REVIEW
by Doctor of Economics, Associate Professor,
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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 the field of knowledge 29 International Relations
in specialty 292 International Economic Relations

Relevance of the qualification thesis topic

Economic inequality in the People's Republic of China has a complex multidimensional character and is manifested in income differences, access to education and healthcare, territorial opportunities, digital skills, and gender differences. This issue is directly connected with questions of social justice, the provision of equal opportunities and sustainable development, and also has a significant impact on social stability and the internal development of China.

The deepening of economic disparities in 2020-2025 is caused by accelerated industrialization, globalization processes, demographic shifts, and reforms in the spheres of employment and social security. According to forecasts of international institutions, in particular the World Bank and the IMF, without effective redistributive mechanisms, the income ratio between the urban and rural population may exceed 3:1, which will complicate the achievement of the goals of inclusive growth.

In addition, the scale of socio-economic changes in the PRC shapes global processes, which makes the study of economic inequality and social stratification of the population extremely important for the international scientific community.

Connection to scientific programs, plans, and topics

The dissertation is a component of the scientific research of West Ukrainian National University, in particular: the fundamental scientific research on the topic "The Concept of Recovery and Green Reconstruction of Ukraine" (state registration number

0124U000003); the implementation of the international project (Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Module) on the topic "European Inclusive Circular Economy: Post-War and Post-Pandemic Module for Ukraine" (registration number 101085640); and the contractual scientific research on the topic "Formation of the Ecological Brand of a Company in Foreign Markets" (Contract No. MEV-37-2024 dated 25.04.2024).

Reasonableness and reliability of results, conclusions and recommendations

The scientific statements, conclusions, and proposals presented in the dissertation are reliable, well-founded, multifaceted, with a consistently implemented research methodology.

To achieve the defined purpose, the dissertation thesis used a set of research methods (theoretical, historical, empirical, and others), the unity of which made it possible to fulfil all the outlined tasks. In the research process, general scientific and special methods of scientific knowledge were used: the method of theoretical generalization (to systematize conceptual approaches to economic inequality), the historical method (to trace the evolution of income inequality), the method of dialectical cognition (to study linkages to social stratification), the method of analogies and comparative analysis (to analyze the dynamics and structure of income inequality in the PRC), the methods of induction and deduction (to formulate public policy adjustments in the context of overcoming economic inequality), the methods of analysis, synthesis and data processing (to assess status and role in social 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 study examines economic inequality as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses disparities in income, wealth, and opportunities among individuals, social groups, and regions, manifesting itself in access to education, healthcare, and the

labor market, as well as in social mobility and the standard of living of the population. The author has developed a typology of inequality (income, wealth, opportunities, regional, global, intergenerational, gender-social) and analyzed the economic theories that explain its causes and mechanisms (classical, Marxist, neoclassical, Keynesian, institutional, and modern approaches). It has been revealed that social stratification is determined both by economic factors (production relations, labor market, property) and by socio-cultural factors (status, prestige, cultural and social capital).

The study examined the tools for measuring inequality (Gini coefficient, Theil index, Atkinson index), as well as the role of government policy and redistributive mechanisms (taxation, social programs, public services) in mitigating it. Causal mechanisms linking inequality and stratification were identified, including access to education, labor market segmentation, spatial stratification, political power, cultural reproduction, health disparities, and barriers to social mobility.

The transformation of China's economic model from a centralized planned system to a "socialist market economy" and its impact on social stratification were analyzed. Four stages of reforms were identified (agrarian, industrial-urban, market-oriented, post-WTO), which enabled high GDP growth and lifted over 800 million people out of poverty, but also caused disparities between urban and rural areas, regions, and social groups. The household registration system ("hukou") plays a particularly significant role in creating social barriers, limiting rural migrants' access to education, healthcare, and social protection.

The study examined dimensions of inequality (sectoral, regional, socio-demographic), government policies (poverty alleviation campaigns, social guarantees, the "common prosperity" initiative), and the impact of globalization and technological development on social differentiation. Statistics were provided on income, educational opportunities, occupational and gender inequality, the role of the middle class, and the concentration of wealth among the top 10% of the population.

The study examined China's fiscal and taxation system, which is based on consumption taxes and social contributions, and conducted a comparative analysis of international inequality indicators. An average level of inequality in China was

identified (Gini index ~0.47) along with a moderate negative correlation between GDP growth and inequality.

A conceptual model for reducing economic inequality was proposed, combining income redistribution, inclusive growth, and regional balance through the use of progressive taxation, social transfers, development of public services, education, and small businesses, as well as targeted fiscal transfers and infrastructure projects for underdeveloped regions.

A mechanism for inclusive economic development was developed, emphasizing social guarantees, digital technologies, progressive taxation, and expanded access to education and vocational training. A roadmap of reforms was proposed for the short-, medium-, and long-term in accordance with national plans (the 14th Five-Year Plan, "Vision 2035"), focusing on regional leveling, inclusivity in education and healthcare, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability.

The validity, reliability, and soundness of the conclusions and recommendations presented in the qualification work are supported by a thorough analysis of professional literature. The theoretical and methodological foundation of the study is based on the works of leading economists, statistical data, and analytical materials from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations Development Programme, National Bureau of Statistics of China, other international organizations and research centers, national development strategies, legislation on social equality, as well as scientific articles, monographs, and online resources.

Scientific novelty of the research results

The most significant scientific results personally obtained by the researcher include:

− 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.

The significance of the results of qualification thesis for theory and practice

The theoretical significance of the work lies in the systematization and generalization of scientific approaches to the study of economic inequality and social stratification, the identification of its structural mechanisms, causes, and consequences, as well as the development of a conceptual framework for modeling inclusive economic development and strategies to reduce socio-economic disparities.

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 PRC can be used in the practical activities of governmental bodies, local authorities and in further scientific developments.

The research results, translated into practical recommendations, are supported by implementation certificates provided by Yumen Shunte Logistics Co., Ltd. (Certificate JIU No. 22 from May 08, 2025) and by Gansu ZOSE Culture Advertising Media Co., Ltd. (Certificate JIU No. 24 from May 09, 2025).

Completeness of the published main provisions of the qualification thesis

Wu QI's qualification thesis is an independent, comprehensive, and substantive scientific research. The main provisions and results of the dissertation are presented in 8 scientific papers with a total volume of 2,63 printed sheets, including 3 articles in Ukrainian scientific editions, 1 article in a foreign periodical, and 4 papers of approbation nature.

The dissertation's provisions, which constitute its scientific novelty, have been fully presented and discussed at 4 international and national scientific-practical conferences. The qualification thesis is an independently conducted scientific study, in which the author personally developed theoretical and methodological provisions as well as practical recommendations aimed at reducing inequality and promoting inclusive socio-economic development in the PRC. The scientific ideas, theoretical developments and generalizations, conclusions, and recommendations submitted for defense by the candidate, which are also reflected in her publications, belong personally to her.

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

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

Absence (presence) of a violation of academic integrity

Acquaintance with the content of Wu QI's qualification thesis allows us to conclude that the author adheres to the norms and principles of academic integrity. The dissertation contains all the necessary references to sources of information in cases of using other people's ideas, developments, statements and data, which meets the requirements of current legislation on copyright and related rights. The qualification thesis successfully passed the plagiarism check using the StrikePlagiarism online service. All this allows us to conclude that the author of the qualification work complies with the requirements and rules of academic integrity.

Discussion points and comments on the qualification thesis

Wu QI's dissertation research is distinguished by a high level of analytical elaboration and practical orientation. At the same time, some provisions are subject to

discussion and may be the subject of further scientific clarifications or additions, namely:

1. The dissertation successfully combines macroeconomic indicators, such as the dynamics of the Gini coefficient, with household-level microdata; however, at times, there is a lack of a clear connection between these levels of analysis, for instance, between national trends and regional disparities in household incomes. Furthermore, the focus is primarily on aggregated statistics, which do not always account for informal employment and hidden incomes, potentially limiting the assessment of the actual level of economic inequality in the PRC.

2. The author effectively describes the digital and educational gaps as key factor of inequality, particularly in the context of the "hukou" system and access to resources; however, the analysis is mostly qualitative. It would be beneficial to complement the discussion with quantitative calculations using specialized indices, such as the "Digital Divide Index" and the "Education Gini", to provide a more robust empirical basis for the conclusions regarding social stratification.

3. Internal and external migration is considered as a factor of social mobility and a source of new disparities; however, the conclusions are presented fragmentarily, without an in-depth analysis of its impact on regional imbalances. Additionally, gender differences in access to education, the labour market, and social protection are insufficiently addressed, despite their significant role in shaping social stratification.

4. The candidate has developed a roadmap of strategic reforms aimed at reducing stratification in Chinese society, in which a multi-level timeline is aligned with national plans and is strategically oriented; however, the mechanism for engaging stakeholders in the implementation of these reforms is not clearly defined. Moreover, the impact of "The Belt and Road Initiative" on population inequality within the framework of China's international cooperation is insufficiently explored.

The noted comments and points of discussion do not affect the overall high evaluation of Wu QI's qualification work and may serve as a basis for scientific debate as well as for the author's further research in the chosen field.

General evaluation of the qualification thesis its compliance with established requirements

Wu QI's qualification thesis 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, represents a complete independent study containing novel, scientifically grounded theoretical and applied results in the field of economic inequality in the PRC as an imperative for shaping social stratification. The results obtained by the candidate, as well as the proposed new solutions, recommendations, and conclusions, are reliable and comprehensively substantiated. The dissertation is carried out at a high professional level, and its content corresponds to the chosen research topic and the profile of specialty 292 – International Economic Relations.

In terms of scientific novelty, theoretical and practical significance of the results obtained, structure, language, and style of presentation, Wu QI's qualification thesis on the topic "Economic inequality of the PRC as an imperative for the formation of social stratification of the population" meets the requirements of "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" approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated January 12, 2022, No. 44 and the requirements of the Order of Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine "On approval of requirements for dissertation design" No. 40 of January 12, 2017 (with amendments from May 31, 2019). The author, Wu QI, deserves to be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the specialty 292 "International Economic Relations" in the field of knowledge 29 "International Relations".

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Завіряю:
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