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# Land Ownership of Families in Son La: A View from Cadastral Records in the Minh Menh's Year

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## Abstract

The issue of land is always a key issue when studying the feudal agricultural economy. Currently, in the economic structure of Son La province, the agricultural economy is still the main economic sector of most ethnic groups. Therefore, the study of issues on land and agricultural economy in the past is of greater significance. During the feudal period, the land ownership situation of Son La province was recorded in the original cadastral records kept at the National Archives No. 1 in Hanoi. Total 34 cadastral records in Sino-Vietnamese characters in Son La province are 34 “động” and communes at different times. In the Minh Menh's 21st year (1840), there were 11 cadastral records listing land area of 5 “châu” (Phu Yen, Thuan, Son La, Mai Son, Yen) with 11 communes which clearly showed the difference in land ownership among the families in Son La province.

**Keywords:** Land, Families, Son La, Cadastral Records, Minh Menh

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduce the Problem

There are not many studies researching issues on land and agricultural economy in a particular locality like Son La in the feudal period. With regard to foreign authors, there are mainly French studies on issues related to agricultural economy in Son La province at the end of the 19th century. Through careful research and examination of different sources in French, the author found that during the colonial period, there was no monograph on Son La in general and Son La agriculture in particular. This is quite special because many provinces in Tonkin often have geography books compiled by the French but Son La has so far not found any similar document. Because of the aforesaid reason, information about the socio-economic of Son La, especially the agricultural economy of this province, is mainly mentioned in some general studies on the Tonkin. First of all, there are records of the French during the invasion and pacification of the upstream Northern Vietnam in the late nineteenth century, such as Edouar Petit's research on "Le Tonkin", H. Lecène - H. Oudin - Éditeurs, Paris, 1887 (“Xứ Bắc Kỳ”) (Edouar Petit, 1887), or Philippe Henri d'Orléans' research on "Autour du Tonkin", Camann Lévy – Éditeurs, Paris, 1894 (“Vòng quanh Bắc Kỳ”) (Philippe Henri) d'Orléans, 1894).

In his records, Edouar Petit recorded quite in detail about the Da River region, agricultural, industrial and commercial products of Tonkin and of the upper Da River region in particular. However, information about Son La agriculture is very little and fuzzy. Philippe Henri d'Orléans focuses on the transport network from Hanoi to Vạn Bú by road and by waterway across the Da River. According to Philippe Henri d'Orléans, this is a lifeline of trade and economy of the upland region, including agricultural development and consumption of agricultural products of Son La. He also focused on population issues, ethnic groups in Vạn Bú province such as the Thái, Mán, Mèo, their cultural characteristics and their farming habits.

Regarding the establishment of infrastructure and transportation for economic development, including agriculture in the Northwest and Son La, this issue has also been mentioned in some studies such as that of KUNITZ. F, "La haute Riviere Noire. Ses voies de communication avec le haut Fleuve Rouge", Bulletin de la société de géographie de Rochefort, X, 1888-1889 (Upstream of the Da River: Roads connecting this region with the upper Red River region) (KUNITZ. F, 1889). This study mainly deals with the limitations and difficulties of traffic connecting Son La, Lai Chau, Dien Bien with other regions, especially the delta and upper Laos. Limitation on traffic is also the most difficult for economic development in general, agriculture in particular and commerce of this region. The authors also mentioned the colonial government's efforts to invest in renovating and renewing some connecting routes between Son La and Hanoi, Son La to other "châu," etc., in order to develop the colonization process.

With regard to domestic authors, the studies on the land issue of Son La in feudal period are mostly studies of ethnographers which mainly refer to the ownership of public fields by the Thái people in the Northwest region in general. Specifically:

When mentioning the land of Thái people, in the book named Ethnic groups in Northwest of Vietnam, a group of authors including Cam Trong, Bui Tinh, Nguyen Huu Ung affirms that "The mường's fields are generally public fields under the supreme management of the "tạo"" (Cam Trong, Bui Tinh, Nguyen Huu Ung, 1975, page 111).

The author Khong Dien published the work named The socio-economic characteristics of the northern mountainous ethnic groups and also affirmed that "For the Thái people, until 1945, they did not have the concept of private land ownership. Land management concentrated on the aristocratic ruling apparatus in the "châu" of "mường" (Khong Dien 1996: 186).

Thus, from the perspective of ethnography, the aforementioned authors have sketched and reconstructed an overall picture of the agricultural economy of the Thái ethnic group in the Northwest and affirmed that the public ownership over the fields is typical of the land ownership of the Thái people in the Northwest, as well as confirmed the management role of the Thái people in this area.

In addition, some works mentioned the dominance of Thái noble families in Son La. For example, in the article "Initially research on social regimes in Tày, Nùng and Thái regions under French colonial rule," author La Van Lo affirmed: "In the Thái region, which is the Northwest region and the upper reaches of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An, the "phìa, tạo" regime was maintained until before the August Revolution. The aristocratic hereditary families dominated each region, such as the Đèo family in Lai Chau and Phong Tho, the Bạc – Cầm family in Thuan Chau, the Cầm family in Mai Son, the Sa family in Moc Chau, and the Hoàng family in Yen Chau (the Northwest autonomy area) ..." (La Van Lo, 1964, page 43).

Or when referring to the domination of the families of Thái people over the "châu" and "mường" in the feudal period, the work named 110 years of Son La Province (1895 - 2005) affirmed that "Power and authority in the "châu" in Son La are wholly owned by noble families: the Cầm family and the Lò family in Mai Son, Muong La and Phu Yen; the Hoàng family in Yen Chau, the Sa family in Moc Chau; the Bạc family in Thuan Chau" (Provincial Party Committee - People's Council, People's Committee of Son La province, 2005, page 43).

Recently, author Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy has researched on the land ownership of the families in Son La province in the feudal period through the article named "The situation of land in Son La through the view of the cadastral records in the Gia Long's 4th year (1805)". Through the analysis of 16 cadastral records of Son La province under Gia Long reign when referring to land ownership of the families, the author has commented: "The disparity in the

number of landholders, the average land of landholders, land area and among families in Son La also show the position of families in Son La. In which, the position of families of Thái people such as Cầm, Lò, and Hà is quite significant” (Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy, 2018, page 59).

It can be seen that most of the above works just refer to the role of public land as well as the role of Thái aristocrats in the society in Son La but not study the issue of land ownership of the families. Even if it is mentioned, they just point out the disparity in land ownership of the families in Son La but not explain the relationship in land ownership of the families in order to clarify position and role of the families of Thái people in the economy, politics and society in Son La.

On the basis of inheriting the results from previous studies and studying the cadastral records in the Minh Menh’s 21st year (1840) of 11 communes in 5 “châu” in Son La province today, the article focuses on clarifying land ownership of the families or in other words, the disparity in quantity, level, scale, etc. in land ownership among the families in Son La under Minh Menh reign and almost maintained until the end of the 19th century. On such basic, to a certain extent, the author will explain the causes leading to the disparity in land ownership among the families and point out impacts which are caused from the issue of land ownership of the families, especially the families of Thái people, on the agricultural economy, social issues and political institutions of Son La province during this period.

## 2. Overview about Son La and cadastral records in Minh Menh’s 21st year (1840) in Son La

In the list of cadastral records in the National Achieves No. 1, there are 11 cadastral records in Minh Menh’s 21st year (1840) belonged to territory of Son La Province today. Detailed list of cadastral records is as follows (Please see table 1).

Table 1: List of cadastral records of Son La in Minh Menh’s 21st year (1840)  
(The National Achieves No. 1)

No.	Communes	Symbol	Number of pages
1	Tuong Phu	1911	14
2	Tuong Phong	1914	11
3	Khinh Khoai	1958	8
4	Nam Trinh	1960	8
5	Thanh Binh	1963	7
6	Bac Nhi	1885	16
7	Trinh Nho	1886	15
8	Nhan Ly	2059	8
9	Trinh La	2065	20
10	Dong Minh	2063	11
11	Lo Ty	1888	8

*Resource: The author synthesizes based on the cadastral records in Minh Menh’s 21st year (1840) of 11 communes belonged to territory of Son La today*

Regarding the territory of Son La province during Minh Menh reign, according to Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi No. XXII, Hung Hoa province was recorded as follows: "In the 12th year of Minh Menh, the province was divided, changed to Hung Hoa province, Tam Nong district belonged to Son Tay province was merged to this province... In the 14th year of Minh Menh, Thanh Son and Thanh Thuy districts were separated... In the 1st year of Thieu Tri, “phủ” Dien Bien was added; in the 4th year of Tu Duc, Thanh Son district managed Thanh Thuy district, “châu” Moc managed “châu” Yen, “châu” Mai managed “châu” Da Bac, “châu” Quynh Nhai was merged to “phủ” Dien Bien and managed by “châu” Lai; in the 5th year of Tu Duc, “châu” Luan was merged to “phủ” Dien Bien and managed by “châu” Tuan Giao. Now there are 6 districts and 16 “châu” (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 1971, page 254). “Phủ” Gia Hung consists of 3 districts and 8 “châu”; 3 districts including Tam Nong, Thanh Son, Thanh Thuy, 8 “châu” including Phu Yen, Moc, Yen, Mai, Thuan, Mai Son, Da Bac, Son La.

In conclusion, in Minh Menh reign, territory of Son La belonged to “phủ” Gia Hung, Hung Hoa province, included 6 “châu”: Phu Yen, Moc, Yen, Son La, Mai Son, Thuan with 28 communes and “động.” However, as per cadastral records in Minh Menh’s 21st year (1840), only 5 out of 6 “châu” and 11 out of 28 communes were recorded, “châu” Moc were not recorded. It can be seen that land area of Son La province under Minh Menh reign is collected incompletely.

Through 11 cadastral records of Son La in Minh Menh’s 21st year (1840), it can be seen that there is a clear difference in the area of land among the communes. Trinh La commune had the largest land area with 418.7.09.7.0, successfully restored 313.0.09.7.0. Lo Ty commune had the least land area with 18.7.14.0.0 and all of which are cultivated fields. Besides, through the statistics table, all of Son La's land is a one-crop field. Please see table 2.

Table 2: Situation of land in Son La province from cadastral records in Minh Menh’s 21st year (1840)

o.	Commune	Private land	Cultivated land	Successful restoration	Level
	Tuong Phu	78.3.07.4. 0	70.3.07. 4.0	8.0.00. 0.0	Ter tiary
	Tuong Phong	66.8.13.2. 0	60.8.13. 2.0	6.0.00. 0.0	Ter tiary
	Khinh Khoai	19.9.04.8. 0	6.7.04.0 .0	13.2.00 .8.0	Ter tiary
	Nam Trinh	49.7.03.2. 0	14.7.00. 0.0	35.0.03 .2.0	Ter tiary
	Thanh Binh	61.6.12.6. 0	13.3.05. 0.0	48.3.07 .6.0	Ter tiary
	Bac Nhi	171.9.02. 0.0	100.2.1 0.0.0	71.6.07 .0.0	Ter tiary
	Trinh Nho	182.2.05. 9.0	100.2.0 0.9.0	82.0.05 .0.0	Ter tiary
	Nhan Ly	111.8.14.7 .0	39.0.14. 0.0	72.8.00 .7.0	Ter tiary
	Trinh La	418.7.09. 7.0	105.7.0 0.0.0	313.0.0 9.7.0	Ter tiary
0	Dong Minh	96.8.05.6. 0	31.8.05. 0.0	65.0.00 .6.0	Ter tiary
	Lo Ty	18.7.14.0. 0	18.7.14. 0.0		Ter tiary
	Total	1277.0.03 .1.01	561.8.1 3.5.0	715.1.0 4.6.0	

Resource: The author synthesizes based on the cadastral records in Minh Menh’s 21st year (1840) of 11 communes belonged to territory of Son La today

At the same time, we also see that the entire land area of 11 communes in 5 “châu” of Son La is private land, the successfully restored land accounts for a large proportion (56% of the total land), no land is uncultivated (See Figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> Stand for 1277 acres 0 poles 03 yards 1 dm 0 cm

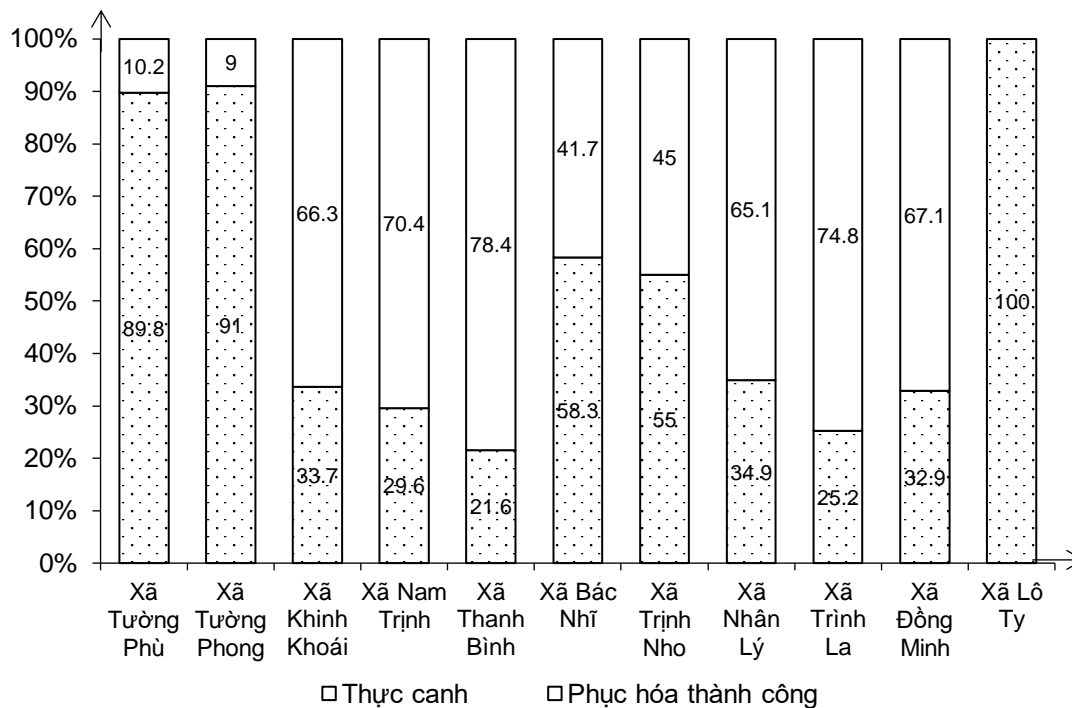


Figure 1: The percentage of cultivated land and successfully restored land in Son La through the cadastral records in Minh Menh's 21st year (1840) (%)

Resource: The author synthesizes based on the cadastral records in Minh Menh's 21st year (1840) of 11 communes belonged to territory of Son La today

### 3. Materials and methods

#### 3.1. Background of the study area

In general, when studying the cadastral records of Son La in Minh Menh's 21st year (1840), it can be seen a clear disparity in land ownership among the families. The land of Son La through the cadastral records in Minh Menh's 21 year focuses on the ownership of a few large families. The total number of landholders is 228 belonging to 24 different families. In which, the families with a large number of landholders include the Lò family with 72 landholders, accounting for 374.1.01.7.0 (accounting for 29.30%), the Hà family with 38 landholders, accounting for 208.1.14.3.0 (16.30%). On the contrary, there are families with only one landholder such as the Lê family, the Đông family, the Lãng family, the Quảng family, the Vinh family, and the Phu family. In addition, none of total of 228 landholders is female and there are no sub-landholders. Please see table 3.

Table 3: Land ownership of families in Son La province through the view of the cadastral records in Minh Menh's 21st year (1840)

No	Family	Total of landholders		Owned land area	
			%		%
1	Lò	72	31.58	374.1.01.7.0	29.30
2	Hà	38	16.67	208.1.14.3.0	16.30
3	Cầm	21	9.21%	102.7.05.2.0	8.04%
4	Hoàng	18	7.89%	128.2.06.8.0	10.04
5	Lương	12	5.26%	44.1.12.1.0	3.45%

6	La	10	4.39%	97.0.00.0.0	7.60%
7	Bac	9	3.95%	50.0.08.2.0	3.92%
8	Danh	6	2.63%	31.0.00.0.0	2.43%
9	Tập	6	2.63%	49.4.11.1.0	3.87%
10	Tùng	5	2.19%	21.2.00.9.0	1.66%
11	Ma	5	2.19%	34.4.07.0.0	2.69%
12	Khuôn g	4	1.75%	16.6.00.0.0	1.30%
13	Đường	4	1.75%	24.5.02.0.0	1.92%
14	Bùi	3	1.32%	20.7.05.9.0	1.62%
15	Đình	3	1.32%	19.6.00.0.0	1.53%
16	Ngô	2	0.88%	8.2.00.0.0	0.64%
17	Nguyễn n	2	0.88%	6.5.02.5.0	0.51%
18	Lưu	2	0.88%	3.8.00.0.0	0.30%
19	Other families	6	2.63%	36.4.00.0.0	2.85%
Total		22	100%	1277.0.03.1.	100%
		8		0	

*Resource: The author synthesizes based on the cadastral records in Minh Menh's 21st year (1840) of 11 communes belonged to territory of Son La today*

### 3.2. Data and analysis

The present study uses the families survey in the original cadastral records kept at the National Archives No. 1 in Hanoi. The 6 families in the Son La were recoded, cross-sectional survey that was sampled using a multi-stage stratified cluster sampling. Details on the survey's methodology and sampling technique are included in Appendix A of the National Archives report. In the report's Appendix A, you can find the questionnaire as well as information about the variables' definitions and measurements. The National Archives is chosen because it is the largest, most comprehensive, and nationally representative survey that collects information on landownership in Vietnam. The level of land concentration according to the families in each commune is shown more clearly. There are communes with only 6 families owning land in a commune such as Bac Nhi commune ("châu" Yen), out of a total of 29 landholders, the Lo family accounts for 17 landholders. This situation is common in almost every "châu."

In addition to gender, age, ethnicity, and the highest level of education held by the family's head, the independent variables include family's size and families' socioeconomic status. Using STATA 21 software, data analysis was carried out using the Pearson Chi-square and logistic regression methods. Due to the binary nature of the dependent variable, logistic regression was used to identify the relevant predictors of land ownership among households (Gobin et al., 2002). To determine if the connections between the predictor and dependent variables are statistically significant, a p-value of at least 0.05 was used.

Table 4: Descriptive statistic of variables

Variables	Descriptio n	Mi n	Ma x	Mean	SD
Total family	Continuou s variable	0	12	2.261	1.376

Families' socioeconomic status	1 = poorest, 2 = poorer, 3 = middle, 4 = richer and 5 = richest	1	6	3.089	1.986
Total landholder	0 = No, 1 = yes	0	59	4.578	3.398
Gender of household head	1 = Male, 2 = Female	1	2	1.181	0.239
Age of family's head	Continuous variable	15	82	44.78	14.76
Families size	Continuous variable	1	68	4.987	3.987
Highest education level	0 = no formal education, 1 = primary, 2 = secondary, and 3 = higher	0	3	1.541	1.103
Ownership of livestock	0 = No, 1 = Yes	0	1	0.544	0.397

Resource: The author synthesizes based on the cadastral records in Minh Menh's 21st year (1840) of 11 communes belonged to territory of Son La today

#### 4. Results and discussion

##### 4.1. Land ownership of families

The results table 4 show that in Son La, land ownership is under the large families of Thái people such as the Lò family, Hà family and Cầm family. It is result of the fact that Thái people are the largest population in the province (until 1932, the Thái people accounted for 74.5% of population of Son La province)<sup>2</sup> and the historical nature when Thái people lived in Son La area in particular, the Northwest in general.

Table 5: Land ownership of families in each commune of Son La according to cadastral records in Minh Menh's 21st year (1840)

No.	Commune	Total family	Total landholder	The family with largest number	The highest number of landholders
"Châu" Phu Yên					
1	Tuong Phu	7	23	Lò	10
2	Tuong Phong	4	19	Cầm	7
"Châu" Thuan					
3	Khinh Khoai	5	6	Luu	2
4	Nam Trinh	3	8	Bạc	5
5	Thanh Binh	6	10	Bạc, Lò	3
"Châu" Yen					
6	Bac Nhi	6	29	Lò	17

<sup>2</sup> See more at: Tong Thanh Binh, 2017, page 82



7	Trinh Nho	11	29	Lò	10
"Châu" Son La					
8	Nhan Ly	5	16	Lò	6
9	Trinh La	12	59	Lò	15
10	Dong Minh	5	19	Hà	10
"Châu" Mai Son					
11	Lo Ty	4	10	Lò	5

*Resource: The author synthesizes based on the cadastral records in Minh Menh's 21st year (1840) of 11 communes belonged to territory of Son La today*

During the period from the 9th to the 13th centuries, the Thái people in the Tibetan Plateau (Tibet - China) for various reasons sought to migrate to the south to the Northwest. According to Quam tô mường Mường La (The story of "bản mường" of Muong La) tells about the process of Lang Chuong and a part of Thái people going to Son La, Lai Chau, the first place Lạng Chuợng came to occupy was Muong La (Son La). When he came here, there was a conflict with the Xá people in Muong La: "Here the "Chúa" had to fight with the Xá people led by General Khun Quảng. The "Chúa" won in the end, but Muong La's land was too narrow and "bản, mường" was so small that it couldn't be taken". Therefore, Lạng Chuợng pulled his army to Muong Muoi (Thuan Chau), forcing the Xá leader named Ắm poi to pay taxes to the "Chúa". The wars of the Thái with other ethnic groups, especially the Xá, created their new land areas or the establishment of "bản" and "mường". After the "bản" and "mường" of the Thái people are formed, they will be ruled by the "Chúa" (refer to the landlord, the Thái people call it as "Châu" or "Pú Châu"). "Chúa" sent his descendants to different lands to establish "bản", "mường" and take over new lands. Since then, the whole land has been under the common ownership of the "bản mường" and the head is "Chúa". All fields, regardless of the source (collectively exploited during the war, won by local residents, further exploited, etc.) of anyone later on are fields of "mường" (public fields). "Private field here is almost nonexistent or even insignificant and is considered as illegal" (La Van Lo, Dang Nghiem Van, 1968, page 215).

After holding a dominant position in the "châu mường", the Lò Cầm aristocracy took the public surnames: Cầm (or Khẳm), Bạc Cầm, Hoàng, Đèo (or Điều Khẳm), Tao (or Đèo, Đào). Quam tô mường Mường Chanh- Mai Son (the story of muong village of Mường Chanh - Mai Son) has a passage that says: "When the Thái people came to Mường Lò, the families of Lò, Lường, Cà, Vi, Mè, Lêm, etc., worshiped the Lường family as "mo" and the Lò family as "tạo". The development history of Northwestern society has progressed on an extremely complicated process and finally a branch of the Lò family has occupied a dominant position. One branch of the Lò family has become aristocracy, recognized by the society with an expression "they were born to own the golden land" (in Thái language: "họ bầu chầu cắ"). The Lò Cầm (or Khẳm) family, which means Lò Vàng, was separated from the Lò family, so people named them Lò Luông, which means Lò Bé, and Lò Lặc, which means Lò with the custom of "stealing"". In the aristocratic genealogy, the family name Lò Cầm (or Khẳm) is still recorded. In Son La, the "châu mường" are ruled by aristocratic families: the Cầm family, the Lò family in Mai Son, Muong La, and Phu Yen; the Hoàng family in Yen Chau, the Sa family in Moc Chau; Bạc family in Thuan Chau (Provincial Party - People's Council, People's Committee of Son La province, 2005, page 43).

According to customary law, aristocrats must hold the top positions of the "mường" on the principle that "the title of landlord belongs to a certain aristocratic family, hereditary. People cannot be lords under any circumstances. If the aristocratic family dies or is punished for their crimes against the state, the people have to look for the lord elsewhere to replace" (Dang Nghiem Van 1987: 29). As is the case in Muong Mua (Mai Son) "Cầm Phần died with no inheritance. The "toàn mường" elder had to go and pick up his brother, Mr. Cầm Nguyên from Muong Chanh (an outer village of Muong Mua) to replace" (Ngo Duc Thinh, Cam Trong 1999: 192). Therefore, the noble family is responsible for managing the "bản mường." Representing the aristocratic family is a landlord "the landlord is head of the ruling apparatus in terms of military, economic, cultural and even religious aspects" (La Van Lo, Dang Nghiem Van 1968: 219).

#### 4.2. Regarding ownership scale

In consideration of the average land ownership of the families, the families with the largest land area such as the Lò family and Hà family, the average land area is not large. Each landholder of the Lò family owns 5.20 acres of land at average, each landholder of the Hà family owns 5.48 acres on average. Meanwhile, each landholder of the La family owns 9.7 acres on average, each landholder of the Xí family owns 8.23 acres on average, etc. There are also families where the ratio of the number of landholders and the average land is low such as Luru family with 2 landholders and an average of 1.90 acres per landholder. To see the difference in average land ownership among families in Son La, please see Figure 2.

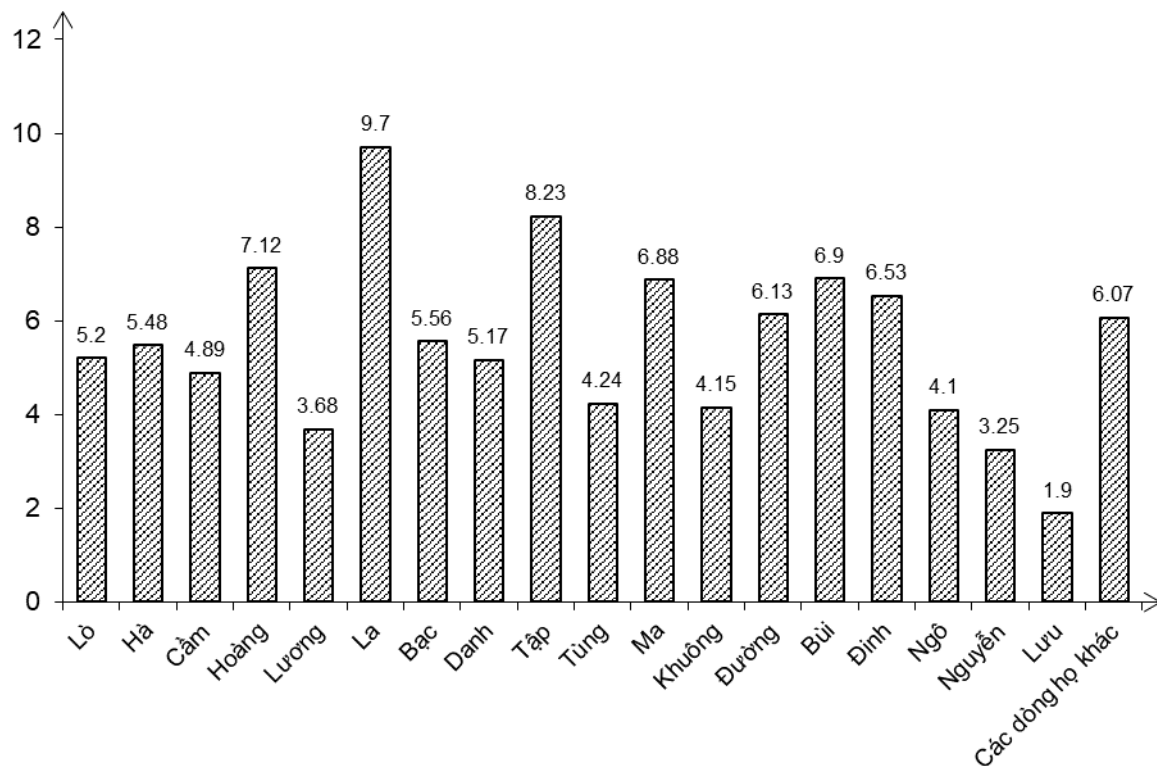


Figure 2: Average land ownership among families in accordance with cadastral records in Minh menh's 21st year (1840)

Resource: The author synthesizes based on the cadastral records in Minh Menh's 21st year (1840) of 11 communes belonged to territory of Son La today

Within large family-based landholders in Son La, there is only one landholder who own the highest land area of 14.7.00.0.0, it is Lò family. Most of the family-based landholders are small and medium landholders. Let take a case of the Lò family as an example. Under Minh Menh reign, 72 landholders of Lò family own a field area of 374.1.01.7.0. On average, each landholder owns about 5.20 acres of land. In which, the landholders of less than 6 acres are quite large, including 56 landholders, accounting for 77.78%, owning a land area of 214.0.00.5.0 (accounting for about 57.17% of the total land area). There were 6 landholders who own more than 6 acres, accounting for 8.33%, owning the land area of 64.0.01.2 (accounting for 11.76% of the total land area). There were 8 landholders who own more than 10 acres, accounting for 11.12%, owning a land area of 96.1.00.0.0 (accounting for 25.69% of the total land area). The biggest landholder owns land area of 14.7.00.0.0, the smallest landholder owns land area of 1.1.03.0.0. Please see Table 5.

Table 6: Land ownership scale of Lò family in son La according to cadastral records in Minh Menh's 21st year (1840)

Ownership scale	Number of landholders		Owned land area	
1 – 2 acres	3	4.17%	5.0.03.0.0	1.34%
2 – 3 acres	11	15.28%	27.3.10.8.0	7.30%
3- 4 acres	18	25.00%	66.5.00.7.0	17.78%

4 – 5 acres	18	25.00%	81.4.02.0.0	21.76%
5 – 6 acres	6	8.33%	33.6.14.0.0	8.99%
6 – 7 acres	1	1.39%	6.2.00.0.0	1.66%
7 – 8 acres	5	6.94%	37.8.01.0.0	10.10%
8 – 9 acres	0	0.00%	0	0%
9 – 10 acres	2	2.78%	20.0.00.0.0	5.35%
10 – 11 acres	4	5.56%	41.6.00.0.0	11.12%
11- 12 acres	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
12- 13 acres	2	2.78%	26.0.00.0.0	6.95%
13 – 14 acres	1	1.39%	13.8.00.0.0	3.69%
14 – 15 acres	1	1.39%	14.7.00.0.0	3.93%
15 – 16 acres	0	0.00%	0	0,00%
Total	72	100%	374.1.01.7.0	100%

*Resource: The author synthesizes based on the cadastral records in Minh Mennh's 21st year (1840) of 11 communes belonged to territory of Son La today*

Thus, in the land ownership structure of the families in Son La, there were mainly small and medium landholders, few large land landholders, and no female landholder. In case of the Lò family who owns the largest land area of 374.1.01.7.0, there are only 8 landholders who own more than 10 acres, accounting for 11.12%, owning a land area of 96.1.00.0.0 (about 25.69% of the total land area). The main reason is the land in this period was under the management of Thái aristocrats and it was the common land of the “mường” (“ruộng toàn mường”). The existence of the public field system is recognized by Thái customary law. Through the study of "Traditions of Black Thái people in Thuan Chau" and "Luật lệ bản mường Mai Sơn" in Thái customary law in Vietnam by author group of Ngo Duc Thinh and Cam Trong, the entire content of the laws does not mention any type of private field, but only refers to the division of public land or the Thái people called it as the “ruộng toàn mường”. The “phia tạo” and the servants in the “bản, mường” divide common land to the people depending on their status in society. As a result, the area of land to be divided has been specified into "parts" corresponding to the position of the divided people in society and the area of land in the “bản, mường”. Therefore, there are disparities in land ownership among Thái families and within Thái families themselves, and most of them are small and medium landholders<sup>3</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

The difference in land ownership among families in Son La through the study of cadastral records in Minh Mennh's 21st year (1840) has shown the process of land concentration in some families and in most localities in Son La during that time, the land was held by certain families, all of them were Thái people: Lò, Hà, Cẩm, etc. There were localities where only 3 families hold all the land. The disparity in land ownership proves the different degrees and ability to influence among the families on economic and social issues in Son La during this period.

First of all, regarding the agricultural economy: In land ownership in Son La province, it could be seen the important role of Thái people, especially Thái aristocratic families and servants worked in the government apparatus. The role of this aristocracy is more clearly shown through the customary laws of the Thái people. In general, the land belongs to the common ownership of the “bản, mường” managed by the Thái nobles (“Phia, tạo, chầu mường”) and then divided to the villages. In the villages, there is a system of servants taking care of different fields and continue to divide the land for different segments of the population (including the Thái people as well as other ethnic groups). Thus, the division of “ruộng toàn mường” to the aristocracy, to the servants, to the peasants led to the appearance of many types of land. Each type of and corresponded to a specific population in society. In particular, in order to maintain the domination apparatus, the “phia tạo” and servants relied on the “ruộng gánh vác” or exploitation of the free peasants in the “bản, mường” as the basis for their existence. And the part of Thái free peasants accepted the obligation of taking care of “bản, mường”'s jobs to receive cultivated land, complying with customary laws set forth by the domination apparatus. The division of land and the organization of farming on different types of land as in Thái customary law made agricultural production fragmented and small, agriculture

<sup>3</sup> See more at: The method of dividing land of Thái people to servants (Ngo Duc Thinh, Cam Trong, 1999, pages 72-98).

can only partially meet local needs without regular exports. In other words, agricultural production in this period was self-sufficient.

Ethnic groups in Son La rely on farming as their main support, including wet farming and upland cultivation. The characteristics of the wet-agricultural economy led the Thái people to soon settle in lowland areas, which are convenient for irrigation and production. Meanwhile, the Thái people was the majority of the population in Son La, the other ethnic groups especially Kháng, Xinh Mun, La Ha, and Khơ Mú are dependent on and have to work as “*cuông, nhóc, pua pái*” for the Thái people. The Mông people do not have to work as “*cuông*” but they also have to pay tax in kind for the “*chầu mường*”. The Chinese people and the Kinh people, if they live in the Thái villages, have to submit in kind when requested<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, although the fields of Thái people are not as large as upland fields, they are the basis for determining all social relations. In other words, from the basis of the field, it causes the society to be divided into the rich and the poor, the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled.

Secondly, regarding political and social issues: The land ownership of the Thái family has led to the long-term existence of the regime of “*phia tạo*” in the “*bản, mường*”. The domination of Thái families as a result of land exploitation and establishment of “*bản, mường*” has led to the domination of the Thái families on the social structure of Son La province. Society has divided into two parts: one side is the ruling class represented by the nobility with responsibility for managing the “*bản, mường*”; one side is the ruled class including all farmers in the “*bản, mường*” with responsibility for working to take care of “*mường*”’s jobs. In comparison of the aristocracy in Thái society with the landlord class in feudal society, it can be seen that these are all parts that are capable of exploiting workers on the basis of land. Landlords are those who own a lot of land, ownership is determined in the documents, so they have the right to buy and sell land. Landlords distributed the fields to tenant, farmers and collect rents in return or because the tenant and farmers had very little or no land, had to farm and pay rent or pay in kind (rice, money) to the landlord. In other words, the landlords obtained the peasants' rents when the peasants received the land from the landlords. The relationship between landlords and tenants was only an economic exploitation relationship. On the contrary, the “*phia tạo*” does not take over the object of labor, but the working person. People are of the “*tạo*” because “*tạo*” represent the “*bản, mường*”. In other words, this is domination and exploitation of both body and soul. “*People live as serfs for them; When they die, they are still ruled by the "soul" of the landlord. Their lives depend entirely on the landlord*” (La Van Lo, Dang Nghiem Van, 1968, page 219). Thus, the Thái aristocrats relied on the management function of the “*bản, mường*” to obtain all labor and employee. A type of exploitation of the entire population “*by tribute and unpaid labor*” with various degrees applied to difference segments of the population, depending on their status in society as described above in terms of rights and obligations when receiving the “*ruộng toàn mường*”. According to Cam Trong, “*this is a very dangerous way of domination and exploitation. It affects directly the relationship between people and people. It directly forces people to bow their heads to injustice. It need not go from grasping the objects of labor to depriving labor, forcing workers to comply, because there is no object of production. It goes from the most common thing - the state, to using that common ground to deprive production power*” (Cam Trong, 1978, page 265).

However, the domination of Thái aristocrats with the “*phia tạo*” regime did not lead to severe social conflicts; until the French colonial invasion, there was no struggle of ethnic farmers against the “*phia tạo*” regime. This is due to some following reasons:

For the Thái people, they believe the “*phia tạo*” regime as supreme. “*Phia tạo*” are the people who led them to occupy land, build “*mường*”, help them have a stable life here. The Thái people think that customary law is the law, and they strictly comply with the customary law set forth by “*phia tạo*”. They think the exploitation of the “*phia tạo*”, the nobility, servants to the people as a duty. People have an obligation to repay the “*phia tạo*” for their establishment of the “*mường*” and government which help the people have a stable life. “*Mường and landlord are considered as an identical concepts. In order to establish a “mường”, there must be a “tạo”; the “mường” is stable when the “Chúa” is strong*” (La Van Lo, Dang Nghiem Van, 1968, page 218).

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<sup>4</sup> See more at: Regulations on “*cuông, nhóc*” in “*châu*” Thuan (Ngo Duc Thinh, Cam Trong, 1999, pages 134-138)

For other ethnic groups, especially the Khơ Mú, Kháng, La Ha, and Xinh Mun people, "almost none of them reside in an area which is concentrated and built into an administrative unit above "bản" (Dang Nghiem Van, Nguyen Truc Binh, Nguyen Van Huy, Thanh Thien, 1972, page 27). They did not have a "mường", so they had to comply with the Thái feudal landlords, live in Thái domains and accept the unspecified labor and tribute of the Thái feudal class.

For the Mông people, they appeared in Son La later than other ethnic groups, the Thái people carried out different exploitation methods to the Mong people because the Mong village was more stable, the social organization was more clearly divided, the upland farming was more developed than the Khơ Mú, Kháng, Xinh Mun, and La Ha people. They are allowed to "... manage forests, upland fields and exploit local forest products. They organized their own villages led by their chiefs with their own rules and regulations" (Dang Nghiem Van, Dinh Xuan Lam, 1979, page 88). While the other ethnic groups collectively known as "Xá", have to work as "cuông, nhốc, pụa pải" for the ruling Thái class, the Mong people only have to pay taxes in kind. In the book named "Luật lệ bản mường Mai Sơn", it is stated: "The Mông people came here after the Thái people about 300 years. They cultivated in the high mountains, had not to work for any servant, but they had to pay tax to the court. Whenever the "mường" needs to do something like worship, they had to donate pigs and chickens. When the judge-built houses, they had to bring planks to make his doors, walls, and windows. They did not have to do other things" (Ngo Duc Thinh, Cam Trong, 1999, page 136).

Thus, as a result of the efforts of establishment of "mường", skillful governance policy applicable to each part of the population, the conflicts between the ethnic groups and the Thái people, as well as the conflicts between the residents in the Thái ethnic group does appear, of course, but not as profound as in other regions. Therefore, there was a few fluctuations, contradictions, conflicts in Son La. Later, when the French colonialists came to dominate Son La, they basically kept the old ruling apparatus under the "phịa tạo" regime because of these advantages.

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