

STANDPOINT

by Prof. Milena Bratoeva, PhD,
Classical East Department, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”,
member of the scientific jury for participation in the competition
for the academic position “Professor” in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Japanese
Literature and Culture), announced in State Gazette, issue 21 of 13.03.2020

For participation in the announced competition to occupy the academic position “Professor” in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Japanese literature and culture) documents has submitted Assoc. Prof. Gergana Rumenova Petkova (PhD), who is the only candidate. There are no violations in the admission procedure. The candidate meets fully the requirements for the academic position “Professor” according to the Academic Staff Development in the Republic of Bulgaria Act as well as according to the Rules on the Terms and Conditions for the acquisition of scientific degrees and the occupation of academic positions at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. The candidate meets also the minimum national requirements according to the Academic Staff Development in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (Art. 26) respectively the Regulation for its implementation – Assoc. Prof. Gergana Petkova is registered in the List of Habilitated in the Register of Academic staff of NACID and the collected points of her according to the attached reference are 752.5.

1. General information about candidate’s academic activity

Assoc. Prof. Gergana Rumenova Petkova (PhD) is a lecturer at the Department of Japanese Studies at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology of Sofia University, and since 2018 she has been the head of the department.

Assoc. Prof. Petkova graduated with a master's degree in Japanese Studies from Sofia University in 1999. In 2004 she defended her doctoral thesis at the University of Zurich (Switzerland) on the topic: *Male Characters in the Japanese Fairy Tale: Classification and Analysis*. Since 2003 she has been working as a part-time lecturer at the Department of Languages and Cultures of East Asia (Japanese Studies), and since 2007 – as a full-time lecturer, initially as an assistant professor, and since 2012 as an associate professor of Japanese literature and culture.

During her 13-years academic work at Sofia University, Assoc. Prof. Petkova has prepared a total of 12 courses of lectures – 8 for the BA-Programme and 4 for the MA-

Programme. She is also the head of the Master's program in Japanese Language and Culture. Petkova is the research supervisor of two PhD-students who defended successfully their PhD-theses (Diana Nikodinovska in 2015 and respectively assistant - professor Evelina Hein in 2018), and currently of the full-time PhD- student Maria Simeonova, enrolled in 2020.

Assoc. Prof. Gergana Petkova is an active member of the academic staff of the Department and Faculty with numerous and diverse performances as an university teacher, scholar and organizer of academic events and research work. She is a member of reputable international scientific organizations such as the European Association of Japanese Studies, Japan Anthropology Workshop – JAWS, International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences), International Society of Ethnology and Folklore. Since 2019 she has been a member of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of classical and modern Philology. Assoc. Prof. Petkova is a head of and participant in many prestigious national and international research projects. She introduces her research work at conferences and other academic forums both at home and abroad. Petkova gave talks at universities and other institutions in Japan (Seijo University, 2002, 2011; Kokugakuin University, 2007, 2011), Russia (Moscow City Pedagogical University) and Hungary (Japanese Foundation, Budapest, 2011, 2019). In 2014 she was a guest-researcher at the International Research Centre for Japanese Studies NICHIBUNKEN.

With her academic activity and scientific achievements, Assoc. Prof. Petkova contributes both to the establishment of the authority of the Bulgarian Japanese school and to the promotion of Japanese culture in Bulgaria, for which in 2019 she was awarded the Japanese Ambassador Award for Contribution to Teaching and Research of Japanese language and culture.

2. Assessment of the scientific and scientific-applied contributions of candidate's research works submitted for the competition

To participate in the competition Assoc. Prof. Gergana Petkova has submitted a total of 27 publications, of which: one monograph, two chapters of monographs, one handbook (co-authoring), four studies and nineteen articles (four co-authoring). Sixteen of them are in foreign languages – English, Japanese and Russian.

The main importance among the publications submitted for participation in the competition has the monograph entitled *Conscious education: on the example of Bulgarian japanology school* (Zvezdi Publishing House, Sofia, 2020).

Based on actual examples from the establishment of Bulgarian Japanology, from its history and present, from the pedagogical approaches, followed in the teaching at the department, as well as based on her own experience as an university teacher on Japanese literature and culture, the author of the monograph introduces and proves her concept for an effective and adequate to the challenges of the 21st century, educational strategy defined by her as "conscious education". As stated in the study, it "combines theories of different origin"(p.13), I would add Eastern (Ishikawa, Imai) and Western (Maslow, Vygotsky, Makarenko, Dewey, etc.), traditional (Buddhist, Zen-Buddhist) and modern viewpoints (interdisciplinary, interactive) concerning the nature of the educational process, its priorities and mechanisms. In this sense, I will highlight as a significant quality of the research work the achieved fine balance and synchronicity between them, so that they are embedded in a consistently interdisciplinary pedagogical methodology with high scientific and scientifically applied potential. Thus, beside between the different theoretical approaches, a productive balance has been achieved between theory and practice – theoretical propositions and generalizations are derived from the direct teaching practice at the department, and of course from the own pedagogical practice of Assoc. Prof. Petkova and applied back in the teaching practice, as it is evident from the second part of the monograph (*Conscious Education Afoot*) and from the Appendices. The proposed innovative educational method, whose target are predominately students at the Department of Japanology of Sofia University, focuses on the idea of awareness, respectively self-awareness of the individual as an immanent part of his/her own environment. To some extent, as the author by herself has noted (p. 10), these ideas are influenced by the Buddhist understanding of *smṛiti* (Sanskrit, literally "memory", "recollecting") or *sati* (Pali). I would highlight this reference to the in-depth psychological teachings of Buddhism as particularly valuable because it addresses the key role played in the proposed methodology by the reflection and self-reflection of both sides – the educator and the learner. In addition, it sets a completely different horizon to the discourse on the nature and meaning of the learning process, which I not only admire but also fully share. Moreover, the author attaches great importance to

Buddhist philosophy and in particular to Zen Buddhist teaching and aesthetics as a starting point for her method of "conscious education". In the chapter entitled *The Blossoming of the Flowers and the Conscious Education: The Guidance of Eastern Philosophy*, Petkova convincingly proves her original idea to apply in the proposed educational strategy the theory of the iconic Japanese playwright, philosopher, actor and art critic Zeami Motokiyo, concerning the progressing of the actor in the theatre Nō, which he compares to the blooming of a flower (the idea of *hana*), elaborated in his treatise *Fūshikaden (The Transmission of the Flower Through [a Mastery of] the Forms)*. This part of the research is not only original, but also reveals the author's ability to critically rethink and creatively read traditional concepts and approaches. To the same conclusion leads me also the previous chapter entitled *HERE and NOW – constant improvement in every respect or the Japanese model of quality management*, in which Petkova briefly introduces Kaoru Ishikawa's theory of total quality management, which she "borrows" from the field of economics and management sciences. This part of the study reveals not only erudition, reflective and analytical thinking obligatory for an university lecturer and scholar, but also "affinity" to experiment, which is no less valuable quality for any researcher. As Petkova points out, "the applicability of Ishikawa's theory in the educational processes has not yet been fully explored, but here we will demonstrate some of its principles in view of the challenges to the foreign language teaching in the 21st century and to Japanese studies in particular to seek adequate working solutions to deal with the problems" (p. 29). I am definitely of the opinion that the "solutions" found and introduced in the current monograph, synthesized in SEGA (including seminars, experiments, group discussions and quests), are not only working, but also attractive and inspiring for the students at the Department of Japanese Studies, as I can assume from the presented concrete examples from the classroom.

In general, the proposed monographic study demonstrates in an attractive and convincing way the applicability of the methodology of "conscious education" in the foreign language teaching and in the educational process at all. Systematically are presented and argued some of the most valuable characteristics and effectiveness of this innovative pedagogical approach which simultaneously requires and provides flexibility, adaptability and conscious personal responsibility, both on the part of teachers and students.

The methodology of "conscious education" is introduced in one of the studies which Petkova has submitted to participate in this competition, namely *Conscious education: the challenges and perspectives of teaching eastern languages and cultures*, published in the authoritative, peer-reviewed scientific journal *Language World (Orbis Linguarum)*.

The topic about the exploration of new educational strategies and policies in teaching foreign languages and specifically Japanese language, and through the language the Japanese culture, is in the focus of Petkova's lasting interest. It has been discussed in-depth and skilfully in Petkova's several other papers and articles (some of them co-authored), published in renowned Bulgarian and foreign scientific journals. To them I will add the handbook, written in co-authorship with Ivanka Petrova (*Bulgaria for Japan: Japanese language and culture teaching handbook*), "the first methodical manual in Bulgarian language for teaching Japanese, created according to the specifics of the initiative and targeting the youngest age group in foreign language teaching".

Given the specifics of the genre of the standpoint, I could not dwell in detail and separately on all of Petkova's publications submitted for participation in this competition. However, I would like to emphasize that they present her as an erudite and subtle connoisseur of the Japanese folklore tradition, literature, folk psychology and culture in general. I would especially like to single out a few of them – *From Samurai to Otomen: 150 Years of Masculinity Reform*, *Masculinity on Stage: Male Characters in Contemporary Japanese and Chinese TV Dramas*, *The Softening Masculinity: in Desperate Search of the Perfect Man. On the Example of Japanese and Korean TV Drama Serials My Perfect Darling and My Love from the Stars*, which can be ranked among the pioneering studies of gender in the Bulgarian Oriental Studies.

The citations of Petkova's works are of sufficient number (23), and not a small part of them are in foreign language books or journals, which speaks of the authority of the respective publications of the author.

Conclusion

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gergana Rumenova Petkova is an academic lecturer with established profile and significant contributions in the field of Bulgarian Japanology. The stated qualities of her research activity, the scientific and applied contributions, her administrative and pedagogical experience and the personal impressions that I have, all give me reason to give a positive assessment and propose to the Scientific jury and to the Scientific Council of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology the election of Assoc. Prof. Gergana Rumenova Petkova, PhD for the academic position “Professor” in the Department of Japanese Studies of Sofia University.

10. 09. 2020

Prof. Milena Bratoeva, PhD