

BOOK TITLE: *Red Scarf Girl* **AUTHOR:** Ji-Li Jiang **TYPE OF BOOK:** Autobiography **POINT OF VIEW:** 1st person

SETTING:

Shanghai, China,
during the Cultural
Revolution,
beginning in 1966

CHARACTERS:

Protagonist: Ji-Li Jiang, a 12 year old Chinese girl who enthusiastically supports Chairman Mao. Bright, hard working, talented, happy, with many dreams for the future. Name means “lucky and beautiful.”

Antagonists: The Communist party authorities, represented by Thin Face: cruel, domineering

Others:
Chairman Mao: Even though not physically visible, his presence permeates the story
Ji-Li’s father and mother, participants in the Communist Revolution, ardently love Chairman Mao, relatively wealthy.

Her younger brother and sister
Grandmother, whose husband had been a “landlord,” a particularly hated class in China
Song Po-Po: housekeeper
Her friends An-yi and Chang

Plot Stage 3

Climax: Ji-Li’s home is ransacked as authorities search for the letter. She is promised leniency by Thin Face if she will betray her family by giving up the letter. While she ponders what she should do, the letter is found. Thin Face threatens her future since she would not cooperate.

Plot Stage 2

Conflict, Rising Action: The **Conflict** is introduced when Ji-Li learns that her family has the “wrong” class status. **Will she ever be able to fulfill her dreams?** The **Rising Action** begins when she learns that she is a member of a hated class because her late grandfather was a landlord. She begins to resent her family background because it limits her opportunities. The campaign against the Four Olds begins. Soon Ji-Li’s family is persecuted too, which is astonishing to Ji-Li as her family passionately supports Mao. Her father is arrested for some unknown crime, and Ji-Li is asked to testify against him, but she refuses to make up lies about him. Schools are closed. Ji-Li is sent to work on a rice farm. She is called back for participation in an acting troupe and learns her uncle has written an incriminating letter against the local authorities.

Plot Stage 4

Denouement: Ji-Li’s grandma is forced to sweep the streets as a landlord’s wife. Her mother’s health deteriorates. She worries that her dad will be tortured to death in prison. Ji-Li promises to always take care of her family, who she now considers her most important responsibility. She cares about them more than the dreams she once had.



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THEMES

Family Relationships
Loyalty
Truth
Corrupting Influence of Power

CONFLICT

Man vs. Society, Man vs. Himself
Will Ji-Li Liang be able to fulfill her dreams
in spite of her family’s class status?

Plot Stage 1

Exposition: Ji-Li Liang name means “lucky and beautiful. She feels like the luckiest girl in the world, and is thrilled to be chosen to audition for the Liberation Army dance troupe; however, she is dissuaded by her parents, since her family background will be investigated. She does not understand what the issue is and she is heartbroken. The rest of the family is introduced and the family’s life situation is described. The people of China believe that Mao is doing what is best for the country and most people enthusiastically go along with the Revolution.

Plot Stage 5

Conclusion: Eventually Ji-Li’s father is released from prison, she and her family move to the United States, and she later becomes a college professor. Only after Mao’s death do Ji-Li and the people of China realize they had been brainwashed. They had believed the terrible suffering was a necessary part of making China better. They learn that it really was just a plan to keep Mao strongly in power. The lesson learned is that, “Without a sound legal system, a small group or even a single person can take control of an entire country.”