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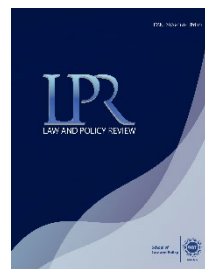
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# Examining China's Integration into the World Trade Organization (WTO): Effects, Obligations, and Lessons

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## Abstract

The current study offers a detailed examination of China's involvement in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its subsequent acceptance into the World Trade Organization (WTO). While China was an original member of GATT in 1948, political unrest led to its withdrawal from the global trade system in 1949. China later expressed interest in rejoining the organization in 1986, which resulted in the creation of a GATT Accession Working Party tasked with assessing China's rights and responsibilities. China made significant pledges to enact structural and functional changes to open up its markets to foreign competitors and enhance its trade practices, which led to its admission into the WTO in 2001. However, there have been debates and criticisms regarding China's compliance with its WTO obligations. This paper examines the commitments that China fulfilled on the road to becoming a member of the WTO and the structural and functional changes it underwent. The study also delves into the process of screening and how China advocated its position to become a member of the WTO. Additionally, the paper analyzes the impact of China's inclusion in the WTO on other developing and developed countries. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive and insightful analysis of China's association with GATT and its admission into the WTO, highlighting its impact and challenges for the global community. It serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, academics, and anyone interested in understanding the complexities of international trade and China's role in the global economy.

**Keywords:** global community, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), international trade, political unrest, World Trade Organization (WTO)

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## China and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)

### Introduction

China's association with the “General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)” stretches back to 1948 when it was among the founding members of the agreement. However, after much political turmoil in China in 1949, the then government of China, out of no way, decided to withdraw itself from GATT, ceasing to be a part of the global trade system established by GATT. Decades later, in 1986, China furthered its desire to rejoin the organization and re-instate its position as its member, thereby seeking to re-integrate itself into the global trade system established by GATT and develop its trade relations governed by the agreement (World Trade Organization, [2021](#)). The GATT finally accepted China's request on July 10, 1986 and established GATT Accession Working Party. This working party was charged with evaluating rights and obligations to be outlined in the agreement of China. As a GATT contracting party, it provided a venue for negotiation, addressed any other issues pertinent to China and GATT and made suggestions to the main body (Song & Wei, 2019). China pledged to enact extensive changes in order to open up its markets to foreign competitors and enhance its trade practices which made its admission to World Trade Organization (WTO) a significant turning point in its economic growth. However, some claimed that China did not completely comply with its WTO obligations. It did not contribute towards most of the commitments of WTO amid its negotiations which led to debate and criticism surrounding China's WTO membership.

The current paper intended to examine the commitments that China fulfilled on road to become a member of WTO and what structural and functional changes it underwent. Similarly, it discussed how China advocated its position to become a member and the process of screening. Lastly, this paper also analyzed the impact of inclusion of China in WTO on other developing and developed countries.

### The Remit of the Working Party vis-à-vis China's Tenure as a Signatory of the Accord

The said committee was entrusted to examine China's foreign trade regime. It developed a draft memorandum, summarizing rights and obligations of China to be a member, providing a forum for negotiation,

addressing any other issues concerning China and the GATT, and making recommendations to the Council (Song & Wei, [2019](#)).

### **A Point of Discord or Dispute that Arises between China and its Premier Trading Partners within the Realm of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**

The question of "special measures" with respect to Chinese shipments was the primary source of conflict among China and the main GATT trade partner. The main industrialized nations wanted China to commit to "selective safeguards" against the exporters that would enable acquiring markets to implement limitations specifically against China in an attempt to shield local manufacturers from subsidized Chinese exports. China showed notice of many poor nations' worries and acknowledged a wish to resolve these issues through alternative measures other than "selective safeguards" approaches (Li & Liu, [2018](#)).

### **China's Position and the Advocated Position**

China insisted that important improvements and adjustments would be undertaken in its home and international markets and that they would be undertaken shortly. Nevertheless, the major players in the setup argued that China's admission to GATT needs to be examined until future conferences mainly, for instance, Uruguay Round would get completed and the whole process and formalities of organizational frameworks were established. China never formally became a member of GATT (Chen & Zhang, [2017](#)).

The Uruguay conference that was supposed to be initiated in 1994 and culminated in the formation of WTO with that of realm of GATT maintaining a critical feature of WTO accords.

### **Economic Perturbations that Occur During the Negotiations Regarding Incorporation of China**

China's inclination to accede WTO has its origins dating back to 1980s. However, the proceedings to incorporate WTO were actively pursued in 1986. China's petition to accede WTO was examined as per Article XII of the WTO's constitutive accord which establishes the protocol for the admission of new members. The negotiations were led by a working party which was responsible to assess China on joining WTO and forwarding any proposals including a draft Protocol of Accession to the General Council 1995 (The World Trade Organization, [2021](#)).

## **Transformation of Working Party**

Originally, a committee for China's standing was found in 1987 (Wang & Li, [2020](#)). The working party, initially preoccupied with China's commercial trading policy, was transformed into a committee which was then directed to be led under WTO. The scope of this committee was then changed and even spaced that circled around many tariff and tax regulations along with many other legislations and enactments. The ambassador Pierre-Louis Girard of Switzerland was later given the charge of the said committee to keep things in check (Liu & Li, [2018](#)).

## **Tasks of the Working Party**

As per Article 12, the working committee assessed China's request for membership in the WTO and presented any suggestions along with a draught Instrument of Accession to the General Council. They investigated China's overseas business sector and the findings. There were detailed decisions in the Study of the Review Committee on China's Membership and the Proposal Instrument of Accession (Wang & Li, [2014](#)).

## **Difficulties During Negotiations**

During the process of joining, the matter of customs valuation presented itself as a formidable obstacle. Certain people in the committee articulated their concerns about the methodologies employed by China. These methodologies helped to determine the percentage of goods in terms of customs, specifically with regard to the utilization of prices for specific commodities, which would be incompatible with the Customs Valuation Agreement of the GATT 1994. However, China assured that it would adhere with the Customs Valuation Agreement upon gaining entry.

## **Effects of Reforms on Chinese Economy and Fulfillment of Obligations**

WTO laid down some complex pre-accession reforms for China to implement in its country. These reforms could bring paradigm shifts in the economy of China. The reforms in the trade sector of Chinese financial sector have been given paramount significance and were asked to make reforms in trade department too. Before accession, the trade sector of China was majorly controlled by FTCs and these FTCs had their say in almost all matters of imports and exports. This control of FTCs was due to the fact

that they stimulated monopolies that exerted much influence on the trade, keeping in check the interests of these corporations.

To implement the reforms in their true letter and spirit, China had to undergo a major fluctuation in their financial sector, that is, in order to increase the proportion businesses and enterprises apart from those that are already state-owned. The main purpose depicted out of this reform was to minimize the influence of government in marketing practices and to give confidence to the market itself in order to manage their resources accordingly.

Another area of reform was the legal and regulatory framework for foreign trade and investment. China was required to improve its legal and regulatory framework in order to ensure that it was consistent with WTO rules and regulations. This included the introduction of new laws and regulations to govern foreign trade and investment along with the strengthening of existing laws and regulations (Javorcika & Narciso, [2017](#)). Another area of reform was the use of tariffs and quotas. Before the implementation of reforms, the import market of China was imposing tariffs according to the interests of those FTCs and they controlled the policies and tariffs regulations accordingly. However, China had to implement the uniform trade and tariff policies along with reducing the taxes and tariffs for the incoming products in the country and make China lean more towards the concept of free-market.

This was achieved through a process of tariff reductions and the quota system was largely subtracted from the policies. By the time, China was about to join WTO in 2001, its tariffs were reduced to an average of 9.4% which was significantly lower than the average of 15.3% for developing countries. Additionally, China eliminated quotas on more than 90% of its imports. China's accession to WTO was a significant event in the global economy. The negotiations for China's accession to WTO were a long and complex process that lasted for 15 years (Chen & Li, [2016](#)).

In 1986, China proffered its petition for admission to WTO under the aegis of GATT in 1947. After a prolonged period of negotiation, spanning nearly 15 years, China was officially admitted as the full-fledged signatory and member. This rigorous process of incorporation into WTO entailed a thorough examination of China's trade policies and end of long-term tiring and discords, agreements, commitments, and pacts.

## **Doha Development Round and China's Participation**

China's involvement in the Doha Round was of paramount importance as it facilitated its engagement in multilateral trade discussions and enabled it to participate in the formation of global trade regulations. China also used the Doha Round to further its own trade interests.

China's participation in Doha Round also served to enhance its reputation as a conscientious participant in the global trading system. Following the rigorous participation of China in the negotiation and engagement plans of WTO, it finally convinced WTO and its members for its rightful position in WTO. Doha rounds played a significant part in the whole process.

However, some of the issues that were on the table during the negotiations, such as, agriculture quotas and Free market for developing countries were still unresolved. Despite this, China's participation in the Doha Round was beneficial for both China and the global trading system, as it helped to bring China into global arena of trade and open the doors of the world to explore its economy (Johnson, [2019](#)).

## **China's Participation in Other WTO Agreements**

In addition to its participation as mentioned in the previous section, China also attended other agreements with WTO. The key agreements that China participated in include:

### ***Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC)***

China is a signatory to ATC which governs the trade of textiles and clothing. The agreement was implemented to phase out the quotas that were in place for many years on textile and clothing trade between developed and developing countries.

### ***Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)***

China is a signatory to AoA which governs agricultural trade. The agreement was established to phase out the trade-distorting policies and to open up markets for agricultural goods. China, as a signatory to the Agreement on “Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)”, is bound by the regulations set forth therein which pertained to the basic functionalities of IPRs. This accord, in its capacity as a fundamental instrument of the World Trade Organization, institutes great

measures through the rights of the said agreement would be rightfully secured throughout the world.

### ***Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)***

China is a signatory to TBT, this agreement was enacted to restrain from imposing any measure that would have the tendency to create any operational hurdle in the smooth functioning of trade (Johnson, [2019](#)).

### ***Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA)***

China is a signatory to TFA which aims to ease customs, procedures, and streamline the process of importing and exporting goods. The said agreement would not only provide free markets to other states, however, it would also be beneficial for the financial development of the country (Johnson, [2019](#)).

### ***Preferential Trade Arrangements and Dispute Settlement***

Now that China has joined WTO, it has implemented a multitude of preferential trade arrangements where China would not impose any taxes on countries that are not developed. Additionally, it was also an active participant within WTO's dispute settlement mechanism, assuming various roles as complainant, respondent, and amicus curiae in a plethora of disputes (Williams, [2020](#)).

### ***Assistance to Developing Countries Multilateral Negotiations***

In fulfillment of its commitments to WTO, China demonstrated significant efforts to collaborate with developing countries for their improvement and development. The primary areas in which China worked with these developing countries include capacity building and infrastructure development. Following the significant implementation of reforms and the fulfillment of its commitments with the WTO, many leading experts and scholars at the time predicted that China would be on the verge of becoming a leading member of the WTO in the future. Upon joining WTO, China actively participated in the Doha Development Round of negotiations which started on the same day. Additionally, China joined several coalitions within the WTO including many Asian and other members, along with the G-20 (Patel, [2017](#)).

### ***Compliance with WTO Agreements***

As a WTO member, China had to conform to various accords including “the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing, Agreement on Agriculture and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights”. Additionally, China was subject to regular Trade Policy Reviews in which its trade and related policies were evaluated through the panel of WTO (Patel, [2017](#)).

### ***Trade Relations with Developing Countries***

Within the first decade following its accession, China accomplished a mutually beneficial outcome with remaining countries, particularly with respect to trading relations with developing nations. For instance, China was the primary market for trade of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) since 2009. Furthermore, China was a substantial supporter of the Aid for Trade initiative from 2008, likewise premier developing nation in terms of outward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

### **Market Economy Status**

As a growing state, China suffered both internal and external strains to safeguard and expand its economy. China was classified as a Non-Market Economy (NME) following the rules of its WTO Protocol of Accession only until 2016. Chinese administration, on the other hand, was working hard to achieve Market Economy Status (MES) for limiting amount of anti-dumping probes involving Chinese imports (Lewis, [2016](#)).

### **Trade Policy in China-US Relations**

Trade policy remained an important problem in China's interactions with other nations, notably the United States, two decades after its admission to the World Trade Organization. In the current history, US President Donald Trump chastised China for its economic policy, alleging the nation of unfair trading practices with the US. Moreover, some nations say that China is the exclusive beneficiary of foreign trade (Smith, [2018](#)).

### **China's Participation in Coalitions within the WTO**

China's participation in coalitions within WTO refers to its involvement in groups of countries that work together to advance common trade-related interests within the organization. These coalitions may be formed based on geographic, economic, or ideological factors. For instance, China is a

member of G-20 which is a coalition of major economies that seeks to promote economic growth and development, and to address global economic issues. China is also a member of G-33 which is a coalition of developing countries that focuses on agriculture-related issues, such as, food security and rural development.

China also participates in other coalitions, such as, G-77 which is a coalition of developing countries that focuses on a wide range of issues including trade and development, poverty reduction, and climate change. China also participates in the Joint Statement Initiative on Trade and Environment which focuses on the relationship between trade and environment and the development of trade-related environmental policies. Additionally, China is also a part of the "Like-minded Group of Developing Countries" which is a coalition of developing countries that seeks to promote the interests of developing countries in the multilateral trading system (Williams, [2020](#)).

### **Preferential Trade Arrangements and Dispute Cases**

China's position on Preferential Trade Arrangements (PTAs) within WTO is that it generally supports PTAs as long as they are consistent with WTO rules and do not discriminate against non-members. China has also been actively participating and concluding PTAs with other countries.

China was also involved in a number of dispute cases within WTO, both as a complainant and as a respondent. As a complainant, China brought cases against other WTO members over issues, such as, market access barriers and anti-dumping measures. As a respondent, China was the subject of complaints from other WTO members over issues, such as, intellectual property rights and subsidies.

China has also been actively participating in the consultations and negotiations process to settle these disputes along with working to resolve disputes through dialogue and cooperation.

Overall, China's position on PTAs and dispute cases within WTO is that it supports PTAs as long as they are in compliance with WTO rules, and it is willing to engage in consultations and negotiations in order to resolve disputes in a peaceful and cooperative manner (Patel, [2017](#)).

## Regional Trade Agreements

China has notified WTO of several Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) that it has entered into with other countries. These include:

- China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA)
- China-Korea Free Trade Agreement (CKFTA)
- China-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (CNZFTA)
- China-Peru Free Trade Agreement (CPFTA)
- China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA)
- China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA)
- China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (CPFTA)
- China-GCC Free Trade Agreement (CGCCFTA)

These are few of the agreements that China has notified to the WTO as a member of the organization. China is obligated to notify its RTAs to WTO in order to ensure that these agreements are consistent with WTO rules and do not discriminate against non-members.

## Challenges and Future Outlook

China is developing as perceived by WTO and facing pressures from both inside and outside the country to protect and develop its economy, while also making larger contributions to the global economy. The significant protection clauses in the WTO pact reflect a negative hazard which might limit China's larger trade development. China's 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) emphasized on the continuation of systemic market reforms and promotion of private sector engagement in the business, however, the level of success remained to be determined.

## Lessons for Other Countries from China's Inclusion in WTO

Since its inclusion, China has been an active participant in the organization, participating in regular Council and Committee activities and Doha Development Agenda negotiations (WTO, 2020). Additionally, China is first one in the organization with some scholars suggesting that it has taken over the leading role in WTO.

China's being a member of WTO marked a significant turning point for the global economy. The nation's integration into this new system brought about both opportunities and challenges for China and its trading partners. In particular, nations which are not developed, such as, Pakistan and Bangladesh had to navigate the implications of China's increased competitiveness in the international arena (Li & Liu, [2019](#)).

China's inclusion was the result of 15 years of negotiations, culminating in the country's legal membership on December 11, 2001. Since then, China engaged itself in all matters of the organization including regular Council and Committee activities and Doha Development Agenda negotiations. Additionally, it furthered “duty-free treatment for Least Developed Countries (LDCs)” since 2010 and a beneficiary of Generalized System of Preferences with various countries, such as, Australia and Japan.

### **Lessons for Developing Countries**

One of the key take-up which could be learned from China's inclusion in WTO is the imperativeness regarding economic reforms for developing countries. China's accession to WTO was closely tied to its ongoing economic reform efforts which included the private enterprises and state business in the market. These efforts were credited with driving China's economic growth and development and served as a model for other developing countries looking to reform their economies and integrate into the global economy (Chen & Li, [2015](#)).

Another lesson that could be learned from China's inclusion in WTO is the importance of trade negotiations and agreements for developing countries. China's accession to WTO was the result of extensive negotiations and agreements with the organization and its member countries which opened up new markets for Chinese exports and facilitated the country's integration into the global economy. This serves as a reminder for other developing countries about the importance of trade negotiations and agreements to drive economic growth and development.

### **Lessons for Developed Countries**

For developed countries, the lessons from China's inclusion in WTO primarily revolve around the challenges and opportunities posed by the country's economic rise. One of the key challenges is the potential for market disruptions caused by Chinese exports as seen in the textile industry. This serves as a reminder for developed countries to be vigilant in order to

monitor trade flows and taking action to control trade in poor conditions of the market.

### **Implications for Developing Countries**

China's improved efficiency in the international economy for services and products carries a considerable influence on emerging economies, notably those from the fabric and related industries. In a World Bank report, the elimination of textile and clothing caps underneath WTOS's Agreement on Textiles and Clothing showed a detrimental impact upon jobs and earnings in emerging economies. Furthermore, Chinese shipments were proven to exert a detrimental influence on developing-country's exporting success in areas including clothes, cotton, or shoes (Zhang, [2015](#)).

Nevertheless, China's entrance towards WTO created possibilities for poorer nations. Until 2009, the nation has become a stronger focus of LDC exports & serves as its primary supplier for several large markets. Furthermore, China contributed to the Aid for Trade effort from 2008 and is currently the major emerging nation by the amount of external FDI.

### **Lessons for Pakistan and Bangladesh**

The example of Pakistan and Bangladesh to handle the ramifications of China's WTO entry are instructive for many underdeveloped economies. The rising accessibility of Chinese goods in the worldwide industry harmed Pakistan's fabric and garment industries. Nevertheless, Pakistan also benefited through improved free trade offered by China's WTO membership, notably in the agriculture area.

Bangladesh has also had to contend with the impact of increased Chinese competition in the global market, particularly in the textile and clothing sector.

One of the key lessons that Pakistan and Bangladesh could learn from China's inclusion in WTO is the importance of trade liberalization. Prior to its accession to WTO, China possessed a heavily protected economy with high tariffs and non-tariff barriers in place. However, as part of its accession process, China committed to significantly reducing these trade barriers which paved the way for greater integration with the global economy. This led to increased exports and economic growth for China and similar trade liberalization efforts by Pakistan and Bangladesh could lead to similar results (Li & Wang, [2018](#)).

Another lesson that Pakistan and Bangladesh could learn from China's inclusion in WTO is the importance to invest in infrastructure and logistics (Wang & Huang, 2016). China's infrastructure and logistics networks were not well-developed prior to its accession to WTO, however, the country since invested heavily in these areas which improved its ability to trade with other countries. This led to increased exports, economic growth, and foreign investment in China. Pakistan and Bangladesh could similarly benefit from investing in infrastructure and logistics, as it would improve their ability to trade with other countries which, in turn, would lead to greater economic growth and development.

A third lesson that Pakistan and Bangladesh could learn from China's inclusion in WTO is the importance to address intellectual property rights (IPR) issues. China was criticized for its inadequate protection of IPR which led to issues, such as, counterfeiting and piracy. However, as part of its accession to WTO, China committed to address these issues which led to improvements in IPR protection. Pakistan and Bangladesh could similarly benefit from addressing IPR issues, as it would improve the ability of their domestic industries to compete in the global market which, in turn, would lead to greater economic growth and development (Chen & Li, [2015](#)).

Overall, China's inclusion in WTO brought both benefits and challenges for other countries, particularly for developing nations, such as, Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, by learning from China's experiences, these countries could apply similar strategies to their own economic development, such as, trade liberalization, investing in infrastructure, and logistics.

### **Conclusion**

Although, China's association with GATT has been a long and complicated journey and it has faced an exhaustive process of over 15 years for its accession. While the process of negotiation has been its way, China has undergone major changes in its economy, especially to curtail the role of FTCs among the others. This economical shift was done to make the system of China in line with the policies of WTO. Similarly, China fulfilled majority obligation set out by the working committee ranging from participations in various multinational conferences and deals, working with developing countries and compliance of various multinational agreements to trade relations and trade policies. Likewise, the inclusion of China did not adversely affect the developing countries. Rather, the countries that had

strong bond with China benefited from it in terms of trade and investments. China's increased efficiency in the global economy for both services and products shows a significant impact on emerging economies, particularly in the textile and related industries. The removal of textile and clothing restrictions under WTO's Agreement on Textiles and Clothing negatively affected job opportunities and income in emerging economies, with Chinese shipments having a detrimental effect on developing countries' exporting success in areas such as clothing, cotton, and shoes. However, China's accession to WTO opened up opportunities for poorer nations. China has become a primary supplier for several large markets and has contributed to the Aid for Trade effort since 2008. Additionally, China is the leading emerging nation in terms of external foreign direct investment. Therefore, countries must benefit from this fast growing economy in the long run.

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