

The rise of Post-Tantra: the formation of *snying thig* from 1050–1213

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Eleventh and twelfth century Tibet was marked by both a flood of Buddhist tantric teachers, lineages and systems from India, and by an astonishingly creative reinvention of these tantric traditions in specifically Tibetan terms. We are still only in the beginning phases of sorting out these developments historically, which are obscured due to the paucity of clear historical accounts, the tendency by many authors to present their compositions as excavations from the past, and the tendency by most authors to cloud their innovativeness with claims of faithfulness to Indian precedents. One of the most important developments was the rise of what some have termed philosophical Vajrayana, the most interesting example of which is the tradition of *rdzogs chen snying thig*. My paper will assume that the tradition originated in the mid eleventh century and developed into its basic form by the close of the twelfth century, relying upon new sources that have become available only in the past few years. I will focus on outlining the basic features of the tradition in relation to esoteric Buddhism, including the famous *gsang ba snying po tantra*. In doing so, I will argue that the tradition broke with the central norms of Indian esoteric Buddhism, and constituted – in the minds of Tibetans as well as in substance – a quite distinct development that could be termed “post-tantra”, since it deeply problematizes the division of Buddhism into sutra and tantra. In doing so, I will argue that the *snying thig* tradition makes perfect sense as a creative development in eleventh and twelfth century Buddhist Tibet, in contrast to suggestions that its true origins lie earlier in time and/or in other cultures and religious traditions.