

**ANGLO-CHINESE JUNIOR COLLEGE**  
**JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION 2015**

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**GENERAL PAPER**

**8807/02**

**Paper 2**

**INSERT**

**1 hour 30 minutes**

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

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This document consists of **3** printed pages.



*Tim Adams writes about nostalgia.*

- 1 Is it healthy to dwell in the past? Up until about 15 years ago most psychologists would have suggested probably not. The habit of living in memory rather than the present, of comparing how things once were with how things are now, was for several centuries thought at best a trait to avoid and at worst a root cause of depressive illness. Nostalgia was the soldiers' malady – a state of mind that made life in the here and now a debilitating process of yearning for that which had been lost: rose-tinted peace, happiness, loved ones. It had been considered a psychological disorder ever since the term was coined by a 17th-century Swiss army physician who attributed the fragile mental and physical health of some troops to their longing to return home – nostos in Greek, and algos, the pain that attended thoughts of it. 5
- 2 Since the turn of this century, however, things have been looking up for nostalgia. It has become a focus of enquiry in university departments across the globe, a whole new field of academic study that takes in sociology and political science as well as psychology. Some of the research has proved the universality of the feeling itself – a new study shows the commonality of nostalgia effects in 18 countries in five continents. Among the measurable effects, nostalgia is shown to be both a driver of empathy and social connectedness, and a potent internal antidote for loneliness and alienation (a fact which has led to the beginnings of nostalgia-based therapies for illnesses that include clinical depression and perhaps even Alzheimer's). 10 15
- 3 Nostalgia seems to be a kind of inbuilt neurological defence mechanism, which can be marshalled to protect us against negative thoughts and situations. Particularly in times of hardship and difficulty, nostalgia compensates for uncomfortable states such as feelings of meaninglessness or a discontinuity between past and present. Nostalgia spontaneously rushes in and counteracts those things. Strong anecdotal evidence exists of women in concentration camps during the Holocaust who responded to starvation by waxing nostalgic about shared meals with their families and arguing about recipes. Scientists describe this effect as being an "as if" loop – a mechanism by which your mind can temporarily affect your perceived body state – linking it to research which showed that people were significantly more likely to generate nostalgic emotions in a cold room than a warm one – and that those emotions had the effect of making the room seem warmer. Concentration camp survivors describe using their memories to temporarily alter their perception of the state they were in. It was not a solution, but the temporary change in perception allowed them to crucially persevere just a bit longer. 20 25 30
- 4 In community experiments, research suggests that nostalgia helps build resources like optimism or inspiration or creativity, which are correlated with mental fortitude. In difficult situations and at life's major transitions, nostalgia grounds us and gives us a base on which to evaluate the present as a temporary state, and in doing so it perhaps builds resilience. Leaving home for the first time, increasingly to study abroad, is among the most powerful of these types of situations. By getting homesick students to describe one particularly meaningful or positive memory, scientists have found that these memories are mostly nostalgic narratives – whether collective or personal – and are predominantly positive experiences. They do have elements of loss, maybe even trauma and sadness. But that is posed in a redemption sequence: for example, "I lost my grandmother, but we went to the funeral and realised how close we are as a family." 35 40
- 5 It seems that as parents, people habitually and subconsciously invoke nostalgia as one technique of helping children through difficult periods – reminding them to think of happier moments as a defence against the present and a hope for the future. Does part of successful parenting lie in trying to lay down experiences that children can refer back to and use in this way – is that the impulse behind memorable birthdays and holidays? One of the strongest predictors is the parents' use of mental time travel. Parents who had encouraged their children to think about past things that had been fun (and also future things that their 45 50

children would do) had children who were always the highest nostalgia-prones. The ability and encouragement to access nostalgia also builds gratitude and connectedness towards others and tends to make children less selfish.

- 6 One problem parents face is that however hard parents might try to engender such feelings, we have little control over what childhood experiences children will actually return to and what memories they will use to create their sense of identity. Reinforcing some formative positive experiences over and over could be one way of attempting to manipulate that subconscious selection process. If there were to be therapeutic uses of nostalgia, they would have to include methods to direct victims of one kind of trauma or another to positive memories. One of the strengths of nostalgia is that even if they have not had a good childhood, most people have at least one nostalgic memory that they cherish and that they can use repeatedly. Once positive memories are instantiated they might have only represented half an hour of one's entire childhood, but we can dwell on them and return to them forever. Nostalgia in this sense is like choosing the neural pathways you want to tread most often, like creating an inexhaustible bank account which is there for you if you want to withdraw from it. 55 60 65
- 7 In strongly nostalgic states, individuals are shown to be more likely to commit to volunteering or other expressions of altruism. Their sense of the value of money is weakened, leading them to make wilful purchases. Couples use shared nostalgia narratives to create and strengthen bonds between them. In group situations those with induced nostalgia not only tend to feel more closely bonded with the group but also more willing to form intimate associations with strangers and to be freer in their thinking. In one experiment, subjects in whom nostalgia had been induced were asked to set up a room for a meeting – those in a nostalgic frame of mind consistently set up the chairs closer than those in the control. In another experiment, those in nostalgic moods were asked to write essays, which were compared in a blind judging process with those of peers, who had no induced feelings of nostalgia. The essays written in a nostalgic state were judged more imaginative and creative (storytellers, professional nostalgics, have long intuited this, not to mention poets). 70 75
- 8 Nostalgic memory is a bittersweet combination of rumination, counterfactual thinking and nostalgia. Rumination and counterfactual thinking are related to despair and perhaps to depression – for instance, using memories to remind oneself of how poorly one has been treated or to reinforce regret. In the grouping of past-oriented thought, nostalgia stands out as adaptive – it is distinct from these negative memories in that it is always related to intimacy maintenance. People want to remind themselves of the people who are no longer here and what they meant. It serves to remind them of what intimacy they have achieved and therefore what they are capable of. 80 85
- 9 Of course advertisers and political speechwriters have long understood the power of collective nostalgia. Is it not the fact that such feelings can also manipulate us into doing things, buying things, voting for things, that in more coldly rational states we might resist? The nostalgists concede this danger certainly exists, particularly in group situations. Nostalgia can certainly be a nationalistic, chauvinistic tool. We have to tread carefully if we use nostalgia as a group therapy. Anything that increases the bonds within the group also has the power to increase the negativity towards other groups. 90