

Mountaineering in China

One Hundred Years of First Ascents Remain

Edward E. Vaill
Photographs 2-21

PEKING (AP) 30 November, 1984

China will open all of Tibet's high mountains to foreign climbers in the next few years . . . the official Xinhua news agency reported today.

The report quoted Lesang Dagwa, vice president of the Tibet Mountaineering Association, as saying climbers will gain access to more than 40 peaks over 23,100 feet high. . . .

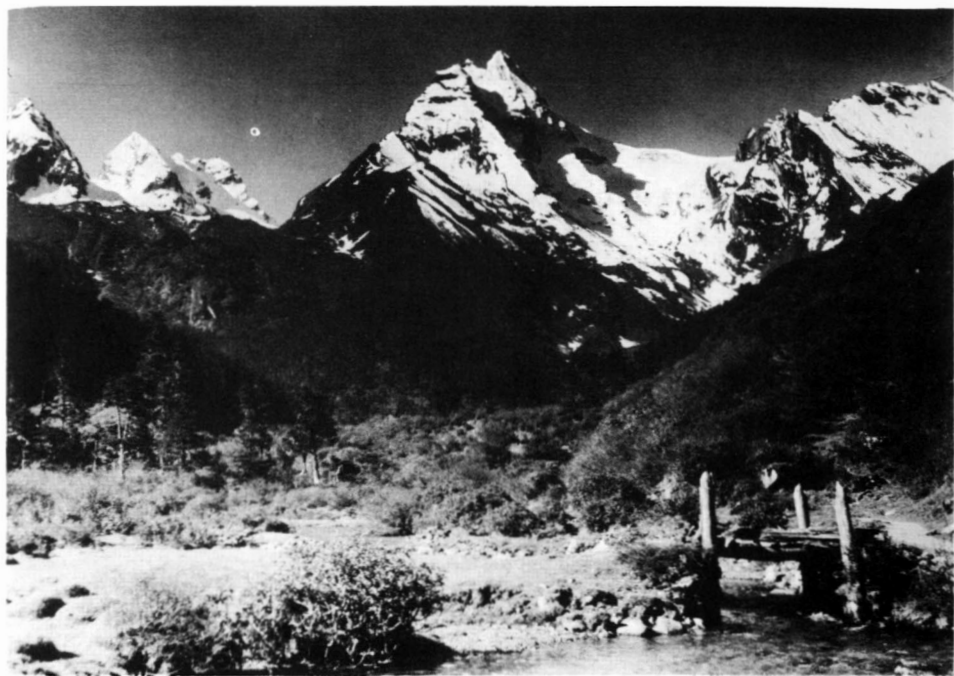
'The association has decided to open all the peaks in the region in the next few years,' Lesang said. 'It will send out reconnaissance teams to make surveys of some peaks before opening them.'

This exciting announcement presages an explosion of mountaineering activity in China during the remainder of the 1980s and beyond which will make available to Western mountaineers the last unexplored mountainous regions of the world. It could take 100 years to explore them completely.

Mountaineering in China today is carefully controlled by the Chinese Mountaineering Association, an agency of the All-China Sports Federation guided by the State Physical Culture and Sports Commission. CMA was organized in 1958, one year after an expedition led by Shi Zhanchun, currently Executive Vice Chairman of CMA, reached the summit of Gongga (Minya Konka). Thereafter, Chinese mountaineering was co-ordinated through CMA. In 1960, CMA's current General Secretary, Wang Fuzhou, reached the summit of Mt. Everest with two other Chinese mountaineers, and in 1964, he was a member of the summit team which made the first ascent of Xixabangma (Gosainthan), the last unclimbed 8000m peak. These two gentlemen were deeply involved in the operation of CMA in those early years, and they remain active in its leadership today and are instrumental in implementing its policies.

The daily administrative functions of CMA are handled by its Executive Council, comprising the chairman Qiao Jiaqin (also currently General Manager of China International Travel Service), Shi Zhanchun and Wang Fuzhou. Major policy issues faced by CMA, such as its principles, direction and responsibilities, are deliberated upon and approved by the Executive Council of CMA, which includes the Chairman, Vice Chairman, General Secretary and several executive members. The leading members of the Executive Council are nominated by the All-China Sports Federation.

With the emergence of Vice Chairman Deng as China's leader in 1978, and following his triumphant visit to the United States in January, 1979, the normalization of relations with Western nations proceeded rapidly. In September 1979, 'Tentative Regulations for Foreign Mountaineering Groups Conducting



2 The holy mountain of Takpa Siri in Tsari

Photo: Taylor (R.G.S. Collection)



3 Namla Karpo in the Yigrong range

Photo: Sherriff (R.G.S. Collection)



4 Namche Barwa seen from the Karina La in the NE

Photo: Sherriff (R.G.S. Collection)



5 Namche Barwa

Photo: 'Glaciers in China'

Expeditions in China' were published by CMA and were made available to Western mountaineers. Eight major peaks were opened to foreigners:

- Qomolungma (Mt. Everest, 8848m) and Xixabangma (8012m) in Tibet, and their sister peaks;
- Mustaghata (7546m), Kongur (7719m), Kongur Tiubie (7595m) and Bogda (5445m) in Xinjiang Province;
- Gongga (7556m) in Sichuan Province; and
- Anye Maqen (6282m) in Qinghai Province.

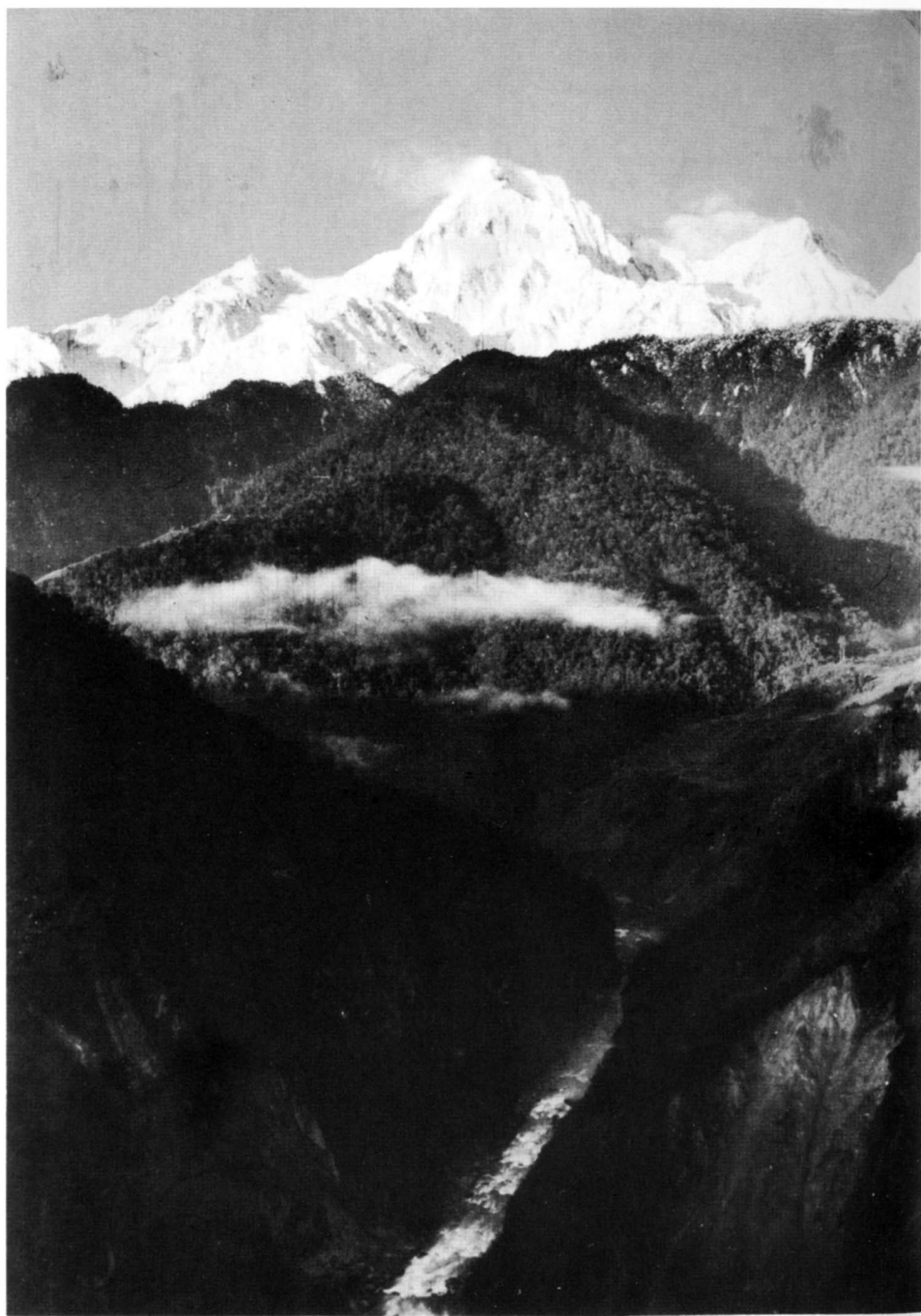
CMA proceeded carefully in opening these areas, for the Chinese government wanted to make sure that foreigners visiting China were treated well and left China wanting to return. It was necessary to ensure that facilities were available to house foreign mountaineers on their way to the mountains, that transportation to the mountains existed, that pack animals and drivers were available at times which often conflicted with local harvest seasons, and that everything was cleared through the vast bureaucratic structure which existed at the local, district, regional, provincial and national levels of the Chinese government. The fact that most expeditions to China to date have operated relatively smoothly is a tribute to the heroic efforts of the officials of CMA to cut through this massive bureaucratic 'red tape'.

Since mountaineering in China has historically been intimately tied to scientific endeavours, it was often necessary for Chinese scientists to visit the areas opened to foreigners beforehand to conduct the required scientific observations. In its early years, Chinese mountaineering also took on the appearance of a military operation, and this was appropriate, because most of these Chinese expeditions relied heavily on the Chinese military for logistical and organizational support.

Many of the mountains in China most desirable to foreigners are located in areas of some political sensitivity (Tibet, western Xinjiang Province near the Soviet Union, Afghanistan and Kashmir; and Anye Maqen, where the fierce, nomadic Gologs reside). Since these peaks are located in 'Autonomous Regions' which have somewhat decentralized political structures, delicate negotiations were undoubtedly required before foreigners could be allowed to enter.

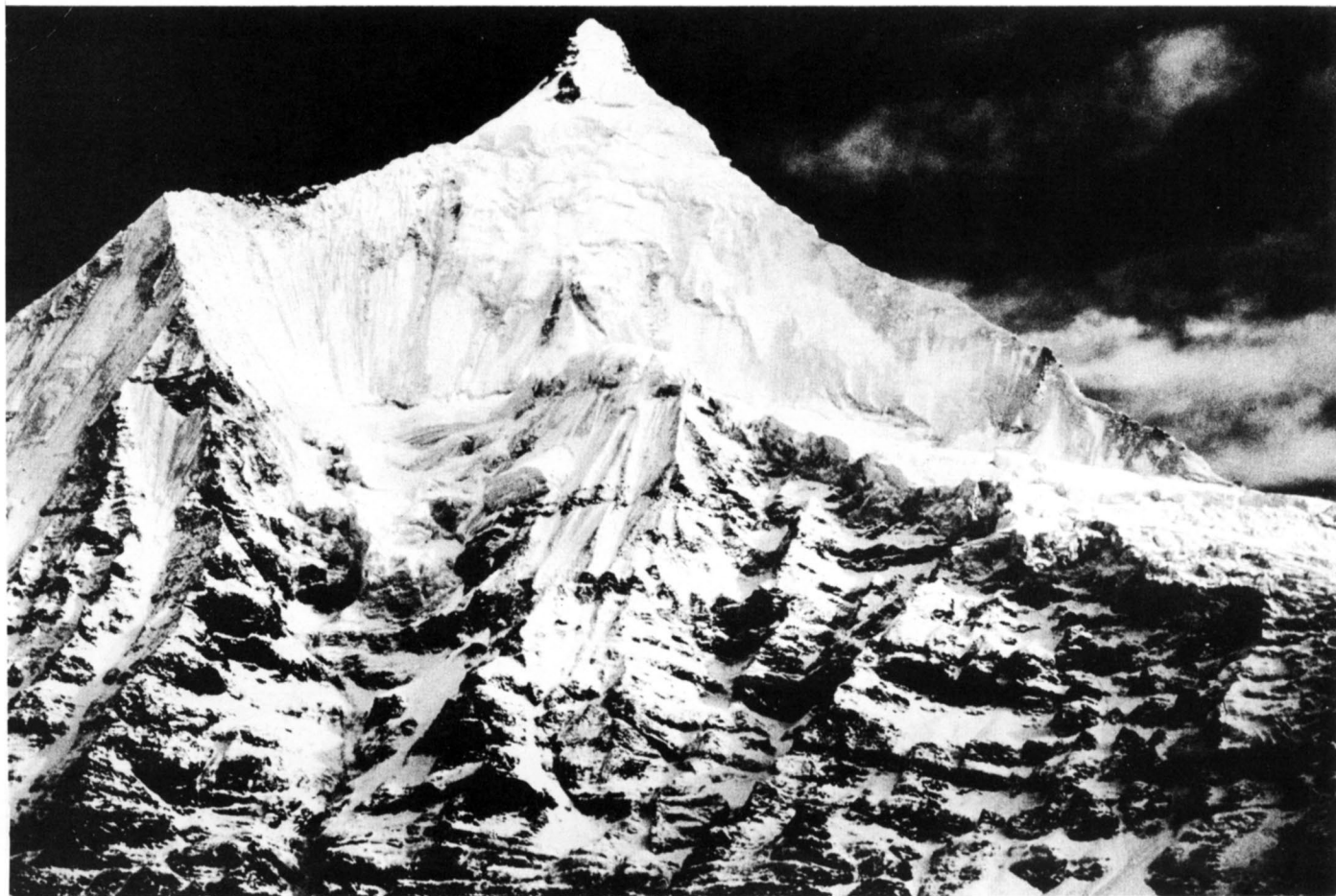
The initial groups of Western mountaineers entered the mountainous areas of China in Autumn, 1979 and Spring, 1980, largely for reconnaissance, with Japanese, German, British and American teams in the forefront. CMA's initial regulations, which were extremely detailed and sophisticated, also required payment of fees to climb the authorized peaks which were substantially higher than those charged by any other country in the world. The laws of supply and demand had not been forgotten by the Chinese despite 30 years of Communism.

As their experience with foreign expeditions grew, CMA issued additional regulations and modified the initial ones, often in response to suggestions from visiting Western mountaineers. In December 1980, CMA opened a ninth area to foreign mountaineers, Siguniang in Sichuan Province north of Gongga, and in 1982, added four major peaks in the Karakoram Range: K2 (Qogir, 8611m), Gasherbrum I (Hidden Peak, 8068m); Gasherbrum II (8034m) and its sister peaks; and Broad Peak (8047m) and its sister peaks. Other sister peaks near those already opened were also made available to foreign expeditions as the 1980s unfolded.



6 Gyela Peri seen from Tsakchugong in the NE

Photo: Sherriff (R.G.S. Collection)



7 Jitchu Drake from the Jangothan side

Photo: Capt. M. S. Kohli

In October, 1984, Vice Chairman Deng completely embraced free enterprise within the Chinese version of the Communist system, and word has arrived that many of the hitherto closed areas of China will open up soon. It is an exciting time for the mountaineers and explorers of the world and this article will attempt to outline the opportunities which will exist in China for the lifetime of the current generation of the world's mountaineers.

EASTERN CHINA

The eastern half of China has numerous mountainous regions but few high mountains. Nevertheless, climbing opportunities exist for those who are able to get permission. The beautiful limestone spires of Guilin (Kweilin) provide numerous opportunities for difficult (although usually vegetated) rock climbing. The granite spires of the Huangshan region (1841m) in Anhui Province west of Shanghai and Huashan (1997m), 120km east of Xian in Shaanxi Province, and the limestone spires of the Qingyan Shan is the Wuling Range of Hunan Province could provide numerous extreme, but relatively low budget rock climbs. Care should be taken to clear such climbs with CMA, and with local authorities, as these areas, with their fragile beauty, have special significance to many Chinese.

On a lesser scale, eastern China has a number of mountains which can be ascended, like Ben Nevis in Scotland, by easy routes. These peaks, which are climbed for religious reasons by many Chinese like Mt. Fuji is by many Japanese, include: the eastern peak of Taishan (1532m) in Shandong Province south of Beijing; the middle peak of Songshan (1369m) in Henan Province near Zhengzhou; the north peak of Hengshan (2082m) in Shanxi Province west of Beijing; Lushan (1426m) near the Yangtze River in Jiangxi Province; and Emei Shan (3099m), south of Chengdu in Sichuan Province. All of these peaks can be easily ascended in one or two days, and many have Chinese hotels strategically placed along the popular routes of ascent. Ascents of these peaks most likely could be fitted into tourist travel itineraries within China if requested.

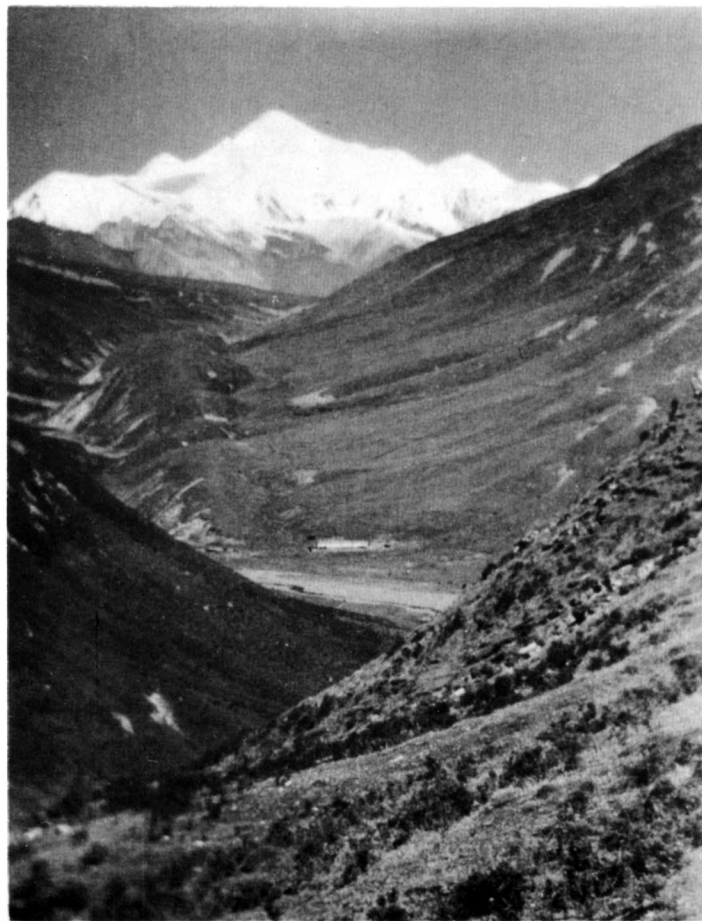
Many of these peaks are used by Chinese mountaineers as training climbs for expeditions. The foremost of such peaks is Taibai Shan (3767m) near Xian, which was first ascended on 25 April 1956 by China's pioneer mountaineering team, organized by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and led by Shi Zhongchun. Members of this expedition formed the nucleus of what became CMA several years later.

WESTERN CHINA

The vast and largely unexplored ranges of western China will provide exciting challenges for foreign, as well as Chinese mountaineering expeditions, for many decades to come. These ranges lie within the central Chinese provinces (from north to south) of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan, and the huge Autonomous Regions of Tibet and Xinjiang in the far west of China.

The Central Provinces

Gansu Province On the edge of the Gobi Desert and Mongolia, Gansu Province is bordered on the south by the Qilian Shan, a range of peaks extending over 1000km and reaching heights in excess of 5000m. The northern front of this



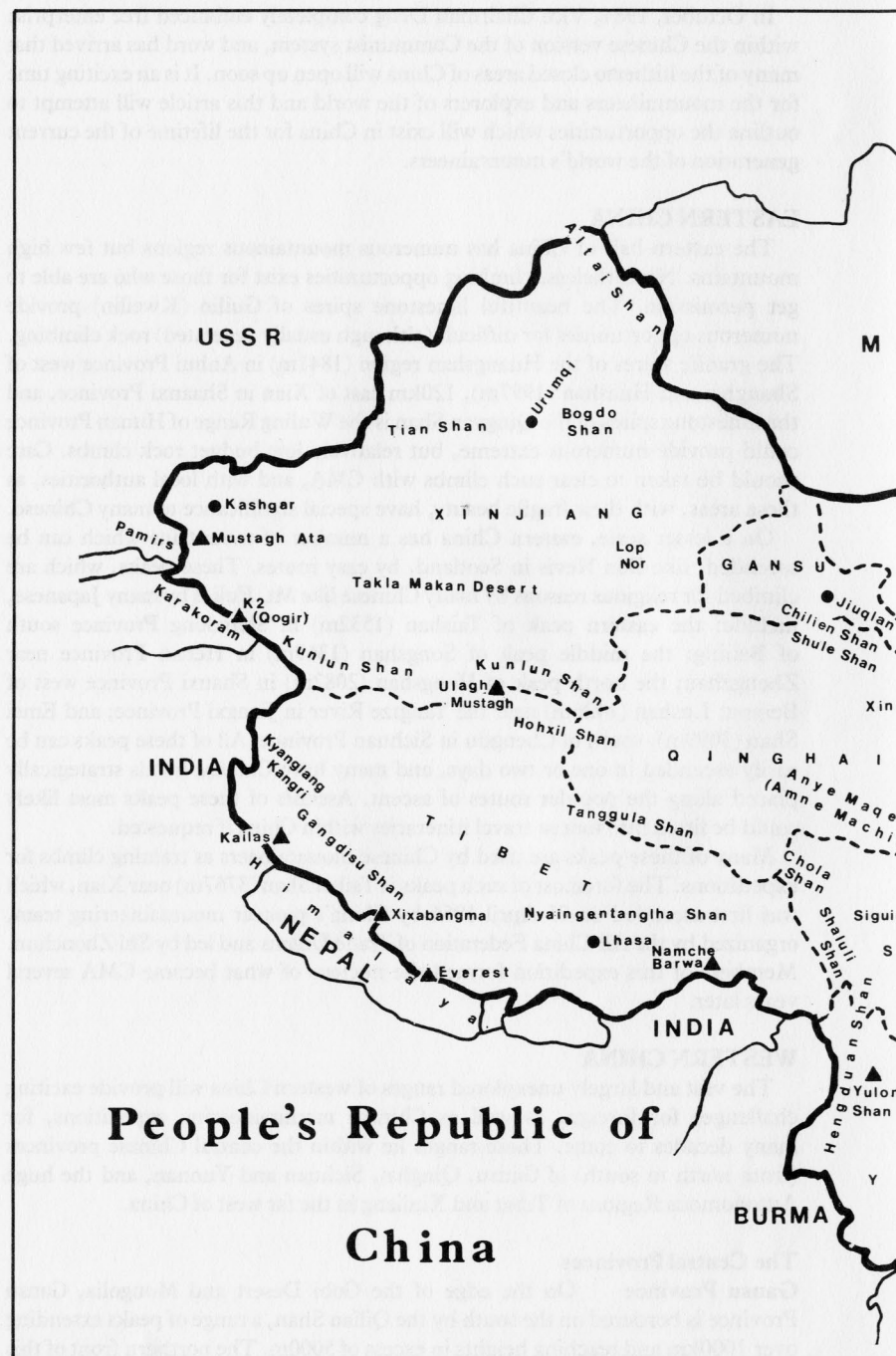
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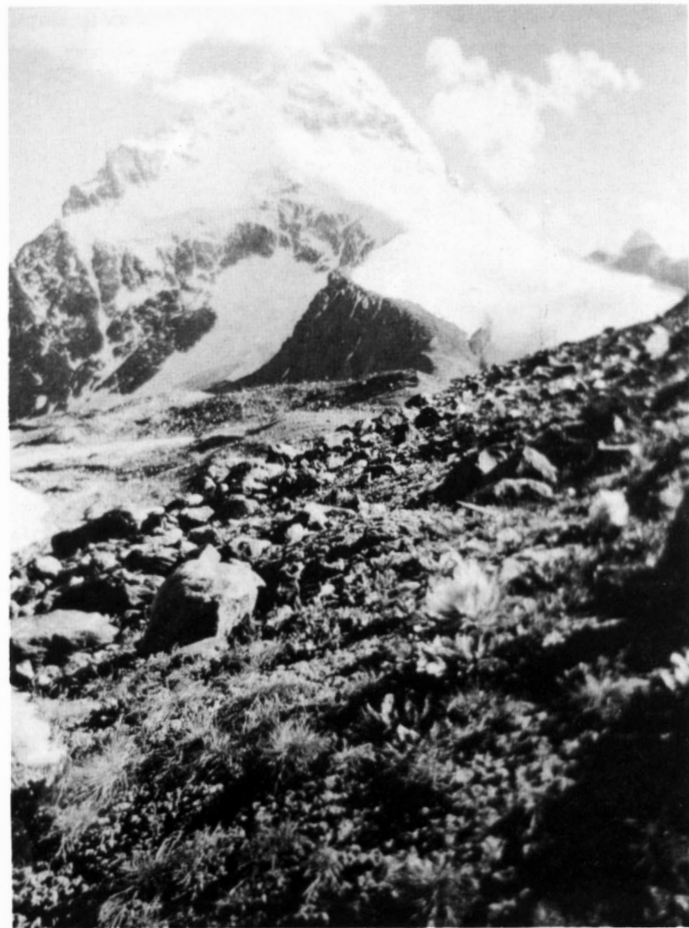
Photo: High Mountain Peaks in China



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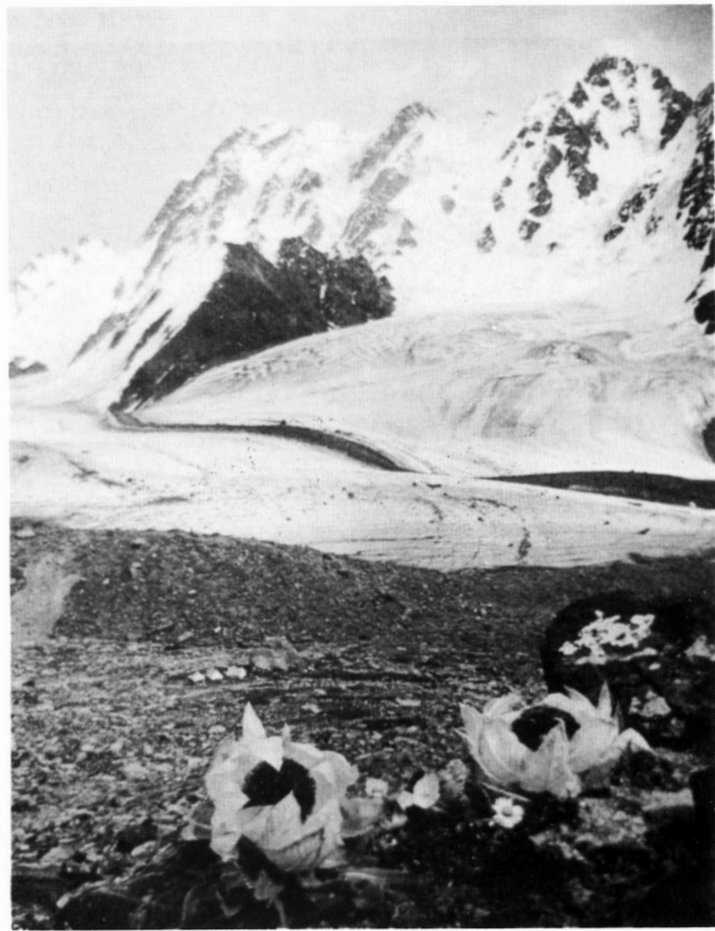
Photo: High Mountain Peaks in China





10 Bogdo Shan

Photo: High Mountain Peaks in China



11 Bogdo Shan

Photo: High Mountain Peaks in China

range, not currently open for climbing by Westerners, is accessible by railroad (Chinese trains are excellent) or air from Beijing to Jiuquan (Suzhou). The only known ascents in this range (by the Chinese) are of Shule Shan (6305m) in Qinghai Province and July 1 Glacier Peak (5120m) in 1958. As seen from the air by the author, the peaks appear to be heavily glaciated, but not extremely difficult. The Chinese have counted 3306 glaciers in this range, covering 2062 square kilometres.

Qinghai Province Qinghai lies south of Gansu, and also provides access to the southern slopes of the Qilian Shan, as well as Shule Shan, by air, rail or motor vehicle, via Lanzhou and Xining. In SE Qinghai lies the legendary Anye Maqen, which is most easily reached by motor vehicle 630km from Xining (and then 30km by foot). Galen Rowell, in his recent book *Mountains of the Middle Kingdom*, recounted in detail the history of the attempts to climb Anye Maqen, once thought to be the highest mountain in the world. American explorer Joseph Rock approached within 80km of the peak in the late 1920s and reported that it was c. 9150m high. In 1949, American adventurer Leonard Clark approached within 3km of the peak, and pronounced it to be 9041m high. The closure of China to the West in late 1949, following the founding of the People's Republic of China, ended foreign exploration of the range, but a Chinese climbing expedition from the Peking Geological Institute apparently climbed one of the highest summits on 2 June, 1960. This expedition surveyed this summit to be 6268m.

Anye Maqen is a massive mountain, with many summits and subsidiary peaks, and the Chinese apparently did not reach the highest point in their 1960 ascent. Following the reopening of mountaineering in China to foreign climbers, four ascents were made in 1981 of various Anye Maqen summits by Japanese, Australian, American and German/Austrian teams. The Japanese team, led by Yuzo Tada, completed the ascent in late May, but also may not have reached the highest point. Galen Rowell's American team completed their ascent on 9 June 1981, one day ahead of the German/Austrian team, but controversy continues as to who made the first ascent. Given good weather (which is rare), the peak is not that difficult to climb, but its remote location and the somewhat inhospitable Golog nomads who populate the area make Anye Maqen less than an attractive objective. Nevertheless, many unclimbed summits remain in the range. The Chinese now survey the highest point, Maqengangri, to be 6282m, well under Everest.

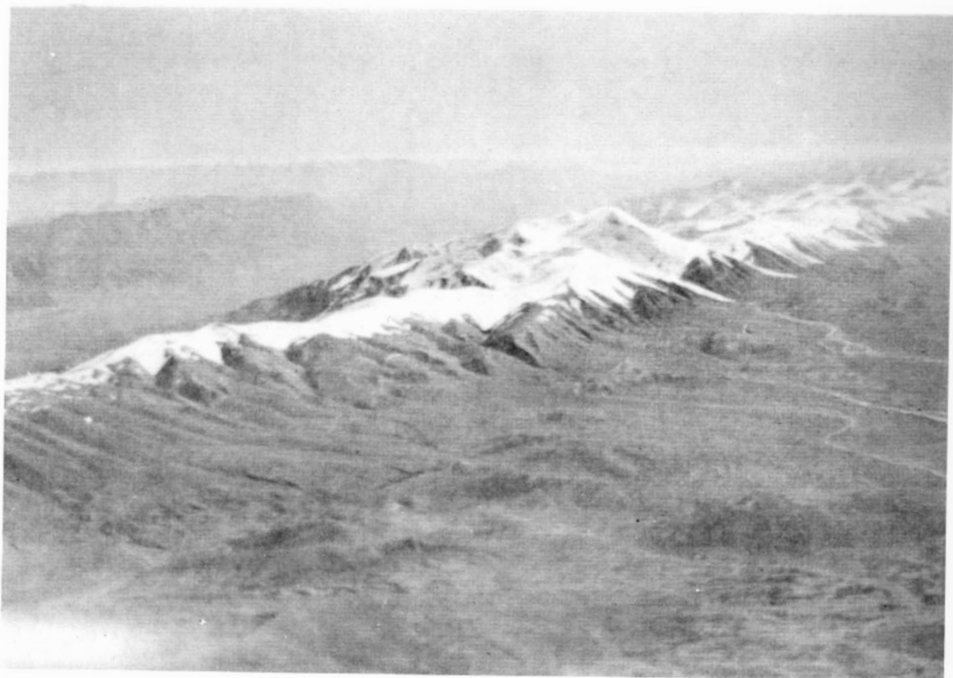
To the south, Qinghai Province borders Tibet and the Tanggula Shan separates the two provinces. This range, which is about 1000km long, is crowned by Geladaintong Feng (6621m). The Jianggen Dirunan glacier on this peak is the source of the Yangtze river. The range is heavily glaciated, and many peaks exceed 6000m. No ascents in this range have been reported, although Chinese glaciologists have visited the region.

Sichuan Province Sichuan Province, to the south of Qinghai and to the east of Tibet, is the bread-basket of central China, with its great irrigated plains. The Yangtze river forms its western boundary and much of the southern border. The western half of Sichuan is quite mountainous, and most of the people are Tibetan.



12 Kunlun Shan

Photo: Glaciers in China



13 Tonggula Shan

Photo: Glaciers in China

The branch office of CMA, which handles in a very capable manner all foreign expeditions to the mountains of Sichuan and Tibet, is located in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province.

To the southwest of Chengdu lies Gongga (Minya Konka) in the Hengduan Shan, which was first ascended in 1932 by Americans Richard Burdsall and Terris Moore in a mountaineering epic. Minya Konka also laid claim to the title of the world's highest peak, following an approach in 1929 by the Kelly-Roosevelt expedition hunting the Giant Panda. Joseph Rock also saw the peak on his expedition to Anye Maqen, and the Germans Heim and Imhof explored the environs of the peak in 1930-31. On 13 June 1957, six Chinese mountaineers of an expedition organized by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and led by Shi Zhanchun made the second ascent of the peak, which was determined to be 7556m high.

In the 1980s, Gongga has seen successful ascents by Swiss and American teams, and at least eight attempts. Loss of life has been great on the peak, due largely to the high avalanche danger and unpredictable weather. A number of peaks in the vicinity of Gongga, some over 6000m, have also been ascended by teams from Britain (Riuchi Gongga or Tshiburongri, 5938m), Switzerland (Zhong Shan or Jiazi, 6540m) and the United States (Jiazi) in the past few years.

Two hundred and thirty kilometres directly west of Chengdu are the magnificent Siguniang ('Four Sisters') peaks in the Qionglai Range in the northern part of the Hengduan Shan. Accessible by motor vehicle and trail in no more than four days from Chengdu, the awesome granite peaks in the vicinity of Siguniang have provided some of the most difficult technical climbing accomplished to date in China. Siguniang (6250m) was first ascended, after a difficult siege via a snow and ice route, by a Japanese team in July 1981. An attempt was made on the extremely difficult N face of Siguniang in November 1981 by a strong American expedition, but high winds and extreme cold drove them off the face. A Japanese team is planning to attempt this imposing 1500m wall, which is capped by a huge hanging glacier.

In October 1983, an American team led by the author made the first ascent of Celestial Peak (5334m), a beautiful granite spire directly west of Siguniang, which provided some of the most difficult free climbing (5.10c) done to date in China. (See the author's article in the *American Alpine Journal* 1984.) Another American group made the first ascent of Bok'ra III (5364m), to the north of Siguniang, that same month. Many other difficult ascents of superb granite spires and faces remain in the Siguniang region. This area is ideal for a low budget expedition (for China) to the fringes of Tibet.

Fragmentary reports have indicated the existence of other granite peaks and ranges in Sichuan Province to the west of Siguniang, not currently open to foreigners, notably in the Shaluli Shan, Chola Shan and Que'er Shan near the Yangtze river. The highway from Sichuan to Tibet passes near Chola Shan (6168m), so it is conceivable that this range could be opened for climbing in the near future. An area 640km north of Chengdu, Jiu Zhai Gou ('The Valley of the Nine Villages') in the Min Shan, has recently been opened by CMA for trekking. The highest peak in this range, Mt. Shu Baoding (5525m), an ice-clad Matterhorn-like spire, may soon be opened for climbing by CMA.



14 Kang Tengri

Photo: The Tianshan Mountains



15 Kang Tengri

Photo: Glaciers in China

Yunnan Province To the south of Sichuan Province, and north of Vietnam, Laos and Burma, lies Yunnan Province. Due to the current political tensions with Vietnam, China did not open this province to Western climbers until very recently. A Japanese expedition visited the mountains of Yunnan in 1984 but did not reach a summit. In the north of Yunnan, situated in the southern part of the Hengduan Shan, is the beautiful Yulong Shan (5596m). This area was visited by Joseph Rock during his 1927-1929 expedition and by British climbers in the 1930s (see 'A Mountain in China', p35 — *Ed*). One peak in the Yulong area has been ascended by Chinese mountaineers from the Peking Geological Institute in 1963. Yulong appears to be a truly alpine peak, from the few photographs available, with the most southerly glaciers (hanging and cirque) in China and the rock appears to be quite good. Scientific investigations in the Hengduan Shan by a Chinese team under the auspices of the Chinese Academy of Science are scheduled to be completed by 1985. An American team will attempt Yulong Shan in autumn 1985 or spring 1986.

The Western Autonomous Regions

Tibet and Xinjiang, the westernmost frontier regions under Chinese jurisdiction, contain most of the high peaks with the greatest allure to foreign mountaineers. Of the world's fourteen 8000m peaks, nine (Everest, Lhotse, Makalu, Cho Oyu, Xixabangma, K2, Gasherbrum I, Gasherbrum II and Broad Peak) lie at least partially within the borders of Tibet and Xinjiang. Almost all of these peaks have now been opened by CMA to foreign expeditions.

Tibet The Tibetan Autonomous Region has been under Chinese control since the early 1950s, and it is once again open to foreign visitors as the traumatic events of the Cultural Revolution, which resulted in the destruction of many beautiful Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, fade into memory. The Chinese are attempting to rebuild some of the most beautiful and important monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, but the control of Tibetan daily life by the monks which existed before the Cultural Revolution is gone, perhaps forever.

Tibet today is reachable primarily by air from Chengdu, although several rough roads also reach into Tibet from Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces, and a railroad is slowly being built. Everything in Tibet is very expensive for foreigners, and expedition costs are horrendous. Despite this, the presence of Everest, Xixabangma, Lhotse, Makalu, Cho Oyu and many other legendary Himalayan peaks will make this region a magnet for mountaineers for many decades to come.

On the eastern end of the Himalaya lies Namche Barwa (7782m), the highest unclimbed peak in the world. The Chinese have previously reserved Namche Barwa for themselves, as they did a reconnaissance of the peak in 1982 and 1983 and attempted the summit unsuccessfully in Spring 1984. A subsidiary peak, Naipeng (*c.* 7500m), was reached in April of both years. This year the Chinese may attempt Namche Barwa again, this time jointly with the Japanese. Nearby to the north, in the Baishula Shan, is another formidable peak, Jialobaili (7151m). Between these two peaks is the Big Bend Gorge of the Yarlung Zangbo (Brahmaputra) River, which flows eastward through southern Tibet and turns south at the Big Bend into India. In this section, the river flows at an astounding rate. Namche Barwa soars over 6000m above the Big Bend Gorge.



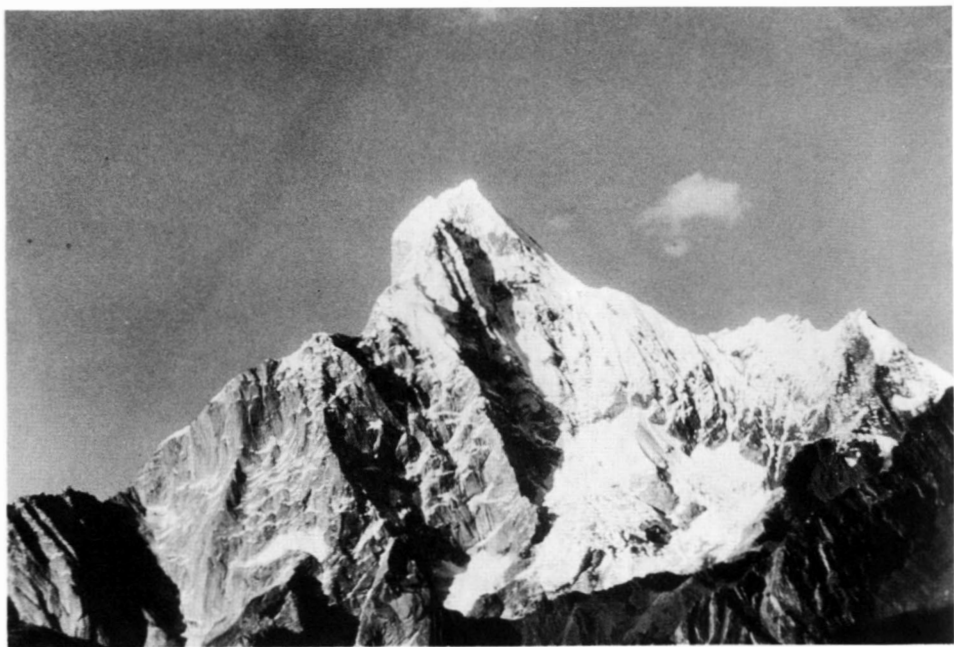
The history of Everest (Chomolungma) has been covered extensively in mountaineering literature and in the press. Suffice it to say that the only remaining major unclimbed 'problems' on the Chinese side of Everest appear to be the completion of the long NE ridge on which Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker tragically disappeared in 1982, and other routes on the Kangshung (East) face of Everest ascended by an American expedition led by Dr. Jim Morrissey in October, 1983 following an unsuccessful 1981 attempt. During that 1981 attempt, it became clear that the E face was highly dangerous, as it was swept by huge avalanches. The Chinese decided that they would close the face to climbing in the future, but a nucleus of the 1981 American team prevailed upon CMA to allow one more attempt by them. Luckily, Autumn 1983 was a relatively low snowfall season in the Everest area and the weather was excellent. Some of Dr. Morrissey's team climbed in T-shirts at 7500m, and Lou Reichardt reported that the air was so still when he reached the summit on 8 October, that he could have lit a candle. Thus, this bold second attempt to climb the Kangshung Face beat the odds and resulted in a major mountaineering accomplishment for Dr. Morrissey and his team.

Whether the success of the Americans will cause CMA to reconsider its decision to close the face to climbing following that expedition remains to be seen. The American team took the only logical route up the lower part of the face which could avoid the avalanches, up a vertical, rocky prow, but other possible routes exist for those willing to risk the odds. Reinhold Messner, by soloing Everest in 1980 from the North Col without oxygen while on an outing with his girlfriend, removed some of the mystique from this route, which was attempted by numerous British expeditions so courageously in the 1920s and 1930s, but it will remain popular for as long as sponsors are willing financially to support ascents of the world's highest peak.

Lhotse, Makalu, Makalu II (7760m), Cho Oyu, Gyachung Kang (7897m), Pumori (7145m) and other peaks in the Everest area along Tibet's southern border with Nepal also await ascents from the north, and Chomolungma (7997m) has some unclimbed faces and ridges, as does Changtze (7347m) across the North Col from Everest. Gino Casassa was expelled from China for making an unauthorized solo ascent of Changtze in 1983 while ostensibly participating in a Chilean expedition attempting Everest's North Col route. Peaks north of Kangchenjunga (8585m) on the Nepal-Sikkim border with China, such as Jongsong (7427m), also will present future challenges from the Chinese side as will Kula Kangri (7554m) directly south of Lhasa on the Chinese border with Bhutan.

Xixabangma, with its drive-in base camp (in dry years), has seen at least nine ascents since it was made accessible to foreign climbers in 1979, most by the Chinese first ascent route. Other unclimbed routes exist, however. Expeditions have also been active on peaks near Xixabangma: in 1980, a German Alpine Club expedition led by Dr. Manfred Abelein climbed a 7150m peak west of Xixabangma; in 1981, a New Zealand Alpine Club team led by Austin Brooks climbed Molamenqing (7703m) east of the peak; and in 1982, a British expedition led by Doug Scott climbed Pungpa Ri (7445m) to its south.

Climbing on the Chinese side of its border with India in the Garhwal and Ladakh regions is complicated by the conflicting border claims by these two



17 Siguniang from S. The Japanese route is via the right hand ridge

Photo: E. E. Vaill



18 Unclimbed Peaks N of Celestial Peak, Qionglai Shan

Photo: Peter Wood

nations. This political sensitivity may inhibit access to peaks in this area to the north of Kamet (7711m) and Nanda Devi (7756m) from China for the near future. However, a joint Chinese/Japanese expedition attempted Gurla Mandhata (7728m) near the Nepal-India-China border in spring 1985.

In the interior of Tibet, many totally unexplored ranges exist. The Gangdise Shan, which parallels the Chinese border with Nepal to the northwest of Xixabangma is an area of geothermal activity with many hot springs and geysers. It is capped by Kangrinboqê Feng or Kailas (6656m), a beautiful pyramid-shaped peak with peculiar horizontal bands of rock and ice, which is regarded as a sacred peak by many Tibetans. Ice climbing on this peak could rival in difficulty the Diamond Couloir on Mt. Kenya. The area has now been opened for trekking and Charles Allen's book, *A Mountain in Tibet*, has stimulated a lot of interest in it. However, its sacred nature may foreclose any ascents of the peak. Paralleling the Gangdise Shan to the north is Nganglong Kangri, a heavily glaciated range with one summit surveyed at 6596m, but little else is known about it. To the north of Lhasa and extending eastward for hundreds of kilometres is the Nyaingentanglha Shan. One 6177m peak in this range near Lhasa has been climbed by the Chinese, as a training climb for other peaks in Tibet. The Chinese have identified 2756 glaciers covering 4880 square kilometres in this range, whose main peak reaches 7111m.

Xinjiang Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region is the largest and most strategic area of China. Rich in natural resources, Xinjiang is surrounded by the Soviet Union on the north and west, and Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kashmir on the southwest. A minority of the people are Han Chinese, as it has large Uighur (Turkic Caucasian) and Kazakh (Cossack) populations.

In northern Xinjiang, the Altai range along the Soviet border is currently closed to climbing on the Chinese side, but some trekking groups are allowed in by the Soviets. The Chinese have identified 459 glaciers covering 271 square kilometres in the Altai. In the Bogda Shan near Urumqi, Xinjiang's capital, Eric Shipton and Bill Tilman attempted the main peak (5445m) in the late 1940s. A Japanese team accomplished the peak's first ascent in June 1981, and Japanese teams have ascended several other peaks in the Bogda Shan since then. The author has visited this range, and the peaks are reachable in three days from Urumqi, are heavily glaciated (with some avalanche danger), but are not of extreme altitude. A number of first ascents remain, and its northern latitude makes summer climbs best. CMA has a branch office in Urumqi.

West of Urumqi, the majestic Tian Shan stretches in an unbroken string of peaks to the north of the fierce Takla Makan Desert for hundreds of kilometres to the border of the Soviet Union and beyond. None of the peaks in the Tian Shan are currently open to foreign mountaineers. A north-south road has recently been opened through the Tian Shan which will undoubtedly provide excellent access to the interior of the range. On or near the Soviet border are the highest peaks in the Tian Shan: Kang Tengri (6995m) and Tomur (7435m). Tomur, known to the Soviets as Peak Pobeda, was climbed in 1956 by a Russian expedition led by Vitaly Abalakov. On 25 and 30 July 1977, a Chinese expedition led by Shi Zhonchun placed a total of 28 climbers on the summit from the Chinese side.



19 *The sacred mountain of Kailas (Kangrinboqē)*

Photo: 'The Roof of the World'



20 *Minya Konka*

Photo: AC collection

Kang Tengri, a massive, K2-like peak, was for many years believed to be the highest peak in the Tian Shan. It was explored by Gottfried Merzbacher in the early 1900s and was seen by Nicholas Roerich on his 1925 expedition. It was first ascended by a Russian expedition led by M. T. Pogrebetsky in 1931. Chinese scientists have identified 6896 glaciers covering 9436 square kilometres in the Tian Shan.

In the westernmost corner of Xinjiang, near the legendary Silk Route city of Kashgar, are Kongur (7719m), Kongur Tiube (7595m) and Mustaghata (7546m). Mustaghata was attempted by Sven Hedin in 1894 and by Shipton and Tilman who nearly reached the summit in 1947, and was first ascended by a joint Chinese-Russian team (in friendlier days) on 1 July 1956 under the leadership of Shi Zhonchun and E. A. Beletsky. A Chinese expedition led by Shi Zhonchun also placed 33 climbers (including eight women) on the summit in 1959. Mustaghata has been one of the most popular peaks for foreign expeditions since it was opened in 1979; it has seen at least nine successful ascents since then, and a number of ski descents of its gentle (but treacherous) SW slope.

Kongur was first reconnoitred by Chris Bonington in 1980, during which reconnaissance his group made the first ascent of nearby Sarakyuquqi Peak (6180m). In 1981, Bonington returned with an expedition led by Dr. Michael Ward and completed the first ascent of Kongur with Boardman, Tasker and Rouse, as well as Karatash Peak (5409m), north of Kongur. Since 1981, the peak has been attempted several times without success. Kongur Tiube was initially ascended in 1956 by a joint Chinese-Russian team, in 1961 by a Chinese women's expedition, again led by Shi Zhonchun, and a Japanese team made the third ascent in 1981. Many other routes remain to be done on these peaks.

In the Karakoram, SE of Kashgar along China's border with Pakistan, major ascents await foreign and Chinese mountaineers. K2 (Qogir Feng) from the north was opened to foreigners in 1981, and a Japanese Mountaineering Association team led by Isao Shinkai and Masatsuga Konishi succeeded in ascending the right side of K2's N face in August, 1982, a magnificent mountaineering achievement. The Japanese paid about \$125,000 (US) to obtain the permit to attempt this ascent. This route was repeated by an Italian expedition in July-August, 1983. Other significant (and extremely difficult but hopefully not as expensive) routes remain to be ascended on K2's N side as well as on its neighbouring peaks, Gasherbrum I, Gasherbrum II and Broad Peak, and their sister peaks. An American team will attempt a new route on K2's N side in 1986.

Finally, a range exists in the south of Xinjiang which extends for almost 1280km, in which no ascents are known: the Kunlun Shan. In the west Kunlun, Chinese glaciologists have identified 3180 glaciers covering 4331 square kilometres. In the eastern part of the range, on the border with Tibet, is the mysterious, remote Ulagh Mustagh, which could be the second highest unclimbed mountain in the world, after Namche Barwa. Until recently, it was estimated to be 7723m high, but some recent estimates place it far lower, at 7123 or even 6973m. Only a few pictures of Ulagh Mustagh, taken from a distance, are available, and they tell little about the peak. The Chinese almost succeeded in climbing Ulagh Mustagh in 1984. A joint Chinese/American team will attempt the peak from the north east in autumn 1985.



Since China closed its borders to non-Communist Westerners in 1949, the Golden Age of Himalayan mountaineering has come and gone, with all the 8000m peaks ascended. The reopening of China's remote regions to the mountaineers of the world in the 1980s may lead to another Golden Age, in a country where there still are a few 'blanks on the map'. Many exciting challenges exist for the mountaineers of China and the world in the decades to come in that country's vast, unexplored ranges.

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