

# From Negative to Descriptive: An Approach to Marxist Ideological Theory

Yingli Han\*

School of Marxism, Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing, China  
hanyingli66@163.com  
\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** *The theory of "ideology" has experienced a process of continuous enrichment and development in the history of Marxist development. Clarifying the evolution of the concept of "ideology" is the basic premise for a correct understanding of the theory of Marxist ideology. The connotation of ideology has gone through a process from negativity to descriptiveness from Marx's "false consciousness" to Lenin's "scientific ideology". On the basis of proposing the theory of "scientific ideology", Lenin further elaborated the theory of ideological leadership. Its core essentials include that the proletarian party's grasp of ideological leadership is its basic principle, the unity of criticality and construction is the essence of its theory, and the theory of ideological indoctrination is its important method and strategy.*

**Keywords:** *Ideology; Ideological leadership; Critical and constructive; Indoctrination Theory*

## 1. Introduction

"Ideology" is an important category formed with the development of modern Western philosophy. As a philosophical concept, "ideology" was first proposed by the French philosopher Tracy in the early 19th century. It has experienced a process from negativity to descriptiveness from Marx to Lenin. The early expositions of ideology by Marx and Engels were mainly based on the critical exposure of the "false ideology" of the bourgeoisie. In their view, ideology is an upside-down and distorted response to real society, a false concept system that covers up real social relations. "If in all ideologies, people and their relationships are imaged upside down as if they were in a camera. Then this phenomenon is also produced from the historical process of people's life, just as the reflection of objects on the retina is directly produced from the physiological process of people's life. "[1] This classic expression in "The German Ideology", from an epistemological perspective, clarifies Marx and Engels' claims about ideology as an inverted and false knowledge.

## 2. Criticism of "False Ideology" by Marx and Engels

According to Marx's concept of "society as a whole", the general social structure includes the economic base and the superstructure, and the latter itself contains two levels, namely, politics and law, and ideology. Consider the overall structure of society as a building, with the "basic structure" below and the "two-story building" above. This expression contains a spatial metaphor, implying that the floors above cannot exist in a vacuum, but must just rest on the foundation, which endows the foundation with a functional identity, that is, the "final decisive role" of the economic foundation. So what kind of functional label is given to the "floor" of the superstructure? Engels made a clear exposition on this issue in his later years. As various social forces began to compete for ideological discourse power, Marxist ideological discourse power was faced with severe challenges. Engels expanded and deeply explained the efficacy of ideology, and further developed Marxist ideological theory. In 1886, Engels wrote "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of German Classical Philosophy", which was published in *Neue Zeit*, inverting Hegel's formulation of the fundamental problems of philosophy, "All philosophy, especially It is a major fundamental problem of modern philosophy, and it is the relationship between thinking and existence." [2] In simple and clear language, the basic question of the relationship between thinking and existence is given universal meaning, and the different functions of thinking and existence are highlighted, which provides a theoretical basis for the Marxist ideological theory to emphasize the principle of party spirit. In a letter to Josef Bloch, Engels pointed out: "The

economic situation is the foundation. But there are elements of the superstructure that influence the course of the historical struggle, and in many cases primarily determine the form of that struggle. The various political forms of the class struggle and their results - the constitution established by the victorious class after the victory, etc. The various legal forms and the reflection in the minds of the participants of all these actual struggles, political, legal and philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into doctrinal systems. "[3] It further emphasizes the various factors of the superstructure, especially the active role of ideology.

### **3. Plekhanov Elucidated the Three Functions of Ideology**

Plekhanov, as the first theorist who spread Marxist thought in Russia, further developed Engels' theory of ideology in his later years, focusing on the three functions of ideology. First, ideology has a mobilizing function. In response to the criticism and derogation of the communist ideal by the liberal populists and legal Marxists at that time, Plekhanov emphasized that "the ideal is also the reality, but this is the reality of tomorrow, the reality that will happen." [4] Second, ideology has a cohesive function. Plekhanov attached great importance to the problem of instilling the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat, believing that it could produce great cohesion and centripetal force. It is necessary to gradually "instill in the proletariat more and more the consciousness that the interests of the proletariat are opposed to the interests of its exploiters". [5] Third, ideology has a revolutionary critical function. Plekhanov regards all theories that can clarify class consciousness as "tools of revolution" and "ideological weapons of struggle". It is proposed that "revolutionary thought is a kind of explosive, it cannot be replaced by any explosive in the world". [6]

### **4. Lenin Gave A Descriptive Elaboration of Ideology and Put Forward the Concept of "Scientific Ideology"**

According to the needs of theory and practice, Lenin put forward the concept of "scientific ideology" on the basis of the ideological theories of Marx, Engels and Plekhanov. He made a descriptive exposition of ideology and deeply analyzed the function of ideology. In "What are "friends of the people" and how do they attack Social Democrats? ", Lenin proposed that "ideological social relations are nothing but the superstructure of material social relations." [7] "Social relationship of thought" here actually refers to "social relationship of ideology", and it can be inferred that "social relationship of ideology" is a "superstructure" based on "social relationship of material". From this, Lenin came to the basic definition of ideology "ideology is the superstructure". In "What to Do?" Lenin further pointed out, "The consciousness of the working masses can only become true class consciousness when all other manifestations of every other social class in the ideological, spiritual and political life are observed in the light of various concrete and indeed political facts and events that concern everyone." [8] It unifies ideology and Marxism, and lays the foundation for the concept of "scientific ideology". In "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism" Lenin pointed out that "any ideology is inseparable from and limited by historical conditions, ideology and objective truth and absolute nature are consistent and unconditional. Socialist ideology must be a combination of science and ideology, and the two are highly unified. "[9] The concept of "scientific ideology" was used for the first time.

### **5. Lenin Further Elaborated the Theory of Ideological Leadership**

Mastering ideological leadership is an important mission of the proletarian party, which reflects the principle of party spirit of ideology. Marx pointed out, "Submission and concession to bourgeois ideology will inevitably lead to the weakening and loss of the leadership of the proletariat." [10] Lenin also had a similar statement, "To defeat all the exploitation and enslavement of the bourgeoisie is not only to defeat the bourgeoisie militarily and politically, but also to defeat the bourgeoisie ideologically at the same time." [11] It can be seen that if the proletariat is to fulfill its historical mission, it must not only break the economic and political oppression and exploitation of the bourgeoisie, but also wage a resolute struggle against the bourgeoisie in the ideological field. In "What to Do?", Lenin argued when exposing the reformist error of the Economists in confining their struggle to the economic sphere: "Social-Democracy leads the working class in a struggle not only to gain favourable conditions for the sale of labour power, but to destroy the social system that compels the poor to sell their bodies to the rich. It follows from this that the Social-Democrats cannot only be confined to economic struggles, but cannot tolerate organizing economic exposure as their main activity. We should actively educate the

working class and develop their political consciousness. " In order to further demonstrate the importance of advanced theories as the principles for the founding of proletarian parties, Lenin also quoted Engels' exposition, "The great struggle of Social-Democracy does not have two forms (political and economic), as is commonly held in our country, but three forms, and the two struggles are side by side with the theoretical struggle." [12] Call on the Russian Social Democratic Party to study and publicize advanced Marxist theory, resist all kinds of erroneous ideological trends that oppose and distort Marxism, closely integrate Marxist theory with the Russian labor movement, and promote the Russian revolution to victory.

Based on the Russian revolutionary practice and a thorough understanding of Marxist theory, Lenin put forward the famous thesis that "without revolutionary theory, there will be no revolutionary movement." [13] It expounds the importance of scientific theoretical guidance to the proletarian revolution and the construction of the proletarian party. After the publication of the Communist Manifesto in 1848, the proletariat stepped onto the stage of history and shouldered the great historical task of overthrowing capitalism and realizing communism. The establishment of the First International, the Paris Commune and the Second International shook the capitalist world system. However, after the death of Marx and Engels, various forms of opportunism emerged in the democratic parties of the Second International represented by Bernstein, and even the social democrats in some countries abandoned Marxism and embarked on the road of capitalist reform. Lenin had a keen insight in the early days of leading the revolutionary struggle in Russia: if the proletarian party abandons Marxism, it will be swayed by opportunism, leading to disorganized organization, political backwardness, and ultimately loss of its advanced nature and combat effectiveness. Therefore, only by arming and building a political party with Marxism can we resolve various intra-party crises in a timely manner, clarify the goal of struggle, improve combat effectiveness, and promote the continuous development of the proletarian revolutionary movement.

The unity of criticality and constructivity is the essence of Lenin's ideological leadership. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the contradictions of capitalism in Russia were increasingly intensified. Under the influence of Western European revisionism represented by Bernstein, there appeared in Russia "populists", "economists" and "legal Marxism". This distortion and slander of Marxist theory has set off an anti-Marxist trend, severely challenged Marxism, and affected the ideological stability of the proletarian revolutionary ranks. Lenin realized that the bourgeoisie not only exploited and oppressed the vast number of workers economically and politically, but also deceived and deceived workers in ideological concepts, in order to achieve the goal of making them submit to the rule of the bourgeoisie. Against this, the proletariat must form its own ideology, and it must fight the ideology of the bourgeoisie in an either-or battle.

An important theme of Lenin's ideological theory at the beginning of its formation was to criticize ideology. As early as the autumn of 1888, Lenin participated in the Marxist group founded by N. Ye Fedoseyev and others, and began to accept Marxist theory. It was also from this period that Lenin studied a lot of Marxist literature, read the first volume of Marx's "Das Kapital" and many other important works and notes of Marx and Engels. The early spread of Marxism in Russia was attacked by liberal populists. At the end of 1893, Nikon Mikhailovsky and S. N. Yushakov, among others, wrote an article in the magazine "Russian Fortune" attacking Marxist theory and Social Democrats under the name of "friends of the people". This seriously affected the Russian proletarian revolutionary movement. "What are "friends of the people" and how do they attack the Social Democrats?", written in 1894, is an important text by Lenin criticizing populism and defending the scientific nature of the Marxist world outlook. In the article, Lenin quoted a lot of the original texts of Marx's works, refuted Nikon Mikhailovsky's idealistic view of history and S.N. Yushakov's economic theory, and profoundly explained the basic principles of historical materialism. Lenin also exposed the distortions of Marxism by the Economist and legal Marxism through a series of polemics, and clarified the basic theory of Marxism. This kind of criticism was very necessary in Russia at that time, not only to defend the purity of Marxism, but also to ensure the correct direction of the Russian proletarian revolutionary movement.

## 6. Conclusions

Regarding the issue of ideological leadership, both Marx and Engels have made clear statements. "The ruling ideas of any age are always the ideas of the ruling class." "Dominant thoughts are nothing but the conceptual expression of dominant material relations, but dominant material relations in the form of thoughts. This is, therefore, the conceptual expression of those relations that make a certain class the ruling class, and thus the ruling thought of that class." [15] This is the classic exposition of

Marx and Engels on ideological leadership respectively. On this basis, Lenin further pointed out that "Since there was leadership in the past, Marxists, as opposed to all kinds of people who are divorced from the revolution, must adhere to the idea of leadership now and in the future. This ideological task is completely adapted to the present material conditions. These material conditions . . . are continuing to build, expand and consolidate this class (i.e., the proletariat - citing note), and are strengthening its retaliation against all 'expressions of bourgeois influence'. "[16] That is to say, in a society where classes exist, there will be a struggle for leadership and there will be class struggle. In order to win the proletariat in the process of fighting against the bourgeoisie, it must firmly grasp the leadership of ideology. When the Marxist ideological theory developed to the period of Leninism, the construction of ideological leadership has become the core issue.

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