

A Brief Discussion on the Conceptual Analysis of "Space" in Geography from the Perspective of Marxist Methodology

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ABSTRACT

Western Marxist geographers play an important role in contemporary Western human geography. They have applied Marxist methods of analysis and theoretical paradigms to reinterpret and reinterpret the political, economic, social and cultural issues involved in traditional geography. At the same time, they also criticised the traditional spatial analysis of geography and put forward the idea of reinterpreting and redefining the concept of 'space'. Representatives of this school include scholars such as Lefebvre, Harvey and Suja. Their reconstruction of the concept of space reveals that we should pay more attention to the theoretical study of spatial issues, and re-recognise the theoretical significance of traditional Marxism in guiding contemporary issues.

KEYWORDS

Marxist Geography; Spatial Production; The Spatial Turn.

1. INTRODUCTION

The existence of human beings cannot be separated from the limitations of time and space, and the practical activities of human beings are even more incapable of escaping from the joint action of time and space. In the history of philosophy, time and space have been the subject of constant discussion and debate among philosophers and thinkers. Both time and space are the basic attributes of all existence. Before modern times, both natural and social sciences have thought about space, such as Aristotle's 'finite space theory' and Newton's 'absolute space theory'. However, human knowledge and understanding of space began with physical space, especially since the philosophy of the Enlightenment. In this conception, space is often regarded as a collection of objects. The formation of this concept is not only influenced by the 'entity-property' mode of thinking in scientific thinking, but also because time, as a historical category, has been dominant in the theoretical discussion of social science. Especially since Darwin proposed the theory of evolution, the concept of history has become the starting point and ultimate destination of almost all discussions.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the spatial dimension and spatial categories were neglected or even discarded in the theories of the humanities and social sciences in favour of the dimension of time. The quest of the social sciences lies in applying and believing in the paradigm of temporal and historical thinking in order to search for the laws and future of the development and evolution of human beings and human societies. As Foucault puts it, 'Did this begin with Bergson or earlier? Space used to be treated as something rigid, stereotyped, non-dialectical and static^[1]. In contrast, time was rich, prolific, alive, and dialectical.' Until the 1960s and 1970s, the phenomenon of 'spatial turn' appeared in Western academia, and scholars' interest in spatial issues gradually increased, and spatial research even became the obvious study of postmodernism. Representative figures include Foucault, Lefebvre, Jameson, Giddens, Charlamps, Bourdieu, Harvey, Suja and so on. Among them, the Western Marxist geographers represented by Lefebvre, Harvey and Suja discussed

the spatial issue extensively. They used Marxist analytical methods and theoretical paradigms to re-understand and re-interpret the content of geography involving political, economic, social and cultural issues^[2]. This school of thought has played an important role in contemporary Western human geography and is recognised as a staunch Marxist, with Harvey in particular known as the ‘flag-bearer of neo-Marxism’. Their theories and doctrines have had a profound impact on the international theoretical community.

2. REDEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT OF ‘SPACE’

Marxist geography, by its very nature, is an academic field that uses traditional Marxist methods of analysis and theoretical systems to re-examine, define and understand human geography. The birth of the Western Marxist school of geography is not accidental; it stems from a profound critique of traditional methods of spatial analysis^[3].

In the traditional research paradigm of geography, the spatial analysis method has long occupied a dominant and central position. Geographic Information System (GIS), as an important tool for spatial analysis, provides geographers with an objective and accurate means of quantitative analysis. Geographers often rely heavily on the data collected, processed and analysed by GIS when dealing with all kinds of geographic issues, from natural geographic elements such as topography, climate conditions, to human geographic contents such as population distribution, economic activities, social and cultural phenomena, all of which are measured, statistically analysed in a quantitative manner, and then the corresponding conclusions are drawn. This spatial research method based on objective quantitative analysis has, to a certain extent, greatly promoted the scientific process of geography, made the geographic research results highly accurate and reproducible, and laid a solid foundation for the development of geography.

However, the Marxist school of geography is keenly aware of the obvious limitations of relying purely on quantitative spatial analyses, and is unable to solve all geographic problems in a comprehensive and in-depth manner. In the real world, the complexity of geographic phenomena goes far beyond what can be covered by purely quantitative analyses. Geographic space is not only a realm of material existence, but also a product of the interweaving and interaction of social, economic, cultural and other factors. For example, in the study of urban spatial structure, traditional quantitative analysis methods may accurately depict objective features such as land use patterns, building density, and traffic networks, but it is difficult to fully reveal the deep-rooted factors such as social power relations, class differences, and cultural identities behind urban space. When analysing the problem of imbalanced regional economic development, purely quantitative analysis may focus on the differences in economic indicators between regions, such as the total amount of GDP, the proportion of industrial structure, etc., and ignore the complex spatial impacts of factors such as the flow of capital, the migration of labour, and the policy system.

It is based on the deep understanding of the limitations of the traditional spatial analysis method, Marxist geography school put forward the urgent need to redefine the concept of ‘space’ ^[4]. According to Marxist geography, space is not an isolated, static and purely objective existence, but a material expression of social relations. The production, organisation and evolution of space is determined by the socio-economic base, while at the same time, space in turn plays an important shaping role in the formation, development and transformation of social relations. For example, in capitalist societies, the logic of capital accumulation and expansion profoundly affects the layout and development of urban space. Large commercial centres and financial districts are often concentrated in the core of the city, creating a highly agglomerated spatial pattern, which is not only the result of capital's pursuit of profit maximisation, but also reflects the spatial differentiation of the social class structure. The peripheral areas, on the other hand, may become areas where industrial waste accumulates and the poor are concentrated, and this unequal spatial distribution further exacerbates social contradictions and conflicts.

In addition, Marxist geography emphasises the historicity and relativity of space. In different historical periods, the form and function of space undergoes significant changes due to differences in the level of social productivity, production relations and cultural concepts. For example, in agricultural societies, people's production and living space mainly revolved around farmland and villages, and the spatial structure was relatively simple and dispersed; whereas after the Industrial Revolution, with the rise of the factory system and the acceleration of urbanisation, urban space expanded rapidly, with the emergence of large-scale industrial districts, commercial districts and residential districts, and the spatial structure became more complex and diversified. In the post-industrial era, the rapid development of information technology has given rise to the emergence of virtual space, breaking the traditional limitations of geographic space, so that people's social interaction and economic activities are no longer confined to specific physical places, and the concept and connotation of space have been further expanded and deepened.

Marxist geography's critique of the traditional method of spatial analysis and its reinterpretation of the concept of 'space' have opened up new horizons and directions for the study of geography. It has prompted geographers to pay more attention to the socio-economic roots behind geographic phenomena and the interactive relationship between space and society, promoting the development of geography from a purely natural or social science to a comprehensive and interdisciplinary one, which is of great theoretical and practical significance for deepening our understanding of the interrelationship between human society and the geographic environment.

3. THE SPATIAL CONCEPT OF THE 'TRIADIC SPACE DIALECTIC'

3.1. Core Interests and Theoretical Breakthroughs of the 'Spatial Triadic Dialectic'

The 'spatial triadic dialectic' is a very representative and far-reaching point of view put forward by Lefebvre in his classic work 'The Production of Space'. The core purpose of this theory is to reconstruct the unique 'triadic dialectic' relationship between 'society', 'history' and 'space'. 'relationship between 'society,' 'history,' and 'space. In the traditional theoretical research paradigm, the 'social-historical' dualism of dialectical thinking occupies a dominant position, which to a certain extent limits people's comprehensive understanding of social phenomena and historical development. The new spatial epistemology proposed by Lefebvre is intended to break the bondage of this dualism, and to add the 'space', a long-neglected or marginalised dimension, to the theoretical search for the study of social production and human historical development ^[5].

3.2. Analysis of the Dimensions of the 'Triadic Dialectic of Space'

Lefebvre's epistemology of the three dimensions of the 'spatial triadic dialectic' is deeply and meticulously summarised as 'perceived, conceived and lived'. types, respectively, as 'perceived, conceived and lived'. Specifically, as perceived space, material space is the objective existence that people directly contact and experience through their senses, including the natural environment, architectural facilities, geographic landscapes and other concrete physical entities. These material spaces, with their intuitive forms and attributes, provide the basic places and conditions for people's lives and activities. Mental space, on the other hand, is the conceived space, which exists at the level of human thinking and consciousness, and is a collection of people's imagination, planning, design and various abstract concepts of space. For example, the blueprint conception of future urban space by urban planners and the creative expression of spatial mood by artists all belong to the category of spiritual space. Social space, on the other hand, is the space of life, which is the spatial field that can be continuously transformed and shaped by human social practical activities since the emergence of human society. Social space not only reflects the structure and change of social relations, but also carries people's daily life, social interaction, cultural heritage and other social activities^[6].

3.3. The Theoretical Innovation Value of the ‘Trinity’ View of Space

This ‘trinity’ view of space has an important theoretical innovation value. It integrates the physical space, which is the existence of material entities, and the abstract spiritual space, which can be conceived, as well as the social space, which can be transformed by human social practices since the emergence of human society, in a complete and organic way. In traditional social theory, the perception of space tends to be one-sided and isolated, focusing either on the objective description of physical space or on the abstract exploration of spiritual space, while ignoring the close connection between social space and the first two. Lefebvre's view of space breaks the limitations of this traditional cognition, reconstructs the status and significance of space in social theory, and provides a brand new perspective and theoretical framework for our understanding of social phenomena, historical development, and the interaction between human beings and space ^[7].

3.4. Transformation of the Concept of Space from the History of Philosophy and Lefebvre's Critique

As a matter of fact, from the viewpoint of the long vein of understanding and interpretation of space in the history of philosophy, space has always been an important category that has been seriously neglected or even rejected. In the academic context where temporal categories and historical determinism have dominated, space has often been regarded as a stereotypical existence lacking intrinsic meaning, and even as full of illusions and errors. This view has led to a traditional view of space that separates time and space from each other, and sees space as merely a background or container for the development of time, while ignoring the independence and dynamism of space itself. Lefebvre profoundly criticised and firmly opposed this approach. Through in-depth theoretical analyses and empirical studies, he put more emphasis on the close and complex connection between space and social history and social production. According to him, space is not a passive and static existence, but actively participates in the process of social production and historical change. In capitalist societies, space is precisely the main tool by which capitalism can continue to perpetuate and survive. Through the production, appropriation and control of space, capitalism achieves the accumulation and expansion of capital, and at the same time exacerbates social inequalities and contradictions^[19].

3.5. Transmission and Development of Lefebvre's Views - The Case of Edward Suja

This groundbreaking and insightful view of Lefebvre was highly endorsed and actively passed on by his student Edward Suja. On the basis of Lefebvre, Suja further delved into and developed spatial theory, combined spatial analysis with social criticism, and expanded the field of application and depth of research of spatial theory. His research not only enriches the connotation of spatial theory, but also provides more powerful theoretical support and analytical tools for us to understand various phenomena and problems in contemporary society, such as urbanisation, globalisation, social inequality, cultural conflicts, etc. ^[8].

3.6. The Relevance of ‘Spatial Triadic Dialectics’

Through the in-depth analysis of Lefebvre's ‘spatial triadic dialectic’, we can see that the development of spatial theory not only promotes the progress of academic research, but also provides new ideas and methods for us to understand and solve the problems in the real society. In today's era of globalisation and rapid urbanisation, an in-depth study of spatial theory is of great practical significance for us to better plan and design urban space, to promote social equity and justice, and to advance the sustainable development of human society.

4. THE SPATIAL CONCEPT OF 'HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL MATERIALISM'

4.1. The Excavation of Spatial Ideas in Traditional Marxist Theory

In Harvey's perspective, although the use of spatial categories has been neglected to a certain extent in the theoretical development of traditional Marxism, this does not mean that the theoretical idea of space does not exist in classical Marxism. He makes it clear that the classic work of the Communist Manifesto is extremely rich in spatial (geographical) ideas^[9]. These ideas have a powerful explanatory power and can effectively explain the historical-geographical changes characterising the contemporary world, providing a unique perspective for understanding the development of the world.

4.2. Criticism of the Traditional Spatial Concept of Geography

On the basis of in-depth research, Harvey launched a profound critique of the traditional spatial concept of geography by combining Marxist spatial theory while inheriting the critical spirit of Lefebvre's spatial theory. He believed that the traditional geography's concept of space has serious flaws, and its biggest problem lies in ignoring the complex interaction between space and society, and missing the human factor in this conceptual system. In Harvey's view, space is by no means an isolated, abstract existence, but is closely connected with human activities.

4.3. The Nature and Meaning of Humanised Space

Space should be a humanised space, a humanised social living space formed by the transformation of nature through persistent human practical activities. In essence, space is constructed by human production and social practice, and its construction and formation process cannot exist independently from the existence of human beings. It is because of the active participation of human beings in social space with intention that space is endowed with rich meaning^[18]. This process is particularly evident in the process of capitalist urbanisation, where the advance of urbanisation and modernisation has transformed the manifestations of social space, and at the same time, the ways in which human beings perceive and experience time and space in practice, conditions that have become more pronounced under the impetus of postmodernity^[10].

4.4. Geographic Space as a Vehicle for Capital Expansion

In addition, in Harvey's perception of geospatial space, geospatial space is also an important carrier of capital expansion. Capital has the inherent impulse of unlimited accumulation, and this unlimited accumulation needs the unlimited expansion of political power as a support. The unlimited expansion of political power is inevitably accompanied by territorial aggression and plunder, which is essentially a process of possession and expansion of geographic space^[11]. After capital occupies a certain space, it transforms the geographic space into a social life space that is closely related to the production and life of human beings through the practical activities of human beings. The original seemingly meaningless space becomes vivid and concrete, and can be perceived and participated in by people after it is closely linked to the changes in social production relations brought about by the expansion of capital production^[12].

5. SPATIAL CONCEPTS OF THE 'THIRD SPACE' THEORY

5.1. Origin and Spatial Classification of the Theory of the 'Third Space'

The theory of the 'third space' was developed by Suja on the basis of geographic interpretation, drawing on and inheriting Lefebvre's view of the 'triadic dialectic of space', which classifies space

into three forms: the 'first space' is the material form of figuration; the 'second space' is the spiritual form of conception; the 'third space' is the spiritual form of conception. ' is the material form of figuration; 'second space' is the mental space of conception; and 'third space' is simultaneously real and imagined^[13].

5.2. The Traditional Epistemology of Space: 'First Space' and 'Second Space'.

The 'first space' and the 'second space' are the traditional epistemology of space, and the 'third space' is the 'real and imagined space'. The 'third space,' i.e., 'the space of the real and the imaginary,' is the epistemology of space promoted by Suja. The first epistemology of space favours the objectivity and materiality of space and seeks to establish a formal science of space. The second spatial epistemology emerged in the process of refuting the overly closed and emphasised objectivity of the dominant first spatial epistemology. It implicitly assumes that the production of spatial knowledge is accomplished primarily through discursively constructed spatial reproductions, spatial activities of a spiritual nature^[14].

5.3. Critique of Traditional Spatial Epistemology

According to Suja, traditional geography has an incomplete knowledge of space based on these two traditional spatial epistemologies and ways of thinking. In terms of the first spatial epistemology, the problem is that space is overly materialised and physicalised, and that space is only 'physical space' that exists externally that can be grasped and perceived through empirical means such as touch, observation and experimentation ^[15]. The second space epistemology is a critique and reflection of the first space epistemology, space is not only concrete, but also can be abstract, thus there exists a kind of abstract cognisable spiritual space, this spiritual space is the space that human beings can produce only through fantasy and imagination ^[16].

5.4. The 'Third Space': A New Epistemological Construction of Space

The 'third space' proposed by Suja is a new spatial epistemology that is re-conceptualised and constructed on the basis of a critique of both. This 'third space' is different from the 'physical space' of the 'first space' that can be directly perceived and experienced, and the 'second space' that can be imagined and abstracted, as well as from the 'first space' that can be directly perceived and experienced, and the 'second space' that can be imagined and abstracted. ' the imaginable and abstract 'mental space', but a space that includes both and goes beyond, a more open and all-encompassing space in the world of social life ^[17].

5.5. 'Third Space' Theory and the Reconstruction of Social Critical Theory

Suja argues that traditional Marxist critical social theory is one that ignores the spatial category and focuses on the temporal category, hence the need to reconfigure critical social theory by adding a spatial dimension to classical Marxist theory, and that the process of reconfiguring spatial theory necessarily 'revolves around the demystification and politicisation of the social production of space' ^[18].

5.6. The Essential Properties of the Concept of Space in 'Third Space' Theory

On the whole, the concept of space in Suja's 'third space' theory is precisely one that connotes the dual attributes of materiality and humanised relations of space, a space of social production relations ^[20].

6. CONCLUSION AND PROSPECT.

6.1. Conclusion

In summary, through an in-depth study of the Western Marxist school of geography, we have been able to systematically and comprehensively clarify the profound discussions on the issue of 'space' by several major representatives such as Lefebvre, Harvey, and Suja. Lefebvre pioneered the 'spatial triadic dialectic' and reconstructed the dialectical relationship between 'society', 'history' and 'space'. 'The dialectical relationship between the three, the organic integration of material space, spiritual space and social space, breaking the limitations of the traditional 'social-historical' dualism thinking, reconstructing the status and meaning of space in social theory. Harvey mined the spatial ideas embedded in classical Marxist theory, criticised the traditional geographic concept of space for its neglect of the interactive relationship between space and society as well as the human factor, and emphasised that space is humanised and constructed by the social practice of production, while pointing out that geographic space is an important carrier for the expansion of capital. On the basis of Lefebvre, Suja put forward the theory of 'third space', criticised the traditional epistemology of 'first space' and 'second space', and constructed a theory that contains both materiality and spirituality and transcends both. It critiques the traditional epistemology of 'first space' and 'second space', constructs a new epistemology of space that contains both materiality and spirituality and transcends both, and stresses that space contains the dual attributes of materiality and humanisation, and that it is the space of social production relations.

The theoretical attempts and firm determination of these representatives not only enriched the connotation of Marxist theory, but also provided us with new perspectives and ideas for re-understanding and recognising the classical Marxist theory as well as the ever-evolving Marxism. Through the study of their theories, we are able to grasp more clearly the importance of the spatial dimension in Marxist theory, and to realise that space is not an isolated and passive existence, but a dynamic category that is closely connected with and interacts with social history and production practice. This helps us to correct the previous bias in our understanding of Marxist theory, improve and develop the Marxist theoretical system, and make it more contemporary and explanatory.

6.2. Prospect.

The research results of the Western Marxist geography school and the enthusiasm they show for Marxism and spatial issues provide valuable learning and reference experiences for our academic research and theoretical exploration. In contemporary society, with the acceleration of globalisation and urbanisation as well as the rapid development of information technology, spatial issues have become more and more complex and important, which further highlights the reality and urgency of spatial issues research.

Re-understanding and re-interpretation of the concept of space has undoubtedly become the core task and key direction of spatial research. We need to further deepen our understanding of the multiple attributes of space, not only focusing on the material, spiritual and social nature of space, but also exploring the specific manifestations and mechanisms of space in different scales (e.g., global, regional, urban, community, etc.) and in different domains (e.g., economic, political, cultural, ecological, etc.). At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the cross-fertilisation of spatial analysis with the theories of other disciplines, such as sociology, political science, economics, cultural studies, etc., so as to form a more integrated and comprehensive spatial research methodology and theoretical system.

Spatial analysis is bound to become an indispensable and important theoretical dimension in contemporary social theory. In our future research, we should make full use of spatial analysis methods to deeply analyse the various problems facing contemporary society, such as social inequality, unbalanced regional development, urban spatial justice, cultural conflicts, etc., in order to

provide new ideas and strategies for solving these problems. In addition, we should actively promote the innovation and development of spatial theories, and put forward forward spatial theoretical perspectives with foresight and guidance in the light of new changes and needs in contemporary society, so as to contribute theoretical power to the construction of a more just, harmonious and sustainable social and spatial order. Through continuous exploration and practice, we have reason to believe that space research will play an increasingly important role in the theory and practice of contemporary society and provide more solid theoretical support for the development of human society.

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