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Call for papers  
International conference

“Globalization in the making:  
China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (1986–2001)”

25–26 November 2021

Organizers:

Lucia Coppolaro & Francesco Petrini

Department of Political Science, Law and Political Studies of the University of Padova

The year 2021 marks the 20th anniversary of China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The size of China’s economy, along with its unique economic model, makes the country the most economically and politically consequential addition to WTO as well as a major challenge to the multilateral trade institution. The complexity of China’s WTO membership was anticipated throughout the almost 15 years of negotiations and in some 900 pages of legal text required for formal acceptance by the 142 members of the WTO in 2001.

In 1986, China notified the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) about its wish to resume its status as a contracting party. The application was a result of Deng Xiaoping’s 1978 policy of internal reforms, opening the country to the outside world. The policy set the stage for China’s request for membership in the GATT. Accessing foreign capital and technology and opening foreign markets to Chinese products were of paramount importance to the country’s goal of export-led economic growth. The GATT helped reduce the vulnerability of China from the various discriminatory measures imposed on the trade of Chinese low-cost products, especially by the Western countries. After years of stalemate and sporadic negotiations with the major WTO members, the United States and the European Union, in particular, it was in 1996 that the discussion gained momentum with the emergence of a consensus on China’s WTO accession. While negotiations continued in the 1980s and 1990s as well, China emerged as a major player in the global economy and at a pace unlike any other country had ever experienced. Since 2001, China has benefited significantly from its WTO membership, becoming the largest export trader in goods. The economic rise of China and the shift to a multipolar world have led to shifts in power among the WTO member states, which, as some argue, have contributed to the weakening of the multilateral organization.

That said, the aim of our conference is to bring scholars from different disciplines (economy, history, law, and political science / international relations) together to reconstruct the negotiations leading to China’s membership in the WTO and publish a volume co-edited by Lucia Coppolaro and Francesco Petrini. We are interested in contributions that investigate the following:

- The preferences, stance, and expectations of governments and other representative institutions in China and the United States, as well as the European Union and its member states;
- The preferences, stances, and expectations of the other governments involved;
- The role, positions, and expectations of specific non-state actors (national and transnational political parties, economic associations, corporations, trade unions, and other social forces, and public opinion, in general);
- The role of personalities;
- The role of GATT/WTO services and officials;
- The expected impact on the economy of the countries involved, their political and legal systems;

Within these lines of inquiry, our goal is to understand, in the context of China's WTO ascension, which political, economic, and institutional factors affected the trajectory and outcome of the negotiations, which events can be considered milestones and decisive turning points, how the relationship between domestic politics and governments' roles in global economic governance shaped the role of the main actors involved, how domestic changes and the changes in the international economic and geopolitical context influenced the outcome of the negotiations.

Recognizing the broad scope of the subject, we also want to consider other contributions to the subject of "China's accession to the WTO, 1986–2001."

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Please submit proposals of up to 500 words along with your CV to [lucia.coppolaro@unipd.it](mailto:lucia.coppolaro@unipd.it) or [Francesco.Petrini@unipd.it](mailto:Francesco.Petrini@unipd.it) by 30 May 2021. The final decision will be sent out within a month of the submission deadline at the latest.

Selected authors will be invited to present draft papers (5000 words) at the workshop scheduled for 25–26 November 2021 to be hosted at the Department of Political Science, Law, and Political Studies of the University of Padova.

We currently envision a hybrid event, with both in-person and virtual participation options for attendees. We are prepared to transition to a fully virtual event if required.

Funding will be available to cover the travel and accommodation expenses of the selected participants.