



7A: Red Scarf Girl

Text

Red Scarf Girl by Ji-li Jiang

Introduction to the Text

Jiang Ji-li is an excellent student who lives in Shanghai, China, with her loving family. She has been taught to admire Chairman Mao Ze-dong and respect the Communist Party. A red scarf is the symbol of youthful good citizens. Ji-li and her family are good citizens. However, in 1966, Mao's Cultural Revolution throws the world of 12-year-old Ji-li into chaos. This political movement ruins her family. Jiang describes her experiences in her memoir, *Red Scarf Girl*.

Background and Context

Communism

Communism's major idea is a classless society, where there is no class of people who are rich and no class of people who are poor. Communists think that wealth should belong to people equally. No single person should be richer than another. Communists dislike capitalism, an economic system of private ownership and profit. The United States is one example of a capitalist nation.

Chairman Mao and the Cultural Revolution

After his takeover of China in 1949, Chairman Mao took bold steps to reshape the nation. First, he tried to improve the economy of the country so China would not need products from foreign countries. Then, in the spring of 1966, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution. This movement encouraged people, especially young people, to overthrow old habits, ideas, customs, and

cultural traditions. In *Red Scarf Girl*, Jiang refers to these traditions as "Four Olds." During this time, the communist government shut down schools across the country. It also encouraged people to inform the authorities about neighbors, friends, and family members who seemed to be holding on to Western or capitalist ideas, or who disagreed with or resisted the Communist Party.

The Cultural Revolution lasted for more than a decade. It destroyed China's economy and society. The chaos turned people against one another, and it ruined many lives and futures. Children such as Ji-li lost opportunities for education. Intellectuals were attacked, and some were even killed, in the name of getting rid of "old" beliefs. It was not until the late 1970s that Chinese people began to understand that the movement had not only ruined the country, but had also hurt generations of people.

Word Count: 301

Keywords

communism
capitalism

Cultural
Revolution

Chairman Mao
Ze-dong
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Sources

- "Cultural Revolution," Encyclopedia Britannica, [britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com)
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