# The Process of Driving the Local Government in Self-Governing Province Concept: A Case Study of Chiang Mai Municipality, Thailand

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## Abstract
This qualitative study aims to study the driving forms of the policy of the local government under the self-governing province of Chiang Mai province, Thailand. The main participants of the study are the academicians, the policy-driving leaders, and the issue-dimension network groups. The purposive sampling technique was used in recruiting the samples while the documents, the in-depth interviews, and the focus group were utilized in data collection.
The driving of the policy of the local government under the self-governing province concept of Chiang Mai province is focused on the creation of the self-governing province concept, which extends outward, as well as the creation of advocate groups in driving the policy forward. This commenced in 2008 during the political conflicts at the national level, with the NGOs as the leading groups asking for decentralization of the policy in the early days. The policy-driving process was conducted through seminars and social communication via various media, with monetary support from several sectors. The driving of the policy occurred among political conflicts as well as arguments from the disagreeing groups. Despite this, a draft of the Chiang Mai Act was completed for consideration. However, its role was diminished due to the national coup d'état in 2014.
**Keywords:** Policy-Driving Process, Self-Governing Province Concept, Chiang Mai Municipality

## Introduction
Thai local government has faced a variety of problems, including reduced participation among locals in managing their own lands, as described by Chamnan Chanruang (2012), who said that there is the problem of local people only voting for the election of the Local Administration Organization council and the Local Administration Organization executives. After that, they do not participate in other activities, which limits the power of the Local Administration Organization, the cooperation, and the lack of interest from local people makes the Local Administration Organization unsuccessful, as would be expected. Hence, their problems persist, including the economic difficulties of the locals. Charas Suwanmala (2012), said that such problems within the centralized-state system fail to resolve the differences in economic and social gaps between the provinces both vertically and horizontally. National politics and the centralized state system cannot solve problems in these specific areas, resulting in Hamilton's

Paradox, which destroys the tax base in the area and fosters a lack of enthusiasm among local people to increase their incomes.

The problems caused by local Thai government have been compounded as the trend towards decentralization has increased in Thailand. This issue is in the interest of the academicians and the groups who demand decentralization in conjunction with greater local governmental control, leading to a movement to fight for a reconfiguring of the form decentralization takes. The direct election of the provincial governor in Thailand is the new and essential topic which yields the much impact on Thailand' state management. This issue occurred from the people during 1992-1994 when the people saw that the direct election of the provincial governor should be established since they saw that this was one part of the drive for the devolution. Importantly, the regional state management at the provincial level under the provincial governor could not solve the people's problems. (College of Local Administration, King Prajadhipok's Institute, 2010). The issue on the election of the provincial governor is in the interest of the society in the early period and it is less interested in due to the political systems that do not continually support or promote as Tanet Charoenmuang (2007), said about this issue that when the election of the provincial governor was truly popular during 1992-1993, the most important factor that boosted such interest was that the political party especially the Pha Lang Tham Party led by Gen. Jamlong Srimuang who played the important roles in the Black May 1992.

During 2008, governmental decentralization was a major social issue. The decentralization discourse entitled the "Self-Governing Province Concept" began in Chiang Mai province, created by a group of leaders pushing Chiang Mai province towards decentralization, believing that locals should have more authority to manage their own areas. The main topics at issue were the election of the provincial governor, the cancellation of the regional state administration, and the increasing ratio of the budgets of local offices. Chiang Mai province was the successful model driving the "Self-Governing Province Concept" policy under the 2007 Constitution of the Thai Kingdom of Section 281. They also proposed the draft of the Chiang Mai Metropolis Governing Regulation Act for consideration on 20 October 2013. However, when the political change took place, the consideration of the draft was postponed.

The study was carried out on local state administration policy process under the title, "The Self-Governing Province Concept: A Case Study of Chiang Mai Province." This study ran from 2008 until the time of the coup d'état on May 22, 2014, in order to better understand policies from other provinces.

## Research Methodology

The researcher has the interest in studying the discourse on the decentralization based on the "self-governing province" concept in order to describe various situations related to such issue. The researcher then relies on the qualitative research approach via the documents, the in-depth interview, and the focus group as the main data collection tools. For this study, the population was those people involving with the policy-driving of the local administration under the self governing province concept of Chiang Mai province, Thailand. They are the group of the leaders from the civil sector comprising the academicians, the group of the issue networks who play the important roles in the policy-driving. The study process can be shown as follow:

1) The group of 12 leaders involving in the policy-driving of the local administration under the self governing province concept of Chiang Mai province were the main informants. The focus group discussion and the in-depth interview were utilized in the data collection of this study.

2) The group of 5 people from the issue networks were the main informants. The in-depth interview was utilized in the data collection of this study in order to derive the more obvious

The data analysis was conducted based on the data characteristic of the study and the data derived was further analyzed through the data analysis process of Patton (1990), with the reference of the meaning quotes which are the origin of the interpretation and for some dimensions of the interpretation, it was the explanation of the in-depth beliefs of the informants focusing on the data derived directly from the informants. The concept mapping was used saying that this is the collection of the concepts and the result of the study is shown in the form of the relationship map showing the relationships between the major topics and the minor ones. This analysis was developed for the clear analysis of various issues.

As this study is the qualitative study, the test of the reliability of the data is then regarded as the essential thing to be carried out in order to derive the accurate and clear data. The researcher used the analysis process with the reference of the meaningful quotes and still used the concept-mapping technique in order to avoid the distortion of the data. Besides, the reliability of the data was also tested (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in the following sections of the study: The multiple methods technique, audit and member check technique.

## Local Administration under the Self-Governing Province Concept

"The self-governing province concept" has been in the interest of the political science and public administration science academicians for a long time and the its definition was made clear during 2008 but the issue concerning with the policy-driving for the change of the governing and for the decentralized governing has been driven by the academicians and the group of the people for a long time such as the demand for the election of the provincial governor by the people in their own province among the others. Hence, when speaking about the self-governing province concept, it can be defined that it is the concept needing the change in administering concentrating on the participation of the local people, the decentralization, and the allocation of the resources and each province can manage by his own which corresponds with the characteristic of the local governing. That is the local governing is relationship in terms of the authority in allocating the resources for the local which generally, is the characteristic of the making of the public services in the local under the transfer of the authority from the central government to the decision-making of the people with the true goal to promote the people to be able to govern themselves. (Mala, 2010), who held that "the self-governing province concept" is the concept of the need to let the locals participate in managing their own spaces.

The "self-governing province" concept started in 2008 based on the "self-reliance" concept for the agricultural community such as the community forest and the alternative agriculture which is the concept taken place a long time ago and spreaded throughout the country together with the bringing of the lessons from the political crisis during 2005-2006 to be the topic in the discussion of various sectors moving for the social development such as the cooperative committee for the private organization development in the North, the institution for the social management, and the freelance academicians who exchanged the ideas on the self-reliance and the solving of the political problems. (Tantiwittayaphithak & Neeraphol, 2012: 37), and this led to the seeking of the approach to change the local governing and the social movement in order to further drive the policy.

For the meaning of the "self-governing province" concept, the definitions are varied and they are just the general principle with the concentration on the participation of the people in the areas to

manage their own areas covering all dimensions for the development and the problem-solving of the contexts.

"The self-governing province" means the people in the provincial area join in making the decision for the setting of the resource development, the management of their own province in all dimensions either in politics, economy, society and culture, natural resources, environment, physical and mind health, and wisdom corresponding with the problems and the needs of the people as a whole and when there is a problem affecting the life and the society, they can solve them by themselves."[6]

## The Process of Driving Policy of the Local Administration under the Self-Governing Province Concept

The process of driving policy of the local administration under the self- governing province concept: the case study of Chiang Mai, Thailand, was the work of many groups of people. The process can be divided into two main steps-preparation for driving policy and driving policy in the area.
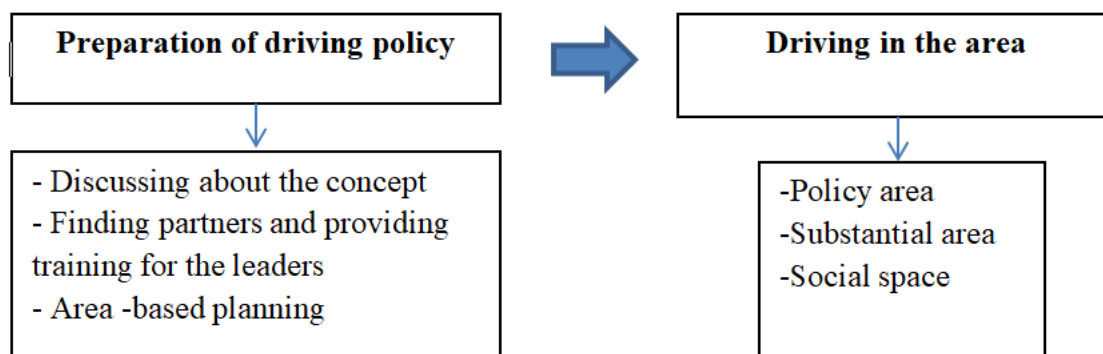


**Figure 1** The process of driving policy of the local administration under the self- governing province concept

**1) Preparation of driving policy:** The process of preparation of driving policy was the beginning of driving policy of the local administration under the self- governing province concept of Chiang Mai.

**1.1) Discussing the concept:** Discussion of driving policy of local administration under the self-governing province concept of Chiang Mai province was undertaken to solve problems in the year 2008 (at issue was political violence between competing political groups, known as the Yellow Shirts and the Red Shirts) that had come about due to the political instability of the country. From the discussions, the ideological thinking was expanded and there was the establishment of an ideological group known as Ban Chum Muang Yen (Peaceful Homeland Network). This group consisted of academics and leaders of various organizations. Most of them were important people in driving the issues of Chiang Mai. Discussions intensified based on the information obtained from the group.

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[6] The self-governing province from Self-governing Province: The self-governing province Concept Decentralization and Law (Council City Development, 2012: 6).

"The important starting point, which was a turning point in driving policy, was an issue of political violence between Yellow Shirts and Red Shirts. We thought that Chiang Mai people are siblings living in the same house, so they should not fight and die like this. We had to find a solution"

**1.2) Finding partners and training leaders:** Finding partners was the social power in pushing for the policy to be made aware of by the general public. Finding partners started from the issue networks, because these networks were familiar with each other and had worked together previously to drive policies in Chiang Mai, such as the Health Assembly in Chiang Mai, Parties of the self-governing province of Chiang Mai, alternative agriculture networks, and organic farming networks, all of which were their issue networks.

In finding partners to drive the process, the leaders in driving the policy wanted those from each sector to develop understanding on the concept of the local administration under the self-governing province concept and transfer this knowledge to their organizations to expand the base of support to multiple sectors. After gaining representatives from these sectors, the next process was to train the leaders in order to use them to drive the process.

Training leaders to drive policy was one of the important processes, because it was the process of creating understanding in the concept of the self-governing province. Training the leaders in driving the policy was a cognitive process leading to the transfer of knowledge to the organizations and the outsiders to be aware of and agree to support the concept, which would lead to the creation of partners to drive the policy at the public level. In terms of the content related to the training of the leaders, it involved various issues, so the training of leaders in driving policy was the way to expand the social space for the self-governing province concept to be recognized widely in society.

**1.3) Area-based planning:** Area-based planning was initiated to carry out driving policy of the local administration under the self-governing province concept. It was the process used to drive the policy. The leaders in driving the policy divided the driving process into three parts.

**Part 1:** This included preparation of the area and creating an understanding of the self-governing province of Chiang Mai to all issue networks, social networks, government organizations, local governments, and people in the area. Hence, the term "the preparation of the area" was the preparation of Chiang Mai to be the area supporting the concept of the self-governing province, and the cooperation in pushing such a policy to succeed. Learning about the concept and exchanging opinions through the forums on both the concept and the guidelines for the creation of the local administration under the self-governing province concept was administered in order to obtain the opinions from multiple sectors for driving the policy and setting the guidelines to create a model for the local administration. Also, it was a way to push for the Chiang Mai Metropolis Act.

**Part 2:** The social communication process entailed public communication at all levels. Tools to create social communication were used to easily and quickly provide access to the public so that they could learn about the concept of the self-governing province, approaches to drive the policy, and the content of pushing for the Chiang Mai Metropolis Act. This was done through all of the tools that could be easily accessed by the public. Communication was comprehensive and easy to understand, including brochures, books, radio announcements, posters, shirts, and campaign pins.

"The media used for social communication was an important and essential process in creating understanding and expanding the support of the general public. We used the media in all forms so that everyone could easily access and recognize of what we were doing."

**Part 3:** This step included the policy movement process. It was the procedure that directly affected success, since it was the driving process in order to achieve policy formulation. It was also the process of driving strategy, which consisted of the process of drafting the Chiang Mai Metropolis Act. Getting feedback from people in Chiang Mai was done through a process of exchanging opinions in multiple sectors and areas. The data were then analyzed for the appropriate approaches to draft the Act.

**2) Driving policy in the area:** After the preparation for driving the policy had been administered, the next step was to promote it in the area. The word "area" was not an exact location that could pinpoint the extent, but the word "area" in driving the policy of the local administration under the self-governing province concept was the social space associated with the trend of the self-governing province. The area could be separated into three parts, including a physical location, a social section, and a policy concept. These three areas would be brought together to achieve the policy of the administration under the self-governing province concept.
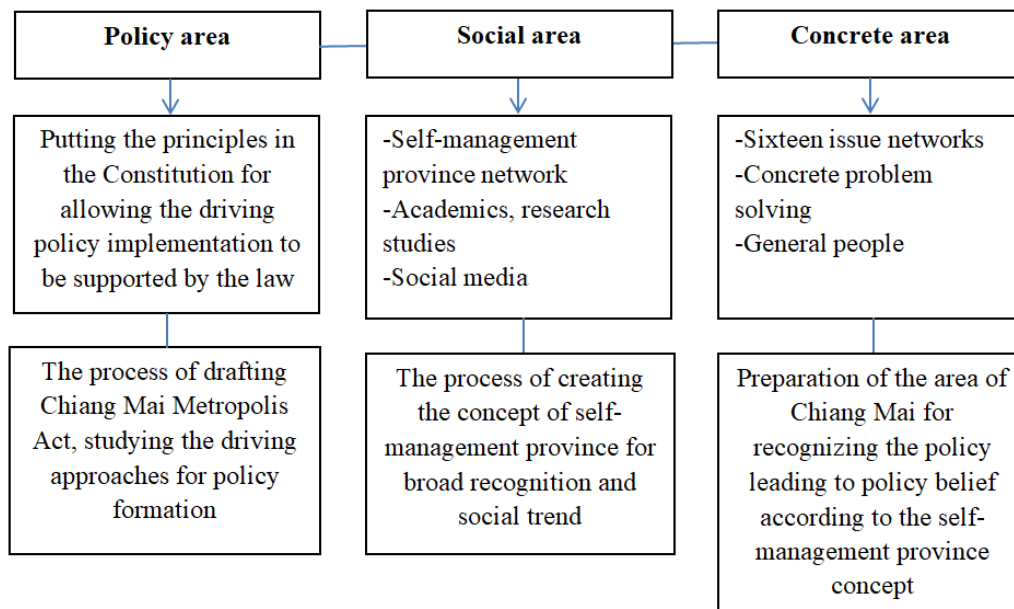


**Figure 2** The process of driving the policy

## The Factors Related to the Success of Driving Policy

The factors related to the success of driving the policy of local administration under the self-governing province concept: Chiang Mai, can be presented in the following figure.
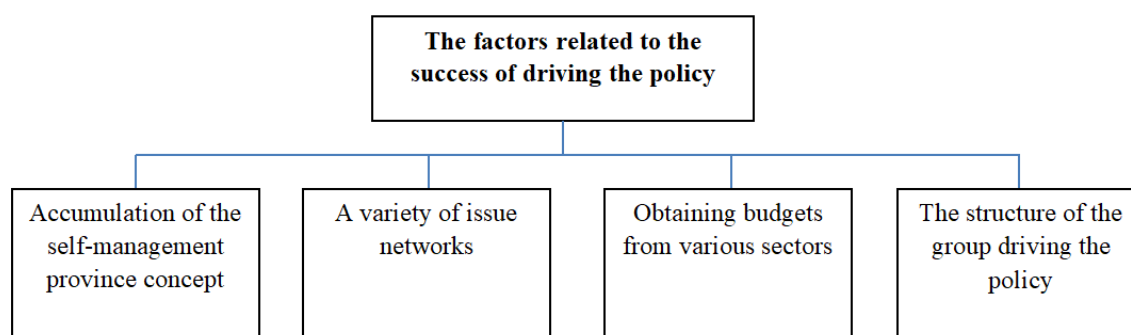
**Figure 3** The factors related to the success of driving the policy

**1) Accumulation of the self-governing province concept**
Chiang Mai started a movement on the issue of decentralization in 1991. Later, there was the integration of groups named "Wiangping Council," and then "Kon Hug Chiang Mai Partner Group," which were regarded as the foundation of "the concept of the self-governing province." That is, the Kon Hug Chiang Mai Partner Group carried on the ideology of the Wiangping Council. The main objective was to maintain Chiang Mai's character in an appropriate context with the right direction of development, as put forth in the data obtained from the group.
According to the understanding of people in Chiang Mai of the problems of the structural administration of a central government that could not respond and solve the problems in the area, the accumulation of information on various points expanded to people in many sectors of the province. The cooperation in maintaining Chiang Mai led to claims and proposed solutions for strategic problem solving, resulting in a movement for concrete solutions. This also led to the establishment of the "Civil Society Partner Group" of Chiang Mai.
"Chiang Mai is the province that has driven the issues involved in the self-governing province for a long time. People in different areas have learned and understood that the problems have been caused by the administration that does not correspond to the province, resulting in various problems. Therefore, self-governing is fostered by the people to make the local administration better."
The factors associated with the success in driving the policy of the local administration under the self-governing province concept in the accumulation of self-governing province concept of Chiang Mai can be described as the following issues:
**Issue 1:** The accumulation of the self-governing province concept was considered the creation of a broader network that covered people in many different sectors, including experiences related to the driving of policy. It operated for a long time, so the driving policy could be quickly and effectively implemented. It was also recognized by the people of Chiang Mai.
**Issue 2:** The social issue driving consistently with the concept of the self-governing province of Chiang Mai, and the accumulation concept of the self-governing province of Chiang Mai, led to concrete knowledge on issues related to policy conflicts of Chiang Mai.
**2) A variety of issue networks:** The issue networks drove the process on different issues, while learning and understanding through experience resulted in a link between the problem-oriented issues and the concept of the self-governing province, which solved issues within the groups.

The role of the issue networks towards the driving of the policy of the local administration under the concept of the self-governing province in Chiang Mai was an important factor in the success of driving the policy.

**3) Obtaining budgets from various sectors:** Budgets were allocated through organizational research projects. The driving of the policy of the local administration, under the concept of the self-governing province of Chiang Mai, was supported by many organizations in the form of financial support through policy-driven research projects.

Budget support from the Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization: The Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization, provided financial support to carry out activities such as exchanging opinion forums and meetings to make action plans to drive policy. Moreover, the policy was also financially supported by the Crown Property Bureau.

"We received financial support from many sectors. At the beginning, the financial support from research projects was an important part in driving the policy. For example, we conducted a study on the civil council for the Thailand Research Fund. The Community Organizations Development Institute also conducted projects related to strengthening community. In particular, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation has always supported us with research funds."

**4) The structure of the group driving the policy:** The design of the drive focused on the participation of all sectors: All groups involved in driving the policy were the hosts. That is, the driving of the policy of the local administration under the concept of the self-governing province of Chiang Mai was done in collaboration with several groups, sectors, issue networks, academic groups, organizations, and agencies. The main cause of such participation was that the design used an open mechanism. It was open for all parties to come together to run the operation**.**

Nevertheless Local administration policy driving under Chiang Mai self-Government was successfully passed through the drafting of Chiang Mai Metropolitan Act proposing to parliament, still several limitations remains. For instance,

The limit about associate members or alliance among network group were not covering officials or private sector. Academic part played their role rather slim. According to the study found that main supporters for policy driving closely involved and related to key informants and leader that potentially lacked of other sector of people, too. Officials and private sectors are considered as huge population that may push and support the policy.

"Despite working with several sectors, particularly the Provincial Administrative Organization, the community, the media, the Community Organization Council, and the social power of 18 issues with collaboration at the provincial level, and having a mutual public policy, considering a joint space and changes in the administrative structure of the country, the government agencies were neglected. We had to decide if we wanted to leave them or work with them. This also included the business sector, the private sector, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Federation of Thai Industries. There was very little connection. So, this was something we had to think about and find ways to connect to work together."

The political instability was also one of the key point for create the limitation of policy driving. Due to law alteration effected to policy driving path and that policy driving also moved along with Constitutional law in 2008, Article 281. But when coup d'état occurred in 2014, it frozen policy driving process which lost track. It was also noticeable that after coup d'état 2014, Local administration policy driving under Chiang Mai self-Government has been unmoved. Even thought it could be presented or operated in others form like communicate in article form in newspaper to provoke decentralization movement.

## Conclusions

Chiang Mai province established the concept of driving Self-Governing Province during 2008, in accordance with the constitutional law of 2007, and was primarily led by the local NGOs inside the network. The policy driving process emphasized working on organized talks and discussions to provide and educate people through multiple mediums, in addition to building up a civil society base in order to create the tools essential for the wildly diffuse concept of self-government, which led to the drafting of the "Chiang Mai Metropolitan Act" and its proposal to parliament on 20 October 2013. Unfortunately, the policy driving force was dismissed due to the coup d'état in May 2014.

Positive arguments by the local administration under the concept of Chiang Mai Self-government has led to the following point for driving the policy. First, local administration policy driving under Chiang Mai Self-Government has been designed as a form of organization specifically and systematically managed through the plan. Secondly, local administration policy driving Chiang Mai Self-Governing Province has applied an open-mechanism in order to allow people to participate. Thirdly, the key participants or leaders in driving policy, who comes primarily from the background of NGOs, could gain access to other networks that are also working towards the same goals with fast and easy links to nearby provincial networks. Finally, local administration policy driving Chiang Mai Self-Government acquired additional financial support from various sources.

Local administration policy of the Chiang Mai Self-Government successfully passed through the drafting of the Chiang Mai Metropolitan Act proposed to parliament. However, several limitations still remain. For instance, the limit on the number of associate members or alliances among network groups does not cover officials or members of the private sector. Moreover, political instability is a key factor that create limitations on policy driving.

To summarize, the period of self-government policy driving appeared to be strong and represent the strengths of its leaders while simultaneously increasing the number of its supporters. NGOs played an important role in employing networks to endorse the social movement of the self-governing province concept.

## Discussions

The process of driving the local government policy of Chiang Mai province, Thailand. According to this study, it has been found that the policy driving group has chosen to gain supporters, resources, and funding in order to create social trends in accordance with the resource mobilization theory, which Prapas Pintoptang (2009), said that the resource mobilization theory focuses on the problems to collect the people, the choice to use the effective strategies for the movement and the factors related to the success or the failure of the social process. The aforementioned movement of the policy driving group is different from the movement of demanding decentralization in 1991, which used the event of the general election on 13 September 1992 as a guideline in driving the political party to create policies to run an election campaign. With regard to the movement of demanding decentralization of these two periods, it is doubted why did the policy driving group choose to demand decentralization in time of political instability in Thailand, as Tanet Chareonmeung (2012), discussed about one of the hidden agenda of the self-government province concept could be seen as the applicant demanding for decentralization. It also played as social issue evade. Self-government province concept movement was concerned as issue evade during 2008 relevant to the analysis from key-persons

of self-government province concept that having political ideology differ from network group that work under the scope of self-governor election.

Regarding the subject mentioned above, in spite of self-government province is considered as a form of local government administration, one part of decentralization. But there was still being a controversial that this concept was suitable and concrete or not. The declination of self-governing province concept emerged when it has been applied into Ubonratchathaini and Rayong province, Thailand. Special economic zone has been built At Rayong province instead of fully apply self-government province concept like Chiang Mai. It leads to the assumption that the structure of self-governing province was appearing as lose condition between each of province, not in proper condition. According to the study of Peerachat Darpped (2014), topic of Decentralization to community: the case study of strategy of self-government province policy driving. The objectives on this study included movement study regarding on local decentralization among self-government provinces in order to find out initiate point, strategy and feedbacks from those movement in the realm of space relationship of each group of self-government province that may not represent network movement.

The battle of power seize to decentralization taking over the time, from the issue of self-governor election to self-government province. If we interrogate the definition of progress or obsolete on policy driving, we can answer in various way. It's undeniable that the impact of decentralization of self-governor was given the obviously concrete result. In contrast, when taking an analysis of the self-government province concept, the result remains that this concept led by political group, less diversity. Main groups was NGOs and their network. By the way the movement also created fundraising and diffuse in large area. There was a solid progress that people pay attention and awake decentralization trend from others unit. The reform committee also advocate the concept of self-government province to be used as model to reform the country. The law reform committee also paid attention and started drafting self-government province Act as per principle for any area or province that ready to adopt this concept.

Once again, the discourse of decentralization needs to be continued. The driving of policy needs to be increased and reworked. Decentralization needs to be taken more seriously regarding this particular political situation. Unfortunately, after 2014, Thailand's political system blocks civil participation. No movements are allowed to take place under these circumstances. Yet the question looms large as to what will be next.

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