Rock glaciers in Daxue Shan, southeastern Tibetan Plateau: an inventory, their distribution, and their environmental controls

Zeze Ran* and Gengnian Liu

Key Laboratory for Earth Surface Processes of the Ministry of Education, College of Urban and Environmental Sciences, Peking University, Beijing, 100871 China

Correspondence to: Zeze Ran (ranzeze@pku.edu.cn)

Abstract. Rock glaciers are typical periglacial landforms. They can indicate the existence of permafrost, and can also shed light on the regional geomorphological and climatic conditions under which they may have developed. This article provides the first rock glacier inventory of Daxue Shan, southeastern Tibetan Plateau. The inventory is based on analyses of Google Earth imagery. In total, 295 rock glaciers were identified in Daxue Shan, covering a total area of 55.70 km^2, between the altitudes of 4,300 and 4,600 m above sea level. Supported by ArcGIS and SPSS software programs, we extracted and calculated morphometric parameters of these rock glaciers, and analyzed the characteristics of their spatial distribution within Daxue Shan. Our inventory suggests that the lower altitudinal boundary for permafrost across the eight aspects of slopes observed in Daxue Shan differs significantly, and that the lower altitudinal permafrost boundary is ~104 m higher on western rather than eastern facing slopes. Moraine-type and talus-derived rock glaciers exhibit mean gradients that are all concentrated within the 22°-35° range. However, tongue-shaped (22°-35°) and lobate rock glaciers (27°-45°) display a greater difference in mean gradient. Shady (*i.e.*, N, NE and E) slopes appear more conducive to the formation of moraine-type rock glaciers, and sunny (*i.e.*, W, SW and S) slopes appear more conducive to the formation of talus-derived rock glaciers. In addition, Tertiary monzonitic granite is more sensitive than other lithological components to the freeze-thaw process, and continuous weathering of this monzogranitic substratum thus provides the ideal raw material for the rock glaciers of Daxue Shan. These results show that environmental controls (*i.e.*, topographical, climatic, lithological factors) greatly affect the formation and development of rock glaciers. This study provides important data for exploring the relation between maritime periglacial environments and the development of rock glaciers on the southeastern Tibetan Plateau (TP). It may also highlight the characteristics typical of rock glaciers found in a maritime setting.

1 Introduction

The term 'rock glacier' was first proposed by the American scholar Capps when the investigating Kennicott Glacier in Alaska (Capps, 1910). By definition, rock glaciers consist of perennially frozen masses of ice and debris that creep downslope under

5 the weight of gravity (Haeberli, 1985; Barsch, 1996; Haeberli et al., 2006). As many Himalayan rock glaciers develop out of moraines and it is hard to distinguish where the moraine ends and the rock glacier begins. The bodies of rock glaciers are similar to moraines, in that as their ice mass moves over a pore ice surface, they do not sort materials in relation to the thickness of the debris they contain. Statistically, rock glaciers occupy extensive areas above the forest line in the mountainous regions of the world (Haeberli, 1985). Indeed, there are ~73,000 rock glaciers in the world (Jones et al., 2018a), with ~1,000 active

10 rock glaciers in the Swiss Alps alone. The freeze-thaw process experienced by the ice masses within rock glaciers can exert a major impact on the hydrological cycle (Azócar and Brenning, 2010; Jones et al., 2018a; Jones et al., 2018b), and creep of rock glaciers can significantly negatively influence any infrastructure built on top. Rock glacier research may therefore aid a more detailed and accurate understanding of the genesis of periglacial geomorphology and of the ongoing and developmental relation between rock glaciers and their local environments.

15 Over the last twenty years, with the rapid development of more advanced Geographical Information System (GIS), remote sensing (RS), and statistical techniques, rock glacier research has entered a new, accelerated phase. This phase has included the compilation of rock glacier inventories (*e.g.*, Bolch and Marchenko, 2009; Cremonese et al., 2011; Bolch and Gorbunov, 2014; Falaschi et al., 2014; Colucci et al., 2016; Janke et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2018a), the mapping of their spatial distributions and their relations with environmental controls such as topography and climate (*e.g.*, Chueca, 1992;

20 Brazier et al., 1998; Brenning, 2005; Janke, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Kenner and Magnusson, 2017; Onaca et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2018b), estimations of the distribution of permafrost based on rock glaciers (*e.g.*, Allen et al., 2008; Boeckli et al., 2012; Schmid et al., 2015; Sattler et al., 2016), and the dynamic movement of rock glaciers (*e.g.*, Haeberli et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2013; Muller et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017). However, compared with ice glaciers, rock glaciers remain poorly described

and infrequently studied. One reason is because they are mixtures of rock fragments of different sizes and are spectrally similar to their surroundings, and therefore cannot easily be automatically mapped from optical RS data (Brenning, 2009). In addition, both supraglacial-debris (upon the glacier) and debris along the glacier margins originate from surrounding valley rock (Jones et al., 2018b), thus their debris surfaces do not produce distinct spectral signals. As a result, it is often difficult to distinguish

5   relict rock glaciers from inactive rock glaciers that still contain ice using optical RS imagery (Millar and Westfall, 2008; Kenner and Magnusson, 2017).

Rock glacier research in China has, up to this point, focused principally on the Tianshan Mountains (Cui and Zhu, 1989; Qiu, 1993; Zhu et al., 1996; Wang et al., 2017), rather than the rock glaciers of Daxue Shan on the southeastern margins of the TP. As this region has been, and continues to be, strongly uplifted and deformed due to the extrusion and collision of the Indian

10   and Eurasian continental plates since the beginning of the Quaternary. This region is therefore characterized by an extremely complex matrix of relations between different environmental factors such as climate and geomorphology. It is therefore of particular importance to study the environmental controls on the rock glaciers of Daxue Shan as an aid to the further study of the complex geographical environment, natural hazards, and to aid environmental planning and management. The purpose of this study was twofold: first, to describe and complete a systematic inventory of the previously undocumented rock glaciers in

15   Daxue Shan; and second, to characterize their distribution and environmental controls (*i.e.*, climatic, topographical and lithological factors). In addition, there was an analysis and discussion of the mechanisms driving the formation, development and spatial distribution of the rock glaciers of Daxue Shan rock glaciers in relation to different environmental controls.

2 Study Area

The study area is situated in China's Sichuan Province between 29.956°N~30.573°N and 101.477°E~101.974°E (Fig. 1). To

20   the west is the uplifted eastern sector of the TP, and to the east are mountain gorges, both of which are important geographical boundaries (Zhang et al., 2017). The topography of Daxue Shan is characterized by the strong downcutting of high energy water courses, resulting in a great altitudinal range (1349 m asl ~ 7321 m asl). The region's climate is relatively warm and humid, and is strongly influenced by a southwesterly monsoonal atmospheric circulation (Wang et al., 2017). East of Daxue

Shan is a subtropical monsoon climatic zone which is principally affected by the aforementioned southwesterly monsoonal atmospheric circulation, but also by a southeasterly monsoonal atmospheric circulation and the Westerlies, all of which transport abundant precipitation to this region. West of Daxue Shan the subtropical monsoon and continental plateau climatic zones intersect, producing a cold-temperate climate, as well as abundant precipitation. Geologically, Daxue Shan is located where the Songpan, Chuandian and South China tectonic blocks intersect. The Xianshuihe (Ganzi-Yushu) Fault passes to the northwest of Daxue Shan (Zhang, 2013).

3 Methods

3.1 Rock glacier inventory, classification and database

The availability of more powerful RS tools such as Google Earth has transformed geomorphological fieldwork and has, on the whole, made the recognition of landforms in remote and poorly accessible areas both fast and easy (Slaymaker, 2001; Bolch, 2004; Kaab et al., 2005). This is beneficial to the present study as Daxue Shan is remote and difficult to access, therefore we compiled an inventory of the rock glaciers of Daxue Shan using high-resolution Google Earth satellite imagery (for the period October 2014~January 2017). Google Earth has been previously used for rock glacier identification in the Bolivian Andes (Rangecroft et al., 2014) and the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region (Schmid et al., 2015). Google Earth contains the best freely available imagery for detecting rock glaciers across large spatial areas.

Rock glaciers are characterized by distinct flow features and structural patterns. Transversal or longitudinal flow features (ridges and furrows) are common on rock glaciers due to the deformation of their internal ice structures (Clark et al., 1998; Humlum, 2000; Haeberli et al., 2006; Berthling, 2011). Many rock glaciers also exhibit structural patterns such as steep frontal slopes and side slopes with swollen bodies. Due to the constant supply of talus or debris, the surface textures of rock glaciers are usually different from those of the surrounding slopes. Depending on the mobility and permafrost presence, rock glaciers are usually divided into active, inactive, and relict rock glaciers (Sattler et al., 2016). In general, the presence of ice within active/inactive rock glaciers is indicated by a steep (>35°) frontal slope (Ikeda and Matsuoka, 2002) and a well-developed flow-like morphology defined by sets of parallel and curved ridges separated by long V-shaped furrows (Barsch, 1996; Roer

4

and Nyenhuis, 2007), and the absence or sparse occurrence of vegetation (Onaca et al., 2013). Inactive rock glaciers also contain ice, but are immobile. In contrast, relict rock glaciers are characterised by surface collapse features as a result of permafrost degradation, with gentler frontal and marginal slopes, and are often vegetated (Wahrhaftig and Cox, 1959; Haeberli, 1985; Scotti et al., 2013). Based on these criteria, we visually examined the Google Earth images and identified any potential

5   rock glaciers. We mapped the distribution of rock glaciers in the study region using the ASTER GDEM dataset (to within a horizontal accuracy of 30 m) and the Google Earth imagery, before marking the geographical location of each identified rock glacier and delineating its outline using Google Earth.

The topographical characteristics of the rock glaciers identified in the inventory were recorded in a GIS environment (ArcMap 10.2) and then extracted and attributed to each rock glacier. These characteristics were both qualitative and quantitative and

10   included each rock glacier's geographical location (*i.e.*, the coordinates of its center), type as determined using dynamic, genetic and geometric criteria (moraine-talus; tongue-lobate), aspect, mean gradient of slope (°), area (km^2), centerline length (m), average width (m), average altitude (m asl), debris source area (parameter), and bedrock lithology. A geological layer was added to the GIS so that the relevant class of bedrock could be attributed to each rock glacier within the spatial distribution database.

15   Based on the main source of the mass input of debris into each rock glacier and its subsequent transport downslope, we subdivided rock glaciers into two distinct categories: talus-derived rock glaciers developing below talus slopes; and moraine-type rock glaciers evolving mainly from glaciogenic materials (Lilleøren and Etzelmüller, 2016; Onaca et al., 2017) (Fig. 2). In terms of their planar geometry, these rock glaciers could be subdivided into two types: lobate and tongue-shaped (Fig. 2). The length/width ratio was used to distinguish between lobate (length/width ratio <1) and tongue-shaped (length/width ratio >1)

20   rock glaciers (Giardino and Vick, 1987; Martin, 1987; Barsch, 1996; Guglielmin and Smiraglia, 1998; Onaca et al., 2017). The overall aspect of each rock glacier was manually derived for each feature according to the main direction of the rock glacier flow before being recoded into eight categories which corresponded to the orientation of each rock glacier.

However, due to the lack of data regarding the flow behavior of rock glaciers, it remains to be determined whether these landforms are currently active, or whether they represent rock glaciers. In addition, some aspects of digitisation were

25   challenging based on visual interpretation of remotely sensed imagery alone and thus the mapped rock glaciers are inherently

associated with further uncertainty (Sattler et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2018b). There are some rock glaciers that may not be correctly delineated. Especially, delimitation of the upper boundary of rock glaciers through geomorphic mapping is arbitrary (Krainer and Ribis, 2012), and delineation of individual polygons where multiple rock glaciers coalesce into a single body is inherently subjective (Scotti et al., 2013; Schmid et al., 2015). Moreover, several complex landforms may are delineated as

5   rock glaciers which could also be landslide deposits or relict rock glaciers. Therefore, in the future research, adding additional data sources and further in situ observations would be useful to constrain methods of rock glacier identification and increase accuracy when building rock glacier inventories; such fieldwork would also supplement results rendered by the Digital Elevation Model (DEM) we used to determine the altitude and aspect of each rock glacier, and which we set to a 30 m spatial resolution. Further, use of a higher resolution DEM paired with in situ climate datasets would likely produce a more accurate

10   representation of the distribution of the rock glaciers in Daxue Shan. Due to the limitations imposed by the 30 m spatial resolution and the uncertainties inherent in any visual identification, we may have failed to identify all the rock glaciers in the study area. These uncertainties explain why we chose to adopt a range of values rather than exact numerical figures during our statistical analyses of the formation and development of the mapped rock glaciers as controlled by local environmental factors.

3.2 Spatial and statistical analyses

15   When there is collinearity between the terrain variables, principal components analysis (PCA) can used to determine the relationships between them (White and Copland, 2015; Ran, 2017). However, in this study, we performed the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests to examine the suitability of the data for factor analysis and found that with a KMO value of 0.387<0.5 (Table 1), the original variables are not suitable for PCA because there is weak collinearity between the terrain variables. Therefore, we retained the original variable information, which allows for in the case of convenient interpretation

20   and calculation (not too many dimensions), without dimensionality reduction.

We set the eight geographical and topographical parameters (*i.e.*, latitude, longitude, rock glacier (RG) area, length, width, altitude asl, mean gradient and aspect) for each of the rock glaciers of Daxue Shan to an eight-dimensional random variable (*i.e.*, X_1, X_2, X_3 ... X_8). A correlation coefficient ρ_{ij} (i, j = 1, 2 ... 8) of X_i and X_j was introduced into the correlation matrix of the random dimensional vector as an eight order matrix for each element, and was denoted by R, thus:

$$R = \begin{bmatrix} \rho_{11} & \rho_{12} & \cdots & \rho_{18} \\ \rho_{21} & \rho_{22} & \cdots & \rho_{28} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots \\ \rho_{81} & \rho_{82} & \cdots & \rho_{88} \end{bmatrix}, \rho_{ij} = \frac{cov(X_i, X_j)}{\sqrt{DX_i}\sqrt{DX_j}}, cov(X_i, X_j) = E\left((X_i - E(X_i)) \cdot (X_j - E(X_j))\right)$$

The diagonal element of the correlation matrix was 1, and the correlation matrix itself was a symmetrical matrix. We performed the statistical analysis using SPSS20® software. Correlations between the quantitative topographical variables were evaluated using Pearson correlation coefficients at a corresponding significance level of $p<0.05$.

4 Results

In total, 295 rock glaciers were identified in Daxue Shan (Fig. 3), covering an area of 55.70 km^2 (Table 2). Of these, 50.51% were talus-derived rock glaciers, the other 49.49% were moraine-type rock glaciers. 94.58% of the rock glaciers were tongue-shaped, and remaining were lobate-shaped. Discussion material most rock glaciers in Daxue Shan are therefore tongue-shaped rock glaciers.

The 295 rock glaciers are found at altitudes of between 4,300 and 4,600 m asl, with the mean altitude being 4,471 m asl. Moraine-type rock glaciers are mainly concentrated between 4,400-4,600 m asl, and talus-derived rock glaciers between 4,300-4550 m asl. Tongue-shaped and lobate-shaped rock glaciers are mainly concentrated between 4,350-4,600 m asl (Fig. 4a). We found that the altitudes of moraine-type rock glaciers were at least 50-100 m higher than for talus-derived rock glaciers. The upper boundaries for the vast majority of rock glacier types were ~4,600 m asl, because at higher altitudes there are often ice glaciers. Figure 4b shows the range in areas covered by different types of rock glaciers. Apart from a few outliers, the area of most rock glacier types area is <0.3 km^2, and in this regard there is no clear difference between rock glacier types. Figure 4c shows the range in the mean gradients of the slopes of different types of rock glaciers. Moraine-type and talus-derived rock glaciers exhibit mean gradients that are all concentrated within the 22°-35° range. However, tongue-shaped and lobate rock glaciers display a greater difference in mean gradient. Tongue-shaped rock glaciers have slopes with mean gradients which are concentrated in the 22°-35° range, whereas the mean gradients of lobate rock glaciers fall within the 27°-45° range. This means that the upper (~10°) and lower (~5°) slopes of tongue-shaped rock glaciers are both lower than for lobate rock glaciers. Figure 4d displays the range in the lengths of different types of rock glaciers. Moraine-type, talus- type and tongue-shaped

rock glaciers are typically 500-1000 m long, whereas lobate rock glaciers are usually 200-400 m long. Compared with lobate rock glaciers, moraine-type and tongue-shaped rock glaciers have more sediment supplies and last longer on gentle slopes. Consequently, that moraine-type and tongue-shaped rock glaciers flow further than lobate rock glaciers.

Our dataset revealed that, apart from south-facing (5.44%), southeast-facing (3.06%) and northeast-facing (20.75%) slopes, the rock glaciers are fairly evenly distributed on slopes with the remaining five aspects that each account for ~15% of the total. Moraine-type rock glaciers are most often northeast-facing (30.34%) or north-facing (20%), whereas talus-derived rock glaciers are most often southwest-facing (22.82%) or west-facing (17.45%). Lobate rock glaciers tend to be found less on south-facing (6.25%) and southeast-facing (0%) slopes, but more commonly on north-facing, northwest-facing and east-facing, which each aspect accounting for ~18.75% of the total. We compared all our results and discovered that shady (*i.e.*, N, NE and E) slopes appear more conducive to the formation of moraine-type rock glaciers, and sunny (*i.e.*, W, SW and S) slopes appear more conducive to the formation of talus-derived rock glaciers. In addition, there are more steep rock walls on the north faces producing debris, north-facing (*i.e.*, N, NW and NE) slopes seem to be more favorable for the formation of lobate rock glaciers than do south-facing (*i.e.*, SW, S and SE) ones (Fig. 5).

5 Discussion

The spatial distribution and dynamics of rock glaciers are especially dependent upon the local topography and climate (Springman et al., 2012; Delaloye et al., 2013). Also, the lithology exert considerable control on the rock glaciers (Onaca et al., 2017). Analyzing local environmental factors (*i.e.*, climatic, topographical and lithological factors) is therefore crucial to obtaining an understanding of the formation, development and spatial distribution of rock glaciers.

5.1 Topographical controls on rock glaciers

The results showed that there is a significantly positive correlation (*p*=0.05) between latitude, altitude, and rock glaciers length (Table 3), a relation which is locally determined by the topographical characteristics. With the increase of latitude from the south to the north in Daxue Shan, the high altitude rock glaciers increase in count, and flow further downvalley than those at low altitude. The altitudes of the mountains and rock glacier length increase with latitude, along with a latitudinal decrease in

8

air temperatures, implying that the northern sector of Daxue Shan has an environment which is more conducive to the formation of rock glaciers and other periglacial landforms. Likewise, there is a significantly negative correlation (p=0.01) between latitude and longitude, indicating no significant impact upon the NW-SE clusters of rock glaciers found in the Daxue Shan region. There is also a significantly negative correlation (p=0.01) between longitude and altitude, as lower altitude areas to the

5   east are less conducive to the development of rock glaciers where warmer and more humid conditions are not conducive to the formation of permafrost landforms. A significantly negative correlation (p=0.01) exists between rock glacier length and mean gradient of slope; the shortest rock glaciers are the talus-derived variety, and these have usually developed in steep topographical environments. Rock glacier area and mean gradient of slope have a significantly negative correlation (p=0.01); the larger rock glaciers are mostly concentrated on gentle slopes, meaning that they are more conducive to the development of

10   large rock glaciers. In summary, the topography of Daxue Shan is an important environmental control on the formation, development, and spatial distribution of the region's rock glaciers.

The mean altitude of a rock glacier's front (MAF) has often been taken to be a good approximation of the lower boundary of the discontinuous permafrost zone (*i.e.*, Scotti et al., 2013). We found a substantial altitudinal difference between the lower permafrost boundaries identified on the abovementioned eight aspects. For example, permafrost was assumed to be probable

15   above 4,300 m asl on east-facing slopes, and above 4,403 m asl on west-facing slopes. The mean lower permafrost boundary was calculated as occurring at 4,352 m asl (derived from a mean value of 4,315 m asl for east-facing slopes at 4315m, and 4,419 m asl for west-facing slopes). The mean lower permafrost boundary on east-facing (shady) slopes would therefore be ~104 m lower than that of west-facing (sunny) slopes (Fig. 6).

In addition, the formation and development of the rock glaciers of Daxue Shan are also strongly influenced by the landforms

20   created by glacial erosion and deposition. The southeastern margins of the TP are in a region of Quaternary glaciation which has been, and continues to be, strongly affected by monsoonal atmospheric circulations (Owen et al., 2005). This region possesses numerous ancient glacial relics and abundant landforms created by glacial erosion and deposition (Li and Yao, 1987). We found that the distribution of rock glaciers is in close association with ice glaciers, as the upper boundaries for rock glaciers were ~4,600 m asl, and at higher altitude there are often ice glaciers. In the context of global warming, it is widely accepted

25   that the majority of glaciers on the Tibetan Plateau (TP) and its surroundings have experienced accelerated reduction (Bolch

et al., 2012; Yao et al., 2012). The rate of glacier decline in Daxue Shan was -0.25 ± 0.20% a^{-1} during 1990-2014 (Wang et al., 2017), with some ice glaciers transforming to rock glaciers. Glacial depositional landforms (*e.g.*, moraine ridges) are highly conducive to the formation and development of moraine-type rock glaciers. Moraine ridges or moraines left after the retreat of the ancient glaciers can provide significant quantities of boulders, erratic blocks, debris, sand, and ground ice. In the process

5   of down-slope movement, rock glaciers can incorporate old moraine material as well as the debris from both sides of the moraine ridge. Glacial erosional landforms in particular have a close relation with the formation and development of talus-derived rock glaciers. Ice structures, snow layers and moraines within glaciers collapse from time to time, supplying talus to the feet of mountains. As a result of the freeze-thaw process and the effect of gravity, talus creep then forms rock glaciers.

5.2 Climatic controls on rock glaciers

10   The west-facing slopes of Daxue Shan lie in the intersection between a sub-frigid monsoonal and a continental plateau climatic zone, and therefore experience a cold-temperate climate. At the Daofu meteorological station (2,957.2 m asl), mean annual precipitation (MAP) is ~613.5 mm, and mean annual temperature (MAT) is ~8.14°C (Fig. 7b). Based on an adiabatic rate of 0.65°C/100 m, we estimated the MAT at 4,311 m asl (*i.e.*, the lower permafrost boundary) to be ~-0.66°C. The east-facing slopes of Daxue Shan are affected by a subtropical monsoonal climatic environment, and are affected principally by a

15   southwesterly monsoonal atmospheric circulation, but also by a southwesterly monsoonal atmospheric circulation, and by the Westerlies. These slopes therefore experience high levels of precipitation (snowfall). MAP at the Kangding meteorological station (2,615.7 m asl) reaches 858.3 mm; MAT is ~7.29 °C (Fig. 7a). We calculated the MAT at 4,352 m asl (*i.e.*, the lower permafrost boundary) to be ~-4.00°C. Here, the freeze-thaw process would be frequent (Fig. 7), meaning that the climatic environment would provide temperature and precipitation conditions highly favorable to the formation and development of

20   rock glaciers.

Compared with Gruber's (2012) global Permafrost Zonation Index (PZI) map, the distribution of rock glaciers in Daxue Shan is in general agreement, but many rock glaciers are situated within the PZI fringe of uncertainty (Fig. 3). However, the PZI is strictly controlled by temperature that decreases with increasing altitude, further indicating the climatic controls on development of permafrost such as rock glaciers. In addition, compared with the distribution of ice glaciers in Daxue Shan,

the distributions of rock glaciers also has characteristic small differences between the south and north, owing to a north–south corridor effect for water and heat transport and diffusion through the longitudinal gorges (Wang et al., 2017), and it is the result of climatic and topographical comprehensive control on rock glaciers.

5.3 Lithological controls on rock glaciers

Lithology is a critical control for the supply of talus to ice- and rock-glacier surfaces (Haeberli et al., 2006). Figure 8 shows that the major exposed strata in the Daxue Shan region are composed of Tertiary monzonitic granite, consistent with the NW-SE trending Xianshuihe Fault. The surrounding mountains in this area generally consist of biotite-muscovite granite that intruded 16~13 Ma ago (Roger et al., 1995). Also located in this region is the tectonically important Zheduotang Fault, which runs through the Zheduo Valley, and is one of the most active fault systems on the TP's margins (Allen et al., 1991). It can be seen from Figure 8 that the distribution of rock masses along the Xianshuihe Fault in the Daxue Shan region is clearly controlled by this NW-SE left-lateral strike-slip fault.

In contrast to other regions (Lilleøren and Etzelmüller, 2016; Onaca et al., 2017), we found that in Daxue Shan both moraine-type and talus-derived rock glaciers have developed in the monzogranitic areas, and that rock glacier and monzonitic granite exhibit a high spatial correlation and interdependence. The Tertiary monzogranites of Daxue Shan are clearly highly conducive to the formation and development of rock glaciers. This is consistent with the findings of Onaca et al. (2017) in the southern Carpathian Mountains. According to Popescu et al. (2015), rock glaciers located in granitic and granodioritic massifs are composed of larger clasts compared with those found in metamorphic massifs. Thus, the higher porosity of the substrata in granitic and granodioritic massifs allows for a significant cooling beneath the bouldery mantle because the denser cold air is trapped between the large boulders (Balch, 1900). The lithological and mineralogical characteristics which accompany the high porosity of tertiary monzogranites are therefore more favorable to the formation and development of local rock glaciers than are other lithologies. In addition, rock glacier formation is also controlled by slope and sedimentation rates contributing debris to the landforms (Müller et al., 2016). There are large sources of sediment and sediment storages in Daxue Shan, which are controlled by the processes occurring within this setting (Müller et al., 2014). An abundance of steep rock walls and

deepened valley sides, provides catchment areas for rock glacier development, and when combined with intense monsoonal precipitation and tectonic activity, drives sediment transport processes and rock glacier development in Daxue Shan.

Several researchers (*e.g.*, Cui and Zhu, 1989; Zhu, 1992; Zhu et al., 1992; Liu et al., 1995; Bolch and Gorbunov, 2014) have previously identified hundreds of rock glaciers in the northern Tianshan Mountains. They found that most of the identified

5 rock glaciers were tongue-shaped, and were located at altitudes between 3,300 and 3,900 m asl, on north-facing slopes. Most rock glaciers in Daxue Shan are also tongue-shaped. However, the altitudes at, and the aspects on, which these rock glaciers are found differ between the Daxue and the Tianshan mountain ranges. First, in terms of altitude, the rock glaciers of Daxue Shan are located between 4,300 and 4,600 m asl, higher than the Tianshan rock glaciers by approximately 700-1000 m. It would be reasonable to assume, therefore, that the rock glaciers located in lower latitudes are more likely to be found at higher

10 altitudes. Second, in terms of aspect, the rock glaciers of Daxue Shan are more evenly distributed across all eight abovementioned aspects than are the rock glaciers of the Tianshan Mountains. This could be explained by several factors, including the differences in overall altitude, as well as in the orientation of the main massif of each mountain range. Daxue Shan lies along an approximately NW-SE axis, whereas the Tianshan Mountains are roughly W-E in presentation. Rock glaciers are therefore less commonly found on the east- and west-facing slopes of the Tianshan. The effect of solar radiation

15 is stronger on the south-facing slopes of the Tianshan Mountains than on its north-facing ones, meaning that conditions on these south-facing slopes are less conducive to the development of rock glaciers; most of the range's rock glaciers are therefore found on its north-facing slopes. Furthermore, when higher altitudes are reached, all aspects experience lower air temperatures, resulting in a lessening of the impact caused by the difference between air temperature and solar radiation exposure; this phenomenon is similar to that found in Daxue Shan, and explains why rock glaciers there are fairly evenly distributed on all

20 eight aspects. However, when altitudes are lower, the impact of solar radiation, combined with warmer air temperatures, is greater, particularly on south-facing slopes; both temperature and solar radiation are lesser on shady north-facing slopes, however, explaining the predominance of north-facing rock glaciers in the Tianshan Mountains.

6 Conclusions

Rock glaciers are widespread in Daxue Shan, and of these, tongue-shaped rock glaciers cover the largest area. The occurrence and characteristics of these rock glaciers can mostly be explained by local environmental controls (*i.e.*, climatic, topographical and lithological factors).

5   In total, 295 rock glaciers were identified in Daxue Shan, covering a total area of 55.70 km^2. The altitudes at which moraine-type rock glaciers are found (*i.e.*, 4,400-4,600 m asl) are at least 50-100 m higher than for talus-derived rock glaciers (*i.e.*, 4,300-4,550 m asl), although the upper altitudinal limit for both these types of rock glacier is ~4,600 m asl. At higher altitude there are often ice glaciers. Except for a few outliers, the area of each type of rock glacier is no greater than 0.3 km^2. There is no significant difference between moraine-type and talus-derived rock glaciers in terms of the mean gradients of the slopes

10 upon which the glaciers are found (*i.e.*, they are all clustered within the 22-35° range), but the upper and lower mean slope gradients of tongue-shaped rock glaciers are ~10° and ~5° lower than for lobate rock glaciers, respectively. Moraine-type, talus-derived and tongue-shaped rock glaciers are longer (*i.e.*, 500-1000 m) than lobate rock glaciers (*i.e.*, 200-400 m). We found shady (*i.e.*, N, NE and E) slopes more conducive to the formation of moraine-type rock glaciers than sunny (*i.e.*, W, SW and S) ones, while sunny (*i.e.*, W, SW and S) slopes appear more conducive to the formation of talus-derived rock glaciers. In

15 addition, north-facing (*i.e.*, N, NW and NE) slopes appeared more favorable to the formation of lobate rock glaciers than did south-facing (*i.e.*, SW, S and SE) ones. The mean regional lowest altitudinal limit of rock glaciers is 4,352 m asl, an altitude which was taken to indicate the local permafrost's mean lower boundary. On east-facing slopes, the permafrost's lower boundary can therefore reasonably be assumed to be ~104 m lower than on west-facing slopes.

The correlation matrix of rock glacier parameters indicates that the formation of rock glaciers is closely related to local

20 topographical parameters. The local climatic environment leads to a frequent freeze-thaw process within these rock glaciers, a process which is also beneficial to their formation and development. Tertiary monzonitic granite, with its large clastic and highly porous characteristics, is more sensitive than other lithological components to the freeze-thaw process, and continuous weathering of this monzogranitic substratum thus provides the ideal raw material for the rock glaciers of Daxue Shan.

Data availability

The data associated with this article can be found in the Supplement. These data include maps of the most important areas described in this article, as well as a tabulation of the parameters of the rock glaciers found in Daxue Shan.

Competing interests

5 The authors declare no competing interests, financial or otherwise.

10

14

References

Allen, C. R., Luo, Z. L., Qian, H., Wen, X. Z., Zhou, H. W., and Huang, W. S.: Field-Study of a Highly-Active Fault Zone - the Xianshuihe Fault of Southwestern China, Geological Society of America Bulletin, 103, 1178-1199, https://doi.org/10.1130/0016-7606(1991)103<1178:FSOAHA>2.3.CO;2, 1991.

5   Allen, S. K., Owens, I., and Huggel, C.: A first estimate of mountain permafrost distribution in the Mount Cook region of New Zealand's southern alps, In: 9th International Conference on Permafrost, Fairbanks, Alaska, pp. 37–42, 2008.

Azócar, G. F. and Brenning, A.: Hydrological and geomorphological significance of rock glaciers in the dry Andes, Chile (27°-33°S), Permafrost and Periglacial Processes, 21, 42-53, https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp.669, 2010.

Balch, E. S.: Glacières or Freezing Caverns. Allen, Lane & Scott, Philadelphia (140 p). 1900.

10 Barsch, D.: Rockglaciers: Indicators for the Present and Former Geoecology in High Mountain Environments. Springer-Verlag, Berlin, pp. 331, 1996.

Berthling, I.: Beyond confusion: Rock glaciers as cryo-conditioned landforms, Geomorphology, 131, 98-106, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2011.05.002, 2011.

Boeckli, L., Brenning, A., Gruber, S., and Noetzli, J.: A statistical approach to modelling permafrost distribution in the

15 European Alps or similar mountain ranges, The Cryosphere, 6, 125-140, https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-6-125-2012, 2012.

Bolch, T.: Using ASTER and SRTM DEMs for studying glaciers and rock glaciers in northern Tien Shan, In: Proceedings Part I of the Conference "Theoretical and applied problems of geography on a boundary of centuries", Almaty, Kasakhstan, 254–258, 2004.

Bolch, T. and Gorbunov, A. P.: Characteristics and Origin of Rock Glaciers in Northern Tien Shan (Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan),

20 Permafrost and Periglacial Processes, 25, 320-332, https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp.1825, 2014.

Bolch, T., Kulkarni, A., Kaab, A., Huggel, C., Paul, F., Cogley, J. G., Frey, H., Kargel, J. S., Fujita, K., Scheel, M., Bajracharya, S., and Stoffel, M.: The state and fate of Himalayan glaciers, Science, 336, 310-314, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1215828, 2012.

Bolch, T. and Marchenko, S.: Significance of glaciers, rock glaciers and ice-rich permafrost in the Northern Tien Shan as water towers under climate change conditions, In *Selected Papers from the Workshop 'Assessment of Snow, Glacier and Water Resources in Asia'*, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 28–30 Nov. 2006, Braun L, Hagg W, Severskiy IV, Young GJ (eds). IHP/HWRP-Berichte 8, https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-137250, 132-144, 2009.

5   Brazier, V., Kirkbride, M. P., and Owens, I. F.: The relationship between climate and rock glacier distribution in the Ben Ohau Range, New Zealand, Geogr Ann A, 80a, 193-207, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3676.1998.00037.x, 1998.

Brenning, A.: Benchmarking classifiers to optimally integrate terrain analysis and multispectral remote sensing in automatic rock glacier detection, Remote Sensing of Environment, 113, 239-247, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rse.2008.09.005, 2009.

Brenning, A.: Geomorphological, hydrological and climatic significance of rock glaciers in the Andes of Central Chile (33-
10   35°S), Permafrost and Periglacial Processes, 16, 231-240, https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp.528, 2005.

Capps, S. R.: Rock glaciers in Alaska, Journal of Geology, 18, 359-375, https://doi.org/10.1086/621746, 1910.

Chueca, J.: A Statistical Analysis of the Spatial Distribution of Rock Glaciers, Spanish Central Pyrenees, Permafrost and Periglacial Processes, 3, 261–265, 1992.

Clark, D. H., Steig, E. J., Potter, N., and Gillespie, A. R.: Genetic variability of rock glaciers, Geogr Ann A, 80a, 175-182,
15   https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3676.1998.00035.x, 1998.

Colucci, R. R., Boccali, C., Žebre, M., and Guglielmin, M.: Rock glaciers, protalus ramparts and pronival ramparts in the south-eastern Alps, Geomorphology, 269, 112-121, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2016.06.039, 2016.

Cremonese, E., Gruber, S., Phillips, M., Pogliotti, P., Boeckli, L., Noetzli, J., Suter, C., Bodin, X., Crepaz, A., Kellerer-Pirklbauer, A., Lang, K., Letey, S., Mair, V., di Cella, U. M., Ravanel, L., Scapozza, C., Seppi, R., and Zischg, A.: Brief
20   Communication: "An inventory of permafrost evidence for the European Alps", The Cryosphere, 5, 651-657, https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-5-651-2011, 2011.

Cui, Z. J. and Zhu, C.: The structure pattern of temperature and mechanism of the rock glaciers in Urumqi River region in Tien Shan, Chinese Sci. Bull., 34, 134-137, 1989(in Chinese).

Delaloye, R., Morard, S., Barboux, C., Abbet, D., Gruber, V., Riedo, M., and Gachet, S.: Rapidly moving rock glaciers in Mattertal, In: *Graf C (ed) Mattertal - ein Tal in Bewegung*. Publikation zur Jahrestagung der Schweizerischen Geomorphologischen Gesellschaft, St. Niklaus, 21–31, 2013.

Falaschi, D., Castro, M., Masiokas, M., Tadono, T., and Ahumada, A. L.: Rock Glacier Inventory of the Valles Calchaquíes Region (~25°S), Salta, Argentina, Derived from ALOS Data, Permafrost and Periglacial Processes, 25, 69-75, https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp.1801, 2014.

Giardino, J. R. and Vick, S. G.: Geologic engineering aspects of rock glaciers, In: Giardino, J., Shroder, J., Vitek, J. (Eds.), Rock Glaciers. Allen and Unwin, London, 265–287, 1987.

Gruber, S.: Derivation and analysis of a high-resolution estimate of global permafrost zonation, The Cryosphere, 6, 221-233, https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-6-221-2012, 2012.

Gruber, S., Fleiner, R., Guegan, E., Panday, P., Schmid, M. O., Stumm, D., Wester, P., Zhang, Y. S., and Zhao, L.: Review article: Inferring permafrost and permafrost thaw in the mountains of the Hindu Kush Himalaya region, The Cryosphere, 11, 81-99, https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-11-81-2017, 2017.

Guglielmin, M. and Smiraglia, C.: The rock glacier inventory of the Italian Alps. Proceedings Seventh International Conference on Permafrost, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada, 1998.

Haeberli, W.: Creep of mountain permafrost: internal structure and flow of alpine rock glaciers, Mitteilungen Der Versuchsanstalt für Wasserbau, Hydrologie Und Glaziologie an Der ETH Zürich., 77, 5-142, 1985.

Haeberli, W., Hallet, B., Arenson, L., Elconin, R., Humlun, O., Kaab, A., Kaufmann, V., Ladanyi, B., Matsuoka, N., Springman, S., and Vonder Muhll, D.: Permafrost creep and rock glacier dynamics, Permafrost and Periglacial Processes, 17, 189-214, https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp.561, 2006.

Humlum, O.: The geomorphic significance of rock glaciers: estimates of rock glacier debris volumes and headwall recession rates in West Greenland, Geomorphology, 35, 41-67, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-555x(00)00022-2, 2000.

Ikeda, A. and Matsuoka, N.: Degradation of talus-derived rock glaciers in the Upper Engadin, Swiss Alps, Permafrost and Periglacial Processes, 13, 145-161, https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp.413, 2002.

Janke, J. R.: Colorado Front Range rock glaciers: Distribution and topographic characteristics, Arct Antarct Alp Res, 39, 74-83, https://doi.org/10.1657/1523-0430(2007)39[74:Cfrrgd]2.0.Co;2, 2007.

Janke, J. R., Ng, S., and Bellisario, A.: An inventory and estimate of water stored in firn fields, glaciers, debris-covered glaciers, and rock glaciers in the Aconcagua River Basin, Chile, Geomorphology, 296, 142-152, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2017.09.002, 2017.

Johnson, B. G., Thackray, G. D., and Van Kirk, R.: The effect of topography, latitude, and lithology on rock glacier distribution in the Lemhi Range, central Idaho, USA, Geomorphology, 91, 38-50, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2007.01.023, 2007.

Jones, D. B., Harrison, S., Anderson, K., and Betts, R. A.: Mountain rock glaciers contain globally significant water stores, Sci Rep, 8, 2834, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-21244-w, 2018a.

Jones, D. B., Harrison, S., Anderson, K., Selley, H. L., Wood, J. L., and Betts, R. A.: The distribution and hydrological significance of rock glaciers in the Nepalese Himalaya, Global and Planetary Change, 160, 123-142, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloplacha.2017.11.005, 2018b.

Kaab, A., Huggel, C., Fischer, L., Guex, S., Paul, F., Roer, I., Salzmann, N., Schlaefli, S., Schmutz, K., Schneider, D., Strozzi, T., and Weidmann, Y.: Remote sensing of glacier- and permafrost-related hazards in high mountains: an overview, Nat Hazard Earth Sys, 5, 527-554, 2005.

Kenner, R. and Magnusson, J.: Estimating the Effect of Different Influencing Factors on Rock Glacier Development in Two Regions in the Swiss Alps, Permafrost and Periglacial Processes, 28, 195-208, https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp.1910, 2017.

Krainer, K. and Ribis, M.: A Rock Glacier Inventory of the Tyrolean Alps (Austria), Austrian Journal of Earth Sciences, 105, 32-47, 2012.

Li, S. D. and Yao, H. Q.: Preliminary Study on the Rock Glaciers in the Gongga Mt. Area, Journal of Glaciology and Geocryology, 9, 55-60, 1987(in Chinese).

Lilleøren, K. S. and Etzelmüller, B.: A regional inventory of rock glaciers and ice-cored moraines in norway, Geografiska Annaler: Series A, Physical Geography, 93, 175-191, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0459.2011.00430.x, 2016.

18

Liu, G. N., Xiong, H. G., Cui, Z. J., and Song, C. Q.: The morphological features and environmental condition of rock glaciers in Tianshan mountains, Scientia Geographica Sinica, 15, 1995(in Chinese).

Liu, L., Millar, C. I., Westfall, R. D., and Zebker, H. A.: Surface motion of active rock glaciers in the Sierra Nevada, California, USA: inventory and a case study using InSAR, The Cryosphere, 7, 1109-1119, https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-7-1109-2013, 2013.

Martin, H. E.: Rock glaciers. Part 1: rock glacier morphology, classification and distribution, Progress in Physical Geography, 11, 260-282, 1987.

Millar, C. I. and Westfall, R. D.: Rock glaciers and related periglacial landforms in the Sierra Nevada, CA, USA; inventory, distribution and climatic relationships, Quaternary International, 188, 90-104, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2007.06.004, 2008.

Müller, J., Gärtner-Roer, I., Kenner, R., Thee, P., and Morche, D.: Sediment storage and transfer on a periglacial mountain slope (Corvatsch, Switzerland), Geomorphology, 218, 35-44, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2013.12.002, 2014.

Müller, J., Vieli, A., and Gartner-Roer, I.: Rock glaciers on the run - understanding rock glacier landform evolution and recent changes from numerical flow modeling, The Cryosphere, 10, 2865-2886, https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-10-2865-2016, 2016.

Onaca, A., Ardelean, F., Urdea, P., and Magori, B.: Southern Carpathian rock glaciers: Inventory, distribution and environmental controlling factors, Geomorphology, 293, 391-404, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2016.03.032, 2017.

Onaca, A. L., Urdea, P., and Ardelean, A. C.: Internal Structure and Permafrost Characteristics of the Rock Glaciers of Southern Carpathians (Romania) Assessed by Geoelectrical Soundings and Thermal Monitoring, Geogr Ann A, 95, 249-266, https://doi.org/10.1111/geoa.12014, 2013.

Owen, L. A., Finkel, R. C., Barnard, P. L., Haizhou, M., Asahi, K., Caffee, M. W., and Derbyshire, E.: Climatic and topographic controls on the style and timing of Late Quaternary glaciation throughout Tibet and the Himalaya defined by 10Be cosmogenic radionuclide surface exposure dating, Quaternary Science Reviews, 24, 1391-1411, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quascirev.2004.10.014, 2005.

Popescu, R., Vespremeanu-Stroe, A., Onaca, A., and Cruceru, N.: Permafrost research in the granitic massifs of Southern Carpathians (Parang Mountains), Zeitschrift Fur Geomorphologie, 59, 1-20, https://doi.org/10.1127/0372-8854/2014/0145, 2015.

Qiu, G. Q.: Development condition of alpine permafrost in the Mt.Tianshan, Journal of Glaciology and Geocryology, 15, 96-102, 1993(in Chinese).

Ran, Z.: Empirical Research on Economic Spatial Difference Based on ESDA—A Case Study on the Silk Road Economic Belt in the Northwest of China, Economic Geography, 37, 28-34+73, https://doi.org/10.15957/j.cnki.jjdl.2017.05.004, 2017(in Chinese).

Rangecroft, S., Harrison, S., Anderson, K., Magrath, J., Castel, A. P., and Pacheco, P.: A First Rock Glacier Inventory for the Bolivian Andes, Permafrost and Periglacial Processes, 25, 333-343, https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp.1816, 2014.

Roer, I. and Nyenhuis, M.: Rockglacier activity studies on a regional scale: comparison of geomorphological mapping and photogrammetric monitoring, Earth Surface Processes and Landforms, 32, 1747-1758, https://doi.org/10.1002/esp.1496, 2007.

Roger, F., Calassou, S., Lancelot, J., Malavieille, J., Mattauer, M., Xu, Z. Q., Hao, Z. W., and Hou, L. W.: Miocene Emplacement and Deformation of the Konga-Shan Granite (Xianshui-He Fault Zone, West Sichuan, China) - Geodynamic Implications, Earth and Planetary Science Letters, 130, 201-216, https://doi.org/10.1016/0012-821x(94)00252-T, 1995.

Sattler, K., Anderson, B., Mackintosh, A., Norton, K., and de Róiste, M.: Estimating Permafrost Distribution in the Maritime Southern Alps, New Zealand, Based on Climatic Conditions at Rock Glacier Sites, Frontiers in Earth Science, 4, https://doi.org/10.3389/feart.2016.00004, 2016.

Schmid, M. O., Baral, P., Gruber, S., Shahi, S., Shrestha, T., Stumm, D., and Wester, P.: Assessment of permafrost distribution maps in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region using rock glaciers mapped in Google Earth, The Cryosphere, 9, 2089-2099, https://doi.org/10.5194/tc-9-2089-2015, 2015.

Scotti, R., Brardinoni, F., Alberti, S., Frattini, P., and Crosta, G. B.: A regional inventory of rock glaciers and protalus ramparts in the central Italian Alps, Geomorphology, 186, 136-149, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2012.12.028, 2013.

Slaymaker, O.: The role of remote sensing in geomorphology and terrain analysis in the Canadian Cordillera, International Journal of Applied Earth Observation and Geoinformation, 3, 11–17, http://doi.org/10.1016/s0303-2434(01)85016-9, 2001.

Springman, S. M., Arenson, L. U., Yamamoto, Y., Maurer, H., Kos, A., Buchli, T., and Derungs, G.: Multidisciplinary Investigations on Three Rock Glaciers in the Swiss Alps: Legacies and Future Perspectives, Geogr Ann A, 94a, 215-243, http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0459.2012.00464.x, 2012.

Wahrhaftig, C. and Cox, A.: Rock Glaciers in the Alaska Range, Geological Society of America Bulletin, 70, 383-436, http://doi.org/10.1130/0016-7606(1959)70[383:Rgitar]2.0.Co;2, 1959.

Wang, X., Chai, K. G., Liu, S. Y., Wei, J. F., Jiang, Z. L., and Liu, Q. H.: Changes of glaciers and glacial lakes implying corridor-barrier effects and climate change in the Hengduan Shan, southeastern Tibetan Plateau, Journal of Glaciology, 63, 535-542, http://doi.org/10.1017/jog.2017.14, 2017.

Wang, X. W., Liu, L., Zhao, L., Wu, T. H., Li, Z. Q., and Liu, G. X.: Mapping and inventorying active rock glaciers in the northern Tien Shan of China using satellite SAR interferometry, The Cryosphere, 11, 997-1014, http://doi.org/10.5194/tc-11-997-2017, 2017.

White, A. and Copland, L.: Decadal-scale variations in glacier area changes across the Southern Patagonian Icefield since the 1970s, Arct Antarct Alp Res, 47, 147-167, http://doi.org/10.1657/Aaar0013-102, 2015.

Yao, T. D., Thompson, L., Yang, W., Yu, W. S., Gao, Y., Guo, X. J., Yang, X. X., Duan, K. Q., Zhao, H. B., Xu, B. Q., Pu, J. C., Lu, A. X., Xiang, Y., Kattel, D. B., and Joswiak, D.: Different glacier status with atmospheric circulations in Tibetan Plateau and surroundings, Nature Climate Change, 2, 663-667, http://doi.org/10.1038/Nclimate1580, 2012.

Zhang, P. Z.: A review on active tectonics and deep crustal processes of the Western Sichuan region, eastern margin of the Tibetan Plateau, Tectonophysics, 584, 7-22, http://doi.org/10.1016/j.tecto.2012.02.021, 2013.

Zhang, Y. Z., Replumaz, A., Leloup, P. H., Wang, G. C., Bernet, M., van der Beek, P., Paquette, J. L., and Chevalier, M. L.: Cooling history of the Gongga batholith: Implications for the Xianshuihe Fault and Miocene kinematics of SE Tibet, Earth and Planetary Science Letters, 465, 1-15, http://doi.org/10.1016/j.epsl.2017.02.025, 2017.

Zhu, C.: Some problems from the slope periglacio-landform on middle Tian Shan Mountain, Mountain Research, Mountain Research, 10, 1992(in Chinese).

Zhu, C., Cui, Z. J., and Yao, Z.: Research on the feature of rock glaciers on the central Tian Shan Mountain, ACTA Geographica Sinica, 47, 1992(in Chinese).

5 Zhu, C., Zhang, J. X., and Cheng, P.: Rock glaciers in the Central Tianshan Mountains, China, Permafrost and Periglacial Processes, 7, 69-78, 1996.

Tables and Figures:

Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.387
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1216.315
	df	28
	Sig.	.000

Table 2. Statistics for the 295 rock glaciers found in Daxue Shan.

RG type	Number of landforms	RG area (km^2)	Altitude (m asl)	Length (m)	Width (m)	Gradient of Slope (°)	MAF (m asl)
Moraine	146	28.11	4,501	793	235	28.45	4,385
Talus	149	27.59	4,442	805	228	30.05	4,321
Tongue	279	52.87	4,470	829	211	28.89	4,347
Lobate	16	2.83	4,491	275	582	35.69	4,447
MTRG	139	26.86	4,496	817	218	27.96	4,377
MLRG	7	1.25	4,592	303	564	38.29	4,539
TTRG	140	26.01	4,444	841	204	29.81	4,317
TLRG	9	1.58	4,412	253	595	33.67	4,376
All RG	295	55.70	4,471	799	231	29.26	4,352

Note: RG=rock glaciers; MTRG= moraine-type and tongue-shaped rock glaciers; MLRG= moraine-type and lobate rock glaciers; TTRG=talus-derived and tongue-shaped rock glaciers; TLRG= talus-derived and lobate rock glaciers; MAF= minimum altitude of rock glacier front. Altitude of rock glacier, altitude of rock glacier front, length, width and gradient of slope are all mean values.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of rock glacier parameters; marked correlations (bold) are significant at the significance level of _p_=0.01 (**) and _p_=0.05 (*).

	Latitude	Longitude	Altitude	Length	Width	RG area	Mean slope	Aspect
Latitude	1.000	**-0.893**	**0.116***	**0.102***	-0.020	0.029	0.092	-0.016
Longitude	**-0.893**	1.000	**-0.290**	-0.062	0.025	0.002	-0.004	-0.034
Altitude	**0.116***	**-0.290**	1.000	-0.075	0.087	0.031	**-0.102***	0.045
Length	**0.102***	-0.062	-0.075	1.000	0.063	**0.776**	**-0.341**	0.013
Width	-0.020	0.025	0.087	0.063	1.000	**0.572**	-0.004	-0.026
RG area	0.029	0.002	0.031	**0.776**	**0.572**	1.000	**-0.265**	0.010
Mean slope	0.092	-0.004	**-0.102***	**-0.341**	-0.004	**-0.265**	1.000	-0.068
Aspect	-0.016	-0.034	0.045	0.013	-0.026	0.010	-0.068	1.000
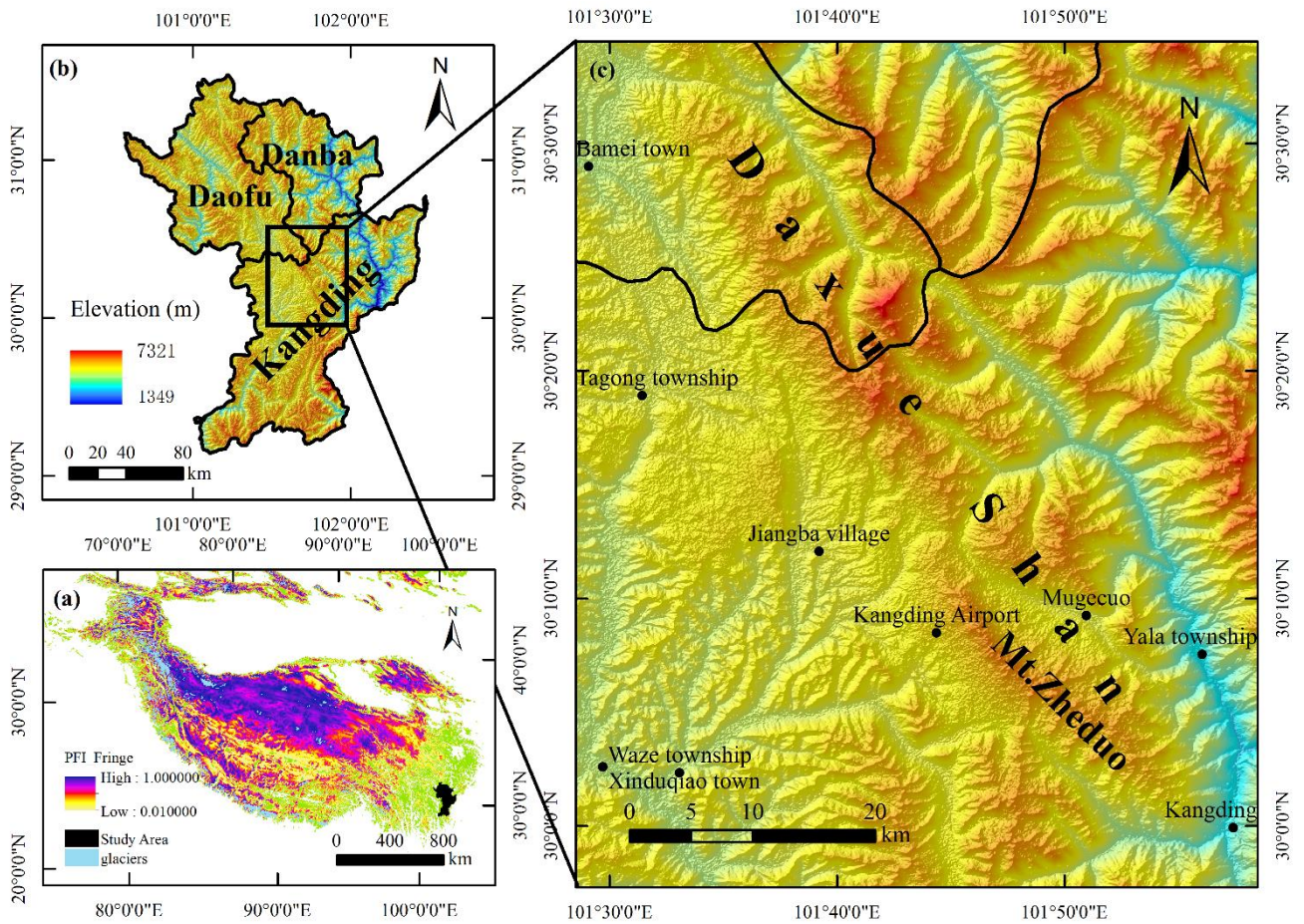
Figure 1: (a) The location of the study area in the permafrost zone of the TP. The Permafrost Zonation Index (PZI), or a corresponding map color, indicates to what degree permafrost exists only under the most favorable conditions (yellow), or nearly everywhere (blue); the map was produced using a temporal resolution of 30 arc-seconds (<1km) on a WGS84 lat/lon grid plotted in a projected coordinate system (Gruber, 2012). (b) and (c) are the geographical and topographical maps of the study area based on a spatial resolution of 30 m using ASTER-GDEM v2 software, as shown in the WGS84 coordinate system.
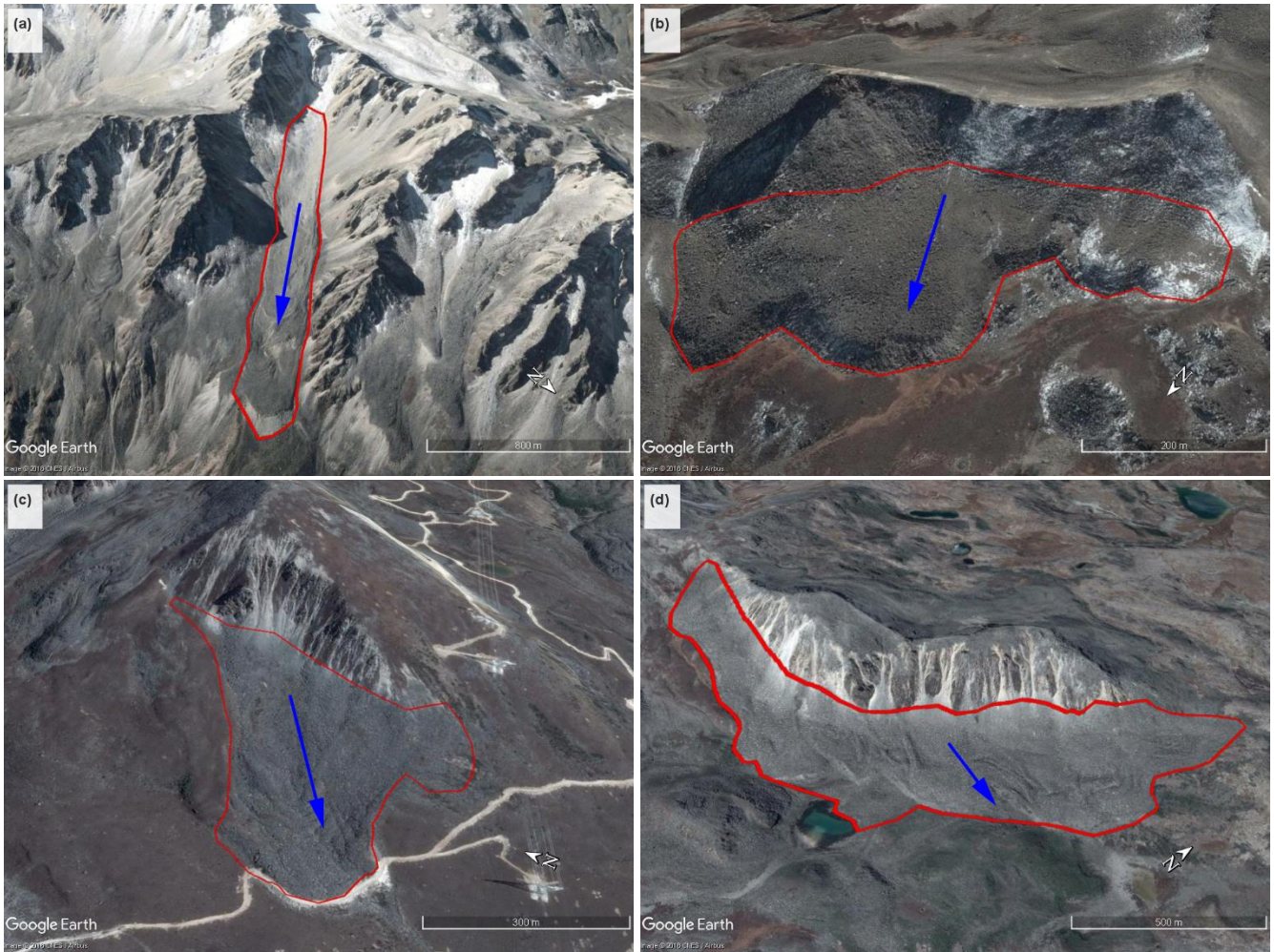
Figure 2: Google Earth images of different types of rock glaciers in Daxue Shan: (a) moraine-type and tongue-shaped rock glaciers (30.332767ºN, 101.707756ºE) (30th January, 2017); (b) moraine-type and lobate rock glaciers (30.217147ºN,101.791585ºE) (15th November, 2015); (c) talus-derived and tongue-shaped rock glaciers (30.067066ºN, 101.819432ºE) (21st October, 2014); (d) talus-derived and lobate rock glaciers (30.127825ºN, 101.812158ºE) (21st October, 2014). The red lines show the outlines of the rock glaciers; the blue arrows indicate the direction of flow of the rock glaciers.

27
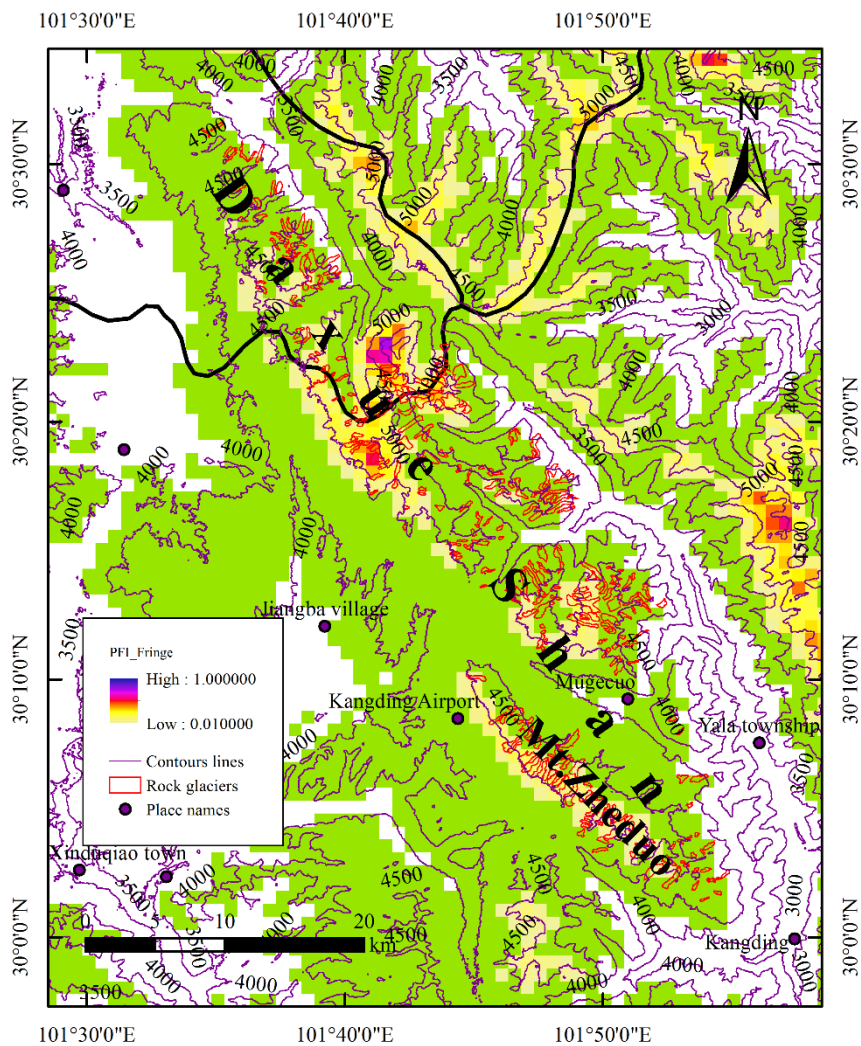
Figure 3: Spatial distribution of rock glaciers and Gruber's (2012) Permafrost Zonation Index (PZI) in Daxue Shan. The green area represents the fringe of uncertainty.
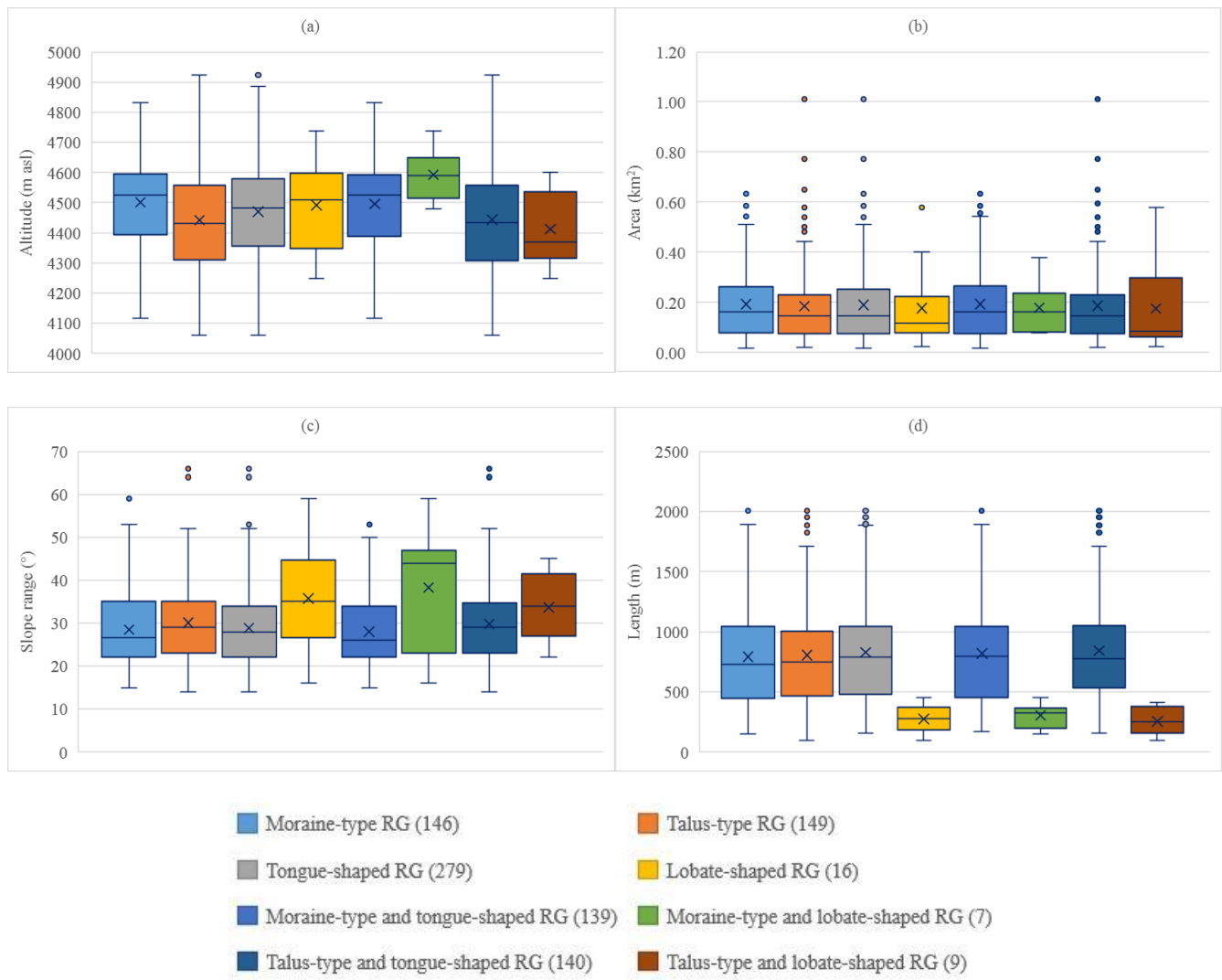
Figure 4: Boxplots illustrating the distributional characteristics of rock glaciers in Daxue Shan: (a) average altitude (m asl); (b) area (km^2); (c) range in the gradient of the slope (°); and (d) length (m). Boxplots represent 25-75% of all values, the caps at the ends of the vertical lines represent 10-90% of values, and the line in the center of each box indicates the median value. The number of the population of the different kinds of rock glacier is in the brackets of the legend.
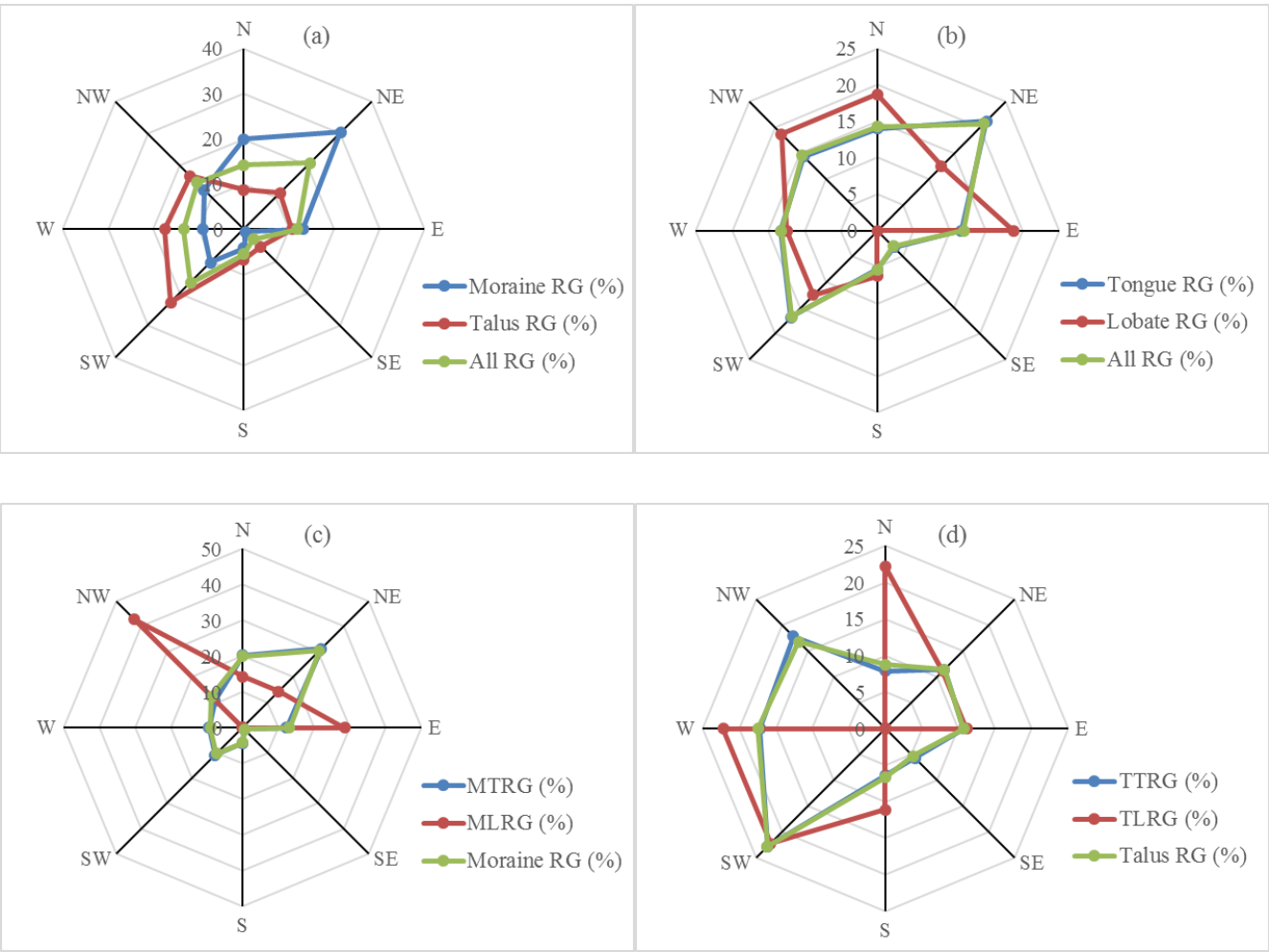
Figure 5: Analysis of the abundances of different rock glacier types versus aspect. The number of rock glaciers for each aspect on each of the four radar plots is shown as a percentage (%). (Note: RG=rock glaciers; MTRG= moraine-type and tongue-shaped rock glaciers; MLRG= moraine-type and lobate rock glaciers; TTRG=talus-derived and tongue-shaped rock glaciers; TLRG= talus-derived and lobate rock glaciers)
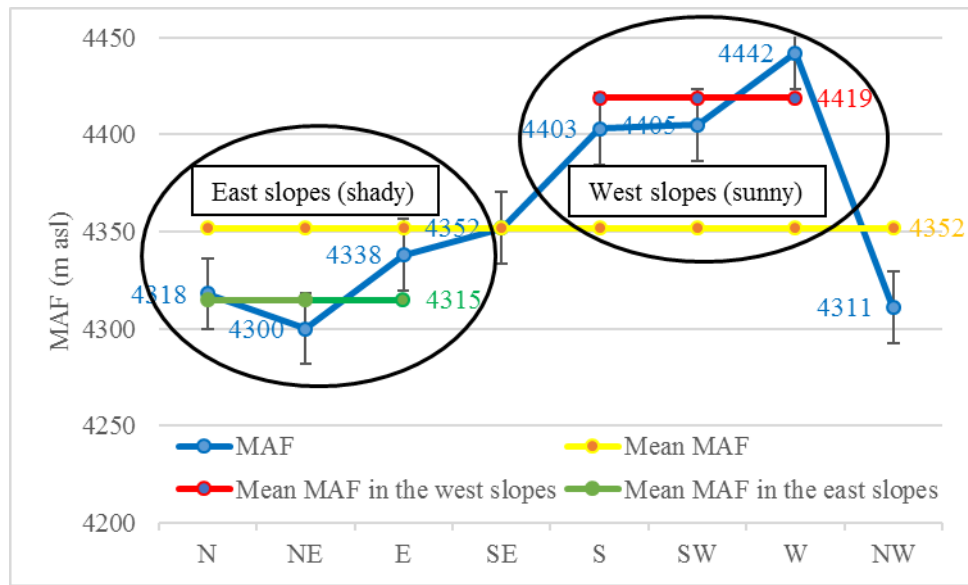
Figure 6: Minimum altitudinal rock glacier fronts (MAF) for all eight aspects, along with the overall mean. These values are taken to represent the lower boundaries of the potential permafrost extent in the Daxueshan region (bars indicate standard errors of the mean). Because Daxue Shan lies along an approximately NW-SE axis, we used this NW-SE axis as the boundary separating east-facing (*i.e.*, N, NE, E), shady slopes from west-facing (*i.e.*, S, SW, W), sunny slopes.
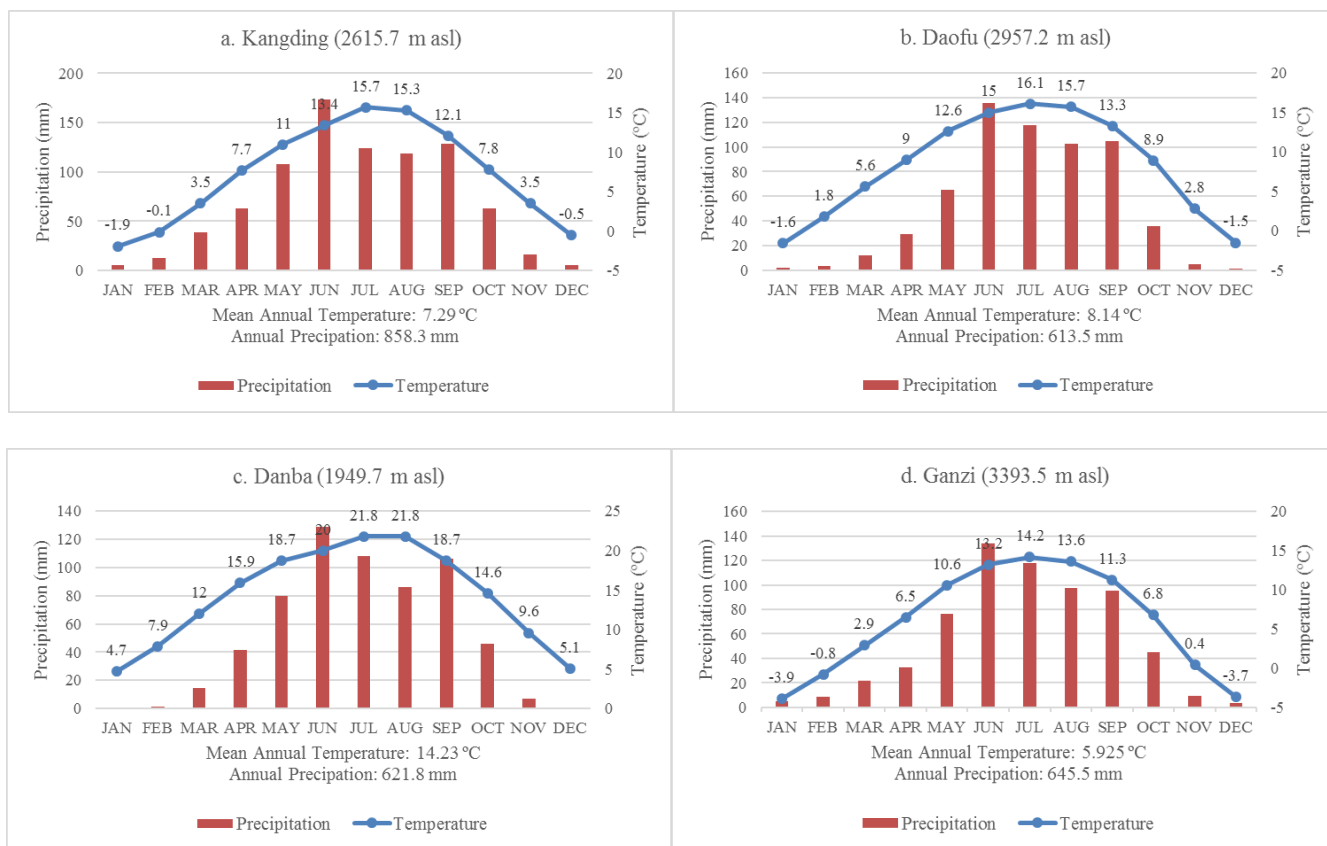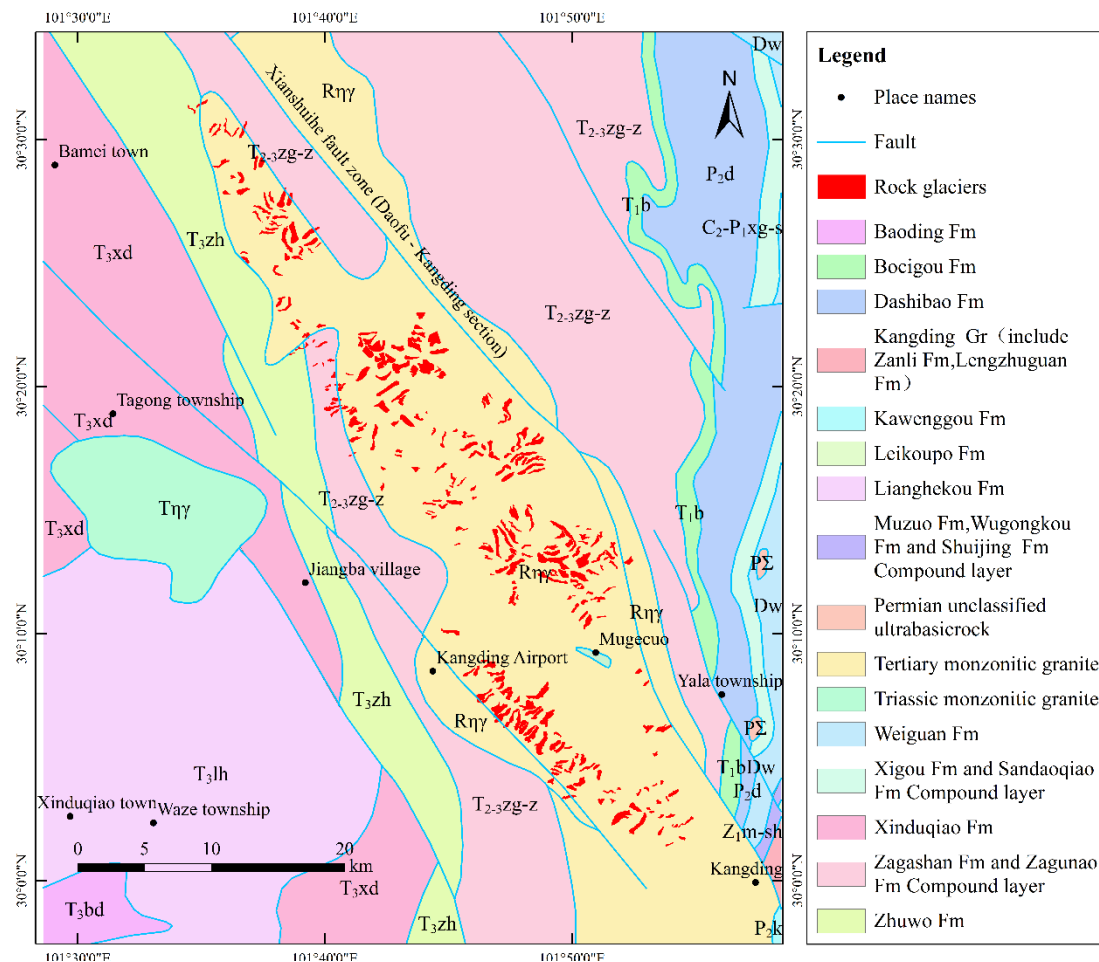
Figure 7: Climatographs for the Kangding (2,615.7 m asl, 30.03°N, 101.58°E), Daofu (2,957.2 m asl, 30.59°N, 101.07°E), Danba (1,949.7 m asl, 30.53°N, 101.53°E) and Ganzi (3,393.5 m asl, 31.37°N, 100°E) meteorological stations. Data sources: Meteorological Data Center of the China Meteorological Administration (http://data.cma.cn/, calculated for the period 1981–2010, inclusive).

Figure 8: The rock glaciers of Daxue Shan superimposed on the local lithologic-geologic environment. Stratigraphic data from the China Geological Survey (http://www.cgs.gov.cn/).

$T_{2-3}zg-z$	Middle-Late Triassic meta-sandstone and slate	Dw	Devonian metapelites
T_3xd	Late Triassic slate and phyllite	T_3bd	Late Triassic sandstone and conglomerate
T_1b	Early Triassic sandstone and siltstone	Z_1m-sh	Lower Sinian meta-sandstone and phyllite
P_2d	Middle Permian volcanic lava and breccia	C_2-P_1xg-s	Middle Carboniferous-Early Permian Carbonatite
$R\eta\gamma$	Tertiary monzonitic granite	$P\Sigma$	Permian unclassified ultrabasicrock
T_3zh	Late Triassic sandstone	$Pt_1K.$	Palaeoproterozoic amphibolite and migmatitic gneiss
$T\eta\gamma$	Triassic monzonitic granite	P_2k	Middle Permian carbonate and pelite
T_3lh	Late Triassic meta-sandstone	T_2l	Middle Triassic dolomite and limestone