

MANDARIN CHINESE SHORT COURSE

<p>Paper 1341/01 Speaking</p>

Key messages

- The Prepared Topic must relate to the Chinese-speaking world.
- The Speaking test should last 12–15 minutes in total. The Prepared Topic and Topic Conversation should last 5–7 minutes and the General Conversation should last 6–8 minutes.

General comments

Most candidates were able to hold good conversations in Mandarin Chinese and some attempted to use various Chinese idioms to express their opinions. Many teacher/examiners used a good selection of open questions which encouraged candidates to speak at length and use a range of language. Others could improve the conduct of their tests by helping candidates to speak more fluently and to talk in depth on a particular issue.

Most Centres kept to the prescribed timings for each section of the test, which ensured candidates had every opportunity to show what they could do. A minority of tests were a little short. Centres should note that the introduction should **not** be included in the timings.

Teacher/examiners should not record any 'warm up' conversations with their candidates. As soon as the recording starts, the candidate should be prompted to proceed with their Prepared Topic presentation. It is suggested that examiners use the following first sentence to get the test going: 你今天讲什么题目？

Many teacher/examiners kept the conversation going in a relaxed way, which put candidates at their ease. Candidates should do most of the talking in the test and the teacher/examiner needs to adapt questioning to reflect a candidate's line of thought, so that a spontaneous and lively conversation can take place. Although it is very natural for the teacher/examiner to want to correct or help a candidate, this must be avoided.

Administration

Centres are reminded that they must send the Working Mark Sheet to Cambridge together with the sample recordings on CD in order to avoid delays to the moderation process.

The quality of recordings was generally of a high standard.

Comments on specific sections

Section 1 – Prepared Topic and Topic Conversation

The Speaking test is an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate what they can do, and practice and preparation before the test should focus on this. Topics should be carefully chosen: each candidate should select a topic which is of interest to them but which is also within their reach in terms of their linguistic ability.

Many candidates delivered a well-prepared presentation on their chosen topic and there were some excellent performances this year. There were some interesting and well-researched presentations on various issues. The conversation which followed was often engaging as questions were well understood and answered by candidates.

In contrast, some candidates found it difficult to say even short sentences fluently in their presentation. In some cases this appeared to be a result of a lack of preparation as their performance in the Topic Conversation was of a higher standard.

Once the candidate has finished the presentation, it is helpful if the Examiner says 好, 现在我来问你一些问题 before moving on to the Topic Conversation.

If, for any reason – e.g. a major bout of nerves/hesitancy – the presentation lasts longer than two minutes, teacher/examiners should not shorten the Topic Conversation to compensate, as this may have an impact on the candidate's performance in the Topic Conversation, by not giving them enough time to demonstrate what they know. Equally, in the interests of fairness for all candidates, teacher/examiners should not extend the Topic Conversation beyond the recommended five minutes.

It may also be tempting for an Examiner who knows the candidate well to say too much about him/herself during the conversation, and this should also be avoided. All candidates should have the opportunity to try and answer more stretching questions.

The best conversations were those in which the discussion was spontaneous and the teacher/examiner's interest was maintained. Candidates were not necessarily fluent all of the time, but they were clearly enjoying the conversation about a topic which was of particular interest to them.

Section 2 – General Conversation

It is helpful for candidates – and the Cambridge Moderator – if the teacher/examiner makes it clear when he/she is moving from the Topic Conversation to the General Conversation. For example, the teacher/examiner could say 现在我们来谈一谈其它的话题.

Many teacher/examiners began with straightforward questions about the candidate's background and interests and then moved on to a more mature conversation covering two or three of the following topic areas: Family, Young People and Education.

As in the previous section, the best conversations were those which were spontaneous and enjoyable and where a range of topics were discussed with ease. The least successful conversations were those in which candidates seemed to be simply reciting pre-prepared responses with little spontaneity.

Regular conversation practice will help candidates to ensure that they are prepared for all types of question.

MANDARIN CHINESE (SHORT COURSE)

Paper 1341/02
Chinese Culture

Key messages

In order to do well in this examination, candidates should:

- read their chosen question carefully and think about what they are being asked to do;
- plan their answer and organise their material with close reference to the question;
- include analysis and argument, and avoid simply narrating events or retelling the story.

General comments

There was a wide range of performance. Many candidates demonstrated very good understanding of the historical, economic and geographical topics and the literature/film they had studied and also the ability to write an excellent, cogent essay in response to the questions. Some candidates, however, did not seem to have enough knowledge at their disposal to construct arguments which would access the higher bands of the mark scheme. Some essays were written in poor English which at times made it hard to understand what was being said. In other answers, the language used was sometimes too informal for an essay, for example the use of terms such as 'flipside'.

It is essential that candidates read each question carefully and answer the actual question asked, covering each part of the question as required. Candidates are advised to plan their essays before they start writing. Some candidates wrote excellent essays but did not fully address the question, and therefore could not access the full range of available marks.

All questions are open to interpretation and it is up to candidates to develop an analytical response to the question with clear, specific examples/evidence (not generalised statements) to back up the argument. Although the mark scheme gives some indicative content for each question on the paper, 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.

Essays should start with an introduction which outlines how the question is going to be addressed. Listing 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. Essays should finish with a strong conclusion. The introduction and conclusion of the essay both need to be relevant and convincing; some good essays were let down by weak introductions or conclusions which were very brief and/or merely repeated the premise of the question.

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 need to know the relevant facts, but need to be able to manipulate those facts to demonstrate their deeper understanding and analytical capability in response to the question. Evaluation is key. Organisation of material is vital and an appropriate style should be used. In the case of the 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 have studied a range of commentaries/viewpoints on 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

Section 1

Question 1

- (a) This question was a popular choice. Many candidates were able to write detailed answers either covering every angle of the period from both the domestic and international viewpoint, or focusing mainly on the domestic scene, particularly on the Yan'an era. The key word in the question was *prepare*. The most successful answers related the period 1937–49 to the People's Republic of China in 1949–56 with good knowledge of both periods. Weaker responses tended simply to recount events with little analysis of how the early period helped Mao to govern once he had attained power.

The chronology in some essays was questionable, for example, references to 'civil war' in the period 1949–56, or confusing this period with the Great Leap Forward.

- (b) There were some very good accounts of the Korean War, with good factual knowledge and insights into how the war affected China and the consolidation of CCP power. A few candidates wrote rather descriptive essays detailing the events of the Korean War from every angle, without analysing fully some of these events.

Question 2

- (a) There were some excellent detailed answers showing how the dramatic reforms of 1978–84 affected productivity. In some cases it was clear that candidates had studied the period thoroughly, as they gave in-depth examples of what the household responsibility system involved and how township and village enterprises had helped with improved productivity.
- (b) Answers to this question fell into two very distinct categories. The best essays demonstrated excellent awareness of what role imported and exported consumer goods have played in the growth of the Chinese economy. Weaker essays were very general and included an element of guesswork on the part of the candidate or things they may have read in the news. To improve, candidates needed to give concrete examples of the type of goods, which countries were involved and which brands/imported goods stimulate demand.

Question 3

- (a) There were some excellent responses to this question. Candidates generally outlined and defined in-depth what the *hukou* system is, both urban and rural, and developed their answers to say how it has affected China's economic growth. Most candidates knew quite a lot about the migrant situation in cities, mentioning pressure on some resources and the fact that migrants without an urban *hukou* could not claim for healthcare and education. Fewer candidates mentioned the situation in the rural setting in terms of 'left-behind children', grandparents having to look after the children, bachelor villages, poor education and healthcare in the villages.

For candidates who knew a lot about the *hukou* system and had studied migration in depth, the question gave good scope for an analytical discussion. For some candidates the discussion was less in-depth and more a reflection of their personal experiences in China without any analysis.

- (b) There were many impressive answers to this question, relating the one-child and two-child policies to the issue of ageing in a country which is changing so rapidly economically. Many candidates focused heavily on the one-child policy, mentioning only in passing the two-child policy. Most candidates talked about the burden of the 4-2-1 situation, healthcare and, to a lesser degree, pensions. Not all mentioned the declining labour supply. Many candidates answered the first part of the question in some depth, but did not say how successful they thought the measures would be.

Section 2

Question 4

- (a) This question was answered very well. It gave candidates an opportunity to embellish their essays with a large range of examples from the stories in order to come to a conclusion about the extent to which the statement given in the question was borne out.

Candidates drew on a number of different stories to exemplify the quotation. Most candidates showed that they not only knew the stories in detail, but that they could analyse the content of them well too. Good answers included some quotations and an acute understanding of the period Eileen Chang was writing about, showing empathy with the characters involved in the stories and good knowledge of the traditional versus the modern struggle which many families experienced at that time.

- (b) In this question, candidates revealed a sympathetic understanding of characters caught up in a world of cultural transition and crisis. For example, there were some sensitive discussions of Zhenbao's confusions and conflict in desiring both a passionate mistress and a spotless wife.

Candidates demonstrated that they knew the content of the stories they chose well and gave good arguments for and against the themes. Good answers kept away from the narrative, gave comparisons between key players in the stories and analysed well the language used in the stories to exemplify their answers.

Question 5

- (a) Some candidates knew the book in great detail and were able to answer both parts of the question in depth. The analyses of the complex character of Ku Wenxuan were mainly done well, showing him sympathetically as a victim of both history and fate. In some essays there was insufficient appreciation of the complex and contradictory historical context of the Cultural Revolution, when heroes could rapidly become villains. Some candidates referred to 'Communist dogma' (in this and other essays) but it was not always clear what they meant by this.
- (b) The responses to this question were on the whole not as thoughtful as in **Question 5(a)**, perhaps because the political context of the Cultural Revolution was rather unfamiliar. The 'scandalous backgrounds' of the boat people were not made explicit.

Question 6

- (a) Weaker essays consisted of a narrative account of the film, but demonstrated some understanding of what the question was asking. Better essays included many examples of traditional and modern Chinese life in order to make comparisons and show the attitude that various characters in the film had towards the times. Many candidates mentioned why they thought Dai SiJie had chosen particular cinematographic styles.
- (b) This question was very popular and gave candidates the freedom to express their own opinions about the roles of Luo and Ma in the village, as well as how they interacted with the Seamstress. Most candidates answered this question well, although some could not score highly, as they either misunderstood the question or failed to address both parts of it.

Most candidates could appreciate the different roles of Ma and Luo, and there were some interesting discussions about the extent to which they exploited or were in turn exploited by the Seamstress. There was a natural interest in the love story, but some candidates also pointed out how important the boys' friendship was to them. Some candidates also pointed out the irony and futility of 're-education' by peasants when the boys were actually quite scornful of 'peasant ignorance', personified by the Seamstress herself.

The underlying theme of the power of literature was understood by most candidates.

The best essays included specific scenes in the film which showed clearly the relationship between each boy and the Seamstress, whether through actions or cinematographic techniques, or a mixture of both. Other good answers focused not only on the theme of love, but also explored

literature and storytelling, and education. They also talked about the boys' roles both as a unit in the village (storytellers, entertainment) and individually.

A few candidates misunderstood what was meant in the question by 'their relative importance to the Seamstress'. Some wrote very descriptive essays focusing heavily on the cinematography, without analysing in depth the roles of the boys and their importance to the Seamstress.