

I am grateful for support of the Santander Travel Award, which funded my travel in China to collect data for my research.

I am interested in whether differences in workplace organization shape the formation of culture or social norm in one society that in turn affect people's preferences. Workplace organization in my project refers to Rice versus non-Rice cultivation. Two features of rice farming distinguish itself from other crops such as wheat and corn. First, rice grows on standing water instead of dry land and farmers in a village traditionally share the same water reserves. This resulted in the need to cooperate in the management of the common resource and the maintenance of the irrigation system. In addition, farmers have to plant rice seedlings, not seeds, into paddy fields. This necessitated a large amount of labor. Indeed, agricultural anthropologists found that the amount of labor required in rice cultivation is at least twice as the number needed in farming wheat. Therefore, families with only a few labor forces would not be able to survive if they rely on rice farming. In sum, farming rice historically requires extensive cooperation among farmers. Thus, I test whether that centuries of rice farming lead to a cooperative social norm that has been transmitted from generation to generation.

To conduct the investigation, I planned to travel to typical rice and non-rice provinces in China and conduct computerized lab experiment in each province. China is a natural test case because the country is historically an agriculture nation and rice has been an important crop. Moreover, refining the sample to China can rule out other potential explanations or confounds, such as language, institutional, and culture.

The typical rice farming provinces in my sample are Hunan and Zhejiang and the typical non-rice farming provinces are Hebei and Shandong. The Santander Travel Award covered the cost of travelling to Hunan, which is a rice province. It was a very pleasant 3-day journey. I conducted 6 experimental sessions over the weekend and 120 students participated in my study.



The above picture is what a typical experimental session looks like. Participants were reading instructions of the experimental tasks. To prevent them looking at each other's decision, I made them sit apart from each other and use computer screens as dividers.

Now I have finished collecting data from all four provinces. Analyses of the data reveals a very interesting result. Rice farming does not increase cooperation per se, but make people more willing to punish free-riders.