

Redating in the Samguk Sagi

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Significant intervals¹ and fictitious foundation dates² are of common occurrence in East Asian historical writing. As a further type of anomaly, I note some examples of displacement of events in the Korean work *Samguk Sagi* 三國史記, completed in 1145 by a team headed by Kim Pusik 金富軾 (1075-1151).

Situation. Especially for the kingdoms of Silla 新羅 and Paekche 百濟, this royally commissioned work faced the difficulty that there were gaps in the available records, one at the beginning, due in part to a wish to provide early foundation dates (018 for Paekche, 057 for Silla), and in part to the loss of records after the fall of Silla in 935. In brief, these gaps were typically filled by either duplicating or transferring recorded events with known cyclical dates. Displacement by a multiple of 60 years would let the original cyclical date be retained. Where names of persons would have been anachronistic in their new location, they were replaced with more appropriate ones, in what I have called “narrative credibility.”

Strategy. The events relocated might be singles or clusters. Thus a sequence of chronologically proximal military encounters between Silla and Paekche might all be antedated by 240 years (four cycles of 60). Clusters might be antedated (or postdated) by sequentially decreasing (or increasing) factors of 60 years. So in the more common case of antedating, a cluster that had been redated by the subtraction of 240 years was followed by another cluster redated by the subtraction of 180 years, then another redated by 120 years, and finally another redated by subtracting 60 years. For shorter periods, a change in the second character of the cyclical date would give a 10-year difference, as from 戊戌 (corresponding to the year 38) to 戊申 (48). Thus in the Paekche Annals for the reign of King Taru, the putative second king of Paekche, who allegedly ruled from 28 to 77, there is a gap between 38 (戊戌) and 48 (戊申). The gap has the effect of antedating by an additional ten years the dates of pre-48 entries which would otherwise have been antedated by five cycles, 300 years. The many examples of this pattern lead to the conclusion that *all* pre-48 entries in the Paekche Annals should be redated upward by 310 years – five cycles plus ten years.

The effort to date the beginning of Silla has its root not in anything in Silla history, but in the claim of an 040 or 031 foundation date for Koguryō. 057 is the first or 甲子 year of the cycle which *includes* those years, and was undoubtedly chosen (by some Silla historian) to give Silla that degree of priority over its better documented rival.

¹As the 100-year reign sometimes attributed to Jōu Mù-wáng 周穆王.

²As the Kojiki date of 0660 for the first year of the reign of Jimmu Tennō 神武天皇.

The Koguryō foundation date, in turn, has its basis in a prediction that the kingdom would last 700 years; a prediction noticed in the Japanese chronicle *Nihon Shoki* under 0668, the date of its destruction.³

The attractions of this sort of schematic history-making are obvious. The *Samguk Sagi* minutely records the sources, many of them Chinese, which were utilized in its compilation. Strikingly absent from them is the *Sān-gwó Jì* 三國志, a work of c280 which is recognized as containing the earliest firsthand account of a visit to Japan by Chinese envoys. The reason is probably that the *Sān-gwó Jì* was all too informative about early Korea, including its blank spaces, and contradicted the more ancient Korea which it was the purpose of the *Samguk Sagi* to put on record.⁴

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Further examples, whether dynastic or personal, are numerous. In China, one thinks of the expected 500-year interval between appearances of a sage in Mencian tradition,⁵ or the prediction that Chín and Jōu would “separate” after a 500-year union,⁶ which led Szm̃ Tán to adjust his account of Lăudž in SJ 63 to identify Lăudž as the prophet in question, thus arguing for a sort of Dàuist patronage of the Chín/Hàn Imperial order – at a time when the increasing ascendancy of Confucianism threatened a Dàuist monopoly at the Hàn court.⁷ On the personal side, family tradition about the dates of Mencius was distorted to make Mencius early enough to have studied with Confucius’ supposed grandson Dž-sž, and late enough to have commented on the 0286 Chí attack on Sùng.⁸ The former removes a gap in the transmission of doctrine from Confucius to Mencius; the latter explains what would otherwise be an anachronism in MC 3B5.

Whenever there is a plausible *reason* for the supposed date of a person or dynasty, that date should be carefully scrutinized. The date may derive from the reason.

Works Cited

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 A Taeko Brooks. *Jwāngdž 33*. WSP v2 (2018) 136-140
 E Bruce Brooks. *The Dates of Mencius*. WSP v2 (2018) 198-204
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³It is this tradition that leads to the foundation date 031. The 040 date is from the funerary inscription of a Koguryō man, Ko Cha, who died in China in 697; it states that at the time of its destruction in 668, the kingdom had been in existence for 708 years.

⁴What remains when these stratagems are removed, and more reputable sources (including archaeological evidence) are substituted? For the case of Paekche, see Best **History**.

⁵MC 2B13, 7B38, both in the final passages of those chapters.

⁶SJ 63 5/2142, a prediction repeated in the Annals of both Jōu and Chín.

⁷For that climate of opinion, see further Brooks **Jwāngdž 33**.

⁸For early attempts close the Dž-sž gap, see Brooks **Dž-sž**.