HEAVENLY FLAVORS

TENGGERI, MEDICINE, AND FOOD IN THE YUAN DYNASTY

AND THE *YINSHAN ZHENGYAO*

by

Gavin Gasperini

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Approved: *Andrew Goble, Ph. D.*
Primary Thesis Advisor

This thesis will focus on the *Yinshan Zhengyao* (*Essentials for the Emperor's* Diet or *Proper Habits of Food and Drink*), a guide to the court cuisine served to the imperial elite, which was written by Hu Sihui during the Yuan dynasty in the 14th century, and at the height of the broader Mongol empire. Divided into three chapters, or *Juans*, the first chapter details food taboos and recipes, the second explores medicinal beverages and purees, and the third serves as a field guide to ingredients available to chefs during the Yuan dynasty. Notably, the text includes food ingredients and *materia medica* originating far beyond the geographic boundaries of Yuan China.

This thesis argues that many of the recipes in the *Yinshan Zhengyao* reflect continuities in traditional Mongol beliefs, shifts in Mongol medical culture, and broader transformations in the wealth and structure of the Mongol Empire. The study begins by contextualizing Mongol medical practices, spiritual beliefs, and cuisine prior to the establishment of the empire. It then provides a concise overview of the Mongol Empire's history to foster a deeper understanding of the Yuan dynasty's formation and its significance in world history. Following this, the thesis

examines the medicines, medical culture, spiritual beliefs, and cuisine of the Yuan dynasty, drawing parallels to their pre-imperial origins.

Through this historical analysis, the thesis demonstrates that the cuisine of the Yuan dynasty, as represented in the *Yinshan Zhengyao*, embodies the continuity of Mongol traditions within a region with rapidly evolving connections across Eurasia and the Middle East. More broadly, this thesis serves as a case study of the Mongols' ability to preserve their distinct identity while fostering extensive cultural diffusion in the territories they governed.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Diversity has been an important part of global history. A compelling example of the importance of diversity within the cultural threads of social networks could be found in the Mongol empire. The Mongol empire, much like contemporary countries that are considered cultural melting pots, was rich in culture from diverse geographical areas.[1] The Mongol empire expressed this diversity through various means, including its cuisine. In anthropological terms, the consumption of food "may represent shared identities, political divisions, health imperatives, and spiritual duties, or lack thereof."[2] With regards to the food of the Mongols prior to the creation of their empire, during its rise, and after its creation, none of the aforementioned elements are absent.

Currently, historical literature on the food and food pathways of the Mongol empire tends to focus on the medical applications of food, the political divisions created by food, or the general composition of the early Mongol diet. Notably missing from the literature is an analysis of the spiritual elements inherent within Mongol cuisine. Additionally missing from current literature is an investigation of the relationship between medical and spiritual ideas within the cuisine of the Mongols. As such, throughout this essay, I will explore the spiritual elements within traditional Mongol cuisine, and how these elements were integrated into the new cuisines that formed as the Mongol empire expanded into new territories, and consequently, created new recipes and food pathways. I will also explore in this work how the medical elements of Mongol cuisine relate to the cuisine of the Mongols before and after empire, and whether or not the

1 For a concise picture of the diversity within the Mongol empire, see David Morgan, The Mongols, 2nd ed. (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 3. Specifically, his words on the linguistic depth and difficulty in Mongol studies readily paints the picture.

2 Anna Waldstein, "Food, Anthropology Of," *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea1605.

medical elements of the cuisine were interrelated with the spiritual elements of the cuisine. In conducting this analysis, I will demonstrate that traditional Mongol spiritual ideas remained extant within the cuisines that were created during the Yuan dynasty, that the medical elements were interrelated with the spiritual elements of Mongol cuisine both before and after the empire, and that these spiritual and medical ideas contributed to the creation of a fusion cuisine.

To accomplish this, I will explore Mongol cuisine with a distinctly global perspective in mind. Some works within rather aged historical literature have studied Asian history through problematic lenses, which created one-sided representations in western literature of Asian history. The worst of such historical literature has adopted an Orientalist narrative, treating East Asian history, particularly Chinese history, as a collection of stereotypes. These portrayals often emphasize a sense of timelessness, exoticism, and decadence, oversimplifying and misrepresenting the region's complex history and culture. The first individual to substantially acknowledge such trends in literature, while also contributing to the infant field of postcolonial studies, was Edward Said. In his book *Orientalism* he stated that "the Orient and Islam have a kind of extra real, phenomenologically reduced status that puts them out of reach of everyone except the Western expert. From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the Orient could not do was to represent itself."[3] Due to a lack of self-representations accessible in English, this improper interpretation of historical sources has created quite harmful representations of certain Asian histories. In my work and original historical analysis, I aim to prioritize Asian sources in translation to prevent the overemphasis of Western perspectives in this thesis. By doing so, I seek to engage more authentically with the historical events and

3 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1979), 303.

tendencies under examination. While Western sources will still be incorporated, they will primarily serve to support and contextualize the Asian sources.

In summary, this thesis will explore historical literature that acknowledges the interconnected nature of cultures, emphasizing how cultural elements blend within both homogenous and heterogeneous populations. By focusing on the intersections of religion, health practices, and cuisine, this analysis will highlight the dynamic interplay of these elements within the Mongol empire. Through this approach, I aim to demonstrate how the spiritual and medical dimensions of Mongol cuisine evolved and intertwined, shaping the fusion cuisines that emerged during and after the empire's expansion. This perspective will not only deepen our understanding of Mongol cultural practices but also contribute to a broader discourse on the fluid and interconnected nature of cultural exchange.

Pre-Empire Context

Traditional Mongol Beliefs

To begin this discussion of changes and continuances within Mongol cuisine, we must first summarize and contextualize Mongol beliefs, medicine, and foods prior to their creation of an empire. Traditionally, Mongols, and other steppe nomads, believed in a form of empirical heaven. Mongols believed that Heaven was not an abstract idea, but instead, was a supreme governing force that would "shape one's destiny and offer one protection."[4] This empirical heaven, or Tenggeri, was fundamental to Mongol spiritual thought, and led to more complex shamanistic beliefs in the four directions and nature in general. These forces were subordinate to the domain of Tenggeri, which was the most divine force in the Mongol belief system. Additionally, Mongols commonly derived feelings of supremacy over others as a result of their beliefs in Tenggeri. Tenggeri would, similar to the Chinese concept of the Mandate of Heaven, legitimize a ruler or Qan [Khan], who would bring Tenggeri's order to conquered lands.[5][6] Belief in Tenggeri is also commonly ascribed as the reason why the Mongols were so open to other religions both in their territories and amongst their people. This was because a supreme and empirical heaven was not mutually exclusive with another godly figure, unlike, for example, theistic religions including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The supreme and empirical heaven was also compatible with religions like Buddhism and Hinduism, which provided complex pantheons of deities which could be integrated into Tenggerism. Instead, it was quite conducive

4 Brian Baumann, "By the Power of Eternal Heaven: The Meaning of Tenggeri to the Government of the Pre-Buddhist Mongols," *Press Universitaires de Vincennes* 1, no. 35 (2013): 247.
5 Joseph Fletcher, "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46, no. 1 (1986): 30–31.
6 For information on the romanization of Mongol titles and names please see Lawrence Krader, "Qan-Qayan and the Beginnings of Mongol Kingship," Central Asiatic History 1, no. 1 (1955): 17–35.

to sub-deities, as even under Tenggerism, there existed a total of ninety-nine lesser deities who were subservient to the empirical heaven of Tenggeri.[7]

Tenggeri, and the lesser gods of the Mongol belief system, represented what the literature refers to as the transcendental elements of Mongol religion. There also existed animistic beliefs within the overarching Mongol belief system. The Mongols believed that animals, plants, and natural features were imbued with spirits. As a result of this animism, there existed cults celebrating natural phenomena. Unsurprisingly, the Mongols held particular reverence for the horse in such cults.[8]

Animism, and the other mystical aspects of the Mongol belief system, tied transcendental elements to the more practical, daily life elements of Mongol beliefs. The down-to-earth aspects of Mongol beliefs were expressed through shamanism. Much of the beliefs related to the shamans was based in folklore and oral stories, but it can be stated that their function within Mongol society was to act as a protector of health by warding off evil spirits and disease.[9]

While traditional Mongol beliefs are characterized by Tenggeri, shamanism, and animism, all of which are central to Mongol spiritual practices, they did not exist in a vacuum. For example, there is some debate in the literature about whether Tenggerism competed with other belief systems, most notably Buddhism, prior to the establishment of the empire. Some scholars argue that in fact Buddhism was introduced to Mongolia prior to it being introduced to the nearby areas of China or Tibet. Specifically, these scholars contend that Xiongnu nomads had learned of Buddhism in India, and transmitted their knowledge back to Mongolia, popularizing the religion sometime before 150 BCE. This understanding of Buddhism was then allegedly

7 Frank McLynn, *Genghis Khan: His Conquests, His Empire, His Legacy*, 1st ed. (Da Capo Press, 2015), 509.
8 Frank McLynn, 510–11.
9 Frank McLynn, 512.

passed to China when the Han Chinese emperor conquered parts of Mongolia.[10] While this and similar theories are discussed in the literature, they generally fail to reach a consensus. Instead, the consensus is that Buddhism was first introduced to Mongolia sometime after 1206 CE, and gained popularity over time, especially during the time of the empire. Despite this lack of agreement, the theories suggest and illustrate that, although Tenggerism was likely the dominant belief structure throughout Mongolia, there were competing ideologies throughout the steppes that influenced Mongol beliefs.

Despite these external influences, the Mongol belief system retained a unique structure that intertwined transcendental, mystical, and practical elements. Various theories have been offered on how the elements of Mongol beliefs intertwined, but for the purposes of this research, only a couple key principles are important. Firstly, Tenggeri reigned supreme over all other elements. Secondly, animism permeated much of Mongol culture, leading to the worship of hearths, of fire, and of blood. Finally, shamanism primarily concerned itself with improving health through prayers to ward off disease or evil spirits.

Traditional Mongol Medicine

The interplay between spiritual principles and practical needs, central to Mongol beliefs, also shaped their traditional medical practices, which evolved to address the challenges of their nomadic lifestyle. Mongols, prior to the formation of their empire, were quite adept at practical medicine, which was referred to as Mongol Dhom. As pastoral nomads, Mongols were prone to various types of injuries, the most common of which were trauma based, or exposure based.[11] As such, Mongol Dhom remedies reflected the needs of the Mongols and was a very practical form

10 Sharav Bold, *History and Development of Traditional Mongolian Medicine: 5000 Years of Medical History*, ed. Sh Bira (Ulaanbaatar, 2013), 89.
11 Bold, 28.

of medicine that had a particular emphasis on trauma care. Additionally, Mongol Dhom, particularly in certain advanced states, had robust pharmacological elements.

With regards to trauma care, many Mongol practices were based upon observations of animal behavior which they mirrored. For example, concussions were quite common among the nomadic Mongols, often from a fall from a horse. A typical treatment for concussions according to Mongol Dhom involved another person delivering either another blow to the concussed individual's head or firmly shaking them from the back to treat "poison by poison." This was done to mirror the behavior of goats, who upon butting each other's heads shook their own head as if shaking off the impact.[12] This approach characterized much of Mongol Dhom's treatment of direct trauma.

In terms of other medical care, we can look at records from the Xiongnu and the Khitan empires. While neither of these empires were Mongol, both of them are considered precursors to many of the Mongol tribes. Historical literature has generally identified that the Xiongnu, Mongol, and the Khitans have a unified culture, with many similarities, albeit, with a certain amount of variation between.[13] It can also be noted that DNA samples from the Xiongnu peoples who were active 2,400 years ago show similarities to both samples from the era of the Mongol empire and to samples from modern Mongolians. This connection to precursor states suggests that cultural elements, and in this case medical elements, would likely have been passed down along family lineages.[14] With this in mind, from the Xiongnu, we can find examples of how the shaman might have functioned in a medical setting within Mongol society.

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12 Bold, 30.
13 G Sukhbaatar, *Mongolia Nirun Uls* (Ulaanbaatar, 1971), 46. Cited and translated to English by Serchmaa Shiirevdorj in "The Ties and Contacts Between Ancient Mongolian Nomads and Other Asian Civilizations" found in *The Journal of Mongolian History and Culture* (2024).
14 Christine Keyser-Tracqui et al., "Population Origins in Mongolia: Genetic Structure Analysis of Ancient and Modern DNA," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 131, no. 2 (2006): 280, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.20429.

The Xiongnu shamans practiced medicine to a certain extent, exorcising demons deemed responsible for diseases, setting bones, giving acupuncture treatments, and practicing moxibustion. Even so, shamans were not doctors. Xiongnu doctors operated separately from shamans, with the primary difference being that shamans did not employ pharmacological remedies, and doctors did not perform exorcisms.[15] The Xiongnu also believed in qualities of warm (positive principles) and cold (negative principles), much like many other traditional Asian medical systems. In this system, ailments were identified as either warm or cold, and treatments would be of an opposite nature. For example, venereal diseases were considered to have cold qualities, and treatments such as moxibustion (burning moxa herbs close to the skin) were applied due to their corresponding opposite nature.[16] The Khitans employed herbal drugs, both from single herbs and in combination, for acute treatment. They even employed herbal drugs proactively, signaling the commonplace of herbal drugs within their society.[17]

Taken together, Mongol Dhom, along with the medical practices of the Xiongnu and Khitans, underscores a robust tradition of healthcare among the steppe peoples. This tradition reflects both a practical orientation suited to the nomadic lifestyle and a sophisticated understanding of pharmacology and medical specialization. Mongol Dhom, with its focus on trauma care and its emulation of animal behavior, directly addressed the injuries common to pastoral life. The past examples of the Xiongnu and Khitans demonstrated stratification within the medical system, with distinct roles for shamans and doctors, as well as a foundational understanding of balancing opposing forces in treatment. These precursor empires likely transmitted much of this knowledge to the Mongols, implying that Mongol Dhom would have

15 Bold, *History and Development of Traditional Mongolian Medicine: 5000 Years of Medical History*, 66.
16 Bold, 60.
17 Bold, 103.

had access to stratified medical roles and a robust pharmacological history. This cultural background provided the Mongols with a rich repository of medical knowledge, enabling them to address diverse health needs as they transitioned from disparate tribes to a unified empire.

Traditional Mongol Cuisine

Now, having described the traditional religious beliefs and the medical practices of the Mongols and other steppe nomads, we can detail the traditional cuisine of the Mongols, and the interplay between traditional cuisine, traditional religion, and traditional medicine. The literature on the topic of traditional Mongol cuisine describes it as "simple, calorically-sufficient-and poorly balanced."[18] This is primarily attributable to the nomadic lifestyles of the steppe peoples, which meant that they derived a majority of their diet from animals that grazed on the pastures available in the Eurasian Steppes. Living in an area not conducive to sedentary agriculture, Mongols relied on pastoralism to generate food. As a result of their pastoralism, the steppe nomads' diet consisted primarily of meat and dairy products from their livestock and hunted game. More specifically, Mongols typically raised sheep, horses, goats, and a smaller number of bovines and camels, from which they derived meat and dairy products like milk, cheese, and curds. The herds of steppe nomads were quite large in order to secure a stable living and to protect themselves from intermittent pasture failures. Generally, the herds of steppe nomads included at least 100 sheep and five ponies for subsistence for one family, with additional horses being required for military use.[19] Aside from raising animals, the most important method of food production was hunting. Contrary to western hunting practices, where individuals or small groups of hunters target singular animals, the Mongols organized large groups in battue or nerge

18 John Masson Smith, Jr., "Dietary Decadence and Dynastic Decline in the Mongol Empire," *Journal of Asian History* 34, no. 1 (2000): 36.
19 John Masson Smith, Jr., 36.

style hunts. These hunts consisted of large groups of mounted hunters slowly converging on a group of animals, eventually constricting the animals to a small space and then shooting them with arrows.[20]

The meat of animals, both hunted and raised, was most commonly either roasted or boiled. Boiled meat, and boiling in general, was the preferred and most popular cooking method. This was mostly based on traditional Mongol beliefs in Tenggeri that dictated boiled meats, which were specifically boiled to the point of being a broth, contained the very soul of the animal. This essence, according to Tenggerism, should be consumed as all living things contain pieces of Tenggeri, and therefore could impart these pieces upon consumption. While representing a smaller portion of their diet, wild vegetables and fruits would be added to fortify these broths.[21] Another staple of the traditional Mongol diet, and one that continues to be popular in Mongolia today, is kumiss. Kumiss is a beverage of fermented mare's milk, which during the summer months, when mares produce the most milk during their foaling season, would provide the bulk of a Mongol's calories. William of Rubruck, a Flemish Franciscan missionary, described kumiss as having "the taste of milk of almonds and greatly delights the inner man; it even intoxicates those who have not a very good head. It also greatly provokes urine."[22]

Coupled with this animal-based diet was a pronounced manifestation of religious convictions woven into everyday culinary practices. Now, to inform us of traditional Mongol food culture, I will rely mostly on the accounts of the European explorers Plano de Carpini, and Marco Polo. While their writings were composed after the beginning of the Mongol empire,

20 Paul Buell, "Steppe Foodways and History," *Asian Medicine* 2, no. 1 (2006): 182.
21 Paul Buell and Eugene Anderson, *A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era as Seen in Hu Sihui's Yinshan Zhengyao: Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Chinese Text*, 2nd ed., vol. 9 (Brill, 2010), 42.
22 William of Rubruck, *Mission to Asia*, trans. Christopher Dawson (University of Toronto Press, 1980), 99.

1250 for the works by Carpini and 20 - 45 years later for Polo's memoirs, they do speak to longer standing traditions that were more than likely present within Mongol society prior to supratribal organizations. Plano de Carpini noted that the Mongols would eat the entirety of an animal, using its blood and entrails within their cuisine, because they generally considered it a sin to waste any part of an animal.[23] This particular taboo enshrined the importance of Tenggeri within Mongol food culture, as wasting food equated to wasting the soul of the animal, as the animal's soul could not reach Tenggeri as long as they still resided within meat and bones. This no-waste practice is also consistent with the Mongol practice of boiling foods in order to preserve the essence and soul of the consumed animals further supporting the idea that this was a longstanding tradition. In addition to the culinary traditions related to Tenggeri, there were other practices related to the shamanistic aspects of Mongol traditional beliefs. Noted by Marco Polo, Khubilai Qan would refuse to take his share of any bounty that had been affected by lightning, whether it be ships, cargo, cattle, or sheep. This was because the lightning showed that the deities felt displeased with the owner of the goods. As a result, Khubilai refused the goods to avoid the divine displeasure passing to himself.[24] Here, Kubilai referred to deities that were part of the traditional ninety-nine lesser divine entities within Tenggerism. It is unlikely that he referred to deities adopted by the Mongols after their expansion. This note by Marco Polo shows that in addition to the deep-rooted presence of Tenggeri in traditional Mongol culinary practices, there were also many shamanistic elements, and general superstitions within the culinary practices and rituals of pre-empire Mongolia.

23 Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, *The Texts and Versions of John de Plano Carpini and William de Rubruquis*, trans. Raymond Beazley (Liechtenstein, 1967), 52–57.
24 Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. Manuel Komroff (The Modern Library, 1926), 168–69.

The characterization of Mongol cuisine in historical literature presented so far appears to underemphasize the importance of plant-based foods in the Mongol diet. While this likely does reflect certain sources, as well as Mongol general dietary preferences, it misses some key sources that suggest plant-based foods were more important than previously thought by historical authors. In his book, doctor of traditional Mongol medicine Sharav Bold stated that the traditional diet of the Mongols changed seasonally: a black diet in spring, a white diet in summer, a green diet in autumn, and a red diet in winter. Each diet was named to reflect the predominant types of food consumed during that season. According to Sharav, the black diet consisted of aged meats and cheeses, the white diet indicated substantial amounts of milk, the green diet involved mostly plant-based foods, and the red diet was characterized by copious amounts of red meat. These various diets were adopted based on the availability of certain foods in each season and were thought to promote health by administering cold or warm properties corresponding to that season. The black, white, and red diet is largely the same as what is described above by historical sources, consisting mostly of meat and animal-based products. The green diet in autumn, however, is almost entirely plant-based, including many vegetables and grains.[25] This idea does have some important support. Osteoarcheologists have determined that there were regions within Mongolia, especially the Ordos Plateau, in modern day Inner Mongolia, which subsisted on a grain-based diet from the Western Zhou dynasty (104-771 BCE) to the Han dynasties (202 BCE – 220 AD).[26] This study analyzes samples which date back to the Huns. In their study, the authors provide evidence that people near the area that would later become early Mongol territory had access to grains and other crops. This suggests that grains and

25 Sharav Bold, *Insight into the Secrets of a Mongolian Healthy Lifestyle*, ed. Anthony Power (Ulaanbaatar, 2007), 67–74.

26 Liangliang Hou et al., "Human Subsistence Strategy in the Ordos Plateau, Inner Mongolia, China, During the Qin and Han Dynasties: Using Stable Isotope Analysis," *International Journal of Osteoarcheology* 5, no. 31 (2021): 840.

other edible plants grew in closer proximity to the Mongol tribes' pastures than what is described in historical literature. While this was largely due to the expansion of Zhou and Han China, it nonetheless offers evidence that certain Mongol tribes were capable of incorporating agricultural products into their diets. Together, these sources suggest that plant-based foods might have been a more important part of the pre-empire Mongols diet than previously described in the literature.

Thus far, I have discussed traditional Mongol cuisine, how it was influenced by and reflected religious beliefs in Tenggerism, and I offered some revisions for how historical literature views traditional Mongol cuisine. However, the cuisine was also shaped by and aligned with Mongol Dhom. In the seasonal diets described by Sharav Bold the various diets demonstrated the use of specific foods to impart warm or cold properties. Furthermore, elements of Tenggerism reflected in the Mongol diet, such as consuming the soul of animals and adhering to food taboos related to lightning, reveal a deep concern for aligning food choices with religious beliefs. While primarily religious practices, for the Mongols, they inherently connected to health outcomes. In this context, adhering to dietary practices based on their beliefs was considered essential for maintaining proper health.

As has been demonstrated, traditional Mongol cuisine was far more than "simple, calorically-sufficient-and poorly balanced."[27] It was a sophisticated system shaped by the unique interplay of religious beliefs, medical practices, and the practical realities of life on the steppes. Rooted in Tenggerism and informed by Mongol Dhom, the cuisine demonstrated a thoughtful integration of spiritual, medicinal, and nutritional considerations. Seasonal diets, food preparation methods, and taboos all reflected a deliberate effort to maintain health and harmony with nature.

27 John Masson Smith, Jr., "Dietary Decadence and Dynastic Decline in the Mongol Empire," 36.

As the Mongols united under Temüjin and expanded their empire, their cuisine adapted to new contexts while retaining its foundational connection to their cultural identity, serving as a living expression of their beliefs, medical traditions, and adaptability.

Formation of the Mongol Khanates and the Yuan Dynasty

The creation and expansion of the Mongol Empire represents a massively transformative period, marked by both large-scale destruction and large-scale cultural exchange. Numerous scholars, including Bernard Lewis, have explored this topic extensively, highlighting the dual legacy of the Mongol conquests: the Tartar Yoke, symbolizing the empire's capacity for destruction, and the Pax Mongolica, signifying its role in fostering cultural and economic integration. [28] For the purposes of my thesis, a general understanding of how the Mongol Empire began and the cultural practices that emerged during its creation will suffice.

The creation of both the Tartar Yoke and the Pax Mongolica began in 1206, when Temüjin earned the title of Chinggis Qan after successfully uniting the various tribes of Mongolia into one supra-tribal polity.[29] This unification was not only a military accomplishment, but instead, it was Chinggis Qan's "ability to learn from others and to draw on others for administrative and productive talent" in addition to his "incredible generalship" that allowed for this unification to take place.[30] Following this consolidation, Chinggis Qan would expand his empire southward towards the Xi Xia empire in China, and westward towards the Uyghur empire in Central Asia. He successfully conquered significant portions of these territories until 1227, when he died shortly after subjugating and ending the existence of the Xi Xia empire.

After Chinggis Qan's death, his son Ögödei assumed power. As Qan, Ögödei continued the expansion of the empire, strengthened its administrative structure, and established

28 Bernard Lewis, "The Mongols, the Turks, and the Muslim Polity," in *Islam in History: Ideas, Men, and Events in the Middle East* (New York: Library Press, 1973), 179–98.
29 For information on the details of Temüjin including his early life, rise to power, and lasting effects please see Michal Biran, Chinggis Kahn (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007). Biran presents a comprehensive telling of the history of Temüjin, and in particular, explores the idea of the Pax Mongolica as it applies to Islam and Arabia.
30 Eugene Anderson, *Food and Environment in Early and Medieval China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 183.

Karakorum as the capital in 1235. Multiple Qans would follow the reign of Ögödei, and in 1251, Mongkë would assume power.[31] During his reign, Möngke delegated greater authority to regional leaders, enhancing the stability and organization of the khanates—regional administrative divisions of the Mongol Empire—that remained influential even after his death.[32] The Chinese Khanate was led by Qubilai, Mongkë's brother. Upon his elder brother's death, Qubilai and his younger brother Ariq Böke vied for leadership, resulting in a civil war. Qubilai emerged victorious and named himself Great Qan. This would be a somewhat symbolic position for the remaining time period of the Mongol empire, as the other khanates, the Golden Horde in particular, recognized little authority from Qubilai. Instead, the khanates increasingly turned inward for leadership and development, perceiving the other khanates as trade partners at best and adversaries at worst. More tangibly significant was Qubilai's leadership of the Chinese Khanate, which he declared as the Yuan Dynasty in 1271.[33]

With his dynasty established, and with the entirety of China coming under his control by 1279, Qubilai was able to refocus his attention away from conquest, and enacting the Tartar Yoke, to creating the Pax Mongolica.[34] Qubilai established agricultural offices to support farmers and improve yields, formed a universal education system, and limited the exploitation of the peasantry from provincial authorities.[35] These initiatives and policies not only served government interests by enhancing stability and productivity but also improved the welfare of his

31 For more information on the reign of Ögödei as well as the rulers between Ögödei and Mongkë please see Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, The Cambridge History of China: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907 - 1368, vol. 6 (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 366-394.
32 For more information on the specific policies and ways in which Mongkë contributed to the formation of the khanates please see Thomas Allsen, Mongol Imperialism: The Policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China (University of California Press, 1987).
33 Paul Buell and Francesca Fiaschetti, *Historical Dictionary of the Mongol World Empire*, 2nd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Incorporated, 2018), 12–48.
34 Franke and Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907 - 1368*, 6:436.
35 Franke and Twitchett, 6:447–48.

subjects. Such policies characterized much of Qubilai's rule, with varying degrees of success in terms of the policies themselves. Some were extraordinarily successful, establishing a network of couriers and relay stations known as the Yam, which could deliver communications with remarkable speed and operated similar to the Pony Express that would emerge in the 19th-century United States. Other initiatives, like his repeated attempts to invade Japan, would fail miserably.

Through domestic reforms, new policies, and campaigns to subjugate neighbors Qubilai generated much in the way of cultural change. One such policy involved the Mongols' treatment of artisans. Like many other Mongol rulers, Qubilai valued artisans for their ability to produce metals, luxury goods, and other specialized products unavailable through Mongol craftsmanship. To support their productivity, Qubilai frequently sponsored artisans in various ways, including providing them tax incentives, bonuses, but also in some cases, forcibly relocating them to locations strategically advantageous for the completion of his endeavors.[36] Not only were the Mongols dependent upon others for the production of artisanal goods, but they also relied on foreigners for the administration of their empire. With little experience in governing sedentary societies and limited interest in bureaucratic operations, the Mongols often delegated day-to-day administrative tasks to non-Mongol officials.[37] This dependency on skilled artisans and reliance on foreign officials created a unique multicultural character in the imperial administrations. This diversity was recognized by Qubilai as necessary for successful rule. With diversity recognized as a necessity, Qubilai invited religions like Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity to the empire and welcomed learned scholars from each faith. This religious tolerance stood in no contradiction to Tenggerism.

36 Franke and Twitchett, 6:448.
37 Thomas Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

However, the Yuan dynasty did have a regulated and official ethnic hierarchy. In descending order, this hierarchy placed Mongols at the top, followed by Western and Central Asians, Northern Chinese, and finally Southern Chinese. While some early scholarship on the topic portrayed this hierarchy like a rigid caste system, recent scholarship has shown that there were many exceptions to the regulated hierarchy. For example, there were numerous Southern Chinese individuals who held key government positions. Consequently, scholars now tend to view the ethnic hierarchy of the Mongol empire less as an inflexible system but instead as a general guideline, with individual merit often taking precedence over strict adherence to the prescribed hierarchy.[38]

In summary, the transition from competing tribes to a united supra-tribal alliance under Chinggis Qan, and its transformation under successive leaders like Qubilai, exemplifies a complex interplay of conquest, governance, and cultural integration. While the empire often wielded destructive force, exemplified by the Tartar Yoke, the corresponding Pax Mongolica fostered unprecedented cultural exchange and economic connectivity across Eurasia. Qubilai's policies, from agricultural reforms to his patronage of artisans and religious tolerance within the Yuan Dynasty, reflect a pragmatic approach to rule that balanced Mongol traditions with the necessities of governing a vast and diverse empire. Although the Yuan Dynasty maintained an ethnic hierarchy, its flexibility and meritocratic tendencies allowed for exceptions that challenged rigid social boundaries. Collectively, these cultural changes allowed for otherwise separate cultures to meld together to form new and unique cultural practices, one of them being cuisine.

38 Franke and Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China: Alien Regimes and Border States*, 907 - 1368, 6:611.

The Yuan Dynasty

New Medicines and Medical Culture

With the creation of the Yuan dynasty and the significant cultural changes described above, Mongol Dhom interacted with other medical systems. Under Mongol rule, diverse medical traditions —Chinese, Arabic, Tibetan, and Ayurvedic—intersected and influenced one another, contributing to the formation of a new medical culture. This transformation was further shaped by deliberate policies enacted by the Yuan rulers, such as the sponsorship of medical practices through the establishment of medical schools. These policies created a new medical system, exemplified in the Yuan-era medical text, the *Huihui Yaofang* ("Muslim or West Asian Recipes"). The system shown in the *Huihui Yaofang* demonstrates the confluences of diverse traditions that the Mongols encountered in the formation of their empire and the Yuan dynasty. Furthermore, it highlights new health imperatives that would seep into the culinary practices of the Mongol empire.

To understand these relationships, we must first explore the prevalent medical cultures at the time of the Mongol empire and the *Huihui Yaofang*. At the time of the *Huihui Yaofang*, Chinese medicine, similar to traditional Mongol Dhom, was based on centuries of accumulated knowledge transmitted through oral tradition, written text, and common practice. Both systems emphasized the warming and cooling properties of food and medicine, diagnosing illnesses as either hot or cold and prescribing treatments of the opposite nature to restore balance. However, Chinese medicine exhibited a far more intricate approach to this correspondence theory than the Mongol Dhom system. Central to Chinese medical thinking was the five-phase correspondence theory, which associated foods, medicines, and illnesses with the elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Each element was believed to interact with others in ways that could either

disrupt or restore balance in the body. For example, an illness with fire properties might be overcome by food and medicines with water properties, as water could cancel out fire and return equilibrium to the body. In tandem with correspondence theory, were theories that stressed the importance of *yin*, *yang*, and *qi*. *Yin* and *yang* were opposite forces inherent in all things, including the human body. Imbalance between these forces would result in a weakening of one's life energy or *qi*. Restoring harmony between *yin* and *yang* was essential to maintaining a healthy flow of *qi*, which resulted in good overall well-being.[39]

With the principles of Chinese medicine dominant at the time of the Yuan dynasty, two ideas warrant further attention. Firstly, in addition to the formal theories and practices discussed above there existed a substantial body of magical, folkloric, and superstitious medical practice in China. These informal traditions, often rooted in local customs, rarely reached the imperial court nor were they included in official medical records; however, they played a significant role in the everyday medical practices of the population and are an essential aspect of Chinese medical knowledge during this period. Secondly, while the characterization above generally suffices for the purpose of my thesis, it is important to acknowledge that it simplifies a highly diverse tradition. Chinese medicine was far from monolithic; significant regional differences existed. For example, the Northern Jin and Southern Song medical traditions varied greatly. These distinctions reflected variations in local practices, resources, and philosophical influences, highlighting the complexity of Chinese medical systems at the time of the Yuan dynasty. [40]

In contrast to both Mongol Dhom and traditional Chinese medicine, Arabic medicine did not come from a longstanding practice of medicine within their own lands. There is little written

39 Paul Buell and Eugene Anderson, *Arabic Medicine in China: Tradition, Innovation, and Change* (Boston: Brill, 2021), 44.
40 Buell and Anderson, 44–46.

evidence that the Arabic tribes, prior to Islam, had societal roles of shaman, medicine women or men, or other categories of healers. However, by the time of the Mongol rule Arabic medicine was largely based on Greek Galenic medicine, which had been altered to fit the frameworks of Arabic practitioners.[41] The Arabic tribes came into contact with Greek medical texts during their own tribal expansions during the 'Abbasid period, beginning in 750 AD, in Byzantium, which had long been a repository for Greek knowledge. An age of translation followed, with Arabs translating Greek texts to Syriac, and eventually Arabic, expanding their source base from Byzantium to Egypt.[42]

The Greek medicine that the Arabs adopted was largely founded by the Greek scholar Galen circa (129-216 C.E.). Galen was a staunch defender of Hippocratic medicine and practitioner of clinical medicine. Galen also pioneered Greek understandings of the body's needs. Galen believed that the body required a balance of heat, cold, wetness, and dryness, and that many diseases could be classified under some excessive amount of one of these conditions. Galen also pioneered the theory of humors, which was another theory surrounding balance within the body. According to this theory, the body was made up of certain fluids: yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm.[43] While he was certainly not the only medical theorizer in Greece at the time, with other popular theories including methodist theories, corpuscular theories, and other less well documented theories, Galen garnered the most attention from the Arabs. As the Arabs studied Greek medicine and developed their own frameworks to integrate these theories, Galen's ideas proved particularly enduring in their medical practices and culture.

41 M Young, J Latham, and R Serjeant, *Religion, Learning, and Science in the 'Abbasid Period* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 342.
42 Buell and Anderson, *Arabic Medicine in China: Tradition, Innovation, and Change*, 93.
43 Buell and Anderson, 83–84.

In the medicine that the Mongols encountered in Arabic lands, and that would be integrated into the medicines used during the Yuan dynasty, Galenic medicine was ever present. Arabic doctors continued to use the different humors and the balance of hot, cold, wet, and dry as clinical explanations for illness. Arabic scholars had also meticulously categorized much of the *materia medica* available in their lands, as well as the *materia medica* that were traded between Arabia and Europe, Africa, or East Asia. Foods were blended into drugs as well. What we now call nutraceuticals was commonplace. Bleeding and cupping were also common, along with surgery. Surgery was avoided, whenever possible, as it was observed that surgeries could lead to infection.[44]

Arabic medicine was not only distinct from traditional Chinese medicine and Mongol Dhom in its origins, diagnoses, and treatments; it also differed significantly in its social applications. Arabic medicine was unique in that it considered medical ethics as incredibly important and the social standing of doctors as advanced when compared to traditional Chinese medicine or Mongol Dhom. Ali ‘al-Tabari (838 C.E. – 870 C.E.) a Persian Muslim scholar and physician, in a medical treatise prior to the *Huihui Yaofang*, thought the following virtues essential for any doctor:

1. A continual concern to bring relief to all peoples alike
2. An earnest attempt to find out what is wrong with the patient
3. The realization that the physician is needed by both patricians and plebeians
4. An awareness of the physician’s status among the public
5. The performance of professional duties only if God chooses (*bi-idhn Allah*)[45]

44 Buell and Anderson, 118–19.
45 Siddiqi, *Firdaws Al-Hikmah*, n.d., 4. Translated in M Young, J Latham, and R Serjeant, *Religion, Learning, and Science in the ’Abbasid Period* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 350.

As Arabic medicine was rolled into the medicines employed in the Yuan dynasty, these social aspects would be added to Yuan dynasty policies as well.

With this understanding of the medicines that contributed to the expanding Mongol medical system during the Yuan dynasty, we can now examine how these medical practices spread throughout the Mongol Empire. Policies supporting physicians and medical personnel date back to Chinggis Qan and the early rise of the Mongol empire but proved more consistent and notable under the Yuan dynasty. For Chinggis Qan, his sponsorship of medicine and medical culture was most clearly stated in one of his edicts, or *Jasaq*, where it reads:

> "He (Chinggis Qan) decided that no taxes or duties should be imposed upon the descendants of Ali-Bek and Abu-Ta-Leb without exception, as well as upon fakirs, readers of the Al-Koran, lawyers, physicians, scholars, people who devote themselves to prayer and ascetism, muezzins and those who wash the bodies of the dead."[46]

Here, Chinggis Qan provides a specific level of sponsorship through tax law. Qubilai would later take greater steps of support during his rule. In 1260, shortly after the establishment of the Yuan dynasty, he created the Imperial Academy of Medicine. This governmental agency was somewhat special as it was not under one of the three branches that made up the Yuan dynasty administration but existed as its own entity. The academy was responsible for the curation of medicines for the imperial family and the Mongol court, as well as presiding over medical offices.[47] Over time, the academy would open more administrative offices and expand its reach over medicine and medical culture throughout the Yuan dynasty. In 1262, Qubilai reinstated medical schools throughout the Yuan dynasty which had been closed during the dynastic transition war. Previous dynasties, including the recently conquered Jin and Song dynasties, had

46 Juvaini Ata-Malik, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World-Conqueror* (University of Washington Press, 1997), 599.
47 Reiko Shinno, *The Politics of Chinese Medicine Under Mongol Rule* (Routledge, 2016), 34.

medical schools, which served as examples and templates for the Yuan medical schools. To encourage their formation, Qubilai also granted tax benefits to instructors, and exempted instructors and students from labor service.[48]

Under the Yuan dynasty's sponsorship of medicine, numerous innovations emerged, one of the most remarkable being the compilation of the *Huihui Yaofang*. This extensive hospital manual, written in Chinese and inspired by Middle Eastern medical texts, originally spanned nearly 3,500 pages. However, the only surviving copy is a 15th-century adaptation created during the Ming dynasty, preserving only about 15% of the original content, totaling only 484 pages. Specifically, three chapters remain intact, along with the table of contents for the encyclopedia portion of the manual. The three extant chapters, chapters twelve, thirty, and thirty four focus respectively on paralysis and related conditions, general conditions and symptoms of the body, and external injuries.[49] These chapters document 128 drugs of Chinese origin and 517 of Middle Eastern origin, as identified by a biochemist from the University of Hong Kong. [50] The formulations include ingredients rooted not only in traditional Chinese and Arabic pharmacology but also in Ayurvedic, Tibetan, and Mongol Dhom traditions.[51] This blend of influences highlights the Mongol rulers' preference for Arabic-style medicine over traditional Chinese approaches, reflecting a broader integration of diverse medical traditions under their rule. More specifically, it created a shift from pure correspondence theory to the incorporation of Galenic medicine within the Yuan dynasty, and a relatively larger adaptation of Arabic medicines and formulas when compared to Chinese medicine.

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48 Shinno, 39.
49 Paul Buell, "Arabic Medicine in China," in *Chinese Medicine and Healing: An Illustrated History*, ed. TJ Hinrichs and Linda Barnes (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 132.
50 Y.C. Kong and D.S. Chen, "Elucidation of Islamic Drugs in Hui Hui Yao Fang: A Linguistic and Pharmaceutical Approach," *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 54, no. 1 (1996): 85.
51 Anderson, *Food and Environment in Early and Medieval China*, 205.

The creation of the Yuan dynasty catalyzed an unprecedented exchange of medical knowledge, practices, and philosophies among diverse cultures. Through deliberate policies, such as the establishment of the Imperial Academy of Medicine and medical schools, the Yuan rulers institutionalized a pluralistic medical system that integrated Mongol, Chinese, Arabic, Tibetan, and Ayurvedic traditions. The *Huihui Yaofang* serves as a testament to this era of cross-cultural synthesis, showcasing how diverse medical ideologies were adapted and harmonized to meet the needs of the empire. These developments not only advanced medical practices but also underscored the Mongols' pragmatic and inclusive approach to governance, as they sought to unify their vast empire through shared knowledge and innovation. These medical changes and advances would then go on to create significant changes in how the Mongols sought to better their health. In particular, it changed what ingredients they might use, and what ideas they had to justify the food choices that they made.

Cultural Importations

Armed with a foundational comprehension of pre-empire Mongol culinary customs and spiritual beliefs, what general changes occurred during the formation of the Mongol empire, and the new medicines and medical culture that arose from the creation of the empire, we can begin to detail how these various elements changed Mongol culture. As seen above, the empire created by the Mongols was culturally diverse; however, in the ensuing analysis we will only look at the Mongol importation of Islamic, Turkic, and Chinese cultural elements. These specific cultures most drastically affected the cuisines and cultures of the Yuan Dynasty. All of these were cultures that the Yuan Dynasty had come into contact with during their territorial expansions. The Yuan dynasty was also influenced by Hindu, Tibetan, and other cultures as well, but these cultures did not have as great of an impact as those named above.

The most important cultural impact on the Mongol empire was the religion of Islam. In the Mongol holdings in Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Qipchaq Steppes, the Mongols converted to Islam in large numbers. This mass conversion had two main drivers. Firstly, was the proselytizing nature of Islam. Islam had lessons and elements that was generalizable across cultural boundaries. In comparison, the Chinese beliefs of Daoism and Confucianism, which the Mongols encountered before Islam, were more specific to Chinese culture and not easily adaptable.[52] Secondly, Mongol beliefs in Tenggeri, as previously stated, lended themselves to syncretism with other religions, as it did not establish itself as an exclusive religion, but rather, provided room for additional belief systems while still ruling supreme overall. Additionally, an important change occurred as the Islamic Middle East influenced the Mongols. The Mongols and the Chinese, at the time of the Mongol empire, were fairly centralized powers. While the Mongols came from tribal origins, they had formed a supratribal alliance that owed strong allegiances to a central leader. A consequence of these strong central powers was a tendency to emphasize displays of power and status rather than focusing on personal indulgence. The Islamic world, at the time of the Mongol empire, did not have as strong of central leadership. The Islamic world was fragmented, consisting of the significantly reduced Abbasid Caliphate in Central Iraq, the Seljuk Empire of Persia, the Khwarazmian empire of Persia and Central Asia, and other small powers. These fragmented powers did not have to display and magnify their power to the extent that more centralized powers did. As a result, the Islamic world tended to place greater emphasis on personal enjoyment and sensory experience in various aspects of life, including cuisine, when compared to contemporary Chinese and Mongol societies. Relating this to food, the food derived from the Islamic world, was much more concerned with the pleasure of the

[52] Joseph Fletcher, "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives," 43.

consumer, with spices and sweeteners being used liberally throughout the traditional cuisines of the Islamic world.[53] These spices and sweeteners were easily adapted to Mongol cuisine, and imparted a deep concern for flavor.

In contrast, the Mongols imported the medical concepts discussed above, including *yin* and *yang*, *qi*, and other ideas from Chinese medicine. Consequently, their cuisine began to reflect the more complex fivefold correspondence theory of Chinese medicine, as opposed to the simpler correspondence theories traditionally associated with Mongol Dhom.[54] These properties were associated with specific ingredients, which in turn, meant that certain dishes attempted to combine these different properties in ingredients to form healing dishes. This correspondence theory became more complex by the incorporation of humors from Arabic medical ideas, with references to the various fluids thought important under Galenic medicine. The incorporation of these medical ideas was made possible by texts like the *Huihui Yaofang* and the *Yinshan Zhengyao*, which both included large sections dedicated towards the discussion of various *materia medica*. This combination of Chinese concepts with imported ideas from the Islamic and Turkic worlds, formed a dining experience for the Mongol courts fusing various cultural elements into one unique and new cuisine.

Thanks to their mass conquests the Mongols had unprecedented access to a wide variety of ingredients, many being rather new both to the Mongols, and to the people they ruled over. In particular, the Mongols were exposed to much more grains like rice, wheat, and barley than ever before. In their pre-empire homelands, Mongols generally had limited access to grains. Grains were, as discussed in earlier sections, seasonally incorporated into the traditional Mongol diet,

53 Paul Buell and Eugene Anderson, *A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era as Seen in Hu Sihui's Yinshan Zhengyao: Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Chinese Text*, 9:62–63.
54 Paul Buell and Eugene Anderson, 9:171.

but were not a staple food. After the construction of their empire, the Mongols had access to substantial amounts of grains that were consistently used in their cuisine. Congees using rice became common, just like breads and buns. Spices also became much more common in Mongol cuisines, especially Middle Eastern spices, which were used liberally in the new cuisines that served Mongol courts.[55] Combining the spices of the Middle East, the Galenic medicine of the Arabs, the medicinal knowledge of the Chinese, and culinary methods of the Chinese, the Mongols created a novel cuisine which prioritized the health of food over a pure emphasis on flavor. Since the Mongols generally wanted cuisine that "was not only splendid but also genuinely tasty within their ancient traditions, and genuinely healthy according to the best medical standards of the time" their foods were generally Mongol in tradition, prepared in a Chinese way to prioritize health, using Middle Eastern spices and sweeteners to enhance the pleasure of the consumer. [56]

These new methods of cooking were also paired with an increasing variety of alcoholic beverages. Prior to expansion, the only alcoholic beverages that were available were kumiss and qara-kumiss, a clarified kumiss. These beverages generally ranged from 1.65% - 3.25% alcohol and could be drunk nearly all day with little risk of severe alcohol poisoning. These beverages were also mainly available in the summer, due to limitations on mare milk production resulting from natural foaling seasons. Following expansion, alcohols including wine, rice-wine, meads, and early distillates like whiskeys and brandies were paid to the Mongols as tribute. These newly available beverages contained far greater concentrations of alcohol then the Mongols had experienced before and were produced and delivered by sedentary agrarian societies, were

55 Paul Buell, "Mongol Empire and Turkicization: The Evidence of Food and Foodways," in *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy* (Brill, 2000), 208.
56 Paul Buell and Eugene Anderson, *A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era as Seen in Hu Sihui's Yinshan Zhengyao: Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Chinese Text*, 9:89.

available year-round for the Mongols. The increased availability of beverages with a high content of alcohol quickly led the Mongols to become budding alcoholics, with many Mongol leaders dying as a result of the overconsumption of alcohol.[57]

The *Yinshan Zhengyao*

Of the new cuisines and alcohols that rose to prominence in the Mongol diet, perhaps the best descriptions are exemplified in the *Yinshan Zhengyao* written by Hu Sihui and submitted to Toghon Temür in 1330. Not much is known about Hu Sihui, in particular whether he was Mongol or Chinese, but the *Yinshan Zhengyao* was an impressive work written in Chinese that relied on borrowed terms from Mongol, Turkish, and Arabic languages. The book, while making frequent references to Khubilai Qan, was actually presented to his later successor Toghon Temür, for whom Hui served as court dietician ("Grand Doctor of Food and Drink"). The work intended to inform cooks on proper Mongol court cuisine and additionally informs modern readers of both the extravagance of the Yuan Dynasty as well as the more mundane daily practices and beliefs of individuals within the dynasty.[58] Written roughly 30 years prior to the end of the Yuan dynasty, the *Yinshan Zhengyao* represents the peak of the cultural confluences that were created from the various interactions between the Mongols and other cultures, and between the various Mongol Khanates. While presenting us with multiple recipes from the time, the majority of the text of the book is concerned with medical applications of food, as well as providing a field guide of the new foods and specifically grains available in the Yuan dynasty. Separated into three chapters the first chapter covers food taboos and recipes, the second chapter

57 John Masson Smith, Jr., "Dietary Decadence and Dynastic Decline in the Mongol Empire," 39–42.
58 Francoise Sabban, "Court Cuisine in Fourteenth-Century Imperial China: Some Culinary Aspects of Hu Sihui's Yinshan Zhengyao," *Food and Foodways* 1 (1986): 162.

covers medicinal beverages and purees, and the third chapter is a field guide of ingredients available to chefs in the Yuan dynasty.

The third chapter of the *Yinshan Zhengyao* shows the breadth of new ingredients that were available for consumption in the Yuan dynasty and their area of origin, medicinal effects, and a brief description of the ingredients flavor. The following text provides a brief example of such ingredients:

> "Chickpeas are sweetish in flavor and lack poison. They are good for diabetes. They should not be eaten boiled with salt. They come from the Muslim areas. The sprouts are like those of other beans. Today they are found here and there among fields and waste land…Iranian Sesame Seeds are sweetish in flavor and slightly cooling. They expel all obstinate illnesses. If eaten for a long time they thicken muscle and flesh and firm a person's oils. They benefit excretion and regulate retention of afterbirth… *Ji* Panicled Millet is sweetish in flavor and lacks poison. It is good for increasing *qi* and supplements for insufficiency. In Guanxi it is called mizi grain. It is also called *ji* grain. In ancient times it was highly esteemed for its aroma."[59]

From these examples, we can first observe the diverse geographical origins of the ingredients. The source of ingredients ranged from the far western regions of the Middle East to various locations throughout China. Secondly, we can see the influence of Chinese medicine on the description of these ingredients. Each of the given examples provided both a description of flavor, and a description of the food's specific effect on the body whether that be cooling, increased *qi*, or something else. We can also see the effect of Galenic medicine, through the reference to firming a person's oils, which is related to the humors. Both the diversity of ingredients, and meticulous descriptions of the ingredients continue for the entirety of the chapter, and demonstrate the culinary considerations used to feed the individuals in the Mongol courts.

59 Hu Sihui, *Yinshan Zhengyao*, in *A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era as Seen in Hu Sihui's Yinshan Zhengyao: Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Chinese Text*, trans. Paul Buell and Eugene Anderson, 1330, 489–94.

In practice, these ingredients combined to form dishes that incorporated new Chinese, Islamic, and Turkic influences, while still remaining distinctly Mongol at their core. Once again referring to the *Yinshan Zhengyao*, this time chapter 1, we can find the following recipe for Eggplant Manta, with some included notes from the editors:

> "Mutton, sheep's fat, sheep's tail, onion, prepared mandarin orange peel (cut up each finely), "tender" eggplant (remove pith). Combine ingredients with meat into a stuffing. But (instead of making a dough covering) put it inside the eggplant and steam. Add garlic, cream (or yogurt), finely ground mint (or basil). Eat."[60]

From the recipe for Eggplant Manta, we can see multiple cultural influences at play, which the editors of the translation, summarize this rendition of Eggplant Manta as a "hallmark of Turkish and neighboring cuisines."[61] Additionally, the inclusion of mandarin orange peel is most likely attributable to Chinese influence. Furthermore, the inclusion of onion and freshly ground mint highlight the Islamic elements within the dish, as both onion and mint are native to Mediterranean areas. Now, despite these strong foreign influences, we still see strong Mongol culinary traditions at play. Firstly, the use of sheep's meat and fat in the dish is distinctly Mongol, as sheep were the most prevalent animals in the pastoral herds of the Mongols. While multiple cultures used sheep's tail as a source of cooking fat, as it was a fairly common practice throughout the Middle East and among Turkic peoples, it is consistent with Mongol tastes how many instances of sheep products were in recipes throughout the *Yinshan Zhengyao*. Despite the vast number of new foods and food pathways that the Mongols found in their various territorial conquests, the Mongols continued to practice pastoralism and hunt for game. Noted by Marco Polo in his description of Khubilai Qan's court was the persistence and abundance of game meats and raised meats like sheep in the Yuan dynasty markets. According to Polo, these large

60 Hu Sihui, 302–3.
61 Paul Buell and Eugene Anderson, *A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era as Seen in Hu Sihui's Yinshan Zhengyao: Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Chinese Text*, 9:303.

food markets served "from forty to fifty thousand persons" in the span of three days.[62] While possibly a numerical exaggeration, Polo's comment highlights the persistence of traditional Mongol food pathways within the Yuan dynasty even as new food pathways became available to the Mongols.

In addition to the continuances of traditional Mongol food pathways in the Yuan dynasty, traditional Mongol beliefs, particularly those in Tenggeri and shamanism, continued in the conquered territory. Marco Polo, while commenting on the religion of the Mongols, brought up the respect and dedication with which the Mongols worship a god named Natigay. According to Polo, the Mongols regarded Natigay as the god of terrestrial objects and beings.[63] Natigay, is considered to be the earthly counterpart to Tenggeri. Tenggeri, as previously discussed, is the embodiment of an empirical heaven, and in contrast, Natigay, is generally limited to being a god of the hearth, to which individuals might pray for health, children, and livestock.[64] While this comment was made fairly early in the Yuan dynasty probably between 1271 and 1275, the notes of Marco Polo highlight the continuances of Mongol traditional beliefs beyond the expansion of the Mongol empire and the creation and ruling of the Yuan dynasty.

The continuances of Mongol traditional beliefs were also extant within the new cuisines that formed as we saw in examples from the *Yinshan Zhengyao*. Specifically, the previously mentioned importance of consuming the entire animal, and the practice of making broths was still highly prevalent in the *Yinshan Zhengyao*. In chapters one and two of the *Yinshan Zhengyao*, there are 156 food recipes. Of these 156 recipes, forty-nine dishes were either soups, congees, or broths. These forty-nine dishes demonstrated the continued importance of consuming the broth,

62 Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, 239.
63 Marco Polo, 171–72.
64 Frank McLynn, *Genghis Khan: His Conquests, His Empire, His Legacy*, 510.

which according to Tenggerism contains the essence of an animal's soul. Furthermore, of the 156 dishes, a majority contained some type of entrail, bodily fluid, organ, or other pieces of meat that was usually not consumed in normal court cuisine, but was in traditional Mongol cuisine. Examples include wolf heads, sheep's stomach, and other pieces of meat that might be discarded in Western cuisine. This persistence of eating the entirety of an animal once again demonstrates the dominant idea of Tenggerism that an entire animal should be eaten, so that it may be released from its mortal body and enter heaven. This persistence of culture rituals does not solely prove the persistence of Tenggerism, as the food rituals could have persisted while having lost their relation to Tenggeri and related ideas. However, in combination with the remarks of Marco Polo, it does heavily suggest that despite outside cultural influences the traditional cuisines and beliefs of the Mongols persisted and formed fusion cuisines inspired by outside influences.

The continuance of traditional Mongol cuisine, and evidence of the interplay between medical practices and cuisine, can also be seen in the *Huihui Yaofang*. The text mentions the Hindi Bish, a form of poison made from a perennial plant, *Aconitum Ferox*, that was adapted by the Arabs for various medicinal purposes. The following is a commentary from the *Huihui Yaofang* on the uses and qualities of Hindi Bish:

> (*Aconitum Karikolicum*) and (*Aconitum Soongaricum)* taken in kumys (kumiss), or in broth, and the like, in spite of high toxicity, for tuberculosis and headaches and sore throats; externally for rheumatism and similar painful conditions. (*Aconitum Leucostomum*) used for heart arrhythmia. (*Aconitum Talassicum*) for rheumatism, malaria, veterinary medicine.[65]

Parentheses show the Latin names of species that were used for different medical purposes. From this, we can see that the application of the medicinal *Aconitum Ferox*, and related species, catered to illnesses common among Mongol patients. For oral intake, it is advised specifically to

65 Paul Buell and Eugene Anderson, trans., *Huihui Yaofang*, in *Arabic Medicine in China: Tradition Innovation and Change* (Brill, 2021), 185.

be taken in kumiss or in broth. Both kumiss and broth as seen above were essential for Mongol cuisine and generally consumed in relation to Tenggerism. Therefore, it can be shown that not only did Mongol court cuisine cater to adherence to traditional Mongol belief systems, but the new medical culture that arose during the Yuan dynasty also catered to traditional Mongol belief systems.

The fusion cuisines though, were not experienced by the entirety of the Yuan Dynasty population. The foods presented in the *Yinshan Zhengyao* were very much court foods, meant specifically for individuals with the highest socioeconomic status in the Yuan Dynasty. General cuisine for lay people during the Yuan Dynasty remained more or less the same both before and after the dynasty, meaning traditional Chinese cuisine remained relatively unchanged throughout this time. In a contemporary recipe book, the *Yinshi Xuzhi*, translated as "Needed Knowledge About Drinking and Eating," by Jia Ming, there are few mentions of western foods, and few imports of Mongol culinary practices. Instead, the text focuses on foods that had been in China for centuries, including wheat, barley, sesame, fennel, and other foods. Some foods like carrots and watermelon were introduced in the *Yinshi Xuzhi* but were minor additions to an otherwise traditional Chinese recipe book. Additionally, some similarities are shared between the *Yinshi Xuzhi* and the *Yinshan Zhengyao* like an emphasis on moderation and certain taboo combinations, but these likely reflected traditional Chinese ideas rather than the confluence of cultural ideas that are expressed in the *Yinshan Zhengyao*.[66]

Furthermore, looking slightly beyond the territory of the Yuan Dynasty, it does not appear as though the foods of the *Yinshan Zhengyao* had much effect. In the old capital of the Mongol empire, Karakorum, at the time of the Yuan Dynasty, there remained little to no pastoral

66 Anderson, *Food and Environment in Early and Medieval China*, 238.

activity as determined by archeologists. Pastoralism was replaced by sedentary agriculture that grew the bulk of the food supplying the city, which would be supplemented with imported foodstuffs. This means that many of the ingredients that were necessary for the recipes in the *Yinshan Zhengyao,* including milk, various herd meats, hunted game, and other pastorally produced products would have been in short supply.[67] Instead, the city relied upon locally produced grains and imported products. How they were prepared is unknown, but given the proximity to Northern China, the citizens of Karakorum would have likely prepared food approximating what could be found in the *Yinshi Xuzhi.*

67 Jann Bemmann and Susanne Reichert, "Karakorum, the First Capital of the Mongol World Empire: An Imperial City in a Non-Urban Society," *Asian Archaeology* 4 (2020): 135.

Conclusions

Within the *Yinshan Zhengyao*, Hu Sihui detailed an entirely new cuisine that was presented to Mongol court elites. This new cuisine was one that formed as a result of the expansion of the Mongol empire, and the related interactions with different cultures. Imported from China were ideas of medicine and food preparation, and imported from the Middle East were spices, sweeteners, and principles of Galenic medicine. Despite these importations, traditional Mongol foods persisted, including Mongol beliefs and rituals applied in culinary practices. Although the fusion cuisines described in the *Yinshan Zhengyao* did not seem to leave a lasting imprint on neighboring culinary traditions, they played a significant role in spreading new ingredients and cultural ideas across regions. In this way, the *Yinshan Zhengyao* served as a microcosmic reflection of the broader Pax Mongolica, embodying the cultural exchanges and diffusions that defined this era.

My thesis, contrary to other literature on Mongol foods and food pathways, has focused on the placement of Mongol traditional religious practices within pre and post empire cuisines. Applying this work more broadly, it speaks to general patterns of continuance and supremacy of Mongol culture. Traditional Mongol beliefs were preserved concurrent to new and foreign influences, and reigned supreme over these new beliefs. This generally held true, despite widespread Mongol adoption of new cultural ideas, such as Islam. This syncretism and cultural supremacy are what transformed the pre-empire pastoral cuisine into the multi-cultural fine dining that is seen in the *Yinshan Zhengyao* during the Yuan dynasty. This syncretism also illustrates a broader phenomenon: the ability of Mongol culture to absorb and adapt foreign elements while maintaining its own identity and core traditions. Cuisine, as explored in this work, mirrors the political and cultural strategies of the Mongol Empire, where, contrary to

widely held belief, dominance was not achieved through erasure and conquest alone. Dominance was achieved through a planned and coordinated use of strategic integration and complex diplomacy after conquest. In this way, cuisine functions as a metaphor for the Mongol Empire's broader success in creating a diverse and multicultural state.

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