

within the possible limits from Han to Sung times. Of the reading of one 'Nien-hao,' Yung P'ing, Chiang felt quite sure. But, alas! this proved to be represented several times, in the sixth as well as the third century A.D., and farther back I scarcely had the courage to look. In the other 'Nien-hao,' Chien —, my learned secretary was at a loss how to recognize the second character, though written quite clearly in two tablets. Those who know something of the intricacies of Chinese script, with its tens of thousands of distinct ideograms and their palaeographic variation at different periods, will not wonder at his doubts.

I had vainly searched near the Yung P'ing periods already mentioned for a regnal title likely to give Chiang a clue to Chien —, when at last in my despair I boldly took a jump of several centuries. There was a Yung P'ing period commencing in 58 A.D.,—and just before it there stood the regnal title of Chien Wu. Without a moment's hesitation Chiang recognized in it the character which had puzzled him so far. It was the first title adopted by the Emperor who founded the Eastern Han dynasty in 25 A.D., and the twenty-sixth year mentioned in our two tablets corresponded to 50 A.D. So the ruined frontier wall I had set out to explore went at least as far back as the first century of our era, and as proof I had in my hands the oldest written Chinese records so far known!

We both loudly rejoiced at this discovery, which put us at once on safe chronological ground for further researches. Even 'Dash' was roused from below the blankets of my camp bed where he lay peacefully curled up for the night. I wondered what he thought of the excitement displayed by his devoted Chinese friend and by his own master. But, indeed, Chiang's historical sense was now keenly stirred, and I myself felt highly elated; for I had all along put faith in the antiquity of this *Limes*, and now felt confidence in its successful exploration.