

Development of Social Change

As people move towards a more advanced future, they find the limits of the society in which they live. As a society approaches these limits social changes occur to meet the needs of an advancing society. The new model of society represents the needs and desires of the citizens. Such social changes can be as simple as a new clothing fad or as complex as a new farming system designed to lead the society to the ultimate communist society. An unrealistic plan for social change plays a major role in the disasters of Maoist China. When China reached its social limits, the people searched for a new system to take them farther. The answer was a complete remodeling of the social system. The change described in Jasper Becker's *"Selections from Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine"* consisted of an entire redevelopment of the communist system. The power of science was taken out of the hands of the elite few scientists and passed on to the everyday citizens. Malcolm Gladwell's *"The Power of Context Bernie Goetz and the Rise and Fall of New York City Crime"* exposes a model of social change and the influence society has to create social change. Gladwell expands on a model of social change, based on disease and its spread, which suggests that changing the little things in society can lead to a much larger social change, specifically in crime. The model of social change developed by Gladwell begins to explain the situation of famine and disaster in Maoist China yet Mao's attempt to change society through science is a model of change itself. This model of social change appears in Mao's attempt to improve his society through new farming techniques. Social change is like farming rice in that small steps to a new procedure can, when supported by a leader, lead to large scale, unexpected results.

In Gladwell's model of social change, the focus is on a theory he developed based on epidemiological events. Gladwell states "some ideas catch on and spread like wildfire, and others fail to attract widespread attention and wither on the vine" (285). This is an idea he developed when researching the introduction and advancement of the AIDS virus. The same idea appears in Becker's story of Mao's quest for a more perfect communist society

which closely follows the patterns Gladwell develops. In an attempt to create a better way of life for his people Mao leads them to disaster. Mao is introduced to an idea developed by a Soviet scientist named Lysenko. "Lysenko held that plants acquire new characteristics when their environment is changed and that these changes are transmitted to the next generation" (Becker 121). Mao took this new idea and spread it to the people of China as the new wave of farming. As the idea became widely accepted by the Chinese public, it gained power and was put to use. Plants were grown much closer together than they conventionally were grown and the result was famine. This process follows Gladwell's disease based model of social change in which an idea is introduced and spread. Much like the spread of the AIDS virus, Mao's ideas could not be stopped once the spread began. Once the farming breakthrough was exposed, there was little that could be done to stop further spread and the result is disaster. The farming technology introduced by Mao represents the disease from Gladwell's model which when spread to the majority leads to total destruction.

While the story of Mao's disastrous farming technology closely follows Gladwell's theory of social change, boundaries are exposed which limit the possibility for change. As in the process of lowering the crime rate in New York City, the road to social change in communist China is composed of small steps which lead to a much larger outcome. When a project was established to clean up New York, David Gunn was brought in to lead the subway project. Gunn argued that the first step to success was the removal of graffiti from the trains. Gunn said "the graffiti was symbolic of the collapse of the system" (Gladwell 290). He said that until that was gone, crime would continue. He goes on to say "when you looked at the process of rebuilding the organization and morale, you had to win the battle against graffiti" (Gladwell 290). Gunn is saying that it is the small problems in a system which sends larger messages to the public. Mao's plan to improve China's farming system begins to follow Gladwell's model of social change, but reveals the limits to this model. The society will go no farther than Mao, as their leader, plans for it to go. Because

the ideas used to bring about these changes are borrowed from other societies, their limits are known and the society will not advance farther than the idea allows for. As Gladwell showed, his model works well to explain minor social changes such as a fashion fad, but does not work on a much larger scale of taking an entire society to a more advanced level of communism.

Gladwell's model of social change works well when applied to small scale change yet when applied to larger changes the results are significantly limited. Becker documents Mao's plan to take a small step in farming to reach enormous success. Mao plans to plant his crops close together because "with company they grow easily, when they grow together they will be comfortable" (Becker 124). This is a small plan which in Mao's mind will carry his country to prosperity. Mao plans to change a few small things and have his dream of perfection become reality. Because the plan is left to be developed solely by Mao, the results reflect only the limited change Mao plans for. Mao is the creator of this plan for change and the change is limited to what Mao can imagine. A more effective plan for change would allow the advancement to go far beyond the plans of its creator.

When applied to Mao's attempted social change Gladwell's disease based model has obvious limits on its success, yet a better model can be developed to prevent current issues from reaching disastrous proportions similar to that in Maoist China. A model of social change can be developed from the ideas which Becker explains from Maoist China.

Although the people chose to head straight in to change and forget the past, the plan could have been successful if it was approached differently. The Chinese people knew what it took to support the population's agricultural needs. Rather than eliminating the existing process, the Chinese could have continued to farm in traditional fashion and experiment with new technology on the side. In both China and the Soviet Union, propaganda led people to believe good things were being achieved. Becker writes "ignoring Lysenko's repeated failures, the Soviet press continued to trumpet his endless successes" (124). The Chinese and the Soviets were forced to believe that their technology was working and that

the new plans were the answer to their problems. The countries failed to test the new ideas before implementing them on a large scale. If the new technology was successful, it could later be put to use by farmers around the country, but when new ideas failed, little would be lost. Once the new concept was tested and approved, the idea could be spread and the result would be an abundance of crops. Unfortunately the new technology was unsuccessful and too many people had decided to completely abandon original ideas. This left the Chinese in a state of famine with a leader who was incapable of advancing the society.

The Chinese did not follow this model of social change which would have led them to realize the flaws in their ideas, and instead followed their own plans leading only to problems. The model based on gradual growth involving in depth testing could be put to use in issues far larger than Chinese agriculture. This model of change was seen in the appearance of gay pride. Gay pride was not accepted until a group of people decided to put forth the effort and attempt to spread their views. In the initial attempt to spread gay pride, a small number of people began to make displays of their pride in who they are. Flags appeared and began to fly to represent the views of this otherwise sheltered lifestyle. When the public was given chance to react to a small symbol, such as a flag, the gay population was given the opportunity to gauge a response and begin the next step. The people promoting gay pride realized that their introduction of the flag and rainbow were generally accepted so they took the next step to spread their ideas to other people and begin to gain support. People had already seen that gay pride existed and there was no longer a reason to hide who you are. The result was the wide spread appearance of gay pride. Because of the efforts put forth by a few proud people, it is publicly accepted today to display your pride in who you are regardless of who you are.

Gladwell develops a model of social change which can be applied to small scale changes. When the changes are on a much larger level, a different model is needed. Through the application of Gladwell's model in Maoist China, the limits of that model are exposed. It is obvious that to achieve the results Mao attempts to achieve, a much stronger

plan must be developed. A more effective model can be developed to solve problems and create social change on a much larger and more successful level. This well developed model of social changes allows the society to go as far as it can and not be restricted by the dreams of a narrow minded leader. The plans developed in this new model will prove to be successful in most attempts to change the way a society works.