

# Domestic Research on Ecological Imperialism: a Literature Review and Prospect

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## Abstract

Ecological imperialism is a general term of series measures such as economic exploitation, political oppression and ecological plunder implemented by imperialist countries against the third world countries in the field of ecological environment, which is a new variety and new manifestation of imperialism in the contemporary era. This concept was first proposed by Alfred Crosby, and then elaborated by John Foster and other theorists to form a complete theoretical system. Domestic research on ecological imperialism began in 1995. Since 2008, ecological imperialism has gradually become an academic hot spot and relevant domestic research continued to emerge, which mainly focus on three dimensions: theoretical research on ecological imperialism, research on western scholars' criticism of ecological imperialism, and research on the thematic application of ecological imperialism. Great progress has been made in understanding the theoretical framework of ecological imperialism. While at the same time, there are also some shortcomings in the theoretical research, such as the research mainly introduces the western research, and lacks the research of other western ecologists, and the application of the theory is inflexible. There are still bright prospects for further study of this theory in some directions.

## Keywords

Ecological imperialism, Alfred Crosby, John Foster, environmental history, ecological Marxism.

## 1. Introduction

"Ecological Imperialism" is a concept first proposed by Alfred Crosby in 1986 in his book "Ecological Imperialism: European Biological Expansion 900-1900". From the perspective of biological factors, Crosby believed that the expansion of the alien species brought by the Europeans to the New World was a deeper and more important reason for their successful colonization. Since then, western ecological Marxist scholars represented by John Foster have further explained and developed the concept of "ecological imperialism", extended it to the category of political-economic theory, and formed a relatively complete theoretical system.

In China, Zhang Jiancheng and other scholars took the lead in studying ecological imperialism in 1995, but the development of relevant research was relatively slow for some time later. Since the publication of Hart and Negli's "Empire" in 2008, domestic scholars have conducted more research on ecological imperialism. Articles through the system of domestic related research literature, ecological imperialism is divided into the theoretical level of ecological imperialism research, western scholars on the criticism of ecological imperialism, applied research of ecological imperialism in three aspects, analyze the domestic ecological imperialism research status and the insufficiency, and try to explore the prospect of further development of related research. The study of ecological imperialism is conducive to deepening the understanding of international relations, having a deeper understanding of the nature of capitalism and its new

contemporary changes, and providing theoretical support and useful reference for domestic ecological construction.

## 2. A theoretical study of ecological imperialism

The most important thing for the study of ecological imperialism is the theoretical study, which expounds the theory of ecological imperialism by combining the classical views of Marxism. Domestic Marxist scholars have carried out a lot of research on this, and have constructed a more systematic theoretical framework. Its research mainly includes the following aspects:

Some scholars focus on the basic concepts, theories and definitions of ecological imperialism, and analyze its historical evolution, development trend and research turn. Zhang Zhenzhen to the concept of "ecological imperialism" as the research center, combed from Crosby to contemporary western ecological scholars from put forward to the development process of ecological imperialism concept, the ecological imperialism and ecological colonialism, imperialism, and analyzes the development of ecological imperialism theory of two turns, namely from ecological colonialism to ecological imperialism and from environmental history to ecological marxism. Zheng Jiwei pointed out that since the beginning of the new century, the theoretical research of western ecological imperialism has shifted from the perspective of history and literature to the perspective of political economy, and introduced the latest developments of the research of western ecological imperialism theory around the exchange of Marx's labor theory of value and ecological inequality.

Some scholars focus on the deep investigation of ecological imperialism, and explore its root cause, essence and the capital logic behind it. Li Xiaohong was an early scholar to discuss the root and essence of ecological imperialism. She clearly pointed out that the essence of ecological imperialism is to make use of monopoly privileges to plunder natural resources and environment and obtain the maximum profits in the competition. The article also summarizes its basic characteristics: internal ecological abuse, exploitation of people, and external plunder of resources. Finally, it analyzes the harm brought by ecological imperialism: it causes the crisis of human living environment and deepens the social inequality. It is worth noting that she believes that the internal environmental damage and exploitation of the people also belong to the category of ecological imperialism. Li Juan defines the present western countries to "bidirectional" ecological plunder, namely the natural resources to the center, garbage and pollution enterprises to the marginal countries, then analyze the western beautification of ecological imperialism and points out the nature of ecological imperialism, ecological imperialism rooted in the nature of capitalism, finally got four enlightenment. Liu Shun based on the capital logic and ecological justice of ecological imperialism theory, discusses the justice of capital logic and "justice", points out that the capital logic space expansion is ecological imperialism and ecological justice exits, discusses the ecological debt is the core characteristics of ecological imperialism, finally illustrates the in the capital logic to build ecological justice is beyond the road of ecological imperialism.

The overall research on ecological imperialism focuses on the construction of a complete theoretical framework of ecological imperialism, which is numerous and fruitful. Zhang is domestic earlier put forward the concept of "ecological imperialism" and its study, he straightforward and concise put forward the environmental problems of Asia, Africa and Latin America is rooted in unreasonable international economic relations, the first time to pass on pollution and ecological plunder system is discussed, deeply revealed the ecological aggression of developed countries. Liu Weizhe examined ecological imperialism from two levels of history and reality, and elaborated the core view of Crosby from the expansion history of thousands of years: The expansion of Europe has regional selectivity, and its decisive condition lies in the

transformation of the ecosystem of the conquered areas. On the practical level, we introduce the direct and indirect forms of ecological plunder in Europe.

Jia Xuejun systematically summarized the five characteristics of ecological imperialism and discussed the five main manifestations of ecological imperialism in detail, and summarized the three enlightenment to China, indicating that the need to establish a construction road with ecological socialism as the direction. Feng Wangzhou introduced the three characteristics of ecological imperialism, explained the reasons for the emergence of ecological imperialism from three aspects: political, economic and the five manifestations of less developed countries, and finally summarized four important inspirations for China's construction. Wang Zhenxi "the theory of ecological imperialism narrative, strategy and counter" is about the new study of ecological imperialism overall research, introduces the history of ecological imperialism generation and realistic movement, from the economic strategy, political strategy and cultural strategy three angles comprehensive and systematically analyze the imperialist ecological colonial strategy, finally on the basis of Marx and Lenin about imperialism, points out that to solve the ecological crisis, can only completely sublate capital logic, build "human and natural life community". These achievements mark that the basic theoretical framework of ecological imperialism has reached system and maturity.

### **3. On the study of western scholars' critique of ecological imperialism**

Crosby was the author of the concept of "ecological imperialism", and Foster elaborated the theory of ecological imperialism and extended it to the political-economic category, which can be described as the master of this theory. Therefore, the study of western scholars and ecological imperialism mainly focuses on Foster and Crosby.

There are many studies on Foster's criticism of ecological imperialism. Chen Yongsen systematically introduced Foster's study of ecological imperialism in China. It systematically elaborated Foster's criticism of ecological imperialism through the concepts of "biocultural circle", "metabolic cracks" and "ecological debt". The "biocultural circle" adopted by Foster is free of the shackles of specific ecosystems and is characterized by "dominating nature". Foster further developed Marx's concept of "metabolic cracks", believing that "metabolic cracks" not only exists in the soil nutrient cycle, but also widely exists in various fields. The global "cracks" caused by capitalist countries through resource plunder are the main cause of the global ecological crisis. At the same time, Foster also adopted the concept of "ecological debt", through quantitative and comparative analysis of the "carbon emission" index, pointed out that developed countries actually owe a large amount of ecological debt to less developed countries. Finally, he pointed out that ecological problems cannot be solved within the framework of capitalism, and ecological socialism is the only way to solve the ecological crisis. Later, Jia Xuejun also introduced and studied Foster's thoughts similarly, which will not be repeated here. Cao Lihua introduces the foreign scholars for foster in favor and negative different views, for domestic scholars from different angles of the study of foster and ecological imperialism is summarized, finally summarizes the academic research still shortcomings and enlightenment. In addition, there are comparative studies on the ideas of Crosby and Foster. Cheng Huimin compare Crosby biological perspective and foster's political and economic perspective of the two different ecological imperialism interpretation perspective of comparative study, points out that the criticism of ecological imperialism in deep fit, have pointed out the great harm of ecological aggression, criticism of capitalism. At the same time, there are also great differences in their criticism of ecological imperialism. In terms of critical approaches, Crosby focuses on the analysis of biological expansion from the perspective of geographical and biological aspects, while Foster focuses on the criticism of the deep capitalist system. In Crosby's theory, man only acts as a transmission medium in the biological expansion and plays a small role, while Foster's

theory highlights the role of man. Man is the maker of the system and the initiator. Crosby's theory reveals the necessity of biological survival of the fittest, while Foster reveals the necessity of communism replacing capitalism.

#### 4. Thematic applied research on ecological imperialism

The thematic applied research of ecological imperialism combines the theoretical research of ecological imperialism with the specific objects, and starts innovatively from a more specific perspective. This kind of research focuses on a detailed study in a certain region, a certain industry or a certain event, analyzes the internal logic of ecological imperialism, and breaks through the limitations of the grand narrative.

From for the first time, the article combines the two theories of ecological imperialism with the new liberalization of nature. First of all, the research results of foreign scholars on ecological imperialism, Discuss the theoretical connection between ecological imperialism and the new liberalisation of nature, Thereafter introduced the rise of third world economic nationalism and anti-movement and its process of being replaced by "anti-anti-movement", Finally, in Africa, The increase increased foreign investment in Africa and the change of trade and investment rules, Have illustrated the Western plunder of African resources, Africa's resources are heavily exported and the African countries actually receive very limited returns.

Focusing on industrial changes, Qiao Yu takes the development of irrigation agriculture as the breakthrough point to analyze the ecological expansion of the European colonists, This paper introduces the environmental management of the indigenous people, the development of irrigation agriculture from the "wool boom" to the gold rush, the ecological impact of the ecological expansion and the impact on the indigenous society, Analyzed the drivers of promoting irrigation agriculture in Australia, Finally illustrates the final result of irrigated agriculture -- overall return to the coastal areas, The irrigation area did not become a "new Europe".

Some scholars focus on a certain historical event. Shi Xiaowen explores the whole process from the environmental perspective from the discovery of the value of the eastern United States to the monopoly of Peru, the plunder of bird droppings in the United States and the formation and development of the "bird drofever" with the rise of new ecological imperialism. In addition, the paper also analyzes the difference between new ecological imperialism and ecological imperialism, and in the end analyzes the influence of new ecological imperialism, that is, caused the global "metabolic" rift.

Ecological imperialism has also been applied in both national and international social analysis. Zhang Chunhou based on the analysis of American interests politics and the global opposition to environmental justice and ecological imperialism, first introduces the concept of "environmental justice" put forward and the development of environmental justice movement, after the public opinion testing data studied the American interest groups and the modern struggle about environmental protection, analyzes the international extension of environmental justice, namely the global environmental justice around the conflict of interest, lists around the ecological imperialism of the four performance, finally summarized for China's enlightenment.

From the perspective of literature, Lin Yuanjing combine ecological imperialism and literary novels, pioneering from the perspective of ecological imperialism Lessing weeds in singing, through the analysis of Mary, Dick and Wright fate, points out that the European colonists cannot blend with Africa, illustrates the Wright criticism of colonists and ecological imperialism and sympathy for the earth in Africa. Jiang Zhenyong for ecological perspective for the avatar expressed natural theme of mining, the image of the people and earth mercenaries, think the theme of the film reflects Leopold's land ethics, points out that conquer the backward nation

and conquer the nature has the same robber logic, and the story is extended to contemporary time and space to outer space to the capitalist logic rise to the empire.

## 5. Summary and outlook

In a word, in the course of long-term efforts in the theoretical research of ecological imperialism, the basic knowledge of ecological imperialism has formed a complete system, its theoretical structure has been perfected and mature, and many gratifying results have been achieved.

However, it should be noted that there are also some shortcomings in the domestic research on ecological imperialism. First of all, the phenomenon of homogenization in the overall research of ecological imperialism is more prominent, while the introductory research on foreign research results is mostly prominent, and the innovation is slightly insufficient. Secondly, when studying the criticism of ecological imperialism by western scholars, the western scholars are limited to Foster and Crosby et al., and lack the relevant research of other important ecological Marxist scholars. Thirdly, in the study of Foster's theory of ecological imperialism, there is a lack of study on the limitations and deficiencies of Foster's thought. Finally, in the thematic application level of ecological imperialism theory, or the application of ecological imperialism theory analysis is too mechanical, or the correlation with ecological imperialism is not prominent enough.

Based on the current situation and shortcomings of the academic research progress, this paper believes that the following four directions are expected to become the areas for further research of ecological imperialism.

First, further strengthen the study of foreign ecological Marxist scholars' criticism of ecological imperialism. At present, most of the studies on the criticism of ecological imperialism by Marxist scholars focus on Foster, and pay little attention to other western scholars. And many scholars in the West, such as Clark, Pepper, O'Connor, Rabica, York, Bright and so on, have also made significant contributions to the study of ecological imperialism. In addition, it is also necessary to deepen the understanding of Foster's ecological imperialism theory, systematically summarize and summarize the limitations and deficiencies of Foster's theory, and improve its theory, so as to serve the construction of ecological civilization in China. The further exploration and research of foreign ecological imperialism will help us to build up a more systematic and comprehensive understanding system of ecological imperialism in China. Second, to strengthen the concept and theory research related to ecological imperialism. On the one hand, the study of new concepts related to ecological imperialism. For example, as the concept of new ecological imperialism proposed by American scholar Cushman, there has not been much research on the concept of new ecological imperialism, which is limited to the rise of new ecological imperialism in the United States, and related fields still need to be explored. On the other hand, strengthen the correlation research of ecological imperialism theory and other ecological theories to promote the intersection and integration of theories.

Third, the in-depth analysis of resource competition from the perspective of ecological imperialism. Resource competition is an important means for capitalist countries to achieve capital expansion and seek economic benefits. Therefore, the western capitalist countries have a global competition for all kinds of resources in both the history and the reality. In modern times, after the "guano fever", the West fell into a competition for saltpeter and fish meal. In modern times, China also suffered from the plunder of rare earth resources by the imperialist countries. At present, there is fierce competition for energy resources, including oil, which leads to constant wars in the Middle East. And new ways of resource plunder have also emerged, and the developed countries have begun to plunder the rich biological genes of the third world countries. By observing and explaining the flow of a certain resource from the perspective of ecological imperialism, the internal logic can be found.



Fourth, to observe international trade from the perspective of ecological imperialism. International trade and foreign investment are the most important ways to realize the flow and transfer of ecological resources. At present, the academic circles pay relatively little attention to ecological imperialism and trade. Coffee, sugar, banana, rubber and other commodities production and trade exists in the ecological imperialism direct influence or indirect influence, from the perspective of historical or reality of international trade and ecological imperialism association can be rich ecological imperialism research direction, can select one commodity for thematic research.

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