

CHIHARU YOSHIMURA

First Ascent of Xiaqiangla 5470m, Daxue Shan, Sichuan

The Japanese Alpine Club, Hiroshima Section, May 2010

(Translated, edited and supplemented with map by Tamotsu Nakamura)

What should be the next target after Bawangshan 5551m in Qonglai Mountains, of which I made the first ascent in 2007 (JAN vol. 9 May 2008) ? No much time was required to search for a suitable mountain fitting to our conditions: unclimbed, beautifully towering and easily accessible.

An outstanding peak having been thus focused is Xiaqiangla 5470m located in the northern rim of greater Daxue Shan range stretching west of the Dadu River basin. Famous Minya Konka massif dominates the southern part of the mountain range. Only Tom Nakamura, Tadao Shintani and Kiyoshi Kawajiri made an access in the past. Xiaqiangla is not only alluring for its sharp pyramid soaring to sky, but is attractive for so-called “**Valley of Beauty**” of Danba county, where you will come across unique local Tibetan local culture featured by affluent heritages of arts, literatures and building designs such as stone towers which are inherent in this region of the Dadu River basin.



Painted by Yasushi Tanaka



Danba girl (Tamotus Nakamura)

I organized an expedition to attempt on Xiaqiangla in spring of 2010.

Period: April 24 to May 9, 2010

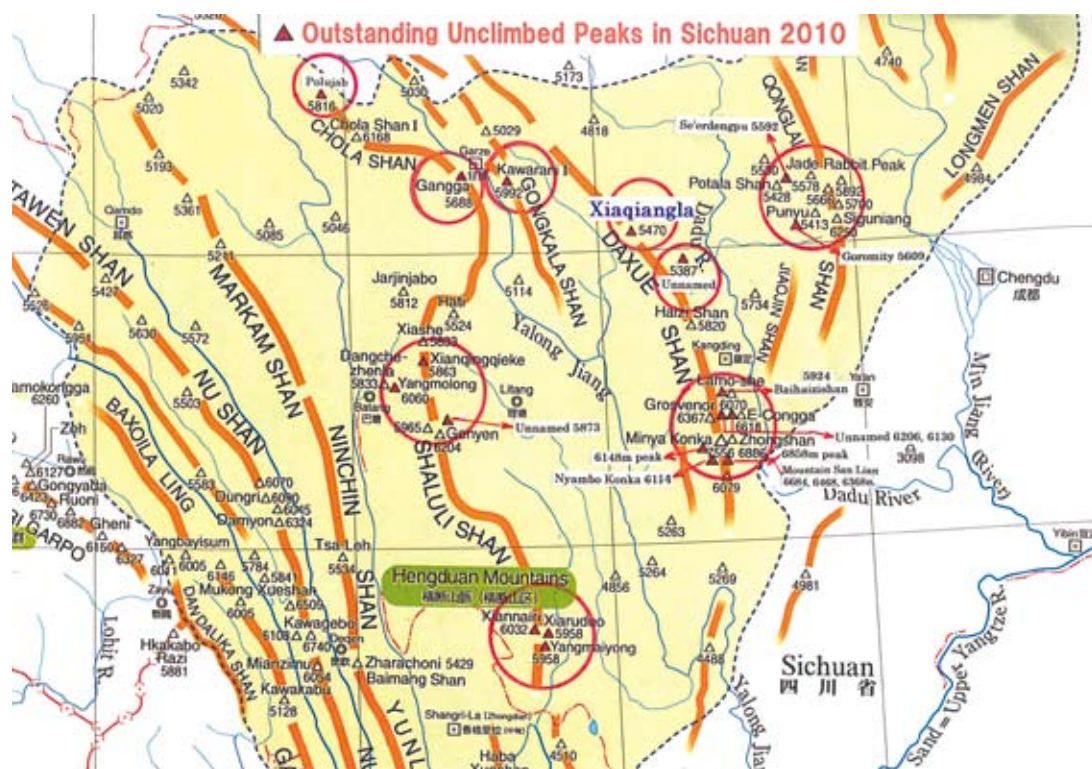
Name of expedition: Japanese Alpine Club – Hiroshima Section

Leader: Chiharu Yoshimura

Member: Hiroshi Matsushima, Mitsuru Kato, Ken Sato



Photo by Kenzo Okawa



Drawn by Tamotsu Nakamura

Outline of Expedition

The expedition members drove to a village of Dang Ling (3,300m) from Chengdu along the Dadu River and a tributary flowing into the main stream near Danba town-ship. A distance from Danba to Dang Ling is 68km. Then we set up a base camp (BC) on the shore of Da Haizi at 4,350m and soon started climbing. Walking time from Dang Ling to Da Haizi is eight hours to southwest.

Reconnaissance led us to establish an advance base camp (ABC) at 5,020m as shown on the following map with climbing routes. An attempt was made from two different routes, say, one was the northeast (NE) face and the other was the north (N) ridge.

NE face route: First to follow a couloir on the face and then to climb up directly the summit rock wall to the top. The northeast ridge is very steep and has rock pinnacles to be negotiated on the way to the summit, which provides an attractive climbing route.

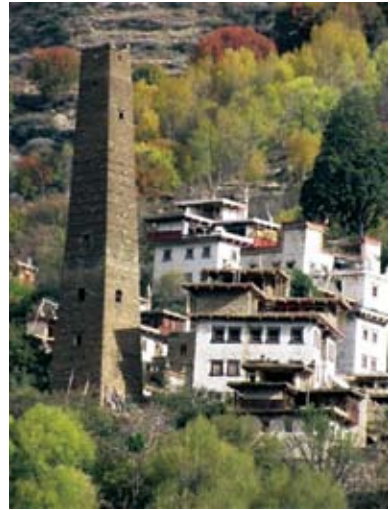
N ridge route: First to ascend to the north col and to continue climbing a steep north ridge with outstanding rock peaks ranging one after another to the main summit like the back of a dinosaur to the top. This ridge is the main divide of the Daxue Shan range. The long and large south ridge also constitutes the main divide.

On May 2, two parties departed from the ABC at 6:00am. NE party stood atop the main summit (Pk 1) at 14:40, but N ridge party reached only Pk 3 because of lack of time. The both parties gathered at a col between Pk 2 and Pk 3 and returned to the ABC at 20:40





Xiaqiangla main summit E face (Tamotsu Nakamura)



Stone tower in Danba (T. Nakamura)



2nd pitch on rock ridge

CLIMBING



Climbing unstable rock ridge

Itinerary

April 24: Hiroshima – Shanghai – Chengdu

April 25: Chengdu – Danba

April 26: Danba – Dang Ling

April 27: Dang Ling to Da Haizi BC ferrying gear and supplies by 11 yaks

April 28: Reconnaissance from BC to a point at 5020m (on the foot of the NE face after making a detour around the northeast ridge)

April 29: Rest. Climbing routes decided

April 30: No progress due to bad weather

May 1: BC to ABC as the weather improving

May 2: To the summit (Our GPS indicated 5,497m)

NE face party, Matsushima and Sato, reached the main summit. Grade III – IV

N ridge party, Yoshimura and Kato, gave up at the PK 3.

May 3: ABC to BC

May 4: BC to Dang Ling

May 4 to 9: Dang Ling – Danba – Chengdu – Shanghai – Hiroshima

We could luckily succeed in the first ascent of a fascinating peak “Xiaqiangla” by launching a swift attack.

Editor’s note

We are unable to ignore the fact that serious destruction of environments is now taking place in Dadu River basin of Sichuan because of accelerated West China Development projects. The following photos show a huge dam of the Dadu River under construction near Luding.



Dam construction at Luding, Dadu River (Tom Nakamura, July 2010)