

Locating History in Post-war Japan: Are the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281 a regional, national or world historical event?

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Introduction

The German historian Reinhart Koselleck (1923–1906) wrote in an essay called *Space and History* (“Raum und Geschichte”) that in Japan the same term was used for history and space, thereby emphasising the connection between geographical spaces and history.¹ The Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281 and the “divine winds” (*kamikaze*), which apparently saved Japan from the foreign invaders, are one historical event, not only literally showing the connection between space and history, i.e the creation of “*lieux d’histoire*,” but also metaphorically taking up space within regional, national and world history. I argue that due to the national appropriation of the history of the Mongol invasions and the myth of the divine winds during the Pacific War, historians relocated the Mongol invasions from national to regional history in post-war Japan.

This paper is the result of a research project about the history of historical writing in Japan from the mid-seventeenth to the twentieth centuries with a focus on the Mongol invasions. In the following, I will first give a short overview of the history of historical writing of the Mongol invasions from the Edo period to the end of the Pacific War. I will then focus on trends in the field of history in post-war Japan.

Before 1945

The Mongol invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1281 and the myths about the divine winds were recurrently revived in times, when Japan faced foreign crisis. In the seventeenth century, when the Manchu conquered China, the Japanese feared a renewed invasion by the “Tatars” (*Dattan* 韃靼) or “Barbarians from the North”

¹ Koselleck, Reinhart, “Raum und Geschichte.” In: *ibis. Zeitschichten*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000, 78–97, here 78.

(*hokuteki Beidi* 北狄). As a consequence, Japanese scholars turned attention to the history of Japan's foreign relations. From the course of history they concluded that Japan due to its unique geographical insular location and its protection by the Gods, was a superior country. The Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, warded off by the winds, sent by the Gods of the Ise Shrine, were seen as the historical precedent. The encyclopaedias of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries give insight into then common historical narratives.

Nakamura Tekisai 中村惕斎 (1629–1702) wrote the *Kinmō zui* 訓蒙図彙, an illustrated encyclopaedia, in 1666. The chapter about “peoples” (*jinbutsu bu* 人物部) shows different representatives of Japan and the outside world. The illustration on Japan's neighbouring countries shows China (*Chūgoku* 中国), Ryūkyū 琉球, Korea (*Chōsen* 朝鮮), India (*Tenjiku* 天竺), the Mongols (*Mōko* 蒙古) and the Jurchen (*Shukushin* 肅慎). Above the depiction of the Mongol it says: “Mongols also called Tatars.² When they attacked Japan, the divine winds (*jinpū*) destroyed [them] [...]” This is an early reference to the “divine winds” – pre-modern sources mostly refer to “great winds” (*ōkaze* 大風) (図 1).³ In the *Kōnōshō* 行囊抄, a gazetteer (*chishi* 地誌) covering the whole of Japan, the military specialist Ema Ujichika (dates unknown) called the chapter on the province of Ise “*Shinpū kōnōshō* 神風行囊抄”, clearly locating the divine winds at the Shrine of Ise.⁴

After the Manchu threat faded in the late seventeenth century, the Mongol invasions were mainly the topic of gazetteers and historical compilations of the region of northern Kyushu where battles against the foreign invaders had taken place. The foreign invasions were deemed a distinct feature of the province of Chikuzen, distinguishing it from other regions of Japan. According to the scholar Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒 (1630–1714), who originated from Chikuzen, the prosaic name Tsukuishi 筑紫, used to designate his home province, derived from the expression

² Nakamura Tekisai follows the account of Hayashi Gahō 林鶯峰 in the *Nihon ōdai ichiran* 日本王代一覽、五卷.

³ There are two exceptions only, including the word *kamikaze*: “Satsuma kokubunji kansenji” 薩摩国分寺官宣旨 in *Kamakura ibun*, Nr. 11265; 12163; 27819; and *Masukagami* 増鏡, Kōan 4 (1281).

⁴ 行囊抄、写, NDL, 要求番号 237-136.

“stone wall” *tsukuishi* つく石. In Ekiken’s view, the name hence referred to the defence walls erected at the coast of Chikuzen since time immemorial.⁵

From the 1770s onwards, when Russian ships appeared off the coast of Japan in the North, historians from different parts of Japan once again turned attention to the Mongol invasions to seek models for the military defence of their own time.⁶ Moreover, between the summers of 1863 and 1864, at the height of the *sonnō jōi* 尊皇攘夷 movement, several artists created satirical prints on the naval battles fought by the Chōshū 長州 warriors against Western powers. A common pattern was to disguise these battles in the historical garb of the Mongol invasions. In September 1863 (eighth month of Bunkyo 3) the artist Kawanabe Kyōsai 河鍋暁斎 (1831–1889) designed a woodblock print with the title “Repelling of the Mongol Pirate Ships” (*Mōko zokusen taiji no zu* 蒙古賊船退治図). It shows three masts, clearly an allusion to Western ships, crushed by a storm (図 2).

After the Meiji restoration of 1868, the new government promoted the establishment of a national history. The Japanese warriors, who defeated the Korean-Mongol fleet in the thirteenth century, were at the centre of attention in historical academic writings and history textbooks. During the same period, regional historical, patriotic associations boomed. Yuchi Takeo 湯地丈雄 (1847–1913), a policeman from Kumamoto, founded the “movement for the establishment of a monument for the Mongol invasions” (*Genkō kinenhi kensetsu undō* 元寇記念碑運動) in 1888. The aim was to erect a bronze statue of the regent Hōjō Tokimune 北条時宗 (1251–1284), the leader of the foreign defence during the Mongol invasions, in Fukuoka. Yuchi earned the support from the painter Yada Isshō 矢田一嘯 (1858–1913), who drew large canvas paintings for the campaign (図 4).

⁵ The *Chikuzen no kuni zoku fudoki* 筑前国統風土記 of Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒 contains numerous details on the Mongol invasions and influenced subsequent accounts on the Mongol invasions. Moreover, the first treatise focussing on the Mongol invasions, the *Sankō Mōko nyūkōki* 参考蒙古入寇記 was written in 1758 by Tsuda Genkan 津田元貫 (1734–1815), scholar from Hakata.

⁶ See the *Genkō shimatsu* 元寇始末 of 1789 by Komiyama Fūken 小宮山楓軒 (1764–1840), the *Mōko kō ki* 蒙古寇紀 of 1816 by Nagamura Seisai 長村靖斎 (1767–1820), or the *Genkōki ryaku* 元寇紀略 of 1853 by Ōhashi Totsuan 大橋訥庵 (1816–1862).

Yuchi also engaged in archaeological and historical surveys of the region of Northern Kyushu. Him and the editors of historical compilations at the then newly founded history departments in Tokyo exchanged a lively correspondence on his archaeological and historical discoveries related to the Mongol invasions. Yet, from the Meiji period onwards, there was a clear division between an “institutionalised” national history promoted at places, such as the Historiographical Institute (*shiryō hensanjo* 史料編纂所) in Tokyo and a “non-professional” regional history conducted by local non-academic associations.

By the time of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, the Mongol invasions were an essential part of the cannon of national history, as shown by newspaper articles for instance. In 1904, at the height of the Russian war, the *Yomiuri shinbun* 読売新聞 advertised postcards of “total victories” (*zenshō* 全勝). In pre-modern times these were Empress Jingū’s subjugation of the three Korean kingdoms, the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281, Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s campaigns in Korea. In modern times these were the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, the Boxer War of 1900 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 (図 3). Academic publications also dealt with the history of these wars, deemed of national importance.⁷

The *kamikaze* myth reached a peak during the Pacific war, when in 1944, the military operation “victory Nr. 1 (*Shō ichi gō* 捷一号)” sent zero bombers charged with 250kg-bombs to stop the advance of the American army in the Philippines. The suicidal aviation unit was called kamikaze unit (*kamikaze tokubetsu kōgekitai* 神風特別攻撃隊). Two historians, Seno Seichirō (*1931) and Kitajima Manji (*1935), remember that towards the end of the war they firmly believed that “the land of the gods was everlasting” (*shinshū fumetsu* 神州不滅)⁸ and waited for “divine winds to arise”⁹.

During the same time historians endorsed the *kamikaze* myth in scholarly publications. In 1942, the Japan study centre (*Nihongaku kenkyūjo* 日本学研究所)

⁷ 史学会『弘安文禄伝戦偉績』富山房 1905.

⁸ 北島万次「「日本は神の国」とはどういうことか—神国思想とその歴史的系譜」『歴史評論』604 (2000), 78–88, here: 78.

⁹ 瀬野前掲論、2頁.

published a special edition on the Mongol invasions, suggesting that “divine help” (*ten'yū ron* 天祐論) had characterised the course of Japanese history.¹⁰ Despite the nationalist underpinning during 1930s and 1940s, scholars also produced valuable research. Two pre-war historians, Ikeuchi Hiroshi and Aida Jirō, influenced two major research topics related to the Mongol invasions, i.e. Japan’s foreign exchange with East Asia in the pre-modern period and the effects of the Mongol invasions on Japanese society and economy.¹¹ Ikeuchi Hiroshi published an article in the aforementioned special edition of the Japan study centre, comparing the storms during the Mongol invasions with the rain, leading to the defeat of Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo. Ikeuchi thus emphasised that a mere, coincidental climatic constellation had influenced the course of history and denied any form of divine intervention. His view did certainly not correspond to the official propaganda at the height of the Pacific War.¹²

After 1945

The defeat in 1945 and the subsequent Allied occupation led to the collapse of the Emperor centred historical writing (*kōkoku shikan* 皇国史観) and a crisis in the field of history. Sebastian Conrad has indicated in a comparative study of post-war historical writing in Germany and Japan that under the aegis of Marxist trends, historians in post-war Japan, much more so than Germany, critically dealt with the near “national past”. Still, he acknowledges that the non-Marxist, i.e. Emperor centred historical writing, overshadowing the war years, remained a taboo.¹³ In contrast, the Middle Ages and in particular the Mongol invasions developed into a

¹⁰ 日本学研究 2:9、1942.

¹¹ 池内宏『元寇の新研究』東洋文庫、1931; 相田二郎『蒙古襲来の研究』吉川構文館、1958.

¹² 池内宏「弘安の役と颱風」『日本学研究』 2:9 (1942), 22–35.

¹³ Conrad, Sebastian. *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation: Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan, 1945-1960*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1999, 52. In English: *The Quest for the Lost Nation: Writing History in Germany and Japan in the American Century*. Berkeley: California University Press, 2010.

field of contestation between conservative and left-wing historians in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁴

In 1958 the meteorologist Arakawa Hidetoshi (1907–1984) on the basis of meteorological data ranging back to 1894 contested the opinion that a typhoon had destroyed the Mongol fleet in November 1274. Two years later he published a new article with the title: “Reply to the critic of the various schools about the end of the Mongol invasion of 1274” (*Bun’ei no eki no shūmatsu ni tsuite shoke no hihan ni kotau* 文永の役の終末について諸家の批判に答う).¹⁵ In the 1950s, conservative historians still perceived Arakawa’s revisionism as a provocation. Seno Seichirō indicates that in the same period he was compelled to remove the following sentence from the main text of a history textbook: “There is also the explanation that the Mongol army did not retreat from Japan because of divine winds in 1274 but conducted a planned retreat.”¹⁶

In the 1970s, in particular historians from Kyushu, where a many sources related to the Mongol invasions are handed down to us, contributed to the research on the Mongol invasions. Seno Seiichirō and Kawazoe Shōji (*1927) made important contributions on warrior society and Japan’s relation with East Asia during the Mongol invasions. Chikushi Yukata (1904–1982), specialised in the local history of Fukuoka, wrote an overview on the Mongol invasions.¹⁷ In contrast, Kuroda Toshio

¹⁴ Only recently, scholars have directed attention to the Emperor centred historical writing (*kōkoku shikan* 皇国史観) of the early twentieth century. See 今谷明「平泉澄の皇国史観とアジール論」『創造の世界』95 (1995); 今谷明『天皇と戦争と歴史家』洋泉社、2012; Ueda, Kiyoshi. *Hiraizumi Kiyoshi (1895–1984): “Spiritual history” in the Service of the Nation in Twentieth Century Japan*. Ph.D., University of Toronto, 2008; Yoshikawa, Lisa. *Kuroita Katsumi and his State-Sanctioned National History, 1896–1937: Narrating Absolute Imperial Sovereignty and Japan’s Civilizing Mission in Asia as History*. PhD Yale University, 2007.

¹⁵ 荒川秀俊「文永の役の終りを告げたのは台風ではない」『日本歴史』120 (1958), 41–46; 荒川秀俊「文永の役の終末について諸家の批判に答う」『日本歴史』145 (1960), 113–116.

¹⁶ 瀬野前掲論、4 頁:「文永のモンゴル軍が日本から退いたのは、神風によるものではなく、予定の撤収であったとする説もある」.

¹⁷ 瀬野精一郎『鎮西御家人の研究』吉川構文館、1975; 川添昭二『蒙古襲来研究史論』雄山閣出版 1977; 筑紫豊『元寇喜危言』積分館書店、1972.

and Amino Yoshihiko, based in the Kansai and Kantō areas respectively, wrote general overviews of medieval society in the 1970s, despite the according titles of their books, the “Mongol invasions.”¹⁸

Similarly, the archaeological and cultural projects, conducted in Northern Kyushu during the same time, suggest the establishment of the Mongol invasions as a subject of regional history. From 1966, Kyushu University led the excavation and conservation of the defence wall against Mongol invasions (*genkō bōrui* 元寇防塁). The team thereby took up the work by Nakayama Heijirō (1871–1956), who was a professor of medicine at Kyushu University and led archaeological projects in the early twentieth century. A picture of 1915 shows the recovery of the stone wall along Hakata Bay by Nakayama (図 5).¹⁹ Unlike the celebrations of the 650-years commemorations in 1924 and 1931, including nationwide celebrations and expositions, the 700-years commemoration of the Mongol invasions in 1974 was confined to celebrations in Northern Kyushu.²⁰ In 1981 expositions were again held mainly in the area of Northern Kyushu. Moreover, catalogues were dedicated to the underwater archaeology discoveries of Mongol ships off the coast Nagasaki prefecture.²¹

The trends in the 1970s and 1980s point to the formation of a booming regional history, well embedded in an academic environment. Paralleling this development, a popular regional history culture developed: nowadays, the sites of the Mongol invasions are a part of the tourist attractions in the area of Fukuoka and the adjacent islands of Nagasaki prefecture, Tsushima, Iki and Takashima. While Tsushima’s main tourist sites are dedicated to the friendly relation between Tsushima *han* and Korea during the Edo period, advertisements promote the so-called *dantsuke mochi* だんつけ餅, which remind of the food prepared in haste before the Mongol invasions. The local speciality does not include red bean paste but is turned in the beans. Again tourist leaflets designate Takashima as *kamikaze shima*, the “island of the divine

¹⁸ 網野善彦『蒙古襲来』岩波書店、2008（初刊 1974）；黒田俊雄『蒙古襲来』中央公論新社 2004（初刊 1971）。

¹⁹ 川添 前掲論、186 頁。

²⁰ 川添 前掲論、288 頁。

²¹ 朝日新聞社『700 年のロマン：海から甦る元寇』福岡朝日新聞社、1981；日本テレビ放送網『蒙古襲来 700 年：海底に甦る日本侵攻の謎』日本テレビ放送網株式会社、1981。

winds,” because according to written records, after the destruction of the Mongol fleets through “divine winds” in 1281, shipwrecked Mongol fleets landed on Takashima. A local museum displays archaeological discoveries and an adventure park includes Mongolian tents and Mongolian hotpot meals (図 6). The Mongol invasions have moved from national history to the regional history culture of Northern Kyushu.

Historical writing today

In the past few years, there has occurred a change of paradigm in the field of history under the impression of “globalisation” and the “increasing relevance of the relation with Asia.”²² The “perspective from the outside” has replaced the “perspective from the inside.”²³ Historians understand Japan as a part of the East Asian region and regard Japan’s historical frontiers as fluid. The trend to emphasise Japan’s historical contacts with the outside world, i.e. Japan’s “counterfactual island-being” (*kontrafaktische Insulierung*)²⁴ are similar to recent trends in Europe. Here, the

²² 荒野泰典/石井正敏/村井章介、編『倭寇と「日本国王」』吉川構文館、2010, III 頁。

²³ See the title “Japan inside and outside” (*Nihon no uchi to soto*) of Murai Shōsuke and following him the article “Looking from Within and Without” by Charlotte von Verschuer (村井章介『中世日本の内と外』筑摩書房、1999; Verschuer, Charlotte von. “Looking from Within and Without. Ancient and Medieval External Relations.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 55:4 (2000), 537–566. The research trend is reflected in recent publications, e.g. 荒野泰典/石井正敏/村井章介編『アジアのなかの日本史』6巻、東京大学出版界、1992–1993; 荒野泰典/石井正敏/村井章介編『倭寇と「日本国王」』(日本の対外関係4)吉川弘文館、2010; 村井章介『アジアの中の中世日本』校倉書房、1988; 田中健夫/石井正敏編『対外関係史辞典』吉川弘文館、2009. New publications in Western languages, which take up the Japanese trends are westlichen Sprachen, die den japanischen Forschungstendenzen folgen, sind Batten, Bruce Loyd. *To the Ends of Japan: Premodern Frontiers, Boundaries and Interactions*. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2003; Goble, Andrew E. e.a., eds. *Tools of Culture: Japan’s Cultural, Intellectual, Medical, and Technological Contacts in East Asia, 1000–1500s* (Asia Past & Present: New Research from AAS, Nr. 2), Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 2009; Zöllner, Reinhard. “Kontrafaktische Insulierung: Japan”. In: Ertl, Thomas/Michael Limberger, ed. *Die Welt 1250–1500*. (Globalgeschichte: Die Welt 1000–2000, Bd. 2). Wien: Mandelbaum, 2009, 383–402.

²⁴ Zöllner 前掲論。

medieval, trans-cultural interactions around the Mediterranean have attracted scholarly attention in the past few decades.²⁵

From this perspective the Mongol invasions, although an unfriendly encounter, are viewed as a part of the vibrant exchange between Japan and the Asian mainland. The rewriting of the history of the Mongol invasions is reflected in the new use of vocabulary. The term for “Mongols” *Mongoru* モンゴル has replaced the former terms *Gen* 元 and *Mōko* 蒙古, reflecting the new attention directed to the “Mongol Empire,” rather than peoples at the fringes of China or a Chinese dynasty. Historians recently explore the Mongol invasions from the economic and political perspective of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), by also including considerations on the economy of the Yuan Dynasty, the Mongol expansion in South East Asia, conquest of the Korean peninsula or the Mongol campaigns against the Ainu in the North of the Japanese archipelago.²⁶

Moreover, they assess the aborted attempt of the Mongols to invade Japan as the starting point of Japan’s influence in the maritime networks in East Asia.²⁷ Finally, biographies serve to illustrate Japan’s exchange with East Asia: In 2001, books and an exhibition catalogue were published on Hōjō Tokimune (1251–1284), the regent of the bakufu and leader of the Japanese defence during the invasions. At the same time the taiga-drama *Hōjō Tokimune* was launched. The illustrations of underwater archaeological discoveries, potteries and coins from the Tang (617–907),

²⁵ See the publications of the SPP 1173 “Integration and disintegration of cultures in the European Middle Ages” (*Integration und Desintegration der Kulturen im europäischen Mittelalter*).

²⁶ New publications, reflecting the new trends include 新井孝重『蒙古襲来』（戦争の日本史 7）吉川弘文館、2003；2007；近藤成一『モンゴルの襲来』（日本の時代史 9）吉川弘文館、2003；村井前掲論，98–123；佐伯弘次『モンゴル襲来の衝撃（日本の中世 9）中央公論新社、2003；湯浅治久『蒙古襲来と鎌倉滅亡』吉川弘文館、2012。

²⁷ 田中健夫『東アジア交通圏と国際認識』吉川弘文館、1997；田中健夫『対外関係史研究のあゆみ』、吉川弘文館、2003；岡田英弘『世界史の誕生—モンゴルの発展と伝統』ちくま文庫、1999。

Song (960–1279) and Yuan Dynasties evoke the cultural exchange in the “age of Hōjō Tokimune.”²⁸

Despite the deconstruction of the myths of the divine winds in post-war Japan, the Mongol invasions have not lost their appeal in academic and popular publications. While the Mongol invasions have lost their meaning to create a Japanese identity, they are nowadays a key to the quest of an East Asian identity. Perhaps, Nakayama’s picture of the wall against the Mongol invasions of 1915 forestalls this trend (図 5). It is the only picture, I know, which does not depict the wall from the coast towards the land but takes a border-crossing perspective, from the wall towards the ocean. This perspective metaphorically reflects the ambitions of Japan’s colonial Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. But above all, it indicates Nakayama’s personal emphasis of the “shared history” of Chikuzen and Japan with East Asia. The picture thus illustrates the regional and global dimensions of the history of the Mongol invasions beyond a national history. It hence reflects the current trends in the field of history.

²⁸ 村井章介『北条時宗と蒙古襲来: 時代・世界・個人を読む』日本放送出版協会、2001; NHK プロモーション編『北条時宗とその時代展』NHK, 2001; 佐藤和彦/ 樋口州男『北条時宗のすべて』新人物往来社、2000.