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## Cooperative member commitment, trust and social pressure -- the role of members' participation in the decision-making

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*Though we can find the separate research of the antecedents of member commitment, there has been little systematic research into member commitment within agricultural cooperatives, especially the way how these antecedents (or correlates) affect member commitment. Using a sample of 391 farmer cooperative members in China, this study investigates whether trust and social pressure affect cooperative member commitment and if so, whether the effect is mediated by member participating in the decision-making process. Our study finds that trust is positively associated with three components of member commitment – affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment, while social pressure is positively related to normative commitment. Participation plays a partially mediating role between trust and social pressure and member commitment. Generally, these findings offer empirical evidence on the important role of cooperative chairman between members and Chinese cooperatives and on the influence of social pressure with Chinese characteristics in maintaining cooperative membership.*

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#2635



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## *Abstract*

Though we can find the separate research of the antecedents of member commitment, there has been little systematic research into member commitment within agricultural cooperatives, especially the way how these antecedents (or correlates) affect member commitment. Using a sample of 391 farmer cooperative members in China, this study investigates whether trust and social pressure affect cooperative member commitment and if so, whether the effect is mediated by member participating in the decision-making process. Our study finds that trust is positively associated with three components of member commitment – affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment, while social pressure is positively related to normative commitment. Participation plays a partially mediating role between trust and social pressure and member commitment. Generally, these findings offer empirical evidence on the important role of cooperative chairman between members and Chinese cooperatives and on the influence of social pressure with Chinese characteristics in maintaining cooperative membership.

## *Key words*

Member commitment, trust, social pressure, member participation

## *1. Introduction*

Commitment has been widely discussed by scholars mainly in different organizational settings, such as teachers, police officers and athletes to their own employing organizations and employees in companies and public bureaucracies (Carroll, 2017; Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Vandenberghe, 2009). Comparatively less attention has been paid to the commitment in the context of agricultural cooperatives. This paper is concerned with the antecedents and the way how the member commitment generated in the agricultural cooperative settings.

Over the years, organizational commitment has not been uniformly conceptualized (Klein, Molloy, and Cooper (2009), and Meyer and Allen (1997)). Among the various definitions, two formulations are most widely used. Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979, p. 226) defined organization commitment as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization”. The other popular formulation is proposed by Meyer, Becker, and Van Dick (2006), who define organization commitment as “a force that binds an individual to a target (social or non-social) and to a course of action of relevance to that target” ( p. 666). Here we adopt the latter way of defining commitment. Organizational commitment theories suit member commitment to cooperatives, because both is about the relationship between individuals and the organizations they belong to.

Member commitment concerns the viability of cooperatives. Members’ commitment is an essential input for organization to succeed, particularly at early stage of the collective action (Tadesse and Kassie, 2017). Member commitment maintains membership and trade volumes even as transactions become more unstable and opportunities to reorganize show up (M. Fulton, 1999). Lacking member commitment and good management can lead to the demise of the cooperative. Various ways of measuring cooperative member commitment can be found in the existing research (Cechin, Bijman, Pascucci, & Omta, 2013; Osterberg & Nilsson, 2009). In general, member commitment can be measured either by the behaviors or the attitude of members to cooperatives. For example, member commitment means to maintain her/his membership and to provide voluntary patronage to the cooperative when outside opportunities show up (Fulton, 1999). Member commitment can also be a psychological state increasing the probability for the member to retain within the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

Though few research has described or outline the mechanism or the process by which member commitment is formed, insights can be gained from both quantitative and qualitative studies of commitment which seek to identify its antecedents and correlates in cooperative settings. The antecedents of member commitment include economic and social factors, such as the price of product or service provided by the cooperative (Fulton and Giannakas, 2001), and trust (Borgen, 2001; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002; Mayer and Gavin, 2005). Besides, organizational factors, for example being a member of the board of director, can also influence member commitment to the cooperative (Cechin et al., 2013). In addition, the degree of member heterogeneity and the way how the property rights are defined and allocated within the cooperative may impact commitment (Bijman and Verhees, 2011). Mathieu and Zajac (1990) argued that motivation (which indicated by job involvement, stress and occupational commitment etc.) and job satisfaction are difficult to be specified as the causal precedence of different affective responses, and thus can be considered as the correlates of commitment.

Specifically, trust is supposed to be able to improve cooperation between individuals by enhancing communication and decreasing transaction costs (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Numerous research has

shown that trust can reduce free-riding problems and facilitate collective action (Ostrom, 2000). Trust in cooperatives can also improve members' participation in the governance and loyalty to the organizations (Ole Borgen, 2001).

Member participations concerns the viability of cooperatives and active member participation can engender better performance of cooperatives (Gray & Kraenzle, 1998; Verhees, Sergaki, & Van Dijk, 2015). Jiménez, Martí, and Ortiz (2010) point out that lacking member participation results in a lack of member commitment. Another possible antecedent of member commitment is social pressure, which has not been much discussed in the cooperative settings. People are influenced and molded by the living surroundings and social context (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014). The impact of social pressure on member commitment needs to be further examined.

Though we can find the separate research of the antecedents of member commitment listed above, there has been little systematic research into member commitment within agricultural cooperatives, especially the way how these antecedents (or correlates) affect member commitment. Most of the existing research tend to mix both attitudinal and behavioral commitment and the results have been confounded. The objective of this study is twofold. First, we want to examine the antecedent of member commitment, especially the effect of the participation, trust and social pressure on the member commitment. Second, we try to examine the factors impacting members' participation in the decision-making process and its role played between trust, social pressure and member commitment.

## *2. Theoretical Framework*

Commitment is “a force that binds an individual to a target (social or non-social) and to a course of action of relevance to that target” (Meyer et al., 2006), p. 666). This definition recognizes that individuals can develop psychological connection with an organization or a target and commit themselves to behaviors pertinent to that target (Bishop & Scott, 2000; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Organizational commitment has been conceptualized and measured in various ways in the existing research (Bijman & Verhees, 2011; Cechin et al., 2013; Osterberg & Nilsson, 2009). In general, the ways can be divided into two groups, behavioral commitment and attitudinal commitment. On the one hand, J. R. Fulton and Adamowicz (1993) and M. Fulton (1999) think that member commitment is the extent to which the member maintains her/his membership, or to provide voluntary patronage to the cooperative. On the other, Allen and Meyer (1990) and Meyer and Parfyonova (2010) consider organizational commitment as an attitude of an individual to an organization, which can be an affective attachment to the organization's goals and values (Buchanan, 1974), or an “unconflicted state of internal readiness” (Jussila, Goel, & Tuominen, 2012).

Some research has mixed up commitment with loyal behaviors ( or continued patronage). Tadesse and Kassie (2017) point out that measuring commitment by behaviors cannot always measure the true commitment. Contributing to the cooperative can be due to the mandatory requirement or because of no other outside options. Comparatively, the three-component model of commitment proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991) is more comprehensive in depicting member commitment.

Allen and Meyer (1990) conceptualize and measure the commitment in three different components: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Affective commitment

refers to an individual's identification with and involvement in the organization. Members with a strong affective commitment has affective or emotional attachment to the organization and enjoy the membership. They stay within the organization because they *want to* do so. Normative commitment is obligation-based and is the result from personal internalization of normative pressures (Wiener, 1982). Individuals with high level of normative commitment believe that staying within an organization is a "right" and moral thing to do. They feel obliged to stay and *ought to* do so (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Continuance commitment reflect that individuals are aware with the costs associated with leaving the organization. Members with high level of continuance commitment stay within the organization because they *need to* do so.

## *2.1 The antecedents of commitment*

Meyer and Allen (1991) think that given the conceptual differences of the three components of commitment, the antecedents of the psychological states reflecting the three components of commitment can be quite different. They classify the antecedents of affective commitment into four groups: personal characteristics, structural characteristics, and both objective and subjective work characteristics. For the antecedents of continuance commitment, they include alternatives and side bets. Because most of the research on normative commitment is based on theoretical, rather than empirical analysis, few scholars have indicated specifically the antecedents for normative commitment. Most attention has been paid on the study on the first two components of commitment.

However, since the three components of commitment reflects an individual's psychological states, other than distinguish different antecedents to different components of commitment, we can examine the different effects of common objective antecedents for the three components, including personal characteristics and organizational factors. Demographical characteristics such as age, gender and education, have been linked to commitment, even though the connections are proved to be either indirect or inconsistent (Mottaz, 1988; Tadesse and Kassie, 2017). Organization factors include the internal governance structures to the organizational mechanisms, such as the size of the cooperative, whether the board of director is democratically elected by members, whether there is constraint to exit and whether the cooperative has dividends to its members.

Here we mainly focus on the effect of member participation in the governance of cooperatives and trust on member commitment. Intrinsic rewards have been shown to be more powerful determinants of commitment than extrinsic rewards (Mottaz, 1988). It has also been shown that relational norms increase commitment and decrease opportunism (Joshi & Stump, 1999). Social pressure is also included as one of the antecedents.

## *Trust*

Trust can be treated as members' internal motivation for being committed to the cooperative, while social pressure can be considered as the external press. Both internal and external "powers" increase members' commitment to the cooperatives.

Though a concise and widely accepted definition of trust remains elusive, trust can fundamentally be conceptualized as a psychological state. Trust is characterized as a state of perceived vulnerability or risk, which derives from an individual's uncertainty about the dependents' motive, intentions and prospective actions (Kramer, 1999). According to Robinson (1996), trust is a person's beliefs about the other's future actions to be beneficial, at least not harmful to one's interest. In the cooperative settings, members' vulnerability towards the cooperative can be understood in view of their dependence on the latter in terms of revenue and information, which is resulted from information asymmetry about either market prices or clients' behaviors (Barraud-Didier, Henninger, & El Akremi, 2012; Ole Borgen, 2001). It is this uncertainty about the behaviors of one of the parties of the exchange which makes trust a determinant of the attitudes and behaviors of the other party (Kollock, 1994).

Here we conceptualize trust as trust in the leadership, which is defined as members' trust or confidence in the leader man's motives with respect to matters relevant to the members' benefits and management abilities of dealing with cooperative business.

## *Member Participation*

Views diverge on how to define participation in a group, whom to involve, what it is to achieve and how it is to be brought about (Agarwal, 2001, 2010). Here we specify the member participation as the member's participation in the decision-making process within the cooperative. The importance of membership participation for the cooperative is determined by the characteristics of cooperatives -- a cooperative is owned, controlled and patronized by its members.

First, members' participation in the decision making can help to realize members' control over the cooperative. In addition to the capital provided by the cooperative members, cooperatives are also financed by fairly amount of unallocated equity capital (Dunn, 1988). Members thus can lack motivation to invest or involve themselves in the cooperative governance and look for free-ridings. Free-riding and lacking investment can result in members losing control rights over the decision makings (Osterberg and Nilsson, 2009). Second, members' participation shows the core element of the cooperative -- the principle of democracy. Participating in the decision-making process allow members to voice their opinions. When their voice is not valued or heard, they can choose to terminate their cooperative membership.

## *Local social pressure*

Latane (1981) defines social impact as any influence on individual feelings, thoughts, or behavior that is exerted by the real, implied, or imagined presence or actions of others, which indicates the influence of social environment in shaping the participants. Therefore, we define social pressure here as the impact of or pressure from the social environment and local culture.

The existing research has emphasized the important influence of social environment on human behaviors (Carter, 2013; Gifford & Nilsson, 2014). According to Salancik and Pfeffer (1978), individual attitudes and behaviors can be predicted by studying the informational and social environment where attitude forms and behavior occurs and adapts. Due to China's Confucian legacy, the interpersonal relationship (or *guanxi*) is the most important characteristic of China society. Chinese tend to "view themselves interdependent with the surrounding social context" (p.60, (Tsui & Farh, 1997). Locality, together with kinship, colleagues, classmates and teacher-student relationship, are the most common factors or bases for *guanxi* (Jacobs, 1979). Therefore, opinions with and concerns of *guanxi* with neighbors and people in the same community can influence Chinese's attitude to both personal relationship and organizational relationship.

#### *Trust and member participation*

Trust in cooperatives can also improve members' participation in the governance and loyalty to the organizations (Ole Borgen, 2001). Using data of Swedish farmers, Nilsson, Kihlén, and Norell (2009) have empirically confirmed that trust in the cooperative management is positively correlated with members' involvement in the cooperative's democracy activities, or decision-making processes. Similar conclusions can be found in the research conducted by James and Sykuta (2006).

H1: trust is positively correlated with member participate in the decision-making process.

#### *Trust and member commitment*

Many studies have shown that trust induces commitment (Pesämaa, Pieper, da Silva, Black, & Hair, 2013; Rodríguez & Wilson, 2002; Yilmaz & Hunt, 2001). Jiang and Probst (2016) use data from 1071 staff and administrative professionals at a large university and show that trust in management is positively related to affective commitment. When the members trust their cooperatives, particularly regarding cooperatives' ability, goodwill and honesty, member commitment tends to increase and identification with the cooperative becomes stronger (Jiménez et al., 2010). The possible reason is that people trusting each other can synchronize and work together constructively, which can improve the decision quality and make problem solved effectively. This leads to increased commitment (Sholihin, Pike, Mangena, & Li, 2011). Similarly, employees who trust management are likely to be more committed to the organization (Albrecht and Travaglione, 2003; Laschinger et al., 2000; Tan and Tan, 2000; Brockner et al., 1997). Therefore, consistent with these past empirical studies, we predict that:

H2: Trust is positively associated with all components of member commitment.

#### *Member participation and member commitment*

The research of the relationship between member commitment and member participation in the cooperative can also be found in the literature. Osterberg and Nilsson (2009) maintain that member participation in the cooperative decision-making process closely relates to members' commitment to the cooperative. The more the members perceive that they participate in the cooperative governance, the more committed to the cooperative they are. Bijman and Verhees (2011) contend that participation and commitment have a mutual effect. Active member participation and member

commitment makes cooperatives keep energetic and survive in the long run (Bhuyan, 2007). Some scholars further distinguished the effects of different types of commitment on participation behaviors (Meyer, et al.(2002). For example, affective commitment has been identified as a major motivation of participation behaviors in an activity (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Van Der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005).

We propose that member participation plays a mediating role between trust and member commitment, respectively. Both trust not only has positively affect members' participation in the decision-making process, but also members' commitment to cooperatives. Therefore, the impact of trust on member commitment can be induced by both direct and indirect ways via member participation.

H3: member participation is positively associated with all components of member commitment.

#### *Local social pressure, member participation and member commitment*

Little literature about the relationship between social pressure and member participation or commitment can be found in the context of cooperatives. Similar research can be found in the community cooperation studies. Kandori (1992) point out that members in the community can observe each other's behaviors and reactions. The specification of desirable behavior together with sanction rules in a community influence people's cooperation behavior. Particularly, sanction rules within community can be considered as local social pressure in this sense. Social environment unavoidably affect both the interpersonal relationship and the individual's organization commitment (Leiter & Maslach, 1988). Therefore, we propose that

H4: Local social pressure is positively related to member participation.

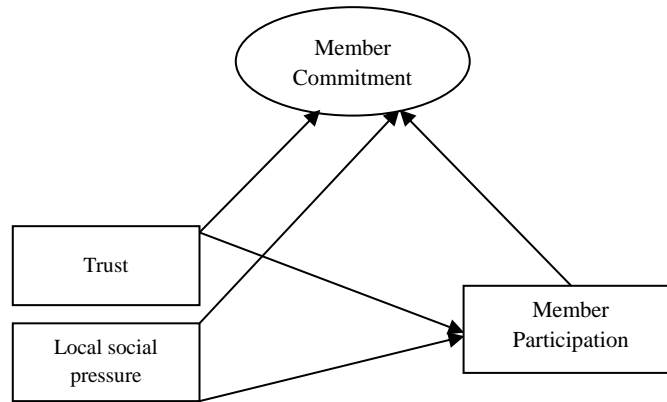
Given the distinctive characteristic of different components of commitment, we cannot make a uniform hypothesis about the relationship between local social pressure and member commitment. According to Qi (2013), social pressure comes along with the burden of high expectations. Social pressure is contrary to affection in this sense. We thus hypothesize that:

H5: Local social pressure is negatively related to affective commitment.

Alternatively, local social pressure can also be regarded as a part of an individual's social network, through which individuals can use as an instrument for social benefits. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H6: Local social pressure is positively related to normative commitment.

H7: Local social pressure is positively related to continuance commitment.



*Figure 1 Conceptual framework -- Mediator role of participation*

### *3. Methodology*

#### *3.1 Research setting, subjects and design*

We conducted a survey among farm households between January and March 2015 in the Shaanxi Province in the Loess Plateau area and the Shandong Province in the Bohai Gulf area. A multistage sampling procedure was used for the selection of observation units. In the first stage, we used the probability proportional to size (PPS) method to select 7 counties (out of the 10 most important apple production counties) in Shaanxi and 8 counties (out of the 10 most important apple production counties) in Shandong according to the size of apple production in 2014. In the second stage, we asked the Agricultural Bureau in each county for the list of apple cooperatives in the county; 5 cooperatives were randomly selected from those lists. Therefore, in total we first selected 75 cooperatives. However, the chairmen of 12 out of the 75 selected cooperatives could not be reached. Therefore, we dropped these 12 cooperatives from our sample resulting in a final sample of 63 cooperatives that were interviewed (30 in Shaanxi and 33 in Shandong). We did face-to-face interviews with the chairperson or other officials involved in cooperative management. Data about the cooperative (e.g. number of members, initiation) and members (e.g. household and farm characteristics, such as age, education, farm size and asset investments, and attitude towards cooperatives and their colleagues) were also collected.

#### *3.2 Measures*

##### *Member Commitment*

Despite the theoretical and practical importance of commitment in an organization, its measurement is difficult. As mentioned in the previous part, member commitment is generally measured in two ways, either by behaviors or by attitudes towards the organization. For instance, commitment is usually measured using proxy variables such as financial contribution to the cooperative and supplying outputs to the cooperative. While these proxies measure certain forms of commitment, it is difficult to believe that they are really measuring the true commitment. Sometimes contributions are mandatory, and members sell to the cooperative not because they are committed, rather the cooperative is the best option.

Following the more recent organizational commitment literature (Cechin et al., 2013; Solinger, Van Olffen, & Roe, 2008), member commitment is defined as members' attitudinal commitment to the organization (cooperative). Our measurement is based on the well-established three-component model by Allen and Meyer (1990) and Meyer et al. (2002), v.i.z. affective, normative, and continuance commitment. We adapted the items to the farmer cooperative context.

The affective component is believed to be an emotional or affective attachment to an organization, so that the strongly committed person identifies with and enjoy the membership of the organization. The normative component refers to employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organization. The continuance component corresponds to a lack of choices other than to remain a member of the organization when leaving it would entail costs and the loss of acquired advantages.

Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree). The resulting instrument yielded 12 separate commitment constructs measuring the three bases of affective, continuance, and normative commitment. The following three items are examples of the modification: (1) “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization” (Affective Organizational Commitment); (2) “It would be very economically costly for me to leave my co-op.” (Continuance Commitment); and (3) “Jumping from this co-op to other organization seems unethical to me.” (Normative Commitment). Column 4 in Table 2 lists the reliability coefficients for the 12 commitment constructs. All coefficient alphas are above 0.70 except Normative Commitment that is at 0.56. These alphas are acceptable given the early stages of research with these constructs (Nunnally, 1978). A confirmatory factor analysis supports these measures and is discussed in the Results section.

### *Trust*

Trust can be generally measured in two ways, either trusting attitude or trusting behaviors. Much of the social capital research relies upon attitudinal survey questions from the General Social Survey such as “generally, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” The other method is to measure trust and trustworthy by conducting experiments with monetary rewards (Glaeser et al., 2000).

The chairman plays an important role both in the initiation and the operation of a Chinese farmer cooperative. Chairmen’s (or chairwomen’s) capability in information collection and marketing concerns the viability and development of the cooperatives in China (Liang & Hendrikse, 2013). Given the critical role of cooperative chairmen, we thus measure members’ trust with the cooperative by measuring their trust with the chairmen. For example, trust with the chairman’s character (“I trust in the co-op chairman’s character.”), trust with the chairman’s management capability (“I trust in the chairman’s management ability.”) and members’ self-evaluation with the trustworthiness of the cooperative on average (“The co-op has great reputations of being reliable.”)

### *Local social pressure*

Chinese society is deeply influenced by Confucian legacy and interpersonal relationship (or *guanxi*) is one of the most important components of Chinese social values. *Guanxi* is double-edged and it does not only benefit parties involved, but also can become social pressure for one party because of the high expectation from the other (Qi, 2013). We have five statements to depict the social pressure within Chinese society context. (1) The reason why I stay in the co-op is that social pressure forced me to do so. (2) My relationship with the members will be disturbed if I quit the co-op membership. (3) Since most of the villagers have joined in the co-op, I will be isolated if I exit. (4) I will feel embarrassed if I go to the chairman and tell him/her to quit. (5) I worry that I will make the chairman to feel lose face if I quit. The coefficient alphas of these five items are around 0.80.

### *Member participation: a typology*

Participation is a difficult objective to define and implement (Gallie, 1964). Views diverge on how to define participation in a group, whom to involve, what it is to achieve and how it is to be brought about (Agarwal, 2001, 2010). The levels of participation range from nominal membership to

dynamic interactive process in which the disadvantaged have voice and influence in the decision-making (White, 1996). It is also a concept and process intimately connected to the political and economic dynamics of the geographical and historical contexts within which it is being applied. Here the participation refers to participation in the decision-making process. We generally follow the participation typology (see Table 1) proposed by Agarwal (2001), where the participation levels are defined by the extent of people's activeness.

<Table 1 is here.>

#### *Other control variables*

Beside variables of members' demographical characteristics and of organizational characteristics, we also control for members' satisfaction with the service provided by the cooperative, whether the member holds shares of the cooperative and the regional dummy variable. The member satisfaction is indicated by the farmer on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly satisfied to strongly unsatisfied and shares hold by members is a dummy variable. Additionally, we also control for group cohesiveness. Members of strongly cohesive groups are more inclined to participate readily and to stay with the group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). We measure group cohesion by two indicators – members' concern about the cooperatives' future development and the self-evaluation of the cooperatives' problem solving abilities.

<Table 2 is here>

#### *4. Analysis, results and discussions*

This paper mainly examines the factors influencing the three components of member commitment. Because member commitment is measured by Likert scales from 1 to 5, Generalized Structural Equation Model (GSEM) is thus more appropriate than standard linear Structural Equation Model (SEM) for our case given its metrics for fitting not just linear but also generalized linear models. GSEM simultaneously examines both measurement and structural equations. The measurement equation identifies the relationship between the indicators and the constructs (or latent variables) they represent (Sholihin et al., 2011). The structural equation specifies the relationships among constructs. Though these two equations can be estimated together, they should be interpreted separately (Hulland, 1999). The estimates of measurement equations and structural equations are shown in Table 3 and Table 5, respectively.

#### *Measurement model analysis*

The results reveal that all measures, are all significant at 1% level and above the 0.60 loading level. In other words, loading with a minimum of 0.60 is important as it indicates that the measure is accounting for at least 60 percent of the variance of the underlying latent variable (Chin, 1998). This criterion of fit test indices is for linear SEM. Generally, coefficients and standard errors of the measurement equation estimated by GSEM and by SEM are not directly comparable due to different transformations used. However, when the categories are five or more with large sample sizes and normally distributed variables, results obtained with ordinal regression and OLS regression methods

are similar (Newsom, 2015). This criterion thus can also be applied in the fit test for GSEM. The result shows that the measurement models fit the data at least adequately.

<Table 3 is here.>

### *Structural model analysis*

The structural model is applied to test the hypothesized relationships. In this study, for the convenience of post-estimation and latter comparative analysis, we take step-by-step estimations by using GSEM to test the effects of trust and social pressure on different components of member commitment and member participation, which also allow us to examine the role of participation in the relationship between trust, social pressure and member commitment.

Firstly, we include only trust and other control variables in the GSEM to estimate the direct effect of trust on AC/NC/CC. The results are presented in the 3<sup>rd</sup> line of Panel A in Table 4. We learn that trust is positively correlated with AC, NC and CC, respectively. In other words, trust has positive direct effect on AC/NC/CC. Similarly, we also include only pressure and control variables in GSEM. We conclude from the estimated results of social pressure (shown in the 4<sup>th</sup> line of Panel A) that social pressure has positive direct effect on NC, but not on AC or CC.

<Table 4 is here.>

Next, to test the role of member participation between trust/ pressure and different components of commitment, we include member participation in the structural models of AC, NC and CC, respectively based on the first step. The results are shown in Panel B and Panel C of Table 4, respectively.

We find from Panel B that other than the direct effect, trust exerts significant indirect effects on different components of member commitment through member participation. From Panel C we learn that social pressure is not significantly correlated to member participation or member commitment, except NC. Social pressure exerts positive indirect effect on NC. Our previous hypothesis H1-H7 have been generally supported by the results thus far.

Thirdly, we conduct the full model estimation by including both trust and social pressure and other control variables. The results are shown in Table 5. From the estimated coefficients of trust for both participation equation and commitment equations, we learn that trust is significantly and positively associated with member participation and three components of member commitment. Member participation thus plays a mediating role between trust and all components of member commitment. The total effects of trust on the three respective components of commitment are significant and positive<sup>1</sup>. The results are in line with our previous hypothesis H1 and H2.

< Table 5 is here.>

We learn from Table 5 that member participation is only positively associated with affective commitment, but not with the other two components of member commitment. However, the

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<sup>1</sup> We have calculated both the direct and indirect effects of trust and social pressure after the estimation of GSEM. Given the length limit, the results can be obtained via contacting with the first author.

estimates of participation changes as we add more control variables into the model, which can be told from Table 4 and Table 5. The result suggests that member participation is closely associated with their affection and emotion with the cooperative, but not related with continuance benefits or social norms and obligations with the cooperative. This reflects the voluntary principle of cooperatives. Members participate in the cooperative decision-making activities because they “want to”, not because they feel obligated or have to. It also explains the insignificant relationship between social pressure and member participation.

Social pressure has no significant effect on AC or CC. The result is not contradicted with H5 or H7. Its significant relationship with normative commitment provides supports to our hypothesis H6. The computation of total effects of social pressure on the different components of member commitment reconfirm our hypothesis. The insignificant relationship between social pressure and AC or CC is intuitively reasonable because social pressure cannot make individuals emotionally connected with one organization or produce economic benefits for individuals.

Baron and Kenny (1986) argue that partial mediation exists when the relationship between the independent and dependent variable remains significant if we control for the effects of mediating variables. Therefore, the results obtained from the stepwise estimations indicate that member participation partially mediate the relationship between trust and social pressure and member commitment.

## 5. Conclusions

The existing research has emphasized a bunch of important factors for organizational commitment, but limited papers have been about an integrated analysis about the antecedents of member commitment within the cooperative settings. This study distinguishes the members’ attitudinal commitment towards cooperatives from the ambiguous definitions of commitment. Specifically, we explore the relationship among trust in the cooperative leaders, social pressure (*guanxi* in Chinese) and members’ participation in the decision-making process. Using a sample of 391 farmer cooperative members in China, this study investigates whether trust and social pressure affect cooperative member commitment and if so, whether the effect is mediated by member participating in the decision-making process.

Our study finds that trust is positively associated with three components of member commitment – affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment, while social pressure is positively related to normative commitment. Participation plays a partially mediating role between trust and social pressure and member commitment. Generally, these findings offer empirical evidence on the important role of cooperative chairman between members and Chinese cooperatives and on the influence of social pressure with Chinese characteristics in maintaining cooperative membership.

The Chinese government has been promoting farmers to participate in farmer cooperatives since 2012. Liang and Hendrikse (2013) found that the genesis of cooperatives in China is not the result of bottom-up collective action by small farmers, but is due to the political pressure and the converging interests of specific agricultural entrepreneurs. Deng, Huang, Xu, and Rozelle (2010) claimed that the government is of primary importance in the cooperative establishment and growth after 2006.

However, successful farmer cooperatives must also be voluntarily initiated (Cook, 1995). Therefore, can Chinese cooperatives develop sustainably given that the pursuit of potential policy benefits has been the important motivation for their formation?

Our research has partially answered the question from the members perspective. Though some scholars hold negative views about the future of Chinese cooperatives (Deng & Wang, 2014; Yuan, 2013), members' trust in their cooperative leaders and Chinese community environment in the village are positive to form member commitment to some extent. The answers to the question can also be explored from other aspects, for example, from the perspective of Chinese land tenure reform and rural labor migration. Further viability and development of Chinese cooperatives is closely connected with the state policies.

Table 1. Typology of member participation in the decision-making

Form/level of participation	Characteristic features
Nominal participation	Merely membership in the group.
Passive participation	Attending meetings and listening in on decision making, without speaking up.
Consultative participation	Being asked an opinion in specific matters without guarantee of influencing the decisions.
Active participation	Fully expressing opinions, whether solicited or not.

Note: This is a modified version of the typology presented in Agarwal (2001).

Table 2 Descriptive statistics

Variable name	Mean	Std. Dev.	Reliability coefficient $\alpha$	Scale reliability coefficient	Description
age	51.793	8.077	na	na	Age of the household head
education	8.440	2.198	na	na	Education years of the household head
village cadre	0.258	0.438	na	na	Whether the household head or other family member has the work experience of being the village cadre. (0=no)
housesize	3.775	1.372	na	na	Household size
non-farm	0.102	0.320	na	na	Whether the household participates in the non-farm work (0=no; 1=yes)
land	8.181	7.386	na	na	size of land bearing fruits (unit: mu)
share	0.148	0.356	na	na	whether have shares in the co-op (0=no; 1=yes)
dividends	0.138	0.345	na	na	whether the coop have dividends (0=no; 1=yes)
BoD	0.404	0.491	na	na	Whether the Board of Directors are democratically elected (0=no; 1=yes)
exit	0.100	0.300	na	na	Whether there is constraint to exit the co-op (0=no; 1=yes)
satisfaction	4.043	0.917	na	na	degree of satisfaction with the coop in general (in Likert scale: 1= very unsatisfied; 5= very satisfied)
land_coop	3995.88	5581.78	na	na	The total land size of the members and the co-op (unit: mu)
region	0.483	0.500	na	na	Regional dummy (Shandong=0; Shaanxi=1)
cohesion1	2.637	1.334	na	na	Members care little about the co-op's future development.
cohesion2	4.202	1.001	na	na	The members can generally solve the problems together.
trust1	4.455	0.884	0.722	0.812	I trust in the co-op chairman's character.
trust2	4.320	1.046	0.722		I trust in the chairman's management ability.
trust3	4.189	1.043	0.779		The co-op has great reputations of being reliable.
Pressure1	2.059	1.271	0.802	0.835	The reason why I stay in the co-op is that social pressure forced me to do so.
Pressure2	2.315	1.398	0.809		My relationship with the members will be disturbed if I quit the co-op membership.
Pressure3	2.223	1.347	0.786		Since the majority of the villagers have joined in the co-op, I will be isolated if I exit.
Pressure4	2.061	1.243	0.811		I will feel embarrassed if I go to the chairman and tell him/her to quit.
Pressure5	2.049	1.230	0.800		I worry that I will make the chairman to feel lose face if I quit.
AC1	4.005	1.114	0.737	0.802	I will treat the co-op business as my own.
AC2	4.304	0.898	0.782		I will feel proud if the co-op is developing successfully.
AC3	4.090	1.125	0.748		I don't think that I could become as emotionally attached to another co-op as this one.
AC4	4.317	0.884	0.738		I feel that the members are like my families.
CC1	3.437	1.448	0.809	0.814	It would be very economically costly for me to leave my co-op.
CC2	3.816	1.280	0.745		I can have stable marketing channels if I stay in the co-op.
CC3	3.693	1.325	0.746		I can sell my apples with higher prices if I stay in the co-op.
CC4	4.279	1.063	0.783		I can have better access to market information if I stay in the co-op.
CC5	4.120	1.178	0.800		I can obtain inputs with cheaper price and better quality.
NC1	3.453	1.447	0.801	0.772	Jumping from this co-op to other organization seems unethical to me.
NC2	4.271	0.935	0.667		I believe that loyalty is important and therefore I feel a sense of moral obligation.
NC3	4.115	1.137	0.594		I was taught to remain loyal when I was young.
participation	2.463	1.092	na		The activeness of participating in the decision-making process

“na” denotes not applicable.

Table 3 Estimates of measurement equations by using GSEM

Construct	Indicators	Coefficient	Standard errors
TRUST	trust1	3.511***	0.556
	trust2	3.145***	0.436
	trust3	2.086***	0.240
SOCIAL PRESSURE	Pressure1	2.059***	1.271
	Pressure2	2.315***	1.398
	Pressure3	2.223***	1.347
	Pressure4	2.061***	1.243
	Pressure5	2.049***	1.230
AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT (AC)	AC1	0.957***	0.105
	AC2	0.667***	0.077
	AC3	0.941***	0.107
	AC4	1.013***	0.123
CONTINUANCE COMMITMENT (CC)	CC1	0.631***	0.066
	CC2	1.204***	0.142
	CC3	1.202***	0.138
	CC4	0.759***	0.084
	CC5	0.631***	0.070
NORMATIVE COMMITMENT (NC)	NC1	0.649***	0.077
	NC2	1.476***	0.236
	NC3	1.561***	0.286

\*\*\* denotes the 1% significance level.

Table 4 Estimates of direct and mediating effects of trust and social pressure on AC, NC and CC by using GSEM

Panel A: Direct effect, including TRUST and PRESSURE plus control variables in the structural models, respectively			
	AC	NC	CC
TRUST	0.497*** (0.103)	0.332*** (0.091)	0.561*** (0.103)
PRESSURE	-0.021 (0.071)	0.208*** (0.073)	0.095 (0.067)

Panel B: Mediating role of participation between TRUST and AC/NC/CC, respectively						
	participation	AC	participation	NC	participation	CC
TRUST	0.288*** (0.075)	0.453*** (0.104)	0.291*** (0.083)	0.330*** (0.092)	0.291*** (0.083)	0.581** (0.108)
participation	--	0.209*** (0.067)	--	0.073 (0.063)	--	-0.059 (0.065)
Indirect effect	0.06** (0.024)		0.021 (0.019)		-0.017 (0.020)	

Panel C: Mediating role of participation between PRESSURE and AC/NC/CC, respectively						
	participation	AC	participation	NC	participation	CC
PRESSURE	0.050 (0.064)	0.010 (0.072)	0.048 (0.064)	0.208*** (0.073)	0.050 (0.064)	-0.097 (0.068)
participation	--	0.273*** (0.063)	--	0.131** (0.061)	--	0.055 (0.057)
Indirect effect	0.014 (0.018)		0.214*** (0.074)		0.003*** (0.005)	

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* denote significant levels of 10%, 5% and 1%, respectively.

Standard errors are inside of brackets.

Table 5 Full model: estimates of affective commitment (AC), normative commitment (NC)continuance commitment (CC) and participation

Explanatory variables	Participation		AC		Participation		NC		Participation		CC	
	coef.	S. E.	coef.	S. E.	coef.	S. E.	coef.	S. E.	coef.	S. E.	coef.	S. E.
age	0.011	0.008	0.025***	0.009	0.011	0.008	0.019**	0.009	0.011	0.008	-0.012	0.009
education	0.053**	0.027	-0.010	0.031	0.052*	0.027	-0.034	0.031	0.053**	0.027	0.013	0.030
village cadre	0.149	0.144	-0.150	0.166	0.149	0.144	0.077	0.160	0.150	0.144	0.056	0.158
non-farm	-0.209	0.197	0.018	0.226	-0.212	0.197	0.078	0.219	-0.214	0.197	-0.255	0.219
land size	-0.002	0.008	-0.009	0.009	-0.002	0.008	-0.007	0.009	-0.002	0.008	-0.005	0.009
share	0.032	0.242	0.082	0.277	0.032	0.242	0.179	0.266	0.032	0.242	0.047	0.262
dividends	0.208	0.248	0.043	0.288	0.208	0.248	0.037	0.275	0.206	0.248	0.076	0.274
BoD	0.209*	0.121	0.053	0.141	0.209*	0.121	0.008	0.134	0.210*	0.121	0.196	0.134
exit	-0.376*	0.197	0.187	0.231	-0.374*	0.197	0.213	0.222	-0.378*	0.197	-0.328	0.217
satisfaction	0.032	0.070	0.395***	0.083	0.033	0.070	0.321***	0.078	0.031	0.070	0.370***	0.078
land_coop	-0.107**	0.048	0.021	0.056	-0.107**	0.048	0.027	0.054	-0.107**	0.048	-0.105**	0.054
region	0.555***	0.127	0.383***	0.150	0.553***	0.127	0.399***	0.145	0.555***	0.127	0.181	0.143
cohesion1	-0.042	0.047	-0.183***	0.054	-0.042	0.047	0.006	0.052	-0.041	0.047	-0.139***	0.052
cohesion2	-0.004	0.065	0.354***	0.073	-0.005	0.065	0.187***	0.069	-0.004	0.065	0.226***	0.070
Participation	---	---	0.209***	0.067	---	---	0.078	0.064	---	---	-0.057	0.065
TRUST	0.291***	0.083	0.453***	0.104	0.292***	0.083	0.330***	0.094	0.292***	0.083	0.584***	0.108
PRESSURE	-0.053	0.065	-0.014	0.075	-0.051	0.065	0.208***	0.075	-0.051	0.065	0.105***	0.072

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* denote significant levels of 10%, 5% and 1%, respectively.

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