

But this natural barrier was pierced in one place, the gorge debouching at Huang-tsao-ying, and for the safe keeping of the ancient border line held during Han times it became essential to bar this opening. When the *Limes* protecting the route to Tun-huang and hence to the 'Western Regions' was abandoned during the T'ang period, the closing of the Hao-shan-k'ou defile ceased to have any purpose. The old wall built across must have been a complete ruin by the time when the new 'Klause' was erected for the sake of purely local defence. Thus the existence of the two walls facing each other finds its simple chronological explanation.

In the Hao-shan-k'ou gorge I had in fact touched the point where the wholly distinct purposes of the line belonging to the old Han *Limes* and of the defensive line of Chia-yü-kuan reveal themselves in full clearness. The crumbling wall of stamped clay which I had seen starting from the latter at right angles, and which I subsequently traced along the whole northern border of the Su-chou and Kan-chou districts, proved to have been originally connected with the *Limes* of Tun-huang and An-hsi, and to date like that from the second century B.C. Its purpose was to protect the narrow belt of oases along the north foot of the Nan-shan which, since Chinese expansion westwards had commenced under the Han dynasty, was indispensably needed as a passage for commercial and political advance into Central Asia. The second line through which one now passes by the Chia-yü-kuan Gate,—the first western mention of it is to be found in the account of the embassy sent to the Ming Emperor's court in 1420 A.D. by Shah Rukh, the son of the great Timur—is of far more recent construction, and was built for the opposite purpose, that of closing the great Central-Asian trade route at a time when China had resumed its traditional attitude of seclusion from the barbarian West.

Of the border policy which Chia-yü-kuan served from the very beginning down almost to our own days, Shah Rukh's envoy has left us a characteristic glimpse. In his narrative, as excerpted by Sir Henry Yule, he records how