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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

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 a range of well-informed and well-written responses from candidates on IAS Paper WHI02 1B which covers 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.

In common with the previous series, candidates found Section A more challenging than Section B. Some candidates were still not clear on what was meant by 'value' and 'weight' in the context of source analysis and evaluation. Performance in Section A was also affected by the absence of the detailed knowledge base required to add contextual material to support/challenge points derived from the sources. 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 allowed all abilities to be catered for. Furthermore, in Section B, most responses had an analytical focus and there were very fewer 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 the lack of a sharp focus on the precise terms of the question and/or the second order concept that was targeted. This meant that some candidates wrote at length on topics that were only peripherally related to the question or which did not cover the whole time period.

It remains important to realise that Section A topics are drawn from highlighted topics on the specification whereas 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. There was little evidence on this paper of candidates having insufficient time to answer questions from Sections A and B.

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

Question 1 (a)

The majority of candidates produced answers that achieved at good level 2 and into level 3. Most candidates understood the question and were able to comprehend the source and comment on what it revealed about the impact of the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Candidates were able to draw out valid inferences from the source evidence, including the evidence of the brutality of the Japanese. 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. Lengthy passages about problems with the Japanese economy, for example, were not related to impact and could not be used to develop inferences, while descriptions of events such as the Rape of Nanking that were not used to develop inferences from the source could be rewarded in level 2 but not in level 3. Some candidates did not use any contextual knowledge and this did depress their achievement within the levels. Some candidates were able to use the attributes of the source effectively to develop their ideas about the value of the Tchou's speech, with a particular focus on his credentials and the audience to which he was speaking. 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)

Candidates understood the source material and were able to select from it to develop some inferences about the achievements of the Great Leap Forward. Most candidates achieved in level 3 and level 4. 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. Many candidates made effective comments about the nature of the source as propaganda and the most effective discussed the value of examining the way that the CCP used propaganda and contrasted this with the reliability of the source to demonstrate different ways in which the historian could use the source. However, many candidates still approach the consideration of weight by writing about adding and subtracting weight rather than considering the strengths and weaknesses of the source material and then reaching a judgement about the weight that the source would bear in an enquiry. There was a noticeable trend this summer for some candidates to use the structure of the generic mark scheme to write their answer. Whilst this meant that they addressed all three bullet points, it did mean that they did not integrate the ideas in their answer so that, in particular, knowledge was free standing and not used to develop and explain inferences. This technique would be best avoided for candidates who wish to access the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Question 2

This question prompted a number of answers. Most achieved into level 3 and some accessed level 4. Those candidates who achieved level 4 demonstrated good knowledge that was used effectively to address the second order concept – change. Level 4 responses reached sound judgements on the whether the lives of women in China remained unchanged in the first half of the twentieth century. The most common error in answering this question was a failure to focus on the time period set. A number of candidates looked at changes in the period after 1949 with a particular focus on the 1950 Marriage Law. This was not relevant to the question and therefore could not be rewarded.

Question 3

This question led to a number of well-focused responses. Most candidates contrasted the significance of Sun Yat-Sen’s contribution to the development of the GMD with that of Chiang Kai-shek and many also considered the role of Borodin and other Soviet officials. Knowledge was good and most candidates were able to access the higher marks in level 3. There were also many candidates who had a good analytical focus in their answers and achieved good marks in level 4. The most common error was to focus on events outside of the time period such as Sun’s early career and his response to the 1911 Revolution or Chiang’s activities in the 1930s. This led to a lower achievement within the appropriate level.

Question 4

This was the most popular essay question on the paper and prompted answers across the levels. Most candidates had some knowledge of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Cultural Revolution and nearly all candidates organised their responses to consider similarities and differences. The best responses were carefully planned answers that had a good grasp of the events and were able to produce a tightly focused analysis. The most common errors included superficial knowledge, a lack of balance in which the answer was overwhelmingly focused on the Cultural Revolution and some that claimed similarities/differences with unconvincing comparison of features.

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
- 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 deficiencies 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
- Try to distinguish between fact and opinion by using your contextual knowledge of the period
- Knowledge should be integrated with the source evidence, to discuss the inferences drawn and their validity in the light of the contextual understanding 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
- In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to assess reliability by considering what has been perhaps deliberately omitted from the source. However, simply stating that a source is limited because it does not cover certain events or developments does not establish weight since no source can be comprehensive.

Section B

Essay questions

- Candidates must provide more factual details as evidence. 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

- Pay careful attention to the date range in the question. Plan the answer with a focus on this range and avoid lengthy exploration of events outside of the time period set
- Try to explore links between issues to make the structure flow more logically and the arguments more integrated.