Queer Chinese-German Lives: Crossing/Queering Boundaries of Nation-States, Languages, and White-Heteronormativity

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Abstract

The essay examines the experiences of queer individuals of Chinese heritage living in Germany. Through semi-structured interviews with four individuals, conducted online in German, English, Mandarin Chinese or a mixture of the three, their unique positionality which transcends the limits of nation-states, languages, and white heteronormative sociocultural norms, emerges The essay is informed by works from the disciplines of Geography, Linguistics, Anthropology, Sociology, and Queer and Queer of Colour critique. This project maps out a mosaic of issues and questions within the queer Chinese-German diaspora, and aims to reveal the scope of opportunities for further inquiry.

Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic aggravates anti-Asian racism and Sinophobia in Germany and across the world (Jeung, et al., 2021; Janke & Schäfer, 2021; Kong et al., 2021; Mayer, Nguyen & Suda, 2020) questions of belonging, home and safety have arisen once again for members of the Chinese diaspora. Queer Chinese-Germans are at a particularly unique intersection, as the transnational nature of their lives, the heteronormative, family-centred values of Chinese culture, the white-heteronormativity of German society, and their language practices, affords them a distinct set of characteristics, advantages and disadvantages. This essay will examine how four queer Chinese-Germans are confronted with issues of (in)visibility of being German and being Chinese, being de- and hypersexualised, performing masculinity and femininity, and experience racism. It will also observe the language preferences and practices of the interviewees.

Methodology

The project was conducted with primary research at its core. This is not only due to the sparse academic literature on the queer Chinese diaspora in Germany, but also in an effort to centre the voices of the interviewees. Four interlocutors were asked to share their experiences individually, in four semi-structured interviews. Rather than passive informants, both the participants and my participation as interviewer of Chinese-German background are active co-producers, shaping the nature of this essay. The interviews are shaped by the interviewees' personal accounts in relation to my own personal experiences as person of Chinese heritage growing up in Germany.

Terminology

Queer is used not only as an umbrella term for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual, but also to refer to all sexualities and gender identities which do not conform to the socio-political environments of the interviewees.

Chinese-German, and *Germans with Chinese heritage* are used as an umbrella term for people who are either born, have lived, or are living in Germany, with at least one parent being of Chinese heritage.

Asiaten, literally translating to 'Asians', is used in German to refer to people racialised as 'Asian', most commonly meaning people of East and Southeast Asian descent. The term *Asian* will here also be used to refer to people of East and Southeast Asian descent.

Interviewees

All interviewees have been pseudonymised.

Shan is a 32 year old non-binary polysexual, who was born to two Chinese parents in China and moved to Germany from Kunming nine years ago, as part of the federal voluntary service (*Bundesfreiwilligendienst*). Shan now works in a care home for people with mental disabilities near Freiburg, Baden-Württemberg.

Felix is a 20 year old queer man, who was born to a white German father and a Chinese mother and grew up in a small Bavarian village, to which he moved at age four. He moved to Berlin two years ago for his university studies.

Nina is a 24 year old lesbian woman, born in Chicago to a white German father and a Chinese mother, who has lived and attended school in the US, Germany and China. In 2015, she moved to Leipzig to go to medical school, where she still lives.

David is a 23 year old gay man, born to two Chinese parents, who migrated to Germany thirty years ago. He moved from near Düsseldorf to Hamburg for his university studies four years ago, and now works in Hamburg in an advertising and design agency.

The interviewees were able to choose which language(s) to speak to me in. Their language capabilities can be summarised as follows:

	Childhood spent in	**Level of German**	**Level of Chinese**	**Level of English**	**Interview conducted in**
Shan	China	Intermediate-Fluent	Native	Intermediate	German, with parts in Mandarin and few in English
Felix	Four years in China, significant parts in Germany	Native	Intermediate	Fluent	English, with few parts in German and Mandarin
Nina	Partly in the US, partly in Germany, partly China	Native	Intermediate	Native	English, with parts in German and few parts in Mandarin
David	Germany	Native	Intermediate	Fluent	German, with significant mixture of English and German, and parts in Mandarin

All interview quotes are transcribed in their original language(s), and, if applicable translated into English.

(In)Visibility of Gender, Sexuality, Race

On being German, Chinese, and Chinese-German

When I asked Felix about his experience moving from a small town in Bavaria to Berlin, he recalled:

"When I moved to Berlin […] there were just like so many **non-white people**. That was very refreshing. […] When I looked it up, more than 50% have **a migration background**. I know it's stupid that I feel that way, […] it isn't like, **German people** discriminated *that* much. But I just feel more comfortable when there are a lot of **foreigners**, like, just people with a different ethnic background, around me. I don't feel like weird or different. **It's like normal that you aren't white.**"

Although, the term *Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund* (people with migration background) was formally introduced in 2005 as part of the *Mikrozensus* (Will 2020) in an attempt to move away from the term *Ausländer* (lit. 'foreigners'), colloquially, *Ausländer* is still commonly used to refer to visibly non-White individuals.

Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund is officially defined as follows:

„Eine Person hat einen Migrationshintergrund, wenn sie selbst oder mindestens ein Elternteil die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit nicht durch Geburt besitzt." (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018)

"A person has a migration background if he or she or at least one parent does not have German citizenship by birth."

Therefore, even if someone does not have first-hand experience of migration, e.g. in the case of interviewee David, they are still considered to have a migration background. As Will (2020) argues, this results in many individuals born and raised in Germany to be rendered as 'others' or *Fremde* ('foreigners'/'strangers'). Additionally, I argue that this consequently influences the self-perception of non-white Germans, which is also reflected in the above quote by Felix. Aside from the persistent synonymous usage of 'people with migration background' and 'foreigners' in colloquial language, despite the attempt to be reflective of peoples' migration experiences (Will 2020), the term continues to imply a differentiation between 'normal' Germans (those *without* migration background), and 'others' (those *with* migration background).

Although officially the term *Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund* refers to individuals with migration backgrounds of any countries, I argue that both this term, and the term *Ausländer* is more prevalently used when referring to individuals who are non-white, and *Deutsche* (lit.

'Germans') is used to refer to white Germans, meaning that the term is much more linked to ethnicity, rather than migration background. From the above quote, the perception that whiteness is equated to normalcy and Germanness becomes evident. Indeed, Canan & Foroutan's study (2013) examining the *Kriterien des Deutsch-Seins* ('criteria to be German') reveals that 37,6% of participants without migration background responded that having German ancestors is an important criterion to being German. Similarly, 34% of participants with migration background agreed that having German ancestors is an important factor. Collectively, an understanding of Germany as a post-migrant, *Einwanderungsgesellschaft* (immigration society) is still lacking.

In the case of my interviewees, being visible as German proved difficult, as equation of Germanness and whiteness contributes to the continued perceived otherness of non-White individuals. As Shan expressed:

" Ich fühle mich weder Chinesisch, auch nicht Deutsch. Ich bin schon so lange in Deutschland, aber ich fühle mich immer noch nicht integriert. Und dann, wenn ich auf die Straße laufe, ich werde trotzdem als Chinesin gesehen, ich werde nicht als Deutsch gesehen."

„I feel neither Chinese, but also not German. I have been in Germany for so long, but I still don't feel integrated. And then, when I walk onto the streets, I will still be seen as Chinese, I will not be seen as German."

Towards the end of our interview, Shan asked me:

"Du hast immer geschrieben, du bist eine Chinese in Deutschland, wer in Deutschland geboren ist. Und dann wollte ich fragen, ob du. Ja… Weil, das- das ist für mich interessant. Ich finde, wenn jemand in Deutschland geboren ist, dann würde man sich als Deutscher gesehen. Aber ja. Warum? Warum du noch chinesisch als deine kulturelle Identität gesehen, oder, oder nur hab ich falsch verstanden?"

„You always wrote, you are a Chinese in Germany, who was born in Germany. And then I wanted to ask if you… Well, because, that- that's interesting to me. I find, if someone is born in Germany, then one would see oneself as German. But yeah. Why? Why do you still see Chinese as your cultural identity, or, or did I just misunderstand?"

In my initial call for participants, and while introducing myself to my interviewees, my self-perception shaped by the common German social understanding of 'Germanness' as Whiteness, and in turn the language usage reflecting this understanding, is revealed. This is echoed by Felix who spent most of his childhood growing up in Germany. Being perceived as and made to feel like an 'other', combined with limited exposure to other Chinese people both shaped his identity (along other factors of varying influence, such as language, culture, etc.). When asked whether Felix identifies more with his Chinese heritage, he recalls proudly defending his Chinese heritage in school. He explains:

"I always felt very Chinese, like until 10th and 11th grade when I went to boarding school, and there were many Chinese international students. But like, before that, **I was always the only Chinese person everybody knew**. So it was always, I guess a big part of my identity […]."

However, Felix also emphasises, how, over time, he has come to realise and claim his 'German-ness', and developed an attitude of acceptance towards his multicultural and biracial background:

"But […] since I met more Chinese people who are much more Chinese than I am, like, I'm just starting to realise, okay, **I'm not actually that Chinese. I'm very, very German**. And now that I moved to Berlin two years ago […], it's very multicultural. And so I'm accepting that I'm just, I'm mixed, **I'm both Chinese and German**. And that's fine. And the person who I am like, it definitely reflects that."

However, it is not only due to the racialisation and othering that individuals identify strongly with 'Chineseness'. All interviewees, despite spending significant parts, if not all, living in Germany, express that their 'Chineseness' was never as open to question, as their 'Germanness' has been. This may be partly due to essentialist understandings of identity, but also due to the cultural influences of the interviewees' family backgrounds: As is common of many individuals of the Chinese diaspora, three out of four interviewees attended Chinese weekend school to learn Mandarin; cook Chinese food at home; frequently visit their relatives in China; and speak Chinese to their Chinese family members. Despite not living, or not ever having lived in China, their Chinese and Chinese diasporan identity seems much less questioned, both by others, and themselves.

Between Desexualisation, Hypersexualisation and Fetishization

Not only in the collective understanding of what it means to be German do race and ethnicity play a role. When asked about their dating and sex lives, interviewees report feelings of both de- and hypersexualisation. Particularly when recalling their school lives, multiple interviewees mention feelings of being 'overlooked', 'weird', 'unwanted'. David recounts:

"Du musst dir halt vorstellen […], ich habe dabei zugesehen, wie alle meine Freundinnen mit 14, 15, 16 ihren ersten Kuss hatten und alle so, *sexual contact*. Und ich war halt immer so, that *gay Asian friend, that's like kind of funny at parties*, aber einfach so, dieses '*The one left out*'."

"You just have to imagine, I watched all my friends have their first kiss with 14, 15, 16, and everyone had their first like, sexual contact. And I was always like, **that gay Asian friend that's like kind of funny at parties, but like kind of 'The one left out'**."

On the other side of the spectrum, Felix and David report that in homosexual contexts, members of other ethnicities fetishize features such as 'hairlessness, smooth skin, small frames,

innocence, boyishness' on them. This resembles the examples that Lee (2009) lists while describing the emasculation of Chinese American men:

> "[W]omen are instinctive believers in muscular manhood. These lank, scrawny limbs, the drooping glance…he was more like a woman than a man." (Wright 1870 in Lee 2009)

> "[A] sashimi-smooth chest…what other men visit salons to get, the Asian gene pool provides for free…ladyboy fingers: soft and long." (McNally 2004 in Lee 2009)

As Lee (2009) points out, "Despite a difference of over a century in publication dates, these excerpts from popular periodicals evince remarkably similar imaginings of the Asian male body". Now, another two decades later, Felix shares his feelings about his masculinity with me:

> "I feel like most people [think], I cannot be a *top*. Like people just see me as, yeah, I'm Asian, I must be a *bottom*. I'm feminine. And there are many guys who are attracted to that. So yeah, people just either don't answer me [on dating apps], or they like really fetishize me."

Lee (2009) argues that the examples stated above are indicative of the historical roots and continuity of the contemporary constructions of Asian masculinity, which characterise Asian men as deviant and emasculate. Indeed, when I asked Felix if he thinks Eurocentric beauty and masculinity standards and representation in Western media played a role, he agreed:

> "I think definitely. […] In movies and television shows, the Asian guy is also always very shy and timid, at least in the past. Like, the nerdy math guy who like, really sucked with girls. And I guess, I guess that's how people saw me. And that's also, that *was* also how I saw myself."

As Moscovici (1973) argues, social representations are never neutral. Instead, they emerge from a "system of values, ideas and practices" to help those who created them make sense of the world. In Felix' quote, it becomes evident how the media representations of Asian men shaped how he was perceived by others and perceived himself. Additionally, "representations are never neutral but reflect the power dynamics inherent in stratified social systems. In such systems, representations are deployed for the purpose of creating and maintaining ideological definitions of 'difference.'" (Said 1978 in Han 2015:60).

The image of the feminised Asian man can be traced back to the growing racist ideology of the *yellow peril* in the early twentieth century (Han 2015:58), during which the generalisation of a multitude of different Asian ethnicities and cultures, the desexualisation and emasculation of Asian men, and conflation of Asians with Asian Americans was not only utilised to maintain the dominance of white Western masculinity, but also rendered Asian Americans as 'others' along with Asians. In addition, the trope in which the hyper-sexed, submissive, male-dominated Asian woman is painted as the ideal complement to the white Western male, dates back to "White heterosexual male presence in East Asian wars" (Woan 2008:278), which Woan coins as *White Sexual Imperialism*. The term *yellow peril* itself finds its origins in the 19th century, during which German emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II used said ideology to encourage and justify European empires to wage war on China, and later Japan (Klein 2015). The persistent

continuity of such tropes continue to influence individuals of Chinese and Asian heritage, whether directly or indirectly, through media representation or other individuals.

With the recent surge in popularity of Korean and Japanese pop culture, men racialised as Asian have experienced a different form of fetishization. David explains how due to the increased interest, Korean and Japanese culture are idealised and fetishized. Additionally, people who fetishize Korean and Japanese culture and people seem to apply a 'blanket fetish' towards all people racialised as *Asiaten*. As David tells me:

"Die ersten Dates, auf denen ich war, waren dann am Ende die, wo ich auf Instagram gehe und sehe, [sie folgen] 40 koreanische Influencern. Und damals war ich so ‚That's weird'. But ja, I would still want to go on that date with that person, weil ich halt meine Erfahrungen machen wollte. Und ich wurde halt eindeutig fetishized. So, the first three guys I went out with, had an Asian fetish. […]"

„The first dates I went on, those people were the ones who in the end I found out were following 40 Korean influencers. And back then I was like 'That's weird'. But yeah, I would still want to go on that date with that person, because I just wanted to make my experiences. And I was definitely fetishized. Like, **the first three guys I went out with, had an Asian fetish**."

He tells me that when dating people who are not *Asiaten*, checking who they follow on Instagram and if they are interested in Kpop became like a precaution to avoid being fetishized:

"Und luckily […] war ich auch schon auf so zwei, drei Dates mit Guys […] that liked me for who I am. Ich war mal auf einem Date mit einem White Guy […]. So, sein Instagram, he didn't follow a single Asian person, and he didn't even know BTS or BlackPink. Das ist halt für mich so, dieses 'You probably don't have a fetish'. Und das, that made me feel so incredibly special. And it's the bare minimum! That's sad."

„And luckily I've been on two or three dates with guys that liked me for who I am. I was on a date with a white guy once. Like, his Instagram, he didn't follow a single Asian person, and he didn't even know BTS or Blackpink [popular Kpop bands]. **That's kind of like a 'You probably don't have a fetish' to me**. And that, that made me feel so incredibly special. And it's the bare minimum! That's sad."

Performance of Masculinity/Femininity/Gender Roles

In both Felix' and David's case, the importance and power that representation in media have are evident. Felix, who recalls the tropes in Western media being reflected in his feelings of being emasculated and inadequate in his masculinity, chooses to conform to ideas of masculinity he has been confronted with, and mentions how improving his physique helped him feel more comfortable about himself:

"I joined the gym, and I do work out. I gained some weight. Like, yeah, I gained like quite a lot of weight. In the past, I was very underweight. […] And I think that, **if I gain muscle and become more healthy and have like a masculine body, I feel more confident about myself and my gender.**"

He shares his observations of heterosexual Asian men, which he also relates to:

“I feel like, many Asian guys who are straight, who grow up in a predominantly white country, that so many of them just go to the gym to, like, **compensate this femininity people put on them.**”

In David’s case, although he has been confronted with a new form of fetishization through the rise of Korean media, he has also found an outlet for safely expressing his effeminacy. When I asked David, who has been dancing to Kpop choreographies, mainly those choreographed for girl groups, if he thinks dancing helped him in terms of his identity, he replied:

“It's like the first time I thought about it, aber... Früher... So, being feminine. Dafür wurdest du halt immer irgendwie gescolded. In der Schule auch so […]. Aber so seitdem ich tanze, und ich tanze ja eigentlich eher nur so Choreos that are more on the feminine side und dafür Komplimente bekomme – das ist halt super rewarding, weil, wenn ich tanze bin ich mein authentic self. So, when I dance I don't hold back. […] Und ich habe dann gemerkt, […] I can be feminine, and still get praised for it“

„It’s like the first time I thought about it, aber… Back then… Like, being feminine. That’s something that you were always kind of scolded for. Including in school. But since I started dancing, and I tend to only dance choreographies that are more on the feminine side, and have been getting compliments – that’s like super rewarding, because **when I’m dancing, I’m my authentic self**. Like, when I dance I don’t hold back. And I then noticed, **I can be feminine, and still get praised for it**.

Although perhaps not consciously – David explains to me that he has never made a connection between his dancing and his sexuality and gender expression – David assumes the trope of the feminised Asian man. This lets David become an active participant and reappropriate a trope usually externally imposed on Asian men in a derogatory way, and uses it to his advantage: in his spare time, David is part of a popular Kpop cover dance group and works as a dance teacher.

Invisible Racism and the Model Minority Myth

As aforementioned, racist tropes and stereotypes involving Asians have deep rooted histories of colonialism and White Supremacy, yet anti-Asian racism is rarely taken seriously. Although the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated overt racism in form of verbal and physical assault, Asian Germans continue to be dismissed as victims of covert racism.

While sharing their thoughts about my project, Shan comments with a distressed laugh:

“Die Asian werden eigentlich nicht so oft gesehen in Deutschland, finde ich. Wenn man über Rassismus spricht, da, oft wird nur an, an der, an zum Beispiel Afrikanischer Deutscher geguckt oder, die Türkische werden in Deutschland oft geguckt. […] Ja, es wird mehr gesehen, [Leute denken] es gibt da mehr Problem. Und dann, Asian… Es wird nicht gesehen, deswegen gibt es kein Problem.“

„**The Asians aren’t seen in Germany**, I find. When people speak about racism, then, often only African Germans are looked at, or the Turkish are often looked at in Germany. Yes, it is seen more, [people think] there are more problems. And then, Asians… **It’s not seen, therefore [people think] there is no problem**”

Various Asian German activists attribute this to the seemingly benign myth of Asians as the model minority, a trope much discussed in Asian American context, but lacking academic literature in German context. In the US, the model minority myth is a familiar tool to denying institutional racism, asserting 'colour blindness' and continuing to divide racial minority groups (Kim 1999, 2000 in Kawai 2006).

A first public portrayal of Asians as the model minority in Germany is found in Spiewak's 2009 article "*Das Vietnamesische Wunder*" ('The Vietnamese Miracle') for *Die Zeit* ('The Time', a reputable German newspaper), in which the academic success of Vietnamese Germans is attributed to their ethnic/cultural background, and compared to Germans of other ethnic backgrounds (e.g. Turkish Germans). In almost identical manner to the US, Vietnamese Germans' academic success are used to vilify other ethnic minority Germans (Hartlep & Bui 2020). In addition, Asians are depicted as docile, silent and well-integrated migrants, oftentimes painted in contrast to loud, poorly integrated Black Germans or Arab Germans (Schindler 2021).

In addition to numerous negative side effects of the model minority myth for Asians and other people of colour (see Li 2005; Gupta, Szymanski & Leong 2011; Kim & Lee 2014; Takahashi 2020), the model minority myth contributes to the dismissive and trivialising attitudes towards anti-Asian racism in German media, state, and society (Koreaverband 2020; Ho 2021), resulting in many Asian Germans such as Shan to feel not seen, and their experiences rendered invisible or insignificant.

Language – Preferences, Restrictions, Translanguaging

Language Preferences: Vocabulary, Knowledge, Emotional De-/Attachment,

For the interviews, interviewees were able to choose between speaking German, English, or Mandarin Chinese. All four interviews used all three languages to different extents. Nina and Felix, who are both native speakers of German, chose to talk mostly in English with me. Both of them mentioned their preference of speaking English when talking about emotions, sexuality and gender, despite being equally fluent in both languages, and in Felix' case, using German more on a day-to-day basis. Nina additionally notes in regards to her relationship with her girlfriend:

> "We've been together like almost five years, **we've never said 'I love you' in German. We say it in English all the time**, but […] I would never go out and be like '*Ich liebe dich'*. It's so weirdly awkward to me to talk about my real emotions in German"

She further explicates that speaking in German about intimate topics feels particularly personal, partly because she perceives German culture to emphasise hierarchy and distance to strangers more. Nina, who moved to Germany to pursue her medical career, points out that depending on the usage of *Sie* (formal, polite 'you') and *Du* (informal, more casual 'you'), social distance or closeness is established. She adds:

> "Also just the fact that you have a formal 'you' in German. And you know, obviously I '*Siez*-ed' my therapist, and it's like… I'm not going to talk about my sexuality to someone I'm *Siez*-ing, like, no!"

Addressing her therapist with the *Sie* pronoun asserts a distance between Nina and her therapist which is reminiscent of more formal interactions, such as with strangers or in the workplace, hence resulting in a feeling of oddness when talking about personal topics, such as gender, love and sexuality in German.

Restrictions – Grammatical Gender, Vocabulary

Another reason why Nina believes she prefers speaking to me in English was also mentioned by interviewees Felix and David: the process of acquiring 'queer vocabulary and knowledge' is strongly informed by the English-speaking internet, and the German language feels inadequate or restrictive. As Nina explains:

> "I feel like **everything in German is so gendered**. […] A lot of my knowledge about queer stuff was from the English speaking internet. […] That whole vocabulary just doesn't exist in German, or can't express what I want to say."

Indeed, the restrictions of the German language emerge in conversation with Shan, too. As a grammatically gendered language, both semantic and grammatical gender is reflected in nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and accompanying articles (Hord 2016), making it difficult for a gender neutral configuration to be incorporated – a challenge for Shan, as they try to accommodate for their gender identity which does not conform to the heteronormative binary. While in English, Shan uses the pronouns they/them, they further mention how, in spoken Mandarin, the gender of the person referred to when using third person singular pronouns is unclear: he 他, she 她 and it它 are all pronounced the same way: tā. In written online conversations, the non-normative form 'ta' is used to "obscure the gender of the intended referent by transferring its oral properties to written discourse" (Sluchinski 2017). In German, however, until there is an official gender neutral pronoun, Shan uses *es* ('it') pronouns – both for grammatic simplicity, and due to lack of a better alternative.

'Denglisch' – Bilingualism, Code Switching and Translanguaging

Methods to overcome the restrictions in German felt by the interviewees were particularly striking when talking to David, who spoke to me primarily in German, but with significant parts in English, and occasionally Mandarin. David, who speaks mostly German in his day-to-day life, is also fluent in English, and speaks a mix of Mandarin and German to his family in Düsseldorf, and Mandarin to his family in China.

For most of our conversation, both David and I stuck to a German-English mixture. In particular when recalling memories with his family, David would talk in *Denglisch* (a colloquial term for the mixture of *Deutsch* (German) and *Englisch*), while quoting him and his family speaking in Mandarin. English parts of the sentence were adjusted to match the German syntax and grammatical structure of German:

„Ich hatte früher, als ich gerade mein Coming Out […] hatte ich legit so Anxiety wenn ich so zu... mit meinen Eltern zum Essen mitgegangen bin, wo halt so Chinese Parents mit dabei waren, weil ich hatte wirklich immer – das war wirklich krass – so They would always ask about school first. Und die zweite Frage war immer so ‚有女朋友吗？‘ Und for some reason that made me so anxious, obwohl ich ja nicht obliged bin, denen das zu sagen, aber ich war immer so, mein Gefühl war dann halt so dieses ‚Ich tu meine Eltern gerade in eine richtig unangenehme Situation, ‘cause they know I'm gay.‘“

„I used to have, just after I came out, I legit had such anxiety, when I like, went to go out to eat with my parents, where Chinese parents were also there, because I really always had – and that was really extreme – like, they would always ask about school first. And then the second question was always like ‘Do you have a girlfriend?’ And for some reason that made me so anxious, even though I'm not obliged to tell them, but I was always like, my feeling was like ‘I'm putting my parents in a really uncomfortable situation, ‘cause they know I'm gay’”

Some linguists refer to this seamless language mixing as code switching (CS) (Bullock and Toribio 2009 in Vuorinen 2019). David utilises CS in both intra-sentential (within a sentence, highlighted in pink), and inter-sentential (between sentence boundaries, highlighted in blue) ways. Bullock and Toribio (2009 in Vuorinen 2019) claim that bilingual speakers utilise elements from their *multiple* linguistic repertoires, depending on intentions and demands of the conversation. This is in line with traditional conceptions in which bilingualism was thought of as *additive*: someone who is a bilingual is a speaker of two *autonomous* languages (Wallace Lambert 1974 in Garcia & Wei 2013). However, as Garcia and Wei propose in their concept of translanguaging, speakers utilise *one singular*, *multilingual* language repertoire, instead of multiple *mixed* or *hybrid* ones. The practice of translanguaging “makes visible the complexity of language exchanges among people with different histories […] and releases understandings that had been buried within fixed language identities constrained by nation-state” (Garcia & Wei 2013: 21). Translanguaging therefore accounts for the cultural hybridity and transnational identities of multilinguals. This is in line with the accounts of my interviewees, whose life experiences are not contained in a singular language, and who have different emotional responses and associations to different languages depending on contexts and contents.

Conclusion – Grenzen überque(e)ren: Crossing/Queering Boundaries

The multifaceted experiences of queer Chinese-Germans necessitates and enables individuals to navigate issues of identity and belonging. Their unique positionality call into question traditional norms and definitions of the nation-state and migration, language and bilingualism, sexuality and gender roles.

Chinese-Germans challenge the common equation of ‘Germanness’ to Whiteness. At the same time, their Chinese identity persists despite being out of bounds of the Chinese nation. While resisting externally imposed racial tropes in German society, and expectations of Chinese

culture, Chinese-Germans maintain a unique identity that cannot be contained within geographically constructed borders.

As Gopinath claims, “queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation” (2005). Listening to queer non-white voices is necessary to bring Whiteness out of centre in the construction of queer German subjectivities, just as listening to non-white German voices is necessary to rethink construction of German identity as white, and listening to diasporic Chinese voices is necessary to gain an understanding of ‘Chineseness’ in a transnational frame.

Through translanguaging language practices, queer Chinese-Germans find ways to accommodate experiences and identities that cross boundaries of one language. Through engaging in fluid language practices, the interviewees resist monolingual practices which assert the boundaries socially constructed to separate plurilingualism into autonomous languages. Through finding home and claiming identity, queer Chinese-Germans affirm their multiple belongings in ways that are transnational, intersectional and queering boundaries.

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