

Acculturation of Ethnic Minority University Students in China: A Narrative Literature Review

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Abstract: *Acculturation among ethnic minority university students is a crucial issue in higher education in multi-ethnic countries, impacting student development, ethnic unity, and social harmony. It aligns with the core principles of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning for all.” This study employs a narrative literature review, systematically analyzing nine relevant articles published between 2020 and 2026, focusing on the current adaptation status, core influencing factors, and mechanisms of ethnic minority university students in cross-cultural environments. The study finds that acculturation among ethnic minority university students exhibits dynamic and contextual characteristics, primarily influenced by individual psychological traits, cultural differences, educational environment, and media use. Cultural identity integration, positive psychological capital, and media literacy enhancement are key pathways to promoting adaptation. Existing research still suffers from limitations such as insufficient localization of theoretical frameworks and a single research methodology. Future research should strengthen interdisciplinary studies and long-term follow-up surveys to provide a more solid empirical foundation for developing support policies that are both equitable and inclusive, thus contributing to the implementation of SDG goals in multi-ethnic higher education settings.*

Keywords: Ethnic Minority University Students; Acculturation; Narrative Review; Influencing Factors; Adaptation Pathways; SDGs

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

As a unified multi-ethnic country, China has witnessed a continuous expansion of its ethnic minority university student population due to the advancement of higher education and the implementation of support policies for education in ethnic minority areas. According to data released by the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (2025), as of 2024, the total number of ethnic minority students receiving higher education in China reached over 4.66 million, accounting for 8.93% of all university students, with ethnic minority students making up 10.01% of undergraduate and vocational university students. These students leave their familiar ethnic cultural environment to study and live in universities in other regions where Han Chinese culture is the mainstream. They inevitably face cultural clashes in areas such as language communication, customs, and values, making acculturation a significant challenge in their university life.

This narrative literature review on the acculturation of ethnic minority university students in China provides important academic support for sustainable development issues, with its most direct connection being reflected in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, “Quality Education”. By exploring pathways to inclusive adaptation in higher education, this study focuses on SDGs 4.5 and 4.7, emphasizing the guarantee of equitable educational opportunities and the promotion of cultural diversity for disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, by examining the socio-cultural integration of ethnic minorities, this study directly responds to SDG 10, “Reducing Inequality”; and by exploring mechanisms for fostering social harmony, it provides theoretical and practical support for SDG 16, “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions”, thereby contributing to the construction of a non-discriminatory and inclusive education policy system. Ultimately, the findings of this study provide empirical evidence and theoretical support for establishing an equitable support system, laying the foundation for a multi-dimensional sustainable development framework for multi-ethnic countries that integrates education, social inclusion, and social cohesion.

Intercultural contact produces changes in an individual’s culturally grounded beliefs, behaviours and identities, a process known as acculturation (Ward & Szabó, 2023). For ethnic minority university students, this process involves not only adjustments to external behavior but also the reconstruction of their internal psychology and identity. Positive acculturation not only promotes students’ academic development and mental health but also enhances their sense of ethnic identity and national belonging, laying the foundation for a strong sense of community within the Chinese nation (Dong, 2020; Wang & Ren, 2025). Conversely, poor adaptation may lead to academic pressure, psychological anxiety, and social isolation, affecting students’ growth and development (Suo & Teng, 2020; Yang et al., 2023).

This study aims to systematically integrate existing research findings on the acculturation of ethnic minority university students in China through a narrative literature review, clarifying the following core questions:

- RQ1 What is the current status and main challenges of acculturation among ethnic minority university students?
- RQ2 What are the key factors influencing their acculturation?
- RQ3 What effective adaptation pathways and intervention strategies have been proposed in existing research?

From a theoretical perspective, this study helps integrate scattered research findings, constructs a more systematic theoretical framework for the acculturation of ethnic minority university students, and addresses the shortcomings of existing research in terms of theoretical localization and multi-dimensional integration. From a practical perspective, the research findings can provide specific suggestions for universities to optimize their educational management models and improve their support service systems, helping ethnic minority university students successfully complete their studies and achieve personal development, while also promoting campus cultural diversity and ethnic unity.

1.2 Literature Search and Screening

1.2.1 Search Strategy

This study used academic databases such as the Web of Science, CNKI, and Google Scholar to search for literature using keywords such as “minority students”, “minority university students”, “acculturation”, and “inter-cultural adaption”. The retrieved literature was systematically reviewed, and with a time limit of 2020-2026, nine articles were finally identified, including Chinese core journal articles, English journal articles, and related research results.

1.2.2 Data Screening Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

- i. The research subjects are Chinese ethnic minority university students;
- ii. The core theme revolves around acculturation and its related factors (such as identity, psychological capital, media use, etc.);
- iii. The research method is empirical research (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods) or theoretical review;
- iv. The literature is of high quality, with detailed data and rigorous argumentation.

Exclusion criteria:

- i. The research subjects were not ethnic minority university students;
- ii. The core theme was not directly related to acculturation;
- iii. The literature was duplicated or of insufficient quality.

Finally, 9 qualified articles were included for in-depth analysis.

1.2.3 Results

Table 1: Results

No.	Authors and year	Title	Main obj/question	Method	Key findings
1	Dong Li. (2020)	Adaptation and Development: From the Perspective of Cultural Identity—— Taking Xinjiang Ethnic University Students for Example	Investigate the development characteristics, influencing factors, and internal mechanisms of cultural identity among ethnic minority university students	qualitative	1. Cultural identity is dynamic, hierarchical, differential, and situational, tending to integrate their own ethnic culture and Chinese culture. 2. Cultural identity is self-identity in the interweaving of tradition and modernity; flexibility is an important feature of cultural integration. 3. Academic performance, interpersonal communication, and career planning have a greater impact on adaptation than cultural identity.
2	Qiu Z.Y & Cui Y.J. (2020)	A Study on the Acculturation of Minority College Students—— Take Two Universities in Harbin as an Example	Analyze the current situation, dilemmas, and influencing factors of acculturation among ethnic minority university students	mixed	1. Most students face high academic pressure and uneven Chinese proficiency. 2. Differences in living customs and insufficient school support hinder adaptation. 3. Acculturation is at a medium-to-above level, with the core issue being incompatibility between their own ethnic culture and mainstream culture.

3	Suo X.M. & Teng X. (2020)	The Study on the Path of Improvement of Ethnic Minority Students' Information Literacy in Colleges and Universities for Nationalities from the Perspective of Acculturation Theory	Explore the correlation between information literacy and cultural adaptation of ethnic minority college students, and identify influencing factors	mixed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information literacy is significantly correlated with cultural adaptation ability; Chinese proficiency affects information literacy development. 2. Students have weak pre-university information foundations, and the school's information literacy curriculum system is imperfect. 3. Public compulsory courses, campus networks, and peer learning are key factors for improving information literacy.
4	Suo X.M. & Teng X. (2022)	A study on factors influencing information literacy among ethnic minority university students within the theoretical framework of acculturation	Analyze the influencing factors of information literacy among ethnic minority college students based on cultural adaptation theory, and discuss the limitations of Western theories	mixed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrative cultural adapters have the best information literacy; family cultural background and campus activity participation are related to information literacy. 2. Western cultural adaptation theories need to be adjusted to Chinese national conditions; there is no "marginalized" adaptation type among Chinese ethnic minority students.
5	Yao S.J, Khir, A. M., Ma'rof, A. A., & Jaafar, W. M. W. (2023)	The mediating role of positive psychological capital in the relationship between acculturative stress and ethnic identity among ethnic minority university students in Mainland China	Explore the relationship among ethnic identity, positive psychological capital, and acculturative stress, and the mediating role of positive psychological capital	quantitative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ethnic minority students have strong ethnic identity, with Chinese national identity significantly higher than their own ethnic identity. 2. Chinese national identity is negatively correlated with acculturative stress, and both types of ethnic identity are positively correlated with positive psychological capital. 3. Positive psychological capital partially mediates the relationship between ethnic identity and acculturative stress.
6	Wu, Y., Xu, J., Shen, Y., Wang, Y., & Zheng, Y. (2024)	Daily agreeableness and acculturation processes in ethnic/racial minority freshmen: The role of inter-ethnic contact and perceived discrimination	Examine how agreeableness interacts with inter-ethnic contact and perceived discrimination to influence mainstream cultural orientation (MCO) as daily within-person processes	quantitative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreeableness has a positive indirect effect on MCO through inter-ethnic contact at both within- and between-person levels. 2. At the within-person level, higher agreeableness is associated with higher MCO only on days with lower perceived discrimination.
7	Wang Y.Q & Ren	Pathways to Enhanced Intercultural Adaptation:	Analyze the impact of media use on cross-cultural	mixed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students are highly dependent on social media and short video platforms but lack media literacy and use skills.

	H.T. (2025)	Media Usage Among Ethnic Minority Students in Universities	adaptation of ethnic minority college students and explore improvement paths		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. They face dilemmas such as cultural and identity confusion, and insufficient media participation and interaction capabilities. 3. Cultural differences, individual psychology, educational background, and family and social factors cause poor cross-cultural adaptation.
8	Wang, X., Liu, Y., Wang, S., Zhu, R., & You, X. (2025)	Longitudinal study of acculturative stress and depression among Minority College students in China	Examine the longitudinal relationship between acculturative stress and depression among ethnic minority college students, and the moderating and mediating roles of hope and cultural intelligence	quantitative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a significant positive correlation between acculturative stress and depressive symptoms. 2. Hope plays a mediating role in both immediate and delayed predictions of depression by acculturative stress. 3. Higher cultural intelligence weakens the immediate predictive effect of hope on depression, and weakens the delayed direct and indirect effects of acculturative stress on depression.
9	Yang, L., Liu, Y., & Zhuang, Z. (2025)	Chinese ethnic minorities and learner identity in non-autonomous schools: a systematic review	Systematically sort out the factors influencing the identity construction of ethnic minority students in inland classes (non-autonomous areas)	qualitative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language learning, cultural conflicts, and school practices are the core factors shaping identity construction. 2. Mandarin-dominated teaching environments lead to the loss of native languages and academic identity anxiety. 3. School courses and policies tend to be assimilative, neglecting the diversity of ethnic cultures.

2. The Current Situation and Challenges of Acculturation among Ethnic Minority University Students

2.1 The Overall Characteristics of Adapting to the Current Situation

Existing research indicates that acculturation among ethnic minority university students constitutes a dynamic and complex process, exhibiting hierarchical, differential, and contextual characteristics (Dong, 2020). Overall, the majority of students are able to achieve integration of cultural identity through proactive adjustment, maintaining their ethnic cultural identity while actively integrating into the mainstream cultural environment (Suo & Teng, 2022; Wu et al., 2023). For instance, Dong (2020) conducted in-depth interviews with 26 ethnic minority university students from Xinjiang Province, finding that all participants perceived no contradiction between preserving their ethnic culture and integrating into Chinese culture, demonstrating an inclusive and open attitude towards diverse cultural expressions.

However, the overall level of acculturation among ethnic minority university students still needs improvement. A survey conducted by Qiu and Cui (2020) of 71 ethnic minority university students from two universities in Heilongjiang Province showed that although their cultural adaptability was at a moderately high level, they still faced many challenges in academic pressure, language communication, and adaptation to local customs. The research by Suo and Teng (2020) also pointed out that ethnic minority university students had relatively

scarce information literacy and cultural capital before entering university, and there were significant individual differences in their cross-cultural adaptability. Some students encountered adaptation difficulties due to factors such as weak Chinese language proficiency and differences in cultural customs.

2.2 Main Adaptation Dilemma

2.2.1 Academic Stress

Academic pressure is one of the primary challenges faced by ethnic minority university students. Due to the relatively weak level of basic education in ethnic minority areas, some students have significant gaps in basic courses such as Chinese, English, and advanced mathematics, leading to learning difficulties, high retake rates, and even grade repetition (Qiu & Cui, 2020). Surveys show that 74.6% of ethnic minority university students reported significant academic pressure, worrying about retakes and failing grades, and 54.9% of students felt that some courses were too difficult (Qiu & Cui, 2020). Furthermore, the predominantly Chinese language of instruction also creates listening barriers for some students with weaker Chinese proficiency, affecting their learning outcomes and sense of academic achievement (Suo & Teng, 2020; Yang et al., 2023).

2.2.2 Cultural and Identity Confusion

Identity confusion stemming from cultural differences is a core dilemma for ethnic minority university students' acculturation. Within a mainstream cultural environment, students need to find a balance between their own ethnic culture and the mainstream culture, a process that easily triggers identity anxiety (Wang & Ren, 2025; Yang et al., 2023). For example, some students struggle with whether to use their ethnic language or Mandarin for communication, and whether to adhere to ethnic customs or integrate into mainstream lifestyles (Dong, 2020). Research has found that 85.3% of ethnic minority university students prefer WeChat or QQ for online social networking, and their communication is mostly limited to their own ethnic circle of friends, demonstrating a certain tendency towards cultural isolation (Wang & Ren, 2025). Furthermore, a minority of students may encounter prejudice or misunderstanding due to cultural differences, further exacerbating their identity confusion and integration difficulties (Wang et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2023).

2.2.3 Social Interaction and Life Adjustment Disorders

Differences in lifestyle customs and social practices also present adaptation challenges for ethnic minority university students. Regarding dietary habits, some religiously observant students have specific dietary restrictions, yet university canteen services often struggle to adequately meet these needs, thereby affecting their life satisfaction and social engagement (Qiu & Cui, 2020). Socially, factors such as limited language proficiency and cultural differences hinder some students from forming deep interpersonal relationships with peers from other ethnic groups. Their social circles often remain confined to fellow ethnic peers, leading to a phenomenon of 'grouping together' (Wang & Ren, 2025; Suo & Teng, 2020). Surveys indicate that 23.3% of ethnic minority university students experience difficulties adapting to cultural customs, while 24% face challenges in the linguistic environment (Suo & Teng, 2020).

2.2.4 Insufficient Media Literacy and Digital Adaptation

In the digital age, media usage has become a crucial pathway for acculturation, yet ethnic minority university students generally exhibit insufficient media literacy and digital adaptation capabilities. Research indicates that these students possess weaker critical analysis skills regarding media content, tend to passively receive information, and possess limited media

usage skills, making it difficult for them to fully utilize online resources to access learning and lifestyle information (Wang & Ren, 2025). Furthermore, some students encounter conflicts regarding cultural expression and identity affirmation within cyberspace. For instance, content posted in Mandarin Chinese receives higher engagement metrics than that in their ethnic languages, undermining their cultural confidence (Wang & Ren, 2025).

3. Factors Influencing Acculturation Among Ethnic Minority University Students

3.1 Individual-level Factors

3.1.1 Personality Traits and Psychological Capital

Personality traits constitute significant individual factors influencing acculturation. Research by Wu et al. (2023) revealed that agreeableness positively correlates with mainstream cultural orientation among ethnic minority university students, with those exhibiting high agreeableness demonstrating greater propensity for cross-ethnic engagement, thereby facilitating acculturation. Moreover, positive psychological capital (comprising four dimensions: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience) plays a pivotal role in acculturation. Yao et al. (2023) demonstrated that ethnic identity among minority university students exhibits a significant positive correlation with positive psychological capital. Furthermore, positive psychological capital partially mediates the relationship between ethnic identity and acculturation stress, indicating that students with higher psychological capital are better equipped to cope effectively with adaptation pressures.

3.1.2 Linguistic Competence

Language is a core tool for cultural exchange, and Chinese language proficiency directly impacts the academic performance, social interaction, and cultural integration of ethnic minority university students (Suo & Teng, 2020; Yang et al., 2023). Studies show that ethnic minority university students with higher Chinese proficiency have significantly higher information literacy and cultural adaptability than those with lower proficiency (Suo & Teng, 2020). Conversely, insufficient Chinese proficiency can lead to obstacles in classroom learning and daily communication, resulting in academic pressure, social isolation, and hindering the process of acculturation (Qiu & Cui, 2020; Yang et al., 2023).

3.1.3 Cultural Identity

Cultural identity encompasses two dimensions: ethnic identity and national identity, and it has a significant impact on the acculturation of ethnic minority university students (Yao et al., 2023; Dong, 2020). Yao et al. (2023) found that ethnic minority university students' national identity was significantly higher than their ethnic identity, and that national identity was significantly negatively correlated with acculturation pressure, while ethnic identity was positively correlated with positive psychological capital. Suo and Teng (2022) also indicated that students with a greater understanding and higher level of identification with their own ethnic culture were more likely to adopt an open and inclusive attitude towards mainstream culture, and their acculturation ability was stronger. Furthermore, an integrated state of cultural identity (identifying with one's own ethnic culture while accepting mainstream culture) is the ideal adaptation model, helping students switch flexibly between the two cultures and achieve good adaptation (Dong, 2020; Suo & Teng, 2022).

3.2 Environmental Factors

3.2.1 Educational Environment and School Support

The educational environment and support service system of universities are crucial for the acculturation of ethnic minority university students. Existing research shows that support measures provided by universities, such as academic assistance, cultural exchange platforms, and psychological counseling services, can effectively promote students' acculturation (Qiu & Cui, 2020; Suo & Teng, 2020). For example, offering Mandarin tutoring classes, basic course tutoring classes, and organizing ethnic cultural activities can help students improve their language skills, alleviate academic pressure, and enhance their cultural confidence (Qiu & Cui, 2020). Conversely, an inadequate educational supply system (such as a monotonous curriculum, neglect of ethnic cultural differences, and insufficient catering services) can exacerbate students' adaptation difficulties (Qiu & Cui, 2020; Suo & Teng, 2020). In addition, teachers' multicultural sensitivity and teaching methods also affect students' adaptation experience; teaching lacking multicultural awareness may lead to the neglect of students' cultural needs (Yang et al., 2023).

3.2.2 Family and Social Support

Family and social support are crucial external safeguards for the acculturation of ethnic minority university students. Family cultural values and educational philosophies influence students' cultural identity and adaptation attitudes. A supportive family environment that encourages integration into mainstream culture helps students develop a positive adaptation mindset (Dong, 2020; Yao et al., 2023). Social support, such as the implementation of ethnic policies, societal respect and tolerance for ethnic minority cultures, and peer support, also provides favorable conditions for students' acculturation (Wang & Ren, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Research has found that peer support plays a unique role in students' acculturation; interaction and communication with students from different ethnic groups can help students understand mainstream culture, improve social skills, and alleviate adaptation stress (Dong, 2020; Suo & Teng, 2022).

3.2.3 Media Environment

With the advent of the digital age, the media environment has become a significant factor influencing the acculturation of ethnic minority university students (Wang & Ren, 2025). On the one hand, online media provides students with platforms for acquiring information, communicating, and expressing their culture, helping them understand mainstream culture, maintain ethnic cultural connections, and mitigate culture shock (Wang & Ren, 2025). For example, students maintain contact with family and friends through social media and learn about ethnic and mainstream cultural dynamics through short video platforms, which helps enhance their cultural identity and sense of belonging (Wang & Ren, 2025). On the other hand, the media environment can also have negative impacts, such as misinformation and cultural bias, which may exacerbate students' identity confusion and adaptation pressure (Wang & Ren, 2025). Furthermore, insufficient media literacy can limit students' effective use of media resources and hinder their ability to promote acculturation through media (Suo & Teng, 2020).

3.3 Cultural Factors

3.3.1 Cultural Differences

Cultural differences are one of the root causes of adjustment difficulties among ethnic minority university students (Qiu & Cui, 2020; Yang et al., 2023). Significant differences exist between ethnic minorities and Han Chinese in language, diet, religious beliefs, values, and customs. These differences can lead to "culture shock" for students within the mainstream cultural environment, manifesting as negative emotions such as anxiety, confusion, and loneliness

(Wang & Ren, 2025; Qiu & Cui, 2020). For example, students who practice Islam have customs regarding diet and religious activities that differ from the mainstream culture. If these customs are not adequately respected and understood, it may lead to social isolation and psychological stress (Qiu & Cui, 2020; Yang et al., 2023).

3.3.2 Acculturation Policy

National and local policies related to acculturation play a crucial guiding role in the adaptation process of ethnic minority university students (Yang et al., 2023; Suo & Teng, 2022). My country's ethnic education policies emphasize ethnic equality, ethnic unity, and cultural diversity, providing more opportunities for ethnic minority students to receive higher education through measures such as establishing inland classes, preparatory education for ethnic minorities, and the backbone program (Qiu & Cui, 2020; Yang et al., 2023). These policies, while promoting educational equity and improving the overall quality of ethnic minority students, also create favorable conditions for their acculturation. However, some policies still have shortcomings in their implementation, such as overemphasizing assimilation and neglecting ethnic cultural differences, which may pose challenges to students' acculturation (Yang et al., 2023).

4. Pathways and Intervention Strategies for Promoting Acculturation among Ethnic Minority University Students

4.1 Individual Level: Enhancing Self-adaptability

4.1.1 Strengthening Cultural Identity and Psychological Capital

Promoting cultural identity integration among ethnic minority university students is key to enhancing their adaptability. Students should proactively learn about the connotations of their own ethnic culture and Chinese culture, establishing a "pluralistic yet unified" cultural perspective. While maintaining the characteristics of their ethnic culture, they should actively embrace the excellent achievements of mainstream culture (Dong, 2020; Yao et al., 2023). Furthermore, students should focus on cultivating their positive psychological capital by setting reasonable goals, actively coping with setbacks, and seeking social support to improve self-efficacy, optimism, and psychological resilience, thereby enhancing their ability to cope with and adapt to stress (Yao et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025).

4.1.2 Enhance Language Skills and Media Literacy

Improving language proficiency is fundamental to acculturation. Ethnic minority university students should actively participate in Mandarin training and language exchange activities, improving their Chinese expression and comprehension skills through various means such as classroom learning, daily communication, reading, and writing (Qiu & Cui, 2020; Suo & Teng, 2020). Simultaneously, students should emphasize improving their media literacy, learning to critically receive and analyze media information, skillfully using online resources to obtain information for learning and daily life, and engaging in cultural expression and communication through media platforms, fully leveraging the positive role of media in acculturation (Wang & Ren, 2025; Suo & Teng, 2020).

4.2 At the School Level: Improve the Support Service System

4.2.1 Optimize Education, Teaching and Academic Support

Universities should optimize their teaching and learning models to cater to the characteristics of ethnic minority students. In terms of curriculum design, they should add courses related to ethnic culture and intercultural communication to meet students' cultural needs. In terms of teaching methods, they should adopt diverse teaching approaches, pay attention to students'

language differences and learning foundations, and provide personalized teaching support (Qiu & Cui, 2020; Suo & Teng, 2020). Furthermore, universities should establish and improve academic support mechanisms, such as offering basic course tutoring classes, implementing one-on-one support programs, and assigning academic mentors, to help students alleviate academic pressure and improve their learning abilities (Qiu & Cui, 2020).

4.2.2 Strengthening Cultural Exchange and Campus Inclusivity

Universities should actively foster an inclusive and diverse campus culture, providing platforms for cultural exchange for ethnic minority students. This can be achieved through events such as ethnic cultural festivals, intercultural exchange activities, and ethnic unity-themed education, promoting mutual understanding and respect among students of different ethnicities (Qiu & Cui, 2020; Dong, 2020). Simultaneously, universities should improve campus service facilities, such as providing dining options in canteens that cater to the dietary customs of ethnic minorities and establishing venues for ethnic cultural activities, to meet students' living and cultural needs (Qiu & Cui, 2020). Furthermore, strengthening multicultural training for teachers and students can enhance their multicultural awareness and communication skills, reducing cultural prejudice and misunderstanding (Yang et al., 2023; Wang & Ren, 2025).

4.2.3 Improve Mental Health and Social Support

Universities should establish and improve their mental health service systems to provide targeted psychological support for ethnic minority students. This can be achieved through offering mental health courses, establishing counseling centers, and conducting psychological assessments and interventions to help students cope with the psychological stress and emotional problems encountered during acculturation (Yao et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025). Simultaneously, universities should strengthen student management and services, assign dedicated ethnic minority counselors, establish home-school communication mechanisms, and fully leverage the collaborative roles of families, schools, and society to provide students with comprehensive social support (Qiu & Cui, 2020).

4.3 Social Level: Creating a Favorable Environment for Adaptation

4.3.1 Strengthen Policy Support and Implementation

The government should further improve policies related to ethnic minority education and acculturation, increase investment in basic education in ethnic minority areas, and narrow the education gap (Qiu & Cui, 2020; Yang et al., 2023). At the higher education level, the government should continue to optimize enrollment policies for ethnic minority students, while strengthening oversight of policy implementation to ensure fairness and effectiveness. Furthermore, the government should increase its efforts to protect and preserve ethnic minority cultures, foster a social atmosphere that respects multiculturalism, and create a favorable social environment for the acculturation of ethnic minority university students (Dong, 2020; Wang & Ren, 2025).

4.3.2 Improve the Quality of the Media Environment

Relevant departments should strengthen the supervision of online media, regulate the dissemination of online information, combat misinformation and cultural bias, and create a healthy and orderly media environment (Wang & Ren, 2025). At the same time, media outlets should be encouraged to produce and disseminate content related to multiculturalism, strengthen the promotion and display of ethnic minority cultures, and promote cultural understanding and exchange among different ethnic groups (Wang & Ren, 2025). Furthermore, social organizations can conduct media literacy training programs for ethnic minority

university students to help them improve their media literacy and fully utilize media resources to promote acculturation (Suo & Teng, 2020).

5. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

5.1 Research Limitations

Existing research largely draws on Western theories of acculturation (such as Berry's cross-cultural adaptation model and Ward's acculturation process model), lacking an original theoretical framework based on China's national conditions and ethnic characteristics (Suo & Teng, 2022; Yang et al., 2023). Western theories emphasize the conflict and adaptation of individuals between different cultures, while my country's ethnic relations have a unique "pluralistic unity" characteristic. The acculturation of ethnic minority university students is more reflected in the integration of ethnic cultures with Chinese culture rather than opposition, and existing theories cannot fully explain this special process (Dong, 2020; Suo & Teng, 2022).

In terms of research methods, existing studies are mainly quantitative, with relatively insufficient qualitative and mixed-methods research, making it difficult to deeply reveal the dynamic process and individual differences in acculturation (Wang & Ren, 2025; Yang et al., 2023). Regarding sample selection, research subjects are mostly concentrated on large ethnic minorities such as Uyghurs and Tibetans, with insufficient attention paid to other ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the samples are often drawn from single regions or universities, lacking representativeness (Suo & Teng, 2022; Yang et al., 2023). In addition, most studies are cross-sectional, making it difficult to reveal the long-term development trends of acculturation and the causal relationships of influencing factors (Wang et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2023).

Existing research largely focuses on the current state of acculturation, influencing factors, and macro-level intervention strategies, with insufficient exploration of the specific mechanisms of acculturation (such as the interactions between different influencing factors, and the relationship between acculturation and academic development and career planning) (Dong, 2020; Wang et al., 2025). Furthermore, with the deepening development of digitalization and globalization, new factors such as the use of new media and cross-regional mobility have an increasingly significant impact on acculturation, but related research remains relatively weak and needs further strengthening (Wang & Ren, 2025; Suo & Teng, 2020).

5.2 Future Research Outlook

Future research should combine China's "pluralistic yet unified" ethnic structure with the acculturation characteristics of ethnic minority university students to construct a acculturation theoretical framework with Chinese characteristics. It can draw upon local theoretical resources such as Fei's theory of "pluralistic yet unified Chinese nation" and Professor Teng's theory of "multicultural integration education" to deeply explore the essence and laws of acculturation among ethnic minority university students, thus overcoming the limitations of Western theories (Suo & Teng, 2022; Yang et al., 2023).

In terms of research methods, the application of qualitative and mixed-methods research should be strengthened. Ethnography, in-depth interviews, and long-term follow-ups should be used to deeply reveal the dynamic process and individual differences in acculturation (Wang & Ren, 2025; Yang et al., 2023). Regarding sample selection, the sample scope should be expanded to include more ethnic minority groups and different regions and types of universities to improve the representativeness of the research results (Suo & Teng, 2022; Wang et al., 2025). Furthermore, longitudinal studies can be conducted to explore the long-term development

trends of acculturation and the causal relationships of influencing factors, providing a basis for developing long-term and effective intervention strategies (Wu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025).

Future research should further expand its scope and delve into the specific mechanisms of acculturation, such as the mediating and moderating roles of positive psychological capital and media literacy (Yao et al., 2023; Wang & Ren, 2025). Simultaneously, attention should be paid to the relationship between acculturation and academic development, career planning, and mental health, comprehensively revealing the impact of acculturation on the growth and development of ethnic minority university students (Dong, 2020; Wang et al., 2025). Furthermore, in the context of digitalization and globalization, research can be strengthened on the impact of new media use, cross-regional mobility, and unforeseen events such as pandemics on acculturation, providing theoretical support and practical guidance for addressing new challenges (Wang & Ren, 2025; Suo & Teng, 2020).

6. Conclusion

Acculturation among ethnic minority university students is a dynamic and complex process, exhibiting hierarchical, differentiated, and situational characteristics. Their adaptation difficulties mainly manifest in academic pressure, identity confusion, social interaction barriers, and insufficient media literacy. Key factors influencing acculturation among ethnic minority university students include at the individual level, personality traits, language ability, and cultural identity; at the environmental level, the educational environment, family and social support, and the media environment; and at the cultural level, cultural differences and related policies. Promoting acculturation among ethnic minority university students requires collaborative efforts from individuals, schools, and society. This can be achieved through various pathways, such as enhancing individual adaptability, improving school support services, and creating a favorable social environment, to help students integrate their cultural identity and achieve successful adaptation.

Current research still has shortcomings in the theoretical framework, research methods, sample selection, and research content. Future research needs to strengthen the localization of theory, enrich research methods and samples, and expand research content and perspectives to provide more solid theoretical and empirical support for enhancing the cultural adaptability of ethnic minority university students. This research topic not only concerns the personal development and ethnic unity of ethnic minority university students but also deeply aligns with the SDG4 goal of “inclusive and equitable quality education.” Future research and practice should further strengthen this intrinsic connection by constructing an inclusive education system and expanding lifelong learning opportunities, enabling ethnic minority university students to equally enjoy quality higher education resources and achieving sustainable progress in personal development and social harmony.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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