

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. 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.

TANIAWENG 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 Taniaweng 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)

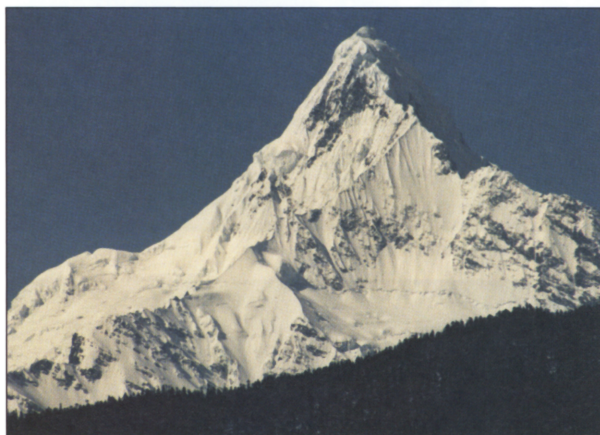
Meili Xueshan (also known as Ka-Kar-Po, Kang Karpo, and Moirigkawagarbo) is located at 98.6°E and 28.4°N and is engulfed by over 20 peaks with permanent snowcover, six of which exceed 6,000 meters. Meili Xueshan is topographically higher in the north and lower in the



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.