

# Preface to *Modern Tibet* [1937] by Taixu

*Géshé*<sup>1</sup> Fazun has sent me his freshly penned book, *Modern Tibet*, for my assessment. Upon finishing the reading, I found myself with a couple of reflections. To begin with, the Tibetan people's acceptance of the Buddhadharmā is not just extensive but also filled with deep sincerity and earnestness. Still, it appears that numerous women act without shame or restraint (potentially as a result of the practice of sexual yoga<sup>2</sup> in Highest Yoga Tantra).<sup>3</sup> In the same vein, both officials and traders often display corruption and a deficiency in moral standards. Within the nomadic territories of Golok,<sup>4</sup> many people resort to acts of robbery and murder for their livelihood. Acts of murder, theft, infidelity, and deceit have alarmingly turned into widespread customs. What is the reason for this situation? In addition, the Tibetan saṅgha

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**1** Here, Taixu employs the sinograph *geshi* 格什, corresponding to *géshe* (T. dge bshes) in Tibetan, to praise Fazun for his accomplishments in Tibetan Buddhist scholarship. As Fazun himself explains in Chapter 1, however, he never earned the title of *géshe*. For the *géshe* degree, cf. Chapter 7.

**2** The expression *shuangshen fa* 雙身法, 'method of dual embodiment', indicates the practice of sexual yoga in a Highest Yoga Tantra setting.

**3** By *wushang mizong* 無上密宗, literally 'Unsurpassed Secret Mantra Tradition', 'Supreme Secret Mantra Tradition', Taixu designates the Yoganiruttara division of the tantra class of scriptures (T. Rgyud sde) as intended in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Notably, Taixu uses the sinograph Mizong 密宗 (J. Misshū) as a synonym of Mijiao (J. Mikkyō) 密教. During the Republican period, both sinographs designate 'tantra' in Buddhist Chinese in the sense that Li Youyi intended the term (see also the Introduction).

**4** C. Guoluo 廓落, T. Mgo log.



represents the heart of the Tibetan nation.<sup>5</sup> They hold significant authority in both religious matters and societal respect, while also playing a crucial role in the realms of education and governance. Why? Unlike the general population, which lacks a reliable economic structure and an organized political governance, the saṅgha enjoys both stability and structure. It becomes clear that a society characterized by virtue cannot be established through mild methods of conversion alone. It requires effective political management alongside a thriving economic system. Still, practitioners of Buddhism worldwide depend exclusively on moral evolution to uphold the Buddha's dispensation through righteous monastic communities. They disregard the monastic organization and the management of temple assets. It is not apparent to many that only a limited group of wise and righteous individuals can achieve purity and goodness through conversion alone. The majority of individuals need ongoing engagement in meaningful activities and compliance with regulations in order to receive guidance and motivation towards positive behavior. If Tsongkhapa<sup>6</sup> had not reformed the saṅgha in Tibet by enforcing strict rules and managing the collective assets of the leading monasteries, the community would likely have fallen into a state of disorder and decline, much like what happened in Nepal. Should the political and religious leaders in Tibet enhance their guidance, create initiatives for advancement, and maintain a robust and principled administration, the commendable actions described in the four core precepts<sup>7</sup> would effortlessly emerge as a prominent feature of a nation that has been transformed by the Buddha's teachings.<sup>8</sup> The principles that humans hold dear and the teachings of the Buddha, which emphasize practices that lead to higher rebirths and ultimate enlightenment, should align with the requirements of the human realm in order to evolve progressively. The essential factor is to establish a rational economic system that ensures the survival of all individuals. This should be succeeded by respectable administration grounded in morality to promote peace for all. Individuals can only immerse themselves in the supreme teachings when they find themselves in a secure and stable environment. Without these essential elements, no matter how much one admires and trusts the teachings, it would be impossible to rectify irresponsible and deviant conduct, leaving individuals with a deepening

**5** The phrase *Xizang minzu de zhongxin* 西藏民族的重心 can be rendered as 'the heart of the Tibetan nation', 'the core of the Tibetan nation', with *zhongxin* also meaning core, focus, median point, center of gravity. On the term *Xizang minzu* and the ways in which scholars of Tibetan Buddhism from the Republican period, including Li Yizhuo and Fazun, associated Buddhism with the Tibetan nation, see the *Introduction to the translation*.

**6** C. Zong ke ba 宗克巴, T. Tsong kha pa (1357-1419). This is Fazun's sinographic transcription. Today, Tsongkhapa's name is also rendered into Chinese as Zong ka ba 宗喀巴. On Fazun's account of Tzongkhapa, see Chapter 3.

**7** C. si genben jie 四根本戒. By this term, Taixu refers to the ethical guidelines that form the core of the Vinaya. The four core precepts restrict: (1) any forms of sexual relations, whether with people or animals, (2) the act of theft, which encompasses taking anything that is not given, (3) the killing of another individual or being, and (4) deceit, especially in falsely claiming to have reached a state of enlightenment or to have special powers. This set of rules is connected to the *pārājika* (C. boluoyi 波羅夷; T. phas pham pa) offenses, the most severe infractions of the monastic code. The word *pārājika*, derived from Sanskrit and Pāli, translates to 'defeat'. It denotes actions influenced by impurities that lead to an automatic and permanent removal from the saṅgha for both monks and nuns.

**8** The phrase *Fohua minzu* 佛化民族 indicates the process of converting or transforming (C. hua 化) a nation (C. minzu 民族) into one that embraces the Buddha's (C. Fo 佛) teaching.

sense of regret! Therefore, in my address to the Tibetan nation, which has already achieved a remarkable level of moral advancement, I wish to share a helpful suggestion with its leaders. With this purpose in mind, I have briefly captured these thoughts in written form.

April 8, 1937, in the Abbot's Quarters at Xueshan 雪山,<sup>9</sup> Taixu

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**9** The term *xueshan*, 'Snow Mountain', refers to Xuedou shan 雪竇山, 'Snow Burrow Mountain'. In the first half of 1937, Taixu spent several months in retreat near Xuedou si 雪竇寺, 'Snow Burrow Temple', a Chan temple in old Mingzhou 明州 prefecture, located near modern-day Ningbo 寧波, Zhejiang 浙江 province. He wrote the preface to Fazun's book at Xuedou Temple's *zhangshi* 丈室, the 'abbot's quarters'. See Yinshun 1995, 228.



Portrait of Jampel Rölpai Lodrö ('Jam dpal rol pa'i blo gros, 1888-1936), known as Amdo Géshé,  
from the 1937 edition of *Modern Tibet*