

Inside this issue

“We believe that “keeping tradition” is “making new things”” 1 + 2

Swiss President Viola Amherd Visits Japan 3

Key Findings of JETRO’s Global Trade and Investment Report 2024 3

Terra Drone and Innovation Park Zurich to Pursue Drone R&D Together 4

会見

INTERVIEW

“We believe that “keeping tradition” is “making new things””

Interview with Yumiko and Clément Philippe, Managers at *Mono ni kokoro*.

Mono ni kokoro (ものこころ) is an online store that specializes in high-quality, one-of-a-kind home decor, tableware, and accessories from Japan. For this edition of our newsletter, we interviewed the managers of *Mono ni kokoro*, *Yumiko Philippe* and *Clément Philippe*.

Can you tell us more about the origins of Mono ni kokoro?

Mono ni kokoro is a couple's project: Yumiko, a Japanese woman living in Switzerland since 2013 and Clément, a Swiss man who fell in love with Japan in 2008. Since we met more than ten years ago, we have been traveling to Japan regularly. On each trip, we discover objects made with the greatest care. Little by little, the idea of presenting these objects in Switzerland but above all of highlighting their creators was born. It was during the summer of 2021 that we finally decided to take the plunge and open an online store specializing in Japanese crafts in May 2022. We opted for the online store because we are parents of two young children, and it seemed too complicated to run a physical store with them. We select creations steeped in a long tradition and made with great craftsmanship. The artisans we select have literally put their heart into their works. That's why we chose the name *Mono ni kokoro* (ものこころ),



Clément (left) and Yumiko (right) opened their online store *Mono ni kokoro*, which specializes in Japanese crafts, in 2022. Their aim is to bring these crafts to Switzerland and to highlight the artisans behind these creations.

which means “the heart in objects”.

What inspired you to bring Japanese craftsmanship to Switzerland, and how do you select the artisans you collaborate with?

Yumiko: I have been living in Switzerland since 2013. I always thought that most of the Japanese products we find in Switzerland are very typical and very traditional. However, in Japan, there are many craftsmen or artists who create new designs and try to modernize old styles. They invent their own style while keeping the traditional technique. Objects with a modern design that at the same time also keep the traditional side touch me personally a lot. So, I wanted to present this kind of objects in Switzerland and thus show another side of Japan.

What are the product categories that you specialize in?

Our store does not specialize in certain categories. If we find something that touches us, we contact the creator.

What products are the most successful?

The small plates called “Mamezara” are very popular. They are used to put condiments or sauces. These small plates made of Arita porcelain are very fine and refined. The pure white of the porcelain and the blue of the Gosu painting blend perfectly. In addition, their traditional but well-modernized patterns are very attractive. Our “Uchiwa” fans are also very successful. They are made entirely by hand by a workshop in the region where Yumiko grew up. We met them in January 2022 and were impressed by the quality of their products and their ethics. They only use local and natural materials. They are magnificent objects, very useful and long-lasting.

What challenges have you faced in introducing Japanese design and craftsmanship to the Swiss market?

As you know, the food culture is different between Switzerland and Japan. Normally, the Swiss only use one large plate for the meal.

(continue on page 2)

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A selection of „Mamezara“ plates, one of the most popular items sold on *Mono ni kokoro* © *Mono ni kokoro*

On the other hand, the Japanese use several plates or bowls. For example, in Japan we use: a large plate for the main course; a small plate called “torizara” to share a common dish; a rice bowl; a soup bowl; a “Mamezara” plate; etc. We have seen that Japanese foods are successful in Switzerland, but we have noticed that people do not necessarily know how to use the plates we offer. Finally, we have noticed that the type or design of the products we present does not necessarily correspond to the image that the Swiss have of Japan and therefore have more difficulty “seducing” them. As with plates, the cultural differences between our two countries complicate the understanding of the uses of the products.

How do you see the trend of Japanese items in Switzerland?

We see a lot of typical Japanese things. Objects that are very reminiscent of Japan, with the cherry blossom motif, Hokusai's paintings, the kimono etc. They are very nice, but they lack a bit of modernity.

Who are your main customers?

Our main customers are mainly people who are familiar with Japan

in terms of culture and customs. Most of our customers are women from about 40 to 65 years old. We feel that younger people are interested in the aesthetics of the products in our range but are not willing to spend a lot of money to acquire beautiful objects.

What Swiss stores or companies are you currently working with?

We have put some products on deposit in the Japanese pastry shop *Osio* in Prilly and in shops offering quality, original and diverse things. For example, the shop *L'INSOLITE* in Peseux and the bookstore *ADITYA* in Lugano. We also exhibit in the showroom workshop of a jewelry designer called *nextime* in Hauterive.

What are your future plans for Mono ni kokoro?

We don't have any big plans for now. We just want to continue this project. We have a lot of respect for craftspeople and artists who are always trying to create new things, and we always look forward to meeting them and discovering their products. We believe that “keeping tradition” is “making new things”. Indeed, it is important that tradition is passed down from one generation to the next and that younger generations make it evolve. Otherwise, tradition would disappear. *Mono ni kokoro*'s mission is to help craftspeople make their art known as well as the origin and history of their creations. We put a lot of heart into accomplishing this mission.

Thank you for the interview!

For more information about *Mono ni kokoro* and their diverse catalogue of products, visit their website at mononikokoro.ch.



An „Uchiwa“ fan made with local and natural materials © *Mono ni kokoro*

Swiss President Viola Amherd Visits Japan

Swiss President *Viola Amherd* visited Japan from 5 to 8 August 2024 and met, among others, with Prime Minister *Fumio Kishida*, Foreign Minister *Yoko Kamikawa* and Defense Minister *Minoru Kihara* to hold talks about various topics and to commemorate the 160th anniversary of bilateral relations between the two countries.

President Amherd started off her visit with a stop in Shinagawa, a city ward of Tokyo, which has historical friendship ties with Geneva. There she met the Mayor to discuss ongoing cultural exchanges between the two cities. She traveled to Tokyo on 7 August 2024, where she first met with Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Both sides highlighted their desire to deepen and strengthen bilateral relations, particularly in trade, science, and innovation. Regarding economic ties between the two countries, President Amherd stressed that an update of the [2009 Free Trade Agreement \(FTA\)](#) is desirable from a Swiss perspective, since there is a “lack of dynamism in trade in goods”. Both parties further acknowledged the significance of engaging in dialogue and exploring opportunities in key sectors such as energy and sustainability. Another discussion point was the upcoming 2025 World Expo in Osaka, where

the Swiss pavilion will focus specifically on life sciences, environmental protection, and AI. Discussions about geopolitical issues with Defense Minister Minoru Kihara on the same day mainly focused on the global security architecture as well as the situation on the Korean peninsula and efforts to alleviate tensions. On the last day of her visit, President Amherd was received for an audience by Emperor Naruhito.

Sources: [admin.ch](https://www.admin.ch); [swissinfo](https://www.swissinfo.ch)

動向

SITUATION

Key Findings of JETRO’s Global Trade and Investment Report 2024

JETRO’s 2024 *Global Trade and Investment Report* examines the risks associated with the global economy and the ongoing transformation of the international trade landscape.

Some key takeaways of this year’s edition: In 2023, global trade experienced a decline in both value and volume for the first time in three years. This downturn is linked to several factors, including geopolitical tensions, disruptions in maritime transport routes, and a rise in protectionist measures, all contributing to significant uncertainty regarding the future of trade recovery. One notable trend is the marked decrease in trade between the U.S. and China. Conversely, China is actively increasing its global market share, particularly in sectors such as lithium-ion batter-

ies, EVs, and solar cells. Meanwhile, Western nations are becoming increasingly cautious about the potential oversupply of Chinese goods. Additionally, it has been over three years since the Japanese yen began to depreciate, and while this trend has intensified, Japan’s export performance has remained relatively weak overall.

Cross-border M&A is at a 10-year low. This downturn is largely attributed to the deteriorating financing environment and the heightened scrutiny of inward investments by Western nations, which has significantly restrained overall investment activities. Notably, there has been a marked decrease in Western invest-

ments directed toward China, while Chinese companies accelerated investment in the Middle East and ASEAN. In reverse, Japan’s foreign direct investment is showing signs of recovery. For Japanese companies, export control remains the top economic security issue. The expansion and strengthening of US export controls will particularly require companies to adopt practical measures, such as the establishment of an internal system to appropriately conduct examinations, reports, and evaluations. Despite advancements in establishing environmental and human rights regulations, the industry is experiencing rising discontent as these obligations continue to escalate.

Source: [JETRO](https://www.jetro.go.jp)

動向

TREND

Terra Drone and Switzerland Innovation Park Zurich to Pursue Drone R&D Together

革新

INNOVATION

The Japanese company [Terra Drone](#) and [Switzerland Innovation Park Zurich](#) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), aiming to achieve further advancements in drone technology research and development. This is the first MoU that Switzerland Innovation Park Zurich signs with a non-Swiss drone company.

The partnership aims to advance drone technology and applications, leveraging the strengths of both entities to foster innovation and technological growth in the drone sector. The MoU outlines a framework for collaborative efforts in various drone-related projects, focusing on enhancing the capabilities and applications of drone technology. This strategic partnership is expected to bring together Terra Drone's expertise in drone technology and Switzerland Innovation Park Zurich's robust innovation ecosystem, creating a conducive environment for groundbreaking developments in the field.

Switzerland is a global leader in innovation and has held the top spot in the *Global Innovation Index* for 13 consecutive years. Terra Drone emphasizes in its official press release that this agreement will enable it to work with universities and startups within Switzerland Innovation Park Zurich's extensive network, which consists of universities, industry players and

government. Another goal is to promote collaborative projects and support spin-off companies, especially in areas like robotics and mobility. With over 500 employees, Terra Drone operates in 11 global regions and specializes in drones and urban air mobility. The company is also contemplating the establishment of a development base in Switzerland in the future, which would further enhance the global progress of the drone industry through these initiatives.

Sources: [swisstrade](#); [Terra Drone website](#)

Agenda

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AGENDA

✓ Stay tuned!

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online: <http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>

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