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WELCOMING THE OPPORTUNITIES: DECIPHERING CONTEMPORARY MOBILITY OF INDONESIAN PROFESSIONALS TO JAPAN

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Abstrak

Penelitian tentang mobilitas transnasional para profesional dari negara berkembang masih terus mengisi ruang diskusi akademik. Berangkat dari data kualitatif yang dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan profesional Indonesia di Jepang antara tahun 2018 sampai 2020, artikel ini mendiskusikan berbagai faktor yang memfasilitasi mobilitas para profesional Indonesia di Jepang, termasuk narasi-narasi individual yang terkait dengan Jepang maupun Indonesia. Narasi para pekerja profesional Indonesia di Jepang menunjukkan bawah persilangan antara bukan hanya kredensial, kecakapan, dan ekonomi transnasional antara Jepang dan Indonesia, melainkan juga berbagai saluran lain, seperti rezim beasiswa dan pasar tenaga kerja dan sistem perekrutan Jepang yang tengah berubah telah menciptakan satu set kesempatan yang membuka jalan bagi mereka untuk bekerja di Jepang sambil tetap dapat berkontribusi bagi tanah air. Mobilitas transnasional para profesional dari negara berkembang dapat dilihat sebagai bentuk dari penyambutan kesempatan tersebut dan juga salah satu pilihan yang dapat diambil oleh talenta global.

***Kata Kunci**: migrasi Jepang; mobilitas transnational; pasar tenaga kerja jepang; professional Indonesia*

Abstract

The research on how transnational mobility of professionals from developing countries is facilitated and constructed are still widely discussed. Drawn on qualitative data collected between 2018 and 2020, this article discusses all the factors that facilitate the mobility of Indonesian professionals to Japan, including the individual narratives related to Indonesia and Japan. The case study of Indonesian professionals in Japan demonstrates that the intersections of not only credentials, skills, and transnational economy between two countries, but also the various emerging channels such as scholarship regimes and the changing in Japan's domestic labor market and recruitment systems have created a set of opportunities that increasingly pave the way for foreign professionals to build a career in Japan while contributing to the homeland. The transnational mobility of working professionals from developing countries could be seen as a form of welcoming such opportunities and one of the options global talents can choose.

Keywords: *Indonesian professionals; Japan labor market; Japan migration, transnational mobility*

Introduction

Putri never imagined that this year would mark the eighth year of her living in Japan. In spite of the initial plan to stay and work in Japan for only several years before returning to Indonesia, she somehow ended up working in Japan for longer period. She even changed her job twice and decided to apply for a permanent residency in the next couple of years. Being a working professional and a graduate of Japanese university with excellent Japanese linguistic skills, Putri belongs to the most preferred and welcomed group of foreign workers by the Japanese government. Putri, along with many other foreign professionals – those who hold professional and skill-based professional working visa – of different national and cultural backgrounds, have steadily increased in number in the past few years. As of October 2019, there are 276,770 people working in the fields associated with professional or technical and specialized work, comprising 18.9 percent of the total 1,460,463 foreign workers in Japan (MHLW, 2019). This number is likely to keep increasing considering Japan's plan to accept more foreign professionals (MOJ, 2018).

This growing number of non-Japanese professionals in Japan, furthermore, indicates a larger context of the changing domestic labor market that has been taking place in Japan in the last few years. According to Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW, 2018), job openings-to-applicants ratio in the country hit the point of 1.59 in 2017, making it the highest ratio since 1974. This means that in 2017, there were 100 job seekers for 159 job openings available in the country. In the same period, Japan also saw a rising number of highly skilled foreign workers relocating to the country to pursue a professional career (MHLW, 2019; MOJ, 2020), and an increasing presence of Japanese recruitment companies in Southeast Asia to recruit many young talents from the region to work in Japan (Conrad & Meyer-Ohle, 2017, 2018). The latter demonstrates what Conrad & Meyer-Ohle (2018) have shown on the emerging trend of global recruitment of talents from Southeast Asia by Japanese enterprises. Some companies even aim to recruit among their annual new hires as many as 10-20% from foreign graduates (Conrad & Meyer-Ohle, 2018).

Following such development, it is therefore important to discuss what motivates foreign professionals, including Indonesian, to relocate to Japan and also what facilitates their mobility. Previous studies on skilled migration to Japan have been

mostly dominated by research on two-step migration of Chinese and Vietnamese international students in Japan (e.g., Liu-Farrer, 2011; Sato, 2016), research that focuses on the migration infrastructures that channels various groups of migrants to Japan (e.g., Conrad & Meyer-Ohle, 2017, 2018; Liu-Farrer & Tran, 2019), and other research that highlight the emerging forms of migration to Japan from developed countries (e.g., Hof, 2018). There has not been much attention given to the research on the mobility of highly skilled professionals to Japan from developing countries, especially Indonesia.

This study attempts to contribute to the discourse on transnational mobility of highly-skilled foreign workers by examining the narratives of Indonesian nationals working Japan as professional white-collar workers (hereinafter is referred to Indonesian professionals). It examines this particular group of people as Indonesian nationals are among the top 10 foreign nationals residing in Japan for the past few years. In 2016, it ranked 10th, while in 2022 it climbed to the 7th place with 83,169 Indonesian residents (MHLW, 2023). Among these numbers, there were 1,678 Indonesians who hold specified skilled/professional working visa in 2016 and the number increased by 55% to 4,926 in 2022.

This article, in particular, aims to discuss the contemporary transnational mobility of Indonesian professionals to Japan and what facilitates it. It does not only consider the significant increase of the number of Indonesian professionals in Japan, but also takes into account the current body of literature that pays little attention to this group of people. In contrast to many studies on Indonesians in Japan that focused on less-skilled workers (e.g., Efendi, et al., 2016; Palmer, 2016; Nawawi, 2010; Romdiati, 2003; Tirtosudarmo, 2005) or skilled healthcare workers under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) program (e.g., Alam & Wulansari, 2012; Hirano, Ogawa, & Ono, 2012; Hirano & Wulansari, 2009; Świtek, 2016), this study particularly investigates Indonesian professionals as highly skilled foreign professionals who autonomously migrated to and work in Japan on their own. This research addresses two research questions: (1) Who are Indonesian professionals in Japan? What characteristics differentiate these people from other Indonesian nationals in Japan? (2) Why and how did Indonesian professionals decide to work in Japan? What facilitates the process?

This article first outlines the profile of Indonesian professionals in Japan, followed by discussion of the reasons and motivations to work in Japan as well as the different

mechanisms that have channeled these people into corporate Japan. This article further examines what it means to work in Japan as foreign professionals coming from a developing country and what makes Indonesian professionals different from people from other countries. Since international migrants will become an integral and substantial part of Japan's labor pool (Liu-Farrer, 2011), research on migrant workers' mobility to Japan's labor market is increasingly important. The findings of this study are expected to shed light on the phenomenon of highly skilled migration to Japan from a developing country and provide empirical findings related to highly skilled professionals' aspiration on transnational mobility. In addition, it also aims to contribute to the discourse of intra-Asia migration for global talents.

Contemporary Transnational Mobility to Japan: Actors and Channels

The phenomenon of transnational mobility, as many contemporary studies on migration have suggested, goes beyond merely "push and pull factors" which cannot fully explain the complex process of today's movement of people. The particular practices of migration which take place in Asia, moreover, also provide a platform to re-conceptualize theories in migration studies, considering that the practices are different from the existing migration process in other parts of the world (Liu-Farrer & Yeoh, 2018). In the context of Japan where the labor shortage increasingly challenges the socio-economic situation of the country, the inbound migration is believed to solve the problem by bringing in foreign workers. However, Douglass & Roberts (1999), for instance, argue that many people's motivation to come to Japan is not necessarily for economic reasons or work. According to them, inbound migration to Japan is inseparable from emerging global factors, such as the role of migration channels, the development of transportation and information technology, and the involvement of citizen groups and NGOs.

People's mobility to Japan, furthermore, have drawn academic interests and seen several changes, from those focusing on the entrance of unskilled labors to those emphasizing the meaning of highly skilled workers' mobility to Japan. Given such development, I reviewed and categorized literatures on labor migration to Japan according to the actors who move and the channels that facilitate their mobility, i.e.,

ethnic Japanese returnees (*nikkeijin*), technical trainees, international students, healthcare workers, and foreign professionals.

In 1990, the revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was implemented and it prohibited the entrance of unskilled immigrant workers while imposing penalties on both employers and labor brokers who recruit illegal immigrants (e.g., Kondo, 2015; Tsuda, 2018). Kondo (2015), in particular, refers to this particular time period as "The 90 Regime" where the Japanese government strictly controlled immigration but at the same time, established three loopholes for unskilled workers to work in the country, i.e., ethnic repatriates (front door), trainees/technical interns (side door) and irregulars (back door). The 'front door' legally allowed the admission of ethnic Japanese descendants (*nikkeijin*), mainly from South America, to come to Japan and engage in any kind of work (Kondo, 2015; Tsuda, 2018), mostly low-status, unskilled immigrant jobs in large Japanese companies (Tsuda, 2003).

Following the legal admission of ethnic Japanese returnees, Japanese Government established in 1993 the Technical Intern Training Program (*Gaikokujin Ginō Jisshū Seido*) or TITP that opened a door for the second group, the foreign trainees. Aiming to contribute to the human resource of developing countries, TITP is said to allow young people from developing countries to come to Japan as technical trainees to acquire specific skills through on-the-job training. In the context of labor migration to Japan, this training program, in fact, has served as a side door (Kondo, 2015) that channels unskilled labor to Japan since the early 1990s, and the trainees themselves are seen as a 'stable labor force' (Kamibayashi, 2015) for the employers who suffer from labor shortages. These trainees ended up doing 3D (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) works (e.g., Kamibayashi, 2015; Romdiati, 2003).

Another group is international students. Different from *nikkeijin* and technical trainees, international students can be seen as not only source of low-wage laborers but also potential future skilled human resource for the labor market of the host countries (Liu-Farrer, 2009), including Japan. International students' motivations to study in Japan are varied; for instance, for academic, immigration, cultural consumption, and economic reasons (e.g., Liu-Farrer, 2009; Sato, 2016). From the case of contemporary Chinese students' mobility to Japan, Liu-Farrer (2009) argued that international students not only provide the host country with both unskilled and skilled labor, but also occupy

an important position in host country's economic globalization. As a 'labor migrant', these international students are channeled to Japan through education. The case of international students from Vietnam and Nepal (Sato, 2016), furthermore, demonstrated that these people, especially for those who come from lower economic backgrounds, come to Japan for work while studying in Japanese language school. While the Nepalese students tended to either work for Japanese companies for a longer period or start businesses, Vietnamese students tended to return to their home country after experiencing work in Japan and start a business back home.

Different from previous unskilled migrant groups, the migration of healthcare workers to Japan is considered as skilled migration and is made possible under a bilateral agreement called the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between Japan and Indonesia, the Philippines, and most recently, Vietnam. The EPA grants healthcare workers, i.e., nurse and care workers, from the above-mentioned countries access to work in Japan for a maximum of three years, or indefinitely if they can pass the National Board Examinations. Coming to Japan under G-to-G (Government-to-Government) bilateral scheme does not necessarily ease their employment into Japan. These people ended up experiencing a reality different from what they had expected and imagined of working in Japan under this EPA scheme (e.g., Hirano & Wulansari, 2009; Takahashi, 2018). They work in hospitals or care facilities, and experience rigid seniority in the workplace. As they have not passed the examinations, they are not considered as professional nurses in Japan and are therefore limited to doing simple and menial tasks. These healthcare workers came to Japan for various reasons; some expected to secure a better salary, career, and to gain knowledge about nursing in Japan (Efendi et al., 2016; Hirano & Wulansari, 2009), while others hoped to satisfy their interests in Japanese culture, such as in animation and comics (Hirano et al., 2012). However, almost all of them shared the same issues during their employment in Japan, such as language issues, especially *kanji*; the pressure to pass the national examinations (Alam & Wulansari, 2010, 2012; Efendi et al., 2016; Hirano et al., 2012; Nugraha & Hirano, 2016); and the sense of downgrading and deskilling, as they are treated similar to trainees despite their status as skilled laborers back home (Alam & Wulansari, 2010; Efendi et al., 2016; Świtek, 2016; Vogt, 2013).

The mobility of professional workers, particularly in migration literature, however, has been mainly discussed in terms of brain-gain and brain-drain (Baruch, Budhwar, & Khatri, 2007) and it has focused mostly on the practice of skilled migration in Europe and the West (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011). Professionals' migration to Japan, in particular, has been discussed in the literature on migration channels, such as international education (Liu-Farrer, 2009) and global recruitment (Conrad & Meyer-Ohle, 2018, 2019). Another body of literature examined professionals' migration to Japan and their meanings, for instance, the relocation of young European professionals to Japan demonstrated the phenomenon of flexible migration and the practice of migration for cultural consumption (Hof, 2018), and the migration of Chinese skilled workers showing the emerging occupational niche provided by transnational economy between Japan and China (Liu-Farrer, 2011).

Research Method

This study, in particular, analyzes a case study of Indonesian professionals in Japan. The data was collected from 2018 to 2020 through semi-structured in-depth interviews with Indonesian nationals who work in the Greater Tokyo area. Tokyo is selected as the field, for not only represents the center of Japan's economy, but also home to a considerable number of foreign professionals (MHLW, 2019). The interviews were all conducted in Indonesian language. Besides interviews, I attended several social gatherings and events organized by various Indonesian communities in Japan.

The Indonesian informants in this study were recruited through my personal social network using snowball technique and referrals. Recruitment requirements were the following: Indonesian nationals that hold university degree(s) and graduated from higher education institutions either in Japan, Indonesia or other countries; and hold a valid professional working visa, and work in a company in Japan. The data from interview were recorded, transcribed and translated into English before being categorized and analyzed. In analyzing the data, I follow Weiss (1995)'s qualitative data analysis methods: coding, sorting, local integration, inclusive integration.

Twenty-six Indonesian professionals, 15 males and 11 females participated in this study as informants. All the informants hold professional working visa. Almost all informants are proficient in business level Japanese equivalent to JLPT N2 and above.

Most of the informants work for large scale Japanese firms, while the rest work for foreign companies. Their work experiences vary, ranging from four months to seventeen years. Most of them hold the employment status of regular workers (*seishain*) with only four contract workers and one top managerial position (*kanrishoku*).

The author sent interview questions to each informant prior to the interview and received their written consent to participate in this study. In addition, to protect informants' privacy, any information that could potentially reveal informants' identity, such as name, universities or employers are anonymized and hidden. Pseudonym is used for direct quotations.

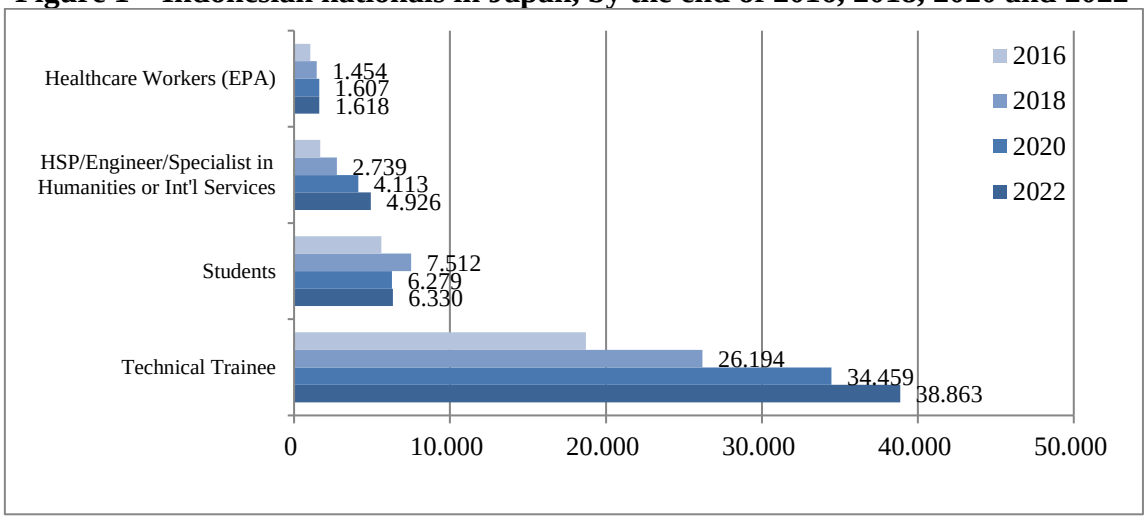
Result and Discussion

Profile of the Indonesian Professionals

In this article, Indonesian professionals, or Indonesian professional workers, refer to Indonesian nationals who are engaged in professional and skill-based works in Japan, in either Japanese (*nikkei*) or foreign (*gaishikei*) firms, and hold a valid professionals working visa, such as Highly Skilled Workers, Engineer/Specialist in Humanities or International Services, including Permanent Residents. The number of Indonesian professionals in Japan climbed up significantly from 1,678 in 2016 to 4,926 in 2022. The number is relatively low when compared to Chinese or Korean nationals who constitute the majority groups of foreigners in Japan; however, it has increased steadily in the past few years.

In June 2016, there were 50,478 Indonesian nationals in Japan, and the number hiked to 83,169 in June 2022, ranking Indonesians as the 7th among the foreign residents most highly represented in Japan, above the number of US nationals (57,299). By the mid of 2022, within the group of Indonesian residents in Japan, technical trainees ranked at the first place (38,863), followed by students (6,330), working professionals (4,926), and healthcare workers (1,618) under Japan-Indonesia Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), and other visa categories, such as Dependent, Permanent Resident, University Professor, etc (MHLW, 2023). The following figure depicts the comparison of the number of Indonesian nationals in Japan, based on visa categories, in December 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022.

Figure 1 – Indonesian nationals in Japan, by the end of 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2022



Source: compiled from MHLW, Japan (2023)

Upon the data analysis, in this study, I categorize Indonesian professionals into two large groups: "Japanese University Graduates" and "Indonesian and Overseas University Graduates." These two groups do not only represent different educational backgrounds and mobility patterns, but also distinctions in terms of work experiences and career aspirations.

Japanese University Graduates

Indonesian professionals who graduated from Japanese universities demonstrate five distinct characteristics. Firstly, they all came to Japan as international students receiving scholarship from Japanese institutions, either from the Japanese government (MEXT) or from private foundations. It is not uncommon for Indonesian students who studied in Japanese universities to come to Japan on scholarship either from the Indonesian government or Japanese institutions. For those who came as undergraduate MEXT students under the Government-to-Government (G-to-G) scheme, they are allowed to extend their study in a Japanese graduate school. Initially, most of my informants did not think of progressing their study into a graduate program. Some common reasons of

their decisions to later pursue graduate degrees include the opportunities provided by the MEXT scholarship, the economic situations and labor market both in Japan and Indonesia, and also academic related considerations.

Furthermore, the opportunities and flexibilities provided by the foreign scholarships are what leads to the second distinction of this category of people – that many of them possess a graduate degree, either a Master's or a Ph.D. In contrast to scholarship from the Indonesian government which requires them to return to Indonesia after graduation, the scholarships offered by Japanese institutions do not have such contract for post-graduation. It means that they are not obliged to return to their home country after graduation. They are granted freedom to choose between going back to their home country, advancing their studies in Japan at a graduate level, or entering Japan's domestic labor market and working for Japanese corporations.

Thirdly, graduating from Japanese higher institutions when the internationalization of education has not been taking place in Japan has allowed them to possess proficient Japanese language skills to work in Japan. Most of the people I interviewed who came to Japan before 2010 were enrolled in the era where English based instruction had not yet developed and the program for the internationalization of Japanese universities, such as Global 30, had not yet been widely promoted. These people were enrolled in Japanese-medium taught programs for their degree. Their scholarships also played an important role as it provided these people Japanese language training prior to entering the degree program. Consequently, as they are able to fluently communicate in Japanese, most of these people are later engaged in works that require Japanese proficiency at a business level.

The Japanese language proficiency and academic credentials from Japanese higher institution allowed these professionals to go through the Japanese traditional job-hunting activities (*shūkatsu*). Possessing wider access to job-hunting activities in Japan is the fourth characteristic of people from this group. In Japan, students usually start their job-hunting activities in their third year of study so that they could secure a job offer in their fourth year. The whole process of traditional job-hunting takes up to one year, starting from when they attend job session seminars. The process usually starts from April, and they do several tests and interviews, until they receive a formal job offer to start work in April of the following year. Most of the people in this category

went through this procedure, the same path as Japanese students. However, some people from science-engineering backgrounds went through a more 'non-traditional' job hunting activities. Some mentioned that a referral from their university Professors had helped them with job-hunting. Other people were hired by companies where they have done internships and part time jobs. Some others received referrals and job information from their social networks while one individual received a work offer from a company affiliated to the foundation which provided them the scholarship. For them job hunting activities and interviews meant rather a formality as they have been guaranteed a job after graduation.

Lastly, most people in this category came to Japan as international students in a relatively early period. Some of them came in 1990s and in I refer them as the older generation. This longer period of living in Japan allowed them to have longer professional experiences in Japan after their studies. Most of them have changed jobs at least once during their professional career in Japan. They did not do job-hopping simply because they wanted to change their job, but there were other external factors, for instance, bankruptcy of the company they worked for. Financial crisis in Japan made these people change their jobs. Moreover, longer working experience in Japan have also allowed some of them to reach managerial positions, either as team leader (*shūnin*), manager, or director (*kanrishoku*). Some people achieved that managerial position without changing their jobs, but most have experienced a job turnover.

Indonesian and Overseas University Graduates

Indonesian professionals who had their education in Indonesian or other countries' universities possess significantly different characteristics compared to Japanese universities graduates. Firstly, these people are relatively young (under 30s) and most of them possess only a bachelor's degree. They mostly are in their first professional career after graduation from university.

Secondly, their linguistic skills demonstrate that they do not necessarily possess Japanese language proficiency. They could be categorized into two groups: those who speak Japanese and those who do not. Japanese speaking Indonesian professionals mostly acquired their linguistic skills from university as they usually graduated from the Japanese Studies department. Their credentials, however, do not necessarily mean that

they engage in work associated with Japanese language and translations. In this study, they are engaged in various sectors, such as system administrator and overseas business development. One of them is engaged in a work related to creative design even though she does not hold any degree in art or design. The other group of Japanese speakers acquired their language proficiency after their arrival in Japan. The company facilitated their intensive studies at a Japanese language school prior to their employment. People who do not speak Japanese, or what I call 'zero Japanese,' were mostly recruited because of their technical skills and prior work experience, such as those in the fields of engineering, animation, or finance. The companies where they work usually provide Japanese-English translators and that significantly reduces the language issues they face in the workplace. The aspirations to work in Japan came from the interest to Japan as a country. Being zero Japanese also means that these people tend to lack knowledge of Japanese culture and norms.

In general, the people I interviewed shared common channels of how they found the job, which serves as their third characteristic. They could be categorized into two groups: those who went to recruitment events in Indonesia or other countries and those who directly applied to the companies. In contrast to the former group that went through the traditional job-hunting process in Japan, the Indonesian universities graduates were mostly recruited directly from Indonesia through the facilitation of Japanese recruitment companies and recruitment events in Indonesia, such as Nikkei HR (see Conrad & Meyer-Ohle, 2018, 2019). Some of them had their job interviews in Indonesia and Singapore. One of my interviewees who work for a large Japanese trading company said that he was the only recruit from Indonesia among the new five international recruits. Those who applied for jobs directly to the companies in Japan were recruited mostly for their technical skills, such as animation and graphic design. They found job opportunities in Japan through their professional networks. Since all application procedures, including interviews, were done online, they were not required to come to Japan during the recruitment period. Compared to other groups that went through the long and complex job-hunting process, people in this group enjoyed faster and simpler procedures. However, they were mostly hired as contract workers (*keiyaku-shain*) for a certain period before becoming regular employees

Reasons and Motivations to Work in Japan

The reasons as well as motivations to work in Japan vary and are inseparable from the context of both Japan and their country of origin. It, therefore, could be categorized into two large groups, i.e., the narratives related to Japan and those related to Indonesia.

Narratives Related to Japan: From Following the Track to Gaining Experience

From a macro point of view, Indonesian professionals share one common narrative in their reasons to work in Japan, which I refer to as 'following the track'. The track, however, varies depending on the individual's educational background. All of my interviewees who graduated from Japanese universities found working in Japan as the ideal track they should follow after graduation. Working in Japan also meant that they could make use of all the advantages of being Japanese university graduates, as I have discussed, including Japanese language proficiency, wider access into Japan's labor market, and more options in job-hunting activities including the 'non-traditional' ones. However, the job-hunting activities are diverse among the informants. For those who sought employment at large companies, they went through traditional job-hunting activities where they were treated the same way as Japanese students and sometimes ended up being the only foreigner among the candidates. Furthermore, some of my informants who sought employment at medium-sized firms enjoyed job-hunting with full confidence because of the referral from their university Professors (*sensei*) or their university seniors (*senpai*), as I have discussed. Some of my informants got their first job in the company where they did an internship or a part-time job.

Furthermore, working in Japan is also perceived as the ideal track for these following categories: the Japanese studies graduates of Indonesian universities; the people who love Japan as a country and its popular culture; and the people who work in specific industries such as, advanced technologies and animation. Being knowledgeable in Japanese culture and language, Japanese studies university graduates felt the urge to experience the real Japan by working and living in the country they studied. For these people, working in Japan serves not only as a platform where they can apply their knowledge of Japanese language and business culture, but also where they can complete their journey of understanding Japan. For the second group who did not study Japanese at university but love Japan and its popular culture, they found themselves attracted to

Japan as a country. Being relatively young, these people grew up in Indonesia under the influence of Japanese popular culture. Their decision to work in Japan was influenced by the desire for cultural consumption, as also observed in other studies on young people's migration to Japan (e.g., Hof, 2018). For the third group, as they see Japan as a technologically advanced country with established research-based industries, they perceived working in Japan as the ideal track to follow where they can gain some knowledge and work experience, and develop their skills in particular fields.

From a more individual perspective, almost all Indonesian professionals I interviewed share a common narrative that they aim to seek and gain some knowledge and professional work experience by working in Japan. For Japanese university graduates, they feel the urge to gain some working experience in Japan first before returning to their home country. The aspiration to gain knowledge and experience is the most important motivation of Indonesian professionals to work in Japan. Economic consideration does exist; however, this study did not find it as the most significant factor for Indonesian professionals in building a career in Japan. Some people were even willing to 'sacrifice' themselves in order to seek both personal and professional growth by working in Japan. Andri is one of them.

As a graphic designer, Andri worked in Indonesia on a freelance basis before coming to Japan. His first employer in Japan was a Japanese company commonly known among animators as a black company (*burakku kigyō*) due to its really bad reputation and working condition. Even though he was aware of this, he still applied to that company for several reasons. Firstly, the company provided a working visa sponsorship for foreign workers with simple procedures; and secondly, he hoped to find a better job after working and settling down in Japan. He, and some fellow Indonesians, took advantage of the ease in obtaining Japan's working visa[1], and managed to get a contract position there. Andri ended up sacrificing himself by working for such a company for several months before quit. He managed to change jobs into his current company where he receives better working condition and salary.

[1] Compared to other countries, Japan's professional working visa is relatively easier to obtain once the requirements are met: possession of skills related to education background and the presence of an employer who act as a sponsor and applies for the visa on the behalf of the candidates.

Narratives Related to Indonesia: From Limited Opportunities to Contribution to Homeland

In addition to the narratives related to Japan, there are several reasons of their decision to work in Japan that are rooted in the existing conditions of Indonesia. These include limited career opportunities in Indonesia's job market for Ph.D degree holders, socio-political situations and the traumatic memory of being discriminated in Indonesian society, the emerging global recruitment events by Japanese companies, and the call to contribute to Indonesia's development.

In Indonesia, where R&D has not yet become an integral part of the industries, a Ph.D degree is not necessary to work in most industries. This lack of job opportunities outside academia is perceived as one of the reasons why some people decided to not return to Indonesia after completion of their graduate degree in Japan. This, moreover, is what makes Japanese university graduates feel the sense of waste (*mottainai*) of their degree if they return to Indonesia.

Another reason, the socio-political situation, is strongly connected to the memory of discrimination experienced by some informants. One of my interviewees recalls his experience of being racially discriminated in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. Born into a Chinese Indonesian family, he experienced racial discrimination from the moment when he and his family moved to Jakarta where he spent his teenage life. This traumatic experience is what made him decide to move out from Indonesia and apply for a job in Japan. His migration to Japan served as a way to escape from discriminatory situations. The urge to avoid such situations also affect people's decisions when it comes to their children. Another informant said that, having similar experiences of being discriminated in Indonesia, he and his wife decided to work and live in Japan as they don't want their children to have similar negative experiences.

Another reason that affected the Indonesian professionals' decisions to work in Japan is the opportunity brought by recruitment events by the Japanese companies held in some big cities in Indonesia. These events are what Conrad & Meyer-Ohle (2018, 2019) referred to as the emerging global recruitment practices by Japanese companies targeting university graduates, mainly from Southeast Asian countries. For Indonesian universities graduates, these recruitment events serve as an important means for their mobility to Japan as such events provide opportunities to work in Japan without coming

to Japan for job-hunting and even without having a Japanese university's credentials. Some informants noted that if there were no such events, they would not have ended up working in Japan. Some perceived that their attempts to apply for work in Japan through these recruiting events as nothing-to-lose and a good try. They would love to work in Japan if they were accepted but if not, they would not have any issues with it.

Another narrative on their reasons to work in Japanese firms in Japan is that they believe that it would help them contribute to Indonesia. Many of my interviewees particularly chose positions with responsibilities related to Indonesia. One of my interviewees who is a Japanese university graduate chose to work in Japan first instead of immediately returning to Indonesia. During job-hunting, she decided to choose her current job in a large Japanese building management company as she found her job there to have the potential of contributing to the homeland by bringing in FDI to Indonesia. Upon employment, as she had expected, she was involved in a project on Indonesian market development.

For these people, their decisions to work in Japan are heavily influenced by and partly rooted in what is taking place in Indonesia. As their country of origin, Indonesia serves as one of the bases of consideration for their decisions to make a career in Japan. Some people chose to leave Indonesia for better living environment while others made use of their employment in Japan to contribute to Indonesia.

Channels into Corporate Japan: Welcoming the Opportunities

The narratives of Indonesian professionals in Japan demonstrate various reasons and motivations that affected their decisions to work in Japan as well as the various mechanisms that facilitated and channeled them into corporate Japan. As both highly educated and highly skilled professionals, these people do not emphasize the financial security from working in Japan at the first place. It resonates with previous studies on skilled migration to Japan (e.g., Conrad & Meyer-Ohle, 2019; Hof, 2018, 2019; Liu-Farrer, 2009, 2011) that argue that skilled migration practices cannot simply be attributed to economic factors; that they involve complex motivations and rationalities as well as the various channels that facilitate this process. For some professionals, migration to Japan is seen as part of their work-life pathways (Hof, 2018) and even used as a practice of middle-class reproduction (Hof, 2019). While for Indonesian

professionals, their migration to Japan as well as employment in Japan are perceived as tools for self-improvements and ways to contribute to the homeland. Their aspirations to gain knowledge and experience from working in Japan are what primarily motivated them to work in Japan, while their hopes to contribute to Indonesia were what further affected their job-selection. Their motivations are, however, not limited to what related to Japan, but also Indonesia. The motivations related to Japan are constructed mainly from their contact with Japan and how they see Japan. In contrast, the motivations related to Indonesia lies on the structural conditions of the country and the aspiration that their work in Japan is the way they contribute to their homeland.

Furthermore, Indonesian professionals' migration to Japan as well as their employment in corporate Japan were facilitated and channeled by various factors that have also been widely discussed in the migration studies, from their credentials from Japanese universities (e.g., Liu-Farrer, 2009), their Japanese language and cultural skills (e.g., Liu-Farrer, 2011), and the global recruitments in Indonesia in which they participated (e.g. Conrad & Meyer-Ohle, 2018, 2019). In addition to those factors, this study observes other structural factors that have not been widely discussed in other literatures, such as, the scholarship regimes, the emerging channels resulted from Japan's changing labor market where non-regular[2] positions are becoming increasingly common, and the diversifying recruitment systems in corporate Japan where non-traditional job-hunting mechanisms are emerging. As discussed earlier, Japan's changing labor market and the diversifying recruitment systems in corporate Japan are the ones that have created a niche for people like Andri and allow him to come to Japan as a contract worker and even to change jobs and find better employment after his entrance into Japan's labor market. Some people welcomed and made use of such opportunities to come and work in Japan.

Conclusion

Indonesian professionals' migration to Japan, as with other groups of foreign professionals, cannot simply be attributed to economic factors as they involve complex motivations and rationalities as well as various channels that facilitate the process. In

[2] In Japan, the term non-regular workers refers to part-time workers, temporary and contract workers including dispatch workers (Asao, 2011).

contrast to foreign professionals who perceived their migration to Japan as part of their work-life pathways (Hof, 2018) and a practice of middle-class reproduction (Hof, 2019), this study argues that Indonesian professionals' mobility to Japan were made possible by the various factors related to not only Japan but also Indonesia, constructed through how they see Japan. The case study of Indonesian professionals in Japan further demonstrates that the intersections of not only credentials and skills, but also the various emerging channels such as scholarship regimes as well as the changing in Japan's domestic labor market and recruitment systems have created a set of opportunities that increasingly pave the way for foreign professionals, including Indonesians, to build a career in Japan while contributing to the homeland. Indonesian professionals' decisions to work in Japan are, therefore, seen as a form of welcoming such opportunities, and it makes working in Japan as one of the options global talents can choose. These people initially welcomed the opportunities to work in Japan, took such opportunities, and aspired to gain knowledge and develop skills from their employment in Japan with hopes that it would be beneficial for their future mobility and for Indonesia's development. As highly skilled foreign workers, Indonesian professionals in corporate Japan enjoy a higher degree of privilege and wider access than other groups of Indonesian migrants in Japan (e.g., Hirano & Wulansari, 2009; Nawawi, 2010; Palmer, 2016) which allow them to contribute to Indonesia, Indonesian people, or Indonesia's development. This study has contributed to the discourse on how highly skilled foreign workers' mobility from developing countries are constructed and facilitated. It further suggests that studies on the professionals' transnational mobility within Asia are worth pursuing.

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