



**MOUNT
QOMOLANGMA**

ZHANG RONGZU

**—THE HIGHEST
IN THE WORLD**

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—the Highest in the World

ZHANG RONGZU

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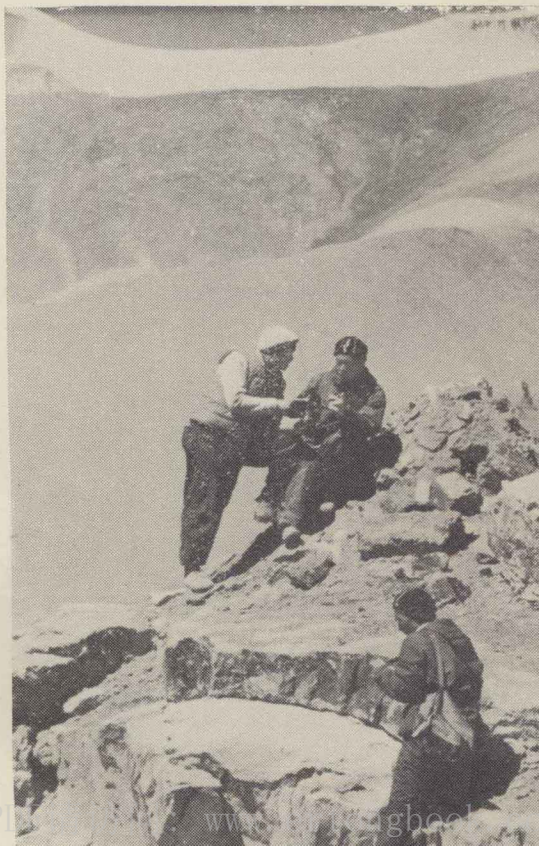
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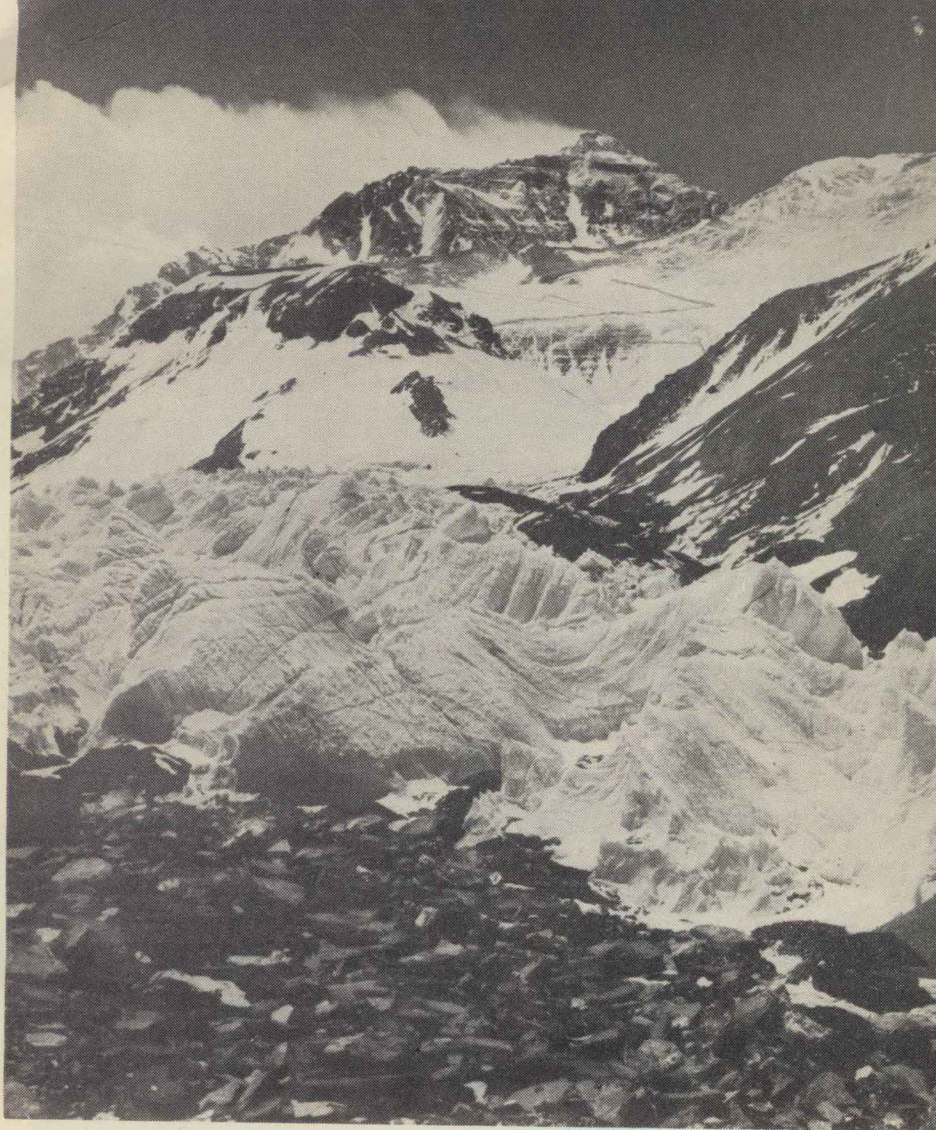
The folded rock strata exposed above ground.



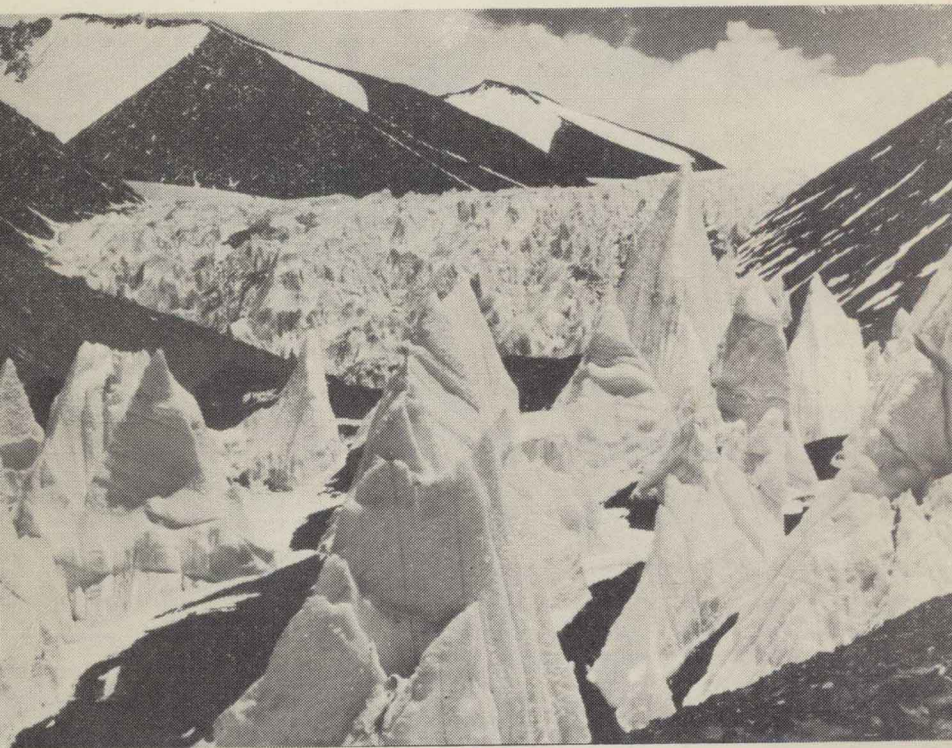
A fossil *Glossopteris* leaf.



Collecting sea-animal fossils, which reveal the history of formation of Mt. Qomolangma, on exposed rocks 4,000 metres above sea level.



The "flag cloud".



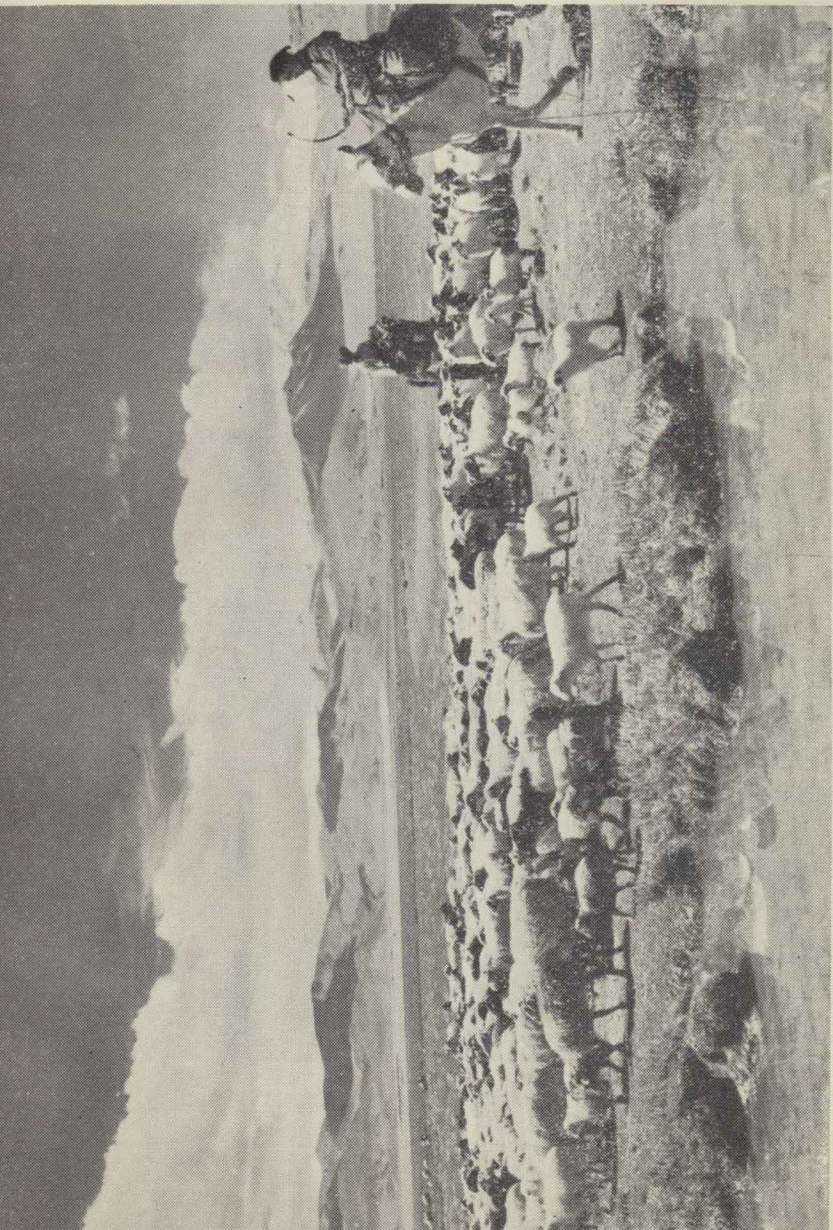
Ice pinnacles.

North Col, a natural barrier to mountaineers.





An ice hole.



The gentle slopes on the north face of Qomolangma are good pasturelands.



A primeval forest in the Qomolangma area below 4,000 metres.

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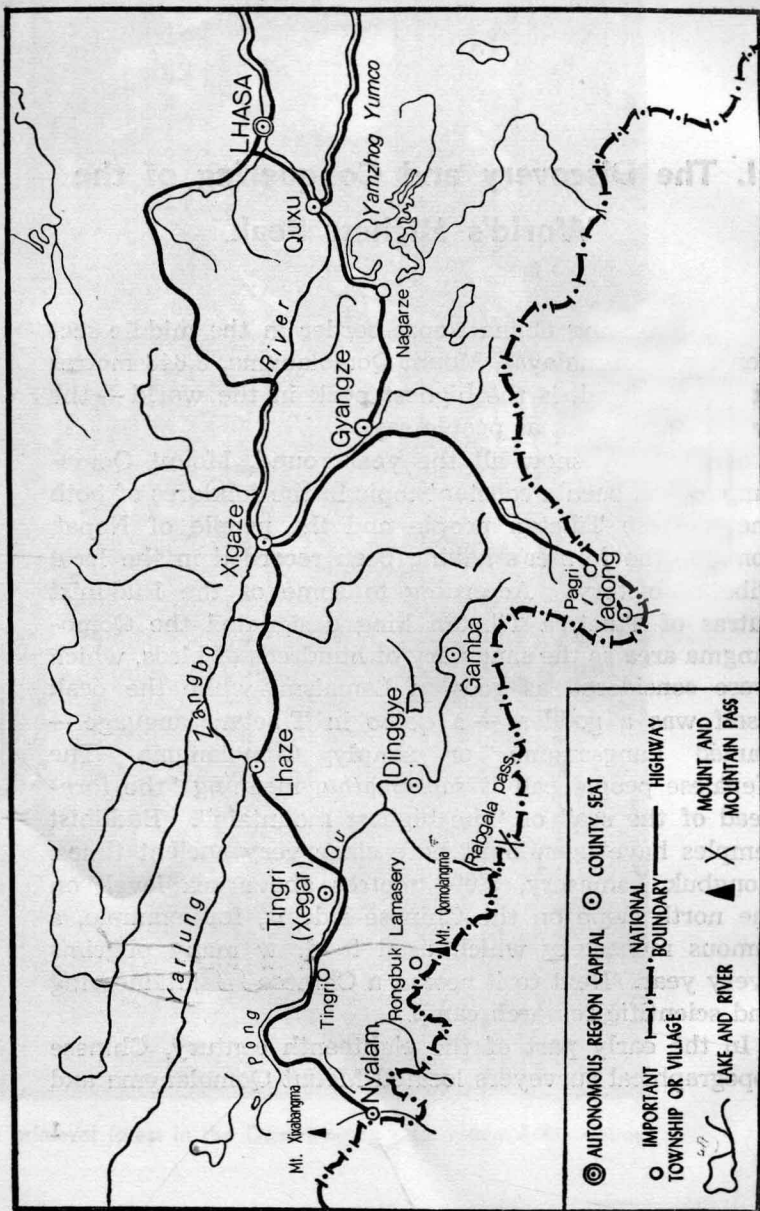
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I. The Discovery and Conquering of the World's Highest Peak

Straddling the China-Nepal border in the middle section of the Himalayas, Mount Qomolangma, 8,848 metres above sea level, is the highest peak in the world — the world's first peak as people say.

Covered by snow all the year round, Mount Qomolangma has been a constant topic in the folklores of both the Chinese Tibetan people and the people of Nepal, some of the former's having been recorded in the local Tibetan history. According to some of the Buddhist sutras of Tibet, a Tibetan king designated the Qomolangma area as the sanctuary of hundreds of birds, which were considered as gods in Lamaism; while the peak itself was a goddess — a *qomo* in Tibetan language — named Langsangma, or simply Qomolangma. The Nepalese people call it *sagarmatha*, meaning “the forehead of the sea” or “the highest mountain”. Buddhist temples have been built here since very ancient times. Rongbuk Lamasery, 5,000 metres above sea level, on the north slope on the Chinese side is, for example, a famous monastery which used to draw many pilgrims every year. Next to it now is a Chinese mountaineering and scientific research camp.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, Chinese topographical surveyors located Mount Qomolangma and



had it drawn in the Qing Dynasty "Map of the Imperial Territory" printed on copper plates in 1719. The first foreign map of China was a French one based on the Qing map and printed in the Hague, 1733. This gave the name of the peak as M. Tchoumoup Lancma, its first transliteration appearing in a foreign publication. Today, this highest peak of the world, whose accurate geographical location at 27° 59' N, 86° 55' E, is to be found in any modern world atlas.

The Himalayas, meaning the "home of snow", in Tibetan, stretch 2,400 kilometres on the south fringe of the Tibet Plateau at an average elevation of 6,000 metres, with their snowy peaks from 7,000 to 8,000 metres. Hence, the Himalayas are known as the "roof of the world", whose highest ridge is Mount Qomolangma. Several figures have been given for the exact height of the peak. Between 1966 and 1975, Chinese topographical surveyors, with the help of mountaineers, gauged the peak on several occasions and determined the height to be 8,848 metres. They erected a red surveying tripod on the peak in May 1975, which Dougal Haston and Doug Scott, two British climbers, who, on reaching the peak from the south face in September of the same year, referred to in wonder as "the mysterious red object".

Qomolangma has, for the past hundred years, attracted many explorers who call it "the third pole", comparing it to the South and North poles. Whereas the polar regions were marked with man's footprints as early as the beginning of the last century, Mount Qomolangma, mysterious and ominous and seemingly the last unconquerable region on the globe, frustrated more than a dozen attempts to scale it from the north face by mountaineers

from four different countries before the 50s of this century.

On May 25, 1960, three Chinese mountaineers reached the summit for the first time from the north face. They were Wang Fuzhou, Gongbu (Gonpa), a Chinese Tibetan, and Qu Yinhua, who assaulted the peak via North Col, the classical route taken by previous foreign expeditions. The first to conquer the peak from the south face via the southeast ridge were two members of an English group, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, a Sherpa, on May 29, 1953. Junko Tabei of Japan was the first woman alpinist to reach the summit from the south face, on May 16, 1975, together with Ang Tsering, a Nepalese guide of Sherpa nationality, while Pando (Phanthog), a Chinese Tibetan, was the first woman to accomplish the feat, on May 27 of the same year, from the north face together with eight men colleagues. By 1977, of the more than 30 attempts to conquer the peak 14, undertaken by mountaineering expeditions of 9 countries involving a total of 59 people, had been crowned with success.

What is it that draws so many people to Qomolangma?

With its thin air, its height being half of that of the troposphere, a treacherous land layout and an unpredictable climate, Mount Qomolangma and its eternal snow present countless barriers to mountaineers. In the last few decades, many explorers have been buried under the treacherous avalanches. People, however, are all the more eager to conquer Nature, when she puts difficulties in their way. Moreover, Mount Qomolangma, the pinnacle of the earth, has still retained many of her secrets, and whatever happens in the area arouses deep interest among people all over the world. After the 1950

earthquake in Assam to the south of Tibet, it was widely circulated in the United States that the peak had risen. Following the frequent mountaineering and exploring activities of the early 50s, rumours of the Himalayan abominable snowman — the *Yeti* in Tibetan — believed to be an inhabitant of the peak area, were rife, causing quite a sensation at the time. All this shows that people's interest in Qomolangma never wanes. People may ask questions like: how this peerless peak was made, whether it is still rising, what its geological formation is, what special flora and fauna there are and what height limit they survive, and how man acclimatizes himself to the rarefied air, etc. Knowledge of Mount Qomolangma is being accumulated with the repeated expeditions and scientific researches carried out in the area over the last 50 years. Yet the peak is still like a house of inexhaustible mysteries — when a door to a secret room is opened, more doors to inscrutable mysteries loom up.

Chinese mountaineers, co-operating closely with scientific workers, conquered the peak twice: in 1960 and 1975, and conducted scientific research between 1966 and 1968. Thanks to these multi-disciplinary researches by the Chinese Academy of Sciences (Academia Sinica) on geology, palaeontology, geophysics, geography, glaciology, meteorology, pedology, biology, physiology, and topographical surveys, the mysteries of Qomolangma gradually begin to be solved, and her history disclosed.