The kingdoms of China were the last, greatest, longest, and most difficult of all the Mongol conquests. Indeed, “It began before any other major Mongol conquest of sedentary civilizations and continued long after the others had been completed.” All told, from Chinggis Khan’s earliest skirmishes with the Tanguts in 1205 and the Jin in 1206 to the final massive naval battle between Yuan and Song forces in March 1279, the conquest was accomplished over seven decades of intermittent, piecemeal prosecution punctuated by brief and intense offensives with cavalry, infantry, mechanical artillery, and (in the last decade) warships.

**THE MONGOLS’ GREATEST STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL ADVANTAGES: MOBILITY AND SWIFTNESS**

In his gratuitously harsh review of Timothy May’s *The Mongol Art of War*, Denis Sinor criticized May’s comparison of the swift and mobile warfare of the Mongols with Germany’s Blitzkrieg. “Contrary to his [May’s] view,” Sinor wrote in 2007, “I think that the idea of the Blitzkrieg of World War II is basically different from the Mongol concept of warfare. What characterized the long-range Mongol campaigns was slow advance that could take years preceding the final onslaught.” But May was not arguing that the Mongols were seldom, if ever, careful and methodical in planning their campaigns:

Sinor confuses long-term strategy with short-term tactical execution, and May is essentially right at the tactical level. Strategically, Qubilai Khan was a careful man who had a long-term planning horizon, and it took him thirty years of trying before he finally conquered all of China in 1279. But the final concerted campaigns against Song China, when they did come in the mid to late 1270s, were indeed executed very swiftly. Mongol Yuan battles waged against Song China during this time were swift and decisive engagements in which mobility was an indispensable factor and signal contribution to victory.
What is more, Sinor implicitly and teleologically assumed that the Mongols always or usually prepared slowly and methodically. But the campaigns against China were by no means planned and contemplated consistently over seven decades and were instead launched contingently and by fits and starts over long intervals with little fighting.

Decades earlier than May, B. H. Liddell Hart had already identified speed and mobility as the chief tactical advantages of the Mongols. Hart’s comments, which were mostly about Chinggis Khan and Sübedei, were correct about the importance of speed and mobility. He only erred, through no fault of his own, in attributing these qualities only to Mongol cavalry:

During the final conquest of Song China in the 1270s, swift mobility was not limited to Mongol cavalry. After the Mongol Yuan forces finally took Xiangyang and Fancheng in 1273, their commanders (who were both Mongols and Han Chinese) instinctively took very well to warships as vehicles for swift tactical mobility. What Mongol horses had for decades been on land, Yuan ships were now on water, both on the Yangzi River and, from 1277 through 1279, along China’s southeastern and southern coasts. And on the water, as on the land, Yuan forces racked up victory after victory not because of force majeure or overwhelmingly superior numbers, but because of superior speed and mobility.

## INTERLUDE

After the fall of the Jin in 1234, Ögödei’s governance over northern China was greatly influenced by Yelü Chucai (1189–1243), a Khitan who previously served as an administrative advisor to Chinggis Khan and Ögödei. At Yelü Chucai’s advice, Ögödei reduced the administrative functions of Mongol military commanders and turned them over to civilian officials in order to effectively tax Chinese peasants and fund his empire. Yelü Chucai administered tax collection in northern China, and in this capacity he is well-remembered in Chinese history for dissuading Ögödei from depopulating northern China and converting it to pasturelands. His arguments were in utilitarian rather than emotional or moral terms: if regular and systematic Chinese methods of taxation were employed, revenues would greatly increase for the khan. Ögödei assented to this, and the revenue results were just as the Khitan had predicted.

After Ögödei drank himself to death in 1241 and his second wife Töregene became regent of the empire, there was a limited but successful Mongol campaign launched against Shouzhou (Anhui) in 1245. But thereafter the Mongols were mostly too preoccupied with succession crises to attend to serious campaigns against Song China.

## THE GREAT TOLUID ENTERPRISE: MÖNGKE’S CAMPAIGNS

This all changed, however, with Möngke’s enthronement in 1251. To finance his planned conquests, the new Toluid khan conducted a thorough census of the entire realm, and effective taxation ensued. Campaigns against the Middle East, Korea, and southwestern China were decided upon at Möngke’s quriltai in 1251, and he
was eager to proceed with them. This was politically important for him, since “it was
difficult for disgruntled princes to challenge Möngke’s authority at a time when the
empire was engaged in carrying out Chinggis Khan’s mandate to his people to con-
quered the world. Most Mongols, whatever their other differences, generally agreed
that the principal business of the Mongolian empire was to conquer and subdue.”

Möngke’s younger brother Hülegü reached Khurasan in 1256 and Baghdad in
1258. Meanwhile Prince Yekü’s Korea campaigns eventually led to Korea’s recogni-
tion of Mongol overlordship in 1259. In China, Möngke attempted a western flank
attack to avoid an arduous and risky frontal assault directly southward. He ordered
his younger brother Qubilai to attack the Nanzhao or Dali kingdom to the south in
Yunnan, which he subdued by early 1254. Meanwhile, in autumn 1252 Yuan forces
broke into the Sichuan Basin and established a major foothold there. In the summer of
1256, Möngke and Qubilai launched massive offensives into Song China, and by
1259 three Mongol columns were attacking Song China: Möngke’s on the west into
Sichuan, Qubilai’s in the centre into Hubei and the city of Ezhou at the confluence of
the Han and Yangzi Rivers, and an eastern column making for Anhui. This ominous
tripartite attack may well have doomed Song China, but in August 1259 Möngke
died in Sichuan, likely of wounds and infection received during his siege on Diaoyu
Fortress, an objective he ultimately failed to capture despite his best efforts. (The
much-ballyhooed Song victory at Diaoyu is widely celebrated and commemorated
in China today.)

THE GREAT TOLUID ENTERPRISE:
BAYAN’S CAMPAIGNS

Even though “the Mongolian campaigns throughout Eurasia came to a standstill
after Möngke’s death,” Qubilai knew the eventual conquest of southern China
would be very difficult, but he was not uniformly bellicose towards the Song. In
1260, he sent Hao Jing to propose that China recognize Qubilai (and not the Song
emperor) as Son of Heaven, in return for a high degree of autonomy. The Song
responded by detaining him under indefinite house arrest. Two decades later, Qubilai
used Hao’s continuing detention as a casus belli for attacking the Song.

The Xiangyang quagmire

Minor clashes ensued, followed by a major one in Sichuan in 1265. Then Qubilai’s
siege of the strategically important city of Xiangyang on the Han River and its twin
sister Fancheng across the river dragged on from 1268 to early 1273. On 31 January
1273, the final attack on Fancheng began, and when Yuan forces using siege ladders
broke into the city on 2 February they butchered every last person there, sparing
none. They then piled the dead bodies into high heaps for Song defenders across the
Han River in Xiangyang to see, and this did indeed frighten and dishearten them.

To prevail at Xiangyang, the Mongols had to learn logistics, logistics interdiction,
naval tactics (from Chinese, Korean, and Jurchen naval experts), and siegework with
counter-weight trebuchets crewed by Middle Eastern artillerists. The artillery made
the biggest difference, and by spring 1273, the Song defender Lü Wenhuan exited
Xiangyang and defected to the Yuan.
Different warfare, different warrior: Bayan the Baarin

Resolving to avoid future quagmires and protracted, debilitating attacks on walled cities whenever possible, Qubilai opted in 1274 for warfare that was "a combination of nomadic ways of swift, mobile warfare and reluctance to attack fortified city walls on the one hand and the Chinese strategist Sunzi’s preferences for largely the same things on the other."18

The man Qubilai chose for the job, Bayan of the Ba’arin, was a veteran of Hulegi’s campaign in Persia in the 1250s, who had returned to China in 1265 in his late twenties.19 Bayan began his campaign in October 1274 down the Han River (a Yangzi tributary) with a multi-national force of Mongol cavalry, Chinese infantry, Middle Eastern artillerymen, and warships with mostly Mongol captains. His purpose was to reach the Yangzi and thence Jiangsu and Zhejiang, whence he would launch coordinated land and sea attacks on the Southern Song capital at Lin’an (modern Hangzhou).

The intent of Bayan and his khan was not the destruction of the Lower Yangzi or its conquest per se, but its submission to the Yuan, peacefully if at all possible. Qubilai counseled Bayan to avoid bloodshed whenever he could and told him about Cao Bin (931–999), an official of the Later Zhou during the Five Dynasties period (907–960), who switched his allegiance to the Song and campaigned against holdouts in Sichuan. “The one person in times past who excelled in securing southern China,” Qubilai said, “was Cao Bin. If you can avoid killing, you too shall be a Cao Bin.” Cao Bin’s Song generals had wanted to put recalcitrant Sichuan cities to the sword, but Cao stayed his hand. Later it was said that he never indiscriminately killed anyone in his conquest of southern China.20 Bayan seems for the most part to have taken Qubilai’s admonitions to heart, and much more often than not, the cities his forces approached along the two rivers submitted peacefully as his forces neared them.

But Bayan did not live up to the purportedly bloodless ideal of Cao Bin; during his Yangzi campaigns at least three Song cities were put to the sword: Shashi (Hu’nan), Changzhou, and Zhenchao (Anhui). Further, between cities there were many bloody riverine naval battles. Crossing the mighty Yangzi with large numbers of Yuan forces was an important objective of Bayan’s, and he understood the Song’s reliance on it as a major psychological and strategic barrier.

Bayan sets out

In October 1274, Bayan and his combined forces set out from Xiangyang and Fancheng on the Han River. The first jurisdiction they encountered was Yingzhou, which they simply bypassed by flooding a side creek. His Chinese lieutenants objected strenuously to leaving Yingzhou uncaptured, but Bayan overruled them: “I know all about when to slacken and when to hasten in using troops,” he said and then alluded to cautions in Sunzi’s Art of War about the risks and folly of attacking walled cities: “What is more, military writers regard attacks on walled cities as the lowliest of plans.”21 How could the use of our troops be only for this one city? If we attack this city, we shall lose [our momentum] for greater things.” With this, the matter was dropped.22
The first battle waged by Bayan’s forces was at Shayang, which refused his summons to surrender. To establish credibility of threat in his future battles on the Han and Yangzi Rivers, he had to respond. He ordered his Muslim artillerymen to hurl incendiary munitions into the city, and a large portion of it was soon alight. He slaughtered the city’s garrison but spared its civilian population.23

The next city was Xincheng, and Bayan ordered it to surrender with the visual incentive of laying out the heads of the Shayang defenders at the foot of city’s walls. His archers then shot written warnings wrapped around arrows into the city. When there was no immediate response, he made ready to attack on 26 December 1274, but then the troops in the city mutinied and surrendered. Their commander committed suicide, and Bayan was moved by his courage and loyalty. The commander was eventually given a posthumous title, and a shrine to him was built on the spot where he perished with honour.24

At the next city his forces approached, Bayan sent in messengers promising not to harm so much as “a fine autumn hair” in the city if it surrendered peacefully. It did, and Bayan was true to his word, his Chinese lieutenants’ objections that his forces would not even enter the city notwithstanding.25

Crossing the Yangzi

Up ahead was the confluence of the Han and Yangzi Rivers at Hankou, and it was protected by the massive Yangluo Fortress. This was a key objective he knew he would have to take, and its Song commander refused summonses to surrender. Bayan then reluctantly deployed his siege artillery around it on 9 December 1274, all the while likely dreading a repeat of the quagmire a few years earlier at Xiangyang. But two nights later a brilliantly unorthodox thought occurred to him: was it really necessary to take the fortress at all? What if he could simply bypass it the way he had bypassed Yingzhou? He counselled secretly that night with the Mongol commander Aju (1227–1281),26 his chief lieutenant:

The Song generals are now of the mind that I must capture this Yangluo Fortress in order to cross the Yangzi. What is more, this fortress is indeed very strong, and attacking it would be to labour in vain. If tonight three thousand of your heavy cavalry rode in ships against the current and travelled upstream, [you could] hasten to observe their deployment. I anticipate that upstream, although they have made preparations, they are not strong. We should make plans to attack their weak points. On the morrow at dawn, cross over and [make a] surprise attack [on] the south shore of the [Yangzi] River and quickly dispatch a man to report to me.27

Aju readily agreed, and they quickly identified Qingshanji on the southern bank of the Yangzi as their objective. If they could transport three thousand cavalry across the Yangzi on the few boats they then had on the river, it would be an enormous psychological victory for the Yuan against the Song, which was relying on the river as a massive obstacle to further Yuan attacks. In the night, he launched a massive diversionary attack on Yangluo Fortress while Mongol commanders actually did get three thousand cavalrmen aboard the boats and succeeded in crossing the river and
landing at Qingshanji on its southern bank! The light Song defences there were no match for them, and the Yuan cavalrymen stood and fought as infantry until their horses arrived.

Qubilai was elated the next morning, and Zhang Shijie, the commander of the Song forces, was devastated. During his diversionary attack, Bayan managed to get many of his warships out onto the Yangzi, where a large battle ensued with the Song navy. The Muslim artillerists who had set up counter-weighted trebuchets on the shore to attack Yangluo Fortress were now ordered to turn them about and shoot munitions out onto the water. The Song ships remained tightly grouped together, while the smaller and faster Yuan warships scattered. The amassed Song warships were easy targets, and Yuan artillery “sank all the ships,” reported a biographical notice on Abu Bakr (son of Isma’il) in the *Yuan shi*. 28 The end result of it all was a massive victory for the Yuan, with one Yuan source narrating that “Almost all of the tens of thousands of Song troops were killed or wounded, and their floating bodies completely covered and flowed down the river.” 29

As Song defenders at Yangluo Fortress watched all this helplessly, morale disintegrated “like a shattered ceramic tile.” 30 Hanyang, one of the three cities at the key confluence of the Han and the Yangzi, surrendered peacefully, while Ezhou put up a stout fight. One of its commanders named Zhang Shanweng (doct. 1262) steadfastly refused to surrender, and when he was finally captured he remained defiant and unsubmitive. Several Yuan commanders wanted him executed, but Bayan, moved by his loyalty and courage, called him an “upright man” (*yiishi*) and ordered him released unharmed. 31

**Down the Yangzi**

On 25 January 1275, the Yuan juggernaut proceeded eastward down the Yangzi, peacefully capturing cities as it approached them because they obeyed Bayan’s surrender summonses. Bayan lightly garrisoned surrendered cities with stern warnings never to revert to the Song. On 16 March 1276, his navy fought another gargantuan battle with the Song navy, this time at Dingjiazhou, which was defended by five thousand Song warships and 130,000 men. Bayan again ordered his Muslim artillermen to hurl kinetic stone munitions (not explosive ones) at the Song navy from the riverbanks, and to great effect, both tactical and psychological. The Song navy’s will to fight evaporated and its surviving warships sailed farther down the river. Yuan cavalry and infantry operating on both riverbanks greatly routed Song forces. 32 Meanwhile more fighting under separate command in Hubei was also going well for the Yuan. 33

Yuan forces conquered several more cities and jurisdictions along the Yangzi down to Jiankang (Nanjing), which surrendered on 30 March 1275, as did Jiangsu and Anhui provinces. On 8 April 1275, the city of Changzhou surrendered but reverted to the Song only a week later, a tragic and fatal mistake. On 21 May 1275, Qubilai ordered Bayan to suspend campaigns because of hot weather and return north. (He might also have wanted Bayan’s help in confronting his recalcitrant cousin Qaidu. 41) His trusted Mongol lieutenant Aju remained behind and won a massive naval battle at Jiaoashan, an island in the middle of the river. Meanwhile, in Hubei on 2 May 1275 the Uighur general Ariq Qaya (1227–1286), 35 not under
Bayan’s command, had butchered the town of Shashi because it did not surrender. This was his ominous warning to Jiangling, the nearby provincial capital. There was also fighting in Hu’nan; in August 1275 Ariq Qaya attacked Hu’nan from his station at Ezhou, besieging Tanzhou (modern Changsha) in September and capturing it in January 1276 after a ghastly orgy of suicide in the city. Qubilai returned to the Yangzi in the fall, capturing Zhenjiang on 14 November 1275. He and Aju formulated plans for capturing the Southern Song capital at Lin’an and decided that they would advance in three columns, two overland and one on the sea, ultimately to merge simultaneously at the city.

### Putting Changzhou to the sword

First, there remained Changzhou’s perfidy, which Qubilai could not ignore. He knew he had to make a grisly example of Changzhou in order to show the terrible consequences for defection back to the Song. Chinggis Khan himself abominated this kind of inconstancy, and so did his successors and their lieutenants. On 5 December 1275, Qubilai’s archers shot arrows into the city with messages tied to them:

To the supreme commander, general officers, lieutenants, and ordinary soldiers of Changzhou: Changzhou is a city that has already submitted to our Great Yuan, but all of you have come and occupied it once again. The Chief Grand Councillor [Bayan] is leading troops and approaching your city for a four-pronged attack, and you are as vulnerable as brittle dried wood. But for the sake of our sovereign [Qubilai], who delights in life and abhors killing, we must first summon you to come [and surrender]. For many days we have sent people to exhort you, but they have not been heeded. Your troops and civilians need not have misgivings about having submitted to us and then rebelling once again; your officers and men need not fear that they have resisted and striven with our troops. If within the next few days they leave your city and submit to us in order to preserve its living souls, then we shall not inquire into any of your former crimes and shall not indiscriminately slaughter a single person.

Bayan waited for only one day to conclude that Changzhou meant to defy him to the end. He broke into the city on the morning of 6 December 1275 and, a Yuan source says laconically, “slaughtered the city.” Centuries later the Qing scholar and historian Bi Yuan (1730–1797) gave more of the gruesome details: Bayan’s forces compelled people to carry dirt and stone to use in constructing ramparts by the city walls, and afterwards laid the people themselves like bricks into them:

Wroth, Bayan ordered the surrendered [former Song official] Wang Liangchen to press the residents outside the walls into transporting earth and building up ramparts, and when the earth arrived he made ramparts out of it and the people. Further, after killing them he fried their oil and made it into [incendiary] munitions [by] burning their shields and bidents. He attacked [Changzhou] day and night without stopping. . . . Bayan commanded that all of its [Changzhou’s] people be slaughtered.
Approaching Lin’an and receiving the Song surrender

On the same day as the Changzhou massacre, the Mongolian commander Cherig Temür and the myriarch Khaidu captured Wuxi, approximately 130 kilometres north of Lin’an. On 11 December 1275, Yuan troops led by the Mongol Alaghan broke through the strategically important Dusong Pass, fifty kilometres northwest of Lin’an, and this led to mass defections to the Yuan and panic at the court in Lin’an. That same day, naval forces led by Dong Wenbing (1217–1278) arrived at Jiangyin, approximately 185 kilometres north of Lin’an on the southern bank of the Yangzi. Bayan’s planned three-pronged assault on Lin’an was shaping up nicely, and he wanted it to go as smoothly and non-violently as possible, his spectacular brutality at Changzhou notwithstanding. In late December 1275, the Song sent a missive to Bayan imploring him not to attack Lin’an now, while the empress dowager was still in mourning for the previous Song emperor, who had died in 1274. (Attacking a state during national mourning was indeed long frowned-upon in Chinese military culture.) But Bayan paid such Chinese taboos no heed and replied tartly, “Of old, your [state of] Song obtained its empire from the hands of a boy, and it will be lost from the hands of a boy. This is the way it is going to be. Why more talk from you?”

On 29 December 1275, Bayan sent a surrender summons to Lin’an. The Song temporized for a few weeks, but by early February, they had submitted their official imperial jade governmental seal and a formal written instrument of surrender (xiangbiao) to Bayan in unambiguous gestures of utter capitulation. Bayan then took the Song’s imperial seal and sent it to Shangdu. On 12 February 1275, still outside of Lin’an, he sent Yuan officials to Lin’an to give instructions to the grand empress dowager, and two days later in response she sent several high Song officials to see Bayan, including hyper-patriot blowhard Wen Tianxiang (1236–1283), a newly appointed Grand Councilor. Meanwhile, she had sent out orders to all Song jurisdictions that had not yet submitted to the Yuan indicating that they were to do so forthwith and as one. In this audience with Bayan, Wen Tianxiang did his best to pretend, in a display of self-importance and wishful thinking, that the Song had not really just surrendered after all and attempted to get Bayan to agree to terms less than surrender. Bayan, of course, would have none of this, and he dismissed all Song officials except for Wen Tianxiang, whom he detained because he had correctly sized him for what he was: a mercurial hothead who harboured obstreperous ambitions and purposes.

On 18 March 1276, Bayan finally entered Lin’an himself and stayed there for a few days. He did not sack Lin’an or put it to the sword because it had surrendered
peacefully, and the magnificent city survived to bedazzle Marco Polo a few years later. But he did put one last city to the sword: Zhenchao, about 280 kilometres northwest of Lin’an, on the northern bank of the Yangzi. In March 1276, all of Huaiyi (Anhui) surrendered except for Zhenchao, which a year earlier had reverted to Song control after declaring for the Yuan. Perhaps because it knew the fate that awaited it for this perfidy, Zhenchao fought through to the bitter end and was put to the sword.55

On 19 March, Bayan threw a grand banquet in Song government buildings in Lin’an for his Yuan victors, and on 27 March, a large Yuan military contingent entered the imperial palace and summoned the Song emperor and empress dowager to hear Qubilai’s decree that formal and involved surrender ceremonies would not be necessary. With this, the Song empress dowager said to the young Song emperor, “You should thank the Son of Heaven [i.e., Qubilai Qa’an] for his humanity and mercifulness in sparing our lives and not killing us. You should face the direction of his palace and do obeisance in gratitude.”56 Then the Yuan military moved out the young emperor and the grand empress dowager, along with all of their attendants, and closed down Song government buildings and treasuries. On 29 May 1276, the young emperor and the empress dowager arrived at Shangdui, along with a retinue of several thousand people, and on 14 June 1276, they left Shangdu through the West Gate and travelled for five li on the grasslands to a makeshift shrine. There the young Song emperor, his empress (wife), and the empress dowager (his mother) did obeisance to their ancestors, thus informing them that their dynasty had come to an end. Zhao Xian (the young Emperor Gongdi) lived on in Yuan captivity until his death in 1323.57

CHASING DOWN THE FUGITIVE SONG LOYALIST REGIME, FEBRUARY 1276 – MARCH 1279

But it was not all over. On 4 February 1276, the very day the Song’s child emperor handed over the formal written surrender to Bayan, diehard Song loyalists spirited two male children (ages eight and four) of the royal blood out of Lin’an and fled. Over the next three years, Yuan forces would doggedly pursue and battle the fugitive Song loyalist regime in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi, Guangdong, and Guangxi provinces, finally managing to catch up with it and destroy it in a massive naval battle off the coast of Yaishan (Guangdong) on 20 March 1279.58

At first, however, it looked like the Song regime might even prevail and re-establish itself. It made the coastal city of Fuzhou in Fujian its headquarters, and on 14 February 1276 it installed an eight-year-old boy (Zhao Shi) as emperor Duanzong. On 14 June 1276 it renamed Fuzhou Fu’an, which sounded more auspicious, and many people flocked to Fu’an.59 On 16 July 1276, Yuan forces responded by taking Guangzhou, a major city in southern Guangdong, to prevent it from falling into Song loyalist hands. By midsummer 1276, Song forces had recovered several cities Yuan forces had previously taken, including Nanfeng, Yihuang, Ningdu, and Qianshan. Several other cities followed suit and did not wait for Song forces to recover them: Chuzhou, Taizhou, and Wuzhou. By late summer, Song forces had recovered substantial stretches of Jiangsu and Zhejiang, and Yuan forces in Lin’an were so alarmed that they began taking precautions to prevent Lin’an from falling.
But by late summer and early fall, things began going badly for the Song loyalist cause once again. In mid-August 1276, three hundred Yuan cavalry and seven hundred infantrymen easily defeated a force of militiamen at Nanfeng and then, in reprisal for the city’s perfidious reversion to Song control, put it to the sword. Song counter-offensives also went badly elsewhere in Zhejiang and Jiangsu, with the Mongol general Sodu recapturing Wuzhou and then advancing into Fujian, capturing Jianning.61

The Yuan coastal navy comes into its own

On the sea, on the other hand, right from the start things had gone swimmingly for the new Yuan navy and its Mongol captains, who were very quick studies at naval warfare. In the summer of 1276, a Mongol captain named Qaradai (1237–1307) won every engagement he fought off the northern coast of Zhejiang. Qaradai was a veteran of the sieges at Xiangyang and Fancheng and of the great naval engagement at Jiaoshan on the Yangzi in July 1275, when he captured two Song warships. At that time the Mongol general Aju, who led the Yuan forces at Jiaoshan, was so impressed with Qaradai that he ordered one hundred large Song-style seagoing White Hawk (Baiyao) warships built and then gave Qaradai command over them. Like other Mongol captains, Qaradai took readily to naval warfare. He commanded and manoeuvred his warships as if they were cavalry and readily grasped the importance of mobility and speed on the water (rivers and coastlines) better than any Song naval commander ever did. Late in the summer of 1276, he fought a large naval battle at Zhoushan Island and captured over three hundred Song battleships. In the fall, a Song fleet attempted to wrest control of Zhoushan Island, but he fought it off victoriously. From October through December 1276, the Yuan launched a massive and coordinated three-pronged attack on Fu’an, with the Mongol captains Qaradai and Alaghan commanding naval forces and marines, and Sodu and the Uighur general Ariq Qaya attacking the city from different directions on land. The Yuan general Dong Wenbing and Alaghan attacked Rui’an (the regime’s new name for Wenzhou) and captured it, but not before the fleeing Song set a good portion of the city alight in order to deny its material wealth to the Yuan. When Dong Wenbing and Alaghan entered the city, they immediately issued orders to Yuan troops to extinguish the flames, and their efforts saved half the city. The people of the city sang a little ditty about this:

南軍放火北軍救
The Southern Armies lit the flames,
The Northern put them out.

異事稀奇古無有
Such strange, bizarre, uncommon things
The ancients were without.63

Meanwhile, from October through December 1276, Yuan forces had recovered much of northern Fujian, and they also entered and recovered Fu’an peacefully and changed its name back to Fuzhou. By 21 December 1276, the Song regime in
Fuzhou had had enough and fled aboard a massive flotilla bound for Quanzhou. The Yuan warships patrolling in the area did not detect the fleeing Song flotilla because of fog. In Quanzhou, Zhang Shijie, a man who had been leading Song resistance against the Yuan for many years and was suffering from what we today would probably call shellshock, combat fatigue, or post-traumatic stress disorder, could not get along with Pu Shougeng, the local shipping magnate and tycoon. The chemistry between the two men became so bad that the regime had to move on to Chaozhou (in Guangdong), where it arrived in January 1277. There the vindictive Zhang Shijie simply nationalized and confiscated all of Pu Shougeng’s ships. Thereafter Pu hated Zhang for the rest of his life and even switched sides to the Yuan to spite Zhang. He surrendered Quanzhou to the Yuan in late 1276. Meanwhile, Alaghan had been busy with his portion of the Yuan offensive. In January 1277, he attacked the coastal Fujian city of Xinghua, halfway between Fuzhou and Quanzhou, and the next month it surrendered to him. Xinghua would soon revert again to Song control, and it paid a heavy price for doing so, as also would Chaozhou, a city not far from the coastline of southeastern Guangdong, which had surrendered to the Yuan on 22 February 1277. Elsewhere Ariq Qaya had attacked the strategically essential city of Jingjiang (Guangxi province; modern Guilin) from his base in Hu’nan. Ariq Qaya patiently endured the killing of his envoys four times before finally resolving to take the city and put it to the sword. After a long fight, during which Ariq Qaya’s forces drained Jingjiang’s moats and scaled its walls without the use of artillery, his forces broke into the city and wiped it out by burying all of the residents alive. After that, he took the rest of Guangxi easily.

The little empire strikes back

In March 1277, Qubilai severely depleted Yuan forces in the south because he needed them to quell a rebellion in Mongolia. In the aftermath, it was not long before Song resistance forces multiplied and attacked like opportunistic viruses. They soon recaptured Xinghua, which had earlier surrendered to Yuan, and killed its garrisoning Yuan general, an act the Mongols would not forget. In May 1277, the Song recovered Guangzhou, and the next month an emboldened Zhang Shijie was launching counterattacks in Guangdong and Fujian. Wen Tianxiang recovered most of his home province of Jiangxi. In July 1277, Song loyalists even succeeded in retaking Rui’an/Wenzhou, unnervingly close to Lin’an as far as the Yuan were concerned.

But by the summer and fall of 1277, Yuan troops returned and quickly recovered territory lost to Song pretenders. In the summer of 1277, Yuan forces cleaned out Jiangxi and reversed all of the gains made earlier there by Wen Tianxiang. (Wen Tianxiang showed his true colours by abandoning even his wife, children, and concubines and making a run for it when Yuan troops were approaching.) By late 1277, all was quiet on the Jiangxi front as minor anti-Yuan uprisings in Guangxi and Hu’nan were also crushed during this time, and it had become readily apparent that the fight had boiled down to Fujian and Guangdong.
The (partial) Xinghua massacre

In October 1277, Yuan ground and naval offensives began. On the sea, things went smashingly for the Yuan. Captain Qaradai’s naval and marine forces approached Rui’an (renamed Wenzhou after the Yuan captured it), ordered its defending general to surrender, and captured five Song warships. On land, in November 1277 Sodu was determined to recapture Xinghua. The Song defender of the city originally said he would surrender peacefully, but then he went back on his word and shut the city’s gates. As Sodu approached the city, he once again summoned it to surrender, but the response was a hail of arrows. Sodu then constructed large siege ladders and began deploying artillery. On 11 November 1277, he ordered his troops to scale the city’s walls, and they did so successfully. But even so, street-to-street fighting was fierce and cost Sodu the lives of a thousand of his troops. When the city was finally taken and Sodu went to meet its commanding defender, his response was to hurl imprecations and abuse at his captors. This so enraged Sodu that he had the man drawn and quartered, and then he ordered the city put to the sword. Sodu’s Jurchen advisor and lieutenant Wugusun Ze remonstrated with Sodu against butchering the entire city, but the apoplectic Sodu would not listen. Then Wugusun Ze altered his approach and advised sparing the city because its wealth and resources (human and otherwise) would prove useful in keeping Quanzhou under Yuan control and out of the hands of Zhang Shijie, whose forces were besieging it. Sodu assented to the logic of this and had the slaughter stopped, but not before more than thirty thousand of the city’s inhabitants had already been massacred and the rest had fled. Wugusun Ze’s intervention saved part of Xinghua’s population not by special pleading to the Mongol general Sodu for clemency or mercy, but by appealing to his desire for swift victory. The strategy did seem to work; soon thereafter, a discouraged and disheartened Zhang Shijie lifted his siege of Quanzhou and fled to Guangdong. By the end of 1277, Sodu succeeded in recapturing Zhangzhou, and after this it was down to a fight over Guangdong.

The Song loyalist regime runs (again)

As for the fugitive Song loyalist regime, during all this it had changed its headquarters several times, according to the incompetent Zhang Shijie’s assessments of the danger the court was in, and would continue to do so until its ultimate destruction in March 1279.

Sodu then concentrated on capturing coastal towns in Guangdong, but he bypassed Chaozhou for the moment. Meanwhile, the Yuan navy was racking up victory after victory, its fleet of smaller and faster warships completely outclassing the larger and slower Song navy. On 3 January 1278, the Mongol general Taici’u (1244–1280) arrived at Guangzhou and besieged the city, which was then back in Song hands. The Song attempted to ship aid to the beleaguered city, but the ships were stopped and fell into Yuan hands. Later that month, Qaradai’s fleet arrived at Xiangshan (southern Guangdong, near the Pearl River Estuary), where the fugitive Song court was then headquartered, and Qaradai won a naval engagement off its waters, yet again capturing more Song warships. The Song court then fled to Jing’ao (southwest of the Macao Peninsula). Qaradai’s fleet once more won a naval battle.
there, this time capturing two hundred more Song warships and several members of the Song royal clan. In February 1278, when almost all of Guangdong had been taken, Taici’u ordered Sodu to attack and besiege Chaozhou. Sodu’s forces finally broke through its defences and entered the city on 23 March 1278. Sodu then put it to the sword, but some of its occupants did escape the slaughter. In March 1278, the Song court fled to Gangzhou (location undetermined; some place in southern Guangdong), and on 14 July 1278 it fled from there to Yaishan, where it would make its last stand.72

Choosing the right man for the job (again)

While planning the final campaign against the Song pretenders in the summer of 1278, Qubilai selected Zhang Hongfan (1238–1280)73 to command the entire operation, over both Mongol and Chinese land and naval forces. Zhang hesitated, concerned that as a Han Chinese his command over Mongol forces might “skew regulations and measures” (guai jiedu; i.e., discipline and morale). He suggested a joint command with a Mongol, but Qubilai rejected this because he was not convinced that such inter-ethnic joint commands were always viable. Qubilai knew and trusted Zhang Rou (1190–1268),74 Zhang Hongfan’s father, and recalled how a previous joint command between him and the Mongol commander Chaghan75 had not worked out:

Do you remember the matter of your father and Chaghan? They broke through [and captured] Anfeng. Your father left troops occupying it, but Chaghan was unwilling to do this. After the troops withdrew [at Chaghan’s insistence], the Song again took possession of the city and [our troops] well-nigh lost their basis for advance and retreat.76

Zhang Hongfan left on campaign on 28 November 1278, leading naval forces along the Fujian and Guangdong coastline while Chinese infantry and Mongol cavalry operated on land. His fleet arrived at Chaoyang and captured Wen Tianxiang, whom Zhang respected and treated well as a guest. His purpose was eventually to deliver Wen to Qubilai.77

Zhang Hongfan left Chaoyang on 14 February 1279 and soon spied out the whereabouts of the Song loyalist regime. He then appointed Li Heng (1236–1285)78 over a smaller fleet of light coastal patrol craft. In Yaishan, Zhang Shijie learned that Zhang Hongfan knew his location but refused to flee again, resolving this time to stay and fight: “Lo these many years have we voyaged upon the seas. Now must we decide betwixt us and them the victor and vanquished.”79 He then made the tactical blunder of his life: tying his thousand or more warships in a long straight line and anchoring them with sterns facing outwards to the sea and the prows inward towards the shore, making it all the more difficult to flee. He then placed the boy emperor in the middle of this great wall at sea.80

Zhang Hongfan repeatedly asked his captive Wen Tianxiang to write a surrender summons to Zhang Shijie. Wen finally did write something, a poem with concluding lines familiar to every educated Chinese:
人生自古誰無死
Since ancient times, when do we find
A man who never meets his end?

留取丹心照汗青
My loyal heart I leave behind
On history’s pages to resplend.

With this, Zhang Hongfan laughed and dropped the matter.81

THE GREAT NAVAL BATTLE OFF YAISHAN,
20 MARCH 1279

Knowing that there were six months of food stores aboard the line of warships and that he was too badly outnumbered to attack it without softening it up first, Zhang Hongfan waited for thirst to take its effect. The partially provident Zhang Shijie had thought to store food but not fresh water aboard his warships.82
Zhang Hongfan essentially besieged the immobilized Song navy, which, unlike medieval castles, had no well. Barely a week into the siege, the Song sailors were reduced to drinking seawater, which sickened and incapacitated many of them.83

Zhang Hongfan attacked on 20 March 1279 in the wee hours, ordering Li Heng to take his smaller and faster craft north of the line of ships and south of the shoreline and then attack southward while other flotillas, including Zhang Hongfan’s, attacked simultaneously from the south and west. He planned this in close synchrony with the tides so that Li Heng’s ships would attack southward with the ebb. Li Heng attacked at dawn, and a great clash ensued with “arrows and projectiles obscuring the sky.” After a while, the battle dissolved into boarding operations with hand-held weapons.84 This was “not so much as a naval battle, but rather as a form of floating trench warfare.”85

At noon, Yuan squadrons to the south joined the battle, with cries of fighting men “shaking the heavens.” For whatever reason, in the mêlée and fog of battle, the colours of one Song warship were stricken, and seeing this as a clear gesture of surrender, the large majority of Song warships followed suit and struck their own colours. With this, the Song’s will to fight evaporated. The Song prime minister forced his wife and children at sword point to kill themselves by jumping into the sea and then joined them, as did the seven-year-old boy emperor Zhao Bing (posthumously Di Bing; 1272–1279). Large numbers of government officials and harem women soon followed their emperor and prime minister in suicide by jumping into the sea.86

The aftermaths of the battle were horrendous, with estimates of 100,000 or more bodies floating in the sea.87 (The young emperor was assumed to have drowned, but his body was never found.) This was how the Song ended, perishing with a bang and not, like the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), a whimper. The largest land empire the world has ever known reached its greatest extent with a gargantuan battle at sea.88
NOTES

1 Wright 2012, 1.
3 Wright 2015, 67.
4 Hart 1927, 32–33.
5 On Sübedei, see Buell 1993; Pow and Liao 2018.
6 In Hart’s day there were very few, if any, studies of the Mongol/Yuan navy.
7 Wright 2015, 68.
8 On Yelü Chucai, see De Rachewiltz 1993 and 1962.
9 On Töregene, see Broadbridge 2018, passim.
10 Allsen 1994, 400.
11 The definitive work in English on the Mongol conquest of Korea is still Henthorn 1963. See also Huang 2000.
13 Indeed, in China it is famous as the only battle site where a Mongol khan died.
14 Rossabi 1984, 421.
15 On Hao Jing and his story, see Lynn 1993.
16 Li 1988, 2,1058–1060.
18 Wright 2013, 141.
19 For Bayan, see Hsiao 1993a. For an annotated translation of Bayan’s YS biography, see Cleaves 1956.
20 For a biography of Cao Bin, see SS 258.8977–83.
21 Bayan’s allusion here is, of course, to Sunzi’s Bingfa 16 (Sawyer and Lee Sawyer 1993, 177).
22 PSL 1.2; SSJSBM 106.1142–43; XTJ 180.4929–30.
23 PSL 1.2–3.
24 PSL 1.3; SS 450.13250–51; XTJ 180.4931; SSJSBM 106.1143.
25 PSL 1.3–4; XTJ 180.4932.
26 Biography YS 128.3119–24.
27 PSL 1.5; YS 127.3102.
28 YS 203.4544.
29 PSL 1.5.
30 PSL 1.5.
31 Zhang Shanweng has a brief entry in SS 454.13347, in the “loyal and righteous” (zhongyi) section.
33 Li 1988, 2,1212–1217.
34 Li 1988, 2,3106. Hsiao Chi-ch’ing also argues along these lines; see Hsiao 1993a, 593. But fear of the threat from Qaidu might have been overblown; Michal Biran argues in her biography of Qaidu that his ultimate purpose was neither to usurp power from his cousin Qubilai nor to protect the traditional pastoral nomadic lifestyle and ecology, but to “establish for the house of Ögödei a state commensurate with the other Mongol states” (Biran 1997, 112).
36 Li 1988, 2,1214.
37 On the fighting in Hu’nan, see Li 1988, 2,1279–1286.
38 PSL 2.11–12; XTJ 182.4966; SSJSBM 106.1156; YS 127.310607; Li 1988, 2,1231.
39 On the reasons for the punishment of Changzhou for reverting back to Song control, see Wright 2013.
40 PSL 2.13; Wright 2013, 155.
41 PSL 2.13.
42 Cha; for an illustration of a Song bident, see Zhou 2010, 302.
43 XTJ 182.1968.
44 Davis 1996, 98–103.
46 Not, of course, Qubilai’s cousin.
47 Biography YS 129.3147–49.
48 Biography YS 156.3667–76.
49 This prohibition is in the ancient Chinese military classic Sima Fa (Sawyer and Lee Sawyer 1993, trans., 126).
50 This is a sardonic reference to how the First Song emperor seized his empire in 960 from the hands of a boy monarch from a previous minor dynasty and how the empire would now be taken from another boy.
51 PSL 2.14; YS 127.3108.
52 YS 9.177.
53 Biography SS 418.12533–41. For a biography in English, see Brown 1986; for one in German, see Huber 1976.
54 PSL 2.16; XTJ 182.4977–78; SSJSBM 107.1160; YS 9.176.
55 Li 1988, 2.1292–1294.
56 XTJ 182.4981.
57 On Zhao Xian’s subsequent life in Yuan captivity, see the nonpareil Kai 2018.
58 The best account of this period is the monumental Li 1988, v. 2, q.v.
59 Fuzhou is a simple place name, but with “an” added to it in place of “zhou,” it is a binome meaning something like “Prosperity and Tranquility.”
60 Biography YS 129.3150–53.
61 Li 1988, 2.1390–91; XTJ 183.4999–95; SSJSBM 108.1170.
62 Biography YS 132.3215–17.
63 Li 1988, 2.1391. The ditty was recorded on Dong Wenbing’s shendaobei, the text of which can be viewed at http://blog.sina.cn/dpool/blog/s/blog_b77a68fa0102w8jv.html (accessed 31 March 2021).
64 On Pu Shougeng, see Kuwabara 1928 and 1935.
65 XTJ 183.4995.
68 Li 1988, 2.1415; XTJ 183.5001; SSJSBM 108.1174.
69 YS 163.3831–32.
70 Li 1988, 2.1433–34; YS 47.943–44; YS 129.3152, 3154; YS 163.3831–32; SSJSBM 108.1176.
71 Biography YS 135.3272–75.
72 Li 1988, 2.1435–1437, 1440; YS 129.3152; YS 129.3155; YS 132.3215–17; YS 135.3274–75; YS 163.3831–32; SS 47.943–44; SSJSBM 108.1177; XTJ 183.5007–11. Strangely, Li does not mention the massacre of Chaozhou, but it is recorded in SSJSBM 108.1177 and XTJ 183.5010–11.
73 Biography YS 156.3679–84; Hsiao 1993c.
74 Biographies YS 147.3471–76; Hsiao 1993b.
75 Biography YS 120.2955–57.
76 XTJ 184.5016.
77 YS 156.3682–83; XTJ 184.5019–21; YS 128.3128; SS 47.944–45; SSJSBM 108.3128.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


The Mongol conquest of the Song Empire

Kuwabara, Jitsuzo. (1928, 1935) ‘P’u Shou-keng, a Man of the Western Regions, who was Superintendent of the Trading Ships Office in Ch’uan-chou Towards the End of the Sung Dynasty.’ MRDTB. 2: 1–79 and 7: 1–104.
PSL, See List of Abbreviations.
SS, See List of Abbreviations.
SSJSBM, See List of Abbreviations.

XTJ, See List of Abbreviations.

YRZJZLSY, See List of Abbreviations.

YS, See List of Abbreviations.


ZZL, See List of Abbreviations.