

## REVIEW

by **Professor, Dr. Sc. (in Philosophy), Ph.D. (in History) Nako Raynov Stefanov,**

**Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"**

of a monographic work in connection with the holding of a 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) in the Department of "Bulgarian Language" of the Faculty of Philology of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski", announced in the State Gazette, issue 96 of 11.11.2025 with candidate Senior Asst., Ph.D. Hwang Jong James Kang.

**Author of the monograph:** Senior Asst., Ph.D. Hwang Jong James Kang

**Topic:** «The Korean Spirit of Resistance During the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the „People of the Pen».

### **1. General description of the submitted materials**

By Rector's Order No. RD-22-46 of 09.01.2026, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury in the announced competition for the academic position of "Associate professor" with the sole candidate Senior Assistant, Ph.D. Hwang Jong James Kang to ensure a procedure for the defense of a monographic work on the topic "The Korean Spirit of Resistance during the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the People of the Pen" in: field of Higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Korean Language - Cultural Studies) in the Department of "Bulgarian Language" of the Faculty of Philology of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski", announced in the State Gazette, issue 96 of 11.11.2025.

The set of materials on paper submitted by Senior Assistant, Ph.D. Hwang Jong James Kang is in accordance with Art. 36. (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff /RDAS/ of PU, including all necessary documents in accordance with the RDAS of PU "P. Hilendarski".

The candidate for the academic position of "Associate Professor" Senior Assistant, Ph.D. Hwang Jong James Kang has attached the following publications:

1. 9th International Conference on the Application of Information and Communication Technologies and Statistics in Economics and Education ICAICTSEE: On the topic "The Fourth Industrial Revolution and Education in the Republic of Korea" Pages: 13-21, – 2019, 24.8.2020, University of National and World Economy, ISSN 2367-7

2. 13th International Conference on the Application of Information and Communication Technologies and Statistics in Economics and Education ICAICTSEE] On the topic: "Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Korean Media". Pages 23-31, University of National and World Economy, 2024, ISSN:2367-7635, Publication indexed by CEEOL

3. 14th International Conference on the Application of Information and Communication Technologies and Statistics in Economics and Education ICAICTSEE]: On the topic: "Artificial Intelligence and the Challenges of Education in Korean Universities" Pages: 50-60, University of National and World Economy 2025, ISSN: 2367-7635, Publication indexed by CEEOL;

4. Societas Classica, volume 13. Proceedings of the scientific conference "Cultures and Religions in the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the East", [Cultures and Religions in the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the East]: Report on the topic: An Analysis and Evaluation of History of Protestantism in Bulgaria, 2025;

5. Seventh International Scientific Conference “Media and Communications in the 21st Century”, 2024. Report on the topic “The new normal in Korean media in the era of Artificial Intelligence”]

6. International Scientific Conference “Oriental Studies – Traditions and Modernity” 2023. Report on the topic: “Changes in the field of Education in Republic of Korea in the Post-Covid 19 era”;

7. Proceedings of the International Conference on Korean Studies. [On Religious and Cultural Contents in Korea and Bulgaria]:On the topic “The Korean Protestant Church and its Ethnic Church in Bulgaria”, 2017, ISBN: 978-619-7084-41-2;

8. Proceedings of the International Conference on Korean Studies “Outlining the Korean society”, 2015: On the topic “Mutual relationship between The Republic of Korea and the

Republic of Bulgaria in the Field of Tourism and in the Social and the Humanitarian Field”, 2015, ISBN: 978-619-7084-15-3;

9. National scientific conference with international participation “Countries of East, South and Southeast Asia and the world - relationships and interactions”, 2015, Collection of materials from a national scientific conference with international participation: On the topic “The beginning of political contacts and establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Bulgaria”, ISBN: 978-954-07-3932-8;

10. Chapter from a collective monograph (20 vol.) [Monograph: 100 Years of Korean Diaspora In Europe (1919-2019)] Chapter: “Korean Community in Bulgaria” Pages: 74-116,– Volume 3 (2020)The Association of Korean Residents in Europe/Korean Overseas Agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Korea;

11. Monograph "The Korean Spirit of Resistance (1910-1945) and the People of the Pen", Publishing House "KOREAN CULTURAL CENTER BULGARIA FOUNDATION", Sofia 2025, ISBN 978-619-91739-3-0;

12. Book "Korea and Bulgaria" - from recognition to promising cooperation (1990-2014)", ISBN 978-619-91739-2-3;

13. Short Korean Dictionary 1000 Words, Sofia 2021;

14. Short Korean Dictionary, 500 Verbs, Sofia 2025;

15. Translation of MAGAZINE "Black and White" into Korean.

## **2. Brief biographical data about the candidate**

Hwang Jong James Kang has lived in Bulgaria for more than 20 years. In addition to teaching and scientific activities, he is engaged in translations. He is also an active public figure in the field of Bulgarian-Korean relations. He was a translator at the high-level meetings between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Bulgaria. He is a member of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists. In 2015, at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Faculty of Philosophy, Department of "Political Science" he defended a dissertation on the topic "Relations between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Bulgaria: from recognition to perspective cooperation". He obtained an educational and scientific degree "Ph.D." in the field of Higher education 3.

Social, economic and legal sciences, in the professional field 3.3. Political science (Political science). For ten years, Dr. Kang has been a lecturer in Korean language, culture and history at the Veliko Tarnovo University "St. Cyril and Methodius".

Today he holds the position of Senior Assistant in the Department of Bulgarian Language of the Faculty of Philology of the Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski". He teaches the following subjects: Practical Korean Language I, Practical Korean Language IV, Old Korean Literature, Korean Literature of the 20th Century, Korean Language through Korean Films.

His research interests are: Korean literature during the Japanese occupation (1910-1945); bilateral relations between Korea and Bulgaria in the field of education and culture; The development of modern democracy in South Korea; The influence of Christianity on Eastern philosophy in modern Korea.

Hwang Jong James Kang is the Chairman of the Korean Community Association in Bulgaria (since 2021), and also the Auditor of the World Korean Community Association (since 2022). He is a recipient of the Award of Merit from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea (2001, 2002).

### **3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and objectives**

The topic developed by James Kang in the monograph "The Korean Spirit of Resistance (1910-1945) and the People of the Pen" is important and relevant, given the opportunity provided to the widest Bulgarian audience to get acquainted with:

- A difficult period in the history of the Korean people;
- But also, with the indomitable spirit of a number of representatives of the intelligentsia, namely the writers, the "people of the pen" playing in this difficult historical moment for the Korean people, the role of awakeners, as well as preservers of the traditions and values of national identity.

**4. Knowledge of the problem.** James Kang is undoubtedly the researcher in Bulgaria who is most knowledgeable about the problem of the role of the Korean intelligentsia, in particular the people of the pen in the resistance against the Japanese occupation and colonization of Korea. But also, with the assimilation efforts of the Land of the Rising Sun

towards the Korean people in the period 1910-1945. The monograph includes a bibliography with 102 titles in Korean, 14 sources in Cyrillic (we can be happy about the fact that some of these sources are by Bulgarian researchers of Korea) and 13 Internet sources. All this testifies to a serious research source base, which allows for extensive and deep penetration into the topic.

**5. Research methodology.** The methodological approaches used in the monograph are:

- The systemic approach, according to which the studied object is considered as a system, i.e. a set (complex) composed of interconnected components acting as a single whole. All these components form the internal environment of the system, and everything outside this internal environment represents an external environment to the system;

- Analytical-structural approach – “breaks down” the studied phenomenon into the most important components, as well as classifies the latter on the basis of a certain logic, which allows us to obtain knowledge about the functioning of the phenomenon;

- Historical approach, based on the presumption that the object cannot be understood if we do not analyze it historically, i.e. how it has developed in time and space;

- Comparative approach – based on a comparison of various social, economic and cultural parameters between Korea and other countries and regions, important new knowledge is obtained about the processes and events that have taken place in Korean society and, accordingly, world history and societies. The author of the monograph, based on these approaches, achieves the goals and objectives set for his research.

**6. Characteristics and evaluation of the monograph work.** The monograph consists of four chapters, Introduction and Conclusion. The Introduction provides a brief overview of the interactions and relationships between the two peoples and countries - the Land of Morning Freshness (Korea) and the Land of the Rising Sun (Japan). The fact is noted that "the formation of the Japanese people is inextricably linked to ancient migration processes from the Korean Peninsula to the Japanese islands". At the same time, it is noted that "Japan, as an island state, perceives the doctrine of continental expansion as an important strategic goal, and the Korean Peninsula - as a springboard for the realization of this ambition". It is emphasized that the purpose of this work is to show the resistance against the establishment of Japanese domination in the period 1910-1945. And above all, the indomitable spirit of a specific intellectual

community - Korean writers. As in any society, "people of the pen" are an important exponent of the views and aspirations of a people and their opinion has a special weight. In the words of James Kang, "through their works the reader becomes acquainted with both the social reality of the then Korean society and the desires of the authors themselves, who reveal and affirm the concept of the "Korean spirit". (see Introduction, p. 16).

Chapter One «KOREA AND JAPAN - IMMEDIATE BUT MOST DISTINCT NEIGHBORS» consists of three subchapters. The first one presents a concentrated retrospective view of the relations between Korea and Japan until 1910, when the Japanese annexation of the Land of Morning Freshness, as Korea is often poetically called, took place. Here we should add that over the centuries Korea was the bridge through which both Buddhism and Confucianism penetrated Japan, which to this day are one of the pillars of spirituality in the Land of the Rising Sun. The Imjin War (1592-1598) was a turning point in the relations between Korea and Japan. The Japanese leader Toyotomi Hideyoshi did not simply set expansionist goals for himself. He became famous for the so-called monument "Hanazuka" and "Mimizuka" near Kyoto, at the base of which are buried the severed noses and ears of 38 thousand Korean soldiers, peaceful Korean citizens and partly Chinese soldiers of the Ming Dynasty. Such a monument is an extreme expression of cruelty aimed at breaking the spirit of resistance and the desire for independence of the Korean people. The next two sub-chapters are a story about Japanese colonialism and its repressive and assimilationist policy towards the Korean people as a whole, characterized by ruthless and inhuman actions and an extremely humiliating position towards Koreans. It should not be forgotten that from the beginning of the 1930s the Japanese colonial authorities set out to assimilate Koreans. The Korean language was forbidden to be used in public. All Koreans were obliged to take Japanese names. The peak of humiliation was the phenomenon of "Yanfu", i.e. forcing young Korean women to become part of the so-called; «comfort women» in the Japanese army.

Chapter two «MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE KOREAN PEOPLE AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR» consists of four subchapters. Each of these subchapters is in a sense a sad story about the efforts of the Korean people in the international arena and within the country to restore their sovereignty. The story is sad due to the fact that, driven by their own interests, a number of countries playing an important role in world

affairs practically refuse to support these efforts. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the «Korean question» in an international context and Korea's actions to receive support for restoring its independence after the First World War. Special attention is paid to the participation of the Korean delegation in the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, as well as to the initiatives to solve the Korean problem within the framework of the League of Nations and diplomatic actions to mobilize public opinion in the United States. The analysis also examines the significance of the March 1st Peace Movement in 1919 and the founding of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in Shanghai. Here we will note the extremely interesting and innovative approach used by James Kang in compiling the comparative tables, numbered from 1 to 9. Through them, important valuable knowledge is obtained on the basis of comparison, which, thanks to the comparative analysis, remains imprinted in the memory of the readers.

The center of the third chapter «ROLE, PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE “PEOPLE OF THE PEN” – THE ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE (1910-1945)» is the role and place of writers as awakeners of their people, as people who, with their works, preserve traditions, identity and a sense of sovereignty, as well as awaken the desire for independence in the conditions of the occupation of Korea by Imperial Japan and the repressive and assimilating colonial policy pursued by it. This chapter has four subchapters, the titles of which speak for themselves, namely:

1. The literature of resistance and the struggle against foreign oppression on a global scale;
2. The role and contribution of Korean writers in the historical development and national struggles of the Korean people;
3. The Korean “people of the pen” and the resistance against the Japanese occupation;
4. Leading Poets in Korean Literature in 1910-1945 and the Resistance against the Japanese Occupation.

Here we will fully agree with the assessment that the author gives to the "people of the pen" and their works in this ruthless period for the Koreans, namely: "Their works go beyond purely literary achievements, such as national sadness, the will to resist and the longing for independence, leaving a significant legacy in the history of Korean literature. The common spirit

of resistance inherent in these poets continues to send literary messages, recalling the universal human values of justice and freedom." (p. 197 of the monograph).

The fourth chapter "THE SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE IN LITERATURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH KOREA" is extremely interesting in its content, themes and results. The focus of this chapter, also composed of four subchapters, is on the review, analysis and evaluation of the literary life of the Republic of Korea after the Liberation in 1945. This review and analysis includes the period of the "Cold War between East and West", as well as the "hot clash" within this war - the Korean War of 1950-1953, a huge tragedy in the historical destiny of the Korean people. The socio-political processes and development of South Korea after this war are covered - the military dictatorships and the painful processes towards democratization, industrialization, modernization.

James Kang demonstrates, based on deep knowledge of social processes, but also, relying on sociological tools, how public perceptions and feelings develop in South Korea. It is about the national memory associated with the deep pain left by the Japanese occupation and colonial policy. However, the blows that the positions of official Japan, with their inconsistent apologies for the dark period of colonialism, inflict on relations between Tokyo and Seoul.

This chapter also examines the influence of the literature from the period of the struggle against the Japanese occupation on contemporary literature in the Republic of Korea. The positive impact that this literature has on the affirmation of national self-consciousness, as well as on efforts for national unification, is noted. This literature of the Resistance helps to continue the tradition of literary works that continue to be, even in today's conditions, "a space of moral resistance and social awakening" (see p.237 of the monograph).

The Conclusion makes an important interpretation, which we fully support, that «...the spirit of resistance will remain an enduring symbol of human dignity and democracy, as well as a source of inspiration for all who believe that human dignity and the value of human life must be placed above all forms of power and interests» (p. 238 of the monograph).

## **7. Contributions and significance of the work for science and practice**

The monograph "The Korean Spirit of Resistance (1910-1945) and the People of the Pen" represents the most significant contribution to Bulgarian literature on Korea in several aspects:

The first aspect is in terms of the history of Korea. Although in a rather concentrated, but sufficiently saturated factual format, a clear picture of significant periods in the history of the Korean people is given. The second contribution is related to the revealed broad picture of the efforts of Korean society to fight for independence and sovereignty after the First World War, which struggle has not been reflected in Bulgarian scientific literature.

The third contribution concerns Korean literature. In our country, the history of Korean literature in terms of resistance against Japanese occupation and colonial policy has hardly been considered. From such a point of view, the monograph in this part has an extremely innovative character. The fourth contribution relates to another topic, which has also been a "terra incognita" for Bulgarian literature. It is about the spirit of resistance in literature and the development of South Korea. The fifth contribution means that we should not forget about the comparative tables, which represent an innovative approach with their content.

**8. Assessment of the publications on the dissertation.** A part of the more than ten publications presented are indirectly related to the topics covered in the monograph. But they offer a broad picture of the processes and events in Korean society, which further reveal that indomitable spirit, characteristic of Koreans as a people.

**9. Personal participation.** The proposed monograph was written personally by the candidate Dr. James Kang.

**10. Critical remarks and recommendations, Notes.** The monograph uses names of dynasties, personalities, and others that are reflected in a different way than the one officially accepted in Bulgarian literature on this issue. For example, on p. 19 it talks about the "Japanese pirates (wako)". In our literature it is customary to use the name "Wokou". On p. 22 and elsewhere it talks about the "Treaty of Kanghua", while in our country it is customary to write "Treaty of Kanghwa". In the same way it is written "King Sejong the Great", while in Bulgarian literature it is spoken of "King Sejon the Great". That is, according to the Bulgarian transcription, where in English the ending is "-ng" in our country it is written only "-n". These notes are recommendations to James Kang. This does not change the overall excellent assessment of the monograph.

**11. Personal impressions.** My personal impressions of James Kang, whom I have met at conferences, seminars, various forums and cultural events, are extremely positive.

**12. Recommendations for future use of the contributions and results of the monograph “The Korean Spirit of Resistance (1910-1945) and the People of the Pen”**

Each of the chapters of the given monograph can be developed as an independent scientific study, given the significance of the topics it touches upon. Also, each individual chapter can become the basis of a lecture course, which can be read in both bachelor’s and master’s programs. The topics themselves, considered in the monograph, can, given their significance, be offered in doctoral programs for the development of the relevant dissertations.

**CONCLUSION**

The monograph “The Korean Spirit of Resistance (1910-1945) and the People of the Pen” with its innovative view and development of a topic that has not been revealed in our country so far, contains important scientific and applied results and contributions. The monograph meets the requirements of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADAS), the Regulations for the Implementation of ADAS and of Plovdiv University.

The author Hwang Jong James Kang, through this monograph, proves that he possesses the necessary theoretical knowledge and professional skills, as well as qualities and abilities for independent research and training. In this way, he deserves the academic position of "Associate professor" in the field of Higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Korean language - cultural studies) in the Department of "Bulgarian Language" of the Faculty of Philology of the University of Plovdiv "Paisiy Hilendarski". **In view of the above, I give a positive assessment Hwang Jong James Kang to be assigned the academic position of "Associate professor" in the field of Higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Modern Korean language - cultural studies).**

March 3, 2026

Reviewer:.....

Prof, Dr. Sc. (in Philosophy) Ph.D. (in History) Nako Stefanov