Innovation

The project deals with the development of innovative competences in China. Despite an institutional environment characterized by high levels of uncertainty, entrepreneurship thrives even in the technology-based sector. The research asks for explanations how innovative competences were developed in such an institutional environment. For analyzing the institutional environment the research will rely on the business system approach (e.g. Whitley) while approaches from industrial demography / career histories (e.g. Burton) and the theory of social capital (e.g. Burt, Coleman, Granovetter) will be used for explaining the behavior of firms and individuals.

In this project we ask several questions:

1. What is the social-, economic- and political environment of the ICT industry?
2. What are the challenges, in terms of risk, for private SMEs in the ICT industry?
3. How do private SMEs respond to such challenges? What competences are developed?
4. How does the emerging business/political environment support the governance of these innovative competences?
5. How do careers allow some innovative competences to be credible within the Chinese context?
6. How do individual’s develop competences through their careers?

The empirical study will rely on two data sets collected in China: a career path study of alumni; and data on the life history of private SMEs in the IT industry. We are currently in the process of data collection.


Suggested readings:


Questions:

Directly related to my project/papers:

1. Acknowledging the need to explore the link between the individual and firm level in explaining innovative competence development and entrepreneurship, how do we safely theorize and measure such a link? What kind of methods are appropriate?
2. (related to Q1): Arguing that careers of key persons (such as a founder or manager) in a firm allow some competences to be credible, how do we a) theorize the link between certain career paths and certain firm competences; and b) how do we provide empirical evidence for such link?

3. How do I link the challenges that innovating firms in an emerging economy face to specific capabilities that they develop in response? Concepts? Empirical study?

4. What can comparative studies contribute? How do I make a comparison with other software industries in other emerging and/or advanced economies?

5. Methodology-wise: too few case studies? What alternatives? What other factors are still missing in the results part of the paper?

More general questions referring to the two suggested readings:

6. Should we focus on trying to explain familiar problems in a novel context (such as existing research questions but now studied in China) or on trying to explain idiosyncratic problems (such as problems related to specific features of the Chinese IT industry)?

7. If we choose to study China-specific problems, is there a need to build a comparative study? If so, how should we do that?

8. To what extent should we use triangulation of existing methods whereas the appropriate use of a single method often poses many problems in the Chinese context?

9. Ownership and innovative capability: What kind of challenges do minority state-owned (‘hybrid’) firms face and what kind of innovative competences do they develop? What are the major differences between minority state-owned firms and private firms?