



Three Dimensions of the Practical Turn in Ideological Theory

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Abstract

Marx and Engels, based on practical materialism and employing the philosophical paradigms of historical materialism and dialectics, developed the theory of ideology, marking its first practical turn. Grounded in the philosophical paradigm established by Marxism, Gramsci later formulated the theory of ideological hegemony, laying the cornerstone for Western Marxist ideology theory. Western scholars further advanced this practical turn by exploring the dimensions of popular culture, science and technology, and modernization.

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1. Introduction

In the development of Marxist ideological theory, the "practical turn" has become a core transformation within this field. Marx and Engels initially redefined the nature of ideology from the perspective of practical materialism, using historical materialism and dialectics to reveal its fundamental social function. This theoretical shift not only shaped the evolution of Marxist thought itself but also laid a philosophical foundation for later thinkers such as Gramsci and other Western Marxists. Building upon this foundation, they introduced concepts with deeper political and philosophical implications, such as ideological hegemony, thus moving ideological theory from pure philosophical speculation toward concrete social and historical inquiry. The following section will explore the origins of this practical turn in detail, as well as the foundational concepts and developmental path of ideology theory within the Marxist philosophical framework.

1.1. The First Practical Turn: Basic Theories of Ideology within the Marxist Philosophical Perspective

Marx adopted the term "ideology", originally coined by Destutt de Tracy from a philosophical standpoint, but he redefined its concept and implications in the context of social history and real-life experiences. Using practical materialism as the philosophical foundation, he, together with Engels, reshaped ideology theory through the paradigms of historical materialism and dialectics, establishing a foundational model for its practical orientation at a macro level.

1.1.1. Establishing the Theoretical Premise: Practical Materialism

In his "Theses on Feuerbach", Marx posited "practice" as the foundation and ultimate aim of philosophical theory, shifting philosophy from pure speculation to practical, sensory-based reality. This shift brought philosophy from a detached, mystical "heaven" back down to the tangible, everyday "earth", initiating an epistemological and methodological transformation. Marx criticized materialists, including Feuerbach, for understanding "objects, reality, and sensory perception" merely in "objective or observational forms". Instead, he argued that these should be comprehended as "sensory human activities" and "practices", condemning Feuerbach for failing to grasp the importance of "revolutionary, practical-critical activity". He asserted that "all of society is fundamentally practical" and that the essential task of philosophers is not merely to "interpret the world" but to "change it" (Marx & Engels, 1995, pp. 54-57) ^[1].

In Marx's discourse, philosophy no longer served solely as a speculative theory but rather emerged as a practical theory rooted in reality, one that seeks to understand and transform the existing world. This foundation established the fundamental premise and logical base for Marxist ideology theory.

1.1.2. Basic Theory of Ideology within the Marxist Philosophical Perspective

Marx and Engels, adopting the frameworks of historical materialism and dialectics, fundamentally unveiled the essence of ideology. They articulated its basic properties, implications, categories, functions, and its role and position within the historical process.

(1) Revealing the Nature of Ideology from an Epistemological Perspective: "False Consciousness" Generated by "Pure Thought"

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels use the paradigm of practical materialism to expose the nature of ideology. They critique German philosophy, particularly the speculative foundations of the "Hegelian system," noting that "all issues" within German critical philosophy originate in this speculative basis. They assert that German philosophical critiques predominantly begin with "actual religion and genuine theology", but only address religious perspectives. As a result, all conclusions about politics, law, morality, and consciousness derive a "mystical and speculative character" (Marx & Engels, 1995, pp. 64-66)^[3], forming an ideology that distorts or obscures the objective realities of society, thereby resulting in a false or inverted consciousness.

Marx and Engels argue that a scientific understanding of ideas and consciousness requires a departure from idealistic, speculative foundations. Instead, it requires returning to human history, which has often been misinterpreted or neglected by ideological constructs, and examining it through a practical materialist philosophical paradigm. Accordingly, they shift the study of ideology from the realm of abstract thought to the realm of human history, centering on real individuals and their practical activities, expanding the focus from cognition to history and from theory to practice.

After Marx's death, Engels, in a letter to Franz Mehring, further clarified the "false" nature of ideology by analyzing it through three dimensions: content, motive, and form of production. Regarding form, Engels explains that ideology is a process completed by so-called "thinkers" through a "false consciousness." On the motivational level, Engels suggests that the true driving force behind ideology is often unknown to the thinker, stemming from what the thinker has "imagined falsely or superficially". In terms of content, Engels argues that ideology is a product of the thinker's "pure thought," where thinkers engage only with the intellectual materials produced by thought itself, failing to probe the "roots beyond thought". Consequently, the "most stubborn facts" are obscured. Many individuals are misled by the "seeming independence of national institutions, legal systems, and diverse ideological fields", failing to perceive these as reflections of objective reality in the human mind.

(2) Basic Attributes and Connotations of Ideology

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels examine the process of the generation, transformation, and development of consciousness and ideology, focusing on the four fundamental factors of real individuals' material productive

activities, material living conditions, and primary historical relations, all verifiable through "pure empirical methods". This approach rejects the idealist historical assertion that "consciousness determines life," and instead establishes the historical materialist premise that "life determines consciousness." From an ontological perspective, they elucidate the essential attributes and implications of consciousness and ideology.

Marx and Engels point out that the production of "thought, ideas, and consciousness" is intertwined from the beginning with people's "material activities," "material interactions," and "the language of real life." Concepts like "politics, law, morality, religion, and metaphysics" manifest as expressions of "people's imagination, thinking, and mental interactions," which are spiritual productions based on language and are, fundamentally, "direct products of people's material actions". The "consciousness" generated by the thinking of "real, active people" is merely the awareness of their "existence" in their real life process. Across all ideologies, the relationship between "existence" and "consciousness" is shaped within the "historical process of people's lives," even if it may appear "inverted" at times. Additionally, concepts like "morality, religion, metaphysics, and other ideologies," along with the corresponding forms of consciousness, are products of real human thinking and society, determined by social reality rather than existing independently (Marx & Engels, 1995, pp. 72-73)^[4].

Thus, Marx and Engels outline the generative nature of ideology, and though they do not explicitly define "ideology," three key connotations can be derived from their discussion: (1) it is a reflection of real-life processes or objective social existence in the human mind; (2) it is a social product, borne from the need for interpersonal interaction and language as its vehicle; and (3) it is a mental production of human thought, appearing as various forms of consciousness—politics, law, morality, religion, art, philosophy, and metaphysics—falling under the domain of the "ideological superstructure" (Yu, 2009, pp. 68-69)^[2].

(3) The Ontological Perspective of Ideological Categories and Practical Function

In the *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx explains that "the relations of production" occurring within the social production of life correspond to "a certain stage of development of the material productive forces." These relations, as a whole, form the "economic structure of society," upon which rests the "legal and political superstructure," as well as the "definite forms of social consciousness" that align with this structure and are conditioned by the "mode of production of material life." Concurrently, "the social existence of individuals determines their consciousness," and "the entire vast superstructure" may change, quickly or slowly, with "changes in the economic foundation." Forms of ideology—"legal, political, religious, artistic, or philosophical"—likewise undergo corresponding transformations, and these changes must be explained through the "material contradictions of life" and the "current conflicts between productive forces and production relations" (Marx & Engels, 1995, pp. 32-33)^[1].

Here, Marx treats ideology as a part of ideas or consciousness that falls within the "ideological superstructure" and forms part of the larger superstructure. Ideology is an objective reflection of social existence in human thought, creating a societal structure hierarchy of "social production—economic

foundation—legal and political superstructure—ideology,” endowing it with a practical function that plays a role in social and historical transformations.

In his later years, Engels, addressing skepticism, elaborated on the ability of ideology, though constrained by the economic base, to influence it to varying degrees and types. Through historical materialism and dialectics, he demonstrated how ideology interacts with multiple factors to participate in historical creation. Moreover, ideology can determine the forms of class struggle to some extent and contribute to the defense and consolidation of political power through its own development, thus affirming its political-philosophical implications. This perspective highlights the agency and practical-political function of ideology within the dynamics of class struggle and political power (Marx & Engels, 1995) ^[3].

(4) The Historical Agency of Ideology and Its Counteractive Influence on Economic Development

In response to critics who argued that Marx denied the independent historical development of ideological domains or their impact on history, Engels, in a letter to Franz Mehring, employed historical dialectics to emphasize the interaction between various factors within historical processes. Engels acknowledged that while “economic conditions are foundational,” factors within the “superstructure,” such as “the political forms and results of class struggle,” also influence the progression of historical struggles and, in many cases, determine their specific forms. After a victorious class establishes a constitution, “political, legal, and philosophical theories, along with religious views,” further evolve as well. In creating history, “all these factors” interact, with “economic preconditions ultimately decisive,” yet “political and other factors” also play significant roles (Marx & Engels, 1995, pp. 695-698) ^[4].

Engels also affirmed the mutual influence between ideology and the economic base, viewing ideology as exerting a counteractive force on the economy that “can alter the economic base to some extent.” For instance, state power can influence economic development in three distinct ways: by fostering growth in alignment with economic trends, by impeding progress in opposition to these trends, or by introducing uncertainty through interventions that either disrupt the established direction of economic development or set new ones.

1.2 Advancing the Practical Turn: The Theory of Ideological Hegemony in Political Philosophy

Economic determinism within the Second International reduced the counteractive role of ideology on the economic base in Marxist theory to merely a “mechanical, passive reaction” or an “incidental phenomenon.” This interpretation, which Murphy and Nomad termed “the economic reductionism of Marxist philosophy,” framed ideology as an “essentially linear deterministic relationship,” suggesting that it “has no real effect within historical processes” (Yu, 2009, pp. 236-237; Yang, 2009, p. 155) ^[2, 5].

Engels, in his later years, addressed distortions that misconstrued the Marxist materialist conception of history as claiming “that economic factors alone are determinative in history.” In his letter to Joseph Bloch, Engels first acknowledged that he and Marx were partly responsible for “sometimes placing too much emphasis on economic aspects” for the younger generation. However, he clarified

that “in rebutting our opponents, we often had to emphasize the main principle that they denied,” and thus did not always have the “time, place, or opportunity to sufficiently address the other interacting factors” (Marx & Engels, 1995, p. 698) ^[1]. Engels explained that Marx’s early emphasis on the determining role of economic factors within history was necessary to critique historical idealism, highlight the principles of historical materialism, and strategically assess the development of capitalism.

An early representative of Western Marxism, Antonio Gramsci, criticized this reductionist understanding of economic determinism. He argued that the specific theories within the foundational Marxist philosophical paradigm carry the characteristics of their historical period and stage of development. The relationship between ideology (the “ideological superstructure”) and the economic base, as defined by Marx and Engels, reflected the historical conditions of free-market capitalism. Gramsci opposed a dogmatic interpretation of Marxism that overlooked its historical context. Building on the ideological theories of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Lukács, and Korsch, Gramsci reconsidered the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure by adopting a methodological principle known as the “two impossibilities.” This principle served as a foundation for his theory of ideological hegemony, which deepened and extended the political-philosophical dimensions of ideology from an ontological perspective, revealing the mechanisms underlying the persistence of capitalism and providing guidance for proletarian revolutionary movements.

1.2.1. Reflection on the Relationship between the Economic Base and Superstructure

With the shift from laissez-faire capitalism to what Lenin termed “monopoly capitalism” and Gramsci called “Fordist (organized) capitalism,” capitalism transitioned from free-market competition to organized production? This change manifested in the concentration of financial capital and the emergence of trusts and syndicates. State interventions in capital markets became increasingly prevalent in both political and cultural spheres, and the conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat shifted from “irreconcilable” antagonism to a relatively more “harmonious” state, weakening the proletariat’s class consciousness and revolutionary will (Yang, 2009, p. 156) ^[5]. Gramsci argued that the political, economic, and cultural relationships in Fordist capitalism form an integrated whole, necessitating a break from “linear thinking” to analyze the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure. He drew on the “totality” philosophy proposed by Lukács and Korsch. Marx’s “two impossibilities” principle states that “humanity always sets itself only those tasks it is able to solve,” and the emergence of such tasks is premised upon “the material conditions for solving them already existing or at least in the process of formation” (Marx & Engels, 1995, p. 33) ^[3]. Gramsci adopted this framework to define the “two impossibilities” as a methodological principle for analyzing the relationship between the economic base and superstructure: “No society sets tasks for itself unless the necessary and sufficient conditions for their solution are either present or at least in formation,” and a society “will neither dissolve nor be replaced” until “all the life-forms contained within its internal relations have been fully realized” (Kolakowski, 1978, p. 177; Yang, 2009, p. 159) ^[5].

The contradiction and dynamic interactions between productive forces and relations of production, and between the economic base and superstructure, are the sources of social transformation. The “internal relationships” among various social structural factors form the necessary and sufficient conditions for resolving social tasks and achieving social movements. The key to analyzing social tasks and movements lies in understanding their evolving “internal relationships” rather than rigidly or dogmatically interpreting them. Simply put, the resolution of social tasks, the success of social movements, and the replacement of social forms are not, as the Second International suggested, determined solely by economics but by multiple factors.

With this new methodological principle, Gramsci not only acknowledged the foundational role of the economy and the agency of the superstructure but also emphasized the “motivation of consciousness.” Within a framework of totality and social pluralistic determinism, Gramsci examined the power struggles within social structural factors related to the economic base. He argued that historical transformations result from an integrated whole formed by the alignment of these forces, with collective will and ideas playing a crucial role in this process. In the laissez-faire capitalism phase, the economic base and the superstructure functioned relatively independently. In the Fordist (organized) capitalism phase, however, the economic “base” of production relations did not straightforwardly determine the “superstructure” of human consciousness (Rehmann, 2003, p. 51) ^[6]. As state interventions in capital markets and organized production intensified, interactions between the economic base and the superstructure became more frequent and diversified. In these power struggles, the economy serves as a prerequisite and foundation, while the collective will and ideas of social classes or groups become vital to the resolution of tasks and the success of movements. In many cases, consciousness and ideology demonstrate motivational force.

In the context of underdeveloped productive forces, a weak economic base, and a stark disparity in power between opposing forces, the collective will or ideology of the proletariat and its political party was undeniably a key factor in the success of China’s New Democratic Revolution as well as the subsequent socialist revolution, construction, and reform.

1.2.2. The Theory of Ideological Hegemony from a Political Philosophical Perspective

In reflecting on the relationship between the economic base and superstructure, Gramsci integrates the historical features of capitalism, viewing the components of social structure as an organic whole. He sees ideology evolving from something “imposed” to something “organic,” becoming an indispensable part of the social structure capable of influencing economics and organizing production. Gramsci then raises a critical question: “How can the masses be organized through ideology to achieve a common will?” (Yang, 2009, p. 167) ^[5]. To answer this, he expands the meaning of ideology and establishes the theory of ideological hegemony.

First, Gramsci defines ideology as a “worldview implicitly revealed in art, law, economic behavior, and all aspects of individual and collective life.” This encompasses four interconnected and hierarchical levels—philosophy, religion, common sense, and folklore. The latter two constitute the cultural background of everyday practice and represent a

“common-sense” worldview, described by Gramsci as “spontaneous philosophy” or “non-reflective ideology” that merges seamlessly with daily life. In contrast, philosophy and religion form a “system of ideas,” or “reflective ideology,” shaped by intellectuals and constituting an “organic” part of ideology (Yu, 2009, pp. 237-238; Yang, 2009, p. 168) ^[2, 5]. In Gramsci’s framework, ideology originates from social reality yet has the capacity to guide life through its worldview and values, which serve a practical function.

Second, Gramsci emphasizes that ideology is not a random, false consciousness on an individual level; rather, it is a structured “value foundation” created and disseminated by intellectuals, expressing the collective beliefs and will of a social group. This ideology can organize the masses and “create a domain in which people act, gain awareness of their positions, and struggle accordingly” (Sun, 2012, p. 52). Therefore, individuals must engage in social practice and participate in real-life social settings to adopt a collectively endorsed worldview and values, thereby integrating into a “shared life” and “struggling” for collective interests. Gramsci situates ideology within political philosophy and divides it into two levels: a “social psychological, non-reflective” level for the masses and a “system of ideas” level for intellectuals. Between these exists a flexible field, where intellectuals, through organized dissemination, develop and propagate ideology, rallying the masses to collectively construct a shared reality. Thus, in Gramsci’s framework, ideology is “organized,” characterized by “educational, creative, universal, and identifying” qualities, making the establishment of ideological hegemony a subject of great theoretical depth.

Third, the expanded meaning of ideology inherently links it to hegemony. Gramsci argues that ideological hegemony is the “dominant position of a class’s worldview and values within the domain of consciousness, allowing them to control and influence the minds of the masses, who then genuinely believe in their worldview and values.” He asserts that “ideological hegemony” is a precondition for a class’s political power: it must be seized before capturing power and then exercised to maintain ongoing “leadership” (Sun, 2012, pp. 62-64). Gramsci deepens the political-philosophical implications of ideology from an ontological perspective, positing that the failure of the European proletarian revolution stemmed from a lack of “ideological hegemony.” Capitalism, however, was able to revive after economic crises because the bourgeoisie not only held “ideological hegemony” but wielded it with flexibility. The proletariat must first seize “ideological hegemony,” occupying the ideological space to undermine the bourgeoisie’s dominance in ideology, creating the conditions necessary to gain political leadership and establish a proletarian state.

2. The Three Dimensions of the Practical Turn in Ideological Theory and Their Internal Relations

Marx and Engels initially achieved the practical turn in ideology theory, establishing a political-philosophical framework from an ontological perspective. Gramsci, building on this foundation, developed the theory of ideological hegemony, laying the cornerstone for Western Marxist political philosophy. Western scholars, including Adorno, Althusser, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas, and Leszek Kolakowski, incorporated historical characteristics of different periods to integrate ideological hegemony with popular culture, science and technology, and modernization.

In doing so, they further advanced the practical turn of ideological theory.

2.1. The Dimension of Popular Culture: Popular Culture as Ideology

Marx and Engels argued that the ruling class not only controls material forces but also holds intellectual power, and this domination requires mastery of both economic leadership and ideological or cultural power. Within Gramsci's framework of ideological hegemony, in the Fordist (organized) capitalism phase, the union between ideology and individuals (intellectuals and the masses), along with the organic merging of "systems of thought" and "common sense," enables the ruling class's worldview and values to become the "core value system" of the entire society. This system not only controls the minds of the masses but also gains their internal, genuine acceptance as "common sense" within the entire social order.

The ruling class skillfully uses the material carriers of ideology—such as education, family, mass media, unions, political parties, and other civic organizations—to spread its worldview and values through intellectuals, deeply embedding these ideas into everyday customs and transforming them into the "common sense" of the social order. These customs and "common sense" hold a rich cultural foundation and are closely intertwined with popular culture, helping to strengthen social cohesion, integration, and stability. This shift allows Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony to extend into the realm of popular culture, revealing the "dynamic process through which cultural practices intertwine with politics and ideology," thus realizing the cultural practical turn in ideology theory.

Gramsci believed that the proletarian revolution must seize cultural and ideological leadership to achieve political leadership. Inspired by Gramsci's cultural dimension of ideological hegemony, Adorno and Horkheimer argued that "popular culture is the ideological control mechanism within Fordist capitalist society." Kolakowski also stated, "Workers can only achieve political power by attaining cultural 'hegemony'" (Yang, 2009, p. 241) ^[5]. Drawing on this insight, establishing and consolidating class power requires not only economic and military "hard" power but also ideological and cultural "soft" power, including ideas, political systems, and values. For China, this means not only maintaining stable economic growth and strengthening national defense but also promoting "core social values," innovating popular cultural practices, advancing the flourishing of Chinese socialist culture, and occupying ideological territory to counter Western ideological infiltration that uses popular culture as a vehicle.

2.2. The Dimension of Science and Technology: Science and Technology as Ideology

In Gramsci's framework, intellectuals are not limited to traditional knowledge producers and disseminators of scientific and cultural knowledge. They also include "technical intellectuals, managers, practical scientists, and technicians directly involved in the formation of production and state policies" (Rehmann, 2003, p. 34) ^[6]. These individuals are modern "organic intellectuals" with specialized skills that permeate various layers of economic life. Compared to the "common sense" of everyday practice, the intellectuals' "system of thought" represents a form of "science," and ideology is a fusion of "common sense" and

"science." Intellectuals, as the carriers and creators of ideology, are comprehensive talents equipped with scientific knowledge and technical skills. Within Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony, science and technology also possess an ideological function.

Structuralist Marxist Louis Althusser argued that scientific theory is established by first "discarding ideological frameworks." Science then develops into "free science within historical necessity," by continually "breaking away from those ideological elements that attempt to surveil, attack, or entwine it." Scientific knowledge proceeds "from abstract to concrete," whereas ideology operates conversely, abstracting "pure essence" from "specific individuals" (Yu, 2009, pp. 281-282) ^[2]. The evolution from ideology to pure science marks a qualitative leap forward, one that requires continual "struggle" with ideology. The key to this process is "theoretical practice," and such "practice" broadly includes not only scientific but also pre-scientific, or "ideological" theoretical practice. In other words, the practice of scientific theory emerges through the critique, reform, and processing of ideology, meaning that from a developmental perspective, science itself can be seen as a form of ideology.

In the 1870s and 1880s, as the ideology of free exchange began to disintegrate and the social order of market systems became disrupted, Habermas argued that "the increasing independence of technology transformed science and technology into the primary productive force." The bourgeoisie adopted science and technology as a rationalizing "compensation mechanism," establishing it as a new form of legitimate ideology that replaced "free exchange" and corrected market deviations, thus regulating the "dysfunctional state activities" (Yu, 2009, p. 288) ^[8]. Under the influence of science and technology, capitalism's productive capacity grew, and social production and exchange relations, as well as the social order and state functions, transitioned from disorder to regulation. Based on this, Marcuse observed that "technology and science also function ideologically" (Yu, 2009, p. 289) ^[2].

Following World War II, science and technology became increasingly integrated, and their regulatory impact on economic, political, cultural, and social life grew more prominent, deeply shaping human production, lifestyles, and modes of thinking. Humanity has entered an era dominated by technology, where the design, selection, and execution of scientific and technological systems—as well as the intentions of scientists, policymakers, and implementers—are influenced to some extent by ideological standpoints and objectives. Although science and technology, as tools, lack inherent ideological characteristics, they have become means and instruments by which the ruling class maintains power and consolidates the state, thereby fulfilling an ideological function.

2.3. The Dimension of Modernization: Modernization as Ideology

After World War II, capitalist and socialist ideologies polarized the world into two opposing camps, ushering in the Cold War era. Ideological hegemony, once a precondition for maintaining domestic class power, now became a prerequisite for global supremacy between nations of differing social systems. Ideology theory shifted from a focus on domestic class struggle to an international political struggle, expanding from the national to the global stage. To counter the strong ideological challenge posed by Soviet

communism, American scholars developed modernization theory, framing “modernization” as an ideology aimed at enhancing the global appeal of American political systems, culture, values, and national image. Through this modernization ideology, American leaders sought to reshape imperialist strategy to claim global dominance.

American policymakers perceived unstable governance and widespread poverty as fertile ground for Marxist revolutions. U.S. economist Walt Whitman Rostow argued that the international communist movement, led by the Soviet Union, exploited “the internal instability of underdeveloped regions” to breach the Cold War ceasefire line, spreading communist ideology worldwide and weakening the U.S.-established “political and economic alliance system.” To address this challenge and maintain the influence of capitalist ideology globally, Rostow contended that the U.S. must move beyond limited economic and military aid, directly intervening in the “entire creative process of modernization” in underdeveloped nations and regions. This involved not only influencing their cultural mindset but also controlling the mentalities and policies of their governments (Rehmann, 2003, pp. 1-3) ^[6]. In Rostow’s discourse, “modernization” evolved from an academic model to a social science framework, and from a theoretical system into policy recommendations, becoming a strategic decision for the capitalist bloc led by the U.S. to counter communist ideology.

American scholar Raymond H. Reuss viewed the global situation during Kennedy’s administration and argued that the greatest threat to the U.S., then rising as the world’s dominant economic and military power, came from “a hostile, subversive foreign ideology,” namely Soviet communism. Modernization theorists maintained that the most effective means to defeat communism during the Cold War was to leverage America’s “advanced” and “modern” advantages. This meant assisting underdeveloped nations in achieving economic growth, political democracy, and socially progressive ethics to emulate and replicate the American model of modernization. This approach aimed to “promote American liberal social values, capitalist economic structures, and democratic political frameworks” in these regions, accelerating the natural transition of underdeveloped nations from a “traditional” society to a progressive “modernity” (Rehmann, 2003, pp. 8-10) ^[6], thereby creating a shared system of institutions, culture, and values.

In summary, the concept of “modernization” in American theoretical discourse functions as both an ideology and a conceptual framework. It encapsulates an alignment with the nature of society, a shared aspiration to alleviate poverty, and the creation of a better life. It intertwines national security and international status with historical standing and modernization potential. By infusing social science into policy, this ideology obscures the political aspects of the methods used to advance modernization, making modernization a strategically subtle and ideologically driven approach to advancing global development.

2.4 The Internal Relationship among the Three Dimensions

Popular culture, science and technology, and modernization as ideological dimensions represent the practical turn in ideological theory. These dimensions have evolved through the contributions of scholars responding to the characteristics of their historical periods, continually deepening and expanding Marxist ideology theory and Gramsci’s theory of

ideological hegemony from a political-philosophical perspective. These three historically rooted dimensions have become interdependent strategic approaches for defending and consolidating ideological hegemony in the age of information revolution, technological change, and globalization, functioning as essential elements in the pursuit of institutional legitimacy and national strategic goals.

Modernization theorists, represented by Walt Rostow, evaluated the differences between “traditional” and “modern” societies, estimating the conditions necessary for societal transition with the support of U.S. federal funding. Modernization, they argued, encompasses transformations in “economic organization, political structure, and social value systems.” Unlike Marxist classicists, who identified a communist society as the highest stage in the evolution of human social structures, modernization theorists positioned “Western, industrialized, capitalist democratic states” at the top of the historical progression. They posited that America’s historical experience represents the true path to modernity and advocated that this American experience and model could guide underdeveloped nations toward social transformation.

Modernization theorists recommended that the U.S. help developing countries through infrastructure building, technology transfer, personnel training, project collaboration, and aid in health and education. They also advised the U.S. academic community to contribute to national security by researching knowledge that is “politically practical for the world” and studying ways to “directly promote and control societal change worldwide.” As such, “modernization” became a collaborative ideological belief among intellectuals, officials, and the American public, grounded in an understanding of American society. It reflects the conviction that American influence and involvement can drive global change, with the ultimate goal of extending the global appeal and influence of U.S. political systems, values, and culture, thus validating the legitimacy of capitalism.

The ideological concept of “modernization” inherently incorporates popular culture and science and technology; in other words, modernization is both the modernization and globalization of culture and technology. In the global information era, information technology has become a primary symbol of “modernization.” It has expanded channels for popular culture, transforming its media and methods. Only by holding the leadership in information technology can a country maintain control over culture, values, and ultimately ideological hegemony.

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