

Queer Chinese-German Lives

Crossing/Queering Boundaries of Nation-States, Languages, and White-Heteronormativity

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This project examines the unique positionalities of queer individuals of Chinese heritage living in Germany, which transgress the limits of nation-states, languages, and white heteronormative sociocultural norms, and maps out a mosaic of issues and questions within the queer Chinese-German diaspora.

Methodology

Informed by works from the disciplines of Geography, Linguistics, Anthropology, Sociology, and Queer and Queer of Colour critique, the project is co-produced by the interviewer and four interviewees through semi-structured interviews conducted in English, German, Mandarin, or a mixture of the three, in dialogue with the interviewer.

Belonging in a society that equates 'Germanness' to Whiteness

"I will still be seen as Chinese, I will not be seen as German."

Despite living in Germany for significant parts, if not all of their lives, interviewees struggle with being seen and seeing themselves as German in a society which constructs 'Germanness' as whiteness. Efforts to change social understandings of 'German' by introducing terms such as *Deutsche mit Migrationshintergrund* exist, although colloquial language continues referring to non-white Germans as *Ausländer* ('foreigners'). Interviewees' 'Chineseness' was overall less questioned and contested than their 'Germanness'.

Between Model Minority and Yellow Peril, Hyper-sexed and de-sexualised

Growing up in Germany, interviewees recall encountering tropes ranging from the hypersexualised submissive Asian woman, and the Asian man as the undesirable, "nerdy math guy who like, really sucked with girls", to the hypersexualised, feminised ladyboy fetishized for effeminate, childlike features. Tropes originating from White Sexual Imperialism (Woan 2008) and asserting White Supremacy, continue to persist in German collective memory and media representations, without awareness of their origin.



Fig. 1 - Chinese character 舞 for 'dance' hanging in an interviewees room

One interviewee uses artistic expressions, such as dance to Kpop girl group choreographies to reappropriate the externally imposed trope to his advantage.

The limits of monolingualism and the opportunities of translanguaging

"That whole vocabulary just doesn't exist in German, or can't express what I want to say"

Interviewees lived experiences can neither be contained within the borders of a singular nation, nor of a singular language, as vocabulary, emotional connotations and contexts differ. German, as a grammatically gendered language, additionally makes accommodating for identities outside of the heteronormative binary, challenging.

he/she/it/they
他/她/它/ta
er/sie/es/?

In the interviews, interviewees use mixtures of English, German and Mandarin, partly seamlessly integrated with one another – a practice referred to as 'translanguaging' (García and Wei 2013), which accounts for the cultural hybridity and transnational identities.

References

- GARCÍA, O. & WEI, L. (2013). *Translanguaging - Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Palgrave Pivot London.
- WOAN, S. (2008) *White Sexual Imperialism: A Theory of Asian Feminist Jurisprudence*. 14 Wash. & Lee J. Civ. Rts. & Soc. Just. 275.

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