Pacific International Journal, Vol. 9(3); 2026
ISSN (Print) 2663-8991, ISSN (Online) 2616-4825[1]
DOI:10.55014/pij.v9i3.1006
https://rclss.com/index.php/pij

The Historical Evolution and Policy Implications of Japan’s Teacher Certification Examination System

Yuan, Pei. Li.[1] & Qing, Wei. Yi.[2]

[1] Center for Teacher Education Research, Beijing Normal University, Key Research Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Universities, Ministry of Education, Beijing 100875, China

[2] Institute of Curriculum and Instruction, East China Normal University, Key Research Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Universities, Ministry of Education, Shanghai 200062, China

Abstract: The teacher certification examination is an important mechanism for defining the entry threshold of the teaching profession, but its institutional role differs substantially across national systems. This study examines Japan’s teacher certification examination system and explains how it has operated as an alternative route within a broader certification framework dominated by university-based teacher preparation. Drawing on the historical evolution, certificate hierarchy, eligibility rules, examination content, and exemption arrangements of Japan’s system, the study argues that the Japanese model is characterized by limited openness, differentiated access, and a strong concern for practice-based competence. Its value lies in its capacity to respond flexibly to shortages in specific school levels and subject areas without replacing the professional preparation function of universities. At the same time, the model also has limitations, including a small scale of implementation, restricted coverage, and possible tensions between flexible entry and systematic professional preparation. Based on this analysis, the study suggests clarifying the position of China’s teacher certification examination within the teacher quality assurance system, developing more differentiated certification mechanisms for shortage areas and subjects, and strengthening practice-oriented assessment across the certification process.

Keywords: Japan’s teacher certification system; teacher certification examination; alternative route; teacher quality assurance; teacher education

I. Introduction

Amid global efforts to improve educational quality, the construction of a high-quality and professional teaching workforce has become a central concern in education policy. A teacher certification system refers to the state-regulated institutional arrangement through which entry into the teaching profession is authorized. It establishes minimum professional standards, protects the public interest, and provides a basic guarantee for the quality of primary and secondary school teachers and teacher professionalism.[1] Within this broader framework, teacher certification examinations are often designed to test whether prospective teachers have reached the minimum level of professional knowledge, pedagogical understanding, and teaching competence required for entry into teaching.[2]

China’s teacher certification examination system has made notable progress in standardization and institutionalization. Since the implementation of the nationally unified examination, the system has helped promote procedural fairness, expanded access to the teaching profession, and strengthened the visibility of teacher professional standards. Yet several problems remain. Existing studies have pointed to the insufficient connection between examination content and real teaching demands, the relatively weak assessment of educational beliefs and teaching competence, and the limited capacity of the examination to distinguish candidates’ professional potential.[3][4] These problems constrain the examination’s effectiveness as an entry threshold and raise a broader policy question: how should a certification examination be positioned within the overall teacher quality assurance system?

This question has gained renewed significance in China. In January 2025, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the *Outline of the Educational Powerhouse Construction Plan (2024-2035)*, which called for improving the national teacher certification system. The reform task is therefore not simply to adjust examination subjects or question types, but to reconsider the institutional relationship among teacher preparation, certification, recruitment, registration, and professional development. From this perspective, international comparison can help clarify alternative institutional logics and identify reform possibilities.

Japan provides a useful case for such comparison. As a major education system in East Asia, Japan has long emphasized university-based teacher preparation as the principal route to teacher certification. Unlike China’s current nationally unified certification examination, which is open to a broad range of applicants, Japan’s postwar certification framework has been built on the principle of “training teachers in universities” and certification by completion of prescribed teacher education coursework. The teacher certification examination does not serve as the mainstream route into teaching. Instead, it functions as a limited alternative route for specific school levels and shortage subject areas.

[Received 6 April 2026; Accepted 10 May 2026; Published (online) 20, June, 2026]

The existing Chinese literature on Japan's teacher certification system has mainly introduced its historical development, legal framework, or general institutional characteristics. However, relatively limited attention has been paid to the internal logic of the examination route itself: why it has remained limited in scope, how it is connected to the certificate hierarchy, and what strengths and constraints arise from using an examination as a supplementary mechanism rather than a universal entry route. In addition, comparative discussions often move directly from Japanese experience to Chinese reform suggestions without sufficiently explaining the institutional differences between the two systems. This leaves a gap between descriptive comparison and policy learning.

To address this gap, this study examines Japan's teacher certification examination system as an alternative route embedded in a university-centered certification framework. It asks the following research question: How has Japan designed and adjusted its teacher certification examination system as a limited alternative route, and what implications and cautions does this model offer for the reform of China's teacher certification examination system? The study first reviews the historical evolution of Japan's system, then analyzes its current institutional structure and key features, and finally discusses its implications for China with attention to both transferable experience and contextual limitations.

II. Historical Evolution of Japan's Teacher Certification Examination System

The development of Japan's teacher certification examination system can be understood as a gradual process of institutional adjustment. Rather than replacing university-based teacher preparation, the examination route emerged and evolved as a controlled mechanism for balancing teacher quality and teacher supply. Three stages are especially important.

(1) Initial Establishment under the Dual Pressure of Teacher Quality and Quantity (1949-1970)

The establishment of Japan's postwar teacher certification system was shaped by both teacher shortages and the reconstruction of teacher professionalism. After the Second World War, Japan faced a serious shortage of teachers in both quantity and professional quality. In response to democratic educational reform and social reconstruction, Japan promulgated the *Educational Personnel Certification Act* on May 31, 1949. The Act abolished the prewar state-led normal education model and established the principle of "training teachers in universities."[5] Individuals could obtain a teaching certificate after completing the prescribed teacher education curriculum, including subject-specialized courses and professional education courses, at higher education institutions recognized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

This open university-based framework played an important role in expanding teacher preparation after the war, but it also revealed several weaknesses. Certification standards were relatively lenient, and the number of certificate holders increased rapidly even though many did not actually enter teaching. In addition, the system paid more attention to subject knowledge than to pedagogical professionalism and practical competence. A 1958 advisory report, *Policy Guidelines for Improving the Teacher Preparation System*, identified excessive openness as one cause of declining teacher quality and emphasized the need to strengthen the professional character of teaching.[6]

Against this background, the 1964 revision of the *Educational Personnel Certification Act* formally introduced a standardized teacher certification examination route.[7] This reform did not abandon the university-based route. Instead, it added an examination-based mechanism to supplement the existing framework. From its beginning, the examination route had a limited scope. It applied mainly to specialized upper-secondary subjects such as nursing, kendo, and bookkeeping and computation, while general subjects in elementary and secondary education continued to rely on university-based preparation.[8] Thus, the original purpose of the examination was not general replacement but targeted supplementation.

(2) Differentiated Openness by School Level (1970-2005)

From the 1970s to the early twenty-first century, Japan's teacher certification examination system became more formalized and differentiated by school level. The 1973 revision incorporated examinations for elementary schools, lower secondary schools, and special support schools, and the *Regulations on Teacher Certification Examinations* specified examination categories, content, procedures, and organizing bodies. The 1988 revision further developed a hierarchical certificate structure. Ordinary teaching certificates were divided into advanced certificates, first-class certificates, and second-class certificates. For upper-secondary school teachers, only the advanced and first-class certificates were retained. The reform also made clear that candidates passing the certification examination could obtain only the lowest-level certificate for the relevant school level.[9]

However, the expansion of the examination route did not continue without challenge. By the early 2000s, policymakers increasingly questioned whether certification examinations could adequately judge the professional preparation of candidates who had not completed systematic university-based teacher education. In 2002, the Central Council for Education stated that the future form of teacher certification examinations should be reconsidered, including the possibility of abolition.[10] This policy discussion reflected a concern that examination-based entry might not fully compensate for the lack of structured pedagogical training and school-based preparation.

As a result, the lower secondary school teacher certification examination was abolished in 2004. In 2005, Japan established the kindergarten teacher certification examination, and the system gradually formed a differentiated pattern: kindergarten, elementary school, and special support school teaching remained partially open through examinations, whereas lower secondary school teaching largely returned to the university-based preparation route. This stage therefore shows both expansion and contraction. Japan did not simply broaden access; it recalibrated the examination route according to perceived professional risks and teacher supply needs.

(3) Targeted Adjustment in Response to Changing Social Needs (2005-Present)

Since 2005, Japan's teacher certification examination system has maintained a relatively stable structure while making targeted adjustments in response to new demands. The system long covered kindergarten, elementary school, and special

support school education. Around the transition from the Heisei era to the Reiwa era, three changes became especially visible.

First, examination administration became more centralized and professionalized. In the past, several universities, including Miyagi University of Education, Tokyo Gakugei University, Yokohama National University, and Shizuoka University, jointly implemented the examinations. Since 2019, this responsibility has been transferred to the National Institute for School Teachers and Staff Development (NITS). As a national professional organization for teacher development, NITS has strengthened the standardization and authority of the examination.

Second, the examination process was simplified. Before 2020, the elementary school teacher certification examination had three stages: a first examination on teacher-related subjects, a second examination on subject knowledge, and a third practical examination. Because the process was lengthy, candidates faced high time and financial costs. In 2020, the first and second stages were merged into one written examination, while the practical examination was retained. This adjustment reduced the burden on candidates without removing the practice-oriented component of assessment.

Third, examination types were adjusted in 2024 to respond to changing social needs. The examination for special support schools was suspended, and the applicability of special teaching certificates was expanded for professionals with relevant practical experience.[11] At the same time, Japan introduced an upper-secondary information technology teacher certification examination to respond to the growing demand for teachers with digital competence.[12] This "one suspension and one addition" shows the core logic of the Japanese model: examination-based entry is activated or restricted according to specific supply needs and professional considerations.

Taken together, the historical evolution of Japan's system shows a pattern of selective openness. The examination route has never become a universal substitute for teacher education. Its function has been repeatedly adjusted to solve specific problems: teacher shortages after the war, differentiated access at particular school levels, and recent demand for digital and practice-based expertise.

III. Current Structure and Main Features of Japan's Teacher Certification Examination System

Japan's current teacher certification examination system, adjusted in Reiwa 6 (2024), is institutionally separated from teacher recruitment. Passing the certification examination allows a candidate to obtain a teaching certificate, but it does not guarantee employment. Candidates who seek employment in public or private schools must still pass the relevant appointment examination. This institutional separation is important because it defines certification as a professional threshold rather than a recruitment decision.

(1) Examination Positioning: Limited Openness and Alternative Entry

The most distinctive feature of Japan's teacher certification examination is limited openness. The examination is not a society-wide selection mechanism covering all school levels and all subjects. It is available only for kindergarten, elementary school, and upper-secondary information technology, while most lower- and upper-secondary subjects still rely on the university-based route.

This design creates a dual structure. The mainstream route requires candidates to complete teacher education coursework, undertake teaching practicum, and obtain certification through the university route. The examination route provides an alternative channel for specific fields where additional flexibility is needed. Its purpose is therefore not to weaken university-based preparation but to broaden teacher supply in carefully selected areas.

Eligibility rules also show this differentiated logic. For the elementary school examination, applicants must be at least 20 years old by April 1 of the examination year and must have completed upper-secondary education or be otherwise eligible for admission to higher education. The kindergarten examination is stricter. Applicants must meet the basic conditions for elementary school candidates, possess at least three years of work experience in early childhood education institutions, and hold the hoikushi qualification.[13] The upper-secondary information technology examination is also highly selective: candidates must meet the basic requirements and pass the Applied Information Technology Engineer Examination or hold advanced professional qualifications in the information technology field. These conditions show that Japan uses the examination route selectively, combining openness with prior experience or professional credentials.

(2) Teaching Certificates: Stratified and Categorized Design

Japan's teaching certificate system is stratified and categorized. It mainly includes ordinary teaching certificates, temporary teaching certificates, and special licenses. Following the 2022 revision of the *Educational Personnel Certification Act*, the previous ten-year validity period for ordinary teaching certificates was abolished. Temporary teaching certificates are used on an emergency basis to address regional shortages and are valid for three years. Special licenses are granted to individuals who have relevant expertise and have passed teacher personnel examinations; they generally serve as a flexible mechanism for bringing experienced professionals into schools.

Those who pass the teacher certification examination generally obtain an ordinary teaching certificate, but only at the lowest level available through that route. Kindergarten and elementary school candidates obtain second-class certificates, while candidates passing the upper-secondary information technology examination obtain a first-class certificate. Higher-level certificates require degree-based preparation and completion of the prescribed teacher education credits. This arrangement sends a clear institutional message: examination-based certification is an entry point, not a complete substitute for professional preparation and long-term development.

Table 1. Levels and Basic Qualifications of Ordinary Teaching Certificates in Japan

School Level	Certificate Level	Basic Qualification
Kindergarten	Advanced Certificate	Master's degree
	First-Class Certificate	Bachelor's degree
	Second-Class Certificate	Graduation from a junior college, or passing the kindergarten teacher certification examination
Elementary School and Lower Secondary School	Advanced Certificate	Master's degree
	First-Class Certificate	Bachelor's degree
	Second-Class Certificate	Graduation from a junior college, or passing the elementary school teacher certification examination
Upper Secondary School	Advanced Certificate	Master's degree
	First-Class Certificate	Bachelor's degree, or passing the upper-secondary information technology teacher certification examination

Table 1 shows that examination-based certification is located at the lower end of the certificate hierarchy. This design preserves the professional value of degree-based preparation while allowing a limited entry route for selected fields.

(3) Examination Content and Format: School-Level Specificity and Practice Orientation

Japan's teacher certification examinations are differentiated by school level and subject area. The design of each examination reflects the professional tasks associated with the relevant teaching context. In general, the system combines standardized written tests with performance-based assessment.

The elementary school teacher certification examination has two stages. Candidates must first pass the written examination before entering the educational practice examination.[16] The written examination consists of four modules. Subject (I) assesses foundational theories of education. Subjects (II) and (III) assess elementary school subject content and instructional methods. Subject (II) requires candidates to answer questions in six of ten elementary school subjects, including at least two of music, art, and physical education.[17] Subject (III) requires candidates to select one subject for more specialized assessment.[18] Subject (IV) focuses on teachers' professional qualities, including professional awareness, understanding of child development, and practical instructional skills. The second stage evaluates lesson-plan design, simulated teaching, and oral performance through an individual interview.

The kindergarten teacher certification examination includes Subject (I), Subject (II), and the Kindergarten Education Practicum Subject.[19] Subject (I) assesses foundational educational theory and the professional competency requirements for kindergarten teacher preparation. Subject (II) examines knowledge of early childhood curriculum and childcare practice. The practicum subject requires candidates to complete lesson-plan design or other practice-oriented tasks based on the *Kindergarten Education Guidelines*.

The upper-secondary information technology teacher certification examination follows a similar staged structure.[20] The first-stage written examination includes educational theory, information technology subject knowledge, and subject-specific teaching methods. It also assesses teachers' professional qualities, such as professional awareness, understanding of student development, and practical instructional skills. The second stage uses lesson-plan design, simulated teaching, and an oral examination to judge candidates' practical teaching competence.

Table 2. Contents and Formats of the Elementary School Teacher Certification Examination

Exam Session	Subject Category	Exam Format
First Exam	Subject-related and Teaching Profession-related Subjects (I)	Written test (multiple-choice questions)
	Subject-related and Teaching Profession-related Subjects (II)	Written test (multiple-choice questions)
	Subject-related and Teaching Profession-related Subjects (III)	Written test (two essay questions)
	Subject-related and Teaching Profession-related Subjects (IV)	Written test (two essay questions)
Second Exam	Educational Practice Examination	Lesson-plan preparation, simulated classroom teaching, oral test, individual interview, etc.

Table 2 indicates that the elementary school examination does not rely only on written testing. It combines theoretical, subject-specific, and practical components, which helps align certification with actual classroom work.

(4) Examination Results: Ability-Oriented Standards and Experience-Based Exemptions

Japan applies differentiated passing standards according to examination format.[21] Multiple-choice questions and most essay questions use an absolute scoring standard, with 60 percent as the general passing threshold. Elementary School Subject (II) uses a dual standard: candidates must score at least 60 percent overall across the six selected subjects and at least 40 percent in each individual subject. Some essay modules and educational practice examinations are evaluated

through a binary grading system of A (Pass) and B (Fail). This design shows that Japan combines quantitative scoring with holistic judgment when evaluating practical competence.

The system also includes exemptions.[22] One type is stage-based exemption: candidates who have passed certain kindergarten examination subjects within the previous two years may apply for exemption from those subjects. Another type is experience-based cross-level exemption: applicants who hold a teaching certificate for another school level, have at least three years of teaching experience, and show satisfactory professional performance may be exempted from specific subjects. However, the scope of exemption remains limited. For example, exemption from Elementary School Subject (I) is available to holders of kindergarten, lower secondary, and upper-secondary teaching certificates, while exemption from Elementary School Subject (III) is available only to holders of lower and upper secondary certificates. These arrangements recognize prior professional experience but still preserve school-level boundaries.

Table 3. Passing Standards for Teacher Certification Examinations

Exam Format	Passing Standard
Multiple-choice questions and most essay questions	A score of at least 60% of the total points; for Elementary School Subject (II), an additional minimum of 40% in each selected subject is required.
Essay questions for Elementary School Subject (IV) and Upper-Secondary Information Technology Subject (II)	Assessed as A or B. Grade A indicates passing; Grade B indicates failure.
Educational Practice Examination	Comprehensive performance in lesson-plan preparation, simulated teaching, and oral examination is graded A or B. Grade A indicates passing; Grade B indicates failure.

Table 3 shows that Japan uses both score-based and holistic standards. This combination is especially important for assessing practice-oriented tasks that cannot be fully captured by numerical scores.

Application Stage	Exempted Subjects	Exemption Requirements
Kindergarten	Subject (I), Subject (II)	Having passed the corresponding subjects in the Kindergarten Teacher Certification Examination in the past two years
Kindergarten	Kindergarten Educational Practice Subject	Holding a teacher certificate for another school level, or having passed the Kindergarten Educational Practice Subject in the past two years
Elementary School	Subject (I)	Holding a kindergarten, lower-secondary, or upper-secondary teaching certificate, having served as a teacher for at least three years with satisfactory performance
Elementary School	Subject (III)	Holding a lower-secondary or upper-secondary teaching certificate, having served as a teacher for at least three years with satisfactory performance
Upper Secondary School (Information Technology)	Subject (II)	Holding an upper-secondary teaching certificate, having served as a teacher in an upper-secondary school for at least three years with satisfactory performance

Table 4. Exemption Paths for Teacher Certification Examinations

Table 4 suggests that exemption is not a general relaxation of standards. It is granted only when prior qualifications or teaching experience provide relevant evidence of professional competence.

(5) Critical Evaluation: Strengths and Limitations of the Japanese Model

The Japanese system has three notable strengths. First, it protects the central role of university-based teacher preparation while leaving room for controlled flexibility. This helps prevent the examination from becoming a shortcut that bypasses professional preparation. Second, it links certification to differentiated school-level and subject-specific needs. The addition of the upper-secondary information technology examination in 2024 shows that the system can respond to new teacher demand without redesigning the entire certification framework. Third, the inclusion of practical assessment and experience-based exemptions reflects an understanding that teacher quality cannot be judged only by written tests.

At the same time, the system has limitations. Its limited scale means that it cannot solve broad structural shortages by itself. The narrow coverage of the examination route may also restrict opportunities for capable professionals in other shortage areas. Moreover, the balance between flexible entry and systematic preparation remains fragile. Candidates who enter through examinations may have strong professional credentials or practical experience, but they may not have received the same depth of pedagogical preparation as graduates of university-based teacher education programs. Japan partly addresses this problem through certificate hierarchy, appointment examinations, and in-service development, but the tension cannot be fully eliminated. Therefore, the Japanese model should not be understood as a simple endorsement of examination-based entry. Its deeper lesson lies in the careful institutional control of where, when, and how an alternative route should be used.

IV. Implications for Reforming China's Teacher Certification Examination System

The Japanese case is valuable for China not because its institutional design can be copied directly, but because it clarifies the conditions under which a certification examination can support teacher quality assurance. Compared with Japan, China's teacher certification examination is broader in scope, more nationally unified, and more open to the general

public. This difference means that China's reform must focus not only on examination content, but also on institutional positioning and coordination.

(1) Clarifying Institutional Positioning and Strengthening System Coupling

Japan's experience suggests that a teacher certification examination should be clearly positioned within a broader quality assurance system. In Japan, the examination route is defined as an alternative route that assesses minimum professional competence in specific areas. It does not replace university-based teacher preparation. It is also connected to a certificate hierarchy, appointment examinations, and post-entry professional development. This institutional coupling helps reduce the risk that certification becomes a one-time test disconnected from professional growth.

China has gradually built a teacher quality assurance system centered on professional standards, but the relationship among certification examinations, exemption-based certification for teacher education graduates, teacher recruitment, periodic registration, and teacher development remains insufficiently integrated. In particular, the coexistence of the examination route and exemption-based certification raises the issue of standards equivalence. If the two routes are not clearly coordinated, they may produce different expectations for professional preparation and entry competence.

This study suggests clarifying the role of the teacher certification examination as a minimum entry threshold within the teacher quality assurance system. Examination standards should be aligned with teacher professional standards and with the requirements of teacher education program accreditation. At the same time, the system should leave room for recruitment examinations and induction training to evaluate candidates' school-specific suitability and developmental potential. In the long run, China may also explore a more stratified certificate structure that distinguishes entry-level certification from higher levels of professional development. Such a structure would help transform certification from a one-time access mechanism into part of a career-long professional development pathway.

(2) Building Differentiated Certification Mechanisms for Regional and Subject-Specific Needs

Japan's differentiated certificate design offers useful insights for addressing structural shortages in China. In Japan, ordinary teaching certificates maintain national professional standards, while temporary teaching certificates and special licenses provide flexible responses to regional and subject-specific shortages. The 2024 information technology examination further shows how an examination route can be used to attract professionals in emerging fields.

China faces uneven teacher supply across regions and subjects. Shortages are especially visible in rural and remote areas and in subjects such as science education, mental health education, arts, physical education, labor education, and information technology. A single national examination model is not well suited to these differentiated needs. China therefore needs a more flexible certification framework while maintaining the bottom line of national professional standards.

This study suggests developing differentiated certification mechanisms in three directions. First, China could explore regionally adapted certification arrangements for central and western regions, ethnic minority areas, and remote rural areas. Such arrangements might include temporary or internship-based certificates, but they should be accompanied by clear service requirements, induction training, and professional development support. Second, special pathways could be developed for shortage subjects and practice-oriented fields. For example, candidates with recognized industry credentials, professional certificates, or substantial practical achievements could be allowed to enter targeted certification processes, provided that their pedagogical competence is also assessed. Third, China should establish dynamic evaluation mechanisms linked to periodic registration, school-based mentoring, and continuing professional development. Flexibility should not mean lowering standards; it should mean matching certification requirements more precisely to teacher supply needs and professional tasks.

(3) Strengthening Practice Orientation and Improving Competence-Based Evaluation

The Japanese system also highlights the need to strengthen practice orientation. Its examinations assess not only educational knowledge but also lesson-plan design, simulated teaching, oral performance, and prior teaching experience. These arrangements help judge whether candidates can act effectively in real teaching contexts.

China's teacher certification examination includes written tests and interviews, but the assessment of authentic teaching competence remains limited. Structured interviews and trial lectures provide useful evidence, yet they often occur in compressed and artificial settings. The examination process pays insufficient attention to candidates' sustained teaching practicum, classroom observation, reflective ability, and capacity to respond to complex educational situations.

This study suggests improving the evaluation of teaching competence across the whole certification process. First, teaching practicum or classroom observation experience could become an explicit prerequisite for examination application, with clear minimum requirements for duration and quality. This would help ensure that both teacher education graduates and non-teacher education applicants have basic exposure to real classrooms before certification. Second, the interview stage could include more contextualized teaching tasks, such as analysis of classroom incidents, diagnosis of student learning difficulties, and reflection on teaching decisions. Third, China could build a developmental portfolio system for teacher certification applicants. Such a system could collect evidence from teaching practicum, school-based observation, tutoring, rural service, and reflective reports. These records would provide a richer basis for certification and recruitment than one-time test performance alone.

However, the use of digital tools in practical assessment should be cautious. AI-supported classroom performance analysis may improve feedback and objectivity, but it may also introduce algorithmic bias and over-standardization. Therefore, any AI-based assessment should remain supplementary, transparent, and subject to human professional judgment.

V. Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it is based mainly on policy documents and secondary literature. Although these materials are suitable for analyzing institutional design, they cannot fully reveal how candidates, universities, schools, and local education authorities experience the examination system in practice. Future studies could use interviews, case studies, or administrative data to examine the implementation effects of Japan's examination route.

Second, the study focuses on the national-level structure of Japan's teacher certification examination system. Local practices in teacher recruitment, appointment examinations, and in-service support may influence the actual value of certification, but these issues are not examined in depth. Further research could compare prefectural practices and explore how certification interacts with local teacher labor markets.

Third, the implications for China are proposed through institutional comparison rather than empirical policy testing. China and Japan differ in population size, regional diversity, teacher supply structure, and governance arrangements. Therefore, the Japanese experience should be used as a reference for reform thinking rather than as a direct policy template.

VI. Conclusion

This study examined the historical evolution, current structure, and policy logic of Japan's teacher certification examination system. The analysis shows that Japan's examination route is best understood as a limited alternative route embedded in a university-centered teacher certification framework. Its main function is to supplement teacher supply in specific school levels and subject areas while preserving the professional status of systematic teacher preparation.

The key lesson of the Japanese case is not that certification examinations should be expanded without restriction. Rather, it shows that examination-based entry must be institutionally bounded, professionally benchmarked, and connected to teacher development after entry. For China, the reform of the teacher certification examination system should therefore move beyond technical adjustment of test content. It should clarify the examination's position within the teacher quality assurance system, develop differentiated certification mechanisms for shortage areas and subjects, and strengthen practice-oriented assessment. Only in this way can the teacher certification examination better serve as a professional threshold for teacher entry and as a component of a broader system for improving teacher quality.

References

[1] Li, J. Y. (2022). The epoch-making innovation and development trend of China's teacher qualification system reform: An interview with Liu Limin, president of the China Education Association for International Exchange and former Vice Minister of Education. *Teacher Development Research, 6*(1), 1-12. [in Chinese]

[2] Yang, H. B. (2021). An analysis on the development of primary and secondary school teacher qualification examinations under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. *China Examinations*, (7), 42-49. [in Chinese]

[3] Huang, J. L., & Yuan, P. L. (2024). Evolution logic and optimization path of teacher qualification accreditation system based on social barrier theory. *Journal of Northeast Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, (6), 125-132. [in Chinese]

[4] Feng, J. G. (2024). Research on the transformation of the development form of primary and secondary school teacher qualification examination system in China. *Chinese Journal of Educational Science (Chinese & English), 7*(1), 140-149. [in Chinese]

[5] Tsuchiya, M. (2004). *Training of modern Japanese teachers* (Bao, L., Trans.). Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press. [in Japanese]

[6] Niui, I. (1988). Postwar Japanese teacher policy and contemporary issues. *Journal of Sociology of Education*, (43), 18-30. [in Japanese]

[7] Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (1981). Centennial history of the school system: Development of teachers and teacher training. [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]

[8] Ma, L. (2009). Historical evolution and characteristics of Japan's teacher qualification system. *Primary & Secondary Education Abroad*, (11), 46-51. [in Chinese]

[9] He, C. J. (2011). A comparison of teacher certification systems between China and Japan. *Journal of Educational Development*, (8), 41-43. [in Chinese]

[10] Central Council for Education. (2002). On the future form of the teacher licensing system (Report). [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]

[11] Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2022). Teacher qualification examination for special needs schools (independent activities) from Reiwa 4 onward. [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]

[12] Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2024). Teacher qualification examinations from Reiwa 6 onward. [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]

[13] Note: To obtain the hoikushi qualification, applicants must have more than three years of relevant work experience, with total actual working hours exceeding 4,320 hours. Working hours not directly involved in childcare are not counted as actual working hours.

[14] Note: Junior colleges are an important part of Japanese higher education, usually with a study duration of two years. They focus on cultivating application-oriented talents with practical curricula, similar to higher vocational colleges and technical colleges in China.

[15] Ji, Z. Q. (2002). An overview of Japan's primary and secondary school teacher certification system. *Educational Practice & Research*, (6), 8-9. [in Chinese]

[16] National Institute for Educational Policy Research. (2024). Examination guide for Reiwa 6 elementary school teacher qualification examination. [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]
[17] National Institute for Educational Policy Research. (2024). Subjects related to curricula and teaching profession (II) in Reiwa 6 elementary school teacher qualification examination. [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]
[18] National Institute for Educational Policy Research. (2024). Subjects related to curricula and teaching profession (III) in Reiwa 6 elementary school teacher qualification examination. [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]
[19] National Institute for Educational Policy Research. (2024). Examination guide for Reiwa 6 kindergarten teacher qualification examination. [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]
[20] National Institute for Educational Policy Research. (2024). Examination guide for Reiwa 6 senior high school information technology teacher qualification examination. [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]
[21] National Institute for Educational Policy Research. (2024). Passing criteria for Reiwa 6 teacher qualification examinations. [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]
[22] National Institute for Educational Policy Research. (2023). Implementation of Reiwa 6 teacher qualification examinations. [EB/OL]. [in Japanese]
[23] Ma, S. W., Ma, Y. R., & Wang, Z. Q. (2020). Quality assurance system for interview in primary and secondary school teacher qualification examinations: Interpretation and construction. *China Examinations*, (1), 65-71. [in Chinese]
[24] Huang, J. L., & Yuan, P. L. (2024). Evolution logic and optimization path of teacher qualification accreditation system based on social barrier theory. *Journal of Northeast Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, (6), 125-132. [in Chinese]