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Afloat, Afoot, Ahorseback: Swiftness and Mobility in the Mongol Yuan Conquest of Song China, 1274-1279

David Curtis Wright

Warfare was an always tragic, often definitive, and sometimes predictable form of interaction between imperial China and pastoral nomadic peoples. Chinese states and pastoral nomadic polities were each passionately committed to their own ecologies and ways of life and regarded the other as less than fully human, and the hatreds born of this mutual dehumanisation contributed to hostility and conflict between them. Each side had its own preferred ways of warfare but found it necessary to learn the other's as well. As early as 307 BCE, King Wuling of Zhao had fielded Chinese mounted archers against the pastoral nomadic enemies of his state. Since Han Times (202 BCE – CE 220) various groups of pastoral nomads often beat northern Chinese jurisdictions into submission through relentless raids and incursions, but when they wanted to conquer recalcitrant walled cities or fortresses they had to use sedentary forces and tactical methods.

Like many pastoral nomadic peoples before them, the Mongols waged fierce and intermittent warfare against imperial China. The Mongol wars against China were, however, different from all the others preceeding them. The Mongol conquest of China in 1279 was not an entirely bad thing for China because it accomplished what the previous Song dynasty (960-1279) could not: the unification of historically Chinese territory under a single government. The swift and mobile military tactics of the Mongols in their campaigns against China throughout much of the thirteenth century, both on land and on rivers and the sea, reunified China and largely defined the majority of the territorial extent of Chinese territory today. The Mongol conquest was thus an integral and essential episode in Chinese history.

Mongol strategic and tactical preferences

In China the Mongols did at times engage in protracted sieges of walled cities and fortresses, including the failed campaign against the Diaoyu Fortress in Sichuan in 1259 and the ultimately victorious ones against the twin cities of Xiangyang and Fancheng (in central China) in 1273, the

successful prosecution of which involved the use of counter-weighted trebuchets constructed and deployed by Middle Eastern siege technicians. Over the course of the thirteenth century the Mongols laid siege to fortified cities when they had no other choice, but overall they retained their instinctive aversion against protracted sieges and their strong preference for rapid and mobile offensives. From 1274 through 1279, during the final push of the Mongol conquest of the Song Dynasty in Song China, highly swift and mobile Mongol Yuan ships were as important on rivers and seas as the Mongol cavalry had been earlier during the conquest of northern China.

Especially under Khubilai Khan, the Mongols avoided siege warfare whenever possible. In the mid-1270s Khubilai instructed his general Bayan to wage swift mobile warfare and avoid sieges on Song cities at almost, but not quite all, costs. Bayan took these instructions from his sovereign to heart, and during his campaigns on the Yangzi River and southward to Lin'an with a massive international force that included a navy, Mongol cavalry, Chinese infantry, and Middle Eastern mechanical artillery corps, he laid siege to and massacred only two cities: Shayang (in central China), 'in order to establish a credible threat to any city they approached with orders to surrender,' and Changzhou, 'in order to show that no city that had previously submitted to the Yuan could revert to allegiance to the Song without suffering the direst of consequences.'¹ Bayan readily grasped and largely followed through on what Khubilai wanted: many more swift and mobile attacks and many fewer protracted siege quagmires. Here the Mongols' preferences paralleled Sunzi's strong cautions against sieges:

The grand strategy formulated by Khubilai and applied by Bayan did not represent a Sino-Mongolian strategic fusion, medley, or reconciliation, because Sunzi's aversion to protracted, positional warfare and attacks on fortified cities on the one hand and the Mongolian aversion to the same on the other were not fundamentally dissimilar. Likewise, and for the same reasons, Khubilai's grand strategy was not a Sino-Mongolian strategic symbiosis or synthesis. Khubilai's grand strategy was, rather, a fortuitous and convenient combination of conceptually similar

¹ D.C. Wright, 'Debates in the Field During Bayan's Campaigns Against Song China, 1274-1276' in: P.A. Lorge ed., *Debating War in Chinese History* (Leiden 2013) 141-162.

Chinese (or at least Sunzi) and nomadic strategic and tactical preferences.²

Speed and mobility

In his excessively harsh review of Timothy May's useful and insightful *The Mongol Art of War*, Denis Sinor pans May's brief comparative discussion of the similarities between the swift and mobile warfare of the Mongols on the one hand and the Blitzkrieg of the German *Wehrmacht* during the Second World War on the other.³ According to Sinor: 'contrary to his [May's] view, 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.'⁴ But May does not push the comparison between the two styles of warfare to an inappropriate or unreasonable extent, and he does not argue or imply that the Mongols were not slow, careful, and methodical planners in their campaigns of conquest. Sinor confuses long-term strategy with short-term tactical execution, and May is essentially right at the tactical level. Strategically, Khubilai Khan was a careful and patient man who had a long-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.

² Wright, 'Debates in the Field', 160.

³ T. May, *The Mongol Art of War: Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Military System* (Yardley, PA 2007) 144-146.

⁴ D. Sinor, 'The Mongol Art of War: Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Military System (review)', *Journal of Military History* 71.4 (2007) 1223-1224. In this review Sinor also criticises May's book because its '(...)descriptions jump from one military theater to the other and follow no clear chronology.' But this is simply because May's approach is topical and, as such, not amenable to chronological treatment or consideration. Topic and chronology are two major divides that every historian must traverse, but not simultaneously. Over two thousand years ago, the great Chinese historian Sima Qian discovered that chronological and topical coverage had to be done in separate sections.

May is correct about Blitzkrieg-style speed and mobility being the chief military asset of the Mongols, as was B. H. Liddell Hart decades before him:

Another canon that they [the Mongols] tore up was that mobile troops, such as cavalry, must need rest on a stable infantry base (...) The prime feature of the Mongol military system was therefore its simplicity, due to the use of a single arm [cavalry], in contrast to the inevitably complex organisation of a combination of several arms which has always characterised European armies(...) The single arm they used was that which possessed the highest degree of mobility, and in this lay the secret of their unbroken run of victory.⁵

In this passage Hart was actually writing more about Chinggis (Jenghis) Khan and Sübötei (Sabutai) Baghatur than the Mongols in general, even though at times he seems to have equated the two. Hart's observations, while correct enough regarding the importance of speed and mobility in the Mongols' conquests, were not broad enough and therefore do contain some error. That is, Hart was partially wrong not about speed and mobility, but about the terrain and the means of transportation. 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.

Bayan's campaigns down the Yangzi, 1274-1276

Bayan began his campaigns against Song in October 1274, when he assembled his forces at Xiangyang and Fancheng, thence proceeding

⁵ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Great Captains Unveiled: From Genghis Khan to General Wolfe* (Novato, CA 1990) 32-33.

southward along the Han River. Because of Bayan's desire to proceed swiftly, he did not make extensive use of his superb artillery forces to batter down city walls. He used his artillery on only three occasions, one from ashore against Song warships on the Yangzi River, and two against Song Chinese cities. After the initial massacre of Shayang, Chinese cities surrendered peacefully once his forces approached them and ordered them to surrender. On 11 January 1275 Bayan's forces crossed the Yangzi and landed massive forces on its southern bank, an important advance that shattered Song morale even as it heightened Yuan morale. Massive naval battles at several points down the Yangzi ensued, with the Yuan winning them all. In November 1275 his forces began approaching Lin'an (the Song capital city, modern Hangzhou on China's east coast) with both overland and coastal naval forces. Along his way he completely massacred the city of Changzhou as punishment for its reversion to Song allegiance after it had earlier surrendered to the Yuan.⁶ By late January 1276 Bayan's forces were pressing closely in on Lin'an.

The Song surrender

There was panic and desperation at the Song court in Lin'an in January and February 1276. Song high officials Wen Tianxiang and Zhang Shijie wanted Grand Empress Dowager Xie, Empress Dowager Quan, and the young imperial heir apparent Zhao Xian to flee the capital and escape on the sea, but Grand Councilor Chen Yizhong did not approve of this; instead he chose to surrender. Knowing that the jig was now up at last, the Song government sent envoys to Gaoting Mountain, where Bayan had encamped, and there they submitted Song's official imperial jade governmental seal (*yuxi*) and an instrument of surrender (*xiangbiao*) to him in unambiguous gestures of utter capitulation.⁷ Literarily surrender was not a particularly impressive performance; perhaps the Song literatus or literati who wrote it up did not think it appropriate to make such a humiliating document very elegant:

⁶ On the Changzhou massacre see: D.C. Wright, 'The Mongol General Bayan and the Massacre of Changzhou 1275', *Altaica* 7 (2002) 108-121.

⁷ *Yuanshi* [History of Yuan] (Beijing 1976) 9.177.

I, [Zhao] Xian, the sovereign of the state of Song, respectfully and with a hundred obeisances say: I, [Zhao] Xian, am of minor account and am young and dilute. My family has met with many difficulties. The villain [formerly] in power, Jia Sidao, turned his back on our [peace] covenant and harmed the state, leading to [Yuan's] labour at mobilising troops and inquiring into wrongdoings. It is not that I, Xian, do not wish to run and hide in seeking barely to survive; but the Mandate of Heaven has, after all, found its place [against Song], and whence shall I, Xian, flee? I have reverentially received of the Grand Empress Dowager a command to pare away my title as emperor and to offer up to the sagacious [Yuan] court all of the currently available jurisdictions of Liang-Zhe East Circuit and Liang-Zhe West Circuit [Zhedong and Zhexi], Fujian, Jiangnan East Circuit and Jiangnan West Circuit, Hu'nán [Jinghu South Circuit], Guangnan East Circuit and Guangnan West Circuit, Sichuan, and the Eastern and Western Huainan Circuits. For the [sake of the] living souls of the state I implore in sorrow and request [Your Majesty's] commands. Prostrate, I hope for [Your Majesty's] sagacious compassion and bequeathal of solicitude, for [Your Majesty] not to be able to bear for the ancestral shrines of your servant Xian to come suddenly to death and severance, and for [Your Majesty] to deign to hand down [an order for the] preservation intact [of the Zhao family ancestral shrines]. [If so], then generation after generation the descendants of the Zhao clan will have [something on which] to rely and will not dare stop or forget [it].⁸

After receiving Song's capitulation, Bayan summoned Song's now fugitive Grand Councilor Chen Yizhong (who did not keep a date to meet and negotiate with Bayan at Chang'an) to come forth and discuss further the particulars of the surrender, and he sent a high Yuan officer to take the imperial seal to Khubilai Khan's court at Shangdu.⁹

On 5 February 1276, Bayan proceeded to a point that day only fifty *li* north of Lin'an when a Yuan messenger came with disquieting news: 'Chen Yizhong and the Lianghuai [defenders] Zhang Shijie, Su Liuyi, Liu Shiyong, and others have taken the [imperial Zhao clan] Princes Guang and Yi and fled from Qiantang. Only the Grand Empress Dowager [Xie] and the young

⁸ I translated the version in Bi Yuan, *Xu Zizhi Tongjian* [*Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*] (Beijing 1987) 182.4976.

⁹ Bi Yuan, *Xu Zizhi Tongjian* 182.4976.

sovereign remain unmoved in their palace.¹⁰ Fortunately for the population and city of Lin'an, Bayan chose not to regard this as an act of general defiance and resistance, but rather one of obstinacy by a few key individuals and the followers they could attract. But as it turned out, these two young princes Guang and Yi were later to be installed as minor emperors by a stubborn and diehard Song loyalist movement. Song pretenders resisted Yuan rule until the spring of 1279, and until that time Yuan did not consider its victory over Song final.

On February 6 Bayan ordered Yuan officials to proceed to Lin'an, enter the Song palace, and give instructions to the Grand Empress Dowager. In response two days later, the Song Grand Empress Dowager Xie sent several high Song officials, including Wen Tianxiang, to see Bayan at the Mingyin Shrine, and Bayan comforted them with warm words. In this audience with Bayan, Wen Tianxiang desperately tried to pretend that Song had not already surrendered to Yuan and attempted to get Bayan to agree to terms less than surrender, but Bayan would have none of it. Wen Tianxiang, in a revolting display of self-importance and wishful thinking, imperiously presented Bayan with a logically fallacious false dilemma: 'Our court has inherited the imperial legitimacy and is the abode of civilisation and culture. Will the Northern Court [i.e. Yuan Court] be a friendly allied state, or will it destroy the [Song] altars of soil and grain?'¹¹ Bayan sought at first to reassure Wen Tianxiang's delegation by conveying his intentions in terms of Khubilai's commands: he would neither touch the Song altars nor kill the Song population. Desperately wanting to see in Bayan's reply something he almost certainly knew was not there, Wen Tianxiang replied:

¹⁰ Liu Minzhong, *Ping Song Lu* [Record of the Pacification of Song] (Taipei 1989) 2.16.

¹¹ Bi Yuan, *Xu Zizhi Tongjian* 182.4977.

Wen Tianxiang's logical fallacy here is what David Hackett Fischer calls the 'fallacy of many questions,' one variety of which is 'framing a question in such a way that two or more questions are asked at once, and a single answer is required.' More precisely, it is a variety of the fallacy of many questions that Fischer calls the 'fallacy of false dichotomous questions,' which is 'a special form of the fallacy of many questions, which deserves to be singled out for special condemnation. It arises from the abuse of an exceedingly dangerous conceptual device. Dichotomy is a division into two parts. If it is properly drawn, the parts are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, so that there is no overlap, no opening in the middle, and nothing omitted at either end.' D.H. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Towards a Logic of Historical Thought* (London 1970) 9-10.

If the Northern Court wants to be a friendly allied state, please withdraw your troops to Pingjiang or Jiaying, and then [we will] deliberate on annual payments and the rewards for your troops. The Northern Court completely withdrawing its forces is the best policy. If [the Northern Court] wants to destroy our ancestral temple, then [consider that] [Eastern and Western] Huai[nan] Circuits, Fujian, [Liang]Zhe [East and West Circuits], Guang[nan East and West Circuits], and still many more [jurisdictions] have not yet fallen; victory and defeat are as yet unknown; and the continuous ravages of war would certainly start from this.¹²

Bayan, apparently taken aback by Wen's chutzpah, gradually became less reassuring in his tone of voice. Wen then responded with braggadocio and bravado that betrayed his fragile male ego: 'I am the Principal Graduate and Grand Councilor of the Southern Court; I have but my one death to give in requital to my country. I fear neither sword nor saw nor cauldron nor pot!'¹³ Bayan and his generals looked at each other in bewilderment for a moment, and then Bayan, having seen through Wen's antics, dealt with the situation intelligently by sending everyone back to the Song court except for Wen, whom he ordered be kept under military guard because he correctly regarded Wen as unstable, mercurial, and harbouring obstreperous intentions and purposes. Wen Tianxiang persisted in requesting that he be allowed to return to Song, but Bayan simply laughed at these requests. This angered Wen Tianxiang, who demanded of Bayan an explanation of why the others in his delegation were allowed to return to Lin'an while he alone was detained at Bayan's military headquarters. Bayan made a show of answering him with warm and consoling words: 'Don't be angry. You are a major official for the Song [royal] family, and your responsibilities are not light. Since you came here with good intentions, it is only normal for you to talk together with me about current matters. I only wish to detain you for a few days.' With this, he ordered officers to accompany Wen Tianxiang and keep an eye on him.¹⁴

On 11 February 1276 Bayan ordered that Grand Empress Dowager Xie's surrender orders to all Song jurisdictions that had not yet submitted to

¹² Bi Yuan, *Xu Zizhi Tongjian* 182.4977.

¹³ These representing four different means by which he could be killed gruesomely.

¹⁴ Liu, *Ping Songlu* 2.16; Bi Yuan, *Xu Zizhi Tongjian* 182.4977-78; *Yuanshi* 9.176.

the Yuan be widely distributed. On 14 February the Song military was divided up and incorporated into the Yuan armies and sent to other assignments and posts. On 18 March Bayan finally entered Lin'an personally and stayed the night there, and the next day he threw a grand banquet in celebration of the Yuan victory over Song. On 27 March he left Lin'an, and thereafter other Yuan commanders would lead up subsequent campaigns against Song holdouts and diehards.¹⁵

Song Pretenders and the final Battle of Yaishan, February 1276 - March 1279

After Lin'an's surrender and Bayan's departure from China, the Yuan armies could not ignore the fugitive loyalist regime that had fled south. For the next three years, determined Yuan land and sea forces under the leadership of both Mongol and Chinese commanders pursued the Quixotic loyalist regime and mopped up pockets of resistance in Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi, and Guangdong. Yuan forces almost always made mincemeat of the forces of Song loyalist pretenders in any engagement with them, and during these last three years the Yuan armies reverted to wholesale butchery of entire towns that resisted them.¹⁶

By early 1279 the last remnants of Song loyalists had fled the mainland entirely and went out to sea aboard thousands of ships. The final decisive battle that finally sank (literally) the Song loyalist cause took place on the sea off the coast of Yaishan (about 120 kilometres due west of modern Hong Kong) in March 1279. What Zhang Shijie, the commander of the Song loyalist navy, did at Yaishan was pure folly: he tethered up his ships, which numbered over a thousand, with ropes into a single line and had them drop anchor, with bows inward and sterns outward. He would make his final stand here, as if his navy were a stationary land force! He was weary of fleeing: 'Lo these many years we have voyaged upon the seas. Now we must decide between us and them the victor and the vanquished.'¹⁷ He

¹⁵ Liu, *Ping Songlu* 2.16-18; *Yuanshi* 9.176; Bi Yuan, Xu Zizhi *Tongjian* 102.4977-4978.

¹⁶ There were, by my reckoning, at least six massacres of southern Chinese cities during this time: Chaozhou (partial), Jingjiang, Nanfeng, Shashi, Xinghua (partial), and Zhenchao.

¹⁷ Bi Yuan, *Zizhi Tongjian* 184.5025.

was a desperate and psychologically exhausted man who had fought the Yuan for over a decade, and he led a resistance movement drained of morale and resolve. His final act of tactical desperation was to place the boy emperor in the largest ship in the centre of his line of ships.

The Mongol Yuan commander, a northern Chinese named Zhang Hongfan, had many fewer and smaller warships than the Song loyalists, but what he lacked in numbers and size he more than made up for with the speed and mobility his ships would have around the tethered and anchored Song navy. Zhang Hongfan understood the advantages he would have intuitively and quickly; indeed, 'the advantages of mobility were readily apparent to one who had fought for the Mongols so long and so well.'¹⁸

On the morning of 20 March 1279, Zhang Hongfan directed his smaller and lighter ships to go north of the tethered Song formation. When the tide went out, this smaller Yuan force attacked southward along with the tide, while the main Yuan fleet of larger ships attacked from the south and set several Song ships alight. Later that morning, Zhang Hongfan ordered boarding operations, the purpose of which was more to kill the people aboard Song vessels than to sink the vessels per se. The boarding operations raged on for most of the day, but at around 5:00 pm, in the fog and confusion of battle, the colours of a Song warship were stricken. Many more Song naval vessels then followed suit because they thought a surrender order had been issued. The Song resolve evaporated in an instant, and many Song naval personnel stripped off their uniforms and surrendered. The Yuan navy captured some 800 Song warships, many of which were later used in Khubilai Khan's invasions of Japan. An orgy of Song suicides ensued, with thousands upon thousands of Song loyalists leaping into the sea and drowning. The aftermath of Yaishan was a grizzly spectacle of perhaps 100,000 bodies floating in the sea.¹⁹

With their speed, mobility, and smaller sizes and numbers, the Yuan ships at Yaishan were deployed and functioned like nomadic cavalry, and the Song navy functioned like stationary infantry forces on land. Yuan warships, the cavalry of the sea, surrounded and picked off not squadrons of trapped foot soldiers, but a fleet of tethered and anchored naval vessels. One imagines that Zhang Hongfan could hardly have believed his own

¹⁸ D.C. Wright, 'Navies in the Mongol Yuan Conquest of Song China 1274-1279', *Mongolian Studies* 29 (2007) 207-216: 209-210.

¹⁹ Wright, 'Navies in the Mongol Yuan Conquest', 209-211.

good luck and the foolishness of his adversary. In the end, it all concluded too easily, and Jennifer Jay may well be right in speculating that the Mongol Yuan victory was ‘a surprise for both sides.’²⁰ But surprise or no, in the spring of 1279, a final world-class naval battle completed the conquests of the Mongol empire:

The Battle of Yaishan was the single largest naval battle in Chinese history, but its importance and magnitude remain underappreciated and largely unknown in the West and even in China. Since around 1400 warships and at least 200,000 people were involved in the fighting in some way, either as soldiers or civilians (Zhang Shijie placed military and civilian personnel alike aboard his roped and anchored warships), in some measures (although certainly not in terms of tonnage or area of action) the Battle of Yaishan may well also stand alongside the greatest naval battles of all time, including the Battles of Salamis (480 BCE), Cape Ecnomus (456 BCE), Jutland (31 May 1916), and Leyte Gulf (23-26 October 1944). The Battle of Yaishan both finished the Mongol conquest of China and achieved the farthest territorial extent of the Mongol World Empire. Indeed, the largest land empire the world has ever known was completed by one of history’s great battles at sea.²¹

Nevertheless, the naval dimensions (both riverine and littoral) of the Yuan conquest should not be overstated or overdrawn; by themselves they were necessary but not sufficient in and of themselves to secure Yuan victory. Foot soldiers and, on two occasions, siege technicians did play indispensable roles in establishing the credible threat necessary for convincing most cities to submit peacefully. Further, even more than it was military, the Mongol conquest of China was political and psychological. That is, if during the 1270s every Song Chinese city had resisted the Yuan onslaught with the stoutness and determination that Xiangyang and Fancheng had, not even the Mongols would have succeeded in conquering China. Chinese collaboration with, and large-scale defection to, the Mongol Yuan cause were the most important elements in a complex constellation of necessary and contributing factors that led to the final collapse of Song in

²⁰ J.W. Jay, *A Change in Dynasties: Loyatism in Thirteenth-Century China* (Bellingham, WA 1991) 57.

²¹ Wright, ‘Navies in the Mongol Yuan Conquest’, 213.

1279. As well, included in this causal constellation must also be more ineffable factors such as Song's defeatism, capitulationism, and low morale; general disgust with the incompetence and ineffectualness of the moribund Song state; and the growing conviction among millions of Chinese that heaven itself must be on the side of the Mongol Yuan, as evidenced by its relentless accumulation of victories, one after another. Song was losing the Mandate of Heaven, and Yuan was gaining it.

Yuan and the national unification of China

As destructive as it was, the Mongol conquest was not, in the end, entirely negative for China. Painting and drama flourished under Mongol rule, and the Mongols helped create a plain written language in China because they spoke only simple colloquial Chinese and could not read complex and allusive literary Chinese. But China's most important long-term legacy from the Mongol conquest is the identity of the People's Republic of China today as a multi-ethnic state. As a part of the larger Mongol World Empire, the Mongol Yuan reunified historically Chinese territory and defined it for the subsequent Chinese Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and the larger Manchu Qing empire (1644-1912). Indeed, as Okada Hidehiro has trenchantly observed:

The greatest legacy of the Mongol Empire bequeathed to the Chinese is the Chinese nation itself (...) In contrast to the Republic of China, which was a Chinese nation-state as was the Ming, the People's Republic of China is not China but an empire in the mould of the Mongol Empire.²²

Ironically enough, then, in addition to being a victory for the Mongol World Empire, Yaishan was a victory for China as well. The Yuan accomplished what China since the fall of the Tang in 907 CE could not: the unification of historically Chinese territory under one government. For the first time in over three and a half centuries, China was one again. The division of China into two or more parts (usually northern and southern) was gone after 1279.

²² H. Okada, 'China as a Successor State to the Mongol Empire' in: R. Amitai-Press and D.O. Morgan ed., *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy* (Leiden 2000) 260-272: 260, 270.

In Beijing's current unificationist religion regarding Taiwan, national territorial division is regarded as one of the worst things imaginable, while unification of historically Chinese territory under one government is seen as the ultimate and greatest goal and good to which any Chinese state and society could aspire. But which dynasty, after all, actually established and more or less defined this territorial extent? Which government reunified all of historically Chinese territory (and much more) under one government for the first time in over 350 years? Was it the effete little court 小朝廷 of Song and the small territory 半壁江山 under its control, or was it the foreign and 'barbarian' Mongol World Empire?

In Chinese culture Wen Tianxiang is typically apotheosised, especially by his descendants, as an ardent patriot and a model of constancy and loyalty, but in actuality he was a difficult and garrulous man who 'was arrogant, blunt, and overbearing and simply could not get along with the other officials'.²³ What is more, in defying the Yuan armies and insisting on pretending that the Song was not a doomed dynasty that had already surrendered, this unstable and solipsistic blowhard was actually resisting the nearly completed reunification of China.

Conclusion

Speed and mobility on land first, then rivers, and finally the sea won for the Mongols their empire. Instead of envisioning the Mongol conquest of China mainly if not completely as a conquest from horseback, we should see it, especially in its latter stages, as a series of complex operations afloat, afoot, and ahorseback. It took the swift and mobile tactics of the Mongol Yuan to do what no native Chinese dynasty had done since 907 CE: unify China.

²³ Jay, *A Change in Dynasties*, 51.