

“The Battle of Diaoyu City” And Its Impact on The Mongol Empire, The Southern Song Dynasty, And the European Landscape

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Abstract. The Mongol Empire in the 13th century was unprecedentedly powerful, establishing a vast empire on the grasslands and setting its sights on the Eastern Song Dynasty. Led by Genghis Khan, the Mongol army launched a three-pronged invasion of the Song Dynasty. However, unexpectedly, Genghis Khan died under the walls of Diaoyu City, leading to a series of significant changes within the Mongol Empire. First, Kublai Khan was forced to withdraw his troops from Xiangyang, giving the Song Dynasty a breathing space. Then, the internal war between Ariq Böke and Kublai Khan resulted in Kublai Khan's victory but also caused the fragmentation of the Mongol Empire. Lastly, the commander of the Western Expeditionary Army, Hulagu, participated in the struggle for the Khanate, leading to the ultimate abandonment of the last Mongol Western Expedition and sparing Africa from the ravages of war.

Keywords: Möngke; Kublai; Mongol Empire; Song-Yuan War.

1. Introduction

In the early 13th century, various Mongol tribes in the north of the Song Dynasty, under the leadership of Genghis Khan and his successors, formed a unified force and gradually broke away from the rule and oppression of the Jin Dynasty. Subsequently, the Mongols rapidly rose to power, destroying the Western Liao in 1218, the Western Xia in 1227, and the Jin Dynasty in 1234, ending more than a hundred years of a fragmented situation.

At the same time, under the leadership of outstanding generals such as Jebe and Subutai, the Mongol cavalry launched three Western expeditions into Europe, successively defeating the Arab Empire, the Khwarezmian Empire, and the Kiev Rus. By the year 1235, after the Mongols and the Song Dynasty joined forces to defeat the Jin Dynasty, the Song army advanced into the Central Plains, recapturing the capital, Bianjing, but being repelled by the Mongol army in Luoyang. A year later, the Great Ögedei Khan ordered a full-scale attack on the Song Dynasty, marking the official outbreak of the Mongol-Song War. Six years later, after heavy casualties on both sides, they agreed to a ceasefire.

In 1258, Möngke Khan led three Mongol armies to attack the Song Dynasty, marking the beginning of the second phase of the Mongol-Song War. Möngke led the main force into Sichuan, while Hulagu Khan attacked Ezhou and Uriyangqadu attacked Guangxi. At the same time, Möngke's brother Hulagu was preparing to launch an attack on Egypt. With the massive mobilization of Mongol forces, the outcome seemed inevitable in favor of the Mongols. However, unexpectedly, the seemingly weaker Song army built a strong defensive line in Sichuan, and even Möngke Khan himself met his demise under the walls of the city of Diaoyu.

Möngke's death was a major blow to the seemingly invincible Mongol Empire, although not critical on the surface, as the empire had no shortage of potential successors to the Khanate. However, his unexpected death actually had a profound impact on the course of world history in the 14th century. So, what unexpected consequences did Möngke's death bring to the Mongol Empire? How did the Song Dynasty manage to survive for another 20 years? And how did Egypt the onslaught of the Mongol cavalry that had swept through Europe? Or, when looking at these questions from a macro perspective, what impact did this event have on the world today? This paper starts with the death of Möngke and provides reasonable explanations for these questions.

2. The Battle of Diaoyu City

This paper mainly explores a decisive battle in the second phase of the Mongol-Song War: The Battle of Diaoyu City. First, the author will provide an introduction to the background of this battle. For the Mongols, their objectives were clear. Möngke would first break through Sichuan, join forces with Hulagu Khan to take Ezhou, and finally attack Lin'an, ultimately leading to the downfall of the Song Dynasty. For the Song Dynasty, Sichuan was not only the first line of defense against the Mongol army, but also faced the direct attack led by Möngke Khan himself. The strategic importance of this region cannot be overstated.

However, although the late Southern Song Dynasty was plagued by political corruption and the rise of treacherous officials, the appointment of Yu Ji as the Governor-General of Sichuan and the Transshipment Commissioner of Kuizhou Road was a wise decision. During his tenure in Sichuan, he vigorously developed finance and military affairs and built the famous "Mountain City Defense System". The core of this defense system was the strategy of "defending points instead of lines", which involved constructing numerous fortresses and strongholds in the mountainous areas of Sichuan. By utilizing the advantages of the terrain, the Song forces compelled the Mongol army to abandon its mobility and engage in siege warfare, which was not their forte, under the well-established defensive structures of the Song forces.

Furthermore, inside the city, ample water supply and food sources, were ensured, and the military and civilians implemented a "garrison farming system", meaning when there was a war, they would serve as soldiers. This defensive tactic created a deep and layered defense system centered around Chongqing, which, to some extent, compensated for the huge gap in military tactics between the Song and Mongol armies and greatly assisted the defense of Sichuan [1].

Diaoyu City, as one of the representative works of the Mountain City Defense System, naturally had its own importance. Firstly, its terrain was strategically important as it served as the gateway to Sichuan. The brothers Ran Lin and Ran Pu once told Yu Ji, the Governor-General of Sichuan, "There is no better place in Sichuan than Diaoyu Mountain. We suggest relocating here. If the right person is in charge and sufficient grain is stored for defense, it is better than having an army of ten thousand soldiers. Ba and Shu will be secure" [2]. Secondly, Diaoyu City was surrounded on three sides by water, and its terrain was higher than the surrounding flat land. The Song army constructed walls and defensive facilities on the slopes, combining high ground and cliffs as natural barriers, enabling them to have a favorable geographical position in battles. Lastly, Diaoyu City was reinforced and expanded four times by individuals like Yu Ji, Wang Jian, further enhancing its strategic significance and combat capabilities [3].

In 1258, Möngke led his troops into Sichuan and captured the surrounding cities of Liyi and Pingliang, effectively besieging Diaoyu city. Möngke sent a defector, Jin Guobao, to persuade Wang Jian to surrender, but Wang Jian beheaded Jin to demonstrate his determination to defend the city. In 1259, Möngke personally arrived at Shizishan, just outside Diaoyu City, to oversee the siege. The Mongol army launched continuous attacks, and although they achieved some initial success, the Song army quickly regained control. Seeing that they were unable to capture Diaoyu city, Möngke called a meeting to discuss the next military actions. Advisor Jusuhuli suggested bypassing Diaoyu and directly rendezvousing with Hulagu Khan in Ezhou to achieve the strategic goal of destroying the Southern Song Dynasty. However, this proposal was unanimously opposed by the Mongol generals. Möngke, known for his stubbornness, and his unwavering confidence in the unmatched achievements of the Mongol army, made a grave strategic mistake – to continue the siege of Diaoyu City.

The Song army chose to avoid direct confrontation and prolonged the war. As the weather turned hotter, the tide of victory began to turn in favor of the Song army. Despite having their reinforcements repelled, the Song forces inside the city remained well-supplied and in high spirits. In contrast, the Mongol army outside the city faced difficulties. They were accustomed to operating on the arid and cold Mongolian grasslands, and the hot and humid Sichuan Basin severely diminished their combat effectiveness and belief in victory. To make matters worse, many Mongol soldiers lost their fighting capacity due to heatstroke, cholera, and malaria. With all these factors, the Song army held absolute

advantages in terms of timing, location, and the condition of their troops, making it impossible for the Mongol army to achieve victory.

During this period, Lü Wende, the Deputy Governor-General of Sichuan, sent troops to rescue Diaoyu but was repelled. Wang Jian took the opportunity to lead a sortie, and the Mongol vanguard general, Wang Dechen, broke through the outer defenses of the city and engaged in battle with Wang Jian. However, Wang Jian refused to engage in battle. The rainy weather was not suitable for a siege, and the Mongols failed to capitalize on the best opportunity to breach the city. After another five months of intense fighting, the Mongol army suffered heavy losses. Wang Dechen attempted to persuade Wang Jian to surrender under the city, but he was severely wounded by flying rocks from the city and died shortly afterward. Wang Dechen's death had a significant psychological impact on Möngke, further deepening his determination to capture Diaoyu city.

Möngke ordered the construction of a high platform near the city's walls to personally assess the situation inside the city, preparing for a decisive battle. However, in a subsequent battle, Möngke himself was also severely injured by projectiles, and the Mongols were forced to retreat. A few days later, Möngke succumbed to his grave injuries. Twenty years later, facing the loss of Jingxiang and Chongqing, Wang Li, the defender of Diaoyu, conditionally surrendered to the Mongol forces, bringing a definitive end to the battle at Diaoyu City [4].

Although the ultimate outcome of the Southern Song Dynasty's demise could not be changed, this battle not only confirmed the success of the Mountain City Defense System but also unexpectedly killed Möngke Khan, the Great Khan of the Mongols. This greatly boosted the determination of the entire nation to fight to the end. Wang Jian and all the soldiers and civilians in Diaoyu temporarily halted the southward advance of the Mongol cavalry, providing a crucial morale boost to the crumbling Southern Song Dynasty.

3. “The Battle of Diaoyu City” and its Impact on the Mongol Empire, Southern Song Dynasty, and Europe

3.1. Mongol Empire

When discussing the impact of the death of Möngke on the Mongol Empire, it is necessary to mention the issue of succession to the Khan's throne. Unlike the Han Chinese dynasties' system, where "the eldest legitimate son usually ascended to the throne," the Mongol Empire's succession system required the selection of a new Khan through an assembly known as the Great Kurultai, where many imperial relatives, nobles, and senior officials participated in the decision-making process.

In addition, the youngest son of the Khan would be entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the homeland, essentially remaining in charge of the Mongol heartland. Since the time of Genghis Khan, competition for the Khanate's leadership had been fierce within the Mongol Empire. This paper mainly focuses on the power struggle after the death of Möngke regarding the succession to the Khanate. Although Genghis Khan's third son, Ögedei, inherited the Khanate, power eventually ended up in the hands of Möngke, the eldest son of Tolui, after Ögedei's death. This transfer of supreme authority from the Ögedei line to the Tolui line marked a significant development in the Mongol Empire's leadership structure.

However, after Möngke's sudden death during the Battle of Diaoyu City, the other potential successors to the throne became involved in power struggles to varying degrees. This section mainly discusses the reactions of Hulagu and Ariq Böke, two brothers of Möngke, to analyze the impact of the succession dispute on the Mongol Empire. Unlike Möngke, Hulagu admired the culture of the Southern Song Dynasty and had relatively moderate policies towards the Han Chinese. As mentioned earlier, Hulagu followed Möngke in the war against the Southern Song Dynasty and was the main attacker of Ezhou. However, at that time, the Southern Song's Prime Minister Jia Sidao personally rushed to Ezhou to command the defense, using wooden barriers to counter Hulagu's tunneling tactics. Hulagu, recognizing Jia Sidao's military talents, admired him, saying, "How could I have someone like Jia Sidao to use [5]."

Under Jia Sidao's unified command, various armies of the Southern Song Dynasty rushed to Ezhou. As mentioned earlier, General Lü Wende broke through the Mongol defense lines and entered Ezhou, making the city even more fortified. In this extremely difficult war situation, news of Möngke's death came unexpectedly. However, surprisingly, Hulagu did not choose to withdraw his troops immediately. Instead, he continued the war against the Southern Song Dynasty. Hulagu had two main reasons for doing so. Firstly, the news of Möngke's death was too incredible that Hulagu initially doubted its accuracy. Secondly, Hulagu had been fighting against Jia Sidao at Xiangyang for months without achieving any significant results. Withdrawing at this point would have damaged his prestige within the royal family. The war continued for several months, resulting in heavy casualties for the Mongol forces.

Furthermore, Hulagu's wife, Chabi, sent a letter to Hulagu, informing him that Ariq Böke, the seventh son who stayed in the Mongol Empire's capital, was preparing to compete for the throne. According to the Mongol system of "the youngest legitimate son inherits the property," Ariq Böke had been staying in Karakorum, not participating in the Southern campaign with Möngke and Hulagu. This seventh prince had similar political beliefs to Möngke and had always opposed Hulagu's sinicization policies. In addition, she hoped that Hulagu would stay in the south – Hulagu's sphere of influence. After receiving this information, Hulagu led his troops to Yanjing and rejected Ariq Böke's request to return to Karakorum to participate in the Kurultai. To seize the initiative, Hulagu held the Kurultai in Yanjing and declared himself the Khan.

Several months later, Ariq Böke also held a Kurultai in Karakorum, resulting in two Khans coexisting in the Mongol Empire. The elite Mongol troops were mainly engaged in the Western and Southern campaigns, with the Western campaign led by Hulagu's loyal general Uriyangqadai, while Hulagu naturally took command of the Southern campaign army after Möngke's death. Therefore, Hulagu was militarily stronger than Ariq Böke. In addition, Ariq Böke's cruelty contrasted sharply with Hulagu's image of benevolence, causing Ariq Böke to quickly lose popular support.

Finally, the resources controlled by Ariq Böke's Chagatai Khanate were far inferior to those controlled by Hulagu. As a result, the outcome of this war was evident [6]. Although Hulagu emerged victorious in this civil war, the damage caused to the Mongol Empire was irreparable. Among the major Khanates of the Mongol Empire, only the Ilkhanate, led by Uriyangqadai, supported Hulagu, while the other Khanates supported Ariq Böke. With Ariq Böke's defeat, these Khanates declared their refusal to accept Hulagu's rule and sought independence from the Mongol Empire. As a result, the once invincible Mongol Empire ceased to exist. Furthermore, the civil war between Hulagu and Ariq Böke greatly depleted the military strength of the Mongol Empire, rendering it unable to launch large-scale expansion campaigns.

3.2. Southern Song Dynasty

For the Southern Song Dynasty, the civil war and fragmentation of the Mongol Empire provided a period of respite and recovery. This period could have been an opportunity for the Song Dynasty to narrow the gap with the Mongols and potentially turn the tide of the war. However, the rulers of the Southern Song Dynasty failed to seize this opportunity and instead took measures that further widened the gap between the two sides, deteriorating the diplomatic environment, economic situation, and military capabilities of the Song Dynasty [7]. This section analyzes the actions of the Southern Song court during the Mongol civil war and explains why the Song Dynasty failed to take advantage of the death of Möngke to change the course of the war.

Firstly, the Southern Song Dynasty faced severe social problems during this period, with economic issues being the most pressing. The prolonged and substantial military expenditures forced the Song court to increase various taxes and issue a large amount of paper currency, leading to excessive exploitation. Jia Sidao, who held significant military and political power in the Southern Song Dynasty, implemented some reforms, such as the "Public Land System." His reform aimed at addressing the serious land consolidation issues in the late Southern Song Dynasty and reviving the

national economy. Unfortunately, this system severely damaged the interests of the landlord class, leading to widespread opposition. Ultimately, these reforms were abandoned [8].

In addition, the military system of private armies weakened the central government's direct control over the military. The combat effectiveness of the army was not guaranteed – “the main military officials suffer from labor and workday and night” [9]. Over time, the Song Dynasty found itself in a weakened state when facing the third stage of the war launched by Hulagu. They were unable to respond effectively or launch counterattacks in contrast to the previous two stages.

3.3. Egypt

Regarding the impact of Möngke's death on Egypt, it is necessary to analyze the third Western campaign led by Möngke's brother Hulagu. This campaign, like the previous two, achieved significant victories. The Mongol army first captured Baghdad, leading to the downfall of the Abbasid Caliphate. They then conquered the Syrian capital, Damascus, almost annihilating the Syrian state. Hulagu continued westward, directly targeting Egypt. He presented a letter to the rulers of the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt, offering them two choices: either surrender or prepare for battle. The Mamluk rulers, Sultan Al-Mu'azzam Turanshah and his generals, believed that based on the previous actions of the Mongol army, surrendering would not guarantee their survival. In this situation, which offered no retreat, it instead sparked a wave of resistance throughout Egypt. To prevent a decisive battle from occurring within Egypt, Sadr al-Din took the initiative to lead troops and headed towards Syria. However, at that time, Hulagu received news of Möngke's death and decided to lead the main force eastwards to deal with the succession dispute. Hulagu took nearly 80% of the army with him, leaving around 12,000 soldiers under the command of the Mongol general Kitbuqa to guard Syria [10].

In 1260, Kitbuqa's 12,000 Mongol soldiers faced the Mamluk army led by Saif ad-Din Qutuz in the Battle of Ain Jalut. At the beginning of the battle, the Egyptians withstood two Mongol charges and launched a counterattack. Although Kitbuqa's Mongol troops were brave and skilled in combat, the allies lacked the same war experience. One of the Syrian military leaders, Al-Ashraf Musa, ruler of Homs and a member of the Ayyubid dynasty, fled the battlefield, causing chaos in the Mongol army. Eventually, Kitbuqa refused the proposal to break out and was captured. Due to his refusal to surrender, he was killed. The Mongol army suffered a major defeat, with almost the entire army being wiped out. With this battle, the large-scale Western expansion of the Mongol Empire came to an end, and the myth of the invincibility of the Mongol army was shattered. Although the Ilkhanate (established by Hulagu after the Mongol Empire's division) engaged in a long war with Egypt, they never had another opportunity or the capability to conquer Egypt. It can be said that this war organized by the Mongol Empire for several decades of westward expansion protected Africa from the ravages of the Mongol cavalry.

4. Impact on Future Geopolitical Landscape

This section will discuss the changes and innovations that occurred in the Mongol Empire under Hulagu's rule after he became the Great Khan. As mentioned earlier, Hulagu consciously shifted his strategic focus to the south and placed his emphasis on governing the region. This strategic move allowed him to emerge victorious in the civil war despite the support for Ariq Böke from the Chagatai Khanate, the Ogedei Khanate, and the Qara Khitai Khanate. It also meant that Hulagu's policies towards the Han Chinese were relatively moderate, as evidenced by the sparing of Diaoyucheng from massacre after its fall.

Furthermore, Hulagu introduced the concept of "Great Unity" or "All-Under-Heaven," gradually establishing the attitude of the Yuan Dynasty as the "master" of the Central Plains, rather than simply being invaders and plunderers as in the time of Möngke. To some extent, Hulagu's rule protected the traditional culture of the Chinese people from a catastrophe.

Moreover, Hulagu implemented various reforms and innovations to consolidate his rule and govern the vast Mongol Empire. He established a centralized administrative system, dividing the

empire into provinces and appointing officials to oversee local governance. Hulagu also established the imperial examination system to select officials based on merit rather than birthright, drawing on the Confucian tradition of the Han Chinese. This allowed for a more stable and efficient administration of the empire.

Hulagu's rule also witnessed cultural exchanges and the blending of Mongol and Chinese cultures. Hulagu patronized Chinese scholars, artists, and intellectuals, promoting the development of literature, art, and science. He adopted the Chinese-style imperial court system and etiquette, further enhancing the assimilation of the Mongol ruling class into Chinese civilization.

In terms of foreign relations, Hulagu actively pursued diplomatic and trade exchanges with neighboring countries and even Europe. He sent envoys to establish diplomatic ties and fostered trade networks, contributing to the growth of the Silk Road and facilitating cultural exchanges between East and West.

Overall, Hulagu's rule brought about significant changes and innovations in the Mongol Empire, marking a departure from the conqueror image of the Mongols and laying the foundation for the Yuan Dynasty's governance. These changes had a lasting impact on the geopolitical landscape of East Asia and the relationship between the Mongol Empire and neighboring regions.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the impact of Möngke's death on the historical developments of the 13th century. In Asia, the Southern Song Dynasty struggled to survive for nearly 20 years. Figures like Wen Tianxiang and Lu Xiufu made their final resistance on the crumbling empire. The Mongol Empire collapsed, and Hulagu emerged victorious in the civil war, establishing the Yuan Dynasty and bringing about a significant ideological shift among the Mongols. In Europe, the Egyptians successfully resisted the Mongol invasion, breaking the "whip of God" in Syria and preventing the conquest of Africa.

The historical records of the Yuan Dynasty were relatively scarce compared to other dynasties, and previous studies have largely focused on specific individuals or policies, without analyzing the specific impact of particular events. This study can serve as the basis for further in-depth research, and the impacts mentioned above require further examination. The paper has highlighted three major impacts resulting from Möngke's death, and future research should delve deeper into these issues to enhance our understanding of the early history of the Yuan Dynasty and the trajectory of historical development.

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