In order to understand the medico-culinary traditions during the Mongol era one cannot evade the *Yinshan zhengyao* (Proper and Essential Things for the Emperor’s Food and Drink) written by the dietary physician Hu Sihui 恽思慧 (Hoshoi) who lived and worked in the service of the Yuan court during the first half of the fourteenth century. For the first time since this classic of Chinese materia medica was mentioned in western scientific publications¹ we have direct access to this precious remnant of a bygone era thanks to the efforts of Paul D. Buell and Eugene N. Anderson. Their work constitutes the first annotated translation of the *Yinshan zhengyao* in a western language. In terms of methodology *A Soup for the Qan* adheres to the “New History” approach, as first initiated by the French *Annales* School. This implies the view that, in studying societies and civilizations, not just the course of political events but also topics of every day life should be taken into account. That this is a fruitful approach is exemplified by *A Soup for the Qan*. One cannot but agree with the authors that:

...food and foodways are sensitive barometers of material and social conditions. They reveal change in progress and cultural interactions which may be studied through archaeology, art, linguistics, and the philological examination of texts. Textual evidence is of particular usefulness for those cultures with long written traditions since it permits detailed study of food, food production, and foodways over the long term. Cultural changes taking place far too slowly or too subtly to draw much notice from contemporaries can be charted and explored. Also revealed are periods of sharp departure from the past, in which the shock of the new is obvious. This

is the case in the *Yinshan zhengyao*, above all on account of its association with the Mongols (p. 6).

The *Yinshan zhengyao* is a rare case of a cookbook (*shipu* 食譜 or *shidan* 食單) that has survived the vagaries of time. In Chinese food history the culinary aspect has always been closely connected with medical and nutritional considerations, and the *Yinshan zhengyao* is a splendid example of this combination. Thus, the work has both a strong therapeutic tendency and provides an insight into a store of culinary curiosities, dainties and delicacies that were enjoyed by the emperor and his household.

The way in which Buell and Anderson have succeeded in bringing the dietician’s work back to life is truly meritorious. One is not immediately plunged into the *Yinshan zhengyao*, because the classic first requires the painting of a solid background. After a brief introduction into the text and the fragmentary documentation on its author, Buell and Anderson devote themselves to a description of the broad historical and cultural context from which the *Yinshan zhengyao* emerged. Before allowing the reader to get a taste of Mongolian dishes, the authors highlight the various geographical, political and cultural dimensions blended so vividly in Hu Sihui’s masterpiece. First the historical setting is meticulously laid out starting with the main actors involved: the Mongols, as conquerors and founders of a great but ephemeral world empire, which soon after its heyday fell apart into rival khanates. Yet, Buell and Anderson stress the importance of maintaining a nuanced view of the Mongols, as not just slaughtering barbarians, but also intermediaries in cultural exchange (p. 19). Their conquests led to a blending on a different, more constructive level, of many facets of the cultural sphere, including culinary tastes. The *Yinshan zhengyao*, which emerged in a time when the united Mongol order was still intact and at its height, is one of the most significant and outstanding examples of this multicultural amalgam. Buell and Anderson take us on a ride back into history, introducing the Mongolian way of life, social structure and, naturally, foods. Notwithstanding the undoubtedly Mongolian recipes, the *Yinshan zhengyao* is also strongly rooted in Chinese culture, reflecting its medical traditions and values. The authors make us aware that the foodways of both cultural areas during the Tang period differed much less than they were to do one thousand years later. In this way it can be understood how the foods of China’s northwest remained under much greater external influence from non-Chinese than those of the southeast. The third cultural component of the *Yinshan zhengyao* is formed by the Muslim world with its

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urbanized societies, variegated populations, zealous religion and distinctive culinary arts partly reflecting age-old pre-Islamic traditions. This differentiation between these three cultural spheres is maintained and further elaborated in chapter 2, where the focus is moved closer to the Yinshan zhengyao itself. This chapter provides insights into the intricate ethnographic situation of China under the Mongols to which the various degrees of input from the culinary and medical traditions of the various cultures are connected. The reader is introduced in greater detail to those food materials and products that were (and on many occasions still are) typical among the Mongols. Subsequently, the same is done with respect to what accounts for the “Turko-Islamic influences”. Apart from a discussion of representative foods, materia medica and dietica as well as relevant recipes, the authors deal with the influences of Islam in food culture as well as what we need to know in this respect about Arabic medicine. Finally, the attention is drawn to what Buell and Anderson call the Chinese framework. Here we get a survey of Chinese medical systems, culinary traditions and the social context of the foodways as expressed in the Yinshan zhengyao. The tracing of the original version of Chinese names of foodstuffs and spices by phonetic interpretation constitutes an impressive piece of linguistic work.

Part B of the book contains the translation of the Yinshan zhengyao, which is precise yet elegant, and provided with lucid footnotes. Hu Sihui’s work consists of three parts. The first covers avoidances, delicacies and specialities, the second common foodstuffs and beverages and prescriptions for various diseases, while in the third part the nutritional and medicinal properties of foods are described. In essence the recipes listed in the Yinshan zhengyao are profoundly Mongolian and originate from the cauldrons of the steppe nomads. In spite of the gap of nearly seven centuries, these rich recipes are mouth-watering. Some, such as “carp soup” (p. 294) or “Chinese yam noodles” (p. 297), seem to appeal as much to modern tastes as they must have pleased the emperor and his entourage. Others, such as “deer head soup” (p. 280) or “boiled sheep’s hooves” (p. 311), appear less familiar or even strange. Yet the medical and nutritional benefits are always of prime concern for the author. This part of the book, moreover, contains a facsimile reproduction of the original text mainly based on the 1456 Ming edition and surviving fragments from the Yuan period, including woodcut illustrations depicting materia dietica and materia medica.

Part C, written by Charles Perry, consists of useful tables listing all foods and spices mentioned in the Yinshan zhengyao and showing the frequency of occurrence in the text. The second appendix is devoted to the grain foods of the early Turks. It represents an exhaustive achievement in philology, tracing and charting the origin of words in many Turkic and other languages and cultures of the regions between Eastern Europe and the Altai Mountains. This analysis will be of great interest to experts in Turkic linguistics and anthropological studies.

In their work Buell and Anderson draw on a substantial corpus of secondary literature in numerous languages relating to a wide variety of cultures, including cuisines of many Turko-Islamic peoples living in the Central Asian republics of
the former Soviet Union. Moreover, *A Soup for the Qan* is a fine product of the incorporation of various disciplines and methods in scientific research. This is exemplified by a most particular and attractive aspect of the book, namely, that the authors have attempted to bring the past back to life by reviving and testing the blending of aromas and tastes of a substantial part of the recipes. Frequently the reader gets recommendations regarding ingredients and ways of preparation. This constitutes a unique, yet natural and helpful method. Indeed, the best way of getting access to this mixture of Chinese, Mongol and Turkic foodways is by putting the stove to work.

In sum, because of the specific nature of the *Yinshan zhengyao* and the way Buell and Anderson deal with it, *A Soup for the Qan* will appeal to scholars from many areas of research. Moreover, although this is unquestionably a specialist publication, the authors have created a work that remains accessible for non-expert readership. Their style is pleasantly descriptive and the book is well provided, though not overloaded, with bibliographical details. After reading *A soup for the Qan* one is left with a feeling of “well-done”, and one becomes aware of the highly contributory value of this work to modern scholarship in the field of linguistics, anthropology or history.