

TOYOJI WADA

Mountains in the headwaters of Yalung Tsangpo

1. Outline

Kubi Tsangpo Headwaters Expedition 2007 headed by Toyoji Wade succeeded in the first ascent of Kubi Kangri (6,721m), the highest peak in Kubi Tsangpo headwaters with no help of sherpas. A climbing leader, Atushi Senda and six students reached the summit from C2 via the east ridge and descended to C2 via the north ridge. Besides the main objective of the first ascent, we conducted the following activities:-

1. Tried to ascend two unclimbed peaks called Absi (6,254) and Langta-chen (6,248m) in Kubi Tsangpo headwaters.
2. As field research, surveyed shrinkage and receding of glaciers due to global warming, retraced a Japanese Buddhist monk, Ekai Kawaguchi who traveled through this far-flung borderland in 1900, and studied the relation of cause and effect between psychology and high altitude.

We saw many sorts of wild animals around and in the vicinity our base camp. In particular, wild yaks, Tibetan wild donkeys, snow leopards and footprints of a bear (known as of Yeti) much attracted our attention.

2. Headwaters of Yarlung Tsagpo

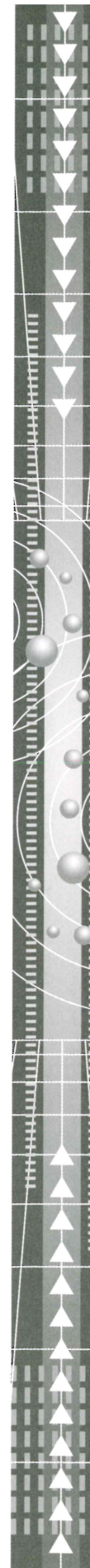
Hindi and Buddhist believed that all the headwaters of Indus, Sutlej, Ganges (Karnali) and Brahmaputra rivers were believed to be the Lake Manasarowar by Hindis and Buddhists in early times. (Local Tibetans call Brahmaputra as Yalung Tsungpo.)

Yalung Tsungpo flows 1,200km eastward from the headwaters in the northern side of the Himalaya, then turned southward forming the world largest canyon Tsungpo Great Bend which embraces Namcha Barwa (7,782m) in the easternmost rim of the Himalaya. The main stream flows to south changing its name to Brahmaputra in Arnachal Pradesh state of Indian, turns to west, and then joins the Ganges river. It finally flows into the Bay of Bengal. The total river length is approx. 2600km.

Yalung Tsungpo is separated to two branches of Kubi Tsungpo and Chema-yundung river at $82^{\circ}54'E$ $30^{\circ}20'N$ near the headwaters. In 1907, Sven Hedin surveyed a volume of flowing water of each river with a view to decide which river was the true source of Yalung Tsungpo. His another survey concluded that Chema-yundung river must be the true headwaters as Chema-yundung river was proved longer than Kubi Tsungpo.

The local Tibetan name of the mountain range in this area is Chang-la Himal or Asja Himal. Nepalese name is Chang-la Himal or Gorakh Himal, Ronglei Himal, Kanti Himal covering Kaqur Kangri(6,859m) east in this area. All peaks surrounding the headwaters of Kubi Tsungpo are called Kubi Kangri and most of these peaks have no proper names. An access to this mountain range is rather difficult either from Tibet or Nepal.

An approach from Nepal takes a long time as an airport is far away and we must march along a deeply eroded valley. Only a party of Northwest Nepal Women's Expedition and Tamotsu Ohnishi visited this area. However they could not climb Kubi Kangri (6,721m) and Kaqur Kangri (6,859m) because of long approach and deep valley in Nepal side.



The Tibetan side is easier than from Nepal because of the conditions of glacier complex are more stable. But Yalung Tsangpo must be crossed en route. On the way from Lhasa to Kailasha, we may have a good view of fascinating Himalayan peaks from Paryang. Crossing Yalung Tsangpo is only in winter. Recently meanwhile many have been constructed over the main stream and its tributaries as well, and consequently vehicles traffic has become busier and frequent. Success in Kaqur Kangri 2002 of the Doshisha University expedition (see the Japanese Alpine News vol. 3, May 2003) much owed easier access to the mountain and possible climbing route in Tibetan side.

3. Kubi Kangri Mountain Range

In 1983, a team of Japanese Northwest Nepal Women's Expedition headed by Kyoko Endo attempted on Chang-la from Nepal side. According to local villagers Chang-la is not a proper name for the peak but represents the name of the mountain range. The women's party challenged the highest of Chang-la, which is Kubi Kangri, but failed. Local people are not well acquainted with Kubi Kangri because it is hardly seen from their villages as the other peaks to their side hinder the visibility. This is the reason why Kubi Kangri has no individual name. However, as our Tibetan guides call this peak "dong dong" or Kubi Kangri, we apply the name of Kubi Kangri (6,721m) for the highest peak in the mountain range which we climbed.

There are many unidentified 6000m to 6500m high peaks around Kubi-kangri. On the border from north to south, there exist Chang-la(6,563m), Kubi Kangri(6,271m), Langta-chen(6,248m), Asja(6,265m), Absi(6,254m), Ngomo-dingding(6,133m).

In the Tibet side, there are beautiful mountains such as Anro, Cnema-yundung, Gave-ting, Mukchung. They are all virgin peaks except for Kubi Kangri.

These mountains have glaciers sharing the headwaters of Kubi Tsangpo. Most of the glaciers have many crevasses in a gentle slope. Some of the glaciers have glacial lakes at the terminus. An access to the glacial lakes is easy by four wheel vehicles or truck except freshet time. This area has a pasture for grazing yaks and sheep from April to August. Foreigners are prohibited to enter this region without permission. This year, because of preparation for Olympic Game 2008 and prevalence of chicken flu, the Chinese authority was particularly nervous ever before to give a permit.

4. Schedule

2007

- August 6: Arrived at Katmandu
- August 8-13: High altitude accommodation (Acclimatization) in Langtang Himal
- August 18-24: Katmandu→Zangmu→Nieram→Saga→New Tongpa→Paryan→
Base Camp
- August 27-30: Route finding and high altitude accommodation (acclimatization)
- August 31-September 23: Climbing
- September 24: Left base camp
- September 25-29: Field survey
- October 1: Raktuang→Zangmu→Katmandu

5. Climbing

We set up our base camp at 4,800m nearby the headwaters of Kubi Tsangpo, where we

arrived by vehicles. Rainy and clouded days had lasted till we got to base camp in late August, while in base camp we could enjoy sunny days.

On the way to C1 (5,600m) from base camp, there are a couple of glacier moraines. To reach the moraines, we forwarded along the river bed of Kubi Tangpo. We repeated up- and-down on the moraines and reached the glacier having many crevasses. The route finding was time consuming and much exhaustive. C1 is 12km far from base camp.

On the way to C1 from C2, we were forced to negotiate with crevasses extensively. Although Kubi glacier is not so steep, many large crevasses are viewed from far away. Three days were required for route pavement using fix ropes.

On September 11, we left base camp to assault Kubi Kangri. On September 13, some of the members reconnoitered the north side of Kubi Kangri hidden from C2. There were few crevasses on the glacier in the north side of Kubi Kangri, while there were many crevasses on the east ridge leading to the north side. They attempted the central peak (6,628m) Kubi Kangri.

At 6:00am on September 14, we departed from C2 and got to the east ridge. On the previous day route paving of two pitches had already been done. Although we had estimated only two or three pitches fix rope enough to the summit, we had to actually place fix ropes of 15 pitches because of steepness. At 12:40 all seven members stood atop Kubi Kangri in a bad weather. Soon after taking pictures, we commenced descending the north ridge. On the way down, though we lost once the route in a white and descended to Nepal side some 50 m, but we could find the right route and safely returned to C2.

On 15 September, we descended from C2 to base camp ferrying all gears and equipment.

6. Another attempt

In succession to Kubi Kangri, we tried to climb Langta-chen(6,248m) and Absi (6,254m), both unclimbed peaks soaring near base camp.

Langta-chen is far behind of the Langta glacier. It seemed likely that climbing would be easy if we followed the glacier reaching to the summit. However, many huge crevasses and hidden crevasses were against before us. In the upper part large ice fall like buildings threatened us. We gave up further pushes at 5,650m. To make the summit of this peak fix ropes and ladders must be needed or winter season when crevasses are not exposed would be better for climbing.

To climb Absi, we had to cross a river to get to the Absi glacier. Pitching camp on the glacier near the end of northwest ridge, we ascended the ridge with rock and ice. Using fix ropes we reached 6,000m, but we retreated from there. This peak would suit alpine style climbing.

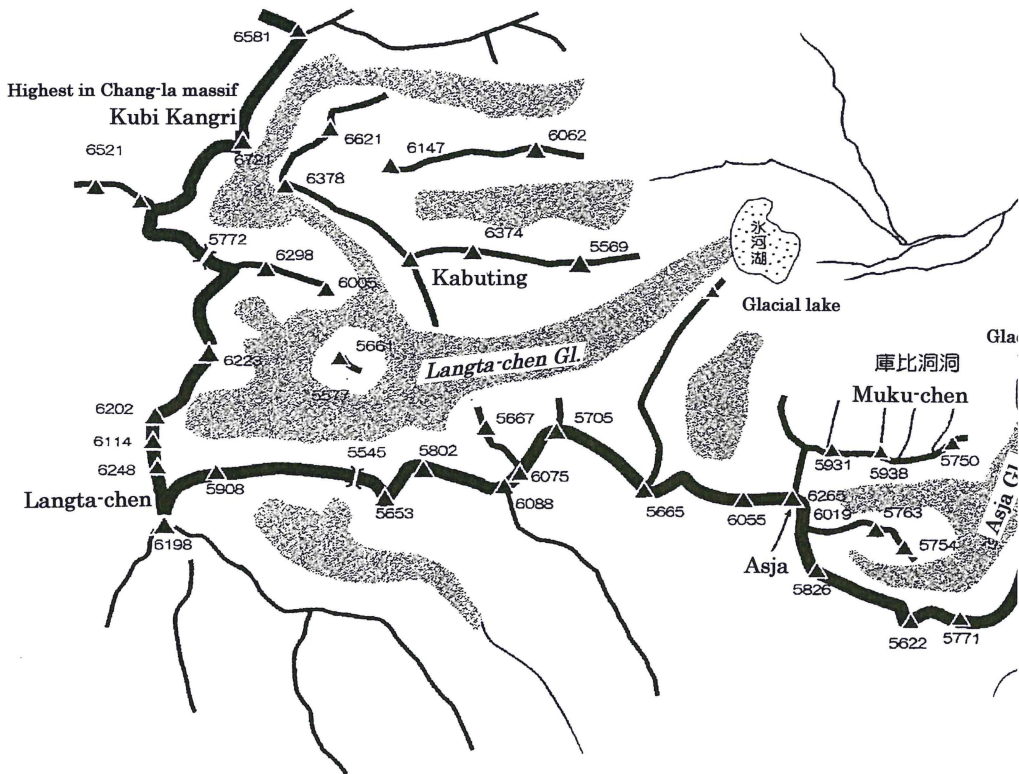
7. Shrinkage of glaciers

Due to climate change the glaciers in the Himalaya are shrinking and/or receding very fast. Plenty of information and supporting data on the glaciers in Nepal is available, whilst information on the glaciers in Tibet is not widely opened to the outside countries. In 1907 Sven Hedin visited and surveyed the area where we have been and he recorded invaluable information of his observation on the glaciers. Now in 2007 we do much appreciate Hedin's work to give evidence for receding of the glaciers which has been taking place in 100 years. We measured the terminus of both the Langta glacier and Absi glacier. The picture that Hedin took in 1907 shows no glacial lake in the both glaciers.

Russian (former Soviet Union) of 1946 also shows no glacial lake in the both glacier. Comparison of Hedin's picture and our observation leads to an estimate that the Langta glacier has retreated by 1,500m to 2000m and the Absi glacier has retreated by 1,200m in 100 years.

Editor's note: Japanese Alpine News vol. 8 May 2007 contains the special articles on the climate changes and faster melting of the glaciers in Bhutan, Central Tibet, Tien Shan, Altai and Yunnan in China..

UNTRODDEN MOUNTAIN MASSIFS in the Headwaters of Yalung Tsangpo

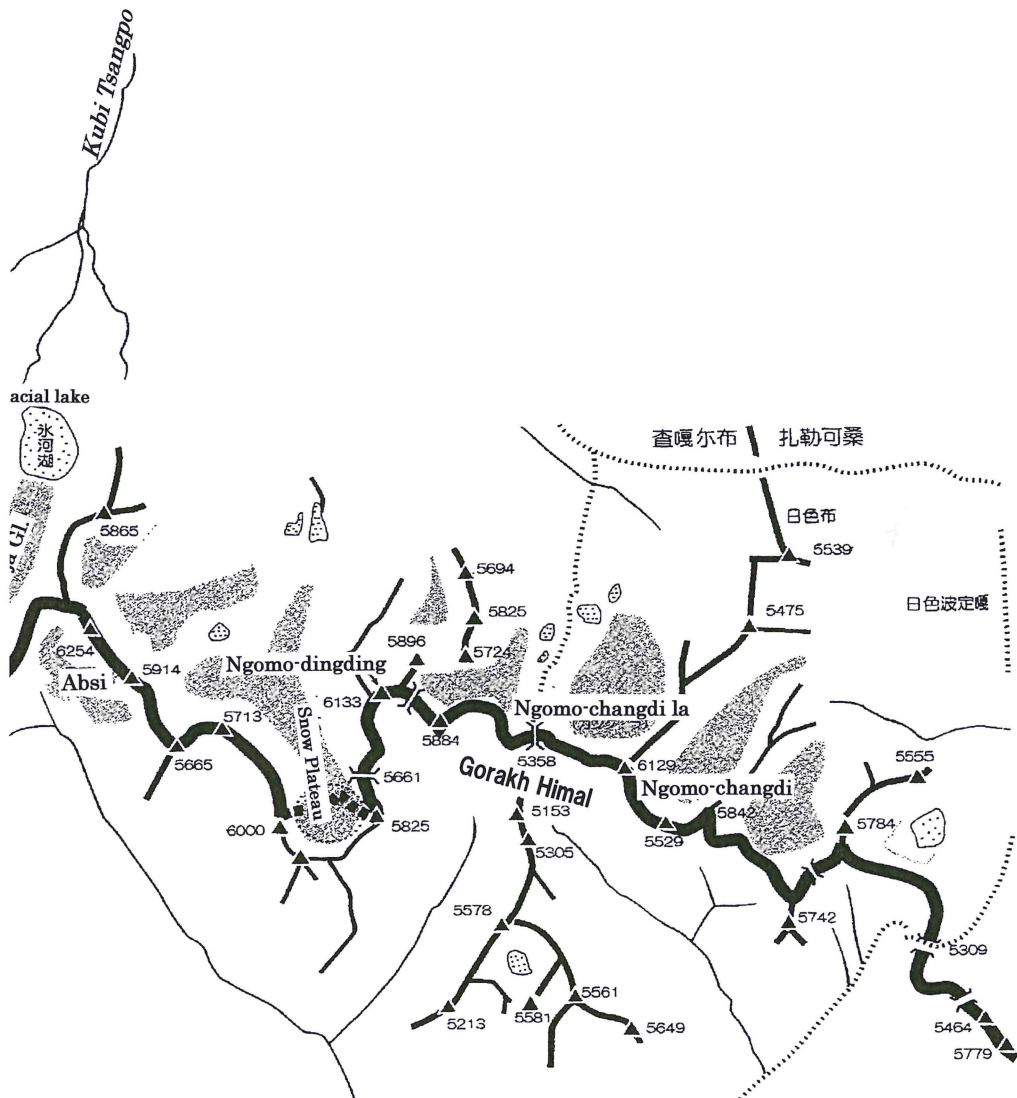


Map of Headwaters of Kubi Tsangpo

8. Wild animals

Many sorts of wild animals were seen near base camp. The place is isolated from village or highway and unspoiled. The most popular one is Tibetan wild donkey (Cyan). We also saw wild yaks which were hardly found in Nepal. In the evening on September, a snow leopard appeared just 20m from our base camp.

To our utmost surprise, we found footprints like those of Snow Man known as Yeti just near the glacial lake. But the scientists would claim that it must be footprints of a Himalayan Brown Bear.





Absi 6,254m



Footprints of Snow Man (A Himalayan bear)



Kubi Kangri 6,721m