

MANDARIN CHINESE (PRINCIPAL COURSE)

Paper 9778/01

Speaking

Key messages

- There were some excellent performances in this examination
- For the Prepared Topic, candidates should choose a topic that is of interest to them and which they are able to talk about with the language they have at their disposal
- Centres should prepare candidates for the Topic Conversation by anticipating the kinds of questions an interested layperson might ask about their chosen topic
- As well as answering straightforward questions, candidates should be prepared to answer questions that will stretch them
- Candidates are encouraged to develop their answers to both straightforward and more challenging questions.

General comments

The Speaking Examination is conducted by the visiting external Examiner. Centres are reminded of the need to provide a quiet room where there will be no significant background noise to interfere with the recording.

There are two parts to this examination - **Section 1** is a Prepared Topic and Topic Conversation and **Section 2** is a General Conversation. The Prepared Topic is marked out of 15 with 10 marks for Content/Presentation and 5 marks for Language. The Topic Discussion and the General Conversation are each marked out of 15 with 5 marks for Comprehension and Responsiveness and 10 marks for Accuracy and Range of Language. In addition, 15 marks are awarded globally for Pronunciation/Intonation (5 marks) and Feel for Language (10 marks). This gives a total of 60 marks.

The Speaking examination is scheduled to last between 12-15 minutes. The Prepared Topic and Topic Conversation should last 5-7 minutes and the General Conversation should last 6-8 minutes.

This examination is the opportunity for the candidate to show the Examiner what he/she can do; the practice and preparation before the examination with the candidate's own teacher should focus on this. Topics should be carefully chosen; a topic needs to interest the candidate, but also be well within his or her reach to talk about with language at his/her disposal. If this does not happen, a carefully prepared presentation can sound stilted, and a candidate may then find s/he has difficulty engaging in the Examiner's questions in the Topic Conversation. The candidate should not necessarily cover all aspects of the topic in the presentation, but might choose to leave one or two obvious things out which can then be picked up by the Examiner.

The Examiner will try to make the move clear between the Topic Conversation to the General Conversation and, wherever possible, when they are moving between topic areas within the General Conversation. For candidates taking Mandarin Chinese as the Principal Course, the Speaking Examination is conducted by an external Examiner with whom they will not have previously spoken. This, therefore, makes the listening element of the examination significantly more testing and so clear indication of a change of topic area will help to avoid any confusion in the conversation. Teachers are encouraged to practise this with candidates before the examination. The sentences used by the Examiner might be 你今天讲什么题目? 和现在我们讲一讲其他的题目, 好不好?

Candidates have time during the year to work on their Prepared Topic and should be able, with practice, to present fairly fluently. This initial presentation should last a maximum of 2 minutes. After this time, s/he can expect to be interrupted by the Examiner if necessary so that the conversation can take place. Whilst tones and pronunciation are not expected to be perfect, the presentation should be easily understood by a

sympathetic native speaker; candidates should have a good feel for the rhythms and cadences of the language within the sentences.

Teachers get used to understanding their own candidates and making allowances for their errors, but in the examination, candidates need to present their topic in a way that they can be understood by the visiting Examiner. Candidates will score highly on the Prepared Topic when they also demonstrate they have prepared well both in the content of what they say and how engaging it is, and also the vocabulary and the structures used – e.g. good use of conjunctions, correct word order and timeframes etc.

In the Topic Conversation, the Examiner will play the part of the intelligent layperson and will be genuinely interested to talk with the candidate about the Prepared Topic. Candidates need to therefore prepare for the Topic Conversation anticipating and preparing for the general kinds of questions which could be asked by an interested layperson.

During the course of their study, candidates should have developed the vocabulary and linguistic skills to answer a range of questions both on their Prepared Topic and also during the General Conversation. Rather than asking a series of pre-prepared questions, the Examiner will seek to follow up what the candidate says so that a natural and spontaneous conversation takes place. In the General Conversation, although there are sample questions in the syllabus, an examiner is likely not to ask questions directly lifted from here, although the standard of questioning will be similar. Although these questions will not be complicated, it is important that centres ensure that candidates are familiar with different types of questioning and have had the opportunity to prepare for the General Conversation. For example, if, for instance, the candidate is asked about the differences between UK and Chinese secondary school education this should not be the first time he/she is discussing this fairly general topic. Such a topic should have already been thought about and discussed in class.

The Examiner will keep the flow of conversation going in as relaxed a manner as possible, in both conversation sections. Candidates need to be prepared for both straightforward questions, and also ones which will stretch them. As well as taking part in a conversation, they need to regard the examination as an opportunity to show the Examiner what they can do, thus maximising their chances of good marks which are obtainable with a natural, responsive conversation showing good use of vocabulary, structures and idiom. At this level, candidates should be encouraged to develop their answers, even if they are asked a very straightforward question. If a candidate has areas of a topic where he/she feels particularly confident, it is up to him or her to try to respond to questions in such a way as to be able to demonstrate this to the Examiner. Candidates should not be concerned that their answer to a question is factually untrue or does not really reflect their opinions; the Examiner is only interested in the level of their Chinese and will not judge them on what they think. Candidates should also not worry if they do not understand a question; they should ask for it to be repeated or rephrased (this request should be made in Chinese); if they still do not understand it, the Examiner will try to move swiftly on to another question.

Cambridge Pre-U Mandarin Chinese is an examination for foreign language learners. Therefore, native speakers of Mandarin who have a well-prepared topic may, in all likelihood, score maximum marks. However, it is the standard required for the foreign language learner which will be borne in mind by the Examiner in the testing and marking of candidates.

MANDARIN CHINESE PRINCIPAL COURSE

Paper 9778/02

Listening, Reading and Translation

Key messages

- Centres prepared the majority of candidates very well for the examination, which was reflected in many exceedingly strong performances. However, on occasion, there did appear to be some inconsistency in levels of preparation.
- Centres are advised of the need to prepare candidates fully with the structure and requirements of the examination. For example, a few errors could be eliminated if candidates are reminded that where 3-point multiple choice questions are set, to ensure that 3 corresponding answers are provided. Key resources to support this are the specimen and past papers (2010-2014).
- Recognition of tones remains a critical area for candidates in the *Listening* section for which candidates need to prepare thoroughly. Candidates should also consider additional practice by listening to authentic recordings, especially since the 2nd and 3rd tone can be very difficult.
- In preparation for the *Reading* section, Centres should introduce and develop the necessary dictionary skills. They should provide candidates with sufficient practice in using a dictionary so they become familiar with the various features and can find information quickly and efficiently. When candidates tackle the open ended questions, they are advised to provide full answers.
- Centres should remind candidates that comprehensive preparation, combined with careful checking of their work in the examination, will guarantee a high score in **Section 3: Chengyu**.
- In the *Translation* section, candidates should not be over-literal. Instead, their objective should be to use common sense to produce translations which read naturally. They should avoid slavish word-for-word renderings of the original which are unlikely to convey meaning.

General comments

The content of the examination clearly reflected the prescribed themes and topics for the Pre-U Mandarin Chinese as expressed in the teaching syllabus. Most of the candidates had been adequately prepared for the examination, which matched the level of difficulty set by the National Qualifications Framework.

In addition, this year there was again an increased number of candidates taking Pre-U Mandarin Chinese from a larger number of centres. Generally, the results and standards were spread evenly across centres.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 – Listening

In general, candidates delivered commendable performances in the *Listening* section this year.

The Examiners were very pleased to note that over half of candidates scored full marks for **Exercise 1** (Pinyin with tones), which has proven to be a challenging task in the past. However, those candidates who lost marks in this task seemed to find the following points demanding:

- Initial – differentiating between ‘j’ (醬油) and ‘zh’, ‘q’ (請客) and ‘ch’
- Tones – remains a difficult area, in particular differentiating between 2nd and 3rd tone.

Candidates are to be congratulated on the superb results for **Exercise 2**, where the vast majority scored full marks.

There were mixed performances on **Exercise 3**, where some candidates scored fully, whilst some candidates accurately identified the subject matter but lost marks due to the lack of precision. At times, there appeared to be a degree of guesswork for this task.

Exercise 4, the summary task, differentiated candidates' performances most strikingly from one another. There were 14 marks potentially available to be scored on this 7-marks task, so even where candidates struggled with multiple areas in the recording, a full mark was still manageable.

There was also a substantial amount of guesswork here where candidates could not identify the subject matter accurately. Although candidates are encouraged to guess if they are really stuck, they are advised to spend additional preparation time in class in order to become stronger in this area.

Section 2 – Reading

Most of the candidates seemed to be very well prepared by centres on the topics, and the resultant efforts were generally pleasing. However, Centres are reminded that, for this level of learning, when tackling Reading tasks, candidates should respond in full, using comprehensive details rather than short, stunted replies lacking the appropriate level of precision. Another point regards the slavish use of dictionaries. For example, in Reading Text (a), a few candidates provided the answer 'cost of time', instead of 'time spent'. This was undoubtedly down to over-reliance on the dictionary instead of trusting their basic knowledge of grammar.

For Exercise 1 – **Question 10**, the majority of candidates scored full marks, but a minority chose a synonym ('reduce' instead of 'decrease') from the text options. Although the content was clearly understood, candidates are reminded to adhere to the instructions to select the answer from the choices provided.

For Exercise 3 - **Question 16**, some candidates answered 'the annual fee at the super middle School is equivalent to four years of undergraduate study', and hence failed to accurately quantify the answer by explaining ('the fee is more than four years of undergraduate study').

Section 3 – Chinese sayings (Chengyu)

Centres appeared to have taken on board the advice given for handling this exercise with the majority of candidates providing accurate responses. However, a very small number of candidates continue to rely on a dictionary to check each character in order to give their answers. Centres are reminded that adopting this strategy can result in a poor quality, or distorted, translation.

Section 4 – Translation

Examiners noted there was an improved performance on this task. There were 19 marks potentially available to be scored on this 16-marks task - which means even if candidates struggle with one or two areas a full mark is still manageable.

Although there were some excellent work here, there was also a small number of rather disappointing responses. Some candidates resorted to dictionaries to reference some key vocabulary items and then pieced these items together with a degree of guesswork, rather than working to understand the actual text and render its meaning in English.

MANDARIN CHINESE PRINCIPAL COURSE

Paper 9778/03
Writing and Usage

Key messages

- There were many excellent performances on this Writing and Usage component
- In order for future candidates to improve their performance, they should work on their character strokes, consolidate their knowledge of basic Chinese grammar, expand their use of more complex sentence structures, and enlarge their vocabulary well beyond GCSE level
- When writing the letter, candidates should use a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures
- For the opinion essay, it is important that candidates develop a series of coherent arguments supported by detailed examples. They should include a brief and clear-cut introduction and a strong conclusion. Candidates will also find it helpful to draft a simple essay plan before they begin writing the essay itself.

General comments

There are three sections to this component. **Section 1** tests candidates' knowledge of the radicals and strokes of Chinese characters, as well as Chinese grammar in terms of grammar markers and measure words. **Section 2** tests candidates' ability to write a letter according to a series of specific bullet points. **Section 3** requires candidates to write an opinion essay on one of six pre-determined topics. The total marks for the paper are 60. **Section 1** is marked out of 10 with 6 marks for the character exercises and 4 marks for the grammar ones. **Section 2** is marked out of 20 with 5 marks for Communication and 15 marks for Language (5 for Accuracy of Characters and 10 for Accuracy of Grammar and Structures). In **Section 3**, the Opinion Essay is marked out of a total of 30 with 20 marks for Accuracy and Linguistic Range and 10 marks for Development and Organisation of Ideas.

This year's candidates did very well on Exercise 1, **Questions 1(a)**, and **1(b)(ii)**; Exercise 2, **Question 2(b)**; the coverage of the bullet points and accuracy of characters in Exercise 3, **Section 2**; and accuracy and linguistic range in the essay in Exercise 4, **Section 3**.

Exercise 1, **Questions 1(b)(ii)**, Exercise 2, **Question 2(v)** proved the most challenging in **Section 1**. In **Section 2**, candidates showed excellent ability to use structures, employ suitable vocabulary and to begin and end a letter in formal style. In the opinion essay (**Section 3**), all of the possible choices of titles were adopted by some candidates and there was no obvious difference in the difficulty candidates had in answering the questions. Those candidates who showed they could manipulate a wider range of vocabulary, make proper use of more complicated sentence structures, and develop a well-structured argument scored highly. Successful candidates tended to read the chosen questions carefully and included relevant arguments in their essays.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 – Radicals, stroke order and grammar markers

Candidates performed well on Exercise 1 which required them to work with the radical and stroke order of characters. This year, candidates were usually successful in identifying the radical. Providing the stroke order of characters proved challenging, some starting (i) 松 and (ii) 闻 with the vertical line which was incorrect. To be more successful on Exercise 2, the grammar exercise, candidates are advised to revise the tense indicators and grammar markers, e.g. 着 etc. For (b), (v) (着) is the right choice indicating in what manner/method the action is taking place. Candidates who chose (i) (了) for (b), were also awarded one mark

because (了) is marginally acceptable for (b) – subsequently, these candidates did not score for (c) where (i) (了) should be.

Section 2 – Letter writing

Candidates generally wrote excellent letters about their experience of learning Chinese. All were careful to cover all four bullet points. In terms of Accuracy of Grammar and Structures, many candidates were successful and accessed the highest marks in this section. Candidates clearly made use of words and characters beyond the level of GCSE and used compound and complex sentences, as well as comparatives and negatives where appropriate. Many letters showed maturity and confidence with fluency in their writing. Some candidates were adventurous too which made for a pleasant read.

Section 3 – Opinion essay

Candidates chose to respond to all six essay titles provided on the question paper, with ‘Urban and Rural life’ and ‘The Environment’ proving more popular whilst ‘Media’ and ‘Education’ had fewer takers. Almost all the essays were of an appropriate length with good variety of vocabulary and comprehensive content. The stronger essays had a clear beginning and ending which were closely related to the question, with organised paragraphs in the middle offering well-developed arguments. The most successful essays were also very polished with rhetoric, idioms and contrasting views leading to logical and convincing conclusions. Candidates made use of a wide range of vocabulary with both simple and complex sentence structures.

In order to achieve even higher marks in this section, candidates are encouraged to read their chosen questions carefully in order to make sure that their statements are relevant and more specific than generalised. Candidates are encouraged to plan how to divide their essays into paragraphs with the main points/themes clearly shown as well as drawing upon more detailed examples/evidence/facts to illustrate the points they are making. In terms of Accuracy and Linguistic Range, candidates are encouraged to pay attention to the meaning of words in a specific context (not solely to the primary definition in the dictionary), to their control of conjunctions, prepositions and punctuation. They should trust their own knowledge more than being over-reliant on the dictionary in the examination.

The best pieces of writing flowed fluently and naturally from beginning to end in a coherent and logical manner. Candidates should read the selection of essay titles carefully and should only choose to answer a title if they are confident they have understood it (titles are provided in Chinese and English), and have something to say on the subject. Learning an essay by heart and reproducing it in the examination without considering the title that has been set is not encouraged, as where the essay written does not answer the question set, this will be reflected in the mark awarded.

MANDARIN CHINESE PRINCIPAL COURSE

Paper 9778/04
Chinese Culture

Key messages

- Questions are open to interpretation and it is important that candidates start by considering the wording of the question and outlining the approach they intend to take
- As well as facts, answers should include discussion (backed up by examples), analysis and evaluation
- To score highly, candidates must write a well-argued essay which is clear and focused.

General comments

Candidates are required to answer two questions for this paper, one from the *Topics in Chinese Culture* section and one from the *Chinese Literature and Film* section. Each answer is marked out of 30 with a mark out of 25 for content and a mark out of 5 for structure. In all cases, questions are open to interpretation; it is up to the candidates to develop an analytical response to the question with clear, specific examples/evidence (not generalized statements) to back up his/her argument. The mark scheme gives some indicative content for each question on the paper. However, there is often no right or wrong way to answer a question; it is up to the candidate to develop an argument and find evidence to support it. There were some very successful essays which demonstrated in-depth analysis backed up by specific references. In general, candidates seemed to find **Section One – Topics in Chinese Culture** – slightly more challenging.

Candidates should make sure they read the question very carefully before they start, making a careful assessment of what is asked for. They should also write a plan before beginning to write.

Each essay should start with an introduction which should outline how the question is going to be tackled. Candidates should avoid giving away the conclusion to their essay in the introduction. Subsequent paragraphs should develop a clear argument/line of thinking with specific, relevant examples/evidence to illustrate the argument, which should always link to the question. Essays should finish with a strong conclusion.

Essays should not be a descriptive list of facts or the story of what happened in a period of history, a novel or a film. Candidates obviously need to have a lot of facts at their fingertips, but then need to be in a position to manipulate those facts to demonstrate their deeper understanding and analytical capability in response to the question. Evaluation is the key. Organisation of material is vital and an appropriate style should be used. In the case of *Yellow Earth*, candidates needed to have a good grasp of the Chinese history of the period in which the film is set. The two sections of the paper can be mutually supportive in this respect.

In order to be able to respond to these essay questions appropriately, during their studies candidates need to be exposed to a range of commentaries/view points about a particular topic and to have had the opportunity to discuss ideas with their teachers and other candidates to inform their interpretation of events or their interpretation of a book or film. It is only this exposure to a variety of views that will give candidates the ability to handle these essay questions with sufficient analysis.

Comments on specific questions:

Question 1

- (a) This question was done well by many candidates. The best responses gave a detailed and balanced discussion of the role of the peasantry, with many examples to support their argument for

or against their playing a crucial role. These essays generally also included analysis of other important factors contributing to the Chinese Communist Party's ultimate victory over the Japanese and the Guomindang as part of the construction of an argument as to the extent of the relationship with the peasantry being fundamental to victory for the Chinese Communist Party. Less able candidates showed some confusion in the chronology: it would be helpful to candidates for this paper if they drew up their own time-lines to clarify the complex events in this period of Chinese history.

- (b) This question was answered less successfully, with candidates sometimes focussing on other events in the period in question rather than discussing issues specifically relating to education.

Question 2

- (a) There were some very good responses to this question, showing detailed knowledge and analysis.
- (b) Although there were some good responses, this question required at least some 'economic/semi-technical' understanding of China's energy needs to be answered fully, and some candidates did not have sufficient depth of knowledge to make an effective argument.

Question 3

- (a) This was a less popular choice of question. A good answer required knowledge of Mao's views on population and an ability to relate these to population policy during the period in question.
- (b) There were some good, detailed responses to this question, showing a broad range of knowledge about pollution issues in China. The best answers went beyond simply reciting the various pollution issues to a discussion of how pollution can be controlled, including the measures the Chinese government has already taken.

Question 4

- (a) There were some good answers, but some did not give enough detailed examples to support their argument.
- (b) Candidates seemed to find this question more straightforward to tackle than Question 4(a) with good examples from the text.

Question 5

- (a) Generally this was answered well, with candidates clearly engaging with Ma Jian and his complex personality. His contradictory character lent itself well to a balanced argument which some candidates achieved impressively well.
- (b) This question was not usually answered as successfully as Question 5(a). Answers needed to be carefully backed up by specific reference to the text.

Question 6

- (a) There were some excellent, thoughtful responses to this question, combining discussion of "fate" with references to the story, the characters and the cinematography. A useful starting point might have been to define "fate" and to distinguish it, as some candidates did, from tradition. The best responses also showed an awareness both of the historical setting of the film itself and the political climate of the time when the film was first released in China.
- (b) The idea of "disconnect" seemed to puzzle some candidates, but the best responses showed real sympathy with and understanding of Gu Qing's situation. The cinematographic references sometimes showed impressive sensitivity and thoughtfulness, relating the physical environment to the colour palate of the film and the director's subtle messages concerning Gu Qing's role and its inherent contradictions.