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**OVER-EMBEDDEDNESS IN AGRICULTURAL MODERNIZATION: POWER
DYNAMICS AND THE EROSION OF FARMER AUTONOMY IN RURAL CHINA**

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State-led agricultural modernization has increasingly relied on subsidy-driven service expansion, yet how these interventions (such as subsidies through a program) reshape rural social relations and affect farmer autonomy once they become institutionalized. This study develops the concept of over-embeddedness to analyze how state intervention transforms cooperative, community-based service arrangements into administratively institutionalized structures that generate asymmetric power relations. Drawing on a case study of Agricultural Production Outsourcing (APOS) in Z town, China, the paper traces a shift from market-based embeddedness to policy-induced reinforcement and ultimately administrative consolidation.

Originally emerging from mutual aid organizations based on relational contracts and reciprocal cooperation, APOS expanded as subsidies and performance

incentives enabled organizational elites to leverage external networks and capture state resources. The recognition of output generality as a positive externality justified scaling-up policies that concentrated support on dominant actors, disrupting the internal logic of embedded cooperation. Meanwhile, in pursuit of accelerated development, actors with richer social networks actively seek external support to enable rapid scale expansion. Together, these forces disrupted the internal logic of embedded cooperation. Through renewed contracting cycles, policy-backed service providers entered asymmetric pre-contractual relationships with fragmented farmers, embedding administrative objectives into production services and gradually transforming cooperation into dependency.

While expansion initially improved efficiency, over-embeddedness generated long-term governance risks: distorted incentive structures, substitution of farmers in core production decisions, loss of production capability, rising dependency, and declining autonomy. Agricultural production thus became contingent on organizational stability and continuous fiscal transfers, creating vulnerabilities and reducing system resilience. These findings offer comparative insights into contested transitions of farming and peasantries globally, highlighting the need to reconsider the balance between state intervention, market competition, and farmer agency.

Palavras-chave: over-embeddedness; agricultural modernization; farmer autonomy; governance; rural china.