

The Legend of Meng Jiangnu

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An ancient tale of love lost and walls torn asunder, as tragic tears move heaven and earth

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The Great Wall of China is not only great for its sheer length, but also for the myths and tales that surround this ancient barrier, which often features on lists of the world's greatest wonders.

One of the most well known tales is a tragic tale of two lovers whose love was extinguished by the winding edifice, but whose love was also able to bring down the mighty wall.

The story is about a girl named Meng Jingnu (孟姜女) and her beloved Fan Xiliang. Their love story is now considered to be one of China's Four Great Folktales, it is called "Meng Jiangnu Weeps" or "Meng Jiangnu Bringing down the Great Wall with Her Tears" (孟姜女哭长城).

According to the Chinese legend, a childless couple with the family name Meng, lived right near another childless couple, with the family name Jiang. One year, Meng planted a gourd vine. The vine grew over to the neighbors' side of the fence and bore a gourd there. The Jiang and Meng families both decided to split the gourd. When they cut the gourd in half, amazingly, they found a pretty baby girl was lying inside. Both families were so happy to finally have a child, and they decided to raise her together, that is why she was called Meng Jiang Nu, which means Meng and Jiang's daughter. (nu stands for female/woman/daughter in Chinese).

Jiangnu grew up to be very pretty and very kind, and she took care of both the Meng and Jiang families. Everybody grew fond of her.

Once, when she was walking in the garden she found a man hiding in the bushes, and immediately called for her parents. When the man came out, it was a young, good looking man named Fan Xiliang. Fan was hiding from officials that wanted to take him to build the great Wall. Jiangnu and Xiliang fell in love, and were married in short order. But their happiness was not everlasting – three days after their wedding Xiliang was taken by officials to build the wall.

A year passed and Jiangnu did not hear any news from her husband. Once she had a dream that he was freezing on the wall, after waking up she started knitting warm clothes for him. It was then she decided she would find him, no matter the cost. Day and night she climbed over mountains and went through the rivers, slipping and falling many times, and after many moons she finally reached the foot of the Great Wall at the present Shanhaiguan Pass. And when she reached there, it turned out that her husband had died from hard labor and was buried somewhere under the Great Wall like thousands of other workers.

Upon hearing such news Meng Jiang could not help but cry with grief for her beloved husband, she wept like this for three days and and three nights.

Suddenly with a tremendous noise, that part of the wall just collapsed. Chinese believed in the telepathy between heaven and man. They thought man’s cries could move God, and that’s why she was able to “bring down the Great Wall with her tears”.

Emperor Qin Shihuang (Qin Dynasty (221BC-206BC) happened to be touring the wall at that exact time, and he wanted to punish Meng for destroying the wall. When soldiers brought him Meng Jiangnu, he was astonished by her beauty, and instead of punishing her, he decided to marry her. Meng Jiangnu had no choice but to agree, but she said she’d marry the Emperor only under three conditions: first, her husband was to be given a proper burial; second, the emperor and his court must go into mourning for Xiliang; and third, she wanted to visit the ocean.

The Emperor was not happy with the idea of giving a proper funeral to a commoner, but he agreed. After the funeral she was determined to escape the Emperor and reunite with her one true husband, so she threw herself into the ocean near the Bohai Sea.



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The story of “Meng Jiangnu” was created, due to people’s hatred toward Emperor Qinshihuang. It reflects the grievances ancient people had about tyranny as well as the praise of unyielding women. The Temple of Meng Jiangnu was first established in the Song Dynasty about 1,000 years ago, and ever since it has been maintained and worshiped at the eastern beginning of the Great Wall, in the Qinhuangdao City of Hebei Province.

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