presentation title： An Exploration of the Qing Court's Agricultural Policy Toward the Returning Torghut Tribe from 1771 to 1789 Based on Manchu Archives

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Abstract

This paper takes the return of the Torghut tribe to China in the 36th year of Emperor Qianlong's reign (1771) as the backdrop, focusing on the agricultural policies implemented by the Qing court during the resettlement process and the governance logic behind them. Based on Manchu archives concerning the Torghut tribe and other core historical materials, the study systematically examines how the Qing court employed cultivation as a prerequisite means to enforce its "divide and rule" strategy. The findings reveal that while demarcating territories for chiefs such as Ubashi Khan, Tsebekdorji, and Tsering and strictly ordering them to "live separately," the Qing court organized the allocation of seeds and farming tools, dispatched Green Standard Army to teach cultivation techniques, and used grain provisions as a regulatory tool to guide the Torghut people from a state of "newly attached poverty and weakness" to one of "ample livelihood." Although cultivation was eventually discontinued and the Torghut people were allowed to pursue their traditional livelihoods, this process involved not only material distribution and technical instruction but also responses to natural disasters, management of the attitudes of tribal leaders, and consideration of the livelihood pressures faced by the tribe, reflecting complex interactions in policy implementation. This paper argues that the Qing court's agricultural policies toward the returning Torghut tribe had distinct political governance attributes. Their purpose was not solely to provide economic assistance but also to achieve deeper goals of dividing power, binding the Torghut people to the land, and exercising control and management through support, employing agriculture as a governance instrument. Cultivation gradually fixed the Torghut people in geographical space, weakening their mobility and ability to rally, thus solidifying the Qing court's "divide and

rule" political structure at the economic and social levels. The Qing court's dual strategy of combining support with control in frontier governance laid the foundation for long-term stability in the northwestern frontier regions.

Keywords: Torghut; agricultural policy; divide and rule; Manchu archives

Introduction

In 1771, the Torghuts, led by their chief Ubashi, returned to China after a grueling journey from the Volga River basin. Upon arrival, this "newly submitted" tribe had suffered severe population losses, their livestock was virtually exhausted, and their livelihoods were extremely difficult. How the Qing court resettled such a large nomadic tribe was not only a matter of frontier stability but also a test of the court's governance capacity. In fact, even before the Torghuts had arrived, the court had already begun to consider how to prevent the potential political influence of this newly submitted force.

Previous studies have mostly examined the Qing court's policy towards the Torghuts from the perspective of relief, paying less attention to the political intentions behind the agricultural measures. Tu Na (1994) reviewed the early agricultural practices of the Torghuts from a socioeconomic history perspective, providing basic data on population, arable land, and harvests, but focused on economic recovery without delving into the political intent behind the agricultural policy.[1] Guo Meilan (2007), using Manchu archives, meticulously reconstructed the agricultural attempts by Ubashi's followers in Jayer and their failure, clearly stating that the Qing's original intention in promoting the "farming-herding" policy was to "prevent the Torghuts from gradually becoming powerful through exclusive herding"—a judgment that touches on the political attributes of the agricultural policy.[2] However, Guo's central concern was the process of allocating land for settlement, where agriculture was merely one aspect, not systematically analyzed as an independent object. Jian Qiang's (2023)

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[1] Tu Na, "Dongfan hou de Tuerhute shehui zhidu ji qi jingji gaikuang" [The Social System and Economic Situation of the Torghuts after their Eastern Return], Journal of Xinjiang University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition) no. 3 (1994):52-56.

[2] Guo Meilan, "Tuerhute han Wobaxi bu zhong donggui hou bodi an zhi shimo" [The Whole Story of Allocating Land to the Torghut Khan Ubashi's People after their Eastern Return], Studies on China's Frontier History and Geography no. 2 (2007):56-66.

research on agricultural development in Tarbagatai falls within the scope of Xinjiang military-agricultural colony history, focusing mainly on Green Standard Army and Chahar forces, with limited direct relevance to the Torghuts.[3] Zhao Yi (2018), in his doctoral dissertation, more systematically analyzed the Qing's "initiation of cultivation" in terms of its objectives, implementation, and eventual cessation.[4] However, his perspective emphasizes the court's overall management of the tribe, where agriculture is just one specific measure. Moreover, his analysis of political purpose remains largely descriptive and does not systematically situate the agricultural policy within the overarching framework of "divide and rule," nor does it deeply analyze how agriculture formed a linkage mechanism with political arrangements such as land allocation and residential separation.

In general, existing research has not yet examined the agricultural policy of the Qing court towards the eastern-returned Torghuts as an independent question of political governance, nor has it systematically revealed how agriculture served the overall strategy of "divide and rule." Based on Manchu-language Torghut archives, this paper focuses on the agricultural policy implemented by the Qing court between 1771 and 1789 and its execution process. This paper argues that the Qing court's agricultural policy was not simply economic relief but served the three political objectives of "dividing power, fixing territory, and exercising control". By combining land allocation with demands to choose arable land, the Qing court, while helping the Torghuts restore their livelihoods, made them gradually settle in specific geographical spaces, weakening the mobility and assembly capacity inherent in their nomadic traditions,

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[3] Jian Qiang, "Qing dai Xinjiang Ta'erbatai nongye fazhan shulüe: yi Qing dai Xinjiang Manwen dangan wei zhongxin" [A Brief Account of the Development of Agriculture in Qing-era Xinjiang's Tarbagatai Region], Agricultural Archaeology no. 3 (2023):78-86.

[4] Zhao Yi, Qingchao dui Xinjiang Tuerhutebu de guanli yanjiu [A Study of the Qing Administration of the Xinjiang Torghuts], Doctoral Dissertation, Minzu University of China, 2018.

thereby consolidating the court's "divide and rule" political structure at the socioeconomic level.

I. The Political Arrangements Preceding the Agricultural Policy

The Qing court's agricultural policy towards the Torghuts must be understood within a broader political context. Even before the Torghuts arrived, the court had begun to guard against their potential political influence.

In the early days of the Torghut's eastern return, the Qing court's primary concern was not livelihood issues, but how to prevent this "newly submitted" tribe from forming a unified political force. In 1771, Councillor Batu-Jirgal of Ili memorialized that the Ööled arriving this time were "not to be trusted" and suggested selecting 20,000 soldiers for backup. However, the Qianlong Emperor was more cautious, stating in an edict: "I judge that nine out of ten of these people have truly submitted; only one in ten is suspicious." "They have abandoned their pastures and come, because they wish to receive my grace. When their leaders are brought for audience, I will bestow great favor upon them." He instructed Šebten-Baljür and Šuhede not to be overly suspicious and to properly pacify them.[5] Gradually, the Qing formed its core strategy of separate allocation and segregated residence. The prevention of Ubashi's core power was central to this strategy.

A. The Qing's Prevention of Ubashi's Power

[5] "Yu Sebtenbaljur deng dui Tubu laigui wu xu huaiyi ying tuo wei anfu" [Edict to Šebten-Baljür et al. to not unnecessarily doubt the Torghuts' submission and to properly pacify them], 1771 June 17, Manwen Tuerhute dangan yibian [Manchu Torghut Archives Translations], pp. 20.

Ubashi, as the supreme leader of the eastern-returned Torghuts, possessed great authority and the ability to rally his people. His contingent was the largest and most powerful, naturally becoming the primary target of the Qing's political containment. The Qianlong Emperor's qualified trust is evident in another edict:

"The leaders of the Torghuts and Khoshuds have come, and I will bestow titles upon them. Although they all express gratitude and joy, in Ubashi's words, he claims to be a direct descendant of the legitimate khans, saying that the leaders who have submitted this time were all brought by him. His intention is to return to Ili, incorporate all the tribes under his own command, and, like Galdan Tseren, attempt to unify the Ili region. This is absolutely unacceptable."[6]

Galdan Tseren had been a powerful leader who once united the northern and southern Tianshan region. The Qing court had struggled against the Zunghars for decades and remembered this lesson all too well. Although the Torghuts were impoverished upon their return, their tribal organization was intact, and Ubashi as khan still held significant influence. If allowed to concentrate their nomads in Ili, given time, he might well have become a second Galdan Tseren. The Qianlong Emperor repeatedly stressed: "I have long foreseen this; it would be unwise to let them live together. They must be separated and allocated different pastures, and not allowed to communicate with each other."[7] Based on this judgment, the Qing determined its basic "divide and rule" strategy. As it was too late to allocate pastures that year, the Torghuts were temporarily settled in Jayer and Qobok Sairi, with formal

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[6] "Yu Shuhede jiang Wobaxi fenbie anzhi juzhu" [Edict to Šuhede to allocate Ubashi separately], 1771 September 25, Manwen Tuerhute dangan yibian, pp. 163.

[7] First Historical Archives of China (hereafter FHAC), Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe [Copied Palace Memorials of the Grand Council, Manchu Language], reel 2439-19; also see "Yu Shuhede jiang Wobaxi fenbie anzhi juzhu" [Edict to Šuhede to allocate Ubashi separately], Manwen Tuerhute dangan yibian, pp. 163.

allocation to be done the following autumn. At the same time, the Qing explicitly proposed the principle of "using this to divide their power".[8] This principle directly guided the subsequent agricultural policy, which forced the people to settle on designated lands, forming a linkage with the "separate residence" arrangement and serving the overall goal of controlling the Torghuts.

Thus, the Qing's agricultural policy was inseparable from political considerations from the very beginning. Agriculture was not merely economic relief, but an extension of the "divide and rule" strategy into the socioeconomic sphere.

B. The Linkage between Land Allocation and the Agricultural Policy

Based on its assessment of Ubashi's intentions, the Qing court proceeded to allocate lands while Ubashi and other leaders were on their pilgrimage to the Chengde Mountain Resort. The Qianlong Emperor explicitly ordered: "Before their return, each tribe's pastures shall be designated and their migration arranged. When they return, the supervising officials should meet them and guide them to their respective allocated dwellings, so that they cannot meet each other and thus cannot quarrel. Furthermore, after they are separated and settled, if they form opposing factions and dislike each other, that too is a good thing."[9] Subsequently, the various contingents were assigned separate, non-contiguous areas: Ubashi's people remained in Jayer, Tsebekdorji's were settled in Qobok Sairi, Bambar's were moved to Jirgalang, Mömentü's were moved to Jinghe, and Sheren's were moved to Ili.[10]

Significantly, land allocation and the agricultural policy were deployed simultaneously.

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[8] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2439-19. "Hereby following the imperial command, although Ubashi's people should not be dispersed, the others are to be moved together with their followers, to divide their power."

[9] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2439-19.

[10] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2426-6.

While instructing that each tribe be allocated separate areas, the Qianlong Emperor repeatedly emphasized that they should "plant crops next spring" and clearly articulated the political objective: "Guiding them to engage more in farming is beneficial. Although it may not immediately diminish their martial prowess, it will ultimately divide their strength. Their martial spirit will wane, and as their leaders live in their own separate nomad camps unable to communicate, it will be difficult for them to stir up trouble, and Xinjiang will long remain peaceful."[11][11] Mentioning "land allocation" and "increasing cultivated acreage" together indicates that in the court's top-level design, the two were integral parts of a single governance strategy.

To ensure policy implementation, the Qing court also dispatched Supervisory Ministers and soldiers to each nomad camp: "For Ubashi's camp, set 5 officials and 40 soldiers; for Tsebekdorji's camp, 4 officials and 30 soldiers ... to be replaced annually".[12] These personnel, along with the later Green Standard Army sent to teach farming, were responsible for monitoring and control.

Thus, the Qing court physically severed connections between the various tribes through land allocation and solidified this separation through the agricultural way of life. Nomadism entails mobility; agriculture ties people to their allotted lands. Physical separation provided the spatial premise for agriculture, and agriculture, in turn, consolidated the results of that separation. This was how the Qing achieved its goals of "dividing their power" and "breaking their combined strength." The agricultural policy was implemented within this political framework.

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[11] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2426-6.
[12] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2579-10.

II. The Implementation of the Agricultural Policy

The implementation of the Qing court's agricultural policy unfolded in seven interconnected stages. It began with a population census to ascertain the labor force, accompanied by the distribution of initial grain relief to ensure basic survival. The court then required each tribe to select arable land within its allotted territory, thereby embedding agricultural production into the existing spatial layout of segregated residence. Subsequently, seeds and tools were allocated, and Green Standard troops were dispatched to provide technical instruction in farming. To address the Torghuts' reluctance to cultivate, the court employed a dual strategy of incentives and compulsion, linking rations to farming performance while imposing pressure on tribal leaders to expand cultivated acreage. After each harvest, grain yields were meticulously calculated, and the results were tied to subsequent relief distribution, gradually transitioning the Torghuts from direct relief to agricultural self-sufficiency. Throughout this process, a rigorous surveillance and reporting system ensured that planting progress, harvest outcomes, and the attitudes of tribal leaders were documented and reported upward to the emperor himself. Finally, once the Torghuts had mastered farming techniques and achieved sufficient livelihood security, the court withdrew the Green Standard instructors and, in 1789, permitted the tribes to return to their nomadic way of life.

A. Population Census and Initial Relief

The policy began with a population census and initial grain relief. The Torghuts were

destitute. The court needed to ascertain the population size both for immediate relief and to decide how many people to mobilize for farming. This addressed the immediate problem of survival, while the court's deeper goal was long-term stability. The Qianlong Emperor stated: "For their permanent livelihood, the priority is to plant crops and store grain."[13]

In August 1771, the Qianlong Emperor ordered a census, stating that "when bestowing titles, the number of people they brought must be taken into account to determine rank."[14] Acting General Šuhede compiled a list. The census showed a total of approximately 14,062 households and 59,564 people. Ubashi's group was largest: 8,251 households, 35,909 people; Tsebekdorji's: 2,151 households, 9,565 people; others had fewer.[15] This census was the basis for all subsequent policies, including food distribution and the allocation of labor and seeds.

Based on these numbers, relief was distributed. From May to July 1771, 6,600 shi of grain were used. From August to March 1772, 26,000 people in Ili received 24 jin per month, totaling over 40,000 shi.[16] The General Overview of Ili recorded details: "Among Ubashi's extremely poor people, 6,514 persons were moved to Ili to be supported and cultivate land, 827 persons were moved to Bortala, and 412 persons of Gongtan's subordinates were moved to Tarbagatai to be settled and supported while cultivating land."[17] The census enabled this mobilization.

B. Requiring Each Tribe to Select Arable Land

After allocating separate territories, the court required each tribe to select arable land

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[13] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2437-40.
[14] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2437-6.
[15] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2437-6.
[16] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2464-22.
[17] Yijiang huilan [General Overview of Ili], "Waifan" [External Dependencies], included in Qing dai Xinjiang xijian shiliao huiji [Collection of Rare Qing Historical Materials on Xinjiang], pp. 83.

within its own area. This was key to embedding the agricultural policy into the existing political layout. Only by settling and farming on their assigned lands could the results of territorial separation be solidified.

An August 1771 memorial stated: "In the places designated for them to settle, we estimate there is much fertile land suitable for cultivation. Accordingly, encourage them to farm for a living, which is greatly beneficial."[18] The court later allowed adjustments. In 1773, when land was found to be "poor and unsuitable for continuous cultivation," the court agreed to "discard the poor land and select fertile places, hastily dig ditches, and cultivate."[19] This pragmatic flexibility reduced resistance.

This dual process of territorial allocation and land selection firmly anchored the Torghuts' production activities within their designated, separated spaces, realizing the Qianlong Emperor's aim of using agriculture to "divide their power."

C. Resource Allocation and Technical Instruction

The Torghuts traditionally "bought grain from the Russians and did not know how to farm."[20] Instruction required both resources and technical knowledge.

First, resources were supplied. In spring 1772, seeds for Tsebekdorji's tribe arrived on February 18.[21] Tools were also provided: for the destitute Ili group, "tools were delivered from China proper, and livestock from government pastures."[22] General Iletu urgently "consulted the ministers in Pizhan and Hami regarding the available tools ... to prepare them

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[18] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2437-40.
[19] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2551-24.
[20] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2437-40.
[21] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2490-16.
[22] Yijiang huilan, "Waifan", pp. 83.

and deliver them in time for the farming season."[23]

Second, Green Standard Army were dispatched to teach. A regulation stated: "For the number of soldiers needed to teach farming, the supervising officials will determine it. If the land is near Ürümchi, send people from Ürümchi; if near Tarbagatai, send people from Tarbagatai."[24] Captain Hai Tianren led soldiers in digging ditches and clearing land.[25]

The number of instructors was adjusted. When one Supervisory Minister could not cover all areas, Manchu officers were sent to specific locations "to personally supervise daily and encourage cultivation."[26]

Third, instruction covered the entire process. From burning and clearing land[27], to sowing[28], to storage after harvest. A Councillor ordered: "Deliver the grain to the teaching Green Standard Army, who will lead the Torghuts in digging storage pits and building shelters ... to prevent dampness."[29] When necessary, stonemasons were provided for grain processing.[30]

When natural disasters like locusts or frost occurred[31], the court organized officials and soldiers to "send more people and do their utmost to thoroughly clear and beat [the locusts]"[32], and adjusted relief accordingly.[33]

D. Incentives and Compulsion

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[23] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2572-5.
[24] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2437-40.
[25] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2490-16.
[26] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2514-4.
[27] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2490-16.
[28] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2580-27.
[29] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2465-33.
[30] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2465-33.
[31] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2476-15.
[32] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2590-48.
[33] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2476-15; FHAC, 2590-48.

Despite resources and instruction, a key obstacle was the people's lack of enthusiasm. The Qing used both encouragement and coercion.

To encourage, the court "encouraged them, saying that if they cultivated diligently, they would have good harvests"[34] and increased rations for farmers. The court praised cooperative leaders. Šuhede told an envoy: "Your prince's careful management of farming matters ... this is truly the way to show gratitude. When the Emperor hears of your good harvests, he will surely bestow rewards."[35]

The court also adopted a firm stance. When Ubashi proved incapable of managing agricultural affairs, the Qianlong Emperor criticized him, stating "Ubashi has no ability." The court dispatched officials "to give him clear guidance and eliminate his hope of relying solely on relief."[36] Facing a half-year grain deficit, General Iletu demanded "more people must be sent to farm." When Tsebekdorji was slow, Iletu sent a stern letter: "Last year's harvest was insufficient ... if you still send too few people next year and the harvest is again inadequate, there will be no more ad-hoc relief from us."[37] This letter, delivered in the Todo script, made clear the temporary nature of relief and forced compliance.

The combination of encouragement and coercion worked. Tsebekdorji became cooperative. He was permitted to exchange camels for cattle to increase their farming capacity.[38] The amount of cultivated land increased significantly.

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[34] "Yiletu zou zengjia Wobaxi xiadi gengzhe zhi kouliang zhe" [Iletu's Memorial Requesting Increase in Rations for Ubashi's Farmers], 1773 January 3, Manwen Tuerhute dangan yibian, pp. 222-224.
[35] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2514-35.
[36] "Yu Shuhede deng lunban qianwang dudu Wobaxi zhong nong shi" [Edict to Šuhede et al. to take turns supervising Ubashi's agricultural affairs], 1772 July 25, Manwen Tuerhute dangan yibian, pp. 215-216.
[37] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2506-6.
[38] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2580-30.

E. Harvest Calculation and Adjustment of Relief

Harvest size determined whether the court could reduce direct relief and achieve a positive cycle of "a positive cycle of transitioning from direct relief to subsistence agriculture". The court strictly calculated harvests and linked results to future rations.

Detailed reports from supervisors allowed the court to accurately assess production and adjust relief. Records included losses from locusts and frost.[39] The court linked production to rations. After Tsebekdorji's first harvest, official grain relief was stopped, and he was told to rely solely on his grain. He set a ration based on the harvest.[40] When harvests were poor due to locusts, rations were reduced.[41] When there was a surplus, grain was sold to buy winter clothes.[42] Meanwhile, in the early stages of implicit resistance and selective adaptation, one can also discern the agency of various tribal leaders—especially Ubashi—who sought to exercise their own initiative through the distinctive means of "weapons of the weak."

When deficits remained, the court intervened, sometimes using sheep to offset rations when grain was scarce.[43] However, after the 1774 locust plague, the surplus from other chiefs was used to feed Tsebekdorji's people[44], indicating increasing self-regulation and reduced dependence.

Thus, transitioning from direct relief to subsistence agriculture was a growing trend, with harvest size dictating rations and reducing the court's burden.

F. Enduring Surveillance and Reporting

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[39] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2476-15.
[40] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2465-33.
[41] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2476-15.
[42] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2595-43.
[43] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2508-3.
[44] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2590-48.

The agricultural policy was accompanied by a strict surveillance network involving officials in the camps, ministers, generals, and the emperor himself. This ensured policy implementation and was a tool for political control.

These officials acted as the emperor's "eyes and ears." The court sensitively detected subtle differences in the attitudes of leaders like Ubashi, Tsebekdorji, and Sheren toward farming and adopted distinct strategies. The compliant were rewarded; the remiss were warned. Leaders' attitudes gradually shifted from suspicion and reluctance to compliance.[45]

The Qianlong Emperor directly engaged. When he saw that Tsebekdorji's harvest was decent, he wrote on the memorial: "From this we see that the people still have grain; this is good."[46] This strengthened the authority of the surveillance system. The court's will penetrated to the grassroots level, transforming the Torghuts into a controllable, monitorable production unit bound to the land.

G. Withdrawal of Instructors and Cessation of the Policy

The final goal was not permanent farming but the achievement of "dividing power" and "fixing territory." Once self-sufficiency was achieved, the policy was phased out.

The prerequisite for withdrawing instructors was self-sufficiency. This goal was met.[47] In October 1775, General Iletu and Councillor Čoktu reported that the Torghuts and Khoshuds "have become familiar with all farming tasks ... and are able to farm on their own." The harvests were good, and the supervising officials concurred. The Green Standard instructors

[45] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2600-9.
[46] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2465-33.
[47] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2540-20.

were withdrawn.[48] Withdrawal did not mean complete abandonment. Supervision continued. In spring 1776, Tsebekdorji was away on pilgrimage, so the minister there delegated farming responsibilities to his brothers, stressing "this is the same as the example of several years of teaching" and "not to delay for a moment."[49]

The policy then shifted from "requiring cultivation" to "allowing self-determination" . By 1789, the Torghuts' livestock had multiplied, and their nomadic traditions reasserted. The court finally allowed them to "no longer be forced to farm, but to listen to their own devices for a living."[50] This was not a policy failure but a natural conclusion after achieving its political goals. The threat was eliminated; the tribes were dispersed.

The three goals of "dividing power, fixing territory, and exercising control" had been achieved. Agriculture fixed them in separate spaces; training and surveillance ensured compliance. The policy's withdrawal was then logical.

III. The Political Governance Attributes of the Agricultural Policy

The implementation of the agricultural policy shows that it was not simply economic relief. By reshaping the Torghuts' economic base, the Qing extended its "divide and rule" strategy from the geographical to the socioeconomic level, achieving effective control.

A. "Governance through Farming": The Political Logic beyond Economic Relief

The primary consideration was never "improving livelihoods" alone. While relief was

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[48] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2659-8.
[49] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 2674-34.
[50] FHAC, Junjichu Manwen lu fu zouzhe 3256-42; "Jiyu Yili jiangjun Baoning zhu zhun suo qing Tuerhute bu bi du qi gengzuo ting zi mou sheng" [Letter to Ili General Baoning Granting Permission for Torghuts Not to be Forced to Farm but to Listen to Their Own Devices for Living], Qianlongchao Manwen jixin dang yibian [Translations of Manchu Confidential Letters of the Qianlong Reign], Vol. 21, pp. 534.

provided, its deeper logic is missed if seen merely as aid. Agriculture was a means; "dividing their power" was the true intent.

Geographic separation came first; teaching came second. Separation provided the spatial premise, and agriculture solidified its results. Nomadism is mobile; agriculture is fixed. When scattered groups were assigned to cultivate their own separate lands, the possibility of another Galdan Tseren materializing disappeared.

B. "Dividing Power, Fixing Territory, Exercising Control": The Three Governance Goals

The archives reveal three clear governance objectives.

First, Dividing Power . Nomadism implies mobility; groups can stay connected or quickly assemble. Agriculture dissolves this potential. The Qing grasped this difference and used agriculture as a tool to erode Torghut cohesion. Scattered in places like Jayer, Qobok Sairi, Jirgalang, and Jinghe, each cultivating its own land, the leaders' authority, the people's identity, and the ulus's integrity weakened. The people lost the material basis for assembly.

Second, Fixing Territory.Mobility is a potential threat. Mobile groups are unpredictable. Agriculture naturally eliminates this. Farming ties people to a specific space for months, reducing mobility. The Qing demanded good land be chosen, ditches dug, and land cultivated, all within designated areas. When labor and tools were thus committed, the cost of large-scale migration became prohibitive. A tribe losing its mobility posed a much lower threat.

Third, Exercising Control . Every aspect of the agricultural policy—seed allocation, tool distribution, instructor deployment, progress monitoring, harvest calculation—was under Qing control. Meticulous archival records, from start-dates to harvest losses, from passive

resistance to expressions of gratitude, passed through layers of officials to the emperor. This unprecedented control penetrated tribal society. Leaders' attitudes were recorded; livelihoods were linked to farming performance; rations were used as leverage. This linkage of survival to political performance ensured control reached the grassroots.

These three goals dividing power, fixing territory, exercising control were internally linked. Dividing power was the objective; fixing territory was the means (severing the basis of mobility); exercising control was the guarantee (ensuring implementation through supervision). Agriculture served all three.

Conclusion

Based on Manchu archives, this paper demonstrates that the Qing court's agricultural policy toward the eastern-returned Torghuts between 1771 and 1789 possessed a distinct character of political governance. Its starting point was not simple economic relief, but rather the consolidation of territorial separation established by land allocation into the sphere of daily production and life, thereby serving a "divide and rule" strategy. The policy pursued the goals of "dividing power, fixing territory, and exercising control." Agriculture gradually fixed the Torghuts within specific spaces, weakening their mobility and capacity for assembly, and strengthening the Qing's ability to control them, all under the guise of restoring livelihoods. The meticulous surveillance and the linkage between rations and farming performance further deepened this control.

The dual strategy of combining relief with control demonstrates the Qing court's sophistication and flexibility in frontier governance. Agriculture was, in practice, a political

arrangement. Once the political goals were achieved, the court permitted the Torghuts to cease farming and return to their customs. This "This coherent policy cycle from initiation to conclusion laid the foundation" laid the foundation for long-term stability in the northwestern frontiers.

The Manchu archives provide invaluable sources for understanding this process. Through them, we see how the Qing court combined short-term relief with long-term control in its frontier administration, and how a nomadic people underwent a profound transformation in their production and living space under the guidance of state power.

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