



Clive Bell's "Significant Form" Theory: Its Development and Influence in China

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Abstract. The development of the "Significant Form" theory in China aims to explore concepts such as "organization," "composition," and "aesthetic emotion," in order to promote the spread and development of artistic form expression, image tools, and meaningful thinking in China. This theory adopts a formalist art aesthetic theory, emphasizing the importance of organizing externalized forms in the aesthetic realm, and considers it as a result of the interaction between the subject and object. While emphasizing the organization of externalized forms, the "Significant Form" theory may neglect the objective factors of organization externalization, leading to an overemphasis on the expression of externalized forms and a lack of pursuit of artistic content. In aesthetic judgment, because it regards the aesthetic emotions of organization externalization as a form of epistemology, it may fall into circular reasoning and move towards mysticism or agnosticism. This is an issue that needs attention and resolution in the development of the theory.

Keywords: Significant Form; Organization; Composition; Aesthetic Emotion

1 Introduction

Since the 1980s, Chinese art theory and practice have been significantly influenced by Clive Bell's theory of "Significant Form." This theory has become one of the important Western art theories in Chinese art studies and has played a crucial role in the formation of Chinese art theory. Dong Ping (2002) pointed out that the British art critic Clive Bell's theory of "Significant Form" has had a significant impact on the practice and theoretical development of modernist art [1], pioneering formal expression in the field of modern visual arts in the 20th century. By reviewing and analyzing the dissemination and development of the "Significant Form" theory in China, we can not only understand the path of Western art theory's spread and development in the Chinese art field but also gain a deep insight into the forty-year development history of the construction of the Chinese art theory system.

1.1 The Development Trajectory of the "Significant Form" Theory

The "Significant Form" theory is not a complete theoretical system. In its development, the basic concepts, sources of thought, and theoretical framework of the theory have different interpretations and applications due to the varying fields and academic inclinations of the researchers. Researchers in academic fields generally believe that Clive Bell laid the foundation for the "Significant Form" theory and introduced it to the field of art studies. In 1913, Clive Bell's English monograph "Art" was published, marking the beginning of his use of the academic term "Significant Form" and the publication of related academic works, which laid the foundation for the development of the "Significant Form" theory. His propositions, along with Croce's "Art as Intuition" and Santayana's "Beauty as Objectified Pleasure," formed a vast body of art aesthetic theory. In China, the dissemination and development of the "Significant Form" theory have undergone roughly three stages.

1.2 The 1980s: Preliminary Introduction Stage of the "Significant Form" Theory

In the 1980s, the "Significant Form" theory began to attract the attention of Chinese researchers. A comprehensive search using keywords, titles, abstracts, and themes in the CNKI database revealed that there were only 8 research articles on this topic in the entire decade. These academic articles were mainly published in university journals. Chinese art theorists and educators, like Qian Guyong, introduced Clive Bell's "Significant Form" theory. Early domestic introductions of Bell's theory mainly discussed art, aesthetic content, and novel development. However, each of these views has certain drawbacks and is hard to fully accept. In his book "Art," British aesthetician Clive Bell defined it as "Significant Form." Another British aesthetician, Osborne, considered this definition to be the most satisfactory in modern art theory. However, Bell's definition is a relative advance compared to the definition "art is the product of human labor in form creation". During this stage, domestic scholars positively evaluated Clive Bell's "Significant Form" theory and regarded it as an important intellectual resource in their field.

During this period, China's research on the "Significant Form" theory mainly focused on introducing and studying Clive Bell's related theories. On one hand, Bell's books "Art" (1984) and "Civilization" (1990) were translated and published in China, and domestic scholars conducted academic research around Bell's "Significant Form" theory, such as Qian Guyong's "On the Question of Artistic Nature - Comments on 'Significant Form'" (1986), Bao Chengji's "The Connotation of 'Significant Form' and Its Development in Novel Theory" (1988), Zhang Fan's "Aesthetic Characteristics of Traditional Chinese Literature and Art" (1988), Suo Songhua and He Yingchun's "Review of Modern Western Aesthetic Form Theory" (1989), and more. On the other hand, Clive Bell's theory, especially his "Significant Form" theory, quickly spread in China and influenced domestic scholars, leading to extensive research and impact. In the field of art studies, focusing on Bell's concepts of "organization," "composition," "form," and "value," researchers emphasized that the individual's artistic aesthetic activity is a

constantly developing process, stressing that the aesthetic process is an interaction between the subject and object. As Bell's "Significant Form" theory spread and developed in China, this stage began to link it with aesthetics and artistic emotions.

1.3 The 1990s: Rapid Development Stage of the "Significant Form" Theory

Since the 1990s, the "Significant Form" theory in China has rapidly developed, showing diverse research characteristics. In this stage, domestic scholars explored the theory from various angles, enriching and deepening its dissemination and development in China. From a literary representation perspective, researchers emphasized the high unity of content and form, believing that only when the content and form of literary works are perfectly combined can they constitute a true "Significant Form". This view highlighted the overall integrity of literary works and the organic unity of internal elements and external forms. From the perspective of aesthetic emotions, researchers argued that "Significant Form" should fuse the artist's aesthetic emotions into meaningful forms, emphasizing the expression of subjective emotions in the creation process and their manifestation in the works. Additionally, from the perspective of artistic imagery, "artworks with their significant forms," unique and typical artistic images can touch people's hearts and generate immense positive power, highlighting the imagery of artworks and how their imagery can move the audience and have a positive impact. In this stage, the representatives of the "Significant Form" theory expanded from Clive Bell to Iser, Heidegger, and others, indicating the deepening and expansion of China's research on the "Significant Form" theory and reflecting the attention and recognition of Chinese scholars for the theory.

Firstly, the core concept of the "Significant Form" theory was introduced by Clive Bell, then shifted to Susan Langer, and studied along with the art aesthetic theories of Collingwood and Dewey, among others. Susan Langer's significant views on "the symbolic creation of human emotions" played a positive role in bridging the gaps in Bell's theory. Since the 1990s, a series of Susan Langer's works have been translated and published, and many research articles on Langer's theory emerged in China, such as Xu Bing's "Susan Langer's Theory of Art Symbols" (1994), Si Youlun and Leng Decheng's "Art - Analysis of the 'Form of Life'" (1997), and Qi Xiaobin's "In Defense of Semiotic Aesthetics" (1999), promoting the dissemination and development of Langer's theory in China.

Secondly, the development and application of the "Significant Form" theory have reached a level of sophistication and diversification, and it has been widely applied in multiple fields. For example, the "accumulation theory" mentioned the transition from representation (simulation) to expression (abstraction), from realism to symbolism, as well as "aesthetic concepts" and "selection of aesthetic characteristics". These ideas and concepts entered the art field, with Sun Jiguo and Ma Guozhu detailing the "Significant Form" theory as the basis of artistic aesthetics in the "Journal of Liaoning Normal University" in 1994, introducing it into the field of modeling art symbols, followed by the introduction of objectified aesthetic imagery and object forms of aesthetic emotions. At the same time, other researchers used a comprehensive to detailed research approach to

explore the "Significant Form" theory's formalism, metaphysics and empiricism, and art aesthetics, applying the theory to "visual art psychology" and "aesthetic intuition psychology," as well as pure form studies in abstract painting and other psychological fields, and Marxism in literary and art studies.

1.4 The 21st Century: In-depth Exploration Stage of the "Significant Form" Theory

Since the beginning of the new century, the development of the "Significant Form" theory in China, combined with a "new round of art theory development," has greatly promoted the evolution of the "Significant Form" theory. Although there are controversies over Clive Bell's theoretical foundation, the substantial impact of the "Significant Form" theory in the development of art theory and aesthetics is still widely recognized by most researchers. "The artist's ethics and moral will not only infect our aesthetic sensibilities through this meaningful form but also have a mental impact on the aesthetic public". "Through meaningful forms, it subtly and gradually influences, transforms, and leads people to approach and accept the correct values without being aware of it" [2]. "When we hurriedly chase the influence of Western-led modernism and post-modernism in landscape design and imitate Pochini, Henry Moore, and Calder, we unconsciously abandon this kind of meaningful form that has been tempered over thousands of years" [3]. "The integration of tradition and modernity, and the consistency of tradition and dissemination is a kind of 'meaningful form,' and how to narrate tradition remains an important issue of the era" [4]. With the development of art aesthetics, the dissemination of the "Significant Form" theory shows new characteristics.

First, the research on the "Significant Form" theory has developed rapidly, and its influence has noticeably increased. In 2000, there were 18 articles on this theory in the CNKI database, and this number has been continuously increasing. Not only has the number of articles increased dramatically, but domestic research on the "Significant Form" theory has also translated and published a series of related works. According to preliminary statistics, since 2000, domestic scholars have translated or published 4 works related to the "Significant Form" theory, such as "Meaningful Form: A Selection of Modern Poems from China and Abroad" by Li Tianjing, Yan Zhiming, and Shan Gang (2016), "The Phenomenology of Visual Arts" by Paul Crowther (2021), "Meaningful Modeling" by Shang Hui (2021), "Meaningful Form: A Study on the Dance Culture Heritage of Chinese 'Circle Dance' from the Perspective of Dance Semiotics" by Hai Wei Qing (2022), etc. In October 2002, at the 50th anniversary symposium of the China Academy of Art, the Chinese art development research community actively participated in the dialogue on the research of the "Significant Form" theory.

Second, the "Significant Form" theory has been widely applied. Firstly, significant progress has been made in the development of aesthetic theory of meaningful forms in China. Since the 1990s, Susan Langer's art theory has received widespread attention in China, but it was not until the "semiotic aesthetics" framework that Langer's "emotion and form" theory was widely applied in the art field. "The shift from visible internal attributes (such as meaningful forms) of artworks to the invisible social and historical attributes in art practice" [5]. "Creation is first, form is second. Susan Langer is the

inheritor and developer of Bell's formal aesthetics", "developing Cassirer's symbol theory, focusing research on the field of art". China's Wang Weichao drew on American semiotic aesthetician Susan Langer's ideas from her book "The Problem of Art," identifying seven characteristics of art symbols, including TV drama symbols [6], "Symbolization with distinct era characteristics represented by Fang Lijun, Wang Guangyi, and Zhang Xiaogang". Emerging art theory paradigms derived from art symbol aesthetics, such as "art illusion theory" [7], psychological emotions and form symbols, and constructing the academic system of television art, have accelerated the extensive research and application of the "Significant Form" theory. Secondly, the "binary" dialectical unity concept of the "Significant Form" has developed rapidly. After 2000, Chinese scholars linked the "Significant Form" with philosophical aesthetics, communication studies, art language, music, etc., and published academic articles on the "binary" dialectical relationship related to the "Significant Form" theory, such as "Program Arrangement Art and Strategy, Object and Network Layout" by Li Chunyi (2000), "Modern and Postmodern Thought - Review of the Two Boundaries of Western Aesthetics from the Late 19th Century to the End of the 20th Century" by Peng Fuchun (2000), "On the Composition of the Picture" by Liang Zhitao (2009), "Meaningful Form and Formed Meaning - On the Folk Expression of Folk Music and the Musical Form of Folk Norms" by Xue Yibing (2009), "Visual Culture Context: Construction of Advertising Culture and Perception of Images" by Zhu Wei (2014), "On the Historical Concept of Mo Yan's Novels in the 1980s and 1990s" by Cao Jinhe (2018), "Structural Poetics: The Aesthetic Intellect of Music Analysis" by Ye Songrong (2021), etc., accelerating the penetration of the "Significant Form" theory into other social science fields.

Third, the "Significant Form" theory has been widely applied in formal aesthetics. Through formal aesthetics as an approach to Chinese art, Fry and Bell reinterpreted Chinese art from their own artistic reform needs, becoming an important resource for the formation of Western modernist formal aesthetics [8]. In Western art, aesthetic theory, and philosophy, influenced by the "Significant Form" theory, formalist aesthetics became a trend [9]. Overall, in its dissemination and development in China, the "Significant Form" theory is mainly viewed by researchers as an art theory or formal aesthetic theory. Most of the research belongs to applied research, mainly focusing on specific fields, disciplines, and directions, and widely exploring in the fields of philosophical aesthetics, literature, fine arts, linguistics, and education. In these fields, the main focus was on art theory and aesthetics, with formal aesthetics research on the "Significant Form" theory being particularly prominent.

Fourth, with the rapid development of the "Significant Form" theory, criticism of it has also emerged. In the theory, the connotation of artistic form is taken as the main research object. Therefore, the issue of artistic form has become one of the earliest controversial topics. researchers both at home and abroad have accused Bell of "circular reasoning", sparking a public discussion on whether the "Significant Form" theory involves circular reasoning. The circular reasoning criticized by Li Zehou is due to the "Significant Form" originating from people's "aesthetic feelings," and people's "aesthetic feelings" in turn come from the "Significant Form". Although Bell's "Significant Form" has issues of circular reasoning in terms of form and meaning, it transcends the

mechanical model of "content and form," giving form autonomy and freedom, and differs from rigid forms, becoming an active form. "If we use Bell's 'Significant Form' to explain Chinese art, it is obviously ineffective. In fact, since the 1980s, the use of 'Significant Form' to explain Chinese art has basically ignored the cultural characteristics and artistic features of Chinese art. At the same time, formal aesthetics and formal literary theory were also questioned, with Lu Shuyuan explicitly questioning Clive Bell's formal literary theory [10]. These challenges have highlighted the issues of formal aesthetics in the "Significant Form" theory, prompting the academic community to further reflect on the theory and point out that it is necessary to start from both content and form, with primary focus on content.

2 Dissemination and Impact of the Basic Concepts of the "Significant Form" Theory in China

From the perspective of conceptual history, basic concepts are not only a representation of the development of art theory but also directly influence the definition of art aesthetics. Changes and transitions in concepts often signify major historical transformations. In the CNKI database from 1980 to 2022, research on the "Significant Form" theory shows that discussions on "organization," "composition," and "value" are among the most prominent. Studying basic concepts and their development changes through the lens of conceptual history can clarify the continuity and change of concepts, thereby revealing the specific and direct impact of the basic concepts of the "Significant Form" theory on Chinese art theory and practice.

2.1 Organization

Although the "Significant Form" theory encompasses many internal schools of thought, at its core, it is a study of organizational form. "By organizing the form of art and using language intentionally to express certain ideas or concepts, meaningful forms can be created". The meaning of organization has changed in the paradigm shift of art theory research. Ye Lang, Wang Yichuan, and Ding Fang argued in "Art and Aesthetics" that "organization is the formal carrier of artistic expression." According to this definition, color, line, and composition constitute the visual elements of organization. Subsequent art theorists explored the source of organization and ways to achieve it, mainly forming different stances of intuitionism and formalism. Intuitionism emphasizes the external form reached directly through art, "Bell's 'meaningful form' partly originates from the intuitionism of the British ethicist Moore" [11]; Formalism emphasizes that organization comes from formal expression, a formalized reflection of various relationships in art. Overall, in the debate between formalism and intuitionism, Kant believed, "'Intuition' is a kind of spontaneous cognition without the intervention of intellect or reason, it is a method or means of cognition". Kant's affirmation of intuitive cognition and his deep thought on intuitionism in aesthetics are evident. Kant pointed out that organization begins in the realm of intuitive cognition, but intuitionism reaches the aesthetic realm through careful analysis, relying on the subject's active participation in cognition.

"In the 1968 book 'General System Theory,' Ludwig von Bertalanffy proposed modern system theory and discussed the relativity of categories. He explicitly stated that cognition first depends on psychological and physiological organization, which includes Kant's forms of intuition". It is the unification and synthesis of conceptual thinking paradigms that allow organizational forms to be included and integrated according to critical principles. Kant's "forms of intuition" made the "metaphysical assumption" possible, forming the "philosophical intuition intellect concept", and provided theoretical support for organizational forms from the perspective of the activeness of cognition. Clive Bell reformed the formalized expression of organization based on Kant's theory of intuitive intellect. "Clive Bell inherited Kant's theory and truly applied it to guide artistic practice. The aesthetic emotion aroused by artworks is the appreciation of form, a kind of intuition judgment independent of reason". From the perspective of organizational form, Clive Bell discarded Kant's "intellectual concept" and used "meaning" and "form" to elaborate the genesis process of art aesthetics. The category of "meaningful" is "the conveyance and expression of certain emotions, atmospheres, styles, and meanings through external forms", thus transforming external expression into internal results; the category of "form" is the combination and arrangement of lines and colors, emphasizing the external form of art. Clive Bell saw the interaction between internal meaning and external form from the perspective of organizational form. Clive Bell revealed the causes of organizational form; intuitive intellect is the manifestation of organization, and organization has the artistic characteristic of constructing external expression. Susan Langer believed that Clive Bell's art theory is "what we call form, is what people call 'meaningful form' or 'expressive form'". She also mentioned, "Meaningful form must be abstracted from specific forms so that artists can create abstract artworks. The specific form itself becomes the main symbol for expressing this 'meaning'". Susan Langer revealed that art organization has a lively expressive symbol, which is expressed through points, lines, surfaces, colors, light and shade, etc. However, some Chinese researchers suggest abandoning the way of representing art through organizational form alone. Gui Yan (2016) pointed out, "In terms of the form of the work, on the one hand, artists at the beginning of creation have abandoned 'meaningful form,' which is also different from the abstract of Western high modernism; at the same time, it neither pursues aesthetic enjoyment nor pursues the so-called personalized 'code'" [12]. Chinese scholar Yu Huoxing noted, "Bell took the extreme path of formalism, isolating and absolutizing form, and interpreted 'meaningful form' as the combination and arrangement of lines and colors, with no connection to life content". By emphasizing the construction method of organizational form, the theory of meaningful form advocates the representation of external form. In terms of the shift in the concept of organizational form in the Chinese art academic community, the influence of hermeneutic theories such as Schleiermacher, Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer, as well as pragmatism of James, Peirce, and Dewey, and Gestalt psychology, played a significant role after Clive Bell's "Significant Form" theory entered China. Many scholars used the "Significant Form" theory as the starting point for discussing the concept of organization and expanded its interpretation. In the new era, domestic scholar Ao Dun proposed, "'Meaningful form' refers to expressing certain ideas or concepts through the artistic organization of forms and the intentional combination of discourses". On the basis of

discussing the connotation of the organizational dimension, the extension of the organizational dimension was further discussed, namely the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in the formation mechanism of organization. Overall, the focus of organization has been placed on the subject by domestic researchers, forming a subject-centered organizational form theory, emphasizing the external construction of the subject in the formation process of organizational forms, while neglecting the internal expression and connotation of organizational forms.

2.2 Composition

The dimension of "composition" is a requirement for the imagery in the "Significant Form" theory, where the theory unfolds using "composition" as a theoretical tool. Ficino, drawing from Neoplatonism, pointed out that the idealistic conception needed to be expressed through lines, colors, shapes, and symmetrically stable compositions, representing the popular "beautiful visions" of the time. Ficino's Neoplatonism introduced art forms that were expressed through lines, colors, shapes, and their compositional relationships. Chernyshevsky criticized Hegel's aesthetic system theory from the perspective of pragmatism, arguing against Hegel's idea that "beauty is the perfect coincidence, the complete unity of concept and image." Since the 1920s, the German psychologist Arnheim in "Visual Thinking: A Psychology of Aesthetic Intuition" discussed the incomplete composition sought in images, stating, "At a higher stage of artistic development, 'form' undergoes another subtle change, from the complete to the incomplete 'form'" [13]. The cognition of the subject towards the object is the basis for the artist's "organized form representation" in composition, not originating from the object itself, constituting Clive Bell's meaningful "metaphysical assumption." The continuous externalization of organization into compositional relationships forms intriguing, meaningful forms. The formal method of organization among subjects continuously seeks subject-object continuous externalization through simplification and compositional representation. Clive Bell believed that only the relationships or forms composed of lines and colors arranged in a particular way could arouse aesthetic emotions. To create "meaningful forms," one must go through simplification and composition. In art, form or composition has significant meaning, becoming an independent object of artistic expression. The form of the artwork itself contains content, and all the expressiveness of the artwork originates from its form.

Clive Bell's concept of composition demonstrates the formalization of organization, achieving the transformation of the artistic subject to object through composition, i.e., the interaction between "meaningful" and "form." Although Susan Langer responded positively to the "Significant Form" theory, her understanding of the composition concept differed from Clive Bell. She believed: "The structure of art and the structure of human life, the arrangement and composition of elements such as colors and materials in created scenes, have astonishing similarities. The life structure is the prototype of the art piece structure, i.e., the art form" [14]. Langer's composition concept was endowed with the connotation of artistic symbols, emphasizing the conceptual connotation of symbols rather than focusing on expression. Once the concept is obtained, expression becomes meaningless, and she further pointed out, "The connotation of artistic symbols

is emotion" [15]. Langer based her concept of composition on the interaction between subject and object and the resulting aesthetic emotions. Subsequently, scholars represented by Langer further developed the "Significant Form" and formed the "art semiotics" theory. "The implicit structure in Kandinsky's abstract art theory and the arrangement and positioning in traditional Chinese painting theory"[16] both refer to "composition." The contemporary representative figure of the "composition concept" is Jan Bublik, who differentiated the concept of composition and summarized its basic principles, proposing the concepts of "Layout" and "Perspective," thus elevating to a larger dimensional perspective of composition. In 1981, he published "Composition Concepts: Theory and Practice," defining "composition" as: Arranging shapes, lines, lights, colors, and other elements on a plane to create meaningful forms and convey clear messages. The "composition" concept in the "Significant Form" theory broke through Kant's cultural standpoint and aesthetic dimension of a priori formalism. Western philosophers even expanded Kant's formal aesthetics into formalism aesthetics to corroborate the art is meaningful form assertion. Organizational formalization precedes composition; art subject and object interact and are continuously verified in artistic practice. Hence, composition is the external manifestation of organizational form. The "Significant Form" theory proves that composition is a representation of organizing art and an unobtainable artistic representation path in the development of art theory. Starting from the artistic subject's activity of representing the object, organization, thought, and art theory development are continuously developed and formed in compositional representation. In this process, composition relies on representational tools and thought. The choice of representational tools depends on the form of interaction between subject and object. This choice aims to effectively reflect the meaning established by the subject dependent on the object and compose it into a medium. This medium should possess the characteristics of thought and cultural representation of art.

The "composition" concept in the "Significant Form" theory provides a new perspective for analyzing artistic emotions, feelings, and representational forms. Ficino, building on the foundation of Neoplatonism, developed Langer's "composition" concept and proposed the idealistic conception. Chinese scholars further utilize the concept of composition as an analytical framework, such as Ji Xingyue and Ren Limin (2021) analyzing the external form and internal concepts of works by Arnold Newman and Platon Antoniou [17], further enriching the basis of the "Significant Form" theory. Therefore, under the influence of the "Significant Form" theory, we value the value of composition to artists and theorists, emphasize the subjectivity of art performers, advocate active representation of subjects, and combine object organization and structure, accumulating and enriching composition. We advocate the "concept of composition" to explore and discover, promoting the dialectical development of the "Significant Form" theory.

2.3 Value (Aesthetic Emotion)

Based on the reconceptualization of "aesthetic emotion" and combined with the concepts of "organization" and "composition," the theory of "Significant Form" is formed. According to Clive Bell and Kigalton, aesthetic emotion is achieved through enhancing the interaction between organization and composition, aiming to meaningfully reflect

the theme of the artwork. Clive Bell sees the organization and composition of the object as a continually related interactive process, where composition, based on the intuition and knowledge of the subject, gradually achieves "visualization" from complexity to simplification within the subject's composition. Thus, aesthetic emotion is not only the process of simplifying organizational composition but also the process of developing organized expression, complex relationships, and abstract forms into sensual aesthetic procedures. For Susan Langer and proponents of "Art Semiotics" theory, aesthetic emotion is understood as the subject's "participation." The concept of organization is the result of the subject's conscious thinking, influenced by factors such as art and culture. Aesthetic emotion is the process of the subject's participation, where the subject not only transforms organized expression into aesthetic visuals but also, based on evolving art theory, internalizes related concepts, art symbols, and forms through interaction with organization and composition, thus forming a meaningful experiential process. Although every aesthetic experience in art involves individual experiential issues, it mostly revolves around differing opinions about whether a particular work possesses such "Significant Form".

Despite divergences in the "Significant Form" theory regarding aesthetic experience, the current theoretical viewpoint that can achieve consensus between artists and art scholars is "Significant Form". Clive Bell's formal study theory, enriched and developed further by Western Marxist scholars like Eagleton and Jameson, internalized socio-historical content [18]. The "aesthetic emotion" concept in the "Significant Form" theory provides theoretical guidance for the development and practice of Chinese art and culture. For instance, Wang Xiaohong and Zhang Chen (2019) stated, "Significant Form can stimulate our aesthetic emotions, better assist in expressing content, and serve our imagination and aesthetic needs" [19]. In the realm of aesthetic emotion, new ideas are emerging around concepts like form, imagery, language, and reconstruction. Concepts such as "Art as Intuition," "Beauty as Objectified Pleasure," and "Art as Expression of Emotion" are becoming hot topics of research.

Integrating the "Significant Form" theory with the concept of "aesthetic emotion" gives it a new meaning. This theory's re-examination of art practice and theory provides new opportunities for us. Meanwhile, China's art practice further enriches the connotations of the "Significant Form" theory. Firstly, the core concept of the "Significant Form" theory, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts", derived from Aristotle's famous proposition, implies that the overall aesthetic emotion corresponds to the degree of externalization of organizational expression and compositional form. Secondly, in terms of the content of aesthetic emotion, since organization and composition are shown in the mutual externalization of form between subject and object, they cannot be separated from intuitive intellect. Emphasis should be placed on providing an appropriate aesthetic atmosphere for the subject, considering aesthetics as the starting point of artistic research. Finally, for the aesthetic subject, it is essential to emphasize its perceptual ability towards the object. From the perspective of the appreciating subject, the sense of form is the perception of this "Significant Form". Therefore, starting from form, imagery, reconstruction, and emotional symbols as meaningful forms, emphasis should be on the subject's organization and compositional display of formal aesthetics and emotional externalization.

3 Reflection: The Impact and Shortcomings of Clive Bell's "Significant Form" Theory

Since the 1980s, Clive Bell's "Significant Form" theory has had a widespread impact on Chinese art theory and practice. This theory has gone through three stages: preliminary introduction, rapid development, and in-depth exploration, profoundly influencing Chinese art, literature, film, painting, and education. Combined with the "new round of art theory development," the theory has redefined the concept of organization, changing its attributes and the way artistic organization is obtained. By focusing on the formal expression of organization, the theory has made us realize that organization involves not only artistic form but also the relationship between organization, subject, and art form, establishing the artist's subjectivity and the foundational ability to construct artistic organizational structures, providing an organizational theoretical basis for the development of Chinese art theory. Additionally, the theory's perspective on composition indicates that organization is the result of subject-object interaction, requiring the subject to obtain organizational methods through individual formalized expression and to continuously apply and practice them in different organizational relationships, mastering the concept of organization flexibly. A series of new concepts and ideas have emerged in relevant studies, such as "accumulation theory," "post-literature," "art public appreciation," "art production," "wildness," etc. Researchers have deeply discussed the nature of art organization, the relationship between subject and object, composition and organization, and the "binary" dialectical relationship of "Significant Form." These studies have not only enriched Chinese art theory but also changed the concept of art development, advancing Chinese art practice and development.

The "Significant Form" theory in China has mainly been seen as a rationale for evaluating the value of artworks, hence many studies belong to foundational research. The "Significant Form" theory falls within the category of art studies and holds a certain position in modern Western art aesthetics evaluation. "Art is a significant form" is the view of British aesthete Clive Bell, while American semiotician Susan Langer proposed the "art symbols theory," introducing Western academic thoughts into art theory research [20]. From the perspective of art aesthetics evaluation, the "Significant Form" theory mainly studies the relationship between subject and object through externalized forms of organization and judges the meaning content of the object based on this externalization. This judgment is highly satisfactory. Early "Significant Form" theory can be traced back to Kant's "beauty is the form of purposiveness of an object," further developed by Clive Bell and Roger Fry in late 19th and early 20th century Britain. Clive Bell's "Significant Form" theory broke the traditional "content and form" mechanical model, creating conditions for the autonomy and freedom of forms. However, from today's perspective, this theory has obvious flaws in "circular reasoning".

4 Conclusions

When emphasizing the externalized form of organization in the field of art aesthetics, attributing organization solely to the interaction between subject and object denies the

existence of objective factors in the externalization of organization. This leads to a focus only on the expression of externalized form, generating meaningful aesthetic emotions and prompting the interaction between "form" and "meaning," thereby neglecting the pursuit of art content. The sum of all internal elements of a thing is its content, and the structure and organization of these internal elements are its form. As Xu Bihui (2015) states, "Form in art is not a replaceable shell or framework but rather the method of organizing content, an 'internal form' inherent in the art structure, having ontological significance for art" [21]. However, due to the vagueness of the "Significant Form" theory, the boundary between art organization and content becomes blurred, overly emphasizing the interaction between form and aesthetic emotion, thus overlooking the influence of art content on intuition and aesthetic emotion. In reality, content and form are superimposed images. Content determines form, while form depends on content and changes with the development of content. However, form also affects the content's development. When form is suitable for content, it plays a powerful role in promoting content development; otherwise, it becomes a significant obstacle. Moreover, the relationship between content and form is relative, and the form of certain content can become the content of another form. On the temporal dimension, irrational factors like the subject's emotions and intuitions also impact the objectivity of externalized form. Nevertheless, externalized form inevitably includes both objective factors and shared values of the subject, not influenced by shifts in the subject's will and intuitive intellect. Indeed, the objectivity of externalized form is the value of human artistic aesthetics. Therefore, in art theory, the externalization of form and the organization of aesthetic emotion are achieved through the formal organization of art and the meaningful combination of discourse. It is with this in mind that Clive Bell continuously elucidates and deepens the concept of organization, enriching and developing his art aesthetics theory.

In the formation of organization, individuals emphasize the profound significance of subject-object interaction, seeking to develop the meaningful form of art theory by mending the individual predicament of organization. This repair is carried out through forms and symbols, thus forming the formal aesthetics of organization, or the externalization of formal symbols. From the perspective of aesthetic judgment, even if the theory of meaningful form could be epistemological, it could fall into circular reasoning and may lead to mysticism and agnosticism [22]. If we assume the validity of mutual verification between form and aesthetic emotion, then art organization will be simplified as an art theoretical standpoint. Art researchers tend to formalism and intuitionism because they have greater discourse power in the field of art aesthetics, thus giving more aesthetic judgments to the externalization and form of organization, emphasizing the concept of organization. If organization in the development of art aesthetics lacks an objective existence, art organization can easily become a play between aesthetic qualification and emotion, and the art aesthetics activity itself will be trapped in conflicts between researchers, schools, cultures, and forms. The concept of organization in the "Significant Form" theory makes us aware of the complexity and simplification of the externalization process of organization, as well as the role of the subject's subjective agency in the formation of externalized organization. However, while rationally identifying the externalization process of organization, we also need to rigorously contemplate the expression of organization and form, the distinction between form and content,

and practice, recognizing that art organization exists independently of aesthetic emotion. Only then can we maintain the concept of art organization. The significance of this contemplation lies in the fact that art theory must follow objective dialectical truths, differing from everyday common sense and intuitive aesthetic judgment, reflecting its value through systematic, vertical, and objective organization. The development of art theory should not only focus on life and aesthetic emotion but also guide art aesthetics researchers to pursue objective truths, exploring those "unimaginable" and "unthought" worlds (Bernstein), thus showing the possibilities in the development of researchers' art theories.

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