Official reviewer

PhD, Vice-Rector for Research at D.A. Kunaev University, Begazova Gulnapisa Zhandarovna, reviewed the dissertation titled "Legal Aspects of Trade and Economic Cooperation within the Framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", prepared by Zhang Ju for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the educational program "8D04201 – International Law"

№	Criteria	Compliance with criteria	Position of official reviewer
1.	Compliance of the dissertation topic (as of the date of approval) with the directions of scientific development and/or state programs	1.1 Compliance with scientific development directions and/or state programs: 1) The dissertation was completed within the framework of a project or target program financed from the state budget (name and number of the project or program); 2) The dissertation was completed within the framework of another state program (name of the program) 3) The dissertation corresponds to the priority direction of scientific development approved by the Higher Scientific and Technical Commission under the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan (indicate the direction)	The dissertation by Zhang Ju, titled "Legal Aspects of Trade and Economic Cooperation within the Framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," has been prepared within the educational program "8D04201 – International Law" for the degree of PhD. The research is highly relevant, as its topic corresponds to priority areas of scientific development related to the study of regional integration, international law, and economic cooperation in the Eurasian region. This focus is of strategic importance for the Republic of Kazakhstan as one of the founding states of the SCO. The dissertation fully aligns with the learning objectives of the "8D04201 – International Law" program and complies with the academic standards for doctoral studies in the fields of "6D030100, 8D04202 – Jurisprudence" and "6D030200, 8D04201 – International Law." The work demonstrates a comprehensive analysis of the SCO's legal framework, employing a robust methodological approach that includes comparative legal and institutional analysis. It makes a substantive contribution to the field through its novel findings and well-grounded practical recommendations for enhancing the Organization's legal mechanisms. The thesis is characterized by its logical coherence, high academic quality, and a compelling argumentation that underscores its theoretical and practical significance.
2.	Importance to Science	The work **makes** / does not make a significant contribution to science, and its significance **is** / is not clearly demonstrated	The research **makes** a significant contribution to the development of the doctrine of international law and the theory of economic integration through a systematic analysis of the legal architecture of the SCO. The relevance and scientific significance of the study are convincingly demonstrated in its content, which consistently reveals the geopolitical scope of the SCO and analyzes systemic legal conflicts that act as structural constraints on the

			deepening of economic integration.
3.	The principle of self-writing	Self-writing level: **1) high;** 2) average; 3) low; 4) did not write myself	The overall quality of the dissertation is **high**. The writing is fluent, clear, and professionally executed. The dissertation leaves a strong and positive impression on the reader.
4.	The principle of internal unity	4.1 Justification of the relevance of the thesis: **1) founded;** 2) partially justified; 3) or reasonable.	The relevance of the dissertation research is comprehensively **founded**. This is due, on the one hand, to the scientific novelty of the topic, which has not previously been subjected to a comprehensive analysis within the framework of a doctoral dissertation. On the other hand, its relevance is determined by the rapidly increasing economic role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on the international stage, which underscores the timeliness and practical significance of this scholarly investigation.
		4.2 The content of the dissertation determines the topic of the dissertation **1) determines;** 2) partially determines; 3) does not determine	The content of the dissertation fully **determines** the declared research topic. The structure of the work is logically organized and sequential: each chapter systematically, purposefully, and concisely addresses the key aspects of trade and economic interaction within the SCO framework, with particular attention paid to identifying systemic problems and legal conflicts that arise in the process of normative-legal regulation.
		The goal and objectives correspond to the topic of the dissertation: **1) corresponds;** 2) partially corresponds; 3) does not correspond	The stated aim and objectives of the dissertation are fully **corresponded** with its thematic focus. The research tasks not only correspond formally to the declared aim but also comprehensively cover all essential aspects of the problem under study, ensuring its thorough examination and the achievement of the primary goal of the research.
		4.4. All sections and the structure of the dissertation are logically connected: **1) completely connected;** 2) partially connected; 3) no connection	One of the distinguishing features of the dissertation is the **coherent and logically structured** integration of all its sections, which is evidenced by the consistent presentation of the material in alignment with the overall framework and logical system of the study. The research is conducted at a high academic level, with the dissertation thoroughly addressing all components of the research process.

		4.5 New solutions (principles, methods) proposed by the author are proven and evaluated in comparison with already known solutions: **1) there is a critical analysis;** 2) the analysis was carried out partially; 3) the analysis is based not on personal opinion, but on references from other authors	The relevance of the research topic is comprehensively and convincingly substantiated. The content of the dissertation, as well as its formulated aim and objectives, fully correspond to the stated problem. The structure of the work is characterized by logical consistency and internal coherence: the chapters are interrelated and sequentially disclose the subject of the study. The author not only proposes new solutions but also conducts a **critical comparative analysis** of these solutions against existing models (e.g., EU, USMCA), thereby confirming their theoretical and practical validity.
5.	The principle of scientific novelty	5.1 Are the scientific results and principles new? **1) completely new;** 2) semi-new (25-75% are new); 3) not new (less than 25% is new)	**Completely new**. The scientific results formulated in the study are fundamentally novel and make an original contribution to the development of the doctrine of legal regulation of economic integration within the SCO framework. The proposed conceptual provisions and methodological approaches are not mere adaptations or modifications of existing scientific paradigms but constitute independent solutions to pressing issues of legal support for integration processes, forming a new scientific paradigm in the field of international legal regulation of economic cooperation.
		5.2 Are the findings of the dissertation new? **1) completely new;** 2) semi-new (25-75% are new); 3) not new (less than 25% is new)	**Completely new.** The conclusions and scientific provisions obtained in the dissertation demonstrate qualitative novelty, as evidenced by the following aspects: - For the first time, structurally coherent models of key SCO development institutions have been developed and scientifically substantiated, such as the Permanent Committee with a detailed mandate and the Model Investment Code with a unified implementation mechanism. - An original sectoral approach to integration has been proposed, synthesizing "hard" and "soft" law methods based on criteria of integration potential and strategic significance of sectors. - For the first time, an algorithm for harmonizing technical standards through

			a roadmap with criteria-based selection of product groups has been proposed, ensuring the feasibility of integration processes.
		5.3 Are the technical, technological, economic or managerial decisions new and justified? **1) completely new;** 2) semi-new (25-75% are new); 3) not new (less than 25% is new)	The scientific novelty of the study is explicitly formulated and substantiated by the content of the dissertation. The author has, for the first time, developed a methodology for analyzing the legal system of economic integration within the SCO, established the relationship between the organization's expansion and the dynamics of integration processes, and proposed concrete new models and conceptual solutions, including the establishment of a Permanent Trade Committee, the development of a Model Investment Code, the creation of an Arbitration Center, and the architecture of the Energy Community.
6.	Validity of the main conclusions	All conclusions **are substantiated**/not substantiated in large-scale evidence from a scientific point of view (in qualitative research and art history and humanities)	All conclusions presented in the dissertation are a direct result of the analysis of the normative framework, comparative legal research, and institutional analysis. Each conclusion is substantiated with references to authoritative sources, statistical data, and the results of the author's comparative assessments.
7.	The main principles put forward for defense	For each principle, the following questions must be answered: 7.1 Is the principle proven? **1) proven;** 2) approximately proven; 3) not proven approximately; 4) not proven 7.2 Trivial? 1) yes; **2) no** 7.3 New? **1) yes;** 2) no 7.4 Level of use: 1) Narrow; 2) Medium; **3) Wide**	The dissertation presents five main conclusions submitted for defense: **Result 1.** The validity of this conclusion is confirmed by the analysis of the current normative-legal framework of the SCO, which revealed a significant institutional gap. The scientific novelty lies in overcoming the abstractness of proposals existing in the literature through the first conceptualization of a specific mandate and accountability mechanism for the relevant body. The non-triviality of the result is determined by the development of a previously absent institutional architecture, moving the academic discussion from the level of general reasoning to the level of concrete parameters. The broad applicability of this result is ensured by the fact that the proposed model of the body can be scaled to other areas of SCO cooperation and applied in designing institutions for other regional organizations. The practical value of this conclusion lies in the provision of a detailed operational model of the body, including monitoring of agreement implementation, development of recommendations for the elimination of non-tariff barriers, and the conduct of preliminary consultations on trade disputes. The proposed mechanism is aimed at debureaucratization and accelerating integration processes within the SCO.

		7.5 Proven in the work? **1) yes;** 2) no	**Result 2.** The validity of this conclusion is confirmed by the finding that the fragmentation of national investment regimes and the underdevelopment of the SCO's financial architecture constitute systemic barriers to economic integration. The scientific novelty is manifested in the creation of a comprehensive concept of a Model Investment Code, which integrates both classical investment policy tools (negative list) and advanced mechanisms (pre-established national regime) into a single normative document. The non-triviality of this conclusion lies in the structural integrity of the proposed model, which unifies rule standardization, investor protection guarantees, and dispute pre-settlement procedures into a coherent system. Its broad applicability stems from the possibility of adapting the Code for different groups of countries with varying levels of economic development, as well as its potential use in other regional integration formats. The practical value consists in providing a ready-made normative template for harmonizing the legislation of member states, thereby reducing transaction costs for both investors and states. **Result 3.** The validity of this conclusion is supported by the identification of heterogeneity in national technical regulations as a key obstacle to the free movement of goods. The scientific novelty consists in the development of a methodology for prioritizing the harmonization of technical standards based on objective economic criteria—volumes of mutual trade, economies of scale potential, and technological compatibility—as opposed to approaches based solely on political agreements. The non-triviality of the result is expressed in the transition from merely stating the problem to the formation of a systematic algorithm for its solution, including an analytical stage (selection of priority groups) and an organizational and financial implementation mechanism. The broad applicability is ensured by the universality of the methodology, which allows it to be used both within the SCO and in other integration associations to reduce technical barriers. The practical value is expressed in the development of an actionable roadmap with clear selection criteria, allocation of responsibilities, and identification of funding sources, ensuring the reproducibility and manageability of the harmonization process. **Result 4.** The validity of this conclusion is ensured by the findings of a comparative analysis of successful and unsuccessful integration practices in

			other international organizations. The scientific novelty lies in the proposal of an adaptive model for sectoral differentiation of legal instruments based on integration potential, technological standardizability, and sensitivity to national security. The non-triviality is reflected in the rejection of a universalist approach in favor of a flexible model, allowing integration to advance in prepared sectors without blocking progress in sensitive areas. The broad applicability is manifested in the possibility of using the proposed model for strategic design of integration in any multilateral format with asymmetric economies. The practical value consists in providing a strategic basis for decision-making, enabling the circumvention of political deadlocks and adaptation of legal regulation to the heterogeneity of SCO member states. **Result 5.** The validity of this conclusion is confirmed by identifying a direct link between the absence of a mandatory mechanism for resolving economic disputes and the insufficient level of legal certainty and business trust. The scientific novelty lies in the development of a model for the SCO Arbitration Center, which combines private-law jurisdiction over disputes between economic entities with the international legal status of its Regulations, ensuring primacy in the process of recognition and enforcement of decisions. The non-triviality of the conclusion is expressed in the conceptual resolution of the fundamental contradiction between national sovereignty and the need for supranational guarantees through the mechanism of recognition and enforcement of decisions. The broad applicability is ensured by the fact that the proposed arbitration model can serve as a universal prototype for other regional organizations and cross-border dispute resolution mechanisms. The practical value of the results consists in the creation of an institutional infrastructure that enhances predictability and the protection of international contracts, which is a necessary condition for the development of mutual investment and trade.

8.	The principle of consistency Sequence of sources and presented information	8.1 Choice of methodology - justified or methodology clearly stated **1) yes;** 2) no	**Yes.** The author conducted an interdisciplinary study based on fundamental scientific works by foreign, Russian, and Kazakhstani scholars, as well as on official documents of international organizations. The research methodology is clearly defined and corresponds to the stated objectives, which allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the topic and ensured the reliability of the results.
		8.2 The results of the dissertation work were obtained using modern methods of scientific research and methods of processing and interpreting data using computer technologies: **1) yes;** 2) no	**Yes.** The dissertation employs a set of general scientific and specialized methods, including comparative legal analysis, normative-dogmatic method, institutional analysis, and case study analysis. The application of these methods ensured the logical coherence of the research, the validity of the conclusions, and compliance with contemporary standards of scientific inquiry.
		8.3 Theoretical conclusions, models, identified relationships and patterns are proven and confirmed by experimental studies (results for areas of training in pedagogical sciences are proven on the basis of a pedagogical experiment): **1) yes;** 2) no	**Yes.** The theoretical conclusions, proposed models, and identified patterns are substantiated by a comprehensive analysis of the SCO legal framework, international integration experience, and the practice of trade and economic interaction among member states. Within the dissertation, the results were verified through case study analysis and the application of comparative legal and institutional methods, serving as an analog of experimental validation in legal and economic sciences. The obtained results are supported by a representative body of sources and have been validated through scientific publications.
		8.4 Important claims are **supported**/partially supported/not supported by references to specific and reliable scientific literature	All key statements of the dissertation are firmly grounded in specific and reliable sources that meet the criteria of academic research. The foundational basis includes fundamental SCO documents, such as the SCO Charter and the Treaty on Long-Term Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation. In addition, contemporary strategic materials are analyzed, including the SCO Development Strategy until 2025 (with a projection to 2035), considered as a

			"roadmap" for the organization's integration development, as well as the provisions of the Tianjin Declaration 2025, which reflect current approaches to strengthening a multipolar world order and deepening integration cooperation.
		8.5 The list of references is **sufficient**/insufficient for a literature review	The research source base (185 references) is **sufficient** and includes key normative SCO documents, official materials, and both foundational and contemporary scientific studies, ensuring the completeness and reliability of the conducted analysis.
9	The principle of practical value	9.1 The dissertation has theoretical significance: 1) yes; 2) no	**Yes.** The dissertation text is written at a high academic level, distinguished by logical coherence, structural clarity, and terminological precision. Its volume (150 pages) and composition (introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography) comply with academic standards.
		9.2 The dissertation has practical significance and has a high possibility of applying the obtained results in practice: **1) yes;** 2) no	**Yes.** The practical significance of the dissertation is demonstrated through the development of specific mechanisms and recommendations aimed at improving the legal and institutional framework of the SCO. The main areas of practical application of the results include: – Legislation harmonization – the proposed model acts, such as the SCO Model Investment Code and roadmaps for standards convergence, provide ready-made tools for the unification of the legal framework among member states. – Elimination of trade barriers – detailed procedures for monitoring the implementation of agreements and developing recommendations for reducing non-tariff barriers establish an operational mechanism for liberalizing mutual trade. – Formation of a unified investment space – clearly structured proposals for the standardization of investor guarantees and investment protection mechanisms are aimed at creating predictable and favorable conditions for cross-border investments. - Implementation of infrastructure projects – institutional solutions, such as the creation of a specialized committee and an arbitration center, are designed to provide the organizational and legal basis for the execution of specific projects in logistics, energy, and digitalization.

		9.3 Are the practical recommendations new? **1) completely new;** 2) semi-new (25-75% are new); 3) not new (less than 25% are new)	**Completely new.** The practical recommendations proposed in the dissertation are comprehensive and innovative. Their novelty is evidenced by the following aspects: – For the first time, the dissertation presents not merely a general idea of establishing new bodies, but a meticulously developed architecture of the Permanent Committee with a clear mandate and accountability mechanism, transforming previously theoretical proposals into a practical framework. – The developed SCO Model Investment Code represents not just a recommendation, but a holistic document integrating interconnected elements: a unified negative list, standardized conditions for regime application, a comprehensive set of guarantees, and a dispute resolution mechanism. Such an integrated approach is unprecedented within the SCO context. – The proposed sectoral approach, which differentiates the application of "hard" and "soft" law depending on the economic and political profile of a sector, provides a fundamentally new and flexible trajectory for phased integration within the SCO.
10.	Quality of writing and presentation	Quality of academic writing: **1) high;** 2) average; 3) below average; 4) low.	**High.** The quality of academic writing in the dissertation meets high scholarly standards. This is evidenced by the following criteria: – The material is presented systematically, with clear argumentation and consistent logical links between theoretical propositions and practical conclusions. – The dissertation demonstrates a well-considered composition, where each section meaningfully contributes to achieving the overall research objectives. – The text maintains a formal academic style, employs appropriate terminology, and provides correct and complete referencing. – The language is precise, professional, and reflects a high level of scholarly level.

11.	Comments on the dissertation		The research, distinguished by its relevance and systemic approach, establishes a solid foundation for further in-depth analysis. In particular, incorporating comparative analysis of legal regulation of trade and economic relations within the Eurasian Economic Union could reveal additional relevant models and practices of economic integration. Similarly, supplementing the study with specific examples of investment regulation within the SCO would enhance the practical orientation of the research and provide a more detailed picture of existing mechanisms. It should be emphasized that these remarks are intended as recommendations for the further development of the scientific field and do not affect the overall high evaluation of the quality and significance of the presented dissertation.
12.	The scientific level of the doctoral student's articles on the research topic (in the case of defending a dissertation in the form of a series of articles, official reviewers examine the scientific level of each doctoral student's article on the research topic)		The main theoretical concepts, conclusions, and practical recommendations of the dissertation are presented in 4 scientific publications, including 1 articles in international journals indexed in the Scopus database; 3 articles in scientific journals recommended by the committee.
13.	Decision of the official reviewer (in accordance with paragraph 28 of these Model Rules)		Zhang Ju is eligible to be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) under the educational program "8D04201 – International Law".

Official reviewer
PhD, Vice-Rector for Research at D.A. Kunaev University, Begazova Gulnapisa Zhandarovna
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