
Part III: **Central Asia**

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The Syntax of Tibetan Colophons: An Overview

Abstract: The value of Tibetan colophons – found in manuscript, xylographic, and other forms of editions of texts pertaining to allochthonous (i.e., translated and mainly Indo-Tibetan) and autochthonous literature, different periods, genres, fields of knowledge, and subject matter – as valuable sources of information has long been recognized in the past. A comprehensive and representative study of the topic from both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective, however, appears to remain a desideratum. This contribution merely attempts to provide an overview of the syntax of Tibetan colophons. It focusses on defining the term ‘colophon’, and discussing various types of colophon (i.e., author/authorship colophon, translator’s/translation colophon, editor’s/editing colophon, printing colophon, scribe’s/copyist’s/calligrapher’s colophon, treasure/revelation colophon, and miscellaneous (sub)types of colophon), structure of colophon, and various kinds of information found in the Tibetan colophons.

1 Prologue

In the past, Tibetologists have not only used Tibetan colophons as valuable sources of information but have also systematically gathered colophonic data, pursued case studies, and written on Tibetan colophons – found in written/manuscript and print/xylograph culture, and in translated and autochthonous literature –, a phenomenon in its own right.¹ A comprehensive and systematic

¹ A survey of works containing Tibetan colophonic data is beyond the scope of this contribution. In general, however, most catalogues of collections of Tibetan works almost invariably include colophonic data. A few publications treating Tibetan colophons (in alphabetical order) are: Almogi 2005; Almogi 2008; Bacot 1954; Bischoff 1968; Bischoff 1974; Cabezón 2001; Clemente 2007; Diemberger, Ehrhard and Kornicki 2016; Eimer and Germano 2002; Herrmann-Pfandt 2002; Jackson 1983; Jackson 1989; de Jong 1972; Martin 2021; Meinert 2007; Samten 1992; Skilling 1994; Sobisch 2007; Sobisch 2008; Taube 1966. José Ignacio Cabezón, in particular, has attempted ‘to examine the colophon of Tibetan texts as a literary artifact, and as a source of historical information about the composition, production and dissemination of texts’, see Cabezón 2001. This study also provides several examples (pp. 239–347) and a ‘tentative structural stylistic analysis of the colophon’ (pp. 252–254).

study of the topic from both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective, however, still seems to remain a desideratum. Although it is not possible to do full justice to the topic within the scope of this contribution, what follows will be an attempt at providing an overview of Tibetan colophons at a putative meta-level, by taking up four issues, namely, (1) definition of the term ‘colophon’ in the Tibetan context, (2) classification of Tibetan colophons, (3) organization (or structure) of Tibetan colophons, and (4) information contained in Tibetan colophons. This paper neither focuses on a case study of a certain Tibetan colophon, a type of colophon, or a certain aspect of it, nor is it based on a statistical analysis of a large spectrum and quantity of colophonic data. Owing to its limited scope, it is not possible to provide ample examples of the cases mentioned.

2 Definition of the term ‘colophon’ in the Tibetan context

To begin with, a working definition of the term ‘colophon’ in terms of the Tibetan textual tradition is most pertinent here. Tibetan sources provide no such ready-made definition, and certainly not one applicable to all types of Tibetan colophons. Nonetheless, a definition of the term ‘colophon’ can be deduced from the manner in which several Tibetan scholars have understood or employed two Tibetan terms: *mjug byang* and *mdzad byang*. In a study published in 2013, titled *Bod yig gna’ dpe’i nram bshad* (‘Explication of Tibetan-Language Old Books’) Tibetan scholar Padma bkra shis, establishes the Tibetan term *mdzad byang* has been used and defined as an umbrella term for various kinds or rather layers of Tibetan colophons.² *Ad sensum*, the term *mjug byang* seems to mean a kind of ‘epilogue’, lexically explained as the ‘concluding narrative of a text’ (*yi ge’i mjug sdud kyi gtam*),³ and indeed also as ‘colophon’, inasmuch as it is used as a

2 Padma bkra shis, *gNa’ dpe’i nram bshad* (p. 103.3–8): *mdzad byang ni gsung rab de thog mar mdzad pa por skul slong gi sa bon thad kar bskrun gnang mkhan gi bla slob dang mchod yon sbyin bdag | ljags rtsom gnang mkhan | ljags rtsom gyi dus yun | ljags rstom gi lung khungs rgyab rten | ljags rtsom gyi reg zig mkhan te yi ge ba | zhus dag mkhan | dbu zhabs lha sku ’bri mkhan | nyer mkho’i nag shog rgyu spus dang yul dus sogs kha gsal gting gsal zhig bkod pa de la rgya bod kyi gsung rab rig pa smra ba dag gis gsung rab kyi mdzad byang zhes brjod gnang gi ’dug pas ...*].

3 Tshig mdzod chen mo (s.v. *mjug byang*): ‘concluding narrative of a text’ (*yi ge’i mjug sdud kyi gtam*). In my view, the definition given by the *Dag yig gсар bsgrigs* (s.v. *mjug*) is better. It states: ‘*mjug byang*: a term for a brief explanation/clarification written separately at the end after the actual-cum-main body of the text is completed (*[mjug byang] dpe cha’i gzhung dngos rdzogs rjes*

definiens of the definienda 'gyur byang ('translator's/translation colophon') and par byang ('printing colophon').⁴ The term *mjug byang* is well attested but the earliest known attestation remains unclear in its precise meaning.

At any rate, in understanding the Tibetan concept of colophon, it is important to scrutinise how Tibetan Buddhists have come to view a scripture or treatise (both as a textual entity and in terms of the medium transmitting it) as having three distinct parts: a beginning, middle, and an end. In so doing, they have adopted and adapted the three attributes of the *saddharma* or *dharmaratna* (i.e., the teaching of the Buddha): 'wholesome in the beginning' (*ādaḥ kalyāṇam: thog mar dge ba*), 'wholesome in the middle' (*madhye kalyāṇam: bar du dge ba*), and 'wholesome in the end' (*pariyavasāne kalyāṇam: tha mar dge ba*). Typically and stereotypically, these expressions are glossed as 'preludial/prefatory/introductory matter, which is wholesome in the beginning' (*thog mar dge ba klad kyi don*), 'main topical matter, which is wholesome in the middle' (*bar du dge be gzhang gi don*), and 'epilogical/concluding matter, which is wholesome in the end' (*tha mar dge ba mjug gi don*). Colophonic statements thus invariably form a part of the

mjug tu logs su bris pa'i gsal bshad mdor bsdus kyi ming). These definitions have been adopted by the digital version of the *sMon lam tshig mdzod chen mo*, which adds information and confusion in equating *mjug byang* with *mdzad byang*. It states (s.v. *mjug byang*): 'A brief explanation/clarification [serving as a] postscript of a work, whose composition is completed. When using honorific, [it] is called *mdzad byang*. In a *mjug byang*, names of the author, of the person at whose behest the work was composed, of the scribe at the time of the composition would be clearly written. An example [of its usage]: There is a text/work, whose *mjug byang* is not found' (*dpe cha brtsams tshar rjes kyi gsal bshad mdor bsdus te | zhe sa zhu skabs mdzad byang zer | mjug byang du rtsom pa po dang rtsom skul byed mkhan | dpe cha rtsom skabs kyi yi ge 'bri mkhan bcas kyi ming gsal po bris yod | dper na | mjug byang mi gsal ba'i dpe cha zhig 'dug lta bu*)). Notably, the word *mjug byang* is not recorded in Jäschke 1881.

⁴ *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. 'gyur byang): *lo tsā'i mjug byang*; *ibid.* (s.v. *par byang*): *par gyi mjug byang*. *Ad verbum*, however, the term *mjug byang* seems to be strikingly similar to the use of the term *explicit* in the European culture of bookmaking. *Encyclopædia Britannica* (s.v. *Explicit*): 'Explicit, in bookmaking, a device added to the end of some manuscripts and incunabula by the author or scribe and providing such information as the title of the work and the name or initials of its author or scribe. Explicit were soon incorporated into or completely replaced by the colophon, which included information about the printer, printing materials, and typeface, and, often, the printer's emblem. In medieval Latin works the word *explicit* meant "here ends" Originally, it may have been an abbreviation for *explicitus est liber* ("the book is unrolled"), but by analogy with *incipit* ("here begins ...") it was taken as a present-tense, third-person singular verb form' (<<https://www.britannica.com/topic/explicit>>, accessed on 10 October 2018).

latter.⁵ Notably, however, this third and last part, which is also called *mjug byang* ('epilogical/concluding statement'), is not always coextensive with colophons.

Following the Tibetan usage of the terms *mjug byang*, *mdzad byang*, and the like, 'colophon' may be defined broadly as 'a piece of writing found as a rule at the end of a work (at times also at the end of its chapters, or less frequently in the frontispiece or on the front page, providing information on one or more facts related to its identity, production, and transmission, including the work's title, names of persons involved – such as author or compiler, translator, scribe, initiator (*bskul ba po*), donor (e.g., of ink, paper, and other material), or artists (in case of texts containing images) – and the duration, date, place, (re)sources, and motives of composition or production'.⁶ It may be noted at this juncture that while we shall have to see genre by genre, case by case, whether or not a colophon forms an integral part of the text or whether or not it is by the author or someone else, it is the nature and structure (or perhaps syntax) of the statement and not its location that determines whether or not it should be called a 'colophon'.

3 Classification of Tibetan colophons

Let us now turn to the classification of the various types or layers of Tibetan colophons. One may choose to classify Tibetan colophons on the basis of various criteria (*dbye sgo*), such as language and culture (e.g. Indic, Sinitic, or Tibetic), type of textual medium (i.e. manuscript, xylographs, inscriptions, etc.), literary genre, fields of knowledge, subject matter, periods (e.g. ancient, modern, etc.), and so forth. I, however, forego such classifications here. Instead, I wish to discuss each of the types by discussing the pertinent Tibetan term(s) for it. To the extent possible and whenever applicable, the various types of Tibetan colophons may be classified according to the sequence they occur in the text or according to the assumed relative chronology.

⁵ See, Kong sprul's *Shes bya kun khyab* (pp. 1021.1–1025.6), where the colophon is indeed contained in the 'epilogical/concluding matter, which is wholesome in the end' (*tha mar dge ba mjug gi don*).

⁶ The definition of 'colophon' proposed here may be compared with the following dictionary entry (Merriam-Webster, s.v. *colophon*): 'an inscription at the end of a book or manuscript usually with facts about its production' and 'an identifying mark used by a printer or a publisher' (<<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colophon>>, accessed on 17 May 2022).

3.1 Author's/authorship colophon

The first and foremost type of colophon is the ‘author’s/authorship colophon’ (*mdzad/sbyar/rtsoṃ byang*). The need to distinguish between ‘author’s colophon’ and ‘authorship colophon’ has been pointed out by Orna Almogi.⁷ The former would be a colophonic statement composed by the actual author(s) of the pertinent work and the latter a statement about the authorship made by someone else, such as the translator, compiler, editor, scribe, copyist, or printer, obviously in cases where the former was absent. The Tibetan term for author’s/authorship colophon is *mdzad byang*. There seem to be, however, three different referents of the term. First, as observed earlier, the term *mdzad byang* has been employed in a wider sense and as an umbrella or generic term by Padma bkra shis to refer to Tibetan colophons in general. Such use of the term seems problematic, especially because it seems to disregard the term *mdzad*, clearly to be understood here as either ‘composer’ or ‘composition’. Second, in a stricter and more accurate sense, the term *mdzad byang* is commonly employed to refer to the ‘author’s/authorship colophon’.⁸ Usually the context would indicate whether *mdzad byang* refers to an ‘author’s’ or an ‘authorship’ colophon. In the case of translated works and early indigenous Tibetan works, however, it is often difficult to tell with certainty whether the *mdzad byang* is an author’s or authorship colophon. Third, there exists yet another use of the term *mdzad byang*, the referent of which is not clear to me. For example, the Dunhuang document Pelliot tibétain 999 mentions the expression ‘*mdzad byang of/in(?) the palace*’ (*pho brang gi mdzad byang*),⁹ where

⁷ See Almogi 2020, 101, where it has also been proposed one should make a similar distinction between ‘translator/s colophon’ and ‘translation colophon’.

⁸ Rong zom pa, *Rab gnas rtsa ba* (p. 161.23–24): *sngon gyi mkhan po rnam kyis mdzad pa’i mdzad byang na bzugs kyang rung* |; Kun dpal, *sPyod ’jug ’grel pa* (p. 807.9): *gang gis brtsam pa’i mdzad byang*. Note that mKhan po Kun dpal in his *Nges sgron ’grel pa* (p. 256.8) employs the term *zhal byang* for the author’s colophon although usually *zhal byang* refers to the title of a work (i.e., in the sense of *mtshan/kha byang* of a text). See the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *zhal byang*): *dpe cha’i kha byang*. The term *mdzad byang* has found its entry in the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v.), which is explained as: ‘[Information] about the identity of the composer, the dates of composition, and the like located at the end of any treatise’ (*bstan bcos gang zhig yin rung de’i mjug tu rtsom pa po su yin dang* | *dus ji tsaṃ la brtams pa yin sogs bkod pa*). It is followed by the following example: ‘Because this text/manuscript has no author’s colophon, one would not know the composer’ (*dpe cha ’dir mdzad byang med pas rtsom pa po su yin mi shes*). Compare, however, the explanation of the word *mdzad byang* found in the *Dag yig gsar bsgrigs* (s.v. *mdzad*: *dpe cha brtsams pa’i rgyu mtshan sogs kyi gsal bshad kyi yi ge’i ming*).

⁹ Pelliot tibétain 999 (Old Tibetan Documents Online [OTDO], <<https://otdo.aa-ken.jp>>, accessed on 10 February 2022): *pho brang gi mdzad byang dang ’phrin byang*.

the referent of the term *mdzad byang* seems unclear. Perhaps it means something like ‘imperial catalogue or registrar [of works composed/translated]’. In addition to the term *mdzad byang*, one also finds, though apparently rarer and in rather more recent sources, two more terms for author’s/authorship colophon, namely, *sbyar byang*¹⁰ and *rtsom byang*.¹¹

Notably, the Tibetan term *mdzad byang* has not been used in the earliest catalogues of mainly (but not exclusively) translated Buddhist scripture and treatises such as the *’Phang thang ma*, although terms such as ‘list of titles’ (*mtshan byang*), ‘translation colophon’ (*’gyur byang*) or simply ‘inscription of records’ (*byang bu*), and ‘catalogue’ or ‘register’ (*dkar chag*) have been used quite frequently. Two related explanations why the term *mdzad byang* has not been in use at this point in time and in such contexts come to mind here. Firstly, during the eighth and ninth centuries, the main concern was to compile catalogues (*dkar chag*) of mainly translated works and to a lesser degree of autochthonous Tibetan works; catalogues which were nothing but an inventory of titles (*mtshan byang*) and translator/translation colophons (*’gyur byang*). Secondly, it appears that, as a rule, these translator/translation colophons recorded in the early catalogues contained not only the titles of the texts but when applicable the names of the authors as well, and thus, no distinction between different types of colophons was deemed necessary.

3.2 Translator’s/translation colophon

The second type of colophon, the translator’s/translation colophon, is conveyed by the Tibetan term *’gyur byang*.¹² We also find its variant *bsgyur byang*. This type of colophon certainly pertains solely to non-Tibetan (i.e. mainly but not exclusively Indic) works in Tibetan translation. Here, too, it is important to point out that not all translation colophons could have been composed by the translators themselves, and it is necessary, as is the case regarding author’s/authorship

10 The term *sbyar byang* can be found, for example, in Khams sprul’s *dByangs can rol mtsho* (p. 18.10); First rDo grub, *Yon tan mdzod ’grel* (pp. 137.17; 636.19–637.1). It has also been recorded in the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v.) as a lexeme, which is explained as ‘composer’s name placed at the end of a treatise’ (*bstan bcos kyi mjug tu bkod pa’i rtsom pa po’i ming*).

11 dPa’ bo gTsug lag ’phreng ba, *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston* (vol. 2, p. 1297.13–16): *sngags rnying ma la skur pa btab pa’i rtsom byang rje’i drung gi mtshan la g.yar ba zhig gzhan zhig gis byas pa byung ste rnying ma pa mtha’ dag ma mos pa nas de’i lan dang rtsom tshul la dogs pa dpyad pa drang po’i sa bon zhes bya ba mdzad ||*.

12 *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *’gyur byang*).

colophons, to differentiate between translator's and translation colophons. The term 'gyur byang occurs at least thrice in the 'Phang thang ma, but my impression is that it was employed not only in the sense of 'translator's/translation colophon', as was largely to be understood later, but also in the sense of a 'list of [works in Tibetan] translation', without establishing much difference between the two.¹³ This seems to have also been the case with the term *mtshan byang*, which meant both 'title' and 'title list'.¹⁴

3.3 Editor's/edition colophon

The third type of colophon is the 'editor's/edition colophon' (*zhus byang*). Interestingly, the specification of this type of colophon appears but a recent development meaning the Tibetan term *zhus byang* is clearly a neologism, coined, for example, by the editors of the *bKa' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* (2006–2009).¹⁵ Although the term *zhus byang* seems to have been coined recently, the theory and practice of 'edition/editing' (*zhu/s dag*), initially and primarily associated with the Tibetan theory and practice of translation, seems to be quite old. Nor brang o rgyan, for example, reports the translation of scriptures and treatises having undergone four phases/types of edition/editing (*zhu dag*),¹⁶ i.e., 'fresh/raw edition' (*smar zhus*), 'reedition' (*yang zhus*), 'revisory edition' (*bskyar zhus*), and 'established/ finalized edition' (*gtan la phab pa'i zhu dag*), or, the 'great edition' (*zhu chen*) as Dung dkar Blo bzang phrin las (1927–1997) dubs it. Dung dkar prescribes these editorial practices for preparing xylographic editions of Tibetan texts.¹⁷ According to the four kinds/phases of edition/editing, he also speaks of

13 'Phang thang ma (p. 50.13): 'gyur byang gzhan las smos pa'i gsung rab kyi mtshan la; *ibid.* (p. 65.2): *sngags nang pa'i 'gyur byang gzhan na bzhugs*; mKhan po Kun dpal, sPyod 'jug tshig 'grel (p. 807.10): *lo tsā ba'i 'gyur byang*. In U rgyan gling pa's *Padma bka' thang* (pp. 524.1–532.18), where 'gyur byang is used repeatedly, the term refers to the enumerations of scriptures and treatises in Tibetan translation. The term 'gyur byang, which occurs in the 'Phang thang ma, and which should actually mean 'list of [works in Tibetan] translation', has been rendered in Halkias 2004, 71 and 82 wrongly as '(translation) colophon'.

14 'Phang thang ma (p. 3.9–11): ...*sngar dha rma bsgyur zhing zhu chen bgyis pa'i mtshan byang rmying zhig mchis pas gzhi bzung ste | sgo sgo na mtshan byang mchis pa yang gtugs |*.

15 lDong Chu shel, *bKa' 'gyur dpe bsdur dkar chag* (B, vol. 108, p. 140.10).

16 For an explanation of the four phases of editing, or, four types of edition, see the *Nor brang gsung rtsom* (p. 474.2–17).

17 *Dung dkar gsung rtsom* (p. 408.13). Terminologically, one can hardly differentiate *yang zhus* from *bskyar zhus* and the attempt to differentiate between the two appears to be rather forced.

the four subtypes of editors (*zhus dag pa*), namely, ‘fresh/raw editor’ (*smar zhus pa*), ‘revisory editor’ (*bskyar zhus pa*), ‘re-editor’ (*yang zhus pa*), and ‘great editor’ (*zhus chen pa*) in this sequence.¹⁸

Tibetan tradition, to my knowledge, is unaware of a separate editor’s/edition colophon corresponding to the four types of editor/edition, but, if any such thing exists, it is one general editor’s/edition colophon. In spite of this, it appears beneficial to differentiate conceptually, regarding the, ‘author’s and authorship colophons’, between (a) an ‘editor’s colophon’, i.e., an editorial statement by the editor himself, and an ‘edition colophon’, i.e., a statement about the editing composed by someone else. Similarly in terms of the Tibetan tradition, it seems necessary to differentiate between (b) an editor’s/edition colophon pertinent to *translation* and an editor’s/edition colophon pertinent to the subsequent *transmission* of non-Tibetan, mainly Indic, texts in Tibetan translation and of autochthonous works composed in Tibetan. Furthermore, the Tibetan term *zhu/s dag* appears to be used in the sense of both what may be dubbed ‘critical editing’ carried out by a learned scholar and the simple ‘proofreading’ or ‘checking’ of a copied text (*bu dpe*) against its *Vorlage* (*ma dpe*) carried out by a scribe or copyist. The kind of edition (*zhus dag*) whose necessity Mi pham rNam rgyal rgya mtsho (1846–1912) vehemently defends,¹⁹ namely, the edition of the Tantric scriptures transmitted in the *rNying ma rgyud ’bum* and works of Klong chen pa Dri med ’od zer (1308–1364), which seeks to eliminate the textual errors (*yig skyon*) comprising of omissions, interpolations, and corruptions/aberrations (*chad lhag dang yig skyon* ≈ *chad lhag nor gsum*) based on all extant textual witnesses and the editor’s prudence, can be considered an example of ‘critical edition’. When dealing with a collection, whether in a manuscript or xylographic form, a colophonic statement on the critical edition may be found towards the end of the collection. One is also likely to find detailed information on such an edition in the catalogue of the collection.²⁰ Remarks such as ‘edited/proofread/checked once’ (*gcig zhus*) and ‘edited/proofread/checked twice’ (*lan gnyis zhus*) found usually at the end of a manuscript may be regarded as an ‘editor’s/edition colophon’ indicating a ‘proof-reader’s colophon’, most likely penned by a copyist or a scribe. A possible

Also note that for Nor brang, *yang zhus* it is the second phase of edition, whereas for Dung dkar, it is the third.

¹⁸ Dung dkar *gsung rtsom* (pp. 416.14–417.10).

¹⁹ Mi pham, *dKar chag rin chen me long* (pp. 27.20–29.17).

²⁰ Mi pham’s *dKar chag me tog phreng ba*, a catalogue of the writings of Rong zom pa Chos kyi bzang po (Almogi 1997) and *dKar chag rin chen me long*, a catalogue of the writings of Klong chen pa, are good examples of catalogues that provide interesting details about the critical edition of a collection.

explanation as to why an ‘editor’s/edition colophon’ did not emerge as a distinct type of colophon, in spite of its presence as a phenomenon, is due to it not being considered separate from that which could be referred to in general as a ‘production colophon’, commonly appended to large collections – whether in manuscript or xylographic form – and which was anyway often composed by the editors or scholars in charge. Interestingly, a Tibetan term for a ‘production colophon’, i.e. ‘printing colophon’ exists for a xylographic ‘edition’ (*dpar/spar/par byang*), but no equivalent specific Tibetan term appears to exist for a manuscript edition.

3.4 Printing colophon

The fourth type of colophon is the ‘printing colophon’ (*dpar/spar/par byang*). At least three orthographic variations of the term can be found.²¹ It may be taken for granted that ‘printing colophon’ initially referred exclusively to ‘xylograph colophon’. Xylograph colophons are often lengthy and very informative, presumably due to the fact that the preparation of a xylograph edition is a very costly and prestigious enterprise.²² The author himself may compose the ‘xylograph colophon’ while preparing a xylographic edition of his own work.²³ According to Padma bkra shis, ‘printing colophon’ was initially a ‘printing colophon [consisting of] verses of aspiration’ (*dpar byang smon tshig*) and contained names of donors (*rgyu dngos shyor mkhan*), verses of auspiciousness and aspirational wishes (*bkra shis smon lam*).²⁴ More recently, however, the term *dpar/spar/par byang* may no longer solely refer to xylograph colophon but to any ‘printing colophon’.

²¹ My impression is that *dpar* and *spar* must be verbs and *par* noun. But the verb *dpar* in the sense of ‘to print’ does not seem to be attested, only as perfect and future form of *dpor* meaning ‘to dictate’ (Jäschke 1881, s.v. *dpar*). Strangely, the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *dpar* & *dpar ma*) treats *dpar* = *par* and *dpar ma* = *par ma*. There *dpar* and *par* have not been considered to be verbs. Moreover, *spar ba* is the perfect and future form of *spor ba*, which means to ‘ignite, lit’, ‘to raise or lift’, or ‘to change or transfer’ (archaic).

²² For a detailed description of the *dpar byang*, see Padma bkra shis, *gNa’ dpe’i nam bshad* (pp. 137.14–183.24).

²³ See Mi pham, *dBu ma rgyan ’grel* (pp. 496.7–499.3).

²⁴ Padma bkra shis, *gNa’ dpe’i nam bshad* (pp. 137.14–138.6).

3.5 Scribe's/copyist's/calligrapher's colophon

The fifth type of colophon is the 'scribe's/copyist's/calligrapher's colophon' (*bris byang*),²⁵ it is clearly distinct from its homophone *bri byang* mentioned in the '*Phang thang ma*, which means 'manual of drawing or diagrams'.²⁶ With some justification, however, the terms 'scribe' and 'copyist' may be employed synonymously and interchangeably. Occasionally, however, there seems to be a need to differentiate the two. A close disciple or confidant of an author might offer to function as a 'scribe' (*yig mkhan*; *yi ge pa*),²⁷ meaning he would put into writing the texts dictated by the author directly or prepare a final version of the text by copying from the autograph. This may have been done in direct consultation with the author. In this sense, a *yig mkhan* or *yi ge pa* is something similar to the author's personal secretary (*drung yig*). But the term *yig mkhan* is not so confined. It refers to any copyist, a *bshu 'bri* (or, *bri shu*) *byed mkhan*, but appears to be a neologism. One may, in theory, speak of a 'scribe's colophon' for the former instance – which would be, if anything, included/integrated into the author's colophon – and a 'copyist's colophon' for the latter. Scribe's/copyist's colophons are clearly less common, one possible reason being that the names of scribes or copyists often occur in one of the other types of colophons. For instance, they are often mentioned in the author's colophon, referring, of course, to the scribe of the autograph, or in the editor's colophon. Their names are often mentioned in colophons of particularly important or famous works.²⁸ Occasionally, however, they are also mentioned in historical accounts concerning the production of large collections. Unfortunately, scribe's/copyist's colophons, if they exist at all, are for the most part, not taken on when the texts are copied. For the modern scholar of the Tibetan textual tradition, this is quite lamentable. Occasionally, however, two (or more) scribe's colophons have been transmitted. Rong zom pa's collected writings contain an example.²⁹ Regarding deluxe manuscript editions of sacred

25 The term *bris byang* is well attested. See, lCang skya's *brGyad stong pa'i bris byang* (pp. 538.5–539.1): *ces pa 'di ni dad brtson nam dpyod thos pa phun sum tshogs shing | nyams len la gzhol ba ja sag bla ma bstan 'dzin chos dar gyis bka' brgyad stong pa gser gyis bris pa'i bris byang 'di lta bu zhig dgos zhes bskul ba'i ngor | shakya'i [= shākya'i] dge slong lCang skya rol pa'i rdo rjes sbyar ba'i yi ge pa ni dpyod ldan dka' bcu bstan 'dzin rgya mtsos bgyis pa'o ||*.

26 '*Phang thang ma* (p. 63.10–11). According to the context, *bri byang* seems to mean 'chart with sketches' (of a *maṇḍala*).

27 *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *yig mkhan* 1): *yi ge pa'am drung yig |... ming gi nam grangs la drung yig dang | 'bri mkhan | smyig can | smyu gu can | yi ge pa | yi ge'i mkhan po bcas so ||*.

28 See the scribes' colophon in the *sGra sbyor* (p. 205.13–18).

29 Almogi 1997, 160–161.

scriptures, a calligrapher responsible for copying the text with golden ink on blue paper could commission his own colophon. For example, Ja sag bla ma bsTan 'dzin chos dar, the calligrapher responsible for writing the text of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* in gold, requested the eighteenth-century dGe lugs scholar lCang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717–1786) to write a 'calligrapher's colophon' for him'. lCang skya's colophon is interesting for it has its own author's colophon featuring the name of an erudite scholar, dKa' bcu bsTan 'dzin rgya mtsho, mentioned as a scribe (*yi ge pa*). Interestingly, some Tibetan sources refer to names of several scribes and their calligraphic styles from the early period of dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet.³⁰ More usually, however, the scribe remain anonymous.

3.6 Treasure/revelation colophon

For the sake of completeness, one may briefly allude to the concept of the 'treasure colophon' or 'revelation colophon' (*gter byang*), which is peculiar only to those Tibetan texts said to have been revealed or rediscovered by 'treasure revealers' (*gter ston/bton*). The referent of the term *gter byang* is not particularly obvious. It may be supposed that *gter byang* refers to the 'treasure/revelation colophon' containing details on the concealer, destined revealer, time and place of revelation, and so on. Samten Karmay, for example, understands the term in such a way, rendering it as the 'colophon of the "rediscovery"'.³¹ The impression, however, remains that *gter byang* is used largely in the sense of 'treasure discovery guide'. This calls out for further investigation.

3.7 Miscellaneous (sub)types of Tibetan colophons

In the Tibetan textual tradition, certain types or subtypes of colophons can be observed that appear to have no corresponding Tibetan terms. Five examples are examined here. The first appears to have no separate term for what may be called the 'compiler's/compilation colophon'.³² The second, 'production colophon' can be found in some manuscript editions of large collections, and occasionally, as in the case of the *Tshal pa bka' 'gyur*, also at the end of each individual section. As seen above, in xylographic editions these production colophons overlap with

³⁰ Rab rgyas & Rin chen, *Ri mo'i nram gzhaq* (pp. 26.4–27.2).

³¹ Karmay 2007, 218.

³² For an example of compiler's colophon see *Rong zom gsung 'bum* (vol. 2, pp. 638–640).

the printing colophon for which there is a Tibetan term, however in manuscript editions of large collections no specific term can be found. Some modern scholars dub a colophon, that is merely appended to specific sections, as a ‘section colophon’.³³ To my knowledge no separate Tibetan term has been attested either for a production colophon in general or for a section colophon in particular, aside from the term ‘printing colophon’, that excludes similar colophons in manuscript editions, and the rather new term editor’s/edition colophon. The third features colophons of varying kinds occasionally found at the end of each chapter of a work commonly referred to by modern scholars as ‘chapter colophon’. No Tibetan term appears to exist here either. In the fourth, no Tibetan word could be traced referring to an inscription at the end of a text merely stating a ‘text with the title X is herewith completed’, often also mentioning the name of the author. This part has been considered by Jacob Dalton and Sam van Schaik to be an ‘explicit’ because it happens to be the last line in a manuscript,³⁴ whereby Cathy Cantwell and Rob Mayer dub it a ‘terminating colophon’.³⁵ Fifth and finally, one encounters what may be termed a ‘donor colophon’ but this too appears to have no specific term in Tibetan.

4 Organization of Tibetan colophons

The structures and features of colophons vary, depending on the type of colophon, the work’s importance, literary genre, size and scope, the text’s history, and uniqueness, and not least the idiosyncrasy of the colophon’s author. It is thus extremely difficult if not impossible for one general statement to satisfactorily describe the structure and features of colophons in the Tibetan textual tradition. However, some general remarks may be ventured here. First, colophons of later periods tend to be more complex, detailed, and informative than those from the distant past. The exception being that a colophon of a more recent work of minor size, scope, and importance may be extremely minimalistic,³⁶ whereas a colophon

³³ Harrison 1996, 78.

³⁴ Dalton and van Schaik 2006, xxvi, 43, etc.

³⁵ Cantwell and Mayer use the term ‘terminating colophon’ in their ‘Catalogue of the *Rig ’dzin Tshe dbang nor bu rNying ma’i rgyud ’bum*’, which is available on several digital platforms. The same expression has been used, in Bandury 2006, 82. In the latter, however, it seems to be used in contradistinction to ‘chapter colophon’.

³⁶ See, dPal sprul’s *rDo rje’i thol glu* (p. 83.4): *a bu hral pos gang shar smras so ||*; *ibid.* (p. 29.4): *dpal sprul pas so ||*.

of an ancient work may have detailed colophons, particularly if it is important or bears controversial textual history. An example of the latter is the translation colophon of the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*.³⁷ Second, an author's/authorship colophon of translated works tends to be generally much simpler and shorter than an author's colophon of an autochthonous Tibetan work. Exceptions occur here too. The author's/authorship colophon found in the Tibetan translation of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is more elaborate than several author's colophons of Tibetan works. Some author's colophons of Tibetan works merely state: '[Composed] by X'. Third, canonical works may have one or more layers within the same type of colophon. For instance, several translation colophons recorded chronologically are to be found in a scripture translated several times. The largest version of the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures is said to have six translation colophons.³⁸ As mentioned earlier, a work – for instance, a super-commentary – may contain several layers of an author's colophon. Similarly, there may be more than one layer of a scribe's colophon. The simplest form of colophon seems to be the one referred to by Mayer and Cantwell as a 'terminating colophon', that only contains the title of the work and a completion phrase (*rdzogs so*). Fourth, a work may have one or more levels in colophons of various kinds. Cases also exist in which a certain colophon contains its own colophon, that is to say, a colophon of the colophon. Cases are also to be found of double author's colophons in which a subsequent master has updated an earlier work whose subject is the transmission lineage of a certain tradition.³⁹ An example of double author's colophons has also been found in which two independent works (i.e. two biographies of a single master) have been merged together, including the colophons.⁴⁰

Fifth, one may reasonably assume that at the very beginning of Tibetan textual culture, the structure of colophons had not been standardized, over time, however, it was to become more and more uniform. It is conceivable that the standardization of authorship and translator's/translation colophon of Indian works in Tibetan translation took place during the process of different phases of

37 Tibskrit (s.v. *Avataṃsaka*).

38 *Bu ston chos 'byung* (p. 216.10–12): *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa stong phrag brgya pa bam po sum brgya ste nyang khams pa go cha | bai ro tsa na | lce khyi 'brug | zhang ye shes sde la sogs pa'i 'gyur byang drug yod par grag go |*

39 For example, bDud 'joms 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje has added some verses in Mi pham's *bKra shis grub pa'i dbyangs snyan*, and thus also a second colophon explaining the addition. The version used in this paper, however, seems to only contain the augmented verses without the augmented colophon. See, Mi pham, *bKra shis grub pa'i dbyangs snyan* (p. 608.8–10). This requires further examination.

40 Almogi 1997, 227–228.

revision ordered by royal decree (*bka' bcad/bcas*). Thus the general pattern of the authorship colophon of Indian works in Tibetan translation became: 'Work title + author's names, often including his title (e.g., Ācārya) + ergative particle (marking the logical subject of the transitive verb) + the word 'composed' + the word 'completed' followed by a final particle (i.e., *rdzogs so*)'.⁴¹ Even regarding author's colophons of later Tibetan works, despite the idiosyncrasies of individual authors (or editors) and the nature and scope of the work, a general pattern can be seen. The actual colophon is frequently preceded by verses of epilogue of varying size. In some cases, these verses feature this introduction: 'The following is stated (*'dir smras pa*)'. Often the verses end with a dedication and an aspirational wish. The closing particle *ces* (and its various forms depending on the *saṃdhi* rules) marks that the colophon begins.⁴²

Sixth, author's (or authorship) colophons are mostly written in prose, even when the entire work is composed in verse but the opposite may also be true. It is even possible that the verses of an epilogue contain information normally expected in the colophon proper.⁴³ Such information is particularly valuable as it is most likely by the author himself rather than information tampered with by subsequent editors. Seventh, graphically colophons found in manuscripts may be written in smaller letters or dBu med ('Headless') script, and occasionally in differently coloured ink.

⁴¹ See the authorship colophon found in the Tibetan translation of Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamaka-lāma-kāra* (Ichigō 1985, 336): *dbu ma'i rgyan 'di ni slob dpon zhi ba 'tsho bdag dang gzhan gyi grub pa'i mtha'i rgya mtsho'i pha rol tu son pa 'phags pa ngag gi dbang phyug gi zhabs kyi padma rnog pa med pa'i ze 'bru spyi bos len pas mdzad pa rdzogs so ||*. See also the syntax of the author's colophon in n. 43: [I, Rong zom] Chos kyi bzang po composed this as a *pañjikā* of the *Śrīguhyagarbha[tantra]* (*dpal ldan snying po'i dka' 'grel du || 'di ni chos kyi bzang pos byas ||*). We may also translate this in the passive case: 'This was composed by [me, Rong zom] Chos kyi bzang po as a *pañjikā* of the *Śrīguhyagarbha[tantra]*'. In either case, Chos kyi bzang po is the logical subject of the transitive verb *byas*, which is clearly marked with the ergative particle *s*.

⁴² See mKhan po Kun dpal, *sPyod 'jug tshig 'grel* (p. 811.15).

⁴³ Rong zom pa, *dKon mchog 'grel* (p. 249.16–17): *bla ma dam pa tshul khrims bzang || de sogs zhabs la phyag btsal nas || dpal ldan snying po'i dka' 'grel du || 'di ni chos kyi bzang pos byas ||*. See also Almogi 1997, 133–134. Nyang ral, *Nang ral chos 'byung* (p. 500.16–21): *lho brag dpal gyi dngon pa gcig pu ru || sams can kun la brtse ba'i thugs rje can || bdud rtsi zhig po zhes zhes pa'i 'khrul zhig dam pa dang || 'jig rten mgon po rin po che || rgyal ba'i sras po thu bo che ye yis || yang yang bskul mar btab pa'i ngor byas nas || bka' gter mang po ji snyed legs gzigs nas || nyang ban nyi ma 'od zer bsam pa dwangs pas byas || rang bzo ra chod [= ras gcod] spangs te yi ger bkod ||*.

5 Information found in Tibetan colophons

One of the main reasons Tibetan colophons have attracted the attention of modern scholars is the invaluable source of information they can provide. This information may be classified into at least five kinds: (1) bibliographical, (2) historical-philological, (3) biographical, (4) socio-cultural or socio-economical, and (5) spiritual-ideological. Firstly, bibliographical information, primarily indicates facts about the title of the work, authorship, date or duration of composition, and place of composition. In ideal cases, all such details may be found there.⁴⁴ It has already been asserted that the title occurring in the author's colophon is to be taken more seriously, particularly if it deviates from the title found on the title page or catalogue, as it is most likely to be the original title. Such bibliographical information can also be very useful in the study of the life and works of pertinent authors or related persons. Earlier, I have indicated that there was no convention in the Tibetan tradition for providing bibliographical lists of works employed by authors, for the composition of a certain work or the practice of providing exact references to their citations and quotations. However, some authors do occasionally provide a list of their sources, at least the major ones, in the colophon.⁴⁵ Thus colophons can be a useful source of bibliographical information for these purposes too. In addition, whenever applicable, an author's colophon also mentions the name of the petitioner (*zhu ba po*), at whose behest the work was composed.

Second, historical-philological information, largely indicates facts related to the history of the text in question; its composition and transmission, sources and versions, editorial guidelines and methods, and so on. Regarding translated literature, information on the source language (i.e., whether the translation in question has been made from Sanskrit, Chinese, Khotanese, and so on), beside the names of translators also the place of translation, circumstances under which the translation was carried out and at whose initiative, number of revisions; and occasionally also manuscripts consulted for the translation or revision, and so forth – all of which may be subsumed under the category of historical-philological information. Most importantly, colophons of xylograph editions, such as those of large manuscript collections, often inform us about the master copies consulted and the editorial policies employed. These colophons are therefore very often inexhaustible sources of information regarding traditional Tibetan textual criticism.

⁴⁴ The author's colophon of Mi pham's commentary on Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* is a good example. See his *dBu ma rgyan 'grel* (pp. 494.5–496.6).

⁴⁵ Thub bstan chos grags, *sPyod 'jug 'grel bshad* (pp. 876.21–880.6); Mi pham, *rNam 'grel 'grel pa* (pp. 557.22–558.14).

Some scribal colophons also mention the master-copy from which the text was copied, e.g., in the manuscript edition of the *Madhyavyutpatti*.⁴⁶ Some scribes justify why the task of copying had been undertaken and plead others to follow suit. A scribe's motive to preserve 'extremely rare texts' (*shind tu dkon pa'i dpe*) may also be detected.⁴⁷

Third, colophons, particularly, author's colophons, can be of immense value as biographical sources. When a prolific writer exhibits the habit of composing detailed colophons loaded with information, one is able to map his entire intellectual career or personal life on the basis of these colophons. Traditional Tibetan scholars, such as Mi pham's biographer, for instance, do not seem to have always recognized the value of colophons and thus not utilized them to the optimum when writing the biography of their masters. Author's colophons may also reveal deeply personal information; the author's character, and his psychological and physical state at the time of composing the work. They reveal details on the author's way of life, and tell us of their own self-perception:⁴⁸ some may reveal extreme arrogance, extreme modesty or self-deprecation,⁴⁹ or, for that matter, extreme honesty.

Fourth, colophons, particularly of xylograph editions, important works,⁵⁰ or large manuscript collections, provide rich information on the socio-cultural or socio-economical aspects of the time and place of production. As the preparation of a xylograph edition is far more costly than the preparation of a manuscript edition – for in addition to the paper, ink, and employment of scribes to prepare the manuscript master copy, a great amount of wood was required, which in the overwhelmingly dry Tibetan plateau was immensely costly, and involved the employment of numerous carvers and metal workers. Artists were often employed

⁴⁶ *sGra sbyor* (p. 205.13–14).

⁴⁷ *sGra sbyor* (p. 205.15–18).

⁴⁸ Sa skya paṇḍita, *sDom gsum rab dbye* (Rhoton 2002, 323): *sdom pa gsum gyi rab ru dbye ba zhes bya ba | chos dang chos rna yin pa mam par 'byed pa'i bstan bcos | mang du thos pa'i nor dang ldan pa | rigs pa dang mi rigs pa dpyod par nus pa'i blo gros can | sde snod 'dzin pa kun dga' rgyal mtshan dpal bzang pos sbyar ba rāzogs so ||*; Rhoton 2002, 200 (English translation).

⁴⁹ See, dPal sprul's *rDo rje'i thol glu* (pp. 126.17–127.2): *'dir smras mdo kham sblad du skyes pa'i mi || dug gsum me ltar 'bar ba'i btsun chung po || a bu mdo med khyi rgan lhod po des || snying grogs khyod la phul ba dge gyur cig ||*. The author was, however, not always self-deprecating and described himself as 'one whose three poisons (i.e., *dveṣa*, *rāga*, and *moha*) are blazing like fire' and as an 'old laid-back/lazy dog'. See *ibid.* (p. 22.8–10): *zhes pa 'di gnas dang mthun pa'i mgur 'di lung rig smra ba'i nyi ma o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang pos smras pa dge legs 'phel ||*. Here, he calls himself 'the sun of the exponent of authoritative scriptures and logical reasons'.

⁵⁰ See, Padma kun grol's printing colophon of the collected writings of Rong zom pa cited and discussed in Almogi 1997, 122–126, cf. 127–128.

to draw miniatures alongside (most importantly) highly qualified editors. These printing colophons are very often quite long and abundant in details, providing, the names of the donors, editors and occasionally the names of important scribes or calligraphers, the number of people employed, their wages or presents and benefits received and so on. In this manner, such colophons provide intricate detail shedding great light on the social, cultural, and economic aspects of book production in Tibet.

Fifth, colophons also provide direct and indirect information on the spiritual orientation, religious affiliation, and sectarian prejudices of the author.⁵¹ They contain elements of self-promotion, not only of the authors themselves but also their religious traditions. A final note is necessary, for a degree of caution has to be taken regarding the information found in colophons, and whenever possible, cross-checked with parallel information in other catalogues and biographical or historical sources. By the same token, information provided in biographical and historical sources may often be confirmed, clarified and even put into question by consulting colophons of various kinds.

6 Epilogue

In conclusion, I would like to point out that gaining a nuanced and accurate picture of the phenomenon of colophons in the Tibetan textual tradition from both its diachronic and synchronic perspectives requires a far more detailed investigation. I hope, nonetheless, that the contribution here at least conveys a general but more or less accurate and representative picture of this complex phenomenon.

⁵¹ See, for example, Mi pham, *dBu ma rgyan 'grel* (pp. 496.7–499.3); 'Od gsal snying po (pp. 604.8–605.16); *bKa' brgyad nam bshad* (pp. 177.9–185.12); *Yang dag nam bshad* (pp. 375.18–379.2).

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