

Changes in the Form of Family in Agricultural Villages in Northern China Arising from Rural Land System Reform:

— A Case Study of Sancun Village in Shandong Province —

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This paper will take a close look at Sancun Village, Wutai Town, Pingyi County, Linyi City, Shandong Province in the context of China's rural land system reform carried out since the foundation of the nation. In this study, physical evidence of the village branch families that have remained to date was collected and analyzed for the purpose of revealing changes in the form of family in agricultural villages in northern China in response to the country's rural land system reform. The study will also examine the concrete manifestation of changes in the form of family and explore the future development of family forms in the region.

In terms of rural land management China has mainly adopted private ownership, state ownership and collective ownership in the course of its history, with several smaller subcategories that reflected regulations of the time. Sancun Village has adjusted its system of land management to those changes over time. In the process of land reform, rights to own, use and transfer land were separated. Furthermore, the holders of each right have varied according to the times, yielding to changes in the positioning of their land—or productive assets in other words—as family property.

During the time of private ownership, land was an important family asset for farmers, since they held absolute land ownership as well as land use and transfer rights. Farmers did not divide their families into branches until their parents passed away, allowing them to maintain the scope of their family property and postpone the distribution of their land until the last minute. While parents were alive, farm households took on the form of a compound family in which parents and the families of all their sons lived under the same roof, worked and ate together and shared the family property. After the death of the parents, the compound family separated into multiple nuclear families.

In the state ownership phase, farmers lost their rights to own and transfer land and were left with land use rights. After a son or sons married, each household was allowed to possess only the daily necessities and real estate as family property, and food was provided by production units according to the number of family members. This made the division of the head family into branch families so easy that it was done right after all sons were married. The resulting branch families were individual nuclear families that worked and ate independently and owned their own assets. In many cases, parents lived with their youngest son. The form of family changed from a compound family to a stem or nuclear family.

In the collective ownership phase, farmers own land use rights and expanded land transfer rights that allow them to transfer their land and place a mortgage on it, but they do not have ownership. As long as farmers work the land, it is considered as family property. The timing and way of dividing the head family into branch families have also changed and become more complex. Parents and married sons live separately, and who is responsible for land management and how to apportion the family earnings are unclear. These families share the property and work and eat together. The definition of such households will be proposed in this paper. It will also discuss whether this new family form can serve as a model in agricultural villages in northern China.