MANDARIN CHINESE PRINCIPAL COURSE

> **Paper 9778/01**
>
> **Speaking**

Comments

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 Conversation should last 5-7 minutes and the General Conversation should last 6-8 minutes.

The Speaking 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 should interest the candidate, but also be well within their reach to talk about with the language the candidate has at his/her disposal, because otherwise a carefully prepared presentation can sound somewhat stilted and a candidate can be left rather exposed, if he/she is then unable to engage in the Topic Conversation. The candidate should not necessarily cover all aspects of the topic, but might choose to leave one or two obvious things out which can be picked up by the Examiner in the Topic Conversation.

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 should practise this with candidates before the examination. The sentences used by the Examiner might be 你今天讲什么题目？and 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 two minutes. After this time, the Examiner may interrupt if necessary so that the conversation can take place. **Candidates are reminded that if their Prepared Topic does not relate to the Chinese world (if desired, it can be in a comparative way e.g. a comparison of UK/China education systems) they will have their mark for Content/Presentation halved.** Candidates may choose topics of personal interest, even if they lie outside the 6 topic areas of the syllabus, namely Family, Young people, Education, the Media, Work and Leisure, the Environment. 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 the Principal course candidate also needs to be able to be understood by the visiting Examiner. In the Prepared Topic, Candidates need to demonstrate they have prepared well both in the content of what they say and how engaging it is, as well as through 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. Examiners will anticipate that such a topic would have already been thought about and discussed in class.

In both conversation sections, the Examiner will keep the flow of conversation going in as relaxed a manner as possible. Candidates need to be prepared for straightforward questions, but also ones which will stretch them. As well as having 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. Candidates should 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 move on to another question.

The speaking test is led by the Examiner, but the candidate should be doing most of the talking and the Examiner will be flexible enough to adapt questioning to a candidate's line of thought, so that a proper conversation ensues. If a candidate has areas of a topic where he/she feels particularly confident, it is up to the candidate to try to respond to questions in such a way as to be able to demonstrate this to the Examiner. Candidates are reminded not to be concerned if their answer to a question is factually untrue or does not really reflect what they think; the Examiner is only interested in the level of their Chinese and will not judge them on their opinion.

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 as the testing and marking of candidates takes place.

MANDARIN CHINESE PRINCIPAL COURSE

Paper 9778/02

Listening, Reading and Translation

Key Messages

- Centres are advised to make sure candidates are aware of the demands of the rubric and advise them to read and adhere to the instructions. Some basic errors could be avoided this way. For example, an instruction to provide an answer in continuous English prose should never be construed as providing the response by way of bullet points.
- Similarly, centres are advised to prepare candidates by studying past papers. These are a tried and tested method for familiarising a candidate with the exam structure and act as a potential warm up for the actual examination.
- The *Listening* section continues to throw up challenges regarding tone recognition. This is a recurring issue for Mandarin learners and it is no surprise to see it crop up during examinations. This can be overcome through solid preparation and increased exposure to the native language, by making use of the myriad of online resources.
- The *Reading* section has exposed some flaws involving dictionary usage. Candidate should avoid an overdependence on dictionaries and listen to their own common sense. Unfortunately in the *Translation* section, some candidates are still using the dictionary for idioms and, as a result, are producing flawed translations. This included a small number of competent speakers who performed very well elsewhere only to slip up in this section.

General Comments

This year there was again a greatly increased number of candidates taking Pre-U Mandarin Chinese, and as a consequence, the results were increasingly diverse. .

Most candidates appeared sufficiently prepared for the examination, which demonstrated both careful revision and also competent guidance from the centres.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section 1 – Listening

In general, candidates delivered commendable, high quality performances in the *Listening* section this year. **Exercise 1** (Pinyin with tones) has proven to be a challenging task. This year, candidates who lost marks in this task seemed to find the following points especially demanding:

- Initial – differentiating between 'k' (kěn) and 'c'
- Tones – 2nd tone remains an area of difficulty: 骑 (qí) 、钱 (qián).

Candidates are to be congratulated on the superb results for **Exercise 2,** on which the vast majority did not lose any marks.

There was mixed performance for **Exercise 3**, where some candidates scored highly, although others performed poorly by appearing to rely on simple guesswork. Although a large number of candidates accurately identified the subject matter; they then lost marks due to lack of precision. For example: for Question 7, some candidates simply answered 'not very well' rather than 'lacks attraction'; also, a number of candidates answered 'implemented policies' rather than 'implemented price reduction policies'.

Exercise 4, noticeably, this was the most challenging task which differentiated candidates' performances. Whilst some candidates impressively scored full marks for Q10, it proved slightly tougher for a selection of candidates. The poorer performances appear to be attributable to the misinterpretation of the oral statement; specifically where the pause occurred. This caused those candidates to misconstrue the response, which made grammatical sense but was nevertheless incorrect. The rubric was unequivocal so it is unfortunate that these candidates did not notice their error.
Also in relation to the rubric, some candidates lost needless marks after they failed to provide their response in continuous prose (and instead using bullet points).

Section 2 – Reading

Most of the candidates seemed to be very well-prepared by centres on the topics, and the resultant efforts are generally pleasing.

For Questions 11 – 13, a large number of candidates scored full marks, however, one candidate had shortened the answer from the text options for Question 11. So although the candidate clearly understood the content, a basic error was made by not adhering to the instruction to select the answer from the choices provided. For Question 16, a number of candidates answered 'Advert on TV', instead of 'Advertising and working with TV Channels, which was not sufficient to be awarded the marks.

Examiners are pleased to note that reading text **(b)** was competently handled this year. However, examiners would like to reinforce the message to centres and candidates that at such level of learning, when tackling Reading tasks, candidates should have the ability to respond in full using comprehensive details rather than in short, stunted replies lacking the appropriate level of precision. For example: for **Question 17**, 'Music skills/talents' was the answer, where 'Music' would not secure the mark. Similarly, some candidates lost a mark for failing to identify 'school plays' and instead answered 'participate in drama' for **Question 18**.
Although there was some guesswork in dealing with **Question 21**, most candidates understood ' 这些孩子还
和家人很亲密' It was a great pity, therefore, that despite the comprehension some candidates chose 'parents' rather than 'family members'.

Section 3 – Chinese sayings (Chengyu)

The majority of candidates provided accurate responses. On the other hand, examiners noted that a small number of candidates simply relied on a dictionary to check each character in order to give their answers.
For example, some candidates answered 'Self appearance spear and shield' for '自相矛盾'。 As highlighted above, such a strategy can result in a poor quality, or distorted, translation. A few candidates lost marks for inaccurate spelling: '骄兵必败'- The arrogant army will loose (lose) the battle for sure; '守株待兔'- to stand by a tree stump waiting for a hair (hare). While the latter does show some degree of ability, the wrong spelling creates a nonsensical translation and therefore it was not possible to gain any mark. Disappointingly, there were also candidates who made a careless error by reversing the order in which they provided the translation and the explanation despite the clear rubric and example provided.

Section 4 – Translation

Examiners noted a mixed performance on this task; where candidates' ability was widely stretched this year. There were 19 marks potentially available to be scored on this 16-mark task. This meant even if candidates struggled with one or two areas a full mark was still manageable.

There were some excellent responses; so much so that technically all 19 points were achieved. On the other hand, a number of candidates misunderstood 大学校 as "university". Furthermore, some candidates translated '不要谈论自己 (a negative command) ….' into 'do not want…'. The latter was particularly disappointing and could surely have been avoided if the candidate had made the effort to read the sentence back to themselves to expose the obvious flaw.

MANDARIN CHINESE PRINCIPAL COURSE

| Paper 9778/03 |
| Writing and Usage |

Key messages

- This year 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 broaden their vocabulary well beyond GCSE level.
- When writing the letter, candidates should read bullet points carefully, use a wide range of vocabulary and variety of sentence structures. They should in particular pay attention to a formal letter register.
- 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)**; Exercise 2, **Questions 2 (a)**; the coverage of the bullet points and accuracy of characters in Exercise 3, **Section 2**; and coverage of topic range in the essay in Exercise 4, **Section 3**.

Exercise 1, **Questions 1(b),** Exercise 2, **Question 2(b)** 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 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. This year, candidates were usually successful in identifying the radical. Providing the stroke order of characters proved challenging, some starting 'Grass' in **(i)** 菜 with the vertical line which was incorrect；incorrect order of strokes in the 我component – this is a very familiar character ('I') so candidates should not have found this to be a problem; the most common mistake was to reverse the order of the final two strokes for **(ii)** 我 and **(iii)** 都. Many candidates found Exercise 2, the grammar exercise difficult and only a minority of candidates

achieved full marks. There seemed to be quite a lot of guesswork from the less able candidates who would benefit from more practice with cloze-type exercises. Candidates are advised to revise comparison structures, as well as directional markers associated with movement, e.g. 更 (even more) is normally associated with 比 (to compare) so it is the right choice for **(a)**; and 从 (from) is the right choice for **(b)** because the main verb in this sentence is 来 (to come)；得 is the right choice for **(c)** because it can indicate the effectiveness of an action - how things have been done; 就 can be found in the structure 'as soon as…then …', so it is the right choice for **(d).**

Section 2 – Letter writing

Most candidates wrote excellent thank-you letters for this work experience question. The majority of candidates were careful to cover all four bullet points, with bullet point **(iv)** proving problematic for some candidates. Terms such as 课程，课，程序，路线 were not accepted as alternatives for 项目，机会，实习工作，安排，计划，经验. Other mistakes such as 去年 'last year' instead of 明年 'next year'; inappropriate structures for a question; informal letter register and reversal of surname and title such as 先生王also lost marks. Candidates should realize that the **formal letter register** offers a relatively easy mark and they have two years to remember these six characters. In terms of Accuracy of Grammar and Structures, most candidates were successful but there were also some common errors in characters with missing or incorrect radicals. A few candidates overly relied on dictionary rather than their knowledge, as demonstrated by the variety of choice of words for bullet point **(iv).** Candidates need to be able to use more complex grammatical structures correctly to achieve the highest marks.

Section 3 – Opinion essay

Candidates chose to respond to all six essay titles provided on the question paper and, unlike previous years, there were no clear favourite titles. Almost all the essays were of appropriate length with a good variety of vocabulary and comprehensive content. The stronger essays showed clear organisation, related closely to the question, and offered well-developed arguments. The most successful essays were very polished with convincing argument backed up with relevant evidence leading to logical conclusions. Candidates made use of a wide range of vocabulary and both simple and complex sentence structures.

(a)   Answered well by many able candidates although others focused on strict parenting or study pressure and failed to gain high marks.

(b)   Answered well by many candidates who provided detailed examples to support their arguments.

(c)   The most popular topic. Unfortunately, some candidates did not focus enough on **employment opportunities**, and instead wrote about a more general cultural benefit of being good at a foreign language and failed to gain high marks.

(d)   Some very interesting and thoughtful responses to this question. This topic is certainly close to the hearts of many young people and most candidates had plenty to talk and argue about, and did so with confidence and flare.

(e)   Answered well by many candidates with some mature insights into adult working life. A few were a little too ambitious and the organisation of their ideas were let down by their language abilities.

(f)   Many candidates were careful to relate their opinions to the question of 'an urgent and personal response to environmental protection' but there were still a few who wrote about general issues relating to pollution and did not gain high marks.

In order to score highly in this section, 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 need to pay attention to the meaning of words in a specific context (not just to the primary definition in the dictionary), and   to their control of conjunctions, prepositions and punctuation. They should trust their own knowledge more than being over-reliant on the dictionary in the examinations.

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. The practice of learning an essay by heart and reproducing it in the examination without consideration of the title that has been set is not to be 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

General Comments

The overall standard was high this year.

Candidates are required to answer two questions for this paper, one from the *Topics in Chinese Culture* section or 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 reference. 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; giving away all the concluding points in the introduction to the essay should be avoided. 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, and essays should finish with a strong conclusion. The introduction and conclusion of the essay both need to be relevant and convincing.

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 both novels and the film, candidates needed to have a good grasp of the Chinese history of the period in which they are set.

In order to be able to respond to these essay questions appropriately, candidates need to be exposed during their studies to a range of commentaries/viewpoints about a particular topic and to have had the opportunity to discuss ideas with their teachers and other students 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) Most candidates did this very well, with a sound analysis and discussion of the Second United Front and the extent to which the GMD and CCP achieved their aims. A clear sense of chronology is helpful to all candidates, and accurate dates make the discussion more credible. Weaker candidates were not able to go further than giving a narrative account of the events rather than an assessment of their relative successes. The term 'United Front' led some to assume that this was a type of coalition government. Weaker candidates often did not say enough about the Second United Front itself, focusing on the roles of the CCP and GMD in fighting the Japanese

(b)   This question elicited some excellent, detailed answers. Weaker candidates seemed unsure of the precise meaning of 'capitalism' in this context, and this affected their ability to answer the question in sufficient depth. Terms such as 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat' need to be used with care in the Chinese context.

Question 2

(a)   This question was also tackled well by many candidates, who sometimes had an impressive grasp of the detailed statistics relating to the policy. The question proved to be well placed in examining candidates' knowledge of Deng's policies and their effects, also revealing that some candidates had not studied or revised the topics in sufficient depth.

(b)   This was not a popular choice, but those choosing it had the detail necessary to frame good answers.

Question 3

(a)   This question was answered very well by some candidates, who had clearly studied the issues relating to water in China in considerable detail and depth. The range of knowledge shown was truly impressive.

(b)   Candidates who attempted this question sometimes were somewhat uncritical of the relationship between modernisation and urbanisation. The most able candidates were able to marshal facts to support their arguments and to provide detailed data in their defence.

Question 4

(a)   There were several sensitive and thoughtful responses to this question, with evidence of careful reading of the author's complex and ambiguous stories. There was excellent and convincing use of quotations by the best candidates. The term 'transition' in the question was not addressed by some candidates.

(b)   This question too elicited a number of thoughtful responses, often relating to how women could escape from convention whilst still having ties to their families. There were arguments made from a variety of standpoints, which is absolutely fine as long as an evidence-based coherent line of thought is put together. It was important to choose stories that would serve the demands of this question adequately, and candidates were judicious in their choices.

Question 5

(a)   Candidates sometimes struggled to make sense of *The Boat to Redemption* as a parable, although there were some very insightful answers from the best. Candidates, in general, demonstrated a good knowledge of the text but tended to stray slightly from the terms of the question. Candidates need to take care to keep their arguments relevant throughout their work.

(b)   This question elicited more successful responses than 5(a), perhaps because candidates could relate to the father-son relationship. There were some thoughtful and detailed answers.

Question 6

(a)   There were some good answers but some suffered from a lack of knowledge about the Cultural Revolution period. Some candidates took a rather simplistic view of the Cultural Revolution and were not aware of how different life at that time could be in remote parts of China such as Sichuan from the urban centres such as Beijing.

(b)   This was one of the most popular questions. Candidates often responded well to the enigmatic character of the *Little Chinese Seamstress* and her changing role from a naïve and uneducated country girl to a confident young woman about to enter a new phase of her life in a big city. Good use was made of quotations.   Candidates need to be able to use technical terms such as 'protagonist' correctly. For weaker candidates the essay was largely narrative, with little analysis.