

LIANG ZHONG

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., Economics, Boston University, Boston, MA, May 2025 (expected)
Dissertation Title: *Essays on Causal Inference, Structural Estimation, and their Applications*
Main advisor: Hiroaki Kaido
Dissertation Committee: Hiroaki Kaido, Jean-Jacques Forneron, M. Daniele Paserman

M.A., Econometrics and Quantitative Economics, Boston University, Boston, MA, 2019

B.S., Mathematics and Applied Mathematics, Zhejiang University, Hang Zhou, China, 2017

FIELDS OF INTEREST

Econometrics, Labor Economics, Digital Economics, Optimization

WORKING PAPERS

“[Unconditional Randomization Tests for Interference](#),” September 2024. **Job Market paper.**

“[Convexity Not Required: Estimation of Smooth Moment Condition Models](#),” (with Jean-Jacques Forneron), September 2024, **Revise and Resubmit, *Review of Economic Studies*.**

“[COPPAocalypse? The Youtube Settlement's Impact on Kids Content](#),” (with Garrett Johnson, Tesary Lin, and James Cooper), April 2024, **Revise and Resubmit, *Management Science*.**

“[Racial Screening on the Big Screen? Evidence from the Motion Picture Industry](#),” (with Angela Crema, and M. Daniele Paserman), November 2023.

WORK IN PROGRESS

“Contextual Bandit Mechanism: Optimal Delegation in the Experimentation Cycle” (with Zixian Liu)

PRESENTATIONS (*: CO-AUTHOR PRESENTS)

Midwest Econometrics Group Conference, Lexington, KY, 2024
Greenline Workshop in Econometrics, Boston, MA, 2024
19th Economics Graduate Student Conference, St. Louis, MO, 2024
NBER SI 2024 Digital Economics and Artificial Intelligence, Cambridge, MA, 2024
New York Camp Econometrics (Poster Session), Bolton Landing, NY, 2023
University of Rochester Simon Business School*, Rochester, NY, 2023
Columbia Business School*, New York, NY, 2023
SOLE Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, 2022
WEAI Annual Conference*, Portland, OR, 2022
United States Military Academy West Point*, West Point, NY, 2022
EEA-ESEM Congress*, Milano, Italy, 2022
Boston University, Econometrics Seminar, Boston, MA, 2021-2024

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Doctoral Fellowship, Boston University, 2019-2024
Optimization-Conscious Summer School Travel Grant, University of Chicago, 2023
IED Travel Grant, Boston University, 2022-2024
MA Prize for Best Paper, Boston University, 2019
Distinction in the MA Comprehensive Examination, Boston University, 2018
Excellence Award in the 7th Chinese Mathematics Competition, 2015

WORK EXPERIENCE

ACADEMIC

Research Assistant for Prof. Kevin Lang, Boston University, 2024
Research Assistant for Prof. Jean-Jacques Forneron, Boston University, 2021-2023
Research Assistant for Prof. Hiroaki Kaido, Boston University, 2020-2022
Research Assistant for Prof. Adam Guren, Boston University, 2018
Research Assistant for Prof. Raymond Fisman, Boston University, 2018

NON-ACADEMIC

Summer Associate, Analysis Group, Boston, MA, 2022

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Fellow, Econometrics (MA-level), Department of Economics, Boston University, Spring 2024 (**Evaluation Score: 4.10/5**)
Teaching Fellow, Advance Econometrics II (2nd year Ph.D), Department of Economics, Boston University, Fall 2023 (**Evaluation Score: 4.45/5**)
Teaching Fellow, Econometrics (MA-level), Department of Economics, Boston University, Spring 2021 (**Evaluation Score: 4.73/5, with course benchmark of 4.15**)
Teaching Fellow, Microeconomic Theory (MA-level), Department of Economics, Boston University, Fall 2020 (**Evaluation Score: 4.69/5, with course benchmark of 4.03**)

LANGUAGES: English (Fluent), Mandarin (Native)

COMPUTER SKILLS: C, MATLAB, R, Python, JULIA, STATA(MATA), Version Control(git)

CITIZENSHIP/VISA STATUS: China/F1

REFERENCES

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Unconditional Randomization Tests for Interference (Job Market Paper)

When conducting causal inference or designing policy, researchers are often concerned with the existence and extent of interference between units, shaped by factors such as distance, proximity, and connection strength. However, the complex correlations across units present significant challenges for inference. This paper introduces Partial Null Randomization Tests (PNRT), a novel framework that is straightforward to implement in experimental settings. PNRT provides finite-sample validity under minimal assumptions on network structure, utilizing unconditional randomization testing and pairwise comparisons. To illustrate the method's broad applicability, I apply it to the large-scale experiment conducted by Blattman et al. (2021) in Bogotá, Colombia, and find the displacement effect for violent crime to be marginally significant. A simulation study calibrated to this dataset further demonstrates PNRT's strong power properties and its suitability for general interference scenarios.

Convexity Not Required: Estimation of Smooth Moment Condition Models

(with Jean-Jacques Forneron)

Generalized and Simulated Method of Moments are often used to estimate structural Economic models. Yet, it is commonly reported that optimization is challenging because the corresponding objective function is non-convex. For smooth problems, this paper shows that convexity is not required: under a global rank condition involving the Jacobian of the sample moments, certain algorithms are globally convergent. These include a gradient-descent and a Gauss-Newton algorithm with appropriate choice of tuning parameters. The results are robust to 1) non-convexity, 2) one-to-one non-linear reparameterizations, and 3) moderate misspecification. In contrast, Newton-Raphson and quasi-Newton methods can fail to converge because of non-convexity. The condition precludes non-global optima. Numerical and empirical examples illustrate the condition, non-convexity, and convergence properties of different optimizers.

Racial Screening on the Big Screen? Evidence from the Motion Picture Industry

(with Angela Crema and M. Daniele Paserman)

We develop a model of discrimination that allows us to interpret observed differences in outcomes across groups, conditional on passing a screening test, as taste-based (employer,) statistical, or customer discrimination. We apply this framework to investigate the nature of non-white underrepresentation in the US motion picture industry. Leveraging a novel data set with racial identifiers for the cast of 7,000 motion pictures, we show that, conditional on production, non-white movies exhibit higher average revenues and a smaller variance. Our findings can be rationalized in the context of our model if non-white movies are held to higher standards for production.