

Deconstructing the Great Wall of China:

The Jesuits' and British
encounters

Chi Chi Huang
Honours,
University of Sydney

'If we fail to reach the Great Wall, we are not men.'¹

Mao Zedong

'It's magical. It reminds you of the sweep of history and our time here on Earth is not that long and we better make the best of it.'²

Barack Obama

The Great Wall of China is an internationally recognisable icon and is a pervasive metaphor used to define modern China's national character, political attitudes, history and culture. Indeed the opening quote from the 'father' of modern China, Mao Zedong, has now been adapted to 'You're not a real man, if you've not got to the Great Wall,' and printed on a variety of tourism paraphernalia.³ The Great Wall is a set of monumental man-made structures that has stood the test of time, much like the centuries' old Chinese culture. It has also come to embody the rich history of the Chinese people, indicative of their strength and ability as a nation. The Wall functions as a source of national pride for the Chinese, whilst also inspiring admiration from other nations, as demonstrated by President Obama's quote above. This Wall has come to represent quintessential Chinese attributes in contemporary society and it is central to how China defines itself. However, there is no single

¹ Mao Zedong as quoted in Julie Lovell, *The Great Wall: China Against the World 1000BC – 2000AD*, (Sydney: Picador, 2006), 11.

² Charles Hutzler, 'A Great Wall: Obama Tours China's Iconic Site,' *The Guardian*, 18 November 2009, accessed 11 May 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/8814316>.

³ Lovell, *The Great Wall*, 11.

‘Great Wall’. It is a set of walls, built sporadically over thousands of years by different dynasties for varying purposes. How then, did the Great Wall of China come to symbolise the fabric of a nation?

The idea of a singular Great Wall is a misnomer which developed after centuries of different cultural interpretations. This essay looks at two specific European encounters with the ‘Great Wall’ - Jesuits in the 16th century and the British diplomatic trade mission in the late 18th century. Utilising both written and visual accounts, I will argue that their experiences of the walls were instrumental in creating a coherent and singular Great Wall, and in turn helped develop the perception of a singular Chinese race.⁴ I will also use these encounters to highlight Jesuit and British sensibilities that influenced their understanding of these walls.

Andrew Waldron and Julie Lovell have both written influential books that deconstruct the myths surrounding the Great Wall.⁵ Waldron was the first to address the myth that the Great Wall had a continuous and linear history, and demonstrated how ideas of the Great Wall affected myths about China’s past and identity as a modern and unified nation. Lovell traces the history of the Great Wall and its symbolic manifestations that have come to define modern China and the Chinese see themselves. This paper contributes to the groundwork already undertaken by these historians by focusing on hitherto under-appreciated literary and visual evidence which reveals how early modern Europeans interacted with the Great Wall of China. I highlight the Jesuit and British encounters with the Great Wall as the two significant turning points in how the walls meaning transformed into a symbol for China and its national identity. I also aim to demonstrate that the history of the Great Wall is a history of cultural encounters that have shaped modern ideas about China within the country itself as well as outside.

I will make my argument by first outlining the historical background of walls in Ancient China. From this it will be clear that prior to the seventeenth century, although walls were built for defence and territorial claim, they were of no real significance as a tool for governance or as a cultural monument. In addition to this, the historical sentiments towards building walls resulted in negative folklore and historical texts. After establishing how walls were perceived and considered in Ancient China, I will demonstrate how the Jesuits cemented the walls as a geographic feature of China in the popular European mindset and in the way the Ming dynasty saw their own kingdom. Using their cartographic skills, which also helped them to ingratiate themselves with the Ming court, the Jesuits communicated their idea of statehood and boundaries and transformed the walls into a distinct and instantly recognisable feature of the Chinese landscape. The British trade mission in the late 18th century built upon this idea by using the Great Wall to symbolise their perception of Chinese national character, which was also coloured by their failed trade negotiations. In doing so, they further propagated the idea that China has always been a homogenous and unified race of people.

⁴ It is important to note that the Great Wall of China is a set of walls throughout the northern modern China. I will use the name ‘Great Wall’ to refer to the widespread understanding of these structures as a symbol and icon. The term ‘Walls’ will be used in reference to the physical structures.

⁵ Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Lovell, *The Great Wall*, 2006.

The History of Walls in China

In Ancient China, walls were a functional construction, but they were not a significant feature in the rule of the different dynasties. Far from the nationally symbolic icon of Chinese landscape and identities, walls in Ancient China were remembered negatively in remaining written evidence and accounts.

As in many other cultures, walls have a long history in China as practical tools of defence and territorial claims.⁶ The families of the Warring States (Qin, Zhou, Yan, Wei, Chu and Qi) built walls since the middle of the seventh century BC.⁷ Walls were built to guard against other family states as well as the nomadic tribes across the steppe.⁸ Chinese culture is defined by farmer and settler societies, thus conflict was common between the 'barbarians' from the steppe and arid terrain. Lovell argues the walls that constitute the contemporary Great Wall are built far into land that has no agrarian value to them. Thus it is unclear whether the walls are an example of defensive strategy, as is commonly understood, or whether they were built as part of an aggressive territorial claim into steppe land.⁹

Qin Shi Huang is attributed to being China's first emperor after 'unifying' the Warring States in 221BC. He is commonly, although erroneously, said to have started building the Great Wall during his reign after appointing his general, Meng T'ien, to build a 'wan-li cheng chang' (ten thousand li wall) with 300,000 men.¹⁰ However, all Warring States built walls and it is the northern walls of Qin, Zhou and Yan that Qin Shi Huang integrated into his system of walls.¹¹ Furthermore, while Qin Shi Huang is credited to be the first emperor to begin work on what would become the Great wall, archaeologists believe that there are very few physical remains of the Qin's walls and those remains themselves are questionable.¹²

Despite the reputation associated with the historical figure of Qin Shi Huang as the instigator of the Great Wall project, remaining literary evidence portrays the walls as an example of his tyranny, tainting his legacy as the first emperor. These two remaining sources are attributed to scholars from successive ruling dynasties. Regardless of their own prejudices towards the first emperor, it is still of interest that the construction of the walls are used to illustrate the character of his reign. The first of these two sources, *Shih Chi*, is written by Ssu-ma Ch'ien (145?-86? B.C.)¹³ He does not criticise Qin Shi Huang overtly, but does so through the actions of his general, Meng

6 The earliest archaeological evidence of border walls is 1,400 meters of a wall that formed part of Chu's southern frontier dating back to 656B.C. and historians have suggested that wall construction is probably an even older practice.

7 Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, pp. 13-15.

8 Ibid., 13-16.

9 Lovell, *The Great Wall*, 47-65.

10 Ibid., 17.

11 Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 16.

12 Ibid., 17.

13 Ssu-ma Ch'ien's *Shih Chi* considered the first example of Chinese historiography, where the overlapping five sections provide multiple perspectives on the one story. For a good overview of Ch'ien's work see Grant Hardy, 'Can an ancient Chinese historian contribute to modern western theory? The Multiple narrative of Ssu-ma Ch'ien,' *History and Theory*, Vol. 33, No.1 (Feb., 1994), 20 -38.

T'ien. The general was required to commit suicide after the emperor died, which Ssu-ma Ch'ien attributes to the fact that 'he [Meng T'ien] conscripted forced labor and did nothing to "alleviate the distress of the common people, support the aged, care for the orphaned, or busy himself with restoring harmony among the masses."¹⁴ The construction of these walls, as documented by Ch'ien, was to the detriment to the wider population because Meng T'ien and his emperor Qin Shi Huang neglected the welfare of their people. Chia I. is the second scholar who wrote on the Qin Dynasty in his book, 'Faults of Ch'in.'¹⁵ In it he expresses his immense belief in the longevity of Qin's empire as a result of 'his walls of metal extending a thousand miles.'¹⁶ The choice of words in this phrase signifies the hardship in building the emperor's extensive walls. These two remaining literary sources on the building of Qin Shi Huang's walls capture a resentful sentiment towards the structure and demonstrate the perception that they were examples of a tyrannical emperor.

This negative perception of the walls is also depicted in folk traditions. 'Songs of the long Wall have never ceased up to now,' remarked a Chinese man in 48 BC, suggesting a multitude of contemporary reference to the structures. Lyrics to one such 'Song of the Long Wall' warns:

If a son is born, mind you don't raise him!
 If a girl is born, feed her dried meat,
 Don't you just see below the Long Wall,
 Dead men's skeletons prop each other up.¹⁷

These lyrics suggest that raising your children would be futile because they would end up dying in the emperor's pursuit of building this long wall.

Perhaps the most popular and renowned folk story regarding the wall is that of Meng Chiang-nü.¹⁸ Her husband was sent to build the wall, and being the dutiful wife, she embarks on a long and treacherous journey to bring him winter clothing, but finds he has died due to the harsh conditions. She is overwhelmed and begins to cry causing the wall to crack open, revealing her husband's bones. Hearing that a woman defeated his wall, Emperor Qin Shi Huang immediately seeks to kill her but, when he sees her beauty, requests that she become his concubine. Meng accepts only after making the Emperor promise to give her husband a proper funeral with the Emperor and his court in attendance. At the funeral, Meng kowtows before her husband's golden coffin crying, before leaping into the river and turning into a silvery fish, much to the annoyance and humiliation of the Emperor. This story has resonated throughout the centuries and is now a tourist attraction at a

14 Derk Bodde, trans., 'Statesmen, Patriot, and General in Ancient China (1940),' quoted in Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 195.

15 Qin and Ch'in are the same emperor and dynasty. I will continue to use the spelling 'Qin' in my own writing.

16 Chia I, 'The Faults of Ch'in,' in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. 1, eds. William Theodore de Bary, et al., (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1960), 152.

17 Anne Birrell, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace: An Anthology of Early Chinese Love Poetry, Translated with Annotations and Introduction*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 49.

18 The earliest reference to this story can be found in the Tun-Huang Manuscripts, believed to have been written during the 6th and 7th century. Woodbridge Bingham, 'Notes on Tun-Huang Manuscripts in Paris and London,' *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Nov., 1951), 67-70.

particular section of the Great Wall. It is clear that Meng's sacrifice continues to be a comment on Qin Shi Huang's tyrannical legacy.

These earliest accounts create a myth not only about the emperor but also of the walls. The fact that there are few literary accounts remaining begs the question as to whether the walls were particularly prominent features in Chinese daily life and court rule prior to the 16th century. The remaining references to the walls are entwined with the first emperor, written to define his dynasty as a tyrannical regime, which has survived to modern times as the common perception Qin Shi Huang. It is important to keep in mind this initial interpretation of the walls when considering the drastically different perceptions of the walls as portrayed in the accounts of the Jesuits and the British in the 16th and 18th centuries.

The Jesuits

The Jesuits came to understand the walls in China as a permanent territorial boundary and would perpetuate this idea through both the books they published and distributed throughout Europe as well as the maps they created for Emperor Kangxi of the Ming Dynasty. They transformed the walls into a uniform structure symbolising the Chinese land. The walls however were not built as a nation's permanent boundary. There is definitely an element of demarcating a space for which the walls were built, since the nature of a wall is to separate one side from the other. But the notion that they functioned as unshifting territorial frontiers was a meaning imbued by the Jesuits upon the walls. Motivated by religious aims and using their cartographic skills, the Jesuits were also able to shift the Chinese perception of the walls as distinct feature of their own land.

Prior to Jesuit accounts, the Western world held vague impressions of walls and barriers within middle Asia. The earliest known written record in the West was formed by Ammianus Marcellinus (330?- 395?).¹⁹ He wrote vividly of a land surrounded by 'summits of lofty walls,' near the land of Seres (silk).²⁰ There are also accounts of extensive walls from the Middle East originating from approximately the first century. In these stories, Alexander the Great was said to have built barriers to contain Gog and Magog, characters from the Old Testament. These barriers are referred to as 'sedd Iskender', meaning 'Wall of Alexander.'²¹ Although these perceptions had no lasting influence in shaping the meaning of the walls within Chinese imagination, they imbued a sense of mysticism and mythology around the structure, especially to those with no physical access to it. Thus, when the Jesuits and other early Europeans made visible contact with the walls, the manner in which they perceived its grandeur and size sat within an exaggerated mindset stemming from these stories. Those early accounts established the expectation that there were walls on a mythical scale in the east.

The Society of Jesus, commonly known as the Jesuits, was founded by Ignatius Loyola (1491 – 1556) and was officially sanctioned by Pope Paul III in 1540.²² This Catholic religious order sought 'to "help souls" live more authentically Christian lives by getting "to know themselves and Christ

19 Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 204.

20 Ammianus Marcellinus, 'History, XXIII: 6,' quoted in Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 204.

21 Rashid ad- Din, 'Jami' al-Tawarikh (ed. A, Ali-zade), (1985),' quoted in Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 204.

22 Thomas Worcester (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to The Jesuits*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-3.

better.”²³ As a Catholic order, it was centred in Rome, although Ignatius began his preaching in Spain, hence the Spanish and Portuguese origins of the first Jesuits. Francis Xavier was the Jesuit chosen to lead their mission to Asia. He had established the Jesuits society in India, Indonesia and Japan but died in 1552 before he was able to reach China. Xavier’s hope of going into China was never forgotten by the society. His successor, Matteo Ricci wrote that Xavier ‘was the first ... to realize the aptitude of the innumerable people of this vast empire for absorbing the truth of the Gospel, as he was also the first to entertain the hope of spreading the faith among them.’²⁴ Ricci completed Xavier’s dream by leading the Jesuits into China in 1583.

Matteo Ricci is one of the most prominent Jesuits to have lived in China. He was responsible for the ‘ascent to Beijing,’ a move to station themselves in the north of China.²⁵ This was significant politically and culturally because foreigners were only permitted to live and work in the south, the area known as Canton, prior to Ricci’s push to the north. This intentional spatial segregation served to reinforce Chinese Imperial superiority and power by emphasising the distance and inaccessibility to the empire’s political centre. Achieving his goal in 1601, he and his Jesuit companions were the first foreigners permitted to reside within Beijing,²⁶ Ricci paved the way for future Jesuits to occupy posts within the Ming and Qing court.

Ricci’s journals, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, were found after his death and completed by Father Nicola Trigault, who included the account of Ricci’s death and burial. They were first published in 1615 and revealed much about the Chinese culture. Of interest to this paper is his one reference to the wall structures. Ricci writes:

To the north the country is defended against hostile Tartar raids by precipitous hills, which are joined into an unbroken line of defense with a tremendous wall four hundred and five miles long.²⁷

Historians have tended to disregard this statement in their research. Waldron references it in a collection of other accounts from Ricci’s contemporaries,²⁸ to only demonstrate that there was consensus amongst Europeans that a wall of considerable length existed in China. Lovell however does not include Ricci’s observations. Despite this, I believe that Ricci’s statement about the Great Wall is historically significant as an example of the way the Jesuits introduced European perceptions of a unified territorial boundary into Chinese cultural perception of their own nation.

In order to understand what the Great Wall meant to the Jesuits, it is necessary to explore the location of the passage within Ricci’s journals. Ricci writes about the wall in the chapter titled ‘Concerning the Name, Location and the Extent of the Chinese Empire.’²⁹ Including the walls in this

²³ Ibid., 3.

²⁴ Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583,1610*, trans. Louis J. Gallagher, S.J., (New York: Random House, 1942), 117.

²⁵ Nicolas Standaert, ‘Jesuits in China,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to The Jesuits*, 169.

²⁶ Jeremy Clarke SJ, ‘Mapping for the Kingdom,’ in *The Great Wall of China*, eds. Claire Roberts and Geremie R. Barmé, (Sydney: Powerhouse Museum, 2006), 221.

²⁷ Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 10.

²⁸ Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 204–205.

²⁹ Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 5.

section demonstrates that Ricci believed the structure to be crucial in understanding the physical empire of China. In this chapter he writes about the geographical boundaries, gives precise degrees of latitude and longitude and describes the changing topographies of China.³⁰ Indeed his statement acknowledges that the wall completes the ‘natural defense of the precipitous hills.’ Bishop Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza wrote the first book of Chinese history, *The historie of the great and mightie kingdom of China*, in a European language in 1585.³¹ In this early English translation of the book, de Mendoza writes that the wall was ‘naturall of it selfe, so that they be right and lightie rockes verie nigh together; but the other hundred leagues ... be made by mens handes of verie strong work of stone.’³² Both these accounts demonstrate that in the sixteenth century, Europeans understood the wall as a series of natural defences filled in with man-made sections. Thus, stemming from the Jesuits’ interpretation, within the European perspective the walls were understood to be integrated into the natural topography, which in turn reinforces these structures as a geographical feature of the land.

It is important to acknowledge that Ricci’s chapter includes the ‘Extent of the Chinese Empire.’ The walls, in this instance, are being described as a state boundary. He begins the paragraph with ‘referring again to ... this empire, it should be observed that it is quite well protected on all sides, by defences supplied by both nature and science.’³³ The walls are therefore a place that demarcates the limits of Empire, reflecting the European notion of statehood. At a time when colonies were being formed, dividing land was a preoccupation of European nation states, especially the Spanish and Portuguese. The 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas was drawn up by Pope Alexander VI to settle disputes between these two empires and divided the New World between 46°W and 49°W.³⁴ The physical boundaries of states were deemed to be imperative in a European perspective, and this was applied to their understanding of China.

The Jesuit interpretation of the Walls as defining the boundaries of the Chinese empire was new. Historically, the function of these larger walls changed according to the foreign policies of the different dynasties. Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty (581-618) obtained allegiance from the Great Khaghan, the emperor of Mongols. In fact chronicles proclaim that when Emperor Yang visited, ‘(t)he barbarians thought a spirit had come: anyone who saw the imperial camp, from ten li around, fell to their knees and kowtowed,’³⁵ including the Khaghan. Despite this allegiance and demonstration of a relatively peaceful period between the two societies, Emperor Yang still built walls. He writes in verse:

The desolate autumn wind gusts up,
We travel far, ten thousand li.

30 Ibid., 5–9.

31 Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza, *The historie of the great and mightie kingdom of China, and the situation thereof together with the great riches, huge citties, politike gouvernement, and rare inuentions in the same*, (trans.) R. Parke, (London: I. Wolfe for Edward White), 1588.

32 Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza, ‘The historie of the great and mightie kingdom of China (1588),’ quoted in Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 204.

33 Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 9.

34 Clarke, ‘Mapping for the Kingdom,’ 221.

35 Hu Ji, Sui Yangdi xinzhuan (1995), quoted in Lovell, *The Great Wall*, 130.

Travelling so far, where are we headed?

To cross the river and build the Long Wall

Does the great emperor rely on his own wisdom to build?

No: he follows the precedent of his sacred ancestors.

Building the wall is a stratagem that will benefit a myriad generations,

Bringing peace to a hundred million people.³⁶

Therefore the function of his walls was not to mark a national boundary, but an act of tradition and peace. The Sui Dynasty only built in areas that had pre-existing walls, suggesting that no new walls were actually built, so the work would have been to refurbish the existing walls.³⁷ By tending to their ancestor's work and continuing their tradition, Emperor Yang was in fact demonstrating respect and tribute to his ancestors. There is no indication that territory or marking territory was the intention of building walls.

The Tang dynasty was the successive dynasty of the Sui. They wrote in their *History of the Sui*, 'the Sui's achievements and shortcomings, preservation and destruction are analogous to those of the Qin,' implying that the Sui Dynasty was a failure and their two Emperors were 'tyrannical and used force and harsh punishments,' and were 'malevolently cruel.'³⁸ The accuracy of this interpretation is not in question in this paper because the Tang Dynasty expanded the Chinese empire as far as any ethnically Chinese empire did, but all without building walls. They adopted open foreign policies that encouraged trade and diplomacy.³⁹ Building walls was not necessary to maintain their Empire. This was also the case for the Yuan Dynasty, whose Mongolian origins enabled them to exert control over both Chinese and steppe populations. These two dynasties and their empires were not bordered by the walls, in fact their empires extended far beyond the wall structures. Therefore, these three different dynasties; Sui, Tang and Yuan, demonstrate that the Jesuits, who viewed the Chinese empire from their European understanding of statehood, were instrumental in constructing the interpretation of the walls as a frontier.

The Jesuit conception of the Wall as a territorial boundary defining the Chinese empire was introduced into Chinese culture by way of cartographic projects undertaken by the order particularly during the eighteenth century. Part of Jesuit training involved studying the humanities and sciences.⁴⁰ Their education enabled them to take posts in the Astronomy Bureau of the Chinese court as well as become scientific advisors to the Emperor. The Jesuits excelled in cartographic skills because they upheld the importance of cartography as a platform for scientific discovery and

36 Lui Qingde et al., *Zhongguo lidai changcheng shi lu* (1991), quoted in Lovell, *The Great Wall*, 131.

37 An insightful map that shows where all large-scale walls have been built in China is available at Peter Hessler, 'Chasing the Wall,' *National Geographic.Com*, accessed 9 May 2010, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0301/feature1/>.

38 Arthur F. Wright, 'Sui Yang-ti: Personality and Stereotype,' in *The Confucian Persuasion*, ed. Arthur F. Wright, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 57.

39 Lovell, *The Great Wall*, 138–147.

40 Clarke, 'Mapping for the Kingdom,' 222.

practice. Maps were also a vehicle to visually display kingdom and power.⁴¹ Moreover, the Chinese court became aware of their mapping skills and, with a new found interest from the national administrators in understanding the limits to their boundaries, commissioned Jesuits to implement their skills in this area.⁴²

In the early eighteenth century, Chinese administrators felt the need to understand the true extent of their power and influence. As Laura Hostetler writes, ‘...the Kangxi emperor commissioned French Jesuits in his service to carry out a large-scale cartographic project encompassing the entire Qing Empire (and beyond).’⁴³ The techniques employed by the Jesuits were European and new to the Chinese court. The fact that they were commissioned based on their European sensibilities and techniques reveals how highly the Chinese courts rated the Jesuits’ cartographic skills, particularly as the Chinese were self-assured of their own superiority during this period. The initial religious missions failed to instil favour for the Jesuits amongst either the Chinese people or the state. However in time, the Chinese state came to value their academic skills and knowledge, which helped the Jesuits gain legitimacy within China to further carry out their work uninhibited.⁴⁴ The ultimate and important bi-product of the relentless and now un-suppressed religious work within China was a cultural two-way road. The Jesuits were able to transfer their knowledge and culture whilst absorbing Chinese society. The Chinese gained insight into new methods of cartography and ‘a sophisticated understanding of the benefits of Western mathematics and science,’⁴⁵ in which the Emperor himself declared the most interest.

In his desire to become knowledgeable regarding his territorial boundaries and limits, Emperor Kangxi commissioned a mapping of the Great Walls. As Jeremy Clarke writes:

According to the early Jesuit historian Henri Bernard, they began at Shanhaiguan Pass on the East China Sea, followed the Great Walls to Jiayuguan Pass in western Gansu province and travelled south to Xining, the capital of present day Qinghai province, returning to Beijing on 10 January 1709.⁴⁶

The commissioned map managed to collate the collection of gates, forts, military positions, rivers and ingresses that made up the Great Walls into a five metre long work. Other maps were based on this original work, including maps sent along with letters to Jean-Baptiste Du Halde in Paris. This was a crucial point in the western interaction with the Great Wall because the maps were incorporated into *Du Halde’s encyclopaedia*, published in 1773. The encyclopaedia became widespread and ‘a standard source for eighteenth century Europeans’ knowledge of China.⁴⁷ The Great Wall was propelled visually onto a European audience and the myth and mysticism of the

41 J.B. Harley, ‘Maps, Knowledge, and Power,’ in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, eds. Dennis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 277–312.

42 Clarke, ‘Mapping for the Kingdom,’ 222.

43 Laura Hostetler, ‘Qing Connections to the Early Modern World: Ethnography and Cartography in Eighteenth-Century China,’ *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Jul., 2000), 653.

44 Clarke, ‘Mapping for the Kingdom,’ 222.

45 *Ibid.*, 227.

46 *Ibid.*, 227.

47 *Ibid.*, 227.

Great Wall could now be realised in these images. The feature of the Great Wall as one singular monument was further cemented throughout Europe by this collection.

Furthermore, the concept that the Great Wall formed the northern boundary of China, an impenetrable border, also became apparent through the circulation of the maps. In Martino Martini *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, 1655, the map of China depicts a long continuous wall as the northern frontier of China. The crenulated wall is only discernable feature of the landscape other than the river systems and mountain ranges. This depiction of paralleling the Great Wall with features of the natural landscape only served to further emphasise Ricci's original perceptions and understandings of the Great Wall as an inherent feature in the topography of China. It was under the Jesuits' gaze that the series of walls were grouped together visually as a single 'Great Wall.' As the Jesuits engrained the Great Wall into the Chinese topography, it became a symbol synonymous with the contemporary Western perception of China.

The British

While the Jesuits were able to cement the walls into the popular landscape and geography of China, the British transformed the wall into a symbol of Chinese identity as a result of their failed trade mission in the late eighteenth century. British sensibilities about nationhood also came into play in their experience of the walls, colouring their understanding of the Chinese nation and their history as a uniform and singular race of people.

The British Empire's dependency on Chinese tea and silks was fast undermining their economy.⁴⁸ In order to address this economic loss, a diplomatic trade mission was organised in 1792 with Lord Macartney at the helm. The aim of this mission was to open trade with China and establish a permanent British embassy in Beijing, the first foreign embassy on Chinese soil.⁴⁹ As was previously mentioned, foreigners were required to reside in Canton, the most southern part of China. Here, they were literally at the very bottom of the country, a reflection of their social position and inferiority as perceived and propagated by the Emperor and his court. Canton has always been a great distance from the political centre of the country, which has moved depending on the dynasty but has remained in the north. This imposed sense of hierarchy become problematic for the British, who were increasingly self-assured of their position within world politics.

Despite the numerous gifts showcasing the technological advancement of the British, Emperor Qianlong was unimpressed and viewed their gifts as tribute.⁵⁰ Although being of Manchurian origin, the Qin dynasty had by the late eighteenth century adopted the worldview of the late Ming that Lovell aptly terms 'Middle Kingdom syndrome,' wherein they believed that the rest of the world revolved around them, politically, culturally and economically.⁵¹ Foreigners were seen as inherently inferior, thus trade was not needed, nor desired. Lord Macartney's refusal to kowtow to the Emperor also signifies the British perception of their significance as a nation state. Thus, the mission failed as a result of respective convictions of superiority.

48 Lovell, *The Great Wall*, 1.

49 Ibid., 2.

50 Ibid., 3-5.

51 Ibid.

The British expressed disgust and disinterest with Chinese food, entertainment, clothing and customs. Yet, what did attract praise and wonderment from the British was the Great Wall, or more accurately the walls at Ku-pei-kou, which were built during the Ming Dynasty. Lord Macartney wrote of it as ‘the most stupendous work of human hands.’⁵² These walls received great acclaim and were worthy of several paintings and sketches by Lieutenant Henry William Parish (Figure 3). This reaction to the walls will be analysed to explore British sensibilities towards travel, ruins and heritage, and ideas of nationalism. Through this framework, the British created an idealised landscape out of the Great Wall, which is used to this day within both Western and Chinese commentary on the character of China.

The British party visited this section of walls on their way to the Emperor, indicative of the significance that sightseeing played in matters of diplomacy. The eighteenth century saw the idea of the ‘Grand Tour’ take shape as a primarily educational institution amongst the British aristocracy.⁵³ Although the ideological justification of the tour and what was practiced did not always take place harmoniously, it established a tradition of educational sightseeing.⁵⁴ This tradition began to romanticise landscapes as an idealised land embodying the past and the people to which the land belonged. As Lowenthal and Prince explore, ‘The types of landscape the English prefer, preserve and reproduce ... embody the past and present virtues of the inhabitants.’⁵⁵ They also comment on the English taste for landscapes to be ones that ‘mirror a long succession of such idealized images and visual prejudices.’⁵⁶ Therefore the way the British viewed the Great Wall sits within that succession of images. Partiality towards travel, ruins and nationalism is embodied in writings and visual renderings of the structure.

By the late 18th century, the Great Wall was already considered an attraction and perhaps the pinnacle of sights in China. Fifteen years before Lord Macartney’s voyage, Dr Samuel Johnson prompted James Boswell, one of the most renowned grand tourists, to explore ‘the wall of China ... [in order to] do what would be of importance in raising your children to eminence ... They would be at all times regarded as the children of a man who had gone to view the wall of China.’⁵⁷ Johnson illustrates that the act of travel reflected well not only on the traveller but of those around him. With this in mind, the travels of the British diplomatic party to the Great Wall, as evidenced by the myriad of documents they produced, served to exhibit to the British back home their own accomplishments.

Moreover, the way in which the British wrote about the Great Wall reflects the historical imperative of travelling. The history of the Chinese was always of interest to them and they projected their understanding of it onto a section of walls that had been built recently by the Ming dynasty. By the eighteenth century, Europeans had printed several publications on China. One such publication was Martini’s *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, which was translated into English in 1654. He

52 J.L. Cranmer-Byng (ed.), *An Embassy to China Being the Journal Kept by Lord Macartney during his Embassy to the Emperor Ch’ien-lung, 1793-1794*, (London: Longmans, 1962), 10.

53 Edward Brodsky-Porges, ‘The Grand Tour: Travel as an educational device 1600 – 1800,’ *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (1981), 171–186.

54 Judith Adler, ‘Origins of Sightseeing,’ *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 16, No. 1(1989), 7–29.

55 David Lowenthal and Hugh C. Prince, ‘English Landscape Tastes,’ *Geographical Review*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Apr., 1965), 166.

56 *Ibid.*, 166.

57 Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 208.

wrote significantly on China as well as producing influential maps. In regards to the walls, Martini writes:

The person who began this work was the Emperor Xius ... He built this wall starting in the twenty-second year of his reign, which was 215 years before Christ ... The work is magnificent, huge, and admirable and has lasted right up to the present time without any injury or destruction.⁵⁸

The British had this image of the Great Wall through the work of the Jesuits before they arrived in China. Thus, when they experienced and saw the walls themselves, it was understood within the Jesuits' image and interpretation.

Lieutenant William Parish, a member of the British trade mission, recreated several sections of the walls and fortresses in sketches. They were meticulous and accurate in capturing the dimensions and physical features of the parts of the wall. These were produced out of the Enlightenment era scientific need to document and observe. Barrow, who accompanied Macartney on the mission, observed that the walls

were calculated to contain as much masonry and brickwork as all London. To give another idea of the mass of matter in this stupendous fabric, it may be observed, that it is more than sufficient to surround the circumference of the earth on two of its great circles, with two walls, each six feet high and two feet thick!⁵⁹

There is a sense of excitement in his tone, but his amazement is filtered through his empirical observations. The Great Wall therefore becomes an object of study within the perception that it is an idealised landscape embodying a uniform and coherent Chinese history.

The perceived lengthy history of the newer walls characterised 'The Great Wall' as a ruin. Parish and William Alexander, another member of the trade party, produced several paintings from this mission featuring the Great Wall, all of which were painted in a romantic style using muted tones and soft lines, characterising British landscape paintings in the eighteenth century.⁶⁰ The painting captures the picturesque, which is defined by irregularity, nature, ornateness and intricacies.⁶¹ The attraction of ruins was their 'proper state of decay, to show the depredations of time, without effacing the grandeur of what it once was.'⁶² Lowenthal and Prince write that 'The ruin was a landscape feature especially favoured by lovers of the picturesque ... [as] weathering has harmonized them with the rest of the landscape.'⁶³ British sensibilities dictated that the value of ruins stem from their natural demise over a lengthy period of time. As such, the Great Wall could only be of value and interest to them as an historical ruin. An imposed history on the structure

58 As quoted in Lovell, *The Great Wall*, 266.

59 Sir John Barrows, *Travels in China*, (London: T Cadell and W Davies, 1806), 11.

60 A catalogue of Parish's and Alexander's images of the Great Wall can be found at 'The Lion and Dragon: Britain's First Embassy to China,' British Library, accessed 11 May 2010, <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/lionanddragon/homepage.html>.

61 Lowenthal and Prince, 'English Landscape Tastes,' 190-196.

62 Ian Ousby, *The Englishman's England: Taste, Travel and the Rise of Tourism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 92.

63 Lowenthal and Prince, 'English Landscape Tastes,' 196.

still marks the contemporary presumption that the entire Great Wall was built over two thousand years ago.

Ruins were also associated with a sense of heritage and origin that were intrinsically linked to British ideals of nation and nationalism. Macartney wrote of the wall:

At the remote period of its building, China must have been not only a very powerful empire, but a very wise and virtuous nation, or at least to have had such foresight and such regard for posterity as to establish at once what was then thought a perpetual security for them against future invasion.⁶⁴

This quote demonstrates the British perception the China was a continuous nation of a unified race of people. He admires their wisdom and foresight as characteristics of a virtuous nation. Macartney's compliment however needs to be assessed against his own experiences in China to demonstrate the significance of the previous passage.

Macartney's trade mission to China was a failure. He was unsuccessful in opening foreign trade to China and in establishing a permanent British embassy in Beijing. It is not surprising then that his views of the Chinese Empire were largely negative. As Jonathan D. Spence proposes:

These men (British) saw themselves as realists ... They viewed with ... hostility China's attempt to force them to accept traditional forms of ritualised subservience ... The British who saw in such ritual observance an abandonment of national dignity rather than a convention of international relations.⁶⁵

However, despite his negative experiences with the Chinese he could not deny the magnificence of the Great Wall. It was a structure that appealed to the British sensibilities towards heritage, travel, aesthetics, and statehood. The wall, and what they said about the China as a historical nation, is the only feature he admitted admiration towards. Macartney also viewed the structure as a defensive tool, but because his mission failed, it led him to see it as a boundary to China. This boundary would come to symbolise, in the West, the insular nature of China. Even today, when referring to trade negotiations and economic relationships, the idea of a wall around China is often used.⁶⁶

Conclusion

In understanding the Jesuits and British interpretations of the Great Wall, their own prejudices and understanding of China are revealed. The Jesuits were primarily motivated by their religious cause to establish Christianity as the dominant faith in China. They believed that assimilating into the culture would allow them to achieve this ambition. As a result, the Great Wall was only significant

64 Cranmer-Byng, *An Embassy*, 112.

65 Jonathan D. Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1998), xiii.

66 An example of recent trade issues between Australia and China have been in regards to Stern Hu. The Chinese State claimed that Hu stole commercial secrets and committed bribery. An article that addresses this topic is John Garnaut, 'Risky Business: Ore or Nothing' in *Sydney Morning Herald: News Review*, 27-28 March, 2010. 1 - 4. There is a large illustration incorporated into the text, by Simon Letch. There is an enclosed set of walls, resembling the Great Wall with a Chinese flag. Three men in bowler hats and suits walking along the structure, illustrating the futility in trying to access China.

to them in defining the topography of China. However this idea was propagated in Europe by widespread circulation of Jesuit writing and cartographic images that cemented the Great Wall as a singular topographical structure demarcating the extent of Chinese land.

The British however were motivated by economic aims to open trade with China due to their expensive dependency on tea. Their trade mission failed and the Chinese court ridiculed them by forcing them to kowtow, fed them undesirable remains of meals and disregarded their gifts. As a result of this they came to view the Chinese empire as impenetrable, both culturally and diplomatically. However their reverence for ruins, the picturesque and their desire for travel enabled them to admire, observe and document the Great Wall as an idealised landscape symbolic of their understanding of China. The British understanding of this place was built upon their expectations of it as formed by the Jesuits accounts of the walls. Due to their mercantile nature and fondness of travel, they transformed the walls from an essential topographical feature to an ideological place. It became symbolic of a lengthy history and national character of a uniformed and continuous Chinese Empire, disregarding the hostile changes from one dynasty to another as well as the varied and inconsistent purposes of wall building for the different dynasties.

These early Jesuit and British encounters with the walls in northern China form the basis of current contemporary understanding of the Great Wall as a uniformed and singular wall, a national icon and symbol for modern China. Both the Chinese and the West have adopted these perceptions in creating their own interpretations of the structure. As much as an understanding of the Jesuit and British experiences help to deconstruct the modern meaning of the Great Wall, it also highlights the preoccupations and sensibilities of their culture and time. Ultimately, the Great Wall can be used to explore not only Chinese history but the history of those who have experienced it.
