

A New Investigation into the Battles of Shenyang and Liaoyang

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Abstract

In 1619, Ming troops attacked Nurhaci's Jurchen forces and were defeated three out of four fronts at Sarhu. Afterwards, Nurhaci took the initiative and launched a major counter-offensive against Ming fortifications at Kaiyuan, Tieling, and Hedong. These Ming strongholds were either conquered or abandoned, and the Liaodong defense was about to collapse. Five months after the Battle at Sarhu, Xiong Tingbi relieved Yang Hao as Military Commissioner of Liaodong. It was a time when Beiguan (North Pass) was lost, and the Shenyang army and civilians were relocated to Liaoyang to save their lives. Xiong Tingbi used Liaoyang as his base to fight back. He rewarded soldiers, and he punished officers who had caused the failure. He rebuilt the troops, weapons and city walls of Liaoyang and Shenyang. He also manufactured a great number of firearms and deployed battlewagons. Then he presented the "Strategy to Defend the Four Routes" to rebuild his troops' morale. Despite explosions at the Liaoyang munitions warehouse and attacks by Jin troops on Shenyang and Fengji Fortress, he continued to prepare for the fight at Shenyang and Liaoyang. Within a short span of 14 months, he was able to turn the tide for the Ming army and created a miraculous recovery of Liaodong. However, due to political struggle, Xiong Tingbi was relieved of his post late in 1620 and replaced by Yuan Yingtai. In the third lunar month of the following year, Nurhaci launched an attack on the cities of Shenyang and Liaoyang. The result was the loss of lands east of the Liao River. After the Battle of Sarhu, attacks by Jin armies could not be seen as just siege warfare but as a major loss of Ming's strategic assets east of the Liao River. This battle marks the beginning of Nurhaci's victories. Concerning the loss of the battle, past scholars often cited the politics behind Xiong's replacement as the culprit for the loss of Shenyang and Liaoyang. This study, however, seeks evidence from the official histories of the Ming and Qing dynasties as well as pictorial evidence from *Manchu Veritable Records*, with their battle depictions, to reexamine the military situation of

both armies in Liaodong after the Battle of Sarhu. Furthermore, from the perspective of military technology and tactics, an effort is made to reexamine both armies' operations to evaluate their military decisions.

Keywords: Battles of Shenyang and Liaoyang, Xiong Tingbi, Battlewagons, Liaodong zhen