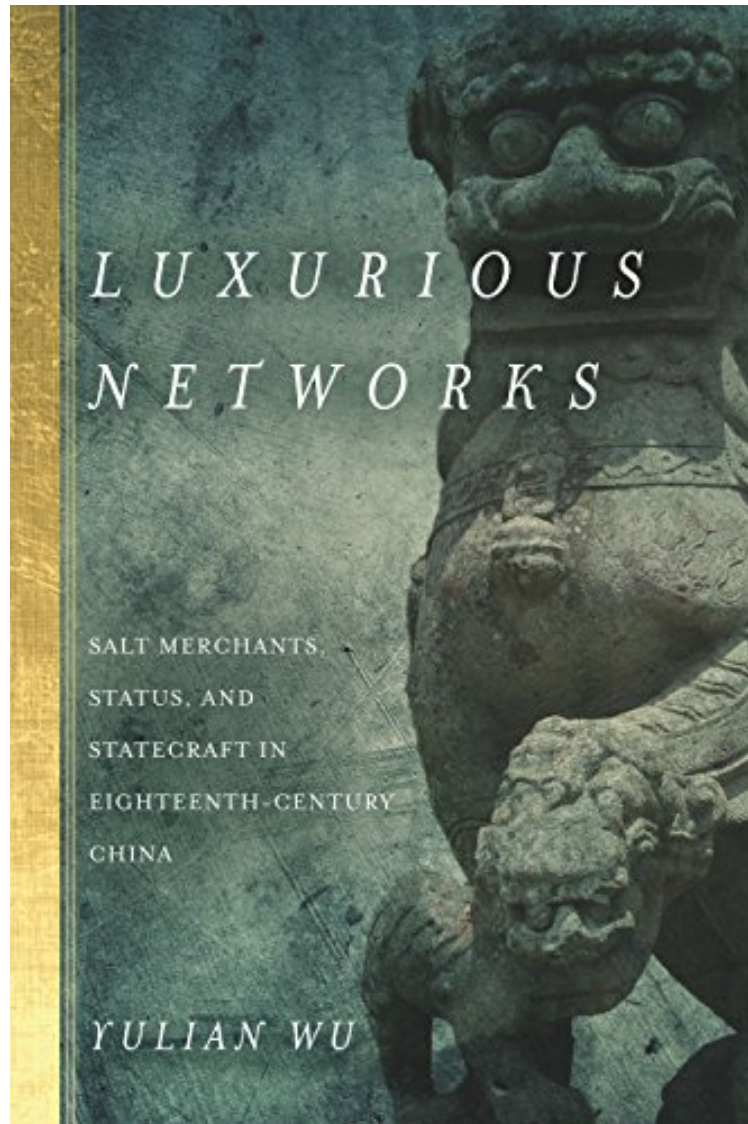


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Luxurious Networks: Salt Merchants, Status, and Statecraft in Eighteenth-Century China

Yulian Wu

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From precious jade articles to monumental stone arches, Huizhou salt merchants in Jiangnan lived surrounded by

objects in eighteenth-century China. How and why did these businessmen devote themselves to these items? What can we learn about eighteenth-century China by examining the relationship between merchants and objects? *Luxurious Networks* examines Huizhou salt merchants in the material world of High Qing China to reveal a dynamic interaction between people and objects. The Qianlong emperor purposely used objects to expand his influence in economic and cultural fields. Thanks to their broad networks, outstanding managerial skills, and abundant financial resources, these salt merchants were ideal agents for selecting and producing objects for imperial use. In contrast to the typical caricature of merchants as mimics of the literati, these wealthy businessmen became respected individuals who played a crucial role in the political, economic, social, and cultural world of eighteenth-century China. Their life experiences illustrate the dynamic relationship between the Manchu and Han, central and local, and humans and objects in Chinese history.

"Yulian Wu presents the salt merchants of Huizhou as powerful historical actors in their own right, and writes a new history of the high Qing period. Documenting the networks built by marvelous things in motion, this fascinating book makes original contributions to Chinese history as well as material culture studies." (Dorothy Ko author of *The Social Life of Inkstones: Artisans and Scholars in Early Qing China*) "This innovative and richly detailed book illuminates the circuits of exchange that bound the Qing court in Beijing to salt merchants in Jiangnan. Focused on transactions around books, seals, jades, collectibles, gardens, and monuments, *Luxurious Networks* reveals unexpected connections between taste, production, consumption, political thought, and moral values." (Tobie Meyer-Fong Johns Hopkins University) "*Luxurious Networks* is a paragon of interdisciplinary scholarship, filled with insights into the political and material cultures of eighteenth-century China. Challenging conventional views of Huizhou's salt merchants as mere literati mannequins, Yulian Wu elucidates their centrality in the historical processes of network formation through which Qing rule was constituted." Michael Chang, George Mason University
About the Author Yulian Wu is Assistant Professor of History at the University of South Carolina.