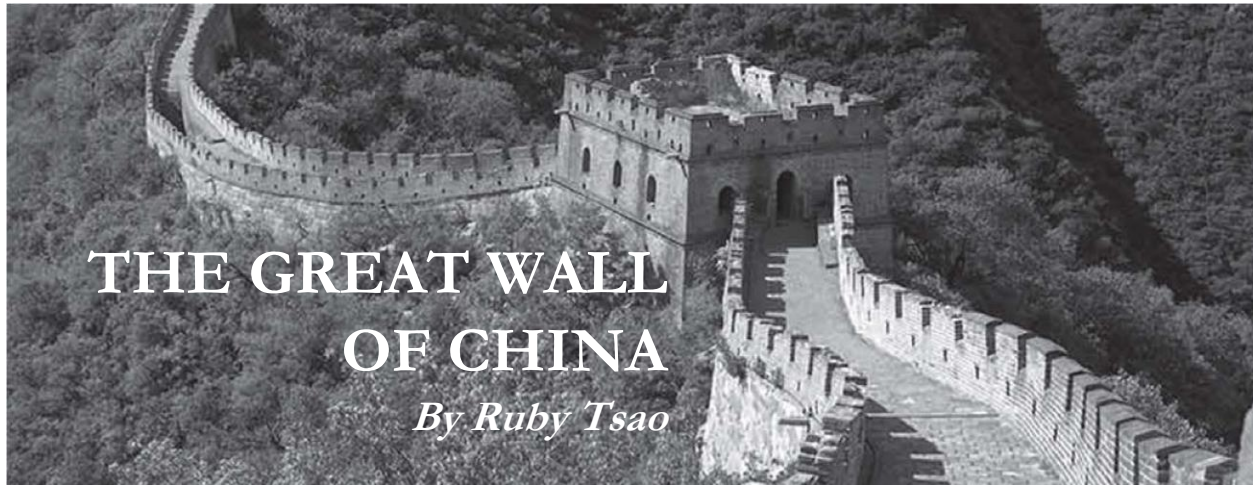


## FEATURE



# THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

*By Ruby Tsao*

The Great Wall of China is perhaps the greatest man-made structure in history, reportedly visible from the moon. It is a series of fortifications from the east to the west of the northern borders against the invasions of nomadic tribes with watch towers at intervals. Smoke signals were used by day and fire signals by night to announce the arrivals of invaders.

The history of the Great Wall traversed some 2700 years of history in China. It has represented the defense nature of Chinese military history throughout the ages. Rammed earth was used in ancient times. Total length of 21,196 km (13,171mi) of all branches was reported. Erosion was inevitable over thousands of years. What we can see today was left from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) when the Wall was constructed with stronger materials of bricks and stones.

It stretches from provinces and special regions of Liaoning, Hebei, Tianjin, Beijing, Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Ningxia and Gansu alongside the southern edge of Inner Mongolia for 8,850 km (5,500 mi). The structure has a base of 15 to 50 feet, height of 15-30 feet, topped by ramparts 12 feet or higher. There are three famous passes: “Shanghaiguan” where the Wall meets the sea; “Juyonguan” near Beijing; and ending at “Jiayuguan” in the deserts of

Gansu. Approximately 4,112 miles were man-made walls and trenches; 1,388 miles were natural barriers of hills and rivers.

It is estimated that thirty percent of the structure has disappeared from erosion and human destruction.

### BACKGROUND

China has 5,000 years of history. Amazingly, we can actually find written records of 5,000 years thanks to the great historian Sima Qian (145 BC-86 BC) of the Han Dynasty. He set the standards of objectivity, scholarship and literary style. His Shiji (Historical Records) started from the Yellow Emperor and ended at the previous ruler in the Han Dynasty leaving succeeding rulers for later historians to evaluate. His Shiji was the most respected book of history; it was also a literary masterpiece serving as the source of many literary works for 2,000 years. He was the inspiration and aspiration for generations of historians in China.

According to legend, Leizu, wife of Yellow Emperor (2698 BC-2598 BC) discovered the use of silk for clothing. His half-brother Yandi (Shengnong) originated agriculture and herbal medicine. Banpo excavation near Xi’an revealed evidence of rice cultivation some 7,000 years ago. China had the most advanced civilization

and was the richest country until the British invasion in the Opium War of 1840. China was protected by high mountain ranges in the west and the sea in the east. Only the northern borders were exposed to nomadic raids.

## HISTORY

**SPRING AND AUTUMN PERIOD (770 BC-476 BC)** Walls were built starting in this period. Five strong states fought for dominance. This was an age of great thinkers who were contemporaries in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC Confucius who had a long-lasting influence in China, Laozi who originated Taoism and Sunzi whose 'Art of War' has been a classic of military strategies for 2,500 years, studied even today at the US Military Academy at West Point.

**THE WARRING STATES (478 BC - 221 BC)** In a period of warfare, the seven states built walls to defend against one another in addition to nomadic invaders until Qin emerged as the victor after defeating six states one by one.

**QIN (221 BC - 206 BC)** Qin Shihuang (First Emperor) united China and connected and expanded the walls to guard against invaders from the north. He standardized the written language; weights and measures, etc. to set the stage for a unified China.

**HAN DYNASTY (206 BC - 220 AD)** Early Han emperors learned from Qin's rule how quickly an empire can disintegrate under tyranny. They reduced taxes and government services for a period of peace and productivity. The historically renowned emperor Han Wudi,



*The ruins of a Han dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD) Chinese watchtower made of rammed earth, Gansu province. Part of Emperor Wu's extension of Han's defence lines to the western regions.*

adopted Confucianism as state doctrine exerting a lasting influence in society. He fought the fierce Xiongnu tribes and drove them out of China. He sent Zhang Qian on expeditions to the West establishing trade routes along Central Asia and Europe all the way to reach Rome, known later as the Silk Road. The peaceful expeditions promoted communication, trade and cultural exchanges between the East and the West. The Great Wall was expanded to protect the trade routes from bandits. Relics of Jade Gate Pass for collecting taxes for jade imports are still visible.

Buddhism entered China during the 1st Century from India. Its influence declined in India while it grew in China. It spread to Korea and Japan from China. The three dominant philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism were compatible in promoting benevolence, peace and harmony. The 426 years of Han Dynasty was a long period of assimilation of people and culture—a melting pot of all tribes perpetually identified as Han Chinese, with prevailing culture as Han culture and the language as Han language. Not a distinct race in the genetic sense, the Han Chinese was a conglomerate of ethnic groups, defined more by Han culture than by ethnicity.

China's Han Dynasty was contemporary with the Roman Empire, both with vast territories of similar sizes, high engineering and military achievements. The difference is: the Roman Empire disintegrated into individual nations in Europe while China has remained a united country to this day. Han Chinese as one people, under prevailing Han culture of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, has a tendency of gravitating towards a united nation despite short periods of disunion.

**THREE KINGDOMS (220-280)**-A short period China was divided into three kingdoms. The historical novel Romance of Three Kingdoms popularized the story and the legend of the wise Zhuge Liang in films, operas,

televisions, not only in China, but in Japan, Korea and Vietnam.

**SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DYNASTIES**-Northern Wei (386-535) were Xianbei (Siberia) invaders that established the kingdom in northern China. A complete assimilation in Han culture with names changed to Han surnames left no traces of foreign origin. Building and repair of the Wall continued. Subsequent Bei Qi (550-577) built and repaired over 900 miles of the Wall.

**SUI DYNASTY** (581 - 618) Xianbei descendents united China; extended and repaired the Great Wall. Two events had long-lasting influence: the building of the Grand Canal still in use today and establishment of Keju (civil service examination — a democratic merit system to compete for government positions in imperial China until abolished in the 20th Century). With lifetime study on Confucian classics, winners achieve high moral standards. Keju required the use of Han written language which resulted in a unified China. Minorities were largely integrated in Han population.

**TANG DYNASTY** (618 - 907 AD) Li Yuan who was related to Sui royal family founded the Tang Dynasty. Tang Dynasty embraced Han culture and brought it to new literary and cultural heights, especially in poetry producing such great poets as Li Bai and Dufu. During the Tang Dynasty, the magnificent capital Chang-an (today's Xi'an) was the most

cosmopolitan city in the world attracting hordes of foreign visitors and scholars from Japan, Persia, etc. However, the Wall lost importance when Tujue was defeated.

**SONG DYNASTY** (960 - 1279) In spite of material abundance and cultural advances in this period, the Song Dynasty was lax in military defense which allowed Liao and Jin take over vast areas of territory in the north. The Southern Song retreated to the south and established the capital in today's Hangzhou.

**YUAN DYNASTY** (1280 - 1368) Genghis Khan created the greatest empire covering vast areas of Europe and Asia. The Great Wall was no barrier to his conquest. After he settled down, he began to admire the refined lifestyle of Han people. His Han counselor advised him to adopt the benevolent rule to manage the overwhelming majority of Han population with these words: "You can conquer the world on horseback, but you cannot rule the world on horseback."

His grandson Kublai Khan was influenced by Han culture and with the help of Han officials, established the Yuan Dynasty with the capital in Beijing. Han culture transformed fierce Mongol warriors to become peaceful people. In the end, China gained territory the invaders brought with them to become part of China. The Great Wall lost military importance but continued the function of protecting trade routes.

**MING DYNASTY** (1368 - 1644) Yuan Dynasty was short-lived. Mongols were driven back to the north, but periodic raids continued. Ming Emperor Yongle embarked on grand building projects of the Great Wall that continued throughout the Ming Dynasty and the building of the Forbidden City at the new capital in Beijing. In 1405, he sent Admiral Zheng He on the first of seven naval expeditions to South China Seas and Indian Ocean to reach as far as Africa for peaceful trade and cultural exchanges, not colonizing activities. China had the most advanced naval technology when Zheng He mapped and named



## Tang Dynasty

**Summary:**  
Second Classical Chinese Age  
Very similar to the Han Dynasty  
Confucianism again dominates govt leaders  
Confucian Civil Service Exams used to hire administrators for the Chinese government locally, regionally and nationally

Extended its influence throughout East Asia (Japan and Korea)

Re-built the new capital at Xi'an

Sui, Tang and Song China



over 300 islands including South China Sea Islands to claim as Chinese territories.

Another achievement was the making of Yongle Grand Encyclopedia—the first



*Genghis Khan had been tampering with the frontier tribes for some time, and so one of the great gates was opened to him by sympathizers.*

comprehensive encyclopedia in the world. Subsequent emperors were ill-prepared without a solid education in Confucian classics. They were not attentive to state affairs and soon, the Ming Dynasty entered into decline. Effortlessly, the Manchu tribe broke through the Great Wall led by traitors of Ming and established the Qing Dynasty.

**QING DYNASTY (1644 - 1911)** Early Qing emperors were great leaders with solid Han education. Emperor Kanxi and his grandson Emperor Qianlong each had reigns of over 60 years. Once more, China gained territory from Kanxi and Qianlong's expeditions. They saw no use of the Great Wall which did not keep them out. The empire entered into decline under the mismanagement of the corrupt Empress Dowager Cixi for nearly half century and invasions of foreign powers, not from the north, but from the sea. The Great Wall fell into disuse in modern times.

**REPUBLIC OF CHINA (ROC, 1912)** Sun Yat-sen overthrew the mighty empire to establish the republic in China for the first time. He attended the same High School in Hawaii that President Obama attended. His "Three People's Principles" for the new republic drew inspiration from Lincoln's "government of the people, by the people, for the people". There was much left to do when he died of cancer in 1925. His successor Chiang Kai-shek led the northern expeditions to defeat the warlords before Japanese invasion started. Chiang and the Nationalist army bore the brunt of the War with Japan from 1931 until 1945 when Japan surrendered. There was hardly a respite for reconstruction of war-torn China when civil war broke out with the Communists.

**PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PROC, 1949— )** Mao Zedong was credited with the victory, but was held responsible with the Gang of Four for the destructive Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In 1978, Deng Xiaoping started the reform and opening up of China that set the country on the road to recovery.

### **A SYMBOL OF PEACE**

Even without total success to ward off invaders, the Wall served to keep peace between



*Macao during Qing Dynasty*

the nomadic and agrarian ways of life for 2,700 years. Herding cattle needed to be separate from farming operations. History has revealed the peaceful nature of Chinese culture embraced not only by Han Chinese and minorities in China, but also by neighboring countries like Japan, Korea, Vietnam and other Southeast Asian areas. All ethnic groups, including invaders at various times, became integrated in the melting pot of Han culture.

In 1987, the Great Wall was named a world heritage site by UNESCO. Millions of tourists came from all over the world to visit the Great Wall every year, especially Badaling near Beijing. More than 500 world leaders including Queen Elizabeth, Thatcher, Putin, US Presidents Nixon, Reagan, Clinton, Bush and Obama came to visit. President Nixon left a message— "Only a great nation can build such a magnificent Great Wall".

Throughout history, it has represented the defensive nature of China's military strategy. For 2,700 years, China devoted its military efforts mainly to keep peace. As a structure not for offense, but for defense, the Great Wall is truly a symbol of PEACE!

