

THE MARCO POLO EXPEDITION

A Journey Along the Silk Road

RICHARD B. FISHER

Photography by Tom Ang



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All photographs are by Tom Ang, except the one of him on page 16 which is by Paul Crook.

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To the source of love without whom
this wonderful journey would have
been improbable and the last incredible
years impossible.

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Emperors and kings, dukes and marquises, counts, knights, and townsfolk and all people who wish to know the various races of men and the peculiarities of the various regions of the world, take this book and have it read to you. Here you will find all the great wonders and curiosities of Greater Armenia and Persia, of the Tartars and of India, and of many other territories.

Marco Polo, *The Travels*

History is full of men who saw cities, and went to them, and found them shrunk to villages or destroyed centuries before or not built yet. And the last sort were the luckiest.

Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*

PERSONNEL OF THE MARCO POLO EXPEDITION

- British:** Richard B. Fisher, Expedition leader
Tom Ang, Expedition photographer
Don Baker, Arabic and Islamic art and architecture
Geoff Clarke, Medical officer
Paul Crook, Chinese language and history
- Soviet:** Yuri Petrovich Badenkov, Deputy Director, Institute of
Geography, USSR Academy of Sciences
Dmitri Borisovich Oreshkin, Liaison officer and publicist
Olga Ivanovna Omelchenko, Translator and interpreter
Natalia Borisovna Steglik, Translator and interpreter
Anatoly Nikolaevich Bobrovich, Stills photographer
Boris Lvovich Antsiferov, TV cameraman, Central TV,
Moscow
Valery Dmitrievich Chekushin, Driver
Gennady Ivanovich Kozlov, Driver
Artiom Yurievich Badenkov, Dogsboby
- Chinese:** Liu Guanjian, Deputy Manager of the Mountain Scientific
Expedition Advisory Service and Liaison officer
Shen Peng, Driver
Zheng Yupei, Physician and nutritionist
Hu Youquan, Journalist
Liu Ziai, Driver
Xiao Wang, Liu Guanjian's fiancée

MARCO POLO'S thirteenth-century account of his family's great commercial journeys to and from the court of Kublai Khan helped to make the West aware of the East. For two millenia traders, travellers and conquerors, when the politics of the latter allowed, have used that network of trade routes linking the markets of China with Christendom known as the Silk Road. In the present century neither Russia nor China have made it easy for independent travellers. But in May 1987 Dr Richard B. Fisher set out with four companions to drive from ancient Antioch in south-east Turkey to arrive four months and 22,500 kilometres later in Beijing.

Their journey through Turkey, Iran, the USSR and China had taken three years to negotiate and, even so, was not without hazard. They reached Tehran on the day the British Consul was beaten up because of a diplomatic crisis engaging London and Iran. They were turned back at gun-point by Iranian customs police from the previously agreed Iran-USSR border crossing and returned to Turkey. They became the first recorded foreigners to cross the windswept frontier at Turugart between Soviet Kirgizia and Chinese Xinjiang.

Along the way they crossed the upper reaches of the Euphrates and the Tigris, digressed to circumnavigate Lake Van and discovered black market rates of exchange on the Iranian shores of the Caspian Sea. They eventually entered the USSR via Kars and explored the great Soviet central Asian cities of Merv, Bukhara, Samarkand, Kokand, whose caravanserais, bazaar life and seats of Islamic learning proclaim an enduring link with the crumbling mudbrick cities of earlier centuries.

In China they travelled from Kashgar to Hotan, along the northern edge of the great Taklimakan Desert to Turfan and Dunhuang, then on through the Great Wall to Lanzhou, Xian and Beijing itself, ending their journey with ceremony on the Marco Polo Bridge.

(continued on back flap)

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(from the front flap)

The Marco Polo Expedition is a journey through history, but at the same time an acute observation of central Asia today, its people and its places, and especially its pride in its past, as demonstrated by restoration work to Islamic, Buddhist and Christian monuments all along the route. Richard Fisher's book offers a splendid read and an invaluable guide for modern travellers along one of the world's most evocative and enduring highways through time.

One of the expedition objectives was to demonstrate by example that the ancient Silk Road could once more become a route for international road travel. UNESCO, embarking on a four-year project to study those parts of central Asia served by the Silk Road, appointed the expedition its official scout. The expedition also, in conjunction with Russian and Chinese scientists, undertook some research into the incidence of oesophageal cancer on behalf of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund.

Richard Fisher's text is complemented by the marvellously evocative photography of Tom Ang who was also in charge of the expedition's foray into the field of mobile holography at museum sites along the way.

DR RICHARD B. FISHER was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1919. A publisher and historian, he received a PhD in 1953 and his MSc in 1978 and has written widely on popular medicine. He is also the biographer of Joseph Lister.

TOM ANG was born in Singapore in 1952. He is a travel photographer who since 1985 has written extensively on photography and is currently associate editor on *Photography*, a contributor to the *British Journal of Photography* and European correspondent to the American journal, *Modern Photography*. He is co-author of two walking guide books.

Front of jacket photograph of the ruins of Gaochang, Xinjiang Province, China, and back of jacket photograph of Fisherman at the Galata Bridge, Istanbul, Turkey by Tom Ang.

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