

## Focus Day

30 August 2019 | National Museum Zurich | 09.00-16.30

## Little Heidi – Big in Japan

**What connects little Switzerland with distant Japan? A girl from the mountains. At the end of August, a group of distinguished guests will be discussing this phenomenon at the National Museum Zurich.**

Heidi was the central character not only in Johanna Spyri's books, but also in a Japanese animated series appearing in 1974. 'Alpenmädchen Heidi' (Heidi, Girl of the Alps) was dubbed in 20 languages and attracted millions of viewers across the globe. Yoichi Kotabe is the 'spiritual father' of the Japanese Heidi character, and a superstar in Asia. He was heavily involved in the birth of the legendary computer game character Super Mario. Kotabe also had a hand in creating the Pokémon phenomenon. Over the past couple of decades the Pokémon fantasy characters have grown into a billion-dollar market, and can be found in films, TV series and games as well as on trading cards. Yoichi Kotabe is one of the co-founders of the now thriving anime industry, whose animated films routinely attract an audience of millions; these masters now enjoy cult status both in Asia and elsewhere. On 30 August he will be coming to the National Museum Zurich. On a 'Focus Day', the master will be meeting with other distinguished guests to discuss the significance of the Heidi character for Japan, the origins of the now world-famous anime genre, and the cultural connection between the two countries.

This very eclectic Focus Day has been organised primarily thanks to the University of Zurich. The University's Institute of Art History, led by Professor Hans Bjarne Thomsen, is involved in studying the Japanese view of Switzerland. The animated film series 'Heidi, Girl of the Alps' has contributed significantly to shaping that view. The idealised image that many Japanese still have of Switzerland is strongly influenced by this particular anime. Even today, the idyllic images of nature and mountains still evoke a sense of yearning in the Japanese, and are a boon for Switzerland's tourism industry. But would Johanna Spyri still recognise her Heidi today? And can translations change a character? The participants in our Focus Day will also be discussing these and other questions. And there will be a musical treat to complement the event: Switzerland's Schwarz Family will be appearing at the Museum. The Schwarz Family recorded the original soundtrack to the cartoon series. Without understanding a word of Japanese.