**The Great Wall of China - Transcript**

Hi, good morning. Thanks for coming again. How are you? I hope you're well. I'm wonderful. Sorry I didn't get to make a video again last week. I've been running around getting stressed about things that I don't need to get stressed about. Never mind. Today's topic is the Great Wall of China. By coincidence, over the weekend I watched Matt Damon's movie The Great Wall of China. Which, although not historically correct, is actually quite interesting. I rather enjoyed it. It didn't get excellent ratings, but I kind of enjoyed it. If you get a chance, go and watch it. Watching movies is a great way of improving your English. Watch them without the subtitles and then watch them with the subtitles. See how much you understood.

Okay. The Great Wall of China. I think I can do it in 5 minutes today. So, I'm going to try and do that. Don't forget as always if you click on the link in the description below here, you can find the transcript for this talk. You can find questions, multiple choice and essay type, and you can also find answers and you can download the MP3. Have a go. It will help you understand the talk and it will help your English. In fact, do it right now. Pause this video. Click on the link below here. Open up the questions in a separate window, right next to me, and watch me while you look at the questions. In fact, do it right now. Go! Did you do it? All right. Let's try.

Okay. Five minutes about the Great Wall of China. Here we go. 3 2 1 go. Okay, the Great Wall of China. In English, of course, it's called The Great Wall of China. In Chinese, I think it's called “ban li”. In Japanese I know it's called “ban li no chyojyo”, which means 10,000 li long castle. 10,000 … well “ban” is 10,000. “Li” is a Chinese mile, which is about 500 meters. So, “ban li” 10,000 Chinese miles is 10,000 times 5000 which is … quick calculation … 5 million miles, which is about 5,000 kilometers. In the beginning, when it was given the name, that's actually how long it was, although, now of course, it's much much longer. The wall at its greatest extent reached 21,196 kilometers, which is a lot further than 5,000km.

Okay. The Great Wall started thousands of years ago. It started with natural fortifications as most defensive walls do. When you have two peoples fighting each other, people with the higher ground tend to win. So, people tend to build castles, forts and walls across the tops of hills or along rivers or anywhere where there are natural fortifications. And that of course is how the Great Wall started. There are a lot of individual states in China. And they were all fighting each other and they all started to build small walls. Those walls slowly increased. After the natural fortifications, the next step were walls made of rammed earth. Rammed earth is something that people still use today. They are very very strong. With rammed earth … well ram means to ram something … with rammed earth what you do is you get a shape, you sift soil or earth into the mold, you moisten it, you compress it, you ram it, you compress it on all sides, and then you leave it to dry. Once it is dry, it is extremely strong. Sometimes even stronger than concrete. And pieces of rammed earth wall from thousands of years ago still exist today. And some countries even use rammed earth to this day. In fact, a lot of Western countries are starting to re-find … to reuse rammed earth because it's much … it’s much better for the environment than other materials and it's also a very good insulator: it keeps your house warm in the winter and cold … cool in the summer. So, rammed earth is making a comeback.

I'm already halfway through.

Okay. This might be a 10-minute talk. I'm sorry. So, after the rammed Earth wall, of course, the next step … the next logical step in the wall’s evolution is a rock wall. This begins with loose pieces of rock and gradually becomes shaped pieces of rock, until you get the final wall, which is made entirely of brick.

Okay, so who is really responsible for the wall that we have today? Well, the state of Qin. I think it's pronounced “chin” in English, it’s spelled Q-I-N, but it's pronounced “chin”. The Qin Dynasty is actually where we get the name China from in English. The Qin people became China. So, in 481 BC to 221 BC China has its Warring States period. Basically, seven states are fighting against each other. These seven states are, and if you can tell I'm reading this from a piece of paper, these seven states are the Qin, the Han, the Wei, the Zhou, the Qi, the Chu, and the Yan. Now, these seven states … these seven tribes … these seven groups of people are fighting each other and some win and some lose and some take over others. Over time, gradually, the Qin dynasty … the Qin tribe ... the Qin State defeat all of the other states and become the first real unified China. It's much smaller than the China we know today, but that's the first real unified China. So, the first emperor of China is Qin Shi Huang. My Chinese pronunciation is terrible, I know. He was the first emperor of China. He unified the wall. He took all these pieces that the different tribes had made and he joined them together. He slowly started to expand the length of the wall and he starts to surround his new China. So, this is where the modern wall comes from.

Okay. So, as China goes through its history, different dynasties rise and fall, and the wall shrinks and grows, and shrinks and grows, and over time it gradually grows until the Ming Dynasty 1368-1644. The Ming Dynasty built the wall to its greatest extent. And the greatest extent was, as I said at the start, 21,196 kilometers. That was the greatest extent of the wall. It stretches from the sea, which is called the dragon's head, all the way across China, as it was then. For 21,196 kilometers. Ah … time’s about to go. All right, I'm sorry. Now, the Ming Dynasty … after the Qin dynasty, the following dynasties start to make changes to the wall and a few of the things they do are … let's keep going … to strengthen the wall. They make it much thicker and much stronger. They use molded brick of course, which is held together with mortar and they make a very strong very thick wall. Also, they come up with the system of watchtowers. Along the wall they have 25,000 watchtowers. What is a watch tower? Well, obviously it's a tower you can watch from, but more than that, it's a system of warning. What you can do, if a certain part of the wall is attacked, you can set a bonfire on top of that watchtower which releases a lot of smoke. Then the next Watchtower, which was within sight of the first watchtower, will see that and they will like their bonfire, their warning fire, and the next watchtower will see that and light their fire in response, and so on. And this series of fires … this series of smoke signals will go all down the wall until it reaches a point where it can be relayed to an army base or a barracks or place where people are … soldiers are staying, and the soldiers can then go and reinforce that part of the wall. So, it was not just a defensive wall, it was also an early system of warning, which was very very useful. If you watch Matt Damon's movie “The Great Wall of China”, you can actually see these beacons being used. I fact “Mulan” as well, the Disney movie “Mulan”, they light these beacons as well when they are attacked by the Mongols, which is interesting.

Okay. So, 21,196 kilometers, the Great Wall reaches its longest extent. After the Ming Dynasty, China of course expands for a while and then it goes through a period of … a few periods of … a few problems. Well England, my country of course, attacks China and destabilizes China, and in fact harms China significantly with both Opium Wars and the treaties that were enforced upon China, but after that, of course, China goes through its revolution in 1912, and the system of dynasties is done away with and the Great Wall was left to basically fall apart. And since its greatest extent, 22% of the wall has actually disappeared, has collapsed, fallen apart and just gone.

However, of course the Great Wall of China has become the symbol of China. It's become China's … the symbol of China's history … of China’s civilization … of China's thousands of years of civilization and it's become a huge tourist attraction as well. So, recently, the Chinese government has been trying to repair and redo the Great Wall of China sometimes with great success. If you look at some of the areas near Beijing, they are absolutely wonderful. Very very well restored. However, sometimes with less success. There was a story in the news a few years ago about how some people in China, some workers in China concreted a huge section of the Great Wall of China. So, rather than rebuild it they just covered it in concrete. I'll put a picture here. As you can see, it's not that nice. So, they've restored it with some mistakes. But, generally, they’re trying to do their best. So, the wall is being repaired.

Okay to finish up with, there is a myth about the Great Wall of China, that it can be seen from space. Is that true or not? Well, have a look at this picture. This is a picture of that area of China from space. Can you see the Great Wall of China on this picture? Your eye is probably drawn to a line that runs across this map. Well, that is of course not the Great Wall of China. That is a huge river. The Great Wall of China is too small to see from space. If I show you where it is, here, maybe now you can see some points of it, but, generally, you cannot see the Great Wall of China from space because it is too narrow. It's narrower than most roads and you can't see roads from space, of course. So, that myth is obviously not true. However, The Great Wall of China was a huge accomplishment. It took thousands … millions of people over thousands of years to produce. It is a symbol of China. It is symbol of China's long-lasting history and culture and all of the inventions and industries that China has provided to the world. In fact, I should do a talk one day about all of the inventions from China, although that would take days because there are simply thousands of them. We just don't realize they came from.

Anyway, finished. That is the Great Wall of China. I'm sorry it took me slightly longer than five minutes, but never mind. Thank you. Again, as I said before, if you have a look in the description down there, you can find the transcript of this talk. You can find questions. You can find answers and you can find the MP3. Please try the questions. Even if you didn't like this talk try the questions. They will help your English. Write some essays, do some speaking, your English will get better. Thank you. If you happen to like this click “like”, if you want to share it click “Share”, if you want to subscribe, please subscribe. The more subscribers, I get the happier I get for some reason. If you have any ideas for talks you'd like me to do, please put them in the comments section below here, and I will try and cover them. Thank you. Talk to you next week. Goodbye.

**The Great Wall of China Questions**

1. What is “ban”?

A: 100

B: 1,000

C: 10,000

D: 100,000

2. How long is a Chinese mile?

A: 500m

B: 5,000m

C: 10,000m

D: 5,000km

3. What were first used to make a wall?

A: Concrete

B: Bricks

C: Rammed earth

D: Natural fortifications

4. Which of these describes “rammed earth”?

A: Dry soil, placed in a mold.

B: Moistened soil, shaped and dried.

C: Shaped soil, hardened and then wetted.

D: Dry soil, moistened and then sifted.

5. How many groups are fighting in the warring states period?

A: 5

B: 6

C: 7

D: 8

6. Why did Emperor Qin have pieces of wall already to build with?

A: because each of the small states had built some for defense.

B: because there were many natural fortifications left to use.

C: because he was able to buy many pieces of wall.

D: because he knew how to build a wall.

7. At its greatest extent, how long was the wall?

A: 12,196km

B: 29,126km

C: 20,169km

D: 21,196km

8. What two purposes does a watchtower serve?

A: A system of bolstering the wall and a place to see the view.

B: A point of observation and a warning system.

C: A method of measuring the length of the wall and holding it up.

D: A place for soldiers to live and a trading post.

9. How did England harm China?

A: By taking possession of the Great Wall.

B: Through its governing of Hong Kong.

C: By demanding unfair trade.

D: Through the treaties imposed after the Opium wars.

10. Steven says, “there is a myth about the Great Wall of China, that it can be seen from space.” Which of these words is closest in meaning to “myth”?

A: Fact

B: Certainty

C: Reality

D: Belief

11. Upkeeping the Great Wall of China costs a lot of money. Should countries pay to keep their old buildings?

12. Donald Trump wants to build a wall between America and Mexico. Can a modern country be defended by a wall?

13. China started as a group of small tribes that became one of the largest countries on Earth. Do you think all countries are destined to amalgamate?

14. Rammed Earth is an eco-friendly building method. Should we encourage more building methods such a this?

**The Great Wall of China – Answers**

1. C 2. A 3. D 4. B 5. C 6. A 7. D 8. B 9. D 10. D

11. Upkeeping the Great Wall of China costs a lot of money. Should countries pay to keep their old buildings?

As countries age, they change. However, all countries need to remember where they have come from as they move into the future. Countries rely on their old buildings to remind them of what they have been and as tourist attractions. For these reasons, they should pay to keep their old buildings.

It is logical to assume that countries change as they age. Politics, technologies, civilizations and ideas all change as they grow with experience. There is no country on Earth today that can say it is exactly the same as it was a thousand years ago. There are some countries that are trying, Saudi Arabia for example, but even these countries cannot ignore the changes in the world that have forced them to change as well. However, countries, as with people, must remember where they have come from when they evolve. We must embrace our successes, learn from our mistakes and become better countries. Our ancient buildings can serve as these reminders. If we allow them to fall into ruin and eventually disappear, we will have no actual reminder of our past, just photos in a book. Photos and textbooks can be altered, buildings cannot. So, even though it is expensive, we must pay the price to be reminded of our history.

Many visitors to a country visit it specifically for its old buildings. Would people go to Rome if it were not for the old buildings? Would people visit Kyoto if it were not for the temples? Would people go to London if the history were not there? Maybe, but certainly not as many. The price paid to upkeep these ancient structures is easily repaid to the economy by the tourists.

So, to remind us of the country we have always been and to ensure we have income from tourists, we should keep our ancient buildings in a good state.

12. Donald Trump wants to build a wall between America and Mexico. Can a modern country be defended by a wall?

The fairly easy answer to this question is, “no, of course not”. A wall can cover a land border, but it cannot stop people arriving by ship or by air. It cannot even completely cover a land border because it is all to easy to tunnel under or climb over. It would need guards stationed at ten-meter intervals to even stand a chance. A wall would stand as a symbol of a country’s intent, but it would not stand as an actual barrier.

13. China started as a group of small tribes that became one of the largest countries on Earth. Do you think all countries are destined to amalgamate?

This is a difficult one to argue. I am going to have to agree. I automatically want to say it is not true because people in different countries are too different, both in culture and in language, from their neighboring countries, but, then, someone would counter, you could have said the same about the small “countries” within England 1500 years ago. And that person would be right. Just because we are different to each other, doesn’t mean we can’t come together. The EU, for example. Countries that have been fighting each other off and on for over a thousand years are now coming together. Admittedly the UK is attempting to leave, but, for the most part, they are amalgamating. You can work in any country, trade with any country, and English is fast becoming a language you can use in any country. How long before the separate countries become states within the EU? And then, what would the next step be? The continents? They would be the next logical groupings of people. In a thousand years, will someone be writing an essay like this, arguing that the countries (our continents) can never come together because they are too different?

I think it is happening. I think it will continue to happen. I think our desire for peace, and our desire for commerce will see to it.

Countries will continue to connect and amalgamate. This will be caused by the ongoing onslaught of globalization. Countries protect their culture and their individuality but, over time, all people end up wanting the same kinds of things. These things erode national identity and, at some point in the future, countries will come together.

If you look through history, you can see a path of small groups of people continuously coming together with like minded people to form tribes, villages, towns, cities, states, countries, federations. The next logical step is for blocks of countries to join together. This will happen. Culturally and economically it makes logical sense.

14. Rammed Earth is an eco-friendly building method. Should we encourage more building methods such a this?

We most definitely should. Rammed earth, and construction techniques like it, have three necessary conditions that we need in the modern world. They are cheap, environmentally friendly and they can reduce the need for electricity.

Modern building techniques tend to be expensive. To build a house costs far more than many people around the world can afford. Rammed earth construction is cheap because all you need is soil, water and a shaped press. These are things that anyone in any country can find and can learn. Rammed earth construction will enable people in any country to construct sound and cheap houses. It will significantly cut down on the amount of homelessness in developing countries.

Modern building techniques use any materials that have to be produced: plastics, metals, etc. These mining and production processes reduce vast amounts of CO2 and other gasses into the atmosphere, worsening climate change. Rammed earth is a purely natural process and, so, does not have the same consequences as manufactured materials.

Finally, because rammed earth is a natural insulator, it would cut down on the need for heaters in the winter and air-conditioners in the summer. Anything that reduces our need for electricity is a good thing.

For these reasons, there are no negatives to rammed earth construction and we should start investing in it and other similar methods.