



Multilateral Trading System and Future International Economic Law : Implications for rule of law in China (3 Dec 2021)

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The World Trade Organization (WTO), the centre for multilateral trading system, is the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which was founded in the aftermath of World War II. While the WTO is still relatively new, the global trading system established under the GATT is more than 70 years old. Given the importance of a rules-based multilateral trading organization to the global economy, the Centre for Chinese and Comparative Law (CCCL) of the City University of Hong Kong (CityU) School of Law hosted a distinguished public lecture on December 3, 2021, with **Judge and Professor Zhao Hong**, the former member and chairperson of the WTO's Appellate Body, as the guest speaker to discuss the relationship between the multilateral trading system and future international economic law.

Professor Wang Jiangyu, the CCCL's Centre Director, gave a welcome speech to start the public lecture. **Judge Zhao Hong** is currently a Professor at Peking University Law School's International Law Department and a Visiting Professor at Fudan University. She additionally held various senior positions at the PRC Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), including the Commissioner of the Department of WTO Affairs, Assistant Representative of the Office of Trade Negotiations, and Deputy Director-General of the Bureau of Anti-Monopoly. After retiring from MOFCOM, she served as the Deputy President of the China Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation. Having chaired the WTO's TRIMS Committee while working at China's Permanent Mission to the WTO, she has a thorough understanding of the multilateral trading system (MTS) and international economic law. She began the lecture by describing the MTS's accomplishments and challenges. She mentioned that the most recent setback could occur on MC 12, which was postponed indefinitely owing to a new COVID-19 viral type. She cited a number of factors for the current MTS issue, including a leadership vacuum at the WTO, MTS' lack of inclusivity for Least Developed Countries, the consensus decision-making process, and strategic competition between the US and China. She then gave a quick overview of international law's prospects in a changing world. She argued that due to changes in the geopolitical landscape and rapidly advancing technology and economy, international economic laws had fallen far behind. Last but not least, she anticipated that China's domestic legal structure and rule of law will be strengthened. Although there is still a long way

to go, China is widely expected to take the lead in international rulemaking, particularly in trade, investment, and financial and economic matters.

Professor Bryan Mercurio and **Assistant Professor Fang Meng** led a discussion session following Judge Zhao Hong's thought-provoking speech, in which they shared their insights into the relationships between MTS and the rule of law in China. The majority of all those in attending took the opportunity to express themselves, and many of them were insightful and imaginative. **Professor Wang Jianguy** gave a brief closing remark in which he thanked all of the attendants for their outstanding contributions, which attributed to the lecture's success.



Judge Zhao Hong and Professor Wang Jianguy (from left to right).



Professor Bryan Mercurio and Assistant Professor Fang Meng (from left to right).