

The Politics of Innovation: China in a Global Context

Abstract for a Keynote Address

Erik Baark, Hong Kong University of Science & Technology

The emergence of China as a major economic power has inspired many – both inside and outside China – to venture predictions about the role of innovation in making China into a superpower. The evidence demonstrates that China’s organizations have become significantly more adept at utilizing technology to achieve new levels of competitiveness, and that research and development (R&D) efforts have reached an advanced stage. The leadership of China has been enthusiastic in its support for innovation and a vigorous policy promoting the development of science and technology has mobilized national investment in R&D, reaching 2% of GDP in 2014. Although this record is impressive, it must be seen in a global context. What are the main driving forces of innovation in China? What are the effects on global economies, environments and societies?

This is where the politics of innovation in China becomes relevant. The political priorities of the Chinese leadership are crucial for the direction and speed at which key technologies are developed and diffused. The politics of local governments constrain the actions of firms, researchers, entrepreneurs. The cultural synthesis of traditional Chinese values and rapid modernization are actively shaping innovation processes and outcome. A more comprehensive theoretical approach is required to analyze these developments in a global context, and this address outlines key components of this type of insight.