



# **How the Term “Silk Road” Came Into Linguistic Usage**

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## **Structure**

- I. Introduction**
- II. A short view on “The New Silk Road”**
- III. A short view on the history of routes between China, Central Asia and Europe**
  - + Beginning of trade along the ‘Silk Road’
  - + Purposes of the ‘Silk Road’
  - + End of caravan epoch along the ‘Silk Road’
- IV. Geologist Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen**
  - + Education
  - + Journeys of exploration
  - + Results of explorations
  - + Heritage
- V. Conclusion**
  - + How the term “Silk Road” came into linguistic usage

Dear Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's a great honor for me to be here at Nazarbayev University and to speak to this audience and first of all I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to talk about the so called "Silk Road" in this wonderful atmosphere. It's especially an honor for me, because I know that only a few days more than two years ago, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2013, the President of the Peoples Republic of China, Mr. Xi Jinping delivered a remarkable speech here at Nazarbayev University, introducing his idea of building a -as he called it: 'Silk Road Economic Belt'<sup>1</sup> between China and Central Asia by creating a vast network of railways, energy pipelines, highways, and streamlined border crossings.

In the course of my lecture, I would like to bring to your attention how this term 'Silk Road' came into common linguistic usage.

During the last century the term 'Silk Road' made its entry into almost all languages of our world. In German language it is 'Seidenstraße' in Russian: 'Schjolkovi Put (Шёлковый Путь)', in Chinese: 'Sichóu zhi lú', in Turkish: 'Ipek Yolu' and in Kazakh language it's: 'Schibek Scholi', just to give you a few examples. When I went from Shimkent to Tashkent in April this year, I crossed the border between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan at a crossing point named 'Shibek Sholi', which translates into 'Silk Road'. Whenever discussions arise about the relationship between China, the Central Asian states, Russia and Europe, the term 'Silk Road' can frequently be heard. It is not a term that is only connected with economic trade between countries, it represents so much more. The 'Silk Road' or as it is often called, the 'Great Silk Road,' plays an important role in the history of China and the Central Asian states, including Kazakhstan. One easily identified example is in the new National Museum of Kazakhstan here in Astana. Only one day after President Nursultan Nazarbayev opened the museum on July 2, 2014, the museum hosted a festival called "Journey along the Great Silk Road", with re-imaginings of settlements along the Great Silk

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<sup>1</sup> President of The Peoples Republic of China, Mr. Xi Jinping,: „Promote People-to-People Friendship and Create a Better Future“, Speech at Nazarbayev University Astana 07th Sep 2013

Road, arts, national music and food, and numerous other events. Even in discussions about the 550<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Kazakhstani Statehood, which Kazakhstan is celebrating this year, experts often refer to the term 'Silk Road', just as the researcher Aliya Sagandykova did in an article about the Venetian Cartographer Fra Maoro in 'The Astana Times' on July 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>2</sup>

Searching in different sources for definitions of the term 'Silk Road,' we find many similarities among their descriptions. Commonly it is described as an "ancient network of trade and cultural transmission routes that were central to cultural interaction through regions of the Asian continent connecting the West and East by merchants, pilgrims, monks, soldiers, nomads and urban dwellers from China and India to the Mediterranean Sea during various periods of time. ...". If we pay careful attention to the sources cited in these definitions, we also note that most of them will acknowledge that the term originated with the German geographer Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen, who made seven expeditions to China in the years from 1868 to 1872.

The reason why it is me of all people who is going to talk about the term 'Silk Road' may be easily identified from my name; Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen was one of my ancestors, the very same who coined the term 'Silk Road' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I will come back to this later, so please let me first introduce myself with a few words. My name is Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, and I have been serving as the Defense Attaché at the German Embassy here in Astana for two years now. Although I'm not wearing a uniform today, I am a senior officer of the German Armed Forces 'Bundeswehr'. I joined the army in 1978 and have served in many different positions before I came here to Kazakhstan. And I am really glad to say that, just as my ancestor would have said so many years ago, we feel very fortunate and are doing quite well here living on the old 'Silk Road'!

## II. A short view on "The New Silk Road"

That said; let's return back to our main topic of the 'Silk Road' again. As I already mentioned, the 'Great Silk Road' was of great importance in the history of Kazakhstan, and when I came here two years ago, it surprised me to read and hear

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<sup>2</sup> The Astana Times, Page A7, „Venetian Cartographer to Help Prove 550th Anniversary of Kazakh Statehood” by Aliya Sagandykova, 29.07.2015

so often not only about the history of the ancient 'Silk Road,' but even more about the 'New Silk Road':

At the 25<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the Presidential Council of Foreign Investors, President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev said: *"Today I'd like to suggest that you all start the project of the 'New Silk Road'. Kazakhstan should revive its historic role and become a business transit hub for Central Asia. As a result of implementation of this project, by 2020 the volume of transit goods passing through Kazakhstan should double with further plans of achieving 50 million tons of cargo."*<sup>3</sup> That means that in the President's perception, the New Silk Road is to create new gigantic transportation routes which will help strengthen the sovereignty of Kazakhstan as well as the other Central Asian States.

The purpose of the 'New Silk Road' is quite similar to the 'Silk Road' in the past. In a very modern way China, the Central Asian States and Europe will be closely connected by highways, railway systems, pipelines and even ships crossing the Caspian Sea in order to facilitate trade between countries on this "New Silk Road." All these means of transportation in the future will belong to the 'Concept of the New Silk Road' which requires an immense amount of investment. In particular, the so called 'Iron Silk Road', which started operating in 2012, refers to the railway as part of this larger trade concept. It starts in Chongqing, a rising Chinese industrial city with factories producing laptops, touch screens, car and motorcycle parts and all kinds of machinery, and extends on a 10,800 kilometer, 15-day train journey west on a route that crosses Kazakhstan and reaches all the way to Duisburg, Germany.

The \$7 billion Western Europe - Western China highway stretches over 8.445 kilometers, with 2.787 kilometers of the highway located here in Kazakhstan. For Kazakhstan, efforts to become a major transit route between Asia and Europe are a top priority. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> this year, at the 8<sup>th</sup> Astana Economic Forum, President Nursultan Nazarbayev emphasized plans to finish Kazakhstan's section of the Western Europe - Western China road system by the end of 2015, and huge segments of this road system have already successfully been completed.

The government of Kazakhstan expects to benefit in major ways from the New Silk Road. President Nursultan Nazarbayev has said that Kazakhstan projects up to 30

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<sup>3</sup> TengriNews May 2012 "Nazarbayev offered foreign investors a project "New Silk Road"

million tons of freight being concentrated annually to its section of the Western Europe - Western China corridor<sup>4</sup>.

Discussion about the “New Silk Road” is not limited to Central Asia, China, or Europe. Even the US-Government officially uses the term ‘Silk Road’, when talking about the ‘New Silk Road Initiative’ which “aims to use energy, transport, trade, and infrastructure projects to integrate the region, provide regional stability and boost its potential as a transit area between Europe and East Asia”<sup>5</sup>.

The term ‘Silk Road’ is in all forms of media, as we can all observe its use watching television or reading newspapers, but how did this term come into common linguistic usage? To answer this question we have to conduct a short review on the history of the ‘Silk Road’.

### III. A short few on the history of the Silk Road

#### Beginning of trade along the ‘Silk Road’

To find the historical origins of the ‘Silk Road’, we have to go back at least 2.200 years. Trade routes, which initially traversed from east to west through Central Asia, are collectively known today as ‘Silk Roads.’ These trade routes originate from the Han Period in China and the Roman Empire in the West, approximately 200 years before Christ (BC)<sup>6</sup>. Even before that time, silk was exported from China as a very valuable commodity. Silk has been found in ancient Greek colonies near Kerth in the Crimea and Alexander the Great also spoke of “Serian cloths”, which had come to India from the north<sup>7</sup>. In Alexander’s time, the term “Seria” referred to the land of Serica which literally means “the land of silk”.

The wealthy Roman Empire was extremely interested in buying luxury products such as jewels, spices, ceramics, paper, and of course silk from China and the Romans were able to pay handsomely for it. These caravans did not return across Central Asia and back to China empty, rather they carried commodities produced in Rome, Byzantium, India, Iran, the Arabic caliphate, Europe and Russia, increasing trade with Central Asian peoples and China. The relationship benefitted multiple peoples and

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<sup>4</sup> President of Republic of Kasachstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev: Welcome Speech at 8<sup>th</sup> Astana Economic Forum, 22.May 2015

<sup>5</sup> US Council on Foreign Relations: „Building the New Silk Road”

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Schwarz, „Schnee in Samarkand – ein Reisebericht aus 3000 Jahren (Snow on Samarkand – a travel report from 3000 years”) P. 33 ff., P. 358 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Sven Hedin, “The Silk Road – Ten Thousand Miles through Central Asia”, Page 227

states, and as a result many trade routes arose that collectively created a vast network of interconnected roads and routes. Consequently, when we use the term 'Silk Road' today, it may seem to be rather imprecise at first glance.

Doubtless, before these land routes appeared, there were already trade routes from the Far East to Europe using ships. However, taking these maritime routes took an extraordinary amount of time, with a one way journey to get goods to the Roman Empire requiring at least 18 months. By comparison, the continental trade routes were more complex and were much safer as they were protected by various rulers and trading cities who benefitted immensely from the caravans traveling back and forth. Even though they required a substantial amount of time, even these maritime routes from China via India to Europe became associated with the larger term "Silk Road", sometimes being described as the 'Maritime Silk Road'<sup>8</sup>.

Due to political or military developments along the enormous way from China to Europe, the routes regularly changed and several reloading or waypoints arose. Samarkand in Uzbekistan, Isfahan in Iran, and Herat in Afghanistan became typical continental reloading points for silk from China traveling on its way to Europe. By this time, silk was not just a luxury textile, it was considered viable form of currency just as gold was<sup>9</sup>. Silk was presented to tsars and ambassadors, and was even used as a means of payment for soldiers who protected these routes and reloading points.

As already mentioned, the "Silk Road" was not only one road but a whole network of routes. There also were north-south routes crossing Mongolia and of course the territory of what is modern Kazakhstan. The regions of Central Kazakhstan were famous because of their bountiful natural resources: pasture lands gave plentiful food for the caravans' numerous herds of horses and sheep, and that is why these regions were included into the system of the Great Silk Route<sup>10</sup>.

In his work "The Silk Road – Ten Thousand Miles through Central Asia" the famous Swedish Geographer Sven Hedin says that the Chinese called the great trade routes the 'Imperial Highway'<sup>11</sup>. The first ever known map of these routes was drawn by the

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Schwarz, „Schnee in Samarkand – ein Reisebericht aus 3000 Jahren (Snow on Samarkand – a travel report about 3000 years“) P. 103

<sup>9</sup> Prof. Daniel C. Vaughn, University of Washington (Seattle), 2010: "Richthofen's 'Silk Roads' – Toward the Archaeology of a Concept", Page 7

<sup>10</sup> Prof. Dr. Karl Baipakov, "Along the Great Silk Road", published by "Kramds—reklama", 1991

<sup>11</sup> Sven Hedin, "The Silk Road – Ten Thousand Miles through Central Asia", Page 226

Greek geographer Marinus of Tyre some 150 years BC<sup>12</sup>. Although he illustrated their geographic locations, there was no official expression or term for these routes.

#### Other Purposes of the 'Silk Road'

Trade along these routes continued for centuries, but they also came into use for other purposes. For example, conquerors and strategists such as Alexander the Great in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Genghis Khan at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and Tamerlan, who is better known in Central Asia as Timur, used routes in the 14<sup>th</sup> century along what today is known as the 'Silk Road' to expand their power and sphere of influence. Just as they sometimes used the routes to try and expand their influence, often the sword of a conqueror was raised in an effort to cut off the trade routes to reduce the influence or expansion of an enemy. Alexander of Macedonia, Genghis Khan, and Timur all tried to take large segments of the massive network under their control but ultimately each failed. The plundered and burnt towns were restored and reconstructed again and again as the trade proved more lucrative than the damage any conqueror could inflict<sup>13</sup>.

The 'Silk Road' was a route of religions as well.<sup>14</sup> There were a number of pilgrim centers during the various epochs of history and even today many spiritual places bear witness to the spread of religion along these routes. Samarkand again is a good example for that.

Last but not least, the 'Silk Road' was of great value because it facilitated an extraordinary exchange of culture.

Along with merchandising, the Silk Route promoted cultural exchanges, involving not only applied art, wall-painting and architecture, but music and dancing as well. Amusing shows, performed by strolling musicians, dancers, actors, tamers, acrobats, mimes and jugglers, were some sort of medieval "variety art". There were no language barriers for them: they entertained Greek Ruler and Turkish Kagan, Kiev Prince and Chinese Emperor alike, and oriental actors often performed in Constantinople. Objects and artifacts, excavated along the full extent of the Silk Route, give material evidence of the development and enrichment of national cultures, music and theatre in particular. Of great interest in this connection is the

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<sup>12</sup> 1911 Encyclopaedia Britannica vol. 17, "Marinus of Tyre"

<sup>13</sup> Prof. Dr. Karl Baipakov, "Along the Great Silk Road", published by "Kramds—reklama", 1991

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Schwarz, „Schnee in Samarkand – ein Reisebericht aus 3000 Jahren (Snow on Samarkand – a travel report from 3000 years“) P. 788 and 890



collection of terracotta pottery dating from the times of the T'ang dynasty's ruling. These unique samples depict dancers, actors wearing masks, and musicians sitting on camel humps. Judging by their faces, they were representatives of Central Asian nationalities.

Favorable influence of the Silk Route on the development of culture in Central Asia and Kazakhstan is indisputable. Linking two great civilizations, Asian and European, the Silk Road was critical to the development and distribution of the Middle Ages' most remarkable cultural achievements. Cooperation between nomadic and settled peoples resulted in the creation of wonderful blended cultures that have persisted to today. Thus, the Great Silk Route played an important role in the development of world civilization<sup>15</sup>.

Indeed, you may recognize even today the partial mix of cultures along this great network of trade routes.

In the year 1271, a Venetian merchant traveler, Marko Polo, purportedly traveled from Italy to China and has long been considered the first to write reports about his journey and about China. But still experts are not sure if he had truly been there or not, as there are no clear evidences but many doubts about his journey. For example, he never describes the spectacular Great Wall of China in any of his reports, but its location and prominence should have been obvious to any traveler. Nevertheless, his reports strongly influenced European cartography, leading to the introduction of the so called 'Fra Mauro Map'<sup>16</sup>, a map which depicts Asia, Africa and Europe. But again, even during the time of Marko Polo there was no term or expression that defined the routes between China through what we nowadays call Central Asia to Europe.

#### End of caravan epoch along the 'Silk Road'

The caravan epoch with endless caravans following the different 'Silk Routes' came to an end when fast caravels from Lisbon shipyards appeared and replaced the former low-speed galley- boats that had previously sailed the maritime trade routes. These caravels were able to sail against the wind along the given sea lanes and were not subject to the weather cycles as were their draft galley predecessors. In 1499 it was the Portuguese sailor Vasco da Gama who was the first to reach the true spice lands. As the era of caravans on the 'Silk Road' drew to a close with the rise of

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<sup>15</sup> Prof. Dr. Karl Baipakov, "Along the Great Silk Road", published by "Kramds—reklama", 1991

<sup>16</sup> British Library: "Fra Mauro World Map"

these now faster maritime routes, the epoch of great geographical discoveries took its place.

Because the Asian continent seemed to be a vast territory with never ending resources, it was of highest interest to Europe and America at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, many famous geologists and geographers came here to explore this huge territory, one of whom was the famous geographer and scientist Alexander von Humboldt. Another one of these explorers was my ancestor, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen.

#### **IV. Geologist Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen**

Just to give you an idea about whom we are talking, I would like to draw a brief picture about the education, life, and work of Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen.<sup>17, 18:</sup>

##### Education

Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen was born in 1833 in the small town of Bad Karlsruhe in Silesia. Even as a young boy in school he loved to walk over the fields and through the woods of his neighborhood and collect interesting and unique stones. Although he was yet a young boy, he recognized that the amount of harvest was significantly dependent on the nature of the soil. These experiences made him become more and more interested in geology, and at the age of 17, after finishing school, he started to study geology at the University of Breslau, the capital of Silesia. Only two years later, in 1852, he changed to the University of Berlin, which was one of the leading universities of that time, because of its extraordinary professoriate. Here he heard lectures from different geologists and mineralogists, including Gustav Rose, who had accompanied the famous Prussian geographer, naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt on his explorations from the Urals to the Altai Mountains. By the way, the expression 'Central Asia' goes back to Alexander von Humboldt as he introduced this term in his renowned work about this huge region in 1844.<sup>19</sup>

At the University of Berlin, Ferdinand von Richthofen also met the famous old geographer Carl Ritter who was by then more than 80 years old and the author of a voluminous work about the geography of Asia. At this time in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Archives of Family „Freiherr von Richthofen“

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Hettner: "Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen 1833 – 1905", Assay on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> Birthday of the China-explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen

<sup>19</sup> Encyclopedia of the European East: "Central Asia"

century, the study and knowledge about the geography of Central Asia and Far East was relatively poor and not wide spread in Central Europe. That led Ferdinand von Richthofen to become more and more interested in this relatively unknown geographical area. Even as a young university student, he hoped to soon become a member of an explorer-team to go to Asia, and although he finished his studies at the University of Berlin in 1856, it would take him four more years before his dream would come true.

### Journeys of exploration

In 1860 the Prussian government decided to send an official delegation to East Asia to sign trade agreements with Japan, China and Siam. Richthofen, who was 27 years old, was a member of this delegation. According to Ferdinand von Richthofen's travel diary, this step was the most important part of his life.<sup>20</sup> The expedition took the delegation around Africa to Ceylon, further to Hongkong – Kanton – Shanghai before they arrived in Japan. After signing trade agreements with the Japanese, the delegation travelled to China, where the so called 'Taiping Rebellion' was ongoing. Nevertheless, at the end of the year 1861 and in the beginning of 1862, all agreements with China were signed and the delegation left East Asia heading back to Europe, but without the young Ferdinand von Richthofen. He decided not to return to Prussia, but to stay in Asia to conduct the geographical studies that he was always so interested in. His main interest had always been the 12 million square kilometers of an area described as the "Inner Asia-Territory," because he suspected that this geographic expanse would be the central key to the structure of the whole Asian Continent. Consequently, he began his trek to reach Central Asia. I would like to remind you, that the understanding of Central Asia at that time was quite different than what we now understand and define as Central Asia. In the introduction to his life-work titled "China", which I will introduce further to you later, it may come as a surprise that it opens with a chapter on Central Asia, but the area he describes as Central Asia now correlates approximately to what we now call Xinjiang, China. More specifically, the area bounded by the Altai Mountains in the north, Tibet in the south, the watersheds of the major Chinese rivers in the east and the Pamir Mountains in the west. In other words, this "East Turkestan" was central, whereas that which lay

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<sup>20</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, Reisetagebuch (travel diary) – personal notes

west of the Pamirs, and even the loess plains to the east, the heart of agricultural China, were to him periphery<sup>21,22</sup>.

Due to insurmountable difficulties, such as the ongoing armed clashes between Uyghurs and the Dungan People, who were a minority of Muslim People of Chinese origin<sup>23</sup> in East-Turkistan, Richthofen could not manage to get into Central Asia. As a result he decided to take a more circuitous route via California, Alaska, and Kamchatka to the Amur River and from there to the northern part of Central Asia. Unfortunately it took him six years to complete such a long journey, as he had to collect money for this expedition while he was still on it! During this long period of travel, he published a scientific work titled 'Production of Metal in California and Neighbouring Regions'<sup>24</sup>, but the time in California made him deeply dissatisfied as he wrote into his diary: *"Extensive journeys in California and Nevada certainly gave me insight into a new world of highest interest. But that was, as far as the kind of my studies is concerned, the domain of a corps of American geologists. In comparison with that, what they did with united power, the individual's work couldn't be of any consequence. Almost to no purpose I filled my diaries with my observations ...."*<sup>25</sup> Thus, on New Year's night 1867/68 he renewed his resolution, to once again focus on the exploration of China. As he wrote in his personal notes, *"Here a task of colossal dimensions occurred and I decided to devote all my energy on this task for a couple of years. ...."*<sup>26</sup>

Because China always has been a country with an ancient culture, a dynamic history possessing a rich literature that was published and available in Europe, it was not an unknown country. There were even reliable maps of some Chinese regions with all major towns and rivers of that time depicted on them. Nevertheless, vast areas of Asia and China were unknown to the West and this lack of information drove a new demand for scientific geographical study.

In the years from 1868 to 1872 Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen travelled seven times on different routes between the East coast of China and destinations in Inner

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<sup>21</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, „CHINA. ERGEBNISSE EIGENER REISEN – vol 1“, Berlin, Verlag von Dietrich Reimer, 1877

<sup>22</sup> Prof. Daniel C. Waugh, University of Washington (Seattle), 2010: "Richthofen's 'Silk Roads' – Toward the Archaeology of a Concept", Page 5

<sup>23</sup> Wikipedia „Dungan People“

<sup>24</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, „Die Metallproduktion Californiens und der angrenzenden Gebiete – Production of Metal in California and Neighbouring Regions“ (German language)

<sup>25</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, Reisetagebuch (travel diary) – personal notes

<sup>26</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, Reisetagebuch (travel diary) – personal notes

Asia and Central Asia. He studied the climatic conditions, the soil, hydrography and landscape as well as geological conditions. These studies became the foundation of his life-work. Thanks to his scientific knowledge, skills in cartography, careful choice of travel routes, and last but not least thanks to his personality, he was able to accomplish the enormous mission which he had tasked to himself. As you may imagine, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen faced serious critical situations multiple times during his journeys through regions where Europeans hadn't been before. For example, once he was threatened by a group of farmers with sickles and knives in Chekiang. Rather than panic, he just went towards them and smiled. With his tall figure (1,90 meters) and persevering personality he made them lay down their weapons.

The results of his studies were entered into different scientific reports, which were made available to Chinese authorities during his journeys as well as to leaders and scientists in Berlin. These scientific reports were careful and precise descriptions about what he observed and recognized traveling through China and Central Asia. Significantly, he didn't only conduct geographic and geological studies; he also studied the history of the regions he traveled, taking time to study the population, religion, economic affairs, traffic, lines of communication and even climatic conditions in accordance with the model of Alexander von Humboldt, as Richthofen had learned to do as a young student in Berlin. Richthofen very carefully made efforts to focus on geomorphology, a branch of geography that incorporates the expertise of a geologist. Specifically, it is the scientific study of the origin and evolution of topographic bathymetric features created by physical or chemical process operating at or near the earth's surface. Richthofen's work in this field was exceptionally significant.<sup>27</sup> In the conclusion to volume 1 of his most important work "China", which I will introduce to you in a few minutes, he is very explicit about what he considers the correct approach to the study of geography. He writes, *"One must start with studying geology and the physical landscape, but then a geographer should move on to a second stage of analysis, focusing on human interaction with a changing environment"*.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Prof. Daniel C. Waugh, University of Washington (Seattle), 2010: "Richthofen's 'Silk Roads' – Toward the Archaeology of a Concept", Page 4

<sup>28</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, „China“ vol. 1, P. 726 ff.

The results of his studies enabled him to write reports in a manner that was completely new for this region. His “Letters on China”, which were published in Shanghai from 1870-1872, provided the first descriptions of huge coal-deposits in the areas of Shantung, Shansi and Shensi as well as of the origin of fertile loess-plains in the Hsingan region.<sup>29</sup> Publishing these reports allowed him to continue his journeys and explorations, as he received the needed money from the ‘Shanghai Chamber of Commerce’<sup>30</sup>.

His great vision had always been to publish a popular, but at the same time scientific travel-work about China. Consequently, he went on collecting as much information about the huge ‘Inner Asia Territory’ as possible. He wrote down his perceptions, drew the initial basic maps of the areas he traveled, and even helped the farmers in their agricultural labor in order to learn more about the region’s soil. At the conclusion of these efforts, he owned a voluminous bulk of records, scripts and drawings, which became the basis of his later work. In 1872, after 12 years of travelling through North America and Asia, Ferdinand von Richthofen returned to Berlin, which during his world travels had become the capital of the German Empire.

#### Results of his explorations

Upon his return to Germany, he immediately started to work on collecting and organizing his records into publications, the most important of which was his 5-volume about China with an additional 2-volume atlas. The first volume, titled “China – Results Of Own Journeys”<sup>31</sup> was published in 1877 in Berlin and immediately became world-famous. Even today it is still a foundation for those who deal with the geography or geology of China and Central Asia. As I have already mentioned, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen not only viewed the regions he travelled through as a geologist, but also as a scientist, observing all kinds of influences which had affected these regions. Because of this careful and comprehensive approach to his research, this volume “China – Results Of Own Journeys” describes a history dating back 200 years before Christ. It is in this work that Ferdinand von Richthofen used the term “Silk Road” for the first time. I will come back to this later.

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<sup>29</sup> Petermanns Geografische Mitteilungen, Band X, 1870, Seite 369 - 372

<sup>30</sup> Alfred Hettner: “Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen 1833 – 1905“, Assay on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> Birthday of the China-explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen

<sup>31</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, „CHINA. ERGEBNISSE EIGENER REISEN – vol 1“, Berlin, Verlag von Dietrich Reimer, 1877

Several other works were published in the years after his return from his journeys, one of which, the “Guide for exploration-travelers”<sup>32</sup>, published in 1886, is still today an up-to-date handbook for geologists.

With his great experience as a geologist and with his understanding of modern geography, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen was appointed Professor of Geography at the University in Bonn in 1879, and was awarded the same honor in 1883 at the University of Leipzig and in 1886 at the University of Berlin. Among his students there were many successful explorers, one of whom was the well-known Swedish explorer Sven Hedin, who later continued Richthofen’s work on China and Central Asia. In Hedin’s book “The Silk Road – Ten Thousand Miles through Central Asia” published in 1936, he wrote: “The name ‘Silk Road’ is not a Chinese and has never been used in China. Professor Baron von Richthofen was probably the inventor of this descriptive name. In his famous work on China, he speaks of ‘die Seidenstraße’ and, on a map, of ‘die Seidenstraße des Marinus’”<sup>33</sup>.

In 1903 Richthofen was appointed Head of the Berlin University, and a short time later Ferdinand von Richthofen was also chosen as president of the Geographical Society in Berlin, which had been co-founded by Alexander von Humboldt.<sup>34</sup>

### Heritage

Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen died on 06<sup>th</sup> October 1905 in Berlin, but still today his works and his heritage are well known, not only in our family but also in the larger family of geologists, geographers and explorers. Even in China and parts of Central Asia you may very often meet the name of my famous ancestor. For example I was really surprised during my visit to Uzbekistan earlier this year, when a tour guide offered a tour titled “Following the tracks of Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen along the Silk Road”.

Soon after their publication, the studies of Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen became the foundation of wide-range developments in several public and economic issues with China and Central Asia. Many travel routes, settlements and even at least one harbor on the coast of China were built up and expanded on the basis of Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen’s studies. Perhaps more interesting, China honored him in

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<sup>32</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, „Führer für Forschungsreisende“, Dietrich Reimer Verlag Berlin, 1983, unveränderter Nachdruck von 1886

<sup>33</sup> Sven Hedin, „The Silk Road – Ten Thousand Miles through Central Asia“, Leipzig 1936, Page 226

<sup>34</sup> Archives of family “Freiherr von Richthofen”

a very special way. Up until the 1960's the mountain range running along the southern edge of the Gansu Corridor leading into XinJiang was named the 'Richthofen Range'<sup>35</sup> or 'Richthofen Mountains'. Only then was the name changed to the current Qilian Shan mountain range.

## V. Conclusion

### How the term "Silk Road" came into linguistic usage

And now, to conclude, we return to the term 'Silk Road': Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen uses this term in his work "China" twice. The first instance is when he describes the history of routes between China through Central Asia to Europe and he uses this term in connection with the trade of silk.<sup>36</sup> The second usage occurs when he refers to the previously mentioned map of Marinus of Tyre, calling it 'die Seidenstraße des Marinus (the Silk Road of Marinus)'<sup>37</sup>.

The specific context for Richthofen's use of the term 'Seidenstrasse' or 'Silk Road' in his "China, vol. 1", is his comprehensive examination of the West's historical and geographical knowledge of China, and conversely, Chinese knowledge of the West. He devotes particular attention to the earliest acquisition of this geographic knowledge in the relatively narrow period encompassing the Han Dynasty and Imperial Rome. In this large section of his book, Richthofen analyzes the evidence in Greek and Roman sources which first speak of the Serer, those peoples connected with the silk trade, or Serica, the land of silk. He also examines the evidence in Chinese annals concerning the first missions to the Western Regions and the subsequent Han campaigns that led Chinese trade into Central Asia. Much of this is the now familiar story of the beginnings of the 'Silk Road'<sup>38</sup>.

What seems to be very interesting when we talk about the term 'Silk Road' in connection with the founder of this term, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen, is that his use of this term was quite limited. He applies it sparingly only to the Han period, discussing the relationship between political expansion and trade on the one hand and geographical knowledge on the other. In this sense the term describes a very

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<sup>35</sup> Prof. Daniel C. Waugh, University of Washington (Seattle), 2010: "Richthofen's 'Silk Roads' – Toward the Archaeology of a Concept"

<sup>36</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, „CHINA. ERGEBNISSE EIGENER REISEN – vol 1“, Page 442 ff. Berlin, Verlag von Dietrich Reimer, 1877

<sup>37</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, „CHINA. ERGEBNISSE EIGENER REISEN – vol 1“, Page 496, Berlin, Verlag von Dietrich Reimer, 1877

<sup>38</sup> Prof. Daniel C. Waugh, University of Washington (Seattle), 2010: "Richthofen's 'Silk Roads' – Toward the Archaeology of a Concept"



specific overland route from East to West, although Richthofen of course knew that there were other routes in various directions<sup>39</sup>. He also recognized that silk was not the only product carried along these routes. Thus Richthofen always preferred to use expressions like ‘main routes’, ‘trade routes’, ‘communication’ or just simple ‘roads and routes’.

During his lectures and even in his correspondence with Sven Hedin, there is no evidence that he used the term ‘Silk Road’. Only once, in 1877, Richthofen used the term “Silk Road” in the title of a lecture given to the Geological Society. During this lecture von Richthofen emphasized that “the concept of the transcontinental Silk Roads had lost its meaning”. This might be interpreted as a sign that von Richthofen did not intend to create a term for the “Silk Road” as a unique and sophisticated concept, but meant it in a more general technical way.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that von Richthofen might not have meant the “Silk Road” in the way we use the term nowadays. But undoubtedly he was the first to coin the term “Silk Road” and significantly influenced how the term was used. As a result, the term has always been directly connected to my ancestor. On the basis of Richthofen’s work many scientists at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century used ‘Silk Road’ or the plural of it ‘Silk Roads’ when studying the history, geography or geology of China and Central Asia, of whom Sven Hedin might be the best known. Another scholar of Richthofen was the geographer August Herrmann, who was the first to publish a book to use the term ‘Seidenstraße’ or ‘Silk Road’ in its title. But also the Hungary-British scientist and geographer Aurel Stein at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century traveled on the basis of the results of Richthofen’s explorations through Central Asia and his reports, often using the term ‘Silk Road’, were published in the London Times. Of course all these scientists held lectures as in the days before television the lecture tour was a significant form of public entertainment<sup>40</sup>.

With these scientists and their different works the term ‘Silk Road’ came more and more into linguistic usage and as we are all very well aware today, it is now used in almost all languages.

Mr. President, ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much for your attention; I would now appreciate to answer your questions.

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<sup>39</sup> Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, „CHINA. ERGEBNISSE EIGENER REISEN – vol 1“, Page 459 – 462, Berlin, Verlag von Dietrich Reimer, 1877

<sup>40</sup> Prof. Daniel C. Waugh, University of Washington (Seattle), 2010: “Richthofen’s ‘Silk Roads’ – Toward the Archaeology of a Concept”

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