Acculturative Stress and Coping Strategies: A Comparative Study of Hong Kong Drifters and Northward Drifters in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

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Abstract

This study examines the acculturation of Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters in the Greater Bay Area. Despite sharing nationality, both groups face challenges adapting to a familiar yet distinct cultural and linguistic environment. The study delves into acculturative stress and coping strategies using a qualitative approach to analyze survey data. Findings reveal significant differences in stress levels and coping mechanisms between the two groups. Hong Kong drifters experience higher stress due to changes in social circles, perceived discrimination, and language barriers. Northward drifters face lower overall stress, except when it comes to academic or work-related pressures. Both groups prioritize integration, but Hong Kong drifters emphasize separation while northward drifters lean towards assimilation. Socioculturally, Hong Kong drifters adapt better to local accommodation, regulations, and relationships, while northward drifters excel in language acquisition, social norms, and local activity participation. Psychologically, despite higher stress levels, Hong Kong drifters exhibit greater adaptability, characterized by personal growth, confidence, and a stronger sense of purpose. These findings highlight the need for tailored interventions and resources to address the specific needs of each group. Language training, community-building, and intercultural understanding initiatives can facilitate successful integration.

Keywords

Acculturative Stress, Coping Strategies, Hong Kong Drifters, Northward Drifters

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of population movement and cultural exchange between Chinese mainland and Hong Kong has given rise to two distinct groups known as "Hong Kong drifters" and "northward drifters". These individuals navigate the sociopolitical landscapes of both regions, seeking opportunities for education, employment, and a better quality of life. According to Berry's classification of acculturating groups (Berry, 1997, 2005), which considers two dimensions—mobility (permanent or temporary) and voluntariness of contact (voluntary or involuntary)—Hong Kong drifters can be defined as mainlanders who temporarily come to Hong Kong to study, work, and live for a specific period of time. Similarly, northward drifters are Hongkongers who temporarily cross the border to work, study, and live in the cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) for a specific period of time.

The primary objective of this research paper is to provide insights into the acculturative stress experienced by Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters, as well as their coping strategies and the resulting psychological and sociocultural adaptation. By delving into these aspects, we can develop a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced by these two groups and identify potential interventions and resources that can facilitate their successful integration and overall well-being in the GBA.

1.1. Hong Kong Drifters

The term "Hong Kong drifters" typically refers to individuals who have relocated from Chinese mainland to Hong Kong in search of employment and housing opportunities. Over the past two decades, the population of Hong Kong drifters has steadily increased, reflecting the economic and social ties between the two regions. The allure of Hong Kong's comprehensive legal system and values, including fairness, justice, and freedom, also attracts Hong Kong drifters. The city's reputation as an international hub for business and finance, as well as its economic prosperity, further entices individuals to make the move (Lee, Lee, & Tsang, 2014).

One significant factor contributing to the influx of mainland students into Hong Kong is the admission policies of local universities. According to UGC Statistics (2023), approximately 14,000 mainland students are admitted to Hong Kong universities each year. Furthermore, the implementation of a policy in 2008 allowing non-local fresh graduates to extend their visas for one year to seek employment has contributed to the growth of the Hong Kong drifter population. This policy enables graduates to explore career prospects in Hong Kong, attracting individuals who wish to leverage the city's economic opportunities and global connections. Additionally, various programs, such as the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, have facilitated the arrival of approximately 20,000 experts from Chinese mainland. These programs aim to attract highly skilled individuals with extensive work experience and strong academic qualifications to contribute

to Hong Kong's development. It is estimated that the number of Hong Kong drifters in the city has exceeded 350,000 (Hong Kong China News Agency, 2022).

1.2. Northward Drifters in the GBA

The Greater Bay Area encompasses the two Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macao, along with nine municipalities in Guangdong Province, including Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Zhuhai. This ambitious project initiated by China aims to create a financial and economic powerhouse that can rival Silicon Valley, showcasing its dedication to economic integration.

Within the GBA, there exists a group known as northward drifters or Hongkongers. These individuals are Hong Kong residents who have chosen to study, work, or spend their later years in Chinese mainland. The social and economic ties between the mainland and Hong Kong have strengthened significantly over the past decade, leading to an increase in the number of Hong Kong residents living and working in the GBA.

The Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions is expected to attract a growing number of middle school graduates who will pursue their undergraduate programs in GBA universities. This scheme provides opportunities for Hong Kong students to experience Chinese mainland's educational system and explore career prospects in the GBA.

Moreover, senior citizens form a significant portion of the northward drifters. Approximately 100,000 Hong Kong seniors currently reside in the GBA under the "Guangdong Scheme" launched by the government in October 2013. This scheme provides a monthly old age allowance to eligible Hong Kong individuals aged 65 and above to meet their specific needs arising from old age (SWD, 2018). The scheme aims to provide a supportive environment for Hong Kong seniors to spend their later years in the GBA.

The opening of transportation links, such as the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, has further facilitated the movement of Hongkongers into the GBA. These infrastructure developments have enhanced connectivity between the regions, creating opportunities for collaboration and growth.

2. Research on the Drifters

The phenomenon of drifters, encompassing both Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters, has gained considerable attention in recent years due to the growing interactions between Hong Kong and Chinese mainland. This literature review aims to provide a more analytical approach by critically synthesizing the existing research on drifters, with a specific focus on the acculturation process, cross-cultural communication, and adaptation experiences of both groups.

Upon closer examination of the available literature, it becomes apparent that research on Hong Kong drifters has primarily concentrated on mainland stu-

dents studying in Hong Kong's tertiary institutions (Pan, 2008; Yi & Tsang, 2010; Cheung, 2013; Zhang, 2015; Yu & Zhang, 2016) and newly arrived immigrants from Chinese mainland (Chan, 2001; Chou, 2009; Hung, 2002; Chan, 2013). While these studies have contributed to our understanding of the acculturation experiences of mainland students in Hong Kong, they have also shed light on the significance of sociolinguistic interactions with locals (Gu, 2011; Zhang, 2015) and the role of communication accommodation in facilitating cross-cultural adaptation (Song & Shan, 2016). Furthermore, the moderating role of social support in the acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation of these students has been explored (Lian & Tsang, 2010; Ng, Wang, & Chan, 2017).

However, a noticeable gap in the literature is the lack of research on Hong-kongers living and working in Chinese mainland. The few existing studies, such as the work by Selmer & Shui (1999) on ethnic Chinese expatriate business managers from Hong Kong working in Shanghai and Beijing, and the Society for Community Organization (2007)'s survey of Hongkongers who had returned from working and living in Chinese mainland, offer valuable insights into the experiences of Hongkongers in Chinese mainland. Nonetheless, these studies are limited in scope and fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of the acculturation process and adaptation challenges faced by Hongkongers in Chinese mainland.

Furthermore, comparative studies between Hongkongers in Chinese mainland and mainlanders in Hong Kong are scarce, with Ma's study (Ma, 2005, 2009) being one of the few exceptions. However, it is important to note that Ma's study was conducted during a period of relatively low national-local tensions, and its findings may not be generalizable to the current context. Therefore, there is an urgent need for updated research that takes into account the evolving dynamics and explores the communication patterns, adaptation difficulties, and perceptions of sociocultural and psychological adaptation among these two groups.

The limited research on drifters is particularly concerning, given the prevalence of terms like "Hong Kong drifters" and "northward drifters" in media and daily conversations. A critical analysis of the existing literature reveals that crucial aspects, such as the acculturative stressors faced by drifters, coping strategies employed during interactions with locals, and their perception of sociocultural and psychological adaptation to the new environment, have received inadequate attention. This lack of research has significant implications for our understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by drifters in both Hong Kong and Chinese mainland.

In conclusion, this literature review emphasizes the necessity for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges encountered by drifters in both Hong Kong and Chinese mainland. By synthesizing the existing literature and identifying gaps in research, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics and implications of cross-cultural adaptation among drifters in the Hong Kong and Chinese mainland contexts.

3. Research Design and Methodology

The research design and methodology section outlines the framework and approach used to investigate the acculturation and adaptation process among drifters in the Greater Bay Area. It encompasses the theoretical framework, research questions, measurement tools, participant selection, and data analysis approach.

3.1. Theoretic Framework

Acculturation is the process by which individuals or groups adopt the practices and values of another culture while still preserving their own cultural identity. In the case of Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters, who belong to a larger, privileged cultural group, acculturation plays a significant role in their experiences.

Acculturative stress is a key aspect of the acculturation process for ethnic minorities. It refers to the negative impact on mental health and well-being that arises from the tensions between the native and host cultures during the adaptation to a new culture (Berry, 1997). Factors such as social customs, language preference, and perceptions of prejudice contribute to the level of acculturative stress experienced by drifters. Addressing this stress is crucial for promoting their well-being and successful adaptation (Berry, 1997, 2005).

Berry's bidimensional model provides valuable insights into different acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 1997, 2005). Assimilation involves fully embracing the host culture, while integration emphasizes maintaining a balance between the host and original cultures. Separation focuses on preserving the original culture, while marginalization reflects a rejection of both cultures. It is important to note that assimilation and integration are generally associated with positive outcomes, while separation and marginalization can lead to increased acculturative stress.

Long-term cross-cultural adaptation can be further distinguished into sociocultural and psychological adaptation (Searle & Ward, 1990). Psychological adaptation involves adjusting to psychological challenges, maintaining mental well-being, and developing a positive sense of self Sociocultural adaptation, on the other hand, focuses on integrating into the social and cultural aspects of the host society, including language proficiency and understanding social norms (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). These two forms of adaptation are interconnected, with psychological well-being facilitating sociocultural integration and vice versa.

The following theoretical framework presented in **Figure 1**, *Modified Stress and Coping Framework for Acculturation of Drifters in the GBA*, is based on Berry's acculturation model and aims to explore the acculturation and adaptation process among drifters in this region.

In conclusion, the modified stress and coping framework based on Berry's acculturation model provides a comprehensive understanding of the acculturation process, acculturative stress, and adaptation among drifters in the GBA. By
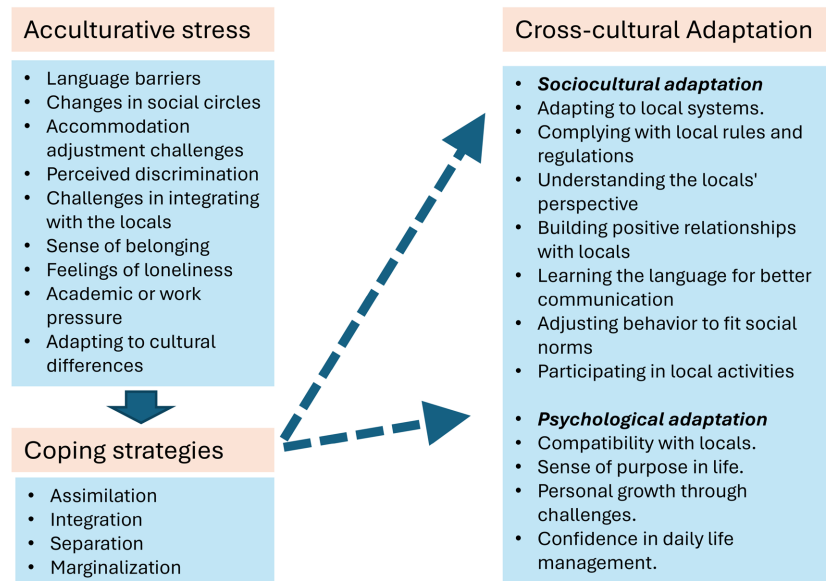
Figure 1. Modified stress and coping framework for acculturation of drifters in the GBA.

addressing acculturative stress and promoting psychological and sociocultural adaptation, it is possible to support the well-being and successful integration of drifters into the GBA community.

3.2. Research Questions

The study aims to address three key research questions pertaining to Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters:

 1) *To what extent do Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters experience acculturative stress*?

 2) *What are the common stress-coping strategies employed by Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters*?

 3) *Are there significant differences between Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters in terms of their psychological and sociocultural adaptation*?

These research questions will serve as a guide for the study, allowing for an exploration of the levels of acculturative stress experienced by both groups, an identification of the coping mechanisms they employ to manage this stress, and an examination of any notable variations in their psychological and sociocultural adaptation processes. By addressing these questions, a deeper understanding of the acculturation experiences of Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters in the GBA can be gained.

3.3. Stress-Coping-Adaptation Scale (SCAS)

A multitude of measurement tools have been developed within academia to effectively assess acculturative stress, psychological and sociocultural adaptation, as well as ac-culturation strategies. Some commonly utilized instruments in this domain include the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS (Ward & Kennedy, 1999)), Cultural Readjustment Rating Scale (Furnham & Bochner, 1982), the

Acculturative Stress Scale for Chinese Students (ASSCS (Bai, 2015)), the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF (Keyes, 2005)) for measuring psychological adaptation, and Chan's AS-C-HK Scale (Chan, 2001) for identifying acculturation strategies.

Drawing upon these existing scales and incorporating pertinent items, the Stress-Coping-Adaptation Scale (SCAS) has been specifically developed for this study. This comprehensive self-report inventory comprises 36 items, meticulously designed to gauge the levels of acculturative stress, coping strategies, and cross-cultural adaptation among Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters in the GBA. To facilitate scoring, the SCAS employs a 5-point Likert-type scale, enabling participants to indicate their agreement or frequency of specific experiences.

3.4. Participants

Data collection for this study spanned from January 2021 to June 2023. A total of 249 Hong Kong drifters were recruited to participate in the questionnaire survey. We established frequent contact with Hong Kong drifters through various channels, including mainland students studying in Hong Kong universities, the Hong Kong Mainland Student Association, and influential bloggers in the Drifters Circle. 245 northward drifters in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Zhuhai were recruited to take part in the questionnaire survey. This group consisted of Hong Kong students in local universities, young Hongkongers in the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Youth Innovation and Entrepreneur Hub, and senior Hongkongers residing in Guangzhou Biguiyuan, a residential area densely populated by Hongkongers, among others.

To ensure the statistical data's representativeness and generalizability, sampling criteria such as gender, age, profession, education, and length of stay were applied. The questionnaire survey in this research encompasses a substantial number of questions, requiring approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. As an incentive, each participant in this study received a HK$50 cash coupon. This approach aims to increase response rates and, ideally, enhance the overall quality of the data.

3.5. Data Analysis

This study took a unique approach to analyzing survey data for Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters. Instead of relying solely on traditional inferential statistical techniques, such as hypothesis testing or regression analysis, we combined descriptive statistics with qualitative interpretation. This innovative approach aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the adaptation process for these two groups.

We followed several steps to analyze the data:

Quantitative analysis: We calculated the percentages for each survey question. For example, we determined that among the 249 responses to the question "I feel nervous to communicate in Cantonese", 45% of Hong Kong drifters agreed or

strongly agreed. This calculation was done using the formula: Percentage = (Number of Responses/Total Number of Responses) * 100.

Summarization and listing of research findings: We compiled the research findings based on the percentages or frequencies of the questions. We created tables to summarize the findings for different categories such as acculturative stress, coping strategies, sociocultural and psychological adaptation.

Comparison of research findings: We compared the research findings of Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters to identify similarities and differences within each category. For instance, we discovered that while 45% of Hong Kong drifters felt difficulty and nervousness in communicating in Cantonese, only 2.9% of northward drifters experienced a similar challenge with Putonghua. This comparison led to the conclusion that language proficiency is a significant stressor for many Hong Kong drifters, whereas it is less of a stressor for the majority of northward drifters.

By combining quantitative analysis with qualitative interpretation, our approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the adaptation process for Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters. It allowed for a nuanced exploration of their experiences and shed light on the factors that contribute to their sociocultural and psychological adaptation.

4. Research Findings

The research findings shed light on the acculturative stress experienced by Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters in the GBA, as well as their coping strategies. By comparing the acculturative stress of both groups, the study highlights the differences in their main sources of stress. Additionally, the research analyzes the coping strategies adopted by both groups, emphasizing the variations and complexities in their responses to acculturative stress. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of drifters as they navigate their cultural adaptation journeys in the GBA.

4.1. Acculturative Stress

Acculturative stress, a key aspect of the acculturation process, can significantly affect the psychological well-being of drifters in the GBA. Drawing from existing literature, this study focuses on several factors that contribute to acculturative stress among the drifters. These factors include language barriers, challenges in adjusting to new living conditions, changes in social circles, the sense of belonging, experiences of perceived discrimination, feelings of loneliness, academic or work-related pressures, and difficulties in integrating with the local community.

4.1.1. Acculturative Stress for Hong Kong Drifters

The analysis of survey on acculturative stress experienced by Hong Kong drifters identified the key stressors, as summarized in Table 1 *Acculturative Stress for Hong Kong Drifters*. The table presents a ranking of various stressors based on the experiences of the drifters.

Table 1. Acculturative stress for Hong Kong drifters.

Stressors	Hong Kong drifters	Rank
language barriers	45% find it difficult to use Cantonese	1
changes in social circles	38.8% experience reductions in their social circles	2
perceived discrimination	31.4% experienced discrimination	3
challenges in integrating with the locals	28.6% find it difficult to integrate into the social circle of local people	4
sense of belonging	24.5% feel a lack of belonging	5
Feeling of loneliness	18.3% felt lonely	6
academic or work pressure	14.2% felt pressure	7
Adaptation to cultural differences	12.2% face difficulties in cultural adaptation	8
difficulties in adjusting to accommodation and transport	6.1% felt discomfort and a lack of adaptation	9

4.1.2. Acculturative Stress for Northward Drifters

Northward drifters portray a different picture of their acculturative stress. Table 2, *Acculturative Stress Experienced by Northward Drifters*, presents a summary of their stressors, listed in the order of the percentages of responses.

Table 2. Acculturative stress for northward drifters.

Stressors	Northward drifters	Rank
academic or work pressure	35.7% experience pressure	1
changes in social circles	8.6% feel a reduction in their social circle	2
sense of belonging	8.6% feel a lack of belonging.	2
Feeling of loneliness	7.1% felt lonely.	3
challenges in integrating with the locals	5.7% find it difficult in integrating with the locals	4
perceived discrimination	5.7% perceive discrimination	4
Adaptation to cultural differences	4.3% find it difficult to adapt to the mainland culture.	5
difficulties in adjusting to accommodation and transport	4.3% felt uncomfortable and struggled to adapt.	5
language barriers	2.9% struggle with communicating in Mandarin.	6

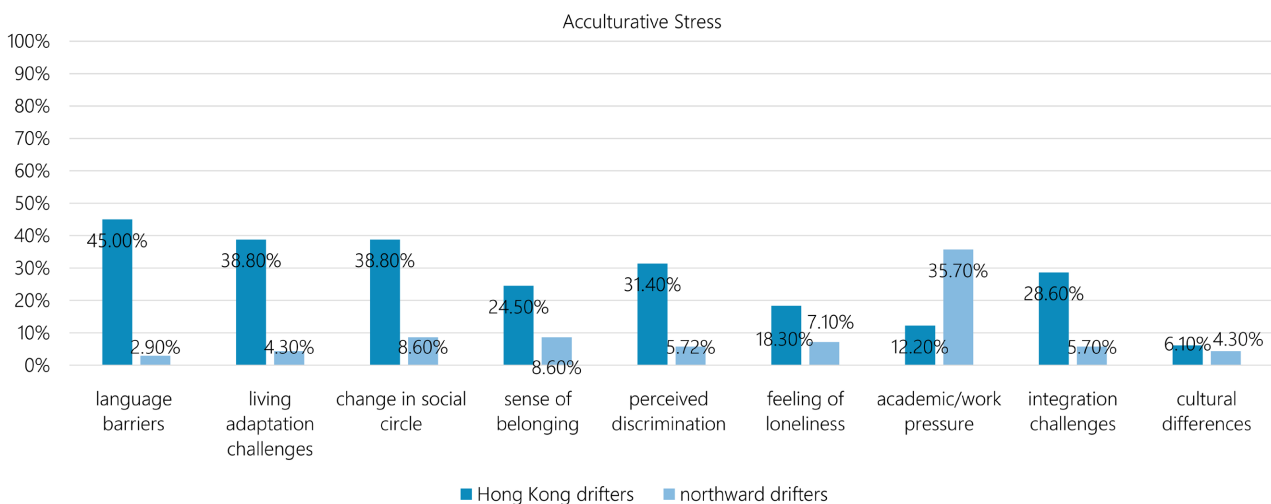### 4.1.3. Comparison of Acculturative Stress for Both Groups

Both Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters experience various stressors during their journeys, which can be attributed to the process of acculturation. While they encounter similar challenges such as changes in social circles, a sense of not belonging, and difficulties in integrating with local communities, there are notable differences in the main sources of stress for each group. Hong Kong drifters primarily face language barriers and changes in social circles, while northward drifters prioritize academic or work pressure, as evidenced by **Figure 2** *Comparison of Acculturative Stress by Both Groups.*

The following section will delve into the specific details of these stressors and analyze their implications for both groups.

Language Barriers: The findings highlight a significant disparity in language barriers between Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters. An astonishing 45% of Hong Kong drifters find it challenging and anxiety-inducing to communicate in Cantonese, their native language, while only 2.9% of northward drifters struggle with Mandarin communication. This stark contrast emphasizes the substantial language proficiency challenges faced by Hong Kong drifters as they navigate a different linguistic landscape.

Changes in Social Circles: There are notable differences in the changes experienced in social circles between Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters. Approximately 38.8% of Hong Kong drifters reported a reduction in their social networks, while only 8.6% of northward drifters experienced a similar decline. This discrepancy suggests that Hong Kong drifters are more likely to encounter a decrease in their social connections compared to northward drifters. Further exploration is necessary to understand the underlying reasons for these differences and their implications for social integration and support systems.

Academic or Work Pressure: The findings indicate that northward drifters face higher levels of academic or work pressure compared to Hong Kong drifters. About 35.7% of northward drifters feel that this intensity negatively affects

Figure 2. Comparison of acculturative stress by both groups.

their physical health, whereas only 14.2% of Hong Kong drifters report similar pressure. These findings highlight the significant academic and work-related challenges faced by northward drifters and the potential impact on their overall well-being and adaptation. Further investigation is required to understand the specific factors contributing to these pressures and their implications for the two groups.

Perception of Discrimination: There is also a variation in the perception of discrimination between Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters. Approximately 30.6% of Hong Kong drifters feel they experience discrimination, while only 5.7% of northward drifters perceive discrimination towards their group. This suggests that Hong Kong drifters are more likely to perceive themselves as facing discriminatory treatment compared to northward drifters. Further examination is needed to understand the underlying factors contributing to these perceptions and their implications for the psychological well-being and adaptation of the two groups.

Sense of Belonging: The sense of belonging differs significantly between the two groups. Among Hong Kong drifters, 24.5% feel a lack of belonging, while only 8.6% of northward drifters share the same sentiment. This indicates that Hong Kong drifters are more likely to struggle with feeling connected or accepted compared to northward drifters. A deeper analysis is necessary to explore the factors contributing to this disparity and its impact on the overall well-being and adaptation of the two groups.

Feelings of Loneliness: Feelings of loneliness also vary between the two groups, with 18.3% of Hong Kong drifters reporting loneliness compared to only 7.1% of northward drifters. This suggests that Hong Kong drifters are more likely to experience loneliness during their journey compared to northward drifters. A more detailed analysis is required to explore the factors contributing to these feelings of loneliness and their impact on the overall well-being of the two groups.

Challenges in Integrating with the Locals: The challenges in integrating with the locals also differ between the two groups. Only 5.7% of northward drifters found it difficult to integrate, while 28.6% of Hong Kong drifters struggled to integrate into the social circle of Hong Kong people. This indicates that Hong Kong drifters face more significant challenges in integrating with the locals compared to northward drifters. A more detailed analysis is necessary to explore the underlying factors contributing to these challenges and their impact on social integration and cultural adaptation.

Adaptation to Cultural Differences: Among Hong Kong drifters, 12.2% face difficulties in cultural adaptation, while only 4.3% of northward drifters find it challenging to adapt to Chinese mainland culture. This suggests that Hong Kong drifters are more likely to struggle with cultural adaptation compared to northward drifters. A deeper analysis is required to understand the specific cultural differences and the factors contributing to these adaptation challenges.

Difficulties in Adjusting to Local Accommodation and Transportation: Among Hong Kong drifters, 6.1% express discomfort and a lack of adaptation, while 4.3% of northward drifters face similar difficulties.

Although both groups encounter some level of adjustment issues, further analysis is needed to understand the specific factors contributing to these challenges and their impact on the overall adaptation process. By gaining a deeper understanding of these stressors and their implications, we can better support and address the needs of both Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters as they navigate their respective journeys.

4.2. Coping Strategies

Both the Hong Kong drifters and the northward drifters exhibit diverse approaches in navigating their experiences within a new culture. The coping strategies adopted by each group highlight the variations and complexities in their responses to the acculturative stress they encounter.

4.2.1. Coping Strategies of Hong Kong Drifters

The variations in coping strategies adopted by Hong Kong drifters, as showcased in Table 3 *Coping Strategies Adopted by Hong Kong Drifters*, reflect the diverse ways individuals navigate their experiences in a new culture. The high percentage

Table 3. Coping strategies adopted by Hong Kong drifters.

Coping strategy	Result summary	Rank
Integration	71% of the participants reported adopting the strategy of integration, which involves valuing the incorporation of aspects from both Hong Kong's lifestyle and the new culture. They emphasize effective communication regardless of language, feel comfortable interacting with both mainlanders and Hongkongers, and have good friends from both backgrounds. This indicates a strong willingness to embrace the new culture while maintaining intercultural interactions.	1
Separation	68% of the participants reported utilizing the strategy of separation, expressing a desire to maintain their original way of life from Chinese mainland. They preferred using Mandarin language and leaned towards interacting with people from Chinese mainland.	2
Assimilation	56% of the participants reported using the strategy of assimilation, indicating a willingness to follow the local way of life in Hong Kong. They make efforts to communicate in Cantonese and feel comfortable interacting with locals. However, it is worth noting that a significant portion of participants disagrees with language assimilation and does not strongly identify as Hongkongers.	3
Marginalization	13% of the participants reported using the strategy of marginalization, indicating that only a small percentage expressed concerns about language uncertainties and a discrepancy between their expectations and the reality they experienced.	4

of participants embracing integration highlights a willingness to embrace the new culture while maintaining intercultural interactions. It is interesting to see that a significant portion of participants lean towards separation, indicating a desire to maintain their original way of life. The presence of individuals adopting assimilation and marginalization strategies further emphasizes the complexity and range of experiences among Hong Kong drifters.

4.2.2. Coping Strategies of Northward Drifters

The data in Table 4 *Coping Strategies Adopted by Northward Drifters* reveals that northward drifters adopt various coping strategies. The majority lean towards integration, embracing the new culture while maintaining their own way of life. Assimilation is also common, but some participants express resistance to fully embracing the dominant culture. Separation is chosen by a significant portion, reflecting their attachment to their Hong Kong identity. A small percentage experience marginalization due to language uncertainties and unmet expectations.

Table 4. Coping strategies adopted by northward drifters.

| Coping strategy	Result summary	Rank
Integration	75% of the northward drifters reported utilizing the strategy of integration, as evidenced by their willingness to incorporate elements of the local culture while maintaining their own way of life. They also expressed comfort in interacting with both Chinese mainland and Hong Kong people. Additionally, their friendships encompass individuals from both cultures, showcasing their inclusive and integrated social circles. This indicates a strong inclination towards embracing the new culture while fostering intercultural connections.	1
Assimilation	64% of the northward drifters reported adopting the strategy of assimilation, indicating their agreement or strong agreement to follow the local way of life and make efforts to communicate effectively in Mandarin. However, it is important to note that some participants expressed neutrality or disagreement regarding their preference for interacting with mainlanders compared to Hongkongers. This suggests a potential resistance to fully embracing the dominant culture.	2
Separation	46% of the northward drifters reported using the strategy of separation, indicating their aim to maintain their Hong Kong lifestyle and preserve their cultural practices. They expressed feeling more comfortable interacting with people from Hong Kong compared to mainlanders. Furthermore, a significant portion confidently identifies themselves as Hong Kong residents living in Chinese mainland, reflecting their strong attachment to their Hong Kong identity and their desire to maintain a sense of separation from Chinese mainland culture.	3

Continued

Marginalization	11% of the participants reported using the strategy of marginalization, indicating that they feel uncertain about communicating in Mandarin and find that Chinese mainland doesn't meet their expectations. This can potentially lead to feelings of exclusion and disconnection from the dominant culture.	4

4.2.3. Comparison of Coping Strategies of Both Groups

The coping strategies adopted by Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters can be summarized by their ranks, as shown in **Figure 3** *Comparison of Coping Strategies of Both Groups*. Both groups prioritize integration as their top strategy, valuing the incorporation of aspects from the new culture while maintaining their identities. Assimilation ranks second for northward drifters, as they follow the local way of life and communicate effectively in Mandarin. Hong Kong drifters rank separation as their second strategy, preferring their original way of life and interactions with mainlanders. Marginalization is the least used strategy for both groups, with a small percentage expressing concerns about language and feeling disconnected.

The following section provides more information on the results of the survey regarding each of the strategies:

Integration: both Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters show a high level of integration. Hong Kong drifters prioritize incorporating aspects of Hong Kong's lifestyle (71% agree) and feel comfortable interacting with both Chinese mainland and Hong Kong people (63.3% agree). They also have good friends from both backgrounds (65.3% agree). Similarly, northward drifters are open to incorporating local culture (75% agree) and have inclusive social circles (72.8% agree). They also feel comfortable interacting with both groups (57.2% agree). These findings indicate successful integration for both groups, emphasizing their
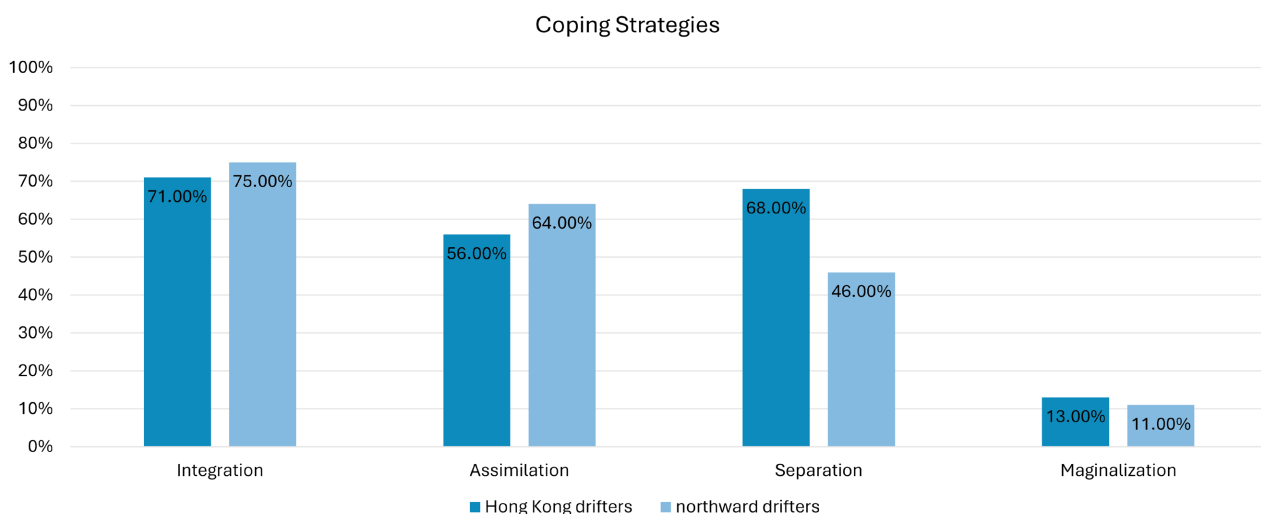
Figure 3. Comparison of coping strategies of both groups.

willingness to embrace new cultures while maintaining intercultural interactions.

Assimilation: Northward drifters show higher levels of assimilation compared to Hong Kong drifters. The majority embrace the local way of life (71.4% agree) and strive to communicate in Putonghua (70% agree). However, comfort levels with locals vary (38.6% feel at ease). Interestingly, nearly 50% prefer being recognized as Hongkongers in Chinese mainland. In contrast, Hong Kong drifters have a more diverse assimilation picture. While most embrace the local way of life (87.7% agree), language assimilation varies (46% agree to Cantonese, 37% disagree). Most Hong Kong drifters (73.5%) don't strongly identify as Hongkongers but as mainlanders in Hong Kong, combining assimilation and retention of their cultural identity.

Separation: The strategy of separation differs between Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters. Among Hong Kong drifters, a significant 68% reported using this strategy, with 30% expressing a desire to maintain their original way of life from Chinese mainland. Additionally, 53.1% preferred to communicate in Mandarin, and 51% felt more comfortable interacting with Chinese mainland people. In contrast, 46% of northward drifters adopted a strategy of separation, with only 18% desiring to maintain their Hong Kong lifestyle. Moreover, only 20% preferred to primarily communicate in Cantonese, and just 14% felt more comfortable interacting with people from Hong Kong. These percentages highlight the differing levels of cultural preservation and integration between the two groups.

Marginalization: The level of marginalization appears relatively low among both Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters. Among Hong Kong drifters, only 16.3% avoid interactions due to language uncertainties, while 12.2% feel a significant discrepancy between expectations and reality. Similarly, a minority of northward drifters (8.5%) feel uncertain about communicating in Mandarin, leading to potential exclusion, and 11.4% find Chinese mainland doesn't meet their expectations, causing disconnection. These findings highlight the challenges faced by a portion of both groups in terms of language barriers, cultural adjustment, and feelings of marginalization.

4.3. Sociocultural Adaptation

Sociocultural adaptation is the process of adjusting and integrating into a new social and cultural environment. It involves acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to effectively function and relate to the norms, values, and practices of a specific community or society. This adaptation encompasses various aspects, including adapting to local accommodation and transportation, complying with local rules and regulations, understanding the perspective of the locals, establishing positive relationships with them, learning the language for better communication, adjusting behavior to fit social norms, and actively participating in local activities and services.

4.3.1. Sociocultural Adaptation of Hong Kong Drifters

Hong Kong drifters have successfully adapted to local accommodation and transport, with 85.7% achieving this. Compliance with rules and regulations is not a challenge for them, as 81.6% have no difficulty following them. They have started to see things from the locals' perspective (71.4%) and have good relationships with Hongkongers (61.3%). Around 55.1% are willing to learn Cantonese for better communication. While they have adjusted their behavior to fit social norms (53.1%), participation in local activities and services is relatively low (40.8%). Overall, according to the data in Table 5, *Sociocultural Adaptation of Hong Kong Drifters*, there is notable adaptation, but increased participation could be improved.

4.3.2. Sociocultural Adaptation of Northward Drifters

Northward drifters have successfully adapted to the living environment and transportation in Chinese mainland (70%). They have established positive relationships (65.7%) and prioritize learning Mandarin (64.2%). Compliance with regulations and systems is not a challenge (58.6%). They also show an understanding of the locals' perspective (57.1%). While some have adjusted their behavior (45.7%), participation in local activities is moderate (44.2%). Overall, northward drifters display commendable sociocultural adaptation in terms of accommodation, relationships, and language learning. However, as demonstrated in Table 6 *Sociocultural Adaptation of Northward Drifters*, there is room for improvement in behavior adjustment and increased engagement in local activities.

Table 5. Sociocultural adaptation of Hong Kong drifters.

| Items	Hong Kong drifters	Rank
Adapting to the local accommodation and transport	85.7% have adapted to the local accommodation and transport system	1
Compliance with local rules and regulations	81.6% have no difficulty following rules and regulations in Hong Kong	2
Understanding the locals' perspective	71.4% have started to see things from the locals' point of view.	3
Establishing positive relationships with locals	61.3% have a good relationship with Hongkongers	4
Learning the language for better communication	55.1% agreed to learning Cantonese	5
Adjusting behavior to fit social norms	53.1% adapted their behavior	6
Participating in local activities and services	40.8% participated in activities and services provided by local communities	7

Table 6. Sociocultural adaptation of northward drifters.

Items	Northward drifters	Rank
Adapting to the local accommodation and transport	70% have adapted to the living environment in Chinese mainland.	1
Compliance with local rules and regulations	65.7% have a good relationship with people from Chinese mainland.	2
Understanding the locals' perspective	64.2% strongly agree to learning Mandarin	3
Establishing positive relationships with locals	58.6% have no difficulties complying with the regulations and systems in Chinese mainland.	4
Learning the language for better communication	57.1% have started to see things from the perspective of people from Chinese mainland.	5
Adjusting behavior to fit social norms	45.7% made behavior changes	6
Participating in local activities and services	44.2% enjoyed the activities and services provided by the local communities	7

4.3.3. Comparison of Sociocultural Adaptation of Both Groups

The ranking order of sociocultural adaptation for both Hong Kong drifters and north-ward drifters is generally similar, with slight variations, as depicted in **Figure 4** *Comparison of Sociocultural Adaptation of the Both Groups*. Both groups prioritize adapting to local accommodation and transport, followed by compliance with local rules and regulations. Understanding the locals' perspective is also important for both, although Hong Kong drifters place slightly higher emphasis on it. Establishing positive relationships with locals and learning the local language hold importance for both groups as well. While there are slight differences in the rankings, these similarities and variations provide insights into their unique adaptation journeys.
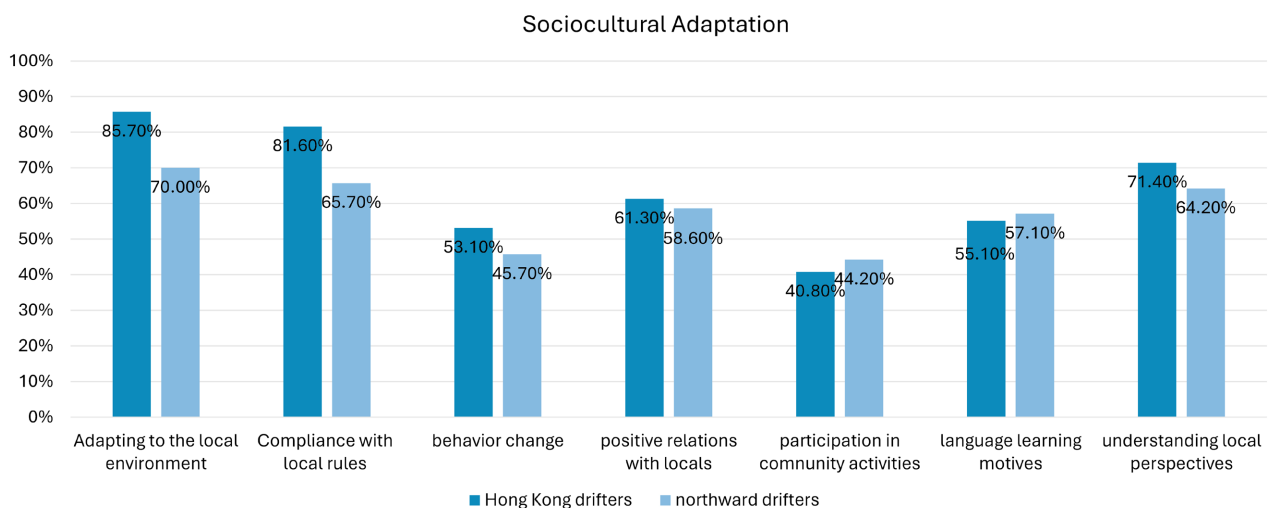
Figure 4. Comparison of sociocultural adaptation of the both groups.

4.4. Psychological Adaptation

Psychological adaptation refers to the process of adjusting and coping with psychological changes and challenges in response to a new or changing environment. It involves developing the necessary psychological skills, attitudes, and strategies to effectively navigate and cope with the demands and stressors associated with a new situation. Psychological adaptation encompasses various aspects, such as personal growth through challenges, confidence in daily-life management, compatibility with locals, and finding a sense of direction or purpose in life. These elements contribute to individuals' ability to adapt and thrive psychologically in their new environment.

4.4.1. Psychological Adaptation of Hong Kong Drifters

Table 7 *Psychological Adaptation of Hong Kong Drifters* illustrates the psychological adaptation of Hong Kong drifters. It reveals that a vast majority (89.8%) of drifters reported personal growth through their experiences in Hong Kong, challenging them to become better individuals. Additionally, 81.6% feel confident in managing their daily lives, indicating a sense of self-assurance. Furthermore, 75.5% have positive relationships with colleagues or classmates, highlighting compatibility with locals. Lastly, 69.4% find a sense of direction or purpose in their lives while being in Hong Kong.

Table 7. Psychological adaptation of Hong Kong drifters.

Items	Hong Kong drifters	Rank
personal growth through challenges	89.8% reported that their experiences in Hong Kong have challenged them to become a better person.	1
Confidence in daily-life management	81.6% feel confident at managing their daily life in Hong Kong.	2
Compatibility with locals	75.5% have positive relationships with colleagues or classmates in Hong Kong.	3
Sense of direction or purpose in life.	69.4% find a sense of direction or meaning in their life.	4

4.4.2. Psychological Adaptation of Northward Drifters

In Table 8 *Psychological Adaptation of Northward Drifters* offers insights into the psychological adaptation of North-ward drifters. It reveals that a significant percentage (72.9%) of drifters have positive relationships with colleagues or classmates in Chinese mainland, indicating their confidence in daily-life management. Additionally, 64.3% of the drifters experienced personal growth in Chinese mainland, finding a sense of direction or purpose in life. Moreover, 58.6% find a sense of direction or meaning in their lives in Chinese mainland, demonstrating compatibility with locals. Lastly, 42.9% of the drifters express their

**Table 8.** Psychological adaptation of northward drifters.

Items	Northward drifters	Rank
Confidence in daily-life management	72.9% have positive relationships with colleagues or classmates in Chinese mainland.	1
Sense of direction or purpose in life.	64.3% experienced personal growth in Chinese mainland.	2
Compatibility with locals	58.6% find a sense of direction or meaning in their life in Chinese mainland.	3
personal growth through challenges	42.9% are willing to continue living in Chinese mainland.	4

willingness to continue living in Chinese mainland, showcasing personal growth through challenges.

4.4.3. Comparison of Psychological Adaptation of Both Groups

When comparing the rankings in the two tables, we can observe some interesting in-sights into the psychological adaptation of Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters in light of the data presented in **Figure 5** *Comparison of Psychological Adaptation of Both Groups*. Both groups prioritize confidence in daily-life management and compatibility with locals, indicating the importance of social connections and self-assurance in their respective environments. However, there are notable differences as well. Hong Kong drifters place a higher emphasis on personal growth through challenges, showcasing their resilience and ability to learn and develop in the face of difficulties. On the other hand, northward drifters rank a sense of direction or purpose in life higher, suggesting a strong desire for clarity and meaning in their experiences. These distinctions highlight the unique psychological adaptation experiences of each group.

The comparison of sociocultural and psychological adaptation reveals a compelling portrait of both Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters actively embracing the challenges of cross-cultural experiences. Both groups demonstrate a shared commitment to integrating into their new environments, placing importance on aspects such as housing, local norms, perspectives, and fostering positive relationships. However, subtle distinctions emerge, with Hong Kong drifters showcasing resilience and personal growth, while northward drifters seek a deeper sense of purpose. Despite these variations, the prevailing narrative highlights their unwavering determination to adapt. Despite encountering adversity, these drifters exhibit a resolute resolve to navigate unfamiliar territories, establish meaningful connections, and carve out their own space within these new cultural landscapes. Their adaptability serves as a testament to their resilience and resourcefulness.
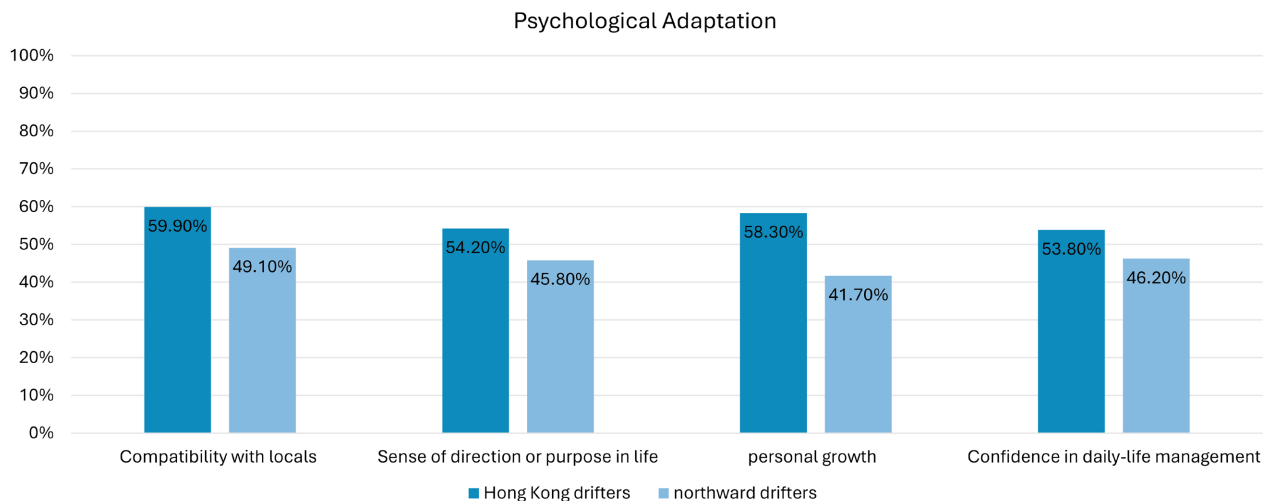
Figure 5. Comparison of psychological adaptation of both groups.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study has identified the common stress-coping strategies utilized by both groups, along with the similarities and differences in their psychological and sociocultural adaptation. These findings carry significant implications for policymakers, employers, and support organizations in the Greater Bay Area in developing targeted interventions and resources that can effectively address the unique needs of these individuals.

5.1. Acculturative Stress

The research highlights notable differences in acculturative stress between Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters. Hong Kong drifters consistently report higher stress levels, emphasizing social circle changes, discrimination, and language barriers as significant stressors. Integrating into the local community and developing a sense of belonging are also major challenges. In contrast, northward drifters experience lower overall stress, with academic/work pressure being their primary concern. They face fewer issues with social circles, belonging, and cultural adaptation. Northward drifters' higher Mandarin proficiency contributes to their relatively lower stress levels. These findings underscore the importance of tailored support to address the distinct acculturative needs of each group in the Greater Bay Area.

Recognizing these challenges is crucial for targeted support in facilitating the cross-cultural adaptation of each group.

For Hong Kong drifters, language barriers, social circle changes, perceived discrimination, and difficulties integrating with the local community are significant stressors. To address these, the local society should offer intensive Cantonese language courses and immersion programs to improve conversational skills rapidly. Cross-cultural social events, peer mentoring programs, and participation in diverse community organizations can help build meaningful connections with locals. Workshops, discussions, counseling, and support services can miti-

gate the impacts of perceived discrimination. Cultural immersion activities, collaborative projects, and intercultural communication training can further bridge gaps in integrating with the local community. In contrast, northward drifters primarily face academic or work-related pressure as their main acculturative stressor. To address this, the local society should enhance academic advising and tutoring support, provide workshops on time management and study skills, and offer career counseling and internship opportunities to alleviate work-related concerns.

5.2. Common Stress-Coping Strategies

The comparison of coping strategies reveals Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters share a focus on integration but differ in their use of separation and assimilation. Hong Kong drifters prioritize separation to maintain their Chinese mainland identity, while northward drifters more readily assimilate. Marginalization is least common for both groups. These differences reflect unique circumstances and priorities, underscoring the need for tailored support programs to facilitate their adaptation in the Greater Bay Area.

To enhance assimilation and integration among Hong Kong and northward drifters in the Greater Bay Area, policymakers and community leaders should prioritize language acquisition, cultural orientation, community engagement, mentorship, employment support, housing assistance, and social integration programs. Addressing the needs of marginalized drifters is crucial, even if their numbers are small, through safe spaces, counseling, resource access, and awareness campaigns for their inclusion and well-being.

5.3. Differences in Sociocultural and Psychological Adaptation

The findings reveal that Hong Kong drifters experience higher levels of acculturative stress compared to their northward counterparts. However, they demonstrate a higher level of sociocultural and psychological adaptability, showcasing resilience and a strong sense of direction in their new environment. This suggests that they possess the necessary skills and mindset to thrive in their new surroundings. Policymakers and community leaders can capitalize on this adaptability by providing resources and support programs that enhance their integration and well-being. By recognizing and leveraging their resilience and sense of direction, Hong Kong drifters can contribute positively to their new communities and foster a harmonious multicultural environment.

It is indeed intriguing to note that while northward drifters in Chinese mainland may experience lower levels of acculturative stress compared to Hong Kong drifters, they still encounter challenges in terms of sociocultural and psychological adaptability. This underscores the significance for policymakers and community leaders to recognize the distinct needs of northward drifters and establish specialized support programs to facilitate their integration. One crucial aspect to address is the work and academic pressure they face, which we have identified as their primary stressor. By providing targeted assistance and re-

sources to help them navigate these challenges, policymakers can contribute to their overall well-being and successful adaptation within their new environment.

The findings of this study offer valuable insights that can inform policymakers, employers, and support organizations in the Greater Bay Area. Recognizing the unique acculturative stress and coping strategies of Hong Kong drifters and northward drifters is crucial in developing tailored interventions and resources. This will facilitate their smooth adaptation and enable them to thrive in the dynamic environment of the Greater Bay Area.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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