Discussant Comments on "Religion and Conflict: Evidence from China, 1860 - 1911"

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Introduction and Overview

- **Objective of the Paper:**
  - Investigate the impacts of anti-missionary conflicts in late Qing China.
  - Examines competing hypotheses: religious competition vs. economic complementarities.
- **Key Findings:**
  - Little support for religious competition hypothesis.
  - Significant role of economic complementarities in mitigating anti-missionary violence.
  - Persistent and negative short-term effects of anti-missionary violence on financial development and early industrialization.
  - Long run effects on economic attitudes.

What I liked

- I find the setting and data work very interesting
- The paper is well written

Broader Context and Literature

- **Economic Insecurity and Religious Intensification:**
  - People often turn to religion during economic hardships
  - Increased religiosity can lead to resistance against foreign religious influences.
- **Group Identity and Conflict:**
  - Economic stress exacerbates in-group and out-group distinctions, leading to increased hostility
- **Resource Competition:**
  - Historical examples show resource competition (attention & power) as driver of conflicts

Effect of Religious Competition: Estimating Equation

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Conflict}_{it} = \alpha_i + \lambda_t + \beta_1 \text{Mission}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{Confucian}_{it} \\ + \beta_3 (\text{Mission}_{it} \times \text{Confucian}_{it}) \\ + X_{it} + \epsilon_{it} \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

- Conflict_{it} denotes the number of anti-missionary cases or prints in prefecture i in a five-year period t. Mission_{it} is an indicator variable indicating the presence of Christian missionaries. Confucian_{it} is the strength of local Confucian elite.
- But Mission_{it} is an outcome likely affected by Confucian_{it}. Can this be the reason why you don't find competition effects?

Potential idea

- Use exogenous variables such as geography and treaty ports to predict Mission_{it}
- Use the predicted values as an instrument for Mission_{it}.
- You do something similar with matching. Matching prefectures based on their distance to the coast and rivers, terrain ruggedness, population density, whether they are a capital or not, and the number of years of missionary presence. I would omit the last variable unless pre-determined to the outcome.

Consequences of Anti-Missionary Movements

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_i + \lambda_t + \beta_1 \text{Conflict}_{it} + X_{it} + \epsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

- Y_{it} number of industrial firms and banks. Conflict_{it} is to the number of anti-missionary conflicts in each prefecture in each five years (events or pamphlets).
- Conflict_{it} is likely endogenous...

Potential idea (2)

- Use your exogenous source of variation.
- Reduced form analysis using the same IV as above, if it works, of course.

My final take

- Interesting paper, setting and data work. I am looking forward to seeing it developed further.
- I think, however, more work needs to be done to sharpen the story and the empirics.
- Currently the paper is speaking more to the impacts of religious conflicts, but it would also be interesting to explore economic conditions affecting missionaries.
  - Data on economic conditions such as grain prices or even pre-determined bank data, but is this possible