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Experiences of 2000 Census of China

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A. Background

Since the first population census in 1953, there have been five population censuses conducted in China. The Chinese government decided in 1980s that population census would be conducted every ten year in the year with last digit of 0 since the fourth population census in 1990.

The 5th population census of China was conducted on November 1, 2000. This cross-century census is the largest one in China's history and it is the first census since the country set up initially its socialist market economic system.

B. The goal of the 2000 Population Census

The goal of the 2000 population census of China is to find out the changes of population in number, structure, distribution, quality and living environment, etc. since the 1990 census and provide reliable basis for checking up the implementation of the 9th Five-year Plan of Social and Economic Development, formulating scientifically the 10th Five-year Plan of social and Economic Development and the Long and Medium-term Program of Development, making overall arrangement of people's material and cultural life and realizing the sustainable development of population, economy, resource and environment.

C. The organization of the 2000 Population Census

China has no permanent census organization. For conducting the 2000 population census, census leading groups and their offices were set up by the State Council, the governments of 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, and the governments of all county and township level administrative units. They will be responsible for leading the population census and organizing its implementation.

D. The coverage of the 2000 Population Census

The 2000 population census was conducted on a “de jure” basis. The “de jure” count included all persons who hold the nationality of, and permanent residing place in the People’s Republic of China. Everyone must be enumerated in his or her usual residence and everyone should be enumerated in one place only.

The following persons should be enumerated in their own townships, towns and street communities:

- (1) Those who reside in the townships, towns and street communities and have their household registration there.
- (2) Those who have resided in the townships, towns and street communities for more than 6 months but the places of their household registration are elsewhere.
- (3) Those who have resided in the townships, towns and street communities for less than 6 months but have been away from the place of their household registration for more than 6 months.
- (4) Those who live in the townships, towns and street communities during the population census while the places of their household registration have not yet settled.
- (5) Those who used to live in the townships, towns and street communities but are working or studying abroad during the census and have no permanent household registration for the time being.

E. Major Characteristics of the 2000 Population Census

(1) New items were added to meet new demands. To meet the various demands emerged with the social-economic development, based on a balanced consideration for many factors such as various requirements from different parties, possibility of respondents’ understanding and cooperation,

costs and etc., the census items were carefully selected and revised in 2000 census. Compared with the 1990 population census, some new items including birthplace, time of residency, time of work last week, source of income, and items about housing were also added. It's the first time to include items about housing in China's population census.

(2) Census date was changed. During the past four censuses of China, the census reference time was zero o'clock of July 1st. In 2000 census it was changed to November 1st. In the early November the climate is usually much amiable in most part of the country and is more convenient for enumeration.

(3) Time and space standard for permanent residents were adjusted. Following the active development of market economy, the residential place of people changes more and more frequently. In 2000 census, the time standard for permanent residents was reduced from one year to six months; the space standard was also reduced from county (city) to township (street) so as to reflect the more frequent movement of population.

(4) Short and long forms were introduced. China is a developing country with limited financial resources, and with rapid development of social economics, more population information has been expected from the census. Therefore, we combined the sample survey with the population census by using a long questionnaire and a short questionnaire. The short form only consisted of some basic items, and 10% households were selected to fill in the long questionnaire for all 62 items.

(5) New IT measures for data capture were adopted. Keyboard data entry was used during 1982 and 1990 census of China. As the cost of labor has increased in recent years and governmental departments and the public hope to get census results within a short period, image technique was used for data capture in 2000 population census. The questionnaire forms were scanned by more than 400 scanners, which were deployed in 340 prefectures and cities, and characters in the forms were recognized by OCR software. The images of questionnaire forms were also stored as census archives.

(6) Disseminating census data by various means. Better dissemination of census data is crucial for wide and effective utilization of population census data. To ensure easy and broad access, the census data has been published in

different ways. Population census offices at different level complied and published a series books with detailed tabulations of the 2000 population census in both paper and CD-ROMs. Census information was also published in the websites of the National Bureau of Statistics and Statistical Bureau at local levels. The population census office under the State Council also released different micro sample datasets by topics for conducting research projects conducted by research institutes and universities.

(7) Mapping and GIS technique were introduced. In 2000 census, the geographic area framework for census was well designed; nearly 5 million EA maps were drawn for census enumeration and digital maps down to township level census areas have been created for data dissemination and analysis. This was the first time to introducing census mapping and GIS technique in the population census of China.

F. The Main Difficulties of the 5th Population Census of China

The 2000 population census encountered unprecedented difficulties as compared with the previous censuses. Examples of such difficulties included:

(1) The large size, wide areas and frequent changes of the floating population;

(2) Prominent phenomenon of inconsistency between one's actual vs. registered residence;

(3) Negative impact on the census of various administrative assessment or punishment mechanism (For instance, floating population were afraid of paying fees or sending back to rural areas; households with extra births beyond the family planning program were afraid of being fined; local leaders were afraid of assessment based on the census results);

(4) Decline in the cooperation in the census from some respondents;

(5) Difficulties in recruiting enumerators under the market oriented economic system.

All these were new difficulties that were not encountered in previous censuses. In addition, some traditional approaches in population control, household registration and employment management were faced with new challenges and failed to meet the dramatic changes in the economic and

social life, while new regulations and policies were not in place. Situation like this brought about unprecedented difficulties against the smooth conduct of the census.