



What Connectivity Matters in Enhancing Thai Local Governance? Empirical Evaluation of Thai Local Government Survey in 2006*

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Abstract

Since the enactment of Act on Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO) in 1994, 2 decades has passed. It has created almost 7 thousand basic local governments in rural areas from 1995 to 1997. Then, Thai Constitution of 1997 was promulgated, which strengthened autonomy of existing local governments and promoted decentralization. And based on the Decentralization Promotion Act of 1999, massive devolution of duties and responsibilities, financial resources, and personnel was implemented.

There are many case studies on local governance in Thailand. Nonetheless, there are few research on local governance based on systematic qualitative analysis.

In this paper, we will identify several factors to affect capability of local government, based on the Thai local government survey conducted in 2006 by the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) of Japan and Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University. 2 different types of questionnaires were sent to all TAOs and Thesaban (Municipalities) by mailing. And collection ratio was 35%.

After identifying important variables, correlation shall be explained between contact frequency as independent valuables and local capability as dependent valuables. Changing connectivity at grassroots level between local governments, field agencies of the central governments and local people shall be analyzed in this paper.

Keywords: Local Government Survey/ Decentralization/ Tambon Administrative Organization/ Thesaban/ Thailand

Introduction

Since the enactment of the Act of Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO) (hereafter, abbreviated as TAO Act of 1994) in 1994, 2 decades has already passed. This Act has created almost 7 thousand basic local governments in rural areas from 1995 to 1997. Then, Thai Constitution of 1997, which was considered the most democratic constitution in the Thai political history, strengthened the local autonomy and promoted decentralization. Based on the Act Determining the

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Decentralization Plan and Procedures of 1999 (hereafter, abbreviated as the Decentralization Promotion Act of 1999), massive devolution of duties and responsibilities, financial resources and personnel was implemented.

The decentralization has the theoretical pre-condition that the closer the local government is to the local residents, the more effectively and efficiently public services can be delivered. In other words, decentralization is supposed to bring the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery by local governments. However, devolution does not automatically and always guarantee the capacity building of the local government. Not only may the strengthening of the internal organization, but also the relationship with outside organizations and local residents be equally important. Because of the unique characteristics of the Thai local administrative system, consultation and cooperation with various field agencies of the central government is indispensable to respond to local needs.

There are many case studies on local governance in Thailand. However, there are few researches on local governance based on systematic qualitative analysis.

This paper aims to make up the gap by the systematic research on local governments through the elite survey. Specifically, this paper explores to identify possible significant factors which may affect the capability of local government, based on the Thai local government survey conducted in 2006. This survey was conducted under the collaboration of the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) of Japan and the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University. 2 different types of questionnaires were sent by postal service to all mayors (or *Nayok* in Thai language) and clerks (or *Palat* in Thai language) of TAOs and Thesaban (Municipalities). Collection ratio turnout was about 35%¹.

This paper is composed of 6 sections. The first section analyzes the difference between urban local governments and rural local governments, which significantly determines the Thai local government institution. The second section discusses about how to measure the administrative capability of the local government. Following sections 3 through 5 explain the possible independent variables, which may determine the capability of local governments: namely the relationship between local government and other organizations and outside individuals, the year of establishment of the local governments, and clerk's experience at the local governments. And in the Section 6, the result of the Ordered Logistic Regression Model shall be indicated and interpreted. And in the concluding section, further implications and remaining questions will be discussed.

Local government system in Thailand: Urban areas and rural areas

Modern state formation of Thai local administrative system can be traced back to the late 19th century, when colonization threat was immense. King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868-1910), or the Rama V, initiated various administrative

¹ As for the background of this research project and immediate result of simple counting, please see Nagai, Nakharin and Funatsu [2008].



reforms since 1890s, including local administrative reforms. It is during this era of absolute monarchy that vertical local administrative line of the Interior Ministry was installed over the Thai territory. It was composed of 5 tiers of administrative units, namely *Monthons*, provinces, districts, Tambon (Sub-district) and village. At *Monthon*, province and district levels, the Interior Ministry dispatched super-intendants, provincial governors and district chief officers respectively, and other central line ministries also dispatched their officials to the *Monthon*, provincial halls and district offices. On the other hand, there were *Kamnan*/village headmen, who were elected by local residents and performed various assigned functions from the central government. Though after the Constitutional Revolution of 1932 *Monthon* was abolished, the rest of vertical architecture has been kept until today. This legacy of administrative centralization is well depicted in the fact that the Local Administration Act of 1914 is still effective.

On the other hand, local governments in Thailand had been subtle and fragile. The history of local government in Thailand could be traced back to the early 1930s. Due to the frequent occurrence of the military coup d'état and inconsistent democratization at the national level, the development of local government was not full-fledged until 1990s. It was only 35 local governments that were first set up in narrow urban areas in 1935, which enjoyed economic prosperity and dense population. This type of urban local government is called *Thesaban*. Promoters of 1932 Constitutional Revolution initially intended to enlarge the area of *Thesaban* to rural areas eventually. However, the number of *Thesaban* established until 1999 was merely around 150 entities. The delay of this increase of *Thesaban* can attribute to various factors, such as the strict fiscal and population requirements, the legal condition that *Kamnan*/village headmen should be abolished in *Thesaban* area etc. *Kamnan*/village headmen, who are also elected by rural residents, perform assigned tasks commissioned by the central government, such as maintaining law and order, population registration, etc. Naturally, they are less inclined to agree with the establishment of *Thesaban*, simply because they did not want to lose this prestigious post. However, this legal condition was changed in 1999, which made it certain kinds of *Thesaban* and *Kamnan*/village headman to co-exist in rural areas.

There are 4 waves of decentralization in Thailand. The second wave of decentralization was seen in 1950s, when several kinds of local government were newly introduced in Thailand.

One was sanitary districts (in Thai, called as *Sukhaphiban*). Sanitary districts were established in the semi-urban areas, economically prosperous areas next to *Thesaban* areas, and in the district office areas². Sanitary districts, firstly established in 1953, showed remarkable increase of its number to 981 places until 1999. Another kind of local government was the Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO). Its

² During the absolute monarchy, the first sanitary district was set up in 1897 and the Act of Sanitary District was promulgated in 1907. However, sanitary districts during the absolute monarchy were managed only by district officers, *Kamnan*/village headmen: it did not include elected members from local residents. It did not hold the status of juristic person. Therefore, this paper does not consider sanitary districts established during the absolute monarchy as local governments. In fact, 35 newly established *Thesaban* were upgraded from former sanitary districts established before the 1932 Constitutional Revolution with juristic person's status.



administrative area covers the same provincial area except for the existing *Thesaban* areas and sanitary district areas. PAO was set up in every province in 1955, including Bangkok province and Thonburi province. Sanitary districts and PAOs were legally considered as ‘local governments’ in the State Administrative Organization Act.

However, there was a significant difference between *Thesaban*, sanitary districts and PAOs. While all council members of *Thesaban* were elected directly by local residents and the mayor of *Thesaban* was elected among council members³, half of the sanitary district committee members were ex-officio members, such as chief district officers, *Kamnan*/village headmen, whose administrative areas overlaps with sanitary district areas totally or partially. Chairperson was represented by the chief district officer in many cases. PAO council members (at that time, called as Provincial Council members) were all elected directly by local residents; the PAO president⁴ was assumed by provincial governor, who was dispatched by the central government, and other senior officials of the PAO were also assumed by other high officials, such as deputy governors (the highest position in the province, dispatched from the department of local administration, Interior Ministry), district chief officers (senior officials dispatched from the department of local administration, Interior Ministry) etc. In short, though the legal status of the sanitary district and PAO was local government, centrally dispatched officials and local notables were allowed to join in the management of local governments⁵.

The third wave of decentralization came in 1970s, when special local governments were established: Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and Pattaya City. BMA was originally established in 1971, when existing Bangkok Province, Thonburi Province, Phra Nakhon *Thesaban* and Thonburi *Thesaban* were amalgamated. The governor of BMA, who was appointed by the Prime Minister, was entitled to attend at the cabinet meeting at that time. However, between 1975 and 1976, BMA governor was elected directly by Bangkok residents and after the interval of appointed governorship, the BMA governor has been elected directly again by metropolitan people. Pattaya is an internationally famous resort town, which is located in the southeast coastal area Thailand along the Thailand Bay. What made Pattaya ‘special’ comes from its special system to employ the City Manager, developed mainly in the United States. Over the half of its councilors were occupied by the appointed councilors by the Interior Minister. The role of Pattaya City Mayor, who was elected among council members, was limited only to ceremonial ones: real function was assigned to the City Manager⁶.

³ During military regime from late 1960s to early 1970s, interior officials assumed the appointed mayors. After the late 2003, all mayors came to be elected directly by local residents.

⁴ The word of the “PAO president (in Thai, called as *Nayok*)” has been used since the late 2003, when the PAO Act of 1999 was amended to allow this top position to be directly elected by local residents. Until then, this post was called the Chief Executive Chairperson (or in Thai, called as the *Prathan Khanakamakan Phuu Borihan*). To avoid this technical complex, the word *President* will be used in this paper.

⁵ One of the authors of this paper used to call this phenomenon as the ‘fusion’ between central government and local governments in Thailand [Nagai 2008 a , 123-124].

⁶ Concerning to the details of the formation of Thai local government system, please see Chuwong(1996), Thanet(1997), Hashimoto (1999a; 1999b) , Nagai (2001), Pathan (2004), Kowit (2005) etc.



From the overview of the historical development of Thai local governments, we can understand several distinctive characteristics of local government system in Thailand. First of all, Thai local governments were established according to the degree of economic prosperity. Local governments in Thailand prior to 1997 were made of 1 tier system. Secondly, the degree of direct intervention by the central government and its field agencies (provinces and districts) was different, depending on the kind of the local government. In *Thesaban* areas, *Kamnan*/village headmen were not allowed to exist: Interior officials did not join in the management of *Thesaban*, except military regime period around 1960s. In contrast, in sanitary districts, district chief officers and *Kamnan*/village headmen participated in the management as committee members and/or committee chairperson: In PAOs, executive members such as presidents and other high-ranking officials were all occupied by the high-ranking officials from the Interior Ministry. In other words, the organizational principle of the local government illustrates distinctive contrast between the urban area, the semi-urban area and the rural area [Nagai 2006,110-111] (See, Table 1).

**Table 1 Direct Involvement of interior officials distinguished by the kind of local governments
(as of March 1995)**

Kind of Local Government (Established year)	BMA (1986)*	<i>Thesaban</i> (1935)	Sanitary District (1953)*	PAO (1955)	Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO)(1995)	Tambon Council ***
Provincial Governor	/			○		
District Chief Officer	/		○	○		○
<i>Kamnan</i>	/	/	○		○	○
Village headman	/	/	○		○	○

Source: Authors

Note: The vertical column shows the commanding line from the Interior Ministry. The horizontal columns indicate the decreasing degree of urbanization and autonomy from the left to the right. Pattaya City is excluded from this table. Because Tambon Council was the former status of TAO before March 1995, it was included in this table.

* BMA enjoys the dual function as province as well as *Thesaban*. Provincial governor and district officers do not exist in BMA area. *Kamnan*/village headmen do not exist in BMA nowadays, but until recently in outer areas in BMA, *Kamnan*/village headmen did exist. Therefore, in this table, dashed line is inserted in the column of *Kamnan*/village headmen in the area of BMA.

** Except 1 place which was abolished, sanitary districts were all upgraded into *Thesaban* in May 1999. It does not exist nowadays.

*** Tambon Council was set up at all Tambon in 1972 according to the Revolutionary Decree No. 326. However, after the establishment of TAO in 1902, the number of Tambon Council decreased dramatically. In the end, after the modification of the TAO Act in 2003, all remaining Tambon Councils were urged to merger with neighboring



TAO or *Thesaban* in the same district as legal requirements. Thus, the existence of Tambon Council is quite negligible. Tambon Council, which did not possess a juridical personality, used to serve for the preparation of Tambon Development Plan, which was submitted to PAO to deliver development projects. PAO at that time was mandated to spare its certain amount of budget to the development plan of Tambon Council. As TAO was established, part of tax resources was also transferred from PAO to TAO. Thus, PAO lost its significant part of its own tax income base, which arose the question of its existence in late 1990s and early 2000s.

Decentralization after 1990s, or the fourth wave of decentralization, changed the existing Thai local government system dramatically in several points.

First, basic local government was established in rural areas: Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO)⁷. Before the establishment of the TAO, there were not administrative offices at the *Tambon* and village levels⁸. Private homes of *Kamnan*/village headmen have been used as de-facto offices. TAO is the newly created local government with the juristic person's status in rural areas, by overlapping the existing administrative units of *Tambon* and villages⁹: *Kamnan*/village headmen are allowed to exist in TAO areas. During the transitional period between the first set-up of TAOs in 1995 and the promulgation of 1997 Constitution, *Kamnan*/village headmen served as ex-officio TAO councilors together with elected members from each village in TAO (two members are elected in one village). The first president of TAO was occupied by *Kamnan*. The number of newly established TAOs was 617 entities in 1995, 2,143 entities in 1996 and 3,637 entities in 1997 respectively¹⁰. If certain condition was not fulfilled to set up as the TAO, the status of Tambon Council was maintained, with the juristic person endowed¹¹.)

Secondly, the PAO Act of 1955 was amended to include the jurisdiction area of existing *Thesaban* and sanitary districts. In short, PAO's administrative area was extended to cover the whole provincial area. Now that the PAO becomes the wide-area local government, Thai local government system becomes two-tiers, except for the BMA. Amendment of the PAO Act in 1997 also changed the rule to select the PAO

⁷ This is not the first time for the organization, named TAO, to be established. TAO did exist between 1956 and 1972. However, the number of established TAO was less than 100 places and they were all abolished after 1972 by the Revolutionary Order No. 326. Instead, Tambon Council was established in every Tambon in 1972. District chief officer, *Kamnan*, Medical practitioner attached to the Tambon, village headmen, school master, and several elected members among local residents compose the Tambon Council. The main function of Tambon Council was to prepare Tambon Development Plan. Problem of the Tambon Council was the lack of juristic person's status, which made it impossible for the Tambon Council to implement the budget.

⁸ At least one health center was set up basically in every Tambon. As for schools, normally several elementary schools and junior high schools are established in one Tambon area.

⁹ To be precise, if some part of Tambon area was already incorporated into sanitary district area, the jurisdiction of newly created TAO covers only the remaining area of Tambon. Therefore, there exists some gap between the jurisdiction of Tambon area and TAO area.

¹⁰ After the promulgation of the 1994 TAO Act, TAO was established at the Tambon under the condition that the average of income of that Tambon during the past 3 years exceeded one hundred fifty thousand Bahts. Before the setting up TAOs, PAO collected local tax, such as housing tax, land development tax, signboard tax etc. in rural Tambon area. These tax bases were transferred to TAOs.

¹¹ Concerning to the installment of the TAOs, please see Nagai (2006). After the amendment of the 1995 TAO Act, most Tambon Councils were amalgamated with neighboring basic local governments (*Thesaban* or TAOs) in the same district.



President: PAO president comes from the mutual selection among PAO councilors. This change expelled not only the provincial governors but also all other Interior officials from the management of PAOs. While this change improved the managerial autonomy of the PAO, PAO's service delivery to the local residents became more remote. Formerly, as district chief officers assumed the posts of PAO in district levels, service delivery was made at the district offices. Now that district chief officers retreat from the management of the PAO, PAO cannot use district offices as its branch offices. The tax base of the PAO had been already transferred to the newly established TAOs. This change tremendously threatened the financial basis of the PAO, thus PAO has to largely depend on unstable subsidy from the central government. Though the PAO becomes the second tier wide-area local government, the question has been always beset with the *raison d'être* of the PAO.

Third, the Article 285 of the 1997 Constitution totally prohibited ex-officio members, such as the Interior officials and *Kamnan*/village headmen, to participate directly in the management of the local governments. Not only from PAOs but also from sanitary districts and TAOs were ex-officio members forced to withdraw from the local government offices. As a result, except for 1 abolished entity, 980 sanitary districts were all upgraded to *Thesaban* Tambon (or town municipality)¹² at the same time. As the result of the amendment of the 1994 TAO Act in November 1999, ex-officio members in the TAO (*Kamnan*/village headmen) could not participate in the management of the TAO any more (the 1997 Constitution's Article 335 stipulates the transitional provision to allow ex-officio members to remain at the post until the expiration of the term of the office).

While 1997 Constitution severely prohibited the direct involvement by the vertical local administrative line in the local governments, the co-existence between vertical local administrative line and local governments was remained intact. While *Kamnan*/village headmen could not manage directly the TAO, they still keep the traditional mandates, such as maintaining the peace and order and enjoying quasi-judicial powers. Furthermore, newly upgraded *Thesaban* Tambon in May 1999 shows very interesting treatments. If this general rule had been applied to the upgrade of sanitary district, *Kamnan*/village headmen were not allowed to stay in the area of *Thesaban*. Therefore, the *Thesaban* Act of 1953 was amended to allow *Thesaban* Tambon (Town municipality) area to co-exist with *Kamnan*/village headmen. In other words, it is only in *Thesaban* Nakhon and *Thesaban* Muang area which force the retirement of *Kamnan*/village headmen¹³.

¹² *Thesaban* is sub-categorized into 3 kinds, namely *Thesaban Nakhon* (Special City), *Thesaban Muang* (City), and *Thesaban Tambon* (Town). The kind of *Thesaban* differentiates the necessary number of councilors, duties and responsibilities of required mandates. The setting up a new *Thesaban* used to require both population size as well as population density. After the amendment of *Thesaban* Act of 1952, only the population size became the requirement for the new *Thesaban*.

¹³ Afterwards, further amendment of the *Thesaban* Act of 1953 allows *Thesaban* Muang area to co-exist with *Kamnan*/village headmen.



Decentralization Reform immediately after the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution thus focused on the reform of the local government (organizational) system. In short, it intended to enhance the local autonomy by prohibiting the direct involvement of ex-officio members such as the interior officials, *Kamnan*/village headmen. It also aimed to realize the 2 tiers local government system which is composed of wide-area local government (PAO) and basic local governments (*Thesaban* in urban areas and TAOs in rural area).

However, it did not intend to deny the existing roles played by vertical local administration of the central governments. This cautious attitude is well indicated in the case of upgrading the sanitary district to the *Thesaban* Tambon. No alternation was imposed on the existing local government related laws, with respect to the duties and responsibilities and composition of local councils from 1997 through 1999. There are significant differences of duties and responsibilities between the *Thesaban* and the TAO. Generally speaking, while the population registration, formal education at schools, management of health centers are usually provided by the *Thesaban*, those public services are not provided by the TAO. While the number of council members of *Thesaban*, the number of electorates and the number of council members in the electorates are all fixed by the law¹⁴, the electorate unit of the TAO is a village: the number of TAO council members is fixed twice as many as the number of the village in the TAO (There are some exceptions, in case the number of villages in one TAO is less than 3). The per capita expenditure of local government to one resident also shows significant differences, almost 7 times: the average administrative area was quite different between the *Thesaban* and the TAO [Nagai 2008a, 146-147]. Due to the huge difference of administrative roles and geographical conditions between *Thesaban* and TAOs, simple comparison should not be avoided¹⁵. What we can identify here is the consistence of the institutional difference of the local government between urban areas and rural areas until today (Table 2).¹⁶

¹⁴ The number of *Thesaban* council members is fixed at 24 members for *Thesaban Nakhon*, 18 for *Thesaban Muang* and 12 for *Thesaban Tambon*. The number of electorates is fixed at 4, 3 and 2 respectively (6 councilors in each electorate). One vote can list up maximum 6 names in the ballot sheet.

¹⁵ There exists a difference of legal interpretation between the local government establishment acts and the 1999 Decentralization Promotion Act. While the duties and responsibilities written in the TAO Act of 1994 and *Thesaban* Act of 1953 are different, those written in the 1999 Decentralization Promotion Act is same. According to one official attached to the Department of Local Administration (DLA), the Council of State interprets that local government establishment acts are superior to the 1999 Decentralization Promotion Act. (Author's interview on October 3, 2014 at the DLA, the Ministry of the Interior).

¹⁶ The number of local government categorized by their kinds has been changing dramatically since 2007, because many TAOs were upgraded into *Thesaban*. Nowadays, there are many *Thesaban* established in rural areas, based on the upgrade from former TAOs (as for the political process of "upgrading" from TAO to *Thesaban*, please see Nagai (2008b)). When the local government survey in Thailand was implemented in 2006, this phenomenon has not started. As of June 20, 2011, the number of local government in each category was 76 PAOs, 2010 *Thesaban* (*Thesaban Nakhon* 27 entities, *Thesaban Nakhon* 145 entities, and *Thesaban Tambon* 1818 entities), 5765 TAOs, BMA and Pattaya City.

**Table 2 The number of local governments by kinds (as of January 19, 2007)**

Kind of Local government	The number of local government	
PAO	75	Set up at every province, except Bangkok
<i>Thesaban</i> (Municipality)	1,162	Requirement for the <i>Thesaban Nakhon</i> needs the population more than fifty thousand residents, <i>Thesaban Muang</i> ten thousand populations or the place of provincial hall. Other places of district offices are designated as at least <i>Thesaban Tambon</i> . Except one case, former sanitary districts were all upgraded to <i>Thesaban Tambon</i> in 1999.
<i>Thesaban Nakhon</i> (Special City)	22	
<i>Thesaban Muang</i> (City)	120	
<i>Thesaban Tambon</i> (Town)	1,020	
Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO)	6,616	
Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA)	1	Special local governments are directly controlled and supervised by the Interior Minister.
Pattaya City	1	
Total Sum	7,855	

Source: Prepared by authors by referring to the website of the Department of Local Administration, the Ministry of Interior (<http://www.thailocaladmin.go.th>) (access on February 13, 2007)

In 2002, Thai government embarked on the decentralization. The process of the decentralization has been hardly smooth as expected. The Decentralization Promotion Act was promulgated in November 1999 and based on this Act, the National Committee of Decentralization (NDC) was established in January 2000. NDC decided the decentralization plan: On October 2000, the Master Plan of Decentralization was recognized by the Chuan Government (1997 to 2001) and on November 2001 the Action Plan was recognized by the Thaksin Government (2001 to 2006). According to these plans, duties and responsibilities, budget and personnel were to be transferred as a package from the central government and its field agencies to local governments basically within 4 years and at longest 10 years. The Decentralization Promotion Act also stipulated the ratio of local expenditures vis-à-vis total government expenditure to be increased at least 20% in 2001 and at least 35% in 2006 respectively [Anek 2000a, 2000b; Woothisan 2001]. Nevertheless, this fiscal target ratio could not be achieved, which forced the amendment of the Decentralization Promotion Act at the end of the year 2006. New fiscal target was reset 25% within the year 2007 and it was easily achieved. As of the fiscal year 2014, the ration is only 27%, much lower than the target goal. The number of transferred duties and responsibilities remained 185, which did not increased since 2006 and the total number of transferred personnel from the central government to local governments was merely 10,000 officials.



Though devolution did not proceed smoothly, there was one significant event in terms of local governance. In late 2003, the PAO Act of 1955, the *Thesaban* Act of 1953 and the TAO Act of 1994 were all amended to allow the local government presidents to be elected directly from local residents. Previously, directly election of mayors was only applied to *Thesaban* Nakhon and Muang (since 1998). This institutional change seems to bring impact on the nature of local governance, because candidates for the local government presidents have to get supports from local residence directly rather than local councilors. Now local government presidents come to be judged by local residents based on their accomplishment or policy platforms, too.

Administrative Capability of the Basic Local Government

In the previous section, we have realized that one of the important structural variables to determine the local capability is the categorical kind of local government (urban local government or rural local government)¹⁷. As mentioned above, the kind of local government is closely linked with the year of establishment and the amount of fiscal resources. Nonetheless, other factors, such as relationship with outside organizations or local residents, could be important in determining the local capability. Before going into the correlation or causal relationship with these factors, we have to argue the important issue, how to measure the administrative capability of local governments.

It is very difficult to determine the ‘capability’ of the local government. The surrounding socio-economic environment differs from one local government to another; issues confronted by each local government are desperately diverse. Nonetheless, the public service expected to deliver to local residents are determined by the kind of local governments. Resources available for the local government to respond to local needs are either legal or financial. Personal capacity of the local government president may be also another important factor to determine the local capability, but this cannot be simply determined by his/her educational and professional background. Suppose the president him/herself possess high capability but cannot keep good relationship with local government personnel or local residents, performance of that local government would not be impressive as a whole. Financial capability itself cannot guarantee the local capability, if it fails to respond to local needs from the residents or fails to be used effectively and efficiently. Decisions of local governments may be autonomous, but it does not automatically guarantee the expected outcomes. Decisions could be made by the local government swiftly. Yet, unless it could not get good cooperation from local residents and/or other

¹⁷ In this paper, large-area local governments, namely the PAO and the BMA, are excluded from this analysis. There are 3 reasons for this exclusion. First, while the PAO before 1997 was the rural local government, after the enlargement of its area to include urban and semi-urban areas, the PAO nowadays cannot be categorized as a rural local government. Second, there are only 75 PAOs at the time of local government survey and the number of samples is too limited to be used for analysis. And third, in terms of the horizontal relations between PAOs and the delivery of public services to local residents, PAO is quite different from the basic local governments. The reason to exclude BMA is because BMA exceeds far from other local governments in terms of financial scale, human resources, duties and responsibilities. BMA enjoys dual functions that of provinces and *Thesaban*.



organizations, it may not accomplish the expected outcomes. In some occasions it may be more appropriate to contact to the central government or its field agencies and assign them to respond to local needs. These kinds of ‘assignments’ could be considered a part of the capability of the local government.

In our analysis, the number of awards given to the local government in a certain period is employed to measure the capability of the local government.

There are various kinds of awards given to the local governments in Thailand. Besides central ministries and departments, provincial halls, district offices, and even private organizations evaluate local governments and give awards to local governments. It is quite common in Thai local governments to exhibit shields and trophies at the entrance room of the main office building or inside the president’s room. Local governments seem to consider those awards as the proof of their administrative capability. Some awards are given with money (typical case is the “good governance awards” given by the NDC). These awards could be categorized into several groups according to the public policy areas, such as tax collection awards (NDC), good governance awards (NDC), voting rate growth awards (Election committee), promotion of income generation (Community Development Department), Narcotics Suppression Movement (Narcotics Suppression Commission), Promotion of Sanitation and Public Health (Ministry of Public Health), Improvement of Job Environment and Living Environment (Ministry of Public Health), Environmental Protection (Ministry of Environment), Sports Promotion and Protection of Local Culture (Ministry of Culture and Sports, Provincial Halls, district offices etc) , Good Governance on people’s participation and transparency (King Prachatipok’s Institute) etc. Because of its diversity, even the central government does not grasp exactly how many local government awards exist. There seem at least 200 kinds of local government awards, as long as the local government survey data is concerned.

The fact that the central ministries and departments, provincial halls and district offices give awards to local governments may show the strong interest of the central government and other organizations in the public service delivery and the management of the local government. All these awards are given to the duties and responsibilities of the local government. These awards are not determined solely by the amount of the fiscal budget and/or the educational background of the chief executive and/or local government staffs: it may reflect the degree of efforts by the local government as an organization to improve the quality of public service and residents’ life.

Generally speaking, there are two different ways to evaluate the local government: one is based on an absolute scale evaluation and another on competitive evaluation (such as the ‘good governance awards’ given by the NDC). In case of the national-level absolute scale awards, an application form is disseminated to all local governments in Thailand and those expecting to be evaluated send back the filled-in evaluation sheet to the evaluation organization. Local government awards at provincial and district levels seem to give competitive awards. Methodology of the evaluation looks similar: Staffs attached to the evaluation organization compose the evaluation



committee together with invited members from outside, and they conducted both documentary and on-site survey investigation.

There are some local governments which criticize that those award giving is a fixed game, saying that rich local governments are much more privileged, and that award giving cannot evaluate the real capacity of the local government. Nevertheless, as long as present authors' field research is concerned, generally speaking the award-giving seems to be positively accepted by the local government. Considering the variety of the awards and public service delivery to respond to the administrative needs in a limited time and budget constraint, the number of local government awards in a certain period may rather impartially reflect the capability of the local government. In the local government survey conducted in June and July 2006 in Thailand, we have inquired the number of the given awards and their names. We categorized those local government awards into 30 some kinds according to the public policy areas and treated them as variables to evaluate the local government capability.

In summary, it could be interpreted that the more the local government receives awards, the higher the local capability is. Table 3 shows the distribution of the number of awards given to local governments.

In the analysis of Thai local government survey, we should be attentive to the separation of urban local governments and rural local governments. *Thesaban* established before 1999 and TAOs established after 1995 shows striking difference in terms of their experiences as local governments. Therefore, in the following sections, we shall analyze the performance of local governments by separating urban local governments and rural local governments.

Table3 Distribution of Local Government Awards

Number of prizes		(%)	
0	1	2 or more	DK,NA
45.9	25.2	20.5	8.4
N=2723			

Source: Calculated from the survey data

Establishment year of the Local Governments and Rural/Urban Local governments in Thailand

As is discussed above, there is a distinct institutional difference between urban local government and rural local government in Thailand (the PAO and BMA are excluded from our analysis here). In general, *Thesaban* is considered to be urban local government and the TAO as rural local government.



However, in our analysis, we will redefine this formal institutional setting. Among the TAO, which is classified into large-sized, middle-sized and small-sized, we shall incorporate the large-sized TAO into urban local government. We shall redefine this new category as ‘Urban LAOs’ (all *Thesaban* and the large-sized TAOs) and the rest of TAOs (middle-sized and small-sized TAOs) as ‘Rural LAOs’ (Table 4).

Table 4: Urban/Rural LAOs

(%)			
Urban LAOs	Rural LAOs	DK,NA	N
13.9	81.5	4.6	2723
N=2723			

Source: Calculated from the survey data

The purpose of this incorporation is twofold. The first is that in many cases the large-sized TAO was set up at the neighboring area of *Thesaban*, which was economically prosperous. It does not sound peculiar for the large-sized TAO to be upgraded into *Thesaban Tambon* or even *Thesaban Muang*¹⁸. The second reason is more practical: to modify the dispersion of the number of samples to some extent.

We consider the establishment year of the local government an important factor to determine the administrative capability of the local government. It is natural to think that the older the local government is, the more experienced it is. The establishment year of the urban local government can be traced back to the older time and the urban local government has richer financial resources. This is exactly true of the TAO. TAO established in 1995 had better financial resources than TAOs established later in 1996 and 1997. Establishment of the TAO even after 1998 was fulfilled because of the increase of the shared tax from the central government; the financial base is much more fragile.

Nonetheless, it is not so simple to arrange the establishment year from the old time to recent time, because the establishment year does not mean the fresh start of public service delivery by that local government. In particular, we must be careful about dealing with *Thesaban* established in May 1999. Those new *Thesaban* used to be sanitary districts, which had accumulated administrative experiences to some extent. Elected committee members and clerk of the sanitary district became automatically those of *Thesaban* (vacancy of elected members was supplemented by

¹⁸ At the time of conducting local government survey in Thailand between June and July 2006, mass-scale of the upgrading from TAOs to *Thesaban* had not started yet. From 2000 to 2006, there were only 97 cases of upgrading of local governments: 32 cases upgraded from Tambon Councils to TAOs, 22 cases from TAOs to *Thesaban Tambon*, 41 cases from *Thesaban Tambon* to *Thesaban Muang*, and 2 cases from *Thesaban Muang* to *Thesaban Nakhon*. There left around 200 Tambon Councils even after the mass establishment of TAOs between 1995 and 1997. Those Tambon Councils mostly disappeared by the year 2004 as the result of the amalgamation with *Thesaban Tambon* (92 cases) and with TAOs (95 cases). There are other cases of amalgamation, such as amalgamation of TAOs and TAOs (61 cases) and that of TAOs and *Thesaban Tambon* (69 cases). In short, the upgrading of TAOs into *Thesaban Tambon* is very limited, and the existence of Tambon Councils can be ignored in our analysis. The number of figures was taken from the Department of Local Administration, the Ministry of Interior, as of March 14, 2006.



by-elections). Other newly set-up *Thesaban* after 2000 was mostly former TAOs (this phenomenon has been observed since 2003, but not so common until 2007)¹⁹.

Judging from the above, the most fragile local government in terms of fiscal capacity and experiences is the TAOs established in 1996 and 1997. On contrast, the most experienced local government is *Thesaban* set up before May 1999. *Thesaban* upgraded in 1999 comes in-between. In short, there seems a big difference between *Thesaban* established before May 1999 and after May 1999 and between TAOs established in 1995 and those set up afterwards.

Based on this historical and institutional background, we shall divide Thai local governments into 3 groups by the establishment year; the 1st generation (*Thesaban* established before 1995 and TAOs established in 1995), the 2nd generation (TAOs set up between 1996 and 1998), and the 3rd generation (Mostly *Thesaban* set up in 1999 and very small number of TAOs)(Table 5). Based upon this generational category, we will analyze the correlation between the establishment year and the local capability by separating ‘Urban LAOs’ and ‘Rural LAOs’

Table 5 Established year of the Local Governments

Established Year of LGs		(%)		
before 1995	1996-1998	1999-	DK,NA	N
8.1	52.7	13.6	25.6	2723

N=2723

Source: Calculated from the survey data

Relationship between the Local Government and Outside Organizations/Individuals

Besides providing public services to the local residents, Thai local governments keep daily contacts and interactions with various outside organizations and individuals. Through those interactions, local governments may learn the changing local needs, and respond better in providing public services.

It is quite common for Thai local governments to visit other local governments to which local government awards are entitled during the observation tour. For instance, in the field of the environmental protection, advanced measures taken by Lamphun City (Northern Thailand) or Phisanulok Special City (Northern Thailand) were learned by Ko Kha Town (Lampang province in Northern Thailand), which was also imitated by the neighboring local governments. Another example is the garbage

¹⁹ Since the number of the councilors in *Thesaban Tambon* is fixed as 12, there is a high possibility for the TAO council to decrease its number of TAO councilors after the upgrading to the *Thesaban Tambon*. The number of TAO councilors is the double of the number of villages in that TAO area. Despite of the decrease of the number of councilors or even the abolishment of Kamnan/village headmen, some TAOs decided to seek for the upgrading from the TAO to *Thesaban Tambon* or even *Thesaban Muang* respectively. This is because they believe that they can get more general subsidy allocation from the central government [Nagai 2008b].



disposal policy, which was originally developed by Phisanulok Special City. It was learned by Don Kaew TAO (Chiang Mai province, Northern Thailand), and then further imitated by Khaosamyot Town (Lopburi province, Central Thailand). There is many other examples of policy transmission.

Besides the horizontal level relations among local governments, local government presidents and clerks meet with officials from the central government, NGO/NPO staffs, and intellectuals etc on daily basis. In Thailand, educational career is required to be elected: high school diploma for the TAO president and bachelor degree for the president of *Thesaban* and the PAO respectively. Therefore, bachelor or master degree program for the local government president and its staffs are offered at various places nationwide in Thailand. The Department of Local Administration (DLA) permits certain part of local government budget to spend for the tuition paid to the special programs mentioned above as the personnel resource development. For instance, University of Khon Kaen was once assigned by the DLA to manage special degree programs for the local government executives and officials. Not only university lecturers but also incumbent interior officials are invited to deliver lectures in these special programs. It is through this occasion that local government presidents can construct their own political networks²⁰.

Hypothesis in this section is as follows: the more local government executives meet with outside organizations and individuals, the higher the local capability will be improved. In this context, outside organizations and individuals mean other local government executives, officials from the Interior Ministry, other state bureaucrats attached to the central government agencies (such as school teachers and health center officials), *Kamnan*/village headmen (local residents are not included in our analysis²¹).

Regardless of the places, provincial governors, district chief officers, assistant district officers, and officials attached to the DLA often meet with local government executives and clerks. Provincial governors and chief district officers enjoy the mandates to call for meeting. Thus, it is observed commonly that every province hall and/or district office calls convene the local government executives for the monthly regular meeting. The purpose of this kind of meetings is to transmit the important state policies to the local governments. In some cases, governors and district offices ask local government executives for ‘assisting’ them. Provincial governors and vice governors sometime pay visit to local governments directly to exchange opinions with local residents or participate in the important events or ceremonies held by local governments. DLA officials seem to give advice or suggestions to the daily problems confronted by the local government, such as the management of the local council, the interpretation of the acts and regulations, the implementation of policies etc.

²⁰ *Khon Kaen University had 8 branch campuses to manage these special programs. Rajaphat University and the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) also have many branch campuses to offer recurrent education to elected members or officials of the local governments.*

²¹ *In the questionnaires, questions on the frequency of contacts by local residents/residential groups were not included. However, there were many free description answers on the frequent visits by local residential groups (such as youth groups, housewives groups etc.) So we created new variables for the frequent visits by local residential groups and conducted cross-analysis. We find that there is a significance of correlation between the frequency of visits to local governments by local residential groups and the number of local government awards (alternative variables of performance). See Nagai and Kagoya [2011].*



In rural area, local governments keep close relations with *Kamnan*/village headmen, who are field agencies of the central administration. As is discussed, in the early stage of the development of the TAOs, both *Kamnan*/village headmen participated in the management of the TAOs directly. Even nowadays, rural residents consult with *Kamnan*/village headmen to solve various problems, such as the public works, keeping peace and order, solving personal disputes among neighbors etc. In case issues are related with the budget, *Kamnan*/village headmen often come to consult with the TAOs. While *Kamnan*/village headmen enjoy the right to call for the village meeting, the TAOs do not. Therefore, when the TAOs formulate the development plans or transmit important policies of the central government, they often ask cooperation from *Kamnan*/village headmen. Some *Thesaban* even invites *Kamnan*/village headmen who don't possess the voting right in the council, and let them be de-facto members of the local council.

It is also quite common for the local governments to interact with neighboring local governments in the same province/district as well as those living far from them. Besides formal regular meeting convened by provincial officers and chief district officers, they have informal local cooperation in such public services as garbage disposal, fire-fighting, flooding prevention and mitigation, etc. Local executives and senior officials also meet with each other through the activities of the Thai Municipal League or Association of Tambon Administrative Organization at the headquarter or their branch offices. Accomplishment is necessary to hold prestigious posts in these national organizations. If introduced in the monthly magazine named 'Local' (in Thai, "Thongthin"), issued by the DLA, he/she will be nationally well-known. Those people, who serve at these special posts, may get more new ideas.

Local governments are also paid frequent visit by school teachers and health center officials. Most local governments provide computer-related devices and sports instruments with schools and vaccines and health promotion subsidy with health centers. It is found from our survey data that more than 90% of responding local governments provide subsidy to provincial halls, district offices, primary schools and health centers.

Table 6 shows the frequency of "visit" by the public officials to the offices of local governments. Here, 'visit' means that those people really did pay a visit to the office of the Local governments, specifically to meet with either the president/mayor or the clerks.

Table 6 Visit by Public Officials to LAO office

Visit by Public Officials to LAO office (Answered by LAO President)							(%)
	No meetings	Once or Twice a year	Once in 2-3 Months	Once a Month	Several times a Month	DK,NA	
Kamnan, Village Headmen	5.3	5.2	14.6	23.0	47.4	4.4	
Teachers	3.5	10.5	31.4	20.8	30.6	3.2	
Public Health Officials	3.9	9.8	28.9	24.5	29.7	3.1	



DLA Officials	15.2	23.9	21.9	20.1	12.7	6.2
District Officers / Assistant Officers	6.6	16.0	22.1	28.2	22.8	4.3
Other LAOs' President	11.6	23.7	28.9	18.1	12.6	5.0
Other LAOs' Clerk	24.6	21.2	26.0	11.7	9.2	7.3

N=2723

Source: Calculated from the survey data

Based on the Table 6, let's divide respondents into 2 groups by "frequency" of visit. This procedure is made by 4 steps as follows.

First, "many" visits are defined as more than median of respondents on visits by the field agencies and central government officials and as more than once a month on visits by other local government presidents and clerks. On the other hand, "few" visit as less than median of respondents on visits by field agencies and central officials and as less than once per month on visits by other local government presidents and clerks. Secondly, let give scores "1" to those local governments which receive "many" visits and "0" to those which receive "few" visits. And thirdly, let's sum up those scores in 3 categories, namely field agencies, central governmental officials and other local government presidents and clerks. These categories represent similar nature of visitors. And finally, let's prepare average score in each category. This average score represent relational variable of the local government visited by outside organizations and individuals. Table 7 shows the relationship variables in each category.

Table 7 Relationship Variables from Outside Organizations/Individuals
Relationship Variables (%)

	Average					N
	0	0.33	0.5	0.66	1	
average1	26.4	18.6	0.7	23.8	30.5	2668
average2	41.0		29.2		29.9	2637
average3	64.1		16.4		19.5	2620

Note: Average 1: Kamnan/Village head, Teachers, Public Health officials

Average 2: DLA officials, District Chief/Assistant Officers

Average 3: Other local government presidents/clerks

Source: Calculated from the survey data



Clerks' Experience at and Controllability of Local Governments

Needless to say, local capability may be determined by the capability of local government bureaucracy. Indeed, there are many factors to determine the bureaucratic capability of local government, including the working culture, fairness of personnel administration, relationship with executives and council members, relationship with local residents, professional capability of each official, and so forth.

However, at the same time, it is very difficult to evaluate the bureaucratic capability of the Local Government as a whole. There are no convenient variables to measure the bureaucratic capability. Nonetheless, we must recognize that the clerk, highest position of local government official, plays a pivotal role in decision making process in his/her local government and give concrete instructions in delivering public services to local residents. The clerk knows various Acts and regulations, prepare the budget and the development plan, and knows the capability of his subordinate officials. We can assume that the more experienced the clerk is, the more capable that local government may be.

In Thai local governments, local officials are allowed to move between one local government and another. Before 1999, the transfer of local officials had been managed by the Department of Local Administration (DOLA). It was quite common for local officials to move every 3 or 4 years. Yet, after the promulgation of the Act of Local Personnel Administration of 1999, the power of local presidents has become very important: without the consent of the president, local officials cannot be allowed to move from one local government to another. Promotion of local officials is nowadays decided by the will of local government presidents.

Therefore, experience as local officials itself does not automatically mean his capability. Experience as local officials at particular local governments may be more meaningful than pure length of his/her experience.

Table 8 Clerk' s Experience at Local Governments

Clerk's Experience		(Unit: month)				
		average	SD	min.	max.	N
Months of working as a clerk		112.6	53.1	1	456	2631
Months of working at concerned LG		56.3	39.8	1	300	2653

Source: Calculated from the survey data

**Result of Ordered Logistic Regression Model**

Based on these explanations on the variables, we have implemented the ordered logistic regression model.

Table 9: Result of Ordered Logistic Regression Model

		B		SD	Wald
/cut	No Prizes	0.741	***	0.232	10.178
	1 Prize	2.014	**	0.237	72.145
Relationship					
	average1	0.364	*	0.131	7.739
	average2	-0.029		0.123	0.057
	average3	0.009		0.129	0.005
Organization					
	Months of working as palad	0.000		0.001	0.023
	Months of working at O Po Tho	0.003	*	0.001	4.534
Establishment Year					
	before 1995	0.271		0.212	1.628
	1996-1998	0.418	*	0.191	4.772
	after 1999	0.000			
Urban-Rural					
	Urban LAOs	1.110	***	0.213	27.110
	Rural LAOs	0.000			
Number of obs		1646			
-2LL ChiSquare(df=8)		46.99	(p<0.001)		
Negelkerke Pseudo R ²		0.032			

*: p<0.05, **: p<0.01, ***: p<0.001

From this result, we can interpret this model in following ways.

First of all, our model can explain the capability of the Thai local governments. However, its coefficient of determination is not so high. This may be partly because in this analysis we did not consider other possible variables such as the frequency of visits by local residents/residential groups and fiscal capabilities.

Secondly, we can recognize that the structural variables, namely ‘Urban LAO’ and ‘Rural LAO’, are very important.

Thirdly, among the relationship variables, only average1 is effective. Average 1 is composed of Kamnan/Village head, Teachers, Public Health officials. On the other hand, Average 2, which is composed of District Chief/Assistant officers and DLA official, is not effective. This suggests that it is horizontal relationship, not supervision relationship that may determine the local capability.



Fourthly, the establishment year of the local government proves a determinant factor of the administrative performance to some extent. The importance of the establishment year might reflect the accumulation of experiences of the local government and/or the scale of the financial scale.

Fourthly, we could recognize that the relation between the local government with the outside organizations and individuals is important to determine the performance of the local government.

Fifthly, clerk's experience as a proxy variable of bureaucratic capability, is partly effective.

Conclusion

From the result of the 2006 Thai local government survey analysis, there are further implications for the decentralization and local governance in Thailand.

First of all, while decentralization in Thailand has tried to strengthen basic local governments (Thesaban and the TAOs), horizontal relationship between local governments and field agencies seems to be very important in local governance. While this survey was conducted 8 years ago, this tendency does not seem to be changed.

Secondly, the interaction between local governments and central government agencies (district chief/assistant officers and DLAs) was not significant in deciding the local capability. This suggests that as the result of gradual decentralization in Thailand since 1994, local governments have become more independent in deciding their policies.

Thirdly, the difference between “Rural” and “Urban” local governments was very important in the Thai local government system in terms of the local capability. This strongly suggests that this kind of structural difference should be minimized as much as possible wherever local residents live in Thailand. However, this situation has become more complicated because of the upgrading of TAOs to Thesaban.

Lastly, while our model can explain the capability of the Thai local governments, many other variables should be inquired, such as the interaction with local residents/residential groups, allocation of financial resources in each local government and among local governments. This paper shows just the start of the scientific research of Thai local governments based on the survey results.



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