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**Review Article**

# A Study on Improving Local Legislation in China's "Cities with Districts"

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## Abstract

In 2015, China amended its Legislation Law, granting local legislative power to cities with districts (i.e., prefecture-level cities with subordinate districts). These cities have carried out legislation in light of local conditions, which has affected local economic and social development. This paper examines the status quo of local legislation in cities with districts, analyzes issues in its implementation that warrant further research, and discusses possible approaches to improvement, with a view to providing references for relevant research and practice.

**Keywords:** Cities with districts; Local legislation; Legislative authority; Public participation; Cultivation of legal literacy.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the amendment to China's Legislation Law granted local legislative power to cities with districts, extending local legislative power from the provincial level to prefecture-level cities with subordinate districts. Since then, some of these cities have actively carried out local legislation in light of local conditions, which has affected local economic and social development. However, as a newly granted power, its implementation in some cities may still involve issues such as insufficient public participation, unclear boundaries of legislative matters, and limited legislative capacity, which warrant further improvement. Based on an analysis of the status quo and existing problems of local legislation in cities with districts, this paper explores possible approaches to improvement, with a view to providing references for relevant research and practice.

## II. Basic Status Quo of Local Legislation in China's Cities with Districts

### *(1) Overall Situation*

Following the 2015 amendment to the Legislation Law, the people's congresses and their standing committees of cities with districts may, provided that they do not contravene the Constitution, laws, administrative regulations, or the local regulations of their province or autonomous region, formulate local regulations on matters such as urban and rural construction and management, ecological civilization development, historical and cultural protection, and community-level governance. This constitutes an important development in China's local legislative system. In practice, these cities have carried out local legislation in light of local conditions; however, in implementation, issues such as limited public participation and unclear boundaries of legislative matters remain and warrant further improvement, which merits further research.

### *(2) Main Problems*

#### 1. Public Participation Needs Improvement

Public participation is widely regarded as an important element of legislative quality. At present, however, public awareness of and engagement in legislation appear limited, and participation channels and feedback mechanisms remain underdeveloped. In Wenzhou, for example, the Wenzhou Property Management Regulations, one of the local regulations that attracted comparatively greater public attention, received legislative opinions from just over 300 citizens, compared with Wenzhou's permanent population of more than 9.2 million. In practice, statutory legislative procedures are generally followed, but the extent to which public input affects legislative outcomes remains limited. The distinctiveness of local legislation is shaped not only by people's congresses and governments but also by public input; limited public participation may constrain the extent to which such distinctiveness can be achieved [1].

[1] Li Shishi, "Solidly Advancing Local Legislative Work in Cities with Districts to Provide Solid Rule-of-Law Support for the Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy," Local Legislation Research, 2016, No. 1, pp. 14–20.

**2. Boundaries of Legislative Matters Are Not Clear Enough**

Article 81 of the Legislation Law provides, in an enumerated manner, that cities with districts may formulate local regulations on four categories of matters. These categories are broad and internally diverse, and their specific boundaries are not clearly delineated. By the end of 2025, the total number of local regulations in cities with districts was approximately 5,000. These cities have adopted local regulations across the four categories, but issues such as differences in operational standards and difficulties in delimiting the scope of matters remain in practice and warrant further clarification.

**III. Specific Measures for Improving Local Legislation in Cities with Districts**

***(1) Broadening Channels for Orderly Public Participation***

Public participation is one dimension of local legislation in cities with districts. In some localities, public participation remains limited, which may be associated with limited legal literacy, restricted participation channels, limited disclosure of legislative information, and underdeveloped feedback mechanisms. Possible measures include strengthening legal education and information dissemination, raising public awareness of participation, expanding channels for soliciting public opinions, using government websites, news media, and official platforms of people's congresses to publish draft regulations, and improving mechanisms for collecting and responding to public opinions, with a view to integrating public participation into the processes of initiation, drafting, deliberation, and evaluation. For example, during the second deliberation of a regulation, the Standing Committee of the Bengbu Municipal People's Congress solicited public opinions on proposed amendments through television, newspapers, government websites, and official platforms of the people's congress. Such practices may help more people learn about this matter and may offer references for improving the transparency and responsiveness of local legislation in cities with districts; the city's good practices are worth learning from.

***(2) Refining the Boundaries of Legislative Matters in Cities with Districts***

The Legislation Law enumerates four categories of matters on which cities with districts may legislate: urban and rural construction and management, ecological civilization development, historical and cultural protection, and community-level governance. In practice, these categories are broad and internally diverse, and their specific boundaries require further clarification. For example, urban and rural construction and management alone covers planning, infrastructure, and municipal management, while the other categories also encompass wide-ranging matters. Rather than immediate amendment, their scope may be clarified through legislative interpretations, guidance on recording and review, lists of local legislative matters, and legislative work guidelines, thereby improving operability.

## CONCLUSION

It has been eleven years since the National People's Congress amended the Legislation Law to grant local legislative power to cities with districts. During this period, local legislation in these cities has advanced rapidly and achieved notable progress. As channels for public participation continue to expand, the boundaries of legislative matters are gradually clarified, and legislative capacity continues to improve, local legislation in cities with districts will become more standardized, practical, and effective. This paper aims to provide references for relevant research and practice.

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