The Evolution of Population Census Undertakings in China, 1953–2010*

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Abstract

This article documents the evolution of census undertakings in China since 1953, with a focus on how the recently completed 2010 census differs from the 2000 census. We argue that how the censuses were conducted and what social and demographic information was collected per se to a large extent reflect the changing social and political situations in China over the past six decades. The article highlights the changes made since the 1982 census, especially the improvements of the 2000 census over the 1990 census and of the 2010 census over the 2000 census. Selected data are drawn from censuses to chart key aspects of social changes in China, including migration, urbanization, and employment. Finally, problems encountered during the 2010 census undertaking and challenges for future censuses are identified and discussed.

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