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China's death penalty reform

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30 October, 2005

THE ARTICLE

China's death penalty reform

China has announced it will change its system of capital punishment so that its top court will review all death sentences. This transfers decision making out of the hands of local courts, which often make mistakes and execute innocent people. The new process should reduce the number of miscarriages of justice. The new system could also reduce the total number of death sentences in China by a third. The president of the Supreme People's Court, Chief Justice Xiao Yang, said: "As few executions as possible should be carried out and as cautiously as possible, to avoid wrongful executions."

China executes more people each year than all other countries put together. China's government refuses to say how many people are killed, but Amnesty International estimates more than 3,400 people were executed last year. Amnesty claims many of these people were wrongly executed. One case was recently discovered, sixteen years after the execution took place. The supposed victim of a man executed by firing squad was found alive and in prison. Mr. Yang said capital punishment "is reserved for [criminals] guilty of the most atrocious crimes" but must be fair to avoid error.

WARM-UPS

1. MY COUNTRY: In pairs / groups, talk about the system of justice in your country. Is it effective? Does it prevent crime? Does it make society safer? What changes would you like your government to make?

2. DEATH PENALTY METHODS: In pairs / groups, talk about the following methods of capital punishment that are used around the world. What are the worst things about each method?

- Hanging
- Guillotine
- Firing squad
- Stoning
- Lethal injection
- Beheading
- Electrocution (electric chair)
- Gas chamber

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

China / capital punishment / courts / innocent people / making mistakes / miscarriages of justice / Amnesty International / criminals / atrocious crimes

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. DEATH PENALTY: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the death penalty. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: Discuss the following statement from Amnesty International about the death penalty:

"The death penalty is the ultimate, irreversible denial of human rights. [It is] a system riddled with economic and racial bias and tainted by human error."

6. TWO-MINUTE DEBATES: Debate each of the arguments about the death penalty below with a partner for just two minutes, before moving on to the next partner and debate. Student A agrees with the first argument, Student B, the second.

- a. All killing is wrong. vs. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.
- b. It saves taxpayers' money. vs. No price can be put on human life.
- c. The death penalty reduces the number of crimes. vs. Not true.
- d. The death penalty takes away human rights. vs. So does multiple murder.
- e. Mistakes are made. Innocent people die. vs. No system is perfect.
- f. The death penalty gives society the message that killing is OK. vs. That's not true.
- g. Executed 'terrorists' may become 'martyrs'. vs. Society wants terrorists to die.
- h. It provides closure for victims' families. vs. That's a poor reason to kill someone.
- i. Life in prison is better. vs. Life in prison is watching TV, reading and chatting.
- j. Most of the public supports the death penalty. vs. Not true.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. China is going to change its system of capital punishment. | T / F |
| b. Local courts will be able to use capital punishment for more crimes. | T / F |
| c. The reform may cut the number of death sentences by a third. | T / F |
| d. A leading judge said there should be more executions. | T / F |
| e. China executes more people than all other countries combined. | T / F |
| f. Amnesty International says China executes 340,000 people a year. | T / F |
| g. The 16 victims of a man who was executed were found alive. | T / F |
| h. The death penalty is reserved for felons guilty of atrocious crimes. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| a. announced | mistakes |
| b. review | criminals |
| c. process | carefully |
| d. miscarriages | examine |
| e. cautiously | declared |
| f. put together | found |
| g. estimates | system |
| h. discovered | monstrous |
| i. felons | combined |
| j. atrocious | guesses |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. China has announced it will | hands of local courts |
| b. its top court will review | were executed last year |
| c. out of the | how many people are killed |
| d. reduce the number of miscarriages | executions |
| e. wrongful | recently discovered |
| f. China's government refuses to say | change its system |
| g. more than 3,400 people | by firing squad |
| h. One case was | to avoid error |
| i. a man executed | all death sentences |
| j. ...must be fair | of justice |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

China's death penalty reform

China has _____ it will change its system of capital punishment so that its _____ court will review all death sentences. This _____ decision making out of the _____ of local courts, which often make mistakes and execute innocent people. The new process should _____ the number of miscarriages of justice. The new system could also reduce the total number of death sentences in China by a _____. The president of the Supreme People's Court, Chief Justice Xiao Yang, said: "As few executions as possible should be _____ out and as cautiously as possible, to _____ wrongful executions."

China _____ more people each year than all other countries _____ together. China's government _____ to say how many people are killed, but Amnesty International _____ more than 3,400 people were executed last year. Amnesty claims many of these people were _____ executed. One case was recently discovered, sixteen years after the execution took place. The supposed victim of a man executed by _____ squad was found alive and in prison. Mr. Yang said capital punishment "is _____ for [criminals] guilty of the most atrocious crimes" but must be fair to avoid _____.

avoid
hands
top
third
announced
carried
transfers
reduce

reserved
estimates
firing
executes
error
put
wrongly
refuses

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

China's death penalty reform

China has announced it will change its _____ capital punishment so that its top court will _____ death sentences. This transfers decision making _____ hands of local courts, which often make mistakes and execute innocent people. The new process should reduce the _____ miscarriages of justice. The new system could also reduce the total number of death sentences in China _____. The president of the Supreme People's Court, Chief Justice Xiao Yang, said: "As few executions as possible should be carried out and as cautiously as possible, _____ wrongful executions."

China executes more people each year than _____ countries put together. China's government refuses _____ how many people are killed, but Amnesty International estimates more than _____ people were executed last year. Amnesty claims _____ these people were wrongly executed. One case was recently discovered, sixteen years after the execution took place. The supposed victim _____ executed by firing squad was found alive and in prison. Mr. Yang said capital punishment "is reserved for [criminals] _____ atrocious crimes" but must be fair to avoid error.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**death**' and '**penalty**'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "DEATH PENALTY" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about the death penalty.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| • announced | • put together |
| • hands | • Amnesty International |
| • innocent | • wrongly |
| • miscarriages | • 16 years |
| • third | • alive |
| • avoid | • atrocious |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of capital punishment?
- c. What is the history of the death penalty in your country?
- d. Do you think the death penalty keeps crime at a lower rate?
- e. Both the USA and Saudi Arabia has the death penalty but crime is much lower in Saudi. Why do you think this is?
- f. Should people who commit crimes against humanity be given the death penalty?
- g. How can a court be 100 percent sure that someone is guilty?
- h. Is there a "kindest" way of executing someone?
- i. Do you think capital punishment is the same as murder?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What do you think about China's new reform?
- d. What should a government do for the family of someone who has been wrongly executed?
- e. What kinds of criminals should get the death penalty?
- f. People sentenced to death in the USA often have to wait five years before they are executed. What do you think of this?
- g. Do you agree with the saying, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"?
- h. Could you "press the button" that executes someone?
- i. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT: In pairs / groups, discuss and agree on the correct punishment for people found guilty of each of these crimes:

CRIME	PUNISHMENT
Someone put a bomb on an airplane that had 387 passengers on board. The bomb didn't explode.	
Someone put a bomb on an airplane that had 387 passengers on board. The bomb exploded, killing everyone.	
An assassin killed the leader of your country (and the monarch, if your country has one).	
A computer hacker managed to delete all of the hard drives on all the computers in your country.	
A doctor killed 232 of his patients over 20 years and took all of their money.	
A bank robber stole \$1 billion from your country's national bank and killed three security guards.	
An army general ordered the killing of three hundred women and children as part of ethnic cleansing. He didn't kill anyone himself.	
A soldier in charge of 27 prisoners or war shoots and kills all of them.	

Change partners and show each other what punishments you decided.
If your ideas are different, agree on a new, jointly decided punishment.
Discuss what your government(s) might think of your punishments.
Give a presentation of your punishments to the rest of the class.
Vote on the best presentations.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on capital punishment around the world. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. PROS AND CONS: Make a poster describing the pros and cons of capital punishment. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all find similar things? Discuss the pros and cons together.

4. LETTER: You are a relative of the man in the article who was wrongly executed sixteen years ago. Write a letter to the government about your feelings towards his death and of the system of capital punishment. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. T d. F e. T f. F g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| a. announced | declared |
| b. review | examine |
| c. process | system |
| d. miscarriages | mistakes |
| e. cautiously | carefully |
| f. put together | combined |
| g. estimates | guesses |
| h. discovered | found |
| i. felons | criminals |
| j. atrocious | monstrous |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. China has announced it will | change its system |
| b. its top court will review | all death sentences |
| c. out of the | hands of local courts |
| d. reduce the number of miscarriages | of justice |
| e. wrongful | executions |
| f. China's government refuses to say | how many people are killed |
| g. more than 3,400 people | were executed last year |
| h. One case was | recently discovered |
| i. a man executed | by firing squad |
| j. ...must be fair | to avoid error |

GAP FILL:

China's death penalty reform

China has **announced** it will change its system of capital punishment so that its **top** court will review all death sentences. This **transfers** decision making out of the **hands** of local courts, which often make mistakes and execute innocent people. The new process should **reduce** the number of miscarriages of justice. The new system could also reduce the total number of death sentences in China by a **third**. The president of the Supreme People's Court, Chief Justice Xiao Yang, said: "As few executions as possible should be **carried** out and as cautiously as possible, to **avoid** wrongful executions."

China **executes** more people each year than all other countries **put** together. China's government **refuses** to say how many people are killed, but Amnesty International **estimates** more than 3,400 people were executed last year. Amnesty claims many of these people were **wrongly** executed. One case was recently discovered, sixteen years after the execution took place. The supposed victim of a man executed by **firing** squad was found alive and in prison. Mr. Yang said capital punishment "is **reserved** for [criminals] guilty of the most atrocious crimes" but must be fair to avoid **error**.