Candidates' Performance

General comments and recommendations

On the whole, candidates seem to have been well prepared for the examination. Most answers displayed knowledge relevant to the issues and topics covered by the curriculum. However, the performance was not always commensurate with the effort made. To achieve good results in History examinations, candidates need the following skills: identifying the key term(s)/phrase(s) in a question in order to grasp the gist of that question; using relevant historical information to support any arguments made; and presenting logical, coherent and clear answers.

It is imperative that candidates read the questions carefully if they want to produce relevant answers. Candidates too often jumped into answering a question without paying close attention to what it required. This explains why some candidates produced irrelevant answers when answering data-based questions: when the question required the use of sources only, they drew on their own knowledge; when the question required the use of both sources and their own knowledge, they used one but not both. Similarly for essay-type questions, candidates should make sure that they grasp the gist of a question before producing the answer. Candidates are advised to read *A Manual of Question Words Used in History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007; online version 2011 http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/HKDSE/Subject_Information/hist/HIST-QuWords-E.pdf), in order to familiarise themselves with various command words and other commonly used words that appear in HKDSE History questions.

It is also important that candidates choose relevant historical information to substantiate their arguments. Some scripts were marred by irrelevancies resulting from the indiscriminate use of historical information. Writing down 'model answers' prepared in advance should be avoided.

Last but not least, candidates should pay special attention to logic, coherence and clarity of presentation. They should organise answers and use facts appropriately in their answers, and make clear arguments. Language and presentation skills are also areas in need of improvement.

Question Choice Pattern

Question Number	Popularity
Paper 1	
1	Compulsory
2	
3	
4	
Paper 2	
1	40%
2	25%
3	2%
4	70%
5	35%
6	1%
7	27%

Q.1 **(a)** Performance was good. This question required candidates to examine which extract in Source A was more anti-Japanese in tone. Many candidates were able to identify Extract 1 as more anti-Japanese in tone, sometimes justified with good comparisons.

(b) Performance was fair. This question required candidates to infer from Source B two characteristics of the Hong Kong Chinese merchants' reaction towards the May Fourth Incident at the time. Only the best candidates were able to infer valid characteristics from the Source. Weak answers reflected efforts to focus on the keyword 'characteristics', but such characteristics were either irrelevant to the Hong Kong merchants' reactions towards the Incident or were vaguely explained.

(c) Performance was satisfactory. This question required candidates to discuss whether Chinese in mainland China and Hong Kong shared similar views on major events that happened in China in the 20th century. Many candidates managed to identify major events, but did not always succeed in making clear comparisons of views. Only the best candidates identified the major events and showed clearly whether Chinese in mainland China and Hong Kong shared views on them with reference to the Sources and their own knowledge.

Q.2 **(a)** Performance was satisfactory. This question required candidates to conclude from Source C one problem that might have hindered Japan's development. Many candidates answered the question as required. However, the weak candidates misinterpreted the Source, and focused on diplomatic relations between Japan and Korea, the chaos brought about by the Second World War, etc. instead of the mentality of restoring the old Japan.

(b) Performance was fair. This question required candidates to explain whether the author of Source C would have agreed to Japan's hosting the Olympic Games, as mentioned in Source D. While many candidates managed to answer the question as required, weak candidates misread the Source and made ungrounded inferences such as 'Japan did not need any reputation', 'small nations should not host an Olympic Games', etc.

(c) Performance was fair. This question required candidates to explain how important the domestic factor was in bringing about Japan' economic miracle in the period 1945-80. The best answers used the two sources and the candidate's own knowledge to give relevant and substantiated discussions about factors that led to Japan's economic miracle in the period. Weak answers discussed only the domestic factors, or failed to clearly differentiate between domestic and foreign factors.

Q.3 **(a)** Performance was good. This question required candidates to identify the cartoonist's view towards the USA. Many candidates managed to identify the US's double standard as reflected in the cartoon. The weak candidates misinterpreted the Source – some thought that the cartoonist supported the USA in fighting the USSR; others thought that the cartoon described the US military force as being weaker than the USSR.

(b) Performance was fair. This question required candidates to explain how the USA's participation in foreign wars affected its budget. Many candidates managed to make use of the Source to explain how the two periods represented by the Korean War and Vietnam War affected the US budget. The weak answers copied indiscriminately from the Source without making any valid inference.

(c) Performance was satisfactory. This question required candidates to explain why détente took place between the USA and the USSR in the late 1960s and 1970s. Many candidates were able to write about the causes of détente. The weak answers listed examples that illustrated USA-USSR cooperation without relating these to causes of détente.

Q.4 (a) Performance was good. This question required candidates to identify the main message of the cartoon in Source G. Many candidates described the harsh demands on Germany by the victors of the Great War, as symbolised in the cartoon. The weak candidates misunderstood the cartoon as one that blamed Germany for making greedy demands to Britain and France, and so lost marks.

(b) Performance was fair. This question required candidates to identify the attitude of Clemenceau towards the French government regarding its execution of the Treaty of Versailles, with reference to the language and arguments used in Source H. The best candidates made use of the Source to explain the attitude of Clemenceau. Some candidates cited clues to the explanation, but without focusing on the Source's language and argument as required. The weak candidates misunderstood the Source as one that illustrated a positive attitude towards the implementation of the Treaty, or merely cited the Source without clearly explaining Clemenceau's attitude.

(c) Performance was poor. This question required candidates to discuss whether the Treaty of Versailles became less and less important as a factor in determining Europe's international relations in the 1920s. Quite a number of candidates failed to grasp the gist of the question and discussed major events in the 1930s that led to the rise of totalitarianism in Germany and deteriorating international relations, which were irrelevant to the question. Some candidates mistook the Treaty of Versailles for the Paris Peace Settlement, and unnecessarily discussed the discontent of Italy after the First World War. Some adopted the 'other factor' strategy and discussed irrelevant factors that affected international relations in the 1920s. Only the best candidates focused on international relations in the 1920s and made the Treaty of Versailles the subject of exploration, with valid reference to the Sources and using their own knowledge.

Paper 2 (Essay-type questions)

Q.1 Performance was satisfactory. This question required candidates to discuss the extent to which Hong Kong underwent transformation in the period 1967-97, with reference to the socio-economic and political developments in that period. Most candidates were able to discuss the transformation in Hong Kong in these two areas, substantiated by relevant historical evidence. However, some ignored the key words 'to what extent' and therefore failed to discuss the historical continuity of Hong Kong in the period. The most able candidates covered both continuity and transformation and reached valid conclusions. Some weak candidates treated the question as one asking for the year 1967 as a turning point, and gave unnecessarily lengthy discussion about Hong Kong's historical developments before 1967.

Q.2 Performance was fair. This question required candidates to discuss whether both the late Qing Government (1901-12) and the Nanjing Nationalist Government (1928-37) aimed to promote economic more than political development. Most candidates attempted to compare the two reforms, but not many focused on their 'aims'. The weak answers displayed one or more of the following flaws: mistaking 'aim' as 'historical background'; forming their arguments based on counting the number of reforms listed in the answer instead of conducting a holistic and qualitative discussion of the two reforms; producing unbalanced discussions, mostly disproportionately on the Nanjing Government and/or political developments. Only the best answers contained balanced and well-substantiated discussion of the two reforms, producing valid comparisons of their aims.

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Q.3 Performance was fair. This question required candidates to discuss whether decolonisation in Southeast Asia was primarily caused by the Japanese occupation during the Second World War. The best candidates were able to give valid comparisons of Japanese occupation and other factors in terms of their relative importance in leading to decolonisation. The weak answers displayed one or more of the following flaws: producing unbalanced answers favouring Japanese occupation or other factors; producing separate paragraphs of the factors so that comparisons, if any, were weak; ignoring the keyword 'primarily' and failing to compare the factors. The weakest answers were merely about general facts of decolonisation in Southeast Asia or developments in Japanese militarism and foreign aggression, which were not required by the question.

Q.4 Performance was fair. This question required candidates to discuss whether Nazi aggression was more important than the appeasement policy in causing the Second World War. Most candidates attempted to compare the two factors with relevant historical evidence. Only the best answers gave valid comparisons. The weak answers displayed one or more of the following flaws: inaccurate understanding of the appeasement policy such as blaming it for giving the Japanese a free hand in invading China and mistaking the USA as the one behind the policy; producing separate accounts of the two factors with very rough comparisons in a short paragraph at the end. The weakest answers discussed factors other than the two listed in the question, which was irrelevant to the question.

Q.5 Performance was satisfactory. The question required candidates to discuss the extent to which the end of the Cold War was due to Mikhail Gorbachev's liberalisation policy. Generally speaking, candidates were well prepared for this question, and many produced relevant historical evidence about Gorbachev's liberalisation policy and other factors that led to the end of the Cold War. The more able candidates clearly explained the relative importance of Gorbachev's liberalisation policy and other factors leading to the end of the Cold War. However, some did not pay heed to the key phrase 'liberalisation policy' and included many more of Gorbachev's other policies, which were irrelevant to the question. The weakest candidates merely gave a brief account of developments during the Cold War, without any discussion about its end.

Q.7 Performance was fair. The question required candidates to elaborate on the statement 'national interest may lead to war; it may also lead to mutual cooperation' with two examples, one for each scenario. A good answer should have addressed how 'national interest' led to the two results stated in the question. Weak answers displayed one or more of the following flaws: misunderstanding the concept of national interest; giving both examples on war or mutual cooperation; and producing separate accounts of the two events without closely relating them to 'national interest'. Only the best answers explained how national interest led to war and mutual co-operation in a balanced manner.