

# A Development of Thailand's Special Economic Zones

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## Abstract:

Thailand's special economic development zones mainly aims to progress border areas' economy as well as to promote investment and trade contributing for more Thai and foreign investors. Developing the special economic zones focuses to improve various aspects: the infrastructure, economy, society and environment, privileges, administration and increasing Thai and immigrant workers' competency, One-Stop service and border areas organization for stability, that facilitate a transit between Thailand and its neighboring countries. The main emphasis of this certain development is to build positive outcomes towards the country, as one of ASEAN members under the laws. Therefore, government sectors must provide advantages, organize the infrastructure, and adjust a set of regulations to be consistent with the working process that would allow private sectors to invest in the special economic zones. Besides the public sector participate and gain benefits from the development without giving impacts on natural resources, environment, society and constancy. A framework of the development should be flexible and appropriate to a particular area, in order to ease the administration.

**Keywords:** *Special Economic Zones, Development, Thailand*

## INTRODUCTION

Regarding the free world holding the capitalist economy, it shapes many different countries to trade and rely on one another. Thailand's economy has been controlled and regulated by the government so as to ensure the country's existence and prosperity, since the past. However, globalization results to a reform of individual countries in several variations: lifting the country's economy by enriching trades and investment, establishing policies and plans for the government and the public sectors' cooperation, designing and obligating laws as well as organizing the economy's infrastructure to aid private entrepreneurs (Jermstittiparsert, Sriyakul, & Rodoonsong, 2013; Peter & Jayant, 2016; Godil, Sharif, Rafique, & Jermstittiparsert, 2020; Jermstittiparsert & Sriyakul, 2020). Enhancing the country's competitiveness becomes the national agenda and a key strategy to economic sustainability, stated as one of the government's policies in developing the country's economy and society. (Siripen, 2006)

In other words, the development of special economic zones would stimulate the economy in terms of trading, investment, and employment. Factors related to the achievement depend on studies, development strategic plans considering positive and negative effects towards the society. The development is thus examined and carried on through the study on foreign countries' economic forms being practical to Thailand, forming comprehension, and listening to all sectors' opinions to the development and

readiness. Consequently, the special economic development zones could better a quantity and value of trade and services in border areas, particularly a launch of One-Stop services, with the government sector support (Siripen, 2006).

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To examine the development of Thailand's special economic zones.

## REVIEW LITERATURE

The critical purpose of the special economic zones is to expand different areas the development, aiming at avoiding the growth in big cities. Economic activities are then mainly used to distribute the development into the special economic zones, which better citizens' quality of lives. The development can also enhance the country's economy and potential in world trade arena (Office of the Council of State, 2013)

Community development is improved simultaneously with the special economic zones, expecting for higher progress and incentive on investment so that patterns of administration and privilege offering to investors of the special economic zones totally differ from the normal regulations. To raise the country's competitive ability, the economic zones has been turned into trade suppliers as manufacturing base and to release local and foreign investors' products, counting on local resources and workers living inside and outside the country (Sari, Esther & Karina, 2013). It is additionally important to ease trading and

investment regulations, to adjust the policy supported the investment including privileges, One Stop Service, a reduction on alien workers' hiring, and foreign exchange transactions. The development should better the communities by increasing more trades, investment, and production especially linking local agriculture to small and medium enterprises into regional and international markets. This leads to a small rate of unemployment; people acquire greater incomes, infrastructure, and public utility, which resulting to better quality of life and environment. (Morse, 1997)

In contrast to foreign nations, developed countries and other countries joining the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) pay no attention to develop the special areas to provoke the economic system; they focus on improving the whole service system by eliminating irrelevant disciplines and procedures. More importantly, various data are stored systematically in electronic database and are integrated to different sectors in order to form a sort of service center as well as to apply network technological system to serve customers rapidly and efficiently. European Union (EU) adheres to Free Transbordering of goods, labors and capital; member countries perform their development similarly to the countries in OECD whereas the new members need to revoke the special economic development zones. That is to say, most of the developing countries hold on the certain concept since their political structures are not conducive or take times to develop the whole service system, which unable to catch with the currently borderless world. Accordingly, they have enlightened the special areas before developing the service system. (Peters, 1995)

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research conveys qualitative research using documentary research. Documents studied were gathered from various sources including the government and the private sectors' information, research papers, and textbooks related to the field of the study. Collected data was analyzed and interpreted into following issues: 1) an analysis of the private sector's documents, 2) a study of the government's movement in developing the special economic zones by analyzing problems and challenging during the administration, and 3) exploring ways to promote the special economic development zones using document and feasibility analysis.

#### RESULTS

Research findings on Thailand's special economic zones development are presented as follows:

"Special Economic Zones" is a guideline, being studied in Thailand for years, to distribute a development to different areas employing several economic activities as a lead. On October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004 concerning an improvement of Special Economic Zone's Law, the Cabinet resolution initially agreed on principles of establishing border areas in Tak Province, according to Office of the National Economics and Social Development Council proposed. Moreover, the

Council of Ministers approved the proposal of Special Development Zone Act, presented by the Secretariat of the Cabinet since the recent Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand Act A.D. 1979 intends to turn specific areas into Export Processing Zones or EPZ. (Documentation for the draft review, 2013)

Later in 2013, the Council resolved Regulations of the Office of the Prime Minister on Special Economic Zones and officially declared in Royal Thai Government Gazette on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The government started the special economic zones in order to strengthen the country's trade and investment employing the regional transportation regarding ASEAN's Free Trade Agreements and others economic frameworks. It additionally covers border areas' trading between Thai and its neighboring countries and the government also support Sub-district Administrative Organizations to work well and explicitly as well as to serve the public's needs effectively.

Recently the drive in establishing the special economic zones turned solid and apparent since National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) has governed the country. The NCPO appointed policy committees on special economic development zones on the announcement no. 72/2014, at the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Economic Zones Committee Conference 2014. General Prayut Chan-o-cha, as chief of the National Council for Peace and Order, consented to the establishment of 5 border areas as the special economic zones at the primary phase, which fully supported the accession to ASEAN community in 2015. Those five areas consist as follows: (National Security Council - Thailand, 2014)

1. Mae Sot District, Tak Province (close to Republic of the Union of Myanmar)
2. Aranyaprathet District, Sa Kaeo Province (close to Cambodia)
3. Border Areas, Trat Province (close to Cambodia)
4. Border Areas, Mukdahan Province (close to The Lao People's Democratic Republic)
5. Sadao District, Songkhla Province (Sadao and Pa Dang Besa Crossing Points closed to Malaysia)

The committees agreed to the principles and schemes funding the establishment of the special economic development zones in four areas including: 1) Privilege for Investment 2) One Stop Service (OSS) 3) Supportive Measures on Immigrant Workers and 4) Infrastructure Development and Local Customs

To prop any movements in the special economic zones and to link in the regional level effectively, administration plans are regulated and assigned to relevant sectors. The Office of the National Economics and Social Development Council assessed the zones development in five areas on various aspects, used for improving and setting the special economic zones in the next phase: 1) the sectors' progression, 2) economic valuation, 3) impacts on economy, society, environment, and stability, 4) different sectors' satisfaction, 5) problems and solutions for effective practice and the country's common interest. The development will be achieved through many factors like researching and planning strategies as well as studying the relevant laws.

What should not be neglected is a consideration on effects of the development. It apparently provides positive outcomes to the country's economic system; however, negative effects would occur in different dimension, particularly society (Pawarit, Wanwipa & Wipawee, 2017). Therefore, the special economic development zones should be worked along with possible effects on society.

#### SPECIAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ZONES

Developing the special economic zones would arouse the economy in terms of trades, investment, and employment. Factors related to the achievement include studies and development strategic plans. The development definitely give positive effects on economic system; on the other hand, it delivers impacts on various aspect, particularly the society. Thus it's required the study of foreign countries' economic forms that being practical to Thailand, forming comprehension, and listening to all sectors' opinions to the development and readiness. Consequently, the special economic development zones could better a quantity and value of trade and services in border areas, particularly a launch of One-Stop services, linking to ASEAN Single Window (Krainer & Routary, 2010). Thai and foreign investors then put more confidence in their investment causing more tourism incomes and connection. (James, 2018) This builds constructive atmosphere, that ease and enlarge the regional tourism; incomes from customs tariff, income, vehicle taxation and other fees increase. Moreover citizens' lives would get better in variations of a life quality, career, new business as well as the ability to improve a language proficiency and other knowledge.

#### POLICY AND NATIONAL STRATEGY CONCERNING TO SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES

Government's Policy on Special Economic Zones:

1. The Council of the Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha announced the policy to National Legislative Assembly on Friday dated September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014 involving the special economic zones as follows: Policy no. 7 Enhancement of roles and opportunity in ASEAN community in 7.6 To develop the special economic zones, it started at border areas trade crossing and transportation points around the main door suppliers to accommodate a connection of manufacturing process and cross-border investment. Road system, National Single Window and trading accommodation and cross-border exportation are unceasingly adjusted. This would enable the transportation and logistic system of the country to link with the neighboring countries effectively and sufficiently for travel and transportation, which expect to be more as being an ASEAN member.

2. National Strategy on Special Economic Zones

2.1 The Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2012). The plan has stated the fifth strategic issue concerning with the creation of regional connectivity for the country's economic

and social stability by underlining two core strategies as follows:

2.1.1 This strategy is designed to develop transportation and logistics systems, through sub-regional cooperation by reforming laws and regulations regarding passengers and goods transportation. It gives priority to personnel development in transportation and logistics systems related to the special economic zones as well as manufacturing system in the country.

2.1.2 This strategy focuses on developing investment bases by empowering the country's in regional competition. It moreover enables several regional areas to link with neighboring countries and the Southeast Asia Region, as development bases for agricultures and tourism, special economic zones and border cities including an integration to link other countries by sharing mutual benefits, wealth, and stability.

2.2 Strategy on Thailand's Special Economic Development Zones (2015) has been identified the following main and relevant plans as follows:

2.2.1 Two main strategic plans consist of: 1) standardizing investment and migrant workers system by offering health insurance and progressing their infrastructures and public utilities and assistance, and 2) developing customs' infrastructure which adequately links the special economic zones to the country.

Apart from the main strategic plan, another supportive plan stated as follow:

2.2.3 Public health services, in the special economic zones, should be improved by launching One Stop service for a restriction of infective disease, promoting how to prevent and control contagious and emerging diseases occurring in border areas, and renovating hospitals and clinics.

2.3 The Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board. (2017) Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) proposed goals and approaches involving the special economic zones in the 12<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (retrieved September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019). With a regard to the plan, border areas are strengthened balanced in terms of economy, society, environment, and stability. So those areas will become the country and local communities' production bases. A framework of this 12<sup>th</sup> plan is stated in the issue no. 5.6 concerning a development and a connectivity in the regional areas.

Noticeably the development of Thailand's special economic zones contributes both positive and negative effects toward a particular area differently. Apparently economic growth become the main outcome of the development; it is significant to seek for appropriate regulations, mutual agreement of local citizens, and perception of the upcoming changes, which would decrease any possible impacts. Hence developing the special economic zones may harm the communities when it completely manages natural resources, lands, irrigations, forest and marine resources. It causes an attrition to local communities in aspects of economic system

and citizens' way of life. Traditional career of the people living in the special economic zones may disappear; traditional culture may be altered since the special economic zones are administered under the laws acquiring great ownership than the community. The areas are used for agricultural and tourism industries and other projects. The special economic zones deliberately build incomes and various benefits such as tax exemption, hiring lower-paid workers, omission of legal regulations, and foreign investors'. Local citizens who own the natural resources will, however, gain daily payment, or receive no advantages if employers hire low-paid workers. This situation possibly results to a high number of migrant relocations to the special areas; the migrant workers will substitute local Thai workers. Consequently, local Thais workers are unemployed and not able to reach natural resources used in production (Health Systems Research Institute, 2015)

Asian countries that perform a productive administration consist of People's Republic of China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Dubai State. These countries are comparable to Thailand, which a development model initiated. Benefits given in each country are mentioned as follows:

People's Republic of China: Significant benefits contribute to entrepreneurs. They can launch their business freely in the special economic zones and hiring outsiders for techniques and administration areas, along with machines, accessories, materials and other components imported. With an exemption of import duty, the entrepreneurs are able to pay the rental fee at a low price, comparing to fee rates outside the economic zone. (Sarbjit & Shigemi, 2010)

Vietnam: Corporate income tax is a critical benefits starting from 10%, 15%, and 20% by considering business investment or any investment that hire at least 100 local workers per an average number of labors in Ho Chi Minh city that year. Import and export duty will be paid for some kinds of products, basically natural resources like forest product and scrap metal. Rate of export duty starts at 0-45%. Foreign companies and investors that are a part of an investment will get a import duty exemption for machines and special transportation. There are three rates for construction materials imported: 0% (is applied with delivering goods and services to Export Processing Zones), 5%, and 10%. Moreover, personal income tax is deducted when doing business or projects in the special economic zone, the economic zone with policy incentives, natural location, etc. could achieve the main economic objectives of attracting investment capital, promoting resources to serve the local economy, create diffusion and promote regional or national economy development. (Tien Dzung, Anh Tuan & Phu Tran Tinh, 2017)

The Philippines: Benefits are given to legal persons within the economic zones: exemption of national and local tax. Businesses they own in this zone can get financial incentives. Moreover, the entrepreneurs are able to bring SEZ businesses' capital and profits out of the country without asking the central bank permission. They can also rent land and buildings in the economic zones for 50 years

and extending the rent for another 25 years. The entrepreneurs can additionally deduct their income tax using labors' development payment or training administrators who work in the economic zones. (Sarbjit & Shigemi, 2010)

Dubai (United Arab Emirates): Benefits are particularly for business owners and investors in which they are able to establish new companies regarding Free Zone Establishment (FZT) platform, by not limiting a number of companies and not focusing on stockholders' nationality. They can also import goods and various services to the special economic zones; taxes are not required for exportation and for organization staff. Properties and projects will be preserved legally through all periods that businesses being operated in the economic zone. Labor employment is under a consideration of the organization or officers, not being under the laws. (Patcharee, Nanthi & Wanchai, 2014)

Regarding the successful economic zones, no restriction appears as a main factor resulting for the success; it emphasizes on the suitability between a special zone and activity. As in Vietnam and Dubai, administering system is independent and flexible in terms of personnel and finance. Both countries approve all kinds of businesses in which the entrepreneurs do not need to ask other sectors' permission. This would ease a group of investors. Particularly in Dubai, the administrative sectors provide public utilities to facilitate the entrepreneurs and citizens in the economic zone as well as to develop their quality of lives, environment, public health, and education. Similar to People's Republic of China, both Vietnam and Dubai benefit the entrepreneurs and the publics on tax privileges. Information technology has been employed to serve the public rapidly, accurately and transparently. It then lessen the capital and corruption and results to a better the public relations.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In a summary, the direction in developing the special economic zones gets more explicitly. National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) announced policy committees, to vote the selected border areas possessing latency in building Thailand's special economic zones during the first phase. The government sector promotes the selected areas in 4 variations namely 1) investment's privileges, 2) One Stop service, 3) measurement of migrant workers' employment, and 4) infrastructure development and local customs. This develops both economy and local communities simultaneously, which lead to much prosperity relying on "the whole service system" development.

The government has initiated the special economic development zones in 2014, aimed at promoting more investment in border areas and creating benefits as a part of ASEAN community. With a regard to recent legal regulations, the government sector should offer privileges, organize the infrastructure along with regulations adjustment. In the public sector, the citizens are allowed to take their participation and benefits from the development. It should maintain natural resources, environment, society, and stability. Furthermore, plans should be adaptable base on the situations and the areas need to be determined to ease the



administration. Lastly local citizens should be improved to equip essential skills, language competence, preparing for a major number of tourists. Raising local people's awareness is also obligatory to preserve the traditions, which may be influenced by the development. It is suggested that a gradual development would sustain the local communities effectively.

Special zones are developed through different countries under the critical aims as for increasing its competitiveness, particularly in countries where governmental services are lack of integrity and productivity. This becomes a huge obstacle that obstructs foreign investors and a development of Thai investors investing in the country. Possible factor to be considered in this certain development includes special border area zones and neighboring countries' development. Thailand's neighboring countries have started various Special Economic Zones (SEZ): some are in operation and some in a process of development. Hence building a connection between SEZ of Thailand and its neighboring countries would provide much opportunity and support, resulting to more investment in the region. This is related to the concept of Free Trades under the framework of AEC. The following parts will provide Thailand's special zones and its neighboring countries briefly (Patcharee, Nanthi & Wanchai, 2017).

1. Myawaddy Special Economic Zones: Myawaddy is located in Kayin State which its border areas link to Mae Sot and separated from the Thai border by the Moei River. This city is close to Myanmar's main economic zones such as Yangon and Mawlamyine. Additionally Myawaddy is on EastWest Economic Corridor (EWEC), the most important trading point between Thai and Myanmar. Developing this certain border would provoke trading and investment between the two countries. Special zones of Myawaddy support labor industries and industry estates, a depo of imported and exported products, OSS customs care center, distribution points and exempting license of consumption goods, agricultural products and equipment (Cui & Yuzhuo, 2017)

2. Poipet-O'neang Special economic development zone in Cambodia get an extensive support from its government using various tactics to attract foreign investors, for instance, establishing One-stop service center, exempting import duty of machines and ingredients, customs exemption as well as supporting transaction of US currency. Cambodian and Thai potential industries hold on fabrics and sewing industry, agriculture, processes agricultural products, auto parts and glass industries. It enables Thai investors to employ Cambodian labors at a lower cost, comparing to Thai labors. (Sergey, 2017; Daniel, Dail & Syed, 1997)

3. Koh Kong Special Economic Zone links to Klong Yai district, Trad Province, which is appropriate for making investment in seafood business and tourism. Koh Kong SEZ may appear as the industrial base and provide different benefits including GSP tax exemption of fabrics and some Chinese agricultural goods for 100%, imported machines tax exemption, construction materials as well as to exclude

income tax. More importantly the Customs Department has been launched at the front of the development zone to offer One Stop Service (OSS); it enables to import and export transaction to be accomplished without passing through the customs procedures in Phnom Penh.

4. Savan-Seno Economic Zone is considered as a critical means of trading, investments, and service in the region. It is located on road no. 9, as a part of East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) aiming at demanding and supporting investments as to build accommodations to facilitate this development zone as the industry base of the country. Here can lift up the industries' labors capabilities resulting to get a better job. In addition, potential businesses comprise transportation, logistics, and tourisms since the zone allows people to travel back and forth among three countries withing a day. (Mozfi, 2013)

5. Malaysia Special Economic Zones in Kedah State. The Malaysian government has announced a policy to develop a huge project in Thai border areas: Friendship City project at Kota Persahabatan, opposite to Pa Dang Besa. The government set up this area as the development center of new automotive industry. Kota Putra is also developed as a major venue for improving agricultural industries, especially rubber products that link to rubber city in Songkhla.

Regarding the successful economic zones, no restriction appears as a main factor resulting for the success; it emphasizes on the suitability between a special zone and activity. As in Vietnam and Dubai, administering system is independent and flexible in terms of personnel and finance. Both countries approve all kinds of businesses in which the entrepreneurs do not need to ask other sectors' permission. This would ease a group of investors. Particularly in Dubai, the administrative sectors provide public utilities to facilitate the entrepreneurs and citizens in the economic zone as well as to develop their quality of lives, environment, public health, and education. Similar to People's Republic of China, both Vietnam and Dubai benefit the entrepreneurs and the publics on tax privileges. Information technology has been employed to serve the public rapidly, accurately and transparently. It then lessen the capital and corruption and results to a better the public relations.

In contrast to the former part, factors causing a failure in establishing the special economic zones compose of many aspects. Administrative organizations own no independency in administering. The organizations' service also take time, lack of efficiency, and has lots of procedures. In addition, political situations within the countries or even international level fluctuate. Citizens take no participation in determining a principles and processes of the special development zones as well as lacking of appropriate public relations.

Developing the special economic zones should consider other aspects. Studying success and failure of the economic zones inside the country and its neighboring countries in order to determine developing strategies both short and long terms. This would ease the administration, attract more investment, and strengthen the government's ability in stabilizing and solving possible troubles during extending

Asian trading. The problems include drug trafficking, smuggled goods, and crime caused by tyrants' conflicts. These may expand along with an upcoming economic investment and change.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

According to an analysis of other countries' economic zones, the following recommendations can be formed a framework in developing Thailand's special economic zones.

- 1) No restriction on business in the economic zones. Not only industrial estates, the economic zones should allow other businesses to be launched: cattle, fishery, tourism, transportation, housing and construction, research and production using advanced technologies as to trading and services.
- 2) Mapping and public utilities should be completely appropriate for business and publics.
- 3) Administrative sectors should be independent in directing personnel and finance under a proper assistance and monitor.
- 4) Administrative sectors should provide inexpensive utilities and should also deliver services to investors and the public rapidly and efficiently. The OSS service should be evident and verified.
- 5) Entrepreneurs and publics living in the special zone should gain preferential rights on different taxes.
- 6) Operation and business in the special zone should be competent with a principle of sustainable development.
- 7) Publics living in the special zone should participate in developing and monitoring the administration.
- 8) Government sector administration, both in region and local areas, should go with the same path of the special economic zone policy.

An establishment of Thailand's special economic zone supported by the government and the committee board requires a well-study from related sections. This will create the special economic development zone, to meet the government's intention.

### Enhancement on Thailand's Special Economic Development Zone

1. Network association should be built with external areas. For instance, to connect with any organizations that are responsible for border areas development through an integrated learning project.
2. Role of a development should be adjusted in order to create a society that acknowledges the special economic development zone in border areas. This will create an interaction among different local sectors initiating new knowledge, innovation, products, services as well as sustaining the special economic zones around the border areas.
3. Committee of Special Economic Zones Office should be established as a public organization being operated by a director of the special economic zone and other representatives from all related sectors as the administration board.

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