TRIUMPH OF KAQUR-KANGRI IN THE SOURCE OF YALUNG TSANGPO

Doshisha University Expedition to Ronglai-Kanri Range

Toyoji Wada

1 First ascent of Kaqur-Kangri 6,859m

T. Wada, team leader, four other members of Doshisha University Alpine Club (DAC) and three sherpas succeeded in making the first ascent of Kaqur-Kangri, the highest peak of the Ronglai-Kangri Range located in the headwaters the Yalung Tsangpo River, Tibet. Our caravan started from Laru on the Tibet Road and five days later, the team established a base camp at an altitude of 5,100m at the side moraine below the East Kaqur Glacier. Then, following an advance Base Camp, Camp 1, and Camp 2, all of the eight members made the first ascent at 11.40 am, 24th September 2002. Incidentally, for environment protection, our team tried our best to make zero-trash climbing efforts during its mountaineering activity.

2 Ronglai-Kangri Range

This is a group of mountains with the main peak situated in the center at lat. 29°46' N. and long. 82°45'E., extending about 40 km from east to west. In accordance with information from inhabitants in Tibet, we decided to call the main peak of the Range Kaqur-Kangri, a name used by the natives and already known to the Chinese. It is also noted that some inhabitants call it Zazi-Kangri.

We confirmed the existence of a mountain called Rongla-Kangri (6,799 m), 12km north-north-west of Kaqur-Kangri. A map on scale of 1: 200,000, made by the USSR shows the summit is located in Tibet at a short distance from the border. In Tibetan, "ron" stands for inhabitants living in a low land, thus Nepali while "la" is a pass and "kangri" means a snow mountain. "Rongla-Kangri" thus means a snow mountain on a pass where Nepalis come and go.

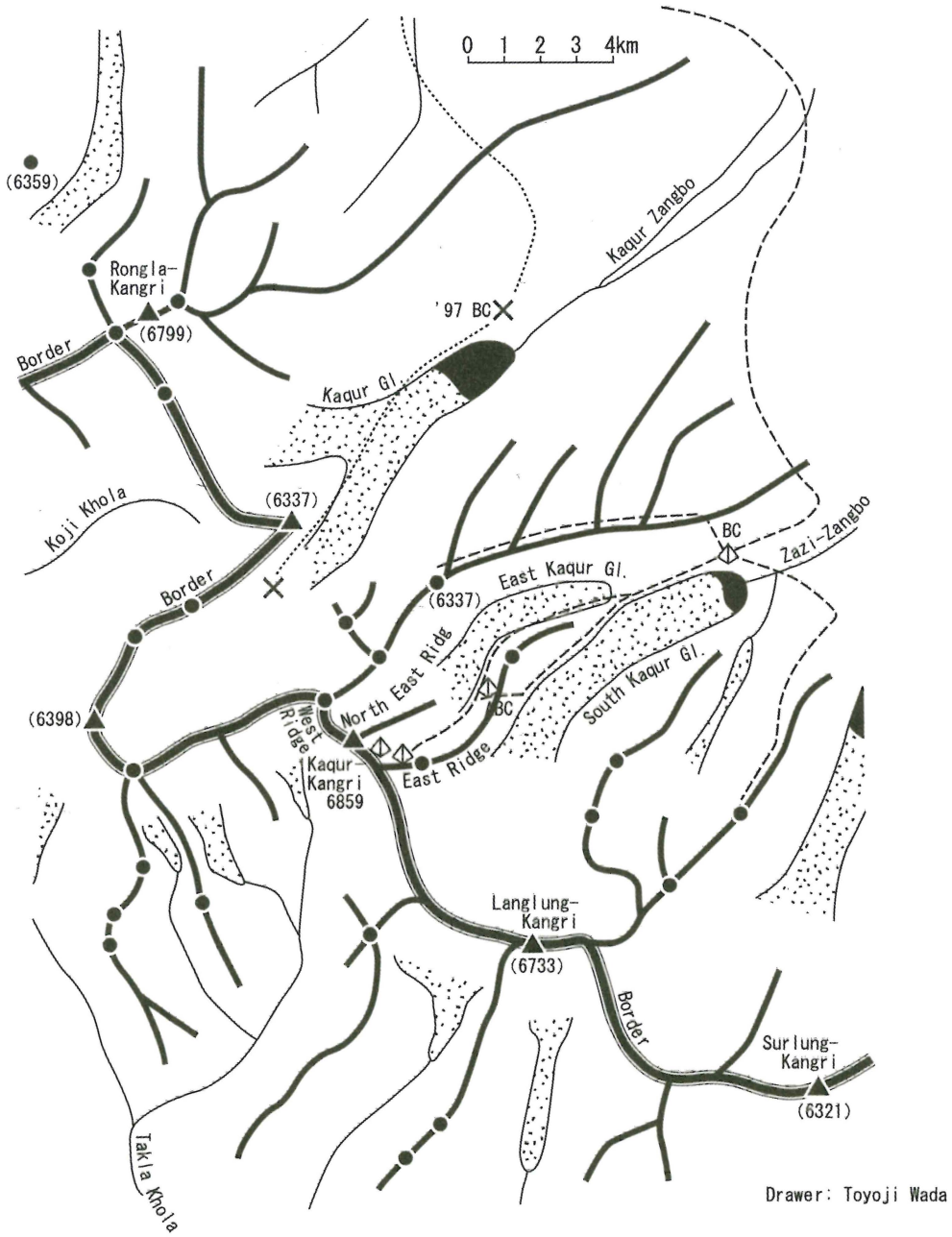
We decided to call the mountain area as Ronglai-Kangri and the main peak, as Kaqur-Kangri. On the map jointly completed by the Geographic Science Research Institute of China, the National Geographic Bureau and the Chinese Mountaineering Association, Ronglai-Kangri (6,859 m) is shown as the main peak. Almost all of them are virgin peaks and the altitudes indicated are taken from the Russian topographical map except those of Kaqur-Kangri and Kubi-dongdong. On this map, the altitudes are, in many cases, about 100m higher than in maps published in Nepal.

Ronglai-Kangri might have come from Chinese characters when the word "Rongla-Kangri" was first translated. It is called Kanti-himal in Nepal.

The foreigner who first entered this area was a Japanese priest named Kawaguchi Ekai (1866-1945) who passed through the area when he entered Tibet to study Tibetan Buddhism and its sutras. He left Marpha along Kali-gandaki, Nepal in 1900, went up the northern side of Dhaulagiri, then, wandered around the mountain area until he found a way to the Cang-chu river so as to reach Narue. The next foreigner who came to the area was Sven Hedin. He was the first person who went up the Cang-chu river in 1907 and sketched Kaqur-Kangri. Meanwhile, pursuant to the first ascent of Mt.Api in 1960, DAC made the first ascent of Mt. Saipal in 1963, when they witnessed the range from the summit of Mt. Saipal. Then, when Katsuichi Fukuda and Tashiro Matsumura made a survey trip crossing Nepal from west to east, they went up the Langun river from Mugu village and on the way to Bhijor village, they confirmed for the first time from the Nepalese side that the range runs along the border ridge. In 1997, Sadao Yoshinaga and others from Osaka Alpine Club went up Mugu-khora and climbed a vanguard peak of Rongla-Kangri and made a reconnaissance of Kaqur-Kangri.

3 Reconnaissance and the first challenge

Two members of DAC, namely, Takashi Sano and Katsumi Nishida, entered the area in September 1997 to make a reconnaissance. They had been fascinated by the pictures of the area taken by the China-Japan Joint Friendship Expedition Team to Mt. Naimona'nyi, organized by Doshisha University, Kyoto University and Chinese Mountaineering Association in 1985.



Ninety years had elapsed since Sven Hedin made a survey of the area from a distance, when he tried to seek out the source of the Yalung Tsangpo River.

They started from Laru, which is located upward of Paryang and is about three hours by car. It is the most upstream of the Yalung Tsangpo and downstreams are called by the names of tributaries such as Cang-chu River (Rongla Tsangpo), Kubi Tsangpo River, Chema-yundung-chu River. If we go up the Cang-chu River, we will reach the Namuja La which leads to Nepal.

The two members of DAC's reconnaissance team went on horseback from Laru, moving up along the Cang-chu River to arrive at Narue which Kawaguchi Ekai passed in 1900. "Cang-chu"means a river where cang live. In fact, there live many cang (wild horses) in this area. The stream left Cang-chu river around here and crossed hills branching out from the Ronglai-Kangri Range toward south. Two days after the start, they set up a base camp at the tip of a tongue of the Kaqur Glacier and conducted a reconnaissance activity. They surveyed up to 5,605m of the Kaqur Glacier and tried in vain to find a climbing route from western ridge of Kaqur-Kangri. However, they thought a possible climbing route could be found from the east face or south-eastern side.

From August to September 1998, five members of DAC, namely Yoshiharu Suita, team leader, Junichi Noda, Koji Tanabe, Ryo Suemori and Katsumi Nishida, took a route on the east ridge from the East Kaqur Glacier and challenged Kaqur-Kangri. The team went by car as far as Nakchu village, east of the Ronglai-Kangri Range from New Zhongba on the Yalung Tsangpo River, crossing a bridge over it. That took them ten hours. There they rode horses. After two days, they found a base camp on 18th August at 5,460 m along the East Kaqur Glacier.

They went a side moraine on the left bank of the East Kaqur Glacier, passed through sérac zone and made an advance base camp below the lowest col of the eastern ridge after having traversed the glacier. Then, they further advanced on the snowfield, climbed up a snow wall, reached a point below a col on the ridge of the border and made it Camp 1. They further worked on the snow wall of the east ridge with a steep slope of about 50 degrees, and settled fix ropes. On 3rd September, when they reached an altitude of 6,350 m, an avalanche came down and two of them were carried away and fell into a crevasse. Fortunately, some fix ropes prevented them from being carried away any farther. If they could move up 50m farther, they would have reached a would-be Camp 2 site. As it was, however, they had to withdraw, since the two members were heavily injured.

4 Approach

In 2002, five members of DAC, namely Toyoji Wada, team leader, Katsumi Nishida, climbing team leader, Yusuke Ueda, Atsushi Senda and Hyosuke Tsuboi and three sherpas with Naga-Dorje as sardar, again challenged Kaqur-Kangri. The time of climbing was deferred by about one month to avoid avalanches and enable the team to make an ascent of the summit between from the late September and early October. They arrived at New Zhongba on 31st August to cross the Yalung Tsangpo River but owing to an unusual swelling of a tributary, it was impossible to traverse it by four-wheel drive vehicles. A ferry service at Saga was also suspended and they were held up for some time. Comparison of the water levels of the YalungTsangpo at three post-monsoon period, the reconnaissance in 1997, a challenge in 1998 and this time, showed us that the water level is very changeable by year. As there was no other choice at that time, the team went up to the vicinity of the Kubi Tsangpo River and decided to start an approach from Laru. Loads were carried by yaks while the members and sherpas used horses.

The caravan started on 4th September and reached the Kaqur Tsangpo, taking the same route as at the 1997 reconnaissance. Then, we took a day to cross a branch of the ridge of Kaqur-Kangri,

and established a base camp on 8th September. The site was on the left bank of a tongue of the South Kaqur Glacier, about 5,100 m in altitude.

The monsoon season had not completely ended over there. The lowest temperature at the base camp was between – 6°C and + 2°C with a lettle snowfall every day, but the snow did not stay below 5,000 m. Mountains on the border ridges were hidden under heavy clouds most of the time. When the monsoon season was over on 14th September, fine weather continued and the mountains on the border were clearly seen. On and after 6th October when the climbing was completed, the number of snowy days increased, and the snow started to lie. By the middle of September, all yaks and sheep put out to pasture during summer returned to the villages at the foot of mountains.

5 Climbing

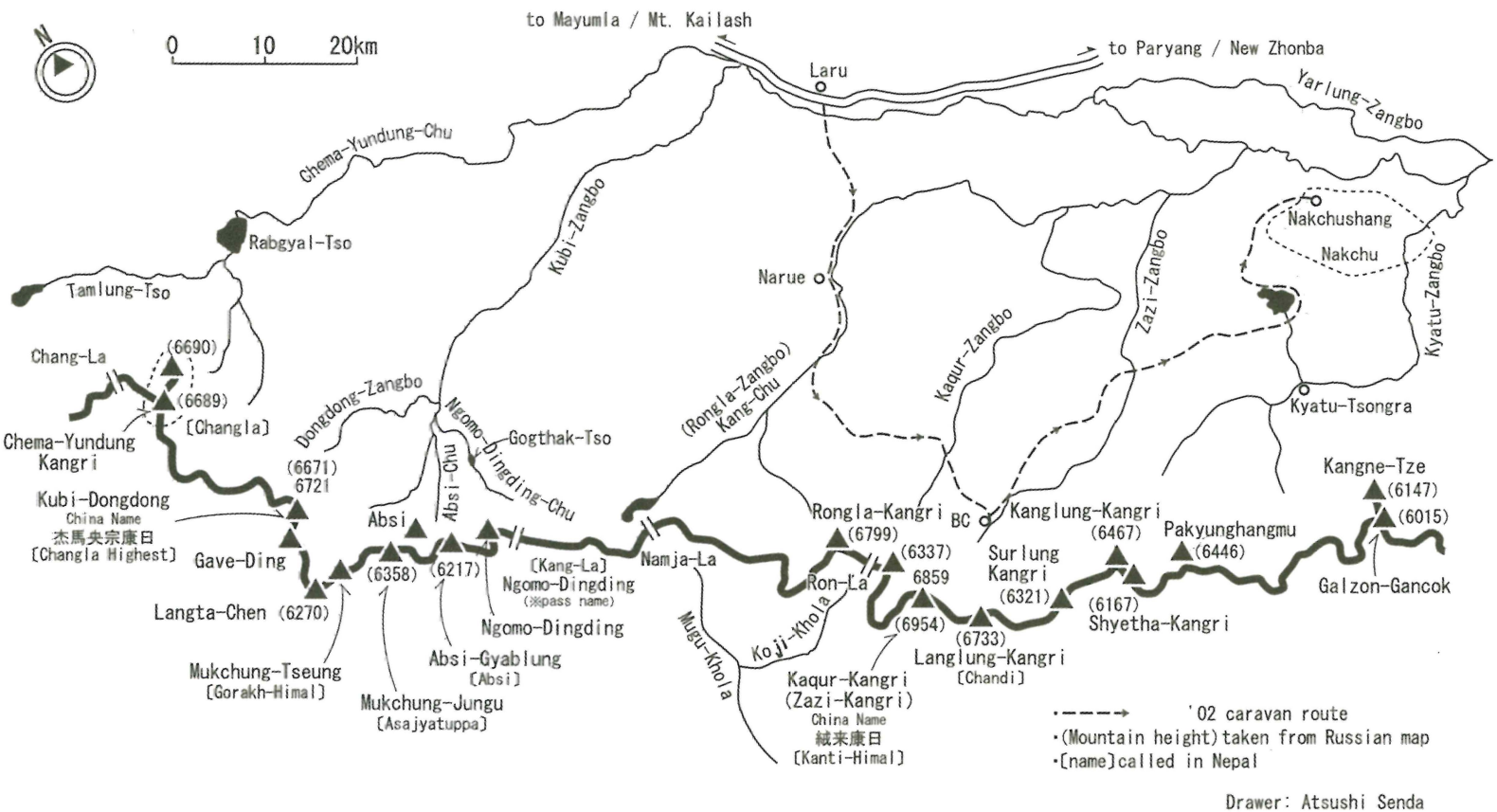
After making a reconnaissance of the route, we built an advance base camp at 5,800m on the lowest col of the east ridge from the South Kaqur Glacier and moved on the great snowfield of the East Kaqur Glacier which has many hidden crevasses. So we decided to tackle again the wall of the east ridge. A rough sketch of the climbing route is shown. In view of possible avalanches, crevasses, we had to fix ropes in succession. Monsoon having gone, preparation of routing started on a full scale. Japanese team members prepared the route from Advance Base Camp to Camp 1, and then, sherpas opened the route from Camp 1 to above Camp 2. Due to very strong winds on the col of the border ridge, the tent site of the Camp 1 (6,100 m) was chosen on a snow flat created on the leeward east side of the border ridge. On 20th September, we set up Camp 2 (6,400 m) on a huge ice shelf close to the ridge. It was about 50 m above the point where an avalanche occurred in 1998.

Turning on the headlight, we started the attack at 7.40 am, Beijing Standard Time on 24th September. The route was almost along the ridge on the border. A slope with an angle of 45 to 60 degrees, with a hard snow surface and crevasses continued. Crampons caught snow very effectively. Fix ropes having been extended for 1700 m from below C1 on the previous day, the route to the east peak had been secured. From there, we climbed over a small cornice and went up on the ridge to the summit where the wind blew much stronger. Kanajeroba Himal was viewed on the far left in Nepal. Unfortunately, Mt. Api and Mt. Saipal could not be recognized due to the sea of cloud. A flat route on the ridge was anticipated but, in reality, a steep ridge continued . Fix ropes were extended 200 m further but still could not reach the main peak. So, using two additional main ropes, we could arrive at the snowfield leading to the main peak. The final upward approach to the main peak was on a gently snowy slope. Paying careful attention to cornices, we proceeded to the highest point. Thus, all the five members of the team and three sherpas stood at the summit at 11.40 am.

6 Survey of the mountain area and the source of the Yalung Tsangpo River

After the ascent of Mt. Kaqur-Kangri, the team made a survey of the periphery of the Ronglai-Kangri Range. The names of the mountains surrounding the area are called in various ways by local inhabitants and it is difficult to find names common to all. Names are based on local pronunciations in Tibet.

In this mountain range, besides Kaqur-Kangri, the main peak in center, there are mountains


N
0 10 20km
to Mayumla / Mt. Kailash
to Paryang / New Zhonba
Laru
Yarlung-Zangbo
Chema-Yundung-Chu
Rabgyal-Tso
Tamlung-Tso
Kubi-Zangbo
Narue
Nakchushang
Nakchu
Zazi-Zangbo
Kyatu-Zangbo
Kyatu-Tsongra
Chang-La
(6690)
(6689)
[Changla]
Chema-Yundung Kangri
Dongdong-Zangbo
Ngomo-Dingding-Chu
Gogthak-Tso
(Rongla-Zangbo) Kang-Chu
Kaqur-Zangbo
(6671) 6721
Kubi-Dongdong
China Name
杰馬央宗康日
[Changla Highest]
Absi
Absi-Chu
Rongla-Kangri
(6799)
BC
Kanglung-Kangri
(6467)
Pakyunghangmu
(6446)
Kangne-Tze
(6147)
(6015)
Gave-Ding
[Kang-La]
Ngomo-Dingding
(※pass name)
Namja-La
(6337)
6859
Surlung Kangri
(6321)
Galzon-Gancok
Langta-Chen (6270)
(6358)
(6217)
Ron-La
(6167)
Shyetha-Kangri
Mukchung-Tseung
[Gorakh-Himal]
Mukchung-Jungu
[Asajyatuppa]
Absi-Gyablung
[Absi]
Ngomo-Dingding
Mugu-Khola
Koji-Khola
(6954)
(6733)
Langlung-Kangri
[Chandi]
Kaqur-Kangri
(Zazi-Kangri)
China Name
絨来康日
[Kanti-Himal]
'02 caravan route
(Mountain height) taken from Russian map
[name] called in Nepal
Drawer: Atsushi Senda

with typical Himalayan creases. They include Langlung-Kangri, Surlung-Kangri and Pakyung-hangmu (according to a local legend, a wife of Kaqur-Kangri) on the east side, virgin peaks of 6000 to 6,500 m, among which stands a rocky peak of Galzon-gencok which is quite unique among the mountains of western Tibet. These are situated on the border ridge leading to Kaqur-Kangri. Most of those mountains running in a northwest direction remain unclimbed. Since the ridge is so complicatedly curved, it makes it difficult to define the border ridge. Unlike on the Nepalese side, glaciers develop comparatively well, and each glacier can be used as a climbing route. If the timing of ascent is appropriately selected, the approach will be comparatively easy.

The team also confirmed the names of mountains extending from the deepest source of Yalung Tsangpo River, which branches off to the Kubi Tsampo and the Chema-yundung-chu, further west of the Ronglai-Kangri Range. The team owes Sven Hedin for his relevant detailed sketch. This range is called Gorakh Himal and Changla Himal in Nepal. The only climbing record of Changla Himal is that of the Northwest Nepal Women Expedition and Climbing Team of Japan in 1983. We wish to explain briefly about each mountain group.

Gorakh Himal

Among mountains in this mass, Mukchung-Jungu, Absi, Ngomo-dingding are outstanding. They are all unscaled. "Ngomo-dingding," originally the name of a pass in the east, means a flat and blue place. In Nepal, this pass is called Kang La. To approach to these mountains, one may go up the Kubi Tsangpo river. The main peak on the border is called Absi Gyablung (behind Absi) by local people while the vanguard peak called Absi, so the mountain on the border is Absi. According to Hedin, the main peak of the mass is Mukchung-Jungu which ranges to Mukchung-Tseung in the west. Mountains called Asajyatuppa and Gorakh-Himal in Nepal correspond to Muchung-Jungu and Mukchung-Tseung respectively.

Changla Himal

The border line from Gorakh Himal sharply bends 90 degrees at Langta-Chen and extends to north and south. The mountain mass extends along the border is Changla Himal. Its main peak (6,721 m) and Chema-yundung-kangri to the east of Changla stand out among others. Chema-yundung-kangri has twin peaks: one is on the border and the other is located inside Tibet. In Nepal, the peak on the border is recognised as Changla Himal (6,563 m).

The name of the main peak (6,721 m) has not been determined yet. According to Mr.Ohnishi's report, it is called Changla highest. The climbing team of 1983 challenged this mountain. The main peak is called Kubi-dongdong or Dondong in Tibet. As far as we could observe, the summit was a pinnacle bare of snow.

Source of the Yalung Tsangpo River

As to the question of the source of the large river, Yalung Tsangpo, we asked for information from local inhabitants. Some said that the Kubi Tsangpo could be the source, while others insisted that it should be the Chema-yundung-chu. As a result, no definite reply was obtained. We confimed the point where the two rivers actually joined. Since the Kubi Tsangpo excelled both in the level of water and speed of flow, it seemed to be the main stream, which was exactly what Sven Hedin had observed. On the other hand, the map indicates that Chema-yundung-chu is apparently longer and therefore seems to be the main stream. Our conclusion is that river may sometimes have two sources.

7 No trash mountaineering

As part of sustainable study and survey of development of mountain areas, our climbing team observed no trash activities throughout climbing and exploration. We left nothing behind us; climbing gears, rubbish, excrement or others. We tried to find out what are the problems to practice such activity. We are able to finish the mountaineering leaving neither artificial stuff nor excrement (except urine) behind us on and around Kaqur-Kangri. We did leave fix ropes near the summit, because their recovery usually involves great danger. It may be added that we used portable toilets, "sanita-clean" in the attack camp and during the action, and excrements were put into a plastic bag and when descending, it was hung from the rucksack. As a result, the surroundings of the tent remained clean and enabled us to obtain safe water even during the snowstorm and to spend a comfortable life in the tent.

Wastes brought down were separated at Base Camp. Kitchen refuse and feces were mixed with a fermentation accelerating agent and then buried in the grass field. Combustibles and portable toilets were burned there, and incombustibles were taken back to Lhasa. Sherpas were also very cooperative since they were faced with environmental issues in Nepal.

At Nakchushang which we called at on the way back, we taught local students and village people how to dispose of rubbish: classifying it into what should be burned and what can be buried.

Thus, we were able to see that it is possible to achieve a fairly "clean" climbing.

Literature cited:

1. The Rev. Ekai Kawaguchi, "Three years in Tibet" 1909 Madras
2. Sven Hedin " Southern Tibet" B.R. Publishing Corporation 1991
3. The journal of the Japanese Alpine Club SANGAKU Vol. LIX 1964
4. NAIMONA'NYI 1985 by China-Japan Joint Friendship Expedition to Mt. Naimona'nyi Published by the Mainichi News Paper
5. Geographic Science Research Institute of National Geographic Bureau, China, Chinese Mountaineering Association Mountains Map of Tibet Plateau 1989
6. Kyoko Endo, Masako Uchida "Report of North-West Nepal Women Expedition and Climbing Team" Dojin Jungfrau 1983
7. The USSR A Map on scale of 1:200,000
8. Osaka Alpine Club Homepage - http:/www.showa_p.co.jp/oac/
9. Onishi "Ascent of Mt. Narakankharu (6,062 m) and Expedition to Extreme North-West Nepal" SANGAKU Vol.96/2001 P.137~147