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Future Alpine Paradise, Sichuan 2012

Alluring Rock Peaks “Gangga Massif”**Unclimbed Sacred & Forbidden Mountains “Kawarori”**

Political situation in Tibet is uncertain and sensitive. Since no foreigners are allowed to enter remote areas of my field, eastern Tibet, in 2012, instead I organized an elderly survey team from the Hengduan Mountains Club (Tom Nakamura, Tsuyoshi Nagai, Tadao Shintani) to visit West Sichuan Highlands and Yunnan from late September to late October.

The main objective was to photograph, map out and identify peaks of the Gangga massif and least-known Kawarori. The Gangga massif is just south of Ganzi town and the Yalong Jiang, a northernmost extension of the Shaluli Shan range. Kawarori is a sacred mountain of the Gongkara Shan range which is located east of the Gangga massif and Yalong Jiang, northwest of the Daxue Shan range in the West Sichuan Highlands. The Yalong Jiang is one of the large tributary of the Yangtze River (Chang Jiang). Reconnaissance of the Gangga massif was made only one time in 2005 by a Japanese party from the Nagano Prefecture. They were unable to bring back useful and informative record.

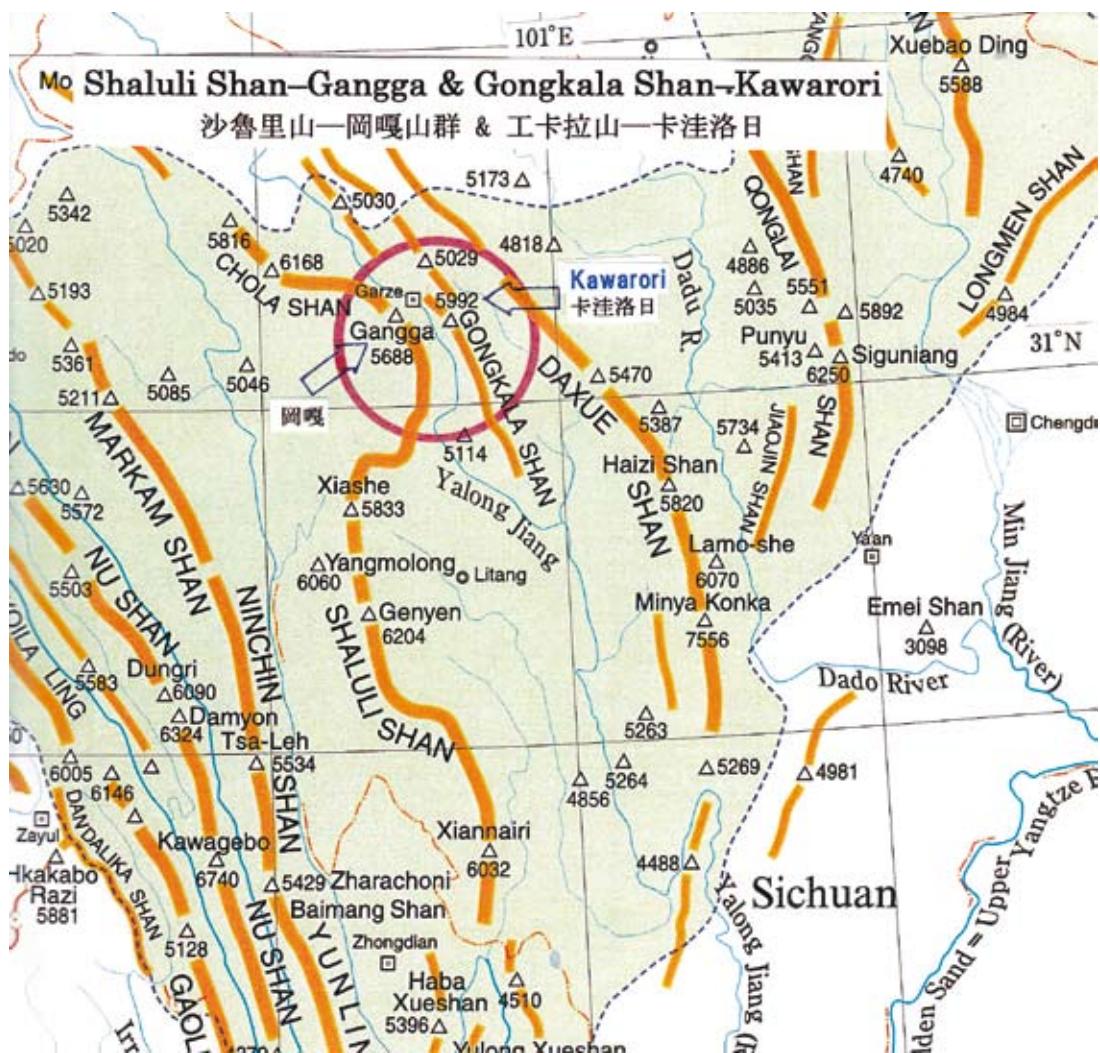
The Alps of Tibet, mountains in eastern Tibet, is the final frontier in the greater ranges of the world. About 260 peaks over 6,000 meters high remain untraversed in Nyainqntanglha East, Kangri Garpo and Gorge Country. On the contrary, unclimbed mountains exceeding 6,000 meters are only more or less 10 summits in the West Sichuan Highlands, a region of Tibetan inhabitants too.



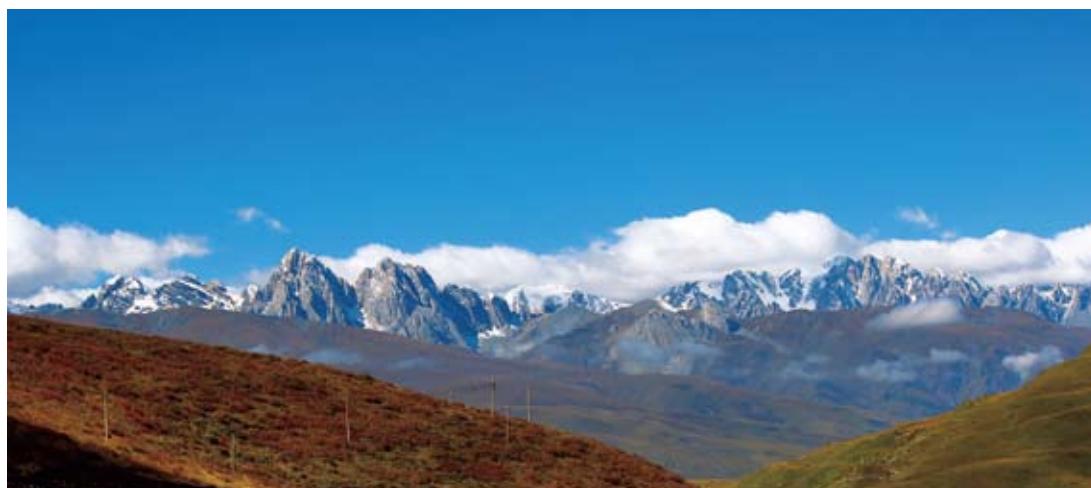
Gangga I Group: Central Peak 5,670 m (left), North Peak 5,650 m (right) seen from Ganzi

Nevertheless, if you look into and focus on peaks lower than 6,000 meters, you will come across many fascinating and challenging peaks that attract and enchant climbers seeking for unfrequented targets. Climbers have been rushing to rock peaks in the Qonglai Mountains of now popular Siguniang and currently several climbers have started an attempt on alluring rock peaks in the Genyen massif north of the Litang Plateau. However the Gangga massif and Gongkala Shan are still behind climbers' attention. The Gangga massif is not a large mountains group and heights is 5,300 – 5,600 meters, but provides fantastic rock peaks. Kawaroni are holy mountains guarded by Tibetan monks and villagers.

Our team arrived at Chengdu on the 26th September. Sichuan Earth Expedition Inc. arranged for our trip as usually and Zhang Jiyue joined the team. We left Chengdu for the mountains on the 28th September. We followed a newly-built highway Chengdu-Xichang making a detour of Erlanshan Tunnel passage. Acceleration of highways construction in West China is amazing. We left the highway at Ximien and drove northward along Dadu River, and then crossed a pass Xuemenkan 3,948 m down to Kangding new town. The pass divides Minya Konka massif to southwest and Lamoshe massif to northeast.



I must mention two unusual factors of our survey trip. One is an extraordinarily bad weather in late September to mid October and the other is a political situation. During our travel in two weeks, only one and a half days were considerably fine weather (but not perfect blue sky) though I could take advantages of a narrow chance to photograph the mountains necessary for peaks identification. We stayed at Ganzi town only three nights during the good weather. On the 30th September we ascended to a pass Lazika 4,000 meters of the Sichuan-Tibet Highway for taking a panorama view of the Gangga and Kawarori. From this pass Erich Teichman viewed Kawarori in 1918. On the 1st October we enter a valley just south of Ganzi town and ascended to a high pass Zhuodana 4,820 meters leading to Baiyu County for reconnaissance of the central part of the massif. Remaining one week were spent for visiting interesting places including a village with famous stone towers in Danba County and Mt. Siguniang. It was a keen interest in going to the largest monastery and school with 20,000 monks and students in Seda, but I regret that there was no time.



Panorama picture of the central part of the Gangga Massif east face, Shaluli Shan

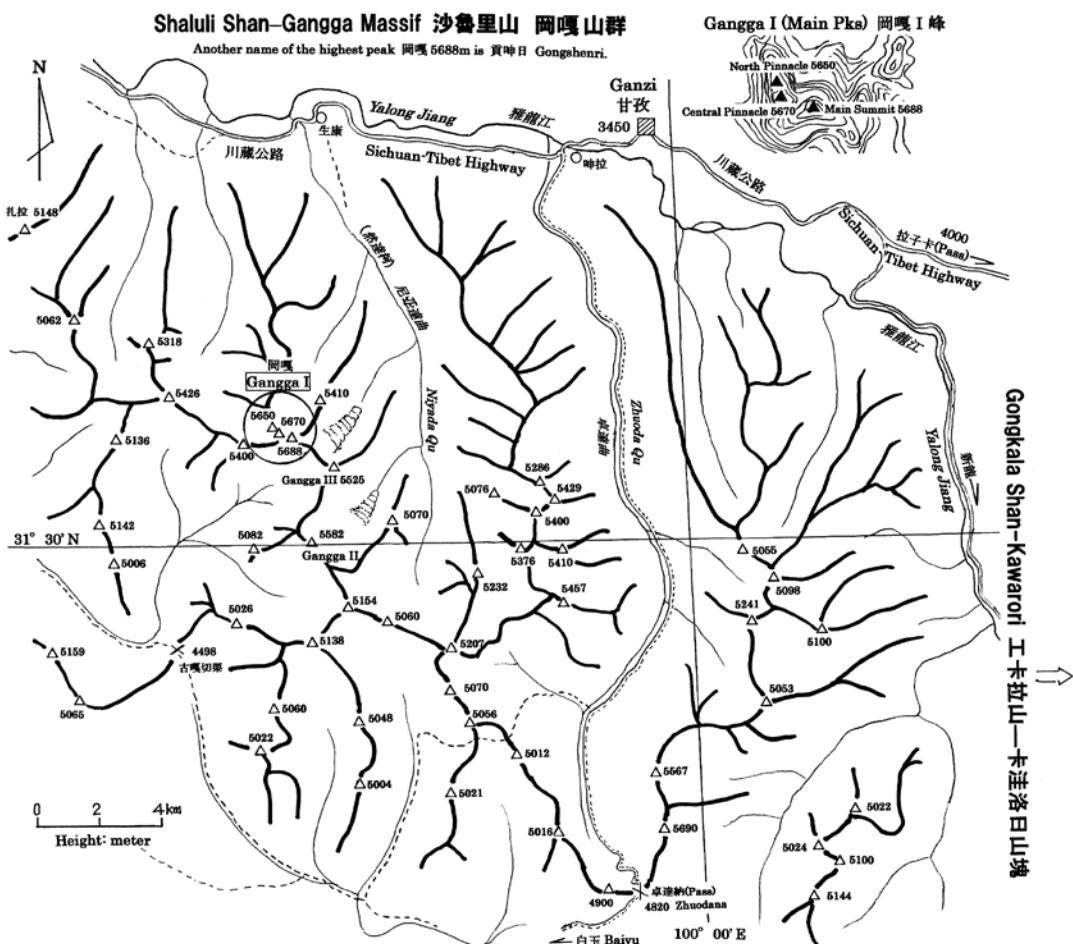


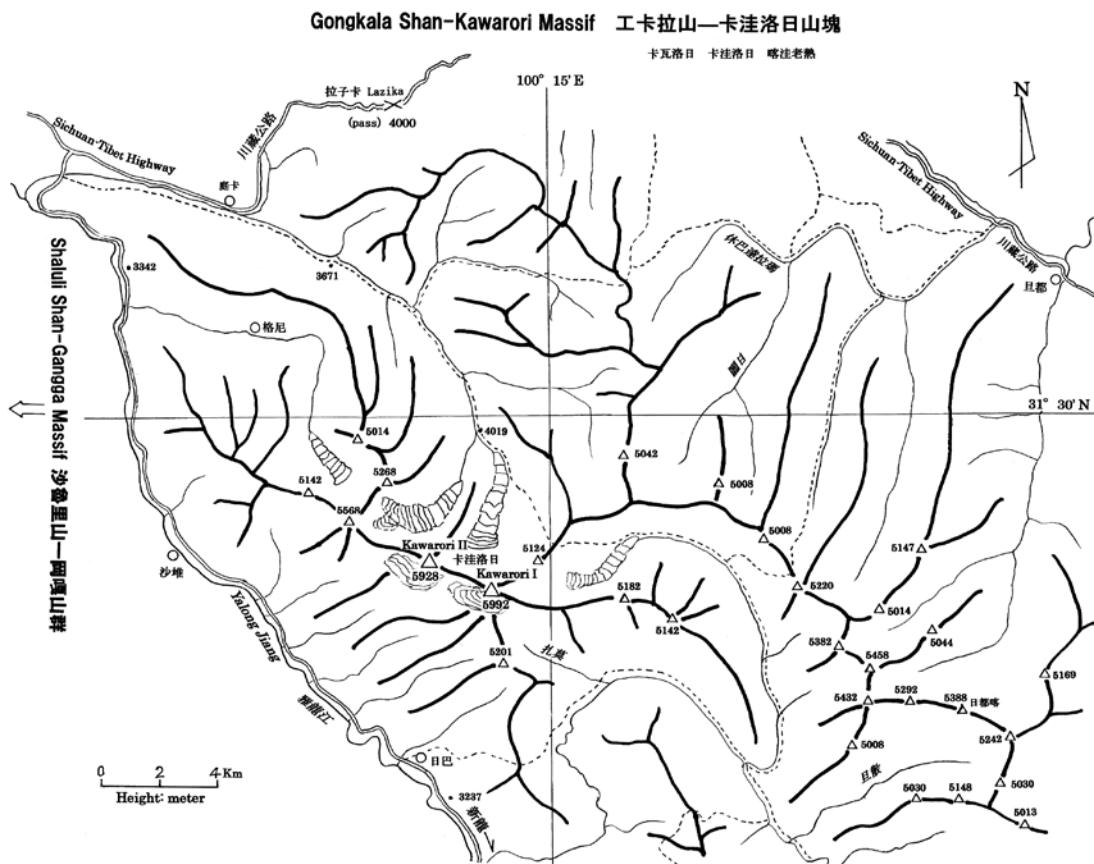
Eastern Rim of Gangga Massif: 5,690 m (left) and 5,241 m (center, Russian map 5,641 m). The top of 5,567 m is seen in between two peaks. East face, Photo by Takashi Shiro

The other problem was a restriction imposed on foreigners due to political uncertainty in the region. The areas of Ganzi and adjacent counties were closed to foreigners in principle since spring of 2012 when Tibetan monks' fire suicide happened. As after the spring, fire suicide took place intermittently, the authorities became nervous about foreign visitors. Under such circumstances we could manage to travel through the officially restricted areas with no difficulty and without any problem thanking to Jiyue's careful attention. We met only a couple of westerners and no Japanese throughout the trip. We returned to Chengdu on the 10th October and flew to Kunming on the 11th for traveling south Yunnan and north Laos to retrace footsteps of the 19th century French Mekong River expedition. This is another story.

Mountains of Kawarori were first reported by an early British consular officer and explorer, Eric Teichman who traveled through the highlands in 1918.

[Passing Joro, the trail tops a rise and emerges on to rolling grass-lands now patched with snow. Here we saw many gazelle. A long pull up hill with occasional short descent brought us to the top of the She Chu – Yalung Divide, only about 13,000 feet high. As one tops the last rise, the great range beyond the Yalung bursts into view, a glittering mass of ice, snow and rock, culminating in the snow-clad mass of Kawalori ("peak of everlasting snow"), a sacred mountain of Nyarong, and one of the highest peaks in Eastern Tibet. This great range is here pieced by the Yalung, and glimpses of it are occasionally caught from the She Chu valley below Driwo.]





(*Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet* Erich Teichman, Cambridge 1922) Teichman's observation is accurate.

Kawarori of the Gongkala Shan range is located 30 km southeast of Garzi. Two principal peaks Kawarori-I 5,992 m and Kawarani-II 5,928 m remain unclimbed. Local Tibetan pronounce it "Kawaruori" but in this article "Kawarori" applies. Reconnaissance was first conducted by a Japanese party, Yamanashi Mountaineering Federation in autumn of 1999 and then a British party first attempted on climbing in autumn of 2005. They set up the second camp at 4,800 m. However hostile monks of a lamasery forcibly opposed the British to continue climbing for religious reason because of Holy Mountains. They could not help to abandon the attempt. Another British party came to Kawarori in 2007 but a climbing permit could not be obtained.

The Tohoku University Alpine Club planned to climb Kawarori in summer of 2011 in a hope that a climbing permit would be issued. After getting an official permit of the Sichuan Mountaineering Association, they left Japan on 24th July. To their great upset, however, their plan was turned down by a senior official, Deputy Director of Sports Administrative Department, Garze Tibetans Autonomous Region at Kangding. He excused that Kawarori was holy mountains to local Tibetans and would oppose anyone to climb the mountains. Supposedly there might have been the other reason of recent sensitive and uncertain situation as monks' fire suicides, though the official was silent. In fact the public security bureau (PSB) was cautious and nervous about foreigners to contact local villagers in Khamba territory.



Gangga I Group: (from left) Main 5,688 m, Central ,5670 m, North 5,650 m east face
A flock of flying hawks are seen.



Gangga: (from left) 5,429 m, 5,400 m, 5,286 m northeast face



Gangga 5,429 m (left) 5,286 m (right) east face



Gangga Pk 5,318 m west of Gangga I NE face



Gangga 5,241 m east face



Gangga II 5,582 m east facce



Gangga Peak 5,241 m north face



Gangga (left) 5,567 m (right) 5,690 m W face



Kawarori I 5,992 m (left), Kawarori II 5,928 m (center), Pk 5,568 m (right)



Kawarori I 5,992 m north face (Takao Ohe)



Kawarori II 5,928 m north face



Chunglu village stone towers in Danba (1)



Chungle village stone tower in Danba (2)