The Mongol World

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CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

THE MONGOL INVASIONS OF JAPAN AND THEIR LEGACY

Li Narangoa

The Mongol invasions of Japan in the 13th century had a profound impact on the country. The two invasions, led by Qubilai Qa’an in 1274 and 1281, are known in Japan as 助被の戦 (the Bun’ei War) and 助被の戦 (the Koan War) respectively according to the Japanese-era names of the time. Although the Mongol armies were defeated in both cases, these wars brought huge social, economic and political challenges and changes to Japan. These Mongol invasions were also the only severe threats to Japan from overseas invaders prior to Western threats in the second half of the 19th century. As a result they left a long-lasting imprint upon the Japanese collective memory.

QUBILAI AND JAPAN

The Mongol invasions were an extension of Qubilai Qa’an’s plan to isolate the Southern Song dynasty from its trade network and undermine their ability to resist the Mongols. He also sought to gain access to the coastal trade network to extend his maritime empire. The Song strongly resisted Mongol conquest until 1279. After putting the Korean Peninsula under his control, Qubilai hoped to use diplomatic pressure to convince the Japanese to surrender. He sent envoys to the Japanese via Korea several times between 1266 and 1273. The first mission in 1266 returned without reaching Japan. Qubilai then ordered the Korean king to send envoys to Japan with a letter the following year. The envoys arrived in Dazaifu (today’s Fukuoka) in 1268. The letter started with the typical style of the Mongol khans ‘Cherished by the Mandate of Heaven, the Great Mongol emperor sends this letter to the king of Japan’ and asked to ‘communicate with each other and become friendly’. The letter also ended with the typical Mongol threat: ‘Nobody would wish to resort to arms’. No reply was received. A third envoy was sent in March 1269, but all they managed was to capture two locals from Tsushima before returning home. Half a year later, in September 1269, a further envoy was sent along with the two captive Japanese. The Japanese imperial court wrote a response, but the Shogunate decided to ignore the Mongol demand, and a reply was not sent. In September 1271,
Qubilai Qa’an sent an embassy of 100 people led by Zhao Liangbi, a high official. Upon arrival in Hakata, Zhao insisted that he would only submit the khan’s letter to the emperor in person. This was not permitted, so he made a copy of the letter to Shoni Sukenori, a shogunate official in Hakata. The letter reached the shogunate and the imperial court in October. The letter was much more provocative than the earlier ones and in fact was an ultimatum. ‘[We] had sent several letters, but received no response at all. We will, however, wait until the coming November, and if there is still no response, battle ships will be prepared’. Japan did not respond but began to prepare for a war with the Mongols instead. Zhao returned with his group but once again went back to Japan the following year. He remained there a year waiting for a response from the Japanese, but he failed to see the shogun and emperor, so he returned.

After the failure of these diplomatic attempts, Qubilai decided to attack Japan. On 3 October 1274, a combined Yuan and Koryo force under the command of Mongol general Xin Du (Hundun) moved on Tsushima. It is reported that a combined army of Yuan soldiers and Koreans arrived at Komoda port on Tsushima two days later. Tsushima did not possess any great defence. Sosuke Kuni, the head of the local garrison, died in the battle against the Mongol forces, and the island was taken. On 14 October, the Mongol armada landed on Ikishima, a small island between Tsushima and Hakata (today’s Fukuoka). Local soldiers battled the invaders but were overwhelmed. The Mongol armada also attacked smaller islands along the way, including Hirado and Takashima. It landed at today’s Fukuoka on 20 October. Despite the fact that the Mongols were winning, their forces withdrew to their ships at the end of the day to rest. Overnight the Mongol ships mysteriously disappeared.

There are different arguments as to why and how the Mongol ships suddenly disappeared. Most Japanese research done before 1960 argued that a storm (taifun, typhoon) wiped out the Mongol ships. Others argue that the Mongol general decided to withdraw due to bad weather, disagreements and communication problems between the generals. According to this line of explanation, the loss of the 200 ships and 13,000 soldiers at sea was due to a combination of the battle, bad weather on the return journey and the shoddy quality of ships rather than a typhoon. This view was represented by meteorologist Arakawa Hidetoshi, who was the first scholar to contest the conventional view. This hinges upon the thesis that the Japanese fabricated the destruction of the Mongol ships by typhoon for political-religious reasons. Shinto priests, Buddhist monks and others prayed before and during the Mongol invasion to avert the foreign enemy. For them, the idea that the gods sent a divine wind (kamikaze) to protect Japan was highly appealing, especially for priests trying to garner support from the shogunate. This idea of kamikaze led to the ideological concept that Japan is a divinely protected nation from the 19th century to WWII. After WWII, the divine element disappeared, but the typhoon theory continued to hold. From the 1960s, and especially during the 1970s, Japanese historians gradually accepted Arakawa’s no-typhoon theory.

After the failure of the first invasion, Qubilai Qa’an did not stop sending envoys to Japan. The Japanese, however, were even more determined not to meet the Mongol Khan’s requests for diplomatic relations. The Japanese shogunate even planned to attack Korea in revenge for the Mongol invasion attempt, while strengthening their defence line at Kyushu, south-western Japan. However, the plan was cut short, due
allegedly to insufficient funds. Building a defensive wall and other associated costs did not leave much for a military expedition to Korea. In February 1275 a group of five envoys was sent to Japan. This was led by two of Qubilai’s high officials, the Mongol Du Shizhong (whose role was equivalent to today’s deputy minister for culture), and his deputy, the Chinese official He Wenzhu (deputy minister of military affairs). They arrived at Nagato (Shimonseki) and were then sent to Hakata and finally in late July to Kamakura, where the shogunate was located. The shogunate responded by beheading them at Tatsunokuchi on 7 September. Having no knowledge of what had happened to his envoys, Qubilai sent another group of envoys to Japan after conquering the Southern Song dynasty in 1279. These envoys were also executed. A second invasion attempt thus became inevitable.

Qubilai sent his army in two divisions: the Eastern Army (consisting of a Mongol army and a Korean army) from Korea and the Jiangan army from south China. The Eastern Army, led by the Mongol general Hudun, who had also commanded the first invasion, left Korea in early May and arrived at Tsushima on 21 May 1281. After attacking Tsushima, the armada left for Ikishima on 26 May on their way to Hakata. Part of the Eastern Army also attacked Nagato. At Hakata, however, the Mongols were hindered by the city’s long, high stone defensive walls. After failing to land at Hakata, the Mongol armada occupied Shikajima on 6 June and made a base there. Three days later, however, the Mongols had to retreat to Ikishima to wait for the arrival of the Jiangan army from Southern China. Nonetheless, the Jiangan army did not arrive on 15 July, as had been planned. This was due to prolonged preparation and ill health on the part of the Mongol general assigned to command it. While waiting for the Jiangan army’s arrival, the Eastern Army was itself stricken with illness. This was caused by the unfamiliar hot and humid climate and cost many lives. The Japanese, meanwhile, organized themselves and attacked the Mongol army at Ikishima. The Jiangan army only began to arrive late in the month. The combined Mongol armies were moved to Hirado Island, which was much closer to the Japanese mainland. By the end of July all were ready to attack the mainland, but, on 30 July, a storm struck, causing serious damage to the Mongol armada and demoralizing the army. In early August the Japanese attacked the remaining Mongol ships. Those ships which were still able to sail departed for Korea, but many soldiers, left without ships, found themselves stuck. They were slaughtered or captured by the Japanese samurais.

Qubilai Qa’an prepared for a third invasion, planned for August 1286, but this was cancelled due to the defeat of the Mongols in their Vietnam campaign. Internal unrest also made later plans impossible to carry out. The Japanese, however, continued their preparation against possible Mongol attacks. In 1289, the shogunate gave the order to the shugo (constables) in Kyushu to have the temples make prayers to repel possible attacks from the Khan, even though by this time Qubilai Qa’an neither had a working plan nor the necessary conditions to make an invasion due to internal unrest represented by princes Nayan and Qaidu. By 1292, however, Qubilai had settled internal unrest in his empire and asked the Korean king to send another envoy to Japan. At the same time a letter was sent to the Japanese via a trading ship from Southern China. These only allowed the Japanese to further tighten their defences, prepare armies, and, by the end of 1292, they had readied themselves for war. In early 1293, high-ranking commanders from the Hojo family
were sent from Kamakura to Kyushu to upgrade the Kyushu administration to a deputyship (Chinzei Tandai) and to tighten administrative control in Kyushu. This new, upgraded institution not only had command over the armies in wartime but also controlled the daily and judicial affairs of the warriors. This was done so the warriors and administrators did not have to go all the way to Kamakura for administrative and legal decisions. They could now concentrate on the business of defence. The regions (kuni) in Kyushu were asked to patrol the shores against a possible foreign invasion. This was organized in a rotating system, whereby each region was responsible for 3- to 12-month deployments of sentries. Not only the temples and shrines but also the imperial family were actively engaged in prayers to assure the defence. In March 1294, to efficiently communicate between the islands that lay between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, fire signal exercises (lighting fires on hills) were ordered to be carried out in Ikishima, Oshima and Takashima, which could be seen from Hakata, the end station. Before the third invasion, however, Qubilai Qa’an died in 1294. A few small-scale local clashes were reported in 1297, 1301 and 1314. It is, however, not clear if they were official Yuan troops or just pirate ships. Still, the perceived fear was greater than the actual clashes. Rumours of Mongol invasions continued until the very last year of the Yuan dynasty, and caution against external intruders and emergency defence regulations continued.

**RAMIFICATIONS OF THE INVASIONS**

Though the Japanese had defeated the Mongol invasions, the attacks still brought enormous socio-political changes for the country as well as a profound fear towards outsiders and pride at the successful defence of their country. Firstly, the invasions strengthened the centralized power of the shogunate or military government. In the name of war against foreign invaders, the shogunate was able to issue laws covering areas that were traditionally outside its jurisdiction. At the time of the Mongol invasion, the Japanese political structure was based on two poles: the shogunate government, which had its power base in the eastern part of Japan, centred in Kamakura (east of today’s Tokyo), and the imperial court, which ruled from Kyoto with its own sphere of influence in the western part the country. Real power rested with the shogunate, but the imperial court had power over the imperial household, the court nobles, most of the shrines and temples (except those in the east) and their estates. The imperial court was also responsible for the external relations of the country. The Mongol invasions, however, helped to blur the administrative and territorial lines of these two institutions.

During the war, or, more correctly, immediately after the war, for it was not yet clear that the Mongol invasions would cease, the shogunate declared that both the gokenin (shogun’s warriors) and non-gokenin in Kyushu must participate in the military efforts. Also, those whose estates had traditionally been outside the shogunate’s control (estates owned by nobles or shrines and temples that were under the rule of the imperial court) were ordered to contribute to the defence against the invaders. In other words, not only warriors but also the court nobles and religious institutions, which had previously not been involved in military efforts, had to participate in defence. As Amino points out, this was the biggest reform since the establishment of the shogunate in the late 12th century. Though it was restricted to wartime, access
to the privileges of the nobles and the temples opened up the path for the shogunate to expand its power into an area that had traditionally not been under its control. This order was formalized into law in the immediate aftermath of the second invasion of 1281.\(^{18}\)

Secondly, the Mongol invasions also further strengthened the authoritarian power of the shogun’s regent (shikken), and the power of his clan. Although real power resided with the shogunate in Kamakura Japan (1185–1333), the shogunate was very much a divided and complex institution. From the beginning of the 13th century, the shogun increasingly lost power and became a puppet of his own regent, a position exclusively reserved for the main branch of the Hojo clan. Nonetheless, all laws and orders were still issued under the name of the shogun. The shogun, at least nominally, had control of his warriors or housemen (gokenin) and everything related to them, such as rewards and the power to recommend warriors to become part of the gokenin. The fiefdoms under the shogunate were managed by shugo or constables who were chosen from among the powerful gokenin (including the Hojo family). At the time of the Mongol invasion, Hojo Tokimune was the seventh regent of the shogun. The invasion offered Tokimune the chance to wield emergency powers and become the real commander in chief over both the warriors (including gokenin and non-gokenin) and court nobles. Tokimune even went as far as issuing laws under his own name rather than the shogun’s during the second Mongol invasion. To prepare for war, he also sent his most trusted people to Kyushu as shugo (constable) to command the warriors.\(^{19}\) As a powerful family of gokenin, the Hojo family was also entitled to have shugo positions. As the regent’s powers increased, the number of shugo from his clan increased from 2 in 1200 to 17 in 1250. In the aftermath of the Mongol invasion more than half of the known shugo of 68 in 1285, and thus most of the country, came to be managed by the Hojo family.\(^{20}\) Shugo, especially those who commanded the western shore of Japan, grew more powerful during this time of war. Extensive authority was not only given to shugo in Kyushu but also to the shugo in the provinces of Suo and Nagato neighbouring Kyushu on the western-most point of the Japanese main island. The most important administrative and military posts were all given to the regent’s family members in these geopolitically important places.\(^{21}\)

Thirdly, the shogunate exerted greater control over Kyushu. Located far away from both Kyoto and Kamakura, the shogunate’s control was weak in Kyushu. As a commercial gateway to Asia, the main town Hakata had a strong autonomous character during the Middle Ages. Its Dazaifu (governing agency) was even called To no mikado (‘Distant imperial court’).\(^{22}\) Although the founder of the Kamakura shogunate installed his trusted private warriors (gokenin) as shugo (constable) to manage warriors, there were many estates that were not under warrior rule. Yet in order to mobilize people for the war against the Mongols, those who were not warriors in Kyushu were all put under the command of shugo. On the eve of the first Mongol invasion the shogunate ordered the gokenin, who resided in the east but possessed estates in the west (Kyushu), to go to the west or send their representatives to participate in the preparations against the external enemy.\(^{23}\) An estate and land survey of gokenin was carried out to efficiently mobilize their human and material resources, and selling land to non-gokenin was forbidden. The shogunate also put many estates owned by non-warriors in northern Kyushu into the hands of warrior
officials by offering them comparable land close to Kyoto. The aim was to simplify and unify the control of estates, which until then had been administered in a complicated multi-level structure involving the owner, administrator, and farmer who cultivated the land. These reforms were aimed at securing the provision of grain and materials necessary for defence purposes.

In the aftermath of the first Mongol invasion, a formal guard system was established to patrol the northern Kyushu shores in case of foreign invasion. Two or three Kyushu fiefdoms (regions) would take turns patrolling for 3 to 12 months. All Kyushu regions were to build walls along the northern shoreline from 1276 onwards. Estate owners, warriors, court nobles and temples had to build and maintain a certain length of wall according to the size of their estates. The bigger the estates the longer the wall they had to build and provide upkeep for. To prepare for a third possible Mongol invasion, the shogunate, as mentioned previously, upgraded its administration in Kyushu to a deputyship (Chinzei Tandai) model that not only managed defence against foreign invaders but was now also able to manage the judicial affairs for all Kyushu. The deputyship was also given the right to manage and oversee people from overseas. The Mongol plan for a third invasion of Japan never materialized. Qubilai became ill and was succeeded by his grandson, who sent a rather mild diplomatic letter to Japan via a Buddhist monk in 1299. Though there was no hint of a threat from the Mongols, the shogunate still continued to tighten its control in Kyushu in the name of defence. Many gokenin from the east moved to the region and settled there. The development of Hakata (Fukuoka) was altered due to the administrative changes and the building of the defensive wall. The business and trade centre of the town was moved to the interior, changing the town’s urban development.

Fourth, the Mongol invasions also created social problems in Japan. Before and during the war, warriors were promised that they would be handsomely rewarded for fighting the foreign enemy. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the shogunate was expected to follow through on this. In the past, when the samurai had fought against internal enemies under the shogun, they were rewarded with the lands of defeated lords or clans. The external enemy, however, did not bring any land, and the shogunate government did not have the capacity to immediately pay the massive number of people who had participated in the war. The shogunate tried to both meet and hedge on its promises by instituting a slow and very strict evidence-based process for granting awards. Even a strip of shoreline that had been allocated as part of the shogun’s personal holdings (kanto goryo) was used to meet the land shortage for the awards in Kyushu. Later, the shogun awarded some warriors lands taken from the defeated warlord Yasuda Yasumori and his followers following internal political upheavals in 1286. To strengthen the defence in Northern Kyushu, where the Mongols were most likely to land again, warriors were given lands from this region as their rewards, even if they were from Southern Kyushu. Since the shogunate did not want warriors to move out from Kyushu, land rewards were restricted and were divided into smaller areas to meet more people’s needs. This not only led to a major shift in landholding patterns in the region but also caused enormous challenges to many new owners to manage the land from a distance. The shogunate attempted to meet their demands as far as possible, and some cases were not settled until 1307. The long process, the inequality and also the challenges to manage distant land,
however, caused the soldiers much frustration. Temples and shrines also claimed rewards for their contribution to fighting the Mongol invasions. Large temples and shrines (Kobunji and Ichinomiya) had been mobilized to pray to avert or defeat the Mongol invasions. New laws were therefore issued to reward and support temples and shrines in 1284 and 1301. All warriors and commoners who owned land which had been part of a religious estate were to be returned for free. This caused tension amongst different groups of the society. Moreover, the expense of building defensive fortifications had been a drain on the local economy in the regions around Kyushu, causing a great deal of social dissatisfaction that lasted beyond the immediate period of mass mobilization.

Against all odds, trade went on as usual during the interwar period and also after the war, with the exception of a 10-year period of suspension between 1330 and 1340 due to social and political unrest in both Yuan China and Japan. Despite continued trade, the domestic economic and social challenges caused by the Mongol invasions contributed to the downfall of the Kamakura shogunate. Although the shogunate gained momentum in its efforts to extend its power more fully across Japan, the Mongol invasion also amplified internal conflicts. While the regent increased his power, this also caused conflict between the gokenin followers of the Shogun and the miuchibito followers of the Hojo family. So too between the main-line Hojo family and its branch families in the shogunate. This caused several bouts of social unrest and destabilized the Kamakura shogunate. In the end, however, the regents themselves became puppets of their own advisory groups, and power was destined to be handed over to the gokenin. Coupled with the social and economic problems, the internal political conflicts ended the Kamakura shogunate in the early 14th century.

THE MONGOLS IN HISTORICAL MEMORY

Apart from the social and political legacies, the Mongol invasions also etched a long-lasting legacy of isolationist fear and pride on the Japanese historical memory. The invasions precipitated a newfound fear of the outside world. The Mongol army’s onslaught and the suicide of defeated Japanese warriors at Kyushu, Tsushima, Ikishima and other small islands introduced the Japanese to the terror of invasion by foreign enemies. The Japanese have recalled the Mongol invasions whenever they have faced a foreign threat over the centuries. Images of the Mongol invasions resurfaced in Japanese popular memory in the 18th century, when Japan faced the Russian threat from the north. It is no coincidence that the ‘Mongol invasion picture scroll’, which was recorded by Kinaga Takezaki, who participated in the battles against the Mongols, was ‘discovered’ five centuries later at the end of the 18th century. Many people were interested, and many copies were made, and there are 40 different copies known today. Artists also depicted the Mongol invasions in their work based on the scroll.

A feeling of fear set in lasting many generations, so long in fact that there are still popular sayings and stories about the Mongol invasions in southern Japan. For example, parents would say: Mukuri kokuri no oni ga kuru [The demons of Mukuri Kokuri are coming], to stop them from crying. The Mukuri Kokuri demons were a reference to the Mongols. To prevent children from getting close to
water unattended, they were told that the demons known as Kappa would call out ‘moko moko’ or ‘mokko mokko’ and take the children into the water! Interestingly the sound of the Kappa is a reference to the Mongols (moko means Mongol or Mongolia). The memory of the Mongol invasions is still visible today in Fukuoka, Takashima, Tsushima and Ikishima, in the form of monuments, memorial signposts, songs, writings and museums. Apart from fear, the Mongol invasions brought a sense of unifying pride to the Japanese. Japan had won against the foreign invasions, and in the future, should there be more, they would surely triumph. The term kami-kaze (divine wind) and the belief that the gods had protected Japan from foreign attack, originated from this experience. This provided a sense of confidence and pride that outlasted Kamakura Japan and would continue to inform the nationalist imagery of modern Japan several centuries later.

These fear- and pride-laden memories of the Mongol invasion were later used at local and national levels for mobilizing the Japanese in the 19th and 20th centuries against foreign invaders and towards empire-building of their own in Asia. The first of such campaigns took place when Japan’s sovereign right was challenged in the second half of the 19th century by Western powers. Memories of the Mongol invasions were called upon to create a unified Japanese national consciousness. This time the unification was not under the shogunate but under the name of the emperor, who in 1868 had been restored to power in place of the ruling Tokugawa shogunate. This was a politically and socially unstable period – the old shogunate system was gone, but the new emperor-centred and modernized political system was still rather divided. There was a profound need for the unification of Japanese society to deal with the Western threat. The message was simple and clear – that the Japanese had been unified during the Kamakura period and this allowed them to defeat foreign invaders. This could be repeated – ‘we defeated the Mongols and so we will win against any intruders from outside’. The memories of the Mongol invasions informed Japan’s sense of itself as a divinely protected land which had triumphed over its enemies. Popular artwork was published to illustrate fighting scenes between the Mongols and the mighty Japanese as the kamikaze blew away the Mongol ships and soldiers. Thirteenth-century Japan was presented as a unified country with fully formed ‘national awareness’.

Commemorations of historical persons connected with the invasions became ever more important. Taira no Kagetaka and Sosuke Kuni, who were acting shugo (constable) on the Iki and Tsushima islands respectively and fell during the first Mongol invasion of 1274, were celebrated as national heroes. Commemorations were conducted and shrines were built to worship them on Iki and Tsushima. In 1896, both Taira no Kagetaka and So no Sukekuni were posthumously promoted to higher ranks by the imperial household for their ‘heroic spirit’. This recognition came some 622 years after their deaths!

In Fukuoka statues were erected of Emperor Kameyama (r. 1260–1274 as emperor and 1274–1287 as cloistered emperor), who reigned when the Mongols invaded Japan, and Nichiren, the founder of the Nichiren Buddhist school, who was said to have prophesized the Mongol invasion, to commemorate the invasion events in November 1904. The former was initiated by Yuchi Takeo (1847–1913), a chief constable of Fukuoka, and the latter by Sano Zenrei, a Nichiren priest. Yuchi originally started with the idea of constructing a monument to Hojo Tokimune, the
regent of the Kamakura shogunate during the invasions. His idea, however, faced much protest because it was not in line with the political and ideological framework of the time, which was focused on restoring imperial power rather than promoting the shogunate. In 1899 it was decided that a bronze statue of Emperor Kameyama (1249–1305) should be made instead. The reasoning behind this was that he had supposedly gone from shrine to shrine across the country before and during the Mongol invasions, and his prayers were the reason that the kamikaze destroyed the Mongol fleets. Yuchi believed that constructing memorials to the Mongol invasions would not only preserve history but that it would also rally the spirit of the people against foreign powers. The initiator of the statues presented the projects as a great undertaking for national defence and the protection of the country. Offices were set up in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, Mie, Hiroshima and Nagasaki to make people more aware of the importance of remembering the Mongol invasions and to raise funds for monuments. Touring around the country, Yuchi gave slide shows (using a lantern projector), talks on the Mongol invasions, and organized exhibitions. His audience reportedly reached over a million by January 1901. Artists were inspired by his talk and enthusiastically supported his projects.

In 1892 Naga’i Kenko, who was then working in an army band, wrote a song entitled ‘Genko’ [The Mongol Pirates] to support Yuchi’s efforts to construct monuments in Fukuoka. Naga’i Kenko’s song became very popular all over Japan and helped to celebrate the victory over the Mongol invaders and promote national unity. Special concerts and theatre performances were also held for this purpose.

A local artist, Yada Issho also completed 14 huge panoramic oil paintings depicting the Mongol invasions to support the statue construction projects in Fukuoka. His paintings were described as ‘powerful’, ‘realistic’ and a perfect depiction of Japanese resoluteness in defence of their land (gokoku tekkki no ki) by reporters. Yada’s paintings presented a coherent story of why Qubilai Qa’an attacked Japan, how the Japanese samurai fought heroically, and how horribly the Japanese suffered. Marco Polo was depicted as the antagonist, historically advising Qubilai Qa’an to invade Japan for its rich resources. This depiction reflected the anti-Western atmosphere within Japanese society at the time.

The commemoration projects mostly began at the local level but were soon promoted as national projects supported by the imperial government because the local initiatives advanced the policy of creating a single coherent national narrative with a unified history. As mentioned earlier, at the time of the Mongol invasions, samurai mostly participated in the war to be awarded land, but 600 years later, they were depicted as national heroes who died protecting the ‘entire nation’ and were awarded posthumously with imperial medals. People who experienced the Mongol invasions in the 13th century were seen as suffering ‘imperial subjects’ (teikoku no gunmin). Yuchi Takeo and Sano Zenrei’s initiatives of building local monuments were seen as projects of national interest. Erecting memorials across the natural landscape creates an environment in which people think about stories and heroes of the past and feel a common sense of belonging. In Haga Shoji’s words, they served to create a ‘logical community’ (rinri teki kyodotai). This ‘logical community’ was created on the basis of virtue, morality and honour.

Interest in the Mongol invasions was rejuvenated in the early 20th century to mobilize the nation for war as Japan began building an empire in Asia. This time,
the memory of the Mongol invasions became a basis for conveying the ideal of a selfless Japanese military spirit. The 650th anniversary of the Mongol invasions was celebrated enthusiastically across the country. A memorial rally was held in Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo to commemorate the first Mongol invasion of 1274. A memorial was also constructed for Qubilai Qa’an’s five ambassadors led by Du Shizhong in Takiguchi, close to Kamakura, where the group was beheaded in 1275. The Ministry of Education together with Tokyo City organized a memorial festival to commemorate the 650th anniversary of the second Mongol invasion of 1281 on 1 July 1931. Flyers and reports emphasized that ‘we Japanese defeated the strongest enemy in the world by the grace of god’. Along with film and music, a dance performance showed how the prayers of the imperial family in the Ise shrine were heard by the god-of-the-wind, and how the god-of-the-wind created the kamikaze to defeat the Mongol army and protect the Japanese people. Ten years later, in November 1941, the same kind of three-day memorial rally was organized in Tokyo to commemorate the 660th anniversary of the second Mongol invasion. These commemorative activities continued to the end of the war.

The memories of the Mongol invasions became a subject of mass media interest, especially radio and film. Soon after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, a film entitled Mongol Invasions: The Surrender of an Enemy Nation (Moko shurai: Tekkoku kofuku) was produced by the Shochiku film company in Kyoto in 1937. Its theme was the Japanese samurai under Hojo Tokimune defeating the Mongol invaders. This grandiose film aimed to conjure up Japanese patriotic feelings. The film was advertised with slogans such as ‘national crises!’; ‘entire nation should watch!’; ‘a great history of loyalty and patriotism!’ In a certain sense, the film encapsulated the narrative that had been avidly promoted since the second half of the 19th century. Naga’i Kenko’s 1892 song ‘Genko’, which had been written to support the huge memorial statues of Hojo Tokimune (later emperor Kameyama, as mentioned earlier) was used in the film. The film was praised by the Ministry of the Interior as the first historical film to be appropriate to current times. The censorship fee was even waived because the film ‘presented the Japanese spirit in the war against the Mongol invasion that marked a shining page in Japanese history, and it aimed for common good’. When the film was screened in September 1937, the box office sold out every day at big cinemas in Tokyo and Kyoto.

The stories of the Mongol invasions came to represent Japanese solidarity and fighting spirit during WWII. One of the largest national newspapers claimed in December 1939 that the situation at the time of the Mongol invasions could be applied to the current war; Japanese fighting spirit was destined to defeat the foreigners (the Westerners this time), just as it had done in the 13th century against the mighty Mongol Empire. Sensationally heroic stories of samurai and their families defending Japan during the Mongol invasions were depicted in newspapers, such as a samurai’s wife who tried to bring onigiri (rice balls) to her fighting husband.

CONCLUSION

The two Mongol invasions of the 13th century not only exerted powerful political and social changes in Kamakura Japan, they have also been of great importance for shaping Japanese self-image in modern times. The Mongol invasions helped to
expand the authoritarian power of the Kamakura shogunate, especially the power of the regent, Hojo Tokimune. However, this heightened power in turn contributed to the downfall of the Kamakura shogunate. Similarly, memories of the Mongol invasions in the 19th and early 20th centuries contributed to creating an image of a divinely protected land and of the Japanese as a people superior to their enemies. The Mongol invasions played an important part in the process of modern Japanese nation-building, but the strong sense of superiority led Japan into war and eventual defeat. While the Mongol invasions in the 13th century were real, the memories of the invasions in the 19th and early 20th centuries were the socially constructed product of a Japan desperate for unifying myths. Through commemoration, artwork, press, radio and film a ‘collective heartbeat’ and new memories were created. More recently, the sites of the Mongol invasions have become places of local historical and cultural heritage, contributing to local identity in a globalized world rather than a nationalist one. What will the Mongol invasions bring in the future? As Jacques Le Goff once pointed out, the relationship between present and past is never ending.62

NOTES

1 Bun’ei 文永 (1264–1275); Koan 弘安(1278–1288).
3 Cited in Saeki 2003, 81.
5 On troop and naval strengths, see Conlan 2001, 264; Rossabi 1987, xiii; Turnbull 2010, 49; Verschuer 2010, 89.
8 Amino 1989, 162–164. For further scholarly argument on this, see Chikushu 1972; Kawazoe 1977; Kaizu 1998, just to name a few.
9 Fukuoka 1962, 61; Amino 2000, 241–244.
10 Aida 1958. See also Kawazoe 2001, 144.
22 Batten 2013, 13–24.
23 Kawazoe 1971, 57.
25 Amino 2000, 46–47.
26 Ishii 1995, 76.
27 Murai 2013a, 242–272 (here 265).
28 Kawazoe 1971, 57.
33 Li 2017, 30–31; Enomoto 2007, 106–117.
39 Narangoa 2009, 404–414. The following sections are a modified and summarized version of the previous article.
40 ‘Moko shurai no saini tatakatta busho futari ni so’I’ [Upgrading two generals’ ranks who fought against Mongol Invasion], Yomiuri Shimbun 1896, 2.
43 Nozomi 1931.
45 For detailed activities of Yuchi, see Nakamura 2015.
46 ‘Geko: Gunka’ [Mongol Invasions: Military Song], Available https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%85%83%E5%AF%87_%E8%BB%8D%E6%AD%8C (accessed on 20 February 2018). For the English translation of the song, see Delgado 2008, 17–18.
47 Yomiuri shimbun 9 November 1893; 23 November 1893.
48 ‘Geko egai’ta dai abura’e’ [Grand oil paintings of Mongol Invasions], Yomiuri Shimbun, 29 July 1896, 3.
50 Yomiuri shimbun, 1 October 1893, 3; for paintings of Yada, see Yomigaeru Meiji Kaiga 2005, 20–51.
52 ‘Genko no eki kara 650-nen’ [650 Years since the Mongol Invasion], Yomiuri Shimbun 8 December 1924, 2.
53 ‘Shichigatsu tsuitchi Hibiya kokaido de Genko kinensai’ [Memorial Festival of Mongol Invasion will be held in Hibiya Hall on 1 July], Yomiuri Shimbun 28 June 1931, 1.
54 ‘Genko roppyaku rukujunen kinen taikai’ [Commemoration of 660th anniversary of Mongol Invasion], Yomiuri Shimbun 31 October 1941, 3.
55 Yomiuri Shimbun 27 September 1937, 3; 1 October 1937, 3.
56 Yomiuri Shimbun 18 September 1937, 2.
57 Yomiuri Shimbun 30 September 1937, 3.
58 Yomiuri Shimbun 28 September 1937, 3.
59 Yomiuri Shimbun 2 October 1937, 2.
60 ‘Moko kuru’ [Mongols Coming], Yomiuri Shimbun 11 December 1939, 2; Genko no kyokun’ [A Lesson from Mongol Invasions], Yomiuri Shimbun 23 October 1942, 2.
61 Yomiuri Shimbun, 28 February 1943, 2.
62 Le Goff 1992, 111.

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Nihon Rekishi. 120: 41–46.


*Yomiuri Shimbun*. 9 November 1893; 23 November 1893; 1 October 1893; 3; 29 July 1896: 3; 3 November 1896; 8 December 1924: 2; 28 June 1931; 18 September 1937: 2; 27 September 1937: 3; 28 September 1937: 3; 30 September 1937: 3; 1 October 1937: 3; 2 October 1937: 2; 11 December 1939: 2; 31 October 1941: 3; 23 October 1942: 2; 28 Feb. 1943: 2.