2024 VCE Chinese Language, Culture and Society written external assessment report

General comments

The majority of students attempted all sections of the 2024 VCE Chinese Language, Culture and Society written examination. The responses showed satisfactory levels of knowledge and skills in both language and cultural components.

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

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, while some students did not transfer notes into the answer space. Students should use dictionaries to correct the writing of characters whenever time allows for Part B questions.

Students are highly encouraged to respond to all questions. Relevant answers are awarded with marks; if students repeat an answer, they cannot be awarded marks. Unless otherwise instructed, students are expected to write in full sentences for Part B of Section 1. While most students responded with accurate information converted from the written text in Part A of Section 2, many students missed the information. Students were able to provide a response of the 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 language and culture 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.

While it is important for students to take notes when listening to texts as much as possible, it is also important to understand the scenario and the relationship between the speakers. Students are encouraged to make the most of the gap time between the two readings and pay attention to details. While most students were able to capture and convey the general idea, some students missed key information or did not make the right connection on important points. For example, while most students understood that the speaker and Ma Li played sports together, they did not always pick up the details on the sequence of events. The speaker stated that they became friends first and played sports together later. Therefore, playing sports is not the correct answer for Question 1a., but is the correct answer for Question 1b.

Text 1

Question 1a.

* They have studied Chinese together since Year 7.
* They did homework together.

Question 1b.

* They played sports. / They played football, basketball and swimming together.
* Their Chinese language has improved. / They became interested in Chinese culture.

Question 1c.

* They will always be friends/remain friends, as long as their love of Chinese culture remains.
* They plan to go to China together. They will go to Beijing, Shanghai and Xi’an/taste food/meet up with friends. Therefore, even though they study different subjects, they will still have common interests.

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. Separate marks are not awarded for content and language. Responses that include the relevant information from the text and are expressed clearly in the language should be awarded full marks.

Text 2

Question 2a.

李美觉得每个人比赛时跑得很快，每场比赛的比分都很高。Li Mei feels that every player runs very fast in the game and the scores of every match are very high.

Question 2b.

澳式足球已经有四十年的历史/上世纪80年代，一些澳大利亚人在中国工作或生活时， 就开始玩澳式足球了。 In the 80s of last century/ Having 40 years of history, some Australians who were working and living in China started to play AFL.

后来，中国人觉得澳式足球很好玩儿， 也开始和澳洲人一起玩了。Later, some Chinese people found AFL was quite fun, and (they) started to join Australians playing AFL.

现在，澳式足球队在中国有七、八支队了。Now, there are about seven or eight AFL teams in China.

Question 2c.

李美除了可以在澳大利亚看澳式足球，她还可以回中国时去上海看。 Li Mei does not have to be in Australia to watch AFL. She can also watch AFL in Shanghai when she returns to China.

Section 2 – Writing in Chinese

Part A

Students were expected to provide short answers to four questions based on the information found in Text 3, which was a journal entry written by an international student living with her Australian homestay family. Most students showed their capacity to understand and convey some key information from the reading text in response to each question, but some students missed one or more activities. For example, in Question 3c., the key word in the question is ‘new things’ (新体验) and its conversion in the text is ‘first time’ (第一次); therefore, all activities listed after ‘first time’ (第一次) should be included in the answer.

Responses that scored highly were structured logically in full sentences, covering the relevant key information outlined in Text 3. Students capable of manipulating Chinese effectively and organising information in a simple informative writing style scored very well.

Text 3

Question 3a.

她来墨尔本学英文和澳大利亚历史文化。She came to Melbourne to study English and Australian culture.

Question 3b.

她和住家相处得很好。她和小美每天放学后一起出门，比如去公园骑车或去体育馆看球赛，对她很好。他们还给她机会练习英文。 She gets along well with her homestay family. She likes to go out with Xiao Mei after school every day; for example, they ride bicycles at the park or go to watch ball games in a stadium together. They are nice to her. The family also provides opportunities for her to practise her English.

Question 3c.

在澳大利亚，她第一次看到蓝蓝的海水；第一次了吃西餐。 In Australia, she saw the blue ocean for the first time; she ate Western food for the first time.

Question 3d.

她下周可以向小美哥哥学做西餐和西式点心。She can learn from Xiao Mei’s older brother how to make Western food and Western snacks.

Part B

For Part B, students were expected to produce a piece of writing in Chinese in approximately 150 characters. Most students chose Question 4 (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 Chinese cultural activities. No marks were awarded for content in the responses that were irrelevant to the task requirements.

Question 4

Students were required to write an informative speech about Chinese Culture Day to all students studying Chinese in the school. Responses were expected to address fellow students. The features of an informative speech include the opening address to the audience, a list of their experiences/activities on Chinese Culture Day, recommendations/comments, 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 addressing fellow students appropriately, using language that demonstrated or implied their experiences of Chinese Culture Day held in Melbourne, some interesting and detailed descriptions of one or more activities that they have participated in, and their impressions and reflections on those activities/Chinese culture.

Question 5

Students were required to write an imaginative story for a magazine aimed at secondary school students. The story had to highlight the writer’s experiences in a modern hi-tech educational environment, demonstrated in the visual material. Few students chose this topic; however, high performing responses contained an interesting storyline within a special classroom setting that included the use of digital/AI technology.

Section 3 – Culture and society in Chinese-speaking communities

Question 6

Students were required to respond to the quote ‘China has the talent but does not yet have the jobs’ to explain the situation China’s Only Child Generation faces after university graduation. Students who scored highly were able to identify the quote from the prescribed text and provide causes for the situation from social, economic and cultural perspectives.

While most students demonstrated a good understanding of the situation described by the quote, many did not provide an explanation of the reasons that were mentioned in the book.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response that provided an accurate description of the situation and a comprehensive explanation of the cultural and social context.

Since 1999, China’s rate of graduation has “risen sevenfold”. This is partially due to the “tremendous pressure” of the one child generation to succeed their education (as education is seen as “the only way… [to] get ahead” by families). Consequently, there is an oversaturation of college graduates but not the jobs, especially “white collar jobs”. China is transitioning into a “service sector dynamos” from being “manufacturing based”, however, this shift has not been completed. As a result, the “talent” from college graduates is unused, as they face high unemployment due to the lack of jobs in the service sector compared to the sheer number of university graduates.

Question 7

Students were required to provide an explanation regarding young Chinese people seeking a sense of security in their behaviour, with examples from the prescribed text. High-scoring responses demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the prescribed text, using a range of examples from the book, such as:

* the success of the Singles Day/Online/Taobao shopping bonanza as a form of mass retail therapy playing a ‘clever psychological trick’: ‘Because Chinese believe they can use purchases to improve their appearance, they also believe that these purchases improve the perception of your life in the city’
* consumer semiotics: at the most basic level, the ability to buy a certain phone, wear a certain brand, or drive a certain car symbolising the security of a ‘good life’, gaining the social recognition of individual success
* ‘self-improvement’ of meeting a standard of beauty that didn’t exist in China a few decades ago, such as ‘高富帅’ (tall, rich and handsome) or ‘白富美’ (pale, rich and beautiful), or security of relationship
* education: studying hard to secure a job; Bella’s story as an example.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response with in-depth analysis based on the prescribed texts for Unit 4.

Zak Dychtwald’s ‘Young China’ reveals that people seek a sense of security in their behaviour to a high extent. This is exemplified through consumer culture, where individuals are revealed to spend a high amount on products which represent financial security. Using a whole year’s salary to purchase an iPhone, the next big purchase boost within reach, the younger generation seek to convey a financial prosperity in how they are perceived by showcasing and expensive purchases, thus exhibiting a sense of reliability. They understand that the right show of a good income and a good image translates to financial stability. ‘88% of city dwellers have smart phones,’ highlighting how common this behaviour is.’

Furthermore, a sense of security is displayed through Taobao’s success due to the many purchases of individuals, for example, a girl purchases double eye-lid stickers so that to achieve “an quan gan” to aid in her relationship with her boyfriend. The consumer’s emphasis on convenience in the interest of ultimate deriving security is showcased by the e-commerce platform’s success in eclipsing Black Friday and Cyber Monday in its growth to dominate 75% of China’s e-commerce market.

Question 8

Students were required to provide an extended response to this question regarding the scenes depicting discussions about decision-making principles in collective family matters in Lulu Wang’s film The Farewell. Students who scored well showed their logical exploration of the idea of ‘social hierarchy’ and how it was the key principle of the collective decision-making process illustrated in the film. Some students responded with several scenes from the film, while some students responded from the perspectives of different family members; responses were awarded marks as appropriate. Some students were able to further provide original analysis on how social hierarchy was a key concept of China’s traditional philosophies, showing a deep understanding of Chinese social organisation models.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response providing not only a thorough and detailed analysis of the prescribed texts in Unit 4, but also a unique interpretation of the cultural dilemma between fulfilling one’s filial responsibility and (not) revealing the truth. This response used the prescribed texts accurately and strategically, and structured and sequenced the evidence to provide effective support of the student’s ideas.

By highlighting the ever-present impact of society’s structure toward family structure, Lulu Wang’s film ‘The Farewell’ reveals how social hierarchy is at the centre of everyday life in China. Demonstrating the importance of upholding one’s role in maintaining cohesion in family hierarchies, the social harmony stemming from obedience and the importance of Confucian mindset in maintaining social stability. Following the depiction of Billi’s family’s struggle to cope with her Nai Nai’s terminal illness, Wang amplifies the importance of social hierarchy as a cornerstone of Chinese society.

By highlighting the prevalence of social hierarchy in familial interactions, Wang demonstrates the fundamental role of filial piety and adhering to one’s place in society following the guiding principle of Confucianism. In the Anecdote, including the authority of husband over wife and of father over son, the family unit is displayed in adhering to the will of Nai Nai and Hai Bin as the head of the family. Aligning herself with “Zhong” a virtue encouraging the dedication to their role in society, Billi instantly respects her father’s wishes for her “not to say anything” when she initially enters the house and is greeted by her Nai Nai. This displays both the importance of demonstrating obedience to her father’s wishes, as well as respecting her Nai Nai, thus maintaining social harmony. Reminding Billi that “(she) shouldn’t try to control (her father)” her mother additionally encourages her to continue to obey the guiding principles. Furthermore, social hierarchy is illustrated in the wedding feast scene where Hai Bin cried, feeling guilty for not having been near Nai Nai for 25 years. Aligned with the Analects saying “when one’s parents are alive, one doesn’t travel afar,” his guilt underlines the importance a Confucianism places on acting as a filial son, modeling off his parents behaviour This is further reflected in Hai Bin’s reaction to adhering to mirror Nai Nai’s decision to withhold the truth from her husband in a humble manner years ago. Maintaining harmony under heaven, the importance of social hierarchy is further displayed by Nai Nai’s admonition during a prior feast about the wedding, insisting “(they) can’t look cheap.” This frames the significance of upholding face or “mian zi” in maintaining how one is perceived by society. Further illustrating the importance of his ancestor and demons descent, it’s important to keep certain practices alive “and” doing so to keep society alive. This reflects the fundamental nature of Nai Nai’s insistence on “living in a proper banquet” and traditional practices in maintaining harmony and stability in society’s function and approach to everyday life. Underpinning the cause in society’s stability, Wang utilizes the relationships of characters in various banquet scenes to depict common attitudes toward maintaining harmony.

Similarly, the family’s dedication in upholding Hai Bin’s decision-making in regard to family matters amplifies the importance of social hierarchy within Chinese families. Informed by ancient Chinese philosophies of “San jiao he yi,” Billi finally obeys Hai Bin’s wish for her “not to tell Nai Nai no matter how sad she feels.” All influencing Billi in similar ways, Daoism and Buddhism act as a cohesive model. Confucianism being a normative model for ethics, etiquette, and culture, according to Heidi’s text “China,” Confucianism compels Billi to value family hierarchy—termed within “managing human hierarchies”—as well as “family ideology” as a practical ideology. The philosophy is revealed by the podcast “Ancestor and Demons” to motivate adherence to a social harmony in a manner similar to Daoism and Buddhism. While Buddhism “takes care of people’s karma,” while Daoism “manifests divine hierarchies,” forming on concepts which extend beyond the transcends of human imagination, all three ideologies foster the common principle of self-cultivation and the interests of maintaining society’s function. Daoism and Buddhism as an amalgam of different principles, particularly shared as overlap, offering rituals and practices promoting a sense of belonging to and dedication to the broader picture. All three concepts therefore underpin Billi’s dedication to obeying Hai Bin as the head, valuing the role of individuals in maintaining the broad-scale progress of the welfare of the family, and by extension, society. Dedicating themselves to the common decision to fuel Hai Bin’s white lie, family members are exhibited to recognize the prominence of family hierarchy.

Moreover, Wang now depicts the role of collectivism in maintaining social hierarchy over Western influences of individualism. Reflected in the close reunion and lively atmosphere of the various feast scenes, collectivism emphasizes a society in which bonds are strong, each member adhering to a relationship of reciprocal care and respect. Each individual offers loyalty and obedience in return for consideration of their needs in decision-making. Finally agreeing to change the X-Ray to “benign shadows” depicts collectivist mindset and therefore willingness to uphold social hierarchy is depicted by the close community of the feasts, as well as a juxtaposition of a shot of her walking down the road with the whole family walking together. Emphasizing the emphasis on community, Wang depicts the difference between the East and the West where “in the West, where in the west a person’s life is part of a whole” nurtured by loyalty to family structure. In contrast, Billi’s initial reluctance demonstrates individualism, promoting individual happiness. Playing the piano loudly over family chatter at lunch, her frustration with the Confucius approach is presented in her reluctance to adopt a totalitivist mindset and western thinking, highlighting the illegal nature of lying. Depicting the stark contrast between integrated societies of obeying social structure and obedience, as opposed to one in which ties are loose, Wang communicates the crucial role of collectivism than individualism to family decisions.

Portraying the significance of social harmony, Wang ultimately indicates the long-lasting impact of the three Chinese religions, in sculpting attitudes toward family structure. Through various scenes and character relationships, she stresses the value in commitment to one’s role in the stability of society.