Thesis Statement Practice - China

World History

**Instructions:** Read the below excerpts from articles around key SPICE issues in modern China. For each issue, attempt to identify the author’s argument and evidence. Once you identified them, suggest a possible thesis statement that the author might use.

**Social Issue in Modern China: Social Credit System**

Ever since China announced that it would be establishing a social credit system by 2020, Western media has generally covered the issue with harsh criticism...The pilot system clearly has a lot of challenges that need to be quickly addressed. However, it is also more complex and less sinister in its intent than the West’s neat dystopian vision suggests.

First, using the phrase “social credit system” for this massive Chinese social engineering effort is misleading. We typically associate “credit score” with a credit bureau’s assessment of one’s record of repaying debt. When extending this thinking to social spheres, it is easy to conjure an image of a single credit authority assigning scores to all aspects of one’s social and personal life. However, there is a great deal of confusion and uncertainty on the future direction of this massive social governance project. In a 2014 document, the Chinese government outlined its vision for such a system and noted that it involved four distinct segments: a government trust system, a commercial credit system, a social trust system and a judicial trust system. What drives this gargantuan project is an effort to build a culture of trust in Chinese society. Given this broad aim, a more appropriate term to describe the initiative is a “social trust system.”

Second, many Western media stories overstate the level of public and government consensus over the pilot programs, especially when applying scoring systems to social affairs. Right now, there are over two dozen local government pilot scoring programs, each with different types of grading systems, and a few commercial programs as well. The point of pilot programs is to explore boundaries. These programs have thus been revised or revoked at times, depending on public reception.

Third, most Western reports on China’s social trust system sidestep the reality that there are different cultural expectations of the government in China than in other countries. China’s governance tradition of promoting good moral behavior goes back thousands of years. In recent decades, as the economy took off and people’s living standards improved dramatically, fraud and technology-enabled economic crimes proliferated as well. Fraud is now so widespread that anyone who has lived in China in recent years has most likely experienced it in some form. Another widespread social ill today is the difficulty in enforcing court decisions, as mentioned earlier. Given all these problems, a system that bolsters trust is seen by many Chinese citizens as necessary.

**Source:** Song, Bing. "The West May Be Wrong about China's Social Credit System." *The Washington Post.* November 29, 2018. Accessed January 09, 2019.

**Position/Argument of the Author:**

**Evidence Used:**

**Possible Thesis Statement:**

**Political Issue in Modern China: Repression of Uighurs Minority**

A United Nations panel has accused China of turning its far-flung western region of Xinjiang “into something that resembled a massive internment camp shrouded in secrecy, a ‘no rights zone’.”...Former detainees describe being tortured during interrogation, living in crowded cells and being subjected to a brutal daily regimen of Communist Party indoctrination that drove some people to suicide. Most of those who have been rounded up by the security forces are Uighurs, a Muslim ethnic minority that numbers some 10 million. Muslims from other ethnic groups, including Kazakhs, have also been detained.

Uighurs have bristled at what they say are harsh restrictions on their culture and religion. They have faced periodic crackdowns, which intensified after riots in the regional capital in Urumqi in 2009 killed nearly 200 people. Bombings in Xinjiang and attacks allegedly carried out by Uighur separatists, including a mass stabbing in the city of Kunming in China’s southwest in 2014 that killed 31 people, led to further restrictions. In recent years, under Chen Quanguo, the Communist Party secretary in Xinjiang and a loyalist of President Xi Jinping, measures against Uighurs have included a ban on “abnormal” beards for men and restrictions on religious pilgrimages to Mecca. Chen has also overseen the installation of a pervasive, technology-enhanced surveillance apparatus across Xinjiang. Tens of thousands of security personnel have been recruited to staff police stations and checkpoints. Security screening, including scanners equipped with facial recognition cameras, has been installed in public places such as mosques, hotels and transportation hubs.

Adrian Zenz, an anthropologist who has tracked the expansion of the camps, estimates there could be as many as 1,200 – at least one for every county and township in Xinjiang. By August this year, the number of buildings at these facilities had more than doubled to 1,129. The area they covered had almost tripled to more than 1 million square meters - roughly the size of 140 soccer fields. Some of the former detainees said they were shackled to chairs for days during interrogation and deprived of sleep. They described living in prison-like conditions. Their every move, including visits to the toilet, was monitored by cameras and microphones, they said. From early morning to night, the detainees said they were subjected to mind-numbing political indoctrination. This included reciting Chinese laws and Communist Party policies, as well as singing the national anthem and other traditional Red songs. Those who failed to correctly memorize the lines of Communist Party dictums were denied food, said one detainee. Detainees were forced to renounce their religion, engage in self-criticism sessions and report on fellow inmates, relatives and neighbors.

But China, which for months denied their existence, now calls them vocational training centers. “Through vocational training, most trainees have been able to reflect on their mistakes and see clearly the essence and harm of terrorism and religious extremism,” Shohrat Zakir, the Xinjiang governor, said in remarks to the state-run Xinhua news agency in October. “They have also been able to better tell right from wrong and resist the infiltration of extremist thought.”

In September, a Chinese official at the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva said the West could learn from his country’s program of vocational training. “If you do not say it’s the best way, maybe it’s the necessary way to deal with Islamic or religious extremism, because the West has failed in doing so,” said Li Xiaojun, the director of publicity at the Bureau of Human Rights Affairs of the State Council Information Office.

Mosques across Xinjiang are now adorned with Chinese flags and banners exhorting people to “Love the Party, Love the Country.” During Friday prayers, the mosques are almost empty. The Chinese government has been trying to change the ethnic balance by shifting members of the majority Han Chinese into the region. That policy is reflected in other ways on the ground – such as the dramatic transformation of the Old Town section of Kashgar, once considered one of the best-preserved sites of traditional Islamic and Central Asian architecture in the region. The local authorities have long espoused the need to bulldoze and modernize large swathes of the mud-brick maze of courtyard homes in the Old Town, citing building-safety concerns. Now, large sections of the quarter have been vacated and shut for reconstruction. Already, there are bars and restaurants springing up that offer food designed to appeal to Han tourists visiting from other parts of the country.

**Source:** Reports, Special. “Tracking China's Muslim Gulag.” *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 27 Nov. 2018.

**Position/Argument of the Author:**

**Evidence Used:**

**Possible Thesis Statement:**

**Environmental Issue in Modern China: Toxic Smog**

The U.S. Embassy in Beijing reported that levels of PM 2.5—a type of particulate air pollution that seeps into lung, vein, and heart tissue—surged above 850 micrograms per cubic meter; the UN says that 20 micrograms per cubic meter is the highest safe level.

Schools, highways, and airports closed. More than 7,000 children were sent to Beijing Children’s Hospital on a single day. At least 50 of the country’s 74 major cities exceeded national air-quality standards. The episode remains the worst haze pollution ever recorded in the month of January. Something was strange about the smog. Usually smog will dissipate when sources of air pollution—like cars or factories—shut down for a time. But this cloud was stubborn. As part of solar new year celebrations in February 2013, millions of families drove their cars out of Beijing to go on vacation, and the government ordered all factories to cease operations. The smog didn’t subside much, and less than a week later the full-on “airpocalypse” returned as bad as before.

What made the winter smog so bad that year—and in the winters since, which have also been stubbornly smoggy? Two new studies revisit the episode. Both of them argue that climate change will make this kind of smog event much more common. And, remarkably, one of them asserts that the Chinese smog of January 2013 was worsened by two weather phenomena thousands of miles away. Because the Arctic Ocean froze less than it usually does, and because higher-than-usual snowdrifts piled up across the boreal forests of Russia, millions of Chinese people were subjected to some of the worst air pollution ever measured.

These two weather events seem to be getting more common, and more intense, as the climate keeps warming. This means that even as China succeeds in reducing some of its emissions, the winter haze may worsen for meteorological reasons. Really, this is what’s already happening: Even in January 2013, there was no reported massive surge in factory emissions. The sudden build-up of smog was all meteorology.

**Source:** Meyer, Robinson. "How Climate Change Covered China in Smog." *The Atlantic*. March 21, 2017.

**Position/Argument of the Author:**

**Evidence Used:**

**Possible Thesis Statement:**

**Cultural Issue in Modern China:** LGBT Rights in China

On a wood-panelled wall above the judge’s bench hangs a red seal featuring the scales of justice. Smaller chairs and tables, for the legal teams, face each other across the room. Another row of seats is reserved for observers. These remain empty. Justice in China is rarely open for all to see, no matter how much officials insist that proceedings are public. But restricted access to this room, on the third storey of a nondescript building in Qingdao, a coastal city in Shandong province, has done nothing to diminish the attention focused on a recent hearing there. Gay-rights activists, a small but increasingly vocal group, see the case as a landmark one for their cause.

The plaintiff is a 32-year-old teacher who claims he was unjustly fired by the kindergarten in Qingdao where he worked. He goes by the pseudonym Ming Jue. Mr Ming says his bosses confronted him after seeing a message he had posted on social media about a gay-pride event he had attended. They claimed that parents objected to the employment of a gay teacher, and said their business would suffer if Mr Ming remained at the school. Mr Ming says that he had tried to nurture the right values among his pupils. “I’ve always taught my students the importance of honesty,” he says. “When they asked if I was gay I acknowledged it.”

Justice in China is not only opaque: it also rarely involves much argument. Mr Ming only got one 90-minute hearing. He will hear nothing more until the court issues its ruling, probably by the end of November. Mr Ming says that if he wins, it will send a signal that bigotry against gay people is unacceptable. “And if we lose, it will show that this society still has more to do to overcome prejudice and discrimination, and I will continue to struggle.”

Since Xi Jinping took over as the country’s leader in 2012, activists of any kind have found it increasingly difficult to pursue their causes openly in China. In 2015 the authorities made it even tougher by rounding up hundreds of independent lawyers and members of their staff—people who had played a vital role in bringing cases to court involving abuses by officials. In the past few weeks the authorities have arrested dozens of university students who have been campaigning on behalf of workers at a factory in the southern city of Shenzhen who want to form a trade union.

LGBT activists struggle on, helped by a gradual change in public and official attitudes. Several cases involving gay rights have come to court in recent years. Rulings have often been unfavourable to the complainants. One suit was lodged in Shenzhen in 2014 by an employee who was fired from an interior-design company after being outed as gay in an online video. He lost the case and his appeal was rejected. But in 2016 a transgender worker who was dismissed from a job at a clinic in Guiyang, another southern city, won partial compensation, despite failing to convince the court that the firing itself was illegal.

Despite some setbacks in court, campaigners see progress of sorts. That gay-rights court cases are heard at all is a small step forward, they believe. So too is the debate surrounding them that bubbles up on social media—censorship of traditional media had previously meant that such discussion was stifled. A graduate law student in Beijing, who is the co-founder of an LGBT advocacy group, compares the approach of activists like herself to that of counterparts in America who, in recent decades, have advanced their cause through the courts. “We don’t know if it will work here, but we are learning and trying to copy this strategy,” says the student, who uses the pseudonym Joan.

One reason why China’s gay activists appear to have more room to manoeuvre than other kinds of campaigners may be that the Communist Party does not see them as a political threat. (So long as they do not try to form a nationwide movement—the party fears anything national that it does not control.) Unlike environmental activists, advocates for sexual minorities do not face opposition from powerful vested interests, such as polluting industries and the local governments that profit from them. Joan, the activist in Beijing, contrasts the tactics used by her group with those of the students who have been riling the authorities with their campaign for labour rights. “Those guys are much more radical. We work quietly and carefully within the law,” she says.

However, next year could be a tougher one for activists of every stripe. The party will be on guard against anything that could mar official celebrations of China’s 70th anniversary as a Communist dictatorship. Campuses will be watchful for any unauthorised attempt to mark the 100th anniversary of the May Fourth movement involving nationalist protests by students that led to calls for democracy. In 1989 commemorations of that movement fuelled nationwide pro-democracy unrest. No gay-pride celebration has ever been allowed on the capital’s streets (the picture on the previous page shows a small display of pride in a park). If any parade is permitted next year, it is far more likely to involve tanks, missiles and goose-stepping troops.

**Source:** “China's Gay-Rights Advocates Have a Bit More Freedom than Others.” *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, 22 Nov. 2018.

**Position/Argument of the Author:**

**Evidence Used:**

**Possible Thesis Statement:**

**Economic Issue in Modern China:** American Companies Need Chinese Consumers

In a rare bit of bad news for its investors, Apple last week laid the blame for [lower than expected revenue on its performance in China](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/02/technology/apple-revenue-decline-china.html?module=inline). The news sent Apple’s stock price plunging, and investors also ditched other companies with significant exposure in China. The scale of the damage, both to Apple’s bottom line and to the broader market, underscores how critically important China — and Chinese consumers — have become for American companies.

China accounts for about $52 billion in sales for Apple, and is its third-largest market. Apple is not the only technology company that relies on sales in China. For Qualcomm, a chip maker whose technology is used in many Apple smartphones, the figure is $15 billion, or about 65 percent of its total sales, according to an estimate by FactSet. Others with big bets on China include Intel (24 percent of sales), Micron Technology (51 percent), and Texas Instruments (44 percent).

These numbers make it very clear that the perception of China as the “factory of the world,” flooding global markets with cheap goods, is badly out of date. Exports and capital investments such as buildings and roads are no longer the main engines of China’s growth. Exports have dropped from 36 percent of China’s gross domestic product in 2006 to 20 percent in 2018. Going after China’s exports with tariffs, as the Trump administration is attempting, is, to a certain extent, fighting yesterday’s war.

In recent years, China’s economy has shifted to one that is much more dependent on domestic household consumption — ordinary Chinese people buying things for themselves and their families. In China over the last decade, the growth in private consumption has outpaced overall economic growth rate. In 2018, G.D.P. in China grew by 6.5 percent, and household consumption accounted for about four-fifths of that growth. China is now the fastest-growing consumer market in the world, with private consumption amounting to about $5 trillion, more than 10 percent of the world’s total. Competition for Chinese consumers’ hard-earned renminbi has become intense.

Consider the smartphone market. As recently as 2016, Apple was China’s leading maker of handsets. But by the third quarter of 2018, China’s dominant telecommunications company, Huawei, was on top, with 23 percent of the market. [The Chinese smartphone makers Oppo, Vivo and Xiaomi](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/04/technology/china-smartphones-iphone.html?module=inline) occupy the next three spots, while Apple ranked fifth, with 9 percent. South Korea’s Samsung, the global leader in smartphone sales, has all but disappeared from China, having failed to recover from the fiasco over its dangerously overheating Galaxy Note 7 batteries.

Even industries where American consumers once reigned supreme are now increasingly shifting toward China. General Motors, for example, sells more cars in China than in North America. For global filmmakers, box office sales in 2018 totaled about $9 billion in China, compared with almost $12 billion for North America in 2018.

My company made a decision more than a decade ago not to invest in China’s export sector. Costs for Chinese manufacturers are rising, and prices for their exports are flat or falling. Instead, I feel strongly that there is much greater potential for companies — inside and outside China — that cater to the Chinese consumer market. Yes, [China’s economic growth has begun to slow](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/20/opinion/huawei-arrest-trade-war-china.html?module=inline), and there has been a decrease in investments as Beijing has moved to tighten credit. And the threat of a trade war with the United States is real. But my long-term outlook has not changed. The Chinese consumer market will continue to grow, albeit at a slower pace, and it will continue to be a market that any global company must pay serious attention to if it wants to remain competitive.

So where does this leave companies like Apple that find themselves caught in the middle of the trade war? They must hope, first of all, for a swift conclusion to the latest round of trade negotiations between China and the United States, [which began in Beijing on Monda](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/06/us/politics/us-china-trade-talks-trump.html?module=inline)y. The best possible outcome is a deal that will encourage China to open its economy further, commit to shrinking its bloated state-owned sector and ease barriers to further foreign investment and trade.

Tariffs were supposed to hurt China by hitting its exports to the United States. That hasn’t happened. Should it persist, the trade war will, of course, hurt Chinese companies, just as it has already hurt so many American companies. But if the conflict eventually drags down Chinese consumer demand, businesses all over the world will be the losers.

**Source:**

Shan, Weijian. “American Companies Need Chinese Consumers.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 8 Jan. 2019.

**Position/Argument of the Author:**

**Evidence Used:**

**Possible Thesis Statement:**