It has long been held that Dharmakirti, the great Buddhist philosopher of the seventh century, wrote a work on Alankāraśāstra. In Subandhu’s Vāsavadattā, when the Nāyaka is face to face with Vāsavadattā, a large number of comparisons are given, among which is the following: 

\[ \text{bauddhasahgatim ivālaṅkāraḥbhūṣitām} \]

The most natural way to understand this is that her face was adorned with jewels (alaṅkāra) the way a meeting (saṅgati, the word need not have any technical sense; it is common enough in classical Sanskrit and the Vāsavadattā is after all not a Buddhist text) of Buddhists is adorned with (a text called) alaṅkāra. Now the commentator Śivarāma says of this:

\[ \text{bauddhasahgatim ivālaṅkāro dharmakīrtikrto granthaviśeṣas, tena bhūṣitām}, \]

and this is the phrase that has led many writers (Aufrecht, Hall, Peterson, Telang and Siva-prasad Bhattacharya) to hold that Dharmakirti wrote a work called Alaiṅkāra. This seems to me (as it did to Kane) very meagre evidence. For all that Śivarāma says is that alaṅkāra refers to a certain book written by Dharmakirti. He does not say that Dharmakirti wrote a work on poetics (alaṅkāraśāstra), but only that he wrote a book in which the word alaṅkāra figures in the title. Several Buddhist texts (e.g. the Mahāyānasūtra ālaṅkāra, the Abhisamayālaṅkāra) use the word alaṅkāra though they have nothing to do with poetics, and it is not impossible

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* Professor de Jong has very kindly drawn my attention to the following articles of Sylvain Lévi: “Āśvaghoṣa, Le Sūtraḷaṅkāra et Ses Sources”, in J.As., II (1908), p. 74. Note: “Le Sūtraḷaṅkāra, c’est les Sūtra mis en littérature, comme nous dirions: ‘La Bible pour les gens du monde’.” Also: “La Dṛṣṭāntaṭpaṅkti et Son Auteur”, J.As., July, 1927, p. 126.

1 The Vāsavadattā, A Romance by Subandhu, with the Darpaṇa of Śivarāma Tripāṭhin, ed. by Fitzedward Hall (= Bibliotheca Indica) (Calcutta, 1859).


3 Śivarāma quotes the Alaiṅkārasēkhara (see Hall’s Introduction, p. 45) and so must have written later than the sixteenth century.

4 See P. V. Kane, History of Sanskrit Poetics (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1961), p. 64.

On S. Bhattacharya, see below notes 5 and 11.
that Dharmakirti had written a text with this name in the title which is now lost to us. If this work were to “embellish a meeting of Buddhists” it would be very odd were it to be a work on the Alāṅkāraśāstra for there would be no point in reciting a work on poetics at a presumably religious meeting. It is true that Dharmakirti was a good poet, referred to already in the ninth century by the great Ānandavardhana and we know from his works that he was familiar with many of the orthodox śāstras. There is, therefore, nothing impossible in the suggestion that he might have written a work on poetics. However we must take into consideration the following fact: The only writer whose words can even be interpreted (unfairly as I hold) to mean that Dharmakirti wrote a work on poetics is Sivarāma, a late author of very little authority. Even supposing that by alāṅkāra Sivarāma did mean a work on the Alāṅkāraśāstra, the evidence still seems to me overwhelming that he was mistaken. For Dharmakirti’s works were known to both Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, the two greatest writers on Alāṅkāraśāstra in Sanskrit. If Dharmakirti wrote a work on poetics, is it not exceptionally strange that these two authorities, as well as the entire tradition after them, do not even mention the work, let alone quote from it?

In spite of the above, Professor Ingalls, the last person to write on this

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5 There is no doubt that the Buddhists wrote on poetics, for we have Abhinava’s remarks on one Rāhuḷaka, who obviously wrote a commentary on the A.Bh. and who was a Buddhist: ... dehavikāra līlādayah śākyācayārāhulakādibhir yan matam viśeṣāsukṣmyād anupalakasya hetukāhāvādīn līlādīmadhyā eva paśchātasāvālāṅkārabhāṣāt. A.Bh., Vol. III, p. 158 (= G.O.S.) (Baroda, 1954). Apart from the Kārikās of the Alāṅkāraśekhara, the only Buddhist text to come down to us is a commentary by a Sinhalese Buddhist in Sanskrit of Daṇḍin’s Kāvyādārśa, known as the Kāvyalakṣaṇa. Considering the large number of works by Jaina authors, this is very curious. See Sivaprasad Bhattacharya, “The Neo-Buddhistic Nucleus in Alāṅkāra”, Journal of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1955, reprinted in “Studies in Indian Poetics”, Indian Studies Past & Present (Calcutta, 1964).

6 His verses are quoted in most Subhāṣītas, e.g. Subhāṣītaratnakāśa 437, 440, 454 etc. See the edition of this text by D. D. Kosambi and V. V. Gokhale, H.O.S. (1957), and the translation by Daniel H. H. Ingalls, H.O.S. (1965).

7 Dhvanyāloka, edited with the Locana of Abhinavagupta and the Būlapriyā of Rāmaśāraka, by Paṭṭābhīrāma Sāstrī (Banaras, 1940). The verse on p. 487 is ascribed by Ānanda to Dharmakirti on the basis of the verse on p. 489 which he says is definitely by Dharmakirti (Locana: nirvīdātadiyaśloka) and which contains a similar idea. They are both good verses.

8 See Hall, op. cit., p. 44.

9 Abhinava refers to Dharmakirti often in the Saṃpratyaabhijñāvivrttimatāsāra. For references see “Saṃtarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics” by J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan, B.O.R.I., 1969, p. 34. See also Locana p. 519, and for a discussion of this difficult passage, “Saṃtarasa etc.”, p. 191-2.