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# Mongol Imperialism in the Southeast: Uriyangqadai (1201–1272) and Aju (1127–1287)

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**Abstract:** Son of the famous general Sübe’edei, Uriyangqadai followed in his father’s footsteps into the highest ranks of the Mongol military. Placed in charge of the *keshig*, or imperial bodyguard, under Möngke (r. 1251–1259), his fame was mostly due to his involvement—along with prince Qubilai (r. 1260–1294)— in the Mongol campaigns in Tibet, Yunnan and Đại Việt. Some of these campaigns are thoroughly described in his *Yuanshi* and other biographies. Other sources reflect the political relevance of this general as well. The same goes for Uriyangqadai’s son Aju, who accompanied him on campaigns in the South and built upon Uriyangqadai’s legacy after his death. An analysis of the various texts reporting the careers of the two generals provides important material regarding a decisive moment in the Mongol conquest of China, as well as information on numerous aspects of the military and political structures of the Mongol empire. Uriyangqadai’s and Aju’s lives provide an important case study of the role of political alliances and family relations in the formation of the military elite under Mongol rule. Furthermore, their careers depict an important moment of change in Mongol warfare. The campaigns in Yunnan and Đại Việt proved a challenge to Mongol strategies, leading to important innovations, changes which ultimately facilitated creation of a Yuan land –and maritime Empire.

**Keywords:** Yuan China, Southeast Asia, Mongol military, military elite, Southern Song campaign

## 1 Introduction

The Mongol conquest of Song China, and the territories on its southern and southeastern frontiers, constituted an important moment in Mongol expansion to Eastern Eurasia. Senior generals played major roles in supporting the Chinggisid elite in these conquests. Prominent among them were the father and

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son Uriyangqadai (1201–1272) and Aju (1227–1287), descendants of marshal Sübe’edei (1176–1248),<sup>1</sup> mastermind of the great Eastern Europe campaign in the West. Uriyangqadai was a key player in the campaigns in the Tibetan borderlands and Yunnan, and later against Đại Việt, as well as an important supporting figure in Qubilai’s ascension to power.<sup>2</sup> During his career he was involved both in the victories and expansion of the empire to the northeast, as well as in its initial difficulties in the southeast that resulted in disaster after his death.

His biography, together with that of Aju, offers a portrait of the continuity between the period of the United Mongol Empire (*yeke mong’ol ulus*) and the military establishment of the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368) in China. Most importantly, it shows how in Southeast Asia traditional Mongol military strategies faced the challenges of a new climatic environment and new ways of warfare, challenges against which they ultimately proved ineffective. It was through Uriyangqadai’s abilities that the Mongol army began enriching its strategies. By the time of Aju’s engagement as a leading general against the Southern Song, new ways of fighting had become fully integrated into Mongol tactics. Uriyangqadai’s and Aju’s leadership therefore signal the end of one era, and the beginning of a new one, characterized by a radical change in military leadership – with the increasing inclusion of non-Mongol ethnicities in command roles—and the adoption of naval warfare, among other innovations. In addition, an overview of the fate of the Sübe’edeid lineage also addresses the political roles of cross tribal alliances and military elites in the process of empire formation.

Due to their political and military prominence, information about the Sübe’edeids is abundant and found across a variety of sources. The *Secret History* informs us about the origin of the alliance between the Uriyangqais and the Borjigids, and the early career of marshal Sübe’edei.<sup>3</sup> The Persian chronicle *Jāmi’ al-Tawārikh* (*Compendium of Chronicles*) by Rashīd al-Dīn (1247–1318), and, more extensively, a number of Chinese sources supplement this with information about his offspring and their role at the side of the imperial house.<sup>4</sup> As for Uriyangqadai, a main document on his life and career is his biography in the *Yuanshi* 元史 (*History of the Yuan Dynasty*, presented in 1370).<sup>5</sup> This source, however, scarcely addresses biographical matters, instead focusing

<sup>1</sup> The life and career of Sübe’edei have been analyzed in particular by Buell 1993 and Sverdrup 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The main study about the Sübe’edeid lineage, which also highlights Uriyangqadai’s role in Qubilai’s rise to power is Tsutsumi 1989.

<sup>3</sup> De Rachewiltz 2004, § 120: 46–47, § 195: 118–122, § 202: 133–134.

<sup>4</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn/Thackston 1998: 83–84. Sübe’edei’s Chinese biography is in Song 1370/1976, 121: 2975–2978.

<sup>5</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2978–2982.

on his campaigns.<sup>6</sup> In this it is relatively consistent with the account in the *Jingshi Dadian* 經世大典 (*Compendium for Administering the World*, presented in 1331), another state-sponsored compilation, which is reported in the later source almost *verbatim*.<sup>7</sup> Another important source is the temple inscription by Wang Yun 王恽 1227–1304 celebrating generations of the Uriyangqai family's service—*Da Yuan guanglu dafu pingzhang zhengshi Wuliangshi xian miaobei* 大元光祿大夫平章政事兀良氏先廟碑 (*Temple Stele of the ancestors of the Grandee of the Third Class, Privy Councillor of the Uriyangqai lineage*, compiled in 1296)—which provides on occasion more complete information.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the biography of Aju collected in Su Tianjue's 蘇天爵 1294–1352 *Yuanchao Mingcheng Shilüe* 元朝名臣事略 (*Short Biographies of Eminent Officials of the Yuan dynasty*, completed in 1329),<sup>9</sup> offers an overview of the careers of the various members of the Sübe'edeid lineage, from Sübe'edei to Aju, relying heavily on Wang Yun's text. The *miaobei*, commissioned with the aim of celebrating the individual achievements of its subjects, served as a source for both the privately compiled biography by Su Tianjue, and the state-compiled *Yuanshi* biography.<sup>10</sup> Given that the aim of the *Yuanshi* was the legitimization of the dynasty, however, the text has been reworked in places in order to focus on the achievements of the imperial lineage, rather than on the individuals in its service.<sup>11</sup> Scrutiny of all these sources in combination is therefore useful for understanding the multifaceted careers of Uriyangqadai and Aju.

## 2 The Sübe'edeids

As his name suggests, Uriyangqadai was a member of the Mongol Uriyangqan lineage, originating in the region between the Onon and

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, a few other Chinese sources (such as the Dali Stele mentioned below) mention Uriyangqadai's campaigns in the South, although they don't provide many details on his life and career. For an overview of these sources see Fang Guoyu 1998–2001, vol. 3: 256–257.

<sup>7</sup> See in particular the sections on the “Pacification of the Song” *Pingsong* 平宋 in: Su 1334/1983, 41: 14–20, “Yunnan” in: Su 1334/1983, 41: 26–27 and “Annam”, in Su 1334/1983, 41: 25–26.

<sup>8</sup> The inscription by Wang Yun (hereafter *miaobei*) is to be found in Li 1999, vol. 6, 183: 382–393.

<sup>9</sup> Su 1329/1962, 2: 23–31. See also Aju's biography in the *Yuanshi*: Song 1370/1976, 128: 3119–3124.

<sup>10</sup> Privately commissioned epigraphy became increasingly widespread during Yuan times, as analysed by Iiyama 2016.

<sup>11</sup> On the methods and principles for the compilation of dynastic histories see Yang 1961; Chan 1981.

Kerulen rivers.<sup>12</sup> Relations between these Uriyangqai and the Kiyan Borjigid clan dated back to the period of Temüjin's great-grand-father Tumbinai Sechen.<sup>13</sup> The alliance was rhetorically strengthened by claiming a common pedigree for the two clans through the legendary ancestress Alan Qo'a.<sup>14</sup> As the *Secret History* reports, this relationship altered to one of vassalage when Jarchigudai offered his son – Sübe'edei's cousin Jelme— to Temujin's father Yesügei,<sup>15</sup> sanctioning an alliance, which in many ways proved instrumental to the rise of the Borjigin themselves.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between the two groups was the background to Sübe'edei's military career beside the future Chinggis Khan. Entering Temujin's service as a hostage,<sup>17</sup> and quickly distinguished himself in the military, becoming famous as one of Chinggis' "Four Hounds".<sup>18</sup> The merit gained through his loyalty and his many victories provided him military prominence, as testified to by the granting of the title *baghatur* ("hero", "elite officer").<sup>19</sup> In political terms he likewise ascended quickly, as shown by his inclusion in the imperial bodyguard (*keshig*) as early as 1203.<sup>20</sup>

The vassalage expressed by this appointment was further reinforced by Mongol marriage policy. Ögödei (r. 1229–1241) granted Sübe'edei an elite Mongol wife, the imperial princess Tümegei, in an attempt to confirm his allegiance.<sup>21</sup> Thus, through Sübe'edei's career the historical alliance of the Uriyangqan and Borjigin assumed an important role in connection with the building of the Mongol empire. Moreover, Sübe'edei's success brought

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12 Today the Uriyangqai include reindeer herders and may have in the past as well. On the two different ethnicities under this name, this Mongol lineage and a Siberian forest tribe, see Buell 1993: 14–15; Sverdrup 2013: 34.

13 Song 1370/1976, 121: 2975 reports: "His ancestors, hunting on the Onon river, met the Emperor Tumbinai, they contracted a mutual alliance, which down to the time of Chinggis Khan had lasted already five generations". See also the *miaobei* in: Li 1999, vol. 6, 183: 382, Buell 1993: 13.

14 Buell 1993: 13–14 for further references.

15 De Rachewiltz 2004, § 121: 47–48; Sverdrup 2013: 34.

16 Buell 1993: 14.

17 Su 1329/1962, 2: 23. Sübe'edei was sent as a hostage apparently in 1203. However, as shown by Buell, this date does not agree with the accounts of the *Secret History*, which mentions Sübe'edei as a follower of Temujin already in the 1190s. Buell 1993: 14.

18 As is well known, Sübe'edei played a major role in the Mongol campaigns in the West, in the first and later European campaigns as well as in those against the Tanguts, and the Jurchen. For an overview see Buell 1993 and Sverdrup 2013.

19 For this title, see Doerfer 1963: 37.

20 Buell 1993: 14.

21 Buell 1993: 20.

prominence to him as an individual, to his family and his lineage. Because positions in the imperial bodyguard were hereditary, Uriyangqadai was able to capitalize on his father's achievements, inheriting status which he then expanded through his own military career and achievements. The connection between Uriyangqadai's rise to prominence and his father's achievements is underlined by the *Yuanshi* compilers' positioning of Uriyangqadai's biography as a continuation to Sübe'edei's. The biography furthermore stresses connections between Möngke and Uriyangqadai, who acted as the future emperor's tutor (by the order of Chinggis Khan) and was given command of the imperial bodyguard.<sup>22</sup> The report by Rashīd al-Dīn differs here, instead mentioning Uriyangqadai's brother, described as a "commander of a *hazāra* in the left wing, named Kōkchu. After Sübādāi's [sic] death he took his father's place".<sup>23</sup>

Uriyangqadai's role as Möngke's tutor was the result of reciprocal support between the Sübe'edeids and Toluids, which had already started broadly under Sübe'edei.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, his appointment to command the imperial bodyguard underscores the nature of this institution, which not only had military functions, but acted as a political core and collection of talents supporting the imperial family.<sup>25</sup> It also played a key role in the frequent divisions and quarrels within the court.<sup>26</sup>

A notable example of this was the decisive participation of Uriyangqadai in the *quriltai* supporting the election of Möngke in 1251. The *Yuanshi* offers a detailed picture of the turmoil surrounding the election of Güyük's successor after a period of indecision.<sup>27</sup> When a *quriltai* was finally convened at Ala Qamaq, the Ögödeids proposed Shiremün, grandson and reportedly designated successor to Ögödei; the other faction suggested Batu (1207–1255), Khan of the Golden Horde and the family's *aqā* (elder male), who instead proposed Möngke. The *Yuanshi* attributes a decisive role to Uriyangqadai in resolving the issue in Möngke's favour.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2978–2979.

<sup>23</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn/Thackston 1998: 84.

<sup>24</sup> An example was the protection offered to Sübe'edei by Tolui in the occasion of a mistake in the European campaign. Buell 1993: 24.

<sup>25</sup> On the nature and structure of the *keshig* see May 2007: 32–36.

<sup>26</sup> In this it is comparable to the *comitatus*, that Beckwith identifies as a fundamental structure for the formation of imperial rule in Central Asia. Beckwith 2009: 12–23.

<sup>27</sup> The *Yuanshi* reports: "The dynasty did not have a sitting monarch for quite a while. Within and without [the realm] there was great tumult", Song 1370/1976, 3:44. Translated in: Allsen 1987: 23.

<sup>28</sup> Song 1370/1976, 3:44. Parts of the passage are also translated in: Allsen 1987: 23–25. Uriyangqadai's *Yuanshi* biography is even more explicit on his decisive role, reporting that:



The positive outcome of Uriyangqadai's alliance with Batu in opposing the line of Güyük in this case led to increased political relevance for the Sübe'edeid family. Previously, during the 1230s European campaign, relations between Batu and Sübe'edei had been conflicting, so the fact that Batu sought an alliance with Sübe'edei's son shows that he understood that the Sübe'edeids were instrumental to the Qa'an's enthronement.<sup>29</sup>

Political status was reflected in the military autonomy that the generals had, as *de facto* leaders of campaigns started by the emperors. This was also the case with the Mongol campaigns at the southern borders of China, which provided scope for Uriyangqadai's confirmation as a military commander.

### 3 Military Career

Soon after Möngke's election, a *quriltai* ordered the expansion of the empire in various directions. As part of this, Möngke's brother Hülegü (1217–1265) was sent to southwestern Asia and Qubilai to the East.<sup>30</sup>

Uriyangqadai had at this point already gained fame and experience fighting in Europe beside Sübe'edei and Batu, and in the Northeast, in the campaigns against the Jurchens, and in Liaodong.<sup>31</sup> He was therefore, as Tsutsumi underlines, the perfect candidate to accompany the less experienced Qubilai on his enterprises.<sup>32</sup> The main aim of this campaign, which lasted from 1253 till 1256,<sup>33</sup> was to open a front to attack the Song from the South, and at the same time conquer some important territories on the Tibetan Plateau, thereby strengthening

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“Batu, the royal clansmen, and officials discussed to establish Möngke [as Qa'an]. For a long time the matter remained unsettled. In the fourth month, at a *quriltai* [held by] Batu, the empress [wife] of Güyük (Oghul Qaimish) inquired if it was an opportune decision to establish [Möngke], all were perplexed, but no one dared to oppose. Uriyangqadai on the contrary said: “The decision has been made long ago, we cannot change [it].” Batu said: “What Uriyangqadai says is right” and then the decision was made”. Song 1370/1976, 121: 2978.

<sup>29</sup> The alliance between Batu and Uriyangqadai is pointed out by Herman 2007: 47. The conflictual relationship between Sübe'edei and Batu is analysed in Buell 1993.

<sup>30</sup> The suggestion, according to the *Yuanshi* came to Möngke from the official Guo Baoyu 郭寶玉: Song 1370/1976, 149: 3521; Herman 2007: 262 note 10. For a detailed analysis of Möngke's expansionism see Allsen 1987.

<sup>31</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2978.

<sup>32</sup> Tsutsumi 1989: 125–130. This apprentice system, which paired experienced generals with less expert ones, or with imperial princes, was a common element of the Mongol military training. See May 2007: 87–88.

<sup>33</sup> For an overview of this campaign see Herman 2007: 45–70; Anderson 2014.

political and military alliances with Tibetan monastic groups such as the Sa-sKya and a general position of dominance against others such as the aBri-kung.<sup>34</sup> To achieve the conquest of the Dali kingdom (1096–1253; in present-day Yunnan), the army was divided into three wings. Its leadership was mainly Mongol: Uriyangqadai was sent through the Tibetan plateau, while two armies, under the command of Qubilai and Aju, passed through Sichuan. Wang Dechen's (1222–1259) troops went through Yunnan. Attacking on multiple fronts served to engage the enemies outside the Dali capital, and reflected a typical Mongol pattern of war,<sup>35</sup> one that Uriyangqadai would later employ in North Vietnam.

As Tsutsumi correctly notes, the accounts of this campaign are not homogeneous. State-compiled historiography ascribes the leadership of the Southern campaigns to the future emperor Qubilai.<sup>36</sup> So for example the *Jingshi dadian* reports that:

In a *guichou* year (1253) *Shizu* (Qubilai) received the order to attack the tribes in the Southwest. He ordered Uriyangqadai to lead the vanguard. After a year [Qubilai] returned to the court and let Uriyangqadai alone to lead the campaign. Till the fifth year (1256) [Uriyangqadai] had completely pacified all [the territories].<sup>37</sup>

This was Qubilai's first campaign and he left the armies soon after the capture of Dali's capital, returning to Möngke to plan further strategies against the Song.<sup>38</sup>

The *Yuanshi*, following the *Jingshi dadian*, states that: “Shizu (Qubilai), as the emperor's younger brother, was in command of the army in the punitive campaigns (*tao* 討) against the Southwestern people (*yi* 夷), and the polities of the Wuman, Baiman and Guiman.”<sup>39</sup>

Rashīd al-Dīn's account agrees that Uriyangqadai was in command of the vanguard.<sup>40</sup> However, the *miaobei* and Su Tianjue's account differ from the above sources in stating that: “The Duke (Uriyangqadai) was put in charge of all the troops and horses”,<sup>41</sup> therefore being in a superior position to Qubilai himself.

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<sup>34</sup> Wylie 1977: 117–118.

<sup>35</sup> See the examples in: May 2007: 115–137.

<sup>36</sup> Tsutsumi 1989: 127.

<sup>37</sup> Su 1334/1983, 41: 26.

<sup>38</sup> Hermann 2007: 304; Song 1370/1976, 121: 1310–1313.

<sup>39</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2979. The rhetoric of this passage, aimed at legitimating the Yuan dynasty, is common to Chinese dynastic histories. The most evident elements are the description of the Dali campaign as a “punitive campaign” (*tao* 討) and of the Southwestern populations as *yi* 夷 (“Barbarians”).

<sup>40</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn/Thackston 1998: 84.

<sup>41</sup> Su 1329/1962, 2: 27.



The difference in the narrative is not only due to the different chronology of the sources, as Tsutsumi correctly affirms,<sup>42</sup> but of course also due to their distinct aims. Whereas state-compiled documents had the legitimation of the dynasty in sight, the *miaobei* and Su's biography rather stress Uriyangqadai's individual contributions and in any case serve family rather than imperial interests. However, other elements speak for the prominent role of the Sübe'edeid general in this campaign, such as the title of "great marshal" (*da yuanshuai* 大元帥) granted to him by Möngke before the campaign.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore it was Uriyangqadai who was assigned the task of crossing and annexing the Tibetan plateau, a region of strategic importance, which the Mongols had tried to annex for years through raids and diplomatic means. Its submission had been problematic owing to the presence there of so many competing entities, including the antagonistic but powerful aBri-kung order.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, after his arrival in the South, the Mongol general had to prove his skills not only as a military commander, but also as a diplomat and administrator. First of all, the topography of Sichuan, Yunnan and Eastern Tibet presented serious difficulties for the Mongol army, and it was through the marshal's strategic measures—sending scouts to gather information and organizing surprise attacks—that the Mongols were able to reach and capture first the capital Dali, which had been left empty by the ruling clan, and later take the secondary capital of Shanchuan. This was defended by its natural position, surrounded as it was by mountain valleys and water basins. Furthermore, shortly after Qubilai left the battlefield, the Mongols encountered strong resistance from local rebels, fostered and economically supported by the Song.<sup>45</sup> Uriyangqadai faced these challenges following the typical Mongol strategy previously used, for example, by Sübe'edei and Möngke, of integrating local troops into the Mongol army – at the time mostly composed of Mongols and Central Asians.<sup>46</sup> He did so by richly rewarding cooperation from Yunnanese troops and populations, thereby fostering the development of a local military elite alongside that provided by his Central Asian generals.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Tsutsumi 1989: 128.

<sup>43</sup> Tsutsumi 1989: 129.

<sup>44</sup> Wylie 1977: 117–118.

<sup>45</sup> Herman 2007: 49.

<sup>46</sup> Tsutsumi 1989: 132. For Möngke see Allsen 1987: 189–216, for Sübe'edei see Buell 1993. For the employment of Central Asian soldiers in China see Allsen 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Herman 2007: 49.

He also understood the political value of exploiting local divisions among the population at large and the elites.<sup>48</sup> The most notable example for this is the case of the Duan 段 clan of Dali: after his surrender, the Duan leader Xingzhi 興智 (d. 1260) was sent to Möngke, who gave him a patent of investiture. He subsequently governed the area for the Mongols.<sup>49</sup>

Support from local groups was also achieved through a policy of clemency towards the population encountered by the Mongol army. On this, again, the sources differ. The *Yuanshi* ascribes this clemency to Qubilai (acting on the advice of his Confucian advisors).<sup>50</sup> The *miaobei* attributes it to Uriyangqadai's command.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the “Stele celebrating Qubilai's pacification of Yunnan” (*Shizu ping Yunnan bei* 世祖平雲南碑, erected in 1304) emphasises Uryangqadai's leadership:

Soon after seizing Shanchan, Uriyangqadai received the Dali ruler Duan Xingzhi's offer of surrender. Uriyangqadai made it clear that the former Dali ruler would not be killed. The Yuan army then advanced into the tribal areas to subdue the Thirty-seven clans of the Wuman (*Wuman buluo sanshiqi* 烏蠻部落三十七), those upland settlements of eastern Yunnan that were allied with the Dali leadership. With tribal assistance from these conquered peoples, Uriyangqadai's forces attacked Jiaozhi (Đài Việt), capturing its capital Thăng Long (Hanoi) and taking control of the Temo District's mountain valley cave settlements (*Temo xidong sanshiliu* 特磨溪洞三十六), the lands of the 'Gold Teeth (*Jinchi* 金齒), the Bai, the Yi, the 'Luo spirits (*Luo gui* 羅鬼) (i.e. Wuman elite of Luodian), and the various native tribes of Myanmar – all in succession were brought under Mongol rule.<sup>52</sup>

This account also underlines the administrative importance of Uriyangqadai's conquest of Yunnan, which, as Herman points out, was not only part of the campaign against the Song, but the beginning of a broader engagement of the Mongols with minorities in the south.<sup>53</sup> It is through Mongol conquest and control that Yunnan was included for the first time in the realm of imperial China, where it has remained ever since. Uriyangqadai, nominated as governor of Yunnan, managed the area first by establishment of military garrisons. Later he requested the establishment “of [administrative] units according to the Han system”.<sup>54</sup>

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48 According to Anderson, such an approach played a major role in the Mongol conquest of Yunnan. Anderson 2014, especially: 110–111.

49 For further details see his biography in Song 1370/1976, 166: 3910–3911; Herman 2007: 48.

50 Song 1370/1976, 4: 58–60; Lane 2011: 12.

51 Li 1999, vol 6, 183: 385.

52 Fang Guoyu 1998–2001 vol. 3: 259. Translation by Anderson 2014: 119.

53 Herman 2007: 47.

54 Song 1370/1976, 121: 2980. The territory was subsequently granted as an appanage to Qubilai's son Hugechi. Su 1334/1983 41: 26.

The annexation of Yunnan gave the Mongols a base for interaction with territories further south. It became a centre for communications and a source of troops. These, as mentioned above, were later used against Pagan (North-Myanmar) and, by Uriyangqadai itself, in attacks on Đại Việt.<sup>55</sup>

Đại Việt was of great strategic interest both for the conquest of the Song in the north, and for successive penetration further south into the kingdom of Champa, controlling as it did important commercial routes and offering a valuable opening to the sea.<sup>56</sup> At this stage, however, both Möngke's and Qubilai's attention was still focused on the Song, with which the Trần dynasty (1226–1413) of Đại Việt entertained a close relationship of vassalage.<sup>57</sup> Thus, in the interactions with Đại Việt, Uriyangqadai was once again in charge, not only of the military confrontation, but also of the diplomatic aspects of the campaign. He first sent envoys with (three) letters requesting submission,<sup>58</sup> a common Mongol practice, applied also towards Dali. At the same time, he sent his son Aju to gather intelligence on the terrain and the enemy's military organization.<sup>59</sup> The capture of Mongol envoys and refusal to engage in peaceful diplomacy led, as with the Dali case, to military confrontation.<sup>60</sup>

The campaign was again organized around three columns led by Inner Asian generals: Aju, the Mongol general Chechegtü,<sup>61</sup> and the imperial son-in-law (*fuma* 駙馬) Qaidu of the Onggirat.<sup>62</sup> The resulting confrontation, which was particularly challenging for both parties, lasted only nine days.<sup>63</sup> The two armies met at No Nguyên (on the Hong river), the Mongol strategy being, as usual, an attempt to engage the enemy away from the capital. This time the strategy did not succeed, however, and the Trần ruler escaped, leaving the capital completely empty.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For Pagan see Song 1370/1976, 210: 4655–4660, translated and analyzed in Wade 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Buell 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Vu, Sharrock 2014: 81 with further references to the Vietnamese sources.

<sup>58</sup> Vu, Sharrock 2014: 84.

<sup>59</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2981.

<sup>60</sup> This was a justificatory tactic frequently used by the Mongols to legitimize their attack.

<sup>61</sup> I did not find further information about this general.

<sup>62</sup> On him see Tsutsumi 1989: 130. This continuity ended however with Uriyangqadai: subsequent campaigns in these regions saw radical changes in strategy, as they were conducted by both land and sea, witnessing an increasing adoption of Chinese strategies and military technology and changes in the ethnicity of the military elites, with Jurchen and Chinese personnel being integrated in leading positions. This was especially the case of the campaigns in Champa and Java. For an overview of Qubilai's maritime campaigns See Lo/Ellemand 2012: 284–322.

<sup>63</sup> Descriptions of the campaign in: Song 1370/1976, 121: 2981.

<sup>64</sup> Details of this campaign in: Vu, Sharrock 2014: 84–87 and Anderson 2014.

The episode, which Vu aptly describes as a surprise for both sides, is controversially reported in the sources: the Vietnamese chronicles saw it as a triumph for the Trần dynasty, whereas the Chinese accounts report it as a Mongol success.<sup>65</sup> The *Yuanshi* biography of Uriyangqadai is an example of the latter, only briefly hinting at the strategic difficulties encountered, ranging from a lack of provisions, to Mongol cavalry's first encounter with elephants. Aju, on this occasion, reportedly ordered his troops to shoot flaming arrows at the elephants' feet, and the animals were dispersed.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, Uriyangqadai, had entrusted Chechegtü with the task of capturing the Vietnamese ships while the Trần troops were occupied in battle, in order to prevent them from fleeing by sea. Unfortunately:

Chechegtü disobeyed the command, and as the Southern tribes were defeated, they could mount on their ships and disappear. Uriyangqadai very angrily said: 'the vanguard disobeyed my command; the army has a precise penal code [for this]'. Chechegtü was afraid, poisoned himself and died. Uriyangqadai then entered *Jiaozhi* (Đại Việt), and for a long time stationed [the army there] and made plans. The orders to the troops were severe, precise and without violation. Rìjióng [Trần Cảnh, r. 1226–1258] asked to surrender, and for this occasion, he instituted an official for the ceremonial offerings of wine. Then the troops returned bringing prisoners to Yachi (Yunnan).<sup>67</sup>

The severe discipline applied here by Uriyangqadai, and which the *Yuanshi* celebrates as the means of victory, mirrors methods adopted by Möngke himself, and typical Mongol tactics in general.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore this severity is one of the rare traits of Uriyangqadai's personality emerging from the *Yuanshi*.<sup>69</sup> Even the posthumous name granted to him of *wuyi* 武毅 "Martial and Resolute" reflects this aspect.<sup>70</sup>

A second attack on Đại Việt forced Uriyangqadai's army to cross interior territories, where the troops –and Uriyangqadai himself– were challenged by epidemics, probably caused by the difficult climate.<sup>71</sup>

Uriyangqadai thus wisely delegated the leadership to his capable son Aju, who played a major role in resisting hostility from local rebels, for example in a

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<sup>65</sup> Vu, Sharrock 2014: 86.

<sup>66</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2981. Different is the account of the Vietnamese sources, as reported in: Vu, Sharrock 2014: 85.

<sup>67</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2982.

<sup>68</sup> Examples for Möngke in Allsen 1987: 88.

<sup>69</sup> The Persian account by Rashīd al-Dīn differs, mentioning that "This Uriangqatai was of much importance and performed great feasts". Rashīd al-Dīn/Thackston 1998: 84.

<sup>70</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2982.

<sup>71</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2980.

famous occasion when all the horses were stolen and he, almost single-handedly, found and rescued them.<sup>72</sup> He also played a key-role in winning a series of major battles, which opened the way for Uriyangqadai's troops to meet Qubilai's army at Ezhou (in Hubei).<sup>73</sup>

This campaign was also Uriyangqadai's last military enterprise, and his biography concludes with the installation of Qubilai as Qa'an in 1260. Soon afterwards the Mongol general went back to the summer capital Shangdu, and died twelve years later, at the age of seventy-two. Our sources provide no details on Uriyangqadai's activities in these latter years, but his position in the *keshig*, as per tradition, was inherited by Aju.

## 4 Legacy: The Career of Aju

The last section of Uriyangqadai's biography overlaps with the biography of his son Aju, who continued the Sübe'edeids' legacy. In general, the documents about his life and career are more colourful than the accounts for his father, sketching his fame as a hero. Thus, in the *Yuanshi* we read that:

His nature was calm, he acted according to the circumstances; clever and skillful in his strategic plans, brave and resolute before the battle, he had the strength of ten thousand men. At the time of Xianzong (Möngke) he followed his father to attack the populations in the Southwest. He gathered selected troops as cavalry scouts, in the places that they attacked annihilated the enemy, no one dared to assault [him]. They then reached and pacified Dali, and subdued all the settlements there. As *Jiaozhi* (Đại Việt) was brought to surrender, there was not a field [of battle] he was not familiar with.<sup>74</sup>

His military achievements gained him very early the attention of Möngke, as reported in the *Yuanshi*: "Once Möngke said in appreciation: "Aju has never had an official appointment, nevertheless he has made efforts and dedicated himself to [Our] reign. As a special reward, he will be granted gold and silver in the measure of 300 *liang*, so that he can make an effort for his [future] career".<sup>75</sup>

One of the most interesting moments of Aju's career, and one that exemplifies his major contribution to the Yuan military history, is his involvement, beside Marshal Bayan (1236–1295), in the campaigns which led to the defeat of the Song. In this occasion Aju's "versatility" and strategical thinking proved

<sup>72</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2981.

<sup>73</sup> Song 1370/1976, 121: 2981–2982.

<sup>74</sup> Song 1370/1976, 128: 3119.

<sup>75</sup> Song 1370/1976, 128: 3119.

crucial. It was Aju's discovery of an alternative route along the Han river, between the strongholds of Xiangyang 襄陽 and Fancheng 樊城, which allowed the Mongols to bypass enemy's resistance and breach into Song territory.<sup>76</sup> The capture of the two strongholds (between 1267 and 1273) represented the Mongols' first large-scale naval operation. Requests to strengthen the Yuan navy had already been voiced by other advisors at Qubilai's court, but it was only after an explicit request from Aju, that Qubilai implemented this.<sup>77</sup> This campaign demanded a change in military personnel, which Aju implemented by employing Han infantry alongside Mongol soldiers, and by giving the command of the maritime troops to Chinese officials.<sup>78</sup> At a later stage, Aju himself was even in command of one of the Yuan fleets.<sup>79</sup>

Utilizing the expertise of Song defectors, he could thus integrate naval warfare into his attacks on south China.<sup>80</sup> The Mongols did not simply adopt Chinese naval tactics, however, but adapted them by using on water the same strategies of their land warfare, including sending scout ships to investigate routes,<sup>81</sup> planning ambushes and launching surprise attacks. Through all these measures, Aju actively participated in building a new phase of Mongol military history.

Finally, Aju's career was also influenced by the close connection of the Sübe'edeids to the Henan region, as Tsutsumi points out.<sup>82</sup> He took office as Commanding General (*duyuanshuai* 都元帥) appointed to command the Mongolian and Han armies of Henan. Because Sübe'edei had played a decisive

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<sup>76</sup> Previous attempts had failed due to the geographical difficulties offered by the mountainous landscape of Sichuan (in the West), and the strong fortifications on the Huai river (East). Lo/Elleman 2012: 213, based on Song 1370/1976, 6: 10.

<sup>77</sup> Lo/Elleman 2012: 215.

<sup>78</sup> Lo/Elleman 2012: 213.

<sup>79</sup> Lo/Elleman 2012: 220–222, based on Su 1334/1983, 41:16.

<sup>80</sup> A famous example is the case of the defected Song general Liu Zheng 劉整 1213–1275, who was entrusted with the troops' training in naval warfare. Lo/Elleman 2012: 214, based on Song 1370/1976, 7: 1. See also Liu Zheng's biography in Song 1370/1976, 161: 3785–3788. May 2007: 113–4 also points out how the employment of Korean and Han personnel was crucial to the successful adaptation of naval warfare in the Mongol military tactics. Another important element leading to military success in this campaign was the employment of trebuchets, built by artisans requested from the Ilkhanate after suggestion of the commander Arigh Qaya. Lo/Elleman 2012: 217.

<sup>81</sup> For example, one of these scout boats, led by Zhang Xi 張禧, was sent by Aju to mark, with stalks of reeds, navigable routes in the 1271 attack against the Song navy. Lo/Elleman 2012: 217. Later such ships, called *baghatur* ships, were to play an important role in the final battle of Yaishan. See Buell 1985–6.

<sup>82</sup> Tsutsumi 1989: 135–139.



role in annexing this region, he had been granted it as appanage along with the title of “Prince of Henan”. The title was then inherited by his descendants, who continued to have, through their careers, a particular impact on the region.<sup>83</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

The careers of Uriyangqadai and Aju provide an important case-study for the role of the Mongol military elites in the building and maintenance of Mongol rule in Eurasia. Studies on Sübe’edei have often underlined the system of meritocracy at the base of processes of elite-formation under the Mongols, through which a commoner could rise to the highest political and military positions, and transmit them to the following generations. However, the contribution of those generals as peers to the Chinggisid elite should also be stressed.

In the realm of politics, the careers of these leading generals developed uninterruptedly under the rule of various Qa’ans, therefore representing an element of stability and continuity compared to the much faster changing imperial leadership. Their impact in preserving the ideology and ways of Mongol rule should be acknowledged, as should their instrumental role in the rise to power of factions within the imperial family.

In matters of military and administration, their engagement in operations of conquest, alternatively through campaigning or diplomacy, profoundly impacted various aspects of the territories and populations they were engaged with. Their planning and severe discipline followed the pattern of the traditional Mongol warfare in which they had been trained. Yet their strategies also were adapted to the challenges they faced in the new environments they encountered. Under their leadership, traditional Mongol systems of land warfare were put on trial, and it was, among others, Uriyangqadai’s and Aju’s invention, adaptation and strategic abilities, that moulded Inner Asian military strategies and administrative policies, allowing the expansion of Mongol imperialism into the South and Southeast of Asia. Their tactical decisions and personal initiative enriched the Mongol army with the knowledge and skills of submitted elites, granting technologies of naval warfare new

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<sup>83</sup> In Su Tianjue’s work Aju is called “the Minister, the Martial and Resolute Prince of Henan” (丞相河南武定王): Su 1329/1962, 2: 23. The title of “Prince of Henan” was inherited then by Aju’s son Būrilgidei (d.1328), who acted as Assistant Director of the Left in the Branch Secretariat of Henan. On him see Iiyama 2014: 478.

importance in Mongol tactics.<sup>84</sup> Chinese, state-compiled historiography does not always give them the right credit in this regard. In this respect, the analysis of documents on Uriyangqadai's and Aju's lives is important for putting the historical narratives and the agendas of the various official Chinese sources into perspective. If on one side state-compiled historiography on occasions focuses on portraying dynastic matters at the expense of individuals, on the other side the epigraphic materials, along with Su Tianjue's compilation focus more on the achievements of their subjects, but are also not free from idealization and elaboration and served at the will of families as well.<sup>85</sup> When combined, these various materials nevertheless furnish a better understanding of the active role of the Sübe'edeids as advisors and peers to the ruling elite, and their fundamental contribution in the ideological and material shaping of the Mongol Empire.

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<sup>84</sup> The Mongols were in fact already aware of naval technologies, but hadn't employed them consistently till the long confrontation with the Southern Song forced them. Lo/Ellman 2012: 212.

<sup>85</sup> A good analysis of such elaborations and differences between the narratives of dynastic histories and other commemorative writings is: Hartmann 2006 and, specifically for the *Yuanshi*: Humble 2015.

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