

# The Untrodden Mountains in West Sichuan, China

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“ TODAY the map has no more secrets.” Idle minds repeat that parrot phrase. But who knows all Tibet, or its far-away frontier on western China? Even its own prayer-muttering tribes know only their own bleak, wind-swept valleys-----*(The National Geographic Magazine, February 1930, Washington, D.C.)*

This is an opening paragraph of Joseph F. Rock's journey seeking the mysterious mountain, Amnyi Machen. The venture was carried out three-quarter century ago. However, the readers' attention is invited to the fact that even today the Rock's words may apply widely through Tibetan territories of Southwest China. Once being off the beaten tracks in the remote regions of Southeast Tibet and West Sichuan, you would meet untouched stunning peaks and hidden valleys with beautiful forests, pastures and, in some places, historic lamaseries.

This article has been worked out to introduce less-known mountains of West Sichuan (formerly Eastern Tibet) in two parts.



Pic.1 Zhopu Pasture and Granite Rock Peaks of Jarjinjabo massif

## I.Hengduan Mountains East • Unclimbed Peaks in Sichuan Province

Being different from Southeast Tibet where all the 6000m peaks still remain untrodden, there are only a couple of unclimbed 6000m peaks in Sichuan nevertheless countless alluring rock and snow peaks of lower than 6000m are waiting visits of climbers and trekkers. In this part an outline of major mountain ranges/massifs in the eastern part of Hengduan Mountains between Jingsha Jiang and Min Jiang of Upper Yangtze River is described from west to east. It is noted that, unless otherwise specifically mentioned, all

the peaks are those unclimbed.

### 1. Chola Shan Massif

Two 6000m peaks were already scaled. Mt. Chola I (6186m) was first climbed by the joint party of Japan-China in 1987 and Mt. Chola II (6119m) was ascended by an American solo climber in 1997. U.A.I.I. team ascended some 5000m peaks in 1997. However, 5816m peak in the northern end is unveiled, and in the west supposedly remarkable rock peaks would exist that surround an old lamasery.

### 2. Shaluli Shan Range

This mountain range covers vast area and a boundary with the other mountain massifs is unclear. Each massif is introduced in succession from north to south.

#### (1) Gangga Massif

This massif is stretched to southeast from the end of Chola Shan in the south of Yalong Jiang. The main peak, Gangga (5688m) and other 5000m peaks have small glaciers.

#### (2) Jarjinjabo Massif

The highest peak is 5812m and the second highest is 5725m. The most impressive peak is a brilliant granite rock tower (5382m) soaring to the sky like Fitz Roy in Patagonia. These are located along the northern rim of wide Zhopu Pasture in the north of Xiashe(5833m) Massif. To the west there are several 5500m peaks and to the east a challenging fortress of Hati (5524m) rises proudly.



Pic.2 The north face of Xiashe(5833m) .  
A view from Zhopu Monastery.  
Unclimbed.

#### (3) Xiashe Massif

Xiashe (5833m), the highest peak has beautiful lakes in the southern side, while the north face seems to attract climbers. The massif has the other 5500-5600m peaks adjacent to Sichuan-Tibet Highway.

#### (4) Dangchezhengla Massif

This massif situates 15 – 20 kilometers away from Batang to the east. An access to the base camp is short. Four principal peaks of 6060, 6033, 5833 and 5850m dominate ranging from east to west. Japanese party assaulted the highest peak from the northern side in 1991, but the attempt was unsuccessful because of the bad weather and danger of avalanches. Since then no one has tried to approach to the mountains. In the southern side of the mountains a heaven lake, called Yamochouken locates at such a high altitude as 4800m above sea level



Pic.3 The highest peak of Dangchezhengla Massif 6060m, A view from south-west. Unclimbed

(5) Genyen Massif and neighbor mountains to the north and northwest

To the south of Sichuan-Tibet Highway between Litang plateau and Batang, there is a vast mountain area. The highest peak, Genyen (6204m) that is a divine mountain was climbed by Japanese party in 1988. However more than ten peaks of rock and snow over 5800m are waiting climbers. In particular, 5965m peak towering like a sharp beak is magnificent and scenery of Rengo Monastery with 600 years history surrounded by spiky rock pinacles is really enchanting.

(6) Gongga Xueshan (Kongkaling) Massif

These mountains had been known by F. Kingdon-Ward and also by Joseph Rock since 1920's. There are three major peaks of Xianre Ri (6032m), Yangmaiyong (5958m) and Xaruo Doje (5958m). Japanese party failed to climb Xianre Ri in 1989 and two Americans made a reconnaissance of Yangmaiyong in 1993. A snow pyramid of complete conical shape of Yangmaiyong which Rock called as "Jambeyang" would be one of the most beautiful mountains in Sichuan.

### 3. Gongkara Shan Range

This is a small mountain range locating 30 kilometers away from Garze to the southeast. In 1998 Japanese party made a reconnaissance of the highest peak, Kawarani (5992m) and the second highest one (5928m) from the south. According to the topographical map

of Chinese Liberation Army (1:100,000), glaciers seems well developed in the northern side. No other record is available.

#### **4. Daxue Shan Range**

This range is the most renowned mountains having Minya Konka (Gonnga Shan, 7556m). Tibet-Qinghai Plateau ends in Daxue Shan. The scope of the range is rather ambiguous. Each massif is introduced from north to south.

##### **(1) Haizi Shan – “Ja-ra”**

Tibetans called Haizi Shan (5820m) as “Ja-ra” to signify “King of Mountains” and many explorers took notes of this outstanding peak. The southwest side is viewed very near from Sichuan-Tibet Highway. The north face would provide a possible climbing route.

##### **(2) Mountains of Dadu River basin**

Along a deep valley of Dadu He, one of the large tributaries to Yangtze River, there exist many 5000m peaks to both the east and west. The highest is 5712m peak in the left bank of the river. The eastern end shares a boundary with Jiaojin Shan (This is a minor range) and Qionglai Shan Range.

##### **(3) Cheto Shan**

This is a minor mountain with the highest peak of 4962m locating between Haizi Shan and Minya Konka.

##### **(4) Lotus Flower Mountains**

Although no glaciers are developed, eminent rock peaks are viewed in the north of Kangding, a capital of Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. The Japanese party climbed the highest peak of 5704m in 1998.

##### **(5) Lamo-she Massif**

This was called as “Mountain of Tachienlu” that is just east of Kangding. In 1993 the highest, Lamo-she (Tianhaizi Shan, 6070m) was scaled by Americans and the forth highest (Shehaizi Shan, 5878m) was climbed by America-Canada-NZ team. The other two peaks of 5924m (Baihaizi Shan) and 5880m are guarded with rocks and hanging glaciers.

##### **(6) Minya Konka (Gonnga Shan, 7556m) and its Satellite Peaks**

All the ascents of Minya Konka, since the first ascent by Americans in 1932 till the 6th ascent by Japanese in 1997, were made via Northwest Ridge. In 1998, however, Korean party succeeded in the 7th ascent via Northeast Ridge, which had taken the lives of 12 Japanese climbers in three expeditions. The future problems are the more difficult South Ridge and Southwest Ridge.

There still remain unclimbed satellite peaks over 6000m. The following shows the

notable peaks to be challenged.

A. Northern part	-----Grosvenor	6376m
	-----Mt. Edgar	6618m (E-Gonnga)
B. Central part	-----Daddomain	6380m
	-----Longemain	6294m
C. Southern part	-----Longshan	6684m
	-----Nyambo Konka	6144m

(7) 6079m Massif

There is an independent massif having unclimbed 6000m peak in the vicinity of Minya Konka to the south, though it is not in large scale. The highest one is 6079m, the profile of which no body has glimpsed yet. To the further south, 5584m mountain is shown in the Chinese map, but no specific information is available.

### 5. Qionglai Shan Range

This range forms Min River-Dadu River divide and the highest peak is a famous Mt. Siguniang (6250m) having been first ascended via East Ridge by Japanese in 1981. Japanese also first climbed the south face in 1992. The southern side of Mt. Siguniang is now a popular place for tourists, but to the north, a splendid climbing field is expanding along beautiful valleys. Many granite rock spires of some 5500m soars peak upon peak and two major peaks of 5892m and 5712m with glaciers are hidden in a veil in the northern end.

Apart from Mt. Siguniang, Americans climbed the following peaks.

1983-----Celestial Peak (5413m, Tibetan name: Punyu), a complete rock pyramid

1994-----5484m and 5383m peaks

1996-----5666m peak

In further north, there is an unknown massif of five 5000m peaks, of which the highest is 5527m.

### 6. Min Shan Range

Min Shan is the eastern end of Hengduan Mountains near Jiuzhaigou and Huanlong registered as UNESCO's World Heritage. The highest peak is Xuebaoding (5588m) that was first climbed by Japanese in 1986. This area is no longer a field to seek a pioneer work but tourist spots.

Sketch map " UNTRODDEN MOUNTAINS IN WEST SICHUAN, CHINA" is attached hereto.

## **II. Journey to Unknown Mountains and Valleys in South Kham**

The South Kham that had belonged to Xikang Province was incorporated into Sichuan Province in 1949 when Communist China enforced new administration.

Our trip in the first half of 2000 was focused to the unknown region of the South Kham. A key word is "Seeking New Discoveries", and consequently the following two targets were programmed.

First round-----Unclimbed 6000m peaks, Dangchezhengla Massif east of Batang

Second round-----Jarjinjabo and Xiashe Massifs north of Litang Plateau

### **1. Dangchezhengla and Heaven Lake**

Except for the satellite peaks of Minya Konka, only three mountain massifs have unclimbed 6000m peaks in West Sichuan. These are Xinanre Ri (6032m) of Gongga Xueshan, 6079m peak south of Minya Konka and Dangchezhengla.

Our party of two elder members (Total age is 132 years old.) arrived at Chengdu via Shanghai on May 26, 2000. We were well received by Zhang brothers of Sichuan Adventure Travel and our guide Lenny Cheung. Zhang brothers are getting reputed in USA as the most experienced guide of rafting in both Yangtze and Tsanpo rivers.

On May 27 we got to Kangding from Chengdu in eight hours by a Toyota Land-cruiser via newly opened Erlangshan Tunnel.

On May 28 to 29 we proceeded westwards in the rain driving Sichuan-Tibet Highway to Batang (2560m). The road maintains a high altitude over 4000m about 200 kilometers long in the section of Litang Plateau. Lenny made necessary arrangements for organizing our caravan at Dongba village (2690m) near Batang.

On May 31 a favor swung towards us as a cycle of good weather was about to commence after it had rained several days. Our caravan could manage to depart from Dongba and ascended a trail along the mountain ridge to the east. Our party consisted of two Japanese, a Chinese guide, three Tibetans (a local secretary of Communist Party and two muleteers), nine horses and one yak. We lost half day because the secretary misled the caravan on the way. It was much frustrating. We stayed overnight at one of Tibetan house in Zhomba village (3740m).

In this season it is not easy to employ local porters and animals such as horses, mules and yaks to carry a burden because villagers are very busy in gathering caterpillar fungus (Chinese traditional medicine) in higher places over 4000m and animals are moved to high pastures for grazing. The fungus is a substantial income source for local Tibetan people. They sell one piece at a quarter dollar.

On June 1 the fine weather came back. The caravan started with five horses and seven porters. The trail was ascending along the left bank of the valley to the east through a primeval conifer forest. Sometimes appeared rhododendrons in full bloom. In the opposite side of the valley there was an isolated lamasery. Before long the valley ended being blocked with an overwhelming rock peak of 5148m, beyond which there must be a heaven lake. We set up our base camp (BC) at 4450m near a temporary summer hut for grazing near the main stream.

On June 2 it was cloudy but often sunshiny. We pushed our way as the path climbed up a steep zigzag slope and then followed a stream leading us to the right shoulder of the rock peak. We must look there the only outlet of the heaven lake, Yamouchouken (4800m). The horses were gasping. Off the trail we could see many *Meconopsis integrifolia*s of yellow flowers, but no *Meconopsis horridula*s, so-called "Blue Poppy" were found in any place. The writer's diary describes as under:

"At last we reached the outlet at 10:30am that locates in the western end of the lake. A complete tranquility rests over the entire vicinity. No sighs of animals are felt at all. The scenery in my front is quite different from what I have been imaging. It is really breathtaking. In spite of early summer, the lake is almost totally frozen and the surface is glittering in silvery white. I was reminded of the salt lakes in the highland of Bolivian Andes and Ethiopia in East Africa. If you had one day walk down to Jinsha Jiang river basin from the lake, you would suddenly suffer from dry and hot blast running up the valley. It is a wonder of the nature, indeed, in South Kham."



Pic.4 The central part of Yamou Laake, still almost totally frozen.4800m

We got off the horses and continued our march further to the east tracing a footpath along the northern bank of the lake until all the three peaks (6060, 6033 and 5833m from east to west) of Dangchezhengla Massif came into sight. We ceased our trekking at the point of 4900m. 5833m peak had a large glacier. The southwest side of the highest

peak seemed not so difficult to climb. In the late afternoon we returned to BC. We could accomplish a preliminary reconnaissance on the mountain massif.

On June 3 our caravan went down to Batang and spent one day there to be prepared for the next round.

## **2. Heart of South Kham – Zhopu Pasture and Jarjinjabo Massif**

We are apt to overlook an important thing that lies near at hand. A hidden paradise has existed not far away to the north from Sichuan-Tibet Highway of our main traffic. Incidentally the local chief of Dongba village gave us the relevant information, which was summarized as follows:

- (1) Zhopu Pasture and its surrounding nature reserves are the most beautiful in Batang County. Wide grassy valley, rock and snow mountains, primeval forests, a blue lake and wild animals are in a perfect harmony. It could be compared with Jiuzhaigou.
- (2) Zhopu Monastery having 700 years history is a holly place of an authentic Red Hat sect. Now an access is possible by a vehicle as a road to carry mining products has been constructed from Chalu to a silver mine beyond Zhopu Pasture.

On June 5 we left Batang early morning for Zhopu Lamasery with a great deal of expectation as if we were entering into a secret and isolated world, “Lost Horizon” of James Hilton. We turned to the north at the junction of the highway to Chalu and Zhopu. From Chalu a young officer of the local government accompanied us as a pilot. He had a role of watching the foreigners too. Our land-cruiser went forward along the left bank of the valley to the northeast. We passed by a hot spring where old lamas were bathing. Plenty of conifers and oak trees grew natural in the mountain. The oak trees yield pine mushrooms that are exported to Japan. An old lamasery and then a ruined stone defense tower appeared. At about 4:00pm, the valley merged with a vast and flat pasture where hundreds of yaks and sheep were grazing.

Zhopu Pasture is at an altitude of 4050 – 4100m above sea level, spreading about 20 kilometers long from NWW to SEE and 2 – 4 kilometers wide where Khamba people are living their life of nomads in black tents looking after yaks, sheep and horses. Jarjinjabo mountain massif stretches in a panoramic view over the pasture. The grandeur of granite rock peak (5382m) viewed in front is outstandingly impressive. But it is regretful that no glaciers are seen.

In late afternoon we arrived at Zhopu monastery (4120m), the neighborhood of which supposedly had an atmosphere of “Shangri-La”. Many lamas and students received us warmly but curiously, as we were the first foreigners to visit them.

On June 6 it was fine. After having taken photographs of the challenging north face of

Xiashe (5833m) in the early morning, we ascended a gully between granite rock walls just behind the monastery to the upper lakes for some hours. It was a hard work and we could not help turn back halfway. At 3:00pm we had an interview with Living Buddha who is the supreme lama in this monastery. He explained that the monastery had been opened in 1260's A.D. and now had 30 lamas and 300 students, of which 100 were nun. We came back to Zhopu Pasture and stayed at a villager's log house.

On June 7 the weather was stable in the morning. We made one day trekking to search the highest two peaks of 5812m and 5725m. Riding on horses we marched calmly to the northwest. Fertile grasslands, yaks, sheep, black tents, Khambas girls and Tibetan dogs were representing a typical picture of Eastern Tibet. We spent a couple of hours in Tibetan black tent where only women and children were stationed almost throughout the year. Tibetan females look after animals and children in the pasture, whilst males remain in their villages to take care of houses and barley fields.

The top of 5727m peak is snow covered and the southern side looks gentle. A profile of the highest 5812m peak seems different. The broad southeast face is guarded with precipitous ridges and gullies with hanging glaciers. But from a climbing point of view, it would not be so attractive. Further to the northwest some 5500m peaks are ranging. In the evening a shower came and the rambling of thunder was heard. It noticed that the weather was changing.

On June 8 it rained. We told "Zaijian (See you again)" to warm hearted Zhopu people. On June 10 we returned safely to Chengdu. The outcome of our whole journey was quite satisfactory.

#### **Reference maps:**

Map of Mountain Ranges in China, 1:6,000,000 (Chinese version)

Map of Mountain Peaks on the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau, 1:2,500,000 (English)

Map of Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, 1:500,000 (Chinese)

DMAAC (USA) – TPC Aeronautical Chart, 1:500,000 (English)

Chinese Peoples Liberation Army, Topographical map, 1:50,000 & 1:100,000 (Chinese)

Russian Topographical Map, 1:100,000, 1:200,000 & 1:500,000 (Russian)

The sketch maps of "JARJINJABO, XIASHE & HATI MASSIFS" and "DANGCHEZHENGLA" are attached hereto.

