

## **WTO and Human Rights: Chinese Perspective**

Otto Chang  
Dean, Doermer School of Business  
Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne

### **Abstract**

China became a member of WTO in 2001 after long negotiations with major trading partners and much controversy. Some of the arguments against accession were accession rewards China's bad records on human rights; mass unemployment is expected from global competition; dumping of cheap-labor products will create unemployment in its trading-partner countries; and given poor legal systems, China may not be able to enforce the rules and agreements. Arguments for the accession include: huge Chinese market will create huge trading and economic opportunities for the rest of the world; economic development in China will bring changes in value systems that encourage human rights and democracy; and isolation of China will make China even more authoritarian, desolate, and dangerous.

In 2004 the World Bank conducted a comprehensive analysis on the expected impact of China's accession to WTO. (Deepak Bhattasali, Shantong Li, Will Martin, 2004). As expected, the winners are industrial and exporting sectors, the losers are agriculture and immobilized rural areas. Living standards for urban households was expected to rise by 1.5%, and decrease by as much as 6% for the poorest percentile in rural areas. About 90% of urban households were expected to gain, and three quarters of rural households were expected to lose.

China's rapid growth in output and exports after its accession to WTO has significantly increased income and hence the well-being of the Chinese population. However, higher income is brought about at the cost of deteriorating environmental and social standards which has increasingly affected the health of the Chinese people, especially those who live in major industrial cities. Accession to WTO has significantly increased social shocks, especially among the farming community, and contributed to poor health outcomes among the rural population. (Parikshit Basu, Yapa Bandara, and Charles Sturt, 2009)

In March 2003, an amendment was made to the [Constitution of the People's Republic of China](#), stating "The State respects and preserves human rights." (Edward Cody, 2004). In 2008, China was dropped from a list of top 10 human rights violators in the annual human rights report released by the U.S. State Department in 2008, while the report indicated that there were still widespread problems in China, such as tightened media and Internet curbs, increased controls on religious freedom in Tibet and the Xinjiang region, extrajudicial killings, torture and coerced confessions of prisoners, and the use of forced labor. (Helene Cooper, 2008)