

Historical Crisis Committee



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Crisis: The Mongol Invasion of Japan (1274-1281)



Introduction:

Welcome to the Historical Crisis Committee (HCC) at THAIMUN VIII! This is a committee like no other. You will be resolving a crisis after crisis yet in a historical context.

As delegates, you will represent a key historical figure from the time period, you will engage in a 'verbal war' with the opposing side, all the while reacting to the ever-changing crises your chairs will hurl at you. While in the HCC committee you will represent the sides and perspective of your historical figure and make decisions as if you were that person.

In this conference we will explore the Mongol Invasion of Japan (1274 - 1281), therefore your knowledge of what happened is crucial to playing your role effectively.

Important Note: The first day of the committee session (March 27, 2021) will be set on November 2nd 1274 - the start of the first invasion.

Summary:

The Mongol Invasion of Japan lasted from 1274 to 1281 CE. During which, numerous attempts of diplomacy were made, typhoons killed thousands, and ultimately, this invasion went down as one of the biggest blunders in history for the Mongol Empire.

During the 13th century, the Mongol Empire was colossal, unstoppable and ruthless, stretching across almost all of Eurasia. Japan, on the other hand, was isolated and comparatively miniscule.

Kublai Khan (grandson of Genghis Khan), the leader at the time, had its eyes on Japan for a multitude of reasons; it's gold, to eliminate trade, acquire a new well-equipped army, and to enhance his prestige.

From 1268-1274 the Khan tried diplomacy, but the Japanese Shogunate dismissed it. So, in early November of 1274, the Khan sent a fleet of 900 ships which tore through small islands off the coast of mainland Japan, and pushed through the Japanese defense at Hakata Bay.

But then they stopped advancing. Instead, the Mongol forces pulled out of Hakata Bay and returned home. Some say they didn't have enough supplies, others say the whole invasion was a reconnaissance mission. Either way, before leaving Hakata Bay, the fleet was obliterated by a storm.

Subsequently, the Khan sent an embassy to Japan in 1275 (yet again) urging for diplomatic ties to be fostered again in 1275. This time, the Japanese Shogunate responded by beheading the whole embassy. Two years later in June, the Khan launched his second, this time much bigger, invasion consisting of 4,400 ships and over 100,000 soldiers.

But ever since the first invasion of 1274, the Japanese had been preparing for a second invasion and held their positions formidably when the Mongol fleet arrived.

After months of fighting, the Khan sent over 40,000 new soldiers, but just before the Mongols could push any further into the Japanese mainland, *another* storm destroyed most of the Mongol fleet and killed an alarming 100,000 soldiers.

What was left of the fleet returned home. There would be no more attempts to invade Japan thereafter.

Background Information

Japan in the 13th century was a period of disorder and political dissonance. On the surface, the imperial house of Yamato still remains the absolute power as the divine ruler of Japan. However, the de facto head of state was actually the Kamakura shogunate, or more precisely: *Minamoto no Yoritomo* who was the first head of the Kamakura house. The defining features of this time period include the emergence of the Samurai, the warrior caste, the establishment of feudalism in Japan and most importantly: **The Mongol Invasion of Japan**. On the other hand, westward of Japan, a grand civilisation is flourishing and prospering at an extremely rapid rate, assimilating all nations into its empire. Kublai Khan came into power in 1264, by which, the *Mogol* empire already ruled from the Pacific Ocean to the Caspian Sea following the empire's successive military victory in Europe and Mainland Asia which included Poland, Kievan Rus and Baghdad. Soon after the three-party Toluid Civil War ended in 1264, Kublai assumed power as the Khan of the Mongol Empire and they set their army's sight eastward to Japan.

Japanese philosophy and organisation

As mentioned before, the Kamakura period marks the transition to a land-based economy and a concentration of advanced military technologies, which consequently started a whole caste of warriors, *the Samurai*. Shogunate (Lords) demanded the loyal services of vassals known as *Daimyo*, which were rewarded with fiefs and lands. The newly created government of the Kamakura Shogunate is the *bakufu* and was modelled after the Fujiwara house government form, which includes an administrative board and a board of samurai retainers. However, despite an initially strong base of supporters and a solid organisational structure, Shogun Yoritomo failed to consolidate the leadership of his family on a long lasting basis. This resulted in numerous political problems for the Shogunate including a civil war between great family clans. This disorganisation also served to hinder the Japanese war effort during the Invasion by the Mongol.

The Change in the philosophy of the Kamakura period can also be accounted for by the teaching of new Buddhism, replacing “Kyu Bukkyo” or Japan’s old buddhism. As a result, this new teaching evolved into a “cultic centre” and created a temple hierarchy that inspired “Bushido teaching” or Samurai’s code of conduct, this is a great boost of Japanese’s army morale and is one of the factors of Japanese’s victory.

Definition of key terms:

| <u>Key Terms</u> | <u>Definition</u> |
|------------------------------|---|
| Southern Song Dynasty | Imperial dynasty of China beginning in 960 and lasting until 1279. Was founded by Emperor Taizu of Song and was eventually conquered by the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty in 1279. |
| Kamakura Shogunate | Military government of Japan during the Kamakura period (1185-1133). Kamakura shogunate was established by Minamoto no Yoritomo after victory in the Genpei War. |
| Samurai | Hereditary military officers from early-modern Japan ranging from the 12th century to the 1870s. Were seen as having high prestige and privileges such as wearing two swords. |
| Yuan Dynasty | Successor state to the Mongol Empire after its division and ruling dynasty of China established by Kublai Khan beginning in 1271 and lasting until 1368. |

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| |  <p>The infographic features a map of the Yuan Dynasty territory in dark green, covering parts of East and Central Asia. To the right, a vertical panel contains the following information: 'Emperor Kublai Khan' with a portrait of Kublai Khan; 'Dynasty: Yuan' with a small green square; '1289' in a large font; and 'Flag:' with a small flag icon.</p> |
| <p>International relation</p> | <p>Peaceful dialogue and diplomatic interaction of member states and government organizations ranging on topics such as politics, security, and economics.</p> |
| <p>Shogunate</p> | <p>Hereditary military dictatorship of Japan (1192-1867). Shogun legally answered to the emperor however as Japan evolved into conflict military control became more pervasive.</p> |
| <p>Kublai Khan</p> | <p>Also known as Emperor Shizu of Yuan was the fifth khagan of the Mongolian empire (1260-1294). Kublai Khan was the founder of the Yuan dynasty and was the first Yuan emperor until his death in 1294. Kublai Khan was the grandson of Genghis Khan.</p> |
| <p>Hakata Bay</p> | <p>Bay in the northwestern part of Fukuoka city, on the Japanese island of Kyushu. The bay is perhaps the most famous for the Mongol invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1281 during the Battle of Hakata Bay.</p> |
| <p>Mongolian Empire</p> | <p>Was one of the largest land empires in history peaking during the 13th and 14th century after being founded by Genghis Khan in 1206. By the time of Kublai Khan's death in 1294 the empire spanned 23,500,000 km².</p> |

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| <p>Kamikaze Typhoon</p> | <p>Japanese for “divine wind” were two wind storms that are said to have saved Japan from two Mongol fleets operating under Kublai Khan by destroying the fleet.</p> |

Timeline of Major Events:

- **1266:** Kublai Khan sent messengers to Japan demanding Japan become apart of the Mongolian empire and send soldiers under a threat of conflict. There was no answer
- **1268:** Kublai Khan sent a second set of messengers still with no answer from Japanese Defense Commissioner Chinzei Bugyo.
- **1269-1272:** Kublai Khan continued to send messengers however were not permitted to land in Kyushu, Japan.
- **1274:** Kublai planned for the Mongolian fleet to attack Tushima and Iki island before reaching Hakata Bay.
- **November 2nd, 1274 (Invasion of Tsush):** Mongolian invasion forces leave from Korea and may head towards Tsushima Island.
- **November 5th, 1274):** Mongolian fleet opens archery fire on the Japanese army securing victory of Komoda and taking the next several days to secure control of Tsushima.
- **November 13th, 1274 (Invasion of Iki):** Yan fleet departed Tushima and attacked Iki island. The governor of Iki, Kagetaka, put up a strong defense however was eventually defeated.
- **November 19th, 1274 (Landing in Hakata Bay):** Yuan fleet landed in Hakata Bay,
- **November 20th, 1274 (Battle of Bun’ei):** first recorded battle in Hakata Bay. Both the Yuan’s and the Japanese forces were estimated to be around 3,000 people each. The battle lasted only a day of fighting. By nightfall the Yuan forces

had forced the Japanese soldiers off of the beach driving them several kilometers inland.

- **November 21st, 1274 (Yuan forces disappear):** Yuan ships disappeared. Japanese reports state there was a sudden wind reverse from the east that blew back the Yuan fleet. An estimated 50 Yuan soldiers and sailors were stuck on the beach from the storm who were then executed.
- **1275:** Kublai Khan sent five messengers to Kyushu who refused to leave without response. The messengers were then beheaded.
- **July 29th, 1279:** Kublai Khan sent five more Yuan messengers all of which were beheaded this time in Hakata.
- **1280:** Kublai Khan held a conference in his summer palace to discuss plans for the second invasion of Japan
- **1281:** Orders for the attacks on Tsushima and Iki were ordered and two fleets were prepared.
- **June 9th and June 14th, 1281:** Eastern route army attacked Tsushima and Iki island
- **June 25th, 1281:** Eastern route army split their forces and simultaneously attacked Hakata and Nagato Province however were driven off and forced to return to Iki
- **August 12th, 1281 (stalemate at Hakata):** Japanese forces repeated their small raids on the invasion fleet however the Mongols reciprocated with stronger forces with time eventually defeating the Japanese defense.
- **August 15th, 1281:** Japanese typhoon, Kamikaze, struck the Mongolian fleet and destroyed it, an estimated 100,000 soldiers died and many ships were destroyed,
- **1281-1290:** Mongolian empire began to deteriorate following the loss of its navy and major defense strategy and not being able to claim more land.

Useful information:

- General overview of the Mongol Invasion of Japan:
<https://www.ancient.eu/article/1415/the-mongol-invasions-of-japan-1274--1281-ce/>
- In Depth overview of Kublai Khan:
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kublai-Khan>
- Kamikaze winds overview from National Geographic:
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/11/141104-kamikaze-kublai-khan-winds-typhoon-japan-invasion/>

Works Cited:

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- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol_invasions_of_Japan
- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kublai-Khan>