

The Mongol Invasions of Japan – Part 3

Based on an article by [Kallie Szczepanski](#) at [Thoughtco](#)

A Close Call

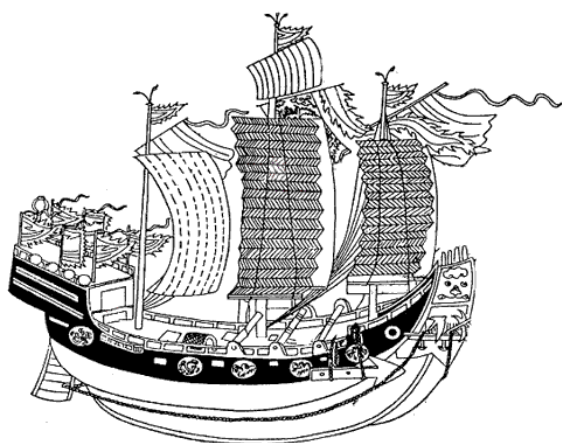
Just as all hope for the Japanese seemed to be fading, the Mongol armada, withdrawing to the open seas to avoid the onshore winds, sailed straight into a typhoon. It is believed that 13,000 of Kublai Khan's soldiers drowned. To the Japanese, this seemed like a miracle.

The Second Invasion, 1281

In the 7 years between the two invasions, Kublai Khan established a new government division called the "Ministry for Conquering Japan". In 1280, the ministry devised plans for a two-pronged attack the following spring, including both a Korean and a Chinese fleet.

With more forewarning of this second attack, Japan was able to muster 40,000 samurai and other fighting men and build a defensive wall.

The Korean fleet reached Hakata Bay in June 1281, but the ships from China were nowhere to be seen. The samurai weakened their opponents by rowing out to the Mongol ships under cover of darkness, setting fire to them and attacking the troops. These raids demoralised the Mongols' conscripts, some of whom had only recently been conquered. A stalemate lasted for 50 days, as the Korean fleet waited for the Chinese reinforcements.



Ships of a similar design were employed during the Mongol invasion.

In August, the Mongols' main fleet landed. Now faced with a force more than 3 times as large as their own, the samurai were in serious danger of being slaughtered. With little hope of survival, they fought on with desperate bravery.

Japan's Miracle

Just when it appeared that the samurai would be exterminated and Japan crushed, a second typhoon roared ashore. Nearly all of the invaders drowned in the storm.

The Japanese believed that their gods had sent the storms to preserve Japan from the Mongols. They called the two storms kamikaze, or "divine winds". Not surprisingly, Kublai Khan abandoned the idea of conquering the island nation.

The Great Wave off Kanagawa

A woodblock print by Katsushika Hokusai – one of the most famous Japanese works of art in the world

In the public domain, via Wikimedia

Currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York



7 The Words and the Story

Which underlined words from the text above fit into the blanks in the summary below?

conscripts ♦ defensive ♦ demoralised ♦ forewarning ♦
kamikaze ♦ miracle ♦ slaughtered ♦ stalemate ♦ typhoons

a The seemingly invincible Mongols were thwarted by two _____ . To the Japanese, this seemed like a _____ .

b For the second invasion, the Japanese had more _____ , and were consequently able to build a _____ wall.

c Many Mongol fighters were _____ – people who had been coerced into fighting. They were _____ by the samurai attacks.

d For 50 days, there was a _____ : neither side could win.

e When the Chinese fleet finally arrived, the samurai seemed likely to be defeated and _____ . Then another typhoon destroyed the Mongol fleet.

f This is how the legend of “divine winds” or “god-winds” or _____ came into being. The Japanese believed that their gods had saved them. During and after World War 2, this word was also used to denote the suicide bombers of the Japanese army.

8 Some Final Insights from this Remarkable Story...

◆ Weather has often influenced the course of history. Read about this example and others at [this link](#).

◆ The individualistic style of Samurai warfare was a disadvantage in fighting against the Mongols, yet the samurai code, which emphasised bravery and made surrender unthinkable, was also crucial to the eventual unexpected victory of the Japanese.

◆ Claiming that the gods are on your side (and, in this case, that they send “divine winds” to protect you) is a common form of propaganda – and not just in the Middle Ages.

◆ A legend can influence history. For instance, Emperor Hirohito of Japan used the legend of the “divine winds” as nationalist propaganda in an attempt to inspire young Japanese soldiers to acts of courage and suicidal desperation during World War 2.

◆ While some researchers question the legend of the “divine winds”, there is modern geographical evidence to support the story, as you can discover at [this link](#).

◆ A set style of fighting can be a disadvantage when one is faced with a highly adaptable enemy. The samurai were fortunate to survive despite their inflexible tactics. Similarly, the European knights’ style of fighting became a handicap during the Hundred Years War. They rode wore heavy plate armour and rode huge warhorses, yet they were defeated by longbow archers whose arrows, in a few minutes, cut through their armour and destroyed their horses. The knights who were unhorsed could barely move in their heavy armour and were easy prey for enemy foot-soldiers.