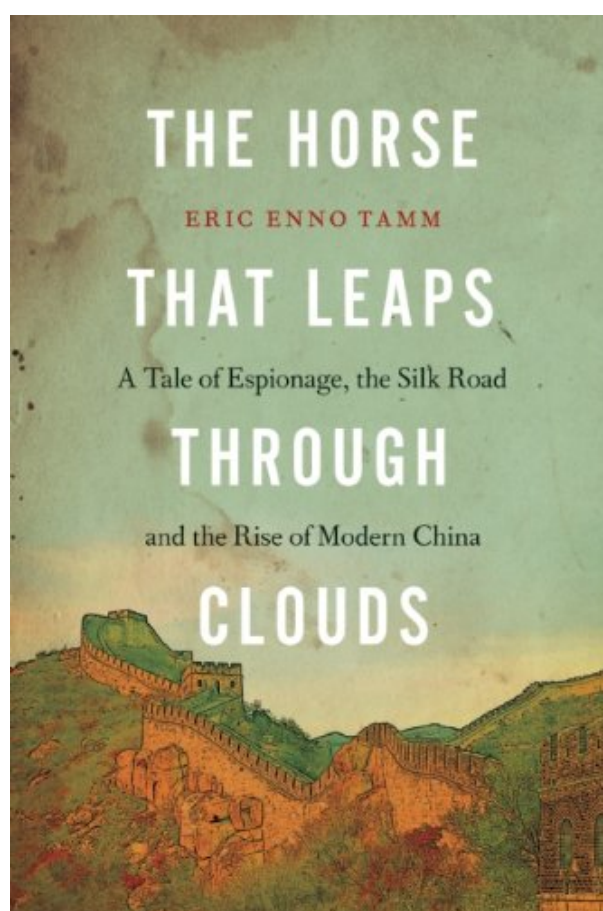
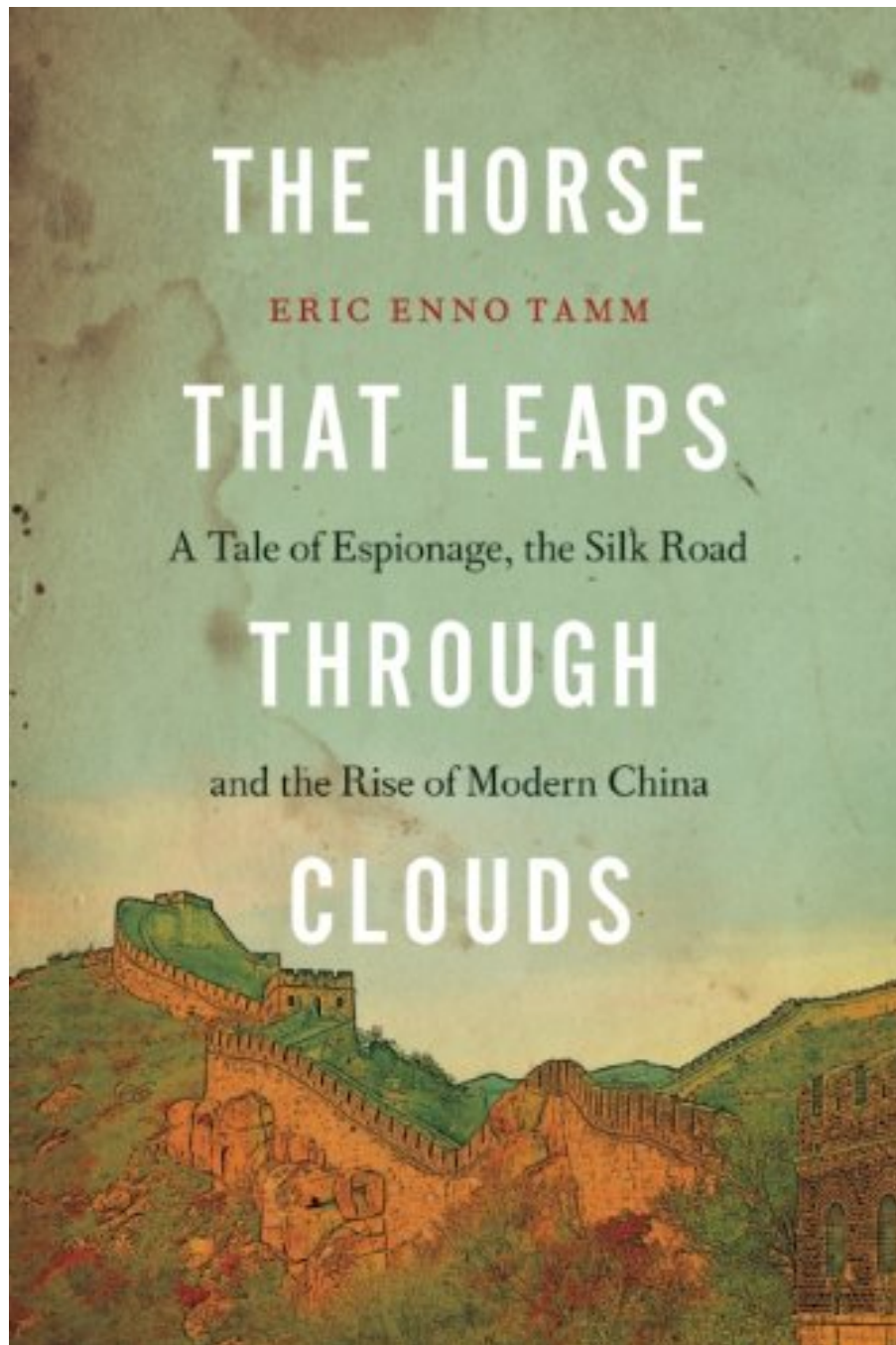


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CLOUDS: A TALE OF ESPIONAGE, THE  
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On July 6, 1906, Baron Gustaf Mannerheim boarded the midnight train from St. Petersburg, charged by Tsar Nicholas II to secretly collect intelligence on the Qing Dynasty's sweeping reforms that were radically transforming China. One of the last Tsarist secret agents, Mannerheim chronicled almost every facet of China's modernization, from education reform and foreign investment to Tibet's struggle for independence.

On July 6, 2006, writer Eric Enno Tamm boards that same train, intent on following in Mannerheim's footsteps. Initially banned from China, Tamm devises a cover and retraces Mannerheim's route across the Silk Road, discovering both eerie similarities and seismic differences between the Middle Kingdoms of a century ago and today.

Along the way, Tamm offers piercing insights into China's past that raise troubling questions about its future. Can the Communist Party truly open China to the outside world yet keep Western ideas such as democracy and freedom at bay, just as Qing officials mistakenly believed? What can reform during the late Qing Dynasty teach us about the spectacular transformation of China today? As Confucius once wrote, "Study the past if you would divine the future," and that is precisely what Tamm does in *The Horse That Leaps Through Clouds*.

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- Binding: Paperback
- 512 pages

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### Most helpful customer reviews

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Central Asia and China -- a century ago and today

By R. M. Peterson

"The horse that leaps through clouds" was Baron Carl Gustaf Mannerheim - one of those people from several generations ago who seemed to lead enough lives and have enough adventures for about ten people of today. He is perhaps THE national hero of Finland. In 1918, Mannerheim led the military forces of the "Whites" in their defeat of Bolshevik armies, thereby securing the liberation and independence of Finland. In 1939, he again assumed command of the Finnish military in its defense against much superior Soviet forces, thwarting the Soviet Union in its campaign to make Finland an occupied satellite. Yet, before the World Wars Mannerheim had been an officer in the Imperial Army of Tsar Nicholas II and, seemingly, a devoted supporter of the Tsar, even when the Tsar was repressing his fellow Finns.

This book was inspired by one of Mannerheim's exploits on behalf of Nicholas II - a two-year espionage mission into Central Asia and China. From 1906 to 1908, Mannerheim, nominally traveling as a Finn collecting archaeological and ethnographic materials for a museum in Helsinki, traversed the remote autonomous areas of Central Asia and on into China, gathering economic, political, and military information for the Tsar. Along the way, in Kashgar, he was given a Chinese passport with a Chinese name - Ma Dahan, which Mannerheim, with both romantic and literary license, translated as "the horse that leaps through clouds".

Author Eric Enno Tamm determined to retrace Mannerheim's journey one century later. *THE HORSE THAT LEAPS THROUGH CLOUDS* is Tamm's account of both his trek and Mannerheim's. Tamm interweaves the two accounts deftly. Nonetheless, it is Tamm's travels in the latter half of 2006 that constitute the principal reason to read this book. Tamm takes us through Azerbaijan and then three of the "Stans" - Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan - and then we follow him from far West China to Beijing. In some of the Central Asian republics, Tamm was assigned a "minder" (and in Turkmenistan he was thrown in jail for a very uncomfortable night), but he rarely was deemed important enough to be given "favored visitor" tours or receive official government "chamber of commerce" presentations, so his experiences probably were more nitty-gritty and realistic than those of most Western visitors.

Nearly three quarters of the book is devoted to his (and Mannerheim's) travels through China, so one

naturally learns more about China than the Central Asian countries. Still, for me, his reports on contemporary conditions in all of the countries he visited were highly informative. Likewise, the occasional, non-pedantic history lessons he gives.

Much of Mannerheim's route - and, thus, Tamm's route as well - was along what history has come to call "The Silk Road." Tamm discusses how that region now has become the greatest energy corridor on earth (with 33 percent of the world's proven gas reserves, 9 percent of the world's oil, and 36 percent of its coal) and how those carbon fuel deposits are being exploited in hasty, pell-mell fashion, transforming the old "Silk Road" into what Tamm calls the "Soot Road". It makes for a rather depressing picture. Equally sad are the repeated accounts of vanishing languages, cultures, and even peoples (for example, the Yugurs). In Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, the main street is strewn with scooter shops blaring Chinese pop music, KFCs, Pizza Huts, and Chinese billboards advertising new condo developments. Tamm writes that along that street "you can see the future of Tibet."

In general, Tamm is rather critical of the new China and he is rather guarded in his assessment of its future. As he sees it, "China remains beset by problems", which he discusses and illustrates anecdotally at some length. *THE HORSE THAT LEAPS THROUGH CLOUDS* is a very informative book and quite readable. I also want to compliment the publisher on the layout and typography (including the small, discrete page numbers).

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

History as The Future?

By Luv2Learn

Apart from the many parallels between the the treks of 1906 and 2006, I was enthralled by the journey across the southern tier of the former USSR and the journey into China. After reading each chapter, I 'flew' by Google Earth to the locations and opened photos and Youtube sources that showed me the people and geography. The concluding chapters left me wondering about and discussing with friends the issues regarding the final days of the Qing Dynasty and the challenges facing the Chinese Communist Party today. You will not be disappointed with the travel and political observations from the treks.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent Research, Writing, and Storytelling

By Gerald M. Henkel

In my mind, Eric Enno Tamm's book ought to be at or near the top of everyone's reading list.

It will have special appeal to those of us who have Finnish ancestry because it is about the notable Finn Baron Gustaf Mannerheim, and his espionage expedition (as a Russian spy) from St. Petersburg all the way to Beijing, China, in 1906-08. The title is taken from Mannerheim's Chinese name, Ma Dahan, meaning "the horse that leaps through clouds."

In 2006, Tamm retraces Mannerheim's epic journey across the Silk Road from St. Petersburg to Beijing, and as Tamm has written, "[I] discovered both seismic differences and eerie similarities between the China of today and the country Mannerheim visited a century ago."

Yet, the book is far from being nostalgia for Finns. This is an adventure tale that has the feel of a novel that any reader can enjoy. But even more so, because Tamm is a very knowledgeable historian and critical observer, it is a book that ultimately reminds us of both the immense political and environmental changes that have taken place on this planet in the last 100 years, and at the same time reminds us of all the corrupt political power-tripping that has remained unchanged in that period of time.

Here's a case in point: Tamm, while preparing for his journey following Mannerheim's footsteps across Asia, visited with Craig Murray who was formerly a British ambassador to Uzbekistan. They discussed Murray's involvement in discovering torture practices benefitting both the US and Britain, and they talked about the idea that American involvement in Central Asia was "only about fighting militant Islam."

"The fundamental motives are more basic than that," Murray told me. "It's about oil and gas contracts." That, according to Murray, is the prize in the New Great Game. A century ago, the game was quite simple: two players, Russia and Britain, competed to control hapless khanates that were economically and militarily backward. Today, the United States, Russia, and increasingly China are attempting to exert influence and control over the region's rich resources. Corrupt autocrats have used these petroleum deposits to become obnoxiously wealthy and powerful, crushing domestic movements that challenge their authority and playing foreign powers against each other. As Murray explained, Enron, the American energy giant, had initially paid \$100 million in bribes to President Karimov's family for lucrative petroleum contracts. However, when Enron declared bankruptcy as a result of massive fraud, the contracts were resold to Russia's Gazprom. Tamm's book begins 100 years ago with Mannerheim, but brings us fully up-to-date about current events. It is a very important contribution to our understanding of today's political and ecological realities. If I rated the books that I review, it would get 6 points on a 5 point scale. Excellent research, writing and storytelling. There are videos, interactive maps of Mannerheim's route, photos and more at [...] Otava will be publishing a Finnish translation that will be available this autumn. Reviewed by Gerry Henkel

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