

The Great Wall of China

By Vickie Chao

The Great Wall of China is like a long winding dragon. It stretches more than 4,000 miles from east to west. For thousands of years, this fortification helped block the advances of northern nomadic tribes. The sheer size of the entire construction is so vast that it is one of the largest building projects ever carried out in human history! Recognizing its architectural achievement and historical significance, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) added the Great Wall of China to its World Heritage List in 1987.



Contrary to what many people may think, the Great Wall of China was not a one-time effort. It was, in fact, an on-going one with its origin dating back to the 7th century B.C.

China was not a unified country back then. There were many warlords, each with a claim to a part of China. Among those warlords, one from the state of Chu began to use packed earth to build a wall around his territory. He called it the "Square Wall." When warlords from other states saw how effective the Square Wall was for defense, they began to follow suit. For the next several hundred years, there were many Square Walls in China.

In 221 B.C., Ying Zheng, the warlord from the state of Qin, eradicated all other warlords and unified China. He established a dynasty called Qin and proclaimed himself "Shih Huangdi," meaning "The First Emperor" in Chinese. About the same time, a northern nomadic tribe called Xiongnu grew aggressive and became an imminent threat to Qin. In 215 B.C., Shih Huangdi sent his trusted commander Meng Tian and 30,000 troops to drive out the Xiongnu and to fortify China's frontier. Shih Huangdi wanted to link up the existing Square Walls so the Xiongnu could no longer cross the border and harass the Chinese. After nearly a decade of construction, Meng Tian finally completed this daunting task. Shih Huangdi was very pleased with Meng Tian's work. He named the new structure "Wan Li Qang Qeng" which later became known as the Great Wall of China.

In Chinese, the term "Wan Li Qang Qeng" literally means "10,000 *Li* Long Wall." Shih Huangdi picked that name because the Great Wall of China was about 10,000 *li* long at the time. (*Li* is a Chinese measurement unit for length; two *li* equal approximately 0.6 mile or 1 kilometer.)

After Shih Huangdi, many emperors from various dynasties helped repair the Great Wall of China. They also built out several branches, making the Great Wall of China even longer. Among all those different endeavors, the emperors from the Ming dynasty (1368 A.D. - 1644 A.D.) spent the most effort. Terrified by the Mongols in the north, Ming emperors renovated the Great Wall of China over a course of more than 200 years. The new Great Wall of China, completed with the usual passes and watchtowers, was built with solid stones instead of packed earth.

Ironically, though the Great Wall of China did help the Ming dynasty to fend off the Mongols, it eventually brought the empire to its demise.

In 1644 A.D., a man named Li Zicheng revolted. After his troops captured Beijing, the capital, Ming's emperor committed suicide. At the time, a Ming commander named Wu Sangui was guarding the Shanhai Pass, the most important pass along the Great Wall of China. Wu Sangui figured that his military force was no match to Li Zicheng's, so he sought help from the Manchus, a nomadic tribe living northeast of China. The Manchus had been eyeing China for a long time. When Wu Sangui approached them, they seized the opportunity right away. The two sides made a pact -- the Manchus would help Wu Sangui defeat the rebels and restore the Ming dynasty in exchange for money and land. Wu Sangui held up his side of the bargain; he opened the gates of the Shanhai Pass and let the Manchus cross. Unknown to him, however, was the Manchus' secret agenda. As soon as the alliance defeated Li Zicheng and his militia, the Manchus took control of China and established a dynasty called Qing. Any hope of restoring Ming dynasty was all but gone!

Name _____



Date _____

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Questions

- _____ 1. Shih Huangdi was the first person in Chinese history to build a fortification around his state.
- A. False
 - B. True
- _____ 2. Shih Huangdi's Great Wall of China was 10,000 *li* long. Two *li* equal approximately 0.6 mile or 1 kilometer. How many miles was Shih Huangdi's Great Wall of China?
- A. 10,000
 - B. 3,000
 - C. 4,000
 - D. 6,000
- _____ 3. Which nomadic tribe was Qin's enemy in the north?
- A. The Manchus
 - B. The Xiongnu
 - C. The Huns
 - D. The Mongols
- _____ 4. Which of the following Chinese dynasties did extensive work on building the Great Wall of China?
- A. Qing
 - B. Yuan
 - C. Tang
 - D. Ming
- _____ 5. Who did Shih Huangdi send to lead the effort of building the Great Wall of China?
- A. Meng Tian
 - B. Ying Zheng
 - C. Li Zicheng
 - D. Wu Sangui
- _____ 6. When did UNESCO add the Great Wall of China to its World Heritage List?
- A. 1978
 - B. 1987
 - C. 1999
 - D. 2004
- _____ 7. Which of the following about the Great Wall of China is true?
- A. The Great Wall of China can trace its origin back to the 7th century B.C.
 - B. The Ming dynasty relied on the Great Wall of China to fend off a nomadic tribe called Xiongnu.
 - C. Shih Huangdi's Great Wall of China was built with solid stones, not packed earth.
 - D. "Wan Li Qang Qeng" means "100,000 *Li* Long Wall" in Chinese.

