*Jiří Viktor Daneš:*

*Czechoslovak Geographer and Diplomat in Colonized Korea*[[1]](#footnote-1)

Jaroslav Olša, jr.

The first confirmed Czech traveller to visit colonized Korea after the end of World War I and the departure of the soldiers of the Czechoslovak Legion from Vladivostok[[2]](#footnote-2) was probably the geographer Jiří Viktor Daneš (1880–1928), the founder of Czechoslovak geomorphology. Daneš was a world-renowned expert on karst regions, and wrote numerous scientific monographs on limestone landscapes based on his firsthand research in such places as Java and Jamaica, Australia and Mexico, the United States and the Balkans. Daneš was only the third Czech to have left a contemporary published travelogue of a visit to Korea,.[[3]](#footnote-3) Although Korea was for him one of many stops on his long trip, which he undertook while returning from his post as the first Consul General of Czechoslovakia in Sydney in 1923, his views and descriptions are interesting as being very sympathetic toward the Korean people.

Jiří Viktor Daneš was born on August 23, 1880 as the eleventh child of a rich landowner and his second wife living in the vicinity of the historical Czech capital, Prague. After his father died when he was only three years old, Daneš, the only child of his mother, moved with her to Prague and studied at the most elite Czech schools as ″the revenue from his large estate allowed him to study and travel without any problems.″ (Rozhoň 2005:68) He started travelling while still a student at the prestigous Charles University in Prague. His first trips were to the Balkans (mainly Bosnia and Herzegovina), which for the rest of his life remained his favourite destination.[[4]](#footnote-4)  After finishing his university education in Prague, Daneš left to study in Berlin for a year and later on he continued to the United States to participate at the 8th International Geographical Congress in 1904. He used the opportunity to spend a couple of months studying there by visiting many of its National Parks. From then on he would regularly attend international geographical congresses all over the world. Two years later he returned to the Americas, spending more than a month conducting pioneering research on the limestone topography in Jamaica, (cf. Chubb 1976) and then traveling around Mexico, the latter being a venue of another congress.

From the very beginning Daneš wanted to travel freely and see the places of his scientific interests with his own eyes. Thanks to his financial situation, he was able to do so. In 1909 he embarked on his first, fifteen-month-long, Asian trip. With his friend, Czech botanist Karel Domin (1882–1953), Daneš crossed the continent, spending some time in Ceylon and Java. They moved to Australia where Daneš joined with the Australian L.C. Ball to develop geological maps of the northern part of Queensland. (Later a small valley in the vicinity of the isolated town of Burketown in northwest Queensland was named after Daneš.)

Upon his return to Prague, Daneš was appointed to the position of full professor. The same year a two-volume travelogue of more than 1,300 pages long was published. *Dvojím rájem* (Across Two Paradises) (1912) was written jointly by Daneš and Domin. Before and during World War I, Daneš repeatedly returned to the Balkans and published another series of scientific articles on geology and geography.

After the independence of Czechoslovakia in 1918, Daneš accepted the offer of the new Czechoslovak government to enter the diplomatic service. Lacking trained diplomatic and consular staff, the new government opted for well-known personalities to represent them abroad. Being a friend of many leading Czechoslovak politicians, he hoped to become an envoy in Belgrade, but he accepted the post in Sydney. As he knew and was known in Australia,[[5]](#footnote-5)  Daneš was the ideal person to head up the establishment of the new Czechoslovak consulate.[[6]](#footnote-6) He began his consular and diplomatic work after a three-month-long trip to Australia in August 1920. Daneš always knew that his job was temporary, but he stayed in Australia for almost two-and-a-half years, representing his country with distinction[[7]](#footnote-7) and also ″every single free moment, when he was not bound by his official duties, Daneš used for his scientific work.″ (Rozhoň 2005:219) In January 1923, Daneš was recalled to Prague. He left Sydney with his wife and, no longer bound by official obligations, embarked on a six-month journey through New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, Hawaii, Japan and Korea.

Daneš and his wife did not spent a long time in Korea, travelling from Busan to Keijo (Seoul) and later on further north towards the Chinese border. Two years later, Daneš published his second weighty travelogue, the two-volume *Tři léta při Tichém oceáně* (Three Years at the Pacific Ocean) (1926), which covered his travels to Australia and back. The chapter ″V Korei (Čosenu)″ (In Korea [Chosen]) deals exclusively with Korea and is ″probably the first Czech account of Korea under the Japanese which introduces Czech readers to matters relating to Japanese rule. Daneš stands up for the Koreans and contradicts books that he had read before going to Korea.″ (Klöslová 2000:139)

As we read in his travelogue, Daneš had a good understanding of the situation on the Korean peninsula, although he was no more than a well-prepared and educated tourist viewing the sights and beauties of the country. He was not an investigative journalist or human rights activist. Everywhere on his trips, presumably travelling first class, he hired only the best guides and stayed in the best hotels to satisfy his interests. His uneventful travels were definitely planned on the basis of pre-existing travel guides or on the few descriptive travelogues then available. This approach resulted in him seeing only the more favorable side of the new Japanese regime, but this did not mean he was amazed by it, as were many foreigners who visited Korea in the 1920s. On the contrary, he was pro-Korean and unsympathetic to Japan’s strategy in the subjugation of Korea, although, like many others, he hesitantly ″acknowledged the technological and economic improvements introduced (albeit for the benefit of the colonial power).″ (Uden 2003:XXIV) His attitude was certainly shaped by his personal experiences as a Czech under the Austro-Hungarian rule of Bohemia and also as a frequent visitor to the Balkans, which were very much under the same sort of colonial ″care″ of the Austro-Hungarian empire as Korea was under Japan.

We have more than just Daneš‘s texts today. Literally thousands of his photographs and colour slides were donated by his wife to various Czechoslovak institutions—the National Museum, the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures and the Geographical Institute—after his untimely death in 1928. An additional 500 colour slides, donated by Daneš´s relative in the late 1980s, are also part of the collection of the regional museum of Kladno. (cf. Kuchyňka 2001) Although partly catalogued, these slides have never been published and likely include some interesting shots of Korea.

After his return to Czechoslovakia, Daneš could not have imagined that he had only five years left to live. He resumed his professorship at Charles University in Prague and briefly served as dean of the Faculty of Science. His life ended tragically during a long tour of the United States which he began in October 1927. Daneš was supposed to deliver lectures at numerous universities there and conduct further research for the whole year for his planned comparative monograph of the world‘s karst regions. His trip was cut short by a tragic accident. While on his way to a meeting in Hollywood, Daneš stopped his car alongside the road to photograph an oil well and was hit by a passing car. He died the following day, April 11, 1928, at the age of 47.

With a long list of monographs to his credit covering important karst sites all around the globe and having been published in many languages during the 1910s and 1920s, Daneš was undoubtedly one of the world’s most capable geomorphologists. Even the influential scientific journal *Nature* published his obituary, saying that Czech science and indeed the whole world had ″lost one of its leading professors.″ (*Nature* 1928, 121, pp. 874-875)

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Jaroslav Olša, jr. (b. 1964) has served as Czech ambassador in Seoul since 2008. He graduated in Asian and African Studies from Charles University in Prague and has worked in the diplomatic service for almost two decades. He dealt with Sub-Saharan Africa and served as his country‘s ambassador to Zimbabwe and five neighbouring countries (2000–2006). He has published on African history, most notably the book *Dějiny Zimbabwe, Zambie a Malawi* (History of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, 2008, with Otakar Hulec) and titles on southern African art. The latest one, ″Modern Art of Zimbabwe - 짐바브웨 현대미술전″ (2010), was also published in English and Korean. He is interested in the history of Czech interactions with Asia and Africa and has written about Czech travellers in Africa. Most recently he prepared an exhibition and edited a book on early Czech travellers in Korea: *1901 photographs of Seoul by Enrique Stanko Vráz and other early Czech travellers´ views of Korea* – 1901년 체코인 브라즈의 서울 방문. 체코 여행기들의 서울 이야기 (2011, with Kang Hong Bin).

1. This article is an updated and expanded version of part of a longer text published by Jaroslav Olša, jr. in 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Between 1918 and 1920, the 60,000-strong Czech and Slovak army, the so-called Czechoslovak Legion, was based in and around Vladivostok. Its soldiers and leaders had multiple contacts with Koreans living in Russia, Manchuria and Korea. Most notably, the Legion’s supreme commander, General Radola Gajda, met Yeo Un-hyeong on several occasions and had talks with members of the Korean Provisional Government while in Shanghai. It is thus possible that some Czechs may have visited Korea at this time. The first confirmed Czech visitor to Korea following WWI was Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, soon to be the first Czechoslovak president, who travelled across the peninsula by train in 1919. However, neither he nor anybody else left us any written travelogue about their Korean stay [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Daneš’s predecessors were other leading Czech travellers—Josef Kořenský (Kořenský 1903-04) and Enrique Stanko Vráz (Vráz 1904, Vráz 1919)—but both of them visited Korea more than two decades earlier, in 1901. More about these early Czech travellers (in English) cf. Klöslová (2000), Olša, jr. (2011), Todorovová (2008, 2011). Daneš was followed by another three Czechs - A. V. Novák, Bohumil Pospíšil and Barbora Markéta Eliášová – who visited Korea in the 1920s, too (in English: cf. Olša, jr. 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Daneš visited various parts of the Balkans at least ten times between 1899 and 1918. He began his life-long interest in limestone formations there and fell in love with this part of Europe, notably Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was also greatly influenced by another leading karst topography expert, Serbian professor and later president of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, Jovan Cvijić (Јован Цвијић, 1865–1927), with whom he remained in close personal and scientific contact throughout his life. Looking over Daneš´s bibliography, it is not surprisingly that both short scientific and popular works from this region of south-eastern Europe are the most numerous. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. At least ten scientific articles by Daneš were published (not only in Czech, but also in English, German and French) on the geography of Australia before his appointment to Sydney, with six more (in Czech and English) published after he returned from his diplomatic mission. (cf. Votrubec 1990) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Daneš was one of several Asia experts to accept a diplomatic posting. Others included Professor Otakar Pertold (1884-1965), a leading Czech Indologist who in 1920 was the first Czechoslovak consul in Bombay, and Jan Klecanda (1883-1964), a prolific writer and expert on Southeast Asia and the Far East, better known by his pen-name Jan Havlasa, who was proposed for the post of first Czechoslovak envoy to China only to be reassigned as the first Czechoslovak envoy to Brazil. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Daneš was extremely active in Australia, as we can see both from his reports kept in the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and in the contemporary Australian press. He was behind the establishment of the first Australian-Czechoslovak Chamber of Commerce in March 1922 and his work for both Czechoslovakia and Australia was repeatedly mentioned in the local press. His obituary was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on May 15, 1928. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)