Khubilai Khan (r. 1260–1294) shared his brother Möngke's longing to bring China to heel, and in 1268 he launched a major campaign against the Song state. The battle at Xiangyang, a city on the Han River (a tributary of the Yangtze), began in 1268 and raged on until 1273 when, after a prolonged siege and blockade, the Song commander Lü Wenhuan finally surrendered Xiangyang and defected to the Mongol (Yuan) cause. Khubilai was fed up with the long duration and slow pace of the Xiangyang quagmire and was determined that subsequent campaigns would avoid protracted and debilitating attacks on walled cities. Khubilai wanted a swift and decisive campaign of conquest against the Song, and this would entail minimizing protracted sieges on cities. The grand strategy he eventually formulated was a combination of nomadic ways of swift, mobile warfare and reluctance to attack fortified city walls on the one hand and the Chinese strategist Sunzi's preferences for largely the same things on the other. This inter-cultural combination of preferred Mongolian and Chinese strategies worked, and the Mongols completed their conquest of China only four years after its implementation.

This Mongol perspective is an important counterpoint to the Sinocentric debates in the rest of this book. Even the Qing dynasty debates in David Pong's chapter, for example, are from the viewpoint of the government controlling China. Where the strategies of the Han dynasty discussed in the first three chapters of this book concern how a sedentary empire tried to defend itself against a steppe threat, this chapter is about how a steppe empire, albeit one that also maintained infantry and naval components, sought to defeat a sedentary empire. The course of the campaign was also somewhat similar to the Song conquest itself, discussed in Peter Lorge's chapter. This campaign shows that while the contingent events of war differed from period to period, the larger process of a successful conquest of China, at the strategic level of planning, had certain commonalities across history.
Khubilai sought out a general who shared his vision of how to conquer the rest of China. At length he selected for the job the Mongol general Bayan (1236–1295), a member of the Ba’arin tribe who had a basic working knowledge of the Chinese military classics, particularly Sunzi.1 Khubilai instructed Bayan to make the campaign as swift and bloodless as possible, but aside from this he gave Bayan very wide discretion and latitude, both in planning and tactical execution. Once this basic strategy was settled, the debates about the war occurred in the field among Bayan’s lieutenants rather than among officials at the Yuan court. In that sense, this chapter is quite different than the others in this volume because it concerns what happened after the imperial court had decided upon a military policy. Once Bayan had hashed out his overall strategy with his lieutenants the operation was his, and in the field Bayan was the arbiter of tactical debates rather than a principal in them. His decisions of where, when, and whether to attack were not always to the liking or comprehension of his Chinese lieutenants and Middle Eastern artillerists. While on his campaign against Southern Song China, Bayan was careful to keep his overall military objectives foremost in his mind, and he steadfastly declined to allow the possibilities for small incidental gains to distract his attention from these objectives.

Bayan was by no means leading an all-cavalry force against Song China. He led infantry, a large naval force, and Mongol cavalry on and along the Han and Yangtze Rivers. Bayan was not above bypassing fortified cities altogether if he could do so without endangering his objective; he was, after all, in the field to secure the submission of Song China, not to reduce individual recalcitrant strongholds to rubble and ashes. He attacked and devastated walled cities only when absolutely necessary and indeed did so only twice during his entire campaign. (Otherwise he had simply to approach a city with his forces to secure its peaceful surrender—something which, according to Sunzi, would mark him as the very best of generals who had achieved the pinnacle of excellence in warfare: winning without

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1 Morris Rossabi claims that Bayan was a Turk on page 87 of his work *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), but this is contradicted by Hsiao. See Hsiao Chi-Ch’ing, “Bayan,” in *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period (1200–1300)*, ed. Igor de Rachewiltz, and others (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993), p. 584.