



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

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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AS paper 2E, which covers the options of Mao's China, 1949-76 (2E.1) and the German Democratic Republic, 1949-90 (2E.2) again saw responses from across the ability range.

The paper is divided into two sections. Section A contains a compulsory two-part question each based around one source and assesses 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.

In general, candidates again found Section A, the compulsory two-part source question, the more challenging largely because many were not clear what was meant by 'value' and 'weight' in the context of source analysis and evaluation (AO2). Noticeably this year, in question (a), more candidates have wasted time by attempting to address how the source is not valuable to the enquiry which is not relevant to this question. It was noticeable also, in both questions (a) and (b), that many candidates neglected the content of the sources in favour of writing responses that were driven mostly by contextual knowledge. Also, some candidates continue to make generic comments on the provenance of the sources though more, taking their nature, origin and purpose into consideration, were able to evaluate the use of the sources to the enquiry in each question. Finally, in question (b), it was noticeable again, after several years, that some candidates were attempting to judge the weight of the source from what was not in it, for example, 'Source X lacks value because it doesn't refer to Y'. It should be remembered that no source is likely to be fully comprehensive in its coverage of a subject. Therefore, such comments are only likely to be rewardable when considering weight if, for example, it can be shown that something has been left out of the source deliberately by its author(s).

Section B, the section in which candidates were given a choice of three essays in order to assess understanding of the period in depth (AO1), tends to be done better. There were few wholly descriptive answers with most candidates attempting to engage analytically with the demands of the questions. The majority of answers were soundly structured and clearly expressed. They also made some effort to come to a judgement. Lack of detailed knowledge of the material continues to be an issue for some as is a tendency not to engage fully enough with the specific focus of the question. Also, there is still a significant number of answers which lack balance in their response to the questions – candidates are reminded that, at this level, there is a requirement that as well as developing the stated factor in essay questions, they also require some development of a counter-case.

Question 1 (a)

Many candidates had impressive contextual knowledge of the reasons for the launch of the Great Leap Forward. However, while a large number used this knowledge in support of material drawn from the source content, for example, making valid inferences about the CCP's desire to make China into an industrial superpower or the confidence of the leadership deriving from the successes of the first Five-Year Plan, many instead chose to write responses driven largely by their knowledge with minor reference to the source. In coming to a judgement on the utility of the source to the enquiry, weaker answers did not go beyond an assertion of value, usually with reference to the origin of the magazine or the date of the article. Stronger answers made valid points about the article being clearly authorised from high up in the CCP.

Question 1 (b)

There were some very good responses to this question. These were able to draw inferences from the source with regard to the, largely negative, impact of the Great Leap Forward on the peasantry, such as the disastrous behaviour of over-zealous party cadres. Such answers often drew upon extensive contextual knowledge to support these inferences. Some made valid comments on the weight that could be given to source's evidence, taking into account its origin as an interview conducted by a western researcher in the considerably looser environment of the 1990s, while others made the observation that Shanxi was particularly hard hit by the famine. Weaker answers, on the other hand, tended to neglect the content of the source in favour of a description of events during the Great Leap Forward and made generic comments on the weight attributable to the evidence of the source, often in relation to the interviewee's memory.

Question 2 (a) and Question 2 (b)

There were very few responses to this question.

Question 3

This was a popular essay question and there were many strong answers. These candidates used their extensive knowledge of the contribution of the PLA to the establishment of communist rule, for example, through the Reunification Campaigns and its triumphs during the Korean War, and were able to make sound judgements after considering other factors, perhaps the popularity of Mao's early reforms or the impact of terror. Weaker answers most often lacked the precise and detailed knowledge of the material necessary to make a convincing argument and some were unable to recognise the significance of the dates contained in the question.

Question 4

This was the most popular of the essay questions. Weaker responses neglected the specific demands of the question by referring extensively to the reasons for Mao's launch of the Cultural Revolution and were unable, therefore, to conclude convincingly about its consequences. However, many responses had very sound knowledge of the impact of the Cultural Revolution on education, as well as on a number of other major consequences, notably on the cultural fabric of China or on Mao's political control. As a result, they were able to make substantiated judgements on the consequences of the Cultural Revolution and many were able to access Level 4 marks.

Question 5

Although this was the least popular question on Paper 2E.1, it tended to be done very well indeed with many candidates able to access Level 4. Those that answered it wrote convincingly about the steps taken by the CCP to improve healthcare in China and came to finely-argued judgements about the effects of these measures on mortality rates and the general health of the population. It was clear that this part of the specification had been taught thoroughly and well.

Question 6

There were no responses to this question.

Question 7

There were very few responses to this question.

Question 8

There were no responses to this question.

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

Section A – Question (a)

- Candidates must be more prepared to make use of the content of the source material presented to them and to draw valid inferences from the source rather than to paraphrase it
- 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.

Section A – Question (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

- Questions can be asked on any element of the Key Topics in the specification
- This is a Study in Depth so it is vital to have precise and detailed knowledge of the issues to score well – candidates are required to have both range and depth in their answer to access the higher levels
- Questions can be asked by targeting any of the five second order concepts – cause, consequence, continuity and change, similarity and difference, significance
- Pay full attention to the stated focus of the question – aim to explain this fully before considering alternatives to give the answer balance and enable you to come to a judgement
- Be sure to respect the time frame in a question – make sure that the material you use is both relevant and covers the chronology as fully as possible
- Try and show links between the issues raised in your answer, especially in coming to a judgement
- Use subject-specific terminology precisely and accurately.

