

Switzerland National Day

Strong relationship in art and engineering

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It is my pleasure to address the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of the Swiss National Day, which marks the founding of the Swiss confederation, 725 years ago. Japan is one of Switzerland's most important partners in terms of trade relations, international affairs, research and innovation. This year, we are seeing many areas where our partnership with Japan has been strengthened and numerous occasions to develop our mutual exchange.

Record-breaking project

While Japan and Switzerland share remarkable achievements in the field of civil engineering, it is the opening of the Gotthard Base railway tunnel, which connects northern and southern Europe through the Alps that is drawing much attention this year. The tunnel is the longest in the world with a length of 57.1km, stretching 3.2km longer than the 53.9-km-long Seikan Tunnel between Honshu and Hokkaido (23km of which runs under the sea). A representation of the tunnels can be seen side by side at the "Doboku Civil Engineering" exhibition currently being held at the 21_21 Design Sight museum in Tokyo.

This once-in-a-century construction project was launched after the Swiss people endorsed in several referendums the policy to pursue sustainable transportation. By shifting transalpine traffic from road to rail, we hope to protect the natural environment of the Alps and bring Europe closer together. The Gotthard Base Tun-

nel also symbolizes Swiss values such as innovation, precision and reliability and was legitimized by means of direct democracy, which is part of Switzerland's unique political system.

In fact, this large-scale project is more than an engineering feat; it also represents a substantial investment by Switzerland to develop European transport infrastructure. As the cornerstone of the European Rhine-Alpine Corridor for freight transport, the tunnel is connecting dynamically growing economic hubs, creating a cost-effective, reliable and competitive rail freight transport axis between the north and south.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and French President Francois Hollande all participated in the inaugural ride on June 1. Shorter journey times make Switzerland's regions, as well as Germany and Italy more accessible. Over 20 million people living in the area between southern Germany and northern Italy will benefit from the Gotthard Base Tunnel. Many Japanese tourists visiting the region every year will also enjoy shorter train rides across the Alps.

Contribution to the arts

In the field of the arts, Switzerland's role as the birthplace of the first global contemporary art movement, Dadaism, and as the birthplace of one of the most renowned architects, Le Corbusier, is much discussed this year. The Dada art movement was born in Zurich's Cabaret Voltaire, 100 years ago, while the continent was involved in World War I. Switzerland, as a neutral and democratic country in the heart of Europe, became a refuge for artists and free thinkers from across the continent. Their artistic experiments, which used humor, abstraction and po-

etic nonsense to highlight the absurdities of society, changed what it meant to be an artist. The Dada movement, which remains to this day a global and universal inspiration to artists, also reached the shores of Japan. From 1923, under the name "Mavo," it was part of the Japanese Avant-garde emerging after the Great Kanto Earthquake. Tokyo, as one of the major world art capitals, will also celebrate the artistic legacy of the movement this year.

Architecture from Switzerland is well recognized in Japan. Amongst Swiss architects, Le Corbusier, is surely the one who had the strongest influence on Japanese architecture. While he later acquired French citizenship, he was born in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a watch-making town in the Swiss Jura, where he studied at the local art school under Charles l'Eplattenier, considered one of the foremost exponents of Swiss Art Nouveau. It's in Switzerland that the architect made his first buildings and where he built his last one: the "Pavillon Le Corbusier" in Zurich-Seefeld — a museum designed to exhibit his artworks. Through the efforts of several countries who share a piece of his architectural heritage, including Japan, France and India, 17 of Le Corbusier's buildings have been inscribed this year to the UNESCO World Heritage sites list, reflecting "outstanding contribution to the Modern movement." The National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo is one of them.

Science and robotics

Japan is one of Switzerland's most important partners in science and technology. The Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) — an important part of Switzerland's dual-track education system — set up several

alliances with Japanese universities this year to expand their international outreach. In the domain of medical technology, MEDTEC Japan, Asia's biggest exhibition in the field, attracted a record-number of 15 exhibitors from Switzerland this year.

With the growing economic and societal importance of robotics, Switzerland hopes to highlight its contributions in this field where Japan is also regarded as one of the leading countries.

Three Japanese teams will be competing in four disciplines at the very first Cybathlon. In this world premiere, to be held in Zurich on Oct. 8, individuals with physical disabilities will compete side by side in six demanding disciplines, using the latest assistive technologies, including powered prostheses, robotic exoskeletons, powered wheelchairs, electrical muscle stimulation and brain-computer interfaces. The various competitions test how the competitors cope with specific challenges and activities from everyday life. The objective is to remove barriers between people with disabilities, the public and technology developers.

Regardless of their obvious differences in size and culture, our two countries share similarities that make cooperation natural and fruitful. It is therefore not surprising that Switzerland and Japan maintain 17 lively city partnerships, some of which will see important anniversaries this year with Davos and Ueda celebrating 40 years; Romainmotier and Nagao-ka marking 30 years; Shinagawa and Geneva honoring 25 years; Chiba and Montreux, Kagamino-cho and Yverdon-les-Bains, Shimada and Brienz, all celebrating 20 years. All of these factors paint a truly encouraging perspective for the future strengthening of our relations.



Inaugurated in June, the Gotthard Base Tunnel connects northern and southern Europe through the Swiss Alps and is the longest tunnel in the world. ALPTRANSIT GOTTHARD LTD



The first Cybathlon will be held in Zurich on Oct. 8. Individuals with physical disabilities will compete side by side in six demanding disciplines, using the latest assistive technologies. AZUSA KUDO



As part of the Dada 100th anniversary festival in Tokyo, the SuperDeluxe art space in Roppongi was transformed into a replica of Cabaret Voltaire, the birthplace of Dadaism, from July 12 to July 18. HIDETO MAEZAWA

Congratulations
to the People
of
Switzerland
on the Occasion
of
Their National Day



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