

Great Wall of China



The Great Wall of China (traditional Chinese: 萬里長城; simplified Chinese: 万里长城; pinyin: Wànlǐ Chángchéng, literally "ten thousand li long wall") is a series of fortifications that were built across the historical northern borders of ancient Chinese states and Imperial China as protection against various nomadic groups from the Eurasian Steppe. Several walls were built from as early as the 7th century BC,[4] with selective stretches later joined by Qin Shi Huang (220-206 BC), the first emperor of China. Little of the Qin wall remains.[5] Later on, many successive dynasties built and maintained multiple stretches of border walls. The best-known sections of the wall were built by the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

Apart from defense, other purposes of the Great Wall have included border controls, allowing the imposition of duties on goods transported along the Silk Road, regulation or encouragement of trade and the control of immigration and emigration.

HISTORY OF THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

History

The history of the Great Wall of China began when fortifications built by various states during the Spring and Autumn (771–476 BC)[1] and Warring States periods (475–221 BC) were

connected by the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang, to protect his newly founded Qin dynasty (221–206 BC) against incursions by nomads from Inner Asia. The walls were built of rammed earth, constructed using forced labour, and by 212 BC ran from Gansu to the coast of southern Manchuria.

Later dynasties adopted different policies towards northern frontier defense. The Han (202 BC – 220 AD), the Northern Qi (550–574), the Jurchen-ruled Jin (1115–1234), and particularly the Ming (1369–1644) were among those that rebuilt, re-manned, and expanded the Walls, although they rarely followed Qin's routes. The Han extended the fortifications furthest to the west, the Qi built about 1,600 kilometres (990 mi) of new walls, while the Sui mobilised over a million men in their wall-building efforts. Conversely, the Tang (618–907), the Song (960–1279), the Yuan (1271–1368), and the Qing (1644–1912) mostly did not build frontier walls, instead opting for other solutions to the Inner Asian threat like military campaigning and diplomacy.

Names

The collection of fortifications known as the Great Wall of China has historically had a number of different names in both Chinese and English.

In Chinese histories, the term "Long Wall(s)" (t 長城, s 长城, Chángchéng) appears in Sima Qian's Records of the Grand Historian, where it referred both to the separate great walls built between and north of the Warring States and to the more unified construction of the First Emperor.[9] The Chinese character 城, meaning city or fortress, is a phono-semantic compound of the "earth" radical 土 and phonetic 成, whose Old Chinese pronunciation has been reconstructed as *denʔ.[10] It originally referred to the rampart which surrounded traditional Chinese cities and was used by extension for these walls around their respective states; today, however, it is much more often the Chinese word for "city".[11]

The longer Chinese name "Ten-Thousand Mile Long Wall" (t 萬里長城, s 万里长城, Wànlǐ Chángchéng) came from Sima Qian's description of it in the Records, though he did not name the walls as such. The AD 493 Book of Song quotes the frontier general Tan Daoji referring to "the long wall of 10,000 miles", closer to the modern name, but the name rarely features in pre-modern times otherwise.[12] The traditional Chinese mile (里, lǐ) was an often irregular distance that was intended to show the length of a standard village and varied with terrain but was usually standardized at distances around a third of an English mile (540 m).[13]

A SYMBOL OF PROTECTION AND DEFENSE

Protection

At its core, the Great Wall was designed as a defensive fortification against invading forces. Towers and ramparts dot its length, providing strategic vantage points for soldiers to keep watch. The Wall's sheer magnitude was meant to dissuade potential invaders and hinder their progress, making it one of the most ambitious defensive structures in history.

As one traverses the Wall, they encounter a stunning array of architectural styles. In some sections, the Wall is made of brick and stone, meticulously crafted and engineered. Other parts showcase the use of tamped earth, a technique where layers of earth and materials were compressed to create a solid barrier. The Wall's design adapted to the landscape, blending seamlessly with the natural contours of the land.

PRESERVING A WORLD HERITAGE

World Heritage

Today, the Great Wall of China is not just a Chinese treasure but a global one. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site, it serves as a reminder of the ingenuity and determination of the ancient Chinese civilizations. Efforts to preserve this wonder for future generations are ongoing, ensuring that this symbol of history and resilience will continue to stand tall against the test of time.

Walking along the Great Wall is akin to stepping back in time. Each brick, each stone, holds within it centuries of history. It witnessed the rise and fall of dynasties, the passage of emperors, and the lives of countless soldiers who once patrolled its battlements.