

Mt Cangshan in Dali: the “Eaves of the World Fastigium”

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Located in Dali prefecture of Yunnan Province, China, Mt Cangshan stretches 50 km from north to south, with its highest peak, Malong Peak, elevated at 4,122 m asl. Mt Cangshan has been regarded as the “Eaves of the World Fastigium” because the lofty Himalayas diminish in this mountain. The rocks that make up the mountain date back to as early as 2 billion years ago but the mountain came into being in a geologically recent time, some 40 million years ago, as a result of the Himalayan orogenic movement. Mt Cangshan is a “textbook” of metamorphic rocks. A wide variety of metamorphic rocks are well displayed and preserved. In particular, the metamorphic rock marble, which has been called “Dali-yan” (Dali rock) in China since at least the seventh century (Tang Dynasty), is the best and most representative, its rich colors and patterns are unrivaled in the world. In 1937, Austrian scientist, H. Von Wisman came to Dali and discovered abundant glacial relics in Mt Cangshan that renders the mountain a representative area in China of glacial activities of the last glaciation in the Quaternary Period. Since Mt Cangshan is the southern-most mountain that the last glaciation could reach, the concept of “Dali Glaciation”, an equivalent of Würm Glaciation in Europe and Wisconsin Glaciation in North America, was established. Today, the upper part of Mt Cangshan is still dominated by various glacial landforms, which are of great geological and paleoclimatic significance. Mt Cangshan is also one of the three major floral endemism centers in China, embracing 9 vegetation types, 14 subtypes within its 500 km² terrain. It is a world-class type locality of plant species. Recorded plant species include 60 endemic species, 2,330 spermatophyte species and 28 nationally protected species. There are 433 animal species, of which 45 species under national protection. Since designated as a national Geopark in 2005, Mt Cangshan has played a critical role in protecting geological heritage and promoting local socio-economic development, it has also become a base for geological study, education and geoscience popularization.

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