

The Maxfins in Xinjiang in the Mid 18th Century

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Abstract: When the Qing army crushed the Jungar Khanate in the Qianlong period, a group of its remnants escaped into mountains. For their own living, they went out for robbery from time to time, and were thus called Maxfins by the Qing forces, which mean robbers in Mongolian language and over time became the synonym for Jungar Mongols.

Key words: Maxfins, Xinjiang, Qianlong.

The word “Maxfin” frequently appears in historical documents regarding the conquering of Jungar Khanate by the Qing Dynasty, and is only seen in the Qianlong period. According to *Mongolian-Chinese Dictionary*, Maxfins mean carnivores, or *Shengfan* (savages, 生番)¹. But the meaning of *Shengfan* is really ambiguous, for during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, *Shengfan* could refer to any ethnic minority group in any frontier region, and not only that in Xinjiang². However, Ji Xiaolan(纪晓岚) had a brilliant account of Maxfins in his *Yuewei Cottage Notes*(阅微草堂笔记), which recorded: “The so-called Maxfins are actually Oyirad refugees. They have no king, no tribes, and live together in a group of a dozen people or a few. They hang around in mountains, and eat birds and beasts when they see them, and do the same when they

1 Institute of Mongolian studies of Inner Mongolia University: *Mongolia-Chinese Dictionary*, Hohhot, The press of Inner Mongolia University, 1999, p821.

2 *Ming History*, v311, Beijing: zhonghuashuju, 1974, p8022. 如《明史》卷三十一《四川土司一》：“十五年，者七阴结生番，约日伏兵陷城。有小校密告于官，遂发兵捕斩者七。生番不之觉，如期入寇，官军掩击败之，于是尽徙羌民于城外。”（中华书局点校本，1974年，第8022页）；

Qingshigao,v23,Beijing: zhonghuashuju,1977,p853. 《清史稿》卷二三《德宗本纪一》：“甲申，台湾生番乱，提督唐定奎剿之。”（中华书局点校本，1977年，第853页）

see humans.”¹ “At dusk, over the other side of the valley, flashed past some figures, who seemed to be Maxfins (In the Oyrad language, robbers are called Maxfins. That name was picked up by the Qing forces.)”² Apparently, Maxfins mean robbers or bandits. They are mainly the remnants of the Jungar Khanate conquered by the Qing Dynasty, and are called Maxfins for their frequent robbery. Qi Qingshun(齐清顺) has made some researches on Maxfins³, but relevant details still need further clarifying.

Maxfins first appeared maybe in the 9th lunar month (intercalary) in the 21st year of the Qianlong reign (1756)⁴, and were last seen in the third month in the 27th year of the Qianlong reign (1762)⁵. According to *Yuewei Cottage Notes*, Maxfins were often seen in Urumqi (乌鲁木齐), Manasi (玛纳斯), Kurkalaus (库尔喀喇乌苏) and Ili (伊犁), etc.⁶ But *The Historical records of the Qing Dynasty(qingshilu,清实录)* shows that Maxfins' areas of activity also included Barkol (巴里坤), Juledusi (珠勒都斯), Tuokesan (托克三), Hutubi (呼图毕), Luokelun (罗克伦), Changji (昌吉), Tarbagatai (塔尔巴哈台), Wulonggu (乌陇古), Sayram (赛哩木), Aksu (阿克苏), Kuqa (库车), Kengge'er (铿格尔), etc., but they were mainly concentrated in the Tianshan Mountains for its good hiding. And in terms of the daily life of Maxfins, the conversation between General Agui (阿桂) and a captured Maxfin can give us some vivid details: “When asked about how they make their living, he said: ‘by hunting animals.’ When asked how they got so much gunpowder, being in hiding for such a long time, he said: ‘Get dried dung beetles powderized, then mix it with the blood of deer. But this gunpowder is less

1 Jiyun, *Yuewei Cottage Notes*, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980, p194. 纪昀:《阅微草堂笔记》,上海古籍出版社,1980年,第194页。

2 *Yuewei Cottage Notes*, p97. [清]纪昀:《阅微草堂笔记》,第97页。

3 Qi Qingshun, *The formation of multi ethnic distribution pattern in Xinjiang in 1759-1949*, Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2010, p114. 齐清顺:《1759—1949年新疆多民族分布格局的形成》,乌鲁木齐:新疆人民出版社,2010年,第114页。

4 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v523, Beijing, zhonghua shuju edition, 1986, p594. 《清高宗实录》卷五二三,乾隆二十一年闰九月己未条,北京:中华书局影印本,1986年,第594页。

5 See *Qing gaozong shilu*, v656, p346. 见《清高宗实录》卷六五六,乾隆二十七年三月丁未条,第346页。至于《清高宗实录》乾隆二十八年、三十五年、三十六年、三十九年、四十七年虽各有“玛哈沁”的记载,实为追述以前的活动,故不列入。

6 See *Yuewei Cottage Notes*, v5\ v9\ v13\ v15\ v17\ v22\ v23. 见《阅微草堂笔记》卷五、卷九、卷十三、卷十五、卷十七、卷二十二及卷二十三。

powerful than that of sulfur and saltpeter.”¹ This reveals in some extent the difficult life of Maxfjins. It is apparent that they couldn't make their ends meet by this, and coupled with their large population², they had to roam around, and even loot the military posts(军台驿站) of the Qing forces for their supplies. Since military posts were often located in strategic key points that mattered greatly to the Manchu government's military operations in Xinjiang, Emperor Qianlong decreed: “Make sure that Maxfjins in hiding are all chased down and killed, and clear the roads.”³ The following is an account of the killing of Deshu (德舒) by Sebuteng (色布腾), which may give us a glimpse into the incident.

In the 24th year of the Qianlong Reign (1759), General Yonggui (永贵) reported: “Deshu came across a hundred or so Oyirad as he reached Aletan Heshuo (阿勒坦和硕) in Sayram (赛哩木). Soldiers and officers were wounded and killed, and Deshu himself was killed also.”⁴ In October, he reported again: “We have searched Maxfjins down to the mountains of Aletan Heshuo, and got traces of their track. But considering that they are a dozen days ahead of us and the snow is heavy, please allow me to wait until next spring, and then lead thousands of soldiers to chase them down.”⁵ Qianlong denounced this request, and ordered them to continue their chase, and to cut off the roads by which Sheleng (舍楞) once fled to Russia⁶. In the same month, the Qing forces chopped off the head of Huojizhan (霍集占), and was prepared to return. In the first lunar month of the next year, Qianlong ordered General ũhede (舒赫德) back to Beijing, and gave him instructions on how to handle Maxfjins: “Make sure that they are chased down and rooted out once for all.”⁷ The Manchu forces this time not only expanded its searching area, but also set up checkpoints along the roads from Kuqa to the Tianshan

1 *Yuewei Cottage Notes*, p538. [清]纪昀:《阅微草堂笔记》,第 538 页。

2 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v551, p1040. 《清高宗实录》卷五五一, 乾隆二十二年十一月丙辰, 第 1040 页。

3 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v545, p932. 《清高宗实录》卷五四五, 乾隆二十二年八月乙酉, 第 932 页。

4 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v596, p646. 《清高宗实录》卷五九六, 乾隆二十四年九月庚申, 第 646 页。

5 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v598, p677. 《清高宗实录》卷五九八, 乾隆二十四年十月辛巳, 第 677 页。

6 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v598, p687. 《清高宗实录》卷五九八, 乾隆二十四年十月壬辰, 第 687 页。

7 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v604, p784. 《清高宗实录》卷六〇四, 乾隆二十五年正月癸丑, 第 784 页。

Mountains, in case Maxjins invaded Hui's land and stole horses from the military posts.

¹ On account of this careful planning, General Agui's troops finally found traces, and "captured 26 men and women, killed more than 30, and got more than 350 horses." Besides, they also found out that Sebuteng (色布腾) and Huojige'er (霍济格尔) were the murderers of Deshu ², which accelerated the manhunt. When the Qing forces "reached Erqis (额尔齐斯) on the 25th day of the 8th lunar month, they had a few locals captured, and asked about the whereabouts of people like Sebuteng. When they learned that the murderers had escaped into Russia, they followed them to the Kenggertula (铿格尔图拉) of Russia, and asked Mayur (玛玉尔) to hand them over."³ After some negotiations, Russia handed over all the 100 plus Maxjins, including Sebuteng (色布腾) and their weapons, horses and other belongings⁴. At the end of the year, Sebuteng was escorted back to Beijing, and "due to his verified crimes of killing Deshu, the commissioner of Kuqa in Aletan Heshuo, he shall be turned over to the Ministry of Penalty for execution."⁵ By this time, finally ended the one year and four months manhunt over the killing of Deshu by Sebuteng that had its footprints all across the north and south of the Tianshan Mountains, and also involved a few negotiations with Russia. The Manchu government's attitude towards Maxjins also changed over time, from the initial annihilation policy to the offering of amnesty and proper arrangements in the later years, roughly with the 23rd year of the Qianlong reign as the watershed. According to *Qingshilu*, in the 3rd lunar month of the 23rd year of the Qianlong Reign, "General Fude (富德) and others captured some Oyirad including Batu (巴图) and Babuqi (巴步奇). They took Batu Mengku (巴图孟库) and Boleke (伯勒克) as their local guides, and let the rest be escorted to Barkol. The decree yesterday, which said

1 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v612, p874. 《清高宗实录》卷六一二，乾隆二十五年五月丙午，第 874 页。

2 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v614, p903-904. 见《清高宗实录》卷六一四，乾隆二十五年六月丙子，第 903—904 页。

3 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v646, p233. 《清高宗实录》卷六四六，乾隆二十六年十月丙子，第 233 页。

4 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v647, p239. 《清高宗实录》卷六四七，乾隆二十六年十月丁亥，第 239 页。

5 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v660, p283. 《清高宗实录》卷六六〇，乾隆二十六年十二月辛未，第 283 页。

that surrendered Oyirad shall be enlisted in the Green Banner, is intended only for those who surrender sincerely, and not for those that were captured. The Oyirad escorted this time, are captured Maxfins, who as the previous decrees suggest, shall be brought to Suzhou (肃州) for later actions.”¹ Based on these records, it can be seen that the Manchu government made proper arrangements for Oyirad of sincere submission, and would not just kill any captured Maxfin. Instead, they would be brought to Suzhou, or taken as local guides for the chasing down of other bandits, or “be escorted to Beijing for rewards”². In the 25th year of the Qianlong reign (1760), the policy of offering government posts and proper arrangements became more obvious³, and soon came a lot of Maxfins for surrender. General Agui made proper arrangements for them⁴. The Manchu government then took a step further and expressed clearly: ‘With such cold weather and heavy snow, the Maxfins have no resting place. They must have scattered in all directions. Sending troops out occasionally to chase them down should be good, but the Maxfins can never be all captured. Now is about to establish a Niru (牛录/佐领) system (a household registration system) to keep Oyirad under control. You should offer wide amnesty, and let them come for surrender. This can not only get the social order in place, but also save trouble of sending troops. Ask Agui to disseminate the notice: If the Maxfins repent and surrender, they shall be taken in; if still hiding out stubbornly, they shall be chased and killed, and be given no mercy. The notice should be hung around in all key roads, and widely publicized. You can act as you see fit.’⁵ Namely, the Maxfins shall be pacified and be registered as citizens in the Niru system for proper control. Even the rebel subordinates of Sebuteng, the murderer of Deshu, were relieved of their crimes and be enlisted as appropriately. Besides, “the Oyirad

1 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v559, p83. 《清高宗实录》卷五五九，乾隆二十三年三月己酉，第 83 页。

2 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v575, p324. 《清高宗实录》卷五七五，乾隆二十三年十一月丙午，第 324 页。

3 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v611, p865. 见《清高宗实录》卷六一一，乾隆二十五年四月辛卯，第 865 页。

4 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v625, p1023. 《清高宗实录》卷六二五，乾隆二十五年十一月辛酉，第 1023 页。

5 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v627, p1046. 《清高宗实录》卷六二七，乾隆二十五年十二月丙申，第 1046 页。

taken in by the Hui people shall be bought out by the government and sent to Ili for proper arrangements”.¹ By then, the Manchu government had recognized them as “registered citizens” as those in the inner land. On account of this policy adjustment and its implementation, the robbery conducted by Maxfins mostly stopped. As a unique historical and cultural phenomenon in Xinjiang during the Qianlong reign, the story of Maxfins was later picked up by Ji Xiaolan who was exiled in Xinjiang, and became one of the many anecdotes in his book “*Yuewei Cottage Notes*”.

1 *Qing gaozong shilu*, v658, p363. 《清高宗实录》卷六五八，乾隆二十七年四月己巳，第 363 页。