Abstract

Tang Gao Zhu (唐高祖) Li Yuan (李渊) (566 - 635 A.D.) was the Duke of Tang and one of the most powerful Sui generals. He joined the scores of rebellious leaders in the waning years of the Sui Dynasty (隋朝) in 617 A.D. and six months later, he became the first emperor of the Tang Dynasty (唐朝), ruling the empire for about nine years (618 - 626 A.D.).

As Li Yuan went on to impose firm central authority throughout the country, he was fortunate in being the heir to the great achievements of the Sui, which had earlier brought centuries of disunion to an end.

The Tang Dynasty founded by Li Yuan was indeed the most powerful dynasty in the history of China, ranking alongside the Han (汉朝) as one of China's two golden ages of empire. The institutions of his new dynasty were established mainly on the solid foundations left by his predecessors. There were also a series of political, economic and social reformations introduced under his rule. It was Gao Zhu who set up the institutional and political framework of the early Tang.

The aim of this Academic Exercise is to look at Tang Gao Zhu as a person, his career in general, and his reformative measures. The thesis also discusses the Xuan Wu Gate Incident (玄武门之变) which was the fault of Tang Gao Zhu for not recognising and preventing its occurrence. The result was Li Shi Ming (李世民), his second son, later became the second Tang emperor (太宗), and Gao Zhu was given the title of Retired Emperor (太上皇).
Despite the above mistake, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Tang Gao Zhu had been one of the most underestimated monarchs in the Chinese history. His reputation had suffered: (i) from the fact that his short reign came between those of the two most striking figures in Chinese history, the archvillain Sui Yang Ti (隋炀帝) and Tai Zong whom later historians saw as a political paragon; and (ii) because his own role in the founding of the Tang was deliberately obscured by his successor. In reality, despite his age — his was over fifty years old when he raised arms against the Sui — Gao Zhu was an ambitious, vigorous and able leader. He placed the Tang Dynasty on solid administrative, economic and military foundations. In short, the Academic Exercise reveals that Gao Zhu was the man who laid the essential groundwork for the brilliant reign of his son.