

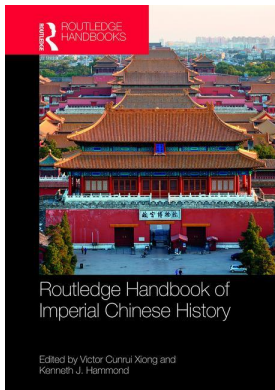
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Victor Cunrui Xiong, Kenneth J. Hammond

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7

THE SUI DYNASTY

Victor Cunrui Xiong

The Sui was a pivotal period in Chinese history that marked the transition from division to reunification. It lasted only two reigns for a total of 37 years, during 29 of which China was united. Still, it laid the groundwork for the success of the brilliant Tang dynasty that followed. The rise of the Sui had as much to do with a confluence of historical forces—political, military, geographic, demographic, and others—as with a select few key decision-makers who changed the course of history through their action (Map 7.1).



Sui China and Its Neighbors, 612

Map 7.1 The Sui Empire. (See Tan Qixiang, vol. 5, 3–4.)

The emperors and top leaders

Of the great historical figures of the late sixth century, none was more influential than Emperor Wen 文 (*né* Yang Jian 楊堅) (541–604) in changing the course of history. Born into one of the most prominent families of the North, he became the Duke of Sui through inheritance at the time of his father's death in 568. As a commanding officer, he followed the Northern Zhou Emperor Wu 武 (Yuwen Yong 宇文邕) on the military campaign that conquered the Northern Qi to the east and unified the entire North in 577. Taking advantage of the incompetence of Emperor Wu's successors, he usurped power to found his own Sui dynasty (581). On his way to the throne, Emperor Wen squelched rebellions against him organized by Northern Zhou loyalists such as Yuchi Jiong 尉遲迥 (in Hebei) and Wang Qian 王謙 (in Sichuan).

As emperor, he was immediately faced with a fragmented political landscape, with the Tujue 突厥 to the north and northwest, the Chen to the south, and the Later Liang on the middle Yangzi. In economic and demographic terms, his state of Sui was only the *primus inter pares*. With vision, strategy, and forceful leadership, he pacified the Tujue and annexed the Later Liang (traditionally a client state of the Northern Zhou). By conquering the Chen in 589, he accomplished the dream of reunification that had eluded dynastic rulers for more than 200 years. But his effort to exercise hegemonic power in the Manchuria and Korea in 598 proved unsuccessful.

Domestically, he pursued policies that contributed to political stability, rising prosperity, and population growth. He reformed the cumbersome system of three-level local administration and reorganized the central government consisting mainly of the Departments (*sheng* 省), Boards (*bu* 部), and Courts (*si* 寺). He enhanced the garrison militia (*fubing* 府兵) and the equal-field (*juntian* 均田) systems adopted by previous regimes. They helped strengthen the military and the economy. He went out of his way to promote Buddhism, making it possible for it to recover from the devastation inflicted by Emperor Wu, and to become the most prominent religion under the Sui. He undertook a number of costly public works projects, including the building of the new capital, Daxingcheng 大興城 (Xi'an, Shaanxi), and the Renshou Palace 仁壽宮 to the west, and the digging of the Guangtong Canal 廣通渠 that linked the capital to the Yellow River.

To guarantee the safe transfer power to the next generation, he selected his eldest son Yang Yong 楊勇 as crown prince, and posted Yang Yong's four brothers to the provinces with extensive civil and military power. Eventually, overcome with suspicion, he replaced Yang Yong with his second son Yang Guang 楊廣 (Emperor Yang 楊) as heir. That, it turned out, was a fatal mistake that led to his own death by the hand of one of Yang Guang's minions.

Following the patricidal regicide, the overambitious Emperor Yang (*né* Yang Guang) ascended the throne in 604. Unimpressed with his father's military misadventure against the Koguryō, he launched three wars against them. While it was true that he continued his father's pro-Buddhist policy, he did not extend the same preferential treatment to the Buddhist clergy.

Although his Eastern Capital at Luoyang was smaller than his father's Daxingcheng, it was more extravagantly built. And his Grand Canal, a waterway system consisting of three long sections that linked North and South, was many times more extensive and costly than Emperor Wen's Guangtong Canal. Along the Grand Canal and in key strategic points he added dozens of secondary and touring palaces. Similar projects by his father paled by comparison. While both father and son built sections of the Great Wall on the northern frontier, Emperor Yang mobilized a far larger labor force: in excess of a million. Apparently, in carrying out these moves, Emperor Yang defied parental authority or deliberately challenged his father's

accomplishments, which was probably a delayed response to his father's draconian parenting. Indeed, under his father's watchful eyes, he had been forced to constantly put on his best behavior. With his father's death, he acted out his repressed impulses, often to excess, which eventually brought about his own downfall.

Among the nonroyal top leaders who helped Emperor Wen seize and consolidate power, none was more important than Gao Jiong. He cast his lot with Yang Jian (Emperor Wen) before the latter founded the Sui dynasty, and was instrumental in the suppression of the Yuchi Jiong rebellion. Upon ascending the throne in 581, Emperor Wen appointed Gao Jiong to head the bureaucracy as chief minister. From then until 599, Gao Jiong was closely involved in carrying out some of the most crucial decisions for the court, including the building of the first capital Daxingcheng and the war against the Chen in the South. He was also responsible for recommending some of the most capable military and civil leaders to the court: Sui Wei, Yang Su, Heruo Bi, and Han Qinhu 韓擒虎. With an unconditional trust in him, Emperor Wen allowed his eldest son, the crown prince, to marry Gao's daughter.

But toward the end of the sixth century, Gao's luck ran out after he incurred the displeasure of Empress Dugu 獨孤 (Emperor Wen's wife), who was not only the mother of Emperor Wen's five sons, but also an influential voice on her husband and his policy. With the empress moving against him, Gao Jiong was dismissed from office, and Crown Prince Yang Yong was replaced with his younger brother Yang Guang (Emperor Yang). Gao Jiong survived Emperor Wen's death to be reinstated as president of the Court for State Ceremonies (*taichang qing* 太常卿). But before long, Emperor Yang, upon hearing his critical remarks on the court, had him executed for libel, together with two other top officials of the previous reign, Yuwen Bi 宇文弼 (a Board president) and Heruo Bi 賀若弼 (a top general) in 607.

Next to Gao Jiong in power and prestige was Yang Su 楊素, another nonroyal top leader. Although a chief minister himself, he was better known as a soldier. He had established his reputation as a great general under the Northern Zhou. Under Emperor Wen of the Sui, he played a vital role in winning the war against the Chen in 589 and was essential in crushing the Southern rebellion against Sui rule. He went on to trounce the mighty Western and Eastern Tujue 突厥. After the fall of Gao Jiong, he took his place as the leader of the bureaucracy and had a hand in replacing Crown Prince Yang Yong with Yang Guang (Emperor Yang). Under Emperor Yang, he was even given the most powerful post, president of the Department of State Affairs (*shangshu ling* 尚書令). But Emperor Yang, who felt increasingly threatened by him and his extensive clan, soon took steps to limit his power. And Yang Su died not long afterward after he had stopped taking medication for a debilitating disease he was suffering from.

The third influential top leader was Su Wei 蘇威. A talented administrator, he was appointed to chief ministerial posts early in Emperor Wen's reign. Although he was the only top leader of the first reign who continued to serve in the inner circle of Emperor Yang and survived him, his lack of tack often placed him in disfavor. Less powerful than Gao Jiong and Yang Su, he was never considered a real threat to the throne. So oftentimes he was restored to power not long after his disgrace. However, his unsavory advice to Emperor Yang in 607 led to his permanent dismissal.

Political institutions

During the first reign, Emperor Wen of the Sui undertook a thorough overhaul of the political institutions in an effort to counteract the archaic reform introduced under the previous Northern Zhou. At the center, the Five Departments were designated as the top echelon of the government. Of these, three, namely, the Department of State Affairs (*shangshu sheng* 尚書省), the

Secretariat (*neishi sheng* 內史省, or *zhongshu sheng* 中書省 under the Tang), and the Chancellery (*menxia sheng* 門下省), were the top decision-making bodies. Of these, the Department of State Affairs with its Six Boards (*liubu* 六部), each headed by a Board president (*shangshu* 尚書), was by far the most important. So much so that the presidency of the Department (*shangshu ling* 尚書令) was essentially left vacant (except for a brief period when it was filled by Yang Su). Two vice presidents (*puye* 僕射) served as its actual co-presidents. The *puye* and the heads of the other two Departments were by default the chief ministers (*xiang* 相), who were the most powerful decision-makers, whose advice the emperor relied upon.

The remaining two of the Five Departments, namely, the Palace Library (*mishu sheng* 秘書省) and Palace Administration (*diannei sheng* 殿內省), in spite of their high status, were much less powerful—responsible, among other things, for the compilation of historical and academic works and the management of palace affairs.

Ranking lower than the Departments were the 11 Courts (*si* 寺) headed by their chamberlains (*qing* 卿) with functions often parallel to those of the Six Boards.

The surveillance arm of the government consisted of the Censorate (*yushi tai* 御史台; lit., the Terrace of Censors).

In local administration, Emperor Wen attempted to undo the situation of the previous age, where “for every 10 sheep there are nine shepherds,” by eliminating the mid-level administration called *jun* 郡 (commandery) so that only two levels of local government remained: *zhou* 州 (prefecture) and *xian* 縣 (county).

Emperor Yang made a few important changes to the administrative structure he inherited from his father. He converted two of the 11 Courts to Inspectorates (*jian* 監). The remaining Nine Courts, although matching the Nine Chamberlains (*jiuqing* 九卿) of Qin-Han times in number, were made much less powerful. Emperor Yang demoted all but one of the heads of the Nine Courts to a rank lower than the presidents of the Six Boards, while boosting the power of the Boards’ other top leaders. All this pointed to a bureaucratic subordination of the Courts to the Boards, a practice that would continue under the Tang. While Emperor Yang did not bother to tinker with the all-important Three Departments, he abused a previous administrative practice by appointing *de facto* chief ministers as the only true power-holders at court. And that seriously weakened the power of the top echelon of the central government. Normally, *de facto* chief ministers were of much lower status than the traditionally appointed chief ministers, and were much less likely to oppose the emperor’s decisions.

To the Censorate (Terrace of Censors), Emperor Yang added two more Terraces to create the Three Terraces, which was in keeping with an age-old tradition. However, they did not necessarily add to the power of the surveillance arm of the central government.

In local administration, Emperor Yang renamed the top local government, *zhou* (prefecture), as *jun* (commandery); he abolished a large number of commandery and county governments, and created a large number of new ones. But the two-level structure of the previous reign remained intact.

The Sui military readopted the *fubing* 府兵 (garrison militia) system of the previous age. Under Emperor Wen, it consisted of the Twelve Garrison Commands (*fu* 府), which constituted the main fighting force for the central government. Each Garrison Command was headed by a general-in-chief (*da jiangjun* 大將軍) (rank 3a). *Fubing* troops were responsible for their own equipment and were called to duty on a rotational basis. The *fubing* garrisons were stationed in and around the capital and other strategic areas.

Emperor Yang created a system of the Sixteen Garrison Commands, 12 of which were *fubing* commands, also known as the Twelve Guards (*shi'er wei* 十二衛). The remaining four non-*fubing* garrison commands were in charge of palace security.

During the first reign, local military forces were under the control of area commands (*zongguan* 總管) under area commanders (also called *zongguan*). Each *zongguan* was in charge of a number of prefectures. Emperor Wen grouped the *zongguan* into four gigantic superior area commands (*da zongguan* 大總管), each of which was led by a superior area commander (also called *da zongguan*), and put his sons in charge most of them. During the second reign, Emperor Yang abolished the *zongguan* system altogether.

Religion

Subjects of the Sui dynasty were familiar with the Three Teachings (*sanjiao* 三教)—Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism—three belief systems that rivaled and complemented one another. While the term *sanjiao* can also be translated as “three religions,” strictly speaking, Confucianism was primarily a code of ethics, rather than a religion, even though Confucian state ritual had strong religious elements. On the other hand, Buddhism and Daoism, one imported and the other indigenous, were *bona fide* religions that had come of age.

Daoism

During the Sui, Daoism experienced sustained growth. Two Daoist schools, Louguan in the North and Shangqing in the South, were great beneficiaries of this growth.

The Louguan school had a mysterious beginning. Allegedly, it started with Yin Xi 尹喜, the Eastern Zhou petty official who built a multistory belvedere (*louguan* 樓觀) to watch stars and auras in the Zhongnan Mountains 終南山 south of Xi'an. That, it was believed, marked the founding of the Louguan school. But, in reality, Louguan did not have a significant beginning until the Northern Dynasties. It was not until the Northern Zhou that it came into its own. Under Emperor Wen of the Sui, in the new capital Daxingcheng, two religious institutions, one Buddhist and one Daoist, were set up south of the Imperial City as the national centers of the two religions. Wang Yan 王延, the leading proponent of the Louguan school, was appointed to head the Daoist institution, the Xuandu Abbey 玄都觀. That showed the high status Louguan enjoyed at the Sui court.

The religious focus of this school was on the *Daode jing* 道德經 (Classic of the Way and virtue) because of the special connection it had with the classic itself. Allegedly, it was Yin Xi, the first Louguan patriarch, who received the first copy of the *Daode jing* from Master Lao 老子 himself. In addition, it embraced the claim that Master Lao and Yin Xi had made a trip to India to convert the barbarians. The claim was found in a group of controversial, apocryphal works, especially one entitled *Huahu jing* 化胡經 (Classic of the conversion of the barbarians).

As the most prominent Daoist school in the South, Shangqing 上清 was particularly favored by Emperor Yang. It was also known as the Maoshan 茅山 school, because its early practitioners were based in Maoshan (Mt. Mao), southeast of Jurong, Jiangsu. Its scriptures consist of revelations from the Perfected (for example, the *Zhengao* 真誥 [Declarations of the Perfected]). It worshiped Yuanshi Tianzun 元始天尊 (Celestial Venerable of Primordial Beginning) above other divinities. Through the work of Wang Yuanzhi 王遠知, his successors Pan Shizheng 潘師正 and Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎, and others, Shangqing was to become the dominant Daoist school in the Early Tang.

The Sui emperors, although devout believers in Buddhism, patronized Daoism. Emperor Wen sponsored the building of 36 Daoist abbeys in and around Daxingcheng the capital. In the principle hall of the Palace City inside the capital, Emperor Wen, of his own volition, went through a quasi-ordination ceremony presided over by Wang Yan himself.

Emperor Yang, for his part, built 24 Daoist abbeys in the Eastern Capital Luoyang. Holding the Shangqing patriarch Wang Yuanzhi in high esteem, Emperor Yang went through a ritual ceremony to become Wang's disciple.

One of the main reasons for this royal patronage was the magical powers associated with the religion. Emperor Wen sought help and protection from Daoist ritual when he fought the pro-Northern Zhou loyalist Wang Qian. Emperor Yang set aside an entire neighborhood in Luoyang to settle occultists of Daoist and other traditions, which was appropriately named Daoshu fang 道術坊 (Ward of Daoist Techniques).

Buddhism

Far more popular than Daoism, Buddhism in Sui times was, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the dominant, *de facto* state religion. Emperor Wen himself was born in a Buddhist convent and brought up by a nun. When Northern Zhou Emperor Wu launched the anti-Buddhist proscription campaign nationwide, Emperor Wen, at great risk to his career and himself, took her under his wing. As soon as he seized control of power, Emperor Wen took steps to promote the revival of the religion that had been underway. In fact, no sovereign in Chinese history came close to the record he set in patronizing Buddhism in terms of the number of monasteries built (3,792) and the number of ordinations (230,000) made during his reign. Inside the capital, he had the only Buddhist national monastery, Daxingshan Monastery 大興善寺, built, which was the Buddhist counterpart of the Xuandu Abbey.

Following an age-old tradition, Emperor Wen set up a national office headed by a *datong* 大統 (controller-in-chief) to take charge of Buddhist affairs. Appointees to the post, always prominent members of the clergy, functioned like archbishops in Catholic Church, whose responsibility it was to spread and protect the religion.

While still the Prince of Jin 晉王 based in the southern city of Jiangdu 江都 (Yangzhou, Jiangsu), Emperor Yang (Yang Guang) set up and patronized the Huiji Monastery 慧日寺, which would become the center of Buddhist learning in the South. As crown prince, he founded monasteries inside the capital Daxingcheng, including the Riyan Monastery 日嚴寺, where he settled monks he brought from Huiji, and the Dachanding Monastery 大禪定寺, one of the two largest in the city located in its southwest corner. Near the Palace City of the capital, he had four religious centers set up, known as the four Places of Enlightenment (*daochang* 道場), two Buddhist and two Daoist, which apparently served as accessible venues for his religious services. In the Eastern Capital Luoyang, another Huiji Monastery was set up inside the palace, known as the “palace monastery” or “interior place of enlightenment” (*nei daochang* 內道場), which must have served the same purpose.

Emperor Yang patronized a number of famous Buddhist monks, and cultivated close ties with some of them, particularly Zhiyi 智顛, the greatest Buddhist master in the South and the founder of the Tiantai 天台 sect of Buddhism. He sponsored the translation of Buddhist works and founded an Institute for Sutra Translation in Luoyang. In addition, he showed an intensive interest in occult practices associated with Buddhism. In Luoyang's Huiji Monastery alone, he kept and supported over 2,000 Buddhist occultists.

However, in spite of his strong religious conviction, Emperor Yang took measures to control the clergy and carried out a major campaign to reduce the number of Buddhist monasteries in and around the capital.

During the Sui, no great Buddhist sects came to the fore except for two: the Three Stages (Sanjie jiao 三階教) and Tiantai. The former with its millennial and apocalyptic messages

was not to the liking of the Powers That Be and was eventually suppressed by Emperor Wen. The latter supported by Emperor Yang flourished and blossomed into a great religious sect under the Tang.

History and literature

We know little of Sui historians, because of none of their works survive. At least two of them deserve to be mentioned: Niu Hong 牛弘 and Wang Shao 王劭 (*zi* Junmao 君懋). Niu Hong was the foremost ritual scholar and president of the Board of Rites. His now-lost *History of the [Northern] Zhou* (Zhoushi 周史) was the basis for the *Book of the [Northern] Zhou* (Zhoushu 周書). Since Niu strove to imitate the ancients in style, he probably put in the mouths of his characters, some of whom were poorly educated, too many elegant phrases.

Niu's contemporary Wang Shao wrote the *Qizhi* 齊志 (Treatises on the [Northern] Qi) and the *Suishu* 隋書 (Book of the Sui). They were condemned by contemporaries for being "vulgar," since they were full of colloquialisms, slang, and vulgarities current in the North. But that was precisely the author's intention.

The Sui created a vibrant literary tradition that helped lay the groundwork for the advent of Tang literature. When the Sui dynasty was founded in 581, it was essentially the inheritor to two traditions: Northern and Southern. During the previous age of division, the North had had to constantly come to grips with the cultural dominance of the South. The literature of the pre-Sui South was distinguished from other ages in style and content. Stylistically, Southern litterateurs came to adopt parallelism in prose and poetry and tended to write in a flowery language, which could become ornate or turgid. In content, they seemed to be enamored of the effete, and the sensual, with a sensibility that borders on the "decadent."

Under the influence of the South, Northern writers often wrote in parallel (*pianwen* 駢文) style as well. However, they wrote few rhapsodies (*fu* 賦) and more political essays. There was little interest in the observation of things and the expression of sentimentalism. In poetry, Northerners, where they were different from the Southerners, tended to be expansive, masculine, simple, and less burdened by an ornate vocabulary.

That tradition continued under the Sui in the hands of such writers as the historian Niu Hong, whose historical writing was essentially in non-parallel prose. His fellow historian Wang Shao, on the other hand, cultivated a unique style that was not only removed from Southern parallelism but also noted for its emphasis on realism.

The first great Sui poet of Northern extraction was Lu Sidao 盧思道 (535–586), who spent his most productive life under the Northern Qi. Although his best-known poem "The Song of a Soldier" (Congjun xing 從軍行) is about a woman pining for her husband in the army, it gives much coverage to northern landscape, frontier sceneries, and military life.

Somewhat younger than Lu Sidao, but living a much longer life, was Xue Daoheng 薛道衡 (540–609). His fame as the greatest Sui poet rests on a number of poems on different themes, ranging from frontier life, poetic dialogue, his personal experience as attendant of the emperor, to sentimentalism. The best-known of them is the "Xixi yan 昔昔鹽" (Nocturnal song), a melancholy love poem from the perspective of a woman separated from her husband.

Xue was eventually killed for his unsavory remarks on Emperor Yang's reign. The order to end his life was given by Emperor Yang, who resented Xue out of literary jealousy. But Emperor Yang himself was a formidable literary figure. Exposed to much Southern influence through his wife, his own experience in the South, and his mentor Liu Bian 柳璡, he wrote palace-style poems with great skills. However, some of his works are distinguished by a grandiose vision and a sense of august majesty, and his stylistic simplicity evokes a Northern literary heritage.

The last great poet of the Sui was Yang Su, known mainly for his successful military career. His poetry stands apart from that of the palace style of the South, a style that, with its effete themes and florid phraseology, was all the rage in Sui times. Instead, it is characterized by a fusion of passionate emotionalism, expansiveness, and expressive vigor that heralded the arrival the poetic greats of the Early Tang.

Foreign relations

As Emperor Wen was founding his Sui dynasty, a powerful nomadic power posed an immediate threat to its existence. This was the Eastern Tujue (Turkic) qaghanate that stretched from Manchuria across the Mongolian steppe to Turkistan. Previously, both the Northern Qi and the Northern Zhou had held the mighty Tujue in awe. The Northern Zhou even married off Princess Qianjin 千金公主 (Emperor Xuan's cousin) to the Tujue qaghan Tuobo 佉鉢. Tuobo soon died, and Qianjin eventually married his successor Shabolue 沙鉢略, following the practice of levirate (580). At the urging of Qianjin, Shabolue launched a massive invasion against the Sui, which had overthrown the Northern Zhou (582); however, it soon fell apart because of effective Sui resistance and internal strife among the Tujue. Throughout his reign, Emperor Wen was able to soften the Tujue challenge by playing off one qaghan against another. This allowed him to shift attention to the South.

In 587, Emperor Wen sent an army to occupy the middle-Yangzi kingdom of Later Liang, which paved the way for his next strategic move, the war against the Chen based in the lower Yangzi. A propaganda campaign was carried out to vilify the Chen sovereign (Chen Shubao 陳叔寶), and his regime before the Southern Expedition, led by Emperor Yang (Yang Guang) and Gao Jiong, was launched. It soon crushed Chen resistance and reunified China proper in 589.

The conquest of the South by the Sui signified its rise as a hegemonic power. Soon it found itself on a collision course with Koguryō, a rising power in the northeast and in Korea. When the Koguryō king refused to follow Emperor Wen's orders not to infringe upon his neighbors and intruded into Sui territory, Emperor Wen launched a full-scale war. But his fleet was practically wiped out by storm and his land forces made little headway because of disease. So Emperor Wen called a stop to the operation. Instead of starting another war, he was sensible enough to accept a face-saving apology from the Koguryō king.

Throughout his reign, Emperor Wen pursued a foreign policy that aimed to support his long-term goal of reunification and pacifying the northern borders. After the ill-fated expedition against Koguryō, he scarcely ventured beyond the realm.

Emperor Yang, however, had much more ambitious foreign policy objectives. He dispatched a military force on a predatory expedition against Linyi 林邑 in central Vietnam in early 605, and invaded northern neighbors beyond the realm: Tuyuhun 吐谷渾 (in Qinghai and east Xinjiang) and Yiwu 伊吾 (Hami, east Xinjiang) in 609, and Koguryō in 612, 613, and 614. He sent his men to far-off places: three missions to Liuqiu 流求 (Taiwan?) (607–610), a mission led by Chang Jun 常駿 to Chitu 赤土 in the Malay Peninsula (608), and a mission led by Pei Shiqing 裴世清 to Yamato 倭 (Japan) (608).

Lying to the west of China proper was the Western Regions (Xiyu 西域), a vast area which, in a narrow sense, encompassed Xinjiang. The most influential person in formulating and executing Emperor Yang's aggressive Xiyu policy was Pei Ju 裴矩, who had a vision for the Sui empire to dominate the northwest, Central Asia, and beyond. Guided by this vision, the Sui army conquered both Tuyuhun and Yiwu (608), while Gaochang 高昌 (in Turfan, Xinjiang), the most important oasis state, was pressured to accept the Sui's dominance.

Under Emperor Yang, relations with the Tujue underwent noticeable changes. Of the three Tujue qaghanates—the Eastern, the Abo branch of the Eastern Tujue, and the Western—the Abo branch came to an end when its last qaghan, Chuluo 處羅, submitted to the Sui (611). Although Chuluo's rival in the Western Regions, Shegui 射匱, qaghan of the Western Tujue, dominated the area, he remained on friendly terms with the Sui. Qimin 啟民 qaghan of the Eastern Tujue owed his rise to the Sui, so he was loyal to Emperor Yang until his death in 611. But Pei Ju's dishonest schemes against the Eastern Tujue eventually backfired, and Qimin's successor was to become an implacable foe.

Before the relations with the Eastern Tujue soured, Emperor Yang was preparing for a large-scale invasion of Koguryō, more out of a desire to excel his father than to avenge his defeat. In a span of three years, he fought three wars against the northeastern neighbor. In the first war (612), he mobilized an armed force in excess of 1.1 million, but it ended ignominiously after the Sui main force suffered devastating defeats on the Sa River. In the second war (613), Emperor Yang went to the front to direct military operations in person. But he was forced to end the campaign prematurely when one of his top officials, Yang Xuangan 楊玄感 (Yang Su's son), rebelled in the Central Plains. In the following year (614), he started his third war. After he made some initial progress, the Koguryō king sued for peace. And Emperor Yang soon pulled back his invading army. By then “all under heaven” was embroiled in rebellion.

Economy

Population and urban centers

For most of its 37 years, the Sui period saw a steady rise in population. It is necessary to point out that the population figures provided by the sources are those of *registered* subjects. They may undercount *total* populations by as much as one-quarter to one-third.

When the Sui was founded in 581, its population is estimated to be slightly under 33 million. It grew to approximately 38 million after the annexation of the Chen in 589, and peaked at over 46 million in 609. Thereafter, it began to decline precipitously. By the Zhenguan period of the Early Tang (627–649), the population was estimated at 15 million, which indicates a population loss of close to 70% in a few decades. Apparently, the decline was caused by the socioeconomic upheaval that started in the last years of the Sui dynasty and continued into the first few years of the Tang.

Although most of the population lived in the countryside, there were a number of large cities. The greatest of them were Daxingcheng and Luoyang, two world-class cities. Daxingcheng (Xi'an, Shaanxi) in Guanzhong 關中 was the capital built from scratch in 582–583, with an urban area of 84 km² and a population well over half a million. In the north-central part of the city were located its enclosed palace and administrative areas, and to the south were the two enclosed markets. The rest of the city was divided up into closed neighborhoods called *fang* 坊 or *li* 里 (wards) on a gridiron plan.

The first part of Luoyang (Luoyang, Henan), the Eastern Capital, was built in the Central Plains in 605–606. It included the enclosed palace and administrative area in the northeast corner and the area to the east north of the Luo River. Only later was the vast area south of the river developed. When the city was finally completed, it had a walled area of 47 km². Its population too exceeded half a million. It had three enclosed markets and more than 100 wards, usually smaller than their Daxingcheng counterparts.

Both Daxingcheng and Luoyang were the national political, economic, religious, and cultural centers. Throughout the Sui, Daxingcheng, where the imperial Ancestral Temple

was located, served as the principal capital. But Luoyang assumed greater importance during the second reign because Emperor Yang made it his preferred domicile.

Toward the last years of his reign, Yangidi shifted his focus to Jiangdu 江都 (Yangzhou, Jiangsu), the most important urban center in the South, which became his *de facto* capital from 616 until his death in 618.

The land tenure and taxation systems

The dominant Sui land tenure system was that of *juntian* 均田 or “equal field.” When it was first implemented under Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 of the Northern Wei, the Tuoba state was transitioning from a nomadic to an agrarian economy. The new system was intended to accommodate that change. In the subsequent Northern Dynasties, the system continued to be used. Under the Sui, new *juntian* statutes were promulgated as early as 582. Essentially, two types of land grants (*yongye tian* 永業田 [inheritable lands] and *lutian* 露田 [open fields]) were allotted to adult male and female recipients. Inheritable lands were not subject to return. Open fields, however, were returnable when one reached 60 (59) and became “elderly” (*lao* 老). The Sui added a new population category, *zhongnan* 中男 (adolescent male), with a legal age range of 11–17 (later the upper limit of this group was extended first to 20, then to 21). That would afford a significant economic advantage to households with adolescent males, because they were not liable for taxation or corvée duties.

A *juntian* household paid a fixed amount of grain (millet or rice) and textile (silk or hemp) as taxes each year. Even though recipients of *juntian* land were very rarely granted the maximum share of land as stipulated in the statutes, their taxes were by no means heavy. The real crushing burden was the demand for corvée duties. While the standard period of corvée labor was 30 or 20 days, it was frequently ignored as the emperor imposed ad hoc corvée assignments. Assignments like these were not light under Emperor Wen, and became increasingly oppressive under Emperor Yang as he pursued public works projects of extraordinary magnitude, including those of Luoyang, the Great Wall, the Grand Canal, and the palaces.

Money

The monetary system had been in disarray following the fall of the Eastern Han. Briefly, under the Cao-Wei, bronze coins were withdrawn from circulation. Grains and textiles functioned as commodity monies. Throughout the early medieval period, coins played a much more diminished role in the economy compared with the Eastern Han dynasty. At the beginning of the Sui, a variety of coins of Northern Zhou and Northern Qi mintage were in circulation. Under Emperor Wen, with the issuance of the Sui *wuzhu* 五銖 coin, the coinage was finally unified. However, under Emperor Yang, especially during his last years, coin debasement became widespread as commodity prices soared in a runaway inflation.

Rebellion

In 609, not long after Emperor Yang succeeded his father as emperor, the Sui empire reached the pinnacle of its power. With a registered population in excess of 46 million, it was more populous than ever since the fall of the Eastern Han dynasty. Its Grand Canal, running from Hangzhou, Zhejiang, in the South, to Beijing in the North, provided a vital transportation link between the Yellow and Yangzi River valleys for the first time in history.

Within two years, however, ominous signs began to emerge. The first major anti-government rebellion led by Wang Bo 王薄 broke out in Shandong, just as preparations for Emperor Yang's first war against Koguryō were underway. As the fire of rebellion spread, more and more rebel groups made their appearance. While Emperor Yang was still fighting his second war against Koguryō in 613, the Yang Xuangan 楊玄感 rebellion, one of extraordinary scale, erupted in the Central Plains. Although the rebellion itself was soon suppressed, other rebellions of vast magnitude soon sprang up in both North and South. Toward the end of Emperor Yang's reign, China was engulfed in a total civil war of warlords fighting against one another as well as the Sui court.

By 617, Emperor Yang had moved the court to Jiangdu in the middle Yangzi valley. In the North, Luoyang was in imminent danger when Li Mi 李密, leading the mightiest rebel force in the realm, the Wagang Army 瓦崗軍 (which he claimed to be one million strong), captured the Luokou Granary 洛口倉, the lifeline of Luoyang. Emperor Yang dispatched his most trusted general in Jiangdu, Wang Shichong 王世充, with a rescue army, to Luoyang, in an attempt to prevent the fall of the city. Wang's arrival complicated the situation in the North, where there were already more than half a dozen powerful warlords with their own numerous armies, including Dou Jiande 竇建德 in Hebei, Li Yuan 李淵 in Daxingcheng, and Liu Wuzhou 劉武周 in north Shanxi, Xue Ju 薛舉 in west Shaanxi, and Liang Shidu 梁師都 in north Shaanxi. In addition, there was Tujue in Mongolia, ready to lend its might to any rebel forces that would do its bidding.

The Yangzi valley was divided up by such warlords as Xiao Xian 蕭銑, Du Fuwei 杜伏威, and Li Zitong 李子通. While Emperor Yang's court in Jiangdu was not immediately threatened by rebel attacks, the departure of Wang Shichong had compromised the security of the palace. In early 618, Yuwen Huaji 宇文化及, a general of the Sui palace security forces, started a coup in which Emperor Yang was killed. Thereupon, the Sui empire fell.

What were the causes of the turmoil that led to the collapse of the Sui empire? First, Emperor Yang's abuse of the labor force for horrendously costly projects ruined the lives of his subjects by the millions; second, the incessant warfare he waged against Koguryō with massive casualties drove the laboring masses further into despair; third, in times of turmoil, he chose first Luoyang, then Jiangdu, as his base, abandoning the much more defensible Guanzhong; fourth, he surrounded himself with sycophants, who kept him in the dark about the seriousness of the situation until it was too late.