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China's death penalty reform

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30 October, 2005

THE ARTICLE

China's death penalty reform

China's government has announced it will reform its system of capital punishment by ensuring the Supreme Court reviews all death sentences. This transfers ultimate decision making for capital punishment out of the hands of provincial courts, which have all too often been responsible for wrongly executing innocent people. The new judicial process should reduce the instances of miscarriages of justice from taking place. Several mistaken executions exposed recently prompted the latest review, which could reduce the total number of death sentences 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 combined. Chinese authorities refuse to reveal actual numbers, but Amnesty International estimates more than 3,400 people were executed last year and a further 6,000 sentenced to death. Amnesty claims many of these were wrongly executed. One such case recently came to light, 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 insisted that capital punishment must be imposed fairly to avoid error. He said: "The death sentence is the most serious level of penalty for criminals. It is reserved for felons guilty of the most atrocious crimes."

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 measures or changes would you like to see introduced.

2. DEATH PENALTY METHODS: In pairs / groups, talk about the following methods of capital punishment that are used around the world. What is the worst thing 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 / reform / capital punishment / courts / innocent people / miscarriages of justice / Amnesty International / firing squads / 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. By working towards the abolition of the death penalty worldwide, Amnesty International...looks to end the cycle of violence created by 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.

1. All killing is wrong. vs. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.
2. It saves taxpayers' money. vs. No price can be put on human life.
3. The death penalty is a deterrent. vs. Murder is common with or without it.
4. The death penalty violates human rights. vs. So does multiple murder.
5. Mistakes are made. Innocent people die. vs. Hey, no system is perfect.
6. The death penalty gives society the message that killing is OK. vs. No way.
7. Executed 'terrorists' may become 'martyrs'. vs. So be it.
8. It provides closure for victims' families. vs. That's a poor reason to kill someone.
9. Life in prison is better. vs. Life in prison means life watching TV, reading and chatting.
10. 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 reduce the number of death sentences by a third. | T / F |
| d. A leading judge said there was a need for 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 executed by firing squad 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 | failures |
| b. ensuring | monstrous |
| c. judicial | vigilantly |
| d. miscarriages | criminals |
| e. cautiously | alleged |
| f. combined | legal |
| g. came to light | declared |
| h. supposed | guaranteeing |
| i. felons | put together |
| j. atrocious | surfaced |

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

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| a. This transfers ultimate decision | countries combined |
| b. out of the | of justice from taking place |
| c. reduce the instances of miscarriages | fairly to avoid error |
| d. mistaken executions exposed recently | hands of provincial courts |
| e. avoid wrongful | of the most atrocious crimes |
| f. ...than all other | executions |
| g. One such case recently came | making for capital punishment |
| h. The supposed victim of | to light |
| i. capital punishment must be imposed | prompted the latest review |
| j. reserved for felons guilty | a man executed by firing squad |

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's government has _____ it will reform its system of capital punishment by _____ the Supreme Court reviews all death sentences. This transfers _____ decision making for capital punishment out of the hands of provincial courts, which have _____ too often been responsible for wrongly executing innocent people. The new judicial process should reduce the _____ of miscarriages of justice from taking place. Several mistaken executions exposed recently _____ the latest review, which could reduce the total number of death sentences by a third. The president of the Supreme People's Court, Chief Justice Xiao Yang, said: "As few executions as possible should be _____ out and as _____ as possible, to avoid wrongful executions."

China executes more people each year than all other countries _____. Chinese authorities _____ to reveal actual numbers, but Amnesty International estimates more than 3,400 people were executed last year and a _____ 6,000 sentenced to death. Amnesty claims many of these were wrongly executed. One such case recently came to _____, sixteen years after the execution took place. The supposed victim of a man executed by _____ squad was found alive and in prison. Mr. Yang insisted that capital punishment must be imposed fairly to avoid _____. He said: "The death sentence is the most serious level of penalty for criminals. It is _____ for felons guilty of the most _____ crimes."

all
carried
ultimate
instances
announced
cautiously
prompted
ensuring

light
reserved
refuse
error
further
combined
firing
atrocious

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

China's death penalty reform

China's government has announced it will reform its system of capital punishment ____ the Supreme Court reviews all death sentences. This transfers ultimate decision making for capital punishment out ____ of provincial courts, which have ____ been responsible for wrongly executing innocent people. The new judicial process should reduce the ____ of miscarriages of justice from taking place. Several mistaken executions exposed recently ____ the latest review, which could reduce the total number of death sentences by a third. The president of the Supreme People's Court, ____ Xiao Yang, said: "As few executions as possible should be carried out and as cautiously as possible, to avoid ____ executions."

China executes more people each year than all other countries _____. Chinese authorities _____ actual numbers, but Amnesty International estimates more than 3,400 people were executed last year and a further 6,000 sentenced to death. Amnesty claims many of these were wrongly executed. One such case recently _____, sixteen years after the execution took place. The _____ victim of a man executed by firing squad was found alive and in prison. Mr. Yang insisted that capital punishment must be _____ fairly to avoid error. He said: "The death sentence is the most serious level of penalty for criminals. It is reserved for _____ guilty of the most _____ crimes."

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:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| • ensuring | • combined |
| • ultimate | • Amnesty International |
| • all | • light |
| • prompted | • supposed |
| • third | • imposed |
| • cautiously | • 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 acts as a deterrent keeps crime at a lower rate?
- e. Both the USA and Saudi Arabia has the death penalty but crime is so 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 and should be sentenced to death?
- h. Is there a "most humane" way of executing someone?
- i. Do you think capital punishment is state-ordained 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 crimes should be punishable by 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. Is there any situation in which you could "press the button" that starts the process of putting someone to death?
- 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 the following crimes:

| CRIME | PUNISHMENT |
|---|------------|
| Someone placed a bomb on an airplane that had 387 passengers on board. The bomb failed to explode. | |
| Someone placed a bomb on an airplane that had 387 passengers on board. The bomb exploded, killing all aboard. | |
| 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 of all computers in your country. This brought about the collapse of society. | |
| A doctor killed 232 of his patients over 20 years and profited from the contents of his victims' wills. | |
| A bank robber stole \$1 billion from your country's national bank and killed three security guards in the process. | |
| An army general ordered the killing of three hundred women and children as part of an attempt at ethnic cleansing. He didn't kill anyone himself. | |
| A soldier in charge of 27 prisoners or war shoots and kills all of his detainees. | |

Change partners and show each other what punishments you decided.

If your ideas are different, compromise and agree on a new, jointly decided punishment.

Discuss what your government(s) might think of your punishments.

Give a presentation of your punishments and reasoning 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 outlining 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. ensuring | guaranteeing |
| c. judicial | legal |
| d. miscarriages | failures |
| e. cautiously | vigilantly |
| f. combined | put together |
| g. came to light | surfaced |
| h. supposed | alleged |
| i. felons | criminals |
| j. atrocious | monstrous |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| a. This transfers ultimate decision | making for capital punishment |
| b. out of the | hands of provincial courts |
| c. reduce the instances of miscarriages | of justice from taking place |
| d. ...mistaken executions exposed recently | prompted the latest review |
| e. avoid wrongful | executions |
| f. ...than all other | countries combined |
| g. One such case recently came | to light |
| h. The supposed victim of | a man executed by firing squad |
| i. capital punishment must be imposed | fairly to avoid error |
| j. reserved for felons guilty | of the most atrocious crimes |

GAP FILL:

China's death penalty reform

China's government has **announced** it will reform its system of capital punishment by **ensuring** the Supreme Court reviews all death sentences. This transfers **ultimate** decision making for capital punishment out of the hands of provincial courts, which have **all** too often been responsible for wrongly executing innocent people. The new judicial process should reduce the **instances** of miscarriages of justice from taking place. Several mistaken executions exposed recently **prompted** the latest review, which could reduce the total number of death sentences 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 **combined**. Chinese authorities **refuse** to reveal actual numbers, but Amnesty International estimates more than 3,400 people were executed last year and a **further** 6,000 sentenced to death. Amnesty claims many of these were wrongly executed. One such case recently came to **light**, 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 insisted that capital punishment must be imposed fairly to avoid **error**. He said: "The death sentence is the most serious level of penalty for criminals. It is **reserved** for felons guilty of the most **atrocious** crimes."