

# The Historical Changes and Enlightenment of Dai Minority Groups Traditional Land System Under the Background Reform of "Three Rights Separation"

Jing Wang, Wei Long, Rui Chen\*

School of Economics and Management of Yunnan Agricultural University, Kunming, Yunnan 650201, China

\*Corresponding author. Email: [2686798265@qq.com](mailto:2686798265@qq.com)

## ABSTRACT

The traditional land system of the Dai minority has the nature of public ownership. Its historical changes and characteristics are of great significance to the innovation of China's land system and the promotion of the reform of the "three-right separation" of agricultural land in ethnic areas. It is used the historical documentation method to study the historical changes of the traditional land system of the Dai minority groups in this paper. It is found that the traditional land system and the village governance model have a close relationship with each other in the changes of the Dai people's land system, which formed gradually a code of conduct influenced by the experience of the traditional sustainable land use. By learning from the traditional land system experience of the Dai people, optimizing the governance structure and functions of village collective organizations, protecting traditional culture, and encouraging farmers to participate land management, it will promote the smooth implementation of the current rural land system reform.

**Keywords:** *dai minority group, traditional land system, historical changes, enlightenment*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

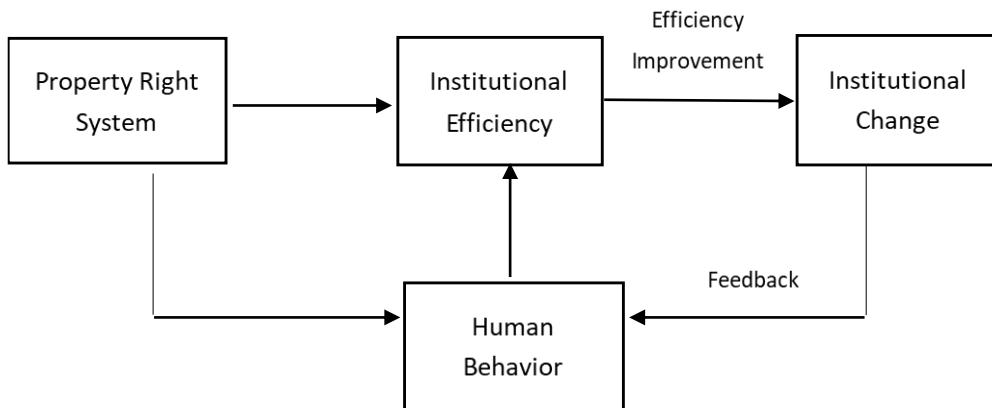
The land system is one of the important factors that play a decisive role in social development. It is of great significance to promote the country's social and economic development and promote social stability. The household contract responsibility system has promoted social and economic development for a certain period of time, but it has also changed the social form of traditional rural areas, making the main body of economic organizations at all levels virtual and absent [1]. The core of China's current rural land system "three rights separation" reform is to solve the resource flow path and benefit distribution pattern led by collective economic organizations, and to ensure the benefit distribution of farmers' basic rights.

The Dai minority has a long history of farming culture and advanced water resources management system, and has accumulated rich experience in production and life in the process of long-term labor practice. The unification of the tribes was realized in the Xishuangbanna area in 1160. Under the feudal lord system, the traditional land system of the Dai has been used until 1956. During this period, compares to the Han nationality and other minority groups area that implemented the feudal lord system, in the Dai area's that the social structure is more stable, and the production and life order is more harmonious [2]. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country carried out a nationwide reform of the rural land system. Although the Dai traditional land system was replaced by a

new land system, in Dai villages, traditional land use and land management methods still exist in reality in the form of traditional customs, such a traditional land management system not has legitimacy, but it has obvious sociality, and has become an important part of the actual norms, restricting and guiding people's behavior, and bringing a positive impact.

The Dai people are mainly distributed in Xishuangbanna, Dehong and other places in Yunnan Province. The academic research on the Dai minority groups mainly focuses on culture, history, and religion. There are few research documents on the land system. So far, there is still a lack of systemic research on the traditional land system of the Dai. Therefore, researching and discussing the Dai-traditional land system and its changes has certain historical value and practical significance.

North believes that system includes formal system, informal system and system implementation mechanism [1]. The change of land system is a process of substitution, conversion and transaction of land system. The Theory of Institutional Change considers that property rights and land tenure systems, human nature and human behavior, behavior efficiency and system efficiency are the three core issues of institutional analysis. Among them, the property right system determines the characteristics of human behavior, human behavior determines Institutional efficiency, efficiency improvement promotes Institutional Changes, and system changes reshape human behavior. The three have circular interaction causality, interdependence and operation mechanism (Figure 1)



**Figure 1** The logical framework of institutional change

## 2. HISTORICAL CHANGES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DAI TRADITIONAL LAND SYSTEM

### 2.1. Evolution of the Dai-traditional Land System

The evolution of the land system is mainly reflected in the evolution of land tenure system. The traditional society of the Dai people has a similar historical evolution trajectory to the Han people and other ethnic groups, but the evolution of the land system is very different. Because of the special existence of Dai rural communes, the changes in the Dai land system are mainly linked to the changes in land forms, and land ownership has always maintained the obvious characteristics of public ownership.

At the end of the primitive commune, the land tenure system of the Dai society was a public ownership. With the transition from society to serfdom, the form of land began to change. The process of change can be divided into three categories. The changes in land form are accompanied by the evolution of the land system.

In the first stage, the land is owned by the village community and used by all villagers. In the primitive commune period, the members of the commune established villages by reclaiming wasteland. Therefore, the members of the commune jointly owned the ownership of the village land, and distributed and used it evenly among all members.

In the second stage, the land is transformed from collective ownership to "king" ownership, the lands were managed by the village leader, and distribute to all villagers to use. At the end of the primitive commune, come with the emergence of monarch, the land that belonging to the village and family, for the first time changed, from "collective ownership" to "one-man ownership", that is,

owned by the highest feudal lord. However, in this stage, the original land system has not big changes at form. The feudal lords still adopt the "collective ownership", and distribute land to farmers through rural communes. The farmers can use their own labor, tools and Information to cultivate the land. Although land belongs to collective had rights of management, distribution and use, but the ownership still belongs to the supreme ruler, and the members of the village community pay "in-kind rent" to the supreme ruler in the form of taxation.

In the third stage, the land was owned by serf owners and village collectives, and used by all villagers. Due to the supreme ruler plundered the land of Dai villages, and the land form changed again. The land is divided into serf-owner land and peasant land. The land of serf-owner land is directly occupied and managed by serf owners, and farmers are conscripted to cultivate land, forming a "labor rent." The proportion of collective land in the village has shrunk, but it is still owned by the village collective and used equally by all villagers.

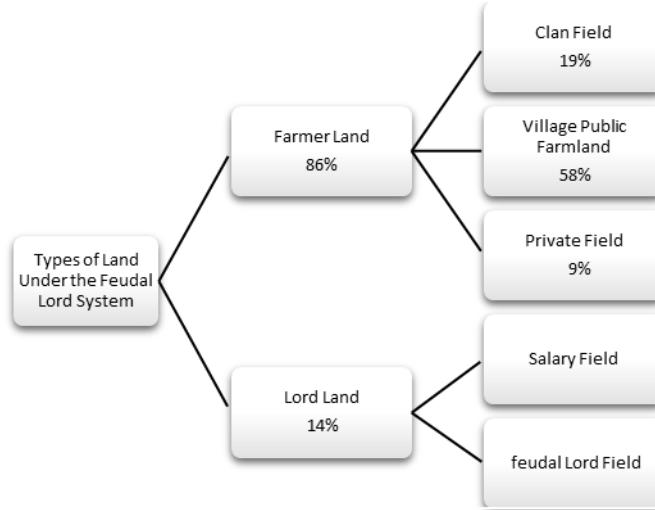
The division of land types has formed different forms at land in terms of occupation and exploit, it marks the development and evolution process of the Dai minority groups land form, and also reflects the law of the evolution of the traditional land system of the Dai people [1]

In the process of changes in the traditional land system of the ethnic group, in different regions, the second and third stages existed at the same time. Among them, the feudal land ownership system has existed for the longest time and has the most research significance.

### 2.2. The Characteristics of Dai Feudal Land System

The feudal lordship system of Xishuangbanna preserved the original rural commune form. The land was collectively owned and used for villagers use, and regular adjustment and distribution were carried out. Under the

traditional land management system of the Dai people, although the land belongs to the feudal lord, in fact, the village has relatively independent ownership and control rights over the land.



**Figure 2** The proportion of different land forms under the feudal lordship system

According to the Xishuangbanna Social Survey in 1954, until the implementation of the first land reform in the country, there were two main types of land in the Dai area: lord land and farmer land. The land of the lords accounted for 14% of the total cultivated land, it was owned by the feudal lords, it was cultivated by directly recruiting village farmers to perform labor services; The land of the farmers accounted for 86% of the total cultivated land and was jointly owned by the members of the village community. Farmer land comes from three types of field: 1. Clan field, accounting for 19%. The clan field was only distributed among clan members. Due to the construction, use and maintenance reason of public facilities, etc. Farmers voluntarily included clan fields in the collective field of the village for management; 2. Village public farmland, accounting for 58%, is the land collectively owned by the village, which is usually distributed evenly among the members of the village community; 3. Private Field, accounting for 9%, derived from farmers' individual reclamation of wasteland, but generally only 3-5 years have use-right by individuals, after which the land must be incorporated into village public farmland. Therefore, the three types of land eventually become collective land owned by the village [6].

### 2.2.2. A variety of land practices norms had been gradually formed in the utilization of land resources

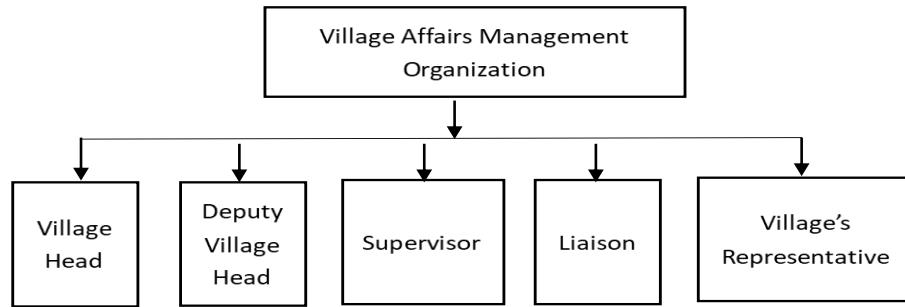
According to historical data, the Dai society has always used farming agriculture as an important production

### 2.2.1. The land ownership system of the Dai has the nature of public ownership

method. The development of agriculture depend on the natural environment, it makes the Dai people must make sustainable utilization of natural resources, and that formed the traditional land use. For example, in land use, it clearly distinguishes water source forests and firewood forests, in order to meet different production and living needs, meanwhile it is adjusts the climate and protects the ecological environment;[i] People only use green manure, crop rotation, fallow in farming, and do not over-exploit and use land, and insist on sustainable land use; Using traditional experience and wisdom to Agroforestry planting, that makes full use of the complementary advantages of land space and mixed planting of different qualities, promote land use, increase production and reduce labor. These practical experiences have played an important role in regulating land use behavior, guaranteeing agricultural production activities and regulating social and economic relations.

### 2.2.3. The organizational structure and functions of land management are very clear

The land system is one of the core systems in the Dai traditional society. In the traditional Dai society, a sound administrative organization is established at the village level, responsible for the distribution, adjustment and management of land. The management organization of a Dai village usually consists of 5 people, each of whom is responsible for managing different affairs of the rural community (Figure 3)



**Figure 3** The management organization form of the Dai village

The village head is appointed by the higher-level management agency. Apart from that, all other committee members are elected by the villagers; the supervisor is the most prestigious elder in the village and is mainly responsible for supervising the actions of the village committee; the liaison is responsible for Internal and external information communication; and set up a villager representative to participate in the management of village community affairs.

The village community management organization is the core carrier of social resource management and distribution. According to the identity of the village community member, each village community member can obtain survival resources such as land, forest, water, etc. from the village community. When they meet difficulties, can get social help from the village community, thereby enhancing the sense of security of survival. However, as members of the village community, they also need to undertake corresponding obligations, safeguard the interests of the village community, and participate in religious affairs activities in which the village community is a unit. For a long time, it may also have formed the unified behavioral norms, social values and social relations in the community of the Dai people.

### 3. ENLIGHTENMENT OF DAI MINORITY GROUPS TRADITIONAL LAND SYSTEM

According to the Malthusian theory of man-land relationship and the historical lessons of various countries, considering the socio-economic development and population increase, if the distribution of interests between the ruling class and the peasants is out of balance, it will eventually lead to diminishing institutional efficiency, which will trigger institutional changes.

With the rapid development of urbanization and modernization, China's reform of the rural land system got more and more attention. The reform goal of the land system widely recognized by all sectors of society, it should be development of towards promoting social equity, safeguarding the interests of farmers, and

improving the efficiency of resource allocation. China has a vast territory, and various regions have great differences in social and economic development. In the long-term historical practice, the national wisdom and traditional experience accumulated by various ethnic groups have yet to be explored. However, judging from the historical experience of the evolution of the Dai traditional land system, it has the following significance enlightenment of make the "three rights separation" reform for other ethnic regions.

#### ***3.1. To Optimize the Governance Structure and Functions of Village Collective Organizations, to Promote Social Equity in Land Rights***

Land property rights are the institutional basis for rural governance, and the reform of land property rights is the main reason for the reconstruction of rural order. The reform of property rights relationship can not only reshape the rural economic form, social relationship and the interest structure among multiple subjects, but also shape the governance structure of rural society to a certain extent, and finally form the unity of property rights management and rural governance.

From the law of the evolution of Dai property rights, the change of land property rights has an important impact on the transformation of Dai village governance [8]. In the Dai traditional society, the possession, utilization and distribution of land resources are the core content of village management. From the perspective of the village management organization structure, the management members have a clear division of labor, mutual power constraints, and special supervisors, which can reflect the fairness of land distribution and use to a certain extent.

Under the "three rights separation" policy, land ownership belongs to the village collective. As the owner of the land, the village collective economic organization is an important subject in the rural land management. By adhering to the villager autonomy system, improving the village collective economic organization ability, it can

realize the lower cost communication and compatibility of interests between the country and farmers, improving the rural governance structure, promoting social justice in the operation of the land system, and advance the national governance system and governance capabilities.

### ***3.2. Influence of Traditional Culture on Land use Behavior should be Pay Attention, that can be Promote Sustainable Land Use***

The sustainable use of land resources is an objective requirement for realizing sustainable social and economic development. Through the rapid development of urbanization, the reduction of land resources, the decline of land quality and the low utilization of rural land are prominent problems. Protecting and improving the productive capacity and ecological functions of land resources is the focus of the rural land system reform.

The Dai traditional society has rich experience and traditional practices in sustainable land use and resource management. These beneficial experiences mainly come from the long-term accumulation of the Dai people's agricultural production and daily life, and the result of following the laws of nature. For land use in the modern environment, especially in the global urbanization development trend, the effective use of land, appropriate development and ecological protection can be used for reference [9].

Therefore, when formulating relevant land policies, the government should fully proceed from the actual conditions of various ethnic regions, respect and excavate local "civil wisdom", and improve the economic efficiency of land use while maintaining sustainable land use.

### ***3.3. Villagers Participation of the Land Management, should be Increased to Better Protect Farmers Land Rights***

Farmers are the main body of land use. Villagers actively participate in the management of land in their own village. On the one hand, they can provide guarantee for the smooth implementation of the current land system reform; on the other hand, it can better reflect the significance of the "three rights separation" policy reform. By improving the cultural level of the villagers themselves and improving the villagers' cognition and expression ability, the farmers' ability to participate in collective land management can be better improved. Enhancing the legal concept and rights awareness of villagers will help villagers actively participate in community management, and better protect the legitimate rights and interests of villagers.

In addition, the family is the smallest unit of society and an important carrier of cultural heritage. Encouraging the family inheritance of local traditional etiquette and customs is conducive to the continuation of the excellent

traditional culture in ethnic areas, and it is conducive to the use of the rich experience accumulated in land use and land management in the long-term labor practice of various ethnic areas.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

From the perspective of system change theory, this paper uses historical documents to study the historical changes and characteristics of the traditional land system of the Dai minority, and analyzes the pattern of land ownership separation and its features of "village collective-owned but individual-used" in the early Dai society.

It is shown that this model has always run through the changes in the Dai land system. Since the implementation of the feudal lord large land system in Dai society, the stability of this land system can be maintained for a long time, whose main reason lies in the promotion of public affairs and the construction of common values and unified behavioral norms to enable the governance model of Dai villages to play a role and balance effectively the interest relationship between feudal lords and farmers. The system constrains people's behavior on land use and land management, and shapes people's individual behavioral norms. The compliance of this behavioral norm ultimately enables the efficiency of the implementation of the Dai traditional land system to be maintained.

It is concluded that it can promote social equity in land rights, and maintain the shaping of sustainable land use behavior, and better guarantee the land rights of farmers by optimizing the governance structure and functions of village collective organizations, encouraging the protection of traditional culture, and increasing the participation of villagers in land management,. Combining the particularities of various ethnic regions is conducive to the smooth implementation of the current "three-rights separation" policy for agricultural land.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

This work was supported by School-level Youth Social Science Fund of Yunnan Agricultural University (2018SK11).

## **REFERENCES**

- [1] Deng Rong. Reconstruction of the main body status of collective economic organizations in the process of rural land system reform. *Rural Economy*, 2017(03):43-48.
- [2] Wang Xiuling, Li Bochuan, Zhu Xibin. A study on the traditional land system of the Dai people in Xishuangbanna [J]. *Journal of Yunnan Agricultural University: Social Sciences Edition*, 2009(6):114-118.

[3] North.C, System, system changes and economic performance, published by Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore, 1994

[4] Cao Chengzhang, Dai Village Community Culture, Central University for Nationalities Press, 2006.

[5] Editorial Committee of revision of Chinese Ethnic Minority Social and Historical Survey Data Series, Dai Ethnic Social and historical Survey, Ethnic Publishing House, 2009

[6] Li Jie. The characteristics and changes of Xishuangbanna's folk beliefs. Journal of Dali University, 2019, 4(11):1-6.

[7] Zheng Xiaoyun, A Brief History of Contemporary Dai People, Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2012

[8] Yang Lei. The Reform of Farmland Property Rights and the Order of Rural Governance: An Analytical Framework for the Changes of Farming Policy——Based on the Case Study of Z Village in Hubei Province. Journal of Public Management, 2020, 17(01):84-95+172.

[9] Zhao Hui, Lu Chao. Yunnan: Traditional Ecological Folk Customs of Ethnic Minorities. Regional Governance, 2019(44):8-10.