



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel
In GCE 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

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 deliberately by its author(s).

Section B, the section in which candidates were given a choice of three essays 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. Most 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 were able to use Mao's telegram to Stalin very effectively to address the impact of participation in the Korean War on China. For example, many inferred that the economic cost had been significant and used sound contextual knowledge to support this, with reference to the social spending of the fledgling PRC. Other common inferences from the source material allowed candidates to explore Mao's use of the war to consolidate communist control at home, with reference to the campaigns against internal opposition. In coming to a

judgement on the utility of the source to the enquiry, many answers made valid points about the Mao's informed position as the leader of China during the war.

Question 1 (b)

There was many very good responses to this question. These were able use the provenance of the source to distinguish between the facts and the unfounded claims of its evidence, often concluding that as a publication linked closely to the PRC, it contributed little to the enquiry. There were some insightful inferences drawn from the source material, with regard to description of opposition to the PRC in Tibet for example, and impressive contextual knowledge added to these regarding the role of the Dalai Lama or to the extent to which the source's claims of improvements could be trusted. As a result, there were many responses that reached into high L3 or L4.

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 Hundred Flowers and the Cultural Revolution to make sound comparisons between their origins, natures and/or effects. Many candidates noted that both campaigns had the effect of strengthening Mao's position for example and resulted in considerable upheaval. Popular differences used in evidence included the fact that the Hundred Flowers campaign began, partly, as an attempt to start a debate about China's direction whereas the Cultural Revolution was, at least partly, an attempt by Mao to restore his personal position. Weaker answers most often lacked the precise and detailed knowledge of the material necessary to make a convincing argument.

Question 4

This was by some distance the most popular of the essay questions and its was often answered very well with many L4 answers. Though some candidates struggled a little to link the causes of the Great Famine to the backyard furnaces campaign, most did, before turning their attentions to the wider causes, notably the pressure put on party cadres to meet over-ambitious grain targets to satisfy export demands, or the results of Lysenkoism or 'sparrow-cide'. There were some impressive reasoned and insightful judgements reached. Again, weaker answers most often lacked the precise and detailed knowledge of the material necessary to make a convincing argument.

Question 5

Although this was the least popular question on Paper 2E.1, it tended to be done well with many candidates able to access Level 4. Those that answered it wrote convincingly about the steps taken by the significance of Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution, for example, in her role as Mao's wife, her part as a member of the Gang of Four and to cultural developments. Against this, candidates assessed the significance of Mao himself or the PLA for example.

Question 6

There were few responses to this question.

Question 7

There were few responses to this question.

Question 8

There were few 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.