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### ARTICLE

# Navigating Cultural Tensions: Dynamic Integration of Rural-Urban Art Identities in Chinese Art Education

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the cultural adaptation process of rural art students in China after passing the college entrance examination and entering urban art academies. The authors note that traditional cultural theories cannot fully explain the unique challenges faced by this group, such as value conflicts and conceptual differences in teacher-student interactions. Therefore, the paper proposes an “education-driven dynamic integration theory of art and culture,” which frames their adaptation as an active, selective, and reflective process. Through qualitative interviews with 55 rural art students, the study found that these students adopted strategies of “phased adaptation” and “dual artistic maintenance,” skillfully retaining and integrating their own rural cultural symbols while absorbing mainstream urban art elements. This dynamic adaptation not only effectively alleviated psychological stress but also significantly enhanced their creativity. Furthermore, the study found that institutional support, social network heterogeneity, and individual artistic resilience were key factors influencing their adaptation. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its ability to break away from the static categorization of traditional cultural adaptation theories and provide a new framework for understanding

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cultural adaptation within specific institutional contexts. On a practical level, this paper also provides valuable references for art schools and policymakers, hoping to promote the integration of urban and rural art and culture by building a diversified art dialogue platform and strengthening institutional support, thereby promoting artistic equity and the sustainable development of the educational ecology.

**Keywords:** Art Education Migrants; Cultural Adaptation; Dynamic Integration; Rural Art Students

## 1. Introduction

The acceleration of globalization and urbanization is profoundly reshaping the pattern of education and population mobility, among which the phenomenon of art education migration is becoming increasingly prominent<sup>[1]</sup>. Art education migration refers specifically to the process whereby individuals or families cross geographical or cultural boundaries in pursuit of superior art education resources<sup>[2]</sup>. In China, with the increasingly significant urban-rural cultural differences brought about by rapid urbanization, the art college entrance examination provides a key path for a large number of rural art students to enter urban art colleges, thus forming a unique group of “education-driven art migrants”<sup>[3,4]</sup>. The core of this phenomenon lies in: driven by the college entrance examination system, how can China’s rural art college entrance examination migrants effectively cope with the conflict between urban and rural art cultures and ultimately achieve cultural integration and individual adaptation?

This education-driven migration extends beyond mere geographical relocation; it constitutes a complex challenge involving art values, creative methods, social resource acquisition, and personal identity reconstruction. Rural art students in urban art university environments frequently encounter collisions in art values, differences in creative norms, and imbalances in social resource access, with particular prominence given to potential conflicts with urban art teachers in creative concepts, skill transmission, and evaluation standards, as well as clashes between their own rural art styles and urban mainstream art styles. These adaptation challenges not only directly impact individual psychological health and art development—where persistent urban-rural art cultural conflicts may induce cognitive dissonance and identity crises, leading to internalized psychological barriers such as self-denial, art alienation, frustration, and learned helplessness, thereby weakening individual psychological resilience and art adaptation capacity—but also, at the social structural level, adaptation

failure may restrict the occupational development opportunities and social mobility of art education migrants, exacerbating inequalities between urban and rural areas as well as regions. Moreover, from the perspective of art equity, due to relative disadvantages in cultural and economic capital, migrant students may struggle to fully utilize the high-quality resources of urban art universities, resulting in uneven resource distribution, forming a vicious cycle, and exerting far-reaching effects on the sustainable development of the art education ecosystem.

In the Chinese context, this issue is particularly urgent: numerous studies and reports confirm the urban-rural cultural differences, cultural conflicts, and adaptation challenges faced by Chinese rural art students upon entering urban art universities. These challenges include art style collisions, communication barriers in teacher-student interactions, feelings of marginalization, and resulting psychological stress and identity crises. For instance, relevant research indicates that rural students in elite universities often experience cultural discomfort and uneven resource access, increasing the risk of adaptation failure and affecting their social mobility and art development<sup>[5]</sup>. Additionally, disparities in urban-rural art education resource allocation in China are pronounced, with shortages in rural art education further amplifying these problems. Some surveys show that rural students in urban universities are prone to being viewed as having “outdated styles,” reflecting the dominant position of urban mainstream art culture and potentially undermining their art potential and group cohesion, ultimately affecting global art equity<sup>[6]</sup>. Therefore, there is an urgent need for in-depth research into their adaptation mechanisms to promote art equity and the sustainable development of the global art education system.

Cultural adaptation issues have garnered significant attention due to their profound impacts on individual psychological health, social mobility, and art equity<sup>[7,8]</sup>. Cultural capital theory<sup>[9]</sup> provides a crucial perspective for understanding this issue, positing that educational migration involves not only geographical relocation but also the

recognition, transformation, and reconfiguration of the cultural capital carried by migrants in new social fields. This theory reveals structural barriers in the cultural adaptation process. In the Chinese context of marked urban-rural art cultural differences, art education migrants face multiple challenges in cultural adaptation. For example, Ersoy and Akçaoğlu (2025) indicate that international students encounter psychological adaptation difficulties, cultural adaptation stress, insufficient social support, identity conflicts, and psychological health problems during cultural adaptation<sup>[10]</sup>. Ergin-Kocaturk (2025) further emphasizes that insufficient social support, cultural and economic capital, as well as low self-esteem and self-efficacy, are primary constraining factors in cultural adaptation within higher education contexts<sup>[11]</sup>. Bender and Osch (2019) show that international students are more prone to psychological health problems compared to local students, while social support can effectively alleviate their psychological stress<sup>[12]</sup>. Tineo (2024) also finds that the impact of cultural adaptation stress exhibits gender differences, with males showing more pronounced depression and psychological distress when facing such stress<sup>[13]</sup>. In the local Chinese context, urban-rural cultural differences further amplify adaptation challenges for educational migrants. Rural areas are centered on collectivism, traditional values, and close community ties, emphasizing family responsibilities and neighborly mutual aid; urban culture tends toward individualism, consumer culture, and professional norms, focusing on personal achievement and international vision. These differences are not only common among ordinary college entrance examination candidates but are more pronounced among art students who emphasize personalized expression and sensitivity to phenomena. In particular, art students born in rural areas, due to limited access to art resources and information channels, struggle to form a globalized art perspective; upon entering urban universities, they may encounter implicit discrimination and institutional neglect due to misalignment with mainstream urban art norms. On the other hand, these students inject unique vitality and diversity value into universities through their distinctive regional characteristics, resilience of traditional culture, and vivid expressions of folk art. This reaffirms the importance of dynamic integration paths: art education migrants are not merely “vulnerable groups” in cultural adaptation but active agents in art reproduction. Only when art universities regard cultural diversity as a valuable re-

source rather than an obstacle can cultural complementarity between urban and rural art students be truly realized, thereby advancing art equity and social integration within universities.

Although existing studies have examined cultural adaptation in higher education and international migration contexts, there remains limited empirical research focusing specifically on rural art students in China who enter urban art universities through the Gaokao system. These students face unique challenges at the intersection of artistic identity, cultural values, and institutional expectations, which are not fully addressed by general theories of acculturation or migration.

Addressing the aforementioned issues, this study focuses on China’s art college entrance examination educational migrants, aiming to reveal the dynamic mechanisms of their art cultural adaptation and identity reconstruction, and to distill common patterns and practical insights for art education migrants from a global perspective. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following core questions:

- (1) How do Chinese rural art college entrance examination migrants under education-driven conditions cope with urban-rural art cultural conflicts, and what dynamic characteristics do their cultural adaptation strategies exhibit? Particularly, how do they adjust in teacher-student interactions and regional style collisions?
- (2) How does this dynamic integration of art cultural adaptation strategy influence the psychological health and creative performance of rural art students?
- (3) What mediating role does psychological health play between art cultural adaptation strategies and creative performance?
- (4) How do factors such as institutional support, social network heterogeneity, and individual art resilience moderate the art cultural adaptation process and its impacts on psychological health and creative performance?

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in constructing the “Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory,” breaking through the static classification limitations of traditional cultural adaptation models and providing a new theoretical perspective for understanding art education migrant adaptation under China’s urban-rural dual structure. It particularly emphasizes the important

influence of teacher-student conflicts and regional style collisions in art education on student cultural adaptation. The practical significance is that this study offers scientific guidance for global art universities and policymakers, promoting art equity and the sustainable development of the global art education system, and providing robust empirical evidence and practical recommendations for facilitating cultural fusion among urban-rural art education migrants and university support policies.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study aims to deeply explore the cultural adaptation mechanisms of Chinese rural art Gaokao migrants under education-driven conditions. Cultural adaptation is the psychological and behavioral change process experienced by migrants upon contacting new cultures. In existing research, Berry's cultural adaptation theory serves as a foundational framework, proposing four adaptation strategies—integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization—emphasizing the choices individuals make between retaining original cultural identity and adopting a new culture<sup>[14]</sup>. Ward's dual-dimensional model further distinguishes psychological and social adaptation, revealing internal and external mechanisms of adaptation<sup>[15]</sup>. Additionally, Schwartz's identity reconstruction theory emphasizes the initiative and self-cognitive reconstruction of individuals in cultural adaptation. These classic theories provide important perspectives for understanding cultural adaptation, particularly highlighting the impacts of cultural contact on individual psychology and social behavior<sup>[16]</sup>.

Berry's cultural adaptation theory, as the foundation of the field, emphasizes psychological and behavioral patterns of migrants in cultural contact. However, this model primarily focuses on cultural factors, with less in-depth discussion of institutional environments' profound impacts on cultural adaptation, especially neglecting the complex interactions between individual agency and structural constraints. Meanwhile, they must also handle differences with urban and rural teachers in creative concepts and teaching methods, as well as potential judgments on their native rural art styles. These institutional norms not only shape art criteria but may also exacerbate students' psychological anxiety, loneliness, and identity contradictions<sup>[17]</sup>. Students need to strive to retain their original rural art identity on one hand, while attempting to conform to urban mainstream art culture on the other, to ensure their creations are understood and accepted, thus achieving academic and future success. Therefore, Berry's static adaptation types struggle to fully explain this dynamic, multi-layered art identity reconstruction process.

To this end, combining the profound insights of existing theories on the multi-dimensionality of cultural adaptation and the initiative of identity reconstruction, addressing their insufficient attention to institutional contexts and micro-practices, the "Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory" is proposed (**Figure 1**). This theory places art cultural adaptation in the grand context of China's Gaokao system, emphasizing the Gaokao as a strong institutional driving force that not only propels the geographical migration of rural art students but also triggers their art identity transformation.

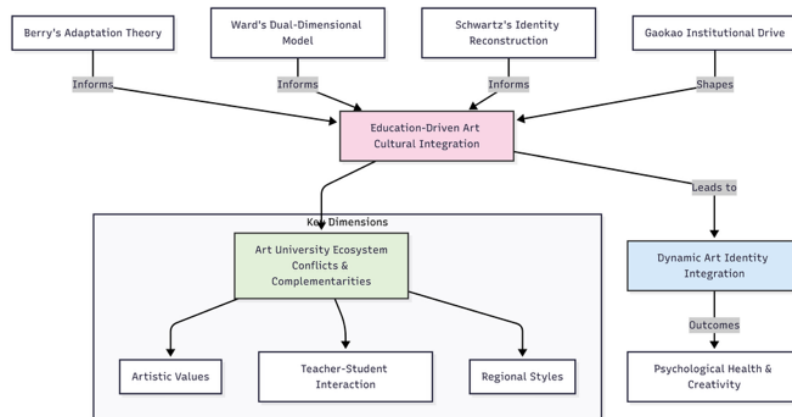


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework.

Art university campuses serve as intersections of diverse art cultures, gathering teachers and students from different art cultural backgrounds, forming complex and rich art ecosystems. In this unique environment, art cultural conflicts and complementarities coexist, jointly shaping campus social atmospheres and individual developments. Conflicts mainly stem from differences in values, creative norms, and communication methods, potentially causing misunderstandings, psychological pressure, and directly affecting students' creative performance and psychological health, particularly manifested in mismatches in teaching concepts during teacher-student interactions, as well as expression barriers and feelings of restriction caused by regional style differences. However, complementary effects are also significant, with diverse fusions not only enriching campus art connotations but also promoting cross-art understanding and dynamic reconstruction of individual identities. By adjusting art identities, students can enhance their ability to adapt to complex art environments. Art education systems, through measures such as psychological counseling, art exchange activities, and support for diverse expressions, can effectively alleviate conflicts, promote

art cultural complementarity, thereby ultimately enhancing students' psychological health levels and creative performance, advancing the construction of harmonious art campus cultures. In summary, a deep understanding of the interactive effects of art cultural conflicts and complementarities holds important theoretical and practical value for building inclusive, diverse, and innovative art university campus cultures.

To understand the cultural adaptation mechanisms of Chinese rural art Gaokao migrants under education-driven conditions, it is necessary to critically examine classic theories in the field of cultural adaptation and situate them within the specific context of Chinese art universities for in-depth analysis (**Table 1**). In the Chinese context, the cultural adaptation of rural art students extends beyond mere collisions in art concepts and is more deeply embedded in the norms of the art education system. The Gaokao, as a national selection mechanism, directly drives the migration of rural art students to urban environments; this migration transcends geographical shifts and is accompanied by fundamental transformations in art styles, creative methods, and social expectations<sup>[18]</sup>.

**Table 1.** Theoretical Foundations of Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory.

Theory Name	Core Focus	Explanatory Power for Education-Driven Art Migrants	Supplements/Breakthroughs of This Study's Theory
Berry's Cultural Adaptation Theory	Cultural Contact Adaptation Strategies (Integration, Assimilation, Separation, Marginalization)	Can Classify Adaptation Types, but Ignores Institutional Drive	Adds Institutional Drive, Dynamic Integration Process, Art Agency
Ward's Psychological and Social Adaptation Dual-Dimensional Model	Internal and External Dual Mechanisms of Adaptation (Psychological and Social Adaptation)	Distinguishes Adaptation Levels, but Fails to Fully Elucidate Institutional Environment and Specific Art Contexts	Introduces Art Gaokao Institutional Context, Emphasizes Teacher-Student Interactions and Regional Styles as Specific Mechanisms
Schwartz's Identity Reconstruction Theory Individual	Cognitive Identity Reconstruction in Adaptation	Emphasizes Individual Initiative, but Insufficient Discussion of Structural Forces	Emphasizes Gaokao Institutional Drive on Identity Reconstruction, and Refines Identity Integration in Art Contexts
Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory (Proposed in This Article)	Gaokao Institutional Drive Under Art Cultural Dynamic Integration, Art Dual Maintenance, Art Agency, Multi-Moderating Factors	Provides a More Explanatory Framework Targeted at the Specificity of Chinese Art Gaokao Migrants	Comprehensive Integration and Deepening, More Emphasis on Specific Art Education Contexts

To systematically sort out the multi-dimensional manifestations of art cultural conflicts and complementarities in art university campuses, this article proposes the “Edu-

cation-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory,” summarizing the specific manifestations, potential mechanisms, and coping strategies of different art cultural influ-



ence dimensions.

As shown in **Table 2**, cultural differences in art university campuses may lead to art value conflicts, creative barriers, and psychological stress, particularly issues embodied in teacher-student interactions and regional style collisions, but may also stimulate innovative thinking, enhance expressive abilities, and promote art fusion in diverse interactions. This dual role should not be simply viewed as a one-way assimilation process but understood as a reflexive, selective, and phased dynamic integration process. Therefore, this article, based on absorbing acculturation theory, psychological-sociocultural dual-dimensional models, and identity reconstruction theory, further proposes the “Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration” model tailored to the context of Chinese art college entrance examination education migrants. This model breaks through the limitations of traditional cultural adaptation models dominated by static classifications, not only addressing the real com-

plexity of art cultural conflicts and fusions<sup>[19]</sup>, but also emphasizing the dynamic evolution of art choices, mixed reconstruction of art identities, and interactions between institutional environments (such as the college entrance examination mechanism), social support networks, and individual agency, with greater attention to teacher-student relationships as key interactive fields in cultural fusion, and regional art styles as core cultural elements in dynamic evolution<sup>[20,21]</sup>, providing a more explanatory theoretical framework for understanding the cultural adaptation paths of rural art students in urban art universities. Subsequent empirical analysis will be based on this model to systematically examine the impacts of different art cultural adaptation strategies on students’ psychological health and creative performance, and to explore the mediating and moderating roles of social support, psychological resilience, and other factors, thereby offering feasible recommendations and theoretical support for art equity and university governance practices.

**Table 2.** Specific Manifestations, Potential Mechanisms, and Coping Strategies of Different Dimensions of Art and Cultural Influence.

No.	Dimension of Influence	Manifestation of Art-Cultural Conflict	Manifestation of Art-Cultural Complementarity	Coping Strategies / Suggestions
1	Differences in Artistic Values	Conflict between traditional and modern artistic values, leading to creative divergence	Collision of diverse artistic values stimulating innovative thinking	Art diversity education, promoting cross-art communication
2	Teacher-Student Interaction	Teachers lack understanding of local art styles; misalignment between teaching and students’ creative concepts	Teachers guide students to integrate diverse styles, promoting mutual learning	Teacher training, establishing teacher-student communication platforms, encouraging teachers to adopt diverse perspectives
3	Creative Norm Conflicts	Differences in artistic habits causing exclusion or isolation	Complementary habits enriching campus art ecology	Organizing art integration activities, psychological counseling
4	Regional Style Collisions	Local art styles not recognized, restricting students’ self-expression	Integration of regional styles forming new artistic forms and genres	Hosting regional art exchange exhibitions, encouraging students to innovate
5	Expression and Communication	Barriers in artistic language affecting learning and communication	Enhancing artistic abilities and cross-cultural communication skills	Offering art support courses, encouraging multi-style exchanges
6	Impact on Mental Health	Artistic shocks triggering anxiety, loneliness, and other negative emotions	Support groups providing emotional support, enhancing artistic resilience	Establishing mental health support systems, conducting group counseling
7	Creative Performance	Artistic conflicts affecting class participation and creative motivation	Artistic complementarity improving resource utilization and innovation	Diversifying teaching methods, providing personalized art support

### 3. Materials and Methods

Based on the aforementioned theoretical framework, to deeply reveal the complex art cultural adaptation paths

of rural art students in urban art university environments, this study adopted qualitative research methods to ensure thorough theory construction and empirical validation. The research primarily proceeded through in-depth interviews.

In the qualitative exploration phase, the aim was to conduct theory building and concept extraction. Five representative art universities were selected, covering eastern, central, and western regions to ensure sample diversity and representativeness. Purposeful sampling was employed to randomly select 55 in-school art students with typical rural backgrounds for semi-structured in-depth interviews. The sample included students from diverse art disciplines, such as painting, sculpture, design, and traditional crafts, to capture a range of experiences relevant to cultural adaptation across varied artistic practices, ensuring the findings reflect the broad applicability of the ‘Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory’ in addressing urban-rural cultural conflicts.

The interview content revolved around the following core themes: first, specific experiences and feelings of urban-rural art cultural shocks; second, interactive experiences and potential conflicts with art teachers in creative concepts, skill transmission, and evaluation standards; third, experiences and feelings of collisions between their own rural art styles and urban mainstream art styles; additionally, the evolutionary process of art identity cognition, as well as adaptation strategies adopted to cope with cultural conflicts and their underlying motivations; finally, how they balance rural and urban art elements in art creation

and learning.

The questionnaire was developed based on a review of existing literature on cultural adaptation, art education, and identity theory, and was piloted with two participants to ensure clarity and relevance. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted either in-person or online, depending on the participants’ availability. All interviews were recorded with the participants’ informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized prior to analysis. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure diversity in geographic regions (eastern, central, and western China) and art disciplines.

Data analysis was conducted meticulously using the grounded theory approach<sup>[22]</sup>. During the analysis, open coding was first applied to conceptualize and categorize the raw data, identifying recurring key themes and concepts. Subsequently, axial coding was used to organize these concepts, establishing relationships between them and constructing a preliminary theoretical framework. Finally, selective coding was employed to refine the core theoretical framework of the “art dynamic integration” process, clarifying two key dimensions: “phased adjustment” and “dual art maintenance.” This approach deeply elucidates how rural art students flexibly adjust their identity and creative strategies amid urban-rural art tensions (**Table 3**).

**Table 3.** Interview Topics and Their Corresponding Core Concepts.

Main Interview Topics	Extracted Core Concepts
Experience of Urban-Rural Art and Cultural Shock	Differences in artistic concepts, differences in teaching modes, unfamiliar creative tools and materials, differences in art evaluation standards and aesthetic orientations
Cultural Conflicts and Adaptation in Teacher-Student Interaction	Conflicts in teaching concepts, communication barriers and psychological pressure, students’ active adaptation, influence of teachers’ inclusiveness
Identity Reconstruction in Regional Style Collisions	Impact and struggle of self-identity, integration and innovation of styles, formation of “hybrid identity”
Moderating Factors in Cultural Adaptation	Perceived institutional support, heterogeneity of social networks, individual artistic resilience
Relationship Between Mental Health and Creative Performance	Negative impact of psychological pressure on creation, positive role of mental health in promoting creativity

## 4. Results

This study is based on in-depth interview data from 55 rural art students, employing grounded theory methods for coding and analysis. Through meticulous interpretation

of the interview texts, the complex process of cultural adaptation for rural art students in urban art universities was uncovered, particularly the specific manifestations and impacts in teacher-student interactions and regional style collisions.

#### **4.1. Interview Themes and Core Concept Extraction**

Through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, a series of core themes and concepts were extracted from the interview data, collectively constructing the qualitative landscape of the “Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory.” These core concepts, their connotations, and typical interview examples will be elaborated in the subsequent analysis of this section and summarized in tables for clearer presentation of the research findings.

##### **4.1.1. Concrete Manifestations of Urban-Rural Art Cultural Shocks**

Interviewees generally expressed profound urban-rural art cultural shocks experienced after entering urban art universities. These shocks do not remain at the macro level of art values but penetrate deeply into their daily art learning and creation.

First is the difference in art concepts and teaching modes. Many rural students stated that the art education they previously received often emphasized concrete, realistic traditional modes, stressing form and perspective training. However, upon entering urban art universities, they found the teaching concepts starkly different, leaning more toward various forms of expression, conceptual thinking, and Western contemporary art concepts. A student from the southwestern region described with deep feeling: “Back home, we started with sketching plaster casts, very focused on form and perspective. But in university, teachers placed less emphasis on such basic skills and more on abstract forms of expression, like using lines to convey emotions; at first, I had no idea how to proceed.” This conceptual gap left students confused and at a loss in class.

Second is the unfamiliarity with creation tools and materials. In interviews, many students mentioned encountering more diverse and professional art tools and materials in urban universities, but they had little prior knowledge of their use. One student shared their experience: “Back home, I used simple Chinese painting pigments and rice paper. In university, seeing various oil painting, sculpture, and installation art materials, I felt very unfamiliar. When the teacher mentioned them, surrounding classmates

seemed to understand, making me feel like an alien.” This unfamiliarity with tools and materials undoubtedly increased their adaptation difficulty in creative practice.

Finally, these shocks are also manifested in art evaluation standards and aesthetic orientations. Rural students generally felt that their familiar art styles and themes with strong rural flavors were often not fully understood or appreciated in urban universities. A student candidly expressed their inner feelings: “I paint rural landscapes from home, ridges, cooking smoke, old houses—I think they have vitality. But teachers hope I have an international vision and integrate with international cutting-edge art forms. This also leaves me unsure how to proceed.” This statement vividly reflects the tremendous psychological pressure rural art students face in seeking self-expression.

##### **4.1.2. Cultural Conflicts and Adjustments in Teacher-Student Interactions**

The interview data illustrate the cultural conflicts experienced by rural art students in interactions with teachers, as well as the adjustment strategies they adopt to cope with these conflicts.

First, conflicts in teaching concepts are a prevalent phenomenon. Some students reported that certain teachers may lack understanding of rural students’ art backgrounds or fail to fully respect their original art experiences, leading to overly uniform teaching methods that are difficult to effectively guide students. A student recalled: “Teachers always emphasize breaking traditions and pursuing innovation. I tried incorporating hometown clay sculpture elements into modern sculpture, but the teacher said, ‘Don’t blindly imitate folk crafts; have more of your own ideas.’ I really didn’t know how to proceed.” Such teaching feedback easily undermines students’ creative confidence, making them feel their efforts are unrecognized, thereby exacerbating psychological stress and adaptation barriers, even triggering identity crises and further hindering their integration and development in urban art environments.

Second, differences in art language and values sometimes lead to communication barriers between teachers and students, thereby inducing psychological stress in students. Rural students often tend to remain silent or internalize problems rather than actively seeking communication with teachers. One interviewee frankly stated: “I don’t dare to



ask teachers proactively, fearing they'll think my questions are too basic or my ideas strange. Sometimes, I don't understand what the teacher says, so I just pretend I do." Such communication gaps not only hinder effective teaching interactions but also lead to the accumulation of internal stress in students, affecting their psychological health.

Despite numerous conflicts, most rural students demonstrated proactive adjustment capabilities. They did not simply abandon their rural art identity but attempted "dynamic integration" under teacher guidance. A student illustrated this adjustment with an example: "Teachers ask me to try new materials and techniques, so I incorporate some modern elements into my creations, but I still paint stories from our village. Gradually, teachers can see my efforts and uniqueness." This strategy embodies the "phased adjustment" and "art dual maintenance" concepts proposed in this study, namely, students actively absorbing urban art elements while cleverly retaining and integrating their own rural cultural symbols.

Additionally, interviews revealed the positive influence of a minority of culturally sensitive teachers on student adaptation. Some students mentioned that when encountering teachers who understand and respect their regional backgrounds, their learning motivation and creative performance significantly improve. A student gratefully stated: "My mentor greatly encourages me to paint hometown things and proactively helps me find relevant materials, making me feel my art has value. He taught me how to find contemporaneity in tradition." This indicates that teachers' inclusivity and guiding roles are crucial for the cultural adaptation of rural art students.

#### **4.1.3. Identity Reconstruction in Regional Style Collisions**

Collisions between rural students' rural art styles and urban mainstream art styles represent the core link in their art identity reconstruction process.

In the initial stage, students often experience shocks to self-identity and struggles due to their regional styles not being recognized, accompanied by strong identity anxiety. They frequently engage in difficult choices and trade-offs between "maintaining rural identity" and "integrating into urban mainstream." A student candidly stated: "At first, I felt my style was very outdated and wanted to complete-

ly abandon previous things to become a full urban artist. But later, I realized that wasn't the real me, and creations lacked soul." This internal struggle reflects their re-examination of self-identity in adapting to new environments.

However, as the adaptation process deepens, some students begin attempting organic fusion and innovation of rural art styles with urban art concepts, thereby creating distinctive art works. For example, students may apply the vivid colors and simple compositions of traditional peasant paintings to modern decorative painting creation or cleverly incorporate folk narrative elements into installation art. This not only successfully maintains the original rural identity but also transforms it into valuable innovative resources, achieving sublimation of art styles.

In this process, many students gradually form a unique "mixed identity." They no longer simply define themselves as pure rural artists or urban artists but consider themselves "hybrid" artists possessing both rural sentiments and modern art vision. The formation of this "mixed identity" makes them more confident and free in art creation. A student summarized: "Now when I paint, it has the soul of home and the vision of the big city. I think this is my advantage, something others can't imitate." This statement fully embodies the positive transformation of successfully integrating diverse cultures into their own art practice and finding unique value after experiencing collisions.

#### **4.2. Moderating Factors Influencing the Cultural Adaptation Process**

Interviews also repeatedly mentioned several key moderating factors influencing the cultural adaptation process. These factors act as boosters, helping rural art students better cope with challenges and achieve positive cultural integration.

First is institutional support perception. Students generally believe that school-provided psychological counseling services, mentorship systems, abundant club activities, and an overall inclusive campus cultural atmosphere play positive roles in their adaptation. A student mentioned: "The school's art festival showcases works of various styles, making me feel my works can be seen and recognized. Moreover, the psychological counseling room teachers have helped alleviate much of my anxiety." This indicates that institutional support from schools enables

students to feel attended to and accepted, thereby more actively engaging in the adaptation process.

Second is social network heterogeneity. Having diverse social relationships, particularly establishing connections with teachers and students from different backgrounds, is considered an important pathway for rural art students to acquire art resources and broaden their horizons. A student shared: “I met some urban classmates who often take me to art exhibitions and tell me new art information. This makes me feel less isolated and able to access things I couldn’t before.” Such heterogeneous social networks provide important information and emotional support for them.

Finally is individual art resilience. In interviews, students who can actively face setbacks and firmly pursue their art demonstrate stronger adaptation capabilities. They often transform negative evaluations into motivation for improvement and maintain enthusiasm for art creation in adversity. A student stated with strength: “Being criticized by teachers is common, but I won’t give up because of it. I’ll reflect and continue trying different methods. I think as long as I believe in my own art, I’ll find my own path.” This internal resilience is an important guarantee for their continuous growth and overcoming difficulties in cultural collisions.

### 4.3. Association Between Psychological Health and Creative Performance

Interview results clearly indicate a close association

between students’ psychological health status and their creative performance. This association is manifested both in negative impacts and positive promotions.

When students feel immense pressure from cultural conflicts and teacher-student contradictions, their creative motivation and inspiration are significantly affected. Anxiety, inferiority, and feelings of marginalization directly lead to decreased creative enthusiasm in some students, even resulting in “creative bottlenecks.” A student expressed frustration: “During that time, I felt nothing I painted was right; picking up a pen made me worry. The psychological pressure was too great, and I couldn’t calm down to create.” This statement vividly reveals the direct hindering effect of psychological distress on art creation.

Conversely, when students can effectively alleviate psychological pressure through dynamic integration strategies and gain a sense of recognition and belonging, their creative enthusiasm and expressiveness significantly improve. The relaxation of psychology and establishment of confidence stimulate their intrinsic creativity. A student shared excitedly: “When I truly found my style, it felt like discovering treasure; every day I have various creative inspirations, full of creative enthusiasm.” This illustrates that good psychological health status is an important foundation for high-efficiency and high-quality art creation. This illustrates that good psychological health status is an important foundation for high-efficiency and high-quality art creation.(see **Table 4**)

**Table 4.** Core Concepts, Their Meanings, and Typical Interview Examples.

Core Concept	Description	Typical Interview Example (Condensed)
<b>Urban-Rural Art and Cultural Shock</b>		
Differences in Artistic Concepts	Differences in concepts between urban and rural art education, such as abstraction vs. figuration, tradition vs. modernity	“Back home we started with plaster sketching, but in college they asked us to paint abstract art—I had no idea where to start.”
Unfamiliarity with Creative Tools and Materials	Rural students lack experience with professional art tools and materials used in urban colleges	“I used to work with simple pencils and traditional paints, but in college, there are so many new materials I’ve never seen before.”
Art Evaluation Standards and Aesthetic Orientation	Rural art styles are not fully understood or appreciated in urban colleges	“I painted scenes from my hometown, but the teacher said it ‘lacked international perspective.’”

Table 4. *Cont.*

Core Concept	Description	Typical Interview Example (Condensed)
<b>Cultural Conflict and Adaptation in Teacher-Student Interaction</b>		
Conflict in Teaching Philosophy	Teaching methods fail to respect students' original artistic experiences, or contain conceptual bias	"The teacher said, 'Don't just imitate folk crafts; you need to have more of your own ideas.'"
Communication Barriers and Psychological Pressure	Differences in artistic language and values cause communication problems and internal stress for students	"I didn't dare ask the teacher questions, afraid they'd think it was too basic—so I pretended I understood."
Students' Active Adaptation	Students incorporate urban art elements while retaining and blending rural cultural symbols	"The teacher asked me to try new techniques, so I added modern elements but still painted stories from my village."
Teacher's Inclusive Influence	Teachers' understanding and respect for students' regional backgrounds positively promote adaptation	"My advisor encouraged me to paint my hometown and taught me how to find contemporaneity in tradition."
<b>Identity Reconstruction in Regional Style Collisions</b>		
Identity Shock and Struggle	Initial self-doubt and anxiety when regional styles are not recognized	"At first I felt my style was outdated, and I wanted to abandon everything I used to do."
Integration and Innovation of Styles	Blending rural art styles with urban artistic concepts to create unique works	"Now my paintings carry the soul of my hometown but also the vision of the big city."
Formation of a 'Hybrid Identity'	Students see themselves as hybrid artists combining rural and urban artistic characteristics	"I think this is my strength—others can't imitate it."
<b>Moderating Factors in Cultural Adaptation</b>		
Perceived Institutional Support	Support such as counseling services, mentorship systems, and inclusive campus culture	"The university art festival gave visibility to my work, and counseling helped relieve my anxiety."
Heterogeneity of Social Networks	Building connections with peers from diverse backgrounds to access resources and broaden perspectives	"I met urban classmates who took me to art exhibitions and shared new information with me."
Individual Artistic Resilience	Ability to face setbacks positively and persist in artistic pursuit	"Criticism from teachers is common, but I reflect, keep trying, and believe I'll find my path."
<b>Relationship Between Mental Health and Creative Performance</b>		
Negative Impact of Psychological Pressure on Creativity	Anxiety, inferiority, and marginalization reduce creative motivation and lead to stagnation	"During that time, nothing felt right. I froze whenever I picked up a brush—the stress was overwhelming."
Positive Role of Mental Health in Creativity	Recognition and belonging boost creative enthusiasm and expressive ability	"Once I found my style, I wanted to paint every day and felt full of inspiration."

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Results Analysis

This study, through in-depth interviews, deeply ex-

plores the urban-rural art cultural adaptation mechanisms of Chinese rural art college entrance examination migrants under education-driven conditions and validates the "Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory" from a qualitative perspective. The "dynamic integration"

path has a significant promoting effect on rural art students' psychological health and creative performance, with psychological health playing a partial mediating role between this path and creative performance. This result profoundly reveals the art agency and strategic adjustments exhibited by rural art students when facing urban-rural art cultural differences and institutional pressures. Specifically, they do not passively accept urban art cultural assimilation but selectively absorb urban art elements based on their own art development stages and social resource conditions while firmly retaining rural art identity, thereby achieving "dual maintenance" of art identity. This phased adjustment strategy not only effectively alleviates psychological stress from cultural conflicts, significantly enhancing their art integration sense and subjective well-being, but also further stimulates creative motivation, ultimately promoting art efficacy and creative outcomes. Particularly in teacher-student interactions and regional style collisions, the interview results strongly demonstrate the key roles of these specific conflicts in student cultural adaptation. Differences between teachers' teaching concepts, evaluation standards, and students' art backgrounds are primary causes of student confusion, anxiety, and even self-denial. However, these conflicts are not irreconcilable. When students employ "dynamic integration" strategies to organically combine their rural art experiences with urban mainstream art concepts and receive teachers' understanding and guidance, conflicts can transform into sources of innovation.

While this study focuses on student experiences and aims to amplify their underrepresented voices, the perspective of teachers is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of acculturation, particularly with regard to teacher-student interactions and the encounter between regional styles. Existing literature suggests that educators often face challenges in adapting pedagogy to diverse cultural contexts, such as balancing a standardized curriculum with sensitivity to regional artistic styles<sup>[23]</sup>. For example, teachers may struggle to understand rural students' artistic frameworks or feel constrained by institutional expectations to prioritize mainstream urban art norms.<sup>[24]</sup> Integrating teachers' perspectives can reveal how they perceive and respond to the cultural backgrounds of rural students and the challenges they face in promoting

inclusive teaching practices. These insights will enrich the "Theory of Dynamic Integration of Arts and Culture Driven by Education" by emphasizing the pivotal role of teachers in the adaptation process of art education migrants; they are not only transmitters of knowledge but also guides for cultural fusion.

Additionally, the interview results emphasize institutional support perception, social network heterogeneity, and individual art resilience as key moderating variables in optimizing the effects of dynamic integration paths. Institutional support provides rural art students with valuable art resources and psychological safeguards, enabling them to feel accepted and supported during adaptation, thereby more actively engaging in cultural integration. For example, when teachers adopt an open mindset to accept and guide students in integrating regional styles into modern art contexts, such collisions can generate unique artistic innovations. Social network heterogeneity broadens students' art horizons and resource access channels, allowing contact with diverse art concepts and practices, promoting cross-cultural exchange and learning. Individual art resilience enhances students' psychological elasticity and problem-solving abilities in facing art adversities, enabling better coping with challenges from cultural conflicts and transforming them into growth opportunities. These three moderating factors collectively promote positive art cultural integration, significantly improving rural art students' psychological health and creative performance. This study further reveals that art university campuses are not only arenas for art cultural conflicts but also key spaces for cultural fusion. The intersection of urban-rural art cultures may initially lead to exclusion and marginalization, but with appropriate institutional support and exchange mechanisms, such differences can instead stimulate art cognitive elasticity, innovative thinking, and social connections. For example, in the tension between folkism and modernism, tradition and abstraction, although certain psychological burdens may arise, this tension may also become a powerful driver for art creation. The discovery of the "dynamic integration" path breaks through the limitations of traditional cultural adaptation models dominated by static classification, emphasizing that cultural adaptation is a complex process of dynamic negotiation and structural support interactions. It provides empirical evidence for art

university cultural governance, namely that universities should recognize and respect art cultural diversity, guiding art cultural fusion through dialogue and symbiosis rather than imposing uniform assimilation, thereby effectively alleviating adaptation barriers and fully unleashing the immense creative potential contained in diversity. Therefore, this study not only elucidates the internal mechanisms by which dynamic integration enhances psychological health and creative performance but also reveals the dual roles of art cultural conflicts and complementarities in art university ecosystems, providing clear path support for art equity practices. Extending these insights to international contexts, the theory's applicability is evident in similar patterns of cultural adaptation across diverse settings. For instance, in India, rural-urban art migrants experience similar value clashes between traditional crafts and urban modernism, where phased adjustments help mitigate psychological stress and enhance creativity, though socioeconomic barriers exacerbate isolation<sup>[25]</sup>. In the USA, rural art students adapting to urban programs often form hybrid identities amid cultural shocks, with teacher inclusivity playing a moderating role akin to China's, but influenced by racial and economic divides<sup>[7]</sup>. European cases, such as in rural-to-urban transitions under EU cultural policies, highlight complementary effects in diverse art ecosystems, yet reveal institutional gaps in supporting regional styles<sup>[26]</sup>, mirroring China's emphasis on social networks and resilience. These comparisons underscore the universal potential of the 'Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory' while noting adaptations needed for varying institutional drivers.

## 5.2. Contributions

This study achieves the following major theoretical contributions: First, it proposes and validates the "Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory." This theory breaks through the static single classification limitations of traditional cultural adaptation theories, emphasizing that art cultural adaptation is a processual, selective, and reflexive dynamic process. It is particularly suited to the special context of China's urban-rural dual art cultural tensions and art education migration, providing a new theoretical framework for understanding cultural adaptation in specific institutional backgrounds. Second,

placing art cultural adaptation within the college entrance examination institutional framework and deeply exploring the influences of teacher-student conflicts and regional style collisions. This reveals how art education institutions, as a structural driving force, profoundly shape rural art students' art practices, identity constructions, and art reproduction processes. Through detailed interview evidence, the study refines conceptual conflicts that may arise in teacher-student interactions, challenges posed by regional style differences, and how students cope with these challenges, providing novel perspectives and robust qualitative evidence for art sociology, education sociology, and cultural adaptation research. Third, constructing a multi-level influence model. This model integrates psychological health as a mediating variable and institutional support, social network heterogeneity, and individual art resilience as moderating variables, thereby deepening the analysis of causal mechanisms in the art cultural adaptation process and revealing the interactions between external environments and individual traits in adaptation success.

In practical terms, this study provides feasible recommendations for cultural support and psychological interventions in art universities, summarized as follows: First, the importance of systematic support, indicating that art cultural adaptation should not be viewed merely as an individual student issue but as a systematic project involving institutional design and social support, with universities building support systems at the macro level. Second, the establishment of diverse art dialogue platforms, particularly promoting exchanges between teachers and students and across regional styles, recommending that art universities set up regular mechanisms such as urban-rural art fusion salons, narrative healing spaces, and art sharing workshops, encouraging rural art students to express rural experiences, opening urban art resources, and promoting bidirectional construction of art identity through themed activities and online forums; simultaneously emphasizing open teacher-student dialogues, allowing teachers to respect regional backgrounds and help students understand mainstream concepts, and organizing activities like regional art exhibitions and student creative markets to showcase different styles. Third, strengthening the allocation and institutional assurance of psychological counseling resources, transforming these supports into drivers for art cultural



integration to help students effectively cope with psychological stress. Fourth, recommendations for incorporating the “art cultural sensitivity” principle in admissions and curricula to advance institutionalized art inclusivity, enhancing rural art students’ campus belonging and creative success rates, such as adding introductions to Chinese regional arts and ethnic arts, encouraging incorporation of hometown elements in creations, and adopting diversified evaluation standards to avoid biases due to regional style differences.

### 5.3. Recommendations

Based on the qualitative validation of the “dynamic integration” path, the following policy recommendations are proposed to promote the cultural adaptation and comprehensive development of rural art education migrants. To prioritize implementation, these are categorized as short-term or long-term strategies:

#### 5.3.1. Short-term Strategy

Constructing systematic art cultural dialogue and support platforms, with particular attention to effective communication between teachers and students and the fusion of regional styles. This includes establishing regular exchange mechanisms such as urban-rural art fusion salons, narrative healing spaces, and art sharing workshops, encouraging rural art students to express rural art experiences while opening urban art resources, promoting bidirectional construction of art identity through regular themed activities and online forums; for art conceptual differences between teachers and students, organizing teacher training to enhance inclusivity and guidance capabilities for diverse art styles, and establishing “regional art characteristic courses” to encourage students to incorporate hometown elements into creations and invite relevant experts for guidance<sup>[27]</sup>; universities should establish feedback mechanisms to continuously evaluate platform effects and support students’ dynamic art adjustments<sup>[28]</sup>. Additionally, to ensure feasibility within bureaucratic educational systems, universities can pilot low-cost, scalable initiatives such as virtual art salons hosted on existing platforms like WeChat groups or university-specific applications, minimizing administrative and financial barriers. Furthermore, cultural

sensitivity training can be integrated into mandatory faculty development programs, such as those required by the Ministry of Education, to enhance teachers’ capacity to guide diverse art styles without requiring extensive new resources.

Strengthening the allocation and institutional construction of psychological counseling resources, including improving campus psychological health service systems and enhancing accessibility and utilization rates for rural art students; particularly training a team of psychological counseling faculty with knowledge of art education migrant cultural backgrounds to ensure cultural sensitivity and effectiveness of counseling services, transforming institutional support into effective emotional support and creative guidance to help students build positive self-cognition.

#### 5.3.2. Long-term Strategy

Formulating differentiated admissions strategies and course integration, including paying attention to rural art students’ art cultural backgrounds and adaptation needs in admissions policies, incorporating art cultural adaptation potential into entrance evaluations, and providing pre-admission adaptive training courses; course settings should be more diversified, incorporating urban-rural art elements, offering cross-art communication elective courses or case discussions such as “Chinese Regional Art Research” and “Traditional Art and Contemporary Creation” to promote art understanding and fusion; in teaching evaluations, emphasizing students’ innovativeness and personalized expression rather than solely using urban mainstream art styles as standards; scholarship policies should consider the difficulties of art cultural adaptation, incentivizing students to retain rural identity while actively absorbing urban norms, thereby strengthening creative performance and social network expansion.

Encouraging the construction of diversified art relationships and social networks, including expanding students’ art resources and enhancing art adaptation social capital through mentorship pairing projects, mixed studio arrangements, art club activities, volunteer services, and off-campus practical activities; particularly encouraging informal exchanges between teachers and students, such as holding teacher-student joint exhibitions and art salons

to enhance mutual understanding and trust, thereby resolving conflicts caused by poor communication; simultaneously, art universities may develop relevant applications or platforms to track the heterogeneity of students' social networks, evaluate their role in moderating art cultural conflicts, ensuring these measures help students enhance art cognitive elasticity and innovative thinking in dynamic integration.

To assess the effectiveness of these interventions, institutions could conduct annual surveys on students' psychological well-being and cultural integration, collect qualitative feedback via focus groups with students and faculty, and monitor creative outputs. These evaluations, integrated into existing institutional review processes, would enable continuous refinement of strategies to support art equity.

#### **5.4. Research Limitations and Future Directions**

Although this study has achieved relatively rich results in theoretical construction and qualitative analysis, certain limitations remain. First, this study's reliance on qualitative interview data, while effective for theory construction, limits the generalizability of findings due to the absence of quantitative measures. Future research could adopt mixed-methods approaches, integrating standardized scales for acculturative stress or creative self-efficacy to quantify the relationships between cultural adaptation, psychological health, and creative performance identified here. Such methods would complement the qualitative insights and provide broader validation across diverse populations.

This study primarily relies on interview data; future research may consider combining other qualitative methods, such as participatory observation and case studies, to obtain more comprehensive and in-depth insights. Second, although the sample covers multiple regions, the types and professional distributions of art universities remain limited; future research may expand to more universities of different levels and types to enhance the generalizability of results. Third, although multiple moderating factors were mentioned in interviews, in-depth exploration of their action mechanisms requires further refinement. Additionally, this study primarily explores teacher-student conflicts and regional style collisions from students' perspectives; future research may incorporate teachers' perspectives for bidi-

rectional teacher-student interviews to more comprehensively understand the essence of such conflicts and their resolution paths. The continuation of art identity and social integration for rural art students after graduation is also an important direction for subsequent research to fully understand the social integration process of art education migrants. Future research should deepen the understanding of education-driven art cultural adaptation in both depth and breadth, promoting continuous refinement of theory and precise implementation of policy practices, contributing more powerful academic support to promoting urban-rural art education equity and social fusion.

## **6. Conclusions**

This article, through constructing and qualitatively validating the "Education-Driven Art Cultural Dynamic Integration Theory," deeply reveals the strategic adaptation processes of Chinese rural art students facing urban-rural cultural conflicts in urban art universities and their far-reaching impacts on psychological health and creative outcomes. The research results indicate that rural art students can effectively achieve cultural fusion through flexible phased adjustments and dual maintenance of art, significantly enhancing psychological health and creative performance. Particularly important is the finding that, although conflicts in teacher concepts and regional styles exist in art education, through students' agency adaptation and universities' institutional support, these conflicts can transform into opportunities for positive fusion and innovation. Psychological health plays a key role in this process, while institutional support, social network heterogeneity, and individual art resilience serve as important moderating factors, collectively promoting positive adaptation effects.

This study not only enriches the localized paths of cultural adaptation theory, providing a new theoretical perspective for understanding the complex adaptation mechanisms of education migrants under China's urban-rural dual structure, particularly emphasizing the importance of teacher-student interactions and regional style collisions in art education, but also offers systematic qualitative evidence and feasible policy recommendations for how higher art education can better support rural art students in the process of urban-rural fusion. Looking ahead, re-

search may further incorporate time-series data to explore the evolutionary paths of dynamic integration at different grade levels and focus on the continuity of art identity and social integration trajectories for rural art students after graduation, with the aim of deepening the understanding of cultural change mechanisms in the art education migration process and contributing more influential academic support to promoting art equity and social fusion.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, validation, formal analysis, investigation, writing—original draft preparation, Y.D.; methodology, software, data curation, writing—review and editing, supervision, project administration, Y.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Not applicable.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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