

Benefits of the great wall of china



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The Great Wall

The text *The Great Wall*, by John Man, is about the world's longest man made structure. Ranging from eastern to western China the length of the great wall remains unknown because the wall does not form a single continuous line.

There are several gaps and it's been destroyed and rebuilt during different dynasties. Measurements vary between 2,694 and 6,000 kilometers from the western desert to the sea (Man, 5). The section that was built in the Ming Dynasty is about 25 feet tall and 16 feet wide. In Chinese, the symbol for "wall" is ambiguous; it can mean both "Long City," and "Long Walls."

Construction of the Great Wall began around 214 BC and it was maintained until the 16th century. The Wall that was built in the Qin Dynasty is the most famous one because it was the first and oldest section that still remains today. The latest or the most current segment was built in the Ming Dynasty. There is much more to it than just a barrier; the wall itself contains fortresses, barracks, guard towers and beacon towers (Man, 5).

Though the Great Wall is a national symbol of identity for the Chinese, the reason for its construction is commonly unknown. Most people believe that the wall was built to create protection from the barbarous nomads in northern China who were attacking them, but this was not the case. John Man in *The Great Wall* argues that the nomad "attacks" were a justification for the destruction of the tribes. The nomads were not the ones to initiate violence; it was the Chinese that provoked and attacked the nomads for land. The Wall was never the barrier it seemed or was claimed to be because nomads could still easily go over or through it while the Chinese empire ruled and influenced both side of the wall (Man, 8). So it was useless against the

Mongols in the north. It was Chinese expansionism that eventually forced the evolution of pastoral nomadism and Chinese expansionism that created the threat (Man, 21).

The construction of the wall served multiple purposes. One, it defined spheres of interest, marking a frontier and confining the “ unruly” nomad populations where they could eventually be turned into workers (Man, 8). Two, it was a way for ambitious leaders to flaunt their power and warn alien threats. The wall was first created when China was divided into three different states: the Zhou in the northern borderlands, the Qin in south and west, and the Yen in north and east. These rulers each built walls for protection from each other and to show that they were serious about ruling (Man, 23). In 221 B. C. Qin Huang conquered and unified all the states and symbolically demolished the inter-state walls. He then extended the remaining wall into the northern frontier for protection from an Xiongnu invasion (Great Wall). The wall eventually became China’s main civic project, comparable in scope to the pyramids in Egypt, and construction continued until the last dynasty in the 16th century.

One of the biggest advantages of the Great Wall was that it created a sense of identity for the Chinese. It portrayed their endurance and their economical and political power. Although it was functionally useless and took hundreds of years to complete, it worked as a symbol of authority and power in the eyes of China’s opponents and enemies. It also isolated the nomadic tribes that lived in the northern side of the wall, forcing them to participate in barter and trade. One of the advantages of the great wall was this forced increase in commercial and trade. Scholar Jia Yi states, “ our markets

beneath the Great Wall will surely swarm with the Xiongnu...When the Xiongnu have developed craving for our rice, stew, barbecues and wine, this will have become their fatal weakness. Border Markets Thrived”(60). The Wall also helped protect traders and administrators, which encouraged a merchant middle class in the western kingdoms, leading China to be richer than ever.

While the empire was split in three different states, it was the nobles who were responsible for organizing a workforce for the construction of the walls. Peasants were forced to work on the wall by their nobles (Man, 23). People suffered from the forced labor it took to build the Great Wall, (Man, 123). It was estimated that during the construction of the wall, from 5th to 16th century, about 2-3 millions Chinese workers lost their lives (Great Wall). They didn't have a formal burial, the workers that died were sealed inside the wall as if they were born to support in weight both in life and in death. The workforce was divided into three different groups: soldiers, criminals, and ordinary people. Millions were called to work on the Wall, leaving their families and loved ones behind; even children had to join the workforce (Labor Force of Great Wall).

The wall led to a large numbers of deaths and injuries during the years of its construction. It split up families and widowed many women. Not only did the wall have a negative effect on the citizens of the empire but it also had a negative impact on the nomads that lived on the northern side of the wall. It restricted their area of stay and the resources they had, limiting their amount of space for animals and restricting their travel to alternative trade or lands. This eventually led nomads to unify under the Mongolian Empire.

The Mongolian Empire was led by emperor Genghis Khan, who organized raids and attacks on the Chinese Empire. The wall might have been a great authoritative representation, but it had an equally strong negative effect on the communities surrounding it.

The wall that was built by the first emperor Qin was not sustainable; it was made of earth rather than stones, causing the wall to vanish over the years. Later dynasties would then rebuild it using earth, wood, or stones. Originally, the earth wall was made from was a mix of mud and local grass straws. The wall in north of Guyuan and in Yinchuan is the oldest original earth section. Later, lacking any efficient form of transportation for the materials, the workers would just adapt local resources. They would use rocks from nearby mountains or rammed earth from the plains. It wasn't until the later dynasties started expanding the walls to Hohhot and Beijing that carved stone began to be formally and universally used. Because of this patchwork of materials, some parts of the wall were made of chunks of flat, slate-like rock and ran along a hillside while others used bricks (Man, 8). During the Ming dynasties the walls were constructed using tiles, lime, and stone, which managed to last longer and be more effective (The Wall). Because the bricks were easier to carry compared to stones and earth, they made it easier for the workers to build the walls (The Wall). The stones were still used for the foundations since they could hold the walls weight better under different conditions. As years passed, people continued to acquire better resources and methods to construct the walls.

The time and the location of the structure help determine the reasons behind the creation of the walls. It was built at a time where competition and power

among the different states and regions was at its peak, different Emperors wanted to intimidate their respective enemies by showing them that they had the economic and political power necessary for this huge civic project. It was more of a symbol of their power rather than functionally protective as there was no real exterior threat to the dynasties. Even if there was, the nomads had no problem climbing or going through the wall. To them, the wall was not an obstacle. The Great Wall was built at a time where emperors wanted to flaunt their dominance to intimidate any potential enemy attacks.

The great wall was an intimidating structure, a series of safe-houses for traders, a hugely extended barracks, a road for the transport of goods-and thus, as the second meaning of the symbol for " great wall" in Chinese implies, a very long city. Today the great wall is a representation of peace. A Tibetan said " The Great Wall is a masterpiece containing the wisdom and diligence of all the peoples and nationalities of China. As the years passed, the wall became more redundant. Today the wall is a representation and symbol of China. The wall is no longer a barrier or a border but a pure symbol of a Chinese heritage." It attracts millions of people from all over the world who come to see the world's largest structure. Useful in its time, today construction of the wall would create a dispute among United Nations. It would be even less functionally protective as a wall would not stop the intentions of any outside threat with the technology and weapons we have today.

The Great Wall by John Man isn't the best literature I've read, especially for this assignment. The most useful information I received for this assignment was in the introduction. The rest of the book focused more on the broader

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history of China and its dynasties. Even though it was interesting to learn about the different dynasties, it wasn't really related to our assignment and wasn't engagingly written. I felt like there was too much factual information for a reader to keep focused on the main idea. The author didn't have clear specific information about the wall. It was scattered all over different chapters without a clear organizing structure. It would've been better if he included more information on and of the people who built the walls, their lifestyle, and the conditions in which they worked in. He could have also included more information on the lifestyles of nomads and how the wall changed their traditional cultures.