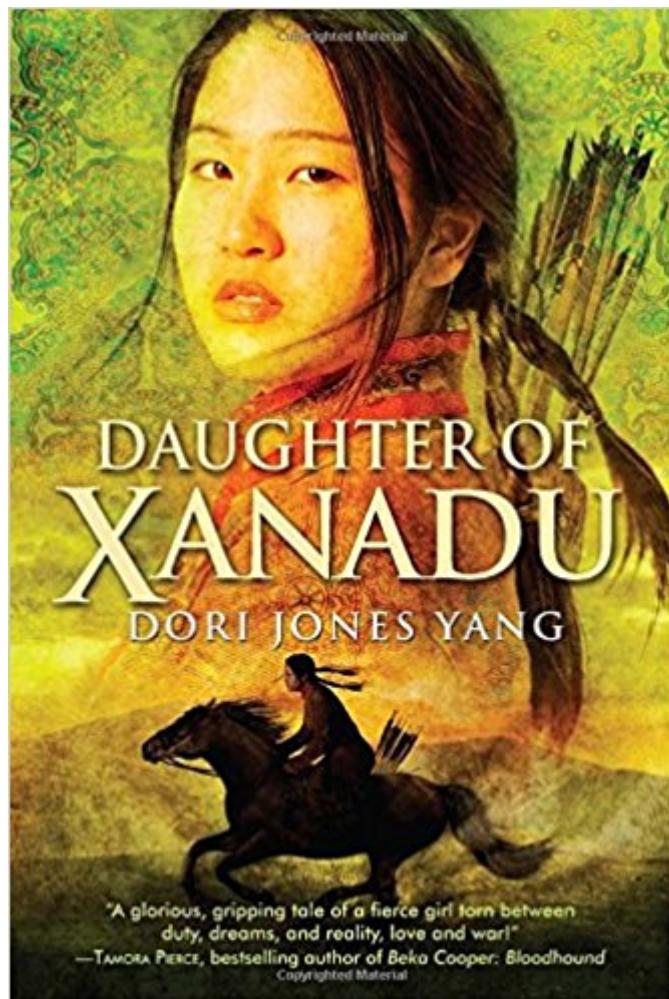


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# Daughter Of Xanadu



## Synopsis

Athletic and strong willed, Princess Emmajin's determined to do what no woman has done before: become a warrior in the army of her grandfather, the Great Khan Khubilai. In the Mongol world the only way to achieve respect is to show bravery and win glory on the battlefield. The last thing she wants is the distraction of the foreigner Marco Polo, who challenges her beliefs in the gardens of Xanadu. Marco has no skills in the "manly arts" of the Mongols: horse racing, archery, and wrestling. Still, he charms the Khan with his wit and story-telling. Emmajin sees a different Marco as they travel across 13th-century China, hunting 'dragons' and fighting elephant-back warriors. Now she faces a different battle as she struggles with her attraction towards Marco and her incredible goal of winning fame as a soldier. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

The granddaughter of Khubilai Khan, 16-year-old Emmajin takes more interest in joining the army than in finding a husband. When her grandfather asks her to gather intelligence from foreigners who have arrived from the West, she befriends young Marco Polo. Their relationship, begun with some trepidation and marred by cultural missteps and misunderstandings, deepens throughout the story. Meanwhile, Emmajin's goals slowly alter through her contacts with other cultures and her experiences as a soldier. An appended glossary identifies characters and places, defines Mongolian

terms such as del and ger, and offers historical information that separates fact from fiction within the novel. Emmajin's first-person narrative will capture readers with its scenes of adventure and its vivid depiction of a capable young woman in a time of change. The battle scene is realistically brutal, and the love scenes are subtly written, but the most involving element of the storytelling is Emmajin's ongoing struggle to forge her own way. Grades 8-10. --Carolyn Phelan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From A Booklist The granddaughter of Khubilai Khan, 16-year-old Emmajin takes more interest in joining the army than in finding a husband. When her grandfather asks her to gather intelligence from foreigners who have arrived from the West, she befriends young Marco Polo. Their relationship, begun with some trepidation and marred by cultural missteps and misunderstandings, deepens throughout the story. Meanwhile, Emmajin's goals slowly alter through her contacts with other cultures and her experiences as a soldier. An appended glossary identifies characters and places, defines Mongolian terms such as del and ger, and offers historical information that separates fact from fiction within the novel. Emmajin's first-person narrative will capture readers with its scenes of adventure and its vivid depiction of a capable young woman in a time of change. The battle scene is realistically brutal, and the love scenes are subtly written, but the most involving element of the storytelling is Emmajin's ongoing struggle to forge her own way.

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I really wanted to like this book more, especially given the reviews I've seen, which were very positive. There were parts of this book I really enjoyed, which elevated it to four stars rather than three. About the parts I enjoyed, the writing is very good, the historical and cultural information was intriguing. In particular, the descriptions of war were really gripping. I read a lot of historical fiction and this book really made me feel like I was truly there, experiencing those gruesome, morbidly fascinating things. All of these parts of the book? Excellent. Unfortunately, a lot of that is overshadowed by the two things about this book that really bothered me: 1) The contrived "romance" between Emmajin and Marco. I understand it was used as a vessel for us to learn cultural information, but I felt like Emmajin and Marco could have learned these things from each other (and so could we) without it. In fact, I would have vastly preferred it that way. It just... didn't feel natural to me. Their "feelings" for each other felt forced and unrealistic. It wasn't essential to the plot, and I feel like it would have been more realistic if they had admired each other in a more platonic, less bizarrely codependent way, a way that was actually closer to the courtly love that Marco was always

spouting on about. (Honestly, I felt like Marco telling Emmajin about that became a little creepy. At first, I thought it was sweet, but later, as Emmajin clung to this idea and the farther from true courtly love their interactions went, I felt more like Marco was an older man in his early 20s telling this naive, unworldly girl who is barely 16 about this to justify his lusty feelings for her, particularly when he started talking about "courtly love" on, like, on the SECOND DAY. Really?? I just. Ugh.) And Marco kept comparing them to Tristan and Isolde and I'm like, "NO. NO NO NONO." Their "love" isn't timeless, Marco is in no way, shape, or form knight-like (or really even attractive or desirable, as far as I'm concerned), and Emmajin is not a princess--or even a woman--that I admire. I wasn't rooting them for as a couple, and every time one of them talked about the other in that pathetically lovesick, flowery way, I just wanted to throw the book across the room.2) The endless, ENDLESS waffling and inconsistencies. In one sentence, Emmajin says one thing. Then, in the next breath, Marco comes into the room and she changes her mind. Then he leaves and she changes her mind again. This happened over and over and over and over and over... I wanted to scream at Emmajin, "MY GOD JUST MAKE A DECISION AND STICK WITH IT FOR CRIPE'S SAKE!" Keep in mind, sometimes these are decisions about her entire identity that she's changing willy nilly. "I LOVE MY MONGOL HERITAGE WE ARE THE WISEST AND BEST AT EVERYTHING!" \*three sentences later\* "HOW COULD I HAVE EVER THOUGHT MONGOLS ARE AWESOME LOOK AT HOW TERRIBLE WE ARE I AM ASHAMED!" I realize she's trying to find herself, but the author made it seem like the only way to do that is to be completely unable to make any decision ever and, if you make a decision, to change your mind about it immediately, and, if you don't change your mind immediately, to then instantly regret it after you realize that \*gasp\* decisions have consequences and it doesn't always mean you made a bad decision it just means that ALL decisions have consequences, good or bad. The author also made it feel like any decisions Emmajin made depended on Marco. Hardly a way to create a strong female character. There are ways to have her try to decide her future, and whether it includes Marco, without morphing the female into a tiresome, personality-less, direction-less, indecisive bore. While writing this, I almost brought this book back down to three stars, but I'll stick with my four because, like I said, the parts that didn't involve romance or decision-making were very good. I am moving on to the sequel because I want to know what happens, but I don't imagine it will get any better.

I had great hopes for this book. Trying to find adventurous historical fiction for this period in Asia has been very difficult. Her writing is wonderful, descriptive and engaging. I liked the characters. But first and foremost, this is a love story. Love stories make my children gag. (Range of ages: 9 to 18, girls

and boys) They spend chapters on her twitterpation and fluttering in Marco Polo's presence. I just started skipping those parts and read the adventure part. When that was done, the rest of the book (a little less than half) was spent on hand wringing as to her future because (surprise!) war was pretty awful. The ending is so historically inaccurate: Marco Polo heads home (after a year) and she is going to go with him as an ambassador. Has anyone read the history books? Marco spent 17 years with Kublai Khan and I can't find any reference to any wife or concubine. Certainly not one who left with him, for he got married back in Italy. As "peace ambassador," she sounded way more like a 21st century girl than a 12th century Mongol. It was too much for me. We went on to different books.

Daughter of Xanadu by Dori Jones Yang is an excellent novel that I thoroughly enjoyed and highly recommend. It has all the necessary ingredients: vividly-drawn characters, including a highly appealing protagonist, compelling plot, thematic relevance, and evocative settings. The novel effectively combines adventure, romance, and history, and deals with themes that resonate in today's world: a woman's rights and abilities to function in a man's world (in the novel, the world of a Mongol warrior); a country/empire's choice of ethos and goals: militaristic vs. peaceful, conquest vs. construction. The story line focuses on the journey of a young Mongol princess, Emmajin, from determined warrior (she is the first woman allowed into the army of her grandfather, Khubilai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan) to emissary for peace. Emmajin's journey as a warrior culminates in the Battle of Vochan, an epic historical battle in which twelve thousand Mongol horsemen defeated an invading Burmese army of sixty thousand soldiers and two thousand elephants. Intertwined with Emmajin's journey as a warrior is her burgeoning romance with Marco Polo, the Venetian merchant who became a favorite of Khubilai Khan, traveled throughout the Mongol empire for nearly seventeen years, and wrote a book about his experiences. The vulnerability of the lovers to their own emotions and to the cultural mores that prohibit their relationship is rendered with sensitivity and insight. The historical context of the novel is fascinating. I had only heard of Genghis Khan and the "Mongol hordes" and found myself absorbed in the depictions of life at the court of Khubilai Khan and in the Mongol army (warning: includes scenes of graphic violence) and in the portrait of Khubilai Khan, a warrior emperor who, after conquering South China, decided on a peaceful course for the Yuan dynasty that he founded, a dynasty that flourished for nearly a hundred years and that was characterized by economic prosperity, religious tolerance, and significant achievement in the arts. The novel kept me thinking about its characters, historical scenes, and thematic issues long after I had finished it.

I just finished reading Daughter of Xanadu and loved it! What a great read! I especially enjoy reading historical fiction when it is well written and this book is very well written. Dori Yang writes with skill and vision. She had me experiencing the grandeur of China, the horrors of battle, and the coming of age of a remarkable young woman. The story of Emmajin and Marco Polo is delightful and I couldn't put the book down until I was finished. Even then I didn't want to put the book down. I hope there is going to be more.

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