

# Switzerland national day

## Entrepreneurial spirit to tighten our nations' ties of friendship

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AMBASSADOR OF SWITZERLAND

The first of August is the day on which Switzerland commemorates its legendary founding back in 1291, when three regions around Lake Lucerne created an alliance to protect themselves from the power of unjust lords. The political association that arose from this vow in the middle ages evolved quite significantly over the coming centuries until it became Switzerland in its modern form. Nevertheless, in our ancestors' will for freedom and independence, we see the roots of the liberal society that our confederation is today.

Japan is one of Switzerland's most important partners. Both



countries maintain close collaboration not only in terms of economic exchange, but also in the field of science and on the level of international frameworks. Furthermore, a shared entrepreneurial spirit has tightened the ties of friendship between our two nations. In 1858, shortly after Japan started to open up, Swiss watchmakers witnessed the prosperity and recognized the economic ambitions of the Land of the Rising Sun. The first delegation of Swiss merchants reached Japan in 1859 with the purpose to pave the way for direct trade between the two countries. Still, it would take an additional five years of careful preparations until the conclusion of an official treaty of friendship and trade in 1864. Being the first landlocked country to conclude such an agreement with Japan, Switzerland once again revealed its pioneering spirit.

From the outset, Switzer-

land's concern for Japan went far beyond economic interests: Upon his return to Europe, Aimé Humbert, the Swiss government's first envoy to Japan and the father of the 1864 Treaty of Amity and Trade, published one of the greatest works of its time on Japan and its fascinating culture. In "Le Japon Illustré," he revealed an impassioned view on the highly developed arts of Japan. Confident about Japan's great future achievements, and as if blessed by the gift of prediction, Humbert wrote in a letter to his wife in 1864: "I'm convinced that Japan's day is about to come and I tell you, it is striking to be on the spot!"

Next year, Japan and Switzerland will commemorate the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. On this occasion, there will be many possibilities to get a glimpse of some of the multifarious facets

of Switzerland in Japan. The anniversary year celebrations will already have a head start this year with the Lucerne Festival Ark Nova 2013 in Matsushima (Sept. 27–Oct. 13), a unique project aiming to bring hope through music to regions afflicted by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Starting on Feb. 6, 2014, exactly 150 years after the signing of the first treaty of friendship and trade, a four-day public event called Swiss Days at Roppongi Hills Arena will allow a broad audience to experience Swiss culture, culinary delights and entrepreneurial excellence.

During 2014, high-level political visits will strengthen our political collaboration and provide platforms for building up business relations between Switzerland and Japan. At the same time, numerous outstanding cultural events will take place throughout Japan, such as an exhibition on the

Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler and a Japan tour by the Béjart Ballet Lausanne. Furthermore, highlighting Switzerland and Japan's roles as leading nations in research and technology, a series of scientific workshops and symposiums shall be held

to further strengthen exchange between Swiss and Japanese researchers. Commemorating these 150 years of excellent relations will surely provide inspiration for many more successful common ventures in the years to come!

## Fostering exchange between highly innovative countries

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More than half a decade before the conclusion of the official treaty of friendship and trade in 1864, the first Swiss personality to have visited Japan was a scientist: Johann Caspar Horner. The physicist and astronomer traveled in 1805 on a Russian mission to Japan. Using Japanese paper, "washi," he demonstrated the principle of hot air balloons in front of interested local scientists. Ever since this first brief multilateral scientific exchange, Switzerland has had close ties with Japan in the domain of science and technology.

This year Switzerland has again been ranked the most innovative nation worldwide and the country also topped the Global Innovation Index 2013. A common pattern among the most innovative nations is their stability. Another major factor can be found in Switzerland's dual-track education system with a two-third majority of the young people not entering a university but instead receiving professional or vocational education and training, mostly in coordination with local industry. This system enables young people to enter the labor market and ensures that enough qualified workers and managers are available in the future. Another important factor is Switzerland's highly ranked research institutes: Six federal universities and research facilities, as well as 10 cantonal research universities and eight universities of applied science, all internationally strongly connected.

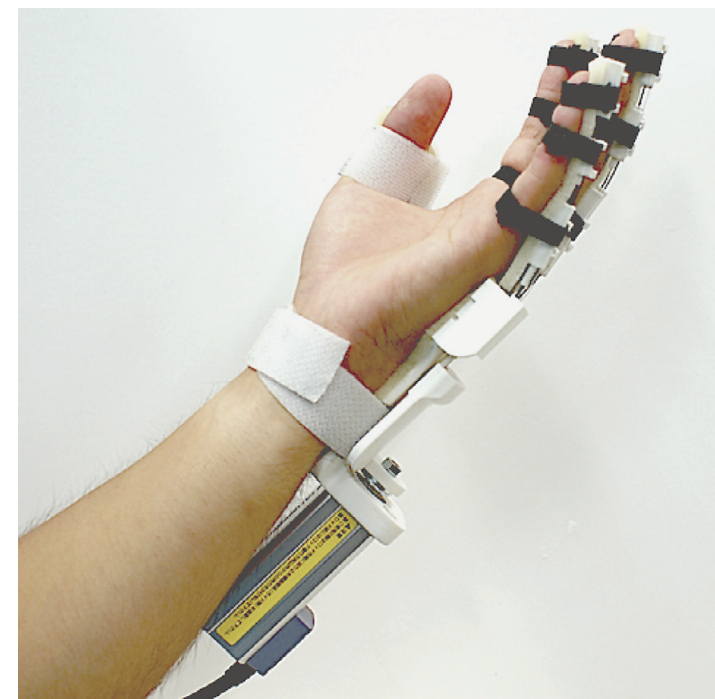
Japan is one of Switzerland's most important research part-

ners: next to countless industrial collaboration ventures, especially in the pharmaceutical domain, more than 60 agreements between Japan's and Switzerland's top research institutions and universities have been signed and are currently active.

Both Switzerland and Japan have much to share and a lot to learn from each other. Even though the two nations are located thousands of kilometers apart and cultural differences are at times obvious, many similarities are nevertheless easily visible. Both countries, being in short supply of natural resources, instead set focus on their brain-resources and people. Both have committed large investments toward their education and research systems, and for both it has paid off with a high ranking in current innovation indices, as well as with world-class research results, e.g. leading to the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Medicine to professor Shinya Yamanaka and to highly-ranked universities.

Another similarity between the two countries appears in their aging population. A joint program was set up between Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, better known as ETH Zurich, in order to strengthen the collaboration between Japan and Switzerland within the field of "medicine for an aging society" to achieve world-class results leading to new technologies.

Funding for three new projects is offered in equal amounts by JST and the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation. Just last week, one of three grants was awarded to professor Roger Gassert from



**Innovative ideas: Top, a meeting of the FP7 ERA-Net Project CONCERT-Japan takes place at ETH Zurich in Switzerland in July. Above, a robotic-assisted hand jointly developed by professors Jumpei Arata and Roger Gassert.** TATE KIHARA/ETH ZURICH, COURTESY OF KYUSHU UNIVERSITY

ETH Zurich and to professor Jumpei Arata from Kyushu University, a former visiting professor and researcher in Switzerland. Together they will perform joint research on a cortically-triggered robotic hand orthosis for home-based training targeting an aged population. The other two selected joint-projects are conducted between the University of Berne and Osaka University as well as Hokkaido University.

Furthermore, Switzerland is a partner in the FP7 ERA-Net Project CONCERT-Japan and is contributing funding to support multilateral research projects in the areas of resilience against disasters and efficient energy storage and distribution.

With the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the current research collaborations will be deepened and new connections established. A nanotech symposium held in October in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture, at the National Institute for Materials Science (NIMS) will mark the kick-off in the scientific field in Japan. Subsequently, several workshops and symposiums are planned in diverse fields — ranging from architecture to energy and higher education to pharmacy and nutrition for an aging society — but all with the common goal to celebrate and foster the exchange between our highly innovative countries.

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