

Call for Papers

Rethinking Free Trade: Liberal International Economic Order in the Wake of Brexit and Trump

(15-16 November 2017)

The GATT in conjunction with the Bretton Wood institutions, are seen as a major effort to retain a liberal international economic order in the aftermath of WWII. In parallel, the European integration project stemming from the Rome Treaties is seen as a political, social, and intellectual engineering project to pursue democratic peace and security through closer economic integration. Economic integration and trade liberalisation are not ends in themselves, but important economic instruments in the service of political and societal ends. In this context, some scholars argue that free trade constitutes a crucial global public good that is from time-to-time belittled and undervalued. This view is not always shared by civil society and the academic community. Social discontent against economic integration and free trade is best illustrated by Brexit and Trump's victory in the US presidential election.

Conceptually, free trade is asserted to be closely associated with neoliberalism, which attracts tremendous criticism. The ideological shift from embedded liberalism to neoliberalism is a topical issue heatedly debated by both proponents and opponents of free trade. A fresh look at neoliberalism and its critique is thus essential to underscore the trajectory of free trade and to the preservation of liberal international economic order.

Practically, free trade has never merely been wholly free trade, and has given rise to 'non-trade' concerns, ranging from environmental protection to labor rights, and from social distribution to national security. Ensuring such concerns are taken into consideration while pursuing free trade, if it is worth pursuing, is a fundamental challenge facing trade policymakers and scholars. Today, the question is even more acute as social anger and discontent with free trade grows and the legitimacy of the EU and the WTO is questioned seriously. The European integration project is in peril due to a surge in Euroscepticism, exemplified by Brexit. The deadlock of the Doha negotiations has led countries to turn to trade liberalization through other venues, such as the TPP, TTIP, and RCEP. Yet, the emergence of such mega-FTAs seems to exacerbate rather than alleviate the suspicions of civil society.

Free trade is also asserted to be one of the main factors contributing to the concentration of national wealth and widening the gap in social inequality. This results in greater discontent with economic integration and trade liberalization and provides fertile soil for populism. On the other hand, the secrecy of trade negotiations, in particular in the context of TPP, frustrates demands from civil society for greater transparency and public participation. Ironically, Brexit and Trump's presidency may contribute to further entrenching free trade, at the expense of social concerns, rather than undermine it. The withdrawal of the US from the TPP—and possibly from the NAFTA and the WTO—does not mean that Trump disdains free trade, but rather displays his preference for bilateral or unilateral action. Similarly, Brexit gives the UK a good opportunity to pursue FTA talks that will unleash its economic competitiveness without needing to overcome the hurdles of social clauses normally contained in EU FTAs. Thus the paradox: resentment against economic

integration and trade liberalization contribute to Brexit and a Trump presidency, which in turn leads to the more radical pursuit of free trade.

Against this background, the Institute of European and American Studies (IEAS), Academia Sinica intends to organize an international conference devoted to these debates on 15-16 (Wed-Thu) November, 2017 in Taipei, Taiwan. The potential topics include, but are not limited to, the following issues:

- The shift from embedded liberalism to neoliberalism and its critique
- The future of mega-FTAs in the wake of Trump and Brexit: Free and Freer Trade and the role of China
- Trump's trade policy and the end of the WTO?
- Populism and economic integration and trade liberalization
- Social impact/consequences of economic integration and trade liberalization

The organizer will be able to cover a round-trip ticket (economy class) and local accommodation. The organizer intends to publish the conference papers, with revisions made in accordance with the comments of participants and/or reviewers, as an edited volume by an international renowned publisher. The organizer welcomes lawyers, political scientists, and sociologists submit an abstract of less than 500 words outlining the main arguments, supported with a short CV of two pages or less indicating the author's affiliation, contact, and relevant publications before May 1, 2017. Interdisciplinary works are particularly encouraged. Successful applicants will be notified by May 20, 2017. Abstracts are to be submitted to Dr. Chien-Huei Wu wch@sinica.edu.tw as well the project manager Mr. David Kuan-Wei Wu davidwukw@gate.sinica.edu.tw. Queries about the conference can also be made to the above email addresses.

Important Timeline

1st May: Deadline for Abstracts

20th May: Notification of Successful Applicants

20th October: Conference Papers Due

15th-16th November: Conference on Rethinking Free Trade Takes Place in Taipei

31st March 2018: Revised Chapters Due