

STATEMENT

Subject: Competition for the occupation of the academic position Associate Professor, professional field 2.1. Philology (Japanese Literature), published in the State Gazette, issue 21/13.03.2020.

By: Prof. Reneta Bozhankova, PhD, Sofia University; grounds for participation in the competition jury: according to the Order of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", RD 38-151/23.03.2020

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Vyara Nikolova from the Department of Japanese Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", is the only candidate in the competition for which this statement is presented.

1. Professional qualifications of the candidate

Vyara Nikolova has a bachelor's degree in Japanese Studies (Sofia University, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, 1998 – 2003), a master's degree in Russian Philology, major, and in Ukrainian Language and Literature, minor (SU, Faculty of Slavic Studies, 1994 – 1999). She also has a master's degree in Business Administration from Sofia University (2002-2004).

In 2014 the candidate defended her dissertation on "Russian drama in the Bulgarian book publishing 1890s - 1940s" at the Moscow State University of Printing "Ivan Fyodorov", Moscow, Russian Federation.

Vyara Nikolova has been a Chief Assistant Professor of Japanese Literature at the Department of Japanese Studies, Sofia University, since 2016. Since 2012 she has also been a part-time Assistant Professor of Japanese Language at the same department. In the academic career of the candidate should be mentioned her work as a senior lecturer in Russian at the University of Library Studies and Information Technology (2013–2016). Since 2018 she has been a part-time lecturer in Russian at the New Bulgarian University.

The documents of the candidate present an impressive list of scientific specializations and scholarships abroad - over twenty - among which those in Japan, dedicated to the teaching and learning of Japanese language and culture, stand out.

The review shows that she is a specialist with a broad profile in the field of philology and cultural studies, lecturer, researcher, and translator.

2. Scientific publications and contributions

The monograph "Reception of Russian Drama in Bulgarian Book Publishing. Part I – 1890s - 1940s" (Moscow, 2020), included in the list of publications, is based on the dissertation defended in 2014. Its prominent features include the review of the presence of translated Russian drama in Bulgarian culture, together with the direct and indirect influences of these translated texts on the development of Bulgarian theatre. The author demonstrates a deep understanding of the laws and specifics of distribution and perception of dramatic texts. Attention is paid to publishing practices, genre choices, analysis of the creation of theatrical repertoires in post-liberation Bulgaria, as well as the work of Bulgarian translators, writers, publishers of several generations, plus the role of Russian immigrants in our cultural life of the time. The experience in literary research, which was gained by V. Nikolova through her dissertation, as well as the preparation of a monograph on it, are undoubtedly important for her overall formation as a scholar. The problems of the translation reception are the subject of long-term interest, as the attempt to trace them in the zone of contact between the Bulgarian and Russian literature is transferred to the presence of Japanese issues and texts in the Bulgarian literature.

Some of Dr. Nikolova's publications are in the field of foreign language teaching and reflect her previous teaching experience in the field of Russian Studies. In recent years, the research and applied science material accumulated during the work in the field of academic Japanese Studies has been added to it. It is noteworthy that the perspectives selected in the articles in many cases are related to cultural development and contacts, and their presentation and application in university teaching.

The comprehensive overview of the publications outlines several main thematic areas:

- foreign language training;
- Japanese language and literature;
- study and preservation of cultural heritage;
- literary translation reception;
- Russian Studies, literary research;
- methodology of teaching the Russian language.

Among the publications mentioned by the candidate for participation in the competition, one monograph, one chapter of a book and eight articles are most directly related to Japanese

Studies and its teaching in an academic environment. The total number of publications submitted for participation in the contest is 28.

The monograph „History of the New Japanese Literature (1868–1945)“ (ISBN: 978-619-185-416-5, „On Letters - O Pismenech“, Sofia, 2020) represents the main work of the candidate in this competition. The book presents a scientific overview of the phenomena in Japanese culture from the Meiji period, rich in names as well as literary and historical data. The author creates a solid picture of Japanese literary and cultural life, the evolution of ideas, the main figures of writers and poets who influenced social development. It is also a useful guide for students studying Japanese language and literature, a fascinating read for those interested in Far Eastern cultural issues and global relations in the last two centuries. The wealth of facts sourced from Japanese literature and its connections with the rest of the world during the Meiji period give rise to reflections and conclusions about the synchronicity and correlation of processes during the years of European and global literary modernism, accompanying and opposing trends, groups, schools. In addition to the history of the Japanese literature, Nikolova focuses on the peculiarities of the reception of foreign literature in Japan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which allows for the juxtaposition of similar phenomena in Bulgarian literature from the period. Special attention is paid to the influence of the classics of Russian literature Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov in Japan, and the peculiarities of the reception of their works translated in Japanese. The monograph includes a rich multilingual bibliography and a detailed reference apparatus of terms, names, and periodization. Among the six appendices I would especially like to highlight the publication and the short commentary of letters from the library of the Bulgarian Saint George the Zograf Monastery on Mount Athos, associated with a missionary stay in Japan by monks from the monastery in the late 19th century. These archival materials are the first step towards a subsequent in-depth study.

It is worth noting the research range of the candidate – from the linguistic and historical Slavic literature, which is close to us, such as Russian, to the much lesser known and, I dare say, exotically attractive Japanese literature. The topic of their presence in the Bulgarian cultural space is a particularly interesting occasion for parallels and significant scientific observations and conclusions. In fact, three literatures and their traditions are constantly in the field of view of Dr. Nikolova – the Bulgarian, Russian and Japanese. Well-equipped with knowledge of their processes from the last more than two centuries, the candidate enters this contest, aiming to continue her academic career at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology of Sofia University.

In addition to articles on literary and linguistic topics, Vyara Nikolova – independently or in co-authorship – publishes other articles on the university life of students studying Japanese language and culture; project-based learning; the factors exerting influence on motivating young researchers toward future professional engagement and realization.

3. Teaching and Project Work

The candidate presents a valuable combination of knowledge and qualifications in the study and teaching of Japanese literature. This presupposes effective work with students majoring in Japanese Studies at Sofia University, as well as testing of the results of scientific and applied research in the classroom and during project activities. The lecture courses in Japanese literature for the Bachelor's degree in Japanese Studies have been developed independently, and those in the Master's program in Japanese Language and Culture - in co-authorship.

Vyara Nikolova provides a list of participation in or management of research projects aimed at involving students in extracurricular activities for their professional training in the field of intercultural communication, as well as contacts with students and professors from other Bulgarian and foreign universities with similar specialties. The publications and conference reports presented for the competition (17 in total) also reflect the results of this project activity. An interesting perspective is the connection of the education in the Humanities of the students with philological profile with the issues of the preservation of the cultural and historical heritage and the preparation of the students for its study and presentation.

4. Conclusion

The candidate in this competition, Dr. Vyara Nikolova, exhibits a wide-ranging scientific output in Humanities, has a long and diverse teaching experience, and actively facilitates students' scientific and practical training. After reviewing the publications submitted for the competition and other data on the professional development and realization of Dr. Vyara Nikolova, I give my positive assessment of her candidacy in the competition for selection of "Associate Professor" in the professional field of 2.1. Philology (Japanese Literature).

Prof. Reneta Bozhankova