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Article

# The Impact of the King's Lifespan on the Political Situation in Ancient Korea: Focusing on the Case of Goguryeo Dynasty

KANG Jin Won



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## Introduction

In ancient times, all power and authority was vested in the king, who stood at the center of the country. Studying the lives of kings thus adds much to our understandings of the society at that time. The same goes for the study of ancient Korean history. Previous scholarship has examined individual kings as well as political systems and social structure, and revealed many historical facts of ancient Korea. These studies, however, focus mostly on either those renowned for great achievements or those who ruled in a time of disaster. There is yet ample room for new approaches to explore in this field.

One of these approaches is to look through the lens of the lifespan of the kings. While the personalities, backgrounds, and aspirations of kings have been studied, lifespan has received little attention. Considering how a king had absolute power over a country during the period of monarchy in East Asia, however, the king's lifespan proves to be an insightful tool in the investigation of ancient Korean history. For instance, if a king ascended the throne at a young age, political stability of the country was under constant threat from manipulative relatives on the mother's side and treasons until he reached adulthood. The most striking examples are King Danjong of Joseon (1441-1457, reigned 1452-1455), King Hyegong (758-780, reigned 765-780) and King Aejang (788-809, reigned 800-809) of Silla. These three kings all came to throne young, fell into adversity, and died tragically. On the other hand, some kings ascended to the throne after coming of age and successfully managed unstable political situations. For example, King Muryeong of Baekje (462-523, reigned 501-523) did not have many supporters, being born in Japan, and came to the throne in the uneasy wake of the mysterious deaths of kings preceding him. Nevertheless, he brought stability and played a major role in the national restoration of Baekje. Of course, the reign of a king is determined by the combination of a variety of factors in addition to his lifespan and age. I argue, however, that previous studies of ancient Korean history have overlooked the age and lifespan of the kings while focusing too heavily on social structure and circumstances.

This article thus seeks to examine how the age and lifespan of ancient Korean kings are related to their reign and political situation. I focus on the kings of Goguryeo due to the availability of records of the kings' lifespan throughout the entire history of the country. The records of Silla, the other

ancient Korean country with relevant records, are concentrated to the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, which make them less useful for this project. I will begin by estimating the respective lifespan of the kings using historical records and then connect these figures to the political situation during each period.

## The Estimated Lifespan of the Kings of Goguryeo

With the exception of certain kings, exact records of the year of birth and/or death of most of the kings of Goguryeo do not exist. In this section I will estimate the lifespan of the kings without these records. The periodization I use divides the history of Goguryeo into four periods: the pre-Bu system period (from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., from the reign of King Dongmyeongseong to that of King Mobon); the Bu system period (from the 1<sup>st</sup> century to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, from King Taejo to King Bongsang); the period of centralization (from the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century, from King Micheon to King Anwon); and the period of aristocrat alliance (from the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century to the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, from King Yangwon to King Bojang) (No 1999, 489-90).

### *From King Dongmyeongseong to King Mobon*

Among the kings who ruled in the first period of Goguryeo, the years of birth and death of King Dongmyeongseong, King Yurimyong, and King Daemusin are known. King Dongmyeongseong was born in April B.C. 58,<sup>1</sup> ascended the throne in B.C. 37,<sup>2</sup> and died in B.C. 19 at the age of 39.<sup>3</sup>

King Yurimyong was born after King Dongmyeongseong left Buyeo.<sup>4</sup> Since King Dongmyeongseong founded Goguryeo in B.C. 37,<sup>5</sup> King

1. *Dongguk-isangguk-jip* 3: "The king knew that she was the wife of the son of the Heaven. She got pregnant by sunlight, and Jumong was born in April of the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Shenque."

2. *Samguk-sagi* 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Dongmyeongseong's reign: "At this time, Jumong was 22 years old in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Jianzhao, the era name of Emperor Xiaoyuan."

3. *Samguk-sagi* 13, the 19<sup>th</sup> year of King Dongmyeongseong's reign: "The king was 41 years old when he died in September. He was buried at Mt. Yongsan and named as King Dongmyeongseong."

4. *Samguk-sagi* 13, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yurimyong's reign: "King's mother was Mrs. Ye. In the past, Jumong was married to him in Buyeo, and she gave birth to a child after Jumong left Buyeo; that child was Yuri."

5. See footnote 2.

Yurimyong would have been born around that time, which puts him at roughly 19 years old when he ascended the throne. This in turn means that King Yurimyong was around 55 years old at his death in the year 18.<sup>6</sup>

King Daemusin was 11 years old when he became the crown prince.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, he would have been born in the year 4. He ascended to the throne in the year 18 at the age of 15 and died in the year 44,<sup>8</sup> indicating that he was 41 years old at the time of his death.

King Minjung was King Daemusin's younger brother. Haeu (who later became King Mobon), King Daemusin's son, was too young when King Daemusin died, which led to the crowning of King Minjung instead.<sup>9</sup> This means that he had already reached adulthood by the time he ascended the throne. Adulthood in ancient Korea was considered to be from around 15 years old. People aged 15 and older provided labor when was mobilized<sup>10</sup>; in Silla, people aged over 15 could enter Gukhak,<sup>11</sup> become government officials,<sup>12</sup> or become *hwarang*.<sup>13</sup> Goguryeo was no different.<sup>14</sup> Gyeonhwon named himself

6. *Samguk-sagi* 13, the 37<sup>th</sup> year of King Yurimyong's reign: "In October, the king died in a royal villa at Dugok. He was buried in the east of Dugok and named as the King Yurimyong."
7. *Samguk-sagi* 14, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Daemusin's reign: "The king became a crown prince in the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of King Yurimyong when he was 11 years old, and he ascended the throne."
8. *Samguk-sagi* 14, the 27<sup>th</sup> year of King Daemusin's reign: "In October, the king died and was buried in Daesuchon and named as King Daemusin."
9. *Samguk-sagi* 14, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Minjung's reign: "The name of King Minjung was Haeseakju, and he was a younger brother of King Daemusin. When King Daemusin died his crown prince could not rule because he was young. So they set him on the throne instead."
10. *Samguk-sagi* 3, the 11<sup>th</sup> year of King Jabi's reign: "In September, the king mobilized Haseulla people over 15 years old to build a castle on the Niha"; *Samguk-sagi* 5, in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of King Bongsang's reign: "In August, the king mobilized men and women over the 15 years old to repair the royal palace in the state"; *Samguk-sagi* 23, the 41<sup>st</sup> year of King Onjo's reign: "In February, the king mobilized people to repair the Castle Wirye in the northeast of the Han River"; *Samguk-sagi* 25, the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of King Jinsa's reign: "In the spring, the king mobilized men and women over the 15 years old to build fortress"; *Samguk-sagi*, the 13<sup>th</sup> year of King Jeonji's reign: "In July, the king mobilized people of the east and north part of the state over the 15 years old to build the Castle Sagu"; *Samguk-sagi* 26, the 12<sup>th</sup> year of King Dongseong's reign: "In July, the king mobilized people of over the 15 years old from the north part of the state to Castle Sahyeon and Isan"; *Samguk-sagi*, the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of King Muryeong's reign: "In February, the king came to Hanseong, and he had to let Sao, *dalsol* mobilize the people over 15 years old in the north counties and prefectures of Hansu to build the Castle Ssanghyeon."
11. *Samguk-sagi* 38: "All students' official rank ranged from *daesa* to no-rank, and they aged between 15 and 30 years old."
12. *Samguk-yusa* 1, Woman Dowha and Man Bihyeong: "When King Jinpyeong heard that he was good, he raised him in the court, and when he was 15 years old, the king appointed him to *jipsa*."
13. *Samguk-sagi* 41, Kim Yu-sin: "He became a *hwarang* at the age of 15."
14. *Samguk-yusa* 3, When King Bojang Worshipped Taoism, the Monk Bodeok Left the Small Temple:

at the age of 15<sup>15</sup>; Simji became a monk at the age of 15<sup>16</sup>; Queen Jinseong intended to cede the crown to her nephew when he was 15.<sup>17</sup> These examples all prove that the age of 15 was the beginning of adulthood in ancient Korea. King Minjung was thus over 15 when he ascended the throne; yet he did not live long judging from his death in the year 48.<sup>18</sup> This puts his age at 19 at the least and 44 at most as he was younger than King Daemusin, who was 41 at his death in the year 44.

King Mobon, despite being King Daemusin's eldest son,<sup>19</sup> was considered too young when his father died in the year 44. Thus, he must have been younger than 15 at that time, but he was likely older than 10 years old for the following reasons: first, he managed the affairs of Goguryeo on his own when he ascended the throne in the year 48. This suggests that he was not too young as to require his mother to govern on his behalf as in the cases of King Taejo and King Jinheung of Silla, which I will demonstrate later.<sup>20</sup> Second, King Mobon proclaimed his heir to the throne in the year 48,<sup>21</sup> which indicates that he had reached reproductive age by then. In short, King Mobon was presumably between 14 and 18 years old when he came to the throne. His atrocity later in life led to his murder in the year 53,<sup>22</sup> which tells us that he was between 19 and

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“*Goryeo-gogi* also written: ‘...He was born in Goguryeo after the death of the emperor. When he was 15 years old, he became intelligent and was excellent in martial arts. At that time, King Muyang heard that he was wise, So the king appointed him a servant.’”

15. *Samguk-yusa* 2, King Gyeonhwon of the Latter Baekje: “The old record also writes: ‘...She gave birth to a baby boy later, and when he was 15 years he called himself Gyeonhwon.’”
16. *Samguk-yusa* 4, The Monk Simji Succeed His Teacher: “Monk Simji was a son of King Heondeok... When he was 15 years old, he became a monk and, following his mentor, learned the Buddhism doctrines.”
17. *Tangwen-shiyi* 68, Queen Jinseong of Silla Dynasty Informed the Emperor of Tang Dynasty of her Abdicating the Throne: “Yo, my nephew, is almost 15 years old, and because of his competence, I abdicated the throne to him without asking for a king from you. I already had him temporarily rule and overcome the confusion of the country.”
18. *Samguk-sagi* 14, the 5<sup>th</sup> year of King Minjung's reign: “The king died. Because the queen and servants could not break the will of the king, they buried him in the cave and named him as King Minjung.”
19. *Samguk-sagi* 14, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Mobon's reign: “King Mobon's name was Haeu, and he was the first son of King Daemusin. When King Minjung died, he succeeded the throne.”
20. *Samguk-sagi* 4, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Jinheung's reign: “King Jinheung's name was Sammaekjong, and he was 7 years old...The King's mother acted as regent because he was young.”
21. *Samguk-sagi* 14, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Mobon's reign: “In October, the king appointed his son Ik as a crown prince.”
22. *Samguk-sagi* 14, the 6<sup>th</sup> year of King Mobon's reign: “Duro killed King Mobon. Duro was Mobon province's person who attended the king.”

23 years old when he died.

It is noteworthy that all the kings mentioned above ascended the thrones when they were adults. This reflects the belief that the king must be an adult to function properly.

One point to keep in mind is that all the records discussed in this section are contained in the parts of *Samguk-sagi* that deal with the earlier periods of ancient Korea. Stories were passed down orally in early ancient Korea, and it was only when royal authority was reinforced and the government system was centralized that the people of Goguryeo began organizing stories and publishing history books. Some of the stories were probably modified in the process of publication. While the information contained in the records should not be accepted uncritically, they still provide a basis from which we can infer historical facts as well as the perspectives of its publishers.

### *From King Taejo to King Bongsang*

Among the kings who ruled in the second period of the history of Goguryeo, the years of the birth and death of King Taejo, King Chadae, and King Sindae are known. Records state that King Taejo's mother managed the state for him because he was only 7 years old when he ascended the throne in the year 53,<sup>23</sup> which places his birth in the year 47. His younger brother Suseong later succeeded the throne when he became too old. King Taejo died at the age of 119 in the year 165.<sup>24</sup>

Suseong became King Chadae. He was 76 years old when he became king in 146,<sup>25</sup> which means that he was born in the year 71. King Chadae was murdered by Myeongnim-dapbu in 165 at the age of 95.<sup>26</sup>

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23. *Samguk-sagi* 15, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Taejo's reign: "King Mobon died; the crown prince was incompetent and was not good enough to be a leader. So, people set Gung on the throne. The king was able to see things from his eyes when he was born, and was superior to others. However, the King's mother acted as regent because he was 7 years old."

24. *Samguk-sagi* 15, the 20<sup>th</sup> year of King Chadae's reign: "In March, King Taejo died at the age of 119 in a royal villa."

25. *Samguk-sagi* 15, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Chadae's reign: "He was abdicated to King Taejo. When he ascended the throne, he was 76 years old."

26. *Samguk-sagi* 15, the 20<sup>th</sup> year of King Chadae's reign: "In October, Myeongnim-dapbu, the *Joui* of Yoenna Division, killed the King because people could not stand him."



King Sindae was 77 years old when he ascended the throne,<sup>27</sup> which indicates that he was born in the year 89. He died in 179 at the age of 91.<sup>28</sup>

Although the records of the lives of the three kings mentioned above are not usually considered as part of the earlier history recorded in *Samguk-sagi*, their reliability is debatable given the unusual phenomenon of having three exceedingly long-lived kings in succession. At the same time, these records demonstrate that they were considerably old when they ascended to and abdicated from the throne. States tend to make older people their leader at the early stage of nation building, and Goguryeo was no exception.

Meanwhile, there is no question that subsequent chronicles record what actually happened. King Gogukcheon became the crown prince in 176.<sup>29</sup> Since King Sindae was 88 years old at that time, King Gogukcheon had likely reached adulthood by then. He came to the throne 3 years later and died in 197,<sup>30</sup> around 20 years after becoming the crown prince, which puts him at least in his 40's at the time of his death.

King Sansang was King Gogukcheon's younger brother.<sup>31</sup> Records showing that he prayed for an heir in 203<sup>32</sup> indicate that he had already reached adulthood when he came to the throne. His concerns about dying without an heir make it unlikely that he was in his youth at that time. He died 24 years later, in 227,<sup>33</sup> in his 50s at the youngest. By 213, he had likely reached the age to designate his successor, as was the practice in traditional societies, which explains why he proclaimed his son Gyoche (who later became King Dongcheon) as the crown prince in 213 even though Gyoche was only 5 years old then.<sup>34</sup>

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27. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Sindae's reign: "Then, he ascended the throne after three refusals when he was 77 years old."

28. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 15<sup>th</sup> year of King Sindae's reign: "In December, the king died and was buried in Gogukgok. He was named as King Sindae."

29. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 12<sup>th</sup> year of King Sindae's reign: "In March, the king appointed his son Nammu as a crown prince."

30. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 19<sup>th</sup> year of King Gogukcheon's reign: "In May, the king died and was buried in Gogukcheon-won. He was named as King Gogukcheon."

31. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Sansang's reign: "King Sansang's name was Yeonu, and he was the younger brother...he succeeded to the throne because King Gogukcheon has no son."

32. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 7<sup>th</sup> year of King Sansang's reign: "In March, the king prayed to the mountains and streams because he had no son."

33. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 31<sup>st</sup> year of King Sansang's reign: "In May, the king died and was buried in Sansangreung. He was named as King Sansang."

34. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 17<sup>th</sup> year of King Sansang's reign: "In January, the king appointed his son Gyoche as a crown prince."

King Dongcheon, the son of King Sansang's second wife,<sup>35</sup> was born in 209. He was 19 years old when King Sansang died in 227,<sup>36</sup> and he himself died in 248 at the age of 40.

King Jungcheon was born in 224. His father,<sup>37</sup> King Dongcheon, who was still the crown prince then, was 16 years old at that time. King Jungcheon became the crown prince in 243 at the age of 20<sup>38</sup> and ascended the throne at the age of 25. He would have been 47 years old at his death in 270.<sup>39</sup>

King Seocheon was King Jungcheon's second son.<sup>40</sup> He became the crown prince in 255<sup>41</sup> when King Jungcheon was 32 years old. Since sons of the king were not conferred the title of crown prince in their childhood in Goguryeo except in urgent circumstances, King Seocheon was likely in his early/mid-10s at that time. He ascended the throne 15 years later and died in 292,<sup>42</sup> which means that he probably came to throne in his late 20s or early 30s and died in his early to mid-50s.

King Bongsang had two sons when he committed suicide in the year 300.<sup>43</sup> He would have thus already reached adulthood by that time. Taking into account the age of his father, King Seocheon, I estimate that King Bongsang was in his 20s to 30s or older when he came to the throne in 292.

35. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 13<sup>th</sup> year of King Sansang's reign: "In September, the girl of the Village Jutong had a baby boy... Then, the king called his son's name Gyoche and appointed his mother to the royal concubine."

36. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of King Dongcheon's reign: "In September, the king died and was buried in Siwon. He was named as King Dongcheon."

37. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 28<sup>th</sup> year of King Sansang's reign: "The grandson of King Yoenbul was born."

38. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 17<sup>th</sup> year of King Dongcheon's reign: "In January, the king appointed his son Yoenbul as a crown prince and declared an amnesty in the state."

39. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of King Jungcheon's reign: "In October, the king died and was buried in Jungcheon-won. He was named as King Jungcheon."

40. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Seocheon's reign: "He was the second son of King Jungcheon."

41. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 8<sup>th</sup> year of King Jungcheon's reign: "The king appointed his son Yakro as a crown prince and declared an amnesty in the state."

42. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of King Seocheon's reign: "The king died and was buried in Seocheon-ji-won. He was named as King Seocheon."

43. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 9<sup>th</sup> year of King Bongsang's reign: "Changjoli knew that the king would not repent of his mistakes and feared that he would be harmed. So, he went out of the palace and consulted with another servants, and he dethroned the king and set Eulbul on the throne. The king killed himself because he could not avoid death, and his two sons killed themselves. The king was buried in Bongsan-ji-won. He was named as King Bongsang"; *Samguk-sagi*, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Micheon's reign: "In September... at last, they all dethroned the king together, put him in a separate room, and then surrounded him with soldiers. Then, they received the grandson of the king, and they offered the royal seal to him. He ascended to the throne."

### *From King Micheon to King Anwon*

King Micheon was the son of Dolgo, the brother of King Seocheon,<sup>44</sup> and of the same generation as King Bongsang. He was already mature or nearly so in 293 when his father was killed by King Bongsang<sup>45</sup> since records show that he escaped and worked as a hired man and a salt merchant<sup>46</sup> at that time. He would have therefore ascended the throne in his 20s or older, which means he was in his 50s or older when he died in 331.<sup>47</sup>

King Gogukwon became the crown prince in 314,<sup>48</sup> presumably in his 10s or older, when King Micheon was in his mid- to late 30s according to the analysis above. He became the king 17 years later, and was killed by Baekje's army in 371.<sup>49</sup> This indicates that he ascended the throne in his 20s or 30s, and died in his 60s or 70s.

King Sosurim became the crown prince in 355<sup>50</sup> when King Gogukwon is considered to have been in his 40s or 50s. If King Gogukwon had fathered King Sosurim between his late 10s and early 20s, King Sosurim would have been in his 30s when he became the crown prince, which is unusually late if this were the case. There are no records, however, indicating that King Sosurim's case was exceptional in any sense. One explanation may be that King Sosurim was not the eldest son and thus likely between his early 10s and early 20s in 355 just

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44. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Micheon's reign: "King Micheon's name was Eulbul. He was the son of Dolgo, gochuga, the son of King Seocheon."

45. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of King Bongsang's reign: "In September, the king killed his younger brother Dolgo because he thought Dolgo had a traitorous mind. People were sad because they knew Dolgo was innocent. Eulbul, the son of Dolgo, fled to the field."

46. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Micheon's reign: "For the first time, King Bongsang killed his younger brother Dolgo because he thought Dolgo had a traitorous mind. Eulbul the son of Dolgo was afraid that he would be harmed by the king, and he was secluded. At first, he was hired under Eummo, the man of the Village Susil...1 year later, he left Eummo's house and sold salt with Yeommo, the man of the Eastern Village."

47. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 32<sup>nd</sup> year of King Micheon's reign: "In February, the king died and was buried in Micheon-ji-won. He named as King Micheon."

48. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 15<sup>th</sup> year of King Micheon's reign: "In January, the king appointed his son Sayu as a crown prince."

49. *Samguk-sagi* 18, the 41<sup>st</sup> year of King Gogukwon's reign: "In October, the king of Baekje led 30,000 soldiers and attacked the Castle Pyeongyang. The king led the army and fought against them, hit by a flying arrow, and died on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the month. He was buried in Goguk-ji-won."

50. *Samguk-sagi* 18, the 25<sup>th</sup> year of King Gogukwon's reign: "In January, the king appointed his son Gubu as a crown prince."

like any other crown prince. King Sosurim was recorded as “King Gugukwon’s son”<sup>51</sup> without any specification of whether he was the first son or not; perhaps he had an elder brother who died at an early age. King Sosurim became the king 16 years later and died in 384.<sup>52</sup> In other words, he presumably ascended the throne between his late 20s and late 30s, and died sometime between his early 40s and early 50s.

King Gogukyang was recorded as the younger brother of King Sosurim.<sup>53</sup> However, as I will discuss later, his son King Gwanggaeto was born in 374, which indicates that King Gogukyang was already an adult with an 11-year-old son at the time of his enthronement in 384. Having a teenager son would usually place the father in his late 20s to early 30s in ancient societies; depending on when King Gogukyang fathered King Gwanggaeto, he may have been slightly older as well. At any rate, King Gogukyang died in 391<sup>54</sup> probably in his late 30s to mid-40s.

King Gwanggaeto died in 412.<sup>55</sup> Records state that he was 39 years old at that time;<sup>56</sup> hence he was born in 374. He became the crown prince in 386 when he was 13 years old.<sup>57</sup> He ascended the throne 5 years later in 391 at the age of 18.

King Jangsu was 98 years old at the time of his death<sup>58</sup> in 491, signaling that he was born in 394, which in turn means that King Gwanggaeto had him at the age of 21. He became the crown prince at the age of 15<sup>59</sup> in 408 and ascended the throne 14 years later at the age of 19 in 412.

51. *Samguk-sagi* 18, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Sosurim’s reign: “King Sosurim’s name was Gubu, and he was the son of King Gogukwon.”

52. *Samguk-sagi* 18, the 14<sup>th</sup> year of King Sosurim’s reign: “In November, the king died and was buried in Sosurim. He was named as King Sosurim.”

53. *Samguk-sagi* 18, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Gogukyang’s reign: “King Gogukyang’s name was Iryeon, and he was the younger brother of King Sosurim.”

54. *Samguk-sagi* 18, the 8<sup>th</sup> year of King Gogukyang’s reign: “In May, the king died and was buried in Gogukyang. He was named as King Gogukyang.”

55. *Samguk-sagi* 18, the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of King Gwanggaeto’s reign: “In October, the king died. He was named as King Gwanggaeto.”

56. *Monument of King Gwanggaeto*: “Because Heaven did not care for him, he died at the age of 39.”

57. *Samguk-sagi* 18, the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of King Gogukyang’s reign: “In January, the king appointed his son Damdeok as a crown prince.”

58. *Samguk-sagi* 18, the 79<sup>th</sup> year of King Jangsu’s reign: “In December, the king died at the age of 98. He was named as King Jangsu.”

59. *Samguk-sagi* 18, the 18<sup>th</sup> year of King Gwanggaeto’s reign: “In April, the king appointed his son Georyeon as a crown prince.”

King Munjamyong was King Jangsu's grandchild and the son of Joda, who was in charge of *gochu-daega*. Since Joda died early, King Munjamyong ascended the throne as the supreme grandson, i.e., the king's eldest grandson.<sup>60</sup> Joda does not seem to have been conferred the title of crown prince under King Jangsu's reign judging from references to him only as *gochu-daega* in contrast to mentions of King Munjamyong as the supreme grandson (I 2006, 18-19). Generally the first son became the crown prince; Joda is thus not considered to have been the first son of King Jangsu. This widens the possible age gap between King Jangsu and Joda to more than 20 years. Due to the long life of King Jangsu, however, Joda's age is difficult to estimate; likewise, the exact age of King Munjamyong is hard to determine without knowing when he became the supreme grandson. We do know, however, that King Munjamyong made his first son, Heungan (who later became King Anjang), the crown prince in 498,<sup>61</sup> so if Heungan had been in his mid-/late 10s to early 20s at this point, King Munjamyong would have been in his 30s to 40s. As King Munjamyong ascended the throne 6 years ago in 492 and died in 519,<sup>62</sup> a safe guess would be that he became king in his mid-/late 20s to mid-/late 30s and died in his early/mid-50s to early/mid-60s.

As mentioned above, King Anjang is considered to have been in his mid-/late 10s to early 20s when he became the crown prince in 498, which places his birth during the latter years of King Jangsu's reign, such as after the conquest of the Han River basin in 475. According to this timeline, he ascended the throne in his mid-/late 30s to early/mid-40s and was killed in 531<sup>63</sup> while in his late 40s to mid-50s.

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60. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Munjamyong's reign: "King Munjamyong's name was Naun, and he was the grandson of King Jangsu. His father's name was Joda, *gochu-daega*, who was the son of King Jangsu. Joda died earlier than King Jangsu. Then, King Jangsu raised him in the court, and appointed him as a supreme grandson. He ascended to the throne when his grandfather died in the 79<sup>th</sup> year of his reign."

61. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 7<sup>th</sup> year of King Munjamyong's reign: "In January, the king appointed his son Heungan as a crown prince"; *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Anjang's reign: "King Anjang's name was Heungan, and he was the eldest son."

62. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 28<sup>th</sup> year of King Munjamyong's reign: "The king died. He was named as King Munjamyong."

63. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 13<sup>th</sup> year of King Anjang's reign: "The king died. He was named as King Anjang"; *Nihon-shoki* 17: "*Baekje-bongi* written: 'Goguryeo people killed their king An this month.'"

King Anwon, the younger brother of King Anjang,<sup>64</sup> was younger than King Anjang at the time of his ascension in 531. He made his son Pyeongseong (who later became King Yangwon) the crown prince in 533.<sup>65</sup> As I will discuss more in detail later, Pyeongseong, the son of King Anwon's second wife, was under 3 years old at that time. King Anwon is believed to have hastened the proclamation of the crown prince in order to rally supporting forces (Kang 2018, 18-19). The fact that he did not wait for his first wife to give birth to a son shows that King Anwon was already advanced in years by the time of the proclamation as was the case with King Sansang. He would have been in his mid-30s or older when Pyeongseong became the crown prince, which puts him in his early to late 30s or older when he ascended to the throne in 531 and in his late 40s or older at his death in 545.<sup>66</sup>

### *From King Yangwon to King Bojang*

*Baekje-bongi* of *Nihon-shoki*—a history book written by the people of Baekje—records that King Yangwon was 8 years old when King Anwon died in 545.<sup>67</sup> This information, however, is hard to believe: since King Anwon proclaimed his heir to the throne in 533, 12 years before dying, King Yangwon had to be 13 or older at the time of his enthronement, which produces a 5-year difference from what is written in *Baekje-bongi*. More importantly, placing him as 8 years old in 545 does not add up with the timeline of subsequent events: King Yangwon made his first son, Yangseong (who later became King Pyeongwon), the crown prince

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64. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Anwon's reign: "When King Anjang died in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, he had no son. So, the king ascended to the throne."

65. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of King Anwon's reign: "In January, the king appointed his son Pyeongseong as a crown prince."

66. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 15<sup>th</sup> year of King Anwon's reign: "In March, the king died. He was named as King Anwon."

67. *Nihon-shoki* 19: "*Beckje-bongi* written: 'In Goguryeo, on the Day *gabo* of December, Chugun and Segun fought in the gate of royal palace with beating drums. When Segun was defeated, they did not dismiss army for three days. Then, Chugun killed most of Segun's offspring. On the Day *musul* of this month, King Anwon died'; *Nihon-shoki* 19: "*Beckje-bongi* written: 'On the Day *byeongo* of January, Goguryeo people set a son of King's second wife on the throne. He was 8 years old. Goguryeo's king had 3 wives. The legal wife had no son. His second wife gave birth to a son. His mother's parents' home was Chugun. The king's third wife also gave birth to a son. His mother's parents' home was Segun. As soon as the king fell into a critical condition. Chugun and Segun, each tried to set their own son on the throne. As a result, more than 2,000 people were killed in Segun's group.'"

in 557.<sup>68</sup> King Yangwon would have been 20 years old, and Yangseong would have been 5 at most, if King Yangwon were indeed 8 years old in 545. But King Pyeongwon designated his son as the crown prince in 565,<sup>69</sup> which means that King Pyeongwon had a son in his early 10s and that King Yangwon, if still alive, would have become a grandfather at the age of 28, which does not make sense.

In this regard, it is unlikely that King Yangwon was 8 years old when he ascended the throne; considering the fierce conflicts surrounding his succession of the throne, however, he would not have reached adulthood yet either. A more likely timeline is that King Yangwon ascended the throne when he was younger than 15, the age regarded as mature in traditional societies (Kang 2017, 262), and became the crown prince when he was 3 years old or younger. If so, King Yangwon would have been 15 years old or younger when he ascended the throne in 545 and 29 years old or younger when he died in 559.<sup>70</sup>

As mentioned above, King Pyeongwon became the crown prince in 557 when he was likely in his early 10s or younger, given that his father, King Yangwon, was under 27. Thus King Pyeongwon presumably ascended the throne in his mid-10s in 559 and died in his mid-/late 40s or younger in 590.<sup>71</sup>

King Yeongyang, King Pyeongwon's first son,<sup>72</sup> became the crown prince in 565. King Pyeongwon was in his early/mid-20s or younger at that time, making it highly likely that King Yeongyang was under 10 years old in 565. This would mean that King Yeongyang ascended the throne in his mid-30s in 590 and died in his early 60s or younger in 618.<sup>73</sup>

As King Yeongryu is recorded as King Yeongyang's younger half-brother,<sup>74</sup> he was younger than King Yeongyang at the time of his ascension in 618. In

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68. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 13<sup>th</sup> year of King Yangwon's reign: "In April, the king appointed his son Yangseong as a crown prince."

69. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 7<sup>th</sup> year of King Pyeongwon's reign: "In January, the king appointed his son Won as a crown prince."

70. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 15<sup>th</sup> year of King Yangwon's reign: "In March, the king died. He was named as King Yangwon."

71. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 32<sup>nd</sup> year of King Pyeongwon's reign: "In October, the king died. He was named as King Pyeongwon."

72. *Samguk-sagi* 20, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yeongyang's reign: "King Yeongyang's name was Won. He was the eldest son of King Pyeongwon."

73. *Samguk-sagi* 20, the 29<sup>th</sup> year of King Yeongyang's reign: "In September, the king died. He was named as King Yeongyang."

74. *Samguk-sagi* 20, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yeongryu's reign: "King Yeongryu's name was Geonmu. He was a half brother of King Yeongyang."

640, King Yeongryu sent the crown prince, Hwankwon, to the Tang dynasty,<sup>75</sup> supposedly to advance the relationship between Tang and Goguryeo, which implies that he was old enough to perform that role. This also means that King Yeongryu had a mature son by then. Considering King Yeongyang’s age at the time of his death, King Yeongryu would have been in his 30s to 40s or older when he came to the throne and in his 50s to 60s or older when he was killed by Yeon-gaesomun in 642.<sup>76</sup>

King Bojang was the son of Daeyang, who was the brother of King Yeongryu.<sup>77</sup> According to *Nihon-shoki*, King Yeongryu’s younger brother-prince died in 641<sup>78</sup>—i.e., Daeyang. Based on the estimation of King Yeongryu’s age, Daeyang died at 40 to 50 years old, which would make it likely that King Bojang, his son, was an adult when he ascended the throne in 642. Alternatively, it is possible that King Bojang was a young king. King Bojang is recorded only as “the son of Daeyang,” and Yeon-gaesomun, who seized power from the beginning of King Bojang’s reign, may have placed a son of Daeyang who had not yet reached adulthood as king to reinforce his power. In short, it is highly probable that King Bojang was 15 years old or younger when he ascended the throne. He would have been 40 years old or younger when Goguryeo was destroyed in 668 and in his early to mid-50s at the time of his death in 682.<sup>79</sup>

The following table is a summary of what I have examined so far.

**Table 1.** The Age and Lifespan of the Kings of Goguryeo

King-title	Year of Birth	Age at the Time of Enthronement	Period of Reign	Year of Death	Lifespan	Note
Dongmyeongseong	B.C. 58	22	19 years	B.C. 19	40	
Yurimyong	B.C. 37	19	36 years & 1 month	18	55	

75. *Samguk-sagi* 20, the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of King Yeongryu’s reign: “In February, Hwankwon the crown prince went to the Tang Dynasty. Emperor Taizong comforted him and gave him a generous gift.”

76. *Samguk-sagi* 20, the 25<sup>th</sup> year of King Yeongryu’s reign: “Yeon-gaesomun killed the king.”

77. *Samguk-sagi* 21, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Bojang’s reign: “King’s name was Jang. He had no posthumous name because Goguryeo fell. He was the son of Daeyang, the younger brother of King Geonmu.”

78. *Nihon-shoki* 24: “Goguryeo’s envoy replied: ‘Last June, the king’s younger brother died. In September, Yeon-gaesomun, a grand government official, killed the king with more than 180 people including Iligeosesa. Then, he set Daeyang’s son on the throne.’”

79. *Jiu-tangshu* 199.1: “Bojang died in the 1st year of Yongchun.”



Daemusin	4	15	26 years	44	41	
Minjung	5-30	15-41	less than 4 years	48	19-44	
Mobon	31-35	14-18	more than 5 years	53	19-23	Killed
Taejo	47	7	93 years & 1 month	165	119	Abdicated throne in 146
Chadae	71	76	18 years & 10 months	165	95	Killed
Sindae	89	77	14 years & 2 months	179	91	
Gogukcheon	150s or earlier	20s or older	17 years & 5 months	197	40s or older	
Sansang	170s or earlier	20s or older	30 years	227	50s or older	
Dongcheon	209	19	21 years & 4 months	248	40	
Jungcheon	224	25	22 years & 1 month	270	47	
Seocheon	240s	late 20s-early 30s	22	292	early to mid-50s	
Bongsang	260s-270s or earlier	20s-30s or older	8 years	300	20s-30s or older	Committed suicide
Micheon	280s	20s or older	30 years & 5 months	331	50s or older	
Gogukwon	300s-310s	20s-30s	40 years & 8 months	371	60s-70s	Died in a battle
Sosurim	330s-340s	late 20s-early 30s	13 years & 1 month	384	early 40s-early 50s	
Gogukyang	340s-350s	late 20s-early to mid-30s	7 years & 6 months	391	mid- to late 30s-late to mid-40s	
Gwanggaeto	374	18	21 years & 5 months	412	39	
Jangsu	394	19	79 years & 2 months	491	98	
Munjamyong	450s-460s	mid-to late 20s-mid-to late 30s	more than 28 years	519	early to mid-50s-early to mid-60s	
Anjang	475 or later	mid- to late 30s -early 40s	12 years	531	late 40s-mid-50s	
Anwon	500s or later	early to mid-30s or older	13 years & 10 months	545	mid- to late 40s or older	
Yangwon	530s	15 or younger	14 years	559	29 or younger	

Pyeongwon	540s	mid-10s or younger	31 years & 7 months	590	mid- to late 40s or younger	
Yeongyang	550s or later	younger than mid-30s	27 years & 11 months	618	younger than early 60s	
Yeongryu	560s-570s or later	older than 30s-40s	24 years & 1 month	642	50s-60s	
Bojang	earlier than 627	younger than 15	25 years & 11 months	682	younger than early to mid-50s	Goguryeo was destroyed in 668

\* The lifespan and ages of the kings at the time of enthronement were calculated according to the system used in Korea. The period of reign was calculated using the international system.

\*\* A.D. was omitted.

The following section analyzes these results in relation to the social and political situations of Goguryeo.

## The King's Age and the Political Situation in Goguryeo

Since the king played a central role in his kingdom in pre-modern East Asian societies, theoretically—and likely in reality as well—his lifespan had an impact on the political administration of the state. In this section I will examine parts of Goguryeo history that the findings summarized in Table 1 shed light on.

The first thing that stands out is that the kings tended to come to the throne at a mature age and die at an age considered average for them at that time. With the exceptions of King Taejo, King Yangwon, King Pyeongwon, and King Bojang, most of the kings were adults at the time of their enthronement. Many of them also lived out their natural lives, considering that the life expectancy of the kings of Goryeo and Joseon was around 40 to 50 years. Only three kings appear to have died before the age of 40 after King Sindae: King Bongsang, King Gwanggaeto, and King Yangwon. Their premature deaths, however, would not have caused upheaval since King Bongsang committed suicide after being removed, and King Gwanggaeto and Yangwon had adult heirs at the time of their deaths. To put it differently, the kings of Goguryeo, usually crowned at a mature age, died with successors who could by then take care of state affairs. Royal authority could be maintained steadily as a result. From a broader standpoint, the history of Goguryeo is made up less by sudden, noticeable social changes than by slow, systematic changes occurring over time

in an overall stable society. The most striking example is the law. In the latter half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Goguryeo was ruled based on the legal system of the Qin-Han dynasty (Yeo 2013, 93; Hong 2013, 98-104). Whereas the Chinese legal system had been renewed since the invention of the Taishi Law Code (267), Goguryeo maintained its previous system for a century. Rites of the state in Goguryeo display the same tendency: foreign culture was accommodated slowly while the existing system was maintained for a certain period. One reason behind this tendency may be that a homogeneous ethnic group continued to be the ruling class (Kang 2015, 192-95). The influence of the lifespan of the kings, however, should not be overlooked. Bringing about gradual change in a society kept stable would have been difficult had many kings died early and left behind young sovereigns in their wake.

Another thing to note is that the period of state reformation and longevity of the reigning kings coincide. Scholars generally agree that royal authority in Goguryeo was gradually reinforced when Gungnae was the capital. Political power became increasingly centralized particularly from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century to the early 4<sup>th</sup> century. For example, a unitary official rank system was created, and the king could send assigned government officials to each district. In the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, King Sosurim carried out various social reforms including establishing *taehak*, accepting Buddhism, and issuing a decree. Such changes were no doubt possible due to the strong royal authority.

Goguryeo between the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, however, was not peaceful enough to guarantee smooth progress. The king had limited control over the state domestically, and the system of royal succession was not stabilized. Conspiracies and revolts consequently took place often. Table 2 below summarizes relevant events based on the records of *Samguk-sagi* and *Nihon-shoki*.

**Table 2.** Conspiracies and Revolts

Time (A.D.)	King-title	Year/Month of Reign	Leader's Name	Result	Note
53	Mobon	6/November	Duro	Killed the king	Enthronement of King Taejo
165	Chadae	20/October	Myeongnim-dapbu	Killed the king	Enthronement Of King Sindae
190-191	Gogukcheon	12/September-13/April	Jwagaryeo	Suppressed	

198	Sansang	1/Unknown	Balgi, King's older brother	Suppressed	
248	Jungcheon	1/November	Yemul and Sagu, king's younger brothers	Suppressed	
286	Seocheon	17/February	Ilu and Sobal, king's younger brothers	Suppressed	
300	Bongsang	9/September	Changjoli	Deposed the king	Enthronement Of King Micheon
531	Anjang	13/Unknown	Anti-group Of King Anjang	Killed the king	Enthronement of King Anwon
545	Anwon	15/Unclear	Chugun and Segun	Victory of Chugun	Enthronement Of King Yangwon
557	Yangwon	13/September	Ganjuli		
642	Yeongryu	25/September	Yeon-gaesomun	Killed the king	Enthronement of King Bojang

\* Successful political upheavals are included.

The table above shows that 5 out of a total of 11, or nearly half of the events, occurred between the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century and early 4<sup>th</sup> century, although minor inaccuracies may exist given the scarcity of ancient Korean historical records.

The international situation was unstable as well. After the collapse of the Later Han dynasty and the development of the Three Empires period in China, Western Jin unified China for a while, but the peripheries were getting increasingly nervous. Goguryeo, which was geographically close to the Chinese dynasty, could not stay free from the ripples of confusion. When Balgi revolted at the time of King Sansang's ascension, the forces of Gongsun, who was a warlord of Liaodong, intervened.<sup>80</sup> During the reign of King Dongcheon, the capital was invaded and conquered by Wu Qiu Jian, the governor of Youzhou;<sup>81</sup>

80. *Samguk-sagi* 16, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Sansang's reign: "When Balgi was in difficult situation, he ran away to Liaodong with his family and met Gongsun Duo, the ruler of Liaodong. Balgi said... If you give me 30,000 soldiers to attack them, I will be able to suppress the rebellion. Gongsun Duo followed with his word"; *Sanguozhi* 30: "In the years of Jian, Gongsun Kang's army attacked Goguryeo. Goguryeo's capital was destroyed, and villages burned."

81. *Sanguozhi* 28: "In the years of Zhengshi, Wu Qiu Jian attacked Goguryeo along various roads with 10,000 soldiers from Xuantu because Goguryeo people rebelled many times."

under King Jungcheon, the Wei dynasty invaded Goguryeo;<sup>82</sup> during King Seocheon's time, Sushen plundered a village located near the border;<sup>83</sup> and under the reign of King Bongsang, King Seocheon's son, the Murong group of the Xianbei invaded Goguryeo twice after gathering forces in the area of Liaodong.<sup>84</sup>

Of course, turmoil both domestically and internationally may have contributed to the unification of the people of Goguryeo as well as to the centralization of political power. Even so, a centripetal force—royal authority—is needed to carry out change, such as state reforms in the case of Goguryeo, amidst social instability. It is worth noting again here that all the kings who ruled in the time of reformation ascended the throne after reaching adulthood and died when their successors were old enough to take over the state. As a result, various reforms could be accomplished in spite of unfavorable surrounding circumstances.

The suppression of the conspiracies and revolts are also cases in point. With the exception of King Bongsang, who repeatedly abused his power, all the kings who managed to suppress the revolts were old enough at the time of the event: King Gogukcheon was over 30, King Sansang was over 20, King Jungcheon was 25, and King Seocheon was over 40. If they had been younger, they might have failed to suppress the revolt; even if they had managed to suppress it, confusion in other areas of the state could have ensued due to their young age and consequent lack of control.

The next point to note is that the kings who reigned in the time of decline

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82. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 12<sup>th</sup> year of King Jungcheon's reign: "In December, the king hunted in Dunul-ji-gok. The army of Yuchi Kai, the general of Wei dynasty, attacked us. The king selected 5,000 elite cavalry. They battled in Yangmaek-ji-gok, then our troop won and killed more than 8,000 soldiers."

83. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 11<sup>th</sup> year of King Seocheon's reign: "Sushen invaded a border area, killed people of that place... Then, the king made Dalga to attack them. Dalga attacked them and destroyed the Castle Danro, killing their chief, and moving 600 to 700 houses to the Ocheon of southern Buyeo. He surrendered 6 to 7 villages."

84. *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of King Bongsang's reign: "In August, Murong Hui's army attacked. The king went to the New Castle to escape the enemy, and the procession of the king came to the Goklim. Murong Hui knew that the king had escaped and sent troops to chase him. The enemy was about to arrive, and the king feared the enemy. At that time, Go-noja, the governor of new castle and *sohyeong* of Northern division, led 500 elite cavalry. His army attacked and defeated them when they encountered the enemy"; *Samguk-sagi* 17, the 5<sup>th</sup> year of King Bongsang's reign: "Murong Hui's army invaded. they came to the Gogukwon and saw King Seocheon's royal tomb. Murong Hui let the people dig up the royal tomb. However, He was afraid of ghost because people died by blast and there was a sound of music in a pit. So, he retreated with his army."

present opposite traits to the kings mentioned above. This is evident in historical records of the political situations from the late 6<sup>th</sup> century onward. For example, *daedaero*, the highest rank of the state administration, was not appointed by the king but elected by aristocrats.<sup>85</sup> Although the term of the position of *daedaero* became predetermined later, the king still could not exert any influence on its election.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, important tasks of the state were handled by the top five government officials,<sup>87</sup> which is why the political system during this time is called the aristocratic coalition regime. Such arrangements demonstrate the relative weakness of the king's power during this period.

There is a disagreement as to whether the aristocratic coalition regime actually existed. Records in Chinese historical materials, however, show that royal authority was indeed restricted while aristocratic power became stronger in contrast (No 1999, 437-44). Since the Chinese history book *Zhoushu*, which contains records of the earliest period during the latter days of Goguryeo, writes of the circumstances of the Northern Zhou period (ibid. 557-81),<sup>88</sup> the abovementioned situations are thought to have occurred after King Yangwon's enthronement (Kang 2017, 263-64). Similar records can be found in *Gaoliji*, which was written based on Chen Dade's report during the reign of King Yeongryu. Thus, the same political situation had evidently held for nearly a century, from King Yangwon to King Yeongryu's reign.

Significantly, young kings appeared in tandem with the beginning of the decline of royal authority. For instance, King Yangwon, who was underage when he was crowned, entered a political stage that had already started to fluctuate: King Anjang was killed; King Anwon, who was crowned upon his death, also

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85. *Zhoushu* 41: "The highest government official is *daedaero*... The king can't appoint *daedaero* because strong aristocrat argue and take over the public office and was appointed it to himself."

86. *Jiu-tangshu* 199.1: "The highest government official is *daedaero*, which is compared to the first class of Tang's government official. *Daedaero* discusses the affairs of the state. The term of *daedaero* is 3 years, but if they do their duties, there is no limit to the term. When replacing *daedaero*, if people cannot accept the decision, they will all attack each other with army, and the person who win this battle becomes the next *daedaero*. The king simply closes the palace, defends himself, and does not control such a situation."

87. *Hanyuan*: "Written in *Gaoliji*: "There are 9 classes of government officials in the state. The highest government official is *tojol* which is compared to the first class of Tang's government official. Its past name is *daedaero*... The 5 government officials mentioned so far are responsible for the important tasks of the state such as changing the agenda, mobilizing army, and giving government post."

88. *Zhoushu* 41: "This is all that has been written at that time, and I have filled in what was missing through this record."

died in the dispute over the succession to the throne. As a result, King Yangwon ascended the throne amidst political turmoil. Even a mature man would have found it difficult to handle such political chaos, let alone a young king.

The later years of King Yangwon's predecessor, King Anwon, did not see a complete victory of one group over its rivaling forces, and King Yangwon came to the throne after a close match between two antagonistic groups, Chugun and Segun. Political tension thus likely remained even after the enthronement of a king that was not old enough to mediate the two groups and reinforce royal authority. One of the outcomes was the election of the highest rank of state administration by aristocrats instead of being appointed by the king. In other words, the young king played a part in the establishment of the so-called aristocratic coalition regime. King Yangwon may have attempted to take the reins after reaching adulthood, but existing power structures would have been hard to dismantle, and external events such as the invasion of Turks and the loss of the Han River territory only compounded the situation.

The case of King Pyeongwon is not much different from that of his father. King Pyeongwon is estimated to have been in his mid-10s or less when he was crowned, an age far from mature. His young age would not have been a problem in a period of stability, but his enthronement was right after Ganjuli's revolt. Furthermore, King Pyeongwon seems to have lacked the power to break the new ruling system that had already taken root during King Yangwon's time.

Individually speaking, the two kings possessed the capacity to become powerful kings. King Yangwon was said to have been intelligent and wise from childhood;<sup>89</sup> King Pyeongwon allegedly was bold and good at horseback riding and archery.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, they had no choice under the then power structure but to accommodate the power of the aristocrats.

Thus, the aristocratic coalition regime became settled during the reign of the two kings. King Yeongyang, although mature at the point of his ascension to the throne and not lacking in ambition,<sup>91</sup> apparently found it hard to change the power structure. The comment made by Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty

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89. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yangwon's reign: "He was intelligent and wise from childhood, and when he reached adulthood, he became a magnanimous man than others."

90. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Pyeongwon's reign: "He was good at horseback riding and archery."

91. *Samguk-sagi* 19, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Yeongyang's reign: "He had an imposing appearance and considered it his duty to make people comfortable and to save the world."

in 612 on Goguryeo's political situation sums it up well: "the powerful vassals and local forces are controlling the state's management and forming faction."<sup>92</sup>

In sum, the age of the king had an impact on the political situations of the state after mid-6<sup>th</sup> century. Becoming a sovereign at a young age made it hard for them to efficiently exercise power. In that sense, the fact that King Jangsu purged the high vassal and powerful political groups can be seen from a new angle.<sup>93</sup> In 472, King Gaero wrote to Emperor Xianwen of the Northern Wei dynasty explaining that King Jangsu was being oppressive. Recall that King Munjamyong was born around the 450s to 460s. King Jangsu was reaching eighty at that time, older than most people, while his grandson—his heir—was still too young. He therefore seems to have severely suppressed the forces that might threaten his grandson in the future, similar to how Emperor Hongwu of the Ming dynasty purged a considerable number of the founding contributor groups to help his own grandson (who later became Emperor Jianwen) rule free from opposition.

## Conclusion

The king's lifespan or age affected the political situation of Goguryeo considerably. The reason why Goguryeo gradually centralized its political power despite the problems from inside and outside the state from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> to early 4<sup>th</sup> century is because the kings ascended the throne at a mature age and died after securing an heir. Likewise, the reason why royal authority declined and the aristocrats gained power after the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century is also because the kings were too young to seize hegemony. Additionally, when we look at the history of Goguryeo as a whole, the country was able to introduce changes while maintaining its societal system because most of the kings were crowned after reaching adulthood.

In short, in the history of Goguryeo, the lifespan and age of the king

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92. *Suishu* 4: "the royal message says: ...Also, Goguryeo has severe laws and heavy tax. The powerful vassals and local forces are controlling the state's management and forming faction."

93. *Weishu* 100: "Also he says: now Goguryeo was wrecked because Georyeon sinned. He purged the high vassal and powerful political groups. Goguryeo people fell into extreme distress because his sin was full and his vice piled up."



cannot be neglected. The fundamental reason is because the king was the center of the state in the pre-modern age. In the Later Han period, with the exception of the initial stages, the king's maternal relatives meddled in politics and caused political confusion. One of the reasons for this is that the emperors were crowned at an early age, died young, or did not have a son. To further theorize the relationship between the king's lifespan/age and the political situation, the cases of Baekje and Silla need to be examined. In particular, the middle age (*jungdae*) of Silla needs to be investigated first, since we know for certain the time of birth and death of the kings who ruled in that period. This remains a future task.

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**KANG Jin Won** (liechten@hanmail.net) is an assistant professor at the history education department of Seowon University. Kang studied Korean ancient history with a focus on ritual and culture. His articles include "Goguryeo Sumyo-bi geonlip ui yeonheok gwa baekyeong" (2016) and "Silla Hadae Jongmyo wa Yeoljo Wonseong-wang" (2017).

## Abstract

This paper examines the lifespan of the kings of Goguryeo and presents the following findings: first, the kings of Goguryeo tended to be mature when crowned and have lifespans average for them, which ensured the succession of an heir capable of managing state affairs. Royal authority could thus be maintained steadily. Second, the kings reigning during state reformations ascended the throne after reaching adulthood and died late in life, when their successors were old enough to take over the state. Successful social reform was consequently possible even amidst undesirable situations. Third, the kings who reigned in the time of decline present opposite traits from the kings who undertook social reforms. The age of the king also influenced the political situation after mid-6<sup>th</sup> century. Young kings found it difficult to efficiently exercise power. In short, the lifespan and age of the kings played a crucial role in the history of Goguryeo, because the king was the center of the state during the pre-modern age.

**Keywords:** Goguryeo, lifespan, crown prince, enthronement, aristocratic coalition regime