



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In History (8HI0/2E)
Advanced Subsidiary

Paper 2: Depth study

Option 2E.1: Mao's China, 1949–76
Option 2E.2: The German Democratic
Republic, 1949–90

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Introduction

It was pleasing to see candidates able to engage effectively across the ability range in summer examination series of the AS Level Paper 2- which covers the options: Mao's China, 1949-1976 (2E.1), and The German Democratic Republic, 1949-90 (2E.2). The paper is divided into two sections. Section A contains a compulsory two-part question for the option studied, each part based on one source. It assesses source analysis and evaluation skills (AO2). Section B comprises a choice of essays that assess understanding of the period in depth (AO1) by targeting five second order concepts – cause, consequence, change/continuity, similarity/difference and significance.

Performance compared favourably to previous series with most coping well with Section A. Candidates demonstrated that they are able to comprehend, select and summarise from the source material. Most are able to make relevant comments using the provenance. However, some candidates are still not clear on what is meant by 'value' and 'weight' in the context of source analysis and evaluation. It is important to note that Question 1a/2a focuses on value and no marks are awarded for examining the shortcomings of the source. Candidates are well advised to avoid wasting time on this. In this series, performance by some candidates in Section A was affected by the absence of the detailed knowledge base required to draw upon contextual material to support/challenge points derived from the sources. In answering Question 1b/2b, some candidates concentrated their use of contextual knowledge on what was missing from the source. This is a legitimate approach where there is reason to judge that there is a deliberate omission or an omission through ignorance, but it is not legitimate where a candidate refers to the omission of events that had not happened at the time of the production of the source. Also, if the author, or the type of source, would not be expected to refer to this knowledge. The best responses come from candidates who have concentrated on the focus of the question, for example 'importance', 'reasons', 'changing status' etc. and draw inferences, explain and support this with contextual knowledge. A significant proportion of candidates evaluate the sources in a vacuum and draw inferences and support with context that is not related to the focus of the enquiry. Sharper focus will help candidates to make the most of their time and produce effective answers.

In Section B, in this series, most responses had an analytical focus and there were very few that were wholly descriptive essays which were devoid of analysis and, for the most part, responses were soundly structured. The most common weakness in Section B essays was a lack of knowledge and especially precise knowledge applied to the question. Some candidates did not focus on the time period set. It is important that candidates read the question carefully and note the time period before planning and writing their answers. This avoids mistakes that undermine performance. It is also important to realise that Section A and Section B questions may be set from any part of any Key Topic, and, as a result, full coverage of the specification is enormously important.

Most candidates did use their time effectively and, although a few responses were quite brief, there was little evidence on this paper of candidates having insufficient time to

answer questions in both sections. The ability range was diverse, but the design of the paper catered for all abilities.

The candidates' performance on individual questions is considered in the next section.

Option E.1 – Mao's China, 1949-1976

Mao's China had the biggest candidature of the two Options. Q4, which focused on the reasons for the launch of the Cultural Revolution, was by far the most popular choice but there were still sufficient responses for Q3, on the First Five-Year-Plan, and Q5, on change during the Cultural Revolution, to be able to make general comments.

Question 1a

Candidates were expected to explain why Source 1 – a directive from the CCP – was valuable to the historian for an enquiry into the importance of the 'three antis' campaign for establishing communist rule in China.

It was noted by 2E examiners that a significant number of candidates did not attempt to make inferences from the Source or focused on limitations. The mark scheme distinguishes the AO2 skill of making inferences and so responses that do not make inferences with the L2 and L3 descriptors not being able to be fully met for BP1 without an inference being made. The best examples of inferences are usually found in responses that are fully engaged with focus of the enquiry (see Introduction comments) and not just the Source itself. Here responses that just focused on the importance of the campaign tended to concentrate on validating the source material at face value, whereas those responses that focused on the importance for establishing communist rule were able to make inferences about the methods used, e.g. the use of intimidation to make people conform, the wide-ranging targets allowing complete control of the Chinese people.

Discussion of limitations is not rewardable in the mark scheme as the question is focused on the value of the Source – value is assumed, with the question being why it is valuable. Writing about limitations wastes time writing about aspects that will not be rewarded rather than losing marks. There were, however, some excellent responses that were able to use contextual knowledge to confirm or expand matters of detail, e.g. knowledge of 'struggle sessions', and to use the provenance to show that a CCP directive is useful in understanding what the 'new' communist government wanted to achieve.

Question 1b

Candidates were expected to determine the weight that could be given to Source 2 – an article written by a high-ranking female CCP member - for an enquiry into the changing status of women in Mao's China.

Some candidates feel the need to put a numerical value to the weight of the Source, which is not always helpful to their answer and which they often end up contradicting in their final evaluation. For Q1b, candidates are looking to show understanding that while all Sources are useful in some way, there will be criteria that can be deployed, such as accuracy, source provenance etc, to establish the reliance that can be placed on the Source for the specific enquiry. Here they are making a judgement using both limitations and value.

Examiners noted that Source 2 was handled more confidently than Source 1. Many answers recognised that Kuang was a woman who benefited from the policies but as a CPP member was bound to promote the work achieved. Stronger candidates recognised that she probably was not so well-placed to discuss the lack of changes in rural areas for women or used contextual knowledge to challenge the accuracy of the claims about 'efforts to train and promote women leaders'. Here, it was often and relevant to determine limitations by considering what was not discussed in the Source but this needed to be explained rather than just asserting that 'evidence was missing'. There were some excellent stronger responses that were able to combine discussion of the provenance, content and contextual knowledge to determine that while the article clearly showed some of the gains in status for women over the period of Mao's rule these were often not as far-reaching or as universal as was being claimed.

Question 3

Candidates were expected to determine the extent to which the First Five-Year Plan was a success. Most candidates had good knowledge of the basis of the Plan in relation to the rebuilding of the Chinese economy after the devastation of the Civil War and the beliefs of Mao and the Communist Party. Only a few candidates mistook the First Five-Year Plan for the Great Leap Forward (Second Five-Year Plan). Responses focused on industrial production, state planning, agricultural centralisation and the growth of the transport infrastructure. Responses balanced concrete gains with the focus on quantitative targets, the impact of the Korean War, and the negative impact on rural areas. Some response referred to the longer legacy in relation to future economic plans. Weaker responses tended to describe and/or explain the Plan rather than analysing and exploring the extent of success.

Question 4

Candidates were expected to determine whether the main reason why Mao launched the Cultural Revolution was to get rid of his opponents in the Communist Party. There was some excellent knowledge of the motivations of Mao in launching the Cultural Revolution and most candidates were aware of other influences (often with a complex understanding of the inter-relationships between influence) such as ideology, the concept of 'permanent revolution', attacks on the 'bourgeoisie' and personal gain. It would have been good to see

more responses place the launch of the Cultural Revolution in the context of what went before rather than using the events of the Cultural Revolution to validate motivation. Often too much description of the events of the Cultural Revolution undermined the organisation of the argument as to the main reason for its launch. Weaker responses tended to just describe the Cultural Revolution rather than analyse the reason why. Some candidates focused on opponents in general rather than opponents in the Communist Party. Overall, there were some very strong responses with good knowledge of Mao's relationships with other Communist leaders and the wider Party.

Question 5

Candidates were expected to determine the extent to which the nature of the Cultural Revolution changes in the years 1966-76. Most candidates had a good grasp of the chronology of events – moving from the era of the Red Guards, through the 'up to the mountains' period, the role of the PLA and the final years of tension between pragmatism and continued revolution. There were very few responses that confused chronology. Weaker responses described each of the transitions and so implied change rather than analysed or explored the changing nature but there were some very strong responses that were able to discuss aspects of continuity as well as change.

Option E.2 – The German Democratic Republic, 1949-1990

The GDR had the smallest candidature of the two Options by far. Q7, which focused on the most significant feature of the development of a GDR identity under Honecker, was the most popular choice. There were sufficient responses for Q8, on the impact of Western influences on the authority of the SED, to be able to make general comments but not for Q6 on the GDR economy in the years 1963-71.

Question 2a

Candidates were expected to explain why Source 1 – a confidential telegram sent by the Soviet Ambassador in the GDR to the Soviet Politburo during the 1953 June rising – was valuable to the historian for an enquiry into the response to the rising of June 1953. The Source gave candidates as chance to comment on responses from both inside the GDR and from their Soviet allies.

The general comments on inferences and limitations made for Q1a apply here (please see above). However, in general the responses seem to have understood that this was a question about value. Examiners noted that candidates were able to identify that Source 3 was trying to present accurate information, focusing on the purpose of the Source to inform

the Soviet Politburo and also picking out that the author had to admit to what information they did not yet have regarding casualties. Inferences tended to be centred around the need for the Soviet response, as the SED seemed to have lost control of the situation or that the GDR did not seem to be prepared for such an event.

Question 2b

Candidates were expected to determine the weight that could be given to Source 4 – the officially published resignation statement of Honecker – for an enquiry into the end of Honecker’s leadership of the GDR in October 1989.

Please see the second paragraph above for 1b for a more general comment about the AO2 skills being deployed in the (b) part of the question.

Examiners notes that the majority of candidates handled Source 4 confidently, recognising that Honecker didn’t want to sully the SED’s reputation, which is why *Neues Deutschland* was happy to publish such a statement, and one that included a validation of the incumbent leader Krenz. Many stronger candidates were also able to make valid inferences regarding the meeting with the Politburo and challenging the personal decision of Honecker with strong contextual knowledge of the events of 1989 which led to Honecker’s downfall.

Question 6 – as indicated previously there were insufficient responses to make a general comment.

Question 7

Candidates were expected to determine whether sport was the most significant feature of the development of a GDR identity under Honecker. Stronger responses were able to show the impact of sport in relation to other features such as the creation of a distinct GDR culture, international recognition, relations with West Germany and economic developments. Some responses acknowledged the role of sport in creating an identity, particularly participation in the Olympics and the participation of women, but also pointed out that this identity was not wholly positive, with negative aspects such as revelations about the taking of performance enhancing drugs starting to appear before the fall of the GDR. Weaker responses described the key features rather than analysing or exploring the impact.

Question 8

Candidates were expected to determine the extent to which Western influence undermined the authority of the SED in the years 1961-85. A very small number of candidates answered this question but most made references to the effectiveness of the SED in combatting influences and to the gradual encroachment of Western influences through culture, travel and access to Western media.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Section A

Value of Source Question (1(a)/2(a))

- Candidates must be more prepared to make valid inferences rather than to paraphrase the source
- Focus inferences, contextual support and explanations on the focus of the enquiry
- Be prepared to back up inferences by adding additional contextual knowledge from beyond the source
- Move beyond stereotypical approaches to the nature/purpose and authorship of the source e.g. look at the specific stance and/or purpose of the writer
- Avoid writing about the limitations of the source when assessing its value to the enquiry.

Weight of Source Question (1(b)/2(b))

- Candidates should be prepared to assess the weight of the source for an enquiry by being aware that the author is writing for a specific audience. Be aware of the values and concerns of that audience.
- In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to use contextual knowledge to support/challenge statements and claims made in the source
- Consider omissions from the source material only where it is apparent that there is a deliberate decision to exclude something, or the ignorance of the author has led to omission
- Try to distinguish between fact and opinion by using your contextual knowledge of the period
- In coming to a judgement about the nature/purpose of the source, take account of the weight you may be able to give to the author's evidence in the light of his or her stance and/or purpose.

Section B

Essay questions

- Candidates must revise thoroughly and ensure that they have good knowledge to draw upon in addressing the essay question. Candidates must provide more factual details in support of their arguments. Weaker responses lacked depth and sometimes range
- Take a few minutes to plan your answer before you begin to write your response
- Pick out three or four key themes and then provide an analysis of (for e.g.) the target significance mentioned in the question, setting its importance against other themes rather than providing a description of each
- Pay more careful attention to key phrases in the question when analysing and use them throughout the essay to prevent deviation from the central issues and concepts
- It is a good idea to address the factor in the question where given. This makes it easier to consider relative significance
- Try to explore links between issues to make the structure flow more logically and the arguments more integrated.

