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L'AVENTURE CHINOISE

UNE FAMILLE SUISSE À LA CONQUÊTE DU CÉLESTE EMPIRE

Estelle Niklès van Osselt and Christiane Perregaux-Loup

A cache of letters, hidden in the bottom of a trunk for many years, traces the fortunes, business enterprises, and interior lives of a family who left the canton of Neuchâtel in the nineteenth century to sell watches to the Chinese. A set of old photo albums, full of pictures taken by these pioneers, miraculously turns up in an antique shop in the same area. Assembling this invaluable evidence enables us to piece together the Loup family's nearly century-long journey through the Celestial Empire.

The saga of this clan is representative of a category of Swiss citizens who left the country in hopes of improving their lot. Remarkably, the story of these Swiss emigrants is still relatively neglected by standard histories, and this treasure trove is a salutary reminder that modern Switzerland's economic miracle was built upon the adventurous spirit and self-sacrifice of its forebears.

This book is richly illustrated with the photographs and documents of the period, as well as objects (porcelain, jade, precious stones, cloisonné work, textiles, and snuff bottles) acquired at the turn of the twentieth century by one of the members of the Loup family, Gustave (1876–1961). These antiques witnessed the slow decline and fall of an empire that had flourished for centuries, as well as the clash between two radically different cultures. They were sent to Europe by ship before becoming the prized possessions of one of the period's greatest collectors of Asian art, and are today in the collection of the Baur Foundation in Geneva.

Told here for the first time, this is the story of a truly remarkable adventure.

Estelle Niklès van Osselt is a Sinologist who has studied Asian art and archaeology at universities in Geneva, London, and Beijing. She is assistant curator at the Baur Foundation, Museum of Far Eastern Art, in Geneva, and was formerly employed by the Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation for contemporary Chinese art and their UCCA art center in Beijing.

Christiane Perregaux-Loup was born in Neuchâtel in 1942 and has taught in the fields of language and cultural studies. She has always maintained a close link with China, where her great-grandparents Eugène Borel and Alphonse Loup emigrated in the mid-nineteenth century. She grew up hearing tales of her forefathers' exploits, surrounded by Chinese artifacts and the photos she found scattered throughout the family home.