
Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen, who was born 5 May 1833, coined the term “Silk Road” while on one of his expeditions across China 1869-1871. He made these journeys soon after the of the Taiping rebellion, a civil war which raged across China between 1850 and 1864, killing over 50 million people.

Richtofen’s main duty was to record the economic state of the lands he passed through, document Chinese industries and the taxation system. The Library holds a collection of rare reports, published in Shanghai, written by Richtofen after each trip. In these reports he paints a fascinating picture of the places he travelled through.

I started from Peking on October 25th[1871], bound for Tai-yuen-fu, by way of ‘Kalgan. I did not take the usual road to the latter place, which leads through the Nankou-pass, but went to the hills west of the capital, and found an extremely mountainous but highly interesting mule trail, across hills and narrow gorges, to Pau-ngan-chau, whence I took the road to Siuen-hwa-fu and Kalgan. After spending a fortnight on a trip through the southern portion of Mongolia, I reached Ta-tung-fu. Thence I travelled through the whole province of Shansi from north to south, leaving it at the fortress of Tüng-kwan, on the great bend of the Yellow River. From that place I followed the-high road to Singan-fu.

In Shansi and Sheusi I seldom left the high road, because any great deviation from it, to the northernmost portion of Shensi or to Kansu, is at present attended with much delay, on account of dangers which must be avoided; also because the additional results, which I should have been able to get, did not appear to be commensurate with the time and trouble required for arriving at them.
succeeded, however, in gathering some information regarding those Countries. Ferdinand Richthofen, Shanghai, 1872

References


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