

Research on the Influencing Factors of New-Type Professional Farmers to Broad-Scale Land Management Willingness: Evidence from 327 Survey Respondents in Hainan

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Abstracts: Focusing on the group of new-type professional farmers and based on the ABC theory of attitude, this study systematically explores the influence of the Land tactic institutional cognition and the Land value consciousness on the willingness of new-type professional farmers to operate Broad-scale land management, and analyzes in-depth the mediating role of Place Dependence between the above variables and the willingness to operate land on a large scale. Based on the empirical data of 327 new-type professional farmers in the region of Hainan Province, the study used structural equation modeling (SEM) to reveal the influence mechanism from the perspective of organizational behavior. The study found that both Land tactic institutional cognition and land value consciousness significantly and positively affect place dependence; meanwhile, place dependence plays a mediating role between Land tactic institutional cognition, Land value consciousness and Broad-scale land management willingness operation. Therefore, enhancing the willingness of new-type professional farmers to operate land on a large scale is an important part of the strategy to promote China's rural revitalization, and is of great significance in promoting the transformation of agricultural modernization and rural revitalization. This paper further puts forward the following tactic recommendations: growing the team of new-type professional farmers, enhancing the added value of agricultural products, strengthening the efforts of land transfer and centralized management, and reinforcing the Place dependence on emotional education.

Keywords: Broad-scale Land Management Willingness; Land Value Consciousness; Land Tactic Institutional Cognition; Place

Dependence; New-type Professional Farmers

1. Introduction

Consolidating and perfecting the basic business system in rural areas, developing a new type of rural collective economy, developing new types of agricultural business entities and socialized services, and developing moderate-scale operations in agriculture are important strategic plans for the development of agriculture, rural areas and farmers in the new era. Adequate scale operation of agriculture is an effective way and inevitable trend to improve the efficiency of agricultural production and promote the development of agricultural modernization in the new era. According to the results of the Third Agricultural census, the number of small farmers in the country accounts for more than 98% of the main body of agricultural business, and the area of arable land operated by small farmers accounts for 70 % of the total area of arable land; there are 230 million farming households in the country, with an average household size of 7.8 acres of business, and 210 million households operating arable land of less than 10 acres of land. China's agriculture is still mainly small farmers scattered farming, the scale of agricultural moderate scale operation is still very small, the need for land transfer and other ways to further concentrate the farmland, to create conditions for the moderate scale operation of agriculture, and according to China's land contracting policy, the transfer of land must adhere to the principle of voluntary and remunerative in accordance with the law, and the transfer of land shall not be contrary to the will of the farmer. Consequently only by stimulating the endogenous motivation of farmers to operate land on a large scale from a cognitive point of view can we open up the space for the development of agricultural scales.

China issued the Circular on the Fourteenth

Five-Year Plan for Promoting Modernization of Agriculture and Rural Areas in 2022, which re-emphasized “adherence to the status of farmers as the mainstay of the economy”. With the continuous progress of agricultural production technology, the higher the requirements for agricultural management personnel, new professional farmers will be the main body of China's agricultural management. As the proportion of new professional farmers in the agricultural production population is steadily increasing, and land is the foundation on which their survival depends, the willingness of new-type professional farmers to operate land on a large scale has become one of the key elements in effectively promoting rural revitalization. The exploration of governance models for land issues is an important strategic consideration that needs to be made in the process of rural revitalization.

Therefore, this research focuses on two types of subjective mindset of new-type professional farmers, land value consciousness and Land policy institutional cognition, based on the perspective of organizational behavior, by constructing a “cognitive-emotional-behavioral” analytical framework, we empirically test the mediating transmission mechanism of Place dependence between subjective mindset and the Broad-scale land management willingness, so as to reveal the psychological drivers of decision-making of micro subjects in the process of agricultural modernization. This will consolidate the foundation for constructing the Hainan Free Trade Port, steadily advance the rural revitalization strategy, and enable new-type professional farmers to advance toward the common prosperity goal, thereby promoting agricultural modernization development.

2. Theory and Research Hypothesis

2.1 ABC Theory of Attitudes

The ABC theoretical model of attitude consists of three core elements: Cognition, Affect, and Behavior Tendency. The theoretical model posits interconnected among cognition, affect, and behavior, where mobilizing and adjusting intrinsic cognitive-affective factors constitute critical mechanisms for effecting enduring behavioral modifications.

Grounded in the ABC theory of attitude, farmers integrate cognitive and affective factors

through individual characteristics to generate willingness for land scale management. This willingness continues to be modulated by cognitive-affective factors, ultimately forming land transfer decisions toward scale management under the convergence of multidimensional determinants. Specifically, individual cognition is mainly reflected in the level of farmers' knowledge of the nature of land ownership, the potential value of land, and land-related policies and institutions; place dependence manifests as functional dependence arising from farmers' long-term engagement in agricultural production. This affective dimension constitutes an externalized emotional variable that influences specific behavioral generation, thereby establishing a closed-loop dynamic feedback regulation system.

Liang et al conducted an empirical study on purchase intention in live-streaming commerce, grounded in the ABC theory of attitude [1]. Given the demonstrated effectiveness and applicability of this theoretical model in analyzing the formation mechanisms of individual behavioral tendencies, its application to studying land scale management willingness among new-type professional farmers demonstrates both theoretical congruence and practical viability.

2.2 New-type Professional Farmers

New-type professional farmers are market-oriented and professional agricultural operators formed in the process of urbanization and agricultural modernization, with the characteristics of independence and autonomy, intensive and efficient, open mobility, etc. Which is the core force to promote the transformation and upgrading of agriculture, and their willingness to operate the land on a large scale has become one of the key elements for the effective promotion of rural revitalization. Wen defines new-type professional farmers as an agricultural cohort driven by economic return maximization, who engage in modern production, marketing, or service activities with demonstrated entrepreneurship [2]. Traditional farmers are primarily characterized by subsistence-oriented livelihoods and distinct non-urban identities, whereas professional farmers engage agriculture as an industrialized sector, fully integrated into market systems while leveraging all feasible options for return maximization.

Traditional farmers are status farmers in the sociological sense, emphasizing a hierarchical order, while new professional farmers are more similar to rational people in the economic sense, a new type of occupation emerging in the process of agricultural industrialization and even modernization [3-4]. Existing studies have seldom examined the impact of new-type professional farmers' willingness to operate land on a large scale.

2.3 Broad-scale Land Management Willingness

Broad-scale land management willingness refers to the desire, tendency and attitude of farmers to transform the current decentralized operation mode, participate in land operation activities on a large scale, and obtain the benefits of large-scale operation [5]. Currently, scholars mainly study that agricultural subsidy policy has a facilitating effect on land scale operation by looking at the policy system level. Qian et al demonstrated that moderate farmland subsidies effectively mitigate farming constraints, thereby strengthening willingness for land scale management [6]. Cheng empirically identified significant impacts of contemporary land allocation policies on farmers' perceived satisfaction in China [7]. Lü et al systematically synthesized research on farm households' policy cognition, behavioral responses, and land utilization patterns, emphasizing the imperative to incorporate farmers' comprehension of land policy frameworks during implementation [8]. Ma et al. established that land value consciousness exerts positive effects on land transfer intentions and scale management willingness [5]. By improving the agricultural infrastructure and technology adaptation system through an institutional-policy synergy mechanism, we can drive the expansion of land-scale operations [9]. After the realization of preliminary large-scale operation, they can obtain policy support and alleviate the financial constraints of further expanding their operation scale [10].

Consequently, this study proposes:

H1: Land value consciousness positively affects the Broad-scale land management willingness

H2: Land policy institutional cognition positively affects the Broad-scale land management willingness

2.4 Land Value Consciousness and Land Policy Institutional Cognition

Land value consciousness actually expresses the maximum use of land to create value and maximize value. Under the premise that the collective ownership of rural land remains unchanged, who own the right to use land, as the most basic and independent production and management units, can maximize the use of land to create value [5]. Farmers' profound attachment to land defies singular characterization. As Fei observed, they maintain "an enduring bond with traditions of deriving sustenance directly from the soil" [11]. Consequently, while approaching land through rational economic lenses, farmers retain deep affective connections to their holdings [12]. Under natural economic conditions, competition for land frequently instigates rural and economic conflicts [13]. When land returns increase, rural rooted motivates preferential local employment choices. Crucially, the evolution of farmers' land attitudes constitutes a vital indicator of agricultural modernity [14].

Farmers' cognition of land policy institutional fundamentally determines policy implementation efficacy, as their role as policy enact necessitates accurate comprehension and evaluation of policy substance [15]. This cognitive mediation actualizes the "land-to-the-tiller" ideal, thereby amplifying Broad-scale land management willingness. Post-2000, the proper of land contractual management rights and state-driven institutional reforms have reconfigured villagers' perceptual frameworks, engendering profit-driven consciousness that fuels land resource expansion [16]. These transformations concomitantly reinforce reciprocal farmer-village dependence. Consequently, this study proposes:

H3: Land value consciousness positively affects the Place dependence

H4: Land policy institutional cognition positively affects the Place dependence

2.5 Relationship between Place Dependence and Broad-Scale Land Management Willingness

"Place dependence" refers to a functional emotional dependence that reflects the importance of resources and the facilities they provide for the desired activity [17]. And it leads to a sense of indispensability and indissolubility of the farmers to the countryside,

which ultimately results in a deep sense of place dependence. Yan et al. found that place dependence and place identity have significant negative effects on farmers' land transfer intention; place identity plays a mediating role between place dependence and farmers' land transfer intention [18]. Tang and other studies show that farmers' land sentiment significantly affects land resource allocation [19]. With the advancement of agricultural mechanization and policy support for large-scale operation, enhancing farmers' place attachment can improve their village land scale operation willingness [20]. This study proposes:

H5: Place Dependence positively affects the Broad-scale land management willingness

2.6 The Mediating Role of Place Dependence

The cognitive-psychological processes of new-type professional farmers encompass affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of place attachment, with particular emphasis on how dependency structures shape cognition and behavior. Critically, the affective component constitutes the primary determinant, providing robust explanatory power for the "person-place dependency nexus"[17]. Concurrently, value-based cognition drives decision-making: when anticipated returns from resource-oriented land utilization exceed alternative livelihood options, these farmers elect to remain in hometowns. This choice simultaneously mitigates occupational adversities associated with migrant labor and facilitates familial obligations, thereby reinforcing territorial dependency.

New-type professional farmers exhibit heightened attentiveness to national land policies, anticipating agricultural support policies or stabilized contractual rights to facilitate optimized land utilization and long-term planning for enhanced agricultural returns. Consequently, their policy cognition manifests exceptional clarity [20]. In recent years, local governments have intensified agrarian subsidies and secure tenure provisions, ensuring the implementation of long-term land use strategies that elevate sustained land-based returns. These institutional arrangements reinforce place dependence while consolidating agricultural career commitment. As such dependency intensifies, these farmers demonstrate increased willingness for enduring agricultural engagement, pursuing augmented returns through expanded land scale management [21].

Large-scale operation is the only way to realize agricultural and rural modernization [22]. Thus, this study proposes:

H6a: Place dependence mediates between Land value consciousness and Broad-scale land management willingness

H6b: Place dependence mediates between Land policy institutional cognition and Broad-scale land management willingness

Based on the above theoretical analysis and research hypotheses, the theoretical model of this study is shown in Figure 1

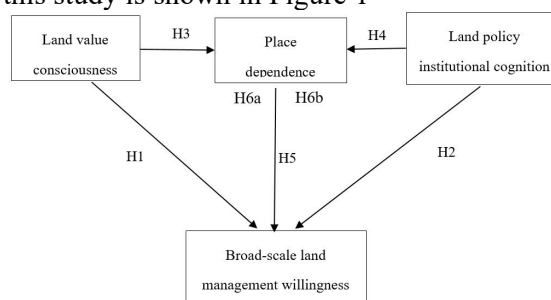


Figure 1. Theoretical Model of This Study

3. Research Methodology and Design

3.1 Questionnaire Design

To ensure instrument reliability and validity, this study employs established scales from prior literature. Land value consciousness and Broad-scale land management willingness were measured using Ma et al.'s 8-item scale [5]. Place dependence was assessed via Williams' 6-item instrument [23], while Land policy institutional cognition adopted Zhong et al.'s 6-item measure [15]. All constructs—land value consciousness, land policy institutional cognition, place dependence, and broad-scale land management willingness—were operational using 7-point Likert scales anchored as: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat disagree, 4=neutral, 5=somewhat agree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree.

3.2 Data Collection

This study employed convenience sampling to distribute questionnaires online to new-type professional farmers within Hainan Province. Participants were operationally defined as: farmers possessing upper secondary education or higher, or those with less education but having completed at least two agricultural training programs accumulating to over 60 days. Questionnaires were administered anonymously, ensuring no collection of personally identifiable

information. Participants were explicitly informed that responses would solely serve scientific research purposes. a total of 513 questionnaires were disseminated, with 350 returned (response rate: 68.2%). After eliminating incomplete or carelessly completed instruments, 327 valid questionnaires were retained, representing 93.4% of returned surveys.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1 Measurement Models

4.1.1 Reliability and validity assessment

Hooper et al. established that factor loading exceeding 0.45 are acceptable, while values above 0.6 indicate adequate item reliability [24]. As presented in Table 1, all items demonstrated

factor loading > 0.6, confirming robust item-level reliability. Composite reliability (CR) reflects internal consistency within latent constructs. Following Fornell and Larcker, CR > 0.6 and average variance extracted (AVE) > 0.5 denote acceptable thresholds [25]. Table 1 reveals: CR values for all constructs exceeded 0.6. AVE for land value consciousness, Place dependence, and Broad-scale land management willingness surpassed 0.5. Land policy institutional cognition AVE = 0.425, notably, Fornell and Larcker emphasized that 0.5 is not an absolute cutoff; when AVE is marginally below 0.5 (as observed) while CR > 0.6, convergent validity remains acceptable [25]. Collectively, these results substantiate the reliability and validity of the instrument (Table 1).

Table 1. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Title	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Land value consciousness		0.832	0.865	0.619
LVC1	0.735			
LVC2	0.702			
LVC3	0.790			
LVC4	0.904			
Land policy institutional cognition		0.807	0.815	0.425
LPIC1	0.618			
LPIC2	0.718			
LPIC3	0.675			
LPIC4	0.650			
LPIC5	0.631			
LPIC6	0.611			
Place dependence		0.859	0.895	0.588
PD1	0.836			
PD2	0.706			
PD3	0.790			
PD4	0.768			
PD5	0.730			
PD6	0.764			
Broad-scale land management willingness		0.852	0.876	0.640
LM1	0.748			
LM2	0.834			
LM3	0.794			
LM4	0.821			

Distinguishing validity means that there is only a low degree of correlation or a significant difference between the variable represented by the construct and the variables represented by other constructs, and this study refers to Fornell

and Larcker's discriminant criterion [25], and as shown in Table 2, all the question items corresponding to the variables have distinguishing validity.

Table 2. Distinguishing Validity

Dimension	Land policy institutional cognition	Land value consciousness	Place dependence	Broad-scale land Management willingness
Land policy institutional cognition	0.652			
Land value consciousness	0.396**	0.787		

Place dependence	0.417**	0.535**	0.767	
Broad-scale land management willingness	0.266**	0.214**	0.262**	0.800

Note: *** denotes $p < 0.001$, ** denotes $p < 0.01$, * denotes $p < 0.05$.

4.1.2 Common method bias assessment

To address potential common method bias, Harman's single-factor test was employed for common method variance examination. Principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on all items measuring the four primary variables, extracting factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1 [26]. The results indicated that the first principal component accounted for 25.329% of the total variance, which is below the 50% critical threshold. This suggests no significant evidence of substantial common method bias in this study.

4.2 Structural Models

4.2.1 Model fit indices assessment

The model fit indices demonstrate acceptable psychometric properties: $\chi^2/df = 2.122$ (< 3.0 threshold). GFI=0.908 (> 0.90 criterion). RMSEA=0.059 (< 0.08 cutoff). CFI, IFI, and TLI all exceed 0.90. Collectively, these indices satisfy established benchmarks for good model fit, confirming the structural model's robustness.

4.2.2 Regression analysis

As presented in Table 3, land value consciousness exerted a significant direct effect on land scale management willingness ($\beta = 0.196$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H1. Land policy cognition significantly predicted land scale management willingness ($\beta = 0.325$, $p < 0.001$), confirming Hypothesis H2. Land value consciousness demonstrated a significant direct effect on place attachment ($\beta = 0.345$, $p < 0.001$), validating Hypothesis H3. Land policy cognition showed significant predictive power on place attachment ($\beta = 0.350$, $p < 0.001$), substantiating Hypothesis H4. Finally, place attachment had a significant direct effect on land scale management

willingness ($\beta = 0.158$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis H5.

Table 3. Path Regression Analysis

Path	β	S.E.	C.R.	p	Hypothesis
LVC→LM	0.196	0.058	3.358	***	H1 Supported
LPIC→LM	0.325	0.088	3.685	***	H2 Supported
LVC→PD	0.345	0.051	6.812	***	H3 Supported
LPIC→PD	0.350	0.077	4.544	***	H4 Supported
PD→LM	0.158	0.062	2.545	**	H5 Supported

Note: LVC=Land Value Consciousness, LPIC=Land Policy Institutional Cognition, PD=Place Dependence, LM=Broad-scale land management willingness

Note: *** denotes $p < 0.001$, ** denotes $p < 0.01$, * denotes $p < 0.05$.

4.2.3 Mediation analysis of place dependence

This study examined the mediating role of place attachment using the established three-step approach and bootstrap method [27-28].

As shown in Table 4, the mediation effect of Land value consciousness on the Broad-scale land management willingness has a bootstrap95% confidence interval of [0.0256,0.1716] (excludes zero), with a mediation effect size of 0.0941 ($p = 0.016$). This indicates that local dependence partially mediates the relationship between land value consciousness and Broad-scale land management willingness, supporting hypothesis H6a.

Similarly, the mediation effect of land policy institutional cognition on this willingness has a bootstrap95% confidence interval of [0.0208, 0.1369] (excludes zero), with a mediation effect size of 0.073 ($p = 0.013$). This suggests that local dependence partially mediates the relationship between land policy institutional cognition and Broad-scale land management willingness, supporting hypothesis H6b.

Table 4. Analysis of Mediating Effects

	Indirect Effect	Se	95% CI	p	Hypothesis
LVC→PD→LM	0.0941	0.0368	[0.0256,0.1716]	0.016**	H6a Supported
LPIC→PD→LM	0.0730	0.0299	[0.0208,0.1369]	0.013**	H6bSupported

Note: LVC=Land Value Consciousness, LPIC=Land Policy Institutional Cognition, PD=Place Dependence, LM=Broad-scale land management willingness

Note: *** denotes $p < 0.001$, ** denotes $p < 0.01$, * denotes $p < 0.05$.

5. Research Findings and Policy Recommendations

5.1 Research Conclusions

This study takes new-type professional farmers as the research object, explores the influence of land policy system cognition and land value consciousness on new professional farmers' land scale operation willingness based on the

ABC theory of attitude, and tests the mediating role of place dependence between land policy system cognition, land value consciousness and farmers' land scale operation willingness. The results of the study show that both land value consciousness and land policy system cognition of new professional farmers have a significant positive effect on place dependence. Specifically, when the value of land rises, the new professional farmers' local dependence emotion will subsequently increase, prompting them to be more rooted in local agriculture. In order to pursue profitability comparable to that of other industries, new professional farmers will inevitably raise their economic awareness of large-scale operation, because land-scale operation can effectively increase the income of individual farmers.

The innovation of this study is to systematically explain the role of cognitive factors (Land Value Consciousness, Land Policy Institutional Cognition, Broad-scale land management willingness) and affective factors (Place Dependence) on the willingness of new professional farmers to engage in large-scale land management. Drawing on local emotional connection is a prerequisite for achieving psycho-cognitive equilibrium and behavioral adaptation, providing individuals with a sense of stability in environmental change. This study introduces place attachment as a mediating variable, revealing a positive association between cognitive factors and place emotion: individuals expect to maintain a lasting and close connection with places, giving them spiritual meaning and thus forming place attachment. Driven by the current policy of large-scale land management in China, high-quality new professional farmers first form cognitive judgments about land value and policy, and then develop an emotion of dependence on place based on their cognition. The deepening of this emotion significantly enhances their willingness to engage in large-scale land management.

5.2 Policy Recommendations

5.2.1 Expand the cohort of New-Type professional farmers

Currently constituting a modest proportion of China's agricultural population, new-type professional farmers are poised to become the vanguard of scaled agricultural operations. Therefore, the training of farmers can be

strengthened to enhance their knowledge and culture. According to the central government's definition of a new type of professional farmer, the training of farmers cannot be limited to training in specialized knowledge of modern agricultural planting techniques, but also needs to be strengthened in the cultural fields of agricultural management, agricultural policy, ecological environment, laws and regulations, so as to enhance the overall cultural quality of agricultural personnel. At the same time to attract highly educated people to return to the countryside to engage in agricultural production. At present, very few of the highly educated people who have been cultivated from the countryside are returning to the countryside to be employed again. This part of the population grew up in the countryside and knows more about agriculture, plus they have received higher education and know more about agricultural technology and business management. If this part of the population can return to the countryside, take root in agriculture, and become a new type of professional farmer, it will certainly greatly promote the economy of scale in agriculture and enhance the efficiency of agricultural production.

5.2.2 Enhance the value of agricultural products
In order to promote large-scale agricultural operations, it is also necessary to further increase the value of agricultural products, which can enhance the new professional farmers' sense of value, enhance their attachment to the countryside, and strengthen their determination to take root in agriculture, while also attracting more senior intellectuals to return to the countryside to develop under the call of countryside attachment, so as to enhance the willingness of the entire agricultural community to scale economy, and to produce more agricultural products contracted by the large-scale farmers.

5.2.3 Strengthen land transfer and land concentration

New professional farmers generally have a strong policy awareness, and they are generally supportive of the policies introduced by the government on land transfer and land concentration, but in actual production, they generally feel that it is difficult to concentrate land, so the government should introduce stronger policies on land transfer and land concentration to create conditions for new

professional farmers to carry out large-scale operations.

5.2.4 Strengthen the local dependence emotion Education land value consciousness and land policy institutional cognitive enhancement can enhance the new-type professional farmers' place dependence emotion, but this is not enough, but also need to be through the specialized local dependence emotion education, to further strengthen the new-type professional farmers on the love of the native land, to enhance their solid hometown, rooted in the determination of agriculture, and also can further enhance their willingness to land scale operation, to Promote agricultural scale operation.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The exclusive reliance on questionnaire data from 327 new-type professional farmers in Hainan Province constrains the geographic generalize ability of findings. Future investigations should expand sampling frames to incorporate diverse provincial contexts, thereby enhancing explanatory power through more representative datasets.

This study examined antecedents of land scale management willingness (land value consciousness, Land policy institutional cognition, Place dependence,) solely through an organizational behavior lens. In the future, the influencing factors affecting the willingness of new-type professional farmers to operate land on a large scale can continue to be explored in depth from the me so and macro perspectives.

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