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**HOMELAND HUNTING: THE SOCIAL PROCESS OF RETURNING TO
FARMING AND THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF AGRARIAN
TRANSFORMATION**

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Returning home for entrepreneurship has become a significant phenomenon within China's Rural Revitalization, positioning returnees as crucial agents for rural development. This study introduces the concept of "return farmers"—individuals who migrate back from urban to rural areas specifically to engage in agricultural production. Employing a qualitative field research approach, including participant observation on farms and in-depth interviews with return farmers, local officials, and villagers, this research investigates their industrial practices, community interactions, and lived experiences.

The study identifies three distinct typologies among return farmers: family-based, enterprise-based, and commercial-based. The study further explores how these actors mobilize resources, configure their farms, and commercialize products. They channel urban-accumulated capital into agriculture, navigate complex land and labor markets, and leverage—though sometimes contend with

the weakening of—community networks. In their operations, they blend traditional and modern technologies, integrate production with lifestyle, and develop both physical and internet-based markets.

A central finding highlights the identity crisis that many returnees confront, which often stems from a combination of business pressures, family strain, and community friction. Successful reintegration and stable identity formation are shown to depend on achieving economic sustainability, gaining socio-political recognition, and engaging in daily community life, enabling them to bridge urban-rural divides.

Ultimately, this paper argues that return farmers represent a distinct social force in contemporary agrarian transformation. Their practices facilitate the flow of capital, technology, and new production relations into the countryside, fostering diverse organizational forms. Notably, while their operations often follow a capitalist logic, their embedded social identity can mitigate exploitative tendencies, leading to what we term "gentle transformation" through non-destructive development, protective employment, and shared-interest linkages. Research points out that the inherent fluidity of migration means their long-term settlement is not guaranteed; therefore, sustaining a positive urban-rural circulation calls for deeper and more supportive institutional and social reforms.

Palavras-chave: migration; return farmers; returning home for entrepreneurship; agricultural transformation; social dynamics.