



Read this historical account and the excerpt from a memoir. Then answer the questions that follow.

China's Cultural Revolution

by Joseph Vitale

1 During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and '70s, China underwent many drastic changes. The leader of the Chinese Communist Party was Mao Zedong, a powerful man who believed that the peasant class represented the best of Chinese society. China had followed the Soviet Union into Communism in 1949. This political system was meant to improve life for the working people, the proletariat. Mao put into effect a series of Five-Year Plans meant to transform the nation.

2 Nearly two decades later, Mao felt that the country was heading in the wrong direction. There were still rich and poor, and the upper classes and the peasants led very different lives. Mao blamed business people and landlords for China's problems. Born to a peasant family, he also blamed teachers and others who did not work on the land. Mao staged a movement he called the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," a period lasting from 1966 to 1976.

3 An important part of this revolution concerned the peasant farmers. For two thousand years, the rural Chinese had lived under the feudal system through which peasants had worked to produce crops for the wealthy landowners. The labor was hard, and the workers earned little income. On top of this, they also had to pay rent, taxes, and fines. From time to time, the peasants rebelled against the feudal lords. In some cases, the farmers began to work for their own benefit. Such people were called "middle peasants," and perhaps there would have been more of them in time. Still, millions of agricultural workers lived in poverty, and their children could not hope for anything better.

4 Under Chairman Mao, there was a new system. Farmland was seized from landowners by the state and established as agricultural collectives. These were groups of farmers who shared the labor and sold crops to the state. In the beginning this seemed like a fair plan: no longer would a wealthy aristocrat treat peasants poorly. Local government would oversee the welfare of the people. However, there were serious problems with the new system. The land was not always managed well, and drought often spoiled the crops. Farmers did not make much money from the state because they had to charge low prices for their produce. As a result, agricultural laborers began to work less hard. The government was slow to recognize these problems; as a consequence, many people starved.

5 There was another dark side to the Cultural Revolution, which was the war between the social classes. Centuries of resentment often led to violence, and peasants sometimes attacked people from higher classes. Many innocent people were seen as class enemies and deprived of their jobs, possessions, and sometimes even their lives.



6 This was especially true in the cities, where Mao's Red Guards carried out a reign of terror. Anyone suspected of having wealth or holding intellectual interests might become a victim. The owner of a building might be arrested and worse; a classroom teacher might be jailed and humiliated, then forced to take on the lowest possible kind of work. The new government saw these people as class enemies. Keeping the upper classes down was also practical for Chairman Mao and his followers because it was a way to retain power for the Communists.

7 Under Mao's leadership, the people were expected to reject the "Four Olds": old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits of the wealthier classes. Anything that reflected Chinese history was to be discarded. This was the "improved" China, where they swept away reminders of the past centuries. This included clothing, pictures, ideas, and ways of life. Many people suffered during these years; government spies were everywhere. Quite a few Chinese people fled the mainland for the island of Taiwan, which was not under Communist control.

8 The Cultural Revolution finally ended in the late 1970s after a period of economic woes. Chairman Mao blamed his former allies, The Gang of Four, for all of China's troubles. Mao died in 1976, and by the following year, the Cultural Revolution was over, leaving historians to weigh its pros and cons.

9 Mao and his political policies have been harshly criticized. That said, his revolution did accomplish a great deal. For centuries, Chinese peasants had suffered terribly, but now they had a voice and some power. A farming family could own the land it worked, and education became available to the masses. These were important changes indeed.

10 Communism also unified the huge nation. No longer did the people engage in civil wars as there were no more rival kingdoms to defend. Instead, China was one nation poised on the brink of economic success and global power. People will probably be debating Mao's legacy for decades, but this one man changed a nation and the balance of world power.

from *Red Scarf Girl*

a memoir by Ji Li Jiang

1 Mom got home from work that evening looking nervous. She whispered to Dad and Grandma, and as soon as we finished dinner, she told us to go outside and play.

2 "We have something to take care of," she said. I knew this had something to do with the Cultural Revolution. I wished she would just say so. We were too old to be fooled like little children. But I didn't say anything and went outside with the others.

3 When it was nearly dark, Ji-yun and I went back home, leaving Ji-young with his friends.



4 As we entered the apartment, I smelled smoke, acrid and choking. I looked around in alarm. But Grandma was sitting alone in the main room, showing no sign of worry.

5 “Grandma, is there a fire?” we shouted anxiously. “Don’t you smell the smoke?”

6 “Hush, hush!” Grandma pulled us to her quickly. “It’s nothing, they’re just burning some pictures.” We looked puzzled. “Your mother heard today that photos of people in old-fashioned long gowns and mandarin jackets are considered fouolds. So your parents are burning them in the bathroom.”

7 “Can we go watch?” I loved looking at pictures, especially pictures of all those uncles and aunts I had never met.

8 Grandma shook her head. I winked at Ji-yun, and we both threw ourselves into her arms, begging and pleading. As always, she gave in, and went to the bathroom to ask Mom and Dad.

9 Mom opened the door a crack and let us in.

10 The bathroom was filled with thick smoke that burned our eyes and made us cough. Dad passed us a glass of water. “We can’t open the window any wider,” he said. “The neighbors might notice the smoke and report us.”

11 Mom and Dad were sitting on small wooden stools. On the floor was a tin washbowl full of ashes and a few pictures disappearing into flames. At Dad’s side was a stack of old photo albums, their black covers stained and faded with age. Dad was looking through the albums, page by page, tearing out any pictures that might be fouolds. He put them in a pile next to Mom, who put them in the fire.

12 I picked up one of the pictures. It was of Dad, sitting on a camel, when he was about six or seven years old. He was wearing a wool hat and pants with suspenders, and he was laughing. Grandma, looking very young and beautiful and wearing a fur coat, was standing beside him.

13 “Mom, this one doesn’t have long gowns or anything,” Ji-yun said. “Can’t we keep it?”

14 “The Red Guards might say that only a rich child could ride a camel. And besides, Grandma’s wearing a fur coat.” She threw it in the fire.

15 Mom was right, I thought. A picture like that was fouolds.

16 The flames licked around the edges of the picture. The corners curled up, then turned brown. The brown spread quickly toward the center, swallowing Grandma, then the camel, and finally Dad’s woolen hat.

17 Picture after picture was thrown into the fire. Each in turn curled, melted, and disappeared. The ashes in the washbowl grew deeper. Finally there were no more pictures left. Mom poured the ashes into the toilet and flushed them away.

18 That night I dreamed that the house was on fire.



Answer the questions. Mark your answers to questions 1–4 on the Answer Form to the right.

Answer Form

1 (A) (B) (C) (D)

2 (A) (B) (C) (D)

3 (A) (B) (C) (D)

4 (A) (B) (C) (D)

**Number
Correct**

4

1 In “China’s Cultural Revolution,” paragraph 4 states that the farm collectives were not managed well. Which of the following sentences from the passage **best** supports this statement?

- A** “Mao put into effect a series of Five-Year Plans meant to transform the nation.”
- B** “For two thousand years, the rural Chinese had lived under the feudal system through which peasants had worked to produce crops for the wealthy landowners.”
- C** “Farmland was seized from landowners by the state and established as agricultural collectives.”
- D** “Farmers did not make much money from the state because they had to charge low prices for their produce.”

2 In “China’s Cultural Revolution,” the author makes many claims. Which of the following claims is **not** supported by evidence?

- A** “Mao blamed business people and landlords for China’s problems.”
- B** “Keeping the upper classes down was also practical for Chairman Mao and his followers because it was a way to retain power for the Communists.”
- C** “This was the ‘improved’ China, where they swept away reminders of the past centuries.”
- D** “For centuries, Chinese peasants had suffered terribly, but now they had a voice and some power.”

3 Which fact from “China’s Cultural Revolution” provides evidence that the Chinese feudal system might have ended eventually without the Cultural Revolution?

- A** Before the Cultural Revolution, the peasants had to pay rent, taxes, and fines.
- B** Before the Cultural Revolution, some farmers began to work for their own gain.
- C** Before the Cultural Revolution, millions of agricultural workers lived in poverty.
- D** Before the Cultural Revolution, most rural peasants worked for a wealthy landowner.



4 Based on both passages, why does the family need to destroy the family photos?

- A** Families could not have photos as part of the Five-Year Plans.
- B** Families are not allowed to show photos of themselves to others.
- C** Photos of people wearing woolen clothing are considered old fashioned.
- D** Photos that represent the old way of life are forbidden.

5 Below are three claims based on the article “China’s Cultural Revolution.”

CLAIMS

	Chairman Mao put into effect a series of Five-Year Plans that improved life for working people.
	Chairman Mao’s Cultural Revolution drastically changed the lives of the Chinese people.
	Chairman Mao showed that wealthy business people and landlords were responsible for China’s problems.

Part A

Draw an X by the claim that is supported by the **most** relevant and sufficient evidence within “China’s Cultural Revolution.”

Part B

Write down two sentences from the article that **best** provide evidence to support the claim selected in Part A.

First sentence: _____

Second sentence: _____



- 6** The mother in *Red Scarf Girl* has heard that long, old-fashioned gowns and mandarin jackets are fourolds. Think about both the memoir and the historical account. Explain why the Communist Party opposed this type of clothing.

- 7** Why might the author of *Red Scarf Girl* agree with author Joseph Vitale's statement that "Mao's Red Guards carried out a reign of terror"?



The Cultural Revolution is presented differently in *Red Scarf Girl* and “China’s Cultural Revolution.” Details in each passage suggest that the authors have differing points of view. Compare and contrast how these presentations reveal each author’s point of view about this revolution.

- explain the author's point of view in *Red Scarf Girl*
- explain the author's point of view in "China's Cultural Revolution"
- compare and contrast the authors' attitudes toward the Cultural Revolution
- use details from each passage in your answer

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