

PEER REVIEW

of Assoc. Prof. **Bilyana Bozhinova Todorova**, PhD, Department of Bulgarian language, Faculty of Philology, South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

on the materials submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Contemporary Korean language – Culturology)

By order No. RD-22-46 of 09.01.2026 of the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury of a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Contemporary Korean language – Culturology) for the needs of the Faculty of Philology.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate/s

In the competition for the competition for the position of "Associate Professor" announced in the State Gazette, issue 96 of 11.11.2025, and on the website of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the needs of the Department of Bulgarian Language at the Faculty of Philology, one candidate has submitted the documents for participation: **Dr. Hwan Joung James Kang** from Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, senior assistant professor in the same department since 2022. The set of materials submitted by him includes the necessary documents in accordance with the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. The candidate participates in the competition with a monograph, which is a habilitation work, a published book based on his doctoral dissertation, two dictionaries, a chapter in a collective monograph, and seven published articles. The monographs, dictionaries, the chapter from a collective monograph, and two of the articles are in Bulgarian, while the remaining articles are in English. The author has also provided a list of citations, two of which are included in Scopus database, while the rest are in other sources.

Thus he fulfils the requirements of LSDT (ZRASRB) and the Regulations for the Terms and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and for Holding Academic Positions at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the position of associate professor.

2. General characteristics of the candidate's activities

The candidate obtained his PhD in Political Science from Sofia University in 2015, having previously completed his bachelor's degree at Kookmin University in the Republic of Korea and a master's degree in public administration at Sofia University. The attached materials show that the candidate has diverse interests, mainly in comparative studies, literary translation, translation of legal documents, and teaching methodology, and cultural studies. He is a member of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists and the Association of Korean Journalists, president of the Korean Cultural Center Foundation, etc. The candidate has taught courses not only at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, but also at Sofia University, St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, and has been a visiting professor at Kangnam University (Republic of Korea), among others. In addition, he has organized academic forums and creative camps for students from Plovdiv University who are studying Korean in 2022, 2023, and 2024. It is evident that the candidate is particularly committed to maintaining good relations between Bulgaria and Korea, as well as to establishing close cultural and linguistic ties between the two countries, and in this regard has developed extensive public and academic activities.

The publications presented in this competition also reveal the candidate's various interests and diverse activities.

The James Kang's habilitation thesis is entitled *THE KOREAN SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION (1910-1945) AND THE PEOPLE OF THE PEN*. The publication is 279 pages long and presents information about the relations between Korea and Japan that is unknown to the wider academic community, with a particular focus on the relations between the two countries in the first half of the 20th century. The first three chapters present the political situation in historical terms and the role of the Korean cultural elite in the struggle for cultural resistance and preservation of the language, for the development of literature and art in this historical period. The author also presents and translates works by five poets from the period under study, who were key figures in preserving Korean identity and developing literature and culture.

The fourth chapter, "The Spirit of Resistance in Literature and the Development of South Korea," presents how the events of the first half of the twentieth century continue to influence the political, linguistic, literary, and cultural situation in South Korea today. It points out the consequences of the national trauma, which is still alive and reflected in attitudes toward Japan, as shown by survey data collected by the author in 2023. It is noted that quite a few respondents still perceive Japan as a threat and distrust its policies. However, the candidate notes that among younger people, negative attitudes are being replaced by more neutral ones, revealing that "younger generations, due to broader cultural contacts and less historical baggage, are more open to positive interpretations." Among the slightly older generation, however, distrust remains strong.

According to James Kang, a large part of the intelligent people also maintains its reserved attitude towards Japan, with many expressing "their indignation at Japan's attempts to distort history and avoid taking responsibility for past mistakes" in their works. In this chapter, Kang also points to some representative authors of the period who wrote after 1945 and whose works affirm Korean national identity. For the uninformed Bulgarian public, this book is a useful and interesting read on the facts related to the political situation on the Korean peninsula, the struggle to preserve the Korean script, and Korean literature. At the same time, it seems to me that the author should have focused more clearly on the linguistic processes in the period under study – there is a lack of linguistic analysis, and instead, general political, literary, and cultural processes characterizing Korean society are presented.

The book, which is the author's published dissertation, also addresses interesting issues. It deals with the relations between Bulgaria and Korea, which, according to the author, are undergoing a process of economic, political, and cultural readjustment.

Four articles presented by the author in this procedure address a very topical issue – the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the development of technologies and AI on education in South and North Korea, as well as on the Korean media. I believe it would be beneficial for the author to present current observations on this interesting issue in publications indexed in Web of Science and Scopus in order to reach a wider audience.

The Korean education system is also presented in another article, which points out the consequences of the COVID-19 global pandemic on the field of education. I find the author's conclusion that technological modernization in education can only be successful if it goes hand in hand with humanistic pedagogical principles particularly valuable.

From a cultural perspective, the article discussing the role of the Korean Protestant Church in Bulgaria is also interesting. The chapter from the collective monograph, which addresses the specifics of the Korean community in Bulgaria, covers a similar topic. As a member of the Korean community in Bulgaria, James Kang has the expertise to present unknown facts to the academic community, thus revealing important facts about the contacts and relations between Korea and Bulgaria.

The two dictionaries – of nouns (1,000 words) and verbs (500 words) – are an invaluable resource for anyone studying Korean in Bulgaria.

3. Critical remarks and recommendations

My recommendations are primarily related to the candidate's academic publishing activity. He is involved in a wide range of educational, mediation, translation, and teaching activities in

Bulgaria, thus enabling Bulgarian students and those interested in Korean culture to learn about it. At the same time, the candidate's scientific interests should reach more colleagues, and in my opinion, it would be good for him to participate in more scientific conferences and publish in more diverse journals and conference proceedings and to present the language, literature, and culture of Korea and their reception in Bulgaria more clearly. This would also lead to a higher citation rate for his works. I have already mentioned my main critical remark about the candidate's habilitation thesis, which, in my opinion, needs to address the linguistic processes in the period studied in the book to a greater extent.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that the candidate has scientific interests in the fields of cultural studies, translation, social sciences, education, and the development of new technologies, which makes him a suitable candidate for the academic position of associate professor. As an author of books, articles, and dictionaries, he has demonstrated his scientific potential. For many years, the candidate has taught Korean language, Korean literature, cultural studies, and translation, which has allowed him to gain enviable teaching experience in the field of higher education. The scientific contributions related to James Kang's teaching, scientific, and publishing activities give me reason to give my positive assessment and to propose to the Scientific Jury of this competition that it recommend to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology support the appointment of Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Hwan Joung James Kang to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Contemporary Korean language – Culturology)

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Author:

Assoc. Prof. Bilyana Todorova