

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

HISTORY A

OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in History A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y317/01 Summer 2025 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper Y317 series overview

Y317 is one of twenty one units for Paper 3 of the A Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests an extended period of History of at least one hundred years through an interpretation question on a named in-depth topic and through two essays.

The paper is divided into two sections. In Section A candidates are required to use contextual knowledge to test the views of two historians about one of the three named in-depth topics or an aspect of one. The question does not require them to comment on the style of writing or the provenance of the interpretation.

In Section B candidates are required to answer two essay questions from a choice of three.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- showed a clear understanding of the views of the two interpretations in relation to the question - were able to use contextual knowledge to test the interpretations, linking that knowledge directly to the interpretation through evaluative words - were able to consider the strengths and/or limitations of both interpretations using contextual knowledge - covered the whole period in a balanced way - adopted a thematic approach - made links and comparisons between aspects of the topic - explained the links and comparisons - supported their arguments with precise and relevant examples - reached a supported judgement about the issue in the question.	- showed a limited understanding of one or both of the interpretations - did not go beyond a basic explanation of the interpretation - did not link contextual knowledge directly to the interpretation and therefore did not evaluate the interpretation - adopted a chronological rather than thematic approach - did not make links or comparisons, even if events from different parts of the period were discussed in the same paragraph - did not cover the whole period - did not focus on the precise wording of the question - did not use specific and relevant evidence - made unsupported comments about issues which were no more than assertions.

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Section A overview

There is one compulsory question in this section. This question requires candidates to explain the view of each interpretation in relation to the question and then evaluate the interpretation by the application of contextual knowledge. Responses should show an understanding of the wider debate connected to the issue.

Section A in Paper Y317 is focused on the nature and course of the Cultural Revolution.

Question 1

- 1 Evaluate the interpretations in **both** of the two passages.

Explain which you think is more convincing as an explanation of the nature and course of the Cultural Revolution.

[30]

Many candidates answered this question well, showing sound understanding and a wide range of knowledge about the nature and course of the Cultural Revolution. Most candidates were able to successfully identify the main differences between the interpretations, with Passage A suggesting that Mao was in control and the Revolution was organised from the top down, and Passage B arguing that Mao lost control of the Revolution and faced significant opposition.

Candidates supported Passage A with a wide variety of evidence and contextual knowledge, including examples of demonstrations of loyalty to Mao, the use of the Little Red Book to foster Mao's cult of personality, and Mao's ability to control the urban youth through the 'up the mountains and down to the countryside' campaign.

Some candidates struggled to show the same breadth of knowledge when evaluating Passage B. There was no requirement for candidates to demonstrate any specific contextual knowledge of the Wuhan incident or the actions of General Chen. Successful candidates tackled Passage B by considering opposition to Mao more widely, evaluating whether this was typical of the Revolution as a whole, and by evaluating the references made to Li Shao-Chi, Madam Mao, and the Small Group.

Weaker responses explained the nature of the Cultural Revolution more generally, but with limited specific knowledge, paraphrasing the passages without providing examples of evidence in support of the interpretations.

Exemplar 1

1	Passage B argues that many were opposed to the cultural revolution, especially in the Wuhan province. Un The passage could be seen as credible as many resented Mao's use of violence, especially of the Gang of Four, referred to as "Small group" in the passage. This is seen in the arresting of the Gang of Four, and by Hua, by giving them all separate meeting times and having them arrested. Which marked the end of the cultural revolution, as the Gang of Four was charged with persecuting 750,000 people. A However, the source is limited in ^{its} credibility as it overstates the "opposition" within the Wuhan province, as and underplays the fact that "no one dared to attack Mao openly." This was because Therefore, the source underplays the nature of opposition during the cultural revolution, while many disagreed with the violence, they feared Mao too much to openly defy him. This is seen in the his cult of personality, relying on Lin his propaganda minister to keep the cultural revolution maintained by the Red Guard, who carried the Little Red Book
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and often ~~affirmed~~ reported their parents and teachers ^{for anti-revolutionary behaviour.} The source also has limited credibility as ~~the~~ the Red Guard ~~also~~ were destroyed the '4 olds' and supported Mao as a leader, praising him in the August Rallies. Therefore, while the source is credible in suggesting there was opposition to Mao ^{particularly} in Wuhan, as the Gang of Four were arrested including Jiang, its credibility is limited because it overstates this opposition and underplays the lack of "open" opposition towards Mao.

Whereas, passage A more convincingly argues that the nature of the cultural revolution was "anarchy" and many "regional groups began to clash". The source passage is strong as the PLA did begin "hunting down" students and workers they once supported. This is seen + suggested by the fact that ~~the~~ the PLA arrested 350,000 Red Guard members and killed 50,000. The source ^{passage} continues to be credible in its suggestion that the Red Guard were allowed to "run wild". This is suggested by the fact that the Red Guard destroyed churches and only 2% of them went to university. While, the passage could be seen as weak as it says "Mao could use the PLA to pull

them back in line", as it could be said that Mao simply started the cultural revolution when swimming across the Yangzi River and attending the August Rallyes and afterwards let the Red Guard takeover. However, the source remains a strong passage as Mao did use the PLA to send the Red Guard to the countryside in 1967 and stopped them from destroying the Forbidden city, by sending the PLA to stop the Red Guard from doing so. Therefore, while the passage may be weak as it could be argued Mao simply started the cultural revolution and then removed himself from the spot light, however, he did in fact use the PLA to attack the Red Guard, leading to a movement that "turned in on itself" and was filled with "anarchy".

In conclusion, Passage A is more convincing in arguing that the nature and course of the cultural revolution was chaotic and ^{filled with} regional clashes*. Whereas, passage B ^{nature of the} less convincingly suggests the cultural revolution was ^{especially in Wuhan} filled with opposition against Mao and the "Small Group". While, the passage is somewhat credible as the Gang of Four was arrested by Hua and charged

		with 35,000 180,000 persecuting 150,000
		and cultural destruction of plays and music.
		The passage is ultimately limited as the it
		underplays the fact that "no one dared attack
		Mao openly" as his cult of personality meant
		people feared his violence, encouraging Kang
		Sheng to purge 90% of the CCP at the start
		of the cultural revolution. Whereas, Passage
		A more convincingly argues the cultural
		revolution was filled with 'anarchy' and
		"regional clash" as the PLA executed 50,000
		Red Guard and there were regional clashes
		even within the Red Guard ^{itself} . Which was all
		encouraged by Mao's guidance and control of
		the PLA who sent the Red Guard to the
		countryside. Ultimately, suggesting Passage A
		more convincingly explains the nature and
		course of the cultural revolution.
		* 'encouraged by Mao and his associates'

Exemplar 1 is a good example of Level 5 evaluation. The candidate has taken at least two of the main arguments from each passage and supported or challenged the argument using some specific contextual knowledge. For Passage B, the candidate has noted the argument that there was opposition to the Revolution, directed at the Gang of Four, and supported this with knowledge of the actions of the Gang of Four and their treatment at the end of the Revolution. They also acknowledge the passage's statement that 'no-one dared attack Mao openly', and suggest this is in fact an understatement, expanding on this with knowledge of how Mao's cult of personality was developed.

Specific knowledge is then also used to evaluate Passage A, particularly Passage A's suggestion that the Revolution was characterised by violence, and that 'it turned in on itself'. The evaluation is clear throughout, and the knowledge used is specific and detailed. This candidate is demonstrating the skills we are looking for in this response.

There were other points made within each passage that the candidate could have considered, and so the range of evaluation and knowledge demonstrated here is not comprehensive enough to reach Level 6. However, a couple of examples of clear and valid evaluation, with specific knowledge, secures this response in Level 5.

Section B overview

Candidates are required to answer two questions from a choice of three. To do well on Section B candidates need to make connections and links across the whole period of their study. They should explain similarities and differences between the events they are discussing to show an awareness of continuity and change across the whole period, unless instructed otherwise. The comparisons may be made across the period within the topic or between regions, depending on the topic. It is also important that the comparisons are explained - what is similar or different between the periods or regions.

The strongest answers will test a hypothesis and reach a supported judgement.

Question 2*

- 2* 'Throughout the period from 1839 to 1989, changes to the nature of government in China were only possible through violence.'

How far do you agree?

[25]

This was a popular question although many candidates were not fully focused in their response. This question required candidates to consider how changes to the nature of government were achieved in China throughout the period; whether violence, or other factors, prompted change.

Successful candidates considered how violence led to change through events such as the 1911 Revolution, Communist takeover in 1949, Taiping Uprising, and Northern Expedition, among others. This was then compared to alternative factors that prompted change, such as changes in ideology, or actions of individuals, providing examples of change where violence was not the driving force.

It is valid to argue that the nature of government in China has been characterised more by continuity than change, and that violence was more often used to prevent change rather than cause it. This was a perfectly acceptable approach, and argued well by some candidates. Some candidates took a thematic approach to nature of government, with paragraphs focusing on structure of government, ideology, centralisation, repression etc, and within each theme considering whether it was violence or other factors that brought change. This was also a valid and successful approach.

However, many candidates struggled to focus on 'changes to the nature of government'. Some weaker responses focused on economic and social changes, which were not relevant to this question. Some also described how governments used violence, but without linking this to changes in government. Responses sometimes described change or continuity in the nature of government, but without addressing how these changes occurred, and whether violence was the cause. These responses were not fully focused on the question and could not reach the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Assessment for learning



Remind candidates to look carefully at the wording of the question and to choose the themes they discuss accordingly, rather than try to make a pre-planned structure fit the question posed.

Question 3*

- 3* 'The most important change in the Chinese economy during the period from 1839 to 1989 was the growth of industry.'

How far do you agree?

[25]

This was the most popular of the three essay questions, and candidates generally showed good knowledge of the changes in the Chinese economy. Candidates typically identified changes in agriculture and trade in addition to industry, before coming to a conclusion about which they felt was most important.

While weaker responses offered more generalised and vague descriptions of changes to the economy, most answers were able to explain specific changes, supported with some detailed evidence and examples. However, many candidates took a chronological approach within each paragraph, explaining steps taken by each leader in turn to improve the economy in terms of industry, agriculture, or trade. While this is a valid approach, it did not usually lead candidates to show developed synthesis or develop a sustained line of reasoning.

The strongest answers were able to explain the impact of changes to the economy, and to identify and develop change and continuity over time. For example, some candidates argued that industry was the most important as it brought steady, consistent improvement across the period, compared to agriculture which often stagnated. Alternatively, some candidates argued that while industry and agriculture saw some improvements, the impact of this was not fully realised until trade expanded at the end of the period, making changes to trade the most important. No set argument is expected, but it is this recognition of change and continuity over time that enables candidates to show the developed synthesis required at the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Exemplar 2

		Whilst the growth of industry was an extremely important change to the Chinese economy as it would facilitate
		trade, it was far too often conflated with ideologies not only restricting the developments made but also the quality. Under Mao Zedong the 1 st 5 year plan 1952-56 led to great development in the industrial sector leading to a 130% increase in industrial output & the building of 300 industrial plants. However, due to the ideological alignment of the Soviet Union & Mao's PRC rather than seeking practical industrial growth rapid industrial growth was sought leading to the encouragement of Backyard furnaces that provided no benefit to the Chinese.
		Furthermore, similarly under the Qing & the Confucianist ideology held by Cixi meant that advancements to the industrial sector made by Li Hongzhang with the Self-Strengthening movement in 1861 received no government help. Whilst it is true that governments did hinder the progress made to industrial sector there is still evidence of governments supporting and promoting sustainable growth. Under Jiang Jieshi there was the building of 50,000 miles of railway by 1949 and great

3	investment into the industry by the ED Chinese Development financial corporation. These developments facilitated extensive trade with the GMD exppan trading various resources like grain within China. Overall whilst changes to the industry were made & were necessary in facilitating the growth of China's trading, it is evident that the government the most growth of industry was not the most important as it wasn't always sustainable & plagued down by the interest of government. Trade was the most important change as it significantly benefited China. Under the Deng Xiaoping the Special economic Zones set up in 1978 allowed for greater trade amongst the Chinese & foreigners. By 1978-88 foreign trade quadrupled & the Chinese exports increased by 400%. This significantly benefited the growth of the Chinese economy. Similar to Alike the Special economic zones attracting foreign investment trade facilitated by the Treaty of Nanjing 1842 allowed for Shanghai to become economically
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3	prosperous with textile exports increasing to 5 million, alongside this came with foreign direct investment with the British setting up 130 trading offices as well as hospitals which employed the Chinese. However, the opening up to trade wasn't without its faults. Mao Zedong was forced to trade grains with the Soviets during the Great famine & evidencing that reliance on trading partners did sometimes leave China susceptible furthermore whilst the Soviets invested heavily, 300 million in industry plants this was subject to heavy interest & was later removed following the Sino Soviet Split. This evidences that reliance on trading partners did leave China susceptible to exploitation. However overall trading & changes to that lead to the opening up of trade did prove to be successful & the most beneficial to the Chinese economy. Changes to agriculture were the least important as not only were they not sustainable but at times led to great failures. Under Mao Zedong there was
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3		Substantial change to agriculture, yet unlike the industrial sector Mao being lead by political motives meant these changes did not serve the purpose of improving agriculture itself but instead promoting political ideology. He established 26,000 communes as well as adopting Soviet methods like Lysenkoism & Sparrowcide that were not grounded in science, this eventually led to the 'Great famine' of 1959-62 & the death of 36 million. Unlike Mao the issue that was consistent under the Qing & the GMD was rather a lack of sufficient attempts to change agriculture. Under the Qing whilst the Ministry of Agriculture was established it lasted only two years & the GMD prioritising political security amidst the warlord period 1916-27 chose not to disrupt the agricultural structure as political control was fragile controlling on $\frac{1}{3}$ of land & $\frac{2}{3}$ of its population. Overall changes to agriculture whilst overall there were few changes to agriculture, when there were changes they were severely undermined by the political motives of government.
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Exemplar 2 is a good example of an answer which is focused on the question, demonstrating relevant and sometimes detailed knowledge, but does not show the developed synthesis required at the higher levels of the mark scheme. Within each paragraph, changes made by various leaders are explained, but largely in isolation, with little comparison. On occasion, the candidate has used words such as 'similarly' to indicate a comparison, but this is not explained and so cannot be credited as developed synthesis. For this reason, it is a good example of a Level 4 response.

Exemplar 3

		Changes to economy ^{industry} was an important
		change change throughout the period,
		but was not the most important
		change. Both the Guomindang (GMD)
		and the Chinese Communist Po.
		Both the Chinese Communist Party as (CCP)
		and the Guomindang (GMD) aimed to
		grow industry through nationalisation of
		industry. In the Nanking 1927-37 In
		the Asian Nanking Decade, 1927-37,
		Tiang ^{介石} introduced the National Resources
		Commission - nationalising key heavy
		industries like steel. Similar to At Tang
		介石, who was dictator of China, Mao Zedong
		Zedong, nationalised industry to facilitate
		the growth of industry in the First
		Five Year Plan. Both Between 1931-37,
		Chinese industry grew by 8.7% each
		year as Mao's production of steel
		went from 4.12 million to 385 million

		tonner as a result of the Great War First Five Year Plan. These Both were important changes because China was was not an an industrial nation so T'ang was able to begin a new pattern of change with China's industry growing. That However, this was not that although the war significant to China's reputation, it did not necessarily bring China much the Chinese people much any success. For example, in the self-strengthening movement (c.1860 - c.1900), China China industrialised significantly, compared to the early Qing period similar to under the Manchus: the iron investment led to the production of steel going from 3000 tonnes to 30,000 tonnes from 1912 to 1927 and the number of textile machines going from 300,000 to 1.2 million from 1913-1921. However, in both of these cases, China's attempt to grow industrially was significantly weak because on both occasions the Chinese lost the Second Sino-Japanese War was it were too weak to cope with the Japanese offensive from 1931 and too weak, technologically to deal with in Korea (1894-1895) against Japan. This shows that the change to industry was rather not the important
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		change as it didn't make success
		inevitable.
		Changes to trade were important as it
		allowed China to form relations intensifying
		relations but this was only dependent on
		the China rule of China. Both the the
		Whilst the Qing emperor (who died in
		1850) changed signed the Treaty of
		Treaty of Nanjing Mao was after
		After the Communist takeover in 1949,
		Mao isolated China from the rest of
		the world, changing a pattern that
		Qing Tieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) established followed
		of forming allowing trade. Mao restricted
		China, not providing them from trading
		with other nations, except Russia. The
		war period was a poor decision as the
		economy plummeted significantly, suggesting that
		changes to trade were not always
		needed. The Both Both the Qing
		emperor and Deng Xiaoping (paramount leader)
		changed a pattern of trade and also,
		res allowed trade to occur in certain
		areas. Deng Xiaoping allowed trade to
		occur in the special economic zones
		(SEZs) and the emperor allowed trade
		in the treaty ports like Fuzhou and
		Shanghai. This was an important change

		to trade as Deng allowed exports to
		increase by 500% and by 1850, 20,000
		charts of opium ^{war} there leaving Shanghai.
		In both cases, the leader of China
		knew that trade was needed to
		help the new poor economy, they inherited
		from their predecessor, the Qianlong
		emperor and Mao Zedong and the Qianlong
		emperor respectively. Moreover both both it
		was only with these traders that Deng
		was perhaps to gain and to gain Hong
		Kong in the Joint Declaration of 1984 and
		the emperors were able to stay in
		power as a result of being able to
		trade showing that trade was
		significant in both, aiding the economy
		and aiding the revolution of the
		leader of China.

In comparison, Exemplar 3 demonstrates aspects of the 'developed synthesis' we are looking for at Level 5. In these paragraphs on industry and trade, there is a range of examples from across the period to support the argument. Rather than just listing these examples in isolation, there is also an explanation of similarities and differences, demonstrating an awareness of change and continuity over time. The synthesis is not consistent throughout the answer, but there is enough here to demonstrate that the candidate has met some of the requirements of Level 5.

Question 4*

- 4* 'The Korean War (1950–1953) was the most important turning point in Chinese relations with the wider world during the period from 1839 to 1989.'

How far do you agree?

[25]

This was the least popular of the three essay questions, although candidates who chose it often tackled it successfully. The question required candidates to consider the impact of the Korean War on Chinese relations with the wider world, and compare this with other potential turning points of their choice.

Strong responses broke 'relations with the wider world' into specific themes, which formed the basis of each paragraph. These often included trade, conflict, sovereignty, and the introduction of new ideas, or focused on relations with individual countries such as the USA, USSR, and Japan. Multiple approaches were valid.

Within each theme, successful candidates compared the impact of the Korean War with other turning points, including the Opium Wars, the Communist takeover in 1949, the Boxer Rebellion, and Deng's rise to power, among others. The importance of each turning point was considered according to whether it was positive, negative, short-term, or long-lasting.

Weaker responses explained one turning point per paragraph. While the explanation was relevant, this approach did not enable candidates to compare turning points and show the developed synthesis required at the higher levels of the mark scheme. Some candidates also chose a narrow range of turning points, all in the 20th century, which did not enable them to show synthesis across the period.

Assessment for learning



Remind candidates that they must cover as much of the time frame of the topic as possible in their response, drawing on examples and evidence from across the period. Without a range of evidence or turning points, they cannot demonstrate an understanding of change and continuity over time, or 'developed synthesis'.

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