Prominent rock peaks ca. 5600m in the headwaters of Mekong River (Za Qu, Qinghai-China)

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TAMOTSU (TOM) NAKAMURA

PHOTO GALLERY

Least-known Mountains in the Upper Mekong River
Qinghai Province, eastern Tibet, west China
The Mekong River drains more than 313,000 square miles (810,000 square km) of land, stretching from the Plateau of Tibet to the South China Sea. Among Asian rivers, only the Yangtze and Ganges have larger minimum flows.

The contrast between the physical conditions that prevail above and below the Mekong’s descent from the Yunnan highlands divide it into two major parts. The upper Mekong flows 1,215 miles (1,955 km) through a long, narrow valley comprising roughly one-fourth of the total area, cutting through the mountains and plateaus of southwestern China. The lower Mekong, below the point where it forms the border between Myanmar and Laos, is a stream 1,485 miles (2,390 km) in length draining the Khorat Plateau of northeastern Thailand, the western slopes of the Annamese Cordillera in Laos and Vietnam, and most of Cambodia, before reaching the sea through the distributary channels of its delta in southern Vietnam.

In its upper reaches, the Mekong rises in the Tibetan Plateau between the Salween and Yangtze rivers: the streambed has cut deeply into the rugged landscape through which it flows. Along its course between Myanmar and Laos, the Mekong drains about 8,000 square miles (21,000 square km) of territory in Myanmar, comprising rough and relatively inaccessible terrain. In its more gentle lower stretches, where for a considerable distance it constitutes the boundary between Laos and Thailand, the Mekong inspires both conflict and cooperation among Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The sources of the Mekong, including its principal headstream, the Za Qu River, rise at an elevation of more than 16,000 feet (4,900 metres) on the north slope of the Tanggula Mountains in Qinghai province. They flow southeast through the Qamdo (Chamdo) region of Tibet, where the Za Qu joins other headstreams to form the main stream, called the Lancang in Chinese.
Pete Winn, Shangri-La River Rafting Expeditions wrote:

Tamotsu Nakamura, a Director of the Japanese Alpine Club and editor of the Japanese Alpine News, translated the CISRN and ISGNRR reports into English, prepared a history of the search for the source of the Mekong in English (JAC, 2001) and prepared the maps for the TUA, 2001 article. Nakamura and Pete Winn, Science Director of Earth Science Expeditions, prepared a Letter to the Editor of the Geographic Journal of RGS and a report submitted to the Himalayan Journal summarizing the CISNR data and documenting the fact that the glacial spring at the head of Lasgongma Creek is the true and official source of the Mekong. In 2007, the Chinese Exploration and Research Society, using high resolution satellite imagery, identified the source as being the spring on Mt. Jifu discharging into Gaodepu Creek due to the large number of meanders compared to Gaoshanxigu Creek, even though it has a much smaller discharge. However, CERS did not publish a specific location. Again, the true source may vary due to differences in the rate of glacial retreat.

Pieter Neele published an article in the April, 2014 issue of Japanese Alpine News (edited by Tomatsu Nakamura) describing the efforts of he and his co-explorer, Luciano Lepre, to confirm the source of the Mekong in 2013. In the process, they discovered a new source, located between the CISRN and ISGNRR sources but at a higher elevation, also discharging from a glacier: 33 45.677 E, 94 40.562 N, altitude 5,374 m. His article also summarizes the information listed above, and provides maps and photos and a strong rationale for making a claim to have discovered a source that is further from the mouth than the other sources to date.”
PHOTO GALLERY
LEAST-KNOWN MOUNTAINS IN UPPER MEKONG
(Area A, B, and C in the following map)

I first made study and collection of information on research of a history of reaching the true source of the Mekong River (Za Qu – Lancang Jiang).

In the next step I conducted to search the unknown mountains in the Upper Mekong River, as no other record than the highest mountains ‘Qiajajima (5930m) massif first ascended by Japanese teams” was available. To realize my plan, I conducted 4,500km journey from Sichuan to Qinghai Province in June of 2013. A route is shown in the previous page.

In the first stage of a long journey, I attempted to access to the veiled mountains of the Mekong headwaters and tried to take pictures least-known outstanding peaks viewed en-route from Yushu/Zadoi to the Mekong headwaters. Those peaks introduced hereinafter are grouped in Area A, B and C as shown below. Unless otherwise specifically mentioned, pictures were taken in early June of 2013.

All the peaks in the PHOTO GALLERY have yet been attempted and remain unclimbed.
Yushu town light-up view, King Kesal in left

Yushu reconstructed from 2010 earthquake, capital of Yushu Prefecture of Qinghai (2018)
Area A

5,000m peaks just north of Yushu Airport (2018)

5725m peak north face south west of Yushu Airport (2018)
Blue poppies (2018)

Upper Mekong River 3900m near Nangcheng, Qinghai (2018)
(above & below) 5500m peaks north face southwest of Yushu Airport
(above & below) 5000m peaks southwest of Yushu Airport
Area B

Widely opened mountains scenery, 5000m rock peaks surrounding Chang La Pass
Views from Chang La Shan Pass, 5000m peaks north face

(5000m peak north face seen from near Chang La Shan Pass)
(above & below) 5000m peaks seem to south from Chang La Shan Pass
5000m peaks viewed to north from Chang La Shan Pass

5000m peaks north face viewed to south from Chang La Shan Pass
(above & below) 5000m rock peaks north face viewed from a point rather close to Zadoi
5000m rock peak north face seen en-route of Chang La Shan Pass to Zadoi

Upper Mekong River, approaching to Zadoi
(above & below) Approaching to Zadoi and Upper Mekong River
(above & below) Zadoi town and Upper Mekong River (Za Qu)
(above & below) Upper Mekong (Za Qu) west of Zadoi town
Ferocious Tibetan mastiffs at Zadoi town

5000m peaks north face ranging immediate south of Zadoi town
(above & below) 5000m peaks north face south of Zadoi town
(above & below) 5000m peaks north face south of Zadoi town
Tibetan gathering caterpillar fungus at 4500m
Area C: To Mekong Headwaters

Marching north toward Mekong River headwaters from Zadoi town, (above) first pass
Outstanding rock peak in far distance to west
(above & below) 5000m peaks seen on the way to the headwaters from Zadoi town

(above & below) 5000m peaks seen on the way marching up to the headwaters
Prominent rock peaks ca. 5600m seen in distance to west
(above & below) ca. 5600m peaks seen on the way to the headwaters
Approaching to the headwaters, 4600m, peaks 5300~5600m
(above & below) Approaching to Hongse 4700m, a base for exploration of the headwaters, peaks ca. 5600m
(above & below) Tibetan gazelles at 4600m near Hongse in the headwaters
(above & below) Hongse, a base for exploring the Mekong headwaters
Mekong headwaters and mountains near Hongse at 4700m

Water birds near Hongse
(above & below) 5500–5600m peaks seen near Hongse 4700m, mountains of the Mekong headwaters
5700~5800m unexplored mountains with glaciers in the headwaters

Mekong River headwaters beyond Hongse at 4700m
Tom Nakamura in a high pass on return way