

## Abstract

Anthropological research is interested in "property rights" within the social relations that define human behaviour and the use and possession of surrounding natural resources. Property rights is not static but its forms are evolving according to the different conditions of society. As a consequence, this has resulted in changes in the relationship between humans in society throughout history.

This study titled "Common property rights regimes: Dynamics of management of freshwater fisheries resources in the communities of the Lower Songkhram River Basin" attempts to explain the changes in property rights regime in the freshwater fisheries resources in Nong Nam Yai community in the lower Songkram River Basin. Using the methodology of cultural ecology as the research framework, the study looks into the social organisations, culture and beliefs of the community in managing the freshwater fisheries resources, the community adaptation in the context of changes to the local ecosystem and, using a political economy approach, the study looks into the external conditions relating to economics and politics.

The research found that Thailand's economic development during the ten-year period 1987-1997 has resulted in changes involving greater complexity and diversity in the ways of livelihood of the local community. The practice of fishing as a means to barter for essential goods has changed to fishing for cash income along with the increased migration of community members to cities and towns as labour. At the same time, the community has also continued rice cultivation as well as fishing and collecting plants from the seasonally flooded forest for their daily life. A household does not survive only through a single means of production as it was necessary for the community to initiate new forms of property rights regimes. These new property rights regimes have evolved to provide greater distribution of the rights in the use of natural resources and more appropriate to the economic conditions both of the members of the community as well as outsiders.

Other political conditions such as the changes in the policy for local governance that have emphasised increased decentralisation of authority in the management of natural resources and community self-reliance for cash income have resulted in changes in the property rights regimes from private or household property to common property rights. The community has established new institutional arrangements by mixing local institutions such as community beliefs with formal state institutions such as the Village Committee or Subdistrict Administrative Organisation. These changes to the property rights regimes throughout the decade 1987-1997 did not evolve smoothly but involved struggle, negotiation, compromise and flexibility between the traditional institutions that possessed natural resources with the evolving new institutional arrangements.

This research also found that the local community neither relied on one particular kind of property rights regimes nor clearly divided the property rights regimes (state, private and commons). On the other hand, the management system for property rights of the local community was diverse and overlapping while the character of the

property rights regimes was reversible viz. from private to commons and vice versa. The research, other than establishing the reality of complex property rights in practice, also points to the necessity of complex property rights in order that humans can live together in society. Only giving importance to either state or individual property rights could prevent the decentralized use of natural resources by the community and result in injustice.