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From the “Zurich School of Silk Weaving” to the “Zurich Textile Training School” 1881–1956 *

Origin and early days

A century ago, J. J. Staub of Horgen, who had given up running his big Jacquard weaving mill, started a private weaving school which met with immediate success and for a period of nine years numbered regularly between twelve and sixteen pupils. Then came the War of Secession resulting in a serious loss of markets for the Zurich silk industry, which in its turn caused the number of Staub's pupils to drop to such an extent that in 1864 he was obliged to close his school.

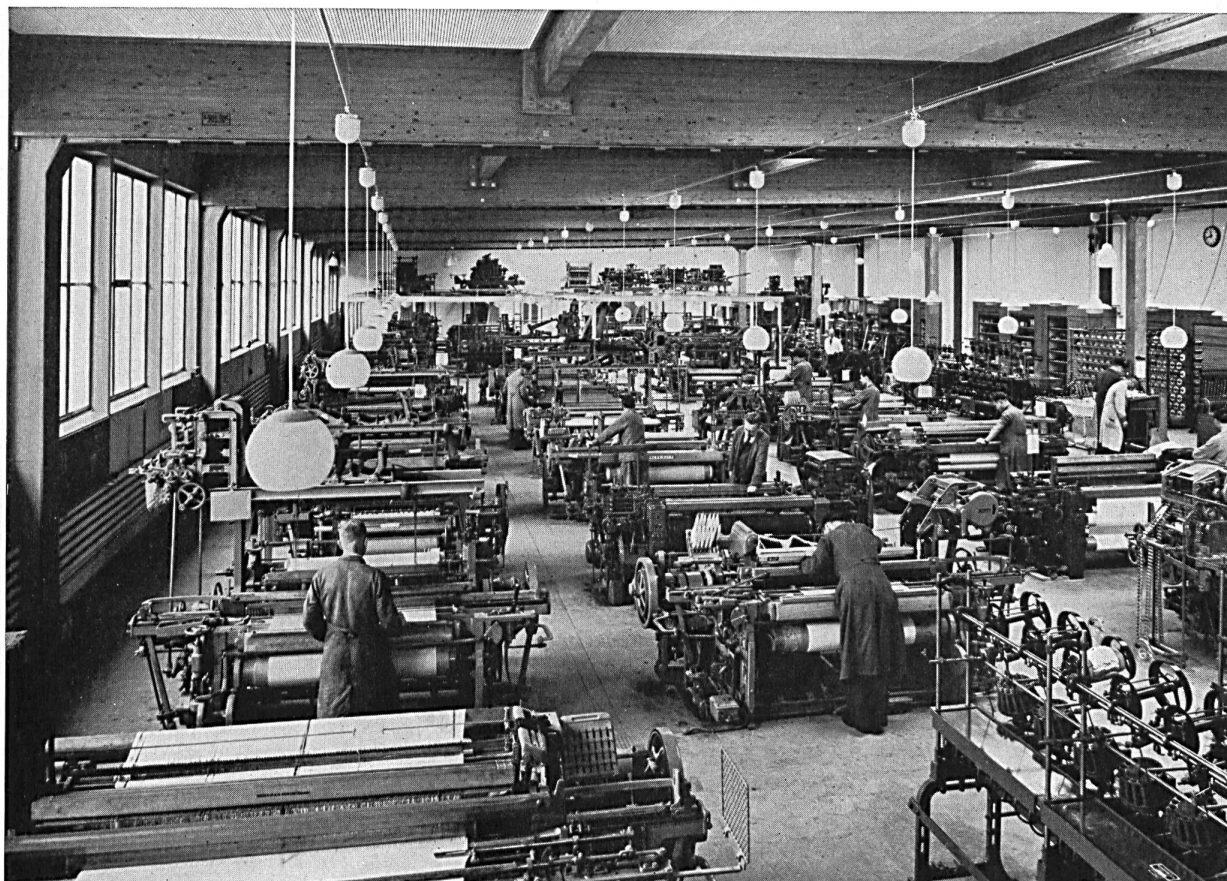
Two years later, the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry approached the government of the canton of Zurich to request the establishment of a cantonal school of weaving. As this request was not granted, two more attempts were made after 1870. A voluntary collection for the purpose of establishing a cantonal weaving school having been made among members of the association and having brought in some 208 500 francs by the end of 1876, a government bill was submitted to popular vote on June 30th, 1878, and rejected

by a small majority of 250 votes out of a total of 45 000.

The members of the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry were naturally very disappointed at this result but did not give up. A few months later, the « School Committee » that had been set up under the presidency of J. J. Abegg of Kusnacht, a cantonal councillor and future federal councillor, drew up a fresh plan which rapidly met with the approval of the town of Zurich. The municipal authorities offered to make available to the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry the two buildings which had formerly belonged to the Hofmeister cotton printing works and situated at Letten near Zurich, to be turned into a school with two apartments for the masters, and agreed at the same time to grant an annual subsidy to meet running costs.

On the basis of this agreement, J. J. Abegg submitted to the Legislative Council of the Canton of Zurich, on November 16th, 1880, an application for an annual subsidy of 9000 francs for the School of Weaving which was to be founded by the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry. This sum was agreed to and the efforts of the Association were at last crowned with success after many years of difficulties and setbacks.

* See also « Textiles Suisses » Nr. 2/1956, page 103.



A view of the
weaving room.

Cliché: Zürcher Seiden-
industrie-Gesellschaft.

The Zurich School of Silk Weaving

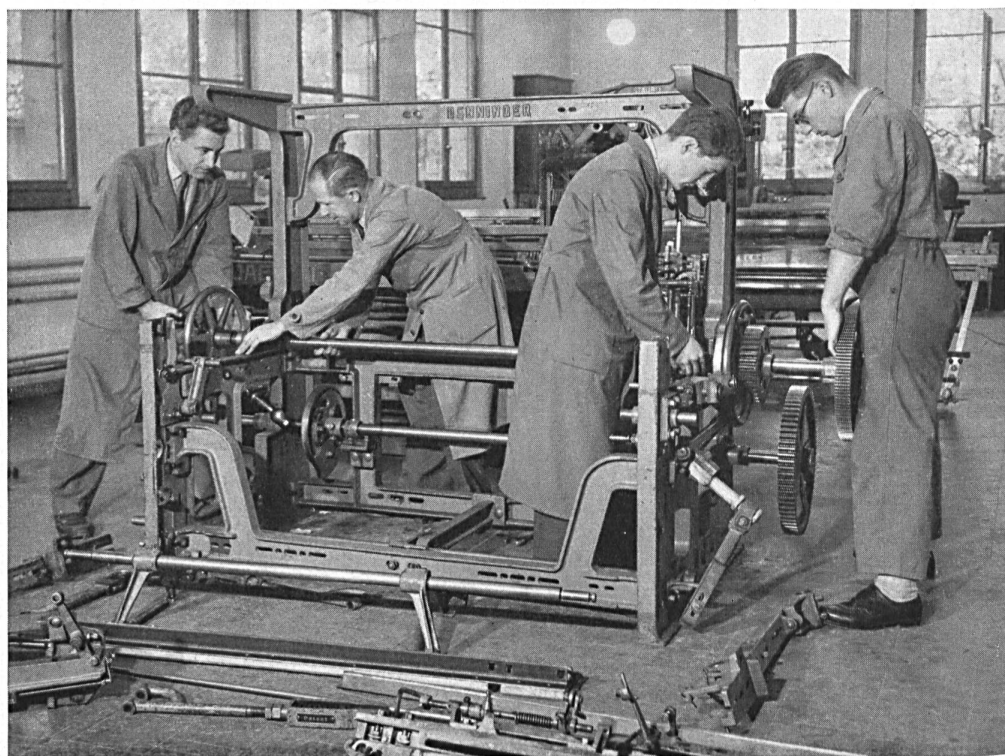
The necessary alterations to the premises having been carried out and the classrooms equipped, the Zurich School of Silk Weaving opened its doors on November 14th, 1881, with 21 pupils varying between the ages of 16 and 31. The courses were given by two masters, assisted by an outside teacher who gave instruction in hand-weaving.

The aim of the new school was to teach the technique of weaving to young people in such a way that once they had completed the course they could rapidly perform the various tasks required in the manufacture of silks and become competent assistants in the practical sphere of industrial production. This aim, which has remained steadfast down to the present day and been continually adapted to keep pace with technical developments, has proved to be a sound one. When the school was founded, hand-weaving still played a very important role in Zurich (there were 3151 power looms as opposed to 30 400 hand looms!) and this fact was taken into consideration in the courses. In those days the full programme consisted of two courses of a year each, the first giving complete training in weaving on dobby power looms and the second concentrating on Jacquard weaving. The fees amounted to 200 francs for the first course and 300 francs for the second for citizens of Zurich and 300 and 500 francs respectively for students from other cantons. Right from the start, a few gifted but needy young men who were unable to pay their way were accepted as non-paying students and the interest from a special fund, which was comparatively small at the start, made it possible to give some assistance. Students who qualified for the diploma entered the silk industry, depending on their training (some knowledge of hand-weaving was still required), as hand-weaving overseers, assistants to loom overseers, assistants to works managers or designers.

Power weaving having almost completely supplanted manual weaving, the whole system of instruction was overhauled in 1913. The abolition of certain subjects made it

possible to concentrate the programme and reduce the length of the courses to 10 ½ months. This brought the instruction to be obtained at the school within the reach of larger numbers of the population. It was about this time too that artificial silk made its first appearance, followed in the years to come by staple fibre and, more recently, numerous synthetic fibres, all of which opened up many new possibilities of manufacture. At the same time, the construction of textile machinery developed rapidly, first of all with semi-automatic winding machines, then completely automatic ones, spindleless reeling machines, new warping-frames and automatic weaving looms. The new textile raw materials, greeted at first with a certain reserve in industrial circles, soon led to a certain overlapping between the different textile fields. The natural silk mills became rayon mills, which also made use of cotton and wool. The Zurich School kept abreast of this progress and adapted its methods to meet the new situation. The attempt to bring about the amalgamation of the textile schools of Zurich and Wattwil* and to expand them into a Swiss Textile Institute, failed as a result of the position taken in the matter by certain circles in Eastern Switzerland. Finally, the board of governors of the School of Silk Weaving was obliged to go ahead on its own. In order to raise the funds required for the indispensable expansion of the school, the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry issued an appeal to its members and in a very short time 370 000 francs had been collected. A second subscription for the purchase of apparatuses and equipment brought in another 217 000 francs. The applications to the authorities also met with success. The Cantonal Legislative Council voted a sum of 300 000 francs to cover the cost of building a new weaving workshop and the town of Zurich very generously offered to double the amount. Construction began before the end of the last war. There were still many difficulties to be overcome therefore. Finally in the spring of 1946, after 30 months of work, the last workmen left the premises.

* See our next number. (Ed.)



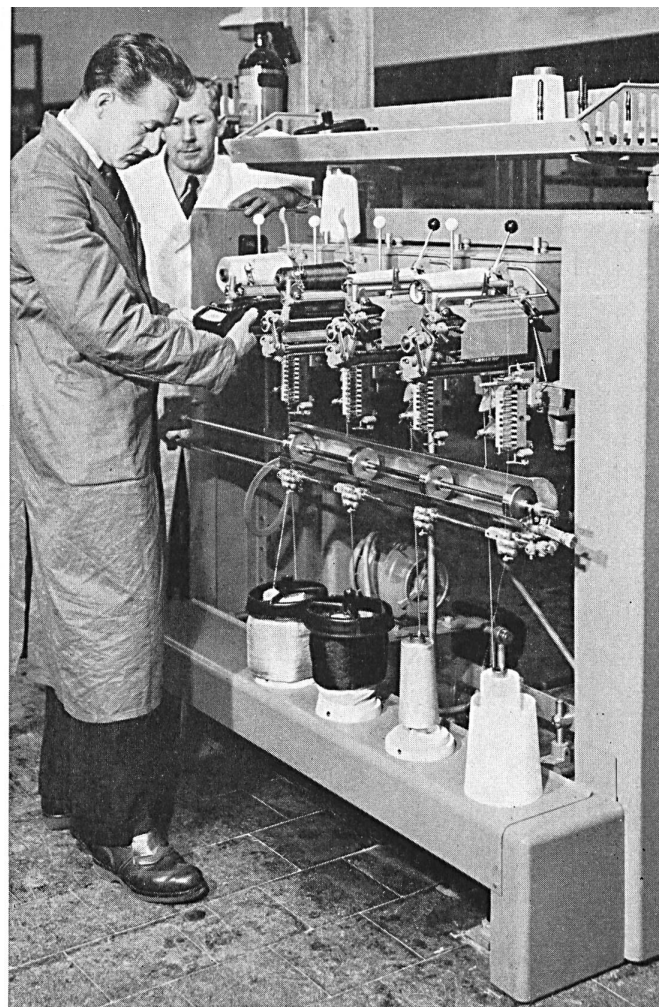
Assembling looms.

Photo Schwitter.

Instructors and their students quickly installed the machines in the new premises; it should be mentioned here that the Swiss Textile Machinery Industry very kindly placed all types of new machines at the disposal of the school. On June 9th, 1946, a modest ceremony was attended by representatives of the authorities and industrial associations as well as friends of the old weaving school to mark the inauguration of the new school bearing its new name.

The Zurich Textile Training School

The programme of the new school was further extended, modernised and adapted to meet the requirements of the various textile branches (textile merchants, heads of weaving departments, loom overseers and weaving engineers). It is thus possible to acquire there a thorough knowledge of all branches of weaving in a period of 1 ½ to 2 years depending on the student's previous experience. The newly created textile designing section makes it possible to obtain a diploma as a designer after 3 ½ years of study. The instruction given by the school offers the advantage over an apprenticeship with a firm of being methodically graduated. The various subjects are taught by different masters, what enriches the instruction. During the course of their studies the students (in this section they are mostly girls or young women) are



Checks being carried out on a winding machine.

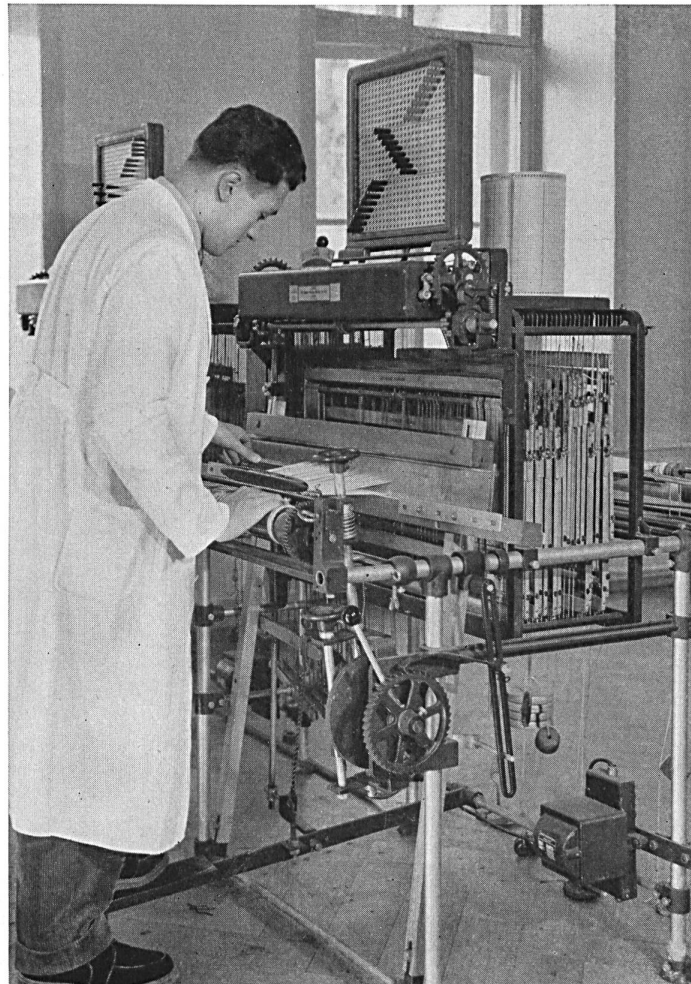
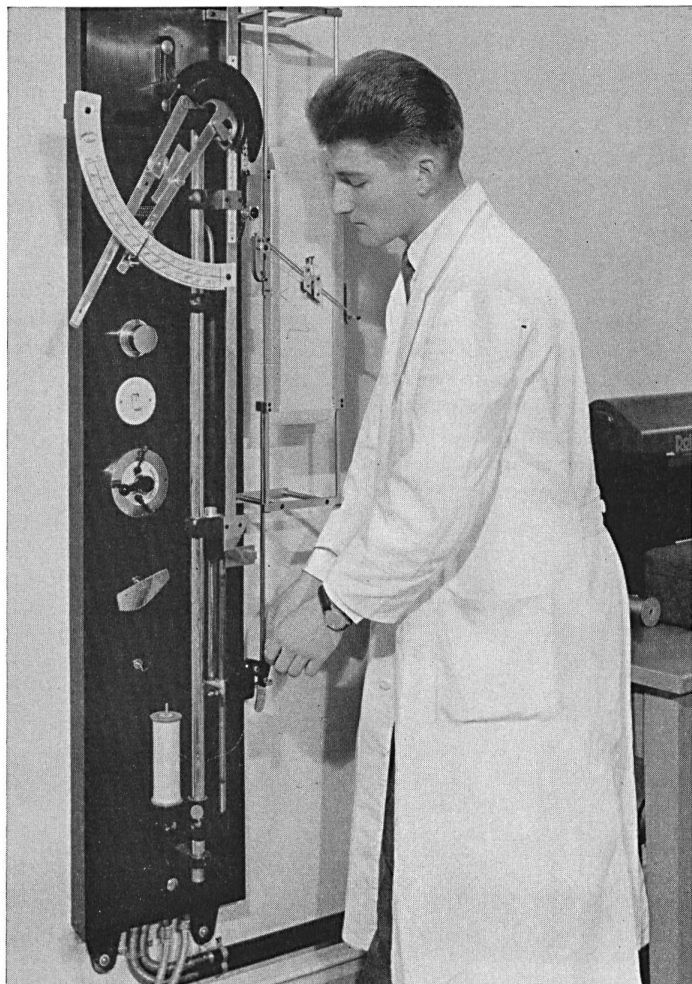
Photo Schwitter. Cliché Ciba Rundschau.

Checking the material (silk thread).

Photo Schwitter. Cliché Ciba Rundschau.

Weaving a sample on an electrically driven sample-making loom.

Photo Schwitter. Cliché Ciba Rundschau.





Instruction in textile designing ; a pupil at work.

Photo Schwitter.
Cliché Ciba Rundschau.



Practical instruction in screen-printing.

Photo Schwitter.

sent to an industrial workshop to gain experience of practical work. Vocational training in the other sections has been considerably enriched thanks to the collaboration of leading figures in the industry, who give courses or lectures on the treatment of staff, works' hygiene, market surveys, history of art, the finishing of textiles, etc.

The school has always remained on excellent terms with industry and it is justly proud of the friendly relations it maintains with the Swiss Textile Machinery Industry, to which it owes its fine collection of machines.

The former Zurich School of Silk Weaving and the present Textile Training School, which during the last 75 years have trained 2563 pupils, 2412 of whom were Swiss and 151 foreigners representing 25 countries and 5 continents, enjoy a reputation that extends far beyond Switzerland's frontiers. In textile centres throughout the world one comes across former pupils of the Zurich School occupying important posts and many of them are even the heads of their own concerns in Switzerland and abroad.

In the future too, the new generations of fully trained experts will have a decisive influence on the Swiss textile industry by helping it to keep up its position in the international competition for world markets. It is important therefore for the Textile Training School to be able — like its predecessor — to count on a large number of friends and benefactors as well as a first-rate teaching staff.

The 75th anniversary of the School was marked by an exhibition of the outstanding work of pupils and, on the evening of August 12th, 1956, by a very simple celebration attended by representatives of the authorities, the Zurich Silk industry as a whole as well as a number of guests from the Wattwil School of Weaving. Former pupils celebrated the anniversary on the evening of July 14th at the Congress Hall in Zurich.

Robert Honold



Checking a Jacquard fabric with the pattern.

Photo Schwitter. Cliché Ciba Rundschau.