



The Mongol Invasions of Japan - Part 1

Kublai Khan's Quests for Domination in 1274 and 1281

Original Article by [Kallie Szczepanski](#) at [Thoughtco](#)

Adapted for Year 8 History by Roslyn Green

INTRODUCTION

The Mongol invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1281 devastated Japanese resources and power in the region. These attacks almost destroyed the samurai culture and the Empire of Japan entirely, before a typhoon miraculously spared the last stronghold of the Japanese warriors. At the start of the conflict, Japan relied on troops of samurai, whose intense sense of honour made them courageous and resolute fighters. Yet the sheer force and brute strength of the Mongol invaders pushed these noble warriors to their limits, making them question their code of honour as they faced these fierce combatants.

The impact of nearly two decades of struggle between their rulers was to echo on through Japanese history and influence the Second World War as well as modern Japanese culture.

1 Vocabulary - Choose from the underlined words above.

a Find a word in the text with a similar meaning to “devastated”:

b Identify a word in the text that is a synonym of “hurricane”:

c Which fighters were influenced by their code of honour? The

d Which fighters displayed brute strength? The

e Locate another word for “armed struggle” in the text:

f Find a synonym for “warriors” or “fighters”:

g Can you locate another word for “savage”?

h Can you identify a phrase in the second paragraph that means “to have a lasting impact”?

i Which adjective has a similar meaning to “determined”?

The Background Story

The Mongol ruler, Kublai Khan, wanted to subdue all of China. In addition to this challenging quest, he sent a message to the Emperor of Japan in 1266, addressing him as “the ruler of a small country”. He advised the Japanese sovereign to pay him tribute at once—or else. The Japanese Emperor did not respond to these demands. Five times over the next six years, Kublai Khan sent his messengers; the Japanese shogun would not allow them to land on Honshu, the main island.

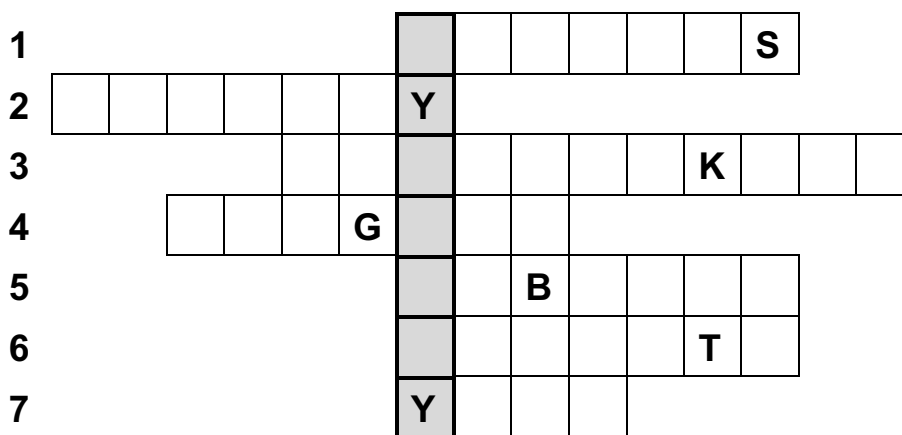
In 1271, Kublai Khan declared himself the first emperor of China's Yuan Dynasty. A grandson of Genghis Khan, he ruled over much of China, as well as Mongolia and Korea; meanwhile, his uncles and cousins controlled an empire that stretched from Hungary in the west to the Pacific coast of Siberia in the east.

The great khans of the Mongol Empire did not tolerate impudence from their neighbours, and Kublai was quick to demand a strike against Japan as early as 1272. However, his counsellors advised him to bide his time until a proper armada of warships could be built—300 to 600, vessels which would be commissioned from the shipyards of southern China and Korea, and an army of some 40,000 men. Against this mighty force, Japan could muster only about 10,000 fighting men from the ranks of the often-squabbling samurai clans. Japan's warriors were seriously outmatched.

② Words and Details

a Use the details above to fill in the crossword below. The **key word** (shown vertically) means a succession of leaders or kings from one family.

- 1 The Japanese Emperor did not respond to the Mongolian Emperor's _____.
- 2 Kublai Khan referred arrogantly to the Japanese emperor as “the leader of a small _____”.
- 3 Grandfather of Kublai Khan (2 words)
- 4 The Mongolian Empire at this time stretched to _____ in the west.
- 5 The eastern border of the Mongolian Empire was the Pacific coast of _____, a part of modern-day Russia.
- 6 The Mongolian Emperor wanted the Japanese to pay _____.
- 7 Of which Chinese dynasty was Kublai Khan the first ruler?



b Match the definitions below with the underlined phrases or words in the text under the heading “The Background Story”.

a Another word for a king, emperor or supreme ruler: _____

b A payment made from a dependent state to a dominant state: _____

c A fleet of ships: _____

d Disrespect, rudeness or cheek: _____

e Bring something under control or overcome it: _____

f Gather, bring together: _____