

Theoretical Basis of the Ideological and Political Education Category: Based on Studying the Marxist Category Theory

LI Changsong^{[a],*}

^[a]College of Politics and Public Management, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Supported by Youth Found Project of MOE (Ministry of Education in China) Humanities and Social Sciences “A Study on Category of Ideological and Political Education and Its Establishment of System” (12YJC710028).

Received 12 March 2014; accepted 18 June 2014
Published online 28 July 2014

Abstract

In the scientific and rigorous system of Marxist theory, category is the basic logic unit. The great strength of Marxist category theory finds its full expression in the science and vitality of Marxist theory. In fact, Marxist category theory is of immense benefit to the development and research of ideological and political education category, and is the theoretical basis of the ideological and political education category. In this sense, we should seriously study the Marxist category theory, improve our theoretical thinking skills, so as to make Marxist category theory better guide and promote the development of ideological and political education.

Key words: Ideological and political education; Category; Theoretical basis; Marxism

Li, C. S. (2014). Theoretical Basis of the Ideological and Political Education Category: Based on Studying the Marxist Category Theory. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 7(1), 22-25. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/5207> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/5207>

INTRODUCTION

The production of Marxism-Leninism is on the basis of a series of basic categories. After surveying the history of categories, we can find that Marx, Engels and Lenin

are the pioneers and founders of scientific category theories. Their theories and ideas about category are the insurmountable commanding heights in the relevant field, and are the inspirations for the systematic building of modern scientific categories.

1. THE STATEMENTS ON CATEGORIES BY MARX AND ENGELS

In the process of building their own scientific theoretical system, especially of building the Marxist philosophy, Marx and Engels constructed a category system for the materialist dialectics in a scientific and systematic manner, thus forming their rich and important category theories and ideas.

1.1 Marx and Engels Determined the Materialistic Nature of Categories

Marx thinks that the objective existence of things is the premise and foundation for the production of categories. Categories reflect the reality of humans' living life, and are the simplest and the most essential rules obtained on the basis of practices which are in the form of concepts.

1.1.1 Categories the Constant Abstraction of the Objective World by the Human Mind

As is stated by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, “In the final stage of abstraction (because it is abstraction, rather than analysis), all the things will become logical categories, Should you feel strange? If we gradually remove the things that constitute a house, get rid of the building materials and the unique form of this house, then what remains will only be an object; if we remove the limits of the object, what remains will be space; if we remove the dimensions of the space, what remains will be the logic category—measure, so should you feel strange? If we make a deduction like this and take away all the living or inanimate things that constitutes a subject, human or object, we will have good reasons to say that in

the final abstraction, the ultimate entity will be some logic categories”¹. In this sense, the “abstraction” mentioned by Marx is based on the objective reality.

1.1.2 Categories Are not the Product of Subjective Will but Are the Reflection of the Real World

Marx believes that categories are closely related to the origin of the world. He pointed out in the letter to Paganov in 1846:

What Mr. Proudhon does not know is that the social people as well as the various ideas and categories produced in line with the production level reflect the abstract social relations and production level. Therefore, categories are the same as the social relations that they reflect, so they are not eternal. They are just the temporary product of history. However, the understanding of Mr. Proudhon is just the opposite. He believes that the abstract things and categories are the origin of things².

Besides, Marx also points out that categories are the simplification of or regulations for the objective existence in essence, so they are primary. He further suggests that,

when studying the development of the economic category, we should keep the same thing in mind as we study other historical science and social science. In specific, we should know that whether in reality or in the mind, the subject—here is the modern bourgeois society—is established; thus what the categories reflect is often one side of a certain society, or one side of its existent forms and existent regulations. Therefore, such a society is existent before we talk about the “society” in science.³

1.1.3 Categories Are the Abstraction of History and the Abstraction Is Consistent Throughout History

Marx believes that humans’ understanding of the objective world develops with the historical evolution of human society. As the reflection of the nature of things, categories have their own history, reflect the history of humans’ understanding, and take shape in a certain historical order. They are the unity of logic and history. “The theoretical thinking in every age is a product of history, so is the theoretical thinking in our times. It has different forms and contents in different ages.”⁴ As is indicated by Engels when he finds that the order in which economic category appears is the same as the one in which the economic category develops,

the point where history starts is the one where thoughts start; nevertheless, the development of thoughts is the consistent reflection of historical process of abstract and theoretical things. Such reflection has gone through amendment, but the amendment is in line with the laws of historical process.⁵

So Engels argues that categories are concrete and historical.

¹ *Selected works of Marx and Engels* (Volume One, pp.138-139). (1995). Beijing: People’s Publishing House.

² *Selected works of Marx and Engels* (Volume Four, p.539). (1995). Beijing: People’s Publishing House.

³ *Selected works of Marx and Engels* (Volume Two, p.24). (1995). Beijing: People’s Publishing House.

⁴ *Selected works of Marx and Engels* (Volume Four, p.284). (1995). Beijing: People’s Publishing House.

⁵ *Selected works of Marx and Engels* (Volume Two, p.43). (1995). Beijing: People’s Publishing House.

1.2 Marx and Engels Expounded the Materialism and Dialectic of Category

Marx and Engels argue that categories are dynamic, contradictory, and transformable, and that categories are connective and developing.

1.2.1 Dynamic Category

Marx believes that all things in the world, including the living things on the land or the things in the river, exist and live because of movement. As is stated in *The Poverty of Philosophy*,

Just like the way we turn everything into a logical category through abstraction, we can obtain abstract movement, the pure movement, as long as we take away all the characteristics of movement. If we regard logic category as the entity of all things, then we can look the logical formula of movement as an absolute method, which not only explains every object, but also contains every object’s movement⁶.

Thus we can draw a conclusion that methods, objects and entities as well as all the things in the world can be attributed to the movement of categories. Moreover, Marx also holds that we should have a correct understanding of the dialectical movement among each category, “the dialectical movement of a simple category will contribute to the generation of category groups, which will then produce category catena, and then a category system will take shape”⁷. This not only indicates the motor process of categories, but points out the essence of the dialectical movement of categories and category system.

1.2.2 Contradictory and Transformable Category

Marx reveals the dialectic nature of categories: “Dialectic movement is the coexistence of and struggle between two contradictory aspects and is the integration of the two contradictory aspects into a new category”⁸. According to Marx, the transformation of categories is the self-affirmation of rationality which set itself as a specific category. This statement was proposed by Marx when he was examining the dialectic movement of categories, which are substantially meaningful for us to have a deeper understanding of the transformation of categories. Besides, Marx profoundly reveals the transformational and motor process of categories, i.e., a dialectic movement from thesis to antithesis and then to synthesis. He said,

The integration of two conflicting ideas will form a new idea, that is, the synthesis of the two conflicting ideas. Nevertheless, this new idea will be divided into two mutually contradictory ideas, and these two ideas together will be fused into another new synthesis. In this way, ideal group will take shape. Just like categories, ideal group also follows the dialectic movement. It also has a contradictory group as the antithesis. Then a new idea

⁶ *Selected works of Marx and Engels* (Volume One, p.139). (1995). Beijing: People’s Publishing House.

⁷ *Selected works of Marx and Engels* (Volume One, pp.140-141). (1995). Beijing: People’s Publishing House.

⁸ *Selected works of Marx and Engels* (Volume One, p.199). (1995). Beijing: People’s Publishing House.

group will be formed out of the two idea groups. Then the new ideal group is the synthesis.⁹

In this sense, we can see that Marx not only reveals the contradictory transformation of categories, but also puts forward the concept of ideal group, which, to some degree, indicates the hierarchy of categories' movement and proves that idea group is the product of the upscale dialectic movement of logic categories.

1.2.3 Connective and Developing Category

Marx proceeds from the analysis of commodities to analyze and investigate the capitalist society, revealing the hidden contradictions, and finding out the connection and development between the contradictions. Lenin made remarks in *Discussion on Dialectics*,

Marx made an initial attempt to analyze the simplest, the most common, and the most basic relation in the capitalist society—exchange of commodities. This analysis later reveals all the contradictions (or the buds of contradictions) in the modern society from this simplest phenomenon (from this 'cell' of capitalist society).¹⁰

In other words, Marx regards the commodity category as the starting point of logical analysis; then following the order that is from the abstract to the concrete, and from the simple to the complex, he in turn exposes the internal connections and logic changes within the major economic categories in the capitalist society. To a certain extent, the law of capitalism development found by Marx is on the basis of his investigation on the dialectic connections and changes among the major economic categories. In Marx and Lenin's views, categories are not solidified and static, but are connective, developing, and dynamic. They believe that the mutual generation and mutual connection between logic categories are caused by the connection, development, and dialectic movement of categories, which thus promote categories to advance towards an ideal group, idea catena, and idea system. Nevertheless, it is through the orderly integration of categories that category system grasps the essential connections of objective things.

2. THE STATEMENTS ON CATEGORIES BY LENIN

On the basis of Marxist category theory, Lenin has critically absorbed Hegel's idealist "rational core", thus he advanced the study on categories to a new height and injected a strong impetus to the development of Marxist category theory.

2.1 Lenin Deepened the Understanding of the Essence of Categories

Lenin inherited and developed Marxist category theory, specified the concept of category, and clearly pointed out

⁹ *Selected works of Marx and Engels* (Volume One, p.140). (1995). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

¹⁰ *Selected works of Lenin* (Volume Two, p.558). (1995). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

the status and role of category, thus further deepening people's understanding of the essence of categories.

2.1.1 Lenin Specified the Concept of Category

Lenin made a profound discussion on categories. He regards them as the most general and abstract knowledge of the objective world, "the various links in which people get to know the natural world (i.e. the concepts that people hold towards the natural world) are logical categories."¹¹ He points out that categories show the internal rules and connections within the objective things, so they are the simplification of and regulations for the objective reality. Besides, Lenin revealed that "logic categories are the numerous and detailed simplification of the 'external things and activities' (He used the word "generalization" in other situations)"¹². As cognitive thinking, logic categories are thinking forms and logic tools used by human beings to perceive the world, which determines the possibility and extent of people's knowledge of the world,

in front of people is a network of natural phenomena. Instinctive human beings, that is, barbaric human beings, fail to distinguish themselves from the natural world. Nevertheless, the conscious human beings have achieved so. In the process of distinguishing humans from the natural world, categories serve as ladders, namely, the ladders in the process of understanding the world that helps us to understand and master the "knot" in the network of natural phenomena.¹³

This statement made by Lenin has clarified that categories are the essential logic forms of humans' cognitive thinking, and are the fundamental things distinguishing conscious humans from instinctive (barbaric) humans. So it is of great significance for humans to master the nature and laws of objective things.

2.1.2 Lenin Discussed About the View Of Practice

The practice viewpoint is the primary and fundamental viewpoint of the epistemological view of dialectical materialism. Categories, as the important "knots" for humans to understand the world, the production and development of which is based on practices. Through the contact with the objective world, people are constantly testing, adjusting and enriching categories and the category system, "we can find the truth through practices and verify and develop the truth in the process."¹⁴ Then "these categories will in turn serve people in practices".¹⁵ According to Lenin, categories are dynamic, changeable, and connective. They are the inevitable product of the development of logic. When it comes to the history of philosophy, Lenin said, "Simply speaking, the

¹¹ *Collected works of Lenin* (55th Volume, p.168). (1990). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

¹² *Collected works of Lenin* (55th Volume). (1990). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

¹³ *Collected works of Lenin* (55th Volume, p.78). (1990). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

¹⁴ *Selected works of Mao Zedong* (Volume One, p.296). (1991). Beijing: People's Publishing House

¹⁵ *Collected works of Lenin* (55th Volume, p.75). (1990). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

history of philosophy is the history of people's general understanding", and "is the history which proceeds from the general concepts of logic and from the development and application of categories." He compares the simplest and the most basic categories of "cells" and "buds". Although such comparison is simple and basic, it contains the complex forms of development in the future, which is a major advancement of humans' logic thinking.

2.2 Lenin Explained the Dialectics of Categories

Under the new historical conditions, Lenin has raised the Marxist category theory, especially the category theory in light of the dialectical materialism to a new height, whose basic characteristics are profound exposition and revealing of the dialectics of categories.

2.2.1 The Principle of Uniting Dialectics, Logic, and Epistemology Is the Basis of Establishing Category System

In Lenin's view, dialectics, logic and epistemology are the same thing, which is the basic idea of Lenin. He said,

although Marx did not leave behind 'logic' (The capital letters), but he left the logic of *Das Kapital*. We should take full advantage of the logic in this book to solve problems. After reading this book, we can find that logic, dialectics and epistemology are applied to one science.¹⁶

This statement enables people to make scientific differentiation between the various aspects that categories refer to, so that the content of categories has been clarified. Besides, people can distinguish the levels that their thinking is in, can determine the dialectic relations between different categories, and can define the categories as people's thinking forms and stages of understanding. Just as he said, "the advancement firstly gives provisions to itself like this: it starts from simple rules, followed by increasingly rich and specific rules."¹⁷ Therefore, following this principle, the dialectical materialism is a rigorous philosophy system constituted by a series of categories in terms of internal specific logic relations.

2.2.2 Lenin Demonstrated the Network Analysis of Dialectic Categories

Lenin believed that the most fundamental thing of dialectic categories is the knots and ladders of understanding, as well as the understanding network composed by knots and ladders. Lenin paid much attention to the network analysis of dialectic categories when he analyzed Hegel's *Logic*. In Hegel's view, categories are some stages in which absolute concepts make self-movement and self-development, and are the physical basis of the whole natural world and the spiritual world. However, Lenin argues that everything is in a space-time relationship or some interrelated connection, that any category is in the network of people's understanding, and that categories give regulations to things when they are in interrelated

connections. In this sense, Lenin's categories are the ladders on the way to distinguish things, that is, the ladders in the process of understanding the world. So the categories help us get to know and grasp the knots in the network of natural phenomena.

2.2.3 Lenin Revealed the Dialectic Transformation Among Categories

Lenin made an in-depth study of Hegel and Marx's dialectical thinking. He said, "in order to inherit the cause of Hegel and Marx, we should dialectically study the history of humans' thinking, science and technology."¹⁸ Lenin has given full play to this idea. He established the materialist dialectics as a "theory about the unification of opposites", based on which he enriched the content of the category system in light of materialist dialectics. In accordance with the principle of "unity of opposites", he advocates exposing the internal relations of and the relations between things from different aspects, such as "phenomenon and essence", "content and form", "reason and result", and other categories. With regard to the transformation among categories, Lenin thinks that anything will make change and development, which concepts and categories are not fixed but are in a constant change and transformation.

The relationship of concepts (= transition = contradiction) = the main content of logic, and these concepts (and their relationships, transition, and contradiction) are reflected as the reflection of the objective world. It is the dialectics of things that creates the dialectics of concepts, rather than the vice versa.¹⁹

Categories are "united as well as contradictory", and the dialectics of categories is originated from the dialectics of objective things.

CONCLUSION

In short, the statements made by Marx, Engels and Lenin have exposed the connotation, nature, characteristics, function and significance of categories from different perspectives and at different levels. They are the theoretical origin and basis of the formation and development of the ideological and political education category theory, and have important implications and direct significance for the building of the basic category theory in ideological and political education. Therefore, when carrying out the studies on ideological and political education category theory, we should make a detailed and rigorous review about these important statements, draw important lessons from them, consolidate the theoretical basis of ideological and political education category, and promote the research and development of the category theory in ideological and political education.

¹⁶ *Collected works of Lenin* (55th Volume, p.290). (1990). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

¹⁷ *Collected works of Lenin* (55th Volume, p.199). (1990). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

¹⁸ *Collected works of Lenin* (55th Volume, p.122). (1990). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

¹⁹ *Collected works of Lenin* (55th Volume, p.166). (1990). Beijing: People's Publishing House.