

A Dynamic Application Study of Advance Organizers in Senior High School English Reading Teaching from the Perspective of Scaffolding Theory

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How to cite this paper: Liu, D. (2026). A Dynamic Application Study of Advance Organizers in Senior High School English Reading Teaching from the Perspective of Scaffolding Theory. Educational and Humanities, 2(2), 43-56. ISSN Print: 3104-4352; ISSN Online: 3104-4360. <https://doi.org/10.63313/EH.9040>
Published: 2026-02-16

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Abstract

This study aims to address the persistent "static" application dilemma of advance organizers in senior high school English reading instruction, which often reduces them to isolated background inputs and fails to support students' deep comprehension and strategic autonomy. Based on Vygotsky's scaffolding theory, and integrating insights from constructivism, second language acquisition, and individual differences theory, a dynamic theoretical reconstruction of the advance organizer is undertaken. Through theoretical analysis and model building, a dynamic application framework is constructed. The research proposes a three-phase dynamic model centered on "diagnostic initiation—interactive transformation—gradual internalization." Corresponding design principles and application logic for senior high school English reading are clarified. This reconstruction endows the advance organizer with procedural and generative vitality. The reconstructed model provides a key theoretical pivot and practical pathway for shifting senior high school English reading teaching from a "knowledge-transmission" paradigm toward a "cognitive-development" paradigm, effectively bridging the gap between strategic design and deep learning needs.

Keywords

Scaffolding theory; Advance organizer; Senior high school English reading; Dynamic application; Cognitive modeling

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Research

Senior high school English reading instruction carries the critical mission of developing students' language proficiency, higher-order thinking, and intercultural

awareness. The complexity of literary and informational texts at this level presents significant pedagogical challenges. In this context, the advance organizer—a classic instructional strategy rooted in Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning—has been widely adopted to facilitate comprehension. However, a substantial body of teaching practice reveals that its application in current classrooms has largely been reduced to a superficial routine. Often, it is implemented merely as a brief background introduction or a mechanical pre-teaching of vocabulary, thus functioning as a perfunctory "pedagogical prelude" that prioritizes form over substantive cognitive engagement. This oversimplified usage starkly contradicts the advanced instructional goals of senior high school English, which emphasize deep text analysis, critical thinking, and metacognitive strategy development (Chew, 2021).

The core limitation lies in the theoretical lens traditionally applied to the advance organizer. It has predominantly been interpreted through the single framework of cognitive assimilation theory, conceptualized as a static, pre-set "conceptual anchor." While this view explains its basic role in activating prior knowledge, it fails to account for how the organizer can function as a dynamic and interactive cognitive tool throughout the ongoing, complex, and individualized process of classroom reading. Consequently, there is a pressing need to re-examine and theoretically reconstruct the advance organizer through a lens that emphasizes process, interaction, and developmental support.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to undertake a fundamental theoretical reconstruction of the advance organizer strategy by introducing Vygotsky's scaffolding theory as a core analytical framework. Scaffolding theory conceptualizes learning as a dynamic process of internalization within the learner's zone of proximal development, facilitated through socially mediated support. Its core tenets—diagnosis, interactive assistance, and gradual fading—directly address the static and isolated shortcomings observed in the traditional application of advance organizers.

To comprehensively address this multifaceted instructional issue, this study employs a multi-theoretical integration approach. Beyond scaffolding theory, it synthesizes key insights from: (a) constructivism regarding active knowledge construction; (b) cognitive load theory concerning information processing efficiency; (c) second language acquisition theory on input, output, and monitoring mechanisms; (d) cognitive linguistics focusing on conceptual schemata and metaphorical thinking; and (e) individual differences theory emphasizing learner diversity. This integrated perspective aims to construct a rich, multidimensional analytical lens to dissect the problem of the "static organizer" and lay a solid theoretical foundation for its transformation into a "dynamic scaffold" (Wu, 2025).

The theoretical significance of this research lies in bridging the gap between the

classic advance organizer and contemporary, process-oriented learning theories like scaffolding theory, thereby promoting the modern reinterpretation and theoretical enhancement of established pedagogical strategies. Its practical significance is to provide senior high school English teachers with a set of theoretically grounded instructional design principles and a referential model framework. This guidance moves beyond experiential practice, offering tangible support to address the real-world challenges of facilitating deep reading comprehension in the classroom.

2. Conceptual Foundation and Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Definition and Core Characteristics

This chapter aims to systematically analyze the practical dilemmas of advance organizers in senior high school English reading instruction. To establish a clear analytical framework, it is first necessary to define two interrelated core concepts: one is the "advance organizer" as a theoretical prototype, and the other is the "static organizer" as the alienated outcome of practice.

2.1.1. Advance Organizer

In this study, the "advance organizer" refers to the classic instructional strategy from Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning. It denotes the guiding materials provided before presenting new learning content, which are more generalized and inclusive than the material itself (Ausubel, 1960). Its theoretical purpose is to serve as a "cognitive bridge" connecting prior and new knowledge.

Its core functions are manifested in three key aspects: Firstly, it activates anchoring ideas by linking relevant concepts already present in students' cognitive structures; secondly, it promotes meaningful assimilation, providing a clear "conceptual anchor" for the integration of new knowledge; and finally, it facilitates cognitive differentiation and integration, helping students establish distinctions and connections among knowledge, thereby forming a hierarchical cognitive structure. Thus, this concept represents an idealized, normative prototype of a pedagogical tool.

2.1.2. Static Organizer

The "static organizer" is the core problematic concept critically constructed in this study. It specifically refers to the alienated, narrowed, and fossilized form that the advance organizer has assumed in current teaching practice. Having lost the dynamic cognitive function of the original theory, it has degenerated into a closed, preset, and isolated mechanical segment.

This is concretely manifested through four interrelated core characteristics. First, functional solidification: it regresses from a cognitive bridge into a unidirectional transmission of information, emphasizing factual delivery while lacking cognitive challenge. Second, procedural fragmentation: it becomes logically disconnected

from subsequent in-depth reading activities, reduced to a one-time, detachable "pedagogical prelude"; third, design rigidity: it relies on teachers' unilateral presumptions, lacking diagnosis of actual learning conditions and dynamic adjustment; and fourth, learner passivation: it positions students as passive recipients of information rather than active constructors of meaning. Together, these characteristics outline the complete profile of the "static organizer" as the carrier of the problem.

2.1.3. Scaffolding Theory

"Scaffolding theory," rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, is adopted in this study as the primary analytical and reconstructive framework. It conceptualizes learning as a process where a more knowledgeable other provides temporary and adaptive support to help a learner accomplish a task within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—the gap between what they can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance (Vygotsky, 1978).

Its defining features include: diagnosis of the learner's current level, responsiveness through interactive and contingent support, and the intentional fading of assistance as the learner gains competence. In this context, scaffolding theory offers a dynamic, process-oriented, and interactionist perspective against which the static, preset, and isolated nature of the "static organizer" can be critically diagnosed, and towards which a reconceptualized, "dynamic scaffold" can be designed.

2.1.4. Conceptual Synthesis: The Analytical Triangle

Through the definition of this set of contrasting and complementary concepts, this study clarifies its analytical object and lens. The "static organizer" is posited not as a poor application of the "advance organizer" but as its systemic alienation. The "scaffolding theory," with its emphasis on dynamic support, serves as the critical theoretical tool to both explain this alienation and to envision its resolution. This conceptual triangle establishes a precise framework for the subsequent diagnosis of the problem's theoretical roots and its systematic reconstruction.

2.2. Literature Review

This study aims to diagnose and reconstruct the "advance organizer" in senior high school English reading instruction. To this end, this review will center on this theme, tracing its classic theoretical foundations, explorations in practical application, the dilemmas that have emerged, and preliminary attempts at theoretical reconstruction, ultimately clarifying the point of departure and innovative space for this research.

2.2.1. Theoretical Foundation and Empirical Validation: Studies under the Classic Paradigm

Early research, both domestic and international, jointly established the legitimacy

and effectiveness of the advance organizer. Ausubel (1960) pioneered this concept, defining it as introductory material presented before new learning content that is more inclusive and generalized, with its core function being to act as a "cognitive bridge" facilitating the assimilation of new and prior knowledge. This classic cognitive theory forms the cornerstone of all subsequent research.

At the empirical level, a substantial body of studies (e.g., Mayer, 1979) validated its structural effects on improving knowledge retention, transfer, and comprehension across multiple subject domains. Research from both contexts indicates that well-designed advance organizers can effectively activate prior knowledge, reduce cognitive load, and provide an organizational framework for new information. Research from this period established its status as an effective instructional technique, but primarily viewed it as a cognitive tool pre-designed and statically presented by the teacher, with the focus concentrated on the "design features" of its information presentation.

2.2.2. Emerging Practical Dilemmas: From "Technical Failure" to Reflection on "Theoretical Limitations"

As educational goals shifted towards deep learning and core competencies, the limitations of the classic application model became increasingly apparent in complex instructional contexts. Researchers from both domestic and international spheres observed similar phenomena of practical alienation almost concurrently. Domestic research points out that advance organizers in the classroom are often reduced to background introductions or vocabulary pre-teaching, becoming superficial and failing to engage deep cognitive integration, exhibiting problems of "functional superficiality" and "procedural isolation." International research also began to critique its overly prescriptive nature, failing to adequately consider learners' dynamic comprehension processes and individual differences (van Merriënboer & Kirschner, 2018).

These critiques collectively point to a core issue. When the instructional context shifts from the "transmission-reception" of knowledge to the "interaction-construction" of meaning, the classic paradigm—based on a single theory of cognitive assimilation and centered on teacher prescription—proves inadequate. Although research has identified the symptoms of "staticization" (i.e., what this study terms the "static organizer"), most analyses remain at the pedagogical level, lacking a fundamental theoretical explanation for why it fails and how to systematically rebuild it. This reveals a critical gap in existing research: insufficient depth in diagnosing the dilemma, and the absence of a more inclusive and dynamic theoretical framework for root-cause analysis and systematic design.

2.2.3. Explorations for Reconstruction: Preliminary Dialogues with Contemporary Learning Theories

To break through the above limitations, the academic community has begun

attempting to engage the advance organizer in dialogue with richer contemporary learning theories, which provides important inspiration for this study.

Drawing on sociocultural theory, scholars have initiated a productive line of inquiry that reimagines instructional support through the lens of "scaffolding." This work, exemplified by Hmelo-Silver and colleagues (2007), investigates the dynamic function of supportive tools within collaborative inquiry, thereby furnishing a powerful conceptual metaphor. This perspective critically reframes the potential role of the advance organizer, suggesting a fundamental shift from a static, teacher-preset artifact toward a more fluid and interactive form of dynamic support that emerges within the learning process.

Concurrently, research informed by cognitive load and metacognitive theories has focused on the strategic design of supports to optimize learning under complexity. This strand of work emphasizes the management of finite cognitive resources during demanding tasks, a central concern in the research of Sweller and others (2011). It is closely allied with efforts to understand and foster student self-regulation, a key area of study advanced by scholars like Zimmerman (2002). Together, these perspectives shift the focus from mere information presentation to the architecture of cognitive and metacognitive support, aiming to enhance learners' efficiency and autonomy in knowledge construction.

However, these explorations remain fragmented. They either emphasize social interaction or focus on individual cognition, failing to form a unified and coherent theoretical analytical framework and design model that takes "scaffolding theory" as its core and organically integrates cognitive, language acquisition, social interaction, and individual difference dimensions (Ament & Zhang, 2025). The specific theoretical pathways and practical principles for how the advance organizer can achieve a fundamental transformation from a "fixed anchor provided by the teacher" to a "temporary support co-constructed by teachers and students" within a dynamic instructional dialogue remain unclear.

2.2.4. The Position of This Study

In summary, existing research has clarified the value and current dilemmas of the advance organizer and initiated preliminary explorations for its theoretical reconstruction, yet two critical gaps persist: first, a lack of in-depth theoretical tracing of the causes behind the "staticization" dilemma; second, the absence of a powerful and integrative theoretical framework to guide its systematic reconstruction. Therefore, this study positions itself as follows: Using Vygotsky's scaffolding theory as the core analytical framework, it systematically integrates cognitive construction, second language acquisition, and individual difference perspectives. It first conducts a deep-level theoretical diagnosis of the "static organizer," and then constructs a complete theoretical model and practical pathway for its transformation into a "dynamic scaffold." This aims to directly address the

aforementioned research gaps, promoting the theoretical innovation and practical transformation of this strategy in the era of cultivating higher-order thinking and language abilities.

3. Problem Identification

3.1. Introduction: From Symptom to Diagnosis

As defined in the previous chapter, the "static organizer" is characterized by functional solidification, process fragmentation, design rigidity, and learner passivity. These symptomatic features, however, are not random failures but surface manifestations of deeper, systematic disconnections between the strategy's design logic and foundational learning theories. This chapter aims to diagnose these underlying theoretical ruptures, which collectively explain why the advance organizer has atrophied into its static form.

3.2. Diagnosis from Cognitive and Constructivist Perspectives

First, examining from the perspectives of information processing and cognitive construction, the "static organizer" often neglects the limits of students' cognitive load. A typical manifestation is that it usually degrades into a one-way transmission of decontextualized facts. For example, before reading a literary work, slides might list the author's birth and death years, names of major works, and other historical dates and biographical entries. Or when explaining a scientific text, a long list of isolated technical vocabulary might be presented in advance. This design tends to input a large amount of scattered, intrinsically unconnected facts at the beginning of a lesson. These facts are presented mechanically as inert knowledge rather than being organized into a meaningful cognitive framework. The result is an unreasonable occupation of students' limited working memory resources, draining their cognitive energy on memorizing these fragmented pieces of information. This, in turn, seriously hinders the cognitive space necessary for subsequent deep semantic integration, logical reasoning, and elaborative processing of the text. This directly violates the core principle of cognitive load theory regarding optimizing working memory processing efficiency. Simultaneously, it implies a "knowledge transmission" rather than a "knowledge construction" metaphor, viewing students as passive information containers. This runs counter to the core constructivist principle that learners are active constructors of meaning.

3.3. Diagnosis from Language Acquisition and Cognitive Linguistics Perspectives

Second, analyzing from the dimensions of second language acquisition and cognitive linguistics, the disconnection becomes considerably more conspicuous. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, effective language acquisition depends on "comprehensible input" ($i+1$). However, the "static organizer" often provides

background information that is parallel to or below the student's current level (i), failing to carefully construct the cognitive scaffolding needed to reach the deeper logic of the text and unfamiliar language forms (+1). From the perspective of Swain's Output Hypothesis, it is seldom designed as a starting point that can stimulate students to produce accurate output and engage in metalinguistic reflection, nor does it create the cognitive context that requires learners to continuously test hypotheses and monitor meaning (Swain, 1995). Furthermore, from a cognitive linguistics viewpoint, advanced reading involves understanding a large number of abstract concepts and metaphorical language, which requires activating corresponding conceptual schemata. If the "static organizer" stops at explaining surface-level vocabulary without touching upon and constructing these underlying conceptual networks, it cannot genuinely facilitate deep understanding.

3.4. Diagnosis from the Perspective of Individual Differences

Finally, and crucially, is the neglect of the "static organizer" regarding individual differences among learners in the post-critical period. Senior high school students are well beyond the "critical period" for language acquisition. They exhibit significant diversity in language aptitude, cognitive style, learning motivation, anxiety levels, and other aspects (Xing, 2025). A uniform, standardized "static organizer" cannot meet these differentiated needs. It may fail to present the desired cognitive challenges for high-ability students, and it may exacerbate the anxiety of less confident students due to information overload, raising their "affective filter" and consequently hindering the intake of comprehensible input. This "one-size-fits-all" design fundamentally ignores the respect for the learner's holism, uniqueness, and agency emphasized by humanistic educational philosophy (Huang et al., 2025).

3.5. Conclusion: Systemic Disconnection and the Imperative for a New Framework

In summary, the drawbacks of the "static organizer" are not accidental teaching flaws, but rather the inevitable result of a systematic disconnection between its design logic and the cognitive laws of language learning, the nature of knowledge construction, and the characteristics of the learner as an active agent. This multi-layered theoretical failure provides a compelling rationale and the clearest directional guidance ...for its thorough reconstruction. The diagnosis points unequivocally to the need for a framework that is diagnostic (to address individual differences), interactive and responsive (to align with language acquisition processes), and adaptive (to manage cognitive load and support constructive learning)—precisely the core tenets of scaffolding theory.

4. Problem Solutions

4.1. Theoretical Reconstruction: Constructing a Dynamic Application Model of "Diagnosis-Transformation-Internalization"

In response to the drawbacks of the "static organizer", this chapter, grounded in the core tenets of Scaffolding Theory (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) and integrated with relevant theoretical perspectives, undertakes a systematic theoretical reconstruction of the application of advance organizers in senior high school English reading instruction. The core objective is to transform the advance organizer from an isolated "teaching event" into the starting point of a dynamic scaffolding sequence that runs through the entire process of reading cognition and ultimately fosters the independent development of students' competencies. This reconstruction is embodied in a three-stage dynamic model structured around the core thread of "diagnostic initiation — interactive transformation — gradual internalization".

4.1.1. Diagnostic Initiation—Targeted Intervention Based on the Zone of Proximal Development

The core of this stage lies in shifting the design starting point of the advance organizer from the teacher's text-centered presupposition to the diagnosis of learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). This requires teachers, in accordance with the Theory of Individual Differences (Snow, 1991), to fully take into account students' existing schemata, potential misconceptions, interests, and cognitive styles. Instead of providing ready-made answers, dynamic initiation involves presenting a carefully designed "cognitive perturbation", such as a dilemma, a comparative chart, or an incomplete structural framework. For instance, prior to reading an argumentative essay, instead of directly informing students of the thesis statement, teachers can present concise pros and cons of a relevant social issue, triggering cognitive conflict and preliminary stance-taking among students. This design itself accomplishes the detection of students' preconceptions and sets clear cognitive goals for subsequent learning. Its theoretical essence lies in the effective integration of the diagnostic principle of Scaffolding Theory with the humanistic care that respects learners' subjectivity (Rogers, 1969).

4.1.2. Interactive Transformation—Cognitive Progression Through Social Interaction

The pivotal phase of the dynamic model, this stage aims to thoroughly eliminate the disconnect between the "static organizer" and the teaching process. Teachers need to operationalize the pre-reading cognitive perturbation into tasks during the reading process. This means that the initial questions or conflicts should be converted into specific instructions that guide students to engage deeply with the text. The theoretical underpinnings of this approach are twofold: social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) holds that learning arises from social interaction, while second language acquisition (SLA) research (Swain, 1995) confirms that

meaningful language processing and internalization are precisely achieved through the completion of driving cognitive tasks. For example, a predictive question posed before reading can be transformed into a sustained self-monitoring task during reading, where students "seek textual evidence to confirm or revise predictions". A comparative chart provided prior to reading can be converted into step-by-step procedures for organizing information and analyzing relationships (Tao, 2025). The teacher's role shifts from an information provider to a facilitator of dialogue and a regulator of support, offering timely and personalized secondary scaffolding based on the specific needs of students arising from their interactions with the text and peers. This essentially simulates and facilitates the authentic process of deepening comprehension through "negotiation of meaning" in second language acquisition (Long, 1981).

4.1.3. Gradual Internalization — Toward Strategic Autonomy and Metacognitive Development

The ultimate goal of the dynamic model is not merely to achieve comprehension of a single text, but to promote students' internalization of external support into independent cognitive and metacognitive competencies. This stage fully reflects the fading principle of Scaffolding Theory (Wood et al., 1976) and the laws of "automatization" formation proposed by Information Processing Theory (Anderson, 1983). The focus of instructional design lies in how to systematically and sequentially withdraw external scaffolding. For example, teachers can start by providing a complete analytical framework, then offer a partial framework for students to supplement, followed by having students collaboratively construct frameworks in groups, and finally enable students to independently and implicitly apply analytical strategies. In this process, reflective activities are of crucial importance; students should be guided to review how the advance organizer directed their reading path and evaluate its effectiveness. This directly fosters the development of metacognitive strategies (Flavell, 1979). Ultimately, what students internalize is not only the knowledge of a specific text, but also a transferable set of methods that enables them to analyze any unfamiliar and complex texts independently, thus realizing a fundamental leap from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" (Ahuja, 2016).

4.2. Four Core Design Principles

To support the implementation of this dynamic model, this study extracts four core design principles. First, the sequential principle requires the design to be both prospective and retrospective, embedding the organizer into a coherent cognitive chain to ensure seamless connection with preceding and subsequent teaching activities. Second, the generative principle emphasizes that instructional design should reserve sufficient open space to accommodate and encourage new questions,

interpretations, and connections that naturally emerge from teacher-student interactions(Wang, 2024). Third, the graduated fading principle mandates that, from the long-term perspective of a unit or semester, a clear blueprint and rhythm for the gradual withdrawal of scaffolding should be formulated, with the fundamental goal of systematically guiding students to move from reliance on external support to complete autonomous learning. Finally, all the above principles need to be unified under the integrative principle, which requires the advance organizer, as a macro cognitive framework, to interact cooperatively with micro linguistic support tools such as vocabulary and syntax, thereby constructing a multi-dimensional learning support system(Jafari & Hashim, 2012).

This model fundamentally redefines the value of advance organizers. Their effectiveness no longer hinges on the richness and novelty of the content presented, but rather on the high-quality sequence of cognitive activities they successfully trigger and the extent to which these activities are ultimately transformed into students' internalized and transferable reading competencies.

5. Conclusion

This study, through a multidimensional theoretical analysis of the dilemma of the "static" application of advance organizers in senior high school English reading instruction and the construction of a "Diagnosis-Transformation-Internalization" dynamic model from the perspective of scaffolding theory, completes a theoretical exploration from critique to construction. Its core theoretical contribution lies in achieving a paradigmatic reconstruction of the function of advance organizers—elevating it from a static cognitive tool focused on knowledge association to a dynamic cognitive process centered on competency development. This reconstruction not only injects theoretical vitality aligned with the spirit of contemporary learning science into a classic teaching strategy but also, through the organic integration of multidimensional perspectives such as scaffolding theory, second language acquisition, cognitive linguistics, and individual differences, provides a more explanatory comprehensive framework for analyzing the complexity of reading instruction. The proposed three-phase dynamic model clearly reveals the transformation mechanism of advance organizers from "external support initiation" to "internal mental operation," offering clear principles and logic for instructional design.

This study carries profound implications for the practice of senior high school English reading instruction. First, it advocates for a paradigm shift in instructional design: from an "activity-chain design" focused on combining isolated teaching activities to a "cognitive journey design" that plans the pathway of students' cognitive development. The core question in lesson preparation should shift from "What will I teach?" to "What cognitive development will my students undergo, and how can I guide this process through sequenced support?" Second, it promotes a

reorientation of teaching objectives. Reading instruction should transcend the comprehension of specific textual content and explicitly position the cultivation of metacognitive strategies and autonomous learning abilities as one of its core goals, thereby elevating "teaching reading" to "teaching how to read." Finally, it encourages a redefinition of the teacher-student relationship. Teachers should become "expert learners" and "cognitive coaches," forming a collaborative inquiry community with students based on the continuous diagnosis of learners' zones of proximal development to jointly tackle textual challenges.

As a theory-building exploration, the value of this study lies in proposing a systematic analytical framework and reconstruction model, but it also has limitations that require further research for depth. First, the constructed dynamic model needs to be validated, refined, and detailed through rigorous empirical research, such as design-based research or quasi-experimental studies, to examine its actual impact on students' deep reading comprehension, strategy use, and learning motivation. Second, future research could delve into the specific application variations and adaptation strategies of this model for different text genres and different student groups. Furthermore, teacher professional development pathways warrant attention. Developing corresponding training courses and support resources is necessary to help teachers understand and master the design thinking of dynamic scaffolding and classroom interaction skills. Looking ahead, the dynamic reconstruction of the advance organizer is merely a starting point. It points toward a broader educational vision: the fundamental pursuit of senior high school English reading instruction is to use the text as a vehicle to develop students' deep-level thinking quality, autonomous learning capacity, and sound humanistic literacy, thereby truly realizing the ultimate value of using the discipline to educate and fulfill individuals.

Acknowledgements

I extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Zhang Shu, for her meticulous guidance throughout this research. From a vague inspiration to a well-defined question, and from an uncertain framework to a solid structure, her foresight and rigor illuminated every step of my journey. During the writing process, her incisive suggestions not only refined this paper but also profoundly shaped my academic thinking.

My heartfelt thanks go to my family. Your silent support has been my strongest anchor, and the understanding and tolerance you have offered allowed me to immerse myself wholeheartedly in scholarly pursuits. The peace and strength derived from this familial bond are beyond what words can fully express.

Finally, I wish to extend my sincerest appreciation to myself.

I thank the self who, while lost in the forest of literature, persisted in charting a map; the self who, repeatedly questioned by competing theoretical perspectives, still

chose to face them with intellectual honesty. I am grateful for the countless ordinary days spent in the company of dawn and starlight—it was the solitude of those moments that deepened my reflections. I am also thankful for every instance of confusion and hesitation when ideas ran dry; they taught me to coexist with theoretical complexity and allowed me to experience the clarity of conceptual coherence in moments of breakthrough.

This journey has been far more than the completion of a paper. It has been a practice in focus, a dual test of theoretical reasoning and scholarly endurance, and, above all, a precious process of recognizing my own limitations and striving to transcend them. I thank myself for retaining throughout this odyssey that simple curiosity and unwavering theoretical sincerity—they have convinced me that every step taken toward truth, regardless of its size, holds intrinsic meaning.

The road ahead is long, and I dedicate this paper to the memory of this time.

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