

## **The development and present status of statistics on basic information of cities in China**

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### **Abstract**

Statistics on basic information of cities form an important part of the national statistical survey system in China. Cities statistical work in China started in the early 1960s, which was formally incorporated into the national statistical system in 1982. With China's rapid economic development and the advance of China's urbanization development strategy, statistics on basic information of cities have been getting more and more attention. China's National Bureau of Statistics has been committed to building the cities statistics system with scientific methods, open channels and reliable sources. The development of the cities statistical indicator system has gone through a process, progressing from just a few indicators, to more indicators, and then to better though less indicators. The cities statistical indicator system featuring a wide range of indicators, comprehensive contents, and being continually improved, was ultimately formed. Currently, China cities statistics adopt different statistical systems and data collection methods for prefecture-level and above cities and county-level cities. China's cities statistics are subject to limitations of the current administrative system and the statistical system. There are many difficulties and problems that need to be further enhanced and improved.

**Key Words:** China statistics of cities, statistical contents, data collection, and main shortcomings

### **1. Development of statistics on basic information of cities in China**

Statistics on basic information of cities in China started in the early 1960s. In order to meet the needs of the adjustment of national economy and enhancement of city administration, a one-time survey of 39 cities was arranged in China in 1962. The survey mainly collected indicators on industry, infrastructure, business, finance, employment, education and population in these 39 cities in 1957, 1960 and 1962. This was the first cities statistical work in China. Subsequently, in order to meet the needs of researches on urban economic problems under the planned economy, the basic situation of the national economy card survey of all cities was arranged in China in 1974, which mainly included most of the indicators of industrial production. As the central tasks of the country gradually shifted to economic work, the status of cities became increasingly important. The survey of the urban basic situation of the national economy card was further strengthened in 1979, with the content of the indicators enriched and the unified national system took initial shape. In order to meet the needs of the urban economic system reform, the *Urban Basic Situation of the National Economy Card* was renamed as the *Basic City Statistical Yearbook*, which was

formally incorporated into the national statistical system in 1982. Up to then, the China's statistical system on basic information of cities had been formally established.

The development of the China cities statistical indicator system has gone through a process, progressing from just a few indicators, to more indicators, and then to better though less indicators. The urban statistical indicator system featuring a wide range of indicators, comprehensive contents, and being continually improved, was ultimately formed as detailed below.

- (i) The number of indicators had been increasing gradually and then progressing to better though less indicators. At the initial stage of development of the methodology and system, there were just a few indicators. The number then increased gradually and ultimately to a maximum of some 400 in 1992. Along with the evolution of urban development theory and actual requirements of cities statistics, the cities statistical indicator system has become simpler, with indicators not required in city development and difficult to be collected deleted. At present there are over 250 major indicators, and we will continue to follow the "few but better" rule.
- (ii) The indicator system continued to improve, and the coverage continued to expand. During 1990s, some indicators such as those classified by ownership groups, agriculture outputs and retail groups, have been eventually phased out. While other indicators have been enhanced such as those on public finance, environmental protection, and city land use, indicators on insurance, environment and energy consumption have been added into the system. This has changed the nature of the indicator system, from one taking priority on industry to a more comprehensive and sustainable system, which reflects the essential requirement of scientific development.

The cities statistical indicator system is a part of the national statistical indicator system, and is the only nation-wide system that adopts cities as the basic statistical unit..

## **2. Contents of China Cities Statistics**

Currently, China's cities statistics adopt different statistical systems for prefecture-level and above cities and county-level cities.

### **2.1 Statistics of prefecture-level and above cities**

Statistics of prefecture-level and above cities adopt the *City Basic Information Statistics Form System*. The target of the statistics cover the 288 prefecture-level and above cities all over the country, and are further divided into "whole city" and "urban districts". The indicators include city population, employment, resources, economic development, social development, environment and infrastructure construction, etc. The detailed contents include 268 indicators in 11 categories, covering administrative division, population, employees, land and water resources; overall economic situation;

industry; communications and transportation, postal and telecommunications, energy and power; trade, foreign trade, tourism; fixed assets investment; education, science and technology, sports, culture and health; people's life, social security; transportation, social safety; municipal public administration, environmental protection, etc. The detailed contents include:

- (i) The subsystem that reflects the situation of urban human resources. It includes section 1, in which 41 indicators reflecting city administrative division, population, employees, land and water resources, etc;
- (ii) The subsystem that reflects the situation of urban economic development. It includes 118 indicators from Section 2 to Section 6. Among which, Section 2 reflects overall city economic situation, with 31 indicators covering GDP, secondary, and tertiary sector, financial income and expenses, finance and insurance, etc; Section 3 reflects urban industrial economics, including 24 indicators of industrial enterprises above designated size in various economy types ; Section 4 includes 25 indicators reflecting urban communications and transportation, postal and communication, energy and power; Section 5 reflects urban trade, foreign trade, and tourism, including 20 indicators; Section 6 reflects indicators of urban fixed assets investment. It mainly comprises 18 indicators concerning fixed assets investment, real estate investment as well as affordable housing construction.
- (iii) The sub-system that reflects the city social development. It includes 79 indicators from Section 7 to Section 9. Specifically, Among which, Section 7 includes 32 indicators on urban education, science and technology, sports, culture and health ; Section 8 refers to indicators on urban living standard and social security, including 40 indicators ; Section 9 refers to 7 indicators concerning urban accidents and social safety.
- (iv) The sub-system that reflects the information of urban infrastructure, that is, 22 indicators in Section 10. It consists of indicators on urban infrastructure, gas supply, public transport and green space ;
- (v) The sub-system that reflects the urban environmental protection. It includes 8 indicators in Section 11.

## 2.2 Statistics of county-level cities

Regarding statistics of county-level cities, the *Statistical Reporting System of Basic Socio-economic Information in County-level Cities* is employed. It consists of 182 indicators of 13 categories: basic information of rural areas; population and

employment; overall economic situation; agriculture; industries and construction; transportation, postal & telecommunication, energy; trade, foreign trade and tourism; fixed assets investment; education, science & technology, culture and health; people's living standard; social security; social safety; resources, environment and sustainable development. The indicators cover 374 county-level cities nationwide, with breakdown by "whole city" and "urban districts".

### **3. Data Collection for China's Cities Statistics**

#### **3.1 Institutions Responsible for Organization and Implementation**

In total, 31 provincial bureaus of statistics nationwide, except Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, are the parties responsible for implementing the cities statistics reporting system. They are responsible for overseeing the bureaus of statistics at county and above level under their charge in conducting the annual reporting tasks according to the national methods and system and take responsibility for the overall data quality assurance.

#### **3.2 Channels of Data Collection**

There are three data collection channels for the China's cities statistics according to the current systems of city administrative control.

The first source is from statistics available internally in various statistical bureaus in the government. For example, the section of employed persons adopts and the section of GNP adopts *Labor and wage statistics system* from population and employment professional and the section of GNP adopts *National Accounts Statistics System* from national accounts professional.

The second source is from statistics available in other relevant government departments. E.g. the gross amount of water resources adopts *Water Resources Bulletin* from Ministry of Water Resources, and the section of public security adopts Criminal Case Statistical Table from Ministry of Public Security.

The third source is from administrative records of relevant government departments and organizations. E.g. the number of households at year-end adopts household registration from department of public security, and the amount of import and export goods adopts administrative records from department of customs.

The fourth source is from the upper level statistical department. These indicators mainly include those from sample surveys, such as population, or cross-city (e.g. region) indicators such as freight volume by train.

The first two channels are the main source of data collation.

#### **3.3 Work-flow of Data Collection**

The Department of Urban Surveys of the National Bureau of Statistics is in charge of formulating and revising the cities statistical indicators for prefecture-level and above cities. These branches formulate the System for Report Forms of City Basic Information Statistics and this is then distributed to specific bureaus of statistics in provinces, districts and municipalities after approval. The System is then further distributed to every city under these institutions. Department of Rural Surveys of

National Bureau of Statistics is in charge of formulating and revising the System for Report Forms of County Basic Information Statistics. Similarly, the System is distributed to specific bureaus of statistics in provinces, districts and municipalities after approval. The System is then further distributed to every county-level city by the provincial Bureau of Statistics and to counties by county-level cities.

All cities collect specialized and department statistics. The statistics from cities on and above prefecture-level are reported to bureau of statistics in provincial level that re-examine the statistics from all cities, and then report them to the Department of Urban Survey of the National Bureau of Statistics. Similarly, County-level cities statistics are reported to the Department of Rural Survey of the National Bureau of Statistics from a bottom-up approach..

#### **4. Main difficulties and problems of China's cities statistics**

China's cities statistics were established and developed adapting to the development in China's urbanization process, and alongside to the improvement of people's cognition of cities. But China's cities statistics are subject to limitations of the current administrative system and the statistical system. There are many difficulties and problems that need to be further enhanced and improved.

##### **4.1 Indicator system should be further improved**

As the cities statistical system was set up relatively late, the current urban statistical indicator system is still not perfect. Faced with the limitations of report form of different specialized statistical systems, the cities statistical system is still not completely in line and adapting the statistical methods, coverage and definition of China's current situation and regulation of socio-economic development of urban areas. Especially with the rapid development of Chinese economy, a large number of farmers migrate to cities which encounter a lot of new cases and problems in the development process. How to accurately reflect China's cities development is a long-term and realistic problem with which China's cities statistics must be face.

##### **4.2 The lack of cities statistics at county level**

At present, China's cities statistics cover the county level, but it is often difficult to differentiate statistical data of urban area at the county level as the county-level city doesn't have the information following a "pure" city concept. Hence, this will affect the comparability of cities' statistical data. Researching and solving this technical problem will depend on the further improvement of China's statistical methods.

##### **4.3 Accuracy of splitting of statistical data in strips**

China's current city administrative management system is a combination of strips and pieces with pieces being dominated. Some strip units, such as railway transportation, finance and insurance, and air transportation, implement management system that cuts across industries and administrative regions. So, the cities statistical data should be split by administrative area. Sometimes the splitting criteria are different, and as a result the splitting results are different, affecting the accuracy of the

split data.

#### **4.4 Inconsistency between government statistics and department statistics**

(i) Statistical definition is not consistent

In China, department statistics need to be filed in the government statistical institutions at the same level or above. Some departments don't implement the strict filing system, or some data are not easily available, so some statistical definitions will be inconsistent between the department statistics and government statistics. This inconsistency is a common technical problem in urban statistics.

(ii) Lack of department statistics (no statistics available or can't compile the statistics)

Government statistics is not bullet proof. In the same way, department statistics are also not bullet proof. There are many gaps in department statistics. Some departments failed to provide some data and information about cities economic and social development of the most important aspects and fields, such as data of cities environmental protection. Owing to the complexity of the indicators, some departments still failed to provide accurate information on some individual indicators, such as data of transportation and energy.

In order to solve the above two problems, national statistical offices need to consider the scientific reasonableness of individual indicators when conducting annual revision.

(iii). Seeking departments' cooperation

In China, government statistical departments are "vulnerable" departments. The quality of government statistical work, to a certain extent, depends on the "cooperative" level of the related departments. China's cities statistical work involves nearly 30 related departments. The difficulty of seeking departments' cooperation is always an important problem to statistical workers.

#### **References**

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