

## Chapter 1

# The role of the public bureaucracy in policy implementation in five ASEAN countries: a comparative overview

Jon S. T. Quah

### 1.1 Introduction

#### *The Parable of the Owl and the Centipede*

*In the forest there lived a centipede who developed foot problems, and for a centipede that means a lot of pain. He asked the other animals what he could do about it, and no one had any suggestion except that he ask the Wise Old Owl.*

*So he went to the Wise Old Owl. 'Wise Old Owl, Wise Old Owl', he said. 'Tell me what I can do about my aching feet.' The Wise Old Owl considered the problem and said, 'Go back to your home and turn into a fish.' Since a fish has no feet, that seemed like good advice, so the centipede went home and tried it out. But, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't turn into a fish. He asked the other animals how to do it and none of them knew.*

*Again he limped back to the Wise Old Owl. 'Wise Old Owl, Wise Old Owl', he said. 'I have tried very hard, every way I can think of, to turn into a fish, but I can't. Please, Wise Old Owl, Wise Old Owl, tell me how to do it.'*

JON S. T. QUAH

*The Wise Old Owl looked annoyed. ‘You don’t understand my situation. I don’t know **how** to do anything like that; I just make policy.’*

(Steve Sachs, Attorney General of Maryland, quoted in Young 1983: 39)

This parable captures accurately the relative ease of formulating a policy on the one hand, as well as the difficulties encountered in policy implementation on the other hand. In their analysis of policy implementation in the Third World, Bertsch, Clark and Wood (1986: 472) observe that many governments ‘operate under administrative, economic, and political constraints that virtually guarantee failure at the point where the policy is applied to the society’. Caiden (1976: 142–64) describes implementation as the ‘Achilles’ heel’ of administrative reform and identifies twelve reasons for the failure of policy implementation in the developing countries.

Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of the difficulties encountered in implementing policies is provided by Chase (1979: 386–435) who has identified forty-four obstacles to the implementation of human services programmes. In their pioneering book, *Implementation*, Pressman and Wildavsky (1973: xiii) contend that ‘implementation, under the best of circumstances, is exceedingly difficult’. The obstacles to effective implementation in Third World countries are many and include lack of qualified personnel, lack of political support for the implementers and implementing agencies, insufficient direction and control from political leaders, severe lack of funds available to meet the costs of implementing projects and programmes, resistance to the policy itself, corruption, and social indiscipline (Quah 1984: 118).

## A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

### 1.2 Review of literature

A review of the literature on policy implementation reveals four important trends. First, there has been a growing interest in implementation studies in the United States dating from the 1970s and 1980s. Majone and Wildavsky (1984: 163) have described the study of implementation in the United States as 'a growth industry'. The pioneering work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) in analysing the difficulties encountered by the Economic Development Administration in implementing the Oakland Project was followed by Bardach (1977), Radin (1977), Van Horn (1979), Brigham and Brown (1980), Edwards (1980; 1984), Nakamura and Smallwood (1980), Williams (1980), Mazmanian and Sabatier (1981; 1983), Mann (1982), Levin and Ferman (1985), May and Williams (1986), Ripley and Franklin (1986), Shumavon and Hibbeln (1986), Frazier (1992) and Peck and Six (2006).

The second trend is the focus on comparative studies on policy implementation in the United States and other countries. The case studies on implementation compiled by Lewis and Wallace (1984) focus on race relations, employment and industrial strategy in the United Kingdom, cutting public expenditure in California, and two chapters on the European Community. The two comparative chapters deal with defence collaboration and education in the United Kingdom and the United States. Meyer (1993) compares the problems in implementing economic development projects in the United Kingdom and the United States. Echeverri-Gent (1993) has compared the implementation of government policy towards the rural poor in India and the United States. Rose-Ackerman

JON S. T. QUAH

(1995) analyses the implementation of environmental policy in Germany and the United States and argues that policy-makers in both countries can learn from each other's experiences. Similarly, Lehmann (2000) compares environmental policy implementation in Germany and the United States by analysing the detailed negotiations between industry, regulating agencies and third parties in both countries. The implementation of European Union environmental policy in Germany, Great Britain and Greece is compared in Heinelt et al. (2001). Berg (1999) examines the implementation of the European fisheries law in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The most recent example is the comparison of policy implementation in the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) of the US Department of Defense with Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) by Jordan and Koinis (2014).

The third trend is that there is still a significant research gap on policy implementation in Asian countries in spite of the research that has been done so far. The first reader on implementation in twelve Asian countries, edited by Iglesias (1976), focuses on agriculture and rural development in Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines and Sri Lanka; infrastructure and industrial development in India, Indonesia and Japan; housing and urban development in Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand; and social development in Iran and South Korea. All the case studies were prepared by local scholars from the twelve countries. In his introduction, Iglesias (1976: xxvii) explained that the approach of his book was based on 'the need to examine the dynamics and the environmental and historical contexts impinging on the implementation process' especially

A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

the role of such factors as ‘structure, leadership, support, resources and technology’. While the public bureaucracy’s role in implementation was analysed in a few case studies, it was generally not emphasized in Iglesias’s book as a whole.

Unlike Iglesias’s pioneering volume, Grindle’s (1980) reader consists of nine case studies on implementation in the Third World that are written by American scholars. Of the seven countries represented in the book, two are from Africa (Kenya and Zambia), four from Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru), and India is the only Asian country represented. The case studies in Grindle’s book focus on rural electrification, health care and rural development in India; cooperative policy in Zambia; housing policy in Brazil, Colombia and Kenya; agrarian reform in Peru; and agricultural development in Mexico. According to Grindle (1980: 20), these case studies focus on ‘what went wrong’ in policy implementation and Grindle makes recommendations for ‘avoiding similar outcomes in other contexts’.

The third major work is Warwick’s (1982) excellent comparative study of the implementation of population policies in these eight countries: Dominican Republic, Egypt, Haiti, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico and the Philippines. Warwick’s book is an important contribution to the literature on policy implementation for three reasons. First, there is an explicit focus on the ‘key actors in implementation: top-level officials, field implementers, opinion leaders’ in Warwick’s comparative analysis of implementation of population policies (6). Second, Warwick (1982: 163) emphasizes the ‘significance of clients’ because they ‘can speed, slow, stop, or redirect implementation’ of a service delivery programme. Finally, Warwick’s book

JON S. T. QUAH

illustrates that it is possible and useful for scholars from different countries to collaborate on a cross-national project. As the project manager, Warwick worked closely with sixteen collaborators from the eight participating countries.

Five years later, a special issue of the *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* was devoted to ‘The Public Bureaucracy and Policy Implementation in Asia’. This special issue, edited by Quah (1987a), focused on the public bureaucracy’s role in policy implementation in Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The articles on Hong Kong, Indonesia and the Philippines were written by three foreign scholars familiar with the public bureaucracies in these countries (Scott 1987; Warwick 1987; Richter 1987). The other three articles, on India, Singapore and Thailand, were authored by local scholars (Jain 1987; Quah 1987c; Voradej and Likhit 1987). All six articles adopted a common analytical framework and focused on: the policy context, a profile of the civil service and civil servants, the policy-making process with emphasis on policy implementation, evaluation of the public bureaucracy’s role in policy implementation and lessons to be drawn from the country’s experience in policy implementation. An analysis of the six country studies shows that Hong Kong and Singapore were effective in policy implementation because of their governments’ commitment and support and their effective public bureaucracies. In contrast, India, the Philippines and Thailand were ineffective in policy implementation because of the lack of governmental commitment and the ineffectiveness of their public bureaucracies (Quah 1987b: xv). However, according to Warwick (1987: 53), Indonesia occupied an intermediate position as its bureaucracy was ineffective in

A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

policy implementation if judged by conventional criteria, but if field criteria were used, then the Indonesian civil service was effective in policy implementation.

The fourth trend is that research on policy implementation in Asian countries has focused on case or country studies rather than comparative cross-national studies. China and the Philippines are the two Asian countries where the most research has been undertaken on policy implementation. For China, the studies are: Ross 1984; White 1985; Zweig 1985 ; Lampton 1987; Manion 1991; Chung 1993; Lee 1993; Chow 1994; Sinkule and Ortolano 1995; Lee 1997; Hsu 1998; Huang 1998; Yu 1999; Chan 2001; Zheng, Lu and White 2009; Burns and Zhou 2010; Gobel 2011; and Ahlers 2014. Similarly, in the case of the Philippines, research on policy implementation has been conducted by Varela (1976); Hanisch (1977; 1978); Wurfel (1977); Richter (1980; 1982); Ledesma and Tizon-Montinola (1988); Tadem (1993); Riedinger (1995); Reyes (2007; 2009a; 2009b); and Brillantes and Flores (2011). Other Asian countries where research has been done on policy implementation include: Bangladesh (Barenstein 1994), Hong Kong (Scott 1986; 2005), India (Vepa 1974; Jain 1984; Bussell 2012), Indonesia (Emmerson 1978; Rohdewohld 2003; Synnerstrom 2007; Prasojo 2011; Brata 2014; Suhardiman 2015), Japan (Muramatsu and Krauss 1984; Cothran 1987), Malaysia (Ness 1967; Puthuchearry 1970; Esman 1972; Shamsul 1983; Nik Rosnah 2011), Singapore (Jones 1998; 2001; Neo and Chen 2007; Quah 1982a; 2010), Thailand (Kraiyudht 1989; Leoseng and Zimmermann 2005; Thandee 1985) and Vietnam (Fritzen 2005; Acuña-Alfaro 2009; Davidsen et al. 2009; Poon, Nguyen and Do 2009; Hausman 2010; Acuña-Alfaro and Do 2010).

JON S. T. QUAH

While there is a plethora of country studies on policy implementation, there are few comparative studies on policy implementation in Asian countries. The pioneering study by Gable and Springer (1976) analysed the implementation of rice production programmes in Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand. In his Foreword, Riggs considers Gable and Springer's book as 'a major landmark' because it has made 'an extremely important and truly original contribution to the fields of comparative and development administration' (p. xxiii). Springer and Gable (1980) continued their comparative research on the four rice production programmes by analysing the impact of informal relations on organizational rewards. Cheema and Rondelli (1983) and Rondinelli (1983) have focused on the implementation of decentralization programmes in Asian countries. Cloete (2000) compared the effectiveness of the public bureaucracies in delivering public services in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Finally, Quah (1982b) examined the implementation of anti-corruption measures in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. His most recent work focuses on the implementation of anti-corruption measures in these ten Asian countries: Hong Kong SAR, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand (Quah 2011).

1.3 Purpose and approach

The review of literature in section 1.2 has shown that research on policy implementation has focused on country studies that



## A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

outnumber the comparative studies. The ASEAN Integration Through Law (ITL) Project's focus on the public bureaucracy's role in policy implementation in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam is therefore timely and appropriate as it addresses the significant research gap on policy implementation in these five ASEAN countries. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comparative overview of the role of the public bureaucracies in policy implementation in these countries. This comparative overview is based on the five country studies in Chapters 2–6 in this book and the relevant published literature.

Van Meter and Van Horn's model of the policy implementation process is adopted as the framework for analysing the public bureaucracy's role in the five countries because of their focus on both public and private individuals and their emphasis on the importance of the policy context. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975: 447) define policy implementation as: 'those actions by public and private individuals (or groups) that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decisions'. Their model focuses on the 'economic, social, and political conditions' or policy context and the following five aspects: (1) definition of policy standards and objectives; (2) policy resources; (3) inter-organizational communication and enforcement activities; (4) characteristics of the implementing agencies; and (5) disposition of the implementers (462–74).

Before proceeding to analyse the public bureaucracy's role in policy implementation in the five countries, it is necessary to describe their policy context, the profile of their public bureaucracies and their role in policy formulation.

JON S. T. QUAH

To illustrate the public bureaucracies’ role in policy implementation, the penultimate section of this chapter evaluates the implementation of the ASEAN Cosmetic Directive (ACD) and the ASEAN Declaration on Transnational Crime of 1997, which is administered by the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) in the five ASEAN countries. These two different policies are selected as case studies to demonstrate the different levels of effectiveness of the public bureaucracies in policy implementation in the five countries. The concluding section identifies the factors responsible for effective policy implementation in the five ASEAN countries and explains why they have been more effective in implementing the ACD than the AMMTC/SOMTC.

**1.4 Policy context**

The policy context refers to all those aspects of the environment in the five ASEAN countries that influence the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies. The most comprehensive definition of ‘policy context’ is provided by Leichter (1979: 41–2) who defines ‘policy context’ in terms of the interaction between the thirty-seven situational, structural, cultural and environmental factors that influence the public policy-making process.

Why is policy context important in the formulation and implementation of public policies? Warwick (1979: 296–310) has found that the socio-historical and political contexts shaped both the contents and process of policy