

*To the Specialized Academic Council DF 58.082.083_ID 10847
at the West Ukrainian National University
of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine*

REVIEW

of the opponent **Illya Vasylovych KHADZHYN**
Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor, Rector of Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National
University,

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

Economic inequality in the People's Republic of China as a factor shaping the social stratification of the population represents an extremely relevant scientific problem of today. The transformational processes in the Chinese economy over the past four decades have led to fundamental changes in the structure of society, where the transition from a planned to a market economy was accompanied by a rapid increase in economic differentiation. This highlights the need for a scientific understanding of the mechanisms shaping the new social stratification under the conditions of a profound transformation of the economic system.

The scale of economic inequality in the PRC has reached critical levels, as confirmed by international studies. The Gini coefficient in China exceeds that of most developed countries, creating serious challenges for social stability and sustainable societal development. Such dynamics emphasize the urgent need for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between economic differentiation and the formation of new social strata, particularly in the context of the unique conditions of Chinese society.

Of particular scientific value is the study of China's unique experience, which combines market mechanisms with socialist ideology and an authoritarian governance system. This specific context creates distinctive patterns of social stratification, which differ from the classical models observed in developed capitalist countries. Analyzing these features is essential for understanding contemporary transformational processes

not only in China but also in other developing countries experiencing similar structural changes.

The global significance of this problem is reinforced by the fact that China, as the world's second-largest economy, exerts a substantial influence on global economic processes. The peculiarities of its social stratification can serve as indicators of the development trends of the international economic system and are directly related to the formation of a new world order. At the same time, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that systematically analyze the relationship between economic inequality and the formation of social stratification under China's specific conditions. Most existing works focus on individual aspects of the problem, which does not allow for the formation of a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study and its theoretical justification.

Thus, the chosen research topic corresponds to the modern challenges of socio-economic science and has high theoretical and practical significance for understanding the patterns of social development in the context of globalization and economic system transformation.

Given the above, it can be concluded that Wu Qi's qualification thesis, aimed at solving the important scientific task of studying the impact of economic inequality in the PRC on the formation and transformation of social stratification, identifying its structural mechanisms and consequences for social stability, as well as developing strategic recommendations to reduce inequality and promote inclusive socio-economic development, constitutes a timely and relevant scientific study.

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-funded research on the topic "Formation of the company's ecological brand in foreign markets" (Contract No. MEV-37-2024 dated 25 April, 2024).

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

The qualification thesis is logically structured, contains clearly defined objectives and tasks, and provides methodologically substantiated approaches to their implementation. All conclusions and recommendations of the study concerning economic inequality in the PRC as an imperative for the formation of social stratification are duly justified and have a practical orientation.

The dissertation employs a variety of general scientific and specialized research methods, in particular: the method of theoretical generalization (to systematize conceptual approaches to economic inequality), the historical method (to trace the evolution in socialist contexts), the method of dialectical cognition (to study linkages to social stratification), the method of analogies and comparative analysis (to analyze dynamics in the PRC), the methods of induction and deduction (to formulate policy adjustments), the methods of analysis, synthesis and data processing (to assess status and role in stratification), the monitoring method (to analyze risks and challenges), regression analysis (to illustrates the relationship between China's annual GDP growth rate and the GINI Index), cluster analysis (to provides a comparative visual interpretation of inequality using two widely accepted indicators: the Gini Index and the income share held by the top 10%) and the method of data visualization (to graphically present key provisions and research results).

The main theoretical and applied provisions of Wu Qi's dissertation received favourable reviews at Ukrainian and international conferences and were published in Ukrainian and international scientific publications.

Thus, all the above allows us to draw a positive conclusion regarding the scientific level, the reliability of the presented material, the theoretical justifications and arguments put forward in defence of the provisions, the practical significance of the conclusions and recommendations arising from Wu Qi's dissertation.

Structure and volume of the qualification thesis

The qualification thesis is written in business English, contains annotations in

Ukrainian and English, an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, a list of sources used and appendices.

In the first chapter, "Theoretical Foundations of Economic Inequality and Social Stratification in the PRC," the author analyzes conceptual and methodological approaches to the study of economic inequality. In particular, the use of empirical research methods made it possible to demonstrate the evolution of theories of economic inequality (pp. 12-29). The study highlights the role of different types of inequality within the social structure, including income, wealth, and regional inequality. It is shown that the effectiveness of policies addressing inequality depends on institutional capacity and the economic context – especially in scenarios characterized by globalization or technological change, where reducing inequality may prove ineffective. The work demonstrates that economic inequality significantly affects social mobility, resource distribution, and societal stability. It emphasizes the dichotomy between short-term interventions aimed at redistribution during crises and long-term objectives such as improving education and investing in human capital.

The work examines the typology and theoretical explanations of economic inequality and establishes that classical, Marxist, and neoclassical theories recognize it as a key factor of social differentiation. The above made it possible to determine the priority areas of reform, including tax policy, access to education, and social protection mechanisms. It is shown that institutional barriers and historical factors in developing countries hinder the reduction of inequality.

The study also highlights the impact of gender and ethnic barriers on social stratification. The analysis of theoretical models underlying inequality reduction includes human capital theory, which defines investment in education as the key to mobility; the institutional approach, which supports reforms for equal opportunities; and Piketty's theory, which argues that inequality increases when the return on capital exceeds growth.

The study examines inequality measurement indicators such as the Gini coefficient and the Lorenz curve, as well as the evolution of inequality in socialist contexts. It is noted that inequality in the PRC has increased due to reforms, but

“common prosperity” policies aim to mitigate it (pp. 47-63). The study analyzes institutional and structural determinants of inequality in the PRC, including urban-rural divides, regional imbalances, and the role of the hukou system.

In the second chapter, “Analytical Assessment of Economic Inequality and Social Stratification in the PRC,” the author substantiates the dynamics and structure of income and wealth inequality in the PRC, including income trends, redistribution policies, and stratification indicators (pp. 67-100). It is noted, in particular, that the growth of the middle class remains constrained by urbanization, with a noticeable widening of gaps. The study shows that inequality management in the PRC follows a strategy of “common prosperity,” which leads to a decrease in the Gini coefficient. However, regional disparities persist, requiring policy adjustments. China’s current policies have become more inclusive, characterized by education and social protection programs. Further analysis showed that recent interventions target mitigating urbanization-related risks, stimulating mobility, and counteracting polarization.

The study concludes that although the PRC’s strategies set goals for reducing inequality, major structural imbalances remain, especially at the regional level. The study highlights the challenges faced by the lower strata in the PRC, particularly after COVID-19. It is found that marginalized groups face barriers to accessing education and employment. The work notes that mobility has increased, but intergenerational inequality persists. In addition, there has been an expansion of support for the middle class within the framework of efforts toward high-quality development.

The chapter shows that over the past decade, social stratification in the PRC has evolved, with the emergence of new elites. Further analysis revealed a link between income and stratification. A strong correlation was established, indicating that the growth of inequality is closely related to class formation. This link is influenced by factors such as education, migration, and industry. The study concludes that the dynamics of inequality and stratification reinforce each other and reflect the transformation of the PRC’s economy.

In the third chapter, “Strategic Proposals for Reducing Economic Inequality and Mitigating Social Stratification in the PRC,” the author develops measures aimed at

reducing inequality in the PRC. It is established that the implementation of educational initiatives effectively addresses inequality faced by the lower strata, especially women. It is also emphasized that inclusive policies, such as hukou reforms, can narrow the gaps. The study proposes strategies for policy adjustment, including regionally adapted taxation. It is noted that the integration of the digital economy significantly enhances mobility.

The study examines sustainable financing mechanisms, such as green initiatives, which have proven important for aligning with global standards. The availability of resources is critical for mobility. These findings underscore the need for coordinated efforts to create an inclusive ecosystem. The study substantiates the components of sustainable strategies, including targeting and reversibility, and establishes that prioritization improves effectiveness.

The work proposes a shift toward progressive taxation, strengthening of social protection, taxation of windfall profits, investment in education, and international assistance. The proposed directions for PRC policy include targeted incentives, educational grants, procurement priorities, counter-cyclical policies, and regional coordination. These proposals can serve as instruments for resilience.

The study develops a conceptual model of income redistribution, inclusive growth, and regional balance for the PRC, which includes a support strategy, gap reduction and opportunity creation, direct subsidies (including for education, mobility, and digital transformation), and access provision through guarantees. It is noted that lowering barriers through reforms contributes to mobility. The mechanisms of inclusive economic development in the PRC have been improved, and a roadmap of strategic reforms aimed at reducing stratification in Chinese society has been developed.

The totality of scientific propositions, conclusions, and recommendations presented in the qualification work, as well as their practical significance, allow us to conclude that Wu Qi's dissertation is complete, coherent, and well-structured.

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

The results that have been substantiated in the qualification thesis, which have theoretical and practical significance, and define the scientific novelty of the dissertation, are as follows:

- for 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, regional balance and increasing of local incomes and access to services;
- improved the mechanism for inclusive economic development in the PRC, which includes instruments for strengthening social safety nets and targeted welfare programs that give the ways for expanding access to quality education and narrowing the 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 resources;
- improved the technique of state policies assessment and institutional responses to economic inequality; performed cluster analysis of economic inequality across countries; done regression analysis of GDP growth to the Gini Index; performed comparative analysis of crisis measures and inequality impact;
- further developed the research on the dynamics and structure of income and wealth inequality in the PRC; assessed poverty reduction programs and their impact on inequality in the PRC, including the “Go West” strategy, the New Socialist Chelsea program, and the “Common Prosperity” agenda, aimed at mitigating socio-economic imbalances;
- further developed the study of empirical indicators and trends of social stratification in Chinese society; identified socio-economic characteristics and trends; proved that Chinese society is characterized by elites, a growing middle class, and vulnerable lower groups such as migrants and informal sector workers;

- further developed conceptual and methodological approaches to the study of economic inequality, particularly the typology of economic inequality, including inequality in income, wealth, opportunities, regional, global, intergenerational, gender, and social-group inequality;

- further developed theoretical approaches to social stratification in the context of economic inequality have been further developed; causal mechanisms linking economic inequality and stratification have been established: access to education, labor market segmentation, spatial segregation, political power, cultural reproduction, and health inequalities;

- further developed the institutional and structural determinants of inequality in the PRC; the role of globalization and the reconfiguration of Chinese stratification has been assessed, the impact of globalization and technological change on economic dynamism and the deepening of stratification through the creation of new forms of exclusion.

Significance of the research results for science and practice

The theoretical significance of the qualification work lies in solving a scientific problem and developing proposals for overcoming economic inequality as an imperative for the formation of social stratification of the population.

The practical significance of the results of the dissertation is that the main theoretical provisions of the study of economic inequality, social stratification of the population and ways of policy adjustments the reducing economic inequality in the PRC can be used in the practical activities of governmental bodies, local authorities and in further scientific developments.

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 08 May, 2025) and Gansu ZOSE Culture Advertising Media Co., Ltd. (Certificate JIU No. 24 from 09 May, 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 work is performed at a high scientific level, but there are some comments that are of a debatable nature:

1. Exploring conceptual and methodological approaches to the study of economic inequality (pp. 12-15), the author provides a general conceptual overview, not considering recent achievements in intersectional analysis, in particular the integration of race and ethnicity, the status of migrants, which are specific to different segments of the Chinese population. This limits the analysis of the complex effects of multiple dimensions of inequality and simplifies the understanding of their interaction in the formation of social hierarchies. As a result, the methodological tools are somewhat limited when analyzing the unique multicultural context of China;

2. The assessment of the dynamics and structure of income and wealth inequality in the PRC (pp. 65-70) is carried out using reliable statistical data, but does not consider the role of the shadow economy and its weight in the formation of incomes of the high-income population. This exclusion may overstate official inequality metrics, as informal sectors significantly contribute to hidden assets.

3. The thesis successfully explores empirical indicators and trends in social stratification in Chinese society (pp. 81-85), but cohort studies should be conducted to track intergenerational mobility in China over recent decades. This limitation does not allow for a full capture of the sustainable nature of stratification, as it does not demonstrate the foundations of inequality in the long term.

4. The applicant has developed and detailed a mechanism for inclusive economic development in China (pp. 132-140), but has not sufficiently taken into account the risks of technological unemployment from the introduction of AI in China's labour markets. This shortcoming weakens, to some extent, the sustainability of the mechanism, since rapid digitalization displaces vulnerable workers, and strategies to mitigate technological shifts would strengthen their position.

The above-mentioned remarks indicate some debatable aspects of the qualification work. However, overall, they indicate the relevance, complexity, versatility, 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 work on the topic "Economic inequality in the PRC as an imperative for the formation of social stratification of the population" is a completed scientific study, the result of which is the formation of scientifically based proposals for the development of the theory, methodology and practical implementation of economic inequality in the PRC as the main imperative for the formation of social stratification of the population.

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

In general, the qualification thesis "Economic inequality of the PRC as an imperative for the formation of social stratification of the population" meets the requirements of the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 12 January, 2022, No. 44 "On the Approval of the Procedure for Awarding the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and the Cancellation of the Decision of a One-time Specialized Academic Council of a Higher Education Institution, Research Institution on Awarding the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy" in terms of content, substantiation of scientific provisions and recommendations, and level of scientific novelty. The author, Wu Qi, deserves to be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the specialty 292 "International Economic Relations".

Official Opponent:
Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor
Rector



Illya KHADZHYNOV