

Wall a symbol of hard work

The Nanjing City Wall was built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and took 21 years to construct. The unique inner construction meandered for 35.3km while the outer wall spanned more than 60km when it was completed. The Nanjing wall is the largest remaining city wall in the country and in the world. Designed to defend the city, it also epitomizes hard work, along with great historical and ornamental significance.

HISTORY

The wall was designed by Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (1368-1398) after he founded the Ming Dynasty and established Nanjing as the capital. The wall was among the largest constructed in China and it remains in good condition today.

In expanding the walls, it appears the emperor intended to strengthen the existing walls and encompass the new city to the east. The main north gate would have been the Drum Tower. However, it was decided that it would include Lion Hill, to the northwest, in the city's defenses, almost doubling the wall's coverage. In addition to the original walls of stone and brick, an outer wall was built along the river and to the south as an additional defensive measure. Old maps show there were about 20 gates in the wall. This outer wall is now long gone but the names of the gates survive as local place names. Part of the wall on the south shore of Xuanwu Lake was built on the foundations of the old Stone City walls from the Six Dynasties period.

CONSTRUCTION

Now, the existing length of the wall is 23.7 km. The average height of the wall varies from 14 to 26 meters. The wall foundation is 14 meters wide. The top of the wall varies from four to nine meters in width. The interior and exterior of the wall are made of bricks with gravel, clay and broken bricks rammed between them.

The entire project took 21 years — from 1366 to 1386, and cost six million ounces of gold. One-third of the cost was donated by Shen Wansan, a man of wealth from south of the Yangtze River. There were 200,000 laborers and craftsmen involved in the construction. They were recruited from Jiangsu, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei and Hunan provinces. There were 350 million bricks made for the wall. Each of the bricks is 40cm long, 20cm wide and 10cm thick.

The city wall was completed in four phases: The first phase of the project was to build an imperial palace and rebuild the city wall of the Southern Tang Dynasty (1366-1367); the second phase of the project was to extend the old city wall of Yingtian Prefecture to the bank of the Yangtze River (from 1369-73) and then to start construction of a new city wall; the third phase was to build three city gate castles and 10 other city gates as well; the fourth phase was to continue the outer wall construction (from 1380-86). When the project was completed in 1386 there were 13 city gates.



FUNCTION

Unlike the city walls of Beijing and Xi'an, its design and construction was unique and began a new style. The construction concentrated on military defense because the city was at the foot of a mountain.

On top of the outer wall were 13,616 battlements for defenders of the city to observe and fire upon the enemy. Opposite was a wall used as a balustrade to keep the defenders and horses safe.

The wall was carefully designed with a special drainage system to withstand flooding. When it rains, water flows off the top and into drains at the foot of the wall, which empty into the city's moat.

ZHONGHUA GATE

Zhonghua Gate is the most famous and most fortified gate of the city wall. It was constructed with 1000kg of vertically sliding doors and contained 27 vaults that could hold thousands of soldiers. The idea was that if an enemy entered, the doors could be slammed shut. The enemy, trapped inside, would then be ambushed by the city's defenders. Enemy armies avoided this super-fortified gate in favor of attacking Nanjing via weaker points along the wall. For 20 yuan you can climb up to the top of this fortress to get a good view of the city near Qinhuai River.



Note: The 25km-long Ming Dynasty city wall was revamped and opened to the public for the opening of the Nanjing 2014 Youth Olympic Games. On Aug 8, 45 torchbearers, including Olympic badminton champion Lin Dan, ran along the wall.