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## **“My friend Furukawa”**

**Networks of the Zurich Silk Merchant Hermann Siber in Yokohama,  
1866–1872**

**Alexis Schwarzenbach**

From 1866 until 1872 the Zurich silk merchant Hermann Siber (1842–1918) lived and traded in the newly opened Japanese port of Yokohama. Together with his Swiss business partner Caspar Brennwald (1838–1899) he ran a trading house by the name of Siber & Brennwald. This company was at the origin of an important 20<sup>th</sup>-century trading house, SiberHegner, which in 2002 was integrated into the largest Swiss service provider in Asia, DKSH.<sup>1</sup> While in recent years the history of Swiss trading houses in general and of Siber & Brennwald in particular have been analysed by various authors, a key source for the foundation of the latter has so far been overlooked.<sup>2</sup> Over 300 letters written by Hermann Siber to his brother Gustav have survived in two archives.<sup>3</sup> Combined with another set of important but better known sources (the diaries of Caspar Brennwald), the letters of Hermann Siber shed new light on the first decade of their joint commercial enterprise.<sup>4</sup>

While the wealth of information contained in these ego-documents allows for a great variety of research questions, this article focuses on the case of Hermann Siber. More specifically, it analyses the European and Japanese networks the businessman used in order to build up a transnational trading house based in Yokohama between 1866 and 1872. This micro-historical and actor-centred approach follows what Christof Dejung has called a combination of economic and cultural history. In other words, this article also attempts to analyse the cultural dimensions at work when 19<sup>th</sup>-century European and Asian traders met to do business.<sup>5</sup> Special emphasis is placed on the concept of friendship which, as we shall see, played an important role in the letters of Herman Siber but which so far has received little attention by historians working on 19<sup>th</sup>-century European traders.

## Background of Hermann Siber

Hermann Siber's family was Swiss but lived in Bergamo where he was born in 1842.<sup>6</sup> There, in the heart of the Italian silk rearing district, his father and a Swiss business partner had established the silk trading house Zuppinger, Siber & Co. The company also ran a large silk throwing factory in Bergamo.<sup>7</sup> Close links existed to the important Swiss silk weaving industry located in the canton of Zurich. Zuppinger, Siber & Co. had an office in Zurich and nearby, Hermann's brother Gustav founded a large mechanical silk weaving mill in 1863.<sup>8</sup>

While the Zurich silk industry traditionally processed raw silk produced in Italy, from the 1850s onwards a disease called pébrine negatively affected the production of raw silk everywhere in Europe.<sup>9</sup> Because demand remained high, European manufacturers began to import large quantities of Asian silks, at first from China and later on also from Japan, which in 1854 had been coerced into opening up its markets to Western trade by gunboat diplomacy. London, and later on also Marseille, became the most important European trading places for Asian silks.<sup>10</sup> Under these circumstances it does not come as a surprise that, after school and university studies in Zurich and after work experience in the family company in Bergamo and Zurich, Hermann Siber was sent to London in 1862. There the 20-year-old worked at the silk department of the banking and trading house Fred. Huth & Co.<sup>11</sup> The main aim of his posting was getting to know East Asian silks. Hermann Siber's principal job was to inspect bales of Chinese and Japanese silk which arrived in the London docks.<sup>12</sup> As silk was a natural product and as Asian silks were, in contrast to European silk, not yet mechanically reeled and thus not standardised, it was important to inspect each bale of silk individually in order to assess its quality.<sup>13</sup> In January 1863 Hermann Siber told his brother that 4000 new bales of raw silk had arrived each of which he wanted to inspect.<sup>14</sup>

During his two years in London Hermann Siber gained valuable knowledge of the various qualities of East Asian silks including Chinese *tsatlees* and *kahings*, Japanese *maibashis* and *oshios* and other, unspecified varieties. The correspondence with his brother shows that, while at first Hermann's quality assessments sometimes displeased the family firm in Bergamo, over time complaints became less frequent, a clear indication of Hermann Siber's increasing expertise.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, a plan began to take shape in Hermann Siber's mind: He wanted to establish himself as a trader in Asia. But until his return to the continent at the end of 1864, he was not yet sure whether he wanted to go to China or to Japan.<sup>16</sup>

The next we hear of Hermann Siber is in the diary of Caspar Brennwald. The latter had been the secretary of the first Swiss trading mission to Japan which in 1864 had been able to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries.<sup>17</sup>

Convinced of the economic potential of Japan, Caspar Brennwald wanted to es-

tablish himself as a trader in Yokohama and had good reason to believe that the Swiss government would entrust him with the Swiss Consulate, a job he officially obtained at the beginning of 1866.<sup>18</sup> However, for the realization of Brennwald's dream he needed to acquire two more things: capital and silk knowledge. His own background was in cotton. Before embarking on his diplomatic mission he had begun his commercial career by working for an Aarau cotton trader. Furthermore, as the son of a master baker from Männedorf his financial means were not sufficient for starting a transcontinental trading activity.<sup>19</sup> On 24 July 1865 Brennwald recorded a meeting taking place in Zurich: "Hermann Sieber [sic] spends the whole afternoon with me; during our conversations I propose to do something together in Japan, to which he is not disinclined, but he wishes to talk it over with his brother."<sup>20</sup>

Over the next couple of days Caspar Brennwald met again several times with Hermann Siber and also had a longer discussion with his brother Gustav. The latter supported the plan of establishing a trading house in Yokohama but insisted that the two prospective partners had to "find a rich London house readily supporting us with money."<sup>21</sup> On a joint journey to London in November 1865, Caspar Brennwald and Hermann Siber were able to convince Siber's former employer Fred. Huth & Co. to support their plan.<sup>22</sup> Shortly thereafter Gustav Siber also came to London and assisted the two partners in drawing up a contract.<sup>23</sup> While this document does not survive, the correspondence between Hermann Siber and his brother shows that Siber and Brennwald were to share all future profits of the company equally.<sup>24</sup> This is at odds with the fact that Caspar Brennwald was only able to invest CHF 50,000 into the new company, while Hermann Siber contributed CHF 200,000.<sup>25</sup> The most likely explanation for the equal distribution of profits is that the Siber family placed high hopes in the commercial value of Caspar Brennwald's diplomatic network in Japan, an area of the world they as yet knew nothing about.

The two partners' personal investments, which added up to £ 10,000, were more than doubled by a "blanco credit" from Fred. Huth & Co. for £ 15,000.<sup>26</sup> In Zurich, the partners were able to secure a credit line from the Schweizerische Kreditanstalt for CHF 100,000 to 150,000, while in Bergamo they had obtained a guarantee "for each kind of eventuality" from Zuppinger, Siber & Co.<sup>27</sup> With this sound financial basis in place, a well-known prerequisite for the establishment of any trading house, the new company by the name of Siber & Brennwald was officially founded in London in November 1865.<sup>28</sup> One day after Caspar Brennwald's official appointment as Switzerland's first consul in Japan, the partners' journey began. Leaving Zurich on 15 February 1866 and travelling via Lyon, Marseilles, Egypt, Ceylon and China, Siber and Brennwald reached Yokohama after 69 days, on 24 April 1866.<sup>29</sup>

## Yokohama Friendships

The Yokohama Siber and Brennwald travelled to was a new city. Before the shogunate decided to turn it into a major port for Japan's interaction with foreign traders in 1859 it had been a mere fishing village. While foreigners had extraterritorial rights placing them outside of local jurisdiction, the city was planned and policed by the Japanese authorities.<sup>30</sup> Within a day's reach by boat to the country's capital Edo, renamed Tokyo in 1868, Yokohama was endowed with a deep-sea harbour and divided into several sectors. Constructed along a straight waterfront, the city's centre held docks, the custom's house and other government buildings. While the Japanese quarter lay to the northwest, the foreign settlement lay to the southwest. Behind the city centre, on a moated area to the southeast, lay the brothel quarter, deemed essential for both Japanese and foreign residents.<sup>31</sup> Shortly after their arrival, Siber & Brennwald bought Lot 90A of Yokohama's foreign settlement, which was to remain the company's base until the 1923 Kantō earthquake destroyed large parts of the city.<sup>32</sup>

Hermann Siber stayed in Yokohama for six years, returning to Switzerland after the death of his brother Gustav in May 1872. His stay can be divided into three distinct periods. A first phase was marked by the establishment of Siber & Brennwald's trading activity in Japan. This period lasted until the departure of Caspar Brennwald to Europe in August 1867. At this point, Hermann Siber took over Brennwald's diplomatic post as Switzerland's Consul-General in Japan. He retained this position all the way through the turbulent year of 1868 marked by the Japanese civil war, which was to overthrow the shogunate and install the Meiji regime.<sup>33</sup> The third and final phase of Hermann Siber's stay covers the period from December 1869, when Caspar Brennwald returned to Yokohama and resumed his diplomatic post, to Siber's departure in May 1872.

During his time in Yokohama, Hermann Siber was able to activate and construct a great variety of financial, commercial and diplomatic networks and put them to use for his business. While for the establishment of relations with Japanese business partners, the existence of what Christoph Dejung has described as a "shared mercantile culture" between Western and local traders in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Asia helped overcome misunderstandings in order to identify lucrative business opportunities on both sides, Hermann Siber's most important network was a traditional one.<sup>34</sup> As Harold James and others have pointed out, family capitalism was the corner stone of most 19<sup>th</sup>-century transnational economic activity.<sup>35</sup> In our case, Hermann Siber's brother Gustav clearly was his most important business partner, financial supporter and general adviser. Every single business move was discussed between Yokohama and Zurich. While private family matters were at times also discussed, most ink was spent on deals past, present or future.

Reading Hermann Siber's letters it becomes clear, however, that his familial network was complemented with a network of friends. While in the plural the term usually referred to companies he was doing good business with, in the singular it was applied to individuals Siber personally knew.<sup>36</sup> Frequently he tells his brother of meetings with friends he had either known before coming to Japan or made upon arrival. This group of people included both Europeans such as "my old friend Carlino Ziegler", whom Hermann Siber was overjoyed to meet on his first day in Yokohama, and Japanese individuals such as traders, government officials or high ranking officers whom he got to know in Yokohama or Edo.<sup>37</sup>

Following Clifford Geertz's seminal study on a Moroccan bazaar, sociological research often argues that close ties of friendship can be harmful in business relations.<sup>38</sup> However, in the age of family capitalism, business and friendship were not considered to be at odds with each other. When Carlino Ziegler decided to work for a rival raw silk trader in 1867, Hermann Siber told his brother: "[W]e shall be competitors, for sure, but we shall always remain good friends."<sup>39</sup> Especially in times of crisis, a businessman such as Hermann Siber relied *both* on his family and on his friends. In the spring of 1871, for example, when the establishment of the Paris Commune caused Gustav Siber to predict a global collapse of raw silk prices, his brother argued that their European "friends" should not lose faith in them and continue to provide Siber & Brennwald with credit to buy silk at advantageous prices.<sup>40</sup> For both Hermann Siber's European and Japanese friends, we often do not know much more than their names and functions. One friendship established in Siber's last phase in Yokohama, however, is far better documented and sheds light on the gradual way in which a business contact could develop into a much more encompassing relationship. As this case involves a Japanese individual, it furthermore sheds light on one of the strategies employed by Europeans eager to enter Asian markets.

### **Phase 1: April 1866 – August 1867**

The main reason why Hermann Siber came to Japan was to turn his silk expertise gained in London into a profitable business. Before leaving Europe he had therefore contacted potential buyers via his extensive silk network not only in Switzerland, Italy and Britain but also in France, where Europe's most important silk weaving industry was located (in Lyon).<sup>41</sup> These efforts were paying off: Two weeks after their arrival in Japan, Caspar Brennwald noted: "In the evening, the English Mail of 12 March sails in and brings us a great many letters of credit from Lyon and London for silk purchases."<sup>42</sup> The problem was that silk was in

such high demand that Hermann Siber had difficulty buying the commodity at the prices set by his customers.<sup>43</sup> It took half a year before Caspar Brennwald could note: “Today Siber buys silk for the first time.”<sup>44</sup> In October 1866, Hermann Siber’s letters mention the first shipment of 13 bales of raw silk, presumably for a French customer in Lyon.<sup>45</sup> Further shipments followed, among them 60 bales exported to Europe in December 1866.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to raw silk, exporting silkworm eggs was a major business. This was directly linked to the pébrine crisis damaging the production of raw silk in the traditional European silk rearing districts, including the main centres of production, in southern France and northern Italy. As Japanese silkworms were less affected by the disease, European traders and governments began buying large quantities of silkworm eggs mounted onto cardboard. Thanks to Caspar Brennwald’s contact to the Swiss government, Siber & Brennwald were able to buy silkworm eggs not only for private entrepreneurs but also for the governments of the Swiss cantons of Ticino and Grisons, Switzerland’s main silk rearing regions.<sup>47</sup> Incidentally, Siber & Brennwald entered the trade at exactly the right moment, for the market for silkworm eggs began to boom in 1864/65, reaching a peak at the end of the decade.<sup>48</sup> In May 1867 the Canton of Ticino ordered silkworm eggs for no less than CHF 100,000.<sup>49</sup> One year later Hermann Siber proudly told his brother that in silkworm eggs Siber & Brennwald were making “a solid business & for ourselves a good name because our cartons are exquisitely beautiful & most Italians want to buy some.”<sup>50</sup>

The key for successful purchases of raw silk and silkworm eggs was the Japanese language. In contrast to China, where Europeans often depended upon bilingual intermediaries, the so-called *compradores*, in Japan, in addition to using *compradores* brought in from China, Japanese intermediaries such as *bantos* or *kodzukais* played an important role.<sup>51</sup> They expected their European employers to acquire some working knowledge of the local language.<sup>52</sup> This was probably the reason why Hermann Siber began learning Japanese as soon as he arrived in Yokohama.<sup>53</sup> To his brother he explained: “In view of the fact that I shall probably have to stay in this country for many more years, [...] it is my aim to learn the language as well as possible.”<sup>54</sup>

## Phase 2: August 1867 – December 1869

The outbreak of the Japanese civil war and the installation of the Meiji government in 1868 coincided with Caspar Brennwald’s absence in Japan. In these turbulent times, Hermann Siber was Switzerland’s Consul-General in Yokohama. Despite the fact that at the outbreak of hostilities the foreign representatives had

declared their neutrality, Hermann Siber took advantage of the situation and developed an intense trading relationship with the northern Japanese domain of Sendai.<sup>55</sup> This region was an ally of the shogunate and together with the latter was eventually defeated by the Meiji forces. During the conflict, Hermann Siber provided the domain with military equipment in exchange for high quality silk and silkworm eggs the region was famous for.<sup>56</sup> This trade was highly illegal, not only because foreign powers were supposed to be neutral in the conflict. The island of Sabusawa on Sendai Bay, with which Hermann Siber traded, was also not one of the treaty ports officially opened to foreign trade.

In the spring of 1868, Hermann Siber told his brother several times of the promising silk trade with Sendai.<sup>57</sup> Probably because the trade in military equipment was illegal, this part of the deal was not mentioned in the correspondence. However, when reporting the problems a Dutch competitor, Textor & Co., was encountering in trading military equipment to Sendai, Hermann Siber told his brother that the Dutch consul was much embarrassed because of this and added: "Me, on the other hand, I'm doing the things in a cleverer way, of this you can be sure."<sup>58</sup> In other words, the Swiss consul himself was doing illegal business but got away with it because he was not caught. After the war, Siber & Brennwald were even able to take the Sendai government successfully to court thus recuperating the debts the domain had incurred in the weapons-for-silk trade. While the court case is the reason we know about Hermann Siber's trade in military equipment, its profit was impressive: The debt alone amounted to \$47,188.<sup>59</sup>

### Phase 3: December 1869 – May 1872

At the end of 1869 Hermann Siber was glad to return his diplomatic job to Caspar Brennwald, because it had tied him down in Yokohama and prevented him from making useful business trips to silk producing regions.<sup>60</sup> Soon thereafter, Hermann Siber started promising relations with the Maebashi domain, one of the most important silk regions of central Japan. In 1869, the British diplomat Francis Adam had undertaken a research trip to Maebashi. Together with the British trading house Jardine, Matheson & Co. and with the support of the British Minister Sir Harry Parkes, Adam aimed at introducing European style silk reeling to the domain.<sup>61</sup> Maebashi officials were not convinced by the British proposal however, and in April 1870 a high representative of the domain visited Siber in Yokohama, enquiring about silk reeling in Europe, the London raw silk market and ways to improve the quality of local silk.<sup>62</sup>

Hermann Siber immediately sensed his chance to get privileged access to Maebashi silk. He suggested that the domain hire the Swiss silk expert Caspar Müller

and construct a European style silk reeling plant under Müller's supervision. Siber told his brother in June 1870: "Better a Swiss than an Englishman, who, if they can attain such a position, would try to monopolize all for themselves, according to the principle & model & instruction of their minister Sir Harry Parkes."<sup>63</sup> One month later Hermann Siber triumphantly reported: "After endless efforts and works, I succeeded in realizing the employment of C. Müller as supervisor of the filature for the province of Maebashi and in obtaining permission from the government for that. It was really not an easy matter & I was often in despair for its ultimate success."<sup>64</sup> Siber went on to explain that this success was "a personal satisfaction for me, because by this I can celebrate a great triumph over Parkes who will get extremely annoyed anyway that my proposal was finally accepted instead of his."<sup>65</sup>

While for Hermann Siber the main aim of his new connections with Maebashi was privileged access to the region's high-quality silk products, for the domain the employment of Caspar Müller meant that for the first time European silk reeling technology was introduced to Japan. Previously, all Japanese silk was hand spun and thus much more uneven than the mechanically spun European silk.<sup>66</sup> Now Maebashi had the chance to improve its most important crop, and get a better price for it on the world market to which it was linked through traders such as Hermann Siber. And although Caspar Müller only stayed in Maebashi for two and a half months, the knowledge he brought with him stayed in the region.<sup>67</sup> Two years later, the Meiji government established a much larger mechanical silk mill in the immediate vicinity of the dominion's capital, in Tomioka. This time, a French trading house established in Yokohama set up the deal and the gigantic Tomioka plant was erected under the supervision of a Frenchman.<sup>68</sup>

While we don't know to what extent the Maebashi engagement contributed to the performance of Siber & Brennwald, another Japanese contact established one year later did become a positive, long-term business relationship. In April 1871 Hermann Siber informed his brother that he had been able to secure a large portion of high-quality silks produced around Oshiu in northern Japan. The deal was made possible through Furukawa Ichibé, the *banto* of the important Kyoto banking and trading house of the Ono family. Chief buyer of the Ono group since 1862, Furukawa was responsible for their silk trade in Yokohama.<sup>69</sup> Hermann Siber told his brother: "The man with whom I arranged this business is one of the biggest & richest Japanese merchants, absolutely the biggest trader of Oshiu silk. He does not want to sell his silk here since the local market price seems too low to him & he could be convinced to consign his stock to us, hoping to get a better price in Europe."<sup>70</sup>

Although Hermann Siber was appalled by the low prices his London partners accepted for some of the Oshius he sent them, his fears that Furukawa Ichibé

would stop doing business with him were unfounded.<sup>71</sup> This was partly due to the nascent friendship between the two businessmen, a terminology which first appears in the sources in October 1871. Half a year after their first meeting Hermann Siber told his brother that "my silk friend Furukawa" still intended to sell silk in Europe if the prices in Yokohama were too low. At the same time Siber was helping Furukawa build up a mechanical silk mill headed by Caspar Müller near Tokyo, incidentally the second European-style factory in Japan.<sup>72</sup> In February 1872, Caspar Brennwald noted that Siber & Brennwald gave their friend an expensive gift, a gold watch with a chain worth \$108.<sup>73</sup> In April 1872 Furukawa invited his Swiss friend to a two week trip to Hyogo, Osaka and Kyoto, where he was introduced to Furukawa's boss, the owner of the Ono group.<sup>74</sup>

Shortly before his trip to Kyoto, Hermann Siber had received the news of the death of his brother and decided to return to Europe in May 1872.<sup>75</sup> The diary of Caspar Brennwald shows that Furukawa remained an important partner for the company even after Siber's departure. Several times the Swiss merchant house organised six-figure dollar loans for their business friend who in return consigned large amounts of silk to them.<sup>76</sup> Even after the collapse of the Ono group in 1874, Siber & Brennwald continued to do business with Furukawa – in 1876 he became their silk buying agent and received generous commissions for his services.<sup>77</sup> One year later Furukawa changed his line of business. With the financial assistance of a Japanese partner he bought a copper mine in central Japan which he successfully transformed into a profitable enterprise. This was the nucleus of the Furukawa *zaibatsu*, one of the most important Japanese industrial groups still in business today.<sup>78</sup>

Both Hermann Siber and Furukawa Ichibé founded companies with long-lasting commercial success. While business historians have long stopped analysing the emergence of modern firms by focusing on the perceived genius of their founders, it is clear that both Siber and Furukawa were cut from the same cloth. The two men shared a keen business sense seeing opportunities rather than risks in the global economy emerging in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, apart from a mutual appreciation as shrewd businessmen, Furukawa and Siber also stood by each other in difficult times. In August 1876, four years after the departure of Hermann Siber and two years after the collapse of Furukawa's employer, the Ono group, Caspar Brennwald's diary shows that Furukawa was hired as a silk agent by Siber & Brennwald.<sup>79</sup> While this employment was certainly a welcome opportunity for Furukawa to get back on his feet, it is very likely that it came about because of his friendship with Hermann Siber. Three months earlier, Caspar Brennwald had noted: "Furukawa passes by once more and asks about the money for Siber's girl, he will go back into silk and [silkworm egg] cartons. I'm writing to Siber."<sup>80</sup>

The woman referred to in this passage was called Shiho Kashiwagi. While Caspar Brennwald referred to her as Siber's "musm ", a term used by Westerners to describe young Japanese women,<sup>81</sup> her Japanese descendants note that the two got married and had two sons, Shoichi born in 1867 and Jiro born in 1872.<sup>82</sup> After Hermann Siber's departure from Japan he supported Shiho Kashiwagi financially and, as the above quote indicates, used Fukukawa Ichib  as an intermediary between his company and his Japanese family, a clear indication of the intimacy of their friendship.<sup>83</sup> Both sons were eventually adopted by Japanese families and Shiho Kashiwagi married a Japanese man. She stayed in touch with her sons and revealed her identity as their children's grandmother at the news of Hermann Siber's death in 1918. His sons organised a memorial service for him at the Bodaiji temple in Yokohama which their mother attended.<sup>84</sup> In Europe, Hermann Siber had remained a bachelor.

#### Notes

- 1 On SiberHegner see SiberHegner (ed.), *Hundert Jahre im Dienste des Handels, 1865–1965*, Z rich 1965; on DKSH see Friedemann Bartu, *The Fan Tree Company. Three Swiss merchants in Asia*, [Z rich] 2005, and [www.dksh.com](http://www.dksh.com) (18. 4. 2019).
- 2 On Swiss trading houses see Christof Dejung, "Unbekannte Intermedi re. Schweizerische Handelsfirmen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert", *traverse* 17/1 (2010), 139–155; Christof Dejung, *Die F den des globalen Marktes. Eine Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Welthandels am Beispiel der Handelsfirma Gebr der Volkart 1851–1999*, K ln 2013; Andreas Zanger, "Schweizer Seidenh ndler in Japan", in Michaela Reichel, Hans Bjarne Thomsen (eds.), *Kirschbl te & Edelweiss. Der Import des Exotischen*, Baden 2014, 128–143; Lea Haller, *Transithandel. Geld- und Warenstr me im globalen Kapitalismus*, Berlin 2019. On Siber & Brennwald see Bartu 2005 (see note 1), Zanger (see note 2). On the origins of Siber & Brennwald see also Mariko Fukuoka, Alexis Schwarzenbach, "Between Trade and Diplomacy. The Commercial Activities of the Swiss Silk Merchants Siber & Brennwald in late Edo and early Meiji Japan", in Robert Fletcher, Robert Hellyer (eds.), *Westerners in Nineteenth-Century China & Japan. New Sources and Perspectives*, forthcoming.
- 3 247 letters are held by the Zentralbibliothek Z rich (ZBZ), MS Z II 349; 80 letters are held by the corporate archives of Diethelm Keller Holding AG in Zurich (DKH), C 3 1, DKH C 3 2.
- 4 The diaries of Caspar Brennwald (DCB) are held at DKH, C 1 54. The author would like to thank Diethelm Keller Holding AG for granting him access to both the diaries and the Siber letters in their archives. For an ongoing research project on the Zurich silk industry at Lucerne University, [www.hslu.ch/en/lucerne-university-of-applied-sciences-and-arts/research/projects/detail/?pid=124](http://www.hslu.ch/en/lucerne-university-of-applied-sciences-and-arts/research/projects/detail/?pid=124) (5. 10. 2019), the letters were transcribed by Dr. Alexandra Bloch-Pfister, M nster, Germany. The transcription was co-financed by Lucerne University and the Rekihaku, the National Museum of Japanese History. The author would like to thank Mariko Fukuoka (Tokyo) and Pierre-Yves Donz  (Osaka) for assisting him with Japanese sources used for this article, and Fuyuko Kondo (New York) for granting him access to the memoirs of her mother Akiko Kondo, great-granddaughter of Hermann Siber. Christophe Gautier (Zurich) kindly established the contact to Hermann Siber's Japanese descendants.
- 5 See Dejung 2010 (see note 2).
- 6 See entry "Hermann Siber" in Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz, [www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D30929.php](http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D30929.php) (18. 4. 2019).

- 7 See Silvio Honegger, *Gli Svizzeri di Bergamo. Storia della comunità svizzera di Bergamo dal Cinquecento all'inizio del Novecento*, Bergamo 1997, 96.
- 8 On Gustav Siber's factory, the Mechanische Seidenweberei Schönenberg (TG) see Erwin Brüllmann, *Seidenstoffweberei Schönenberg. 1863–1963*, Schönenberg 1963.
- 9 On the history of the Zurich silk industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century see Walter Bodmer, *Die Entwicklung der schweizerischen Textilwirtschaft im Rahmen der übrigen Industrien und Wirtschaftszweige*, Zürich 1960, 304–308; Alexis Schwarzenbach, Monika Burri, Roman Wild, *Glanzgut. Eine transnationale Geschichte der Zürcher Seidenindustrie*, forthcoming.
- 10 On pébrine and its effects on the global silk industry see Giovanni Federico, *An Economic History of the Silk Industry, 1830–1930*, Cambridge 1997, 36–41.
- 11 Hermann Siber to Gustav Siber, henceforth HS to GS, 13. 10. 1862, ZBZ Ms Z II 349. For Hermann Siber's education see SiberHegner (see note 1), 12.
- 12 HS to GS, 21. 10. 1862, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 13 On the history of European mechanical silk reeling see Carlo Poni, *La seta in Italia. Una grande industria prima della rivoluzione industriale*, Bologna 2009.
- 14 HS to GS, 1. 1. 1863, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 15 HS to GS, 22. 11. 1862 or 23. 3. 1863, ibid.
- 16 HS to GS, 26. 1. 1863, ZBZ Ms Z II 349; HS to GS, 4. 12. 1863, ibid.
- 17 For details of the Swiss diplomatic mission see Paul Akio Nakai, *Das Verhältnis zwischen Japan und der Schweiz. Vom Beginn der diplomatischen Beziehungen 1859 bis 1868*, Bern 1967, 45–114. See also the contribution of Pascal Lottaz in this issue.
- 18 Brennwald compiled several reports on the Japanese economy, see Kaspar [sic] Brennwald, *Bericht über den Seiden-Export von Japan*, Bern 1863; Kaspar Brennwald, *Bericht über den Thee-Exorthandel Japans und den Exorthandel Japans im Allgemeinen*, Bern 1863. For his appointment as consul general see DCB, 14. 2. 1866.
- 19 On Caspar Brennwald see entry "Caspar Brennwald" in Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz, [www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D30913.php](http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D30913.php) (18. 4. 2019); [Lebenslauf Caspar Brennwald], ca. 1899, DKH C 1 56; SiberHegner (see note 1), 7–10.
- 20 DCB, 24. 7. 1865.
- 21 DCB, 11. 8. 1865.
- 22 DCB, 10. 11. 1865.
- 23 DCB, 20. 11. 1865.
- 24 HS to GS, 10. 9. 1867, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 25 DCB, 2. 10. 1865.
- 26 DCB, 28. 11. 1865.
- 27 DCB, 27. 11. 1865. For the deal with the Kreditanstalt see DCB, 5. 9. 1865.
- 28 For the importance of finance see Dejung 2010 (see note 2), 148–149.
- 29 DCB 15. 2.-24. 4. 1866.
- 30 On the establishment of Yokohama by the shogunal government see Simon Partner, *The Merchant's Tale. Yokohama and the Transformation of Japan*, New York 2017.
- 31 For a map showing Yokohama c. 1860 see ibid., 14.
- 32 DCB, 3. 9. 1866; SiberHegner (see note 1), 15, 32.
- 33 On the Meiji restoration see Marius B. Jansen (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 5, Cambridge 2008, 308–366.
- 34 Christof Dejung, "An den Grenzen der Kaufmannskultur? Europäische Handelsfirmen in Asien während der Kolonialzeit", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Sonderheft 24 (2012), 159.
- 35 See Harold James, *Family Capitalism. Wendels, Haniels, Falcks, and the Continental European Model*, Cambridge, MA 2006, and, for instance, Geoffrey Jones, Mary Rose, "Family capitalism", *Business History* 35/4 (1993), 1–16.
- 36 The Swiss trading house Sarasin & C. is, for example, repeatedly referred to as "Freunde". See HS to GS, 31. 8. 1867; 25. 2. 1871, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 37 HS to GS, 10. 5. 1866, ibid.

- 38 Clifford Geertz, "Suq: The Bazaar Economy in Sefrou", in Clifford Geertz, Hildred Geertz, Lawrence Rosen (eds.), *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society. Three Essays in Cultural Analysis*, Cambridge 1979, 123–313; for a recent discussion see Arne Dulsrud, Kjell Grønhaug, "Is Friendship Consistent with Competitive Market Exchange? A Microsociological Analysis of the Fish Export, Import Business", *Acta Sociologica* 50/1 (2007), 7–19.
- 39 HS to GS, 30. 10. 1867, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 40 HS to GS, 29. 5. 1871, *ibid.*
- 41 For the trip to Lyon see DCB, 8.–15. 2. 1866.
- 42 DCB, 1. 5. 1866.
- 43 HS to GS, 27. 7. 1866, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 44 DCB, 23. 10. 1866.
- 45 HS to GS, 31. 10. 1866, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 46 DCB, 16. 12. 1866.
- 47 HS to GS, 11. 7. 1866; 12. 5. 1867, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 48 Federico (see note 10), 38–39.
- 49 Nakai (see note 17), 121.
- 50 HS to GS, 22. 8. 1868, DKH C.3.1.
- 51 Zanger (see note 2), 135.
- 52 Albert Jost, *Charles Rudolph & Co. 50 Jahre Rohseidenimport*, Zürich 1939, 65.
- 53 HS to GS, 10. 5. 1866, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 54 HS to GS, 11. 7. 1866, *ibid.*
- 55 保谷徹「国際法のなかの戊辰戦争」（奈倉哲三・保谷徹・箱石大編『戊辰戦争の新視点』（上））(Toru Hoya, "Boshin War seen from the International Law", in Nakura, Hoya, Hakoshi [eds.] 2018), 2–24.
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- 59 Hayakawa (see note 56), 18–19.
- 60 HS to GS, 2. 12. 1869, DKH C.3.1.
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- 62 速水美智子編・内海孝解題『速水堅曹資料集—富岡製糸所長とその前後記』（文生書院、二〇一四年）資料編「速水堅曹翁の自伝」、「履歴抜粹」(Michiko Hayami [ed.], *Collection of Sources of Hayami Kenso. Director of Tomioka Silk Mill and Records Relating to His Life*, Tokyo 2014), 9, 114.
- 63 HS to GS, 13. 6. 1870, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 64 HS to GS, 11. 7. 1870, *ibid.*
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 On the Early Modern mechanization of European silk spinning see Poni (see note 13).
- 67 For details of Caspar Müller's stay in Maebashi see Fukuoka, Schwarzenbach (see note 2).
- 68 On Tomioka see Seiichi Kondo, "Tomioka Silk Mill and Related Sites. World Heritage Nomination", UNESCO World Heritage Nomination File. Agency of Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, 2013, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1449/documents> (10. 10. 2019).
- 69 On Furukawa Ichibé see 五日会編『翁の直話—古河市兵衛ノ経歴談』（五日会、一九二六年）(Itsukakai [ed.], *The Old Man's Personal Account. Narrative of Furukawa Ichibé's Life History*, Itsukakai 1926); Stuart D. B. Picken, *Historical Dictionary of Japanese Business*, Lanham 2017, 159.
- 70 HS to GS, 8. 4. 1871, ZBZ Ms Z II 349.
- 71 HS to GS, 21. 8. 1871, *ibid.*
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- 73 DCB, 9. 2. 1872.
- 74 DCB, 22. 4. 1872; 小野善太郎著・宮本又次解説『維新の豪商 小野組始末』(青蛙房、一九六六年) (Zentaro Ono [Commentary by Mataji Miyamoto], *The Outcome of Ono-gumi. Big Trading Firm of the Meiji Restoration Period*, Tokyo 1966), 134, 89–91.
- 75 DCB, 12. 3., 25. 5. 1872.
- 76 DCB 17. 6., 20. 8. 1872, 23. 3. 1873, 20. 1. 1874.
- 77 DCB 16. 6., 3. 8. 1876.
- 78 On Furukawa group see [www.furukawakk.co.jp/e/corporate](http://www.furukawakk.co.jp/e/corporate) (16. 5. 2019).
- 79 DCB, 3. 8. 1876.
- 80 DCB, 23. 5. 1876.
- 81 DCB, 31. 12. 1872; for a discussion of the term *musm * deriving from Japanese "musume" (daughter) see <https://forum.wordreference.com/threads/musm%C3%A9-o-musme.526834> (8. 9. 2019).
- 82 Mémoires Akiko Kondo, no date, and further information provided to the author by Fuyuko Kondo, great-great-granddaughter of Hermann Siber and Shiho Kashiwagi. DCB, 31. 12. 1872, notes the birth of the second son.
- 83 In his autobiography, Furukawa mentions both Hermann Siber and Caspar Müller but does not elaborate on the quality of his relationship with them. See Itsukakai (see note 69).
- 84 Fuyuko Kondo to the author, 7. 6. 2019.

## R sum 

### **«Mon ami Furukawa». Les r seaux du marchand de soie zurichois Hermann Siber   Yokohama, 1866–1872**

Cette contribution examine les r seaux du n gociant en soie zurichois Hermann Siber, qui,   partir de 1866, a d velopp  avec Caspar Brennwald l'une des premi res soci t s suisses de n goce au Japon. Elle se fonde notamment sur la correspondance encore in dite de Siber avec son fr re bas    Zurich. Ces sources fournissent des informations sur un r seau de relations   plusieurs niveaux avec des partenaires europ ens et asiatiques, r sultant   la fois des contacts commerciaux et diplomatiques de Hermann Siber. Cet article soutient que les amiti s,   c t  d'un puissant r seau capitaliste familial,  taient essentielles   la construction d'une soci t  de n goce transcontinentale. Dans ce but, le texte s'arr te sur l'exemple de l'ami de Hermann Siber, l'homme d'affaires japonais Furukawa Ichib  (1832–1903).

*(Traduction: Cyril Cordoba)*