

OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Harun Harun Bekir

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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”,
in the field of higher education 2. Humanities,
professional field 2.1. Philology (Modern Korean Language – Cultural Studies)

In the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, announced in the State Gazette of the Republic of Bulgaria, issue No. 96 of 11 November 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, the candidate participating in the procedure is Dr. Hwang Jong James Kang, Chief Assistant Professor at the Department of Bulgarian Language of the Faculty of Philology at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

By Order No. RD 22-46 of 09.01.2026 issued by the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the procedure for occupying the academic position of Associate Professor in 2.1. Philology (Contemporary Korean Language – Cultural Studies), with the sole candidate being Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwang Jong James Kang from the aforementioned unit of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

1. General Presentation of the Procedure and the Candidate

The procedure for the academic position of *Associate Professor* was opened following an announcement in the State Gazette of the Republic of Bulgaria, issue No. 96 of 11 November 2025, and a decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. In accordance with Order No. RD-22-46 of

09.01.2026 issued by the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, a scientific jury was appointed which, at its remote meeting (Minutes No. 1 of 21.01.2026), established the formal compliance of the submitted documents. The only candidate in the competition is Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwang Jong James Kang.

The procedure under the announced competition was conducted in full compliance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. The set of documents submitted by the candidate provides a certain degree of clarity regarding his professional development.

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwang Jong James Kang holds the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in Political Science (diploma issued by Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, 2015). His academic career is closely connected with Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv and St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, where he has established himself as a leading lecturer in the Korean language, literature, and area studies. The candidate possesses the unique advantage of being a native speaker who is nevertheless fully integrated into the Bulgarian philological and academic tradition.

The submitted set of documents generally covers the main required components of the competition procedure; however, a detailed review reveals certain omissions and inaccuracies that should be taken into account within the framework of the evaluation (see item 3).

2. General Characteristics of the Candidate’s Activity

The overall characteristics of the candidate’s activity demonstrate that the scholarly, applied research, and pedagogical work of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwang Jong James Kang is distinguished by a high degree of interdisciplinarity, organically combining philological analysis, historical retrospection, and lexicographic practice.

A central place in his scholarly output is occupied by the habilitation thesis “*The Korean Spirit of Resistance during the Japanese Occupation (1910–1945) and the People of the Pen*” (2025), which represents a unique study for Bulgarian Korean studies, as it offers a systematic and in-depth perspective on literature as a form of political and national resistance. In this research, the candidate successfully applies the methods of content analysis to historical documents, such as the Japan–Korea Annexation Treaty of 1910, as well as a literary-critical approach in the analysis of the works of the so-called Great Five of Korean poetry. A particularly significant scholarly contribution is the introduction of authentic Korean texts through the author’s own translations, which fills existing gaps in the knowledge of Far Eastern modernism.

Dr. Kang’s second monograph, devoted to Bulgarian–Korean relations in the period 1990–2014, reveals his ability to analyze the macro-framework of diplomatic and economic exchange between the two countries. These studies are complemented by a series of scholarly articles published in refereed databases such as Central and Eastern European Online Library and Scopus, addressing contemporary topics related to modern innovations, including the role of artificial intelligence in Korean higher education. In this way, the candidate demonstrates the ability to trace dynamic global processes and interpret them through the prism of educational practice.

In the field of applied research, a particularly significant achievement is the work “*Short Dictionary of the Korean Language: 500 Verbs*” (2025), which goes beyond the framework of a traditional lexicographic reference work and is conceived as a methodological aid adapted to the needs of Bulgarian students. By systematizing a basic predicative minimum, the publication facilitates the transition from receptive to productive command of the Korean language.

Dr. Kang’s pedagogical activity is closely connected with his scholarly pursuits. At Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, he teaches a wide range of courses—from practical Korean language classes to specialized courses in classical Korean literature and Korean cinema—allowing him to build among students a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Korean culture and society.

In this context, the candidate's contributions are manifested in the development of a new research framework for the analysis of Korean anti-colonial literature in the context of national identity, in the codification of a lexical corpus adapted to the Bulgarian academic environment, as well as in the development of modern teaching strategies incorporating multimedia and technological resources. In addition, Dr. Kang has made a significant contribution to the establishment of Korean studies as a promising academic field at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv and in the Plovdiv region through active teaching and organizational activities.

The overall professional profile of Dr. Kang outlines him as a mature researcher and an erudite lecturer whose work makes a substantial contribution to the development of philological education in Bulgaria.

3. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

Alongside the positive aspects of the application, several significant procedural and formal inaccuracies should also be noted.

In the submitted set of documents, some mandatory materials are either missing or not clearly distinguished (e.g., a declaration of originality, a certificate of employment record, and documents concerning teaching workload). These documents may possibly be included in the departmental file but are not present in the set that was provided for review.

In the list of publications, the works used in previous procedures (for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and for the position of Chief Assistant Professor) are not clearly distinguished, and some of them have been improperly included again in the scientometric report.

Some publications indicated as "in press" should not automatically be taken into account in the calculation of points until their actual publication.

The report on compliance with the minimum national requirements requires correction, since the actual total of recognized indicators is lower than initially declared, although the candidate still meets the minimum statutory requirements for the position of Associate Professor.

These remarks do not call into question the candidate's scholarly potential; however, they are important from the perspective of the strict application of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the relevant subordinate regulatory framework.

Conclusion

Despite the procedural and formal shortcomings noted above, the scholarly and teaching activities of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwang Jong James Kang demonstrate a consistent professional profile, thematic coherence, and a genuine contribution to the development of Korean studies within the Bulgarian academic environment.

Provided that the necessary corrections to the scientometric report are taken into account and that only the normatively admissible set of publications and citations is accepted, the candidate meets the minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position of Associate Professor.

On this basis, I give a positive evaluation of the application and propose that the esteemed Scientific Jury support the appointment of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Hwang Jong James Kang to the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 2.1. Philology (Contemporary Korean Language – Cultural Studies).

Date: 06.03.2026

Member of the Scientific jury:

/Assoc. Prof. Dr. Harun Bekir, PhD/