



## Householders and monks: a study of treasure discoverers in contemporary Kham

*Antonio Terrone*

Recent events in eastern Tibet have dragged attention on a phenomenon that has aroused curiosity among Tibet scholars and provoked indignation among local authorities. Last decade has seen the rise of large religious monastic-like compounds, called “gar” (*sgar*), and at the same time the rejuvenation of an ancient activity seldom studied in its contemporary manifestation, the tradition of treasures (*gter ma*). I think these two phenomena are not isolated, but intimately linked. The leaders of at least four of the largest presently active *sgar*-s are themselves treasure discoverers (*gter ston*) and tend to adhere to a monastic lifestyle. However at the same time another figure of treasure revealer, more isolated, less publicly involved, and less popular, coexist with the more famed ones. They are lay Tantric specialists (*sngags pa*) who prefer to live in remote areas or on mountain peaks, with a small entourage of close disciples or even alone. Developing healing charismatic powers, visionary experiences, and revelation of mental treasure teachings they are often on the move to monasteries, nunneries, and retreat centres to transmit teachings, mass empowerments, and meditation instructions.

In this essay I will describe the social cultural phenomenon of treasure tradition in present areas of Kham as represented by both trends briefly mentioned above. I will also attempt to provide analysis of the symbolic processes enacted by the phenomenon in both the manifestations.