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## 10 Views on the Governance of Tibet

**Summary** 10.1 Past Governance of Tibet. – 10.2 Modern Governance of Tibet.

### 10.1 Past Governance of Tibet

[145] In *Tibet, As I Once Passed Through*, I provided a detailed account of how Tibet was governed in earlier times. I have also addressed this topic in the historical section of the present book. After the Qianlong era, the emperor's authority in Tibet became de facto solidified through the deployment of imperial commissioners to Tibet. These commissioners, acting as the emperor's envoys, held supreme authority and earned the admiration and trust of Tibet as a whole. Had they genuinely governed on the emperor's behalf, their administration would almost certainly have succeeded. Instead, they drew salaries while oppressing others, displayed arrogance, treated everyone with contempt, neglected their duties, squandered resources, and even manufactured conflicts where none existed. How could such a conduct not incite rebellion? Broadly speaking, this was the state of affairs in the past.

### 10.2 Modern Governance of Tibet

Ever since Han forces were expelled from Tibet, Tibet has severed its ties with the Inner Lands. There have been instances where it has even responded with military force. What bases do we have, then, to confidently state that we govern Tibet? I am genuinely puzzled by how the phrase "modern governance of Tibet" is being used today. If Tibetans were to read this, I suspect they would scoff at it, and I fear that even foreigners might laugh at me. And yet, I know that Tibet has always been part of our country's



territory.<sup>1</sup> For a number of years, due to domestic crises and foreign threats, the State was simply unable to allocate time for its government. Still, to designate this period of unavoidable neglect as “poor governance” – is that truly deserving of ridicule? Consider the northwestern provinces. Since the

**1** In Fazun’s Chinese: “Danshi wo zhidao Xizang zongshi woguo de bantu 但是我知道西藏總是我國的版圖”。 This statement appears at a turning point in Fazun’s critique of Qing and Republican rule in Tibet. In the preceding passage, Fazun observes that, after the expulsion of Chinese troops (C. Han bing 漢兵), Tibet severed all ties with China and sometimes even responded to Chinese advances with military force. Here, Fazun questions what it means to “govern Tibet” (C. zhi Xizang 治西藏). He expresses confusion over the phrase “modern governance of Tibet” (C. xiandai de zhi Xizang 現代的治理西藏), which was in vogue in Republican China, and anticipates mockery from Tibetans and foreign observers for merely using it. At this point, when Chinese leadership appears most hollow, Fazun asserts, “And yet, I know that Tibet has always been part of our country’s territory”. The phrasing – *danshi wo zhidao* (但是我知道) – is telling. The conjunction *danshi* ‘but’, ‘and yet’ marks a break from the historical logic of the earlier passage and introduces an assertion grounded not in fact, but in the need to reassert sovereignty. The pronoun *wo* 我, although denoting the first person, often marks a collective voice in Fazun’s writing – evoking not just the voice of the author, but Chinese civilization as a whole. The phrase thus functions less as an empirical claim than as a performative act: a reaffirmation of sovereignty through mere repetition, precisely when its meaning is most in doubt. This sudden turn interrupts Fazun’s train of thought, affirming exactly what that reasoning had called into question. This statement disrupts his logic at least in three ways. First, it may reflect national pride aligned with Republican ideology. Second, it may serve as a response to the uncomfortable truths he had just exposed. A third, and perhaps more unsettling, possibility is that Fazun does not seek to resolve the contradiction between political claim and political absence; instead, he builds it into the very structure of his argument. He acknowledges that the Republican government, weakened by internal unrest and external threats (C. neiyou waihuan 內憂外患), lacked both the capacity and the will to govern Tibet. Yet this admission does not lead him to question the legitimacy of China’s territorial claim. On the contrary, he reaffirms it without qualification. The result is a deepened tension: the less China governs Tibet, the more emphatic the assertion of sovereignty becomes. This rhetorical strategy reveals a conception of sovereignty that is not grounded in administrative control but in historical continuity and symbolic repetition. Fazun’s analogy to the neglected northwestern provinces (C. Xibei zhusheng 西北諸省) reinforces this point: these territories too suffered prolonged administrative failure, yet their status within the nation was never doubted. The case of the thirteenth Dalai Lama’s death illustrates the same logic. Fazun describes Special Envoy Huang 黃 as symbolically present, while actual governance is reduced to the transmission of telegrams. What remains is not state power in action, but the persistence of a claim that must be repeated precisely because it cannot be enacted. In this, Fazun articulates a paradoxical form of sovereignty – defined not by effective rule, but by its rhetorical endurance in the face of political absence. To trace Fazun’s response to this tension over time, we must turn to the 1943 edition of *Xiandai Xizang*, where a major revision occurs. Again, Fazun published *Tibet, As I Once Passed Through* and *Modern Tibet* as separate volumes in Chongqing in 1937. In 1943, *Modern Tibet* was reprinted in Chengdu with *Tibet, As I Once Passed Through* added as an appendix. In this revised edition, the sentence “And yet, I know that Tibet has always been part of our country’s territory” is erased entirely. In Chapter 10, the paragraph that featured the statement is replaced instead with a detailed account of Qing envoys in late imperial Tibet. This omission shifted the meaning of the original edition. In 1937, Fazun placed his strong territorial claim at the end of a reflection on China’s inability to govern Tibet. He implied that sovereignty could persist without governance, even when sovereignty was sustained by repetition alone. And so, in 1943, by merely removing the statement, Fazun appeared to resolve this tension. Still, its omission only gave his statement greater momentum. For it raised the question of whether the original statement was perceived as too weak, or whether it revealed too much. Notably, Fazun’s erasure occurred between 1937 and 1943, when the College of Chinese and Tibetan Doctrine in Chongqing was at its peak, under the leadership of both Fazun and Taixu. These years also marked the height of the Japanese occupation of China. During this time, Fazun’s reasoning may have been shaped by the wider pressures and uncertainties of the war, but also by new developments in Tibet after the passing of the thirteenth Dalai Lama. The absence of the statement in the 1943 edition – published three years after the enthronement of Tenzin Gyatso (T. Bstan’ dzin rgya mtsho; b. 1935) as the fourteenth Dalai Lama in 1940, and while the fifth Radreng Rinpoché served as the Regent of Tibet (1934-1947) – carries as much weight as its presence had in 1937, before the inception of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-45). For the revised Chapter 10, see Fazun 1943a, 116-17. See also Fazun’s Chapter 1 in the present book.

founding of the Republic, when has there been an opportunity to handle their [146] administration? Still, because they are an integral part of our territory, we can assert our authority over them, even when they are neglected or poorly governed. This is entirely without fault.

In the wake of the [thirteenth] Dalai Lama's passing on the thirtieth day of the tenth lunar month in the twenty-second year of the Republic [December 17, 1933],<sup>2</sup> the Chinese Government dispatched Special Envoy Huang 黃<sup>3</sup> to Tibet to participate in the memorial service. His foremost responsibility was certainly to convey condolences, but I suspect he may have had other mandates as well, perhaps to strengthen diplomatic relations and managing other responsibilities. After he returned, several counselors remained in Tibet to take care of ongoing affairs. Yet, what precisely are they doing? Besides relaying telegrams from the Chinese Government and conveying its directives to the Tibetan administration, I am afraid they seem to be largely inactive, with few responsibilities to keep them busy. Were this not the case, then why has there been no further engagement between the Tibetan authorities and the Chinese Government so far? Consequently, the current approach to governance appears confined to relaying messages and conveying directives. Is there any point in discussing other matters?

To govern Tibet well in the future, greater care must be taken in selecting the officials to be stationed there. At the end of my book, *Tibet, As I Once Passed Through*, specifically in Chapter 9 and [147] Chapter 10,<sup>4</sup> I appended several personal insights on this matter. Are such measures truly necessary for effective administration? That is a question that requires careful consideration by the authorities. My contribution here, offering what I personally know,<sup>5</sup> has been simply to fulfill the sacred duty of a citizen,<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The Thirteenth Dalai Lama passed away at the age of fifty-seven, on the thirtieth day of the tenth month in the Tibetan calendar, during the Water-Bird Year. Fazun correctly reports this date according to the Republican period calendar as *minguo ershier nian shiyue sanshi ri* 民國二十二年十月三十日. In the Gregorian calendar, it corresponds to December 17, 1933.

<sup>3</sup> C. Huang zhuanshi 黃專使. Here, Fazun refers to the special emissary Huang Musong 黃慕松 (1885-1957), a Chinese general sent to Lhasa in 1934 on a diplomatic mission. His task was to persuade the Tibetan government to accept Chinese sovereignty. He delivered his proposal under the pretext of offering condolences for the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama. The Tibetan National Assembly rejected it, declaring Tibet an independent state under the rule of the Dalai Lamas. After the mission failed, Huang was appointed head of the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission in 1935. For Envoy Huang, cf. Goldstein 1989; Powers and Templeman 2012, 302-3; cf. also Richardson 1961, 141-3; Zhu 2016, 170; Tuttle 2005, 152, 177, 185, 191, 206.

<sup>4</sup> The two chapters are part of *Wo quguo de Xizang*; for Chapter 9 and 10, see Fazun 1937b, 59, 68.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase *wo geren suo zhidao* 我個人所知道, meaning "that which I personally know", expands upon the earlier *danshi wo zhidao*, "and yet, I know", which appears at the beginning of the chapter. Together, these expressions characterize Fazun's statement not as an official claim but as a moral position. His later invocation of *guomin tianzhi*, "the sacred duty of a citizen", clarifies the subject behind the *wo* - not an isolated self or an imperial subject, but a citizen of the modern Republic. Fazun speaks out of a sense of obligation, for his tone reflects loyalty to the nation while also revealing his doubts against State policies.

<sup>6</sup> Here, Fazun employs the compound *guomin tianzhi* 國民天職, which can be understood as "the holy obligation of a citizen" or "the sacred duty of a citizen". This phrase illustrates the changing understanding of the notion of citizenship in China during the early twentieth century. In Nationalist Republican discourse, the phrase highlighted a commitment to civic duties, associating individual responsibilities with the broader aspirations of the nation. The May Fourth Movement advocated the importance of people's rights (C. *minquan* 民權) and public opinion (C. *minyì* 民意). During this time, both workers and citizens began to view their contributions as a collective national obligation, framing their involvement in labor and social movements as a natural, sacred duty (C. *tianzhi* 天職) to promote the nation's welfare. This development marked

and to present these thoughts for the reference of my fellow countrymen. That was my intention in writing this book. As for the many errors and omissions in the text, they are certainly many. Because of time constraints, I was unable to offer a more detailed account. I hope readers will kindly forgive these shortcomings!

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a change from a conventional, hierarchical interpretation of civic duty towards a contemporary, participatory approach to civic engagement. On *guomin tianzhi* and related terminology from the Republican era cf. Smith 2002, 106-7.

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