

Food and Health at the Mongol Court

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Introduction

*In Xanadu did Kublai Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree...*

Coleridge, in his opium dream of earthly paradise, ate well:

*For he on honeydew hath fed
And drunk the milk of paradise.*

In fact, Kublai Khan--more correctly Qubilai Qan--did eat honey and milk, but mostly he ate sheep.

In 1234 the Mongols took north China. By 1280 the Mongols had conquered all China, establishing the Yuan Dynasty. Qubilai did indeed have his summer palace at Shang-tu (Coleridge drew on Iberian sources, which used X for the "sh" sound). In 1368 the dynasty fell, and the Mongols rode back to the steppes. Contrary to stereotype, China did not assimilate them or "conquer her conquerors," and the food the Mongols still ate (among other things) proves this point.

In 1330, a book was presented to the Emperor that summed up elite ideas on food and health. This work, the *Yin-shan Cheng-yao* ("Drinking and Dining According to Principles and Needs" or, more idiomatically, "Proper and Essential Knowledge About Drinking and Feasting," henceforth *YSCY*), was written by the court dietitian and nutritionist, Hu Ssu-hui.

Ultimately, it was published to the world, with prefaces by the Emperor and distinguished courtiers, and it is still in print.¹ Hu may

¹ The most recent edition is an excellent one, with the classical Chinese text with translation into modern Chinese and scientific identification of biota, by Li Ch'un-fang, *Yin-shan Cheng-yao* (Peking: 1988). Nevertheless, Li is sometimes wrong in his translations and identification (but is a good guide).

have started cooking under Qubilai Qan (1215-1294), but first appears as serving under various of Quibilai's short-lived successors in the early 1300s. He was Turkic in background. The international quality of the Mongol Empire is shown in the fact that we have here a Turk writing in Chinese for a Mongol sovereign. He probably came from one of the groups that can be called, anachronistically, "Uighur" (a T'ang term that lapsed out of use by Yuan times, to be revived in the 20th century). The book deals with recipes and with the medical properties of foods.

Françoise Sabban provides a brilliant and pathbreaking analysis of this work.² Related traditions have been analyzed by Lao (1969) and Franke (1966, 1975). The broader Yuan context is well covered by Mote (1977). Paul Unschuld (1986b) placed the *YSCY* in the context of medical and herbal lore. More recently, Paul Buell and the present writer have investigated it and prepared a translation with extensive introductory material (Buell and Anderson ms.; see Buell 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, for an account, and a review of previous scholarship). The present paper seeks to place the *YSCY* in the context of modern nutritional anthropology.

The *YSCY* documents the construction of a unique and distinctive court cuisine, based on a fusion of Mongol, West Asian and Chinese elements. Food is culturally constructed (see e.g. Meigs 1988); but often more or less unconsciously, as in Bourdieu's "habitus" (Bourdieu 1977, 1992). In the case of the *YSCY*, however, we can see *haute cuisine* being deliberately created by selection from several regional styles. The book also provides many insights into the cuisine, or cuisines, already extant in north China and Mongolia. Millennia of interaction between Chinese and Inner Asian peoples had long since led to mutual influences of each over the others.

Henry Schwarz devoted his career to elucidating the complex relationships between central Asia and north China. He naturally turned to food, among other things, as clear evidence of cultural connections and cultural history (Schwarz 1984:11, 54, 73 and elsewhere). Foodways are markedly sensitive to historical forces, and they are usually visible, measurable and reasonably well documented. Thus, it is appropriate, in this volume, to follow Henry Schwarz's trail into the kitchens as well as the courts of Inner Asia. Food is an important part

² Sabban, "Cuisine à la couer de l'empereur de Chine au XIVE siècle," *Mediévales* 5 (1983): 32-56. An English translation later appeared in *Food and Foodways*.

of the cultural picture, and studying food is a valuable way to continue Dr. Schwarz's project.

Chinese and Central and West Asian Cooking

China's interaction with Central Asia is as old as humanity--indeed, as old as life itself. From the early days of agriculture, specific foodstuffs were being borrowed (Anderson 1988; Chang 1977). Panic millet (*Panicum miliaceum*) appears as a cultivated crop at about the same time in China and the Ukraine, around 4000 B.C.; this may indicate independent domestication, but borrowing in one or the other direction seems more likely to the present writer. Wheat and barley, unquestionably West Asian natives, appear in China around 2000 B.C. With the rise of empires east and west, borrowings became more frequent. The Han Dynasty borrowed not only grapes and wine, but also flour-milling techniques and flour technology (see Sabban 1990a), and perhaps stir-frying (Anderson 1988). Han began the creation of a complex Chinese cuisine (Huang 1990).

Westward influences seem to have increased after Han. Chia Ssu-hsieh's famous *Ch'i Min Yao Shu* reflects several Central Asian foodways (Donald Harper, personal communication; Sabban 1990b). During T'ang, as is now well known from the classic works of Berthold Laufer (1919) and Edward Schafer (1963), Central Asian influences became very strong. Iranian influences were particularly pronounced. Eventually, North China's food seemed almost west Asian--based on filled dumplings, pasta, sesame breads ultimately derived from Persian *nan*, and an increasingly western-influenced set of spices and vegetables (Anderson 1988; Laufer 1919).

We shall probably never know who invented pasta, or filled dumplings, or distilled liquor; anything invented at one end of the Silk Road spread rapidly to the other. Trade relations between China and Inner Asia were complex and intimate (Buell and Anderson ms.; Jagchid and Simons 1989). Nor were the great civilizations at the ends of the Silk Road--the Chinese and Iranians--the only players. The earliest outsiders' accounts show that the Turkic and Mongol peoples had a deep and highly sophisticated knowledge of the food and medicinal values of their fauna and flora (Buell and Anderson ms.; see also Roux 1966, Svanberg 1990).

By 1330, China, or at least northwest China, had been westernizing its food for a long time. In addition to the many sources cited by Sabban, we have, for instance, Yang Hsuan-chih's "Memories

of Loyang" (Yang, tr./ed. Jenner, 1981), including the delightful if less than subtle jibes that northwesterners and southeasterners threw at each other's foodways in the early sixth century A.D. The northwesterners laughed at the southern taste for frogs and other water creatures, while the southeasterners laughed at the northern addiction to sheep and to yogurt and other dairy foods. It was all very much like the slurs that the English and French exchanged in the nineteenth century. In China (as in England and France) such gibes were evidently a standard and stereotyped exchange (cf. Freedman 1977, Gernet 1962, Mote 1977, Schafer 1963).

T'ang literature confirms that northwestern food habits were of this kind more than half a millennium before the *YSCY* (Anderson 1988; Schafer 1963, 1977). The accounts speak of dairy products, noodles, dumplings, sheep, and occasionally game. Some West Asian fruits and spices are mentioned (cf. Laufer 1919). The *YSCY* no doubt reflects a reality already in existence; whole sections of it could have come straight out of medieval Near Eastern recipe books (compare e.g. 'Abd al-Latif 1962, Perry 1989, Roden 1970). Donald Harper (personal communication) has traced some *YSCY* recipes to earlier works going back as far as T'ang. Not only are many more Near Eastern foods used, but they are processed in various ways and included as integral components of the foods.

Meanwhile, the sophisticated cooking of China itself developed considerably during the Sung Dynasty. T'ang cuisine was relatively simple and plain, but by the end of Sung a brilliant, complex, diverse cuisine with many regional variants existed (Anderson 1988; Freedman 1977; Gernet 1962; Gwinner 1988). Sung influence waned early in the north, but the early "conquest dynasties" had their own sophisticated foods. Elaborate cuisine and huge ritual feasts are well attested for Yuan times, even by so uncouth an alien as Marco Polo, to say nothing of aesthetes-turned-cookbook-writers like Ni Tsan (Wang and Anderson 1991).

Foodways track a steady increase in the social, economic and political integration of the world-system bound together by the Silk Road. Increasingly ambitious empires conquered farther and farther along it. T'ang and Arab forces clashed in the 700s, but both had over-extended their supply lines. It was inevitable that an indigenous Central Asian power would arise to "conquer the world" defined by this Persia-China axis. The Turkic peoples were well-placed for this endeavor, but were torn by endemic strife. The Mongols, remote and no doubt

regarded as backward by the sophisticated Turks, were also strategically placed to act.

The Mongol empire, in many ways the greatest the world has ever known, rose to glory in the late twelfth century under Chinggis Khan ("Genghis Khan," ca. 1162-1227) in the late 12th century. Central Asia, from eastern Europe to the borders of China, was under its sway. It grew and consolidated through the early 1200s (see Langlois 1981; Rossabi 1988) under Chinggis and his sons. The empire divided, with Qubilai eventually inheriting the eastern portion while his younger brother Hüle'ü (Hulagu) took over the Near East. Other relatives held the Central Asian and Russian territories.

Chinggis himself began the conquest of China, but the task proved difficult, and could not be completed until 1279, with the Yuan finally being proclaimed as the sole and ruling dynasty of all the Middle Kingdom in 1280. By this time the world-empire of Chinggis had long since fallen into disunion, but was still ruled by a single family, its members more or less at peace and cooperative with each other in spite of inevitable sibling rivalries. Their world was one in which Marco Polo could travel overland from Venice to Hangchou, serve in the government of a small Chinese city, and return by sea, while two Chinese Uighurs of the Nestorian Christian faith could travel to the Holy Land and become heads of the faith there, eventually traveling as far as France. Never in history--not excepting the present--has the Asian heartland been so united and so easy to traverse.

This was the first true world-system, and the first time that all the "oikumene" had been linked in one economic unit dominated by a single vast political complex. While the united empire did not long survive Chinggis, Mongol solidarity disintegrated only slowly, disintegrative forces being countered by a sense of loss, a desire to restore the unity, and a sense of protectiveness toward such solidarity as could be maintained. Qubilai jockeyed for power with an eye to becoming hegemonic in at least the eastern end of the realm, and dreamed of adding Mongolia as an integral part of his domain--in which enterprise he eventually succeeded.

Under such rule, the internationalized Central Asian cuisine reached its apotheosis.

When the Mongols conquered China, they obviously felt the need to construct a court cuisine that would show their power and authority. This was inevitable, given the long and hallowed tradition in Chinese society (and indeed in all court societies) of using food to

indicate respect, domination, hierarchy and power relations in general (Anderson 1988; Bourdieu 1977, 1979; Chang 1977; Goody 1982; Murcott 1984). The various exegeses on the *Li Chi* had long ago stressed the importance of food and feast manners in marking status and role (Legge 1967).

Though we have no direct evidence for the Mongols prior to the time of Chinggis Qan, there is every reason to believe that they shared in this Asia-wide and, indeed, world-wide pattern. After all, the heart of the difference between "cooking" and "cuisine" is "class"; Jack Goody's classic work *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1982) remains the best discussion of this. More directly, the early Chinese dynastic histories speak of feasts among the Central Asian "barbarians" and of food as central to their state ceremonies and displays of hospitality. Western sources can also be adduced (see e.g. Marco Polo's classic account in Yule and Cordier 1903, and that of William of Rubruck, etc., in Buell and Anderson ms.). One possibility for the Mongols would have been to pick up the classic cuisine of China. They did not, however, do this: they instead built on their own traditions, incorporated a wide range of international influences (predominantly Chinese, to be sure) and created a new cuisine of great subtlety, variety and originality.

Frederick Mote cites the *Yuan Shih* in support of this thesis:

. . . in their Great Banquets (Ta-hsiang) for imperial clansmen and in feasts tendered their chief officials, they continued to follow mostly the usages of their own people (1977:205).

He adds a somewhat cynical assessment:

Thus the Mongols, whose cuisine has never evoked much admiration from any observers, appear to have been particularly conservative in retaining their steppe eating formalities and, presumably, the steppe food itself, even in the presence of the Chinese alternative. That must be counted a display of grim, outlandish determination, unmatched again in history until, in the nineteenth century, the Westerners . . . set up their . . . enclaves (*ibid*).

This quote is too delightful to omit, and contains much truth. However, the *YSCY* shows that the whole truth was somewhat more complex and even more interesting.

Conservatism was anything but characteristic of Mongol Court cuisine. In the first place, North China, where the Mongols naturally

set up their capital, had already been under non-Chinese rule for more than a century, and a quite distinctive and interesting cuisine already existed (cf. the Jurchen recipes cited by Franke 1975). In the second place, even the more narrowly Chinese food in the north had been influenced since the Han Dynasty, and particularly since the Wei Dynasty, by Central and West Asia. In the third place, when the Mongols took China, they had been imperial for some time. The old capital at Karakoram was predominantly a tent city, but even it must have had some sort of fancy cooking, and the Mongols had every opportunity to absorb whatever high traditions existed at Khotan and Kashgar, or among the Tanguts and Tadhiks, before they came directly into China.

In short, we are not to assume a rabble of uncouth barbarians knocking at the gates of the Great Wall, but rather a frontier society long resident in a region where Chinese and Altaic peoples had influenced each other through thousands of years of interaction (see Lattimore 1951; cf. also Langlois 1981, Rossabi 1988). They had no special need to adopt the highest Chinese cuisine of the time. Moreover, they had no opportunity to do so. That cuisine was far away, in Sung's southern refuge, where it had become a cuisine based on fish and shellfish and southern plants. Its raw materials were barely available in the north.

The Mongols had already been heavily influenced by their Turkic officials and masses. Moreover, the court cuisine the Mongols found in Peking was already Altaicized by Liao and Chin--to say nothing of the previous thousand years. It was in this setting that the very real cultural conservatism of the Mongols, and their evident desire to maintain a core of truly Mongol foodways, operated. Around that conservative core they constructed a new international cuisine, deliberately invented to display and validate their role as ruling elite of a genuine world empire.

Drink and food were important aspects of Mongol life--too important, it would seem, for Qubilai eventually became "grotesquely fat" (Rossabi 1988, pp. 67, 227) and a large percentage of the court followed him into overconsumption of alcohol and fine delicacies. Many Mongols drank themselves to death on wine, beer, and fermented mares' milk (Buell, personal communication; Rossabi 1988, pp. 12, 227). Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the prestige of physicians was high (Rossabi 1988, p. 125) and that diet and nutrition were preeminent among their concerns. As is well known, the place of food in Chinese medicine has always been high (Anderson

1988), and the Mongols had every reason to absorb this tradition. Hu's book thus emphasizes the health aspects of diet.

However, the *YSCY* is much more than a health food manual. It merely reflects an elaborate, refined, international cuisine. Dishes from Baghdad, India and China override in importance the simple, hearty fare of the Mongols. A proper cuisine for a world empire had arisen. The glory, power and above all the international scope of the Mongol rulers was clearly expressed in this cuisine. It seems probable that this was quite deliberate. The court had constructed a cuisine to express and validate its claim to world rulership.

To demonstrate their thorough control, traditional east Asian rulers ate foods from all over their realms and had gardens with plants and animals from all over their realms. There was a magical belief, at least in the early Chinese empire, that by controlling such a microcosm the emperor controlled and ordered the macrocosm (cf. Stein 1990 for a comprehensive account of macrocosm and microcosm in East Asian thought). The Mongols may or may not have believed in this ancient idea, but they surely realized the symbolic value of the actions it involved. They were heirs to the long Chinese tradition of deliberate construction of ritual and ideology to validate and demonstrate power. (The best account of this for medieval times is Wechsler's 1985 work on T'ang. T'ang history was well known to the Mongols.)

The Yuan dynasts were also aware of the more practical values of internationalism. They made use of craftsmen from all their lands and from as far afield as France and Korea. They patronized philosophers, and heard disputations about the various religions from traveling divines. They were eclectic in their statecraft and military techniques, borrowing from one area the skills they could use in (or against) another. Few people in history have been as self-consciously anxious to establish themselves as true world-rulers.

Aware of the limitations and rather provincial nature of their Mongol heritage, the Mongol rulers drew on court rituals, ideological systems, and technological methods from all the known world for the culture of their capitals. Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that the *YSCY*, and specifically its first section, represents some of the results of an attempt to create a cuisine appropriate for world-rulers. It showed their sophistication, magically or symbolically represented the extent of their power, and provided them with a varied and excellent bill of fare.

The *Yin-shan Cheng-yao*

The *YSCY* is divided into three *chuan*, each of which can be further subdivided. The first contains prefaces; general introductory medical lore; and a section titled "Exotic Delicacies of Refined Flavors," including ninety-five recipes. The second consists of two sections: one of drinks, conserves and the like, and a second of standard Chinese medicinal foods. Interspersed among these are many medicinal essays, lists, and recommendations. The third is a systematic account of over two hundred foodstuffs, arranged as in the old herbals and agricultural manuals, but including many Mongolian game animals and wild-gathered foods as well as standard grains, vegetables and domestic meats.

All in all, the *YSCY* discusses no fewer than 564 foods and medicines. This is a comprehensive list, including all the medicines, all the animal parts (sheep's feet, donkey's head, etc.) and all the spices. What is perhaps most interesting for our purposes here is the breakdown of the origins of these foods. Based on somewhat tentative analysis, the breakdown is as follows.

The largest category, 216 items, is the set of foods that are clearly Chinese: Chinese medicines, native Chinese fruits and vegetables, etc. One hundred and eleven items are fairly strictly Mongol or Turko-Mongol--game, game products, and wild foods native to Mongolia and high Central Asia but rare or rarely used in China. Sixty items are from west Asia, including the Near East and India. One hundred and seventy-seven items (the second largest block) are indeterminate--items that were found throughout Asia, or at least East Asia, since ancient times. Fifty-nine of these 177 are basically East Asian but would have been shared by China and Mongolia indifferently (wide-ranging game animals like tigers and gorals, for instance).

Items borrowed by the east from the west pose a categorization problem. Many, like wheat and barley, had been in East Asia for thousands of years. These I categorize as indeterminate. However, anything borrowed during or since the Han Dynasty was classified as West Asian, including things like sesame that had been in China so long that they were probably considered thoroughly Chinese. Only a few foods in the *YSCY* would have seemed definitely exotic Near Eastern items: such things as rosewater, chickpeas ("Iranian beans"), asafoetida, safflower and saffron, pomegranates, sharbats, and mastic.

The recipe sections reflect very different culinary mixtures. The first section, the "exotic dishes," has attracted the most interest (e.g.,

Sabban 1983). Of these ninety-five recipes, by my reckoning, twenty-eight are Mongol or Central Asian (Turkic, Afghan, or whatever they may be). Thirty-three are basically Near Eastern, usually with Mongol and Chinese influences. Three are purely Chinese--chicken and fish recipes still prepared in China. Two are explicitly called Indian in the text, and one of these is recognizable as a typical Kashmiri dish (it is close to the "qalia" in Dar 1977). Twenty-eight are genuinely new dishes, not quite like anything known in the world outside of the *YSCY*. (A few similar recipes do exist in contemporary, related texts, e.g. Franke's Jurchen materials.) They are basically blends of Central Asian, Near Eastern and Chinese traditions and foodways. Some are nothing more than that--blends--but some are truly creative and original dishes that obviously represent a quite new, albeit hybrid, tradition.

Most of these are closest to the Turkic Central Asian recipes. Several are of a distinctive pattern: stews of lamb and various vegetables, subtly flavored with a variety of spices, and thickened with ground legumes or nuts. This is a basically Near Eastern framework. Specifically, it is close to Persian cooking and to the Persian-influenced traditions of Mesopotamia and the Caucasus. However, these dishes contain so many Central and East Asian ingredients that they cannot reasonably be categorized as West Asian. They are probably original dishes created by the Mongol court chefs, or elaborated by them from Central Asian prototypes. Some survive today in West Asia or Northwest China.

The recipes in the second *chuan* have a more Chinese flavor. The drinks and other minor foods fall into two categories: drinks, teas and medicinal teas, mostly Chinese, a few Central Asian; and sharbats, conserves and jams, an unmistakably Near Eastern group identical to those one finds in Turkish and Iranian bazaars today. Some are made with Chinese ingredients, but the whole group forms one integral block in the text, with the word *sharbat* actually transliterated here and there, and is clearly related to Near Eastern medicinals of the time (cf. Levey 1966.) The medicinal recipes, "dishes to treat various diseases," are all either purely Chinese or are Chinese except that Mongolian game animals are used. Even in this third group of recipes, however, the predominance of the sheep stands out.

This brings us to the foods specific to the *YSCY*. As Sabban (1983) pointed out, the predominance of the sheep is the most obvious and outstanding fact in this area. The sheep is the basis of some seventy-two of the ninety-five "exotics" recipes, plus eight of the

medical recipes. All parts of the animal are used, from the head to the feet. The whole animal was pit-barbecued, wrapped in willow leaves (cf. accounts of whole sheep in Mongol and Khotanese cooking in Schafer 1963, Mote 1977, etc.). The skin was boiled and cut into noodle-shaped pieces for use in soup. The blood was mixed with wheat flour for noodles. The tail fat was the preferred cooking oil, featured in many recipes. Many breeds of Central Asian sheep are specially bred to deposit large amounts of fat in the connective tissue of the rump and tail. This fat-rich tissue can itself be roasted and eaten, or the fat can be rendered out, as in the *YSCY*, for cooking. Vegetable oil is referred to as "lesser oil" in the *YSCY*. Apparently it was less favored than sheep fat. No other meat is significant. There are one or two recipes for wild boar, but the pig--the very basis of everyday Chinese meat cookery--is essentially absent. This is not an Islamic influence. The *YSCY* is full of foods that no proper Muslim would eat: blood, blood-rich organs, donkeys and horses, and game such as wolves and bears. It was probably omitted because it was Chinese. Other Chinese staples such as fish are also relatively rare in the recipes.

Turning to starches, the most important distinction made is not between species but between modes of preparation. Most starches are eaten as pasta. Wheat is by far the most important, but several recipes call for bean noodles or for noodles made of the flour of the *chi t'ou*--seeds of *Euryale ferox*, a Chinese water-lily much used in medical cuisine (now as then).

The combination of sheep and pasta is, of course, fundamentally Near Eastern, but had also been established in Central Asia and the China borderlands for a long time by 1330. We do not know how long.

In general, ingredients have been well covered elsewhere (Sabban 1983 is especially valuable, but see also Anderson 1989, Buell and Anderson ms.). There are, however, a few notes to be made. Several of the recipes, including a whole cluster of the ones at the very beginning, depend on lamb cooked with chickpeas. The peas are taken out, mashed, and returned to the broth as thickening. This is a thoroughly Near Eastern and specifically Irano-Mesopotamian dish. It has spread westward too, and is common in Mediterranean lands influenced by Islam. It even survives in New Mexico, as an ancient introduction by the Spanish settlers there (Jaramillo 1981 gives a recipe quite similar to the *YSCY* cluster).

Several other more refined dishes in the *YSCY* used sesame paste and/or nut pastes as thickeners, again a Near Eastern influence

(found in some very un-Near Eastern dishes). The nuts include *hsing kuo*, literally "apricot kernels," and apricot kernel paste is still used medicinally in China; here the substance is obviously a local substitute for almond paste. (There is a slight chance that it is actually intended to be almond paste, and the *pa tan* of *pa tan hsing kuo* has simply been left out; but usually the book is meticulous about names, including these two specifically.)

Many of the dishes consist of, or are based on, filled dumplings of the *chiao-tzu* type. Many of them are not called *chiao-tzu* in the *YSCY*, but bear various other names, often Turkic or otherwise non-Chinese and non-Mongol. At some point there should be a serious study of filled dumplings. They were, of course, long known throughout Asia by the time of the *YSCY*. For China, we have, in addition to indigenous testimony, the interesting observations of the Korean Buddhist monk Ennin, who traveled through China in the late T'ang and found that he was given *chiao-tzu* (vegetarian, of course) as the standard "special treat" food wherever he went (Reischauer 1955). Filled dumplings may go back as far as the Han Dynasty. In the Near East they are probably far older, indeed as old as the idea of making good wheat flour. *Samusa* and related Arabic foods of this type may represent lineal descendents of the original filled dumpling. Variants occur throughout west and south Asia, often under names traceable back to *samusa* (e.g., in India).

In Turkic languages they are called *mantu*, *manty* or the like--Schwarz's Uighur *manta*--and this word has been borrowed into Korean and several other languages. This word is, of course, the Chinese *man-t'ou*, "barbarian heads" or "filled heads," and it may be a loanword into Chinese from Turkic, or a parallel development in both languages (see Buell 1991). We need not take seriously such stories as the one stating that the dumplings were inspired by seeing decapitated barbarians' heads floating down the river. Modern *man-t'ou* are solid wheat flour (leavened), but we know from T'ang accounts like Ennin's that they were stuffed in those days. The Turkic/Central Asian forms begat Russian/Ukrainian *pelmeny*, Jewish *kreplachs*, and many other Eastern European forms.

The modern center of dominance of filled dumplings is Central Asia, from Afghanistan to southern USSR and northwest China. Here they occur in a kaleidoscopic variety of forms and fillings. The *YSCY* reflects this, and goes beyond it. Dumplings can be wrapped not only in the usual wheat flour, but in bean or euryale flour skins. They may

be stuffed with simple spiced minced lamb or with exotic mixtures of lamb with nuts of various sorts, spices, and vegetables.

The *YSCY* also attests the Chinese technique of putting a filling inside a cup and steaming it on a steamer tray (a specialty of modern Hunan). Nowhere in the modern world save perhaps in Ukraine does one find such a wide variety of stuffed dumplings. Significantly, all are in the initial section of "exotic" recipes. None are in the overwhelmingly Chinese second *chuan*.

The dumpling filled with ground meat or equivalent is probably a West Asian creation which spread eastward. However, there is no reason why it could not have been independently invented in China and elsewhere. (Cf. the quite independent invention of the tamale in pre-Columbian Mexico, where it is part of a trinity--Nahuatl *tlaxcal* "tortilla," *tabal* "food to eat with tortillas" and *tamal* "tamale"--that almost exactly, and quite independently, reproduces the Chinese trinity of *fan*, *ts'ai* and *chiao-tzu*. Cf. also the various stuffed leaves and bamboo products typical of Southeast Asia but extending up into China in e.g. *tsung-tzu*. Obviously, eating a snack in a wrapping is not only "good to eat" but also "good to think," and certainly easy to think.)

One very significant omission in the *YSCY* is dairy products. All Central Asian groups, of course, use milk products very heavily, and this was certainly true of the Mongol court (Buell and Anderson ms.). Now, with Sabban's superb review of the importance of milk in medieval China (Sabban 1986) to add to the classic survey by Wheatley (1965) for Southeast Asia, we know that not only did China (at least western China) take to dairy foods, but that they were a very important component of diet in medieval times. Introduced probably by (or at least in) the Wei Dynasty, these foods remained important through the Mongol period and were apparently not rejected until some time during Ming. (Yogurt persists as an important food in Yunnan, where many milking groups, primarily of Tibeto-Burman stock, live among Chinese who have picked up the food habit--in part because of the strong Mongol presence there in Yuan times, Buell suggests.)

This being the case, it is astonishing that dairy products hardly figure at all in the *YSCY*. Cheese is mentioned in several recipes. A few mention yogurt. (The character employed could also mean cream or kumiss, but is clearly yogurt here, since two of the recipes that call for it are still very common in Asia and always employ that ingredient. One is the aforementioned *tutmaj*; the other is a stuffed vegetable dish that is not so clearly identical to anything today but is very similar to

several modern stuffed vegetable dishes that use yogurt.) Even the medical sections do not discuss dairy foods in any detail. This is partly because traditional Chinese medicine did not give dairy products any significant place, but even in China the late-medieval herbals do not seem to be as anti-dairy as the *YSCY*.

Probably Hu felt that these foods were too common and ordinary to need discussion. Also, he drew heavily on Chinese medical texts, which have little to say about dairy foods. In addition, not only kumiss but all alcoholic drinks are conspicuously downplayed in the *YSCY*, with the very significant exception of a long section on drinking that can be summarized in the one word: MODERATION. Hu knew his clients and understood their chief medical complaints.

The other somewhat surprising fact is that the *YSCY* is absolutely lacking in the two cooking techniques that we most associate, today, with Central Asia and with China respectively: there are no kababs (except for one possible reference; there are also some grilled dishes of unmistakably Arab origin) and there is no stir-frying. This is simply explained: the *YSCY* is a medical cookbook, and boiling is believed by both Mongols and Chinese to be the proper way to extract the virtues of foodstuffs and maximize their digestibility and safety. Steaming and grilling may be all right and are occasionally employed in the *YSCY* recipes. A few simple, light foods are even baked. But heavy, fat-rich cooking or cooking over long intense heat is regarded as unhealthful and is thus absent. It is clear, however, that stir-frying and various other specialized techniques were not as commonly used then as they are now.

Vegetables are of limited variety and are rather few: cucumbers, carrots, cabbage and other cold-weather forms, as well as several Mongolian wild greens.

Spices were many and diverse. Such characteristic West Asian flavorings as saffron and asafoetida met with Chinese flower-pepper (*Zanthoxylum*) and gardenia seeds. By far the most important are tsaoko cardamoms (*Amomum* spp.)--large, brown, fibrous-shelled cardamoms with a camphoraceous taste, quite different from the small cardamoms familiar in the western world. These large cardamoms abound in South and East Asia, where they were and are used as a heating medicine. The artist Ni Tsan, in his cookbook written shortly before the *YSCY*, notes the heating qualities of cardamoms (Wang and Anderson 1991). A high percentage of the soups and stews of the *YSCY* are flavored with them, presumably to strengthen the Mongols

and protect them against the rigors of nomadic life, especially the chills of winter. Commonly, tsaokos were combined with dried mandarin-orange peel (a standard ingredient of Chinese medicinal soups), onions, and often vinegar. The vinegar was usually added later, often--obviously--by the diner at the table as in modern Inner Asian Chinese cuisines. Both black and flower pepper are common. These spices, especially the tsaoko-citrus peel axis, make up a true "signature spice" or "flavor principle" (Rozin 1983) which is otherwise undocumented.

On the other hand, some spice combinations betray a specific foreign origin. Dried and fresh ginger used together occur in one or two recipes, one specifically labeled as coming from "Balpo" in "Western India." This is an unmistakable mark of Kashmiri cooking (Dar 1977). Similarly, marinating lamb parts in saffron and rosewater (two recipes, actually variants of the same recipe) appears to be specifically Arabian. More general West Asian touches include light spicing with cinnamon and cardamom; considerable use of onions, including roasted onions, and vinegar; and many of the sweets and drinks described in the second chapter, some being specifically called *sharbat*. The first dish in the *YSCY* calls for mastic, under that name.

By contrast with the Baghdadi foods of the time, the *YSCY* recipes are rather simple. Also, they often add Chinese flavorings. For example, a recipe from Harun al-Rashid's court (in Baghdad, several centuries before the *YSCY*) calls for ground lamb with oil, onion, leek, coriander greens and ground coriander seeds, caraway, black pepper, greater galingale, vinegar, honey and salt (Perry 1989; cf. on medieval Mesopotamian cuisine 'Abd al-Latif 1964; Roden 1970.). Closely equivalent *YSCY* recipes include, typically, lamb, tsaoko cardamom, black pepper, ginger, lesser galingale (Chinese--as opposed to the greater galingale, which is South Asian), and onions. The *YSCY* does not add sweets to meat nor use many greens or apiaceous seeds; in all these recipes it differs from the West Asian court tradition and matches that of Central and East Asia.

Chinese ingredients found in many recipes include (besides the *Euryale* and tsaokos) lesser galingale, soy products, pork (long displaced from West and Central Asian cuisine by Islamic law), local fish dishes, and several vegetables. Usually these Chinese touches occur as additions to eclectic dishes. Only three dishes in the first section are unmistakably Chinese. However, the sixty-one "recipes to cure the

various diseases" are almost entirely Chinese. They are very simple and rather plain--medicinal rather than gourmet fare.

Recipes are sometimes specified by their place of origin, as in the Indian case cited above, and can often be identified with particular places even without specification. The Balpo recipe is virtually identical with modern Kashmiri cooking not just in its use of two forms of ginger, but in all other ways, and is in fact a variant of the modern Kashmiri dish *qalia* (see Dar 1977; the modern dish calls for red peppers, unknown in Asia in 1330, and there are other trivial differences). Another dish specified as Indian is similar to dishes found today in western Central Asia and in Ladakh. The modern Ladakhi version, said to be popular, consists of root vegetables, garlic, "chicken or mutton soup, some starchy material, and some spices (e.g., cardamom, cinnamon, pepper, fennel, coriander, ginger, etc.)," steamed together (Navchoo and Buth 1990:321).

Medical Aspects

The medical tradition is almost entirely Chinese. Indeed, the book contains long quotations from Chinese medical classics. However, there are also some Near Eastern influences. The rosewater-saffron combination is one that is considered, in Arabic medicine, to be cheering (Levey 1966), and is so described in the *YSCY*--a clear Arabic influence. Sugar and honey are used in the drinks and elsewhere to mollify and harmonize ingredients--clearly a West Asian touch. That these are West Asian recipes is further attested by use of the word "sharbat." These are, however, isolated exceptions in a book otherwise based on Chinese theories of correspondence, utilizing *ch'i*, *yang* and *yin*, longevity potions (Chinese asparagus was highly favored), and other familiar items (Porkert 1974; Unschuld 1986a, 1986b).

The vast majority of the foods are boiled, reflecting both Mongol and Chinese health concepts. For the Chinese, it makes the food more "cooling" and digestible, and renders its nutrients more available. Most of the foods are "heating" in terms of the medical system that was already shared, by 1330, through civilized Asia--an accommodation between various local traditions assigning heating or cooling values to medicines and foods (Anderson 1988). Boiling made these dishes safe--warming and strengthening rather than overheating. Teas are cooling and so are several of the other drinks.

The principle of mutual influence led to the use of sheep lungs to strengthen (human) lungs, etc. The medicinal lore employed does

not seem to be highly sophisticated. Extracts from herbals, local nostrums and magical lore, and solid common sense are combined in long lists of rules. Many combinations of foods are forbidden, as was typical of the period (cf. Chia Ming's slightly later compendium with a very similar title, the *Yin-shih Hsu-chih* "Necessary Knowledge for Drinking and Eating"). Clearly, these were often deduced by some correspondence logic rather than being based on experience; one doubts, for example, whether the Mongol rulers had much occasion to test the instruction to avoid ape meat after taking false hellebore. Mongol taboos such as that warning against urinating toward important cosmological points are also found. Chinese folk beliefs intrude when, for example, fox meat is recommended for the kinds of mental problems that the Chinese explained as due to fox spirits. Other rules seem simple common sense: spoiled meat is to be avoided, liquor is to be drunk in moderation. Much praise is given to the world's favorite medicine, chicken soup--but a Chinese touch intervenes in that yellow and black chickens are used for different complaints.

The major concern in the recipes is with *ch'i* ("breath; vital essence") and its circulation. Most of the foods are labeled as warming and/or strengthening to the *ch'i*. They would be so labeled today as well. Slowly stewed meats, especially game, are still the preferred foods for exactly this purpose (see Anderson 1988). Many of them are further described as strengthening (*pu* "supplementing"), nourishing or being generally beneficial to various organ systems. There is need for further study of the medical conditions discussed, with comparison to other books of the time.

The descriptions of the foodstuffs and ingredients provide standard brief accounts as in the *pen-ts'ao* "basic herbals" of the day. They usually indicate the taste of the food (in terms of the "five tastes" system) and whether the nature of the food is warming, cooling or neutral (this refers to the Chinese equivalent of the "humoral medicine" of the west). They indicate whether the food "has poison" (i.e., potentiates poisons in the eater) or not. They may indicate whether it is cleansing or strengthening. They indicate what parts of the body it affects.

In general, the medical indications in the book are largely for strengthening, supplementing, counteracting deficiencies, and augmenting or repairing *ch'i* (or will or energy or other subtle forces). Clearly, one perceived major problem of the Mongol court was weakness and loss of energy, and the medical system was dedicated in great measure to repairing this by providing the most nutritious and restora-

tive foods possible. Indeed, the dishes are mostly high in protein and minerals and extremely digestible. Blood and internal organ meats are extremely rich in most nutrients that humans need. Vegetables and fruits would provide crucial vitamins, but are not featured. The spices have a carminative and digestive effect. Dairy foods are not much used in Chinese medicine today. Perhaps this partly explains their relative unimportance in the *YSCY*, but dairy products were more medicinal then, so this does not tell us all.

Several foods are recommended to cure pain, poisoning, diarrhea, alcohol damage, and other problems. Pending further study of medieval Chinese disease terminology, it is difficult to discuss their value. However, it appears that digestive upsets may be second only to depletion or weakness in importance, and that they are mostly blamed on overeating and overindulgence in alcohol. Most of the indicated foods are soothing and easy to digest by modern standards (both Chinese and biomedical).

The lists of taboo foods and combinations appear to be based primarily on ideas of what is unnatural. Uncanny and abnormal items, especially animals, are banned. Combinations are banned if they seem unnatural or violate the systems of correspondence.

Homesickness and cultural conservatism also influenced the book. In Peking, in spite of whatever Chinese contacts were to be seen, the Central Asian diet persisted. Sheep were basic and game was apparently brought in large quantities. It is unclear how much in the way of Chinese vegetables and fish would have been available, but certainly more than the *YSCY* treats. We do not have the words of the Mongols on the subject, but we do have the words of a later counterpart, the Manchu Tungus who became the first emperor of the Ch'ing Dynasty. He wrote frequently of his desire to be back in the wild, and of the superiority of broiled game by an open campfire as opposed to the overcooked foods of the capital (Spence 1974). Rossabi reproduces an illustration of Qubilai and his queen "on a cookout" (Rossabi 1988, p. 17), suggesting that the K'ang-Hsi Emperor was not alone in his tastes.

A variable that often gives structure to food, but does not in the *YSCY*, is the calendar. The *YSCY* makes no reference to yearly rituals, seasons, special occasions or the like, except to make common-sense recommendations to the effect that the court should eat cooler, lighter foods in summer and more warming and filling ones in winter. Presumably many of the foods were consumed at the ritual feasts as

attested by Marco Polo and others, but we have no evidence of this in the *YSCY*.

Regional Variations

The distinction between northwest and southeast prevails today (Dru Gladney, personal communication; William Jankowiak, personal communication; Nancy Peterson Walter, personal communication; Anderson, personal observation). Lamb and noodle dishes indistinguishable from those in the *YSCY* were known before its time and persist now in Ninghsia and in the city of Sian. The *YSCY* draws on a preexisting tradition. However, the more sophisticated cooking of the *YSCY* appears to have no successors in modern East Asian cooking. (The "Mongolian barbecue" familiar to diners at North Chinese-style restaurants is conspicuously absent, as is stir-frying, from the *YSCY*. It is probably a recent creation [Mote 1977] and very possibly is more Korean than Mongol.)

Henry Schwarz's notes on contemporary Uighur food (1984:11) show some significant differences from and similarities to the cuisine of the *YSCY*. He describes polo (pilaf), yet another item that is conspicuously absent from *YSCY* cuisine, like "kewap" (kabab). But "*manta* meat-filled dumplings, *shorpa*, a meat soup (Schwarz 1984:11)," long noodles, biscuits, halva-like confections and other foods are all recognizable, often by name. The pilaf and kabab are borrowings from Iran and Afghanistan; evidently their popularity is mainly post-*YSCY*. Otherwise, the modern Uighurs seem to preserve much of the *YSCY* flavor.

The Central Asian tradition continues in Northwest China. Street food and Muslim café food in Sian, for instance, follow the basic framework of the food in the *YSCY*: lamb, dumplings, noodles, onions, vinegar added at the table, black pepper, simple straightforward tastes (Anderson, personal observation). Regional cookbooks and other available lore confirm that this is typical of the region. Anthropologists report it to be general in the northwest (Dru Gladney, William Jankowiak, personal communication; Jankowiak notes from Inner Mongolia that Chinese there eat dogs but Mongols do not, but foods are otherwise rather similar, with much mutton and wheat).

Ninghsia Hui food is very much like that of the *YSCY*. The staple starches are noodles and huge Persian-style breads (Persian *nan*, from Indo-European *pan*, which latter form has been widely borrowed into Turkic languages). Dumplings abound and rice is a minor item.

The made dishes include many stews of lamb and vegetables in a rich, subtly spiced broth--i.e., very much like *YSCY* food. However, there are also many stir-fried dishes and other modern specialized productions.

Modern Mongolian food still has much meat, and far more dairy products than the *YSCY* mentions. In Afghanistan, and apparently in neighboring parts of China, we enter a somewhat different region. Dumplings and mutton continue, but baked Persian-style bread becomes the staple and, for many, almost the only calorie source, while meat is eaten mostly in the form of kababs, and dairy foods (notably yogurt and a cheddar-like cheese) are much more important than in modern northwest China or in the *YSCY* (Anderson, personal observation; Saberi 1986). Vegetable tastes are very different, though related. Fruits and sweets are more important than in old or new North China. In some ways, e.g. use of nuts and spices, the *YSCY* is closer to modern Afghanistan than to modern North China, reflecting the heavy western influence on the Mongols.

YSCY-like dishes survive today, in West Asia, primarily in the Iraq hinterland (see e.g. Najor 1981) and in the more remote Turkic areas. Iran, though the obvious source or intermediate station for many *YSCY* foods, now has a quite different cuisine. The heavy use of herbs and fruit in meat dishes, alone, is enough to separate Iran from the *YSCY* world. However, in Azerbaijan, a somewhat Persianized Turkic population preserves some dishes that are almost pure *YSCY* (Akhmedov 1986; see esp. pp. 34-51). Such dishes are no longer common in metropolitan Turkey, with its eclectic cuisine so heavily influenced by Iran, Greece and even the New World.³

It would appear, from the rather sketchy evidence here, that the modern cooking of Inner Asian China is directly continuous with that of Wei and T'ang times. It is similar in basic framework to the *YSCY*, but there are some very striking differences. Specifically, the enormous western influence on North China during the "conquest dynasties"

³ See Algar 1991. It is impossible to imagine modern Turkish cooking without tomatoes, squash, green and red peppers, and other New World introductions. Turkey was one of the first countries, if not *the* first, to adopt New World foods; they were popular almost from the beginning of contact, while Europe did not adopt them for hundreds of years. Hence we speak of the "turkey" for the American native fowl, and Europeans call maize "Turkey" corn.

(attested by other cookbooks as well as the *YSCY*; Buell and Anderson ms.) seems to have been transient. The Near Eastern use of nuts, spices, baked rolls, complex stews thickened with nut or seed or chickpea pastes, etc. has dropped out of the modern repertoire. The simpler and more archaic western borrowings persist, but the more elite and expensive ones do not.

Thus, the *YSCY* seems in many ways a more westernized document than anything one could produce from studying the cuisine of North China today. The foodways of the Uighurs and neighboring groups in Sinkiang form the only comparably westward-looking cuisine, and it is quite different (more bread and kababs, fewer sophisticated stews--in short, more like modern Afghanistan than like medieval Mongolia).

The reason for the Baghdadi influence on the *YSCY* may well be that Qubilai Qan's younger brother Hüle'ü (Hulagu, Hülegü) conquered the Near East shortly after Qubilai conquered North China, and Hüle'ü set up his capital at Baghdad just as Qubilai was establishing his in Peking. Imperial solidarity, fraternal solidarity, status, pride, and above all a conscious attempt to create a properly international cuisine for an international empire led to massive borrowing. With the fall of Yuan, there seems to have been a nativistic reassertion of traditional and focally southeast Chinese foodways in China, while the Mongols rode back to the steppes to return to a simpler diet of mutton and noodles. The new international cuisine of the Mongol world empire did not go on to develop into a new style. Further research is needed to disclose what exactly did happen to it, and how much may survive in Ninghsia or Sinkiang today.

Conclusions

The eclectic dietary of the book suggests a quite different source for its structure and system. The wish to enjoy exotic and high-status delicacies overrode nostalgia. The importance of status in the construction of elite cuisine has been well documented (Goody 1982; Murcott 1984). There is more to this than mere show. Thus, Elster (1981) has argued against Bourdieu (1979) that genuine considerations of quality and taste may enter into the construction of an elite lifestyle; money has its privileges, and the Mongol courtiers did not eat expensive garbage. The *YSCY* cuisine is not just elite; it is sophisticated and (in our opinion after much kitchen-testing) excellent.

A genuine fondness for the food itself must be recognized, as well as a desire to appear sophisticated.

However, it is significant that the recipes are from all the areas of the world that were under Mongol rule and influence--and from no other areas. Significant also are the many combinations: Chinese flavorings in an Iranian dish, Mongol game cooked in Chinese style, and the like. The spices had to be imported from all over Asia. The skills and training of many chefs, very likely from many parts of the Mongol world system, were required. The only adequate explanation of this pattern is that the Mongol court created a cuisine for that entire world system. The rulers were stating their position as rulers of the *oikumene*, not merely as sovereigns of one ethnic group that had taken over an empire. They were arguing that they had power or authority over all the lands held by the heirs and allies of Chinggis Khan. They were also showing their power to get foods and medicines, courtiers and chefs, ideas and knowledge from most of the known world.

The Mongol rulers were noted for taking skilled craftsmen from cities and states they conquered and bringing them to the capital. They were also noted for using courtiers from all over the world; they were noted for the international administration of their empire, where a Persian could rule southwest China and a Venetian could serve in the administration of a Yangtze Valley town.

This exercise in social construction, in "the invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), is not without theoretical significance for anthropology. It accords well with Bourdieu's theories of practice and of distinction (Bourdieu 1977, 1979). We have here an archaic substrate of diet, whose structure and flavors were literally absorbed with mother's milk--a "habitus." On this basis the Mongols erected a discourse of politics and control--a way of using food to comment on their networks of alliance, their rise in status, their power over skilled persons. The use of food as a channel of communication, and of feast management as discourse, was an ancient and quite self-conscious tradition in China (Anderson 1988) and must have been long known to the Mongols.

As Antonius Robben has pointed out (1989), people are often much more conscious of their systems--habitus and practice--than Bourdieu seems to suggest. The Mongols and their courtiers and chefs took control of their foodways and shaped them quite consciously. They could not have been unaware of the contrast with the conservatism of Chinese diners, and with China's historic regional focus with

one ethnic group overwhelmingly dominant. The Mongol empire was a world empire, based on the cooperation of talented people from all regions and speaking many languages. There is a lesson here for today's nation-states.

Foodways cannot be understood without attention to *both* physical facts (nutritional needs, geographical imperatives, etc.) and social construction. The Mongols could not survive without an assured food supply providing calories, proteins, vitamins, etc. They could not stay healthy without some attention to nutrition--at least the good Dr. Hu's instructions to moderate the consumption of fatty meat and strong alcohol. They could not, however, rest content with this; they felt a social need to display their wealth and generosity in lavish feasts, and to create a properly splendid, impressive and tasty cuisine for their visitors. They also appear to have wanted to display their truly international and intercultural power and authority.

One wonders what Coleridge would have written had he known that "Kublai Khan" in "Xanadu" devoured sheep's lungs, donkey's heads, wolves, and bears.

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