
A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2P The Transformation of China, 1936-1997
Report on the Examination

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General

In this second year of examining the new A-level specification it was pleasing to see so many students offering strong answers, both for the compulsory question (01) and the essay section. Questions 02 and 03 were considerably more popular than question 04. Centres and their students have clearly honed their approach to Question 01 and there was a marked improvement in the overall standard of responses to this question. In general, students' understanding of the subject matter was good, and centres are clearly preparing their students well for the examination.

Section A

Question 01

As set out in last year's report, the most effective approach to this question is for students to consider the sources in turn rather than to seek to integrate or compare them. Whilst a large majority of students took this approach there were still some responses that attempted comparisons; this detracted from their overall quality. Students were not credited for source comparison and time was far better spent developing evaluation of the sources' content and provenance individually, and in the order they were presented. Most students made explicit comments on the value of each source and this aided their focus on the question.

Almost all students demonstrated some understanding of the Great Leap Forward and were able to apply this to the sources, often in a sophisticated manner. The provenance and tone of Source A was evaluated well by many students, with some making clear reference to the initial hubris surrounding the Great Leap, and with an understanding of the source's purpose as motivational propaganda. Most placed this source at the start of the Great Leap, though some mistakenly took the source as a verdict on the Great Leap as a whole. In those instances led students to deploy contextual knowledge about later failures that the source could not possibly have an understanding of, and which would have been better used to support arguments made about Sources B and C. There were good conceptual references to mass mobilisation in many answers. Most students also used the content of Source B effectively, with some very good contextual knowledge deployed to demonstrate the scale of and reasons for the widespread famines the Great Leap exacerbated, and of the failings of the commune system. In particular there was good understanding of the mistakes made in agriculture such as the use of Lysenko's ideas and the 'Four Pests' Campaign and centres whose students were able to use this material effectively had clearly prepared them well. The provenance of Source B was used less effectively in many instances, however, with some students making 'stock' evaluative comments about the source referring to only one commune, when they had previously validated the source's content as indicative of a national crisis in agriculture. Other students did not recognise the retrospective nature of Source B and this, too, weakened the quality of evaluation. That said there were some very impressive arguments advanced about why Liang was able to make these claims about the Great Leap at a later date. This distinction between the quality of students' use of content and provenance was also true of Source C. The vast majority of students developed valid material from Source C based around the falsification of targets, with some answers acknowledging the climate of fear that led to this. Some strong responses also focused on the 'double burden' of women during the Great Leap that Source C alludes to. Whilst some students advanced impressive arguments based around the value of Source C's provenance – for example by comparing Zhang's stance to that of Peng Dehuai, or by considering the bravery of expressing such opinions in 1959 – there were also some stock evaluations of the source's provenance that were less effective and difficult to credit.

Section B

Question 02

This was the most popular of the three essay questions, and many students were able to offer effective arguments, which focussed on the GMD, the period in question, and the issue of whether Jiang's government was strengthened. Some very detailed evidence was deployed by the most able students, with issues such as Operation Ichi-Go, the 'Rape of Nanjing' and the New Fourth Army Incident analysed well in respect of the weakening of the GMD regime in the eyes of various parties. Whilst some responses provided effective balance, the weight of many arguments were in favour of 'weakening' and some gave very little attention to evidence of 'strengthening' such as the support and acknowledgment of foreign powers, and these imbalanced answers could not reach the higher levels. Some students focused their material on the CCP rather than the GMD, and whilst this was sometimes analysed in the content of the question, its relevance was sometimes no more than implicit. Other students focussed less well on the time frame of the question – with some answers straying into the Chinese Civil War – and there was comment about the GMD that was more relevant to the 'Nanjing Decade' rather than specific to the Sino-Japanese War.

Question 03

Whilst fascinating, the Cultural Revolution has some complex material for students to digest, and it was very pleasing to see so many strong responses to this question, which was only slightly less popular than question 02. Many students were able to navigate the topic effectively, and provide commentary on the significance of a range of groups or individuals during the Cultural Revolution. Many focused on the 'active phase' alone, but this was an acceptable approach. Some students answered the question thematically rather than taking each group or individual in turn, and this too produced some strong responses if there was a suitable focus on significance. The PLA was a key organisation in both the inception and the course of the Cultural Revolution and most students could provide supporting evidence of this, with many of these analysing specific aspects of significance and so demonstrating a clear understanding of the question. The Red Guards, the Shanghai Radicals (or the CCRG) and Mao himself were commonly advanced as other significant factors, and there were some impressive arguments that centred around the primacy of Mao, though some students overplayed Mao's direction of the PLA in early 1967. Some students were less confident with the material, and this produced narrative responses, which often confused the roles of the PLA and the Red Guards.

Question 04

This was the least popular of the three essay questions and saw a relatively higher number of responses in the lower levels as some students had a limited grasp of the question. That said, some impressive answers were seen, with students able to offer analysis and specific evidence for both the stated and other factors and arrive at judgments about how they led to the Tiananmen Square demonstrations. Such students were able to analyse long and short terms factors and the interaction between them. There were some less convincing responses, however, with some students looking at the relative success of Deng's economic policies rather than how they caused grievances that led to the demonstrations. Others considered valid factors but these were often rooted in the later 1970s or early 1980s and their connection with Tiananmen Square were presented as a *fait accompli* rather than being analysed in terms of their relevance in the late 1980s.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.