

Introduction. Typologies in Tibetan Literature: Genre or Text Type? Reflections on Previous Approaches and Future Perspectives

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1 Introduction

A typology reduces a near-infinity of examples to a limited number of types, classes, and subclasses for the sake of better comprehension. Textual genres are such typologies; they assign certain texts to a specific text type. Speakers often do this intuitively, while it is done more systematically in literary studies. What purpose do typologies serve? In everyday interaction, allocating a text to a certain class is vital to basic communication: we instinctively know to distinguish a letter from an advertisement, we expect certain things from a novel, and may fear a school report. For those concerned with the study of literature, division into genres serves to generate a framework of comprehension as well as to interpret and evaluate texts and textual corpora.¹ In modern literary studies, genres are not thought of as normative categories or existing ontological entities but rather as “historically and culturally relative categorisations that are established via communication and thus socially shared.”² Since by default genres are blurred, changing, and bound to the cultural discourse of a given period, developing a textual typology is demanding. Consequently, examining the transformations of genres may be the most fruitful way to approach them.³ Literary studies have discussed the related challenges at length, mostly with ‘occidental’ literature as main referent.⁴ The tripartite ‘natural’ or ‘inherent’ categories of lyric, epic, and drama that emerged from a specifically European cultural context comply neither with current research nor with the actual

1 Zymner 2011: 7–8. On text types in every-day use (such as letter, report, etc.), see Brinker 2010: 122–24 and Dimter 1981: 28–37. I would like to especially thank Roger Jackson for reading an earlier version of this paper and Volker Caumanns, Marta Sernesi, and Peter Schwioger for their helpful remarks.

2 Zymner 2011: 10, 18.

3 Raible 1996: 72.

4 For an overview of the genre debates in literary studies, see Zymner 2011 and the more extensive Zymner 2003; cf. Adamzik 2007 and Dammann 2000. For research in the study of ‘non-occidental’ genres, see especially the contributions in Conermann and El Hawary 2011.

range of literary works—and such categories certainly cannot be applied to the textual output generated on the Tibetan plateau.⁵ However, Tibet’s textual traditions, heavily influenced by Indian literary ideals and Buddhist religion, manifest an abundance of textual classes that have developed during the course of history—classes we will provisionally call “genres” or “text types”. Scholars in pre-modern Tibet did not theorise extensively about genre or literature, but, encountering a mass of texts, developed implicit schemes and classifications through their cataloguing of work titles, tables of contents, and the like. As the pragmatic goal of organisation was different in each case, such categories were by no means homogenous.⁶

As Ulrike Roesler points out in this volume, understanding native Tibetan categorisations and developing analytical tools and meta-typologies for the academic researcher is useful for both pragmatic reasons (such as database and library organisation) and for theoretical comprehension. Jeffrey Schoening suggested more than twenty years ago that: “genre classification may be a key to understanding a whole tradition.”⁷ Systematic study will further clarify how we may relate the concepts of genre, literature, or text type to a textual culture that has only recently identified a term (namely *rtsom rig*) that bears some similarity to the general notion of literature in Western academia.⁸ Moreover, such study may also help to locate Tibetan literary genres in the comparative context of other literatures—as difficult as such an enterprise may be.⁹ If one considers the elaborate discussions and reflections undertaken in English literature, Slavonic Studies, or Roman and German Studies, it becomes clear that

5 For a discussion of contemporary concepts of the traditional *trias* as a systematic genre category, see Dammann 2000: 552–54; see also Zymner 2003: 10–33, for the historical developments of genre distinctions and *ibid.*: 48–53, for an account and critique of genre as an ontological category. For applying concepts of ‘literature’ and ‘genre’ to Tibetan texts, see below as well as the contributions by Ulrike Roesler and Roger Jackson in this volume. Cf. also Cabezón and Jackson 1996: 19, 29.

6 Schwieger 2011: 262. On the different Indo-Tibetan and Tibetan classifications during the course of history, see especially the paper of Roesler in this volume.

7 Schoening 1988: 426.

8 In “Ascendancy of the term *rtsom yig*,” Hartley 2007: 8–12, shows conclusively how the earliest use of the term *rtsom yig* for ‘literature’ can most probably be dated to in 1955 to render the Chinese *wenxue* in Mao’s speeches about literature. The term became slightly more widespread in the 1980s (*ibid.*: 17) but the actual discourse about Tibetan literature (*bod kyi rtsom yig*) as opposed to *snyan ngag* only started in the 1990s (*ibid.*: 18 ff.).

9 See Venturino 2007: 2–5 and 2004, for a discussion of modern Tibetan literature in the context of world literature.

there is an overall lack of systematic research in ‘pre-modern’ ‘non-occidental’ textual cultures.¹⁰

It is thus not surprising that, despite some substantial earlier attempts, the investigation of Tibetan texts from a literary perspective and the systematic analysis of Tibetan genres are still relatively young. The number of Tibetan texts that are becoming available, however, is constantly growing. To date, the most comprehensive study of literary genres remains *Tibetan Literature—Studies in Genre* (1996), edited by José I. Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson. Its introduction discusses Tibetan literature and genre, suggesting a genre typology; the papers contained examine a range of individual genres.¹¹ While some address a genre in broader perspective (for example David Jackson’s on *bstan rim* or Leonard van der Kuijp’s examination of historiographical texts) others (such as Donald Lopez’s on *dgag lan*) are concerned with a single instance of an individual genre.

Since then, an increasing number of publications—mostly to be found as chapters of monographs, articles or conference papers—have generated further knowledge about the genres examined in *Tibetan Literature*, as well as text types not covered by the volume. While some text types, such as songs (*mgur*), meditation instructions (*khrid*), spiritual biographies (*rnam thar*) or legal documents have received further attention, others, such as question and answer texts (*dris lan*) or art-related genres remain relatively unstudied; legal documents have received further attention in various research projects.¹²

10 Conermann and El Hawary 2011: 316–17.

11 The following genres were studied in Cabezón and Jackson (1996): history and biography (historiography [*lo rgyus*, *rgyal rabs*, *chos 'byung*]; Indian *rnam thar*), canonical texts (*bka' gyur*, *sūtra* and *śāstra* commentaries, Bon, and *gter ma* literature), philosophical literature (*grub mtha'*, *bsdud grwa*, *yig cha*, and *dgag lan*), literature on the paths (*bstan rim*, *blo sbyong*, treatises on grounds and paths, *gdams ngag*), ritual (*mchod pa*, *sgrub thabs*, *zhabs brtan*), literary arts (Gesar epic, “poetry” and “songs of experience” [*glu*, *mgur*, *snyan ngag*]), non-literary arts and sciences (grammar, legal literature, *rgyud bzhi*, and art), and finally guidebooks and reference works (*gnas yig*, *dkar chag*).

12 Legal documents had been examined by Schuh (see, for example, Schuh 1983) and in the monographs of the “Diplomata et Epistolae” subseries of the *Monumenta Tibetica Historica* Series (ITBS, Halle). Recently, various publications have dealt with such genres (see, for example, Ramble, Schwiieger, and Travers 2013; Schwiieger 2015). Sources for the history of Tibetan painting have been employed by David P. Jackson, among others, in his recent catalogues for the Rubin Museum. For some research on the *lha mo* theatre, see the contributions in *Lungta* 15 (winter 2001). I have started to reflect about the *dris lan* genre in a presentation at INALCO, Paris (Rheingans 2011b) and plan to complete this research in a future publication; a *dris lan* is discussed and translated in Rheingans 2011a. An extensive survey of all previous research about individual genres would expand the scope of

Some textual phenomena, such as *za'yig* (“what is to be eaten [for ritual purpose]”) or *gdan yig* (“arrangement of the sitting [order]”) go almost unmentioned.¹³ Additionally, a considerable amount of research about Tibetan literature in general touches on genre issues, such as E. Gene Smith’s collection of pioneering introductions in *Among Tibetan Texts* (2001), or, to mention a few others, Ulrike Roesler’s *Frühe Quellen zum buddhistischen Stufenweg in Tibet* (2011), Orna Almogi’s *Contributions to Tibetan Buddhist Literature* (2008), and Kurtis Schaeffer and Leonard van der Kuijp’s *Early Tibetan Survey of Buddhist Literature* (2009).¹⁴ Further, a growing number of publications are concerned with modern Tibetan literature, for example Steven Venturino’s *Contemporary Tibetan Literary Studies* (2007) and Lauren Hartley and Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani’s *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change* (2008).

Since the publication of *Tibetan Literature*, however, only a few papers have tried to come to terms with the issue of systematising Tibetan literary genre itself, most notably Leonard van der Kuijp’s overview “Die Tibetische Literatur” (2002), Orna Almogi’s “Analysing Tibetan Titles” (2005), and Peter Schwieger’s application of text linguistics, “Traditionelle tibetische Textsorten” (2011). Recently, modern Tibetan scholars, for instance Go shul Grags pa ’byung gnas in his *General Forms of Tibetan Literature* (1996), have begun to reflect explicitly on Tibetan literature and genre.¹⁵ Still, given the vast number of unstudied texts, we are—compared to the sophisticated elaborations undertaken by other philologies—still a long way from fully appreciating the entire scope of Tibetan literary genres and their indigenous classifications. We also need to reflect further on useful methodologies for genre analysis. In contemporary literary studies, genre is usually approached from three perspectives: (a) a systematic perspective in which one tries to define literature and genre and discusses text boundaries as well as typologies; (b) a historical perspective in which one attempts to understand the development, contexts, and functions

this introduction beyond reason. For other citations of previous research on genres, see the papers of Jackson and Roesler in this volume and the next section of this introduction. For some previous research on *rnam thar*, see also Rheingans (2014).

- 13 As no one has examined such texts in detail, one may question—as with any genre—whether one should consider texts or passages entitled thus genres by way of their title alone (see also the sections below).
- 14 These works contain some information on the topic, but do not clearly relate to the topic of literary genre, as that is not their central concern.
- 15 For a summary of Go shul Grags pa ’byung gnas 1996, see Roesler in this volume. On the term *rtsom rig* in Tibetan literary discourse, see Hartley 2007.

of genres; and (c) comparative research that seeks to link genres of different language-cultures as well as intra-lingual texts.¹⁶

As the result of a conference panel at the twelfth Tibetan Studies seminar, this volume aims to contribute to understanding Tibetan text types mainly from the perspectives (a) and (b): It offers a platform for articles that deal with observations on particular genres (both pre-modern and contemporary) as well as reflect on classifying genre, the limitation of typologies, and methodologies for the study of Tibetan literature. It thus becomes a differently oriented continuation of the above-mentioned *Tibetan Literature*. While treating a smaller number of genres, it reflects on them in different ways: papers in part one discuss genre typologies, part two deals with blurred genre boundaries, part three concerns specific texts and text types, and part four portrays genres in transition to modernity. The text classes receiving individual attention can be roughly summarised under the terms “songs and songs of experience” (*mgur, nyams mgur*), “offering” (*bla ma mchod pa*), past and present “spiritual biographies” or “hagiographies” (*rnam thar*) and related narratives, encyclopaedia, grammar, oral trickster narratives, and modern literature. This introduction attempts to provide an overview of academic approaches to text typologies. After surveying previous classification strategies, it briefly discusses the text linguistics concept of text type and other analytical angles considered useful for future research. Finally, the contributions in this volume are introduced in greater detail.

2 Classifying Tibetan Texts: Previous Research

The idea to systematise the textual output in Tibetan language is as old as Tibetan Studies themselves. It probably became important to researchers for similar reasons as it had been for traditional scholars of Tibet: from the need to categorize a vast amount of textual material. In this survey, I would like to limit myself to some key contributions of ‘Western’ academia so as not to overlap with Roesler’s excellent study of (mostly) Indo-Tibetan and Tibetan classifications in this volume.¹⁷ Earlier contributions to Tibetan literary

¹⁶ Zymner 2011: 7.

¹⁷ The reader is kindly referred to Roesler’s paper for the retrospective overview and further discussions of work titles, lists, and contemporary approaches; see also Cabezón and Jackson 1996. This section focuses on key contributions to *genre typologies as such*, and works about Tibetan literature that are very closely related. It would extend the scope of this survey too far to include publications about individual genres or about Tibetan

classification were based mainly on attempts to gain access to Tibetan texts and catalogues that were very difficult to acquire at the time. The first efforts were Csoma de Körös' lists, contained in "Enumeration of historical and grammatical works to be met within Tibet" (1838), as well as his *Grammar of Tibetan* (1834), which was drawn mostly from bKa' 'gyur works.¹⁸ The Tibetan canon was a slightly different matter, since it was more easily accessible than autochthonous Tibetan literature.¹⁹ With regard to the texts of the Tibetan plateau, Csoma de Körös' article remained essential for approximately hundred years: Emil Schlagintweit had, with the help of W.W. Rockhill, attempted to get hold of a list of Tibetan writings by issuing a letter to the 13th Dalai Lama in 1902, requesting permission to work on a catalogue of important libraries—the letter went unanswered, likely due to the rising political turmoil in Tibet.²⁰ Johan van Manen's attempt to produce a bibliography from hearsay, i.e. by asking Tibetan lamas to pronounce title lists they had encountered proved quite awkward. Although he certainly put quite some effort into this enterprise, van Manen's paper (1922) could not, of course, have proven academically satisfactory—due to its methodological inadequacy. Van Manen's method and content were criticized as early as 1935 by A. Vostrikov,²¹ who, in his

literature in general (since almost any research based on texts is, in some way, a contribution to the study of Tibetan literature). Further, the many indirect contributions to Tibetan literary genres cannot be mentioned in detail: studies that, for example, made Tibetan lists and printing catalogues available, such as Lokesh Chandra's and Helmut Eimer's manifold contributions (Lokesh Chandra 1959, 1961, 1963; A khu Rin po che's *dPe rgyun dkon pa 'ga' zhiq gi tho yig* in Lokesh Chandra 1963; Eimer 1992–94, 2005) or the bibliographical survey of Martin and Bentor (1997). Nor can this section take into detailed account works that examine mainly the Tibetan reception of Indian literary concepts, such as van der Kuijp's *Sa-skya Paṇḍita on the typology of literary genres* (1986), which mainly focuses on the reception of Tibetan poetry in the *mKhas 'jug*. But the reception of Indian literary concepts in Tibet is certainly a major theme in the study of Tibetan literature (cf. Kapstein 2003) and is addressed directly in Roesler's, Sobkovyak's, and Verhagen's paper in this book.

- 18 Cosma de Körös 1938, 1984 [1934]. Csoma de Körös does not give the sources for his lists, but Vostrikov (1970: 11, n. 19) has later identified for example the *rGyal rab gsal ba'i me long* and *Deb ther sngon po* as his key sources for historical literature.
- 19 Cf. Eimer 2002, who also points out that Csoma de Körös had been one of the pioneers of bKa' 'gyur studies.
- 20 For the letter to the Dalai Lama, see Schlagintweit's documentation "Bericht über eine Adresse an den Dalai Lama in Lhasa (1902) zur Erlangung von Bücherverzeichnissen aus den dortigen buddhistischen Klöstern," published 1905. For the long-term relevance of Csoma de Körös' study in the early period of Tibetology, see Vostrikov 1970: 11–15.
- 21 Van Manen 1922, Vostrikov 1935.

posthumously published *Tibetan Historical Literature* (published in 1962 and translated into English in 1970) put earlier attempts into perspective and first developed an analytical structure for understanding Tibetan historical literature. After a survey of previous research, he systematically studied Tibetan textual genres considered either intended to conserve a tradition's past or to serve as a source for the study of Tibetan history. Vostrikov carried out this impressive survey with the sources available to him, especially in the library of St. Petersburg. He mainly examined texts with titles indicating "historical" content (*lo rgyus*, *rgyal rabs*, *chos 'byung*), and additionally included writings that he identified as a source for historical research, such as *thob yig* and *gsan yig*, as well as chronological treatises, such as *bstan rtsi*.²² Early sources, including such *gter ma* as the *Padma bka' thang*, and geographical texts were also taken into account.

After the above mentioned founding contributions, Manfred Taube was a true opener for the study of the history of Tibetan literature and genre. He recognised the need to systematise the material in libraries into genre categories. Understanding that such texts—stemming from a culture shaped strongly by Buddhist religion—would need their own classification, Taube emphasised the systematic historical examination of texts (and their colophons) available in libraries, along with the thorough study of *gsan yig*, *thob yig*, and *dkar chag*.²³ Over a century earlier, V.P. Vassiljev had hinted at the importance of *gsan yig*, which were later taken as a separate historical genre by Vostrikov and marginally considered by Giuseppe Tucci.²⁴ But Taube was among the few that acknowledged the importance of indigenous lists, and also addressed many of the issues that still pertain today: he used the Indian categories of the "fields

22 See the chapter headings and table of contents of Vostrikov 1970. Van der Kuijp 1996 approaches such texts similarly and uses the term "historiographical literature"; see also Martin and Bendor 1997. One may discuss whether terms like 'historiographical' for *lo rgyus* or 'biographical' for *rnam thar* do justice to the Tibetan material. And it is therefore useful that such terms—like any modern scientific term—are applied on the basis of clear definitions. In any case, these genres were heavily used for the study of Tibetan history. For a discussion of the Tibetan conception of history, see Schwieger 2013; for a discussion about narratological methods with regard to Tibetan *rnam thar*, see Rheingans 2014 and for hagiographies in general, Conermann and Rheingans 2014. For the problem of using *rnam thar* for the study of Tibetan history and a discussion of other sources, see Schwieger 2015.

23 Taube 1969.

24 Vassiljev 1856; Vostrikov 1970. Schoening remarks that Tucci's *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Kyoto: Rinsen, 1980) was mainly interested in historiography rather than genre. On a contemporary study of the *gsan yig* (of A mes zhabs), see Sobisch 2002.

of knowledge” (Skt. *vidyāsthāna*, Tib. *rigs gnas che ba*) and their Tibetan sub-categories (*rigs gnas chung ba*), and expanded them further with those genres that *de facto* form a category but were not explicitly mentioned by Tibetan savants, such as astrology, medicine, etc. The basis of his discussion was the *thob yig* of the Jaya Paṇḍita Blo bzang 'phrin las (1642–1708/15). Taube further undertook the first serious use of *gsung 'bum* catalogues. This method boils down to using indigenous genre categories along with further classes dictated by the given material’s content—and, as we shall see, this still remains a major theme today.

Interestingly, Taube also raised the issue of evaluating the significance of texts by studying their reception. He suggested that repeated occurrence of a text in *thob yig* and mentions of it in *rnam thar* would indicate its use and importance.²⁵ This is a topic that warrants further investigation.²⁶ Taube’s general approach was evident in his first catalogue of Tibetan texts in German libraries (VOHD, Vol. XI, 1, *Tibetische Handschriften und Blockdrucke*); a system that Cabezón and Jackson referred to as one of the most “complete and rationally structured”:²⁷

- I. Canonical texts and commentaries
- II. Esoteric Buddhism
 - A. Consecration and spells
 - B. Offering and devotion
 - C. Prayers and vows
 - D. *Guru yoga*
 - E. Esoteric teachings
 - F. Non-canonical *dhāraṇī* and *sūtra*

25 Taube 1969: 189ff. *et passim*. For a systematic list, see Taube 1966. The research on the material available in libraries published as *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland (VOHD)* has come, and still is coming, to fruition in the various projects guided by Dieter Schuh and Peter Schwieger.

26 Vostrikov also lamented that often in early Tibetology, scholars focused on texts of a given genre that were by no means representative of it. I am planning to address the issue of reception in a future publication about the origin, transmission, and reception of the writings of Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554).

27 Cabezón and Jackson 1996: 28. For the extensive version of Taube’s systematisation, see the table of contents of Taube’s catalogue in Taube 1966: v–vii. I have only given the subsection headings where necessary for the presentation. Cabezón and Jackson (*ibid.*) did question the inclusion of mind-training texts under “Vinaya exegesis” or Prajñāpāramitā in the category of “Logic and epistemology”. I consider the inclusion of non-canonical *sūtras* under “Esoteric Buddhism” debatable, too.

- III. Vinaya exegesis
 - A. Stages of discipline (Śikṣāpada)
 - B. Particular precepts
 - C. Exoteric instructions (*lam rim, blo sbyong*)
- IV. Sciences
 - A. Logic and epistemology (a. Prajñāpāramitā, b. Madhyamaka, c. Abhidharma, d. Logic)
 - B. Linguistics
 - C. Medical science
 - D. Calculative science (a. astrology, b. divination, c. iconometry)
- V. History and geography (a. *rnam thar, lo rgyus*, b. *gsan yig*, c. letters, d. *dkar chag*, e. place descriptions)
- VI. Songs
- VII. Compilations
- VIII. Fragments

In his *Bibliography of Tibetan historical works at the University of Washington*, Jeffrey Schoening (1988) points to a similar strategy for classifying Tibetan historical literature. His paper identifies the following possible methods: (i) the “intrinsic strategy”, using only Tibetan terms, (ii) the “extrinsic strategy”, using only Western terms, and (iii) the “combination strategy”, which outlines a path for future research:

Recognizing the Tibetans lacked written formal criteria for classifying historical genres yet had a tradition of genre classification, study the Tibetan tradition to devise a classification scheme possessing formal criteria which will explain the Tibetans’ traditional use of genre terms, give the rationale for the new classification scheme, and provide guidelines for handling ambiguous situations in order to clarify methods of classifying works.²⁸

This “combination strategy” is not very different from Taube’s general approach. Schoening refers to Gene Smith, who had already pointed out the difficulty of using only Tibetan categories for developing genre classifications by citing the example of the term *dkar chag* due to its varying content (ranging from tables of content to pilgrimage guides etc.) and multi-faceted co-titles. Schoening ultimately recommends the third method, namely to employ both Tibetan and Western categories. But, as he himself did not do so, this strategy

28 Schoening 1988: 425.

remains theoretical. For his own library-catalogue, however, he followed the first strategy, using Tibetan terms only. And, he agrees that, despite the difficulty of relying on the generic designation of the title alone, a title cannot simply be dismissed.²⁹

Orna Almogi (2005) later resumed the systematic discussion of Tibetan work titles, so as to help the cataloguer of large textual corpora assess them more quickly.³⁰ She suggests that for a comprehensive classification, Tibetan titles and the generic terms employed therein should be analysed with regard to the descriptive and ornamental components of the title as well as any additional title, such as the colophon title, which often is more original.³¹ After portraying some traditional ways of naming a text and the reasons for those names, Almogi distinguishes between “genre terms” and “genre category”. An example of this division with reference to the term *dkar chag* is as follows. Texts whose title contain the term *dkar chag* could, depending on content, be in the following genre categories: 1) list of contents, 2) bibliographical lists, 3) inventories or registers, 4) comprehensive catalogues of collections, 5) narrative accounts not containing anything “list like”. At the same time, “1) lists of contents” would possibly include various Tibetan genre terms such as *them byang*, *tho yig* etc.³² She suggests that some categories, such as *nam thar*, should be included in the category of “biography” but also “accounts/narrations”; the category “biography” would then also include works such as *rtogs brjod*, *mdzad nam*, and *nam mgur*, and have “auto-biography” as a further sub-category.³³

It is indeed an achievement—following, in a way, Schoening’s recommendation—to further emancipate genre terms in titles from genre categories, thus subsuming texts with “similar meaning or application”³⁴ under the same genre category and texts with the same title designations under different genre categories. The criteria for the genre categories (“meaning and application”) such as “biography”, “history”, etc. are apparently based on content and structure (or sometimes on a double mention of a term in a title). They do, however, not follow an explicitly outlined rationale. As the examples of *dkar chag* and *nam*

29 Ibid.; for *dkar chag*, see Smith 1970: iii; see also Martin 1996. For a contemporary study that includes various classifications of Tibetan literature, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las, *Bod kyi dkar chag rig pa*.

30 Almogi 2005: 29.

31 Ibid.: 29; for the colophon title, see *ibid.*: 44.

32 Almogi 2005: 37.

33 Ibid.: 39, n. 46. In this note, Almogi also outlines possible sub-categories for the commentarial genre (*grel pa*).

34 Ibid.: 37.

thar show, an extensive sub-categorisation leads to a quite detailed picture of the breadth of Tibetan literary production. The study of titles along with traditional accounts of title designation begun by Almogi will certainly pave the way for a better understanding of genre terms and help to develop guidelines for ambiguous cases of work titles.³⁵ And the issue of work titles and naming is taken up by both Roesler's and Jackson's contributions to this volume.³⁶

In their introduction, Cabezón and Jackson (1996) point out that some Tibetans, though not having the concepts of literature or genre we entertain, may understand their texts as a kind of writing on the five sciences, which is, however, a purely Indian category (this point is taken up by Sobkovyak and Roesler in this volume). Cabezón and Jackson recommend that scholars allow Western and Tibetan perspectives to inform each other—assuming the study is done through careful analysis.³⁷ Having observed some Tibetan scholars' varying classifications when compiling texts into collections, they conclude that some are occasionally form- or function-based but mostly oriented to subject matter. Cabezón and Jackson suggest their own preliminary typology, one that consciously avoids the “school” divisions, Buddhist rubrics (such as *sūtra*/*tantra*), and, most importantly, the distinction of religious vs. secular.³⁸ They propose a manageable number of meta-categories that still allow for subsuming most genres and subgenres. What makes a text belong to a certain category is mostly the title or the heading under which Tibetan scholars have categorised the respective work. As is typical in the study of genre, it is not always clear whether the title, the Tibetan categorisation, or the content plays the decisive role, especially in ambiguous cases.³⁹

- I. History and biography (*lo rgyus*, *rgyal rabs*, *chos 'byung*, *rnam thar*, *gsan yig*, *bl ma'i rgyud*, autobiographies, letters)
- II. Canonical and quasi-canonical texts (rNying ma canon, gSar ma pa canon, Bon po canon, and *gter ma* literature)

35 Almogi ultimately recommends not only a thorough examination that will help clarify categories on the basis of a larger corpus of titles but also research into how a title's composition was conceived of by the tradition. In the long run, she calls for extensive studies of individual categorisations as well as their contents (*ibid.*: 30–36, 45).

36 See, for example, section 3.2. of Roesler's paper in this volume.

37 Cabezón and Jackson: 1996: 29.

38 *Ibid.*: 28.

39 *Ibid.*: 30–31. Here, only the main rubrics and their Tibetan language or English language subgroups (if there is no Tibetan term) are presented. For those genres treated in the volume, see note 11 above.

- III. Philosophical literature (*'grel pa, grub mtha', bsdud grwa, yig cha, dgag lan*, and treatises on various topics such as Abhidharma, Madhyamaka etc.)
- IV. Literature on the paths (*bstan rim, lam rim, blo sbyong, sdom gsum*, treatises on grounds and paths, *gdams ngag*, treatises on various practices such as *rdzogs chen, mahāmudrā, lam 'bras* etc.)
- V. Ritual (*rab gnas, mchod pa, sgrub thabs, zhabs brtan, dbang bskur, mnyung gnas, sbyin sreg*, death rituals, *maṇḍala* construction)⁴⁰
- VI. Literary arts (*sgrung, glu*, poetry: *nyams mgur, synan ngag, bstod tshogs*, novel, treatises on poetry and composition, e.g. *tsom rigs*)
- VII. Non-literary arts and sciences (grammar, law, medicine and pharmacology, astronomy/astrology, mathematics/iconometry, geography/cosmology; painting, sculpture, architecture; drama, music)
- VIII. Guidebooks and reference works (*lam yig, dkar chag, tshig mdzod*, encyclopaedias)

In his overview “Die tibetische Literatur”, van der Kuijp (2002) explicitly concentrates on Buddhist literary arts (“schöne Literatur”) (excluding non-literary texts, biographical, historiographical, and epic literature as well as Bon po texts). The term chosen indicates the aesthetic function of such texts, and he subdivides these genres with regard to their structure in the following way: (1) prose, (2) verse, (3) mixture of prose and verse, and (4) a kind of running poetry (“durchlaufende Dichtung”), which consists of a huge verse foot without any punctuation.⁴¹ Following his paper of 1986, he outlines the key influence on Tibetan literary arts of Tibetan translations of Indian texts, such as Kṣemendra’s *Bodhisattvāvanānakalpatā*.⁴²

Schwieger (2011) uses quite a different approach, following Brinker 2006 [2010] in leaning on the idea of *Textlinguistik* (“text linguistics”). This concept entails distinguishing groups of texts, *Textsorten* (“text type”), by means of criteria that are either common text-external or text-internal. The concept of text type avoids the distinction into “literary” and “non-literary” arts—which is helpful, as those differentiations originate with ‘Western’ notions of literature.⁴³

40 One may remark with regard to the category “ritual” that “ritual” itself is rather an action, whereas the actual texts mentioned, *cho ga* in Tibetan, indicate how the ritual should be carried out. One may thus call these text types “ritual manual” or “ritual prescription”. I would like to thank Peter Schwieger for raising this issue.

41 Van der Kuijp 2002: 116.

42 Ibid.: 116; van der Kuijp 1986.

43 Schwieger 2011: 260–61.

Following Brinker, who considers the text-external pragmatic function and communicative intention as key criteria, Schwieger favours a functional classification of Tibetan texts. He further assumes that the traditional genres emerged from and are thus situated in specific realms of communication/action.⁴⁴ Tibetan categories came to be through a pragmatic interest that developed over time in response to the quickly growing number of texts; as the pragmatic interest was different each case we cannot assume a single system of categorisation.⁴⁵ As opposed to Cabezón and Jackson, Schwieger maintains “religion” as a realm of communication and action, and it remains a distinguishing factor. Schwieger’s approach may be visualised roughly as follows:

- I. Realm of communication: rule and administration
 - Text types according to their predominant function:
 - A. Declarative texts
 - B. Obligative texts
- II. Realm of communication: religion
 - Text types according to function:
 - A. Polemical texts
 - B. Explicative texts
 - C. Normative texts
 - D. Appellative texts
 - E. Poetical texts
- III. Realm of communication: folk and orally transmitted (often overlaps with II)
 - Text types according to function:
 - A. Songs
 - B. Narrative texts

It is evident that narratives and songs are found in both the realm of communication of religion and that of folk and orally transmitted texts—demonstrating that these are not easily divided. Schwieger further outlines how Tibetan scholars came to detailed classifications: in the realm of communication of religion, for example, scholars distinguished canonical Buddhist literature according to their origin (Indian) and rNying ma pa texts by means of their way of transmission (*bka’ ma* or *gter ma*) or their belonging to a certain level of teaching (the nine *yāna*-system).⁴⁶ Such and other classifications along with Tibetan work

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.: 261, 268.

46 Ibid.: 268–69.

titles can amount to detailed genre-designations (see the discussion of Almogi above) and Schwieger thus proposes to use more abstract functional categories for the sake of an overview-typology, such as, for example, the rubric of argumentative texts. Argumentative texts are supposed to persuade the reader of a certain viewpoint (*lta ba*) and would include both the discourses of the Buddha and polemical texts such as *dgag lan*. Explicative texts would comprise not only of the rich commentarial literature with its diverse subcategories, but include descriptions of the path (*bstan rim, lam rim*), treatises on grammar and logic, and ritual prescriptions (*cho ga*). Although a text can have various functions, Schwieger observes that its title usually derives from the predominant function.⁴⁷ A functional approach opens a different perspective; and it further forces us to enquire how to determine exactly the text function (appellative, narrative etc.) and how that function correlates with the work's title.

In the study of genre proper, the contributions of Gene Smith are especially noteworthy. His forewords to reproductions of important Tibetan texts (as mostly collected in Smith 2001) opened the field as no previous works had, and the founding of the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center advanced textual studies to an unprecedented degree. With its technically developed categories, tags, and a growing number of electronically searchable texts, TBRC now allows for advanced storage and data retrieval.⁴⁸

In sum, most academics have considered implicit Tibetan classifications (i.e. canon organization, Tibetan title designations, tables of content-categorisations etc.) incomplete, and expanded them with additional etic categories, which are based on the extant Tibetan texts' content and form. Thereby Tibetologists created an overarching typology with meta-categories (Cabezón and Jackson's typology, Almogi's "genre categories"). In other words, researchers employed a variation of what Schoening called a "combination strategy", which, in essence, Taube (1966, 1969) had already laid out. Such a typology allocates a text to a certain category on the basis of more or less strictly defined criteria of title, content, form/structure. Herein lie a major challenge and various questions. Because it is not always indicated clearly whether a text belongs to a certain type by way of its title designation, what other criterion might we apply? Does, for example, a text entitled *rnam thar* that is focused on praise, belong to the category "praise", even though a Tibetan compiler may have classified the work under the heading *rnam thar*? When is it useful to create

47 Ibid.: 269–70.

48 To take just one example, in his "Tibetan biography: growth and criticism" (2010), Kurtis Schaeffer has made extensive use of the possibilities of databases, most notably TBRC (see especially the chapter "Charting the Growth of Tibetan Biography", *ibid.*: 266 ff.).

the category “narrative texts” (cf. Almogi or Schwieger) or the transcultural category “hagiography” and exclude those (probably rare) texts entitled *rnam thar* that are not narratives of a saint?⁴⁹ Schwieger’s approach stands out to some degree by including such further text-external criteria as pragmatic function and realm of communication—but the function of a text, too, needs to be defined and is not always easy to determine.

Therefore, researchers need a consistent terminology and the clearest possible criteria for what eventually makes a text belong to a certain category in each classificatory scheme. However, as Roger Jackson argues in this volume, the ideal of clear-cut categories is probably impossible, as boundaries are so often blurred. Thus, ways of generally approaching text types from a different angle than categorisation alone—for example genre-transformation or communication (text linguistics, intertextuality)—may yield valuable results, too.⁵⁰ It also seems advisable to follow up on Roesler’s paper in this volume and further examine post-1951 Tibetan scholars’ concepts of Tibetan text types. A further challenge is the comparative scarcity of large-scale studies of individual genres. Digital technique could and will considerably advance the scope of research, but does not necessarily open a different analytical perspective on its own.

3 Text Type, Text Reception, and Prototype

As noted, there are numerous possible ways to further examine Tibetan text types. I would like to briefly mention four prospective perspectives for further research.

(1) From among the academic categorisations, the approach of text linguistics seems advantageous. The concept of literary genre mainly takes into account what is considered “literature”, and was developed for (mostly) secular literature in the Western hemisphere.⁵¹ Definitions of *Textsorte* (hereafter: “text

49 For hagiography as a transcultural category, see Conermann and Rheingans 2014.

50 Cf. Sernesi forthcoming, for a brief summary of intertextuality in its original meaning.

51 In general, the problem with theoretical approaches may be that they become too abstract, bypassing the present challenges of research. The argument, however, that we cannot apply such approaches at all to pre-modern texts (of a different culture) may be dismissed, too—we could then stop our endeavour of academically making sense of texts altogether (regardless of which methodology we use). See, for example, White 2003, for a discussion of the tension between theory and history in the study of (mostly occidental) literary genres. Cf. Rheingans 2013: 71–74, for a very brief discussion of narratological methodologies in Buddhist Studies.

type”), however, emerged from a text-linguistic analysis, where the most common (but not only) objects of study are functional texts, namely non-literary texts that do not aim at aesthetic value but were written for a specific function.⁵² In modern terms, such functional texts would be newspaper articles, flyers, instructions for use, recipes, advertisements, letters, law books, radio broadcasts, etc.⁵³ Although it remains mostly an ideal, most researchers concur that an overarching typology should encompass both literary and non-literary texts under a possible heading “text type” or “class of text types”.⁵⁴ With regard to Tibetan literature, this sounds intuitively appealing: are not many of the texts we encounter written for a specific use, especially the many ritual prescriptions, advice texts, instructions, and even commentaries? If one applies the label “literature” (with, for instance, the criterion “aesthetic value”), it may suit one of two main text type classes—(a) literary text types and (b) functional text types—but, as pointed out, such a criterion may already be problematic.⁵⁵

Text linguistics defines a text as a coherent linguistic and communicative entity and examines in detail both text structure and text function.⁵⁶ “Structure” includes syntactical and thematic analysis. Analysis of the theme covers both content and basic types of thematic exposition, i.e. descriptive, narrative, argumentative, and explicative. Any text is realised as part of a class and each class, or text type, is considered a complex pattern of communication. Text types are then defined on the basis of either common text-internal and/or text-external criteria, in relation to which a multitude of classificatory schemes has been developed.⁵⁷ Text-internal criteria would be structure, that is, recurring syntactical constructions or specific contents. Text-external criteria

52 Rolf (1993: 125), in his in-depth study of German functional texts, cites various definitions of such non-literary works (Belte, van Dyk). For further debate on the distinctions among functional texts, see Rolf 1993: 125–28.

53 Brinker 2010: 14–15.

54 Brinker (2010: 121) concludes that an overarching typology should incorporate both functional and literary text types. Heinemann (2000: 515) suggests that the term “genre” should be limited to aesthetic literature as one of the many text types.

55 Dammann 2000: 558, for example, suggests labelling those texts, that we would give an aesthetic value “literary text types” and, those among them, which are historically developed, are called “genres”. In the Tibetan context, aesthetic concepts often derive from the reception of Indic ideals (van der Kuijp 1986, 2002); see also Roesler 2011: 67–75, for the influence of the Indian *nīti* literature.

56 Brinker (2010:16–19) vouches for such an integral definition, which combines structuralist and communicative approaches.

57 Brinker 2010: 56–77. For an overview of classificatory schemes, see Heinemann 2000 and Rolf 1993: 81–124.

are the intended function and the realm of communication. Brinker advises that the intuitive everyday use of a text and scientific typology applied to it should not be too contradictory. He argues that the communicative function of a text should thus be a basic distinguishing criterion (as opposed to language-structure), as it would offer the most homogenous basis for a typology, and believes the dominant communicative intention to indicate the text function. Such functional approaches emerged from speech act theory.⁵⁸ Brinker lays out the following criteria and hierarchy for classifying text types:⁵⁹

1. Text function
2. Contextual criteria
 - a. Form of communication
 - b. Realm of action
3. Structure of the text

These criteria may be hierarchized and adapted to Tibetan textual corpora. What is a text function? Most concepts of text function are based on Bühler's organon-model and Searle's illocutionary acts. As was said, Brinker, having surveyed previous approaches, sees the communicative contact as main point (which assigns the context more importance than the respective text-internal criteria) and distinguishes the following functions:⁶⁰

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- 58 Brinker 2010: 121, 125. If we assume that the implicit Tibetan categories represent everyday categories, then previous Tibetologists, whether consciously or not, have taken this into account. Gansel (2011: 66–68) points out that Brinker's text-external criteria are still vague and proposes (on the basis of Luhmann's social definition of communication) to examine more closely text types as functions with regard to the function of the respective social system (such as economy, science, or education).
- 59 Brinker 2010: 120ff. We should note that these criteria were developed for drawing *boundaries* between types, and not necessarily for extensively describing one class. In the description of one class, the thematic and syntactical characteristics of a text type should be analysed in detail.
- 60 Brinker 2010: 94–98. Klein 2007 introduces two further categories: *Geltungsmodus* (maybe best translated as “mode of application”) refers to the institutional and juridical obligations of a text type (ibid. 38). It may help to refine the various Tibetan obligate text types in Schwiegers' realm of action “rule and administration” (Schwieger 2011: 263–66). *Texthandlungsmuster* (maybe: “pattern of textual impetus”) attempts to distinguish the pragmatic instrument of a text type, namely the means through which the text-emitter constitutes something (Klein 2007: 38–40). Again, in law texts it would mean the way a text assumes, for example, ownership and the like (ibid.: 40–41 analyses a constitutional text as an example). On Austin and Searle's speech act theory as basis for concepts of text function, see Brinker 2010: 79–88; cf. Searle 1975.

1. Informative function
2. Appellative function
3. Obligate function
4. Contact function
5. Declarative function
6. [Poetical or aesthetic function]

Schwieger has adopted his classification slightly differently (see above). Further, Schwieger's category "narrative texts" in the realm of action "folk and orally transmitted texts" does not take function as its basic criterion, but rather "structure", and more precisely, "thematic exposition". This choice was made, because in our literary theories we would have well defined genre terms that would generally fit with the Tibetan material; the function of such orally transmitted literature would be "educative" or "entertaining".⁶¹ Such functions are illustrated in Giacomoalla Orofino's analysis of the trickster figure in Tibetan oral literature found in this volume.

For specific aims of research, one might argue for various other functional classifications and hierarchies: a large number of Tibetan texts have an "informative function", more precisely "religious instruction". In order to examine this instructional dimension, I have, for example, created the meta-category called "instruction texts" (a text with an informative function of religious instruction). With regard to text types according to Tibetan title designations, those coming to mind are: spiritual instructions (*gdams ngag*), esoteric precepts (*man ngag*), meditation instructions (*khrid*), and pieces of advice (*bslab bya*). Looking at the theme as well as the function of information, letters (*'phring yig*), epistles (*chab shog*), and questions and answers (*dris lan*) may be included. Such an informative instruction function could also refer to instances of texts whose titles are not necessarily associated with instruction, for example songs (*mgur*), or passages embedded in a spiritual biography (*rnam thar*).⁶² For comparing both oral and written narratives through methods of narratology, the category of "narrative texts" (based on their type of thematic exposition alone, without regard to function or Tibetan title) may in turn be helpful. Such systematizations would allow for different perspectives on Tibetan texts—certainly to be applied carefully and with the respective aim of research and context in mind.

61 Schwieger 2011: 271 and E-mail communication, 17.01.2015.

62 Cf. Rheingans 2008: 69, where I have first employed the term "instruction texts". Brinker's "contact function", too (2010: 110f.), i.e. the wish of the emitting agent to contact the reader, is a useful category for the genres mentioned.

Either way, we definitely have to continue researching Tibetan sources and may adapt the systems of text linguistics accordingly.

(2) If one of the significant implicit emic categories is organisation of collections, such as *gsung 'bum*, we need not only to inspect the categorisations as such, but to continue researching *how* and why such collections were authorised, compiled, produced, categorised, and employed.⁶³ One will not only arrive at a deeper understanding of such categorisations but may also try to systematise texts according to their type of origin and production (for example, all texts that have been noted down, *zin bris*).⁶⁴

(3) Text reception and use of texts, as already mentioned by Taube, is certainly a field that deserves attention: to what degree, were texts read and used in religious or administrative practice? Are there texts, in collections, that are only marginally read? Which texts, according to the tradition, demand a *lung*? How are they used in the meditative and scholastic curricula? Although at times difficult to assess with the available sources, these questions remain significant. If we further understand the religio-cultural context of our sources, we can avoid serious misconceptions about the meaning and value of their contents and have a clearer sense of their cultural function.⁶⁵

63 For Tibetan catalogues and lists, see also section three of Roesler's paper in this volume. For authorisation and compilation, see, for example, the discussion on collected sayings and authorship in Sernesi's forthcoming article. In my forthcoming research about Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje's writings, I will try to sketch the development of a textual corpus (for previous research, cf. Rheingans 2008: 57–71). Just to give an impression of how organisation of a table of contents reflects traditional doctrinal concepts (such as the "four dharmas" [*chos bzhi*] of sGam po pa), section number five of the table of contents of Mi bskyod rdo rje's *gsung 'bum* reads (dKon mchog yan lag, *dKar chag*, p. 22/fol. 12a): "The sūtra and tantra instructions which apply one to the highest magical absorptions" (*sgyu 'phrul ting 'dzin mchog la sbyor byed pa'i mdo sngags khrid*) [section headings added]: *mdor byas lnga pa la* (v.i) *chos chos su 'gro ba'i khrid/* (v.ii) *chos lam du'gro ba'i khrid/* (v.iii) *lam 'khrul pa sel ba'i khrid/* (v.iv) *'khrul pa ye shes su'char ba'i khrid* (v.iv.i) *thun mong ba'i khrid* (v.iv.ii) *thun mong ma yin pa'i khrid/ dngos dang bka' rgya ma* (v.iv.iii) *de dag gi gags sel dang 'tsho ba bstan pa/* (v.iv.iv) *khrid 'phro can du mdzad pa/*. See also the various title lists of the writings of Śākya mchog ldan in Caumanns 2012: 326–37.

64 Combining point (1) and (2) of this section's discussion, both function and way of production have been employed to coin the term "orally determined genres" (Martin 2010: 202), which Sernesi further elaborates on in her forthcoming paper. I would like to thank Marta Sernesi for sharing these points in discussion.

65 I have tried to sketch some possibilities in a recent paper, "Tibetan hagiographies in Buddhist teaching: Narrative performances and their reception in past and present", presented at the IABS Seminar in Vienna, 21 Aug. 2014. My forthcoming research on the origin, transmission, and reception of Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje's writings may shed some

(4) According to recent literary approaches that lean on the concept of family resemblance, categorisation is a general human need. Such categories may be acquired through prototypes.⁶⁶ It will therefore be useful to identify Tibetan texts—both oral and written—that are considered typical, whether implicitly (through the study of reception and intertextuality) or explicitly (via statements of authors).⁶⁷ Is there, for example, a prototypical autohagiography (*rang rnam*), such as that of the Fifth Dalai Lama or Karma Chags med (1608–1678)?⁶⁸ Needless to say, such prototypical genealogies are desirable for the study of Tibetan literary history, too.

Enquiry will evidently have to continue in the three fields mentioned at the outset: (a) defining text type/genre, literature, and typologies; (b) delineating historical developments of individual text types and their contexts; (c) comparing Tibetan texts to those in other Tibeto-Burman cultures, other Asian cultures, and beyond.⁶⁹ To summarise the abovementioned suggestions for meaningful future research (mainly referring to the discussed area [a] and partly [b]):

- (More) systematic criteria for types belonging to classes
- Consistent terminology (possibly with text linguistic terms)
- Creation of a criteria-hierarchy for Tibetan text classification
- Examinations of “text function” with specific aims and corpora
- Further study of implicit Tibetan categorisations
- Examination of the production and contexts of text collections
- Reception studies and development of methods for doing so
- Delineation of possible genre-prototypes and genre-transformations
- Survey of modern Tibetan concepts of pre-modern literature
- Continued study of individual genres

light on text reception and use, too. To approach reception not in history but in the sense of modern Tibetan studies (and practices) of pre-modern genres is another possible angle of research (see the modern attempts of surveying the history of Tibetan literature, such as, for example, rGya ye bkra bho et al., *Bod kyi rtsom rig lo rgyus skal bzang mig sgron*).

66 Zymner 2011: 15–20. The concept of knowledge acquisition was examined in the context of cognitive psychology by Eleanor Rosch (see Rosch 1999, for an overview that summarises some of her previous papers). Roesler, points this out in her paper, too.

67 Roesler 2014: 132ff., for example, discusses explicit Tibetan views on autobiographic life writing.

68 Karma Chags med's *dGe slong rā ga a syas rnam thar* is a bulky work that consists of various sub-*rnam thar*.

69 Cf. Klafkowski 1983, for misapprehension of Rong and Lep cha literature.

It is hoped that this overview might shed some light on past and present developments and helps us to appreciate the papers presented in this volume—for, indeed, they cover new ground in all of the areas mentioned above.

4 About This Book

This volume consists of four parts that attempt to move from the more general to the more specific. The first section reflects on the overall issues and challenges of classifying Tibetan texts: Ulrike Roesler's contribution takes a look at Indo-Tibetan and Tibetan ways of categorising Tibetan literature. Beginning with two important frameworks for Tibetan literary theory that originate in India—the five fields of knowledge and Indian poetics—she moves on to the categorisations found in early Tibetan catalogues, *dkar chag*, and other lists. She then discusses the concepts of contemporary Tibetan and Western scholars, in order to find out whether it is really literature that is being classified. The following paper, by Ekaterina Sobkovyak, clarifies particular details of the transmission of these five (and more) fields of knowledge to Tibet on the basis of the “Enumeration of Terms Derived from Art, Medicine and Astrology” (*bZo dang gso ba skar rtsis rnam las byung ba'i ming gi rnam grangs*) by the eminent Buddhist scholar-encyclopaedist Klong rdol bla ma (1719–1795). She devotes special attention to the significance of and difficulties with texts entitled “enumeration of terms” (*ming gi rnam grangs*). Giacomella Orofino examines a famed topos in Tibetan folk literature, the story of the trickster, and its voyage through various cultures. By discussing the influence of orality on Tibetan written output and the transcultural dimension of Tibetan literary topoi, Orofino addresses important issues that shed new light on our general understanding of Tibetan texts.

Part two deals with how specific genres should or should not be classified and how they historically developed. On the basis of a dGe lugs pa ritual, the *Bla ma mchod pa*, Roger R. Jackson suggests that the very attempt to establish ‘bright lines’ between and among various types of texts is to some degree misguided. He argues that many texts turn out, on close inspection, to be far more fluid than their location under such-and-such a title or such-and-such a genre might lead us to believe. In the following article, Ruth Gamble contrasts two histories of the Tibetan songs (*mgur*) genre, those by Chögyam Trungpa (1939–1987) and Don grub rgyal (1953–1985). Her paper highlights the way the conception of genres is shaped by the literary and social criteria of their interpreters and the expectations of their audiences.

The third part zeros in on single texts of a given genre, thereby testing theses and assumptions against concrete textual realities: Franz-Karl Ehrhard studies a *Padma'i thang yig* from the seventeenth century, an unusual treasure-text of the Sa skya pa. Closely examining the historical and literary contexts, he outlines how this work achieves a blend of two literary genres: biography and the prayer of the Precious Guru. Peter Verhagen, with his expertise of the Tibetan reception of Indian grammatical concepts, investigates a specific layer of texts and terminology, namely the tools of the Tibetan translator. He poses crucial questions about terminology and lexicography in Tibetan genre definitions. Victoria Sujata analyses a selection of highly expressive songs (*mgur*) from the *gSung mgur bslab bya'i rim pa rnams phyogs bsgrigs* of Pha bong kha (1878–1941). Presenting translations of four of his autobiographical songs, Sujata's contribution expands our understanding of this genre by investigating how it can be used skilfully as a means of informal expression.

The fourth part takes a look at genre in modern Tibetan literature. First, Lama Jabb criticises scholarship on modern Tibetan writing that takes the early 1980s as the point of 'birth' of a new literary revolution, viewing it as a rupture with traditional forms of literature. He suggests that this interpretation ignores the styles, themes, and concepts derived from Tibet's rich oral traditions. Peter Schwieger documents a genre in transition: he examines a modern short story that discusses traditional hagiography in a literary manner, in that it playfully contrasts the old and new social ideals of Tibetan life through symbolic characters and metaphor.

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