



Xiao Gongga (Little Konka), North Face; Melcyr Shan, West Face Variation; Jiazi, West Face, Judgment

China, Sichuan, Daxue Shan

On October 17, Chen Chujun, Liu Junfu, and Tong Haijun (China) arrived at a base camp below Mt. Grosvenor and Jiazi, and the next day they went up to 5,000m to acclimatize and scope out the west face of Jiazi, returning to base camp the same day.

On the 19th they set out for the north side of Xiao Gongga (a.k.a. Tshiburongi or Little Konka, 5,928m) and bivouacked at 4,600m. Their plan was a new route on the north face, with Chen and Liu climbing as a roped team while Tong Haijun climbed unroped a little to the right.

They started up the north face at 4 a.m. on the 20th, but at 5,200m they encountered strong spindrift avalanches. They continued, as the terrain was not too difficult, though protection was hard to find. Above 5,600m the face became steep, and they had to clean snow from the rock outcrops to find reliable protection. For 70m–80m they climbed ice between 3cm and 5cm thick, with one pitch involving no protection.

At 4:50 p.m., after climbing for 13 hours, they summited. Descending the northwest ridge, they were back at their 4,600m bivouac that day. Inspired by Russian *direttissimas*, and as this route more or less followed the fall line from the summit, they named their route Russian Style (M4 70°).

On return to the 4,600m bivouac, Tong Haijun felt tired and decided to descend to base camp, but Chen and Liu, wanting to make the most of a good weather window, moved up the glacier to a bivouac at 5,200m below Melcyr Shan (5,910m). This peak, locally called Queba or Ueba, stands at the head of the Xiao Gongga/ Tshiburongi Glacier. It is not visible from the Minya Konka trekking route, which is probably one reason it did not have an ascent until 2012 (AAJ 2013).

At 6 a.m. on the 21st, Chen and Liu began climbing the ice gully that forms the start of the You Happy, We Happy variation to Nubiline (both climbed in 2012) on the west face. The first three pitches were thin: better than the ice on Xiao Gongga but not sufficiently thick for a 16cm ice screw. After the fourth pitch the terrain steepened. Higher, the difficulty was far more than they had anticipated, and they were forced to make a rising rightward traverse to the upper west ridge, well above the traverse line followed by You Happy, We Happy. Footholds only just accepted frontpoints, and the climbers' arms were pumped throughout most of the climb. Finishing up Nubiline, they summited at 3:30 p.m. The 700m route had difficulties of M4 WI5.

After rappelling the ca 500m west ridge directly to the col at the head of the glacier, they regained the bivouac site at 6 p.m. With dead headlamp batteries, the two then stumbled down moraines to arrive in base camp at 1 a.m. on the 22nd.

All three climbers now decided to return to Kangding for a rest and to wait for the next weather window. The forecast predicted clear skies but strong winds, easing on the 30th.

They returned to base camp on the 26th, rested on the 27th, and then moved up to camp below the

west face of Jiazi (6,540m) at 5,100m. On the 28th, Chen and Liu started up a line left of the 2011 route Liberal Dance (AAJ 2012). To a height of 5,600m, they were able to move together with running belays, but then they encountered the first crux: thin ice with no possibility of placing a 10cm screw. After three pitches they moved to a dihedral in the rock, where it was possible to place gear. A section here, which involved a 2m overhang climbed by laybacking, was graded M6.

After four more pitches, the two were able to move together until sunset. They had climbed more than 1,200m that day. They dug a 1m-wide ledge for an open bivouac at around 6,300m and spent an uncomfortable night in deteriorating weather, with 5cm of snowfall.

The next morning, Liu dropped one of his crampons, meaning Chen had to lead, with Liu cutting steps for each move in the manner of an alpine guide more than a century ago. However, Chen got so cold while belaying Liu's slow progress that he gave Liu one of his crampons, told him to lead, and in this way they climbed to the summit ridge at 6,400m. Just before reaching it, they found a second crux: a rock overhang below the cornice. At around 4:30 p.m. they reached the summit, after crossing a risky corniced crest. Rather than reverse this, they rappelled directly, following a line similar to Liberal Dance. After 20 rappels, they reached the glacier and subsequently their camp at 2 a.m.

Chen and Liu felt this was the hardest route they had climbed. They were so oppressed and intimidated by the face that they felt they were being "judged." Due to this, they named the route **Judgment (1,500m, M6 WI5)**. [After starting a little left of Liberal Dance, Judgment slants left to join a 1982 route climbed to the summit ridge by Americans Dave Stutzman and James Williams (AAJ 1983). It then takes a similar line through the middle section of the face, before leaving the 1982 route to make a long, rising, rightward traverse to a point not far from the upper section of Liberal Dance. From there it slants up and left to the summit (north) ridge.]

– **Xia Zhongming, Germany**

Editor's Note: Chen Chujun's name has been corrected from the original report in AAJ 2023.

Images



Xiao Gongga, showing (1) Fu Yao on the north and northeast faces, and (2) Russian Style on the north face. The northwest ridge is the right skyline.



The line climbed in 2022 by Chen Chujun and Liu Junfu on the west face of Melcyr Shan.



Climbing one of the steep ice runnels on the west face of Melcyr Shan.



The west face of Jiazi and the line of Judgment, climbed in 2022. The middle part of the route coincides with a 1982 ascent to the summit ridge by Americans Dave Stutzman and James Williams. For other routes on this face, see AAJ 2012.

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