2023 VCE Chinese Language, Culture and Society written external assessment report

General comments

Most students attempted all sections of the 2023 VCE Chinese Language, Culture and Society written examination. The responses showed various levels of knowledge and skills.

In 2023, students performed best in Section 1 – Listening and responding. Students showed a wide range of knowledge and skills in Section 2 – Writing in Chinese and Section 3 – Culture and society in Chinese-speaking communities in English. Students who scored highly were able to elaborate on original ideas and give in-depth analysis on the topics in this section.

Students should use the 15-minute reading time to familiarise themselves with all questions. They are also expected to be able to make efficient use of dictionaries for unfamiliar Chinese vocabulary.

For Part A of Section 1, students should take notes while listening prior to writing their answers. Most students used the space provided to take notes; however, some students took notes in Pinyin, but did not manage to convert them to meaningful English or Chinese responses. Students should use dictionaries to correct the writing of characters whenever time allows for Part B questions.

Students are encouraged to respond to all questions. Unless otherwise instructed, students are expected to write in full sentences for Part B of Section 1. Most students responded with accurate information converted from the written text in Part A of Section 2, but many missed the information from viewing text. Students were able to provide a response with desired length and depth in Section 2. All students attempted to provide responses to all questions in Section 3 covering both Unit 3 and Unit 4 topics.

Students who scored highly overall demonstrated sound knowledge and skills in both the Chinese and English parts of the examination.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

Section 1 – Listening and responding

Part A

Most students responded to all questions for Text 1. Students who scored well demonstrated their capacity to understand, convey and rearrange information accurately from Chinese into English.

It is important for students to take notes when listening to texts. Most students were able to capture and convey key information, but some students missed relevant information or did not make the right connection on important points. For example, in Text 1 Question 1a., most students understood the description of China Town as ‘漂亮’ (pretty) and ‘好看’ (good-looking; beautiful), but could not make the connection of ‘五颜六色’ as an idiomatic expression for ‘colourful’ or in Question 1c. when speakers discussed the choice of restaurant, and used ‘更好吃’ (taste better), that it implied the reason for their choice.

Text 1

Question 1a.

Tom and Lingling think Chinatown is beautiful / pretty / good looking.

Lingling thinks that Chinatown is colourful / has colours.

Question 1b.

Chinese restaurants; the Chinese History Museum / history / Chinese Gardens; a Chinese medicine shop and book shop.

Question 1c.

They will eat dumplings/noodles and fried rice at the Shanghai Noodle House, because the food in this restaurant is better/tastier than the Beijing Noodle House.

Part B

Students were expected to answer all questions in complete Chinese sentences. Responses are marked holistically, considering both content and language aspects. Higher-scoring responses demonstrated the capacity to accurately organise the information presented in Text 2 with appropriate linking words/phrases and accurate use of grammar. Students are advised to address the key words from the question in their answers. For example, in Text 2 Question 2b., when responding to the question of benefits and challenges of having pets, most students could identify the key information of ‘有爱心’ (loving) and ‘好朋友’ (good friends) but missed the challenges of ‘如果小狗病了’ (if the dog is sick) and ‘挺花钱’ (expensive; spending a lot of money). Students who rephrased the full question in Chinese could have better used the time to check the accurate spelling of the Chinese characters in their answers with a dictionary. Practice in the use of a bilingual dictionary is strongly recommended.

Text 2

Question 2a.

丽丽有一只北京小狗， 它很喜欢吃肉/爱吃肉。(Lili has a little Beijing dog; it likes/loves to eat meat).

Question 2b.

养宠物的**好处是**可以让人有爱心，你可以和宠物玩及和宠物成为好朋友,；**挑战是**/但是/不过如果宠物病了，要送它们去动物医院/看医生/很花钱/很昂贵/贵。

The **benefits** of having pets are to make people have a loving heart, you can play with the pet/make friends with pets. The **challenges** include that you have to send the pets to a vet clinic when they get ill, and it could cost you lots of money.

Question 2c.

大伟想明天放学后去丽丽家和她的小狗一起玩/跟小狗玩。

Dawei intends to go and play with / play together with Lili’s dog at her house after school tomorrow.

Section 2 – Writing in Chinese

Part A

Students were expected to provide short answers to three questions based on the information found in Text 3, which is a comparison of the Teachers’ Day celebrations in mainland China and in Taiwan. It is important for students to include the information presented in both reading and viewing texts. The majority of students showed their capacity to understand and convey some key information from the reading text, but many missed the information from the visual. Responses that scored highly were structured logically in full sentences, covering the relevant key customs outlined in Text 3. Students capable of manipulating Chinese effectively and organising information in a simple informative writing style were awarded highly.

Text 3

Question 3a.

在中国内地，九月十日是教师节，(因为这是) 新学年的开始，是学生做尊师活动的好机会。在台湾，九月二十八日是教师节，(因为)这天是孔子的生日。(In mainland China, 10 September is Teacher’s Day. At this time, the new school year begins, which is a good opportunity for students to do activities to show respect for teachers. In Taiwan, Teacher’s Day is 28 September, because this day is Confucius’ birthday).

Question 3b.

人们认为老师的工作很有意义，他们不但教知识，而且培养爱心。 People think that the teaching profession is quite meaningful. They not only give knowledge, but also foster love.

Question 3c.

学校都会开会表扬好老师；学生会给老师唱歌、跳舞、画画和送小礼物，比如：给老师送花等等。 On Teachers’ Day, Chinese schools will hold assemblies to praise conscientious and excellent teachers; students draw pictures, sing songs, and dance, give gifts to teachers, and present flowers to their teachers

Part B

For Part B, students were expected to produce a piece of writing in Chinese. A relatively equal number of students chose Question 5 (personal letter) and Question 6 (informative speech). Higher-scoring responses were awarded marks for the relevance, breadth and richness of the content. Most students were able to produce a structured piece with interesting details. Various techniques were used, such as variation in sentence length, quotes and emotional language where required (e.g. effective use of interjections). Responses that scored highly included engaging details of students’ study plans and personal reflections for Question 5, and descriptions of the tourist destinations, features and comments about those destinations for Question 6. No marks were awarded for content in the responses that were irrelevant to the task requirements.

Question 4

For this question, students were required to write a personal letter to a pen pal in China, talking about their plans for future study. Features of this personal letter include details of the study plans and reflections on the reasons for choosing those plans.

Most students demonstrated a good understanding of the task requirements, and many were able to describe their future study plans and reflect on their reasons with personal details. Responses that scored highly demonstrated the students’ ability to produce a sophisticated personal writing piece; however, many included extensive travelling plans, which was considered irrelevant to the question.

Question 5

Students were required to write an informative speech about their most recent travel destination. Responses were expected to address young travellers in their local community. The features of an informative speech include the opening address to the audience, a short list of their experiences, recommendations, and a conclusion such as ‘谢谢’ (Thank you) or ‘这就是我的演讲’ (This is the end of my speech).

Students who scored highly produced a structured piece using language that demonstrated or implied their love for travel and their travel experiences, some interesting and detailed descriptions of the most recent destination that they had travelled to, and their impressions and reflections on the attractions and features of this destination~~.~~

Section 3 – Culture and society in Chinese-speaking communities

Question 6

For this task, students were expected to describe the significance to Chinese culture of the scene shown in the visual from Lulu Wang’s film, *The Farewell*. Students who scored highly were able to identify the scene from the film, describe the significance of this traditional behaviour and link it to Chinese culture or philosophical concepts.

Most students demonstrated a good knowledge of the prescribed film and provided detailed descriptions of this tomb-sweeping tradition, but some students misunderstood the scene as a family gathering feast or wedding scene, which impacted their subsequent cultural explanation. The following is an example of a high-scoring response that provided an accurate description of the tradition shown and an effective analysis of the cultural significance.

The scene shown above depicts Billi’s family partaking in the Tomb Sweeping Ceremony for their deceased Grandpa, relating to the traditional practice of ancestor veneration in Chinese culture. Chinese families venerate their ancestors by placing and burning ‘flowers, incense, and other goods’ (Paul Hedges) including ‘paper money and jackets’ seen in the film as a fulfilment of filial piety as decreed in Confucianism, supporting the deceased with goods to help them navigate the ‘10 hells’ (Paul Hedges) of the afterlife.

Question 7

Students were required to provide an explanation on a given statement regarding Sanjiao (the three Chinese Religions) for this question. The statement emphasised the three religions as ‘teaching the same thing in different ways’. Most students were able to give definitions of Sanjiao and identify the three religions in their responses, but many failed to provide evidence and analysis to explain the accuracy of the statement.

High-scoring responses demonstrated a thorough knowledge of Chinese religious structure, were able to identify the three religions and their interconnections with each other and gave examples to explain how those religions gave philosophical guidance from different perspectives. The following is an example of a high-scoring response with in-depth analysis based on the prescribed texts for Unit 3.

The suggestion that ‘the three religions are all teaching the same thing in different ways’ stems from the nature of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism presenting ‘the Three Traditions Harmonious as One’ in China’s contemporary religious systems of thought, which Ancestors and Demons decrees is ‘not a monotheistic mindset’. Whilst the Three Teachings preach in ‘different ways’, Confucianism is a public state ideology which provides ‘training for government, and a normative model for ethics, etiquette, and culture’ whilst Daoism and Buddhism are concerned with ‘inner spiritual cultivation’. Paul Hedges notes the overlap in the Three Teachings’ content with the concepts of ‘dao’ (‘way’, ‘path’) and ‘tian’ (‘sky’, ‘heaven’) featuring in multiple of these religions. Ultimately the modern Chinese people’s experience religion is an amalgamation of the Three Teachings, as Cindy testifies on the Ancestors and Demons podcast, ‘you can visit a temple to pray and not know which religion it is.’

Question 8

Students were expected to provide an extensive response to this question regarding Lixin Fan’s documentary, *The Last Train Home*, exploring the social changes that have occurred in China based on knowledge learned from prescribed texts. Students who scored well showed their comprehensive knowledge of social changes in contemporary Chinese-speaking communities, including urbanisation, migrant workers, absence of parenting, which is shifting away from the traditional family structure, as well as individualism and its impact on younger generations. Some students were able to further provide original analysis on those social changes that are creating intergenerational disconnection, and showed empathy for the suffering and sacrifice of both the younger generation, the daughter mentioned in the question, and her parents.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response providing not only a thorough and detailed analysis of China’s social changes, which were highly relevant to the question, but also their implications for individuals and communities. This response used the prescribed texts accurately and strategically, and structured and sequenced the evidence to provide effective support of its ideas.

Qin Zhang’s absence of appreciation for her migrant worker parents sacrifices in Lixin Fan’s The Last Train Home can be asserted to a large extent as the consequence of 20th century social changes in China. Shifting social dynamics necessitated by economic phenomena have resulted in the collapse of the traditional Chinese family unit, exemplified by the absence of respect and gratitude in the Zhang family. The destabilisation of traditional Confucian emphasises on education amongst the impoverished additionally contributes to Qin’s lack of understanding regarding her parents’ sacrifices. The rise of individualism following 20th century globalisation and Western influences further facilitates the lack of respect and filial piety Qin demonstrates in The Last Train Home.

The social changes invoked by China’s migrant work phenomenon play a crucial role in Qin’s ideology and absence of traditional familial connection. The shift from agriculture to become ‘a manufacturing empire’ (Zak Dychtwald, Young China) in China’s economy over the late 20th century has seen ‘275 million’ impoverished rural adults become ‘migrant workers’ in urban cities; the resulting social constraints placed on the family unit have become known as the ‘left behind children’ generation, with Qin ‘seeing her parents for only 1 week for 16 years’. The consequence of migrant workers’ sacrifices for their children is a collapse in respect and connection within family units, reflected in Mr Zhang’s comment ‘when we are home, we barely know what to say to our children’, whilst Qin cries ‘I’ve barely seen [my parents], how can there be any connections?’ the physical and social distance necessitated by migrant work primarily informs Qin’s lack of appreciation for her parents sacrifices unable to see the work Mr and Mrs Zhang do to provide ‘for our children’, Qin cries ‘you won’t come back for us! You always say that, but you never will! You haven’t done anything for me!’ before destabilising traditional familial hierarchy by resolving to ‘walk out of [Mr Zhang’s] f\*\*king house!’ The lack of respect and appreciation expressed by Qin is hence largely a product of the contemporary social shifts of migrant work and ‘left behind children’.

Impoverished young Chinese people’s social change away from the high valuation of education held by their parents additionally informs a lack of appreciation. Stemming from the Confucian practice of ‘scholars of the Emperor’ (Paul Hedges), older Chinese generations maintain an enduring education as the ‘only way’ for ‘a peasant’s child’ to have a better life. Social changes inform Qin’s resentments of her parents’ pestering about ‘her report card’ and her lack of appreciation for Mr and Mrs Zhang’s sacrifices for the sake of her education. As such the breakdown of Confucian principles has resulted in social tensions and conflict between contemporary generations of Chinese communities – whilst Qin and her brother Yang believe ‘school is boring’ and plan not to ‘work too hard’, their parents’ social standpoint is that they’d ‘rather work harder’ in cheap labour ‘than have Qin drop out of school’ (Mrs Zhang). Lixin Fan consequently presents social changes regarding educational emphasis as a significant cause of intergenerational tension and lack of appreciation of sacrifices.

The rise of individualism in Chinese social spheres threatens to disrupt traditional collectivist ideologies, presented as a cause of Qin’s rebellion and lack of respect for her family’s sacrifices. The Confucian obligation to filial piety, a ‘reciprocity of duty and respect’ (Paul Hedges) between parents and children, is undermined by the individualistic mindset Qin and her contemporaries exhibit. Her rebellion to escape from the ‘cage’ of ‘school’ and gain her own ‘happiness [through] freedom’ by becoming a migrant worker is informed by this social damage, contributing to her failure to appreciate and fulfil her familial duty by pursuing her education and ‘buying a big house in the city for us all’ (Qin’s Nai Nai). The contribution of individualism to a disregard for social duty and familial sacrifices is implicated by Lixin Fan’s strategic cinematography; as Nai Nai and Yang provide for their family in the Sichuan fields and Mr and Mrs Zhang work to provide for the family, Qin is seen spending all her money on a fashionable haircut and partying in a nightclub.

Lixin Fan’s The Last Train Home explores the absence of parenting felt by young generations to their family’s sacrifice, linking this phenomenon strongly to the Chinese social changes of migrant work, decreased educational emphasis, and Western individualism.