



# The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties (History of Imperial China)

By Timothy Brook

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## The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties (History of Imperial China) By Timothy Brook

The Mongol takeover in the 1270s changed the course of Chinese history. The Confucian empire?a millennium and a half in the making?was suddenly thrust under foreign occupation. What China had been before its reunification as the Yuan dynasty in 1279 was no longer what it would be in the future. Four centuries later, another wave of steppe invaders would replace the Ming dynasty with yet another foreign occupation. *The Troubled Empire* explores what happened to China between these two dramatic invasions.

If anything defined the complex dynamics of this period, it was changes in the weather. Asia, like Europe, experienced a Little Ice Age, and as temperatures fell in the thirteenth century, Kublai Khan moved south into China. His Yuan dynasty collapsed in less than a century, but Mongol values lived on in Ming institutions. A second blast of cold in the 1630s, combined with drought, was more than the dynasty could stand, and the Ming fell to Manchu invaders.

Against this background?the first coherent ecological history of China in this period?Timothy Brook explores the growth of autocracy, social complexity, and commercialization, paying special attention to China's incorporation into the larger South China Sea economy. These changes not only shaped what China would become but contributed to the formation of the early modern world.

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*By Timothy Brook*

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#### Review

A broad and well-written overview of Chinese history from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century. Brook uses stories and anecdotes to illuminate historical trends with grace and skill. For those interested in Chinese history, and for comparative historians, this is a very useful book. (Peter Ditmanson, University of Oxford)

Brook has given a readers a fast-paced, intriguing account of the Yuan and Ming dynasties that will be read and enjoyed for many years to come. (David D. Buck *Canadian Journal of History* 2011-08-01)

Brook's ecological approach to China is both original and timely: for also China's rulers of today are faced with widespread social tension deriving from environmental calamity and natural catastrophe. (Tjalling Halbertsma *Journal of Asian History* 2011-06-01)

One of those rare works that appeal to both academic and general readers. Its readable prose and intriguing storytelling, coupled with the emphasis on total history, make it more accessible to students at different levels... The Troubled Empire is an outstanding macro study of the Yuan–Ming dynasties by a leading authority on Chinese history. (Wensheng Wang *Journal of World History* 2012-03-01)

#### About the Author

Timothy Brook is Professor of History and Republic of China Chair at the University of British Columbia.

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