

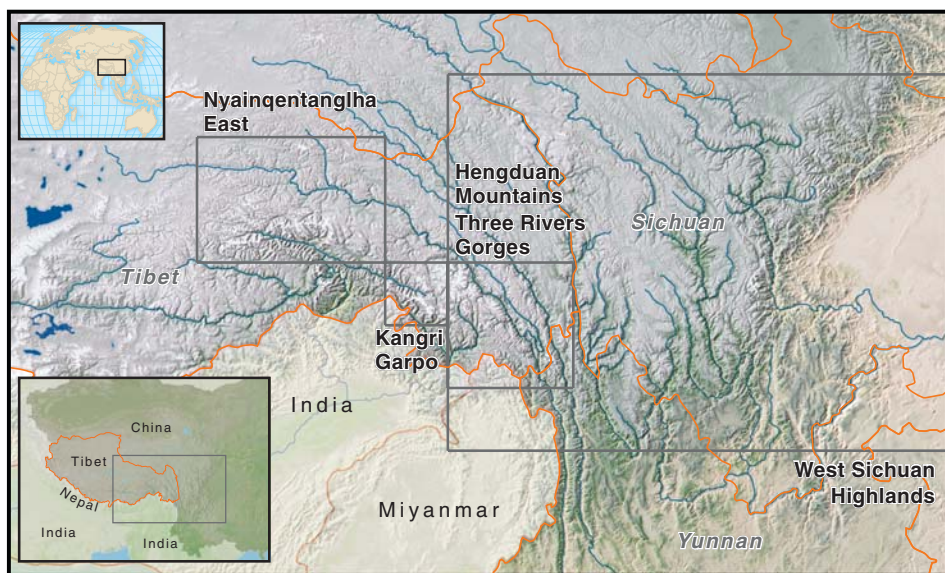
# EAST OF THE HIMALAYA

*From the “Alps of Tibet” to the eastern fringes of the Hengduan Mountains, this mysterious land holds countless unclimbed summits. Incredibly complex, the region can be explained, but it will long remain an enigma.*

TAMOTSU NAKAMURA

*Photographs by the author*

*Maps by Martin Gamache*



*Today the map has no more secrets. Idle minds repeat that parrot phrase. But who knows all Tibet, or its far-away frontier on western China? Even its own prayer-muttering tribes know only their own bleak, wind-swept valleys.*

—Joseph Rock, *National Geographic magazine*, February 1930

East of the Himalaya there is a vast mountain region that spreads from the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau to the western rim of the Sichuan Basin. The upper streams of East Asia's five great rivers flow north to south through here, carving fantastically deep valleys between giant mountain folds. In one place the five rivers are squeezed into a span of merely 150 kilometers before fanning out on their journeys to independent seas from the Pacific near Shanghai to the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean.

For climbers, the great region of East and Southeast Tibet, West Sichuan, Northwest

Yunnan, West Qinghai, and North Myanmar (Burma), offers ranges upon ranges of stunning 5,000- and 6,000-meter peaks. Very few of these have been explored by mountaineers, fewer still have felt crampons on their summits. Below them lie equally untrodden glaciers, hidden gorges, lush forests, verdant pastures, exotic flora and fauna, historic monasteries, and friendly villagers, most of Tibetan heritage. The Tibetan ethnic group embraces this entire region, extending far beyond the high plateau or even the Tibet Autonomous Region most of us imagine when we hear the name “Tibet.”

The open-door policy carried out since 1980 by China’s former premier, Deng Xiao-ping, has enabled foreigners to reach ranges previously unknown to climbers. Today access is opening even further under the West China Development Plan, which is reaching the most isolated frontiers. Even the least-frequented rural areas are experiencing rapid changes. Unfortunately, access for mountaineers is still not a simple matter, involving many permits and sometimes considerable cost, especially within Tibet proper.

In this article, which stems from my 25 exploratory journeys to the border country since 1990, I have divided this huge “East of the Himalayas” region into three broad sections, each with its own collection of mountain ranges. These are East Tibet, The Three Rivers Gorges of the Hengduan Mountains, and the West Sichuan Highland in the Yangtze River Basin. Within these sections are many named mountain ranges. And within the ranges themselves, I have defined further subdivisions for convenience in describing the peaks.

This area is becoming increasingly known to climbers, and I hope that my survey will prove helpful in understanding its complexity and its opportunities. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Nicholas B. Clinch, Dr. Michael Ward, Mr. Harish Kapadia, Mr. Ed Douglas, Mr. Christian Beckwith, Mr. John Harlin, Mr. Bernard Domenech, and many friends overseas and in Japan as well for their continued support and encouragement.

#### SPECIAL NOTES:

*Pronunciation:* The letter “q” is used for something between a “ch” and “je” sound. Thus, “Nyainqentanglha” is most easily pronounced “Nyainchentanglha,” and the same principle applies for Jieqinnalagabu, etc.

*Names:* The names we see in print result from a complicated process. After deciding which name to use when there are several local choices, we must interpret the sound through our foreign ears, and then approximate it with a phonetic English spelling. Sometimes the process involves four languages, each with its own alphabet: Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, and English. Therefore, don’t be surprised when you find several spellings or even names for the same mountain. The names in this article are the ones that I judge to be the most commonly used. For many of these peaks, I have personally translated the oral Tibetan into English spelling. Often the altitude can be used to confirm a peak, but even this is complicated by the existence of several maps with conflicting altitudes. I use the 1:50,000 and/or 1:100,000 scale China People’s Liberation Army (PLA) maps as the final arbiter whenever these are open to me (the maps are restricted and not commercially available). For areas where I have not seen PLA maps, the 1:100,000 or 1:200,000 scale Russian topographical maps we have applied.

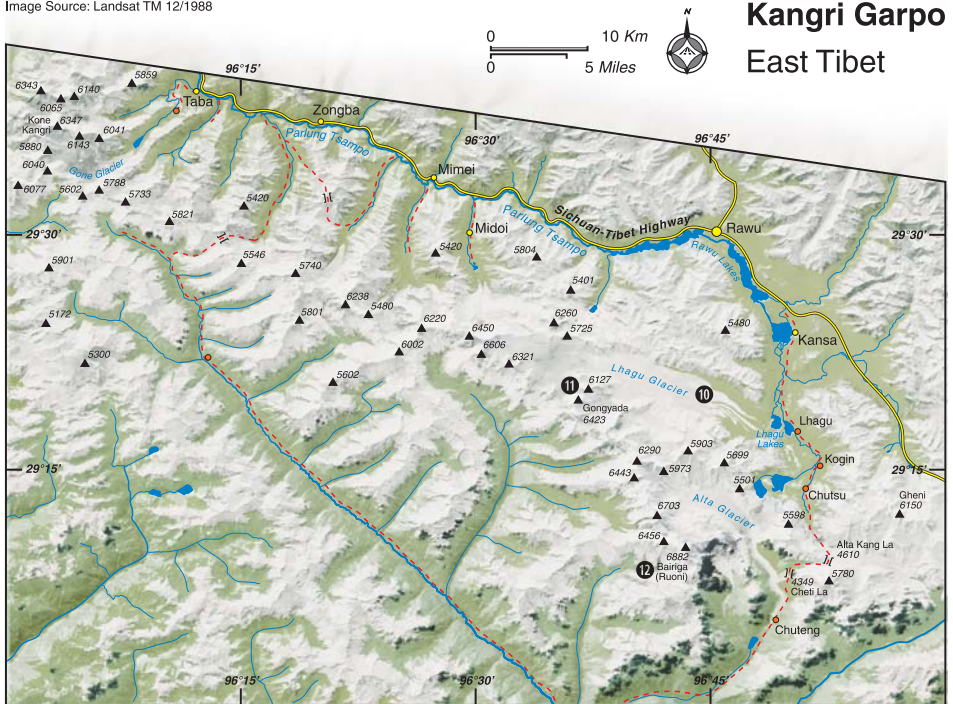
*Climbing seasons:* In general, good timing for climbing is before or after the rainy season that runs from the end of June to the end of September. That is, most climbers will want to visit from May to mid June, or from the end of September to November. However, the climate here is complex and not necessarily uniform. I discuss many variations within the different sections.

# EAST OF THE HIMALAYA

## Part 1

# EAST TIBET

Image Source: Landsat TM 12/1988



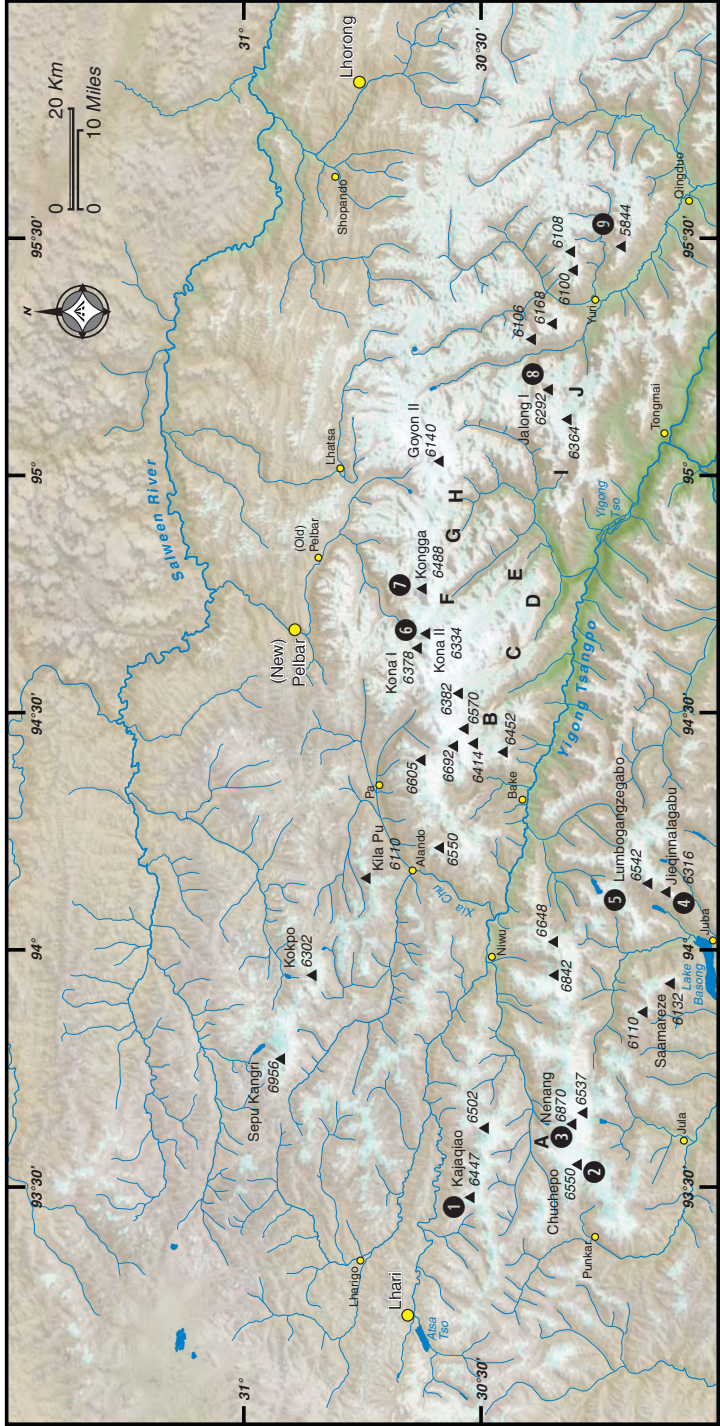
THE NUMBERS INSIDE CIRCLES ON THE MAPS CORRESPOND WITH PHOTOGRAPHS. ALL PEAKS ARE VIRGIN UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

East Tibet holds two principle mountain ranges, the Nyainqentanglha and the Kangri Garpo. Nyainqentanglha is a huge range: 750 kilometers long, it extends west-east between latitude 30°N and 31°N. The westernmost end is a massif of four 7,000-meter peaks south of the Tibetan sacred lake, Nam Tso, while the easternmost end extends to Rawu, east of the Great Bend of the Tsangpo River. Over this tremendous distance there are two primary natural divisions; they split east versus west near the town of Lhari. Kangri Garpo is a sizeable mountain range stretching 280 kilometers from northwest to southeast in N:28°30'-29°60' and E:95°30'-97°30'. It exists between Tsangpo Great Bend, the eastern end of Himalaya, and Baxoila Ling, the western end of the Hengduan Mountains.

# Nyainqentanglha East Tibet

- A Aigagong Glacier
- B Jiangpu Glacier
- C Daoge Glacier
- D Gongpu Glacier
- E Qiacing Glacier
- F Ruogo Glacier
- G Malong Glacier
- H Maguolong Glacier
- I Qiabiegong Glacier
- J Zepu

Image Source: Landsat Earthsat Mosaic N46-30  
12/1987 to 08/1995





No.1: The Matterhorn of Nyainqentanglha, Kajaqiao (or Jajacho) (6,447m), in a view from west.



No.4-5: Lake Basong and the west face of Jieqinnalagabu (6,316m) (right) and Lumbogangzegabo (6,542m) (left).

## NYAINQENTANGLHA WEST

Nyainqentanglha West forms a part of the high altitude Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. Climbers from the Tohoku University of Japan made the first ascent of the highest peak here, Nyainqentanglha (7,162m) in 1986. All of the other 7,000-meter peaks have already been climbed. Glacier development is concentrated only in the vicinity of the mountaintops. Snow lines are as high as 5,700 meters. (See *AAJ* 2002, ppg 427-429, Jon Otto.)

## NYAINQENTANGLHA EAST

Nyainqentanglha East is located on the southeastern rim of Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. The upper tributaries of Yalung Tsangpo erode the plateau into deep valleys like creases in wrinkled cloth, sewing seams. The topography becomes complicated. The climate is humid and brings much snowfall, which buries the summits, fosters glaciers below, and grows beautiful conifer forests below the permanent snowline. The highest peak of the main range is Sepu Kangri (6,956m), which was first climbed in 2002 following repeated attempts in the late 1990s. All the other stunning 6,000-meter peaks in the range remain unclimbed.

The main range of Nyainqentanglha East forms the watershed between Yalung Tsangpo and the Salween River (a.k.a., the Nu Jiang). The upper Salween flows in the north, and two tributaries of the Yalung Tsangpo—Yigong Tsangpo and Parlung Tsangpo—flow in the south. Countless peaks exceeding 6,000 meters still exist, veiled and unvisited, while unexplored glaciers reach up to 35 kilometers (22 mi.) in length (the Qiaqing Glacier). Few of these peaks are even known to climbers; Sepu Kangri is the only significant peak to have been summited. One branch of the Nyainqentanglha East separates from the main range near Lhari to the east in the south of Yigong Tsangpo. Here are many fascinating snow peaks. At Lake Basong (Bassom Tso), mountains and valleys surround a scenic and historic spot with an island lamasery. Turquoise blue Lake Basong, with neighboring peaks that rise 3,000 meters higher, brings to mind the European Alps; I call this region the “Alps of Tibet.” The highest peak, Nenang (6,870m) is guarded with a precipitous snow face and a treacherous ridge. The breathtaking pyramid, Jajacho (or Kajaqiao, 6,447m) soars into the sky in an impressive Matterhorn-like tower.

Within the main Nyenqentanglha East, we can think of four geographic groupings. The following is a brief chronicle of the explorations, scientific researches and climbings in these areas:

### *Northwest Region: north of Yigong Tsangpo to Sepu Kangri massif*

Sepu Kangri (6,956m) was challenged by the British parties lead by Chris Bonington and Charles Clarke in 1996, '97, and '98 successively. They came within 500 feet of the summit in 1998 (*Tibet's Secret Mountain: The Triumph of Sepu Kangri*, 1999). On October 2, 2002, Americans Carlos Buhler and Mark Newcomb reached the summit (see “Sepu Kangri”, later in this Journal). No other peaks have been attempted.

### *Lhari to Lake Basong region south of Yigong Tsangpo (1-5)*

Japanese parties from Nagano Prefecture visited in 1994 and 2000. They explored the northern



Top: No.2: The beautiful west face of Chuchepo (6,550m), east of Punkar. No.3: Middle: The south face of Nenang (6,870m). No.7: Bottom: The north face of Kongga (6,488m).

side of Kajaqiao in 1994 and entered the valley north of Lake Basong in 2000. In October 1999 a New Zealand party led by John Nankervis attempted a 6,250-meter peak to the east of Basong Lake and reached nearly 6,000 meters on Jieqinnalagabu (Namla Karpo, 6,316m). In 2001, T. Nakamura's Japanese party tried to go down Yigong Tsangpo from Lhari, but frequent and dangerous landslides blocked them soon after they left Lhari. In 2001 John Town and colleague visited the valley north of Lake Basong. In March-April 2002 Nicola Hart and John Town (U.K.) entered Yigong Tsangpo from Lhari and made a reconnaissance of the northwestern side of Nenang (6,870m, currently the highest unclimbed peak in Nyainqentanglha) and other peaks that surround Niwu Qu. In April 2002 John Harlin and Mark Jenkins (USA) reached 5,250 meters on Jieqinnalagabu but retreated due to avalanche danger (they plan to return in 2003); they then trekked north of Lake Basong and looped over a 5,000-meter pass to southwest of Basong. In October-November 2002 T. Nakamura's party made a reconnaissance of the southern slope of Nenang from Jula and ascended to a high pass, Laqin La (5,300m), on the watershed to Niwu Chu.

*Central Region: north of Yigong Tsangpo to Tsangpo-Salween Divide (6, 7)*

In 2000 Charles Clarke (U.K.) approached from the north to unvisited glaciers south of Shargung La. In April and May 2002 T. Nakamura's party (Japan) searched for peaks and

glaciers in the north central part of the range south of Pelbar (Pemba) on the Tsangpo-Salween Divide.

*East Region: Botoi Tsangpo basin north of Parlung Tsangpo (8, 9)*

In 1989 a joint Chinese and Japanese party of science institutions carried out a field survey and research of Zepu Glacier and its vicinity of Botoi Tsangpo north of Parlung Tsangpo. In October-November 2002 T. Nakamura's party explored unknown peaks surrounding Zepu Glacier and Jalong Glacier in Botoi Tsangpo basin, a tributary of Parlung Tsangpo. Here remain many magnificent untouched 6,000-meter peaks.

## KANGRI GARPO

In this almost unknown mountain range lies the lowest-altitude Tibetan glacier (Ata Glacier South, 2,440m) and Tibet's largest glacier by surface area (Lhagu Glacier, 30 kilometers long by 2 to 5 kilometers wide). The range is encircled by three tributaries of the Tsangpo-Brahmaputra River. The northern side is deeply eroded where the Parlung Tsangpo, a tributary of the main Tsangpo, forms a narrow and precipitous gorge. To the south and east of the range, the Lohit River (Chinese name Zayul Qu) plays an important role. The river separates into two tributaries, Kangrigarpo Qu (qu and chu mean river) to the northwest and the Sang Qu to the northeast. The confluence is in a small point at Samai, in Zayul County not far from the border with Arnachal Pradesh, India.



Top: No. 6: The east face of Kona I (6,378m) (right) & Kona II (6,334) (left), Puyu valley. No.8: Middle: The stunning east face of Jalong I (6,292m), west of Zepu Qu, Botoi Tsangpo. No.9: Bottom: The west face of a spiky peak (5,844m), east of Yuri village, Botoi Tsangpo.



In the south of the range, the Dihang River (a tributary of the Brahmaputra) flows at 2,000-3,000 meters, while the mountain ridges only reach 4,000 meters, which is too low to provide a climatic barrier effect. Therefore, Kangri Garpo on the southernmost rim of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau receives a humid southwest seasonal wind direct from the Indian Ocean, resulting in considerable precipitation during the monsoon season and heavy snowfall in winter and spring. North of the watershed the topography is complicated. The eastern end is a high plateau, while to the west the valley of Parlung Tsangpo becomes a deep forested gorge. In the south the valleys are extremely eroded. For at least three months a year villages are isolated from the outside world because of heavy snow. All the 6,000-meter peaks in Kangri Garpo remain unclimbed. The New Zealand party climbed only one minor and nameless 5,000-meter peak along the Lhagu Glacier.

*Kangri Garpo East: Mountains surrounding Lhagu Glacier and Ata Glacier (10-12)*

In May 1999 T. Nakamura's party entered Lhagu Valley and first explored Ata Glacier North to make a reconnaissance for a climbing route to the highest peak Ruoni (or Bairiga, 6,882m). In October to November 2000, the Silver Turtle Party (Japan) explored the Lhagu Glacier to 5200 meters near the ridge dividing Lhagu and Ata Glaciers. In October-November 2001 the Silver Turtle Party again visited Lhagu Glacier and then went to Ata Kang La and descended the Zayul side to the north for a complete view of the eastern side of Ruoni. In October to November 2001 a New Zealand party headed by John Nankervis: Lhagu Glacier investigated the glacier extensively, but were unsuccessful at climbing due to bad weather. In October 2002 the Kobe University Alpine Club (Japan) made a reconnaissance of Ruoni; they have a permit to climb it in fall 2003.



No. 10: The Lhagu Glacier and the east face of Hamokongga (6,260m) west of Lhagu village.



No.11: The east face of Gongyada (6,423m) (left) & Zeh (6,127m) (right), Lhagu Glacier.



No.12: The northeast face of Ruoni (or Bairiga) (6,882m), the highest peak of the range, southwest of Kogin, Lhagu valley.

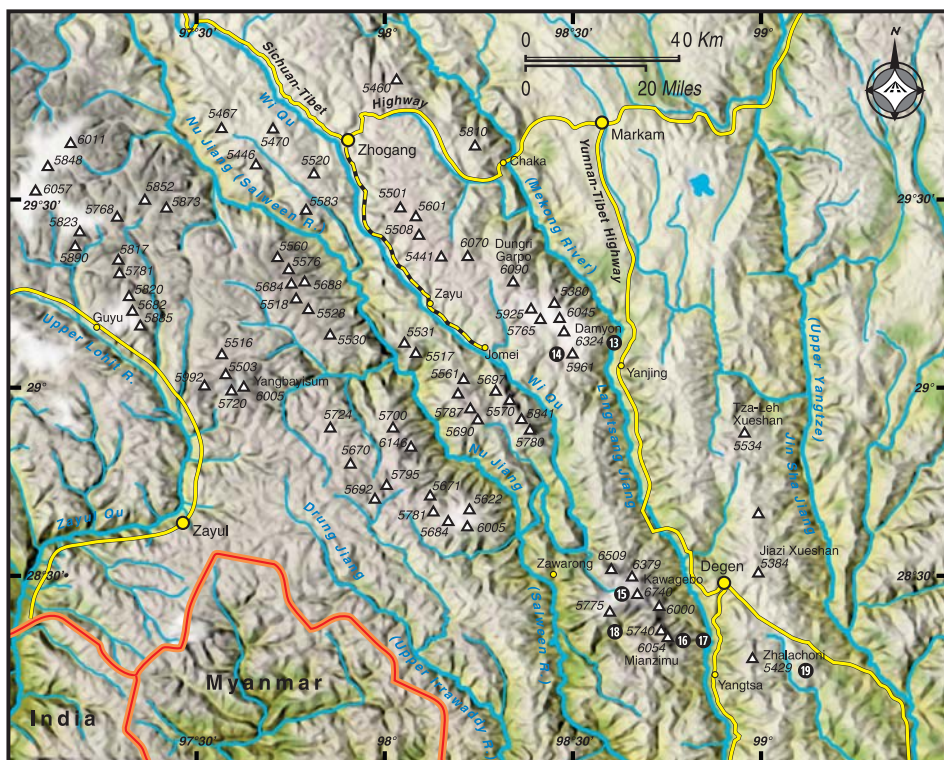
*Kangri Garpo West: Mountains west of Lhagu Glacier extending to Kone Kangri*

In September to October 1999 the Gakushuin University team (Japan) searched for what was expected to be the second highest massif, Kangrigarpola Feng (6,602m). They entered the Gone valley from Taba village (3000m) on the left bank of Parlung Tsangpo. However, no peak of that altitude was found; they concluded it must be Peak 6,347m according to the 1:50,000 China People's Liberation Army (PLA) map. They named it Kone Kangri.

# EAST OF THE HIMALAYA

Part II:

## THREE RIVERS GORGES OF THE HENGDUAN MOUNTAINS



### Hengduan Mountains- Sichuan/ Yunnan Three Rivers Gorges

The Chinese name for this complex region is “Hengduan Shan,” which means “traverse cutting mountains.” Early Chinese geographers understood that most of Asia’s mountain chains trend west-east, whereas the Hengduan Mountains slice north-south. These mountains form a considerable communication barrier between the people of the Tibetan Plateau and those of the Sichuan Basin. The barrier effect was especially prominent before the 1950s, when travel depended entirely on tortuous mountain trails and rope bridges or iron suspension bridges.

Of all the subranges within the Hengduan Mountains, the most geographically distinctive is the “Three River Gorges Country” on the frontier between Tibet, Sichuan, and Yunnan, with its tremendous bow-shaped geomorphologic structure. Unique in the world, these parallel ridges separate three mighty rivers: the Salween (Nujiang), the Mekong (Lancangjiang), and the River of Golden Sand (Jinshajiang). Between them, they constitute the headwaters of the Yangtze (Changjiang). The vertical relief between river and ridgecrests reaches 1,000 meters in the north and 2,500 meters in the south.

The Hengduan region is climatologically a transition zone between the lowland subtropical climate of Southeast Asia and the highland climate of the Tibetan Plateau. The Hengduan region correspondingly displays a wide variety of microclimates, but all are dominated by the southwest Asian monsoon rhythm, characterized by a seasonal change of wind systems. A recent study suggests that the Tibetan Plateau has its own permanent pressure system, which is also marked by changes in the prevailing wind direction between winter and summer on an independent plateau monsoon system. This system dominates the weather and climate of the Plateau, and may cause some deviation from average Asiatic monsoon conditions in the adjacent areas, including the Hengduan Mountains. In general, the snowline is between 4,800 and 5,200 meters.



## ROHIT-IRRAWADDY DIVIDE

The Rohit River is the easternmost tributary of the Brahmaputra River, which forms a watershed called the Dandalika Shan range with the upper Irrawaddy River in north Myanmar and southeast Tibet.

### *Hkakabo Razi*

The Irrawaddy and its tributaries have their sources in the Dandalika Shan that spreads over 200 kilometers along the border of China, Myanmar (Burma), and India. There are two peaks higher than 5,800 meters, which includes Hkakabo Razi (5,881m), the highest mountain in Myanmar. There are many small glaciers and snowfields. Hkakabo Razi was first discovered and its height measured by an Indian surveyor in 1923. In 1931 Kingdon-Ward tried an access to the mountain from the Burmese side and in 1937 he reached the upper Adung valley searching for possible climbing routes. In September 1996 Takashi Ozaki made the first ascent of Hkakabo Razi. The route taken is on the northeastern side of the mountain along the upper Adung valley. They cut a footpath which has not been maintained. No one has entered the region for climbing after the Ozaki's attempt.

## BAXOILA-GAOLIGONG RANGES: LOHIT/IRRAWADDY-SALWEEN DIVIDE

In the northwest of the Dandalika Shan range, the Rohit River separates into two tributaries, the Kangri Garpo Qu to the northwest and the Zayul Qu to the northeast. The Kangri Garpo range

lies in between the two tributaries, while the Zayul Qu (the upper Rohit), the Drung Jiang (the upper Irrawaddy), and the Salween River form a watershed called the Baxoila Ling Range. Baxoila Ling changes its name to Gaoligong Range in the south.

*Baxoila Ling Range-Lohit/Irrawaddy (north)-Salween divide*

The western divide of the Salween River is topographically complicated. The two rivers Irrawaddy and Lohit have their source in the divide of the Salween. The Baxoila Ling range has many unknown 6,000-meter peaks and no climbing attempt has yet been made. The outstanding 6,000-meter peaks from south to north are Peak 6,005m, Peak 6,146m, and Yangbayisum (6,005m). Pk 6,005m and Pk 6,146m can be seen from a pilgrimage route around Meili Xueshan (Kang Karpo). The area from Baxoila Ling to the Salween-Mekong divide is called Tsawarong, the Heart of the Deep Gorge Country, which has long had a small isolated human population. No one has visited the range for climbing.

*Gaoligong Shan range-Irrawaddy (south)-Salween divide*

The 250-kilometer-long Gaoligong Shan range starts near the Yunnan-Tibet border and extends southward along the Yunnan-Myanmar border. These 4,000-meter mountains have no value for mountaineering except one glaciated unclimbed 5,123-meter peak that the local people call Kawakabu, north of Gongshan.

## TANIANAWENG SHAN/NU SHAN

The Salween-Mekong divide in the Hengduan Mountains region stretches over 700 kilometers from the Tibetan Plateau to the south.

*Damyon and Dungri Garpo (13, 14)*

The Sichuan-Tibet Highway passes through the southern rim of the Tibetan Plateau, crossing the southern part of the Taniantaweng range at Tungda La (5,008m). To the north of the high pass there are no prominent mountains that exceed 6,000 meters, while to the south soars Damyon, a sizeable massif with two 6,000-meter peaks. Kingdon-Ward first called this mountain "Ta-miu" during his journey in 1911. Kingdon-Ward tried to climb one of the southernmost peaks from Yanjing (Yakalo) and reached a point of 5,170 meters in 1922, where he found a number of dead glaciers.

Damyon is a sacred mountain for local Tibetan people. A whole panorama of the eastern side can be seen at the point where the Yunnan-Tibet Highway passes over the Mekong-Yangtze divide. The mountain massif has many high rock peaks, but the glaciers are small and retreating. The Chinese map indicates two 6,000-meter peaks: Dungri Garpo (6,090m) and Damyon (6,324m), the highest in the massif. All the peaks remain untouched.

*Meili Xueshan (15-18)*

Meili Xueshan (also known as Ka-Kar-Po, Kang Karpo, and Moirigkawagarbo) is located at 98.6°E and 28.4°N and is engulfed by over 20 peaks with permanent snowcover, six of which exceed 6,000 meters. Meili Xueshan is topographically higher in the north and lower in the



No.13: The east face of Damyon (main peak) (6,324m), west of Mekong.



No.14: The east face of the 5,900m peak of Damyon Massif, south of Damyon near Yangjing.



Top: No. 16: The east face of Mianzimu (6,054m), the most beautiful mountain of Meili Xueshan. No. 17: Middle: The north face of Mianzimu (6,054m). No. 18: Bottom: The east face of Jiariren-an (5,470m) (Five Crown Peaks) of Meili Xueshan.

south. Its river valley is so wide in the south that an air current travels easily up the valley. As a result, the Meili Xueshan area is strongly affected by the monsoon, and there is a marked difference between the dry and humid seasons. In addition, the high and steep mountains help to produce vertical climatic belts with utterly different features. Above the snowline of 4,000 meters, the tall snow peaks shine white; in the valley, the glaciers extend dozens of kilometers. The glaciers around the highest peak were first explored by Kingdon-Ward in 1913. Below snowline, dense alpine shrubs and coniferous forests blanket the mountain slopes.

Melili Xueshan has received significant attention from mountaineers, thanks to Japanese and American attempts. The first to have attempted the highest peak, Kawagebo (6,740m) was a Japanese party, the Joetsu Alpine Club, in 1987, followed by the Academic Alpine Club of Kyoto University (AACK). In winter 1990-91 they attempted the peak from the eastern side in a joint expedition with China. In January a snow avalanche struck the mountaineering team at night. The campsite vanished and all 17 mountaineers were killed. AACK again challenged the peak from November to December 1996, but in spite of good weather conditions they were not successful. Meanwhile, American parties led by



No. 15: The east face of sacred Kawagebo (6,740m), the highest peak of Meili Xueshan, west of Mekong.

Nicholas B. Clinch visited the mountains four times in 1988, '89, '92, and '93. They attempted Peak 6,379m but gave up due to dangerous snow conditions, and then focused on Peak 6,509m, the second highest in the massif. In 1992 and '93 the Americans made attempts on Peak 6,509m from the northwestern side, but were unsuccessful due to bad snow conditions, then heavy precipitation in 1992, and dangers of avalanches and overhanging cornices in 1993. All the peaks including incredibly beautiful Mianzimu (6,054m) remain unclimbed.

*Baimang Shan: Mekong-Yangtze Divide (19)*

The Mekong-Yangtze (River of Golden Sand) divide contains three sections, from north to south they are the Markam Shan, Ninching Shan, and the Yunling. Markam Shan and Ninching Shan have no particular snow peaks. Yunling is divided to two sections.

To the north of Baimang Shan (Paima Shan) pass (4,292m) near Deqen, the topography is much complicated where there are two groups of Jiazi snow mountains and Tza-Leh snow mountains. Both groups have a number of 5,000-meter peaks. The mountain ridges are composed of thousands of rock pillars and pinnacles. An Australian climbed a minor peak of 5,200 meters, but no other climbs are recorded.





No.19: The north face of Zharachoni (5,429m), the highest peak of Baimang Xueshan.

To the south of the pass is the well-known Baimang Shan, which appeared frequently in explorers' journals. The highest peak, Zhalachoni Feng (5,429m), snow-clad and glaciated, remains unclimbed.

*Yulong Xueshan and Haba Xueshan: across Yangtze Great Bend (20,21)*

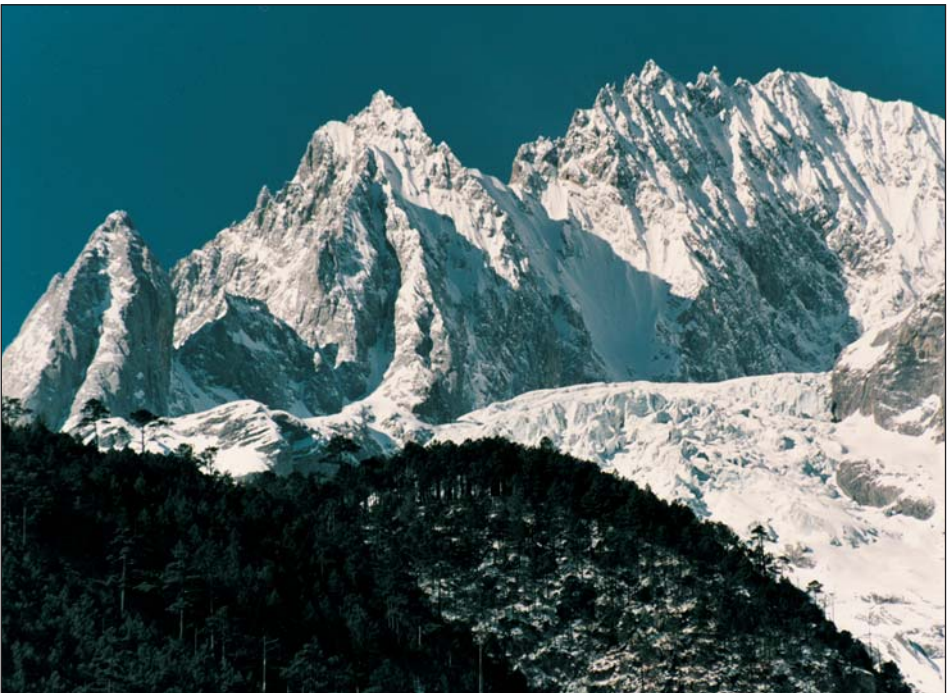
The river of Golden Sand is the main stream of the Yangtze (Chinese name: Jinsha Jiang), dropping southward from the Tibet Plateau along the border of Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces. It turns abruptly 110 degrees to northeast at Changjiang (Yangtze). It then flows into the world famous Tiger Leaping Gorge, where tremendous waters rage through a 30-60-meter passage. Huge mountain walls and ridges drop precipitously on both sides of the gorge. The main mountains are Yulong Xueshan to the east and Haba Xueshan to the west.

Yulong Xueshan (5,596m), also known as "Jade Dragon Mountain," is at the southern end of Yulong Xueshan range in the Lijiang district of Yunnan Province. Running north-south, Yulong Xueshan is some 34 kilometers long by 13 kilometers wide. There are 18 towering peaks over 5,000 meters. The main peak Shanzidou (5,596m), lies at 100.1°E and 27.0°N. In 1987 Americans made the first ascent of the main peak from the eastern side. No second ascent has been made.

To the west of the Tiger Leaping Gorge, Haba Xueshan (5,396m) rises 3,500 meters directly above the riverbed. Further to the northwest several small groups of distinctive 4,700-meter rock peaks surround the Zhongdian plateau. Haba Xueshan was first climbed by a Chinese party in 1995.



No.20: The rock peaks of the west Ridge of Yulong Xueshan soaring above the Tiger Leaping Gorge of the Upper Yangtze, Yunnan.

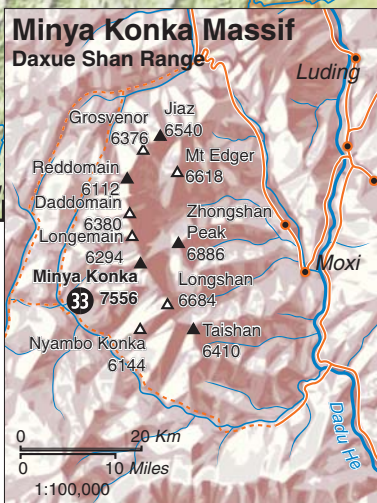
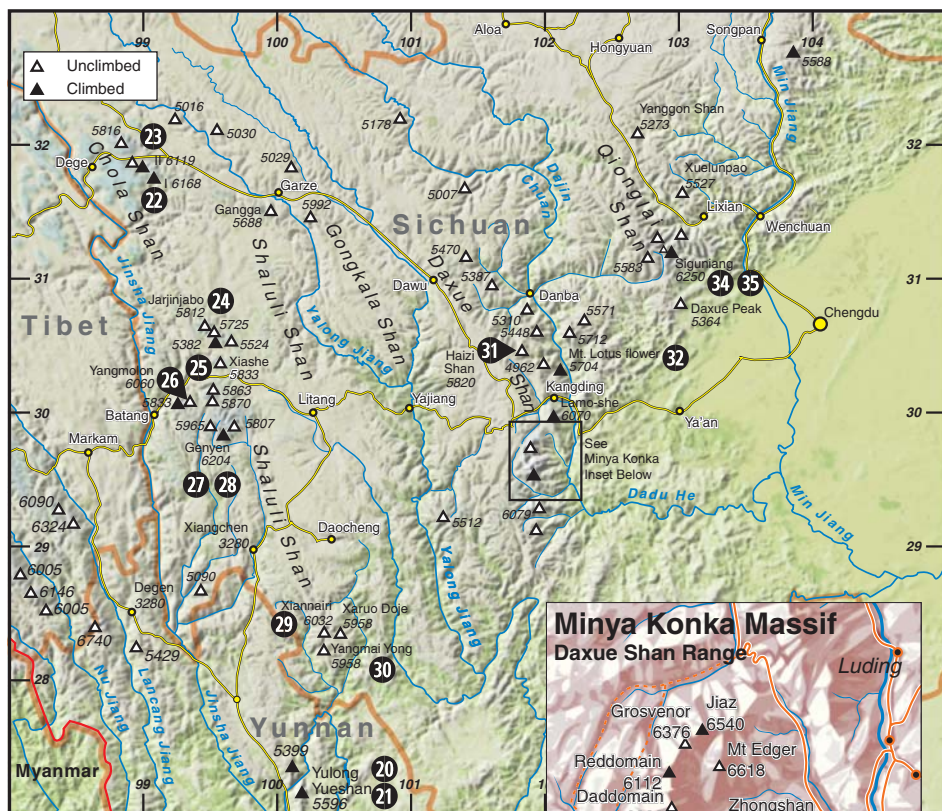


No.21: The east face of Yulong Xueshan, north of Lijiang, Yunnan. Climbed.

# EAST OF THE HIMALAYA

## Part III

# WEST SICHUAN HIGHLAND—YANGTZE RIVER BASIN



Topographically, the area from the River of Golden Sand to western Sichuan—which contains the drainage basins of the Yalong and the Dadu rivers, the tributaries of River of Golden Sand, and further east the Min River—is usually described together as a

geomorphological region called the “West Sichuan Highland.” This area shares the same landscape characteristics as the Three River Gorge country, but it possesses a little different geological history and structure.

Western Sichuan and the adjacent areas of Yunnan to the south are characterized by much more varied topography. The extensive plateau-type landforms stretch north to unite with the Tibetan Plateau proper. Many of the highest peaks of this area exceed 6,000 meters, the most conspicuous massif being Minya Konka, otherwise known as Gongga Shan (7,556m) (see *AAJ* 2002, ppg. 22-23, for the story of the 1932 first ascent).

Unlike southeast Tibet, where almost all 6,000-meter peaks remain unclimbed, in Sichuan there are only a couple of virgin 6,000ers. Nevertheless, countless alluring unclimbed rock and snow peaks lower than 6,000 meters await their first ascents. (See *Rock Peaks of the Siguniang Region*, by Tamotsu Nakamura, *AAJ* 2000, ppg. 127-134, for a comprehensive survey and a regional map.)

The first part of this section outlines the major mountain ranges and massifs in the eastern Hengduan Mountains between Jingsha Jiang (River of Golden Sand) and Min Jiang of the Upper Yangtze River. These are described from west to east. Unless otherwise mentioned, all these peaks are unclimbed.

## CHOLA SHAN (22, 23)

Towering at the southern fringe of Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, Chola Shan stretches northwest-southeast in the northern part of the Hengduan Mountains. It is linked up with Mola Shan in the north and joins Shaluli Shan in the south. Within its large and complex terrain of rock and snow peaks, Chola Shan’s main peak is lofty and magnificent at 6,168 meters (99.1°E and



No.22: The north face of Chola Shan I (6,168m), south of Lake Xinluhai. Climbed.



No.23: The west face of 5,000m rock peaks of Chola Shan massif, west of Lake Xinluhai.

31.8°N). The second highest peak is 6,119 meters, three kilometers away; there are several dozen snowy peaks above 5,000 meters. In September 1988, the main summit was first ascended by the joint expedition team of Kobe University and the Geological University of China, taking their route up to an eastern glacier from the base camp of Lake Xingluhai. Some 5,000-meter peaks were climbed by a UIAA team in September, 1997. Chola II (6,119 meters) was first climbed by the American Charlie Fowler, solo in 1997.

## SHALULI SHAN

This mountain range covers a vast area and there is no clear boundary between it and the other mountain ranges. Each massif is introduced in succession from north to south.

### *Gangga Massif*

This massif stretches to the southeast from the end of Chola Shan, south of Yalong Jiang. The main peak, Gangga (5,688m), and other 5,000-meter peaks have small glaciers. No one has attempted climbing here.

### *Jarjinjabo Massif (24)*

The highest peak is 5,812 meters and the second highest is 5,725 meters. Both are unclimbed. The most impressive peak is a brilliant granite rock tower (5,382m) soaring like a small Fitzroy in Patagonia. These mountains are located along the northern rim of the wide Zhopu Pasture north of Xiashe (5,833m). To the west there are several 5,500-meter peaks, and to the east the challenging fortress of Hati (5,524m) rises proudly. The granite rock tower (5,382m) was first climbed by a Japanese party in July, 2001. An American party climbed various rock peaks in August, 2002. (See Jarjinjabo, by Peter Athans, in this Journal.)



No.24: The southeast face of Jarjinjabo (5,812m), northwest of Zhopu pasture.



No.25: The north face of Xiashe (5,833m), a view from Zhopu Monastery.

### *Xiashe Massif (25)*

Xiashe (5,833m), the highest peak, has beautiful lakes on its southern side, while the north face attracts climbers. The massif also has 5,500- to 5,600-meter peaks adjacent to the Sichuan-Tibet Highway. Everything is unclimbed, including Xiashe.



Top: No.26 The south face of Yangmolong (6,060m), east of Batang.



No.27 The west face of Genyen (6,204m) (right, climbed), and 5,965m peak (left, unclimbed).

### *Yangmolong and Dangchezhengla Massif (26)*

This massif is situated 15-20 kilometers from Batang to the east. Access to basecamp is short and easy. Four principal peaks of 6,060 meters (Yangmolong), 6033 meters, 5833 meters (Dangchezhengla), and 5,850 meters dominate. A Japanese party attempted the highest peak from the northern side in 1991, but they were stopped by avalanche danger. The two 6,000-meter peaks remain unclimbed. On the southern side of the massif, a heavenly lake called Yamochouken lies at 4,800 meters. Dangchezhengla was first climbed by Japanese party on June 17, 2002. (See Climbs and Expeditions in this Journal.)

*Genyen Massif and neighboring mountains to the north and northwest (27-28)*

To the south of the Sichuan-Tibet Highway, between Litang Plateau and Batang, lies a vast mountain area. The highest peak, Genyen (6,204m), is a divine mountain situated at 99.6°E and 29.8°N. It was first climbed by a Japanese party in 1988. However, more than 10 untouched rock and snow peaks of over 5,800 meters await climbers. In particular, a 5,965-meter peak towering like a sharp beak looks magnificent, and the scenery surrounding the 600-year-old Rengo Monastery amid spiky rock pinnacles is truly enchanting. In 1877, William Gill had a glorious view of the highest peak. He wrote in his narrative (“The River of Golden Sand”) that “No word can describe the majestic grandeur of that mighty peak. . . . The traveler can appreciate the feelings of the Tibetans that have led them to call it Nen-Da, or The Sacred Mountain.”

*Gongga Xueshan (Kongkaling) Massif (29-30)*

These mountains with three snow peaks are located in the boundary of Muli county and Daocheng County, the southern end of Shaluli Shan. They are well-known among the Tibetan people as the Heavenly Charms in the Snow World. The highest north peak, Xiannairi (6,032m, 100.3°E and 28.4°N) means Buddha’s Mother. Yangmai Yong, the south peak (5,958m) means Manjuist Buddha. Xiaruoduoji (5,958m) means “the Buddha with warriors’ hands.” J.F. Rock visited this mountain in 1928 and took a beautiful photograph of Yangmai Yong (he called it “Jambeyang”), which appeared in *National Geographic* (Vol. 191. No. January 1997). In 1989, the Himalayan Association of Japan sent a climbing expedition. Bad weather defeated them. In 2001, an American party attempted Xiaruoduoji but was not successful. All the peaks remain unclimbed. Now the Daocheng County government strictly controls climbing permits. (See Gildea in this Journal.)



GONGKALA SHAN

This is a small mountain range located 30 kilometers from Garze. In 1998 a Japanese party made a reconnaissance from the south of the highest peak, Kawarani (5,992m), and the second highest

Top: No.28: The 600-year-old Rengo Monastery, near Genyen. Bottom: No.29 The north face of Xiannairi (6,032m) of Gongga Xueshan.





No.30: The east face of Yangmai yong (5,958m) of Kongga Xueshan.

one, Peak 5,928m. According to the topographical map of the China People's Liberation Army (1:100,000), there seem to be well-developed glaciers on the northern side. No other records are known.

### DAXUE SHAN

This range has the most famous mountains, including Minya Konka (Gongga Shan, 7,556m). The Tibet-Qinghai Plateau ends at Daxue Shan. The scope of the range is rather ambiguous. Each Sub-Range is described from north to south.

#### *Haizi Shan "Ja-ra" (31)*

Tibetans called Haizi Shan (5,820m) 'Ja-ra' to signify "King of Mountains," and many explorers have noticed this outstanding peak. A good close-up view of the southwest side can be had from the Sichuan-Tibet Highway. The north face would provide a possible climbing route. An American attempted the peak in 2001 but failed.

#### *Mountains of Dadu River basin*

Along the deep valley of Dadu He, one of the large tributaries of the Yangtze River, there are many 5,000-meter peaks. The highest is a 5,712-meter peak on the left bank of the river. The eastern end shares a boundary with the Jiaojin Shan, a minor range, and the Qionglai Shan ranges. There is no record of climbing.

#### *Lotus Flower Mountains (32)*

Although no glaciers have developed, eminent rock peaks can be seen north of Kangding, the capital of the Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. A Japanese party climbed the highest peak (5,704m) in 1998. The other 5,000-meter rock peaks remain untouched.

#### *Lamo-she Massif*

This massif, east of Kangding, has been called the Mountains of Tachienlu. In 1993 its highest peak, Lamo-she (a.k.a. Tianhaizi Shan, 6070m) was scaled by Americans, and the fourth highest (Shehaizi Shan, 5,878m) was climbed by an American-Canadian-New Zealand team. Two virgin peaks, 5,924 meters (Baihaizi Shan) and 5,880 meters, are guarded by rocks and hanging glaciers.

#### *Minya Konka (Gongga Shan, 7,556m) and its satellite peaks (33)*

Minya Konka, or Gongga Shan in Chinese, is the highlight of the Hengduan Mountains. Minya Konka, which means "Highest Snowy Mountain" in Tibetan, is located in the middle section of Daxue Shan to the north of Lamo-she. Some 60 kilometers from south to north and 30 kilometers



No.31: The north face of Haizi Shan (or Ja-ra) (5,820m).



No.32: The west face of 5,000m rock peaks of the Lotus Flower Mountains, north of Kangding.



Top: No.33: The west face of glorious Minya Konka (7,556m) from Zimei Pass. Northwest ridge climbed.

Bottom: No.34: The south face of Mt. Siguniang (6,250m), the highest peak in Qonglai Mountains. Climbed.

from east to west, its main peak (7,556m) lies at 101.8°E and 29.6°N. It has only been climbed eight times, and by just two routes (the northwest and northeast ridges). Remaining problems are the difficult south ridge and southwest ridge. (See Choudens in this Journal.)

Frequent geological movement in the Minya Konka area has brought about a lot of folds and fractures. As the mountain rises, valleys are formed with a height difference of 5,000 meters on the east and west slopes. Teamed with more than 20 neighboring high peaks over 6,000 meters, it has a total area of 290 square kilometers, with 45 glaciers. Five glaciers have lengths of about 10 kilometers each, the longest being Hailuogou (Conck Ditch) Glacier, with a 1,000-meter-long icefall and a glacial tongue that dips to 2,600 meters. The climate undergoes great changes, with the rainy season extending from June to October and the dry season from November to May.

There still remain unclimbed satellite peaks over 6,000 meters. The following list shows the most important peaks still to be attempted: Northern part:

Grosvenor (6,376m) and Mt. Edger (E-Gongga, 6,618m). Central part: Daddomain (6,380m) and Longemain (6,294m). Southern part: Longshan (6,684m) and Nyambo Konka (6,144m).

### *6,079-meter Massif*

This is an independent massif with an unclimbed 6,000-meter peak to the south of Minya Konka. No one has made a reconnaissance of the highest peak at 6,079 meters. Farther to the south, a 5,584-meter mountain is shown on the Chinese map, but no specific information is available.

### *Qionglai Shan Range*

To the east of the deep canyon of the Dadu river lies Jiaojing Mountain, which is famous as the historical “Crossing of the Daxue Shan,” where the Red Army soldiers overcame great difficulties during Long March in 1935. There are several snow peaks over 5,000 meters, but there is no detailed information. Further to the northeast of Jiaojing mountain, Qionglai Shan runs south to north. In the middle section of Qionglai Shan, where it joins the western fringe of Sichuan Basin, lie the highest peaks, Siguniang Shan. Further north are a number of untrodden 5,000-meter snow and rock peaks.

### *Mt. Siguniang (34)*

Siguniang Shan (also known as Four Girls Mountain) is considered a holy mountain by Tibetans.. The legend says that four warm-hearted girls fought bravely with a ferocious leopard to save their treasured giant pandas, thereby becoming the four graceful peaks. Rising at 6,250, 5,614, 5,454, and 5,355 meters respectively, the four peaks stand at the boundary between Xiaojing County and Wenchuan County. The main peak, Yaomei Feng (peak of the youngest girl), is 6250 meters, and lies at 102.9°E and 31.1°N. Its extremely steep walls and ridges feature hanging glaciers on the south slopes and vertical rock walls hundreds of meters high on the west and north slopes.

The main Siguniang peak (6,250m) has been climbed three times from the south and once from the north. The first ascent was in 1981 by a Japanese team via the east ridge; they took 16 days and used 2,000 meters of fixed rope. The second ascent in 1992 took 23 days via the south face using 600 meters of fixed rope; also by Japanese. The third ascent was made by an American, Charlie Fowler, who soloed a line between the two Japanese routes in three days.

The north face sports extremely steep and smooth granite walls with intermittent ice streaks. It was first attempted on the right hand side in 1981 by Jack Tackle, Jim Donini, Kim Schmitz, and Jim Kantzler (USA). They reached 5,000 meters after 11 days above high camp, six of which were spent on the final push. The first ascent of the north face was made by Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden over 6 days in April, 2002. They descended the unclimbed north ridge in two days. (See Siguniang, in this Journal.)

### *Rock Peaks north of Siguniang (35)*

Mt. Siguniang has become so famous and popular within China that the southern side of the mountain, which can easily be reached from Chengdu, is now congested with hundreds of tourists and trekkers, domestic as well as foreign. However, to the north are many towering granite 5,300- to 5,900-meter peaks encircling two beautiful valleys as if to form a grand coliseum. Many of these are unclimbed.



No.35: The east face of a 5,466m granite rock peak, Qonglai Mountains.

A brief climbing history follows. 1983: Celestial Peak (5,413m) (Tibetan name: Punyu; Chinese name: Mountain of Gods). First ascent by American party led by Ted Vaill. 1985: Celestial Peak. Second ascent, via a new route of the southeast ridge, by Keith Brown, solo. 1994: Nameless 5,383-meter peak west of Celestial Peak. First ascent by Charlie Fowler, solo. 1994: Nameless 5,484-meter peak and adjacent peak north of the main summit of Siguniang. First ascent by Charlie Fowler, solo. 1997: Nameless 5,666-meter peak north of the main summit of Siguniang. First ascent by Charlie Fowler, solo. 1997: Rock tower southwest of Celestial Peak, first ascent by John Mesler.

### MIN SHAN RANGE—EASTERN END OF HENGDUAN MOUNTAINS

To the east of the upper Min river lies the Min Shan range in Songpan County; it defines the eastern end of the Hengduan Mountains. Xuebao Ding (5,588m, 103.8° and 32.7°N), in the middle section of the range, is listed as the highest peak of Min Shan. The main summit has many surrounding peaks such as Yuzhan Feng (5,119m, “the peak of jade hairpin”) to the southwest, Sigengxiang Feng (5,359m, “the peak of four incenses”), and the lesser Xuebao Ding (5,440m), towering to the southeast. On the northern side sits the world famous Huanglong (Yellow Dragon) Scenic Spot.

The main peak was first climbed by a Himalayan Association of Japan party in August, 1986, and the second and the third ascents were made by the Japanese in 1991 and 1992.

### BEYOND THE HENGDUAN MOUNTAINS-SICHUAN BASIN

No snow and rock peaks with glaciers that attract climbers exist beyond the eastern fringe of the Hengduan Mountains where they meet the fertile Sichuan Basin.

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