Oponent’s review on doctoral thesis

Viktor Rodionov
Population development of Kazakhstan: geographic, economic and geopolitical aspects

The research of Victor Rodionov has interdisciplinary character. The principal problem of the study is to answer the question how the availability of rich natural resources influences trends in demographic development, migration and redistribution of population in Kazakhstan. Demographic trends in the period 1999-2009 are studied in the context of geographical, economic and geopolitical aspects.

The thesis consists of 9 chapters (excluding Introduction and Conclusion) and its extent is 170 pages. In introduction author informs first of all about general geopolitical, economic and demographic situation with the respect of ethnic structure of Kazakhstan. The goals and the structure of thesis are mentioned only marginally. First chapter gives overview of literature dealing with demographic situation and economic and geopolitical perspectives of Kazakhstan. Theoretical and empirical framework of the problem under study is described in second chapter and theory of modernization is accentuated. Theory of demographic transition is mentioned only shortly in several sentences. More detailed explanation of figure 1 (stages of demographic transition) with the respect of population development in Kazakhstan is missing. Research questions and hypotheses are presented in chapter third, data sources and methodology are rather briefly described in chapter fourth.

Population development of Kazakhstan is the subject of following chapters. Recent population development, changes in age and ethnic structure of population, main trends in fertility and mortality and external migration are described in fifth chapter. I have several critical notes to this chapter: in the title of chapter no time period is given, I miss more detailed explanation of demographic indicators used for evaluation (e.g. what does it mean "age of dependency ratio", see also tab. 51), there is no more detailed information about the ethnic statistics (way of enumeration etc.)

Expected future population development and population policy are described in sixth chapter. Author gives overview of existing population prognosis and tries to evaluate them from the point of present trends in population dynamics. Chapter 6.2 informs about present measures of population policy in Kazakhstan, health care and migration policy are also mentioned. The text gives interesting information but no linkage to the expected population development is discussed.

Regional aspect of population development of Kazakhstan is preferred in chapter seventh. Social-economic differences by regions represent serious problem in Kazakhstan. Author informs in detailed way about distribution of population by regions, density of population, proportion of urban population, differences in fertility and mortality characteristics and migration trends. Special attention is given to the ethnic and economic peculiarities of the regions and their impact on demographic characteristics. The classification of the regions is based on selected demographic and economic characteristics and the method of cluster analyses was used. The absence of clear definitions of indicators and terminology in methodological chapter (4) is reflected again here - page 114: GRP per capita in Kazakhstan (for a country GDP is used, the term GRP is reserved for a region). The headline of map 17 (p. 115) is wrong - it concerns 2009, not 1999.

Regional policy, its strategy and present social-economic situation in regions and future economic perspectives are discussed in chapter eight. Geopolitical development and
strategic partnerships for the future are mentioned in chapter ninth. Summary of presented research is given in Conclusion. All important findings and potential problems are mentioned here but there is no confrontation with research questions and hypotheses given in third chapter.

List of references includes first of all Russian authors and national documents (juridical, economic etc.). The thesis has all requirements needed for good orientation in text - list of tables, figures and maps, only list of appendices is missing.

The thesis provides good information about present geographic, social-economic and demographic situation in Kazakhstan. Interdisciplinary approach discovered many important structures and possibilities for future development and the thesis could be a good source of such information. But it seems that the demographic characteristics were not elaborated in such detailed way as was expected. For future research I recommend to pay more attention to the methodology. I also miss more detailed information about historical and political context of the problem (in spite of the limited time period on 1999 - 2009). Abstract of the thesis is very brief and it could be characterized rather as a description of known facts than as an overview of principal findings of the presented research.

Critical notes mentioned above concerns mainly methodology, technical requirements and only partly the conception of the thesis and the approach to the problem under study. They have no serious influence on the quality of the final research. The thesis of Víctor Rodionov fulfills the demands put on doctoral thesis and I recommend it for defense.

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