Qian Li is a doctoral candidate in Beijing Normal University and also a PROPHE member. Her topic is “For profit higher education as a fledging sector in China: An analysis of national policies and local and provincial variations”.
The economic reform in China in 1980s made private higher education revive and grow. Private higher education institutions might be in operation pursuing profits, but for-profit higher education was forbidden in the laws. In 2013, Chinese government amended national education laws and for-profit university began to have its formal role in Chinese legal system.
National policies had made it clear that China will set up separated legal frameworks for nonprofit and for-profit private higher education institutions. And pilot reform projects have been launched in local areas that were shown as red spots in the map below. In the beginning of this year, Chinese national government has proposed to develop supporting regulations and policies, including education land policies, grants, taxes, student insurance, teachers’ tenure, etc, to give differentiated supports to nonprofit and for-profit higher education.
To study how local government responded to the national reform, text analysis of local regulations and policies has been done. The research has not been finished, but 3 types of local reactions have been identified.

(a) Policy innovation. Central government’s policies were vigorously carried out and further developed in some regions such as Wenzhou, Shenzhen, and Shanghai. These regions always have highly developed system of private higher education.

(b) Policy copy. Some of them simply declare that local policies will be in harmony with national policies and present no specific regulations, while some of them learn from other local governments’ regulations.

(c) Policy escape. Some local governments purposely stray from the guidance of the central government or take no action to promote the reform.
Because most local governments adopt the “wait-and-see” strategy, and national supporting policies are still not clear, for-profit university is still a proposal in policy texts, not in reality.
Thanks!

Please email me if you have any questions and comments.

liqian08@mail.bnu.edu.cn