

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 438

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Great Wall

Location : 17 provinces of northern and central regions

State Party : China

Date : December 29, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II, III, IV and VI.

C) JUSTIFICATION

Traditionally known to the Chinese as the "Long Wall of Ten Thousand Li", the stretch of formidable defensive structures built to ward off invasion of the Celestial Empire by barbarians is most often called the "Great Wall" or the "Wall of China" by Europeans.

The principle of these extraordinary fortifications goes back to the Chunqiu period (722-481 B.C.) and to the Warring States period (453-221 B.C.), so-called because of the long struggle among seven rival dynasties for supreme power. The construction of certain walls can be explained by these feudal conflicts, such as the one built by the Wei in 408 B.C. to defend their kingdom against the Qin. Its vestiges, conserved in the centre of China, antedate by many years the walls that the Kingdoms of Qin, Zhao and Yan erected against the northern barbarians around 300 B.C.

Beginning in 220 B.C., Qin Shi Huang, the founder of the Empire of the Ten Thousand Generations, undertook to restore and link up the separate sections of the Great Wall which had been built in the 3rd century B.C., or perhaps even earlier, and which stretched from the region of the Ordos to Manchuria. Towards the west, he had the fortifications extended in the valley of the Huanghe all the way to Lanzhou. Thus was the first cohesive defense system of which significant vestiges still remain, completed, shortly before the accession of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.). During their reign the Great Wall was extended even further, and under the emperor Wudi (140-87 B.C.) it spanned approximately 6,000 kms between Dunhuang in the west to Bohai Sea in the east. The danger of incursion along northern Chinese border by the federated tribes of Mongols, Turks and Tunguz of the Empire of the Xiongnu, the first empire of the

steppes, made a defense policy more necessary than ever. Alternating military actions with intensive diplomatic efforts, this policy entailed massive relocation of Chinese peoples within the frontier zone. In 102 B.C., there were 180,000 peasant soldiers in the "command posts" of Gansu.

After the downfall of the Han dynasty (220 A.D.), the Great Wall entered its medieval phase. Construction and maintenance work were halted, only occasionally being recommenced. Under the Northern Wei, for example, a 1,000-km section of wall was built in 423; this was added to in the 6th century, but work was suspended during the Tang period (618-907). China at that time enjoyed such great military power that the need for a defense policy was no longer felt.

It was the Ming emperors (1368-1644) who, after the long period of conflict which ended with the expulsion of the Mongols, revived the tradition begun by Qin Shi Huang. During the Ming dynasty, 5,650 kms of crenelated wall were built. The stones used were incredibly well matched, and the wall was fortified by 25,000 towers and protected by 15,000 outposts. To defend the northern frontier, the Wall was divided into nine Zhen, which were military districts rather than simple garrisons. At strategic points, fortresses were built to defend the towns (e.g. Jinshanling for Peking), passes or fords. The passageways running along the top of the wall made it possible to move troops rapidly and, in peace time, for imperial couriers to travel. Two symbolic monuments still proudly stand at either end of the wall. These are the "First Door under Heaven" at Shanhaiguan, located at the wall's eastern end, and the "Last Door under Heaven" at Jiayuguan, which, as part of the fortress entirely restored after 1949, marks its northwestern end.

Having been presented with a nomination concerning one of humankind's most striking cultural properties, ICOMOS can only give a wholeheartedly favorable opinion, while noting that the Great Wall satisfies criteria I, II, III, IV and VI.

- Criterion I. The Great Wall of the Ming is, not only because of the ambitious character of the undertaking but also the perfection of its construction, an absolute masterpiece. The only work built by human hands on this planet that can be seen from the moon, the Wall constitutes, on the vast scale of a continent, a perfect example of architecture integrated into the landscape.

- Criterion II. During the Chunqiu period, the Chinese imposed their models of construction and organization of space in building the defense works along the northern frontier. The spread of Sinicism was accentuated by the population transfers necessitated by the Great Wall.

- Criterion III. That the great walls bear exceptional testimony to the civilizations of ancient China is illustrated as much by

the tamped-earth sections of fortifications dating from the Western Han that are conserved in the Gansu province as by the admirable and universally acclaimed masonry of the Ming period.

- Criterion IV. This complex and diachronic cultural property is an outstanding and unique example of a military architectural ensemble which served a single strategic purpose for 2000 years, but whose construction history illustrates successive advances in defense techniques and adaptation to changing political contexts.

- Criterion VI. The Great Wall has an incomparable symbolic significance in the history of China. Its purpose was to protect China from outside aggression, but also to preserve its culture from the customs of foreign barbarians. Because its construction implied suffering, it is one of the essential references in Chinese literature, being found in works like the "Soldier's Ballad" of Tch'en Lin (c. 200 A.D.) or the poems of Tu Fu (712-770) and the popular novels of the Ming period.

Having underscored the outstanding quality of a cultural property exceptional by its significance, its function, its form and its size, ICOMOS should like to express a few comments purely on form concerning the nomination.

It is obviously not possible to guarantee the integral protection of the 50,000 kms of ancient walls preserved in China (this figure includes the fortifications of the inner kingdoms), nor even the some 6,000 kms of great walls erected in the north, approximately half of which subsist materially.

It is, however, indispensable for the World Heritage Committee to ascertain whether the government of the People's Republic of China envisages, as it would seem, making a global classification of the Great Wall or, on the contrary, delimiting specific representative sections, according to principal periods of construction or principal regions crossed (desert plateaus, mountains, valleys, etc.), or the different types of associated fortifications (fortresses, garrisons, fortified gates, bastions, terraces, watch towers, etc.). In the absence of these specifications, the present proposal may, in fact, be taken in various ways. This will inevitably bring about conflicts in the short term as to the definition of the property and in the medium term as to the role the international community might play in cooperation with the People's Republic of China concerning the study and conservation of the Great Wall.

ICOMOS, April 1987

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By letter of 20 May 1987, the government of the People's Republic of China expressed its will to enhance in priority some representative sections of the Ming Wall. However the Great Wall "has to be considered and protected as a whole". These specifications seemed to satisfy the Bureau of the Committee which recommended the inscription on the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS, October 1987