

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... Wasn't Conflict_{it} the outcome variable in Equation (1)?

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