**5. THE SUI DYNASTY (581-618).** The prolonged period of disunity finally ended when a general from the northwest united China by establishing the new dynasty of Sui. A second great period of imperial unity was begun. The relationship of the Sui to the succeeding T'ang Dynasty was much like that of the Ch'in to the Han. It served as the unifying foundation on which its successor could build. The first Sui emperor, Wen Ti, introduced a series of economic reforms, such as reduction of the peasants' taxes, a careful census for equitable tax collection, and restoration of the equal allocation system used in the Northern Wei. Every taxable male received a grant of land, part of which was returnable when he ceased to be a taxpayer at age 60 and part of which he could pass on to his heirs. He also revived the Han system of examinations based on Confucian classics.

Sui Wen Ti's premature death might have been caused by his ambitious son Yang Ti, whose grandiose projects and military campaigns ultimately led to the Sui's downfall. Some of his projects were productive, especially the construction of the Grand Canal, which linked up the Huang, Huai, and Yangtze rivers and connected north and south China.

Yang Ti's overly ambitious scheme of expanding his empire led to disastrous wars against Korea. After a series of futile expeditions, the Chinese army of over a million was defeated and forced to flee. In 618, Yang Ti was assassinated in an army coup; one of the coup leaders, Li Shih-min, installed his father as emperor, founding the T'ang Dynasty. After about a decade, during which he was able to secure his father's abdication, he took the throne himself in 626 as the emperor T'ai TSong.

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| **Sui Dynasty (580-618 AD)**China was finally reunited under the efforts of a capable and thrifty military leader from the northwest named Yang Jian, also known by the reign title, Wen Di. His dynasty would be known as Sui. Like the earlier Qin dynasty, however, the Sui was short and severe, but garnered many accomplishments.  **Sui Yang DiToday's Grand Canal**  The Sui revitalized old connections throughout the empire and revived institutions of control that would be further embellished by the great Tang dynasty that followed. Among the accomplishments of the Sui was the building of the Grand Canal that linked the thriving cultures of southern China with those of the north, near his new capital at Luoyang. The canal acted as an inland watery highway, especially useful for the transport of grain.  Strains were placed upon the Sui treasury by wars with alien peoples on the northeast border, including attempts to defuse an alliance between the Korean state of Koguryo and nomadic Turkic allies. Leadership also became a problem after Yang Jian’s son, Yang Guang, or known by his reign title, Yang Di, took the throne. Although he is responsible for the success of the Grand Canal, historians and popular literature have not been kind to his memory. A case study in imperial decadence, the emperor was known for high living and lavish expenditures on parties, palaces, and lengthy trips through the exotic southern reaches of his realm.  Stories of Yang Di’s well-known “pleasure tour” throughout the lower Yangzi delta are still told by storytellers in China today, and became the subject of racy vernacular romances by the 17th century. Legend suggests that he had the custom of being drawn through the streets in a carriage pulled by unclad young men and women, who would unceremoniously topple upon each other when the ruler pulled back on the reins.  Losing support of the gentry landholders, the Sui economy eventually waffled and uprisings began. Retreating to the south, Yang Di was eventually assassinated (at the hand of his most trusted general’s son, while bathing) in 618 AD and the empire was again dissolved. In the meantime, however, a capable general named Li Yuan and his brilliant, but ruthless son, Li Shimin had managed to position themselves for conquest and rule of their own dynasty—the Tang. |