

## **Swiss Collectors of Korean Art: Dr. Paul Ritter and Dr. Heinrich von Niederhäusern**

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Korean art first began to enter Swiss collections during the first decades of the twentieth century. Museum records show that the Korean objects found in Swiss collections today were donated by or acquired from a fairly small number of collectors. While in most cases it is known how and from whom these objects were obtained, tracing their histories further back is often difficult. Nonetheless, a study of the biographies of collectors and donors offer a better understanding of the collections and on the early movement of Korean objects to the West.

This presentation will focus on two notable donors to Swiss museums, Dr. Paul Ritter and Dr. Heinrich von Niederhäusern, whose names appear most frequently in the museums' records of their Korean collections. As a diplomat and acting in his capacity as Swiss ambassador to Japan that enabled him to travel to Korea, Paul Ritter's commissions for the acquisition of Korean objects are well documented in museum records. In contrast, we know much less of Heinrich von Niederhäusern's personal and collecting history. Aside from their prominence as donors in terms of the sheer numbers of objects they procured for the collections, what sets them apart from other Swiss donors is that they acted primarily in the service of Swiss museums, and by extension, with the Swiss public in mind. The Swiss collections holding Korean objects and artworks are, for the most part, ethnographical collections, implying a purpose of informing on foreign cultures.

The Bern Historical Museum's Korea collection includes albums of both Ritter and von Niederhäusern with photographs from their visits to Korea. They are arguably most revealing of what captured the interests of each of these men. The photographs represent some of the earliest photographs of Korea by Europeans and will be explored as primary source materials that may offer insight on Ritter, the diplomat, and von Niederhäusern, the private traveller, as donors.