



CONSTRAINED PARADIPLOMACY: SOUTH SULAWESI–EHIME SISTER PROVINCE COOPERATION, 2019–2025

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ABSTRAK

Di era globalisasi dan desentralisasi, paradiplomasi telah muncul sebagai mekanisme vital bagi pemerintah subnasional dalam menavigasi hubungan internasional. Namun, ketegangan antara otonomi daerah dan pengawasan pusat masih kurang dieksplorasi secara teoritis maupun praktis. Studi ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan analisis dokumen dan wawancara semi-terstruktur untuk mengkaji kemitraan provinsi kembar antara Sulawesi Selatan dan Prefektur Ehime. Analisis didasarkan pada teori interdependensi liberal dan pembangunan identitas konstruktivis untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas agensi subnasional dalam struktur politik hierarkis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun kemitraan ini menawarkan potensi strategis di sektor perikanan (transfer teknologi) dan pertanian (model Michi no Eki), implementasi selama periode 2019–2025 sebagian besar masih bersifat normatif. Capaian nyata terhambat oleh kendala birokrasi, asimetri keuangan, dan ketidakstabilan politik pasca pergantian kepemimpinan. Penelitian ini memberikan perspektif kritis dengan menyoroti potensi kendala struktural yang dihadapi diplomasi subnasional dalam konteks Global South.

Kata kunci: Provinsi Kembar, Kemitraan Sulawesi Selatan–Ehime, Pemerintah Subnasional, Negara Kesatuan, Paradiplomasi

ABSTRACT

In an era of globalization and decentralization, paradiplomacy has emerged as a vital mechanism for subnational governments to navigate international relations. However, the tension between regional autonomy and central oversight remains theoretically and practically underexplored. This study employs a qualitative case study method, using document analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the sister province partnership between South Sulawesi and Ehime Prefecture. The analysis is grounded in liberal interdependence and constructivist identity-building theories to evaluate the effectiveness of subnational agency within a hierarchical political structure. The results show that while the partnership offers strategic potential in fisheries (technology transfer) and agriculture (the *Michi no Eki* model), implementation during the 2019–2025 period has been largely normative. Tangible outcomes have been stifled by bureaucratic hurdles, financial asymmetries, and political instability. This study contributes a critical perspective by highlighting potential structural constraints facing subnational diplomacy in Global South.

Keywords: Sister Province, South Sulawesi–Ehime Partnership, Subnational Government, Unitary State, Paradiplomacy

BACKGROUND

In the dynamic global political landscape, the role of subnational actors in international affairs has increased significantly. Historically, diplomacy and foreign policy were considered the exclusive domain of sovereign nation-states, particularly through their central governments. However, the dynamics of globalization, decentralization, regional integration, and the emergence of transnational issues such as climate change, migration, and economic interdependence have gradually expanded the scope of international engagement to include subnational governments such as provinces, regions, and cities (Tavares, 2016; Keating, 1999). This growing involvement of subnational entities in international relations is referred to as paradiplomacy.

Indonesia provides a case study illustrating this trend. Following the 1998 democratic reforms and the decentralization policy stipulated in Law No. 22 of 1999 concerning Regional Government, provinces and regencies gained significant autonomy. Article 88 of this law explicitly authorizes regional governments to cooperate with foreign institutions, formalized through mutual agreements. This authority was reinforced by Law No. 32 of 2004, specifically Article 42, and supplemented by provisions in Law No. 23 of 2014, which outlines the role of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) in reviewing international cooperation projects relevant to regional interests. However, a critical look at power dynamics reveals a persistent asymmetry; while local governments may initiate cooperation, they remain subject to central government oversight. All agreements must obtain recommendations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and other relevant institutions. These ministries work in coordination with Indonesian foreign missions abroad to explore potential regional partnerships (JDIHN, 2025). This “top-down” regulatory framework in a unitary system distinguishes Indonesian

paradiplomacy from federal systems like the United States or Canada, where subnational entities often enjoy broader constitutional foreign policy autonomy.

Indonesian paradiplomacy is still in its formative stages, with asymmetric capacity and varying levels of implementation (Firman, 2009; Surwandono & Maksum, 2020). While several provinces and municipalities have initiated bilateral cooperation agreements with foreign partners (Alam & Sudirman, 2020), these initiatives often face the limitation of conflicting interests between local development goals and national foreign policy priorities. Scholars argue that without careful alignment, subnational actors might inadvertently challenge central authority or create policy incoherence (sovereignty vs. autonomy). Despite these risks, the pragmatism of addressing development challenges through trade, investment, education, tourism, and defense remains a primary driver for regional growth (Anwar, 2014; Sukma, 2010; Putra & Affandi, 2022).

Among prominent examples of Indonesian paradiplomacy is the sister province cooperation between South Sulawesi and Ehime Prefecture, Japan. This initiative began with the signing of a Letter of Intent (LoI) in January 2019 and was formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in December 2020. The collaboration focuses on strategic sectors such as fisheries, agriculture and plantations, the creative economy, and human resource development (South Sulawesi Provincial Government, 2019; South Sulawesi Provincial Government, 2020). This partnership reflects the growing trend of interregional cooperation between developed and developing regions, particularly in East and Southeast Asia, where subnational diplomacy is increasingly seen as a mechanism for decentralized development and mutual learning. In contrast, while paradiplomacy in Malaysia or the Philippines is often driven by central development agencies (Idris et al., 2021; Brillantes & Sonco, 2017), Indonesia's model allows for more "bottom-up" provincial initiative, though it

is frequently hampered by bureaucratic hurdles that partners like Vietnam navigate through more centralized, state-led frameworks (Hadpakdee, 2025; Tubilewicz, 2017).

Ehime Prefecture, located in Japan's Shikoku region, has a long history of involvement in international cooperation, particularly in technology transfer, fisheries, and environmental management (Ehime Prefecture, 2013). Japan as a whole has embraced subnational diplomacy as part of its broader soft power strategy. Through frameworks such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and various regional exchange programs, Japanese prefectures are encouraged to build international relations that support the country's diplomatic, economic, and development goals (JICA, 2020). In this context, partnerships with developing regions in Southeast Asia provide opportunities for knowledge exchange and the application of technological innovations in new development settings.

Despite growing interest in paradiplomacy, academic studies in Asia, and particularly in Indonesia, remain largely descriptive or theoretical. Most existing literature focuses on national-level diplomacy or city-level case studies, with limited exploration of provincial-level initiatives. Academic discussions on Indonesia–Japan relations, for instance, primarily examine large-scale infrastructure projects and macroeconomic agreements, with little attention to subnational cooperation (Basri & Hill, 2011; Setiawan, 2012; Ardiyanti, 2015). This lack of critical perspective leaves questions of sovereignty and national unity underexplored. For instance, can provincial diplomacy operate without challenging the central government's "one voice" policy? The South Sulawesi–Ehime partnership presents a case to move beyond descriptive accounts and examine the tension between local aspirations and national constraints within Asia's decentralized landscape.

This study addresses this gap by examining the South Sulawesi–Ehime partnership from 2019 to 2025. It analyzes the effectiveness of this form of subnational cooperation, the institutional and political challenges encountered during its

implementation, and the implications of developmental asymmetries between a Japanese prefecture and an Indonesian province. By examining these factors, the research moves beyond a success-story narrative to provide a critical assessment of the feasibility of such initiatives in the Global South. Methodologically, the study uses a qualitative approach, combining document analysis with semi-structured interviews to examine how provincial actors navigate central government regulations in paradiplomatic initiatives.

The novelty of this study lies in its empirical focus on provincial-level paradiplomacy within a unitary state. It contributes to broader debates on decentralization, international cooperation, and regional development while offering policy-relevant insights for improving subnational engagement in international partnerships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Paradiplomacy, derived from the notion of “parallel diplomacy,” refers to the direct or indirect involvement of non-central governments in international cooperation to achieve functional, political, or economic goals (Tavares, 2016). Subnational actors pursue paradiplomacy to enhance local development, attract foreign investment, gain access to international expertise, and promote cultural exchange. Paradiplomacy may take place on a permanent or ad hoc basis. It often complements national diplomatic strategies and serves broader domestic and foreign policy objectives (Lecours, 2008). It operates at the intersection of two core subfields of political science: international relations and comparative politics (Chatterji & Saha, 2017). From a liberal perspective, this trend is driven by complex interdependence, where subnational actors pursue mutual gains through technological exchange and economic collaboration within broader national frameworks. A constructivist perspective further suggests that such

interactions may shape how regions position themselves within institutional partnerships.

The concept was first introduced into academic debate by Ivo Duchacek and Panayotis Soldatos in the early 1980s, amid the growing federalist discourse in the United States under President Richard Nixon, who had proposed devolving certain federal powers to state and local governments. Along with Duchacek (1990) and Soldatos (1990), Cornago (2010) was among the first to systematize the study of paradiplomacy, highlighting its strategic potential and implications for domestic governance and international relations.

The emergence of paradiplomacy as an academic field was catalyzed by developments in North America and Western Europe, where federal systems such as those in Canada and the United States enabled regional and state governments to foster transnational partnerships (Soldatos, 1990; Duchacek, 1990). A key milestone was the 1984 special issue of *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, which drew attention to the theoretical foundations and practical applications of paradiplomacy (Aldecoa & Keating, 2013). Further academic interest emerged in Europe after World War II, particularly through intercity diplomacy aimed at reconciliation, peacebuilding, and postwar reconstruction (Cornago, 2010). These initiatives exemplify how local actors can play meaningful roles in international relations by promoting cross-border cultural, educational, and technical cooperation. Paradiplomacy is thus seen as a grassroots complement to traditional diplomacy, capable of fostering cooperation, reducing tensions, and contributing to peace and mutual understanding in line with the broader goals of state-led diplomacy (Chatterji & Saha, 2017). This momentum was reinforced by the 1999 special issue of the *Journal of Regional & Federal Studies*, which underscored the growing relevance of subnational actors in global politics (Keating, 1999).

As the global governance landscape became increasingly complex and multi-centric in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, paradiplomacy expanded beyond Europe and North America to other regions, including Latin America, Africa, and Asia. In Latin America, for example, subnational governments in Brazil have engaged in cross-border economic and environmental cooperation. In Africa, cities have initiated partnerships to promote capacity building and sustainable development (Lecours, 2008; Cornago, 2010). By contrast, the development of paradiplomacy in Asia remains relatively underexplored, both in practice and in academic literature. This condition is largely shaped by the dominance of unitary political systems, centralized government structures, and limited delegation of foreign policy authority to the subnational governments (Keating, 1999). As a result, critical perspectives within international relations literature have paid relatively limited attention to the potential risks associated with paradiplomacy, including tensions with national sovereignty or the emergence of local initiatives that diverge from national policy priorities. In comparison, while paradiplomacy in the Philippines is facilitated by a clear Local Government Code (Brillantes & Sonco, 2017; Legaspi, 2001), and Vietnam's subnational engagement remains strictly state-led (Hadpakdee, 2025; Tubilewicz, 2017), Indonesia occupies a unique middle ground of formative autonomy with asymmetric institutional capacity. This transition from state-centered models toward multilevel global governance suggests that subnational governments in Asia are increasingly internationalizing their territories to meet local development needs.

A systematic framework for understanding the forms and objectives of paradiplomacy is provided by André Lecours (2008), who identifies three main layers of paradiplomatic practice. *First*, economic paradiplomacy, in which subnational actors seek to attract foreign direct investment, access new export markets, expand trade, and leverage strategic sectors for growth. *Second*, multidimensional paradiplomacy, which encompasses collaboration in education, culture, science,

health, and technology that directly affects societal development. *Third*, political paradiplomacy, in which subnational governments assert distinct identities or advocate for regional autonomy by distinguishing themselves from the national government in international fora. This typology demonstrates the diverse motivations and strategies of subnational governments, shaped by their resources, capacities, and political context. In a unitary state like Indonesia, the interaction between these layers is often restricted by a complex hierarchy of national oversight.

The ability of subnational actors to engage in paradiplomacy has become increasingly significant as international relations shift from a state-centered model toward a polycentric and multilevel global governance framework (Keating, 1999; Tavares, 2016). Cities, provinces, and local governments are reemerging as important actors capable of representing local interests, exercising functional autonomy, and engaging in mutually beneficial international exchanges (Soldatos, 1990; Kuznetsov, 2015). This transformation demonstrates that paradiplomacy is not limited to federal states but is also increasingly relevant in unitary states, including Indonesia. However, the limitations of these initiatives, particularly the power dynamics between central and local governments, require further empirical investigation to ensure that subnational diplomacy does not inadvertently challenge national unity or diplomatic coherence. This opening of new avenues for research allows for a deeper understanding of how the South Sulawesi-Ehime partnership functions within broader constraints of Indonesia's decentralized but unitary landscape.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to analyze the dynamics of paradiplomatic cooperation between South Sulawesi Province (Indonesia) and Ehime Prefecture (Japan). The case study design was chosen because paradiplomacy is contextual and complex, requiring methods

capable of capturing interactions between actors, institutional dynamics, and implementation challenges within a unitary state framework (Yin, 2018).

Data collection was conducted through three main methods. *First*, document analysis served as the primary basis for understanding the formal framework governing the cooperation, including the LoI (2019), MoU (2020), the cooperation action plan, and decentralization regulations (Law No. 22/1999, Law No. 32/2004, and Law No. 23/2014). This analysis also included internal reports, meeting minutes, press releases, and media coverage to capture the dynamics of policy implementation. Document analysis is considered crucial as it provides a stable and verifiable source of information for reconstructing the institutional and policy context (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2003).

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two key informants from the Bureau of Governance and Regional Autonomy of the South Sulawesi Provincial Government. These individuals served as coordinators of Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD) activities related to cooperation with Ehime. Their insights were cross-checked with official government statements and media sources to ensure internal validity and mitigate potential bias. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their ability to balance systematic inquiry with flexibility in exploring institutional processes and policy implementation challenges (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Third, a literature review and secondary sources were used to strengthen the theoretical framework and compare the South Sulawesi–Ehime case with similar paradiplomatic practices in other countries. Key conceptual references include Duchacek (1990), Soldatos (1990), Cornago (2010), Lecours (2008), and Chatterji and Saha (2017), which discuss the motivations, dynamics, and challenges of paradiplomacy. The literature review also ensured that the study is situated within

contemporary academic debates and extends beyond descriptive accounts (Hart, 2018; Snyder, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis, which emphasizes identifying patterns, categories, and themes relevant to the research objectives. The raw data from interview transcripts and policy documents were condensed to extract relevant themes such as “bureaucratic constraints,” “technology transfer,” and “leadership transitions.” Then, these themes were categorized using Lecours’ (2008) conceptual framework of paradiplomacy. This categorization allowed the authors to interpret the data not only as a report of activities, but also as an analytical case study of power dynamics between central and regional authorities.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, who were briefed on the study’s objectives and their right to withdraw at any stage. Where requested, personal identities and institutional positions were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and data protection.

The combination of document analysis, interviews, and secondary literature enabled methodological triangulation, which is essential for strengthening the validity, reliability, and credibility of the research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, the methodology employed not only provides a rich and in-depth understanding of the case study but also contributes academically to the development of paradiplomacy studies in Asia and within the context of a unitary state undergoing decentralization.

DISCUSSION

This section analyzes the evolution, implementation, and challenges of the sister province cooperation between South Sulawesi Province and Ehime Prefecture during the 2019–2025 period. This partnership represents a concrete practice of

paradiplomacy, driven by a shared goal of leveraging local strengths for mutual benefit. However, the dynamics of this alliance are shaped by complex internal and external factors, ranging from leadership transitions to the global pandemic.

To provide a systematic understanding, the analysis in this section is divided into four main thematic focuses. *First*, origins and institutional framework of cooperation, highlighting the background, legal basis, and key actors involved. *Second*, sectoral implementation, emphasizing fisheries and agriculture as the main sectors of collaboration. *Third*, implementation challenges and constraints, examining political, bureaucratic, and external factors influencing the program's progress. *Fourth*, strategic potential and future prospects for paradiplomacy, discussing opportunities to strengthen subnational cooperation within the broader context of relations between Indonesia and Japan.

Origins and Institutional Framework of Cooperation

The Indonesia-Japan relationship has a long historical foundation, dating back to 1954 when the two countries officially established diplomatic relations. Japan subsequently strengthened its position as Indonesia's main development partner through the 1958 Peace and War Reparations Treaty and consistent support in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA). As of 2016, Indonesia was the largest recipient of Japanese ODA, underscoring the close bilateral ties between the two countries (JICA, 2018). This strong relationship provides room for cross-level cooperation, including at the subnational level.

In South Sulawesi, interaction with Japan has become increasingly evident since 2009 through grants of fire trucks and ambulances from automotive companies in Ehime and Kochi Prefectures. In 2019, the Japanese government again donated 38 vehicles to the South Sulawesi Provincial Government, consisting of 27 fire trucks and 11 ambulances. This assistance program continued into 2021, with the province

receiving an additional 13 vehicles (South Sulawesi Provincial Government, 2019; VOI, 2021).

Formal cooperation in the form of a sister province agreement between South Sulawesi Province and Ehime Prefecture began on January 15, 2019, with the signing of an LoI. The LoI affirmed the principles of equality and mutual benefit and encompassed cooperation in human resources, trade, tourism, agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry, education, culture, and sports, with expansion opportunities based on the needs of both regions (South Sulawesi Provincial Government, 2019; Tenola, 2019). The formulation process continued for almost two years until an MoU was signed virtually on December 16, 2020. This MoU, valid for five years with the option of extension through diplomatic channels, covers four main areas: a) fish farming and seafood processing, b) agriculture and plantations, c) creative economy development, and d) human resource capacity building. Of these, only the fisheries and agriculture sectors have reached the action plan and road map discussion stage by the OPD.

The process leading to the MoU illustrates the procedural steps required for foreign cooperation between local governments in Indonesia. The first stage is initiation. The collaboration began under Nurdin Abdullah's leadership in Bantaeng Regency, where he successfully established good relations with Japanese partners. During his tenure as Governor of South Sulawesi (2018–2023), this cooperation was expanded to the provincial level. This phase started with initial communication and mapping of regional potential in 2018, facilitated by the Governor's Team for Development Acceleration (TGUPP), a group of academics who played a key role in formulating the direction of the collaboration. Ehime Prefecture was identified as a strategic partner in the East Asia region. The mapping results revealed shared characteristics between South Sulawesi and Ehime.

Figure 1.
South Sulawesi Governor Nurdin Abdullah Received a Visit from Ehime Deputy Governor Joko Toshifumi



Source: South Sulawesi Provincial Government (2019)

The exploratory phase was marked by institutional visits, including a meeting between South Sulawesi Governor Nurdin Abdullah and Ehime Deputy Governor Joko Toshifumi, along with 35 Japanese delegates, on November 27, 2018, in Makassar. On this occasion, Nurdin emphasized that the selection of Ehime was based not only on shared potential but also on the track record of existing relations. The provincial government hoped this collaboration would encourage industrial relocation, particularly in aquaculture and plantations, as well as human resource capacity building (South Sulawesi Provincial Government, 2018; Fitriani, 2018; Wahana Infota, 2018).

Figure 2.
Meeting between South Sulawesi Governor Nurdin Abdullah and Ehime Deputy Governor Joko Toshifumi along with 35 Japanese Delegates



Source: Wahana Infota (2018)

Subsequently, the LoI was drafted, verified, and approved by the DPRD of South Sulawesi Province before being signed. The document was officially signed on January 15, 2019, at Baruga Karaeng Pattingalloang, the South Sulawesi Governor's Official Residence, by Governor Nurdin Abdullah and Ehime Prefectural Governor Tokihiro Nakamura.

Figure 3.
Signing of the Letter of Intent



Source: South Sulawesi Provincial Government (2019)

The signing was attended by the Speaker of the South Sulawesi Provincial House of Representatives, the Speaker of the Ehime Prefecture House of Representatives, several regional heads, and government officials, demonstrating broad support from multiple levels of government. The LoI affirmed the principles of equality and mutual benefit and outlined cooperation in human resources, trade, tourism, agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry, education, culture, and sports, with opportunities for expansion based on regional needs (South Sulawesi Provincial Government, 2019; Tenola, 2019).

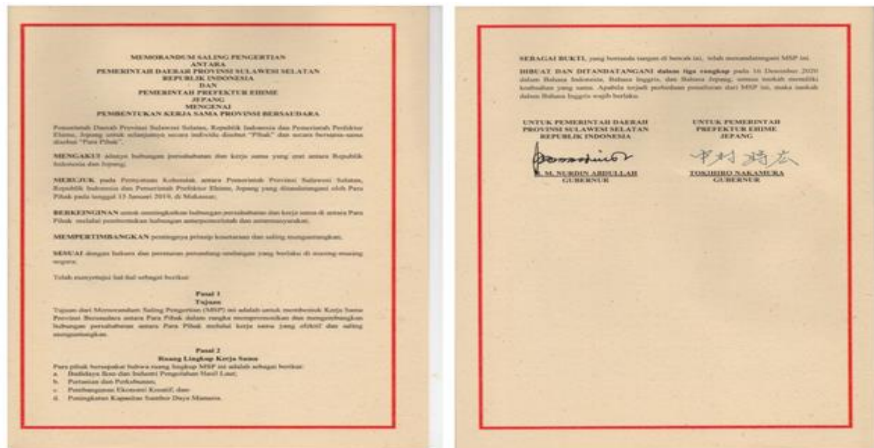
The next stage was the drafting of the MoU, which required coordination with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to meet editorial standards under Law No. 23/2014 concerning Regional Government. Only after ministerial approval could the MoU be signed. The MoU signing between the South Sulawesi Provincial Government and Ehime Prefecture took place on December 16, 2020, in Jakarta, with Governor Nurdin Abdullah in attendance, while the ceremony was also witnessed virtually from the Leadership Meeting Room of the South Sulawesi Governor's Office. The event was attended by the Indonesian Ambassador to Japan, officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Regional Secretary of South Sulawesi, and all Regional Government Organizations. Through this MoU, the two provinces agreed to collaborate across strategic areas with the expectation of achieving mutual benefits. Following the signing, the programs outlined in the joint action plan could be immediately implemented as a concrete manifestation of the sister province partnership between South Sulawesi and Ehime (South Sulawesi Provincial Government, 2020; Arsyad, 2020).

Figure 4.
Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding



Source: South Sulawesi Provincial Government (2020)

Figure 5.
Memorandum of Understanding



Source: South Sulawesi Provincial Government (2022)

The process leading to the MoU in 2020 illustrates the procedural constraints that characterize paradiplomacy in a unitary state. Unlike federal systems where subnational units enjoy constitutional autonomy, Indonesian provinces must navigate a “negotiated space” where the central government maintains strict oversight. The requirement for ministerial approval from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlights the vertical power asymmetry embedded in Indonesia’s governance structure. While local governments are empowered to initiate,

they remain constrained to national validation (Setzer, 2015). This vertical power dynamic distinguishes Indonesian paradiplomacy from more autonomous models like those in Brazil (Lumertz et al., 2026; Salomon, 2016) or the Philippines (Brillantes & Sonco, 2017; Legaspi, 2001).

Theoretically, this dynamic reflects functional paradiplomacy (Lecours, 2008), where actors establish relations for pragmatic economic and technological benefits. However, a critical look at this implementation reveals that the one-voice policy of Indonesian foreign affairs creates bureaucratic friction. The need to continuously demonstrate that international engagement remains purely functional and does not challenge Jakarta's authority produces a top-down regulatory framework that constrains local innovation.

Sectoral Implementation

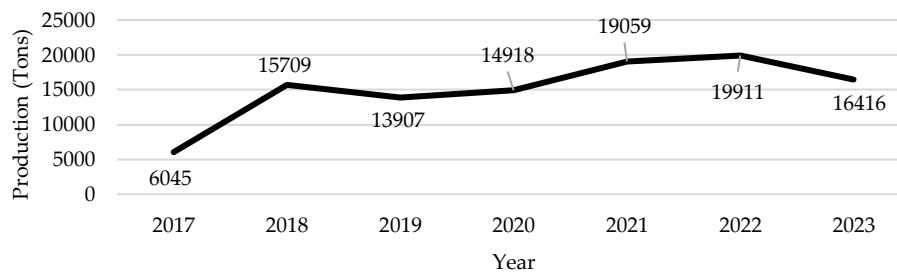
The implementation of the sister province cooperation program between South Sulawesi Province and Ehime Prefecture prioritized the fisheries and agriculture sectors, both viewed as strategic instruments for regional economic paradiplomacy (Cornago, 2010). These sectors reflect patterns commonly associated with complex interdependence, in which both regions seek absolute gains through the exchange of natural resources for high-end Japanese technology. While initiatives in the creative economy and human resource capacity building have been discussed, their implementation remains secondary to these primary economic drivers.

1. Fisheries Sector

South Sulawesi is one of the largest tuna-producing regions in Indonesia, with significant marine capture fisheries potential. Data indicate a fluctuating trend, with peak production reaching nearly 20,000 tons in 2021–2022 before declining to 16,416 tons in 2023 (Figure 6). This instability underscores the urgency for technological

intervention to move beyond raw capture fisheries toward value-added processing. Cooperation with Ehime has centered on technology transfer for environmentally friendly fishing and supply chain modernization. It aimed at strengthening export competitiveness in the Japanese market.

Figure 6.
Marine Capture Fisheries Production by Main Commodity (Tons), 2017–2023



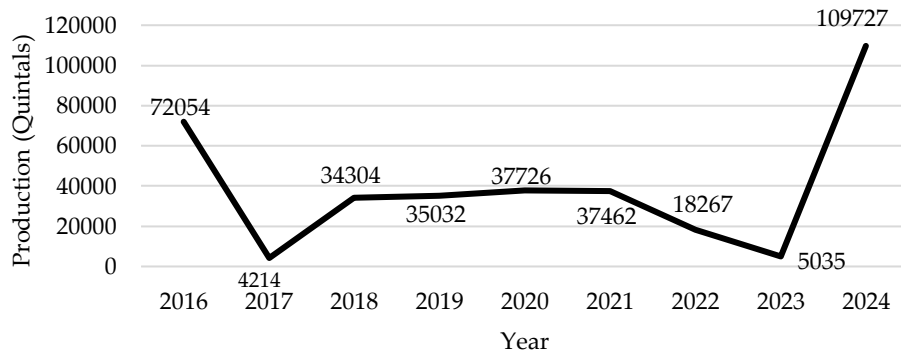
Source: Statistics Indonesia and Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (compiled by authors)

A concrete manifestation of this strategy is the Wajima Project, which shifts the partnership dynamic from “assistance” to “investment-led cooperation.” By sending four young South Sulawesi residents to Japan for aquaculture training, the province is attempting to build local human capital to support the relocation of Japanese industrial capacity (South Sulawesi Provincial Government, 2021; Wardyah, 2021; South Sulawesi Provincial Government, 2019; Ehime Prefecture, 2013a). Theoretically, this reflects constructivist identity-building, as South Sulawesi seeks to transform its image from a developing province into a high-tech aquaculture hub. However, a critical limitation has emerged regarding “commodity misalignment.” While South Sulawesi prioritizes tuna, Ehime’s expertise lies in red snapper. This discrepancy has created a “policy friction” that requires ongoing negotiation. It highlights how even functional cooperation is subject to the challenges of harmonizing local and international technical standards.

2. Agricultural Sector

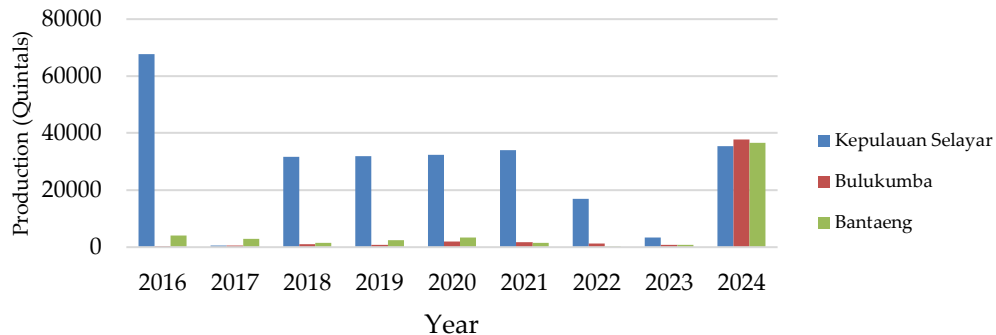
The agricultural sector focuses on the development of Siamese oranges (Selayar tangerines), drawing on Ehime’s reputation for organic *mikan* (tangerines) and other citrus varieties, especially in its southern Nanyo region (Ehime Prefecture, 2013b). From an interdependence standpoint, the goal is to facilitate the transfer of Japanese modern agricultural technology to local farmers to stabilize production. However, citrus production in South Sulawesi has historically been erratic; according to Statistics Indonesia (2025), production plummeted between 2017 and 2023 before surging to 109,000 quintals in 2024 (Figure 7). A similar trend occurred in the three main citrus-producing regions: Selayar Islands, Bulukumba, and Bantaeng. In 2024, Bulukumba and Bantaeng surpassed Selayar in production (Figure 8). This volatility reveals systemic vulnerabilities in seed quality and pest management that Japanese technology is intended to solve.

Figure 7.
Tangerine Production of South Sulawesi Province (Quintals)



Source: Statistics Indonesia and Agricultural Statistics for Horticulture (compiled by authors)

Figure 8.
Tangerine Production (Quintals) in Selayar Islands, Bulukumba, and Bantaeng Regencies



Source: Statistics Indonesia and Agricultural Statistics for Horticulture (compiled by authors)

Despite the strategic alignment, plans for technical training have remained in the “planning stage” due to the COVID-19 pandemic and leadership transitions. This reveals a critical power dynamic in Indonesian paradiplomacy: the high dependency on gubernatorial initiative means that when leadership changes, technical projects often lose momentum.

To mitigate this, the South Sulawesi Provincial Government plans to adopt *Michi no Eki* (Roadside Stations), a Japanese rural development policy innovation introduced in 1993 by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism (MLIT). Since its inception, *Michi no Eki* has evolved into a multifunctional rural service center, providing marketing access for local products while also promoting culture, culinary development, and community-based tourism (Murakami & Oyabu, 2016; Oikawa, 2017; Hiraoka et al., 2018; Matsuo, 2020).

Adopting the *Michi no Eki* model is a strategic attempt to embed South Sulawesi’s agricultural products into the global value chain (Murakami & Oyabu, 2016). It transforms the cooperation from a top-down Government-to-Government (G-to-G) model into a more participatory framework, involving Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) (Oikawa, 2017; Matsuo, 2020). By strengthening

production capacity and branding through Japanese expertise, South Sulawesi aims to build a sustainable local economic ecosystem (Hiraoka et al., 2018). However, for this to move beyond a “paper project,” the provincial government must secure consistent funding and bridge the ecological gap caused by climate differences between Selayar and Ehime. The agricultural cooperation provides an important indicator of whether paradiplomacy in a unitary state can successfully transition from ceremonial MoUs to tangible rural transformation.

Implementation Challenges and Obstacles

Although the sister province collaboration between South Sulawesi and Ehime was comprehensively designed, its implementation highlights the significant structural and political barriers inherent in paradiplomacy within a unitary state. These challenges can be grouped into four main categories, namely administrative capacity, funding constraints, political dynamics, and external factors. From a critical IR perspective, these obstacles are not merely technical but reflect a persistent power asymmetry between the central and regional governments. While decentralization has legally empowered the province, the “negotiated space” of Indonesian diplomacy ensures that local initiatives remain secondary to national bureaucratic oversight, leading to what scholars describe as a gap between legal authority and institutional readiness (Fitriani et al., 2005).

First, limited administrative capacity remains a significant obstacle. The Bureau of Government and Regional Autonomy of the South Sulawesi Provincial Government, as the lead sector, faces difficulties in cross-regional coordination and the management of international protocols. The lengthy “top-down” bureaucratic procedures, where every minor implementation detail requires validation from the Ministry of Home Affairs or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, result in a “bureaucratic drag” that discourages local agility. This reflects a broader issue in central-local

relations, where the national government's "one-voice" policy often functions as a constraint rather than a support system for provincial innovation. Furthermore, the slow pace of proposal preparation by several OPD indicates that the lack of a specialized "international relations" unit at the provincial level hinders the development of detailed implementation plans.

Second, funding constraints and financial asymmetries have disrupted the momentum of the partnership. The COVID-19 pandemic forced a major budget reallocation, diverting funds intended for the MoU toward emergency health measures. This created a resource gap between the developed Japanese prefecture and the developing Indonesian province. While Ehime maintained its technical readiness, South Sulawesi struggled to provide the necessary operational funding and logistical support. This asymmetry highlights a core challenge for paradiplomacy in the Global South: without independent financial mechanisms or the ability to access international credit directly, as seen in federal systems like Brazil (Salomon 2016; Mendes & Figueira, 2017), provincial diplomacy remains highly vulnerable to domestic fiscal shocks (Hadpakdee, 2025; Setzer, 2015).

Third, political dynamics and leadership transitions have severely disrupted the continuity of the cooperation. The dismissal of Governor Nurdin Abdullah in 2022 led to a significant shift in policy orientation. It illustrates that Indonesian paradiplomacy is often driven by individual leadership rather than institutionalized frameworks. The subsequent transitions, first to Andi Sudirman Sulaiman and later to Zudan Arif Fakrulloh as Acting Governor, required extensive periods for rebuilding administrative continuity, causing the Ehime agenda to lose its "priority status" within the regional bureaucracy. This underscores a constructivist concern: without a deeply embedded institutional identity for the partnership, the cooperation remains a "personal project" of the executive, making it fragile in the face of political instability.

Fourth, external factors and technical discrepancies have further complicated the implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) halted physical mobility, and while programs shifted to virtual formats, the effectiveness of remote technology transfer was perceived as considerably lower than face-to-face learning. Additionally, technical friction arose from divergent commodity preferences (tuna in South Sulawesi versus red snapper in Ehime) and ecological differences that hampered citrus cultivation.

Taken together, these challenges show that South Sulawesi–Ehime cooperation is shaped by a complex interplay of technical, political, and systemic barriers (Keating, 1999). Nevertheless, this partnership remains a significant shift in the Indonesia–Japan relationship, moving from a top-down development assistance model toward a bottom-up alliance that attempts to redefine the contours of subnational engagement (Tavares, 2016).

Strategic Potential and Future Prospects for Paradiplomacy

Despite the various obstacles encountered, the South Sulawesi–Ehime sister province partnership continues to hold significant strategic potential as a bridge between the Global South and the Global North (Cornago, 2010). This partnership serves not only as an instrument of regional economic diplomacy but also as a crucial channel for deepening bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan through the involvement of subnational actors (Kuznetsov, 2015; Lecours, 2008). Future cooperation could benefit from moving beyond a donor-recipient assistance model toward more reciprocal and collaborative forms of engagement. By harmonizing cross-sectoral programs in fisheries and agriculture, the partnership can generate beneficial synergies that move the regional economy toward higher value-added production (South Sulawesi Provincial Government, 2019). This transition requires the active

engagement of farmers, fishermen, and local businesses to ensure that technology transfer translates into inclusive economic development.

The prospects for future cooperation are tied to the constructivist goal of building a “globalized” regional identity. Although the creative economy remains largely unrealized, its potential is significant if South Sulawesi can successfully adopt Japanese standards in branding and marketing. Strengthening human resources through staff exchanges and technical training is a prerequisite for this success. In this context, capacity-building programs must extend to civil servants at both central and regional levels, covering essential “paradiplomatic” skills such as international negotiation and project management. This would mitigate the current administrative bottlenecks and allow the province to navigate the “negotiated space” of Indonesian diplomacy more effectively.

Sustainability, however, requires a shift from “individual-led” to “system-led” cooperation. The five-year MoU provides a window for periodic evaluation, but long-term stability necessitates a joint funding mechanism that involves non-governmental organizations and external donors. Institutionalizing a joint steering committee with representatives from both Ehime and South Sulawesi, along with independent observers, can enhance transparency and provide the political continuity that has been lacking during leadership transitions. This model has proven effective in more established subnational partnerships in Europe and Latin America, where institutional frameworks prevent international agendas from being derailed by local political cycles (Soldatos, 1990; Keating, 1999; Cornago, 2010).

Furthermore, the future legitimacy of this paradiplomacy depends on expanding civil society participation. Engaging universities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities will ensure that collaborative programs align with the actual needs of the society rather than remaining “paper projects” for the political elite (Aldecoa & Keating, 2013). An inclusive communication strategy can

reinforce the social foundations of this partnership, transforming it into a resilient “bottom-up” alliance. From an academic perspective, the South Sulawesi–Ehime case highlights the unique character of paradiplomacy in a unitary state. Unlike federal states with formal foreign affairs authority, Indonesian provinces must operate through innovation and strategic alignment with national interests (Mukti, 2013; Kuznetsov, 2015; Lecours, 2008). Ultimately, the long-term prospects of this collaboration depend on maintaining political consistency and the capacity to adapt to technical and international dynamics in a polycentric world.

CONCLUSION

The sister province cooperation between South Sulawesi Province and Ehime Prefecture represents a maturing practice of paradiplomacy within the decentralized framework of a unitary state. This study demonstrates that while Indonesian paradiplomacy is in a formative stage characterized by asymmetric institutional capacities, such partnerships serve as vital instruments for regional development and international networking. Through cooperation with a technologically advanced partner, the province seeks to access expertise and institutional experience that may support local economic development and strengthen its engagement in international cooperation.

The implementation phase highlights significant strategic potential, particularly in the fisheries and agriculture sectors. The adoption of innovative Japanese models like *Michi no Eki* and the transfer of aquaculture technology offer a blueprint for rural empowerment and the enhancement of local value chains. However, the first five years of this cooperation (2020-2025) reveal a clear gap between policy ambitions and empirical outcomes. Data shows that sectoral cooperation has yet to yield significant export growth or sustained technology transfer. Most initiatives remain at the discourse or planning stage, impeded by the power dynamics of a

unitary state, specifically the friction between local initiative and centralized oversight, alongside budget reallocations during the pandemic and the disruption caused by provincial leadership changes.

Theoretically, this case affirms the multidimensional paradiplomacy typology proposed by Lecours (2008), proving that such agency is not exclusive to federal systems. However, a critical evaluation suggests that without institutionalizing these ties to survive political transitions, paradiplomacy risks becoming a “ceremonial project” rather than a functional alliance. The “asymmetry of power” between the central government and the province remains a primary hurdle, as the local government’s functional autonomy is often secondary to national bureaucratic requirements. This research suggests that for paradiplomacy to be effective in a unitary context, there must be a shift from “individual-led” diplomacy to “system-led” institutionalization that includes civil society and private sector stakeholders.

In conclusion, the South Sulawesi–Ehime partnership is a microcosm of the emerging dynamics in 21st-century international relations, where subnational diplomacy reflects larger shifts in global power structures toward regional integration. While the partnership has not yet achieved its full transformative potential for local communities, it provides a critical empirical lens into the challenges of subnational agency in the Global South. This study contributes to the paradiplomacy literature by moving beyond descriptive success stories to offer a nuanced critique of how institutional, political, and developmental barriers shape the feasibility of cross-border cooperation in a polycentric world.

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