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Rhetorical Polemics as Literary Frames and Conceptual Framework in Tibetan Buddhist Discourse

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ABSTRACT Tibetan polemical literature is especially known and enjoyed for its harsh language and offensive comparisons, which stand in marked contrast to the philosophical and doctrinal matters that works of the genre commonly discuss. Drawing from a detailed literary analysis of a particular polemical exchange between Ju Mipam (1846–1912) and Pari Rapsel (1840–1912), this article calls for a distinction between what might be called "rhetorical polemics" and "formal argumentation," and argues that the former is used to exercise framing functions towards the latter, in both structural and conceptual terms. With regard to conceptual considerations, polemical comparisons play an important role. Through frequent allusions to a stereotypical divide of Buddhist experts in practice-oriented yogis and logic-oriented scholars, these discourses connect to a larger narrative framework about the correct or incorrect transmission of Buddhism on the Tibetan plateau, which individual agents use to characterize their opponents. In so doing, they contribute to the further solidification and promotion of the master narrative that this framework entails.

KEYWORDS Polemics, discourse analysis, rhetoric, stereotypes, historiography, Tibet, Buddhism

Introduction

Polemics, in a broad sense of the term,[1] appear as a central force in the development of Buddhist scholastic traditions. The delimitation and definition of a certain position or group requires "boundary work," a distinction from what is the "Other"—often conceived to be [1]

1 As exemplified in Steckel's (2018, 11–32) polythetical listing of the central constituents of polemics, discourses described as polemical entail a range of different phenomena. In particular, there seems to be a sliding scale between openly aggressive rhetoric as one extreme and more neutral discourses of religious encounter as the other. As will be shown below, the underlying tension pertains also to central features of Tibetan polemical literature.

not just different, but wrong. As such, polemic was an accepted and vital principle of scriptural exposition in Buddhist India (laid out, for example, in Vasubandhu's classic treatise *Vyākhyāyukti*).[2] Furthermore, the co-existence of different strands of thought and practice between Buddhism and other religious and intellectual traditions as well as within Buddhism itself led to questions of superiority, a problem whose solution is often narrated as a personal encounter between proponents of the respective traditions in formalized debate or another kind of contest.[3] This propensity for polemics was one of the features that was inherited when Buddhism began to spread over the Tibetan plateau. Even the constitutional decision about which form of Buddhism was to be established and supported by royal decree is said to have been based on the outcome of a formal debate. While the historical details are unclear, this event is remembered as a debate between two factions:[4] the Indian Buddhist tradition, as represented by Kamalaśīla, who favoured a gradual soteriological path with a focus on rational analysis; and, on the other side, Héshang Móhēyǎn / Hashang (*hwa shang*) Mahāyāna,[5] as a proponent of a Chinese subitist approach, which stressed the elimination of all conceptual thinking. According to the common narrative, which solidified with the passage of time and continues to regulate scholastic discourses until the present day, the Tibetan ruler favoured the Indian side and expelled the Chinese Buddhists, thereby establishing the fundamental cultural affiliations and demarcations of Tibetan Buddhism.[6] While this debate, which allegedly took place in Tibet's first monastery Samyé (*bsam yas*) at the end of the eighth century, is particularly widely known, Tibet's scholastic history offers plenty of accounts of polemical encounters. With larger monastic institutions taking shape in the eleventh century,[7] it was not uncommon that scholastic adepts would prove their intellectual abilities in a "testing tour" (*grwa skor*), where they would leave their home institution and debate against scholars from other monasteries (see Dreyfus 2005, 294–95; Tarab Tulku 2000, 12).[8] The institutionalization of Buddhist learning also provided the context for employing specific forms of debate as a tool for monastic education. So-called "debating institutions" (*rtsod grwa*) began to emerge in the fifteenth century and would dominate the intellectual and educational landscape for centuries to come (see Dreyfus 2005, 293). Adherents of different Tibetan Buddhist schools, in particular, used texts as a means to communicate and negotiate disputes, which enabled opponents to cover larger geographical distances or to link back to debates in the near or

2 There, a commentary is said to require five principal elements, the last of which entails polemical discourse: purpose (*dgos pa*), condensed meaning (*bsdus pa'i don*), literal meaning (*tshig gi don*), connections [to other passages or topics] (*mtshams sbyar ba*), and objections and responses (*brgal ba dang lan*). See Lee (2001, 6–249) for an edition of the Tibetan text, and Nance (2012, 129–52) for excerpts of a translation.

3 See Cabezón (2008) for a review of important debate narratives of Buddhist India, drawn from Chinese and Tibetan sources. Such narratives of debates exhibit a considerable spectrum in which the exchange of arguments as well as combat in magical powers are given equal importance.

4 See Bretfeld (2004) for a discussion of the narratives that evolved around this controversy.

5 In Tibetan, the Chinese name is commonly rendered as Hashang (spelled as *hwa shang* or *ha shang*) Mahāyāna, which is also used in the following. For a brief summary on Móhēyǎn's activities and doctrinal stance, see van Schaik (2015, in particular 131–146). As a general convention, Tibetan words are given in Wylie transliteration, in parentheses at their first occurrence, and in a phonetic rendering according to the system of The Tibetan & Himalayan Library (THLIB): https://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/phconverter.php, accessed February 5, 2020. In cases where a different phonetic rendering is more commonly known, we also use this.

6 This is also related to the common view of Tibetans being the righteous continuators of Indian Buddhism. On this notion in historiographic literature, see Schwieger (2000).

7 The prime example and most influential model of such an institution is the monastery of Sangpu Neutok (*gsang phu ne'u thog*), see, e.g. Hugon (2016).

8 For a new perspective on such tours, see a forthcoming article by Jonathan Samuels, entitled "Tours, titles, and tests: issues of standardisation in medieval Tibetan monastic education," from which the current translation of the term is borrowed.

distant past. Eventually, this came to form a distinct literary genre, which is commonly denoted as "polemical literature"[9] and pertains to two principal settings: works that criticise adherents of other positions (*rtsod yig*, *dgag yig*, etc.) and thereby initiate debates (*rtsod pa*) in the first place; and works that respond to such accusations (*rtsod lan*, *dgag lan*) and hence provide an answer (*lan*) to the former. While the identification of responsive works is relatively straightforward, the category of works that initiate debate is ambiguous and depends on later reactions as well—that is, whether a given work actually sparked a controversy.[10]

[2] Even though comparatively few in number, works of this genre enjoy a particular prominence among Tibetan scholars for at least three reasons: polemical treatises are the prime medium to formulate and negotiate doctrinal differences; therefore, they are also important for identity formation, for delineating the borders of one scholastic tradition[11] against another; and lastly, polemical treatises are enjoyed for their rich literary features, the prominence of verbal insult and use of different stylistic devices, such as wit and irony, scathing metaphors, and also polemical comparisons, which turn texts of this genre into a spectacle.[12] While many polemical treatises emerge from personal disputes, they speak to a larger yet specialised scholarly audience. Similar to how reputation is gained on the debate yard, the expertise in Buddhist theory and sophistication in invective rhetorics demonstrated in polemical treatises is noted and will contribute to a scholar's fame among his peers as well as rivals.

[3] In fact, when reading polemical texts, one is often struck by sudden shifts in language and tone, and we find passages of rather dry and technical discussions of doctrinal matters juxtaposed directly alongside flowery and often highly insulting passages of a much different nature. Given the polemical character of the latter that is developed in combination with a skill in the domain of rhetorics, we suggest referring to such passages as "rhetorical polemics." The former, in contrast, are focused on the subject matter at stake, which they explore according to fixed argumentative procedures. They are hence denoted as "problem-focused discussion" or "formal argumentation."[13] The main aim of this paper is to investigate how these two divergent aspects of polemical literature can be related in a meaningful way. This will entail two basic considerations. Through a close reading and contextualized analysis of textual samples, I will first of all show how passages of rhetorical polemics act as a structuring device and hence provide a literal frame for formal argumentation. Furthermore, I will argue that the repeated use of comparisons, allusions, or analogies documented in those passages of rhetorical polemics contributes to the construction of a conceptual framework, which facilitates locating opponents in a larger narrative about the correct and incorrect transmission of Buddhism on the Tibetan plateau.

9 For a brief description of the genre of polemical literature, see Lopez (1996); its specific features are discussed more extensively in the introduction of Cabezón and Dargyay (2007, 2–57), followed by an overview of its historical development.

10 See Viehbeck (2014, 40–42) for addressing these ambiguities in defining polemical literature.

11 There is, of course, a considerable range in scale of what constitutes a scholastic tradition, and this could pertain to anything from rather fine-grained nuances in the interpretation of specific doctrinal matters, to more fundamental differences that are also tied to larger religious affiliations.

12 See Cabezón and Dargyay (2007, 2–10) for a discussion of these important features of polemical literature.

13 Naturally, the prominence of what I call "rhetorical polemics" varies, and with it the polemical character of any given text. Thus, the presence of rhetorical polemics might perhaps also be employed as a marker to distinguish polemical treatises from other dialectical works.

The Encounter of the Tiger and Lion of the Old and New Traditions

[4] The prime textual material for investigating the relationship between rhetorically and argumentatively inclined passages is drawn from a particular debate that evolved in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The catalyst for this controversy was the interpretation of the ninth chapter (the "Wisdom Chapter") of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, a renowned Indian Buddhist classic, crucial for—among other aspects—formulating fundamental ideas of Madhyamaka, the commonly accepted supreme philosophical system in Tibet. When Ju Mipam (*'ju mi pham*, 1846–1912), the emerging philosophical spearhead of the Nyingma (*rnying ma*) tradition, composed his commentary on this text in 1878,[14] he formulated his ideas in stark contrast to, and sometimes as an explicit criticism of, the mainstream interpretation within the intellectually dominant Géluk (*dge lugs*) tradition. He was therefore confronted with several critical treatises from three Géluk scholars, writing from the huge monastic institutions of Drépung (*'bras spung*) and Kumbum (*sku 'bum*) in central and northeastern Tibet.[15] This debate was therefore conceived of as a controversy not only between concrete individual opponents, but also as a critical exchange between the larger traditions of the Nyingma and Géluk schools. Put in this perspective, the issue is not only about different scholastic approaches and areas of expertise, with the Géluk dominating discourses of non-tantric Tibetan philosophical systems contrasting with the Nyingma's focus on tantrism, but also one of institutional and regional power asymmetries. While the Géluk tradition established itself in often enormous monastic institutions that were also part of the political rule that reached out from the central Tibetan government, the Nyingma tradition was organized much more loosely. The latter saw a significant shift towards monasticism and a more systematic organisation of its doctrines only in the nineteenth century,[16] in particular in Kham (*khams*) in eastern Tibet, where the influence of the Géluk was weaker.

[5] Amongst the different individual controversies, the debate between Mipam and Pari Rapsel (*dpa' ris rab gsal*, 1840–1912), a scholar of Kumbum Monastery, was particularly productive. Their extended exchange produced six treatises in total. While most of these took the form of personal responses, and in fact were at first circulated as individual documents, they were clearly aimed to include a larger audience in their attempts to establish and defend their scholastic traditions. This second aspect is corroborated by the fact that all of the treatises were included and preserved in their authors' respective collected works, where they provide a rich testimony to the argumentative as well as rhetorical features of Tibetan polemical literature.[17] Among Tibetan scholars, this debate is remembered as "the encounter of the tiger and lion of the old and new traditions."[18] This metaphorical description points to the acumen of the two opponents, as well as their roles as proponents of broader traditions, with Mipam

14 For an English translation of this text, called *Nor bu ke ta ka*, see Padmakara Translation Group (2017). A French translation was produced by Stéphane Arguillère (2004).

15 For details on the historical development of the debates, see Viehbeck (2014, 29–38).

16 This "homogenization" of Nyingma doctrines along with the foundation of monastic structures is discussed in Dalton (2016, 115–20), among others.

17 For an overview of the texts instigated by this controversy and their geographical location, see Viehbeck (2014, 37). Revealing historical details about the dissemination practices of these treatises are often documented in their introductory passages. Mipam, for example, reported that his initial treatise was intended primarily for his own peers, but as it spread more widely, others regarded it as criticism (see *Rab lan* 458.1–3). This also pertains to the story that as a reaction to this critical treatise, monks of the major Géluk monasteries allegedly gathered to counter Mipam through harmful rituals (see Phuntsho 2007, 192).

18 Tib.: *gsar rnying gi stag seng gdong thug* (Khu byug 2004, 374).

representing the Nyingma—literally, the "old" tradition—and Rapsel the "new" traditions, Sarma (*gsar ma*), of which the Géluk is a part.[19] Several details in the individual treatises inform us about the socio-historical context of their authors and thereby contribute to stabilizing common images of the Nyingma and Géluk schools, with the former being perceived as less concerned with monastic structures and more drawn to practical applications of Buddhism than the latter with its focus on institutionalized scholarship. In the colophon of one of Mipam's texts, for example, we find the following note:[20]

> This [treatise] too [was composed] by a Nyingma monk called Mipam Namgyel (*mi pham rnam rgyal*) who had "slept" a few years in the midst of solitary mountains. At that time, he was residing at a mountain that was white in all directions and his ragged hair had grown long. [6]

Obviously, sleeping is used as a synonym here for being immersed in meditation, and Mipam, perhaps in a self-humbling gesture, is referring to a period of extended retreat. He spent this time of intensive religious practice in solitude in a complex of caves near Dzongsar (*rdzong gsar*) in Kham, where he stayed most of the time during the years 1881–1893 (see Schuh 1973, XXXII). Rapsel, by contrast, was based at the debate college of Kumbum Monastery, a bustling monastic institution of several thousand monks in northeastern Tibet. He confidently refers to himself as a "logician" (*rtog ge ba*) who resides at "the great Dharma centre of Kumbum Jampaling, which rules over all directions."[21] Such markers of the different socio-historical settings of the two masters—one being described as a practice-oriented, solitary yogi, the other as a dialectically-trained scholar among other scholars—abound in their polemical treatises. Beyond their historical grounding, these allusions develop a life of their own and illustrate important features of the rhetorical repertoire of such texts. [7]

Rhetorical Polemics versus Formal Argumentation

While in the past Tibetan scholastic literature, including polemical works, has been studied mostly with an eye to its philosophical and doctrinal contents as well as to the theory of argumentation, more recently other elements—such as rhetorical features and the practice of argumentation—have also caught the attention of scholars.[22] As emphasized by José Cabezón and others, stylistic features are an important part of polemical literature and its popularity as a genre: [8]

> In the final analysis it may be *style* more than anything else that explains the [9]

19 This equation of Rapsel with the Sarma traditions it not unproblematic either. Most commonly, the label of Sarma is used to refer to the three schools of Kagyü (*bka' brgyud*), Sakya (*sa skya*), and Géluk. With regard to doctrinal issues as well as personal networks, the first two are rather closely related to the Nyingma, and in the context of the nineteenth century, in particular, a larger divide emerges between the Géluk and the non-Géluk traditions.

20 *Brgal lan nyin snang* 188.4–5: *'di yang rnying ban mi pham rnam rgyal zhes bya ba lo shas dben pa'i ri sul na nyal zhing | skabs 'dir phyogs kyi mtha' gru dkar ba'i ri la gnas shing ral pa'i zar bu ring po dang ldan par gyur pa.* All translations by the author unless indicated otherwise.

21 See *'Ju lan* 421.2: *phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i chos sde chen po sku 'bum byams pa gling.* An early Western account of this monastery is provided by Filchner (1906), who visited it at a time (1904) when Rapsel was active there.

22 For examples regarding the latter see, e.g. Cabezón and Dargyay (2007, 2–10), Dreyfus (2008), also Lempert (2012), and Liberman (2004).

> disproportionate appeal of such works. Polemical literature has glitz. It is to philosophy what action movies are to the film industry. A polemical work entices by titillating. It uses caricature, exaggerating the boundary between good and evil. It employs invective, insult, and at times even overtly violent language. (Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 8)

[10] Abusive language, *ad hominem* attacks, a rich repertoire of stylistic devices such as sarcasm and irony, and the frequent use of strong metaphors and insulting comparisons are fundamental to polemical literature, and appear at times in marked contrast to the technical discussions about philosophical and doctrinal matters that works of this genre commonly address. These stylistic features are often already in place in the titles of polemical works, which usually, as titles of Tibetan texts typically do, contain two parts: a more descriptive one that indicates genre or content, and a more ornamental one that provides a poetic label for the text.[23] One episode from the controversy in question may suffice to illustrate this point. When Mipam responded to Drakkar Trülku (*brag dkar sprul sku*, 1866–1928), one of the critics from Drépung, he called his work *Illumination of the Sun: An Answer to an Objection*,[24] thus clearly ascribing it to the genre of polemical literature and providing a poetic name for it. Following the same conventions, Drakkar Trülku responded with a much more graphic title: *Emetic that Brings out the Inner Blood of Wrong Views: A Further Answer to the Objections of Mipam Namgyel*.[25] While such strong language is not uncommon in Tibetan polemical titles, there is a considerable range in ways of addressing opponents, from more respectfully and politely to openly offensive. The exchange between Mipam and Rapsel, for example, seems to have been nurtured by mutual appreciation, as is reflected in the generally amicable tone of their conversations, as well as the mutual exchange of gifts (see Viehbeck 2014, 35; further also Smith 2001, 233). That said, their letters and treatises are not limited to sober discussions about the doctrinal and interpretational issues at stake, but also contain polemical comparisons, side blows, and ironic remarks. However, it seems that within any given text these two types of discourses—what I call rhetorical polemics, on the one hand, and formal argumentation, on the other—are clearly distinguished and treated quite differently.

[11] Within passages of formal problem-focused discussion, the issues at stake are disputed according to a rather strict protocol: each accusation must be not only concrete and specific, but also backed up by proper argumentation or reference to authoritative scriptures. Individual lines of reasoning are formulated according to accepted logical principles and fixed argumentative procedures. This is also evident in the responses, which often discuss matters in a strictly chronological way, thus ensuring that the development of the discussion from one text to another is understood. The resulting dialogue is very much technical in character, which is also reflected on the linguistic level.

[12] Passages of rhetorical polemics, by contrast, involve an entirely different register of speech, which has, for example, a much more colloquial, often more local, and much more poetic flavour to it. Here, accusations are made in a seemingly random and general way, often phrased as personal assaults. Obviously, these act as stylistic devices, and in this way do not call for any argumentative backup (e.g. when the opponent is called a drunkard). But on the level of rhetorical polemics, as well, individual phrases and accusations, invective labels, and comparisons are picked up and paid back to the attacker in the response. This is

23 These two parts of Tibetan text titles are analysed in Almogi (2005).
24 Tib.: *Brgal lan nyin byed snang ba* (see *Brgal lan nyin snang*).
25 Tib.: *Mi pham rnam rgyal gyis rtsod pa'i yang lan log lta'i khong khrag 'don pa'i skyug sman* (see *Skyug sman*).

done, however, not in a systematic and chronological way, as it is in formal argumentation, but rather, the rhetorical elements are sprinkled here and there, as seems fitting in stylistic terms.[26] Both types of discourses therefore evolve as a kind of ping-pong play, but while one draws on expertise in logic and Buddhist theory, the other draws on mastery of rhetoric.[27]

[13] Besides the obvious stylistic function of rhetorical polemics, when the relationship between rhetorical elements and formal argumentation is investigated more closely, other functions can be detected. In terms of their mutual placement within the respective treatises, it can be argued that rhetorical elements act as a frame and structuring device for problem-focused discussion. But they are not completely unrelated to argumentative issues either, as the comparisons and allusions used as rhetorical elements can also contribute to constructing a larger conceptual framework for the debate as a whole. Both of these functions often collide in the beginning parts of polemical treatises.

Framing Debates: Rhetorical Polemics as Paratextual Elements

[14] The introductory sections of polemical texts are especially prone to containing rhetorical elements,[28] and in the exchange between Mipam and Rapsel, as well, passages of invective language and personal insult are placed at the beginnings of their texts. Rapsel, for example, introduces his first criticism of Mipam in the following way:[29]

> [15] In these days, I have seen a *Commentary on the Wisdom Chapter* (*sher Tika*) by Ju Mipam. He has a biased view and is short-tempered; he blindly criticises any scriptures of his own or of others' [tradition]. In particular, he is not familiar with the path of reasoning and hence he is tormented by the weight of contradictions between the explicit and implicit [meaning] of his own words and between earlier and later [statements]. While he mixes earlier and later traditions, thus akin to the *tsampa* of a beggar, he is drunk on the poisonous water of pretending to shout out the melody of the clouds of the beneficial scriptures. [His commentary] lacks essence and is an unclear compilation of the sayings of many earlier [scholars].

[16] This cluster of personal polemics and insulting comparisons illustrates well the tone of such passages. Several grave flaws are ascribed to Mipam, without providing any real argumentative backup for these accusations. Clearly, there is a stylistic element to these paratextual

26 In this regard, as pointed out in Dreyfus (2008), there are important parallels between written polemical exchanges and oral debates that also contain many performative and rhetorical elements that seem to be in contradiction with a normative model of debate.

27 Tibetan scholastic culture indeed delineates and values different areas of learning. A common list of five major fields of knowledge (*rig gnas che ba lnga*) includes logic (*gtan tshigs kyi rig pa*), medicine (*gso ba'i rig pa*), arts and crafts (*bzo gnas rig pa*), and grammar (*sgra'i rig pa*), along with expertise in Buddhism, or "inner knowledge" (*nang gyi rig pa*). A secondary list of five additional, minor fields shows a heavy emphasis on linguistic and rhetorical aspects: poetics (*snyan ngag*), composition (*sde sbyor*), study of synonyms (*mngon brjod*), drama (*zlos gar*), and astrology (*skar rtsis*). For an orientation, see Townsend (2016). These fields of learning are also explored in monastic education; see Dreyfus (2003, 101–6).

28 It is no accident that the beginning section of a polemical treatise is quoted to exemplify typical features of the genre in Lopez (1996, 217).

29 *'Ju lan* 371.1–3: *dus 'dir phyogs re'i mig can blo sna thung zhing gya tshom du rang gzhan gyi gzhung gang la'ang skyon brjod cing | khyad par rigs pa'i lam la rgyus med pas rang tshig dngos shugs dang snga phyi 'gal ba'i lcid kyis gzir te phyogs snga phyi'i lugs bsres te mu to'i phye lta bu la mngon rlom gyis gzhung bzang sprin gyi dbyangs su sgrogs pa'i dug chus myos pa 'ju mi pham bya ba'i sher Tika zhig mthong la| snying po med cing sngon ma mang po'i zer sgros nyog por bris pa.*

introductory passages: their strong language entices the audience, and they invite the reader to continue into the main part of the treatise, which would then also have the duty to provide more argumentative substance to the earlier rhetorical accusations.[30]

[17] On the conceptual level, the idea of lineage or tradition is important. Here, Mipam's writing is compared to the *tsampa* of a beggar. While *tsampa*, a special kind of roasted barley flour, is enjoyed by all Tibetans, the *tsampa* of a beggar is far less scrumptious; as it is gathered from different, unreliable sources, it is bound to be impure. The aim of this comparison is obvious. Mipam is accused of pretending to profess authentic scriptures, while in reality, these lack an authentic line of transmission and are merely a diverse conglomeration of statements of earlier scholars. Especially in Tibetan scholastic culture, which focuses heavily on identification with a specific lineage of transmission, this is a grave accusation,[31] and it is hence not surprising that similar claims are also found in other treatises. In all of the treatises involved in the controversy, we find attempts to either legitimate a scholar's belonging to a larger tradition or to question it. These commonly involve a listing of earlier masters of a particular tradition that traces its origins to Buddhist India. On the other hand, earlier detractors of the Buddhist teaching in Tibet are also mentioned, and hence a lineage of corruption is delineated as a contrast. With regard to such threats to the proper transmission, the figure of Hashang Mahāyāna figures prominently as the proponent of a corrupt form of Buddhism *par excellence*.[32]

[18] The introductory passages thus frame the main text not only in structural terms, but also conceptually. Both of these paratextual functions are witnessed also within the main text itself. Here, passages of rhetorical polemics and formal argumentation alternate, with the earlier displaying paratextual functions towards the latter.

Rhetorical Polemics as Structuring Devices: A Sample Passage

[19] In order to understand how rhetorical polemics frame formal argumentation in structural terms, and also to get a better grasp of the flavour of rhetorical polemics, it will be useful to take a look at a more extensive exemplary passage, which in itself contains the discussion of one single problem. The philosophical context of this passage is a discussion of the doctrine of emptiness and addresses possible objections against this doctrine. Here, an opponent objects to the teaching of emptiness by arguing that an understanding of the non-existence of a personal self is enough to be liberated from *saṃsāra*. Rapsel and Mipam, however, disagree in their interpretation of the characterisation of this opponent. The details of their arguments are complex but can be put aside for the present purpose. We are interested in the structural setup of the texts, rather than contents.

[20] Passages of problem-focused argumentation usually contain three basic elements: 1) a statement of the opponent's position, often found towards the beginning of a particular discussion; 2) arguments against this position that point out specific faults within that position and also provide a concrete reason for this conclusion; and 3) a statement in which the attacker pro-

30 Enticement is of course among the functions ascribed to paratextual elements in Gérard Genette's classic *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997).

31 See e.g. Cabezón (1998, 4–5), who describes the association with tradition as one of the central features of scholasticism. As a means to question this affiliation, Tibetan scholars often accuse each other of having professed a merely "self-made" (*rang bzo*) interpretation. On this concept, see Seyfort Ruegg (2004, 329–35) and Kapstein (2000, 205).

32 For a more detailed discussion of some of these professed lineages, see Viehbeck (2019, 209–11) and Viehbeck (2014, 50–57). The idea of a pure lineage of transmission is also related to a notion of Tibetans as guardians of authentic Indian Buddhism. On this latter notion, see Schwieger (2000).

poses a contrasting position of his own. This last element is likely to be present, but it is not obligatory. Passages of rhetorical polemics are found at the margins of all of these elements of formal discussion. They may introduce any of these three elements, as is sometimes the case, or they may appear at the conclusions of any of these elements, which happens more frequently. When placed before a problem-focused element, rhetorical polemics may anticipate the outcome of the later discussion, for example, by ridiculing an opponent before even stating his position or making an argument against it. When placed after a problem-focused element, rhetorical polemics tend to exaggerate and celebrate the outcome of a previously made argument. Often, verses containing rhetorical polemics are used to mark the end of a particular discussion, and in this context also act as a structuring device to separate one topic from another, which is extremely useful—or even necessary—as the texts often contain no detailed formal topical outline. This function is also reflected in the label of such verses as "intermediate verses" or "transitional verses" (Tib. *bar skabs kyi tshigs bcad*; Skt. *antaraśloka*),[33] as they are termed by the authors themselves.

The sample passage is taken from Rapsel's first criticism, and starts with a statement of the opponent's position. In this case, this is provided not by way of a short paraphrase of the opponent's positions, but through a literal quotation from Mipam's commentary:[34] [21]

> [Stating the opponent's position:] Further, you said in the *Commentary* (*Ṭikka*): "Although one understands that there is nothing like a permanent, indivisible, and independent [self], subtle self-grasping is not abandoned through this [understanding]." [22]

This statement is followed by the first argument, which again contains two elements: first, an unwanted consequence is pointed out, and, second, the reason why this consequence will occur is declared:[35] [23]

> [Argument (1):] It follows that [this statement] is unrelated [to the original issue], since the opponent [in the original text] accepts that self-grasping is abandoned by the path [practiced by him], but he does not accept that it is abandoned, dividing it into subtle and coarse. [24]

At this point, the first argument is already completed. Before turning to the next issue, however, the attacker celebrates his triumph in the form of a lively expression of insult:[36] [25]

> Defeat! As [it is expressed] in the statement "This is a *vajra* rock mountain!" you have no answer and it is truly as it has been said: "[Your] mouth has been shut and sealed!" [26]

This passage also illustrates the significant shift in linguistic terms. While in the argumentative part, the language is technical, terse, and to-the-point, rhetorical polemics make use [27]

33 On the function of such verses, see Mimaki (1980), who points to their popular usage in Tibetan literature.

34 *'Ju lan* 386.3: *yang khyod kyis Tik+kar| rtag gcig rang dbang ba de 'dra med par shes kyang des ngar 'dzin phra mo mi spong ste zhes smras pa.*

35 *'Ju lan* 386.3: *'brel med du thal| pha rol pos lam des ngar 'dzin spong bar 'dod kyi phra rags phye nas spong bar mi 'dod pa'i phyir|.*

36 *'Ju lan* 386.3–4: *'khor gsum| 'di ni rdo rje brag ri yin| |zhes gsungs pa ltar lan med cing | kha la smra bcad rgya yang byin| |zhes gsungs par nges so|.*

of a wide range of often regionally specific expressions and are more closely related to the spoken language. This again adds to the performative character of these passages.[37]

The next argument shows the same structure as the first one. A reason is stated due to which the opponent has to accept an unwanted consequence:[38] [28]

> [Argument (2):] Consequently, through those words [quoted earlier] you as well accept that subtle [self-grasping] is not abandoned, even though manifest coarse afflictions are abandoned through meditating on coarse selflessness. [29]

After the point is made, a highly polemical passage emphasises the defeat of the opponent:[39] [30]

> You do not know which way of reasoning to take for yourself, yet again you go after the realisation of the masters of the Sar[ma], Nying[ma], Kar[ma] and Druk[pa] traditions. You are a great drunk, and [you] should take a leave from the work of refutation and affirmation! [31]

As was noted also in the introductory passages of the treatises, a personal criticism of the logical acumen or even moral character of the opponent, as well as the questioning of his legitimate place within the different religious traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, are common topics of rhetorical polemics. These insults then also mark the transition to the next argumentative element, that is, a statement where the offender provides an alternative interpretation of the issue at stake. This is introduced with a short polemical side blow, after which follows the actual statement of the offender's position:[40] [32]

> In short: [You] should really let go of [your] recollection of the description of subtle and coarse self-grasping! [33]
> [Proposing a contrasting position]: It is, however, correct to understand [the passage] in the following way: Because of the example [used in the original text], a specification like "coarse" or "as explained in the Abhidharma" must be applied to the expressions "having abandoned or not having abandoned afflictions" [and] "being endowed or not being endowed with afflictions."

This ends the argumentative part of this particular discussion and gives way to more polemical mockery:[41] [34]

> Should it be otherwise, then the following advice by the fifth Yapjé Gyelwé Wangpo (*yab rje rgyal ba'i dbang po*; that is, the fifth Dalai Lama) should be seen as the most profound instruction: "When, at the times of listening and reflecting, [35]

37 A full-throated exclamation of "khorsum" (*'khor gsum*)—here translated loosely as "Defeat!"—for example, is a common way to declare the argumentative loss of the opponent in oral debates, as practised in Tibetan monasteries on a daily basis. On the performative aspect of this expression, see Dreyfus (2008, 50).

38 *'Ju lan* 386.4: *des na tshig des bdag med rags pa bsgoms pas nyon mongs rags pa mngon gyur pa spong yang | phra mo mi spong bar khyod kyis kyang khas blangs mod|*.

39 *'Ju lan* 386.4–5: *rang nyid rigs pa'i lam ci 'drar 'gro rang gis kyang mi shes par da dung gsar rnying kar 'brug gi mkhas pa dag gi drod tshol ba khyod ni ra ro ba chen po ste dgag sgrub kyi las su gnang ba khrol lo|*.

40 *'Ju lan* 386.5–6: *mdor na ngar 'dzin phra rags smos pa'i dran pa mngon du zhog la| dpe des 'dir nyon mongs spong mi spong nyon mongs can yin min gsungs pa rnams la rags pa'am mngon pa nas bshad pa lta bu'i khyad par sbyor dgos pa shes par rigs te|*.

41 *'Ju lan* 386.6–387.1: *gzhan du na| yab rje rgyal ba'i dbang po lnga pas| thos bsam gyi tshe dper brjod res mi dgrol na re dogs 'dzub rtsis kyi g.yeng ba bshol nas bem po zhal 'gril |gyi ting 'dzin la mnyam par 'jog par zhu| zhes gdams pa man ngag zab shos su mthong ste|*.

> one cannot untie [the meaning of] the examples mentioned, then one should postpone the distractions of counting hopes and fears with the fingers and rest in the meditation of pretending to know [the meaning]."

This reference to a saying by the fifth Dalai Lama is, of course, bitter irony. As Rapsel clarifies in the next polemical insult, for him, only the practice of debate and reasoning leads to a proper understanding of Buddhism, and any meditative practice that lacks this logical basis must be seen as pointless: [36]

> And since I am [your] Dharma friend, arguing in the bazaar of disputation of the best scholars of the world, I also offer a gift of a heartfelt advice.[42] [37]

His actual advice then takes the form of poetic stanzas that are employed to mark the end of the discussion of this particular issue, as such intermediate or transitional verses commonly do:[43] [38]

> Haha! [39]
> Arise! Leave from the bed of the scholars' meditation!
> Look! The lion of reasoning glides through the snow;
> He measures the circumference of the snowy Mount Meru in an instant.
> Where to will the *asura* flee who thought he was confident?
> Hehe!
> Drown in the depths of the ocean of fear of nihilism and eternalism,
> Bound by the magical leash of various kinds of reasoning,
> Suppressed by a Mount Meru of 1000 steps of stubbornness and confusion,
> Sealed by the *vajra* of eternal changelessness.

These stanzas display a lively, colloquial format, as illustrated most pointedly by the opening interjections of loud laughter. As is common in such passages, they make heavy use of various metaphors and comparisons. The lion of reasoning is of course Rapsel, a logician amongst other logicians in "the bazaar of disputation of the best scholars of the world." Mipam, by contrast, is likened to an *asura*, or "demigod"—that is, beings that inhabit the lower part of Mount Meru, the centre of the Buddhist universe, and which, despite their special qualities, are weaker than the gods, with whom they are engaged in an eternal fight. According to Rapsel, it is his "personal Mount Meru" of ignorance, sustained in the bed of meditation, which keeps Mipam suppressed and makes him succumb to the mighty lion of reasoning. [40]

Particularly striking is the extent of rhetorical polemics. While of seemingly minor importance for the argumentative contents, they have a prominent place in polemical treatises, where in terms of relative proportions they sometimes exceed the formal discussions that are their counterparts. That said, it should be conceded that the clarity of the distinction between these two types of discourses may vary. Sometimes there are clear linguistic markers that separate rhetorical polemics from content discussion; at other times, these elements are tied more closely together. From a structural as well as a stylistic perspective, it can be argued [41]

42 *'Ju lan* 387.1: *'dzam gling mkhas pa yongs kyi rtsod pa'i tshong brdal du bgro ba bgyid pa'i chos mthun gyi mdza' bo lags pas snying gtam gyi bslab pa'i skyes bstab pa'ang yin no*|.

43 *'Ju lan* 387.1: *ha ha*| *bzhengs shig mkhas rnams ting 'dzin mal las spyon*| |*gzigs shig rigs pa'i seng chen gangs la 'phyo*| |*gangs dkar lhun po'i khor yug yul tsam 'jal*| |*gdeng drod rtog pa'i sbyin skyes gang du bros*| |*he he*| *rtag chad nyam nga'i chu gter klong du bying* | |*rnam mang rigs pa'i 'phrul gyi zhags pas bcings*| |*'gal 'khrul rim pa stong gi lhun pos mnan*| |*mi 'gyur g.yung drung rdo rje'i rgya yis btab*| |*zhes kyang smras so*|.

that passages of rhetorical polemics act as a frame for formal discussion: structurally, as a marker and mount of the various argumentative elements; and stylistically, as a linguistically rich and lively contrast to the dry language of technical discussion which it encloses. Another form of frame emerges when considering the relationship between rhetorical polemics and formal argumentation in conceptual terms.

Rhetorical Polemics as Conceptual Framework: The Yogi and the Scholar—and the Hashang

Rhetorical polemics commonly draw from a rich repertoire of mostly Indian imagery, making full use of various kinds of metaphors, allusions, and comparisons, as illustrated above. In the controversy between Mipam and Rapsel, there is a particular focus on using poetic expressions to align the two opponents with a typology that bifurcates experts of Buddhism into being more practice-oriented or more theory-oriented. In this scheme, Mipam is portrayed as the yogi *par excellence*: a religious practitioner who engages in meditation in solitary places, far removed from the bustling, larger monastic institutions. These institutions, in turn, are seen as the homes of scholars like Rapsel. Rather than train in meditation, these logicians must train themselves in the practice of reasoning as it is commonly fostered in the debate-focused education of the monastic institutions of the Géluk school. [42]

This allusion to the two roles of yogi and scholar, of course, has a certain grounding in the living conditions of the two opponents. After all, Mipam spent larger periods of his life in solitary retreat, and Rapsel became famous for his achievements as a teacher at the debate college (*grwa tshang*) of Kumbum Monastery. Rhetorical polemics, however, exaggerate and simplify these roles to stereotypes. Mipam, in particular, was not just a yogi but also a formidable scholar. In his own tradition, he is remembered most importantly as a prolific writer of scholarly treatises, and during a sojourn to central Tibet he even spent some time at a philosophical college of Ganden (*dga' ldan*) Monastery, one of the main institutions of the rival Géluk school.[44] [43]

However, rhetorical polemics clearly do not aim at a historically faithful and nuanced rendering; rather, they are set so as to caricature their characters. A couple of examples may provide a better understanding of the nature of such portrayals. Again, in passages that are clearly part of rhetorical polemics, Rapsel refers to Mipam in the following way, in his second critical treatise:[45] [44]

> Understanding could come forth if you were able to hold a thesis at the great centres of learning. But even though you may compose many letters in solitude, this is simply a [useless] hardship! [45]

A similar description is found in his first criticism:[46] [46]

> This profound roar, a melody of a thousand strings of good explanations, is known [47]

44 This was reported by one of his biographers, Khenpo Künpel (*mkhan po kun dpal*). See Pettit (1999, 24) for a translation of the respective passage.

45 *Ga bur chu rgyun* 439.1–2: *bshad grwa chen mo rnams su dam bca' 'jog thub na go ba skye rgyu yod la| |dben pa zhig tu yi ge mang po srel kyang ngal ba tsam mo|*.

46 *'Ju lan* 408.2–3: *gzhung lugs rab 'byams smra ba'i dkyil 'khor du grags pa legs par bshad pa'i rgyud stong dbyangs kyi nga ro zab mo ste| dben pa'i ri sul kun tu grags pa'i gtam ni ma yin no|*.

> in the *maṇḍala* of those who proclaim countless scriptural systems, [but] it is not advice known in every secluded mountain valley!

[48] Not only is the uniform nature of these depictions striking, but also their frequency. While other metaphors and comparisons are used, references to the yogi-versus-scholar theme outnumber these other allusions by far. As most of these comparisons come from Rapsel's side, one could argue for an immediate purpose of these simplified depictions: the denigration of his opponent Mipam as a merely practice-focused yogi and, at the same time, the enhancement of Rapsel's own status as a scholar among scholars, as is suggested in the following stanzas:[47]

[49] > Untrained in the path of reasoning, the retreatant Mipam
> Is not grasped by the wind that kindles the fire of reasoning.
> Hence, setting up [a line of] reasoning he refutes himself,
> And is ridiculed by the assembly of logicians.

[50] However, despite the harsh tone of rhetorical polemics, one has to consider the playful nature of such passages, which use both poetic denigration and praise as stylistic devices. The following passage, for example, also makes use of the yogi-versus-scholar scheme, but it depicts both as legitimate roles that constitute their own domain as different approaches to the same ultimate aim of the Buddhist teaching:[48]

[51] > The unequalled bliss of meditation is possible in solitude,
> The secret words that emanate from the path of reasoning [befit] the Dharma centres.
> Everybody has his own share of *karma*, they will not cross [each other];
> [But] this does not mean that the wealth of great meaning is lacking [in either].

[52] Even though rather harsh rhetorical manoeuvres dominate, passages such as these reflect the generally more amicable tone of the exchange between Mipam and Rapsel. How these are interpreted also depends, of course, on the audience. The two opponents themselves often refer to these polemical side blows as mere "teasers" (*nyams mtshar*)—a term that hints at the playful nature of rhetorical polemics.

[53] That said, their play on the yogi-versus-scholar scheme also has a broader conceptual dimension. The frequent allusions to this divide and the caricatured picture that is painted contribute to stabilizing a simplistic notion of these roles, which would resonate with a larger audience. In fact, stereotyping along a divide between yogis and scholars is a rather common theme in Tibetan intellectual history, as is the mockery that is associated with such typologies. The valuation of these roles varies according to context. In the popular life stories of so-called "holy madmen" (*smyon pa*)—yogis like Milarépa (*mi la ras pa*) or Drukpa Künlek (*'brug pa kun legs*)—criticism of overly-scholarly scholars is a typical element. However, in the more specialized scholastic discourses of which the majority of polemical literature is a part, the role of the yogi might easily be seen as the more problematic one. As the argumentative core of these texts is constituted by an expertise in the textual heritage of Buddhism and its accepted

47 *Ga bur chu rgyun* 436.5: *rigs lam ma sbyangs mi pham dgon pa ba*| |*rigs pa'i me grogs rlung gis ma zin pas*| |*rigs pa bkod de rang gis sun phyung ba*| |*rigs pa smra ba'i tshogs kyis ga zhar mdzod*|.

48 *Ga bur chu rgyun* 460.1–2: *mi mnyam bsam gtan bde ba dben par 'os*| |*rigs lam 'phrul gyi gsang tshig chos kyi grwar*| |*rang rang las kyi bgo skal mi bsnol ba*| |*de ni don chen nor gyis dbul ma yin*|.

logical principles, qualities typical of a scholar are favoured. This is, for example, also obvious in the way that pure and corrupt lineages of the transmission of Buddhism are professed in the introductory parts of such treatises, as discussed earlier (see also Viehbeck 2019, 207–12, 2014, 50–57).

A central element in the narrative construction of a threat to the proper transmission of [54] Buddhism is the figure of Hashang. In later references in scholastic literature, both of the opponents in the Samyé debate, as well as their respective positions, are depicted in rather uniform ways, with the Indian Kamalaśīla representing the superior rational approach to the Buddhist teaching, and the Chinese Hashang representing the inferior focus on meditative practices. In this way, these opponents also stand for more general stereotypical roles, as José Cabezón explains: "It *is* to say that just as Hwa shang becomes the paradigmatic 'other,' Kamalaśīla becomes in some ways the paradigmatic defender of the faith, especially when the issue has to do, as it often does, with the question of quietism" (Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 21). In this conception, Hashang's position is depicted not only as antirational, as it would go against fundamental principles of authentic Indian Buddhism in its preference for meditative experience over rational reflection, but also as embodying a distorted approach to proper meditative procedure. Thus, Hashang is perceived as a particularly dangerous figure not because he is attacking Buddhism from an external, non-Buddhist perspective, but from a misguided understanding of Buddhism itself. And while he is perceived as a threat, the narratives also emphasize his defeat, and he emerges as a stereotypical erring, but ultimately losing, opponent.

In light of the generally different approaches to Buddhism with which Hashang and Ka- [55] malaśīla are associated, as well as with regard to numerous smaller details in the narrations about these figures, it seems feasible to argue for a striking parallelism to the way the notions of the yogi and the scholar are developed in the nineteenth-century debates analysed here. Luckily, Rapsel spares us an elaborate argument for a close relationship between yogi and Hashang rhetorics, as such a connection is established in a much more direct way. The very same passages of rhetorical polemics that draw on the stereotyped yogi-versus-scholar scheme also make particularly telling use of comparisons and analogies to the figure of Hashang. Two examples from Rapsel's first criticism may suffice to illustrate this point. Again, in a passage that is structurally and rhetorically not part of formal argumentation, Rapsel jokingly suggests that Mipam's appearance as an ordinary monk is only a disguise. At heart, and in his philosophical position, he should be seen as the Chinese Hashang:[49]

> Despite [your] great hypocrisy of pretending to belittle the Hashang view, […] [56] there is no doubt that you have arrived from China, in the guise of a monk of the present age.

This comparison is also drawn in another ironic passage, which directly relates Mipam to [57] the standard narrative about Hashang's defeat. In this narrative, it is said that when Hashang was defeated, he lost one of his boots when leaving the debate yard. This, in turn, was seen as an omen that his views would be left behind and still be present, as a possible threat, among

49 *'Ju lan* 404.2–3: *hwa shang gi lta bar smad khul gyi zob che na yang* | […] *khyed rgya nag nas da lta rab byung gi gzugs kyis byon pa gor ma chag go.*

later Tibetan Buddhists.[50] In a very straightforward way, Mipam is depicted to be one of them, in having gained Hashang's boot as a reward:[51]

> There is no doubt that you follow Hashang Mahāyāna, but as you obtained [his] lost boot as your allotted share, you are not even to blame! [58]

Clearly, this is an accusation that cannot be left uncommented upon, and Mipam felt compelled to respond both in content-related as well as rhetorical terms. In his answer, he argues, as he also does in similar cases, that his position is not a personal innovation, but part of a long-standing tradition. This is commonly done by pointing to relevant quotations from Buddhist scriptures that his opponent also has to accept as authentic. The extent of these references, however, is remarkable. In order to prove the legitimacy of his own position, in this particular case, Mipam lists quotations from over one hundred and sixty passages contained in various Indian scriptures (in their Tibetan translations), and thereby also illustrates the scope of his scholarship.[52] Beyond the engagement in serious argumentation, his response also functions on the level of rhetorical polemics, as his plays on words and various side blows at the very the end of this particular discussion demonstrate:[53] [59]

> Thus, these explanations that draw from the path of reasoning and are in accordance with the above[-mentioned] scriptures and their meaning establish those who propose the so-called "Great Madhyamaka, free from extremes" as the unsurpassable, long-standing tradition of the Conqueror (i.e., the Buddha). Hence, it is not the case that all those holding this tradition are merely people who take their share of Hashang's lost boot. Rather, the *sūtra*s and *tantra*s, together with the commentaries on their intention, had come down as the rain of the Dharma of the Conqueror, the Lion of the Śākya [clan], prior to the appearance of Hashang. These were then brought [to Tibet] by the earlier kings, ministers, and *bodhisattva*s so that the people of the Snow Land can enjoy them. The stainless nectar of these [scriptures] is their very lot. Accepting this in a way that one does not exclude oneself, one certainly is exclusively someone with a good fortune! [60]

While Mipam often calls for more cautiousness in attributing certain philosophic viewpoints to the tradition of Hashang—clearly also as a manoeuvre to avoid such an association for himself—he knows and enjoys the ping-pong play of rhetorical polemics and their comparisons. In so doing, he also reproduces and reinforces the stereotypes that developed around the figure of Hashang in the larger perspective that the standard narrative of the historical development of Buddhism on the Tibetan plateau provides. [61]

50 Regarding the symbolic meaning associated with Hashang's shoe, see Lopez (1996, 223), further also Cabezón and Dargyay (2007, 19–21).

51 *'Ju lan* 398.1: *ha shang ma hA ya na'i rjes su song ba la the tshom med de| lham lus pa bgo skal du thob pa'i phyir le lan bda' ba'ang med do|*.

52 See *Rab lan* 257–292. For a discussion of the principle of scriptural authority in this context, see Viehbeck (2019, 17–21).

53 *Rab lan* 302.2–5: *de ltar gong du lung dang de'i don bzhin rigs pa'i lam nas go bar bshad pa 'di dag gis mtha' bral dbu ma chen po zhes gang smras pa de dag rgyal ba'i ring lugs bla na med par grub pas na| 'di 'dzin pa po thams cad ha shang gi lhwam lus pa'i bgo skal len pa sha stag ma yin te| ha shang ma byung ba'i sngon du rgyal ba shAkya seng ge'i chos kyi char phab pa'i mdo rgyud rnams dang de'i dgongs 'grel dang bcas pa sngon gyi rgyal blon byang sems chen po rnams kyis gangs can pas longs spyad byar drangs pa rnams kyi bdud rtsi dri ma med pa'i bgo skal nyid rang gis rang la bcad par ma gyur par tshul bzhin len pa skal pa bzang po can 'ba' zhig tu nges so||*.

Concluding Remarks

This paper aimed to explore crucial features of polemical comparisons in Tibetan Buddhist discourses, drawing from a set of treatises that were exchanged between Ju Mipam and Pari Rapsel, two eminent scholars of the late nineteenth century. While set in their specific historical context and determined by their authors' concerns as well as literary style, a close reading and contextualised analysis of their respective works exhibited issues of a larger concern—with regard to literary conventions of Tibetan polemics in more specific terms and issues of identity construction in scholastic cultures more generally. [62]

Based primarily on stylistic and structural observations, it has been argued that the investigated treatises are constituted by two distinct discourses, termed as formal argumentation and rhetorical polemics. While earlier research on Tibetan scholastic literature has often focussed on the doctrinal contents negotiated in passages of formal argumentation, the consideration of rhetorical features addressed in this article shows how these two discourses can be related. As shown through textual analysis, passages of rhetorical polemics act as a structural and stylistic device: they delineate and frame different argumentative elements in structural terms, and add to the literary richness and quality of polemical works through their frequent employment of polemical comparisons, invective language, and other stylistic means. The consideration of polemical comparisons, in particular, also revealed a conceptual dimension of rhetorical polemics. By drawing on an imaginary in which the two opponents are equated to stereotypical images of Tibetan religious specialists—which are here depicted as following either a yogic or a scholarly approach—rhetorical polemics also formulate a conceptual framework. [63]

This framework and the stereotyped comparisons it entails make it possible, I argue, to connect to a larger vision of identity construction among Tibetan Buddhist scholars. In a simplified and increasingly solidified master narrative of the introduction and development of Buddhism on the Tibetan plateau, Tibetan Buddhists are depicted as the righteous keepers of the flame of authentic Indian Buddhism. In this vision, the authentic transmission of Buddhism is always under threat, and its contours must be guarded against possible dangers. This pertains to non-Buddhists, like proponents of the Bon religion in Tibet, but more importantly to threats from the inside, from people with a misguided understanding of Buddhism. In this setting, the figure of Hashang Mahāyāna is depicted as being responsible for a faulty transmission of Buddhism in the first place, and he is developed as the stereotypical "Other," against which all proper Tibetan Buddhists must distinguish themselves. The rhetorical polemics, analogies, and comparisons endorsed by our nineteenth-century opponents connect to this grand narrative, and, at least from the side of Rapsel, suggest a close connection between yogic and Hashang rhetorics. Such comparisons thus allow Tibetan scholars to locate their opponents as well as themselves in a larger conception of the development of Buddhism on the Tibetan plateau. While articulated in the context of playful rhetorics, the pervasive character of this narrative resonates with a wider audience and hence also has an effect on the general perception of the two opponents. At the same time, by using and supporting this master narrative, our nineteenth-century opponents contribute to its further solidification, as numerous Tibetan scholars had done, in various ways, before the polemical exchange of Mipam and Rapsel. [64]

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