

A Note on Training and Support for Resettlement Refugees in Japan

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The Japanese government pledged that it would accept 90 Myanmar refugees from the Mae La camp in northern Thailand over three years in a pilot resettlement program, and the first group of refugees arrived in Japan in September 2010. Before leaving the camp, the five refugee families received pre-departure training courses in the basic Japanese and life in Japan for three to four weeks. On arrival in Japan, the refugees entered into a settlement support program, where they received Japanese language education, guidance on the social systems and customs in Japan, and vocational counseling services in Tokyo during the first six months, before settling in more rural areas. In spite of these efforts, two refugee families gave up their lives in the rural area, where they had received on-site vocational training in agriculture, and moved to the central Tokyo area, where the Myanmar refugee community was located. Although the Japanese government announced an extension of the pilot program in March 2012, the third group of refugees, who were expected to arrive in Japan in October 2012, cancelled their resettlement to Japan before they departed due to the bad press.

The problems seemed to arise from poor communication and various cultural differences. In order to make the pilot program successful, I suggest a more customized and continuous Japanese language education program, and applying more research and theories on intercultural communication in designing the resettlement program. Theories such as Hall's "high vs. low context cultures" and Hofstede's "cultural dimensions" provide good insight into understanding the problems of resettlement and how to restructure the training and support system of refugees in resettlement programs.