

Jaroslav Olša, jr.: 150 Years of Hidden Ties between Koreans and Czechs / 체코와의 숨겨진 오랜 인연, 150년의 교류사

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The Republic of Korea. The name of the country which has been resonating in the minds of the Czech Republic's inhabitants more and more frequently in the last decades. Initially, the infinitely distant and, for most Czechs, almost inaccessible Korea is turning into a country that almost everyone can visit at least virtually or in person to experience its beauty, culture, people and differences. However, this opportunity goes hand in hand with the level of relations achieved between the two countries. These began to take shape in modern history in 1990 with the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states. The current Czech Republic has been successfully continuing to develop the bilateral relations for more than 30 years, with the Korean side reciprocating, and has helped to shape them positively in many ways or areas through its activities.

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between the Czech Republic and the Republic of Korea, a very interesting and, for many readers, certainly beneficial book was published. It was written by Jaroslav Olša, Jr., a former Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Seoul (2008–2014). He is the author of several publications on the history, culture and literature of selected countries in Asia and Africa and on the historical relations of the Czech Republic with various countries – for example, Korea and the Philippines.

The content of this publication introduces the readers not only to the history and present state of Czech-Korean relations, but also to some significant personalities who participated in the creation and subsequent formation of these relations, and some significant events in the relations. The aim of the book is to bring readers closer to the Czech-Korean relations at the cultural, economic, and political level. In particular, it explores the genesis and development of these relationships in the 19th and 20th centuries. Throughout the book there are many interesting pictorial materials, which significantly enliven the publication and offer the reader a picture of both the present-day Korea and its history. The book is written in both Korean and English, but the Czech version is unfortunately missing, and it is not currently available for sale.

The chapters in the publication are arranged chronologically, as the discussion spans from the first references to Korea in Czech translations of foreign language works (especially travel diaries) to current information

on Korea. The first chapter, supplemented by selected newspaper clippings discussing Korea and the front pages of some of Josef Kořenský's travelogues (both from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries), deals mainly with the experiences of travellers who had the opportunity to visit the country. However, as Olša points out, these initial contacts with this distant country did not help to establish closer relations with it, whether political or commercial (p. 13). The author of the publication mentions here individuals such as William F. Lukes, a Czech native who enlisted in the US Navy and took part in the Korean expedition in 1871. The other mentioned travellers include Max Taubles, perhaps the first "Western" journalist to live in the country, and Joseph Haas, a Prague-born consul of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy who visited Korea as part of his profession as early as in the 1880s (pp. 15–17). Although the author describes several interactions in detail, he describes them as "accidental" (p. 11). On page 13, the author mentions some research concerning visits by Czechs in Korea but does not mention its name anywhere in the book. It would certainly be beneficial to mention such information for readers who are interested in this issue.

The years 1901–1910 are the period chosen by the author as the focus of the third chapter (pp. 25–29). Like the previous ones, this chapter concentrates on the representation of Korea in Czech literature, but this time the literature is in the form of publications that deal mainly with the aforementioned Russo-Japanese War. The chapter also presents selected contemporary newspaper articles that give a proper account of the period. These surviving publications or diaries are undoubtedly proof of the interest of the Czech public at that time in the events in these distant lands. Although the publication is written in English and Korean, these Czech language newspaper articles are not translated, which unfortunately means that they will go unread by most of the book's Korean- or English-speaking readers.

The activities of the Czechoslovak Legions in Korea in 1918–1920 are the subject of another chapter of the publication. The author mentions the activities of these legions in Vladivostok and their subsequent assistance to the Koreans during the liberation of their state in the 1920s (p. 31). This is a very interesting and not yet thoroughly researched topic, but it is also a very valuable event in the Czech-Korean relations. The Legionnaires not only supported the liberation of Korea by supplying arms,

but they also mentioned the issue in contemporary newspapers such as *Czechoslovak Daily*. However, it was not only weapons that remained after the Legionnaires, but also many photographs, memoirs, etc. Just as in the chapter before, the newspaper articles in this chapter are only in the Czech language, which seems to be a reoccurring problem in the whole book.

In the following chapters, the author focuses on the cultural aspect of the Czech-Korean relations during the years of 1920–1940 (pp. 53–57). He begins by reprinting some newspaper articles from the time period which deal with Czech literary works appearing in Korea, and discussing these articles, but these articles are once again only in the Czech language. Karel Čapek's works were among the first to be performed in theatres in Korea. This author's works are still popular in Korea today, and many of them have been translated into Korean. Other authors who appeared in the Korean press in those days included Jaroslav Hašek and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. It is clear that art has played, and continues to play, a significant role in spreading awareness of Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic in Korea and vice versa. Therefore, in this chapter the author also mentions many other literary or pictorial works, films, etc. which have contributed to raising awareness of Czech culture in Korea (p. 57). At the end of his publication Olša refers the reader to other literature on Korea, including linguistic literature, which is especially suitable for students of Korean studies, and literature focused on economics, science, military topics or fiction (pp. 125–131). Olša is himself the author of several literary works, so his focus on literature in this book is understandable. He mentions Korean translations of works by famous Czech writers, who are still very popular in South Korea, but correspondingly recalls the exhibitions on Korea which have been held in Prague and the Korean music and films that are popular all over the world (p. 135). In this chapter, the author also mentions countless Korean films, books, comics and musical compositions that have enjoyed great success in the Czech Republic in recent times.

Furthermore, the book does not omit the history and tradition of Korean studies in Czechoslovakia, the genesis of which can be traced back to the 1950s (pp. 59–69). The chapters on this topic are especially devoted to the personalities who contributed to laying the foundations for the teaching of Korean studies in Prague. These were not only Czechoslovaks, but also Koreans who resided in Czechoslovakia during this period. The

most famous personality of this sort of this period was Alois Pultr, the first Czech expert on Korea, who served as the head of the Department of Korean Studies at Charles University. To give another example, one of the most famous experts on Korea of all time was Vladimír Pucek, who wrote several textbooks on the Korean language and culture. In the following years, Czechoslovak students of Korean studies were also able to travel to Korea for study stays, but only to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The post-war military-political situation also marked a major shift in the Czech-Korean relations. Jaroslav Olša, Jr., describes the efforts of the Czechoslovak government to take the position of a "bridge" between the West and the East, which, among other things, involved dealing with the "Korean issues" (pp. 71–73). However, these efforts came to naught in the context of Czechoslovakia's inclusion into the Soviet-led Eastern bloc. Following the division of Korea into two separate parts after the end of World War II, in 1948 Czechoslovakia established diplomatic relations only with North Korea. The opening of the Czech Embassy in Pyongyang took place in September 1948. This cooperation lasted until the end of the 1980s. It was a cooperation in various areas – humanitarian aid, scholarships for students, cultural cooperation, etc. Until the establishment of the independent Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia's relations with the Republic of Korea were practically at a standstill.

The following part of the book focuses on the development of bilateral relations between the countries in the second half of the twentieth century. The Czechoslovak Republic had almost no contact with South Korea during its pro-Soviet orientation. However, an exception was, for example, the XXIV Summer Olympic Games in 1988, which took place in Seoul. Thus, the first official Czechoslovak diplomatic relations with South Korea were established no earlier than 1990, and a year later an Embassy of the Czech Republic was opened in Seoul (in contrast, Czechoslovakia's relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea declined somewhat at this time). The author describes the following years as a period of "turbulent change" in Czech-Korean relations (p. 107). The author also highlights the year 1990, when a bilateral agreement was concluded between Charles University and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, thanks to which students from both countries are still able to go on exchange study stays in the other country (p. 109). Subsequently, the Hankuk University

of Foreign Studies established a study programme in Czech-language studies. Thanks to Korean experts on Bohemia, additional materials for Koreans wishing to study Czech as well as new Korean-Czech dictionaries were also created.

Since the author himself served as ambassador to South Korea from 2008 to 2014, he describes the diplomatic situation between the Czech Republic and Korea in the following part of the book as a direct participant. Olša mentions the year 2015 as a turning point because in this year, several Czech-South Korean official meetings took place in Prague and Seoul. Since 2016, the relations have taken a somewhat different direction, as they started to focus more on closer cooperation within the fields of economy, science and research. The economic cooperation experienced its first boom between 1993 and 1997, but due to the stagnation of Asian economies in the late 1990s, it slowed down again. In the following years, however, this cooperation regained its strength, and in 2010 South Korea took 15th place in the ranking of the Czech Republic's most important trading partners. In recent years, South Korea has been ranked third after China and the United States in the list of the Czech Republic's trade partners outside the EU. To date, however, several dozen Korean companies operate in the Czech Republic. To give some examples of important Korean companies operating in the Czech Republic, we can mention Hyundai, Sungwoo Hitech, Doosan Heavy Industries and Nexen Tire. It is therefore clear that the automotive and heavy industries are a key sector in Czech-Korean trade. However, we must not forget the Czech products that are exported to Korea, especially Czech beer, which is very popular among Koreans.

The publication was drawn up with an emphasis on the historical events that led to the formation of the mutual relations between the Czech Republic and Korea. It is based not only on a number of historical newspaper articles and photographs, but also on a presentation of publications and travelogues from various eras. However, the attached Czech language articles and documents are not translated. Since the book is written for Korean- and English-speaking readers, it would be appropriate to translate these sections into these languages, but the formatting of the book, namely the number of pictures per page, does not really allow for this. The author does not overlook the importance of cultural and public diplomacy,

which greatly contributed to raising both countries' awareness of each other. Economic cooperation is also highlighted in the book. In addition to examples of this cooperation between Czech and Korean companies, Jaroslav Olša, Jr., also provides selected statistical data that improve the information on the involvement of the Republic of Korea in the Czech economy and vice versa. Furthermore, the author underscores the importance of engaging in Korean studies both in the Czech Republic and in Korea as another important aspect in the development of Czech-Korean relations. Korean studies have a long tradition in the Czech Republic and are gradually attracting more and more people interested in this field. Accessible Korean studies programmes are offered by Charles University in Prague (the Korean Studies programme) and Palacký University in Olomouc (the Korean for Business and Commerce programme).

This unique publication is therefore suitable for both the professional and the general public. It focuses mainly on the history of Czech-Korean relations during the 19th and 20th century, but not that much on the recent history. As these relations are currently flourishing, it would be fitting to outline their possible future and opportunities that could strengthen these relations. The book also focuses mainly on culture and art, despite the fact that the Czech Republic cooperates with South Korea mainly in economic and commercial terms. Certainly, it will also arouse further interest in Czech-Korean relations and the countries' mutual future development at the political, commercial, and cultural level. In a way, it is a positive response to stepping into the fourth decade of the successfully developing mutual relations between the Czech Republic and South Korea and their people. However, as this book is not for sale, and it was presented only through the social networks of the Korean Embassy in Prague and is available only in selected libraries, it is difficult for readers interested in this topic to read the book or learn about its existence at all.

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Veronika Kyseláková is a final year student of the Bachelor's degree programme Korean for Business and Commerce at Palacký University in Olomouc. As part of her studies, she completed internships at the Czech Embassy in Seoul, the Czech Center Seoul and Czech Invest Seoul. The activities of these institutions are crucial for the development of further relations between South Korea and the Czech Republic. Currently she is also engaged in the project Sinophone Borderlines: Interaction at the Edges.