Abstract

This is a study on Jingyang County, located in the central region of the Shaanxi Province, in northwest China. Specifically, this study deals with the state-society relations in this locality in the late imperial period. The main aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the fluidity of state-society relationships, and highlight the significance of investigating the transition of state-society relations over shorter historical periods. To achieve this aim, this thesis will be divided into four chapters to trace the changes of state-society relations in Jingyang across four different historical periods in the Ming and the Qing dynasty.

The first chapter deals with the “localist turn” that took place in the Ming dynasty, roughly from the 1480s to the end of the dynasty. In this period, there was a graduate shift in balance of power away from the state, giving rise to an expansion of the sphere in which the local elites could operate in. However, despite being given more freedom in public scenes, the Jingyang elites were never given unrestricted access to handle all the local projects in the county. They were required to work closely with the state representatives assigned to the county in order to accomplished most of the projects.

The second chapter deals with the early Qing period, where there was an apparent decrease in the intensity of elite’s activism. The change in ruling house was accompanied by revitalized vigor among their representatives, as most of the public projects in this period were accomplished by the local officials. The loss of financial ability due to the poor economic climate had also contributed to the regression of local activism.