

Urban Space Issues Under the Logic of Capital

Zhang Xuan

School of Marxism

Jiangsu Police Institute.

Nanjing, China

Abstract

Capital is a key element in the formation and development of urban space, and spatialization must obey the logic of capital. The theories of capital circulation, capital accumulation, and capital expansion are important tools for characterizing spatial perspectives and interpreting urban spatial issues. The logic of capital has an extremely important impact on the physical space, social space, and natural space of cities, causing many problems such as homogenization, hierarchy, and differentiation in urban space. Analyzing urban spatial issues requires connection with capital logic, and solving urban spatial problems requires clarifying the capital logic behind and moving towards spatial justice in the post urban era.

Key words: Capital logic; Spatial logic; Spatial justice

“Capital logic” is an exchange principle and system aimed at capital appreciation, where capital holds the leading and dominant position. The development of a city is not simply a process of geographical expansion, but a process of capital utilizing urban space to achieve its own expansion. The construction and production of urban space are the result of capital control and action, and the logic of capital has an extremely important impact on the spatial process of a city.

1. The impact of capital logic on urban spatial processes

1.1 The logic of capital determines the physical spatial and morphological changes of cities

1.1.1 The spatial shaping effect of capital

Harvey believes that, from a macro perspective, the internal driving force behind urban form and spatial changes is the process of capital continuously achieving self appreciation and resolving the crisis of over accumulation through the use of "time-space compression". In order to solve the contradiction caused by overproduction and over accumulation, and pursue maximum surplus value, capital has turned to investing in the construction environment, creating new space for further capital circulation and accumulation.

1.1.2 Homogenization of Urban Space

In the process of modernization, cities no longer exist simply as spaces for people's production and life, but have actually become carriers for the development of capitalism itself. As space becomes a means of production and is transformed by capital into a spatial commodity, it is endowed with exchange value and use value just like all other commodities, becoming a circulating commodity in the market economy. Driven by the profit driven nature of capital, other commodities in urban space have become standardized and patterned, and the physical spatial form of cities has become more similar. The uniform grid like planning has replaced the original urban characteristics. The urban space has become homogenized, and the personality and charm have been dissolved, the abstract goal of 'modernization' has made contemporary cities' A thousand cities with one side'.

The acceleration of urbanization has promoted the spread of homogenization, and this standardized and patterned city continues to expand and replicate infinitely. From the West to the East, regardless of the historical or cultural background of cities, as well as their climate and natural conditions, each city has been "cloned" into a series of "concrete forests".

1.2 The logic of capital has influenced the communication space and methods of cities

1.2.1 The alienation of people in the "fetishism"

The acceleration of exchange under the logic of capital enables cities to continuously provide a wide variety of goods, and also leads to a sharp increase in urban liquidity. The constantly changing social space has caused people's tension and anxiety. The nature of self-protection often leads people to make negative assumptions when facing the fleeting urban life, and to act alone as much as possible to avoid getting involved in other people's affairs, that is, to have a cold, indifferent, and detached attitude towards others. In specific social behaviors, when this psychological distance makes people feel lonely and unsupported, a rational thinking mode is used to establish defense mechanisms to resist various trends and contradictions in the external environment. So precision, punctuality, and instrumental rationality were imposed on everyone in the city, and people began to use their minds instead of their hearts to respond, constantly calculating gains and losses, and becoming worldly wise and smooth. Marx believed that in modern society, under the influence of "fetishism", the relationship between people has been shrouded in the relationship between capital and commodities. Whether it is the "objectification" of personality or the "personification" of things, both interpret the alienation of capital from the entire society.

1.2.2 "One-dimension" people under technological rationality

The logic of capital influences the psychological space and living conditions of cities. "fetishism" is first a typical urban lifestyle mentality. What diverges from commodity fetishism is the worship of currency (capital, money). People believe that money is omnipotent and can buy everything: beauty, wisdom, status, and even personality. The vast majority of modern people regard making money as their primary pursuit of life, and currency has been internalized as an ultimate goal. Although the psychological distance between people creates a sense of distrust towards each other, they show indifference towards things while also pursuing individuality and extreme stimulation. Through these activities, people gain a so-called 'sense of happiness' in their lives. And it is precisely these false feelings of happiness that make people, as free and creative practitioners, lose the negativity, criticality, transcendence, and so on that they should have. The rationality of technology ultimately alienates everyone into a 'one-dimensional person'.

1.3 The logic of capital has led to over capitalization of natural space

The capitalization of natural space is an inevitable product of capital accumulation, and capital has not set its own accumulation limits since its birth, so the excessive capitalization of natural space is also inevitable. This is mainly reflected in two aspects:

1.3.1 Ecological crisis

The leap of human productivity achieved by capitalism comes at the cost of enormous environmental costs. Natural space is not only the production condition and factor of capitalism, but its limited natural resources also objectively become the limit of its production. However, the inherent nature of unlimited accumulation and expansion of capital constantly breaks through this limit to achieve maximum profit, which inevitably leads to contradictions between the two. The deeper the accumulation of capital, the more it dominates natural space, and the excessive use of natural space will inevitably lead to a comprehensive tension in the relationship between humans and nature, and bring serious ecological problems

1.3.2 Ecological colonialism

The globalization of capital accumulation breeds a global ecological crisis. In the hierarchical world pattern dominated by capitalism, the over capitalization of natural space is also reflected in the ecological colonialism implemented by a few developed capitalist countries against backward countries. Given the limited nature of global natural resources, with the deepening of global capital accumulation, the struggle between developed capitalist countries and backward agricultural countries for global natural resources will become more intense, and this struggle will be more of an economic means. The opening up of the world market has provided realistic conditions for developed capitalist countries to plunder and exploit the natural resources of underdeveloped countries.

The latter's local resistance to this ecological colonialism is obviously unable to compete with the dominant logic of capital, and the tension between humans and nature has thus expanded to the global space.

1.4 Capital logic causes spatial differences and unbalanced development

1.4.1 Spatial Grading

While promoting the development of modern urban space, capital has transformed old production relations with its own logic, forming a "center--edge" spatial relationship with capital characteristics.

From the perspective of spatial production, the primary meaning of spatial development is the development of physical space and the increase of basic wealth. With the further expansion of capital, capital becomes the "link" connecting urban spaces. Capital establishes an order that is in line with its own characteristics through the differentiation of urban land and spatial functions. Under the intervention and influence of power, a series of "central spaces" have emerged and continuously solidified the permanence of this pattern.

Capital operates in urban spaces, and due to unbalanced development, on the one hand, it completes spatial production, and on the other hand, it creates "edge spaces" that are different from the "central space", causing urban spatial hierarchy and wealth inequality. For example, spatial rights are violated, spatial opportunities are deprived, spatial outcomes are squeezed, and people are excluded from the central system.

1.4.2 Urban-rural opposition

Urban space, as a fundamental link for capital accumulation, gathers superior conditions for capital production and reproduction, including infrastructure, surplus labor, and commodity markets. Marx said that urban space "has railways, canals, and highways", more "opportunities to select skilled workers", "markets and exchanges with customers gathering", and so on. However, the development of urban space is based on the "deprivation" of rural space. Capitalist civilization is marked by the rise of urban space and the development of industrial civilization as its core. It has had a huge impact on rural space centered on agricultural civilization, expanding the contradiction between urban centralization and rural marginalization, and making rural areas completely dependent on cities. In Marx's view, the advantage of urban space stems from its "concentration of population, production tools, capital, enjoyment, and demand", while the disadvantage of rural space stems from its "isolation and dispersion". Essentially, cities and rural areas represent two different modes of production, serving as a watershed between civilization and ignorance. With the continuous strengthening of capital accumulation in urban space, "more labor will come from rural areas to cities, and the agglomeration effect of cities will be greater." While strengthening the status of cities, it also leads to the decline of rural areas and the polarization of the binary opposition between cities and rural areas. The spatial accumulation of capital has created an unbalanced development between cities and rural areas. With the continuous deprivation of rural areas by cities, cities have become increasingly civilized and developed, while rural areas have gradually become backward and ignorant. From this perspective, cities have a superior "agglomeration effect" compared to rural areas, gradually becoming an important carrier of capitalist production relations. The more frequent the accumulation of capital, the more forced the capitalist mode of production will penetrate into the countryside, and the position of the city will become more consolidated. The countryside will also decline, and the spatial relationship between the city and the countryside will eventually become fragmented.

2. The solution to urban space problems -- Spatial Justice

To solve the problem of urban space, it is necessary to sort out the underlying logic of capital and to achieve the spatial justice turn of the logic of capital. To regulate and guide capital by using the values and principles of spatial justice to overcome its nature of value-added and greedy, and to promote a more rational and orderly urban spatial production. The spatial justice refers to the social fairness of the rights and interests of citizens in the allocation of spatial resources and spatial production, which includes justice in the production, possession, utilization, exchange and consumption of spatial resources and spatial products. Achieving a spatial justice shift in the logic of capital is conducive to optimizing the spatial layout and form of cities, improving the sustainable development capacity of cities, realizing the equalization of public services, promoting the process of integrated urban-rural development and building a people-oriented city, thereby enhancing people's sense of well-being. To achieve the spatial justice turn of the logic of capital should focus on the following aspects:

2.1 Promoting the reconstruction of capital's social responsibility

Firstly, pay more attention to the 'people-oriented' and 'fairness and justice' in the process of capital value-added and income distribution, ensuring that the welfare of capital politics is shared by the whole society.

Secondly, to actively promote the restructuring of social responsibility system of multiple capital beneficiaries by promoting the reform of the corporate social responsibility evaluation system, improving the participation and supervision mechanisms of public welfare venture capital, etc. To make capital serve the spatial production in a rational and orderly way by promoting the restructuring of the social responsibility of capital.

2.2 On the aspect of spatial production

Firstly, it is necessary to coordinate the interests of capital at all aspects of spatial production, such as the interests between international capital and domestic spatial production, between regions, and between urban and rural. Secondly, to coordinate the interests of managers, producers, and consumers at the aspect of urban spatial production. Again, it is necessary to regulate capital from all aspects of spatial production. Strengthen the responsibility of government, improve the design for the system and promote the spatial justice while ensuring the fundamental role of the market in allocating spatial resources. Finally, to establish a comprehensive mechanism for guaranteeing and regulating basic spatial products to prevent spatial isolation and marginalization, as well as to preventing the privatization of public spaces.

2.3 At the aspect of spatial ecology

To drive the spatial justice turn in the logic of capital through the transformation of spatial ecology. Firstly, focus on the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature, and build a green production, living and consumption pattern. Secondly, determine the urban boundaries, spatial layout and spatial scale according to the carrying capacity of nature and the constraints of the ecological environment. Thirdly, enhance the overall protection of cultural ecology, inherit and promote outstanding traditional culture, promote the cultural development with local characteristics and preserve the urban cultural memory.

3. Conclusion

With the continuous development of the social economy, the logic of capital is also changing subconsciously to become more conducive to promoting the urban spatial production. And it is undeniable that there is still a certain friction between the logic of capital and the logic of spatial production of urban development, especially in terms of the ultimate value orientation of the development process. The ultimate value orientation of the logic of spatial production is to achieve the great enrichment of material wealth and the freely comprehensive development of human, while the ultimate goal of the logic of capital is to achieve continuous accumulation and proliferation of capital. The contradiction between the two is difficult to resolve in a short term. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to the logic of capital and free it from the limitations of its historical essence and value connotation. Capital can be not only a catalyst but also a stumbling block for the urban spatial production. Although profit seeking is the essential attribute of capital, its facilitating role in the urban space development is worthy of recognition. Therefore, it is necessary to dialectically understand the role of the logic of capital in urban development, to find specific solutions to transcend the logic of capital, to eliminate the stranglehold of capital on urban development, to expel the domination of capital over the modern city and to return to the essence of the city.

4. Acknowledgement

This paper was supported by Research project of Jiangsu Police Institute (2020SJYSZ04), and Education project of Jiangsu Provincial Department (2021SJA0514).

References:

[1] Zhao Chao, Song Donglin. Exploration and Enlightenment of the Logic of Capital in Urban Spatial Production of Developed Countries -- Based on the Research Perspective of Marxist Spatial Political Economy. The Journal of Shandong Social Sciences. Vol 8,2022.

[2] Xue Linyu. The Introspection and Critique on Capitalist Urban Civilization [J]. Journal of International Social Sciences. Vol 2,2018.

[3] Yuan JiuHong, Chen Yanbing. Misunderstanding China by the Logic of Capital Liberalisation and Spatialisation -- A Review of David Harvey's Analysis of China's Path [J]. Marxism and Reality. Vol 5, 2018.

[4] Zhuang Yougang, Xie Xiao. The Marketization of Spatial Production and the Critique of Contemporary Urban Development. Journal of Social Sciences. Vol 8, 2017.