

Analysis of the Three Great Defense Lines of the Southern Song Dynasty

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Abstract

After the royal court moved south during the Jianyan period to preserve the Song Dynasty and hold onto half of China's territory, the Southern Song Dynasty exhausted its national resources to construct three major defense lines-Huaihe - Yangtze, Jingxiang, and Sichuan - along its more than 1,800 - kilometer - long border from east to west. These three defense lines were interconnected and supported each other in both offense and defense. They successfully repelled the southern advances of the northern cavalry on numerous occasions, enabling the Southern Song Dynasty to survive for over 150 years.

Keywords

Southern Song Dynasty; Mongolia; Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line; Jingxiang Defense Line; Sichuan Defense Line.

1. Introduction

In the 11th year of the Shaoxing period (1141), after the Song and Jin dynasties signed the Shaoxing Peace Agreement, under the guidance of the principle that "Northerners return to the north and Southerners return to the south", the border of the Southern Song Dynasty retreated to the south of the line connecting Dasan Pass and the Huaihe River. To resist foreign invasion, the Southern Song Dynasty, adhering to the core principle of defending the southeast and protecting Lin'an (the capital), built three defense lines relying on the terrain in the Huaihe - Yangtze region, Jingxiang region, and Sichuan region respectively, forming a defensive posture similar to the "Changshan Snake Formation". These three defense lines were interconnected: if the Sichuan region was attacked, the garrison in Jingxiang would immediately send troops to assist, forming a pincer attack with the Sichuan garrison; if the enemy invaded the Huaihe - Yangtze region, the troops in Jingxiang could join forces with the Sichuan army to sail down the Yangtze River, either launching a pincer attack on the enemy's rear or sending elite troops from Jingxiang to march directly into the Central Plains to achieve the effect of "besieging Wei to rescue Zhao"; if the enemy attacked the Jingxiang Defense Line, the armies from Sichuan and the Huaihe - Yangtze region could also dispatch troops, forming a three - sided siege. Thanks to the mutual cooperation between the three defense lines, the Southern Song Dynasty, relying on half of China's territory, successfully withstood numerous attacks from the Jin and Mongol dynasties and survived for more than 150 years.

2. The Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line

The Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line covers an area that extends south to the Yangtze River, north to the Huaihe River, west to the Tongbai Mountains, and east to the Yellow Sea. It includes the Western Huainan Circuit, the Eastern Huainan Circuit, and the areas on both banks of the Yangtze River. Specifically, it refers to the region between the Yangtze River and the Huaihe River east of present - day Wuhan (Hubei Province) and Xinyang (Henan Province). Geographically, this area has two natural barriers: the Huaihe River and the Yangtze River.

Between the Huaihe and Yangtze rivers, the terrain is undulating, with criss - crossing rivers and numerous lakes and marshes. This terrain is highly unfavorable for the Jin and Mongol cavalry, who were accustomed to cavalry warfare but not proficient in water battles. Therefore, by establishing a defense system in the Huaihe - Yangtze region based on the advantages of the terrain, the Southern Song Dynasty could maximize the security of its political core area and further ensure the stability of the entire Southern Song regime. The Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line was mainly responsible for defending the lower reaches of the Yangtze River and directly protecting Lin'an (the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty) and the important economic zones in Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Once the Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line was lost, Lin'an would be in imminent danger. Hence, the gain or loss of this defense line was crucial to the security of the southeast and the survival of the Southern Song regime.

The important military towns of the Southern Song Dynasty along the Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line included Yangzhou (present - day Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province), Zhenzhou (present - day Zhenong), Xuyi Army (present - day Xuyi), Chuzhou (present - day Huai'an), Chuzhou (present - day Chuzhou), Taizhou (present - day Taizhou), Hezhou (present - day Hexian County, Anhui Province), Wuwei Army (present - day Wuwei County), Luzhou (present - day Hefei, Anhui Province), Anshi Army (present - day Shouxian County, Anhui Province), Guangzhou (present - day Huangzhou, Henan Province), and Huangzhou (present - day Huanggang, Hubei Province). A total of 150,000 troops were stationed here all year round. In addition, to prevent the enemy from launching a surprise attack on Lin'an by sea, an additional 20,000 naval troops were deployed at the mouth of the Yangtze River.

For a long time, the southern regimes subjectively believed that they could maintain a secure existence in the southeast by relying on the natural barrier of the Yangtze River. However, without the thousands of miles of strategic depth provided by the Huaihe - Yangtze region in the north, it would be difficult for the southern regimes to resist the northern cavalry from crossing the Yangtze River. Therefore, there was a saying that "to defend the Yangtze River, one must first defend the Huaihe River".

In the first year of the Jianyan period (1127), Li Gang, in his "Defense Strategy" submitted to Emperor Gaozong, pointed out the importance of deploying defenses in the Huaihe region: "Shouchun in the Western Huaihe Circuit shall be the command headquarters, Luzhou, Shuzhou, and Qizhou shall be the key prefectures, and Guangzhou, Huangzhou, Haozhou, and Hezhou shall be the secondary prefectures; Yangzhou in the Eastern Huaihe Circuit shall be the command headquarters, Suzhou, Bozhou, Chuzhou, and Sizhou shall be the key prefectures, and Zhenzhou, Haizhou, Tongzhou, and Taizhou shall be the secondary prefectures [1]." He believed that key defenses should be established around cities such as Shouchun, Luzhou, and Chuzhou in the Huaihe region. In the third year of the Shaoxing period (1133) of the Southern Song Dynasty, Lü Zhi put forward the "Theory of the Internal and External Relationship between the Huaihe and Yangtze Rivers" in his military book "Convenience of Defense in the Southeast". He advocated that "defend the Yangtze River to stabilize the interior and prepare defenses along the Huaihe River to guard against external threats". He believed that the Huaihe region should serve as a protective barrier and the Yangtze River as a gateway. By defending the Huaihe River, the Yangtze River could be protected, and the Huaihe and Yangtze regions could be integrated into a single defense system. Key locations in the Huaihe region should be selected for defense deployment, and a large number of troops should be stationed along the Yangtze River. This approach would not only ensure the security of the key locations in the Huaihe region but also save mobile troops that could be dispatched to support dangerous areas at any time. He also detailed the military strategies for defending the southern regions, such as the strategic situations of the border and interior areas like Xuyi, Sizhou, Shouchun, Hefei, and Hezhou [2].

However, at the beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty when the royal court moved south, the strategic idea of prioritizing the defense of the Huaihe River was established. At that time, the

most direct geographical barrier for Lin'an (the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty) was the Yangtze River, not the Huaihe River. Therefore, in the early stage after the southward move, the Southern Song Dynasty mainly relied on the Yangtze River to establish its defense line. However, this defense arrangement did not achieve the expected results. Firstly, although establishing a defense line along the Yangtze River could cover a wide area, it required a large amount of human, material, and financial resources to deploy defenses along the river. The overly long defense line made it impossible to focus on key defenses, resulting in weak local defense capabilities and vulnerability to concentrated enemy attacks. Secondly, by relying on the Yangtze River to establish the defense line, the Southern Song Dynasty essentially abandoned the Yellow River Basin in the north. Most of the Southern Song soldiers at that time were from Shaanxi, and seeing no hope of recovering their homeland, they were extremely uncooperative with the defense line established along the Yangtze River. All these factors made it difficult for the Southern Song Dynasty's strategy of deploying defenses along the Yangtze River to be effective.

In the late Shaoxing period, Wanyan Liang, the King of the Jin Dynasty, led his army to invade the south. They easily broke through the defenses in the Huaihe region, reached the Yangtze River, and threatened Lin'an, the capital of the Song Dynasty. This made the Southern Song court realize the importance of building a defense system in the Huaihe region and began to focus on constructing defenses there. In the mid - late period of the Southern Song Dynasty, during the wars between the Song and Jin dynasties and the Song and Mongol dynasties, the Jin and Mongol armies still regarded the Huaihe region as a breakthrough point to the south of the Yangtze River. Therefore, the Southern Song court spared no effort to continue investing troops, materials, and attention in the Huaihe region, which was reflected in both the theater commanders and the court decision - making level.

At the general level, for example, after the failure of the Kaixi Northern Expedition, the war entered a stalemate stage, and the Jin army began to cross the Huaihe River from Wokou. Someone advised Qiu Cong, the then Xuanfu Envoy of the Huaihe - Yangtze region, to abandon Luzhou and Hezhou and withdraw his troops to the area along the Yangtze River. Qiu Cong firmly rejected this suggestion, saying, "Abandoning the Huaihe region means sharing the danger of the Yangtze River with the enemy. I will live and die with the Huaihe region [3]." He insisted on reinforcing the Western Huaihe region to strengthen its defense capabilities.

At the national level, after the peace talks between the Song and Jin dynasties, diplomatic contacts began. Faced with the Jin Dynasty's territorial demands for the Huaihe region, Emperor Ningzong of the Song Dynasty wrote in a letter to Wanyan Zonghao, the commander - in - chief of the Jin army, stating, "The land south of the Yangtze River serves as a protective screen for our country. If we comply with your request, how can our country survive [4]?" This expressed an uncompromising attitude towards the Huaihe region. On the Jin Dynasty's side, Wanyan Zonghao also submitted a memorial to Emperor Zhangzong of the Jin Dynasty, saying, "Even the danger of the Yangtze River cannot be relied on. How can the mere Huaihe region be sufficient as a protective screen for a country? Just like the Six Dynasties in the Jiangzuo period in history [5]..." Although on the surface he belittled the military status of the Huaihe region, in fact, he still insisted on demanding the Huaihe region to strengthen his strategic advantage over the south of the Yangtze River. All the above facts show that both the Song and Jin dynasties attached great importance to the Huaihe region.

The Southern Song Dynasty selected key locations in the Huaihe region to station heavy troops and build the Huaihe - Yangtze military defense system. However, as Wang Zhiwang said, "Defending a city is the worst strategy. The previous constructions were all like child's play... When the enemy comes, we should retreat to defend and clear the fields to trap them [6]." Relying solely on solid city walls as a means of defense makes it difficult to maximize the defensive function of the city. It is also necessary to adopt various strategies and methods to

mobilize the subjective initiative of the border - defending soldiers to give full play to the city's defensive role. In the second year of the Duanping period (1235), Li Zongmian served as the Zhizhi Commissioner of the Western Huaihe region and the Deputy Zhizhi Commissioner of the Yangtze River Defense. He submitted a memorial to Emperor Lizong of the Song Dynasty, suggesting the establishment of a connection between the Jingxiang theater and the Huaihe - Yangtze theater so that the two major theaters could be linked, realizing the complementary use of military resources in the middle and upper reaches and the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. However, throughout the entire Southern Song Dynasty, this problem was never properly solved. The reasons for this were, on the one hand, the hesitation to abide by the ancestral family precepts of "governing the military with civil officials and emphasizing civil affairs over military affairs"; on the other hand, it was restricted by objective conditions, as the national strength of the Southern Song Dynasty was unable to support the construction of such a large - scale theater. The ultimate downfall of the Southern Song Dynasty was precisely due to the disconnection between the Jingxiang Defense Line and the Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line. In conclusion, the Southern Song Dynasty's defense strategy for the Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line was: to defend Lin'an, one must defend the Yangtze River; to defend the Yangtze River, one must defend the Huaihe River. The Southern Song Dynasty's deployment of the defense system in the Huaihe - Yangtze region was very tight. Until the demise of the Southern Song Dynasty, the Mongol army never broke through the Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line from the front.

3. The Jingxiang Defense Line

Since ancient times, the Jingxiang region has been a strategic location that controls the center of the country and is a battleground for military strategists. The Southern Song Dynasty established its state facing the sea, with a declining national power, and was constantly invaded by the northern nomadic peoples. Although Jingxiang was located in the center of the country, during the Southern Song Dynasty, it became the northern border and naturally became a forward position for resisting foreign enemies.

Although the Sichuan region was conducive to defense, it was far away. In case of a large - scale enemy attack, the reinforcements from the Huaihe region could not arrive in time. Although the Huaihe - Yangtze theater was of great importance to the country and heavily garrisoned, the flat terrain of the Huaihe region allowed the enemy to advance in multiple directions after crossing the Huaihe River. Strategically, the enemy could either harass the Huaihe region or sail down the Yangtze River, leaving the Huaihe - Yangtze garrison exhausted from running around. Therefore, the Jingxiang Defense Line, which was at the center of the defense system, became particularly important. While resisting the invading enemy, the more important role of the Jingxiang Defense Line was to connect the Wu and Sichuan regions and ensure the smooth operation of the Southern Song Dynasty's national defense system. When the "head" and "tail" (referring to the Huaihe - Yangtze and Sichuan defense lines) were attacked, the Jingxiang Defense Line often took on the responsibility of providing auxiliary defense. During the 150 years of the Southern Song Dynasty, the Jingxiang Defense Line became the core of the defense for the survival of the Southern Song Dynasty. If Jingxiang was lost, the Southern Song Dynasty would perish. After the destruction of the Jin Dynasty, the Mongol cavalry was helpless in the face of the Jingxiang Defense Line for 40 years. However, due to the declining national strength of the Southern Song Dynasty and the corruption of the court, the Jingxiang Defense Line finally collapsed, and the Southern Song Dynasty perished soon after.

The Jingxiang Defense Line covered the Western Jingxi Circuit and the Northern Jinghu Circuit. With the support of the natural barriers of the Han River and the Yangtze River, it formed an iron triangle of attack and defense centered on three cities: Xiangyang, Jiangling (present - day Jingzhou), and Ezhou (present - day Wuchang District, Wuhan). Xiangyang was in the north,

Jiangling in the southwest, and Ezhou in the southeast. While Xiangyang withstood the Mongol attacks, Jiangling and Ezhou could not only outflank the enemy from the flanks but also directly support Xiangyang via water routes. In case Xiangyang was lost, Jiangling and Ezhou could quickly form a second defense line relying on the Yangtze River. Back in the day, Yue Fei recaptured Xiangyang by relying on this defense line and defeated Wanyan Zongbi (Wushu) of the Jin Dynasty. A total of 200,000 troops were stationed along the Jingxiang Defense Line all year round, including 50,000 naval troops.

The Jingxiang region is connected to the western Henan mountains in the north, bordered by the Wuling Mountains in the south to control Hunan and Hubei, backed by the Wudang Mountains, Jingshan Mountains, and Shennongjia Mountains in the northwest, adjacent to the Enshi Plateau in the southwest, and blocked by the Tongbai Mountains and Dabie Mountains in the northeast. The Han River merges into the Yangtze River here. Sailing down the Yangtze River from here leads to the Huaihe - Yangtze region; sailing upstream along the Yangtze River to the northwest leads to the Hanzhong region, crossing the Qinling Mountains to the north reaches Shaanxi, and crossing the Daba Mountains to the south enters the Sichuan Basin. Surrounded by towering mountains in the east and west and with areas in the south that can provide military supplies and food, the Jingxiang region became a crucial battleground for military strategists. During the Spring and Autumn Period, the State of Chu relied on the Jingxiang region and its dangerous mountains and rivers to attempt to conquer the Central Plains. During the Three Kingdoms Period, Lu Su once explained the importance of the Jingxiang region to Sun Quan, saying, "Jingchu is adjacent to our country. The water flows northward. It is surrounded by the Han River and Yangtze River on the outside and blocked by mountains on the inside, forming an indestructible fortress. It has a vast expanse of fertile land and a prosperous population. If we can occupy it, it will serve as a foundation for establishing an imperial career [7]."

As the saying goes, "A country without the Huaihe and Sishui regions will be weak, and a country without the upper reaches of the Han River and Yangtze River will be in danger." To resist the northern peoples' southward invasion, the Southern Song regime established the Jingxiang Defense Line in the Jingxiang region and took Xiangyang, Jiangling, and Ezhou-three transportation hubs-as the military defense centers of this line. These three cities supported each other like the horns of an ox and were interdependent like lips and teeth. Among them, Xiangyang, located at the northern tip, served as the northern barrier of the entire Jingxiang Defense Line; Jiangling was the gateway connecting to the Sichuan region; Ezhou, as the confluence of many tributaries of the Yangtze River in the middle reaches, became an important stronghold for the defense of the southeast and could also communicate with the Huaihe - Yangtze region. In other words, Xiangyang was for attack, Ezhou for defense, and Jiangling for control.

If Jingxiang was lost, the Southern Song Dynasty would perish. The Jingxiang Defense Line played an important role in the wars against the Jin and Mongol peoples for over a hundred years.

However, when the Southern Song Dynasty was inferior to the enemy in national strength and military power, it focused its defense on the Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line to ensure the security of Lin'an, while the role of the Jingxiang Defense Line was only to assist in defending the Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line. This wrong strategic thinking remained unchanged until the demise of the Southern Song Dynasty, and the collapse of the Southern Song military began with the fall of Xiangyang.

4. The Sichuan Defense Line

After the Song royal family moved south, the Sichuan region became increasingly prominent in its strategic position due to its unique geographical situation. It was a forward area where the Song Dynasty confronted the Jin and Mongol dynasties for a long time, undertaking the important tasks of recovering the Central Plains and protecting the security of the southeast. At that time, Lizhou Circuit, Zizhou Circuit, Yizhou Circuit, and Kuizhou Circuit were collectively called "Sichuan". During the peak period of the Southern Song Dynasty, the population of Sichuan exceeded 12 million, contributing at least 30% of the Southern Song Dynasty's tax revenue. Due to its important military and economic status, the Southern Song Dynasty built the Sichuan Defense Line. The Sichuan Defense Line covered Kuizhou Circuit, Lizhou Circuit, and Qinfeng Circuit. Relying on the Qinling Mountains and the natural dangers of the Sichuan roads, it roughly covered the border areas of southern Shaanxi Province, northern Sichuan Province, and southern Gansu Province. The only horse farm of the Southern Song Dynasty was located in this defense area (Xihe Prefecture).

Since the fourth year of the Shaoxing period (1134), after Wu Jie, a famous anti - Jin general of the Southern Song Dynasty, severely defeated the Jin army in the Battles of Heshangyuan, Raofengguan, and Xianrenguan, the Jin Dynasty suspended its attempt to outflank and eliminate the Southern Song Dynasty via Sichuan. To prevent the Jin army from invading Sichuan from Shaanxi again, the Southern Song Dynasty built the Sichuan defense system centered on the "Three Passes and Five Prefectures".

The Three Passes were divided into the Outer Three Passes and the Inner Three Passes according to their locations. The Outer Three Passes were Dasan Pass (south of present - day Baoji City, Shaanxi Province), Huangniu Fort (present - day Feng County, Shaanxi Province), and Zaojiao Fort (present - day Tianshui, Gansu Province); the Inner Three Passes were Wuxiu Pass (present - day Liuba County, Shaanxi Province), Xianren Pass (present - day Huixian County, Gansu Province), and Qifang Pass (Kang County). The Five Prefectures were Fengzhou (Feng County), Chengzhou (Cheng County), Jiezho (Wudu District, Longnan City), Xihe Prefecture (present - day Xihe County, Gansu Province), and Tianshui Army (present - day Tianshuizhen, Qinchuan District, Tianshui, Gansu Province). The Sichuan Defense Line took the Three Passes as the gateway and the Five Prefectures as the barrier. They supported each other and formed a multi - layer defense to guard the fertile "Land of Abundance" (the Chengdu Plain). Since the Southern Song Dynasty had basically lost the areas north of the Qinling Mountains, such as Guanzhong and northern Shaanxi, the Three Passes and Five Prefectures actually became the front line for the Southern Song Dynasty to resist the enemy's southward advance into Sichuan, known as the "Sichuan Gateway".

To defend this crucial area of the Sichuan Gateway, the Southern Song Dynasty set up three major Dutong Divisions (referred to as Rongsi for short) at the beginning of its founding. Three senior generals were appointed to command three large armies, which were stationed in three important towns respectively: Xingzhou (later renamed Mianzhou, with 60,000 troops in the Xingzhou Rongsi), Xingyuan Prefecture (the prefecture government was located in present - day Nanzheng District, Hanzhong City, Shaanxi Province, with 27,000 troops in the Xingyuan Rongsi), and Jinzhou (the prefecture government was located in present - day Ankang City, Shaanxi Province, with 11,000 troops in the Jinzhou Rongsi). In the third year of the Kaixi period (1207), after Wu Xi, who was stationed in Xingzhou, rebelled, the Southern Song Dynasty set up the Lizhou Deputy Rongsi in Lizhou to divide the military power of the Mianzhou Rongsi. Together with the previous three Rongsi, they were called the "Four Military Command Divisions of Sichuan" (also known as the "Four Great Rongsi"), which were responsible for the military defense of the Sichuan Gateway. The Southern Song Dynasty stationed 120,000 troops in the Sichuan Defense Line area all year round, including 10,000 cavalry. Although these troops

were insufficient for offense, they were more than enough for defense. Combined with the dangerous passes in Sichuan, the defense line was as solid as a rock.

In the third year of the Duanping period (1236), because Zhao Yanna retreated without fighting, the Three Passes and Five Prefectures were lost. Kuo Duan, a Mongol general, marched unimpeded into the Chengdu Plain. In the end, the land of Sichuan was devastated, with less than one - tenth of the population remaining. This led to the collapse of the defense system centered on the "Three Passes and Five Prefectures" that the Southern Song Dynasty had built over the years.

In the second year of the Chunyou period (1242), Yu Jie, a famous official of the Southern Song Dynasty, officially took office as the Anfu Zhizhi Commissioner of Sichuan and began to take overall charge of the administration of Sichuan. At this time, the Sichuan Defense Line centered on the Three Passes and Five Prefectures had collapsed, so the Southern Song court had to move the Sichuan Defense Line southward. Yu Jie spent 10 years building the Sichuan mountain city defense system represented by Diaoyu City (in Hechuan District, Chongqing). The mountain city defense system led by Yu Jie was mainly carried out around the following three aspects.

Concentrating Troops to Defend Strategic Ferry Points and Important Passes

First, Yu Jie concentrated the Song troops in the Sichuan region, deploying the effective forces at various strategic ferry points and important passes in Sichuan. He built mountain fortresses relying on the dangerous mountains and rivers in Sichuan. These fortresses supported each other like the horns of an ox, forming a multi - layer defense network with strategic depth to block the Mongol army.

The "Eight Pillars of Sichuan" While building mountain cities at various important locations in Sichuan, Yu Jie focused on developing eight mountain cities: Yunding City in Jintang, Yunshan City in Peng'an, Dajue City in Cangxi, Dehan City in Tongjiang, Baidi City in Fengjie, Diaoyu City in Hechuan, Qingju City in Nanchong, and Kuzhu City in Jiange. These eight cities were collectively called the "Eight Pillars of Sichuan". With the "Eight Pillars of Sichuan" as the center, various military camps and fortresses were set up around them, and agriculture was developed inside the cities, integrating military and agricultural activities. When the Mongol army arrived, the outer camps and fortresses would resist step by step, while the core important towns would provide coordinated support.

Building Command Centers Along the Yangtze River In the mountain city defense system, Yu Jie established rear command centers such as Chongqing City (Yuzhong District), Huanghua City (Zhongxian County), Tiansheng City (Wanzhou District), and Baidi City (Fengjie) along the Yangtze River in Sichuan. These mountain cities were all located along the Yangtze River in Sichuan, which could not only provide support for the front - line mountain city fortress groups but also rely on the Yangtze River water network to restrict the movement of the Mongol cavalry. They were the last reliance of the Southern Song Dynasty's Sichuan Defense Line.

Yu Jie's mountain city defense system in various parts of Sichuan embodied a three - tier strategic concept: dividing the enemy in the outer areas, disintegrating the enemy in the central areas, and providing support from the rear. The core of the mountain city defense system was not to firmly block the Mongol army outside Sichuan but to disintegrate the Mongol army into fragmented parts after they entered Sichuan. Firstly, the outer theater was composed of cities such as Jiading City (present - day Leshan City, Sichuan Province), Kuzhu Fort (Jiange County), Yunding City (Jintang County), Changning City (Cangxi County), Dehan City (Tongjiang County), and Dajue City (Cangxi County). The purpose of this theater was to initially divide the Mongol army when they invaded Sichuan, thereby weakening their overall offensive momentum. Secondly, the core theater was composed of cities such as Denggao City (Yibin City), Yunshan City (Peng'an County), Pengxi Fort (Pengxi County), Qingju City (Nanchong City), Diaoyu City (Hechuan, Chongqing), and Liyi City (Quxian County). These dense mountain cities, relying on

the mountains and water networks in Sichuan, divided the various regions in Sichuan into countless small areas. As long as these mountain cities were held, the Mongol army would still be split into fragmented parts after entering Sichuan, making it difficult for them to form an effective offensive force. Over time, with difficulties in rear supply, they would inevitably gradually become exhausted. Finally, central cities such as Chongqing City, Huanghua City, Tiansheng City, and Baidi City served as the rear base. These central cities formed the backbone of the mountain city defense system, and the water networks formed by rivers such as the Minjiang River, Fujiang River, Tuojiang River, Jialing River, Qujiang River, and Yangtze River constituted a natural transportation network. This allowed the various mountain cities to receive effective support in terms of troops, food, and military supplies, preventing them from being surrounded and destroyed one by one by the Mongol army. On the other hand, when the Mongol army was trapped under the solid city walls, these central cities also gathered troops to launch strategic counterattacks.

5. Conclusion

The Sichuan Defense Line, Jingxiang Defense Line, and Huaihe - Yangtze Defense Line formed the strongest defense system in the 13th century. At its peak, the Mongols spent more than 40 years trying to break through it, and a total of more than 500 battles of various sizes broke out, including the Battle of Mianzhou, Battle of Zhenzhou, Battle of Xianrenguan, Battle of Yangpingguan, Battle of Luzhou, Battle of Jingxiang, Battle of Ezhou, Battle of Yangzhou, and Battle of Diaoyu City. In the first year of the Kaiqing period (1259), Mongke Khan, the Great Khan of the Mongol Empire, died under the walls of Diaoyu City. This event changed the course of human history.

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