

# Penetration and Interaction: Bloomsbury and Adoption of French Modernism Paintings in Britain (1876-1948)

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## ABSTRACT

From the 19th century to the 20th century, the adoption process of modernism paintings born in the romantic landscape of France was long and tortuous due to the British who were advocating the Anglo-Saxon spirit. From the initial rejection to the later entry into the public collection field, the British aesthetic taste and various factors were intertwined and mutually promoted. The Bloomsbury group offered significant references to the issues of how intellectuals intervene in the public cultural field and how foreign culture is transformed into the popular art of the receiving country. Aiming to reveal the rule of adopting French modernism paintings art by the elite class, public opinion leading figures, and other factors in Britain (1876-1948), this paper analyses Bloomsbury's specific performance, group member's interaction, and social activity.

**Keywords:** French modernist paintings, art adoption, Bloomsbury, intellectual intervention.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the rapid development of science and technology under the second industrial revolution opened the curtain of redistribution of French production. The commercial prosperity of small and medium-sized cities and the liberal lifestyle and intellectuals' aesthetic taste affected the artistic creation and acceptance - French modernism (Impressionism, Post Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, etc.) painting flourished here. Compared with the French people who pursue romantic novelty, Britain's acceptance of foreign culture is very slow. On the one hand, the British character has a silent instinct and persistence, which contains an inherent continuation while loving the intrinsic life [1]. On the other hand, just like the social custom in Britain, restraint and upbringing are the most respected virtues, which is in sharp contrast to the indulgence of some other western countries. Therefore, it is not difficult to comprehend that the Royal Academy of art established the "protection of local art" at that time, which is difficult to change its creed. French modernist paintings were generally exhibited in exhibitions independently held in France and art galleries of painters. Since the 1870s, these works have

also been regularly exhibited in London, but they are mainly small exhibitions, attracting relatively limited visitors. However, the British public collection system, such as the National Gallery, does not allow the collection of works of living painters. At the same time, the Tate Gallery, a National Gallery established in 1897, was only allowed to collect British painters' works. Before 1917, the proportion of foreign modern art in the British national collection was tiny. In the meantime, Sir Redesdale, one of the members of the National Gallery Committee, the National Gallery, has bluntly attacked the whole French modern art. He believed they were low-level, crazy, and short-lived and did not deserve to open the National Gallery's entrance, only to the highest and best art [2]. His over-simplistic attitude towards French modernist painting represents the profound and robust stereotype of most of the old school elites in Britain on foreign culture [3]. The members of Bloomsbury have an opposite attitude towards this. It can be said that in French modernist painting, whether it is the urban landscape depicted by Impressionism, or the coffee shop, lawn lunch, bar, lakeside embankment illustrated by Post Impressionism, or the meaningful form characterized by Fauvism. In the circle of Bloomsbury in Britain, it has received great resonance and response [4].

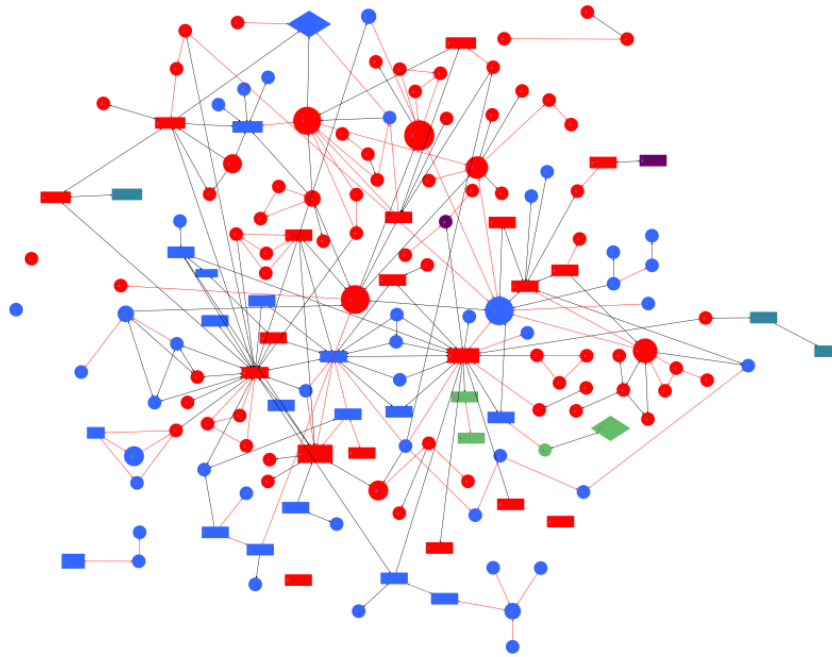
For a long time, art history has focused more on the artist and the creative process, materials, methods and content. However, there is little research on art communicators and their role in art history. Writing the art market's history only lists and states the market behaviors and exhibitions and cannot sufficiently analyze the root causes of some problems. It seems that Alan Bowness, a British scholar, points out that the public adoption of paintings develops into four stages, namely, the broad recognition of industry colleagues (artists), critics (opinion guides), collectors, and dealers (art market), and the public [5]. This path makes it possible to explore the critical factors of French modernist paintings that impress the British elites and enable them to spontaneously bring French modernist paintings to the public. In addition, through the analysis of Bloomsbury members in modern French paintings as foreign cultural exchange, intellectuals through galleries, exhibitions, publications, and other ways to intervene in the social and cultural field of exploration become a possibility.

It is an interdisciplinary way to look at the history of art from the perspective of sociology. From the perspective of acceptance theory, a large part of the research focuses on the post-modernism perspective. Meanwhile, for some artistic communication and acceptance phenomena during the social transformation period of the late 19th century and the early 20th century, few studies are demonstrated from the sociological perspective. The Bloomsbury community has been divided, with some praising its liberal atmosphere with the motto "you can say anything you like about art, sex or religion" and others disagreeing that Bloomsbury is "a constant disruptive influence" [6]. Before for its research perspective is mostly literature and comparative literature or eulogists of pure research, mainly focus on the part of the members of the content of the literary work and thorough communication among the members of the details, such as correspondence, etc. Nevertheless, it is a pity that profoundly ignores the general cultural phenomenon's derivation and analysis of cause and effect.

Investigating the British intellectual gathering organization Bloomsbury (1876-1948), this article analyzes French modernist paintings adoption in Britain, which has five parts. The first part leads to some existing tracks of Bloomsbury group research and puts forward the research significance. The second part from the macro perspective from the social structure theory to grasp the relationship between Bloomsbury group members, as well as the relationship between the group and the external (French) group or individuals; The third part, from the artistic ontology to explain the reason of content of French modernist painting can move Bloomsbury members and British people; The fourth part analyzes the mutual influence between group members and the symbolic interaction between individual behaviors from the micro-level of symbolic interaction theory. Finally, it concluded that the advocacy of French modernist painting by Bloomsbury members has given excellent enlightenment to cross-cultural communication and the intervention of intellectual groups in the public society.

## **2. EMBEDDING AND PENETRATION: BLOOMSBURY AND FRENCH INTELLECTUALS**

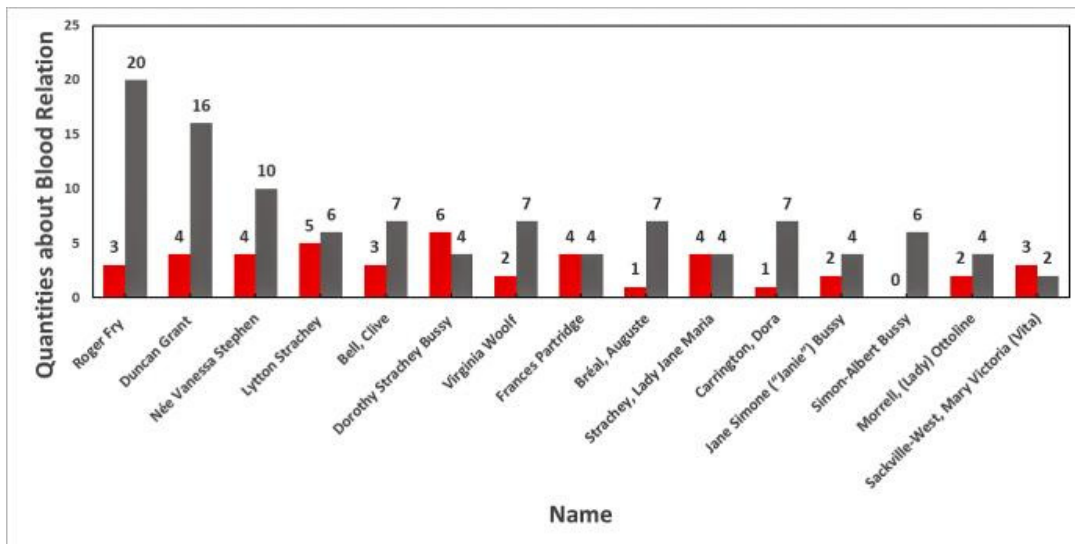
It is necessary from the macro-level to understand what kind of group Bloomsbury is and how the relationship between the embedment and penetration of French modernist intelligence and Bloomsbury members. From overall network to secondary network, social scientists Jacob Moreno, Alex Bavelas, Mark Granovetter, and other social network analysts, which research method can more intuitively explore the position of individuals in the group and the size of the group [7, 8]. According to Bloomsbury's member information, the network analysis chart can clarify how Bloomsbury, as a social group, is influenced by French modernism's intellectuals and artistic groups; Meanwhile can intuitively see the interaction between the members of the two groups.



**Figure 1** The social network of Bloomsbury members and French intellectuals, Red: Bloomsbury members; Blue: French intellectuals; Red line: blood relationships; Black line: none-blood relationships. Data based on Mary Ann Caws and Sarah Bird Wright, *Bloomsbury and France: Art and Friends*, Oxford New York, 1999: 612-633

In Figure 1, it can be seen the marked blood relationship or husband and wife relationship as the red line while marked the non-blood relationships as the black line. Meanwhile, statistics of the blood relationship and non-blood relationship of the top 15

Bloomsbury members with the most lines in all kinds of relationships got Figure 2. Thus, it is not difficult to find the interpenetration between the two populations, and we can examine the overall interactive relationship between them based on historical facts.



**Figure 2** The top15 significant figures associated with the Bloomsbury/France exchange with blood and None-blood quantities

**2.1. Blood (including in-laws) and non-blood**

Whether it is a “social organism” with different divisions of labor among groups or a whole aggregation with different and interrelated parts, such groups are divided into two types by The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies: The former is the manner-controlled

Society, which is formed by a powerful informal social control system through tradition, kinship, friendship or some other bonding factors of social organizations (the majority of Bloomsbury members) [10-12]. The law-controlled Society, a Gesellschaft, linked people together by contract, in which people exchanged for equivalent products or services [12].

Some Bloomsbury members were married to French painters. For instance, Dorothy Strachey Bussy, sister of Lytton Strachey, wife of the French Painter Simon Bussy; Virginia Woolf was once the landlord of Duncan Grant, a British post-impressionist painter. Interestingly, even this contractual relationship is mixed with emotional relations. This overlap of blood and non-blood relationships with French and British Bloomsbury members made it easy to adopt The French modernist ethos because the relationship permeated all aspects.

## ***2.2. Consistency of knowledge structure and collective consciousness***

The significant figures associated with the Bloomsbury/France exchange (not specifically degree studies) provide an undoubted convergence of their knowledge structures and collective consciousness. In the late 19th century, Roger Fry, Ethel Sands, and Nan Hudson studied art in Paris. 1893, French painter Simon Bussy meets Roger Fry at Christ's College, Cambridge. Both non-blood and blood mainly revolve around Thoby Stephen's close friends in Cambridge, such as Desmond MacCarthy, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Roger Fry. Marx influenced many sociologists adhering to the theory of social structure. Marx argued that repeated social encounters between individuals were a reproduction of social resources and structure, and such reproduction was the product of individual utilization of resources [13]. Regard as cultural capital, which includes French modernist paintings' ideas, techniques, and themes, Bloomsbury members redistributed it together with the inherent cultural capital of Britain [14]. Durkheim, regarded as the epitome of classicism, integrated social structure with cultural, structural, interpersonal, and cognitive mechanisms [15]. For Bloomsbury, group members share the same collective consciousness and representation (a cultural mechanism). On top of that, they rely on each other through blood and non-blood structures (a structural mechanism) and carry out symbolic interaction through loose gatherings (an interpersonal mechanism) and everyday matters (a cognitive mechanism).

## ***2.3. Multi-centred development of relationships and multiple opinion leaders***

Jean Guignet once has noticed that Bloomsbury's center is everywhere and its circumference nowhere [16]. Furthermore, these people have more or less traveled or visited France and have many associations. This experience is consistent with Simmel's view that the multi-group connection of individuals gives individuals more freedom, and the intersection of various fields and groups can prevent polarization and over-coverage [17]. Culture is a functional process of diffusion and mutual communication. It is, moreover, influenced by "gatekeepers" and opinion leaders [18]. It

can also be seen from the figure that some nodes are more associated with French modernist painting than others, namely opinion leaders and gatekeepers, who changed the aesthetic taste of the British public through public publications and exhibitions. Bridging the gap between the emotional tension of modern art and the traditional conservative British public aesthetic was the driving force of literary criticism by some members of Bloomsbury at the time. For example, Roger Fry had been aroused by Maurice Denis' article on Cezanne, had the piece translated for Magazine Burlington (December 1910), which was founded by Roger Fry and Herbert Read in 1909. In November 1910 and from October to December 1912, Roger Fry curated two French modernist paintings in the Grafton Galleries in London [19]. The exhibition "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" Select Cezanne, Matisse, Gauguin, Vlaminck, Rouault, Derain, Manet, Van Gogh, Signac, And Seurat; In the second Exhibition, Roger Fry worked with Duncan's help of Selecting Art by Cezanne, Bonnard, Matisse, Picasso, Derain, Marchand, and Others in Paris. In May 1922, "The French School of the Last Hundred Years" was a large loan show at the prestigious Burlington Arts Club. Roger Fry is the lead member of the exhibition's organizing committee [20].

Not only that, but two prominent Bloomsbury artists, Bell's wife, Vanessa Bell, and Grant Duncan, painted freely and brightly. They became leading figures in British post-impressionist painting and contributed wisdom and strength to the French Modernism exhibition curated by Roger. It is worth noting that Duncan's paintings were influenced by the French modernist painting style, such as Matisse's *La Danse*, exhibited in 1912.

However, these exhibitions have been accompanied by a heated debate about the place of French modernist art as a whole in the British national collection, which has made French modernist painting less complicated for the public to accept. By the influence of multiple Bloomsbury members, the public has more widely adopted French modernist paintings.

## **3. FRENCH MODERNIST ART: SIGNIFICANT FORM**

Debate on French modernist art exhibitions is a kind of symbolic interaction, but the Bell aesthetic thought puts forward Significant Form is also a kind of symbolic interaction, apparently from art ontology. Through the analysis of art ontology, one can learn the French modernist paintings themselves to attract a member of the Bloomsbury, and later the British public. Bell mentioned that lines and colors combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, would stir aesthetic emotions. Thus, he treated these relations and combinations of lines and colors, alongside these aesthetically moving forms into a single conception as

Significant Form. Bell believes it is the one quality common to all works of visual art [20]. Bell's remarks seem to answer why Bloomsbury members were so keen on French modernist contents. Here he emphasizes that "significant" is something that "arouses our aesthetic feelings" and is "aesthetically moving". Nevertheless, he did not attribute the valuable insights into the theoretical system because he did not speak of the precise meanings for "significant" and "aesthetic feeling". What he called "significant forms" is always cryptic, but in Bell's comments will be felt based on Kant's apriorism. Kant believes that knowledge is the unity of "form" and "matter" of knowledge, and the form of knowledge is a priori, including perceptual experience elements and logical experience elements [21]. The meaning of the word "Gestalt" is derived from Kant's thought matrix of the "transcendental category". Rudolf Arnheim believes that shape, form, style, media, space, light, and color in the structure of visual perception all belong to the category of "form" in his opinion. Therefore, he advocated that painting should be separated from the real world, believing that the "forms" of work are inherent in form and color, so fine art can realize its essence without reproducing natural objects. In contrast, abstract art has greater rationality than realistic art. Arnheim's "form" seems to be a gestalt, which has integrity and is an organization or structure of "signs" in visual perceptual experience [22].

The common preference for nature, and the common pursuit of light and color in different ways of expression, to some extent, established the acceptance of Impressionist and post-impressionist painting in mainland Britain. Mainland England was dominated by the sincerely rustic landscapes of John Constable and John Mallord William Turner and the narrative and lyrical pre-Raphaelites. On the one hand, these two kinds of art originated from the British mainland, representing the public's tendency to accept literature and art at that time. On the other hand, they also reflect the collective interest of public institutions. In July 1870, the Franco-Prussian War began to break the old pattern of Europe. Some of the Impressionists, such as Camille Pissarro, Claude Monet, and Alfred Sisley, made England, just across the English Channel, their temporary home in the face of turmoil. Similarly, British landscape painting's capture of the changes of light and shade and its profound insight into nature had a subtle influence on impressionist painters' creations. As Pissarro later recalled, "Monet and I loved the London scenery. We all draw from life." He admitted that watercolors and oil paintings of Turner and Constable and the oil paintings of Crom the elder have great influence. They admired Borough, Lawrence, Reynolds but were mainly fascinated by landscape painters, who have more in common with Monet and Pissarro in the study of outer light, light, and ephemeral effects [23]. The mutual influence of the two painters in

terms of content and style also foreshadowed the acceptance of French postmodern paintings by the British public in the future, casting the gestalt waiting for the gestalt.

In terms of depicting content, French modernist paintings mostly depict the secular life of the elite class and the middle class, which is very easy to resonate with the same class. The Bloomsbury Artists and Writers are obsessed with drama. For example, Duncan met the French director Jacques Copeau on the recommendation of Roger Fry and designed the sets and costumes for his plays. Lydia Lopokova, a wife of John Maynard Keynes, was an excellent dancer; Virginia Woolf's "Prince Show" on the Dreadnought; Courtauld and his wife Elizabeth, who are close to Bloomsbury members, are also fun of the dramatic arts. Therefore, it is easy for the British elites and public to accept the dancers depicted by Degas, Renoir's "La Loge" and Manet's a Bar at the Folies-Bergeres. Britain, after all, is the honorary homeland of Shakespeare, the theater kingdom.

The introduction of Modern French paintings to British museums began in 1900 with landscape and drama themes. Constantine Ionides, a patron and collector, bequeathed the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). His collection includes landscapes by Gustave Courbet, a renowned Barbizon painter, and Degas' the Ballet from Robert le Diable (1876), which is one of his most famous early works. These works have shown the British elite's preference and the public for familiar landscapes and traditional narrative portraits.

#### **4. SYMBOLS AND INTERACTION: HOW DO INDIVIDUALS INFLUENCE POPULAR CULTURAL TASTES**

Just now, the interaction between art Noumenon and the recipients is analyzed. Then, the interaction between the members of The Bloomsbury group as the recipients of French modernist paintings as individuals and the symbolic interaction between them as communicators and the British society is discussed. Although scholars adhering to the theory of social structure do not explicitly say it, they all imply that if an individual interaction is inconsistent with the macrostructure, individuals will make adjustments to maintain a certain degree of consistency with the overall social situation.

The view that macrostructure restricts individual interaction ignores, in a sense, the self-sufficiency of individuals and the superiority of groups spontaneously aggregated by individuals in comparison with the society as a whole, especially for Bloomsbury's relatively advanced group (such as de-marriage, LGBT, feminist). This phenomenon requires a more specific analysis of the spread and promotion of French modernism paintings by the Bloomsbury group in the UK from the micro-level.

#### ***4.1. Input and output: Interaction of individual symbols and mutual restriction of social structure***

The symbolic interaction theory was proposed by Herbert Blumer and developed the linguistic and non-linguistic symbolic interaction in interpersonal communication in different degrees in the criticism of Manford Kuhn [24]. Sheldon Stryker, Alfred R. Lindesmith, Anselm L. Strauss, and other scholars all believe that individuals have certain presuppositions and speculations about others' actions in individual, interpersonal interaction [25, 26]. In general, these people tend to think that when individuals are placed in a situation, they tend to interact with the object in the situation in a certain way; Although individual symbolic interaction can change the social structure, once the structure comes into being, it will reverse restrict individuals. It is not hard to understand the actions of Bloomsbury's members, who publicly pushed French modernist painting into the public eye. Life, study, honeymoon, vacation... France is the preferred destination for Bloomsbury members, who have mingled with painters such as Dylan, Matisse, and Picasso. We can understand it as the individual's embedment into the French cultural structure and the corresponding interaction consistency between subject and object. When they returned to England, they naturally embedded the role of self in the context of the social structure and its cultural significance. According to Peter J. Burke, the self is the possession of a role in a situation. These situations, in turn, are often embedded in larger social structures and associated cultural meanings. The individual will input others for their role, compare and match these inputs, and then select a behavioral pattern. Role identity has a positive correlation with others' positive responses to others' emotions in interaction [27]. It can be understood that Bloomsbury members have extensive and profound interactions with French intellectuals in the fields of art and culture, which is inputs behavior mode for this cultural intake.

#### ***4.2. The self orientates the self-object in its interaction with others***

Charles Horton Cooley and William James both believed that the self includes the individual self-feeling formed by communication with others, and further defined it as and believed that the self is the symbolic interaction between individuals in the group background [28, 29]. Cooley emphasizes the looking glass self and measures oneself by the feedback of others. In the Primary group, Cooley emphasizes that it is more important to participate in the group to show oneself [30]. Roger Fry and Clive Bell saw "significant form" in French modernists such as Paul Cézanne and Matisse [31, 32]. Moreover, it reinforced their belief in

popularizing French modernist painting among the British public. Virginia Woolf, a close friend of Roger Fry's, supported his art criticism in daily salons and essays such as "Roger Fry's Biography" (1940). In her writing, she gave a biography that she was similar to impressionist painters in the conception of visual scenes [33]. Erving Goffman believed that crew members were more loyal to the crew than to the audience; The word encounters indicate that interactions are thematic, aware of each other, and gathering in a social setting [34]. Perhaps it is understood here that Bloomsbury's members were remarkably consistent in the face of some widespread criticism.

Ralph Linton emphasizes that individuals are socially placed in a particular position through interaction with other positions, the collection of rights and obligations [35]. Ralph H. Turner emphasized the importance of consistency of feedback from others in the process of interaction. Differentiation tends to connect roles with social values when directed to more general social environments and situations [36]. Samuel Courtauld, entrepreneur, collector, and educator, exemplifies both. He maintained good communication and contacts with John Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, and other Bloomsbury members. Courtauld represents the English capital's affirmation of modern French painting. His family's wealth in the silk reeling industry laid the foundation for his collection of funds, and his collection is impressive, especially for impressionist and post-Impressionist works. Moreover, Courtauld actively shared his collection with the public in various forms. He served as a member of Tate's council and donated extensive collections to the gallery to establish the Courtauld Trust, the Gallery, and the Courtauld Institute of Art. Courtauld's collection is divided into two parts: in 1923, he spent 50000 pounds to set up Tate's new board, the Courtauld Trust. The fund was used to purchase the works of the selected French artists in the second half of the 19th century, which greatly enriched the connotation of the French Modern Art (especially Impressionist and post-Impressionist) collections he donated. The Tate Commission accepted the donation in June 1923, but it was not officially announced until legal proceedings in January 1924. On the other hand, due to the limited fund of the foundation and the lack of recognition of some painters, he collected several treasures not collected by the foundation from the perspective of a private collection (Some acquisitions followed Fry's advice). His collections include Manet's a Bar at the Folies-Bergeres purchased in 1926, Cézanne's Mont Sainte Victoire, le Lac d'Annecy and the best version of the card players, two important works of Gauguin, a landscape painting by Van Gogh, and a self-portrait with bandaged ear, and Renoir's La loge, three works of Degas, Henri de Toulouse Lautrec's Jane Avril in the Entrance of the Moulin Rouge, putting on her gloves, etc. According to his

wishes, these works were donated to the Courtauld Institute of Art, established in 1932, lent to the British National Gallery. Thus, almost no collector has been ready to bring his collection into the public collection from the beginning of collection activities in art history. The Samuel Courtauld memorial exhibition was held at the Tate Gallery from May to August 1948, after his death in 1947. Many of Courtauld's works meet the public, such as Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur L' Herbe*, Van Gogh's *Self-portrait with a bandaged ear*, Gauguin's *The Dream*, Cezanne's *Man with a pipe*, Renoir's *woman at her toilet*, Degas's *two dancers on the stage*, Seurat's *study for the chahut*, Picasso's *child with a pigeon* [37]. From a personalized aesthetic ideal to a public value, this exhibition is almost an epitome of French modernism art history and a symbol of French modernism paintings in Britain.

#### ***4.3. Make concerted efforts to change the parameter world***

Inspired by Edmund Husserl, Alfred Schutz believed that people acted in the real world based on shared experience and perception. It is reality such as objects, people, places, ideas are parameters. Consciousness is particularly important for the abstract process of reality [38]. Put, in the abstract process of reality, the parameters change. The reality will change. At that time, the British public could not fully understand French modernism painting. However, it challenged tradition, the desire for freedom, the creative expression of light and color. These paintings struck a chord with Bloomsbury's members. In Degas, Monet, Cezanne, Matisse, and other French modernist painters who dare to break the rules, Bloomsbury members believe that France has the best painting and literature in life. The beauty of French modernist art and emotion are closely linked with the purest melody of beauty constantly stirring the calm British aesthetic [38]. In art and Society, Bell said, "To make everyone an aesthete is to make them forget the theoretical definitions they understand and learn in museums. If they acquire the ability to perceive beauty, then in a way they will discover the greatest art in the new faith they have been pursuing" [31]. Keynes played a positive role at the government level for Impressionist and post-impressionist painting to enter the public view. He worked in the British Treasury in 1926 when the British and French governments and allies continued an agreement during the first World War: the British government could use loans to France to offset its expenses in France. However, due to the impact of the war on the economy, it was difficult for the French government to pay off the interest loan. Given the difficult economic situation of the British National Art Gallery, Keynes proposed to use the loan line to France to participate in the auction of works of art. According to Keynes, Charles Holmes, the curator of the National

Art Gallery, could use the £ 20000 line allocated by the French government to the British Embassy to participate in the collection auction. He and Charles Holmes acquired a Corot, a Gauguin, four paintings by Ingres, two by Delacroix, two Manets, a Rousseau, and several drawings for public collection, a Cézanne as well as an Ingres drawing and Delacroix painting for his private collection; In addition, he bought a Delacroix drawing for Duncan. Unfortunately, Holmes would not consider purchasing a Cézanne [39]. Therefore, government (John Maynard Keynes), capital (Samuel Courtauld), literary critics (Clive Bell, Roger Fry), philosophers (Moore, George Edward), painters (Vanessa Bell, Grant), Duncan, Writers (Virginia Woolf, etc.), and other variable parameters for the real life of the public, all moved towards the same result. When French modernist painting was promoted, it had a significant impact on the acceptance of the British public.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

From resistance to high enthusiasm, there is no doubt that in the decades when French modernist painting entered Britain (1876-1948), the traditional conservative British public attitudes alternative was inseparable from Bloomsbury members' advocacy. It provided excellent inspiration for cross-cultural communication and the intervention of intellectuals in the public society. The mutual influence between consanguinity and non-consanguinity of the recipient group in a foreign culture; The knowledge structure and collective consciousness possessed by the carriers of the two cultures converge. With the development of the relationship gradually falling into the trend of multi-center development, multiple opinion leaders speak out together. The interaction of individual symbols and the mutual restriction of social structure is the inevitable outcome of input and output. The ego of intellectuals orientates its object through interaction with others and creates social value. When multiple variables change, it can alter the public's perception of the cognitive world.

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