

OPINION

by Prof. Stiliyan Lalev Stoyanov, Ph.D. , South-West University "Neofit Rilski"

on the materials submitted for participation in a competition

for the academic position of " **associate professor** "

announced by the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" in the State Newspaper, issue.

96 from 11.11. 20 25 and on the university 's website .

Higher education field 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Modern Korean language – cultural studies).

Reason for writing : Order No. RD-22-46 of 09.01.2026 of the rector of the "Paisii Hilendarski" University

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

The only candidate for the academic position of "associate professor" under the announced competition is Senior Assist. Prof. Ph.D. Hwang Jong James Kang. He has a bachelor's degree in public administration, obtained at Kookmin University (Seoul, Republic of Korea) and a master's degree in public administration from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2015, he was awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor". The topic of the dissertation is "Relations between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Bulgaria: from recognition to perspective cooperation".

Ph.D. Kang has a rich public and translation experience, related to the development and strengthening of relations between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Bulgaria: president of the Korean Cultural Center Foundation, translator, chairman of the Association of the Korean Community in Bulgaria, member of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists, chief expert and translator at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Bulgaria. His teaching activities are related to universities in Bulgaria (SU, VTU, PU) and Korea. He is currently a chief assistant at PU "Paisiy Hilendarski". He is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards and distinctions.

2. General characteristics of the candidate's activities

James Kang presented as his habilitation thesis the monograph "The Korean Spirit of Resistance during the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the People of the Pen". He also participated in the competition with thirteen more publications: a monograph, articles and two dictionaries, the publications being from various fields of humanities knowledge: aspects of

relations between the Republic of Korea and Bulgaria, the role of artificial intelligence in university education and in the media sphere, the impact of the industrial revolution on education in the Republic of Korea and North Korea, Protestantism in Bulgaria, the Korean Protestant Church in Bulgaria, etc. As can be seen, the scientific interests of Dr. James Kang are located in a wide spectrum, affecting not only humanities knowledge, but also religion, interstate relations, the industrial revolution and its impact on the educational system and media discourse. It is logical to expect that with such a wide range of interests, deficiencies in the depth and argumentation of scientific research will be found, but overall the scientific output offered by Dr. James Kang meets the required scientific standards.

James Kang's habilitation thesis "The Korean Spirit of Resistance During the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the People of the Pen" was published in 2025 by the Korean Cultural Center Bulgaria Foundation. It represents a voluminous study that, in terms of content, far exceeds the claim set out in the title to look at the Korean spirit of resistance through the eyes of writers and poets who lived and created during the period of Japanese occupation. James Kang places the spirit of resistance in a broad cultural-historical context, which is absolutely necessary for the Bulgarian reader, since the history of Korea is poorly known in Bulgaria. On the other hand, the phenomenon of a revolutionary poet (writer) is also deeply inherent in Bulgarian culture, and in this sense, it is not difficult for the Bulgarian reader of James Kang's monograph to compare and make sense of the regional specificities of the phenomenon. Already in the introduction, the claim is made not to dig into the past in a revanchist way, but to understand the relations between Korea and Japan as a basis for future reconciliation and cooperation (p. 16).

The first chapter of the monograph examines the relations between Japan and Korea in the interval 16th – 20th centuries. It is very aptly called “Japan and Korea – immediate, but most distant neighbors”. The title, by the way, reminds one of a brilliant definition by Alexander Balabanov about the Balkan countries: centuries-old sympathizers and temporary enemies. James Kang talks about the relations between Japan and Korea, logically placing emphasis on the period from 1910 to 1945. The tables in which he systematizes his observations turn out to be very successful.

The second chapter describes the movement for freedom and independence of the Korean people. The various institutional manifestations of the movement, as well as the leading figures in it, are systematically presented.

The third chapter of the monograph directly corresponds to its title, describing the role of writers, poets and journalists in the struggles of the Korean people. It is logical that James

Kang's position corresponds to the sociological trends in literary studies: "The literature of resistance... is not satisfied with only analyzing and deconstructing existing systems, but seeks to offer alternative models of existence, thought and lifestyle." (p. 65) James Kang seeks the connection between politics and literature in the sense that literature can be an instrument for directly transmitting political messages and mobilizing actions. Despite the fact that the subject of the study are writers and poets who worked in the first half of the twentieth century, James Kang makes a useful for the Bulgarian reader a concise look at the history of Korean literature in general.

The people of the pen, who through their texts fight the Japanese occupation, are systematized into three groups: scientists and historians, journalists and publicists, writers and poets. The main names of scientists, journalists and poets are mentioned, their political activities, the themes and ideas in their texts are described. James Kang published in the original and in Bulgarian translation basic artistic texts and offers his point of view on them. An attempt is made to systematize the philosophical and ideological views of leading Korean intellectuals from the first half of the twentieth century. A rather concise (half a page) and therefore incomplete and inaccurate attempt is made to comment on the artistic means of expression of poetry as an instrument of intellectual resistance. The third chapter focuses on the work of five Korean poets, whose work, according to James Kang, is an exemplary expression of the resistance of Koreans against the Japanese occupation. The well-sounding Bulgarian translations that the author offers, as well as his adequate interpretations of the literary texts, deserve praise.

The scientific contributions in James Kang's monograph are undeniable, and not only because for the first time the Bulgarian reader is given the opportunity to become acquainted with the main names, themes, ideas, imagery, and specifics of the expression of a literature that is generally unknown in Bulgaria.

The topics of the remaining publications proposed by James Kang for the competition are diverse. Several articles comment on the impact of artificial intelligence in the university education system and in the media environment. The exceptionally good knowledge and analysis of an issue that is more than topical and which is very often commented on superficially in the paradigm from "Hosanna" to "Crucify Him" are impressive. James Kang's reflections on the impact of the fourth industrial revolution in the educational systems of the Republic of Korea and North Korea are interesting. The connection between the fourth industrial revolution and the projections of modernity in both Koreas is well-founded and motivated.

James Kang sees another driver of modernity in another time in Protestantism – as a presence in Bulgarian history and culture and as part of the complex puzzle of philosophical and religious doctrines characteristic of Korea.

Commenting on the scientific production proposed by Dr. James Kang, we cannot fail to note his purposeful efforts to make the Republic of Korea closer and more familiar to the Bulgarian reader. He talks about the Korean community in Bulgaria; about the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Bulgaria; about the development of tourism and cultural and social contacts between the two countries. The benefit of both dictionaries created by him is undeniable.

3. Critical remarks and recommendations

It has already been mentioned that the wide spectrum of interests of Ph.D. James Kang, reflected in the monograph "The Korean Spirit of Resistance during the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the People of the Pen" and in the rest of the scientific production that he offers, as well as his desire to describe as many facts, names and events from Korean culture as possible, sometimes leads to a concise and somewhat perceived as self-serving listing of names, biographies, facts and events. Some of the subchapters are 3-4 pages long; it is not clear in what way Socrates or Rousseau, Solzhenitsyn, Remarque or Simone de Beauvoir influence Korean literature and in particular the literature of the resistance. On the other hand, we need to realize that such a concise approach could be and is productive when a generally distant and unknown culture is presented to the Bulgarian readership. In this sense, the scientific production proposed by Ph.D. James Kang fits very well into the nomenclature of the announced competition: modern Korean language - cultural studies.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials submitted by Assistant Professor Dr. Hwan Jong James Kang comply with all requirements of the **Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria**, the **Regulations for its Implementation**, as well as the relevant Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The candidate in the competition has presented a substantial number of scholarly works published after those used for the defense of the PhD degree. The candidate's works contain original scientific and applied contributions that have received international recognition. His theoretical developments have practical applicability, some of which are directly oriented toward teaching

activities. The research and teaching qualifications of Assistant Professor Dr. Hwan Jong James Kang are beyond doubt.

The results achieved by Assistant Professor Dr. Hwan Jong James Kang in both teaching and research activities meet the minimum national requirements as well as the additional criteria adopted in accordance with the Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University for the implementation of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

After reviewing the materials and scholarly works submitted for the competition, and considering the analysis of their significance and the scientific, scientifically applied, and applied contributions contained therein, I find it justified to give my positive evaluation and to recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report proposing to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology the election of Assistant Professor Dr. Hwan Jong James Kang to the academic position of **Associate Professor** at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the field of: **Field of Higher Education 2. Humanities, Professional Area 2.1. Philology (Modern Korean Language – Cultural Studies)**.

Blagoevgrad,

04. 03. 2026

Prepared the opinion :

(signature)

(Prof. Stiliyan Stoyanov, Ph.D.)