

Missions Accomplished

In May 1920, Ian Ozolin (Jānis Ozoliņš), an English teacher at Kwansei Gakuin College, began working as a diplomatic and consular agent of the Republic of Latvia to Japan at the request of J. Mazpolis, who represented Latvia in Siberia and the Urals. Eighteen months had passed since Ozolin's homeland proclaimed its independence. Each national consulate in Japan dealt with whether to issue visas to the people of this rising nation in its own way. Russia refused to issue visas to Latvians for travel to Vladivostok. The United States had not yet recognized the independence of Latvia and also firmly refused to issue visas. The United Kingdom and France required the applicants to contact London or Paris, respectively, in advance. Italy issued visas without demur. Ozolin reported these situations to Latvia but there is no record of how many passports and visas were issued through his arrangements.

Ozolin was also busy with his teaching duties. He asked Tamotsu Sone, one of his students, to translate his book from English to Japanese. As the work progressed, the two shared a house for almost a year in Maiko, Kobe. According to Sone, Ozolin was a linguistic genius and could speak sixteen languages. The professor bought his student a train pass from Maiko to Nada and taught him German on the train. In class, he taught the poetry of Robert Browning. Later Sone became a scholar of English literature and a recognized authority on Browning.

In July 1921, Ozolin left Japan for Latvia after publishing *Kohaku no Kuni (Amber Land, or Latvia, Past and Present)*. Kwansei Gakuin deeply regretted his resignation. Dean H. F. Woodsworth of the Literary College and President C. J. L. Bates put forward a resolution proposing that Ozolin be given a token of appreciation. It was adopted and 100 yen was provided, a significant sum at that time. The Kwansei Gakuin community thanked Ozolin for his good influence on the students and his prominence in academic knowledge. Everyone sent him off with a prayer for the successful development of Latvia.

Ninety years have now passed. On October 20, 2011, Mr. Pēteris Vaivars, the first Latvian ambassador to Japan, visited Kwansei Gakuin to present several saplings of oak, the national tree of Latvia, to President Takutoshi Inoue in commemoration of Ozolin. "Ozolin" means "oak" in Latvian.

Yuko Ikeda, Kwansei Gakuin Archives
October 2012



Solvita Āboltiņa, Parliamentary Speaker of the Republic of Latvia, was invited to Japan by the president of the House of Councillors. On March 8, 2012, at a welcome dinner at the Kyoto State Guest House, she noted the relationship between Ozolin and Kwansei Gakuin and expressed her gratitude to the university for the tree planting ceremony to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Latvia. Speaker Āboltiņa can be seen in the centre of the front row, and Ambassador Vaivars and President Inoue are in the centre of the back row. Photo courtesy Ambassador Vaivars.



Courtesy of House of Councillors
[Special thanks to Camilla Blakeley for editorial assistance.]

Special Invitation: The Centennial of the Founding of Latvia

When Latvia proclaimed its independence from Russia on November 18, 1918, Kwansei Gakuin was located at its original site of Harada-no-mori and a young Latvian named Ian Ozolin (Jānis Ozoliņš) taught English at the College Department (Literary and Commercial). In May 1920, he began working as a diplomatic and consular agent of the Republic of Latvia to Japan at the request of Latvian government in Siberia and the Urals.

As the representative of the provisional government of Latvia, he contributed an article on his country to the Japan Advertiser, drawing an immediate response from Russia. The Russian vice consul in Kobe wrote a letter to the Hyogo prefectural governor, asking if Ozolin had been officially authorized by the Japanese government to represent Latvia as diplomatic and consular agent. The governor in turn inquired at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and received the following answer: "The Imperial Japanese Government has never approved his status." Japan had not yet recognized Latvia's independence.

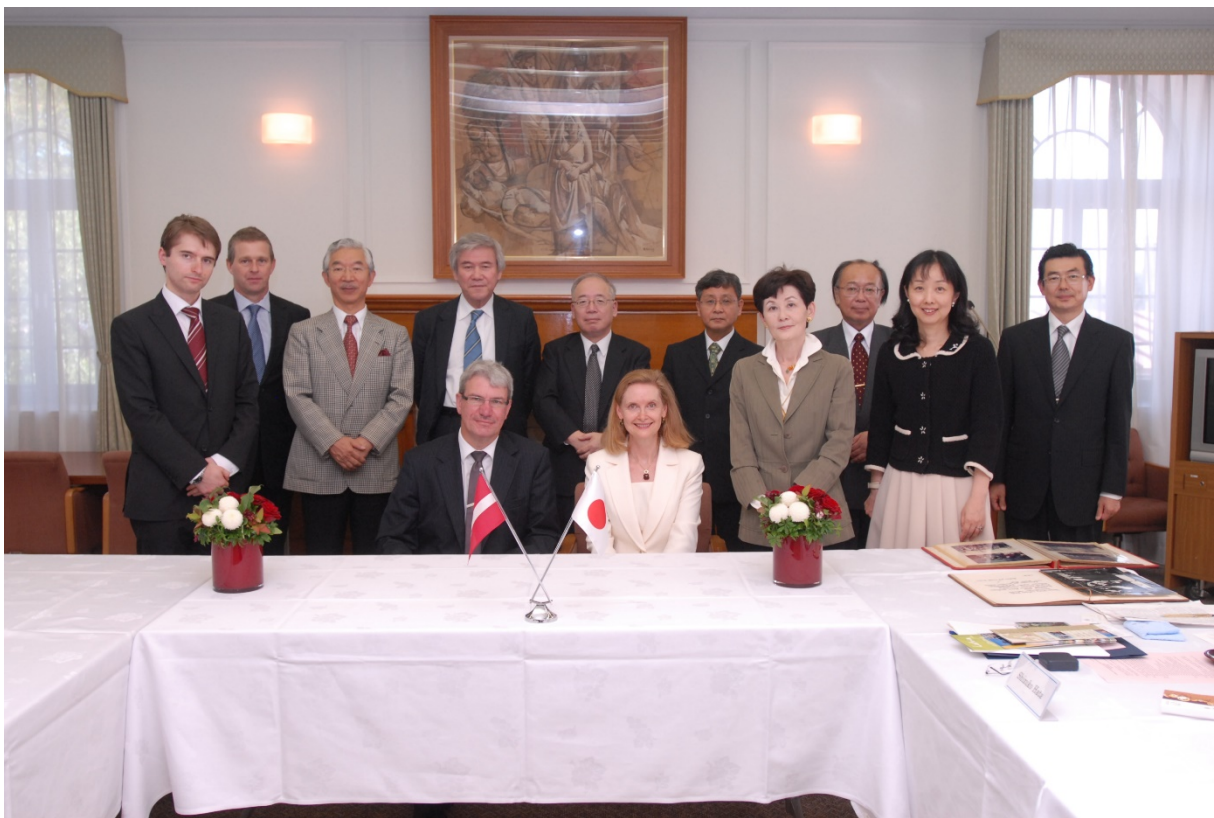
Ozolin, however, had a strong desire to make his home-land widely known and continued to write to the press. In January 1921, he wrote to the Japan Weekly Chronicle, "Let me point out, for the benefit of readers that may not be acquainted with the facts, that, of all the 'border States' sometime forcibly annexed to the Russian Empire and now liberated, Latvia is the most conservative as it is also the most nationalistic." He continued, "All this goes far to show how improbable, not to say impossible, is a Communistic upheaval in Latvia." He ended his article with a warning, "Let me express my surprise at seeing the valuable space of the Chronicle thrown open to malicious canards manufactured by a syndicate of Russian imperialists now on [a] vegetarian diet in the pleasant city of Paris."

In the classroom at Kwansei Gakuin, Ozolin likewise encouraged his students to take a principled stand: "The young should consider themselves especially fortunate at this moment in the world's history, because it is they that are particularly invited to build up the new world."

Yuko Ikeda, Kwansei Gakuin Archives
April 2018



The Republic of Latvia became independent from Russia again in 1991. Pēteris Vaivars was the first Latvian ambassador to Japan, from 2006 to 2013. When he visited Kwansei Gakuin in 2008, he declared, "I am the successor of Ozolin." With Ruth Grubel, the 15th chancellor of Kwansei Gakuin, at the Japanese garden, October 10, 2008.



[Special thanks to Camilla Blakeley for editorial assistance in English.]