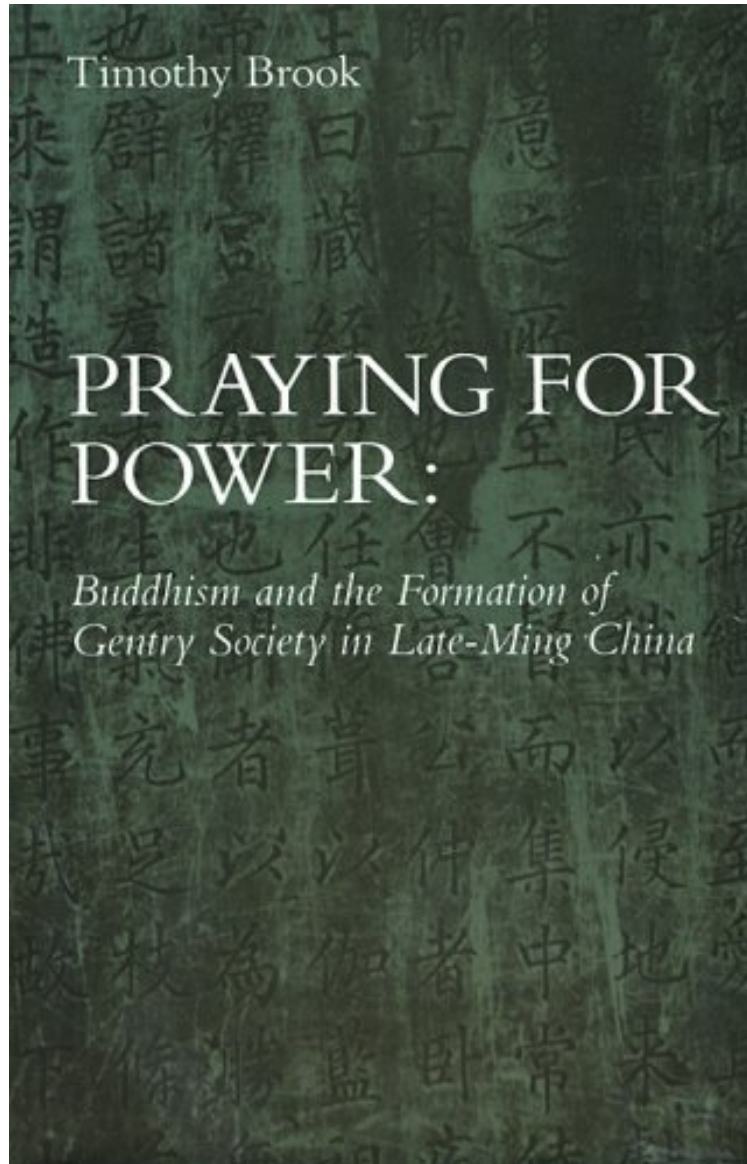


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Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China (Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series)

Timothy Brook

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Timothy Brook : Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China (Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be

worth my time, and all praised *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series):

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. An In-Depth Look at a Subtle, but Massive, ShiftBy Read TaylorThis is not a book for those new to Chinese studies. While Brook's *Confusions of Pleasure and Quelling the People* are both written to be easily understandable, this book grew out of his Harvard dissertation and, though fascinating, is not readily accessible to everyone. Those familiar with Ming or ancient world history will know of the monetization of the world economy in the 1500's due to massive amounts of precious metals coming from the Spanish New World. Much of this money flowed into China, 'freeing' wealth from land ownership and allowing merchants to become truly powerful in China for the first time. The gentry, the level of Chinese society that controlled land and society through the law, symbolic support of cultural keystones and government service, were suddenly in competition with merchants' sons for these bureaucratic posts that defined a large portion of their self-image. Brook's book looks at the mid- to late-Ming defense of status undertaken by the gentry through support of the Sangha, or Buddhist church. Their monopoly on education, government service and wealth undermined, the gentry connected themselves to 'the people' through the support of the Sangha and to each other through cultivation of artistic tastes. While Craig Clunas is the expert on the latter phenomenon, Brook explains the former in this book. Exploring the gentry culture, dispelling ideas of conflicts between Confucianism and Buddhism and summarizing huge socioeconomic shifts in China, Brook has written an important book. Any reader who has read through the long sentences and generalizations in this review can make it through Brook's work, which is no more unclear and is far more interesting than my review. All those versed in basic history and interested in social shifts should read this work, but those trying to begin a study of China or of the Ming should not begin with this complicated work.

In 17th and 18th century China, Buddhists and Confucians alike flooded local Buddhist monasteries with donations As gentry numbers grew faster than the imperial bureaucracy, traditional Confucian careers were closed to many; but visible philanthropy could publicize elite status outside the state realm. Actively sought by fund-raising abbots, such patronage affected institutional Buddhism. After exploring the relation of Buddhism to Ming Neo-Confucianism, the growth of tourism to Buddhist sites, and the mechanisms and motives for charitable donations, Timothy Brook studies three widely separated and economically dissimilar counties. He draws on rich data in monastic gazetteers to examine the patterns and social consequences of patronage.

Timothy Brook has written a splendid book which deals with two dimensions of Ming history that are still quite insufficiently studied in the West, namely, the social history of 'Buddhism' in the late imperial period (specifically the late Ming), and the study of social elites (the gentry). He makes important contributions to both fields, showing the vitality of Buddhist monastic institutions and the appeal of Buddhist religious culture among the highest levels of the local elite...The book presents a clearly structured argument, which is an enjoyment to read...Timothy Brook's important contribution to the social history of the late Ming period and of Buddhist life in particular can be read in several ways. It can serve as an excellent introduction to the social and religious history of the late Ming period for students at all levels, but also presents the established historian with a sound piece of investigative research. I, for one, look forward to taking up the arguments formulated here as a starting point for my own future research. (Barend J. ter Haar T'oung Pao)The author concludes that the phenomenon of gentry patronage is an important example of what he terms the separation of state and society in the late Ming. It is a careful, extremely well documented and well argued work and makes an important contribution to the field of gentry studies and China's social and religious history. (Michael Dillon Asian Affairs)About the AuthorTimothy Brook is Professor of History and Republic of China Chair at the University of British Columbia.