

MANDARIN CHINESE PRINCIPAL COURSE

Paper 9778/01
Speaking

Key messages

- The Prepared topic must relate to the Chinese-speaking world.
- Candidates are advised to choose a topic which is of particular interest to them; it is not advisable for all candidates in a Centre to work on the same topic.
- The Speaking test should last 12–15 minutes with the Prepared topic presentation lasting up to 2 minutes.

General comments

The standard of performance was generally very high and many candidates were able to hold a free-flowing conversation with the Examiner. There was evidence that most candidates had prepared sufficiently well for the examination and many tried to use various Chinese idioms to express themselves.

Centres should encourage candidates to practise speaking in reasonably long sentences and talking in-depth on a range of issues in order to help them prepare for the General conversation. Teachers should ask candidates as many different questions as possible. If in the examination the Examiner asks a question for which candidates really have no answer, they can reply 对不起，我在这方面没有什么研究。

Administration

Some Prepared Topic Submission Forms were not received by the deadline stipulated in the Instructions for Centres. It is important that the Examiner has the forms no later than two weeks before the date of the examination to allow them sufficient time to prepare. It is helpful for Examiners when candidates also include a few bullet points on the form outlining the content of the presentation.

The quality of recordings is improving. Centres need to make sure that background noise is kept to a minimum; the location of the room is a key factor here.

Comments on specific sections

Section 1 – Prepared topic and topic conversation

Prepared topic

The majority of candidates delivered well-prepared presentations on their chosen topics and most presentations were of an appropriate length. Most candidates had prepared thoroughly for this part of the test and there were a range of interesting presentations covering topics such as Beijing's censorship on the internet and Chinese migrant workers. Candidates demonstrated good knowledge of their chosen topics.

The least successful presentations were those which were either over-ambitious or under-prepared. Candidates should be reminded that they should be comfortable with the information they are presenting, and that their presentation should be easily understood by a sympathetic native speaker.

Candidates are advised to choose a topic which is of particular interest to them and it is more likely that candidates will practise topic conversations when this is the case. An interesting topic also allows them to think about all possible dimensions for a fruitful discussion with the Examiner.

Topic conversation

After the candidate finishes his/her presentation, the Examiner will say 好, 现在我来问你一些问题 before starting to ask questions.

Candidates can prepare for this section of the test by thinking about possible questions the Examiner might ask. For example, if the presentation is on pollution, other related environmental issues such as global warming and its consequences should be considered. Candidates should also prepare a range of vocabulary and structures, for example, by making good use of conjunctions, correct word order and timeframes etc. The best conversations ensue when candidates answer questions in as much detail as possible, depending on his/her ability.

The best candidates were able to have a free-flowing conversation on their chosen topic and demonstrated good understanding of unexpected and more complex questions.

Section 2 – General conversation

When the conversation on the Prepared topic reaches the end, the Examiner will say 现在我们来谈一谈其它的话题 to move from the Topic conversation to the General conversation.

Generally speaking, candidates tended to be more confident in this part of the test, particularly in the three basic topic areas: Family, Young people and Education. They understood most of the questions and coped well with unexpected questions.

Some candidates also prepared very well for the advanced topics. For Media, they knew vocabulary such as 脸书 (Facebook), 微信 (WeChat) and 低头族 (people addicted to smartphones) and used them appropriately. For Work and leisure, a variety of leisure activities were mentioned and candidates talked about young people's ways of dealing with pressure in daily life. The most able candidates were able to talk about school pressure, parents' lifestyles and the way to relax. Environment was a topic in which candidates seemed to either excel or struggle. If they are interested in the issue they usually perform well, but if candidates do not have enough relevant vocabulary at their disposal, it can be difficult to hold a productive conversation.

Centres are advised to encourage candidates to prepare for a range of unexpected and challenging questions from the Examiner on all six topics listed in the syllabus. Candidates should also be reminded that the more difficult questions are intended to stretch them and allow them to show off the best of their linguistic ability.

It is helpful for candidates if they converse in Chinese with teachers and fellow students throughout the course, so that they can cope easily with unexpected questions in the examination. Candidates should be prepared to do most of the talking in the examination. If a candidate feels confident in a particular topic area, it is up to them to try to respond to questions in as much detail as possible.

Candidates should not worry that their answer to a question may be factually inaccurate or does not really reflect what they think; the Examiner is only interested in the level of their Chinese.

Impression – Feel for the Language & Accuracy of Tones

Many candidates gave reasonably good answers to all types of questions and the best were able to use advanced sentence structures and complex idioms convincingly.

MANDARIN CHINESE (PRINCIPAL)

Paper 9778/02
Listening, Reading and Translation

Key messages

- It is important that candidates fully understand and adhere to the rubrics and answer according to the number of marks required. For example, for a two-mark question candidates should ensure that they provide two points of information in their answer.
- Centres are advised to prepare candidates by practising past papers.
- For the Listening section of the examination, particularly in relation to the recognition of tones, candidates are advised to prepare by listening to authentic recordings, especially with the second and third tones, which can be more difficult.
- In preparation for the Reading section, candidates should avoid overreliance on dictionaries in the examination as this can waste valuable time and can often lead to misunderstandings.
- When candidates answer the open-ended questions, they are advised to provide full answers.
- 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.

General comments

The majority of candidates appeared to have been well prepared for the examination and there were many excellent performances.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 – Listening

The majority of candidates performed well in **Exercise 1** (pinyin with tones). Candidates who did less well seemed to find the following points demanding:

- Initial – differentiating between ‘h’ and ‘k’ (婚礼 hūn lǐ).
- Tones – differentiating between 2nd and 3rd tone (长期 cháng qī).

Almost all candidates achieved full marks in **Exercise 2**.

There was a mixed performance in **Exercise 3**, where some candidates accurately identified the correct subject matter but could not be awarded marks due to a lack of precision in their answers. For example, in **Question 7**, the correct answer was ‘we should respect wild animals’, but some candidates wrote only ‘respect’ which was not sufficient to be awarded a mark.

Exercise 4 was the task which gave the widest range of outcomes. There were some very competent summaries but also some examples of pure guesswork. Candidates should be reminded that responses must be in continuous prose, not bullet points and/or short phrases.

Section 2 – Reading

Most candidates seemed to be very well prepared for the topics, and overall, both texts were understood well by candidates.

To further improve their performance in this section, candidates should respond in full using comprehensive details rather than short answers which lack the appropriate level of precision.

There were occasions when candidates' dictionary skills let them down. For example, in **Question 14**, a few candidates wrote 'keep a positive heart direction' when the answer required was 'positive mind-set'. This was undoubtedly down to overreliance on the dictionary.

In **Question 16** a small number of candidates ticked one option instead of two, contrary to instructions.

Section 3 – Chinese sayings (Chengyu)

The majority of candidates provided accurate translations of the sayings, although a very small number relied on a dictionary to check each character in order to formulate their answers. For example, the expected translation of 唇亡齿寒 was 'The teeth will feel cold if the lips are gone' whereas a literal character-by-character translation produced 'lip dead teeth cold'.

Candidates' explanations of each saying should be written in their own words. Candidates are advised against giving equivalent English sayings/idioms/proverbs as their answers as these do not fully explain the meaning of the Chinese saying, and are sometimes just as unclear in terms of what they mean.

Section 4 – Translation

There were some excellent responses but also a small number of less successful translations. Examiners noted that some candidates resorted to dictionaries to reference some key vocabulary and pieced this together with a modicum of guesswork.

MANDARIN CHINESE (PRINCIPAL)

Paper 9778/03
Writing and Usage

Key messages

- Candidates should work on character strokes, consolidate their knowledge of basic Chinese grammar, expand their use of more complex sentence structures, and widen their vocabulary well beyond (I)GCSE level.
- When writing the letter, candidates should read the bullet points carefully, use a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures, paying particular attention to formal letter register.
- For the opinion essay, it is important that candidates develop a series of coherent arguments supported by detailed examples. They should refer closely to their chosen question, 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

The overall standard was high and candidates did very well on **Question 1(a) (i) and (ii)**, **Question 2(a)**, and in the coverage of the bullet points and accuracy of characters in **Question 3**. A wide range of topics was covered in **Question 4**. **Question 1(a) (iii)** and **Questions (b) (ii) and (iii)** proved more challenging.

In **Question 3** the majority of candidates demonstrated very good preparation and an excellent ability to use structures, employ suitable vocabulary and to begin and end a letter in formal style. In the opinion essay (**Question 4**), 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. The best essays were those where candidates had read their chosen question carefully and included relevant arguments. There were many essays of a very high standard with good focus.

For future candidates, Centres may consider offering more guidance in areas where there is room for improvement, such as the skill of identifying and using compound words, for example: 中西 as in 中西教育 is a compound word from two root words 中国 or 中方 and 西方。

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Exercise 1 – Radicals and stroke order skills

Candidates performed quite well in **Question 1(a)** which required them to identify the radical. Many were able to score full marks and nearly all tackled 续 successfully. A small number of candidates identified 自 as the radical for 息, rather than 心. Part (iii) (数) proved challenging for some candidates: all three parts of the character 米, 女 and 攴 were identified as the radical whereas only the third one was correct.

Candidates had variable success with **Question 1(b)** which required them to show the stroke order. The majority of candidates were successful with 息 but less so with 续. Some candidates wrote two or three strokes in one go for the top of 卖 while others wrote 大 first before putting the two dots for 头. 数 proved to be the most difficult in this exercise: some candidates wrote 十 first and some struggled to provide the correct stroke order for 女.

Exercise 2 – Use of grammar markers, aspect markers, and measure words

This grammar exercise proved challenging for some candidates again this year. The measure word 种 was chosen correctly by many candidates and so was 被, the passive marker, which is far less common and often associated with complex sentences. A number of candidates found the relatively straightforward characters 也 and 的 difficult. Some candidates used the marker 的 twice and candidates should be reminded that each option should only be used once. There seemed to be an element of guesswork from some candidates.

To improve performance in this exercise, candidates are advised to revise all the common and non-common markers in all kinds of different contexts, not just in straightforward sentences. There are always clues in the word directly behind the mark, for example, a measure word is more likely to follow a number; 的 is normally followed by a noun and 也/都 followed by verbs or adjectives.

Section 2 – Letter writing

Most candidates answered the letter-writing question very well and the standard was generally high. The majority covered all five bullet points comprehensively and most candidates asked a good question for bullet point (iv). The correct formal opening and closing of a letter was provided by most candidates, although there were unacceptable registers such as 亲爱的 and 谢谢 in some letters.

Bullet points (i) and (ii) were addressed successfully by almost all candidates, while a few missed the point for bullet point (iii) which required them to explain how their school will benefit from their participation in the Chinese speaking competition. Most candidates were able to address bullet point (iv) correctly with a straightforward, simple and valid question. Examples of unacceptable questions included: 比赛会在哪? (should be 哪儿/哪里) and 有奖金吗? /奖金是多少? (it must be accompanied by 第一等奖 to make it a 'prize', otherwise 奖金 is a bonus awarded for additional paid work) and 比赛有参赛者吗? (will be acceptable if accompanied with 已经...了 already) and 比赛有法官吗? (法官 criminal/civil court judge). Candidates must remember that even if the question is grammatically correct, it must be appropriate for the occasion and not likely to cause misunderstanding or confusion to a native speaker of Chinese.

Over-reliance on a dictionary in the exam often results in misuse of words which has an impact on marks for accuracy. Many candidates produced a well thought-out letter with a wide range of characters and a rich variety of complex structures mostly correctly applied. It was also evident that a few candidates relied on (I)GCSE-level vocabulary and knowledge and had to resort to a dictionary for help, often choosing inappropriate vocabulary. For example: 连接 or 从事 for 'to take part in', 法官 for 'judge', 奖金 for 奖品. 学校变得流行 for 受欢迎. Erroneous structures included using 吗 unnecessarily and wrongly: 有没有...吗? / 发生在哪里吗?

Section 3 – Opinion essay

The opinion essays were generally of a high standard and all of an appropriate length. **Question (c)** on Education was the most popular.

Most candidates appeared to have read the questions carefully and chose a title with which they were confident and had plenty to write about. Good essays demonstrated a focus on planning with clear division of paragraphs showing the main points/themes and included more detailed examples/evidence/facts to illustrate the points being made.

The best essays were well-argued and written in excellent Chinese with a good range of complex structures. Many essays were well organised with balanced arguments and convincing examples with good focus. The most successful essays were not overly long but had well-developed arguments closely related to the question.

- (a) This was answered with variable success. The best essays discussed the role of parents being the guardian and provider for their children, which commands respect and obedience but at the same time acknowledged that parents can also be their children's best friends if they share the same interests and hobbies. Some candidates used idioms such as 老马识途 to support their argument while others drew on their knowledge of the one-child policy to illustrate how important it is for children to feel they could talk to their parents as if they were their best friends. A few candidates

did not have sufficient linguistic skills and the communication of their ideas was often impeded by poor and inaccurate vocabulary and often confusing grammar.

- (b) The best essays explored many aspects of life of present and of yesteryears, including the advancement in technology; the internet; communication through post and online; the ubiquity of cheap air travel. Weaker essays included opinions which were not often followed up with valid arguments/examples/evidence.
- (c) Many candidates showed impressive knowledge about the Chinese education system such as *Gao Kao*, pushy parents; large class sizes; strict teachers; study pressure; lack of free time to name but a few. Successful essays provided detailed and specific examples to support points of view, and many candidates were able to offer well-balanced arguments by illustrating pros and cons in both Chinese and western education systems. Most candidates were unable to change 中西教育 into 中方/中国教育 and 西方教育 when they talked about the systems separately and instead, they wrote 中教育 and 西教育.
- (d) There were some interesting and thoughtful responses to this question. Some essays covered a wide range of undesirable effects of modern media, such as internet addiction; damage to one's eyesight and communication with people. Others focused on how the media created unrealistic body image expectations amongst young girls; caused a reduction in people's outdoor activities; used advertising to encourage people to eat unhealthy food, overspend and so on. A few candidates did not focus on the question in their essays and instead talked about the pros and cons of the internet in a general way which could not score highly for Development and Organisation of Ideas.
- (e) Many candidates were able to discuss in a mature and well-informed manner what people look for in a job: the benefit of a high salary for material comfort; work pressure versus an easy lifestyle; how to deal with a demanding boss; family life versus career advancement; rewarding aspects of a volunteer's job and so on.
- (f) This was generally answered well and most essays stayed focused on the question which had been asked. Some successfully argued how people can protect the environment and still live a comfortable life, and/or why, if the environment is damaged further, we will not have a comfortable life anyhow. Less successful essays included statements which were not backed up with examples or valid arguments apart from listing things people can do to protect the environment.

MANDARIN CHINESE (PRINCIPAL)

Paper 9778/04
Chinese Culture

Key messages

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

- read their chosen questions carefully and think about what they are being asked to do;
- plan each 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

Candidates answered the full spread of questions, with **Questions 1(a)** and **6(b)** proving particularly popular.

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.