EXAMINER’S ASSESSMENT

Written by: Assoc. Prof. Polina Valentinova Tsoncheva, PhD

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Regarding the PhD-thesis of Aneta Rumenova Dimitrova,

PhD-candidate in Korean Studies Department, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology – Sofia University *St. Kliment Ohridski*

2.1. Philology, Scientific specialty: Languages of the people of Asia, Africa and America (Korean language and society)

Thesis topic: FAMILY RELATIONS AND THE “EDUCATION” FACTOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA – BETWEEN CONFUCIUAN TRADITIONS AND MODERNITY

Dissertation supervisor: Prof. Svetla Karteva – Dancheva, PhD

The present Examiner’s assessment is written on grounds of the decision of the Board of Examiners (Protocol No. 1/March 24, 2023), set by Order No. RD 38-125 / March 14, 2023 signed by the Rector of Sofia University *St. Kliment Ohridski* and approved by the Faculty Board meeting of FCMP on 7 March 2023.

1. **Information about the PhD-thesis and the PhD-candidate**

Aneta Rumenova Petkova is enrolled in full-time PhD program in Korean Studies Department in the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology of Sofia University *St. Kliment Ohridski* (Order No. RD 20-74 / January 17, 2020) and has completed her PhD-studies with the right of thesis-defence on 1 February, 2023.

The documentation provided is comprehensive and reflects the successful completion of the all the examinations by the PhD-candidate under the curriculum, declaration of originality of the study, as well as a report of verification of authenticity.

The attached autobiographical reference presents the doctoral student as an active and responsible young person with deep and lasting interests in the field of linguistics. Aneta Dimitrova studied English, German, Russian, Korean, Japanese and uses Swedish as well. The job positions held by the PhD student are focused on processing, summarising and analysing databases, which has contributed to her growth as a researcher with analytical thinking. Meanwhile, since 2014 Aneta Dimitrova has been working as a part-time lecturer at Sofia University, where she holds lectures and exercises in Korean language, history and culture, modern Korean society, gender relations and family transformations in the Republic of Korea.

The doctoral student has presented seven publications on the topic of the dissertation, three of which are still under print.

**2. Presentation of the dissertation and the autography**

The dissertation proposed for public defence contains an introduction, 3 chapters, a conclusion and 3 appendices in a total volume of 184 pages. The 164 titles in the bibliography are in Bulgarian, English and Korean respectively. The doctoral student also used data from 54 media sources in English and Korean.

The *Introduction* identifies the objectives set in the study — to trace and analyse “Confucian values as a conceptual framework for understanding Korean family processes, structures, relationships and roles, both in family and social contexts, and to prove the nature of the relationship between the educational needs of the family and the choices of its members related to the whole family and to the very person” (p.7). The realisation of the objectives is linked to the execution of carefully thought out and well-systematised tasks. The object and subject of the study are also duly delineated.

Within the *Introduction*, the PhD candidate makes a scientific assumption, which she structured in two parts. The first part is aimed at subjecting scientific proof of the influence of Confucianism on the modern Korean family, which stems from certain “social problems in the state and exacerbated inequality and misunderstanding between the sexes” (dissertation work, p. 8). The second part of the hypothesis relates to the proof of education as leading in the formation of family relationships, the definition of roles, the form and composition of the family.

The first chapter of the dissertation, *Essence and Characteristics of the Korean Family* is an overview of the “characteristics and peculiarities of the Korean family”. The PhD-candidate offers a comparison between the traditional and the modern and presents the evolution of family roles. In a separate item all the important aspects of the relations in the modern Korean family are outlined and separately discussed, as well as the new family forms, dictated by the changed social needs and attitudes.

The second chapter, entitled *Education and its influence on family relations from the Joseon period to this day*, presents the role of education in Korean society and the growing trend of compulsory complementary paid education resulting from traditional Confucian views, which has grown to an unimaginable scale. Based on the statistical data and social surveys collected and processed in this chapter, Aneta Dimitrova concludes that “shadow education in Korea represents a fusion of culture and functionality” (p. 71). According to traditional Confucian views, which are still strongly embedded in Korean culture, “education is the highest goal and the surest way of elevation in society” (p. 71). Despite the controversial effectiveness of additional lessons for better performance of learners in university admission exams, parents continue to invest in them, probably, as the PhD candidate states, perceiving them “as a symbol of prestige and reassurance that everything is being done for the better opportunities of the child” (p. 71).

“The relationship between the sexes and the social consequences of the confrontation of Confucianism with modern reality” are the “multiple social problems faced by the Republic of Korea and its population as a result of the incompatible burden of traditional with the reality of modern times” (dissertation, p.12). In conclusion, Aneta Dimitrova summarises that Confucian norms are still deeply intertwined in Korean society, family and human relationships (p. 142). This leads to a clash and discrepancy between the traditional with the specifics of the modern world, as well as the emergence of a number of social phenomena “such as solo culture..., gender inequality, a culture of excessive education, refusal of marriage, childbirth and even family, as well as subsequently a poor old population and labour shortages” (p. 142). Alarming is the trend that dissertation outlines - “fear of commitment”, emergence of sharp feminist and anti-feminist movements at all levels in modern Korean society.

On the other hand, in the so-called “meaningless generation” or *muminse*, “the preferences of young people for a peaceful life, freedom and individualism” (p.124). Young people draw back from traditional Confucian values that strengthen competition and speed up everyday life, putting educational success at the centre of the human life.

In the *Conclusion* all the important generalizations of the author of the PhD thesis are drawn and systematized. Interesting is the observation offered by the PhD-candidate regarding the ability of Confucian traditions to transform, extending the father-son relationship to that between mother and daughter, and the fact that “family relations are not between spouses, but between parents and children” (p. 146), while retaining their key role for the modern family. This is also evident from the still strong influence of the spouse’s parents on the choice of a spouse and on the relationship in the newly created family.

The appendices included in the dissertation appropriately supplement the text of the study. The first is a Dictionary of terms, expressions and neologisms referring to family relationships and new social phenomena in Korea. Appendices 2 covers proverbs, sayings and expressions related to the family, and Appendices 3 includes graphs and tables with basic statistics, on the grounds of which part of the analyses of the modern state of the Korean family are made.

The PhD thesis review consists of 31 pages, and it is structured according to the requirements for such kind of scientific publication and correctly reflects the content of the thesis, the conclusions and the contributions to the study.

**3. Relevance of the problem presented in the dissertation**

The topicality according to the PhD candidate evolves by the fact that the family, being the oldest and most sustainable social unit, with its specifics, in terms of Korean culture and its past and present, continues to be the focus of a number of researchers worldwide — from “development (Im 1966), transnational forms (Finch and Kim 2012; Cha and Kim 2013), values (Jan and Rosenblatt 2008) and roles (Kim 2001; Pyeong 2002)” (dissertation work, p. 11). As Aneta Dimitrova states, the available comprehensive monograph studies do not address the changes that have occurred in Korean society over the past 10-20 years (p. 11). The dissertation builds upon the existing research works in world science by tracing and analysing the interrelationship between family, Confucianism and education, examining the contemporary phenomena and social problems evolving by this interaction.

The significance of the thesis presented is indisputable and consists of filling a white field in scientific knowledge not only in Bulgaria but also globally. Given the role of Confucianism in Chinese and Japanese society, the study sets the basis for further future studies of the educational needs, processes and phenomena in the modern times of these East Asian cultures.

**4. Main conclusions and scientific contributions of the dissertation**

The main contributions of the dissertation (6 in number) are correctly and accurately presented by the PhD candidate on page 28 of the author’s work and on page 150 of the dissertation.

“1. The dissertation study is the first study in Bulgaria on family relations in the Republic of Korea.

2. It traces the traditional Confucian values that are leading in family relationships in Korea to this day.

3. It binds Confucianism and education to the traditional and modern family and clarifies their interrelationship and influence.

4. Analyses the impact of education on human choices such as those of a partner and number of children, as well as its place in reorganising family relationships with a focus on the child and his educational needs.

5. It traces the roots of systemic gender inequality, as well as the indirect influence of Confucianism on other social issues such as reluctance to marry and low birth rates.

6. It introduces new social phenomena such as solo culture, the Sampo generation, Gold Miss, etc. and traces them to the burden of traditional expectations and the financial demands of education.

It is commendable that Aneta Dimitrova does not perceive the completion of this work as a finale of the research on the topic. On the contrary, she provides guidance for possible complementary future studies.

**5. Opinions, recommendations and notes**

The thesis proposed for public defence is well structured. The goals and tasks set at the beginning of the study, as well as the appropriately selected research methods, ensure logically sound exposure of thought. The research is sufficiently analytical, which proves the dissertation’s capabilities for conducting independent original scientific research with selection, systematisation and processing of a solid volume of material.

The notes I may make are related to some technical, grammatical and punctuational inaccuracies that we find in the text, which do not affect the thorough value of the study.

**6. Conclusion and proposal**

In view of all the above, I believe that the present dissertation is an original study of an actual and significant worldwide problem with an undisputed contribution to Bulgarian and world science. All the requirements for such kind of scientific researches have been met, which provides me all the reasons to give my positive assessment and confidently recommend to the members of the respected Examiners’ Assessment Board to vote “FOR” the award of the educational and scientific degree “doctor” to Aneta Rumenova Dimitrova.

May 15, 2023

Veliko Tarnovo Assoc. Prof. POLINA TSONCHEVA