuriko has colleagues of three other young female trainees from K city, two of whom are Yuriko's cousins, and one whose father, like Yuriko, is a former trainee. In D City, where industry or job opportunity is limited especially for women, and the practice of domestic

transmigration is common, it is not uncommon to find "second-generation trainees" whose relatives are former trainees and decided to come to Japan by listening their reputation about lives as trainees in Japan. Their mothers said that their daughters were very brave and they were proud of them very much. They added, "Before going to Japan, they had never even worked outside of D City, but TIT was a "official program", and I knew the staffs at LPK Magokoro very well, so I had no worries" [Yamaguchi 2025].

Yuriko had heard from her father and sister that Japanese people are kind and Japanese cities are clean. At first, however, she was surprised by the strictness of the Japanese foreman at her workplace in Japan, but now she is used to her job. Every day she looks forward to making video calls on her smartphone with her family and fellow trainees. She also frequently contacts the staff at Magokoro, with whom she was very close, if she needed advice, and even sometimes take lessons of Japanese language online from them. Thus, in this delicate balance between business and intimacy, and in the closed cycle of "the second generation" on each side of the sender and the being sent, technical intern trainees are constantly being produced in Yuriko's hometown in Indonesia [Yamaguchi 2025].

6 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Japan's Technical Intern Training (TIT) program, despite its stated purpose of facilitating skill transfer from a developed country to a developing country, has functioned primarily as a labor supply system embedded in Indonesia's socio-economic landscape. The program has generated new forms of "migration infrastructure" in local communities, where former trainees have become central actors in managing sending institutions and vocational training institutions. The case of LPK Magokoro in relatively urbanized D City in Eastern Indonesia, illustrates how not only do these institutions serve as a mechanism for reproducing apprenticeships characterized by debt and discipline, but also kinship-based trust and intergenerational pathways that sustain a localized and self-reinforcing cycle of migration.

The shift from TIT program to the Employment for Skill Development (ESD) program raises important questions about continuity and change in transnational labor mobility. While the ESD and Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) programs hold the potential to resolve some of the contradictions inherent in the TIT, particularly the ambiguous status of trainees as "non-workers", they risk reproducing many of the same structural inequalities if intermediary practices, debt burdens, and uneven protections remain unaddressed. For Indonesia, the persistence of high youth unemployment and uneven domestic opportunities or employment ensures that the demand for overseas migration will not diminish with the formal abolition of TIT program.

By foregrounding the perspectives and practices of returned trainees who now serve as intermediaries, this study underscores that migration policy cannot be fully understood through state regulations and bilateral agreements alone. Instead, it must account for the everyday infrastructures of recruitment, trust, and aspiration that connect households in eastern Indonesia to workplaces in Japan. The findings therefore call for a

rethinking of policy approaches: Japan must move beyond narrow labor shortage solutions and recognize migrants as workers with rights, while Indonesia must balance its promotion of labor export with sustainable protections for its citizens abroad.

Ultimately, whether the transition from TIT to ESD represents a genuine paradigm shift or merely a rebranding will depend on how both states engage with the lived realities of migrants and their families. Without such engagement, the structural contradictions of transnational labor mobility are likely to persist, albeit in new institutional forms.

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