

## EXAMINER'S ASSESSMENT

**Written by Polina Valentinova Tsoncheva, PhD – Assoc. Prof.**

**In St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo**

Regarding the materials submitted for participation in the competition

For the academic position of **Associate Professor**

**At Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv**

In field of higher education 2. Humanities

Professional field 2.1. Philology

(Contemporary Chinese Language - Linguocultural Studies)

In the competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor” announced in the State Gazette, issue 98/19.11.2024, and on the website of *Paisii Hilendarski* Plovdiv University for the needs of the Department of Russian Philology at the Faculty of Philology, Elitsa Dimitrova Milanova, PhD, Senior Assistant Professor at the same Department of the Faculty of Philology at Plovdiv University, participated as a candidate.

### **1. General presentation of materials received**

By Order No. ПД-22-435/18.02.2025 of the Rector of *Paisii Hilendarski* Plovdiv University (PU) I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury of the competition for the academic position of '**Associate Professor**' at PU in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.1. Philology (Contemporary Chinese Language – Linguoculturology), **announced for the needs** of the Department of Russian Philology at the Faculty of Philology.

For participation in the announced competition documents were submitted by:

**Elitsa Dimitrova Milanova, PhD** – Assistant Professor at the Department of Russian Philology,  
Faculty of Philology, *Paisii Hilendarski* Plovdiv University.

The set of electronic/paper materials submitted by Elitsa Milanova, PhD **are** in accordance with the Academic Staff Development Act of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU, and includes the following documents:

- Claim form;
- Autobiography;
- Master's Degree Diploma;
- Academic Degree “Doctor” (PhD) Diploma;
- List of scientific works;

- Copies of the scientific publications with which the candidate participated in the announced competition for the academic position of Associate Professor;
- Reference for compliance with the minimum national requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor;
- Annotation of the scientific works with which the candidate participates in the competition for Associate Professor (in Bulgarian);
- Self-assessment of the contributions of the scientific production with which the candidate participates in the competition for Associate Professor (in Bulgarian and in English);
- Annotation of the scientific works with which the candidate participates in the competition for the position of Associate Professor (in English);
- Declaration of originality and reliability of the results and contributions of the scientific production submitted by the candidate for participation in the competition procedure for Associate Professor;
- Evidence of professional experience;
- Reference of the candidate's academic work;
- Reference to the candidate's research work.

The candidate Asst. Prof. Elitsa Milanova, PhD, has submitted a total of 13 scientific works, including 2 studies, 1 monograph (habilitation work), 1 book published on the basis of a defended dissertation, and 9 articles, most of which were presented as papers at international scientific forums and/or published in peer-reviewed journals, including journals refereed and indexed in world databases. A total of 12 research papers that are outside the dissertation are accepted for peer review and will be counted in the final evaluation. All scientific publications submitted for the competition are published in the country.

The documents submitted by the only candidate in the competition are in full and meet the requirements of the Law for the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of *Paisii Hilendarski* Plovdiv University.

## **2. Brief biographical details (of the applicant(s))**

Elitsa Milanova graduated with honors from the Bachelor's degree program *Applied Linguistics – Russian and Chinese Language* of the *St. Cyril and St. Methodius* University of Veliko Tarnovo (2014), for which she was awarded the Academic Prize of Veliko Tarnovo Municipality. During her studies, she won a scholarship for one year of study and from September 2012 to July 2013 she was on a language specialization at Dalian University, PRC. Asst. Prof. Milanova, PhD, is a laureate of the 1st World Russian Language Festival held in 2011 in St. Petersburg, Russia. Asst. Prof. Elitsa

Milanova, PhD, has developed and deepened her interest in mathematical linguistics over the years, which in 2013 led her to membership in the Task Committee of the International Mathematical Linguistics Olympiad and membership in the National Committee of the Mathematical Linguistics Olympiad. From 2014 – 2016 Asst. Prof. Milanova, PhD continued her studies in the Master's Program in Translation and Intercultural Communication at Plovdiv University. She is enrolled as a PhD student in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.1. Philology (Slavic Languages – Linguoculturology) at the Department of Russian Philology of the University of Plovdiv and in 2021 successfully defended her doctoral dissertation on “Linguocultural Potential of Mythonyms in Russian and Chinese Linguocultures” with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Nadia Cherneva. She is member of the Association of Chinese Studies in Bulgaria, which was founded in February 2024.

Asst. Prof. Elitsa Milanova, PhD, has been appointed as a senior assistant professor after successfully passing a competition in 2023, working on a basic contract at Plovdiv University since 2019. She has been teaching a wide range of subjects in the field of linguistics, cultural studies, and teaching methodology of Chinese language to students of Chinese language majors since 2015: “Country Studies”; Phonetics, Lexicology, Morphology and Syntax within the discipline of “Modern Chinese”; “Methodology of Chinese Language Teaching”; “Translation”; “Practical Chinese”, as well as elective and optional courses whose task is to broaden and deepen the students’ knowledge – “Chinese Culture as a Part of Chinese Language Teaching” and “Business Vocabulary of Modern Chinese”. Asst. Prof. Milanova is listed in the NACID with the current academic position she holds at the University.

From the reference, which was submitted for participation in the competition, it is evident the extracurricular activity of Asst. Prof. Milanova, PhD, which is an essential part of the overall teaching work of the candidate: Asst. Prof. Milanova, PhD, prepares examination materials and participates in the review of state examinations since her appointment to a full-time position in 2019 in both examination sessions (summer and winter); Ms. Milanova, PhD, has been a reviewer of three Master's theses – in 2022, 2023 and 2024; her methodological work with students for their preparation for participation in scientific forums is commendable. In 2024, Asst. Prof. Milanova, PhD, is the scientific supervisor of Gabriel Valchev, who successfully defended his master's thesis on “Translation and comparative characteristics of news translation from English to Bulgarian”.

### **3. General description of the activity of the applicant(s)**

*Evaluation of the candidate's teaching and pedagogical activity*

Teaching and pedagogical activity of the Asst. Prof. Elitsa Milanova, PhD, is closely related to and logically assumed by her research interests in the field of comparative linguistics, linguoculturology, ethnolinguistics, linguodidactology, intercultural communication, problems of translation. Such an interrelationship ensures, on the one hand, the possibility of regular enrichment and updating of the thematic content of the courses, as well as modification of the ways of presenting the material, with a view to better absorption by the students. On the other hand, the results of the applied research could be experimentally proved or disproved thanks to the constant contact with the students of the different courses during the classes. In this regard, and taking into account the accumulated teaching experience and the proven over the years dedication, which is evident from the candidate's work with students and graduates, I declare my positive assessment of the overall teaching and pedagogical activity of Asst. Prof. Milanova, PhD.

*Evaluation of the candidate's scientific and applied activity*

For participation in the competition announced for the needs of the Department of Russian Philology, Asst. Prof. Elitsa Dimitrova Milanova has submitted the following scientific production: 1 habilitation work (monograph), 9 articles, 2 studies in Bulgarian, Russian and Chinese. Co-authored (with one co-author) is the book published in volume 1 of Current Problems in *Contemporary Chinese Studies and Source Studies*, Sofia: University Press St. Kliment Ohridski (2022) article “中文 + 旅游” 项目在普罗夫迪夫大学孔子课堂的可行性探究 / Exploring the Feasibility of Implementing Chinese + Tourism in Confucius Classroom at Plovdiv University”; The study “Precedent Phenomena on Clothing as a way of Social Self-representation” (with one co-author) and the article “Memes as Polifunctional Educational Instrument in Foreign Language Teaching” (with two co-authors), published in the collection of scientific articles “Linguocultural Emblematics: Projections and Interpretations” by Plovdiv University Press (2024).

It is noteworthy the variety of periodicals and peer-reviewed journals on whose pages the articles and studies with which Asst. Prof. Milanova participated in the competition are published. Two of the publications proposed for peer-review have successfully passed the strict control of the journal “Chuzhdoezikovo obuchenie – Foreign Language Teaching”, refereed and indexed in Web of Science.

The monograph “Mythological Metamorphoses” (2024) is of unquestionable weight among the presented scientific works, with which Asst. Prof. Milanova in a unique way both builds on and expands the achievements of her dissertation research “Linguocultural Potential of Mytonyms in Russian and Chinese language”, and broadens the scope by offering an analysis of “the most frequent elements of the Chinese and Slavic mythological world-picture represented in various discourses and

genres of contemporary culture – fiction, cinema and visual arts, online content, computer and board games” (9. a. Materials annotation, p.2 ). An important aspect of the monographic study is the tracing of key moments in the development and rethinking of mythology with the aim of adapting it to the principles of transmediality and the new needs of society. Asst. Prof. Milanova examines the possibilities of using mythological characters of the global market as a linguistic didactic tool in the foreign language and cultural studies of students. The study is well balanced, the place of mythology in the modern world is examined, the phenomenon of information distortion is traced as inherent in the structure of myth, the trichotomy of information distortion – linguistic personality – cultural memory is explored, and information distortion is examined as a process that through its influence on the individual linguistic personality gradually leads to the replacement of collective cultural memory. Asst. Prof. Milanova traces the principles of transmedia storytelling and the construction of alternative universes through different media forms. The standard algorithm of transmedia storytelling of mythological images in contemporary mass culture is traced, the question of prevention against the marginalization of niche mythologies, of which the Chinese and Slavic ones are a part, is raised. The last chapter of the monograph is oriented towards developing the linguodacological potential of images from Chinese and Slavic mythology. Asst. Prof. Milanova proposes various authorial strategies for gamification and adaptation of mythological knowledge to the needs of the contemporary educational market, taking into account the generational characteristics of learners.

The habilitation thesis “Mythological Metamorphoses” is of a distinctly interdisciplinary nature, research methods from linguocultural studies are used, and techniques from the fields of statistics, marketing, user-centered design, and user experience are adapted to the research (9.a. Abstract of Materials, p. 3).

As correctly reflected in document 9.a. Annotation of the materials submitted for review, the scientific and applied works can be distinguished into three thematic areas: *Linguocultural Potential of Culturally Significant Units of Mythological Consciousness (focusing on the Chinese Mythological Worldview in the Context of the Slavic Mythological Worldview)*; *The Linguocultural Element in Foreign Language Teaching*; and *Verbalisation of Cultural Memory: Universality and Specificity*.

To the first thematic area can be attributed the habilitation thesis, as well as the following articles: “The Distortion of Characters from Chinese Mythology in Computer Games and their Influence on the Formation of the Linguistic Personality” (No. 3 from document 6. List of scientific works); “Mythonyms as a Means of Expressing Verbal Aggression Online – The Ten Baidu Mythical Creatures” (No. 4 from document 6. List of scientific works); “Fetish-Mytonyms in Russian and Chinese Linguoculture” (No. 5 from Document 6. List of Research Papers); “Archetypal Mistakes in

Adaptations of Russian Folk Tales with Lower Mythology Characters (Based on Material from the “Gusi-Lebedi” Website)” (No. 9 from Document 6. List of Research Papers).

The second thematic area can be assigned to the articles presented under numbers 1, 2, 6 and 8 of Annex 6. List of scientific papers, namely: “Chinese Mythology and Transmedia Storytelling”; “Computer Games with Mythological Content - Escape from Reality or a New Educational Horizon”; “中文 + 旅游” 项目在普罗夫迪夫大学孔子课堂的可行性探究 / Exploring the Feasibility of Implementing Chinese + Tourism in Confucius Classroom at Plovdiv University” and “Memes as Polifunctional Educational Instrument in Foreign Language Teaching”.

The scope of the third thematic area includes the studies numbered 1, 2 and article 7 of document 6. List of scientific works, namely “Precedent Phenomena of XXI Century: Millennials vs. Zoomers”; “Precedent Phenomena on Clothing as a Way of Social Self-representation,” and “Measure words – a Unique Feature of the Chinese Language.”

#### *Contributions (scientific, applied) and citations*

1. The contributions of the scientific papers proposed for review are comprehensively and correctly set out in document 10.a. Self-assessment of the contributions of the scientific production of Asst. Prof. Elitsa Dimitrova Milanova, PhD. It is only natural that the habilitation thesis, which represents “the first modern comparative study in Bulgarian of the metamorphoses of mythological images from Chinese and Slavic mythology perceived as niche for the fantasy genre (presented with examples from its variants in three linguocultures - Russian, Bulgarian and Serbian)” (document 10.a., p. 1), prevails in this respect.

2. I also take as a contributory point the consideration of the process of “informational distortion of mythological images as inherently embedded in the structure of the mythologeme,” emphasizing its inextricable link to the linguistic personality and collective cultural memory of the linguocultural community (Document 10.a., p. 1).

3. A categorical contribution of the monograph is the sociolinguistic experiment conducted with the study of generative artificial intelligence, which “uses the available knowledge about all forms of modification of mythological images to generalize information about them” (document 10.a., p. 1). Generative artificial intelligence is seen, on the one hand, as a kind of “victim” of different kinds of information distortion, but also as a “favourable environment” for further dissemination and development of this knowledge. “It has been hypothesized that there is a possibility and a need for G.A.I. to be purposely trained to recognize canonical mythological images and to “clean up”

informational distortion. The feasibility of the hypothesis was tested in a classroom setting, and the results are described in the linguodectological section of the study” (Document 10.a., p. 1).

4. A further contribution of the habilitation work is the examination of the concepts of trans-media and transmedia storytelling in the context of transformation of mythological characters and the expansion of the narrative, concluding that mythology has been functioning on the principles of transmedia since the most ancient times and presenting a stable algorithm in the stages of standard development of transmedia storytelling.

5. The individual discourses of mass culture are examined as distinct functional spheres for unfolding the potential of the myth's fermentation and the transformation of mythological images – literature as a field for the development of new plots; cinema (in its synthetic form, combining live-action and animated elements) as a means of unified visualization of the images; games as an interactive field seeking exotica and giving new life and non-canonical interpretation to mythologemes; internet memes as modern folklore, turning users into co-authors.

6. A trend of verbal and visual convergence between discourses has been identified, where a leading factor provoking the creation of an alternative mythological world is often found in computer games. Under their influence, the logical sequence of the transfer of characters from mythology to literature is overturned, and instead, a transition of literary characters into mythology occurs, turning them into quasi-mythologemes.

7. A trend of mixing Chinese and Slavic mythological characters with Western European ones, based on the same archetype, has been identified, as well as the transfer of ethnic stereotypes onto mythological characters.

8. A conclusion has been drawn regarding the ethnospecificity of internet memes with mythological content from Slavic mythology, and the absence of such memes from Chinese mythology has been justified due to the high degree of sacralization of the most frequent Chinese mythological characters.

9. For the first time, mythology is presented as a market product and an area of intersection of marketing strategies. In order to prevent the marginalization of niche mythologies, an analysis of the market has been made, and target groups of consumers of mythological content (fantasy authors, video game developers, content creators, members of various subcultures, etc.) have been identified. The innovative element of the research is realized through the application of marketing strategies in the analysis of the groups, the creation of user personas, empathy maps, and differentiated strategies for attracting attention to mythology.

10. An original approach is presented in the interpretation of mythological characters as part of the contemporary toolkit of linguodidactics. The proposed models of games and tasks based on transmediality, the revealing of the potential of memes as motivators and catalysts of the learning process, as well as the created sample model of an interdisciplinary lesson, in which mythological characters serve as building material for activities that are engaging and emotionally close to the learners, have practical value in education. Also useful in the teaching process is the “Mythological Index” appended to the monograph.

11. A contribution to contemporary linguoculturology is the well-argued conclusion in the monograph about the formation and development of a collective global mythology, based on universal and universalized characters according to national stereotypes. This new collective mythology is perceived as closer by representatives of contemporary digital generations, gradually replacing ethnospecific mythologies and, alongside *informational distortion*, leading to the *replacement of cultural memory*.

As contributions to the thematic field “Lingocultural Potential of Culturally Significant Units of Mythological Consciousness” As contributions to the thematic field “Linguocultural potential of culturally significant units of mythological consciousness” should be pointed out the derivation of the problem of information distortion and reconstruction of mythological images at different linguistic levels (lexeme, phraseology, text).

To the thematic field “Linguocultural Element in Foreign Language Teaching” as a contribution is reported the analysis of the generational characteristics of contemporary learners; the identification of elements at risk of educational marginalization and the proposal of unconventional approaches through which culturally significant units can be integrated as a natural part of foreign language teaching.

As contributions to the thematic field “Verbalization of Cultural Memory: Universality and Specificity” are considered the conclusions regarding the direct connection between generational characteristics and the development of precedent phenomena in the direction of visualization; the establishment of the concept of “patterned precedent”; and the analysis of the manifestations of cultural memory in the speech and behavioral patterns of contemporary individuals.

The quotations noted and used in the competition show that the scientific work of Asst. prof. Milanova's research is well received by a number of researchers in the country and abroad. Her publications have been cited in academic journals in Serbia, Russia, as well as in publications of Plovdiv University Press. It is noteworthy that the citations are of publications from different periods (2015, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021) with a time gap between the publication and the citation of one to



eight years, which strongly proves the real impact of the scientific achievements reflected in the candidate's published work on the development of scientific research in the field of linguocultural studies, linguodectology, ethno-linguistics and translation theory.

#### **4. Evaluation of the personal contribution of the applicant(s)**

The formulated contributions, derived as a result of the scientific production of Asst. Prof. Elitsa Milanova, PhD, are undoubtedly the personal merit of the candidate and this is evident from the overall scientific research and scientific applied work presented to us in various documents in connection with her participation in the competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor”, including the scientific publications of Asst. Prof. Milanova, with which she participated in the competition for “Senior Assistant Professor”.

#### **5. Critical comments and recommendations**

I recommend to Asst. Prof. Elitsa Milanova, PhD, to republish her two monographs in a larger edition at the earliest opportunity, and I, in turn, commit to invite her to present her scientific developments to a wide range of colleagues – lecturers, students, and PhD students of the Faculty of Modern Languages of the University of Veliko Tarnovo. The innovative approaches that Asst. Prof. Milanova, PhD, skillfully uses, including in her pedagogical work, it is imperative to get the attention of established, young, and future researchers.

#### **6. Personal impressions**

I have known Elitsa Milanova since 2010, when as a first-year student she embarked on the adventure of a lifetime, tying her forever to the Chinese language and culture. The personal qualities, professional qualifications, achievements in scientific and applied activities, and pedagogical experience that Asst. Prof. Elitsa Milanova, PhD, has built upon and developed over the years with focus and diligence characteristic of any thorough Chinese scholar build her as an individual and a professional. Patience, tolerance, precision and dedication are qualities that, being part of her personality, over the years Asst. Prof. Milanova has skillfully transferred into her pedagogical work. High morals, academic ethics and loyalty are qualities inherent in the candidate, which I would also like to emphasize, especially when the competition is linked to a habilitation procedure. I am impressed, but not at all surprised, by the precise selection of the scientific publications with which Asst. Prof. Milanova participated in the competition. Each of them, first of all, complements the contributions to the outlined three thematic fields; secondly, reveals the candidate's areas of scientific interests and research searches; and, last but not least, the publications presented in co-authorship (with different co-authors) demonstrate in a delicate but definite way Asst. Prof. Milanova's ability for research work in a team.

## CONCLUSION

The documents and materials, presented by Asst. Prof. Elitsa Dimitrova Milanova, PhD, **comply** with all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB and the relevant Regulations of *Paisii Hilendarski* Plovdiv University.

The candidate in the competition **has submitted a sufficient number** of research papers published since the materials used in the defense of the Ph.D. and demonstrating her sustained research interests. The candidate's works have original scientific and applied contributions that have received international recognition, as a representative part of them have been published in journals and scientific collections published by international academic publishers. The theoretical developments have practical applicability, some of them are directly oriented to teaching work. The scientific and teaching qualifications of Asst. Prof. Elitsa Dimitrova Milanova are **undoubted**.

The achievements of Asst. Prof. Elitsa Dimitrova Milanova, PhD results in teaching and research activities **fully** comply with the minimum national requirements adopted in connection with the Regulations of the PU for the implementation of the Law on Research and Development.

After reviewing the materials and scientific papers presented in the competition, analyzing their significance and the scientific, applied and applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and recommend to the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology for the election of Asst. Prof. Elitsa Dimitrova Milanova, PhD, to the academic position of “associate professor” at the *Paisii Hilendarski* Plovdiv University under the: higher education field 2. Humanities, professional field: 2.1. Philology (Modern Chinese Language – Linguoculturology).

April 4, 2025

Examiner: .....

(signature)

*Assoc. Prof. Polina Tsoncheva, PhD*

(ac. position, deg., name, family name)