

Zeitschrift: Swiss textiles [English edition]
Herausgeber: Swiss office for the development of trade
Band: - (1951)
Heft: [1]: 25th anniversary of Textile suisses

Artikel: The silk and rayon industry
Autor: Niggli, Th.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-798753>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 01.04.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

TEXTILE INDUSTRY



THE SILK AND RAYON INDUSTRY

by Dr. Th. NIGGLI, Vice-President of the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry

Switzerland's silk industry enjoys a world-wide reputation, less on account of its industrial importance than because of its capacity of output which is based on a centuries' old tradition. As early as the 13th century, silks were woven in Zurich with Italian raw silk and sold abroad. To-day mainly raw silk from the Far East and rayon are used. Nevertheless, the fact that most of Switzerland's output is sent abroad has not altered. This consists of silk, rayon and staple-fibre fabrics in all price ranges, from the popular to the most exclusive article. Silk and rayon fabrics are exported to all countries. Exports for 1950 are estimated at roughly 80 million Swiss francs; this total used nevertheless to be much greater when quotas, payment difficulties and discriminations were still unknown.

Exports are either handled directly by the manufacturers or by the many export firms which have their own representatives on all markets and often have the goods woven and finished to order, according to their own instructions.

One of the reasons, and not the least important, for the reputation of Swiss silk and rayon fabrics is the quality of their finish. Switzerland's textile finishing and processing industry which is also numbered among the oldest industries of the country and enjoys a sound reputation, both at home and abroad, has developed to a very high degree.

The weaving of bolting-silk constitutes a speciality apart. This fabric is still made on hand-loom and is known for its unequalled quality. Output is almost entirely devoted to export.

The silk ribbon industry which was established long ago in Switzerland concentrates mainly on export. There is a special article on this subject (see page 85).

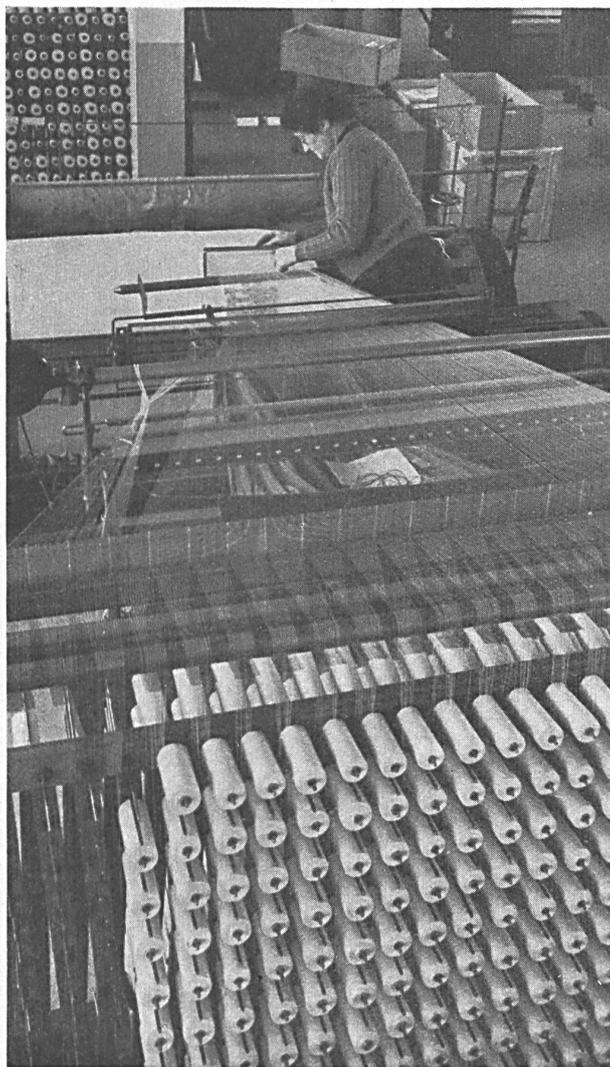
The working of silk, rayon and mixed yarns for weaving, for the manufacture of stockings and other purposes, has also been carried out in Switzerland for many centuries. Mention must be made too of an important speciality, the manufacture of sewing and embroidery silks for industrial purposes or for sale retail, a large proportion of which is exported.

Schappe has also been spun in Switzerland for many years now. The continually increasing difficulties of obtaining stocks of raw materials and the dwindling possibilities of disposing of schappe yarns have caused manufacturers to work with other fibres, which has considerably increased the range of possibilities open to them.

The raw and finished silk used in weaving and for other purposes is supplied by numerous import firms and business houses, which not only maintain buying organisations on the principal raw silk markets, but also possess their own spinning mills, particularly in Italy.

With regard to rayon, Switzerland possesses a large very well equipped manufacturing industry of its own which is able not only to meet home demands but also to export a very large proportion of its products. Up till now only viscose rayon has been manufactured but the manufacture of nylon and other synthetic yarns will very shortly be undertaken.

One of the distinguishing features of the Swiss silk industry is its international structure: there is probably not a country in the world where its products



IN SWITZERLAND

are not known and bought, and there are many firms with their own mills abroad. The silk industry and trade are therefore particularly susceptible to crises, especially since the home market, less affected by market fluctuations, only takes up a limited part of the output. Thanks to the variety of its production and the great number and diversity of the markets open

to it, the Swiss silk industry can however make the best possible use of the opportunities for business presented. It has survived crises and successfully come through periods of difficulty and will certainly know how to succeed in the future particularly now that the emphasis is placed on liberalisation and a more elastic organisation of trade.



THE COTTON INDUSTRY

by Dr. A. WIEGNER, President of the Paritary Commission of the Swiss Cotton Industry, St-Gall

Switzerland is a small country in the heart of Europe, without access to the sea and not possessing any natural treasures worth mentioning apart from its resources of electrical energy. An area of 16,000 sq. miles and a population of 4.75 million inhabitants make it one of the most densely populated countries in Europe, for a large part of the country, which is so famous for its natural beauties, is composed of unfertile mountains and lakes. Nevertheless, the standard of living of its inhabitants is at the moment the highest in Europe and is only beaten in the world by that of the United States. How is this possible?

Considered as the oldest democracy in the world, Switzerland has always defended its principles of liberty, which enabled the early development of its trade and industry. Without raw materials, without a seaboard of its own, it has only been able to attain a high standard of living by exporting considerable quantities of finished products of a high standard of workmanship. With the raw materials it imports, Swiss industry manufactures products of a very high quality, the greater part of which is re-exported; machinery, watches, chemical and textile products, all have acquired world-wide fame because they come up to the highest technical requirements and satisfy the most refined tastes.

Of Switzerland's textile industries, cotton plays by far the most important role. More than half of its 20,000 looms work for export. The raw material, imported from all producer countries, is transformed in Swiss spinning, doubling and cloth mills and finishing establishments into a great variety of fabrics. Let us mention among these the fine novelty fabrics, resulting from the very finest finishing processes, such as organdie, which was invented in Switzerland, voiles and fashionable colour-woven and printed fabrics, poplins, furnishing fabrics, handkerchiefs and even fabrics for industrial use, all of which have carried the good name of the Swiss cotton industry to every continent.

The high wages demanded by the very advanced standard of living make it more difficult to compete on world markets. The limited home market and the

diversity of the needs of the foreign consumer do not allow manufacture to be carried on rationally in large quantities. Therefore the Swiss cotton industry has to find its own solution in order to be able, in spite of everything, to offer its products at competitive prices, while at the same time adapting itself to the changing demands of fashion and the foreign consumer. This result is only possible at the price of a very highly developed rationalisation of the work, which allows a small-scale production to benefit by the industrial advantages of production on a large scale. Without taking any of the mobility away from Swiss production, the most modern methods of the scientific organisation of work have had to be applied. Nevertheless, in spite of very modern up-to-date machinery and a completely rational organisation, Switzerland's cotton industry would not be able to do without skilled manpower; and the manual skill of the workers and their sense of quality, handed down from generation to generation, are indispensable to the manufacture of fabrics of a beauty and a perfection such as are found to-day in hand-printed fabrics for example.

Both official and private experimental and research laboratories are continually trying to obtain more and more perfect results. Close contact with world fashion centres and continual market research make it possible continually to create new fabrics corresponding to the trends of the day and the desires of the foreign buyer. A sales organisation of Swiss export firms reaching out all over the world makes it possible to sell products wherever there is a demand.

Historically, the cotton industry is the oldest in Switzerland. Until the end of the 18th century, work was carried on exclusively in basements. Women and children spun by hand. Industrialisation proper began more than 150 years ago, with the installation of the first mechanical spinning mills. The cotton industry was at its peak from the industrial point of view before the first World War. Since then, the number of machines and workers has decreased, but production itself has not declined because the continual increase in the number of operations carried out automatically by machine and more rational industrial