
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Spatial Position of Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Rule of Law: From the Perspective of Marxist Space Theory

Zhenxue Guo¹ ✉ and Caixia Wu²

¹School of Marxism, Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing, Guangdong, 526061, China

²School of Foreign Languages, Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing, Guangdong, 526061, China

Corresponding Author: Zhenxue Guo, **E-mail:** robin0076@163.com

ABSTRACT

Space theory is an important part of Marxism. It is the source of the continuation, inheritance, and development of the space theory of New Marxism in the second half of the 20th century. The Marxist space theory adheres to the people-centered space position, which has had an undeniable impact on the post-Marxist party's ruling philosophy, ruling guidance, and ruling strategy. There has formed a profound, extensive, and practical ecological rule of law, namely Xi Jinping's thoughts on the ecological rule of law, in the great practice of leading the construction of ecological civilization in China in the new era since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. The idea of Xi Jinping's thought of the ecological rule of law adheres to the people-centered space position, attaches great importance to building high-quality ecological space for the people, practically guarantees the equal enjoyment of high-quality ecological space by the people according to law, and advocates the construction of high-quality ecological space for all mankind.

KEYWORDS

Xi Jinping's thoughts on rules of ecological law, ecological civilization construction, people-centered, space position, Marxist space theory

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 July 2023

PUBLISHED: 08 July 2023

DOI: 10.32996/jhsss.2023.5.7.2

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC hereafter) regards "promoting green development and promoting harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature" as the mission of the CPC in the new era and new journey. To accomplish this task, we need to promote the overall layout of "five in one"¹ and put the construction of ecological civilization in a more prominent position. "Ecological prosperity leads to civilization prosperity, and ecological decline leads to civilization decline." Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the Party Central Committee, with Xi Jinping at its core, attached great importance to China's ecological protection and raise ecological protection to the height of national strategy, formulated and issued a series of laws and regulations for ecological protection, built a scientific, rigorous, systematic, and complete Xi Jinping's ecological legal system, and formed a profound, broad, and practical Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law. Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law is the latest theoretical achievement of the Sinicization of the Marxist ecological concept. It is the important guiding ideology and fundamental observance of China's ecological civilization construction in the new era and provides strong theoretical support and a scientific practical basis for promoting global ecological civilization construction and international cooperation in

¹ "Five in one overall layout" refers to the integration of economic construction, political construction, cultural construction, social construction, and ecological civilization construction are comprehensively promoted. It was proposed as a comprehensive strategic deployment for China's development in the 18th National Congress of the CPC.

ecological governance. Space theory is an important part of Marxism and also the source of the continuation, inheritance and development of the space theory of New Marxism in the second half of the 20th century. Marxist space theory originated from Marx and Engels' exposure to and criticism of the defects of capitalist system operation and early state governance. Therefore, criticism is a prominent feature of Marxist space theory. Objectively speaking, as the pioneer of capitalist space criticism and research, Marx and Engels' space theory research still needs to be supplemented and improved. Nevertheless, Marxist space theory still shows strong explanatory power, persuasiveness and influence in many fields at present.

On the basis of absorbing the reasonable core and beneficial elements of Marxist space theory, the constantly developing and maturing Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law shows a strong theoretical innovation characteristic and the character of keeping pace with the times. The people-centered space position is an important cornerstone of the formation and development of Marxist space theory and also a main line running through Xi Jinping's thought of the ecological rule of law.

2. Marxist space theory

Marx once pointed out when discussing the logic of capital expansion: "On the one hand, capital should strive to destroy all space restrictions on communication and exchange and seize the whole earth as its market. On the other hand, it should strive to use time to eliminate space. That is to say, the time it takes to transfer goods from one place to another should be reduced to the minimum. The more capital develops, the more the market in which capital flows, and the more the market that constitutes the circulation path of capital space" (Marx & Engels, 1980). It can be seen that space is an important support and inevitable result of capital expansion and growth and has a strong political nature. "The political nature of space is most concentrated in the legitimacy of the possession, use, transfer and profit of space formed by relying on the ownership of space"(Xu, 2020). Since the modern industrial revolution, space has become the "new favorite" and driving force of capital proliferation and expansion. Under this macro narrative background, the function and nature of space have undergone major changes, that is, space is no longer just the "container" of means of production and the "cradle" of capital production, but also the main object of capital production and capital itself, stipulating and reflecting the spatial subordination between people in capitalist society. In particular, the bourgeoisie uses the advantages of space possession to presumptuously squeeze and plunder the survival and development space of the proletariat, which ultimately leads to the formation of the latter's personal attachment to the former. The essence of this personal attachment relationship is the gradual loss of the legitimate rights and interests of the people in space and the increasing expansion and crazy expansion of the "legitimate rights and interests" of capital in space. Therefore, safeguarding capital's ownership of space is the "sacred duty" of the capitalist society, and safeguarding people's ownership of space is an important mission of the socialist society. Behind it are two different kinds of space logic: "capital supremacy" and "people supremacy". Therefore, it can be said that the essence of the competition between the capitalist system and the socialist system is the ultimate confrontation between the capital-centred spatial position and the people-centered spatial position. While affirming the positive role of capital, we must also have a deep understanding of the harm that the capital-centered spatial position causes to society. The former was the foreign aggression and expansion of the Western capitalist powers under the pressure and promotion of capital, and the latter was the ecological deterioration, environmental pollution and the transfer of high-polluting and energy-consuming industries to developing countries induced by "capital supremacy". In short, as Marx said, "Capital comes into the world, from head to foot, every pore drip blood and dirty things"(Marx, 2004). In contrast, Marxist space theory adheres to the people-centered space position, which has a significant and far-reaching impact on the post-Marxist political party's ruling philosophy, ruling guidance, and ruling strategy. Guided by the people-centered space position, Marxist political parties fully mobilized the masses in different historical periods of revolution and construction, relied on the masses, insisted on coming from the masses and going to the masses, respected the people's pioneering spirit, and let the people share the achievements of development, thus ensuring the victory of the revolution and the success of the cause of scientific socialism. This is also a powerful interpretation of the law of social development that historical materialism emphasizes that "the people are the creators, promoters and subjects of history". At the same time, this spatial position is also the fundamental guarantee for the continuous development of Marxist political parties.

3. The legal connotation of Marxist space theory

Marx criticized the injustice caused by the spatial production of capitalism and based spatial justice on labor practice, civil society, and communism. Firstly, labor practice forms the practical foundation of the Marxist spatial position; Secondly, civil society constitutes the sociological premise of the Marxist spatial position; Third, the communist position constitutes the axiology premise of the Marxist spatial position.

Marx thus advocated spatial justice from the perspective of practice theory, social theory, and axiology, presenting the explicit critical logic of spatial injustice, the implicit critical logic of space politics, and the super-explicit critical logic of space ecology. In terms of explicit logic, Marx revealed that space production of capitalism maintained private ownership, illustrated spatial injustice such as exploitation and suppression in social space, and demonstrated the importance of the proletarian revolution to realize spatial justice. In terms of implicit logic, Marx pointed out capitalist political ideology resulted in spatial injustice, criticized the

hegemony of space politics, and advocated justice in space politics. In terms of super-explicit logic, Marx revealed the destruction of space production of capitalism as a non-ecological behavior to natural space and called for harmony between natural space and social space to achieve spatial ecological justice(Sun, 2022).

In terms of the road map of achieving spatial justice, Marx demanded to limit the logic of capital proliferation in spatial production, establish humanistic space, equally distribute space resources, coordinate various interests in space, and achieve a balanced development of global space. Marx's spatial justice is distinctly critical, class-based and practical, contains values of equality, humanity, and diversity, and improves critical social ethics.

From the perspectives above, the legal connotation of Marx's space theory reflects the people-orientation's and ecological rule of law, which is highly in line with the direction of China's ecological civilization construction in the new era. Regarding the important goals of ecological civilization construction, in the report of the 18th National Congress of the CPC "on the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and deepening reform and opening up", it is pointed out that: Significant progress should be made in the construction of a resource-saving and environmentally friendly society; The layout of the main functional areas should be basically formed, and a resource recycling system should be preliminarily established.

Protecting valuable spatial resources is not only related to development but also survival, which is an important part of ecological civilization construction. Space protection urgently requires increasing efforts in environmental protection and governance to significantly improve environmental quality. The current level of ecological civilization construction in China is still far from the people's expectations. There is still a significant gap between the goals of building a beautiful China and the requirements of building a new development pattern to promote high-quality development. The construction of ecological civilization has a long way to go.

The ecological civilization governance system and governance capabilities urgently need to be improved and enhanced. The content and implementation of the ecological civilization system need to be strengthened, the incentive and constraint mechanisms for green development are not yet sound, and the market-oriented operation mechanism and policies for ecological civilization construction are not exerting a sufficient role. The monitoring and supervision of the ecological environment and the construction of information technology are lagging, and the application of new technologies, methods, and means is insufficient.

From a spatial perspective, the construction of ecological civilization urgently needs to coordinate and promote the protection and restoration of mountains, rivers, forests, fields, lakes, grasslands, and sand, build a natural reserve system with national parks as the main body, implement major biodiversity conservation projects, and strengthen the control of alien species. The current ecological civilization construction urgently needs to strengthen the system of river and lake leaders, strengthen the ecological protection and governance of major rivers and important lakes and wetlands, and scientifically promote the comprehensive management of desertification, rocky desertification, and soil erosion, and carry out large-scale land greening actions. There is also an urgent need to promote the revitalization of grasslands, forests, rivers, and lakes and strengthen the protection of black land. The construction of ecological civilization also calls for the improvement of the regulatory system for nature reserves and ecological protection red lines through firmly upholding the boundaries of natural ecological security, adhering to Xi Jinping's ecological civilization ideology as the guide, accurately grasping the new development stage, deeply implementing the new development concept, and accelerating the construction of a new pattern of ecological civilization construction and development (Wang, 2021).

4. The spatial position of Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law has been formed in the great practice of leading the construction of China's ecological civilization in the new era. Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law adheres to the people-centered spatial position and embodies this position in the following three aspects.

First, Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law attaches great importance to building high-quality ecological space for the people.

It is the fundamental spirit and lofty goal of Marxism to promote the free and comprehensive development of human beings and to build a "union of free people". The realization of this "fundamental spirit and noble goal" needs to expand and optimize the people's living and development space and consolidate and strengthen the people's space ownership. On November 15, 2012, Xi Jinping stressed at the meeting between the members of the Standing Committee of the 18th Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Chinese and foreign journalists, "The aspiration of the people for a better life is our goal" (Xi, 2018). Since the reform and opening up, with the continuous improvement of people's living standards, the connotation of the good life people expect has been enriched, and the extension has been expanded. In many dimensions of a good life, high-quality ecological space

is an indispensable necessity without substitute. Xi Jinping emphasizes high-quality ecological space, which can be seen since he took office at a minor local place in China. From leading the whole village to build the first biogas digester in northern Shanxi when serving as the secretary of the brigade branch in Liangjiahe, Yan'an, to formulating the Decision on Relaxing the Development of Forestry when working in Zhengding, Hebei, from incorporating the "ecological environment planning" into the regional development plan when working in Fuzhou to proposing "strengthening the implementation of ecological legislation and ecological laws and regulations to ensure the institutionalization and legalization of ecological construction", and build a green Zhejiang in an all-round way when working in Zhejiang (Zhang, 2021). The consistent action vividly illustrates Xi Jinping's feelings and responsibilities of attaching great importance to building high-quality ecological space for the people. After serving as the top leader of the CPC and the country, Xi Jinping drew a blueprint for the construction of an ecological rule of law from the perspective of the overall national development strategy and built a high-quality ecological space to meet the need of the people. "A good ecological environment is the most equitable public product and the most inclusive welfare of people's livelihood" (Xi, 2014). Regardless of identity, status and wealth, everyone can enjoy it equally, and everyone has the responsibility to protect it. To protect ecological space is to protect productivity, and to improve ecological space is to develop productivity. A good ecological space can make people feel comfortable, secure and happy.

Under the guidance of Xi Jinping's thoughts on the ecological rule of law, building and protecting high-quality ecological space jointly in accordance with the law is the most valuable economic interest and the most basic well-being of the people. It is also the real desire and fundamental interest of the people, and it is also a reliable guarantee for the sustainable development of the Chinese nation.

Second, Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law ensures that people enjoy equal access to high-quality ecological space according to the law.

Scientific legislation, strict law enforcement, fair administration of justice, and law-abiding by the whole people are important guidelines for the construction of the rule of law in socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, the basic way to promote the modernization of national governance, and the basic requirements for building a country under the rule of law and realizing the governance of the nation under the rule of law. Based on understanding the historical context and future trend of China's ecological space changes, Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law has made and promulgated a series of laws and regulations for the protection of ecological space with a highly responsible attitude to the people, and established rules and regulations for the construction of high-quality ecological space in China in the new era, thus to protect it along the way. In October 2014, the Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Several Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Promoting the Rule of Law issued by the 4th Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee clearly stated: Protect the ecological environment with a strict legal system, accelerate the establishment of an ecological civilization legal system that effectively restricts development activities and promotes green development, circular development and low-carbon development... formulate and improve laws and regulations on ecological compensation, soil, water, air pollution prevention and marine ecological environment protection, and promote the construction of ecological civilization (The Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2014). Consequently, the outline of Xi Jinping's ecological rule of law gradually came into being. On April 24, 2014, the 8th Session of the Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress voted to adopt the Environmental Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (Amendment), known as the "strictest environmental protection law in history", which was formally implemented on January 1, 2015. "The strictest rule of law" has become a main line throughout the construction of China's ecological civilization in the new era. Since then, a series of new laws and revised versions of the old laws relating to the elements of ecological space (atmosphere, ocean, desert soil, wetland park, large rivers, etc.) have been promulgated and implemented². From the perspective of legislation at the national level, at present, China has formulated more than 20 laws related to ecological environment protection, more than 50 administrative regulations related to ecological environment protection, and built a legislative model of the Constitution - the basic law of ecological environment - the implementation law of ecological environment, making the "protection network" of ecological space stricter and more specific.

Finally, Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law advocates building high-quality ecological space for all humankind. Space is an essential element for all production and all human activities (Marx, 1995). From a diachronic perspective, it can be seen that

² In 2017, the Marine Environmental Protection Law of the People's Republic of China was promulgated and implemented, and the Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law of the People's Republic of China (revised version) was introduced. In 2018, the National Defense Desertification Control Law of the People's Republic of China (Revised Edition) and the Air Pollution Prevention and Control Law of the People's Republic of China (Revised Edition) were promulgated and implemented. In 2019, the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Prevention and Control of Soil Pollution was introduced. In 2021, the Yangtze River Protection Law of the People's Republic of China was promulgated and implemented. In 2022, the Wetland Protection Law of the People's Republic of China and the Noise Pollution Prevention and Control Law of the People's Republic of China (revised version) were successively introduced.

the changing landscape of global space since modern times, "The generation, flow and appreciation of capital are continuously extended with the transfer of spatial dimensions. Space has become the key field for the subject to carry out material production practice and capital flow, and gradually presents the appearance of "humanization" with the improvement of the subject's practical ability" (Liu, 2017). The most direct expression of "humanization" of space is: "Countries are increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Human beings live in the same global village, in the same time and space where history and reality converge, and increasingly become a community with a shared future of mankind" (Xi, 2013). From the perspective of the community with a shared future of mankind, the diversity, multi-level, and multidimensional nature of space are often crisscrossed and intertwined. As a result, many space problems are easy to "spill" beyond their own boundaries to other spaces, thus causing the "domino" effect of space problems. The COVID-19 that broke out at the beginning of 2020 has evolved into a global public health crisis, and the deep "fission" and "fusion" that caused global economic development, regional cooperation, governance pattern, national rise and fall and other issues are obvious examples. The mobility, transmutation and transnational nature of ecological space require countries around the world to abandon differences in social systems and ideologies, eliminate differences in national interests, coordinate conflicts between current interests and long-term interests, and ensure that all mankind share high-quality ecological space with concerted efforts. At the opening ceremony of the Beijing World Horticultural Exposition in April 2019, Xi Jinping pointed out that "in the face of the challenges of the ecological environment, mankind is a community of shared future prosperity and loss, and no country can survive alone" (Xi, 2020). At present, China, which is increasingly approaching the center of the world stage, has become an important participant, contributor, and leader in the construction of global ecological civilization and has deeply participated in global environmental governance and ecological protection. China properly guides and actively responds to international cooperation on climate change and takes the lead in putting forward and formulating a timetable and road map for carbon peak and carbon neutrality, highlighting the responsibility of major countries to ensure that all mankind shares high-quality ecological space.

5. Conclusion

The report on the 20th National Congress of the CPC emphasized that the Chinese path to modernization is a "modernization in which people and nature coexist in harmony" and mapped out a strategic arrangement for building a socialist modern power in an all-around way. Specifically, "from 2020 to 2035, China will basically achieve socialist modernization; from 2035 to the middle of this century, Chinese people will build the country into a strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious and beautiful socialist modern power" (Xi, 2022). Only "harmonious coexistence between man and nature" can present the "beautiful" side of a socialist modern power, and provide important support for building a "beautiful socialist modern power". From the perspective of Marxist space theory, adhering to the people-centered space position while promoting economic and social development, respecting nature, conforming to nature, protecting nature, dispelling the tension between human's free and comprehensive development and natural space, and realizing "harmonious coexistence between human and nature" is the only way to build an ecological civilization. It is also the essence of Xi Jinping's thoughts on the ecological rule of law. This paper analyzes the concrete embodiment of the people-centered spatial position of Xi Jinping's ecological rule of law from the cognitive level, the legal level and the global level, which has a certain warning and reference value for ensuring that we do not deviate and remain unchanged in the process of implementing Xi Jinping's ecological rule of law.

This paper reveals the specific representations and clear direction of the people-centered space position of Xi Jinping's thought on the ecological rule of law. The people-centered space position is the essence and soul of Xi Jinping's thoughts on the ecological rule of law. This "essence and soul" is mainly manifested in the following three dimensions, namely, the ecological rule of law attaches great importance to building high-quality ecological spaces for the people, effectively ensuring equal enjoyment of high-quality ecological spaces by the people in accordance with the law, and advocates for the construction of high-quality ecological spaces for all humanity. Enhancing awareness, ensuring legal protection, and embracing the globe are the road map and construction blueprint for the implementation of Xi Jinping's thoughts on the ecological rule of law. This is the practical approach to the ecological rule of law and the practical significance of this study too.

It should be pointed out that building a high-quality ecological space for all mankind is an important content and dimension to promote the construction of a community of shared future for mankind. However, under the background of a century of major changes that have triggered profound adjustments in the international system and order, efforts to build a high-quality ecological space for all mankind will face many obstacles from the games of power within and between different countries and the conflicting interests of different actors in the international community. Therefore, facing the future, how the international community should coordinate the conflicts in interests among countries, balance the interests of different domestic forces and factions, and clear the way for the construction of high-quality ecological space for all mankind is the crucial problem. This paper fails to expound on this problem. This is one of the limitations of this study and also a focus of future research.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References:

- [1] Liu, J. L., Pei, X. (2017). Marxist Space Criticism and Reflection on Contemporary Aesthetic Discourse. *Journal of Yunnan Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), (4):76.
- [2] Marx, C., Engels, F. (1980). *The Complete Works of Marx and Engels (Vol. 46 II)*. Beijing: People's Publishing House, (1): 33.
- [3] Marx, C., Engels, F. (1995). *The Complete Works of Marx and Engels (Vol. 2)*. Beijing: People's Publishing House, (1st ed.): 573.
- [4] Marx, C. (2004). (Trans by the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau). *On Capital*. Beijing: People's Publishing House, (Vol.1): 24.
- [5] Sun, Q. S. (2022). Basis, Logic and the Road Map of Marx's Space Justice. *Journal of Shenzhen University* (Humanities & Social Sciences), (Vol.39): 137.
- [6] The Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. (2014). Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Major Issues Concerning the Comprehensive Promotion of Rule of Law. *People's Daily*, 2014-10-23 (1st ed.).
- [7] Wang, J. N. (2021). New Tasks for Ecological Civilization Construction in the New Situation. *Flag*, (07): 27.
- [8] Xi, J. P. (2013). Following the Trend of the Times and Promoting World Peace and Development: Speech at the Moscow Institute of International Relations. *People's Daily*, 2013-3-24 (1st ed.).
- [9] Xi, J. P. (2014). *Series of the General Secretary Xi Jinping's Important Speeches*. Beijing: People's Publishing House, (1st ed.): 123.
- [10] Xi, J. P. (2018). *Xi Jinping's Discussion on Governance (Volume 1)*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press. (1st ed.): 4.
- [11] Xi, J. P. (2020). *Xi Jinping's Discussion on Governance (Volume 3)*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press. (1): 375.
- [12] Xi, J. P. (2022). Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Unite and Strive for the Comprehensive Construction of a Socialist Modernized Country. *People's Daily*, 2022-10-17 (1st ed.).
- [13] Xu, W. (2020). On Xi Jinping's View of Spatial Governance on the Prevention and Control of COVID-19. *Journal of Wuhan University* (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), (4): 5.
- [14] Zhang, Y. L. & Yang, Y. X. (2021). Theoretical Framework and Practical Guidance: Research on Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Rule of Law. *Journal of Xi'an University of Electronic Science and Technology* (Social Science Edition), (2): 55.