

# **JAPANESE MOUNTAINEERING IN CHINA**

**An Overview of the last twenty years: 1979 to 2000**

*Shigeru Kodama*

Dr. Eizaburo Nishibori, former president of The Japanese Alpine Club (JAC) was invited to the General Meeting of Chinese Sports Conference held at Beijing in the fall of 1977. The occasion gave Nishibori an opportunity to talk with some of the executive officials of the Chinese Mountaineering Association (CMA), and he had a perspective that in the near future China would certainly open the door for foreigners to climb the high mountains in the greater ranges in West China.

In less than two years after Dr. Nishibori's visit, the Chinese authorities began to take necessary steps in this regard. In November 1979, CMA announced that eight mountains would be opened to foreign climbers from the year 1980 onward. Now bamboo curtains were about to be raised. The said eight peaks were Chomolangma, Shishapangma, Kongur, Kongur Chubic, Muztagh Ata, Minya Konka, Amnemachin and Bogdo Ola.

In the summer of 1979, JAC was advised, unofficially in advance, of a permit to climb Chomolangma in 1980. JAC promptly sent a team to Tibet with an objective to reconnoiter a practicable climbing route via the north ridge. This was the first access by a foreign party to attempt the mountain from the northern side after World War II.

In 1980, a JAC party stood atop Chomolangma via the north ridge and north face. The three other parties from Japan went to Shishapangma, Kongur and Minya Konka for the purpose of reconnaissance. Accordingly, the high mountains of China began to attract a great deal of attention among Japanese climbers.

In the following year 1981, eighteen parties from Japan visited the eight opened peaks, and one party entered to the mountain in West Sichuan, which had been under negotiation with CMA.

CMA became very positive to keep pace with increasing activities in China of foreign mountaineers. They prepared a variety of attractive programs.

In 1985 CMA established their local sections in the Provinces and Autonomous Region so that the CMA headquarters in Beijing might sustain an influence to manage and control mountaineering in China. In the same year twenty-three Japanese parties entered the newly opened areas and challenged the mountains in Tibet, Sichuan and Xinjiang.

Before 1985 most of the potential climbers belonging to active climbing clubs were not much interested in the mountains in China because of expensive costs, bureaucratic administration, complicated go-through formalities and limited targets. Meanwhile, to

cope with such tendency, CMA made an effort to expand the opened areas in Chinese Himalaya, Chinese Karakoram, Chinese Turkestan and Tibet.

In the decade of 1990s Japanese parties accomplished the remarkable first ascents of many of the outstanding high peaks, which include Gurla Mandhata, Khula Kangri, Nyainqentanglha, Namchabarwa, The Crown, Chong Muztagh and so on. Aggressive climbers first ascended difficult big walls and ridges: the north face of Chomolangma, the north ridge of K2, the southwest face of Cho Oyu and the east ridge of Makalu.

Meanwhile, in the same ten years, inexperienced young climbers and elderly climbers increased in number. Being attracted to the big names, they have been crowding in such popular and famous mountains as Chomolangma and Mustagh Ata.

Most of the expedition parties and many of individual climbers have written their accounts in mountain journals and published books. But to our regret most of them are in the Japanese language. However, the fact remains that a considerable number of reports have already been introduced in AJ, AAJ and HJ.

Here a table and a reference map are shown. The area-wise table indicates that 342 parties visited the mountains in China, but this number does not cover small and trekking parties which have recorded no notable ascents. (Editor's note: List of Japanese Mountaineering Activities in China, in which reference is made to AJ, AAJ, HJ and JAC Journal SANGAKU, is now available from the JAC headquarter.)