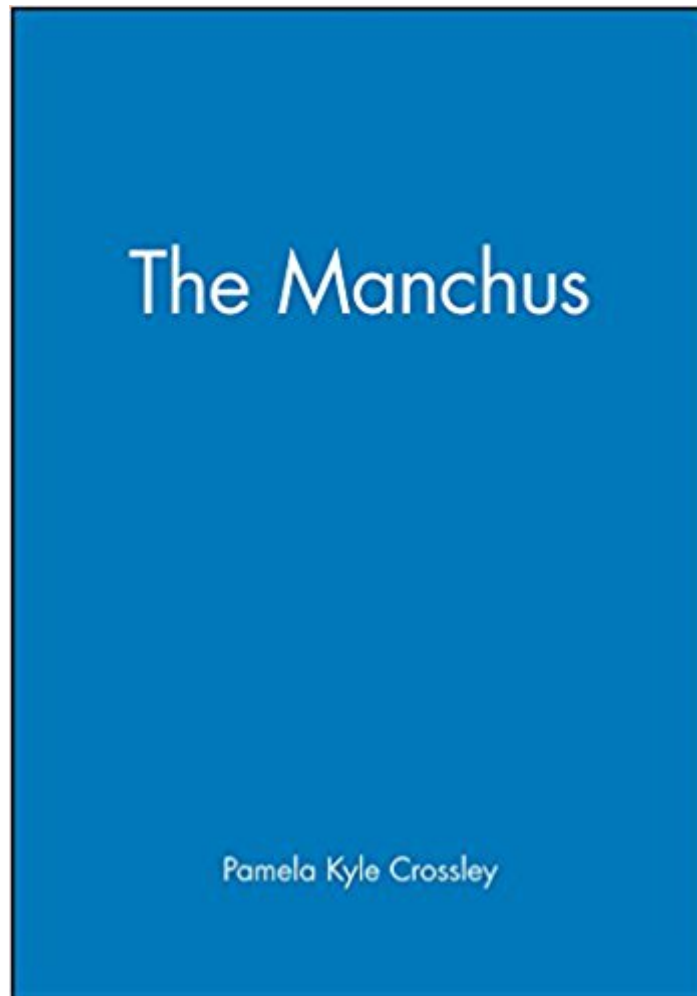




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The Manchus



Synopsis

This book relates the history of the Manchus, the rise and fall of their vast empire and their legacy today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Pamela Crossley's *The Manchus* is the book that those interested in China's last dynasty have always needed. Through her clear, erudite, and succinct presentation, we are led to understand the origins of Manchu social organization, the formation of a Manchu ethnicity, and the implementation of a specifically Manchu view of universal empire. We also see the loss of purpose and erosion of self-confidence that led to the dynasty's collapse in 1912." Jonathan Spence, Yale University

For centuries the Manchurian peoples inhabited a cultural and economic world that made them sometime enemies, sometimes allies, of neighboring Chinese, Koreans, Mongols, and Russians. Between 1636 and 1700 this picture changed dramatically. The Manchus united and conquered the whole of China and Mongolia. A century later they added Tibet and Eastern Turkistan, Creating one of the largest land empires in history. How they achieved this, and what the consequences were to themselves and to their subjects, are the main themes of this book. After an account of the early fishing and hunting communities in eastern Asia, the author describes the period of early urbanization, literacy, and empire-building in medieval Manchuria, and the constant struggle over five centuries to maintain independence against the great power of the Mongols, Chinese, and Russians. She investigates the origins and rise of the great leader, Nurgachi, and shows how he

succeeded in founding the first Manchu state. In 1636, ten years after Nurgachi's death, his descendants declared themselves to masters of the Qing Empire, and from 1644 to 1912 the Manchus were among those conquerors of China who were "conquered" by it, and reveals the subtle ways in which the rulers used a Chinese mask to achieve their ends (and to confuse European visitors). The final chapters show the role of the West and Japan, in the undermining of Qing authority in the nineteenth century and in the sporadic attempts to restore it in the twentieth. The author considers the fate of the contemporary Manchu minority in China and examines the signs of a resurgent identity.

Pamela Kyle Crossley tells a fascinating story about the rise and fall of the Manchu empire. It is hard to believe, yet a fact that a 120.000 Manchu troops conquered all of China. It is as amazing that the Manchus were able to rule China for 267 years (1644 -1911). Some important conclusions are as follows. The conquest succeeded because the preceding Ming rulers had become very incompetent, because the Manchus were outstanding warriors with excellent military and political strategic capabilities and several outstanding leaders. The Manchus succeeded to attract prominent dissatisfied Han Chinese to join them already during the conquest of China. The Manchus were able to maintain control over China by maintaining the Chinese administrative system where government employees were recruited based on competitive selection based on civil service examinations. Every man wanted to pass the examinations as it led to prestige and fortune. The Civil servants remained loyal to the Manchu rulers. The Manchu emperors also saw to it that no local regional or aristocratic elite could build an independent base of power. The Manchus furthered equal treatment of Han Chinese, Mongols and Manchus as a general policy. However several times a quota system was implemented that fixed the proportion of Manchu, Han Chinese and Mongols that should pass the examination. At the higher levels of government Han Chinese were always paired with Manchus. The Manchus were eager learners and studied Chinese philosophy, culture and adapted several parts of it. However, the Manchus maintained a separate identity, forbade intermarriage between Han Chinese and Manchus, the Han Chinese were forbidden to move into Manchuria, and the Manchus forbade foot binding of their women. Several competent emperors, peace order, the right economic policies led urbanization, a prosperous middle class, and a flourishing economy. The Manchus were considered to be more "enlightened" than the Mongols during their Yuan dynasty. However especially in Southern China many Han Chinese resented Manchu rule. One reason for the decline was the "bad emperor" problem. Han Feizi (280-233 BC) had already referred to the problem with filial piety; that some fathers had incompetent sons, some

fathers were incompetent and they could not be made virtuous or competent. Corruption, excessive government expenditure on the ruling classes and declining defensive capabilities were other causes. The emperor and the civil servants believed that China was superior in every way and could learn nothing from other countries. The result was that aggressive and colonializing countries including UK, France, the USA, Russia and Japan with superior weapons attacked China and imposed grossly unfair penalties, import export policies and even occupied parts of China. One of worst example is the opium war where the Western forces attacked China to force the Chinese government to allow them to continue to their sales of opium in China on which they made fabulous profits. The Taiping rebellion was another major cause. The rebels wanted to chase the Manchus out of China. The Western powers were not sure whether to support the rebels or the government. They were in favor of a weak government to protect their opium profits but did not like the Taiping movement. They decided to back the government. The Government and Western forces defeated the Taiping rebels with an estimated number of deaths between twenty and thirty million which makes it the worst civil war in history. A revolution became inevitable under the initial leadership of Sun Yet Sen, who initially also considered driving the Manchus out of China an important goal. It later became apparent that rehabilitating China required a lot more change. The disastrous experience of not is able to defend itself from foreign aggression and prevent internal wars between different regions of China still remains a major concern of Chinese governments.

Read your typical history book covering Chinese history and you'll get a very distinct picture of the Jurchens and Manchus--about their conquest of china, the corruption of the Qing government (as if no other dynasty had corruption), of the power-hungry Aisio-gioro Nurgaci, founder of the Qing dynasty, and their alien, steppe-nomadic ways. Most Chinese history books have little good or substantive to say about this north-east Asian culture whose term for their religious priesthood was adopted by the West, "Shaman" (Chinese, "saman"). This book takes all that mythology and anti-Manchu rehtoric and blasts it to pieces with a compelling story of a people who have rarely been studied objectively and as a culture separate from the Mongols and Chinese. Nurgaci was not the man of the myths we've heard and never called himself Emperor. In fact for most of his life his title was "beile of the Jianzhou Jurchens". He was a great lord and chieftain of his lineage, but not even an autocrat in his authority, ruling jointly with his brother, Surgaci, for many years. Besides the myths about Nuragi, many cultural myths are also dispelled. One major one is the assumption that the Manchus were nomads with a steppe culture analogous to the Mongol culture. This book explains how and why this assumption is wrong and is essential to anyone who wants to know the

real Manchu people. I'm only 3 chapters into the book and already know I need to reread it. there's a lot of information for the student of Jurchen and Manchu history! WELL DONE!!

I visited to pick up the paperback of this book, and saw this perplexing comment below. This book and *The Last Emperor* are apples and oranges. This is a popular book (I got my original copy from History Book Club) and intended for reader's with a general interest, or maybe beginning historians. The book by Evelyn S. Rawski is an academic title, very thorough and erudite. But also the books are not on the same subject. Rawski is about the Manchu emperors, their courts and palaces. *The Manchus* is much more general. Please do not get confused into thinking that these two books are on the same subject.

I read this book after Evelyn Rawski's "*The Last Emperors*" and it did answer & clarified a lot questions I had with regards to the Manchus and how they were like before entering China proper. The chapter on Nurhachi was good as was the section on the inevitable power struggle between Cixi and Guangxu (my only wish that this was elaborated further). Crossley's book is highly recommended for both casual & serious historians alike. My suggestion is to read this first before Rawski's "*The Last Emperors*"

It's funny to note that at many times the Qing dynasty faced many of the same problems that we see today: overpopulation, government corruption, war against drugs. So much of what we think of as Chinese is also Manchu and was introduced rather recently. Well written and clear all the way through.

I have read a more recent book Evelyn Rawski's "*The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* " in which she discusses the context between her book and "*The Manchus*". The two books are probably quite similar but I think that Rawski's book would contain much more undisclosed material. I have decided not to change the rating on this book in the interest of fair play.

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