

OPINION
official opponent
Doctor of Economics, Professor
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for Li Zongkeng's dissertation on the topic:
"Management of socio-economic development of the southwestern provinces
of China", presented for obtaining the scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the field of knowledge 07 "Management and Administration"
in the speciality 073 "Management"

Relevance of the research topic

Disparities in regional development are a common challenge facing nations around the world. In China, the problem of unbalanced and uncoordinated economic development among different regions is particularly evident. In the current era, comprehensively promoting a regionally coordinated development strategy plays a crucial role in achieving high-quality economic growth and ensuring social stability. These efforts are aimed at optimizing the distribution of productive forces and building a regional economic and territorial space system with complementary advantages and high-quality development. This strategic framework not only prioritizes economic progress and efficiency improvement, but also emphasizes the principles of collective prosperity and social justice, which has profound implications.

Disparities in regional development pose a common challenge for nations worldwide. In China, the issue of unbalanced and uncoordinated economic development among different regions is particularly evident, especially in the southwestern ethnic regions, which belong to national poverty areas. The current era demands a comprehensive approach to promoting regionally coordinated development strategies to achieve high-quality economic growth and ensure social stability. This strategic framework aims to optimize the distribution of productive forces, building a regional economic and territorial space system with complementary advantages and fostering high-quality development. It not only prioritizes economic progress and efficiency

improvement but also emphasizes the principles of collective prosperity and social justice, with profound implications.

The complexity of the problem is heightened by the fact that the southwestern ethnic regions face unique challenges due to their special geographical and environmental factors, weak economic base, and differences in policy implementation. This complexity results in a significant gap in the level of regional development between provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities, notably reflected in the disparities in the development of cities and villages, as well as the unbalanced and insufficient development of the economy, society, ecology, and livelihoods of people in the areas where ethnic minorities live.

This complexity underscores the high degree of relevance and timeliness of Li Zongkeng's dissertation topic selection.

Connection of work with scientific programs, plans, topics

The dissertation research aligns with the framework of the topic 'Development of management in the conditions of international integration processes' (2019-2023, state registration number 0119U001336) and corresponds to the thematic plan of research works at Sumy National Agrarian University (Ukraine), where the author focuses on overcoming socio-economic inequality in areas where ethnic minorities live in Southwest China. Additionally, the research contributes to personal projects, including 'Improving Basic Research Abilities for Young and Middle-aged Teachers' at Guangxi University (022KY0682) and the Special Project '14th Five-Year Plan' of Guangxi University Education (2022ZJY2695).

The scientific and practical significance of the dissertation

This manuscript comprehensively examines the spatio-temporal characteristics of unbalanced economic and social development within ethnic regions in Southwest China

from a meso perspective. This approach contributes to the continuous promotion of coordinated and sustainable development among China's regions at a practical level

This study improves the level of coordination in balanced economic and social development within and outside the region, including urban and rural areas in the ethnic regions of Southwest China. It addresses the existing development disparities between urban and rural areas in these regions and identifies significant factors influencing unbalanced development. By quantitatively analyzing the spatio-temporal distribution characteristics in economic, social, environmental, and livelihood dimensions, it measures the development factors and root causes affecting ethnic regions in Southwest China. The analysis focuses on promoting balanced economic and social development while reducing urban-rural disparities among provinces and regions.

The dissertation also examines the experiences of polycentric governance and sustainable development measures in developed regions as explored by domestic and foreign scholars. It delves into the ways and models suitable for achieving balanced economic and social development in the ethnic regions of Southwest China, providing a driving force for the comprehensive improvement of economic and social levels and promoting innovative development in these areas.

Completeness of presentation of the dissertation material in scientific publications

During the period of study, the author prepared 1 computer software copyright and 10 scientific papers: 4 conference papers, 3 articles published in journals indexed in Scopus, and 3 articles in journals included in the list of scientific professional publications of Ukraine assigned category 'B'.

The main provisions and results of the dissertation research were made public by the author at the following events: the International Scientific Conference 'Modern Management: Tendencies, Problems, and Perspectives of Development' (Dnipro,

Ukraine: 2020.04, 2020.11, 2022.04) and the conference 'Problems of Effective Management of State: Materials of the International Scientific Conference' (Tbilisi, Georgia, 2020.11).

The degree of validity of the scientific propositions formulated in the dissertation

Dissertation research is an independent scientific work by the author. Scientific results, conclusions, and proposals submitted for defense were personally obtained by the author. The scientific provisions, conclusions, and recommendations derived from the research results are sufficiently substantiated and reliable.

The dissertation demonstrates a clear adherence to the structural and logical scheme of the research, aligning the scientific results and issued provisions for scientific novelty with the set goal and specific tasks of the research.

The author of the dissertation utilized a significant number of information sources from open databases, regulatory and legal literature, and statistical and analytical materials. The results of the research and the author's recommendations underwent practical testing, as confirmed by relevant documents. The above evidence indicates a sufficient level of validity and reliability of the results of scientific research, conclusions, and proposals

The scientific novelty of the obtained results

It involves the deepening of existing theoretical provisions and the development of scientific-practical and methodological recommendations on the problems of economic and social development in the ethnic regions of Southwest China. The scientific results are reliable and, in terms of their scientific essence, can be expressed as follows:

- for the first time, a conceptual program was developed to eradicate regional disparities in the economic and social development of the southwestern provinces of China. This program addresses the context of inequality between urban and rural areas and is characterized by the reasonable coordination of actions by state and local authorities, orderly competition among all economic entities in the region, environmental sustainability, joint prosperity, and mutually beneficial results for all parties involved in the development process – the state, enterprises, and the population;

- the methodological framework for assessing the level of development of urban and rural areas in southwestern ethnic groups was enhanced. This improvement is based on the entropy weight method, measuring the results of unbalanced development in ethnic regions of southwestern China through the method of fuzzy comprehensive assessment in four dimensions: economy, society, ecology, and the means of existence of people;

- a theoretical-practical approach was developed to identify ways of development and methods for implementing the strategy of achieving balanced economic and social development in the ethnic regions of Southwest China. This approach focuses on three key aspects: the principles of joint management, the function of collective management, and the synergy of development pathways. It takes into account sustainability in four dimensions: economic, social, ecological, and sources of livelihood;

- the theoretical connection between the theory of unbalanced development, the theory of polycentric management, and the theory of sustainable development in the ethnic regions of Southwest China was further developed. This development involved applying the model of uneven regional development, which includes the analysis and comparison of the measurement model and the model for assessing the imbalance of regional development. Additionally, a measurement system for unbalanced development in ethnic areas in Southwest China was constructed;

- impulses for innovative development and acceleration of building a reliable system for high-quality development were established. This includes strengthening the economic and demographic capacity of central cities, urban clusters, and other economically developed regions. Simultaneously, it strengthens the role of other regions in ensuring food security, ecological integrity, and border stability.

The structure and content of the dissertation, its completeness and compliance with the established requirements for design

The presented dissertation work by Li Zongkeng exhibits a logical structure, and its content fully explores the scientific research topic. The primary focus of this dissertation was to identify strategies for implementing coordinated regional development—a long-term endeavor requiring sustained commitment. This involves adjusting and improving the framework of regional policy based on objective economic principles, leveraging the comparative advantages of each region, promoting a rational course, and effectively concentrating various factors. Additionally, continuous efforts were made to strengthen initiatives for coordination and development within and outside the provinces.

Currently, China's economic and social landscape in the new era is chiefly influenced by key principles such as the "Rural Revitalization Strategy," the "One Belt, One Road" Development Strategy, and the "Regional Coordinated and Sustainable Development" National Plan. Drawing inspiration from European strategies for rural development and revitalization, significant advancements have been achieved across various economic and social facets in the ethnic regions of southwest China. However, as interregional economic and social development levels rise, challenges emerge, particularly regarding the intensification of disparities in intraregional development. The stark urban-rural divide within the ethnic regions of southwest China significantly impedes overall developmental progress in these provinces. Therefore, addressing the

issue of unbalanced economic and social development within the regional context stands as a top priority for the ethnic regions of southwest China.

The problem is particularly complex because the southwestern ethnic regions belong to the national poverty areas. Combined with their special geographical and environmental factors, weak economic base, and differences in policy implementation in the ethnic regions, the gap in the level of regional development between provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities is relatively large. This is mainly reflected in the differences in the development of cities and villages, as well as in the unbalanced and insufficient development of the economy, society, ecology, and livelihoods of people in the areas where ethnic minorities live.

This dissertation research focuses on the study of differences in economic, social, and environmental aspects between urban and rural areas in the ethnic regions of Southwest China through theoretical and empirical analysis. The dissertation research introduces the following innovative aspects:

- from the perspective of qualitative research, it combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to regional development. This involves an in-depth exploration of the theoretical logic of unbalanced economic and social development in ethnic regions in southwest China. This integration establishes a new theoretical research basis for understanding regional economic and social imbalances, aligning with the requirements of the regional strategy of coordinated development;

- from the standpoint of quantitative research, the research builds upon Tsinghua University's unbalanced development index system and incorporates findings from scientists in the academic field. This creates a more suitable methodological foundation for calculating the index measuring the level of economic and social development in the ethnic regions of southwest China, considering the specific conditions of these regions;

- in terms of evaluation methodology, the research develops a new evaluation model for regional economic and social development in ethnic regions of Southwest

China. This model utilizes spatio-temporal regression (GTWR) to facilitate horizontal and vertical comparative analysis of measurement results in provinces and cities each year.

Therefore, conducting a comprehensive examination of the existing disparities in economic and social development across different provinces, urban and rural areas within the southwestern region, and elucidating the factors influencing these inequalities in the ethnic regions of the southwest holds immense theoretical and practical significance. It significantly contributes to formulating a strategic policy for the holistic development of ethnic territories in the southwestern region.

The objects of the dissertation research are Chongqing Municipality, Sichuan Province, Yunnan Province, Guizhou Province, Tibet Autonomous Region, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

The results of the study highlight representative data on the development of urban and rural areas in six provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) in southwest China over the past 10 years. The study also characterizes the current state and problems of unbalanced economic and social development in ethnic areas in southwest China through a comprehensive assessment, which includes an empirical study of the imbalance and causes of insufficient economic and social development. The research provides proposals for ways to improve the situation.

The applicant presented the material competently and logically, at a high level of English proficiency. The content of the dissertation corresponds to its essence, with a proper relationship between the sections and subdivisions of the work, and all sections containing figures and tables. Links to informational resources are correct. Conclusions to sections of the dissertation and general conclusions are logical and confirmed by the results of testing at international and all-Ukrainian scientific and practical conferences, as well as publication in specialized scientific publications of Ukraine and international journals indexed in the scientific and metric database Scopus.

All of the above allows us to ascertain the sufficiency of the validity and reliability of the main provisions, conclusions, and recommendations of the dissertation work.

Discussion clauses and comments on the content of the dissertation

Despite the positive impression from reading the dissertation and the author's publications, attention should be paid to the presence of certain shortcomings and debatable provisions, namely:

1. In our view, the first chapter of the dissertation strongly emphasizes the postulates of Marxist theory in interpreting balanced development. The research could be enriched by giving more consideration to alternative economic theories of development.
2. In constructing China's balanced development indicator system, the dissertation first outlines the crucial components of people's wellness and their inextricable link to the issue of imbalance and insufficiency (sc.1.3). However, there is a need for more clarification on how to construct an index system within the empirical framework of this study.
3. Chapter 2 “An empirical study on the unbalanced development of ethnic areas in southwest China”, relies on data primarily limited to the year 2020. Consequently, the calculated results may not fully capture the contemporary situation, given the significant changes that have occurred during the global military crisis and the redistribution in the world markets of goods and services, which influence regional economies in China.
4. Among the empirical results, this study primarily focuses on the countermeasure path and influencing factors of unbalanced development on the Chinese economy in ethnic minority areas in southwest China (sc.2.1). But what are the clear

- characteristic trends, comprehensive evaluations, and impact factors of unbalanced development in minority areas in southwest China?
5. The countermeasures for the balanced development of ethnic areas in Southwest China, as proposed in section 3.3, seem to be declarative, lacking specific algorithms for implementation at the level of management institutions.
 6. The conclusions are general in nature, the statements are too formalized, and they do not reflect the specific results obtained in the dissertation.

General conclusion

The dissertation work by Li Zongkeng on the topic 'Management of Socio-Economic Development of the Southwestern Provinces of China,' submitted for defense to the specialized academic council for obtaining the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the field of knowledge 07 Management and Administration, specifically 073 Management, meets the requirements outlined in the Order of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Ukraine No. 40 dated January 12, 2017, 'On the Approval of the Requirements for the Preparation of the Dissertation,' and the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated January 12, 2022, No. 44, 'On the Approval of the Procedure for Awarding the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and the Cancellation of the Decision of the One-Time Specialized Academic Council of the Institution of Higher Education and Scientific Institution on Awarding the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,' as amended by Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 341 dated March 21, 2022.

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