



Political Hegemony: An Analysis of Lisa See's Novel *Dreams of Joy*

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Abstract

Political hegemony is referred as using the power over other groups, in other terms domination is purely led by political leader's coercion. Politics and its leaders have great power to rule the society and it controls every individual. The paper focuses on how the government of the People Republic of China, Chairman Mao's rule affects the regular life of the Chinese in the nineteenth century is analysed through Lisa See's novel *Dreams of Joy*. The novel centers on the journey of the protagonist Joy, the American born Chinese returns to her native land to find her biological father. Through the character Joy, how and what are the ways the politics dominates the community is picturised in the paper. The paper theoretically analysed based on Liberal Theory. Mao's political establishment and its outcome is mirrored through the character Joy.

Key words: Political Hegemony, People Republic of China, Liberalism, Great Leap Forward, People's Commune, and Ideal State.

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A society functions on the laws of politics. Political hegemony is referred as using the power over other groups, in other terms domination is purely led by political leader's coercion. Politics and its leaders have great power to rule the society and it controls every individual. Politics have great power to rule society and it controls every individual. Politics directly or indirectly affects human, social and economic life. Aristotle, the Greek philosopher in his work *The Politics* asserts, "the search for the ideal state and the best constitution". Moreover, Aristotle refers to man as "a political

animal". Political man is poisonous for the nation. He only sees his growth and dignity. To rule the nation, political leaders need to maintain some standards and principles. Aristotle views, "It was the aim of political philosophy to establish standards of social behaviour". Social behaviour changes according to the ruler's decision. The paper focuses on how the government of the People's Republic of China, Chairman Mao's coercion affects the regular life of the Chinese and is analysed through Lisa See's novel *Dreams of Joy*. The novel centers on the journey of the protagonist



Joy, the American-born Chinese returns to her native land to find her biological father. Through the character Joy, how and what are the ways politics affects the community are pictured in the paper.

The research paper is analysed through the political theory of liberalism. The welfare state aims at, the “positive role of the state in securing a dignified life for individuals”. The welfare state provides all happiness and secures the lives of every individual. As far as the state is concerned, Gauba, an author of the book *An Introduction to Political Theory*, writes “that provides for various types of social services for its citizens, e.g. social security, free education, public health, poor relief, supply of essential goods and services like food grains, milk, fuel and transport to the needy at subsidized rates” (27). Chairman Mao desired to equalize Great Britain in production. So with his political coercion, he implements the Great Leap Forward. The Great Leap Forward represents Mao’s energy and interest in the development of the nation in technology and agriculture. Mao first introduced the People’s Commune in 1958. According to this establishment, he strongly believes that the People’s Commune helps the nation's growth. Based on this concept people are supposed to share food in a large hall. At the beginning of this concept, the Chinese were so happy and did voluntary work to satisfaction. In the People’s Commune, everyone shares the same attire. In *Dreams of Joy*, Brigade Leader Lai hangs the new sign. He is the head of that town, the sign explains,
WELCOME TO GREEN DRAGON VILLAGE
MEMBER OF THE DANDELION NUMBER EIGHT
PEOPLE’S COMMUNE

1. PLANT MORE.
 2. PRODUCE MORE.
 3. WORK POINT WILL BE AWARDED ACCORDING TO PHYSICAL STRENGTH AND HEALTH.
 4. ALL PRIVATE HANDICRAFTS AND PRIVATE ENTERPRISES ARE FORBIDDEN.
 5. EAT THREE MEALS A DAY FOR FREE.
- (DOJ 165)

People were happy about the new politics and its goal. But they fail to realize the hegemony of their powerful leader.

Chairman Mao also introduced the Great Leap Forward. According to this movement, every individual should build up the spirit to produce more. They need to work hard in the steel and agricultural industries. Brigade Leader Lai orders the peasants to grow wheat instead of rice. All the experienced peasants resisted but they were scared of the Chinese authorities. For many generations, the peasants grew the rice crop in the cultivated land. However, the government officials forced them to change the cropping method and the grains. Brigade Leader Lai, “Our great Chairman says he wants wheat. Wheat we will give him” (DOJ 197). The country's people are forced to produce wheat where as the rural people are supposed to produce more steel. Every individual should work in all sectors. To produce more Mao instructed Close Planting System in the agriculture land. The American-born Chinese girl Joy realise these suggestions won’t work. Joy the protagonist expresses, “Everyone is afraid to voice too much criticism. No one wants to get in trouble . . . we all put on smiling faces as we go back into the sun to rejoice our work teams” (DOJ 197). In the book, “How Maoism Destroyed Communism”, Geoffrey Hudson provides more interesting details on that, “Under the commune system, peasants may either be required to perform non-agricultural task . . . their living standards have declined” (11). Chairman Mao’s target is to beat Great Britain in Iron and Steel production. Peasants and their family had hard times.

Moreover, the government demanded ‘ten times the normal grain yield’ (DOJ 239). Due to this implementation forced China’s crop fields to produce yield. People began to experience food shortages. Pearl, the mother of Joy, expressed, “Could she be suffering from the same food shortages that we’re experiencing in Shanghai?” (DOJ 247). The ideal state has been destroyed by one man’s ambition. The commune system that Mao introduced has perished. As a result of the failure, Brigade

Leader Lai announced, “meals will no longer be served in the canteen . . . Now you can be with your families again” (DOJ 282). The total political system collapsed in Mao’s period. People had no right to criticize the government and its rule. The entire nation starved to death. Pathetically people started to eat soil. Joy expresses, “Once we tried eating Kwan Yin soil – named after Goddess of Mercy. . . The mud hardened in this stomachs and they died painfully” (DOJ 283). The citizens feel hungry and many family members die. To get food from the ration, the family members hide the dead bodies of the members in their yard.

Liberalism aims to provide basic rights to the individual. According to Gauba, In politics, the Liberal theory is of two types. Individualism and Utilitarianism. “Individualism focused on the individual as a rational creature. It requires individuals dignity” (28). Whereas Utilitarianism refers, to the “ greatest happiness of the greatest number” (28). Chairman Mao fails to share happiness to the great members, instead, he provides hunger and death to the community. His rule is individualistic and aims only for his own dignity and happiness. The life of the society is expressed through the character Joy. She expresses, “My body is as thin as a ginseng root. My hands are as bony as dried twigs” (DOJ 284). The community members are not happy about the current politics. They lost their loved ones in Mao’s period. They are weak and lost their physical strength. Mao failed to create an ideal state for his people.

Moreover, a mass tragedy occurs all over the country. Roderick Mac Farquahar, the British politician writes, “in the fields, bumper harvest of grain, cotton, and other crops awaited collection. A massive tragedy . . . many areas failed to gather in all the harvest” (12). People work more than eleven hours a day with less food. Because of the Great Leap Forward, the mortality rate was doubled. Mao failed to give free education, peace, health, comfort, and happiness to his beloved people. Because of his ambition and selfishness, the whole Chinese nation suffered a great loss. An ideal state

should aim for the happiness of people without any drawbacks. The paper suggests that the political decision should be taken after a long discussion with the experts in the field. The individual’s ambition should not harm poor people. In that way, the government will able to create the perfect ideal state as Aristotle mentioned. I concluded based on this study it is visible that political hegemony has great impacts on the people and the state.

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