

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
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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.

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