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BETWEEN INTELLECTUAL AUTONOMY AND A LACK OF ORIENTATION: PERCEPTIONS OF CHINESE STUDENTS IN GERMANY

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Title: **Between Intellectual Autonomy and a Lack of Orientation: Perceptions of Chinese Students in Germany**

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Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Selbsteinschätzung und Wahrnehmung von Chinesen und Chinesinnen, die sich zu Studienzwecken an deutschen Hochschulen aufhalten. Die Untersuchung bezieht die akademischen Leistungen der Studierenden sowie das Studienumfeld und die Studienkultur in Deutschland ein und vergleicht diese mit China. Es wurden quantitative und qualitative Erhebungsmethoden kombiniert und geeignetes empirisches Material mithilfe eines Fragebogens erhoben, der sowohl geschlossene Fragen mit vorgegebenen Antwortkategorien als auch offene Fragen beinhaltete. Darüber hinaus wurden leitfadengestützte Interviews zu Teilergebnissen geführt. Die empirischen Daten geben Aufschluss darüber, wie chinesische Studierende akademische Herausforderungen meistern. Das Studium an deutschen Hochschulen wird aufgrund der interaktiven und innovativen Lehrmethoden und der akademischen Freiheit hochgeschätzt. Die Lehrenden in Deutschland werden als respektvoll und hilfsbereit angesehen. Obwohl die Studienanforderungen in Deutschland als höher empfunden werden als in China, ist es trotzdem möglich, die Noten auf einem konstant hohen Niveau zu halten. Disziplin, Fleiß und Eigeninitiative werden als die wichtigsten Tugenden für ein erfolgreiches Studium hervorgehoben. Im Vergleich zu den deutschen Hochschulen wird der Zusammenhalt unter den Studierenden und das Konkurrenzdenken in China als ausgeprägter angesehen. Unterschiedliche Variablen wie Alter, Geschlecht, Studienfach, Heimathochschule in China, Hauptgrund für ein Studium in Deutschland und Aufenthaltsdauer wurden berücksichtigt, um divergierende und statistisch signifikante Muster auszuarbeiten.

Abstract

This article discusses the self-assessment and perception of Chinese people residing at German universities for study purposes. The investigation involves the students' academic achievement as well as study environment and academic culture and compares these to China. Quantitative and qualitative survey methods were combined, and suitable empirical material was collected utilising a questionnaire with both standardised closed answer categories and open questions. In addition, guideline-based interviews with partial findings of the evaluated questionnaire were further discussed. The empirical data presents insights on how Chinese students master academic challenges. An education obtained at German universities is favoured due to its interactive and innovative mix of methodology and academic freedom. Teachers in Germany are considered respectful and helpful. Though study requirements in Germany are perceived to be higher than in China, it is possible to keep grades at a consistently high level. Discipline, hard work and initiative are highlighted as the most important virtues for studying successfully. In comparison with German universities, cohesion among students and academic competitiveness are considered more pronounced in China. The variables such as age, gender, area of study, the home university in China, the primary reason for enrolment in Germany, and length of stay were taken into consideration resulting in divergent and statistically significant patterns.

Über den Autor

Björn Pawlak absolvierte sein Studium in den Fächern Philosophie und Soziologie an der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (Abschlussarbeit über soziale Implikationen nach Wittgensteins Sprachphilosophie). Außerdem studierte er Kommunikation und Sprache an der Technischen Universität Berlin (Abschlussarbeit über Motivationsfaktoren beim Fremdsprachenerwerb) und Chinastudien an der Zhejiang University in Hangzhou. Er unterrichtete Deutsch als Fremdsprache an der National University of Costa Rica in Heredia und arbeitete von 2013 bis 2018 als Lektor des Deutschen Akademischen Austauschdienstes (DAAD) an der Wuhan University. Dort unterrichtete er ebenfalls deutsche Landeskunde, Linguistik, Literatur und Philosophie.

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Björn Pawlak graduated in philosophy and sociology at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz (thesis on social implications in accordance with Wittgenstein's language philosophy). He further graduated in communication and language at the Technical University in Berlin (thesis was on motivational factors for foreign language acquisition), and China studies at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou. He taught German as a foreign language at the National University of Costa Rica in Heredia, and worked from 2013 to 2018 as a lecturer of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) at Wuhan University. There, he also taught German regional studies, linguistics, literature, and philosophy.

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Between Intellectual Autonomy and a Lack of Orientation: Perceptions of Chinese Students in Germany

Content

1. Background information: Chinese international students in Germany

Germany and China desire to mutually cooperate closely in terms of economy and academic exchange. A strategy paper from the *German Academic Exchange Service* (*DAAD*) states that China is a competitor in the international education markets, and to ensure a balance of interests, Germany should closely cooperate with it (DAAD, 2012: 4). From a Chinese perspective, on the other hand, it is not seen as a loss if graduates abroad do not return to China as long as they remain part of a global Chinese community: "The plan is to foster brilliant, innovative minds that can help a developing nation become developed, whether by returning to China or by entering global networks that may facilitate this passage." (Hansen, 2015).

Despite the abolished one-child policy and its rapidly ageing population structure[1], China has an extensive target group for foreign education providers and is, in number, the world's most important country of origin for international student mobility (Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung, 2018: 24). A key measure, given the demographic shift, is the ongoing educational development plan[2]: "An ageing population affects not only the number of people who are available in what used to be a 'labour' force, but it also influences the quality of that labour force. […] The challenge is going to be a massive test of our entire educational system." (China Development Research Foundation, 2014: 89ff.). The growing proportion of Chinese students also reflects the change from an industrial to a knowledge and service-oriented society (Schulte, 2014). According to the 21st social survey of *Deutsches Studentenwerk*, China has been a country of origin with an "upper middle income" since 2012, which is also evident in the socio-economic background of Chinese students abroad (Apolinarski & Brandt, 2016: 17). The offspring of the growing urban middle class, which are subject to high-performance requirements as only children, is particularly in focus and the families invest primarily in their education (e.g. excellent kindergartens and schools, tutoring or educational stays abroad). On average, around a third of a family's budget in this income class is invested in the education and later university access of their children (Baron & Yin-Baron, 2018: 134). However, it is still only a small percentage of the total population that can afford to finance their children's study abroad.

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1 Chinese society is ageing with one of the highest acceleration rates worldwide (China Development Research Foundation, 2014: 44). In China, this is seen as an immense challenge: "These elderlies made their contribution to China's society and helped lay the foundation for China's socioeconomic development. It is the responsibility of all China's society to see that they enjoy a decent life in their later years." (China Development Research Foundation, 2014: 47).

2 This is also visible in the international rankings, dominated by universities in the USA and Great Britain, of which China has moved up to the top (see Lanvin & Montero, 2019; Willmann, 2006).

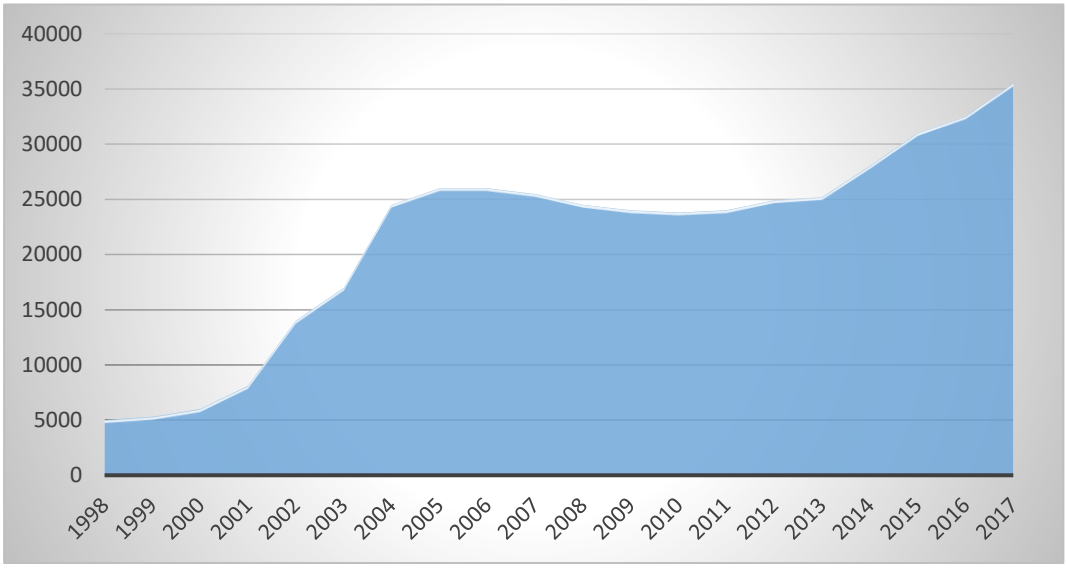
The expectations of the family providing the financing must be met accordingly, otherwise, there is a risk of stigmatisation in the Chinese society as a "garbage student" (留学垃圾, liúxué lājī) (Zhou, 2010).

Germany, hosting a population of almost 40,000 Chinese students, is one of the most crucial target countries for Chinese students abroad. The reasons for their choice are traditionally the excellent reputation of German universities, a wide range of study options and low tuition fees (DAAD, 2017a: 32). As a result of the Chinese economic rise, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Germany to persuade the best Chinese graduates of the domestic study programmes to remain beyond their studies or their doctorates and to establish themselves professionally, given that attractive programmes have been created in China which are in favour of "reverse brain drain" (Klemm, 2017). A recent OECD report further states: "Germany is one of the most attractive destinations for international university students, but its rating for foreign workers with graduate degree is just above average." (Tuccio, 2019: 39).

According to the *Akademische Prüfstelle* (*APS*), which is the Chinese requirement for all Chinese who want to study in Germany, the Chinese trend for studying abroad in Germany is declining slightly, and the number of applicants has stagnated, while other target countries have become more attractive for Chinese students (DAAD, 2019: 33). Compared to other target countries, Germany only ranks ninth on the popularity scale for Chinese foreign students (just under 870,000 worldwide in 2018). English-speaking countries, in particular, and Japan are in demand (first ranks: USA, Australia, Great Britain, Japan and Canada) (DAAD, 2019: 29). With a share of 13%, the group of Chinese students is by far the largest contingent among all international students at German universities (DAAD, 2017a: 11). In addition, the quota to which the degree is successfully completed is larger than 80% among Chinese, which is the highest compared to all other groups of international students studying in Germany (DAAD, 2017b; see also Kercher, 2018: 7).

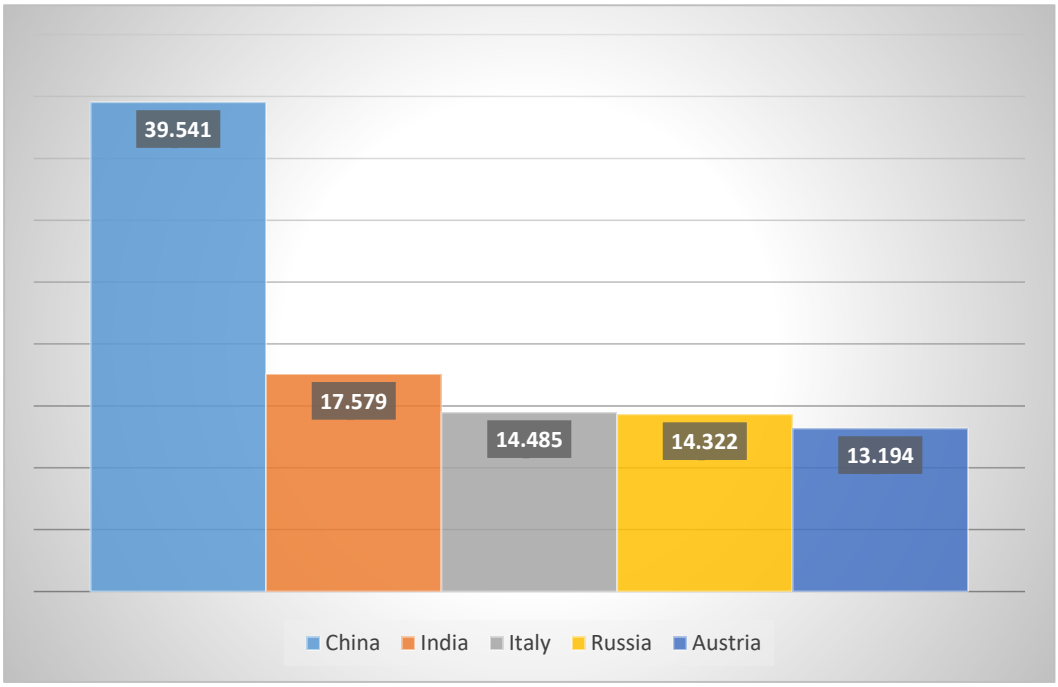
For the Chinese, the university entrance in Germany is strictly regulated: In addition to the university entrance examination (高考, Gāokǎo), the students must prove that they have at least partially completed a bachelor's degree in China.

Fig. 1: Number of Chinese students in Germany between 1998 and 2017



Source: DAAD

Fig. 2: International students in Germany (2017) according to origin: Top five countries



Source: Statista

How do Chinese students reflect on their experiences at German universities? How do they perceive similarities and differences in a student's life? Those questions were the starting point for the empirical study presented in this paper. The topic is part of a research project on migration and mobility between Asia and Europe at the Heidelberg University. The results presented below, in which initial hypotheses and methodologies were tested, are outcomes of a preliminary study on Chinese students in Germany.

2. Research questions

In educational research, culture-specific differences, especially regarding the Chinese learning culture, are described in various ways. According to the generalisation, typical learning patterns for Chinese are "strong social orientation in motivation to learn", "conventional learning methods such as self-learning", "learning in blocks", "passive attitude towards learning" and "expectations of teachers to be professional and moral role models". On the other hand, typical German patterns would be "competence and innovation orientation", "structured learning", "self-motivated learning behaviour" and "factual expectations of lecturers" (Luo & Kück, 2011). The role of the teacher, as we know from educational research, is conceptualised differently in China. Zhang summarises the typical expectations as follows:

> In China, teachers are not only teachers but also models of correct behaviour: High expectations are placed on teachers (task and relationship); teachers carry a moral responsibility for their students; students do not question teachers directly, the teacher is treated with reverence; respect of teachers is a virtue (Zhang, 2015: 69).

Against this background, the present study aims to critically examine cultural and social explanatory patterns of student behaviour, based on perceptions and self-descriptions according to the following guiding questions: What is the current perception of the Chinese students in Germany? How do they cope with local teaching habits and lecturers? Which differences are found dependent on specialisation, educational background, gender, or other subcategories? How do the Chinese fit into the broader academic life in Germany? What are specific strengths, weaknesses, and obstacles, and how do the students overcome them?

3. Methodology

The primary tool for data acquisition was a questionnaire comprising of a total of 60 questions in three sections: collection of demographic data (first section), perceived contrasts at universities in Germany and China (second section), and living conditions in Germany (third section). Open questions allowed room for written comments from the participants. The questionnaire was designed in German and then translated into Chinese. In order to reach as many Chinese students and PhD candidates in Germany as possible, primary access was made to networks of former students from the department of German studies in Wuhan, living in Germany for study purposes at the time of the survey, whom the author of this article had supervised as a lecturer in recent years. The questionnaires were also

distributed to other Chinese students studying in Germany, in multiple locations, thus, allowing subsamples to be obtained in the following cities: Berlin, Cologne, Duisburg/Essen[3], Dusseldorf, Heidelberg, Jena, Marburg, Munich and Trier. In addition, one of the contacted Chinese student associations within Germany agreed to give support and provided another partial sample from Göttingen. All subsamples were collected in the first quarter of 2019. The return of all questionnaires amounted to 192 cases[4]. The number of freely formulated open answers was relatively high, namely between 135 and 165.

Triangulation/cross-examination (see e.g. Diekmann, 2004; Flick et al., 2017): For further consolidation, five selected students at various locations were presented with relevant partial results for further discussion. The interview was partially standardised and flexible for question reformulation and varied demand strategies.

Due to the spatial distribution as well as the limited number of in-depth interviews, the results of the study are regarded as preliminary, i.e. the study does not intend to make any generalisable statements about the situation and opinions of Chinese students in Germany. Furthermore, given this constellation, specific biases regarding the high or low performance of the replying students or types of universities (origin and hosting) are possible. Nevertheless, the results, even if they do not present the whole picture as yet, may highlight specific self-assessments and patterns of perception that are of interest for further research.

4. Quantitative findings

4.1 Univariate[5]

The largest subsamples by location (indicating the study location) are Duisburg/Essen (16%), Göttingen (14%), Berlin and Trier (each 9%), and Heidelberg (each 8%)[6]. Based on the sample, the universities attended by most students were the Georg-August-University in Göttingen (26 cases), the University of Duisburg-Essen (23 cases), the University of Trier (18 cases) and the Ruprecht-Karls-University in

[3] Shared university location

[4] Depending on the dimension of the investigation, cases are excluded in the quantitative part of this study. Based on the population size of the Chinese students in Germany, the present sample, insofar as one takes it as a random sample and ignores exclusion of cases, results in a margin of error of approximately 7% at a pre-set confidence level of 95%.

[5] Missing cases are included in the following statistics.

[6] To illustrate the bias: In the population, most Chinese study at universities in North Rhine-Westphalia (23%, in my sample 31%), second most in Baden-Wuerttemberg (16%, in my sample only 8%).

Heidelberg (16 cases). Compared to the population, female students in the sample are probably overrepresented with a share of 67%, whereas the percentage of female students at Chinese universities is just over 50% (DAAD, 2017a: 21). On the other hand, according to the planned degrees, the sample should be comparable to that of the population: 52% study in master programmes, 27% in bachelor programmes, 13% plan for a doctorate. The average age is 25.45 years.

Due to the recruitment process with students from the departments of German studies (40 of the 192 cases of the complete sample), one can find significant distortions in the area of study in comparison with the total population (source for the reference values: DAAD, 2017b). The results showed that 34% study language or cultural sciences (compared to 12% of the population), 23% study social sciences, economics or law (compared to 20% of the population), 18% study mathematics or natural sciences (compared to 17% of the population), and only 13% study engineering (compared to an enormous 41% of the population), 5% study medicine (compared to 2% of the population), and 7% of the sample can only be assigned to subjects that have not yet been recorded under the previous categories. Just under half of the sample has been studying in Germany for more than two years (49%). The majority (57%) previously studied in Chinese elite universities ("211" or "985"[7]). For 59%, the language of instruction is exclusively German, for 22% it is English, and for the rest (18%) it is mixed. The vast majority of students, namely 76% of the cases, are financed by their family. A large number of the participants state that they are studying their initially desired subject (76%).

The primary motivation for coming to Germany was, to a large extent, intrinsic (for 81%). The teaching style in Germany is mostly perceived as "different" (50% say "mostly" compared to 4% "hardly"). The comparison is rated positively: 60% say that classes in Germany are more profitable for them than in China, only 7% state the opposite. Compared to China, the grades in Germany remain constant for the majority (58%), the remaining tend to be somewhat better than worse (19% compared to 16%). The performance level at German universities is rated higher than in China (50% "equal", 30% "higher"). In addition, it was noticed that in the German degree programmes, there was a larger gap between strong and weak students than in comparison to China (43% versus only 14% vice versa). There is a divided opinion regarding the strictness of teachers (18% seeing no difference, 41% state that the teachers in China are stricter than in Germany, and 36% state the opposite). Teachers at German universities are

[7] This was launched at the end of the 1990s by the *Chinese Ministry of Education* (中华人民共和国教育部, Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó Jiàoyùbù) at a high financial expenditure. It was initiated with the intension to support certain universities within the framework of an elite programme and to establish them as well-known institutions with international comparison. "211" stands for (initially) 100 outstanding educational institutions for the 21st century; "985" refers to the decision made in May 1998 and stands for (initially) ten "world-class universities" with associated research institutions.

perceived as more respectful (53%, only 5% state this regarding Chinese teachers). The image of teachers in Germany is also more favourable when it comes to the willingness to help the students: 39% find them more helpful, only 13% report this about Chinese teachers. Problems with the language (20%) and content (21%) in the classroom are not perceived as serious.

The perception of fellow students in Germany is mostly neutral (66%), and for 23% they are friendlier in comparison to those from Chinese universities. The participants perceive that the sense of community among the students in Germany is weaker than in China (accumulated 69% versus only 6% on the contrary). Simultaneously, they perceived more assertive and competitive thinking among the students in China (51%, but only 10% describe this as more pronounced among the students in Germany). The picture is clear when it comes to the question of the independence of students in Germany: 83% see them as more established than in China (44% even say "clearly stronger"). They perceive the teaching requirements in Germany concerning reading (80%), text production (66%) and oral participation demanded by the teachers (62%) as more extensive than in China. In addition, discussion in the classroom is cultivated more frequently in Germany than in China (estimation of 76%). Grade fairness is perceived somewhat more positively in Germany (accumulated 85% affirm it for Germany compared to 70% for China). The pressure to perform in the course of study is mostly based on one's expectations (63%), followed by "competition from across society" (16%). Overall, satisfaction with studying in Germany is good to moderate (72% chose, out of five answer categories, the second-best category being "reasonably satisfied"). The thought of dropping out of the studies in Germany rarely occurs (71% say "never").

The acclimatisation to everyday life in Germany was rather fast (according to 72%). The majority are satisfied with the living and leisure conditions (18% "very" and 66% "reasonably"). The social atmosphere in Germany is perceived positively (52% "rather", 7% "very positive"). The social atmosphere in China, on the other hand, is rated even better (44% "rather" and 19% "very positive"). The security situation in Germany is also considered as good (51% "rather" and 6% "very positive" versus 6% "negative"). Establishing contacts with Germans is described as difficult, namely by 61%. 69%, on the other hand, state that establishing contacts with other (non-Chinese) foreigners in Germany is rather easy. 41% say they also maintain contact with other Chinese in a non-academic environment. New "freedoms" are perceived significantly in Germany (only 14% disagree). More than half of the students state that their image of China has changed (39% "more", 13% "strongly"). More than half consider living and working in Germany for the future (57%). 69% also state that they identify with Germany (52% "rather", 17% "clearly yes").

Fig. 3: Distribution according to location (n=193)

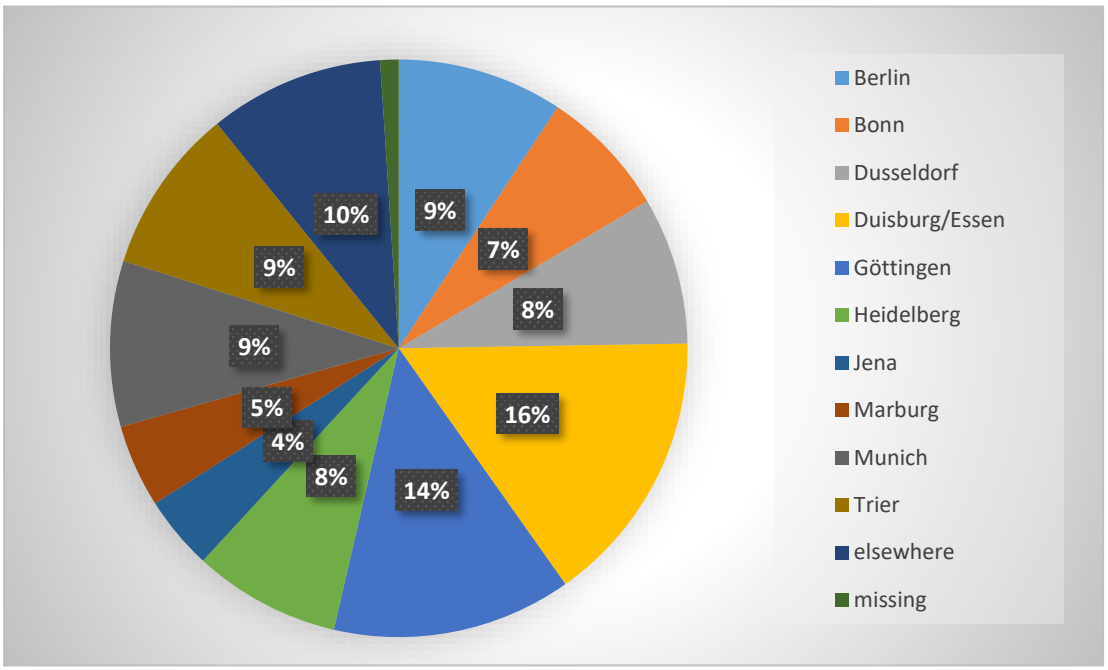


Fig. 4: Case count for age (n=193)

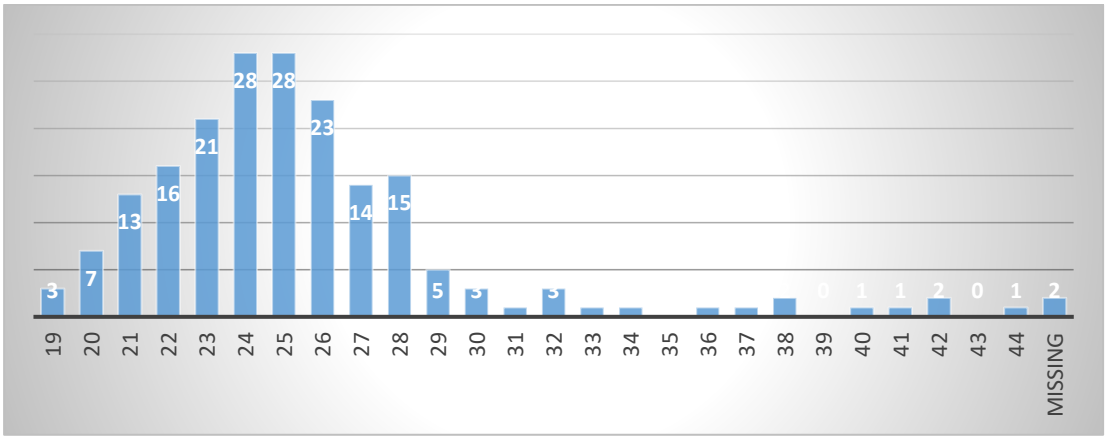


Fig. 5: Average age (n=181)

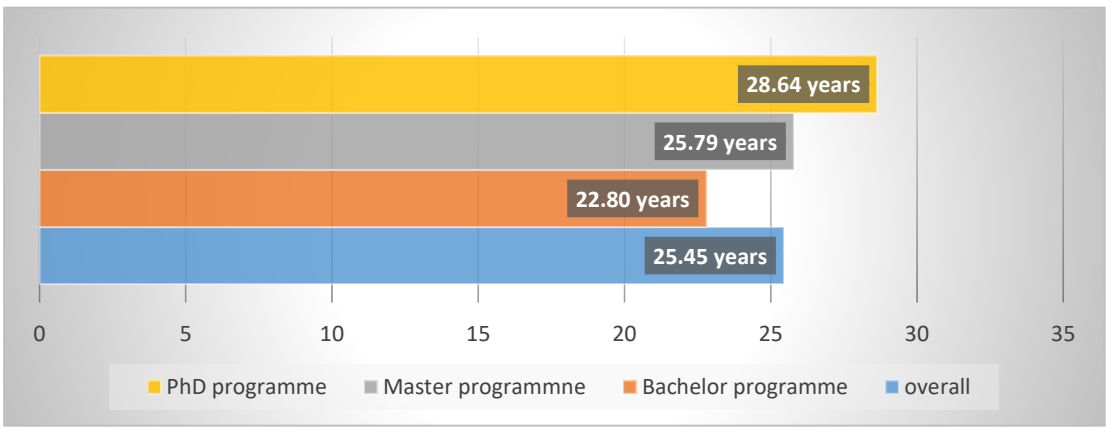


Fig. 6: Subject area vs gender (n=192)

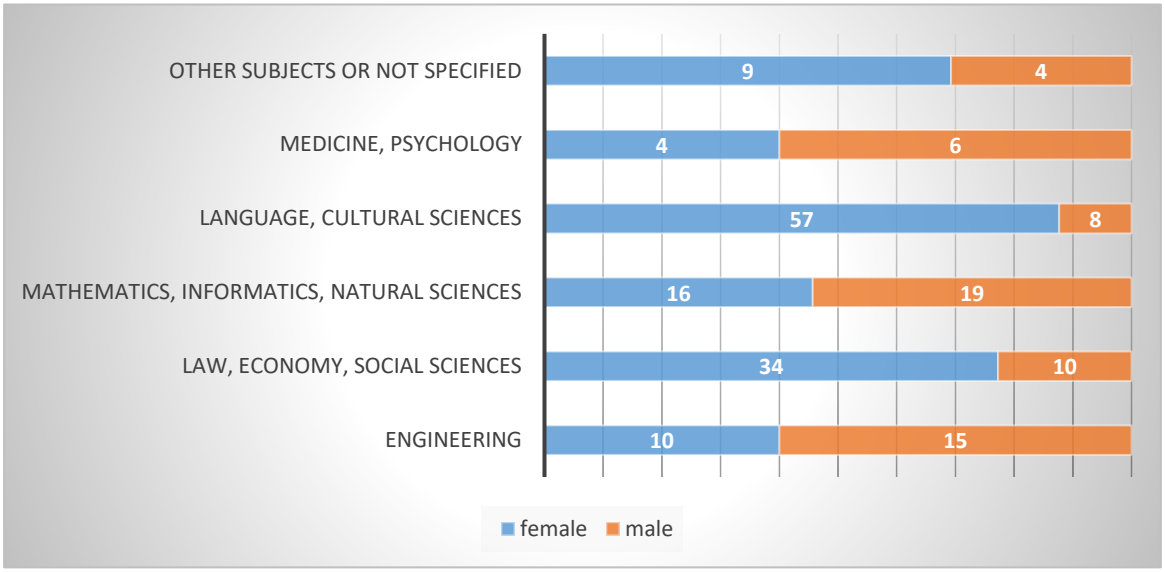


Fig. 7: Main funding vs study programme (n=164)

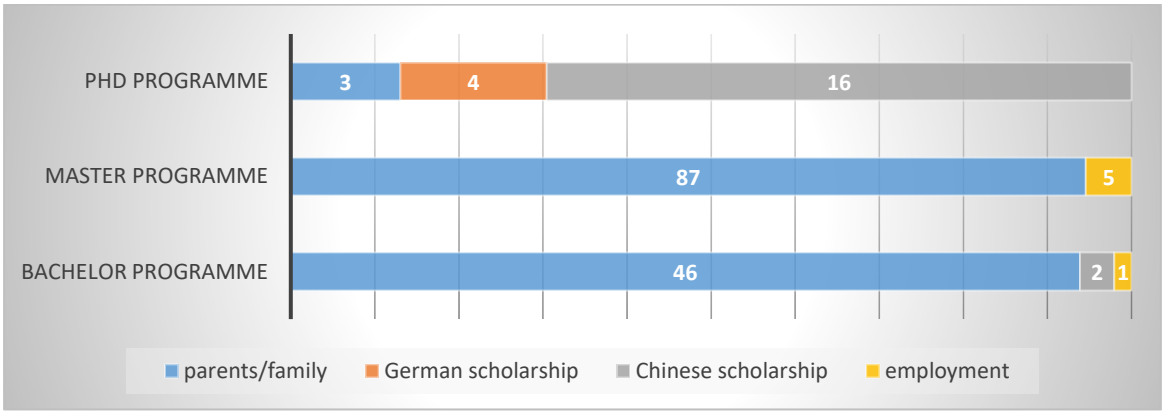


Fig. 8: Perception of the performance gap between students in Germany compared to China according to the subject area (n=171)

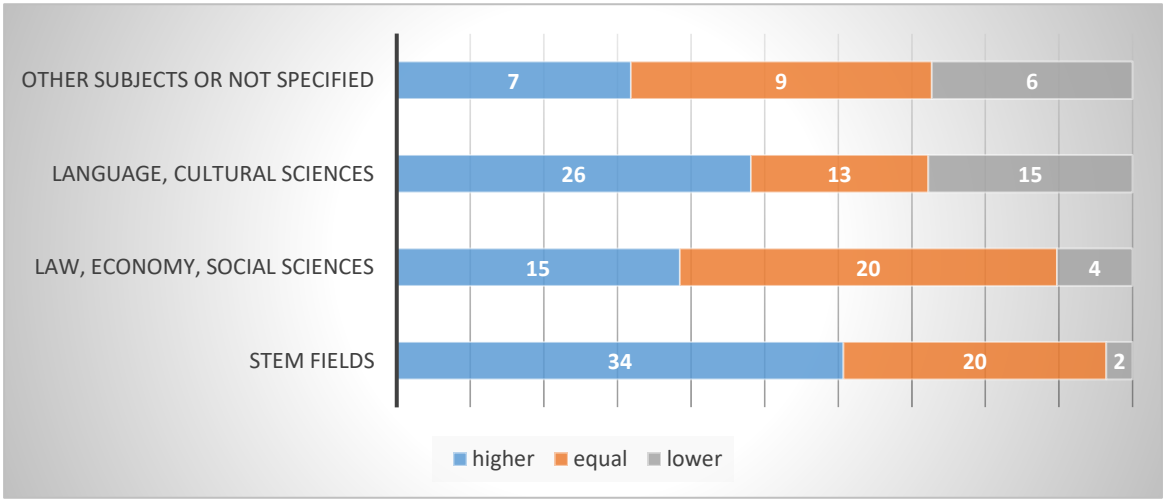


Fig. 9: Perception of the teachers' strictness in Germany compared to China (n=193)

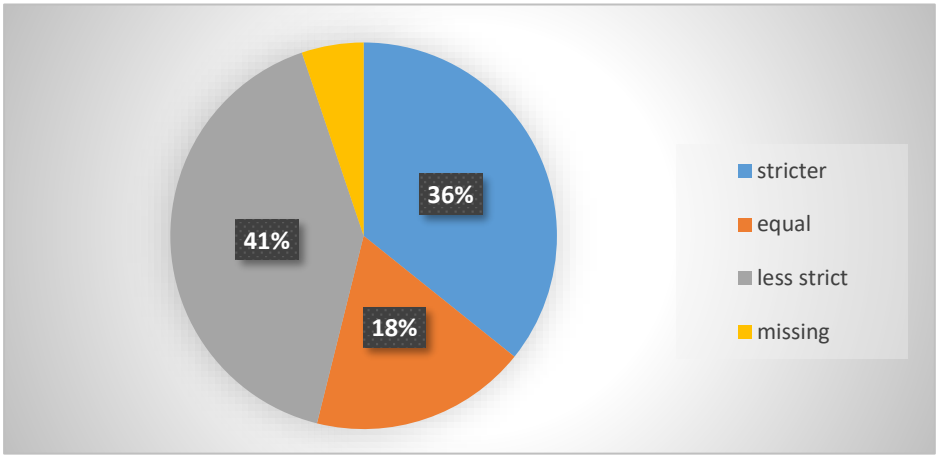


Fig. 10: Perception of the teachers' respectfulness towards the students in Germany compared to China (n=193)

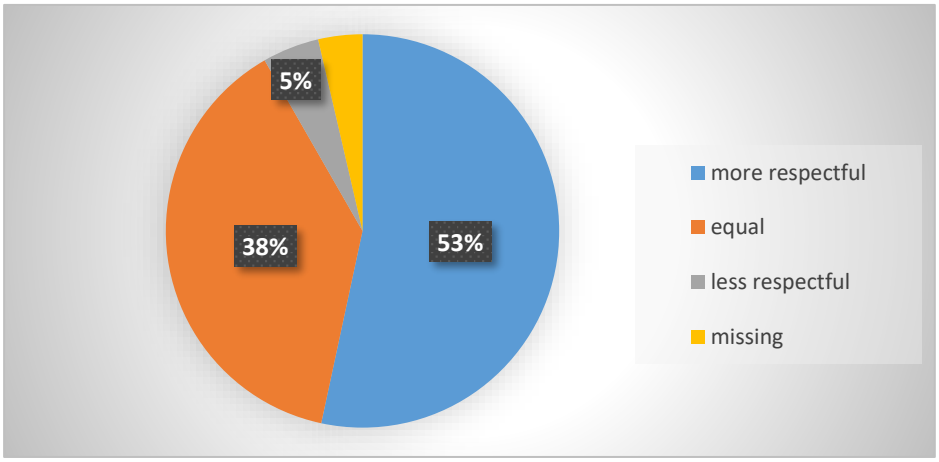


Fig. 11: Perception of the teachers' helpfulness towards the students in Germany compared to China (n=193)

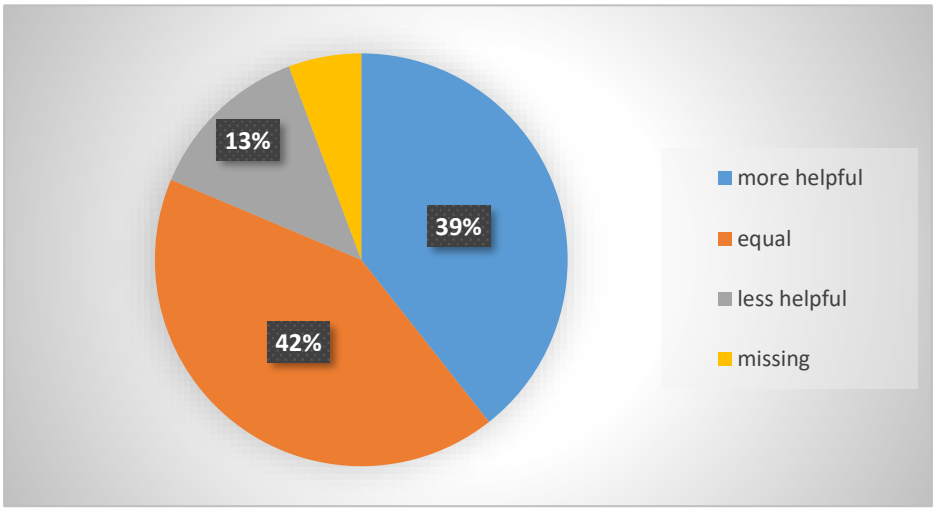


Fig. 12: Perception of the sense of community among students in Germany compared to China (n=193)

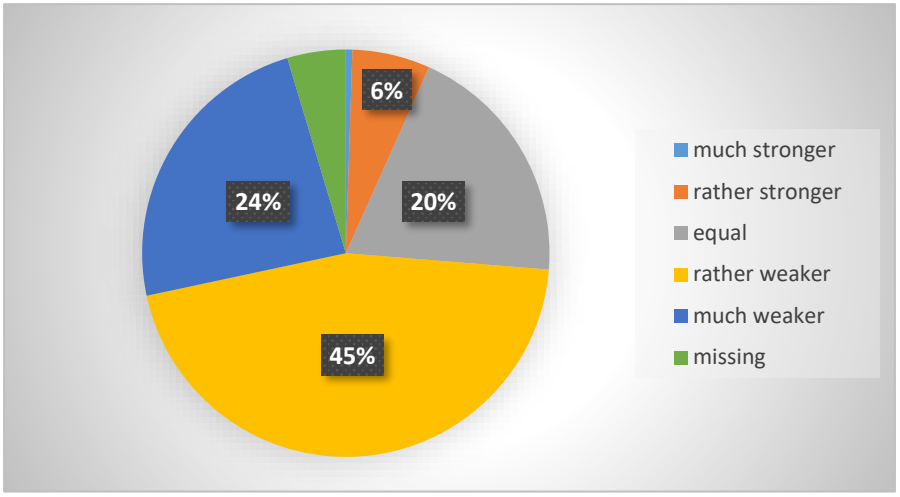


Fig. 13: Perception of the sense of competitiveness among students in Germany compared to China (n=193)

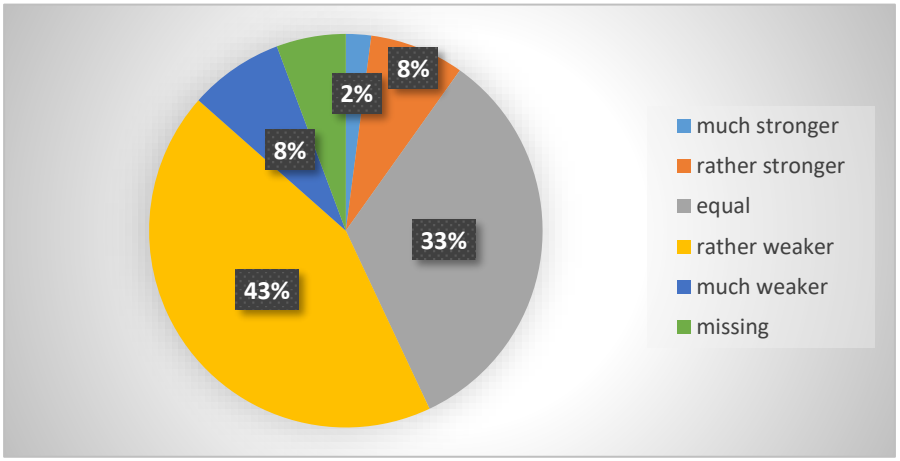


Fig. 14: Perceived study requirements in Germany compared to China: Reading (n=193)

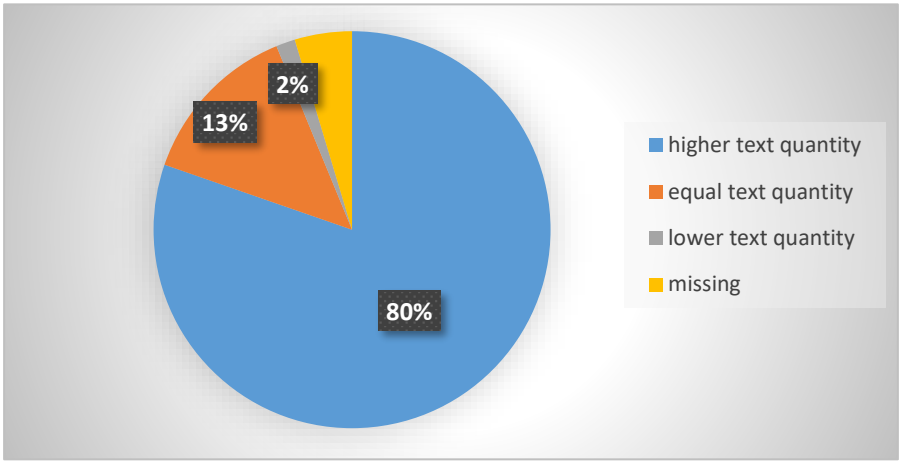


Fig. 15: Perceived study requirements in Germany compared to China: Writing (n=193)

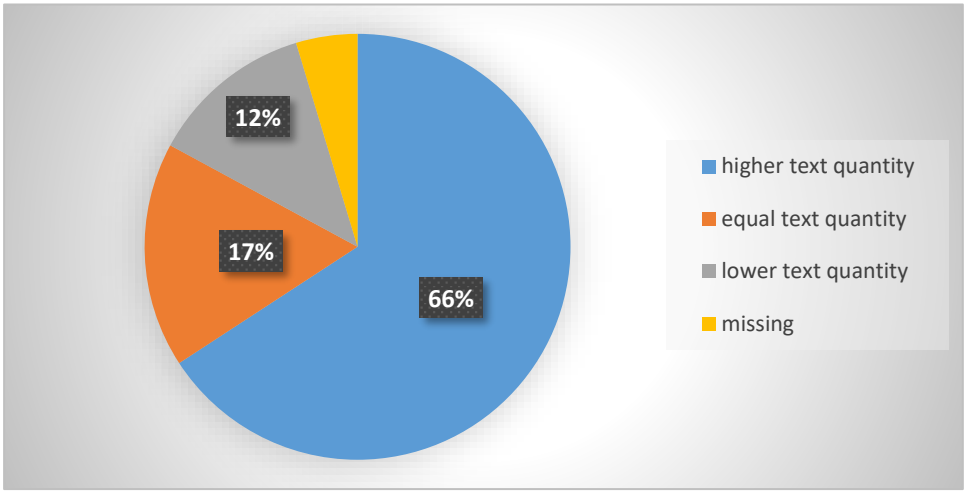


Fig. 16: Perceived study requirements in Germany compared to China: Oral participation (n=193)

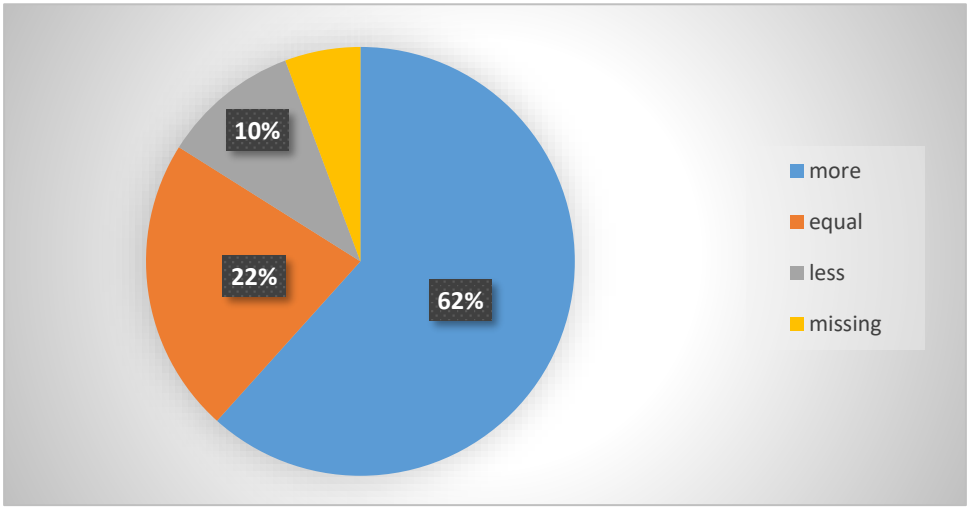


Fig. 17: Perception of the importance of debates as a method of instruction in Germany compared to China (n=193)

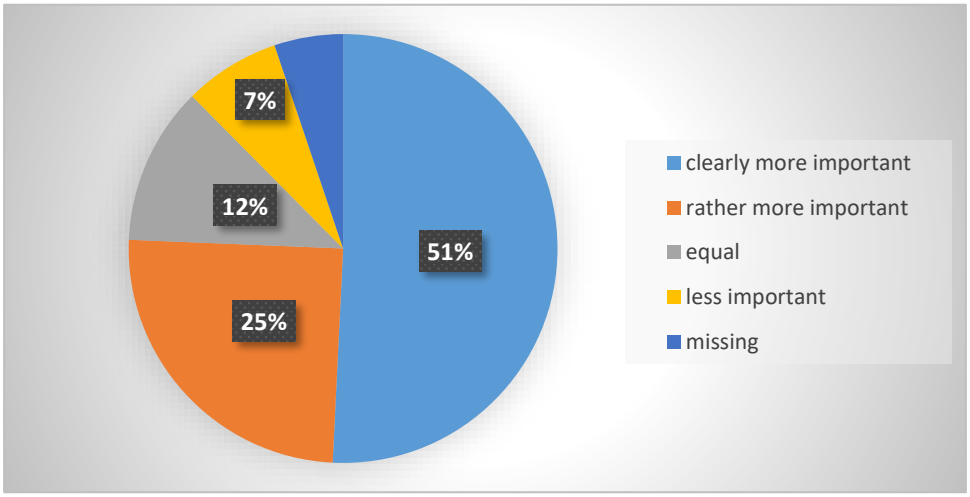


Fig. 18: Perception of grading fairness in Germany (n=193)

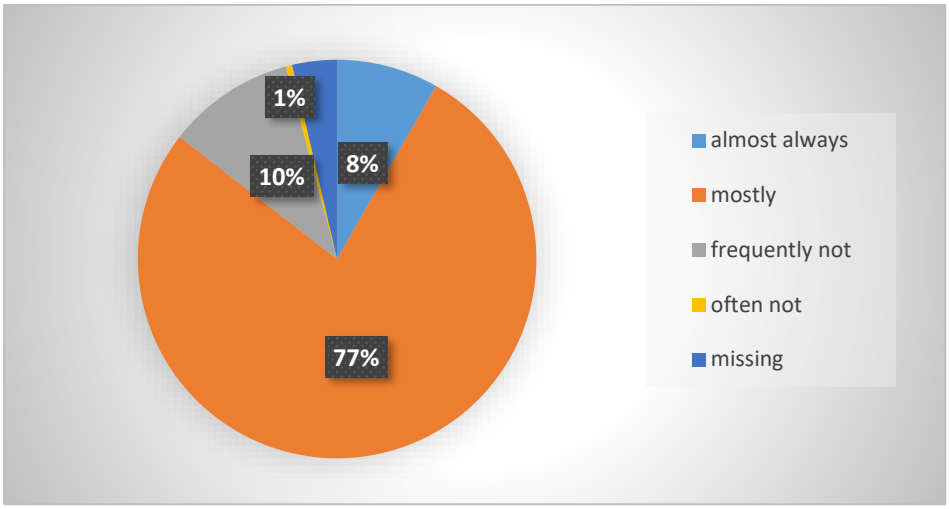


Fig. 19: Perception of grading transparency in China (n=193)

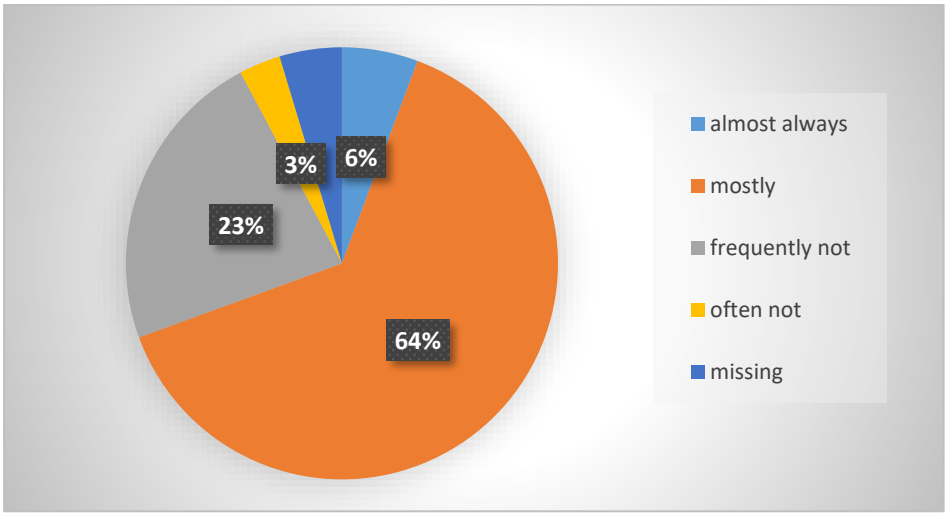


Fig. 20: The primary source for pressure to perform at university (n=193)

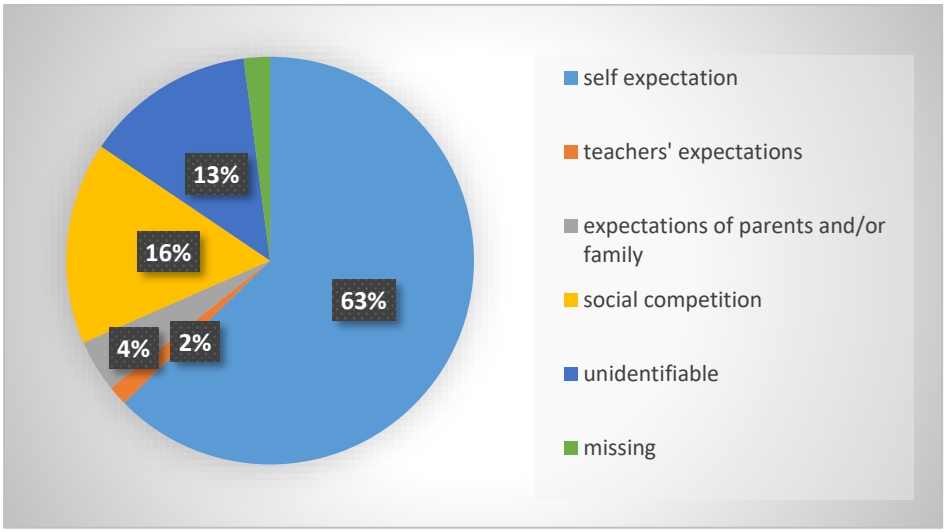


Fig. 21: Satisfaction level with studying in Germany (n=193)

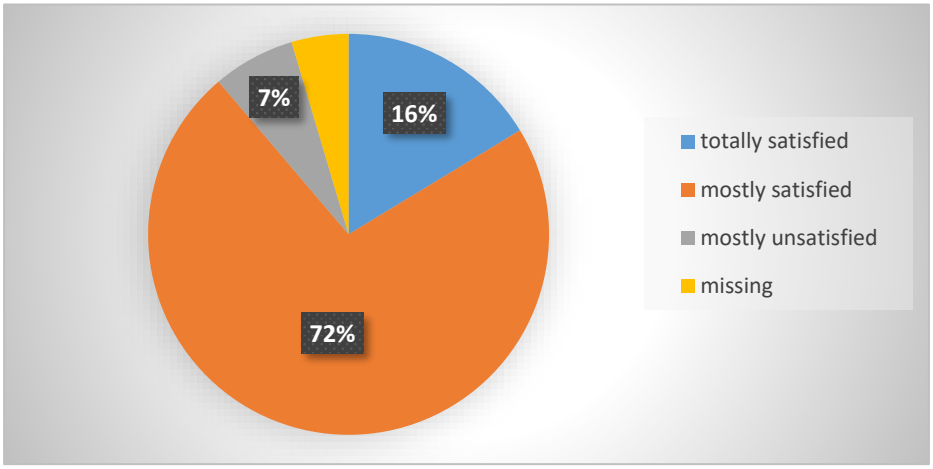


Fig. 22: Thoughts of dropping out of studies in Germany (n=193)

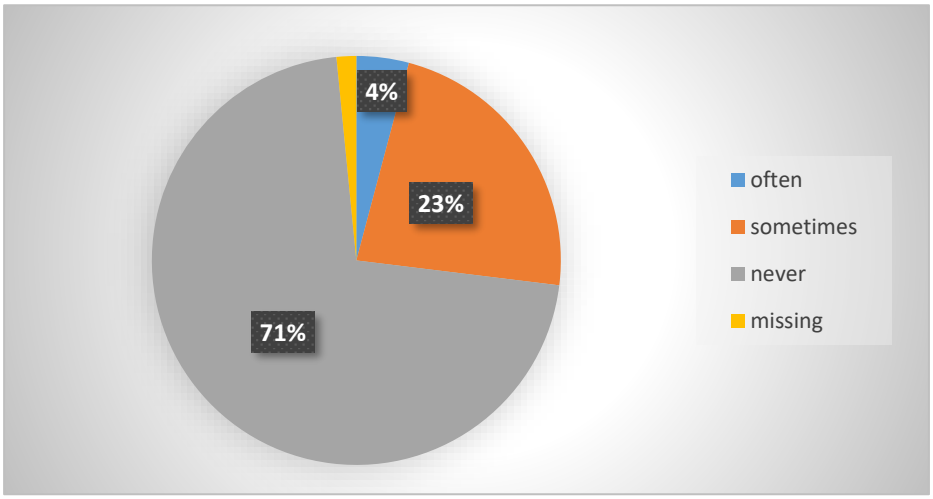


Fig. 23: Perception of the social atmosphere in Germany (n=193)

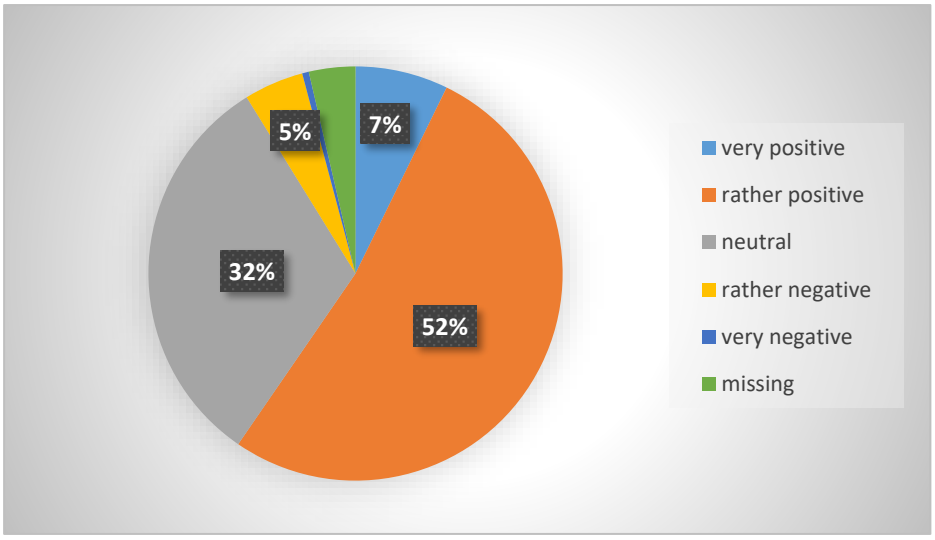


Fig. 24: Perception of the public safety situation in Germany (n=193)

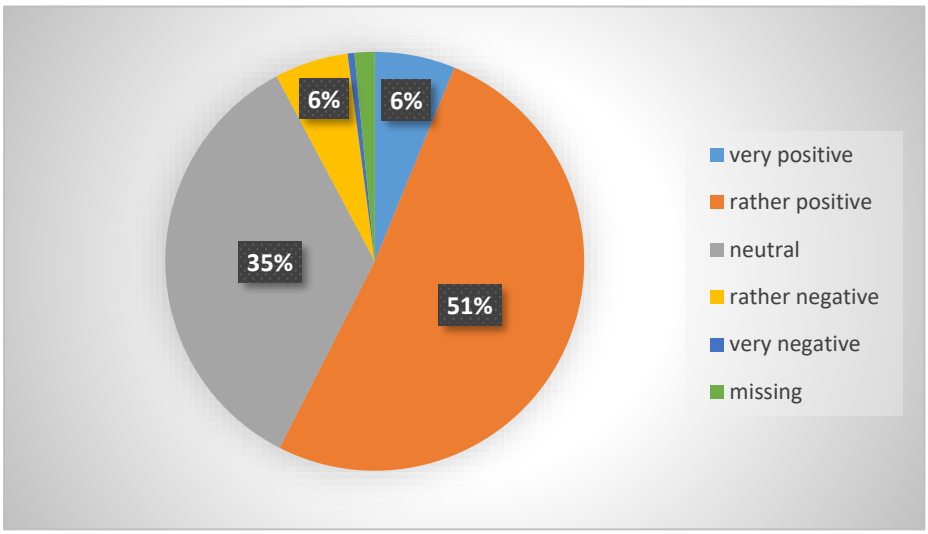


Fig. 25: Perceived ability of socialising with German locals (n=193)

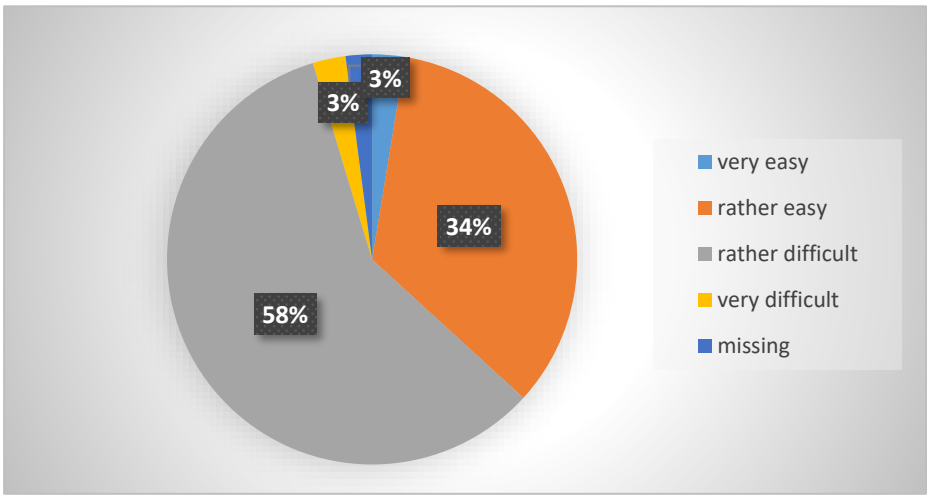


Fig. 26: Perceived ability of socialising with other (non-Chinese) foreigners in Germany (n=193)

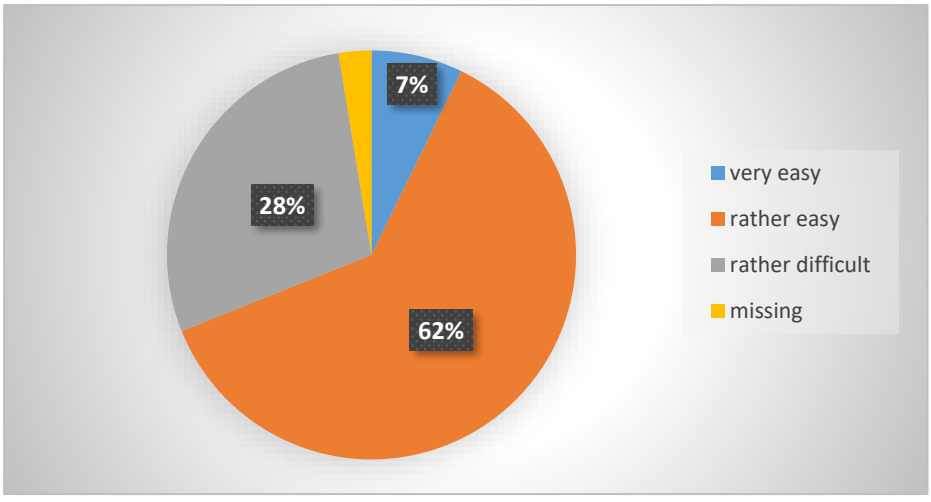


Fig. 27: Environment for contacts with other Chinese in Germany (n=193)

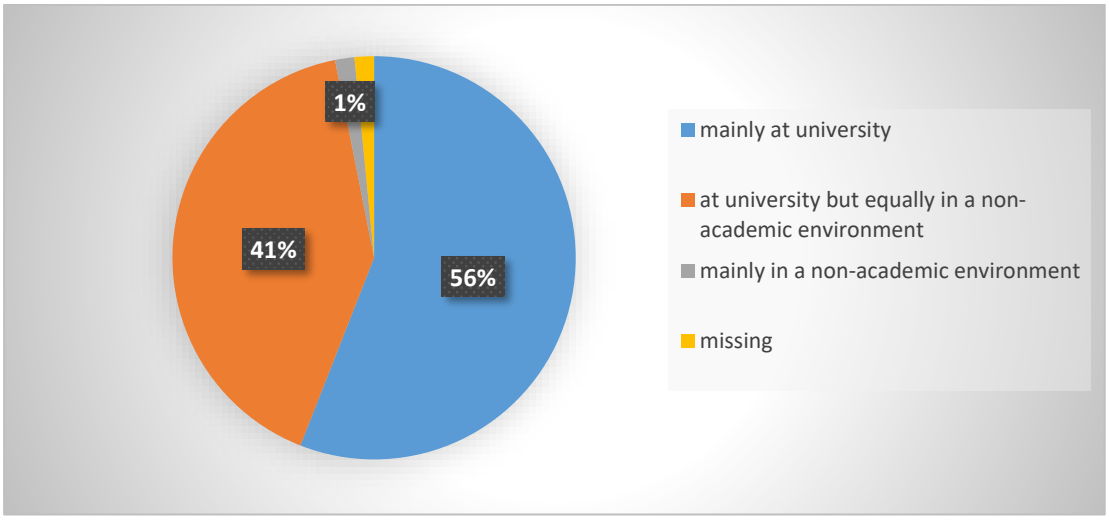


Fig. 28: Change of one's image of China after studying in Germany (n=193)

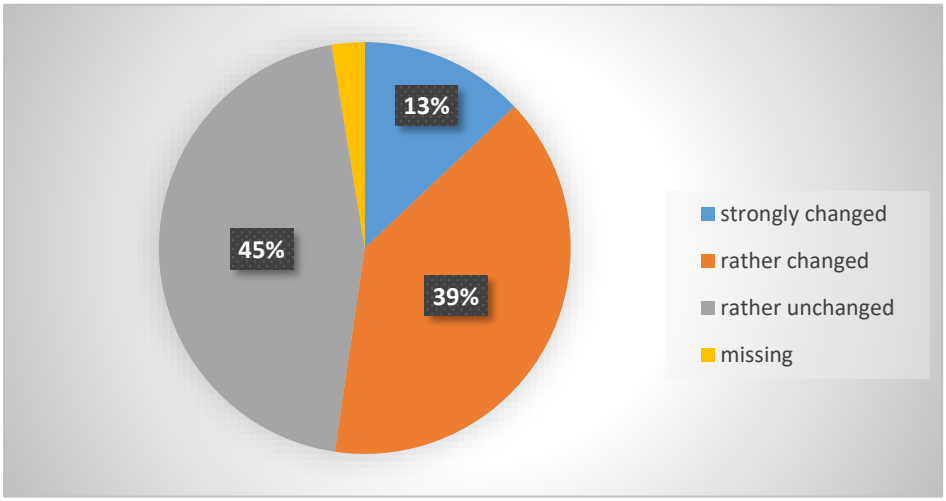
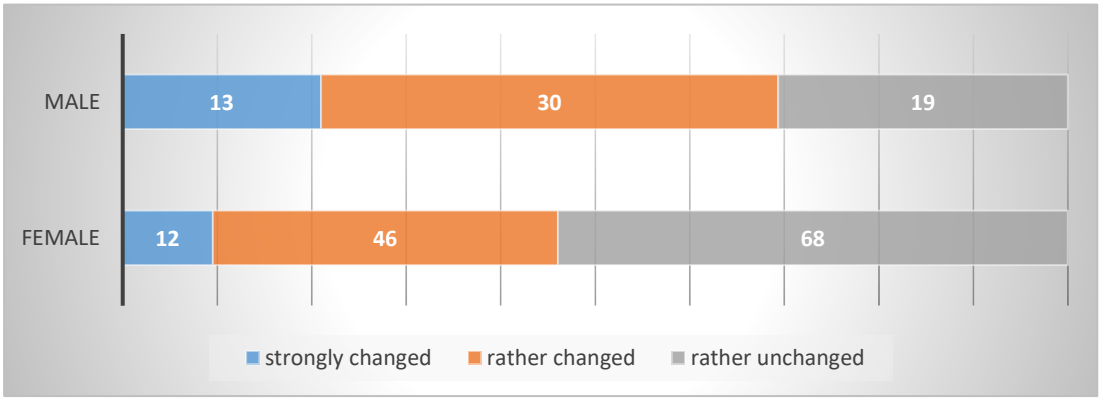


Fig. 29: Change of one's image of China after studying in Germany according to gender (n=188)



4.2 Bivariate/multivariate[8]

Age: For the bivariate analysis, the respondents were divided into two groups: "younger students" (up to 24 years) and "older students" (from 25 years on). Older students are rather intrinsically motivated concerning the demand of their studies: 70% in contrast to 56% of younger students (other selectable answers about main sources of performance pressure were social competition and influence of parents/teachers)[9]. Older age correlates significantly with the perception of the German teachers' willingness to help the students and their respect towards the students[10]. Older students rate both significantly differently, namely higher[11]. This effect is also confirmed, based on a different hypothesis. When the mean of the separated questions regarding the teachers' respect towards the students and their willingness to help is calculated, the older students have a significantly higher positive teacher image than the younger ones[12]. Older students also seem to establish contacts more easily. This effect does not show up when meeting other Chinese or Germans, but with people from all other countries of origin: More than 62% of the younger students reported that this was difficult for them, contrary to the 38% of the older students[13].

Gender: The next hypothesis also concerns the image of the students for their teachers. It was examined whether there is a connection between gender and positive or negative assessment of teachers in Germany. Questions were asked (see above) about the perception of helpfulness and respect of the teachers towards the students. The results determined that there is a significant connection with gender and the willingness to help[14] and perceived respect[15]. Men, rather than women, have a more positive image of the teachers in Germany compared to the Chinese academic environment. However, this effect can be explained by another influencing variable. Likewise, the next hypothesis which turns out to be significant, is that women feel more strongly than men that the requirements for studying in Germany, disregarding requirements of the foreign language, are higher compared to Chinese universities.

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8 The confidence level of all subsequent analyses is 95%.

9 n = 188; Chi-square (4) = 9.541; p = 0.049; This test shows whether there is a connection between two categorical variables. It is not a measurement of the direction of the connection which requires a closer look at the corresponding crosstabs.

10 Three answer categories of the questionnaire: the lower the value, the more positive the image of the teacher in Germany.

11 1) willingness to help: n = 182; Chi-square (2) = 7.69; p = 0.021; 2) respect: n = 182; Chi-square (2) = 6.86; p = 0.032.

12 By calculating the arithmetic mean for both questions (five values at a distance of 0.5 between 1 and 3), the lower the value, the more positive the teacher image; t-tests for independent samples: The mean is 1.73 for the younger (n = 84; SD = 0.52) and 1.51 for the older (n = 97; SD = 0.54). The Levene test, which checks for homogeneity of variance, shows no significance (F (1; 179) = 0.15; p = 0.698). The test statistics for the t-test become significant (p = 0.006; t = 2.81; df = 179). The effect size according to the correlation coefficient r is 0.206, which is in the weak to medium range.

13 n = 187; Chi-square (2) = 7.78; p = 0.020

14 n = 182; Chi-square (2) = 19.23; p = 0.000

15 n = 186; Chi-square (2) = 8.43; p = 0.015

The unequal distribution of the gender overlays both effects mentioned above according to subject areas. Males tend to study in the STEM subjects (sample: 55% of men, but only 20% of women). "STEM" abbreviates the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (see next section). Males are more often negative about the social atmosphere they perceive in Germany (14% versus 2% among women)[16], but both values are relatively low. It can also be observed that men are more likely than women to have contact with Chinese people outside the academic context (55% versus 36%)[17]. A higher level of life satisfaction in Germany on the part of female students from China, such as ascertained by Zhang et al. (2010) in a partly similar quantitative study, cannot be confirmed based on the sample evaluated here. The assumption of better psychological and socio-cultural adaptability of female students in Germany, as was shown in the study by Zhang (2015: 138), cannot be supported through the quantitative analysis either, though the in-depth interviews shed some light on these findings (see below). On the other hand, the following hypothesis was confirmed based on the survey values: Compared to women, men indicate significantly more often that the image of the Chinese homeland has changed[18]. An evaluation of the open questions will show (see below) that China often appears in an even more positive light than before.

Subject area: The distribution among the subjects shows a high concentration of males in engineering, natural sciences, mathematics, computer science and medicine. In contrast, higher female concentration appears in languages and cultural studies as well as in social, economic and legal sciences. The findings fit in with the total population of Chinese students. Yang & Gao (2019) summarise in their study on the lower proportion of Chinese women in the STEM subjects[19]:

> In 2015, there were 3,585,940 college graduates in China. Among them, female students accounted for 52.4% (Ministry of Education of China, 2015). However, the phenomenon of missing women in STEM fields is still evident. In 2015, there were a total of 5,482,528 research and development personnel. Among them, women accounted for only 26.56% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016). Furthermore, there were 1,613 academics in the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering. Among them, only 5.52% were women.

An exclusive comparison of the most frequent subject areas based on the data (language/cultural studies for women versus STEM subjects for men) shows that the additional effort in Germany (requirements of the reading, paperwork, oral presentation and participation in technical discussions)

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16 n = 186; Chi-square (4) = 11.23; p = 0.024

17 n = 190; Chi-square (2) = 6.02; p = 0.049

18 n = 188; Chi-square (2) = 10.43; p = 0.005

19 Against the background of the shortage of skilled workers, the recruitment of workers with STEM qualifications is a high priority for Germany's political agenda, with the Chinese increasingly coming into focus (see Zhang, 2016: 86).

is perceived more clearly in the language and cultural studies subjects than in the STEM subjects[20]. This trend is also confirmed individually in the Chi-square tests. In each case, a greater increase in requirements in language and cultural studies was perceived. It turns out that it is not the gender, but rather the affiliation to the subject that is related to the stronger or weaker perceived additional academic effort in Germany compared to China[21]. The same method can also be applied to testify the previously observable relationship between the perception of the teacher and gender. Due to this, an index from the two questions, respect and willingness to help, regarding the perception of the teacher was created[22]. As with gender, the affiliation to a subject area (language and culture versus STEM) shows that there is a connection: In the STEM area, the perception of respect and willingness to help on the part of teachers at German universities is higher[23]. A regression analysis had to be carried out again to determine the dominant correlation. The results showed that affiliation to the subject area is decisive, and not gender[24]. There are other peculiarities of the STEM students (in each of the following cases in the exclusive comparison with the students of the language and cultural sciences): In comparison to China, a more significant performance gap is perceived between stronger and weaker students (the answer category "clearly" was chosen five times more often)[25]. Concerning general adaptation in Germany, STEM students say it takes them longer to adapt (32% versus 24% in language and cultural studies)[26]. Students of the STEM subjects, in comparison to students of language and cultural studies, state more rarely that intrinsic motivation was their decisive factor for choosing Germany as a study location (77% versus 91% in language and cultural studies)[27].

University type in China: Do people previously enrolled at 211/985 universities find it easier to adapt to their studies in Germany because they have already been more challenged in their home country

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20 By calculating the arithmetic mean for both questions (nine values at a distance of 0.25 between 1 and 3), the lower the value, the higher the perceived increase in study requirements; t-test for independent samples. The mean for language and cultural studies is 1.19 (n = 62; SD = 0.32) and for STEM subjects 1.44 (n = 55; SD = 0.49). The Levene test, which checks for homogeneity of variance, shows significance (F (1; 115) = 16.56; p = 0.000), so variance heterogeneity can be assumed. The test statistics for the t-test (with Welch correction) become significant (p = 0.002; t = 3.23; df = 91.40). The effect size according to Pearson's correlation coefficient r is 0.32, which is in the middle range.

21 Multiple linear regression analysis: The model as a whole becomes significant (F (2; 114) = 6.43; p = 0.002), but now only the factor subject area (t-test for the regression coefficient of the subject area: t = 2.38; p = 0.019; constant: t = 6.36; p = 0.000). (The independent variables gender (1 = woman or 2 = man) and subject area (1 = language and culture or 2 = STEM), each with two categories, were used like dummy variables when performing the regression analysis.)

22 Arithmetic mean, calculated from the three values: the lower the value, the more respectful or helpful the teacher is in the perception of the students

23 By calculating the arithmetic mean (five values at a distance of 0.25 between 1 and 3), the lower the value, the higher the perceived respect or willingness to help; n = 119; Chi-square (4) = 17.88; p = 0.001

24 Multiple linear regression analysis: The model as a whole becomes significant (F (2; 116) = 3.44; p = 0.035), but now only the factor subject area (t-test for the regression coefficient of the subject area: t = - 2.55; p = 0.012; constant: t = 11.06; p = 0.000). (The independent variables gender (1 = woman or 2 = man) and subject area (1 = language and culture or 2 = STEM), each with two categories, were used like dummy variables when performing the regression analysis.)

25 n = 110; Chi-square (4) = 20.05; p = 0.000

26 n = 122; Chi-square (1) = 4.06; p = 0.035

27 n = 125; Chi-square (2) = 5.99; p = 0.050

and have also received better preparation for studying abroad? In the perception of the increased study-specific requirements, only a correlation between the text production to be performed and the type of university in China can be observed. Former 211/985 students feel less strongly that the claim in this regard has increased in Germany[28]. In addition, the former students of the 211/985 institutions also perceive less strongly that the general level at the German university is more advanced than in China (25% compared to 41% of those previously enrolled at other state universities in China)[29].

The primary reason for enrolment in Germany: Getting used to everyday life correlates with the main reason for the choice to study in Germany and takes place significantly faster with intrinsic motivation. Those students who came primarily at the request of the family or on the advice of teachers are more likely to need more time to adapt to living in Germany[30]. The idea of dropping out of study also affects students stronger when indicating that studying in Germany was mainly a decision on the advice of parents or teachers[31].

Length of stay: Those who have been studying in Germany for a more extended period are more likely to get better grades[32]. Furthermore, the teachers' respectfulness towards the students in Germany is perceived to be stronger, the longer someone has been studying in Germany[33]. The same applies to the perception of the teachers' willingness to help[34].

5. Evaluation of the freely formulated answers

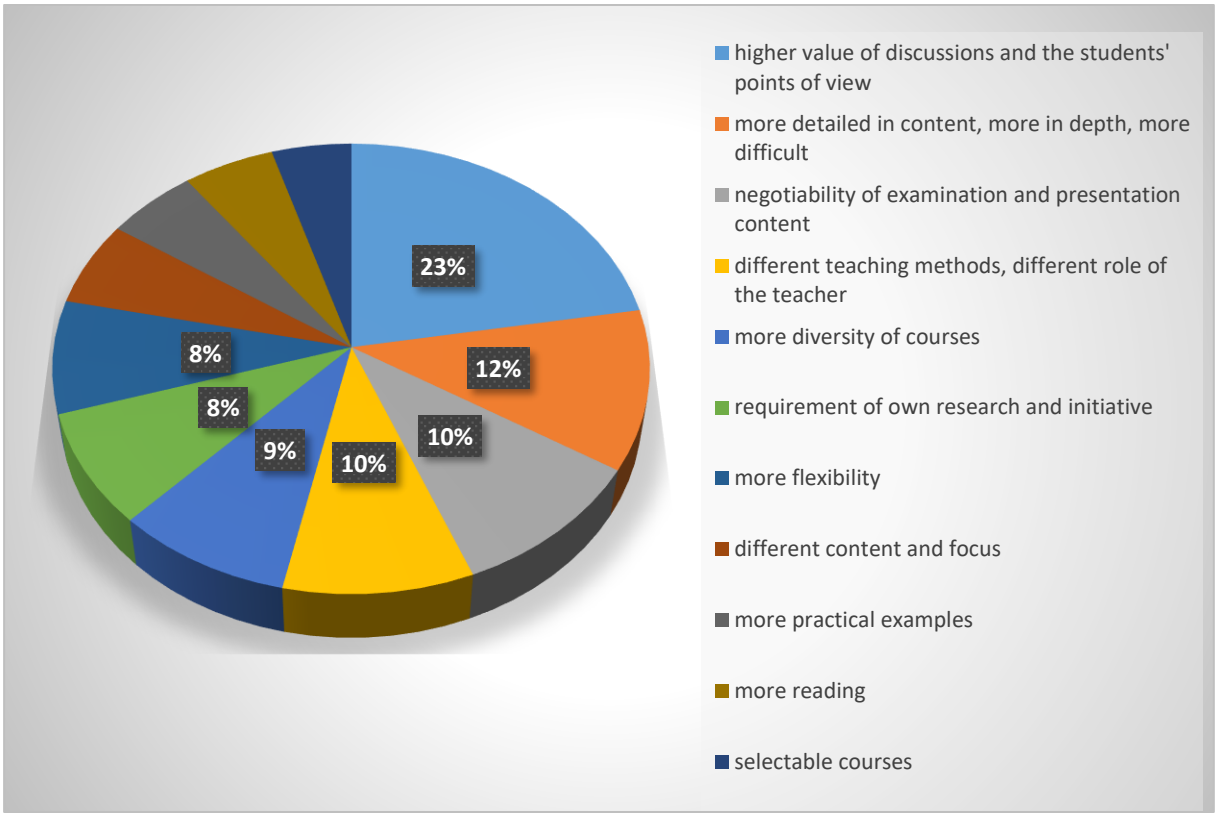
Regarding the freely formulated answers to the open questions, the study gains the desired explorative character. The response rate within all questionnaires of the sample (n = 192) ranged from 71% (136 cases) to 86% (165 cases). Overall, it was necessary to sift through 1,231 individual freely formulated answers (the majority in Chinese[35]) from the relevant eight questions. It would be worth looking at the entire facet of the partial responses, which have been extracted and categorised according to the similarity principle (several individual responses can therefore be found in each case's answers). This would be a valuable process, making the dimensions visible, not only in width but also in depth. At this

28 n = 163; Chi-square (2) = 8.08; p = 0.018
29 n = 154; Chi-square (3) = 8.66; p = 0.034
30 n = 184; Chi-square (2) = 10.2; p = 0.006 (comparison of the answers with the three categories "own drive", "family or teacher" and "coincidence" as main factor for the choice to study in Germany)
31 n = 189; Chi-square (6) = 29.36; p = 0.000
32 n = 179; Chi-square (6) = 13.15; p = 0.041
33 n = 186; Chi-square (6) = 14.85; p = 0.021
34 n = 182; Chi-square (6) = 13.20; p = 0.040
35 The entire text corpus was translated into German with the help of master students of German studies at Wuhan University and then evaluated by the author.

point, however, the most common aspects are presented in order to highlight dominant answer patterns.

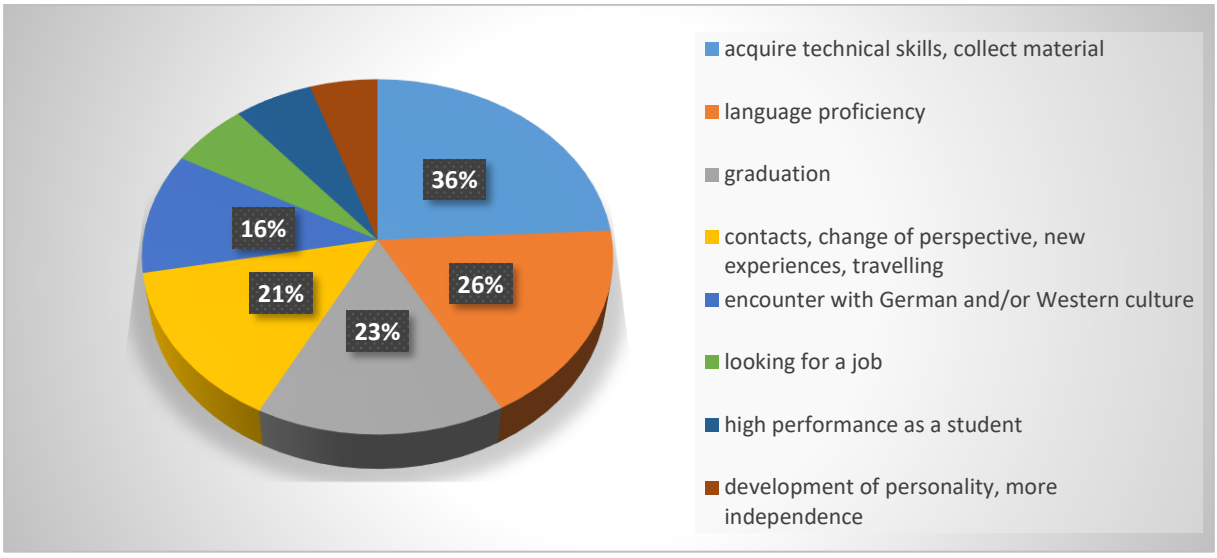
How do teaching styles in Germany differ from those in China? (n = 146): Most prominent is the partial answer that the students' authentic points of view and discussion were more important in Germany (23%). It follows that the lessons in Germany were more detailed, more in-depth, and more difficult (12%). Examination topics would be negotiable and oral sub-performances, such as presentations, would be included in the grade (10%). 10% answered that the teaching methods were not alike, and that the teaching role was differently interpreted. The courses would be conceived differently in terms of content and topic (9%), and self-research and initiative were more relevant (8%). Teaching in Germany would be handled with more flexibility (8%).

Fig. 30: Perceived teaching differences in Germany compared to China (n=146)



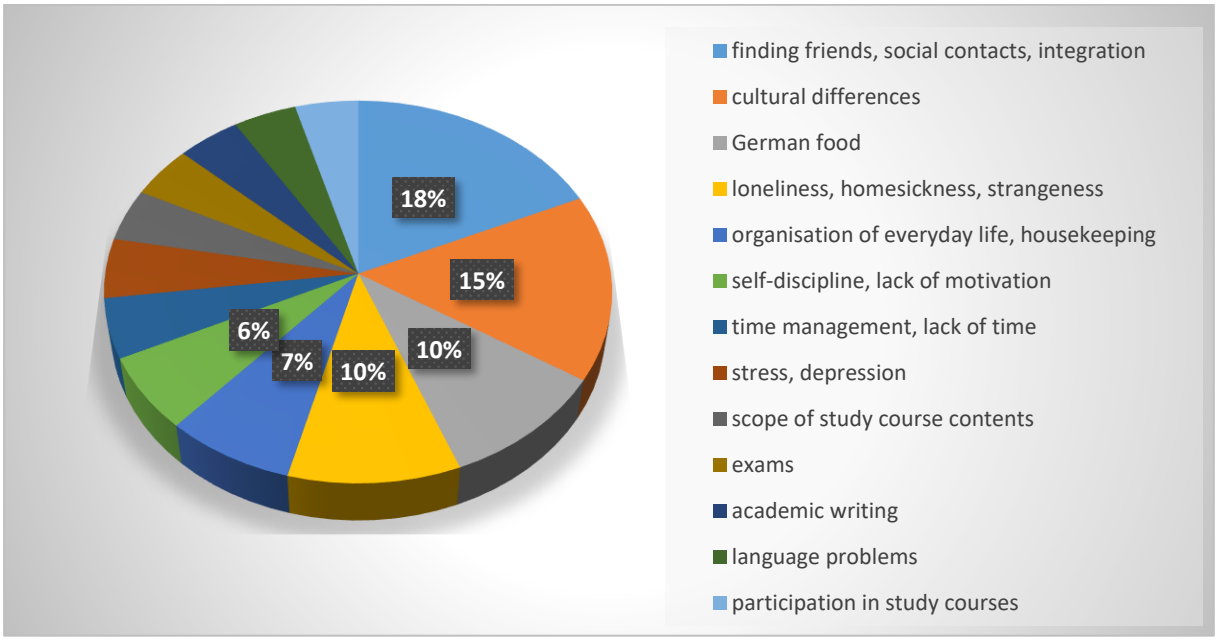
What are the expectations of studying in Germany? (n = 159): The acquisition of technical skills and the collection of relevant study material are mentioned (36%). Thereafter, language skills (26%), successful completion (23%), travel/experience/social contacts (21%) and encounter with German and Western culture (16%).

Fig. 31: Expectations regarding studying in Germany (n=159)



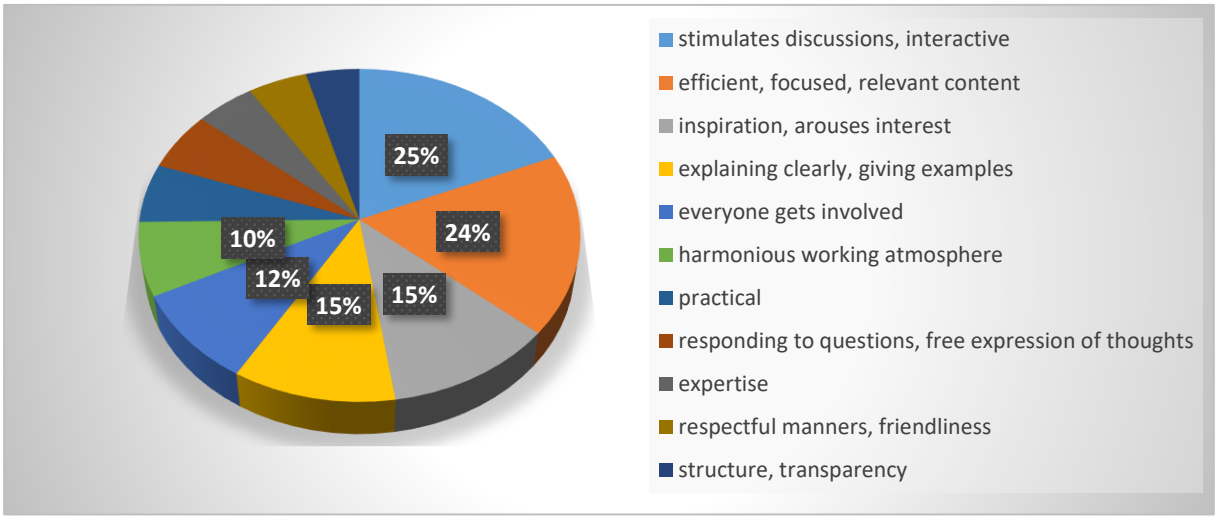
What are the obstacles when studying in Germany? (n = 165): Most frequently mentioned are searching for friends, socialising and integration (18%). There are also adjustment problems concerning cultural differences (15%), German food (10%), loneliness/homesickness/strangeness (10%), the organisation of everyday life/housekeeping (7%) and self-discipline/lack of drive (6%).

Fig. 32: Obstacles while studying in Germany (n=165)



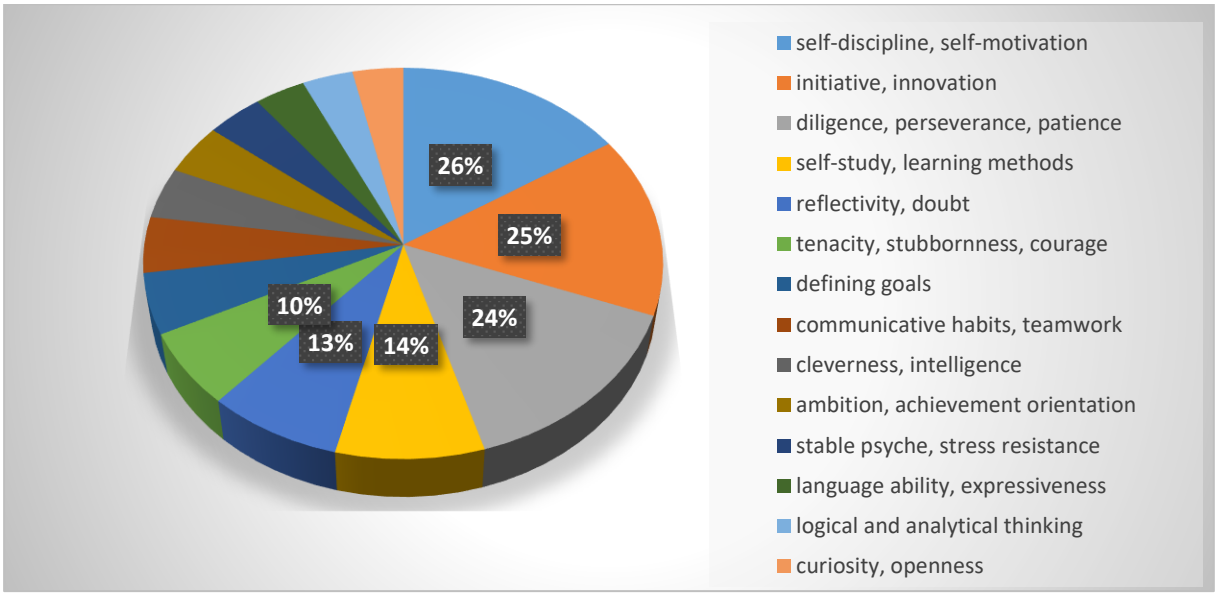
What is good teaching? (n = 155): Listed as most important is an interactive teaching design and that discussion is stimulated (25%). Many Chinese students state that they are willing to disclose their point of view to other participants in the class. The esteem for efficient, focused and content-relevant teaching (24%) is also prominent. The following points are mentioned next: inspiration/arousing interest (15%), understandable explanations and examples (15%), the participation of all attendants (12%) and a harmonious working atmosphere (10%).

Fig. 33: Demands regarding good teaching (n=155)



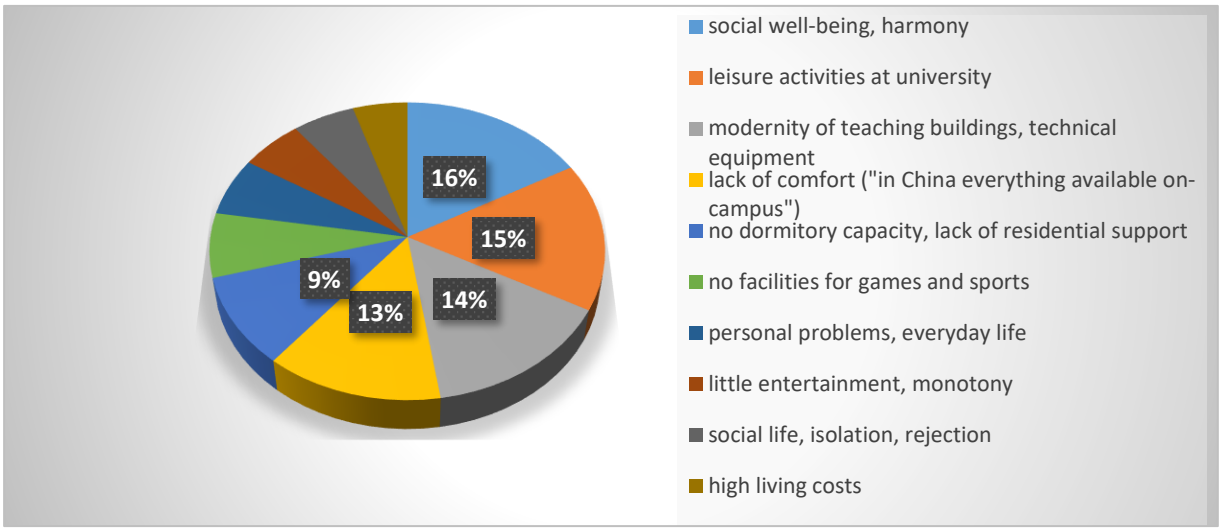
What makes a successful student? (n = 159): On top of the list rank self-discipline/self-motivation (26%), initiative/innovation (25%) and hard work/persistence/patience (24%). Self-study/methodical learning (14%) and reflectivity/doubt (13%) were mentioned as well as stubbornness/courage (10%).

Fig. 34: Demands regarding study ability (n=159)



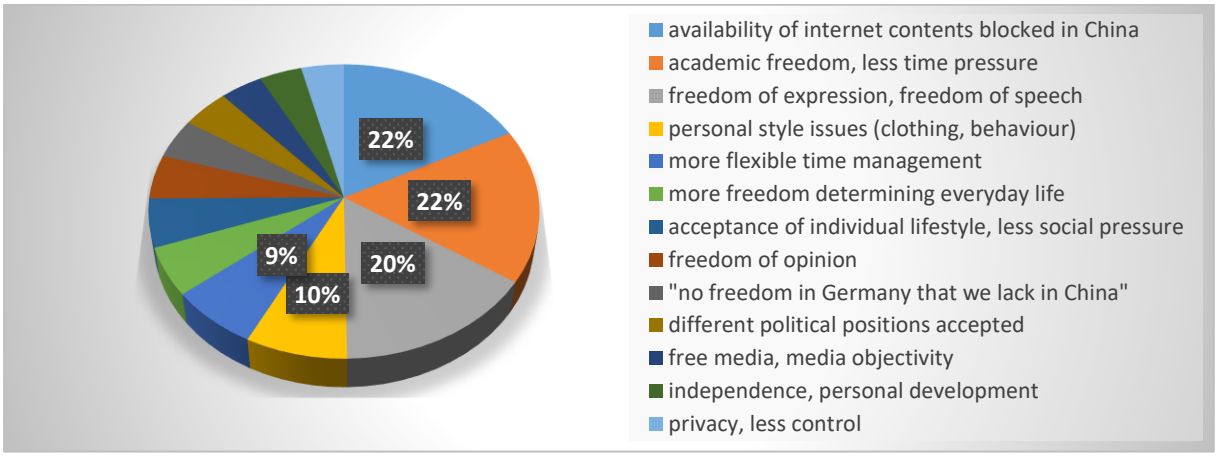
University campus, housing, and leisure: What is disturbing or lacking? (n = 150): Most frequently mentioned was the lack of mutual well-being and harmony (16%). There were also complaints about a lack of leisure facilities on campus (15%). In addition, the participants mentioned the poor condition of the classrooms and the technical equipment (14%), and the lack of comfort, whereas, in China, everything was available on campus (13%). Further disturbing was the unavailability of student dormitories and a lack of support for finding accommodation from the relevant persons in charge (9%).

Fig. 35: Perceived deficiencies regarding university campus, housing, and leisure (n=150)



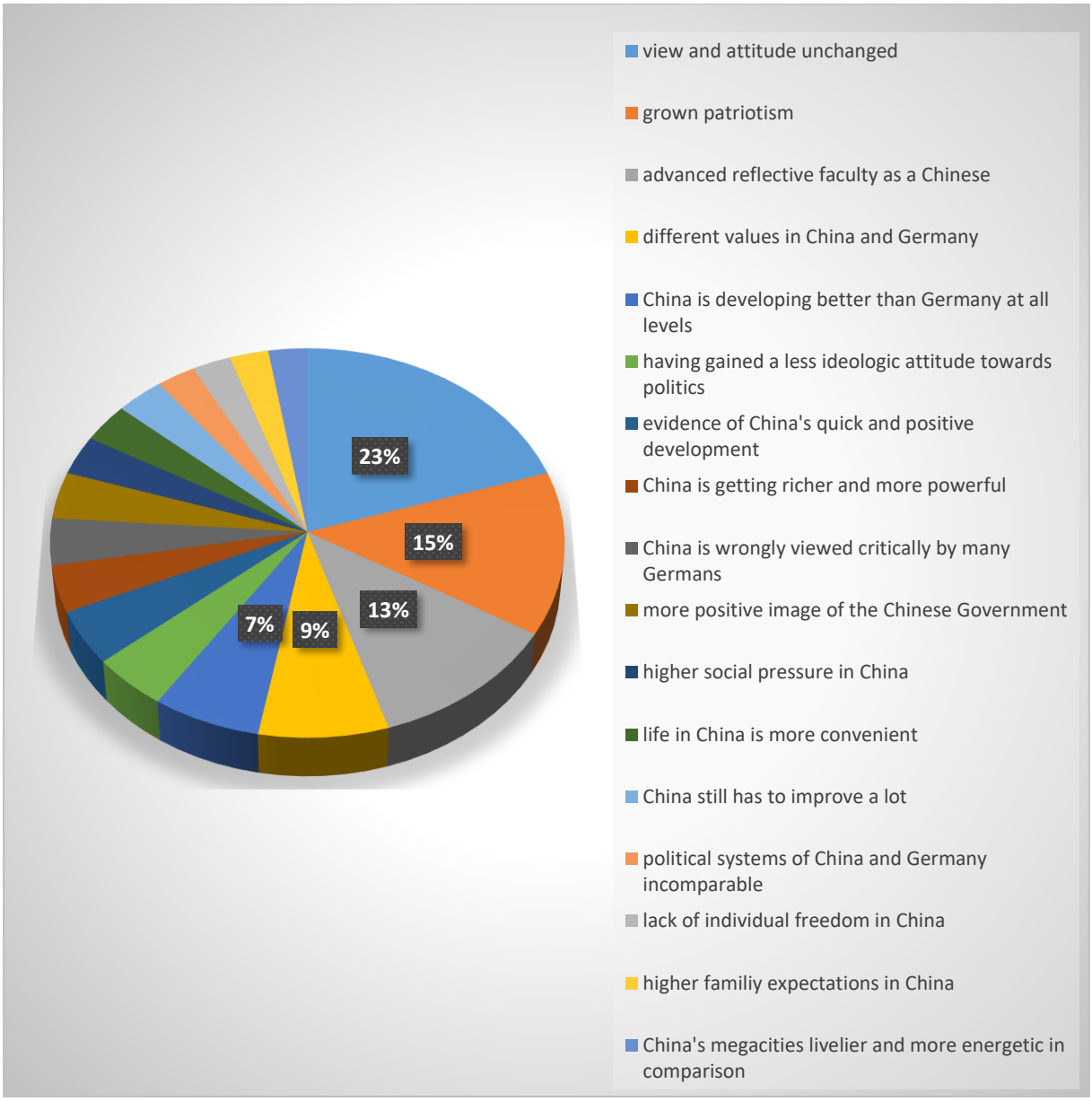
In comparison with China, what kind of freedom (自由, zìyóu) do students in Germany enjoy? (n = 161): The most common answer was that internet content blocked in China could be accessed in Germany (22%). The students also emphasise greater academic freedom, both in terms of content and in terms of time management (22%). The following aspects were also mentioned: freedom of expression/freedom of speech (20%), decisions on personal style issues (e.g. clothing or behaviour) (10%), and the general economy of time (9%).

Fig. 36: Newly perceived "freedoms" ("自由") while studying in Germany (n=161)



How did the image of China change with the study visit to Germany? (n = 136): It is most often stated that the view and attitude towards China were unchanged. Taking into consideration that the overall response rate is the lowest here, a tendency to defend or omit this question is visible, perhaps as a result of assumed suggestive power. 15% say patriotic feelings have grown stronger, 13% state that they were more reflective as Chinese citizens, and 9% assume that the worldviews and values of the two countries are simply different. For 7%, China is developing better than Germany is, in all areas.

Fig. 37: Change of one's image of China after coming to Germany (n=136)



6. Approaches to in-depth understanding: In-depth interviews

These interviews were conducted between June and September 2019 in Dusseldorf, Heidelberg, Munich, and Berlin. Depending on the willingness of the participating interviewee, statements were audio-recorded or put down in writing (for the use of the qualitative interview: Flick et al., 2017: 349ff.). Four participants were female, one male. The selection considered a variance of respondents concerning age, study programme and length of stay in Germany. The interviewees were between 24 and 46 years old at the time of the interview. The length of stay in Germany varied between one and a half years and (with interruptions) almost two decades. The study programme was the bachelor in one case and the masters in two cases (those affected had not yet completed the programme at the time of the survey). The two older interviewees had already completed their studies in Germany (state examination and diploma) and have subsequently remained in Germany. The subjects of study were German philology, philosophy, Japanese studies, chemistry, sinology, and economics. Only parts of the interviews were relevant for this article. In the following, selected statements were documented and treated by employing content analysis (verbatim reproductions are shown in italics for better readability).

Descriptions of German locations: On the one hand, the descriptions of the German study location praise the beauty and picturesque vision of the cities, in particular, this applies to a place like Heidelberg ("*time-honoured university*", "*small*", "*attractive*", "*impressive*", "*a wonderful castle*", "*graceful nature*"). Another aspect is the "*cosiness*" and "*compactness*" (as in the case of Dusseldorf). Munich, where the interviewees' first impressions go back to the beginning of the 2000s, is also described in very favourable terms such as "*clean*", "*modern*", "*like from a picture book*". However, the interviewee, who temporarily lived in Berlin, also states that some of these perceptions have been put into perspective by recent developments of the People's Republic of China: "*The impression was previously that everything in Germany looks more modern and orderly than in China. Today's students can no longer have this impression, because at that time there were much greater differences in terms of living standards.*" Berlin, in particular, also receives negative attributions: "*In Berlin, I see many inefficiencies, and there are policy failures*"; also, "*the infrastructure, especially as far as internet and network technology are concerned, leaves much to be desired*". Other interviewee added: "*As far as digitalisation is concerned, Germany is completely backward*"; and "*a word that I can no longer hear: data protection*".

On the other hand, Berlin is being described as "*tolerant, but also somehow a broken city, in which conflicts and crime are evident*"; "*I do not feel so safe, there have been negative and unpleasant*

encounters in public spaces". Other positions were: "*Everything in Berlin is chaotic and inefficient*"; and "*There are too many foreigners in Berlin, and I know that this is also the impression of other Chinese*". In general, according to this individual's opinion, the Chinese visiting the country are often "*disappointed as to how little German culture one actually sees and finds in Germany*", and that there was "*a gap between expectations and the image of Germany in China, and in reality*". Some other opinions, this time in the case of Dusseldorf, were the "*necessity to walk long distances*" and "*In China, you can do many services cheaply online, that is much more convenient*".

When it comes to freedom, one of the interviewees even sees his perception reversed: "*Berlin remains a place that opens up new freedoms for Chinese, but I now also see many freedoms available in China that the Germans have lost, perhaps the Chinese mentality is more free-spirited*". In contrast, positive aspects of the German locations were addressed: "*free, international and diverse*" (concerning Berlin); "*I do not have to integrate, and I can dress the way I want*" (Berlin); "*The social pressure drops off*" (Dusseldorf); "*a little provincial next to big Chinese cities, we speak kindly of a big village*" (regarding Berlin); "*cosy and ideal for strolling and shopping*" (Dusseldorf); "*more freedom of movement than in the Chinese cities*" (Berlin).

Study requirements in Germany: Of interest are the requirements among STEM subjects. The interviewees (four out of five) indicated that the subject-specific metalanguage was familiar to the students from the Chinese university context, making the switch to the foreign language of instruction correspondingly easier to grow accustomed to. Also, it was clarified that the STEM topics are intensively promoted in the Chinese education and school system, especially concerning the university entrance exams, which is why a solid basic knowledge was available (all five interviewees express themselves in this sense)[36]. In one case, it was explained that the cultural studies subjects in Germany were ideologically different, which could lead to confusion on the part of the Chinese students. It was also mentioned that the social and cultural sciences were more controversial and in need of more interpretation than in the natural sciences: "*The natural sciences are based on standards, but the criteria of the cultural and social sciences are no longer firm and undisputed*". Another explanation was:

[36] The findings fit in with the *MINT Frühjahrsreport 2019 of the Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln* which states: "High STEM skills of the students should have a positive effect on the future of China as a research location." (Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln, 2019: 5). In addition, according to the findings, China has increased research spending very dynamically in the STEM field in recent years, with a GDP share of 2.1 percent now even surpassing the EU (Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln, 2019: 14). There were also higher results of Chinese schoolchildren participating in the PISA study ("Programme for International Student Assessment"; reference values from 2015): The participating provinces (Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Guangdong) achieved 531 points in mathematics and 518 points in natural sciences, the EU member states only 493 and respectively 495 points on average (see Reiss et al., 2016). Henze & Zhu (2012) previously spoke of an "Asian paradigm of educational success".

"*The Chinese find it more difficult to deal with subjects that require creativity, where partial findings are controversial, need interpretation, or where one has to establish and defend one's point of view.*"

Teaching style in Germany: The interviewees agree that there are sometimes great differences in the teaching style between China and Germany. In line with the overall findings of the study, it was pointed out that the lecturers in China mainly teach frontally and that the interactive elements in the classroom have limitations. In one case, it was explained that "*despite the initial reluctance, Chinese students generally like to say something and want to take an active part in class*". Furthermore, it was noted that teachers in Germany are more tolerant about students' answers: "*The transitions between right and wrong answers are more likely to be allowed by the teachers, there is not such a rigidity between right and wrong, and one can still talk about it.*" Students at the German university would therefore rather have the feeling that they could take their own stance. This goes hand in hand with "*a kind of freedom*" to penetrate deeper into the teaching material and to find connections with "*idiosyncratic aspects*". The Chinese contrast was formulated as follows: "*The Chinese literature professor followed a very rigid pattern when interpreting the poem, anything else was rejected as wrong, she showed no curiosity for creative thoughts from the students.*" In Germany, on the contrary, students are encouraged "*to think creatively and even rewarded with better grades*". This would arouse "*potential*" and may inspire Chinese students in Germany, "*particularly those who are committed and successful participants*". In China, on the other hand, many students are described as remaining "*passive for content that is not relevant for the exam, which is clearly predefined by appropriate textbooks*". The teaching style in Germany, on the contrary, would pose challenges for Chinese students because not only is the textbook content relevant for the exam, but also class content, where the lecturer allows interpretations that are found "*between the lines*". It is due to this that Chinese students would learn to follow the lessons in Germany much more attentively than they might have done in China. Concerning China, it was criticised that professors "*make little effort to teach and rather concentrate on their publications*". It was also suggested that Chinese university teachers often wanted to be "*flattered*", e.g. by "*repeating their opinion as being the only objectively correct one*". Another point of criticism is that "*Unfortunately, in China, we often work with outdated teaching material*". In Germany, however, students had to think and give opinions. "*Unlike in the university entrance examination, where the performance principle counts, the students at Chinese universities are dragged along by the teachers, where only very rarely does someone fail, even if their performance is poor.*" The conclusion from this interview was stated that "*In Germany, you lose the seminar completely if the requested*

performance cannot be achieved". In China, many teachers would only make an insignificant distinction between stronger and weaker students[37].

One of the interviewees praised the "*loosened and more flexible pedagogical system at the German universities*", but found it unsuitable for school and kindergarten, and complained that "*too much encouragement*" and "*too little demand*" were executed. He concluded that Germany was "*on a descending branch in terms of education policy*". The interviewee goes on to say: "*Here in Germany, the stronger have to orientate themselves towards the weaker, that is completely wrong. I do not like to hear the term inclusion anymore; it is a mistake. Schooling is much better in China. The weaker must be measured against the stronger. Only encouraging does not help the children; one should also demand that the pupils are expected to perform more. Otherwise, it is no wonder if the future is painted in dark colours.*"[38]

Further statements in favour of the Chinese teaching tradition are cited, which make the overall picture appear somewhat more comprehensive. According to the Confucian model (with its social obligations[39] as a frame of reference), the relationship between teacher and pupil does not end when the lesson has finished and the classroom has been left. Hence, some answers can be found in these further comments: "*In Germany, the connection with the teacher is academic, at most you can still consult him or her during the consultation hour. My Chinese teachers, on the other hand, would like to shape my entire being.*" The interviewee continues to comment: "*Contact with teachers is more anonymous in Germany, you feel like you are part of a mass university.*" In Germany, lessons are said to have sometimes arbitrary contents if the lecturer refuses to work with the textbook: "*What is missing then is the setting of priorities and the restricting of what is relevant.*" Additionally, the extracurricular studies at the Chinese university are being praised: "*I like that we students of different backgrounds also look outside the box when studying in China, be it in sports or also when being taught our Chinese tradition.*"

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[37] According to other former German colleagues in China: If there is a risk that one of the course participants will not reach the class target due to poor performance, this will be perceived by the head of department as an impending "loss of face" or will fall back on the teacher who threatens to miss the class target with all participants. The teachers then intervene to ensure that a course participant who does not actually meet the standards is still graded as sufficient.

[38] China's traditional pedagogy is now also becoming more popular in the West, which can be seen, for example, from the success of non-fiction books such as Amy Chua's bestseller, *The Mother of Success* (2011). Baron & Yin-Baron (2018), on the other hand, point to a change in the upbringing style as a result of the one-child policy: "Only children, especially girls, receive more attention, warmth and support from parents (and grandparents) than children did earlier. Their upbringing is less authoritarian, they get more freedom and more opportunities in education including school and/or studying abroad." (Baron & Yin-Baron, 2018: 140).

[39] The three social obligations are called "loyalty" (忠, zhōng), "veneration of parents and ancestors" (孝, xiào) and "upholding decency and custom" (礼, lǐ) (see Wang, 1997: 646; or in the original: Confucius, 2014).

211/985 universities: According to the interviewees, graduates of 211 and 985 universities reach a higher level of professional qualification and reputation. Typical attributions include: "*higher sense of responsibility*"; "*higher intelligence*"; "*better adaptability in Germany because most of this group in China socialised in big cities and not in rural provinces*". 211/985 students have a reputation for actively networking with each other: "*Others tend to be left out*". Career possibilities for this group are considered excellent since "*They are more confident because they have gone through a selection process*"; "*They are in demand in China and are offered attractive positions*". The general ability to study in Germany by those who do not come from the 211/985 universities, on the other hand, is not questioned since "*they too must meet the quality criteria and be examined, for example, by the academic test centre* [Akademische Prüfstelle]". Resentment towards 211/985 graduates may occur, but this is said to be relatively insignificant among Chinese students in Germany.

Female and male students: There are concise assessments among the interviewees, some of which overlap. The following are considered typically male statements: "*structured life planning*"; "*thinking about a career, work, earn more money*"; "*a more open and courageous character*"; "*less afraid of conflicts*"; "*greater political engagement and interest, while women traditionally withdraw from this area*" (all five interviewees share the latter assessment). Typical female traits based on the interviews, on the other hand, are: "*living and striving according to the beauty principle*"; "*with restraint by essence*"; "*one does not want to stand out negatively, but rather meet with approval*". Relevant individual statements related to Germany were given, for example that exceptional academic success and better grades correlate with a greater willingness to learn on the part of Chinese women, and that women also have a significant talent for language learning or better communication skills, in essence, a better feeling for language than males. Women could also concentrate better on study content: "*They are less easily distracted than Chinese male students who spend their time playing computer games.*" Greater self-confidence on the part of women in Germany could also stem from the fact that the gendered role models known from China are not transferable in Germany: "*This makes men feel insecure and devalued in their masculinity, while women become more confident.*" Another point was raised, which concerns "flirting" behaviour: "*We Chinese female students notice that we often attract German or foreign men, we notice it by their looks or compliments and feel flattered by it.*"[40]; "*It is our perception that the male Chinese students are hardly noticed by the German women in their masculinity and feel slightly inferior. On the other hand, Chinese men seldom feel attracted to German women.*"

[40] Similar in a study by Yu & Wang (2011): "Asian females seem to be integrated more easily than males partly due to the material success. Eastern females seem to be gentle, obedient and charming in the eyes of the Western males."

In the opinion of two interviewees, the increased interest in politics and a "*need for compensation due to the feeling that one is no longer that important in Germany*" could lead to the fact that Chinese patriotism in the German environment is becoming more popular among men[41]. For example, it was commented that primarily male Chinese students deal actively with the Western media and the China image conveyed (at least verbally and in conversation with other Chinese), and even aggressively "*argue in opposition to the West*". Chinese women are reported to have a high level of professional ambition on par with men, but only outside the sphere of politics, which in China is still traditionally male.

A contradiction between stronger competition and a greater sense of community: According to the consensus among the interviewees, the generally higher level of competition in China is still due to a collective consciousness in a country that preserves "*famine and extreme poverty in the short-term memory*". A suitable quote states that "*In China, we are many people with few resources, so we have to use our elbows against each other.*" Despite the emergence of a broad middle class, personal advancement is still described as being linked to hard work and significant deprivation, which the children had to learn early in their lives. The apparent contradiction, which emerges from all five interviews, is relatively easy to resolve: Competing would not only take place on the individual, interpersonal level, but especially between groups with their at times "*artificially constructed cohesive power*" (e.g. by teachers, group leaders, class speakers) that would "*gain momentum at the competitive level*". Schoolchildren would be forced to compete directly on the interpersonal level, since "*grades are marked at school from an early stage, and it is noted as to who gains which rank. All grades are announced publicly, so you know the ranking*". For example, one is seen as "*a face through performance due to a particularly good grade*". In addition, there is "*competition for only a few scholarship programmes or adequate services*" and "*awards and prizes*". Also, "*the Gaokao divides the school graduates and excludes many from the higher education system*". Against this background, the parenting, as mentioned in the interviews, becomes more understandable. It is mentioned that "*in early childhood, we are very sheltered and we want to be protected from all dangers, but then the pressure comes from the parents, so that we can act successfully in society.*" A contrasting perception of parenting in Germany was described as "*the parents are more carefree with the small children, for example allowing them to play outside, and they lack discipline with the children who are already in kindergarten and school.*"

[41] Another explanation would be that the patriotism-strengthening measures of the *Chinese Ministry of Education* and corresponding directives for the stay abroad (keyword "students as a soft power tool") are effective and that men feel obliged to actively promote a positive image of their homeland (Bislev, 2017).

The community-building measures also stand out with insightful statements from the interviews. "*The students have already gone through a tough selection process, so now they are in the same boat, they can be good friends*". Other comments are: "*The university in China organises numerous joint activities, there is no such thing in Germany*", and "*student clubs and connections are commonplace in China*". It was also mentioned that "*we live in China in small dormitories with our fellow students*"[42] and that "*team spirit is specifically encouraged in China: you are not competing human against human, but collective against the collective, e.g. in the sports competition of the faculties*". One stated that "*the basic military service also welds us together*"[43] and that "*the class is marked as a team that has to prove itself to the classes of other faculties*" and that also "*it is conceivable to select the university in competition with other universities, e.g. at the annual international debating competition*".

Of course, there is also the question of how to deal with conflicts in these rather cramped constellations. The interviewees state that: "*This is regulated internally, either with the class representative or with mentors*" and "*if necessary, the living constellation can be changed, students then swop the places assigned to them*". It is noted that "*hostilities within the class structure like envy occur, but we try to hide it, and the feelings are under control*" so much so that "*competitive thinking does not blow up the groups as long as they remain institutional*". The longevity of the friendships and partnerships that arose during the years of studying are minimised based on the answers from the interview: "*Friendships later diverge, maybe there is still contact with the direct roommates*" and "*friendships break up after graduation*".

Contact with other Chinese: The interview participants state that they also seek extensive contact with their compatriots in Germany to coordinate non-academic programmes (e.g. travelling together). Often, however, this is limited to those people who already knew each other before entering Germany, via social networks such as *WeChat* (微信, Wēixìn)[44]. As far as other Chinese people are concerned, the contacts would remain fleeting: "*We perceive each other, and as Chinese, we feel superficially related, but an increased interest in getting to know each other does not follow*" and "*our cohesion and the feeling of belonging together remain rather neutral*". Further comments about this are: "*The cohesion of the Chinese with one another abroad is not very pronounced, by the way, it is the same within Chinese society*". It was further explained that "*there are far too many Chinese in Germany anyway*" and that "*the Chinese community in Germany already exists, e.g. the student associations, but I don't*

[42] usually four students of the same gender in one room

[43] In the first semester, the newcomers of both genders are drilled for one month on the university campus, uniformed in a sporty-military style. Their exercises can then be observed by everyone else on campus.

[44] This chat service, which is very widespread in China, has now been expanded to include a mobile payment system and, according to the provider, was already used by almost a billion people in 2017 (a tenth of it outside of China). Today, it is the centre for many Chinese online activities. The Chinese authorities have full access to the content sent.

participate and many of my Chinese fellow students neither". It was noted that "*sometimes, another Chinese speaks to me in the supermarket, but mostly we walk past each other without greeting*" and that "*if anything, the principle of usefulness prevails*". Furthermore, it was stated that "*it is always only small groups that develop a feeling of belonging together, never the Chinese community as such*" and that "*it basically is of no interest for Chinese people whether their compatriots live in the same German city or not, they will not explicitly look for contact*".

The pragmatic moment clearly dominates since "*I am always looking for a Chinese person who can help me with bureaucratic matters*" and "*sometimes I get a Chinese person who can help me*", but "*we do not create a friendship, but rather a community of purpose*". Of interest though is that traditional Chinese celebrations, such as the Chinese Spring Festival, were the only exception: "*It is only on this day that I feel the need to meet all the other compatriots in this city* [Berlin] *and to cultivate our folklore and customs with them.*"

7. Conclusive findings

An extremely broad field was explored in the context of this study. Factual findings were presented based on the empirical data collected with the questionnaire and the in-depth interviews. Individual partial findings were pieced together, and a coherent overall picture is visible.

Despite a different perception of learning and teaching culture in his/her homeland, the average Chinese student in Germany is intrinsically motivated and seems to prosper with the education at German universities. German teachers are considered even more respectful and more helpful than in China. On the other hand, the relationship between teachers and students in China is described as closer and going beyond professional contact, but it does not take place on equal footing. The courses in Germany are described as more advantageous compared to China, and the interactive mix of teaching methodology is praised. The students' point of view can be stipulated and even considered.

The aforementioned contradicts the image of Chinese learners as passively receiving class participants. In various studies, Chinese students are described stereotypically as being in "total obedience or submission to their teachers" and being "passive receivers of knowledge". Also, "they do not actively participate in tutorials and group discussions", give "little input in the class", and are "less autonomous, more dependent on authority figures, and more obedient and conforming to rules and deadlines" (cited from Xiao, 2007: 57f.).

Littlewood (2000) and Li (2017), however, in accordance with the findings presented here, report a discrepancy between the wishes of Chinese learners and what teaching conventions in China demand of them. A significant challenge for Chinese students in Germany is undoubtedly to become more independent, since no class representative or delegate can do anything for the benefit of the collective. In Germany, it also appears to be difficult that the teaching is often not strictly textbook-oriented. However, although the perception of study requirements in Germany is higher than in China, grades can be kept at a consistently high level. For the Chinese, the most critical expectations of studying in Germany is gaining relevant subject-specific skills and foreign language learning. Discipline, hard work and initiative are mentioned as the most important virtues for a successful degree. It is perceived that the cohesion among the students is weaker in Germany than in China. Nevertheless, there is no contradiction with the perception that competitive thinking among Chinese students is more pronounced.

Regarding the STEM subjects, integration at the German university appears to be somewhat easier, since increased study requirements are not seen to be complicated, and the image of the teachers is significantly positive. The students who attended the 211/985 elite institutions in China are also somewhat more adaptable, as can be seen in their assessment of the professional level in Germany, than those who have come to Germany to study mainly at the family's request. Older students find it easier to adapt in Germany than younger ones, both in the context of the university sphere and in everyday life. Male students, compared to females, tend to have a more negative image of the host country and are more pro-Chinese and patriotic. This is confirmed and partly explained in the in-depth interviews, whereas gender roles in China seem to be differentiated more clearly than in Germany. When it comes to the distribution according to subject areas, there are different preferences, such as with male dominance in the STEM subjects.

Despite minor irritations, as emerged in the in-depth interviews concerning customs and culture in Germany, Chinese students are generally optimistic about German society and integrate quickly. The majority says they identify with the host country and can imagine a professional future here. Nevertheless, contacting Germans seems difficult for Chinese students, whereas socialising with other foreigners in Germany appears relatively easy. According to self-disclosure, social isolation in Germany could be a potential risk for Chinese students. Based on the empirical data, living in Germany ought to bring new freedoms and a change in opinions of the Chinese homeland, although patriotism is reinforced. Free internet access, freedom of expression and academic freedom are considered to have significant differences from China. In detail, as can be found in the in-depth interviews, ambivalent perceptions of Germany become visible, in which positive and negative aspects are balanced. Often

criticised is the lack of technical innovations and standards (e.g. for cashless payments) in Germany and a majority considers living in China as a more developed, modern and progressive lifestyle in which everyday life is more convenient and efficient.

The study has presented some insights into the current perspectives, experiences, and self-descriptions of Chinese students in Germany. More in-depth research in the differences between Germany and China, ranging from teaching styles to digitalisation, remains to be further explored and studied. Also, of interest for further research and clarification is the high continuity of the Chinese students' perception and opinion about China, despite numerous vastly different experiences abroad.

8. References

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