



In the valley of the Luruppa Khola: (left to right) Phil Bartlett, Nick Colton and Ed Douglas. (Julian Freeman-Attwood)

hideous moraine where there had been a lot of glacial recession. The west faces of Langtachen (6270m) and Langtachen South are hidden by many other peaks and had not been photographed before. Sadly there was no safe route to be found on the faces, guarded by some evil-looking séracs. Such are reconnaissance trips where no previous information can be found. We also looked at some fine peaks between 5500 and 5800m to the south in the Karpunath Lekh.

Note on the source of Brahmaputra: Whilst the source of the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) is traditionally thought to be the east face of Kailash, it is in fact some miles to the south-east of there. The general area of the source was ascertained early on, as mentioned above, but the exact source is more difficult to determine and the truth is probably that there is more than a single source. Three contenders are Changla (feeding lake Rabgyai Tso), the peak Kubi Kangri and the peak Langtachen both feeding the Dong Dong Tsangpo (this stream was suggested by Sven Hedin). The furthest point upstream on the Dong Dong is Langtachen and this peak is as good a single contender as any for the title.

Summary: An account of exploratory mountaineering in the far North-west of Nepal, along the border with Tibet in the districts of Dolpo, Mugu and Humla.

TAMOTSU NAKAMURA

Rock Peaks of Gangga and Forbidden Kawarani



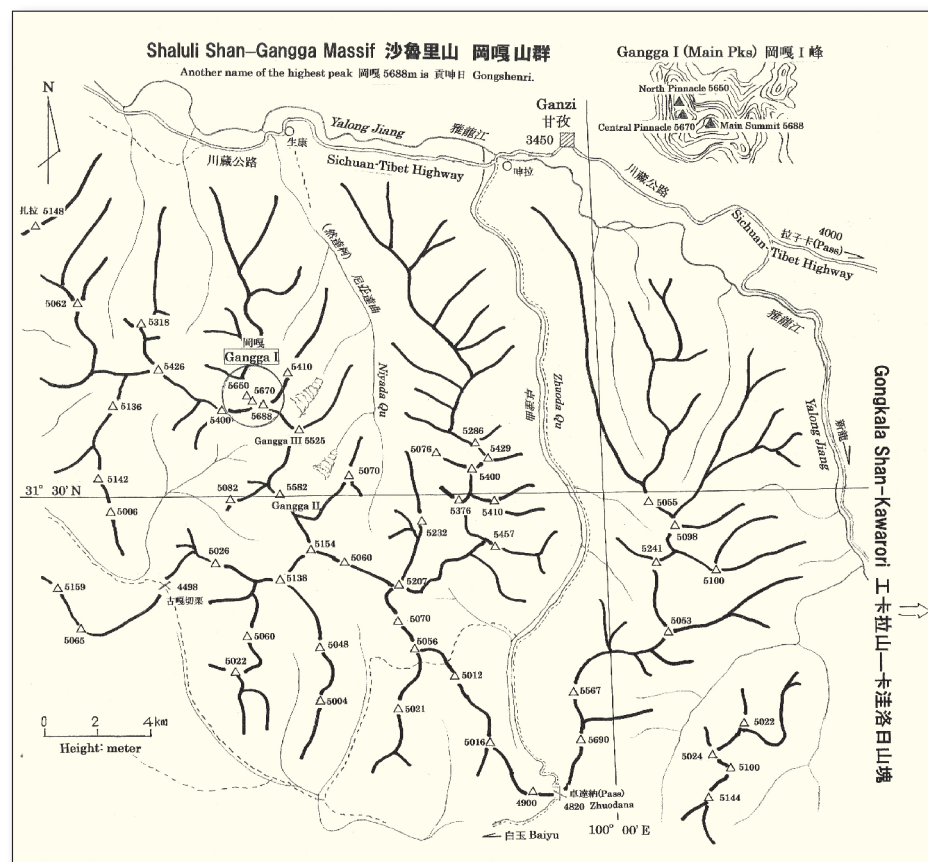
South face of Punyu (5413m), aka Pomiu or Celestial Peak, in the Siguniang massif, viewed from near the Balangshan pass. (Tamotsu Nakamura)

As I write this in January 2013, the political situation in Tibet remains uncertain and sensitive. No foreigners were allowed to enter the remote areas of my field of interest, eastern Tibet, in 2012, and so instead I organised an elderly survey team from the Hengduan Mountains Club to visit the West Sichuan Highlands and Yunnan. There would be three of us: Tsuyoshi Nagai, Tadao Shintani and myself.

Our main objective was to photograph, map and identify peaks of the Gangga massif and the less known Kawarani group. The Gangga massif is the northernmost extension of the Shaluli Shan range and lies just south of Garze town and the Yalong Jiang river. Kawarani is a sacred mountain in the Gongkala Shan range, east of the Gangga massif and the Yalong Jiang and north-west of the Daxue Shan range. The Yalong Jiang is one of the large tributaries of the Yangtze (Chang Jiang). A reconnaissance of the Gangga massif was made in 2005 by a Japanese party from the Nagano



Panorama of the Gangga massif, central part, east face; Shaluli Shan range, west Sichuan. (Tamotsu Nakamura)



Prefecture, however they were unable to bring back a detailed record.

While the 'Alps of Tibet' are the final frontier in the greater ranges of the world – with some 260 untrodden peaks exceeding 6000m in Nyenchen-tanglha East, Kangri Garpo and the Gorge Country of eastern Tibet – by contrast only about 10 peaks exceeding 6000m remain unclimbed in the West Sichuan Highlands, a region also inhabited by Tibetans. Nevertheless, if you focus lower than 6000m, there are many fascinating and challenging peaks to enchant climbers seeking unfrequented objectives.

Climbers have been rushing to the rock peaks of the Qonglai range, including the now popular Siguniang, and recently to alluring rock peaks in the Genyen massif north of the Litang Plateau. However the Gangga massif and Gongkala Shan have so far had less attention. The Gangga massif is not a large group and heights are around 5300m–5600m but the peaks are spectacularly rocky. The Kawarani are holy mountains guarded by Tibetan monks and villagers.

We arrived at Chengdu on 26 September and left for the mountains two days later, following the newly-built Chengdu-Xichang highway. Sichuan Earth Expeditions had arranged our trip as usual and their chief, Zhang Jiyue, joined our team. The speed of highway construction in West China is amazing. We left the highway at Ximien and drove northward along the Dadu river, and then crossed the Xuemenkan pass (3948m) down to Kangding, 'capital' of the Garze Tibetan Autonomous Region. The pass divides the Minya Konka massif to south-west and the Lamoshe massif to north-east.

I must mention two unusual factors of this survey trip. One is extraordinarily bad weather in late September to mid October and the other is the political situation. During our two weeks of travel only one and a half days were of fine weather and even then not perfect blue sky. Fortunately I was

Opposite: Map of the Shaluli Shan – Gangga massif. (Tamotsu Nakamura)



East face of 5690m peak on south-eastern rim of the Gangga massif. (Tamotsu Nakamura)



East face of 5241m peak [Russian map 5641m] on south-eastern rim of the Gangga massif. (Tamotsu Nakamura)

able to take advantage of short breaks to photograph the mountains necessary for peak identification.

We stayed at Garze town for three nights during the good weather. On 30 September we ascended to the Lazika pass (4000m) on the Sichuan-Tibet



Central part of the Gangga massif showing, from left, peaks 5429m, 5400m, and 5286m, north-east aspects. (Tamotsu Nakamura)

Highway for a panoramic view of the Gangga and Kawarani peaks. It was from this pass that British consular officer and explorer Erich Teichman sighted Kawarani in 1918, describing it thus:

Passing Joro, the trail tops a rise and emerges on to rolling grass-lands now patched with snow. Here we saw many gazelle. A long pull up hill with occasional short descent brought us to the top of the She Chu – Yalung Divide, only about 13,000 feet high. As one tops the last rise, the great range beyond the Yalung bursts into view, a glittering mass of ice, snow and rock, culminating in the snow-clad mass of Kawalori ("peak of everlasting snow"), a sacred mountain of Nyarong, and one of the highest peaks in Eastern Tibet. This great range is here pieced by the Yalung, and glimpses of it are occasionally caught from the She Chu valley below Driwo.

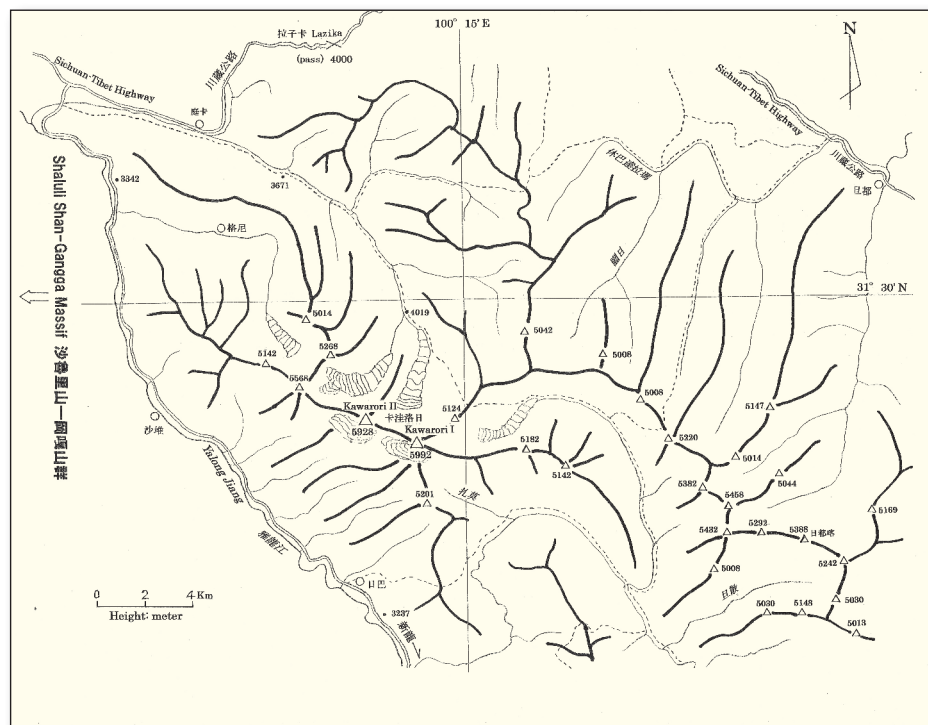
(Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet, Erich Teichman, Cambridge 1922)

Teichman's observation is accurate. Kawarani, in the Gongkala Shan range, is 30km south-east of Garze. Its two principal peaks Kawarani I (5992m) and Kawarani II (5928m) remain unclimbed. However access to the mountains is problematic due to local hostility and to restrictions placed on foreigners – the second of our two headaches on this survey.

In autumn 1999 a Japanese party from the Yamanashi Mountaineering Federation conducted a first reconnaissance and in autumn 2005 Dick Isherwood and Alpine Club friends arrived for a first attempt to climb the



East face of Gangga massif viewed from Garze town, showing Gangga I group Central Peak (5670m) (left) and North Peak (5650m). (Tamotsu Nakamura)



Kawarani massif. (Tamotsu Nakamura)



Central part of Gangga massif showing the north face of Peak 5241m [Russian map 5641m]. (Tamotsu Nakamura)



Kawarani massif, Gongkala Shan range, showing Kawarani I (5992m) (left) Kawarani II (5928m) (central) and Peak 5568m (right); north-west face viewed from Garze town. (Tamotsu Nakamura)



North face of Kawarani II (5928m). (Tamotsu Nakamura)

mountain. They set up a second camp at 4800m, however further progress was prevented by hostile monks from a nearby lamasery for whom the mountain is sacred¹. Another British party targeted Kawarani in 2007 but a climbing permit could not be obtained.

In 2011 the Tohoku University Alpine Club with Takao Ohe managed to get an official permit for Kawarani from the Sichuan Mountaineering Association and left Japan on 24 July. But to great disappointment their attempt was blocked by the Deputy Director of the Sports Administrative Department of the Garze Tibetan Autonomous Region at Kangding². He said that Kawarani was a holy mountain to local Tibetans and anyone attempting to climb it would be opposed. There might have been other reasons, including sensitivity over self-immolation protests by Tibetan monks, but the official was silent on this. In fact the Public Security Bureau is cautious and nervous about foreigners contacting local villagers throughout the historic Khamba territory.

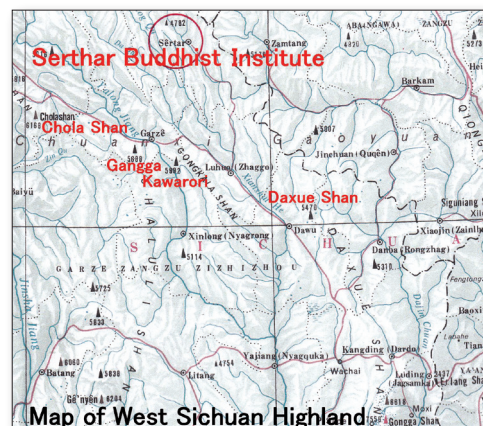
Garze and adjacent counties were closed to foreigners in principle in spring 2012 following 'fire suicides'. Even under such circumstances we managed to travel through officially restricted areas with no difficulty thanks to Jiye's careful attention. We met only a couple of westerners and

1. Dick Isherwood, 'A Cautionary Tale', *AJ* 111, 71-74.

2. A photo of Kawarani I (5992m) north face by Takao Ohe appeared in *AJ* 116, 135.



Serthar Tibetan Buddhist Institute in the Larung valley, near Serthar, Garze prefecture. Founded in 1980 by Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok (1933-2004) it grew from a handful of disciples gathering in Khenpo's home to be one of the largest centres for the study of Tibetan Buddhism in the world, numbering nearly 10,000 monks, nuns, and lay 'vow-holders' by the year 2000. (Hironobu Ono)



Location map of Serthar Buddhist Institute.

no Japanese throughout the trip.

On 1 October we entered a valley just south of Garze and ascended to the Zhuodana pass (4820m) leading to Baiyu County for reconnaissance of the central part of the massif. The remaining week was spent visiting interesting places including Chungla village in Danba County famous for its stone towers and the Mt Siguniang area. We had hoped to visit the extraordinary Serthar Tibetan Buddhist Institute in the Lirung Valley, near Serthar town, but unfortunately I was suffering from a serious cold. We

returned to Chengdu on 10 October and flew to Kunming next day in order to travel through south Yunnan and north Laos, retracing the 19th century French Mekong river expedition. But that is another story.