

OPINION

by **Dr. Elitsa Dimitrova Milanova**,
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on the materials submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position
of Associate Professor
at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”

Field of Higher Education: 2. Humanities

Professional Field: 2.1. Philology (Contemporary Korean Language – Cultural Studies)

In the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, announced in State Gazette, issue 96 of 11 November 2025, and on the website of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU) for the needs of the Department of Bulgarian Language at the Faculty of Philology, the candidate participating in the procedure is Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwang Jong James Kang from the Department of Bulgarian Language at the Faculty of Philology of PU.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

By Order No. RD-22-46/09.01.2026 of the Rector of PU, I was appointed a member of the scientific jury for a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Contemporary Korean Language – Cultural Studies), announced for the needs of the Department of Bulgarian Language at the Faculty of Philology.

Only one candidate has submitted documents for participation in the procedure: **Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwang Jong James Kang from PU**. The set of materials submitted by the candidate in both printed and electronic form complies with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU. The materials accepted for evaluation in the competition include a **habilitation thesis, a book published on the basis of a defended dissertation, 7 articles, a chapter in a collective monograph, and two dictionaries**.

Hwang Jong James Kang holds a Bachelor’s degree in Public Administration from Kookmin University (Seoul, Republic of Korea). In 2000 he completed a Master’s degree in Public Administration at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, and in 2015 he was awarded the PhD degree in Political Science after defending a dissertation entitled “Relations between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Bulgaria: From Recognition to Prospective Cooperation.” In 2020, a book based on this dissertation was published.

Dr. Kang’s teaching experience has been accumulated during his work at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (adjunct lecturer 2015–2019; assistant professor 2019–2022; chief assistant professor since 2022), at St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo (adjunct lecturer in 2015; assistant professor in 2016; chief assistant professor since 2017), and as a lecturer at Sofia University during the academic years 1998/1999 and 2015/2016. Since 2023 he has been invited as a visiting professor at Kangnam University (Republic of Korea).

The candidate also reports professional experience in other areas such as journalism, interpretation at high-level meetings, and coordination of cultural activities. He is a member of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists and holds leadership positions in several organizations, including the Korean Cultural Center Foundation in Bulgaria, the Association of the Korean Community in Bulgaria, the General Association of the Korean Community in Europe, and the Bulgarian-Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry, among others. He has received awards from the Plovdiv Journalistic Society “Evropress”, the Association of Korean Journalists, the

Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Bulgaria, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea.

2. General Characteristics of the Candidate's Academic Activity

Hwang Jong James Kang delivers lecture courses such as “Old Korean Literature,” “20th-Century Korean Literature,” “Korean Language through Korean Films,” and “Country Studies,” as well as practical classes for students studying Korean at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”.

Since 2017, the candidate has participated in two professional training programs: one aimed at acquiring key digital competencies (2022) and another focused on working with artificial intelligence (2025). His research output has been presented through lectures, presentations, reports, and conference papers at various academic conferences and forums. The candidate has also demonstrated the necessary publication activity corresponding to the minimum national requirements and the provisions of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”. In addition to the publications submitted for the competition, the candidate has included other works relevant to the field of the announced competition.

The materials accepted for evaluation within the competition for the position of Associate Professor include a habilitation thesis, a book based on the doctoral dissertation, seven articles in Bulgarian and English, a chapter in a collective monograph in Korean, and two dictionaries.

The habilitation thesis “The Korean Spirit of Resistance during the Japanese Occupation (1910–1945) and the People of the Pen” (Sofia: Korean Cultural Center Bulgaria Foundation, 2025. ISBN 978-619-91739-3-0) examines the literary life of Korea during the occupation period from the early to the mid-twentieth century and the role of the “people of the pen” as guardians of the cultural identity and spirit of the Korean nation. The study reveals another dimension of resistance, which “does not exhaust itself in armed struggle but also encompasses cultural and spiritual forms of resistance” (p. 15). The monograph is structured into four thematically organized chapters.

The first chapter, “Korea and Japan – Immediate but Most Distant Neighbours,” provides a brief historical overview of relations between the two countries across different historical periods, concluding with the Japanese occupation of Korea between 1910 and 1945. The author also offers a short comparison between Japan’s colonial policy and the policies of other major colonial powers of the era—Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands.

The second chapter, “The Movement for the Rights and Independence of the Korean People after the First World War,” presents a retrospective analysis of Korea’s diplomatic activities during the period of colonial dependence.

In the third chapter, “Role, Participation and Contribution of the ‘People of the Pen’ – Anti-Colonial Resistance (1910–1945),” J. Kang examines literature as “a means of taking an active stance against social injustice and political oppression” (p. 65), and as “an active participant in the struggle for freedom, equality, and human dignity.” The historical roots of resistance literature on a global scale are also traced. In exploring the relationship between literature and politics, J. Kang identifies several points of intersection:

- literature as a “mirror of the era,” reflecting political processes;
- literature as a component shaping the political consciousness of readers;
- literature as a new discourse of social change;

- literature as a voice of marginalized groups in society.

Special attention is devoted to the “people of the pen” during the period of Japanese occupation. They are grouped according to their principal field of activity—scholars and historians, journalists and publicists, writers and poets. For representatives of each group, brief biographical information is provided, together with an outline of their main philosophical and literary ideas against the background of resistance to occupation.

Examples from poetry are presented in the original language as well as in the author’s translation, demonstrating the relationship between the poetic world and anti-colonial sentiments. The poems are subjected to literary analysis.

The fourth chapter, “The Spirit of Resistance in Literature and the Development of South Korea,” focuses on literary processes in South Korea after the period of occupation, emphasizing the search for contemporary Korean identity and the reinterpretation of the occupation period through literary discourse. An analysis of motifs and ideas in several post-occupation novels is presented.

This chapter of the monograph also includes a 2023 study on the structure of public perceptions of Japan in South Korea.

In the concluding section, J. Kang summarizes the main ideas discussed in the monograph.

The remaining materials accepted for review cover various thematic areas, including contemporary problems and trends in the development of Korean education, the integration of artificial intelligence into public life and education in the Republic of Korea, the characteristics of the Korean community in Bulgaria, the role of the Protestant Church, and the compilation of dictionaries.

The book based on the doctoral dissertation examines the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and Bulgaria.

The seven articles submitted for review are written in Bulgarian (2) and English (5), have an interdisciplinary character, and were published in peer-reviewed editions between 2017 and 2025. The main body of the articles addresses current issues in the development of education in the Republic of Korea. The influence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, COVID-19, and artificial intelligence on education in the country is examined step by step. It is noteworthy that the author has also conducted research on the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on education in North Korea. In his more recent publications, a sustained interest in artificial intelligence can be observed. Both good practices and potential risks related to its application in education and media discourse are highlighted.

Another lasting research interest of the author concerns the role of the Protestant Church. This topic is examined through the prism of the historical development of the Protestant Church in Bulgaria and that of the Korean Protestant Church.

The two dictionaries of Korean nouns and verbs represent valuable resources for learners of the language.

The list attached to the submitted documentation indicates seven **citations**: two in publications indexed in internationally recognized databases and five in peer-reviewed but non-indexed journals.

3. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

The works submitted for participation in the competition undoubtedly represent a valuable source of otherwise difficult-to-access information and are of substantial benefit for the education of students of Korean studies.

The remarks and recommendations concerning the materials are primarily aimed at their further refinement and the elimination of technical inaccuracies.

I recommend that the habilitation thesis undergo additional editing and proofreading in order to eliminate spelling, punctuation, and technical errors, which can be found in several places throughout the book. The bibliography should be presented not only in Bulgarian translation but also with the original titles, so that the sources can be more easily identified.

Many of the footnotes could be integrated into the main text, as their current form makes reading and comprehension more difficult.

It is noticeable that the bibliography focuses mainly on Korean scholars, whose works are cited and used in the monograph. I would recommend enriching it with works by additional international authors in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the research field. Regardless of whether the author supports or rejects their arguments, their inclusion and discussion would contribute to a higher degree of academic rigor and scientific objectivity.

I would also recommend clarifying the data from the study on the structure of public perceptions of Japan in South Korea (pp. 187–196). The text does not clearly indicate who conducted the study and under what conditions; whether the stimulus words presented to respondents carried only negative connotations or also included neutral and positive vocabulary; and whether the study belongs primarily to the fields of sociology, political science, or cognitive linguistics, among others.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials submitted by J. Kang **comply with the requirements** of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation, and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”. The candidate **meets the minimum national requirements**, has the required number of points according to the relevant indicators, and no evidence of plagiarism has been identified.

This provides sufficient grounds for me to give a **positive evaluation** and to recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology for the election of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwang Jong James Kang to the academic position of Associate Professor at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Contemporary Korean Language – Cultural Studies).

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Prepared by:
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