

REVIEW

By: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Irina Sotirova, Department of Korean Studies, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Regarding: Documentation submitted for the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, Field of Higher Education: 2. Humanities, Professional Field: 2.1. Philology (Modern Korean Language – Cultural Studies), Faculty of Philology, Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", Announced in the State Gazette, Issue 96 / 11.11.2025

Candidate: Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwan Joung James Kang

1. General presentation of the submitted materials

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

One candidate has submitted documents for participation in the announced competition – Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwan Joung James Kang.

The set of materials submitted by the candidate complies with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University and includes the following documents: Curriculum vitae; Diploma for higher education (Master's degree) with supplement (copy); Diploma for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (copy); List of scientific publications; List of citations; Report on compliance with the minimum national requirements; Annotation of the scientific works; Self-assessment of contributions; Order for the appointment of the scientific jury; Copy of the habilitation work "The Korean Spirit of Resistance during the Japanese Occupation (1910–1945) and the People of the Pen"; Ten publications in Bulgarian and English (two accepted for publication); Published chapter from a collective monograph in Korean. The submitted works are accepted for review as relevant to the competition.

Based on the reviewed materials, **I confirm the eligibility** of the candidate. According to the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the minimum required score for occupying the academic position of Associate Professor is 400 points. The candidate Hwan Joung James Kang has accumulated 595 points and therefore fulfills the national minimum requirements.

2. Brief biographical information about the candidate

The submitted documents indicate that the candidate obtained his Bachelor's degree from Kookmin University, Republic of Korea, and a Master's degree in Public Administration from Sofia University. He obtained his doctoral degree from Sofia University with the dissertation "Relations between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Bulgaria: From Recognition to Prospective Cooperation". **According to the Curriculum vitae received, Hwan Joung James Kang is currently listed as Chief Assistant Professor at both Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" and Veliko Tarnovo University "St. Cyril and St. Methodius". This information requires clarification within the framework of the procedure.**

3. General characteristics of the candidate's academic activity

Dr. Hwan Joung James Kang is a lecturer and researcher in the field of Korean studies whose academic work is related to the development of education in Korean language, culture, and history. The candidate has considerable teaching experience in courses related to modern Korean language, cultural studies, and intercultural relations. Through his teaching activity he contributes to the development of students' interest in Korean culture and language and to the strengthening of academic relations between Bulgaria and the Republic of Korea.

The candidate's scientific output includes monographs, articles, and conference papers presented at national and international scholarly forums. Among the most significant works is the habilitation monograph "The Korean Spirit of Resistance during the Japanese Occupation (1910–1945) and the People of the Pen", which analyzes the role of intellectuals and literature during the period of Japanese

colonial rule in Korea. The study provides a historical and cultural perspective on the processes of national identity formation and cultural resistance in Korean society.

The candidate's publications address topics related to Korean culture, history, and contemporary social processes, as well as Bulgarian–Korean relations. A number of the research results have been presented at international academic conferences and published in scholarly editions. Citations of the candidate's works are also documented, indicating recognition and engagement from the academic community.

4. Evaluation of the candidate's scientific contributions

The scientific production of Dr. Hwan Jong James Kang demonstrates thematic consistency and an interdisciplinary approach within the field of Korean studies, cultural studies, and contemporary social processes in the Republic of Korea.

The central work submitted in the procedure is the habilitation monograph devoted to the role of writers and intellectuals in the Korean resistance movement during Japanese colonial rule. In addition to historical and cultural interpretation, the author provides original translations from Korean into Bulgarian. The translation of representative poems of Korean literature illustrates the role of literary figures in the resistance movement. Furthermore, translations of significant historical documents such as the Japan–Korea Annexation Treaty, the Treaty of Ganghwa, the Eulsa Treaty, and the Korean Declaration of Independence make important primary sources accessible to Bulgarian readers.

Another research direction in the candidate's work concerns the impact of technological development and digital transformation on contemporary Korean society. His publications analyze the influence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and artificial intelligence on higher education, media environments, and educational policies in both South and North Korea.

A practical contribution is represented by the Korean language dictionaries compiled by the candidate, which support the study and teaching of Korean language in Bulgaria and reflect his experience as both translator and lecturer.

Overall, the candidate's scientific production demonstrates consistent research interests, interdisciplinary perspectives, and contributions to the development of

Korean studies and intercultural dialogue between Bulgaria and the Republic of Korea.

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

5.1. The monograph submitted as the principal academic work in the competition for the position of Associate Professor is focused on one of the most painful topics for the Korean people – Japanese colonial rule. With their half-century domination over Korea, the Japanese left traumas that not only do not fade with time but seem to become even more painful. Nevertheless, a monograph submitted for an academic position requires an academic approach. Such an approach presupposes impartiality and objectivity in the presentation of the issues. In the submitted work, emotional and subjective motives are clearly evident, which the author has not presented in a scientific form nor supported with the necessary evidence. Statements such as “The Japanese state falsifies history” (p. 14 of the monograph) in themselves deserve a multi-volume study and cannot be introduced axiomatically or presented as ready-made conclusions. The issue becomes even more controversial and complex with the comparison made between the Japanese colonization of Korea and other colonial regimes. The author brings into the work Great Britain, India, France, Vietnam, the Netherlands, and Indonesia, summarizing their complex histories in one-sided and highly debatable labels. Each of the claims in Chapter 2.1, “Comparative Analysis of Japanese Colonial Rule and the Colonial Empires of European States,” requires serious argumentation.

Further in the monograph we encounter the tables presented on p. 30 and onwards, which likewise do not meet academic standards and include claims that are debatable, unclear, one-sided, and insufficiently substantiated. Given the seriousness of the statements made, referring to only one or two Korean scholars is clearly insufficient. The comparison with Vietnam also raises questions for the reader. The book states: “Vietnamese independence movements succeeded in connecting with global socialist networks and anti-colonial fights, which provided them with broader international support. Ultimately, resistance in Vietnam developed into a large-scale armed struggle that led to independence” (p. 53). This position immediately prompts the reader to respond that Korean independence movements also established connections with global socialist networks, yet this did not lead to liberation.

The table on p. 30, “Economic Methods of Exploitation in Korea and Southeast Asia,” includes “military mobilization” in the cases of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Indochina in its first row, while the same claim is absent in the column for Korea, despite the fact that Koreans were mobilized on a massive scale. By the same logic, in Table 7, “Military Administration and Mobilization in Korea and Southeast Asia,” the content of column three, referring to the Philippines, Indonesia, and Indochina, should also appear in the column concerning Korea. In other words, the tables do not demonstrate the differences for which the author intended them.

Furthermore, categorical statements such as those found in Table 4 concerning the “complete exclusion of the Korean population from governance” contradict statements made by the author himself several pages later in the discussion of the “Japan–Korea Annexation Treaty,” *where examples are given such as*: “Lee Wanyong received an aristocratic title and privileges from the Japanese government” (pp. 38–39).

While approaching with understanding and empathy the experiences endured by the Korean people during the years of Japanese colonial rule, the above remarks are not intended to challenge the trauma itself or its historical roots. Rather, they concern the manner in which the issue is presented in a monograph submitted for an academic position.

In summary, with regard to point 5.1., it can be concluded that many of the stated claims remain insufficiently substantiated, are presented in a one-sided manner, and the comparisons offered are not measured by the same standards.

5.2. The proposed monograph contains numerous spelling, punctuation, and technical errors. I recommend that the book undergo professional editorial revision. It would also be advisable for the author to adhere to a consistent system of transcription for Korean names and terms and to specify which system is being used.

5.3. It is necessary to clarify and unify the candidate’s current academic and professional position. In the submitted Curriculum vitae, it is stated that he currently holds the position of Chief Assistant Professor both at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” and at Veliko Tarnovo University “St. Cyril and St. Methodius.” In the foreword to the habilitation thesis, it is also stated that he is one of the founders of the Korean Studies program at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” and Veliko Tarnovo University “St. Cyril and St. Methodius.” To the best of my knowledge, however, there is no Korean Studies program at either of these universities.

5.4. From the materials submitted for the competition, the candidate's religious affiliation is clearly evident – from the first page of the habilitation work to a large part of the attached articles. The works devoted to Protestantism in Bulgaria contain recommendations for its strengthening and consolidation (pp. 14–15 of Article 6.5 in the document Scientific Publications) and deliberately emphasize the charitable activities of Korean churches in Bulgaria. In the scholarly works, the idea is visibly promoted that Korea's economic growth is due to the adoption of Christianity (p. 214 of Article 7.2). It is also stated that “Korea officially became a Christian country after the first Speaker of the National Assembly of Korea gave the floor to Member of Parliament Pastor Lee Un-yong to pray” (p. 214 of the same article).

The promotion of the incorrect claim that Korea is officially a Christian state, as well as the suggestion of a causal link between economic success and Christianity, and the repeated emphasis on the claim that the Korean church helps poor Bulgarians and educates them (p. 271 of Article 7.3), shifts the proposed works away from an academic tone and brings them closer to a religious one. In this regard, I refer to Article 3 of the Higher Education Act, according to which “Higher secular education is independent of ideologies, religions, and political doctrines,” and I would like to draw attention to the fact that holding an academic position at a state university in the Republic of Bulgaria is incompatible with the promotion of religion within the academic and educational environment.

Conclusion

The documents and materials submitted by Hwan Joung James Kang comply with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, its implementing regulations, and the respective regulations of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”.

The candidate has presented a sufficient number of scientific works published after obtaining the doctoral degree. These works contain scientific and applied contributions that have received international attention and include publications in academic journals and scientific collections. Some of the results also have practical relevance for teaching and educational practice.

The achievements of Hwan Joung James Kang in teaching and research activities satisfy the minimum national requirements.

After reviewing the materials and scientific works submitted in the competition and evaluating their scientific and applied contributions, I **give a positive** overall

assessment. **Taking into account the remarks 5.3. and 5.4. outlined above,** I recommend that the Scientific Jury propose to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology the election of Hwan Joung James Kang to the academic position of Associate Professor at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Modern Korean Language – Cultural Studies).

Sofia, 6 March 2026

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Irina Sotirova