

Candidates' Performance

General comments and recommendations

On the whole, candidates seem to have been well prepared for the examination. Most answers displayed knowledge relevant to the issues/topics covered by the curriculum. However, the performance was not always commensurate with the effort made. To achieve good results in History examinations, candidates need the following skills: identifying the key term(s)/phrase(s) of a question in order to grasp the gist of that question; using relevant historical information to support any arguments made; and presenting logical, coherent and clear answers.

It is imperative that candidates read the questions carefully if they want to produce relevant answers. Candidates too often jumped into answering a question without paying close attention to what it required. This explains why some candidates produced irrelevant answers when answering data-based questions: when the question required the use of sources only, they drew on their own knowledge; in contrast, when the question required the use of both sources and their own knowledge, they used one but not both. Similarly for essay-type questions, candidates should make sure that they grasp the gist of a question before producing the answer. Candidates are advised to read *A Manual of Question Words Used in History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007; online version 2011), in order to familiarise themselves with various command words and other commonly used words that appear in HKDSE History questions.

It is also important that candidates choose relevant historical information to substantiate their arguments. Some of the scripts were marred by gross irrelevancies resulting from the indiscriminate use of historical information. Regurgitating 'model answers' prepared in advance should be avoided.

Last but not least, candidates should pay special attention to logic, coherence and clarity of presentation. They should learn not to muddle through their answers or cram facts into their answers without making their arguments clear. All in all, they should improve their language and presentation skills.

Question Choice Pattern

| Question Number | Popularity |
|-----------------|------------|
| Paper 1 | |
| 1 | Compulsory |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| Paper 2 | |
| 1 | 29% |
| 2 | 64% |
| 3 | 46% |
| 4 | 26% |
| 5 | 1% |
| 6 | 20% |
| 7 | 14% |

Paper 1 (Data-based questions)

- Q.1 (a) Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to explain, with one relevant clue from Source A, what made the Western countries strong. Candidates were expected to first state the reason and then support the answer with one relevant clue from the source. Many candidates were able to complete the task. However, some failed to cite one relevant clue, and so lost marks.
- (b) Performance was fair. Candidates were required to compare the views of Kang Youwei and Zou Rong regarding the prospect of revolution in China, with reference to Sources A and B. The two key words in this question were *compare* and *prospect*. Weak answers produced separate accounts of Kang Youwei and Zou Rong without making any comparisons and/or discussed the views of Kang and Zou on revolution without focusing on the prospect of revolution.
- (c) Performance was fair. Candidates were required to comment on the validity of the statement 'revolutions are violent, but they can be an effective means of strengthening China.' Candidates were expected to make use of historical facts up to the 1910s to discuss whether revolution, as a violent means, could be an effective means of strengthening China. Whereas the best candidates were able to give a balanced discussion of this seeming paradox using the sources and their own knowledge, weak answers tended to be narratives giving facts about revolutions which ignored the key word 'violent'. Some candidates gave prepared answers on topics such as the Late Qing Reform, which was not a revolution at all. This kind of answer scored no marks.
- Q.2 (a) Performance was good. The question required candidates to identify the cartoonist's view on the prospect of peace with reference to Source C. Most candidates pointed out the cartoonist's pessimistic view about the prospects for peace. However, some weak candidates mistook the key word 'view' for 'attitude', and so lost marks. Some candidates mistook the angel in the cartoon for Germany, leading to problematic inferences and low marks.
- (b) Performance was good. The question required candidates to infer one principle that Clemenceau upheld at the Paris Peace Conference as reflected in Source D. Most candidates made use of clues in Source D to infer one such principle. However, some candidates merely copied or quoted from the source without making any inferences.
- (c) Performance was fair. The question required candidates to discuss whether the criticisms of the peacemakers at the Paris Peace Conference contained in Sources C and D were fair. Candidates were expected to first understand the two sources in terms of criticisms of the peacemakers at the Paris Peace Conference, and discuss whether such criticisms were fair, using their own knowledge. The best candidates were able to clearly explain their answers: for example, the criticisms were fair because they represented what really took place, or they were unfair due to huge limitations the peacemakers faced at the time. However, some weak candidates misunderstood the question as one asking whether the decisions made by the peacemakers – rather than criticisms of the peacemakers – were fair, which scored no marks. Moreover, given the fact that the Paris Peace Conference took place in 1919 and world politics changed a lot in the 1920s, especially after the 1929 Great Depression, it was irrelevant to cite facts from the 1930s.
- Q.3 (a) Performance was fair. This question required candidates to identify from Source E Matsushita's dream for Japan. Whereas the best candidates read the question properly and provided appropriate answers, some misread the question and wrote on the dreams of Matsushita in general, not specifically those for Japan. Answers like this were not awarded any marks.
- (b) Performance was fair. The question required candidates to comment on the validity of the statement 'Japan's economic development after the Second World War up to the 1980s was primarily influenced by internal factors' with reference to Source E and using their own

knowledge. Only the best candidates discussed both internal and external factors before evaluating which group of factors had the larger impact on Japan's economic development after the Second World War. Weak candidates merely presented their arguments without good substantiation, and/or handled either internal or external factors only.

- Q.4 (a) Performance was below expectations. This question required candidates to identify two characteristics of the Cold War with reference to relevant clues from Source F. Only the best candidates managed to make good use of the clues to support the characteristics of the Cold War they identified. Some weak candidates merely pointed out the characteristics without mentioning clues from the source. Still others ignored the source and gave prepared answers about the Cold War's characteristics. This kind of answer scored no marks.
- (b) Performance was good. This question required candidates to show and explain which country – the USA or the USSR – was more threatening to peace in the Cold War period. Many candidates gave their viewpoint clearly and make good comparisons to explain why the chosen country was more threatening to peace than the other; they also supported their answers by referring to the given sources and providing relevant details of their own, covering the whole Cold War period. Some weak answers merely picked one country and narrated its threats to peace without comparing it with the other superpower. This kind of answer was awarded low marks.

Paper 2 (Essay-type questions)

- Q.1 Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to trace and explain the political development of Hong Kong in the second half of the 20th century, up to 1997. Most candidates understood the key phrase 'trace and explain' well. They were able to divide the required period into two or three sub-periods (trace) and discuss characteristics of political developments in a particular sub-period (explain). However, some candidates were not always successful in identifying turning points, for example, the 1967 Riots; such candidates tended to present two sub-periods only (1950s-1970s and 1980s-1997). Some candidates' answers were lopsided, favouring either 'trace' or 'explain'. Only the best candidates were able to present balanced answers about 'tracing' and 'explaining' political developments in Hong Kong, identifying valid turning points such as the 1967 Riots and the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, with substantiated discussion of major characteristics in each sub-period.
- Q.2 Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to select a modern Chinese historical figure and discuss whether his impact on China's development was more positive than negative. Good answers examined the *impact* of the chosen historical figure on China's development over a substantial period of time. However, many candidates discussed policies and/or events related to the chosen figure without proceeding to discuss whether they had a positive or negative impact on China's development. Some weak answers only focused on one or two policies and/or events; answers with such limited coverage were awarded low marks.
- Q.3 Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to explain why militarism arose in Japan in the 1930s but not earlier. Most candidates explained in detail the reasons for the rise of militarism in Japan. However, many were less successful in handling the other task in the question, that is, why militarism did not rise earlier in Japan. Weaker answers gave general accounts of militarism in the 1930s, without concrete facts such as political assassinations and the militarists' domination in the civilian government after the mid-1930s. In other words, candidates did not handle the key word *why* properly. Candidates are advised to read the question carefully, in order to understand the required time span and task.

- Q.4 Performance was fair. The question required candidates to discuss the ways in which the Second World War was a turning point in modern Western history, up to the 1960s. Candidates were expected to demonstrate how the War had influenced modern Western history in different aspects such as political, social, economic and technological. Many answers reflected substantiated attempts to focus on the required task, but they displayed one or more of the following flaws: misunderstanding the question as one that merely asked for the War's influence and results, hence making no attempt to compare the Western world before and after the War; overlooking the key phrase 'turning point' and giving only a narrative account of the Second World War; failing to extend the discussion up to the 1960s. Only the best candidates were able to give a coherent presentation with reasonable and balanced comparison of the periods before and after the Second World War, with effective explanation of the ways in which the War had brought about remarkable changes in modern Western history.
- Q.5 Performance was poor. The question required candidates to compare Yasser Arafat and Nelson Mandela and evaluate, with supporting evidence, who was the greater leader. Candidates were expected to discuss both leaders, and make due comparisons of what they did, before ascertaining who was a greater leader. However, many candidates just picked one leader and narrated what he did without comparing him with the other. Only a few answers made effective comparisons and explain why one was greater than the other. Candidates are advised to pay attention to the skills required by the question, that is, making effective comparisons, and characterising the political careers and policies of given political figures.
- Q.6 Performance was fair. This question required candidates to discuss whether European countries became less dependent on the superpowers and more autonomous in their economic cooperation in the period 1945-2000. Generally speaking, candidates knew more about developments in Western European countries than in Eastern European countries; only the best candidates gave a balanced discussion of both. Many candidates paid more attention to 'autonomy' than 'dependence on the superpowers'. Candidates should have paid equal attention to both. Some candidates ended their discussion at the Marshall Plan and Molotov Plan of the late 1940s. This kind of answer was a very limited response to the question, which asked for discussion of 1945-2000, and was thus awarded low marks.
- Q.7 Performance was poor. This question required candidates to select any two countries and discuss the factors that affected their relationship in the first half of the 20th century. Candidates should have generalised the factors that affected the relationship between the two countries. However, coherent and clear answers were rare. Many answers attempted to discuss the factors, but tended to focus on either country separately instead of their *relationship*. The weakest answers gave separate accounts of the historical developments of the two countries. A handful of candidates ignored the time requirement 'the first half of the 20th century'; answers that discussed the second half of the 20th century were awarded no marks.

School-based Assessment

HKDSE History School-based Assessment (SBA) requires students to complete a two-task assignment related to their selected elective. The two tasks are namely presentation of study outline and study report.

In the 2015 HKDSE History Examination, participating schools have to submit SBA marks for inclusion in the subject result. We are happy to report that 61.5% of schools fall into the 'within the expected range' category, while the marks of 20.6% of schools are higher than expected, and 17.9% lower than expected. However, among the schools with marks higher or lower than expected, the majority only deviate slightly from the expected range. This showed that the majority of the teachers do have a good understanding about SBA implementation, and hence the marking standards are generally appropriate.

The implementation of SBA in 2015 HKDSE History was generally satisfactory. SBA District Coordinators (DCs) were appointed to support schools in implementing SBA. Messages were conveyed to subject teachers through post-mortem seminars, SBA conferences and briefing sessions. Teachers, subject heads and School Coordinators (SCs) were informed of the mark submission arrangement and the format of submitting students' sample works to the HKEAA. Effective communication among DCs, SCs, supervisor and subject manager was maintained via emails and phone calls.

Generally speaking, students' performance on Comparative Studies was better than that on the other two electives. Most students opting for Comparative Studies were able to set appropriate titles with two or more comparable items. As for Issue-based Studies, many titles did not contain any controversy, and therefore did not fit the requirement of the elective. The appropriateness of works on Local Heritage Studies depended on whether the items students had chosen were heritage-related.

While students should draft appropriate titles for their chosen electives, they should also match the titles appropriately with the chosen electives. Quite many mismatches were identified: for example, a title that was claimed to be for Issue-based Studies might have a phrasing that was obviously for Comparatively Studies.

In 2015 HKDSE History, no serious plagiarism was identified. To avoid SBA malpractice, HKDSE History candidates should properly cite sources they have used and quoted (refer to the Appendix H, SBA Teacher's Handbook: <http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/SBA/HKDSE/SBAhandbook-2015-HIST-E-May14.pdf>), and should make analysis and presentation in their own words as far as possible.

Acknowledgements

Material from the following publications has been used in question papers in this volume:

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|--------------------------|---|
| 中國人民大學出版社 | 康有為,《康有為全集》(第6冊),2007 |
| 夢遠書城 | 鄒容,《革命軍》,1903 < http://www.my285.com/xdwx/gmj/ > |
| Liberty Fund | John Maynard Keynes, <i>The Economic Consequences of the Peace</i> , 1919 |
| Marxist Internet Archive | Nikita Khrushchev, <i>Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the 22nd Party Congress</i> , 1962 |
| Panasonic | < http://www.top5.co.jp/pana-mci/syaka.html >, 1960s |
| Punch | <i>Overall the Garden Wall</i> , 1962 |
| The Nation Archives | < http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/g5/images/g5cs2s4b.jpg > |

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