

Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization: Its Original Contribution to Marxist Ecological Theory and Its Practical Expansion

Yan Sun

*School of Marxism, Inner Mongolia University of Technology, Hohhot, China
3057456053@qq.com*

Abstract. Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization represents the latest achievement of the Sinicization and modernization of Marxist ecological theory. It systematically addresses the major issues of why ecological civilization should be built in the new era, what kind of ecological civilization should be built, and how it should be built. This paper takes Marxist basic principles as its foundation and, around the dimensions of natural wealth, people's position, ecological justice, carbon governance, digital governance, Party leadership, and global ecological governance, elucidates its original contributions to the theory of productive forces, the laws of socialist construction, the national governance system, and the global ecological discourse. The study finds that Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization takes the harmonious coexistence of man and nature as its value orientation, green new-quality productive forces as its practical support, and institutional advantages and international dissemination as important guarantees, providing scientific guidance for promoting the construction of Beautiful China and building a clean and beautiful world.

Keywords: Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization, Chinese-style modernization, Beautiful China, global ecological governance

1. Introduction

Ecological issues have never been purely natural problems but rather real issues closely linked with modes of production, social systems, value positions, and governance capacity. Marxism holds that human beings, through labor, engage in material transformation with nature, while the capitalist mode of production, in pursuit of surplus value, continuously expands its domination and consumption of nature, ultimately resulting in contradictions between social production and natural reproduction. In the new era, ecological civilization construction has been incorporated into the "five-in-one" overall layout of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and harmonious coexistence between man and nature has become an important feature of Chinese-style modernization. Centering on this major theoretical and practical proposition, Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization inherits Marxism's views on nature, development, and civilization but also makes systematic innovations based on the practice of Chinese-style modernization. Existing

research has deepened understanding of the laws of socialist construction from the green dimension [1]. Some studies have elucidated the theoretical logic of the conversion of ecological value into developmental value from the perspective of the "natural wealth theory" [2]. People's nature research has revealed the value undertone of ecological benefits to the people, ecological advantage to the people, and ecological priority to the people [3]. Ecological justice research emphasizes the symmetrical unity of ecological rights enjoyment and ecological protection obligations [4]. "Carbon" concept research regards carbon as the core category connecting natural ecosystems, socio-economic structures, and the national governance system [5]. Digital ecological civilization research demonstrates that digital technology is promoting paradigm shifts in ecological governance [6]. Party leadership research emphasizes that comprehensive Party leadership is the fundamental political guarantee for ecological civilization construction [7]. Regional pilot zone research provides a practical perspective for key breakthroughs and demonstration drives in the construction of Beautiful China [8]. Border-region and people-enriching research reveals the comprehensive functions of ecological civilization construction in border governance, common prosperity, and national security [9]. Global ecological governance research shows the theoretical contributions of China's solutions to the transformation of the global environmental governance system [10]. International dissemination research emphasizes the need to build autonomous knowledge systems to break the monopoly of Western ecological discourse [11]. Global discourse leadership research further proposes rebuilding the global ecological order around fairness, justice, and cooperation and win-win outcomes [12]. On this basis, this paper proceeds from the perspective of the Sinicization and modernization of Marxist ecological theory and focuses on analyzing the original contributions of Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization and its practical expansion.

2. Realizing green expansion in the theory of productive forces

2.1. Protecting the ecological environment is protecting productive forces

Marxist theory of productive forces is not the same as one-sided growthism. The development of productive forces includes not only the progress of laborers, labor materials, and labor objects but also the rationalization of the relationship between man and nature. Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization proposes that "protecting the ecological environment is protecting productive forces, and improving the ecological environment is developing productive forces," re-understanding the ecological environment from an external constraint to an internal condition of the development of productive forces. This assertion breaks through the old concept that development is simply understood as economic quantity expansion, making the green aspect an essential requirement for the development of socialist productive forces. Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization, from the green dimension, deepens the understanding of the nature of socialism and the laws of socialist construction, enriching the era's answer to "what socialism is and how to build socialism" [1]. This indicates that ecological civilization construction is not a supplementary link after development but an integral part of development itself.

2.2. Natural wealth transformation promotes the development of green productive forces

Further examination reveals that "green waters and green mountains are golden mountains and silver mountains" is not a mere environmental slogan but a major theoretical proposition concerning the relationship between natural wealth, social wealth, and economic wealth. From the perspective of the "natural wealth theory," this thought affirms the ecological value of nature itself while

emphasizing the service of natural wealth to the people's beautiful life through institutional arrangements and practical transformation [2]. Unlike Western ecological centrism, which abstracts nature and human development as opposed, Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization upholds the principle of development in protection and protection in development, opposing both predatory exploitation and empty environmentalism detached from people's life needs. Accordingly, Marxist theory of productive forces has acquired new ecological attributes: truly advanced productive forces must be green productive forces that are resource-saving, environmentally friendly, and coordinated and harmonious with nature.

3. Highlighting people's nature and ecological justice in value positions

3.1. Ecological civilization construction highlights the people's position

The fundamental position of Marxism is the people's position. The reason ecological civilization construction possesses a socialist attribute is that it is not a tool for a minority capital group to redistribute interests through the "green" concept but rather to meet the people's ever-growing demand for a beautiful ecological environment. The fundamental characteristic of Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization lies in its profound people's nature, whose core is ecological benefits to the people, ecological advantage to the people, and ecological priority to the people, taking people's satisfaction as an important standard for measuring the effectiveness of ecological governance [3]. This judgment reveals the fundamental difference between socialist ecological civilization and capitalist green governance. The capital logic focuses on profit space behind green industries, carbon assets, and environmental rules, while the people's logic concerns the real life of clear skies, green lands, and clean waters that the people can fairly enjoy.

3.2. Ecological justice embodies the value pursuit of ecological civilization

Ecological civilization construction also contains distinct requirements for ecological justice. Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization encompasses ecological justice content on three levels—value narrative, critical narrative, and practical narrative—emphasizing the symmetrical unity of ecological rights enjoyment and ecological protection obligations and responding to ecological injustice issues through compensation mechanisms, institutional construction, and international initiatives [4]. This view helps deepen the understanding of the relationship between "common prosperity" and "beautiful ecological environment." Common prosperity is not merely about income distribution but also about the distribution of ecological products; it is not merely about the total amount of material wealth but also about whether the people can share good environments, green spaces, and opportunities for sustainable development. Therefore, Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization embeds ecological justice into the process of Chinese-style modernization, responding both to the people's need for a better life and overcoming problems such as historical responsibility imbalance, unfair burden-sharing, and restricted development rights in Western ecological governance.

4. Promoting institutionalization, digitization, and systematization transformation in governance paradigms

4.1. Carbon governance promotes institutional innovation in ecological governance

Ecological civilization construction in the new era is not scattered environmental remediation but the reshaping of a governance system running through the entire process of economic and social development. Carbon governance is precisely an important aspect with symbolic significance. Proceeding from the overall interpretation of the "carbon" concept, "carbon" is not only a quantitative indicator for measuring the effectiveness of ecological civilization construction but also a core category connecting natural ecosystems, socio-economic structures, and the national governance system [5]. This means that carbon reduction, pollution reduction, greening expansion, and growth must be promoted in synergy, and institutional arrangements such as carbon budgets, carbon markets, carbon responsibilities, and carbon standards should also be incorporated into the national governance modernization framework. Compared with the Western tendency to instrumentalize and trade-barrier carbon issues, China's carbon governance places greater emphasis on the unity of development rights, emission reduction responsibilities, and institutional coordination.

4.2. Digital ecological civilization promotes governance paradigm transformation

The digital age also brings profound changes in ecological governance methods. Digital ecological civilization is not a simple overlay of digital technology and ecological civilization but a composite theoretical category that integrates governance paradigm innovation, form updating, and goal vision leadership [6]. Technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, remote sensing monitoring, and digital twins can enhance the precision and early-warning capabilities of ecological regulation, but technology itself does not inherently possess justice and public nature. If digital technology is dominated by the capital logic, it may be transformed into a tool for monopolizing data, manipulating carbon prices, and creating new green inequalities. Therefore, digital ecological civilization must uphold the socialist direction, adhere to people-centered principles, prioritize data security, algorithm transparency, and public interests, and ensure that digital technology truly serves the construction of Beautiful China.

4.3. Comprehensive Party leadership guarantees ecological civilization construction

Ecological civilization governance also requires institutional advantages. Upholding the comprehensive Party leadership over ecological civilization construction is the fundamental guideline for high-quality development of ecological civilization construction in the new era [7]. Ecological civilization construction involves systematic adjustments in industrial structure, energy structure, spatial pattern, lifestyle, and value concepts, which cannot be completed through spontaneous market regulation alone. Only by upholding the comprehensive Party leadership can local governance and global strategy, current breakthroughs and long-term goals, government responsibility and social participation be unified, forming a governance pattern of Party committees leading, governments dominating, enterprises as the main body, social organizations, and the public participating together.

5. Serving Beautiful China and high-quality development of border regions in practice paths

5.1. Regional practice of Beautiful China pilot zone construction

Theoretical innovation must ultimately be implemented in practical expansion. The construction of Beautiful China is an important field for the practical transformation of Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization. Centering on the construction of three regional Beautiful China pilot zones—Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei, Yangtze River Delta, and Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area—the pilot zone construction is both a key link in the practical system of Beautiful China and an important carrier for achieving the coordinated advancement of high-quality development and high-level protection [8]. This experience indicates that ecological civilization construction requires classified advancement, key breakthroughs, and regional coordination. Different regions have different resource endowments, industrial structures, and environmental carrying capacities, so a single model cannot be applied; instead, differentiated paths should be explored under unified objectives and bottom-line constraints. The significance of pilot zones lies in forming replicable and promotable experiences through institutional innovation, technological innovation, and governance innovation.

5.2. Ecological civilization construction empowering high-quality development of border regions

Ecological civilization construction in border regions also carries comprehensive significance for national security, ethnic unity, and common prosperity. Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization leads the new-era action of enriching border regions and people, which can enhance endogenous driving forces for people's enrichment through the realization of ecological product value, ecological industrialization of industries, and ecological industrialization of industries, increase ecological resilience in border areas through comprehensive governance, and consolidate ecological consensus among all ethnic groups through ecological civilization construction [9]. Border regions are often simultaneously resource-rich areas, ecological barrier areas, and ecologically fragile areas. Advancing green development in border regions must prevent ecological overconsumption in resource development and avoid weakening the development capacity of border residents under the guise of protection. Ecological restoration, green industries, ethnic unity, and border stabilization should be integrated so that ecological advantages are transformed into development advantages, security advantages, and identity advantages.

6. Contributing China's solutions and autonomous discourse in the global dimension

6.1. China's solutions for global ecological governance

Ecological crises are global in nature, but global ecological governance has long been influenced by Western centrism. Developed countries have accumulated large amounts of historical emissions during industrialization but often restrict the development space of developing countries through technical standards, carbon accounting rules, and green trade barriers. Xi Jinping's important discourses on global ecological governance propose a series of new viewpoints around shared values, scientific concepts, fundamental principles, practical guidance, and global win-win outcomes, contributing Chinese wisdom to promoting the transformation of the global ecological governance system and building a community of life for man and nature [10]. This thought upholds

the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, advocating cooperation that respects the development stage differences of various countries rather than turning green rules into new hegemonic tools.

6.2. International dissemination of ecological civilization and discourse construction

International dissemination capacity building is equally important. The international dissemination of Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization must transcend the mere image dissemination level and shift toward the global presence and output of an autonomous Chinese knowledge system through discourse construction, deconstructing Western ecological imperialist narratives [11]. Comprehensively deepening the global discourse leadership of Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization helps consolidate multilateral cooperation consensus and promote the reconstruction of the global ecological order toward fairness, justice, and cooperation and win-win outcomes [12]. Therefore, the Chinese ecological civilization discourse should not only explain China's governance effectiveness but also the institutional logic, people's position, and civilizational values behind it; it should both respond to external doubts and actively set agendas such as ecological civilization, the community of life, and a clean and beautiful world, enabling China's solutions to rise from practical achievements to theoretical expressions with explanatory power and appeal.

7. Conclusion

In summary, Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization is not a simple inheritance of existing ecological theories but an original theoretical achievement formed in the process of Sinicization and modernization of Marxist ecological theory. It incorporates the ecological environment into the category of productive force development in the theory of productive forces, makes people's nature and ecological justice fundamental standards in value positions, promotes institutionalization, digitization, and systematization transformation in governance paradigms, serves Beautiful China and high-quality development of border regions in practice paths, and promotes the building of a new fair and reasonable ecological governance order in the global dimension. As a graduate student majoring in Marxist theory, researching this thought requires not only grasping its textual basis and academic connotation but also paying attention to its practical expansion and problem orientation. Facing the "15th Five-Year Plan" period, only by upholding comprehensive Party leadership, upholding people's primacy, upholding green development and systematic governance can ecological civilization construction be continuously deepened, providing solid support for the Chinese-style modernization of harmonious coexistence between man and nature. It is particularly necessary to recognize that ecological civilization construction is not only a transformation of development methods but also a transformation of value concepts, institutional systems, and civilizational forms. It requires guarding ecological bottom lines in economic construction, expanding the supply of high-quality ecological products in improving people's livelihood, and safeguarding the reasonable development rights of developing countries in international exchanges. Thus, Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization not only has the theoretical function of explaining the achievements of China's ecological civilization construction but also possesses the contemporary value of guiding future practice and responding to world ecological governance problems.

References

- [1] Shen, S. (2026). The original contribution of Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization to deepening understanding of the laws of socialist construction. *Scientific Socialism*, 2026(2), 30–36.
- [2] Lu, J., & Guo, Q. (2026). On the "natural wealth theory" of Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization. *Academic Exploration*, 2026. <https://link.cnki.net/urlid/53.1148.C.20260602.1624.016>
- [3] Huang, C. (2026). On the people's nature characteristic of Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization. *Marxism Research*, 2026(5), 1–15.
- [4] Tong, C., & Wei, C. (2026). The ecological justice narrative of Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization. *Contemporary World Socialism Problems*, 2026(2), 50–60.
- [5] Qi, G. (2026). The original contribution to understanding the identifying concept of Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization—From the perspective of the overall interpretation of the "carbon" concept. *Cities and Environment Research*, 2026(1), 19–32.
- [6] Ning, Y. (2026). Paradigm transformation of digital ecological civilization governance from the perspective of Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization. *Marxism Research*, 2026(5), 29–41.
- [7] Liu, R., Zhao, J., & Fang, S. (2026). Theoretical connotation, unique advantages, and practical paths of upholding the comprehensive party leadership in ecological civilization construction. *Cities and Environment Research*(2), 3–23.
- [8] Yu, H., He, S., & Zhang, Q. (2026). Deeply studying and implementing Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization and accelerating the construction of beautiful China pilot zones in the three regions. *Environmental Protection*, 54(Z1), 13–16.
- [9] Li, J., & Ren, D. (2026). The intrinsic mechanism and practical path of Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization leading the new-era action of enriching border regions and people. *Cities and Environment Research*(1), 3–18.
- [10] Luo, X., Feng, J., & Peng, F. (2026). The generation logic, core connotation, and implementation path of Xi Jinping's important discourses on global ecological governance. *Journal of Beijing Jiaotong University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 25(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.16797/j.cnki.11-5224/c.20260623.001>
- [11] Zhang, M. (2026). Discourse construction and strategic path of international dissemination of Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization. *Journal of Nanchang University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, 57(3), 31–41.
- [12] Huang, C. (2026). Comprehensively deepening the global discourse leadership of Xi Jinping's thought on ecological civilization. *Journal of Hebei University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 51(4), 1–9. <https://link.cnki.net/urlid/13.1027.C.20260526.1315.002>