

# Stage Division, Theoretical Schools and Future Prospects of Cultural Adaptation

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural adaptation is the process and result of cultural exchange and interactions. The phase division, theoretical schools of thought, and developmental trends of culturally adaptive research are important scientific issues. Based on the perspective of philosophical schools, this article conducts a literature review to study the cultural adaptability and the differences of cross-cultural people. This paper concludes that the research paradigm of cultural adaptation can be summarized by logical positivism, humanism, and structuralism. The school of logical positivism focuses on quantitative analysis and model building of the causality of culturally adaptive change. Cultural adaptability related to the humanist school aims to describe micro-characteristics of the psychology and behavior of cross-cultural people. The structuralism school focuses on the surface structures, development processes, and deep structures of cultural adaptation. Overall, this research provides a valuable reference for understanding the changes, differences, mechanisms, and applications of cultural adaptation.

**Keywords:** *Cultural adaptation, Stage division, Theoretical schools, Future prospects*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Adaptability” was first discussed in Darwinian philosophy and originally referred to individuals or groups with certain morphological characteristics that improved their chances of survival in the face of particular environmental needs<sup>[1]</sup>. In 1936, Redfield et al. proposed the concept of “cultural adaptation” or “cultivation”<sup>[2]</sup>. Existing studies have shown that adaptation is both a process and a state, including both adapting and post-adaptation cultures<sup>[3]</sup>. Different cultures will affect individuals or groups during continuous cross-cultural contact<sup>[4]</sup>. All cultures change over time, and acculturation is the result of adapting to cultural change. Cultural adaptability is the result of cultural exchange between individuals or groups and depends on cognitive structure, self-image, interpersonal communication, mass media, and the communication environment.

These cultural exchanges result in cultural change, inheritance and development, and exposure to individual or group affectional, behavioral, and cognitive changes<sup>[5]</sup> that are related to the life production of individuals or groups<sup>[6]</sup>. In addition, cultural experiences can change the roles or occupations of individuals or groups<sup>[7,8]</sup>. The theory of cross-cultural adaptation believes that cultural

adaptation occurs as a gradual process between cultural cognitive perception and the recovery mode of the self and the other<sup>[9]</sup>. This adaptation is also a process from rejection to cultural integration<sup>[10]</sup> and results from dialectical learning of the culture of the self and the other.

In cross-cultural environments, cultural adaptability focuses on the differences<sup>[11]</sup>, strategies, influencing factors<sup>[12,13]</sup>, and identity characteristics<sup>[14]</sup> of the psychological and social culture of individuals or groups. Cultural differences can be characterized by a physical condition, life satisfaction, bicultural competence, family and cultural relatedness, family and ethnic identity, perceived in-group support, perceived out-group social support<sup>[15,16]</sup>, psychological well-being and stress<sup>[17]</sup>, and adaptation to specific and non-specific indicators<sup>[18]</sup> such as experience with specific everyday problems<sup>[19]</sup>. Applying a culturally adaptive framework<sup>[20]</sup>, factors such as personality, cultural priming conditions in specific situations<sup>[21]</sup>, intercultural communication skills<sup>[22]</sup>, bicultural identity, cultural intelligence<sup>[23]</sup>, emotional intelligence<sup>[24]</sup>, and imagery are used to explore changes and differences of cultural adaptation. Cultural adaptation research areas<sup>[25]</sup> include attitudes, behaviors, practices, activities, values, lifestyles, self-identity, cultural boundaries<sup>[26]</sup>, and social relations<sup>[27]</sup>. Cultural transformation from homogeneity to heterogeneity, or

from singleness to diversity, and the existence of cross-cultural adaptability depends on the stage of cultural adaptability and its development trend. Therefore, studying the stages, philosophical schools, and future prospects of cultural adaptation is important for understanding cultural change, inheritance, and development and for improving the cultural adaptation of cross-cultural people.

## 2. STAGES OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION RESEARCH

The stages of cultural adaptation research can be divided according to the corresponding development of logical positivism, humanism, and structuralism [28-30]. In the mid-to-late 1950s, the logical positivism school of thought established laws and theories using deductive-law and deductive-hypothesis models. These models highlighted positive principles, logical analysis, and econometric analysis [31]. However, there is currently a lack of holistic consideration in the study of cultural adaptability by logical positivism, which creates a contradiction between the empirical nature of culture itself and the rationality of the research methods [31-33]. An example of this contradiction is ignoring heterogeneity among the factors of cultural adaptability [34].

In the late 1960s, the contradiction between logical

analysis and empiricism gave birth to the development of the humanist school [29] in the study of acculturation. Humanism centers on people and their environment. Humanist research uses non-empirical approaches and “creative argumentation”, such as acquiring knowledge through intuition, empathy, introspection, meaning, value, goals, and purposes, focusing on culturally appropriate phenomenological descriptions, historical thinking, and wholeness [33].

As the humanist school ignored the structure of cultural adaptability and preferred the study of psychology and behavior at the micro-level, this prompted the structuralism school of thought to advance the study of cultural adaptability. Structuralism believes that cultural adaptability is composed of many interdependent elements. This theory emphasizes the internal structure of cultural adaptability and opposes simply understanding the external phenomenon of cultural adaptability. In addition, structuralism divides the understanding of cultural adaptability into surface structures, processes, and deep structures [32]. Structuralism emphasizes the relationship and structure between different cultures and pays attention to interpreting the mechanism of cultural adaptive change. However, the structuralism school cannot solve the historical problem of cultural adaptive change (Figure 1).

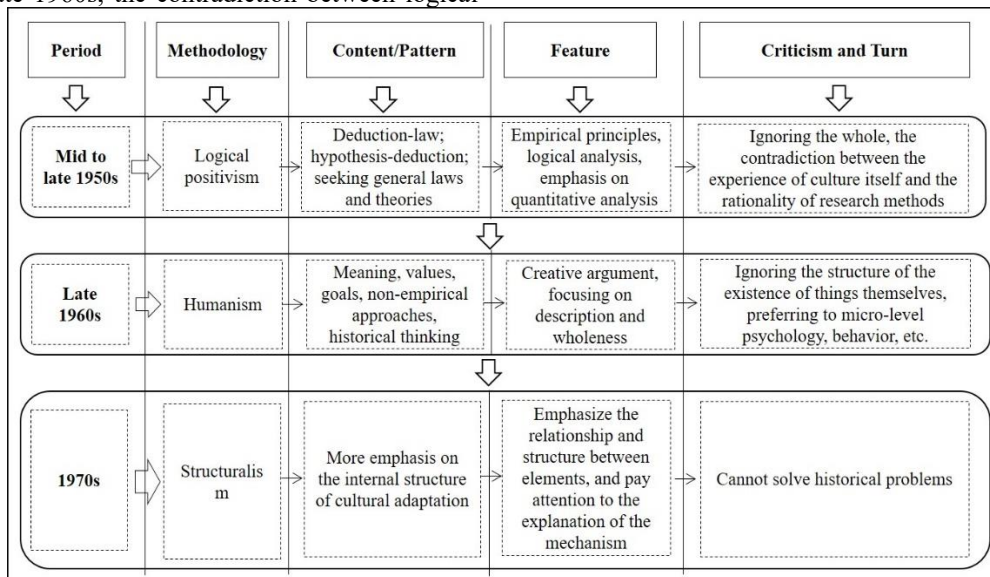


Figure1 Basis for stage division of cultural adaptation research

Note: Part of the content is summarized and summarized according to the literature[28-33]

## 3. THEORETICAL SCHOOLS OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION RESEARCH

The schools of logical positivism, humanism, and structuralism provide a theoretical basis for explaining cultural adaptations and their differences (Figure 2). The school of logical positivism seeks the laws and models of cultural adaptive change through measurement methods, focusing on analyzing the causal relationships of adaptive

differences. The humanist school focuses on understanding cultural adaptation by metaphors, emotions, and values. This school of thought focuses on psychological responses and then studies the adaptation of individuals or groups in terms of cognition, identity, role, and behavior. Finally, the structuralism school interprets the construction and mechanisms of adaptive change through the processes or surface and deep structures of cultural adaptation.

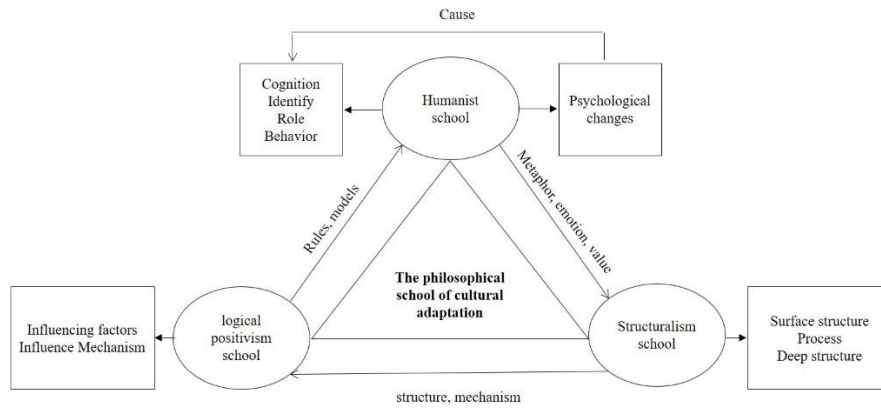


Figure2 Theoretical schools of cultural adaptation research

### 3.1. A Study of Cultural Adaptability from The Perspective of Logical Positivism

The school of logical positivism focuses on analyzing the causal relationship of the differences in cultural adaptation [35]. Culturally adaptive resilience theory and culturally adaptive model theory provide explanations for the school of logical positivism (Figure 3). The theory of cultural adaptability and resilience believes that cultural

adaptability is a process of adjusting meaning, needs, and abilities, including the processing of worldviews, pressures, and resources [36]. Cultural adaptability is improved through individual, family, and social interventions [37]. In the process of cross-cultural communication, individuals or groups first adapt to the changing culture at a psychological level [26]. The use of culturally adaptive psychological measures relies on people's ability to access information rather than simple demographic characteristics [27].

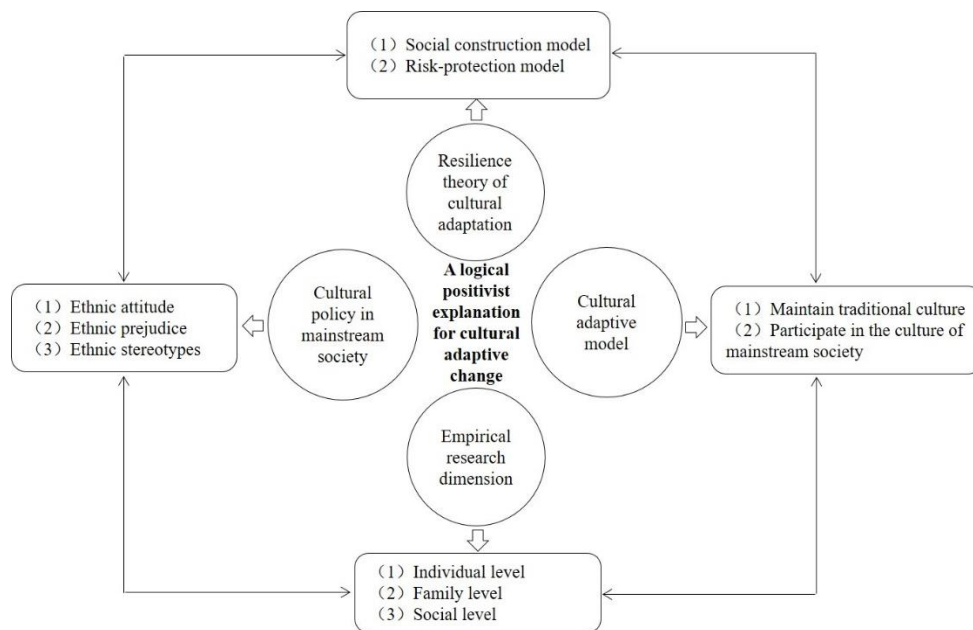


Figure3 A study of cultural adaptation from the perspective of logical positivism

Socially constructed resilience theory considers cultural adaptation and mental health [38]. This approach involves understanding one's own culture and updating an individual or group's experiential knowledge by acquiring new perspectives, insights, positive life events, and social support from another culture [39]. Protective factors have a buffering effect on negative outcomes and can effectively intervene against risks from poverty, disease, dysfunction, disadvantage, and conflict [40]. An example of this process is how good psychological resilience has a buffering effect on stress [41].

In a resilient risk-protection model, the interactions between protective and risk factors reduce negative effects [42]. For example, in a multicultural society, the cultural adaptation of immigrants has two sides: to continue to maintain the traditional culture of their own country or region whilst participating in mainstream society and maintaining mental and physical health in the process of cultural adaptation [19]. The school of logical positivism focuses on the methods of combining quantitative correlation analysis and phenomenal explanations to study cultural adaptability [43]. Previous

research has focused on the areas of psychology, behavior, mental health, scores, reputation, co-worker relationships, and family relationships [44,45].

### 3.2. Research on Cultural Adaptability from The Perspective of Humanism

Cultural adaptation theories related to the humanist school include empathy theory, cognitive theory, identity theory, cross-cultural theory of mind, the culture-shock model, and the social-analysis model. These theories can apply to the psychology of individuals or groups. The role of psychological and social factors on differences in cultural adaptability is shown in Figure 4 [35]. Empathy theory believes that the precondition of cultural

adaptation is to recognize and understand one's own emotions and to achieve mutual respect and harmonious communication [46]. The theory of cultural cognition believes that cultural adaptation is a process of continuous change [47]. Cognition is endogenous in the knowledge and life experience of an individual or group [48] and is linked to psychological responses, attitudes, and behaviors [49]. Cultural cognition depends on the characteristics of the environment [50], and intercultural interactions can promote changes in cultural cognition [51]. However, cultural cognition has a strong inherent subjectivity [52] due to factors such as social, interpersonal, and individual cognition. Individual cognition is embedded in interpersonal cognition, and interpersonal cognition is embedded in social cognition [53].

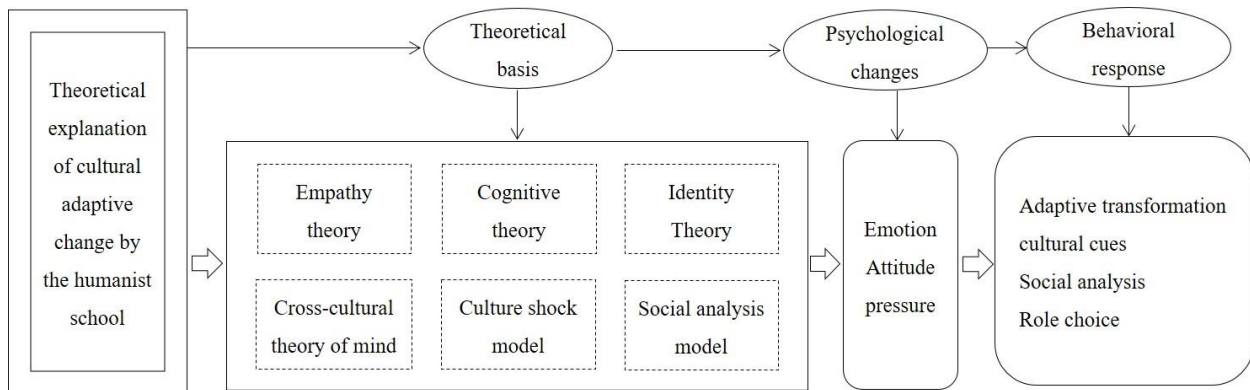


Figure4 Research on cultural adaptation from the perspective of humanism

Cultural identity is the degree to which one's cultural cognition and behavior are consistent with those of others. This identity also refers to the constant acceptance of external cultural stimuli by individuals or groups, processing these stimuli and then exploring the core values of the culture [54]. Bicultural identity may affect the transformation of the cultural adaptation framework [15]. When receiving positive cultural cues, individuals regard their cultural identity as compatible and make consistent cultural identity responses. However, when receiving negative cultural cues, individuals can see their cultural identity as a conflict and react inconsistently to their cultural identity [55]. Social identity theory believes that cross-cultural transformation may include changes in cultural identity and intergroup relations, such as knowledge of new cultures, attitudes toward other cultures, intercultural similarities, and new cultural identities [56].

The cross-cultural theory of psychology believes that there is a close connection between cultural background and individual behavior. This theory is used to understand cultural influences and expectations, what happens to individuals in a cultural background, and when they enter a new cultural environment [20]. For example, using the behavioral model to study the migration of international labor and non-labor [57], it is proposed that the cultural adaptability of intercultural people is affected by the length of residence in the mainstream cultural

environment [58].

The “culture-shock model” proposed by Oberg in 1960 believes that cultural adaptability has stages [59]. This model suggests that cultural adaptability conforms to a “U”-shaped curve or “W”-shaped curve [60]. These curves show that cultural adaptation is a fluctuating process from an initial sense of joy to culture shock, adjustment and recovery, psychological isolation, and improved adaptation [61]. The more the cross-cultural person is exposed to the new culture, the weaker the adjustment in the culture-shock stage. Adjusted resources, such as training and prior experience, will increase focus and ongoing processes. Furthermore, the more similar the new culture is to that of the other, the higher the level of self-efficacy and the easier the cultural adaptation. The factors lead to a cultural adaptation model with a “J”-shaped curve or even a linear progression [62]. The social analysis model accounts for individual differences in the adaptive process. Adaptation includes the ability to expand the scope of roles and comprehend cultural cues to enable cross-cultural individuals to make role choices and then perform social analysis and adaptive transformation. The stress and processing theory emphasizes that individuals or groups need to develop coping strategies to deal with stress [27].

### 3.3. Research on Cultural Adaptability from The Perspective of Structuralism

Structuralism emphasizes the holistic study of the differences and changes in cultural adaptation, which need to be explained from the perspective of surface structures, processes, and deep structures [35] (Figure 5). Superficial structures can be explained by the theory of interculturality. This theory refers to the existence of contact and dialogue between different cultures. Through

mutual shaping and reorganization between cultures, the goals of updating the existing culture or resisting some new cultures are achieved, and this can produce intercultural ripple effects. Interculturality recognizes cultural differences, diversity, and respect for otherness as preconditions [63]. Adaptive models focus on the individual preferences of a majority or minority culture and the impact of such cultural preferences on the overall adaptive process.

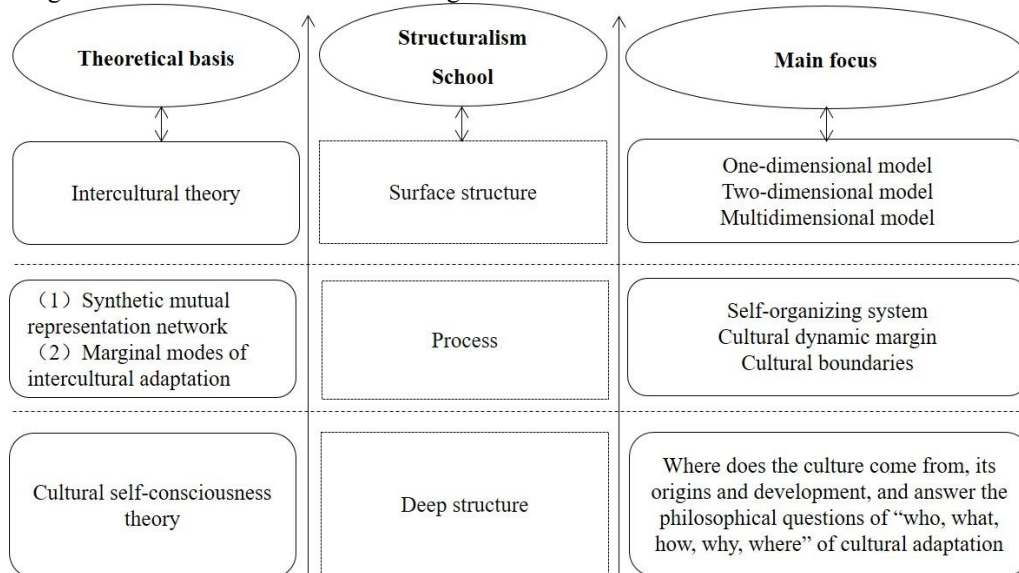


Figure 5 Research on cultural adaptation from the perspective of structuralism

There are one-dimensional [64], two-dimensional [65], and multi-dimensional models of cultural adaptation that can be used to understand dialectical interactions between one culture and another. The single-dimensional model believes that individuals or groups either accept one culture or the other, which is a polarized view of cultural adaptation. The two-dimensional model generates four strategies of assimilation, integration, isolation, and marginalization. Building on the two-dimensional model, the multi-dimensional model adds the cultural policies of individuals or groups in a certain social environment, such as the multiculturalism policy, melting-pot policy, isolation policy, and exclusion policy of mainstream cultural society.

The process of cultural adaptation viewed through the lens of structuralism can be explained in terms of integrated mutual representation networks and marginal patterns of cross-cultural adaptation. This method focuses on the self-organizing system of culture, dynamic cultural boundaries, and cultural boundaries. The cultural adaptation system is a self-organizing system. The synthetic mutual representation network posits that the cultural cognitive system is attributed to two streams of input (external and internal) and two streams of output (external and internal). In addition, the process of cultural adaptation is sequential, meaning that each external or internal input and output factors become subsequent

iterations of the system's input and output elements [66]. The marginal model of cross-cultural adaptation believes that there is a cultural boundary in the process of cross-cultural adaptation, and the cultural boundary is a dynamic trajectory. Two independent cultures complete cultural transformation through absorption, accumulation, and renewal and gradually form a dynamic balance of cross-cultural adaptation [14].

The deep structure of cultural adaptation from the perspective of structuralism can be explained by cultural self-consciousness theory. This theory needs to clarify the subject (who), what to change (what), how to change (how), why change (why), where to develop (where), and other philosophical questions. Fei Xiaotong put forward the theory of cultural self-consciousness, which systematically integrated the process, results, and mechanisms of cultural adaptation and clarified the details of cultural adaptation from a theoretical perspective. The theory of cultural self-consciousness conforms to the deep structural problems of the structuralism paradigm, such as the origin, formation, characteristics, development, ability, and judgment of autonomous cultural selection [5]. The fundamental purpose is to consciously and equally recognize knowing one's own culture and other cultures. The deep structure theory of cultural adaptability raises key philosophical questions about cultural development: how to ensure the



continued vitality of a culture and how to promote the excellent and sustainable development of the culture.

**4. FUTURE PROSPECTS OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION RESEARCH**

**4.1. A Study on Cultural Adaptation Changes and Differences of People with Cross-cultural Backgrounds**

The key to adaptability lies in the emergence of two or more cultures through the formation of new relationships and the loss of old relationships. Key factors can be used to study the cultural adaptability of individuals or groups with cross-cultural backgrounds, including life experience, self-identity, values, attitudes, and behavior. Cross-cultural people include employees of multinational companies, travelers, foreign teachers, international students, transnational immigrants, and migrant workers. In the context of contemporary pluralistic society, the cross-regional flow of population is a common phenomenon, and migrants adapt to different cultural forms such as new and old or urban and rural areas. Cross-cultural adaptation is also reflected in the relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, different generations, husband and wife, disease and health, learning, child weight management, housing, social interactions, occupational activities, corporate motivation, personal achievement, consumption, crime, religion, international trade, business management, and education.

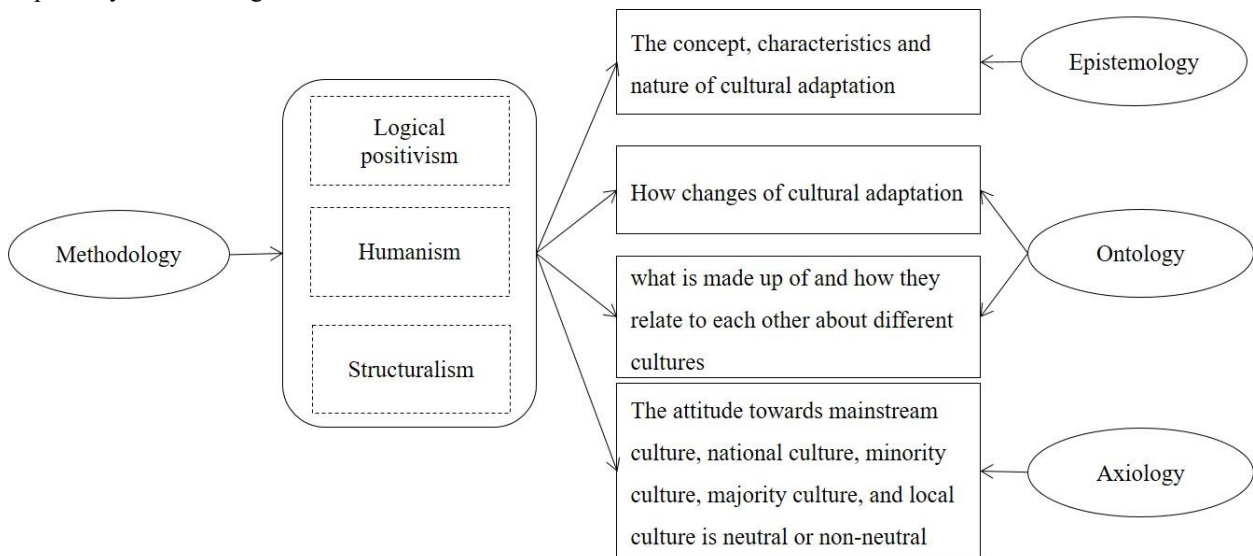
**4.2. Research on The Mechanism of Cultural Adaptation Affecting Intercultural Persons**

Clarifying the mechanisms that affect cultural adaptability is an important way to explain how cultural adaptability changes. A key influence on cultural adaptability is the integration of external and internal

factors. External factors include the natural environment, history, system, economy, society, religion, customs, language, information, technology, and network. Internal factors include demographic characteristics, situational characteristics, psychology, disposition, personality, and other factors. The way that different external and internal factors affect cultural adaptability requires further research.

**4.3. Theoretical Analysis of the Cultural Adaptation Methodology**

The cultural adaptation research paradigm involves ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. These fields require philosophical speculation on the phenomenon, theory, method, and applications of cultural adaptation change and the construction of conceptual models of related research [30] (Figure 6). From an epistemological perspective, this involves studying the concept, characteristics, and nature of acculturation. From the ontological perspective, research focuses on how cultural adaptation changes, what elements cultural adaptation consists of, and the relationship between each component. From the perspective of axiology, methods aim to study the attitudes of individuals, groups, or even countries towards mainstream culture, national culture, minority culture, majority culture, and local culture and then examine whether this attitude is neutral or non-neutral. Finally, the study of cultural adaptability under the influence of different attitudes is explored. From a methodological perspective, this integrated approach studies the scientific problems of cultural adaptation in the aspects of epistemology, ontology, and axiology of logical positivism, humanism, and structuralism. Future work needs to strengthen this type of research and the use of models and modes [31]. It is also necessary to focus on the interactions between people and the environment and to use a constructivist perspective to explore the process, results, and structure of cultural adaptation.



**Figure6** Theoretical analysis logic of the methodology about cultural adaptation

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

(1) The key to cultural adaptation lies in the emergence of two or more cultures. The process and results of cultural adaptation of intercultural people are explained through the formation of new relationships and the loss of old relationships. At the same time, the division of cultural adaptation stages corresponds to the development period of logical positivism, humanism, and structuralism.

(2) The school of logical positivism focuses on the causal relationship of cultural adaptive change. The cultural adaptive elasticity theory and cultural adaptive model provide the explanation for adaptive differences. The humanist school applies the psychological characteristics of individuals or groups to the interpretation of cultural adaptation change, focusing on the descriptive analysis of psychology and behavior and the holistic characteristics it represents. Structuralism analyzes cultural adaptation and its differences from the perspective of surface, process, and deep structures.

(3) Future research about cultural adaptation needs to focus on the interaction between people and the environment and clarify the external and internal factors that affect changes in cultural adaptation. This research involves philosophical fields such as ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. In addition, there is an urgent need to do theoretical research in theoretical construction, methodology, and practical applications and strengthen the analysis of type research, model construction, and mode application.

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