



REVIEW¹

of the submitted works for participation in a competition for the academic position of PROFESSOR in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Intercultural Communication), announced by Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in SJ, issue 55, June 28, 2024.

Reviewer: Prof. Svetlozar Kirilov, PhD

Candidate: Assoc. Prof. Diyana Petkova, PhD

¹ *Note: Recommended review volume - about 6-7 standard pages*



I. Summary of applicant (research, teaching and academic activity)

Diana Petkova teaches academic courses at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of the Sofia University, which offer valuable knowledge and insights to students.

She serves as Head of the Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication.

She has taken part in more than twenty national and international academic conferences. Many of Diana Petkova's publications are in English language, which contributes to their inclusion into academic debates and exchanges of ideas. She often collaborates with foreign scholars in conducting research projects and thus contributes to the linking of science in Bulgaria with international scientific community.

II. Characteristics of the scientific and scientific-applied production of the candidate

Diana Petkova participates in the bid for promotion to Professor with 22 academic publications. Religiosity and intercultural communication have been the major topics of her academic endeavors as visible in her book and many of other publications.

The monography *Religiosity, Identity and Postmodernity*, published by the Sofia University Press in 2024, is the main publication in her bid. The monography is a serious and deep study of complex relations between culture, religion, and identity. The candidate has analyzed four very different societies and cultures: Bulgaria, Ecuador, India and Japan. The study offers very interesting and valuable conclusions about identities of the countries, the influence of religion, dilemmas of national vs. supranational/ civilizational identity, national pride, etc.

Diana Petkova demonstrates very impressive knowledge on leading theories and achievements in the study of culture, religion, and identity. She refers to a plethora of established international scholars in the fields of intercultural communication, sociology, and psychology.

Other publications of the candidate are focused on rumors, conspiracy theories, artificial intelligence in communication, images, etc.

III. Major contributions in science, applied science and teaching minute activity of the applicant

The study of religiosity and its influence in contemporary societies has been the major contribution of the candidate. The assessment of the impact of religion on cultural models of society is one of the academic objectives of the applicant as well as differences in this respect between modernity and postmodernity. Diana Petkova has contributed with research evidence supporting one of the leading theses in the study of religiosity: many of the individuals in modern societies maintain religious ideas mainly because of respect to traditions and because the cultural model of society is related to religion. However, they do not study religious teachings or follow the church; thus, the influence of religious institutions is in decline. According to comparative representative surveys, such as World Values Survey, many



respondents declare that God and religion are important for them but at the same time they admit that they do not attend church services and do not take part in religious rituals.

Diana Petkova has conducted empirical research with questionnaire in Bulgaria, Ecuador, India, and Japan. They have provided valuable data, although the samples are not representative. The surveys have been carried out in distant societies, which are difficult to be reached but nevertheless the candidate has managed to conduct interviews with large number of respondents. Diana Petkova also provides secondary analysis of comparative representative surveys, such as the World Values Survey and the European Values Survey,

A significant segment of researched Bulgarians claim that they are religious and that faith is a expected feature of religious man but at the same time they maintain ideas related to superstitions foreign to the teachings of Christianity, such as belief in black magic or astrology. Diana Petkova concludes that: “the locus of control in Bulgarian culture has been varied from mixed to external” (*Religiosity, Identity and Postmodernity*, p. 161)

The study of the culture of Ecuador has demonstrated the complex relationship between national and supranational Latin American identity as well as the contradictory trends of orientation toward Iberian-American culture, related to Catholicism and Spanish language, and the culture of local Indian tribes. The candidate shows deep understanding of all relevant theories by established scholars and indicates which scientific hypotheses has been confirmed by her empirical research on culture of Ecuador, India, or Japan.

According to the survey, conducted by Diana Petkova, people of Ecuador are proud mostly with the natural beauty of their country, show high level of consumer ethnocentrism (65%) and religiosity (92% believe in God). However, the people of Ecuador, do not seem to believe in superstitions, in stark contrast to Bulgarians. The common trend typical to both Bulgarians and Ecuadorians is that religiosity has been interpreted as mainly related to values and cultural traditions; at the same time people in both societies rarely take part in religious rituals, attend church services, read the Bible or adhere to the teachings of the Church.

The candidate takes into account that the Indian culture is quite different from the Christian culture; she explores to what extent ancient beliefs of Hinduism, such as reincarnation or Vedic astrology influence the thinking of the contemporary Indians. Less than half of Indians reply that they believe in reincarnation; however, many more of respondents agree that good deeds in current life, such as donations and charities, contribute to better destiny in the next life, which is congruent with the belief in reincarnation.

Diana Petkova has also studied syncretism in religion, the fusion of different religious ideas and models. She argues that the belief in reincarnation, typical for Hinduism and Buddhism, has been shared by respondents from Christian countries despite the fact that this belief is not part of Christian faith. The author seeks the analogies between the Christian idea of resurrection as defeat over death and reincarnation in Hinduism and Buddhism. She agrees with those scholars, who hold that world religions might seem different but nevertheless they maintain universal narratives and archetypes: life after death, the Last Judgement, redemption and punishment, resurrection and reincarnation. As Diana Petkova writes: “All these concepts are archaic, archetypal and universal and they have built the core of religious teachings. These are universal mythological mental structures and psychological attitudes that are shared by



human beings irrespective of their race, ethnicity, nationality or culture” (*Religiosity, Identity and Postmodernity*, p. 262)

Syncretism of religions has been explored by Diana Petkova in her study of the Japanese culture. She has discussed the well-known phenomenon that a lot of Japanese adhere to both Buddhism and Shintoism: they take part in rituals of both religions and do not see such behavior as contradictory, which is difficult to be understood by the Europeans or Americans. Interviews in Japan, conducted by Diana Petkova cast light on Japanese culture with her high context and avoidance of direct communication.

A contribution by Diana Petkova has been the proposal of four models of religiosity in contemporary society: traditional model (people adhere to traditional values, eg. Ecuador); the model of rejection and disagreement with religious ideas; the model of resistance (in an environment with competition between different religions and ideologies); and the model of open culture (religion is perceived as a system of cultural and ethical values and does not lead to attendance of religious temples, participation in religious rituals or adherence to principles of the church or other religious institutions).

The research of intercultural communication has also been among contributions of Diana Petkova, especially her study of cultures of Ecuador, India, and Japan and comparison between them.

The comparison between different cultures, such as Bulgarian, Ecuadorian, Indian, and Japanese has led to important conclusions; the comparative perspective allows to be identified what is particular for a culture and also to be sought common cultural features. The candidate has also explored whether some theories of culture could be applied to particular cultures (eg. Indian, Japanese, etc.) She empirically tests whether to particular cultures could be applied characteristics such as external or internal locus of control, high or low context, collectivism vs. individualism, consumer ethnocentrism and others.

The study by candidate of silence as a feature of some cultures, such as Japanese and Finnish, is also scholarly significant. The avoidance of “small talk” and preference to listening and silence have been researched and used to explain different aspects of culture, such as collectivism, high context or power distance. Japan and Finland are similar in their preference to silence but Diana Petkova underlines that in other respects both societies are very different: Japan is a collectivistic society with significant power distance, hierarchy, and high context, while Finland is an individualistic society with small power distance and low context.

The reflections of Diana Petkova about limitations of the Western-Centric research approaches and methods for the study of non-Western cultures has also contributed to the intellectual debate on this important issue. She belongs to the group of scholars, who hold that cultures are different and concepts and empirical methods developed within the Western culture cannot be always applied to non-Western cultures, such as Indian or Japanese. The candidate argues that concepts of religion or mentality are difficult to be applied in Japan. Moreover, the strategy of asking the same questions in different cultures, which is used in comparative international studies, such as the World Values Survey, has disadvantages since respondents from different cultures could attach different meaning to the same questions or some questions for them would be unclear or illogical. Many of the respondents in Japan in



interviews conducted by the candidate declare that they are not religious; however, their answers to next questions reveal that they often visit Buddhist or Shinto temples, take part in religious rituals (meditation, etc.) or possess religious objects in their homes. These findings question studies of the foreign scholars on Japan, who claim that Japanese are non-religious and non-spiritual. Diana Petkova underlines: “religious identity and mentality in many cases are hidden and even unconscious mental structures. It is needed a lot of questions to be asked in order deep beliefs of informants to be revealed (*Religiosity, Identity and Postmodernity*, p. 239).

The contributions by the candidate can be found also in her other publications: about rumors and conspiracy theories during the COVID-19, the media culture, freedom of speech, the application of artificial intelligence in communication, the image-making the study of the image of Bulgaria.

IV. Notes and recommendations

I don't have notes or recommendations to the candidate and her work. I perceive positively her choice of research topics related to the study of religiosity and identity and her empirical approach. She has managed to conduct surveys of cultures, which are very different (Ecuador, India, Japan), belong to different civilizations and are not easy to be reached.

V. Conclusion

Publications and research by Diana Petkova, her experience in teaching at university level and administration have been sufficient to convince me that she deserves to be promoted and become Professor. I am going to vote in favor she to be promoted to Professor due to her scientific contributions and research.

Reviewer: Prof. Svetlozar Kirilov, PhD

Date: November 10, 2024