



Dual Labor Market Theory in Indonesia-Japan Bilateral Relations: An Analysis of the Placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers Under the Specified Skilled Worker Program, 2019–2024

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Abstract

This study analyzes the placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) through the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) programme in Japan during 2019–2024 using Michael J. Piore's Dual Labour Market Theory. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach and library research method based on secondary data from academic literature, government publications, policy documents, and official statistics from Indonesia and Japan. The findings indicate that PMI placement increased substantially from 3,061 workers in 2019 to 44,298 workers in 2024, following a temporary decline during the COVID-19 period. In 2024, Indonesian workers were concentrated in elderly care, food and beverage processing, agriculture, industrial manufacturing, construction, and fisheries. These sectors share characteristics associated with the secondary labour market, including labour shortages, demanding working conditions, and relatively limited attractiveness to domestic workers. Japan's ageing population and declining working-age population contributed to persistent structural labour demand, while Indonesia provided a significant supply of workers through bilateral labour cooperation. The findings support the applicability of Dual Labour Market Theory in explaining PMI placement through SSW as a structural response to labour shortages in Japan.

Keywords : *Specified Skilled Worker, Indonesian Migrant Workers, Dual Labour Market Theory, Labour Migration, Japan.*



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INTRODUCTION

International labour migration has become an increasingly important phenomenon in inter-state relations in line with changes in demographic structures and the demands of the global labour market. Differences in employment conditions between countries of origin and destination countries create patterns of labour mobility that enable countries with a large labour supply to meet the needs of countries experiencing labour shortages. In the context of Indonesia and Japan, this condition is reflected in the development of labour cooperation through the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) programme. Indonesia has a large labour force, whereas Japan is experiencing demographic changes characterized by an increasing elderly population and a declining working-age population, resulting in labour shortages across various sectors. These conditions have made foreign migrant workers an increasingly important source of labour for Japan (Desyana & Jatmika, 2023).

Labour cooperation between Indonesia and Japan had been established prior to the SSW programme through the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP). However, the development of Japan's labour demand prompted the emergence of a scheme that provides greater opportunities for foreign workers possessing specific skills. The Japanese government subsequently introduced the SSW programme in 2019 as a policy instrument to address labour shortages in particular sectors. This programme provides opportunities for foreign workers who meet specified skill and Japanese-language requirements to work legally in various sectors, including elderly care, construction, agriculture, manufacturing, fisheries, and hospitality (Tombalisa et al., 2022).

The SSW programme subsequently developed into an important instrument of bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and Japan. This cooperation was strengthened through the 2019 Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC), which regulates the mechanism for placing Indonesian migrant workers under the SSW scheme. For Japan, this cooperation provides access to foreign labour to fill

sectors experiencing worker shortages. For Indonesia, the programme creates opportunities for labour placement, competency enhancement, international work experience, and economic benefits. Accordingly, the SSW programme can be understood not only as a Japanese employment policy but also as part of the bilateral relationship between the two countries in managing labour needs and labour mobility (Tombalisa et al., 2019).

The magnitude of Japan's demand for foreign labour is reflected in the increasing admission targets under the SSW programme. During the first period, 2019–2024, Japan established a target of 345,150 foreign workers. Subsequently, for the 2024–2029 period, this target increased to 820,000 workers across 16 sectors. The increase in this target indicates Japan's growing structural demand for foreign labour amid demographic problems and constraints in the domestic labour supply. However, actual implementation during the first period did not fully reach the established target. By 2023, the number of SSW workers had reached approximately 200,000, while Indonesia had deployed approximately 86,000 workers. These outcomes indicate that the opportunities available through the SSW programme continue to face several constraints, including language and skill requirements, training capacity, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and competition with other migrant worker-sending countries (Syuhaimi et al., 2025b).

In its development, Indonesian migrant workers under the SSW programme have predominantly been placed in sectors experiencing labour shortages, including elderly care, agriculture, food processing, manufacturing, construction, and fisheries. This pattern indicates that the increasing placement of Indonesian workers is not solely associated with individual aspirations to obtain employment or higher income but is also related to the demands of the Japanese labour market. These sectors tend to be less attractive to domestic workers, making migrant workers an alternative source of labour for filling employment vacancies. Research findings indicate that the increase in PMI placement through the SSW programme during 2019–2024 reflects Japan's substantial demand for labour in sectors classified within the secondary labour market. This phenomenon can be explained through the Dual Labour Market Theory proposed by Michael J. Piore (1979).

This theory explains that international labour migration is primarily influenced by the structural demand of developed countries for workers, particularly within the secondary labour market. The labour market is divided into the primary labour market, characterized by relatively stable employment, higher wages, and career opportunities, and the secondary labour market, which tends to involve more demanding working conditions, higher risks, and lower social recognition. The inability of domestic workers to meet labour demand within the secondary sector consequently encourages developed countries to employ foreign migrant workers. In the Japanese context, these characteristics are evident in SSW sectors that experience labour shortages and are relatively less attractive to local workers. A number of previous studies have examined Indonesia–Japan labour relations and the SSW programme. Budianto (2023) demonstrates Japan's increasing demand for foreign workers as a response to the demographic crisis, whereas Sumiati (2022) emphasizes the importance of training, certification, and institutional support in enhancing the competitiveness of Indonesian migrant workers.

Widarahesty (2023) examines the experiences of Indonesian migrant workers in Japan, particularly in relation to cultural adaptation and employment protection. Nulpauziah (2025) discusses the contribution of Indonesia–Japan cooperation through the SSW programme to labour availability in Japan, whereas Raudha and Iskandar (2024) demonstrate that foreign migrant workers under the SSW programme largely occupy sectors within Japan's secondary labour market. Although previous studies have provided an overview of labour cooperation, migrant worker experiences, Japan's labour requirements, and the implementation of the SSW programme, there remains scope for further analysis specifically addressing the placement patterns of Indonesian migrant workers under the SSW programme in relation to the structural demands of the Japanese labour market. Previous studies concerning the SSW programme have generally emphasized aspects of cooperation, improvements in labour quality, worker experiences, or the contribution of the SSW programme to labour availability in Japan. In contrast, this study positions PMI placement as part of the structure of the Japanese labour market and analyzes it using Dual Labour Market Theory during the 2019–2024 period. Accordingly, this study seeks to address this research gap by linking PMI placement patterns, Japan's labour demand, and the characteristics of the secondary labour market within the framework of Indonesia–Japan bilateral relations.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the SSW programme demonstrates a relationship between the structural demands of the Japanese labour market and the increasing placement of Indonesian migrant workers. Japan obtains labour to fill sectors experiencing worker shortages, whereas Indonesia gains access to the international labour market and opportunities to enhance workforce competencies. However, this relationship also presents challenges related to worker competency preparedness, competition with other labour-sending countries, and migrant worker protection. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the placement of Indonesian migrant workers through the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) programme within Indonesia–Japan bilateral relations using the perspective of Dual Labour Market Theory during the 2019–2024 period, as well as to analyze Japan’s structural demand for Indonesian migrant workers in SSW sectors. This focus is directed toward explaining how labour demand within Japan’s secondary labour market drives the placement of Indonesian migrant workers through the SSW programme.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using the library research method. The object of the study was the placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) through the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) programme in Japan during the 2019–2024 period, particularly in sectors experiencing labour shortages and exhibiting characteristics of the secondary labour market. The study relied on secondary data obtained from academic books, scientific journals, research articles, policy documents, official reports from the Indonesian and Japanese governments, and publications from relevant institutions, including the Immigration Services Agency of Japan and BP2MI. Data collection involved reading, recording, identifying, and classifying information relevant to the placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers through the SSW programme.

Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). The collected data were classified according to Japan’s labour needs, employment-sector characteristics, developments in PMI placement, and Indonesia’s position as a labour-sending country. The analysis applied Michael J. Piore’s Dual Labour Market Theory to examine the relationship between Japan’s labour shortage, demand for workers in the secondary labour market, and the placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers through the SSW programme. The findings were subsequently assessed to determine the extent to which PMI migration during 2019–2024 corresponds with the main propositions of the Dual Labour Market Theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of the Dual Labour Market in Japan, 2019–2024

Japan’s labour market during 2019–2024 exhibited a structural division between relatively attractive employment and occupations affected by persistent labour shortages. Piore (1979) explains this condition through the distinction between the primary labour market, which provides greater employment stability, better remuneration, and stronger career prospects, and the secondary labour market, which is associated with less favourable employment conditions. Japan recorded relatively low unemployment during this period, while several industries continued to experience difficulties in securing sufficient workers. Sudiantini and Kustiawan (2024) associate this condition with demographic ageing and the changing composition of Japan’s working population, particularly the increasing proportion of elderly people.

Table 1. Characteristics of Labour Market Segments and Their Attractiveness to Domestic Workers

Labour Market Segment	Main Characteristics	Relative Domestic Labour Attraction
Primary Labour Market	Stable employment, higher remuneration, stronger employment protection, career opportunities	Relatively high

Secondary Labour Market	Physically demanding work, higher occupational risks, limited career mobility, lower social attractiveness	Relatively low
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The primary labour market generally contains occupations requiring higher qualifications and offering comparatively favourable employment conditions. Employment in technology, finance, education, research, and advanced industries is more compatible with the preferences of domestic workers because these occupations provide greater prospects for stability and professional advancement. Suryadi (2019) notes that the continued participation of older workers in Japan also reflects efforts to maintain labour capacity amid demographic change. The concentration of foreign workers in specific shortage sectors therefore cannot be interpreted as evidence of a general shortage across the entire Japanese labour market.

Table 2. Demographic Conditions and Labour Demand in Japan, 2019–2024

Indicator	Conditions in Japan, 2019–2024	Implications
Working-age population	Declining	Reduced domestic labour supply
Elderly population	Increasing	Increased demand for care services
Labour demand	Remained high in specific sectors	Labour shortages in particular sectors
Foreign worker demand	Increasing	Increased need to recruit workers from abroad

The secondary labour market represents the segment most closely associated with Japan's demand for foreign workers under the SSW scheme. Sectors such as elderly care, agriculture, food processing, manufacturing, construction, and fisheries involve demanding working conditions and have experienced difficulties in attracting sufficient domestic workers. Iskandar (2020) identifies population ageing and the expansion of long-term care needs as important factors behind Japan's demand for foreign care workers, while Syuhaimi et al. (2025) indicate that labour migration arrangements have also developed around specific shortages in care-related employment. The employment characteristics identified in these sectors correspond closely with Piore's proposition that migrant labour is frequently incorporated into occupations that domestic workers are less willing to occupy.

The implementation of the SSW programme after 2019 strengthened the connection between Japan's labour shortages and international labour recruitment. Tombalisa et al. (2019) identify the Tokutei Ginou programme as an important development in Japan–Indonesia labour cooperation, while Sumiati (2022) emphasizes the role of bilateral cooperation in improving the competitiveness of Indonesian migrant workers. The Immigration Services Agency of Japan records the SSW system as a mechanism for admitting foreign workers with specified skills into designated sectors, and Indonesian workers have become an important component of this labour supply. Srimulyani et al. (2024), Widarahesty (2024), Rolasta and Hoesin (2022), and Hirano et al. (2012) further indicate that Indonesian workers' participation in Japan involves questions of adaptation, protection, competence, and employment conditions, which are relevant to the analysis of their position within the secondary labour market.

Patterns of Indonesian Migrant Worker Placement through the SSW Programme, 2019–2024

The placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) through the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) programme increased substantially during 2019–2024, despite a temporary decline during the COVID-19 period. The available data indicate that the number of Indonesian workers under the SSW scheme expanded from 3,061 workers in 2019 to 44,298 workers in 2024. This development reflects the increasing absorption of Indonesian labour into Japanese sectors experiencing persistent labour

shortages. The Immigration Services Agency of Japan provides statistical evidence of the expansion of foreign workers holding specified skilled worker residence status during this period.

Table 3. Number of Indonesian Workers under the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) Scheme in Japan, 2019–2024

Year	Number of Indonesian Workers (SSW)
2019	3,061
2020	1,514
2021	3,061
2022	9,481
2023	25,337
2024	44,298

The decline from 3,061 workers in 2019 to 1,514 workers in 2020 corresponds with the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on international mobility. Placement recovered to 3,061 workers in 2021 and subsequently increased to 9,481 workers in 2022, 25,337 workers in 2023, and 44,298 workers in 2024. The rapid increase after 2021 indicates that the SSW mechanism became increasingly significant as international mobility recovered and Japanese employers continued to face labour shortages. Sumiati (2022) and Tombalisa et al. (2019) identify labour cooperation between Indonesia and Japan as an institutional mechanism supporting the recruitment and placement of Indonesian workers in Japan.

Table 4. Distribution of Indonesian Workers under the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) Scheme by Sector in Japan, 2024

Sector	Number of Indonesian Workers (SSW), 2024
Kaigo (Elderly Care)	9,760
Food and Beverage Processing	9,134
Agriculture	8,514
Industrial Manufacturing	7,028
Construction	3,075
Fisheries	2,452

The sectoral distribution in 2024 shows that Indonesian workers were concentrated in elderly care, food and beverage processing, agriculture, industrial manufacturing, construction, and fisheries. Elderly care recorded the largest placement at 9,760 workers, followed by food and beverage processing with 9,134 workers and agriculture with 8,514 workers. These sectors correspond to occupations associated with labour shortages and relatively limited domestic labour attraction, particularly where work involves physical demands, irregular conditions, or substantial care responsibilities. Iskandar (2020) links Japan's ageing population to the increasing requirement for foreign workers in elderly care, while Sudiantini and Kustiawan (2024) identify demographic ageing as an important feature of Japan's changing labour structure. The distribution of Indonesian workers across these sectors provides empirical support for the Dual Labour Market Theory proposed by Piore (1979).

The concentration of PMI in shortage occupations indicates that international recruitment responds to structural demand within the Japanese labour market rather than occurring solely as a consequence of individual wage-seeking decisions. Srimulyani et al. (2024) demonstrate that Indonesian Tokutei Ginou workers also encounter adaptation requirements within Japanese employment environments, while Rolasta and Hoesin (2022) emphasize the importance of institutional protection for Indonesian migrant workers. The placement pattern during 2019–2024 therefore indicates that the SSW programme functions as a channel through which Indonesian labour is incorporated into Japanese sectors characterized by persistent shortages and secondary-market employment conditions.

Indonesia's Position within Japan's Dual Labour Market

Indonesia occupied an important position among the labour-sending countries participating in Japan's SSW programme during 2019–2024. The available data place Indonesia as the second-largest source country for SSW workers after Vietnam, followed by the Philippines, Myanmar, and China. This position reflects Indonesia's capacity to supply workers for sectors experiencing persistent labour shortages in Japan. Sumiati (2022) identifies labour migration cooperation between Indonesia and Japan as an instrument for strengthening worker competence and expanding access to the Japanese employment market.

Table 5. Ranking of Countries of Origin of Workers under the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) Scheme in Japan

Rank	Country	Position as an SSW Worker-Sending Country
1	Vietnam	First
2	Indonesia	Second
3	Philippines	Third
4	Myanmar	Fourth
5	China	Fifth

Indonesia's position is closely related to the availability of workers who can meet the skill and language requirements established under the SSW programme. The recruitment mechanism requires prospective workers to satisfy specified competency standards, making training and certification important components of labour mobility. Tombalisa et al. (2019) identify the *Tokutei Ginou* scheme as an institutional framework that expanded opportunities for Indonesian workers to enter Japan's labour market. The *Immigration Services Agency of Japan* also establishes sector-specific requirements and procedures for foreign workers entering Japan under the SSW residence status.

Table 6. Dimensions of Preparedness and Support for Indonesian Workers under the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) Scheme

Dimension	Relevance for Indonesian SSW Workers	Dimension
Skills	Required to meet competency standards corresponding to specific employment sectors	Skills
Japanese Language	Required to support communication and integration within the workplace	Japanese Language
Certification	Supports compliance with the requirements for employment in designated occupations	Certification
Training	Strengthens technical preparedness and the ability to perform assigned work	Training

The position of Indonesian workers within the Japanese labour market also involves challenges related to employment adaptation and protection. Srimulyani et al. (2024) demonstrate that Indonesian Tokutei Ginou workers may encounter cultural, linguistic, and occupational adaptation requirements during employment in Japan. Rolasta and Hoesin (2022) emphasize the significance of institutional protection for Indonesian migrant workers, particularly in relation to recruitment, employment rights, and the role of Indonesian state institutions. Widarahesty (2024) also indicates that Indonesian migrant workers' experiences in Japan are shaped by workplace conditions, social interaction, and adaptation to the host society.

From the perspective of Piore's (1979) Dual Labour Market Theory, Indonesia's position reflects the role of migrant labour as a supplementary workforce within Japan's secondary labour market. Indonesian workers are predominantly directed toward occupations where labour shortages

persist, rather than being distributed evenly across all segments of the Japanese economy. The pattern indicates a structural relationship between Japan's demand for workers and Indonesia's capacity to provide labour through an organized bilateral migration mechanism. The SSW programme therefore represents not only an employment channel for Indonesian workers but also an institutional mechanism connecting Indonesia's labour supply with Japan's structural demand for workers in shortage sectors.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) through the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) programme in Japan during 2019–2024 was strongly associated with Japan's structural labour shortages. The number of Indonesian SSW workers increased from 3,061 in 2019 to 44,298 in 2024, despite a temporary decline in 2020 caused by restrictions on international mobility. The largest concentrations in 2024 were recorded in elderly care, food and beverage processing, agriculture, industrial manufacturing, construction, and fisheries. These employment patterns indicate that Indonesian workers were predominantly absorbed into sectors characterized by labour shortages, demanding working conditions, and relatively limited attractiveness to domestic workers. The findings support the relevance of Michael J. Piore's Dual Labour Market Theory in explaining Indonesian labour migration to Japan. Japan's demographic ageing, declining working-age population, and persistent shortages in selected occupations generated structural demand for foreign workers, while Indonesia supplied workers through an institutionalized bilateral migration mechanism. The SSW programme functioned as an important channel connecting Indonesian labour supply with Japan's demand for workers in the secondary labour market. The study also identifies the importance of worker competence, language preparation, institutional protection, and employment adaptation in sustaining bilateral labour cooperation between Indonesia and Japan.

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