



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Level in History (WHI02)

Paper 2: Breadth Study with Source
Evaluation

Option 1B: China, 1900-76

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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. There was a tendency for some candidates to begin each answer by defining every term in the question before beginning to

write. Whilst candidates need to be sure of what the question is asking them to do, they do not need to go through the mechanics of it for up to 2 sides in their answers. 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 source about the responsibility for the outbreak of the crisis in Manchuria in 1931. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about the responsibility of the Japanese for planning the attack on Mukden as a pretext for occupying Manchuria. 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 expand on the topic referred to in the source. Candidates who provide knowledge that is not linked to the source to explain tend to be limited to achieving in level 2 for bullet point 2. Many candidates used their contextual knowledge to discuss the long term ambitions of the Japanese military to expand and the economic imperative of finding new resources during the Depression 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 or provided speculation, 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 Military Tribunal as an official body with the remit to study the evidence when reaching a judgement. It is important that candidates go beyond the stereotypical claims of a source being written by people 'who were there'. 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 consequences of the Great Leap Forward. Candidates made good use of the source to infer that successes were exaggerated and poor planning led to failures.

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. Some candidates did spend too much time on providing detailed knowledge of the reasons for the Great Leap Forward which was not the focus on the question but many did use secure knowledge of the consequences, particularly

to challenge the inferences in the source that downplayed the consequences for agriculture as overestimated rather than resulting in a famine that cost millions of lives. 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.

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 and 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 because he was there or that the account was biased because he was a member of the CCP. Many candidates made good use of the authorship of the source and argued that while Peng could be regarded as subjective because he was a member of the CCP, he was imparting some very painful truths that Mao would not welcome and therefore his letter should be regarded as reliable. 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, Peng's reliability could be detected by his claim that 'We have been misled about the achievements of the Great Leap Forward' and tempered by his need to ease the blow by starting with the claim that the Great Leap Forward had 'proved the correctness of the Party decision' and that it was a 'great success for China'.

Question 2

This was the most popular essay question on the paper. There were many well-focused answers scoring in level 4. Most candidates were able to explain how fall of the Qing caused chaos, particularly in enabling the rise of Yuan Shikai and ultimately leading to a power vacuum that was filled by the warlords and a fragmented country. Most responses also explored alternative causes of chaos, noting that the accession of Puyi heralded chaos before the fall of the Qing. Alternatives included the impact of the Boxer Rebellion, the chaos caused by foreign interference, the May the 4th Movement, economic and environmental challenges and the breakdown of the United Front in 1927. The best responses were able to develop criteria to judge on the most important reason.

Question 3

Responses to this question were rather mixed. While there were some responses that focused on the changing impact of the Cold War on China, including the Sino-Soviet alliance, its advantages to China's economic development and the costs involved, the impact of its breakdown in the early 1960s and the importance of developing trade links with the USA,

contracted with continuing suspicions of both the USSR and the West, there were many candidates who did not focus on the key wording of the question and instead wrote an answer that focused on Cold War hotspots and diplomacy. This material was not clearly focused on the impact on China and therefore 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. Careful planning is the key to success here.

Question 4

This was the least popular essay question. Those candidates who chose it were able to demonstrate some knowledge of the role of barefoot doctors and their importance in a system in which there were very few trained doctors. Some were also able to look at other developments in health care and the best were able to consider the relative importance of barefoot doctors for a very rural society. Some candidates did lose focus on the task and provide lengthy descriptions of the Cultural Revolution with limited focus on the question. 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. Careful planning is essential to maintain focus.

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.

