

REVIEW

of the opponent **Olena Valeriivna BULATOVA**

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on the qualification thesis of **Wu QI** on the topic:

“Economic inequality of the PRC as an imperative for the formation of social stratification of the population”, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in specialty 292 “International Economic Relations”

Relevance of the topic of the qualification thesis

The issue of the interconnection between economic inequality and the processes of social stratification in the People’s Republic of China is gaining increasing scholarly attention in the context of profound structural transformations taking place in the country. The radical changes in China’s economic model, which began in the late 1970s and continue to this day, have been accompanied by the emergence of fundamentally new forms of social differentiation that require thorough academic study.

The current state of economic disparity in PRC is characterized by indicators that raise concern within the international community. The Gini coefficient for China demonstrates a level of inequality that exceeds the threshold of social security and creates risks for the country’s long-term stability. This situation necessitates a detailed examination of the mechanisms through which economic asymmetry transforms into social stratification, particularly given the uniqueness of the Chinese development model.

The scientific novelty of the study is determined by the specific nature of China’s social order, where elements of a market economy are integrated with socialist principles within a centralized political system. Such a hybrid approach generates atypical models of social stratification that have no analogues among traditional capitalist or socialist systems. Studying these processes is significant not only for understanding Chinese realities but also for analyzing possible developmental trajectories of other countries with transitional economies.

The research holds special importance in the international context due to China’s influential role in the global economic architecture. Social processes occurring in this superpower have the potential to influence international economic relations and shape models of global development. Nevertheless, academic literature demonstrates fragmented approaches to analyzing this issue. The overwhelming majority of studies focus on partial aspects without providing a comprehensive understanding of the systemic patterns underlying the interaction between economic inequality and social stratification.

Therefore, the scientific problem chosen for the research reflects the urgent needs of contemporary economic and sociological science in developing a conceptual framework for analyzing complex transformational processes in a globalized world. Theoretical and applied value of such a study lies in the possibility of developing

scientifically grounded approaches to understanding the dynamics of social change under conditions of economic reforms and systemic modernization.

As a result, it should be emphasized that Wu Qi's qualification work, aimed at addressing the important scientific task of studying the impact of economic inequality in PRC on the formation and transformation of social stratification, identifying its structural mechanisms and consequences for social stability, as well as developing strategic recommendations aimed at reducing inequality and promoting inclusive socio-economic development, constitutes a relevant scholarly research.

The dissertation is a component of scientific research of the West Ukrainian National University, in particular: fundamental state budget funding research "Concept of recovery and green reconstruction of Ukraine" (state registration number 0124U000003); implementation of the international project (Erasmus+ Module Jean Monnet) "European inclusive circular economy: post-war and post-pandemic module for Ukraine (EICEPPMU)" 2022-2025, registration number 101085640); business funding research on the topic "Formation of the company's ecological brand in foreign markets" (Contract No. MEV-37-2024 dated 25/04/2024).

Degree of justification of the scientific provisions, conclusions, and recommendations formulated in the qualification thesis

The qualification thesis has a logical structure, contains a clearly defined aim, objectives, and methodologically substantiated approaches to their implementation. All conclusions and recommendations of the research regarding economic inequality in the PRC as an imperative for the formation of social stratification are duly substantiated and have practical relevance.

The dissertation employs a range of general scientific and specialized research methods, in particular: the method of theoretical generalization (for the systematization of conceptual approaches to economic inequality), the historical method (for tracing the evolution of social development), the dialectical method (for studying interrelations with social stratification), the method of analogy and comparative analysis (for analyzing the dynamics of socio-economic development in the PRC), methods of induction and deduction (for formulating proposals on policy adjustments), methods of analysis, synthesis, and data processing (for assessing status and role in stratification), regression analysis (to establish the relationship between China's annual GDP growth rates and the Gini coefficient), cluster analysis (to provide comparative visual interpretation of inequality using two generally accepted indicators: the Gini coefficient and the income share of the top 10% of the population), the monitoring method (for analyzing risks and challenges), as well as the method of data visualization (for the graphical presentation of key provisions and research results).

The main theoretical and applied provisions of Wu Qi's dissertation received positive recognition at Ukrainian and international conferences and were published in Ukrainian and international scientific journals.

Thus, all the above makes it possible to reach a positive conclusion regarding the scientific level, reliability of the presented material, theoretical substantiation and argumentation of the defended provisions, as well as the practical significance of the conclusions and recommendations contained in Wu Qi's dissertation.

Structure and volume of the qualification thesis

The qualification thesis is written in academic English, and includes abstracts in both Ukrainian and English, an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, a list of references, and appendices.

In the first chapter, “Theoretical Foundations of Economic Inequality and Social Stratification in the PRC”, the applicant conducted a comprehensive analysis of the conceptual and methodological approaches to studying economic inequality, which made it possible to systematize the evolution of scientific theories in this field (pp. 29-47). The research revealed the multidimensionality of economic inequality, manifested in income, property, and regional disparities. It was established that the effectiveness of state policies in overcoming inequality largely depends on institutional capacity and economic context, especially under conditions of globalization and technological transformation. It was substantiated that economic inequality directly affects social mobility, resource distribution mechanisms, and overall social stability.

The work systematized the typology of economic inequality and the theoretical concepts explaining it, showing that classical, Marxist, and neoclassical schools regard inequality as a fundamental factor of social differentiation. This enabled the identification of priority directions for reform, including tax system transformation, expanding access to educational services, and improving social protection mechanisms. It was proven that in developing countries, institutional obstacles and historical factors create significant barriers to reducing inequality.

The impact of gender and ethnic barriers on the formation of social stratification was analyzed separately (pp. 55-63). A critical review of theoretical models for reducing inequality was carried out, including the human capital theory (which identifies educational investment as a key factor of social mobility), the institutional approach (which substantiates the need for structural reforms to ensure equal opportunities), and Piketty’s concept (which argues that inequality grows when the return on capital exceeds the rate of economic growth).

The study examined in detail indicators of inequality measurement, such as the Gini coefficient and the Lorenz curve, and analyzed the evolution of inequality in socialist and post-socialist societies. It was found that in the PRC, inequality increased as a result of market reforms, but the “common prosperity” policy is aimed at mitigating it. Institutional and structural determinants of inequality in the PRC were studied comprehensively, including rural–urban divides, regional imbalances, and the role of the hukou system in shaping social stratification.

In the second chapter, “Analytical Assessment of Economic Inequality and Social Stratification in the PRC”, the applicant conducted an empirical analysis of the dynamics and structure of income and wealth inequality in the PRC, including studies of income distribution trends, redistribution policies, and stratification indicators (pp. 83-117). It was found that the growth of the middle class occurs at a slow pace due to rapid urbanization, which deepens social divides. The research showed that inequality management in the PRC is implemented within the “common prosperity” strategy, which contributes to reducing the Gini coefficient. At the same time, regional disparities remain significant, requiring policy adjustments.

It was demonstrated that current PRC policies have acquired a more inclusive character, manifested in the expansion of educational programs and social protection

systems. Further analysis showed that recent state interventions are aimed at minimizing risks associated with urbanization, stimulating social mobility, and countering social polarization.

The research concluded that despite declared goals of reducing inequality, basic structural imbalances in the PRC persist, especially at the regional level. The main challenges faced by representatives of lower social strata were identified, particularly in the post-COVID period (pp. 100-117). It was revealed that marginalized groups continue to experience significant barriers in accessing quality education and stable employment. It was found that although social mobility indicators have improved, intergenerational inequality remains a persistent problem.

In the third chapter, “Strategic Proposals for Reducing Economic Inequality and Mitigating Social Stratification in the PRC”, the applicant developed a comprehensive set of measures to reduce inequality in the PRC (pp. 120-165). It was established that the implementation of educational initiatives effectively contributes to solving inequality problems among lower social strata, especially women. It was emphasized that inclusive policies, particularly the reform of the hukou system, can significantly reduce social divides. Strategies for adaptive policy adjustments were proposed, including regionally differentiated taxation and the integration of the digital economy as a tool for enhancing social mobility.

Mechanisms of sustainable financing were examined, including green initiatives, which have proven critically important for compliance with global sustainable development standards (pp. 135-150). It was substantiated that resource accessibility is a decisive factor in social mobility. The results highlight the need for coordinated efforts to build an inclusive economic ecosystem and define the key components of sustainable development strategies.

A comprehensive conceptual model for reducing inequality in the PRC was developed, integrating strategies of support, gap reduction, and the creation of new opportunities through mechanisms of direct subsidization (education, mobility, digital transformation) and expanding access via guarantee systems (pp. 117-132). It was substantiated that lowering institutional barriers through structural reforms is a necessary condition for ensuring social mobility and achieving sustainable economic development. A mechanism of inclusive economic development in the PRC was developed, based on a combination of social, fiscal, and institutional instruments (pp. 132-147), and a strategic reform roadmap to reduce social and economic stratification in the PRC was presented (pp. 147-160).

The totality of scientific provisions, conclusions, and recommendations presented in the qualification thesis, as well as their practical significance, make it possible to conclude on the completeness, integrity, and structured character of Wu Qi's dissertation.

Assessment of the scientific novelty of the provisions and results obtained in the qualification thesis

The results substantiated in the qualification thesis, which have both theoretical and practical significance and define the scientific novelty of the dissertation, include the following:

- the first time developed the conceptual model of income redistribution, inclusive growth and regional balance for the PRC; which redistributes income through vertical instruments and horizontal transfers; ensures inclusive growth through access to employment, human capital, inclusive infrastructure, support for entrepreneurship, innovation and a green economy; provides regional balance through fiscal equalization mechanisms, regional development programs, connectivity infrastructure, local capacity development, and local interventions; and ensures increased local incomes and access to services, reduced inequality (urban-rural, regional), enhanced fiscal capacity and legitimacy, and sustainable, equitable growth dynamics;

- improved the mechanism for inclusive economic development in the PRC which includes instruments for strengthening social safety nets and targeted welfare programs that in combination with instruments for improving the progressiveness of the tax system give the ways for expanding access to quality education and vocational training and are focused on the institutional reform of the Hukou system to reduce urban-rural gaps and enhancing participation of vulnerable groups in economic activities;

- improved the roadmap for strategic reforms to reduce stratification in Chinese society that addresses short-, medium-, and long-term policy priorities for the purpose of coordinating regional policy and inter-provincial resource equalisation which involves digital transformation and smart governance to improve service delivery which contains a system for monitoring and evaluation system for anti-inequality initiatives which aims at international cooperation and adaptation of best practices in inequality reduction;

- improved the methodics to assessment of state policies and institutional responses to economic inequality; performed cluster analysis of economic inequality across countries, using indicators such as tax-to-GDP ratios, revenue composition, and social spending, that positioning China among moderate-inequality economies alongside the U.S., Mexico, and Turkey; done regression analysis of GDP growth to the Gini Index which revealed a moderate negative correlation according to which higher growth tends to reduce inequality, but not decisively; performed comparative analysis of crisis measures and inequality impact emphasized that growth alone is insufficient to ensure equity, instead, proactive redistributive measures are essential for achieving inclusive development and addressing long-term structural disparities; established that the PRC relies heavily on consumption-based taxation, primarily VAT, and substantial social security contributions, which fund large-scale infrastructure and targeted social programs but this system is less redistributive than welfare-state models in advanced economies;

- further development of the research analysis of dynamics and structure of income and wealth inequality in the PRC in particular China's transformation from an agrarian economy into a global industrial and technological hub combined with persistent disparities across regions, urban and rural areas, occupations, education levels, and gender; evaluated poverty reduction programs and their effect on inequality in the PRC including the "Go West" strategy, the New Socialist Countryside program, and "Common Prosperity" agenda, aimed at mitigating socioeconomic imbalances;

- further development of the research of empirical indicators and trends of social stratification of Chinese society; traced the evolution of social structure from politically

defined categories in Maoist China to economically based strata following Deng Xiaoping's reforms; established socio-economic characteristics and trends, in particular the access to education, health services, and housing by social strata in PRC; proved that Chinese society is characterized by elites, a growing middle class, and vulnerable lower groups such as migrants and informal workers; and established that middle class has become a driver of consumption-led growth but remains highly dependent on property wealth and exposed to market fluctuations;

- further development of the conceptual and methodological approaches to the study of economic inequality, in particular a typology of economic inequality, including income, wealth, opportunity, regional, global, intergenerational, gender and social group disparities; analysis of key economic theories that explain the origins and persistence of inequality; research of indicators and indices for measuring inequality as essential instruments for empirical research;

- further development of the theoretical approaches to social stratification in the context of economic inequality; established causal mechanisms linking economic inequality and stratification: access to education, labor market segmentation, spatial segregation, political power, cultural reproduction, and health disparities; researched social mobility and barriers to upward movement in stratified societies caused by structural and cultural factors;

- further development of the institutional and structural determinants of inequality in the PRC; assessed the role of globalisation and the reconfiguration of Chinese stratification in particular influence of globalization and technological change on economic dynamism and deepen stratification through the creation of new forms of exclusion; described regional disparities and 'government policies of "balanced development" in the PRC, in particular analyzed the inequality across multiple dimensions – sectoral, regional, and socio-demographic.

Significance of the research results for science and practice

The theoretical significance of the qualification thesis lies in addressing the scientific problem and developing proposals for the implementation of fiscal policy under the conditions of the global economic crisis.

The practical significance of Wu Qi's dissertation results is that the main theoretical provisions of the study on the key directions of inequality transformation and policy adjustment in the PRC can be applied in the practical activities of governmental bodies and in further academic research.

The research results are presented, brought to the level of practical developments and recommendations, confirmed by a certificate of implementation provided by the logistics company Yumen Shunte Logistics Co., Ltd. (Certificate JIU No. 22 from May 08, 2025) and Gansu ZOSE Culture Advertising Media Co., Ltd. (Certificate JIU No. 24 from May 09, 2025).

Completeness of the presentation of scientific provisions, conclusions, and recommendations formulated in the dissertation in published papers relevant to the dissertation topic

The main provisions of the qualification work, which have scientific novelty, are substantively and reasonably disclosed in the published works. Based on the main

results of the dissertation, 8 scientific works were published, in particular: 3 articles – in scientific professional publications of Ukraine; 1 article – in a foreign scientific periodical; and 4 publications were published in other publications of an approbatory nature based on conference materials. The number and volume of printed works give the author the right to publicly defend the dissertation.

Assessment of the structure of the qualification thesis, language and style of presentation of the material

The content of the qualification thesis corresponds to the defined purpose and objectives of the research, reveals the topic of the thesis, indicates its integrity and completeness. The qualification thesis is written in English in compliance with all the requirements for its scientific style.

Absence (presence) of violations of academic integrity

The scientific results of the dissertation were obtained personally by the author. In the co-authored scientific papers, only those ideas and provisions that were personally acquired by the author were used in the dissertation. No violations of academic integrity have been detected in Wu Qi's dissertation. The dissertation includes references to relevant sources of information, provides accurate information about the methods used and the results of the research conducted, and complies with copyright and related rights legislation. This allows for the conclusion that the author of the dissertation has adhered to the requirements and rules of academic integrity. The qualification thesis was successfully verified for text similarity using the StrikePlagiarism online service.

Discussion points and remarks on the dissertation

Wu Qi's qualification thesis is carried out at a sufficiently high scientific level; however, there are some remarks of a debatable nature:

- the dissertation presents a typology of economic inequality covering various dimensions, including income, wealth, regional, global, intergenerational, and gender-social. However, the criteria for classification are insufficiently substantiated, which may lead to categorical substitution. This shortcoming reduces the analytical precision of the multidimensional phenomenon, since the boundaries between dimensions (for example, regional and global inequality) remain insufficiently delineated. As a result, the framework structure may only partially support further empirical applications;
- the study clearly articulates the causal mechanisms linking economic inequality with social stratification, such as access to education, labor market segmentation, and health disparities. However, they are insufficiently examined through quantitative modeling tools, relying mainly on qualitative relationships without econometric validation. As a result, there is a risk of incomplete justification of the role of spatial segregation in sustaining the urban–rural divide. A more detailed analysis could strengthen the evidential base;
- the thesis effectively presents statistical analysis of income gaps between eastern and western regions and urban and rural populations; however, the study does not address the problem of endogeneity in these disparities, such as reverse causality from migration to regional growth. This methodological gap may affect the quality of

interpretation of state strategies (for example, the “Go West” program). The use of instrumental variable methods, in particular for estimating causal relationships, could improve the quality of this interpretation;

– the applicant developed a roadmap of strategic reforms to reduce stratification in Chinese society, covering short-, medium-, and long-term priorities aligned with the 14th Five-Year Plan, i.e., with the development of science and technology to ensure “common prosperity.” However, it insufficiently assesses cybersecurity risks in providing targeted assistance to vulnerable groups. In particular, potential digital divides that reinforce social stratification were overlooked. An integrated assessment of these risks would have balanced the proposed roadmap.

The outlined remarks indicate certain debatable aspects of the qualification thesis. However, overall, they confirm the relevance, complexity, multifaceted nature, and practical significance of the chosen topic, and do not significantly affect the qualitative characteristics of the dissertation.

General conclusion and evaluation of the qualification thesis

Wu Qi’s qualification thesis on the topic “Economic inequality in the PRC as an imperative for the formation of social stratification of the population” is a completed scientific research, the result of which is the development of scientifically grounded proposals for advancing theory, methodology, and practical implementation of economic inequality in the PRC as a key imperative for the formation of social stratification of the population.

In its content and professional focus, the qualification thesis corresponds to specialty 292 “International Economic Relations” within the field of knowledge 29 “International Relations”, and in terms of the quality and level of theoretical and applied developments – to the level of a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Overall, Wu Qi’s dissertation on the topic “Economic inequality of the PRC as an imperative for the formation of social stratification of the population”, by its content, level of scientific novelty, substantiation of scientific provisions and recommendations, meets the requirements of the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of January 12, 2022, No. 44 “On the Approval of the Procedure for Awarding the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and Annulment of the Decision of the One-time Specialized Academic Council of a Higher Education Institution or Scientific Institution on Awarding the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy”. Therefore, its author, Wu Qi, deserves to be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in specialty 292 “International Economic Relations.”

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