



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局  
Education Bureau  
Government Secretariat, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
The People's Republic of China

本局檔案 Our Ref.: EDB(EI)/HEA/1/1/(11)

電話 Telephone: 3698 4015

來函檔案 Your Ref.: CB4/PL/ED

傳真 Fax Line: 2382 4403

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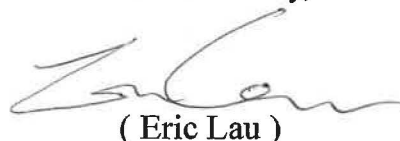
Ms Angel WONG  
Clerk to Panel  
Legislative Council Panel on Education  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Ms WONG,

**Panel on Education**  
**Mechanism of question setting of**  
**the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination**

With regard to Hon Elizabeth QUAT's enquiries made on 20 May 2020 to the Panel Chairman about the agenda item "Mechanism of question setting of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination", the Secretary for Education has responded in the discussion paper submitted to the Panel and at the meeting on 25 May. He further elaborated in his written reply to Hon Elizabeth QUAT's Legislative Council questions at the sitting of 10 June (please see the attachments).

Yours sincerely,



( Eric Lau )

for Secretary for Education

For discussion on  
25 May 2020

## **Legislative Council Panel on Education**

### **Question-setting Mechanism of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination**

#### **Purpose**

This paper aims to outline the question-setting mechanism of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) and explain the views of the Education Bureau (EDB) on question 2(c) of the History 1 examination paper in the 2020 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE).

#### **2020 HKDSE History Examination**

2. One of the questions in History Paper 1 of the 2020 HKDSE is about Sino-Japanese relations in the first half of the 20th century. Question 2(c) provides two pieces of information and states that “Japan did more good than harm to China in the period 1900-1945”. Subsequent to the examination, the question has aroused great controversy in society.

3. The History Curriculum & Assessment Guide (C&A Guide) (Secondary 4 - 6) sets out a number of aims, which include enabling students to approach past and current events in an impartial and empathetic manner, using a variety of perspectives; understanding the characteristics and values of their own culture; and cultivating both national consciousness and the consciousness of being citizens of the global community. Therefore, when there are problems in the implementation of the curriculum and assessment, especially those involving educational and examination and assessment organisations, the Education Bureau

(EDB) has the responsibility to safeguard the education profession and take corresponding rectifying actions in the interests of students and the public.

### **The EDB's follow-up actions**

4. To maintain the professionalism, fairness, impartiality and credibility of the HKDSE, the EDB is going to take / has taken the following actions:

- (a) To assign a team of officers who are familiar with the curriculum and quality assurance to visit the HKEAA to investigate the question setting, vetting and approval mechanism under the HKDSE, and whether the mechanism has been strictly complied with during the preparation of the History examination paper.
- (b) To request the HKEAA to invalidate the examination question concerned and make appropriate adjustments to safeguard the reliability and validity of the History examination, ensuring that all candidates are fairly treated.
- (c) Although the HKEAA is empowered to plan and conduct the HKDSE, in view of the recent incident which has aroused grave public concern, the EDB will review the existing mechanism to fulfil its role of monitoring the conduct of the HKDSE, with a view to ensuring the sustained quality of the HKDSE and the examination papers.

5. The HKDSE is an examination with international recognition. The HKEAA has put in place question-setting and question moderation mechanism for different subjects. The mechanisms concerned are at **Annex 1**. It is worth conducting detailed investigation as to why a problematic examination question appears in this year's History paper despite all these mechanisms, which has affected the candidates and the

realisation of the aims and objectives of the History curriculum.

**EDB's views on the question concerned**

6. The EDB's views on the examination question concerned are at **Annex 2**.

**Education Bureau**  
**May 2020**

## **Mechanism for Setting and Moderating HKDSE Questions**

The HKEAA is responsible for the setting and moderating HKDSE questions. At present, a moderation committee is set up for each of the 24 Category A subjects of the HKDSE. Each moderation committee comprises the Chief Examiner, setters and moderators. Apart from the subject manager from the HKEAA, members include subject / curriculum experts, experienced secondary school teachers and academics from post-secondary institutions. The duty of the moderation committee is to develop examination questions and marking schemes in alignment with the Curriculum and Assessment Guide and the Assessment Framework. The primary principles of question setting for the public examinations are meeting the requirements of the Curriculum and Assessment Guide and the Assessment Framework, and effectively assessing students' abilities.

2. Members of the moderation committees are appointed through various channels, including nominations from schools and subject committees, as well as selection from among experienced markers. The major considerations in selection of members include their subject knowledge and expertise, as well as their relevant experience in teaching and assessment. The nominations for the moderation committee of each subject will also be assessed by the General Manager - Assessment Development (or Assistant General Manager - Assessment Development), and the Director – Public Examinations. The appointment of moderation committee members is reviewed annually with a turnover of membership. The members, regardless of their personal background and beliefs, should set examination questions professionally based on the curriculum and assessment requirements according to the established mechanisms of the HKEAA, so as to ensure that students are assessed by the examination papers in an effective and fair manner. The Chief Examiner is responsible for leading the work of developing examination questions and marking

schemes to ensure that the examination papers can manifest the spirit of the curriculum and is in alignment with the requirements of the Assessment Framework. All question-setting and moderation work is confidential; participants are not allowed to disclose any information to others.

3. After the public examination has been conducted, the Chief Examiner of the moderation committee will be responsible for leading the work of marking the examination scripts, including reviewing sample scripts and analysing candidates' actual performance with the Assistant Examiners, so as to set the marking criteria and standards. The Chief Examiner will also chair the Markers' Meeting to explain the assessment objectives, requirements of each question to the markers, as well as answer markers' questions to ensure consistency in assessment. The markers are mostly frontline teachers. An open recruitment for markers is held every year. A grade point mechanism is adopted, and the selection criteria include the applicants' relevant teaching and marking experience, their academic qualifications, and whether they are subject panel heads. The points required for appointment are subject to the number of applicants every year and their qualifications. The political background or stance of the Chief Examiner, members of the moderation committees or markers has no bearing on their appointment.

(Source: HKEAA)

**The Education Bureau's Views on  
Question No. 2(c) of History Paper 1 of  
the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination**

Candidates easily misled by the sources provided

The historical materials quoted in the question are not complete. It is highly likely that students will be misled into making wrong interpretations, resulting in possible incorrect understanding of the historical events.

2. Major issues were overlooked in the account of the historical events in Source D of the question. Extract A and Extract B in Source D are related to the background and conditions of the loan of the Mitsui Company, in which complicated historical facts are involved. However, a full account of these facts is absent in the Source, and not all conditions of the loan are set out in one of the Extracts. Back then, the mineral resources of China were long coveted by Japan. Therefore, Japan took advantage of the weakness of the Republican Government which lacked capital and demanded that if the Republican Government wished to obtain the loan, it was obliged to let Japan obtain the shares of the Hanyeping Company (**the Enclosure**). Economic independence might be lost if the event was handled improperly. The entire nation was aware of the conspiracy behind the act and vehemently objected to the request. At present, the major topics featured in our curriculum and textbooks are all related to the history of Japanese invasion of China. Such historical events are only briefly covered in textbooks. No detailed account of these historical events would be given even if they are mentioned by individual teachers in class. Nor would such teachers comment on these events from the perspective of “good” or “harm”. For the general Secondary 6 students studying this specific historical period of China, the depth of their learning would not reach a level that enables them to understand the

developments of these events. As such, students would easily be misled by both Extracts of Source D into thinking that it was good for Japan to make the loan to the provisional government as the loan would help the new government (i.e. the so-called “good”). Also, students would use the events as an evidence in their answers to demonstrate that what Japan did was “good” to China. In short, the information contained in the question per se made the candidates develop a biased or even wrong understanding of the events concerned. Such information required students to have an understanding of the historical events that went beyond the required standards of students. The candidates could easily be misled by the one-sided information contained in the leading questions. More importantly, it would affect the historical understanding of the candidates (especially those who will not study history in future) about this specific period.

3. Source C itself is not exactly a very appropriate example of the “good”. The Japanese Ambassador to Qing Dynasty Yano Fumio wrote that “the Qing Government will actively keep sending students to our nation in the future, so the power of our nation will be discreetly strengthened in the East Asian continent.” One historian considers that “the Japanese Government merely wanted to cultivate a pro-Japanese elite class in the Chinese society by allowing Qing Chinese students to study in Japan.”<sup>1</sup> As a source in a question paper of a public examination, Source C is not a sound example of “good”. On the contrary, it will be too difficult for the students to use this as an example of “harm”.

#### Failure of question setting to meet the aims and objectives of the Curriculum and Assessment Guide

4. The setting of this question was not aligned with the rationale of the curriculum and failed to meet the aims and objectives set out in the Curriculum and Assessment Guide (C&A Guide). The curriculum aims of the History subject are to enable students to explore the progress of

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<sup>1</sup> Wang Ke (PhD of the University of Tokyo, Japan and Professor at the Graduate School of the Kobe University) Mentorship, Friends, and Foes: Nationalism and Modern Sino-Japanese Relations, p. 8 and p.10.



human civilisation in the past and to learn about the history of our country and around the world, so as to nurture their sense of national identity with humanities and a global perspective and to establish positive values and attitudes. The assessment content deviated from the learning objectives stated in the History C&A Guide for Secondary 4 to 6. The senior secondary History curriculum takes the stance that there are some fundamental values and attitudes commonly held in our community and across other societies, such as regard for human life and dignity and the quest for peace, co-operation and prosperity. Hence, as a 3-year senior secondary curriculum, the History subject tries to provide students with learning experiences to develop positive values and attitudes, and at the same time encourages teachers to introduce different perspectives as much as possible through class discussion and to remind students to review and reflect on their viewpoints to arrive at balanced judgments on issues. Upon completion of the senior secondary course, students should have cultivated the values and attitudes that are the attributes of a responsible citizen (Extract from P.1-3 of the History C&A Guide (Secondary 4 - 6) (with updates in November 2015)).

5. The question has adopted more “good” than “harm” as the analysis dimension. Not only has it deviated from the historical facts, but it has also contradicted the rationale of the curriculum, failed to meet the aims and objectives of the C&A Guide and neglected the essence of nurturing humanity, morality and historical values as promoted in the History subject. It is impossible to make a reasonable comparison between the atrocities committed by the Japanese Army during its invasion of China and any so-called benefits generated in that period, let alone doing more “good” than “harm”. The way of setting the examination question has not considered that the people who suffered during the Japanese invasion of China would feel offended. Such lack of empathy is like rubbing salt into the victims’ wounds.

Inappropriate to set as an open-ended question

6. Although the question is set in an open-ended form, there has

already been mainstream consensus on the related historical events, and there is very little scope for argument under the related secondary school History curriculum. Under the circumstances, is there any room at all for an argument for more “good” than “harm” to be established? Is it appropriate to set a question which does not allow an alternative conclusion to be set in the form of an open-ended question? Will open-ended questions on similar topics like this be misleading to candidates? The wording of the question is also inappropriate. It is absolutely inappropriate to represent the grave suffering of the whole country inflicted by the Japanese invasion by the single word “harm”.

#### Impossible to devise a marking scheme

7. Given the above inadequacies of the question, how can we compare and allocate marks to the different approaches of analysis? These varied approaches include an argument for more “harm” than “good”; an argument that the superficially so-called “doing good” is in fact “doing harm”; an argument that all the so-called “good” has been overwhelmed by the brutality of Japanese invasion of China; and an argument that there is more “good” than “harm”. Should a balanced analysis of “good” and “harm” be given higher marks, or should an argument for all “harm” and no “good” be given lower marks owing to its one-sidedness? Or should it be the case that an argument for more “harm” than “good” be given higher marks?

8. This question built upon a comparative analysis of “good” and “harm” of the period of Sino-Japanese history between 1900-1945 is grossly inappropriate. Coupled with the finding that Sources C and D have a high possibility of misleading candidates, it is impossible to devise a meaningful marking scheme for this question. If we ignore all these considerations and proceed with the marking work, we will give a wrong signal in history education to the effect that the very essence of history education is on the skills of fallacious argument. In fact, the tremendous harm Japan inflicted on China during 1900-1945 was crystal clear and beyond dispute, and it is extremely difficult to make any objective

assessment free of any value judgement simply on the basis of a quantitative or balancing comparative analysis of the examples of “good” and “harm”. When an objective marking scheme cannot be devised, no fair and reliable marking can be advised.

9. In addition, Source D has a high possibility of misleading candidates. If the marking scheme considers it a wrong answer if candidates’ interpret Source D as examples of “good”, this will not be fair to them since it is not a reasonable expectation for candidates to be able to induce Source D as “bad” based on the provided information. If marks are given to wrong interpretations of supporting evidence of historical events, this will contradict the educational aims by turning History examination questions into comprehension questions, with grave detrimental washback effect and seriously undermining the learning outcome of students.

## Enclosure to Annex 2

According to the study entitled 《漢冶萍公司史略》(Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1972, p154-156.) conducted by Professor Chuan Han-sheng, expert in the economic history of China from the Department of History, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Japan had long coveted the Hanyeping Company (漢冶萍公司). As the company owned iron and coal mines and was mainly engaged in the production of steel and iron, its importance to national defence was clearly evident. In a bid to take control over the company, Japan offered a loan to the provisional government in exchange for running the company jointly with China. Negotiations on the loan were made by Sheng Xuanhuai, General Manager of the Hanyeping Company with Japan. The loan was provided by the Japanese side through a capital injection into the Hanyeping Company, which then provided a loan to the provisional government. This plan to jointly run the Hanyeping Company by China and Japan was generally opposed by Chinese nationals who considered that the company would eventually end up in Japan's pocket, resulting in the surrender of sovereignty and humiliation to the nation. The loan involved three contracts. Owing to the strong opposition countrywide, the first and second contracts were finally cancelled. Only the third contract, the extract of which is shown as Extract B in Source D, was signed. The third contract contained a total of five clauses but the source only quoted part of Clauses 2 and 3.

## Press Releases

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LCQ16: Moderation Committees of Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

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Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 10):

Question:

A question in Paper 1 of the History subject of this year's Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination requested candidates to make reference to two pieces of information and then answer the following question: "Japan did more good than harm to China in the period 1900-45. Do you agree?" There are comments that the question was inappropriate in the selection of topic and was ill-intended, downplaying the painful historical facts of Japan's invasion of China, thereby leading candidates to reach a conclusion which turns the truth upside down. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that moderation committees (MCs) has been set up separately for Category A subjects of HKDSE Examination, which are responsible for setting examination questions and drafting marking schemes, and that the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) appoints members to MCs through various channels (e.g. nominations from schools and subject committees), whether it knows the relevant selection criteria and the weightings attached to the various criteria;

(2) given that the work nature of MCs is highly confidential, and that a staff member who had been nominated by the Education Bureau (EDB) in 2019 was eventually not invited to join the MC of the History subject of HKEAA, whether the EDB will request HKEAA to review the composition of MCs and require that each MC should comprise a member appointed by the EDB in order to strengthen the EDB's monitoring role on the HKDSE Examination;

(3) whether the EDB will explore taking part in the work of setting and moderating questions for the HKDSE Examination in order to ensure that examination questions are objective and neutral; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) as it has been reported that a member of the MC relating to the aforesaid incident has repeatedly made biased remarks on social media, whether it knows if HKEAA has assessed the effectiveness of the monitoring mechanism established to ensure that the acts of MC members meet the codes of professional conduct, and the mechanism put in place by HKEAA for imposing punishments on those members who have breached the codes of professional conduct; and

(5) given that HKEAA publishes, every year after the HKDSE Examination, question papers for the various Category A subjects, in which information such as marking schemes are set out for the reference of the relevant parties, whether it knows if HKEAA will, in view of the grave public concerns aroused by and the invalidation of the aforesaid question, immediately make public the marking scheme of the question, so as to facilitate the public to have a better understanding of the process of setting

the question; if HKEAA will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Question 2(c) of History Paper 1 of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination this year has aroused great controversy in society. When there are problems in the implementation of curriculum and assessment, especially those involving education and examination and assessment organisations, the Education Bureau (EDB) has the responsibility to safeguard the education profession, take corresponding rectifying actions in the interests of students and the public, as well as address the public concern. The EDB has explained the relevant reasoning in its statement dated May 14, at the press conference on May 15 and in the paper for the Legislative Council Panel on Education on May 25. Currently, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) takes full responsibility for the work of the Moderation Committee (MC). The EDB has no knowledge of the relevant duties (including the list of members) as they are confidential. The EDB has referred Parts (1), (2), (4) and (5) of the question which involve confidential information on assessment and staff conduct to the HKEAA. The consolidated reply is as follows:

(1) According to the HKEAA, MC members are appointed through various channels, including inviting nominations from subject committee members and chief/assistant examiners, and writing to schools for nominations from principals on a regular basis. MC members should meet the following criteria:

- currently teaching the relevant subject or have taught the subject in recent years;
- being experienced and innovative in teaching or setting examination questions;
- being up-to-date on the subject area and able to contribute to the process of question setting;
- having significant professional responsibilities (e.g. being a panel chairperson)

All members of MCs are required to declare interest in order to avoid any potential conflicts of interest. This declaration requirement covers the spouse, immediate family members, as well as persons who are residing in the home of the declarant concerned. Persons with potential conflicts of interest will not be appointed as MC members.

MCs comprise academics from tertiary institutions, secondary school teachers, curriculum officers and subject experts and an appropriate mix will be maintained based on the members' academic knowledge, teaching experience, and expertise and experience in question setting or moderation. The HKEAA has laid down guidelines to ensure a healthy turnover of MC members and to provide opportunities for new examination personnel to take up assessment development work.

It is especially important that MC members should be well experienced and innovative in setting examination questions, and be up-to-date on the knowledge and development of the subject area. In the selection of members for a MC, priority will be given to members who can provide constructive and insightful

comments and suggestions from the stages of question setting to moderation, and refine the draft questions up to the required standard for public examination.

(2) and (3) The HKEAA points out that it has been appointing members of MCs based on the criteria mentioned above. Apart from the Manager of Assessment Development of the HKEAA and frontline teachers and principals, some of the curriculum specialists invited by the HKEAA to join the MCs of some subjects include employees of the EDB. These curriculum specialists participate in the work of MCs in their personal capacities. They have to seek prior approval from the EDB for taking up outside work but are forbidden to disclose the relevant work to their supervisors in the EDB. With the EDB's request in recent years for greater participation of its curriculum specialists to enhance the alignment of curriculum and assessment, the EDB will recommend experienced personnel conversant with the curriculum requirement to the HKEAA for consideration. The number of personnel invited by the HKEAA to join the MCs has increased. However, not all the MCs of the 24 Category A subjects in the 2020 HKDSE have invited the personnel recommended by the EDB to join the MCs. Furthermore, their posts in the MCs and the stages they are going to participate are entirely the decision of the HKEAA.

In view of the grave public concern over the History examination question in the HKDSE Examination, the EDB and the representatives of the education sector and the HKEAA will set up a task force to review the issue. The EDB has requested the HKEAA to investigate the incident, review the question setting and moderation mechanism of the HKDSE, and whether the mechanism has been strictly complied with in the question setting and moderation of the History examination paper. The EDB will also review the existing mechanism to fulfil its monitoring role in the HKDSE Examination, with a view to ensuring the sustained quality of the HKDSE Examination and examination questions. As the review has not completed yet, it is difficult at this stage to comment on future improvement measures.

(4) According to the information provided by the HKEAA, regardless of their personal background and beliefs, MC members have to comply with the HKEAA's established procedures and follow the curriculum and assessment requirements in a professional manner when setting examination questions to ensure that candidates are assessed by the examination papers in an effective and fair manner.

Concerning the controversies caused by recent media's disclosure of messages posted by HKEAA staff in their personal social media accounts, the HKEAA reiterates that all HKEAA employees are bound by the HKEAA's relevant regulations, procedures, rules and policies when performing their duties. The HKEAA has a mechanism to follow up staff discipline issues. It will follow up the incident fairly and impartially having regard to the relevant facts and the Employee Code of Conduct and regulations. An employee who is found to have committed negligence when performing his duties or compromised professional ethics, integrity and professionalism will be subject to disciplinary actions in accordance with the gravity of the case and the responsibility to be borne. For the sake of procedural justice, the HKEAA will not make further comment at this stage.

(5) The HKEAA Council is actively considering the request for releasing the marking scheme of the examination question concerned.

According to the information provided by the HKEAA, a marking scheme, which specifies the requirements of individual questions, mark allocation and the range of acceptable responses, is prepared for markers as an important reference but should not be regarded as a model answer. The draft marking scheme has to go through a standardisation process. After examination, sample scripts will be selected by the Chief Examiner and Assistant Examiners, who will then review and compare the sample scripts, in order to reach an agreement on the marking principles and standards among markers. Revisions would be made to the marking scheme if necessary. Markers will then be briefed on the assessment objectives and requirements of individual questions in the markers' meeting. Sample scripts will be trial marked by markers to facilitate better understanding of the principles of the marking scheme, so as to ensure the consistency of the marking principles. Teachers and other readers who were not involved in the marking process are advised to interpret the contents of the marking scheme with caution.

Ends/Wednesday, June 10, 2020

Issued at HKT 17:31

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