

Exploring the Implementation of Sister City Relationship Policy by Thai Provincial Governments

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Abstract

The Ministry of Interior of Thailand has imposed a “sister city relationship policy,” a policy to be implemented by provincial governments to increase international cooperation in a regional area to enhance local development. Though the policy has been implemented for some time, the sister city relationship policy in Thailand is still being undermined due to a lack of tangible results and impact. This research aims to study the characteristics of implementation by the provincial government and identify the problems that arise from implementation to propose recommendations. The qualitative approach method is a literature review and interview process. We then did the conventional content analysis method. Results found that although provincial governments are the leading implementer of the policy, under the current public management system. The implementation process is involved by all levels of organizations, including central governments, provincial governments, and local organizations where each organization plays specific roles and functions. However, although the policy has been implemented for many years, it lacks integration among stakeholders. It leads to limited rules and regulations, unclear strategic plan, unsuitable partnership, constant change of leadership, less favorable attitude toward relationships, limited management and resource, and a lack of evaluation process. Therefore, it recommended that the readjustment of each involved organization for developing evaluation, functions, and roles, uplifting some rules and regulations by the central government, selecting proper partners, and offering report process to higher governing bodies.

Keywords: Policy Implementation, Sister City Relationship, Provincial Government, Central Government, Ministry of Interior

Introduction

During the Thai government's public sector reform in 1998, the Thai government started to shift public sector management toward the principle of deconcentration and decentralization by dividing the government administrations into three significant pillars central, provincial and local government (JICA, 2008; Nuplond et al., 2018; UCLG, 2008). After the reform, policies push through a bottom-up approach, including international cooperation-related policy. One of the well-known regional international cooperation policies is the "Sister City Relationship Policy" initiated by the Ministry of Interior. The procedure commenced under the principle that international cooperation will create, expand, and intensify cooperation with partner countries in the economy, society, security, and other fields to enhance sub-regional and regional connectivity with the rest of the world.

Due to the structure of the Thai government's structure, the process of implementing the sister city relationship policy involves many stakeholders, including central governments, provincial governments, and local organizations. Each organization has its role and requires improvement to ensure the policy's success. Currently, the functions of the involved organizations are still unclear and need proper integration. While some organizations find the accommodative policy and some are not, the evidence shows that the process of policy implementation by each province is still at random, with no aligned direction or standard of procedure among involved organizations. Each level of the organization implements a sister city relationship policy as it sees fit based on its functions and roles.

Although the policy has been implemented for many years, the policy is still being carried out ineffectively. Nagai et al. (1997) summarized that this policy was gradually changed but could offer substantial outcomes. The province established over 90 partnerships, but most are inactive in terms of the activity or discontinued. According to the Ministry of Interior, the provincial government cannot effectively implement the sister city relationship policy. Therefore, it cannot produce tangible results contributing to regional development. Most of the activities are limited to visitations and receiving guests. Some central organizations view the policy as a waste of budget and human resources. Srikaew (2020) explains that some organizations see the establishment of

sister city relationships as a means for officials to use for leisure purposes such as visitation and traveling. Some provinces spent over one million baht or thirty thousand USD to conduct signing visitation.

Moreover, a study or academic research relating to the implementation of the sister city relationship policy by the Thai government is still lacking when examined closely. Without a proper understanding of how the policy is being implemented, the problems that lead to policy ineffectiveness will continue to exist leading to a waste of resources and even policy discontinuity (C. Seangin, 2020). Therefore, this paper aims to examine the characteristics and features of the implementation of the sister city relationship policy by the Thai government to come to a complete understanding of how the policy is being implemented under the Thai public management system. Once the implementation system has been examined, a further study can identify the problems that prevent the Thai government from enforcing the policy effectively and make recommendations to make other improvements.

Research Objectives

1. To examine features and characteristics of implementing sister city relationship policy by provincial governments.
2. To identify problems/limitations that arise from implementing sister city relationship policy by Thai provincial governments

Literature Review

Definition of Sister City Relationship

There are many definitions of a sister city relationship, with most purposes sharing the same. A Sister city relationship is “is a broad-based, long-term partnership between two communities in two countries. A relationship is officially recognized after the highest elected or appointed official from both communities sign off on an agreement to become sister cities”(Sistercities.org, n.d.). Under the sister city relationship, each partner agrees to pursue activities in different areas based on local demands to ensure regional development. Some of the activities include visitation, resource sharing, educational and cultural exchange, and knowledge transfer. Sister city relationship is also known some other names such as twinning city, partnership city, friendship city, and city-to-city relationship (Mascitelli & Chung, 2008). The U.N. Habitat (2001) elaborated

that a sister city relationship was a form of relationship established by two or more local organizations collaborating for mutual interests such as organizational and area development.

Process of Establishing and Implementing Sister City Relationship

Many schools of thought have identified methods of establishing and implementing sister city relationships, and most of the studies share similarities in the process of implementation which can summarize in the studies of Biggs (2003), Lendrum (2003), De Villiers (2009) and discussed as follows:

- (1) Strategize: determine the process of establishment, partner selection, stakeholders, possible activities, expected output, and outcome
- (2) Identify: identify city candidate and conduct an initial study to determine the possibility
- (3) Evaluate: Evaluate alliance capability and conduct a comparison
- (4) Approach/negotiate: approach the exciting city and arrange the area of cooperation
- (5) Implement: Officially establish a relationship and carry out an activity
- (6) Alliance capability: determine alliance capability and the result of the partnership.

Sister City Relationship in Thailand

The central government initiated the sister city relationship policy (Ministry of Interior) carried out by provincial governments where the local government is responsible for conducting sister city relationship-related activities. Including strategizing plans, identifying partners, establishing relationships, and implementing activities. Implementing the sister city relationship policy by the provincial government is similar to selecting and implementing sister city relationships from many existing schools of thought.

Once a relationship establishes, local organizations such as local government, chamber of commerce, and universities can utilize the relationship framework to initiate cooperation and activities to enhance organizational and provincial development. For example, Chiang Mai province has established a relationship with Chengdu Province, and Chiang Mai University has utilized the framework by conducting faculties and students exchange with Chengdu University.

Under the Ministry of Interior's record, 90 sister city relationships established in 38 provinces and 47 associations from 21 provinces are still ongoing. Chiang Mai province has the most partners, with 17 established partnerships. Even though the implementation of the sister city relationship policy by Thai provincial governments is similar to many schools of thought and despite local governments ever having established over 90 relationships, too much concerned Thai agencies,

the result of implementation by provincial governments is still unsatisfying and viewed as unsuccessful.

Research Methodology

The method of this study begins with selection criteria of population and key informants, followed by data collection and data analysis, respectively.

Selection Criteria

Each province represents different regions of Thailand, including the North, the Central, the East, and the North-Eastern. Therefore, the selection criteria for the population determined in this study are as follows:

1. The province must have had experience establishing or establishing a sister city relationship.
2. The province must have a budget and other required resources to implement the sister city relationship policy.
3. The province must contain city-municipality.

After selecting the provinces, the critical informants for each provincial government were determined. The key informants include representatives from the central government provincial government, local administration, and local chamber of commerce (private sectors). A total of 19 key informants participated in the interview, including key decision-makers and working personnel responsible for handling sister city relationship-related activities. The key decision-makers will be able to underline the magnitude and importance of the sister city relationship policy on the organization. Moreover, the decision-makers will be able to emphasize on the direction of the policy to ensure successful implementation. The details of 19 key informants interviewed are shown in Table 1.

Methods of data collection

After selecting the population group and samples assessed in the study, the data collection process is based on an in-depth interview method. The interview questions found how to establish and implement sister city relationships from the literature review. Including strategy in establishing a relationship connection, method of identifying and evaluating partners, partner approached and negotiation, and the process of implementation from selecting a partnership to carrying out the activity and determining alliance capability. The data collected are then

determined in features and characteristics of implementing sister city relationship policy by the Thai government focusing on the provincial government.

Data analysis

Once the data is collected, the research uses the content analysis method to analyze the data by classifying words or sentences into the same categories to identify common characteristics, problems, and concerns issues in the implementation process. For example, the data were grouped into each province and among the higher ranks of officials and employees.

Table 1. Details of key informants

No.	Position	Organization
Central Government		
1	Deputy Permanent Secretary	Ministry of Interior (Central Government)
2	Director of Foreign Affairs Division	
3	International Relations Officer	
Chiang Mai Province		
4	Vice Governor of Chiang Mai Province	Chiang Mai Provincial Government
5	Plan and Policy Analyst	
6	Deputy Municipal Clerk	Chiang Mai City Municipality
7	International Relations Officer	
8	President of Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce	Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce
Khonkean Province		
9	Governor of Khonkean Province	Khonkean Provincial Government
10	Plan and Policy Analyst	
11	Deputy Mayor	Khonkean City Municipality
12	International Relations Officer	
13	Vice President of Chamber of Commerce	Khonkean Chamber of Commerce
Rayong Province		
14	Vice Governor of Rayong Province	Rayong Provincial Government
15	Plan and Policy Analyst	
16	Deputy Municipal Clerk	Rayong City Municipality
17	President of Chamber of Commerce	Rayong Chamber of Commerce
Pathum Thani Province		
18	Governor of Pathum Thani Province	Pathum Thani Province
19	Plan and Policy Analyst	

Results

The results from the interviews consist of (1) current features and characteristics of implementation and (2) problems arising from the implementation process.

1.Current features and characteristics of the implementation

After examining the evidence, we found that although many provincial governments have implemented the sister city relationship policy in Thailand for many years. The concept of sister city relationship policy for the Thai government still needs further study and understanding by all stakeholders to ensure implementation effectiveness which will lead to a successful policy. Thailand's sister city relationship policy is still being undermined or even viewed as wasteful by the Thai government due to a lack of tangible results and impact. Consequently, the policy is facing with many implementation limitations.

Due to the nature of the Thai government's structure, the process of implementing the sister city relationship policy involves many stakeholders, including central governments, provincial governments, and local organizations. Therefore, provincial governments alone cannot single-handedly implement the policy as effectively. Each organization has its own role and responsibility to ensure policy's success. Currently, the part of the involved organizations is still unclear and needs proper integration. While some organizations find the accommodative policy and some are not, the evidence shows that the process of policy implementation by each province is still at random, with no aligned direction or standard of procedure among involved organizations. The features and characteristics of implementing sister city relationship policy by provincial governments can summarize in table 2.

Table 2. Summary of features and characteristics of Implementing sister city relationship policy by provincial governments.

Process of Establishing Sister City Relationship	Feather and characteristics
1. Strategy in establishing a relationship	For every province, before establishing a relationship, an assigned government official will conduct a background study on the city and proposed the city through a provincial committee for consideration.
2. Identify suitable partner	Typically, partners are identified and selected based on personal familiarity with leaders, proposals from local organizations, and the approach of other cities.

Process of Establishing Sister City Relationship	Feather and characteristics
	Partner selection is based on the principle of worthiness, benefit, and sustainability.
3. Evaluate partner	<p>There are three steps in evaluating partners;</p> <p>(1) The province will evaluate partners through provincial committees such as the Joint-Private Public Partnership committee, a meeting platform that the regional government hosts to gather all local organizations to discuss different issues about province's situation.</p> <p>(2) Once a partner is determined, the province needs to seek approval from central governments, including Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.</p> <p>(3) If the central governments give approve, then the province can negotiate on the area of cooperation; however, if not approved, the region needs to seek other cities to establish.</p>
4. Negotiate area of cooperation	<p>(1) Once central governments and committees approve the city, the province will draft and a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to determine the cooperation area and sign area of cooperation and to be signed by both parties to make the relationship official. The MOU is a fix formatted prepared by the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is vaguely stated the cooperation objectives but does not include the detail on projects or activities that both cities will implement.</p> <p>(2) If the MOU is different than the fix formatted, the province must seek approval from the central governments and the Office of the Council of State.</p>
5. Implement activities	<p>(1) For provincial governments, the activity limits insufficient funds, lack of working personnel, and rules and regulations by the central government. Therefore; most provincial governments' actions are</p>

Process of Establishing Sister City Relationship	Feather and characteristics
	<p>usually only limited to visitations or receiving visitors who are viewed as wasteful by central governments</p> <p>(2) Once the partnership becomes official, any local organizations within the province can also conduct activities. However, the activities undertaken by local organizations are usually more productive than creating tangible results which can strengthen the ties between the two cities.</p>
6. Determine alliance capability	<p>Due to the limitations imposed by central governments, provincial governments can only play a “reactive role” in a relationship; thus, provincial governments heavily rely on local organizations and partner cities to implement activities. Therefore; a suitable partner for provincial government are</p> <p>(1) partner that can draw interest from local organizations</p> <p>(2) Province that established a relationship with a Chinese city tends to be more productive than a non-Chinese city. This is because Chinese cities are very active in utilizing the sister city relationship framework for development. In addition, the Chinese cities support and fund the Thai provinces to participate in sister city relationship-related activities.</p>

Provincial governments are the key implementing organization to establish sister city relationships and ensure that the policy is being implemented successfully according to policy goals. The province must establish a connection, implement activities, encourage local participation, and ensure the sustainability of the relationship.

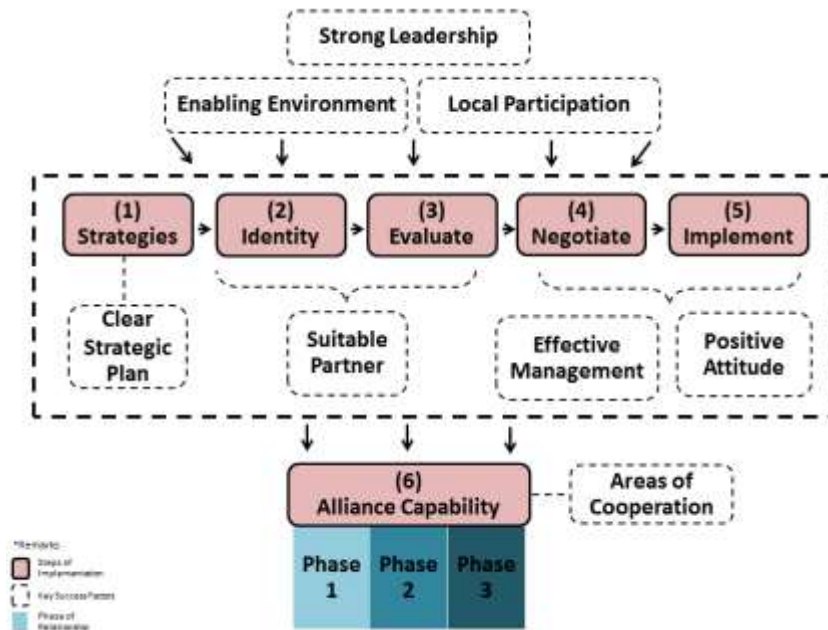


Fig. 1. Implementation process of sister city relationship policy by the Thai government

The process of implementing a sister city relationship by the provincial government is as follows:

1) strategize plans, goals, and expected outcome of the relationship 2) identify partners by conducting a study on the interested partnership and make selection 3) approach the interested partner and seek approval from provincial committee 4) seek approval from Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Foreign Affairs on partner selection 5) plan the area of cooperation and a draft memorandum of understanding 6) Seek MOU approval from central government's 7) sign the MOU to establish the relationship officially 8) conduct activity and promote partnership among local organizations. The Thai government's implementation process of the Sister City Relationship Policy by the Thai government can be displayed in Fig. 1.

2.Problems arise from the implementation.

After analyzing all the results, provincial governments are facing with the following problems/limitations:

- 1) Limited rules and regulations: there are many implementation limitations imposed by central governments, such as traveling restrictions, budget, and resource constraints, and activities limitations
- 2) Unsuitable partnership: usually, the purpose of establishing a partnership is merely being symbolic and to expressing leadership capability. As a result, the relationship does not reflect the

demand of the locals; therefore, both provincial government and local organizations cannot fully utilize the framework and initiate cooperation

3) Limited management and resource: the provincial government must constantly seek central governments' approval throughout the implementation process such as partner selection, drafting the MOU, and determining partnerships that prevent local governments from having full autonomy in performance. In addition, the central government (the Budget Bureau) does not allocate any budget for any activity under the sister city relationship policy as they view this policy as being wasteful.

4) Constant change of leadership: the provincial governments are constantly faced with a change of leadership, especially with higher rank officials. Usually, each leader will have a different direction on the policy. Some leaders might not be familiar with the policy and may not emphasize the activities that weaken the relationship. On the other hand, some may try to establish other relationships to express leadership capability while disregarding the existing association.

5) Unable to produce a positive attitude toward the relationship: due to the limitation mentioned above, provincial governments cannot display a positive attitude toward the relationship, such as constantly interacting with partners, initiating activities, and subsidizing expenses for partners. As a result, most of the connections are shorted live and turn inactive.

6) Lack of evaluation process: it found that all organizations involved in the policy are lack of monitoring and evaluation process. The ministry of the interior does not have the tools to determine the level of success or failure of the policy. The provincial governments do not evaluate the activities conducted by local organizations after relationship establishment. The local organizations do not report the result of implementation to the provincial government. As a result, the policy's success level is still undetermined, and the policy is still viewed as wasteful and unsuccessful.

Discussion

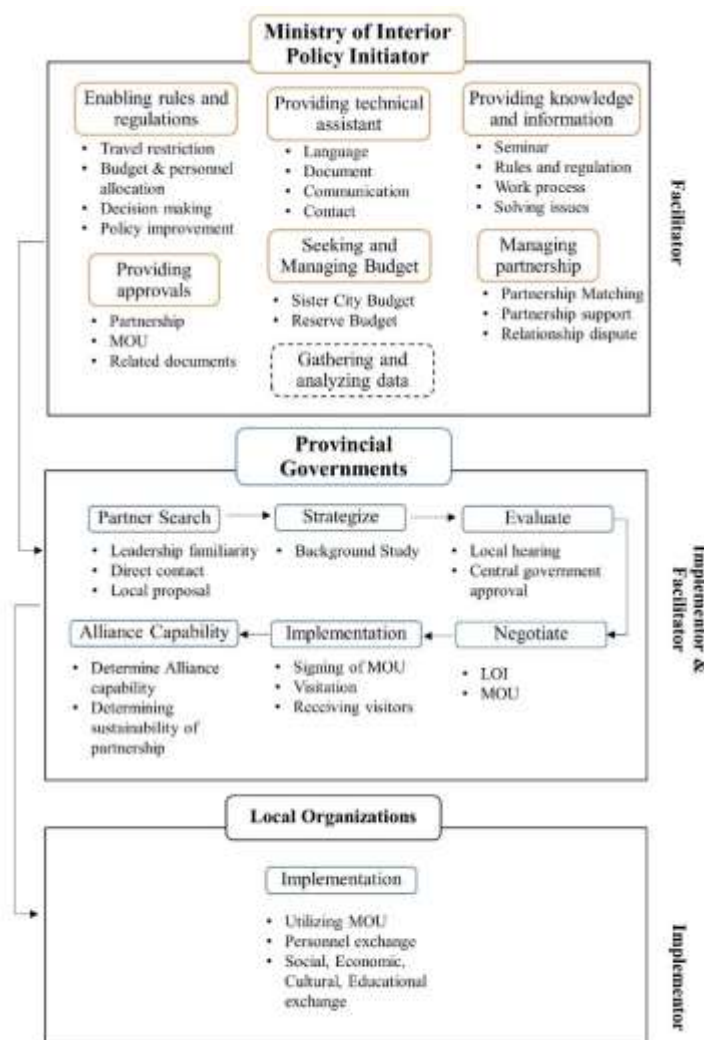


Fig. 2. Overview of implementation of sister city relation policy by the Thai government.

In Fig. 2. Overview of the implementation process of sister city relation policy consists of 3 governments, namely the Ministry of Interior (central government, provincial governments, and local governments). It was found that the Thai government's implementation of the sister city relationship policy for the Thai government cannot be carried out by a single agency, in this case, by the provincial government. Due to the current public management system in Thailand, the implementation of the policy by the Thai government involves all levels of organizations, including central and provincial governments and local organizations. Therefore, in order to understand the implementation features and characteristics of implementing the sister city relationship policy by provincial government, one needs to understand the entire implementation

system, which includes both the implementation process and roles and responsibilities of both central and local governments.

For the central government, the Ministry of Interior is responsible for ensuring that the policy is being carried out properly through the implementation of the provincial governments. The ministry's primary duty is to facilitate the performance of the procedure for provincial governments by providing guidelines, directions, and knowledge for local governments while ensuring that the implementation process abides by the center's rules and regulations. The roles of the Ministry of Interior in the implementation of the sister city relationship policy are as follows: 1) easing rules and regulations, 2) seeking and managing budget, 3) providing partnership and MOU approvals, 4) providing technical assistance, 5) providing and updating knowledge and information on Sister City Relationship Policy 6) managing partnership 7) gathering and analyzing sister city relationship data.

The local government, it was found that local organizations such as city-municipality, chamber of commerce, university, and other private sectors plays a crucial role in carrying out the policy. These organizations are the main mobilizers of the utilizing sister city relationship frameworks for organizational and area of jurisdiction development. In addition, they possess with more autonomy to carry out the policy, including decision making, budget management, and cable human resource.

Conclusion

Provincial governments alone cannot single-handedly implement the policy as effectively. Each organization has its own role and responsibility to ensure the success of the policy. At present, the role of the involved organizations is still unclear and needs of proper integration. Provincial governments are the main implementer of the policy as they are the direct responding organization to the central government. The province has a duty to establish a relationship, implement activities, encourage local participation, and ensure the sustainability of the relationship. The process of implementing sister cities by the provincial government are is partner searched, strategized, evaluated, negotiated, implemented, and determined alliance capability.

Suggestion

Although this research focuses on the implementation of sister city relationship policy by provincial governments, provincial governments alone cannot be the only agency that must adapt their role and function to improve implementation effectiveness. Every involved organization including central government, provincial government, and local organizations needs to adjust their roles and functions. While in contrast, some organizations need to incorporate additional responsibility for the policy's success. Furthermore, the central government is still asserting its authority and limiting the implementer, leading to ineffectiveness implementation. Some provincial governments and local organizations are implementation difficult because of the rules, which sometimes lead to the abandonment of the policy. It was also found that some regulations impose because the central government is under the impression of international cooperation. At the regional level is still a new concept for regional organizations and wants to ensure that the implementing organizations are not violating central rules and regulations as constantly protecting national interest. On the other hand, the central government wants to give freedom of implementation to the regional organizations as well.

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