REVIEW
of the PhD dissertation
"Legal Aspects of Trade and Economic Cooperation within the Framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization"
submitted by Zhang Ju
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
in the specialty 8D04201 – International Law
Faculty of International Relations, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

The submitted dissertation represents a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous study of the legal aspects of regulating trade and economic cooperation within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The relevance of the chosen topic is determined by the growing importance of the SCO as one of the key institutions of regional integration, shaping the architecture of interaction among emerging centers of economic influence across the Eurasian continent. Theoretical significance lies in the need for a holistic scientific understanding of the SCO's legal nature, institutional structure, and normative regulatory mechanisms. The practical significance of the research is conditioned by the demand for the development of effective and balanced legal tools that ensure the efficient functioning of international economic cooperation mechanisms amid deepening integration processes.

The scientific novelty of the dissertation lies in filling a significant gap in modern international legal doctrine, namely the absence of a systematic analysis of the legal nature and regulatory instruments of economic interaction within the SCO. The author convincingly substantiates the dualistic nature of the Organization's legal system, manifested in the combination of formal binding instruments with the predominance of "soft law" mechanisms, reflecting the specific consensus-based decision-making model inherent in the SCO.

Of particular significance is the detailed comparative legal analysis – conducted for the first time in academic literature – of more than fifty SCO normative acts, including previously unexplored documents on sectoral and functional cooperation. This analysis has made it possible to identify structural patterns, tendencies, and distinctive features of legal regulation in the field of trade and economic relations within the Organization, as well as to formulate the author's vision of the prospects for further institutionalization of the SCO's legal system.

The methodological foundation of the research is comprehensive and includes comparative legal analysis of international treaties, an institutional approach to the study of SCO bodies, legal-hermeneutic interpretation of documentary texts, and a systemic approach to assessing the effectiveness of legal mechanisms. The application of this methodology has allowed the author to identify the particularities of the SCO's law-making process—where declarations and multilateral cooperation programs prevail over binding international treaties—and to analyze the three-tier system of legal sources comprising the SCO's founding documents, decisions of governing bodies, and sectoral agreements.

An important scientific contribution of the work lies in demonstrating the correlation between the legal form of acts and the effectiveness of their implementation within the national legal systems of member states. The author has developed an original classification of legal barriers to trade and economic cooperation and proposed concrete mechanisms for overcoming them. The practical value of the research is evidenced by the fact that the recommendations proposed for harmonizing national legislation in the areas of customs regulation and e-commerce have already been applied by SCO working groups, while the proposed model of sectoral integration may serve as a foundation for developing the legal framework of new cooperation areas.

Among the observations, it should be noted that the issues of dispute resolution within the SCO could have been elaborated more extensively, as this area could form a separate line of research. Furthermore, expanding the comparative analysis with other regional integration systems would enhance the study's analytical depth. However, these remarks do not diminish the overall value and integrity of the research.

The dissertation by Zhang Ju constitutes a completed scientific work that fully meets the requirements for PhD dissertations. The findings make a substantial contribution to the development of international economic law. The candidate has demonstrated the ability to conduct independent scientific research, proficiency in the necessary methodological tools, and the capacity to formulate practical legal recommendations. Zhang Ju fully merits the award of the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in the specialty "8D04201 – International Law."

Scientific Supervisor

C.j.s., Professor
al-Farabi KazNU

Sairambayeva Zh.T.