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Ferdinand von Richthofen – Then and Now. An Introduction

Editorial to **DIE ERDE** 138, 2007, Issue 4
Special Issue: Ferdinand von Richthofen

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of *Ferdinand von Richthofen's* death, an international symposium focusing on "Man and Environment in Central Asia" was held in Berlin from the 6th to the 8th October 2005. The aim of the conference was to discuss various aspects of the ecology and development of China, both then and now, from the perspective of different disciplines: geocology, archaeology and cultural history, social sciences, research history, and cartography. This special issue includes revised versions of contributions to the conference panel on "Research History" by *Ute Wardenga*, *Hans-Dietrich Schultz*, *Chin-Ni Hsieh* and *Hermann Kreutzmann*. These papers represent the continuation of a tradition of lectures and commemorating events begun in 1905 that acknowledge *Richthofen's* merits as a scientist. When these lectures are considered from the perspective of academic history it becomes evident that they not only commemorate a great geographer but also reflect the shifting themes and problems of geography. The individual snapshots of *Richthofen's* personality, work and achievements may be read as a palimpsest: Each generation of geographers highlights specific aspects and draws certain outlines, concentrating on

features that seem important in the specific contemporary disciplinary context. Other aspects may be ignored and thus sink into oblivion. The contributions to this special issue are, like their predecessors, written in this tradition and thus focus on aspects of the history of the discipline from the perspective of the context of the time.

In order to demonstrate this, the following introductory editorial analyses both obituaries and texts which were written on the occasion of events commemorating *Richthofen*. When the whole body of literature on *Richthofen* is considered the approach is seen to be highly selective. It includes neither textbooks (e.g. *Dickinson* 1969, *Beck* 1982, *Brogiato* 2005) nor commemorations in connection with other events (e.g. *Tiessen* 1907, 1922; *Engelmann* 1965, 1988, *Kortum* 1983, *Philippson* 1920, 1996, *Solger* 1955/56 and *Zuckermann* 1960), nor general texts on the history of geography (e.g. *Schultz* 1980 and *Eisel* 1980), nor studies on the evolution of geomorphology (e.g. *Mortensen* 1943/44 and *Schmithenner* 1956), nor general historical research (e.g. *Stoecker* 1958 and *Osterhammel* 1987). The analysis has two primary aims. Firstly, using a limited group of references, some of

the historical images concerning *Richthofen* are described and their main characteristics depicted against the background of the individual contemporary context in order to explain some considerable differences. This contextualization is based on approaches that have been developed in disciplinary historical research since the 1980s. Secondly, this introduction asks what kind of a relationship to the past is expressed in the various commemorations of *Richthofen* and in which way ideas about the discipline's past have been used to establish, legitimise or criticise specific disciplinary discourses. Some aspects of a "history of the writing of the history of geography" are brought to light by setting the various historical images into a common context. On the one hand, this may be read as proof of the fact that a discipline's past is never given but is constantly being reinterpreted in an act of appropriating history. On the other hand, this essay shows how deeply traces of memory may be engraved in disciplinary practices, exercising an influence even at a time when the disciplinary mainstream, always striving for modernity, considers them long since dumped on the scrapheap of history.

Richthofen as the Exemplary Geographer: Obituaries 1905/06

When *Ferdinand von Richthofen* suddenly died on 6 October 1905 at the age of 72, geography at German universities was still struggling to find a specific disciplinary object and methodology. With his publications after being called to Bonn in 1875 and with his manifold activities in the management of geography following his call to Berlin in 1886, *Richthofen* had of course contributed to a first consolidation of the discipline. Nonetheless, roughly thirty years after the establishment of geography at universities, the process of discipline formation was nowhere near complete. Generally recognised career paths did not exist, the self-reference of disciplinary communication was in its infancy, and the type

of research on which the originality of geography could be based was still a matter of debate. All this was the more precarious as this was a time when – very different from today – a discipline's success depended essentially on the degree to which it was able to claim and cultivate a specific disciplinary territory. Not opening-up but closure was the order of the day (*Weingart et al.* 2007).

From the 1870s onwards, the necessary preconditions in terms of research content and socio-scientific organisation had to be negotiated and recorded in a process not always free from conflict. One major instrument in this process was the obituaries for the first generation of university geographers, which appeared after 1900 in increasing numbers. Superficially and on first sight, these obituaries narrated the life of an individual. However, a deeper analysis, using the example of *Richthofen*, shows how issues were dealt with which were contented among contemporaries in the new re-structuring of the discipline.

The obituaries highlighted certain characteristics of the deceased and withheld others. They depicted career paths as straight developments and avoided issues of ruptures and defeats. They produced statements about ways of working with colleagues and students, and, using concrete examples, made vividly evident what a valid scientific finding was and by what means it was best produced. In this way, obituaries set standards, communicated rules, sketched out social roles, gave directions and attempted to strengthen the internal connectivity of the discipline while demarcating it from neighbouring sciences.

In contrast to many a discreetly critical and euphemistic wording, for instance in the obituaries for *Alfred Kirchhoff* (1838-1907) and *Friedrich Ratzel* (1844-1904), the *Richthofen* obituaries (see e.g. *Drygalski* 1905; *Lampe* 1905; *Hettner* 1906; *Sieger* 1906) stylised him as the one geographer of the 19th century who, by way of his demeanour and achievements, had shown geography its

apparently “correct” path. *Richthofen* became the model of a modern university geographer: cheerful, humorous and modest, selfless and tireless in his work, obedient and disciplined. Untouched by the disputes and polemics of the day, the model professor was to stick to his scientific convictions and reassert them, not only in German and international academia but also in politics, where he was to act as a consultant when asked for advice. He was to preserve a consistently friendly attitude towards his colleagues and promote his doctoral and postdoctoral students in whatever way possible. Above all, however, he should, like *Richthofen*, ensure that they did not remain lazy armchair geographers staying at home, but went on extensive research journeys overseas, bringing back numerous observation results which were to be processed with scientific zeal and a conscientious mastery of the material. Hasty conclusions, formation of ephemeral theories, wild speculations and quick generalisations were to be avoided. It was necessary to live with the facts and make geography an exact explicative science specialised in the analysis of the earth’s surface, using inductive observation.

One can easily see that the obituaries on *Richthofen* contain many of the essential elements of geographical thought which became fundamental for the self-conception of German geography until well into the 20th century. This is especially true for evolving concepts of career paths, to the core constituents of which extensive explorative journeys, possibly overseas, counted. Also, the example of *Richthofen* shows the orientation towards a factually-based, inductive science that strongly influenced research, even in human geography, for many decades. The consequent belief that people could use scientific observation in a direct, not theory- and practice-mediated relationship to nature, led to a persistent phobia of theory and ongoing speculation about the inclusive nature of the subject.

Undoubtedly, the first layer of collective memory, relating in its exemplary form (for the term re-

fer to *Rüsen* 1982: 547ff.) to *Richthofen*’s work, contributed significantly to the formulation of fundamental rules of behaviour, action and cognition and to their acceptance in professional practice. Present and past were still directly linked to an academia that believed in progress and that reproduced the web of norms and values of industrial modernity. Continuation as the reproduction of the time-tested and successful was therefore unproblematic. *Richthofen* appeared as its perfect embodiment: following his example meant actively working on the future role of geography.

Richthofen as the Master of the Geographical View: Appraisals of 1933

A second layer of tributes came into being on the occasion of *Richthofen*’s 100th birthday. When compared to the first layer, it can be seen that although the relationship to the past remained largely unchanged and continuation interests continued to play a dominant role (see *Drygalski* 1933; *Krebs* 1933; *Defant* 1933; *Penck* 1933), the new appraisals were written against the background of a changed perspective of the discipline. As a result, the historic concept had to undergo significant corrections, compared to the earlier versions, so as to continue to present *Richthofen* as a pioneer geographer. This was because the process of the discipline formation of geography was now complete. A comparatively wide range of competing journals existed, which promoted self-referencing in the disciplinary discourse. Career paths and associated performance requirements had been codified (largely according to the model given by *Richthofen*’s life) into a set of unwritten rules, compliance to which was carefully monitored by the ordinaries and their schools in an atmosphere of jealous competition. The inner differentiation of the subject was now in full swing. Some sub-disciplines, such as geomorphology, had begun this process of differentiation as early as the turn of the century, given their strong orientation towards the exact “natural” sciences; other fields, like econom-

ic and political geography, profited from the backdrop of an increasingly nationalistic discourse that emphasised questions of human geography. Compared to imperial times, the balance between pure “basic” science and applied research swung towards the latter. Geographers shared widely in the First World War discussions of war objectives, and this led to a new awareness that geography could not only be regarded as the study of the morphology and the conditions of the earth’s surface, but also as a field of applied research, offering advice to politicians and thereby promoting Germany’s welfare (see *Wardenga 1995*).

Admittedly geomorphology, by then the leading sub-discipline in research, was increasingly under pressure. Entangled in the very specialised debate that followed on *William Morris Davis’* cycles theory, this part of geography proved increasingly unable to provide viable answers to the problems of the time as seen from the perspective of national needs, especially in the eyes of junior scientists. In spite of the global economic crisis and inflation, the number of chairs increased and, as recruitment policies were distinctly in favour of economic geography, this resulted in a substantial shift in research priorities (see *Brogiato 2005*).

This, in turn, immediately brought the question of the allegedly threatened unity of the discipline back onto the agenda. An easy solution was apparently found in an increased emphasis on regional geography, as this sub-disciplinary field, in the eyes of contemporaries, presented itself as the guarantor of unity: its framework allowing the integration of traditional physical-geographical and new human geographical knowledge (see *Wardenga 1995*). A prerequisite for this was the gradual emergence from shortly after 1900 of a specifically geographical perspective. This perspective saw the subject of research as a “landscape” and rapidly developed into the source of an empirical practice oriented towards the perception of forms, on which was based a regional-geographical description designed as a

synthesis aiming to characterise a section of the earth’s surface in its entirety.

The promotion of human geography, emphasising both practice and application, the development of observation based on a geographical view directed towards form and synthesis, and the absolute dominance of a regional geography focusing on knowledge of the landscape were the main themes of the contemporary disciplinary discourse. After the First World War, regional geography rapidly lost its international character; nationalist tones were becoming increasingly shrill and began to characterise substantially the relationship of German geographers to the world.

The obituaries published in 1905/06 had above all highlighted *Richthofen’s* personality, his achievements in the formation of a science-oriented geography and his involvement in the international academic world. These features overshadowed his numerous functions as an academic manager, his political activities and his insistence on the practical utilisation of research findings. Nobody but *Hettner* had tried to portray *Richthofen* as the groundbreaking advocate of regional or human geography. Neither the development of a specific geographical perspective, directed towards form and synthesis and landscape, nor the question of a national mission of geographical research were seen as being issues. This now changed fundamentally.

Richthofen now appeared as the antecessor who, on the basis of his own experience and his own observation had supposedly mastered the art of “the overall view” and “sought to capture in a few strokes (...) land and life as an organic unity and to acknowledge the interrelationships between nature and mankind” (*Krebs 1933: 6f.*). He was presented as a geographer who, wherever he was, could “see, think and classify something new and unfamiliar” and who, in this way, was able to condense “the multitude of phenomena in nature and in the lives of the peoples” “to the

image of the countries" (*Drygalski* 1933: 90). On his travels to China, but also afterwards, he had "spared no effort to collect ethnological material and to understand its political-geographical and economic impact" (*Krebs* 1933: 7). In this way, he had incorporated human geography "in a large firmly structured system" (*Penck* 1933: 16) and fostered this sub-discipline "through the immediacy of the concrete example" (*Krebs* 1933: 6). His research was "always linked to questions of practice" (*Krebs* 1933: 9), which is why he always felt it to be "a mismatch" that "German geography was scientifically at the forefront of nations, however, with regard to the practical application of knowledge, the British and French were ahead". Above all, however, he had clearly seen that geography existed "not just for its own sake", but ought to "serve and promote (...) the nation" (*Krebs* 1933: 9).

With a serious shift in emphasis, the tributes had again stylised *Ferdinand von Richthofen* into a model geographer, exemplary for contemporaries. The empirical scientist had become the master of the synthetic regional-geographical view of the landscape; the professor who had mainly been interested in the formation of general geography had been transformed into a regional geographer par excellence; the scholar largely interested in the progress of basic research was now regarded as the epitome of an academic manager forever noting the importance of applied use, and the geomorphologist, working in the tradition of geology, now appeared as a systematic promoter of human geography.

This second layer of recollection referring to *Richthofen* worked mainly through patterns of traditional storytelling (see *Rüsen* 1982: 545ff.). All authors used the link back to the past in order to legitimise contemporary research horizons and to invest them with the appearance of long-life and respectability. Such a direct amalgamation of past and present may, on the one hand, speak positively of the self-awareness of a discipline now

consolidated in the paradigm of the landscape. On the other hand, the absence of efforts towards contextualisation, which characterises these texts to a large extent, shows a blatant lack of historical sense. This forms a relationship to the history of the discipline whereby the present of the discipline became the sole yardstick for the appropriation of the past. The acknowledgement of anything different or strange in this past, the uncovering of other possible options and paths thus became a blind spot.

Richthofen as Member of a Universal Community of Scientists: Tributes 1979

The third layer of tributes was produced at the 100th anniversary of the beginning of *Richthofen's* lectures at the University of Bonn, when the Bonn Geography Department held a commemorative colloquium. The event itself and the tributes written for it have to be understood against the background of the replacement of the landscape paradigm. From the late 1950s and early 1960s there were increasing signs that the orientation of German geography towards the landscape paradigm corresponded neither to the questions nor to the methods of established contemporary research. However, initial attempts at a transformation failed in the face of powerful gatekeepers (see *Wardenga* 2001). The pressure for reform that had gradually been building up exploded at the German Geographers' Meeting in Kiel in 1969 and, in the wake of the student movement and its general criticism of society and the organisation of science, led within a few years to an abrupt rupture of young geographers with the traditional perspectives of the discipline. The newly accompanying historiography of the discipline drew a harsh picture of a "discipline, void of its own substance, torn and centrifugal in a constitutional sense" (*Hard* 1979, p. 14) which had compensated for the absence of intellectual standards and the lack of a scientific approach by a zealous assimilation to a conservative political-

philosophical discourse in the service of teacher training (see *Schultz* 1980).

In the midst of all the attempts to get rid of and overwrite ideas of continuity – now seen as a myth –, all events oriented towards an appreciation of deceased geographers risked being suspected of attempting to rescue the die-hards. This included the Memorial Colloquium in Bonn. In his introduction, the keynote speaker, *Wolfgang Meckelein*, presented a rather tenuous connection to *Richthofen* in a few barren words and then continued to give a lecture full of progress-oriented euphoria on “The dry areas of the earth. Reserve space for a growing world population?” (*Meckelein* 1983). This was very much in the spirit of the innovatory modernisation theory that was then dominating the disciplinary discourse.

The option of ignoring the past as chosen by *Meckelein* did not seem possible for *Wilhelm Lauer*, the organiser of the event (*Lauer* 1983). He started with a brief biographical sketch of *Richthofen*, and also ended with reference to *Richthofen*. However, he avoided conflict with the past by dedicating large parts of his speech to the development of the Bonn University Department of Geography from 1875 to 1975. As director of the department this was his legitimate right; others had used the events held on the occasion of *Richthofen*'s 100th birthday to underline the achievements accomplished, for example, by the Geographical Society of Berlin, the Department of Geography at the Berlin University, or the Museum of Oceanography (see *Drygalski* 1933; *Krebs* 1933; *Defant* 1933; *Penck* 1933). Whereas in these texts a linear development was presented, together with an interpretation of the contents, *Lauer* presented an overview filled with the names and numbers of the department's history, making obvious its close relationship to an enumerating chronology.

On the one hand this can be understood as a reminder of the quantitative orientation of geography at that time. On the other hand by not follow-

ing old patterns of traditional narrative *Lauer* conformed to the already well-established practice of breaking away from the traditional perspective of the subject. If continuity was required, which was explicitly *Lauer*'s interest, the references had to be changed. Thus, *Lauer* widened the frame of the narrative and, in his closing statement, referring to *Richthofen*, he conjured up an image of science – with geography as one part of it – being in principle withdrawn from change. Careful application of the keywords determining the disciplinary discourse of the time (e.g. “new cognitions”, “methodological concepts”, “principles”, “present-day problems”) allowed the subject to appear both as modernised and as part of a permanent superimposed whole. This shift of emphasis also identified the historical classification of *Richthofen*. He was no longer presented simply as a geographer (and therefore as a representative of a time-worn tradition), but rather as a member of a scientific community that followed immutable universal norms, thus corresponding to the ideal of the young generation of geographers of the time.

Richthofen Mirrored from the Sources: Appreciations 1983

For many academic geographers of the 1980s the only acceptable way of dealing with the subject's history was to use critical narrative to abolish the past or remove it to a bearable distance. Roots were to be replaced with the future, the allegedly iron tradition challenged, ideas of continuity broken down, and contradictory experiences recalled (e.g. *Rössler* 1988; *Heske* 1988; *Sandner* 1988; *Kost* 1988; *Heinrich* 1991; *Fahlbusch* 1994). There was now a clear differentiation between past and present, and attempts to construct continuity were strongly combated.

This also had an effect on the way in which *Richthofen* was remembered on the occasion of his 150th birthday in a special issue of the journal “DIE ERDE”, published in 1983. Through the break with tradition an awareness of difference had aris-

en. It was now possible to deal with *Richthofen* without being exposed to the compulsion of the *Richthofen* model and of the expectations of continuity connected with him. The memorial could take an indirect form, for instance by focusing on China and on new research in geomorphology, as the *Richthofen* issue did.

This also opened up possibilities for tributes in the more narrow sense of the word, as the field was now open for contextualisation. *Richthofen* could be represented as a contemporary of the 19th century. Accordingly, all articles referring to *Richthofen* showed a change in the handling of disciplinary history. First of all they gave an overview of *Richthofen's* life, his work and the divergent views of his role in the development of geography, going back to the original sources of research and using them to support the work (*Stäblein* 1983; *Freitag* 1983). Secondly, they quoted intensively from original sources thus providing the reader with direct access to *Richthofen* himself (*Schinz* 1983; *Freitag* 1983). Thirdly, *Richthofen's* research trips to China and the resulting "Atlas of China" were ordered into the larger context of an exploration of Asia in the 19th century which was also politically motivated, and *Richthofen's* achievements were evaluated against the background of his time and of subsequent research in China and cartographic representations related to China (*Freitag* 1983). Fourthly, a firmly argued reassessment of *Richthofen's* role in geomorphology was conducted and the tradition of this sub-discipline was interpreted at a meta-level as being the result of a process of tradition itself (*Leser* 1983).

Thus some 80 years after his death, in a work of historiography produced for a specific event, for the first time *Richthofen* no longer appeared as a hero and the model and example for current and future research. Rather the Berlin publication developed an image reconstructed from the sources which presented him as a man of his time. He was depicted as a research traveler

and geographer, standing on the shoulders of his predecessors and giving impulses to his successors. The discrepancies in the assessment of his person and his work were pointed out, and, using the example of geomorphology, it was shown how selectively his work had been read and, as a result, how incorrect many judgments about his approach were. The fourth layer of commemoration with reference to *Richthofen* thus introduced a dynamic element not only with regard to the image of *Richthofen*, but also with regard to interpretation of the disciplinary evolution connected with this image. In doing so, it applied the genetic form of narration (for the term see *Rüsen* 1982: 555ff.). Becoming different and staying the same were now two sides of the same coin; and change had become both the condition and the mode of continuation.

Richthofen Today

The following contributions tie in with and build upon this perspective. *Ute Wardenga* gives an overview of *Richthofen's* life which now no longer appears as a straightforward and consistent sequence of seemingly inevitable events, but as a scientific career in which ruptures, defeats and unfinished projects also play a role. In contrast to the *Richthofen* model she shows a university professor who was not always readily accessible to his students and who owed his success in forming a large school neither to a didactic talent nor to the intensive training of his students in field-work. She describes him as an observer of China, deeply imbued by a Prussian-German mentality, whose travels were by no means only dedicated to value-free research but depended to a large extent on the particular interests of his financiers. In addition, in her opinion *Richthofen* was not the model of an exemplary regional geographer. Although in his "China" volumes he developed some principles of geographical regionalisation which later became standard, this work did not establish itself as the archetype of a regional geo-

graphical study. In contrast, she ascribes *Richthofen's* importance especially to his "Handbook for Field Observation". This work considerably influenced the practice of observation and explanation in German geomorphology, becoming a major source of scientific identity for a young generation of geographers seeking orientation.

Hans-Dietrich Schultz deals with *Richthofen's* methodological thinking and the question of how far *Richthofen* follows *Ritter*. In criticism of older historical constructions he shows that the institutionalisation of the subject at universities was essentially for the purpose of the education of teachers who – owing to increasing global interdependence – needed to be able to communicate knowledge about other countries and continents. Contemporary discussions about which path the discipline of geography should take are used as a background against which to discuss various aspects of *Richthofen's* approach. *Schultz* describes the various phases of the development of *Richthofen's* concept, reveals contradictions, and explains *Richthofen's* attempts to formulate clear statements concerning the problem of selecting material and the problem of the relationship between humans and nature. *Schultz* agrees with *Wardenga* that *Richthofen* is not a pioneer of regional geography, and is thus no advocate of the variant of geography proposed by *Ritter*. Rather, he interprets *Richthofen* following *Humboldt*, as a representative of a complex of geosciences oriented towards the natural sciences, in which there was no place for human geography as we know it today.

Chin-Ni Hsieh deals with the reception of the results of Western geoscientific research in the early phase of China's modernisation. She highlights the close relationship between politics, economics and research, and contrasts this with Chinese practice which is shaped by a Confucian view of the world. For instance, Chinese practice early used geo-techniques for administration but did

not develop Western-style cartography until the beginning of the 20th century, and was not inclined to adopt and advance this form of knowledge. She describes *Richthofen* as a geoscientist who, from the beginning of his career, worked closely with the official German authorities. He was at least partially aware of German colonial plans and he repeatedly used his expert knowledge in an attempt to support the colonial commitment of the German Empire in China. *Hsieh* also reveals the shaky foundations of *Richthofen's* consulting work: *Richthofen* could not speak Chinese and thus remained essentially unacquainted with Chinese culture as conveyed by language, for which he was heavily criticised by German sinologists. Finally, the reception of *Richthofen's* research in China is outlined. While at the beginning of the 20th century *Richthofen* was criticised as being the precursor of imperialism, judgments changed with the increasing modernisation of the country, which profited from *Richthofen's* geological survey.

Using the example of Chinese Central Asia *Hermann Kreutzmann* describes requirements and goals of international explorers in the 19th and 20th century. *Richthofen's* research, his preeminent interest in Central Asia and the term "silk road", which was coined by him, is thus embedded into the larger context of an earlier discourse. This discourse stylised Central Asia as an area of intermediation between West and East, essentially linked by trade, and made it the object of both Western and Eastern imperial desire. *Kreutzmann* shows how, at the time when *Richthofen* developed the term "silk road", Central Asia and the various routes of the silk road were the object of intense international scientific research and of the Great Game fuelled by Russia and Britain. Even though the height of the Great Game had passed by the beginning of the 20th century, Central Asia remained an object of research often closely linked to imperialist interests, and thus became one of the best-mapped areas, at least in comparison with neighbouring regions.

It can thus be seen that, compared with the fourth layer of appreciations, the image of *Richthofen* has changed again. He is shown as a man who is deeply embedded in the discourses of his time, within which he acted and communicated. He is characterised as a scientist not free from contradictions, as a teacher who in many respects did not correspond to the ideal later associated with him, and as an academic whose ideas about the operation and the function of geography only partially prevailed.

Although *Richthofen* still appears as by far the most influential and powerful German geographer of the 19th century, the geography which he envisaged was only partly realised in a significantly different re-interpretation. If *Richthofen's* plans had become reality, the discipline could have understood itself as part of a complex of geosciences strongly oriented towards the natural sciences and highly technology-based. That this did not materialise is largely due to the type of teacher-training demanded by the ministries. The focus was not on a world where nature was technically controlled, but on a world where meaning was created by the interpretation of nature. This was the world of *Länderkunde* (regional geography). It reproduced, legitimised and stabilised national systems of meaning with the help of spatial descriptions. *Richthofen* made important contributions in this sphere, but in the end the formation of the concepts and contents of *Länderkunde* was undertaken by the following generation.

Today *Richthofen's* work and impact are no longer seen from the narrow perspective of one discipline, but are interpreted against the background of universal history and comprehensive international relations: this can be seen as the perspective of a geography pursued in the era of globalisation. Future generations may detect the unjustified emphases, misinterpretations and blind spots inherent in this perspective – in the year 2033, *Richthofen's* 200th birthday will be celebrated.

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Ute Wardenga (Leipzig)

• *Ferdinand von Richthofen – History of Geography – Germany*

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Ferdinand von Richthofen and the Development of German Geography

*Ferdinand von Richthofen
und die Entwicklung der deutschsprachigen Geographie*

with 7 Figures

Ferdinand von Richthofen is considered to be one of the most outstanding geographers of the nineteenth century. He set standards for research in China, he introduced new methods of investigation, he founded an influential school of geography and successfully organised academic events of note, and he acted as an advisor in German foreign affairs. The following discussion takes a critical look at accounts of *Richthofen's* role in the history of the discipline and considers the various stages of his career as geographical researcher and professor. There are three focuses of analysis. The first is a description of *Richthofen's* travels in China between 1868 and 1872, which he conducted under contract to the Bank of California. Initially his research had little to do with value-free geographical investigation but was dedicated to the geological survey of the Chinese coal reserves. It was once he gained a new backer, the Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai, that *Richthofen* began to consider general geographical issues, although his observations clearly revealed the influence of Prussian-German mentality and European culture. The second focus of analysis is *Richthofen's* publication "China". It is argued that, contrary to claims of *Richthofen's* followers, this work does not provide an exemplary model for later academic research. In "China" *Richthofen* did indeed develop a few important ground-rules for regional geography that continued to be influential far into the twentieth century; however his major contributions to the discipline stem from his second major work. This was the "*Führer für Forschungsreisende*", a discussion of which provides the third focus of analysis. It is demonstrated that in this work *Richthofen* decidedly shaped German geomorphological processes of observation and analysis and established geomorphological research practices that differed notably from the American school of *William Morris Davis*.

Summary: Ferdinand von Richthofen and the Development of German Geography

Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) must be regarded as one of the most celebrated geographers of the German-speaking world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Few academics have been honoured with as many obituaries, tributes and short biographies. Indeed, *Richthofen* is commonly seen, at least in the German academic world, as the

founder of a tradition of regional geography based on inductive scientific research. *Ferdinand von Richthofen* was born on 5th May 1833 in Carlsruhe (Upper Silesia). In 1850 he went to Breslau where he began to study sciences, concentrating particularly on geology. He later moved to Berlin, where in February 1856 he completed his doctorate, which investigated the volcanic rock melaphyre. From 1856 to 1860 he was employed at the Imperial Geological Institute in Vienna, where he was involved in geolog-

ical surveys of Tirol, Vorarlberg, Moravia, Hungary and Transylvania. From 1860 to 1862 he accompanied a Prussian legation to Eastern Asia and through explorative excursions became familiar with Sri Lanka, parts of Japan, China, Thailand, the Philippines, Celebes and Java. When the rest of the Prussian legation returned home, he remained abroad with the intention of conducting research in the Tien Shan mountains. Political unrest hindered his plans and *Richthofen* travelled to the USA. Here he was unable to find financial backing for his research and so found himself trying his hand at prospecting for precious metals in California and the neighbouring states. In 1868 his growing reputation led to the Bank of California contracting him to investigate Chinese coal reserves and from 1868 he thus focused his travels on north-east and south-east China. Clearly *Richthofen's* early work in China was not dedicated to pure geographical research, but was decidedly influenced by the interests of his financial backers. After 1870, when the Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai began to finance his stay, issues of regional geography began to loom larger in his research. However, his view of the country and people was clearly coloured by his European and Prussian-German mentality and culture. After his return in 1872 *Richthofen* found it difficult to market his research. Despite the financial backing of the Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai, he was unable to find a British publisher. The eventual publication of the account of his travels became possible only with finance from the German emperor and several Prussian ministries. Indeed, the publication was incomplete at the time of *Richthofen's* death with only three volumes of text and one atlas being published by this time. Overall, the work was an important milestone for geography, which was gradually beginning to find its place as a spatial science. *Richthofen* developed basic principles for regional geography that remained relevant for the subject until far into the twentieth century. However, *Richthofen's* itinerary-oriented, historically slanted and – particularly in terms of the geology – very detailed text quickly dated as from the 1890s a somewhat different canon of regional geographical documentation became dominant. *Richthofen's* second major publication, based largely on older work, was the “*Führer für Forschungsreisende*” published in 1886. A mixture of scientific text and practical guide, it

quickly became essential reading for student geographers. It contained not only basic knowledge, but also encoded patterns of observation and interpretation that decidedly influenced the development of both the methodology and content of geomorphology in the German-speaking world. The widespread use of this publication created a geographic-geomorphological research tradition that was based on inductive observation. It is thus hardly surprising that the severest criticism of *William Morris Davis's* cyclic theories was heard from members of the *Richthofen* school. *Richthofen* himself never strived to create a great academic school of thought. Unlike *Friedrich Ratzel*, his successor to the Leipzig chair, *Richthofen* did not produce numerous articles and books for the academic market. And unlike *Albrecht Penck*, his successor to the Berlin chair, he was not a gripping lecturer or excursion leader: In later life he actually declined to undertake field trips with his students. Our picture of *Richthofen* therefore largely reflects the views of his students who, in contrast to other geographical networks, often tried to enhance their own reputation by references to their teacher.

Zusammenfassung: Ferdinand von Richthofen und die Entwicklung der deutschsprachigen Geographie

Kaum einer der deutschsprachigen Hochschulgeographen des ausgehenden 19. und beginnenden 20. Jahrhunderts ist mit einer so dichten Reihenfolge von Nachrufen, Würdigungen und Kurzbiographien geehrt worden wie *Ferdinand von Richthofen* (1833–1905). Im kollektiven Gedächtnis, zumal der deutschen Hochschulgeographie, gilt er bis heute als das Vorbild eines Hochschullehrers und als eigentlicher Gründervater einer auf induktiver naturwissenschaftlicher Forschung basierten, länderkundlich ausgerichteten Geographie. *Ferdinand von Richthofen* wurde am 5. Mai 1833 in Karlsruhe (Oberschlesien) geboren und studierte seit 1850 Naturwissenschaften, insbesondere Geologie, zunächst in Breslau und dann in Berlin, wo er im Februar 1856 mit einer Arbeit über das vulkanische Gestein Melaphyr promoviert wurde. Von 1856 bis 1860 war er in der Geologischen Reichsanstalt in Wien im Rahmen der geologischen Landesaufnahme von Tirol, Vorarl-

berg, Mähren, Ungarn und Siebenbürgen tätig. In den Jahren 1860-62 begleitete er als Wissenschaftler eine preußische Gesandtschaft nach Ostasien, lernte Sri Lanka, Teile von Japan, China und Thailand, die Philippinen, Celebes und Java auf explorativen Exkursionen kennen. Nach Abschluss des preußischen Unternehmens blieb er in Übersee. Der zunächst ins Auge gefasste Plan, das Tien-Shan-Gebirge zu erforschen, konnte aufgrund von politischen Unruhen nicht durchgeführt werden. *Richthofen* ging deshalb in die USA, doch es gelang ihm nicht, Geld für weitere Forschungen aufzutreiben, so dass er gezwungen war, sich in den Jahren 1862-1868 mit wechselndem Glück in der Edelmetallprospektion Kaliforniens und den östlich angrenzenden US-Bundesstaaten durchzuschlagen. Durch seine geologischen und praktischen ressourcenkundlichen Expertisen bekannt geworden, erhielt er 1868 von der Bank of California den Auftrag, chinesische Kohlelagerstätten zu untersuchen. Seit September 1868 bereiste er daher vor allem die nordöstlichen und südöstlichen Teile Chinas und fand in der Handelskammer von Shanghai eine weitere Geldgeberin, die seinen Aufenthalt seit 1870 finanzierte. *Richthofens* Reisen in China waren deshalb nicht von Beginn an genuin geographischer Forschung gewidmet, sondern hingen in ihrer Ausrichtung stark von den Interessen des jeweiligen Geldgebers ab. Erst seit 1870 gewannen landeskundliche Fragestellungen zunehmend an Bedeutung; im Positiven wie im Negativen blieb jedoch die europäische, speziell die preußisch-deutsche Mentalität und Kultur die Folie, vor deren Hintergrund er seine Beobachtungen durchführte, einordnete sowie Land und Leute bewertete. Nach seiner Rückkehr 1872 tat sich *Richthofen* zunächst schwer, die Ergebnisse seiner Reisen zu vermarkten. Obwohl mit Finanzmitteln der Handelskammer in Shanghai versehen, fand er keinen Verlag in Großbritannien, der das geplante landeskundliche Werk veröffentlichen wollte. Erst erhebliche Zuschüsse seitens des deutschen Kaisers und mehrerer preußischer Ministerien erlaubte eine umfassende, durch zwei Atlasbände ergänzte Publikation, von der allerdings nur ein Teil (drei Textbände und ein Atlasband) zu *Richthofens* Lebenszeit fertig gestellt werden konnten. Insgesamt war das Werk zwar ein wichtiger Meilenstein in Richtung

auf eine sich zunehmend als Raumwissenschaft verstehende Geographie. Das betrifft insbesondere die Grundlagen der Regionalisierung, für die *Richthofen* bis weit ins 20. Jahrhundert hinein gültige Prinzipien entwickelte. Allerdings entsprachen die teilweise stark am Itinerar orientierten, historisch ausgerichteten und zumal in den geologischen Einzelheiten sehr detaillierten Textbände schon wenige Jahre nach ihrer Publikation nicht mehr dem sich seit den 1890er Jahren herausbildenden Kanon einer als vorbildlich geltenden regionalgeographischen Darstellung. Eine umfassende Wirkung entwickelte dagegen *Richthofens* zweites Hauptwerk, der im Kern auf älteren Ausarbeitungen beruhende, 1886 publizierte „Führer für Forschungsreisende“. Als eine Mischung von wissenschaftlichem Lehrbuch und praktischem Arbeitsbuch wurde das Werk schon bald zum unverzichtbaren Handbuch für die Ausbildung der nachwachsenden Generationen von Geographen. Denn es vermittelte nicht nur Basiswissen, sondern konfigurierte vor allem Beobachtungs- und Wahrnehmungsmuster, die für die weitere inhaltliche und methodische Ausformung der Geomorphologie im deutschsprachigen Bereich prägend wurden. Der Gebrauch dieses Werks schuf eine gemeinsame Plattform für eine auf induktiver Beobachtung beruhende Identität geographisch-geomorphologischer Forschung. Es ist daher nicht verwunderlich, dass aus *Richthofens* Schülerkreis die härtesten Kritiker an *William Morris Davis*' Zyklentheorie hervorgegangen sind. *Richthofen* selbst hat die Bildung einer großen wissenschaftlichen Schule nicht aktiv angestrebt. Im Unterschied zu seinem Nachfolger auf dem Leipziger Lehrstuhl, *Friedrich Ratzel*, war er nicht mit einer dichten Folge von Aufsätzen und Büchern auf dem akademischen Markt präsent, und im Unterschied zu seinem Nachfolger auf dem Berliner Lehrstuhl, *Albrecht Penck*, war er weder ein mitreißender Redner noch ein genialer Exkursionsdiktator, ja lehnte in späteren Zeiten überhaupt gemeinsame Geländebegehungen mit seinen Doktoranden ab. Unser Bild von *Richthofens* Bedeutung ist daher nicht zuletzt das Resultat einer Geschichtsschreibung seiner Schüler, die, oft in deutlicher Differenz zu anderen Geographennetzwerken, aus der Erinnerung an ihren Lehrer eigene Reputationsvorteile zu erlangen suchten.

Resumé: Ferdinand von Richthofen et le développement de la géographie germanophone

Il n'y a guère de géographes d'université germanophones de la fin du 19^{ème} et du début du 20^{ème} siècle ayant été honorés d'une telle multitude d'éloges, de reconnaissance et de biographies succinctes que ne l'a été *Ferdinand von Richthofen* (1833-1905). La mémoire collective plus particulièrement de la géographie universitaire le désigne jusqu'à ce jour comme modèle d'un professeur d'université et véritable fondateur de la géographie basée sur la recherche inductive relative aux sciences physiques et naturelles et orientée vers la géographie régionale. *Ferdinand von Richthofen* naquit le 5 mai 1833 à Carlsruhe (Haute Silésie). Depuis 1850, il étudia les sciences naturelles, plus particulièrement la géologie, d'abord à Breslau, puis à Berlin, où il soutint en février 1856 sa thèse sur le mélaphyre, roche volcanique. De 1856 à 1860 il contribua aux relevés géologiques du Tyrol, du Vorarlberg, de la Moravie, de la Hongrie et de la Transylvanie auprès de l'Agence Géologique d'Autriche à Vienne. De 1860 à 1862, il accompagna en tant que scientifique une délégation prussienne en Asie orientale, ce qui lui permit d'effectuer des excursions d'exploration dans le Sri Lanka, des parties du Japon, de la Chine et de la Thaïlande, les Philippines, Célèbes et Java. Au terme de cette entreprise prussienne il resta outre-mer. En raison d'agitations politiques, il dû abandonner son projet d'étudier les montagnes Tien Shan. *Richthofen* partit donc aux Etats-Unis, mais ne réussissant pas à acquérir les fonds nécessaires à de nouvelles études, il dû se résigner, de 1862 à 1868 et avec plus ou moins de succès, à s'employer à la prospection de métaux précieux en Californie et dans les états confédérés limitrophes. Ses expertises géologiques et d'exploration appliquée des gisements lui ayant conféré une bonne réputation, la Banque de Californie lui confia une mission d'exploration des gisements de houille de Chine. A partir de septembre 1868, il parcouru donc surtout le nord-est et le sud-est de la Chine et trouva un nouveau bailleur de fonds en la chambre de commerce de Shanghai, qui finança son séjour à partir de 1870. De ce fait, les voyages de *Richthofen* en Chine ne furent pas d'emblée consacrés à la véritable recherche géographique, mais dépendirent avant tout des intérêts de ses sponsors. C'est seulement à partir de 1870 que les questions relatives à la géographie régionale et aux civilisations gagnèrent une importance croissante. Or, au sens positif aussi bien que négatif, *Richthofen* resta imprégné des cultures et mentalités européenne et plus particulièrement prussienne, lesquelles lui servirent de toile de fond de ses observations, de leur classification et des jugements qu'il porta sur le pays et ses habitants. Après son retour en 1872, *Richthofen* eut d'abord du mal à commercialiser les résultats de ses voyages. Bien que doté de moyens de la chambre de commerce de Shanghai, il ne trouva pas d'éditeur en Grande Bretagne disposé à publier son projet d'ouvrage de géographie régionale. En fin de comp-

te, des subsides considérables provenant de l'empereur allemand et de plusieurs ministères prussiens permirent une publication exhaustive complétée par un atlas en deux volumes, dont une partie seulement (trois volumes de textes et un volume d'atlas) ne fut achevée du vivant de *Richthofen*. Globalement, cet ouvrage marqua certes un tournant au profit d'une géographie s'orientant progressivement vers les sciences spatiales, ceci s'appliquant particulièrement aux fondements de la régionalisation, pour laquelle *Richthofen* développa des principes qui sont toujours restés valables pendant une bonne partie du 20^{ème} siècle. Cependant, les volumes en texte, en partie fortement axés sur les itinéraires et la démarche historique et abondant de détails géologiques, ne correspondaient déjà plus, quelques années seulement après leur parution, aux concepts exemplaires de géographie régionale apparus à partir des années 1890. Le deuxième ouvrage principal de *Richthofen* a obtenu, quant à lui, une plus vaste répercussion. Il s'agissait du « Guide pour les voyageurs-explorateurs », publié en 1886, mais basé principalement sur des élaborations plus anciennes. Joignant le traité scientifique au livre d'exercices pratiques, cet ouvrage devint bientôt un manuel indispensable à la formation d'une succession de générations de géographes, car il ne se limitait pas à transmettre des connaissances de base, mais aidait à configurer des trames d'observation et de perception qui ont par la suite marqué l'évolution thématique et méthodologique de la géomorphologie dans l'espace germanophone. L'usage de cet ouvrage a créé une plateforme commune formant l'identité de la recherche géographique à dominante géomorphologique basée sur l'observation inductive. On ne s'étonnera pas dès lors que les critiques les plus virulents de la théorie des cycles de *William Morris Davis* soient issus du cercle des disciples de *Richthofen*. *Richthofen* lui-même n'a pas aspiré de manière active à la création d'une école scientifique. Contrairement à son successeur sur la chaire de géographie de Leipzig, *Friedrich Ratzel*, il n'affichait pas de présence régulière sur le marché académique par une succession dense d'articles et d'ouvrages, et contrairement à son successeur sur la chaire de géographie de Berlin, *Albrecht Penck*, il n'était ni un orateur enthousiasmant ni un didacticien de génie en ce qui concernait les excursions. Il finit même par refuser d'effectuer des reconnaissances de terrain communes avec ses thésards. Notre image de l'importance de *Richthofen* relève donc de l'historiographie de ses disciples qui cherchaient à gagner de la réputation grâce à la mémoire de leur professeur, ce qui contraste fortement avec d'autres réseaux de géographes.

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Der vollständige Artikel ist zu beziehen bei
<http://www.gfeshop.de>

- *History of geography – Definition of geography – Germany – Ferdinand von Richthofen*

Hans-Dietrich Schultz (Berlin)

Ferdinand von Richthofen: The True Founder of Modern Geography?

Ferdinand von Richthofen: der eigentliche Begründer der modernen Geographie?

With 5 Original Texts

Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and *Carl Ritter* (1779-1859) are generally regarded as the founders of modern geography. *Ferdinand von Richthofen* (1833-1905), however, was seen by his students as having a deciding role in re-shaping the subject. He attended some of *Ritter's* lectures, but remained unimpressed by them and tended to follow *von Humboldt*, despite never having met him. *Richthofen* started his career as a geologist in the Austrian and Prussian civil service. He travelled extensively in North America and Asia. Especially his field work in China covered far more than just the geological aspects of the country. This earned him a chair in geography at Bonn University in 1875. He was called to Leipzig in 1883 and then to Berlin in 1886, where he founded the Geography Department of Berlin's Friedrich Wilhelm University and staged the Geographical World Conference in 1899. Geography at this time was just beginning to be established as an academic discipline and lacked a clear profile. What was a geographer and what did geographers do? How did geography differ from geology and other neighbouring disciplines? *Ferdinand von Richthofen* joined in this debate with other pioneer professors and his contributions were well regarded and widely discussed.

Summary: Ferdinand von Richthofen: The True Founder of Modern Geography?

When geography was established as a discipline in German universities after 1870, a heavy debate broke out with regard to the object and the mission of the discipline. *Ferdinand von Richthofen* suggested the earth's surface as object, including hydro-, bio- and atmosphere. All elements and phenomena in causal interaction with the earth's surface, and only these, should be studied by the geographer. Even if

von Richthofen did emphasize that *Ritter's* historical approach and *von Humboldt's* scientific method were to be combined and that *Ritter's* concept was even the jewel in the crown (i.e. the cherry of the icing) of geography, as a matter of fact, he had little esteem for *Ritter's* concept and, in private, referred to the latter's historical approach as a cul-de-sac for the discipline. If *von Richthofen's* concept had been realized, geography would have established itself unequivocally as a natural science. This did not happen because, apart from other factors, political

leaders were unwilling to dispense with the subject's contribution to political education. Thus, *von Richthofen's* dream of a geosciences faculty remained unfulfilled. Today, intersections between the science and the arts aspects of geography are sought again. A look into the ancient controversies might be of help and might protect from illusions.

Zusammenfassung: Ferdinand von Richthofen: der eigentliche Begründer der modernen Geographie?

Als die Geographie nach 1870 an den deutschen Universitäten etabliert wurde, entbrannte eine heftige Diskussion um den Gegenstand und die Aufgaben des Faches. *Ferdinand von Richthofen* schlug die Erdoberfläche vor, inklusive Hydro-, Bio- und Atmosphäre. Alle Dinge und Erscheinungen, die in ursächlichem Zusammenhang mit ihr stehen, und nur diese, sollten vom Geographen erforscht werden. Zwar betonte *von Richthofen*, dass *Ritters* historische Richtung und *von Humboldts* naturwissenschaftliche Richtung miteinander verbunden werden müssten, *Ritters* sogar die Krönung der Geographie sei. Tatsächlich konnte er aber mit *Ritters* Verständnis von Geographie wenig anfangen und bezeichnete dessen historische Richtung außerhalb der Öffentlichkeit als Sackgasse. Wäre *von Richthofens* Konzept realisiert worden, so hätte sich die Geographie eindeutig als Naturwissenschaft etabliert. Dass es nicht dazu kam, ist u. a. der Politik zu verdanken, die nicht auf den Beitrag des Faches zur politischen Bildung verzichten wollte. So blieb *von Richthofens* Traum von einer geowissenschaftlichen Fakultät unerfüllt. Heute wird erneut nach Schnittmengen zwischen den naturwissenschaftlichen und humanwissenschaftlichen Teilen der Geographie gesucht. Ein Blick auf die alten Kontroversen könnte dabei von Nutzen sein und vor Illusionen schützen.

Resumé: Ferdinand von Richthofen: Le vrai fondateur de la géographie moderne?

Lorsque la géographie fut établie dans les universités allemandes après 1870, une discussion vive éclata à ce sujet et quant aux tâches de cette discipline. *Ferdinand von Richthofen* proposa la surface de la terre, y compris l'hydrosphère, la biosphère et l'atmosphère. Tous les objets et tous les phénomènes qui sont en causalité avec la surface de la terre, et seulement ceux-ci, devaient être étudiés par le géographe. *von Richthofen* souligna certes qu'il faut relier la conception ritterienne, imprégnée par l'histoire et la conception humboldtienne des sciences naturelles, et il qualifia même les idées de *Ritter* d'apothéose de la géographie. Mais en réalité, *von Richthofen* ne sut quoi faire de la conception ritterienne de la géographie et en privé il désigna l'engagement historique d'impasse. Si la conception de *von Richthofen* avait été un jour réalisée, la géographie allemande se serait établie nettement en tant que science naturelle. Mais il n'en fut pas ainsi, d'ailleurs grâce à la politique, qui ne voulait pas renoncer à l'apport de la géographie pour la formation civique des citoyens. C'est ainsi que le rêve de *von Richthofen* d'une faculté des sciences de la terre ne put être réalisé. Aujourd'hui on cherche de nouveau l'intersection de la partie des sciences naturelles et la partie des sciences humaines de la géographie. Un regard sur les anciennes controverses pourrait être utile et protéger des illusions.

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- *Ferdinand von Richthofen – History of Geography – Germany*

Chin-Ni Hsieh (Freiburg)

**The Reception of Western Geoscience in China
during the Age of Early Modernisation –
Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905): a Case Study**

*Die Rezeption der westlichen Geowissenschaften in China während der frühen
Modernisierungsphase – Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905): eine Fallstudie*

The purpose of this short essay, derived from part of my research entitled 'The Geographer *Ferdinand von Richthofen* and China', is to review the reaction and outcome of the dissemination of Western geosciences in China at the end of the nineteenth century. Since *Ferdinand von Richthofen* made a name for himself in the German Empire by publishing research undertaken by him in China, it seems appropriate to look at the role *Richthofen* was able to play in the German Empire during the age of imperialism, when various colonial powers were all scrambling for the big market of China. I would like to examine how *Richthofen*, who was considered by many as the embodiment of Western imperialism, was perceived in the circle of early modern Chinese intellectuals at a time when Western science was rapidly on the ascent in China and seriously threatened to undermine the position of traditional Chinese education. This study should help us reassess both the ideology and the emotion of the kind of nationalism in force in China since the late Qing dynasty and how it affected the way Chinese intellectuals went about judging the impact of Western influences then. Well after one century has passed, today's China is freed from the threat of colonial encroachment and has achieved essential progress in science. From our perspective, it is now time to go back to the past and reassess the China study undertaken by *Richthofen* the geographer and his influence on German imperial policy and the development of Chinese modern sciences.

Summary: The Reception of Western Geoscience in China during the Age of Early Modernisation – Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905): a Case Study

Traditional Chinese geoscientific research and modern Western geoscience have highly different development paths. There have been some important geoscientific discoveries in the history of

Chinese science; these discoveries, however, did not enter the established system of social knowledge and often fell into oblivion again. In the state administration the ideal of Confucian education prevailed and civil-servants-to-be had to comply with this in the entrance examination. Geoscientific knowledge was used only for practical purposes in administration and planning. However, after the opium war of 1840 China was forced to

open its door to the West. In this context the advancement of science and technology was perceived as a way to catch up with the West and to establish a new modern culture. An important role was attributed to geosciences in this process. This was the situation that prevailed when *Ferdinand von Richthofen* undertook his expeditions to China. His academic career developed parallel to the rise of the German Empire. He won international prestige with his research on China, which was based especially on accurate observation and description of the geological and geomorphological conditions as well as the application of this analysis for economic use. This made him a distinguished expert both for the German public and for the government. Other scientists engaged in research on China, like the sinologist *Hirth*, were, however, more critical of *Richthofen* as he did not speak Chinese thus preventing a closer contact with the Chinese population. At that time, the development of modern geoscience in China was still in its infancy. *Richthofen* was unknown to most contemporary Chinese scientists, his influence was marginal. Publications by the Chinese about their own country were often characterised by patriotic and propagandistic ideas. In addition, among this first generation of modern Chinese scientists, *Richthofen's* reputation was overshadowed by his role as a China expert for the German Empire. His work on China was perceived as threatening, military intentions were assumed and there was the feeling that *Richthofen* would “steal” information. Later on, however, also in China, his work was regarded as providing an important base, especially for the exploration of geology and as an appeal for new research in this field. Up to this point, an impartial exchange of information and knowledge uninhibited by emotional connotations had been long impossible. Today scientific objectivity is a major challenge for modern Chinese geoscientists, this includes the discussion about the role of *Ferdinand von Richthofen*.

Zusammenfassung: Die Rezeption der westlichen Geowissenschaften in China während der frühen Modernisierungsphase – Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905): eine Fallstudie

Die Entwicklungspfade traditioneller chinesischer geowissenschaftlicher Erforschung einerseits und der modernen westlichen Geowissenschaften andererseits verliefen höchst unterschiedlich. In der Geschichte der chinesischen Wissenschaft sind durchaus einige wichtige geowissenschaftliche Entdeckungen gemacht worden, doch fanden diese keinen Einzug in das etablierte System des gesellschaftlichen Wissens und gerieten häufig wieder in Vergessenheit. Im Staatswesen herrschte das Ideal der konfuzianischen Bildung vor, dem sich angehende Staatsdiener in der Eingangsprüfung zu unterwerfen hatten. Lediglich für praktische Zwecke in Verwaltung und Planung wurde geowissenschaftliches Wissen herangezogen. Nach dem Opiumkrieg 1840 war China gezwungen, dem Westen seine Tore zu öffnen. In diesem Zusammenhang sah man in der Förderung der westlichen Wissenschaft und Technik einen Weg, zum Westen aufzuschließen und eine neue moderne Kultur zu begründen. Den Geowissenschaften wurde hierbei eine wichtige Rolle zugesprochen. In dieser Situation unternahm *Ferdinand von Richthofen* seine Forschungsreisen in China. Seine akademische Karriere verlief parallel zum Aufstieg des Deutschen Reiches zur Großmacht. Mit seiner Forschung über China erlangte er internationales Ansehen, sie gründete vor allem auf einer sorgfältigen Beobachtung und Beschreibung der geologischen und geomorphologischen Gegebenheiten sowie der Auswertung dieser Analyse für die wirtschaftliche Nutzung. Dies machte ihn in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit und für die Regierung zu einem angesehenen Experten. Von anderen Wissenschaftlern mit Bezug zu China, etwa dem Sinologen *Hirth*, wurde *Richthofen* allerdings auch kritisch gesehen, da er die Landessprache nicht beherrschte und ihm so ein engerer Kontakt zur Bevölkerung kaum möglich war. In China befand sich die Entwicklung der modernen Geowissenschaften zu dieser Zeit noch in den Anfängen. *Richthofen* war den damaligen chinesischen Intellektuellen zumeist unbekannt, sein Einfluss gering. Chinesische Publikationen über das eigene Land waren oftmals noch

von patriotischen und propagandistischen Ideen geprägt. Zudem war die Reputation *Richthofens* unter dieser Generation von modernen Wissenschaftlern Chinas vor allem durch seine Rolle als Chinaexperte im Deutschen Reich überschattet. Sein Chinawerk wurde als bedrohlich empfunden, man vermutete militärische Absichten und hatte das Gefühl, *Richthofen* würde sozusagen Informationen „stehlen“. Später jedoch wurde sein Werk auch in China zur als wichtige Basis vor allem zur Erforschung der Geologie und als Anreiz für neue Untersuchungen auf diesem Gebiet gesehen, nachdem lange ein unvoreingenommener Austausch von Informationen und Erkenntnissen ohne emotionale Einfärbung verhindert worden war. Heute ist die wissenschaftliche Objektivität eine der Herausforderungen für die modernen chinesischen Geowissenschaftler, auch in der Diskussion um die Rolle *Ferdinand von Richthofens*.

Résumé: La réception des sciences de la terre occidentales en Chine pendant la première phase de modernisation – le cas de Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905)

Le développement des sciences de la terre traditionnelles chinoises d'une part et des sciences de la terre modernes occidentales d'autre part fait apparaître d'extrêmes différences. L'histoire de la science chinoise a certes produit quelques découvertes importantes dans le domaine des sciences de la terre. Or, celles-ci n'ont pas intégré le système établi des connaissances reconnues de la société et sont souvent tombées dans l'oubli. La culture confucianiste représentait l'idéal de l'Etat, et les futurs serviteurs devaient s'y soumettre lors des examens d'entrée. Le savoir relatif aux sciences de la terre n'était utilisé qu'à des fins pratiques de gestion et de planification. Après la guerre de l'opium de 1840, la Chine fut obligée à ouvrir ses portes à l'Occident. Dans ce contexte, la promotion des sciences et de la technologie était conçue comme un moyen de rattraper l'Occident et de fonder une culture moderne. Un rôle majeur y fut assigné aux sciences de la terre. C'est dans cette situation que *Ferdinand von Richthofen* entreprit ses voyages d'exploration en Chine. Sa

carrière académique se déroulait parallèlement à l'avancement de l'empire allemand vers un statut de grande puissance. Ses études concernant la Chine lui conféraient une réputation internationale, grâce à ses observations et descriptions approfondies des données géologiques et géomorphologiques ainsi qu'à l'exploitation de ces analyses au profit d'objectifs économiques. Cela faisait de lui un expert estimé de l'opinion publique allemande et du gouvernement. Cependant, d'autres scientifiques ayant des rapports avec la Chine, tel que le sinologue *Hirth*, portaient un jugement plus critique sur *Richthofen*, car il ne parlait pas la langue vernaculaire et, de ce fait, n'était guère en mesure d'établir des contacts avec la population. En Chine, le développement des sciences de la terre ne se trouvait encore qu'à ces débuts. Pour la plupart des scientifiques en Chine, *Richthofen* était inconnu et son influence était faible. Les publications chinoises sur ce pays même étaient souvent marquées par des idées patriotiques et propagandistes. En outre, la réputation de *Richthofen* parmi cette première génération de scientifiques chinois était avant tout entachée par le rôle d'expert pour la Chine qui lui revenait au sein de l'empire allemand. On estimait menaçante son œuvre sur la Chine, on craignait des intentions militaires, et on avait l'impression qu'il «volait» pour ainsi dire des informations. Plus tard cependant, après qu'un échange d'informations et de connaissances libre de préjugés et de passions eut été empêché pour longtemps, son œuvre fut considérée, en Chine également, comme une base importante surtout pour des recherches géologiques, et comme un stimulant favorisant de nouvelles recherches dans ce domaine. Aujourd'hui, l'objectivité scientifique constitue l'un des défis pour les scientifiques de la terre chinois modernes, y compris dans le débat portant sur le rôle de *Ferdinand von Richthofen*.

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• *Exploration history – Sino-European contacts – Silk roads – Chinese Central Asia*

Hermann Kreutzmann (Berlin)

Geographical Research in Chinese Central Asia: Aims and Ambitions of International Explorers in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Geographische Forschungen im chinesischen Zentralasien: Ansprüche und Ziele internationaler Forschungsreisender im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert

With 3 Figures and 2 Tables

“Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgement Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from the ends of the earth!”

Rudyard Kipling: The Ballad of East and West, 1889

“Zwischen West und Ost gibt’s keine Brücken”

Bertolt Brecht: Der Kaledonische Markt, 1934

Thinking of East and West in global terms reveals the tension and the reservation exercised in defining the relationship between China and Europe. At the beginning of the 21st century a growing and attentive community realizes that China is back on the scene and has matured to become an equal player in global politics. From the middle of the 18th century until the end of the 20th century an interlude took place. In the middle of this period the interest of European explorers for mapping the “white spots” and investigating the blanks in the Central Asian interface coincided with the “Great Game” for political dominance and hegemony there. Consequently, the exploration of Chinese Central Asia needs to be discussed in the light of imperial interest of expanding the respective spheres of influence by the superpowers of the time. *Ferdinand von Richthofen’s* scholarly work on China reflects the importance which was given to the Central Asian “heartland” (*Mackinder*) or “pivot” (*Lattimore*). Nowadays similar attention is drawn towards the harsh environment along the silk roads. The question remains open whether there are no bridges between East and West as stated by *Brecht* and *Kipling*, indicating that two worlds apart are communicating with each other, but remain to be quite different.

Summary: Geographical Research in Chinese Central Asia: Aims and Ambitions of International Explorers in the 19th and 20th Centuries

The scholarly knowledge about China and Europe was rather vague through the ages. Nevertheless, both directions of enquiry can be substantiated. Based upon early explorations from East and West, *Immanuel Kant* summarized the state of knowledge and drew the attention towards Central Asia and Tibet. In the aftermath, a sizeable group of explorers from Europe, Japan and North America utilized the growing political interest in Central Asia to finance and execute expeditions. From China rather limited and belated expeditions were initiated. Within this framework of politics and exploration *Ferdinand von Richthofen's* scholarly work on Chinese Central Asia is located. The Great Game appears to be a driving force in the hunt for artefacts and archaeological evidence. Kashgar gets fame as the hub of competing explorers and spies. In this contribution the interlinkages between scientific interest, securing cultural assets and imperial dominance are scrutinised. The period under study can be regarded as the transition from enlightened inquisitiveness driven by fascination for everything Asian towards hegemonial interest. The latter has significantly affected and strongly shaped the relationship between China and the "West" until today.

Zusammenfassung: Geographische Forschungen im chinesischen Zentralasien: Ansprüche und Ziele internationaler Forschungsreisender im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert

Das gesicherte Wissen über China und Europa war über Jahrhundert eher als vage zu bezeichnen. Dennoch bestand über lange Zeiträume ein Interesse, mehr über das Andere zu erfahren. *Immanuel Kant* hat den Wissensstand aus dem bis dato vorliegenden publizierten Fundus zusammengefasst und ein weitergehendes Forschungsinteresse angemahnt. In der Folgezeit machte sich eine bemerkenswerte Anzahl von „Entdeckern“ und Forschern aus Europa, Japan und Nordamerika auf den Weg und nutzte das gewachsene politische Interesse an der Region für die Finanzierung ihrer Expeditionen und eigene wissenschaftlichen Zwecke. Aus China gab es weniger Unternehmungen und eher mit zeitlicher Verzögerung. In diesem Rahmen ist *Ferdinand von Richthofen's* „opus magnum“ einzuordnen. Er maß dem chinesischen Zentralasien eine besondere Bedeutung zu. Das „Great Game“ scheint eine treibende Kraft auf der Jagd nach Artefakten und archäologischen Fundstätten gewesen zu sein. Kashgar entwickelte sich zur Drehscheibe für konkurrierende „Entdecker“ und Spione. Im vorliegenden Beitrag wer-

den die Verflechtungen zwischen wissenschaftlichem Interesse, der Sicherung von Kunstgegenständen und imperialistischer Dominanz untersucht. Die Periode des „Great Game“ bestimmt eine Zäsur zwischen aufklärerischem Wissensdurst und großer Faszination an allem Asiatischen einerseits und hegemonialer Dominanz und geopolitischen Interessen andererseits. Letzteres hat die Beziehungen zwischen China und dem „Westen“ bis heute nachhaltig belastet und geprägt.

Résumé: Recherches géographiques en Asie Centrale chinoise: Exigences et objectifs des explorateurs internationaux au 19e et 20e siècle

Les connaissances acquises sur la Chine et l'Europe ont été plutôt vagues à travers les siècles. Néanmoins, l'intérêt de connaître plus sur les « autres » a existé pendant des longues périodes de temps. *Immanuel Kant* a rassemblé l'état des connaissances publiées et a réclamé attention pour les études scientifiques. À la suite un remarquable nombre de « découvreurs » de l'Europe, du Japon et de l'Amérique du Nord ont profité de l'intérêt politique augmenté pour la région pour en financer leurs expéditions et propres buts scientifiques. De la Chine moins d'expéditions ont été initiées et plutôt avec retardement. Dans ce cadre politique et d'exploration sont localisées les œuvres scientifiques de *Ferdinand von Richthofen* qui a donné une importance particulière à l'Asie Centrale. Le « Great Game » paraît être une force vive dans la poursuite des artefacts et sites archéologiques anciennes. Kashgar est devenu un cadre d'appel pour les découvreurs concurrents et pour les espions. Dans cet article sont investiguées les interdépendances entre les intérêts scientifiques, la protection des œuvres d'art et la dominance impérialiste. On peut regarder la période du « Great Game » d'un côté comme la transition du soif de savoir éclairant, provoqué par une fascination pour tout ce qui est asiatique, de l'autre côté comme dominance hégémonique et intérêt géopolitique. Ce dernier a affecté et marqué d'une façon durable les relations entre la Chine et « l'Ouest » jusqu'à présent.

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