

## LITERATURE REVIEW ON EMPLOYMENT ISSUES FOR FOREIGN CARE WORKERS - CHANGES IN ISSUES BASED ON STATUS OF RESIDENCE.

Kyoko Hodotsuka and Keiko Hattori\*

Nihon Institute of Medical Science.

Received date: 01 November 2024

Revised date: 15 November 2024

Accepted date: 01 December 2024



\*Corresponding Author: Keiko Hattori

Nihon Institute of Medical Science.

### 1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1) Policies and trends in accepting foreign caregivers in Japan The current total population of Japan is approximately 125 million, of which the population aged 65 and over exceeds 36 million, with the ageing rate reaching 29%. In contrast, the population aged 15-64 peaked at 87.16 million in 1995 and then began to decline, reaching 74.21 million in 2022, or 59.4% of the total population. Furthermore, as if to spur on these current conditions, future estimates of life expectancy have shown an upward trend, with the ageing of the population continuing unabated at 90.50 years for women and 84.45 years for men by 2050. In addition, the working-age population will also find it difficult to break away from the current situation.<sup>[1]</sup> The number of foreign human resources accepted in FY2023 exceeded 2 million, and the text presented at the relevant ministerial meeting on acceptance and coexistence states that "the Government as a whole will continue to steadily implement relevant measures and regularly follow up on comprehensive measures, with the aim of realising a society in which people can live together, The Government as a whole will work towards the realisation of a convivial society."<sup>[2]</sup> Regardless of the field, it can be seen that policies are being implemented with high expectations for foreign human resources.<sup>[2]</sup> Entry routes and status of residence for foreign caregivers and the purpose of the system As a result of accepting foreign caregivers through different entry routes, the number of EPA caregivers and candidates under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), which was launched in 2008, is expected to increase to 2023. As of 2023, the number of EPA care workers/candidates under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), which started in 2008, was 3,257 (including 635 who have acquired qualifications), while the number of those with the "long-term care" residence status was 5,339 and 15,011 as technical apprentices. Furthermore, the number of people with specified skills stood at 28,400 at the end of December 2023, a remarkable annual increase from 16 people in September 2019, when the system was launched<sup>[3]</sup>, indicating the country's proactive stance on accepting people with specified skills. Through such policies, it is clear that a new support system with cross-cultural awareness is being sought for the care of the elderly, who account for just over a quarter of the total population of Japan. The 'specified skills 1' category, which was introduced in 2008 based on the history of accepting foreign caregivers, has been used as a place to continue accepting those who have completed 'technical training' as unskilled workers, as well as those who entered Japan on 'specified activities' but were unable to continue their studies at a care training facility (hereafter 'training facility') because they found it difficult to continue their studies and were therefore unable to continue on a student visa. In other words, the "Specified Technical Skills 1" system is a means of accepting foreign personnel and at the same time preventing them from returning to their home countries.<sup>[4]</sup> In other words, the acceptance of foreign nationals under the 'specified skill No. 1' category is a policy that embodies the aforementioned government's concept of 'symbiosis'. The entry route, status of residence and purpose of employment in the care sector are different for each of these foreign care workers, and a system relating to the period of stay and future career paths has been set out (Fig. 1).<sup>[5]</sup>

### 2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this paper is to clarify, on the basis of past research data, how employment through multiple routes of entry includes different objectives for different statuses of residence, how this affects the caregiving practice and what the challenges are in terms of

employment. Furthermore, while focusing on the changes, including policies, from 2009, when the acceptance of foreign caregivers became more active, to the present, this study will focus on the differences in entry routes and residence statuses, with a view to the

employment characteristics based on entry regulations for multiple routes.

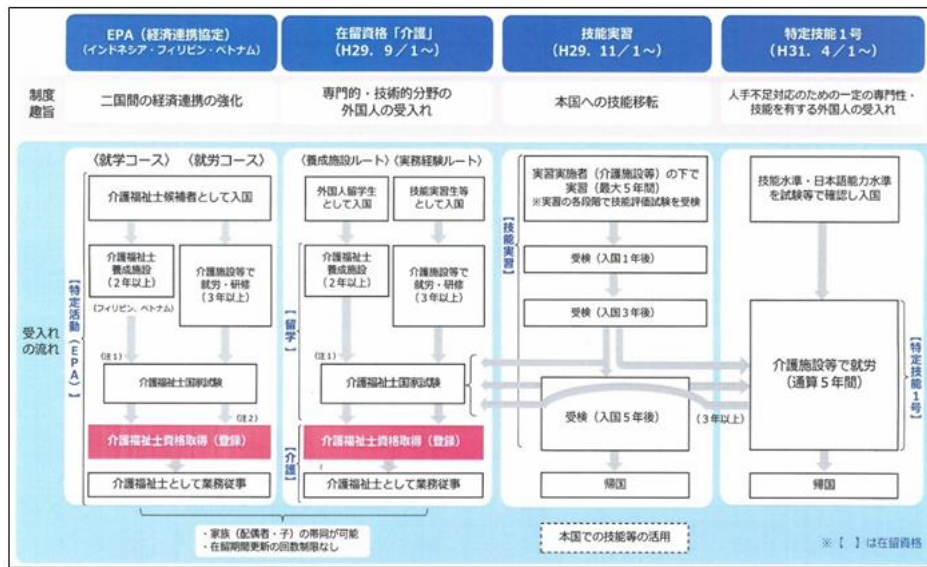


Fig. 1: Source: Bibliography 5.

II. Research methods

Research articles on the employment of foreign caregivers were searched and organised by status of residence, and employment issues were extracted based on the nature of each status of residence. The academic search engine Google scholar was used to search for the keywords 'foreign caregiver', 'employment' and 'employment issues', and research papers that matched the purpose of this paper were targeted. In doing so, research papers from the start of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) (2008/Indonesians) to 2023 were included as the transition of Japan's policy for

accepting foreign nationals. 2. Categorise the retrieved research papers by status of residence and clarify the challenges for foreign nationals working in Japanese care facilities. 3. Search separately under 'nursing care students' for issues faced by graduates of qualified nursing care training institutions while studying in Japan, and clarify the issues they face while studying in Japan. 4. Based on the results of 1-3, clarify the relationship between learning challenges for employment among caregiving students and employment challenges for foreign caregivers who are actually working.

III. Literature review on employment issues based on differences in immigration routes and status of residence (table 1)

year of issue	Total number of papers	Major issues	Number of papers for each assignment	researcher	subject of research	Issue Overview
2008-2013	16	1. Japanese-language	6	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Acceptance Facilities Japanese language teacher	Difficulty in learning Japanese Difficulty in learning Japanese Differences in support from facility to facility
		2. Support system	6	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Caregivers at the receiving facility Japanese nursing staff	Large financial and human resource burden Differences in requests between the government and the facility Burden on the facility
		3. National Exam inator	2	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Acceptance Facilities Candidate	Concerns and dissatisfaction on the part of the facility Differences in support from facility to facility Passing the national exam is a main concern.
		4. Intercultural Communication	3	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Acceptance Facilities	Difficulty in learning Japanese (mainly Kanji) No opportunity to learn about Japanese culture Institutional problems / communication difficulties
2014-2018	22	1. Japanese-language	8	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Acceptance Facilities Candidate Vietnamese candidates	Methods of Japanese Language Education
		2. National Exam inator	5	Faculty outside of the nursing field	person who has passed the national exam Japanese caregivers Acceptance Facilities	national exam Educational methods for passing the National Exam inator
		3. Support system	5	Faculty outside of the nursing field	EPA system Literature on Candidates Documentation of Acceptance Results Candidates	Burden on the facility Difficulty in learning Japanese Educational methods for passing the National Exam inator
		4. Cross-cultural Understanding	5	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Literature on EPA education Candidate 国家試験合格者	Literature on EPA education Candidate 国家試験合格者 Lack of diversity and cross-cultural understanding
2019-2023	6	1. Education Support	3	Faculty outside of the nursing field	外国人国家試験合格者 Candidate	Need assistance with Japanese language barriers Need assistance in preparing for national examinations.
		2. Communication	2	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Foreign and Japanese care occupations Literatures	Foreign caregivers have good communication skills but do not work for long periods of time.
		3. Support system	3	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Foreigners who have passed the national exam Candidates who returned home Literatures	Not financially able to afford it. There was not enough support. Need to fulfill livelihood support.
		4. EPA system	1	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Newspaper articles, literatures	Challenges of the EPA System Structure

[Technical Intern Trainee (Nursing Care Worker)]						
Year of Issue	Year of Issue	Major Issues	Number of papers for each	researcher	subject of research	Issue Overview
2022	2	1. Communication in Japanese	1	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Japanese caregivers	Communication in Japanese for 7 technical intern trainees (Vishan and Yamada) working at 3 facilities
2023		2. In-work training and acceptance system	1	Faculty outside of the nursing field	technical intern	Education support for Japanese language study, nursing care team biology and skills, rules and manners in the facility, dormitory life and communication, safety and other benefits
[Specific skills (nursing care field)] ※ Started only No. 1						
Year of Issue	Year of Issue	Major Issues	Number of papers for each	researcher	subject of research	Issue Overview
2020	2	2. Policies for Accepting Foreign Caregivers	1	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Literatures	Concern that Specific Skill may function as a receptacle for unskilled workers, technical intern trainees and those who have failed the national examination.
2022			1	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Literatures	Concerned about the uneven distribution of foreign caregivers, with a bias toward large cities and specific regions.
[Graduates of nursing care training facilities] ※ Residency status "In-land only"						
Year of Issue	Year of Issue	Major Issues	Number of papers for each	researcher	subject of research	Issue Overview
2019	2	life issue	1	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Foreigners with qualifications	Life issues: knowledge and skills of caregiving, communication, mental health, understanding of labor-related laws and labor management, etc.
2023			1	Faculty outside of the nursing field	Foreigners with qualifications	Whether the effectiveness is necessary for workplace adjustment
					Japanese caregivers	
【介護学生】 ※ 在留資格「特定活動」						
Year of Issue	Year of Issue	Major Issues	Number of papers for each	researcher	subject of research	Issue Overview
2008-2013	2	1. International Communication	1	Faculty outside of the nursing field	International students	Impact of difficulty in learning Japanese on employment
2014-2018	9	2. Education Support	4	Nursing instructor	International students	The reality of users' difficulty in understanding dialects Introducing experiential learning for effective teaching Simultaneous approach to practical training Understanding user psychology in the class "Communication Technology"
		3. International Communication	3	Japanese caregivers	International students Japanese caregivers	Confusion about different cultures in institutionalizing differences in hygiene concepts
		4. In-service support	2	Nursing home administrator	Nursing home administrator	Impact on employment due to difficulty in learning Japanese (including nursing care team biology)
2019-2023	27	1. Education Support	17	Japanese caregivers Nursing instructor Faculty outside of the nursing field	International students Japanese caregivers	Education for caregivers - including Japanese students Caregiver Education Methods - Introduction of theoretical techniques Care Education Methods - Exercise Methods (Practical Use) Introduction of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) Care Education Methods - Understanding Foreign Language Ability for caregiving practice using the Caregiving Education Methods Rubric Nursing Education Methods - National Exam Preparation Nursing Education Methods - Understanding the Nursing Care Process (Nursing Care Team Biology and Records) Caregiver Education Methods - Understanding "Independence Support" Caregiver Education Methods - Understanding Culture, Customs, and Practices
		2. Life Support	6	Nursing home administrator Nursing instructor	International students	Economic support (actual part-time work, internship support) Health care at Corona Disaster
		3. In-service support	4	Nursing instructor Faculty outside of the nursing field	International students Nursing home administrator	Requests and concerns about employment Need for career (qualified) education

IV. Discussion on literature review based on research methods 1. interest in EPAs and research trends This study focuses on changes since 2008, when EPAs were introduced.<sup>[6]</sup> The major national initiatives have also had an impact on research activities, with EPAs accounting for half of the total of 88 papers in this study. The research trends in the first five years after the introduction of the EPAs show that, just as Japan welcomes foreign personnel, workplaces are preparing and ready to receive them, suggesting that at this stage they have not yet reached the stage of actual employment. Furthermore, in the five years to 2018, research on the content of education for national examinations and the resulting burden on Japanese staff will become more prominent, based on the premise that they are "candidates" for national qualifications. Figure 2 shows that from the introduction of the EPA to 2011, the acceptance of foreign personnel in the medical and welfare sectors has declined dramatically. Although the aim was to secure human resources as a matter of diplomatic relations, it is thought that the transition shows that it is difficult to obtain national qualifications, especially with regard to EPAs, as the objective, and research was subsequently conducted to solve this problem. The challenges in achieving qualifications are not limited to the nursing care sector, but also apply to

the national nursing examinations, and since 2011 (the 100th National Nursing Examination), English has been used for technical terms and names of people.<sup>[7]</sup> When looking at the research focused on these EPAs from the perspective of 'qualifications', it is clear that the research is not limited to qualifications, but is focused on employment practice. In recent years, as with the introduction of the EPAs, the content of research concentrating on these EPAs, from the perspective of 'qualified', has been on Japanese language acquisition, rules and manners in facilities, and daily life support for technical interns who specialise in employment practice and are not tied to qualification acquisition. 2. Trends in employment issues from a policy perspective As for changes in employment issues, several issues requiring anticipation and preparation were cited as employment issues at the beginning of the acceptance period, such as Japanese language acquisition, communication problems related to work, and mutual cultural differences in the acceptance and employment process. In particular, a great deal of research was conducted on the EPA, which was introduced as a policy related to diplomatic relations. After 2014, a number of years after the acceptance, issues related to education for passing the National Care Worker Examination (hereinafter referred to as the National Examination) were added, in addition

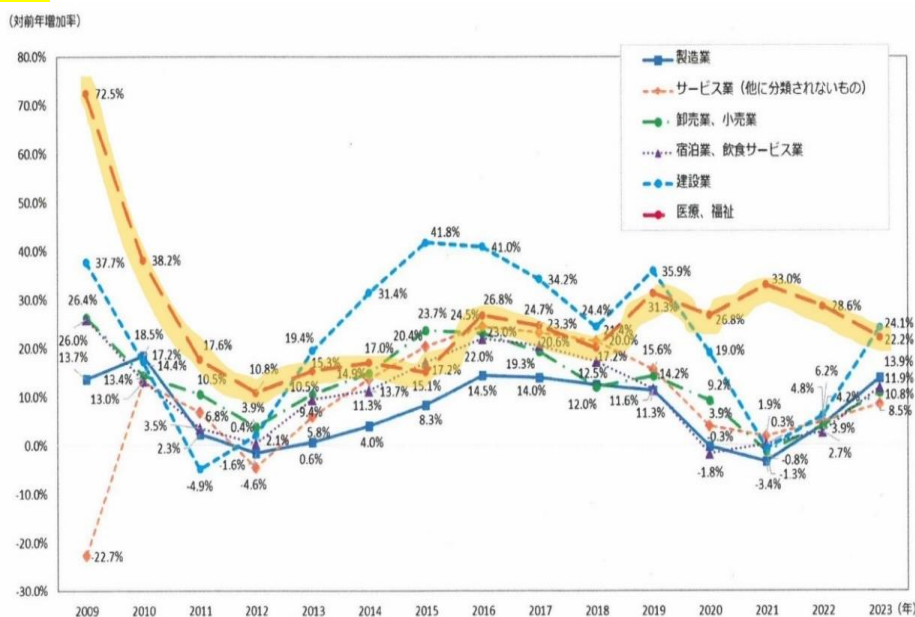
to the acquisition of the Japanese language required for daily work. Furthermore, research was conducted not only on the uniform concept of 'foreigners', but also by specifying ethnic groups such as 'Vietnamese' and 'Indonesians'.

3. Employment issues and research subjects by route of entry and status of residence As foreign care workers from the three countries in the EPA and other South-East Asian countries enter the workforce, naturally the largest number of studies focus on them. However, most of the studies are considered as 'foreign nationals in employment'. A few studies identify ethnic groups, such as 'Vietnamese' and 'Indonesians', but they do not dare to specialise in that 'ethnic group', but rather in the workers of the facilities where the research was carried out. In the future, it would be meaningful to focus on various ethnic groups and extract issues from the employment situation associated with their ethnicity. In addition, as in the present study, the research subject is considered to be 'literature', which is based on already researched articles and mainly focuses on the systems and mechanisms related to the reception of foreign personnel, preparations and responses regarding employment at each facility, as well as difficulties in the living backgrounds of foreign personnel.<sup>[1]</sup> Specific activities: EPA From 2008 to 2013, the employment issue was preparation for acceptance regarding the Japanese language, communication and culture necessary for acceptance in general, but from 2014 onwards, there were many issues as 'candidates' for

national qualifications, and the actual study for their national examinations. In some cases, Japanese care workers at working facilities involved in the study for their national examinations were the subjects of research. In addition, research after 2019, more than 10 years after the introduction of the system, has highlighted not only preparation for the national examinations, but also the living problems brought about by the prolonged stay in Japan, for example, lack of economic affordability and lack of support on the part of the facilities. The initial purpose of accepting foreign care workers was to position them as 'candidates' who would eventually become qualified, as they would play a leading role among foreign care workers, but in the five years since their acceptance, the number of foreign workers in 'medical and welfare' has decreased significantly (Fig. 2).<sup>[8]</sup> Foreign nurses, a pioneer in the care sector In order for foreign care workers to acquire the Japanese language skills necessary to study for the national examinations, including passing the national examinations and employment of foreign nurses, and to study and pass the examinations while working, considerable effort is required of the individual and the workplace to which they belong must also be prepared and provide a great deal of support. If the effective means of learning is the practice of caregiving skills on the job, then the care establishments are not just a place of employment, but also have an important role to play in the learning situation of the foreign care workers.<sup>[9]</sup>

(fig2) Acceptance of Foreign Human Resources by Sector

- Manufacturing
- service industry
- Wholesale and retail
- Lodging and food services
- Construction
- Medical care, welfare



2) Specific activity: Technical training Few studies indicated "technical training," but content related to Japanese language and communication for caregivers from Myanmar and Vietnam after 2022 is being studied. In addition, although the country is not indicated, studies on educational support for Japanese language and manners in the facility, as well as on daily life support such as commuting and salary, are mentioned.<sup>[3]</sup> Specified Technical Skills 1 Since the specified technical skills are to be introduced in 2019, literature research on new policies is being conducted instead of research on the actual situation. 2020 research is conducted from the perspective of acceptance policies, suggesting that the specified technical skills will not be used for their original function of bringing the specified skills to Japan, but will instead be used as a means of receiving foreigners who have become unable to stay in Japan. The 2020 study suggests that, from an inbound policy perspective, the new policy will not be to bring specific skills to Japan, but to become a destination for foreigners who have difficulty staying in Japan. Furthermore, the 2022 study is concerned that foreign caregivers will be concentrated in large cities and that it will be difficult for them to disperse and settle in depopulated areas where more manpower is needed.

4) Status of Residence "Nursing Care" The workers with the status of residence "nursing care" are foreign nursing care workers with a nursing care worker qualification. As an overview of employment issues, in addition to knowledge and skills in nursing care, communication problems, which are similar to the aforementioned issues, are mentioned, but the details extend to an understanding of mental health. In terms of knowledge, the study is not limited to care in daily work, but also expands the perspective to include labor-related laws and regulations, labor management, and other content required of qualified personnel. The future image of foreign nursing care students is the same as the aforementioned EPAs, and since they are mainly engaged in elderly care as "qualified personnel," most of the research on them has focused on educational methods, such as "What kind of education would be beneficial? The majority of the research on these workers has focused on educational methods, such as "What kind of education would be beneficial? For example, the use of tablets to compensate for the lack of verbal communication, the use of theatrical performances to promote understanding of caregiving situations, and the use of rubrics to clarify the level of learning achievement. In addition to research related to education, such as daily teaching methods, practical training, and preparation for the national examinations, there was also research on support for daily life, part-time jobs, and requests related to employment. At present, "transitional measures" related to the national examinations are still in effect, and students are exempted from the national examinations upon completion of the<sup>[10]</sup> Nursing Care Training Facility. Although the government's position on this transitional measure is that it is "only temporary," the

situation in which students who have not taken the exam or failed the exam are still eligible to take the national exam shows the sense of responsibility of nursing care teachers who are engaged in academic training.

V. As mentioned in the introduction, Japan's aging population is expected to increase further in the future, and many nursing homes have welcomed foreign caregivers under various policies since the acceptance of the EPA. Although much preparation has been made for the acceptance of foreign caregivers, this study has found that several issues have become clear during the course of actual work and that measures to deal with these issues have not been sufficient. The newest "specified technical skills" may be a measure that can be expected to be beneficial as a measure to stop foreigners who are finding it difficult to stay in Japan under other statuses of residence. At the same time, however, as Fukushima fears, there are concerns about the emergence of other problems and regional disparities in urban areas<sup>[11]</sup>, and the search for solutions to these problems is likely to be a difficult task. In addition, the transitional measures for the national nursing examination and the securing of foreign nursing personnel are also worth paying attention to. In the past, Japan's nursing system was centered on family nursing, and nurses (nurses at that time) were not the main caregivers. After Japan's defeat in World War II, the GHQ Nursing Division adopted the slogan "Nursing is in the hands of nurses".<sup>[12]</sup> Is it really impossible to hope that "Japan's elderly care is in the hands of Japanese caregivers"? Recently, medical institutions have been increasing the number of medical care beds, and the number of nursing assistants working there is increasing every year as they become qualified to take the national examination for care workers.<sup>[13]</sup> This qualification, which is not limited to nationality, gender, age, or educational background, offers a wide range of career options for those who wish to work in Japan. In light of the goal of the introduction of specified skills at the start of the program, which was "after making efforts to secure domestic human resources," there is a glimmer of hope for the future of elderly care provided by Japanese caregivers.

#### CITATIONS AND REFERENCES

1. White Paper on Aging Society, FY2023 edition, Cabinet Office, 2.
2. Ministry of Justice, Comprehensive Measures for the Acceptance and Coexistence of Foreign Human Resources (revised in FY2023), <https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001397365.pdf> 3) Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, "Policy for the Acceptance of Foreign Nursing Care Workers in Japan: How will the establishment of new specified skills in the field of "nursing care" affect the society?"
3. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Council for Specified Skills in the Nursing Care Sector Steering Committee, FY2022 First Meeting Materials 1 and 2.

4. Misako Fukushima, 2020, "Policy for Accepting Foreign Nursing Care Workers in Japan: How Will the Establishment of the Specified Skills 'Nursing Care' Affect Society?"
5. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare: Acceptance of Foreign Care Workers: [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage\\_28131.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage_28131.html)
6. Handy Network International, Inc, "Good Time Magazine: What is the EPA, a system for accepting foreign caregivers? Understanding the Background and Outline of its Establishment" <https://hni.co.jp/blog/1608/>
7. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare: Replacement of General Terms and Correspondence to Medical and Nursing Terminology in the 100th National Nursing Examination <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/houdou/2r98520000012wp5-img/2r98520000012wst.pdf> \* In the 100th National Nursing Examination held on February 20, 2011, questions were prepared to ensure the quality of the examination and to make the text easy to understand for prospective nurses who are not native speakers of Japanese. The questions were designed to ensure the quality of the examination and to be easy to understand for non-native speakers of Japanese. About 200 questions were written in English, including the use of furigana for difficult kanji and the use of English for the names of diseases.
8. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, "Employment Status of Foreign Nationals" (as of the end of October 2023, Fig. 2-2) [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage\\_37084.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage_37084.html)
9. Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting, "FY2022 Geriatric, 10-11.
10. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 25th Social Security Council, Welfare Committee, July 15, 2020, Document 2: Extension of Transitional Measures for Mandatory National Examination for Graduates of Training Facilities for Nursing Care Workers: Extension of Transitional Measures <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/12201000/000648682.pdf> \*Graduates of training facilities are given a grace period to take and pass the national care worker examination, regardless of whether they are Japanese or foreign nationals, and are allowed to register for the national qualification even if they have not taken or failed the examination. However, the quality of education at the training facility must be improved in order to improve the quality of education at the training facility. However, in order to improve the quality of education at training facilities, a policy has been established to publicize the pass rate of the national examination for each training facility and to implement a system that allows comparison between the number of graduates and the number of examinees.
11. Kamo, Hiroyasu, 2022, "Regional Development of Acceptance of Foreign Nationals with Specific Skills in the Nursing Care Field in Japan," Nihon Fukushi University Economics Review, 64: 9-15.
12. Ryder, Shimazaki, Reiko, and Sugino Oishi, 2003, "Sengo Nihon no Nuri-Kaikaku: Sengo Nihon no Nuri-Kaikaku wo Sukeru GHQ Shojo to Kekkon no Kensho (Nursing Reform in Postwar Japan: An Examination Using Unsealed GHQ Documents and Testimony),"
13. Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, National Examination for Care Workers (Reference Material 1-1, May 17, 2024, the 1st Study Group on the Introduction of Partial Passing of the National Examination for Care Workers) <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/12000000/001256264.pdf>