

## MASTER'S THESIS

### State, salt, and society in late imperial China: a study of Lianghuai

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State, Salt, and Society in Late Imperial China: A Study of Lianghuai

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### *Abstract*

This is a study of the reforms of Lianghuai salt administration in Ming (1617) and Qing times (1830-70). It draws force from Weber's discussion on patrimonial state and its liturgical method; and the theories on principal-agent relationships. It shows that the liturgical arrangements combining burdens with privileges was a feasible way of generating short-term revenue in circumstances where the state was confronted with an ineffective bureaucracy and a battered economy. However, the liturgical arrangement also created a multi-layered principal-agent relationship characterized by the existence, in between the central state and merchants, of strong low-rank officials and local powers. Their abuse of power and extraction of revenue frustrated the efforts of bureaucratic rationalization on the part of the central state, and thus led to the failure of state-making in pre-modern China.

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