

Report on the Research Project of HKDSE History Practice Paper

In this research project, scripts of 100 candidates were collected from three schools on 16 January. The following table shows statistics about question popularity:

Paper 1

Question number	Popularity
1 (a) (b) (c)	Compulsory
2 (a) (b)	Compulsory
3 (a) (b)	Compulsory
4 (a) (b) (c)	Compulsory

Paper 2

Question number	Popularity
1	23.5%
2	34.5%
3	1.5%
4	20.5%
5	5%
6	1%
7	14%

General comments and recommendations

On the whole, candidates were well prepared for the examination. For data-based questions, they were able to cite relevant clues from the sources to explain their answers. They could refer to the allocated marks for each question as a guide to the length of answers. For essay-type questions, candidates were largely familiar with the topic associated with a given question.

From the collected scripts, markers had the following observations concerning candidates' weaknesses:

- Candidates tended to have the following common weaknesses in understanding a question. First, they might focus on some words of a question rather than understand the question as a whole; second, they did not understand the task/command words appropriately, resulting in a wrong way of answering the question. Candidates should read a question carefully and understand the question as a whole before answering.
- Answers tended to be stereotyped. Candidates should make discussions based on carefully selected facts relevant to the theme of the question they are answering, rather than regurgitate a prepared answer.

- When answering data-based questions that require the use of both sources and own knowledge, candidates should carefully specify which part of their answers come from sources, and which from their own knowledge. Otherwise, marks will be deducted.

Candidates' performance

Paper 1 (Data-based questions)

Q.1	(a)	Performance was average. Some candidates failed to use appropriate data from the Source when describing Japan's economic development in the specified period; some even failed to cover the whole period.
	(b)	Performance was average. Most candidates failed to grasp the gist of the question. The changes they described fell beyond the period in question, or such changes were relevant to Japan's livelihood rather than about Allied powers' policy towards Japan.
	(c)	Performance was poor. Most candidates ignored the key word 'primarily', thus failed to compare 'foreign factors' and 'other factors'. Most of them merely focused on the impact of 'foreign factors' on Japan's economic development in the period 1945-75, and treatment of 'other factors' was rough. Candidates should make a balanced and reasonable analysis of internal and foreign factors using Sources and own knowledge; however, such answers were rare.
Q.2	(a)	Performance was good. On the whole, candidates were able to identify two characteristics of the Red Guards, supported by relevant clues from the Source. A few candidates had actually identified one only although they thought they had presented two (e.g. 'admire Mao Zedong' and 'support Mao Zedong'). The weak candidates merely quoted the Source without inferring any characteristics of the Red Guards.
	(b)	Performance was average. The question required candidates to discuss the impact of the Cultural Revolution on China's modernisation, using the Source and their own knowledge. Some candidates failed to specify which part of their answers came from the Source and which from their own knowledge, hence hampering their performance. Some candidates focused on the negative impact, but did not relate their answers to the key word 'modernisation'. Some adopted the 'to what extent' approach in answering this question, which is acceptable; candidates should clearly explain their standpoints, but many who adopted this approach failed to do so. A few candidates mistook the Cultural Revolution as the New Culture Movement during the May Fourth Movement, thus scoring no marks.
Q.3	(a)	Performance was average. The question required candidates to identify the cartoonist's view of the deeds of the country represented by the gander in the event described by the cartoon. In the cartoon, Germany (gander) re-occupied the Rhineland and torn apart the Locarno Treaty on the one hand, and declared the deed as a peaceful one on the other. Most candidates failed to grasp the full message of the cartoon; they could only see the invasive act. Only a handful of candidates could point out the contradictory nature of Germany's deed. Many candidates mistook 'view' as 'attitude', thus their performance was hampered. A few candidates thought that the cartoonist's view was 'positive'; however, the cartoon did not have any clue to this, and this kind of answer was not acceptable.
	(b)	Performance was poor. Most candidates did not understand the meaning of 'threat', and their arguments were instead based on the general problems of the collective security system, such as weaknesses of the League of Nations and the ineffectiveness of disarmament talks, which were not what the question asked. In other words, answers from candidates' own knowledge tended to be irrelevant. When discussing the Source, answers tended to be general; the sentence 'The Source reflected a threat to the collective security' was always not followed by any elaboration. Moreover, candidates needed to specify which part of their answers came from the Source, and which from their own knowledge.

Q.4	(a)	Performance was average. The more competent candidates could point out that the cartoon was published in a capitalist state, with an explanation using clues from the Source. The weak candidates thought that the cartoon was published in a communist state; they misunderstood the continents shown in the globe represented China and the Soviet Union.
	(b)	Performance was poor. Only a minority of candidates could make good use of the Source to infer Khrushchev's purpose of making the speech. Many candidates merely repeated the Source in their answers, without inferring the 'purpose'. Some weak candidates misread the Source; they thought Khrushchev intended to start a nuclear war.
	(c)	Performance was poor. Only a minority of candidates could discuss whether the relationship between the two blocs 'became less hostile', using facts from the 1950s. Some weak candidates merely narrated on the conflicts between the two blocs, without making any attempts to elaborate on their relationship.

Paper 2 (Essay-typed question)

Q.1	Performance was average. The key word 'primarily' in the question indicated that candidates should compare 'China factors' with other factors and state their standpoints on the issue. Most candidates could present separate accounts of China factors and other factors, but few could present a meaningful discussion regarding their relative importance. Answers tended to be unsubstantiated, which reflected candidates' lack of knowledge on Hong Kong's economic development.
Q.2	This is the most popular question in this Paper, yet performance was unsatisfactory. Only a minority of candidates could select appropriate facts to make a direct discussion on why militarism rose in Japan in the 1930s. Many candidates merely narrated on the background of militarism.
Q.3	There were few respondents to this question. Candidates did not have a firm grasp of the key phrase 'turning point'; thus they could not effectively compare developments before and after 1949, describe the fundamental changes, and explain how the year 1949 led to such changes. All answers focused on the political aspect, and relatively rough in other aspects. They attempted to discuss developments before and after the year 1949, but were rather weak in the impact of the year 1949 to the subsequent developments.
Q.4	Performance was poor. Many candidates were not familiar with the phrase 'international order', as a result their answers mistakenly discussed the impact of the First World War on Italy and Germany and how the First World War led to the rise of Mussolini and Hitler. Those who managed to discuss 'international order' tended to miss the key phrase 'Paris Peace Settlements' and mistakenly discussed how the First World War established a new international order. Most answers were too general and unsubstantiated. Only a few candidates could make effective and substantiated comparisons between the international orders before and after the Paris Peace Settlement.
Q.5	There were just a few respondents to this question. Only a few candidates could assess the significance of Gorbachev relative to other factors in bringing about the end of the Cold War. Some weak candidates wrongly placed the focus on the impact of Gorbachev's reforms on the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
Q.6	There were few respondents to this question. Generally speaking, candidates could identify roles the United Nations played in settling the racial conflicts in the Balkans and conflicts between Israel and the Arabs, but answers tended to be weakly substantiated.
Q.7	Performance was poor. Many candidates were not familiar with the situations of the country/region they selected in the early and late 20 th century; thus they could not manage to make any effective comparisons. Some candidates discussed mid-20 th century rather than late 20 th century. All in all, most arguments were rough and weakly substantiated.