Great Wall Of China

Located

Huairou District, China

The **history of the Great Wall of China** began when fortifications built by various states during the Spring and Autumn (771–476 BC) and Warring States periods (475–221 BC) were connected by the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang, to protect his newly founded Qin dynasty (221–206 BC) against incursions by nomads from Inner Asia. The walls were built of rammed earth, constructed using forced labour, and by 212 BC ran from Gansu to the coast of southern Manchuria.

Later dynasties adopted different policies towards northern frontier defense. The Han (202 BC – 220 AD), the Northern Qi (550–574), the Jurchen Jin (1115-1234), and particularly the Ming (1369–1644) were among those that rebuilt, re-manned, and expanded the Walls, although they rarely followed Qin's routes. The Han extended the fortifications furthest to the west, the Qi built about 1,600 kilometres (990 mi) of new walls, while the Sui mobilised over a million men in their wall-building efforts. Conversely, the Tang (618–907), the Song (960–1279), the Yuan (1271–1368), and the Qing (1644–1911) mostly did not build frontier walls, instead opting for other solutions to the Inner Asian threat like military campaigning and diplomacy.

Although a useful deterrent against raids, at several points throughout its history the Great Wall failed to stop enemies, including in 1644 when the Manchu Qing marched through the gates of Shanhai Pass and replaced the most ardent of the wall-building dynasties, the Ming, as rulers of China.

The Great Wall of China visible today largely dates from the Ming dynasty, as they rebuilt much of the wall in stone and brick, often extending its line through challenging terrain. Some sections remain in relatively good condition or have been renovated, while others have been damaged or destroyed for ideological reasons, deconstructed for their building materials, or lost due to the ravages of time. For long an object of fascination for foreigners, the wall is now a revered national symbol and a popular tourist destination.

Geographical considerations

The conflict between the Chinese and the nomads, from which the need for the Great Wall arose, stemmed from differences in geography. The 15" isohyet marks the extent of settled agriculture, dividing the fertile

fields of China to the south and the semi-arid grasslands of Inner Asia to the north. The climates and the topography of the two regions led to distinct modes of societal development.

According to the model by sinologist Karl August Wittfogel, the loess soils of Shaanxi made it possible for the Chinese to develop irrigated agriculture early on. Although this allowed them to expand into the lower reaches of the Yellow River valley, such extensive waterworks on an ever-increasing scale required collective labour, something that could only be managed by some form of bureaucracy. Thus the scholar-bureaucrats came to the fore to keep track of the income and expenses of the granaries. Walled cities grew up around the granaries for reasons of defence along with ease of administration; they kept invaders out and ensured that citizens remained within. These cities combined to become feudal states, which eventually united to become an empire. Likewise, according to this model, walls not only enveloped cities as time went by, but also lined the borders of the feudal states and eventually the whole Chinese empire to provide protection against raids from the agrarian northern steppes.

The steppe societies of Inner Asia, whose climate favoured a pastoral economy, stood in stark contrast to the Chinese mode of development. As animal herds are migratory by nature, communities could not afford to be stationary and therefore evolved as nomads. According to the influential Mongolist Owen Lattimore this lifestyle proved to be incompatible with the Chinese economic model. As the steppe population grew, pastoral agriculture alone could not support the population, and tribal alliances needed to be maintained by material rewards. For these needs, the nomads had to turn to the settled societies to get grains, metal tools, and luxury goods, which they could not produce by themselves. If denied trade by the settled peoples, the nomads would resort to raiding or even conquest.

Potential nomadic incursion from three main areas of Inner Asia caused concern to northern China: Mongolia to the north, Manchuria to the northeast, and Xinjiang to the northwest. Of the three, China's chief concern since the earliest times had been Mongolia – the home of many of the country's fiercest enemies including the Xiongnu, the Xianbei, the Khitans, and the Mongols. The Gobi Desert, which accounts for two-thirds of Mongolia's area, divided the main northern and southern grazing lands and pushed the pastoral nomads to the fringes of the steppe. On the southern side (Inner Mongolia), this pressure brought the nomads into contact with China.

For the most part, barring intermittent passes and valleys (the major one being the corridor through Zhangjiakou and the Juyong Pass), the North China Plain remained shielded from the Mongolian steppe by the Yin Mountains. However, if this defence were breached, China's flat terrain offered no protection to the cities on the plain, including the imperial capitals of Beijing, Kaifeng, and Luoyang. Heading west along the Yin Mountains, the range ends where the Yellow River circles northwards upstream in the area known as the Ordos Loop—technically part of the steppe, but capable of irrigated agriculture. Although the Yellow River formed a theoretical natural boundary with the north, such a border so far into the steppe was difficult to maintain. The lands south of the Yellow River—the Hetao, the Ordos Desert, and the Loess Plateau—provided no natural barriers on the approach to the Wei River valley, the oft-called cradle of Chinese civilization where the ancient capital Xi'an lay. As such, control of the Ordos remained extremely important for the rulers of China: not only for potential influence over the steppe, but also for the security of China proper. The region's strategic importance combined with its untenability led many dynasties to place their first walls here.

Although Manchuria is home to the agricultural lands of the Liao River valley, its location beyond the northern mountains relegated it to the relative periphery of Chinese concern. When Chinese state control became weak, at various points in history Manchuria fell under the control of the forest peoples of the area, including the Jurchens and the Manchus. The most crucial route that links Manchuria and the North China Plain is a narrow coastal strip of land, wedged between the Bohai Sea and the Yan Mountains, called the Shanhai Pass (literally the "mountain and sea pass").The pass gained much importance during the later dynasties, when the capital was set in Beijing, a mere 300 kilometres (190 miles) away. In addition to the Shanhai Pass, a handful of mountain passes also provide access from Manchuria into China through the Yan Mountains, chief among them the Gubeikou and Xifengkou (Chinese: 喜峰口).

Xinjiang, considered part of the Turkestan region, consists of an amalgamation of deserts, oases, and dry steppe barely suitable for agriculture. When influence from the steppe powers of Mongolia waned, the various Central Asian oasis kingdoms and nomadic clans like the Göktürks and Uyghurs were able to form

their own states and confederations that threatened China at times. China proper is connected to this area by the Hexi Corridor, a narrow string of oases bounded by the Gobi Desert to the north and the high Tibetan Plateau to the south. In addition to considerations of frontier defence, the Hexi Corridor also formed an important part of the Silk Road trade route. Thus it was also in China's economic interest to control this stretch of land, and hence the Great Wall's western terminus is in this corridor—the Yumen Pass during Han times and the Jiayu Pass during the Ming dynasty and thereafter.

Pre-imperial China (7th century–221 BC)

One of the first mentions of a wall built against northern invaders is found in a poem, dated from the seventh century BC, recorded in the *Classic of Poetry*. The poem tells of a king, now identified as King Xuan (r. 827 – 782 BC) of the Western Zhou dynasty (1046 – 771 BC), who commanded General Nan Zhong to build a wall in the northern regions to fend off the Xianyun. The Xianyun, whose base of power was in the Ordos region, were regarded as part of the charioteering Rong tribes, and their attacks aimed at the early Zhou capital region of Haojing were probably the reason for King Xuan's response. Nan Zhong's campaign was recorded as a great victory. However, only a few years later in 771 BC another branch of the Rong people, the Quanrong, responded to a summons by the renegade Marquess of Shen by over-running the Zhou defences and laying waste to the capital. The cataclysmic event killed King Xuan's successor King You (795–771 BC), forced the court to move the capital east to Chengzhou (, later known as Luoyang) a year later, and thus ushered in the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–256 BC). Most importantly, the fall of Western Zhou redistributed power to the states that had acknowledged Zhou's nominal rulership. The rule of the Eastern Zhou dynasty was marked by bloody interstate anarchy. With smaller states being annexed and larger states waging constant war upon one another, many rulers came to feel the need to erect walls to protect their borders. Of the earliest textual reference to such a wall was the State of Chu's wall of 656 BC, 1,400 metres (4,600 feet) of which were excavated in southern Henan province in the modern era. However the Chu border fortifications consisted of many individual mountain fortresses; they do not constitute to a lengthy, single wall. The State of Qi also had fortified borders up by the 441 BC, and the extant portions in Shandong province had been christened the Great Wall of Qi. The State of Wei built two walls, the western one completed in 361 BC and the eastern in 356 BC, with the extant western wall found in Hancheng, Shaanxi. Even non-Chinese peoples built walls, such as the Di state of Zhongshan and the Yiqu Rong, whose walls were intended to defend against the State of Qin.

Of these walls, those of the northern states Yan, Zhao, and Qin were connected by Qin Shi Huang when he united the Chinese states in 221 BC. The walls, known as *Changcheng* – literally "long walls", but often translated as "Great Wall" – were mostly constructed of tamped earth, with some parts built with stones. Where natural barriers like ravines and rivers sufficed for defence, the walls were erected sparingly, but long fortified lines were laid where such advantageous terrains did not exist. Often in addition to the wall, the defensive system included garrisons and beacon towers inside the wall, and watchtowers outside at regular intervals. In terms of defence, the walls were generally effective at countering cavalry shock tactics, but there are doubts as to whether these early walls were actually defensive in nature. Nicola Di Cosmo points out that the northern frontier walls were built far to the north and included traditionally nomadic lands, and so rather than being defensive, the walls indicate the northward expansions of the three northern states and their desire to safeguard their recent territorial acquisitions. This theory is supported by the archeological discovery of nomadic artifacts within the walls, suggesting the presence of pre-existing or conquered barbarian societies. It is entirely possible, as Western scholars like di Cosmo and Lattimore suggest, that nomadic aggression against the Chinese in the coming centuries was partly caused by Chinese expansionism during this period.

Great Wall of Yan

The State of Yan, the easternmost of the three northern states, began to erect walls after the general Qin Kai drove the Donghu people back "a thousand *li*" during the reign of Jiping, King Zhao of Yan (312–279 BC) (r. 311–279 BC). The Yan wall stretched from the Liaodong peninsula, through Chifeng, and into northern Hebei, possibly bringing its western terminus near the Zhao walls. The ruins in Jianping County, Chaoyang, are its best existing section. Ruins of the Yan Great Wall were also found close to the Ming Great Wall at Badaling, Changping, northeast of Beijing.

A southern Yan wall was erected to defend against the Zhao; it was southwest of present-day Beijing and ran parallel to the Juma River for several dozen miles.

Great Wall of Zhao

The Zhao walls to the north were built under King Wuling of Zhao (r. 325–299 BC), whose groundbreaking introduction of nomadic cavalry into his army reshaped Chinese warfare and gave Zhao an initial advantage over his opponents. He attacked the Xiongnu tribes of Linhu and Loufan to the north, then waged war on the state of Zhongshan until it was annexed in 296 BC. In the process, he constructed the northernmost fortified frontier deep in nomadic territory. The Zhao walls were dated in the 1960s to be from King Wuling's reign: a southern long wall in northern Henan encompassing the Yanmen Pass; a second line of barricades encircling the Ordos Loop, extending from Zhangjiakou in the east to the ancient fortress of Gaoque in the Urad Front Banner; and a third, northernmost line along the southern slopes of the Yin Mountains, extending from Qinghe in the east, passing north of Hohhot, and into Baotou.

Great Wall of Qin

Qin was originally a state on the western fringe of the Chinese political sphere, but it grew into a formidable power in the later parts of the Warring States period when it aggressively expanded in all directions. In the north, the state of Wei and the Yiqu built walls to protect themselves from Qin aggression, but were still unable to stop Qin from eating into their territories. The Qin reformist Shang Yang forced the Wei out of their walled area west of the Yellow River in 340 BC, and King Huiwen of Qin (r. 338–311 BC) took 25 Yiqu forts in a northern offensive. When King Huiwen died, his widow the Queen Dowager Xuan acted as regent because the succeeding sons were deemed too young to govern. During the reign of King Zhaoxiang (r. 306–251 BC), the queen dowager apparently entered illicit relations with the Yiqu king and gave birth to two of his sons, but later tricked and killed the Yiqu king. Following that coup, the Qin army marched into Yiqu territory at the queen dowager's orders; the Qin annihilated the Yiqu remnants and thus came to possess the Ordos region. At this point the Qin built a wall around their new territories to defend against the true nomads even further north, incorporating the Wei walls. As a result, an estimated total of 1,775 kilometres (1,103 mi) of Qin walls (including spurts) extended from southern Gansu to the bank of the Yellow River in the Jungar Banner, close to the border with Zhao at the time.

Qin dynasty (221–206 BC)

In 221 BC, the state of Qin completed its conquest over the other Warring States and united China under Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China. These conquests, combined with the Legalist reforms started by Shang Yang in the 4th century BC, transformed China from a loose confederation of feudal states to an authoritarian empire. With the transformation, Qin became able to command a far greater assembly of labourers to be used in public works than the prior feudal kingdoms. Also, once unification was achieved, Qin found itself in possession of a large professional army with no more internal enemies to fight and thus had to find a new use for them. Soon after the conquests, in the year 215 BC, the emperor sent the famed general Meng Tian to the Ordos region to drive out the Xiongnu nomads settled there, who had risen from beyond the fallen marginal states along the northern frontier. Qin's campaign against the Xiongnu was preemptive in nature, since there was no pressing nomadic menace to be faced at the time; its aim was to annexe the ambiguous territories of the Ordos and to clearly define the Qin's northern borders. Once the Xiongnu were chased away, Meng Tian introduced 30,000 settler families to colonize the newly conquered territories.

Wall configurations were changed to reflect the new borders under the Qin. General Meng Tian erected walls beyond the northern loop of the Yellow River, effectively linking the border walls of Qin, Zhao, and Yan. Concurrent to the building of the frontier wall was the destruction of the walls within China that used to divide one warring state from another—contrary to the outer walls, which were built to stabilize the newly united China, the inner walls threatened the unity of the empire. In the following year, 214 BC, Qin Shi Huang ordered new fortifications to be built along the Yellow River to the west of the Ordos while work continued in the north. This work was completed probably by 212 BC, signalled by Qin Shi Huang's imperial tour of inspection and the construction of the Direct Road (直道) connecting the capital Xianyang with the Ordos. The result was a series of long walls running from Gansu to the seacoast in Manchuria.

Details of the construction were not found in the official histories, but it could be inferred that the construction conditions were made especially difficult by the long stretches of mountains and semi-desert that the Great Wall traversed, the sparse populations of these areas, and the frigid winter climate. Although most of the walls were of rammed earth, so the bulk of the building material could be found *in situ*, transportation of additional supplies and labour remained difficult for the reasons named above. The sinologist Derk Bodde posits in *The Cambridge History of China* that "for every man whom Meng Tian could put to work at the scene of actual construction, dozens must have been needed to build approaching roads and to transport supplies." This is supported by the Han dynasty statesman Zhufu Yan's description of Qin Shi Huang's Ordos project in 128 BC:

... the land was brackish and arid, crops could not be grown on them. ... At the time, the young men being drafted were forced to haul boats and barges loaded with baggage trains upstream to sustain a steady supply of food and fodder to the front. ... Commencing at the departure point a man and his animal could carry thirty *zhong* (about 176 kilograms (388 lb)) of food supply, by the time they arrived at the destination, they merely delivered one *dan* (about 29 kilograms (64 lb)) of supply. ... When the populace had become tired and weary they started to dissipate and abscond. The orphans, the frail, the widowed and the seniors were desperately trying to escape from their appallingly derelict state and died on the wayside as they wandered away from their home. People started to revolt.

The settlement of the north continued up to Qin Shi Huang's death in 210 BC, upon which Meng Tian was ordered to commit suicide in a succession conspiracy. Before killing himself, Meng Tian expressed regret for his walls: "Beginning at Lintao and reaching to Liaodong, I built walls and dug moats for more than ten thousand *li*; was it not inevitable that I broke the earth's veins along the way? This then was my offense."

Meng Tian's settlements in the north were abandoned, and the Xiongnu nomads moved back into the Ordos Loop as the Qin empire became consumed by widespread rebellion due to public discontent. Owen Lattimore concluded that the whole project relied upon military power to enforce agriculture on a land more suited for herding, resulting in "the anti-historical paradox of attempting two mutually exclusive forms of development simultaneously" that was doomed to fail.

Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD)

In 202 BC, the former peasant Liu Bang emerged victorious from the Chu–Han Contention that followed the rebellion that toppled the Qin dynasty, and proclaimed himself Emperor of the Han dynasty, becoming known as Emperor Gaozu of Han (r. 202–195 BC) to posterity. Unable to address the problem of the resurgent Xiongnu in the Ordos region through military means, Emperor Gaozu was forced to appease the Xiongnu. In exchange for peace, the Han offered tributes along with princesses to marry off to the Xiongnu chiefs. These diplomatic marriages would become known as *heqin*, and the terms specified that the Great Wall (determined to be either the Warring States period Qin state wall or a short stretch of wall south of Yanmen Pass) was to serve as the line across which neither party would venture. In 162 BC, Gaozu's son Emperor Wen clarified the agreement, suggesting the Xiongnu *chanyu* held authority north of the Wall and the Han emperor held authority south of it. Sima Qian, the author of the *Records of the Grand Historian*, describes the result of this agreement as one of peace and friendship: "from the chanyu downwards, all the Xiongnu grew friendly with the Han, coming and going along the Long Wall". However, Chinese records show that the Xiongnu often did not respect the agreement, as the Xiongnu cavalry numbering up to 100,000 made several intrusions into Han territory despite the intermarriage.

To Chinese minds, the *heqin* policy was humiliating and ran contrary to the Sinocentric world order like "a person hanging upside down", as the statesman Jia Yi (d. 169 BC) puts it. These sentiments manifested themselves in the Han court in the form of the pro-war faction, who advocated the reversal of Han's policy of appeasement. By the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BC), the Han felt comfortable enough to go to war with the Xiongnu. After a botched attempt at luring the Xiongnu army into an ambush at the Battle of Mayi in 133 BC, the era of *heqin*-style appeasement was broken and the Han–Xiongnu War went into full swing.

As the Han–Xiongnu War progressed in favour of the Han, the Wall became maintained and extended beyond Qin lines. In 127 BC, General Wei Qing invaded the much-contested Ordos region as far as the Qin fortifications set up by Meng Tian. In this way, Wei Qing reconquered the irrigable lands north of the Ordos

and restored the spur of defences protecting that territory from the steppe. In addition to rebuilding the walls, archeologists believe that the Han also erected thousands of kilometres of walls from Hebei to Inner Mongolia during Emperor Wu's reign. The fortifications here include embankments, beacon stations, and forts, all constructed with a combination of tamped-earth cores and stone frontages. From the Ordos Loop, the sporadic and non-continuous Han Great Wall followed the northern edge of the Hexi Corridor through the cities of Wuwei, Zhangye, and Jiuquan, leading into the Juyan Lake Basin, and terminating in two places: the Yumen Pass in the north, or the Yang Pass to the south, both in the vicinity of Dunhuang. Yumen Pass was the most westerly of all Han Chinese fortifications – further west than the western terminus of the Ming Great Wall at Jiayu Pass, about 460 kilometres (290 mi) to the east. The garrisons of the watchtowers on the wall were supported by civilian farming and by military agricultural colonies known as *tuntian*. Behind this line of fortifications, the Han government was able to maintain its settlements and its communications to the Western Regions in central Asia, generally secure from attacks from the north.

The campaigns against the Xiongnu and other nomadic peoples of the west exhausted the imperial treasury, and the expansionist policies were reverted in favour of peace under Emperor Wu's successors. The peace was largely respected even when the Han throne was usurped by the minister Wang Mang in 9 AD, beginning a brief 15-year interregnum known as the Xin dynasty (9–23). Despite high tensions between the Xin and the Xiongnu resulting in the deployment of 300,000 men on the Great Wall, no major fighting broke out beyond minor raids. Instead, popular discontent led to banditry and, ultimately, full-scale rebellion. The civil war ended with the Liu clan on the throne again, beginning the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220).

The restorer Emperor Guangwu (r. 25–57 AD) initiated several projects to consolidate his control within the frontier regions. Defense works were established to the east of the Yanmen Pass, with a line of fortifications and beacon fires stretching from Pingcheng County (present-day Datong) through the valley of the Sanggan River to Dai County, Shanxi. By 38 AD, as a result of raids by the Xiongnu further to the west against the Wei River valley, orders were given for a series of walls to be constructed as defences for the Fen River, the southward course of the Yellow River, and the region of the former imperial capital, Chang'an. These constructions were defensive in nature, which marked a shift from the offensive walls of the preceding Emperor Wu and the rulers of the Warring States. By the early 40s AD the northern frontiers of China had undergone drastic change: the line of the imperial frontier followed not the advanced positions conquered by Emperor Wu but the rear defences indicated roughly by the modern (Ming dynasty) Great Wall. The Ordos region, northern Shanxi, and the upper Luan River basin around Chengde[were abandoned and left to the control of the Xiongnu. The rest of the frontier remained somewhat intact until the end of the Han dynasty, with the Dunhuang manuscripts (discovered in 1900) indicating that the military establishment in the northwest was maintained for most of the Eastern Han period.

Period of Disunity to the Sui dynasty (220–618)

Following the end of the Han dynasty in 220, China disintegrated into warlord states, which in 280 were briefly reunited under the Western Jin dynasty (265–316). There are ambiguous accounts of the Jin rebuilding the Qin wall, but these walls apparently offered no resistance during the Wu Hu uprising, when the nomadic tribes of the steppe evicted the Chinese court from northern China. What followed was a succession of short-lived states in northern China known as the Sixteen Kingdoms, until they were all consolidated by the Xianbei-led Northern Wei dynasty (386–535).

Northern Wei Great Wall

As Northern Wei became more economically dependent on agriculture, the Xianbei emperors made a conscious decision to adopt Chinese customs, including passive methods of frontier defence. In 423, a defence line over 2,000 *li* (1,080 kilometres (670 mi)) long was built to resist the Rouran; its path roughly followed the old Zhao wall from Chicheng County in Hebei Province to Wuyuan County, Inner Mongolia.[In 446, 100,000 men were put to work building an inner wall from Yanqing, passing south of the Wei capital Pingcheng, and ending up near Pingguan on the eastern bank of the Yellow River. The two walls formed the basis of the double-layered Xuanfu–Datong wall system that protected Beijing a thousand years later during the Ming dynasty. The Northern Wei also built Six Frontier Towns to protect the Hetao meander against northern invasions.

Northern Qi and Northern Zhou

The Northern Wei collapsed in 535 due to civil insurrection to be eventually succeeded by the Northern Qi (550–575) and Northern Zhou (557–580). Faced with the threat of the Göktürks from the north, from 552 to 556 the Qi built up to 3,000 *li* (about 1,600 kilometres (990 mi)) of wall from Shanxi to the sea at Shanhai Pass. Over the course of the year 555 alone, 1.8 million men were mobilized to build the Juyong Pass and extend its wall by 450 kilometres (280 mi) through Datong to the eastern banks of the Yellow River. In 557 a secondary wall was built inside the main one. These walls were built quickly from local earth and stones or formed by natural barriers. Two stretches of the stone-and-earth Qi wall still stand in Shanxi today, measuring 3.3 metres (11 ft) wide at their bases and 3.5 metres (11 ft) high on average. In 577 the Northern Zhou conquered the Northern Qi and in 580 made repairs to the existing Qi walls. The route of the Qi and Zhou walls would be mostly followed by the later Ming wall west of Gubeikou, which includes reconstructed walls from Qi and Zhou. In more recent times, the reddish remnants of the Zhou ramparts in Hebei gave rise to the nickname "Red Wall".

Sui dynasty

The Sui took power from the Northern Zhou in 581 before reuniting China in 589. Sui's founding emperor, Emperor Wen of Sui (r. 581–604), carried out considerable wall construction in 581 in Hebei and Shanxi to defend against Ishbara Qaghan of the Göktürks. The new walls proved insufficient in 582 when Ishbara Qaghan avoided them by riding west to raid Gansu and Shaanxi with 400,000 archers.Between 585 and 588 Emperor Wen sought to close this gap by putting walls up in the Ordos Mountains (between Suide and Lingwu) and Inner Mongolia. In 586 as many as 150,000 men are recorded as involved in the construction. Emperor Wen's son Emperor Yang (r. 604–618) continued to build walls. In 607–608 he sent over a million men to build a wall from Yulin to near Huhhot to protect the newly refurbished eastern capital Luoyang. Part of the Sui wall survives to this day in Inner Mongolia as earthen ramparts some 2.5 metres (8 ft 2 in) high with towers rising to double that. The dynastic history of Sui estimates that 500,000 people died building the wall, adding to the number of casualties caused by Emperor Yang's projects including the aforementioned redesign of Luoyang, the Grand Canal, and two ill-fated campaigns against Goguryeo. With the economy strained and the populace resentful, the Sui dynasty erupted in rebellion and ended with the assassination of Emperor Yang in 618.

Tang dynasty (618–907)

Frontier policy under the Tang dynasty reversed the wall-building activities of most previous dynasties that had occupied northern China since the third century BC, and no extensive wall building took place for the next several hundred years.

Soon after the establishment of the Tang dynasty, during the reign of Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649), the threat of Göktürk tribesmen from the north prompted some court officials to suggest drafting corvée labourers to repair the aging Great Wall. Taizong scoffed at the suggestion, alluding to the Sui walls built in vain: "The Emperor Yang of Sui made the people labor to construct the Great Wall in order to defend against the Turks, but in the end this was of no use." Instead of building walls, Taizong claimed he "need merely to establish Li Shiji in Jinyang for the dust on the border to settle." Accordingly, Taizong sent talented generals like Li Shiji with mobile armies to the frontier, while fortifications were mostly limited to a series of walled garrisons, such as the euphemistically-named "cities for accepting surrender" , *shòuxiáng chéng*) that were actually bases from which to launch attacks. As a result of this military strategy, the Tang grew to become one of the largest of all the Chinese empires, destroying the Göktürks of the Eastern Turkic Khaganate and acquiring territory stretching all the way to Kazakhstan.

Nevertheless, records show that in the Kaiyuan era (713–742) of Emperor Xuanzong's reign, the general Zhang Yue built a wall 90 *li* (48 kilometres (30 mi)) to the north of Huairong present-day Huailai County, Hebei), although it remains unclear whether he erected new walls or only reinforced the existing Northern Qi walls.

The Great Wall, or the ruins of it, features prominently in the subset of Tang poetry known as *biansai shi* , "frontier verse") written by scholar-officials assigned along the frontier. Emphasizing the poets' loneliness

and longing for home while hinting at the pointlessness of their posts, these frontier verses are characterized by imagery of desolate landscapes, including the ruins of the now-neglected Great Wall—a direct product of Tang's frontier policy.