

An Institutional Analysis of the Implementation of the “One Village One Product” Policy in China and Thailand

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Abstract

The One Village One Product (OVOP) program, which originated in Japan in the 1960s, has been implemented in both China and Thailand, each employing distinct institutional frameworks. The objective of this study was to examine how China and Thailand have adapted the concepts of Japan’s original OVOP policy to address their own rural development challenges. The authors employed the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework and a qualitative and interpretive research methodology, collecting data through interviews with key informants from China and Thailand and document research. The findings are as follows. China and Thailand, facing their own rural development challenges, integrated elements of OVOP into their respective strategies. China’s OVOP program addresses its “Three Rural Issues” with an approach characterized by centralized governance. Despite the predominant control of the central government, there is evident decentralization in production models and local economic initiatives. Conversely, Thailand’s One Tambon One Product (OTOP) policy champions “local wisdom” and moderated growth, emphasizing diverse product development and quality control, with a more decentralized approach. While both China and Thailand aim for rural revitalization and economic growth, their strategies differ due to their unique institutional structures and political systems. Both policies highlight the need to strike a balance between centralized decision making and localized execution. This balance fosters tailored solutions addressing the distinct needs of different regions, enhancing policy effectiveness. The present study enriches the discourse on public policy and rural development by providing insights into how institutional attributes dictate policy instrument choices and effectiveness. Future research avenues include assessing these policies’ long-term rural impacts and the potential for cross-country collaboration towards rural sustainability.

Keywords: policy implementation, institutional analysis, OVOP, OTOP, rural development, Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD)

Introduction

The rapid ascent of Japan’s economy in the mid-20th century, rising to become the world’s second largest, generated considerable attention and analysis (Kingston, 2021). Yet, this explosive growth illuminated a stark contrast between Japan’s urban prosperity and rural stagnation, revealing a development gap that demanded urgent attention (Ohno, 2017). To address these discrepancies and revitalize rural communities, Japan initiated a series of rural reconstruction movements in the 1960s. A seminal initiative born out of these efforts was the One Village One Product (OVOP) program (Smith, 2001). Initially focused on agricultural outputs, OVOP’s scope widened to embrace a variety of product types, from crafts and

tourism offerings to cultural events and performances. These changes underscored the program's adaptability and its commitment to fostering both tangible and intangible assets within rural communities (Shen and Chou, 2022).

Similarly, China's rural areas have navigated an intricate web of challenges. China has been modernizing its agricultural practices, causing tension between contemporary production models and traditional collective ownership schemes (Ye, 2015). With a complex history of agricultural evolution and a bifurcated urban-rural economic structure, the Chinese government had to think creatively about rural development strategies (Trappel, 2015; Day, 2008). The OVOP movement attracted interest when Hiramatsu Morihiko, a key figure behind Japan's OVOP, visited China in 1983 and spoke about its merits (Han et al., 2022; Zhang, 2023). Subsequently, China launched localized variations of OVOP, such as Shanghai's "One Factory One Product" and Wuhan's "One Village One Treasure" (Hoang et al., 2018), targeting their endemic "Three Rural Issues"—agriculture, rural areas, and farmers (Wang and Zhuo, 2018; Zhang, 2023).

Meanwhile, Thailand grappled with its own set of rural development challenges. Escalating concerns over inequality and poverty nudged the Thai government to prioritize rural upliftment (Boonmathya, 2003; Pontip and Promphakping, 2023). This shift culminated in the 2001 introduction of the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) program. Conceived by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's cabinet, OTOP drew inspiration from Japan's OVOP along with King Rama IX's philosophy of a "sufficiency economy" (Chambers, 2013).

Though China and Thailand drew inspiration from Japan's OVOP, their adaptations exhibit distinct approaches in policy formulation and implementation. Japan, with a core group led by Hiramatsu Morihiko, has championed a bottom-up approach emphasizing community participation and skill development as the linchpin for sustainable rural development (Noble, 2019). Conversely, China has espoused a top-down "vertical integration" strategy, concentrating on scalability, technology upgrades, and production efficiency (Smith, 2019; Yang et al., 2022; Baych, 2022). Thailand's OTOP program, while top-down (Anh, 2013), incorporates a complex grading system, which is the OTOP Product Championship (OPC), to assess product quality, influencing the level of support that products and their producers receive from the government (Natsuda et al., 2012; Lordko and Grisanaputi, 2023; Naiyanit, Jutaviriya, and Grisanaputi, 2024).

Given this backdrop, the present study seeks to answer a pivotal research question: "How has the OVOP concept, originating in Japan, been interpreted and executed differently in China and Thailand?" Guided by the Institutional Analysis and Development framework, this research investigates the implementation of OVOP policies in both China and Thailand. It is important to note that while this study briefly introduces the basic concepts and historical background of Japan's OVOP to provide context, it does not offer an in-depth analysis of the original policy. Instead, the focus is on examining how the fundamental ideas of OVOP have been adapted and reinterpreted in China's OVOP and Thailand's OTOP policies.

Objective

The objective of the current study is to examine the implementation of the OVOP policies in China and Thailand based on the Institutional Analysis and Development framework.

Related Literature

OVOP in Japan

Initiated in 1961 to boost household income, the New Plum and Chestnuts (NPC) movement was launched by agricultural leaders in Oita Prefecture, Japan. The campaign leveraged the area’s mountainous terrain to turn unproductive land into a profitable orchard for plums and chestnuts (Kurokawa, 2009).

The first phase of the NPC was notably successful, leading to advances in agriculture and food processing, and eventually culminating in the creation of a local specialty brand. In 1965, the second phase aimed to fuse previous achievements with new expertise, focusing on sustainable growth. The third phase, rolled out in 1969, sought to make Oita a multicultural hub and strengthen community bonds. This was seen as vital because, despite economic growth in rural areas, many young people were still migrating to cities due to the gap in local and urban amenities (Fujimoto, 1992).

The NPC movement evolved from its original aim—increasing farmers’ income—to adopt a multi-faceted approach toward regional development (Stenning and Koichi, 2008). This transformation inspired the launch of the One Village One Product (OVOP) initiative in 1979 by Morihiko Hiramatsu, former governor of Oita Prefecture (Mukai and Fujikura, 2015). The first implementation was in Oita village, where Hiramatsu encouraged locals to learn from the NPC experience, leverage geographic assets, develop local industries, and solidify community ties. The Japanese OVOP initiative continues to thrive, focusing on enhancing local income, elevating local products, and stimulating regional economic growth.

When considering an OVOP project in Japan, three core principles are typically involved (Fujimoto, 1992).

1. Internationalizing local culture: The products are seen as vessels to globally disseminate and monetize local culture while preserving its integrity.
2. Professional talent development: The initiative offers a platform for professionals to realize their potential.
3. Fostering local creativity: The strategy aims to reduce dependency on central and local governments while unlocking the region’s capacity for sustainable development.

Thus, the OVOP movement aims for both value addition and expansion. Its primary objective is to uplift the economic status of local residents by creating specialty products adapted to local conditions. In addition, these products are designed to carry a unique cultural significance, which not only promotes local culture but also adds value to the products themselves. Finally, once these local products gain sufficient traction in the market, they can evolve into distinct brands that garner international attention.

OVOP in China

Launched in 1983 by the mayor of Shanghai, China’s One Village One Product (OVOP) movement was aligned with the country’s broader reform initiatives (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2022). The movement initially functioned as a phase of conceptual assimilation, where Chinese professionals visited Japan to study the original OVOP model. These visits resulted in a tailored adaptation of the initiative, leading to the establishment of specialized villages and characteristic towns that leveraged local conditions (Mukai and Fujikura, 2015).

China’s agricultural sector began pivoting away from traditional crop cultivation during the 1990s, aligning with the country’s Five-Year Plans to focus on the processing and marketing of agricultural products (Lingohr-Wolf, 2010; Zhang and Donaldson, 2008). Primarily in eastern China, numerous

companies dedicated themselves to agricultural processing and export growth. This gave rise to specialized and large-scale agricultural enterprises in central and western China, which then received government incentives like special funds and land allotments, positioning them as “dragon head” enterprises within the industry (Schneider, 2017).

The conceptual framework of China’s “Three Rural Issues”—covering agriculture, rural life, and farmer welfare—originated in 1994 (LIN and LI, 1995) and later crystallized into “Three Rural Policies” in 2004 (Wang, 2019). These policies fueled OVOP initiatives, particularly in eastern provinces like Shandong, where a symbiotic business model involving corporations, leading enterprises, and farmers was employed (Smith, 2019; Han et al., 2023). This collaboration led to the professionalization of production, marketing, and talent development, thus establishing a complete industrial chain.

The primary developmental approaches of China’s OVOP are linked to the overall progress of regional development within each province (Huang and Tan, 2023). Among these prevalent approaches are the following five. The first utilizes associations as bridges to link farmers, businesses, and markets (Xujin, P., and Li, 2013; Smith, 2019). The second emphasizes leading enterprises at the heart of the OVOP initiative (Wang, 2019). The third incorporates collaboration between universities and research institutions, partnering with production locations to offer scientific insights and strategic guidance (Ma et al., 2022). The fourth is a holistic OVOP initiative grounded in rural tourism (Gao et al., 2019). The fifth leverages the unique rural culture to propel the advancement of OVOP (Shen and Chou, 2022).

OTOP in Thailand

Launched in 2001, Thailand’s One Tambon, One Product (OTOP) initiative was inspired by Japan’s OVOP model and aimed to catalyze regional development and economic diversification (Kurokawa, 2009). Governed by Thailand’s Community Development Department, the program targets multiple socio-economic outcomes, including poverty alleviation, income enhancement, job creation, and the reduction of urban-rural disparities (Sitabutr and Pimdee, 2017). Furthermore, the initiative strives to reduce poverty by fostering local self-reliance and stimulating community economies (Moore and Donaldson, 2016). It empowers local communities, especially in rural areas, to leverage their unique skills and indigenous knowledge for regional advancement (Choibamroong, 2011). Therefore, the overall objectives of the OTOP program include rural revitalization, income generation and poverty alleviation, as well as the development and conservation of local wisdom. (Kurokawa, 2009; Kasabov, 2016).

The conceptual foundation of OTOP resonates with the sufficiency economy philosophy, a framework introduced by King Rama IX following the 1997 financial crisis (Mongsawad, 2010). This philosophy encourages a transition from external dependency to a more self-sufficient economic model (Chaisumritchoke, 2007). To facilitate the implementation of OTOP, the Thai government adopted a dual-level administrative structure. Established under the Prime Minister’s Office in 2002, the National OTOP Administrative Committee (NOAC) and the OTOP Office oversee inter-ministerial coordination and programmatic execution (Zerrillo and Thomas, 2007).

Moreover, Thailand’s commitment to regional development has roots in initiatives predating OTOP. As early as 1951, King Rama IX launched the Royal Development Project, which subsequently led to the creation of the Royal Project Foundation in the early 1970s (Pipattanawong, 2015). Aided by Queen Mother Srinagarindra, the Doi Tung Development Project (DTDP) was set up in 1988 as a royal community enterprise. This long-term project incentivizes local residents to plant alternative crops for

integrated rural development. It is a typical project to achieve a sufficiency economy in stages (Diskul et al., 2019). This multi-faceted approach to development demonstrates Thailand’s long-standing dedication to leveraging local expertise and resources, all aligned with the core principles of the sufficiency economy philosophy.

Institutional Analysis and Development Framework

The Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (IAD), pioneered by Kiser and Ostrom in 1982, was initially conceived as a multidisciplinary tool to integrate various scholarly perspectives on individual behavior within institutions (Ostrom, 2011). It has since evolved to offer insights into how rules, social factors, and physical conditions collectively influence human actions and their consequences (Imperial, 1999). The framework serves as a crucial lens for understanding policy cycles and implementation, offering strategies for democratic problem-solving in public policy (Ostrom, 2019).

Central to the IAD framework is the concept of the “action arena,” which is a theoretical space where individual and collective behaviors interact with institutional settings (Ostrom, 2005). This arena is composed of “action situations” and actors. The focus sometimes narrows down to action situations to simplify complex analyses (McGinnis, 2011). Ostrom (2011) provides a deep dive into the key variables within an action situation, including roles, actions, outcomes, and control mechanisms, among others.

The term “actor” in the IAD framework can refer to a variety of entities—individuals, groups, or even nations—capable of decision making (Delmas and Young, 2009). Actors operate under bounded rationality, making choices with incomplete knowledge (Mossberg et al., 2018; Wittmayer et al., 2017). Ostrom (2019) builds upon Simon’s rational choice theory to integrate institutions, norms, and social capital into understanding actor behavior, thereby offering a richer set of variables for analysis.

Rules are pivotal in shaping behaviors within institutions. They can stem from legal provisions, community norms, or even cultural practices (Cole, 2017). Ostrom (2005) suggests that rules can be classified in various ways, depending on analytical needs. She identifies seven universal categories of rules, ranging from “position rules” that define roles, to “payoff rules” that establish consequences for behaviors.

Biophysical and material conditions can significantly alter the dynamics within an action situation (Ostrom, 2011; Whaley, 2018). These conditions serve as exogenous variables in the IAD framework, affecting everything from the political landscape to the efficacy of collective action (Devaux et al., 2009; Kuzma et al., 2018).

Community attributes like shared values, demographics, and commonly accepted norms also have a considerable impact on institutional behaviors (Polski, 2017; Milchram et al., 2019). These attributes influence the effectiveness of rule enforcement and policy outcomes, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of community factors in policy analysis (Andersson, 2006).

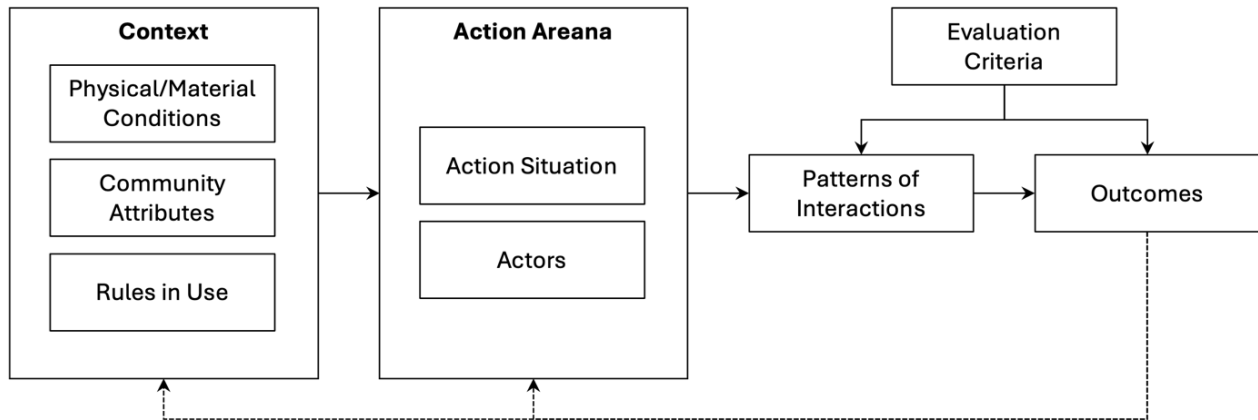


Figure 1 Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (Adapted from Ostrom et al., 1994)

In summary, the IAD framework serves as a comprehensive tool for institutional analysis (Cole et al., 2019). It considers a range of core variables from the resources contributed to specific situations, to the strategies employed by actors in processing information and making decisions (Ostrom et al., 1994, 2011). The framework is invaluable for policy analysts, requiring them to consider multiple facets such as biophysical conditions, community attributes, and the specific rules in use for a thorough understanding of complex policy issues.

Methodology

Research Design

This research examines the OVOP policy's transition from Japan to China and Thailand, using a qualitative and interpretive approach with both nations serving as individual case studies. According to Schramm (1971) and Yin (2014, 2018), case studies illuminate decision-making processes, hence, the goal here is to detail and compare OVOP policy implementation in these countries.

Data Collection Methods

Following Yin (2014), this study consulted documents related to the OVOP policy in both nations, providing a foundation for the analysis and subsequent interviews. This documentation review remained continuous, offering a consistent source of evidence. Emphasizing the roles of government officials and civil servants in the OVOP policy's decision making and implementation, in-depth interviews were conducted. Recent pandemic restrictions had limited interactions, so preliminary findings from document reviews helped guide and enrich the interview phase. The aim was comprehensive yet concise interviews, with exact numbers dictated by initial consultations.

To ensure credibility, a systematic chain of evidence is essential (Yin, 2014). Data, categorized on the basis of attributes like nature and timeline, will be structured into a database, with systematic citation, annotation, and referencing. Regular checks will ensure data remains aligned with the research objectives.

Participants

This study aims to explore the implementation of the OVOP policy in China and Thailand. Three primary stakeholders relevant to OVOP policy research were identified as respondents: Civil servants, OVOP project operators, and academics. The study employed two primary sampling techniques. One is purposeful sampling, which aligns with the explicit study objectives, targeting civil servants who interpret macro policies, scholars providing policy advice, grassroots civil servants, and OVOP project operators.

The other technique is convenience sampling, which offers flexibility in interviews. The categories of interviewees (civil servants, OVOP project operators, and academics) remain constant, but specific participants varied based on convenience. The criteria for participant selection prioritized individuals who were familiar with the OVOP policies of China and Thailand, involved in the policy and implementation, and directly impacted by the policy.

Table 1 Participants

Case	Department/ Field of Work	Position	Number
China	Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of Yunnan Province	Civil Servant	1
	Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism	Civil Servant	1
	Yunnan Cultural Industry Investment Holding Group Co., Ltd.	Civil Servant	1
	Kunming Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Affairs	Civil Servant	1
	Xinmin Community, Xizhu subdistrict, Wuhua district, Kunming city	OVOP Project Manager	1
	Xinmin Community, Xizhu subdistrict, Wuhua district, Kunming city	Grassroots Civil Servant	1
	Zhongping Village Committee, Zhongping town, Luquan county, Kunming city	OVOP Project Manager	1
	Zhongping Village Committee, Zhongping town, Luquan county, Kunming city	Grassroots Civil Servants	2
	Scholar who has long been interested in OVOP policy or program related fields	Scholar	1
Thailand	Community Development Office in Khon Kaen (OTOP)	Civil Servant	1
	Khon Kaen Provincial OTOP Distribution and Exhibition Center	Staff	2
	Khon Kaen OTOP Development and Distribution Center	Staff	2
	Khon Kaen OTOP Product Promotion and Development Center	Staff	2
	Khon Kaen Champion OTOP Product Project	Operators	2
	Scholar who has long been interested in OVOP policy or program related fields	Scholar	1
Total			20

The study focused on three main stakeholder groups involved in the implementation of the OVOP policy in China and Thailand: civil servants, OVOP project operators, and academics. Participants were selected using purposeful and convenience sampling techniques, emphasizing those with familiarity and direct involvement in the OVOP policies. A total of 20 respondents from China and Thailand were interviewed, including government officials, grassroots civil servants, OVOP project managers, and scholars with expertise in OVOP-related topics. This composition ensured diverse insights from policymakers, implementers, and researchers involved in or affected by the OVOP/OTOP initiatives.

Documents

To effectively analyze the OVOP policies of China and Thailand, a thorough textual analysis is essential. Research should explore the connection between policy and key politicians, assess policy document structuring (Saich, 2017), and evaluate the consistency of policy development and implementation

(Roelfsema et al., 2020). The authors decoded the implementation of OVOP and OTOP policies in both nations by examining their macro-policy frameworks. Objectives included understanding the rationale and process of policy adoption to its execution. The approach involved reviewing relevant national development policy documents and extracting and interpreting content related to the OTOP policy. A list of reviewed documents is shown in the table below.

Table 2 OVOP Related Policy Documents

Year	Document Title	Issued by
China		
2008	Guiding Opinions of the Ministry of Agriculture on Accelerating the Development of One Village One Product	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC)
2017	Report of the 19 th National Congress of the Communist Party of China	The 18 th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China
2018	Rural Revitalization Strategy 2018-2022	The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China State Council of the People's Republic of China
2020	Proposal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Formulating the 14 th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-term Goals for 2035	The Fifth Plenary Session of the 19 th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (October 29, 2020)
2020	National Rural Industry Development Plan (2020-2025)	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China
2021	Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Revitalization of Rural Areas	The 28 th Session of the Standing Committee of the Thirteenth National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China
2021	Outline of the 14 th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China and the Vision for 2035	National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China
2022	No. 1 Central Document of 2022 Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Doing a Good Job in Comprehensively Promoting the Key Work of Rural Revitalization in 2022	The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China State Council of the People's Republic of China
2022	Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs on the Identification of the 12 th Batch of National "One Village, One Product" Model Towns and Villages	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China
2022	14 th Five-Year Plan Agricultural and Rural Modernization Development Strategy of Yunnan Province	People's Government of Yunnan Province
2022	The 14 th Five-Year Culture and Tourism Development Plan of Yunnan Province	People's Government of Yunnan Province

Table 2 OVOP Related Policy Documents (cont.)

Year	Document Title	Issued by
Thailand		
2017	National Strategy Act B.E. 2560 (2017 C.E.)	National Legislative Assembly
2018	Thailand’s 20-year National Strategy 2018-2037	National Strategy Committee Secretariat Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board
2017	Thailand 4.0 Driving Thailand towards a Model of Wealth, Stability and Sustainable Development	National Strategy Secretariat Office Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board
2015	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Thailand	United Nations United Nations in Thailand Ministry of Foreign Affairs
2016	The 12 th Five Year National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021)	Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) Office of the Prime Minister
2018	Eastern Special Development Zone Act B.E. 2561 (2018)	National Legislative Assembly
2018	Thailand’s Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC): E-commerce Opportunities for OTOP and EEC Enterprises	Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) Office

Data Analysis

The authors employed thematic analysis to identify and reports patterns within data. This involved becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, grouping codes into themes, refining these themes, and then writing a detailed report. This approach provided in-depth insights into stakeholders’ perspectives on OVOP policy adoption and implementation in both China and Thailand, allowing for comparisons and deeper understanding of the policy’s implementation.

Findings

The analysis of the implementation of China’s OVOP policy and Thailand’s OTOP policy focused on what these two countries are doing to achieve various policy goals during the implementation process. Based on the support of the IAD framework, this study considers the entire policy implementation process as an action situation. The important policy instruments in the implementation process are seen as actors (participants). The action situation, which is policy implementation, is affected by a set of exogenous variables, and the generation of this set of exogenous variables comes mainly from the policy decision-making process because this is a top-down policy dominated by the central decision-making level. Action situations (Implementation Action) and actors (Policy Instruments) together form the action arena. The authors drew on Ostrom’s wisdom on the use of IAD (Polski and Ostrom, 1999) for policy analysis.

In this context, policy instruments function as actors shaped by top-down decision making. The selection of appropriate instruments is contingent upon each government's institutional context, which explains variations in policy outputs even after policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000). This study adopts Dodds' (2018) framework, categorizing policy instruments into four types:

Resources: Financial subsidies, loan concessions, training, and support projects,

Authority: Market regulations, quality supervision, and enforcement systems,

Organization: Tripartite or collaborative arrangements beyond the government aimed at optimizing OVOP projects,

Information: Expert advice on product quality, sales models, and related processes.

Although both China and Thailand utilize these four types of instruments, the configuration of their respective "toolboxes" differs, reflecting varied institutional preferences and contextual factors.

The findings are devoted to understanding the specific structure and information of the OVOP policy implementation, which has been well established in both countries for many years. Therefore, the part to be examined is what is going on in the area of the policy. Is the observed process of policy implementation progressing towards the policy objectives? For this examination purpose, the present article explores the patterns of interaction that take place within the arena of action, i.e., who, where, and how are involved in the implementation of the policy?

OVOP Implementation in China

China's One Village One Product (OVOP) policy aims to address development imbalances and improve the quality of life for rural areas, agriculture, and farmers. It is inspired by Japan's OVOP and seeks to harness local resources to spur growth. The policy focuses on advancing agriculture, increasing farmer incomes, and fostering a harmonious rural society (Central Committee of the CPC and State Council, 2018). China places great importance on its vast population of rural small farmers, emphasizing their role in poverty alleviation and rural revitalization (Mukai and Fujikura, 2015).

To be considered under the OVOP umbrella, an entity must have a dominant industry accounting for a substantial portion of its output value, which should integrate various local sectors (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of PRC., 2022). The term "Product" in OVOP refers to a broad industry that has undergone complete industrialization, encapsulating sectors like agriculture, food, culture, and new business ventures (Wang, 2019). Therefore, a centralized governance approach from the central government sets uniform standards, but local entities provide vital contextual adaptations. This relationship between centralized directives and localized flexibility was clearly emphasized by a rural development policy scholar from Yunnan University:

The central government set the vision and provided resources—pretty typical for our system—but it was on the local governments to make it work on the ground. Our institutions are built for top-down, so they did issue a lot of directives and targets, yet there was also room for bottom-up feedback. Local officials still tweaked things to fit their village's situation while aligning with central priorities. They threw a mix of policy tools with some approaches emerging from local experiments before being codified into formal policies. At the end of the day, it really came down to local leaders adapting those tools to their own context, but always within a framework where successful adaptations could feed back into the central policy cycle (C1 [Pseudonym], 2022).

Local conditions play a significant role in the implementation of OVOP, with over 98 percent of China’s farmers managing land far smaller than the global standard (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of PRC., 2024). To stabilize small farmer operations while pushing for agricultural modernization, China promotes various forms of moderate scale operations, such as “farmer cooperatives” and “family farms” (Central Committee of the CPC and State Council, 2021)

Township and village enterprises (TVEs), which include businesses established in towns and villages, are instrumental in bridging the gap between small farmers and the larger market, facilitating agricultural industrialization through various models (Weitzman and Xu, 1994). The Chinese government has implemented supportive policies to enhance the operational environment for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), fostering innovation and competitive freedom.

The OVOP policy instills operational norms, including application conditions, application procedures, and project declarations (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of PRC., 2022).

China’s One Village One Product (OVOP) policy aims to industrialize rural products dominated by small farmers and improve their branding to boost sales. To achieve this, the Chinese government provides resources such as land policy stability, asset conversion, technical support and equipment subsidies, rural inclusive finance, and agricultural insurance (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of PRC., 2023). Financial assistance is available in various forms, including subsidies directed to village committees, support for new agricultural entities, and direct subsidies for farmers.

To encourage small farmers to participate in industrial development, initiatives like the Family Farm Program, Farmers’ Agricultural Schools, agricultural equipment and training, and infrastructure development have been implemented. The government employs authoritative policy instruments to optimize policy goals, with projects labelled in ways like “One Village One Product Demonstration Villages,” requiring government entities to ensure product conformity to local conditions and economic growth (Huang and Tan, 2023).

Regional public branding is another authoritative tool, focusing on regional attributes and product characteristics. This strategy is crucial for OVOP status, as it aligns regional brands with national strategies while facilitating policy benefits like tax breaks or subsidies. Examples include the “Wu Shang Xing Xian” brand from Wuxing district, Huzhou city, and the “Kunming Dounan Flower” trademark from Kunming Dounan.

Chinese farmer cooperatives and China Farmers Professional Associations (FPAs) play a pivotal role in executing rural development strategies and advancing OVOP leading industries, especially where small farmers dominate the landscape. Their collaboration with governmental agencies and their efforts to consolidate scattered farmers and promote a standardized rural economy are essential for the success of the OVOP policy (Deng et al., 2010).

China’s One Village One Product (OVOP) policy focuses on industrialization and branding of leading products, aiming to promote rural revitalization (Central Committee of the CPC and State Council, 2019). This involves a complete industrial chain, including all stages of production, distribution, sales, and after-sales support. Information dissemination is pivotal during policy execution, and China leverages various tools, such as dedicated websites, promotional materials, training programs, technology transfer initiatives, and comprehensive databases, to bridge rural producers with potential consumers and amplify unique products from China’s rural sectors.

A dynamic management approach was adopted, requiring provincial agricultural bodies to forward OVOP-centric documents to central governmental departments. The “Information into Villages and Households Project” in 2016 revolutionized agricultural practices, fueling OVOP product sales and invigorating rural tourism (World Bank, 2022). Farmers’ professional cooperatives (FPCs) play a crucial role in this process, combining labor and capital to form a new ownership structure (National People’s Congress Standing Committee, 2006).

Grassroots administrative institutions play a crucial role in OVOP demonstration villages and towns, ensuring the integration of small-scale family operations in rural areas and protecting the interests of smallholder farmers. When the standards of OVOP leading industries meet national requirements, grassroots governments act as direct recommenders and submit projects to higher government departments (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the PRC, 2023).

The OVOP policy’s effectiveness is facilitated by information transmission between local governments and the exchange of market information between sellers and buyers. Investments in infrastructure have significantly benefited OVOP industries in rural areas, facilitating the growth of new business models like the Internet economy and comprehensive tourism (State Council of the PRC, 2015). By leveraging local governments’ authority, grassroots economic activities, and infrastructure investments, the policy successfully drives industrialization and regional branding of rural industries, fostering rural revitalization and improving the livelihoods of small farmers.

In applying the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework to China’s OVOP policy, policy instruments are reconceptualized as active “actors” within the action situation of policy implementation. These instruments—such as financial support, technical assistance, regulatory measures, information dissemination, and organizational entities—each play distinct roles that interact to drive rural industrialization and revitalization. Financial instruments provide capital for smallholder operations and modernization, while technical support instruments, such as training programs, equip farmers with necessary skills. Regulatory instruments establish standards that ensure alignment with national development strategies, and informational instruments help bridge rural producers with broader markets. Organizational actors, such as cooperatives and grassroots administrations, coordinate implementation at the local level. The interactions of these actors within the action situation reveal the dynamic relationship between centralized governance and decentralized local flexibility. In this way, the IAD framework highlights the importance of these instruments’ coordinated actions in effectively executing rural development policies and achieving desired outcomes, such as product industrialization and regional branding. This interaction among actors illustrates how local factors, including biophysical conditions and social attributes, influence the policy’s success or adaptations, ultimately ensuring rural revitalization across diverse regions of China.

Within China’s OVOP policy, diverse instruments—including financial subsidies, technical support, regulatory standards, information dissemination, and organizational coordination—act as dynamic “actors” within an IAD action situation. Drawing inspiration from Japan’s model, these instruments interact to stabilize smallholder operations, modernize agriculture, and bridge the gap between rural producers and larger markets. Authoritative measures, such as demonstration villages and regional branding, ensure quality and alignment with national goals, while robust communication channels facilitate adaptive management and continuous policy refinement. Together, these coordinated actions drive rural industrialization and revitalization, enhancing the livelihoods of small farmers across China.

OTOP Implementation in Thailand

Thailand’s OTO (One Tambon One Product) policy is a significant initiative for rural development, aimed at preserving local traditions and culture. The policy is implemented by the Community Development Department of the Ministry of Interior across the country (FAO, 2022).

The OTO products are categorized into food and beverages, ready-to-wear, handicrafts, and herbal products, each reflecting the uniqueness of the region. These products are inspected by various regulatory bodies, such as the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Industry (Thai Industrial Standards Institute, n.d.). After quality checks, products are graded from one to five stars based on their quality. The OTO Product Championship (OPC) competition evaluates products from both supply and demand perspectives (FAO, 2022). As one OTO operator from Khon Kaen remarked,

Our take on the OTO concept was definitely more bottom-up. Sure, it was kicked off by the central government, but the implementation was really decentralized: every community chose a product that made sense for them. And because our local government system allows a lot of autonomy, the program ended up really diverse across regions. The central authorities still gave support—through soft regulations like the five-star quality certification system that set implicit standards for local products—things like training and marketing—but it wasn’t heavy-handed; it was more about empowering local initiatives than micromanaging them (T1 [Pseudonym], 2022).

Key actors in the implementation of Thailand’s OTO policy include community-based enterprises (CBEs) and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as identified by FAO (2022). Financial support for the OTO initiative has evolved since its 2001 introduction, with the Village Fund being a pivotal financial pillar (Kaboski and Townsend, 2012). Government training can be broadly categorized into three types: 1) for OTO producers, covering product quality and regulatory understanding; 2) for OTO sellers, covering accounting, marketing strategies, and sales; and 3) for civil servants, acquainting them with OTO production norms, market regulations, and administrative guidelines.

The authoritative policy tools within the OTO framework include government-led access standards, quality supervision, and product grade evaluations (FAO, 2022). Centralized rules define OTO products based on their alignment with policy objectives, emphasizing their distinctiveness from general items. Following policy enactment, local agencies implement these rules uniformly.

Products are categorized as food, beverages, textiles, decorations, or non-edible medicines and require relevant certifications. Producers register through their local Community Development Department (CDD) office, where CDD institutions assess whether products meet OTO grade requirements. Authority ensures trademark applicants belong to local communities, utilize local resources, employ local labor, and directly benefit the local economy. Successful registration hinges on adherence to these principles and providing requisite certifications in a timely fashion.

Thailand’s OTO policy is a long-term and medium-term strategy implemented by the central government to promote and implement unique products imbued with “local wisdom.” The Community Development Department (CDD) is the key regulator, ensuring that products adhere to specific quality benchmarks (FAO, 2022). However, most OTO operators need ongoing assistance after obtaining the OTO trademark. An organization called “OTO Inter Trader” was set up to cover almost the entire OTO economic process, including production adjustments, marketing strategies, and sales platforms.

The OTOP Network Committee acts as a liaison between government agencies and OTOP communities, guiding product quality and ethics. Information campaigns are used to transmit public data and achieve policy objectives, and Thailand's OTOP project exemplifies this approach (Dalferro, 2022). The government proactively communicates the policy's background, objectives, and incentives through various channels, including policy documents, training for administrative personnel; media campaigns targeting operators, producers, and consumers; and collaborations with scholars, consultants, and international best practices.

The OTOP policy focuses on local entrepreneurial initiatives, focusing on identifying, maintaining, and promoting unique products imbued with "local wisdom." Two critical rules were established: quality inspection for standard commodities and OTOP product entry threshold detection to verify that the product embodies "local wisdom." Community-based enterprises (CBEs) and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in OTOP execution, offering insights into the policy action situation. Subsequent policy tool discussions revolve around these enterprises, emphasizing the policy implementation action situation's perspective for CBEs and SMEs (Sitabutr and Pimdee, 2017).

The OTOP policy in Thailand, overseen by the Community Development Department (CDD), aims to promote local economic growth and poverty reduction. It is a top-down policy that outlines principles such as quality and access standards. The CDD plays a crucial role in local resource development, registration and rating, and connecting OTOP activities with external information. The policy is supported by initiatives like "Young OTOP" and "OTOP Artists" that promote community OTOP projects (FAO, 2022).

The sustainability of the OTOP policy is based on alignment with Thailand's national development strategy and financial backing. The Village Fund offers microfinance and supports SMEs, while larger financing mechanisms like commercial mortgages have become available. As of March 2024, Khon Kaen's OTOP sector continued to expand, with provincial OTOP sales showing a 13.6 percent year-on-year increase, according to the Khon Kaen Provincial Economic Fact Sheet (Office of Commercial Affairs, 2024).

Information transfer is essential throughout the policy implementation, with the CDD and Department of Business Development playing central roles in transmitting information. The OTOP Network Committee and OTOP Inter Trader provide market insights, consulting, and feedback to enhance product competitiveness (FAO, 2022).

However, the policy has not preserved local culture or alleviated rural poverty completely. It suggests the need for evolution, particularly emphasizing decentralization. Local governments should have more decision-making authority and there should be deeper collaboration between government bodies and stakeholders. The OTOP's top-down approach should adapt to local-specific challenges like resource scarcity, marketing inexperience, and limited financing access. Skill and knowledge enhancement through training is also essential (Sitabutr and Pimdee, 2017).

Thailand’s OTOP policy, viewed through the IAD framework, treats policy instruments as active “actors” within the implementation action situation. These actors—regulatory standards, financial support, and organizational agencies—interact to ensure quality, uphold local traditions, and support economic growth. Instruments like the Village Fund and the Community Development Department (CDD) enable community-based enterprises (CBEs) and small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) to access capital and training, enhancing product development. The OTOP Network Committee and OTOP Inter Trader further facilitate policy success by coordinating efforts and fostering information exchange. Despite its achievements, OTOP faces challenges stemming from its top-down approach, which may hinder local autonomy and cultural preservation. This dynamic action situation underscores the need for decentralization and adaptive policy tools to better address the unique conditions of rural areas, ensuring sustainable development and deeper community involvement. Regulatory frameworks, financial support (such as the Village Fund and commercial financing), and targeted training programs for producers, sellers, and civil servants interact dynamically to shape policy outcomes. These actors, coordinated by bodies like the Community Development Department, the OTOP Network Committee, and OTOP Inter Trader, enforce quality standards and facilitate market information exchange while empowering community-based enterprises and SMEs to preserve local traditions and spur economic growth. However, the prevailing top-down approach can constrain local decision making and cultural preservation, underscoring the need for greater decentralization to address region-specific challenges.

Comparison of OVOP Policy Implementation in China and Thailand

China’s OVOP policy addresses the “three rural issues,” aiming for rural revitalization and poverty reduction. Despite variations in natural conditions, economic levels, and cultural histories among regions, most rural areas consist mostly of small farmers. The policy promotes the industrialization of key products, though widespread smallholder operations present challenges. Local governments, in choosing products for OVOP, must consider local conditions. Central to China’s strategy is the merger of small farming with agricultural modernization. While the policy process is overseen by central and local governments, grassroots entities below the provincial level play a vital role in supporting OVOP industries. SMEs and TVEs bridge the gap between small farmers and agricultural modernization, with some evolving into industry-leading enterprises. These entities integrate rural economic development with both global and domestic markets.

By contrast, Thailand’s OTOP policy, rooted in “local wisdom and strength,” fosters local entrepreneurship and community development. Implemented at the sub-district or *tambon* level, it emphasizes locally unique products, embodying Thailand’s cultural identity. OTOP’s vast product range is divided into five categories, often listing thousands of products per province, produced by both larger enterprises and family workshops. SMEs and CBEs crucially aid in pooling resources and expanding market reach. Supervised by the Community Development Department, products under OTOP undergo stringent quality checks by relevant administrative bodies.

The policy instruments for OVOP in China and OTOP in Thailand are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 Policy instruments used in the implementation of OVOP policies in China and Thailand

Country	Instruments			
	Resources	Authority	Organization	Information
China	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural resources • Stabilization (farming) land policy • Traditional culture • Internet and new format business opportunities 2. Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural modernization training and provision of basic production tools • Farmer vocational training • New type of agricultural equipment preparation skills training 3. Financial Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central government financial appropriation • Local government matching subsidies • Unsecured loans, insurance, and incentives 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Industrialization of leading products 2. Regional public brand 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Farmer professional cooperatives (FPC) 2. Farmers' professional associations (FPAs) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Document governance administrative process 2. Information into Villages and Households Project (2016) 3. Multi-channel publicity and training
Thailand	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local wisdom • Local natural resources 2. Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative ability training for civil servants • Business ability training for OTOP practitioners 3. Financial Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village fund • Asset-backed loans 4. Experts and consultants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleges and universities • Research institutes • Scholars 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. General commodity quality inspection standards 2. OTOP product access standards 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Government-sponsored enterprises 2. OTOP network committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy documents available to the public • Advisory services and counseling • Internet and technology information

Both China's OVOP and Thailand's OTOP policies aim to stimulate economic, social, cultural, and resident development in rural areas. They employ similar policy instruments, like financial incentives, technical support, education, training, and market access.

China’s OVOP approach is characterized by centralized governance. The Chinese central government heavily influences its rollout, from project declaration to resource allocation. Despite this, given the decentralized nature of China’s rural economy dominated by small farmers, some decentralization occurs, particularly in production and market-oriented management models. Local governments, for example, may select organizations such as farmers’ cooperatives to shepherd small farmers into modern agriculture. “Leading enterprises,” primarily SMEs and TVEs, help integrate small farmers and their OVOP products into the wider market. This structure creates a blend of centralized guidelines and localized flexibility, fostering vibrant grassroots economic activity. While China’s system somewhat limits international cooperation at decision-making stages, it emphasizes local industry cluster development and global market integration for local products.

On the other hand, Thailand’s OTOP prioritizes local product development, urging rural communities to market their unique offerings and boost income. The policy champions “local wisdom” and moderated development. The Thai government supports these communities with financial resources, technical assistance, training, and marketing. In contrast to China’s focus on industrial clusters, Thailand boasts a diverse array of OTOP products with a more relaxed development pattern. To foster growth, the government encourages private sector involvement via public-private partnerships. Many OTOP products still emanate from small family workshops, so Thailand facilitates access to domestic and global markets through trade fairs, branding, and marketing initiatives. Rigorous product quality and rating supervision ensure standards. Overall, Thailand’s OTOP instruments aim to bolster rural development, fostering local entrepreneurship and economic expansion.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study is based on a nuanced analysis of China’s One Village One Product (OVOP) and Thailand’s One Tambon One Product (OTOP) policies, using the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework as its methodological basis. While both countries aim to advance economic, social, and cultural growth in rural areas, they deploy similar yet distinct sets of policy tools, such as financial incentives, technical aid, education, training, and market access. These variations arise from their unique institutional structures shaped by their differing political systems.

In China, the OVOP policy is directed chiefly by the central government, although some decentralization occurs during its execution. Local governments are empowered to choose guiding organizations to assist small farmers in modernizing agriculture based on the particular needs of their jurisdictions. The role of the central government becomes more evident in macro-level governance, while the dynamism and flexibility of local actors are apparent in production models and economic activities. While China’s OVOP policy is primarily motivated by economic gains for multiple stakeholders, this centralized approach poses challenges, as the lack of comprehensive data can hinder effective policy implementation.

Conversely, Thailand’s OTOP policy focuses more on sustaining and leveraging local knowledge for gradual development. The Thai government encourages private-sector engagement through public-private partnerships and helps rural communities gain market access by organizing events like trade fairs. Additionally, stringent quality control measures are in place to ensure the policy’s objectives are

met. Despite its merits, Thailand's OTOP policy also faces challenges, such as administrative complexities due to the variety of product categories.

The institutions in China and Thailand play a pivotal role in shaping the implementation of their respective OVOP (OTOP) policies. In China, a centralized governance structure drives the OVOP policy, where top-down directives from the central government establish uniform standards, allocate resources, and provide financial and technical support. This centralized approach, however, is complemented by localized adaptations—such as the use of farmer cooperatives and township enterprises—that allow smallholder operations to modernize and integrate into broader markets. Conversely, Thailand's institutional framework emphasizes local wisdom and community-based participation through its OTOP policy. Here, although the central government sets overarching quality and access standards, implementation is carried out at the sub-district level by local agencies and enterprises, which strive to preserve regional traditions and support indigenous economic activities. The IAD framework reveals that these institutional differences—ranging from centralized control in China to a more decentralized, culturally attuned approach in Thailand—critically determine the selection, coordination, and effectiveness of policy instruments, ultimately influencing the diverse outcomes in rural revitalization and economic development observed in both countries.

Notably, both policies underscore the importance of balancing centralized decision making with decentralized implementation, allowing for more adaptive, context-specific policy applications. This equilibrium facilitates customized solutions that can address diverse regional needs, thereby maximizing policy efficacy.

By offering a comparative lens on OVOP and OTOP policies, this study enhances the existing literature on public policy and rural development. It provides valuable insights into how institutional characteristics influence the choice and effectiveness of policy instruments. The findings of this study suggest avenues for future research, such as examining the long-term impacts of these policies on rural communities and exploring opportunities for cross-national learning and collaboration in the quest for rural revitalization and sustainable development.

Conflict of Interest

The first author is an independent researcher. Before this study, she had no personal relationship with or knowledge of the cases considered in the research.

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Declaration of Ownership

This research is our original work.

Ethical Clearance

Ethical approval for this study was granted on 26 July, 2022 by the Khon Kaen University Ethics Committee for Human Research, Center for Ethics in Human Research (approval ID HE653155).

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