

The 23rd Annual Conference on WTO and China: Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the WTO and China's Role

Meihe Chen^{*}

On December 10, 2024, the 23rd Annual Conference on WTO and China was successfully held at the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE). It was sponsored by the UIBE, Shanghai University of International Business and Economics (SUIBE), China Society for World Trade Organization Studies (CWTO), undertaken by the China Institute for WTO Studies (CIWTO) and the School of Global Governance, and supported by the International Trade Forum of the China Society of World Economics, the WTO Law Research Society of China Law Society (WTO LAW), the International Trade Discipline Cooperative Group of National Universities, and Network on International Trade and Investment System (NITIS).

The Annual Conference on WTO and China has been successfully held for the past 23 years as a crucial platform for Chinese and overseas experts to discuss WTO-related issues, such as WTO reform, multilateral economic and trade cooperation, global economic governance, globalization. In addition to providing extensive insightful information, it has also provided innovative perspectives for policy formulation and academic research.

The Conference was titled “Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the WTO and China's Role”. Participants have exchanged and discussed in-depth topics such as the future of the WTO and China's choice after the return of

^{*} Meihe Chen, PhD. Candidate, China Institute for WTO Studies, University of International Business and Economics. Email: 202311012258@uibe.edu.cn.

US President Donald Trump, the economic impacts of trade policy and rule changes, and the directions and pathways for WTO reform.

More than 20 distinguished guests and renowned scholars attended this conference, including: Zhongxiu Zhao, President of UIBE; Quan Chong, President of CWTO; Changtian Han, Deputy Negotiator of Department of WTO Affairs, Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM); Xiaozhun Yi, former Deputy Director-General of WTO; Ruogu Li, former President of the Export-Import Bank of China; Mengzi Fu, former Vice President of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations; Bin Sheng, Vice President of Nankai University; Xiankun Lu, Director of the Lekok Center in Geneva, Switzerland; Xiaodong Hong, former Director of the World Trade Department of MOFCOM; Professor Xiaosong Wang, School of Economics, Renmin University of China (RUC); Dean Tao Xie, School of International Relations, Beijing Foreign Studies University; Professor Wenhua Ji, School of Law, UIBE; Professor and Vice Dean Pinguang Ying, School of Trade Negotiations, SUIBE (WTO Chair); Professor Hong Ma, School of Economics and Management, Tsinghua University; Professor Lijuan Zhang, School of Economics, Shandong University; Xin Chen, PhD. Candidate of UIBE; Nanchen Cui, PhD. Candidate of UIBE; Ke Tang, Lecturer from Henan University of Economics and Law; Shuhui Ruan, Research Assistant from Shanghai WTO Affairs Consultation Center; Professor Weidong Chen, School of Law, UIBE; Professor Liyu Han, School of Law, RUC; Associate Professor Ru Ding, China University of Political Science and Law; Associate Researcher Ming Jing, Fudan University; Yanjiao Ren, PhD. Candidate from Central University of Finance and Economics; Siyi Liu, Lecturer from University of International Relations; Hanquan Huang, President of the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research; and Chenggang Li, China's Ambassador to the WTO.

I. OPENING CEREMONY AND KEYNOTE SPEECHES

The opening ceremony was hosted by Xinquan Tu, Chairholder of the CIWTO, UIBE. Opening remarks were delivered by Zhongxiu Zhao, Quan Chong, and Changtian Han, respectively. President Zhao noted that the WTO has played an important role in promoting economic and trade cooperation among its

members and fostering global economic growth. Since joining the WTO, China has actively fulfilled its commitments and has become the world's second-largest economy. It is clear from this process that the multilateral trading system is effective and has great potential. In the midst of global economic and trade uncertainties, WTO reform has become an urgent and necessary undertaking. On behalf of UIBE, he expressed the hope for further discussions and cooperations with experts attending the conference. As President Chong noted, trade protectionism poses a threat to the multilateral trading system, and issues such as digital technology and climate change are reshaping the previously free-trade-dominated landscape, so academics must actively participate in interdisciplinary cooperation and contribute wisdom to the development of the multilateral trading systems. In light of the current complex and severe international situation, Han stated that the WTO has created a favorable external environment and provided a rules-based guarantee for the stability and development of global trade. In addition, it has safeguarded the authority and effectiveness of international law. Academic participation and the pooling of knowledge are essential to exploring better ways to engage in the WTO reform and to putting the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind into practice.

After the Opening Ceremony, Xiaozhun Yi, Ruogu Li, Mengzi Fu, and Bin Sheng delivered keynote speeches. Yi summarized the accomplishments of the WTO over the past 30 years: promoting economic globalization, facilitating economic growth in developing economies, and engaging in the challenging Doha Round negotiations. A recent visit by the WTO Director-General to the UIBE highlighted the strengthening of the collaboration between UIBE and the WTO. It is her hope that this partnership will continue to deepen in the future and that China will be able to make a greater contribution to the reform and development of the multilateral trading system. Based on macroeconomic statistical data, Li analyzed China's achievements since joining the WTO and emphasized the challenges trade protectionism poses to the multilateral trading system. Fu provided insights into the changes in global economic and trade landscapes, as well as China's response to those changes. Sheng analyzed the functionality and limitations of the WTO and stressed the need to maintain confidence and faith in the multilateral trading system.

II. THE FUTURE OF THE WTO AND CHINA'S CHOICE AFTER THE RETURN OF US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

In the first section of the conference, Xiankun Lu chaired a discussion on “The Future of the WTO and China's Choice after the Return of US President Donald Trump”. The following Guests delivered speeches on this topic: Tao Xie, Wenhua Ji, Xiaodong Hong, Xiaosong Wang, and Pingguang Ying.

In light of the vote in the US Congress, Xie discussed how the attitude of the two parties towards free trade has changed. In his presentation, he examined how the protectionism ideology of the Republican Party has influenced the formulation of US international trade policies. The Trump administration's overly broad and frequent adoption of trade policies will result in a reduction in the effectiveness of policy tools, according to Ji. At the same time, even though the Trump administration's trade policies will present a challenge to the WTO, they are also likely to stimulate the WTO's resilience and vitality, as well as to promote closer trade cooperation among WTO members.

Hong presented China's countermeasures to the challenges and the future directions of WTO. Wang suggested that there has been a significant increase in the influence of the global South in the field of international trade in recent years, and that China, as a member of the South, should actively lead multilateral cooperation. Based on the economic challenges facing the countries of the South, he presented a number of cooperation programs for consideration. Since the United States utilizes systematic and institutionalized competitive measures against China, the best way for China to expand its circle of friends and reduce trade conflicts is to engage in multilateralism, as proposed by Ying.

III. ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF TRADE POLICY AND RULE CHANGES

Professor Hong Ma chaired the second section of the conference entitled “Economic Impacts of Trade Policy and Rule Changes”. A number of guests presented speeches on this topic, including Xin Chen, Nanchen Cui, Ke Tang, and Shuhui Ruan.

Chen examined the impacts of trade policy uncertainty on the quality of

exports. Cui analyzed the impact of De Minimis Rule on the exports of China. A WTO perspective was presented by Tang on green finance, technological innovation, and ecological construction in major global economies. On the basis of US new energy vehicle subsidy policies, Ruan examined the development direction of regional value chain rules. This section finished by expert commentary from Professor Zhang Lijuan.

IV. DIRECTIONS AND PATHWAYS FOR WTO REFORM

In the third section, Professor Weidong Chen hosted a discussion on “Directions and Pathways for WTO Reform”. There were four participants, Ru Ding, Ming Jing, Yanjiao Ren, and Siyi Liu, who presented their viewpoints.

The topic of reforming WTO industrial subsidy rules was discussed by Ding in the context of China’s new development philosophy. Jing specifically examined the role of China’s Belt and Road Initiative in improving cross-border e-commerce laws and influencing global trade reform. From a WTO legal perspective, Ren reviewed the rules on cross-border data flows. Liu proposed a concept for reforming the power distribution mechanism of the WTO Appellate Body. A comprehensive analysis of the perspectives of participants was provided by Liyu Han.

During the conference’s closing remarks, Mr. Hanquan Huang, President of the China Academy of Macroeconomic Research, and Mr. Chenggang Li, Ambassador of China to the WTO, delivered closing remarks via video link. Huang emphasized that China remains a major engine and stabilizer of the global economy based on the latest macroeconomic statistics and policy measures. In his remarks, he noted that China is deeply integrated into the world economy, and its macroeconomic policies have a broad positive effect on the global economic growth. China will continue to foster synergetic development with the global economy in order to achieve shared benefits in the future. As Ambassador Li pointed out, reaching consensus among 166 members of the WTO with varying demands is a difficult task. He believed that reviewing the Marrakesh Accords signed 30 years ago can still provide valuable insights for bridging differences. He stated that China would continue to unite the majority of WTO members, form a broader united front, and remain steadfast in its support for the WTO’s stability and development.