

CHINA CROSSROADS

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The Rice Theory of Culture and the
North-South Divide in China: Evidence
from a Natural Experiment in the 1950s

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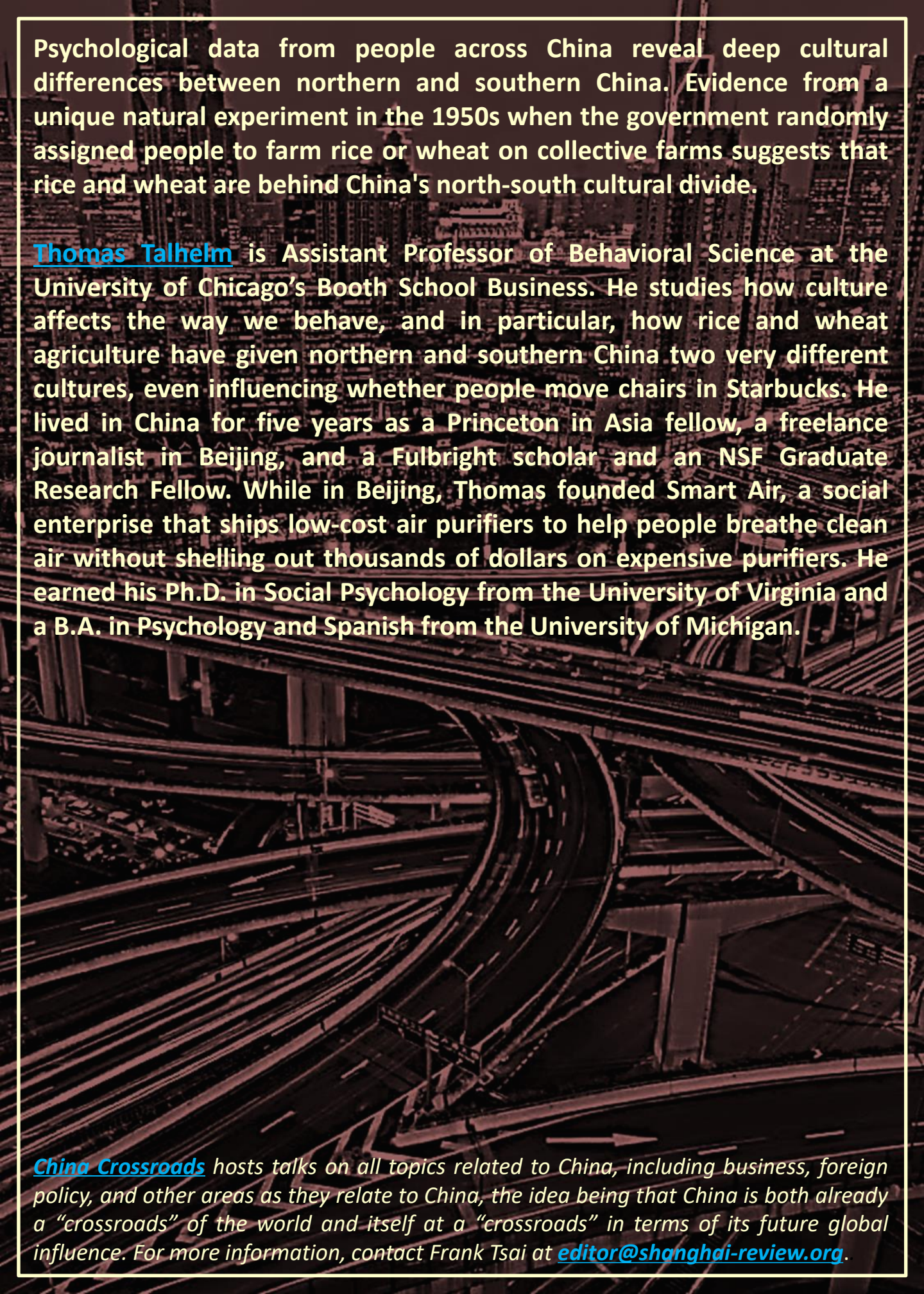


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Psychological data from people across China reveal deep cultural differences between northern and southern China. Evidence from a unique natural experiment in the 1950s when the government randomly assigned people to farm rice or wheat on collective farms suggests that rice and wheat are behind China's north-south cultural divide.

Thomas Talhelm is Assistant Professor of Behavioral Science at the University of Chicago's Booth School Business. He studies how culture affects the way we behave, and in particular, how rice and wheat agriculture have given northern and southern China two very different cultures, even influencing whether people move chairs in Starbucks. He lived in China for five years as a Princeton in Asia fellow, a freelance journalist in Beijing, and a Fulbright scholar and an NSF Graduate Research Fellow. While in Beijing, Thomas founded Smart Air, a social enterprise that ships low-cost air purifiers to help people breathe clean air without shelling out thousands of dollars on expensive purifiers. He earned his Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of Virginia and a B.A. in Psychology and Spanish from the University of Michigan.

China Crossroads hosts talks on all topics related to China, including business, foreign policy, and other areas as they relate to China, the idea being that China is both already a "crossroads" of the world and itself at a "crossroads" in terms of its future global influence. For more information, contact Frank Tsai at editor@shanghai-review.org.