**STATEMENT**

on selection of an "Associate Professor"

in the professional field of 2.1 Philology – Japanese Literature

with a candidate Chief Assist. Prof. PhD Viara Vasileva Nikolova

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The main work presented by Viara Nikolova in the competition for the position Associate Professor is a monograph entitled "From the History of Modern Japanese Literature (1868-1945)", composed of Introduction, two chapters, Conclusion and Appendices with a total volume of 256 pages. The monograph fulfills the set tasks - introduces comprehensively the main characteristics of Contemporary Japanese literature, presenting in retrospect the basis on which it stands (the periods from the beginning of the formation of Japanese literature in the 8th century to the Meiji era) and the reception of Japanese literature in Bulgaria. The appendices include terminological explanations for better understanding Japan, historical eras and chronology, important dates and historical events, index of names, bibliography in Bulgarian, Russian, Ukrainian, German, English and Japanese, as well as unique letters from the library fund of the Bulgarian “Saint George the Zograf” Monastery in Athos, related to Japan. The structure of the text is balanced, the style meets the requirements for scientific work (while allowing easy and unobstructed reading), and the topic is relevant and interesting for everyone studying Japan - students, teachers and scientists, as well as general public.

Viara Nikolova's monograph begins with a brief introduction to Japanese literature, including periodization and basic characteristics of each period. The historical overview of Japanese society in the second half of the 19th century, the time when Japan was building its modern image, sheds additional light on the retrospective view. The brief but systematic and meaningful presentation of Japan during its opening to the world is useful for East Asian students - the processes that take place in Japanese society, for example, directly affect the history and culture of Korea.

The first chapter of the monograph is focused on the formation and development of the Modern Japanese literature - from the 70s of the 19th century to the end of World War II. The initial period (70s - 90s of the 19th century) is key for the modernization of many countries worldwide and the analogies that the author makes with Bulgaria are completely relevant - both countries are influenced from outside and this reflects economy, politics, culture and literature. In the monograph are presented Japanese writers who laid the foundation of contemporary Japanese literature and dramaturgy. Their modern views, combining traditional Japanese values ​​with the inevitable influence of the West, are still read in the uniqueness of Japanese culture. The authors during the period were strongly politically engaged, social issues were the basis of many of the works, and the journalistic voice was loudly audible. As an additional contribution to Chapter One, I would point out the usefulness of the text for Korean studies specialists. The enormous influence that Japanese literature had on Korean literature at the time is an indisputable fact: Korean literature was largely modeled on Japanese literature, and the trends outlined by Viara Nikolova in Chapter One undoubtedly help to understand Korean literature. The author describes well the way in which Japan perceives Russian, English and French literature. Since many countries in East Asia accept Western literature not directly from the West, but through Japan, Japan's perception of European and Russian literature has become in fact the perception of many East Asian countries.

In Chapter One, Viara Nikolova explores in detail the modernism in Japanese literature. Among the reviewed authors are names well known and loved by the Bulgarian reader. Yasunari Kawabata is one of the most translated, loved and republished in Bulgaria Japanese authors. The Nobel Prize winner is well known in Bulgaria and the presentation of his early works is of special interest.

The Second chapter of the presented monograph focuses on cultural and literary development and the processes of interpenetration and interaction. Changes in Japanese society lead to an increase in the role of women in every sphere of social and cultural life - including literature. The flourishing of women's literature, as the author notes, dates back to the Heian period (794–1185), but the modernization during the Meiji period, which gave access to women's education, led to the formation of the modern Japanese women's literature. Viara Nikolova describes in a fascinating way the struggle of Japanese women from the end of the 19th century (I would say completely applicable to women from all over East Asia at the time, and why not from Bulgaria) for the right to self-expression. It is assumed that a woman is not capable of special intellectual achievements and should limit herself to expressing her emotions related to marriage and housekeeping. She is allowed to write, as long as she limits her work to "female" topics. Viara Nikolova rightly notes the paradox - the woman is allowed to write only about her romantic thrills before marriage and her unhappiness after it, and at the same time she is criticized for the sameness of her literary themes. With the development of feminism, women began to raise their voices more boldly through their works, but the works were still, of course, highly criticized and underappreciated.

Viara Nikolova pays great attention to the influence of Russian literature in Japan, as well as to the influence of Anton Chekhov's short stories. As early as the Meiji period, the mutual influence of the literatures of Japan and Russia began, preconditioned by the geographical proximity of the two countries. Classical Russian works have been translated into Japanese and thus become an integral part of contemporary Japanese literature. Western and Eastern culture and sensitivity merge into a common creative energy aimed at interpreting eternal existential themes.

Chekhov's dramaturgy is considered by the author of the monograph in parallel - its distribution and influence both in Japan and in Bulgaria are presented. Viara Nikolova emphasized Chekhov's unusual popularity in Japan during his lifetime (I would again add that this phenomenon also occurs in Korea). His works were translated immediately after their creation and he became more popular in Japan than in his homeland. Interest in his work in Japan continues to this day. The author notes, for example, that "Cherry Orchard" was published 11 times in 8 different translations only for a period of 6 years in the postwar period. The parallel made with the perception of Chekhov in Bulgaria is interesting, as well as the issues raised from the translation of the works. The "lost in translation" situations are eternal topics for every philologist, writer and orientalist.

The monograph concludes with a review of the perception of contemporary Japanese literature in Bulgaria. This part of the monograph is a kind of tribute to Bulgarian Japanese studies over the years.

The Japanese book is a global phenomenon. Beautiful, deep, veiled, different. The monograph "From the History of Modern Japanese Literature" presents the basis on which Japanese literature grew; the trends it follows; the influences it suffers; the influence it exerts. The work with which Viara Nikolova applied in the competition for Associate Professor has the necessary scientific qualities and is undoubtedly of interest to both professionals and the general public. I strongly recommend the work "From the History of Modern Japanese Literature" to be highly evaluated and I wish Viara Nikolova future academic and creative success.

Date: 08.09.2020 Prepared by: Assoc. Prof. PhD Irina Sotirova