China's most famous ruin

CLAIRE ROBERTS

Contrary to popular belief, the Great Wall is not a single wall but a series of walls built by different peoples for defence and offence over more than two millennia. Remarkable, fragmentary and extensive, their physical forms determined by the terrain as well as materials available locally, what started more than two thousand years ago as a series of lines inscribed by successive kings and emperors on notional maps was translated by engineers and labourers into complex concrete structures. Remnants of these walls stretch across the landscape like long arms from west to east, and northwards into present-day Russia and Korea. The walls and watchtowers that remain bear witness to Chinese history — monuments to the builders, soldiers, traders and travellers with whose stories they are inextricably connected.

In fact, the most recent additions to China's long ramparts, the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) walls, faced with stone and fired brick, are chiefly responsible for the images of The Great Wall of China that we carry in our minds.[1] The Ming walls possess the scale and the serpentine majesty of no other heritage structure. No matter whether they are regarded as part of an early and impressive system of integrated military defence, a symbol of containment and oppression or a human folly of extraordinary proportions, the Great Wall of China is a grand idea that has imprinted itself on the minds of people throughout the world.

Walls mean different things to different people. For many Chinese the Great Wall is associated with the foundational but despotic rule of Qin Shihuang (reigned 221–210 BCE), the first emperor of China. It is also associated with the ethnically diverse peoples it was designed to keep out who have historically occupied the strategically important desert area, or Western Region, that connects China to Central Asia and Europe. As early as the sixth century BCE poems were written about the frontier and battles fought between Han Chinese generals and nomadic peoples who were the enemy.

The king has ordered [General] Nan-zhong
To build a fort on the frontier.
To bring out the great concourse of chariots,
With dragon banners and standards so bright.
The Son of Heaven has ordered us
To build a fort on that frontier.
Terrible is Nan-zhong;
The Xian-yun [people] are undone.

Long ago when we started,
The wine-millet and cooking-millet were in flower.
Now that we are on the march again
Snow falls on the mire.

The king's service brings many hardships,
We have no time to rest or bide.
We do indeed long to return;
But we fear the writings on the tablets.[2]

The Western Region is remote for most Han Chinese people and it is associated with exile, hardship and death. In 1906–08, the British explorer and archaeologist Aurel Stein travelled from the border of Afghanistan and India, along the Hindu Kush and Kunlun mountain ranges and

Engraving, 'View of the celebrated Great Wall of China which divides that empire from Tartary and was originally built to prevent the incursions of the Tartars', from *Millar's new complete and universal system of geography*, London, 1782.

across the Taklamakan Desert to the oasis of Dunhuang and beyond. During the course of his expedition he uncovered thousands of archaeological objects from the ruins of watchtowers where troops were garrisoned some 2000 years before. He filled twenty-nine cases with precious manuscripts and paintings from the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang; they are now in the British Museum.[3] Stein observed the sentiment of his Chinese secretary Chiang Ssu-yeh as he approached the Jiayuguan Pass, the westernmost pass of the Chinese empire. 'Ssu-yeh had here said good-bye to true China with tears in his eyes when he passed through seventeen years before. He was sharing now my elation at approaching the famous Gate again.'[4]

Earlier Stein wrote:

> *It did not need ruins to make me feel the historical importance of the narrow cart track by which we continued our march… I knew that I was now treading the very ground over which all Chinese enterprises towards the 'Western Regions' had moved during more than two thousand years. These terribly barren ridges, furrowed by a maze of narrow ravines, must have frowned down on the very first Chinese missions and expeditions which went forth to conquer Turkestan. How many of those thousands and thousands of soldiers and administrators who have passed by here to the lands of exile in Central Asia, had lived to see the day of their fondly-hoped-for return 'within the Wall'?*[5]

For others the Great Wall was a romantic ruin of mythic proportions that came to be regarded as symbolic of China. Lord Macartney saw the wall in 1793–94 when he travelled from Beijing to Chengde (Jehol) as British envoy to the Qianlong emperor. He referred to a section near Gubeikou Pass as 'this celebrated wall which we had heard such wonders of'.[6] His party was fascinated by the wall and examined it at length. Macartney contrasted his own obsession with the apparent disinterest of his guides: 'Wang and Chou, though they had passed it twenty times before, had never visited it but once, and few other attending Mandarins had ever visited it at all.' Macartney commented on the wall's 'ruinous condition' and the 'very little care being taken to preserve it'. By way of explanation he noted astutely that the wall had reached the end of its life as a military barrier: 'For the [Manchu-Qing] Emperor now reigning has extended his territory so far beyond it that I doubt whether his dominions without the wall are inferior to those within.'[7]

In the eighteenth century, China had become a fashionable place to read about and interest in visiting the Great Wall revealed a spirit of wanderlust and curiosity.[8] But many could only dream of visiting it. In 1778, James Boswell observed that his friend Dr Samuel Johnson

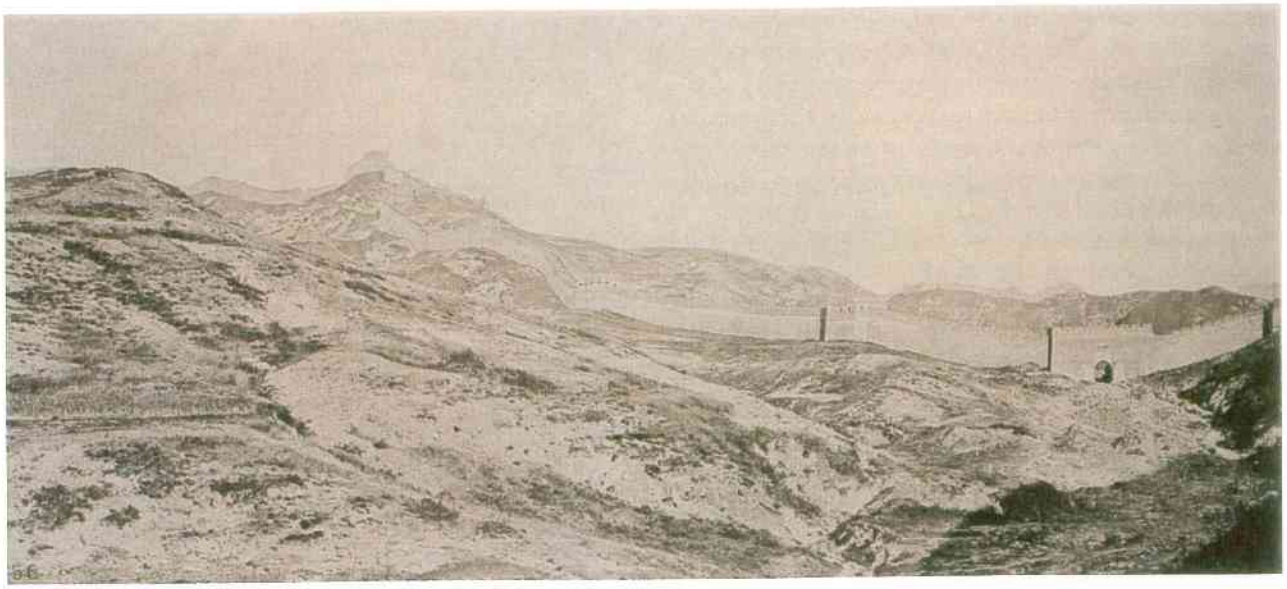
> *expressed a particular enthusiasm with respect to visiting the wall of China. I catched it for the moment, and said I really believed I should go and see the wall of China had I not children, of whom it was my duty to take care. 'Sir' (said he), 'by doing so, you would do what would be of importance in raising your children to eminence. There would be a lustre reflected upon them from your spirit and curiosity. They would be at all times regarded as the children of a man who had gone to view the wall of China. I am serious, Sir.'*[9]

Prior to the eighteenth century, the Great Wall of China had featured in Western historic maps and in the accounts of diplomats, missionaries, explorers, intrepid travellers and traders. Writers who referred to the walls include Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), Benedict Goes (1562–1607), Bishop Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza (1550–1620), the Russian diplomat Ivan Petlin (whose report is dated 1619) and E Isbrants Ides (1692).[10] Accounts of China were accompanied by woodblock prints and engravings, including representations of the Great Wall that were often fantastic in their conception. Then, in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, photographs, valued for their authenticity and faithfulness, usurped prints as the favoured medium for image-making of this kind.

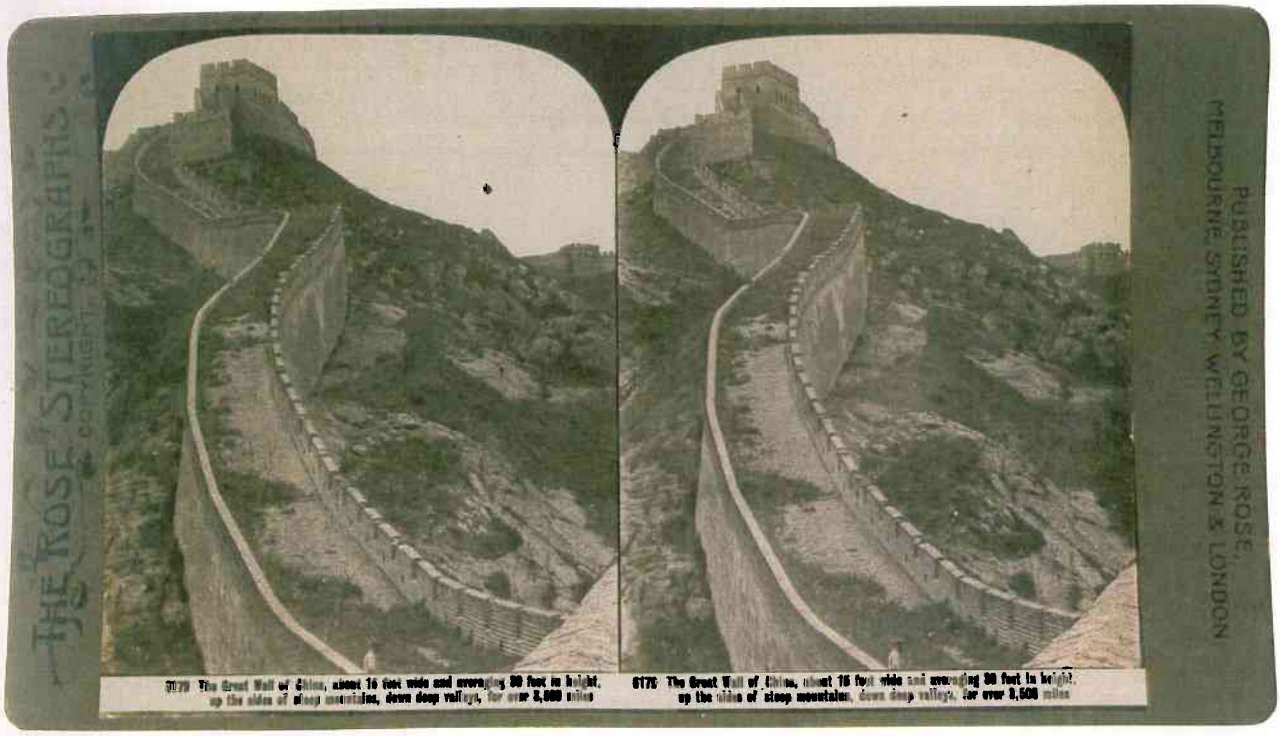
Western photographers had begun to document aspects of life in treaty ports where foreigners were permitted to trade. In 1860, Felice Beato (1820s?–1907?) accompanied the British forces to China to record the Second Opium War (1856–60). Beato's photographs of Beijing are the earliest works of that city by an identifiable photographer.[11] His images of the Anglo-French assault on the forts at Dagu (Taku) that protected the approach to the capital and the destructions of the emperor's garden palaces are as memorable as they are shocking. His photographs of Beijing's majestic, intact and fortress-like city walls are of great historical significance. But there is no evidence to suggest that he visited the Great Wall.

Through deluxe books of travel photographs, China was brought gently into the living rooms of Western households with images that were less confronting but no less fascinating. Publications such as the four-volume folio *Illustrations of China and its people* by John Thomson (1837–1921) appeared in 1873–74 and included 200 photographs taken between 1862 and 1872. Thomson's aim was to 'convey an accurate impression of the country I traversed as well as of the arts, usages, and manners which prevail in different provinces of the Empire.' The photographs were arranged in the natural sequence of Thomson's journey, beginning in Hong Kong, then a British colony, continuing to many of the treaty ports that had been forced open to foreign trade following the opium wars, and concluding with photographs of Juyongguan Pass and the Great Wall at Nankou Pass, north of Beijing, now known as Badaling.

Thomson provided an armchair journey through a country that was still exotic and inaccessible for most of his readers. The caption for his photograph of the Great Wall acknowledged it was already established as a symbolic structure: 'My readers doubtless share with me in feeling



The Great Wall of China, photograph by John Thomson, 1862–72.
Reproduced from *Illustrations of China and its people*, vol 4, plate xxiv, London, 1874



The Great Wall of China, stereograph by George Rose, 1904.
Reproduced courtesy the La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

that no illustrated work on China would be worthy of its name if it did not contain a picture of some portion of the Great Wall.'[12] Thomson travelled to the wall in a 'Pekinese mule-litter … the usual conveyance adopted by the Chinese, if they wish for ease and comfort, when they visit localities outside the great wall'. When he got there he was not impressed. He found it 'neither picturesque nor striking' and called it 'the greatest monument of misdirected human labour to be met with in the whole world.' Thomson's photograph shows a distant section of the Ming dynasty wall at Nankou. It snakes across a bleak and rugged mountain range. Not content with a close-up shot, which might have shown 'its masonry often defective', Thomson chose to convey the wall's length and its integral relationship to the surrounding mountains.

The sections of wall at Nankou Pass, located 60 kilometres north of Beijing, are among the most spectacular. Nankou was of strategic significance because of its mountainous location on the road connecting Mongolia with the markets of China (and the dynastic capital of the Ming). The walls there had prevented many assaults by Mongol and Manchu armies. Owing to their proximity to Beijing these sections of wall were also the most accessible for daytrippers and became favourite sites of tourist pilgrimage. As a consequence, they have also been the most photographed. By 1908, such was the popularity of these sections of wall that the American adventurer William Edgar Geil, who published an account of his journey from San Francisco to China and along the wall from east to west, described it as the 'Tourists' Great Wall'.[13] When train tracks pierced the wall at Qinglongqiao Bridge in 1909 and a regular rail service was established, the journey was made much easier (see 'Steaming through the Wall', pp 128–29).

The Great Wall of China, Die Grosse Chinesische Mauer, postcard, about 1905.
Reproduced courtesy Wang Jia'nan and Cai Xiaoli

Panorama of Great Wall at Nankow Pass, by H Hartung, about 1922.
National Geographic Image Collection

In the second half of the 1800s, stereographs came into vogue. Stereographs are dual photographs taken side by side and mounted on a card. With the use of a special hand-held or tabletop viewer, known as a stereoscope, the two-dimensional photographs can be transformed into a three-dimensional form. Viewed singly, in themed sets or as part of a 'Tour of the World' with captions or an accompanying guidebook, stereographs became a popular and collectible parlour entertainment. Three-dimensional photographs could transport the viewer from mundane reality into remote and fantastic worlds. The Underwood Brothers were active in America, the largest market, selling stereographs door to door. Negretti and Zambra, based in London, published the first commercial views of China in stereo series in 1859.[14] In 1880, George Rose (1861–1942) established the Rose Stereograph Company in Australia. Rose, born in Clunes, Victoria, travelled extensively in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North America and became well known for his stereographs of Australia and the Pacific. His 'large wooden glass-plate camera was fitted with two lenses spaced about as far apart as a person's eyes.'[15] In 1904, Rose journeyed to Japan, lured by the photographic prospects of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05). He did not reach the front-line as he had hoped and travelled on to Korea and China, where he took some fifty stereo views in Weihaiwei, Qufu, Tianjin, Beijing, Shanghai, Canton (Guangzhou) and Hong Kong.[16] Among them is a view taken at Badaling captioned 'The Great Wall of China, about 15 feet wide and averaging 30 feet in height up the sides of steep mountains, down deep valleys for over 3500 miles'. In Rose's dramatic view the Great Wall begins with the masonry in the foreground, ascends steeply, twisting and turning as it climbs, and is punctuated by watchtowers as it recedes into the distance. The tall serpentine form of the wall created a view with clear foreground, middle and background zones and was the perfect subject for the stereograph. Viewed through a stereoscope, the three-dimensional effect was pronounced.[17]

In about 1908, the Rose Company, with offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Wellington and London, shifted its focus to the rapidly developing market for postcards. This Western innovation first appeared in the late 1800s with the emergence of commercial publishers. By the early twentieth century, the postcard industry was booming, driven by the demand of world travellers.[18] Postcards could be printed in large numbers and provided a new application for the work of photographers, even if only a small percentage of photographs taken were deemed suitable. Publishers kept a close eye on the market, catering to a taste for images that were exotic, dramatic and in some cases shocking. The Great Wall of China was a popular subject.

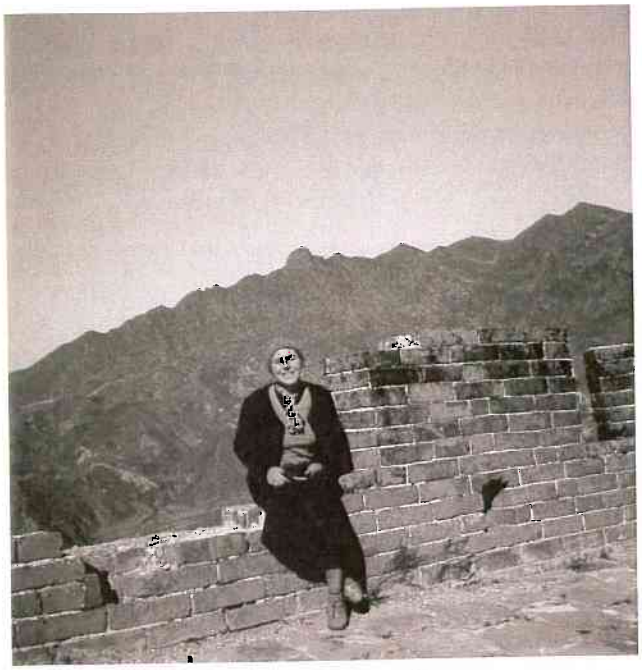
One postcard sent from Beijing shows a crumbling, overgrown, but still majestic ruin of a section of the wall, most probably at Badaling. The caption in German and English indicates the intended tourist market and the Russian stamp and postmark reveal its overland route to Europe. Another card showing the wall at Shanhaiguan Pass in Hebei province sent to Britain in 1905 is inscribed on the front 'Love from Lizzie and Ben'.

Postcards offered a personal, even intimate, way of connecting people and places. In the early 1900s, they were a novel form of time travel. Those particular postcards come from a collection assembled by two Chinese artists, Cai Xiaoli and Wang Jia'nan, who moved from Beijing to London in the late 1980s. Experiencing their own sense of displacement, Cai and Wang were fascinated by the way China was represented on the old postcards they discovered. They were also moved by how the cards had been preserved, treasured by their recipients and handed down through families before eventually being sold.[19] The cards purchased by Cai and Wang in Europe from dealers, auction houses and via the internet have now come full circle: they have recently returned to Beijing with their proud new owners.

S Yamamoto operated a photographic studio in Beijing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was also a publisher of postcards. Yamamoto took many portraits, including one of the renowned Australian journalist George Ernest Morrison (1862–1920) and Sun Tianlu, the manager of Morrison's household, as well as photographs of famous historic sites and scenes of daily life. In 1906, he published a selection of these images in a book titled *Peking*. It was printed in Japan with title page and captions in English and Chinese, suggesting that the primary market was English-speaking residents and tourists in China and Japan. This popular book was reprinted in May 1909. Included in the 100 views of Beijing are four photographs of The Great Wall. The first of these images depicts the Great Wall at Badaling as it zigzags across the bare and rocky mountain range, revealing areas of damage where the wall has been breached. Together these photographs trace Yamamoto's journey up the rampart and along its eroded surface.

A very similar view was accessioned into the photographic archive of the National Geographic Society in Washington DC in 1922. It is captioned *Panorama of Great Wall at Nankow Pass showing passage of road under a loop of the wall* and was taken by H Hartung, a German photographer resident in Beijing. Hartung's photographs of the Great Wall, the Forbidden City and the Summer Palace were used as illustrations in Juliet Bredon's classic book about the old capital, *Peking: a historical and intimate description of its chief places of interest*, first published in 1919. Bredon advised her readers that 'The classical excursion from Peking [Beijing] which no tourist, however hurried, should omit, is to the Great Wall of China via the Nankou Pass … no where is the ancient fortification in better preservation, no where grander.' She described the crumbling towers and the wall in places 'slipping down into the valleys, stone by stone'.[20] In the minds of most Westerners the wall at Nankou Pass *was* 'The Great Wall of China'. Ranging across the tall and rugged mountains, its eloquently dilapidated appearance accorded with the image of a noble and ancient ruin. Juliet Bredon (Lauru), the daughter of Sir Robert Bredon who worked for the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service, spent most of her life in Beijing.[21] Writing under the pseudonym Adam Warwick, her article 'A thousand miles along the Great Wall of China' was published in the *National Geographic Magazine* in February 1923.[22]

The Great Wall at Nankow, by Hedda Hammer (Morrison), early 1940s. Collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney



Hedda Hammer (Morrison) at the Great Wall, 1941. Photo: Alastair Morrison

During the first half of the twentieth century, many interesting images of the Great Wall at Nankou were taken — by professional and amateur photographers, travellers, adventurers, missionaries and those who sought to capture China's rich cultural heritage. Alice Schalek (1874–1956), a Viennese travel photographer, journalist and war correspondent, sold images of the Great Wall taken near Nankou Pass to the National Geographic Society in 1922. The American missionary Reverend Claude Leon Pickens (1900–85) who lived in China from 1926 to 1937 and conducted surveys of Muslims in north-west China, north-east Tibet and Inner Mongolia in the 1930s, also photographed the Great Wall.[23] Langdon Warner (1881–1955), curator of Asian art at the Fogg Museum at Harvard University, led expeditions to China in 1923 and 1925. In 1923, he took a number of photographs of the Great Wall at Nankou and travelled to sites in Gansu, including Dunhuang from where he removed many precious artefacts, including the mural paintings from the Thousand Buddha Caves that are now

Command site of the Eighth Route Army on Chajian Mountain, Laiyuan, Hebei, Autumn 1937, by Sha Fei.
Reproduced courtesy of Wang Yan

Soldiers of the People's Liberation Army have their photograph taken on the Great Wall outside Beijing in 1957.
Photo: © Marc Riboud/Magnum Photos

displayed in the Arthur M Sackler Museum at Harvard University.[24] Warner's 1923–24 photographs of the Great Wall are a silent reminder of his acquisitive eye and the irreparable damage he inflicted on the great religious monuments near the westernmost extreme of China's mighty wall.

The best known photographer resident in Beijing (called Beiping from 1927 to 1949) during the first half of the twentieth century was Hedda Hammer Morrison (1908–91). Born in Germany, Hedda Hammer arrived in Beiping in 1933 to take up the job of manager at Hartung's Photo Shop, which had been established by H Hartung. The shop was located at East of Legation Street, No 3, inside the Legation Quarter.[25] In 1933, the business employed seventeen Chinese staff, who no doubt included some early photographers of the Great Wall. The business appears to have been successful, judging by the extant photographs and postcards that are identified by the name 'Hartung'. In addition to developing and printing film brought in by customers, many of them expatriates and travellers, Hartung's Photo Shop undertook studio portraits and commissions, and built up a stock of images that could be sold as souvenir photographs of the old capital or printed as postcards.[26] Hedda worked there until 1938, after which she stayed on in Beiping as a freelance photographer.

Among the more than 10 000 black-and-white photographs that Hedda took during her thirteen-year stint in Beiping there are a number of the Great Wall.[27] In the work titled *The Great Wall at Nankow*, Hedda revisits this famous and much photographed section of the wall. Her photograph is surprising because she presents us with a bucolic image of mountain goats grazing on slopes of spring pasture below the wall. It differs dramatically from most earlier views, which show the wall in a barren and arid landscape. According to her husband, Alastair Morrison, Hedda spent a day at the Great Wall and on arriving at the train station to return to Beiping realised that the roll of film she had taken had been left behind. She hurried back but by the time the missing film had been located the last train had already departed. She decided to spend the night in the open and passed a

Gough Whitlam, Leader of the Opposition and head of the Australian Labor Party mission to China, at the Ming dynasty Great Wall at Badaling, Yanqing, Beijing, in July 1971.
Photo: © Newspix

The Pierre Cardin spring/summer 1979 collection at the Great Wall, photographed by Eve Arnold, 1979.
Photo: © Eve Arnold/Magnum Photos

very cold night sleeping by the wall. Perhaps this photograph was taken early the next morning.[28]

The Great Wall at Nankow is one of twenty-one 'Scenes of Beiping' mounted in a silk-covered concertina-style souvenir album of photographs by Hedda Hammer. The captions are written in pencil and the last page is signed. Hedda sold such high-quality albums of photographs to foreign residents and wealthy travellers as mementoes of their sojourn in Beiping. Prospective clients were given the option of making their own selection from themed master albums of numbered images. In this case the thematic focus is architecture and the album also includes photographs of the city walls and gates, the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, Jade Spring Mountain, the Yiheyuan Summer Palace, Chengde (Jehol) Summer Villa and the Great Wall at Shanhaiguan Pass.

A photograph, taken by Alastair Morrison in March 1941, records a trip he and Hedda made to the Great Wall soon after they met. Hedda sits in the winter sun on the edge of a dilapidated section of wall, wearing a cap, layers of woollen jumpers and a cardigan. She nurses her own camera and smiles at the one being operated by Alastair, connecting them with one another and with us, the viewers of the photograph, in that instant. The desire to record a person at a particular place carries with it the exhilaration of the moment. This photograph evokes the dramatic context, the rugged expansive mountains, the bracing spring air and the sense of connection between two people. It is a personal moment that records an impulse that has been repeated by millions of people from all over the world.

In the early twentieth century, the Great Wall was visited by an increasing number of local tourists. A photograph of the architect Lin Huiyin and her father-in-law, the famous thinker and political activist Liang Qichao, and most probably taken by her architect husband Liang Sicheng on an outing at the Great Wall, documents their interest in the historic structure and its emergence as a tourist destination and a national icon.[29]

From a Chinese perspective, the final transformation of the Great Wall from a military barrier into a national symbol began after the Sino-Japanese War (1937–45).[30] Following the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and the outbreak of full-scale war in 1937, the Great Wall was once again used as a military base for border defence. This moment in the history of the wall is captured in a series of striking photographs taken at Chajian Mountain in Hebei province by Sha Fei (1912–50), a photographer for the communist Eighth Route Army.[31] But it was not until after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 that the Great Wall underwent its most fundamental physical and metaphoric transformation. Sections of the wall were restored and its stories were updated and reclaimed. In a photograph taken by the French photographer Marc Riboud (born 1923) during his first visit to China in 1957, a group of off-duty, day-tripping People's Liberation Army soldiers pose for the camera on a section of wall at Badaling. Some strike heroic poses, some seem bemused by the occasion, while others stand on the wall as if to assert their ownership — the Communist Party's — of the historic military structure. The restoration of the wall at Badaling, the section most accessible to the capital, undertaken in 1953 and 1957 as a showpiece for the new China, is clearly visible in this photograph.[32]

Australian Prime Minister John Howard with the Chairman of the National People's Congress, Wu Bangguo, in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, 19 April 2005.
Photo: Penny Bradfield/Fairfaxphotos.com

As diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic increased in the 1970s, Chinese government leaders began to take important visitors to the Great Wall at Badaling. The Great Wall featured in glossy magazines such as *China Reconstructs* and, despite having suffered depredations during the Cultural Revolution (*c* 1964–78),[33] was evolving into an icon of which the Chinese leadership was increasingly proud. Gough Whitlam, then Leader of the Opposition in Australia, visited the Great Wall in July 1971 with a delegation from the Australian Labor Party, and American president Richard Nixon was taken there during his ceremonial trip to China in February 1972.

The contrast of old and new featured in the choice of the Great Wall as the backdrop for the launch of Pierre Cardin's spring/summer fashion collection in 1979. The photograph reproduced around the world of a tall, dramatically made-up French model wearing an ethereal rainbow-coloured garment prancing on top of the heavily restored wall at Badaling amid a crowd of bemused onlookers in drab proletarian gear — more appropriate dress for a cold winter's day — marks the beginning of the period when China began to open its doors to the world after the end of the Cultural Revolution.[34] This odd pairing of contemporary international fashion and ancient military structure was an indication of the role

Project for extraterrestrials No 10: project to extend the Great Wall of China by 10 000 metres by Cai Guò Qiang, Jiayuguan Pass, Gansu, 27 February 1993. Photo: Masanobu Moriyama

the wall would play in years to come. The Great Wall was no longer just a site for tourism, it was also a five-star stage from which to project China to the world.

Since the mid 1980s, contemporary Chinese artists have taken an interest in the Great Wall as an icon and have responded to its complex and multivalent meanings.[35] Many have been inspired by the words of Lu Xun (1881–1936), China's great twentieth-century writer:

> *I have always felt hemmed in on all sides by the Great Wall; that wall of ancient bricks which is constantly being reinforced. The old and the new conspire to confine us all.*
>
> *When will we stop adding new bricks to the Wall?*
>
> *The Great Wall of China: a wonder and a curse.*[36]

Two of the most impressive artworks that take 'The Great Wall' as their subject were made in the 1990s by Xu Bing (born 1955) and Cai Guo Qiang (born 1957).

For Xu Bing the Great Wall represented the meaninglessness of human endeavour on an unparalleled scale. The son of a Peking University history professor, Xu cited the late-Ming dynasty intellectual Gu Yanwu (1613–82), who had remarked on the futility of attempting to close China off from the rest of the world. Xu had made a small rubbing of a section of wall in 1987 while he was a student at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, but it was not until May 1990 that he embarked on a monumental project to make a rubbing of a section of the Great Wall, including a watchtower. Xu chose a site at Jinshanling, to the north of Beijing, because the wall there was in good condition and had not been recently restored. He worked with fifteen people and took one month to complete the rubbing, using 300 bottles of ink and 1300 sheets of paper in the process. The work was pieced together and mounted over a four-month period when Xu was artist-in-residence at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in America.[37] It was first displayed in the Elvehjem Museum of Art at the university in 1991 and more recently in the exhibition *The Wall* which opened in Beijing in 2005. Titled *Ghosts pounding the Wall (gui da qiang*, an expression that means 'going around in circles', or being lost), Xu Bing's large installation is invested with power because it is a rubbing of the wall. More than a facsimile, it is like a fingerprint that overwhelms the viewer with its inky blackness and massive scale.

Cai Guo Qiang chose to locate his work in relation to the westernmost pass of the Great Wall, at Jiayuguan in the Gobi desert, a region he had travelled to years earlier. For *Project for extraterrestrials No 10: project to extend the Great Wall of China by 10 000 metres* he laid a 10 000-metre length of encased gunpowder from the Great Wall into the desert. At 7.35 pm on 27 February 1993, Cai created one of his signature night-time pyrotechnic displays when he lit the fuse and set off an amazing fast-burning line of gunpowder that darted across the desert mountains like a writhing supernatural dragon igniting a momentary wall of fire and light. Gunpowder, the dragon and the Jiayuguan Pass are potent symbols of Chinese power. Cai's stated aim for *Project for extraterrestrials* was to recapture the soul of the wall by transmitting signals to the universe and establishing dialogue with other planets. By extending the Great Wall 10 000 metres Cai hoped that energy would circulate between real and virtual worlds and simulate the breath of the universe.[38] Perhaps Cai

was also indirectly referring to the ancient Chinese myth in which the first emperor of China dreamt that his soul journeyed to the moon, and from that vantage point the idea of constructing a boundary line around his kingdom was born. When Qin Shihuang's soul re-entered his body, the building of the wall began.[39] Playing on the age-old question of whether the Great Wall can be seen from the moon — it can't — and working with potent symbolic forms, Cai encouraged us to marvel at our place in an interconnected universe and at human folly.

Today artistic representations of 'The Great Wall of China' appear in all kinds of places. In the Great Hall of the People a huge painting of the Great Wall dominates the room where Chinese leaders meet with visiting heads of state. The painting acts as a backdrop for official photographs, hanging behind a formal arrangement of chairs where leaders and their interpreters are seated. An even larger oil painting of the Great Wall beckons as you wait for your passport to be stamped at China's border control or immigration barrier at the Beijing international airport. *Spirit of the Chinese race* (Huaxia shenyun) by Yuan Yunfu depicts the Great Wall of China snaking across verdant mountains and is painted in a style and palette that re-enforces its majesty and mystery. For official taste-makers the Great Walls that lie to the north of Beijing now stand for China, representing the breadth and beauty of the natural terrain, the ingenuity and might of its people and the antiquity of its civilisation.

So, what is 'The Great Wall of China'? For many people it is the section of wall at Badaling that has been photographed and represented in paintings so often over the past hundred years. This 'Tourists' Great Wall', no more than 10 kilometres long, has become 'The Great Wall of China', symbolic of the nation and the myriad historic structures that were built across China's northern borders over more than two millennia. Like the magical supernatural dragon whose form it is said to emulate, 'The Great Wall' has been invested with meanings that resonate with the ongoing transformation of China. It is China's most famous ruin and one of its most visited tourist destinations, a 'Great Wall' that is an awe-inspiring fragment of something much larger, more complex and contradictory.

Rubbings being made of the Ming dynasty Great Wall at Jinshanling, Luanping, Heibei, 1990, for Xu Bing's artwork *Ghosts pounding the Wall*.
Photo: Xu Bing

END NOTES

FAME

China's most famous ruin – Claire Roberts

1 For centuries 'The Great Wall of China' has fascinated the Western imagination and inspired a rich mythology. Described by travellers as 'The Eighth Wonder of the World' and 'superior to the pyramids of Egypt', its origins and history have often been misunderstood. Many early writers erroneously referred to the Ming walls outside Beijing as having a history of 2000 years. See also Adam Warwick, 'A thousand miles along the Great Wall of China', *National Geographic Magazine*, vol xliii, no 2, February 1923, p 113; and Voltaire, quoted in Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: from history to myth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p 207.

2 Adapted and excerpted from Arthur Waley (trans), *The book of songs: the ancient classic of poetry*, Grove Press, New York, 1996, pp 141–42.

3 M Aurel Stein, *Ruins of desert Cathay: personal narrative of explorations in Central Asian and westernmost China*, Macmillan and Co, London, 1912, vol 2, p 491; vol 1, p xi.

4 Ibid, vol 2, p 275.

5 Ibid, p 274.

6 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*, Longman, London, 1962, p 111.

7 Ibid, p 113.

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9 James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, 10 April 1778, quoted in Cranmer-Byng, *An embassy to China*, pp 40–41.

10 For an overview of Westerners' impressions of 'The Great Wall', see Jonathan Fryer, *The Great Wall of China*, New English Library, London, 1975, pp 157–79; Robert Silverberg, *The Great Wall of China*, Chilton Books, Philadelphia/New York, 1965, pp 172–82, 200–01, 209-15; and Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, pp 203–14.

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12 John Thomson, *Illustrations of China and its people*, Sampson Low, Marston, Low and Searle, London, 1874, vol 4, plate xxiv.

13 William Edgar Geil, *The Great Wall of China*, Sturgis & Walton Company, New York, 1909. See captions to photographs by Harrison Sackett Elliot facing pp 44, 58. The majority of the photographs that illustrate Geil's book were taken by the author.

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15 Ron Blum, 'Australian Photographer George Rose', http://www.dfat.gov.au/akf/akf_10th_anniversary_georgerose.html, accessed 3 March 2006.

16 I am grateful to Ron Blum of Oaklands Park, Adelaide, for sharing with me his research on George Rose's stereographs, which forms the subject of a forthcoming book. Conversation with Ron Blum, 16 March 2006.

17 Norman Thorpe, 'Introduction', *1904: Korea through Australian eyes*, Kyobo Book Centre, Seoul, 2004, p 34.

18 The Chinese postal service was established in 1896 and competed with foreign-run postal services, which issued their own stamps and used their own postmarks. For an overview of Chinese postcards, see Régine Thirez, 'Historical Chinese postcard project: 1896–1920', http://postcard.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr, accessed 7 March 2006.

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20 Juliet Bredon, *Peking: a historical and intimate description of its chief places of interest* (1919), Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, 1982, reprint ed, p 398.

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22 I would like to thank William C Bonner, Archivist, Image Collection at the National Geographic Society in Washington DC, for this information.

23 The Pickens photographic collection is in the Harvard-Yenching Library. See http://via.harvard.edu:9080/via/deliver/advancedsearch?_collection=via.

24 Warren I Cohen, *East Asian art and American culture: a study in international relations*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992, pp 88–100.

25 In the photographic archives at the National Geographic Society (NGS) in Washington DC there are two photographs both captioned 'Great Wall at Kupeikou [Gubeikou]' which are marked © Hartung's Photo Shop. They were indexed by NGS on 15 May 1946. See also Claire Roberts, 'In her view: Hedda Morrison's photographs of Peking, 1933–46', *East Asian history*, no 4, December 1992, pp 81–104, and the Powerhouse Museum's Hedda Morrison website: http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/heddamorrison/.

26 For example, in the 1930s Edgar Snow took his photographs of Yan'an — including the much published picture of a thin young Mao Zedong wearing a cloth cap and Sun Yat-sen suit (*Zhongshanzhuang*) — to Hartung's to be developed and printed. I would like to thank Sang Ye for drawing this to my attention.

27 Hedda's China negatives were bequeathed to the Harvard-Yenching Library. Many of them can be accessed online at http://via.harvard.edu:9080/via/deliver/advancedsearch?_collection=via.

28 Conversation with Alastair Morrison, 25 August 2005.

29 See Jonathan Spence and Annping Chin, *The Chinese century: a photographic history of the last hundred years*, Random House, New York, 1996, p 105.

30 Gao Minglu, *The wall: reshaping contemporary Chinese art*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the University at Buffalo Art Galleries, New York, 2005, pp 192–93.

31 See Wang Yan (ed), *Sha Fei sheying quanji* (The collected photography of Sha Fei), Changcheng chubanshe, Guangzhou, 2005.

32 Construction of the first cable car at the Great Wall began at Badaling in October 1988; it was officially opened in August 1991. Badaling remains the most popular section of the Great Wall and is visited by millions of people each year.

33 Chin Shou-shen, 'The Great Wall of China', *China reconstructs*, January 1962, pp 20–23.

34 Pierre Cardin visited China for the first time in November 1978. He was made a consultant to China's nascent fashion industry and invited to return the following year. Cardin's 1979 spring/summer collection was shown in Paris, Beijing and Shanghai before going to Sydney in March 1979. See Patsy Hollis, 'How Cardin won the East', *The Sun-Herald*, 1 April 1979, p 127.

35 Notable artworks include performances by the Beijing-based group, Concept 21 on the wall in 1988, *Wrapping the wall in red and Screaming against the sky*; Wang Jinsong's 1992 oil painting of Pavarotti singing on the wall titled *I am finally here*; Wang Youshen's 1993 photo documentation *Newspaper-advertising: Great Wall, Beijing, China*; Zhan Wang's 1997 performance *Fixing the golden tooth for the Great Wall*, in which he 'restored' a section of the Great Wall west of Badaling with gold bricks; and Ma Liuming's nude performance *Fen Ma Liuming walks on the Great Wall* in 1998. See Gao, *The Wall*, pp 195–205, 300–01, 318. The exhibition, curated by Gao Minglu, was held at the China Millennium Monument Art Gallery in Beijing, 22 July–21 August 2005, and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the University at Buffalo Art Galleries, New York, 21 October 2005–29 January 2006.

36 Geremie Barmé and John Minford (eds), *Seeds of fire: Chinese voices of conscience*, Hill and Wang, New York, 2nd edition, 1988, p 1.

37 Britta Erikson, 'Ghosts pounding the wall', *Three installations by Xu Bing*, Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, 1991, pp 18–23. See also Britta Erikson, *Words without meaning, meaning without words: the art of Xu Bing*, Arthur M Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution/Washington University Press, Washington DC, 2001, pp 28–29, 41, 49–51.

38 See Fei Dawei, 'Amateur wrecklessness: on the work of Cai Guo Qiang' in *Cai Guo Qiang*, Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain/Thames & Hudson, Paris, 2000, pp 9–10, 140. See also Geremie R Barmé, *In the red: on contemporary Chinese culture*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, pp 224–26; and Gao, *The wall*, pp 200–01.

39 Silverberg, *The Great Wall of China*, p xiv, who quotes Geil, *The Great Wall of China*, p 155.

www.thegreatwall.com.cn – Interview with Zhang Jun by Sang Ye

1 The photographs that accompany the interviews by Sang Ye were taken by members of the *A small site on the Great Wall* website and were part of that project, with the exception of the photograph accompanying *Wall's end*, the interview with Jiang Xiaoli, taken by Jean-Francois Lanzarone for the Powerhouse Museum.

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Delimited boundaries and Great Wall studies – Bruce Gordon Doar

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2 Ibid, p 30.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid, pp 23-29.

5 The papers from the conference, held in Beijing, 23–25 September 1994, were published as Zhongguo changcheng xuehui (ed), *Changcheng guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* (Papers of the international conference on the Great Walls), Jilin renmin chubanshe, Changchun, 1995. A review of the conference was prepared by Li Hongbin (1994), and several papers from the conference were re-edited and included in the journal *Wenhua zhishi*.

6 Zhongguo changcheng xuehui (ed), *Changcheng guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji*, p 334.

7 Dong Yaohui, 'Changchengxue de gainian, tezheng ji fenlei' (The concept, special nature and divisions of Great Wall studies), *Wenshi zhishi*, 1995:3.

8 Ibid, p 26.

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11 Guo Guanghong, 'Qi changcheng zhaojian yuanyin zaitan' (A further study of when the construction of the Qi Great Walls was initiated), *Lishi yanjiu*, 2000:1, especially pp 184–85.

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