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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level in
History(WHI02) Paper 1B

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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 IAS Level Paper WHIO2 1B which covers the option: China, 1900–76. 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 could comprehend, select and summarise from the source material. Most can 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 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, 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. The best responses come from candidates who have concentrated on the focus of the question, for example ‘significance’, ‘reasons’, ‘seriousness’ etc. and draw inferences, explain and support this with contextual knowledge. In this option, a number of students wasted time by describing the craft of the historian before tackling the question set, referring to the need to cross examine and triangulate sources with content and provenance. This added little to the answers as it was completely generalised. It also encouraged candidates to treat context entirely separately from inferences drawn meaning that they were not interrogated and limited the opportunities to achieve at the top level. 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. 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 both sections. The ability range was diverse, but the design of the paper catered for all abilities.

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 dates set in the question. It is important that candidates read the question carefully and note the parameters 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.

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

Question 1(a)

Most candidates understood the question and were able to comprehend the freedoms granted to women in the 1950 Marriage Law. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about the ability of women to exercise choice in marriage under the new law and discussed the claim that the law would bring equality for women. Some candidates made good use of reference to the difficulties of enforcing the law in some regions to infer that the law was not entirely successful and that freedoms were not achieved equally across the country.

The best answers developed the inferences with well-selected context to establish their validity. Candidates would do well to remember that contextual knowledge does need to be used to explain and develop the inferences drawn from the source and not just to provide free-standing knowledge. Many candidates used their contextual knowledge to discuss the deep-rooted Confucianism in Chinese society and Mao's commitment to female equality to develop their inferences. These responses accessed level 3 for both bullet points 1 and 2 of the mark scheme. Contextual knowledge used to confirm or expand on the source material can access level 2. It is important that candidates do consider the relevance of the contextual knowledge that they use and target it appropriately. It was disappointing that some candidates had no context to offer, and this did have a depressing impact on the overall mark awarded.

Most candidates were also able to make good use of the provenance to explain the value of the source, citing the significance of the position of the author, who, although writing in the CCP newspaper, was a legal expert and not a member of the Party and therefore would offer an insight that was not affected by party allegiances. Some of the best answers were able to refer to the acknowledgement of the problems in enforcing the law to support their conclusions that Chang was not producing CCP propaganda. It is important that candidates go beyond the stereotypical claims of a source being produced by someone who was 'there at the time' and therefore a 'primary source'. These comments do not in themselves provide any explanation of value and do not achieve out of level 1. In addition, those candidates who discussed the limitations could not be rewarded for that part of their answer as it is not the focus of part a) responses.

Question 1 (b)

Most candidates understood the source material and were able to select from it to develop some inferences about the attitudes of civilians to the soldiers of the Guomindang and the Communist sides during the Long March. Candidates made good use of the source to infer that the GMD soldiers were a disorganised rabble while the CCP soldiers were seen as saviours.

There were some effective answers that weighed up the strengths and limitations of the source and used this as a basis to reach a judgement about the weight that should be attached to the source for the enquiry. Although some candidates attached free-standing knowledge to the response, many did use secure knowledge, particularly to challenge the inferences in the source that the GMD were a defeated force in the light of their knowledge of the impact of the Long March on the CCP and the heavy losses they sustained with forces being reduced from 100,000 to 20,000 the time they reached their destination, in some cases to carry out a thorough interrogation of the evidence. The establishment of weight is very dependent upon candidates using their contextual knowledge to test the claims in the source. Candidates who only use knowledge to expand on the content of the source remain in level 2 for that bullet point. Some candidates did not use any contextual knowledge in their evaluation, and this limited their achievement. Other candidates did not pay close attention to the question and wrote about the Civil War of 1945-49.

In the most effective answers, candidates were able to use the provenance of the source in conjunction with the content of the source to develop criteria to judge the weight of the source as test this with claims in the source. A minority of candidates made some questionable assumptions about the source and presented them in a very stereotypical way, e.g., source is reliable value because she was there or that the account was given a long time after the event and so 'things might be forgotten' etc. Many candidates made good use of the authorship of the source and argued that while He could be regarded as subjective because she had joined the Red Army and participated in the Long March, her prosperous family's response to the arrival of the soldiers was not typical of the rich and so offered an interesting perspective. This was used effectively to consider what weight could be ascribe to the source. In level 4, bullet point 3 requires candidates to use criteria that are 'justified and applied' to evaluate the source. Where candidates identify bias or subjective views, it is important that they refer to them specifically in their answer to support their evaluation. In this response, He's anti-GMD credentials could be demonstrated by her reference to how 'awful' the GMD army contrasted with the Red Army that was depicted as 'very strong' after having 'forced back' the GMD.

Question 2

This was the least popular essay question on the paper. Although there were a few well-focused responses, for many candidates this did not prove to be a wise choice. Candidates tended to have very limited knowledge of the changes in the key features of the Imperial government in the years 1900-11 and tended to fall back on a description of the Boxer Rebellion and the 1911 revolution. Only a few referred to the changes in government after the deaths of Dowager Empress Cixi and Emperor Guangxu and the regency established by Prince Chun for two-year old Emperor Pu Yi. The best were able to discuss the reforms of the civil service, the extension of voting rights and army reform and consider how far they were implemented in order to reach a supported judgement.

Question 3

Most of the responses to this question scored in level 3. These candidates were able to address the question with a focus on the significance of Japanese influences on China in the years 1900-19. The best focused responses considered Japan's role in crushing the Boxer Rebellion, its seizure of Shandong and imposition of the 21 Demands during the First World War and its acquisition of land in the Treaty of Versailles and then contrasted Japanese influence with other significant influences such as Britain's control over internal trade and Russia's control of railways in Manchuria. Many candidates only described Japan's influence which limited their ability to reach a judgement on 'how significant' and others wrote extensively about Japan's occupation of Manchuria and that war from 1937-45. This material could not be rewarded as it was out of period, and overall, it did undermine the judgements that candidates were making. It is important when selecting an essay that candidates make sure they know what the question is asking them to do and that they focus on the exact date range. Careful planning is the key to success here.

Question 4

The great majority of candidates answered this question. Most candidates were able to focus on the impact of the great Leap Forward and discuss whether it was the main cause of China's economic problems. Candidates considered the problems caused by forcing peasants into communes, the sparrowcide, Lysenkoism and the famine. They considered the waste that resulted from the backyard furnaces and the failure to meet industrial targets. Answers achieving well in levels 3 and 4, contrasted the impact of the Great Leap Forward with other causes of economic problems, including the impact of the Cultural Revolution and the impact of the Sino-Soviet split. Some candidates were insufficiently focused on economic problems when discussing the Cultural Revolution and became side-tracked in discussing the impact on families and culture. The better responses kept tightly focused on economic impact and considered the long-term problems caused by the attacks on education and the dismissal of technological experts. Where candidates achieved in the lower levels, it was often the result of imprecise or insufficient knowledge and a failure address the focus on the question.

Paper Summary

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

Section A

Value of Source Question (1(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))

- 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.

