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# China's Tech Totalitarianism

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Segment Length: 4:39 minutes

## **Lesson Description:**

How has the Chinese government response to the COVID-19 pandemic differed from the U.S. government response? Are the different responses simply a matter of technological innovation? Should government trust its citizens? Should citizens trust their government? What is the Chinese social credit score and how does it work? In this segment John Stossel discusses efforts by the Chinese government to control a pandemic and to control its citizens.

## **Concepts & Key Terms:**

*Social Credit Score* – a Chinese government rating of social reputation and trustworthiness, based on massive government surveillance of Chinese citizens.

*Great Leap Forward* – an attempt led by Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong to industrialize China and modernize its economy between 1958 and 1962. This failed program resulted in tens of millions of deaths.

*Chinese Cultural Revolution* – Spurred by the failure of the Great Leap Forward, Chairman Mao Zedong initiated this campaign in 1966 to promote class warfare and bring the country more in line with communist ideology. Chaos ensued as schools were closed and students attacked “counterrevolutionaries.” As many as two million Chinese died before the revolution ended with Mao’s death in 1976.

## **Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- list components of China's social credit score.
- compare responses to the coronavirus outbreak in China and in the U.S..
- discuss the Chinese social credit score system and mass surveillance.
- assess the impact of the Chinese government monitoring its citizens' internet use.

## **Preview Activity and Questions:**

Use Think, Pair, Share to have students answer and discuss the preview questions: Imagine you're the leader of your country. What do you do if a COVID-like pandemic breaks out in your country? What do you do about people who don't follow your directives? How much power do you actually have?

## **Viewing Guide:**

We recommend that teachers show the video segment twice: once to allow students to view the video and focus on the issues presented, and once to allow them time to complete the viewing guide. After they complete the viewing guide, allow students a few minutes to work in pairs sharing and verifying answers.

## **Answers to Viewing Guide**

1. welded
2. low scores
3. “reeducated”
4. suppressed
5. lock people up

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## Viewing Guide

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. Not so in China, where authorities have \_\_\_\_\_ people into homes to keep them inside or tied people to posts because they didn't wear a facemask.
2. The government punishes people with \_\_\_\_\_ by slowing their internet speed or banning them from traveling.
3. She survived the Great Leap Forward, the Great Famine, the Cultural Revolution. Her parents were doctors so they, and she, were \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Remember, the virus began in China and spread farther because their autocrats \_\_\_\_\_ information and denied that the virus could spread between humans. And they punished scientists who told the truth.
5. We Americans debate these issues, in China, they just \_\_\_\_\_.

**Now, take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer the questions below:**

What information in this video did you find most interesting? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why does John Stossel tell us about China? What does that have to do with the American response to COVID-19? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Discussion and Analysis:**

1. John Stossel says he doesn't believe what the Chinese government says about coronavirus. Why do you suppose that is?
2. How would you describe the difference between the Chinese government response to COVID-19 and the United States government response?
3. What would you say if the U.S. government responded the way China's government did?
4. How does the social credit score work? Why do you think the government of China is doing this?
5. Would you behave differently if you knew the government was spying on you and assigning you a trust score based on your actions? A) Why / Why not? B) If so, what would you do differently?
6. Why would Li Schoolland say about Americans, "You're walking to the communists voluntarily"?
7. Li Schoolland says it was better to be poor and uneducated in Mao's China. Based on the video, why do you think that was?
8. We need to know whom to trust, says Li Schoolland, but government doesn't need to get involved. Why not? Isn't the government more capable of knowing who is trustworthy? How else might we be able to tell if people or businesses are trustworthy?
9. Why do you think many members of the media believe the U.S. government needed to be more involved to combat COVID-19? Why would that lead them to interview mostly those who agree?
10. What do you think of China banning Twitter and Facebook and spying on WeChat?
11. Would you worry if the American government spied on its citizens like the Chinese government does?
12. Why do you think the Chinese government will lower your social credit score for playing lots of video games or having friends with low scores?

### **Discuss These Lines from the Video:**

1. China spies on every citizen. Two-hundred million cameras and electronic eavesdropping let them pull together every person's political leanings and social interactions. They use that to give everyone a trust score.
2. Your score drops if you criticize the government, play lots of video games, watch porn, or even have friends with low scores.
3. WeChat [is] one of the world's most popular mobile apps, so the government spies on that, round the clock. The state also monitors the Chinese version of Amazon called Alibaba.
4. The poorer you were, the better you were. If you're illiterate, you're the best.

5. It's good that our government finally released its stockpile of emergency supplies and brought in the military's hospital ships. But repressive government controls like China's should not be our role model.
6. They arrested the doctors who were trying to blow the whistle about this and made them publicly retract it.
7. I'm glad I live in America, where I can say anything I want about the virus or the government.
8. Some American authorities will go too far. Philadelphia police pulled a man off a bus because he refused to wear a mask. But after this video went viral, police changed their policy.

### **Activities:**

1. Have students individually create their own social credit score system. Then, put them in groups of three and complete the Our Social Credit Score worksheet.
2. Distribute the Minimum Wage Hurts Beginners PMI Chart and have students complete it in class or for homework after watching the video.
3. Read and write a summary of one of the following articles:
  - A) "The Complicated Truth about China's Social Credit System" by Nicole Kobie  
<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/china-social-credit-system-explained>
  - B) "Can We Trust China's Claims That It's Winning the War on Coronavirus?" by Jonathan Kaiman  
<https://reason.com/2020/03/23/can-we-trust-chinas-claims-that-its-winning-the-war-on-coronavirus/>
  - C) "The World Must Not Mimic China's Authoritarian Model to Fight COVID-19" by Shikha Dalmia  
<https://reason.com/2020/03/30/the-world-must-not-mimic-chinas-authoritarian-model-to-fight-covid-19/>
  - D) "The Contrast Between China and Its Neighbors Shows Communist Regime's True Character" by Michael Barone  
<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/contrast-between-china-and-its-neighbors-shows-communist-regimes-true-character>
  - E) "China Should Be Legally Liable for the Pandemic Damage It Has Done" by Marc A. Thiessen  
<https://www.aei.org/op-eds/china-should-be-legally-liable-for-the-pandemic-damage-it-has-done/>
4. In small groups, create a podcast about authoritarianism in China. Possible topics include the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, China's culpability in the global spread of COVID-19, and China's social credit score system.

5. In the United States, state governors have differed in their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Research and write a report or create a slideshow presentation on the different responses of several states, noting the commonalities and the differences in the degree to which restrictions were imposed to fight COVID-19.
6. Have students select several countries with different responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and have them research and write a report or create a slideshow presentation on the different responses, noting the commonalities and the differences in the degree to which restrictions were imposed and the numbers of those tested, infected, and those who died.
7. Write a short story about a character living in a country with a government-run social credit score system.
8. Search for news stories covering the Chinese government's response to coronavirus and present three or four stories as a written or oral report. Be sure to note similarities and differences in the stories.
9. Produce a "man-on-the-street" video in which you ask people if they have heard of China's social credit score system. Then, follow up by telling them more about this system and asking for their reaction. In lieu of person-to-person interviews, students can ask their online friends or conduct online video interviews.
10. Watch Li Schoolland discuss her story in Kibbe on Liberty's "She Survived History's Greatest Mass Murderer" (06:00-36:00) and write a reflection on Li's story.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYZzFu8A5i8>
11. Research the outbreak of COVID-19 in China and the Chinese government's response and create a detailed timeline infographic of what you found. What information did they initially release to the world? Was there any misinformation?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

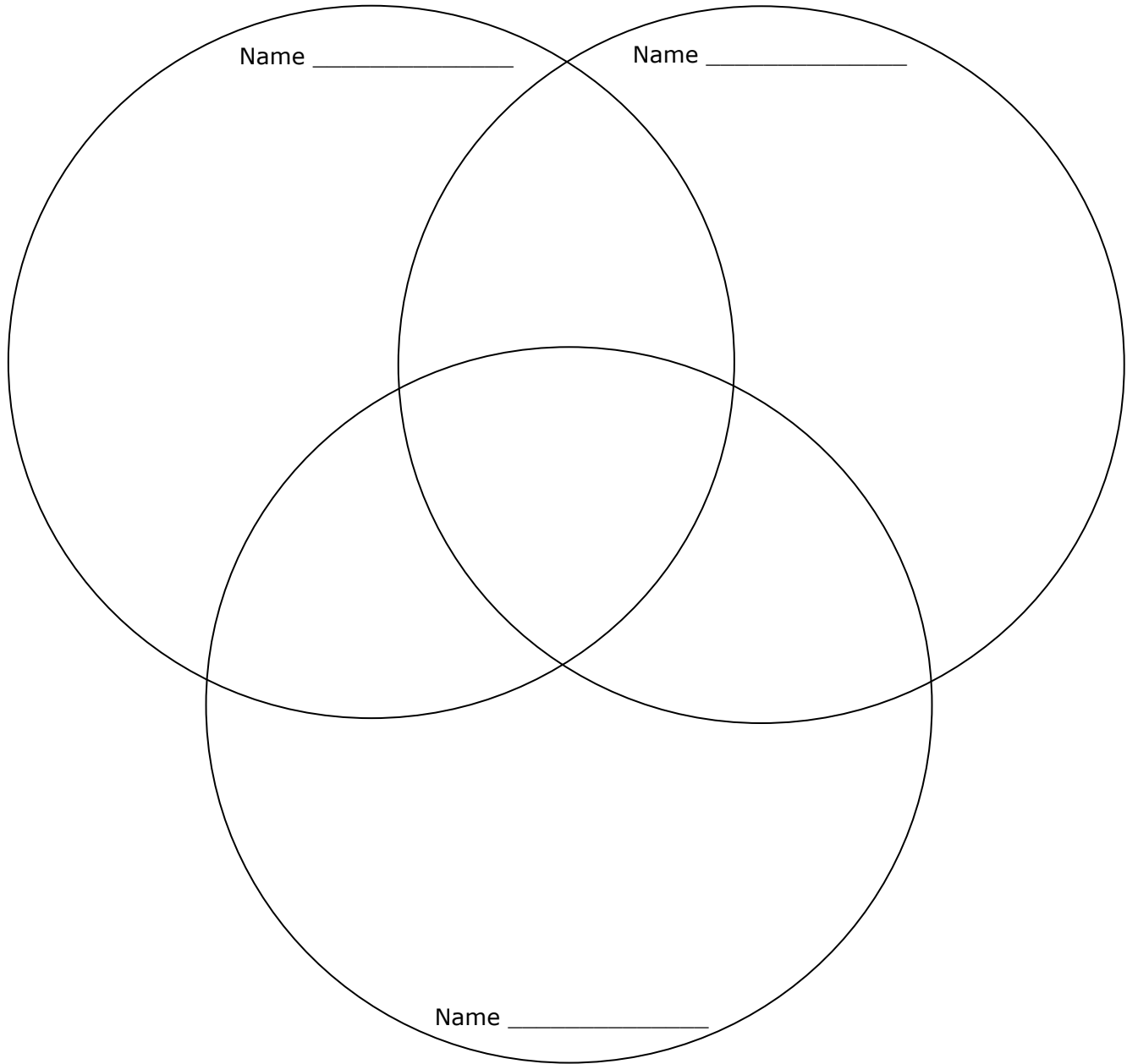
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Per \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## **China's Tech Totalitarianism: OUR Social Credit Score**

**Directions:** After listing features of your own social credit score, compare your features with those of two other classmates, using the graphic organizer below.



|  |
|--|
| What we learned from this exercise: _____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____ |
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Per \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

### China's Tech Totalitarianism: PMI Chart

**P = Plus:** What might be some advantages of government maintaining a social credit score?

**M = Minus:** What might be some disadvantages of government maintaining a social credit score?

**I = Interesting:** What are some interesting perspectives of government maintaining a social credit score?

| + Pluses + | - Minuses - | I |
|------------|-------------|---|
|            |             |   |

Would people agree on what should count and what shouldn't? \_\_\_\_\_ Why / Why not? \_\_\_\_\_

Who would decide what counts toward and against individuals? \_\_\_\_\_

How might this be used against people who have differences with the government? \_\_\_\_\_

How might different political parties use this to their advantage? \_\_\_\_\_