

Revolutions and Revivals: How State-Building Sparks New Religious Movements

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Abstract

What explains the proliferation of new religious movements? I argue that state-building projects, though designed to consolidate control over society, often generate the structural conditions for the emergence of new religious movements. In their drive to atomize society and eliminate competing power centers, the state systematically dismantles intermediary institutions that controlled the spiritual domain, creating a grassroots vacuum that opens space for new religious groups to emerge. I apply this framework to the explosive growth of Christianity in China. Leveraging a novel dataset spanning the pre- and post-1949 eras, I document a striking "reversal of fortune." Prior to the revolution, strong lineage clans, the most important social organizations in rural China, slowed down Christian expansion. However, as the CCP's state-building campaigns dismantled clans, Christianity expanded most rapidly precisely in those areas where clans had historically been strongest. Challenging the view of state building as an engine of social homogenization, I demonstrate that it can act as a catalyst for religious pluralism by shattering the traditional institutions' monopoly over the spiritual realm.

Introduction

In 1860, after the Qing Empire, the last dynasty of China, lost the Second Anglo-Chinese War to Britain and France, it was compelled to allow Western missionaries to reside and conduct mission work within inland China. Yet instead of finding a population adrift in spiritual darkness and receptive to the Christian message of salvation, missionaries encountered a society whose moral and religious life was deeply rooted in Confucian ethics and the family-centered social order. These norms, reinforced by kinship networks and local communities, structured daily life and imposed significant costs on anyone who deviated from them. As a result, proselytization proved difficult, and successful conversions often came only after prolonged conflict within families.

The Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War in 1949 further constrained the spread of Christianity. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regarded Christianity not only as an obsolete

“superstructure” destined to disappear in a socialist society but also as a tool of Western imperialism used to undermine China. After the CCP came to power, missionaries were expelled, church properties were confiscated, and Christian leaders were persecuted. During the radical decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), all Christian activities were completely banned.

Few observers could have anticipated a Christian revival in China after the Cultural Revolution, given the CCP’s lingering hostility and the damage inflicted to the Christian community during the Maoist years. Yet such a revival occurred. Beginning in the late 1970s, the number of Christians grew rapidly—first in rural areas and later expanding into urban centers (Zhao, 1997). In 1980, China had only about 1,000 officially registered Christian churches; by 2018, that number had risen to roughly 60,000. Christian adherence also surged—from roughly 1 million believers in 1949 to an estimated 40–80 million today, accounting for about 7% of the national population (Pew Research Center, 2023), making it the largest Christian country.

What explains the rise of new religious movements, such as Protestantism in China? Scholarship on the development of new religious movements highlights several key factors. First, technological advances in communication and transportation—such as the printing press (Rubin, 2014), the Internet (Iqbal, 2014), and transnational trade networks (Michalopoulos et al., 2018), have facilitated the rapid diffusion of new religious ideas and practices to wide audiences. Second, international actors, including governments seeking to project cultural influence abroad (such as Saudi Arabia) and global missionary organizations, have invested substantial resources into supporting religious outreach, thereby enabling new movements to expand across national borders (Adogame, 2010; Jahroni, 2020). Thirdly, organizational innovations within these movements have enhanced their capacity to adapt to shifting social and political environments (Sun, 2017; Bruce and Packard, 2016). Finally, the religious market theory argues that when states grant monopolistic status to established religions, these dominant traditions often become less dynamic, creating opportunities for new movements to emerge (Finke and Stark, 1992).

This paper identifies another factor that contributes to the rise of new religious movements: the weakening of intermediary social institutions in the state-building processes. Echoing religious

market theory, I focus on how established religions lost their dominant status. However, rather than focusing on the internal process of declining dynamism caused by market monopoly, I focus on how state-building, as an external shock to the religious market, can disrupt the market equilibrium in the spiritual domain.

I argue that the dominance of religious traditions in pre-modern societies was sustained not merely by formal state directives, but by their deep embeddedness in local social structures—specifically through interlocking relationships with intermediary institutions such as clans, tribes, land-based patronage networks, and local religious establishments (Broman, 2022). By simultaneously wielding political power, controlling economic resources, and exercising spiritual authority, these institutions forged a self-reinforcing system of control. Material leverage enabled the sanctioning of nonconformity, while spiritual legitimacy stabilized existing hierarchies. Collectively, these forces established a tightly regulated religious market that raised high barriers to entry for new religious entrepreneurs.

However, radical state-building projects disrupt this equilibrium by undermining the foundations of these traditional intermediaries. Aiming to rapidly centralize authority and extend state reach, political elites seek to dismantle these grassroots social institutions and replace them with state or party agencies (Scoville, 2013; Duffy, 1993; Little, 1965; Duara, 1991; Cancian, 1994; Yang, 1961). Through initiatives such as land reform, educational centralization, and bureaucratic expansion, the state sharply reduces the cultural and material capacity of local social institutions. With their authority eroded, traditional elites lose the ability to enforce norms or maintain a spiritual monopoly. This institutional vacuum creates openings that new religious entrepreneurs can exploit to establish and expand their influence.

I test this theory in the context of China. Unlike the Middle East or Europe, where institutional religions held sway, Chinese spiritual life was anchored in diffuse folk traditions—most notably deity and ancestor worship (Yang and Hu, 2012; Yang, 1961). These communal practices were inextricably linked to the clan, the dominant intermediary institution in historical China (Greif and Tabellini, 2017; Fei and Liu, 1982; Kung and Wu, 2025). Operating in the vacuum of state

presence at the grassroots level, clans functioned as de facto rural governing bodies, cementing their authority by controlling the community's spiritual life—specifically through the mandatory worship of ancestors and patron deities (Faure, 2007, 1989). Deviants, such as Christian converts who refused to partake in these rituals, faced severe sanctions including ostracism and loss of patronage (Carlson, 1966). Thus, clan networks constituted a formidable structural barrier to the spread of Christianity.

However, the radical state-building efforts of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) fundamentally disrupted the clans' control over the religious field. Viewing clans as rival centers of power that obstructed state penetration and local control, the CCP launched a series of campaigns to systematically dismantle clan structures and strip them of the power to enforce local norms. Once deprived of the power to enforce religious conformity, they could no longer effectively block the entry of new religious movements, leading to the rise of Christianity.

Empirically, I construct a comprehensive dataset to date on local-level Christian growth in China, drawing on data from over 2,000 county gazetteers (地方志) covering both the pre- and post-1949 periods. My analysis reveals a striking reversal of fortune: prior to the Communist Revolution, strong clan networks hindered Christian expansion. However, after the Communist Revolution, this relationship was inverted—regions with historically powerful clans experienced faster Christian growth. Leveraging land-reform intensity as a proxy for anti-clan repression, I demonstrate that the CCP's land reform campaign, which explicitly targeted the traditional clan system, served as the critical mechanism facilitating the post-revolution resurgence of Christianity.

This paper makes contributions to the literature on several fronts. First, it advances our understanding of religious growth by offering a novel perspective on how new religious movements spread in monopolistic environments. Departing from the existing view that dominant religions lose their competitiveness through an endogenous process of stagnation and declining appeal (Finke and Stark, 1992), I propose that state-building is the key disruptor. Specifically, I argue that state-building weakens the established religious institutions that typically block new entrants.

Second, this study contributes to debates on the consequences of state-building (Garfias, 2018;

Kennedy and King, 2013; Reno, 1998). Pre-modern societies are often defined by fragmented power structures, where social control lies with informal institutions such as clans and customary authorities (Migdal, 1988, 2001; Huntington, 2006). While the literature typically views state-building as a homogenizing force—intended to standardize laws and reduce social diversity through means ranging from language standardization to ethnic cleansing (Mann, 2005; Scott, 1998; Gellner, 2008), I argue that it can have the opposite effect in the religious sphere. By stripping intermediary institutions of their control, state-building may fracture the existing religious monopoly, allowing new actors to enter and thereby diversifying the religious landscape.

Finally, this paper offers a new theoretical framework for the rise of Protestant Christianity in China. Existing accounts attribute this phenomenon to the strategic adaptation of believers (Koesel, 2013; Sun, 2017), social dislocation (Yang, 2005), or the ideological vacuum left by communism (Xi, 2013). In these narratives, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is cast primarily as a repressive constraint. This paper, however, suggests a more nuanced dynamic: while the CCP remains hostile toward Christianity, its revolutionary project, specifically the dismantling of traditional social institutions, unintentionally created the institutional voids that allowed Protestantism to flourish.

The paper proceeds as follows. I first develop a theoretical framework that explains how state-building reshapes the religious field by weakening intermediary institutions. I then situate the argument within the Chinese context. The third section details the data collection process. Next, I present quantitative evidence on the relationship between clan strength and the spread of Christianity. I then draw on two qualitative case studies—indigenous communities in Mexico and Hmong communities in Vietnam—to demonstrate the generalizability of the argument. The paper concludes by discussing the scope conditions of the theory.

1 Tight-knit societies, State Building, and the Religious Field

Pre-modern states differed significantly from the centralized apparatus familiar to modern observers (Dincecco and Wang, 2022). Unlike modern states, which penetrate daily life through extensive bureaucratic networks (Acemoglu et al., 2016; Lee, 2019; Tilly, 2017; Dincecco and Wang, 2022), pre-modern states were constrained by limited resources and primitive communication technologies. Consequently, they maintained only a minimal presence in grassroots society (Tilly, 2017; Mann, 1984). Rather than governing directly, these states relied heavily on local elites—such as clan elders, tribal leaders, landlords, and religious authorities—to fulfill core functions like maintaining order, tax collection, and conscription. In exchange, these communities were granted significant autonomy over their internal affairs.

As self-governing entities, these tight-knit communities required strong internal solidarity to facilitate coordination among members. Such cohesion cannot be sustained by short-term transactional interactions alone; it requires a shared meaning system to shape group identity. Religion often provides this essential framework. It connects current members not only to one another but also creates a transtemporal collective that embraces ancestors and future generations. By providing a moral framework, religious identities compel members to redefine their priorities, subordinating individual self-interest to the interests of the collective (Durkheim, 2016; Geertz, 2013).

In pre-modern societies, shared religious identities were strengthened by rituals that were both spiritual and social. Events like fiestas patronales in Mexico, temple festivals in China, and agrarian rites were not just religious acts; they were social events that defined group boundaries and reaffirmed shared commitments (Iannaccone, 1994; Bell, 1991). By turning belief into action—through processions, feasting, and collective offerings—these rituals built strong bonds of reciprocity. In this way, religion was a central part of community life, essential for creating the trust and unity needed for survival (Norenzayan, 2013; Wilson, 2019).

However, this system relies on broad participation (Iannaccone, 1994, 1992). A new faith threatens this balance by drawing time and resources away from collective rites. Moreover, religious diversity creates new divisions, breaking the community's shared values and challenging

the close link between political and spiritual power (Dow, 2005; McIntyre, 2019). Because new religious actors often establish rival authorities or justify nonconformity, they weaken the cohesion that holds traditional communities together (Lee, 2014; Robbins, 2004; Duffy, 1993).

Therefore, intermediary institutions face strong incentives to close off the “religious market” and block alternative choices. In such settings, religious deviation is perceived not as a private act of conscience but as a public affront to communal identity. To maintain religious homogeneity, communities impose high exit costs: converts often face severe sanctions, ranging from exclusion from communal rituals and public goods to disinheritance and ostracism.¹ Given these high costs, the barrier to entry for new religious movements remains formidably high.

This exclusionary equilibrium, however, is vulnerable to the rise of the modern state. For political elites committed to modernization, the fragmentation of power across localized, informal institutions presents a fundamental obstacle to governance (Migdal, 1988). State-building efforts thus inevitably target the influence of these intermediary bodies. To extract resources for industrialization and state expansion, central governments often implement land reforms that strip traditional elites of their economic base (Albertus, 2015; Garfias, 2018; Beban, 2021; Hao et al., 2025). Simultaneously, the state extends its reach by establishing bureaucratic agencies that bypass intermediaries to govern citizens directly (Acemoglu et al., 2016; Dincecco and Wang, 2022), while national education and propaganda campaigns seek to replace patrimonial loyalties with a unified national identity (Miguel, 2004).

In the political and legal realms, state-building acts as a homogenizing force: local customs give way to national legislation, distinct dialects yield to a standardized language, and diverse informal institutions are replaced by a streamlined political order. Yet, in the religious sphere, state-building can have the opposite effect—fostering heterogeneity.

As the state assumes responsibility for welfare, arbitration, and public infrastructure—functions previously monopolized by clans, guilds, or temple associations—the functional utility of religious

¹For example, in early modern Europe, religious dissenters could be barred from guilds (Scoville, 2013); in Qing China, abandoning ancestral rites was grounds for disownment; and in indigenous Mexican communities, converts to Protestantism have faced expulsion and physical violence (McIntyre, 2019).

homogeneity declines. Individuals no longer need to rely solely on communal networks for survival, reducing the payoff of conformity. As traditional elites are stripped of their political leverage and control over economic resources (such as land and credit), they lose their disciplinary capacity. Without the power to condition access to resources or impose credible sanctions, their ability to enforce religious monopoly collapses. This institutional unraveling opens the door for alternative beliefs to take root, allowing a diverse religious landscape to emerge from the ruins of the traditional order.

2 Empirical Background

2.1 Clans as the Fundamental Informal Institutions in China

Clans served as the predominant social organizations structuring local life in imperial China. While their origins trace back to the Song dynasty, clan institutions initially crystallized only among elite families. In the Ming era, however, imperial reforms lifted restrictions on commoners' ancestral worship in clan halls (Inoue, Tohru, 2008). This sanctioned the collective veneration of remote, sometimes fictive, ancestors among commoners sharing a surname, establishing a symbolic foundation for cooperation that extended beyond the nuclear family (Kung and Wu, 2025). These groups subsequently developed into the most significant informal institutions of self-governance in grassroots society, most notably within the Pearl and Yangtze River basins.

The dominance of clans was underpinned by their control over substantial economic resources, particularly agrarian land—the most vital asset in the pre-modern Chinese economy. Contrary to the common depiction of historical China as a society dominated by small private landowners (Tawney, 2024), in regions with strong clan structures, much of the land was held collectively as corporate trusts (Han-Seng, 1936; Faure, 2007; Freedman, 2021; Ye Xian'en, 1997; Wang, 2006; Liu, 2005). These estates were managed either by a council of elders or by member families on a rotational basis (Hu, 1948). Prior to the CCP's land reform, clan trusts were often among the

largest landholders, controlling as much as 40–50% of arable land in some locales.¹

The economic resources held by clans were utilized to support a wide array of communal projects. Revenues generated from leasing out clan land were channeled into the provision of local public goods, including the construction and maintenance of irrigation systems and roads (Watson, 1982), the funding of clan schools and education (Elman, 2000). Clans also served as critical providers of social safety nets. They supplied basic means of subsistence to the most vulnerable members of the lineage, including widows, orphans, and the childless elderly. During periods of famine or harvest failure, clans further stabilized the community by distributing grain relief from communal granaries, effectively functioning as a buffer against survival risks in the absence of state welfare (Greif and Tabellini, 2017; Fei and Liu, 1982; Faure, 2007; Szonyi, 2002).

Building on this economic dominance and provision of public goods, clans assumed the role of primary institutions for informal self-governance. Given that the imperial state's administrative reach rarely extended below the county level (Hsiao, 1967), local officials relied on these informal institutions to perform public functions, such as tax collection, order maintenance, and dispute resolution (Ye Xian'en and Tan Lihua, 1985; Siu, 1989; Chu, 1973). In return, clans enjoyed considerable autonomy to govern their internal affairs. They disciplined members and adjudicated commercial and civil disputes according to clan regulations (*zugui*), which possessed significant normative authority over members and were typically recognized by the state (Hu, 1948; Huang, 1996).

Beyond their material and political functions, clans acted as the central organizers of religious life, a role that cemented their legitimacy. Unlike Western or Islamic contexts, where institutionalized religions dominated, organizational religions and professional clergy in historical China were comparatively weak (Goossaert and Palmer, 2011; Brook et al., 2009). Instead, the spiritual life of most Chinese people was defined by "diffused" folk religion (Yang, 1961), which drew upon eclectic elements from Daoism, Buddhism, and local deity cults. In the absence of a professional clergy, these diffused religious activities were coordinated by secular, grassroots institutions—specifically,

¹Data regarding landholding distributions prior to the 1950 land reform are drawn from county gazetteers in the author's collection.

the clans (Faure, 2007; Duara, 1991).

Clan legitimacy rested on a strategic fusion of state-sanctioned orthodoxy and local popular practice (Faure, 2007; Liu, 1990). Clan elders effectively monopolized the local spiritual landscape by financing and choreographing rituals within clan-owned ancestral halls and temples (Freedman, 2021; Yang, 1961). Participation in these communal rites was not a matter of personal belief but a binding social obligation (Szonyi, 2002). Members were compelled to contribute both physically and financially to these events. In this context, enforcing ritual orthopraxy became a mechanism of governance (Watson, 1982): abstention was treated not merely as impiety, but as a rejection of kinship ties, tantamount to effective self-expulsion from the community.

2.2 Clans Clashed with Christianity

The dominance of popular folk religions and clans in the Chinese religious landscape remained unchallenged until the mid-19th century. This hegemony began to fracture following the Second Opium War and the signing of the Convention of Peking (1860), which granted Western missionaries the right to reside and conduct missionary work throughout the Chinese interior.

However, missionaries encountered significant headwinds. These included obstructionism by Qing officials and the often lukewarm attitude of Western diplomats toward missionary endeavors (Fairbank, 1978; Lü, 1966). Yet, the most severe challenge stemmed from the hostility of ordinary Chinese people regarding cultural incompatibilities between Christianity and traditional Chinese culture, specifically Christianity's disruption of traditional gender norms and intergenerational hierarchy. Women's participation in church life and worship, often occurring in the same physical space as men, was viewed by non-Christians as a transgression of gender segregation norms (Sweeten and Studies, 2001). Furthermore, younger Christians who defied the orders of non-Christian elders were frequently accused of being unfilial.

The most profound conflict, however, lay in the incompatibility between popular religion and Christian theological norms. Christian monotheistic exclusivism barred participation in rites deemed idolatrous. This prohibition extended not only to the worship of various deities responsi-

ble for essential domains of community well-being—such as rainfall and agriculture—but also to ancestor worship, which constituted the single most important spiritual obligation of the Chinese people (Yang, 1961). Conversion to Christianity was thus perceived as a betrayal not only of the living community but also of the entire lineage, including deceased ancestors whose souls, left without ritual offerings, would be condemned to become wandering, hungry ghosts (Wang, 2012; Fan, 2014). Therefore, many clans explicitly banned members from joining Christianity and set up severe punishment for members who violated the rule. Some clans explicitly codified this hostility in their regulations (*zugui*). Archival research on lineage regulations reveals widespread punitive measures against members who converted to Christianity. Figure 1 illustrates an excerpt from a genealogy compiled in Foshan, Guangdong, in 1897. This rule explicitly mandates the expulsion of not only the converts themselves but also their male offspring. Additional examples of such exclusionary regulations are documented in Appendix C.

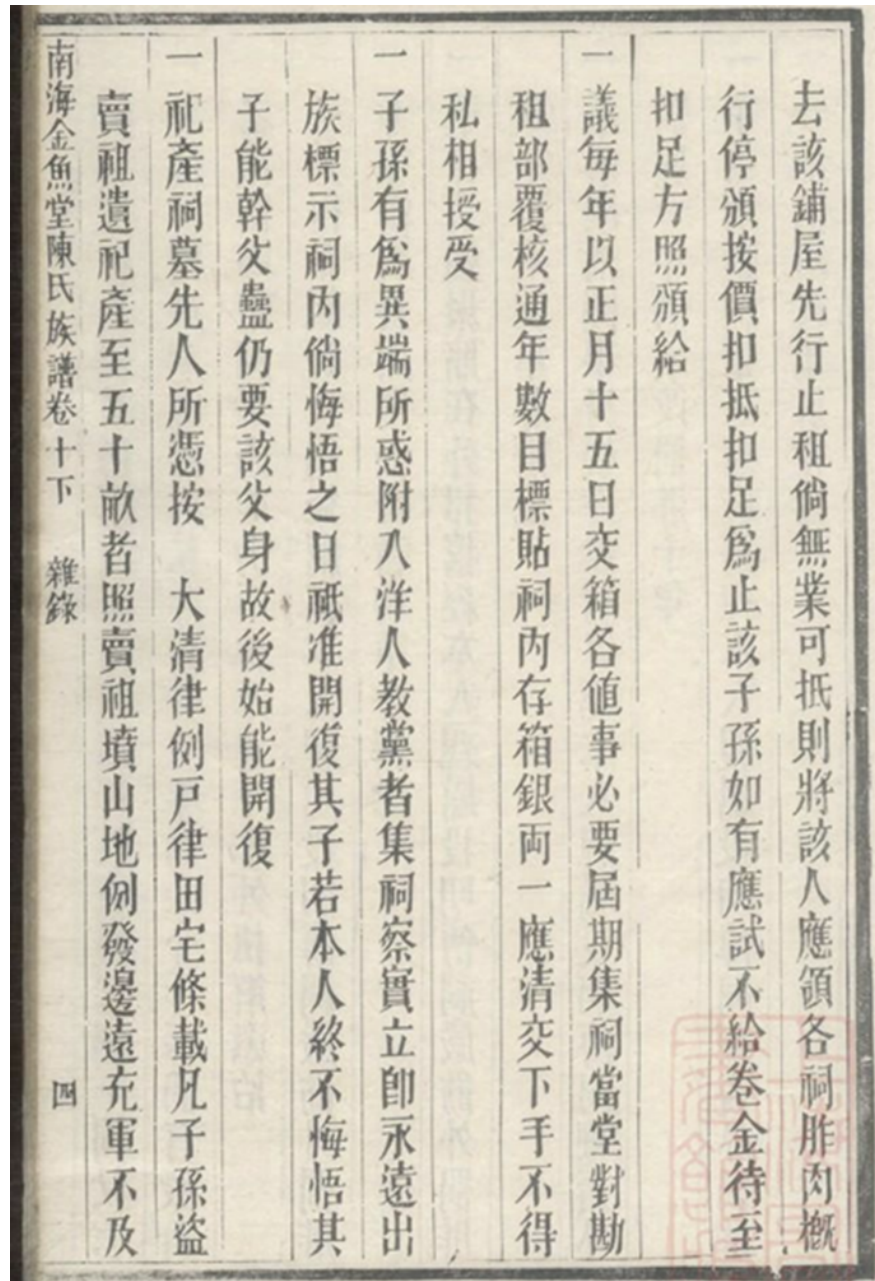


Figure 1: Clan Rule Banning Christianity

Note: Translation of the text: “Regarding descendants who are deluded by heterodox beliefs and attach themselves to foreigners’ churches: Once the facts are verified by a gathering at the ancestral hall, they shall be immediately and permanently expelled from the clan, and a notice regarding this expulsion shall be posted within the hall. Should a day of repentance come, only their sons are permitted to be reinstated. If the individual [the convert] never repents to the end, but his son is capable of ‘remedying the father’s errors’, the son may only be reinstated after the father has passed away.”

Source: *Foshan Nanhai Jinyu Tang Chen Shi Zupu* [Genealogy of the Chen Clan of Jinyu Hall, Nanhai, Foshan] (佛山南海金魚堂陳氏族譜卷10下), compiled in 1897.

Clan regulations were not merely normative guidelines; their violation entailed severe repercussions. First, Christians expelled from clans faced complete social isolation. Missionary records indicate that in Fujian—a region with some of the strongest lineage structures in China—converts were often treated as pariahs. Macgowan (1895), a missionary with the London Missionary Society, noted that Christians were considered traitors to the entire clan and faced systematic persecution and discrimination. When their crops were stolen or their herds seized by other clan members, they had no legal recourse; when they appealed to clan elders for adjudication, they were dismissed on the grounds that, as they were no longer clan members, they were no longer entitled to the clan's protection.¹

Beyond social isolation and persecution, conversion to Christianity often resulted in significant economic loss. Clan members could be stripped of their rights to access revenues from communal properties if they engaged in behaviors contrary to local norms, such as converting to Christianity. Even regarding nominally private family possessions, local customary law dictated that heirs must fulfill ritual obligations—specifically the maintenance of ancestral sacrifices—to validate their inheritance. Consequently, conversion resulted not only in exclusion from corporate clan benefits but also in the forfeiture of private family inheritance,² leading to severe economic destitution.

Such pressure was significantly mitigated in places with relatively weak clans. While Christians in these regions still faced social hostility, the cost of conversion was substantially lower, and missionaries found their work comparatively easier. First, clans in these areas lacked the economic leverage they enjoyed in the South; they held little corporate property and thus generated minimal distributable revenue (Smith, 2013; Huang, 1985). Without the threat of losing access to clan assets, family properties were more likely to be treated as private affairs, and conversion rarely led to the loss of succession rights. Furthermore, unlike the single-surname villages of clan-strong re-

¹A similar report is provided by Stock (1877), a missionary stationed in Fuqing, Fujian province, who observed the social isolation Christian converts experienced.

²A typical example is the Zhao'an Missionary Case (Zhao'an Jiao'an) in Fujian in 1881. Linping, a Christian convert, had his property—including his house, land, clothing, and furniture—seized by other members of the Lin clan. His herds were also confiscated, as clan elders argued that his refusal to worship ancestors invalidated his right of inheritance. See Jiaowu Jiao'an Dang [Archives of Missionary Cases], Vol. 4, No. 2 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1976). The original records regarding Linping's case were sourced from Qing dynasty government archives, compiled in *Archives on Missionary Affairs and Cases* (1974).

gions, villages in clan-weak areas were typically surname-heterogeneous (Duara, 1991). Lacking the monolithic authority of a single lineage to enforce community-wide ostracism, social pressure on converts was fragmented and less effective.

2.3 State Building, Land Reform, and the Decimation of Clans

The CCP's victory in the civil war in 1949 marked an existential crisis for Chinese lineage organizations. For the CCP leadership, clans constituted a dual obstacle: they were viewed ideologically as "feudal" remnants and structurally as impediments to the consolidation of state power.¹

Beyond ideological hostility, the offensive against lineages was driven by the functional imperatives of state-building. Politically, the CCP sought to atomize rural society by eliminating the clan as a rival organizer of social life; as long as lineages maintained their traditional authority, the Party's capacity to penetrate the village remained limited (Schurmann, 1966). Economically, the state's industrialization strategy depended on the maximal extraction of agricultural surplus, a process hindered by the traditional elites' control over agrarian land (Riskin, 1987).

Land Reform (1950–1952) served as the primary mechanism of state-building at the grassroots level. Far more than an economic project aimed at redistributing acreage, Land Reform was a campaign of total social revolution. Its objective was to fundamentally reorder the rural power structure and obliterate the hold of traditional elites—including clans—over society.

A critical component of this process was the confiscation of lineage corporate property. The state expropriated these collective assets, which had historically funded ritual life, education, and social welfare, and redistributed them to individual households.

Simultaneously, the Party supplanted clans with its own organizational apparatus as local power centers. Through "peasant associations," the Party mobilized lower-class villagers to bypass and subvert traditional elite networks (Crook and Crook, 2006; Yang, 1966; Siu, 1989). These associations served as a political pipeline: activists who demonstrated loyalty were recruited into the

¹In *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan* (1927), Mao Zedong identified "clan authority" as one of the four "thick ropes" binding the peasantry, alongside state power, religious authority, and patriarchy.

Party, transforming the associations into the regime's grassroots cells (Hao et al., 2025). Meanwhile, clan elders who managed corporate trusts were stripped of their social and political status, designated as "landlords," and relegated to a political underclass, often regardless of their asset holdings (Hao et al., 2025; Parish and Whyte, 1980; Siu, 1989; Wang, 2006). In doing so, the Party replaced horizontal kinship networks with a state-centered, vertical hierarchy.

The dismantling of the clan precipitated the collapse of folk religious practice. The state's appropriation of clan assets extended to the very spatial anchors of community religious rituals, including ancestral halls and temples. These sacred venues were annexed and converted into instruments of the new regime—schools, granaries, and local government headquarters (Goossaert and Palmer, 2011; Wang, 2020). With the physical venues of worship occupied and religious activities labelled as "feudal superstition" and prohibited, the state effectively dismantled the institutional infrastructure that had sustained rural belief systems for centuries.

附：县城主要庙宇、会馆利用情况表(1985年)

名 称	所在街道	利用单位	备 注	名 称	所在街道	利用单位	备 注
东岳庙	苏兴街	东北乡学校		节孝祠	瑞祥街	房产公司	
马王庙	北河坝街	居民住宅	民国时为小学	天上宫	大北街	制面厂	
北厉坛	北河坝街	城北中学	又名孤魂庙	立善堂	大北街	粮库	
痘疹庵	北关街	自来水厂		川主庙	民主巷	大北街小学	
苍圣祠	回龙街	回龙街小学		南华宫	庆云上街	油脂公司	
西火神庙	大西街	供电分局	1930年 为发电厂	惜字宫	惜字宫街	教育印刷厂	
东火神庙	东城边街	电影院		南火神庙	庆云下街	粮库	
文 庙	大西街	县政府		关岳庙	庆云下街	米面厂	
圣真宫	大西街	粮食局		纯阳观	庆云下街	居民住宅	米面厂对面
湖广会馆	光华巷	粮食局		精忠观	庆云下街	机械厂	
江西会馆	内南街	县联社		南轩祠	南外	南轩中学	民国时期曾 为职业学校
陕西会馆	大东街	县委招待所		龙神祠	茶盘街	糖果厂	
华光庙	马道巷	幼儿园		双忠祠	茶盘街	职业中学	原西南乡小学
城皇庙	瑞祥街	影剧院	1963年 前为剧场	翔符寺	迎祥街	粮站	
北极宫	瑞祥街	废品仓库		杨公祠	小西街	中医院	
洗墨池	墨池街	奶牛场	解放前为学校	文昌宫	大西街	大西街小学	又称灵宝观

Figure 2: Archival Record of Repurposed Religious Sites in Mianzhu County

Note: The original document tabulates the utilization of expropriated temples during the Land Reform.

The data illustrates the state's comprehensive seizure of lineage infrastructure.

Prominent examples include: (1) The **Confucian Temple** (Wen Miao), converted into the **County Government Headquarters**; (2) The **City God Temple** (Cheng Huang Miao), repurposed as a **public theater**; (3) The **Guan-Yue Temple** (dedicated to martial deities), reduced to a **flour mill**; and (4) The **Wenchang Palace**, turned into a **primary school**.

Source: [Mian Zhu County Gazetteer, 1987].

While Christians were not exempt from the political turmoil of the revolutionary era, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, the institutional damage sustained by the church was significantly less severe than inflicted upon folk religions. Two factors account for this resilience. First, Christianity was less deeply embedded in the traditional political-economic order—the primary target of revolutionary campaigns. Unlike clans, the church was not a major land or estate holder,

and Christian leaders rarely occupied key political roles in rural grassroots society; consequently, the state perceived them as a lesser threat to its consolidation of control. Second, Christian practice demonstrated greater material autonomy than folk religions, whose ritual life depended heavily on fixed sites such as ancestral halls and temples. This allowed Christians to adapt to the destruction of physical infrastructure. Even during the harshest periods, believers gathered in clandestine settings—private homes or open fields—relying on oral transmission when physical Bibles were scarce (Zhao, 1997; Liang, 1999; Wang, 2020). This mobility effectively buffered the Christian community from the material devastation that crippled folk religions.

In the post-Mao reform era, although clans and folk religions have experienced a partial cultural revival (Dean, 2003; Tsai, 2007; Tang, 2017), they function fundamentally differently from their historical predecessors. Deprived of their vast corporate estates and lacking binding legal force, revived clans can no longer rely on compulsory participation; instead, they depend entirely on voluntary association (Sun, 2014). The decline in the clan's influence in rural society has created a favorable environment for Christian expansion in two ways. First, the clan has lost the coercive power to penalize converts; while elders may still express social disapproval, they lack the economic leverage or institutional weight to enforce their will (Sun, 2017; Colijn, 2018). Second, the dismantling of traditional authority has individualized rural society, creating a void in communal and ritual life that Christian activities have effectively filled (Dean and Zheng, 2010; Sun, 2017). Thus, the weakening of traditional structures not only lowered the resistance to alternative beliefs but also opened the necessary social space for their growth.

To contextualize my theory, I draw the following three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 Prior to 1949, strong clans inoculated communities against Christian expansion. Consequently, regions with high clan presence will exhibit significantly lower share of Christians.

Hypothesis 2 In the post-Mao era, the relationship reverses: regions that possessed strong clan structures prior to the revolution will exhibit higher rates of Christian growth.

Hypothesis 3 The magnitude of Christian resurgence is conditional on the intensity of state violence. The positive correlation between historical clan strength and contemporary Christian

growth is strongest in regions where Land Reform repression against clans was most severe.

3 Data

3.1 General Rule for Data Collection

I utilize multiple datasets to empirically investigate the relationship between clan strength and the spread of Christianity across the pre- and post-1949 eras. To account for the redrawing of administrative boundaries over time, I harmonize historical units with modern county-level divisions, relying on information from gazetteers on administrative boundary adjustments.

3.2 Gazetteer Data on Christians

Obtaining reliable historical data on the Chinese religious landscape has long posed a challenge for scholars. Unlike in many other nations, China's national censuses do not record religious affiliation. While national surveys conducted by domestic research institutions began including questions on religiosity in the 2010s, these data are of limited utility for this study. First, because these surveys are recent, they cannot shed light on historical trends prior to the 21st century. Second, they typically lack adequate sample sizes at the local level, which is the primary unit of analysis for this research.

To overcome these limitations, I constructed a novel dataset drawing information from local gazetteers (地方志), which are official local directories that document regional histories, demographics, and social life. Historical China has a longstanding tradition of compiling such records. During the 1980s and 1990s, local governments resumed this practice by publishing New Local Gazetteers (新方志) as part of a broader state-led effort to reconstruct historical records disrupted during the Maoist era.

New Local Gazetteers typically provide comprehensive coverage of a locality's historical and contemporary social, political, and economic conditions. Compiled through consultation with local

experts, they synthesize earlier gazetteers, archival records, and government surveys. Crucially for this study, these volumes contain dedicated sections on religion that document the historical trajectory of religious practices and provide quantitative data on adherents. Many gazetteers report Christian population counts for two periods: the pre-revolutionary era (typically the 1940s to early 1950s) and the reform period (primarily the late 1980s to early 1990s, when most gazetteers were compiled).

The reliability of these figures is bolstered by their administrative sources. For the pre-revolutionary era, compilers frequently drew from the archives of previous Republican governments. For the reform era, counts were usually compiled in consultation with church leaders or via local government surveys conducted for internal administrative monitoring. Although not produced for academic research, these figures are relatively reliable precisely because they were gathered by local authorities for regulatory purposes. A sample excerpt from a gazetteer used for data collection can be found in Appendix D.

To construct the final dataset, I manually reviewed and extracted information from over 2,000 New Local Gazetteers, relying on close textual reading and hand-coding. This involved not only identifying explicit statistics but also parsing narrative passages to locate quantitative estimates embedded within descriptions of local religious life. The resulting dataset comprises a panel covering 1,200 counties—encompassing more than half of China’s total population—making it one of the most comprehensive attempts to trace subnational patterns of Christian growth in historical China.

3.3 Land Reform

Land reform delivered the most severe blow to clan structures. It dismantled their economic foundation by expropriating lineage trust lands and communal properties, while simultaneously undermining their socio-political authority through the politics of class labeling. In these classification campaigns, poor peasants and hired laborers were designated as ‘good classes’—political allies of the revolution. In contrast, rich peasants and landlords were stigmatized as ‘enemy classes.’ These

groups were systematically excluded from political participation, denied equal access to public goods and credit, and, in many cases, stripped of basic rights regarding education and career advancement (Alesina et al., 2020).

I employ the share of rural residents designated as 'landlords' as a proxy for the intensity of state repression against traditional clans. A critical feature of the Land Reform campaigns was that class labels were not merely economic descriptors based on property holdings; they were also politically constructed categories. Local cadres frequently targeted perceived threats to the new regime, including clan elders, lineage stewards, religious specialists, and secret society heads—branding them as 'landlords' even if their material wealth was modest (Hao et al., 2025; Siu, 1989). Consequently, a higher proportion of designated landlords in a county serves as an indicator of more aggressive anti-clan repression, particularly in clan-dense regions.

Land reform data are extracted from county gazetteers. The data source has two limitations. First, systematic records are predominantly available for 'newly liberated areas', which are regions captured by the CCP after the resumption of the Civil War in 1946. In contrast, 'old liberated areas,' where land reform occurred earlier and in a more piecemeal fashion, often lack comparable documentation. Second, the consistency of reporting varies across localities; some gazetteers offer detailed religious statistics but sparse class-label data, and vice versa. Consequently, the merged panel contains land reform measures for approximately 40% of the counties.

3.4 Population

I draw population data primarily from Wu et al. (2022), who compiled six waves of the Chinese census (1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, 2000, and 2010) and mapped them onto the historical administrative jurisdictions used in my Christianity dataset. I successfully matched most counties using the Wu et al. (2022) dataset; for the remaining cases, I extracted data from specific county gazetteers. I employ the 1953 census as a proxy for the pre-revolution population. For the post-revolution analysis, given that Christianity data were collected mainly in the 1980s and 1990s, I match each observation with the census data of the corresponding decade.

3.5 Control Variable: Timing of First Christian Activity

The size of the contemporary Christian population may be influenced by the duration of historical missionary activity. Localities where missionaries established a presence earlier could benefit from a longer period of evangelization and community building. Conversely, delayed missionary entry in areas with strong clan structures could stem from logistical factors—such as geography or resource allocation—rather than clan resistance itself. To account for these potential confounds, I control for the year of first recorded Christian activity.

Data for this variable were compiled from county gazetteers, which typically document local religious history. I extracted the specific year or historical period of initial introduction of Protestantism from these narratives. In most localities, Christian activity traces back to Western missionaries during the late Qing dynasty, whereas in a minority of cases, introduction occurred only after the 1949 Communist Revolution.

4 Empirical Results

4.1 Strong Clans Impeded Christian Spread

Hypothesis 1 predicts that prior to the state-building campaigns of the Communist revolution, strong lineage clans inhibited the diffusion of Christianity. Consequently, I expect locales with stronger clans to exhibit a lower share of Christians. To test this empirically, I employ the following cross-sectional specification:

$$\text{Christians}_i = \beta \text{ClanStrength}_i + \gamma \mathbf{X}_i + \delta_r + \varepsilon_i. \quad (1)$$

where the dependent variable is Christians per 100,000 residents; ClanStrength_i is measured by $\log(\text{Genealogies}_i)$; $\mathbf{X}_i$ includes the year Protestant missionaries first arrived (proxying exposure length); and δ_r are province or prefecture fixed effects that absorb time-invariant regional factors. Standard errors are clustered at the prefecture/province level.

Table 1: Clan Strength and Protestant Adherents Before Communist Revolution

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Protestant Adherents (per 100,000)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Clan Strength	−109.066*** (39.817)	−84.313*** (32.237)	−108.146*** (36.741)	−85.966*** (32.433)
Protestant Intro.			−2.011** (0.935)	−1.854 (1.244)
Fixed Effects	Province	Prefecture	Province	Prefecture
Number of Provinces	30		30	
Number of Prefectures		233		233
Clustered SE	Prefecture	Prefecture	Prefecture	Prefecture
Observations	1,059	1,005	1,024	969

Notes: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the number of Protestant Christians per 100,000 people in the late 1940s or early 1950s. The independent variable is clan strength, proxied by the log form of the number of genealogies per 100,000 people before 1949. Standard errors are clustered at the prefecture level.

Table 1 demonstrates a consistent negative correlation between clan strength and the prevalence of Protestant Christianity in the pre-revolutionary era. Models 1 and 2 control for province- and prefecture-level fixed effects, respectively. Models 3 and 4 additionally control for the year Protestantism was first introduced to a county. Across all specifications, the results remain consistent: prior to the Communist Revolution, counties with stronger clan presence had significantly fewer Christians. In Appendix B.2, I replace the independent variable with a dummy variable that indicates whether a county is below the median of clan strength or above. Results show that counties with weak clan presence had, on average, 100 more Christians per 100,000 residents than counties with strong clans. Given that the mean Christian population during this era was approximately 400 per 100,000 residents, this difference represents roughly a 25% in Christian adherents, a substantively meaningful effect, particularly given the generally low Christian population shares of the period. Furthermore, while locales with a longer history of Christian activity tended to have larger Christian populations, this association is attenuated when controlling for prefecture-level

fixed effects.

4.2 Rise of Christianity in Post-Revolution Era China

I then turn to the post-revolution era. Hypothesis 2 predicts that post-revolution growth of Christians was faster in the post-revolution era in localities with stronger clans. As the CCP's revolutionary state-building efforts weakened the power of clans, I expect that counties with stronger clan presence before the revolution would experience faster Christian growth in the post-revolution period. To explore this possibility, I employ a two-period difference-in-differences (DiD) design, using the specification below:

$$\text{Christian}_{it} = \alpha_i + \lambda_t + \beta (\text{ClanStrength}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + \gamma^\top (\mathbf{Z}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + \varepsilon_{it}, \quad (2)$$

where the dependent variable is Christians per 100,000 residents; Post_t equals 1 for the post-revolution period (1980s) and 0 for the pre-revolution period (1940s or early 1950s); ClanStrength_i is measured by $\log(\text{Genealogies}_i)$; the coefficient on $\text{ClanStrength}_i \times \text{Post}_t$ is the DiD estimand of how pre-revolution clan strength predicts post-revolution changes in Christian prevalence; $\mathbf{Z}_i$ are pre-period covariates (e.g., the year Protestant missionaries first arrived), included only via interactions with Post_t ; α_i are county fixed effects and λ_t is a common period effect (so main effects of ClanStrength_i and Post_t are absorbed). Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

Table 2: DiD: Effect of Clan Strength on Protestant Adherents (Post-Communist Revolution)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Protestant Adherents (per 100,000)	
	(1)	(2)
Post Revolution (Dummy)	165.153*** (43.513)	214.372 (1,886.932)
Clan Strength $\times$ Post Revolution	79.234** (36.216)	79.059** (35.378)
Protestant Intro $\times$ Post Revolution		-0.026 (0.986)
Fixed Effects	County	County
Number of Counties	1,050	1,050
Clustered SE	County	County
Observations	2,100	2,100

Notes: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the number of Protestant Christians per 100,000 people before and after the Communist Revolution. Model 2 additionally controls for the interaction between Post revolution dummy and the year when protestant Christianity was introduced to a county. Both models control for county fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

Table 2 presents the Difference-in-Differences (DiD) estimates. All models control for county fixed effects to absorb time-invariant heterogeneity, with standard errors clustered at the county level. The positive coefficient on the interaction term indicates that counties with stronger pre-1949 lineage institutions experienced significantly faster growth in Christian adherence following the revolution. This result supports the hypothesis that the CCP's dismantling of kinship structures created a social vacuum that Christianity subsequently filled. Substantively, against a sample average increase of 189 Christians per 100,000 residents, counties with strong lineage presence grew at nearly twice the rate of those with weak lineages, marking a meaningful divergence in post-revolutionary trajectories. Notably, the interaction between the year of Protestant introduction and the post-revolution dummy is statistically insignificant. This suggests that the drivers of expansion have shifted: while pre-revolutionary growth depended on the historical depth of missionary activity, post-revolutionary growth is driven primarily by the structural voids left by the erosion of

traditional institutions.

4.3 Mechanism Check: Moderating Effects of Land Reform

Could the link between strong pre-revolution clans and faster Christian growth be driven by other factors? Was the dismantling of clans during the land reform the causal driver of subsequent Christian growth?

To probe the mechanism, I test whether the post-1949 reversal is larger precisely where land reform most aggressively dismantled clan authority. The expectation is straightforward: counties with strong pre-1949 clans should see greater post-revolution Christian growth when clan elders were targeted more intensely.

I operationalize the intensity of anti-clan campaign using the *landlord share* recorded during land reform—the percentage of households labeled "landlord". As discussed earlier, CCP cadres often designated lineage elders as landlords in the class-labeling process, irrespective of private holdings; hence, a higher landlord share is a reasonable proxy for anti-lineage repression, conditional on baseline clan strength. Empirically, I estimate a moderation (triple-interaction) model, $\text{ClanStrength}_i \times \text{Post}_t \times \text{LandlordShare}_i$, with county fixed effects and a common period effect, including all lower-order terms and interacting pre-period covariates (e.g., missionary-arrival year) with Post_t . A positive coefficient on the triple interaction indicates that the post-revolution increase associated with strong pre-1949 clans is amplified where land reform was harsher—consistent with the mechanism that state-led erosion of lineage sanctioning capacity lowered the costs of religious deviation and opened space for new congregations.

One caveat is that the coverage of the land-reform data is limited. I was only be able to find data on the share of people designated as landlords in 40% of the counties where I found data on the number of Christians. As a result, the merged sample is smaller than the data used in the main DiD analysis.

Table 3: Triple Difference: Effect of Clan Strength and Land Reform Intensity on Protestant Adherents (Post-Communist Revolution)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Protestant Adherents (per 100,000)	
	(1)	(2)
Post Revolution (Dummy)	645.546*** (210.700)	7,382.371* (3,792.983)
Clan Strength $\times$ Post Revolution	-92.039 (68.083)	-86.861 (67.295)
Landlord Share $\times$ Post Revolution	-74.530*** (28.241)	-63.437** (27.588)
Clan $\times$ Post $\times$ Landlord Share	19.591*** (7.517)	17.533** (7.371)
Protestant Intro $\times$ Post Revolution		-3.583* (1.989)
Fixed Effects	County	County
Number of Counties	403	395
Clustered SE	County	County
Observations	806	790

Notes: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the number of Protestant Christians per 100,000 people. This table reports the triple difference estimates. The core independent variable is the triple interaction term between Clan Strength, Post Revolution dummy, and Lineage Population Share. Model 2 additionally controls for the interaction between Post revolution dummy and Protestant introduction year. All models control for county fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

The results of the triple difference analysis are shown in Table 3. The results indicate that the post-revolution increase in Christianity associated with strong pre-1949 clans is larger precisely where land-reform intensity was higher, as captured by the landlord-share proxy. Substantively, the interaction implies that the same increment in lineage strength translates into markedly greater post-1949 growth in counties where class labeling was more aggressive than in otherwise comparable counties with milder campaigns. This pattern is consistent with my theory: clans' sanctioning capacity was eroded by land reform, lowering the costs of religious deviation and easing entry for

new religious entrepreneurs.

4.4 Robustness Checks

To validate the primary findings, I conduct a series of robustness checks, with detailed results provided in Appendix B. First, I address the potential sensitivity of the estimates to outliers in the dependent variable. Given the long-tailed distribution of Christian density, ordinary least squares (OLS) estimates may be disproportionately influenced by extreme values. I employ two distinct strategies to mitigate this concern. First, I replace the OLS estimator with the two-step quantile regression method developed by Canay (2011). This non-parametric approach is inherently robust to outliers as it does not inflate the weight of extreme observations. Second, I winsorize the outcome variable (Christians per 100,000 residents) at the 5th and 95th percentiles to limit the influence of values in the distribution's tails. Across both specifications, the estimates remain statistically significant and comparable in magnitude to the baseline results. These findings suggest that the main effects are not driven by extreme values or distributional anomalies.

To ensure that the findings are not artifacts of the functional form of the independent variable, I recode clan strength from a continuous measure to a binary indicator. Counties are classified as having 'strong clan' presence if their genealogy density exceeds the sample median. The results remain consistent using this alternative specification.

Third, I refine the sample to strictly isolate the mechanism of Han lineage competition. My theoretical framework links the dismantling of clans to the rise of Christianity, a dynamic predicated on the specific social and cultural structures of Han society. In contrast, Christian growth among ethnic minority groups often follows distinct historical and missiological logics (Covell, 2015; Yamamori and Chan, 1998). Furthermore, my key independent variable—Chinese-language genealogies—does not capture the kinship organizations of non-Han groups, introducing potential measurement error. To address these concerns, I exclude the five Autonomous Regions (Xinjiang, Tibet, Ningxia, Guangxi, and Inner Mongolia) as well as Yunnan Province. The core results persist in this restricted sample, confirming that the findings are driven by the hypothesized clan-church

dynamic rather than unobserved heterogeneity in minority regions.

5 Generalizability and Cases Beyond China

I have demonstrated that in China, revolutionary state-building effectively weakened clans and reshaped the religious landscape, thereby facilitating the rise of Christianity. A potential critique of these findings is that they may be idiosyncratic to the Chinese context, particularly given the CCP's radical revolutionary approach to destroying traditional social structures and reshaping grassroots society. It remains an open question whether more incremental processes of state-building would disrupt the religious field to a similar magnitude.

To assess the scope of the argument, I examine two cases beyond China: Mexican indigenous communities and Hmong communities in Vietnam. In both instances, state expansion did not rely on the systematic erasure of the dominant religion, nor did the state intentionally repress traditional social leaders. Yet, by reconfiguring local authority and channeling resources through state institutions, the state undermined the tight-knit communal structures that enforced ritual conformity, facilitating the rise of new religious actors.

5.1 Decline of Cargo and Rise of Protestantism in Mexican Indigenous Communities

In southern Mexico, indigenous communities were traditionally organized through the 'cargo system,' a fused civil-religious hierarchy. Originating in the colonial era, this institution developed as Catholic missionaries delegated routine liturgical administration to local lay converts. Over centuries, these duties crystallized into a unified governance structure in which civic power is fused with religious authority (Chance and Taylor, 1985).

The cargo system operated as an age-graded, rotating hierarchy that served as the center of community life. Service was mandatory for all adult males, but advancement to leadership positions required the financing of increasingly elaborate fiestas and masses using personal wealth

(Cancian, 1965; Guardino, 2005). While the costs were high, the returns were significant: holding office conferred not only social prestige but also the political power to allocate communal resources, effectively concentrating authority in the hands of those who sustained the ritual cycle.

Consequently, religious festivals were central to community cohesion, and contributions to these cycles functioned as a mandatory signal of civic commitment. To solve the collective action problem, communities collectively sanctioned members who refused to contribute—most notably Protestant converts, who were viewed as ‘free-riders’ enjoying communal protection without paying the ritual ‘tax.’ Sanctions ranged from fines and social shunning to the denial of public resources. In extreme cases, ‘deviants’ who rejected fiesta obligations faced severe repercussions, escalating from social isolation to outright violence (McIntyre, 2019).

However, the institutional foundation of the cargo system was severely eroded by the PRI’s state-building project, which sought to integrate indigenous communities into a centralized, modernizing political order, dominated by mestizo Spanish speakers. Beginning with the administration of President Miguel Alemán (1946–1952), the state aggressively centralized authority. Politically, the National Indigenist Institute (INI) imposed the *municipio libre* (free municipality) as the sole locus of legal authority, effectively stripping civil–religious hierarchies of their governing mandates (Peña, 2014). Cargo roles were formally recoded as voluntary or merely ceremonial, forcing ambitious leaders to divert their efforts toward state-sanctioned channels—municipal councils and PRI committees—to sustain their influence.

Economically, land reform severed the critical link between ritual sponsorship and resource control. The state established *ejidos* (collective landholdings) as the primary mechanism for rural development, bypassing traditional elders. Fiscal resources, agricultural subsidies, and public works contracts began to flow exclusively through municipal presidents and *ejidal* commissaries linked to the PRI patronage network. This reallocation hollowed out the material base of the cargo system: the civil–religious hierarchy lost its capacity to coordinate public goods, effectively relegating it to a sphere of purely ritual obligation devoid of political power.

By the 1970s, this institutional displacement precipitated a sharp decline in the cargo system

(Cancian, 1994). As the state monopolized the means of coercion and distribution, the “prestige–cost calculus” of officeholding collapsed. The political leverage gained from sponsoring *fiestas* evaporated, yet the private costs of these rituals remained exorbitantly high. For many households, the status payoff no longer justified the financial ruin, leading to a succession crisis for high-ranking posts (Dow, 2005).

In this transformed environment, with Catholic identity decoupled from political rights and economic survival, the social cost of exit plummeted. Conversion to Protestantism emerged as a rational strategy to opt out of the onerous financial burdens of the cargo system—a form of “exit” that was previously impossible when traditional authorities retained strong sanctioning power. Consequently, post-1970s Mexico witnessed a surge in Protestant growth, particularly in indigenous regions where the breakdown of the civil–religious monopoly was most acute (Dow, 2005; De la Torre et al., 2020).

5.2 Sedentarization and Religious Diversity in Hmong Communities

The Hmong are a transnational ethnic group tracing their origins to the rugged highlands of southwest China. From the late eighteenth to the nineteenth century, Qing frontier pacification campaigns—compounded by rising taxation, land scarcity, and Han in-migration—precipitated waves of Hmong migration into the northern Vietnamese borderlands. Settling in these remote highlands, they practiced swidden cultivation, maintaining a semi-nomadic lifestyle that allowed them to remain largely beyond the reach of state administration of the central government.

Hmong society traditionally relied on a patrilineal and clan-based system for self-governance. Villages were typically dominated by a few exogamous clans, with authority vested in senior male elders. These leaders functioned as political heads, deriving crucial power from their control over land allocation. In traditional Hmong communities, land was managed collectively, and the village headman or clan elders were in charge of entrusting land to households for use (Moua, 2001; Hoan, 1995; Turner et al., 2015; World Bank, 2009).

This political authority was linked to a religious life centered on animism and shamanism.

Ancestral spirits are believed to actively influence the living of the whole clan, making ritual obligations inseparable from lineage membership. While specialized shamans (*txiv neeb*) diagnose spirit-related illnesses, clan elders officiate routine rites. Communal ceremonies, particularly religious funerals, demand the participation of the entire clan; failure to participate is penalized as unfilial conduct that invites collective misfortune (Ngo, 2015). Consequently, because religious deviation equated to social treason, conversion historically carried prohibitively high social costs, and Christianity remained rare before the late twentieth century (Nguyen, 2021; Ngo, 2015).

However, this traditional autonomy has been fundamentally challenged since the 1970s, when the Vietnamese state began subjecting Hmong people to direct supervision and control. Two projects were of key importance. First, the government launched the “Fixed Cultivation and Settlement Program”, aiming to end swidden agriculture and integrate highlanders into the new political order. The state forcibly resettled Hmong households from mountains into permanent, lower-altitude villages with better road access. As Scott (2009) argues, such projects were designed to render remote, mobile populations “legible” and governable by imposing standardized administrative hierarchies. Secondly, the 1993 Land Law designated property rights to individual households and rejected collective ownership, stripping traditional clan organizations of their status as legal entities eligible to receive land titles (World Bank, 2009).

This state-building project dismantled the institutional foundations of Hmong social organization. In resettled Hmong communities, the state intentionally pursued the consolidation of single-clan hamlets into mixed-clan administrative units. This diluted the kinship networks that underpinned social cohesion, cutting off many Hmong people from their traditional tight-knit communities (Ngo, 2015). Politically, the authority to allocate land and resources was transferred from clan elders to state-backed village management boards (World Bank, 2009). This structural displacement eroded the elders’ capacity to enforce customary law and ritual conformity.

In this new environment, religion transformed from a mandatory communal obligation into a matter of individual choice, often subject to rational economic consideration. Many traditional Hmong customs, including religious festivals and funerals, were considered financially burden-

some and “backward.” Conversion to Christianity became a strategy to avoid these costly obligations (Ngo, 2016). As the mechanism of social sanction weakened, the “cost of exit” from traditional rites also plummeted. Protestantism surged in this vacuum; estimates suggest that roughly one-third of the Hmong population in Vietnam now identifies as Protestant. The faith serves as a modernizing alternative to the fractured traditional order, creating new forms of community cohesion (Lewis, 2002; Ngô, 2010). Furthermore, conversion is more prevalent in resettled villages, where clan authority is more fragmented and incapable of enforcing traditional strictures.

Conclusion

This study challenges the conventional view of state-building as a force for social homogenization. I demonstrate that by dismantling the intermediary institutions that enforce conformity, state-building projects can inadvertently catalyze religious pluralism. By eroding the sanctioning capacity of traditional elites and channeling authority through secular bodies, the state lowers the social costs of exit, effectively opening the local “religious market” to new entrepreneurs.

Empirically, I examine my theory using evidence from China. I show that strong lineage clans historically inoculated communities against Christian entry in China; however, the CCP’s state-building campaigns reversed this relationship, facilitating Christian spread by shattering clan authority. Comparative case studies of indigenous communities in Mexico and Hmong communities in Vietnam further validate the theory, demonstrating how the state-led displacement of civil-religious hierarchies and clan elders created voids filled by new religious movements.

The theory relies on scope conditions. First, this paper focuses on three cases of secular nation-building, where the political leaders were either hostile or indifferent to the dominant religion. Where state-building is fused with a dominant religion, often enforces a religious monopoly, and religions can be incorporated into the state-building project. In such cases, political elites form an alliance with the dominant religious institution to legitimize their rule, using state capacity to subsidize the incumbent faith and solidify its status (Gill and Gill, 2008; Grzymala-Busse, 2015).

Rather than enhancing religious diversity, the state stabilizes the market dominance of the established religion and raises the entry costs for new movements, thereby suppressing pluralism (Fox et al., 2019).

Second, the argument assumes a strategy of institutional displacement rather than incorporation in state-building process. State-building need not always dismantle traditional authority; rather, political centers often face a strategic choice between destroying local intermediaries or ruling through them. In many African contexts, for example, the state incorporates chiefs and customary councils into the modern political architecture, granting them constitutional recognition and significant autonomy (Baldwin, 2016; Boone, 2003).

Under such systems of "indirect rule," communal sanctioning capacity is preserved—or even reinforced by the coercive backing of the central state. Future research should therefore explore how this variation in state-building strategy differentially shapes the religious landscape.

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Appendix A Summary Statistics

Table A.1: Descriptive Statistics \label{tab:desc_stats}

Group		Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Pre-Revolution	Protestants per 100,000 People	414.202	1378.206	0.000	33791.442	1059
	Log Geneology	0.762	1.144	0.000	5.668	1073
	Landlord Share	4.990	3.036	0.490	46.221	406
	Protestantism Intro Time	1900.097	29.729	1595.000	1990.000	1036
	Year	1948.269	5.127	1936.000	1958.000	1074
Post-Revolution	Protestants per 100,000 People	610.827	1673.429	0.000	37259.213	1114
	Log Geneology	0.725	1.126	0.000	5.668	1131
	Landlord Share	4.986	3.032	0.490	46.221	410
	Protestantism Intro Time	1904.108	33.650	1595.000	1990.000	1094
	Year	1986.853	3.307	1977.000	1994.000	1132

Appendix B Robustness Checks

Appendix B.1 Addressing Long Tailed Distribution of Dependent Variable

One significant challenge to the robustness of the empirical results is the heavy right-skewness of the dependent variable (the number of Protestant Christians per 100,000 people). While a logarithmic transformation is a common remedy for skewness, it introduces several non-trivial problems in this context. First, the log transformation necessitates either dropping observations with zero Christian presence or adding an arbitrary constant (e.g., $\log(Y + 1)$), both of which can introduce significant bias (O'Hara and Kotze, 2010). Second, a log transformation distorts the weight of variation: it disproportionately magnifies small fluctuations in counties with negligible Christian populations (e.g., an increase from 5 to 10 people) while compressing substantively important variation in high-density areas.

To address the long-tailed distribution without relying on arbitrary transformations, I therefore employ two approaches. I first used a fixed-effects quantile regression approach. I focus specifically on the conditional median (0.5 quantile), which offers a robust alternative to mean-based estimators. Unlike Ordinary Least Squares (OLS), which minimizes the sum of squared residuals and is therefore highly sensitive to extreme outliers in the right tail, median regression minimizes the sum of absolute deviations. This property allows the estimator to effectively "ignore" the magnitude of extreme values, providing a measure of central tendency that is more representative of the typical county. To incorporate high-dimensional fixed effects into this quantile framework, I utilize the two-step estimator developed by Canay (2011). Standard quantile regression cannot easily accommodate large numbers of fixed effects due to the incidental parameters problem. The Canay approach solves this by assuming that fixed effects function as location shifters that are constant across quantiles. The procedure involves first estimating the fixed effects using a standard within-group estimator, then subtracting these estimated effects from the dependent variable, and finally running standard quantile regression on this transformed outcome. I report standard errors derived from a full cluster-bootstrap procedure, following Canay (2011)'s practice. Results are shown in Table A.2, A.3, and A.4.

Table A.2: Cross-Sectional Analysis of Clan Strength on Pre-Revolution Protestant Adherents (Quantile Regression)

	Dependent variable: Protestant Adherents (50th Quantile)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Log(Genealogy)	−58.974* (35.686)	−69.642** (29.546)	−54.254* (32.477)	−63.164** (31.547)
Protestant Intro			−0.290 (0.697)	−1.045 (0.819)
Fixed Effects	Province	Prefecture	Province	Prefecture
Number of Clusters	30	233	30	233
Cluster Boot SE (R=500)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,024	853	1,024	853

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Standard errors in parentheses are computed using a cluster-bootstrap procedure with 500 replications, clustered at the respective fixed-effect level. All columns report the second-step median regression results following the Canay (2011) two-step fixed effects transformation.

Table A.3: DiD Analysis of Clan Strength on Protestant Adherents (Quantile Regression)

	Dependent variable: Protestant Adherents (50th Quantile)	
	(1)	(2)
Post-Cultural Revolution (Post)	−4.937 (9.502)	−827.618 (1,416.198)
Post × Log(Genealogy)	41.148* (21.475)	44.211** (21.375)
Intro Interaction		0.431 (0.745)
Fixed Effects	County	County
Number of Counties	1,101	1,101
Cluster Boot SE (R=500)	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,102	2,102

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the county level, computed via a 500-replication bootstrap to account for the first-stage transformation in the Canay (2011) fixed effects quantile estimator.

Secondly, I address the issue of extreme outliers by transforming the dependent variable using Winsorization. Unlike logarithmic transformations, which alter the fundamental scale of the data

Table A.4: Triple Difference Analysis of Clan Strength on Protestant Adherents (Quantile Regression)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Protestant Adherents (Median)	
	(1)	(2)
Post Revolution (Dummy)	231.112** (94.620)	4,091.793* (2,365.252)
Clan Strength $\times$ Post Revolution	-52.214 (61.970)	-57.838 (62.801)
Landlord Share $\times$ Post Revolution	-45.221*** (15.380)	-42.585** (17.173)
Clan $\times$ Post $\times$ Landlord Share	14.738 (12.277)	14.482 (11.939)
Protestant Intro $\times$ Post Revolution		-2.034 (1.243)
Fixed Effects	County	County
Number of Counties	395	395
Cluster Boot SE	Yes	Yes
Observations	790	790

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. The dependent variable is the median number of Protestant Christians per 100,000 people. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the county level, computed via a 500-replication bootstrap to account for the first-stage transformation in the Canay (2011) fixed effects quantile estimator.

and complicate interpretation, Winsorization preserves the original unit of measurement. This allows the regression coefficients to be interpreted straightforwardly as changes in population counts (people per 100,000), rather than as percentage changes or elasticities.

To implement this, I Winsorize the dependent variable at the 5th and 95th percentiles. This procedure replaces the most extreme values in both tails with the values at the 5th and 95th percentiles, respectively. By "pulling in" these extreme outliers rather than discarding them, Winsorization reduces the influence of spurious or unrepresentative data points, such as counties with anomalously high reported Christian populations, without sacrificing sample size or ignoring the existence of high-density areas. Results are shown in Tables A.5, A.6, and A.7.

Table A.5: Effect of Clan Strength on (Winsorized) Protestant Adherents (Pre-Revolution)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Clan Strength	-38.134** (18.598)	-27.879** (12.258)	-39.753** (16.250)	-29.181** (12.248)
Year of Protestant Introduction			-2.124*** (0.499)	-1.950*** (0.534)
R ²	0.193	0.459	0.207	0.468
Fixed Effects	Province	Prefecture	Province	Prefecture
Num.Obs.	1063	1063	1028	1028
Num. Provinces	30	–	30	–
Num. Prefectures	–	233	–	233

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the density of Protestant Christians (per 100,000 population), Winsorized at the 5th and 95th percentiles to mitigate the influence of outliers. The key independent variable, clan strength, is proxied by the natural logarithm of the number of genealogies per 100,000 people. All specifications include either province or prefecture fixed effects, and standard errors are clustered at the prefecture level.

Table A.6: Effect of Clan Strength on Winsorized Protestant Adherents (Post-Cultural Revolution)

	(1)	(2)
Post Revolution (Dummy)	156.731*** (22.067)	-1098.800 (1119.650)
Clan Strength $\times$ Post-CR	29.342* (16.446)	32.591* (16.709)
Protestant Intro $\times$ Post-CR		0.660 (0.586)
R ²	0.740	0.740
Fixed Effects	County	County
Num.Obs.	2180	2110
Num. Counties	1090	1050

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the density of Protestant Christians (per 100,000 population), Winsorized at the 5th and 95th percentiles, by pre or post revolution era, to mitigate the influence of outliers. The key independent variable, clan strength, is proxied by the natural logarithm of the number of genealogies per 100,000 people. All specifications include county fixed effects, and standard errors are clustered at the county level.

Table A.7: Triple Interaction: Genealogy, Post-CR, and Landlord Share

	(1)	(2)
Post-Revolution	490.397*** (103.414)	3461.178* (2091.788)
Clan Strength $\times$ Post-Revolution	-88.657*** (33.548)	-86.824*** (33.304)
Post-Revolution $\times$ Landlord Share	-63.404*** (14.819)	-59.354*** (14.696)
Clan Strength $\times$ Post-Revolution $\times$ Landlord Share	18.810*** (3.980)	18.071*** (3.925)
Protestant Intro $\times$ Post-Revolution		-1.576 (1.102)
R ²	0.804	0.802
Fixed Effects	County	County
Num.Obs.	804	788
Num. Counties	402	394

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the density of Protestant Christians (per 100,000 population), Winsorized at the 5th and 95th percentiles to mitigate the influence of outliers. Model 2 additionally controls for the interaction between Post revolution dummy and the year when protestant Christianity was introduced to a county. Both models control for county fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

The point estimates from both approaches closely align with the OLS baseline. As expected, the cluster-bootstrapped standard errors in the quantile specifications are larger than those in the OLS models. This increased variation stems from the two-step estimation procedure (Canay, 2011), which explicitly accounts for the cumulative uncertainty arising from both the first-stage fixed effects transformation and the second-stage quantile estimation. This consistency suggests that while the dependent variable exhibits a long-tailed distribution, the estimated effect of clan strength is not driven by extreme outliers.

Appendix B.2 Dummy Independent Variable

Our independent variable is the log transformation of the number of genealogies per 100,000 people. Despite the log transformation, the distribution of the independent variable is still right-skewed. Following the practice of Cao et al. (2022), we generate a dummy variable, which is coded as 1 if the number of genealogies is above the median and 0 if the number of genealogies is below the median.

Table A.8: Effect of Clan Strength (Dummy) on Protestant Adherents

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Clan High	-193.630*** (68.750)	-123.207*** (46.141)	-199.936*** (71.314)	-131.057*** (48.269)
Year of Protestant Introduction			-2.013** (0.990)	-1.960 (1.276)
R ²	0.084	0.454	0.084	0.454
Fixed Effects	Province	Prefecture	Province	Prefecture
Num.Obs.	1063	1063	1028	1028
Num. Provinces	30	—	30	—
Num. Prefectures		233	—	233

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the number of Protestant Christians per 100,000 people. The independent variable is a dummy variable, which is coded as 1 if the number of genealogies is above the median and 0 if below the median. Either province or prefecture level fixed effects are controlled. Standard errors are clustered at the prefecture level.

Table A.9: Effect of Clan Strength (Dummy) on Protestant Adherents (Post-Cultural Revolution)

	(1)	(2)
Post Revolution (Dummy)	145.093*** (53.822)	561.869 (2051.032)
High Clan $\times$ Post Revolution	142.016** (67.343)	149.355** (69.850)
Protestantism Intro $\times$ Post Revolution		-0.221 (1.068)
R ²	0.879	0.880
Fixed Effects	County	County
Num.Obs.	2174	2104
Num. Counties	1087	1052

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.10: Triple Interaction: High Clan, Post Revolution, and Landlord Share

	(1)	(2)
Post Revolution	508.644*	8704.037**
	(298.604)	(3796.678)
High Clan $\times$ Post-Rev	-172.546	-136.855
	(334.660)	(330.700)
Post-Rev $\times$ Landlord Share	-45.640	-30.929
	(35.454)	(35.781)
High Clan $\times$ Post-Rev $\times$ Landlord Share	30.272	19.546
	(44.991)	(44.380)
Protestant Intro $\times$ Post-Rev		-4.359**
		(1.998)
R ²	0.805	0.805
Fixed Effects	County	County
Num.Obs.	804	788
Num. Counties	402	394

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the number of Protestant Christians per 100,000 people. Model 2 additionally controls for the interaction between Post revolution dummy and the year when protestant Christianity was introduced to a county. Both models control for county fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

Appendix B.3 Excluding Minority Regions

Clans act as the primary social structure for the Han majority, making genealogies a valid measure of clan strength in Han-dominated regions. However, ethnic minority societies are organized around different social principles, and my data source does not capture non-Han kinship structures. Consequently, minority regions might erroneously appear to have weak social institutions simply due to data limitations. To address this, I conduct a robustness check by restricting the sample to Han-majority areas. Specifically, I exclude the five Autonomous Regions and Yunnan province, where significant minority populations reside. The results remain quantitatively consistent with the baseline estimates.

Table A.11: Effect of Genealogy on Protestant Adherents

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Clan Strength	-97.670** (39.682)	-82.173** (32.357)	-96.105*** (36.371)	-83.559** (32.512)
Year of Protestantism Introduction			-2.042** (0.974)	-1.509 (1.302)
R ²	0.130	0.315	0.130	0.313
Fixed Effects	Province	Prefecture	Province	Prefecture
Num.Obs.	936	936	905	905
Num. Provinces	25	—	25	—
Num. Prefectures	—	198	—	198

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the density of Protestant Christians (per 100,000 population). The key independent variable, clan strength, is proxied by the natural logarithm of the number of genealogies per 100,000 people. All specifications include either province or prefecture fixed effects, and standard errors are clustered at the prefecture level.

Table A.12: Effect of Genealogy on Protestant Adherents (Post-Cultural Revolution)

	(1)	(2)
Post Revolution (Dummy)	156.870*** (44.789)	95.032 (2113.039)
Clan Strength $\times$ Post-Revolution	82.250** (36.163)	85.188** (36.068)
Protestantism Intro $\times$ Post Revolution		0.030 (1.108)
R ²	0.752	0.751
Fixed Effects	County	County
Num.Obs.	1898	1836
Num. Counties	949	918

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the number of Protestant Christians per 100,000 people. Model 2 additionally controls for the interaction between the post-revolution dummy and the year when Protestant Christianity was introduced to a county. Both models control for county fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

Table A.13: Triple Interaction: Genealogy, Post-CR, and Population Share

	(1)	(2)
Post Revolution	718.284*** (258.281)	7991.417* (4200.753)
Clan Strength $\times$ Post Revolution	-107.717 (79.028)	-95.085 (77.556)
Post Revolution $\times$ Landlord Share	-93.549** (36.595)	-80.118** (35.569)
Clan Strength $\times$ Post Revolution $\times$ Landlord Share	24.195*** (9.304)	21.641** (9.019)
Protestantism Intro $\times$ Post Revolution		-3.880* (2.219)
R ²	0.806	0.806
Fixed Effects	County	County
Num.Obs.	710	696
Num. Counties	355	348

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variable is the number of Protestant Christians per 100,000 people. Model 2 additionally controls for the interaction between Post revolution dummy and the year when protestant Christianity was introduced to a county. Both models control for county fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

Appendix C Sampled Clan Rules about Converting to Christianity

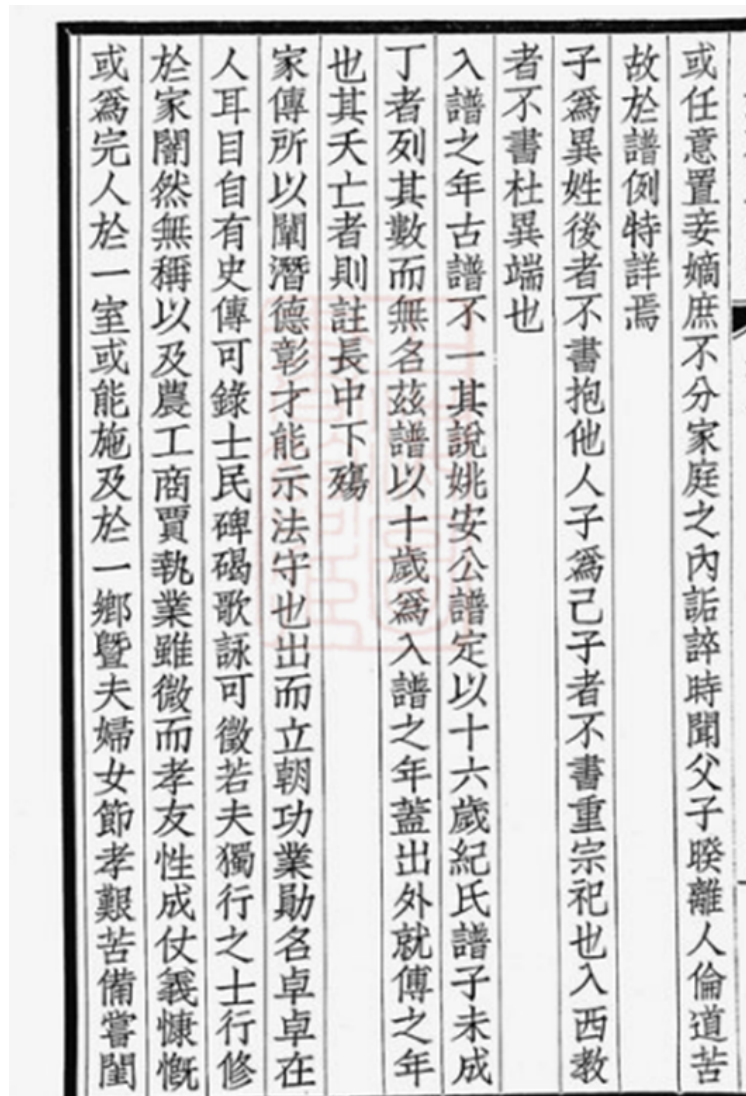
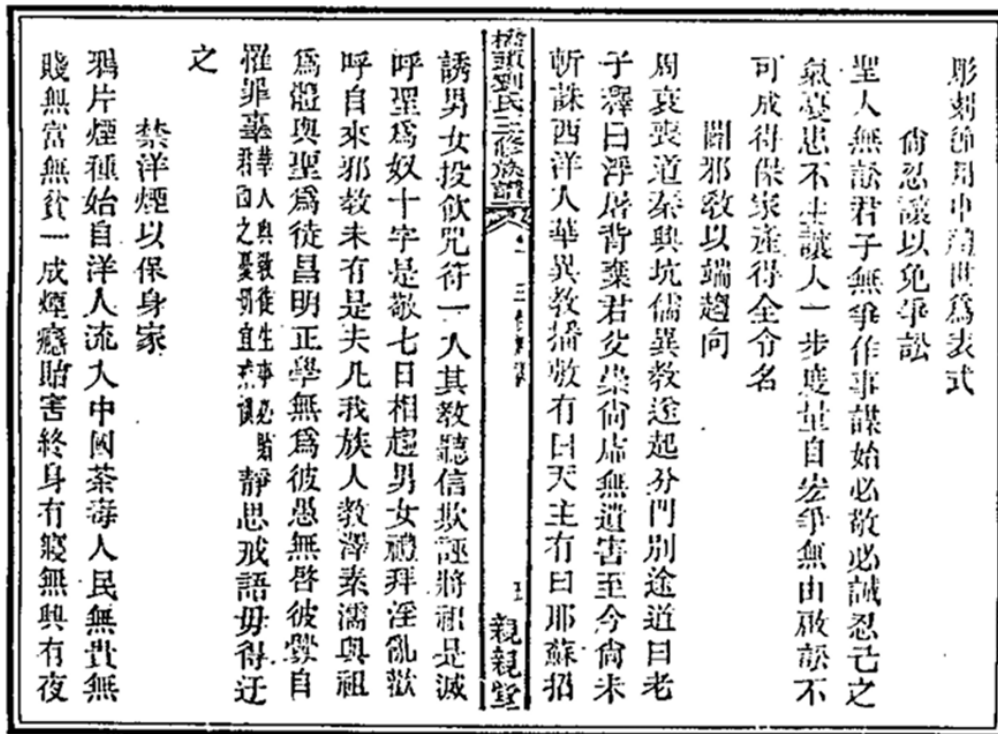


Figure A.1: Clan Rule Banning Christianity

Note: Translation of the text: "Those who join the Western religion [Christianity] are not to be recorded [in the genealogy], in order to put a stop to heresy."

Source: *Shanghai Ge Shi Zupu* [Genealogy of the Ge Clan of Shanghai] (上海葛氏族譜), compiled in 1887, reprinted in 1928.



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Figure A.2: Clan Rule Banning Christianity

Note: Translation of the text: "Westerners entered China, spreading strange teachings. There is [what is called] the 'Lord of Heaven' (Catholicism) and 'Jesus' (Protestantism). They lure men and women, administering potions and spells. Once one enters their religion, they listen to and believe in lies and slanders. They destroy [the memory of] their ancestors (i.e., stop ancestor worship) and call the Sages (like Confucius) slaves. They revere the cross and gather every seven days (the Sabbath). Men and women worship together, leading to promiscuity and [wild] cheering. Since the beginning of evil cults, there has never been anything like this. All my clansmen... must not be fooled by them..."

Source: *Xiangtan Liu Shi Zupu* [Genealogy of the Liu Clan, Xiangtan, Hunan] (湘潭劉氏族譜), compiled in 1887, reprinted in 1928.

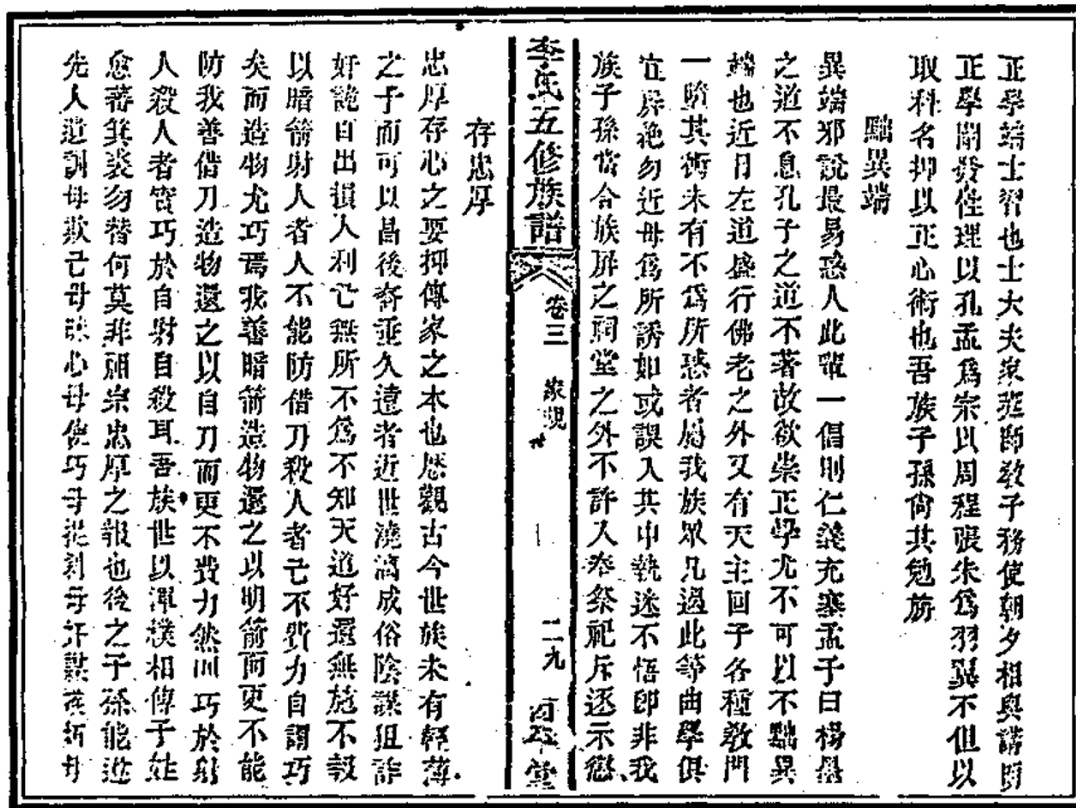


Figure A.3: Clan Rule Banning Christianity

Note: Translation of the text: "Recently, heterodox paths have become rampant. Beyond Buddhism and Taoism, there are now the Lord of Heaven [Catholicism/Christianity], Muslims, and various other sects. Once one falls for their tricks, there are none who are not confused by them.

All members of my clan must completely reject these crooked teachings; do not get close to them and do not be seduced by them.

If anyone mistakenly enters [these religions] and remains obstinate/refuses to repent, they are effectively no longer descendants of our clan. The entire clan must expel/screen them out of the ancestral hall; they are not permitted to enter to offer sacrifices. They shall be driven out to serve as a warning punishment."

Source: *Xiangtan Li Shi Zupu* [Genealogy of the Li Clan, Xiangtan, Hunan] (湘潭李氏族谱), compiled in 1864.

Appendix D Gazetteer Data Example

My data collection relied on county gazetteers. Most of these gazetteers dedicate a specific section to religion, containing detailed narrative accounts of major religious groups. These passages typically document the history of the religion, longitudinal data on the number of churches, and statistics on the adherent population. Figure A.4 illustrates a representative section regarding Protestantism in Minhou County, Fujian Province.

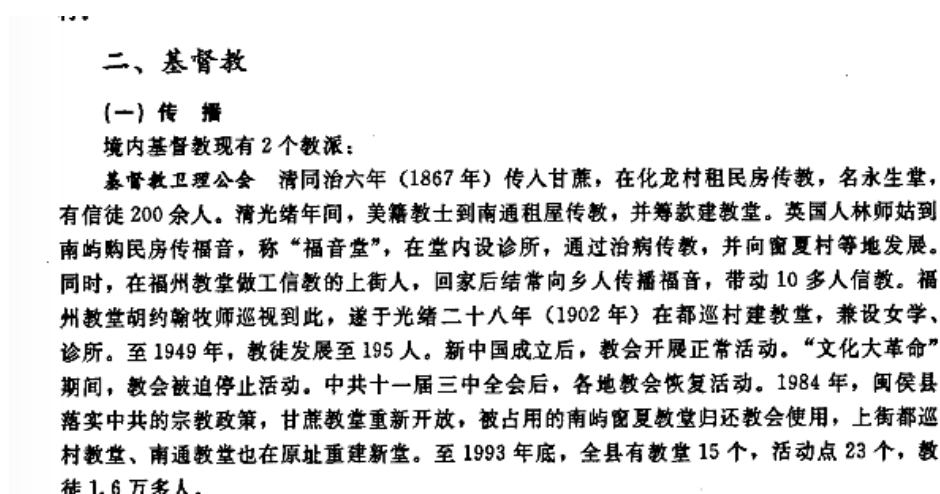


Figure A.4: Example of a Gazetteer entry on Protestantism (Minhou County)

Note: Translation of the text: "It was introduced to Ganzhe in the 6th year of the Tongzhi reign of the Qing Dynasty (1867). [They] rented a private residence in Hualong Village for preaching, named it "Yongsheng Hall" (Eternal Life Hall), and had over 200 believers. During the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty, American missionaries arrived in Nantong to rent houses for preaching and raised funds to build a church. A British missionary, Miss Lin*, arrived in Nanyu and purchased a private residence to preach the Gospel, naming it "Gospel Hall" (Fuyin Tang). A clinic was established within the church to spread the religion through medical treatment, and [missionary work] expanded to Chuangxia Village and other places.

At the same time, people from Shangjie who worked in Fuzhou churches and had converted returned home and frequently preached the Gospel to fellow villagers, leading to the conversion of over 10 people. Pastor Hu Yuehan* of the Fuzhou Church toured this area and subsequently built a church in Duxun Village in the 28th year of Guangxu (1902), concurrently establishing a girls' school and a clinic. By 1949, the number of believers had grown to 195.

After the founding of New China, the church carried out normal activities. During the "Cultural Revolution," the church was forced to cease activities. After the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China [1978], churches in various localities resumed activities. In 1984, Minhou County implemented the CCP's religious policies; the Ganzhe Church reopened, the occupied churches in Nanyu and Chuangxia were returned to church use, and the churches in Shangjie Duxun and Nantong were rebuilt on their original sites.

By the end of 1993, the entire county had 15 churches, 23 meeting points (activity sites), and over 16,000 believers."

Source: *Min Hou Xianzhi* [Genealogy of Minhou County] (闽侯县志), compiled in 1993.