CHAPTER TWO

ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

I. INTRODUCTION

We have shown in Chapter 1 that the Mongol world order, including qanate China, was supranational in character. Mongols dominated politically, and to some extent socially, but were very few in number and thinly spread. As a consequence they were hardly in a position to force others to become Mongol, or to impose more than superficial conformity with important Mongol customs. Mongol conquerors were exposed to, and welcomed the influence of, other cultures as long as they could continue to perceive themselves as Mongols.¹

Food and cuisine were no exceptions. Mongols were willing to try new foods and dishes, with lavish and conspicuous public consumption to promote their new role as would-be rulers of the world. Many of the new foods even gained their ultimate acceptance, but the conquerors remained remarkably true to their own traditions as well.

The YSZY is unmistakable proof of the power and stamina of Mongolian food preferences. The work is in Chinese and embodies a framework of Chinese medical and dietary theory within which Chinese, Mongolian, Turkic, and Turko–Islamic elements freely coexist. Yet it is not the dietary’s overriding Chinese theory and culture which

¹ The following incident from the travelogue of William of Rubruck makes very clear just how important identity was for Medieval Mongols (see Wyngaert, 1929: 205):

Thus as a consequence going towards Baatu due east, we arrived at the Ethelia [Volga] on the third day and when I saw the waters of that river I wondered from where in the north so much water descended. Before leaving Sartach, the above mentioned Coiac said to us, along with many other secretaries of the court: “Do not say that our lord is a Christian, for he is not a Christian but a Moal.” For this is because the name Christian seems to them to be the name of some people, and they have such a pride that although perhaps believing something of Christ, they are nonetheless unwilling to be called Christians, desiring their own name, that is, Moal, to be exalted above all other names.
provides the unifying element. It is rather, in Sabban’s words, “des goûts mongols,” \(^2\) the “Mongol tastes,” which dominate the work from beginning to end, no matter how Chinese it may appear on the surface. The \textit{YSZY} is in its essence a Mongolian document, but this is not to say that the Mongol foods or culture of the fourteenth century \textit{YSZY} represent purely ancestral usage. A great deal had changed since the days of Cinggis–qan.

At the time the \textit{YSZY} was written, the Mongol elite had left the steppe behind for more than 100 years. New political and social alliances had been made. There had been new compromises with the sedentary world, including China, so that local Mongolian rule could continue after the collapse of empire in regionally–based successor qanates. In forming these qanates Mongols had collaborated closely with representatives of many other cultures. It may even be argued that, in addition to broader accommodations within a greater world order, the Mongols had only been able to come to power in China through close alliances forged with the various ethnic groups and regional communities of the culturally diverse north.

These alliances continued to be important even after the establishment of Yuan. The Mongols, for example, continued to recruit northerners by preference among their Chinese subjects. They continued to base their power in the north even after the conquest of Song in 1276, and continued to regard the north as the most important, if not richest, part of their East Asian domains. They even discriminated legally against southerners, barred in theory from holding most high offices.\(^3\)

\(^2\) Françoise Sabban evaluates the \textit{YSZY} as follows: “Média au service des détenteurs du pouvoir, ces Mongols à peine sinisés, encore imprégnés des odeurs de la steppe, le traité de Hu Sihui apparaît comme une traduction dans le langage de la cuisine chinoise des appétits et des goûts mongols.” See page 42 of her excellent study “Cuisine à la cour de l’empereur de Chine: les aspects culinaires du \textit{Yinshan Zhengyao} de Hu Sihui,” \textit{Medievales} 5 (November, 1983): 32–56. Our evaluation agrees with hers with the significant difference that we also see a Turkicization as well as Sinicization of \textit{YSZY} recipes, and a translation into the conventions of Muslim as well as Chinese cuisine. Sabban’s French–language article has appeared in an English version as “Court Cuisine in Fourteenth–Century Imperial China: Some Culinary Aspects of Hu Sihui’s \textit{Yinshan Zhengyao},” \textit{Food and Foodways} I (1986): 161–96. (Henceforth Sabban, 1986b.)

\(^3\) In the Yuan political/judicial hierarchy of the fourteenth century, Mongols and their West Asian allies (\textit{semu ren} 份额人) ranked first, followed by north Chinese (including assimilated members of non–Chinese groups such as Khitan and Jürched) and southerners, with the former enjoying far more rights. The classic study of this