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**Religious difference in the debate narratives of the Pali Canon**

This study aims at investigating the relationship between early Buddhism and its religious environment. It focuses on a literary analysis of the Buddha's religious teaching debates as transmitted in the Pali canon. Particular attention will be brought to the literary construction of the non-Buddhist opponent (or counterpart) in the dialogue situation.

Many texts of the canonical literature of Theravada Buddhism are cast in the literary form of historicising narratives about debates involving the Buddha. Audience and counterparts include disciples or devotees, but also adherents of other, non-Buddhist religious groups and doctrines. These texts provide important information about the religious environment in which the Buddha and his disciples lived. At the same time, the debate genre represents a literary device which has become an essential means of Buddhist self-portrayal and self-understanding. Careful analysis of the literary dialogues will enable us to draw conclusions about the "religious market" in which Buddha and his devotees participated, and uncover their differentiated strategies of standing up to the diverse religious movements at this time's competition.

The study's aim is not to hypothetically reconstruct the "historical" Buddha, but to question the homogenised picture Buddhist tradition conveys of its historical origins.