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FOREIGN LANGUAGE MANDARIN CHINESE

Paper 0547/02
Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

The standard achieved by candidates was similar to last year. Most completed **Sections 1, 2 and 3** and continue to achieve good marks in all sections. The range of marks achieved in **Section 3** is generally wider than in **Sections 1 and 2**.

Candidates appeared well prepared for the examination. However, there is increasing evidence that many candidates have significant difficulty with the use of stative verbs such as *hao* (to be good) and *sui* (to be X years old). Often *shi* ('is') is introduced in advance of stative verbs e.g. *Ta shi qi sui* (he is seven), which gives a pronounced 'foreign' flavour to otherwise appropriate language. It appears that this type of error arises from candidates not understanding that words such as *hao* and *sui* are themselves verbs, not adjectives (and therefore they do not require the use of an additional *shi*). This error is common across the majority of Centres.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Exercise 1 Questions 1-5

Candidates performed well in these multiple choice questions – most scored full marks. Usually no more than one error was made in this exercise by any candidate. There was no pattern to the errors made.

Exercise 2 Questions 6-8

The majority of candidates coped extremely well with these True/False questions, demonstrating a good level of understanding of simple expressions about the weather. The small number of candidates who made errors tended to get two or more of the questions wrong, indicating a problem with weather-related vocabulary.

Exercise 3 Questions 9-11

This was a very successful exercise with nearly all candidates scoring 5 marks.

Exercise 4 Question 12

Candidates were required to write a short note. Performance in this question was generally of a good standard, with the majority of candidates achieving full marks. Those candidates who performed less well either had problems communicating the points requested by the rubric in writing (Chinese characters), or did not address all of the points requested in the rubric.

This year, candidates generally avoided using words in other languages, and very few marks were lost as a result of this practice.

Section 2

Exercise 1 Questions 13-22

A successful exercise. Responses were of a high standard and the majority of candidates achieved full, or almost full, marks. Most candidates gave very full answers (i.e. complete sentences) although shorter answers (appropriate word(s) or phrase(s)) are also accepted here. Candidates who performed less well generally struggled to understand the passage and/or the questions overall.

Exercise 2 Question 23

The standard of responses to this question was generally high. The content of candidates' letters was often interesting (at the middle as well as the top of the mark range) and displayed a good ability to communicate original ideas at this level. A small number of candidates struggled with this question (or chose not to attempt it although they completed the other exercises). These candidates also had problems with **Question 12**, suggesting that they find it difficult to produce a piece of writing using Chinese characters.

Use of words from other languages was again less prevalent this year and very few marks were lost as a result of using, for example, Pinyin or English.

The mark scheme differentiates between accuracy (5 marks available) and communication (10 marks available). There was evidence of a range of ability in both areas. Most candidates successfully addressed the topics in the rubric and were awarded marks in the 6-10 range for communication. The majority of candidates scored marks in the 3-5 range for accuracy. The most common problem was errors in the use of basic stative verbs by candidates. A significant percentage of candidates continue to use *shi* with stative verbs (possibly as a result of 'translating' from other languages). See also **General comments** section.

Section 3

Exercise 1 Questions 24-28

Performance in these questions varied. Candidates performed best in **Questions 24** and **26** with **Questions 25** and **27** proving the most challenging.

Exercise 2 Questions 29-34

Performance in these questions varied although the majority of candidates did well. Most gave good responses to **Questions 29**, **32** and **33**. Incorrect responses were most common for **Questions 30** and **31** (but still rare) perhaps due to difficulties identifying the relevant sections of the passage. Some answers to **Question 34** were very good, but some failed to score because they were not based strictly on the passage.

Paper 0547/03

Speaking

General comments

In most Centres, the Speaking Test was conducted extremely well, with the Teacher/Examiner using skilful and sensitive questioning techniques to allow the candidates to show their ability. Most candidates demonstrated a high standard of spoken Mandarin Chinese. Both candidates and their teachers are to be congratulated on the standards achieved.

There were again some technical problems this year, with several Centres failing to check the sound levels of the recording, making moderation difficult as the tapes were virtually inaudible. **It is vital that Centres ensure that cassette recorders are in good working order before Speaking Tests are conducted and that sound levels are checked at the time of the Speaking Test to ensure that recordings are audible.**

In a few Centres, the required questioning was not carried out in the **Topic Conversation** and **General Conversation** sections, and this seriously disadvantaged candidates. Each section should last approximately 5 minutes. In some Centres, English was used to introduce the different sections of this test, but it is preferable if the target language can be used throughout: a phrase such as *Xianzai di er/san bufen* should serve the purpose.

Marking was generally consistent and fair, and in all but a few Centres no, or only minor, adjustments were necessary.

Comments on specific questions

Role Plays

It is good practice for the teacher to read aloud the introduction to the role play in Chinese before starting.

Most Teacher/Examiners followed the prompts provided in the Teacher's Notes, but a few departed from them and/or asked supplementary questions. Teacher/Examiners are reminded that marks can only be awarded for the tasks specified on the Role Play Cards. Where extra tasks were added this often confused candidates and in some instances disadvantaged them as they failed to complete the mark-bearing elements of the test.

"Generic" answers such as *Wo bu zhidao* (I don't know), *Shi* (Yes) or *Dui* (Correct) cannot be credited as they demonstrate no comprehension of the specific question asked. If a candidate gives such an answer they should be prompted by further questioning to give a more specific response.

Role Play A – Cards 1, 2 and 3

Most candidates found no problem with this exercise.

Role Play A – Cards 4, 5 and 6

Weaker candidates seemed unfamiliar with the expression *daxiao*. The question *Ni hai yao biede ma?* also seemed to cause problems although it follows a common speech pattern.

Role Play A – Cards 7, 8 and 9

Most candidates had no problem with this exercise.

Role Play B – Cards 1, 4 and 7

The fourth task about directions caused several candidates problems.

Role Play B – Cards 2, 5 and 8

Weaker candidates found it hard to improvise an answer to the first question and came up with some unlikely suggestions for the situation of the teaching block. Answers which are so bizarre as to cause the Examiner to wonder whether or not the candidate has understood the question and/or what they are saying in reply cannot be awarded marks.

Role Play B – Cards 3, 6 and 9

Many candidates seemed unfamiliar with the term *danwei*.

Topic/Discussion

It was pleasing to see some more ambitious prepared topics such as "the Merchant of Venice", the contrast between different countries and economic development being tackled this year, as well as more familiar ones such as "School", "My Friend" and "Holidays". However, the latter topics are quite suitable for an examination at this level and Centres should be aware that the choice of an ambitious topic may disadvantage a candidate who does not possess the linguistic skills and maturity of ideas to deal with it.

While some Centres are still allowing candidates to talk for far too long before interrupting them to ask questions (one or two minutes of the monologue is enough), a few went to the other extreme of not allowing any development of the topic by the candidate before starting to ask questions. **Neither approach allows the candidate to show his or her full mastery of the language.**

General Conversation

Some Centres are still failing to make the transition from the **Topic Conversation** to the **General Conversation** clear. Doing so is helpful both to the candidate and to the Moderator: *Xianzai ziyou jiaotan* or *Xianzai disan bufen* are both acceptable ways of indicating the transition. In most Centres the Teacher/Examiner used skilful questioning to allow a relaxed but searching conversation to take place.

Paper 0547/04 Continuous Writing

General comments

The overall standard of candidates' work was high. Many of the letters and also the stories about the mystery phone call used a wide range of vocabulary, idiom and grammatical structures. They were interesting and lively to read.

For each essay, the mark scheme was divided into marks for Relevant Communication (five marks), Accuracy of Characters (five marks), Accuracy of Grammar and Structures (ten marks) and Impression (five marks).

Candidates were not penalised for writing too much. Whilst there is no need for candidates to count the number of characters written, it should be remembered that variety of vocabulary, idiom and structure is rewarded. Therefore, a long, but less varied essay will not be awarded as many marks as a shorter one with greater variety and interest. Essays of significantly fewer than 150 characters did not receive high reward.

There is no need for candidates to be unduly concerned about forgetting how to write the occasional character. In order to enable them to show what they know and can do, questions are deliberately left as open as possible, thus allowing candidates to make their own choice of vocabulary. They should, however, avoid embarking on topics for which they know very few of the characters involved.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

There were some very well-written letters, with the personal letter to a Chinese penfriend the more popular choice. The majority of candidates covered all the guidelines and wrote a suitable beginning and ending to their letter, thereby achieving the full five marks for Relevant Communication.

- (a) Candidates wrote some interesting letters to their penfriends. Some candidates found the expression 课外活动 puzzling and did not appear to know 周末. Those letters which were most successful were the ones where candidates were obviously thoroughly involved in the task, perhaps visualising their own experience of extra-curricular activities/leisure pursuits.
- (b) A smaller number of candidates answered this question. Those who did so generally wrote well and argued their case convincingly. This topic gave the more confident candidate the opportunity to express more complex ideas, but at the same time, was still accessible for candidates at all levels.

Candidates came up with some interesting views about whether it is better to holiday with family or friends – the advantages of parental funding of a family holiday figuring prominently.

Question 2

This question enabled candidates to use their imagination in telling the story of the mystery phonecall and what happened next. Stories involved surprise birthday parties, car accidents, illness, lost pets or outings with friends (preceded by arguments with parents about whether or not to finish homework before going out).

Candidates, in general, wrote good stories with the best essays really drawing the reader into the sequence of events. All candidates should remember that writing in Chinese still requires a story structure with a proper concluding paragraph to round off events.

Candidates scoring highly were those who wrote a good story using a wide variety of vocabulary, structures and idiom. The Relevant Communication marks were awarded on the basis of how well candidates responded to the question of who phoned and what happened next. Most candidates scored full marks for Relevant Communication. Candidates not scoring full marks made little discernible effort at developing a proper storyline. Candidates writing a particularly good story were rewarded with an extra mark for Impression.

Candidates should be advised not to waste time copying out the question before writing their story, especially as some then went on to include the copied out question as part of their 150 character word count. This resulted in essays that were too short and which did not allow the candidates in question to do themselves justice. As has already been mentioned, candidates were not penalised for writing too many characters.

As last year, a few candidates still confused 发生 in the question with 发现.

General comments on characters and grammar

The essays of many candidates displayed an impressively wide range of characters. The ones which were frequently incorrectly written were:

问, 医院, 汽车, 冷, 今, 漂亮, 游泳, 篮球.

There was often confusion between 话 and 活, 上 and 下, 那 and 哪.

There were fairly frequent homophone errors, the most common of which were:

writing 以经 instead of 已经

writing 时 instead of 是

writing 对 instead of 队

Some of these could have been avoided with a careful read through by the candidate after completion of a question.

Candidates showed a good knowledge of Chinese grammar. The most frequent problems were:

- Large numbers of candidates did not seem to know how to say 'somebody telephoned me' correctly in Chinese and failed to make use of the help on this provided in the question.
- There was confusion over the use of 的, 得 and 地.
- Candidates found it hard to use 了 correctly – most were able to use 了 correctly some of the time, but not all the time.
- Many candidates had difficulties with comparisons, i.e. 'he is 6 months older than me' etc.
- Indirect questions, e.g. 她问我要不要看电视. Many candidates seemed unaware of how to form indirect questions and tended to use 如果 in cases like this.