

The 160th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Switzerland

“Imagine Switzerland” The relationships between Japan and Switzerland established by Swiss Watches

Introduction

The year 2024 marks the 160th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Switzerland. The watch has a lot to do with the bond between the two countries.

In 1863, Mr. Aimé Humbert, the president of the Swiss Watchmakers Association, came to Japan as a leader of the Swiss delegation and stayed in Japan for approximately ten months. Believing that the Swiss watch held the key to commerce with Japan, he traveled regions along the coast of Edo Bay and conducted market research while negotiating with the Tokugawa shogunate. After enduring hardships, on February 6, 1864, Japan and Switzerland finally established diplomatic relations. Today, 160 years later, Switzerland is widely known as "the kingdom of watch" among Japanese people and Swiss watches enjoy high popularity.



Aimé Humbert, Minister plenipotentiary / the president of the Swiss Watchmakers Association

This panel exhibition maps out the path of the Swiss delegation and showcases the state of watches and clocks in Japan at that time.

Fédération de l'industrie horlogère suisse FH

In association with: Embassy of Switzerland/Switzerland Tourism/Japan Watch Importer's Association
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Design: Asami Noro



Aime Humbert Minister Plenipotentiary and his aides

Aime Humbert was born in Bulles, Neuenburg, Switzerland famous for the precision machinery industry and watch making in 1819. Upon coming of age, he obtained the teacher's certificate while entering into politics, concurrently he showed an interest in the tertiary industry. He assumed the president of the Swiss Watchmakers Association which was just established in 1858. Its important mission is to introduce the Swiss watch industry widely.

The government of Switzerland dispatched Rudolf Rindau who was also a member of the watch association to Japan to start negotiation for trade with Japan in 1859. But the negotiation did not proceed. Almost at the same time with this movement, Humbert announced his opinions about trade of Swiss watch in Japan to representatives of the political and economic circles in Switzerland. He emphasized the future potential for trade with Japan and demanded dispatch of an official mission to conclude the treaty of amity and commerce. Then on May 17, 1861, the Swiss Federal Council decided to dispatch the mission represented by Humbert.



Aimé Humbert-Droz 1819-1900.
Photo Neuchâtel Library.



Aime Humbert Mission on the terrace of the Swiss Federal Council. Order from left to right: a watchmaker, James Favre-Brandt from Le Locle, Caspar Brennwald from Zurich, Aime Humbert sitting in a chair in the center, a merchant, Edouard Bavier, an engineer, Iwan Kaiser from Zug, and Major John Bringolf from Schaffhausen. Bibliotheque de la ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds.



"Le Japon Illustré" which Aime Humbert published in 1870 after returning to Switzerland. The book authored by Humbert covering all the fields including history, culture, religion, the Emperor System, and life of people in Edo at that time based on the experience for stay in Japan about ten months from April 1863 for conclusion of the treaty of amity and commerce.



Townscape of La Chaux-de-Fonds when Humbert was appointed as Minister Plenipotentiary.

Circumstances of the dispatch

As soon as the Swiss Federal Council approved the dispatch for conclusion of the treaty, Humbert ensured conclusion of the agreement between Switzerland and the Netherlands to ask the Dutch consulate in Japan to intermediate between Switzerland and Japan for negotiation in August 1862 before departure.

Meanwhile, the government of Swiss Confederation budgeted 100,000 Swiss francs, which covered only a part of the necessary costs. Humbert convinced watchmakers of Neuenburg and silk textile manufacturers of Zurich and collected the funds for dispatch of the mission. Finally, the government appointed Humbert as the minister of the mission and Casper Brennwald from Zurich as the secretary for the minister and representative for commercial affairs and decided the four dedicated attendants. On November 18, 1862, The Humbert Mission publicly headed for Japan by vessel from Marseilles with strong support of the Netherlands.



"République et Canton de Genève – Avis du Comité Genevois pour la Mission Suisse au Japon", (1861/left) and «Traité d'Amitié et de Commerce, entre le Conseil Fédéral de la Confédération Suisse et Sa Majesté le Taïcoun du Japon» (Exemplaire en français signé le samedi 6 février 1864/right), Archives fédérales suisses.

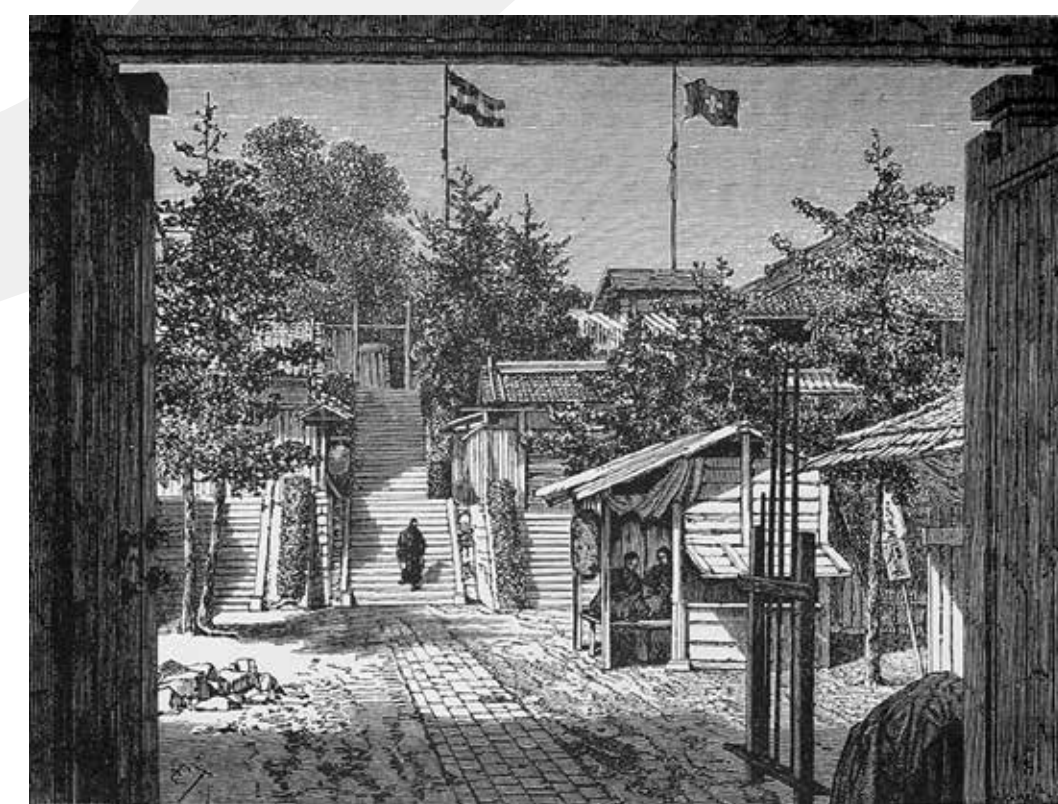


Treaty of amity and commerce between Switzerland and Japan which started with the opposite side of risk.

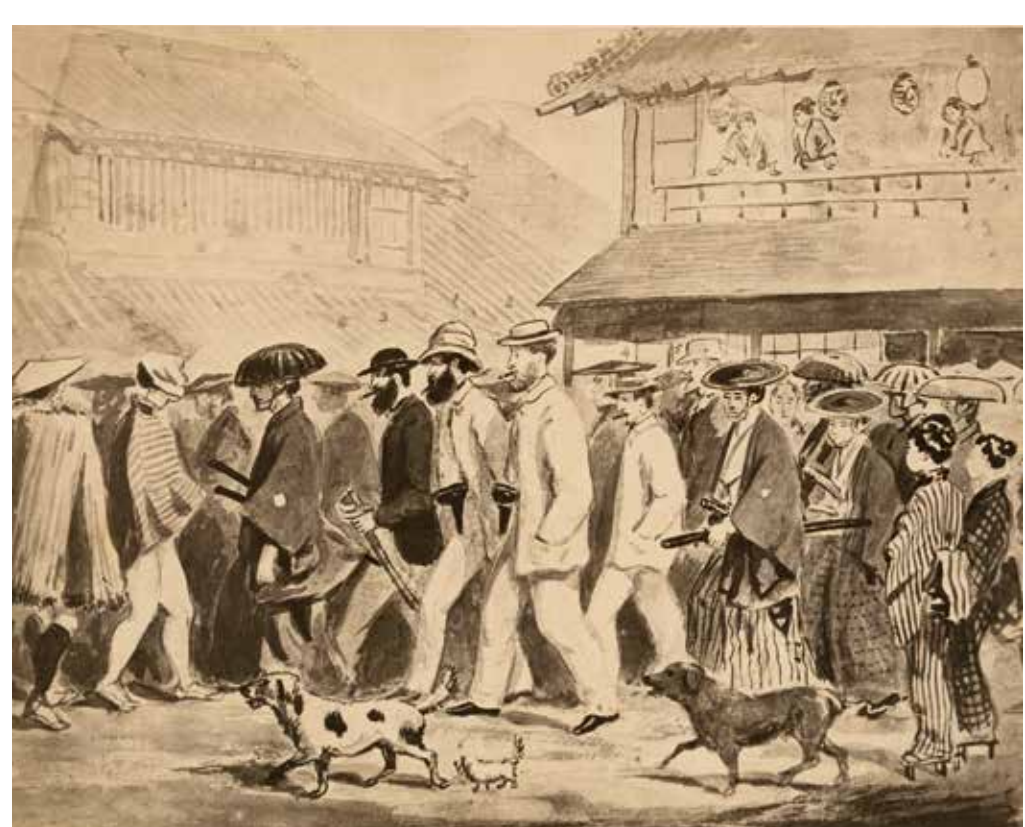
The conditions surrounding the bakufu (shogunate, government) in the 1860s when the Humbert Mission came to Japan were turbulent as shown by the activities for exclusion of foreigners and the Namamugi Incident. Therefore, conclusion of the treaty entailed many difficulties After succeeding in conclusion of the treaty of amity and commerce between Japan and America in 1858, the bakufu encouraged to conclude a treaty with another four countries. But as shown the timetable of the Bakumatsu on the left, the attack to foreigners happened frequently at the then Edo, and then it was not easy to negotiate for the treaty.

The timetable of the Bakumatsu (the last days of Tokugawa shogunate) and Aime Humbert Mission

1641	The Dutch trading house in Hirado was relocated to Dejima, Nagasaki (the completion of the national isolation system)
1853	Perry, East India fleet admiral of the US visited the shore of Uraga
1854	Convention of Peace and Amity between the United States of America and the Empire of Japan (Treaty of Kanagawa) was signed
1858	Tokugawa Shogunate was signed Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the U.S.A / The Ansei Five-Power Treaties Ansei purge (1858-1859)
1859	Rudolf Rindau, a representative of commerce and customs (a member of the watch association), visited Japan
1860	Sakuradamon incident
1861	Heusken, Secretary of the American Legation was assassinated. Exclusionism led to assault on foreigners Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Prussia (Germany) and the Empire of Japan was signed The Swiss Federal Council decided to dispatch of an official mission to conclude the treaty of amity with Japan, and budgeted 100,000 Swiss franc The first Attack on the British Legation at the temple of Tozenji by Mito roshi (masterless samurai) The mission led by Aime Humbert was appointed by the Swiss Federal Council (August)
1862	The attack on the British Legation at the temple of Tozenji Namamugi incident
1863	Shinsaku Takasugi and other nine clansmen of Choshu Domain set fire to the British Legation in Gotenyama. The Humbert Mission arrived at Yokohama by Dutch warship, Meduse (April 26th) The Humbert Mission arrived at Edo by Dutch warship, Meduse, and settled at Choo-ji temple in Edo where the Consulate General of Netherlands resided (May 28th) Shimonoseki war (Choshu Domain fired at foreign merchant ships at Shimonoseki) The Humbert Mission stayed in Edo for 12 days. (June 8th) Anglo-Satsuma War
1864	Negotiation for conclusion of a treaty was conducted at Yokohama. As a result of negotiations held three times in total, the text of the treaty was established (January 26th) Humbert Delegation accomplished their dearest wish to conclude a treaty at the temple of Choo-ji (February 6th)
1867	The return of political power to the Emperor by the Tokugawa Shogunate



The photograph shows the Choo-ji temple in Edo where the Dutch consulate resided (currently, in Minato-ku, Tokyo). The Mission was scheduled to stay there for negotiation with the bakufu, but the then Edo was dangerous to foreigners and thus the Mission stood by. The treaty of amity and commerce between Switzerland and Japan was signed at the Choo-ji temple. The top and bottom two pictures on the right were drawn based on the photograph of F. Beato. Interestingly the national flag hung over backward is different. Apparently the national flag of Switzerland which was not seen in the photograph was newly drawn on the right of the national flag of the Netherlands in the pictures with some intention.



The bakufu ordered the Mission to go out together with guards and stay at the warship of bakufu, Emperor, at night for the safety of the Mission. Phot right: Felice Beato(1863), Nagasaki University Library. Picture above: Promenade à pied dans les rues de Yédo, Photographie d'un dessin de Charles Wirgman (1863), Tirage albuminé original, 24,4 x 32,1 cm, Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel



Gifts from the government of Swiss Confederation

In July 1861, the government of Swiss Confederation budgeted 100,000 Swiss francs for the dispatch of the Humbert Mission (the then annual budget for the bureau of trade and customs was 5,000 francs). Of the said budget, 40,000 francs were said to have been appropriated to the price for gifts to the bakufu. To restrain such expenditure as much as possible, the government of Swiss Confederation collected contributions from various industries of Swiss. In the end, watch and other various articles were ready and marine chronometers, gold pocket watches, watches rimmed with diamond and equipped with gold chains and other gifts were presented to the shogun and the inner place (shogun's consort and concubines). It was said that those gifts substantially reduced the budget.

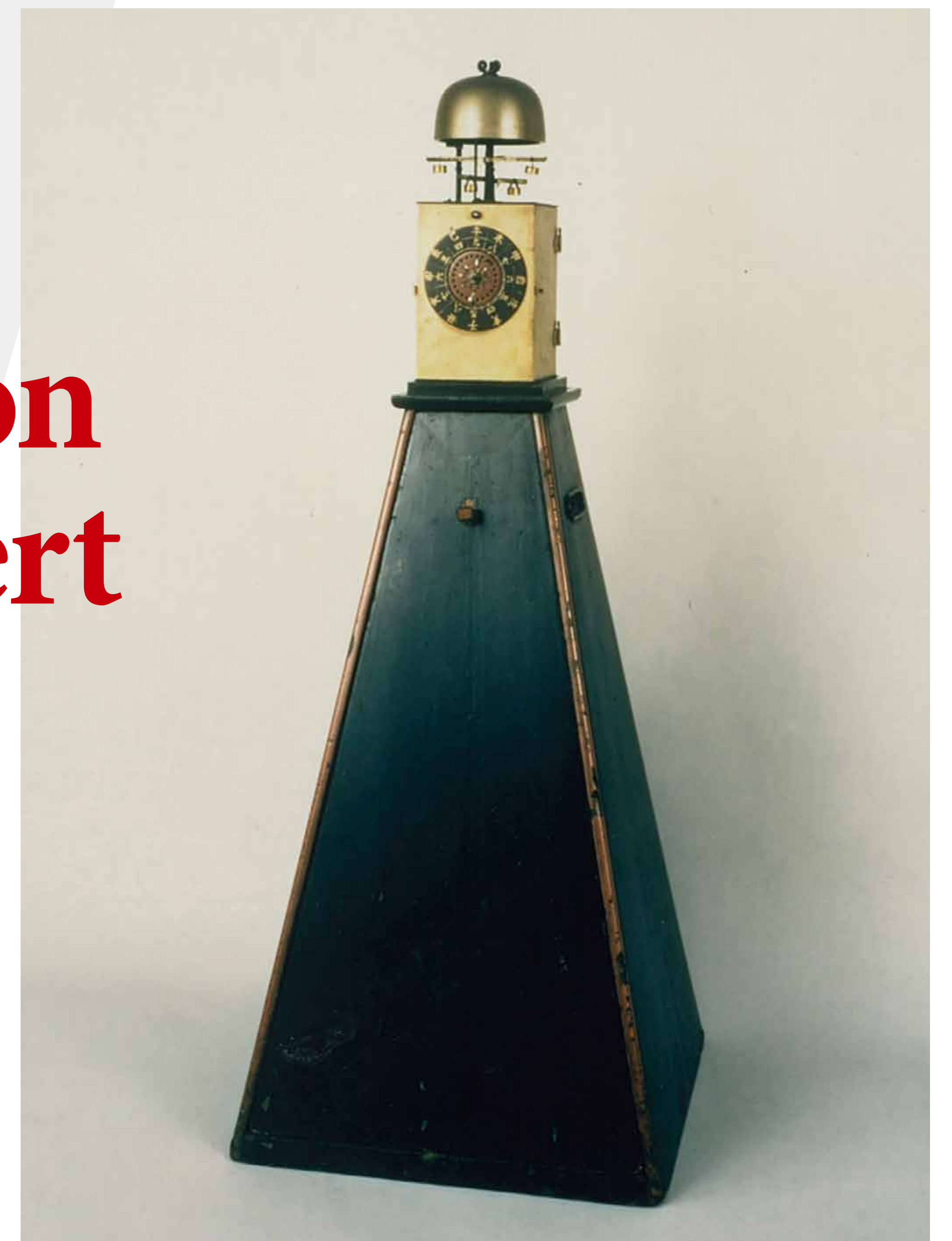
第一	大君殿下へ
第二	親王殿下へ
第三	公卿諸侯殿下へ
第四	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第五	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第六	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第七	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第八	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第九	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第十	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第十一	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第十二	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第十三	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第十四	同僚諸侯殿下へ
第十五	同僚諸侯殿下へ

"Treaty / Treaty of amity and commerce between Switzerland and Japan." Japan Center for Asian Historical Records National Archives of Japan. JACAR Ref.B13090291800.

Japanese daily life around the end of the Edo-period that made a lasting impact on the mission of Aimé Humbert

While negotiating for the treaty, Humbert conducted research to determine if Japan could be a market for Swiss watches. However, Japan in those days used its own time system, which was different from that in Switzerland and, moreover, the life of ordinary people was not exactly affluent and a Swiss watch was out of their reach.

During the ten-month stay in Japan, Humbert and his companions traveled regions along the coast of Edo Bay and carefully observed and documented the daily lives of common people from that time period. He brought back to Switzerland numerous woodblock prints and water paintings depicting architectures and scenes of towns that were obtained in book markets as well as albumen prints taken by Felice Beato, the Italian photographer who lived in Yokohama around that time. These illustrations and photographs were used as reference images in *Le Japon illustré*, which he later published.



At the time when the Humbert Mission stayed in Japan, Japan's unique Japanese clock was used by daimyos (feudal lords) and merchant princes. It is estimated that the work of watchmakers was established in Japan from the Edo period. They studied and modified Western clocks that worked on a regular time system, and created Japanese clocks that were adapted to the temporal hour system. Above photo and the nishikie show a wadokei clock mounted on a base similar to the form of a belfry or a fire tower.

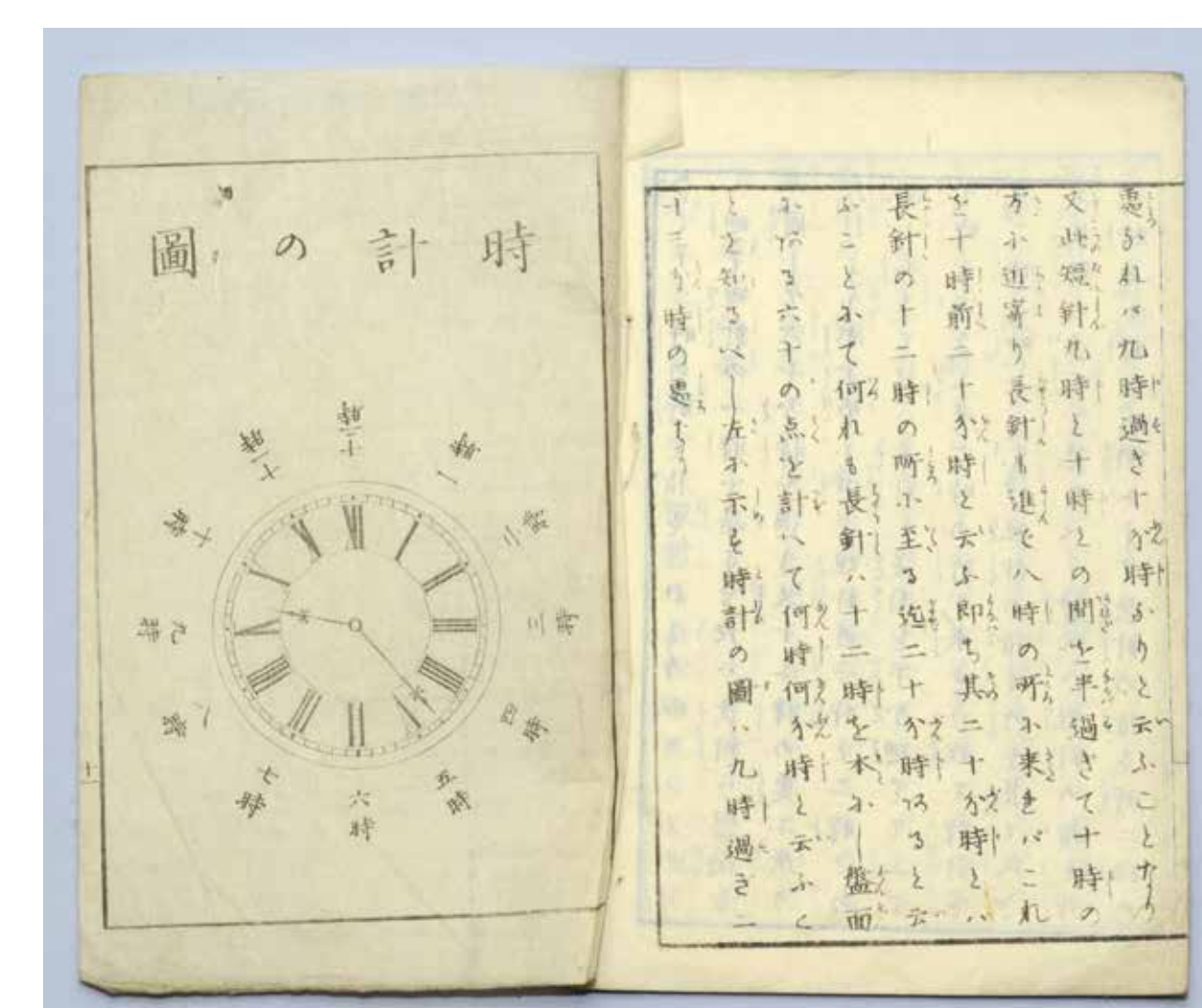
New calendar and old calendar - new calendar and time display

After the Meiji Restoration, the government of Japan aiming to become a modern state implemented the abolition of clans and establishment of prefectures, enactment of the Family Registration Law, promulgation of the Zanpatsu Haitorei (introduction of the rules allowing freedom of hairstyle and banning the carrying of swords), enforcement of the conscription system and opening of railways. These series of reforms include the revision of a calendar. Namely, the lunar calendar (lunisolar calendar, to be precise) based on the movement of the moon was changed to the solar calendar based on the movement of the sun. Generally, these calendars are recognized as the old calendar and the new calendar. The former calendar was used until December 2, 1872 (the 5th year of Meiji) and as of the December 3, 1872 which is the day immediately following the date of termination of the former calendar, the new Gregorian calendar set January 1, 1873 (the 6th year of Meiji) on that day. Concurrently with the change in calendar, the time display was also reformed. The temporal hour system under which the length of day and night is different according to seasons was replaced by the current fixed hour system under which a day is equally divided by 24 hours. The differences between the old and new calendars were written in a book of Yukichi Fukuzawa, "Kaireki-Ben" (Explanation of the new calendar).



The picture above was created as the resulting product upon combination of several paintings of Japan which Humbert took back with him. An acrobat who is about to jump out from a basket in the center and an acrobat on the right side who carry a concealed sword were respectively taken from different sketches.

This fact is proven by the two pictures shown below, (left) *Le sauteur prodigieux*. Auteur inconnu, date inconnue, (right) *L'avaleur de sabre* (Both author and date are unknown). Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel



Wadokei, Nishikie (the color print) and Kaireki-Ben were owned by The Seiko Museum Ginza.

From the old lunar calendar to the new solar calendar Swiss watches that supported the beginning of the new era in Japan

Among the members of the Humbert Mission, C. Brennwald and J. Favre-Brandt remained in Japan afterwards and promoted a trade firm in a foreign settlement in Yokohama. Meanwhile, one member of the R. Rindau advance party which came to Japan a little earlier, Francois Perregaux, succeeded in popularization of the pocket watch which reflected Japanese tastes. After that, trade firms sold products following Perregaux in Japan by ordering them with Longines, Zenith, Omega and other makers.



This is a painting depicting a workshop of Swiss watch in the 19th century. Clockmakers worked facing a window because lighting was not developed yet in those days. Picture left by Gustave Jeanneret. Université de Neuchâtel. Picture above by Fritz Zuber-Bühler, MIH.



Watches imported to Japan through trade firms are called “watches of trade firms” (Shokan Watches). Top left/the left is a pocket watch imported to Japan at the end of the Edo period. The right is a product made by Henri Perregaux which was F. Perregaux sold in the United States. The style shown in the upper side of the middle part was created for the Japanese. Top right/ in order from left to right, Omega imported in about 1898 by the trade firm of J.Colomb who was said to be a nephew of Humbert. The one in a box as shown in the middle part is Borel & Courvoisier imported by Siber & Brennwald in about 1885. Omega imported in about 1896. Below/left is Edouard Favre-Perret imported by Favre-Brandt. It gained great popularity. Then in about 1877, the latest type of a stem-winder made by Longines as shown right was imported. Also in about 1897, the ultrathin Zenith as shown in the upper side of the middle part was imported.

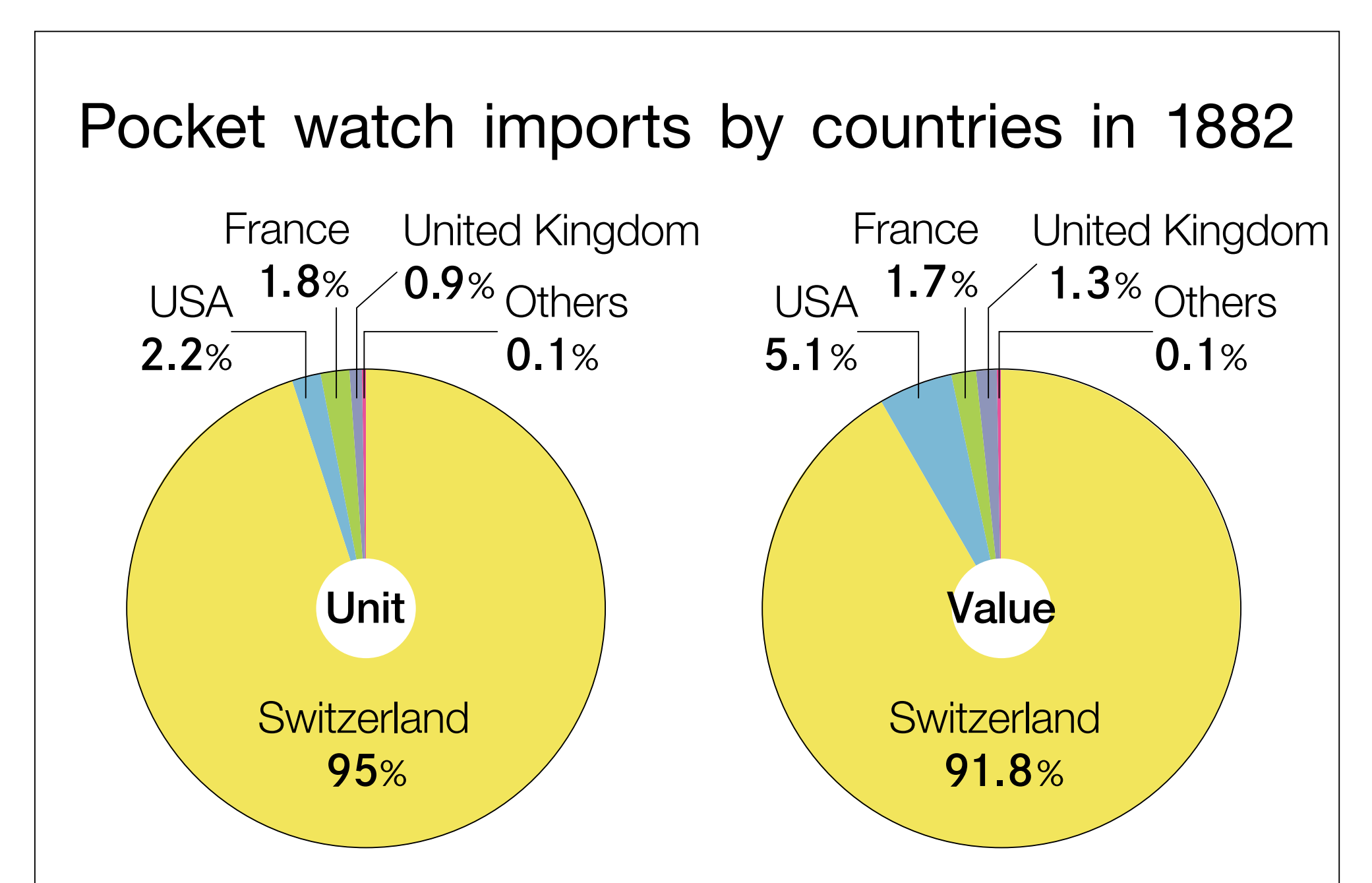
The relationship between Switzerland and Japan which started upon conclusion of the treaty has contributed to development of the Swiss watch industry to the present day.

Japan and Switzerland commemorated the 160th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations on February 6, 2024. The said “establishment of diplomatic relations” may have been linked by the watch industry important in Switzerland. Therefore, the achievements of Humbert who managed to get the treaty signed successfully upon visit to Japan as the minister plenipotentiary should be highly appreciated. Once again respect shall be expressed to Humbert and the members of the Mission who opened the door for export of Swiss watch to Japan.

Two phenomena identified from the statistics

(1) The calendar was revised in Japan on January 1, 1873 (the 6th year of Meiji) by replacing the lunisolar calendar with the solar calendar. In this year, the import volume and amount of desk/table clocks and wall clocks substantially increased sharply, up by 420% and 277% respectively year on year. Therefore, these figures indicated that the revision of calendar in the Meiji Era was one of the causes for increase in import of watches.

(2) The basic trade statistics of Japan includes “Annual return of the foreign trade of the Empire of Japan” compiled by the former Ministry of Finance from 1882 (the 15th year of Meiji). According to the said materials, the import volume and amount of tamoto-dokei (pocket watch) from Switzerland for the said year were 29,819 pieces and 155,042 yen. In eighteen years from conclusion of the treaty of amity and commerce between Switzerland and Japan, 90% or more of the Japan's import of tamoto-dokei was accounted for by that of Switzerland. This result was one of the achievements of Aime Humbert who played the leading role in establishment of diplomatic relations.





Introduction to Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry FH (Fédération de l'industrie horlogère suisse FH)

Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry FH is a leading association to protect and develop the Swiss watch industry, and we have offices in Biel/Bienne in Switzerland (head office), Hong Kong, and Tokyo. The FH currently represents around 500 members, or more than 90% of Swiss firms active in the production and sale of watches, clocks and components. Our objective is to uphold our members' interests generally. FH Tokyo mainly assumes an important responsibility as an information center.



Research and report on Japanese market

- Report to our head office on Japanese political situation and economic condition, as well as results of watch market survey (four times a year)
- Implementation of a survey on Japanese consumers' awareness of watches (every other year)

Support activities for members

- Provide after-sale service for Swiss watches by designated watch repairer
- Business support for Swiss watch manufactures which wish to export to Japan
- Taking action against counterfeit products in Japan
- Organize seminars and provide a forum for exchange within the watch industry

Activities for Public Relations

- Publishing of new models' news for members' brands on our website(www.fhs.jp) and SNS.
- Compiling and distribution of Swiss watch import statistics
- Information provision service for retailers, repairers and consumers
- Management of watch.swiss project to promote the appeal of Swiss watches

watch.swiss Japan official Instagram



Swiss made

The indication Swiss made reflects know-how, impeccable quality, aesthetic prowess, technical innovation, and own value. The watches with Swiss made label rely not only on considerable intrinsic value, but also on criteria defined by law.



Counterfeiting issues

Tens of millions of fake Swiss watches are offered for sale every year, while the Swiss watch industry produces around 20 million original watches. The problem of counterfeiting steals an intellectual property right from brands, and also endangers the health of consumers. Awareness program for elimination of counterfeit products is one of the important roles of the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry.

