

Research Materials

Jaroslav Bařinka: Reflections on Czechoslovak-Korean Cold War Encounters*

Vladimř HLÁSNY

Jaroslav Bařinka, a leading Czech scholar of Koreanology, founding figure of Koreanology in Czechoslovakia, and among the longest-serving Czech diplomats operating in both Koreas, died at the age of eighty-nine on October 3, 2020. Bařinka made invaluable contributions introducing Korean traditional culture, archeology, and literature to non-Korean audiences, based on his extensive travels in the Koreas, Japan, and China spanning half a century. He served as an interpreter and Second Secretary at the Czechoslovak embassy in Pyongyang starting in 1955 and intermittently after that until 1976. He was the first Czech civilian to visit the ROK in 1970, returning there during the 1988 Olympics and in 1991 as Czechoslovakia's—and in 1993 Czechia's—first chargé d'affaires to Seoul. He was famous for his meticulous note-taking, sharp eyes, and technical knowledge. To the moment of his death he could talk at length about metallurgical deposits across Czechia and North Korea, their extraction processes, and their chemical properties—or about Confucian writings and architecture. This article recounts Bařinka's experiences from his long career in Korean scholarship, interpretation and diplomacy, with the aim of shedding light on Czechoslovak-Korean political relations, scholarly and cultural exchanges, and physical encounters from the 1950s to the 2000s. It is a record of conversations based on fifteen long interviews with Bařinka which took place between October 2014 and August 2019, with the objective of tracing the beginnings of Koreanology in Czechoslovakia. The content and style follow Bařinka's presentation as closely as possible, and errors, omissions, and biases are not carefully flagged, with the aim of accurately reflecting Bařinka's own narrative. In

*The author is grateful to Jaroslav Olřa, Jr., for materials from his personal archive and for helpful comments. Constructive comments by Prof. Jung Byung Joon and Mrs. Zdenka Klřoslová are also gratefully acknowledged. Any error of interpretation is the responsibility of the author alone.

Vladimř Hlásny (vhlasny@gmail.com) is an associate professor at Ewha Womans University

Seoul Journal of Korean Studies 34, no. 2 (December 2021): 357–401.

© 2021 Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies

instances where editorial intervention is warranted, references to sources of additional information and corroborations of Bařinka's account are separated clearly from Bařinka's own account.

Keywords: Czechoslovak-Korean relations, Cold War, Velvet Revolution, Jaroslav Bařinka (1931–2020), Kim Il-sung.

Early Exposure to Korean Studies and Koreans

Jaroslav Bařinka (born July 7, 1931) started learning about Korea at the age of thirteen, when his mother bought him several books on the geography of Asia as well as the *New Orient* journals, which came out in 1945 from the presses of the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences of Czechoslovakia. He was also gifted Kang Younghill's *The Grass Roof*, which he read with great interest. In high school, he was asked to give class presentations on what he had learnt about Korea. He resolved to pursue Korean Studies (henceforth Koreanology) under the Korean-born professor, Han Heungsu [Han Hung-soo],¹ whom he knew through the *New Orient* bimonthly. He applied to pursue Far-East Studies (specializing in Korean and Japanese) at the Faculty of Philology (later absorbed into the Faculty of Arts), Charles University.

Bařinka's first Korean lessons in the fall of 1947 were at the Oriental Institute, under the supervision of Han Heungsu (Löwensteinová and Olša 2014). During the short time they interacted, Han left a deep impression on Bařinka. Han was youthful and handsome, always elegantly dressed. He did not give the impression of an intellectual authority, which is how recent studies have tended to portray him. In fact, he appeared quite disoriented while in Prague. During the German occupation of Prague, Han Heungsu was open about his German and Austrian ties, and helped to arrange a large Japanese art exhibition in 1943. Then, suddenly, at the conclusion of World War II when communists were gaining ground in Czechoslovak society, he swung around and began flaunting his communist connections, even claiming that Kim Il-sung had sent for him to appoint him Minister of Education. Han started hanging out with the progressive socialist crowd, befriending the renowned "tough-minded

1. Editorial note: given the difficulty in ascertaining the personal romanization used by many of the people mentioned in this article, we have applied the standard Romanization for most North Korean names while respecting DPRK Hangeul orthography. Thus, we write Ri rather than Yi when it is the surname of a North Korean. For North Korean place names, we have followed the Romanized spelling as it appears to be used within the DPRK.

Stalinist” poet and novelist Marie Pujmanová.

Han Heungsu left Prague in the spring of 1948, shortly after Bařinka’s enrolment in his classes. After bidding goodbye to one another on the eve of the communist coup d’état (21–25 February 1948), they never reunited. Bařinka only later found out that Han ended up staying in Prague for another month before leaving for good. Han traveled to Moscow and, after securing a travel permit to North Korea, continued on to Pyongyang. While it was rumored that he returned to Prague one more time during the 1950s, these rumors have not been corroborated (Löwensteinová and Olša 2014). When Bařinka tried to track Han Heungsu in Pyongyang in 1955, nothing came of it.

After Han Heungsu’s departure from Prague, Alois Pultr, the eventual founder of the Koreanology department at Prague’s Charles University, became Bařinka’s major advisor. In 1949–1950, two Korean–American arrivals in Prague, Alice Hyun and Harold Sunoo (Korean name Seonu Hakwon), briefly gave Bařinka several lessons.²

Bařinka took a handful of private lessons from Alice Hyun. Alice Hyun would read Korean American progressive newspapers with Bařinka, and become emotional over their content. On one occasion, Alice Hyun asked her students to read a passage from a classical Korean novel. As they read it, Alice Hyun started crying. “She would close her eyes, and suddenly from under her long eyelids, tears would appear and roll down her cheeks,” Bařinka recalled.

After Han Heungsu and Alice Hyun had left for Pyongyang, Harold Sunoo arrived from the United States to experience socialism firsthand, and possibly to continue to the DPRK via the Soviet Union. Sunoo enrolled in the history program at Charles University in the fall of 1949, submitted his doctoral dissertation in the summer of 1950, and gave several public lectures at the University of Politics and Economics and at the Oriental Institute in Prague.

Sunoo then attempted to secure an entry visa to the DPRK, but his request was denied. Hence, after staying in Prague for nearly a year—and, incidentally, just before the eruption of the Korean War—Sunoo voluntarily returned to the United States, where he reunited with his wife Helen Sonia Sunwoo (née Sin). When he was interviewed by the FBI and testified at the US House Un–American Activities Committee hearings in Seattle in 1954, Sunoo claimed to be disillusioned with the communist organization of Soviet Bloc societies (Hlásny and Jung 2017b).

2. Both were prominently associated with the communist movement in the United States: Alice Hyun as the Korean Mata Hari, and Harold Sunoo as a communist leader on the US West Coast (Jung 2012; Hlásny and Jung 2017b).

Bařinka remembered Harold Sunoo as unprincipled, obsessed with fashion, and socially highly engaged. He was always elegantly, even extravagantly dressed, be it at the Oriental Institute or outdressing local men in downtown night clubs such as the Alhambra Cabaret. Sunoo spent a lot of money going out in Prague, and when he departed for the United States in 1950, he left behind a large debt owed to an Orientalist colleague and close friend, Jaroslava Bičičťová. Bičičťová sent him a letter requesting repayment, but received a rude reply from Sunoo's wife, questioning Bičičťová's morality and telling her not to contact the family again. Bičičťová could not but drop her demand.

Bařinka was left confused about Sunoo's political orientation. In 1950, Sunoo spoke as if he was completely smitten by Communism, but in 1968 he wrote a letter to the head of the Charles University Institute of East Asian Studies, Jaroslav Průšek, offering his congratulations and admiration in relation to the Prague Spring and pro-democracy movement that took hold in Czechoslovakia in January 1968, but was soon thwarted by a Soviet-led military invasion half a year later on August 21. He also attached what was allegedly a new textbook of the Korean language, and asked Průšek to accept it in lieu of a doctoral dissertation. Bařinka and Klöslová found the manuscript shoddy and unacceptable, and suspected that it had been already rejected by publishers in the United States. Průšek seconded their recommendation to reject the proposal. In the 1960s, Sunoo reportedly came to Prague and requested a meeting with Pultr to enquire about a fellowship with the Koreanology program, but Pultr declined the meeting (Vladimír Pucek, interview by author, Prague, August 6, 30, 2017).

Another early Korean sojourner in Czechoslovakia whom Bařinka encountered was Alice Hyun's son, Wellington Chung, although they crossed paths only once and by chance, without being introduced (Hlásny 2017; Hlásny and Jung 2014, 2017a). Bařinka was visiting a movie theater when, during the traditional pre-show screening of the Film Weekly news, a young Korean man stood up beside the screen and gave a passionate presentation in fluent Czech about US atrocities committed on the Korean Peninsula. It was Chung. At the time, the North Korean army had advanced into South Korean territory (henceforth ROK) as far south as Pohang, and was just starting to encounter resistance in the mountains surrounding Busan. The Film Weekly news showed American battalions firing at North Korean soldiers "destroying the Koreans' country." Bařinka asked his North Korean colleagues whether they were in touch with Wellington Chung, but they replied openly that they "avoided being in contact with him" and implied that they were not interested in him.

In 1950, Bařinka was admitted to the newly founded Koreanology department at Charles University, along with two other students. Between 1951 and

1953, a dozen other students were admitted, but due to a lack of instructors, enrollments ceased until 1956. The Koreanology department did not manage to hire another North Korean (henceforth DPRK) lecturer until 1959, when Han Yeongsun [Han Young Soon] was hired with the help of the DPRK embassy. However, he was caught tearing out politically sensitive pages from books in the library, and was let go in 1962 (Pucek 2015, 14). In the 1960s, a female student from the DPRK, Kim Geunhui [Kim Kun-hi], started giving Korean lessons at the Institute for Foreign Languages, teaching Korean conversation and working as a Czech-Korean interpreter. She eventually opted to stay in Czechoslovakia and distanced herself from the DPRK embassy circle, after Kim Il-sung executed a close friend of her father. Kim Geunhui married the renowned Czech mathematician Otakar Jaroř and settled in Libeř (Pucek 2015, 14).

In 1953, Bařinka was reprimanded by the university for not showing enough enthusiasm for the communist cause, and was accused of undermining the communist “uprising” of February 1948. Bařinka was threatened with expulsion from the university and investigation by the secret service. Several people influential in the university community, including his own advisor, Alois Pultr (who had previously considered Bařinka his best student), had turned against him. Bařinka’s troubles worsened to the point that an officer from the Ministry of Education even came to the university to investigate, and eventually made a formal accusation against Bařinka, calling for his immediate expulsion and drafting into the so-called black epaulettes platoon of the military, which was made up of young, politically untrustworthy men. The affair escalated into a showdown between major political forces. Opposing Bařinka was the leadership of Charles University, including Pultr (head of Koreanology) and Zdeňk Vančura (head of English Language studies, and translator of *The Grass Roof*). Intervening on Bařinka’s behalf—thanks to the efforts of Bařinka’s extended family—were the Deputy Minister of Education František Kahuda, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Josef Tesla, an official in the Office of the President, and the head of the Charles University Institute of East Asian Studies, Jaroslav Průšek.

Bařinka’s troubles blew over by the end of the year, partly thanks to the easing of political persecutions and the doctrinal liberalization that occurred in Czechoslovakia (as well as across the Soviet Bloc) after the deaths of Joseph Stalin and Klement Gottwald in March 1953. Bařinka appealed and his expulsion from the university was commuted and changed to a stern reprimand. Bařinka was allowed to return to the Koreanology department of Charles University in October 1953. By 1955, Bařinka’s future prospects improved, as Pultr turned a friendlier face toward him. Nevertheless, when an opportunity



Figure 1. Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs and North Korean embassy staff; daytrip to Český ráj National Park, ca 1955. Comrades Benda and Matoušek are second and third from left respectively; the other people in the photo have not been identified. Benda was Bařínka's supervisor who later served at the Czechoslovak embassy in Pyongyang as trade secretary; Matoušek was his deputy. Bařínka also joined the daytrip while preparing for his mission to Pyongyang. Source: Jaroslav Bařínka's personal archive.

appeared for Bařínka to serve on the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission in Panmunjom in August 1953, he was rejected on the recommendation of members of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission.³

Bařínka graduated in February 1955. While searching for regular employment, he gave Czech language lessons to staff at the DPRK embassy (Figure 1), and—as an adjunct faculty member—to Korean students at the Railway University in Karlín, Prague. Although Charles University refused to provide recommendations for him to prospective employers, Bařínka succeeded in securing a job with the foreign service. In May 1955, he was recruited by the

3. The Supervisory Commission was 384 persons strong, and on the Czechoslovak side included soldiers, diplomats, Czech-English translators, and three Korean Studies students as interpreters (Pucek 2015, 19, 70), although the numbers decreased significantly during the period 1953–1956 (to seventy-two in 1955, and only seventeen in 1956). The Czechoslovak Brigadier General František Bureš had planned a larger installation of military equipment and personnel, but it became apparent that there was little need for them. Two additional members (presumably Bařínka and another student) were reportedly being trained to join a forthcoming Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission, but the plans did not materialize (Pucek 2015, 19). Pucek served with a Czechoslovak medical unit at Chongjin from late 1954 until 1956.

Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Trade. He was appointed to serve as an interpreter with the trade department of the Czechoslovak embassy in Pyongyang, starting in August 1955.

Fully conversant in Japanese and Classical Chinese, he was also offered a post as the first-ever adjunct research fellow with the Koreanology program at the Oriental Institute, and held this post until 1972 (Filipský 1999, 66–67).

Early Czechoslovak-Korean Interactions

The years 1949 to 1956 were an exciting period for the Koreanology program in Prague, with a significant inflow of arrivals and even renowned visitors from Korea in the years leading up to, during, and following the Korean War (1950–1953). Czechoslovakia served as a gateway between the West and the Far East in the late 1940s (Hlásný and Jung 2017b), provided humanitarian assistance to the DPRK as its Soviet Bloc partner during the War, and was a member of the Neutral Nations safeguarding post-war peace and reconciliation. Several events dedicated to the crisis and the Korean War took place in Prague and other cities, and several high-level delegations, including Kim Il-sung himself, arrived from Pyongyang. The largest group of early Korean arrivals—and, through the lens of history, arguably the most significant—were the students enrolling in Czechoslovak universities, some of whom would later assume leadership roles in the DPRK regime.

1. DPRK Students in Prague

In the fall of 1951, as an upperclassman, Bařínka was appointed as an adjunct faculty member to teach Korean lessons to Czechoslovak students. He taught introduction to the theory of Korean grammar, practical Korean part one, and other courses.⁴ He also started teaching the Czech language to incoming Korean students. The first twenty Korean students who arrived in Prague in December 1951 (Figure 2) were the brightest. They had presumably been carefully selected from among their peers as pioneers for advanced technical training abroad. Some of them had come from the ranks of the DPRK army, having gone through short military training before their studies abroad.⁵

4. Charles University Archive, List of Lectures, Faculty of Philology, academic year 1952–1953.

5. Charles University Archive, Registry of Foreign Students, academic years 1951–1963 (various years). The full list of Korean students is available on request.



Figure 2. The first group of North Koreans to study in Czechoslovakia, ca. 1951. Location unknown. From top left: Mun Jinjae, Oh Minseok, Park Changhui, Heo Songpal. Center row: Choe Dongjun, Ri Changho, Kim Byeong-yong, Ju Gwang-ryeol, Ri Jaewon, Kim Seong-ryong, Kim Yeong-il. Bottom: An Gyeonghyeon, Kim Chunsam, Ri Jonggeun, Sin Gyeongpil (group leader), Lim Songbae, Kim Sanggwon, Jeong Sunam. Source: Jaroslav Bařinka's personal archive.

The twenty Koreans arrived at the Prague Main Train Station, where Bařinka came to greet them and accept responsibility for them. He would pay careful attention to them in his teaching. In coordination with the Czechoslovak Youth Association and the Communist Party office at the University of Political and Economic Sciences, he was tasked with devoting a substantial amount of time to their academic, health-related, political, and other needs, even during his hours of leisure. The students would take formal lessons at the Oriental Institute in the morning, and would visit Bařinka's apartment in the afternoon for additional practice. This experience of taking care of the foreign visitors was very demanding, but also critical for Bařinka's own intellectual, professional, and personal development.

The Korean students stayed in the Roosevelt Student Dormitory, just a block away from Bařinka's own house on Strojnická street. Later, they moved to the Jarov Student Dormitory (located on Koněvova street in Žiřkov district), belonging to the University of Political and Economic Sciences (renamed the University of Economics in 1953). After the first batch of twenty students, a second batch of forty-four students arrived in October–November 1952, and a third batch of some sixty-nine students arrived in December 1952. These later groups were less noteworthy, and in Bařinka's eyes were less bright and less

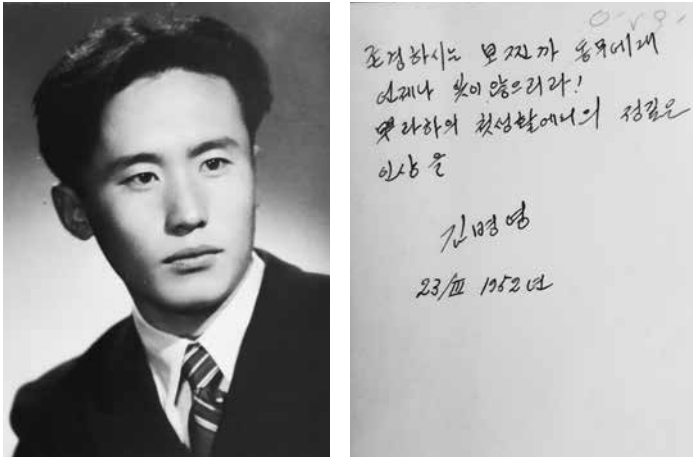


Figure 3. Kim Byeong-yong, with personal note on the back of the photograph, dated March 23, 1952. Source: Jaroslav Bařinka's personal archive.

motivated in their studies. Bařinka thus put less effort in instructing them. They all took lessons in Czech language, and some went on to take classes in Russian, English or French, literature, history, Marxism-Leninism, and, particularly in the late 1950s, political economy. In addition to Charles University and the University of Political and Economic Sciences, students enrolled in various institutes of the Czechoslovak Technical University in Prague: chemical, electric, metallurgical, mining, polytechnical, railway, transport, and typographical. The success of the initial batches of DPRK students opened the doors to a more extensive inflow of students.⁶ Over the following three decades, some fifteen hundred tertiary-school students from the DPRK attended universities in various places around Czechoslovakia.

Of the first batch of twenty carefully selected students, Kim Byeong-yong was among the most talented and Bařinka's favorite (Figure 3).⁷ They became

6. The hundreds of economically and technically trained DPRK state officials notably included three prime ministers of the DPRK, who attended the Prague Institute for Technology. This phenomenon has been dubbed the "Prague School of Economics" among DPRK policy elites, amid the post-Korean War reconstruction (Oh Hassig et al. 2004).

7. Kim Byeong-yong was born on December 4, 1927 in Eumpo (South Hamgyong Province). His mother was Yi Yun-ok (Ri Jun Ok) and his father Kim Taeksik (Kim Thek Sik). He was a member of the Korean Workers' Party and the Korean Democratic Youth Association. He had finished upper secondary education in Korea, and had attained the post of first lieutenant in the Korean army. He arrived in Prague on November 10, 1951, with a permit from the Korean Bureau of National Security (KVNBS) to study in Czechoslovakia for one year. He lived in the Roosevelt

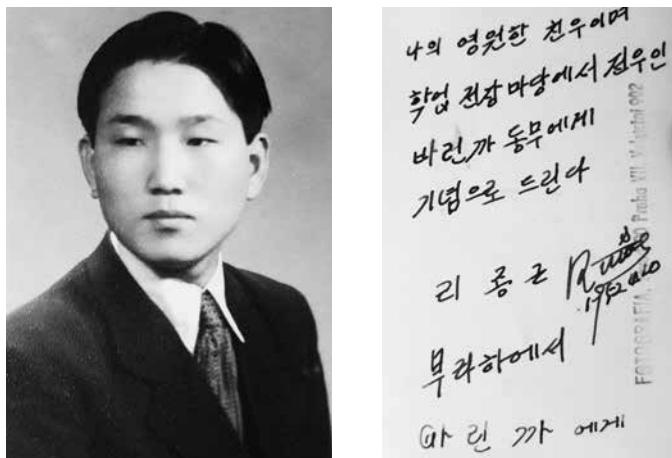


Figure 4. Ri Jonggeun, with personal note on the back of the photograph, dated April 10, 1952. Source: Jaroslav Bařínka's personal archive.

close friends. Kim came from a privileged family. His brother had enrolled in an officers' academy in Pyongyang. His father had also served in the army, but had died prematurely in some sort of accident. Kim Byeong-yong enrolled in the University of Political and Economic Sciences in Prague. Kim would remain friends with Bařínka for over two decades, meeting him repeatedly in Pyongyang and even once in Prague, while Kim was on a mission to Europe from the DPRK Ministry of External Economic Relations.

Another bright student among the twenty, An Gyeonghyeon, studied English and Czech. On his return to the DPRK, he was drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served as a labor union chief. Bařínka met him repeatedly in Pyongyang as part of negotiations between the two countries' Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

Another close friend of Bařínka's, Ri Jonggeun (Figure 4), from a disadvantaged family residing near Sinuiju, was a humble and diligent student of the French and Czech languages, linguistics, and literature. At sixteen, he was the youngest in the group of twenty (born July 13, 1934), but suffered from lung disease, and frequented a student sanatorium for respiratory diseases in Třebetov near Prague. In fact, a large number of Korean arrivals had tuberculosis or pneu-

dormitory, and later moved to the Jarov district near the University of Political and Economic Sciences. Source: Police directorate Prague II – general repository – 1941–1950, Signature K 1675/29 Kim, Bjeng Jen. Retrieved from: National Archives of the Czech Republic, Record 5106 – 1420/1/3 – PR1941–1951.



Figure 5. Jaroslav Bařinka and Lim Songbae, ca. 1952. Photograph taken at Stromovka Park, Prague. Source: Jaroslav Bařinka's personal archive.

mothorax symptoms because of poor living conditions in Korea at the time, and received hospital treatment in Czechoslovakia. When Ri returned to Pyongyang, he lost the authorities' trust on account of his interest in Western enlightened thinking, and was sent to the mines at Sinuiju, leading him to develop pulmonary problems.

Another student, Kim Sanggwon, was a youthful and energetic lad. Moon Jinjae was yet another memorably intelligent student. Tae Hyeongjin (born April 1, 1930), one of the less bright students in the group, studied at the University of Political and Economic Sciences in Prague. On his return to the DPRK he settled in Yongchon. Lim Songbae (Figure 5) went on to study mining at the Technical University of Ostrava, and on his return to the DPRK was drafted into a mining and metallurgical plant in Chongjin. Heo Songpal, another successful student, also found work at a metallurgical plant in Chongjin, and served on a DPRK mining industry commission, occasionally even traveling abroad to negotiate material exports and imports.

The class of twenty had their intricate group dynamics. Jeong Sunam (nicknamed Myeongtae [pollock]), a short man and the worst-performing student among the twenty, informed on his peers to the authorities for the sake of his own advancement. He persuaded the brightest and best-performing student in the group, Pak Changhui—who had been a marine during the Pacific War, and who went on to study at the Brno University of Technology—to marry Jeong's sister. When the group returned to Pyongyang, Jeong Sunam denounced

his brother-in-law to the authorities for holding anti-regime sentiments, in order to improve his own political standing. His brother-in-law and sister were dismissed from their jobs in Pyongyang and sent to the mines outside the capital. There they disappeared.

The DPRK regime never actually stopped monitoring the students stationed in Czechoslovakia. While the first group of twenty were touring Mariánské Lázně, a team of inspectors arrived from Pyongyang to check on their academic and political progress, and on the political conditions of their stay. Sin Gyeongpil, the formal leader among the twenty students—despite being a very kind and sensible person—accompanied the inspectors.⁸

Special envoys were not the only means of checking on Koreans residing in Czechoslovakia and facilitating the flow of intelligence between Prague and Pyongyang. The DPRK secret service operated a headquarters for Eastern Europe in East Berlin. Progressive academics from Europe who wanted to travel to Pyongyang would arrive in Prague for an appointment with the East Berlin agents at the DPRK embassy. They contacted staff at the Koreanology program for informal assistance during their stay in Prague. As an associate of the Academy of Sciences and a recruit of the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Bařinka's standard response to them was, "I don't view this as appropriate," while Vladimír Pucek went out of his way to help, using his car to pick them up from the airport, organizing accommodation for them at Hotel Internacionál, and arranging a meeting at the DPRK embassy. Interestingly, the East Berlin agents apparently got their intelligence mixed up, once addressing Pucek as Mr. Bařinka.

In 1957, all of a sudden, all Korean students, trainees and public servants in Czechoslovakia were recalled, apparently to probe their loyalty amid leadership challenges in Pyongyang.⁹ (It should be noted that the DPRK nationals in Czechoslovakia—notably, for instance, the university student O Minseok—were overwhelmingly opposed to the regime.) Return flights were booked to deliver them immediately to Pyongyang. Their Czechoslovak classmates, concerned about their Korean peers' fate in Pyongyang, considered protesting over the rash repatriations, but they could not stop them. Bařinka worked on persuading his Czech peers to remain calm. Had the Koreans stayed behind in Prague, they would have been unable to return to Korea later. Nevertheless, the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education weighed in by issuing an announcement that the

8. Sin Gyeongpil started his career working for the Korean railways, and eventually ended up with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pyongyang.

9. The struggle reached its high point during an August 1956 Yanan Faction Incident—while Kim Il-sung was touring the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites—but the coup was foiled by his faction.

Czechoslovak authorities understood why the Korean students were needed at home, but the students were welcome to return and resume their studies in Czechoslovakia whenever that should become possible. In fact, no one from the initial cohorts of students returned, but new cohorts started arriving again.

Among these later cohorts of North Koreans, various problems emerged. There were instances of hazing between older and younger cohorts of students, and other delinquencies were reported at a dormitory in Šebetov, as documented in a book by the superintendent, Zdeněk Tax.

A handful of DPRK students from the later cohorts escaped to Seoul through Hungary or Germany, and sought work as Czech interpreters there. One of these was Kim Myeongseong, who had studied in Prague in the 1950s. He fled to the ROK and settled down in the countryside. These emigrants called on Bařinka in the 1990s when he assumed the role of the *chargé d'affaires* in Seoul, asking for Czech newspapers and other Czech resources. However, their contact with Bařinka was brief, as both sides tried to avoid attracting the attention of ROK intelligence.

2. Other Korean Visitors to Czechoslovakia

In April 1949, Prague hosted the World Peace Congress. The DPRK delegation to the Congress included Kim Changjun (Christian Democratic Party leader and pastor), Han Seol-ya (writer, Chairman of the Korean Writers Association) and Pak Cheong-ae (Chairwoman of the Korean Women's League). During her travels around Czechoslovakia, Pak visited textile factories and other landmarks. Bařinka provided interpretation. While listening to a Prague Quartet performance of Bohuslav Martinů's music, she was upset that Czechoslovak people still listened to him despite the fact that he had deserted his country for France (in 1923) and then the United States (in 1940).

In June 1956, Kim Il-sung himself visited Czechoslovakia. Bařinka accompanied him on trips to the car and electro-technical plants in Plzeň, as well as during Kim's stay in Prague and to his meetings with President Antonín Zápotocký. For Kim's return trip east, Bařinka accompanied him to the VIP section of Prague's Main Train Station where Antonín Novotný, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (and president during the period 1957–1968), bade goodbye to Kim. Bařinka then joined Kim on the train to Bratislava and Komárno. At Komárno, a special train was arranged to transport Kim to Budapest, Sofia and Bucharest.

In the early 1950s, a group of sixty-plus DPRK orphans also arrived and

were admitted to orphanages in a handful of Czechoslovak towns.¹⁰ Bařinka visited one of these orphanages near Nymburk with Kim Il-sung's entourage. The orphans had instructors for Korean as well as for Czech. From talking to the native Korean instructors settled in Prague's vicinity, Bařinka realized that it was rather easy to spot those who were loyal to the DPRK regime and the communist line, and those critical of them.

Bařinka's First Mission to Pyongyang, 1955–1959

After graduating from university in February 1955, Bařinka was hired by the Ministry of Foreign Trade in May, and was assigned to serve as an interpreter in the Czechoslovak trade office in Pyongyang. He set off on his journey in August 1955.

As he was approaching Korea for the first time, Bařinka gazed at the Yellow Sea, then at the Yalu River meandering through the countryside and flowing into the sea between mud banks, then at the fields and hills rolling in front of his eyes, just as he had remembered from geography lessons and from the emotional accounts told by Koreans in Prague. The landscape was exactly the way he had imagined it, giving him a sense of *déjà vu*. As the airplane finally glided over the Korean peninsula, Bařinka felt strong emotions at having fulfilled his dream. On another level, Bařinka's travel to Pyongyang also represented a triumph over the academic and political troubles he had faced during the prior three years at the university.

The embassy personnel in Pyongyang, even the local staff, were surprisingly opposed to the DPRK regime. The driver, a former policeman, talked about Kim Il-sung's regime with sarcasm—not attempting to politically provoke the Czechoslovaks, but from his heart. The embassy heating technician was even more anti-regime.

Conditions at the trade office were quite pleasant and liberal at first, certainly when compared to the politically fraught conditions in ensuing years, since staff were allowed to visit private homes and travel unrestricted around the DPRK, as well as to China. Bařinka could hop on and off the train arbitrarily to visit historic sites. Only occasionally while visiting distant places was Bařinka stopped by public officials and asked about his identity and intentions there.

10. At the orphanage in Houřtka, one of the students was Yeo Sun-gu (family name spelled Ryo or Lyuh), the youngest daughter of the DPRK hero Yeo Unhyeong (Lyuh Woon Hyung), and the future founder of the Bohemian Studies program at Pyongyang University for Foreign Studies (Pucek 2015, 16).

In the fall of 1957, mobility and communication restrictions toughened in response to the domestic political struggle between Kim Il-sung's faction and pro-China groups. Mobility restrictions were gradually introduced in a haphazard fashion, changing from one day to the next. For instance, on one occasion when Bařinka went on an evening stroll to Moranbong, a policeman suddenly jumped out of nowhere and started harassing him over the purpose of his journey. Bařinka responded assertively, flaunting his diplomatic protections, and the officer reluctantly let him go.

1. Official Business at the Embassy

Bařinka's duties at the trade office included not only interpretation and translation, but also economic news gathering and dispatch, advocacy, acquisitions, and filling in for foreign-trade staff on their annual leave. He provided interpretation at meetings, including for a government delegation of the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, a medical delegation led by the Ministry of Health, a military delegation led by the Ministry of National Defense, a parliamentary delegation, and many others. He traveled with these delegations around the country, usually in the company of high-level DPRK officials, including Kim Il-sung himself. Bařinka got to meet Kim and other dignitaries frequently in his capacity as a Czech-Korean interpreter. He got to observe the leaders at close quarters, and was able to observe even their less flattering sides, such as their periodic angry outbursts at their underlings, or their physical defects, a case in point being a tumor cyst on the back of Kim Il-sung's head.

As a staff member of the trade office, Bařinka was expected to travel and identify potential export organizations. There were few commodities that could be exported from the DPRK in the late 1950s. There were the natural resources, of course, that the Japanese had started mining during their occupation of the peninsula, such as nickel, cobalt, gold, silver, and poly-metallic ores—particularly lead, zinc, and pyrites—mined in Holtong (North Hwanghae Province) and elsewhere, but the amount produced was not high. Gold was mined in Pukchin and Pyoktong County (North Pyongan Province), and in Pukchang (South Pyongan Province). Magnesite and nickel were mined in South Hamgyong Province. Czechoslovakia had wanted to take part in the magnesite extraction, in order to take over the bulk of the global supply of magnesite.

Most such negotiations between North Koreans and Czechoslovaks were superficially good-natured, and both sides were successful at saving face, but sometimes cracks appeared in their interactions. In the case of prospective collaboration in magnesite extraction, the agreement between the two countries

fell apart. Another time, on a trip to manufacturing plants around the DPRK, including Nampo port, it was painfully clear that the two sides had different points of view and different priorities. The North Koreans were reiterating that what mattered most to them was ideology, while the Czechoslovaks and Soviets emphasized the need to meet economic targets.

Bařinka visited many places while scouting and monitoring trade opportunities, including a large mine of magnetite deposits at Musan, an asbestos mine at Pungyeri (both in North Hamgyong Province), and a site of large polymetallic ore, magnetite, and manganite deposits at Komdok (South Hamgyong Province). Bařinka and his colleagues visited all these sites without any problems, particularly in the early years, and were shown about by official guides from Pyongyang. The guides were only too happy to travel out of Pyongyang with the foreign trade representatives, because even during the early years, Koreans were already restricted in their movement around the country.

During those early years, foreign travelers were simply requested to declare their upcoming travel and wait for permission, but later the conditions of travel significantly tightened. At that point it became dangerous to even speak to locals, because they could be denounced to the authorities for unapproved interactions with foreigners.

On his recurring missions out of Pyongyang to places such as Kaesong or Panmunjom, Bařinka was sometimes urged to travel by car, sometimes by night train only. In the latter cases, the embassy car was loaded onto the train and rolled down once at the destination. These provisions were implemented so as not to disclose to foreigners any defense facilities in the landscape (Švamberk 2013). By the same token, some military facilities—such as a military airport in Hwangju County (North Hwanghae Province)—were habitually deliberately shown to visitors, so as to flaunt the DPRK's military prowess and readiness amid the arms race with the United States and Japan.

One site that Bařinka visited quite often was Hamhung (South Hamgyong Province), on account of a small-scale machinery-producing facility that Czechoslovakia supplied with parts—one of many such factories around the country. A large number of European technicians worked at various DPRK industrial and mining sites, and a sizable group of East Germans were present in Hamhung. They worked at a machinery manufacturing facility, and at a large chemical production facility in Pongung, halfway between Hamhung and Hungnam. Right by the sea in Hungnam was a large Japanese-built chemical plant producing nitrogen fertilizers. On his visit to this plant, Bařinka suddenly recognized a former student from Prague—O Minseok.¹¹

11. O Minseok had received the highest military accolades among the first group of twenty

Huichon (Chagang Province) was the largest industrial site that received Czechoslovak machinery. Bařinka traveled there repeatedly, once even with Kim Il-sung in his car.¹² During official visits to these plants, local officials were eager to show Czechoslovak engineers how well the machines had been maintained, and to hear their feedback on the state of the machines. Factory officials also emphasized their need for other machinery produced in Czechoslovakia.

At the same time, Czechoslovak-made machinery in some factories had their tags of origin removed, while Japanese machinery was clearly shown to be Japanese. Apparently, factory management perceived the latter to be more valuable to showcase to visitors, despite the DPRK's friendship with Czechoslovakia and open conflict with Japan.

2. Observing the DPRK Regime's Terror

When he could not leave Pyongyang, Bařinka spent many hours walking around the city—through Kim Il-sung Square, Taedongmun, Potongmun, Moranbong and surrounding areas, and as far as the Sadong anthracite mining site, north-east of Pyongyang, and Mt. Yongak, near Nampo. Bařinka and his colleagues also bought a small boat, and occasionally navigated the Taedong River to Nampo. They also went swimming at Rungra Island, in east Pyongyang.

On one of his walks to the far side of Moranbong, all of a sudden Bařinka heard women's screams, shouting and a gunshot. Somebody had been accused of a crime, and was tried and executed on the spot. It was not an isolated incident. Bařinka witnessed similar occurrences in Hamhung and Huichon. In Huichon, while Bařinka was visiting a tool factory and talking to the main

students in Czechoslovakia. He wrote a formal letter to Bařinka, praising him for the attention and effort that he devoted to instructing the Koreans.

12. During a stop at a Huichon plant with a visiting chief engineer from Czechoslovakia, Kim Il-sung, the chief engineer and Bařinka were separated from the rest of Kim Il-sung's entourage. Bařinka was swiftly translating between the engineer and Kim Il-sung, and the three of them walked fast through the facility, while the rest of the delegates had trouble understanding explanations for all the equipment at the plant and lingered behind to ask many follow-up questions. Public media clips from this visit therefore showed Bařinka side by side with Kim Il-sung—and nobody else in view—looking as if he was a significant public official at Kim Il-sung's level.

A similar synchronization mishap occurred in Prague in 1984. While Kim Il-sung was visiting Prague's city center, someone, perhaps Gustáv Husák, gave orders that the entourage should walk on foot rather than by car, to get nicer views of the historic center and to do some exercise. While Kim Il-sung and Bařinka walked off in the direction of the Prague Old Town Hall, the rest of the group inadvertently stayed behind discussing some practical matters. Kim Il-sung and Bařinka entered the Town Hall building on their own and took the elevator to the second floor, but once there had to wait in awkward silence for the rest of the group to arrive.

engineer—who had studied in Prague before—a group of men suddenly walked up, dragged the man to the center of an open space for everyone (even foreign visitors) to see, screamed out accusations against him concerning his alleged anti-state crimes, and shot him to death.

Even North Korean youth were encouraged to denounce one another, and when one of them was identified as a traitor, he would be dragged to a public place by his peers and assaulted. One day near the Czechoslovak embassy, Bařinka heard a woman screaming. Her son had just been abducted from school and taken away to an out-of-town reformatory institution from which he would never return. So Jeong-yun, a young book seller whom Bařinka had befriended in his shop which stood between Kim Il-sung Square and the Soviet embassy, also perished one day in this way.

These occurrences were commonplace, so Bařinka was persistently in fear that he would witness them again. Indeed, that was the intention of Kim Il-sung's regime—to crush any sign of disobedience or non-conformity, and terrorize the population into submission. One night, Bařinka was taking a train and listened in on a conversation between two policemen openly discussing the identity of the latest victims of executions, and the terror of it all. They knew Bařinka could hear and understand Korean, but they shared their anxiety openly with him.

While mutual denunciations to the authorities were common even in Czechoslovak society, the sheer scale of the witch hunt in the DPRK, and the cruelty of the sentences, was mind-boggling. In the middle of the night, large trucks would come into a neighborhood, load up a large number of pre-selected individuals, and leave for the countryside. Buses full of people on their forced transit to the countryside were a common sight. The stress level of living under the regime, for skilled and unskilled people alike, was extreme, and people feared that their neighbors and relatives would tell on them.

At the Czechoslovak embassy, the sister of the maintenance worker, Mr. Son (full name unknown; Figure 6), was sent to the countryside. Sometimes their correspondence to one another was delivered, sometimes it was not.

The social fabric and the compact between citizens and the state were damaged. While people were scared of the secret police and of having a political accusation leveled against them, they ceased to fear being held on other charges. Walking around town after dark, one would often see scenes of ordinary people arguing fearlessly with the night patrol. On one occasion at Moranbong, Bařinka saw a policeman confiscate a pair of rubber shoes from a little boy who had taken them off in the park. A group of men approached the officer, assaulted him verbally and forced him to return the shoes to the boy.



Figure 6. Czechoslovak embassy staff, Pyongyang, ca 1956. Photographs taken at the Czechoslovak embassy compound in Pyongyang. Left: North Korean maintenance staff, Ri Song-byo. Right: Mr. Son (last name, full name unknown) maintenance and heating staff. Source: Jaroslav Bařinka's personal archive.

The double propaganda-terror compact was not limited to local residents alone, but extended to foreign visitors. On their arrival in the country, German, French, and other visitors were initially treated like royalty at the Taedonggang or Pyongyang Hotels, but if they showed any disillusionment, doubt, or resistance towards the regime, they were immediately abandoned to their own devices, and were asked to leave. Bařinka saw such a group of German guests looking disheveled and exasperated, having being dumped at their hotel after some sort of disagreement.

3. Reuniting with Acquaintances from Prague

On his arrival in Pyongyang in 1955, Bařinka reunited with Kim Byeong-yong, now employed at the DPRK Ministry of External Economic Relations. (He would eventually serve out his entire career there and peacefully retire.) Bařinka met him in Kim's apartment in Pyongyang. On another occasion, Kim briefly dropped by Bařinka's room in a hotel for foreigners in Wonsan, in total secrecy so as to avoid raising any suspicion from the authorities. Bařinka also traveled by train to Hongwon County (South Hamgyong Province) and Umpo, Kim's hometown, and spent nights there.

Bařinka also attended Kim's wedding. The wedding had been pre-arranged (with a different bride-to-be) since Kim was aged ten, but when the prospective bride's father was murdered and rumors started circulating about the family's

political loyalty,¹³ Kim Byeong-yong's mother persuaded him to find another partner. At first Kim stood his ground: "I will never give in. I have lived abroad, I know how it works elsewhere, and I will not submit to this. I will simply marry the girl who was promised to me." Alas, eventually he backed down and found another partner.

Bařinka also tried to meet his one-time instructors. He asked the head of protocol of the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs about Alice Hyun and was told that, as of September–October 1955, she held a solid position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was "their best translator... fabulous... very funny... a fantastic translator... and an amazing colleague." And then suddenly people stopped mentioning her.¹⁴ He also asked about Han Heungsu, but heard nothing of him, and in fact was subtly urged not to ask.¹⁵ He did hear about To Yuho, Han Heungsu's advisor in Berlin in the 1930s, and now the chief of the DPRK's archeology. To Yuho fared well for several years after the Korean War before he vanished in 1957–1959, like many others. However, in a file photograph from 1958, To Yuho looked conspicuously older and worn out compared to the way Bařinka remembered him from previous years.

4. Legal Guardianship of an Orphaned Korean Boy

During his first mission to Pyongyang, Bařinka befriended a homeless teenager, Pak Gwangbok. Pak was born in 1944 or 1945 in Teokche-ri, a Pyongwon County village northwest of Pyongyang. Near the village, there was a hill visible from flights departing northward from Pyongyang, and Bařinka glanced at it nostalgically every time he flew in or out of the city.

An orphan whose only brother had been executed for alleged treason, Pak Gwangbok earned his living by begging foreign officials for money in the street. Bařinka befriended him by periodically handing him some change and

13. As villagers were escaping their homes toward the north to avoid being liberated by the Americans in 1950, a couple of Korean People's Army men on horses stopped by, singled out the girl's father, shot him and galloped away. It was unclear whether he had been murdered by anti-communist elements in the army, or by soldiers instructed to target him based on some accusation of disloyalty against him, but the latter rumors prevailed. The family had thus been struck by two tragedies—the death of a breadwinner, and a sentence that their daughter would remain unmarried.

14. This conflicts with evidence that Alice Hyun was arrested and interrogated as early as 1953, and possibly executed before 1955.

15. One site where Han Heungsu was reported seen in later years was Kanggye, the capital of Chagang Province, the site of archeological excavations in which he may have participated (Zdenka Klöslová, interview by author, Prague, October 6, 17, 2014.).

exchanging a few words with him. In March 1956, Bařinka offered him a place to stay in his apartment at the Czechoslovak embassy compound, and embarked on obtaining legal guardianship of Pak. In January 1957, Bařinka received approval for the legal guardianship from the DPRK Ministry of Justice and from the (soon to be executed) Deputy Minister of the Interior. They all supported him in his endeavor. The DPRK Ministry of the Interior even issued a decree of the Supreme People's Assembly confirming Bařinka as Pak's guardian. Pak spent a lot of time with Bařinka and his colleagues, and became skilled at Czech conversation. He went to elementary school near the embassy compound, by the Kim Hyong Jik University of Education. When Pak Gwangbok did not stay overnight at the embassy compound, he stayed with one of his classmates across the street.

Pak Gwangbok was frail and looked much younger than his true age when Bařinka first met him. He had long suffered from pulmonary problems, including tuberculosis. During the few years that he lived with Bařinka, his health and stature dramatically improved. From a twelve-year-old boy who looked six, he quickly aged in appearance.

Bařinka also met Pak Gwangbok's teacher, Ri Dalsu, who was two years younger than Bařinka and still pursuing his studies. They talked openly about the political situation in Pyongyang and people's relationships under the oppressive regime. Not long after, Ri Dalsu was expelled from the university and assigned to work in public parks tending plants.

In 1959, Bařinka's service in Pyongyang came to an end, and he returned to Prague. Pak Gwangbok joined him on his trip, and moved in with Bařinka and his mother. He was in the care of Bařinka and his mother for nearly a year, even attending regular lung treatment sessions with a specialist. Pak also attended public elementary school on Šimáčkova Street in Prague-Holeřovice. Bařinka had great hopes for Pak, and even started arranging a scholarship for him at the University of Art and Industry in Prague.

Nevertheless, the Czechoslovak authorities forbade the guardianship on legal grounds. At first, the Czechoslovak Ministry of Justice was inclined to grant the legal guardianship, but it backtracked following deeper scrutiny of the case. Ostensibly, it was not customary to assign guardians to teenagers, and Pak Gwangbok was approximately fifteen years old at the time. Behind the scenes, DPRK officials argued that Bařinka exercised undue influence over Pak Gwangbok, leading him to lose respect for Kim Il-sung and to accept Christianity. Moreover, other DPRK youth staying at a dormitory in the city center on Dittrichova Street were jealous of the fact that Pak Gwangbok had a family in Prague, and their caretakers joined the DPRK embassy in advocating for Pak's

relocation to a dormitory.¹⁶ Pak was forced to comply, and enrolled in a new school in the city center on Charvátova Street. By February 1960, however, he was ordered to return to Pyongyang altogether. While the DPRK ambassador repeatedly assured Bařinka that Pak would be safe and that his health would be safeguarded, this was an empty promise.

Bařinka continued to send resources to pay for Pak Gwangbok's needs, and asked Kim Byeong-yong to call on Pak periodically while Bařinka was abroad, but Kim Byeong-yong was limited in how much he could protect the boy. In Pyongyang, an accusation was leveled against Pak Gwangbok over his suspected relations with foreigners, and from May 1960 he was repeatedly arrested. For a period of time he was banished to an anthracite mine in Sadong. Pak's pulmonary problems deteriorated, and in the spring of 1961 he was treated for a resurgence of pneumonia. Then he was sent back to the mines.

Pak Gwangbok was also prevented from marrying a woman he had met in Pyongyang when he was relocated to a mining site in nearby Kangdong County. As an alternative, his coworkers at the mine arranged for him to be engaged to the daughter of a local official, in order for him to be promoted to a better job. Alas, even that prospect fell through when the authorities forced him to take a factory job southwest of Pyongyang, near Nampo port. There the authorities arranged for him to marry another woman, and assigned them residence in a small house.

Bařinka reunited with Pak Gwangbok during his 1961–1963 academic fellowship in Pyongyang. On Bařinka's urging, the authorities allowed Pak to return to Pyongyang and tasked him with translation between Czech technical personnel and local workers at an electro-technical plant. Bařinka supported Pak financially till January 1963, when Bařinka finished his residency in Pyongyang. In May 1964, Pak Gwangbok disappeared for good.

On Bařinka's next trip to Pyongyang in 1967, he was told by Pak's old-time colleagues that the police had arrived one day and taken him away to a concentration camp for political prisoners. Bařinka expressed his grief and bitterness at the terrible blow without mincing his words: "Korean authorities demonstrate their mistrust of other socialist countries mainly by forcefully breaking the legal and human relations among regular citizens [...] Korean authorities have not made the slightest attempt to solve my fundamental personal problem in the country by providing any form of information about the fate of the Korean

16. Other possibilities are that 1) the political purges in Pyongyang in 1956 forced the government to reverse direction from that pursued by prior administrations; or 2) the Sino-Soviet split forced the governments of Czechoslovakia and the DPRK to put a hold on deepening their relations.

citizen Pak Gwangbok.”

The misgivings were mutual. Starting in the mid-1960s—and particularly following Pak Gwangbok’s disappearance—the DPRK authorities assumed a negative stance toward Bařinka, and denied him access to information and materials about the country. They also engaged in various provocations toward him. In 1962, the DPRK nearly declared Bařinka *persona non grata*, and spread malicious rumors about him. At the same time, in an attempt to lure him to their side, the authorities also provided Bařinka with a fully written manuscript for him to submit to Charles University in lieu of his dissertation work. He refused the offer, fearful of becoming embroiled in their scheming.

Scholarly Work in Koreanology

Bařinka was released from the foreign service in February 1959, before the end of the customary four-year service. This was based on a political assessment conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs one year prior. While most of his colleagues at the Czechoslovak embassy in Pyongyang were on the same wavelength as him privately, in official communications they alluded to Bařinka’s limited adherence to the official Party line, and his tendency to associate with people whose commitment to communism was suspected not to be strong. In regard to socialist countries’ inter-embassy meetings in Pyongyang, one staff member quipped, “I would not advise delegating Bařinka to meet the Polish.”

Bařinka’s release from the foreign service put a halt to his plans to study international trade while serving in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By May 1959, Bařinka secured a poorly paid research position with the library and documentation section of the Oriental Institute. He would continue to be affiliated with the Oriental Institute until 1972. He also served as an interpreter to Korean delegations to Czechoslovakia, including the 1959 state visit of Choe Yonggeon, leader of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly, and another DPRK delegation to the Brno Trade Fair.

Throughout the 1960s, Bařinka immersed himself in scholarly endeavors and penned some of his most important works. In 1962, he published the influential book *The Art of Ancient Korea*, coauthored with the photographer Werner Forman and republished in English, French and Spanish. In 1965, Bařinka was asked by the Military Academy in Prague to write a monograph, titled *The Korean nation’s resistance against the Axis powers during World War II*, about Kim Il-sung and the rest of the resistance. Bařinka also contributed a

number of academic articles,¹⁷ entries to encyclopedias,¹⁸ and translations,¹⁹ and provided referee reports to the *Nový Orient* and *Archiv Orientální* magazines and international journals. In 1969 Bařinka prepared the first monograph on the history of the ROK, to be published by Svoboda publishers, but it was suppressed at the last moment by the censors. In June 1967, Bařinka joined a delegation of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences to Pyongyang. In August of the same year, he participated in the twenty-seventh International Congress of Orientalists held at the University of Michigan, in the role of a discussant. Interestingly, the Soviet Union and its allies had issued a ban on travel to the US, as a response to the escalation of the war in Vietnam. The Soviet delegation canceled their participation at the last moment, but Bařinka managed to sneak through the Czech-German border, and enjoyed the Congress without any hurdles or repercussions. He traveled to Boston and New York City in the company of Professor Edward Wagner, founder of Harvard's Korea Institute.

For the rest of the 1960s, Bařinka lectured at the Oriental Institute and the Faculty of Arts, Charles University. He taught Korean phonetics, practical Korean conversation, Korean history, and Korean contemporary affairs in the Koreanology program, particularly during the period 1964–1966, when the regular instructor Pucek was on a mission to the DPRK. Bařinka also taught Czech to the DPRK embassy staff.

Following the failed attempt at liberalization and the Soviet-led military invasion in August 1968, many Czechoslovak academics, including Orientalists, emigrated to the West. Others were dismissed if they expressed disagreement with the Soviet-led invasion, during inquisitions in the ensuing *normalization* period. This led to many vacancies that suddenly became available, even to non-Party candidates such as Bařinka. He lucked out and was assigned to some of these posts. In the spring of 1969—before the *normalization* regime started in earnest—Bařinka was awarded a three-month fellowship at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and Ghent University, where he assisted Professor Daniël Ellegiers in founding a Koreanology library and introducing Koreanology to Belgian students.

17. These included a chapter in *World Anniversaries of Culture, 1961* on Korean poet Pak Il-lo, and a series of articles for *Nový Orient* magazine: “Korean poet Pak Il-lo,” 1961; “Yeonbyeon: Korean autonomous area in the PRC,” 1968 (under the pseudonym Jan Novák); “Old Confucian Institutions in Korea,” 1968; “Korean Masks,” 1969.

18. These included contributions to the *International Encyclopedia of Comparative Law* (1973), and seven entries in Jaroslav Průšek (ed.) *Writers' encyclopedia: Asia and Africa* (1967, under the pseudonym František Bařinka).

19. *Kim Siseup's new stories from Keumo Mountain* (1973).

1. *Academic Fellowship in the DPRK, 1961–1963*

Bařinka's position with the Academy of Sciences offered him a chance to return to Pyongyang in October 1961, as a fellow with the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of the DPRK. The fellowship was part of a collaboration agreement between the two countries' science academies, and Bařinka's role was to document research methods for the study of the Middle Ages in Korea.²⁰ He was preparing a report for the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of the DPRK that would serve as his doctoral thesis at Charles University. While in Pyongyang, Bařinka accompanied several Czech delegations, including a high-level visit by Jozef Lenárt (First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia; incoming Premier of Czechoslovakia 1963–1968).

Bařinka stayed in the DPRK until January 1963. Professor Kim Seokhyeong, professor of history and director of the Academy's Institute of History, together with another professor of literature and director of the Institute of Literature, were kindly disposed toward Bařinka and assisted him with his expeditions around the DPRK. Several years later, Kim Seokhyeong even visited Bařinka in Prague.

Kim Seokhyeong arranged for Bařinka to realize his study plan to visit all the DPRK provinces and visit each provincial museum of history, as well as each provincial Kim Il-sung museum. There were numerous temples throughout the DPRK that Bařinka was able to explore carefully. Bařinka's assigned Korean companion, Mr. Heo Jongho, roughly Bařinka's age, gladly accompanied Bařinka on the tours of archeological sites (Figure 7). Whenever they arrived in a new location, Heo contacted the local government office to receive permission for their visit and inquire about local transportation. Heo Jongho had studied history in Beijing, both the formally assigned economic history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as more ancient history. In more recent years, Heo even visited Seoul as part of an official state delegation, and was professionally active as recently as the early 2000s. Bařinka and Heo were also accompanied by an archeologist, an expert on Buddhist sutras who could recite them from memory. This man later fell out of favor with the communist regime and, as Bařinka later learned, was bludgeoned to death.

One of the sites that Bařinka was drawn to repeatedly was Mt. Paektu. He

20. Bařinka was not the first Czechoslovak scholar on an academic fellowship to Pyongyang. A Ms. Knodlová (spelling unconfirmed) went there on another fellowship from the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education even before the collaboration agreement of the science academies went into effect.

Figure 7. Historian Heo Jong-ho and an archeologist accompanying Bařinka on a North-Korea wide trip, ca. 1962. Photograph taken near tombs at Sinpal-ri southeast of Pyongyang. In an unknown order: historian Heo Jongho; archeologist; driver of the Czechoslovak embassy. Source: Jaroslav Bařinka's personal archive.



visited it some five times. He remembered the ridge of the Mt. Paektu crater as usually foggy in the morning, and recalled feeling breathless and lightheaded every time he reached the ridge of the crater. The air appeared to plummet into the crater, due to temperature differences between the surface and inside of the crater, leaving a vacuum at the cliff's edge. Looking down into the crater, Bařinka noticed how deprived the air around him was of oxygen and how difficult it was to breathe. One time, his driver nearly crashed into the crater as he was showing off his aggressive driving style. On reaching the crater, he jokingly stopped his car right at the brink of the cliff, just short of the edge, laughing at Bařinka's fright.

The Sino–Soviet Split of the 1960s

The 1960s saw major tensions brewing among the Communist Bloc countries, particularly the Soviet Union (and its Eastern European and Central Asian satellites) and China (and its Far East Asian satellites), whose ideologies started deviating in 1956. The split became especially pronounced post-1963, and the realignment among Communist Bloc countries became palpable across all spheres of society.

Bařinka returned to Prague in the spring of 1963 to a different environment

from the one he had left. Czechoslovak-Korean social and scholarly exchanges suddenly came to a halt. Interest in learning each other's languages, and promoting their culture and history, clearly diminished. Bařinka tried to submit his thesis on research methods for the study of the Middle Ages in Korea. His research was concerned with modern affairs in the two Koreas, including feudalism, twentieth century history, ideology, Confucianism, contemporary law, and political developments. Bařinka successfully passed his doctoral candidature examinations, but his progress on the dissertation became stuck due to the lack of acceptable source materials. The Communist Party rejected his submission. In 1964, Bařinka was thus sent by the Oriental Institute to other European centers for Koreanology (in the Soviet Union, Italy, Switzerland, East Germany, and the Netherlands) in search of such materials. Nevertheless, the Party would block all of his subsequent attempts to submit his research in lieu of a doctoral dissertation.

Bařinka gradually shifted his efforts to maintaining and improving his proficiency in the Japanese language, as well as his understanding of Japanese political and economic affairs. He worked on deepening his relationships with Orientalists at the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. He honed his language proficiency by assisting Japanese photography engineers during their stay in Prague, and accompanying a Japanese cultural delegation.

1. The World Expo and a Surprise Visit to Seoul

In February 1970, the leadership of the Oriental Institute invited Bařinka to serve at the Czechoslovak pavilion at the World Expo in Suita, Osaka Prefecture, Japan, held from March to September. Bařinka served as an official and secretariat member of the Czech delegation. During the Expo, he befriended the ROK delegation and even the ROK consul to Japan at a newly opened Consulate General in Kobe. Bařinka became particularly close to a delegate from Posco Corporation, Won Eungmin, who had been stationed in Tokyo and was tasked with engaging in Mitsubishi-Posco strategic negotiations.²¹

At the conclusion of the Expo, Bařinka embarked on a two–three month journey across Japan, visiting the Academic Association of Koreanology based at Tenri University in Nara Prefecture, with its large library. Bařinka was also approached by the ROK consul in Kobe, who proposed to arrange a trip for Bařinka to Seoul on a forged Danish passport. In April 1971, Bařinka thus flew

21. Bařinka briefly stayed at his apartment in Shibuya, Tokyo. They reunited again in the 1990s, at Won Eungmin's residence in Seongnam, as well as at the Rotary International Club of Seoul.

from Tokyo to Seoul, accompanied by an ROK official. The trip succeeded without any technical or legal troubles. Bařinka landed safely at Gimpo Airport, and traveled around the whole country, taking many notes and photographs. He visited Seoul, Busan, Gyeongju, Seokguram, Bulguk-sa, Tongdo-sa, and other sites. Bařinka's only regret was that he could not tell anyone in Prague about his adventure, not even his mentors Pultr and Průšek. In any case, the excursion made Bařinka the first Czechoslovak civilian to visit the ROK, and he cherished this fact.²²

Post-Prague Spring Normalization

In May 1971, Bařinka once again arrived in a wholly different environment in Prague, compared to the one he had left fifteen months prior. The political purges, following the invasion of Warsaw Pact signatories, had commenced while he was in Japan, and a number of his colleagues, including Průšek, had been dismissed. Under the toxic *normalization* regime, Bařinka had to hide his Korean photographs in his apartment, lest the secret service find them. The situation quietened down in the course of the year 1971, and Bařinka managed to survive the purges. For the rest of the 1970s and much of the 1980s, however, like many Czechoslovak academics and foreign service personnel, Bařinka faced difficult and precarious conditions in his professional life. Only the wave of liberalization in the late 1980s that eventually led to the toppling of socialist rule reduced the terror and gradually cleared the stifling air.

1. *Pyongyang, 1972–1976*

In May and December of 1971, Bařinka was part of the Academy of Sciences delegation to its Soviet counterpart in Moscow. In 1972, he was meant to

22. The Czechoslovak members of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission at Panmunjom represent a technical exception. On invitation from South Koreans or Americans, these delegates were allowed to travel for meetings to Seoul—but no other site south of the border—as far back as the 1950s, first on day trips, then later for two- or three-day trips by car. Bařinka greatly envied their experiences, as he was not allowed beyond the demarcation line. Only on several occasions was he allowed to spend a night at Panmunjom and briefly cross the demarcation line for meetings with the ROK or American parties. For instance, on one occasion when a Slovak serviceman stationed there attempted suicide, he attended proceedings at Panmunjom and stayed overnight. At Panmunjom, Bařinka was closest to Vladimír Vlček, a Czech-English interpreter of Bařinka's age, and deputy chief of the Czechoslovak unit at the Supervisory Commission. Vlček repeatedly traveled to Seoul and other ROK cities.

resume his work at the Oriental Institute working on contemporary Japanese affairs, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs intervened to request Bařínka's interpretation services at the Czechoslovak embassy in Pyongyang. Bařínka was reluctant to return to Pyongyang after his earlier problems with the DPRK authorities, but in September 1972 he agreed to visit Pyongyang with the parliamentary delegation of Alois Indra, Chairman of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly.²³ The delegation toured the countryside, viewed horticultural machinery at a state farm, and visited a manufacturing plant in Huichon.

Bařínka delayed his official posting to the DPRK for nearly a year, but was eventually forced to accept the post by being threatened with immediate termination from the Oriental Institute. In December 1972, Bařínka thus joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a permanent staffer (Pucek 2015, 70), and went on to serve four years as an interpreter (formally, Second Secretary) at the trade department of the embassy in Pyongyang. In June 1973, Bařínka provided interpretation for a delegation led by Gustáv Husák, General Secretary of the Communist Party and future president of Czechoslovakia.

By contrast to Bařínka's 1955–1959 and 1961–1963 experiences, relations among embassy staff in the 1970s were chronically tense and depressing. Personal differences and disagreements among staff constantly threatened to explode into open conflict. By the 1980s, physical conditions had also deteriorated, on account of the political and security situation in the DPRK, and staff were restricted to embassy premises at all times.

In 1974, Bařínka received an extremely low rating from the ambassador to the DPRK Josef Grösser, former Czechoslovak Minister of the Interior.²⁴ Bařínka still managed to complete his four-year term, but on his return to Prague in 1976 the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences was reluctant to re-hire him at the Oriental Institute. Korean and Japanese affairs were no longer priority areas, following a reorganization of the Institute in the mid-1960s. Bařínka was assigned to work on Cambodia, Laos, and Mongolia (spring–summer 1977). After fifteen months, Bařínka was asked to resign from the Academy in March 1978. He had no other option but to re-engage with the Ministry of Foreign

23. Indra had until recently been the Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and during 1971–1972 Chairman of the Party's Commission for Agriculture and Nutrition and Commission for Youth Work. In 1968, he was one of the signatories of the 'Invitation Letter' requesting USSR's support against a looming counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia.

24. On 18 December 1975, Antonín Vavruš, the chief of the International Politics Section of the Communist Party Central Bureau, notified the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bohuslav Chřůupek, of the decision to lay off Bařínka, and transfer him to an apolitical (non-ministry) public post where the Ministry could use his language and other skills.

Affairs, and in April 1978 was brought back as a technical staffer in the Ministry's East Asia division. In this post, he returned to Pyongyang in 1978–1979 for a shorter mission.

During the 1980s, Bařinka continued his scholarly work, but chose to publish his works anonymously to avoid confrontation with censors and political critics and, frankly, with his colleague and putative rival Pucek.²⁵ In the spring of 1983, he finally managed to obtain his doctorate from the Faculty of Arts, Charles University. He provided interpretation at a number of events, most notably for the Premier Lubomír Štrougal's delegation to Japan in November 1979; delegations to Mongolia, China, and the DPRK in March 1983; and Kim Il-sung's visit to Prague in June 1984. Bařinka also traveled to Pyongyang with the delegations of Ladislav Gerle, Minister of Metallurgy, Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering (September 1983), Alois Indra (August 1985), Vasil Biřak, Secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee (September 1986), and Miloř Jakeř, the Central Committee's General Secretary (May 1988).

2. Kim Il-sung's Second Visit to Prague: 1984

From 16 May to 1 July, 1984, Kim Il-sung embarked on a journey to the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia. In collaboration with Pucek, Bařinka interpreted for him on the train trip from Děčín, on the northwestern border, to Komárno on the south-eastern border, as well as during his residence at Prague Castle. Bařinka joined Vasil Biřak in greeting Kim (and Gang Songsan, the new premier of the DPRK) in Děčín, while President Husák and Premier Lubomír Štrougal joined the entourage in Prague (Figure 8).

Kim Il-sung's visit was not devoid of controversies. On one occasion, Kim gave a speech conveying a message that was clearly contrary to what had been agreed between the two heads of state. The Czechoslovaks persuaded Kim to agree to their proposed approach, but in his speech Kim claimed that he had given orders for another, Pyongyang-preferred approach. Bařinka glanced at Kim's personal secretary and Korean-Russian interpreter, who reassured Bařinka non-verbally: "Calm down. Don't worry about it. Don't be surprised." So Bařinka did not bother explaining the situation to Husák, and only sighed to himself:

25. In fact, Bařinka was asked to enroll in a Marxism-Leninism course in 1982 to bolster his political loyalties and profile. His published works in the 1980s include "The traditional view of man and his influence in society: The idea of erudition in Korea of the new age" (1980).



Figure 8. Kim Il-sung and Vasil Biřak's meeting, June 1984. Photograph taken at Prague Castle. Jaroslav Bařínka is at the top right. Source: Jaroslav Bařínka's personal archive.

"Working on North Korean affairs is like being a staffer in a mental institution [...] Alas, let the commies think what they want." On his return to the DPRK, Kim Il-sung called the entire government to Chongjin to celebrate how he had conquered all of Europe.

While in Czechoslovakia, Kim Il-sung visited several manufacturing plants near Prague, accompanied on several of these occasions by President Husák. On these visits, Kim pushed Husák aggressively to reveal the technical specifications of the Tatra 185, an advanced military-grade truck made in Czechoslovakia. Husák refused, explaining that the specifications were protected under an agreement among Warsaw Pact signatories, and could not be shared with outsiders by order of the Soviet Union. Kim became irritated over the refusal.

While they drove from Hotel Internacionál to the Main Train Station, Husák asked Kim Il-sung about his son, Kim Jong-il. There had been rumors that their relationship was fraught, since Kim Il-sung had not yet promoted him to any leading positions. Kim Il-sung deflected the question, responding that he was content with his son's progress, and that Kim Jong-il was working hard and was training.²⁶

26. Kim Jong-il (then a Central Committee Presidium member of the Workers' Party of Korea) did not join his father's 1984 trip. Bařínka met Kim Jong-il on several occasions in Pyongyang, but only from a distance, never talking to him in person.

On Kim Il-sung's departure, his train traveled from Prague to Bratislava, where the entourage stopped for a meeting with public functionaries before continuing to Komárno. Jozef Lenárt, former Premier of Czechoslovakia, got on the train in Bratislava and bade Kim goodbye at the Hungarian border.

3. *Other Korean-Czechoslovak Delegations*

Bařinka accompanied Gusta Fučíková, journalist Julius Fučík's widow and a Communist Party official, on her visit to Pyongyang. They had an audience with Kim Seong-ae, Kim Il-sung's second wife and chairwoman of the Central Committee of the influential Korean Democratic Women's League. When Fučíková expressed her gratitude that the DPRK had published a translation of Julius Fučík's *Notes from the Gallows*,²⁷ Kim Seong-ae made the surprising, categorical assertion that "Never(!) has any work by Julius Fučík been published in the DPRK. That would be a sacrilege. We have never published any foreign works. They have nothing to do with Korea." If Fučík's book had been published, she claimed she would have been aware of it. Fučíková left the meeting gravely upset. She had been meant to give a public speech on the solidarity between Czechoslovak and Korean communists, but the speech was scrapped. She caused a disturbance at the Czechoslovak embassy, blaming staff for failing to promote her late husband's work to the DPRK leadership.

Bařinka also accompanied Kim Kyonghui on her tour of textile manufacturing facilities in southern Bohemia. Kim Kyonghui, Kim Il-sung's daughter and former speechwriter, was the wife of Supreme People's Assembly member Jang Song-thaek, and director of the Light Industry Department at the Workers' Party of Korea (1988–2012). The delegation visited several textile factories in Strakonice, which made head coverings for export to Muslim countries, women's berets, and knitted couch upholsteries. The conditions in these factories were not pleasant, with cotton flying around and causing visitors discomfort in breathing. Kim Kyong-hui was clearly not interested in upholstery manufacturing, but she was highly impressed with the women's berets. She asked for a quick sketch of the design to take with her to Pyongyang.

On this and other similar factory tours by DPRK delegations, the Czechoslovak hosts had to deal with rampant industrial espionage. When a delegation arrived at a factory (such as the one in Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, where proprietary English knitting machines were deployed), the visitors quickly spread

27. The first Korean edition was published in 1949, the second in 1954. The book was even shipped to Czechoslovakia and made available to Korean-language students.

out through the factory grounds, and hosts struggled with monitoring them and bringing them back together, to ensure that proprietary designs were not recorded, removed or sabotaged.

4. *The 1988 Seoul Olympics*

In September–October 1988, Bařínka provided interpretation and translation services at the Seoul Summer Olympics. There had been voices in the Czechoslovak Olympic Committee arguing for Czechoslovakia to boycott the Olympics, but more liberal voices prevailed. Bařínka was not meant to attend the Olympics, because Antonín Himl, the strongly pro-communist head of the Czechoslovak Olympic Committee, had allegedly favored Pucek. Himl, however, suddenly succumbed to a heart attack during an official visit to the Great Wall of China, and was surprisingly replaced by a less conservative sports administrator and outsider to the Committee, Jindřich Poledník.²⁸ Bařínka was thus given a chance.

When it came to light that Bařínka was in the process of publishing an information booklet on the two Koreas,²⁹ Poledník and his deputy, Pavel Klapuš,³⁰ selected Bařínka as interpreter and consular assistant to the three hundred strong Czechoslovak Olympic delegation. Pucek claimed that he had been sidelined from the Olympics, but Bařínka maintained that he had been selected for the post competitively.

Bařínka had assisted Czechoslovak Olympic officials, coaches, and athletes in their political preparedness during certain pre-Games meetings since 1984. This was well before the official establishment of Czechoslovak-ROK relations in 1990, so Bařínka and all delegates were advised not to interact with local hosts in Seoul. In July 1988, Bařínka undertook a short preparatory trip to Seoul and, in August, a longer trip to the main event. He stayed in the Olympic Village, and in fact had a chance to join two or three lunches with ROK officials.

Klapuš immediately revealed himself to be an avid opponent of socialism. While driving around Seoul, Bařínka and Klapuš held utterly frank conversations and gossiped freely about their communist companions on the delegation. The visit to Seoul was not without complications. One athlete had a

28. President of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Association for Physical Education, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and former leader of the Socialist Youth Union.

29. *Politico-economic information about the DPRK and South Korea* (1988, under the pseudonym Miloslav Huttr).

30. Vice-President of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Association for Physical Education.

nervous breakdown and demanded that he receive a medicinal extract from the leaves of a rare native Korean tree. It took Bařinka time to figure out what exactly was needed, find the Czech name in an encyclopedia, and locate a source. Bařinka managed to find the leaves at a street market near Dongdaemun, and delivered them to the Olympic Village, to much praise from the entire team. The athlete calmed down once his coach cooked up an extract from the leaves and reassured him that the leaves were real.

One notable political development involved Jindřich Poledník, who insinuated during a meeting with the Korean and Japanese delegations that it was highly likely that Czechoslovakia would soon enter into a formal relationship with the ROK. Bařinka found this proclamation shocking, and viewed it as a signal of how the political outlook in Prague was falling apart as early as summer 1988.

Incidentally, Bařinka also visited Pyongyang for the last time in 1988, shortly before the staging of the Olympic Games in the South. The trip was with a delegation led by Miloř Jakeř in May 1988. The next Czechoslovak delegation to Pyongyang, involving President Husák, took place in September of 1988, but Bařinka declined to serve on that delegation. Pucek joined it instead. When Czechoslovak Minister of National Defense Milán Václavík visited Pyongyang in 1989, and when the DPRK held the World Festival of Youth and Students in July 1989 (jointly organized with the Prague-based International Union of Students; see Hlásny 2020), Bařinka again declined to participate.

The New Era after the Velvet Revolution

Czechoslovak-Korean relations, not to mention conditions at the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry and the Academy of Sciences, were sent into turmoil in November 1989 with the sudden arrival of the Velvet Revolution and democracy in Czechoslovakia.

During the course of the revolutionary year, 1989, which led to the fall of the communist government between 17 and 28 November, the director of the Oriental Institute at the Academy of Sciences announced that he would not risk damaging friendly workplace relations by asking staff to denounce the student movement's demands of the government. Bařinka thus avoided having to make a formal political stand. The Institute transitioned to the new regime without major upsets among its staff.

Reflecting on his career under socialism, Bařinka felt lucky that he avoided being investigated by the regime. That was particularly surprising, given that

Bařinka had never been a Party member. Following the 1948 coup, unlike many other students and academics, he was not asked to pledge allegiance to the Party. In the late 1960s, due to his extended stay in Japan, he avoided having to sign statements denouncing the Prague Spring movement and applauding the invasion by Warsaw Pact signatories. Of course, these failures to align himself with the Party were not without cost—throughout his career, he earned only two-thirds as much as his Party-member colleagues of equal status, and he was disadvantaged when it came to career-advancing opportunities. With the sudden arrival of democracy, he was vindicated in choosing to shun Party membership.

1. Czechoslovak-ROK Relations

In 1990, Bařinka co-founded the Czechoslovak Korean Society (CKS) in the Koreanology department, later renamed the Czech Korean Society. Pucek served as its first chairman, while Bařinka would serve as vice-chairman for some two decades. Bařinka also served as a member of the Czech-Chinese Association and the Czech-Japanese Society.

Bařinka was present when the ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs Choe Hojung (and his wife Kim Umyeong) came to Prague on March 20, 1990, to formally inaugurate Czechoslovak-ROK relations. On that same occasion, the first ROK ambassador was being introduced to President Václav Havel. Seon Junyeong, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs career official and future UN delegate (Figure 9), was a narcissist and the self-proclaimed best economist in Korea. Talking to Havel, he boasted: “It is an honor for Czechoslovakia to have me. It is not an accident that Roh Tae-woo chose me for the post in Czechoslovakia.” In 1992, Seon Junyeong consciously disregarded projections that Czechoslovakia would split into two countries, and sent misguided messages to Seoul on the matter. When Czechoslovakia split less than a year later on January 1, 1993, he returned to Seoul in disgrace.

2. Chargé d'affaires in Seoul

In 1991, Bařinka was named the first ever chargé d'affaires of Czechoslovakia in Seoul. He arrived in Seoul on Korea's Constitution Day, July 17, 1991, and settled down in Hannam-dong. He served as chargé d'affaires and later as the General Secretary of the Czechoslovak embassy in Seoul in 1991–1992. Following Czechia's split from Slovakia, he also served as Czechia's first chargé d'affaires in 1993–1994. He took part in consultations regarding the future of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission at Panmunjom. Bařinka consulted



Figure 9. Czech officials and South Korean ambassador Seon Junyeong, 1990. Photograph taken at the Prague Castle. From left to right: Karel Schwarzenberg, South Korean ambassador Seon Junyeong, Jaroslav Bařinka, Václav Havel, Jiří Dienstbier, Alexandr Vondra. Source: Jaroslav Bařinka's personal archive.

with representatives of the US, China, and the ROK, and prepared a policy brief with recommendations for the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He received a response from Mr. Soukup, the section director and a former communist, stating, "Thank you for drawing up these contingency plans. I take note of the intelligence. There is no risk [that our participation in the Commission would end]." As it turned out, Czechia and Slovakia were expelled from the Commission only months later, and Czechia had to scramble to handle the ramifications.

Bařinka's other duty at the Czech embassy was to visit major conglomerates (chaebol)—including Daewoo, Hyundai, LG, Samsung, and others—regarding the prospect of investment in Czechia. Most were open to exploring business opportunities, but Hyundai's representative retorted arrogantly "We are not interested in such small countries. The only prospective partners for us are countries like the US, Russia, and to some extent England and France." Ironically, Hyundai ended up taking over some Czech properties when it acquired Kia, including its generator plant in Plzeň. Eventually, Hyundai settled down formally in Nošovice (near Ostrava, Czechia), and Kia settled down in Žilina, Slovakia.

Bařinka assisted the Czech state and Korean firms regarding their direct investment in Czechia. Daewoo was the first corporation to acquire substantial

office space in Prague's Victory Square (Vítězné náměstí). Bařinka helped with the vexing negotiations between Kim Ujung, Daewoo chairman, and the Prague City Hall over Daewoo's excessive demands on city officials. Eventually, Daewoo went bankrupt in 1999, and its Czech and Slovak holdings were forfeited.

In 1992, Bařinka accompanied a delegation to Seoul led by the new democratic President Václav Havel. Bařinka served as the personal interpreter for Havel, while Pucek served as the interpreter for the president's wife, Olga Havlová. At one point, Bařinka proposed that Havel's wife visit a leper colony south of Seoul, to show goodwill and bring attention to the problem of leprosy. The Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Korean authorities, were less than impressed, however. They found Bařinka's initiatives in the planning process inappropriate.

Another unpleasant issue during Havel's visit was the media coverage in the ROK. Newspapers claimed that Havel was asking for a loan to help the young Czechoslovak democracy pay off its debts. Since Bařinka was involved in all the talks as Havel's interpreter, he knew for a fact that Havel made no such request.

Bařinka also provided interpretation when the Czech First Lady, Livia Klausová (the wife of President Václav Klaus, who governed from 2003 to 2013), was invited to Korea to meet Jeong Huija (Kim Ujung's wife) in her family's hotel in Gyeongju. Jeong Huija was a haughty lady who claimed that her husband had been robbing her, and that she was the sole owner of two firms and two hotels. She also blamed her husband for the fatal car crash of her son, Kim Seonjae, in 1990 in the US. Jeong led the Art Sonje Center and Museum in Gyeongju's Bomun complex (named after her son), and boasted to Livia Klausová about her independence and accomplishments as a woman. When it became apparent that Klausová was not paying attention, Jeong became annoyed: "Don't translate this... since she doesn't want to hear it anyway."

During these years, Bařinka was occasionally asked by young Seoulites about his background, given his "ugly and discomforting" North Korean accent. He admitted to them that after spending most of his career dealing with the DPRK, he was bound to speak with that accent in his old age. Older people were not as taken aback by his accent as the younger generation and, having lived in the united Korea of their youth, showed sympathy to him.

Retirement from the Civil Service

In the months following the Velvet Revolution, the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs grappled with a lack of non-communist talent in staffing its

foreign missions. Bařinka was the most qualified candidate to fill the post of *chargé d'affaires* in Korea. By 1994, however, staffing issues were gradually resolved, and so Alexandr Vondra, the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechia, asked Bařinka to retire, ostensibly because of Bařinka's age and length of service, but partly also because of his tainted political record. Bařinka was referenced in the pre-1989 registry of the Czechoslovak secret service.³¹

Bařinka was bitter about this abrupt ending to his foreign service career: "Regarding the question of the pressure by the secret service that I endured before 1989 [...] They've just proclaimed that I was a secret service agent—it's because I was *interrogated* by the secret service! And that's enough for the current administration to claim that I was a collaborator. Even though I had so much trouble [with the regime], and everyone always agreed that 'no doubt Bařinka is not a communist and doesn't enjoy the regime's trust,' as soon as the situation changed, I was labeled a collaborator."

After retiring from the foreign service, he served as an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Koreanology at Charles University, gave lectures during the period 1999–2004, and participated in international academic congresses (Bařinka 2004). He continued providing interpretation (Figure 10), advising Korean businesses about expanding into Czechia, and traveling to the ROK on several advisory missions.

In 2001–2002, Bařinka received a Korea Foundation fellowship to visit Seoul for twelve months, collecting materials on King Sejong. In 2002, Bařinka also stayed in Changwon, South Gyeongsang Province, for two months, assisting with the construction of a large steelmaking facility. The facility had been owned at one point by Posco Steelmakers, which operated nearby, but another firm took over following the 1997 crisis.

A Korean crew were in charge of the first stage of construction at the steel-making facility, while the Czech crew were in charge of the second stage—the construction and installation of a large storage tank.³² Then an Italian crew

31. Bařinka had been registered with the secret service as an agent and secret collaborator. See Cibulkovy listy [Cibulka lists; <http://www.cibulka.com>] and Archiv bezpečnostních složek ČR [Security Services Archive, <https://www.abscr.cz/en/registries>]. In what capacity, how actively or passively, and his period of activity are unknown. Whether this was to protect his family and his ward, Pak Gwangbok, is also unknown. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that his affiliation with the secret service afforded him some professional or personal protections during communist rule, as he was likely aware. In Bařinka's self-introduction to his curriculum vitae, he wrote: "Regarding the question of pressure by the secret service [...], I am ready to provide a detailed explanation if necessary."

32. The storage tank would store sodium hydrate at a constant temperature of roughly 390 degrees Celsius. Steel bars would be dipped into this tank of heated sodium hydrate to deoxidize.



Figure 10. North Korean Chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly Choe Tae-bok, Spring 2004. Photograph taken at Prague Castle. Source: Jaroslav Bařinka's personal archive.

from Milan, managed by a German company, were to work on the third stage of the process. Bařinka had little interaction with the Italians, but he talked regularly with the Czechs and Koreans. When the project finished two months later, and the international crew left, Bařinka decided to take the opportunity to visit Japan for the second time. He traveled there by ferry from Busan. He avoided Tokyo because his old Orientalist friend from Prague, Jiří Václav Neustupný, had recently left Tokyo for Australia.³³ Instead, Bařinka chose to revisit Tenri University and its Korean troves.

In Korea, Bařinka toured the southwest, including Jin-do, known for the shamanist purification ritual Ssitgim-gut. While visiting Jeju Island, Bařinka once awoke in a pothole in the ground adjacent to Mt. Halla's crater, and was startled by the crater's depth. This happened because the main access road to Mt. Halla had been closed for some reason. In his old age, Bařinka had to walk several kilometers around the mountain and then up the incline. Once he reached the peak, he collapsed from his fatigue and dozed off in the pothole.

1. The FIFA World Cup of 2002

Bařinka was even in Korea during the June 2002 FIFA World Cup. He viewed it as a chauvinist event, conceived by the administration of the foolish left-leaning President Kim Dae-jung. The event was marked by mass nationalist demonstrations throughout downtown Seoul which had begun the previous winter. To Bařinka, these popular events were clearly organized by the state. In Busan,

33. Neustupný was a renowned linguist who emigrated to Australia in 1966, and married Reiko Kakihara Neustupný. After retiring from Monash University in Melbourne, where he had established the department of Japanese Studies, he worked at several universities across Japan.

during the matches of the Korean team, the Korean nationalists shouted so loudly and antagonistically toward foreign visitors that the attending Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski stood up during the Poland-Korea match at Busan Asiad Stadium and left. He departed for the airport without bidding goodbye to Kim Dae-jung, even though they had planned a negotiating session for the following day.

2. Praha Sky and Other Engagements, 2000s

In the 2000s, Bařinka became a spokesperson for Praha Sky, a Korean limited liability company providing advertising and publicity services for Hyundai. The company was owned by Mrs. Yi Bomhyo and operated by her husband Lim Hak (or perhaps Lim Hakdong).³⁴ Praha Sky had four branches—two in Prague, one in Ostrava, and one in Žilina, Slovakia. Around the year 2010, the company went through bankruptcy proceedings in a Prague court. Bařinka remembered Lim's wife fondly as a great chef and a hard-working woman. She cooked for Korean employees in a cafeteria in Žilina. She always bought the best ingredients, and even had food shipped from Prague when it was not available in Žilina, at great expense to herself.

Bařinka himself ended up being owed 760,000 Czech crowns (approx. US\$30,000) by the company at the time of the bankruptcy proceedings. He had paid off Praha Sky's debt of 214,000 crowns in rent for an apartment in Prague and other obligations using his personal funds. Nevertheless, Bařinka did not blame Praha Sky or its owners for the loss. Instead, he blamed Hyundai for its failure to pay Praha Sky what it owed. Hyundai ruined Praha Sky, Bařinka sighed, as it did other small contractors in Korea and abroad.

Bařinka's last trip to Seoul took place in 2006–2007 at the request of CzechInvest, the national investment and business development agency, to help Czech enterprises establish research connections for the purpose of converting research output into marketable opportunities. Bařinka gave CzechInvest a list of contacts for Korean firms and individuals who might potentially be interested in partnerships. While in Seoul, Bařinka had a chance to meet Ban Ki-moon during his last year as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Bařinka dropped by the visitors' room of Ban's office without an appointment, yet Ban spontaneously stepped out and cordially greeted him and offered help.

During this trip to Seoul, Bařinka visited the Korean National Museum,

34. Yi Bomhyo was born October 22, 1968 and came from a wealthy family near Busan, as per the company registration records.

which had recently moved to a brand-new structure in Yongsan District. Bařinka disapproved of the modern design of the warehouse-like building from the moment he first saw it. His negative opinion was strengthened when an accident happened to him. Bařinka was taking a long escalator to the museum's second floor, but the moving handrails were not synchronized with the steps, and managed to pull Bařinka backward. He tumbled down the escalator and received a long cut across his calf. The museum employees were extremely apologetic and immediately sent him to a hospital, but Bařinka returned to Prague with his leg in a cast.

3. Retirement Years in Prague

Even after retiring from all professional activities, Bařinka maintained warm relations with Ri Byeonggap, the *chargé d'affaires* of the DPRK in Prague from 2004 to 2011, and remained on the list of invitees to embassy events. Those relations froze the moment Kim Jong-un assumed the leadership in 2011. Ri Gwang-il, the new DPRK ambassador to Prague, greeted Bařinka coldly at their initial meeting.

Bařinka also retained a number of close contacts in the ROK, and periodically corresponded with them. The most notable was Kim Donggil (born 1928), the dean and professor of theology and American studies at Yonsei University. Kim Donggil was a conservative political activist who was once touted as a prospective candidate for president of Korea. Bařinka met Kim in Seoul during the 1990s and 2000s for joint dinners, occasionally attended even by Pak Chorong, a staff member of President Roh Tae-woo's secretariat.³⁵

Throughout the 2010s, Bařinka longed to return to Seoul to reunite with his acquaintances and see the developments in the city. As time passed, however, Bařinka's social circle grew older, less engaged, and less able to pull strings to make physical and financial arrangements for Bařinka's journey. Bařinka's last trip was not meant to be.

To the moment of his death, however, Bařinka remained interested in all things Korean, kept abreast of Korean political affairs, and engaged in conver-

35. Bařinka's other close friends in South Korea included: Jung Seungman (a policeman who met Bařinka during his brief visit in 1970, and lived on the top floor of Bařinka's house in Hannam-dong in the 1990s); Yi Sukjae (Sylvia, living in Canada); Kim Myeongseong; Pak Hong (Jesuit priest, Sogang University president, and a conservative political figure, who at first warmly welcomed Bařinka, but later kept his distance); Yang Mumok (Daejin University); Pak Chorong (staff of the Presidential secretariat for Roh Tae-woo and Kim Donggil's friend; his wife was a caretaker at a leper colony).

sations about Confucianism, Korean history, and geopolitics. He was able to talk at length about metallurgical deposits across the DPRK, their extraction processes, and chemical properties, or about Confucian philosophy, poetry, and architecture. He was famous for his reading, meticulous note-taking, sharp eyes and sound technical mind. He was a lifelong subscriber to the *Transactions* journal of the Royal Asiatic Society's Korea branch. He advised his colleague, Vladimír Glomb, on the subject of Korean Confucian landmarks and writings, including the work of the sixteenth century poet and political reformer Yulgok (Yi I) and his Confucian academy (*seowon*), as well as Yulgok's contemporary Toegye (Yi Hwang).

Life in Perspective

Jaroslav Bařinka was a leading Czech scholar of Koreanology, founding figure of Koreanology in Czechoslovakia, and among the longest-serving Czechoslovak diplomats who worked in both Koreas. He made invaluable contributions, introducing Korean traditional culture, archeology, and literature to non-Korean audiences, based on his extensive travels in the Koreas, Japan and China spanning half a century. In fact, he was the first civilian from Czechoslovakia to visit the ROK back in 1970.

He was also an unapologetic moral authority, who spoke against injustices, and cared deeply for the welfare of vulnerable people around him, including a homeless Korean orphan whom he adopted. The chain of anecdotes recounted by Bařinka reveal a lucid, authoritative mind, and allow us to better appreciate his life's work, as well as to retrace some landmarks of Czechoslovak-Korean encounters and Bařinka's own footsteps. These anecdotes yet again remind us that with Bařinka's passing, the world has lost a brilliant Koreanologist and educator who possessed rare moral authority.

References

- Bařinka, Jaroslav. 1960. "Korejřtina. 951 slov a základnřch frázřř" [Korean language. 951 words and basic phrases]. In *Svřtovř tlumořnřk 26 řeřř. Přřruřka pro turisty, delegace, techniky a montřry* [The interpreter of 26 world languages. A handbook for tourists, delegations, technicians and fitters], 372–446. Prague: Pra'ce.
- _____. 1961. "Pak Il-lo." In *World Anniversaries of Culture, 1961*, edited by a collective of authors, 152. 1st Edition. Prague: řs. vřbor obrancř mřru.

- _____. 1961. "Korejský básník Pak Il-lo" [Korean poet Pak Il-lo]. *Nový Orient* 16: 164–165.
- _____. 1962. *The Art of Ancient Korea*. Prague: Artia.
- _____. 1964. "Review of: Kim Busik: Samguk sagi. Izdaniye teksta, perevod, vstupitel'naya stat'ya i kommentarii M. N. Paka" [The Samguk sagi. Text edition, translation, introductory article and comments by M. N. Pak.] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoj literatury literatury, 1959. 384 pp.). *Archiv orientální* 32: 163–166.
- _____. 1966. *Odboj korejského národa proti mocnostem Osy za druhé světové války (zvláštní číslo)* [The Korean nation's resistance against the Axis powers during World War II (special edition)]. Prague: Vojenská akademie.
- _____. 1967. "Korean Studies." In *Asian and African Studies in Czechoslovakia*, edited by Miroslav Oplt, 83–84. Moscow: Nauka.
- _____. [František Bařínka]. 1967. "Hjon Čin-gon – I Kwang-su – I Sang – I Tche-džu – Jom Sang-sop – Kim Tong-in – Sedžong." In *Slovník spisovatelů. Asie a Afrika*. 1–2 [Writers' encyclopedia. Asia and Africa], Vols. 1–2, edited by Jaroslav Průšek. Prague: Odeon.
- _____. 1968. "Staré konfuciánské ústavy v Koreji" [Old Confucian academies in Korea]. *Nový Orient* 23: 261–266.
- _____. [Jan Novák]. 1968. "Jen-Pien: Korejský autonomní okruh v ČLR" [Yeonbyeon: The Korean autonomous area in the PRC]. *Nový Orient* 23, no. 5: 139–145.
- _____. 1969. "Korejské masky" [Korean masks]. *Nový Orient* 24, no. 9: 272–274.
- _____. 1972. "Review of: Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbank: East Asia: The Great Tradition. A History of East Asian Civilisation." *Archiv orientální* 40, no. 2: 191.
- _____. 1973. "Democratic People's Republic of Korea." In: *International Encyclopedia of Comparative Law, Volume I: National Reports*, edited by U. Drobnig, R. David, H. H. Egawa, R. Graveson, V. Knapp, A. T. Von Mehren, Y. Noda, S. Rozmaryn, V. M. Tschchikvadze, H. Valladão, H. Yntema, K. Zweigert. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- _____. [tr.]. 1973. *Vyprávění z hory Kumo* [New stories from Keumo Mountain]. Author: Kim Siseup. Prague: Odeon.
- _____. 1974. "Han Yong-un – Kim Tong-in – Yi T'ae-jun." In: *Dictionary of Oriental Literatures*, edited by Zbigniew Slupski, Vol. I. East Asia. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- _____. 1974. Review of: Gregory Henderson: *Korean Ceramics: An Art's Variety*. (Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Gregory Henderson. February 9 to March 9 1969, Divisions of Art Gallery – Ohio State University. p.60). *Archiv orientální* 42, no. 1: 66–67.

- _____. 1980. "Idea vzdělanosti v Koreji nové doby—poslední živý projev konfuciánství" [The traditional view of man and his influence in society: The idea of erudition in Korea of the new age—the last manifestation of living Confucianism]. In *Kulturní tradice Dálného východu* [Cultural traditions of the Far East], edited by Jaroslav Bařinka, 25–52. Prague: Odeon.
- _____. [Miloslav Huttr]. 1988. *Politickohospodářská informace o KLDK a Jižní Koreji* [Politico-economic information about the DPRK and South Korea]. Prague: Olympia.
- _____. 1993. "Choi Yong-woong: De l'état des relations coréano-tchèques" [Choi Yong-woong: On the state of Korean-Czech relations]. *Le courrier de la Corée* 30 October: 10.
- _____. 2004. "Tasks for the Study of Materials on the History of Czech-Korean Relations." *Proceedings of the International Conference on Korean Historical Materials and the History of Koreans in Europe*, 1–12. Bonn: University of Bonn.
- Bařinka, Jaroslav, and Hahn-Been Lee. 1973. "Korea: Time, Change and Administration" (Honolulu: East-West Center Press 1968). *Archiv orientální* 41, no. 4: 401–402.
- Filipský, Jan, ed. 1999. *Kdo Byl Kdo: Čeští a slovenští orientalisté, afrikanisté a iberoamerikanisté* [Who Was Who: Czech and Slovak Orientalists, Africanists and Ibero-Americanists]. Prague: Libri, 66–67.
- Hlásný, Vladimír. 2017. "Doctor Wellington Chung: his life and demise in Czechoslovakia." In *Koreans and Central Europeans: Informal Contacts up to 1950, Vol. 2*, edited by Andreas Schirmer, 297–309. Vienna: Praesens.
- _____. 2020. "Betraying Tradition: The Common Legacy of the 1989 Pyongyang Youth Festival and the International Union of Students." Working Paper, Ewha Womans University.
- Hlásný, Vladimír, and Byung-Joon Jung. 2014. "Wellington Chung: Child of the Korean Independence Movement and Victim of the Cold War." *Korea Journal* 54, no. 4: 106–146.
- _____. 2017a. "Paradise Lost of Korean Americans Crushed by Cold War Regimes: Alice Hyun and Wellington Chung." *Transactions* 91: 21–41.
- _____. 2017b. "Political Migration of Korean Activists through Czechoslovakia in the Post-World War II Period." *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 30, no. 1: 31–70.
- Jung, Byung Joon. 2012. "Hyeon Aelliseu iyagi: Eoneu jinbojuuija ui sam gwa pagukjeok jongmal" [The story of Alice Hyun: The life and catastrophic death of a progressive]. *Yeoksa bipyeong* 99: 373–408.
- Löwensteinová, Miriam, and Jaroslav Olša, Jr. 2014. *Han Hung Su: otec československé koreanistiky* [Han Heungsu: The father of Korean Studies in Czechoslovakia]. Prague: Nová vlna.
- National Archives of the Czech Republic, Record 5106 – 1420/1/3 – PŘ1941–1951.

- Oh Hassig, Kongdan, Joseph S. Bermudez, Kenneth E. Gause, Ralph C. Hassig, Alexandre Y. Mansourov, and David J. Smith. 2004. "North Korean Policy Elites: IDA Paper P-3903." Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses.
- Pucek, Vladimír. 2015. "Dějiny koreanistiky: Vznik a rozvoj koreanistiky v Československu/České republice a její přínos k prohloubení vzájemných vztahů s Koreou" [History of Korean Studies: The origin and development of Korean studies in Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic and their contribution to deepening of mutual relations with Korea]. *Seminář koreanistiky*. Prague: Ústav Dálného východu.
- Švamberg, Alex. 2013. "Czechoslovakia and the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission in the 1950s. Work and Experiences of the First Czechs and Slovak Helping to Keep the Truce on the Korean Peninsula." In *The Korean Peninsula after the Armistice as Seen by Czechoslovak Delegates to the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission 1953–1956*, edited by Hong Seungju, Jaroslav Olsa Jr., and Sa Jongmin, 268–279. Seoul: Seoul Museum of History.

