

A century of economic relations between Switzerland and Japan

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A CENTURY OF ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN SWITZERLAND AND JAPAN

ON FEBRUARY 6, 1864, a Swiss trade delegation in Edo signed the first commercial agreement between Switzerland and Japan. Thus began the economic and cultural relations which have since developed so well between the two countries. A few Jesuits of Swiss nationality had served as missionaries in the Land of the Rising Sun in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the old folk custom of the "Japanese Games," still celebrated in central Switzerland, remains as a reminder of those early ties. The first Swiss book on Japan was written in 1586 by Renwart Cysat, the Municipal Scribe of Lucerne, and a recent book on the relationships between the two countries, written by Father Thomas Immoos, points to the influence which Japanese art had upon Swiss Baroque.

Russia, Great Britain, the Netherlands and France had already signed trade treaties with the Shogun of Japan when, after the American Admiral Perry landed in that country, a Basle businessman urged the Swiss Federal Council to establish economic relations with Japan. The Horological Union of La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle, the city of St. Gall, and several other groups, lent their support to this initiative. In 1859, the Federal Council approved funds for a journey by a semi-official delegation to Japan, led by Rudolph Lindau, a Prussian. The fact that this trade mission arrived not by warship, but by means of a peaceable commercial vessel, inspired an immediately friendly reaction among the Japanese, and this in turn led to the dispatching of an official Swiss delegation. The latter embarked from Marseille in November 1862, bearing with it a credit of 100,000 francs—a vast sum for the Switzerland of that time. Chairman of the delegation was Aime Humbert, President of the Horological Union. The negotiators arrived in Nagasaki on April 9, 1863, and immediately encountered all manner of difficulty and a general atmosphere of mistrust, which had been aroused in the Japanese by the rather forceful tactics which the great powers had employed in opening up the Japanese market. But after nearly a year, negotiations led to the signing of the first commercial agreement between Switzerland and Japan on February 6, 1864.

A steam-driven fire extinguisher (invented by the mechanic Schenk of Worblaufen), which had been presented as a gift to the Shogun, contributed to the success of the negotiations; it helped to convince the Japanese that Switzerland could make a significant contribution to the expansion of the Japanese economy—in addition to the happy fact that Switzerland had no navy! As relationships between the two countries flourished in the years that followed, it became clear that Switzerland had more to offer than just material goods and technical and industrial concepts. The ideas of the great Swiss educator, Heinrich Pestalozzi, were received with enthusiasm in Japan and had a marked influence on the formation of that

country's system of public education. Even today, many Japanese schools bear Pestalozzi's name.

The centennial of Swiss-Japanese relations was recently celebrated in Tokyo with a week-long Symposium on Swiss Technology and Enterprise, in the course of which twenty leading Swiss industrial and commercial figures reviewed the varied aspects of their activities. In a land with which Switzerland enjoys lively commercial relations, this symposium served to spotlight Switzerland's cosmopolitanism and its constant efforts to keep its products at a high level of quality consonant with modern requirements. At the same time, Swiss companies joined in issuing a special memorial brochure in Japanese, and Japan's Institute for Democratic Education dedicated an entire issue of its magazine, which is distributed to 39,000 teachers in Japanese primary and secondary schools, to Switzerland. This richly illustrated periodical did much to stimulate a genuine interest among Japanese educators in the nature and achievements of the distant Alpine republic. And to round out the centennial celebration, the Swiss National Tourist Office, in collaboration with the Swiss Embassy in Tokyo, issued a Japanese version of its booklet "Switzerland Today."

A Change in Viewpoint:

BETTER MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN SWITZERLAND AND OTHER NATIONS

THIS IS THE THEME of an article by Wolfgang Hopker in a recent issue of the German weekly, "Christ und Welt":

"Cosmopolitan Switzerland," he writes, "Europe's mediator by virtue of its geographic position at the hub of the continent, sees and feels itself to be a kind of model for the Europe of tomorrow—a land in which varied peoples have integrated into a single nation, in which these divergent groups settle their differences peacefully. With many ties to the rest of the world, confident in their own future, the Swiss restrain their own aggressiveness, turning inward instead to the isolation of a small neutral nation. In conservative insistence upon an historically-founded uniqueness, they strive more strongly than ever to maintain their Helvetian individuality in the face of our rapidly changing world. Engaged in constant self-analysis, Switzerland today seeks to come to terms with the tensions created by its international role on the one hand and its defensive position on the other; the suggestions which have been offered for the resolution of this problem run the gamut 'from Seldwyla to Utopia'."

Hopker then goes on to discuss Switzerland's international relations, and to clear up an old misconception: the stereotype of the self-satisfied Swiss who have remained insulated from the world,