

CHINESE AND CHINESE LITERATURE

Paper 8669/04

Texts

General comments

All candidates displayed a good or excellent standard of written Chinese as a foreign language. Overall, there was more evidence of competent essay planning than in previous years.

Many candidates taking this paper did extremely well, writing carefully organised short answers and essays, showing an in-depth knowledge of the text and an awareness of the social, political and historical context in China in which it was set. Other candidates showed a good knowledge of the text, but were often unable to set the text within the context of the period in mainland China to which it was referring, or seemed only to have a rather hazy knowledge of context.

Some candidates did not do as well in this paper as they should have done, as some of their answers showed no evidence that they had ever read the text for which they were answering the question. One or two just referred to the first few pages of a text in their answer, which made the Examiner question whether they were reading an unannotated copy of the text for the first time in the examination room. Even if a candidate's written Chinese is of a high standard for a foreign language Chinese examination paper, if they have not read the text for which they are writing an answer, then they cannot score highly.

A number of candidates are still misreading the rubrics. Candidates must answer three questions (in each case **either (a) or (b)**). They must answer one question from **Section 1**, one from **Section 2** and one other of their choice. Each answer must be on a different text. It is important that all candidates are aware of this. If a candidate answers two questions on the same text, only the first will be marked. If a candidate answers three questions from one section, only the first two will be marked etc. If the paper ends up being marked out of 50 because only two questions could be considered, then this is a serious handicap to the achievement of a good grade.

The essays of most candidates would have benefited from a judicious use of well-chosen brief quotations from the texts to illustrate the points being made. The apt use of quotation improved again this year compared to previous years, but too many candidates still quoted overly long chunks of texts in their essays, sometimes without any quotation marks to indicate that they were actually using the words of the text. Even where there were quotation marks, there was often insufficient reference as to how the quotation was contributing to the argument in the candidate's answer. The purpose of a quotation is to back up or illustrate the argument of a well-planned essay and to show an in-depth knowledge of the text. The examination questions frequently say that the candidate should (literally) 'give examples to explain'. This means that the candidate should first have a point to make (as part of the argument running through the essay) and that to back up this point the candidate should make very close reference to the text or choose a short quote to illustrate it, then go on to explain why the quotation or reference supports the argument/discussion running through the essay. In some cases, candidates appear to go through the text looking for quotations which have some tenuous reference to the question and then quote them without any explanation.

In many questions on literature, no one answer is right or wrong; the Examiner is looking for a well-argued essay from the candidate, backed up by evidence from the text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

A large number of candidates answered a question on Chaguan. There were some very good answers. Unfortunately some candidates answered both **1(a)** and **1(b)**: only the first of their answers could be awarded

marks. Candidates must illustrate their answers with brief but apt quotations and concrete references to the text.

- (a) This question was a relatively straightforward choice and well-answered on the whole. To gain full marks, candidates needed to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the scene quoted and the people involved and have a clear idea of the situation in Beijing at the time. Some candidates did not seem to have taken the time to understand the question well enough and did not make good use of the prompts the sub-questions provided.
- (b) Some candidates answered this question well, but others were let down by an insufficient knowledge of the background of the play. There were instances of substantial copying out of dialogue from the text without any explanation of how this text illustrated the candidate's answer.

Question 2

Candidates found the questions on poetry quite difficult to answer. Most candidates were unable to give detailed and thoughtful analysis of imagery, even though the standard of their Chinese appeared to be sufficiently high to cope with such expression.

- (a) There were some very good and imaginative answers here and on the whole candidates showed better knowledge of Xu Zhimo's poetry and life in general than has been the case in recent years. The discussion on metaphor in (ii) was generally weak. Many candidates were only able to make some general observations and did not offer any detailed analysis of individual metaphors.
- (b) There were some good answers, but others were very muddled, reflecting a lack of in-depth knowledge of the poems being compared. Candidates should not attempt a poem comparison question unless they know the poems well.

Question 3

There were some good answers to this question.

- (a) Some very good answers, but again some evidence that the text had not always been read.
- (b) On the whole, those candidates who chose this question answered well, but a few chose to write about the problems of 'rusticated' youth returning to the cities after the Cultural Revolution in general, with no reference to the text. Candidates must choose specific examples from the text to illustrate their answers.

Section 2

Question 4

- (a) There were some good answers to this question. However, many answers showed little knowledge of the background of the story and not enough understanding of the text.
- (b) There were a small number of excellent answers, but, again, many answers showed little knowledge of the background of the story and not enough understanding of the text.

Question 5

Both essays for **Question 5** were answered well. However, although the tendency to copy out large chunks of unacknowledged text had declined, all candidates would have benefited from a better use of well-chosen quotations to illustrate their points. A few candidates lacked the background knowledge of China at the time, which was necessary to add depth to their answers. There were a number of disorganised answers and others which showed that the candidate would have benefited from a more careful reading of the question and planning of the answer before starting to write.

Question 6

- (a) There were some extremely well argued essays on the role of the narrator, with thoughtfulness and careful planning as well as awareness of the techniques employed. Other candidates failed to understand the demands of the question.
- (b) Answers to this question were generally good, although some candidates copied very large chunks from the text which did not add to their argument.