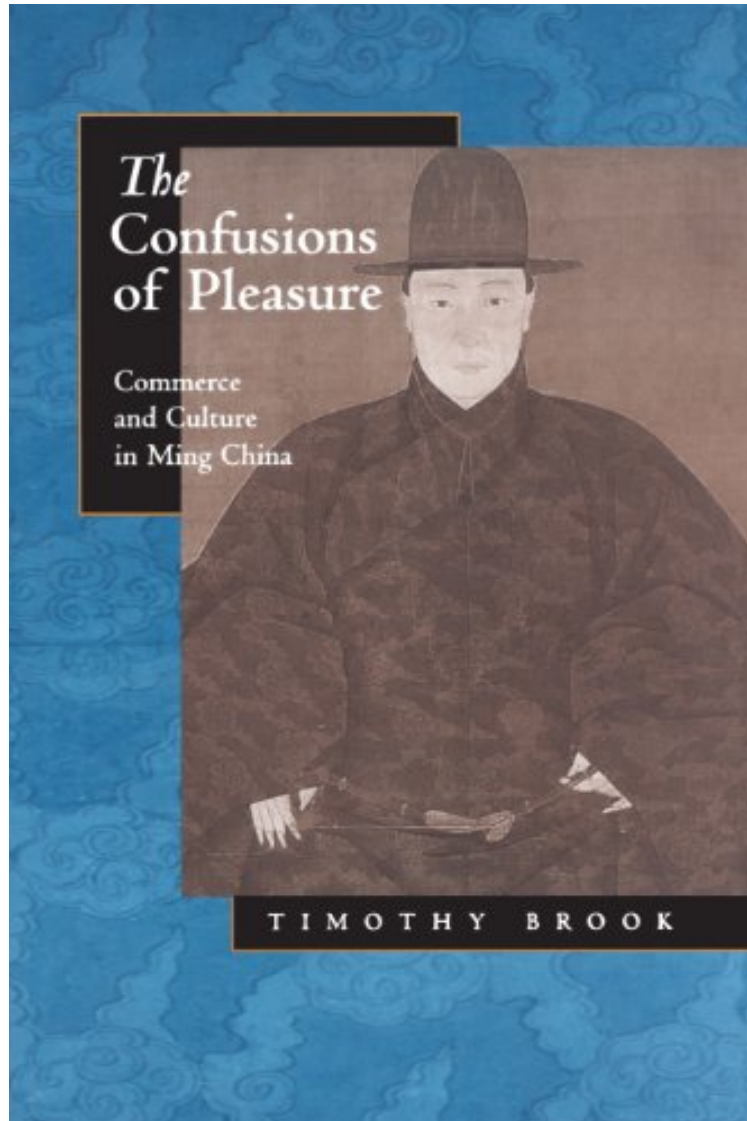


[Ebook free] The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China

The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China

Timothy Brook

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Timothy Brook : The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The rich became richer and the poor, poorerBy PBJWThe rise of commerce during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) brought with it the rise of private wealth and the status of merchants. This was quite alarming to many; Confucius had taught that the four classes of society were (from top to bottom): literati, peasants (who earned their high status by farming the land), military, and way down at the bottom, merchants.

During the Ming, however, elitist scholars could turn into rich merchants, and land-owning peasants could take on the lifestyle and accessories of members of the court. Author Brook traces this evolution, its sources, repercussions and outcomes, but in the end concludes: "However thoroughly commerce had replaced paternalism and deference with a wage relationship, or however well some individuals managed to step over social barriers and move up the social ladder, or however deeply the successful were troubled as standards and distinctions seemed to dissolve beneath them, the class system of overlordship and deference that held the Chinese world together at the beginning of the Ming was still there at the end" (p. 260). The stories of who, what, when and how are to be found in the preceding pages, and explain many aspects of Chinese society that one may have wondered about elsewhere--for example, why certain luxury goods were considered 'collectibles' by some and 'unworthy' by others, why fashions changed in clothing, in art, etc., and the dynastic transition to "the gentry-merchant fusion of the Qing" (p. 262). Readers will be introduced to Zhang Tao, a minor official in 1609 (near the end of the Ming) who fretted: "Those who enriched themselves through trade became the majority, and those who enriched themselves through agriculture were few. The rich became richer and the poor, poorer." Brook's writing and stories are always enjoyable and colourful ("...as he sat at his desk putting his papers in order to the whine of summer cicadas...") and the woodcuts at the beginning of each chapter and throughout, delightful additions, but I found myself wondering over the book's potential readership. It is neither academic, nor entirely general reader-friendly. It assumes a fair amount of background concerning China (dynasties, philosophy, political structure) yet has enough anecdotes to move readers along through the slower bits. But for anyone wondering how scholar and merchant would find themselves sitting at the same banquet table one day, this is a good place to start.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Transitioning from agriculture to commerce
By Fair-Oaks
Mark I am only into the first chapter but would like to express my pleasure on reading a well written and thoughtful book based on good scholarship. I started Chinese studies at Stanford in 1964 and in 1972-3 was at the Stanford Center in Taipei while Professor Brook was in Shanghai. I spent some pleasurable years at Berkeley with Professor Boodberg, Lancaster, Ch'en Shih-Hsiang and Tu Wei-Ming. I eventually ventured outside the university bubble and have enjoyed a variety of non-academic positions. Now that I have more time to read I am pleasantly surprised by the combination of academic and popular style mastered by Dr. Brooks. As a student I worked in the East Asiatic Library at UCB for six years and can picture all the tomes of the Ming and Ch'ing era that scholars never quite got to - the T'ang dynasty was all the rage. Interestingly, the transition from a self-contained agricultural economy to commercialism has been repeated throughout history (Early China - per the Han writers, Judea during Roman times and America). The tension between moral life versus commercial profit life goes on. A recommended read. Thanks Professor Brook.

1 of 4 people found the following review helpful. good book
By Denise I had to use this book for class. it wasn't the most phenomenal book I have ever read but it wasn't dead boring like some required readings I've had.

The Ming dynasty was the last great Chinese dynasty before the Manchu conquest in 1644. During that time, China, not Europe, was the center of the world: the European voyages of exploration were searching not just for new lands but also for new trade routes to the Far East. In this book, Timothy Brook eloquently narrates the changing landscape of life over the three centuries of the Ming (1368-1644), when China was transformed from a closely administered agrarian realm into a place of commercial profits and intense competition for status. *The Confusions of Pleasure* marks a significant departure from the conventional ways in which Chinese history has been written. Rather than recounting the Ming dynasty in a series of political events and philosophical achievements, it narrates this *longue duree* in terms of the habits and strains of everyday life. Peppared with stories of real people and their negotiations of a rapidly changing world, this book provides a new way of seeing the Ming dynasty that not only contributes to the scholarly understanding of the period but also provides an entertaining and accessible introduction to Chinese history for anyone.

"Eloquent and compelling. . . . In his ability to provide a vivid and colorful picture of the Ming dynasty as it was experienced by contemporary observers, Brook has given us one of the best histories of the period, perfect for both expert and non-specialist." -- *The Front Table*
"The best available introduction we have in English to Ming China." -- Craig Clunas, *Times Higher Education Supplement*
From the Inside Flap "This is joyful and comprehensive scholarship, full of motion and detail. Timothy Brook encases the fascinating and changeable world of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) in a clear conceptual and chronological framework which any non-specialist can follow. Here are a wealth of Ming people and their problems, along with the very stuff of their world: bricks and bridges; markets, monasteries, and mail; famines and fashion; printing, passion, and portents. This is the first book we have in English that shows the whole shape of Ming life in all its ebullient complexity." -- Jonathan Spence